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DUMA ELECTIONS AND PROTESTS

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An Evaluation of the Results of the Duma Elections

By Arkady Lyubarev, Moscow

Abstract

The Duma elections were first and foremost a contest between the state executive, which made use of all administrative resources, and various societal groups forming the opposition. Ultimately, United Russia was able to win a majority, but the number of protest votes nevertheless increased significantly. Considerable variation in the results could be observed from region to region and even within individual regions. This can partly be attributed to the varying level of falsification in different areas. Overall, by falsifying the result of the vote, it is probable that United Russia was given 15 million extra votes, so that the true result for the party can be seen to stand at around 34% and not 49%.

Executive Government as an Election Campaigner

The main peculiarity of the 2011 election to the State Duma was to be found in the fact that the central contest did not take place between the seven registered parties. Instead, one of the competing sides was the authorities at all levels, who threw all their resources into supporting United Russia.

The candidate list of United Russia was headed by the president. Additionally, it also bore the names of the head of the presidential administration, 8 members of the central government and 54 governors. The presidential administration assigned the regional administrations with the task of making sure that a high proportion of the vote went to United Russia. The heads of the regional governments, in turn, called their subordinates and their dependent officials and business leaders together, and issued corresponding assignments which included falsifying the elections. The same practice was continued at lower levels, which ultimately resulted in direct pressure being put on the voters.

Resistance From Society

The other side in the contest was made up of those sections of society which wished for a change of power. It was no coincidence that Alexei Navalny, who publicly branded United Russia the "Party of swindlers and thieves" (this turn of phrase was used by practically all opposition parties in the election campaign) and who had called for people to vote for any party so long as it was not United Russia, became the most important ideological leader of the election campaign.

Many citizens reported violations of the electoral code being carried out by representatives of the administrations and documented their illegal actions in the election campaign with audio and video recordings. These materials have been uploaded on the internet and passed on to the media. On the Map of violations, a joint project run by GOLOS and the internet publication Gazeta.ru, more than 5,000 reports of violations were submit-

ted by election day; following election day the number of reports rose to 7,800.

The Election Result

The following table shows the official results of the parties and a comparison with the 2007 Duma elections. According to official figures, United Russia received just under 50% of the vote and was able to command an outright majority of the mandates. By comparison with the last Duma elections, the party, however, lost over 12 million votes (over 15%) and 77 mandates (See table and figures on pp. 8 and 9).

The CPRF and A Just Russia were able to improve their results from 2007 by over 50%, whilst Yabloko more than doubled its share of the vote. The result for the LDPR was also noticeably better, and was their best since 1993. This should, however, in the opinion of many experts, not be considered a success of the party, but as the result of a significant number of protest voters who voted against United Russia.

The results for the Patriots of Russia and Right Cause remained little more than background noise. The Patriots of Russia were able to only marginally improve on their 2007 result. In 2011, Right Cause received fewer votes than two of the three parties, from which this party has emerged (Civilian Power and Union of Right Forces), received on their own at the 2007 elections.

Regional Variation

The election results have become more regionally differentiated. Although United Russia retained the top position in all regions, the results vary considerably, namely between 29.0% in Yaroslavl Oblast and 99.5% in the Chechen Republic. The results for United Russia also varied in the regions with populations predominantly made up of ethnic Russians. Tambov Oblast heads up these regions with 66.7%.

United Russia received less than 35% in 15 regions, between 35% and 40% in 17 regions, between 50% and 60% in 10 regions, between 60% and 70% in 9 regions

(including 6 Russian Oblasts), between 70% and 90% in 7 regions (five Republics and two Autonomous Okrugs), and over 90% in the four Republics: Ingushetia, Dagestan, Mordovia and Chechnya. These regional differences can not so much be traced back to a corresponding will of the electorate as to the level of use of administrative resources, including direct election falsification.

The CPRF attained its best result in Oryol Oblast (32.0%), A Just Russia its best in Novgorod Oblast (28.1%), the LDPR in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (22.5%) and Yabloko in St. Petersburg (11.6%). At the same time, United Russia retained its support primarily in the north-western regions of the country, whilst the heartlands of the LDPR lie in Siberia and the Far East. It is worth noting here that the election results in these regions were those which suffered the least influence from manipulation.

The situation for the CPRF is less clear. In the 1990s, the communists found most support in the agricultural regions of Southern Russia, in the central black-earth region, in southern Siberia and in the Volga region, i.e. in the so-called red belt. In the first decade of the 21st century this pattern saw some decline, but nevertheless remained intact. In 2007, the following regions still represented the ten strongest CPRF heartlands: The Altai Region, the Oblasts Belgorod, Bryansk, Volgograd, Voronezh, Novosibirsk, Oryol, Ryazan, Samara and Tambov. At the most recent elections, only Oryol and Novosibirsk Oblasts were amongst the top ten. A broad range of areas can now be found amongst the regions with the highest support for the communists: the Moscow Region and the Oblasts of Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Kostroma, Nizhny Novgorod, Omsk, Orenburg and Pskov, demonstrating an unmistakable drift to the north. This is partly due to the fact that the regions in the south were most severely affected by manipulation.

The Patriots of Russia and Right Cause failed to achieve more than three percent in any region. The best result for the Patriots of Russia came in the Republic of Ingushetia (2.54%) and the best for Right Cause in Sverdlovsk Oblast (2.07%), which can be explained by the specific party structures in those regions.

Voter Behaviour in the Cities

Of particular interest are the election results in the large cities, where a trend has long since developed: In most regions, United Russia receives its best results on the agricultural outskirts and its poorest in the capital cities. At the 2011 election, this trend was maintained, but now with several exceptions.

Thus, the result for United Russia in 79 regional capitals (with the obvious exceptions of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the Moscow and Leningrad Regions) stood

at a total of 41.25% and in the 30 largest cities (each with an electorate population of over 415,000) at a total of 39.66%. The opposition parties achieved their best results in the large cities, which was particularly evident in the case of Yabloko—the party received 6.76% of the vote in the 30 largest cities.

Of the regional capitals and the 30 largest cities, the worst result for United Russia could be found in Vladivostok (22.69%) and in cities with over 100,000 residents, the worst result was in Korolyov, near Moscow, (22.11%). Even worse were the results in several small science towns in the Moscow hinterland. Thus, the party received just 17.72% of the vote in Chernogolovka, where several leading physics and chemistry institutes are located.

United Russia had to concede its leading position to the CPRF in the cities of Vladivostok, Voronezh, Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Kostroma, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Orenburg, Oryol, Pskov, Ryazan, Smolensk, Angarsk (Irkutsk Oblast), Dzerzhinsk (Nizhny Novgorod Oblast), Kolomna, Korolyov, Serpukhov (Moscow Region) and Tolyatti (Samara Oblast), to A Just Russia in the cities of Yekaterinburg, Novgorod and Rybinsk (Yaroslavl Oblast), and to the LDPR in Khanty-Mansiysk.

Regional Centres and the Regional Periphery

Also of interest are the differences in the results for the leading parties between the regions as a whole and their capital cities. For United Russia there is, almost everywhere, an imbalance of support concentrated in the outskirts and away from the capital. In 2007, there was only one exception here, which was the Republic of Dagestan. In 2011, there were already more: Alongside Dagestan were four other Caucasian Republics (Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia-Alania and Chechnya), as well as the Komi Republic, Stavropol Region and the Oblasts of Astrakhan and Samara. As Syktyvkar, Stavropol, Astrakhan and Samara are, according to our data, amongst the regions most severely affected by violations of the electoral code during the voting and vote-counting processes, we can confidently assume that the results there can be put down to acts of falsification.

In most regional capitals, United Russia received fewer votes than in each region as a whole, with a difference of more than 10% in 27 regions. For the CPRF and A Just Russia, the results in the capitals of most regions (70 for CPRF, 65 for A Just Russia) were better than in the outskirts. The results for the CPRF followed this pattern in 48 regions.

The Extent of Election Falsification

The fact that the vote and vote-counting processes were accompanied by widespread falsifications is proven both

by reports from citizens (members of the election commissions, election observers, media representatives and ordinary voters) who were witness to ballot stuffing and repeated voting, as well as by discrepancies between the copies of election protocols from the voting precincts and the official results for these precincts. Statistical analyses also come to this conclusion.

By mid-January, the association GOLOS had received certified copies of election protocols from 476 election precincts, which showed results different from those given by the official election results. In these precincts, United Russia were given 125,149 extra votes (an average of 263 votes per precinct), whilst A Just Russia had 22,792 votes taken away, the LDPR 15,443, Yabloko 10,108 and the CPRF 9,461. The election turnout had 66,209 extra voters added to it. According to our estimations, the real scale of the election falsifications, which took place during the transcription of the election protocols, is considerably larger.

The extent to which extra votes were stuffed into ballot boxes can be observed with a statistical analysis. Such an analysis has been carried out by various independent researchers. Most interesting is the work conducted by Sergei Shpilkin, who had already developed an original method in 2008, with which the scale of falsifications can be determined. According to Shpilkin's calculations, the artificial increase of the turnout alone (that is, without votes which were shifted around to the detriment of other parties) meant 15 million extra votes

being given to United Russia, meaning that their real total of the vote should be around 34 %.¹

The extent of falsifications varies enormously from region to region. The region most severely affected by election falsifications was Moscow, where United Russia received 46.6% according to official figures, although, according to Shpilkin's calculations, the real figure was just 30.3% (several other projections also show the real share of the vote for United Russia to be little over 30%). The number of extra votes added to ballot boxes in the capital is estimated at a million. By comparison, the extent of falsifications in the Regions of Altai, Krasnoyarsk and Perm, as well as the Oblasts of Arkhangelsk, Vologda and Yaroslavl, and the Leningrad and Sverdlovsk Oblasts, stands at 1% of voters and therefore lies within the statistical margin for error.

These events have led to widespread mistrust in the election results and the electoral system on the whole amongst citizens, which expressed itself in the protest actions that took place in December throughout the country. The President's Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights even passed a resolution on 23rd December, which discredits the moral and political basis of the electoral system and the lower house of parliament formed on the basis thereof; its demands include ensuring that new election laws are passed as soon as possible, in order to allow holding early parliamentary elections.

Translation: Stephen Bench-Capon

About the Author

Arkady Lyubarev is doctor of jurisprudence and leading expert at GOLOS. The present text is a result of the cooperation between the Russian NGO "The Association of Non-Profit Organizations 'In Defense of Voters' Rights' GOLOS" and the European Exchange in Berlin for the purpose of observing the Russian Duma elections 2011, supported by the German Association for East European Studies (DGO) and the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

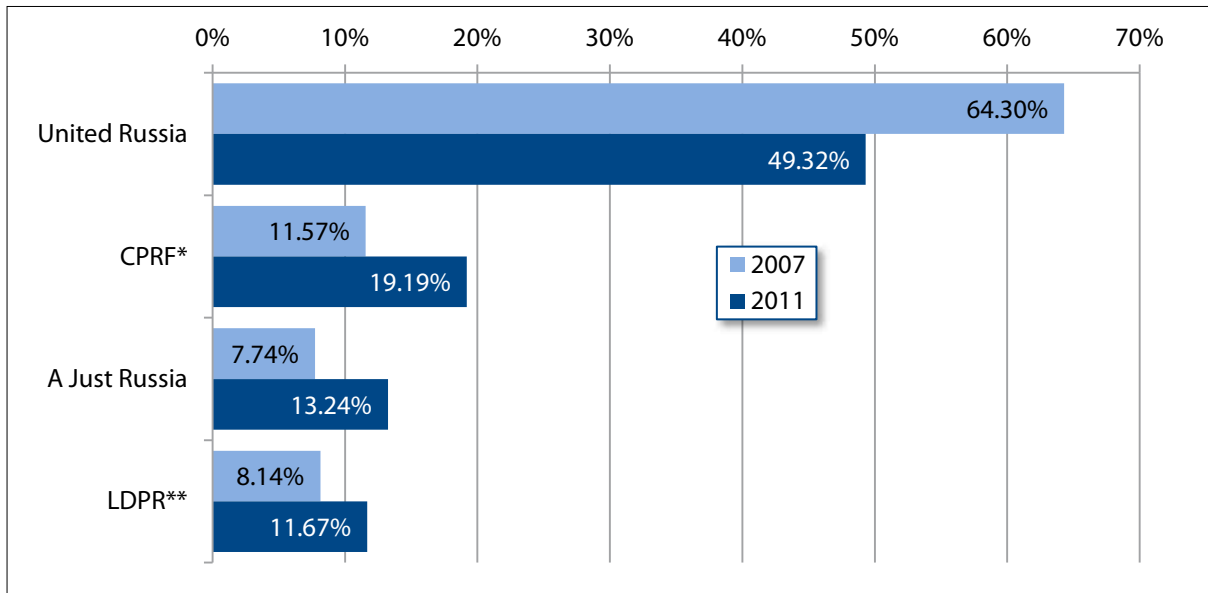
Table 1: Results of the Election by Party Lists

Party	2011			2007		
	Number of votes	Share of the vote	Number of mandates	Number of votes	Share of the vote	Number of mandates
United Russia	32,379,135	49.32%	238	44,714,241	64.30%	315
CPRF*	12,599,507	19.19%	92	8,046,886	11.57%	57
A Just Russia	8,695,522	13.24%	64	5,383,639	7.74%	38
LDPR**	7,664,570	11.67%	56	5,660,823	8.14%	40
Yabloko	2,252,403	3.43%	–	1,108,985	1.59%	–
Patriots of Russia	639,119	0.97%	–	615,417	0.89%	–
Right Cause	392,806	0.60%	–	–	–	–

* = Communist Party of the Russian Federation, ** = Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

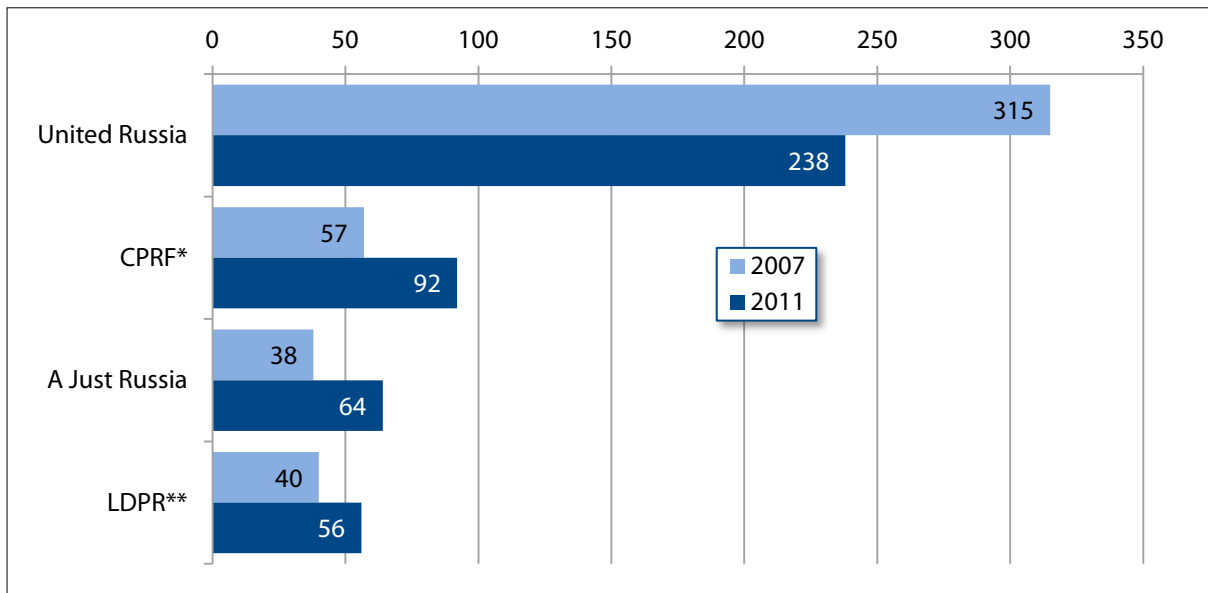
¹ Shpilkin, S. 'Matematika vyborov'. in: *Troitsky variant*, No. 25 (94), 20.12.2011.

Figure 1: Share of the Vote of the Parties Represented in the Duma in the Duma Elections 2007 and 2011



* = Communist Party of the Russian Federation, ** = Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

Figure 2: Number of Mandates of the Parties Represented in the Duma after the Duma Elections 2007 and 2011



* = Communist Party of the Russian Federation, ** = Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

Russia's Protest Movement and the Lessons of History

By Andrei Yakovlev, Moscow

Abstract

The December protests in Moscow do not represent a “Russian Spring,” “Orange Revolution,” or new version of Perestroika. Rather they have more in common with the Progressive movement that fought corruption in the U.S. during the early part of the twentieth century. The demonstrations made clear that Russian citizens now want to play an active role in their country's political life.

The Use of Analogies

The recent new year's holiday season provided an opportunity to contemplate the stormy political events of December 2011 and try to address the questions they raised. Answers have already been provided for the first obvious question: Why did tens of thousands of people in Moscow take to the streets and what do they want? People are tired of the authorities' lies and want honest elections. However, a much more important question remains open: What are the actual consequences of the December protests? In answering this question, it makes sense to look at several historical analogies. As is often the case with such analogies, they can be useful in helping to understand what is *not* happening in Russia.

Analogy 1: “The Arab Spring” and the “Colored Revolutions”

Against the background of the unexpected and spontaneous revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya during spring 2011, leading to the overthrow and criminal trials for the corrupt dictators, many representatives of the Russian “democratic opposition” predicted a similar outcome for the “Putin regime,” but only 5–7 years from now, after it had used up all of its reserves and there remained nothing left to provide the population subsidies for various social services. But this comparison does not work—in the Middle East (as in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010) most protesters were young, unemployed people from the lower social layers of society, and the protests turned into bloody battles with the authorities. By contrast, on Bolotnaya Square and Sakharov Prospect in Moscow, the protesters were mainly well educated citizens who are 30–45 years old. The demonstrators strove to avoid any confrontations and the use of force.

In terms of the social make-up of the protesters and the character of the protests (including their main cause—electoral fraud), the Moscow events, at first glance, seem similar to Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004–5. However, even here there are serious differences. Behind the demonstrations on the Maidan stood serious political competition based on the powerful opposition parties headed by Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko. Moreover, a significant part of

Ukraine's business community supported this opposition financially. There was nothing similar in Moscow. Russia's extra-parliamentary opposition was not prepared for such large protests and the reaction of the protesters to the speeches of the main opposition leaders made clear that they did not reflect the mood of the people standing before the tribune.

Analogy 2: “70–80” and “Perestroika”

In the last two to three years of Putin's decade-long rule, it has become popular to compare his stewardship to the period of “late Brezhnevism.” There is even a convenient phrase “70–80” which simultaneously refers to the 1970s–1980s and to the fact that then oil sold for 70–80 dollars a barrel. Such a price level today would make it possible to support a stable political system. The leaders of the opposition themselves favor this comparison, particularly in their plans to organize another large protest for February 4, the 22nd anniversary of a march along Moscow's Ring Road, after which the USSR Supreme Soviet moved the clause from the Constitution guaranteeing the Communist Party of the Soviet Union a “leading and guiding role.”

However, if it is possible to describe accurately the period of the 1970s and 1980s with the term “stagnation,” it does not apply to the 2000s, despite all the talk about Russia's growing corruption and the lack of innovation. A much better fit is with another period of Soviet history, namely the 1920s. The first time I encountered this idea was three years ago at the height of the economic crisis, when in an informal conversation, the terms that were so characteristic of the 1920s—“bourgeois specialists” and “military specialists” (“*voenspetsy*”)¹ came up. Colleagues who know our currently policy-making system from the inside used precisely these terms to define the roles of the Moscow “liberal technocrats” in their relationship with the “Petersburg group,” who make up the core of today's ruling elite.

¹ These terms refer to technical specialists, engineers, former officers of the czarist army who in the 1920s worked in Soviet institutions, government enterprises, or served in the Red Army.

Such associations with the 1920s came up again for me at a conference marking “Twenty Years after the Collapse of the Soviet Union,” which took place in Berlin in December 2011.² In addition to economists, the conference brought together historians, sociologists, and literature scholars. From their various papers and the discussions during coffee breaks, I experienced an interesting sensation. As in the 1920s, so also in the 2000s, there was a strengthening of the political regime with a base in one political party. Then it was accompanied by “philosophy steamers,”³ political police (OGPU), the Solovki prison camps, and the Industrial Party Affair. Today’s analogies include the tight state control over the main television networks, the forced exile of Gusinsky and Berezovsky and the Yukos Affair, the hostile takeover of the Evroset telecom company, and the Magnitsky Affair. However, as in the 1920s, today there are numerous forms of media operating, the police break up opposition demonstrations, and the blogger Alexey Navalny exposes corruption in state purchases. Then it was also popular to fight with bureaucratism, the authorities dismantled the Trotskyist opposition, and rallies took place, as now, primarily in the capitals. As in the 1920s, there are dozens of new books, films, and plays, and stormy political discussions. In other words, as in the 1920s, today after great chaos and destruction there was a decade of economic growth and active social life.

It is well known how the 1920s ended and what happened to the “bourgeois specialists” and “military specialists.” The ruling party elite tried to overcome the objective economic contradictions between the city and countryside through collectivization and industrialization accompanied by the permanent “search for enemies” that turned into “red terror.” The contradictions of unbalanced growth were clearly visible in the 2000s. The de facto nationalization of natural resource rents that took place after the Yukos Affair was a reaction to serious social contradictions and disproportions at the beginning of the 2000s. Nevertheless, can today’s authorities go farther in the “search for enemies” and start massive repressions?

My answer is no. In the 1920s, the country was ruled by a quasi-religious order, many of whose members fanatically believed in their ideas and were prepared to die and sacrifice half the country to realize these ideas.

Today’s ruling elites are not fanatics, but pragmatists. And they depend on Europe and the US much more than the current opposition members since their children are in London, they own villas on Mediterranean shores, and hold money in Swiss bank accounts or in the Bahamas. Nevertheless, the recent examples of Mubarak and Kaddafi shows that even billions of dollars taken out of the country did not save them. Despite the obvious analogies to the 1920s, this pragmatism of the current Russian elite can become a prerequisite to movement in the direction of common sense and to compromise with society because these people, in contrast to the ideological Leninists, have something to lose.

In this way, the comparison with the 1920s makes it possible to answer the question of why in December the authorities gave a command not to use force, and most likely won’t use it in the future. However, this comparison does not explain the situation on the side of the protesters: What kind of program can realistically unite the very different people participating in the December rallies in Moscow?

Analogy 3: “Progressives” of the 21st Century?

The 1990s in Russia are often compared to the period of “wild capitalism” in the US at the end of the 19th century. This comparison usually highlighted the functioning of the market mechanisms and the brutal methods used for the “primary accumulation of capital.” However, it also relates to the political system and the civil service, which in the US of that time was even more corrupt than the contemporary Russian bureaucracy.

Democratic Party founder and U.S. President from 1829–1837 Andrew Jackson began this process. In particular, in addition to giving all white males the right to vote, Jackson introduced the spoils system which distributed government jobs among supporters of the party that won the election. One of the starkest examples of this system was the activity of William Marcy Tweed (“Boss” Tweed), who led the Tammany Hall political machine of the Democratic Party in New York and, with its help, controlled the appointment of key positions in the state and distributed money from publicly-financed projects.⁴

In 1858 Tweed pushed through the state senate a bill on the construction of a new courthouse. New York state initially set aside \$250,000 in public money for the building. Then, over the course of 13 years, construction costs consumed almost \$13 million, including \$5.6

2 http://www.kompost.uni-muenchen.de/events/ende_su/programm_en_111124.pdf

3 In 1922 Lenin’s government sent inconvenient Russian intellectuals abroad. In September and November 1922, the Soviet authorities deported 160 people from Petrograd to Stettin on the German passenger ships “Oberbürgermeister Haken” and the “Prussia.” Among the passengers were the philosophers Nikolai Berdyayev, Ivan Ilin, Semen Frank, and many others.

4 Jack H. Knott and Gary J. Miller. 1987. *Reforming Bureaucracy: The Politics of Institutional Choice*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, pp. 18–19.

million for furniture, carpets, and curtains, an amount that exceeded all of the federal expenses to support the US postal service. Nevertheless, by 1871, the courthouse remained unfinished and unfurnished. According to contemporary accounts, Tweed personally received kickbacks worth 65 percent of the contracts he distributed. It is estimated that between 1857 and 1870 Tweed and his closest allies took for their personal use from the budget of New York between \$30 million and \$200 million.⁵ Despite the open theft, Tweed remained in power for almost 20 years. His success was possible because the police officers he appointed did not allow the opposition to vote and closed their eyes to the immigrants who cast multiple ballots for Tweed's allies. At the same time, the prosecutors and judges bought by Tweed did not allow suits brought against him to proceed in court.

Nevertheless, ultimately in 1870 Tweed lost the elections, ended up in court, and finished his life in jail. However, the political machines became a ubiquitous phenomenon in American politics and Tammany Hall remained one of the most influential organizations in the Democratic Party until the 1930s. The result of the heavy influence of money in politics at the end of the 19th century led to the growth of monopolies in industry, transportation, and in the banking sector because their "merger with politics" allowed businessmen to gain advantages and privileges while keeping out unwanted competitors. The cost of paying bribes to the politicians was compensated by the resulting higher prices charged to customers. (The main difference from the current Russian situation was that the US federal government during this period was extremely weak; however, there was competition among the states, where real politics was then conducted.)

Social protests against such faults of capitalism were the basis for the Progressive movement, the peak of which in the US was at the beginning of the 20th century. The core demands of the Progressives included an improvement of state management and having the government fulfill its obligations (especially at the local and state levels) in terms of controlling monopoly pricing, providing security, supporting schools and the mail service, and building and repairing roads. As Knott and Miller (see footnote 4) point out, the Progressive coalition was diverse, including at least five different social groups:

- Former "populists"—farmers and small businessmen from the West and South who protested against the constantly rising railroad and insurance prices

and demanded the introduction of antimonopoly regulations.

- "Gentlemen reformers" (or Mugwumps)—representatives of aristocratic families from the East Coast, who considered it imperative to get rid of the spoils system (with its de facto sale of government jobs) and the introduction of civil service principles based on a meritocracy and "scientific management." They set up the New York Bureau of Municipal Research in 1906 and over the course of 20 years it identified, analyzed, and disseminated a variety of municipal management best practices.
- The middle class representatives in big cities (engineers, doctors, and teachers) who paid taxes and regularly participated in elections. They demanded that instead of handing out jobs to their allies and developing big companies through tax breaks and advantages, the authorities should instead do their job: cleaning the streets, fighting crime, and ensuring that all children can go to good schools.
- Urban merchants who wanted to work in conditions in which their customers did not have to think about dirt on the streets and pick pockets robbing them, the police defended business from crime, the fire fighters actually put out blazes, and the Post Office delivered the mail on time.
- Social reformers (united in the Association for Improving the Conditions for the Poor), representatives of higher and middle classes who felt it necessary to guarantee minimal acceptable living standards for the urban poor, and in addition to collecting money for orphans and the homeless, demanded the introduction in the cities of sanitary standards for preventing the outbreak of epidemics.

The Progressives were not associated with any of the traditional political parties, since both the Republicans and Democrats at this time were equally corrupt. And although the Progressives considered President Theodore Roosevelt their leader, his conflict with other influential republicans ultimately led his supporters to create the Progressive Party in August 1912. However, after Roosevelt's failure to win another presidential term, the new party disintegrated. This loss was not surprising. In reality, the Progressives made up a minority of the American voters who at the beginning of the 20th century were distinguished from today's Russian citizens by their low willingness to spend time defending their rights and their even smaller desire to participate in collective action.

Accordingly, the main accomplishment of the Progressives was the introduction of new principles in organizing the civil service, including the separation of politics from administration, hiring professional managers

5 <http://712educators.about.com/cs/biographies/p/bosstweed.htm>
In today's terms, this sum is more than the combined wealth of Abramovich and Berezovsky.

for government service, developing and applying administrative regulations, introducing hierarchical, organizational specialization and clear responsibilities for public officials. The process started at the municipal level in a few states (where Progressives were successful in implementing their reforms by playing off the differences between Democrats and Republicans) and only later, during the 1920s and 1930s moved up to the level of federal agencies. Nevertheless, today many believe that it was the Progressive movement that created the current effective system of public administration in the US and made it possible to significantly reduce the scale of corruption in the public sphere.

Taking Lessons from the Past

Can the ideas of the Progressives today, 120 years later, form the basis for the kind of social movement that flowed into the streets of Moscow after the December 4 elections? Yes and no. Obviously, we are living in a different time, with completely different technology. For example, improving the postal service (which was such an important issue to the Progressives, who pointed to the efficient post offices of Germany and England, even though they operated in monarchical political systems) is not a pressing problem today. However the general idea of holding the authorities accountable and removing corruption from politics, increasing the effectiveness of state institutions in providing public services, creating feedback mechanisms with active voters even as most voters remain passive and are subject to various kinds of manipulation, can be translated to Russian reality.

Such ideas have been discussed for a long time and are gradually being implemented by the “liberal technocrats”

in the government, including A. Kudrin, A. Zhukov, I. Shvalov, G. Gref, I. Artemev, and E. Nabiullina (all of whom are similar to America’s “gentlemen reformers”). For example, the same law on public procurement (94-FL) which made all tenders for state supplies public and which is defended now in public discussions by the blogger Navalny, was initiated by the government rather than the opposition. Additionally, the government strengthened the anti-monopoly legislation and made the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service one of the most influential economic institutions. The Kremlin administration, not the opposition, forced bureaucrats and members of their families to declare their income.

Of course, these measures frequently do not work well, in part because they were part of reforms from above and face opposition and sabotage on the part of the bureaucracy. Therefore the authorities recognized that they needed feedback mechanisms with the “active minority,” including groups like the Agency for Strategic Initiatives and the web site “Russia without Fools.” Naturally, all this does not eliminate the presence at various levels of the “power vertical” and people seeking to realize their own personal interests despite the cost to society. But without out pressure from the side of society, such people will not leave office on their own.

The December demonstrations in Moscow demonstrated that the decade of economic growth and social-political stability led to the appearance of a layer within society that wants to have the right to its own voice and is ready to put pressure on the authorities. It is important that now new leaders who are able to put forward a constructive program and engage in dialogue with the authorities in the name of civil society step forward.

About the Author:

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WITNESS

Russia's Protest Movement: A View from a Young Participant

By Evgenia Olimpieva, St. Petersburg

Abstract

A college sophomore describes her experience participating in St. Petersburg's December 18, 2011, protest. Her insider perspective gives a sense of what it felt like to be there, what the protesters experienced, and what they expect the consequences of these political actions to be. Her article shows one way in which contemporary Russians are overcoming the Soviet legacy.

How It All Began

When I started planning to write this article, I assumed that there would be nothing new and exciting about the Russian elections this year. I wanted to talk about Russians' traditional skepticism and distrust of democracy. I wanted to talk about the population's political apathy caused by its Soviet mentality, which instead of being eradicated has been passed on from generation to generation. But my views changed dramatically as a result of the protest wave which began in Russia on December 4th, immediately following the State Duma elections.

I think that the starting point of it all was September 24, 2011, when President Dmitry Medvedev announced that Vladimir Putin was going to run for president again. Many experts say that Russia's biggest problem is the absence of political competition. For years there has been no figure that could somehow compete with Vladimir Putin. Many Russians put their hopes in Medvedev even though Putin effectively appointed him to the presidency. It was obvious that Medvedev would never have become president were it not for the constitutional term-limits that forced Putin to give up the presidential seat. It was also obvious that Putin had not given up power, but that it was passed on to a very carefully picked candidate who would not dare to become independent.

During his time in office, however, Medvedev created the illusion that he was slowly moving away from Putin. They were never shown together on the television; they never openly praised or supported each other. Their focus and political strategy aimed at very different groups of the population. Medvedev appealed to the educated, intellectual masses, and the businessmen. His rhetoric was always pro-liberal and pro-modernization. He positioned himself as an intellectual, democratic, European-minded politician. A graduate of St. Petersburg State University, with a PhD in law, he fit perfectly with the image of a liberal reformer.

Meanwhile Putin cultivated the image of a brutal and direct politician, a man of actions rather than words. His speeches were often rude and abusive, and were filled with scorn and sarcasm. Putin is a very smart man and he knows that such language speaks to a large part of Russia's population. As opposed to Medvedev's highly

civilized and educated speaking style, Putin's language, although grammatically correct, is a fusion of working class and prisoners' slang. The image of a leader who thought like the working class and was sympathetic to it has always been extremely important to Putin. At the recent United Russia convention, the prime minister's candidacy won praise from Valeriy Yalushkevich, a steel-maker from Nizhniy Tagil. He said that Putin "visits our factory from time to time; gives us advice and makes suggestions. That is why we do our job well." Direct involvement in the factories' business has been Putin's calling card for years. He became popular by publicly exposing the corruption and crimes of the factories' managers.

The two political leaders—Medvedev and Putin—seemed to be so different that many believed the tandem was falling apart and envisioned Medvedev as a figure of the future.

I was hoping that Medvedev would leave United Russia and run for the president against Putin, which would create real competition in the political system. Medvedev's opposition to Putin, I thought, would lead to the birth of a new party led by Medvedev and capable



"You do not even represent us"
Photo: © Evgenia Olimpieva

of competing with Putin's United Russia. What made me very hopeful was Medvedev's political speech at the opening of Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum in the summer of 2011, where he talked about

modernization plans for Russia's economy, repeating over and over again that it was his choice, his view of Russia, as if it was opposed to somebody else's view: "my choice is a policy that give millions of people maximum opportunities for economic activity, and protects them with laws backed by the full weight of state power. My choice is a Russia that, over the next decade, will build an economy offering a high standard of life and an economy that makes life comfortable and interesting and produces what is necessary to make Russia one of the world's leaders."¹

But it was all a show, a play with only two actors. On September 24, 2011 at the twelfth congress of United Russia, Medvedev made clear that Putin would be Russia's leader. When I heard that for the first time, I felt like I had been fooled, I felt like they had been purposefully tricking me all these years. But, worst of all, was that the tandem decided to announce that this rotation had been planned long ago. It almost seemed that they wanted to say "we have fooled you and we are not ashamed of it," and they said it with big smiles on their faces. At the protest I saw an old lady holding a poster that said "They grin when they sin," and unfortunately she was right.

When the rotation became a reality, the tandem lost the trust and respect of millions of people. Both Medvedev and Putin became the targets of endless, often very talented mockery. Simply try searching it online and you will get thousands of the funniest and at the same time the saddest pictures and videos. While Putin is still up on the stage getting ready for the future elections, Medvedev is slowly fading away in people's minds: he indeed turned out to be nothing but Putin's puppet. Somebody put it perfectly in a joke: "Medvedev seat warmers—guaranteed for four years."

"The Russian Spring"

The protest wave started on the night of December 4, right after the Duma election results were published and reached a peak in an all-Russia protest action on December 10: people from 99 Russian cities and 42 cities around the world went out on to the streets to attend peaceful demonstrations to show their disagreement with the results of the elections. On December 18, organized protests took place in several Russian cities. Finally (for 2011, at least), on December 24 as many as one hundred thousand people rallied in Moscow—making this protest the biggest that Russia has seen in decades.

People of various ages and political beliefs, citizens who previously had been completely apolitical, even

those who had never attended any of the protests organized themselves mainly via social networks and went out on the streets to show that they cannot be silent anymore. There was one major feeling uniting all of these people—a feeling of disgust with the shameless lies of



*Trucks of the security forces in St. Petersburg.
Photo: © Evgenia Olimpiva*

the authorities, a feeling of a deep offense received from the government. The first protests were violently suppressed by the police and additional special forces. Many people were arrested and then sentenced without having an opportunity to see a lawyer. A number of people arrested had nothing to do with the protests—they were passing by the demonstrations and happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Later on, seeing that so many people were going out on the streets, the authorities allowed the protests, and since then they have been happening legally and peacefully.

Unfortunately, I was not in the country on December 10—the day of the all-Russia protest action—but I attended the demonstration in St. Petersburg on December 18. I did not know what to expect, but it definitely felt like something truly historical was happening; it seemed that having learned the lessons of the past, this time Russia was doing something right. I was not worried or scared. If this protest had happened a month earlier, or had it been the first one in the sequence and illegal, I probably would not have attended the demonstration at all. But this time everything was different, and it seemed that indeed "fighting for one's rights is pleasant and easy," as Navalny said at one of the Moscow protests. The organizers encouraged people not to be afraid since the protest was completely legal. Another comforting factor for me was that a number of well-known writers and journalists (Boris Akunin, Dmitry Bykov, Leonid Parfyenov) had attended the demonstrations and encouraged people to do so as well. I also heard many positive reports from my friends who had attended previous rallies. The more I was afraid of public demonstrations in the past, the more I felt that

¹ <http://rt.com/politics/official-word/medvedev-economic-forum-speech/>

this time, under such safe and favorable conditions, I have no right and no excuse not to go out and support the movement I liked the ideology of the protest. In the center was the demand to hold new, this time honest, elections for the Duma. Many people understood that this demand was unrealistic, but it was good because it was legitimate, nonviolent, and it united people from all kinds of political movements. Most of the people I talked to thought that it was important to have such protests to show the authorities that we exist and that we care, to show that we hold them responsible for their actions, and that not everybody in Russia can be fooled by government-controlled television.

I asked the lady standing next to me why she was attending the protest. She said that on December 4 she did not find her name on the ballot list, so she could not vote. In addition to that she was mad at the government for shaming Russia in front of the whole world. Many people said that they would not mind United Russia as long as their power was legitimate. As one of the speakers said, "Our country needs laws that work equally for everybody." These demands for legitimacy and appealing to the already existing constitution chased away my fears of the protest turning into something revolutionary, violent and uncontrolled.

What concerned me the most about the protest was the extensive presence of radical nationalist organizations. They did not behave well; they booed some speakers and in the end of the protest a couple of them took over the stage. But what made me happy was the reaction of the people to their actions. For example, when their speaker tried to instigate the crowd to move the protest to the square in front of the St. Petersburg State building, which would be illegal and would provoke confrontation with the police, the crowd shouted back "This is provocation! We are not going to move!" Except for such little incidents, the protest was very well-organized and very peaceful. Police were very polite and did not intrude at all.

Many people brought white flowers and white balloons. The symbol of the protest was a white ribbon, which Putin said he mistook for a condom during his televised call-in show with Russian citizens. "Why did they unwrap it?" was the first question that came to the president's mind. That is how Putin became the main ideologist for the anti-Putin campaign, inspiring many more protesters. What a bottomless source of inspiration that TV-show has been for the protesters! People went out on the streets ready to give a high-quality response to Putin's statements. I saw posters saying "Use contraception against political AIDS!" or the extremely crude "Dutin—Pick," where transposing the first letters of the two words suggested the source of "political

AIDS" and the nature of that source. Since Putin also suggested that everybody who attended the protests on December 10 had been paid by the United States to do so, people brought posters that said: "I am here for free" or "The United States gave me \$10 for being here."



"[The Statue of Liberty with a veil] gave me 10\$ and asked me to stand here"

Photo: © Evgenia Olimpiewa

In that same infamous TV show, after saying that those who attended the demonstrations acted in favor of foreign countries, Putin compared the protesters to the monkeys from "The Jungle Book". Of course, this statement too was not left without a response. I saw a man wearing a monkey mask holding a poster that said "Have you called for me?" (in the "The Jungle Book" cartoon known to all Russians, the python Kaa hypnotizes the monkeys and calls them to move closer, and it was Kaa that Putin quoted on the TV-show: "Come to me!"). There were also posters saying: "I want to be friends with the West" and "We don't believe in the foreign enemy."

The Significance

To people familiar with Russia, it was unthinkable that there would be protests with more than 300 participants. It is important to remember that Russia is not the kind of country where protesting is a typical tool for the expression of civic concerns and demands. We are not there yet. We do not demand; it is not in our mentality to demand from those higher in rank. We do not express our concerns or complains by going out on the streets partly because the ghost of the revolutions is still hunting us.

During one of my first days at home I saw a lady, probably in her sixties, yelling at a young man of my age and accusing him of instigating a new revolution. She was furious. He was peacefully handing out flyers inviting citizens to the legally coordinated rally "For honest elections", which I attended the next day and which, as I have mentioned, was far from anything that can be characterized as revolutionary. The young man

did not try to fight back just as a few days later I chose not to argue with my grandmother who, although not as passionately, also shared the views of the furious lady. And it is not only the old generation who is afraid of the “uncontrolled masses”: I think we all are. This is one of the reasons why for Russians protesting has not become a natural method of fighting for one’s rights. The ghost of bloody revolution in addition to the Soviet mentality, the happy possessors of which always feel that it is safer not to speak up and that the authorities know better, made protests the last tool that a Russian citizen turns to.

Just a month ago Russians protested only when the issue was a matter of life and death and when there were simply no other options left. Other than that, it was only nationalists or communists who went out on the streets. And now I see thousands of people attending political demonstrations. Wherever I go, I hear political discussions. As one of my friends said, “it seems that everything changed overnight; something that was unthinkable a couple of days ago is a reality today.”

What’s Next?

How will the protests affect the upcoming presidential elections? Will Putin come back? Probably yes, because there is no strong alternative that could unite all those who do not want to see Putin in the Kremlin. During the protest I asked the same lady about her expectations for the presidential elections: “I do not know what to do. They will give me a heart attack. There is no one to vote for, we have not been given an opportunity by our two ‘cuties.’ Yavlinskiy—a member of the intelligentsia—won’t be able to do anything. The Communist party cannot restore anything, [...]. All these Prokhorovs...they are all incapable of changing things!” Then I asked her whether the opposition will be able to nominate a new leader: “I believe in that. I want a new leader. I hope so. And I think that this time I will find my name on the list.”

Unfortunately, so far there has not appeared a new leader who would be strong enough to unite the majority of the opposition. Excluding the Communists, whom many consider to be a fake opposition, possibilities might include: Yavlinskiy (a leader of the relatively weak Yabloko party), the oligarch Prokhorov (who some people think is part of a Kremlin effort to deceive the voters), and Navalny (a relatively new figure, a political activist and an internet blog star who, however, dis-

credits himself by his nationalist views). None of these figures is strong enough to unite the opposition and to compete with Putin for the presidential post. Thus, Putin will be back for at least one more term.



“Have you called for me?”

Photo: © Evgenia Olimpueva

Putin’s return does not mean, however, that the protests have been pointless. The government was forced to recognize the existence of civil society and the power of its own people. The authorities saw that the Russian society that they are dealing with has changed and is different from what they thought it was. It is no longer a politically apathetic society, but a demanding society that holds its government responsible for its actions and words. I think it was not just the government that learned something about its people, but the society itself realized its present state.

It is important that due to the “Russian spring”, people with deep political self-consciousness became aware of their own power and saw that they are not alone. Hopefully, the protests are a sign that civil society in Russia is starting to wake up and grow, and that it will rapidly force the government to recognize its wishes. Moreover, protests influenced the strengthening of the opposition. The opposition might not have much power this year, but it will in the future if Russia’s civil society keeps growing.

Protests became a sign of the change in people’s attitude towards their own role in the country. We have grown up as a society. Now we want the government to grow up as well and to keep up with its people. The changes in Russian society now demand corresponding changes among those who hold political power.

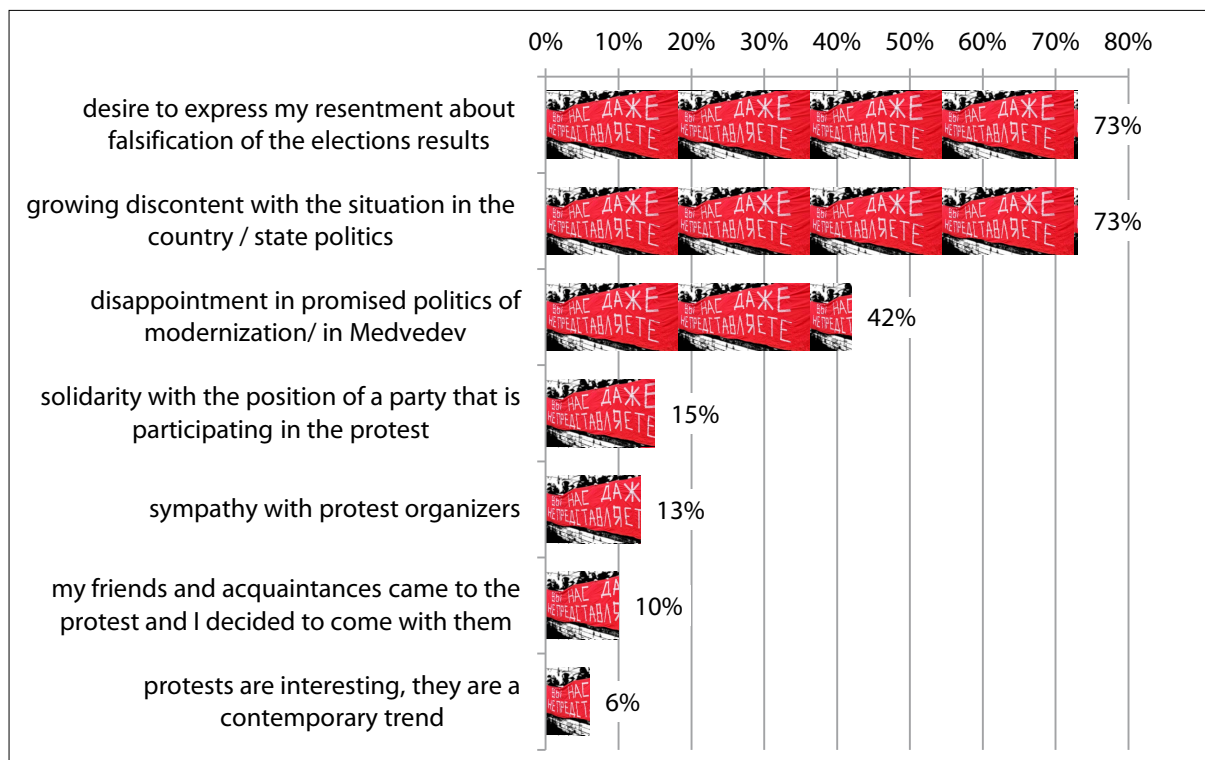
About the Author:

A native of St. Petersburg, Evgenia Olimpueva is currently a sophomore at St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland.

OPINION POLL

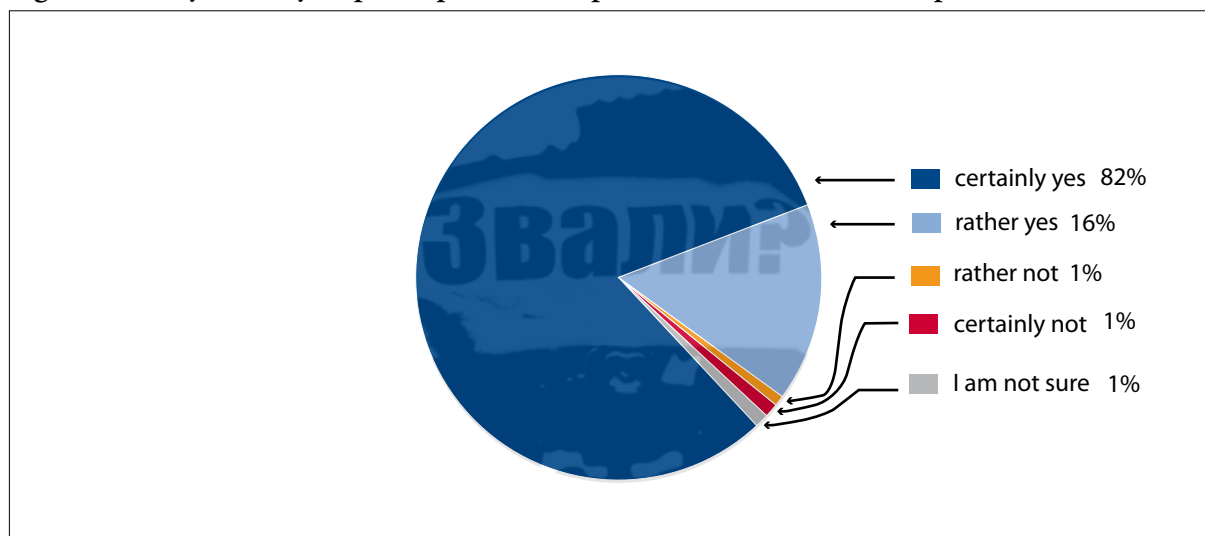
The Opinion of the Protesters

Figure 1: What motivated you to take part in this protest? (multiple answers possible)



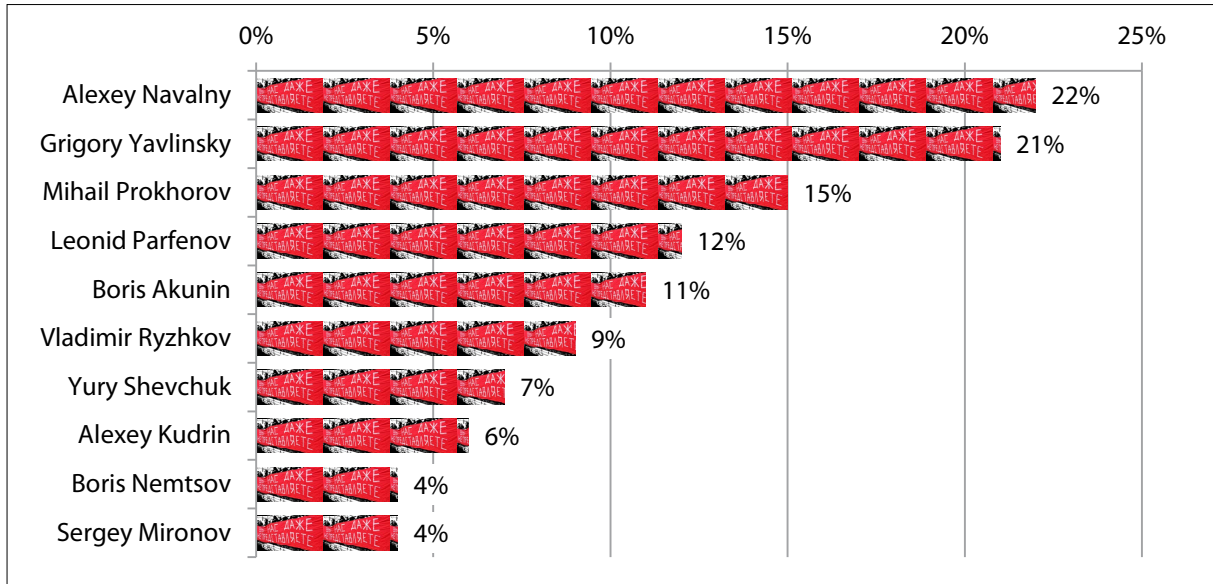
Source: survey by Levada Center during the protest of December 24, 2012 on Sakharov Avenue in Moscow. 791 respondents were surveyed, the margin of error is 4.8%. The sample is representative of the active protesters in Moscow, not of the Russian population in general. <http://www.levada.ru/26-12-2011/opros-na-prospekte-sakharova-24-dekabrya>

Figure 2: Are you ready to participate in new protests if election fraud is proven?



Source: survey by Levada Center during the protest of December 24, 2012 on Sakharov Avenue in Moscow. 791 respondents were surveyed, the margin of error is 4.8%. The sample is representative of the active protesters in Moscow, not of the Russian population in general. <http://www.levada.ru/26-12-2011/opros-na-prospekte-sakharova-24-dekabrya>

Figure 3: Whom of the public (opposition) figures would you be ready to support in the coming presidential elections in Russia? (multiple answers possible)

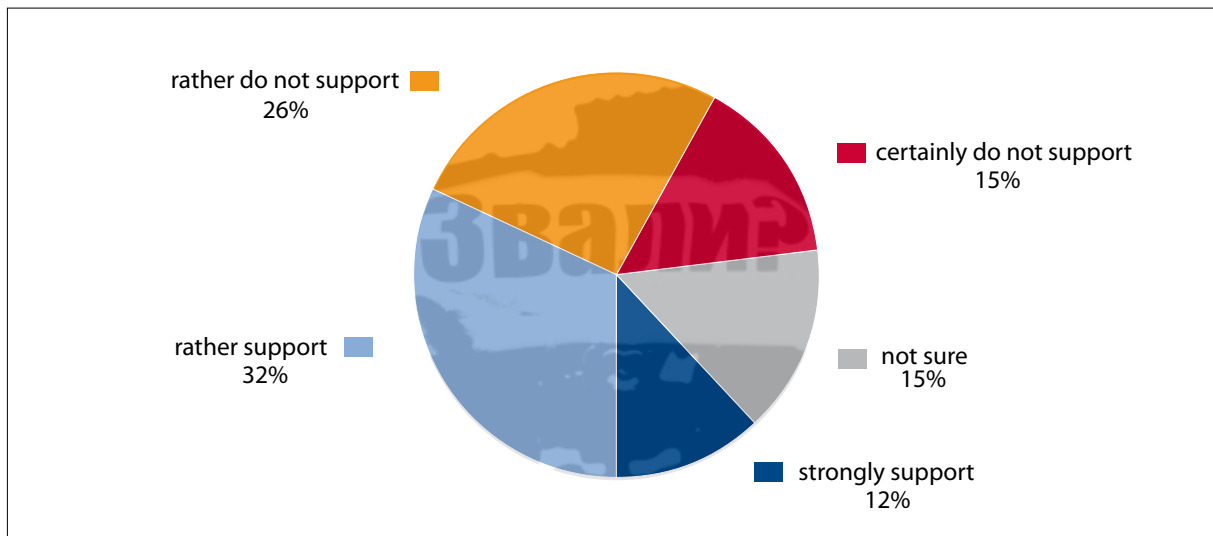


Note: The graph includes all opposition figures mentioned by at least 4% of respondents.

Source: survey by Levada Center during the protest of December 24, 2012 on Sakharov Avenue in Moscow. 791 respondents were surveyed, the margin of error is 4.8%. The sample is representative of the active protesters in Moscow, not of the Russian population in general. <http://www.levada.ru/26-12-2011/opros-na-prospekte-sakharova-24-dekabrya>

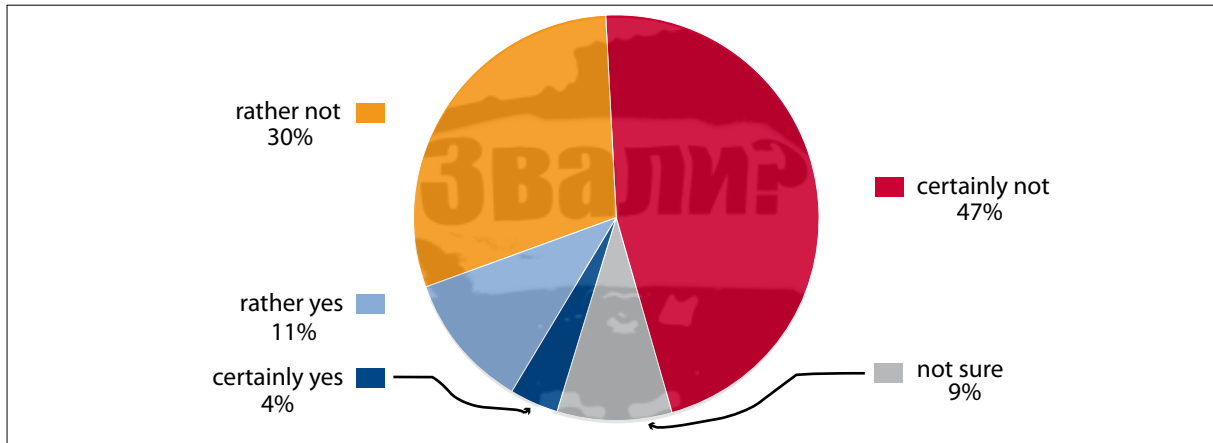
Public Opinion on the Protests

Figure 4: Do you generally support the organisation of street protests against irregularities during the elections and against the manipulation of their results?



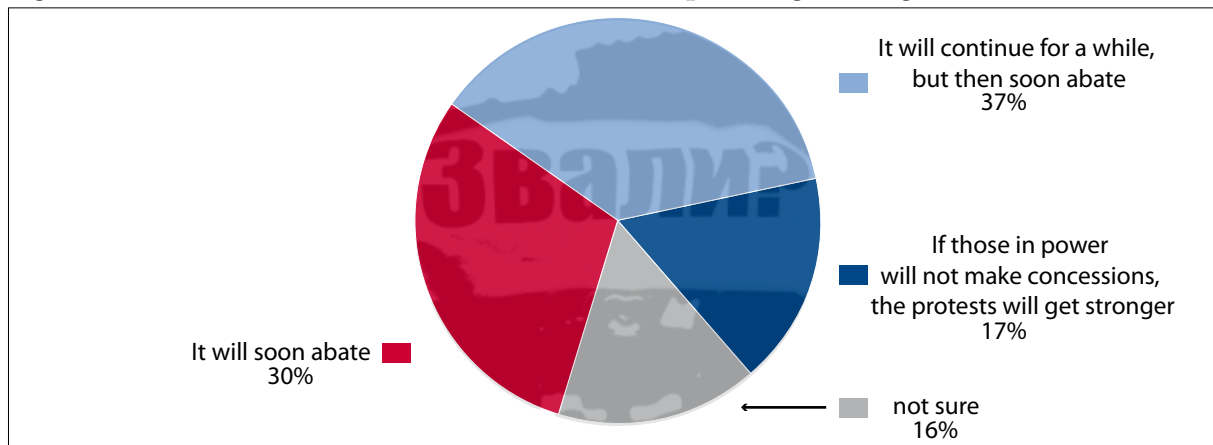
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, December 16–20, 2011, <http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossiyane-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedsikh-vyborakh>

Figure 5: If in the near future there are protests in your town or region against irregularities during the elections and against the manipulation of their results, would you take part?



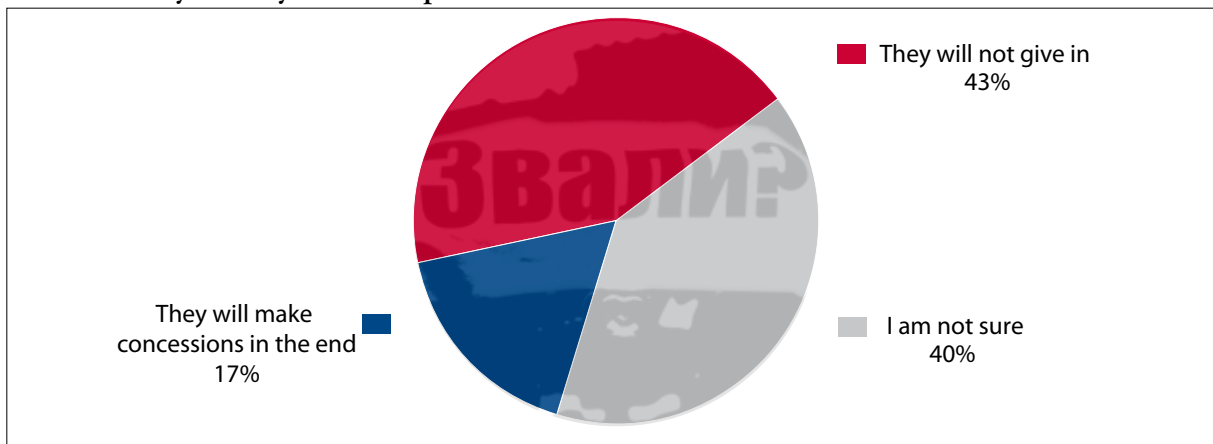
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, December 16–20, 2011, <http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossiyane-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedshikh-vyborakh>

Figure 6: What do you think, will the current wave of protests get stronger in the future or abate?



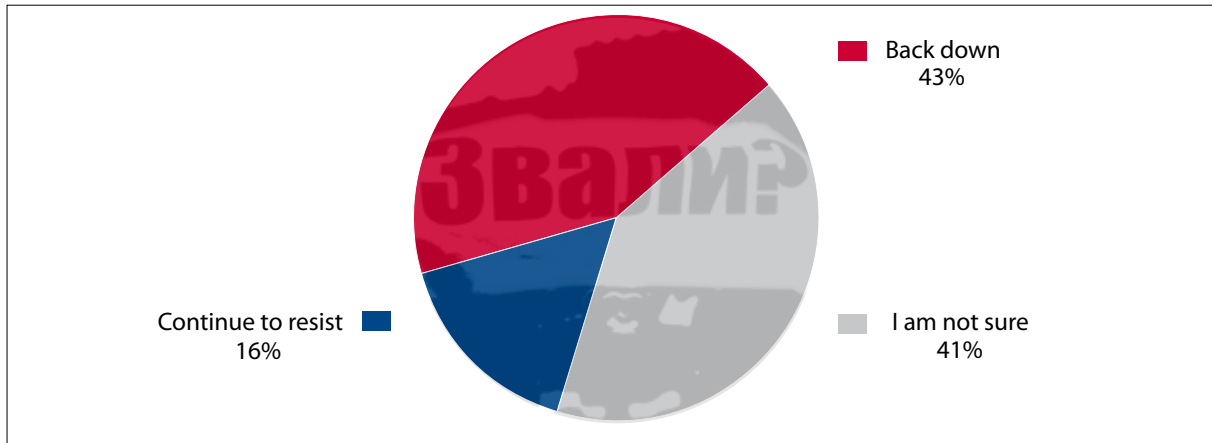
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, December 16–20, 2011, <http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossiyane-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedshikh-vyborakh>

Figure 7: If the mass street actions increase, will those in power finally make concessions or will they use any means to prevent a verification of the elections results?



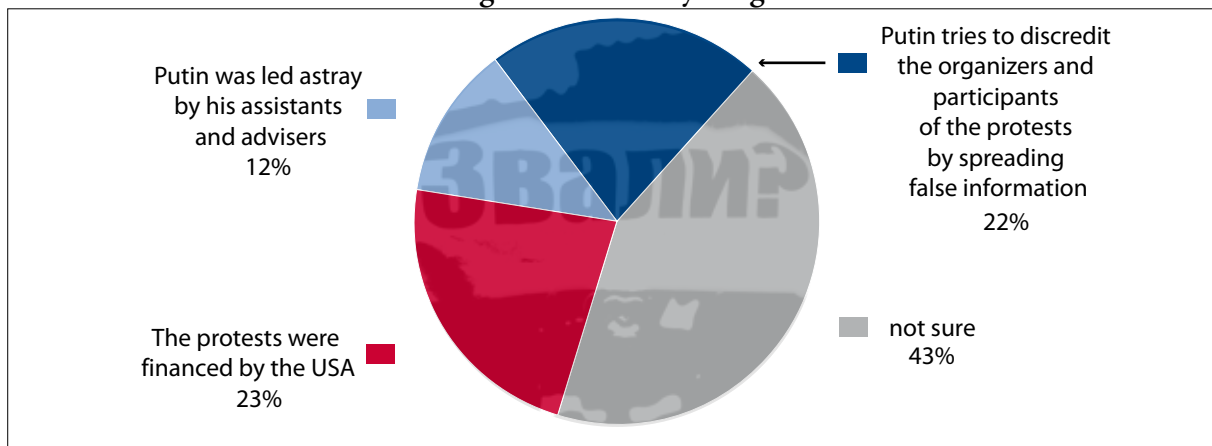
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, December 16–20, 2011, <http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossiyane-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedshikh-vyborakh>

Figure 8: If those in power will take the most severe actions to repress the protests, should the opposition leaders continue to resist or back down to avoid repression of their supporters?



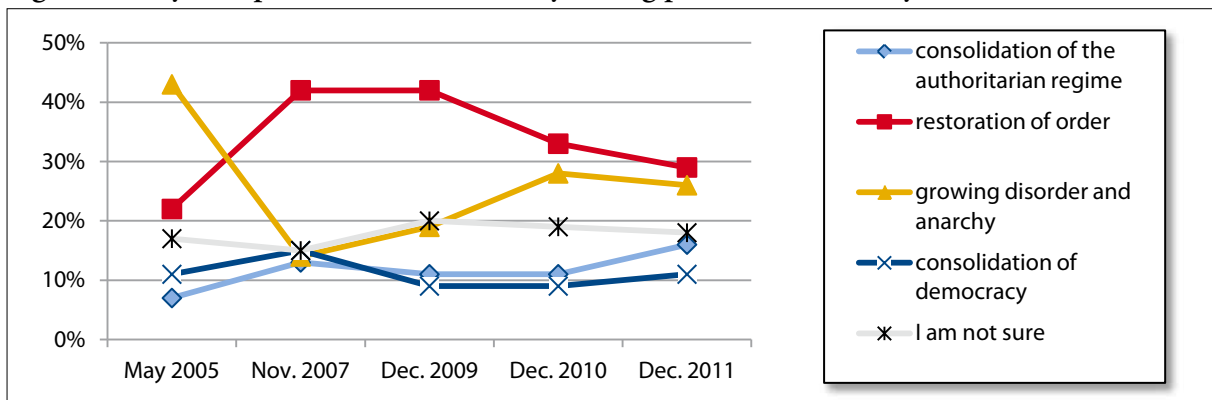
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, December 16–20, 2011, <http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossiyane-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedshikh-vyborakh>

Figure 9: After the protests, Vladimir Putin declared that a lot of the protesters participated on the order of the United States and that their actions were paid for by the United States. With which of the following statements do you agree the most?



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, December 16–20, 2011, <http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossiyane-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedshikh-vyborakh>

Figure 10: In your opinion, what is currently taking place in the country?



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, December 16–20, 2011, <http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossiyane-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedshikh-vyborakh>

ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Ortung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

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