DEFINING COMMON GROUND:

The Language of Mobilization in Russian Protests

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ABSTRACT: Relying on original evidence drawn from surveys and focus group discussions, we explore the structure of grievances among anti-government protesters, pro-government rally participants, and non-participants in Russian in 2012-2013. We show that the protests reflected a national conversation about the direction in which the country was moving. While in many ways the activists on both sides of the street appear quite similar, the analysis underscores the significant role that the President in shaping regime assessments for both rally participants and non-participants but not for protesters. Instead, we find that protesters' grievances focused on political corruption in state institutions, among the bureaucratic elite, and within the economic system. We also find that both protesters and rally participants saw participation in street actions as a moral duty that linked their very different political concerns to personal interest and a desire to safeguard society.

On election night, December 4, 2011, small but unexpected protests emerged in Moscow's city center in response to reported election fraud. Within two weeks, the protests grew to include tens of thousands of citizens who repeatedly took to the streets over the next six months, demanding honest government. Few observers predicted these actions, which occurred between December and June 2012 and expanded beyond rallies and marches to creative protests in the form of citizen's walks, writers' and musician's walks, and a series of occupy encampments. Nor did analysts anticipate the spread of anti-corruption, anti-Putin protests from Moscow to the large cities of Russia's regions.

On the other side of the regime divide, Mr. Putin's Kremlin organized a series of pro-government rallies. Initiated as a means of portraying overwhelming social support for the regime in the face of opposition protests, the rallies quickly transformed into campaign events to win votes for Mr. Putin who faced re-election in March. These rallies emerged at the forefront of Mr. Putin's recommitment to symbolic politics as a mechanism to sustain social support for the regime. The messages of these rallies were also quite clear, melding images of cultural tradition, religion, history, and Mr. Putin with a powerful message of the threat from international enemies, poised to destroy the stability of the regime and the state, and therefore everyday life.

On their face, these conflicting streets actions, opposition protests and pro-government rallies were very different, particularly in their underlying models of mobilization. The opposition lacked many of the prerequisites of social movement organization - leadership, organization, and resources. Moreover, the opposition faced the dilemma of uniting widely distinct political views into a coherent frame that might sustain protest support. Yet, Muscovites continued to show up on the streets to demand reform. In contrast, the pro-government rallies testified to the might and resources of the state, and delivered supporters to rally sites selected to celebrate military (and sports) victories that defined the glory of Russia. They also demonstrated the overwhelming power of savvy deployment of budgetary resources and state-controlled media to sustain citizen loyalty.

Throughout the winter, the spectacle of these dueling visions of Russian society, activist opposition, and the faithful silent majority, played out in the streets, in the media, and in everyday conversation. Our work focuses on a piece of this national conversation: the narratives that emerged within the competing street actions. Relying on an analysis of survey data collected within the protests and focus groups involving protest participants, we show that the street actions essentially constituted a national conversation. The distinct models of mobilization on each side of the protest did not lead to distinct views of politics; rather they are best described as the flip sides of each other. That is, they constitute a constant set of issues that represent underlying attitudes about regime support and civic duty, in which each side takes an opposite opinion.

The next section of the paper briefly reviews the evolution of protests during the Putin era, highlighting the role of political grievances in protests on both sides of

the regime divide. We then turn to an empirical analysis of those political grievances, individual motivations to protest, and finally the political conditions that lead to protest. The analysis shows that activists and non-activists largely engaged the same issues in their conceptions of regime support and the cause of protest.[1] We argue that this finding has an important implication for the nature of regime support and the future of the protest movement.

The Origins of Protest: Two Visions of Russian Society

Analyses of Russian society tend to focus on its passivity and quiescence in the face of the growing authoritarianism of the Putin regime. Prior to December, 2011, dissident art exhibits and protest marches made international news precisely because they were rare, and therefore, interesting. Scholars describe Russian society in the 2000s as quiescent and passive. Without a doubt, the increasingly pre-determined nature of political competition under Mr. Putin brought about a decline in formal participation such as voter turnout, party activism and candidacies. Yet, as Laura Henry (2012) shows, low levels of formal participation masked significant popular participation in the practice of submitting written complaints to official offices at all levels of government. Moreover, she demonstrates that many of these complaints tap into discontent about civil and social rights protections but not political rights.

These patterns of growing activism are supported in Javeline and Linderman-Komarova's (2012) assessment of civil society organizations, which suggests a growing level of organizational support for civic engagement. Most importantly for this work, studies of Russian protest echo a picture of a slow but steady rise in both the types and numbers of protests in the later part of Mr. Putin's first presidency (Robertson 2009, 2010, Volkov 2012). As the Putin regime matured, the locus of protests shifted from the regions of Russia back to the center, forging the basis of protest as an acceptable social response to the closing political opportunity structure. This change in protest behavior gives evidence of a slow but steady shift in civic attitudes in Russia that include an increase in the components of social capital (Ma'karkin and Polischuk 2012).

Still, throughout this period, protests generally remained small and participation was limited to an emerging group of seemingly professional activists. The opposition continued to be separated by ideology and issue concerns that were not linked to broader concerns about the direction of government or the abrogation of democracy. Notable examples of political protest include the constant presence of Eduard Limonov's Strategy 31 protests in support of Russians' right to freedom of assembly (protected by Article 31 of the constitution), the KPRF's May Day marches, and the Dissenters' March led by the organization The Other Russia.

[1] In order to simply our presentation, we use the term protesters to refer to respondents who participated in anti-government protest and rally participants for those who participated in in pro-government rallies. When combined, we refer to these two groups as activists. We refer to the subsample that did not participate in either set of events as non-participants or non-activists.

Ultra-nationalists dressed in black balaclavas marched regularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In addition, groups such as Save Khimki Forest and the Society of the Blue Buckets (formed to draw attention to the elites' ubiquitous and dangerous use of law-enforcement style blue lights in order to evade Moscow's traffic) attracted significant popular attention. In addition to these high profile actions, there were also increasingly frequent local protests across Russia that contested land use, historic preservation, education reform, social policies such as abortion, and corruption.
However limited, these social rumblings clearly influenced the Kremlin. Despite the relative quiescence of Russian society since 1999, the Putin regime has behaved as if it sits atop a social powder keg that is ready to explode at any moment. In response to this perceived threat, the regime constructed an elaborate set of mechanisms to maintain social support from clientelist ties through the United Russia party organization in instances of politicized justice and coercion, such as the cases of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and more recently, Pussy Riot (Smyth and Soboleva 2013). Layered over these institutional mechanisms was a weighty engagement of symbolic politics that appealed to society on the basis of a redefinition of Russian national identity that tied loyalists to support of the regime (Goode 2012; Smyth et. al. 2013). Key to the Kremlin's strategy were the social organizations Nashi, Stal', the All-National People's Front, and the Young Guard of United Russia, which were developed to enable quick mobilization against any opposition action.

After 2006, pro-regime rallies provided tangible evidence of regime support and, in particular, support for Mr. Putin, even after he had passed the presidency on to Mr. Medvedev. Putin paraphernalia, from t-shirts and balloons, to candies, were ubiquitous at these events. Yet, despite the Kremlin's investments and their capacity to mobilize support at the first sign of an opposition protest, the regime could not forestall the growing anti-regime movement that emerged in the face of election fraud in December 2011. The anti-government protests played out in two waves. The first stretched from December, 2011 through June, 2012, while the second, smaller wave took place in the fall of 2012. Protests comprised of marches, rallies, and "walks" designed to evade the municipal law governing protests, and a series of occupations.

The regime responded with a series of well-orchestrated rallies that endeavored to project overwhelming social support for Putin - support that would be reflected at the polls. These events culminated in a rally at the Luzhniki Stadium that ended with a short speech by Mr. Putin that explicitly defined his voting bloc. He said, "There are tens of thousands and tens of millions of people like us. We want to ensure that there are more of us…" (Anti-Organists, 2012). The candidate thanked supporters for both their moral support and their votes. Posters hammered home the message that a vote for Putin was a vote for a strong Russia, stability, and a secure future. State media reports of the rallies reinforced the message that Putin was supported by an overwhelming majority of citizens by systematically underestimating the size of anti-regime protests and inflating pro-regime numbers.

In this paper, we examine the disjuncture and continuities of political grievances within and among participants and observers. Relying on evidence from surveys and focus groups, we explore the patterns of political discussion in the everyday lives of Muscovites. Given the evidence of different models of mobilization in the dueling street actions and the lack of organizational foundations for post-election protest, we expect to find variation in the grievances and characterizations of the regime and the protests themselves. To explore this proposition, we examine whether or not the pro- and anti-government meetings represented a national conversation about Russian politics or if they were two very different conversations occurring on different sides of the street. We also characterize the national conversation around the protests themselves: the individual motivations for protest, and the social and political explanations for anti-government protest. Our findings only partially confirm our expectations. While we do find evidence of significant overlap in the political concerns addressed in rallies and in protests, each group also incorporates distinct attitudes that highlight critical differences. We conclude with a brief discussion of the "defeat narrative" that emerges from our focus group discussion in order to better understand the future direction of the protest movement.

Evidence from Surveys and Focus Groups: The Potential Biases in Our Data

The subsequent analysis of political discussion and protest grievances rests on two types of evidence. The first source of evidence is original survey data collected at five different rallies and protests in Moscow in late February and early March, 2012. Students of political protest face two distinct problems in designing a research strategy: drawing a representative sample from the crowd at each protest, and ensuring that a sample drawn from a subset of meetings accurately represents the movement. The Russian case presented particular difficulties. It was difficult to determine the underlying populations of rally protesters since each event was fairly fluid - participants came and went, and many individuals participated in the marches but not the meetings. The rallies were also very large - there were contested estimations of attendance - so it was difficult to get an accurate sense of the crowd.

Our response to this dilemma was to design a strategy that maximized our ability to compare attitudes and behaviors among groups of participants in both the rallies and protests and also to compare them to Muscovites who did not take to the streets.[2] Given the press reports and posted videos of rally attendees, we were also concerned that participants would be reluctant or deterred from participating by rally captains. While we have experience some minor problems as the presence of the interviewers became known, our interviewers secured very high response

[2] A description of our data collection procedures, and survey instrument is available at: http://www.hse.ru/data/2012/08/27/1242904584/APPENDIX%20ON%20DATA%20COLLECTION.pdf

rates. There was no evidence of a concerted or systematic refusal to participate in either set of street actions.

We also asked respondents which events they had attended up until the point of the survey and found that the anti-government protests had a sizable core of activists, approximately 43 percent of protesters, who had attended three or more events between December and March. The core of the pro-government rallies was smaller, about 25 percent of the sample, but was still significant. Methodologically, the overlap in participation from event to event suggests a basis for cautious claims about the generalizability of our findings in assessing the impact of the movement. If we compare our data to other surveys in the protests at the time, the findings are similar.

The non-activist survey was conducted later than the protest surveys, in early June. Our goal with this work was to devise a representative sample of Muscovites by giving the interviewers a target group of respondents. On the whole, this strategy worked. We have a slight over-sample of young people in our data but the attitudes that we report are comparable to surveys conducted by Russia's leading survey centers. Moreover, when we address the bias using weighted corrections, the change in the overall patterns of response is not significant.

The second type of evidence we use in this paper is derived from a series of five focus groups that included anti-government activists (three groups) and non-protesters (two groups). Each group included ten participants. Activists were recruited through Facebook protest user groups. Irina Soboleva moderated each group, following a protocol designed to address questions raised by the survey data. In this ongoing phase of data collection, conducted a year after the protests, we have found it difficult to secure focus group participation of the rally attendees, and so our supplemental analysis is limited to two sub-samples.

Collecting these data in the politically charged protest environment was a challenge. There is a clear bias in that this is a survey of Muscovites and not national protest participants. Moreover, the attitudes derived from the survey reflect a particular point in time - about the middle of the first wave of protests. However, we find that the supplemental evidence from the focus groups closely map to these attitudes, are consistent with our initial findings, and paint a very interesting picture of the substance of the grievances articulated by protesters and rally participants.

Political Discussion in Everyday Life

The first step in our analysis is to establish that there was a conversation about politics among activists and non-participants. Our findings provide the first clues about the differences between the activists and non-participants, which are consistent with the emerging literature on protest mobilization. These studies explore the concept of protest differential that asks why some individuals participate in protest while others do not. In these studies, the propensity to

discuss politics consistently stands as a key predictor of participation. Frequent political discussion is a leading indicator of political awareness and a sign that politics are salient in a citizen's life.

Figure 1.
Political Discussion

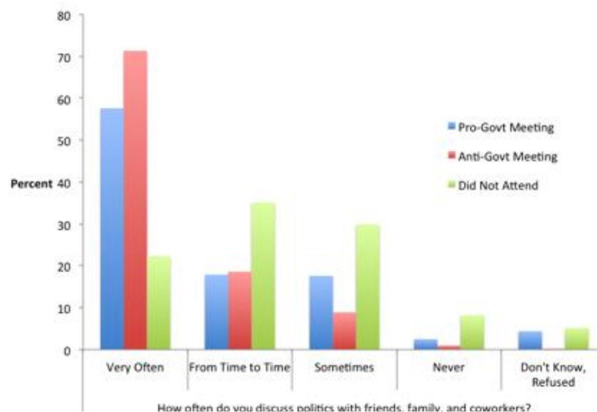


Figure 1 demonstrates that this link between political discussion and protest decisions emerged clearly in our data. As the figure shows, activists on both sides of the Russian street were more likely to discuss politics within their immediate circle than were those who stayed home. Notably, anti-government protesters were significantly more active than their counterparts at the rallies. Nearly, 72 percent of protestors reported that they discussed politics "very often," while another 18 percent said that they engaged in political discussion "from time to time." In contrast, approximately 58 percent of rally attenders "very often" engaged in political discussion. This gap provides evidence consistent with reports of state mobilization of participants at the rallies and the first clues that the different actions reflected distinct models of political mobilization.

However, the high level of political discussion and implied awareness also suggests that incentives and coercion were not the only factors that drove Putin-supporters into the streets. In contrast to the non-participants, the pro-government crowd was extremely active. The lower levels of political discussion among non-participants provide the first insight into the nature of the "silent majority" in the nation's capital, and some participants conformed to the stereotype of apolitical or uninterested in politics. As one young member of the focus groups noted, "I was not looking for the opportunities to speak, to be honest. In general, I am apolitical and consciously move away from politics in Russia. I am not interested, even in principle, in the way that my country lives. I only think about how I live, my family lives, my dear friends live." Another young woman who did not participate in the street actions made a clear cost-benefit calculation. "I don't see myself at the meetings, but I approve this activity. However, I'd rather sit at home and watch TV; I'll do something a little more kind and helpful, maybe read a book or something. I think for me it is much more useful pastime." While some non-participants are clearly passive, these attitudes do not characterize the entire group.

These respondents were indeed quieter than their activist counterparts. In general, they were less comfortable with political discussion: they gave shorter answers, paused before responding and struggled to put their thoughts into words. Yet, even among non-protesters, nearly two-thirds placed themselves on the high end of our

scale while less than ten percent reported that they never discussed politics. However, the focus group discussions underscored that the quality of political discussion among non-participants is different from that of the activists. Non-participants were less likely to cite political pundits or conventional characterizations in their responses but they were more than capable of articulating positions based in their own experiences. In other words, their opinions and insights were formed from information drawn from daily life and not formal political discourse.

These Muscovites also had strong reasons for disavowing both politics and political discussion. In general, the non-participants identified politics as "dirty business." They stressed that they preferred to engage in political action as opposed to discussion. Or as one focus group member said, "Action over simple chatting." Many agreed that they did not see political protest as effective action, but they also could not identify an alternative strategy to express their concerns within the current system. One young woman expressed a commonly held concern, "I mean, I am not interested in politics because nothing will change; there will not by any type of global change." While tentative, these findings suggest that the non-participants are a varied group and that there may be latent mobilization capacity within the "silent majority." These citizens may become more involved as political reform or economic change influences their everyday lives or the opposition is able to counter the regime's claim that Putin is the only viable choice to lead the country.

Figure 2.
Mode of Political Discussion

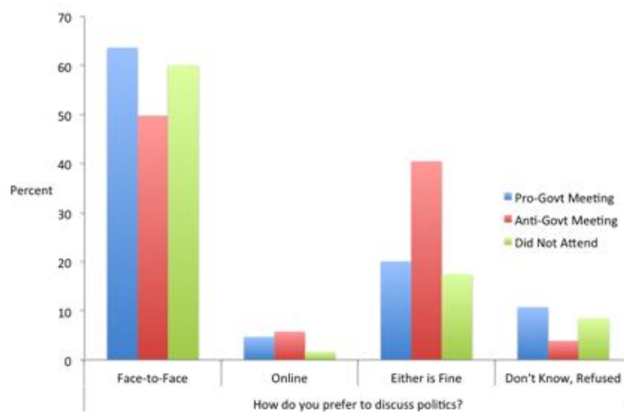


Figure 2 explores the ways in which Muscovites prefer to discuss politics: on-line or in-person. These findings also comport to our conventional wisdom about the Moscow protests, but they point to the need for caution in popular characterizations of participants. In contrast to the protesters in our sample, both pro-Putin activists and non-participants strongly preferred face-to-face discussions. Non-participants were also the least likely of the three groups to engage in online discussions.

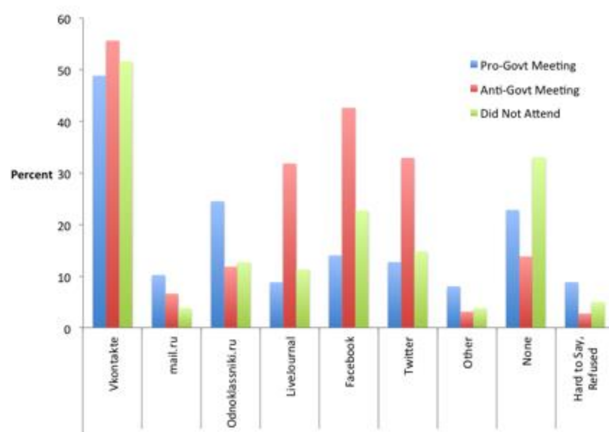
Internet use was more prevalent among anti-government protesters. Yet, while these activists were more likely to discuss politics online than the two other groups, the majority of respondents—50 percent—still preferred face-to-face interactions. Only five percent claimed to prefer online political discussions, while the remainder was comfortable with both venues. Thus, while the Internet is clearly

important in politics, it is not the primary mechanism for political discussion for any of the groups in our study —even the anti-government protest group. Thus, our data suggest that the view of the opposition protests as an entirely Internet-driven phenomenon is over-stated. In fact a closer look at the patterns of Internet use suggest that the role of the Internet and social media in protest mobilization may be indirect for many participants and especially critical for some aspects of mobilization such as coordination and sharing information.

A further breakdown of these data further confirms conventional wisdom about the different role of social media among younger participants. The data show a clear generational divide in these responses about Internet use. Across the sample, respondents under 30 were much more likely to report discussing politics online than older respondents, although this division was less pronounced among non-participants than activists. Still, the role of social media as a transformative component of politics remains important for younger citizens.

Figure 3 reports the data on the Internet sources that respondents use on a day-to-day basis. These data indicate a clear divide between the anti-government protesters and the other two groups. The activists were far more likely to use all types of social media than the non-participants in our sample. Among those who do use social media, *Vkontakte*, the Russian equivalent of Facebook, is the most common Internet source among all respondents. Pro-government activists are also very active on Odnokassniki.ru, which serves predominantly as a social network linking classmates and relatives.

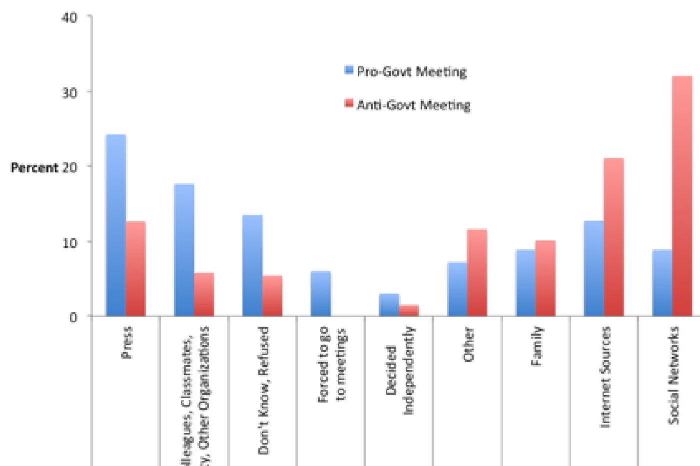
Figure 3.
Internet Use



Consistent with their portraits in the media, anti-government protesters were far more likely to use the more politicized forms of social media than either rally participants or non-participants. In particular, they were frequent users of LiveJournal, the networking website that hosts diaries, journals and blogs. LiveJournal is home to prominent political bloggers, including most protest leaders as well as government officials. The site hosts wide-ranging political discussion. In Russia, it operates in partnership with the independent online newspaper *Gazeta.ru*. In addition to LiveJournal, protesters were also more likely to rely on Twitter and Facebook. As we note below, both of these tools were very important for the coordination and information sharing around the details of protest. Still, it is important to note that none of these social media resources were used by a majority of protesters in any of our three subsamples.

As figure 4 indicates, Internet sources did serve as a primary source of information about the protests themselves, particularly for the anti-government protesters. As one anti-government focus group member noted, “The internet was like a spring of information about the protests. Without it, coordination would have been impossible.” For example, Twitter became a way of communication about the location of the police during the protests known as “controlled walks” in which citizens wearing white clothing or ribbons strolled the streets of Moscow without protests signs or chants. Most interestingly, because phones were not confiscated upon arrest, Twitter became a way to reports arrests and even conditions within the paddy wagons and police stations when protesters were held for charges.

Figure 4.
Patterns of Social Media Use



This evidence corresponds to our findings about the respondents’ reliance on very distinct sources of political information. In general, the split between new media and state-owned media was consistent with expectations: the pro-government rally attenders relied much more heavily on the media and social contacts as opposed to social media to stay informed about street actions. Figure 4 also suggests the degree of third-party mobilization at the protest. While only six percent of pro-government respondents reported being forced to go to the meetings, 18 percent found out about the rallies through work and organizational contacts, and another 14 percent did not answer the question. Importantly, this pattern did not map to patterns of attendance at the protests or the participants’ ties to social networks. The anti-government protesters were far more likely to be integrated into networks of friends, families and colleagues who had participated in protests prior to these events.

This picture of political discussion differs from the accepted wisdom of Russian citizens as apolitical or disinterested. The activists who attended both the rallies and the protests appear deeply engaged in political discussion. Even those who chose not to participate in the street actions frequently discuss politics although their discussions were significantly fewer than the activist. In addition, this evidence shows the limits of the Internet as a venue for political discussion. While some respondents are wedded to the Internet, the majority of our respondents still prefer to discuss politics face to face. To explore the substance of these conversations and the degree to which they varied across the three groups included

in our study, we extend our analysis by focusing on the nature of the grievances bout the regime and the protests expressed by each group.

Core Grievances and Regime Support

Different models of mobilization on both sides of the conversation raise two important questions about the nature of political grievances that are encapsulated in street action. The first question has to do with the nature of grievances that shape rally and protest participation. We ask: do the competing street actions reflect a common set of concerns for Russian citizens or is there a distinct set of complaints and concerns within each group? In other words, are protesters talking past each other, or are they contesting the same set of issues and grievances? We were also interested to find out if non-protesters were engaged in the same discussion as their activist counterparts.

To answer these questions we employed a statistical technique called principal component factor analysis. In general terms, factor analysis explores the relationship among responses to different questions in the survey to uncover a smaller set of unobserved factors that might be driving those responses. This factor—that we identified as regime support—emerged from a broad set of variables that measured political behavior (voting), substantive issues positions, and affect toward the leaders and the regime. We also included some personal assessments of the impact of the regime on respondents' everyday lives. Table 1 reports the findings on the most prominent factor that emerged from the analysis, highlighting both the differences and similarities in the attitudes across these groups.

Table One. Determinants of Regime Support

Pro-Putin Rally Participants	Anti-Putin Protesters	Non-Participants
Falsification *Direction of the Country*	*Falsification* *Direction of the Country*	*Falsification* *Direction of the Country*
Vote for ER Vote for Putin Trust in Putin	Corruption	Vote for ER Vote for Putin Trust in Putin Corruption

Each column of the table represents a group in our data set. The italicized text in each column names the variables that were common to all groups and the non-italicized text indicate the variables that differed across the three groups. In other words, across the entire sample, respondents' positions on two questions—beliefs about the level of falsification, and the direction of the country—were linked together with a small set of distinct variables to define an underlying factor that we label regime support. Each column indicates the variables that condition regime support for each group.

Obviously, the values that the variables took on were different in each of the groups. Among rally participants, the vote for Mr. Putin was very high and the level of perceived falsification was relatively low. Even if these citizens identified some falsification, they did not think that it influenced the outcome of the elections. This assessment is consistent with the claims by Mr. Putin and the Chairman of the Central Election Commission, Mr. Churov, to explain the evidence of fraud. Likewise, the overall assessment of the direction of the country was positive. Regime support among this group also included one variable that was not relevant for protesters and non-participants: vote for the hegemonic party, United Russia, in the 2011 Duma elections, which sparked the initial protests. Notably, this assessment of regime support rests almost solely on performing political actions that express support, primarily voting.

The focus groups provide insight into the interpretation of "the direction of the country" measure. For most respondents, this concept is political rather than economic, concerning abstract principles such as democracy or social control of government. As one non-participant stated in the focus groups, "And this all-out regime that prevails over everything….It's not a democracy." Another young woman stated the problem in a different way, "This is not just about words, it is about what is going on in our country, what laws exist, and the rules we live by. The people are not consulted…" Again, even in the non-participant group, there was a keen awareness of the degradation of the formal political system since 2000.

Yet, not all of the concern focused on the nature of formal institutions. The theme of the state interference with society was significant in both the protester and non-participant groups. As one non-participant argued, "…this is a hostile regime to its own people." The protester groups were equally eloquent on the quesiton of state-society relations, arguing that the corruption within the state had influenced society. Still, not all of the blame for the growing state influence fell on the government or on Mr. Putin. A young man argued, "The problem - people delegate their decisions to the power, to one man."

Among protesters the attitudes on the common or shared variables that defined the regime support factor were very different. The assessments of the direction of the country indicated that most people believed that it was moving in the wrong direction. In addition, these citizens identified high levels of falsification that altered the outcome of the election as a central concern. Protesters also added an additional variable to their assessment of regime support: corruption. These

respondents overwhelmingly identified a rise in the level of corruption over the period of the Putin era, which shaped their opinions about the regime. The analysis of protesters' responses also uncovered a second, much weaker factor, that we labeled "regime alternative" that included only one variable: the respondents' identification of trust in a leader who was not Mr. Putin.

The focus groups provide some insight into the important role that these additional factors- corruption and trust in Putin- play in the attitudes of protesters and non-participants. Both groups consistently mentioned corruption as the primary political problem facing Russia. As one non-participant summed up, "The main problem in these spheres is corruption." Some of the older focus group members were more specific and linked corruption to business practices citing the "criminal economic system," and the need for a luxury tax to counter the power capitalism that exists in Russia. This tie between corrupted bureaucracy and the difficulty of doing business was repeated: "In this country, our politics is committed to stealing someone else's business and it persists mainly due to this." As we argue below, corruption, bureaucracy, and electoral fraud were clearly tied together in people's perceptions.

The non-participants were also engaged in the national conversation on regime support, although they were extremely incoherent in their positions. The underlying dimension revealed in the analysis linked the vote for Putin with a sense that the country was moving in the right direction. However support for non-participants was also related to the ongoing problem of corruption as well as higher levels of falsification. In other words, they split the difference between the positions of the rally participants and protesters.

The crucial difference in determining regime support or quiescence among these citizens was support for Mr. Putin. One non-participant reported that she was asked by poll workers to come and vote for Putin, but that she had no qualms about it. She had planned to do so and did not feel manipulated. Other non-participants were more ambivalent about Putin. As young man argued:

> "Basically I'm open; if a sudden force emerges, I am willing to support him. But then again, I'm not ready to support every person who says that Putin is bad. It is not that I think Putin is good, I just can not be sure that I can trust anyone else."

For the non-protesters the lack of viable leadership appears to influence both their quiescence and their vote choice.

This finding reflects the Kremlin's longstanding effort to build a myth around Mr. Putin that combines hyper-masculinity, morality, and history together in symbolic appeals (Wood, 2011 and 2012; Goscilo, 2010 and 2013). This personalist message clearly drives support for the regime among rally participants and even the non-participants. In contrast, it is clear that the protesters do not consider the carefully

curated myth around Mr. Putin as a central or direct factor in their support for the regime.

The contrary finding—that distrust in Putin is not tied to regime evaluations of the activists—is somewhat surprising, but the focus group discussion underscored its accuracy. Despite the clever placards and slogans that lampooned Putin at the anti-government rallies, Putin was not the primary target of complaint in the focus groups. Rather, the central claims stressed state corruption, transparent justice, electoral system reform, and the inadequacy of leadership. In other words, the titles of the protests "For Honest Elections" and "For Honest Government," reflect the priorities of many of the protesters better than the chants of "Putin Must Go" and "Putin is a Thief."

A number of protesters focused on the real lack of leadership in the country, but many defined leadership quite broadly. One young male argued that, "The political elite are good players and Putin is a genius KGB-schik. But he is a bad politician who does not do useful things." Others focused on similar concerns using different metaphors. A very young group member said, "The contemporary political leadership is not sufficiently active to carry out the modernization of the economy. They are not sufficiently qualified." Importantly here, the language does not target Putin, but his team- the high-level elites.

These views can be reconciled in the characterization of Putin as the face of the corrupt bureaucracy or the face of the system, Putinism. In general, protesters did not really seem to engage the "Putin myth" or personalist appeals. The protesters rejected the notion that Putin was the only alternative for Russia, highlighting the need for institutional reform that would bring a different choice. They also rejected the idea that the regime was a source of stability. Moreover Putin was not the only official that they wanted to remove from office. While discussion of the solutions was often hard to find, the protesters were clear on how to deal with corruption. One young protester called for a "lustration of the power elite." Another argued that they had no need for rotten people in government offices. The view of a broadly corrupt regime linked smoothly with the affront of falsification, "We are fighting with a class of bureaucratic officials. And, for me at least, the election is just a consequence." As one young woman confessed, "Until recently, my husband and I were state employees...They are forced to falsify the elections. They are not happy, but they still do it."

Other participants in the focus groups concentrated the problem of corruption within institutions and the need for institutional reform. A young protester, who had also traveled to be an election observer, noted that voters in the regions saw elections as impositions from the center. He reported, "There was a general gloom. People just do not want elections. I traveled a little bit around there and people said, 'I do not want to go to your elections.' It is not his election, as a local resident, but mine." Across the board there was a strong sense that the electoral system was not working. Likewise, there was pointed discussion about the legal system. A young woman argued, "The problem - an independent court - without that it is not

possible to enforce the law. There is no instrument of control." The need to fix the legal system resonated for both the protesters and non-participants and is clearly tied to more general concerns that both groups expressed about corruption.

This over-all sense of Putinism as a corrupt bureaucratic system and not an individual did not mean that protesters did not have strong opinions about Putin himself. Some were very pointed. A teen protester said, "I only went because I was fed up with Putin's face on the TV." Yet, there are clearly other who hold different opinions. A dissenter in the group argued, "I only care [about] Putin and elections. It was a point of no return that this duo remained in power." In other words, despite the spotlight that most respondents put on the entire system in ascribing blame for the political situation, the respondents had plenty to say about the President as well.

Importantly, our analysis does not entirely dismiss the power of the Kremlin to shape political debate. While Mr. Putin's myth did not overwhelmingly shape activism among protesters, the organization of political debate suggests that the Kremlin's framing of the elections had significant influence on the political conversation. The constant refrain of the Kremlin at its rallies was that there was only one choice to guarantee the stability of the country and that choice was Putin. At the rallies, participants held signs that said, "If not Putin, then who," "Vote Stability-Vote Putin," and "I am for Putin." In the fall, leaders had made the same argument about United Russia. As Andrei Isayev, Secretary of the Presidium of United Russia's General Council argued, "The opposition parties seek to overhaul the country's political system. But then can one be sure that it will be possible to pay for a mortgage or a car loan?"[3] The Kremlin argued that the majority of Russians shared this view and our data suggest that it resonated with some non-participants.

Our factor analysis included a number of variables that did not prove to be linked to the underlying factor of regime support. Notably, none of these issue-based variables that we included in the survey were systematically linked to regime support. In other words, attitudes about migration, social spending, and military power did not drive regime assessments. In response to evidence of falsification, political debate transcended rather than incorporated the key substantive issue positions that motivated the protest throughout the late 2000s. Assessments of the direction of the country became linked to broader ideas about the gap between state and society and the decline of citizens' influence on politics. In short, the protests really were about regime reform and attitudes about democracy, particularly on the anti-government side. Yet, aside from attitudes about

[3] Quoted in Ilyin, Alexei, "How Many Opposition Parties Will Get Into the State Duma?" *Russia Beyond the Headlines,* November 3, 2011 available at: http://rbth.ru/articles/2011/11/03/how_many_opposition_parties_will_get_into_the_state_duma_13697.html

corruption, protests lacked a coherent ideology or basis in easily identifiable issues on both sides of the regime divide.

Similarly, changes in personal economic conditions did not directly shape regime attitudes among protesters or rally participants. The group members were adamant that the protest agenda was purely political. As one young man noted, "At the protest actions, we did not have any economic slogans like 'Increase your salary!'" However, the focus group discussion revealed deeper linkages between the demand for economic and political reform. Noting the primacy of politics, almost all of the members of the group argued that economic reform was not possible without political reform, primarily because the elite is predominantly interested in self-enrichment.

Similarly, many of the protesters also discussed the economy in the guise of social influence. The focus group discussions evinced a shared concern about opportunities for social mobility. As one young male protester argued, "The existing political regime closes opportunities to improve the economic well-being. That is the modern political institutions do not correspond to our modernization aspirations. This deaf bureaucratic wall, this bureaucratic class, completely blocks all social elevators." The discussion also stressed declining levels of state services and the dissolution of the social safety net. Overall, while economic complaints were not directly tied to regime support for the activists, the focus group discussion suggests that they had indirect influence in the sense that they reflected the ways in which the regime blocked social mobility and failed to protect society as well as in attitudes about corruption.

The analysis underscores that the protests emerged as a national debate concentrated on the factors that shaped regime support within political groups. This analysis highlights the overlap in social grievances but also the strong disparities across the three groups. Moreover, it underscores the power of the Kremlin as the steward of national debate. The protests split the country into those who supported the Kremlin's narrative about Putin as the guardian of choice and stability and those who rejected that narrative. As we will see below, this theme reemerges in the protesters' discussion about the future of the movement and the next steps that the movement might take to revitalize itself. Still, it is clear that on both sides the debate centers squarely on government functions and the changing nature of the regime after 2007-2008, when it became clear that popular voice would not determine election outcomes.

The Cause of Protest: Politics, Economics and Civic Duty

Once the protests began in December, it seemed that conversation about the events was omnipresent. Certainly, the state media presented one picture of the protests - downplaying participation and scrupulously avoiding any of the speeches, chants or signs that directly attacked Mr. Putin. The blogosphere and social media sites also lit up with discussion of the protests: the size, strategies, demands, and purposes. The organizing committee broadcast their meetings on the web and

established a strong presence on Facebook and Vkontakte. Twitter became a constant source of updates about negotiations with officials over protest venues, the details of the regulations governing protest, and ultimately reports of arrests and charges. Exhibitions of protest signs sprouted in a number of venues.

We wanted to understand the nature of the conversation about protest among the protesters and rally participants and especially their motivations for protest. As we note above, the focus group discussion of protest centered on the political roots of the actions. Most protesters included in the focus group had not participated in street actions before 2011, although those who were older than 30 recalled participating in protests in the 1990s. The trigger for their renewed interest in political participation was the Kremlin's disregard for social demands. They argued: "power is not interested in our opinion," "the power does not count us," and "we do not decide for ourselves." Many of the focus group members stressed key events as catalysts for their decision to participate, including Medvedev's appointment by Putin, the "castling" in September, 2011 in which Medvedev returned the presidency to Putin, and fraudulent parliamentary elections in 2012. As one male participant said, "I am sure that the large-scale, obvious fraud and machinations during the electoral process became the most important trigger to protest." Yet, these events were clearly goads to action that tapped into a growing sense of discontent. As one older participant noted,

> "…it is impossible to say that we were all content with everything. This feeling that something was wrong, it started much earlier than 2012. I think it started already with these Moscow fires, when people began to die quietly and realized suddenly that no one would help them."

The growing discontent mapped to significant emotions sparked by the Kremlin's blatant disregard of the popular will. Focus group members spoke of the affront to their dignity and self-esteem that was at the root of their resentment toward the state. Older members in the focus groups referred to their emotion in English as dignity, and did not translate the term. One participant said, "I was not only pushed by falsification, but because I came to understand that if I did not go out that I would lose respect for myself. I realized that I had to go out because the system is inhuman and unjust." The same group member quoted Solzhenitsyn, "'Live not by lies.' In the sense that people become aware of themselves in terms of self-worth - that they can and deserve to live better." The protesters shared a sense of moral duty, shared responsibility, and solidarity with each other. Particularly at the occupations, the horizontal organization of the group built a sense of community that transcended social alienation to a feeling of brotherhood.

The same sense of moral duty is clear in our factor analysis of the survey data. We employ factor analysis again to sort out the variables that were linked together in an underlying attitude or factor that drove individual decisions to protest. Our goal was to explore two important aspects of individual decisions to protest. First, we

wondered how the different groups thought about the emergence of protest and whether or not their assessments resonated with the Kremlin's narrative about the events. Second, we wanted to explore the moral and emotional components of participation decisions.

These variables, which we included in the analysis, reflect the same three impulses that the focus group discussion suggested might influence protest decisions: moral and emotional factors, self-interest, and political goals. We included variables that tap into all of these attitudes in our analysis. Table 2 reports the results for both the rally participants and the protesters.

Table 2. Similarities and Differences in Motivations for Protest

Pro-Putin Rally Participants	Anti-Government Protesters
Defend my interests	*Defend my interests*
Show my involvement	*Show my involvement*
It is my moral duty	*It is my moral duty*
Wanted to be an observer	*Wanted to be an observer*
Defend my human rights	*Defend my human rights*
Remove/Keep Putin in Office	*Remove/Keep Putin in Office*
	Put pressure on politicians for reform
Demonstrate support for regime	Convey my concerns
Avoid an Orange Revolution	Pass new laws for elections and parties

As with the previous analysis of regime support, this table reveals a significant amount of overlap in the variables that drove responses among activists on both sides of the regime divide. Each group exhibited high positive assessments of the first five factors in the italicized list: personal interests, defend my human rights, show my involvement, observe historic events, and do my moral duty. Each group had opposite ratings on the affect toward Putin: rally participants wanted to support him while protesters wanted to remove him from office. Given this pattern of motivations, we identify this latent factor as a sense of civic duty. This sense of duty was linked to an overarching concern for either transforming the regime through reform or maintaining it - in particular, maintaining Mr. Putin's leadership.

These results are interesting on both a theoretic and substantive level. Theoretically, we were interested to know if respondents would separate on these factors and whether or not individual interests would emerge as distinct from social concerns. We expected that pro-Putin rally participants would be more likely

to stress self-interest over moral duty and that protesters would be more likely to be concerned about human rights and fulfilling moral duty. Those expectations were wrong, as both sets of activists incorporated social and personal claims into a bundle of factors that reflect their sense of civic duty. They also included moral concerns with their motivations to attend: demonstrating involvement and also participating in the formation of history. On both sides of the street actions, activists' convictions were very strong and strongly linked to the factors that drove their regime support.

Both groups of activists were concerned with the support or removal of Mr. Putin from office. However, it is critical to note the context of the study; these surveys were implemented at the time of elections. Much of the protest agitation was for citizens to vote against Mr. Putin and reflects disappointment that he had prevailed. Among protesters, Putin's election was believed to have resulted from the manipulation of the system to preclude viable choice. Non-participants and rally attenders were more likely to view Mr. Putin's victory as a result of an organic lack of competition and the strength of candidate himself.

The rally participants added two additional political concerns to their list of motivations: the desire to demonstrate support for the regime and avoidance of an Orange Revolution in Russia. This last set of factors fit together with the Kremlin's narrative about the nature of politics in the country: Putin as the only viable choice for the country as well as the profound danger of instability through revolution. These citizens are well described in work with Nadia Zubarevich (2012) and others as those whose political reference is the disastrous period of the 1990s. By comparison, the Putin era is both stable and more prosperous. For these citizens, the idea of a second revolution is unthinkable. Standing up against revolution may well feel like both a moral duty and the fulfillment of their personal interests.

Protesters also added political concerns that were entirely consistent with the anti-regime attitudes expressed above. Two of these factors focused on the need for institutional reform, and, in particular, election reform. The third factor centered on expressing concern for the direction in which the country was moving. Notably, these motivations hint at the importance of just showing up and increasing protest numbers in the development. In the focus groups, participants were very clear that the unexpectedly high turnout at the early rallies led to their decision to join the protest movement, providing some evidence for theories of tipping points and other movement dynamics.

While we did not ask non-participants in our survey why they chose to stay home, it was a central part of the focus group discussions. As we note above, a number of non-participants deemed protest to be an ineffective way to deal with political and social problems. Yet, their concerns about participation extended beyond this judgment. The respondents cited three types of fear that kept them from participating: the fear of injury, the fear of provocation, and the fear of their actions being manipulated. Fear of injury was mentioned by a number of participants as a

factor in their decision. For many it was not determinative, but for others it was clearly important. Another man was less ambivalent about the potential for violence, “You need to understand in which country you live in…The result is not clear, you may be beaten, shit on the head.” Other people expressed concern about their futures in the form of legal problems if they were to participate in the rallies. In their own terms, they feared facing a legal system that only acquits one percent of defendants.

Another non-participant clearly articulated in his concern about the regime’s response. He feared that the Kremlin would respond to mass protest with increased coercion.

> “I sympathize with the people who came out to protest, people who were not indifferent. While at the same time, I understand that this action, people’s participation, can cause very negative consequences for the overall country as well. The regime, the power is quite aggressive now. And it will become even more aggressive after the protest. And, ultimately, it will affect all of us.”

The anticipation of an extreme state response reflected a general sense that the protests themselves could be subject to misinterpretation and manipulation. That is, their participation in the protests could be misinterpreted.

The non-participants also rejected the idea that they are brainwashed by the regime - a common complaint among the protesters. A number emphasized that they were not manipulated but acted out of their own will. Others turned the charge on the protesters themselves, as one young woman argued, “I learned from the mass psychology that people could very easily agree with something, that there is the ‘herd’ instinct. There were some folks, they called other young people, and they all decided to go…Young people are easily manipulated, they are naive, not so well-versed in all things, they just do not have experience behind them, and they are easy to manage, especially if the leader is impressive.” Thus, there were a series of charges and counter charges regarding the direction and source of manipulation.

The systematic organization of moral, personal and political motivations into a single factor that characterized the motivation of both rally participants and protesters was unexpected. However, it fits with the ongoing narrative about the protests in the policy and political science communities. There are at least two Russias - different groups that are concentrated in large cities on the one hand, and smaller towns and rural areas on the other (Zubarevich, 2012). They identify the same issues in society but respond to them very differently. The picture that emerges from our data comports to the Kremlin’s depiction of a silent majority of Putin supporters who are committed and will oppose radical change. Ironically, beyond the role of ratifying the Kremlin’s electoral choices, this group is rarely called to act on their sense of duty because the system is almost entirely closed. The opposition is equally passionate. But denied any role in formal politics, it is confined to street protests and occupations with almost no opening to press their

demands from within the political system. As the closing section of our paper underscores, this standoff has left the opposition in crisis without a clear map forward.

The Narrative of Defeat: Finding a Way to Revitalize the Protests

Assessing the results of the wave of protests between December, 2011 and June, 2012 is complicated not only for political observers but also for the participants. The movement did not topple the regime or preclude the re-election of President Putin. It also failed to win the support of a majority of Russians throughout the Federation. Yet, it did have some significant successes that are likely to have long-term effects, including reforms of electoral processes, the organization of election observation, and the activism of citizens who had previously been inactive. As Karen Beckwith (2010) argues, the ways in which movements frame their narrative of belief has important implications for their future development.

Beckwith defines the defeat narrative as "a form of repeated discourse, linking selected events in causal sequence, within an identifiable timeframe, and drawing conclusions about the movement's future" (Beckwith, p. 3). In the Russian case, much of the popular press analysis has stressed the failure of the movement and marked it as in decline at each point in the organizational process. The large number of participants at the first rally in Bolotnaya Square was not matched by subsequent events. Indeed, after February the size of the crowds dwindled to about half of what it had been at the highpoint, or the protest wave. Moreover, there was clear evidence of a growing class of professional revolutionaries within the protest movement, which caused frustration both within and outside of the protest moment.

Yet, the movement did have some early success on its key demand, institutional reform. The protests provoked the state to loosen the laws on party registration and the reinstitution of gubernatorial elections. However, with the Kremlin's approval rates falling, those concessions were rescinded indirectly through delays, changes in administrative rules, and arbitrary enforcement. Most gubernatorial elections were postponed while the six contests that were held led to victory for United Russia's candidates. Political parties, now allowed to officially register to compete in elections, continue to fragment the political space rather than working to unite the potential opposition. Of course, Mr. Putin secured 65 percent of the vote in the March presidential elections despite the persistent call to roust him from office.

The question is, how might this mixed picture be repackaged to inspire or reignite the movement? Beckwith (2010) argues that successful defeat narrative focus on the learning from the previous action. Past actions must be rendered understandable to members and latent supporters while the movement regroups or finds new support - openings, resources, or partners - that might reinvigorate the movement's efforts. Thus, it is up to the movement to create a narrative that captures the spirit of the events and resonates with citizens.

Such a narrative has not emerged in Russia. There is a clear consensus among most participants that the summer marked a turning point in the protest movement in which even steadfast participants lost momentum. The focus group members were not even unified in assigning blame for the movement failure. Some blamed the government response that became increasingly bold and aggressive after May 6. As one protester argued, "The government has learned to respond to the marches - create all sorts of films that discredit the opposition. It turns out that in principle it learned to control it all." Focus group members described the state response in terms of "tightening the screws," and "bearing down (on society)." Certainly, the police crackdown at the May 6 rally and the subsequent use of politicized justice influenced participation. One protester clearly identified the turning point as, "the hipsters settled down after the arrests following the Bolotnaya march (on May 6)."

Other focus group members highlighted aspects of the movement organization as the cause of the decline. The construction of the defeat narratives divided protesters from the movement leaders. Focus group members spoke of a lack of trust of the leaders, and especially a distrust of their personal ambitions. Instead, the members stressed the importance of horizontal linkages in the protest movement, particularly in occupation that was both inspiring and very emotional for them. These protesters sought to take ownership for the group and foster a broader integration with civil society, and resented the hierarchic structure of the marches that culminated in political speeches.

Still, activists did not entirely blame the movement leaders for failures. Ordinary citizens, inspired to participate by their feelings of dignity and moral duty, separated themselves from professional protesters, referred to as *demoshiza* or democratic schizos, who where universally disliked by members of both sets of focus groups. The focus group members were also very clear about their own confusion about how to move forward. One member argued, "In the community of the opposition, I'm not talking about the leaders of the opposition, there is a crisis. It is unclear what to do." In the focus groups, there was no concensus either about the definition of political goals or how those goals might be achieved. Moreover, the protest activists were strongly divided on their views about the organization of the economy and the appropriate role for government in the economic system. They even disagreed about strategy going forward and the role of violence in the movement.

One idea that did emerge from the focus groups was the need to "go to the people" as a next step in movement development. In a response to the image of the silent majority, the protesters argued for the need to educate or enlighten the people. Some focus group members highlighted divisions between the "people" and themselves, and spoke in adversial terms about "us and them." This language distinguished them from Mr. Putin's supporters and those who did not participate in the street actions.

Despite the obstacles and problems facing the opposition movement, some focus

group members stressed the results of the protests as a foundation for the future. These positive assessments did not stress institutional reforms or political change. Rather, they characterized movement successes in terms of social change, new social linkages, and the end of feelings of alienation. These characterizations resonated with the goals of social education and the need to inform the public, but they spoke to the power of the protests themselves to achieve those goals. Protesters also spoke of their own personal transformations, "Mobilizing people....I would not know [any] thing about that, if it were not for meetings, if I did not get my hands on the Nemtsov's report. I would not have started thinking about our political situation, because before that I was 'apolitical.'" Another very young protester pointed to the way in which protest united citizens and overcame the sense of social alienation and hopelessness: "What have we achieved? The electorate, 'the network of hamsters,' found that not all of Russia voted for Putin. That they are not 5,000 people, and 100 or 200. They realize that with this power can be fought." Others saw the opportunity for new social linkages, common interests and the potential for organization within the crowds. As one young man exclaimed, "I saw this on December 10. For me it was a shock of the first order. The amount of riot police, we are used to in the Days of Rage, etc. But the number of people represented from the Nazis to Communists and anarchists and libertarians - this never happened before." The tone of his statement was not one of condemnation of different groups but interest in the possiblity for creating common ground to work together.

There is no doubt that the movement has not formulated a narrative that can preserve its energy until a new set of political opportunities arises. Yet, it is equally clear that the national conversation that started on the streets in winter 2011 is not yet over. The positive assessments of social change in Moscow are likely to be rebounding through the large cities across Russia. Moreover, the activists have had successes in changing the ways in which citizens respond to elections, both in terms of observation and in terms of expectations. The model of successful street action remains an important lesson for future protesters, even in the face of increased repression. However, there is also no doubt that the lack of a viable narrative of defeat has undermined the movement and created disillusionment that will be damaging in the short term.

Conclusions: Protest Grievances and Regime Support

The protest movement sparked by post-election protests in December, 2011 launched a national conversation about the nature of regime support that focused on election fraud and the overall sense of the direction of political development. For rally participants, who did not see fraud as a sign of regime failure, support constitutes a performance that is consistent with the appeals of the Kremlin. Mr. Putin plays a critical role in the linkages between the state and this sector of society.

Protesters rejected the regime narrative and the symbolic politics that surround the President, replacing it with a view of an increasingly authoritarian and corrupt political system. Our data suggests that election fraud - exhibition of corruption

designed to thwart democratic institutions - provided a tangible public demonstration of connection between both of these factors. In the focus groups, respondents showed deep concern for the lack of government response to societal concerns. Although protesters think about this corruption differently, they were united in a rejection of the growing system of informal institutions.

Non-participants bridge these two viewpoints. Our analysis suggests that non-participants are not entirely ill informed or apolitical. Focus group discussion underscores that this group was also broadly sympathetic to the reform goals of the protest movement. They are not blind to increasing corruption. However, they support the Kremlin's narrative of the primacy of stability over any sort of revolutionary change. Moreover, Mr. Putin personally ties these citizens to the regime and shapes their continued support. Focus group discussion suggests that for these respondents, economic concerns are more important than political concerns. On this basis, we might predict that economic crisis, poor performance, or the tarnishing of Mr. Putin's appeal will shape their willingness to participate in protests or rallies in the future.

Overall, the data suggest that the Kremlin has succeeded in framing a political debate that focuses on its strengths and is organized around Mr. Putin. The Kremlin has also succeeding in keeping problematic policies and positions out of the regime support calculation for most citizens. This finding points both to regime strength and also its potential weaknesses. Moreover, the lack of a coherent defeat narrative among protesters themselves suggests the problems that the movement will face even if the regime relaxes its current reliance on coercion to preclude opposition organization or if a sudden crisis or series of events suggests an opening in the political opportunity structure.

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