

The Politics of Repression in Contemporary Russia: Protests of 2011-2013 and Methods of Suppression

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Abstract

The protests of 2011-2013 have become one of the most serious challenges for the Russian political regime. In their scenario, these protests were similar to those that led to the fall of regimes in a number of other post-Soviet countries; in countries where they were unsuccessful, their suppression was associated with human victims and large-scale repressive actions on the part of the state. The case of Russia differs from the others in that despite the active actions of the regime to counteract the protest movement, the state did not have to resort to mass political violence. For this reason, the study of methods of suppressing protests in 2011-2013 is of great interest, since it allows us to find a common pattern in successful, but not excessively violent, methods of repressive and coercive actions. Using the case-study method for key examples of reprisals during and after the protest, the study shows that the general pattern for the methods of repressive actions is their indirect character, depoliticization of actions against civil society and the use of external actors who are not formal representatives of the regime.

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Introduction

In the evening of May 6, 2012, there were massive clashes between protestors on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow and the Moscow police. Commenting on the actions of the police, Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for elected President Vladimir Putin, said “For the fact that they wounded a policeman, we must smear the protestors' liver on the asphalt” (Abishev 2012). Later, in an interview with Russian political journalist Oleg Kashin, he confirmed his position (Kashin 2012).

Such harsh statements by the representative of the president gave an opportunity to Russian journalists and political analysts to talk about further development of the Russian political regime. They pointed out that the authorities decided to suppress protests as harshly as possible, organize mass repressions and arrest political opposition leaders. Police actions on May 6 and the following days seemed to confirm this mood - the harsh dispersals of rallies, the arrests of activists and ordinary rally participants, the initiation of criminal cases and the harsh statements of officials.

However, despite such tough statements, the real response of the Russian regime turned out to be different. Instead of commencing repressions, launching mass arrests and brutally and swiftly attacking civil society, a completely different tactic was chosen - a slow and not always direct pressure on protestors, the media, NGOs, and politicians. In the largest-scale politically motivated criminal case there were about 30 accused (and those who received a real prison sentence were even fewer), no major independent media was closed or banned, not one NGO was banned from working in Russia, and only one activist among those being perceived as the leaders of the protest was imprisoned - and the least popular and most radical politician was chosen.

It is especially interesting to compare the reaction and actions of the Russian regime in relation to political protests with the actions of similar post-Soviet political regimes. During the 2000s in the former Soviet Union and Socialist bloc countries there was a significant number

of political protests, which resulted in the displacement of the incumbent government (Gerlach 2015). Within a decade, we have seen several examples of such processes, united with the same pattern in different countries; researchers tend to integrate these events in a single process of so-called “color revolutions” indicating the presence of common tactics and strategies of the opposition, as well as their efficiency (Gerlach 2014; Way 2008).

Despite the fact that the term “color revolution” itself is controversial and is not recognized by many authors, the protests themselves and the reaction of authoritarian regimes to them were generally rather fierce. In the case of Belarus or Kazakhstan, the suppression of the protests was successful, but it required the authorities to launch mass arrests (primarily leaders and instigators) and even killings (as in the Kazakhstani city of Zhanaozen in 2011). Moreover, even in the event of a successful regime change, the confrontation reached the stage of bloodshed - in Ukraine during EuroMaidan in 2013-2014, in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, in Georgia in 2003 (Bunce and Wolchik 2010).

However, Russia's protests in 2011-2013 are a quite ambiguous case and do not fit into this framework. Even though at the initial stage these protests were similar to the opposition political processes in the post-socialist countries (the protests started due to the electoral cycle, representatives of political and business elite participated in the protests, the protests had a relatively massive support on the streets), protesters never achieved their goals and political protests failed to change the government and after this they ceased to exist. The government successfully managed to suppress the protests without resorting to massive and overly violent action against those involved. The indirect pressure on social and political organizations was so effective that the regime went through such serious political crisis without any loss (S. White and McAllister 2014).

The common pattern of those methods of repression which helped the Russian regime to survive and overcome a clash with political opponents during the one of the most serious

political crisis since the early 2000s, remains yet unclear, which we consider, to the certain extent, puzzling.

Our assumption is that the element, which explains the differences in the political outcomes of similar protests in other post-socialist countries and in Russia in 2011-2013, were coercive actions against political activists and civil society representatives. Thus, our research questions are as follows: what methods and strategies were used by the Russian regime during and after 2011-2013 in order to suppress protests and remain in power? Is it possible to find a common pattern in the actions of the Russian regime against the protesters?

Historically, political scientists who studied political repression assumed that repressive actions occur because of the imperfection of the authoritarian system (Dahl 1966; Hibbs 1973). Since the 1970s many scholars highlighted some important questions concerning coercive actions of autocracies and differences between strategies employed by various regimes (Geddes 1999a; Linz 2000; Wintrobe 1998). These findings led to significant shifts in our understanding of state coercion.

It is important to note that political science is dominated by the approach, under which repressions are considered as one of the possible strategies of the authoritarian regime against the opposition; the other two possible strategies are legitimation and co-optation (Gerschewski 2013).

The study of political repression for a long time was largely the prerogative of historical research, while in political science they were less emphasized. The cause of it, to an extent, was the complexity of studying closed political regimes, especially in such an aspect like the organization of political repression. One of the main concepts developed in the framework of historical research of repression is the idea that repression is not permanent and stable process - forms of coercive actions vary greatly depending on the time and situation (Engelstein 1993; Wheatcroft 1996).

Some historical studies successfully developed games theory models of repression, combining the historical approach and the political economy of authoritarianism; researchers managed to demonstrate that over time regimes tend to use more indirect forms of repression, because they are perceived as less risky and therefore more convenient for the preservation of political power (Gershenson and Grossman 2001).

At the same time, we must point out that there is gap in political science associated with problem of specific tools and strategies used by hybrid regime for process of overcoming political activity of their opponents, as well as with the proper investigation of direct and indirect forms of coercive actions. This question is of particular interest also for the reason that in the opinion of many researchers the highest amounts of repression occur not in full autocracies or democracies, but in regimes which are between these two poles – competitive authoritarian, mixed, transitional or hybrid regimes are the most coercive (Mesquita et al. 2005; Regan and Henderson 2002; Fein 1995).

Some studies of individual cases of repressions and coercive actions in modern Russia appeared during the past few years (G. B. Robertson 2010; Recuperero 2015). However, most of the authors focused on analysis of a specific case or an area, rather than on a comparison of several cases and areas in order to find a common pattern. In this research we are aiming to demonstrate, describe and analyze a number of the most important cases of actions of state coercion during and after 2011-2012 protests, investigate them in order to find a common pattern and describe the main features of an approach which was adopted by the Russian regime in order to suppress protesters.

It is the most significant, but not the only example of the pressure that exerted by the state on civil society institutions. During 2012-2013, the state gravely increased the pressure on the independent press in Russia, however, instead of shutting down a newspaper or initiating a trial on improvised charges, a different approach, involving indirect pressure through owners was adopted by the Russian regime (Fredheim 2016).

The first hypothesis of my research is based on the theoretical framework developed by Michel Foucault in his book “Discipline and Punish” (Foucault 1975). One of the main findings of his work was a description of transformation of repressive mechanisms. He pointed out that the supervision and control in modern state is much bigger than ever before, but it used to be extremely brutal. From the Enlightenment and French revolution, the new approach was developed, which transformed state coercion in many ways and made it indirect, less painful and brutal. Therefore, considering evolution of the repressive practices of the Soviet and post-Soviet times, we can assume that the Russian regime in its repressive policy tends to organise less risky decisions against the opposition (pressure and public obstruction instead of arrests, selective arrests instead of mass repressions, a new restrictive legislation instead of arbitrary prohibiting activity etc.), because it increases the probability of staying in power.

The second hypothesis of my research is grounded on Wintrobe’s idea of dictator’s dilemma (Wintrobe 1998). Following Wintrobe’s idea, we can assume that the dictator should follow certain logic in his relations with society and the threats to the political regime, which may appear in the society. The regime is trying to maximize the benefit (to eliminate the threat to the regime) and minimize costs. The benefits in this case are the decrease of protest mobilization potential, of the threat from domestic opponents and retention of power. Costs are the prevention of possible protests, probability of restriction of information about the political regime, an increase of the exit price for the dictator and a possible exclusion from the political sphere those politicians with whom the regime could cooperate. Transferring this logic to the analysis of political repression, we can assume that when the regime is forced to use violence and arrest leaders and most prominent activists because of the critical nature of the situation, it will seek to reduce risks in any possible way.

To confirm or contest my hypotheses I will need to conduct a within-case study analysis and present narrative of the most prominent and important cases of the repression. This method allows operationalising and measuring inherent qualities of the relationship between social and

political structures and their surrounding entities by collecting and analysing data. Additionally, it allows to present a narrative of repression which is very important for our analysis; there are several cases, which could help us to understand a pattern of these repressions.

Such research is of interest not only because it helps to understand some general characteristics of coercive actions of the Russian political regime, but also because it allows us to recreate the logic that can be then applied to actions of other hybrid or authoritarian regimes.

In order to present the general trend of behaviour of Russian authorities and their attempts to pacify dissatisfied citizens, I decided to single out four main groups, the main areas within which the representatives of the Russian regime worked. These groups include the Bolotnaya Square case, which is itself a vivid and visible example of politically motivated repression against protesters; pressure on independent media through founders, owners or authors; tighter legislation on rallies, political protests, freedom on the Internet and laws restricting the work of political NGOs; the trials of Navalny and Udaltsov, two prominent opposition leaders.

Selected areas cover most of the actions that were taken by the Russian authorities during and after the protests. Of course, it is impossible to cover every specific case of repression. However, only through a review of the regime's actions it is possible to draw conclusions about whether an implementation of repression was guided by their organization and what were the main assumptions and goals of this logic.

In my view, the review and presentation of the narrative of repressive actions is the most convenient and appropriate method of searching for the general trend and the overall pattern of regime's actions. This approach allows us to provide an overview of the situation in the dynamics and draw the main conclusions regarding the actions examined.

The thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 1, I present my conceptual and theoretical framework, which describes the logic which I was guided by during my description and analysis and which connects all parts of my thesis. I explain concept of political economy of the authoritarian regime developed by Ronald Wintrobe, as well as the theory of the evolution of

punishments developed by Michel Foucault. In addition, I review the literature and show what methods and approaches have been used by political scientists, sociologists and historians to study the phenomenon of political repression.

In Chapter 2, I take a close look at the nature of repression in hybrid regimes – how they differ in complete autocracies, closed regimes, democratic regimes. In addition, I show how protests can be linked to a specific political regime and to what type of political repression it leads.

In Chapter 3, I present the history of the development of the authoritarian regime in Russia since the beginning of 2000s to the protests of 2011-2013. This section describes the key milestones of transformation of Russian political regime into an increasingly authoritarian and closed. Additionally, I present the concept of “electoral protests” and the reaction of Russian political regime to this threat, which provides an insight of that kind of threat the regime was expecting and how it was prepared to react.

In Chapter 4, I present case studies of key areas and examples of repressions, which prove the existence of the common pattern in the development and implementation of repressive actions. I intend to demonstrate that in every case, despite the obvious political prejudice, the regimes were trying hard to officially present the situation not as a punishment for a political activity, but as regular law enforcement actions, strengthening the rule of law; quite often distancing itself from the situation at all and handling the situation via close oligarchs or pseudo-independent organizations.

Chapter 1 - Repression: definition, forms and patterns

1.1 Repression: less violent, more indirect

Ronald Wintrobe's book "The political economy dictatorship" (Wintrobe 1998) and the approach to the definition of political repression, described therein, provides us with an interesting example of theoretical framework concerning the behavior of authoritarian regime. This classic work is of interest for my thesis not only because of its concept of the limits of political repression, but also due to the analytical framework, which was developed and presented by Wintrobe.

In this work, Wintrobe attempted to analyze behavior of an abstract dictator and understand the reasons why he acts in one way or another. He was mostly concerned with the issues of concentration and retention of power, management of the proxies and actions to maintain order in the political system.

Using the theory of rational choice, Wintrobe developed a general model of the dictator's behavior, which is constructed as a relationship between maximizing the power and maximizing personal consumption (to some extent, this idea resonates with the work of Bueno de Mesquita on selector and winning coalition) by the dictator. The dictator may seek to concentrate power, or, conversely, pay more attention to increasing his consumption. Thus, from the Wintrobe's point of view, the dictatorship is a relatively simple political economy model.

Wintrobe writes about one important choice the dictators face, the so-called "Dictator's Dilemma". Practically, it is a situation when the dictator has to choose either to punish or to support agents who implement his orders if the orders were not carried out properly. The choice for the dictator is particularly difficult for several reasons: the dictator cannot fully trust his subordinates, so he did not have enough information to decide with a high degree of certainty whether the orders were poorly implemented because of actual difficulties (orders may contain mistakes, or just be unrealizable) or because of disloyalty of an agent. As a result, the dictator

has two possible choices: to punish the executor for disloyalty or to assist the executor, correcting errors and inaccuracies in the order.

This idea is noteworthy, since there is an obvious discrepancy with preceding concepts of repressions developed in the 1960s and 1970s (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965). The authors of those theories viewed repressions extremely simplistically and did not think that such political actions could be not only the reason for strengthening the dictator's power, but also cause significant political risks. Understanding of political repressions was one-sided: imposing restrictions on various political freedoms, arresting opposition members and dissenters, attacking rebellious elites and selecting someone's property, the dictator does not risk anything, but exclusively strengthens his positions in the society. Wintrobe proved that this view is erroneous and naive, since every repressive action increases both the personal risks of the autocrat and the risks for the system built by him.

Using the relationship between power-maximization and consumption-maximization (which includes some redistribution in favour of society for gaining a popular support and loyalty), he also distinguished four different types of political regimes and its leaders: totalitarians (with a higher level of repression and consumption), tyrants (usually the use repression, but without massive redistribution), timocrats (low level of the repression, but high redistribution) and tinpots (both repression and redistribution are low). As can easily be seen, dictators use the coercive methods of suppressing the protests in different ways because they are afraid of political risks which can grow depending on a specific political situation and management of other social conflicts.

In furtherance of Wintrobe's idea we can assume that the dictator should follow certain logic in his relations with society and in handling threats to the political regime, which may appear in the society. The dictator is trying to maximize the benefit (to eliminate the threat to the regime) and minimize costs. The benefits in this case are reducing the potential for protest mobilization as well as the threat from domestic opponents and the retention of power. Costs

are preventing or reducing possible protests, to prevent the reduction of information about the political regime to the regime authorities, to avoid the increase of the exit price for the dictator (in case of serious uprising or dissent) and exclusion from the politics those politicians with whom the regime could possibly cooperate.

Thus, this model provides an opportunity to understand why in many cases dictators seek the method of carrot and stick, alternating the purchase of loyalty with the punishment of unwanted ones (with cautious and not always cruel punishments - often the sanction takes the form of silencing of various problems or media and public pressure on the dissidents). This model easily explains the general logic of autocrats, and, being flexible enough, can be used to analyze various political situations.

Another influential and much explaining analytical approach was developed by Michel Foucault and presented in his famous book "Discipline and Punish" (Foucault 1975). Even though Foucault does not directly talk about political repression in his work, showing the evolution of the penitentiary system in Europe, this topic overlaps with many of ideas developed by Wintrobe and other researchers of coercive actions.

Michel Foucault's main goal was to show in this book the differences between individual violence and state violence and to see how, in connection with the development of social structures and the development of the state, the main object of state control was not the body but the soul of the criminal. The evolution of methods of supervision and punishment gradually turns gross state violence into an extremely complicated and complexly arranged mechanism of biological power that envelops the modern person in his daily life and forms a society of total control.

One of the main contribution he made in this book was a description of transformation of repressive mechanisms. He pointed out that the supervision and control in modern state is much bigger than ever before, but previously it was extreme brutal. From the Enlightenment and

French revolution, the new approach was developed, which transformed state coercion in many ways and made it more indirect, less painful and less brutal.

One of the central images used by Foucault is the “Panopticon” invented by Jeremiah Bentham (Bentham, Bowring, and Liberty Fund 2008, 60–64): a hypothetical prison in which every prisoner can theoretically at any time be observed by a guard without knowing whether someone is looking at him at a particular moment. This compels him to comply with prison rules - thus, an invisible but constant presence of authority, which has the right to supervise and punish people for violating the rules, is formed.

In “Discipline and Punish” Foucault showed that similar mechanisms influenced the public attitude to visible manifestations of punishment for a crime - torture, beatings, public executions. With the development of society, mass executions began to be perceived as unnecessarily cruel, as standing at the same level with that barbarity for which the criminal is punished. In addition, a public execution or a public torture of a person made him a hero and a victim in the eyes of the crowd, and not a villain whose crimes should be punished. In the end, such theatrical executions were too individual, and the social and state structure became more and more impersonal, mechanistic and institutional.

All this took place simultaneously with the formation of a modern type state, which additionally influenced these processes. In the end, the result of these changes was shifting emphasis in punishment: the priority was no longer the cruelty of punishment, but its inevitability, systematicity and secrecy. If earlier punishment was the most visible part of the judicial process, in the modern state, more attention is paid to the court, and the punishment itself is invisible for the society. Criminals are imprisoned and separated from the rest of society. The prison itself is an impersonal unified punishment, in which there is no individual approach.

Either way, Foucault's observations complement our understanding of the reasons why states avoid the most brutal and bloody repressions over time, trying to get rid of them, replace

them with various indirect forms of coercive action. This is also due to the reasons for the development of the state itself (and the political regime), which at a certain level of development can no longer afford to carry out mass repression (for moral reasons or because of costs), and therefore, to combat dissent, other methods and approaches are used.

1.2 Literature review

Even though the topic of political repression very often was a subject of interest on the part of political scientists who used it as an element of their models and theories, it should be noted that for a long time the very theme of political repression remained the prerogative of historians.

At the same time, many political scientists dealing with the problem of political repression note that in political science there are significant gaps associated with the study of this topic. As it was stressed by Christian Davenport, one of the most prominent political scientist, investigating repression, “[r]epressive action has been largely separated from the agendas of most social scientists, away from topics such as statebuilding, democracy/democratization, economic (under) development, cooptation and public opinion — areas where historically and theoretically it had been central” (Davenport 2007a).

This topic is of particular interest also because the opinion of many researchers the highest amounts of repression occur not in full autocracies or democracies, but in regimes which are between these two poles – competitive authoritarian, mixed, transitional or hybrid regimes are the most coercive (Mesquita et al. 2005; Regan and Henderson 2002; Fein 1995).

Since the topic of political repression is one of the central themes for my thesis, I am sure that it is necessary to clearly and capacitively conceptualize and describe its features in relation to hybrid and authoritarian regimes, understand what are the determinants of the political repression, its main elements and the most common patterns.

It is necessary to begin with the most general and formal approach to the definition of repression. Robert Goldstein in his book, devoted to the history of repression in USA since the end of the 19th century, defined repression as a violation of First Amendment-type rights (Goldstein 1978). From his point of view, only some of the state coercive actions should be considered repressions:

- “Freedom of speech, assembly, and travel. Freedom of the press up to a very narrowly defined “clear and present danger” point, regardless of the views communicated.
- Freedom of association and belief without governmental reprisal, obloquy, or investigation unless clearly connected with possible violations of existing laws.
- The general freedom to boycott, peacefully picket, or strike without suffering criminal or civil penalties” (Goldstein 1978, 30–31).

Even though this definition seems intuitive and obvious, it should be noted that it cannot be considered exhaustive. It lacks a description of the informal pressure that the state and government can exert on their political opponents, not to mention that it overlooks an important point: repression may be economic, may be associated with a different level of redistribution of resources in society, and may take the form of public pressure. In addition, this too formal definition of repression leaves issues related to the length and mass retaliation, as well as targeting. In general, this definition is too formal.

Further development of this definition was formulated in the approach to the understanding of repression developed by Ronald Wintrobe. He created game-theoretical model of political dictatorship and used it for investigating the reasons behind autocrats’ actions (Wintrobe 1998). His definition is broader, highlighting significance of the dichotomy “opposition-government”: “restrictions on the rights of citizens to criticize the government, restrictions on the freedom of the press, restrictions on the rights of opposition parties to campaign against the government, or, as is common in totalitarian dictatorship, the outright

prohibition of groups, associations, or political parties opposed to the government” (Wintrobe 1998, 34).

This definition, combined with the author's game model, somewhat expands the number of actions and phenomena that we can call political repressions, since it provides more variability and different views on the problem. This approach, being more abstract and less normative, proved quite popular at that stage in the development of the study of repression and later, when repressions started being perceived as an effective tool which could be used by the dictator for his personal and political benefit, ideally resulting in decreasing of level of political threat and instability (Stohl and Lopez 1984; Moore 2000; Jackson, Murphy, and Poynting 2009).

A more general and convenient definition of repression was given in different works of Christian Davenport. He concluded that “repression is defined as negative sanctions imposed by state actors against dissidents that raise the costs of dissent” (Davenport 1996b); pointed out that there are many different coercive actions, which varies greatly and all could be used by the state against its opponents (Davenport 2007a); and presented state repressive actions “as the result of cost-benefit analysis by political authorities” (Nordås and Davenport 2013).

Summarizing, we can say that Davenport’s view is built on several main points, which to some extent are continuation of Wintrobe’s ideas. He considers the actions of the government, which is going to repress someone, as a result of authorities’ thoughts about maintaining the political status quo. Preservation of political power is the main factor determining actions of the state, but not the only one. In addition, political authorities weigh the risks and benefits of their decisions to understand which decision is more optimal - whether to repress or not. The decision to repress is carried out if possible risks and consequences from non-repression become higher than the risks of repression. At the same time, the form of these political repressions itself is not of great and decisive importance - it does not necessarily have to be arrest, political murder or torture; it is not uncommon for repressions to take place in a non-

violent form (Davenport 1996b) ¹. Finally, it is important to note that repression in this sense can be directed towards different classes and groups of society, as well as towards individuals and organizations.

Previously we have considered common approaches to the term of repression. At the same time, we are even more interested in different theoretical approaches devoted to political repression in autocracies. There are plenty of different theoretical approaches, which seeks to find and explain causal determinants of the repressions.

Historically, repression studies scholars assumed that the repressive actions occurred due to the imperfection of the authoritarian system itself (Dahl 1966; Hibbs 1973). At that time coercive actions were perceived by political scientists as an exclusive property of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, with emphasis on military and personalist dictatorships. Democracies were perceived as regimes whose leaders do not need such methods to protect their position and their authority.

Later it became clear that this opposition of two types of regimes is misleading, because sometimes we can find similar actions implemented by the democratic governments against its citizens. Since the 1970s many scholars studied important questions concerning coercive actions of autocracies and differences between strategies employed by various regimes (Walter 1969; Dallin, Breslauer, and Studies 1970; Geddes 1999a; Linz 2000; Wintrobe 1998).

These researches successfully managed to add some new points in scientific understanding of state coercive actions. Firstly, it was discovered there is a variety of ways how autocracies could possibly use repressions and it differs between fully closed autocracies and hybrid regimes. Secondly, it was revealed that repressive actions are not the prerogative of autocratic regimes, they can also occur in democracies. Besides, repression relies on many factors, among which policies, aspirations of specific decision makers, specific qualities of a particular political system.

¹ Such broad and inclusive definition seems to me as the most suitable for further use in the study. It does not constrict the number of actions that fall under this term and at the same time is quite clear.

In general, this approach has dominated the academic literature so far. One of the most popular approaches to this issue in political science considers the repression as one of the possible strategies of the authoritarian regime against the opposition; the other two possible strategies are legitimation and co-optation (Gerschewski 2013). Here it is easy to notice the influence of the game-theoretic approach.

The issue of risks and relationships between actors is very important for this approach, as modern researchers note that, because repression is a rather costly process, dangerous for the government itself due to the response from the society can be resistance rather than obedience. In addition, many researchers pay attention to the fact that repression is a two-way process, so the start of repression is most often started as a reaction to some actions by dissatisfied people in society (Poe and Tate 1994). Thus, repression should be investigated precisely as a dynamic process in which the authorities seek to reduce their risks in all possible ways, but at the same time affect the dangerous moods in society; repressions are not static.

Political repression, as a political and social phenomenon, causes many different questions among researchers, several of which sound relatively more often. Many researchers have tried to answer two important questions, related with this area of studies: why do repressions occur and what are the main factors decreasing and preventing state coercive actions?

Repressive actions by the state are usually perceived as a result of a threat to the regime from the civil society or from the opposition (Sullivan 2015). Protests, strikes and demonstrations forced regime to act to calm the situation and return to the status quo. In a situation of a threat to political order, regime authorities decides to start actions which can lead to the pacification of the society and elimination of political opponents (Carey 2010).

These obvious and probably banal ideas about the determinants of political repression have evolved in academic literature for quite some time, but, of course, they are not the only ones. In addition, it is important to note that there are many critics of this view of the factors

triggering repression; some researchers note that although abstractly and speculatively one can understand that repression is somehow connected with discontent in society, it seems difficult to establish an exact relationship and to determine the specific relationship between these two variables that would allow one to accurately predict the probability of reprisals in a particular case (Ritter and Conrad 2016; Escribà-Folch 2010; Ritter 2014).

Various studies have found different factors of increase or decrease the possibility of repressive actions in autocracies.

Richards analysed data concerning many countries and concluded that it is impossible to say that national elections has no effect on decrease in level of political repression in autocracies and on respect to human rights (Richards 1999). Continuing this idea, Bhasin and Gandhi (2013) analyzed all presidential elections in authoritarian regimes from 1990 to 2008 and came to the conclusion that in electoral authoritarianism, the time for the beginning of political repression is associated with electoral cycles: before elections, the political regime becomes milder towards ordinary citizens, directing most of the coercive actions against elites - ruling or oppositional. At the same time, after the election, ordinary citizens also can face state violence – in case if they disagree with the methods of political control of political authorities or with the results of the elections.

Henderson (1991) conducted quantitative analysis which showed that the level of inequality, the degree of democracy and rates of economic growth significantly related with the probability of political repression and could be used for prediction about the possibility of these events. Group of researchers found out that a dictator's actions could be defined to the great extent by the country's wealth and in particular by the dependence on natural resources (Bove, Platteau, and Sekeris 2016).

Social scientists also researched the causes of what prevents the regime from organizing repression and reduces its ability to prosecute the dissent. Davenport concluded that in the long run previous political experience of relations with political opposition and dissidents affects the

behaviour of contemporary regime, but in short-run there are three other factors – level of democracy, political conflicts and dependency (Davenport 1996a); he also developed the theory of “domestic democratic peace”, which states that the higher is level of electoral participation and competition between the main political actors, the lower is possibility of political repression (Davenport 2007b).

Mitchell and McCormick conducted a large-scale quantitative study and concluded that the degree of repression is more determined by economic factors rather than political ones (Mitchell and McCormick 1988). Zanger’s research was focused on the issue of regime change effect of level of state repression; she managed to show that the transition of the country from autocracy to a democratic regime positively affects the state's respect for human rights and reduces the level of repressiveness of the state, while the transition from democracy to anarchy makes the possibility of human rights violations much higher (Zanger 2000).

Summing up, it can be noted that most researchers mainly develop theories related to the influence of economic and political factors on the level of repression in general, but most of them, with rare exceptions, do not delve into details of organization of the repressive regime or the pattern of coercive actions.

This is why the theories and approaches that were developed within the framework of historical and sociological researches of repression are so important: in many cases historians did not need to build hypothetical models of interaction between government and society and talk about possible reasons for using reprisals, as they possessed a large number of archival documents shedding light on moods, desires and intentions of the authorities.

One of the main ideas developed in the framework of historical research of repression (especially in the Soviet regime) is the idea that repression is not permanent and stable process - forms of coercive actions vary greatly depending on the time and situation (Engelstein 1993). Wheatcroft showed in his paired comparison of Soviet and German approach to the mass

repression that these processes were greatly influenced by many incoming factors – both internal and external (Wheatcroft 1996).

Some historical studies successfully developed game theoretic models of repression, combining the historical approach and the political economy of authoritarianism; researchers can show that over time regimes tend to apply more indirect forms of repression, perceiving them as less risky and therefore more convenient for the preservation of political power (Gartner and Regan 1996). Gershenson and Grossman studied the Soviet experience of political pressure and found evidences that Soviet authorities were combining different ways of dealing with the society – coopting talented and skillful people to join to the Communist party, but punishing those trying to organize some clandestine organizations– sometimes directly and severely, but in many cases those people were subjected to non-violent or indirect forms of violence (Gershenson and Grossman 2001).

However, the most useful are case studies of the archives of special services and the police, which allows to understand the logic that determined the actions of the law enforcement agencies. One of the striking examples of such well-researched (and researched so far) archive are the documents of the Guatemalan National Police.

Studies of the archives of the Guatemalan National Police, which were recently became available to researchers, are of immense value since they provide an opportunity to look inside the system of political repression. From these documents one can learn about special words that the Guatemalan police used to conceal facts about repressions and murders organized by the security forces (and, above all, by the police) (Guberek and Hedstrom 2017), and of existence of a system of secret orders coming from the chief officers of the police and leaders of the state about the actions that the police had to take (thus, it became possible to outline the very system of repression and understand how much information was received by high-ranking officials, and how many did not receive them) (Price et al. 2017).

Studies of the Guatemalan archives also confirm the theoretical notions of repression that have been put forward by various researchers for decades: the main goals of those who organize these actions is to dissolve dissident organization, making it impossible for them to continue their activity especially, in a case of relatively peaceful political situation, without ongoing protests and conflicts (Sullivan 2016).

An important addition to all of the above is the typology of repressions and their division into categories. In the work of Linden and Klandermans a very significant distinction was introduced (Linden and Klandermans 2006). In development of the idea which was initially presented by Ferree (Myra Marx Ferree 2004) and using the governmental reaction in Netherlands towards the activists of far-right movements, they distinguished two types of repression: “soft” and “hard”. “Soft” repression usually takes the form of public pressure via silencing or ridiculing political opponents. “Hard” repression involves beatings, arrests and public prosecution. Usually “soft” repression is a prerogative of democratic states, but these measures could also be applied by the leaders of the hybrid or authoritarian regimes.

Some historian even found some evidence that decision to choose one or another way of repression is defined by the internal struggles within the elite – between soft-liners and hard-liners (Thomson 2017).

In this chapter, the main theoretical approaches to the concept of repression and the possible definitions - from the broadest to the most specific ones - are presented. More importantly, I marked main directions of research of specific repressions, as well as the contribution of historians and sociologists to the definition of repression.

Summarizing, it should be noted that the phenomenon of specific patterns of repression is of great interest precisely because it helps to shed light on the system of political repression and to clarify certain theoretical calculations and show which elements need additional study. The evolution of repression and their shift towards less cruel and more indirect forms is one of the key themes for this study; In addition, there is a clear gap in political science, connected

with the understanding of what indirect measures a state can take when conducting coercive actions and why.

In this relation, Russia provides us a rather interesting case to investigate. In past decades there were some efforts to focus historical researches of repressions on single countries such as Germany (Koopmans 1995), Rwanda (Davenport and Stam 2007), Timor-Leste (Romesh and Ball 2006), France and the United Kingdom (Tilly 1995).

However, until this moment there has been no comprehensive analysis of the coercive actions of Russian regime after the protests of 2011-2012, and no patterns of repressive actions were revealed. No one has yet examined this specific case comprehensively and my analysis will help to fill gaps in existing theories.

Chapter 2 - Hybrid regimes and repression

My research is primarily focused on describing the methods of repression in a specific situation: namely, the actions of Russian political regime during and after the protests of 2011-2013, specific methods of coercive actions and repression that allowed the regime to retain power without resorting to excessive violence. However, to proceed to an empirical analysis of specific cases, it is necessary to determine the context and the background beforehand, such as clearly define what the hybrid regime is, what approach I will follow when classifying Russia during and after the 2011-2012 protests and what is the context of those political decisions and events in Russia.

In this and subsequent chapter I will try to outline the main existing approaches to the problem of undemocratic, but not completely authoritarian political regimes, and to tell about the contextual background of Russian political history in the late 2000s - early 2010s.

There is a massive amount of literature devoted to the typology of mixed political regimes, as well as there is plenty of definitions for them – illiberal democracy (Zakaria 1997), partial democracy (Epstein et al. 2006), semi-democracy (Diamond, Lipset, and Linz 1989), low democracy, competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2010) and hybrid regimes (Diamond 2002). At the same time it should be noted that this phenomenon is quite widespread in the world - according to the report of Freedom House in 2017 ('Freedom in the World 2017. Populists and Autocrats: The Dual Threat to Global Democracy' 2017), 59 countries in the world (about 30%) were classified as "Partially free". Such regimes exist on all continents, but dominate in Africa and Asia.

Existence of so many theoretical approaches to this problem indicates that the phenomenon itself raises serious arguments among researchers. Some of them even insist that the search for a certain middle ground between democracy and authoritarianism is a pointless exercise, since it is better to look at the situation as a dichotomous system in which everything that is not democracy is authoritarianism.

Undoubtedly, this diversity of views is due primarily to the fact that different authors understand democracy differently, and, accordingly, rely on different assumptions while investigating political regimes. In addition, many of them consider these border regimes as being in transit - from democracy to autocracy or vice versa. Nevertheless, I do not have the opportunity to go deep into this issue, since this will require an extraordinarily extensive review of literature and main theoretical constructs of political scientists and historians. Instead, I will try to outline the history of the issue and the key characteristics of such regimes, which are especially important for the topic of this study.

The phenomenon of hybrid political regimes drew the attention of political scientists in the period after the Second World War, especially since the 1950s and the 1960s. At this point scientists tended to be attracted by regimes of Central and Latin America, trying to investigate the combination of autocratic power and some democratic elements, which was typical. Terry Lynn Karl in her review of hybrid regimes in Central America distinguish some specific features of these political entities, such as “an uneven acquisition of the procedural requisites of democracy”, “[e]lections are often free and fair, yet important sectors remain politically and economically disenfranchised”, “[m]ilitaries support civilian presidents, but they resist efforts by civilians to control internal military affairs”, “[i]mpunity is condemned, yet judiciaries remain weak, rights are violated” (Karl 1995, 80). These points are of great importance, because with some additions they are still crucially significant for the researchers of hybrid regimes who are trying to define these political regimes as transitional systems between democracy and autocracy.

This topic was further developed later, especially during and after the end of the Cold War. The fall of the communist regimes led to the formation of new political regimes - sometimes democracies, but more often transitional regimes, striving for democracy. Transitologists, who have studied the processes of democratization since the mid-1970s (O'Donnell et al. 1986; Linz 2000), noted that transition was “as the interval between one

political regime and another” (Diamond et al. 2014, 87). To some extent, this perception of the democratic transition was a continuation of Seymour Lipset argument about the necessity and importance of stable electoral system and regular elections (Lipset 1959).

After the fall of the communist regimes of the Eastern Europe in the end of 1980s, transitological theoretical assumptions were applied to the new situation. A large number of social scientists understood democracy in its minimal definition and had an optimistic view of prospects for the democratization of authoritarian regimes. However, after time it became clear that political development in many countries is very different - some successfully have created a democratic regime, while in other countries there was a democratic rollback.

Only in recent years there has been a renewed opinion among scientists that in this case it is not entirely correct to talk about the failure of democracy and the democratic pullback, but it is possible to note that many of those regimes that looked like moving towards democracy were, in fact, not. In reality, the state institutions have simply weakened, and as the economic and social situation recovers, the hybrid regimes that existed there have only strengthened (Levitsky and Way 2015).

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent political changes put researchers ahead of the fact - hybrid regimes are not always just a transition from one big type to another (Carothers 2002). In fact, they are quite stable, sustainable and can exist for decades. Certainly, the degree of non-freedom and non-liberalism of different political regimes may vary; some researchers even manage to build convincing hierarchical typologies of hybrid regimes. This once again underscores the particularity and isolation of such political regimes from democratic and authoritarian ones (Morlino 2009; Bogaards 2009).

In order to solve this problem, Levitsky and Way proposed a new look at hybrid regimes. In their work “Competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2010), as well as in several articles, they argued that in order to be precise the best way to describe such a regimes is to call *them competitive authoritarian*, because other definitions implies that there is some amount of

democracy within the regime. They insisted that many post-Cold War regimes there is a real competition between the government and the opposition, but it is unfair, therefore it is impossible to call these regimes semi- or partially democratic.

2.1 Repression in hybrid regimes

In any case, the variability and differences between the various regimes exist not only in the correlation of democratic and authoritarian elements, but also in how these authoritarian elements are realized in relation to society. The use of repression in hybrid regimes is just one of those issues.

The issue of political repression in hybrid regime is of particular interest because from the point of view of many researchers the highest amounts of repression occur not in full autocracies or democracies, but in regimes which are between these two poles – competitive authoritarian, mixed, transitional or hybrid regimes are the most coercive (Mesquita et al. 2005; Regan and Henderson 2002; Fein 1995). There are several reasons that explain and confirm this opinion.

Christian Davenport introduced the term “domestic democratic peace”, which states that democratic institutions and procedures are crucially important in establishing less violent methods of dealing with public resistance and opposition (Davenport 2007b). Another instrument for political control was developed in democracies, allowing to solve all tensions and public disruption using public contest and open competition of different politics and ideas. Coercion activity towards the opposition costs a lot in democracy; this makes repression undesirable for democratically elected politicians. Repression in this case is very inefficient, seriously complicating the possibility of maintaining political power and, most likely, do not lead to the desired results - an attack on civil society institutions only mobilizes them, and more serious coercive actions practically mean a coup d'état and the abolition of the constitution, which is an excessive response on political conflicts in a democratic regime. Seriously

developed and powerful institutions make the democratic regime more predictable and less cruel.

Davenport has convincingly shown that democracy reduces the determination of political leaders to resort to such extreme measures as political repression, since they can use alternative mechanisms of influence on society. At the same time, he is convinced that there is a certain “threshold” level of democracy – a democratic regime should be sufficiently developed to be able to protect society from the coercive actions of the state. Those regimes that have not yet crossed this threshold can equally be engaged in repressive actions, those ones that have already crossed the line, most likely cannot resort to such actions (Davenport 2004).

It could be figured that in this case the most authoritarian regimes - personalist dictatorships, totalitarian states, military dictatorships and one-party states - should be the most violent and repressive. It seems that there are no limitations or bounds for use of power against citizens, and because of lack of civil liberties and freedom state can do whatever it wants. Some prominent scholars suggested that there is a lack of alternative mechanisms of power and influence in autocracies, which led its leaders to repressive actions in case of public protests (Geddes 1999b; Linz 2000).

Investigating this issue, Davenport decided to create a database of different types of autocratic regimes with cases of human rights violation and research them to find a specific pattern of repression implementation. As a result of statistical analysis, it was possible to find out that in fact single-party regimes and military dictatorships are the least repressive regimes when it comes to restricting civil rights and freedoms, unlike hybrid regimes. In addition, during the Cold War, personalist regimes were also less inclined to take tough actions against their own citizens. Of course, all these political regimes are more violent compared to democracies, but in comparison with hybrid regimes they are less cruel and restrictive (Davenport 2007c).

Explaining the reasons for this difference between autocratic regimes, Davenport formulated another term – “tyrannical peace” (Davenport 2007c, 489). He points out that most

of the researchers suggest that leaders of autocratic regimes resort to repression because their regimes are more politically isolated and therefore rulers and bureaucrats simply do not know any other decent methods of influence, except for power. Davenport emphasizes that most likely this is a misconception, because in autocratic regimes another form of interaction between the population and the government, separate elements resembling a democratic approach is formed.

Limitations and boundaries established within the autocratic system undoubtedly reduce political freedoms, but they also set the rules for the political and public spheres, following which becomes natural. Their observance reduces the likelihood of repression on an ongoing basis, but certainly not in the case of mass uprisings and armed protests. Thus, on an everyday level, even the most autocratic regimes are less inclined to use repression, because there is simply no need for it - if there are clear limitations and there is a threat of hard intervention in case of disobedience.

These ideas were later tested by other researchers, who, basically, confirmed the theoretical position of Davenport (Møller and Skaaning 2013). The autocracies and democracies are not so different in the matter of repressiveness, as one would imagine. Of course, autocracies are more cruel than democratic regimes, but after the Cold War and democracy it is by no means always a reliable safeguard against the state's coercive actions. Of course, there is room for debate about which autocratic regimes are more prone to repression than others, but now there is a fairly convincing consensus in the academic literature on this issue that the more violent regimes are not those that are at different poles, but those which are in between.

There are several main reasons for this phenomenon. Graeme Robertson, who studied the Russian protest movement in the 2000s and the ways that the authorities resorted to managing and suppressing mass protests, notes that after the end of the Cold War, hybrid and authoritarian regimes were forced to evolve and adapt to a new reality (G. B. Robertson 2010, 6–8). Frankly

and publicly deny the need for democratic values, elections, institutions of civil society has become much more difficult than before. Such behavior can only be afforded by the most closed and powerful political regimes, but even they must at least create façade democracy, refer to the popular legitimization of the existing political regime. Less closed regimes are forced to admit at least limited competition - between elite groups, which in one way or another related to protest movements on the streets and using them for their own purposes.

Moreover, one of the key reasons for the greater repression of hybrid regimes is their less stability. They are more flexible and fluid, prone to change as a result of external and internal pressure. Because of the dual nature of these regimes, combining democratic and authoritarian elements, it is more difficult in such regimes to establish clear rules of conduct that are characteristic of democracies or autocracies. As Robertson notes, in democracies protests and mass movements are a part of the political mainstream and most often are not perceived as something out of the ordinary, as something requiring punishment and power interference. In authoritarian regimes, mass protests are also rare precisely because of the risks that such presentations bring to their participants (G. B. Robertson 2010, 10–11).

Thus, it is the hybrid regimes that prove to be the political space in which mass protests and the subsequent reaction is the most possible variant of the development of events, and, often, tied to electoral cycles - as many hybrid regimes were forced to adopt electoralism, rather than democracy.

Hybrid regimes should not be perceived as a transitional form between autocracy and democracy; more correct is the view that these political systems are a separate form combining different ways of managing the political field. Because of their instability and changeability these regimes are more prone to a repressive response to popular outrage. However, these methods may be different in the post-Cold War era, as many hybrid regimes are more likely to resort to indirect repression, in contrast to the regimes of the past.

Chapter 3 - Russian political regime and opposition in the 2000s

The large-scale protests that began in Russia after the parliamentary elections in December 2011 became one of the most serious political challenges for the regime developing in Russia since the early 2000s. They caused a variety of reactions from the authorities, which are the subject of research in this paper. Toughening of laws, pressure on the press, arrests and struggle with NGOs - all this became a response to popular discontent, mass rallies and accusations of election fraud.

In order to investigate the methods of coercive action with which Russian political regime fought against the opposition during and after the protests, it is necessary to briefly present the factors which triggered the beginning of political protest and to present the evolution that Russian regime underwent in the 2000s.

In the late 1980s, Russia led the democratization movement in Eastern Europe, but since the 2000s it is often regarded as an example of failed transition to democracy (Krastev 2011). Disputes and discussions about the nature of the political regime formed in Russia under Putin began to develop in the academic literature from the beginning of the 2000s (Diamond 2002; Shevtsova and Eckert 2001).

The reasons for Russia's new turn to authoritarianism were explained by various factors: the nature of transition from the Soviet rule to democracy (Gill 2006), Putin's personal background as a former intelligence officer in KGB and his desire to restore at least some elements of the soviet system (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003; Baev 2004), and also some authors highlighted the importance of Russian political culture, referring to the Russian history of autocracy during the times of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union (Brovkin 1996).

Even though the versions associated with the political tradition, path dependency and personal aspirations of Putin and his allies based on certain grounds, it is worth noting that the institutional approach seems more convincing and consistent in this case. Timothy Frye in the end of the 1990s successfully showed that many problems with a democratic transition in post-

soviet countries were caused by unsuccessful institutional design in the initial phase of political transformation, which in 1993 caused an armed confrontation between the President and the Parliament (Frye 1997). The outcome of this conflict was a new Constitution that gave the president a very large number of very specific powers (Frye 1997, 545).

Frye stressed out that “many of the powers of the Russian presidency are vaguely defined and grant the president considerable room to expand these powers as events require. This vagueness was part of a conscious strategy” (Frye 1997, 546). Gill expressed very similar point of view, pointing out that it were initial institutional design flaws which defined the later development of political regime in Russia (Gill 2006). Thus, we can say that the foundations for an authoritarian turnaround were laid already at the early stage of the development of post-Soviet Russia, and Putin in 2000 used the tools that were created by his predecessor.

Even though the foundations for an authoritarian turnaround appeared at the stage of the creation of a new Constitution in 1993, the regime's transformation practically took place during the 2000s. There are two mainstream points of view on the form of this authoritarian turn of the Russian regime. Proponents of one of them declares that since 2000 it has been a strategic plan of the Russian authorities to create a manageable electoral autocracy (Gel'man 2006a, 2010), while others suppose that only a sequence of various coincidences and conflicts transformed Russian regime to autocracy (Snegovaya 2013; Kynev 2011).

So far, it is difficult to answer which of these two points of view is the closest to reality, if at all possible. This can become clearer after years, when many documents become available. Now, however, this remains a matter of debate. However, within the framework of this study, this question is not in itself a matter of principle; the key point is the fact that most political scientists agree that the Russian regime is hybrid and was such by the beginning of the 2011 protests (Treisman 2011; March 2009; Taylor 2014; Goode 2010).

Disputes and discussions about the factors that have most influenced the transformation of the Russian political regime from weak, unstable but more democratic to hybrid or autocratic,

have been underway for several years. One of the main characteristics of this transformation is its gradualness; some researchers even compared it to the “salami tactics” used by the communists in Hungary in the late 1940s to suppress political competitors (Balzer 2003; Gel’man 2008), stressing out that “[g]radual extension of restrictions has been characteristic of managed pluralism under Putin. Opponents are dealt with in slow motion, using a variant of “salami tactics,” rather than by sudden moves” (Balzer 2003, 202). This transformation also was characterized by the crucial role played by the President’s Administration, which became one of the most important actor in Russian politics.

In this transformation, there were key points and stages that should be briefly described in order to understand what principles were put into the work of the Russian regime - thus the regime's reaction to the mass protests of 2011-2012 will become clearer.

After the parliamentary elections in 1999, which were characterized by fierce struggle between Kremlin and a number of powerful regional politicians (which were represented by the “Fatherland – All Russia” bloc), the Kremlin's Edinstvo (Unity) bloc, which was created before the election to support acting President Vladimir Putin, emerged as an actual winner (Colton and McFaul 2000). Already in January 2000, Kremlin announced its readiness to form temporary coalitions together with its former opponents - the CPRF and the LDPR - against the liberal parties, offering an agreement on the division of various committees in parliament (Kamyshev 2001). Later, the policy aiming to reduce the number of opposition parties was continued with the adoption of new legislation in 2001, introducing many new restrictions on the creation and functioning of parties.

At the same time, new rules were developed in the relationship between Kremlin and the media (Belin 2001, 2002). Two of the most influential oligarchs, Gusinsky and Berezovsky, who owned large media corporations (NTV and Channel One, respectively) were forced to sell their assets and expelled from the country; in both cases it was officially announced that the

reasons for the rearrangements and sales of media assets were economic, but not political (Burrett 2010).

In the summer of 2002, a package of laws was passed on fighting extremism, which was criticized by many politicians (Taratuta 2002). The bill included the addition of a new article of the criminal code with a very vaguely definition of the term “provocation of hatred” and for the first time imposing punishment for certain types of political activity (Gross 2003).

During the preparation for the parliamentary elections of 2003, one more informal rule of political life was introduced. The arrest of the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky has shown that financing of opposition political parties without the permission of the Kremlin is impossible (Hale 2010; D. White 2007). This step, together with the successful use of the mixed electoral system, led to the fact that “United Russia, the “party of power”, in the elections to the State Duma managed to convert 37.53% of the votes to 68.33% of seats in parliament, and to prevent election of representatives from liberal opposition parties to the State Duma (Golosov 2005). Between the parliamentary and presidential elections, Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov was dismissed, one of the last major officials of the Yeltsin era, who remained in power (Borisov 2004).

2004 was one of the turning points for Russian regime because of a large-scale political changes and the emergence of the main threat to the regime for years to come.

One of the key areas was the final subordination of opposition parties to Kremlin - the last subdued force became the Communist Party. The leader of the party Gennady Zyuganov was threatened with the danger of dismissal from his post, but he asked for help from the President, retaining control over the party (the alternative congress of the party was not recognized by the Ministry of Justice), but becoming a “loyal oppositionist” to the regime (Sakwa 2005; Hamraev 2004).

In the same year, an additional concentration of power was held in the hands of Kremlin - in the fall of 2004, the elections of heads of Russian regions were abolished, from that moment

they were in fact replaced by the appointment of governors by the federal center (Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011). This step was presented to the people as a measure to combat terrorism and extremism - the forthcoming reform was announced shortly after the terrorist attack in the school in Beslan. The new rules strengthened the local authoritarianism of regional leaders and displaced the entire regime as a whole towards electoral authoritarianism (Goloso 2011a).

As it was shown by Bunce and Wolchik (2011) in their study of “colour revolutions” on post-Soviet space, the biggest threat for those kinds of competitive authoritarian regimes is a popular movement connected with the electoral cycle. This factor is of great importance, because “[e]lections can be ideal sites for expanding opportunities for mobilization while lessening the familiar constraints on collective action” (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 16). Elections are largely connected with mass movements, they cannot be separated from each other, since elections are one of the key moments for any political regime, including authoritarian (Bunce and Wolchik 2010).

When the political field inside the country was almost completely cleaned, a threat from outside emerged. In the fall of 2004 and in winter 2005, the presidential elections in Ukraine ended with the Orange Revolution. The candidate Viktor Yanukovich, supported by Vladimir Putin, because of mass protests in the center of Kiev, was forced to admit his defeat at the elections and to give up the struggle (Atwal and Bacon 2012). For the Russian authorities, what happened was a big blow - not only the fact that Russia failed to hold its presidential candidates, but, above all, how it was done - with the help of mass youth movements that are not controlled by major political players and supported by Western countries – at least, that is how it was perceived by Russian authorities (Finkel and Brudny 2012).

The metamorphosis, which the Russian regime and political life underwent after this, is called differently: transformation “from ‘feckless pluralism’ to ‘dominant power politics’” (Gel'man 2006b); from ‘managed democracy’ to ‘defective democracy’ or ‘electoral authoritarianism’ (Goloso 2011a). An important difference from the previous stage was the

willingness of the Kremlin to resort to semi-legal and even criminal methods of fighting the political opposition - even beating journalists and killing political activists became possible (Movement 2017).

One of the first steps to combat the possible mass movement was the creation of the pro-Kremlin youth movement Nashi ('*Ours*'), which emerged on the basis of some pre-Kremlin movements that existed before, especially the Iduschie vmeste ("*Going Together*"), but in part it also resembled the movement that existed in the Soviet Union, Komsomol (Atwal and Bacon 2012; Lee 2013). Official task of "Nashi" movement was to counter "attempts of Western countries to threaten the Russian political regime" and counteraction to attempts to organize a "color revolution" in Russia.

Fulfilling this task, movement was attacking and humiliating liberal parties and movements, as well as the banned National Bolshevik Party and its activists, who were among the most active opponents of the political regime that existed in Russia (Krivonos 2015). At the same time held their summer camps, mass rallies and marches, and actively attracted to cooperation various informal power structures - primarily football fans and ultra-right hooligans.

However, paradoxically, these actions of the authorities only aggravated and heated the political struggle in the country. By 2005, as a result of predominantly legal actions, the opposition in Russia was in such a bad condition that its existence could be almost neglected (Gel'man 2005; March 2009). But the activity of the pro-Kremlin activists served as a motivator for the oppositionists, who tried to at least repulse the attacks of Nashi.

Graeme Robertson in his study of protests and its contention in post-communist Russia (G. B. Robertson 2010), using police data and thorough case studies, shown that in spite of common view "Russians have sometimes been very active participants in protest. <...> The key challenge is to understand how both protest and passivity are produced by, and interact with, organizations, the state, and elites' politics" (G. B. Robertson 2010, 14).

The electoral cycle 2007-2008 was considered by the authorities as a dangerous period from the point of view of the emergence of protest movements (Smyth, Lowry, and Wilkening 2007). The term “non-systemic opposition” became common and included, among others, the liberals (G. B. Robertson 2009; Bol’shakov 2012; Golosov 2011b). Parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007 were presented to the public as a “vote of confidence to Putin and the successor he chosen” and the idea of a fight against “enemies of Russia” becomes part of the official rhetoric (Duncan 2013; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008).

Fears of the authorities did not come true - 2008 was not the moment of unification of the opposition against the authorities. In the elections, United Russia received a supermajority in the parliament, and the new system, with two leaders led by President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was named ‘tandemocracy’ (Hale and Colton 2010).

This new system was rather ambiguous. On the one hand, President Medvedev tried to present himself as a politician with a liberal, reformist agenda, who carried out several reforms and willingly gave interviews to liberal and opposition media. On the other hand, this period was marked with the growing popularity of protests and political resistance. It all started with ‘Strategy-31’ - political action, named in honor of Article 31 of the Constitution of Russia, guaranteeing citizens the right to free access to rallies and meetings (Horvath 2015; Ritter and Conrad 2016). Action was organized by the opposition politician, leader of the banned National Bolshevik Party Eduard Limonov and Lyudmila Alekseeva, founder of the Moscow Helsinki Group. Another notable protest of the same time was the struggle against the construction of the route through the Khimki forest near Moscow (Evans Jr. 2012).

In times of “tandemocracy”, those politicians who will play a significant role during the protests of 2011-2012 come to the fore in the political arena. They are replacing previous leaders who have been engaged in politics since the 1990s and who have been trying to resist the expansion of the Russian regime since the early 2000s (Ross 2015).

The political protests of 2011-2012 were exactly the type of protest that the authorities feared, and it was largely prepared by the few but regular protests that had been held by the opposition since the middle of the 2000s (G. Robertson 2013; Chaisty and Whitefield 2013). Quite quickly it turned out that pro-Kremlin movements are ineffective in the fight against real mass protests. However, at an early stage it was dangerous to resort to the use of police force, since it was impossible to calculate all the consequences. After the first confusion, the methods that were most effective in this case were found (Gel'man 2015).

It was stressed out by the Bunce and Wolchik in the above-mentioned book, that “[t]here are extremely high stakes attached to launching popular protests in response to fraudulent elections. If the demonstrations succeed, democratic progress is likely to follow. However, if they fail, the regime invariably becomes more repressive” (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 340). Case of Russian protests illustrates exactly same logic in many ways.

Chapter 4 - Case Studies

At the end of September 2011, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev announced incoming changes in Russian politics, which immediately received the name of “castling” - Putin said that he would become a candidate for the presidential elections, and in case of victory he would make Dmitry Medvedev his prime minister. A significant part of the society was disappointed. In many respects, it was this feeling of disappointment that caused the popular dissatisfaction (Gill 2012).

Support for United Russia was lower than in 2007; “party of power” received slightly less than 50% of the votes. But despite this in December 2011, a significant number of electoral violations were noticed – it was not the first time, but at that moment there was already a critical mass of dissatisfied people ready to take to the streets. Initially, the regime tried to use against them those tools that developed in the event of such protests - mass arrests, the use of youth pro-government movements. But in a few days, it became obvious that such measures only provoke further spread of protest moods. Then the tactics changed - during the winter all actions of the opposition were coordinated, and the police practically did not detain the protesters.

But after the presidential election in March 2012, the regime realized that the main threat had passed - and began reacting to the protests and their leaders in a different way, not daring, however, to resort to excessively brutal and swift action.

4.1 Bolotnaya Square case

Vladimir Putin won the presidential election on March 4, 2012, gaining 64% of the vote (Lally and Englund 2012). This win marked the beginning of the end of the mass protests of 2011-2012 - a protest rally that took place on the day after the election was less numerous than rallies during the winter, and the police behaved much more harshly towards the demonstrators,

comparing with winter rallies and protests, when in majority of cases police forces tried to be non-violent towards the opposition (Fomina et al. 2012).

The presidential inauguration was scheduled for May 7, 2012, and opposition decided to organize a mass rally a day before it to express disagreement with the election results. The Bolotnaya Square was chosen as a place of the rally.

The rally and the march named “March of Millions” were agreed with the authorities 13 days before; the route and program of the rally were known to the authorities; the rally on Bolotnaya Square was to serve as the final point of the march (Bodnar et al. 2013, 21). It is possible to perceive this rally as a crucial point and culmination of all the protests, which started after the parliamentary elections in December 2011. It is also worth noting that from the authorities' point of view, Bolotnaya Square as a place for a mass protest rally had a serious advantage – this square is on an island in the center of Moscow and in case of any problems, the area can be easily blocked and surrounded by police forces.

According to the different independent observations and to the report prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs “Plan for ensuring public order and security in Moscow on May 6, 2012” (parts of this document were shown during the later court trial against the people, who participated in the protest) police forces had a well prepared plan (Bodnar et al. 2013, 23–24).

It is important that according to the police plan, the procession should not end with a rally in Bolotnaya Square, and police cordons should be located in such a way that would not allow the marchers to go to Bolotnaya Square to participate in the rally. But the organizers of the rally did not know about this police decision, as it follows from the same plan: “the cartographic decision and the plan for ensuring public order and security ... were not coordinated with the organizers of the public event, the public and participants in the event, as these documents are of an official nature” (The criminal case №201/460677-12 (the case of Mikhail Kosenko), n.d.). The police were preparing to curb possible provocations, so a significant number of police officers was concentrated in the center of Moscow (about 12,000 people), of which 8,000 were

around Bolotnaya Square; the special equipment, which was prepared by the police also indicates its readiness to suppress mass riots (Poluhina 2013)

All these preparations led to the fact that on May 6, when the protesters reached Bolotnaya Square, they saw a police cordon blocking the passage to the Kremlin and directing the demonstrators through a very narrow passage to the place of the rally. People began to accumulate on the bridge, passing through a small “bottleneck” on the square and, at some point, the crowd stopped on the bridge.

After some attempts to negotiate with the police, the leaders of the protesters called for a sedentary protest, which, however, did not last long. Soon after this, protesters tried to break through the police cordon, someone threw a Molotov cocktail into the police, and clashes and fights between protesters and police began after that. The police began to detain protesters, beating people and applying stringent measures against people on the street - at least 50 people were injured of varying severity; policemen were also injured - however, the estimates of the victims range from 3 to 65 people. According to the Moscow police, 656 people were detained during clashes between police and demonstrators; many of the detainees received injuries of varying severity (Bodnar et al. 2013, 43).

Within a few weeks after the action, the so-called “people's festivities” continued in Moscow: groups of protesters who did not want to leave the streets organized a camp in the square on Chistye Prudy in the center of Moscow. Later this camp was dispersed by the police.

In the evening of May 6, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation instituted criminal proceedings under Part 3 of Art. 212 of the Criminal Code (calls for mass riots) and Part 1 of Art. 318 of the Criminal Code (the use of violence against a representative of the government). At the same time, all those detained on Bolotnaya Square, including those who later became accused in the Bolotnaya square case, were charged with Violation of Art. 19.3 (Disobedience to the lawful order of a police officer) and art. 20.2 (Violation of the established

procedure for organizing or holding a meeting, rally, demonstration, procession or picketing) of the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offenses.

From the very beginning, the investigation of the circumstances of the clashes has acquired a political orientation, which was noted by both Russian and foreign human rights organizations. The Investigative Committee created a special group, involving more than 200 investigators - it was one of the largest investigative groups in the history of Russia. The main instrument of the authorities was Art. 212 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (“mass riots”), despite the fact that the signs of mass riots described in this article (“violence, pogroms, arson, destruction of property, use of firearms, explosives or explosive devices, as well as rendering armed resistance to the representative of power”), do not really approach the events at Bolotnaya (Rogov 2012).

It is also important to note that the circumstances of the investigation of the event on Bolotnaya Square were unprecedented. For comparison: December 11, 2010 at the Manege Square in center of Moscow, there were ethnic *pogroms* and mass clashes with the police. However, in this case, the reaction of the authorities was different: a group of investigators was much smaller, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin met with representatives of protesters and visited the grave of Egor Sviridov, and fewer than 10 people, mostly political activists, were sentenced to criminal punishments for the fights with police (Verkhovsky and Kozhevnikova 2011).

When investigating the case of Bolotnaya Square, the authorities resorted to another tactic. Even though at the beginning of June there were searches in the homes of the main protest leaders who were present at the Bolotnaya Square on May 6, 2012, practically none of them became accused during the investigation (Novaya Gazeta 2012). Sergey Udaltsov became an exception, but this case should and will be considered separately in this work.

Instead, randomly and haphazardly selected people who were on Bolotnaya Square that day were accused of participation in mass riots. The number of accused and detainees was constantly growing, reaching at some point almost 30 people. The accused in the riots were not

united by some common characteristics: among them were activists of various opposition organizations (Other Russia, former members of the National Bolshevik Party, members of various left, right and liberal-democratic organizations), students, scientists, entrepreneurs, pensioner (Chehonadskih 2014). In addition, not all the accused were Muscovites - some of them came to Moscow for a rally from other cities.

The case of Bolotnaya Square became the largest criminal case against participants of the 2011-2012 protests and one of the largest cases in the history of modern Russia. The police questioned more than 1,300 witnesses (a significant number of whom were representatives of law enforcement agencies), and interrogated a large number of protesters.

During the investigation, outside observers repeatedly noted the politicization of the process and the bias of the investigation. The investigation systematically rejected the protests of defense of the accused, and did not pay attention even to obvious mistakes in its own work (for example, the accusation of people who were not in Moscow on May 6 or were detained not on Bolotnaya Square). The European Parliament in June 2013 issued resolution 2013/2667(RSP) in which condemned Russian authorities in violating human rights and “[u]rges Russia... to investigate allegations of excessive use of force against demonstrators; expresses concern at the allegedly politically motivated nature of the prosecutions linked to the Bolotnaya Square violence” (‘Rule of Law in Russia - P7_TA(2013)0284’ 2013). Later European Parliament reassured its concern about the Bolotnaya Square case and issued resolution 2014/2628(RSP) in March 2014. Very similar reaction was expressed by the Russian Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin (‘Lukin: There Were No Riots on Bolotnaya Square - HRO.org in English’ 2017), The Amnesty International, and The European Court of Human Rights, which openly stated that Russian authorities violated human rights.

Despite widespread public condemnation, the majority of the accused received real prison sentences: 17 people were sentenced to various terms (from 2.5 to 4.5 years in prison);

sentences were passed from 2012 to 2014. Initially, there were 28 people accused, but 11 were pardoned due to the amnesty, caused by the anniversary of the Russian Constitution.

The case of Bolotnaya Square became the largest political repressive process in modern Russia. Despite the fact that the authorities officially announced adherence to a standard procedure for fighting riots and hooliganism, most of the Russian population perceived this investigation and the case as repressive - according to the Levada Center poll, more than 50% of the interviewed respondents believed that the main purpose of the trial was “to frighten the opposition-minded public” (‘Bolotnoe Delo I KirovLes: Ezhemesjachnaya Dinamika (Bolotnaya Square Case and Kirovles: Monthly Dynamics’ 2013).

The case of Bolotnaya Square helped to realize several key tasks. First of all, it became a powerful blow to the political opposition, as it clearly showed that the state is going to punish protesters - not only political activists, but also ordinary protesters. The tactic chosen resulted not only in prison terms for two dozen people, but also pushed a large number of political activists and ordinary protesters to emigrate. In addition, the clearly visible line of the authorities seriously affected the number of protesters in subsequent opposition rallies, which with every month in 2012 and 2013 were becoming less crowded (this was also facilitated by the tightening of the legislation on rallies and protests, taken a month after the incident on Bolotnaya Square). About 60 thousand people took to the streets on May 6, 2012, but on June 12, 2012, the protesters were slightly less than 50 000, and for protest actions in the end of 2012 to the beginning of 2013 there were from 5000 to 25 000 people.

Another important goal achieved as a result of the Bolotnaya Square case was a split between protesters and protest leaders. Even though the progress of the investigation of the case allowed to attract the most active protest leaders to criminal liability, initially such plans were not implemented. On the contrary, the authorities consistently pursued a line to arrest random people, while actively supporting dissatisfaction with the leaders of the opposition. At the meetings of relatives of the arrested and opposition leaders, the latter were often accused of

betraying the protesters and the fact that they framed and threw those people who were called to take to the streets.

Thus, it turned out that the government's strategy worked for an external blow to the protest opposition movement, frightening people and increasing the risks of participating in protest marches and rallies, and contributed to an internal split. Moreover, it is important to note that the authorities' strategy was very different, for example, from the behavior of the Belarusian authorities in 2010 (Beichelt 2004; Padhol and Marples 2011), when the police arrested both representatives of protesters and leaders (including 4 presidential candidates) or actions of the Kazakh authorities during workers' protests in Zhanaozen, where the police resorted to the use of weapons and killed at least 15 protesters (Salmon 2012). In fact, by correlating the scope of the protests and the number of those arrested, it can be concluded that the Russian authorities decided to use a less cruel and less ambitious strategy, which nevertheless turned out to be more successful, especially splitting the opposition.

In their response to the threats from the public, Russian authorities resorted to the “politics of fear” and repression (Gel'man 2016). The very threat of expanding repressive practices proved to be more effective and convincing in terms of influencing public protests than mass arrests and media propaganda.

4.2 State pressure on media

From the very beginning of the mass protests after the December 2011 elections, various independent or semi-independent media played a significant role in covering opposition activities and agitation for participating in protests. This support was reflected not only in the media accompaniment of most of the opposition events and disputes in social networks, but also in the participation of journalists in rallies, opposition organizing committees and performances from the stage (Spaiser et al. 2017; Greene 2013). That is why the attack on media was one of the key elements of the government's strategy of coercive action during the protests.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, since the beginning of the 2000s Russian authorities preferred to use indirect pressure of the independent media, trying not to close down the newspapers and broadcast channels, but to influence the editorial board through the owners (this happened with NTV and Channel One) (Belin 2001).

This practice was not the invention of the Putin era; in fact, it was just a continuation of the methods of managing the press in the late 1990s. The most vivid example of such pressure on the press is the story of *Izvestiya*, which in 1997 accused Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin of corruption schemes (Banerjee 1997). Soon the management of the publication was dismissed, followed by the resignation of most of the journalists - this was due to the existence of old professional and personal ties between the Prime Minister and the owner of the publication (Jones 2002).

Media market in Russia during the 2000s changed dramatically due to state interference in the work of press, creating the system which Becker called “a neoauthoritarian media system” (Becker 2004). During the 2000s, the state consistently expanded its presence in the media environment, including media in state media holdings or purchases through state corporations (primarily Gazprom-media) (Rosenholm, Nordenstreng, and Trubina 2010).

At the same time, despite the consistent expansion of the state's influence and the increase in the number of censorship and self-censorship, as well as attacks on independent journalists, nevertheless, there was a certain (albeit narrowed) free space in the Russian media, especially in the print press and in the Internet. There were several reasons for this - first of all, television and radio were considered the most important media resources affecting society, while the Internet sector, despite its rapid growth, remained less influential (Lipman 2014a).

An important element of the development of Russian media in the 2000s was the widespread use of blog platforms (primarily *livejournal.com*), which became the freest space for self-expression in Russia for journalists and bloggers (Etling, Roberts, and Faris 2014; Johansson 2014).

Thus, it can be said that during the 2000s the structure of Russian media has become no less hybrid than the political regime. On the one hand, the media environment was characterized by significant state influence, which directly or indirectly controlled key media resources (Koltsova 2006; Deibert 2010).

On the other hand, despite the pressure of the state in Russia, there was a significant space of freedom in the media (largely on the Internet). Moreover, it expanded - for example, President Medvedev tried to “flirt” with the opposition-minded part of the society, which resulted in creation of the opposition television channel “Dozhd” (“*Rain*”), which was largely backed by the president himself and also to politicization of “[s]ome of the glossy journals and the so-called “hipster press,” such as *Afisha* or *Bolshoi Gorod*” (Lipman 2014a, 183).

It is important to note that the state has never stopped and tried to maximize its influence, including on the Internet - both through owners of Internet resources, and through its youth pro-Kremlin organizations (Pallin 2017). In addition, major Internet media and blog platforms regularly fell under DDOS attacks, which prevented their regular work.

We can say that indirect pressure on the press started simultaneously with the beginning of protests in December 2011. A week after the elections to the State Duma, a photo of the ballot was published in the issue of the political magazine *Kommersant-Vlast*, where an obscene oath to Vladimir Putin was written (Platov 2011). Kremlin-close oligarch Alisher Usmanov, the owner of the publishing house, reacted immediately, saying that such actions “are close to petty hooliganism” (Gazeta.ru 2011). The very next day the editor-in-chief of the magazine Maxim Kovalsky was dismissed, as well as the general director of the magazine (Strovsky 2011).

This was the first attack on independent media during the protests, but not the last. At the beginning of June 2012, shortly after the events on Bolotnaya Square, the owner of the *Kommersant* dismissed Demyan Kudryavtsev from his post the general director of the holding, after which the company was headed by Usmanov's people who decided to close certain

branches of publishing house (*Citizen K* and radio *Kommersant FM*, both of these media were characterized by liberal political position), explaining this for commercial reasons (Lenta.ru 2012), but majority of Russian media experts were sure that this happened because of *Kommersant* coverage of the May 6 2012 events (Lipman 2014a, 186–87).

The two largest internet independent publications in Russia in 2011-2013 were Lenta.ru and Gazeta.ru (Federman 2010; Toepfl 2011), which existed since 1999. During the 2000s, they developed and increased their audience, becoming the most influential independent media in Russia. In terms of financial independence, their paths were very similar. Both editions became part of the media holding of entrepreneur Alexander Mamut, who also became the sole owner of the blog platform *livejournal.com* and popular magazine for urban citizens *Afisha* (Pallin 2017; Anufrieva and Malakhov 2008).

Gazeta.ru first was attacked first - before the elections to the State Duma in 2011, the editor-in-chief of the publication Roman Badanin was fired. The reason was his refusal to remove the banner of the joint project with the human rights organization *Golos* (“Voice”), in which readers reported violations during the election campaign; he also refused to put advertisement of United Russia (Meduza.io 2016). Even though editorial policy had undergone quite a lot of changes, this was not the last attack. In September 2013, another reshuffle took place in the management of the publication - former employee of the state news agency *RIA-Novosti* Svetlana Babaeva became editor-in-chief and within a few months she got rid of most of the journalists and replaced them with absolutely new people (Fredheim 2016).

In a similar scenario, changes were made in the *Lenta.ru*. It should be noted that the resignations in the editorial board of the publication occurred in March 2014, that is, approximately two years after the start of the protests, and in many ways, this attack should be associated not only with protests, but with the joining of Crimea to the Russian Federation, which occurred at the same time.

However, considering that *Lenta.ru* was one of the most active and popular independent media during the protests, and that it was part of the same media holding, this story should be included in this case.

Lenta.ru devoted a many space to coverage of protests, making interviews with leaders of protests, writing articles and news about, as well as organizing special feature projects and online translation. Even after reshuffles in Gazeta.ru, Lenta.ru continued its work, presenting independent journalistic articles about the Russian politics. In autumn 2013 Lenta.ru became one of the most popular online media in Russia and was covering protests, which started in Ukraine. But after the publishing of the interview with one of the Ukrainian right-wing nationalists Dmitriy Yarosh, the edition received a warning from the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications. Soon after this Alexandr Mamut fired Galina Timchenko, editor-in-chief of Lenta.ru, as well as general director of edition and the journalist Ilya Azar, who took this interview. All the editorial stuff and practically all the journalists resigned protesting against this decision; after this, Mamut appointed his own man as an editor-in-chief, who used to work in the pro-governmental online-editions (Dement'eva and Gorbachev 2014; Fredheim 2016).

As it was convincingly shown in the author's work, the editorial policy of the publications after the change of leadership has undergone serious changes, but not as critical as one might have supposed: "The result is rather more insipid: critical investigations into the corrupt dealings of Russia's elites were not simply replaced one for one by eulogies to Putin or rants about Western interference in Ukraine. Instead they were replaced by articles about health, history, real estate, recipes, or animals." (Fredheim 2016, 46).

News agency RIA Novosti belonged to the state, but always tried to take an objective and independent viewpoint, covering both the state agenda and the opposition agenda. In many ways, this position of the agency was due to the editor-in-chief of RIA Novosti, Svetlana Mirnyuk. In December 2013, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree dismissing Mirnyuk

and liquidating the news agency (Ennis 2013). It was announced that a new resource *Rossiya Segodnya* (Russia Today) will be created on the basis of RIA Novosti, led by Dmitry Kiselev - one of the most famous Russian state journalists, one of the chiefs of the VGTRK (All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company) and a person who has become the face of attacks on the opposition and Western countries and the creation of false news (Pomerantsev 2015; Kochis 2014).

The Dozhd (Rain) channel, informally supported by President Medvedev until 2011, became one of the key media that participated not only in covering the protests, but also in supporting them. The former merits and “flirt” of the previous president with the liberal opposition did not help the TV channel and did not save him from the attack. During the live broadcast in January 2014, the channel asked an opinion of its viewers whether it was necessary to surrender the city of Leningrad to the enemy during the Second World War, which was sieged (Lipman 2014b). At the next day, State Duma deputies began to accuse the TV channel in the absence of patriotism and moral relativism, and cable providers began to disconnect services to provide the channel to end users. The channel managed to survive the attack, but largely switched to Internet broadcasting and subscription payment, and the number of its viewers was reduced critically (Daucé et al. 2015).

It is important to note that we can find a common pattern of coercive actions by the Russian regime in relation to the independent press. Instead of closing the publications, banning the publication or arresting journalists, in each of the cases examined, the authorities preferred to act not directly, but through the owners of the publications.

In many cases, the owners of publications did not interfere in editorial policy before the protests, however, either by executing an order from the Kremlin, or fearing for their business and for being perceived as being disloyal, the owners decided to get rid of excessively independent editors. The only case when the state acted directly was the situation with *RIA Novosti*, but in this case the state was the owner of the media resource.

A very important feature linking pressures on the press to the Bolotnaya Square business is the “depoliticization” of the causes of attacks. Representatives of the authorities and state media tried to present every attack on independent media, as a result of a conflict between the owner and the editorial board or as a result of disputes between various media holdings. Using loyal or dependent oligarchs, the regime managed to organize pressure on the media without resorting to direct attacks, license reviews or censorship.

Such tactics helped the authorities to step back from the process, take the position of an outside observer, and publicly deny any accusations of political censorship. In addition, this tactic not only allowed the regime to achieve the necessary changes in the Russian media with minimal expenses, but also demotivated citizens to speak in defense of certain publications. The more unclear and incomprehensible it was in the situation with each editor-in-chief or the media, the more was the share of those who agreed with the official version and said that it was not a political attack.

It is worth noting the skillful use of patriotic feelings, as an excuse for attacking the media - the accusation of pro-westernism and the unpatriotic nature of the TV channel Dozhd, completely blocked the fact that because of this pressure, the media was on the verge of closure.

Another element of the tactics of repression, which contributed to the success of the entire strategy, was its gradualness. Instead of attacking the key media simultaneously, the process dragged on for years, and gaps between each attack or resignation lasted from one to several months, which did not allow excessive tensions and cause protests associated with these actions.

On the one hand, this tactic has radically changed the Russian media space and put under control a large part of independent and disloyal media. On the other hand, the main drawback of this tactic was that a number of publications survived the attacks, and, in addition, during the implementation of this tactic, some new independent publications appeared in Russia - though not so large, readable and influential.

The favorite explanation of the authorities since the time of the conflict around NTV in 2001 is the reference to the “conflict of economic entities”. The same happened to the least loyal media in Russia after the protests - through the owners, the changes demanded by the authorities were made. The result was a rejection of the status quo that existed before the protests and the reformatting of the Russian media environment.

4.3 New restrictive legislation

The State Duma and the legitimacy of its election was a key source of the beginning of protests: people demanded that the deputies pass their mandates, demanded a recount of votes and re-elections. And it is not a coincidence that the State Duma has become one of the key instruments of the authorities to limit political and public freedom in the country. The parliament became active in adopting restrictive laws that it has received the nickname of an “enraged printer”, but it adopted a strategy of indirect restrictions, trying not to refer to politics as a reason for restrictions (Gel’man 2013; G. Robertson 2013).

An important strategic feature of the adoption of the new legislation was a constant reference to the legislation of foreign countries, from which the most negative practices were selected. It is possible to compare this strategy with the politics of Orbán’s government in the 2010s, so called “politics of worst practices” (Bozóki 2015).

The most striking example of this strategy was the toughening of legislation on rallies. Already on May 7, 2012, the day after the protests on Bolotnaya Square, three new draft laws were introduced in the State Duma, tightening the responsibility for participating in unsanctioned rallies (according to Russian legislation, each protest should be coordinated with the authorities and get permission for a specific place).

The bill increased penalties for violations at rallies tenfold (From 1000 to 20,000 rubles), compulsory works for violators, prohibited coming to rallies in masks and imposed penalties for organizing virtually unauthorized mass actions under the guise of “people’s festivities” - if

this caused a violation of public order. It also prohibited to organize rallies to those persons, which previous rallies ended with unrest (Lanskoy and Suthers 2013).

Despite protests by the opposition and a small number of parliamentarians, amendments to the bill on rallies were adopted in early June 2012, a few days before the next mass protest action by the opposition (RIA Novosti 2012a). President Vladimir Putin stated the following: “I not only signed the law, I carefully looked at the materials sent by the State Duma, comparing our law with similar legislative acts of other European countries. Judging by these materials, in our law there is not one provision more stringent than the measures provided for by similar laws in the European countries” (RIA Novosti 2012b).

Even though in February 2013 the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation recognized the law as partially unconstitutional, minor adjustments did not change its restrictive nature. According to the report written by the Russian NGO *OVDInfo* that the result of the tightening of the legislation on rallies was an increase in convictions under Article 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (from about 50% of the total number of cases in 2009 to 75% in 2015), an increase in the average fine for participation in unauthorized shares from 775 rubles to 10-11 thousand rubles and, in addition, to the growth of indictments in Moscow - from 828 cases in courts to 1466 (Smirnova 2016).

In 2014 this article was further tightened up and now assumes the possibility of administrative arrest for up to 20 days, the maximum possible fine was increased to 300,000 rubles. (Smirnova 2016, 2–3).

The next goal of the authorities was non-profit organizations. During the protests, some NGOs were noted for their great activity in monitoring elections and electoral violations, as well as training of observers. Continuing its anti-Western and anti-American rhetoric, the regime preferred to label disagreeable NGOs as pro-Western. For this purpose, the new status of “foreign agent” was invented, which should have been received by those organizations that received grants from abroad and participated in political activity. According to this law, the

indication of this status is required on any documents, brochures and publication issued by an organization with this status. It is worth noting that the definition of “political activity” in this law was not defined in detail. (*Federal’nyy Zakon Rossiyskoy Federatsii Ot 20 Iyulya 2002 G. No 121 – FZ (O Vnesenii Izmeneniy v Otdel’nye Zakonotatel’nye Akty RF v Chasti Regulirovaniya Deyatel’nosti NKO) [Federal Law of the Russian Federation of July 20, 2002 No. 121-FZ (On Introducing Changes in Separate Legislative Acts of the RF in the Field of Regulating the Activity of NGOs)]*.’ 2012)

The drafters tried to explain the introduction of a new status for individual NGOs by not political bias, but referring to the successful experience of the law of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) in the United States (Vandysheva 2013; Lanskoj and Suthers 2013, 79–81).

Representatives of NGOs, media, opposition politicians and representatives of civil society opposed the law, noting that at the linguistic level it wants to brand Russian NGOs, as well as their employees, presenting them as “enemies of the people” and “foreign spies” (Vandysheva 2013). At the same time, they noted that the big problem of the bill submitted is a vague definition of “political activity”. (Maxwell 2006; Crotty, Hall, and Ljubownikow 2014).

Despite all the protests the law was adopted on July 13, 2012 - two weeks after the bill was submitted for consideration by parliament. Moreover, a law on public control was adopted in 2014, which increased the pressure on Russian NGOs and limited the ability of non-profit organizations to monitor political processes (Flikke 2016, 112–17). Since the adoption of the law, about 100 NGOs have received this status; one of the first were the non-profit organization “Golos”, engaged in electoral monitoring, the human rights center “Memorial”, the non-profit organization “Moscow School of Civic Education”, the oldest independent polling organization The Levada Center, and many other organizations (*Svedenija Reestra NKO, Vypolnjajushhih*

Funkcii Inostrannogo Agenta [Information of the Register of NGOs Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent]' 2017).

The Internet was the next element of society attacked by lawmakers. Bloggers, various Internet resources and social networks played a significant role in disseminating information about rallies and acted as a key communication channel between people and opposition politicians. The regime had to somehow protect itself from the threats that the Internet carried. However, even in this case, legislators publicly argued that the new legislation was necessary not for political censorship, but for combating extremism, terrorism, and the spread of child pornography. It was difficult to publicly protest against such a substantiation of the bill, despite the fact that political bias was obvious (Kramer 2013).

In July 2012, the Russian parliament passed a law “On protecting children from information that is harmful to their health and development”, which took a little more than a month to take. The law prescribed the creation of a register of sites containing and disseminating prohibited information (specifically information about methods of suicide, drug manufacturing and child pornography) (*O Vnesenii Izmenenij v Federal'nyj Zakon „O Zashhite Detej Ot Informacii, Prichinjajushhej Vred Ih Zdorov'ju I Razvitiju ’ [Federal Law of Russian Federation No. 139-FZ of 2012-07-28]* 2012).

When the site was added to this register, the authorities were given the opportunity to block access to this resource on the territory of Russia (Ermoshina and Musiani 2017). The adoption of the law caused fierce resistance from the public, Internet entrepreneurs, leaders of the Russian IT industry and the most important Internet companies – Google, Wikipedia, Vkontakte, and LiveJournal.

The law, received in the press the name “Lugovoy’s law” - by the name of the most the member of parliament Andrei Lugovoy. According to the law, in the event that information is found on the Internet containing appeals for riots, extremist activities, or participation in mass events conducted in violation of established procedures, the Prosecutor General of the Russian

Federation or his deputies send a request to authorities to take measures to restrict access to those resources that disseminate such information (*O Vnesenii Izmenenij v Federal'nyj Zakon «Ob Informacii, Informacionnyh Tehnologijah I O Zashhite Informacii» 398-FZ [On Amendments to the Federal Law 'On Information, Information Technologies and Information Protection' 398-Federal Law] 2013*).

In fact, the law gave practically unlimited opportunities to the state to block websites, without any legal proceedings; this fate awaited many opposition sites and blogs (Denisova 2016; Lansky and Suthers 2013; Rosenberg 2017).

Subsequently, legislative restrictions only expanded and affected more and more elements of civil society - such was the law on the prohibition of “homosexual propaganda”, the law on pre-trial blocking of websites, “Dima Yakovlev's law”, which prohibited the adoption of Russian children by foreigners. But each time the regime followed the same logic - the restrictions were taken gradually (rather than large packages of amendments) and always on the pretext of combating non-political problems.

The activities of NGOs were largely limited (especially since the term “political activism” was widely interpreted), and blocking websites, together with the active use of the Ministry of Internal Affairs article 282 of the Criminal Code (Raising hatred or enmity, as well as humiliation of human dignity), created a serious pressure on blogs and independent publications.

As in the previous case studies, it is important to note the shift in emphasis made by the authorities. The regime and its representatives did their best to avoid the political issue when introducing and passing laws.

Every time, speaking in public, lawmakers, judges, members of parliament said that all amendments and blockages do not pursue the goal of political censorship or restriction of freedom of speech, but only bringing Russian legislation in line with world standards. Even

such conditional legal pressure proved to be effective in the context of the struggle against dissatisfied and protesting people - in particular, the draconian law on rallies and protests.

In addition, the tightening of legislation included not only direct pressure (as in the case of the law on rallies), but also indirect - the most striking example is the new legislation on NGOs. Formally, the status of a “foreign agent” did not require a non-profit organization to refuse foreign grants and donations, it only required the indication of this status on the organization's documentation. However, the image created by this phrase and its influence on the public perceptions of NGOs, in fact, forced the organization to avoid obtaining such status by all means, which either severely limited their possibilities, or even led to closure.

Finally, in the course of legislative activity, there was a place for an extensive interpretation of legislation. Here it is necessary to pay attention to laws regulating the Internet, which were mainly used not to fulfill the declared goals (countering extremism, terrorism, child pornography), but to block oppositional and disloyal web resources.

4.4 Arresting opposition leaders

During the peak of protests in the winter of 2011-2012, the Russian regime behaved extremely cautiously, trying not to intensify the already extremely heated political situation. First of all, the regime tried not to press personally on the main opposition leaders: no criminal cases were brought against them, the maximum rigidity that the regime allowed itself were detention for 10-15 days, and incriminating administrative offenses.

However, when it became clear that the peak moment had passed and the regime realized that it had the opportunity for action, the authorities began to gradually reduce the space for civil society. The analysis of repressive actions against protest leaders shows how the possible risks and benefits of taking certain decisions by the regime were weighed, and what impact this had on the tactics of repression.

The two most prominent new leaders, who have become very popular, were blogger and anti-corruption activist Aleksei Navalny and left-wing politician, leader of the “Left Front” Sergei Udaltsov. They went in very different ways in their political career.

Navalny tried many different approaches and platforms - from the nationalist to the left-centrist (having been an adviser to the liberal governor of the Kirov region), until he became a minority shareholder in large state-owned companies and started several greenmail attacks. This activity further developed into anti-corruption activities, and Navalny established a non-profit organization “Rospil”, which is fighting corruption in state orders and, financed through crowdfunding (Kwiatkowski 2012).

Sergei Udaltsov has been a participant and organizer of a large number of left radical and trade union movements since the late 1990s, cooperating both with legal opposition parties, and with non-systemic opposition parties. Throughout the 2000s Sergei Udaltsov was an active participant in the protest movement and leader of one of the most radical and visible Left movements in Russia, the “Left Front”. Udaltsov was noticeable, but not really popular politician. However, during the protests, he became much more popular and known, and was recognized as a leader even by the authorities - he was invited to a meeting of President Medvedev with leaders of the non-system opposition in February 2012 (Nielen, Ruslandkunde, and others 2014; Stanovaya 2013).

It was clear that sooner or later the regime would launch attack on these leaders. The first attack was the trial against Alexei Navalny. At the end of May 2012, the head of the Investigative Committee of Russia, Alexander Bastrykin revised the decision to terminate the criminal case against Aleksei Navalny Navalny and ordered the case to be resumed (in early 2012 it was terminated for lack of *corpus delicti*) (Weiss 2013).

The state prosecution decided to convict Navalny of corruption - probably due to the fact that Navalny acquired the image of “the main fighter against corruption”. The criminal case, known as the “Kirovles case”, stated that Aleksei Navalny, being an adviser to the governor of

the Kirov region, created the “Vyatka Forest Company”, which played the role of a “paving firm” between the state forest enterprise “Kirovles” and the final recipients of forest products of “Kirovles”. The “Vyatka Forest Company” purchased wood products from “Kirovles” at prices, which were significantly lower than the average market prices, and sold to final consumers at market prices, thus damaging “Kirovles”. The total amount of stolen was estimated at 10,000 cubic meters of timber products worth 16 million rubles (№ 1-225/2013 (The verdict against A. Navalny and P. Ofitserov) 2013).

The position of Navalny's lawyers was based on the fact that “Vyatka Forest Company” was a regular firm engaged in legal trade in timber products. The purchase of timber products from “Kirovles” was made at market prices. In addition, the defense of Navalny insisted that the investigation into the case used an unlawful, broad interpretation of Art. 160 of the Criminal Code (“Assignment or embezzlement”) (Popova 2017).

It is important to note that the resumption of the criminal case against Navalny happened shortly after Navalny accused the head of the Investigative Committee of corruption. In general, despite the fact that investigative bodies and representatives of the state repeatedly denied the political bias of the trial, outside observers constantly noted the conditionality of the judicial process by the politics (Luchterhandt 2017). This was expressed not only in propaganda and biased television programs on the state media, but also in the statements of the head of the Investigative Committee, who promised that Navalny would “spare no mercy” and accused him of working for Western countries (Konstantin Terekhov 2017).

The process itself went with a clear skew in the direction of the prosecution - witnesses of the defense were not accepted by the court, the protests of Navalny's lawyers were constantly rejected by the judge. Despite the fact that the Governor of the Kirov region Nikita Belykh and the former partners of the Vyatka Forest Company stated that they had no complaints against Navalny, and his actions did not harm the budget of the region, the trial continued.

In December 2012 another criminal case against Navalny and his brother Oleg was opened - this time they were accused of fraud: allegedly Navalny's brother of used his official position in the state enterprise for the conclusion of contracts with the company owned by the brothers (Yaffa 2013; Gel'man and White 2015; Lansky and Suthers 2013).

In 2013 it was announced that snap elections of the mayor of the city would be held in Moscow and Aleksei Navalny, while still being accused of several processes, announced his intention to participate in the campaign. He needed to collect the signatures of 110 municipal deputies to be registered (there are no such independent deputies in Moscow). The decision of the incumbent mayor Sergei Sobyanin was unexpected, who asked to transfer part of the signatures to Navalny and other candidates so that they could register.

The outcome of the Kirovles case was mixed. On July 17 Navalny was registered as a candidate for mayor of Moscow. Already the next day in Kirov, Aleksei Navalny was found guilty of committing a crime, sentenced to five years in prison and placed in custody. In the evening of the same day in the center of Moscow there was a massive uncoordinated meeting against this decision. Several hours before this event prosecutors protested Navalny's detention (although they themselves demanded it earlier) and demanded that the complaint should be considered the next day. The prosecution motivated his appeal with an absurd reason - the fact that Navalny, as a registered candidate for mayors, should have access to meetings with voters (Kashin 2013).

Navalny was released under a written undertaking not to leave Moscow, went to Moscow, where for two months he organized an extremely successful campaign, received 27% of the vote and taking second place. In the fall, the court upheld the verdict to Navalny, but replaced the real term with a provisional one.

Despite this, such a decision complicated Navalny's political career, since in the spring of 2012 the State Duma passed legislative amendments prohibiting persons convicted of serious and especially serious crimes to apply for elected office even after the criminal record was

removed. In addition, at the end of December 2014, a verdict was handed down in the case of Aleksei and Oleg Navalny - Oleg Navalny was sentenced to 3.5 years in a general-regime colony, Aleksei Navalny was given 3.5 years probation. The imprisonment of the opposition politician's brother greatly complicated the opportunities for political activity of Alexei Navalny.

In parallel with this case, the Sergei Udaltsov's trial was unfolding. In October 2012, the NTV television channel aired the documentary *Anatomy of Protest 2*, which included a secret shoot of a talks between Sergei Udaltsov and Givi Targamadze, an opposition Georgian politician about the financing of the protest movement from abroad, the preparation of riots in Russia and the conspiracy to overthrow the authorities in the country with money from abroad (Herszenhorn 2012).

The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation conducted a pre-investigation during which Udaltsov was interrogated; soon a criminal case was brought against him, and later he was placed under house arrest (Roth and Barry 2013).

The investigation accused Udaltsov and his associates Razvozhayev and Lebedev of preparing for mass riots. Razvozhayev escaped to Ukraine, but at the end of October he was kidnapped by unknown people and taken to Moscow. Later the politician said that his captors had tortured him (Skovoroda, Barabanov, and Svetova 2012).

In June 2013, Udaltsov was accused of organizing riots on Bolotnaya Square on the May 6, 2012, and in attempts to organize mass riots throughout Russia. Even under house arrest, Sergei Udaltsov tried to take part in the Moscow mayoral election, but he could not register (in contrast to Alexei Navalny).

During the trial, one of the accused Konstantin Lebedev went to a deal with the investigation and began to act as a prosecution witness, shifting the blame for what happened on Udaltsov and Razvozhayev. July 24, 2014 Moscow City Court found Sergei Udaltsov guilty of organizing mass disorders and sentenced him to 4.5 years imprisonment.

The Navalny case is one of the most mysterious episodes of the post-protest repression of the Russian authorities. It is still unclear why Navalny remained on large. Russian political analysts and journalists have put forward different versions: the desire of the mayor Sobyenin to organize demonstratively open elections, possible links between Navalny and the Kremlin, the clash of various elite groups or fears of mass street protests.

However, if we consider these two processes by comparing them, we find some common details and patterns. Firstly, it should be noted that Aleksei Navalny was more popular, and his agenda focused primarily on the middle class and the youth. At the same time, Sergei Udaltsov was perceived as a rather radical, partly marginal politician who, even at the peak of protests, did not have mass personal support. This could already have led to a different attitude on the part of the authorities – in case of Udaltsov's imprisonment risks were significantly lower than in the case of Navalny, which had a good recognition, popularity and was well-known in Western countries.

Secondly, judging by the further political actions of Alexei Navalny, he proved to be more contractual with the acting authorities. Despite the defeat in the first round of mayoral elections, he had the opportunity not to recognize the election (especially since Sobyenin scored just over 50%), but he chose not to do so. Later Navalny had to go to prison after the verdict in the case, in which he was tried along with his brother - but he received a second provisional verdict, which made him a unique defendant in the modern history of Russia. Sergei Udaltsov was too radical and uncontrolled; a politician, who could not be trusted. This could also serve as the reason why the authorities preferred not to jail Navalny, but to send Sergei Udaltsov to prison.

Thirdly, it is important to note that in the case where the potential risks from the conviction of an opposition politician were higher, the authorities preferred to adhere to the tactics of indirect repression - Navalny was not imprisoned, but his actions were severely limited by both the current sentence and the fact that his brother was in prison. In addition, the authorities adhered to the idea of accusing him of economic crimes up to the last, and not

persecution on political grounds. In the case of Udaltsov, the risks were significantly lower, which, most probably, was the reason why the final verdict was so severe.

Finally, in the situation with these two criminal cases, it is necessary to pay attention to two elements that are characteristic of other examples of repression. It is a tactics of depoliticizing repressive actions: instead of openly admitting that the criminal process is connected with the political activity of politicians, the investigation was conducted on economic crimes (in the case of Navalny) or in organizing riots (in Udaltsov's case).

In addition, in the case of Alexei Navalny, the same tactics were used as in the framework of the adoption of legislation on “foreign agents”. Most likely, Navalny was not accidentally accused of fraud and corruption, because he was perceived as the main opposition-fighter against corruption. Thus, the prosecution worked to destroy his political image, and to humiliate him publicly.

Moreover, the situation with Navalny shows that it is impossible to perceive reprisals and coercive actions as an unconditional binary opposition. Repressive actions do not exclude the possibility of using the opposition politicians by the authorities or even collaborating with them. This shows that the Russian regime is more complex and more dependent on the actions of opposition politicians than it may seem at first glance.

Conclusion

Max Weber argued that the monopoly on physical violence is the only clearly defined sign of the state (Weber 1946). Continuing his thought, we certainly must agree that political repression and coercive actions are a part of state violence, and for this reason the study of this phenomenon is of great interest.

That is why repression problem attracted attention of many researchers - historians and political philosophers, as well as political scientists. Among many authors who wrote about the nature of repression, there were those who suggested that repression also evolves over time. With the development of society, brutality and visible cruelty of public punishment give way to less direct and more inconspicuous forms of coercive action (Foucault 1975). Instead of bloody public executions, public judicial institutions and prisons develop in society; political sphere is becoming increasingly institutionalized and less certain; penalties and sanctions take form of ordered legislation.

However, even though democracy and democratic principles become more widespread with every decade, there are still a lot of autocracies and hybrid regimes. Political repressions in closed autocracies are carried out by comprehensive rules, but coercive actions of hybrid political regimes are an interesting subject for research. These regimes combine elements of open and closed political regimes and even allow for some elements of competition in domestic politics. This opens the field for greater opposition activity and makes the leaders of political regime more cautious in suppressing popular discontent. Political repression is becoming a more sophisticated, more complex and more changeable phenomenon.

From this point of view, the study of political repression in Russia during and after the protests of 2011-2013 is quite important. Mass political protests related to election results occurred in several other post-Soviet countries, but only the Russian political regime managed to remain in power without resorting to mass political violence and arrests of key oppositionists. In addition, the protests did not radicalize up to the stage of armed confrontation: neither the

police nor the protesters used weapons; none of the protesters or law enforcement officers were killed because of the confrontation in the streets. Moreover, those coercive actions that were applied by the regime were enough to stop the mass protests.

Since the mid-2000s, the Russian regime was preparing to resist a possible attack by the political opposition. The reason for this was the success of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. Since that time, youth pro-government movements have been actively developing in Russia (as well as pseudo social movements), the state has established links with informal power structures (football hooligans, radical nationalists, criminals), and the actions of the police and special services against the opposition have become much tougher. Political regime was clearly preparing for a violent response to any possible political attacks, constantly building up the tools for a possible emergency.

However, when this threat became a reality, it was clear that the forceful method of suppressing protests was not optimal. The arrests of protesters continued for several days after the end of parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011, but this only led to an increase in the number of people protesting; In addition, it created the risks of radicalization of the protest. Then a completely different tactic was undertaken: authorities decided not to prohibit and disperse protest actions, neither to use force against the protesters. Instead, the regime accumulated strength for subsequent long and indirect actions.

The aim of this research was not only to study the methods and strategy of repression in contemporary Russia in the context of domestic Russian policy, but also to provide a lens for the better understanding of methods that can be applied by other hybrid regimes. It is known that such regimes often borrow practices of managing politics and society from other autocracies. The case of Russia can help to understand the nature of these methods and why they are so effective.

Implications for Other Hybrid Regimes

The study of coercive actions in Russia after protests of 2011-2013 shows that efficient political repression in hybrid regime follows a certain pattern in the case of political regime's inability to resort to mass political repression and brutal attacks on civil society.

First, this pattern is clearly visible in the desire to “depoliticize” repression. Even though the political bias of certain actions and processes is obvious, each time authorities denied any connection of their actions with the politics. Arrests during the investigation of the Bolotnaya Square case were officially associated with vandalism, hooliganism, organization of mass riots - even though in many cases it was known that the arrested people did not take part in clashes with the police, or the degree of their participation was greatly exaggerated.

Toughening of the current legislation on rallies and protest actions was presented by the parliament and the government as a measure aimed at strengthening the rule of law and following “European norms and rules”. Pressure on the press was presented as a conflict between the owner of the publication and editor-in-chief, and not as an element of political censorship: officially Kremlin sought to show that it had nothing to do with dismissals of editors and journalists.

The regime followed the same tactics even during the trial of one of the opposition leaders, explaining in every possible way that this had nothing to do with his political activities - the goal was only to investigate economic crimes. Official representatives of investigative bodies, as well as members of the ruling party, said that no one sets the task of punishing opposition politicians.

Secondly, an important feature of state coercive actions is their indirect character. This approach was especially noticeable during the attacks on independent media. In most cases, pressure on independent media was exercised through owners who were either close to Kremlin or depended on it. This approach to managing media space has been used by the regime since

the late 1990s and only became more massive after protests - reformatting the press was an important task, since it was independent publications that played a significant role in disseminating information about protests, as well as about the authorities' response.

A similar idea lies at the base of the attack on political NGOs. Publicly stating that the state has nothing against the work of non-profit public organizations, the regime at the same time created conditions that severely restricted the work of such organizations. And, foremost, at the level of a public opinion - by creating the status of a "foreign agent", which is clearly perceived as a marker of a politically unreliable, hostile organization. But formally, this measure was presented only as a small change in the law, not aimed at banning or restricting NGOs.

Thirdly, it should be noted that the regime used coercive actions gradually. Instead of inflicting a lot of strikes on the opposition and civil society (simultaneous tightening of laws, arrests of activists, reformatting of independent publications, the regime implemented various measures gradually, switching attention from one measure to another. Punishment and political repression were stretched in time. The dismissals of editors of independent media continued for several years. Litigation against the opposition leaders began at the very moment when the main protest wave was suppressed and people became dissatisfied with the opposition and protests.

The regime carried out coercive actions for a long time, reducing the space for the opposition's actions little by little - each concrete step could not be considered a critical point, after which there is no return to the previous system. But over time, when all these measures lined up into a complex system of restrictions and prohibitions, it became clear that free space was severely narrowed and limited.

Finally, another important feature of political repression strategy was constant weighing of possible risks and possible benefits. Vivid examples reflecting this logic of political repression are the trials of Alexey Navalny and Sergei Udaltsov. Despite the fact that the authorities were able to sentence both of them to imprisonment, they preferred not to do so. The

most radical and less popular leader was sentenced to prolonged imprisonment. This measure should also serve as a lesson for protesters and political activists, and, in addition, should complicate political activities for part of the opposition.

At the same time, imprisonment for Aleksey Navalny was considered too risky a decision, because it could have triggered a new wave of protests. Mass protests in Moscow on the day of the verdict only confirmed the riskiness of such a decision. In addition, Navalny's participation in mayoral elections in Moscow and the victory of the incumbent turned out to be a useful step for the regime. This helped to demonstrate the authorities' confidence in their position and their readiness to confront the opposition not only with repressive and informal actions, but also in the process of an open election campaign.

The case of Bolotnaya Square can be another example of weighing possible risks and profits. The regime was supposed to give a demonstrative response to the protesters, but mass arrests were considered too dangerous, since they could potentially provoke and radicalize the protesters. However, relatively small (comparing with the total number of protesters) and rather random arrests of the protesters proved to be a sufficient measure to intimidate the majority of protesters.

Implications for Russian domestic politics

The methods and strategies of repression described above not only show how cautious and ingenious a hybrid regime can be. These strategies also reflect some important characteristics of the modern Russian political regime.

Graeme Robertson, in his study of protests in Russia in the 2000s, concluded that repression in Russia “is not just about fighting existing opponents but about deterring future ones. <...> ...much of repression is about holding together elite coalitions” (G. B. Robertson 2010, 210). Comparing the repressions after the protests of 2011-2013, we can note a certain

development of the nature of political repression. Overwhelming majority of repressive actions studied in this research were undertaken not against elite groups, but against the emerged non-systemic opposition movement.

Finally, my research shows that even though in recent years the Russian regime has become much more similar to autocracy than to hybrid regime, the leaders of this regime have not dared to destroy politically free space and elements of civil society completely. Moreover, the very fact that when deciding on certain repressions, they weigh possible risks and consequences of these decisions, shows that they are not completely apart from reality and realize that civil society and the opposition represent a political threat.

It can be assumed that the decision of the regime to conduct indirect and prolonged repressions shows that the Russian political regime today is a more complex phenomenon than usually thought it differs from other similar regimes in the post-Soviet space. Part of political space remained free, and those elements of civil society that survived after repressions, learned a lesson. In the future, this may have a key impact on the development of the Russian political regime.

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