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Contemporary Political Opposition in Russia's Competitive Authoritarian Regime

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Contemporary Political Opposition in Russia's Competitive Authoritarian Regime

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my family and the friends I have met in graduate school. Mom, Dad, and Ben, thank you for your constant support and love that has been present in my life for as long as I can remember. Katherina, Tracy, Morgan, and Nikidrea, I could not have done this without you all. Thank you for inspiring me, pushing me forward, and challenging me intellectually. I will never forget you or the experiences we had together. I hope we can all share more books and beers in the future. I wish you all the best.

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Abstract

Contemporary Political Opposition in Russia's Competitive Authoritarian Regime

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Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the Russian political opposition has faced increasing levels of oppression by the state. As elections have become less democratic and the governing practices of Putin have become more authoritarian, Russia has come to resemble a competitive authoritarian regime type. Despite this continually shrinking political environment, opposition candidates still compete in elections and organize protests around the country. This paper provides an analysis of the Russian political opposition and assesses its electoral viability by drawing from existing research on opposition movements in competitive authoritarian regimes. Two models of opposition success, a state/party-based model and an opposition-based model, are applied to the Russian state, party of power, and Alexei Navalny's 2018 presidential campaign. This paper finds that regardless of model used, the benchmarks for electoral success are not met by the Russian opposition as a result of historic international relations and contemporary action of Vladimir Putin and the Russian state. Additionally, this paper argues that the state/party-based model should be prioritized over the opposition-based

model as a more comprehensive model for accurately explaining the political environment and characteristics of opposition movements in competitive authoritarian regimes.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On June 12, 2018, I stood among a crowd of spectators outside of the central stadium in Irkutsk, Russia as the national anthem rang through the air, signaling the beginning of the city's Russia Day parade. The participants began their slow march up Lenin Street toward the city's central square waving flags and singing songs. Among the members of this procession, the greatest presence was undoubtedly supporters of United Russia, the party of power in Russia that has strongly supported President Vladimir since its inception in the early 2000s. Both among the spectators and marchers alike, their T-shirts, flyers, flags, banners, hats, and every possible article of clothing displayed the words "United Russia," the pro-presidential political party, and their logo of a bear. This overwhelming political display stood in stark contrast to my experience several days later as I approached the entrance to the Irkutsk presidential campaign office of Alexei Navalny, one of Russia's most prominent opposition politician. Inside the modest single-roomed office, around a dozen people stood in various groups working on laptops, discussing stacks of papers spread across fold-out tables, and writing out a budget on an upright whiteboard. Although the election had already occurred and Putin had garnered 73.06% of votes in the Irkutsk region, opposition activity continued in this eastern Siberian city.[1] Despite the prominence of United Russia in the city, the large vote share for Putin, and intimidation tactics enacted against them, which included a severed pig's

[1] Дмитрий Нисифоров и Любовь Арбатская (Dmitri Nisiforov and Lyuba Arbatskaya). "Итоги выборов Президента РФ 2018 года в Иркутской области: победил Владимир Путин (Results of the 2018 election of the President of the Russian Federation in Irkutsk oblast: Vladimir Putin was victorious)," *Комсомольская Правда,* March 19, 2018, https://www.irk.kp.ru/daily/26807.5/3843037/.

head affixed to the front door of the business-owner who rented out space for a Navalny rally in the city, the opposition still had the initiative to organize and plan for the future.[2]

This experience in Irkutsk inspired further inquiry into this relationship between Russian political opposition and the difficult environment they contend with both on a day-to-day basis and in electoral campaigns. Rather than simply piecing together analysis of this dynamic through newspaper headlines and media reports, I wanted to better understand the prospects of opposition political success by exploring the characteristic of the opposition and the mechanisms that have created a system which greatly benefits Putin while simultaneously oppressing the opposition. This type of analysis is made more comprehensive by placing the Russian case into a larger context. In this paper, the Russian regime type of competitive authoritarianism is used as the unifying basis of comparison between Russia and other similar regimes in which the nature of the governing system greatly impacts the ability of political opposition to effectively operate.

In order to assess the electoral viability of the Russian opposition, I gathered existing research on cases of opposition successes and failures in competitive authoritarian regimes. Within this research are two schools of thought for explaining what makes political opposition successful. The state/party-based model emphasizes the structural elements of the regime and state as the explanatory elements while the opposition-based model highlights the necessity of certain characteristics of the opposition itself. I applied the state/party-based model to the coordinating structural

[2] "Иркутске бизнесмену подбросили свиную голову. Он предоставил площадку для митинга Навального (A pig's head was given to an Irkutsk businessman. He provided a space for a Navalny rally)," Meduza, October 31, 2017, https://meduza.io/news/2017/10/31/v-irkutske-biznesmenu-podbrosili-svinuyu-golovu-on-predostavil-ploschadku-dlya-mitinga-navalnogo.

elements of the Russian regime and used the 2018 presidential campaign of Navalny as a case study for the opposition-based model. Based on comparing the Russian regime and this campaign with the benchmarks of these models, I argue that the Russian political opposition is not in a favorable position to unseat the incumbent power, regardless of which model is used. Furthermore, the state/party-based model, which prioritizes structural elements of the political environment as most important in determining electoral outcomes, is shown to be the preferred model for properly explaining the successes and failures of political opposition under this regime type. Low levels of linkages with Western democracies and resultant low leverage of Western democracies over Russia, coupled with high levels of state organizational capacity have bestowed the Putin regime with control over the legislature, judiciary, and security apparatus. This consolidation of power and the lack of international connections has left the Russian opposition with little room to maneuver and has rendered it unable to reach the benchmarks of the opposition-based model. The political environment as determined by the elements of the state/party-based model has effectively rendered the Russian political opposition inconsequential in elections.

In the following section the methodology of this paper is further explained. A literature review of both the state/party-based model and the opposition-based model then establishes the necessary benchmarks of each model by discussing the existing work on opposition movements in competitive authoritarian regimes. The findings of the state/party-based model in the Russian context and of the opposition-based model in relation to the 2018 Navalny campaign are then presented. Finally, the conclusion

summarizes my findings and proposes areas in which future research on this topic is needed.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This paper assesses the Russian opposition electoral viability based upon criteria cited in the literature on electorally successful opposition movements in competitive authoritarian regimes. The domestic Russian political environment and the 2018 presidential campaign of Navalny, are used as a case study from which to search for these previously identified markers of successful opposition candidates in these regimes. These markers can be separated into two models which I have termed the state/party-based model and the opposition-based model.

The state/party-based argument removes agency from the opposition movements themselves and places their opportunities for success on the environment in which they are acting as dictated by regime structure, the relations of the state with Western democracies and the organizational capacity of the state and ruling party. The linkages with democracies and the resultant leverage that comes with a greater amount of these links are the most important factors for explaining successful opposition movements in these regimes. Additionally, the organizational ability of the state and ruling party is a crucial element to this equation. This is a measure of the state's ability to mobilize the population, win legislative seats to influence policy and the judiciary, and use coercive measures of the state security apparatus.

The opposition-based argument focuses upon the characteristics of the opposition movement and candidates, including: campaign ideology, opposition cohesion, correlation of campaign platform with public concerns, campaign engagement with the

public and subsequent perceptions of campaign legitimacy on behalf of society. This model places the primacy for change outside of the structure of the state.

The following review of writings on opposition movements in competitive authoritarian regimes more precisely describes the state/party and opposition-based models for successful opposition presidential electoral campaigns. Stevin Levitsky and Lucan Way originated the term “competitive authoritarianism” and thus the section begins with a thorough definition from which to place this regime type in relation to full democracy and full authoritarianism. Their state/party argument is then enunciated upon. Among the scholars reviewed in this paper, they are the only proponents of this model. The remaining writings posit various aspects of the opposition-based argument.

With these two arguments in mind, the key aspects of each one are assessed in the Russian context. This is done in order to place the contemporary Russian opposition in the larger body of work on competitive authoritarianism. An overview of Navalny’s 2018 presidential campaign provides the material from which to assess the opposition-based model. Looking at the Putin era beginning in 2000, the state/party-based model will be assessed through a discussion of state organizational capacity as well as the linkages and resultant leverage between the Russian government and democratic governments. Linkages dating back to 1991 in addition a discussion of contemporary linkages, or lack thereof, will be expanded upon.

Additionally, through this analysis of the mechanisms of state capacity in the relation to Russian opposition during the Putin era, I show how the key aspects of the state/party model often dictate the ability of opposition to reach the markers of the

opposition-based argument. In other words, in order for opposition electoral success to occur in the opposition-based model, the key aspects for success in the state/party model must already be in place. Thus, in my discussion of the current linkages, leverage, and state organizational capacity, I will highlight moments in which low linkages, subsequent low leverage and a steep increase in state organizational capacity under Putin created a political environment in which the Russian opposition was unable to achieve the key indicators of success within the opposition-based model.

Chapter 3: On the Electoral Success of Political Opposition in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes

Since the end of the Cold War, studies of democratization and economic growth in formerly communist countries have been extensive. There are success stories of countries that have emerged from communist rule, joined the European Union, and maintained high levels of democratic legitimacy. However, for many countries, more authoritarian forms of governance have taken hold and remained in place for extended periods of time. Russia falls within this latter category. Crackdowns on Russian political opposition have been well documented; however, analyses of interaction between the opposition and the state frequently document actions and subsequent reactions in the specific context of the time rather than contending with this relationship in a larger context of opposition movements under oppressive regimes. Instead of trying to understand the cycle of state action, opposition reaction, and electoral outcomes solely through analysis of events, positing this Russian case against an existing framework allows for clearer explanations of opposition success and failure. For the purposes of this paper, an overview of existing literature on opposition movements and elite support under competitive authoritarian regimes is necessary prior to assessing the possibility and prospects of a thriving, effective opposition movement and electorally successful opposition presidential candidates in Russia.

DEFINING "COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM"

In characterizing Russia during the majority of Putin's rule since 2000, Samuel Greene states that "the state, while far from democratic, is equally far from totalitarian,

and there is a significant public space in which civil society can operate."[3] From authoritarian to hybrid democracy to kleptocracy, the classifications of Putin's Russian state are numerous. Present in many writings specifically on Russian political opposition is the term "competitive authoritarianism."

This term was originated by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. They argue that competitive authoritarianism is a new phenomenon of the post-Cold War period and thus warrants a separate designation outside of previously existing regime types.[4] The field of terminology within which they place their new regime type is a spectrum between democracy and authoritarianism. At the most standard level of regime type, these types of regimes cannot simply be defined as democracies because their "serious electoral irregularities and/or civil-liberties violations do not meet procedural minimum standards of democracy."[5] Thus, subtypes of democracy are meant to account for different circumstances. These subtypes are numerous: electoral democracy, illiberal democracy, defective democracy, managed democracy, and quasi-democracy are just several terms employed for characterizing regime types. However, citing Juan Linz and Andreas Schedler, Levitsky and Way argue that many hybrid regimes violate democratic norms so severely that they should not be classified under the term "democracy" and instead should be classified with the adjective of "authoritarianism."[6] Occupying a sort of gray area on the continuum between democracy and full authoritarianism are the designations

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[3] Samuel A. Greene, *Moscow in Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 92.

[4] Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

[5] Ibid, 14.

[6] Ibid, 15.

of hybrid regime, semi-democracy, or partially-free regimes, but Levitsky and Way argue that these regime types "reveal little about regimes other than what they are not," in that they are not specific enough in their definitions.[7] At the other end of the spectrum are subtypes of authoritarianism such as post-totalitarianism and bureaucratic authoritarianism which are inadequate in describing competitive authoritarian regimes because these regime types are noncompetitive. Levitsky and Way concede that electoral authoritarianism and semi-authoritarianism are two newer subtypes that are similar to competitive authoritarianism in that they define regimes which are nondemocratic with multiparty elections; however, these terms do not distinguish between competitive and hegemonic regimes.[8] They argue that the specificity of the term "competitive authoritarianism" is warranted because competitiveness is an important regime characteristic that "affects the behavior and expectations of political actors" and thus in turn creates a "set of opportunities and constraints that do not exist in either democracies or other forms of authoritarian rule."[9] Additionally, it is an important term because competitive authoritarianism is widespread to the point where according to their definition, these regimes types outnumber democracies in Africa and the former Soviet Union.[10] Levitsky and Way's "competitive authoritarianism" is a regime type that adds necessary nuance to existing terminology and better captures the characteristics of a large number of regimes.

[7] Ibid, 15.
[8] Ibid, 16.
[9] Ibid, 16.
[10] Ibid, 16.

The two authors define competitive authoritarian regimes as civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state institutions, security apparatus, and monetary resources places them at a significant advantage vis-a-vis their opponents.[11] In these regimes, competition exists, but it is unfair and the "playing field" is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents. This playing field is the electoral environment in which the opposition and incumbent state compete. Levitsky and Way consider the playing field uneven when (1) state institutions are widely abused for partisan ends, (2) incumbents are systematically favored at the expense of the opposition, *and* (3) the opposition's ability to organize and compete in elections is seriously handicapped.[12]

Access to resources, media, and the legal infrastructure are the three most important aspects related to campaigning that are available to both incumbents and opposition. Incumbent control over any variety of these factors tilts the playing field in their favor. The degree to which these are co-opted by the state along with concurrent use of the coercive apparatus of the state are varying; thus, "competitive authoritarianism is a broad category that ranges from "soft," near-democratic cases… to "hard," or near-full authoritarian cases."[13] Levitsky and Way draw the authoritarian line in situations where multiparty elections are either nonexistent or noncompetitive. They deem elections noncompetitive in when "(1) major candidates are formally barred or effectively excluded on a regular basis; (2) repression or legal controls effectively prevent opposition

[11] Ibid, 5.
[12] Ibid, 10.
[13] Ibid, 34.

parties from running public campaigns; or (3) fraud is so massive that there is virtually no observable relationship between voter preferences and official electoral results."[14] It is by these standards that Russia's governing regime is placed within the competitive authoritarian context.

STATE/PARTY-BASED MODEL

Levitsky and Way's study of opposition regimes in competitive authoritarian regimes examined the trajectories of 35 regimes that were or became competitive authoritarian between 1990 and 1995.[15] Their study is focused on the question of why some competitive authoritarian regimes democratized while others did not. The central argument of their study is that ties to western democratic government in addition to the strength of governing-party and state organizations are the main factors that determine whether competitive authoritarian regimes eventually democratize.[16] These ties to western governments are described in terms of linkage and leverage.

Linkage is defined as "the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) among particular countries and the United States, the EU (and pre-2004 EU members), and Western-dominated multilateral institutions."[17] These links are important because they introduce outside influence. Levitsky and Way state that linkages create "domestic constituencies for adherence to regional and international norms," which in

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[14] Ibid, 7.
[15] Ibid, 4.
[16] Ibid, 5.
[17] Ibid, 43.

turn “blurs international and domestic politics, transforming international norms into domestic demands.”[18] These demands are a form of leverage that have the potential to influence the domestic affairs of a nation.

Leverage is defined as “a governments’ vulnerability to external democratizing pressure” and it “encompasses both (1) a regimes’ bargaining power vis-à-vis the West, or their ability to avoid Western action aimed at punishing abuse or encouraging political liberalization; and (2) the potential impact (in terms of economic health or security) of Western punitive action toward target states.”[19]

Regarding the strength of the state and party organizations: state coercive capacity is essential to competitive authoritarian stability and regimes outcomes while strong parties capable of mobilization and utilization of abundant monetary, state, and media resources are more likely to elect presidential and legislative candidates placing them in control of judicial appointments and future state policy.[20]

Of these three factors, linkage which in turn creates the possibility for leverage, is the most important factor in determining whether a regime would lose in a presidential election to opposition and democratize. Of the thirty-five competitive authoritarian countries studied, those with high levels of linkage with the West were most likely to democratize and in cases where linkages were low, outcomes were reliant upon the organizational power of the incumbent.[21] In countries with strong state and governing

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[18] Ibid, 48.
[19] Ibid, 40.
[20] Ibid, 57, 63.
[21] Ibid, 5.

party structures, regimes remained stable and the incumbent remained in power, while states with underdeveloped state and governing party structures were unstable, though rarely democratized.[22]

While this study largely places the onus of regime change on characteristics and actions of the state and governing party, they acknowledge that this theory cannot explain all cases of democratization from competitive authoritarian regimes. They state, "Regime outcomes are influenced by a variety of factors- including economic performance, the strength and strategies of opposition movements, leadership, and historical contingency- that lie outside of our theoretical framework. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the regimes analyzed in this study follow trajectories not predicted by our theory."[23] Additionally, they include two caveats relevant to Russia that are not adequately explored or elaborated upon in regard to the current situation in Russia. Though opposition forces may be relatively weak right now, civic and opposition forces may strengthen over time, thereby increasing the likelihood of endogenous democratization. Additionally, levels of organizational power also may change, often due to exogenous shocks such as war or economic crisis.[24] To relate this to Russia, they state that although dominant in terms of size and resources, United Russia lacks critical sources of cohesion within the party structure to withstand these exogenous shocks. The sources of cohesion are a strong, guiding ideology and a past history of conflict within the nation in which the incumbent party came to power through ethnic or religious appeals. Putin did not face such a crisis

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22 Ibid, 5.
23 Ibid, 24.
24 Ibid. 351.

in the 2000s, but United Russia's heavy reliance on patronage may leave it vulnerable in the future.[25] This briefly mentioned loophole emphasizes the cohesion of the incumbent party as a potential tipping point during times of crisis which could be exploited by opposition movements as the organizational capacity of the state and party rapidly decreases.

OPPOSITION-BASED MODEL

Expanding upon effective areas of opposition action, Daniela Donno states that competitive authoritarian regimes are accurately characterized as *potentially* unstable in that democratization is contingent on whether domestic and international actors choose to pressure the regime.[26] Unlike Levitsky and Way, Donno places the impetus for change less on the structure of the regime and more in the hands of the opposition movements either enabled through domestic or international support. Her findings only hold for competitive authoritarian regimes. The gradual tightening of control and further isolation from democratic leverage can result in a political system Donno calls hegemonic authoritarianism. In hegemonic authoritarian regimes, the incumbent or ruling party enjoys overwhelming electoral dominance (conventionally understood as winning more than 70 or 75% of the vote or seat share).[27] In these regimes the same pressures that can potentially destabilize competitive authoritarian regimes are ineffective.[28] Under these

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[25] Ibid, 201.

[26] Daniela Donno, "Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, Issue 3 (2013): 703–716, doi:10.1111/ajps.12013, 714.

[27] Ibid, 703.

[28] Ibid, 704.

guidelines, Russia once again falls into the competitive authoritarian classification. In the 2012 Russian presidential election, Putin won 63.60% of the total votes as a member of the United Russia party.[29]

Moving still further from structural responsibility for regime change, Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman put the agency for change in the hands of a nation's citizens. Perceptions of legitimacy and recognition of authority among the public is crucial for the continued survival of a regime. The authors argue that these leaders survive "not because of their use of force or ideology, but because they convince the public—rightly or wrongly—that they are competent."[30] These leaders accomplish this through maintaining acceptable living standards, state propaganda, and coopting government elites to support the incumbent leader. In this argument, the state is constantly vying for control because it recognizes that agency is ultimately in the hands of the public and that their buy-in or tolerance of the regime determines the longevity and relevance of the regime.

When describing the competitive authoritarian model, Guriev and Treisman point out that these regimes simulate democracy, enjoy popularity after eliminating rivals, and maintain power through "performance legitimacy," a perceived competence at securing prosperity and defending the nation against external threats.[31] This perceived confidence

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[29] Центральная Избирательная Комиссия Российской Федерации (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation). "Выборы Президента Российской Федерации (Election of the President of the Russian Federation)," March 7, 2012, http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100031793509&vrn=100100031793505®ion=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100031793509&type=226.

[30] Daniel Treisman and Sergei Guriev. "How Modern Dictators Survive: Cooptation, Censorship, Propaganda, and Repression," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, (2015), doi:10.2139/ssrn.2571905, 1.

[31] Ibid, 2.

leads to actual support, as is the case in Russia. However, in times of protest as these perceptions become more negative and critical, often as the result of an economic or security crisis, then co-optation, censorship, and propaganda are increased. However, all these actions require money, which must come from taxing the citizens, depressing their living standards, and indirectly lowering their estimate of regime competence.[32] This ensuing cycle results in the loss of regime legitimacy because the public no longer associates the regime with economic and security benefits that once garnered support despite the non-democratic environment.

Similar to Guriev and Treisman, Marc Morje Howard and Philip G. Roessler again place agency for regime change in the hands of citizens, specifically in the collective action of the opposition. They point out the inherently contradictory nature of competitive authoritarianism as a central weakness of the incumbent leader and the system as a whole. Legitimate procedures like elections are undermined by illegitimate practices such as vote rigging, violent disenfranchisement, and media bias. The resulting tension raises frustration with the incumbent regime and provides further incentive for the opposition to act.[33] For these opposition movements, the end goal is an electoral victory. In instances when the competitive authoritarian regime is removed in favor of a more liberal and democratic policies, a liberalizing electoral outcome (LEO) is said to have

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[32] Ibid, 3.

[33] Marc Howard and Philip Roessler. "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, (2006): 365–381, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00189.x, 369.

occurred.[34] In their analysis, the strongest explanatory variable for a LEO is the opposition's formation of a coalition. Even with a presidential incumbent running for reelection in a country that has not experienced substantial political liberalization over the past five years (and other variables kept at their mean), the probability of a liberalizing electoral outcome increases by more than 80% as the opposition is able to overcome its inherent divisions and build a broad-based coalition.[35]

Citing Howard and Roessler's study, Michael Wahman provides a useful explanation for how these coalitions form and when they are most successful in maintaining cohesiveness. A broad oppositional coalition would be expected if two conditions are met: (i) There has to be a significant policy difference between the incumbent party/parties and the opposition; (ii) The opposition is unipolar.[36] An exception is noted, as coalitions are occasionally also formed in non-ideological party systems where they are created for purely opportunistic reasons assuming a larger free-for-all following the removal of a long-seated incumbent (Wahman 655). Wahman's analysis lends importance to opposition ideology and policy agenda. Instances in which the opposition has formulated a policy agenda distinct from that of the incumbent government are more likely to produce pre-electoral coalitions and as Howard and

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[34] Ibid, 365.

[35] Ibid, 375-376.

[36] Michael Wahman. "Offices and policies – Why do oppositional parties form pre-electoral coalitions in competitive authoritarian regimes?," *Electoral Studies*, 30, (2011): 642-657, doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2011.05.009, 645.

Roessler found, opposition coalitions are a strong indicator for successful opposition electoral outcomes.[37]

Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik offer a slight rebuke to Howard, Roessler, and Wahman's findings on opposition coalitions while still allowing for a great degree of opposition agency and room for maneuvering. In their analysis of competitive authoritarian regimes, they divided the circumstances of successful opposition outcomes from the unsuccessful attempts. The key issue posed by the two sets of elections (opposition success vs. failure) was less a matter of whether regimes were ready to depart than of whether the opposition was ready to defeat them.[38] The strategy of the opposition in relation to voters is cited as the most important indicator of electoral success. They highlight a fundamental truth for any election: the opposition in any regime ultimately cannot win an election without the proper number of votes and the support of the public. The opposition must convince the public to vote, vote for them, and, if necessary, defend their choices in the streets.[39] Engagement with the public is the key to winning and creating an optimistic sense of belief in an otherwise oppressive setting that encourages apathy is important for garnering support.[40]

Creative and innovative strategy is important, though any positive engagement with society is ultimately beneficial for opposition. Bunce and Wolchik's broad swath of

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[37] Ibid, 655.

[38] Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *World Politics* 62, no. 1, (2010): 43-86, doi: 10.1017/S0043887109990207, 47.

[39] Ibid, 59.

[40] Ibid, 67.

strategies include: forging a unified opposition that puts forward a single candidate; the mounting of ambitious, nationwide campaigns by the opposition; collecting and distributing public opinion data that candidates can then use to frame their appeals; orchestrating energetic voter registration and turnout drives; maintaining pressures on the regime to reform election commissions; forming youth movements that support political change through elections.[41] More so than previous explanations of opposition success, the results of this study leave the door open for innovation and new ways of civil engagement that either have not been previously attempted and therefore are less likely to be suppressed by the incumbent government.

[41] Ibid, 67.

Chapter 4. The State/Party-Based Model in Russia: 1991-2019

With the key components of each model established, the following section will present an assessment of each criterion of the state/party-based model in the Russian context from the collapse of the Soviet Union to present day. Linkage, leverage, and state organizational capacity are observable at varying levels in this time period; however, there is a general trend among each criterion rather than constant fluctuation. In this nearly thirty-year span, already low levels of linkages and leverage decreased while state organizational capacity greatly increased.

Low levels of linkage and leverage were already present as remnants of relations from the Soviet period. Russia's nuclear power status and continued regional influence afforded it what some scholars have deemed "black-knight" status- an actor which can counter other outside influence in the domestic affairs of neighboring nations in which it has a strategic interest. These factors had the effect of minimalizing democracy promotion while maximizing efforts relating to security in the region and the world as Russia remained a strategic concern for both the EU, NATO, and the U.S.

From the 2000s onward, these linkages and leverage only decreased. The Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2005 marked a distinct change in how Russia viewed the West, namely the United States and the EU. A distinct anti-Westernism emerged, wrought with suspicion over the true motives of Western policies and a believe that ultimate goal of these policies was the to destabilize Russia and subvert the Putin regime. On several significant occasions, namely the 2008 Russian-Georgian War and the annexation of Crimea coupled with military incursion into eastern Ukraine, Russia

reasserted its influence and challenged what it perceived as Western incursion through militaristic means in areas it regards as its sphere of influence. In addition to these hard power incursions, Russia has exerted influence in the domestic election of both its neighboring countries and around the world.

In more recent years, an international tit for tat relationship has emerged between Russia and the democracies of the EU and U.S. The removal of Russia from the G8, a ban on Russian Olympic competition, the nullifying of long-standing international treaties, and sanctions have been the Western response to the Russian activity in Ukraine and a general rejection of international norms on behalf of Russia. During this period of animosity with the West, Russia-China relations have reached a high point. What few linkages and leverage existed at the beginning of Putin's time in office have only been further reduced as a result of these circumstances.

Concurrent to this reduction of linkages and leverage, a significant increase in the organizational capacity of the Russian state and ruling party occurred. In the early 2000s, administrative changes and consolidation of political parties with their respective constituencies took place and concentrated power in United Russia. This party loyal to Putin filled the legislature and by exploiting the structure of the Russian judicial system was able to influence court appointments. If the ability to enact policy by decree was not power enough for the executive, this strong party loyal to the incumbent ensured that Putin faced nearly no obstacles when passing any legislation he wanted.

During Putin's first term, from 2000-2004, this political consolidation was coupled with actions that signaled the beginning of the end for Russian independent

media. Television stations and print publications were either taken over or shut down. The media landscape became dominated by state-owned or state-influenced outlets while independent sources dwindled over time as they faced increased pressure from authorities and a series of highly publicized murders targeting journalists.

A series of events at the beginning of Putin's second term began to reframe notions of what civil society stood for, while marginalizing NGOs and any Western-backed aid or democracy-promoting organization. Following the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004-2005, Putin undertook what Robert Hovarth has termed a "preventative counter-revolution." This campaign repressed civil society and opposition through coercive actions, laws, and the creation of a parallel self-proclaimed "patriotic" civil society under the auspices of stomping out dangerous Western incursions into Russia's domestic affairs.

This consolidation of power and "preventative counter-revolution" greatly increased the organizational capacity of the state and ruling party. With this new normal established, additional measures were taken during Putin's third term in office between 2012 and 2018. Most notably, in 2012 a series of amendments to laws regulating NGOs were passed and enacted, thereby requiring NGOs receiving foreign funding or engaging in vaguely defined "political activity" to register as "foreign agents." Three years later a similar law was passed which not only targeted NGOs deemed to be "undesirable", but also the individuals and organizations interacting with these "undesirable" groups.

These findings relating to the criteria of the state/party-based system do not paint a promising picture when comparing them to Levitsky and Way's cases of successful

opposition under a competitive authoritarian regime. An already low level of linkages from the Soviet period decreased over time as did already low levels of Western leverage while state organizational capacity drastically rose. Based on these findings, the Russian regime can be classified as "stable" according to Levitsky and Way, meaning that the chances for a democratic transition as a result of an opposition electoral victory are minimal.

LINKAGES AND LEVERAGE

The 1990s and the Yeltsin Presidency

With the Soviet collapse and the fall of the Iron Curtain across Eastern Europe, a period of transition occurred. Authoritarian regimes of the past gave way to new democracies as Western Europe and the United States aided these new governments through engagement in the areas of politics, economics, security, and democracy promotion. The Russian Federation occupied a unique position in this dynamic. As the foundational republic of the Soviet Union, Russia was still a formidable country for Western democracies to contend with in respect to its regional influence, size, and military capability, particularly its nuclear stockpile.

Accordingly, while there was Western support for Yeltsin and a new Western-facing Russia, there was still a prevailing view of Russia as a top security concern, particularly within the U.S. and the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. In a 1995 Carnegie Corporation report on preventing deadly conflict and addressing threats to world peace, a "hostile, expansionist Russia" was listed as the first

priority.[42] More specifically, Russia was seen as a threat to the security of Europe and the United States because its "still very substantial nuclear, scientific, and military prowess" in addition to great uncertainty regarding Russia's domestic politics and the future desires of the country.[43] Following the 1995 Duma elections, the two largest contingents filling the Russian legislature were those of Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation and Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. Zhirinovsky's saber-rattling reverberates in the concerns of the Carnegie report which states: "Today, the Russian state (insofar as it continues to exist) appears perched on the precipice of capture by ultranationalist, anti-Semitic, neo-imperialist forces."[44] The fear of Zyuganov winning the 1996 presidential election was real, as was the uncertainty of what would follow such an event and what the election of a communist to the Russian presidency would mean for both the future of Russia and its relations with western democracies.

As a result of this significant concern and a desire to prevent a backslide into authoritarianism during this time of democratic transition, numerous aid packages were prepared for Russia and other newly independent states (NIS) by the U.S. government, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. The network through which this money traveled was both complicated and at the time, a newly created system.

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[42] Larry Diamond. "Promoting Democracy in the 1990s: Actors and Instruments, Issues and Imperatives," *Carnegie Corporation of New York,* (1995), https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/96/2b/962b2e9f-5474-4494-ab81-dcadd02c18c6/ccny_report_1995_promoting.pdf, 6.

[43] Ibid, 6.

[44] Ibid, 6.

During the Soviet period, there were a minimal number of American NGOs working with Russian officials and following the Soviet collapse, the experience of working in a post-communist country was an entirely new one.[45] Just as American aid organizations faced a new working environment in this post-communist space, in 1992 Russians were only just beginning to form civic advocacy organizations, independent trade unions, competitive political parties, and business associations.[46] Throughout the 1990s, NGOs arose focusing on all aspects of society. While it may appear that these aid packages and the proliferation of these organizations are related to one another, a closer look at the nature of the funds being sent to Russia and the method of disbursing money shows that much of the assistance to Russia came with strings attached and that the primary focus of this aid was not democracy promotion.

Any aid packages approved by the U.S. Congress were coordinated by the U.S. State Department and then distributed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID did not send money directly to the Russian government or any particular region, but rather they contracted USAID-funded projects through a network of private American companies and nonprofit organizations to provide "technical assistance," knowledge, and expertise to Russian counterparts in an attempt to assist in implementing reforms.[47] This process of working through American contractors was a

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[45] Michael McFaul and Sarah Mendelson. "Russian Democracy- A U.S. National Security Interest," *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 8, no.3, (Summer 2000): 330-353, http://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/08-3_McFaulMendelson.PDF, 338.

[46] Ibid, 338

[47] James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose. U.S. Policy Toward Russia After the Cold War.* (Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2003), 95.

requirement of the funding and as such, it was up to these contractors to effectively work with Russian organizations.[48] Problems quickly arose with this system and in many cases, ultimately hindered effective use of funds.

There were no USAID offices in Moscow during the Soviet-era and they did not open a full office in Russian capital until 1993.Within USAID and among the organizations it contracted projects out to, there were few Russian speakers. Among this same group, there were also very few experts who had worked in post-communist countries transforming command systems into market economies.[49] These problems were exacerbated by pressures on USAID from the U.S. Congress to quickly get into the field and assist Russia's transition. Training in these areas was foregone as fast result were demanded in order to show that funding these projects was a politically successful measure.[50] The need to provide conclusive results that funding was producing desire outcomes was also a constant pressure on USAID. As a result, USAID contractors often invented "quantitative" measurements of success relating to programs they were working with, going so far as to hire writers to conjure up success stories across Russia stemming from the USAID-funded projects.[51] Thus, while the U.S. provided aid packages to Russia in the early 1990s, the means by which it was disbursed were highly flawed with questionable rates of efficacy as a result of the enormous task at hand, new working environments, and outside political pressure on USAID.

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[48] Ibid, 96.
[49] Ibid, 96.
[50] Ibid, 97.
[51] Ibid, 97.

Aside from the USAID structure, the nature of these aid packages themselves had a negative effect on democracy promotion because in all cases of congressional approval for economic assistance, projects addressing the security concerns of the U.S. in relation to Russia took highest priority. In 1994 a $2.4 billion aid package was approved by Congress for the newly-independent states of the former Soviet Union. This amount was passed through Congress under the auspices of being a one-time only spike and for the remainder of the decade, funding for Russian reform continually decreased.[52] Of this $2.4 billion, $1.6 million was approved for Russia with the following breakdown accounting for which areas received what amount of funding: $194 million for grant food assistance, $700 million for credit assistance to purchase American food products, $148.4 million for private sector development, and $48 million for democratic assistance.[53] From 1992 to 1998, a total of $5.45 billion was sent to Russia and of this amount, $130 million or 2.3 percent was allocated to programs involved in democratic reforms in Russia.[54]

When addressing the nature of American aid to Russia, U.S. officials often broke down their assistance strategy into three components: democracy promotion, market assistance, and cooperative threat reduction.[55] As was previously shown, instead of focusing on political reforms and promotion of organizations to aid building democratic institutions in Russia, many of the funds sent to Russia through aid packages were focused on economic reform that had mediocre rates of success. Of these three

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[52] Ibid, 93.
[53] Ibid, 111.
[54] Ibid, 114.
[55] Ibid, 107.

components present in official rhetoric of the time, cooperative threat reduction also garnered vastly greater allotment of funds in comparison to democratic assistance. The Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program began in 1992 and was primarily concerned with engaging Russia as a potential security threat to be neutralized. At the heart of the program was the effort to remove weapons of mass destruction and ensure proper decommissioning of nuclear weapons from the former Soviet republics. This program was referred to as "defense by other means" and considered by many in the Clinton administration and within the Defense Department to be the most important aid program to Russia.[56] As such, it received a large amount of funding from the U.S., roughly half of the amount devoted to economic assistance and six times the amount reserved for democratic assistance; however, unlike aid packages which varied in amount, spending on CTR remained around a constant $400 million per year throughout the 1990s.[57] This spending reflects the post-Cold War hesitance to invite Russia into the community of Western democracies without first addressing the many security concerns of these nations. In these instances of U.S. assistance, political reform took a backseat to economic reform and the neutralization of potential threats to the U.S. and its European allies.

The support of international economic organizations such as the IMF and World Bank was also conditional and of questionable efficacy. The World Bank issued Russia ten loans over two years amounting to $2 billion, but their targeted recipients- the

[56] Ibid, 108.
[57] Ibid, 108.

agriculture and mining industries, were slow to reform and marred by corruption as massive state-owned corporations of the Soviet period were privatized.[58] IMF loans were similarly viewed as ineffective and misguided, particularly because of the conditionality attached, their need to eventually be paid back and because IMF loans were seen "as a reward for progress on the economic reform agenda, not a facilitator of progress on the reform agenda."[59]

Considering the programs of the U.S., IMF, and World Bank, the post-Cold War assistance to Russia in the 1990s dealt primarily with economic and security concerns, not political reform aimed at democratic promotion. While the total amount of aid may have been high, with structures in place to facilitate reform, the percentage of money allocated to democratic reforms was minimal compared to other areas and aside from the CTR program, the distribution of aid packages approved by Congressional budgets was done through a hurried, unprepared, and ill-equipped system consisting of USAID and American contractors. The low level of linkages during the Soviet period was increased as these programs were in place, but their temporary nature and lack of concretely definable results meant that the rise was neither substantial nor permanent.

The significance of not establishing USAID offices in Russia until 1993 and of barely addressing the political and institutional aspect of reform can be inferred through the words of Gennady Burbulis, a close-advisor to Yeltsin throughout the 1990s. In 1996, he stated: "The paradox of Russia in the 1990s is that the constitution of 1993 was written

[58] Ibid, 102.
[59] Ibid, 100.

essentially without any alternatives; it was written in the personal interests of Yeltsin and, like him, it contains both democratic and authoritarian tendencies…. And so if he is a democrat, it is situational. With Yeltsin there is always the possibility of ruling with an authoritarian hand, of skipping the difficult processes of analysis, of bargaining for consensus."[60]

This is an implication of Yeltsin as much as it is of the Russian constitution and democratic institutions within the country at the time. The institutional design of the presidency, as set out in the 1993 constitution, placed a great deal of power in the executive during a period when Yeltsin faced substantial opposition in the legislature. These transitions and new institutions were imposed by the executive rather than being negotiated. Both August 1991 and October 1993 were resolved through armed conflict rather than through negotiations and it is argued that because of this, the opportunities for democratic ideas to enter into debates over institutional design were greatly limited.[61]

In conclusion, linkages and leverage between Russia and western democracies, already low from the Soviet-era, remained low during the 1990s. Aid structures targeted US strategic concerns and economic reform; however, both the economic as well as the social aspect of assistance was temporary and ill-implemented. Democracy promotion and political reforms were minimal during this time while what little assistance provided was seemingly too little, too late to effectively have lasting effects on the Russian

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60 Diamond, 83.

61 McFaul, Mendelson, 338.

political structures which were democratic in appearance, but already exhibiting non-democratic flaws in practice.

2000-Present Day: The Putin Era

This is the foundation Putin inherited in 2000 when he entered his first term as President. By 2004, Russia was exhibiting the behavior of what scholars have termed a "black-knight." This type of nation acts as a "counter-hegemonic power whose economic, military, and/or diplomatic support helps blunt the impact of U.S. or EU democratizing pressure."[62] Russian interference in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election was the first well-publicized example of this cross-border countering of Western pressure. In this case, the Russian-back incumbent President of Ukraine, Viktor Kuchma, had aligned Viktor Yanukovych as his successor. As the election approached, circumstances began to favor the candidate of the democratic opposition, Viktor Yushchenko. Following an initial runoff result deeming Yanukovych the winner, the Orange Revolution occurred, a recount commenced and Yushchenko was declared president. Four years after entering office, Putin's actions show a different side to the idea of linkage and leverage that has become increasingly relevant when discussing Russia. Rather than considering linkage and leverage in relation to western democracies, this "black-knight" status has also highlighted countries' connections to Russia and the resultant potential for Russian influence in their domestic affairs. This rejection of international norms and violation of

[62] Levitsky, Way, 41.

sovereignty has put Russia at odds with the western democracies of the international community.

The most egregious acts of Russian influence against democratizing and Westernizing pressure in neighboring countries involved internationally-condemned military campaigns meant to destabilize the countries to the point of halting their progression. The attacks against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 marked a turning point in Russian relations with western democracies. The ensuing E.U. and U.S. sanctions against Russia further soured relations and provoked additional Russian measures against its neighbors and the sanctioning nations. Linkages at the level of international political and economic cooperation decreased during this period and leverage remained low.

The 2008 Russia-Georgia War occurred at a time when Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili was orienting Georgia toward a future in the European economic and security space as opposed to a partnership with Russia. Prior to the conflict Georgia entered into a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), the first step toward joining the mutual defense organization, and in the months before the war, the U.S. took part in joint military exercises in Georgia. Then in August 2008, Russian troops entered Georgia under the auspices of protecting Russian citizens in the two republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. With the Georgian army quickly defeated, Russian troops remained in these two republics which then proclaimed their independence from Georgia, an act recognized as legitimate by Russia. These actions by Russia created a still-frozen conflict

with these self-proclaimed independent republics and halted Georgia's MAP progress in addition to sidelining a trade agreement with the EU.

Most recently, Russian actions in Ukraine showed an increased willingness to engage in the affairs of its neighboring countries and in turn, garnered a more severe response from the US and EU. In 2013, the Russian-supported President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, pulled out of plans to sign a political association and trade agreement with the EU. This plan was seen as an initial step toward Ukraine entering an association agreement with the EU, the first step in the EU membership process. Instead, Yanukovych signed a trade agreement with Russia. This sudden withdrawal from the EU plan sparked protests in Kyiv which eventually led to the ousting of Yanukovych and the election of pro-Western President Petro Poroshenko. Shortly thereafter, unmarked troops, later revealed to be Russian special forces, appeared in Crimea and took over government offices, eventually drafting a referendum which led to Crimea joining Russia. This referendum and annexation were universally condemned and deemed illegal by the US and EU. Simultaneous to these actions in Crimea, war broke out in eastern Ukraine as Russian troops surreptitiously entered the country and Russian-backed separatists proclaimed the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. These proclamations were again not recognized by western democracies. Just as in post-2008 Georgia, Russian hostility toward its western-leaning neighboring countries, in what it deems its "sphere of influence," have had destabilizing effects on Ukraine as large swaths of eastern Ukraine remain in a frozen conflict that routinely flares up into deadly skirmishes.

More so than any other actions since Soviet times, Russian aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of its territory have driven relations between Russia and the EU and US to a low point. The most significant response of the US and EU has come in the form of sanctions. From 2012-2018, the US imposed more than 60 rounds of sanctions on Russian individuals, organizations, and government agencies.[63] The 2017 Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) codified the series of US sanctions against Ukraine. As of December 2018, 36 companies and organizations with relations to the Russian defense sector have been sanctioned in addition to 48 entities and individuals with relations to the Russian intelligence sector.[64] These numbers increased further in March 2019, when the US, EU, and Canada issued joint sanctions against Russia for the November 2018 attack on Ukrainian naval vessels.[65]

These sanctions against Russia stemming from aggression against Ukraine are but a portion of the sanctions leveled against Russia in the past seven years. The 2012 Magnitsky Act "bars individuals (from Russia and elsewhere) who are complicit in human rights abuses and corruption from traveling to the West, owning assets in the West and using the financial [infrastructure[of the West."[66] The law was named in

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63 Cyrus Newlin and Jeffrey Mankoff. "U.S. Sanctions against Russia: What You Need to Know," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, October 31, 2018, https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-sanctions-against-russia-what-you-need-know.

64 U.S. Department of State. *CAATSA Section 231(d) Defense and Intelligence Sectors of the Government of the Russian Federation*, Online, https://www.state.gov/t/isn/caatsa/275116.htm (accessed April 20, 2019).

65 U.S. Department of State. *Transatlantic Community Imposes Sanctions on Russia*, Robert Palladino, Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2019, Online, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2019/03/290382.htm (accessed April 20, 2019).

66 Vladimir Kara-Murza. "What's really behind Putin's obsession with the Magnitsky Act," *Washington Post,* July 20, 2018,

commemoration of Sergei Magnitsky, a tax-accountant who died in prison following his investigation into high-level Russian officials committing tax fraud. Eighteen Russians tied to his imprisonment and death were immediately placed on this list of barred persons following the act's passage in late 2012.[67] In early 2019, the EU began developing legislation of the same name with the same purpose, to punish state and non-state actors for human rights violations.[68] This naming is significant because it once again unifies the EU and US against the actions of Russia through the retaliatory mechanism of sanctions. The Magnitsky Act specifically has drawn a significant response from the Kremlin. A direct, immediate response from Russia was the ban of US adoption of foreign children and additional responses have followed. Russian opposition activist, Vladimir Kara-Murza has stated that he believes that Putin views the Magnitsky Act as one of the biggest threats to his regime.[69] Russian animosity toward both the case around Magnitsky and the Magnitsky Act has had domestic repercussions as well. A libel case was brought against Alexei Navalny in 2016 by an investigator at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pavel Karpov.[70] The entire case centered around Navalny posting a documentary to social media that linked Karpov to the death of Magnitsky.

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http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/apps/doc/A547263666/SCIC?u=txshracd2598&sid=SCIC&xid=5b41d67d.

67 US Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control. *Magnitsky Sanctions Listings*, April 12, 2013. Online, https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20130412.aspx (accessed April 20, 2019).

68 The Moscow Times. "EU Moves Closer to Adopting Sanctions With Magnitsky Name," March 15, 2019. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/03/15/eu-moves-closer-to-adopting-sanctions-with-magnitsky-name-a64815.

69 Kara-Murza.

70 "Навального отпустили из полиции без предъявления нового обвинения по уголовному делу о клевете (Navalny was released from the police without a new charge in a criminal libel case),"

CAATSA and the Magnitsky Act have been two of the more consequential actions taken in response to Russian acts of aggression. The effects of these US-led efforts have can be seen in Russia's response which focused on reducing diplomatic ties with the US. In response to CAATSA, Putin reduced the number of American diplomatic and technical personnel in Russia from 1,200 to a maximum of 455 people, the same number of Russians working in similar positions within the United States.[71] Mirroring the Obama administration's repossession of two Russian diplomatic properties in Washington D.C., Russia coupled this diplomatic expulsion with the seizing of two American diplomatic properties in Moscow.[72] Diplomatic ties further strained in 2018 following the poisoning of a former Russian spy (i.e., Sergei Skripal') in England when the US closed the Russian consulate in Seattle and removed dozens of additional Russian diplomats.[73] Altogether, thirty nations expelled a total of 153 Russian diplomats in response to the Russian poisoning in England.[74] Russia reciprocated in turn to these US

Meduza, October 15, 2018, https://meduza.io/news/2018/10/15/navalnomu-pred-yavyat-novoe-obvinenie-po-ugolovnoy-statie.

[71] Andrew Roth. "Putin orders cut of 755 personnel at US mission," *Washington Post,* July 30, 2017, http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/apps/doc/A519911906/OVIC?u=txshracd2598&sid=OVIC&xid=0155f802.

[72] Roth.

[73] Stephen Sestanovich, interview by Jonathan Masters, *What's Next for Russia's Relations With the West?*, Council On Foreign Relations, March 27, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/interview/whats-next-russias-relations-west.

[74] Andrea Mitchell, Abigail Williams, and Adam Edelman. "Russia retaliates: Expels U.S. diplomats, closes consulate after ex-spy poisoning," *NBC News*, March 29, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/russia-expel-diplomats-close-u-s-consulate-tit-tat-over-n861211.

expulsions by sending another 60 American diplomats back to the US and closing the US consulate in St. Petersburg.[75]

This back and forth between Russia and the international community has not only been limited to reductions of diplomats. Russia's relationship to international organizations and treaties has also changed in the past five years. In all of these instances, the linkages between Russia and western democracies- both political and economic, have been reduced. In early 2019, the US pulled out of the longstanding Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of the Cold War-era citing multiple Russian violations and nonadherence to the treaty.[76] The following day Russia also withdrew from the treaty. Russia participation in and recognition of international institutions has also decreased. In 2015, Russia's legislature passed a law giving Russia's Constitutional Court "the power to review international human rights rulings to decide if they violate the Russian Constitution and are therefore "non-executable.""[77] This ruling essentially allows Russia to disregard rulings of international courts which is precisely what it did in July 2015 when the Russian Constitutional Court found a judgement of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to be a violation of the Russian Constitution.[78] This rejection of an international organization was the choice of Russia. The 2014 expulsion of Russia

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[75] Ibid

[76] The White House. *President Donald J. Trump to Withdraw the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty*, February 1, 2019. Online, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-withdraw-united-states-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-inf-treaty/ (accessed April 20, 2019).

[77] Rachel M. Fleig-Goldstein. "The Russian Constitutional Court versus the European Court of Human Rights: How the Strasbourg Court Should Respond to Russia's Refusal to Executive ECtHR Judgments," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 56, no. 1 (2017): 172-218, 176.

[78] Ibid, 176.

from the G8 was not their choice and signified one of the more substantial steps taken against Russia for their interference in the domestic affairs of neighboring nations.

In addition to the numerous rounds of previously-mentioned sanctions, the removal of Russia from the G8 was in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea. The Hague Declaration was issued in March 2014 by the remaining G7 nations. Following a recitation of Russian illegal action in Ukraine, the declaration states: "This Group came together because of shared beliefs and shared responsibilities. Russia's actions in recent weeks are not consistent with them."[79] These ideas were further echoed the following year at the groups 2015 meeting in Germany when US President Barack Obama said that one of the themes of that year's summit would be "the opposition of Russian aggression in Ukraine."[80] In 2018 Putin responded to enquiries about Russia potentially rejoining the group. He stated that it was not Russia's choice to leave the G8 in the first place and that regardless of membership in that organization, Russia was still a key part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which was overtaking the G7 in purchasing power parity.[81] The SCO nations include China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan. Putin's emphasis on this economic link with Asian nations is a part of a bigger general trend that has been termed Russia's "turn to the east."

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[79] The White House Office of the Press Secretary. *The Hague Declaration,* March, 24, 2014. Online, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/24/hague-declaration (accessed April 20, 2019).

[80] "Обама назвал противостояние с Россией темой саммита G7 (Obama called "confrontation with Russia" the theme of the G7 summit)," Meduza, June 7, 2015, https://meduza.io/news/2015/06/07/obama-nazval-protivostoyanie-s-rossiey-temoy-sammita-g7.

[81] "Путин ответил на призыв вернуть G8 (Putin answered the call to return to the G8)," Лента (Lenta), June 10, 2018, https://lenta.ru/news/2018/06/10/g8/.

Spurn by geographic proximity, international condemnation of actions in Ukraine, and a mutual distrust of Western efforts to interfere in their non-democratic regimes, Russia has increasingly engaged with China. In a 2013 state of the nation address Putin declared: "The resources of the state and private business must be devoted to development and the achievement of strategic goals. For example, the renaissance of Siberia and the Far East. That is our national priority for the whole 21st century."[82] This strategic emphasis on Asiatic Russia has meant a necessary engagement with bordering China. As a result of this domestic development strategy and a worsening of relations with its Western neighbors, Russia-China linkages have increased.

Of the new linkages between Russia and China, no other area has seen more activity than that of economic cooperation. The Eastern Economic Forum began in 2015 as "a summit for developing political, economic, and cultural ties between Russia and Asia Pacific."[83] China attended the EEF for the first time in 2018 as the Chinese ambassador to Russia stated, "At present, China-Russia relations are at their best in history…"[84] Following a year in which bilateral trade between the two nations increased 25 percent, the presidents of the two nations agreed to increase Chinese investment in the Russian Far East in addition to a commitment to reduce their use of the U.S. dollar in

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[82] Stephen Fortescue. "Russia's "turn to the east": a study in policy making," *Post-Soviet Affairs, 32:5,* (2016): 423-454, doi: 10.1080/1060586X.2015.1051750, 424.

[83] Torrey Taussig. "As Western ties fray, Putin and Xi are increasingly close," *Brookings,* October 19, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/10/19/as-western-ties-fray-putin-and-xi-are-increasingly-close/.

[84] Ibid.

bilateral trade deals.[85] This 2018 EEF in Vladivostok was held concurrently with Vostok 2018, the largest Russian military exercise since the Soviet era. Though Russia and China had been holding join naval drill since 2012, this was China's first time participating in this large-scale exercise which in 2018 "focused on enhancing coordination and knowledge between the two countries' militaries."[86] This increase in relations has been the product of mutual benefit in the areas of economic and military cooperation as much as a mutually held position relative to the U.S. The most recent 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy and the Department of Defense's Cyber Strategy identified both China and Russia as strategic competitors "attempting to erode American security and prosperity."[87] When regarding linkages and leverage in the context of 2019 Russia, the state of relations with the EU, U.S., and other western democracies is such that as linkages have decreased with these areas, they have necessarily increased elsewhere and in this case China has been the target of significant Russian interest.

The story of Russia since 1991 was been one of a first gradual then rapid delinking from the U.S. and EU. Low levels of linkages and leverage were carryovers from Soviet period and have only decreased, particularly during the Putin era. A relative lack of outside democracy promotion in the 1990s coupled with Russian institutional design allowing for a strong executive led to a strong decoupling of Russian interests

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85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Alexander Gabuev. "Why Russia and China Are Strengthening Security Ties," *Foreign Affairs*, September 24, 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-09-24/why-russia-and-china-are-strengthening-security-ties.

with those of western democracies. The decrease in economic and especially political links with these nations has had the result of keeping foreign democratizing pressures from taking hold domestically within Russia. In the following section, I will show how a large increase in state and ruling party organizational capacity enabled Putin to suppress civil society, non-governmental organizations and opposition political parties, all of which promoted and advocated for democratic values in Russia.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY OF THE STATE AND PARTY OF POWER

During the Putin era, from 2000 onward, the organizational capacity of the state and ruling party greatly increased. Efforts to consolidate political power began early during his tenure and have continued throughout his four terms as the Russian president. In Putin's first term, administrative districts were redrawn, political parties were merged, many independent media outlets fell under government control, and Putin's party United Russia took hold of the majority of seats in the Duma. This majority legislative control which has continued through Putin's fourth term has allowed for the passage of laws which favor their continued hold on power. This favorable position in the legislature has also granted more influence for Putin's party of power in the Russian judiciary. Simultaneous to this taking over of legislative and judicial control, a crusade against civil society, NGOs, and political opposition commenced. In early 2005, less than a year after the beginning of Putin's second term, the Orange Revolution occurred in Ukraine following the Georgian Rose Revolution of 2003. A series of measures were subsequently enacted in Russia which Robert Hovarth has termed "Putin's Preventative

Counter Revolution." Through media control, legislative as well as physical repression, and the mobilization of state resources, Russian civil society and oppositional political parties were greatly limited in their ability to exist and operate. Most recently, this control over potential opposition sources of power and influence was further expanded by the 2012 "Foreign Agents" law which required all NGOs receiving foreign funding to register as "foreign agents." As the Western linkages and leverage have decreased during Putin's rule, a simultaneous expansion of state and ruling party power has occurred. This combination of factors has created an unforgiving environment for political opposition in Russia.

The measures taken by Putin during the 2000s sought to expand the range of power of his executive branch and the party of power, United Russia. This process began in early 2000 when Russia's administrative districts were redrawn. A presidential decree compiled Russia's 89 provinces into seven large federal districts to be administered by a Kremlin representative meant to oversee implementation of federal law across the country and to "organize cooperation or settle disputes between Moscow and the regions."[88] Additional changes were made regarding regional oversight in late 2004 following the Beslan school siege in the North Caucasus. Under the auspices of increasing security following terrorist attacks across Russia, a presidential decree eliminated regional governor elections in favor of a new system in which the Kremlin appointed these leaders. The security in thirteen of Russia's oblasts was also taken under

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[88] Jeanne Whalen. "Putin Redesigns Regions to Consolidate Power," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 2000, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB958324878809108853.

Kremlin control following the formation of groups led by senior interior ministry officers charged with supervising "all anti-terrorism forces, federal security services, defence and emergency and the interior ministry" within these oblasts.[89] These administrative reforms were part of a larger effort to reinforce the security of the country by preventative measures. In order to accomplish this, the security forces were also granted more financial and material resources during this time period in the early 2000s.[90]

As these administrative and security reforms shortened the distance between the state and the people, a simultaneous reorganizing of the country's political parties further concentrated power in the pro-presidential party of power. In early 2001, the Fatherland-All Russia political party, one of the largest opposition blocs in the Russian Duma, was merged with Putin's party Unity. This new grouping was to be renamed later that year: United Russia, the dominant political party in Russia since this merger occurred. At the time, this merger gave Unity the largest share of the Duma and while Putin regarded the union as a "constructive step on the way to reforming Russia's political system," Sergei Ivanenko of the liberal Yabloko party stated, "Unity has devoured Fatherland…This new party will be dominated by Unity. The Kremlin can view this as a victory."[91] With two years remaining until Duma elections and the largest centrist bloc absorbed, the remaining party landscape consisted of conservative parties with platforms similar to United Russia's as well as more liberal opposition parties like Yabloko. Russia's first

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[89] R.G. Gidadhubli. "Russia after Beslan," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 39, no. 43 (2004): 4704-4706, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4415705, 4706.

[90] Ibid, 4706.

[91] Amelia Gentleman. "Putin consolidates power with party merger," *The Guardian*, April 12, 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/13/russia.ameliagentleman.

Duma elections under Putin occurred in 2003 and the results of this contest, along with every subsequent election, show a continued majority control by United Russia.

Vladimir Putin and *United Russia*: Influence in the Russian Duma and Judiciary

A brief look back at the 1999 Duma elections results is a helpful contrast with later elections in order to see a narrowing of the political field and the emergence of the pro-presidential United Russia in the legislature. The top three vote-getters were the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) (24.29%), Unity (23.32%), and Fatherland- All Russia (13.33%).[92] The vote threshold to enter the Duma in this election was 5% of the total vote. Six parties cleared this threshold while twenty-one were below it. By 2003, United Russia had surpassed the CPRF with a vote share of 37.57% to the CPRF's 12.61% as only four parties of the twenty-one passed the 5% threshold.[93]

The 2007 Duma election saw implementation of several changes in electoral law by the Duma. For this election, voting blocs were prohibited and only parties which completed the arduous registration process could compete in the election. Most significantly, the electoral threshold a party needed to obtain in order to gain seats in the Duma was raised from 5% to 7%, the minimum voter turnout requirement for the election to be valid was eliminated, and the "against all" voting option was similarly done away

[92] Федеральное Собрание: Совет Федерации, Государственная Дума (Federal Assembly: Federation Council, State Duma). "Результаты выборов в Думу III созыва (Results of the elections to the third Duma session)," December 19, 1999, http://www.politika.su/fs/gd3rezv.html.

[93] "Результаты выборов в Думу IV созыва (Results of elections to the fourth Duma session)," Российская Газета (Rossiskaya Gazeta), December 7, 2003, http://www.politika.su/fs/gd4rezv.html.

with.[94] With parties previously consolidated and a majority hold by United Russia in the Duma, the raising of the minimum electoral threshold to 7% coupled with the prohibition of voting blocs imposed massive barriers for parties competing against United Russia. Parties of similar ideologies could not band together in an effort in an effort to consolidate votes and they also had to surpass an already difficult voter threshold. The "against all" vote had previously been seen as a protest vote, a rejection of the establishment parties, and used by voters who were more skeptical of the government's ability to adhere to democratic standards.[95] This vote was often utilized in elections and the 4.70% "against all" received in the 2003 Duma elections was higher than seventeen of the twenty one parties competing for seats. With these new measures in place, the minimum voter turnout requirement of 25% of eligible voters was eliminated to ensure that voters who may have been disenfranchised by these government actions would not have an effect on the election by not participating. After all was said and done, only four parties passed the 7% threshold and United Russia produced its single largest turnout ever in a Duma election, garnering 64.30% of the votes with the next closest party collecting only 11.57%.[96]

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[94] "V созыв. Голосование 2 декабря 2007 года (5th session. Voting December 1, 2007)," Лента (Lenta), http://duma11.ru/history_index.php3.

[95] Ian McAllister and Stephen White. "Voting 'Against All' in Postcommunist Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (2008): 67-87, 84.

[96] Центральная Избирательная Комиссия Российской Федерации (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation). " Выборы депутатов Государственной Думы Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации пятого созыва (Elections of the deputies of the fifth session of the State Duma Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation)," December 02, 2007, http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100021960186&vrn=100100021960181®ion=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100021960186&type=242.

This trend of United Russia victory in a field of weak competitors continued through the 2011 and 2016 Duma elections. A 49.31% vote share was improved to 54.20% from 2011 to 2016 as four parties passed the minimum threshold in each election.[97] [98] The next closest party, the CPRF, trailed significantly in each election: 30.12% in 2011 and 40.86% in 2016.

Through decrees by Putin to initially strengthen their position vis-à-vis other parties and the implementation of new electoral laws once in the legislative majority, United Russia was able to establish a firm grasp on the legislature of Russia by Putin's second term. In addition to his already strong executive abilities as dictated by the 1993 Russian Constitution, this loyal pro-presidential party gave Putin massive control over policy-making and the electoral processes of the Russia.

This concentration of power also extended to the judicial branch as a product of the system of judicial appointments which relies heavily upon the Russian legislature and the President. According to the International Commission of Jurists' country profile of Russia, "Judges of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court are appointed by the

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[97] Центральная Избирательная Комиссия Российской Федерации (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation). "Выборы депутатов Государственной Думы Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации шестого созыва (Elections of the deputies of the sixth session of the State Duma Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation)," December 04, 2011, http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100028713304&vrn=100100028713299®ion=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100028713304&type=233.

[98] Центральная Избирательная Комиссия Российской Федерации (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation). "Выборы депутатов Государственной Думы Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации седьмого созыва (Elections of the deputies of the seventh session of the State Duma Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation)," September 18, 2016, http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100067795854&vrn=100100067795849®ion=0&global=&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100067795854&type=242.

Council of the Federation (upper chamber of the Parliament), upon the proposals of the President while judges of other federal courts are appointed by the President of the Russian Federation, according to rules fixed by federal law."[99] The profile concludes "that elements of law and practice in the appointment process do not adequately safeguard the independence and the quality of the judiciary."[100] Thus emerges a self-reinforcing machine in which judges determining the constitutionality of decrees and laws are appointed and confirmed by the those issuing said decrees and laws. As a result of legislative victories and a presidential tenure spanning nearly two decades, Putin and United Russia have been able to dominate policy-making and greatly influence the judicial system in the process.

Extension of Control: The Cooptation and Repression of Russian Civil Society, NGOs, and Political Opposition

Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution and Ukraine's 2005 Orange Revolution signaled the beginning of significant changes in not only these two nations, but Russia as well. Both changes of power toppled pro-Russian leaders and brought pro-Western leaders to power. These peaceful revolutions were spurned by mass protests advocating for more democratic practices, less corruption, a more Western-oriented future for their nations, and the reduction of Russian influence in their domestic affairs. The incoming pro-Western Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili stated: "If Georgia can resolve its

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[99] International Commission of Jurists. "Russian Federation: Appointment and promotion of judges; Security of tenure," June 16, 2014, https://www.icj.org/cijlcountryprofiles/russian-federation/russian-federation-judges/russian-federation-appointment-and-promotion-of-judges-security-of-tenure/.

[100] Ibid.

problems, that will change the situation in the post-Soviet space…It is important to create a precedent for the entire region…"[101] Following the Orange Revolution, the since murdered Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov echoed this sentiment of looking abroad for examples and inspiration to resolve problems in Russia: "It's a positive kind of envy, because the Ukrainian people have shown that they have a sense of their dignity, that they have their pride, and that they will fight for their freedom and for the truth. And this can teach us a lot. You know, in the past, people in Kiev used to look to Moscow. And now an awful lot of Muscovites, and not only Muscovites, Russians, in general, will probably be looking to Kyiv to see how people are fighting for their rights, fighting for truth and freedom."[102]

This came at a time in Russia when mass protests were occurring throughout the country as a result of dissatisfaction with social welfare reforms. Building upon the momentum of these protests, youth activists and political figures began to widen the scope of their protest just as they had in Ukraine and Georgia from social reforms to larger political demands such as the resignation of the government.[103] Putin's reaction to these events was a multi-pronged campaign to ensure that the events of Ukraine and Georgia would not be repeated in Russia.

The three aspects of this larger project were concerned with ideology, repression, and mobilization. The ideological element was based on the idea that "Russia's

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[101] Robert Hovarth, *Putin's Preventative Counter-Revolution. Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 15.

[102] Ibid, 33-34.

[103] Ibid, 47.

sovereignty was menaced by Western efforts to foment a revolution and impose 'external rule.'"[104] These neighboring revolutions were portrayed by the Russian state as examples of Western, primarily American, imperialism meant to expand NATO and the EU into both areas of Russian influence and Russia itself, all with the intention of infiltrating Russia and bending it to the will of the West.[105] With this narrative of invasive Western incursion established as a threat, the protests at the time and the organizations as well as politicians involved in them were demonized by the state as products of these Western efforts to influence Russia. This framing was used as a justification for repression of protests, civil society, opposition politicians, and Russian NGOs through the coercive use of the security apparatus as well as the mobilization of new non-state structures meant to co-opt and counter anti-government protests.[106]

The campaign against civil society by the ruling regime entailed the creation of new legislation and a separate "patriotic civil society," as well as an increased use of security forces. NGOs became subject to a more arduous registration process in addition to a massive amount of required oversight by the state into the nature of their activities and the sources of their funding.[107] Security officials began openly advocating for legislation which expanded state control over NGOs under the auspices of protecting Russia from foreign infiltration.[108] At the same time as this tightening of control over NGOs was occurring, the regime was creating new, loyal NGOs as a part of a "patriotic

[104] Ibid, 6.
[105] Ibid. 2.
[106] Ibid, 7.
[107] Ibid, 124.
[108] Ibid, 125.

civil society" that was aligned with the regime. While independent NGOs struggled to meet the many new reporting requirements and steep fines for non-compliance, state grants were being extended to these newly created NGOs

One of the most influential creations of the Putin regime during this time period was the youth organization *Nashi*. This state-sponsored group was the single greatest mobilization tool for the regime. In addition to acting as a non-state method of coercion against the demonstrations of the true Russian opposition, *Nashi* used the tactics of the key revolutionary youth movements in Georgia and Ukraine such as creating unique symbols and slogans, the promotion of a strong Russia free from foreign interference, as well as the sanctioning of mass gatherings to divert support for true opposition organizations into this larger, better-funded, and dogmatic organization.[109] *Nashi* had a significant presence throughout Russia and acted in equal parts as a pressure-valve for discontent by diverting support from opposition groups through patriotic gesturing as well as a sort of counter-opposition security force of the regime used to disrupt the protests and activities of the true opposition.

Most significant for electoral outcomes, this period greatly constricted the capacity of opposition parties to exist and operate. Both the systemic opposition parties represented in the Duma and non-systemic groups without representation in the government, were simultaneously targeted. The previously discussed new election laws increased the barriers to entry into the legislature through raising the minimum vote threshold to 7%, the prohibition of political blocs, and an increase in requirements for

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[109] Ibid, 85-86.

party registration. Party leaders like Alexei Kasyanov were target by the state with *kompromat* mean to delegitimize their authority and weaken both the standing of their parties and the opposition as a whole.[110] In many cases, ousted leaders and opposition figures of smaller parties were replaced by regime functionaries, creating a "managed opposition," "whose function was to divert protest into loyal channels and to occupy political space that might otherwise be lost to the anti-Kremlin opposition."[111] Just as parallel, pro-regime structures were created in civil society environment, the electoral space in Russia became co-opted by Putin's regime through these managed parties and the implementation of laws created by the party of power.

The largest source of non-systemic opposition protest was centered around *Drugaya Rossiya*, a coalition formed by the drastically different opposition leaders Garry Kasparov, Eduard Limonov, and Mikhail Kasyanov. Their protests directly addressed the chipping away of civil liberties and the constriction of the political environment. *Drugaya Rossiya* was depicted in the largely state-controlled media as a fascist and anti-Russian group, a labeling which justified the intense state response to their actions.[112] The Interior Ministry's Regional Directorate for the Struggle Against Organized Crime (RUBOP), the *FSB*, and *OMON* special police units were used to infiltrate the non-systemic opposition and detain activists in both preventative roundups under fraudulent pretexts and in the public space during protests.[113] The simultaneous threat from the state

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110 Ibid, 163.
111 Ibid, 145.
112 Ibid, 172.
113 Ibid, 172.

security apparatus and the non-state yet state-sanctioned actors like *Nashi* greatly hindered the ability of these groups to continue functioning.

All of these changes to Russia's political environment occurred in the first eight years of Putin's tenure as president. These measures greatly increased the organizational capacity of the state and party of power. A strong executive branch as established by the 1993 constitution set the stage for initial decrees that could aid in consolidating power for a single party of power. With a legislative majority quickly amassed, the laws of the country could be adjusted to the whims of Putin and control over the process of judicial appointment meant that the constitutionality of new laws was less likely to be challenged. In the months and years following the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, Putin used this consolidated power along with the instruments of the state security apparatus to extend control over the country's civil society while also severely limiting the ability of opposition parties to exist.

In recent years, the state's control over the NGO sector in Russia has been further extended through a series of laws that required NGOs and media outlets receiving foreign funding to register with the Ministry of Justice as "foreign agents." In 2012, the first "foreign agents" law targeting NGOs was passed and was seen as an attempt to demonize the remaining non-state-aligned NGOs. Those receiving foreign funding were to be labeled "foreign agents" regardless of the type of activity the group engaged in, but instead based upon "involvement in the logistical or financial organization of, or participation in, 'political acts' aimed at influencing the decision making of public authorities, changing public policy, or influencing public opinion with respect to

government policy."[114] Going past the point of simply labeling NGOs as "foreign agents," a 2015 law directed toward foreign NGOs authorized the government to "shut down or ban the activities of foreign or international NGOs found to undermine state security, national defense or the constitutional order."[115] The law also penalized Russian citizens and organizations "working for, receiving funds from, participating in the activities of, or distributing information from undesirable groups."[116] Most recently in 2017, a new expansive law allowed for Russian authorities to block online content deemed "undesirable" while also expanding the parameters of the 2012 law to any organization receiving outside funding or based outside of Russia, meaning that media outlets became subjected to these registration and labeling requirement.[117] The "othering" of NGOs and civil society that began following the Orange Revolution has become the norm in Russia.

By 2008, the end of Putin's second presidential term, the Russian political environment had been transformed. The laws, decrees, and tactics used greatly increased the organizational capacity of the state and party of power. A strong executive branch as established by the 1993 constitution set the stage for initial decrees that could aid in consolidating power for a single party of power. With a legislative majority quickly amassed, the laws of the country could be adjusted to the whims of Putin and control over

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[114] PEN International. "Discourse in danger. Attacks on free expression in Putin's Russia," January 2016, https://pen.org/sites/default/files/PEN_Discourse_In_Danger_Russia_web.pdf.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Alina Polyakova. "The Kremlin's Latest Crackdown on Independent Media," *Foreign Affairs*, December 5, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2017-12-05/kremlins-latest-crackdown-independent-media.

the process of judicial appointment meant that the constitutionality of new laws was less likely to be challenged. In the months and years following the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, Putin used this consolidated power along with the instruments of the state security apparatus to extend control over the country's civil society while also severely limiting the ability of opposition parties to exist. Laws passed in Putin's third term continued this narrative of protecting Russia from Western incursion established in the early 2000s. The result of this nineteen-year effort by Putin is a greatly uneven playing field between the incumbent regime and political opposition. Any opposition politician hoping to contend in a presidential election must first navigate this gauntlet of laws, regulation, monitoring, and coercion prior to even running a campaign. It is an inhospitable environment created by a lack of democratic influence via linkages and leverage as well as the structural elements of the regime, namely the high organizational capacity of the incumbent government and party of power.

Chapter 5. The Opposition-Based Model in Alexei Navalny's 2018 Presidential Campaign

The following chapter considers the opposition-based model in the context of Navalny's 2018 presidential campaign. First, I will assess the campaign ideology and its stance in relation to the regime ideology. Second, the issue of opposition cohesion will be addressed. Third, correlation between campaign aims and promises with concerns of the Russian people will be discussed. I will then explore the degree of campaign engagement with the public. Finally, subsequent perceptions of campaign legitimacy on behalf of the society will be addressed. Among the criteria of this model, the only concrete benchmark met is the presence of a distinct, countering opposition ideology in relation to the incumbent regime. Aside from this single area of correlation between theory and reality, the remaining benchmarks were woefully unmet. During the 2018 presidential election, the opposition was fragmented, the policies of Navalny did not adequately address the main concerns of Russian citizens, his campaign's engagement with the population was limited and those who did know about his candidacy more often than not viewed him overwhelmingly negatively. Similar to the assessment of the state/party-based model, a pessimist forecast for the Russian opposition emerges from this opposition-based model as well.

CAMPAIGN IDEOLOGY

Contrasting Navalny's ideology from Putin's first requires an understanding of the prevailing narratives that have been present during the past eighteen years of Putin's tenure as president and prime minister. Scholar Brian D. Taylor coined the term "the code

of Putnism" to describe the combination of worldview, habits, and emotions held by Putin and his team that guides policy and decision-making in Russia.[118] This code emerged around 2003-2004, is not monolithic in that there is room for disagreement within the code, and it "has moved in a more closed and restrictive direction."[119] Conservatism (in contrast to European liberalism), anti-Westernism, and most importantly, great power statism in order "to prevent chaos and collapse" are the most fundamental ideals to this code.[120] Habits or instinctual impulses of the regime that drive decision-making are another component to this code and they include the desire to establish control, a commitment to order, antipluralism, personal loyalty, and hypermasculinity.[121] Emotions are also important to this code. Resentment, vulnerability, and most importantly respect are the main emotional components of the code and are particularly evident when dealing with the West.[122] According to Taylor, this code is central to the decision-making and policies of Putin.

Putin's party, United Russia, has a catch-all electoral strategy, one that retains a fuzzy ideological focus in order to appeal to as many voters as possible. Party programs and manifestos tend to contain a great deal of rhetoric or valence issues, ones that are unlikely to alienate voters. As a result, identifying United Russia's collective or solidarity benefits is a much more complicated task than for the corresponding particularistic or

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118 Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.
119 Ibid, 6.
120 Ibid, 15.
121 Ibid, 30.
122 Ibid, 35.

selective benefits.[123] Despite Putin's initial declaration that he was "against the restoration of an official state ideology in any form," members of his regime sought to define an ideology and identity that could move forward and remain relevant to the Russian population.[124] Vladislav Surkov, the political engineer who has cultivated the current Russian political structure as well as Putin's image, recognized that "a bureaucratic way of keeping the country together cannot last, and we will be unable to maintain the country's integrity without complementing this vertical power with an 'ideology' recognized by people."[125] Additionally, he is on the record as saying that the greatest flaw in the Russian political system is its reliance on the resources of one person (Putin) and, consequently, its reliance on one party.[126]

The emergence of "Putinism" is inexplicably tied to a single man. Because it is not a coherent ideology that has shifted over time, a collection of buzzwords has been used by the regime that reflect the ideals, habits and emotions of the code. "Traditional values" and Russian "national and spiritual identity" have elicited aspects of the tsarist era, the Soviet era, and the post-Soviet era. Similarly, terms like "sovereign democracy" and "authoritarian modernization" emerged as responses to immediate threats and are merely small parts of the larger code guiding Putin and his inner circle. This lack of fixed ideology in favor of these ideas behind the code of Putinism becomes more apparent during his presidential campaigns. United Russia's electoral program for the 2012

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[123] Sean P. Roberts, *Putin's United Russia Party* (Routledge: New York, 2013), 189.

[124] Cheng Chen, *The Return of Ideology: The Search for Regime Identities in Postcommunist Russia and China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 67-69.

[125] Ibid, 68.

[126] Roberts, 189.

presidential election was published on February 8, 2012 in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* less than one month before the March 4 election. The first section, entitled "Our Values: Spirituality of the Russian People," immediately proclaims: "For the new challenges of our time, only a morally healthy society can give a true answer."[127] Putin did not campaign directly and in February 2012, he held his only public rally in Luzhniki on the old Red Army holiday, now rebranded as the Defenders of the Fatherland Day.[128] During this rally he urged citizens "not to look overseas, not to run to the left or to the side, and not to betray your homeland, but to be with us, work for Russia and love her as we do."[129] On December 6, 2017, Putin formally announced his candidacy at a car factory in Nizhny Novgorod with the proclamation, "There is no better space and no better occasion to announce this. I will run for the presidency of the Russian Federation."[130] Yet, at the time of his announcement there was no published platform for Putin's reelection campaign.

Navalny is acutely aware of this relative lack of ideology and how this code is used by the Kremlin. Regarding the political buzzwords, Navalny states, "I don't understand what Putin's ideology of a "special Russian path" actually means. What does "sovereign democracy" mean? There's no positive ideology there. It's just another

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[127] Единая Россия (United Russia). "Предвыборная программа на выборах Президента РФ 2012 года (Election Program in election of the President of the Russian Federation 2012)," 2012. https://er.ru/party/presidential_election/.

[128] Stephen Lee Meyers, *The New Tsar- The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books: New York, 2016), 405.

[129] Ibid, 406.

[130] Neil MacFarquhar. "Putin Confirms He Is Running for President," *The New York Times,* December 06, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/europe/russia-vladimir-putin-president.html.

mythologem that's being imposed on society. When we start asking what exactly this "special path" actually entails in practice, they've no answer to give us."[131] In relation to Putin's patchwork of past Russian ideologemes, Navalny states, "Putin's ideology is strikingly eclectic: it encompasses everything from Stalin to the church."[132] With the "great power" ideas of the past to draw from, "Putin is now skillfully exploiting this nostalgia, and his ideology has no other meaning than that."[133]

In April 2015 during an interview in which he elaborated upon the future of Russia and his role in its development, Navalny not only stripped down "Putinism", but also provided his own ideas of what sort of ideology he subscribed to and how it could benefit the country. In order to garner support from the conservative aspects of society that Putin appeals to as well as to promote a more pro-democratic type of governing system, Navalny describes "a civic nationalism predicated not on psychology or a sense of national superiority, but on universal civil rights and freedoms, and the potential to determine the fate of our country together."[134] A year prior, Navalny's Party of Progress platform states in its introduction, "Archaic, corrupt, and unaccountable to citizens, the state has long been inconsistent with the level of development of Russian society. Our country deserves a modern state, with welfare and the rights of citizens as its cornerstone, and not abstract "state" interests."[135]

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131 Alexei Navalny and Adam Michnik, *Opposing Forces* (London: Egret Press, 2015), 57-58.

132 Ibid, 81.

133 Ibid, 59.

134 Ibid, 64.

135 Партия Прогресса (Party of Progress). "Партия Прогресса Программа (Party of Progress Program)," February 08, 2014,

During his presidential campaign, the two sources for Navalny's policy recommendations and political platform were his anti-corruption blog and his campaign website. The "We Are Often Asked" section of his blog elaborates upon twenty-eight frequently asked questions on matters concerning the state, economy and society. This question and answer section of Navalny's blog provided more information on policy than the official websites of the Kremlin and Vladimir Putin's personal website, both of which merely state the constitutional roles of the presidency, post photo albums, and report recent news of their activities.[136],[137] The questions address, among other things: the structure of the government, the Northern Caucuses, Crimea, foreign policy, the military, law enforcement and the judiciary, the economy, infrastructure, and corruption. The section on foreign policy offers a clear ideological view of Navalny's Russia when he states: "In relations with the countries of the near abroad, Russia must support those principles that it considers to be right for itself: democratic political system, civil liberties and human rights, openness of the economy and foreign trade."[138] On his official campaign website, these points were more specifically addressed in relation to the contemporary situation in Russia.

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https://partyprogress.org/media/pdf/%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BC%D0%B0_1.pdf.

136 Президент России (The President of Russia). "Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России (Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia)," http://kremlin.ru/.

137 Президент Владидмир Путин (President Vladimir Putin). "Личный сайт (Personal Site)," http://putin.kremlin.ru/.

138 Алексей Навальный (Alexei Navalny). "Нас часто спрашивают: (We Are Often Asked:)," *Блог Алексея Навального (Blog of Alexei Navalny)*, https://navalny.com/issues/.

There are six basic points to Navalny's election program which are discussed: the economy, corruption, infrastructure, devolution of power away from Moscow to the regions, foreign policy based on economic development and a migrant policy, and reform of the judicial system. Each subject section on his website began with Navalny's campaign slogan, "It's time to choose," then he posited criticisms of the current state of each area against his proposed solutions and ultimately closed out his points with a paragraph stating why and how he was qualified to properly handle these issues.[139] Overt tones of economic, political, and judicial equality resonated throughout his entire platform. A message in the economic section embodies his overall appeal to voters when he states that he will pursue policies "in the interests of Russian citizens, not government officials, oligarchs or security officials," that will provide a basic standard for the quality of life for all citizens.[140]

When applying Howard, Roessler, and Wahman's conclusions about the importance of ideology for the regime and opposition, Navalny's ideology in relation to that of the ruling party and Putin fits their framework in which an opposition figure with a more defined ideology has the opportunity to create tangible movement forward against a regime with an unclear guiding ideology. Navalny offered clear ideas to rally behind and support with the current problems and proposed solutions plainly stated. Unlike Putin, he did not harken back to the past or attempt to elicit support through ideas of state

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139 Алексей Навальный (Alexei Navalny). "Базовые пункты предвыборной программы Алексея Навального (The Basic Points of Alexei Navalny's Election Program)," *Campaign Website of Alexei Navalny*, https://2018.navalny.com/platform/.

140 Ibid.

power. Rather, Navalny attempted to gain support by looking forward while considering the ills of the past in order to improve the future for Russia.

OPPOSITION COHESION

Russian opposition is a broad term that encompasses many ideas, people, and tactics. To appreciate the state of affairs during the 2018 campaign, the many groups that compose the opposition have to be considered. Additionally, the history of relations between these groups plays a factor in the present conditions as well as the developments in the future. During the campaign and in the year after the election, the prospects for a cohesive coalition of the opposition have not been promising. There is a common person to defeat in President Putin, but disagreements about politics, leadership, and the future of Russia created roadblocks against the opposition in an environment in which the regime had already levied numerous repressive measures.

The systemic opposition in Russia consists of parties and individuals who have formal representation in the Federal Assembly. These parties such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the far-right Liberal Democratic Party of Russia are merely considered opposition in that they run against Vladimir Putin and the party of power, United Russia. The non-systemic opposition is the main area of concern for this paper. Members of the non-systemic opposition operate outside of the political establishment and are often more reform-minded and openly Western-oriented in their political views. At the time of the 2018 campaign, members of the non-systemic opposition included, but were not limited to: Mikhail Kasyanov and his People's

Freedom Party (PARNAS), Alexei Navalny and his Party of Progress, Grigori Yavlinsky and his Yabloko party, the far-left Sergei Udaltsov and his Left Front movement, and Kseniya Sobchak as an independent candidate in the presidential election.

Developments prior to the 2016 Russian legislative election altered the opposition and set the stage for the current divide amongst these leaders. The Democratic Coalition was a collaboration between PARNAS, the Party of Progress, the Libertarian Party, the Democratic Choice Party and the 5th of December Party. This coalition was created with the Duma election in mind so Russia's non-systemic opposition could offer voters a single list of parliamentary candidates that would be chosen through a primary system.[141] Everything fell apart when the pro-Kremlin network *NTV* aired a film about Mikhail Kasyanov and PARNAS member Natalia Pelevina that "contained footage of an intimate nature, filmed by hidden camera."[142] Navalny and fellow opposition figure Ilya Yashin called for Kasyanov to step down and effectively remove himself from the party list. Kasyanov refused which led to Yashin and Navalny withdrawing support for the primary while also convincing other parties to do the same which led to the end of the short-lived Democratic Coalition.[143]

As this took place in May 2016, there was disappointment with the collapse of the coalition, but hope that with presidential elections still two years in the future, coalition building would still be possible. Navalny emerged as a strong, determined

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141 "The Strange Death of Russia's 'Democratic Coalition,'" Meduza, May 31, 2016, https://meduza.io/en/feature/2016/06/01/the-strange-death-of-russia-s-democratic-coalition.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

figure in the affair and there was hope that he would run alongside Yabloko and bring his more widespread appeal to a party whose electoral successes had recently waned.[144] A year and a half after the end of the Democratic Coalition, these divisions remained in place and only further solidified.

The non-systemic opposition did not unite as a whole behind any single candidate and in addition to refusing to support the candidacy of Navalny, two prominent figures within the Russian opposition, Yavlinsky and Sobchak, ran against him. On November 1, 2017 Yavlinsky launched his campaign website and is running as the founder of Yabloko. Sobchak similarly announced her bid for the presidency in mid-October 2017. The daughter of Putin's former boss and mentor Anatoli Sobchak, she was a well-known figure in Russia, both as a socialite and more recently as an opposition voice. Navalny was quick to point out the differences between his campaign and Sobchak's initial rhetoric. During her first press conference following her candidacy, Sobchak admitted she did not want to insult a man who "saved" her father's life; however, as she is running as an opposition figure, Navalny stated that he could not understand her desire to not offend Putin.[145] Playing into Navalny's suspicion of Sobchak as an intentionally placed candidate meant to dilute the opposition, she was given a slot on the immensely popular

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[144] Andrey Pertsev. "Splits Force Russia's Opposition to Rethink," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, May 13, 2016, http://carnegie.ru/commentary/63581.

[145] Alexei Navalny, interview by Oliver Carroll. *Alexei Navalny interview: Don't be fooled, I'm still Russia's best hope of ousting Putin*, The Independent, October 27, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/alexei-navalny-interview-russia-opposition-leader-anti-putin-president-election-ksenia-sobchak-a8023386.html.

state-run debate show *Evening With Vladimir Solovyov* in order for the Kremlin to "listen to the protest agenda" that Sobchak was chosen to represent.[146]

In addition to Yavlinsky and Sobchak running against him, members of the opposition along the political fringes also failed to endorse Navalny, most significantly Udaltsov. Recently freed from five years in custody following charges of inciting public unrest during the May 2012 Bolotnaya Protests, Udaltsov stated that he would not support Navalny in the upcoming election because he was too pro-Western.[147] While he occupied a far-left political position, Udaltsov was a valuable mobilizer and protest leader; it was him alongside Boris Nemtsov and Navalny who helped spark the massive Bolotnaya Protests. Not only did he not support Navalny, but he additionally planned to revive his Left Front movement and begin new protests outside of the realm of support for Navalny and other aspects of the more moderate opposition.

As these numerous candidates emerged and the possibility of achieving a cohesive opposition coalition became more difficult to envision, the need for such a coalition was an idea still being discussed as a necessity. Udaltsov stated that leftist opposition groups should propose a single candidate.[148] Kasyanov also made a plea for unity in a November 13, 2017 blog post. He stated that it is the duty of the democratic opposition to participate in the election, but that this participation will only be effective if

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146 Ibid.

147 Merhat Sharipzhan. "Released Russian Activist Udaltsov Vows To Continue Protests, Won't Back Navalny," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 10, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-udaltsov-vows-continue-protest-wont-back-navalny/28669183.html.

148 Ibid.

the democrats join together in a coalition to include Navalny, Yavlinsky, and Sobchak.[149] Howard and Roessler's work highlighting the necessity of opposition coalitions for successful opposition outcomes is on display in Kasyanov's bid to unite the current opposition candidates. Ultimately, no opposition coalition emerged. There was no unified voice backing a single opposition candidate and the presence of Yavlinsky, Navalny, and Sobchak split any votes the opposition received in an election against the much more popular and familiar figure of Vladimir Putin.

PUBLIC CONCERNS AND CAMPAIGN PLATFORM

An important aspect of any presidential run is appealing to the concerns and desires of the public. In order to assess the relevance of Navalny's campaign platform to the voters, the general ideas that resonate with the public need to be known. Public opinion surveys provide a starting point for this comparison. The Levada Center is the only independent non-governmental research organization in Russia that conducts sociological research on all aspects of society. When conducting and publishing their findings, they follow the principles of the World Association for Public Opinion Research and the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research. They are regarded as an accurate and unbiased alternative to government run polling centers to the point of being deemed a "foreign agent" in 2016 following a survey that showed a drop in

[149] Михаил Касьянов (Mikhail Kasyanov). "Заявление Партии народной свободы (ПАРНАС) (Statement of the People's Freedom Party (PARNAS))," *Эхо Москвы* (*Echo Moskviy)*, November 13, 2017, https://echo.msk.ru/blog/kasyanov_mihail/2091804-echo/.

the popularity of United Russia leading up to the parliamentary elections.[150] In the remaining sections, all polling information was taken from Levada surveys conducted from 2016-2017. The percentages ascribed to each response is the percentage of respondents out of the whole who chose that particular answer.

Before addressing Navalny, the attitudes toward civil society are pertinent to explain. A February 2016 survey was centered entirely on this topic. The question of whether Russia has a civil society shows a murky understanding on behalf of respondents with the strongest results of "probably yes" only yielding a 37% response rate. Responding to whether Russia needs a civil society, 49% responded affirmatively, though only 19% stated "definitely yes" with the remaining 30% stating "probably yes." The main reasons for maintaining civil society among its supporters were to keep power under control (41%), to give society a choice between government and opposition platforms (29%), and to foster dialog between the government and the people (28%).[151] These findings show only a small portion of society has knowledge of current civil society affairs and slightly less than half of respondents deem its mere existence as important in the Russian context.

Two Levada surveys relating to public concerns were conducted in August and October 2017. The August survey asked respondents to identify the most alarming and most pressing problems pressing society while the October survey sought to understand

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150 Ivan Nechepurenko. "Russian Polling Center Is Declared a 'Foreign Agent' Before Elections," *The New York Times,* 09/05/2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/world/europe/russia-vladimir-v-putin-levada-center-polling-duma-united-russia.html?_r=0.

151 The Levada Center. "Opposition," April 4, 2016, https://www.levada.ru/en/2016/04/07/opposition-2/.

the top fears of respondents. Children or loved ones falling ill (47%), war (37%), illness or losing the ability to work (32%), and poverty (22%) were the top four responses.[152] These represent the everyday examples of policy decisions made at the government level as experienced at the level of the individual citizen. At the macro level, the causes of these effects are embodied in the responses to the most pressing issues facing Russia. Economic issues dominated the top concerns: price increases (61%), poverty/impoverishment of most of the population (45%), increase in unemployment (33%), corruption/bribery (33%).[153] Comparing these answers to Navalny's platform shows some area of mutual concern and other areas where his platform touches on problems that are not deemed as important by large portions of society.

The first section of Navalny's platform addressed aspects of the economy ranging from taxation of the wealthy to the reduction of housing prices. He sought welfare for all in order to help aid economic growth, his plans for a tax exemption for small businesses is meant to spur growth, and his desire to instate a higher minimum wage and minimum pension fit well in line with the economic concerns expressed by the respondents.[154] An overall hostile tone toward oligarchs was part of his pledge to reverse income inequality and further in line with a greater desire to improve the economy. It is this area where societal concerns and Navalny's platform have the most overlap. The remainder of his

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152 The Levada Center. "Fears," December 11, 2017, https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/12/11/fears/.

153 The Levada Center. "The Most Alarming Problems," September 26, 2017, https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/09/26/the-most-alarming-problems/.

154 Алексей Навальный (Alexei Navalny). "Базовые пункты предвыборной программы Алексея Навального (The Basic Points of Alexei Navalny's Election Program)," *Campaign Website of Alexei Navalny*, https://2018.navalny.com/platform/.

platform began to stray from this more solid cornerstone that underpins both public fears and their concerns for problems facing society.

Campaign issues and percentage of public concern can be overlaid to display this decrease in relevance. Corruption (33%), healthcare (26%), education (13%), and judicial reform (8%) round out several other pillars of Navalny's platform yet they are areas where, at most, a little over a quarter of respondents deemed as the most alarming societal problems.[155] The issues of "limited civil rights and democratic freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom of press)" only received a 4% response rate and has never risen above this level in the sixteen years Levada has asked it in this particular survey.[156]

Although Navalny's emphasis on the economy was similarly an area of societal concern, the relevance of his other policies in relation to what society wants solved or addressed can be called into question. There may have been a strong connection regarding this emphasis on the economy, but Navalny often framed these problems as all resulting from corruption which, while still a concern, was often used to further a larger anti-regime, pro-democratic agenda which was not as highly valued by these respondents in relation to other problems.

CAMPAIGN ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIETY

While Navalny's ideas of the most urgent areas of concern for Russian may not have exactly met those of most citizens, his attempts at widening his audience were

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155 The Levada Center. "The Most Alarming Problems," September 26. 2017, https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/09/26/the-most-alarming-problems/.

156 Ibid.

largely successful and his ability to disseminate his message under conditions of oppression was one of his strong suits. At the time, TV Rain was the only independent television station in Russia and it along with the several independent newspapers such as *Novaya Gazeta* operated under tedious conditions in which the threat of shutdowns, financial extortion, and physical harm are a part of their everyday existence. It is only through these media outlets that Navalny was able to reach the public through traditional means of politician-to-citizen communication. Every other state-owned news outlet either simply ignored Navalny's campaign for the majority of time or would only portray it as a negative symbol of Western incursion in Russia. Thus, by understanding his limitations, he adapted and sought to expand his presence into one area that has not yet been completely overtaken by the Kremlin and its influence, the internet.

Navalny's blog began as an anti-corruption blog that exposed the illegal dealings of Putin and the elites around him, but as his campaign progressed it also become a stage for his campaign as well. Directly on the top of the home page were links to two separate Navalny RSS feeds and his profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, VK, Odnoclassiki, and YouTube. Similarly, each social media profile links to the other and his posts were shared across platforms to reach as many users as possible. During the fall of 2017 in the few months prior to the 2018 election, his YouTube page had 1.5 million subscribers and his videos which usually are posted a rate of one per week are routinely viewed over one million times. On Twitter, his 2.18 million followers far exceeded any other Russian political figure as well as the official pages of the Kremlin, Russian government, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Instead of attempting to gain coverage in state-run media,

Navalny created an alternative environment for his message that is not limited to just the small scope of the Russian independent media. With his wide online presence, the entire campaign of this opposition figure could be seen throughout Russia and the world.

In Russia, 20-25% of the adult population watches video bloggers and this number rises to 50% of those between the ages 18 to 24.[157] As one of the most popular videobloggers in Russia, he had the opportunity to discuss his political agenda on other popular blogs that are usually reserved for entertainment purposes. The ability to reach beyond his opposition protestor base was entirely a result of his social media presence. Young people in particular were engaged on an entirely different level than previous opposition leaders or the Kremlin had been able to achieve.

At 41 years old, Navalny was a fresh face contrasted against the Kremlin establishment and the elder opposition leaders like Yavlinsky and Kasyanov. During his speeches, Navalny constantly emphasized a very simple message: lying, stealing, corruption, bribery and hypocrisy are bad.[158] Easy to grasp concepts that related to right and wrong were intended to be more accessible to larger parts of the population. For more Western-leaning youth, Navalny's social media presence, age, and rhetoric of simplification were appealing and helped to mobilize supporters.

In addition to gaining subscribers and online followers, Navalny's presidential campaign placed a heavy emphasis on physical appearances and rallies across Russia.

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[157] Левада Центр (The Levada Center). "Телевизор Будущево: Как Видеоблогеры Меняют Медиаландшафт (TV of the Future: How Videobloggers Change the Media Landscape)," July 17, 2017, https://www.levada.ru/2017/07/17/televizor-budushhego-kak-videoblogery-menyayut-medialandshaft/.

[158] Левада Центр (The Levada Center). "Поколение Терпимых и Независимых (The Generation of Tolerance and Independence)," June 20, 2017, https://www.levada.ru/2017/06/20/pokolenie-terpimyh-i-nezavisimyh/.

Initially adept at organizing anti-corruption marches and rallying alongside liberal opposition members in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Navalny applied his past experiences to his campaign. Campaigning meant extensively traveling around Russia while using social media and his array of offices staffed with volunteers to organize "meetings" with citizens everywhere. His blog had a schedule of upcoming appearances with location, date, and time listed, similar to a band touring a country. Within the first two weeks of December 2017, he had travelled and held rallies in six separate cities. With no party apparatus or establishment backing, these travels were funded and organized through donations and his support network of volunteers. According to his campaign website, 189,852 people volunteered for the campaign and 83 offices were established throughout the country.[159]

Navalny's extensive use of social media and Western style campaigning were indispensably valuable to his campaign strategy. He subverted the Kremlin-led oppression and managed to work over the system that was meant to stifle him. Arising out of necessity, the innovative political and media strategy of Navalny allowed for his message to reach a larger audience and engaged the Russian population unlike any previous candidate or political figure in the country. With this mobilization strategy in mind, the final section of this section discusses the perceptions of his campaign by society.

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159 Алексей Навальный (Alexei Navalny). "Команда Навального (Team Navalny). Alexei Navalny Campaign Website, https://2018.navalny.com/.

SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPAIGN LEGITIMACY

When any election day arrives, the support of the public is essential for success. An electoral loss with high turnout and vote-share my not result in attaining the sought-after office, but lessons are learned for future campaigns and areas of success can be weighed against areas that need improvement in order to produce a better result during the next campaign. Navalny's 2013 mayoral run resulted in a loss, but he set a precedent by obtaining an unexpectedly high number of votes, thereby showing that an opposition figure could rally a major city and potentially win the race in the future. Survey polls that account for societal perceptions and preferences of the 2018 presidential election yielded a more grim picture for Navalny's campaign and the future potential of success for his campaigns at the national level.

In a survey that was conducted across 137 Russian cities during February 2017, only 47% of respondents knew who Navalny was compared to 53% who did not. This was the lowest level of name recognition since January 2014. Among those who recognized him, 35% were indifferent toward him and 23% "had nothing good to say about him." Similarly, among those who knew of him, a strong 63% responded that they would "definitely not" vote for him while only 10% of this group stated that they may possibly vote for him.[160] A June 2017 survey shows an increase in recognition to 55% of respondents. Recognition was highest among wealthier and more educated citizens. Moscow also displayed the highest level of recognition with 88% affirming their knowledge of the protest leader, blogger, and former mayoral candidate. The same survey

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[160] The Levada Center. "Aleksey Navalny," 03/20/2017, https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/03/20/aleksey-navalny/.

also enquired into Navalny's political motivations. 30% of respondents said the he acts in the interest in West, 28% for the interest of furthering his campaign and only 12% for the interest of Russia. Again, this split in perception was attributable to the demographics of respondents. The opinion that he acts in the interests of the West was supported primarily by respondents over 40 years old. Young people and Muscovites often showed a positive opinion, that he acts in the interests of Russia.[161]

Lastly, moving beyond name recognition, surveys conducted in late 2017 assessing the attitudes of the population to the presidential candidates did not bode well for Navalny or any opposition figures. Conducted in late October 2017, when asked which candidate respondents would vote for if the election were the upcoming Sunday, Navalny lands in third place with the support of 1.8% of respondents. For comparison, LDPR leader Zhirinovsky, a conspiratorial and radical mainstay of Russian politics since the collapse of the Soviet Union received 3% support.[162] A slight majority of the population knew about Navalny, but within that portion of society, a much smaller number trusted his intentions and said they would support him in the 2018 Russian presidential election.

Of the benchmarks for electoral success in the opposition-based model, only the existence of a distinct ideology is definitively met. There is little cohesion within the opposition and regardless of innovative methods of engagement with society, Navalny's

[161] Левада Центр (The Levada Center). "Протесты и Навальный (Protests and Navalny)," July 17, 2017, https://www.levada.ru/2017/07/17/protesty-i-navalnyj/.

[162] Левада Центр (The Levada Center). "Электральный Рейтинг Собчак Оказалсз Меньше 1% (The Electoral Rating of Sobchak is Less Than 1%)," October 27, 2017, https://www.levada.ru/2017/10/27/elektoralnyj-rejting-sobchak-okazalsya-menshe-1/.

policies did not adequately address the concerns of voter, nor was his campaign itself seen as legitimate or ultimately beneficial for Russia.

Chapter 6. Conclusion and Implications

This paper set out to better understand the electoral viability of the contemporary Russian political opposition by framing this Russian case against the backdrop of scholarship on successful opposition movements in competitive authoritarian regimes. From this existing research, two models emerged for analyzing potential opposition success in these regime types: the state/party-based model and the opposition-based model. In the state/party-based model, opposition electoral success is dependent on the structural factors of the state, including linkages with Western democracies, leverage of these democracies over the competitive authoritarian regime, and the state/party organizational capacity. Opposition movements were most successful in countries with greater linkages and leverage along with lower state organizational capacity while incumbent regimes more often than not retained power when linkages and leverage were low and organizational capacity was high. The opposition-based model places the possibility for opposition success not in the structural elements of the state and political system, but within the characteristics of the opposition itself. A distinct ideology in contrast to the ruling regime, cohesion of the opposition movement, public perception and approval of the opposition and their policies, in addition to competency of opposition engagement with society are the markers of success in the opposition-based model.

After applying each of these models to Russia, both yield the same result: the likelihood of a Russian opposition electoral victory is very low under current conditions. For the state/party-based model, the linkages, leverages, and state/party organizational capacity were discussed chronologically from the 1990s onward to the present day. Low

levels of linkages and leverage with Western democracies was a holdover from the Soviet era and these levels only decreased during the Putin era, especially from his third presidential term onward. The 2000s were also a period during which the organization capacity of the state and party of power was increased to a level of nearly unhindered legislative and judicial control complimented by the simultaneous use of the security apparatus to extend state control. According to the research behind the state/party-based model, in instances of low leverage, low linkage, and high state/party organization capacity, the incumbent regime universally remained in power and was unchallenged by the opposition. Considering the standards of the opposition-based model, the only benchmark met by opposition during Navalny's 2018 campaign was the existence of an ideology distinct from and posed against that of the incumbent regime. The utilization of social media was an innovate strategy for engagement with society; however, the policies of the campaign did not correspond with the concerns of the public and public perception of the campaign was universally very negative.

These models are important because they provide comprehensive explanations and a nuanced approach to the complicated dynamic between a political opposition movement and a competitive authoritarian regime. In the course of this research, I have considered several questions regarding the models themselves. Is it the fault of Navalny's campaign and the opposition as a whole that they do not meet the criteria for success of the opposition-based model? Can these benchmarks be met in the Russian context? Thinking in terms of these models themselves, should one of these be prioritized over the other as a more accurate descriptor of the mechanism for success in these difficult

environments? In this case of studying Navalny's campaign and assessing the opposition-based model, it is important to consider the Russian political environment as described in the context of the state/party-based model. Based on this study, the ability for the opposition to reach the opposition-based benchmarks of success was largely dictated by the factors described in the state/party-based model. As a result of low Western linkages and leverage, the Russian opposition was forced to be self-sustaining and contended with the obstacles of a competitive authoritarian environment without the potential for impactful foreign advocacy or aid. What limited agency they did have was further limited by the state and ruling party's high organizational capacity which leveled electoral laws, utilized the state security apparatus, and reframed political opposition as a pro-Western, anti-Russian entity intent on destabilizing Russia. To use Levitsky and Way's terminology, not only was the playing field uneven, but the parameters of the field and rules of the game were set by the state.

Thus, it seems that the state/party-based model proposed by Levitsky and Way is the more appropriate of these two models gauging the potential for political opposition electoral success in competitive authoritarian regimes. This model provides a better understanding of the dynamic between the opposition and the incumbent leadership. By using this model, the observer is able to better understand how and why certain actions and characteristics of the opposition are manifested. Rather than simply pointing to a single factor such as the lack of opposition cohesion as a reason for why political opposition is not electorally successful, the state/party model delves into the greater structures that are responsible for these opposition failures and successes.

Linkages and resultant leverage take time to establish; however, as was shown in the Russian case, they can be done away with relatively quickly, especially when levels of each were low to begin with and when competitive authoritarian regime in question has strong regional influence in addition to significant military capabilities. Putin was able to further reduce existing linkages with relative ease through aggressive actions that violated international norms. Additionally, the organizational power of the state and ruling party was greatly increased by the time Putin's second term had ended.

Where does the Russian opposition go from this point? Though there are several existing explanations, this area is in need of future research. Once in control of the legislative, judicial and security apparatus, how is state and party organizational capacity? In general, how are the trajectories of components essential to the state/party-based model reversed? Levitsky and Way briefly mention the potentially destabilizing effects of a sudden economic shock in a regime without a distinct guiding ideology. The reasoning is as follows: Without a single unifying ideology to rally behind, elites would defect from the party of power as societal unrest would target this party that they believed to no longer be capable of providing them with economic security and stability. With elite defection comes the lowering of state and party organizational capacity which in turn opens up more space for opposition politicians in the political arena. Brian D. Taylor points out an inherent area of weakness of the Russian governing system that has emerged as Russia has become less democratic. He states that "because the formal [governing] institutions are to a significant degree fictitious, political and economic elites have to rely more than ever on informal networks to pursue their objectives and get

things done."[163] These informal networks compete with one another outside of the institutional setting while still being forced to formally gesture within these institutional facades. This competition and dual nature of the political environment within the government lead to ineffective governance. When considered in relation to Levitsky and Way's loophole, the prospect of elite defection and a decrease in state organizational capacity in times of crisis seems more likely due the fact there is already competition within the Putin regime for influence and status.

While these areas remain deserving of future research, the existing literature on competitive authoritarian regimes is already quite extensive. From this field, these two models for assessing the viability of opposition electoral success have emerged. This paper contributes to this body of work by utilizing these existing models to provide both a contemporary view of the political environment surrounding the Russian opposition as well as a substantive ruling on the prospects of opposition electoral success. Though both models predict the same negative outcome and despite the various barriers imposed on them, the opposition and remnants of non-state civil society continue to campaign and protest. Citizens have not stopped supporting the causes of the opposition or its key figures who still receive international media coverage for their efforts. It is important to remember these facts in the face the daunting realities of the current Russian political system and the bleak forecast for the immediate future. Regardless of model applied or academic assessment leveled, efforts to counter the Putin regime occur every day. The will of the Russian opposition has not been extinguished.

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[163] Taylor, 5.

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