

How Hybrid Regimes Respond to Mobilized Protest The Case of Russia during the 2011-2012 Election Cycle.

William Cohen

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

2012

POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

ADVISOR: MATTEO FUMAGALLI

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

ABSTRACT

The Russian election cycle in 2011-2012 was characterized by increased oppositional mobilization and the largest anti-regime protests since the fall of the Soviet Union. This thesis discusses the challenges and dangers that mobilized protest pose to hybrid regimes seeking to maintain a veneer of democracy while simultaneously controlling the outcome of the democratic process. The thesis then goes on to discuss the various strategies that are used by hybrid regimes to manage mobilized protest and garner support for the regime through a combination of coercion, channelling and political technology. This theoretical background is then used as a prism for analysing how the Putin/Medvedev regime responded to increased protest activity during the 2011-2012 election cycle.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 2011-2012 election cycle in Russia was accompanied by number of protests, some which were the largest mobilized actions since the early 1990s. Unlike previous parliamentary and presidential elections under Vladimir Putin and then the ruling tandem of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, this election cycle suggested that the regime is losing some of its popular support and that the so-called “Putin consensus” has begun to erode and may be coming to an end.¹

Although various disparate groups and parties had been in opposition to the government for much of the past decade, the officially sanctioned opposition parties—the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), and a Just Russia—generally follow the ruling United Russia party on all key issues², are regarded and frequently referred to as the “loyal opposition,”³ and have generally failed to attract significant support or draw large numbers of participants at their rallies. Meanwhile, the unofficial opposition, composed of disparate groups ranging from middle-class city dwellers to nationalists, along with several registered but unrepresented political parties was—and largely remains—so fractured and ineffectual that the sudden surge in dissent and protests following the parliamentary elections was somewhat unexpected and, it would seem, took the Kremlin by surprise. Putin initially took a haughty and dismissive stance toward the protests, notoriously stating that he mistook the white ribbons protestors

¹ Judah, Ben and Wilson, Andrew., *The End of the Putin Consensus*. (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2012).

² Vladimir Gel'man, “Russia’s Communists: the Paper Tigers of the Opposition.” On *Open Democracy*, November 07, 2011. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/vladimir-gelman/russias-communists-paper-tigers-of-opposition>

³ Ioffe, Julia, “The Master and Mikhail.” In *The New Yorker*, February 27, 2012. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/02/27/120227fa_fact_ioffe

wore for condoms, but the authorities quickly formulated a response to this sudden upsurge in dissent. This response relied heavily on tactics from the playbook of what in Russia is commonly referred to as “political technology” and what Andrew Wilson has characterized as “virtual politics.”⁴ Administrative resources were used to ensure a solid pro-United Russia turnout in the parliamentary elections and then a strong pro-Putin turnout in the March presidential elections. Administrative resources were also utilized in mobilizing pro-Putin counter protests, with many attendees being bussed in and/or paid for their participation and the turnout exaggerated by the authorities. State-controlled media outlets avoided coverage of opposition activities and released black PR documentaries and *kompromat* on opposition figures. Meanwhile, the Kremlin did its best to hijack the narrative of the opposition. Examples include a rather unsuccessful attempt to get rid of the nickname “party of crooks and thieves”—a phrase coined by anti-corruption blogger and activist leader Alexei Navalny that quickly became synonymous with United Russia—by applying the phrase “crooks and thieves” to opposition figures and parties, and in a more successful example by hijacking the opposition’s rallying call for “fair elections” by calling in turn for “clean elections,”⁵ thus muddling the dialogue so much that some attendees of pro-Putin rallies believed that they were attending event advocating for “fair elections.”⁶

This thesis will examine the tactics employed by the authorities in response to the surge in popular dissent that accompanied the 2011-2012 electoral cycle in Russia. In outlining and examining the regime’s response to opposition, particular attention will be paid to how elements of political technology were utilized in their response. In addition to this, I

⁴ Wilson, Andrew, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005)

⁵ In Russian, the words for “fair/honest” and “clean” are *chistiye* and *chestniye* respectively.

⁶ See, for example: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoIxj_OxR-0

will attempt to address to what extent this response was effective and what impact it had on the opposition's failure to achieve its goals.

In the first chapter, I will discuss how dissent and protest function in hybrid regimes such as Putin's Russia and explore how these regimes react to and handle dissent. The chapter will begin with a discussion of hybrid regime classifications. This is followed by a section dedicated to the exploration of how dissent and protest function across different regime types and the specific challenges and risks posed to different types of regimes by mobilized protest. Particular attention will be paid to single-party and hybrid regimes and how it can be a slippery slope from dissent to rebellion when opposition mobilizes in these regimes. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how these themes in relation to the Orange Revolution and how this example informed the post-Orange strategies of the Russian elite for preventing and managing dissent and protest.

The second chapter will elaborate on the strategies pursued by Putin's regime in order to prevent what it perceived as a very real threat of a colored revolution being imported to Russia.⁷ For these purposes I utilize Graeme Robertson's model of hybrid regime strategies for managing dissent as protest as being divided into two basic categories: coercion and channeling.⁸ In subsequent sections, I will outline coercive strategies that Putin's regime has employed in relation to opposition activists. I will then discuss the regime's main strategies for channeling political energy away from the opposition and into support of the regime through increased control of the media, restricting the activities of NGOs and civil society and through increased state mobilization of pro-Kremlin youth groups such as *Nashi*. When longer-perspective coercive and channeling efforts fail or short-term solutions are needed to

⁷ Horvath, Robert, "Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63, 1 (2011), 1-25.

⁸ Robertson, Graeme, *The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes: Managing Dissent in Post-Communist Russia*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).170-174

manage dissent and channel public opinion toward a candidate, an arsenal of devices known as “political technology” are often employed in Russia. Working on the models proposed by Andrew Wilson’s in his authoritative study of political technology *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post Soviet World*, I introduce and discuss strategies of political technology in contemporary Russian politics.

In Chapter 3, I use employ the theoretical models of coercion, channeling and political technology in order to analyze how Russia’s regime responded to the sudden surge in mobilized popular protest that took place during the 2011-2012 election cycle. I begin the chapter by providing a chronicle and narrative of the oppositional protests and pro-regime counter protests. After this, I will assess to what extent the regime used coercion and intimidation against protesters, how administrative resources were used to pad election results and mobilize counter protests. The use of black PR and false election drama will also be discussed and examples provided.

In the conclusion, I will reevaluate how Russia’s current regime responded to increased protest activities during the election cycle and try to evaluate why the regime responded the way it did and what implications this may have in the future.

2. THE ROLE OF MOBILIZATION IN HYBRID REGIMES

In this chapter, I will be introducing the ways that hybrid regimes, such as Russia under Putin, handle and manage dissent. I will begin with a classification of the regime and will then examine the specific challenges hybrid regimes face when managing dissent. This will be followed by a brief discussion of how mobilization occurs, across a variety of regimes and particularly in hybrid regimes. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of the wave of so-called “colored revolutions” that swept across Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan between 2000-2005 which inspired genuine—and not entirely unreasonable—concern among elites in Putin’s regime that a color revolution would be exported to Russia⁹. This concern informed the decision to undertake a number of state mobilization projects designed to manage dissent. These responses and the techniques they employed will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

2.1 Classifying Regime Type in Putin’s Russia

In this section I will be discussing the role of protest in hybrid regimes by focusing on the case of Russia under Putin. I will begin with a brief elaboration of why Russia can be regarded as a hybrid regime and the most influential competing classification theories. This will be followed by a discussion of the role protest plays in different regime types and why elites in hybrid regime types are particularly susceptible to being toppled as a result of collective action. In the next chapter I will highlight methods employed by regimes to manage protests in Russia and under Putin today.

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent proliferation and exportation of democracy around the world put authoritarian regimes seeking to remain in power in a

⁹ Horvath 2011, 1-25,

difficult position.¹⁰ Throughout this period, a number of authoritarian regimes around the region fell apart or were overthrown. At the same time, democracy gained popular support and its implementation was on the agenda of Western countries. However, in many of these post-authoritarian countries, transitions to democracy ended in complete or partial failure.¹¹ In this environment of increased pressure to democratize, some countries (e.g. North Korea or Turkmenistan) have responded by drifting deeper into isolation and authoritarianism,. However, a far greater number of countries moved into what Marina Ottaway refers to as “a vast gray zone that occupies the space between authoritarianism at one end and consolidated democracy at the other.”¹² Indeed, as soon as 1995, there were more developing and post-communist countries that fell into this gray zone than could be considered fully democratic.¹³

Scholars have employed a multitude of terms to describe this gray zone and classify the variety of regime subtypes within it. These have included, among others, “hybrid regimes,” “semi-authoritarianism,” “semidemocracy,” and “Partly Free” according to Freedom House.¹⁴ The problem with many of these terms is that they are too centered on democracy as an ideal that post-authoritarian countries aspire toward. The discourse is largely centered around democratization and assumes transition to democracy as a given. Hybrid regimes like Russia are thus described as cases of democratic development having fallen off course or, as M. Steven Fish puts it, becoming “derailed.”¹⁵ However, as Thomas Carothers has persuasively argued, in light of the high number of regimes—some of them quite stable—that occupy this gray zone, it is time to abandon some of the key assumptions from transition

¹⁰ Levitsky, Steven and Way, Lucan A, “Competitive Authoritarianism - Hybrid Regimes After The Cold War” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

¹¹ Levitsky and Way 2010, 3.

¹² Ottaway, Marina, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), 6.

¹³ Levitsky and Way 2010, 3.

¹⁴ Levitsky, Steven and Way, Lucan A, "The Rise Of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal Of Democracy*, 13, No. 2 (2002): 51-65,

¹⁵ Fish, Steven M., *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

to democracy literature that heavily influenced the discussion of regimes such as Russia, including the very notion that these gray zone countries are transitioning to democracy at all.¹⁶ Building on this, Levitsky and Way propose the more authoritarianism-centered term “competitive authoritarianism,” which they define as “civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents’ abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-a-vis their opponents.”¹⁷ Richard Sakwa has recently proposed the term “dual state” to describe focusing on the disconnect between Russia’s liberal democratic constitution and the non-democratic realities of its para-constitutional administrative regime that incorporates a variety of informal practices which subvert democracy and “undermine the spirit of constitutionalism.”¹⁸ Moving even farther away from classifications centered around ideal-type democracy, Vladislav Surkov, one of the main architects and ideologists of Putin’s regime, has proposed the terms “sovereign democracy” and “managed” or “directed democracy” (“*upravljajemaja demokratija*”).¹⁹ Surkov’s terms are appealing in that they reflect the fact that Russia’s current regime is not striving to transition to democracy but rather views the gray zone of hybridity as goal.

Regardless of the specific term is applied, Putin’s Russia is widely regarded as falling precisely within this gray zone between democracy and authoritarianism.²⁰ Given that this thesis does not attempt to situate itself as a comparative study of different regime types, I have opted for the more generic term “hybrid regime”, for which I employ Luke March’s concise definition of “an amalgam of democratic and authoritarian elements occupying the

¹⁶ Carothers, Thomas, “The End of the Transition Paradigm” in *Journal of Democracy* 13, 1 (January 2002), 6-9.

¹⁷ Levitsky & Way 2010, 5

¹⁸ Sakwa, Richard, *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism and the Medvedev Succession*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47.

¹⁹ Krastev, Ivan, “Sovereign Democracy, Russian Style.” On *Open Democracy*, November 16, 2006. http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions_government/sovereign_democracy_4104.jsp

²⁰ See, for example, Levitsky & Way 2010; Robertson 2011

"gray" zone between liberal democracy and outright dictatorship.”²¹ This generic term also has the advantage of being consistently applicable to Russia’s regime over a longer period of time. This is especially applicable with Russia because, while hybrid regimes in general are quite dynamic and must constantly evolve in order to survive, Russia is an especially dynamic hybrid that has exhibited a high level of drift across different subtypes of hybridity over the past two decades.²² For instance, even under Putin there has been a drift away from a seemingly sincere commitment toward making Russia a stable liberal democracy during much of his first term,²³ which justified the more democracy-centered term of semidemocracy, to a drift toward more authoritarian tendencies²⁴ and increased state mobilization²⁵ during his second term.

2.2 The Slippery Slope from Dissent to Revolution in Authoritarian and Hybrid Regimes

Before proceeding into the dynamics of opposition in hybrid regimes, it is worth considering how the concepts of dissent, protest, rebellion and mobilization are related to each other. I conceptualize oppositional activity on a kind of scale, ranging from dissent to revolution, with mobilization acting as the lynchpin that holds it all together and provides momentum. The role of mobilization will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The foundation of all oppositional activity is dissent, in which individuals or groups hold views that do not conform to the norms of a given political system. When dissent is mobilized, it can lead to subversive activities.

²¹ March, Luke, "Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastatal Opposition," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Fall, 2009), p. 504

²² Robertson 2010, p. 6

²³ Sakwa, Richard, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, (London, UK: Routledge, 2004), 40.

²⁴ Gill, G., "A New Turn toward Authoritarian Rule in Russia" in *Democratization* 13, 1 (February 2006), 58-72

²⁵ Horvath 2011; Robertson 2011

However, when dissent goes beyond seeking only to subvert the system it serves as a basis for resistance, which occurs when an individual or group holding dissenting views *directly* refuses to accept something or comply with some kind of order, as when a draftee refuses to go to war or one refuses to pay taxes. Resistance, then, differentiates itself from protest only in that it seeks to reject something that is imposed upon the resistor. This differentiates resistance from protest, where actors lash out and seek to change or curtail something, usually a specific policy or incident. Demonstrations and rallies are then subcategories of protests that typically make specific demands. For example, the peaceful meetings or rallies for ‘fair/honest elections’ (*miting za chestnie vybory*) that took place during the 2011-2012 election cycle in Russia were directed at a specific issue with specific resolutions and demands—in this case, addressing widespread electoral fraud and including five key demands. These were the cancellation of parliamentary elections, the firing of election chief Vladimir Churov, the freeing of those arrested during similar rallies, registration of opposition political parties and holding fair parliamentary and presidential elections.²⁶ While some of the activists present at these meetings were seeking regime change, organizers chose to focus the demonstration’s goals not on revolution, but on specific reforms.

The development of protest into rebellion is neatly clarified by Jenkins and Schock, who distinguish between protests "aimed at limited issues such as changing the policies of authorities or particular personnel" and "rebellions dealing with fundamental issues such as who governs and what is the structure of authority."²⁷ Rebellion, then, is more focused on the fundamental nature of the system, and a successful rebellion would result in a regime change or revolution. While most of the opposition activities that have taken place recently in Russia

²⁶ "Na mitinge 'Za chestniye vybory' v Moskve prinyata rezolyutsia." *Ekho Moskvy*, February 3, 2012 <http://www.echomsk.spb.ru/news/politika/na-mitinge-za-chestnye-vybory-v-moskve-prinyata-rezolyutsiya.html>

²⁷ Craig, Jenkins, J. and Schock, Kurt. "Global Structures and Political Processes in the Study of Domestic Political Conflict." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 18 (1992), 162

have been peaceful protests aimed at specific reforms, there have been several exceptions. For instance, the activities of the art group *Voina* (Russian for “war”) have pushed the line between protest and a more general rebellion. Although the group ostensibly seeks to instigate a rebirth of a leftist artistic front in the futurist tradition of the 1920s,²⁸ actions such as overturning police cars,²⁹ burning police trucks³⁰ or, most famously, painting an enormous phallus on of St. Petersburg’s bridges just before it rose to face the city’s FSB headquarters³¹ can be interpreted as acts of rebellion against the government and power structure as a whole.

I would add that resistance, protest, rebellion and regime change/revolution can utilize both violent and non-violent tactics, although protest and especially rebellion are more likely to invoke violence—from both the opposition and from the government in reaction.

Based on the above discussion I will depict these various oppositional categories on a scale beginning at absolute consensus (which would come closest to existing in either totalitarian systems, which seek to eliminate the seeds of dissent on the most basic psychological level, or liberal democratic systems, which by allowing differing positions under the larger umbrella of support for liberal democracy itself) and culminating with revolution:



Based this scale, we can see that dissent is a slippery slope where peaceful protests can sometimes lead to revolution. This relationship will be illustrated more clearly at the end

²⁸ Free Voina, "What is Voina?." <http://free-voina.org/about>

²⁹ Plutser-Sarno, Alexei, one of Voina’s chief ideologists, chronicles its activities on his blog. In this case: <http://plucer.livejournal.com/297581.html>

³⁰ Plutser-Sarno, Alexei, <http://plucer.livejournal.com/531761.html>

³¹ Plutser-Sarno, Alexei, <http://plucer.livejournal.com/265584.html>

of the chapter in the discussion of the colored revolutions. While dissent can quickly escalate to revolution, it does not account for different points at which different oppositional activity constitutes a threat to different regime types.

The level of opposition a system can handle and the lines between oppositional categories are largely determined by the type of regime and its capacity to absorb or manage dissent.

In democratic systems, protest rarely represent a serious threat to the fundamental system of democracy until it reaches the point of rebellion. This is because in democratic societies, even extremely well mobilized protests involving hundreds of thousands of people do not constitute a rebellion that challenges the fundamental nature or structure of the regime because institutions are strong enough to absorb such opposition. In fact, large demonstrations may even be indicative of robustness in a democratic regime.³²

On the other hand, in a totalitarian system with a high degree of state-directed mobilization³³ which seeks to obtain total control³⁴ the very existence of dissent, even on an individual level, may pose a threat to the integrity of the regime. Most hybrid regimes lie somewhere between these two poles of totalitarianism and democracy.³⁵ Although the point where opposition becomes a threat varies amongst types of authoritarian regimes, one shared trait is that the line separating protest from rebellion is extremely fine to the point that it sometimes borders on being nonexistent.

Beginning in the second chapter I will provide examples of actions that have occurred in Russia under Putin which have blurred the lines between various types of oppositional

³² Tarrow, Sidney, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 204.

³³ Linz, Juan J. and Stepan, Alfred, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolodation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 44.

³⁴ Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins Of Totalitarianism*, (San Diego: Harcourt, 1951).

³⁵ Linz and Stepan 1996, 38

activity. I will also discuss the methods employed by the regime to manage and curtail opposition to avoid the slide from dissent to rebellion.

2.3 Mobilized Protest in Different Regime Types

The driving force between these categories of oppositional activities that enables them to grow in scale and scope is mobilization. I will define mobilization as the “process of increasing the readiness to act collectively.”³⁶ Individuals most act as groups to create strong opposition movement and thus mobilization is the key to collective action.³⁷

According to Linz and Stepan’s typology, authoritarian regimes generally exhibit low levels of mobilization and lack a guiding ideology.³⁸ Democratic regimes, on the other hand, value popular participation, have autonomous civil society and political parties that actively seek to mobilize participants, and allowing for “peaceful and orderly opposition.”³⁹ The key point here is that democracies, by their very nature and ideology, actually foster mobilization as long as it does not violate the “rules of contestation.”⁴⁰

In authoritarian systems, however, the low level of mobilization creates a situation in which the shock waves caused by the levels of oppositional mobilization necessary for even a relatively modest protest cannot be safely absorbed by the regime. In other words, because authoritarian regimes typically do not allow an officially sanctioned field for opposition to operate within well-defined and respected rules, the line between acceptable and

³⁶ Edwards, Bob and McCarthy, John D., “Resources and Social Movement Mobilization.” In *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. Snow, David A, Sarah A. Soule & Hanspeter Kriesi. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 116.

³⁷ Tilly 1978, as cited in Ulfelder, Jay. “Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes.” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2005), 312.

³⁸ Linz and Stepan 1996, 38

³⁹ Ibid, 44-45

⁴⁰ Ibid., 44

unacceptable protest is much less clear. This means that the kind of mobilized protest that would be safely absorbed by most democratic regimes has the potential to rapidly cross over into a rebellion within an authoritarian regime. This is illustrated by Tarrow who notes that, "while authoritarian states try to suppress protest, they also radicalize it and thus put themselves in greater danger than democratic states when opportunities open..."⁴¹ I will show that in softer versions of authoritarianism, especially hybrid regimes, the very act of suppression radicalizes the regime as well. Indeed, one of the main reasons that the line between protest and rebellion is so thin in authoritarian regimes is that the regimes themselves view the protests as rebellions and react to them in this manner.

Mobilized protest poses a stronger threat to single-party regimes, which, as Jay Ulfelder has shown, are especially vulnerable and more likely to break down when faced with non-violent forms of collective action.⁴² This is because of the tendency of single-party regimes, for which Ulfelder uses Geddes' definition as regimes in which "the party has some influence over policy, controls most access to political power and government jobs, and has functioning local-level organizations,"⁴³ to claim that they fully represents the interests of the country's citizens as a whole—hence justifying the lack of oppositional parties. In this context, virtually any non-violent, political demonstration can cast doubt on the regime's legitimacy and put leaders in the difficult position of either having to use suppression—which erodes legitimacy further—or to make concessions. Furthermore, once the opposition gains momentum there arises the potential alternative support base for elites within the regime,

⁴¹ Tarrow, 209

⁴² Ulfelder, Jay "Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes." *International Political Science Review*, 26, no. 3 (2005), p. 314.

⁴³ Geddes, Barbara, "Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game-Theoretic Argument." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA (1999).

who may be ideologically sympathetic to the opposition or might simply be getting nervous and considering their future prospects should the regime collapse.⁴⁴

Russia's hybrid regime does not quite meet the standards for a single-party authoritarian regime, because while United Russia does control quite a lot, but it does not control everything. As Sakwa puts it, United Russia "was not a party *in* power, but a party *of* power" and is still challenged in a similar way⁴⁵

I have shown that hybrid regimes can be vulnerable to even low levels of opposition because they do not have the capacity to absorb oppositional activity to the same extent as democratic regimes. Furthermore, the potential for dissent to quickly escalate into rebellion creates a level of uncertainty that often elicits a strong response from the hybrid regime. I will discuss the form of these responses in the next chapters, but first I will provide an overview of the colored revolutions.

2.4 Color Revolutions as a Stimulus for State Mobilization in Russia

As discussed in the previous section, well-mobilized collective action significantly increases the likelihood of regime breakdown in single-party regimes,⁴⁶ a vulnerability which I argue applies to hybrid regimes such as Russia under Putin as well. This is process can be observed in the so-called "color revolutions," which from 2000-2005 ousted authoritarian leaders in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Kyrgyzstan (2005) and, under somewhat different conditions, Lebanon (2005). These events had a profound impact on the thinking of the Russian elite, prompting the Kremlin to develop what Ivan Krastsev has referred to as a "preventative counter-revolution that...marked a profound transformation of the regime of managed democracy in Russia."⁴⁷ In this section, I will briefly outline theories

⁴⁴ Ulfelder 2005, 317

⁴⁵ Sakwa 2011, 28

⁴⁶ Ulfelder 2005, 316-319

⁴⁷ Krastev 2006

relating to the Orange Revolution and then discuss the effect this perceived threat had on the approach of the Russian regime's strategy to maintain power.

In identifying the causes behind the Orange Revolution, the presence of a contested election and preceding political crises have been widely emphasized as key factors that encouraged mobilization⁴⁸ and lowered the regime's legitimacy in the eyes of the public⁴⁹. In Joshua Tucker's (2007) analysis the presence of a contested election is the key factor. He frames low mobilization to challenge the regime as an offshoot of the collective action dilemma because, "where citizens have strong grievances against the regime, attempts to address these grievances in daily life are likely to entail high costs coupled with very low chances of success"⁵⁰ Thus, potential protesters "shirk" and do not mobilize to challenge the regime⁵¹ An incident of electoral fraud, however, "changes this calculation dramatically" because it is a collective violation that provides a focal point for mobilization and protest⁵². Tucker treats an individual's desire or perceived duty to challenge the regime as something that arises from unpleasant experiences that this individual has in their on-going relationship with the government.⁵³ They would like to challenge the regime but do not feel confident in their chances for success until there is a violation or injustice, such as electoral fraud, that affects the society as a whole. However, even in this situation, the collective action dilemma remains—why should an individual risk going to the streets when, if others do, staying in will achieve the same benefits without the risks? Nevertheless, it seems that a controversial incident, such as electoral fraud, can both provide a focal point for protest and, given the sudden widespread indignation over this single issue, make individuals feel more confident in

⁴⁸ Beissinger, Mark R., "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics*, 5, no. 2 (2007), 261 and McFaul, Michael "Transitions from Postcommunist." *Journal of Democracy*, 16, no. 3 (2005), 7

⁴⁹ Kuzio. Taras, "Democratic Breakthroughs and Revolutions in Five Post-Communist Countries: Comparative Perspectives on the Fourth Wave", *Demokratizatsiya*, 16, no.1 (2008), 101.

⁵⁰ Tucker 2007, 536.

⁵¹ Ibid, 540.

⁵² Tucker 2007, 541.

⁵³ Ibid.

expecting that a large number of people will participate. This expectation increases the likelihood that they themselves will become actively involved. If there is widespread but unexpressed individual discontent with the government, this step from individual dissent into mobilized taps into a momentum that can quickly lead to outright rebellion and possibly regime change or revolution. When this occurs, it sets a kind of precedent that can lower the threshold for triggering mass mobilization in other countries with similar structural constraints that have prevented reaching the tipping point for mass mobilization. When this precedent is set and other countries start following its example, this can result in what Mark Beissinger (2009) calls an "interrelated wave" of revolutions.⁵⁴ Thus, successful protest in one country can set an example encourages potential opposition activists in other countries to pursue mobilization. In this sense, Beissinger presents a kind of cross-country version of Tucker's argument that the perception of better chances for success will make an individual more likely to participate in protests. He also notes (referring to nationalist mobilization in the late Soviet period but applicable here) that this modular mobilization is "produced not by a single shock, but rather by the way in which agents forged connections with the challenging actions of others through analogy and emulation."⁵⁵ In the case of the Color Revolutions, this emulation included sharing "mobilizational frames, repertoires, or modes of contention"⁵⁶ that originated chiefly in Serbia and were then exported, with the help of various NGOs seeking to foster protest and rebellion in non-democratic regimes by providing the resources for mobilization. Thus, we can conclude that protest and mobilization breed further mobilization and protest, even in cross-country instances.

⁵⁴ Beissinger, Mark R. "An Interrelated Wave." *Journal of Democracy*, 20, no. 1 (2009), 74-77.

⁵⁵ Beissinger, Mark R. "Nationalism and the Collapse of Soviet Communism." *Contemporary European History*, 18, no. 3 (2009b), 340

⁵⁶ Beissinger 2007, 261

Looked at in this context, it seems reasonable that the elites in the Russian government were concerned that a colored revolution might come to Russia next. This fear was compounded by several factors. First of all, the defeat of Yanukovich was a slap in the face to the Putin's government, both in terms of its foreign policy goals and also because the Kremlin had quite obviously and unsuccessfully interfered in the election. In part, this interference came largely in the form of political technologists such as Gleb Pavlovsky and Marat Gel'man traveling to Ukraine to work on Yanukovich's campaign.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, opposition figures such as Boris Nemtsov, then leader of the party Union of Right Forces, were down in Kiev and wearing orange ribbons in the company of Yushenko.⁵⁸ The Kremlin elites' fears were further aggravated by a series of protests in early 2005 relating to the monetization of benefits,⁵⁹ lending credence to the elite's sense that they were under siege. That pro-Yushenko activists in Ukraine were funded in part by an assortment of Western NGOs contributed further to the Kremlin's sense of being under siege.⁶⁰ Whether or not a colored style revolution coming to Russia was, as Robert Horvath argues⁶¹, a real threat, we can safely conclude that Putin's regime viewed it as a threat and this had a significant impact on how the elites in Putin's government related both to the domestic and international political situation.

These developments led the regime to embark upon a series of activities designed to "defeat proof" the system and channel potential oppositional energies into more pro-Kremlin activities.⁶² While some of these processes were already underway before the colored revolutions, they took on a more urgent nature afterwards. This channeling took on a number of forms that included seizing control of the information environment, cracking down on

⁵⁷ Horvath 2011, 6-7

⁵⁸ Ibid, 6

⁵⁹ Robertson 2011 contains an extensive case study of these protests. For basic background, see pp. 164-178

⁶⁰ Sakwa, Richard, *Russian Politics and Society*, 4th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 343

⁶¹ Horvath 2011

⁶² Robertson 2011, 15

NGOs, creating pro-Kremlin social movements and groups such as *Nashi*. Some of these tactics overlap with the shady world of post-Soviet political technology, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 where I will examine how United Russia has worked to maintain dominance and the forms of response to opposition as a partial result of the colored revolutions.

3. HOW HYBRIDS REGIMES MANAGE DISSENT AND PROTEST

There are a variety of responses available to regimes as they seek to manage protest. In this thesis I will be focusing on the use of coercion, channeling and political technology as responses to real and perceived threats in Russia under Putin. In the following sections I will define these terms and illustrate the ways these techniques are employed in theory coupled with specific examples to show how coercion, channeling and political technology have manifested under the current regime. Then, in Chapter 3, I will examine the responses of the regime to opposition during the most recent elections.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Russia under Putin is an example of a hybrid regime—purporting to be a democracy while simultaneously controlling the outcome of the democratic process. However, when a hybrid regime's popularity begins to slide, the tendency is to resort to manipulative tactics and electoral fraud. This strategy, however is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can compensate for sufficient levels of genuine electoral support needed to maintain a grip on power, but on the other hand it has the potential to provide an impetus for contentious activity⁶³ that may trigger more powerful and widespread levels of opposition.

Elections, then, pose a particularly serious challenge to hybrid regimes with low or even average popularity, as we have seen evidenced in the colored revolutions. Full adherence to democratic procedures result in electoral losses, but on the other hand, electoral fraud can provide a focal point for protest and, in perpetrating injustice against the populace as a whole rather than against just one individual or group. This collective sense of injustice at manipulated elections can, to paraphrase Joshua Tucker, “alter the calculus” for potential protesters considering whether or not to participate in oppositional activities and thus

⁶³ Robertson 2011, 173

ameliorate the collective action dilemma.⁶⁴ As with most other aspects of being a hybrid regime, preventing and managing protest requires a complicated balancing act. In this case, regimes must exclude potential challengers from participating in the system while simultaneously preventing them from radicalizing and resorting to more violent forms of protest.⁶⁵

As we have seen, hybrid regimes attempt to maintain a balancing act between substantive democracy and authoritarianism. They hold elections but attempt to control the outcome of the elections. That being said, no political system is completely airtight, and even in relatively stable hybrid regimes such as Russia under Putin⁶⁶ protest does inevitably take place and must be responded to. In the upcoming sections I will be discussing the roles of coercion, channeling and political technology in the regime's response to protest.

3.1 Coercion and channeling

By describing the potential courses of action available to elites in hybrid regimes, I make use of Graeme Robertson's model in which coercion and the channeling of dissent are the primary strategies available to elites in such a regime when confronted with protest.⁶⁷

When faced with mobilized protest, authoritarian and hybrid regimes have two fundamental options available: negotiate or put the protests down.⁶⁸ Negotiation is risky because it leads to concessions and if the regime gives in to the demands of protesters, this may encourage oppositional activity and set a precedent for further collective action. Another risk is that signaling a willingness to negotiate can create a situation where rival elites within the regime potentially have much to gain by aligning themselves with the protesters. The other option of putting protests down, however, is a risky strategy. Indeed, hybrid regimes

⁶⁴ Tucker 2007, 541

⁶⁵ Ibid, 173

⁶⁶ For stability see Levitsky and Way 2010, 197-201

⁶⁷ Robertson 2011.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 172

attempting to maintain the appearance of democracy do not have the luxury of using outward force to put down popular protests, as this raises questions about how democratic the system is and how legitimate the regime is at the international level. Thus, while using force to put down popular protest is never an optimal solution for any regime, it is particularly suboptimal for hybrid regimes who intend to give the impression that they support democratic processes. With this in mind, hybrid regimes such as Putin's Russia adopt a more complicated strategy for managing protests. Graeme Robertson, building on Oberschall⁶⁹ and Earl⁷⁰, proposes two useful categories for conceptualizing how Russia's hybrid regime responds to protest situations: coercion and channeling.⁷¹ Earl provides the following definition of these categories and the difference between them:

“Coercive repression involves shows and/or uses of force and other forms of standard police and military action (e.g., intimidation and direct violence). Channeling involves more indirect repression, which is meant to affect the forms of protest available, the timing of protests, and/or flows of resources to movements.”⁷²

Beyond this, coercion is often more of a short-term strategy than channeling, which is designed to create prevent the need for using coercion by preventing dissent while it is still in the formation process. However, as will be discussed later, when channeling fails and a regime does not want to resort to coercion, political technology can be used as a short-term solution to help fill in the gap and ensure electoral success. In the long-term, however, channeling appears to be a more viable strategy.

⁶⁹ See Oberschall, Anthony, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

⁷⁰ Earl, Jennifer, “Tanks, tear gas, and taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression.” In *Sociological Theory*, 21: 1 (2003), 44-68

⁷¹ Robertson 2011, 174

⁷² Earl 2003, 48

3.1.1 The use of coercion

Coercion, or the use of force, has been an important tool for regimes historically. In Putin's Russia, it is important to note that in many cases—and especially the most brutal cases—coercion is performed not only by police and military forces, but also by other various actors—often anonymous—who harass and/or attack participants of oppositional activity. As Earl puts it, “*private agents can also exert unobserved, coercive pressure,*”⁷³ such as death threats or attacks by unidentified assailants. “Unobserved” here refers to the covert nature of these activities and leads to difficulties in quantifying the presence of coercion and drawing conclusions about who ordered them.

Coercion can take a variety of forms, including physical violence, harassment of activists and preventative arrests. It can also take place behind the scenes to extort cooperation. The use of coercion to maintain power has a long history throughout the Soviet Union and continues in the Russian Federation today. In the Soviet Union under Stalin, the use of violent repression, generally carried out by the NKVD and often in an arbitrary manner, was the normal response to any sign of rebellion. As Mark Beissinger notes, repression under Khrushchev became more structured into a hierarchy of applied force, with local and regional police and KGB officials tasked with providing the first response.⁷⁴ If this was not sufficient, local army troops would be summoned and, if necessary, Moscow special forces. The amount of violence used tended to increase as the response moved up the hierarchy, with the special forces being the most brutal.⁷⁵ By the Brezhnev period, manifestations of coercion took on a more preventative and less outwardly brutal nature. The repertoire of coercion during this period consisted more of preventative arrests and harassment of opposition figures. While the special forces were called out on at least twenty

⁷³ Earl 2003, 50

⁷⁴ Beissinger, Mark, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 331

⁷⁵ Ibid, 331

occasions during Brezhnev's rule, the level of violence applied was significantly lower than under Stalin or Khrushchev.⁷⁶ Following a period of decline in state use of coercive tactics on activists under Yeltsin, these tactics have reemerged once again during Putin's presidency.⁷⁷

Coercion of activists under Putin's government is a multifaceted affair. Preventative harassment and intimidation is not uncommon and sometimes this harassment is conducted by the police and or various state agencies. Coercive forms of police harassment have taken on numerous forms over the years, including the detainment of activist leaders in routine document checks just before protests in order to prevent their attendance,⁷⁸ detainment of people wearing the white ribbons associated with the 2011-2012 election protests,⁷⁹ the summoning of independent election monitors⁸⁰ and activist leaders⁸¹ for questioning related to extremist activities and other criminal activities by the police, FSB and various other state agencies. In Nizhny Novgorod, one activist associated with Strategy 31 (a group that holds unsanctioned monthly demonstrations advocating for the right to assemble peacefully) was arrested for failure to pay a fine for organizing one such rally. She had received no notice of this fine, and was allegedly told by the police officer questioning her that if she "keeps up with all the protest activity" she will "never get out of this place."⁸² In addition to non-violent police harassment, the police have been accused of using excessive force curtailing demonstrations, as was the case of the alleged police beating of arrested environmental

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 331

⁷⁷ Robertson 2011, p. 189

⁷⁸ Myers, Stephen Lee. "Russia Detains Opposition Leaders Until They Miss a Protest." *New York*, May 19, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/19/world/europe/19europe.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print.

⁷⁹ "Na Chistykh prudakh zaderzhali lyudej s belimi lentochkami." May 07, 2012 <http://lenta.ru/news/2012/05/07/chistye/>

⁸⁰ Elder, Miriam. "Russian election monitors complain of state harassment." *Guardian* December 2, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/02/russian-election-monitors-harassment?intcmp=239>.

⁸¹ Clover, Charles, "Fear as police summon Russian blogger." *Financial Times*, Mar 13, 2012. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/810fa868-6d2c-11e1-b6ff-00144feab49a.html>

⁸² "Russia: Harassment of Critics." *TrustLaw*. Human Rights Watch, 01 Mar 2012. <http://www.trust.org/trustlaw/news/russia-harassment-of-critics>.

activists demonstrating against the removal of Khimki forest.⁸³ Other coercive acts, especially those involving violence, are often perpetrated by either plain-clothes state agents or anonymous figures in civilian clothing.⁸⁴ After enduring numerous anonymous threats, attacks on associates, finding his dog dead on his front porch and then having his car blown up, another Khimki forest activist (who had published a newspaper article criticizing local authorities) was beaten so severely by anonymous assailants that he lost one leg and was left unable to speak due to brain-damage.⁸⁵ Another example is Oleg Yashin, a *Kommersant* reporter associated with the liberal opposition movement who had written a number of critical articles about pro-Kremlin youth group *Nashi*. He was brutally beaten by two young men, whom he claims were likely associated with the youth group.⁸⁶ There have also been a startlingly high number of killings of journalists who were critical of the regime, notably Anna Politkovskaya,⁸⁷ and a board member of Memorial, Natalia Estemirova.⁸⁸ While establishing guilt for these attacks is well beyond the realm of this thesis, we can reasonably ascertain that attacks on journalists and activist figures who oppose the government with some regularity. There is no evidence whatsoever that these attacks came on direct orders from the Kremlin, and in fact in some of some instances, such as the murders of Politkovskaya or Alexander Litvinkenko—a former KGB-agent turned fringe anti-Putin activist who was poisoned in London—violence against opposition figures causes far more damage than benefits to Putin's government, especially in terms of its reputation

⁸³ Williamson, Hugh. "Letter to the Prosecutor of the Moscow District Anikin A.A. re: violence in the Khimki forest of Moscow." *Human Rights Watch*. Human Rights Watch, 27 Jul 2011. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/27/letter-prosecutor-moscow-district-anikin-aa-re-violence-khimki-forest-moscow>.

⁸⁴ "Russia: Harassment of Critics." 2012.

⁸⁵ Levy, Clifford J. "Russian Journalists, Fighting Graft, Pay in Blood." *New York Times* 17 May 2010, 30 May. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/18/world/europe/18impunity.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁸⁶ Kashin, Oleg. "A Beating on My Beat." *New York Times*, December 11, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/opinion/12Kashin.html>

⁸⁷ Chivers, C.J. "A Journalist's Revelations, in Life and in Death." *New York Times*, October 15, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/15/weekinreview/15chivers.html?_r=1&ref=annapolitkovskaya.

⁸⁸ "Russian activist found murdered." *BBC News*, July 15, 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8152351.stm>.

internationally. This suggests that Putin's regime may not be fully in control of some of extremist pro-Kremlin actors who act to coerce oppositional figures into abandoning their protests. There are, however, incentives in place for local officials and eager pro-Kremlin actors, including youth groups such as *Nashi*, to contribute to this atmosphere of violence and intimidation against opposition participants to gain the favor of the regime. As Andrew Wilson, invoking Lenin's adage *Kto kogo?* ("Who does whom in?"), notes, we can "assume that local elites will behave as badly as circumstances allow them to, if they are then to be subject to any kind of effective restraint."⁸⁹

We can conclude that the selective use of coercion does play a part in that way that Putin's government responds to mobilized protest. State implemented coercion often takes the form of preemptive harassment or excessive use of force in breaking up protests, while the more explicit and violent forms of coercion are often performed by a network of pro-Kremlin actors who are less concerned with maintaining a veneer of democratic legitimacy and are thus more free to get their hands dirty.

3.1.2 Use of Channeling

While coercion has been used in contemporary Russia, in recent years channeling or indirect repression has become the preferred method for managing oppositional activity and a great deal of effort has gone into devising sophisticated tools for channeling energy away from the opposition.⁹⁰ Channeling strategies are numerous and multifaceted, but they largely focus on "influencing both the capacity of people to protest and how protest appears in the media."⁹¹ Some of the basic techniques that are used to channel dissent in Russia, include state control of the mass media, cracking down on NGOs and civil society organizations, and the mobilization of pro-state activist groups.

⁸⁹ Wilson, Andrew, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 186

⁹⁰ Robertson 2011, 174

⁹¹ Ibid, 174

As argued in the previous chapter, events of the colored revolutions led the regime to embark upon a series of activities designed to “defeat proof” the system and channel potential oppositional energies into more pro-Kremlin activities.⁹² While some of these processes were already underway before the colored revolutions, they took on a more urgent nature afterwards. This channeling took on a number of forms that included seizing control of the information environment, cracking down on NGOs, creating pro-Kremlin social movements and groups such as *Nashi*. I will describe these forms of channeling giving, examples to illustrate the way channeling functions in Russia. Some of these tactics overlap with the shady world of post-Soviet political technology, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.1.2.1 Channeling the media

One of the ways Putin sought to ensure the dominance of the state was by launching an attack on independent media and asserting control over the information environment. This can be seen as a form of channeling that attempts to preemptively create support for the regime by controlling the information upon which the public forms its opinion.

In the 1990s, the media landscape in Russia was characterized by the rise of privatized news outlets that were controlled by various oligarchs. While the state at times exercised some authority over news coverage on state owned news outlets, this was spotty and inconsistent. Meanwhile, privately owned media outlets were often blatantly biased according the interests of their owners. Thus, while it cannot be claimed that the media environment in the 1990s in Russia was characterized by fairness or objectivity, there was at least a plurality of biases.⁹³ This atmosphere resembled a chaotic group debate, in which one

⁹² Ibid, 15

⁹³ Lipman, Maria and McFaul, Michael. "The Media and Political Developments." *After Putin's Russia*. edited by Wegren, Stephen K. and Ed. Herspring, Dale R. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 4th edition), 113

could glean something resembling objective information by comparing the ways different biased media outlets covered the same story.

Early in Putin's first term, the Kremlin launched an attack on the system of oligarch-controlled media. Two of the main privately-owned television stations, Vladimir Gusinsky's NTV and Boris Berezovsky's ORT, were brought under state control by 2001, and the country's largest private media holding company, Media-Most, was dismantled. Meanwhile, the state began exerting an increased amount of influence over the coverage on state-owned media outlets. By 2004, the Kremlin was in control of all major television stations and a vast array of print outlets, and the coverage on these outlets was exclusively—and often crudely—dedicated to state policies.⁹⁴ Around 70% percent of Russians get their news from the television. Saturating this coverage with pro-Kremlin stories and little or blatantly critical discussion of the opposition⁹⁵ is an effective way to preemptively prevent the public from forming oppositional ideas in first place.

While Russian television is tightly controlled by the state, a number of independent media outlets are tolerated - primarily in print, radio and online formats.⁹⁶ Some of these are well-established and reliably independent, such as the newspaper *Kommersant* or the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*. Magazines with independent or even oppositional slants come and go, such as the now defunct *Russian Newsweek*. In other cases, the media is clearly oppositional. Michael Idov has characterized Russia's version of *Esquire* as "a monthly anti-Putin screed with some fashion in the back"⁹⁷ and points out that in many cases journalists and editors of these media outlets doubled as some of the primary organizers of the protests during the

⁹⁴ Ibid, 118-121

⁹⁵ Stanley, Alessandra, "On Russian TV, It Isn't All About the Strongman." *New York Times* 13 Feb 2012, May. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/14/arts/television/putins-rivals-in-russia-gain-a-place-on-the-air-for-now.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁹⁶ Lipman and McFaul 2010, 122

⁹⁷ Idov, Michael "The New Decembrists." *New Yorker*. January 22, 2012. <http://nymag.com/news/features/russian-revolutionaries-2012-1/>

2011-2012 election cycle which will be further discussed later. This applies especially to the Moscow biweekly *Big City* (*Bol'shoi gorod*) and arts and entertainment weekly *Afisha*.⁹⁸ By allowing some independent media outlets, the state tolerates a small amount of dissent, in hopes that such small concessions will serve to pacify members of the population seeking oppositional media.

This consolidation of media under state control has coincided with the rapid rise in internet penetration in Russia, however. By the winter of 2011-2012 approximately half of the country's population used the internet regularly.⁹⁹ This is important to note because independent media and media with an oppositional slant thrives in Russian cyberspace. While outlets such as openspace.ru and slon.ru and the online television station *Dozhd'* exist exclusively online, all key independent and opposition-slanted media have a strong online presence. Social networking sites such as facebook and V Kontakte, along with twitter and the blogging platform livejournal.com enjoy a high level of popularity and serve as the key venues for the exchange of independent and oppositional information. They are also the primarily places where oppositional demonstrations are organized.

While there have been some attempts to lash out at online media, including recent inquiry into the financing of *Dozhd'*,¹⁰⁰ it remains thriving. In part this may be a symptom of Putin being somewhat behind on the times. While Medvedev is an enthusiastic internet user who started his own video blog and is often seen with his iPad, Putin has made remarks suggesting, for example that the internet is "50% percent pornographic material" and that he regards the internet with a mixture of incomprehension and disdain. Putin's campaign

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ "Internet v Rossii: dimamika proniknovenie. Zima 2011-2012 gg." Fond Obshestvennoye mnenie, April 24, 2012 <http://runet.fom.ru/Proniknovenie-interneta/10420>

¹⁰⁰ "Prokuratura prishla na telekanal Dozhd'." On *Dozhd'*, February 15, 2012 http://tvrain.ru/news/prokuratura_prishla_na_telekanal_dozhd-173348/

manager for the 2012 election, the film director Stanislav Govorukhin, made the following telling statement in an interview with NTV:

“For me the internet is garbage, because it is all lies. Well, take for example now on the internet or on twitter, they write that I made some statements. I didn’t make any statements. I don’t even know what twitter is. It would be a useful thing if it all wasn’t controlled by the US State department.”¹⁰¹

This attitude highlights the increasing gap between Russians who get their news from the television and those who get their news from the internet. Additionally, this difference plays a defining role in the strategies used by the state and the opposition in distributing information and mobilizing people behind their respective movements. As we will see in Chapter 3, this gap where different people get their news and information is already beginning to have enormous implications both on the Kremlin’s attempts to control the information environment and preventatively channel away dissent.

3.1.2.2 Regulating NGOs and Civil Society

Another strategy employed by the regime in order to preventatively channel support away from opposition has been to change a number of laws concerning the operation of NGOs in Russia. This has been a response to the influx of Western-funded NGOs, the role these groups played in colored revolutions in other countries and possibly fears amongst the elite that similar events could take place in Russia. These changes came in the form of several laws that came into effect in late 2005 and early 2006, requiring NGOs to reregister with the government within six months in order to continue their operations.¹⁰² While there were upsides to the law—it raised the bar for qualifying as an NGO and helped weed out for-profit or criminal organizations posing as NGOs—it put the fates of NGOs at the whims of the

¹⁰¹ As quoted on: http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1509374/citata_nedeli

¹⁰² Sakwa 2008, 343-344

authorities who could approve or deny requests as they saw fit.¹⁰³ Other changes put restrictions on the way NGOs—and especially foreign NGOs—can be funded and required the implementation of stricter accounting practices.¹⁰⁴ There was also a new system of Public Chambers, appointed by the Kremlin, designed to provide a forum for interaction between civil societies and the government and advise on legislation, which allows the government more involvement in the activities of NGOs.¹⁰⁵

3.1.2.3 Increased State Mobilization and Youth Groups

One of the most palpable ways that the colored revolutions impacted the Russian state's channeling tactics was that they illustrated to Kremlin elites the potential danger that mobilized youth groups, such as *Otpor* in Serbia or *Pora* in Ukraine, could pose to regime stability. While the Kremlin had dabbled in the creation of youth groups prior to this, this recognition led to increase state mobilization of youth after the Orange Revolution.

The largest pro-Kremlin youth groups are *Nashi* ("Ours") and the more moderate Young Guard of United Russia ("*Molodaya Gvardia Edinoi Rossii*" in Russian). Both were created in 2005 in an effort to channel youth energies away from existing oppositional youth organizations into either harmless or actively pro-Kremlin political movements.¹⁰⁶ At the time, there were a number of oppositional youth groups in operation. These included Young Yabloko, the Union of Youth "for the Motherland" and the National Bolshevik Party, and these groups did not particularly hide the fact that they were trying—albeit with minimal success—to become the Russian youth vanguard in the style of *Pora* with the ability to instigate regime change.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Robertson 2011, 192-193

¹⁰⁴ Sakwa 2008, 343-344

¹⁰⁵ Robertson 2011, 193

¹⁰⁶ Horvath 2011, 14-17

¹⁰⁷ Schwartz, Michael. "Russia's political youths." *Demokratizatsiya*. 15.1 (2007): 74-75.

Nashi is lead by Vasily Yakimenko, who had previously headed another youth group called “Moving Together” that was one of the Kremlin’s earlier attempts at channeling youth into pro-Kremlin political endeavors. The project was the brainchild of Gleb Pavlovsky, head of the recently defunct Foundation for Effective Politics, and implemented with support from Vladislav Surkov.¹⁰⁸ As Pavlovsky put it, “We felt we had to act quickly. We needed to create a safe political space for young, jobless people.”¹⁰⁹ According to *Nashi*’s website, its primary goals are:

“...the struggle against the unnatural union between oligarchs and liberals who strive to reject the sovereignty and independence of Russia in an “Orange revolution” scenario worked out in Ukraine and Georgia.”¹¹⁰

Additional goals include creating a “reserve of cadres for implementing modernization,” patriotism and the “belief in the future of Russia” and its “future of global leadership,” “uniting the Russian youth” and youth issues such as “to fight hazing in the army and domestic violence.”¹¹¹ While Surkov’s exact level of involvement is unknown, his notion of “sovereign democracy” appears to be the guiding ideology behind *Nashi* indicating that the regime is intentionally promoting such organizations in an attempt to protect the regime. *Nashi*’s manifest is also interesting in that at times it attempts to take on the rhetoric and goals of the opposition. Thus, *Nashi* aims “to expose corruption and expose bribe-takers to personal public ostracism.”¹¹² Or, “the formation of an active civil society [because] the ultimate goals of our movement can only be achieved if modernizing initiatives ‘from above’

¹⁰⁸ Horvath 201,14-17. The exact level of Surkov’s patronage of *Nashi* is unclear. For a more detailed discussion of this, see the following

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Gleb Pavlovsky in BBC *Russia, Putin and the West*.

¹¹⁰ “About *Nashi*.” <http://nashi.su/projects>

¹¹¹ *Nashi* manifest. <http://img.nashi.su/nashi.su/admin/data/3/9/manifest1.doc>

¹¹² Ibid

rely on political support ‘from below.’”¹¹³ Having adopted the rhetoric of the liberal opposition, the manifest describes a:

“...union of fascists, Westernizers [*zapadnik* in Russian, which can be either Westernizer or Westerner], ultranationalists, international foundations and international terrorists. This union is kept together by just one thing: hatred of Putin.”¹¹⁴

This rhetorical strategy of adopting the language and themes of the opposition and then turning it against the opposition is a common tactic that will be discussed more in the context of the 2011-2012 election cycle in Chapter 3. In the case of *Nashi*, the adoption of anti-establishment rhetoric has occasionally extended to criticism of and occasionally minor conflict with United Russia officials. While it has been argued that *Nashi* is not entirely dependent on the state and could potentially exist without state patronage,¹¹⁵ authors such as Horvath assert that *Nashi*’s occasional use of anti-establishment rhetoric and instigation of minor conflicts with regional United Russia officials are primarily part of a strategy for channeling disaffected and nonconformist youth into the movement.¹¹⁶

It seems that attempts to channel youth was somewhat effective, and at its peak *Nashi* had over 300,000 members¹¹⁷ and has been successful at delivering sizable participation in its demonstrations. In addition to arranging demonstrations and the type of harassment and *kompromat* harvesting campaigns described in section 3.3.1, *Nashi* is rumored to have a

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Atwal, Maya, “Evaluating *Nashi*’s Sustainability: Autonomy, Agency and Activism.” In *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61:5 (2009) 743-758

¹¹⁶ Horvath 2011, p. 16

¹¹⁷ Atwal, Mary “Investigating the democratic effects and state-sponsored youth participation in Russia: *Nashi* and the Young Guard of United Russia.”(2011): Submitted as a Doctoral Thesis. 22 Apr. 2012. http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/2842/1/Atwal_11_PhD.pdf

“battle wing” that brings in football hooligans to infiltrate opposition demonstrations as agent provocateurs¹¹⁸ and physically intimidate and attack opposition participants.¹¹⁹

The creation of pro-Kremlin youth groups represents one of the key state strategies for channeling potential dissent away from the opposition and into support for the regime. While *Nashi*’s future has been in doubt for years since the failure of a color revolution to materialize in Russia,¹²⁰ it is clear that elites in Putin’s administration recognize the need for state mobilization of the youth. This need was reiterated when the regime was faced with an unprecedented level of oppositional protest during the 2011-2012 election cycle, during which youth groups such as *Nashi* and Young Guard played a role in organizing pro-Kremlin counter protests. As such it is likely that either *Nashi* or a similar youth organization will continue to exist and play a prominent role in Putin’s channeling strategies.

Coercion and channeling are both used in different contexts and I have illustrated some of the specific ways they have been used in Putin’s Russia to manage dissent by examining the media, formation of pro-state activist groups and the regulation of NGOs. These strategies will be applied again in Chapter 3 as part of the discussion of the 2011-2012 elections. In the next section, however, I will introduce the concepts of virtual politics and political technology so that we may further explore techniques employed in Russia under Putin to manage dissent in the lead up to the recent elections.

¹¹⁸ "Boevoye krylo dvizheniya 'Nashi'. Kto organizoval vesporyadki 6 Maya?" Ekho Moskvyy, May 22, 2012 <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/danilalindele/891253-echo/>

¹¹⁹ Guillory, Sean, "Nashi: Is It Really The End?." *Exile*. April 22, 2008. http://exile.ru/print.php?ARTICLE_ID=18776&IBLOCK_ID=35

¹²⁰ Ibid. See also Atwal 2009.

3.2 Political Technology and Virtual Politics in Contemporary Russia

As discussed in the previous chapter, hybrid regimes such as Russia under Putin walk a fine line between authoritarianism and democracy, and in this political “gray zone”¹²¹ regimes tend to utilize a combination of coercion and channeling in order to maintain control and manage dissent and protest. In conjunction with coercion and channeling, political manipulation takes on paramount importance in establishing and maintaining control in Post-Soviet hybrid regimes. While authoritarian and totalitarian regimes can rely more on blunt mechanisms of repression to manage dissent, hybrid regimes attempt to at least evoke the image of being democratic countries while simultaneously controlling the outcome of what, at least on paper, appear to be democratic procedures. It is in this area, in which soft authoritarian control and simulations of democracy intersect, that so-called “political technology” is in particular demand.¹²² In Russia and much of the Post-Soviet world political technology has so thoroughly saturated the political process that the political environment can be characterized by Wilson as a system of “virtual politics,” a post-modern system in which multiple layers of meaning—both real and deceptive and often both real and deceptive at the same time—saturate the political environment so thoroughly that both the majority of the country’s citizens and foreign actors are left unable to determine what is real and what is virtual.

This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the concepts of “political technology” and “virtual politics” and the role they play in the contemporary Russian politics.

¹²¹ Ledeneva, Alena. *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices that Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 29-30. For a more in depth discussion, see Carothers 2002, 5-21.

¹²² Wilson, Andrew, “Political Technology’: Why is it Alive and Flourishing in the Former USSR?” On *Open Democracy*, June 17, 2011. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrew-wilson/political-technology-why-is-it-alive-and-flourishing-in-former-ussr>

3.2.1 Defining Political Technology

Channeling, as discussed in Chapter 1, is one way that Putin's government has attempted to siphon support away from opposition and toward supporting the regime. In some ways channeling overlaps with certain types political technology dealing with the formation of public opinion and to be discussed later in this chapter. Firstly, I define the difference between them along temporal lines: channeling entails long-term strategies designed to siphon support away from opposition and toward the regime, while the manipulation—and siphoning—of public opinion through political technology is a more short term strategy. However, at times the distinction is blurry. Some channeling strategies, e.g. the creation of pro-Kremlin youth groups, utilize elements of political technology. However, at the same time these are genuine movements with genuine actors openly supporting Putin. With political technology, everything is less straight-forward. For example, some political technology strategies, e.g. the creation of Zhirinovsky's Liberal-Democratic Party, do incorporate longer term channeling strategies to direct support away from substantive opposition. However, unlike *Nashi*, Zhirinovsky supports the regime not by directly siphoning support to United Russia or Putin, but by siphoning support away from substantive opposition into a fake opposition party that ultimately supports the Kremlin on everything important. More generally, it could be said that political technology lies on the fringe of channeling.

In Russian, strategies and tools of political manipulation are generally referred to as “political technology,” and its practitioners as “political technologists.” At its most basic level, political technology occupies many of the same roles that “spin”—“the act or practice of attempting to manipulate the way an event is interpreted by others”¹²³—and public

¹²³ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED). "Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. 24 April. 2012

relations do in Western countries. However, in much of the Former Soviet Union, its use goes much deeper, defining the very nature of the political system.

Political technology in Russia regards elites as the only key players,¹²⁴ but at the same time Russia is a hybrid regime that attempts to at least give the appearance of being a democratic system in which the populace selects its leaders based on popular preferences. Thus, for Russian leaders, legitimacy is, at least to an extent, derived from public support—or rather a peculiar mixture of genuine public support and the manufactured appearance of much wider public support.

In contemporary Russian politics, however, political support is often a fragile thing that Vladimir Gel'man has accurately characterized as “resigned acceptance [that] is still based on the lack of viable alternatives, not on trust in its institutions.”¹²⁵

It is in this context of faked popular support and faked democracy or “virtual politics” that the public is seen as a sort of gullible grey mass that needs to be manipulated in order to generate at least a layer of legitimacy—which even in hybrid or competitive authoritarian regimes is vital to maintaining control. Political technology and virtual politics, then, are the tools and strategies that are employed in order to garner support and the appearance of support and thus bestow a degree of legitimacy on political leaders. A system in which these tools are successfully applied to maintain political control can be regarded as a “virtual democracy,” although Surkov’s term “managed” or “directed democracy” (“*upravljajemaja demokratija*”) perhaps better conveys the manner in which many of Russia’s elites regard democratic procedures—as something that need to be controlled—and the enormous role that political technology plays in managing the outcome of these procedures.

¹²⁴ Wilson, Andrew, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 41.

¹²⁵ Gel'man, Vladimir, “Regime Changes Despite Legitimacy Crises: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in Post-Communist Russia.” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1 (2010), 61

The use of political technology is rooted in a kind of capitalistic nihilism in which creative political ideologies are created for elites who often lack any substantive political ideology beyond pursuing their own personal interests. Politics is viewed as theater, and the tools and strategies of political technology are the narrative devices used to compose the play and move the performance forward,¹²⁶ although its practitioners maintain that the outcome is beyond their control.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, the political technologists view themselves as “puppet-masters, scene-setters, political programmers.”¹²⁸ In other words, they are mercenaries who lack ideology but whose job is, in part, to create ideologies for the masses whom they view as gullible enough to believe in ideologies.

One of the key figures in the political technology milieu today is Gleb Pavlovsky, who got his start with Yabloko in the 1990s before working on Yeltsin’s reelection campaign in 1996. After successfully claiming credit for Yeltsin’s reelection and then Putin’s campaign in 1999-2000, Pavlovsky coordinated the Civic Forum and oversaw the assault on international NGOs operating in Russia. Pavlovsky has proven himself particularly adept at using the internet in his efforts, initially setting up slanderous clone websites, e.g. www.primakov.ru and www.lujkov.ru, similar to the politicians’ real pages except filled with information¹²⁹ along the lines of “Interesting Fact: In 1973, after a serious heart attack, Luzkov quit smoking.”¹³⁰ He later founded a number of highly influential news portals and website, including www.lenta.ru, www.inosmi.ru, and gazeta.ru.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Wilson 2006, 89-118

¹²⁷ Gleb Pavlovsky interview with Aleksandr Morozov. *Open Space*.
<http://www.openspace.ru/media/net/details/36463/>

¹²⁸ Wilson 2006, 41

¹²⁹ Wilson 2006, 54-55

¹³⁰ <http://www.lujkov.ru>

¹³¹ Gleb Pavlovsky interview with Aleksandr Morozov.

Krastev noted that one of the key aspects separating political technologists from other political and PR consultants is that political technologists are almost always connected to the Kremlin in some way.¹³²

3.2.2 *Why Virtual Politics?*

In order for political technology and virtual politics to be a viable strategy for elites, there need to be certain cultural, informational and structural conditions in place. Wilson pinpoints four conditions under which virtual politics can be effectively employed: “a powerful but amoral elite; a passive electorate; a culture of information control; and the lack of an external counterpoint, i.e. foreign intervention.”¹³³

As Wilson notes, “virtual politics is created by supply rather than demand”¹³⁴ and was able to flourish in Russia largely as a result of the vacuum in political identity and ideology that came into being after the fall of the Soviet Union. For the past two decades, Russia has been struggling to come up with a coherent ideology and understanding of its place in the world.¹³⁵ At times it has—as in the early Yeltsin period—seemingly sincerely attempted to move closer to the West. At the same time, however, holdovers from the Soviet mentality and, it has been argued that due to a series of mistakes during the privatization process of the early 1990s caused the country to descend into chaos and poverty. By the mid-1990s Yeltsin was enormously unpopular and in this context elites began moving farther away from Western ideals and withdrawing into increasingly authoritarian tendencies while simultaneously attempting to maintain the appearance—both in domestic and foreign politics—of conforming to Western notions about democracy. At the same time elites fell back on—or perhaps never moved beyond—collusive and informal practices and strategies

¹³² Krastev, Ivan, “Democracy’s Doubles.” In *Journal of Democracy*, 17, no. 2 (2006), 56.

¹³³ Wilson 2006, p. 41

¹³⁴ Wilson 2006, p. 42

¹³⁵ For Russian ideological and identity crisis, see Sakwa 2008, 359-361.

that emerged during the Soviet Union, both to compensate for its limitations and to sidestep its restrictiveness.¹³⁶ While political technology enjoyed a degree of use even during late *perestroika*—the nationalist group *Pamyat*’ and the creation of Vladimir Zhirinovsky and his phantom Liberal Democratic Party being prime examples—it took on an especially large role during Yeltsin’s presidency.¹³⁷ The orchestration of Yeltsin’s reelection in 1996 is perhaps the brightest example, in which the electoral debate was successfully recast from what should have been a judgment of Yeltsin’s performance to Yeltsin vs. the specter of a return to communism and the Soviet past. In many ways, the 1990s were the free-for-all glory years for political technology, which thrived in the Darwinian turmoil of this period.

In the first terms of Putin’s presidency, Russia achieved a degree of economic and political stability that had been absent in the 1990s. In part, this was due to good economic fortune having to do with rising energy prices, but at the same time Putin launched a series of centralizing reforms and effectively limited electoral competition. At the same time, issues of national identity and ideology remained. Putin spent much of his earlier years as president tapping into the public’s wounded pride after the collapse of the Soviet Union and trying to restore Russia’s great power status, but this was not especially successful.¹³⁸ Thus, in lieu of undergoing a serious attempt to construct a coherent ideology or a democratic political system, political technology and virtual politics are used to create a kind of feedback loop that distracts and confuses the public while giving the false appearance of political discourse, competing political parties and a functional democratic system, while simultaneously avoiding all of these things almost all together by relying on the smoke and mirrors of political manipulation.

¹³⁶ Ledevna 2006, 14-17

¹³⁷ Wilson 2006, 38-39

¹³⁸ Judah, Ben; Kobzova, Jana and Popescu, Nicu. *Dealing with a Post-BRIC Russia*. (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

It is in this environment that political technologists were able to supply their services, which are useful in providing a narrative that conceals what Wilson, echoing opposition figures such as Alexei Navalny, refers to as a “kleptomatic regime” that lacks a substantive platform and seemingly exists to profit from its own power.¹³⁹

One key issue in Russia politics today is what impact the internet is having on the state’s ability to effectively use political technology as a means of control. I would argue that in recent years the internet in Russia has come to fulfill a role somewhat akin to what foreign intervention did previously, providing an increasingly large segment of society with an alternative source of information and an another version of reality than that provided by state-controlled information sources.

3.2.2.1 Virtual Politics in the West

Like Western spin doctors, for political technologists “the manipulation of the media is central to their work,” as Wilson puts it, “but by definition it extends beyond this—to the construction of parties, the destruction of others, the framing of general campaign dynamics and the manipulation of results.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, whereas spin doctors generally function almost like commentators constructing a persuasive narrative based on a chaotic mass of information already available, political technologists are more like novelists, constructing characters and events that fit in to a preconceived narrative that fits the needs of their employers.

On the most basic level, the task of political technologists is to improve the image of their client and, often as a corollary, damage the image of the client’s rivals.¹⁴¹ In this sense,

¹³⁹ Wilson, Andrew, "Putin returns, but will Russia revert to ‘virtual democracy’?." On *Open Democracy*. 08 May. 2012. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrew-wilson/putin-returns-but-will-russia-revert-to-virtual-democracy>.

¹⁴⁰ Wilson 2006, 49

¹⁴¹ Wilson 2006, 89

political technology in Russia is similar to PR and the “spin-doctoring” in the West. Just as American presidential candidates inevitably release an autobiography designed to project a certain image and provide a narrative to and tropes for their campaign, Putin released an autobiography in the run-up to the 2000 presidential election, projecting a tough guy narrative on top of what was essentially a blank slate.¹⁴² On the most basic level of smearing a rival’s images, political technology in the West shares similarities with its Russian counterpart. Scouring up pieces of information from a political figures’ past is inevitable in any democracy, although it could be argued that political technology has taken on a greater role in the United States, which has seen a degree of degradation and increasingly moved away from substantive political discourse to overwrought arguments over scandalous non-issues, smear campaigns based on such improbable things as Barack Obama’s birthplace and various sex scandals. Republican strategists success in recasting elections as judgments on moral and religious issues and the narrative of red states versus blue states has been a particularly successful example.

While—at least in the United States political technology is perhaps becoming more important—it can generally be regarded as playing a more vital role in much of the former Soviet Union and is generally more top down than in the West.¹⁴³ Information manipulation exists, but full-on virtual politics is not so prevalent in that the information that is being manipulated and spun is not manufactured specifically to benefit some party. In the West, spin-doctors do sometimes plant stories, their main task is to take existing information floating around in the media and turn it, provide an interpretation of it that best fits the needs of their employers. In contrast, political technologists in Russia operate on a much bigger

¹⁴² For a discussion of how Putin chose to depict himself, see Masha Gessen, *The Man without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).

¹⁴³ Wilson 2006, 48

playing field covering the entire political system and including the creation—rather than mere spin—or facts and events.

3.2.3 *Dramaturgiia*

A second key type of political technology is what Wilson refers to as *dramaturgiia*¹⁴⁴ (Russian for dramaturgy, i.e. “the art or technique of dramatic composition or theatrical representation”¹⁴⁵), which usually consists of “false election drama”¹⁴⁶ and encompasses the “entire culture of politics-as-performance, with common patters and repeat performances, even a common vocabulary.”¹⁴⁷

By constructing powerful *dramaturgiia* politicians are able dictate the narrative of the election. Most major Russian elections have included a key dramatic narrative to compel people to vote for the incumbent. The 1996 presidential election was cast as Yeltsin vs. the a return of communism. In 1999-2000, terrorist attacks and a renewed war in Chechnya provided the *dramaturgiia*. The 2003-2004 drama entailed bringing the oligarchs under control, and the 2007-2008 elections relied on the “Russia from her knees” narrative and a stable transfer of power to Medvedev.¹⁴⁸

Wilson identifies two subtypes of *dramaturgiia* that appear repeatedly in the Post-Soviet political environment. First is a device referred to as *perevod strelki* (‘switching the points’), in which a new drama is superimposed over an old drama in an attempt to reframe the discussion into terms that are more favorable to the party utilizing this strategy.¹⁴⁹ This can entail blaming another party or previous regime for current problems. An example of this

¹⁴⁴ Wilson 2006, 7

¹⁴⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED).” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. 24 April. 2012

¹⁴⁶ Wilson, 2012

¹⁴⁷ Wilson 2006, 49

¹⁴⁸ Wilson, Andrew, “‘Political Technology’: Why Is It Alive And Flourishing In The Former Ussr?” *On Open Democracy*, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrew-wilson/political-technology-why-is-it-alive-and-flourishing-in-former-ussr> 04 17, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Wilson 2006, 90

strategy from the 2011-2012 election cycle was attempting avoid substantive questions about Putin's policies that were raised by the opposition by casting opposition figures as agents of the United States and in this way attempting to turn the political discourse toward a narrative of Western meddling in Russia's domestic politics.

A second device is what Wilson refers to as *zelenye vorota* ('green gates'), which consists of "the artificial polarization of choice, usually involving the threat of *après moi, le deluge*, democracy in danger, or scarecrow extremists taking power."¹⁵⁰ The 1996 democracy vs. communism narrative is a clear example of this strategy being used effectively. However, as will be discussed in chapter 3, Putin's 2011-2012 election narrative had elements of this as well, involving a supposed threat of protesters bringing a disastrous color revolution coming to Russia.

While dramatic election narratives and reframing are used around the world—e.g. elections in the United States being turned into a judgment on social issues such as abortion and homosexuality—Post-Soviet *dramaturgiia* goes beyond simply distracting the public with emotionally charged issues and involves creating and directing virtual actors and events throughout the entire political process. The overlying goal of this is to create an alternative reality in which voters are left in fog of drama rather than discussion substantive policy issues. As Wilson has argued recently, one of the key failures in Putin's campaign during the 2011-2012 election cycle was the failure to produce sufficient *dramaturgiia*.¹⁵¹ At the same time, however, the opposition injected its own drama into the political environment, raising serious questions about Putin and United Russia's leadership and attempting to turn the election unto a condemnation of the existing regime. The role of *dramaturgiia* in the 2011-2012 election cycle will be further discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 90

¹⁵¹ Wilson 2012.

3.2.4 Information Wars and Black PR

A third key type of political technology used in Russia is Black PR, which entails the public distribution of negative information to malign the image of someone or something.¹⁵² The end goal with Black PR is, as Wilson puts it, “to virtualize the client’s opponent, to substitute in informational space a virtual version of the opponent’s image—if only for a captive mass audience.”¹⁵³

A key type of black PR is *Kompromat* (in Russian derived from “*compromising material*”), which consists essentially of mudslinging.¹⁵⁴ Alena Ledeneva has identified four key types of *kompromat*: political, economic, criminal and private. (60-62) First is information relating to indiscretions or malfeasance in an individual’s political activities. Examples include stories ran on the state television channel ORT (now Channel 1) in the 2000 election suggesting that Yabloko presidential Grigory Yavlinsky’s campaign was being financed by oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, a citizen of Israel, shown at the World Jewish Congress as the program explained that it is illegal for Russian presidential candidates to be financed by foreigners. (Led. 61) A more recent example is *kompromat* alleging that Alexei Navalny ‘s oppositional activities are financed by the United States government.¹⁵⁵ The second category relates to alleged economic crimes. A prominent example from the 1990s has to do with allegations that Berezovsky set up a shell company to embezzle funds from Aeroflot into off-shore accounts. (Led. 61). More recent examples include the appearance of what turned out to be a photo-shopped picture of Navalny with Boris Berezovsky¹⁵⁶ or (authentic) wire-tapped phone conversations that were leaked on www.lifenews.ru, a

¹⁵² Ledeva 2006, 32-33

¹⁵³ Wilson 2006, 70

¹⁵⁴ Wilson 2006, 70

¹⁵⁵ Dyatlikovich, Viktor, "Mne govorili: 'Vy s krovavoi gebnei slomatete zuby o Naval'nogo.'" *Russian Reporter*, June 27, 2011 <http://www.rusrep.ru/article/2011/06/27/fsb>

¹⁵⁶ Parfitt, Tom, “Russian Protest Leader Alexei Navalny Is Target Of Fake Photo Smear.” In the *Guardian*, January 09, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/09/russian-navalny-fake-photo-smear>

Kremlin-friendly news site, in which Boris Nemtsov vulgarly berated fellow opposition leaders.¹⁵⁷ The third category of *kompromat* relates to alleged criminal activities. Recent examples of this include the March 2010 release of a series of videos featuring three opposition figures—political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin, a leader of the opposition group *Solidarnost'* Ilya Yashin and editor and chief of the opposition leaning (and now defunct) Russian *Newsweek*—paying bribes to traffic policemen.¹⁵⁸ These videos initially appeared on the website of the United Russia youth group *Molodaya Gvardia*.¹⁵⁹ Several weeks later another video was released allegedly showing Fishman in his underwear using cocaine in the company of a semi-nude women.¹⁶⁰ Ilya Yashin alleged that a similar trap, involving two young women he met at a night club, was set up for him in the same apartment, but that he grew suspicious and left.¹⁶¹¹⁶² The final category identified by Ledeva involves scandalous information about an individual's personal life, including questions of morality, health, sexual orientation, etc.. For example, a Kremlin-orchestrated attack on Evgeny Primakov in the 1990s attempted to cast doubt on his health and suggested he was planning a trip to Switzerland for heart surgery.¹⁶³ In addition to the example above, a slew of hidden camera sex tapes have been leaked allegedly involving opposition National Bolshevik leader Eduard Limonov and writer Viktor Shenderovich,¹⁶⁴ American¹⁶⁵ and British¹⁶⁶ consular workers.

¹⁵⁷ Charles, Charles, "Kremlin accused of move to split protesters." *Financial Times*, December 19, 2011. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5b536af4-2a76-11e1-9bdb-00144feabdc0.html>

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXbivy9i2zg>

¹⁵⁹ Entry for "Fishman, Mikhail." <http://lenta.ru/lib/14204335/>

¹⁶⁰ Osborn, Andrew. "Kremlin accused of honey-trap campaign against opposition." *Telegraph* March 29, 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/7528316/Kremlin-accused-of-honey-trap-campaign-against-opposition.html>

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Yashin, Ilya. <http://yashin.livejournal.com/894296.html>

¹⁶³ Ledeva 2006, 64

¹⁶⁴ http://www.kompromat.ru/page_29133.htm

¹⁶⁵ "Klubnicha': Grekh dimplomata." *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, August 6, 2009 <http://www.kp.ru/daily/24339.4/530152/>

Much of the *kompromat* is harvested by the private security industry that became prevalent after the collapse of the Soviet Union left huge numbers of state security experts unemployed who sought new work using the same skillset they learned working for the KGB and other Soviet security branches.¹⁶⁷ *Kompromat* continues to be harvested, fabricated and published largely due economic incentives both for those are paid to gather it and those who are paid to publish—either directly from clients or in the form of increased readership.¹⁶⁸ There are indications that in recent years overly enthusiastic agents in pro-Kremlin youth groups such as *Nashi* and *Molodaya Gvardiya* have taken to setting up incriminating traps in order to produce compromising information on opposition figures.¹⁶⁹

In some cases the compromising information is accurate, in others it is not. More importantly, the majority of *kompromat* is viewed by the public as fabricated or unreliable.¹⁷⁰ That these scandalous stories are perceived as being unreliable contributes to limited effectiveness of *kompromat* in Russia. I would add that the continued reporting of *kompromat* despite public skepticism of its accuracy contributes to the Russian public's high level of distrust of the media.¹⁷¹ As a corollary to this, I would propose that the public's reasonable skepticism toward the accuracy of *kompromat* contributes to the widespread tendency of Russians to constantly ask themselves who stands to benefit from any revelations or pieces of negative information. This, in turn, can lead the release of *kompromat* to backfire. For example, the *kompromat* leaks described above involving opposition figures paying police bribes or having sex did less to discredit these figures than to provoke indignation toward

¹⁶⁶ Bingham, John. "British diplomat James Hudson resigns over Russian 'brothel' video." *Telegraph* July 10, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5788090/British-diplomat-James-Hudson-resigns-over-Russian-brothel-video.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Ledeva 2006, 69

¹⁶⁸ Ledeva 2006, 72-74

¹⁶⁹ Guillory 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Ledeva 2006, 71

¹⁷¹ For a general discussion of distrust in the media, see Scott Gehlbach, "Reflections on Putin and the Media." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26,1 (2010)

Nashi for manufacturing the materials and by correlation toward Putin and United Russia who stand to benefit from *Nashi*'s activities. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the 2011-2012 election cycle saw the release of numerous pieces of *kompomat*, some of which backfired against the regime.

3.2.5 Abuse of Power and Administrative Resources

Over the past decade, the use of administrative resources in order to influence the outcome of elections in Russia has taken on greater importance and become one of the preferred strategies for maintaining an electoral advantage¹⁷² and, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, were used extensively in the 2011-2012 election cycle in attempts to channel support for Putin and as part of the government's response to increasing levels of anti-regime protest. In Russian, the use of administrative resources is a euphemism for the "the use (or abuse) of bureaucratic advantages and material resources associated with public institutions for purposes of electoral campaigns of one of more candidates."¹⁷³ In other words, it is the bureaucratic branch of political technology.

This can take a variety of forms. Wilson, relying on interviews with a Ukrainian political technologist, identifies three key types of abuse of administrative resources. The first and most crude type consists of local officials using their clout to order people to vote a certain way and obstructing voters whom they cannot control. Second is using "concealed administrative resources" to alter electoral results, as in tampering with ballots or altering the results. Third and most common is the indirect financing of political projects and entities that benefit those in power.¹⁷⁴ All of these categories play a large role in generating support for Putin's regime and padding the vote in Russian elections, either in the ways outlined above or

¹⁷² Wilson 2006, 38; Wilson, 2012.

¹⁷³ Ledeva 2006, 47

¹⁷⁴ Wilson 2006, 72-73

through outright electoral fraud.¹⁷⁵ In addition to being used to influence an electoral outcome, administrative resources can entail influencing the outcomes of judicial proceedings for political purposes,¹⁷⁶ politically motivated inspections by various government agencies such as the tax authorities and fire inspectors,¹⁷⁷ and siphon funds from the budget in order to finance incumbent electoral campaigns.¹⁷⁸

Increased use of administrative technology in Russia was championed by Vladislav Surkov, who until December 2011 was deputy head of the presidential administration, as part of his notion of managed democracy.¹⁷⁹ Managed democracy relies extensively on administrative resources to hold the system together and control the political environment. Wilson argues that the type of system Surkov curated runs the risk of relying too heavily on administrative resources and could only function as long as the regime was popular.¹⁸⁰ If popular support fell, relying exclusively on administrative resources to remain in power would move it well into full authoritarianism. However, Wilson does not give Surkov enough credit in this, because while increasing the use of administrative resources he did not neglect to incorporate channeling—e.g. the creation of *Nashi* and the attempt to introduce the ideology of sovereign democracy—which in many ways is simply a more advanced and long-term application of political technology. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, Putin’s regime did rely too much on administrative technology and neglect the aspects of channeling and political technology that provide an electoral narrative and influence voter opinion. I suspect that this mistake is largely a result of the departures of Gleb Pavlovsky in the spring 2011 and then Surkov after the parliamentary elections in December 2011. Pavlovsky, who was fired for pushing too hard for a second Medvedev term, has claimed that Surkov was in

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 75-79

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 82-84

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 84

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 85

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 85-86

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 85-86

agreement with him.¹⁸¹ While guessing at the inner workings of the Kremlin is not an exact science, this suggests that a rivalry within the elite lead to the ousting of Putin's two key political technologists and that their absence may have led the regime to neglect the other type of political technology that influence public opinion.

3.3 Conclusion

Political technology and virtual politics encompass a variety of manipulative strategies that are frequently used in Russian politics. Often, it is used as a short-term strategy to secure votes in the absence of genuine support, and in the absence of genuinely popular policies, a lack of support is indicative of a failure to effectively channel dissent away from the opposition. In this type of situation, political technology can be used to put voters into a kind of alternative reality in which it is nearly impossible to distinguish between truth and reality. Key strategies outlined in this chapter include the creation of virtual opposition, *dramaturgia*, and black PR. The use of administrative resources also falls into the category of political technology, although it could be argued that in some manifestations it contains elements of coercion or simply outright corruption.

That being said, in a non-totalitarian society virtual politics and political technology are not airtight. Alternative information seeps in, and the main task of elites in a virtual politics orientated system is "that their version of reality should predominate—they know that it can never exclusively dominate."¹⁸² Rising internet usage in Russia has played a key factor in this process of alternative information seeping in, to such an extent that one of the

¹⁸¹ Hearst, David and Elder, Miriam. "How Dmitry Medvedev's Mentor Turned Him Into A Lame Duck." *Guardian* March 02, 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/02/dmitry-medvedev-rivalry>

¹⁸² Wilson 2006, 45

main cleavages in Russian politics lies along the line of people who rely on television and state-controlled media and those who rely on internet sources for their news.¹⁸³

Political technology can be seen as a short term solution for when longer-term channeling strategies are not successful enough and additional support for the regime needs to be generated in the short term. The surge in vocalized dissent that took place during the 2011-2012 election cycle is likely due in part to the failure to channel dissent away fully. Perhaps this is the result of elite laziness or hubris, but since around 2007-2008 it appears almost as if the regime is not trying especially hard to garner support either through good governance or through effective long-term channeling strategies or even sophisticated short-term political technology strategies. Wilson, describing elite attitudes toward political technology in 2006, characterized them not so much as trying to effectively use political technology as a viable long-term strategy, but “more crudely, they are happy simply to get away with it; not every loose end needs to be tied up.”¹⁸⁴ This seems to accurately describe the current use of political technology in Russia, where the standards for the use of political technology seems to have fallen. This is especially the case in the recent election, in which the Kremlin’s campaign was almost completely devoid of any cogent ideology, narrative or *dramaturgia*.

¹⁸³ Ioffe, Julia, "Activists get connected." *Financial Times*[London] 16 Dec 2011, 11 May. 2012. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/a4520742-2607-11e1-856e-00144feabdc0.html>

¹⁸⁴ Wilson 2006, 45

4. MANAGING DISSENT DURING THE 2011-2012 ELECTION CYCLE

The Russian election cycle of 2011-2012 was accompanied by a level of mobilized oppositional protest activity in response to alleged electoral fraud in the December parliamentary elections, March presidential elections, and more generally in opposition to United Russia and Vladimir Putin's attempt to return to the presidency. The opposition was far more mobilized than it has been at any other time during the Putin and Medvedev presidencies and organized the largest oppositional demonstrations since the fall of the Soviet Union.

In this chapter, I will examine how Putin's regime responded to this sudden surge in mobilized oppositional activity. This will be approached through a prism of the theories of coercion, channeling and political technology that have been discussed in previous chapter.

4.1 Time Period of Research

The case study will focus on the 2011-2012 election cycle, beginning in the late summer of 2011 with the build up to the December 4 parliamentary elections and Putin's announcement that he would run for president again and continuing through the March 10 presidential election. Although opposition activities continue to take place up at present and will likely continue to do so, I have cut the discussion off after the second major post-presidential election protest, which took place on March 10. After that rally—which had lower turnout than previous ones—there was something of a lull in protest activity. In some sense this seemed to mark the defeat of the movement and was followed by a period during which time leaders attempted to regroup and determine what shape future opposition activities would take. For some time after this the focus moved from Moscow to the regions, with a disputed mayoral election in Astrakhan and then an aborted mayoral campaign by oppositionist blogger Ilya Varlamov becoming rallying points for the opposition. At the same

time, protests seem to have lost some of the wider appeal they enjoyed in the winter, and with the demonstrations increasingly composed of fewer and more hard-lined participants a degree of radicalization may be taking place within the movement. However, these events are too recent and ongoing to be included in the case study, and so I have opted for the time period from late summer 2011 through March 10, 2012.

4.2 A Note on Sources

Given the recent nature of events, I have had to rely heavily on newspaper and magazine articles in this section. In addition to this, I have included primary sources from informal venues on the internet, such as social networks, blogs and YouTube videos. The reason for this is that the opposition in Russia is most active on the internet, with many of the leading oppositional figures maintaining blogs—most commonly on Live Journal--and therefore in researching the history of recent oppositional events and history, I have sought information in the blogosphere. Meanwhile, instances of electoral fraud and black PR were distributed on YouTube, and when relevant I have relied on these sources.

4.3 Protest during the 2011-2012 Election Cycle

For many, the sudden upsurge in popular protest during the 2011-2012 election cycle seemed to come out of nowhere. Looking back at the period leading up to the protests, there were signs of dissatisfaction and conflict among elites, but few people would have predicted that there would be such a high level of contentious action in the winter ahead. Indeed, while various opposition groups had been pushing for change and organizing demonstrations such as Strategy 31 and the Khimki forest protests for years, there was little unity between the different groups and their demonstrations attracted minimal attendance and posed little threat to Putin's regime.

As early as the beginning of 2011, there were signs that the opposition was gaining some a certain degree of momentum. This was especially the case on the internet. In recent years, internet penetration has increased and high-speed connections have become more widespread, providing a medium for activists to communicate. While this process has been going on for some time, internet as a means for spreading information and mobilizing has taken on a high level of importance during the past year as we be illustrated in this section.

Oppositional sentiments started gaining wider traction earlier in late 2010 and throughout 2011. In 2010, an internet community called the “Blue Buckets”—named after the increasingly unpopular blue lights that important individuals associated with the state are allowed to turn on and essentially disobey traffic rules, frequently causing mayhem in the process—was set up to provide a venue for sharing videos and names of officials with blue sirens committing egregious traffic violations. These stories took off in the press and caused a number of scandals.¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, an anonymously written Twitter feed called KermlinRussia that mocks the official Kremlin Twitter became one of most popular feeds in the country.¹⁸⁶ In late 2010, Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption blogger who in the past couple of years has become one of the key opposition figures, had created an internet crowdsourcing project called RosPil that allows users to analyze government tenders and call attention to corrupt transactions.¹⁸⁷ Then in a radio interview in early February 2011, Navalny referred to United Russia as the “party of crooks and thieves,”¹⁸⁸ a phrase that quickly caught on to the point that, if one entered the word “party” into the search field on Google Russia, the first prompt was “of crooks and thieves.”¹⁸⁹ Although only six percent of Russians

¹⁸⁵ Ioffe, Julia, “Activists get connected.” *Financial Times*[London] 16 Dec 2011, 11 May. 2012. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/a4520742-2607-11e1-856e-00144feabdc0.html>

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

¹⁸⁷ Petrov, Nikoai, “The Navalny Effect.” <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/12/08/navalny-effect-rosopil.net/21ux>

¹⁸⁸ Navalny, Aleksei, <http://navalny.livejournal.com/553708.html>

¹⁸⁹ Ioffe, Julia, “The Kremlin’s Spin Machine and Me.” *Financial Times* September 6, 2011 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/09/06/the_kremlins_spin_machine_and_me?page=full

recognized the name Navalny in April 2011¹⁹⁰, this phrase seemed to take on a life of its own and 28% of the population agreed that the phrase accurately described the party¹⁹¹ and even outside of Moscow and in Siberia, I frequently heard United Russia referred to simply as “the party of crooks and thieves” throughout the electoral season.

While this type of activity internet activity may on the surface seem somewhat trivial, in a country with high level of information control they represent a significant departure from the status quo. Indeed, Russians are among the most active users of social networking sites worldwide,¹⁹² and sites such as Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter and Livejournal have come to function as the key organizational and communication venues for the opposition.

After years of speculation over whether or not Putin would attempt to return for a third presidential term, he announced his intention to run for president again at United Russia’s party convention in September. While many Russians had expected this on some level, for a sizable part of the population the announcement seemed to be a cynical step backwards. Outside of state controlled media, comparisons of Putin to Brezhnev abounded,¹⁹³ invoking the image of stagnation.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, one of Putin’s key strategical mistakes, beginning from this announcement and continuing through his reelection, was failing to provide sufficient justification for his return to the presidency.

By early November, there was a palpable sense that some of the widespread apathy towards politics—over 80% of Russians believe they have no impact on the government’s

¹⁹⁰ “Rossiyane ob Aleksee Naval’nom.” May 20, 2012. <http://www.levada.ru/02-04-2012/rossiyane-ob-aleksee-navalnom>

¹⁹¹ “O partii ‘Edidnaya Rossiya.’” May 20, 2012. <http://www.levada.ru/press/2011050501.html>

¹⁹² “Average Time Spent on Social Networking Sites Across Geographies.” June 7, 2011.

<http://www.comscore.com/2011/06/average-time-spent-on-social-networking-sites-across-geographies/>

¹⁹³ See, for example: “Putin Brezhneva dogonit?” *Kommersant*, October 3, 2011

<http://kommersant.ru/doc/1785754>

¹⁹⁴ “Delu Brezhneva Verny.” *Gazeta*, October 05, 2011.

http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2011/10/05_e_3790830.shtml.

decisions¹⁹⁵—was turning into rancor. Support for United Russia had fallen to around 50%—compared to over two-thirds before the 2007 elections.¹⁹⁶ One of the first signs of this was at a rock concert in Kemerovo when the emcee was booed off stage after announcing that United Russia had sponsored the concert. This was followed by an incident at a hockey game in which one of the team captains attempted to read a speech lauding United Russia and similarly cut off by a booing crowd. Videos of these events were viral hits among Russian internet users, and it seemed to start a trend that culminated in Putin himself being booed off stage to shouts of “go away” while trying to deliver a speech congratulating the Russian winner of a mixed martial arts match against an American fighter. Putin’s press secretary tried to gloss over the incident, asserting that the crowd was booing the loser and not Putin, which lead hundreds of fans to post comments on the loser’s wall congratulating him for a good fight and stating that they were not booing him.¹⁹⁷ While incidents such as these would be of little consequence in a liberal democracy, the “return of satire”¹⁹⁸ in a hybrid regime such as Russia takes on larger meaning and represent the regime’s falling ability to channel away dissent through control of the informational environment. As one of my acquaintances put it, “We used to laugh with Putin [e.g. his response in 2000 to the question “What happened with the (Kursk) submarine:” “It sank.”¹⁹⁹], now we laugh at him.” Even if Putin does still enjoy a high degree of support overall, it is difficult to claim an overwhelming popular mandate to justify Putin’s return for a third term when videos of him being booed off stage are viral hits on the internet.

¹⁹⁵ “Ob otnosheniyakh grazhdan I gosudarstva roli prostykh- ossiyan v politike.” February 15, 2012.

<http://www.levada.ru/15-02-2012/ob-otnosheniyakh-grazhdan-i-gosudarstva-rol-i-prostykh-rossiyan-v-politike>

¹⁹⁶ Ioffe, Julia, “Putin and the Boo-boys.” *Foreign Policy*, November 29, 2011.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/29/putin_and_the_boo_boys

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

¹⁹⁸ Yaffa, Joshua. “The Kremlin’s Not Laughing Now.” *New York Times*, February 25, 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/26/opinion/sunday/political-satire-returns-to-russia.html?pagewanted=all>

¹⁹⁹ See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqDqvKYDv9M>

In the run-up to the December 4 parliamentary elections, one sensed that oppositional politics was coming into vogue among younger Russians. Friends of mine who had previously shown no interest whatsoever in politics and never voted were discussing the upcoming election, and the social networking sites were abuzz with comments and links mocking Putin and deriding United Russia. This trend was further represented by the shift in oppositional strategy—spearheaded by Navalny—of framing the election not as a chance to vote for a specific oppositional party, but as a chance to vote against United Russia.²⁰⁰ This campaign was accompanied by crowdsourcing competitions for designing anti-United Russia posters²⁰¹ and music videos.²⁰² Casting the election as a rejection of United Russia turned out to be fairly effective strategy²⁰³ that provided a degree of unity for a generally divided opposition.

On December 4th, the parliamentary elections took place with United Russia securing 49.32% of the popular vote²⁰⁴ amid widespread allegations of fraud.²⁰⁵ Amateur videos of alleged fraud began spreading across the internet,²⁰⁶ and that evening there were a variety of small unsanctioned protests by more radical fringes of the opposition—the National Bolsheviks, the Left Front and nationalist groups—resulting in over 250 arrests.²⁰⁷ The next day, around 5000 protesters gathered in central Moscow to protest the electoral results.

²⁰⁰ Navalny, Aleksei. "Final'naya bitva mezhdu dobrom i neitralitetom." <http://navalny.livejournal.com/617297.html>.

²⁰¹ Navalny, Aleksei. "Itogi konkursa." <http://navalny.livejournal.com/617297.html>.

²⁰² Navalny, Aleksei. "Spoyem?." <http://navalny.livejournal.com/625374.html>.

²⁰³ Golosov, Grigory. "Nasolit' shulerov." *Gazeta*, December 05, 2012. http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2011/12/05_x_3858542.shtml

²⁰⁴ Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation. "Summary of Election Votes." http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&ttvd=100100028713304&vm=100100028713299®ion=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vbid=100100028713304&type=233

²⁰⁵ Schwirtz, Michael. "Voters Watch Polls in Russia, and Fraud Is What They See." *New York Times* 11 12 2011

²⁰⁶ Ibid

²⁰⁷ "V Moskve nakanune byli zaderzhany bolee 250 oppozitsionerov." Radio Svoboda. December 05, 2011. http://www.svobodanews.ru/archive/ru_news_zone/20111205/17/17.html?id=24411560.

Navalny and Ilya Yashin were arrested and sentenced to fifteen days of administrative arrest. Smaller protests continued into the next day and then fizzled out due to high police presence in the city.²⁰⁸

On December 10 a non-violent protest against the elections took place in Bolotnaya Square, drawing anywhere from 25,000, according to the police, to 50,000 or more, according to organizers of the protest.²⁰⁹ The event had been organized and coordinated on social networking sites, with nearly 40,000 people registered to attend on the event's Facebook page.²¹⁰ The protest was non-violent, and the police did not interfere.²¹¹ One of the things that made this demonstration unusual and larger than any other demonstration in the past twenty years was its inclusiveness, drawing communists, liberals, nationalists and anarchists together to participate in the event.²¹² Opposition leaders from a variety of movements—including Grigory Yavlinsky (Yabloko), Mikhail Kasyanov and Boris Nemtsov (the Other Russia), Gennady Gudkov (A Just Russia), Eduard Limonov (National-Bolsheviks) and other key opposition figures such as journalists, writers and musicians—delivered speeches. Although not represented by any of the speakers on stage, nationalists led by Alexander Belov attended peacefully, although they did cause some minor disruptions such as lighting fireworks.²¹³ Smaller demonstrations took place in dozens of cities across Russia, including one with approximately 10,000 people in St. Petersburg.²¹⁴

²⁰⁸ Barry, Ellen, "Russia Cracks Down on Antigovernment Protests." *New York Times*, December 6, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/07/world/europe/jailing-opposition-leaders-russia-moves-to-quell-election-protests.html#>

²⁰⁹ Barry, Ellen "Rally Defying Putin's Party Draws Tens of Thousands." *The New York Times*, December 10, 2012.

²¹⁰ <http://www.facebook.com/events/198328520252594/>

²¹¹ Barry, Ellen "Rally Defying..."

²¹² Heuvel, Katrina Vanden, "Russia's Great December Evolution." *Nation*. December 12, 2011. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/165102/russias-great-december-evolution>.

²¹³ "10 dekabrya: khronika." December 10, 2011. <http://lenta.ru/chronicles/protest/>

²¹⁴ Gutterman, Steve, "Protests across Russia to Test Putin and Opponents." *Reuters*, December 9, 2011. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/09/us-russia-idUSTRE7B610S20111209?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&rpc=71>

On December 17, a demonstration arranged by Yabloko gathered from 1500-5000 people,²¹⁵ and the next day communists gathered 3000-5000 people for another demonstration.²¹⁶

One of the largest demonstrations took place on December 24 on Prospekt Sakharov Moscow. Like the event at Bolotnaya, it was organized largely on social networks, with nearly 55,000 people registered on Facebook to attend.²¹⁷ The police estimated that around 29,000 demonstrators showed up, while organizers claimed up to 120,000. This increasing discrepancy between police and opposition attendance estimates is notable in that the state controlled media—which did begin to cover the protests—used the police estimates. This took on more meaning as pro-government and anti-Orange Revolution counter protests (which will be discussed later in this chapter) were arranged. The demonstration again included speeches from a wide assortment of opposition groups, although clearly there was not complete oppositional unity given that the nationalist speakers and former finance minister Alexei Kudrin were booed.²¹⁸ However, the appearance of Kudrin, a Kremlin insider who has been a close ally of Putin's since his first term, is important in that it demonstrates that there is an increasing divide within the Kremlin elite.

The next large demonstration took place in on February 4, 2012 despite the temperature being -20 Celsius. Occurring at Bolotnaya Square and again organized on the internet, with nearly 30,000 registered to attend on Facebook,²¹⁹ estimates of actual attendance ranged from 35,000-120,000, with Ria Novosti estimating around 53,000 based on

²¹⁵ Malover'yan, Yury. "Miting 'Yabloko' v moskve sobral neskol'ko tysyach chelovek." BBC Russia, December 17, 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2011/12/111217_yabloko_elex_protest_rally.shtml

²¹⁶ "Na Manezhnoi ploshadi proshel miting KPRF." December 18, 2011. <http://lenta.ru/news/2011/12/18/kprf/>

²¹⁷ <http://www.facebook.com/events/231653370237319/>

²¹⁸ Elder, Miriam. "Russian Anti-Putin Protests Draw Thousands To Moscow Again." *Guardian* 24 11 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/24/russia-europe-news>

²¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/events/212286018856867/>

an analysis of the size of the square and density of the crowd occupying it.²²⁰ Parallel to the planning of this event the opposition was preparing for the March presidential election, including putting together and training over 20,000 volunteers to serve as election monitors.²²¹ Although the atmosphere at this demonstration was optimistic and promised more, larger events in the near future, this turned out to be the last event of its size.

On February 26, 11,000-34,000 (police and organizer estimates respectively) people held hands and formed a human chain around Moscow's Garden Ring—a 15.6 km circular road that encompasses the city center.²²² While this demonstration did have a high level of attendance, the demonstration was less united and dominated more by middle-class and liberal participants than previous actions. Meanwhile, Sergei Udaltsov, one of the key figures in the previous protests, led a far left faction of around 300 people in their own unsanctioned protest in Revolution Square. While the police did not put the protest down, reports indicate that a group of around 50 provocateurs and some "Kazakhs in papakhas" who were quoted as saying they arrived to "control the event so that there won't be any provocations or excesses." The provocateurs instigated conflict with some activists from the League of Voters (one of the election monitoring groups put together by activists), and then the Kazakhs joined in and a brawl broke out.²²³

On March 04, Putin was once again elected president. This was accompanied by allegations of fraud, detailed both online by volunteer election monitors and OSCE monitors giving "bad" or "very bad" rankings to one in three polling stations visited.²²⁴ On March 05,

²²⁰ <http://ria.ru/infografika/20120203/555809005.html>.

²²¹ Ioffe, Julia, "Upping the Ante." *Foreign Policy*. February 5, 2012.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/05/upping_the_ante?page=full

²²² Elder, Miriam. "Russians Protest Against Vladimir Putin By Forming Human Chain In Moscow February 26, 2012." <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/26/russians-protest-putin-moscow>

²²³ "Zamkaya krug. *Lenta*, February 26, 2012. <http://lenta.ru/articles/2012/02/26/ring/>

²²⁴ Barry, Ellen. "After Election, Putin Faces Challenges to Legitimacy." *New York Times*, March 25, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/06/world/europe/observers-detail-flaws-in-russian-election.html?pagewanted=all>

around 23,000 protesters showed up to Pushkin Square to protest the elections²²⁵ after just under 10,000 had registered to attend on Facebook.²²⁶ The demonstration started out peacefully and was accompanied by speeches from various opposition leaders. The meeting was approved to last until 20:00, at which point workers entered the crowd and began sweeping up trash around the attendees' feet. Gradually, the majority of the crowd dispersed, but around 500 more activists, including Navalny and Udal'stov, remained, refusing to leave the square. Special police forces (OMON) moved in and, with a degree of force that had not been applied at previous protests, arrested an estimated 250 people, including Navalny and Udal'stov. There were accusations of police brutality, including one activist whose arm was allegedly broken.²²⁷

On March 10 the final large protest of the 2011-2012 campaign cycle took place. Although police granted a permit for 50,000 demonstrators, although only around 6500 registered on Facebook²²⁸ and only around 20,000 actually gathered on New Arbat Street to protest against Putin. The demonstration was non-violent, and met with minimal arrests, although the general mood was markedly less festive than the previous events and participants seemed to recognize that, while 20,000 protesters several months before would have been a significant event, things had changed to the point that this was a disappointment.

4.4 How the Russian Government Responded to Increasing Levels of Dissent and Protest Activity

Disturbed by the increase in oppositional activities and wary of the fate of countries where colored revolutions took place, the Putin regime applied strategies intended to

²²⁵ <http://ria.ru/infografika/20120306/585313251.html>

²²⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/events/382708068424764/>

²²⁷ "Mitinga 5 marta: khronika." *Lenta* 03 05 2012. <http://lenta.ru/chronicles/thedayafter>.

²²⁸ http://www.facebook.com/events/388283827867165/?notif_t=event_invite

minimize the effects of protest, curb dissent and prevent more threatening forms of oppositional activity from taking place. These reactions can be examined using the framework from the previous chapters where the strategies of coercion, channeling and political technology were introduced.

4.4.1 Role of Coercion

The response of Putin's regime to increased mobilized protest did include some incidences of coercion, primarily in putting down unsanctioned protests. However, as discussed previously, regimes that claim to be democratic to use outright force cannot use force in obvious way. It for this reason that coercion did not figure heavily in the state reaction. However, I will now describe the instances of coercion that did occur to illustrate that even when not employed in pronounced ways this strategy is effective and still employed to some degree.

At the first spat of sizable unsanctioned rallies after the parliamentary elections, the police arrested hundreds of demonstrators along with several key opposition leaders. In this process, they used a degree of force and there were reports of protesters being beaten while being detained.²²⁹ Similar accusations emerged in relation to the police's handling of unsanctioned protests following the presidential election. These accusations included excessive use of force in detentions, denying arrestees food and water, and instances of harassing people wearing white ribbons, especially in the regions.²³⁰ With sanctioned protests—which included all the largest events—the police did not interfere or use coercion

²²⁹ Elder, Miriam. "http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/05/russia-election-violence-arrests-moscow." *Guardian*, December 5, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/05/russia-election-violence-arrests-moscow>.

²³⁰ "Russia: Police Beat, Detained Protesters," *Human Rights Watch*, March 13, 2012. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/13/russia-police-beat-detained-protesters>.

to any significant extent,²³¹ perhaps because the regime realized these events would be observed globally and sought to maintain the appearance of a democratic regime. In addition to isolated instances of coercion in responding to protests, the authorities and the state-controlled media harassed the independent election monitoring group GOLOS.²³² There were also coercive elements in some of the information war strategies (discussed below), such as DOS attacks on GOLOS and virtually all independent media outlets which may be interpreted as coercion.²³³

While there has been a degree of harassment and coercion of oppositional activists over recent years,²³⁴ the authorities mostly avoided coercive responses to the protest that took place during this election cycle.

4.5 Counter Protests

One of the key government responses to the oppositional protests was to arrange counter protests. Generally, these fell into two categories: anti-Orange protests and rallies actively supporting Putin and the regime. While some attendees were genuine supporters of Putin, it appears that many were either pressured or paid to participate. The process of mobilizing people to attend pro-regime demonstrations generally falls into two key strategies:

First, is the use of administrative resources and pressure to push so-called *budzhethniki* (people financially dependent on the state in some way) into attending counter protests. This includes employees of state agencies, teachers and students on stipends. The exact style of applying pressure varies by organization. There are reports of outright coercion or hinted

²³¹ "Russia: Protests Go on Peacefully." *Human Rights Watch*, December 6, 2011.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/06/russia-respect-right-peaceful-protest>

²³² "Russia: Stop Harassing Election Monitors, Release Demonstrators." *Human Rights Watch*, December 5, 2011. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/05/russia-stop-harassing-election-monitors-release-demonstrators>

²³³ Ibid

²³⁴ Lokshina, Tanya. "'Russia: Expert Testimony on the Situation for Human Rights Defenders' *Human Rights Watch*, January 26, 2012. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/26/russia-expert-testimony-situation-human-rights-defenders>.

threats being used, but more commonly attendance is merely encouraged and made easy by providing transport and food.

Second, is through state owned companies or private businesses sympathetic to the regime. In the case of the largest pro-regime demonstrations, the majority of the participants allegedly came from large organizations less than 200 km from Moscow. Again, coercion occurs but more often participation is merely encouraged and facilitated, with attendees being bussed in, fed, and given a free time and an excursion around the city. This is a costly endeavor. Although reliable figures are hard to come by, it has been estimated that, in the case of the February 23 pro-Kremlin counter demonstration, around 22,000 rubles (~\$725) was spent on each participant.²³⁵ So-called agitators, who took active roles such as speaking to media, and distributing materials in support of the regime are believed to have received 10,000-12,000 rubles (~\$330-400).²³⁶ The expenses businesses incur are believed to be compensated through tax breaks and preferential treatment provided by the regime they have helped to support.²³⁷ One of the methods for gathering participants is through ads on websites such as massovki.ru. Here organizers indicate location and time of the demonstration, where to meet and whom to contact, the amount participants will be paid, and how long it will take.

After the opposition protests began, *Nashi* was the quickest to mobilize, arranging counter protests with around 15,000 people on December 4, 2011 and then drawing around 5000 again two days later. It was widely reported that activists were bussed in from other cities and camped out in a fairground. According to reports, activists were primarily 18-19 years old, from smaller cities around Moscow. Some attendees were quoted as saying that

²³⁵ “Ekstremnoe byuro Putin i co.” http://echo.msk.ru/blog/k_borovoi/861787-echo/ 02 23 2012

²³⁶ Ibid

²³⁷ Bulin, Dmitry. "Runet obsuzhdaet, kto oplachival miting za Putina" *BBC Russia*, February 24, 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2012/02/120224_putin_rally_internet.shtml

they had come mainly because they were offered a free trip to Moscow and free meals at McDonalds.²³⁸

The next big counter-demonstration took place on December 12 in support of United Russia. Police estimated the crowd at 25,000, although eyewitnesses claimed it was much less.²³⁹ Press interviews with attendees suggested that administrative resources had been used to bring people out, with some participants reporting that classes had been cancelled at their universities and schools and students pressured to attend the rallies.²⁴⁰

These actions continued and on December 24, several thousand (8000 according to police, 500 according to independent radio station Echo of Moscow) people gathered for an “anti-Orange” revolution demonstration that took place in Moscow.²⁴¹

By February 4, 2012, a much larger anti-Orange demonstration was organized at Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow. Police estimated attendance at 138,000, although this was likely inflated.²⁴² Speakers denounced oppositional protesters as tools of the United States government who were instigating a colored revolution that would be disastrous for Russia.²⁴³ State-media dedicated significantly more coverage to this protest than the oppositional protest on Prospect Sakharov that had taken place the same day.²⁴⁴ Administrative resources were used extensively in mobilizing the event, with many participants transported to the site on

²³⁸ Shuster, Simon "The Empire Strikes Back: Putin Sends in the Storm Troopers." *Time*, December 7, 2011. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2101741,00.html?xid=gonewsedit>

²³⁹ Schirtz, Michael. "Few at Putin Party's Rally, and Even Fewer Willingly." *New York Times*, December 13, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/13/world/europe/attendance-is-light-at-united-russia-rally.html?_r=1&ref=world

²⁴⁰ Ibid

²⁴¹ "V Mockve prokhodit 'antioranzhevy miting'" Regnum, December 24, 2011 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1483343.html>

²⁴² <http://www.ria.ru/infografika/20120203/555840256.html>

²⁴³ Barry, Ellen. "In Biting Cold, Protesters Pack the Center of Moscow." http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/world/europe/tens-of-thousands-protest-putin-in-moscow-russia.html?_r=1 02 04 2012

²⁴⁴ Borodina, Arina. "Bolotnaya--ne Poklonnaya, i naborot." *Kommersat*, February 6, 2012. <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1866809> 02 06 2012

private buses, and employees of government agencies and state owned companies were pressured to attend. One leaked document from the Russian Pension Fund showed that at least 12% of employees were expected to arrive at the meeting,²⁴⁵ while employees of other governmental institutions, such as the Russian Postal Service and United Energy Company, were coerced into attending. Meanwhile, employees of companies such as RosNeft were allegedly told they would be fired if seen at opposition rallies.²⁴⁶

Likely the largest pro-Putin rally took place on the national Defender of the Fatherland holiday on February 23, gathering around 120,000 people and culminating with a speech by Putin at Luzhniki stadium.²⁴⁷ It was reported that there were fewer *budzhethniki* at this demonstration, and that attendance was organized primarily through private companies.²⁴⁸ On March 04, tens of thousands of pro-Putin demonstrators arrived to Manezhnaya Square to celebrate Putin's victory in the election. Dozens of buses filled the surrounding streets, and processions of participants followed organizers with signs for their particular organization into the square, where Putin delivered a teary victory speech

4.5.1 Channeling and Media Coverage

As discussed in Chapter 2, control of the information and media environment is one of the key ways that hybrid regimes seek to channel support away from opposition and toward support for the government. Putin's government has sought to control the information environment by focusing primarily on television. We have seen that while most Russians still get their news from the television, the rise of the internet has resulted in an informational environment that is relatively free from state control and influence. As such, one of the main

²⁴⁵ Adaganev, Rustem, <http://drugoi.livejournal.com/3691948.html>

²⁴⁶ Kozenko, Andrei. "Grazhdan sklonyayut k Poklonnoi. *Kommersant*, February 3, 2012. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss/1864540> 02 03 2012

²⁴⁷ "Putin vystupil na mitinge v 'Luzhnikax." February 23, 2012. <http://lenta.ru/news/2012/02/23/putin/>

²⁴⁸ Kozenko, Andrei. "Glasny den' kalendarya." *Kommersant*, February 24, 2012. <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1879337>

fault lines in Russian political culture lies between the portion of the public who get their news from television and those who get news from the internet. During the 2011-2012 election cycle and accompanying protests, the regime continued to focus its information channeling efforts primarily on television, but at the same time television coverage of the opposition movements opened up to a limited degree.²⁴⁹

Until the major protests in early December, the state controlled television stations provided virtually no coverage of oppositional activities. This continued through the initial unsanctioned protests following the parliamentary elections, with state television channels dedicating their coverage almost exclusively to pro-government rallies.²⁵⁰ This began to ease up after the December 10 opposition demonstration, which was covered on all three major state-controlled television stations. The coverage was dry but more or less objective, although the demonstrators' complaints and demands were addressed only to the extent of saying that they believed there had been electoral fraud.²⁵¹ As the protests continued, the main television stations continued to cover them in this manner. One other positive development is that some of the more moderate opposition figures, such as Boris Nemtsov, who have traditionally been blacklisted from state television, were allowed to appear on shows with a talk show format.²⁵²

While the main television stations did begin to coverage the opposition protests to a much greater degree than before, pro-Kremlin activities still received more airtime, and the television vs. internet fault line continued to exist. For instance, in Irkutsk in mid-December I went to get a haircut, and asked the hairdresser what she thought of the protests taking place in Moscow and Petersburg. "What protests?" she asked. "I think I heard something, but I

²⁴⁹ Alexandra Stanley, "On Russian Tv, It Isn't All About The Strongman." *New York Times*, February 14, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/14/arts/television/putins-rivals-in-russia-gain-a-place-on-the-air-for-now.html?pagewanted=2>

²⁵⁰ *BBC Monitoring*, December 7, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16067899>

²⁵¹ *BBC Monitoring*, December 10, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16128473>

²⁵² Alexandra Stanley, "On Russian TV..."

don't remember what it was about." I asked her if she followed the news, and she said that she listened to the radio, including the news, all day at work and watched the evening news on television every evening.

4.6 Use of Political Technology in the Regime's Response

In formulating a response to the surge in protest, the Kremlin relied heavily on political technology, but at the same time this was not used very effectively. This section will outline some of the specific instances in which political technology was used during the 2011-2012 election cycle in pursuit of electoral victory and in response to increased oppositional activity.

4.6.1 Information Wars and Black PR

In responding to increased oppositional activity, political technology strategies involving information wars and black PR were used throughout the election cycle. Usage of black PR was widespread.

In October, an article in *Novaya Gazeta* reported that United Russia had taken out a 10,000,000 rubles contract with a PR firm to conduct a black PR campaign against Navalny. According to the article, strategies that United Russian officials had discussed with the firm included finding someone who looks like Navalny and taking *kompromat* pictures of him and paying established bloggers to post stories maligning Navalny's reputation.²⁵³ By coincidence or not, ten days later Navalny's private email correspondence was leaked onto the internet. There was little that was controversial in the emails, and Navalny responded by posting them all on his blog.²⁵⁴ The emails did include correspondence with the exiled oligarch Stanislav Belkovsky, which hinted that Navalny might be receiving money from him. While Navalny

²⁵³ Martazin, Irek . "Zakaz na Naval'nogo. Politicheskii detektiv." *Novaya Gazeta*, October 17, 2011. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/48964.html>

²⁵⁴ Navalny, Alesksei, <http://navalny.livejournal.com/635635.html>

confirmed that most of the emails were genuine, he claimed that these ones were manufactured. A similar story came out in February, when leaked correspondence between *Nashi* organizers and various bloggers, including several well-known opposition bloggers, showed that *Nashi* was paying them to write blog posts that were sympathetic to Putin.²⁵⁵

In December, the state-owned television station Channel 1 showed a cartoon that depicted Navalny in a shirt reading “I am a fascist,” performing Hitler salutes and shouting “Sieg Heil.”²⁵⁶

On the even of the December 24 protest, a website linked to the Kremlin, lifenews.ru, released tapped phone conversations of Boris Nemtsov speaking poorly of other opposition figures, referring to them as “hamsters” and “scared penguins.”²⁵⁷

In early January a photograph was leaked on the internet and printed and distributed in some cities that featured Navalny and Boris Berezovsky standing together and the caption ““Alexei Navalny has never hidden that Boris Berezovsky gives him money for the struggle with Putin.” The photograph was quickly revealed to be photo shopped and was likely produced by a pro-Putin coalition called All-Russia People’s Front and the newspaper *Arguments and Facts*.²⁵⁸ This was an instance *kompromat* backfiring, with Navalny boastfully posting the picture on his blog and then other users posting pictures of him with Stalin, Hitler, a bodybuilder.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Elder, Miriam, “Emails Give Insight Into Kremlin Youth Group's Priorities, Means And Concerns.” In *The Guardian*, February 7, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/07/nashi-emails-insight-kremlin-groups-priorities>

²⁵⁶ Ibid

²⁵⁷ Bratersky, Alexander, “Leaks Target Nemtsov Before Rally,” *Moscow Times*, December 20, 2011. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/leaks-target-nemtsov-before-rally/450256.html>

²⁵⁸ Parfitt, Tom, “Russian Protest Leader Alexei Navalny Is Target Of Fake Photo Smear.” *Guardian*, January 12, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/09/russian-navalny-fake-photo-smear>

²⁵⁹ Kramer, Andrew “Smear In Russia Backfires, And Online Tributes Roll In.” *New York Times*, January 8, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/09/world/europe/smeat-attempt-against-protest-leader-backfires-in-russia.html>

One of the most incredible instances of black PR being used in response to the protest movement was a documentary (in the loosest sense of the word) called “Anatomy of a Protest” that was aired on NTV.²⁶⁰ The film attempts to take on the rhetoric and allegations of the opposition and turn them around on the opposition. Thus, a dramatic voice-over informs of oppositional organizers paying people participate in demonstrations in exchange for “money and cookies,” juxtaposed with an image of a crowd of people fighting over a box filled with cookies. “Bums get 300 rubles,” says the announcer, “while people who look like the representatives of the creative class get much more.” Opposition organizers are accused of paying Kenyan students, “*gasterbaiters* from Uzbekistan” and “bums with signs” to attend pro-Putin rallies so that they can film them and put the videos on in internet in an attempt to discredit the pro-Putin rallies for paying people to participate. Meanwhile, the documentary shows footage of a man saying “I don’t understand” in German and asks the viewer, “what are these workers of the American consulate doing at opposition meetings?”²⁶¹

In addition to the above smear campaigns and use of *kompromat*, a variety of sometimes bizarre information was distributed in order to discourage people from attending anti-government rallies. Russia’s chief sanitary inspector warned people that attending protests could put them at risk for falling ill with pneumonia and respiratory infections.²⁶²

Internet attacks—which have elements of coercion—were also common. Before and during both the parliamentary and presidential elections, the websites of virtually every oppositional media outlet, along with LiveJournal, were subjected to DOS attacks that took many of them offline. Additionally, social networks and twitter feeds used to organize

²⁶⁰ <http://www.ntv.ru/video/peredacha/296996/>

²⁶¹ Barry, Ellen & Schwartz, Michael, “Russian Tv Broadcast Besmirching Protesters Draws A Furious Reaction.” *New York Times*, March 24, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/world/europe/russian-show-besmirching-protesters-stirs-outrage.html?pagewanted=all>

²⁶² Schwartz, Michael, “Russia Allows Protest, But Tries To Discourage Attendance.” *New York Times*, December 9, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/10/world/europe/russia-allows-rally-but-discourages-attendance.html>

opposition rallies were flood with spam and pro-government information that was likely sent out by hijacked computers and bots.²⁶³ I also observed that in some cases this spam would distribute false information about where an oppositional rally would be, sometimes providing directions to pro-Putin rallies.

4.6.2 The Use of Dramaturgiia

Unlike previous Russian elections, the 2011-2012 election cycle was unprecedentedly low on *dramaturgiia*.²⁶⁴ Putin's campaign relied heavily on the same tropes and drama he had already used before. Thus, the main narrative devices were running on the Russian public's fear of the 1990s²⁶⁵ and the supposed threat of a colored revolution that was posed by the opposition.²⁶⁶ Both of these narratives utilized elements of the *zeleniye vorota* strategy discussed in Chapter 2 in an attempt to polarize the public's perception of available options to two extremes: stability vs. chaos and status quo vs. disastrous revolution.

Wilson has characterized this as a "grab bag campaign" in which a variety recycled themes were haphazardly employed with no overarching narrative.²⁶⁷ In addition to the above narrative devices, including hyped up accounts of American interventionism interfering in Russia's domestic politics. In this vain, Putin accused Hilary Clinton of sowing protest in

²⁶³ "Russian Twitter political protests 'swamped by spam.'" *BBC News*, December 9, 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-16108876>

²⁶⁴ Wilson, "Putin Returns."

²⁶⁵ Schwirtz, Michael, "Fear of Return to '90s Hardship Fused Support for Putin." *New York Times*, March 3, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/world/europe/in-russia-vote-fear-of-hardship-fuels-putin-support.html?pagewanted=all>

²⁶⁶ Bennetts, Mark, "Russia 'Faces Orange Revolution Threat' After Polls." *Ria Novosti*, February 21, 2012. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20120221/171440562.html>

²⁶⁷ Wilson, "Putin Returns."

Russia and attempting to inspire a revolution along the lines of the colored revolutions or Arab Spring.²⁶⁸

One issue with *dramaturgiia* is that with time voters grow inured to it, and as such newer and bigger and more frightening drama with higher stakes needs to be produced in order to keep their attention.²⁶⁹ In this election, Putin's campaign failed to produce new *dramaturgiia*.

4.6.3 Administrative Resources

In order to produce electoral success and manage protest, Putin's regime relied heavily on administrative procedures during the 2011-2012 electoral cycle. This came in numerous forms throughout the entire electoral cycle and consistently in reaction to oppositional protests.

The most egregious abuses of administrative resources were used to perpetrate widespread electoral fraud in both the parliamentary²⁷⁰ and presidential elections.²⁷¹ This fraud was perpetrated in a variety of ways. On the crudest level, it consisted of ballot stuffing and tampering with ballots in poorly guarded polling stations.²⁷² Another strategy that was widely used in the parliamentary election was so-called "carousel voting," in which buses drove groups of people around the city to cast ballots at multiple polling stations.²⁷³

Numerous instances of alleged fraud were documented by volunteer activists and voters.

Among hundreds of videos documenting alleged fraud, these included a polling station that

²⁶⁸ Elder, Miriam "Vladimir Putin Accuses Hillary Clinton Of Encouraging Russian Protests." *Guardian*, 12/8/2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/08/vladimir-putin-hillary-clinton-russia?intcmp=239>

²⁶⁹ Wilson, "Putin Returns."

²⁷⁰ <http://www.golos.org/asset/5223>

²⁷¹ <http://www.golos.org/asset/5606>

²⁷² Schwartz, Michael, "Voters Watch Polls In Russia, And Fraud Is What They See." *New York Times*, December 5, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/06/world/europe/russian-parliamentary-elections-criticized-by-west.html?_r=2

²⁷³ Grove, Thomas, "Russia's Election 'Carousel'--a Tale of Alleged Fraud." *Reuters*, March 5, 2012 <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/03/05/russia-election-violations-idINDEE82408120120305>

was providing voters with pens with erasable ink,²⁷⁴ polling station employees altering ballots,²⁷⁵ casting ballots,²⁷⁶ insecure ballot boxes²⁷⁷ and carousel voting.²⁷⁸ Fraud appeared to be especially high in the Caucasus.²⁷⁹ The results of the presidential election in Chechnya, for instance, registered 99.76% of votes being cast for Putin with a 94.89% turnout.²⁸⁰ There were also instances of polling station employees threatening and pressuring election observers.²⁸¹ The authorities did address this issue to some extent by installing web cameras in all polling stations after the widespread allegations of fraud in the parliamentary elections and the accompanying protests, cameras were installed in polling stations across the country.

In addition to crude electoral fraud, administrative resources were used to pressure governmental employees and employees of state-owned businesses to vote in favor of United Russia and Putin.²⁸²

Besides applying administrative resources to pad the election results, they were used in formulating a response to the oppositional protests. As outlined above, pro-regime protests were mobilized with extensive support from administrative resources. However, there were other ways that they were applied to the regime's response to the oppositional protests. On December 10, for instance, students in Moscow schools were required to come to classes rescheduled during times the protests at Bolotnaya Square was scheduled.²⁸³ Additionally,

²⁷⁴ http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ezEFUGcdShE#!

²⁷⁵ http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Hw-5y9fy4zU

²⁷⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=KTbdeyfXeGE

²⁷⁷ http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=xsilxis5oJw

²⁷⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLs8kv3u1hw&feature=player_embedded

²⁷⁹ Kramer, Andrew. "At Chechnya Polling Station, Votes for Putin Exceed the Rolls." *New York Times*, March 5, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/06/world/europe/fraudulent-votes-for-putin-abound-in-chechnya.html>

²⁸⁰ http://ria.ru/vybor2012_hod_vyborov/20120304/584254067.html

²⁸¹ "V Podmoskov'e nablyudatelyu ugrozhala, chtoby on pokinul uchastok, a zatel podozhgli ego kvartiru." *Gazeta*, March 4, 2012. http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2012/03/04/n_2228529.shtml

²⁸² Balmforth, Tom "Election Observers Claim Fraud, Intimidation In Russian Vote." *Radio Free Europe*, March 4, 2012. http://www.rferl.org/content/election_observers_claim_fraud_intimidation_in_russian_vote/24504685.html

²⁸³ <http://img.lenta.ru/news/2011/12/09/anotherbrick/pic.jpg>

rumors were circulated by anonymous public officials that the police would search for young men dodging the draft at protests.²⁸⁴

4.7 Conclusion

During the 2011-2012 election cycle Putin and United Russia faced an unprecedented level of dissent and mobilized oppositional activity. The regime responded to this increased dissent and mobilized protest in a variety of ways that relied on channelling, political technology and, to a lesser extent, coercion. Long-term channelling strategies that were pursued years ago, such the mobilizational benefits of *Nashi* and skewed television coverage that is complementary to the regime, helped keep a lid on the situation. At the same time, however, the regime relied heavily on short-term strategies from the playbook of political technology. *Dramaturgiia* was used less in this election than in the past, leaving a vacuum in electoral narrative. At the same time, administrative resources were employed extensively, both to pad electoral victory and also in attempts to mobilize counter protests and discourage people from participating in oppositional protests.

²⁸⁴ Schwartz, Michael, “Russia Allows Protest...”

5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have explored what role dissent and mobilized protest play in hybrid regimes. Additionally, I have discussed the specific challenges that mobilized popular protest poses to hybrid regimes and attempted to shed light on how the Russian elite's recognition of these challenges and dangers—especially based on the example of the Orange Revolution— informs their decisions and strategies for handling dissent and protest. I have also tried to demonstrate how the regime's response relies on a constantly changing mixture of coercion, channeling and political technology. Finally, in using these categories as a prism for assessing how the regime responded to the sudden increase in dissent, oppositional mobilization and popular protests that accompanied the 2011-2012 election cycle, I have shown that the Putin's government has recently struggled to maintain the fragile balance between appearing to be a democratic country while simultaneously controlling the democratic environment.

Maintaining this fragile balance and successfully walking the fine line between democracy and authoritarianism is at the heart of Putin's hybrid regime. At its most successful points, the regime has enjoyed enough genuine popular support that it was able to observe basic democratic procedures and still obtain strong enough mandate to maintain political control and ensure regime survival without resorting to outright coercion or authoritarianism. That is not to say that Putin did not dabble in authoritarianism even in the absence of credible challenges to his legitimacy. He did, and in fact some of Putin's most strikingly authoritarian reforms were implemented precisely when he was at his most popular, as in the cancellation of gubernatorial elections in the aftermath of Beslan. That said, the regime as a general rule did not need to resort to outright coercion—a hallmark of authoritarianism—in order to maintain control. Instead, Putin relied more on a combination

of long-term channeling strategies to siphon the public away from potentially supporting opposition and toward support for the regime. When that was not enough or additional drama was needed to engage apathetic voters enough to vote, the regime resorted to more short-term strategies out of political technology. Until recently, this combination was sufficient.

Recently, however, popular support for Putin and United Russia appears to be in decline. As Brian Whitmore and Kiril Kobrin have pointed out, increasing dissatisfaction with Putin is in many ways a product of his own success.²⁸⁵ His first two terms coincided with increased economic prosperity, which created the very liberal middle and “creative” classes that are protesting against him. The tendency of the public’s expectations to rise as their standard of living rises and basic needs are satisfied is nothing new. However, Putin has failed to respond adequately to these increased expectations. Indeed, one of his key mistakes and one of the main catalysts for the surge in oppositional activity was that Putin never adequately explained why he needed to return for a third presidential term. He could have done this in a variety of ways. The most democratically ideal version would be through courting popular opinion by making popular policy decisions that made a palpable difference. Failing that, he could have resorted to *dramaturgiia* and political technology to drum up a narrative that would somehow help to justify his return. The lack of justification for his return mixed with a lack of electoral drama were, as Andrew Wilson points out, was one of Putin’s key mistakes during this campaign season.²⁸⁶ These failures may have been partially a result of the departures of Gleb Pavlovsky in April 2011 and Vladislav Surkov’s temporary departure after the parliamentary elections in December. Pavlovsky was fired for pushing too hard for a second Medvedev term and has suggested that Surkov agreed with him²⁸⁷ and may

²⁸⁵ Whitmore, Brian and Kobrin, Kiril. *Power Vertical Podcast*, December 12/06/2012

²⁸⁶ Wilson, “Putin Returns...”

²⁸⁷ Hearst, David & Elder, Miriam, “How Dmitry Medvedev’s Mentor Turned Him Into A Lame Duck.” In *The Guardian*, March 02, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/02/dmitry-medvedev-rivalry>

have left on his own accord²⁸⁸ and taking most of his team along with him.²⁸⁹ The Kremlin's loss of its two key political technologists (although Surkov would certainly not approve of being called a political technologist) left without people on staff who were able to or recognized the need to weave together a sufficiently powerful narrative to maintain public support for a regime that is still running on the Russian public's fear of the 1990s. At the same time, the opposition has advanced its own narrative of United Russia as the "party of crooks and thieves." In this most recent election Putin's campaign failed to address the opposition's narrative and resorting to heavy reliance on administrative resources to secure electoral victory and attempt—not very effectively—to manage dissent. The opposition is still weak and divided enough, and the state still strong and popular enough, that this more or less worked. However, if the Putin's regime does not either pursue popular policies and tackle the serious issues raised by the opposition or, failing that, update its repertoire of channeling and short-term use of political technology, all guarantees are off. The regime must, as the saying goes, modernize or die, although as Surkov once said, "stabilization devours its own children."²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Whitmore, Brian, "The End of the Surkov Era: The System Eats Its Architect." On *The Power Vertical*, *Radio Free Europe*, December 28, 2011.

²⁸⁹ Wilson, "Putin Returns..."

²⁹⁰ "Vladislav Surkov: 'Sistema uzhe izmenilas'." *Izvestia*, December 22, 2011.
<http://www.izvestia.ru/news/510564>

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5788090/British-diplomat-James-Hudson->

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