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DURABILITY OF OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS IN RUSSIA

by

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June 2019

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DURABILITY OF OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS IN RUSSIA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Anti-government protest movements have been increasingly significant in Russian politics. This thesis investigates why these movements have risen, as well as if and how they resonate with the broader segments of Russian society. It draws inferences based on scholarly research regarding the durability of these movements in the short and long terms based on social movement theory. Through the application of this theory, it is found that mobilization is the most determining characteristic in measuring the opposition's potential durability. With the Russian government's thus far successful campaign to suppress anti-government movements and mobilization numbers too minimal to generate a necessity for genuine and lasting change, hope for the resilience of the country's opposition force is nominal.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

On December 4, 2011, what became known as the Snow Revolution broke out in response to the Russian legislative elections. These protests, which involved tens of thousands in opposition to the Russian government, were motivated by a then immense concern that the results of the elections had been corrupted. As *New York Times* journalist Ellen Barry wrote just days after the revolution began, “The demonstration marked what opposition leaders hope will be a watershed moment, ending years of quiet acceptance of the political consolidation Mr. Putin introduced.”¹ Vladimir Putin, Russia’s president 2000–2008 and 2012–present, instituted a soft-authoritarianism style of government in Russia, thus holding firm control over the Kremlin (Russia’s central government), law enforcement, and population. The 2011 protests marked the first major outbreak against Putin-influenced corruption, and the beginning of a larger social movement, which would act in opposition to Putin’s style of governance.

Upon Putin’s reelection in 2012 and, thus, reestablishment of his presidential power, pro-government movements surfaced in response to these anti-government protests, intensifying the issue of contentious politics in Russia. Since Vladimir Putin’s rise to political office in 1999, and especially since the Snow Revolution, government-sanctioned movements have been increasingly significant in Russian street politics.. These pro-government groups could foreshadow a solidification in the continued support for the style of government Putin has created. They would create a bulwark against those civil-society groups in Russia seeking a return to democracy and preservation of civil liberties. In the face of pro-government presence in civilian political activity, how durable are anti-government movements likely to be?

¹ Ellen Barry, “Rally Defying Putin’s Party Draws Tens of Thousands,” *New York Times*, December 10, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/world/europe/thousands-protest-in-moscow-russia-in-defiance-of-putin.html>.

This thesis will investigate why these movements have risen, as well as whether and how they resonate with the broader segments of Russian society. It will draw inferences based on scholarly research regarding the durability of these movements in the short and long terms. Specifically, it will evaluate literature that has both laid out the measurements of movement durability and applied said measurements to the Russian context.

To understand the resilience of these movements, it is essential to analyze anti-government movements through measurements laid out by social movement theory. This thesis will apply social movement theory broadly, investigating what characteristics it looks for and measures in determining durability of social movements. The primary factors social movement theory surveys in diagnosis of durability are a movement's collective identity, claims for protest, acquirement of resources (financial and otherwise), organizational capacity, and mobilization of people. The more adeptly a movement can manage these characteristics, according to social movement theory, the more resilient that group should prove to be. The next step will be to apply said indicators to anti-government movements. This thesis will conclude with the findings on the durability of anti-government movements within Russia, in accordance with the measurements found within social movement theory.

B. SIGNIFICANCE

Currently, the Russian people are ruled by a soft-authoritarianism style of government. The term "soft-authoritarianism," in the context of Putin's reign, is used in reference to the hybrid regime Putin has generated. Known as competitive authoritarianism, this kind of regime can be defined as a government that claims its authority under the label of "democracy," but fails to meet the standards of democracy and instead violates them consistently.² Rules of democracy violated by Putin's regime include fair elections and freedom of protest, among others. In the 2011 legislative elections, for example, 17% of polling stations underwent ballot stuffing and 16% of the territorial

² Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press 13, no. 2 April 2002, 51–65, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/17196>.

electoral commissions exhibited poor voting tabulation.³ Additionally, the Putin regime has muted many protests, both domestic and abroad. Many of those interested in participation in the Snow Revolution experienced forced police dispersion or detainment, nearly identical to the Putin-led repression experienced by protestors of the 2010 Belarusian elections.⁴ These are just a few instances in the case of the Putin administration's lack of compliance to democratic rules of governance.

The mobilization of street protests, both for and against the Putin administration, has been sustained since the Snow Revolution incidence of 2011. In opposition to the government, some of the most notable protests have included the demonstration outside of Finland Station in St. Petersburg calling for Putin's retirement, the protest in front of Ostankino television center in Moscow against government censorship of media (which included nearly 2,000 people), and the more recent 2017–2018 nationwide protests against the intense corruption within the Putin regime.⁵ These protests against and rallies for Putin's government have mobilized of thousands of Russian citizens, generating reason for analysis questioning what they might lead to in terms of longevity or dissolution of Putin's current style of government.

Although the Putin administration's progression toward competitive authoritarianism can be clearly traced, the question of the regime's stability and longevity remains open. One way to assess the continuity of a regime such as Putin's is to assess the protests opposing it, particularly with the end of a determination of the durability of these

³ Jim Nichol, *Russia's December 2011 Legislative Election: Outcome and Implications*, CRS Report for Congress, December 13, 2011, 5. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42118.pdf>; OSCE, International Election Observation, Russian Federation, State Duma Elections, 4 December 2011: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, December 5, 2011.

⁴ Nichol, *Russia's December 2011 Legislative Election*; Tom Parfit, "Belarus Protests: More than 600 Charged and Opposition Leaders in Jail," *Guardian*, December 21 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/21/600-charged-belarus-protests-lukashenko>.

⁵ Michael Schwirtz, "Russia's Political Youths," *Demokratizatsiya* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2007), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/21b9/a9bec27bf56332ac09536355b58b5dbe08c7.pdf>; David Filipov, "Russian Police Arrest Protestors at Nationwide Anti-Corruption Rallies," *Washington Post*, March 26, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russian-police-arrest-protesters-at-nationwide-anti-corruption-rallies/2017/03/26/11208e46-10a1-11e7-aa57-2ca1b05c41b8_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c155e9e1d178.

movements. The durability of anti-government movements holds potential impact on the future of Russian politics, government, and international decision making, as the people within these movements aim to spread influence over the Russian people and elites. This thesis will examine the resilience of these movements with the goal of understanding future prospects for Putin's regime in the modern Russian political climate.

Laura A. Henry, an expert on Russian civil society, argued in 2006 that, at that point, no social movements had yet mobilized the public or pressured the government to the point of permanent impact, and that Russian citizens have been reluctant to become involved in the movements.⁶ While this thesis does not study the success of movements but, rather, durability, Henry's point should not be dismissed when considering mobilization in Russian social movements. This is especially true for the modern day Russian social movements, in particular those since the Snow Revolution of 2011. What is it, exactly, that social movement theory scholars look for in terms of durability of a social movement, and is it possible that durable movements have arisen in Russia in recent years? The next section addresses these questions.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review identifies the emergence of contentious politics and its significance in Putin's Post-Soviet Russia, as well as how social movement theory can be applied in effort to understand the potential durability of the movements involved in Russian contentious politics (particularly, anti-government groups). It will begin with a discussion as to why these movements have surfaced, then move on to a presentation of social movement theory, reviewing its foundational concepts and goals as well as what the theory says regarding the cycles of protest in Russia. This section will also analyze the difference between issue-driven and ideology-driven social movements, and how these apply to the Russian context. It will present what authors have said with regard to the durability of these movements. This section will include what characteristics authors have distinguished as measurements of durability, especially with regard to Putin's Russia.

⁶ Schwirtz, "Russia's Political Youths."

1. Why Have These Movements Surfaced?

As Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudny explain, a rise in the occurrence of contentious politics in Russia can be traced to the idea of spreading revolution, especially via the youth of the nation. In Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine over 2000–2004, youths led mass mobilization for anti-government movements, which pressed for governmental reform via mostly peaceful protest. These movements led to the overthrow of leadership in their countries.⁷ Those in the former Soviet Union became known as the color revolutions,

While the color revolutions of the early 2000s, particularly the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, have been a source of inspiration for Russians in opposition to the corruption of the Putin regime, they have been of primary concern to Russian elites and authorities.⁸ While Russian opposition movements have received advice and assistance from participants of the color revolutions, Putin's regime has actively worked to combat and repress any anti-government groups. According to Graeme B. Robertson, "Vladimir Putin's regime has built on the Soviet repertoire of channeling and inhibiting protest, creating a new system for licensing civil society and crafting ersatz social movements that rally support for the state."⁹ Putin has formulated a contemporary style of repression by the state for the sake of generating support for his regime.¹⁰ social movement theory predicts that movements arise with the motivation to sustain radical action in the name of generating or maintaining some significant change.

2. Social Movement Theory

This section will describe the key arguments of social movement theory. It will then discuss the application of social movement theory to the Russian context.

⁷ Schwartz, "Russia's Political Youths."

⁸ Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudny, "Russia and the Color Revolutions," *Democratization* 19, (June 2011): 15, DOI10.1080/13510347.2012.641297; Schwartz, "Russia's Political Youths," 75.

⁹ Graeme B. Robertson, "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia." *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009), 528, doi:10.1017/S0037677900019719.

¹⁰ Finkel and Brudny, "Russia and the Color Revolutions," 17.

a. What Is Social Movement Theory?

Many experts agree that social movement theory contains at least three schools of thought: collective behavior and social movements research of the 1940s–1960s (emotionally focused), resource mobilization and political processes theories of the 1970s–1980s (structurally/rationally focused), and the new social movement theorists of the 1990s (culturally focused).¹¹ Each of these schools represents a generation of thinkers in social movement theory, to include the approaches those generations took to the analysis of the rise of social movements and the impact of those movements. The sharpest differences among these generations can be seen in their arguments as to the key reasons people and groups take to the streets.

The generation concerned with collective behavior (1940s-1960s) within social movements research held that contentious politics were sparked most often by emotional drivers. This school of thought focused on the role of non-rational decision making of social movements, and how emotional thinking led to the rise of impactful social movements.¹² According to experts, these types of movements lean primarily on emotional response to some external stimulus, and they do not tend to involve calculations that would typically be found in rational decision-making.¹³ One clear example of this is the Fascist movements of Europe during World War II (1939–1945), which arose via leadership’s emotional and non-rational turn to violence and imperialism as means to achieve great change following what they saw as the revolutionary World War I.¹⁴ This generation of social movement theory arose practically in direct response to WWII, and it recognized the then prominent will to act and to congregate based primarily on beliefs. It also relies heavily on the concept of Relative Deprivation Theory, as presented by Ted Gurr. Gurr argues that social movements are driven by frustration due to a sense of inequality or, as he labels it,

¹¹ Paul Bate, Helen Bevan, and Glenn Robert, “Towards a Million Change Agents: A Review of the Social Movements Literature: Implications for Large Scale Change in the NHS,” *NHS Modernisation Agency*, 2, accessed March 6, 2019, <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1133/1/million.pdf>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

relative deprivation.¹⁵ According to John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, who wrote in response to Gurr's work, "Shared grievances and generalized beliefs... about the cause and possible means of reducing grievances are important preconditions for the emergence of a social movement in a collectivity."¹⁶ The main concept behind this theory is that discontented people find enough motivation in their grievances to press for a change. This, of course, would then lead to the spark of a social movement, especially if a collective group of people claimed the same inequality and desire for systematic transformation. Thus, this generation of social movement theory centered on the nonrational, emotional drivers behind movements, and placed special emphasis on the power of the mobilized, slighted collective to demand equality and change.

The next generation of social movement theory, which arose around the 1970s-1980s, responded to its predecessor by instead placing heavy emphasis on the rationality and structural opportunity of social movements.¹⁷ This school of thought held that individuals took action based on the potentiality of value or gain.¹⁸ Beginning, joining, and staying in social movements, according to this version of social movement theory, was heavily dependent upon rationally calculated risks versus gains, as opposed to emotions or belief systems. The idea of potential for gain extended to structural gain, which would have involved the opportunity for leadership, meaningful placement in a social or political hierarchy, and more. This generation also held that social movements were started and sustained when resource availability and resource mobilization were accessible.¹⁹ Resources of this matter might include funding, means of travel, locations of meeting, education, and so forth. This emphasis on resources stems from their necessity in order for masses to gather, organize, staff, travel, advertise, incentivize, grow, and protest in a

¹⁵ T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

¹⁶ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 82 (May 1977): 1214, <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/SOC924/Articles/McCarthyZald1977.pdf>.

¹⁷ Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements."

meaningful and “newsworthy” manner.²⁰ As McCarthy and Zald wrote, “Only if survival is ensured can other goals be pursued.”²¹ Without the availability or mobilization of these resources, a movement would not be able to continue or expand, let alone survive. These are the reasons why and how social movement theorists of the 1970s-1980s predicted people would actively participate in a social movement, as well as what would have driven the movement toward a sustainable future.

The third generation of social movement theorists then shifted back toward the concepts presented by those of the 1940s–1960s. These theorists, however, spun the concept of emotionally driven action to include, more broadly, culturally driven action. In addition to beliefs, this school of thought of the 1990s onward also began to take into consideration the individual’s identity and cultural symbols and meanings, further involving cultural historical context and framing processes.²² When considering cultural issues with regard to involvement in social movements, the theorist thereby takes into account how, “cultural conditions affect the decision to join, support and remain in a movement; social networks play a key role in recruiting, mobilizing and retaining participants, and communities of practice can be cultivated as important mechanisms for mobilization.”²³ Within this school of thought, the human factors of decision making are more thoroughly accredited. Generally speaking, this generation takes into account the broader range of factors that should be considered when questioning what sparks and drives action in social movements.

Literature after the spark of the third generation of social movement theory has attempted to incorporate the driving ideas behind all three of the aforementioned generations. This thesis will work off of a definition of contentious politics and social movement that best combine these schools of thought:

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 1216.

²² Bate, Bevan, and Robert, “Towards a Million Change Agents.”

²³ Ibid.

Contentious politics occur when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents ... when backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents. The result is the social movement.²⁴

Presented by S. Tarrow, this definition recognizes what D.A. Snow and other authors argue, which is that social movements generate their own identities, and that they do so with the goal to challenge or defend authority as the basis of their claim.²⁵ This is best accomplished, according to Tarrow, when movements are pushed along by joint community action, are tied into social networks, and are connected broadly by culturally meaningful symbols.²⁶ These are all necessary for the development of a social movement, and must therefore remain consistent in order for that movement to sustain itself. The literature reviewed agrees that social movements exist as a collective action to support or oppose some sort of authority (a person, a law, a government, etc.),²⁷ Durability is therefore intertwined with collective action, dense social networks and resonant symbols. If a movement cannot rise without these three items, it surely would not continue to survive should they become absent. If these factors are not present, it should therefore be expected that the movements would not be durable.

b. What Social Movement Theory Says about Protest in Russia

With regard to Russia in particular, social movement theorists have been especially interested in the post-Soviet, post-communist opportunity for movements that press for political change.²⁸ Henry argues that, when Russian organizations or movements form,

²⁴ S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁵ Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents; D.A. Snow, "Framing Processes, Ideology and Discursive Fields," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, eds. Snow DA, Soule SA and Kriesi H (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

²⁶ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.

²⁷ Andrew G. Walder, "Political Sociology and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (August 2009), 393–412, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-120035>.

²⁸ Laura A. Henry, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia: Leadership, Organizational Diversity, and Innovation," *Post-Soviet Affairs* (2006): 99–124, DOI: 10.2747/1060-586X.22.2.99.

they tend to cluster in niches according to resource availability and agenda compatibility, relying heavily on networking.²⁹ She mentions that the range of political activism in Russia depends largely on the early organizational development as determined by movement leaders, who decide which other groups to affiliate with.³⁰ Especially significant in the Russian context is the differentiation between existent group types: 1) grassroots organizations, which are fluid and informal and not officially registered, 2) professional organizations, which are similar to western nongovernmental organizations and are likely to be legally registered, and 3) government affiliates, which are highly institutionalized, legally registered with a paid staff, have formal hierarchies, and experience incentives and constraints for social activism.³¹ Limited resources; support by and influence of western NGOs; and a corrupt, dominant, activism-opposed state are instrumental in the social movements of Russia.³² The anti-government movements this thesis investigates fall in the first category.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This research will evaluate a proposition derived of the third generation of social movement research to determine the answer to the central research question: How durable are anti-government movements in Russia? This thesis will be based on the propositions set forward by S. Tarrow and Charles Tilly. Their work hypothesizes that a social movement will arise and be sustained when networks, collective identity/symbols, joint action, claims, resource availability, organization/leadership, and mobilization are present. The other two generations of social movement theory presented by earlier experts offer less comprehensive hypotheses with respect to what gives rise to social movements against the state.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Henry, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia"; Ammon Cheskin and Luke March, "State-society relations in contemporary Russia: new forms of political and social contention," *East European Politics* (2015): 261-273, DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2015.1063487.

The first generation follows that social movements are sparked and sustained through an experience of relative deprivation, which recognizes frustration as mobilizing agent against or in favor of the individual/group's claim, depending on what the deprivation is in relation to (i.e., individual resources, opportunity, treatment, etc.). This generation hypothesized that people will start and continue to protest based on some feeling of inequality. Deprivation leads to frustration, frustrated grievances lead to movements, which leads to the hypothesis that irrational frustration of relative deprivation is instrumental to social movements. The central limitation of this approach is that it never makes explicit what objective conditions lead to perceptions of deprivation, and therefore collective action.³³

The second generation focused on the ability to master resources that allow proper seizing of opportunity to gather and protest. As Gurney and Tierney note,

attempts to link the emergence and growth of movements to widespread feelings of deprivation... [gave] way to analyses which emphasize the contribution of social solidarity to movement mobilization (Tilly, 1978; Traugott 1978) and the ways movements function as organizations, recruiting members and mobilizing other resources to achieve collective ends.³⁴

The central proposition derived from this research is that availability of resources and resource mobilization are necessary in order to make collective protests happen. Pro-government groups have resource support from the state, which allows their sustenance. This thesis will investigate the resource opportunity and mobilization that anti-government groups face.

The third generation encompasses the two earlier schools of thought, taking a rational approach to emotional drive and resources, claiming that waves of protest rise and fall in response to windows of political opportunity. Henry's work on post-Soviet

³³ Joan Neff Gurney and Kathleen J. Tierney. "Relative Deprivation and Social Movements: A Critical Look at Twenty Years of Theory and Research," *The Sociological Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1982): 33–47, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/4106351>.

³⁴ Ibid., 34.

movements within this school.³⁵ This generation argues that more is needed for civic mobilization than just frustration or resources. Tilly and Tarrow's work, in particular, argues that movements are sustainable because of the following requirements: networks, claims, organizational capacity, mobilizational capacity, and resources.³⁶ This third generation of social movement theory expects social movements to be durable as long as they have stability and consistency of these characteristics. This thesis, therefore, will evaluate the hypothesis presented by Tarrow and Tilly as the requirements for sustainability of social movements.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis seeks to examine the durability of Russian social movements through application of the indicators set forth by social movement theory discussed above. Because this thesis is concerned with the durability of social movements, it is imperative to analyze the activity within Russia's contentious politics as an indicator of the potentiality surrounding social movements. To establish whether anti-government social movements in Russia are durable or not, the thesis must first examine the extent of contentious politics directed against the government. The main indicator of contentious politics this thesis uses are street demonstrations, as they signify that people have mobilized to generate an active and collective voice against specific acts, ideologies, laws, or people.

1. Temporal Scope of Research

All of the research will be conducted with a temporal scope covering the late Soviet-period to the present day, with an emphasis on the Putin era that began in late 1999. To gather a sense of how deeply Putin's regime is engraved within modern day Russian society, this thesis will observe groups in opposition to the government. Movements will qualify as anti-government, on the other hand, if they protest against the Putin regime, or experience any political silencing by the police (such as Oborona and Youth Yabloko).

³⁵ Henry, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia."

³⁶ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*; Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley).

The groups selected vary in their success, enabling better evaluation of both the tenets of social movement theory and factors affecting movement durability in Russia.

2. Measurements of Durability

When considering the use of social movement theory in terms of this project, it is important to note that the theorists most often do not utilize it to determine durability of social movements. These authors and their works do prove helpful to this thesis, however, because they can still speak to the question of durability through the ways they analyze social movements. Analysis set forth by these authors has been consistent in the measurements of certain characteristics of social movements, and will therefore provide the framework for measurement of durability for the purpose of this research.

Social movement characteristics that will be analyzed to determine durability of the movements in Russia are the following: collective identity (to include meaningful cultural symbols, joint action, and agenda compatibility, which also plays into networking) and claims, resources (availability and consistency thereof), clarity of organization and membership (to include leadership), and mobilization (to include networking).³⁷ According to the literature, collective identity can be indicated by joint action of a community or committed group under one common idea or claim, which also includes the networking that group has established for its community of support.³⁸ Analysis of collective identity in social movement theory considers meaningful cultural symbols, with particular attention to whether there are large, overarching symbols that can bring generations or masses together to stand up to the regime. Claims in social movement theory are measured in terms of the level of radical change aspired to by the movements, and whether that claim is likely to lead to change.³⁹ Resources available are analyzing whether groups have sufficient resources for sustainability, as well as where those resources come from (i.e., the Russian state, western nongovernmental organizations, etc.), as resource

³⁷ Henry, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia: Leadership"; Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents"; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*

³⁸ Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents."

³⁹ Ibid..

scarcity alone can lead to the deterioration of a movement.⁴⁰ Organization in social movement theory is indicated by patterns of clear development, leadership, and ability to generate structure within the movement and/or protest among leaders, members, etc.⁴¹ Finally, social movement theory measures movements' civic mobilization by noting numbers involved for one shared goal (the collective identity/claim), whether those numbers are of group membership from start to present day, of participants in individual protests, and so forth.⁴² The measurement of mobilization also takes into account the demographics of civic mobilization.⁴³ These are the elements that this research will take into consideration in order to assess the potential for durability of social movements in Russia.

In the this thesis then the Applied metrics of durability, as presented in accordance with social movement theory, will include collective identity (framing and claims), organization, group resources, and civic mobilization.⁴⁴ Evidence of collective identity will be "the identification and articulation of common ground among participants."⁴⁵ Organization will be measured based on evidence of self-organization with "central coordinating and resourcing," which could extend to "a) formal organization, b) organization of collective action, or c) social movements as connecting structures or networks."⁴⁶ This thesis will measure claims in terms of whether those involved are involved voluntarily and spontaneously and under common identity, as opposed to via

⁴⁰ Ibid; Henry, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia."

⁴¹ Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents"; Henry, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia."

⁴² Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents."

⁴³ Schwartz, "Russia's Political Youths."

⁴⁴ Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents."

⁴⁵ Croteau D. and Hicks L. "Coalition Framing and the Challenge of a Consonant Frame Pyramid: The Case of a Collaborative Response to Homelessness," *Social Problems*, 50 (2) 2003, 257.

⁴⁶ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 123–124; Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents."

programmed means.⁴⁷ Group resources observed will include financial and locational aspects. And civic mobilization will be measured in terms of numbers consistently involved with the movement. Through these means, analysis of the prevalence and durability of these groups will speak to the probable longevity (or lack thereof) of Putin's style of authoritarianism.

3. Sources of Data

The data source for the purpose of this analysis will be primarily qualitative examination of existing literature set forth by social movement theory and experts on Russia. Additional research will include available quantitative data on population involvement in these groups to determine scale of mobilization, survey data on satisfaction with one's life, government and leadership. Also utilized will be budgets and annual reports for the movement forces that covers details such as membership dues, donations, and financial support (both internal and external), if available in English. This thesis will furthermore draw from primary sources in order to directly quote details such as mission statements, thus providing measurement of group identities, claims, and goals. News articles will also be used in this research to provide some of the most recent information available covering protests and regional political climate within Russia. These non-western sources will furthermore present insight with different biases and agendas than western literature, thus generating a better-rounded basis of research. The answers given by this collective research will be instrumental in determination of the long-term potential for resilience for and, therefore, impact of Russian anti-government social movements on Russian politics.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

Chapter I has introduced the topic and research questions and mapping out the general layout of the rest of thesis. Chapters II–V will introduce the contemporary history of contentious politics in Russia, and will review some of the most significant anti-government protests during four periods. They will analyze these protests and their

⁴⁷ Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents."

significance in Russian politics, to include the state's response of direct intervention in contentious politics and in civil society. Chapter II covers the late Soviet and Yeltsin period of 1987–1999. Chapter III examines the first Putin period prior to the Snow Revolution, 1999–2009. Chapter IV covers the contentious politics of the Snow Revolution (2011–2013). Chapter V will describe the most recent events in Russian contentious politics that followed the Snow Revolution until the present day. Chapter VI examines trends in propensity for the average Russian citizen to protest over time, along with shifts in government approval ratings. Chapter VII will examine three Russian anti-government movements, *Oborona*, the New Decembrists, and Alexei Navalny's movement, to provide more detailed analysis of the characteristics that social movement theorists have set as resilience-determining factors. It will look at the groups' collective identities, claims, resources (what is needed, how they are supplied/who from, how consistently they receive support, etc.), organization style and membership. It will pay close attention to any prerequisites or qualifications necessary for acceptance in those groups, recruiting into the groups, as well as requirements or expectations to remain a member, and mobilization capabilities and success. This thesis will then finish with an encompassing conclusion regarding the resilience of opposition movements and implications for the stability of Putin's competitive authoritarianism.

II. RUSSIAN CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN THE LATE SOVIET AND YELTSIN ERA, 1985–1999

A. BACKGROUND

The coming chapters are dedicated to the review of the recent history and rise of contentious politics in Russia. Contentious politics, as it is outlined in Chapter I, refers to combined citizen confrontation of elites or opponents, and is the backbone of the social movement.⁴⁸ As this thesis is concerned with the durability of social movements. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the activity within Russia's contentious politics as an indicator of the existence and durability of Russian social movements. Street demonstrations are the main indicator of contentious politics this thesis uses, as they signify that people have mobilized to generate an active and collective voice against the government. For historic background, contentious politics of the late Soviet era and early post-Soviet will be briefly reviewed before the remainder of this chapter examines the Yeltsin years.

B. SOCIAL MOBILIZATION DURING THE LATE SOVIET PERIOD

The overall political activity of citizens in the pre-Gorbachev Soviet era was controlled and regulated by the government.⁴⁹ All social organizations not in line with the government agenda were heavily directed in an effort to create, "Good communist citizens."⁵⁰ Not only was general political organization and participation controlled by restrictive laws on protests, group sizing, group funding, etc., but such laws were also formulated to generate consequences for such autonomous activity. This was true to the point that activists "feared the effects that mass participation would have on them and their

⁴⁸ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.

⁴⁹ Sergej Ljubownikow, Jo Crotty, and Peter W. Rogers, "The State and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia: The Development of a Russian-style Civil Society," *Progress in Development Studies* 13, no. 2 (SAGE Publications 2014): 155, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464993412466507>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; A.B. Evans, "Civil Society in the Soviet Union," *Russian civil society: A critical assessment* (Routledge, 2005), 28–54.

ability to access political elites,”⁵¹ and, in avoiding the negative effects of participation in autonomous politics, activists, “subordinated themselves to the state in exchange for access to the political elite. As a result, these actors were considered as part of the state apparatus and not separate from it.”⁵² Thus, the development of truly independent demonstrations and social movement groups was difficult and infrequent. Still, grass-roots social movements existed, but fell victim to the restrictions of the state.⁵³ In accordance with the social movement theorists’ outlined requirements for durability in Chapter I, these groups relied heavily on networking (often with family members and close personal contacts) for resources and sustenance. Vertical interaction and mobility of these movements was greatly limited, however, because of the state’s substantial level of control over citizen political activity.⁵⁴

During the perestroika period under Mikhail Gorbachev, beginning in 1985, liberalization allowed these groups to exist more freely. However, many existed illegally, as they “lacked political and legal authorization.”⁵⁵ It was at this time that social movements (often illegal, unofficial, non-institutional actors within contentious politics) became more commonplace.⁵⁶ The shift in social movement activity after Gorbachev’s attainment of power is visualized in Figure 1, beginning in 1987 with the explosion of informal groups (*neformalni*).⁵⁷

⁵¹ Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rogers, “The State and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia.”

⁵² Ibid.

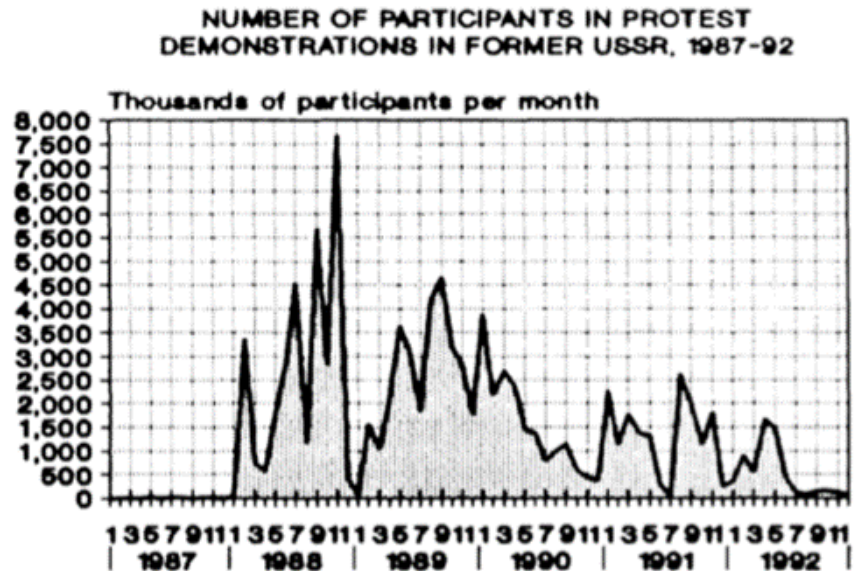
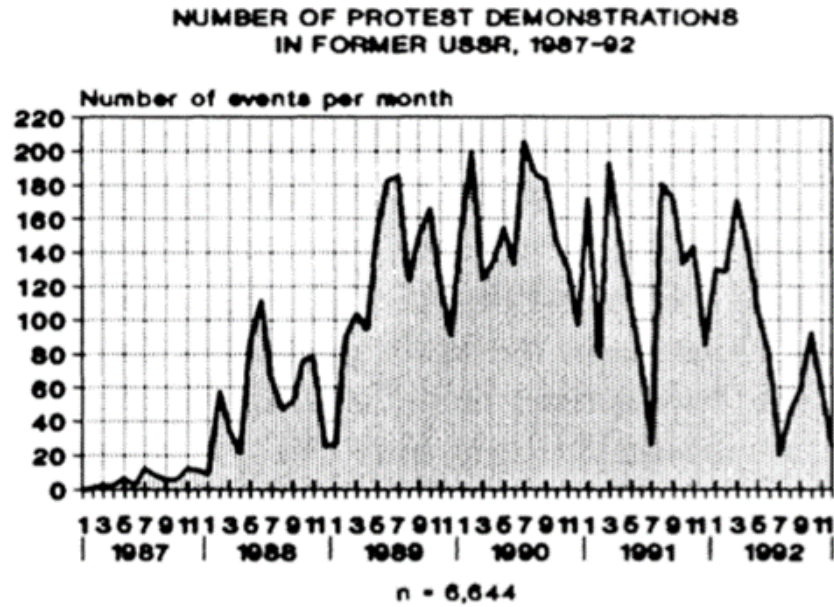
⁵³ Ibid; S. Fish, “The Emergence of Independent Associations and the Transformation of Russian Political Society,” *The Journal of Communist Studies* 7, no. 3 (1991): 299–334, www.researchgate.net/publication/233070629_The_Emergence_of_Independent_Associations_and_the_Transformation_of_Russian_Political_Society.

⁵⁴ Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rogers, “The State and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia,” 156–157.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; Fish, “The Emergence of Independent Associations.”

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Marcia A. Weigle, “On the Road to the Civic Forum: State and Civil Society from Yeltsin to Putin,” *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 2 (2002): 119, http://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/10-2_Weigle.PDF; Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, (Cambridge, UK: 2002) Cambridge University Press.



The upper graph depicts the change in number of protest demonstrations in the former USSR, 1987–1992, while the lower graph shows number of participants in protest demonstrations in the former USSR during the same years.

Figure 1. Mobilization Waves in the Former Soviet Union, 1987–1992⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Source: Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*.

In these graphs, Mark R. Beissinger presents his research on the number of protest demonstrations and number of participants in protest demonstrations in the former Soviet Union from 1987–1992.⁵⁹ Although Beissinger’s research is mainly concerned with the occurrence of violent demonstrations, his information reveals an overall rise in the number of protest demonstrations, and an initial rise in participation numbers that then fall back dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even the frequency of demonstrations fell back down to near zero not long after the rise of an independent Russia.

C. SOCIAL MOBILIZATION IN YELTSIN’S RUSSIA

With the fall of the USSR in 1991 came hope for the rise of a democratic Russian Federation. In post-communist Europe, the early promise of active social movements and individuals within society generated a positive outlook regarding Russia and its surrounding post-communist states.⁶⁰ This was especially the case considering the unavoidable connections between social movements and the disintegration or fall of communism, as could be seen in the rise of the Solidarity movement in 1980s Poland, the environmental protests of the Danube Circle in Hungary from 1984 to 1989, and various demonstrations in Germany and Czechoslovakia, all of which worked to contest communist regime legitimacy in their respective countries (and with regard to their individual issues) prior to the fall of communist regimes in 1989 and dissolution of the USSR in 1991.⁶¹ As Petr Kopecky highlighted, civic political activity is not necessarily the cause of the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe; however, it “did contribute to the demise of communism and certainly played an important role in the various transition scenarios that unfolded throughout [Eastern Europe].”⁶² The contribution of the citizen in contentious politics and social movements within post-communist Europe certainly helped to relieve symptoms of authoritarianism in the late 20th

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rogers, “The State and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia,” 157.

⁶¹ Petr Kopecky, *Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe* (Extremism and Democracy), ed. Cas Mudde (Routledge, 2003).

⁶² Ibid.

century. As Figure 1 reveals, however, the Russian Federation did not necessarily become independent in 1992 alongside widespread demonstrations of contentious politics.

What is evident about the case of early post-communist Russia is that the government's approach to social movements and a politically active civilian population changed only slightly with Boris Yeltsin, then drastically with Putin. As author Sarah L. Henderson noted, while the Yeltsin administration did not actively encourage contentious politics and social movements, the administration allowed some room for growth among social movements in that it did not pass legislation to make involvement in them difficult or disincentivized.⁶³ However, Yeltsin also did not generate state-provided resources to such movements. Foreign people and other entities filled resource gaps for independent movements, while Yeltsin simply avoided initiation of state involvement.⁶⁴ Donations to and participation in contentious politics both ran scant, though, with the immensely poor economic condition of Russia in the 1990s due to the shock-therapy economic reforms: "Most citizens lacked the time, the money, and the inclination to devote to organizations, either as workers, volunteers, or donors."⁶⁵ These essential resources ran thin at the time of Yeltsin's presidency. Lack of social involvement is especially notable considering how little trust the Russian people had in government institutions: "50 to 68 percent of respondents in May 1996 withheld their trust from... the government, the president, the Federation Council, the State Duma, regional leaders, the courts, the police, and the prosecutor's office."⁶⁶ This distrust, which may have been inherited from the Soviet regime, continued after a violent mass-participation anti-state protest in 1993 against Yeltsin's ban of the Congress, Supreme Soviet, the Russian Communist Party, and various

⁶³ Sarah L. Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia," *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 3 (2011): 12, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216580302>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 16; Weigle, "On the Road to the Civic Forum," 119; Zinaida T. Golenkova, "Civil Society in Russia," *Russian Social Science Review* 40 (1999): 13, <https://doi.org/10.2753/RSS1061-142840014>.

⁶⁶ Golenkova, "Civil Society in Russia," 15.

opposition groups and unions.⁶⁷ After intense backlash (and accusations of totalitarianism), Yeltsin brought the crisis to a halt only through with military force.

While Russian civil society remained weak, social movements did emerge in this period. One civic group that gained prominence in the 1990s, and still exists today, is the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (CSM). CSM formed in 1989, but re-surfaced most prominently in 1995 after Russia's first war in Chechnya over the latter's independence in 1994.⁶⁸ The movement's goal was to stop mistreatment of soldiers, end the war, and bring sons home to their mothers—especially those that were still school-aged.⁶⁹ Participants in this movement mobilized consistently throughout 1995–1997 via marches, vigils, and even conducting protests in warzones.⁷⁰ Such persistent actions resulted in the early release of thousands of soldiers. After a petition in May of 1995 to bring soldiers home early in exchange for domestic civilian service, CSM settled into a role of educating Russian society and supporting groups with similar ideologies.⁷¹ Once the initial goals of CSM were fulfilled, the movement evolved its mission and continued activity within Russian society with an expansive mission of “creating a world without war and violence... Formation of civil society and the rule of law... Establishment of civilian control over the actions of state and local authorities... and formation of an active citizenship among citizens of the Russian Federation.”⁷² This movement managed to accomplish its initial goal, and to then evolve its mission in such a way that maintained its relevance within Russian society.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Steele and David Hearst, “Yeltsin Crushes Revolt,” *The Guardian*, October 5, 1993, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1993/oct/05/russia.davidhearst>.

⁶⁸ “‘Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia’ Campaign Against the War in Chechnya 1995,” Global Nonviolent Action Database, 1995, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/committee-soldiers-mothers-russia-campaign-against-war-chechnya-1995>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Committee of Soldiers' Mothers Russia, <http://ksmrus.ru/>.

D. CONCLUSION

At this point in Russia's history, there was opportunity for social movements and contentious politics like CSM to develop and expand. CSM was one issue-focused movement that took advantage of this opportunity. Others, though, failed to gather any momentum and instead remained stagnant or failed to remain at all.⁷³

The information presented in Chapter III will review the general continuation of political passivity brought about by the Putin era.

⁷³ Vikki Turbine, "Women's Human Rights in Russia: Outmoded Battlegrounds, or New Sites of Contentious. Politics?" *East European Politics* 31, (2015): 326–341, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21599165.2015.1064395>.

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III. CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN THE PUTIN ERA, 1999–2010

This chapter will review the activity and evolution of contentious politics in Russia, beginning with the rise of the Putin regime in 1999 and ending around 2010 just before the Snow Revolution, to include government response to the demonstrations. Governmental response will include policy and legislative changes as well as government interaction with contentious politics. An evaluation of such material reveals indicators of the state of democracy—such as freedom of association, freedom of speech, and toleration of dissent—under the “soft” authoritarian government that Putin has generated. In the analysis, this chapter will also introduce the use of public opinion polls as a tool to gauge the political atmosphere in relation to the opinion of the Russian people.

With the transition to Putin’s regime in 1999, the state developed a more watchful eye over the activities within contentious politics and social movements.⁷⁴ The government began funding groups that mobilized under issues that aligned with Putin’s agenda.⁷⁵ State intervention within contentious politics created a barrier to protests on the anti-government side, and inauthenticity on the pro-government side.⁷⁶ This chapter will aim to reveal the significance and impact of these events on the development of Russia’s post-communist political landscape. In some cases, these events have led the state of Russia to respond directly with intervention in and control over contentious politics.

At the start of the Putin regime, civic activism in Russia was considerably weak, although it had potential.⁷⁷ After some time in power, Putin’s regime diminished a great deal of the opposition and promoted movements that acted in its favor.⁷⁸ With the shift to Putin’s Russia, activists faced difficulty in transitioning smoothly from Yeltsin’s laissez-

⁷⁴ Henderson, “Civil Society in Russia,” 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

faire approach to Putin's controlling manner regarding contentious politics. Much like in the 1990s, mobilization occurred not with long-term goals for great reform; rather, people engaged in issue-specific demonstrations. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers mobilized a year-long series of protests against the third iteration of the Chechnyan War, started in Putin's first year of power in 1999.⁷⁹ The Putin regime viewed such demonstrations as threats to the stability of the state. The Putin administration established a "vigilant state," maintaining a hand in and an acute sense of the status of contentious politics and social movements.⁸⁰ It involved itself directly with groups that supported Putin's ideologies and nationwide agenda through funding and support. The government had a vested stake in the mobilization capabilities of these groups and, thus, reason to come down harder via policy on anti-government demonstrations and movements. The Putin regime's involvement within Russian contentious politics has generated inauthentic demonstration turnout, unequal access to resources, and a somewhat forced appearance of the population's government approval via falsified rally numbers, all of which will be discussed in the analysis to follow. This has furthered the apathy of the Russian public and has restricted mobilization within contentious politics.

Putin's vigilant approach came partly in response to the influence the West had in supporting Russian civic political activity, serving both as a role model of democracy, as well as a large source of funding in the early post-Soviet period.⁸¹ This vigilance on the side of the regime complicated regular public political activity. Some of the most significant barriers are laid out clearly by author Samuel A. Greene, who says that the Putin regime's attack on contentious politics and social movements included, "pressure on domestic and international sources of funding; legal changes to allow the state to rein in

⁷⁹ "Soldiers' Mothers of Saint Petersburg," Human Rights Agents, accessed June 12, 2019, <http://hragents.org/en-time/tl-sm-en/>.

⁸⁰ Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia," 18.

⁸¹ Ibid.

[civic political activity];... and the curtailing of independent broadcasting.”⁸² Lack of funding prevented organizations and movements from maintaining and expanding operations, legalized state involvement in street politics, tainted the very concept of street politics as an outlet for the citizen’s voice, and control over media blocked the public eyes and ears from the entire truth of the political state of Russia. This contributed to a lack of activity among the civic political population, as many were demoralized, apathetic, or doubtful their participation would leave an impact. One June 2001 public opinion poll showed that, at that time, the army was the most trusted institution, 60%. Only 60% of respondents trusted the courts and 56% of the population believed the executive branch was the most corrupt institution. Just 14% of Russians in 2001 thought of their nation as a democracy; and 60% did not believe their votes would make a political difference.⁸³ Still, only 5% of Russians were active in public organizations and 73% said they did not want to participate in them.⁸⁴ With the start of the Putin regime, trust was low, civic morale was low, and civic involvement had potential, but little popular enthusiasm.

The Russian state recognized the political atmosphere and initially moved to appear sympathetic to such apathy and hesitations.⁸⁵ In 2001, the potential for a politically active civic population in Russia appeared hopeful. This was especially true after November 21–22, when President Putin convened a Civic Forum involving several government officials, and multiple hundreds of participants in civil society and contentious politics.⁸⁶ This forum met to discuss the social problems within Russia, with the overarching aim to strengthen

⁸² Samuel A. Greene, *Moscow in Movement: Power and Opposition in Putin’s Russia*, (Stanford University Press: 2014): 102, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/reader.action?docID=1742622&ppg=118>; M. McFaul and E. Treyger, “Civil Society,” *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform*, eds. M. McFaul, N. Petrov, and A. Riabov. (Washington, DC: Carnegie, 2004).

⁸³ Alexander M. Domrin, “Ten Years Later: Society, ‘Civil Society,’ and the Russian State,” *The Russian Review* 62, no. 2 (April 2003): 205, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3664180.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ac91dd3326de3106d3950fd4f8ebdaee8>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 204–205.

⁸⁵ Weigle, “On the Road to the Civic Forum,” 117.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

the state as a whole.⁸⁷ According to author Marcia A Weigle, the government officials claimed, “An effective democratic state requires a strong, well-organized, and independent society.”⁸⁸ For the state to stabilize and strengthen, it claimed that it needed the involvement of those it governed. However, the state encouraged civic involvement only in exchange for increased involvement of the state: “What was expected from social organizations engaged in voluntary activism was to sacrifice their independence in order to gain institutionalized consultation of their interests and a share of benefits allocated by the state.”⁸⁹ While this was initially shot down by activists, the regime’s efforts to exercise greater vigilance over interactions between the contentious politics and the state did not waiver.⁹⁰

Following the Civic Forum, activity within Russian contentious politics was scant until 2004, when demonstrations over a proposed change to the social welfare system took place.⁹¹ With the abrupt switch to privatization beginning in the 1990s, the social welfare system began to distribute nonmonetary benefits to very specific groups (pensioners, disabled, military, etc.).⁹² The number of beneficiary groups grew, however, eventually to include nearly half of the Russian population by the time Putin rose to power.⁹³ The new law, which would replace nonmonetary benefits with monetary, passed in January of 2005 and sparked protests across the nation through March. At the time, Mischa Gabowitsch wrote, “Most protesters were older citizens, while younger people were too taken up by

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Archana Upadhyay, “Civil Society and Democratic Space in Russia,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 45 (November 2006): 4651, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4418888?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents; John Squier, “Civil Society and the Challenge of Russian Gosudarstvennost,” *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 2 (2004): 166–182.

⁹⁰ Upadhyay, “Civil Society and Democratic Space in Russia,” 4651.

⁹¹ Mischa Gabowitsch, *Protest in Putin’s Russia* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press Polity, 2017).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

their professional life in Russia's new no-nonsense capitalist economy.”⁹⁴ The efforts of the 2005 welfare protests, though, inspired a wave of protests among other various groups of people. One of these groups was students. After the government moved to exchange social benefits for monetary ones, tuition fees became mandatory for students.⁹⁵ According to RFE/RL, in protest against this change, “Aleksandr Korsunov, a 23-year-old economics graduate, founded an independent Internet-based opposition movement called ‘Say No.’”⁹⁶ Say No provided information otherwise uncovered by government-controlled news sources and encouraged the youth population to defend their rights.⁹⁷ Although the groups and demonstrations still surfaced on an issue-to-issue basis, more groups began to find their voices.

It was around this time, 2005, that the government responded to civic political activity with a new prominent movement: Nashi.⁹⁸ A massive revolution arose in Ukraine in 2004, called the Orange Revolution. The Orange Revolution, began by student activists, demanded an overthrow of the Ukrainian regime in favor of fair elections. Recognizing that this housed the potential to inspire a similar revolution in Russia, the regime mobilized Nashi as an anti-opposition youth force with ample resources and media coverage.⁹⁹ Nashi mobilized around 50,000 people in May of 2005, who marched “to symbolize the young generation taking on from Russia's war veterans the task of maintaining the country's independence.”¹⁰⁰ Such demonstrations continued sporadically over several years. In 2005, they presented a public image that Russian youth supported the regime in a time

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “Russia: Protest Movements are Coordinating and Stepping Up Efforts,” RFE/RL, March 7, 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1066430.html>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Maya Atwal and Edwin Bacon, “The Youth Movement Nashi: Contentious Politics, Civil Society, and Party Politics,” *East European Politics* 28, No. 3 (2012), 256–266. DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2012.691424.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

when popular trust in it was low and activity in contentious politics was increasing. These rallies also provided responses to groups such as CSM and student activists.¹⁰¹

Traces of the opposition continued. Within the first half of 2006, Russia's contentious politics scene began to attract a broader set of people. In March, around 125,000 protestors took to the streets nationwide to speak out against a spike of nearly 40% in utility prices.¹⁰² While pensioners and older citizens were still among those most severely impacted by this issue, waves of protests mobilized students, teachers, private residents; in other words, they mobilized the general citizen.¹⁰³ Many grassroots movements came out at this time, including under the leadership of people like Clarine Clement, director of the Institute for Collective Action in Moscow, Aleksander Korsunov, founder of Say No, and Vyacheslav Lysakov, coordinator of Freedom of Choice, a motorists' lobby group. Their similar achievements can be summarized with the following statement made by Lysakov:

In nine months, we have achieved quite a lot. We have attracted the attention of society, of the power vertical, of the media. We have raised questions that concern many millions of people. The effect is not so much in the concrete results that we have achieved, as in the fact that we have forced people to display their civic activity, believe in their strength, and understand that some things depend on them.¹⁰⁴

Organizers of such movements of this time in Putin's regime recognized the need for Russians to feel that their voices, if heard, could make a difference. While street politics did not increase overall in the 2000s, it was important that such movements prevented its complete dissolution.

Shortly after the pensioner protests began the series of scattered marches, each known as a "Dissenter's March," with the first in December of 2006 and the last in 2008. The marches operated under the banner that Putin had developed an authoritarian state, and

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Agents, "Soldiers' Mothers of Saint Petersburg."

¹⁰² RFE/RL, "Russia: Protest Movements are Coordinating and Stepping Up Efforts."

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

they called for his resignation.¹⁰⁵ Nearly all of the protests were banned. The government issued warnings not to participate in these demonstrations that were labeled mass riots of extremism, and hundreds of participants were beaten and/or detained.¹⁰⁶ Still, people showed up, including the extreme nationalist National Bolshevik Party and the pro-democracy United Civil Front, among others. Meanwhile, according to Atwal and Bacon, Nashi, “Combined efforts with the youth wing of Putin’s party United Russia, Young Guard, to counter the series of opposition ‘Dissenters’ Marches’ in 2007 [and] was entitled ‘Russia for the Russians.’”¹⁰⁷ Where there was an opposition protest, a pro-Putin Nashi rally would follow. And, while the Russian media covered select portions of the Dissenter’s March (and specifically avoided coverage of police violations of civil and human rights), it provided ample broadcasting of the Nashi demonstrations, exemplifying the uneven and artificial playing field generated by the Putin regime.¹⁰⁸

June of 2009 presented some concern to Russian civilians regarding their relationship with the state.¹⁰⁹ According to journalist Luke Harding, “Over the past decade ordinary Russians have been content to put up with less freedom in return for greater prosperity. Now, however, the social contract of the Putin era is unravelling, and disgruntled Russians are taking to the streets, rediscovering their taste for protest.”¹¹⁰ Grassroots protests sparked in June of 2009, in the midst of economic crisis, when the government passed a new law on imports that limited factories’ finances to the point of massive job losses and unpaid wages.¹¹¹ The protests were physical evidence of the

¹⁰⁵ Nick Spicer, “The Other Russia, the One You Don’t See on TV,” CBC News, April 16, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080113175651/http://www.cbc.ca/news/reportsfromabroad/spicer/20070416.html>.

¹⁰⁶ “2007 Reports on Human Rights Practices—Russia,” *REF World*, March 11, 2008, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47d92c4ac.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Atwal and Bacon, “The Youth Movement Nashi.”

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; Spicer, “The Other Russia.”

¹⁰⁹ “From Opinion to Understanding,” Levada-Center, 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>.

¹¹⁰ Luke Harding, “Protests against Putin Sweep Russia as Factories Go Broke,” *Guardian*, June 6, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/07/russia-putin-policies-protests>.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

nationwide unrest caused by this law. Still, the protests resulted in police brutality and detainments.¹¹²

Soon after the Dissenters' Marches and the June 2009 protests, the opposition moved to transform the bans and police brutality issues from the Dissenters' Marches into opportunity for political change. In 2009, numerous protests formed to raise awareness for freedom of assembly and the violations thereof.

From July 2009 Eduard Limonov, the founder of the National Bolshevik Party, organized civic protests in defense of the right of the freedom of assembly on the final day of months with 31 days, to defend Article 31 of the constitution guaranteeing citizens of the Russian Federation the right to assemble peacefully. The protests were joined by leading human rights organizations, including the Moscow Helsinki Group and Memorial.¹¹³

Although these demonstrations resulted in no noteworthy changes, it is important to note the horizontal networking among groups, as well as continued (though sporadic) efforts to call for better treatment of civil and human rights from the government.

In the Putin era, although there was potential for growth at this time, Russians maintained a generally apathetic view toward contentious politics. This came largely as a result of Putin's particularly vigilant watch. This period gave rise to state response against contentious politics in various forms, thus further repressing those who desired to participate. This was true throughout the entire decade, although the last half saw a slight increase in opposition activity from civilians.

The coming chapter will analyze the relationship between this rising concern for democratic principles in Russia and a movement of people willing to mobilize for such concerns surrounding the 2011 parliamentary elections.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Richard Sakwa, "Whatever Happened to the Opposition?" *The Royal Institute of International Affairs* (May 2014): 10, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20140523SakwaFinal.pdf.

IV. CONTENTIOUS POLITICS DURING THE SNOW REVOLUTION, 2011–2013

A. THE REVOLUTION

On December 4, 2011, the Snow Revolution erupted after the Russian legislative elections and breathed hope of oppositional comeback into Russian contentious politics.¹¹⁴ These protests, which were spontaneously organized by journalists and drew in those in opposition to the Russian government, were motivated by a widespread concern that the results of the elections had been corrupted. As *New York Times* journalist Ellen Barry wrote just days after the protests began, “The demonstration marked what opposition leaders hope will be a watershed moment, ending years of quiet acceptance of the political consolidation Mr. Putin introduced.”¹¹⁵ Or, as *New York Times* journalist Julia Loffe noted, “It was a far cry from the conventional wisdom, often Kremlin-sponsored, of Russians’ apathy and disgust for politics. Today, it turned out that no one’s been apathetic, that everyone has been reading and watching and following. Today was just the first time that all of these people came out and discovered each other’s existence.”¹¹⁶

The 2011 protests marked the most significant public uprising against Putin-influenced corruption, and the beginning of a larger social movement that would act in opposition to Putin’s style of governance. Putin had governed Russia as president from 2000–2008. The constitution required that he step down after two terms, and he was replaced by his prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, who was elected president in 2008. They revitalized the otherwise gloomy Russian opposition as a whole.¹¹⁷ Upon Putin’s return to

¹¹⁴ Vladimir Gel’man, “The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia,” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, no. 341 (September 2014), http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm341_Gelman_September2014.pdf.

¹¹⁵ Barry, “Rally Defying Putin’s Party Draws Tens of Thousands.”

¹¹⁶ Julia Loffe, “Snow Revolution,” *New Yorker*, December 10, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/snow-revolution>.

¹¹⁷ Gel’man, “The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia.”

the presidency in 2012, pro-government demonstrations began to surface in response to these anti-government protests, intensifying the sphere of contentious politics in Russia.

The Snow Revolution of 2011 marked a resurrection of government opposition movements of contentious politics in Russia (as well as the first great success of mobilization in civil society). As is brought to light in the previous chapter, the Snow Revolution erupted in response to the notion that the election results for the national legislative body had been tampered with by the government or those in close association to the government. According to the Global Nonviolent Action Database, after it was announced that Putin's United Russia party won 52.88% of the seats, voters began to reveal their experiences with the election fraud:

State employees stated that superiors pressured them to vote for United Russia, poll watchers claimed that election officials stuffed ballot boxes and purposefully miscounted votes, and representatives of United Russia took some individuals to multiple polling locations so that they could vote more than once.¹¹⁸

The news of such egregious violations of free and fair elections sparked the generation of numerous small government opposition groups that quickly gathered en masse. These demonstrations involved anywhere between 25,000 to 120,000 people (exact numbers are difficult to estimate, and the Russian government worked to keep these numbers minimal with protest restrictions and threats) and lasted into 2013.

Such a massive response is due, in part, to the fact that the opposition mobilized people to demonstrate for, "Anyone but United Russia," which nixed issue-specific votes or protests and united the entire opposition under one goal: to keep Putin out of the presidency in the 2012 election.¹¹⁹ The Snow Revolution, initially sparked by journalists in Russia but taken over to Alexei Navalny, brought otherwise ordinary and relatively quiet people of Russia together to call for honest elections and the political representation they

¹¹⁸ "Russians Protest Against Election Fraud (Snow Revolution), 2011–2012," Global Nonviolent Action Database, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/russians-protest-against-election-fraud-snow-revolution-2011-2012>.

¹¹⁹ Gel'man, "The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia."

desired and voted for, rather than that which was the result of forgery.¹²⁰ This is what Navalny sought to achieve in his many acts of involvement in contentious politics: mobilization of the citizenry (rather than the party) against the corruption of the state.¹²¹

As this thesis will review in the coming chapters, street demonstrations do not necessarily mean that clear, well-structured opposition groups were immediately organized and functioning fluently. There was (and, to some degree, still is) a considerable amount of disarray among opposition groups, and many of them would come to disagree ideologically and structurally (based on leadership and hierarchies) for years to come. Opposition groups within Russian civil society at the time of the Snow Revolution certainly had numerous improvements to make, both as individual groups and as a network of groups. Communication, ideologies, and priorities were among several of the items that commonly led to strife within these groups. With that said, the mobilization of the citizen in contentious politics was a landmark in the progression of Russian citizenship and politics.¹²² The action taken by Russian citizens to stand up against those in power sparked hope for the future of Russian politics and the potential for reform.¹²³

B. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

At the spark of the Snow Revolution, the government quickly reacted by setting in motion pro-Putin and pro-government rallies to match (if not to overpower) the voices of the opposition movement. The first powerful event in the Snow Revolution (involving at least 35,000 protestors and possibly up to 100,000) came on December 10, 2011, after

¹²⁰ Global Nonviolent Action Database, “Russians Protest Against Election Fraud.”

¹²¹ Nikita Kulachenkov, “Prime Minister Medvedev’s Empire: The New Investigation from the Anti-Corruption Foundation,” Anti-Corruption Foundation, March 2, 2017, <https://fbk.info/english/press-releases/post/303/>.

¹²² Gel’man, “The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia”; Bronislaw Geremek, “Civil Society and the Present Age,” *The Idea of a Civil Society*, 1998, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/publications/civilsoc/geremek.htm>.

¹²³ Geremek, “Civil Society and the Present Age”; Gel’man, “The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia.”

around a week of smaller protests that helped the movement to gain momentum.¹²⁴ In immediate response, Putin generated at least partially staged rallies in support of him, his regime, and his reelection. These rallies occurred in relatively large numbers and over many days, aiming to, “Protect rule of law and prevent an Orange Revolution scenario from happening in Russia.”¹²⁵ These numbers, however, might not have been a clear representation of willingness to support Putin. Instead, reporters like Michael Schwartz have said that many of the participants at these rallies refused to speak to any press, were forced to participate by their place of business, or had been told to attend the rallies instead of their cancelled classes at universities.¹²⁶ The opposition that took part in the Snow Revolution was forcibly minimized and dissolved on several occasions by the government and police; meanwhile, all pro-Putin rallies were granted the opportunity to assemble in the thousands, as seen in the apparent forceful encouragement of attendance. All Russian media coverage was heavily controlled surrounding the opposition movement. While the western media widely reported anti-regime demonstrations in Moscow following the accused flawed parliamentary elections, “Russian television gave as much, if not more, weight to pro-regime rallies organized by Nashi.”¹²⁷ While Russians were more likely to see coverage of pro-Putin protests, foreigners were more likely to see coverage of anti-regime protests. Over the course of just a few months, numerous rallies of this nature took place in favor of Putin and the government as it stood at that time, all in response to the opposition.

¹²⁴ Loffe, “Snow Revolution”; Masha Gessen, “Russia Repercussions of anti-Putin Snow Revolution,” *Irish Examiner*, February 26, 2014, <https://www.irisht Examiner.com/viewpoints/analysis/russian-repercussions-of-anti-putin-snow-revolution-260058.html>.

¹²⁵ Anna Sulimina, “The Empire Strikes Back,” *The Moscow News*, December 8, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130617010827/http://www.themoscownews.com/politics/20111208/189271247.html>.

¹²⁶ Michael Schwartz, “Few at Putin’s Party Rally, and Even Fewer Willingly,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/13/world/europe/attendance-is-light-at-united-russia-rally.html?_r=1&ref=world.

¹²⁷ Sulimina, “The Empire Strikes Back.”

The Snow Revolution, while initially successful in mass mobilization and taking the government by surprise, lost momentum quickly. There was no sustainable plan or resources for continued protest.¹²⁸ The opposition also failed to vocalize specific elements of the regime and its soft-authoritarianism while it had momentum and widespread mobilization, which showed disjuncture within the opposition ranks.¹²⁹ With the opposition's quickly weakened position, the state's response developed in the form of stricter legislation against opposition protests.¹³⁰ According to Vladimir Gel'man, as a result of the Snow Revolution, "Opposition parties and candidates were not allowed to run in September 2014 sub-national elections, the organizational potential of the opposition was challenged, and its very capacity to serve as organized political dissent came under question."¹³¹ A new law was furthermore passed in 2012, which required that any politically involved social group receiving international funding register itself as a foreign agent.¹³² Under this new law (which would only expand in the coming years), definitions of political involvement were so vague that practically every social movement would have to register as a foreign agent, to include human rights groups.¹³³ As Gel'man stated, since the Snow Revolution, "The scope of abuse and repression against the opposition (and threats thereof) [has] dramatically increased."¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Gel'man, "The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia."

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Edwin Bacon, "Policy Change and the Narratives of Russia's Think Tanks," *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 94 (August 2018): DOI: 10.1057/s41599-018-0148-y; "Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups," Human Rights Watch, June 18, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/russia-government-against-rights-groups-battle-chronicle>.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups."

¹³⁴ Ibid.

C. CONCLUSION

Overall, the state-implemented repercussions of the opposition's Snow Revolution have come in effort to prevent revolution and maintain stability within the Russian state. In doing so, the state has stepped further away from genuine democracy as it has complicated or made illegal a majority of opposition efforts (protest, political campaigning, social movements, etc.). To further complicate the political landscape, many of the 2011–2012 opposition leading figures quickly lost public authority, which opened opportunities for other opposition leaders (perhaps of different, nondemocratic ideologies) to rise to the occasion. With one of the issues of the Snow Revolution having been that groups could not mobilize under actual ideologies, this also meant that the opposition could splinter further.¹³⁵

The coming chapter will cover contentious politics in the post-Snow Revolution era, revealing how the impacts of the Snow Revolution and the government's response might impacted street demonstrations since 2013.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

V. CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AFTER THE SNOW REVOLUTION, 2013–2019

To understand exactly how and to what extent contentious politics reared its head in Russia following the Snow Revolution, it is necessary to review the demonstrations that have occurred since. This chapter is especially dedicated to the most noteworthy demonstrations of contentious politics organized by Russia's most contemporary street opposition. It will discuss demonstrations of both those in opposition to the government and those in support of the government, to allow attention to any protests that might have surfaced in reaction to one another. In presenting the progression of action among Russian citizens in this manner, it will be clear that, although there are two opposing sides of within street demonstrations in this situation, both sides represent contentious politics since the Snow Revolution of 2011.

Numerous protests have taken place since the Snow Revolution, regardless of added difficulties to participate in street politics. Many of them, however, are still organized around micro issues rather than broader ideological issues against the regime. In 2015, for example, international sanctions and the resulting unpaid wages severely impacted teachers and autoworkers, among others.¹³⁶ In response, workers took to protest and strike across the nation, marking, "the first backlash against Putin's economic policies."¹³⁷ The main impetus behind these demonstrations, in contrast to the anti-regime motivation behind the Snow Revolution, was the economy. In November of the same year, trucker protests broke out in response to a new road tax that the truckers could not afford.¹³⁸ Here again, as Harding argued in 2009, Putin had violated the tacit social contract that had previously kept the general population out of politics with a promise of

¹³⁶ Andrew E. Kramer, "Unpaid Russian Workers Unite in Protest Against Putin," *New York Times*, April 21, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/22/world/europe/russian-workers-take-aim-at-putin-as-economy-exacts-its-toll.html>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Andrey Pertsev, "The Kremlin is the Real Winner in the Truckers Protests: How Russia's Officials Manage and Manipulate the Country's New Social Movements," *Meduza*, December 7, 2015, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2015/12/07/opinion-the-kremlin-is-the-real-winner-in-the-truckers-protests>.

social benefits in exchange.¹³⁹ However, because Putin's government does not want a politically active or rebellious population, micro-issues such as these have historically been resolved and largely forgotten.¹⁴⁰ As they have done historically in Russia, such issue-focused demonstrations come and go in considerably brief waves. It is important to recognize, though, that Putin's breach of the social contract is a significant impetus for contentious politics and social movements.

In the case of 2018 protests against waste disposal in the region surrounding Moscow, Putin failed to honor the social contract yet again. In allowing garbage trucks to overfill landfills in the outskirts of Moscow, citizens were endangered with polluted water and noxious fumes.¹⁴¹ As Laura Henry wrote, "As a scholar who studies contemporary Russian politics, I believe these garbage protests reveal a crisis of basic governance that potentially poses a greater challenge to Putin's government than pro-democracy activism."¹⁴² These protests had potential for great involvement, as Henry said, if for no reason other than the crisis could have been easily avoided by the regime. This movement came in the heat of the 2017–2018 nationwide anti-corruption protests, which could signal that the government was too pre-occupied by the opposition to have made a more careful decision.

The 2017–2018 anti-corruption protests were led by Alexei Navalny.¹⁴³ They arose to speak out against and raise awareness of the corruption within the Putin regime.¹⁴⁴ These protests were sparked in March of 2017 by a film "He Is Not Dimon to You," produced by the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which revealed that Russia's Prime Minister,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Laura A. Henry, "Will a Garbage Revolt Threaten Putin?" *The Conversation*, June 7, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/will-a-garbage-revolt-threaten-putin-95704>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Schwirtz, "Russia's Political Youths"; Filipov, "Russian Police Arrest Protestors."

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Dmitry Medvedev, was alleged to have embezzled more than \$1billion from state funds.¹⁴⁵ Russian authorities threatened the protestors by warning that police would, “‘bear no responsibility for any possible negative consequences’ for people who did show up. Putin’s spokesman said that even telling people to come to the rallies was ‘illegal.’”¹⁴⁶ Still, after such threats, thousands of people in opposition to the government showed up in response to reports of the government’s corrupt nature.¹⁴⁷ Navalny was arrested during these demonstrations, along with over 700 other participants.¹⁴⁸ Police used physical force against protestors, as well as tear gas. Such demonstrations in the name of anti-corruption occurred at various times between 2017 and 2018, continually pressuring the Russian government to acknowledge and address its flaws. With these events unfolding, the Levada Center determined that, between 2017 and the fall of 2018, public opinion of Putin as “Completely trustworthy” dropped from 75% to 58%, while opinion of him as “Somewhat trustworthy” or “Not at all trustworthy” each climbed by just less than 10%.¹⁴⁹ Putin’s approval ratings remained high.

Rather than acknowledging the criticism of the 2017–2018 opposition movement, however, the Kremlin moved in quite the opposite direction. Nationwide pro-Putin rallies were scheduled for February 3, 2018, just before presidential election season, so as to boost voter turnout (specifically, voter turnout for Putin).¹⁵⁰ According to the *Moscow Times*, “the Feb. 3 pro-Kremlin action has been timed to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Battle of Stalingrad.”¹⁵¹ World War II has been a central symbol in Putin’s

¹⁴⁵ Kulachenkov, “Prime Minister Medvedev’s Empire.”

¹⁴⁶ Filipov, “Russian Police Arrest Protestors.”

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ “Institutional Trust,” Levada-Center, October 22, 2018, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2018/10/22/institutional-trust-4/>.

¹⁵⁰ “Kremlin Schedules Pro-Government Rallies Ahead of Presidential Vote,” *Moscow Times*, January 24 2018, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/kremlin-schedules-pro-government-rallies-ahead-of-presidential-vote-60265>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

patriotic education of the public in effort to restore national pride, as well as his personal popularity.¹⁵² It was said that around 130,000 participants showed up; however, sources still express confidence that, like rallies of the past, many of those participants were forced or paid to attend.¹⁵³ Rallies such as this have been commonly produced by the Kremlin, and have typically resulted in a cycle of protests against and rallies for Putin's governance. Additionally, violations of human rights continued, with one example being the arrest of journalist Svetlana Prokopyeva under accusations of justification of terrorism, for negative comments made against authorities in November of 2018.¹⁵⁴ In February of 2019, the European Commissioner for Human Rights claimed the arrest was a violation of Prokopyeva's right to free press and expression, and was a sign of the government's continued effort to further control the media and the opposition.¹⁵⁵

The most recent series of opposition protest have taken place in late 2018 and early 2019. In September of 2018, pensioners took to the streets once again, this time to protest the planned increase to the retirement age.¹⁵⁶ This is another example of Putin's breaking of his social contract in that the raised retirement age would theoretically make life harder for the older population. Under Navalny's leadership, these issue-specific and economics-oriented protests resulted in the detainment of over 800 people, and the participation of around 2,000.¹⁵⁷ These protests were organized initially for pensioners, but attracted youth

¹⁵² Elizabeth A. Wood, "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WWII in Russia," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, (2011): 172–200, https://history.mit.edu/sites/default/files/documents/SPSR_038_02_06_Wood.pdf.

¹⁵³ "Russia: Massive Pro-Putin Campaign Rally in Moscow March 3," *Garda World News Alerts*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/95556/russia-massive-pro-putin-campaign-rally-in-moscow-march-3>.

¹⁵⁴ "Russian Federation: Misuse of Anti-Terrorism Legislation Limits Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression," *Council of Europe*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/russian-federation-misuse-of-anti-terrorism-legislation-limits-media-freedom-and-freedom-of-expression>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Reuters, "Russian Police Detain over 800 People Protesting Pension Changes," *New York Times*, September 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/09/world/europe/russia-pension-protests.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

participants and widened the anti-pension-reform message to a broader one, saying, “Russia will be free.”¹⁵⁸

In March, around 15,000 participants showed in Moscow to protest a “sovereign Internet” bill, although official police reports only acknowledged around 6,500 participants, and at least 15 people are thought to have been detained.¹⁵⁹ Banners and signs were also confiscated.¹⁶⁰ In April 2019, the new cyber-security law passed that grants the Russian government great power over domestic internet.¹⁶¹ This new law, according to the government, will achieve Russian sovereignty over the Internet, improving cyber security and isolating Russia’s Internet from the rest of the world.¹⁶² According to the opposition, however, this law will only allow the government to achieve a firmer grip over censorship and contention among the population, especially considering social media was a major platform of protest organization in 2011.¹⁶³ It will be a means for greater control over the Russian people and, therefore, less concern for Putin about his popularity and acceptance within the nation. It is also expected that this law will result in a sort of online “Iron Curtain,” and will bear striking resemblance to the Internet firewall implemented by Chinese communist President Xi Jinping.¹⁶⁴ The greatest common fear amongst opponents

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ “Thousands of Russians Protest Against Internet Restrictions,” *Reuters*, March 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-internet-protests/thousands-of-russians-protest-against-internet-restrictions-idUSKBN1QR0HI>

¹⁶⁰ Sasha Ingber, “Russians, Fearing Internet Isolation, Protest Government Plan,” *NPR*, March 11, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/11/702347714/russians-fearing-internet-isolation-protest-government-plan>.

¹⁶¹ Reuters, “Thousands of Russians Protest Against Internet Restrictions”; Ingber, “Russians, Fearing Internet Isolation, Protest Government Plan”; “Russia’s State Duma Adopts Stable Runet Law,” TASS, April 16, 2019, <http://tass.com/politics/1053917>.

¹⁶² “Russia Internet Freedom: Thousands Protest Against Cyber-Security Bill,” BBC News, March 10, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47517263>; Ingber, “Russians, Fearing Internet Isolation, Protest Government Plan.”

¹⁶³ Ibid.; Gel’man, “The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia.”

¹⁶⁴ Anthony Cuthbertson, “Russia Protests: Thousands March Against Plans to Cut off Internet from Rest of World,” *The Independent*, March 11, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/russia-internet-protest-putin-online-censorship-privacy-a8817361.html>.

of this law can be best summarized by one protestor: “If we do nothing it will get worse. The authorities will keep following their own way and the point of no return will be passed.”¹⁶⁵ This law is yet another example of the Putin regime’s tendency to mold a government under the label of “sovereign democracy,” fitting nicely into the definition of soft-authoritarianism presented in Chapter I of this thesis. Putin’s approval has fallen from around 90% to around 60% since 2018.¹⁶⁶

Most recently, a May Day (May 1st) opposition protest calling for free elections resulted in detainment of around 124 people.¹⁶⁷ Also in early 2019, a new law was passed which, according to PEN America, “Establish[es] criminal penalties for people deemed by courts to have involved minors in unauthorized protests, rallies, and demonstrations.”¹⁶⁸ An extension of further control over contentious politics, the new law could potentially arrest a number of active youth participants and older organizers. The same PEN America article reveals that, during the 2018 anti-corruption protests, 158 minors were detained on May 8 alone.¹⁶⁹ An article by Masha Gessen of the *New York Review Daily* revealed that, in June of 2017, nationwide protests occurred with teenagers making up a large portion of the participants, several of whom were detained.¹⁷⁰ The recent aftermath of the post-Snow Revolution have demonstrate the cyclical nature of Russian contentious politics: opposition breeds hope that the state has not managed to control Russia’s contentious politics completely. The opposition has showed continues to demonstrate in small ways, the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Vladimir Soldatkin, “Russian Police Detain Over 100 People at May Day Protests: Rights Monitor,” Reuters, May 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-may-day-russia-opposition/russian-police-detain-over-100-people-at-may-day-protests-rights-monitor-idUSKCN1S745K>; Reuters, “Russian Police Detain over 800 People Protesting Pension Changes,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/09/world/europe/russia-pension-protests.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Soldatkin, “Russian Police Detain Over 100 People.”

¹⁶⁸ “Russia’s New Law on Public Protests Designed to Further Silence Dissent,” *PEN America*, January 7, 2019, <https://pen.org/press-release/new-law-public-protests-silence-dissent-russia/>.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Masha Gessen, “The New Face of Russian Resistance,” *New York Review Daily*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/06/14/the-new-face-of-russian-resistance/>.

government responds with new legislation minimizing freedom of assembly or authoritarian crackdown, and the cycle continues.

Aside from the generation of pro-government response rallies, in most cases, the Russian authorities have reacted to post-Snow-Revolution demonstrations with soft attempts to combat them. In other words, they have taken action in attempt to prevent or limit opposition protests by increasing the cost of permits and/or refusing to grant permits for the occurrence of some of the protests, for more than a few people at the protests, for amount of time allowed to spend protesting, etc.¹⁷¹ The police have evidently been instructed to continue to detain people at nearly all of the opposition protests detailed, regardless of their peaceful nature.¹⁷² The police have also reported smaller than actual numbers of participants at protests, and have reported larger than supposed numbers of participants at pro-government rallies.¹⁷³ The government's recent crackdown on Internet freedom, as well as the new Internet sovereignty law, are likely direct responses to the anti-government activism. Laws have also been generated that prevent anyone who has been arrested from running for any elected office, which practically targets any/all of the opposition group members who have come to any sort of leadership in their groups, including Navalny. The state has expressed that changes such as this are to prevent potentially scandalous people from entering and participating in politics. More meaningful to Putin and his regime, however, is that these changes will likely reduce any potential for threat to Putin's leadership, or his style of governance. The state's reaction to opposition movements has been, in essence, a rejection of freedom of association, freedom of speech, and government transparency--basic elements of democracy.

Following the Snow Revolution, contentious politics in Russia continued their presence, although on a much smaller scale than during the 2011–2013 demonstrations. Government support rallies arose, opposition rallies against the general corruption of the

¹⁷¹ Ingber, "Russians, Fearing Internet Isolation, Protest Government Plan"; BBC News, "Russia Internet Freedom."

¹⁷² BBC News, "Russia Internet Freedom."

¹⁷³ Reuters, "Thousands of Russians Protest Against Internet Restrictions."

regime resurfaced periodically, and issue-focused demonstrations surfaced according to the timing of the incidents that sparked them. The Putin regime continued to crack down on contentious politics, however, and has added increasing difficulty to the ability to mobilize legally in opposition to the state.

The coming chapter will provide survey data and analysis regarding the overall shifts in Russian propensity to protest over time.

VI. PROPENSITY TO PROTEST OVER TIME

Now that the most prominent examples of Russia's contentious politics have been reviewed, this thesis will analyze the civic inclination to act in such demonstrations over this thirty-year period. This section of the chapter will detail how Russian citizens feel about their government based primarily on survey data, as ratings could be indicative of potential for future change via demands, votes, or action of the Russian people.

The general trend of Russian contentious politics over the past thirty years has changed little, with a few spikes in participation here and there. Figure 2 compares Russian poll answers to the question "Do you wish to participate in protests" (the dark blue line) to "Will you participate in protests" (the light blue line).¹⁷⁴ While responses to the former question have been recorded since 1997, responses to the latter have only been recorded since around 2009. The graph reveals that the number of people who responded "Yes" to the first question spiked immensely in the late 1990s after Yeltsin's regime had been in power for several years. The number then plummeted around 1999/2000, when Putin's regime came in with a more "vigilant" approach to civic political action. This was also the time when Russians expressed great apathy toward contentious politics, distrusted the government, and failed to believe that their actions could make a difference. With the Civic Forum in 2001, desire to protest rose again, with an overall slight increase until 2005 when Putin was up for reelection, the first pensioners protest took place, and just after the Orange Revolution broke out. The numbers settled to a net zero gain or loss in interest to participate politically, until 2010 and especially 2011 with the Snow Revolution. The graph shows an overall decrease in interest to protest over political issues after 2012, until around 2017 when the anti-corruption campaign picked up. While the fluctuation of "yes" responses to the second question generally reflect the trend of the first question, the number of "yes" responses to the question "will you participate in demonstrations?" were consistently lower. This suggests that, between 2009 and 2018, the average Russian citizen's willingness to protest was lower than the affirmative idea of protest. This could reflect the

¹⁷⁴ Levada-Center, "From Opinion to Understanding."

general trend of apathy toward participation in contentious politics and the potential benefit thereof. Overall, from 1997 to 2018, the net change shows that fewer people responded positively when asked if they wished to participate in protests.

POTENTIAL PROTEST WITH POLITICAL DEMANDS



Figure 2. Russian Civilian Desire versus Will to Protest, 1997–2018¹⁷⁵

Although desire to participate in protests displays around a net zero change, the overall approval of Putin decreased and disapproval increased since 2000. Figure 3 shows those who responded with approval of the President (the dark blue line) compared to those who responded in disapproval (the light blue line) over the course of his leaderships (to include his period as Prime Minister from 2008–2012).¹⁷⁶ Because the two lines reflect each other directly, this analysis will only include that of the approval responses. Putin’s approval ratings began high with the start of his Presidency in 1999, with over 80% of respondents approving of him. They dropped marginally in 2001, around the time of the Civic Forum, gradually increased until 2004, and dropped again in 2005 to approximately 65% approval after the Ukrainian Orange Revolution and the Russian pensioners protest.

¹⁷⁵ Source: Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Putin's approval ratings slowly increased until a peak above 80% in 2009. The midterm elections in 2010 and subsequent Snow Revolution brought Putin's approval down to its lowest levels, though. It remained around 65% until 2014 when it was above or at 80%, likely in response to the annexation of Crimea.¹⁷⁷ This continued until 2017, when Putin's approval rating dropped to its lowest levels with the anti-corruption protests. At that time, the percentage of Russians evincing complete trust in Putin fell from 75% to 58%.¹⁷⁸

APPROVAL OF VLADIMIR PUTIN



Figure 3. Public Approval of Vladimir Putin, 1999–2018¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Sakwa, "Whatever Happened to the Opposition?" 10.

¹⁷⁸ Levada-Center, "Institutional Trust."

¹⁷⁹ Source: Ibid.

When compared to one another, public opinion regarding likelihood of participating in political protest and approval of Vladimir Putin reveal the inverted relationship between the average Russian's desire to protest and approval of Putin. As approval ratings increased, desire to protest decreased, and vice versa. This trend has followed suit throughout Putin's regime, with the most recent approval ratings sharply lower and desire/willingness to protest markedly increased. The polling data also suggests what social movement theory contends, that events provide windows of opportunity for organizers to mobilize latent discontent against the regime. These cycles of protest are difficult to sustain in their absence.

VII. ANTI-GOVERNMENT MOVEMENTS

A. BACKGROUND

In the coming chapter, this thesis will examine three groups of Russians who have led anti-regime social movements. While Chapter II discussed the most significant examples of street demonstrations in Russian politics, the aim of this chapter is to gain a more thorough understanding of the most prominent groups or persons involved in and organizing such actions. This chapter describes these groups and then analyzes the characteristics that social movement theorists have set forth as potentially determining of resilience. These are: collective identities, claims, resources, organizational style and membership (paying close attention to any prerequisites or qualifications necessary for acceptance in those groups, recruiting into the groups, as well as requirements or expectations to remain a member), and mobilization capabilities. This research analysis of social movements and the ability (or lack thereof) to mobilize people will allow the opportunity to observe some of the details within Russian society that are essential for evaluating the prospects for Russia's transition to a consolidated democracy. The research will follow the chronological organization of the previous chapter, beginning with analysis of Oborona (Defense), a group existing prior to the Snow Revolution, then some of the main journalists who organized the beginnings of the Snow Revolution, and finally Alexei Navalny and the followership he created during and after the Snow Revolution.

B. OBORONA

Oborona was a sort of super-group that is comprised of a network of other movements, to include Youth Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces party, both associated with opposition political parties, and Walking without Putin, among others.¹⁸⁰ Although it included politically affiliated groups and operates within the political sphere (especially that of street politics), Oborona itself remained intentionally independent and nonpartisan. Co-founded in 2005 by several pre-existing youth groups, Oborona "was the first

¹⁸⁰ Schwirtz, "Russia's Political Youths," 76.

opposition group that openly criticized Putin and broke ‘the conspiracy of silence,’ which had kept President Putin outside of all critique.”¹⁸¹ Although it officially dissolved in 2011, the group was labeled a threat to the stability of Russia at its founding, largely because of its aim to reform the regime in the name of democratic principles as the color revolutions had done.¹⁸²

Two of its primary co-founders and leading figures, Ilya Valeryevich Yashin and Yulia Sergeevna Malysheva, said that the overarching goal of this youth movement was to encourage civil society, activism, and critical analysis among Russia’s youth, with the hope of expanding outward toward other Russian demographics.¹⁸³ Such expansion was initially well accomplished, recruiting hundreds of members within the Moscow branch alone, with an inclusive recruitment process that was largely possible due to its intentional avoidance of political affiliation.¹⁸⁴ One translation of the group’s website, while it was in full operation until about 2011, reads, “Joining up is easy, just fill out a form on this site, and we will be connected with you. In Oborona we have no membership cards or dues payments (as in the political parties).”¹⁸⁵ Oborona’s initial ability to reach a broad spectrum of people could have been due in part to its inclusive manner of attaining and maintaining membership. Structurally, there existed decision makers among its internal network (the elected committee members), as well as regional subgroups that were largely autonomous.¹⁸⁶ The group’s influence spread outward to twenty-five of Russia’s regions

¹⁸¹ Laura Lyytikäinen, “Performing Political Opposition in Russia” (University of Helsinki, Department of Social Research, 2014), 43, https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/229487/lyytik_inen_dissertation.pdf?sequence=1.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Schwirtz, “Russia’s Political Youths”; Lyytikäinen, “Performing Political Opposition in Russia,” 91.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ “Hooray! Here Comes Oborona!” *La Russophobia Wordpress*, April 30, 2007, <https://larussophobe.wordpress.com/2007/04/30/hooray-here-comes-oborona/>.

¹⁸⁶ Schwirtz, “Russia’s Political Youths.”

(with headquarters in Moscow), though its numbers never grew much beyond a thousand.¹⁸⁷ A 2007 map of Oborona's regional presence can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Oborona's Regional Presence, 2007¹⁸⁸

While the group enjoyed some success in its first year, its promise for a bright future quickly faded. After about a year, mobilization diminished and the horizontally organized sectors of the group began to splinter.¹⁸⁹ A 2010 interview with its third co-founder, Oleg Kozlovsky, revealed that regional sectors and factions were at an all-time low.¹⁹⁰ Between 2011 and 2012, the group largely dissolved with the reelection of Vladimir Putin and new legislation that restricted civic activism.¹⁹¹ Although this group represents a movement

¹⁸⁷ Lyytikäinen, "Performing Political Opposition in Russia," 44.

¹⁸⁸ Source: *La Russophobia Wordpress*, "Hooray! Here Comes Oborona."

¹⁸⁹ Lyytikäinen, "Performing Political Opposition in Russia," 44.

¹⁹⁰ "Oleg Kozlovsky (Oborona Movement), 2010," *Russian Peace and Democracy*, March 8, 2010, <http://russianpeaceanddemocracy.com/oleg-kozlovsky-2010>.

¹⁹¹ Lyytikäinen, "Performing Political Opposition in Russia," 44.

that failed to thrive in the face of Putinism, it is important to evaluate it in effort to understand the overall potential for durability of anti-regime social movements.

1. Collective Identity and Claims

This far-reaching youth movement identified under the following ideologies: greater liberties, free elections, honest democratic governance, and anti-putinist regime. In an interview with academic Fredo Arias-King, Malysheva specified that this group was more than just anti-Putin, it should be specified, in saying that Oborona is, “Against the ‘putinist’ regime, with a small ‘p,’ since it does not necessarily depend on Putin but is a manifestation of totalitarian impulses in our society.”¹⁹² The significance here is that the group has formed in opposition to more than just Putin (who will eventually no longer be president). Rather, Malysheva helped to develop a collection of people who additionally identified with the prevention of totalitarianism returning to Russia, even post-Putin. This concept is significant to Oborona, as the movement maintained a goal beyond Putin that was to push for liberation so long as totalitarianism held a grip over Russia, even in a post-Putin world. Such desired liberties are well summarized below, from Oborona’s “Declaration of Purpose”:

We want to live in a free and flourishing country. We want a combat-effective and professional army to protect us, and freedom for students to study in peace. We want the democratic transfers of power via free elections in which the whole country actively participates. We want to be able to obtain information from a free and independent media. We want to work in companies without fearing that they will be shut down because of the visits of bandits or corrupt officials. We want the law to be equally applied to all citizens, not used as tool against those who disagree. We want an honest budget in which there are monies valid social purposes, not the pockets of corrupt officials.¹⁹³

¹⁹² F. Arias-King, “A Revolution of The Mind,” *Demokratizatsiya* 15, no. 1 (2007): 117–128. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/DEMO.15.1.117-128>.

¹⁹³ *La Russophobia Wordpress*, “Hooray! Here Comes Oborona!”

Freedom was the overarching concern for those involved with Oborona—freedom and a trustworthy government. The primary claim the movement operated under, in the same vein, was that which declared putinism (in other words, Russian totalitarianism) as a prominent force within Russian politics and against the liberation of the Russian people. Oborona sought to achieve a form of democracy that emulated those of western forms. This, however, was perhaps the sole claim that members and regional branches of the movement could agree to.¹⁹⁴ Politically, the group diverged, which Lyytikäinen argues aided in the group’s dissolution, especially as the movement was pushed leftward on the political spectrum in its later years with the election of one of its unofficial leaders to parliament in representation of the Union of Right Forces.¹⁹⁵

2. Resources

Before continuing into further analysis of Oborona, its resources should be mentioned. In terms of resources, information is are thus far largely unavailable in English texts. What is available in English, such as the work by Laura Lyytikäinen, reveals that Oborona’s biggest resource is its people: middle class youth.¹⁹⁶ According to Lyytikäinen, this fraction of Russian society gave Oborona its chance at survival because of the time, resources, and energy its participants have been able to dedicate as youth with a decent financial standing and enough time to spare for the movement.¹⁹⁷ However, because of Oborona’s outright distaste for Putin and the regime he has created, the state was especially watchful of the group and ensured strict state-management over its administrative and financial resources, as well as access to news media and formal politics.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Lyytikäinen, “Performing Political Opposition in Russia.”

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

3. Organization and Membership

The organization style of Oborona was unique in that, rather than operating under a vertical hierarchy, the group operated instead through horizontal networking. There was no centralized structure, leader, etc.¹⁹⁹ Instead, this decidedly politically independent group had the organizational freedom to grant equal strength and opportunity to each regional location, member, etc. Horizontal relations among its regional sectors, other Russian regime opposition groups, and even international groups (such as some that have participated in Color Revolutions) allowed Oborona its unique and inclusive functionality, and was designed to avoid development of elitism of any individuals over others within the movement.²⁰⁰ However effective this horizontal approach appeared in principle, it led the movement to internal struggle. The concept of a “leaderless” movement was not fully executed, as Lyytikäinen detailed:

Both Moscow and St Petersburg’s branches had four to five coordinators who were responsible for their own fields of activities, such as public relations, human relations, or street activism, as well as one strong figure, who was seen by many activists and outsiders as the leader of the group despite the leaderless principle.²⁰¹

Lyytikäinen shed light on the still existent tendency of this group to generate some form of hierarchy, even within the horizontal networking system. Leadership naturally developed within the regional branches. She also mentioned that Oborona’s reliance on friendship ties formulated a difficult environment for new, socially unconnected members to incorporate into the group, thus furthering division issues.²⁰² Malysheva said that this horizontal existence was instrumental in the generation of a greater opposition force, which was one of Oborona’s key concerns:

¹⁹⁹ Schwartz, “Russia’s Political Youths.”

²⁰⁰ Ibid; Lyytikäinen, “Performing Political Opposition in Russia,” 100; Arias-King, “A Revolution of The Mind.”

²⁰¹ Lyytikäinen, “Performing Political Opposition in Russia,” 100.

²⁰² Ibid.

Anyone who struggles for democracy, freedom, for honest elections, civil society, those are our allies. [This] also means that we can work in parallel and not intervene with one another. Or sometimes we can form provisional coalitions with those that also think they can do a better job than Putin.²⁰³

According to Malysheva, Oborona aimed to include the masses, provided those involved were for democracy and freedom. In such an open manner of existence and inclusivity, Oborona could remain free of political influence, while simultaneously encouraging other groups to flourish and grow. However, in practice, such goals of inclusive equality were not well met. According to Malysheva, in its first year, the group, “Oborona organized about fifty public activities [and had] twenty-two regional branches.”²⁰⁴ The first year of the movement’s founding was also its most successful, however. After that point, its participation numbers declined, regional branches closed frequently, and leaders took different paths, soon leading to the group’s dissolution.

4. Mobilization Capabilities

Oborona experienced initial success in mobilization, both nationally and abroad, upon its founding in 2005, generating a membership of about 1,000, with Moscow and St. Petersburg together amounting for four hundred members.²⁰⁵ On the first birthday of the group, a celebration took place in the form of powerful demonstrations.²⁰⁶ This included, according to Malysheva:

A street protest called “Enough of Putin...” [and] a few radical activities, one of which made us famous worldwide-when we organized a big protest in Belarus together with Ukrainians and with opposition Belarusians, in April 2005 during the anniversary of the Chernobyl accident.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Arias-King, “A Revolution of The Mind.”

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Lyytikäinen, “Performing Political Opposition in Russia,” 44.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Not only does this exemplify Oborona's early will to mobilize, but also its influence on others to do so, however short-lived such influence might have been. The initial efforts of this movement extended to and interacted with movements of other nations (in the case of the aforementioned demonstrations, Belarus and Ukraine). These protests operated under the slogan "For your freedom and ours" (which suggested that the action was based on a call for civic freedom and liberation), included five to ten thousand people, and continued to survive even once it had been forbidden by the authorities.²⁰⁸ Such will to mobilize is essential in achieving the long-term goal of groups similar to Oborona—to bring any trace of authoritarianism to a halt in favor of democracy—in that a group must remain relevant and undaunting when faced with the government in order to achieve anything similar to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (which serves as a huge inspiration to Oborona).

However, the mobilization of this group quickly began to fail after 2006. At this time, when Yashin left the movement, Oborona's regional locations began to operate under leadership of other different movements and, therefore, differing ideologies.²⁰⁹ As of 2012, Oborona was found to have included no more than 1,000 participants, with only a few of those participants still active.²¹⁰ It seems the greatest downfall in Oborona's mobilization was the tendency for events to have gathered independently from one another, rather than collectively in one demonstration.²¹¹

C. THE SNOW REVOLUTION AND THE NEW DECEMBRISTS

Although eventually taken over largely by opposition politicians, the initial gravity of the Snow Revolution was inspired by a group of journalists who came to be known as the New Decembrists. With the 2012 elections on the horizon, and public tolerance toward the corruption that taunted the freedom of those elections, journalists were the motivated

²⁰⁸ Arias-King, "A Revolution of The Mind."

²⁰⁹ Lyytikäinen, "Performing Political Opposition in Russia," 43.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 44.

²¹¹ Ibid, 45.

few who decided change needed to take place in the undeniably apathetic Russia.²¹² As firsthand witness and chronicler Michael Idov wrote, “The entire point of Putin’s meticulously constructed ‘power vertical,’ a concept that essentially disabled all levers of governance except the president’s, was that spontaneous mass protests could not and would not happen.”²¹³ Under Putin, major television networks came under state control, regional officials shifted from civilian-elected to Kremlin-appointed positions, the voice of Parliament has been diminished, and Putin’s United Russia party has monopolized the political scene.²¹⁴ In summary, Putin’s soft-authoritarianism was settling in. The journalists-turned-revolutionaries began what would become the Snow Revolution because, as Ilya Krasilshchik summarized clearly, “The system was held together not by top-down oppression but by bottom-up cowardice.” The journalists realized that their prior duty to recommend “a good restaurant [was] no longer enough.”²¹⁵ The Russian public had become tolerant and complacent and, as Krasilshchik suggested, the nation’s journalists had been writing pieces no more influential than a sway toward a well cooked meal.²¹⁶ Finally, after Medvedev practically announced Putin’s return and evidence of gross electoral fraud began to mount around the country, the group of journalists who made up the New Decembrists were the few who felt the drive and duty to awaken the Russian public.²¹⁷

Although over twenty journalists can be credited with having a hand in the public mobilization within the Snow Revolution, a select few will be reviewed (in addition to the New Decembrists movement as a whole) with emphasis on their efforts since 2012. The greater list of these journalists includes the likes of Ilya Krasilshchik, Filipp Dzyadko,

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid. 38.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 39–52.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 36–37.

²¹⁷ Michael Idov, *Dressed up for a Riot: Misadventures in Putin’s Moscow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux 2017): 46–48.

Katya Krongauz, Denis Bilunov, Roman Dobrokhoto, Sergei Udaltsov, Ilya Klishin, Sergei Parkhomenko, Masha Gessen, and Oleg Kashin, among many others. To understand the initial efforts of the New Decembrists and the continued spirit thereof, however, this section will focus on Krasilshchik, Dzyadko, and Udaltsov.

At the time of the first major demonstrations at Bolotnaya Square in Moscow (events which soon came to be referred to as “Bolotnaya”), Krasilshchik was a major influencer At the time of Bolotnaya. At the age of 21, right around the time of the revolution, “Krasilshchik became the editor in chief of the eponymous magazine [Afisha], which had a hundred-thousand copy run.”²¹⁸ In continuation of his impact as a young journalist and activist, in 2013, he, “Stepped down... to become the Product Director at Afisha publishing company, launching three separate web-based media and a TV streaming service in one year.” In 2014, “he finally left Afisha, and together with two partners launched Meduza, a groundbreaking Russian language web news outlet based in Riga, Latvia.”²¹⁹ It is unclear whether Krasilshchik has been exiled from Russia, but he has elected to continue his work on Russian relations and media with Latvia as his base.

Dzyadko is another notable young journalist and activist who remains active in similar work today. Comparable in early career and ambition to Krasilshchik, Dzyadko, “Took the reins at *Bolshoi Gorod* [a news magazine]... at twenty-five.”²²⁰ Since the Snow Revolution, his work has been dedicated to the removal of politicization from education of and discussion surrounding history. He has been working toward this goal with his project Arzamas, “Which tries to popularize the cultural achievements of the past.”²²¹ Founded in 2015, Dzyadko and his network of academics utilize social media as a source of education for the general public, thus treating this education as a sort of liberty in contrast to the

²¹⁸ Ibid., 40.

²¹⁹ “Ilya Krasilshchik,” The Wilson Center, accessed June 12, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/person/ilya-krasilshchik>.

²²⁰ Idov, *Dressed up for a Riot*, 40.

²²¹ Howard Amos, “Arzamas: The Cultural History Project Fighting Politicisation of the Past in Russia,” *The Calvert Journal*, July 4, 2018, <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/10393/arzamas-the-russian-history-site-fighting-politicisation-of-the-past>.

patriotic education championed by Putin. Arzamas has been at the center of Dzyadko's efforts since its founding. "The name 'Arzamas' is a deliberate choice and hints at how Dzyadko and his team see themselves as more than just a straightforward education resource. The name of a progressive, 19th century literary society, Arzamas' members went on to have a huge impact on Russian society: from poet Alexander Pushkin to arch-conservative Sergei Uvarov who invented the tsarist ideology of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationalist.'" ²²² In the effort toward accessible education, Dzyadko has furthermore aided in the creation of a Web TV show called *Dzyadko 3*, "which has become a defacto anti-Putin brainstorming session." ²²³ Although decidedly more politically concerned than Arzamas, this internet show keeps open the discussion surrounding the opposition agenda. Filipp, according to journalist Anna Nemstova, believes that protests (and, thus, the encouragement thereof) will, "... help strengthen grass-roots democracy in Russia." ²²⁴ This show played an active role in the mobilization for the Snow Revolution, particularly Bolotnaya, in that it helped to inform its viewers (via the free internet) of the government/election corruption issues, the possibility for discussion of such issues, and the potential to make a change through means of peaceful demonstration. ²²⁵

Sergei Udaltsov is considerably older than the other New Decembrists, but still began his political activism at a young age. According to journalist Olga Khvostunova,

He organized the Red Youth Vanguard (AKM) movement that eventually became the youth wing of Viktor Ampilov's Labor Russia movement. Later still, AKM joined Russia's Communist Party. In 2005, Udaltsov participated in the creation of the Left Front, a radical leftist organization that advocated socialist development in Russia. ²²⁶

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Anna Nemstova, "Russia's Dzyadko Brothers Lead the Opposition," *Newsweek*, May 14, 2012, <https://www.newsweek.com/russias-dzyadko-brothers-lead-opposition-65033>.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Olga Khvostunova, "Russia's Political Prisoners: Sergei Udaltsov," Institute of Modern Russia, accessed June 12, 2019, <https://imrussia.org/en/projects/political-prisoners/746-russias-political-prisoners-sergei-udaltsov>.

He and his Left Front furthermore played a role in leadership and mobilization of Bolotnaya.²²⁷ The Left Front and Udaltsov have since been, “neutralized,” and, “discredited,” by the Kremlin, as the movement’s networking and horizontal communication capabilities were seen as a threat to the Putin regime.²²⁸ In 2013, following the Snow Revolution, Udaltsov was placed on house arrest and, later, was sentenced to over four years in prison for his hand in organizing Bolotnaya.²²⁹ He was released in 2017, only to continue his work with the opposition.²³⁰ In 2018, he led some of the numerous protests against the increased pension age, and was sentenced to thirty more days in jail for violating public gathering regulations.²³¹ He has been arrested on several other occasions; still, his efforts have continued in the form of issue-based protests that create links to the greater issue of governmental corruption.²³²

This coming analysis within this section of the chapter will lay out the measurements of durability, set forth by social movement theory, in relation to the New Decembrists and their following as a whole.

1. Collective Identity and Claims

The New Decembrists and their followers collectively identified against corruption of the government and, especially, against an apathetic public. According to Idov, “On September 24, 2011... Medvedev got up in front of the United Russia congress and simply announced Putin was coming back. There would be no competition from within the party,

²²⁷ RFE/RL, “Russian Opposition Activist Jailed Over Pension-Reform Protests,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, August 15, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-opposition-activist-jailed-over-pension-reform-protests/29434855.html>.

²²⁸ Khvostunova, “Russia’s Political Prisoners.”

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Mitya Aleshkovsky, “Who is Sergei Udaltsov?” *Moscow Times*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/08/08/who-is-udaltsov-a58609>; RFE/RL, “Russian Opposition Activist Jailed Over Pension-Reform Protests.”

²³¹ RFE/RL, “Russian Opposition Activist Jailed Over Pension-Reform Protests.”

²³² Sean Guillory, “Left in a Corner,” *Jacobin Magazine*, June 11, 2018, <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/06/russian-left-communist-party-navalny-udaltsov>.

no primaries, no campaign. There would be, for all intents and purposes, no real election.”²³³ Putin’s casual walk back into political power signified a lack of legitimacy in the electoral process, which the journalists and their followers stood vehemently against in favor of free elections. However, this movement also recognized that the apathy of the Russian public was of concern. After the chaotic instability of 1990s post-Soviet Russia, the Russian people generated a culture of passivity toward Putin’s regime, so long as Putin maintained economic and national security in exchange (referred to in the previous chapters as Putin’s social contract).²³⁴ The younger fraction of society (including the revolutionaries) did not remember the hardship of instability, and were ready to sacrifice it for change.²³⁵

The overarching claim the movement operated under was a lack of real political freedom. The movement’s efforts included a call for free and honest elections. According to Idov,

On December 4, 2011,... United Russia operatives were seen bring buses from polling station to polling station to vote multiple times... institutions such as schools, army bases, and, in one infamous case, a mental hospital, delivered nearly 100 percent of the vote to Putin’s party... Observers saw neat stacks of prefilled ballots shoved into boxes. Those who tried to point out the irregularities were shown the door.²³⁶

This widely shared experience of electoral fraud aided in motivating the masses to join in the protests and call for elections that honestly reflected the desires of the country. Five major demands of the movement are well summarized as follows: “Freedom for political prisoners; forfeit of the election results; investigation of the head of the Central Elections Committee; the ability to freely register opposition parties; and a blueprint for new, fair elections at an unspecified point in the future.”²³⁷ Thus, under these claims, the

²³³ Idov, *Dressed up for a Riot*, 48.

²³⁴ Ibid, 40.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid, 48.

²³⁷ Ibid, 51.

New Decembrists sparked a series of massive protests against the corruption of the political process, and for liberty thereof.

In the aftermath of the Snow Revolution, Krasilshchik's Meduza has remained consistent with its initial identities against Putin's corruption, while Dzyadko's Arzamas has adjusted its claims slightly. According to Idov, Dzyadko's project works under the claim that politicians and the Kremlin have wrongly manipulated Russia's history to provide a source of power or wrongful justification of actions.²³⁸ To combat this accused wrongdoing, Arzamas stresses free provision of courses on Russia's cultural and political history to all. Meanwhile, Udaltsov and his Left Front have identified under the desire for the combination of democracy with socialist and communist-like elements to the social and economic sectors of society, and the claims that the Russian government has mistreated its people as a whole.²³⁹

2. Resources

In terms of resources, the New Decembrists relied heavily on free access to the internet. Specifically, leaders of the movement utilized social media platforms to both personally invite friends and to leave scheduled events open to the public's intrigue.²⁴⁰ This resource brought in a specific crowd--the youth population—which would furthermore serve as an additional resource to the movement:

The Internet, by 2011, remained wholly uncensored... As a result, sites like LiveJournal and, later, Facebook and its homegrown cousin, VKontakte, gradually began to function less as social networks in the Western sense than as alternative mass media for a whole new class growing up right under the government's nose: those who barely remembered the Soviet Union at all.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Amos, "Arzamas."

²³⁹ Khvostunova, "Russia's Political Prisoners," accessed June 12, 2019; RFE/RL, "Russian Opposition Activist Jailed Over Pension-Reform Protests."

²⁴⁰ Ibov, *Dressed up for a Riot*, 39–49.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

Like the movement's leaders, many of those attracted to the protests were also of the younger population in Russia. The New Decembrist's turn to social media for mass gatherings allowed the events to spread quickly and to attract the portion of the Russian people who had no fear of a return to the chaos of the 1990s, and were ready to move in the name of democracy. These social media sites also served to quickly share video evidence of voting fraud, an issue that also brought in the benefits of the modern camera cellphone as an important resource.²⁴²

The internet and social media still prove imperative as a resource for the leaders' extended efforts today. Krasilshchik's Meduza relies on the free use of the internet to report news to the masses, as, "Millions of young Russians are abandoning television news for the internet, and more often than not on their mobile phones."²⁴³ Dzyadko's Arzamas perhaps relies most directly on the free use of the internet, as the project almost solely produces material via podcasts, videos, social media, and several other accessible internet media.²⁴⁴ Other resources for this project include funding from socialite Anastasia Chukhrai and financial partnerships with the likes of the Tretyakov Gallery and Russian search engine Yandex.²⁴⁵ Udaltsov's movement, meanwhile, relies heavily on its network of opposition groups and freedom of speech to continually rally people in motivated protest.²⁴⁶ As Udaltsov is quoted as having said, "Only a public response and large protests can make the authorities ease the repressions."²⁴⁷ This group relies heavily on its ability to upkeep the very communication that the Kremlin has labeled a threat to political stability.

²⁴² Ibid., 46–49.

²⁴³ "Meduza Editor in Chief Ilya Krasilshchik Speaks with Students on the Current State of Russian Press," Middlebury Institute of International Studies, October 26, 2018, <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/graduate-initiative-russian-studies/girs-news/meduza-editor-chief>.

²⁴⁴ Amos, "Arzamas."

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Khvostunova, "Russia's Political Prisoners."

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

3. Organization and Membership

For the Snow Revolution and the three specific New Decembrists under analysis, organization and membership is straightforward in that it is volunteer based. Participants of the Snow Revolution were not required to belong to any group, and leaders of the Snow Revolution simply tended to be a few connected journalists. Readers of Meduza are free to read or skip over the views of the magazine, and the organization of the group is that of an officially established place of news media business rather than a social movement, with journalists and editors involved. Dzyadko works alongside highly-respected academics on Arzamas, and he aims to attract anyone who might have lost touch with their knowledge of history.²⁴⁸ Udaltsov's Left Front operates with press secretaries, regional branch managers, social media specialists, and other positions typical of an NGO or social movement, with Udaltsov as the primary leading figure.²⁴⁹ Membership is free and only requires answers to a brief questionnaire.²⁵⁰

4. Mobilization Capabilities

The mobilization capabilities of the New Decembrists marked a historical point in Russian social movement history. As firsthand revolution witness Michael Idov wrote, between 60,000 and 100,000 participants, "'Bolotnaya,' as the December 10 rally was already known, was by an order of magnitude the largest public demonstration Russia's capital had seen in more than a decade."²⁵¹ Although the protests that followed in the succeeding months were smaller in scale, they continued to surface periodically until May of 2012, when stricter laws on protests were put into place.²⁵² Mobilization of Krasilshchik and Dzyadko followings cannot truly be measured, as they two have settled into journalism rather than contentious activism in the form of protests. It should be noted, though, that as

²⁴⁸ Amos, "Arzamas."

²⁴⁹ "Contact," The Left Front, accessed June 12, 2019, https://www.leftfront.org/?page_id=38.

²⁵⁰ The Left Front, <https://www.leftfront.org>.

²⁵¹ Amos, "Arzamas"; Schwartz, "Few at Putin's Party Rally."

²⁵² Amos, "Arzamas"; Schwartz, "Few at Putin's Party Rally."

of 2015, “The monthly readership of Meduza exceeded 3.5 million unique visitors, with 320,000 app downloads and more than 500,000 followers on social media.”²⁵³ And, with regard to Dzyadko’s Arzamas, as of July 2018, “About 1 million people [were] subscribed to their pages on social media and they have averaged around 4 million monthly views.”²⁵⁴ Although this does not technically qualify as mobilization, as people are not gathering in protest, these numbers show potential relevance of these prior revolutionaries’ works on Russian opposition culture still today. Meanwhile, mobilization of Udaltsov’s following and the Left Front can be seen in quasi-regular protests since Bolotnaya that have sometimes involved hundreds of participants.²⁵⁵ Many of these participants are also aligned with other leftist organizations to which Udaltsov and the Left Front have established close ties.²⁵⁶ Such networking has proven essential to the survival of his movement thus far.

D. ALEXEI NAVALNY’S ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT

As a leader of one of the most expansive opposition campaigns of 21st century Russia, the name Alexei Navalny began to make its way around in 2007 when the anti-Putin lawyer started a blog aimed at exposing corruption within the Kremlin.²⁵⁷ Perhaps Putin’s most sincere threat in the anti-corruption campaign, Navalny has organized, led, and inspired tens of street protests, large and small.²⁵⁸ The primary concern of both Navalny and his following is the intense corruption that exists within Putin’s regime. To combat this element of the Russian government, he founded the Anti-Corruption

²⁵³ The Wilson Center, “Ilya Krasilshchik.”

²⁵⁴ Amos, “Arzamas.”

²⁵⁵ Ilya Azar, “Sergei Udaltsov: Has the Russian Left Found Its New Leader?” *Open Democracy*, April 20, 2012, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/sergei-udaltsov-has-russian-left-found-its-new-leader/>.

²⁵⁶ Guillory, “Left in a Corner.”

²⁵⁷ Veronika Bondarenko, “Meet Alexei Navalny—the Opposition Leader Challenging Putin,” *Business Insider*, March 28, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/who-is-alexei-navalny-vladimir-putin-russia-protests-2017-3>.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Foundation in 2011, helped to lead the opposition in the Snow Revolution, accepted election to chairholder of the Progress Party in 2013, planned to run against Putin in the 2018 elections, and has gained enough of a following to provide threat to Putin's reelection campaign.²⁵⁹ Navalny has been dubbed, "Russia's Last Opposition Hero," and "The Man Putin Fears Most."²⁶⁰

As a major competitor to Putin and his regime, Navalny and his following have faced countless challenges in terms of government restrictions. Navalny himself has been arrested multiple times, only to return promptly to his anti-Putin-themed passion of rallying the people against regime corruption.²⁶¹ Perhaps the most significant challenges have been the government's constant evolution of legislation to prevent Navalny from campaigning for presidency or organize his protests to take place in any form, as well as constant denial of official registration of his progress party by the Ministry of Justice.²⁶² By denying official registration, the party was unable to support or participate officially in the political campaign for presidential office, according to legislation.²⁶³ Thus, with Navalny, his following, and his party posing a potential threat to the Putin regime (and, therefore, the soft-authoritarian Russian regime), such preventative action could minimize this threat of the opposition.²⁶⁴ The government furthermore relied on legislation that required the independent candidate to acquire 300,000 signatures from around the country, but failed to

²⁵⁹ Ibid.; "Navalny Party Denied Registration Over Name," *Moscow Times*, January 22, 2014, <http://old.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/navalny-party-denied-registration-over-name/493053.html>; "Navalny Caves in to Freemasons, Renames Party," *RT*, February 10, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/russia/navalny-party-progress-rename-332/>; Isabel Gortz, "Alexei Navalny: The anti-Putin the Kremlin Can't Neutralize," *Irish Times*, February 10, 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/alexei-navalny-the-anti-putin-the-kremlin-can-t-neutralise-1.3385702>.

²⁶⁰ Bondarenko, "Meet Alexei Navalny."

²⁶¹ Sergey Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?" Wilson Center, August 23, 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/what-the-point-navalnys-pointless-election>; Bondarenko, "Meet Alexei Navalny."

²⁶² "Mistake in Constituent Documents Prevents Registration of Navalny Party's Branches," *RAPSI News*, April 9, 2014, <http://rapsinews.com/news/20140409/271111291.html>.

²⁶³ "Navalny's Party Hits Hitch in Registration," *Sputnik News*, May 6, 2013, <https://sputniknews.com/politics/20130506180994834-Navalny-Party-Hits-Hitch-in-Registration-Bid/>.

²⁶⁴ Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?"

predict Navalny's creative determination to pursue this requirement.²⁶⁵ Additionally, as Parkhomenko wrote, "By early June [of 2017], the number of campaign offices had reached sixty. And each visit of Alexei Navalny with his team to a city becomes the main event of that city's life."²⁶⁶ In the process of acquiring the signatures, Navalny only expanded his geographic influence in the opposition movement. All the while, he continued the endeavor to register the Progress Party. On May 19, 2018, after six failed attempts to register the Progress Party, Navalny elected to start a new party under a different title: Russia of the Future.²⁶⁷ This party, although similar to the Progress Party in its anti-corruption identity and even a nearly identical logo, is differentiated in that its goal is, "Real changes, real reforms."²⁶⁸ Navalny's followership has battled through numerous unexpected limitations. Regardless of erected roadblocks on the path toward effecting oppositional change, though, his followership has hopped on board with his new party's stated motivation to enact "real change," which suggests it has no plans to back out of the political scene. Like the Progress Party, however, the Ministry of Justice suspiciously denied official registration of this new party's name in May of 2019.²⁶⁹ The Ministry claimed that the name had already been taken by "Party of Free Citizens," which reported no name changes.²⁷⁰

1. Collective Identity and Claims

The identity Navalny's following is mainly sourced at the basis of democracy, with anti-corruption and a decentralized government at its core. His anti-corruption foundation operates under the identity of its namesake: anti-corruption within the government. And, according to journalist Sergey Parkhomenko, "Navalny's supporters conduct their street

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ "Russian Opposition Leader Navalny To Create New Party," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 3, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-navalny-to-create-new-political-party/29142446.html>.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ RFE/RL, "The Ministry of Justice has registered a party called "Russia of the Future," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 31, 2019. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29974873.html>.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

protests under the same anticorruption slogans he uses in his investigations.”²⁷¹ To continue the example of cohesion within his followership, Sputnik News noted that his party platform offers, “Reform [of] Russia’s judiciary and law enforcements,” and the home page of the party’s website furthermore claims, “Russia needs strong state institutions: the parliament, an independent court, local government, the media, public control. The executive and legislative branches should clearly carry out their functions and regularly take turns with the help of fair elections.”²⁷² Essentially suggesting the need for a system of checks and balances, as well as the removal of corruption and flaw in the courts and police force, all of these realms of Navalny’s brand of opposition prescribe to the broader concept of free and fair democracy.

In addition to that of general corruption, further claim to action under Navalny’s inspiration and leadership is that of embezzlement by leading government officials. Medvedev has especially been under accusation of such actions: “In a video that has been viewed nearly 13 million times, Navalny accuses Medvedev of owning land, mansions, and luxury yachts from wealth accrued through questionable political deals and state loans.”²⁷³ With work such as this, Navalny has expanded claims of corruption to include embezzlement, therefore adding the claim of an additional layer of fraudulent governance under Putin’s regime. The collective aforementioned ideologies are those which his movements identify under. Navalny also symbolizes these values himself through his various accounts of protest against the regime, therefore representing a culture of freedom, democracy, and change.²⁷⁴ Navalny has united the followers of his several political endeavors (anti-corruption foundation, progress party, campaign supporters, etc.) under his crafted themes of anticorruption and democracy.

²⁷¹ Parkhomenko, “What is the Point of Navalny’s Pointless Election?”

²⁷² “Navalny Declines to Join His Own Party,” *Sputnik News*, December 12, 2012, <https://sputniknews.com/politics/20121215178184843/>; Progress Party, <https://partyprogress.org>.

²⁷³ Bondarenko, “Meet Alexei Navalny.”

²⁷⁴ Alexis Mrachek, “‘The Navalny Effect’ on Russia,” The Heritage Foundation, February 5, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/commentary/the-navalny-effect-russia>.

2. Resources

For Navalny's following, private donations and social media have provided the resources necessary for mobilization. Private donations have maintained the Progress Party and Anti-Corruption Foundation, along with the rest of Navalny's endeavors.²⁷⁵ Navalny admitted that the funding for his work has been largely sourced from the efforts of his Fifth Season of the Year foundation, which he has used to, "Collect donations that finance campaign materials, among other weapons in his drive against corruption and the workings of the Kremlin under President Vladimir V. Putin."²⁷⁶ These donations, which came from the average Russian citizen, amounted to nearly \$4.9 million over the course of 2017 alone.²⁷⁷ In December of 2017, though, officials banned Navalny from candidacy, which Navalny responded to by calling on his followers to boycott the entire election.²⁷⁸ As a result, Putin called for investigation of the Fifth Season of the Year foundation, which led to its disbandment and greater difficulty in financial resourcing for Navalny's work.²⁷⁹ The movement's activity in social media has furthermore aided in the mobilization of people for Navalny and against the regime. Although access to news media has been slight, the group has turned to the freedom offered through social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and especially YouTube. These platforms have allowed Navalny to appeal to a broad population with accessible, easily ingested posts, tweets, videos, or even blogs that detail claims against government corruption and calls for action.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁵ "About Us," Anti-Corruption Foundation, accessed May 12, 2019, <https://fbk.info/english/about/>.

²⁷⁶ Ivan Nechepurenko, "Russian Court Closes Foundation of Aleksei Navalny, a Kremlin Critic," *New York Times*, January 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/22/world/europe/aleksei-navalny-foundation-russia.html>.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.; RFE/RL, "Navalny Lay out Campaign Finance Plan," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, December 16, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-navalny-campaign/28180616.html>

²⁷⁸ Nechepurenko, "Russian Court Closes Foundation."

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?"

3. Organization and Membership

As a whole, Navalny's followership operates primarily under his leadership. He has accomplished this via maintaining a personal and visible role in social media platforms, street demonstrations, his foundations, and his parties. His Progress Party operated under Navalny as the chairman, and eight others as elected members of the central council.²⁸¹ His election campaign was headed by Leonid Volkov, along with other varying departmental leaders such as a fund's executive director.²⁸² However, the rest of his endeavors appear to operate in a horizontal manner under Navalny. His new party, Russia of the Future, is headed by Navalny and shows no sign of other leadership. The Anti-Corruption Foundation, with Navalny as founder and leader, includes a staff of, "30 people, who research and investigate cases of corruption."²⁸³ And his social media platforms, naturally, operate under the thumb of Navalny himself. As the head of the opposition forces to the Putin regime, Navalny must remain a tough, present, and accessible leader to politicians and his followers alike.²⁸⁴ Navalny has provided the leading figure for numerous organizations and demonstrations, and has emphasized the efforts of his movements rather than the political potential of climbing any hierarchical ladder within his movements.

The attainment of membership or followership is largely on a volunteer basis. Membership within the Anti-Corruption foundation appears to be more similar to the application to and maintenance of a job, while that of the Progress Party can be attained via an online application with no evidence of mandatory membership fees.²⁸⁵ His campaigns operate on a volunteer basis, as well as followers of his social media and participants in his protests. Volunteer-ship is the underlining theme to the life of a follower of Alexei Navalny, with no evident costs or long-term required ties.

²⁸¹ "Party," Progress Party, <https://partyprogress.org/party/#ashurkov>.

²⁸² Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?"

²⁸³ Anti-Corruption Foundation, "About Us."

²⁸⁴ Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?"

²⁸⁵ Anti-Corruption Foundation, "About Us."

4. Mobilization Capabilities

When evaluating mobilization and capacity thereof regarding Navalny's movements, analysis should consider numbers involved in demonstrations, as well as voting results in his mayoral elections. To begin with analysis of mobilization in participation numbers, Parkhomenko noted that, although Navalny mobilized 25 to 30 thousand people in March 2017 and 100 thousand people in June, his ability to mobilize masses relative to Russia's 140 million citizens is still in question.²⁸⁶ At the dissolution of his Progress Party in 2018, the party held 100,000 members.²⁸⁷ Attaining membership to the group was simple and anti-elitist. Potential new members were only required to submit a questionnaire and an application.²⁸⁸ Especially since Navalny detached from the party, the Progress Party has not organized protests, Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation have done so, effectively expanding and continuing opportunity for his followership. Among these protests have been those involved with the anti-corruption demonstrations in 2017–2018, a nationwide boycott against voting in the 2018 presidential elections, and numerous non-government sanctioned outdoor rallies over the years, among others.²⁸⁹ These groups, as well as his social media following, have networked fluidly among one another.²⁹⁰ His social media outreach has furthermore managed to attract Russia's youth (to include teenagers).²⁹¹ The networking among these portions of his movement have provided a broad support base for Navalny, as well as greater potential for growth as his outreach impacts varying factions of people within Russian society.

Regarding Navalny's mobilization via his pursuit of political office, he gained his following came in an unexpected manner. In 2013, Navalny ran for mayor of Moscow without Kremlin funding or support, unlike his opponent, who was also incumbent

²⁸⁶ Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?"

²⁸⁷ Progress Party, <https://partyprogress.org>.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Mrachek, "The Navalny Effect' on Russia."

²⁹⁰ *Sputnik News*, "Navalny Declines to Join His Own Party."

²⁹¹ Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?"

mayor.²⁹² As Parkhomenko noted, “At the beginning of the mayoral campaign, by contrast, Navalny had a handful of volunteer supporters and negligible financing compared to his rival. Nonetheless, he managed to collect nearly a third of the votes, which put him in the second place.”²⁹³ In this case, although he lost the election, Navalny still mobilized a third of Moscow’s vote for mayor, which proved the assumptions of his total loss wrong and the potentiality for his spreading civilian support a reality.²⁹⁴ As a result of this political endeavor, Parkhomenko wrote, “The campaign itself could help a human ecosystem coalesce around a leader, an ecosystem that was capable of maintaining and enhancing his popularity. It also became clear that a campaign creates an organizational structure that doesn’t disappear after the votes have been counted.”²⁹⁵ And, as noted in the introduction sections to Navalny’s movements above, Navalny’s efforts in the 2018 elections furthermore expanded his geographical reach within Russia.²⁹⁶ Even with the technical loss of the mayoral elections and his ultimately denied candidacy in the 2018 presidential elections, Navalny’s movement only expanded as a whole.

E. CONCLUSION

After evaluation of the potential durability of the preceding movements based on measurements set forth by social movement theory, it is clear that the answer is not immediately predictable in all cases. Oborona, although promising in its initial founding, failed to create an environment of genuine inclusivity with a solid collective identity that would also prove beneficial in networking relationships. It also failed to maintain significant mobilization of participants with time and change of leadership, which led to the demise of the movement. The New Decembrists, while still active in the opposition movement, have also failed to consistently mobilize a powerful force of people and have

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid; Bondarenko, “Meet Alexei Navalny.”

²⁹⁵ Parkhomenko, “What is the Point of Navalny’s Pointless Election?”

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

been met with careful legislative containment by the Putin regime. Navalny and his following have maintained consistent activity in contentious politics under a unified identity against the general corruption of the Putin regime. But, like the other actors, this movement has shown no evidence of significant and growing mobilization numbers. Still, the New Decembrists and Navalny have not backed out of the opposition arena. Both movements have shown potential to maintain existence despite difficulties set forth by the Putin regime. However, the meaningful impact of such endurance is in doubt if it applies to no more than a small fraction of Russian society.

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VIII. CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzes the potential durability of opposition movements in Putin's Russia. To evaluate the opposition's durability, this thesis has applied the most recent literature on social movement theory to the Russian context..²⁹⁷ The following characteristics have been established as essential to the durability of a social movement: collective identity and claims, resources, organization and membership, and mobilization.²⁹⁸ According to SMT, with strength and consistency in these areas, a movement has the potential to prove durable within contentious politics.²⁹⁹ This thesis set out to use SMT to determine the durability of Russian social movements before and after the Snow Revolution, with the finding that Russian groups have historically failed to mobilize enough of the public to apply pressure on the government to effect change, and are therefore not likely to be durable.³⁰⁰

Beginning with analysis of contentious politics in the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras, this thesis established that the progression of the opposition movement from late Soviet-era to present day has been rather cyclical in nature. In the mid-1980s, under Gorbachev's perestroika period, groups and demonstrations began to surface and exist with less government backlash than in the pre-Gorbachev period, although they were still illegal.³⁰¹ Their illegality is what led to their development as social movements rather than as professional organizations or NGOs.³⁰² Gorbachev provided his people the liberties to assemble and speak that previously did not exist; as a result, many demonstrations and movements arose, some of which (like the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers) formed into

²⁹⁷ Bate, Bevan, and Robert, "Towards a Million Change Agents," 2.

²⁹⁸ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*; Henry, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia."

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.; *Moscow Times*, "Kremlin Schedules Pro-Government Rallies."

³⁰¹ Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rogers, "The State and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia," 156–157.

³⁰² Ibid.; Fish, "The Emergence of Independent Associations."

social movements.³⁰³ Overall, contentious political activity spiked briefly with the liberalization of Gorbachev's perestroika period

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, the eruption of activity in contentious politics slowed drastically with Yeltsin's shaky economy.³⁰⁴ Hope and opportunity for civic political activity remained high after Poland's Solidarity, Hungary's Danube Circle protests, and demonstrations in Germany and Czechoslovakia all occurred surrounding the disintegration of communism in their respective nations in the 1980s.³⁰⁵ Yeltsin operated under a hands-off style of governance regarding social movements and contentious politics, which provided possibility for movement growth. However, the poor economy and resulting lack of available resources (funding, people, time, etc.) led to widespread apathy.³⁰⁶ The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers was one of few movements that flourished at this time; many others, although given the opportunity to expand under Yeltsin's laissez fair attitude, failed to do so.³⁰⁷

When control over the nation was passed to Putin in 1999, political apathy continued among the Russian people, although a rise in contentious politics and social movements had potential.³⁰⁸ The early 2000s were notably quiet in the wake of Putin's implementation of soft authoritarianism, his vigilance over social activity in political demonstrations, and the rising prominence of the pro-Putin movement that took off with regime endorsement and support.³⁰⁹ This time was also quiet as a result of the unspoken social contract that involved improving economic wellbeing by the government in

³⁰³ Turbine, "Women's Human Rights in Russia."

³⁰⁴ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*.

³⁰⁵ Kopecky, *Uncivil Society?*

³⁰⁶ Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia," 12.

³⁰⁷ Turbine, "Women's Human Rights in Russia."

³⁰⁸ Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia," 12.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

exchange for a cooperative and compliant public.³¹⁰ Some issue-based social movements surfaced especially around the mid to late 2000s, such as the welfare protests and pensioner protests and Dissenter's March. These failed to expand after some amount of resolution was established for their claims.³¹¹ Instead, they quieted back down to neutral. The CSM, however, was again one of the movements that evolved to maintain political relevance.³¹² A few groups with broader claims regarding government corruption as a whole, such as "Say No" and Oborona, managed to gain some initial headway. Even Oborona dissolved in about five years as it failed to uphold most of SMT's characteristics of durability.³¹³ With signs of a revival among the opposition, however, Putin's response came in the form of endorsement of support movements such as Nashi, warnings and bans against many protests, and police brutality.³¹⁴ The 2000s did not present a net rise in activity among social movements in Russia, but it did experience an awakening of possibility to demonstrate and to act.

The journalist leaders of the Snow Revolution of 2011 brought a revival to the opposition with more protestors on the streets than ever before in the history of the Russian Federation. Such demonstrations continued (although on smaller scales) over the course of nearly two years.³¹⁵ However, the government's ability to quash the movement via police enforcement, media control, and legislation quieted the opposition forces yet again. They have failed to mobilize in similar numbers since.³¹⁶ Among the revolutions most prominent leaders, New Decembrists Ilya Krasilshchik, Filipp Dzyadko, and Sergei Udaltsov are still politically active today in their own ways, although they have since lost

³¹⁰ Ibid.; Harding, "Protests against Putin Sweep Russia as Factories Go Broke."

³¹¹ RFE/RL, "Russia: Protest Movements are Coordinating and Stepping Up Efforts."

³¹² Human Rights Agents, "Soldiers' Mothers of Saint Petersburg."

³¹³ Lyytikäinen, "Performing Political Opposition in Russia," 43.

³¹⁴ Atwal and Bacon, "The Youth Movement Nashi."

³¹⁵ Gel'man, "The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia"; Global Nonviolent Action Database, "Russians Protest Against Election Fraud."

³¹⁶ Loffe, "Snow Revolution"; Masha Gessen, "Russia Repercussions"; Sulimina, "The Empire Strikes Back."

ties to one another.³¹⁷ None of these journalists have maintained mobilization numbers significant enough or with clear enough ideologies to effect governmental change beyond access to educational opportunities and continued work in journalism and small demonstrations.³¹⁸ The government responded to the Snow Revolution and the New Decembrists with police control over protests, political arrests of leaders and participants, and new legislation that expanded the definition of foreign agents and political involvement among social groups.³¹⁹ As Gel'man stated, following the Snow Revolution, "...The scope of abuse and repression against the opposition (and threats thereof) dramatically increased."³²⁰

Since the Snow Revolution, the government has added numerous barriers to activity within Russian social movements, although demonstrations and groups have persisted on varying levels. Many of the present-day movements are issue-focused rather than anti-systemic.³²¹ Unpaid teachers and autoworkers presented the first response to Putin's economic policies, and truckers followed suit in retaliation of a new road tax.³²² Pensioner protests have resurfaced and protests against the new Internet sovereignty law (part of the government's attempt to control the opposition) emerged.³²³ Such issue-based demonstrations have been met with resolve by the Putin administration, as an outspokenly angry population could pose a threat to the regime.³²⁴ One long-term movement that has remained since the Snow Revolution is that of Alexei Navalny, who emerged during and aided in leading the Snow Revolution. He has since mobilized thousands for the 2017–

³¹⁷ Ibov, *Dressed up for a Riot*, 39–52.

³¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups."

³¹⁹ Ibid.; Bacon, "Policy Change."

³²⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups"; Bacon, "Policy Change."

³²¹ Kramer, "Unpaid Russian Workers Unite in Protest Against Putin."

³²² Ibid.; Pertsev, "The Kremlin is the Real Winner."

³²³ Reuters, "Russian Police Detain over 800 People Protesting Pension Changes."

³²⁴ Pertsev, "The Kremlin is the Real Winner."

2018 anti-corruption protests, among other demonstrations.³²⁵ The identity of his following is more expansive than most others, as it is concerned with the multi-faceted corruption of the Putin regime.³²⁶ Navalny, one of Putin's most legitimate threats, has mobilized thousands in the form of protests, independent presidential candidacy signatures, and election campaigns.³²⁷ Still, like the other demonstrations of opposition, Navalny has failed to mobilize enough citizens to generate lasting, impactful change. To complicate matters, the government has responded via threats against protest organization and involvement, legislation that has banned the involvement of youth in contentious politics, continued political arrests, increased difficulty in attaining protest permits, organization of pro-government rallies, and false reporting of demonstration numbers to downplay the mobilization of the opposition.³²⁸ Putin's ambition to reduce opportunity for threat against his regime is evident and has thus far proven effective. Regardless of continued efforts to mobilize against issues or general corruption within the regime, the overall mobilization of the opposition has yet to overwhelm the repression attempts of the state.

Over time, the propensity for Russians to protest in opposition to the state has wavered alongside the government approval and trust ratings. The Levada Center's survey results regarding whether the individual would be willing to protest are inversely related to the approval of Putin.³²⁹ According to the surveys, between 1994 and 2017, as public approval of Putin decreased, willingness to protest over economic or political demands increased, and vice versa.³³⁰

Although the cyclical nature of movements of contentious politics have not resulted in net political change in favor of their agendas, Russia's opposition forces have still

³²⁵ Schwartz, "Russia's Political Youths"; Filipov, "Russian Police Arrest Protestors."

³²⁶ Bondarenko, "Meet Alexei Navalny."

³²⁷ Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?"

³²⁸ Ingber, "Russians, Fearing Internet Isolation, Protest Government Plan"; *PEN America*, "Russia's New Law on Public Protests"; BBC News, "Russia Internet Freedom."

³²⁹ Levada-Center, "From Opinion to Understanding."

³³⁰ Ibid.

demonstrated some strengths on the scale of SMT durability. They have managed to mobilize the civilian population in moments of opportunity, evident in events like the 2005 welfare protests, the 2009 Dissenter's March, the 2011–2013 Snow Revolution, the 2015 truckers protests, the 2018 landfill protests, etc.³³¹ The youth of Oborona, the New Decembrists of 2011, and the following of Navalny are all evidence of the opposition's continued desire to stand up for (and identify under) democratic principles and to speak out against the faults of Putin's soft-authoritarian government.³³² Periodic efforts to mobilize the Russian public have shown potential, however, only in small numbers or for brief periods of time.

The weaknesses this thesis has discovered in the opposition are those that have stunted its overall capability in Putin's Russia. The opposition has failed to mobilize large numbers in the long term. Oborona dissolved, the New Decembrists are essentially estranged from one another, and the Navalny movement has mobilized decent numbers over short periods rather than mass numbers over longer timeframes. Another weakness is the opposition's inability to continue to gain momentum through the threats of government changes in legislation.³³³ There furthermore exists an inability to overpower the pro-government movements that have the financial backing of the state.³³⁴ The government has both engaged with and shut down contentious politics to its advantage, and the opposition has yet to find a successful way to break through such barriers to its expansion.

The information presented in this thesis has shown an all-around lack of promise for the durability of anti-government movements in Russia. After having reviewed the state of contentious politics and having applied the measurements of durability set forth by SMT, the resilience of the opposition as a whole appears slight. There has been and will likely continue to exist a certain set of people who are opposed to the actions of the state, but this

³³¹ Spicer, "The Other Russia."

³³² Levitsky and Way, "Elections Without Democracy"; Schwirtz, "Russia's Political Youths," 76; Ibov, *Dressed up for a Riot*, 39–52; Parkhomenko, "What is the Point of Navalny's Pointless Election?."

³³³ Gel'man, "The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia."

³³⁴ Ibid.

is a small part of society. The relatively small mobilization that has presented itself thus far has used windows of opportunity to call for Putin to step down or reform his government in favor of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, honest and fair elections and other basic democratic principles.³³⁵ However, these requests have yet to be met and the movements that call for these requests show no sign of expansion.³³⁶ While these movements work to bolster up larger numbers, the Putin regime has demonstrated great skill in combatting the opposition, meanwhile also isolating the average Russian from awareness of protests.³³⁷ The regime has recently passed legislation to disconnect Russians from the world wide web (a massively important resource to the mobilization success of the Snow Revolution) among other freedom-encroaching legislation. Ability to mobilize massively and freely is continually stifled.³³⁸ With the government's thus far successful campaign to suppress anti-government movements and mobilization numbers too minimal to generate a necessity for genuine change, hope for the resilience of Russia's opposition force is nominal at present. The most promising mobilization opportunity for opposition movements appears to require a massive violation of the promise of economic wellbeing on Putin's part. If the opposition is to successfully pressure the Putin regime to exchange soft-authoritarianism for the freedoms of democracy, it would need to mobilize mass numbers over a sustained period of time. Unless that opportunity arises and the opposition seizes that moment, the resilience of the Russian opposition to Putin's regime appears ill-fated.

³³⁵ Sakwa, "Whatever Happened to the Opposition?"

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia."

³³⁸ "Reuters, "Thousands of Russians Protest Against Internet Restrictions."

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