Russian Politics and the Internet in 2012

The elections in 2011-2012 in Russia sparked waves of protests. Throughout these events, political usage of the internet could be widely observed, including people distributing information and appeals for action, crowdsourcing participants and documenting demonstrations, not least for protective purposes. The political role of the Internet should not be exaggerated, but even so it became clear that state-controlled television was beginning to lose its monopoly on shaping public perceptions – at least within a growing urban middle class that could use the Internet to find alternative information.

The Internet policy of the Russian government and its responses to political activism online suggest that those in power regard the Internet as a political force to be reckoned with. A number of laws have come into use to censor and curtail unwanted contents online. In late 2012 there were signs that the government is increasingly conducting information campaigns using a mix of surveillance, dissemination of its own information and physical action to harass and disrupt the opposition.

This report explores how the political landscape in Russia is affected by the Internet, but also adds to the broader research field about the interaction between politics and information technology in various regions of the world.

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Cover photo: Russian activist at demonstration in Moscow on 12 June 2012, photographed by Vladimir Varfolomeev, published on LiveJournal, on the Internet: http://varfolomeev.livejournal.com/2012/06/12/.

Sammanfattning

Det ryska parlamentsvalet 2011 och presidentvalet 2012 utlöste vågor av protester. Under dessa händelser användes Internet flitigt i politiska syften: information och uppmaningar spreds, demonstrationsdeltagare samlades med *crowdsourcing* och protester dokumenterades på nätet, inte minst i skyddssyfte. Även om Internets politiska roll inte ska överdrivas stod det allt klarare att det statskontrollerade TV-mediet började tappa sitt monopol på att forma allmänhetens verklighetsbild – åtminstone inom den framväxande urbana medelklass som kunde använda Internet för att hitta alternativ information.

Den ryska internetpolitiken och statsmakternas svar på nätbaserad politisk aktivism antyder också att makthavarna ser Internet som en politisk kraft att räkna med. Ett antal lagar används för att censurera och förhindra oönskat innehåll på nätet, t.ex. den federala lagen ’Om åtgärder mot extremism’ och lagen om den så kallade ’svarta listan’ som trädde i kraft i november 2012. Vidare framkom under senare delen av 2012 tecken på att staten i ökande utsträckning genomför informationskampanjer där man blandar övervakning, egen information och fysiska åtgärder för att trakassera och störa oppositionen.

Nyckelord: Ryssland, Internet, internationell informationssäkerhet, demokrati, säkerhetspolitik, informationssamhälle, Pussy riot, Twitter, censur, internetkontroll

Abstract

The 2011 parliamentary election and 2012 presidential election in Russia sparked waves of protests. Throughout these events, political usage of the Internet could be widely observed, including people distributing information and appeals for action, crowdsourcing participants and documenting demonstrations, not least for protective purposes. The political role of the Internet should not be exaggerated, but even so it became clear that state-controlled television was beginning to lose its monopoly on shaping public perceptions – at least within a growing urban middle class that could use the Internet to find alternative information.

The Internet policy of the Russian government and its responses to political activism online suggest that those in power regard the Internet as a political force to be reckoned with. A number of laws have come into use to censor and curtail unwanted contents online, e.g. the federal law 'On Counteracting Extremist Activity' and the 'blacklist' law enacted in November 2012. Furthermore, in late 2012 there were signs that the government is increasingly conducting information campaigns using a mix of surveillance, dissemination of its own information and physical action to harass and disrupt the opposition.

Keywords: Russia, Internet, international information security, democracy, security policy, information society, Pussy riot, Twitter, censorship, Internet control

Preface

This report is the result of a joint undertaking by two projects at FOI: Russian Foreign, Defence and Security Policy (RUFS) and National Security in the Information Society (SPIS). As such, it serves a dual purpose. First, it explores how the political landscape in Russia is affected by the Internet, and tells an interesting case study tale from a particularly eventful 2012. Second, it adds to the broader research field about the interaction between politics and information technology in various regions of the world.

The report has benefited from the comments of many people. In particular, Emil Persson from Malmö University offered insightful and detailed comments that substantially improved the manuscript when he acted as the opponent at a research seminar. The other participants at the seminar also gave valuable input, as did David Lindahl at an earlier stage.

Stockholm, December 2012
Jakob Hedenskog, RUFS project manager
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Introduction

In 2011, politics returned to Russia. Since Vladimir Putin was elected president in 2000, political life had gradually become a one-man show. The 'managed tandem' rule of Putin as prime minister and Dmitrii Medvedev as president did not create much commotion. But suddenly the 2011 elections stirred political activism in Moscow on a scale not seen since the 1990s. A number of questions quickly came to the fore. Why did the elections in 2011 create controversy? What was genuinely new? What role did the increasing use of the Internet by opposition politicians and activists play? How did the authorities use the Internet for their own purposes, to manage dissent by digital means?

This study aims to dissect the relationship between Russian politics and the Internet after the presidential elections in 2012. It starts with a short summary of events surrounding the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Second, the study looks at how society has changed with regard to factors such as the role of media freedom and civil society as well as the role of the growing middle class. Third, the state of the Russian-speaking section of the Internet is analysed as regards penetration and infrastructure. Fourth, the study provides an overview of political life, especially oppositional politics, on the Internet, and fifth, the Internet policy of the Russian government and its response to political activism on the Internet are examined.

This study is in many ways Moscow-oriented in that much of the Twitter flows, political and societal organizations and news stations that it features is Moscow-based. While this may not be representative of the Russian population as a whole, the capital is the centre of political demonstrations, opposition and protest at the same time as Internet penetration is considerably higher there than in the rest of Russia. Indeed, sociological research suggests that Moscow has in many ways become a political greenhouse sui generis.

Sources

The materials used in this study are primary sources in the form of official statistics, documents and statements as well as material from the Internet and opinion polls and secondary sources ranging from sociological and political science research to news reports. The aim has been to use primary sources whenever necessary and secondary analyses as background material or when primary sources have not been available. There is a bias in the Internet material in that, as mentioned above, it is Moscow-centred and does not examine, for example, nationalist activism on the Internet but rather focuses on the protest activism that is usually considered as belonging to a more Western-oriented section of society.

Working with opinion polls calls for some caution when interpreting the results. For example, it is still difficult, not to say impossible, to carry out reliable

opinion polls in certain regions in the North Caucasus. On the whole, however, opinion polls by the most prominent institutes have become increasingly refined and developed their methodology accordingly. Among the different opinion research institutes in Russia, the Levada Centre is usually considered as one of the most reliable. It combines good methodology and independence. The Levada Centre is represented in 65 of the subjects (or constituent parts) of the Russian Federation and thus covers about 80 per cent of the population. It conducts 220–230 polls per year, and never by phone. Its opinion polls before elections, for example, have tended to come very close to the actual results. The holding company Romir is Gallup's representative in Russia and is represented in the study to give a backdrop to the Levada Centre's research on trust. The All-Russian Centre for Studying Public Opinion (VTsIOM) is usually considered to be closely linked to the Presidential Administration and lists it as its most important customer. The Foundation for Public Opinion in Society, FOM, also does surveys commissioned by the Presidential Administration. However, FOM provides regular data on Internet penetration and this makes it valid to include its results in this study.[1]

[1] This description is mainly based on the presentations available on the respective institutes' websites (http://www.levada.ru/, http://wciom.ru/, http://fom.ru and http://www.romir.ru).

The Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in 2011 and 2012

The terms used to describe Russia's political system are almost as many as the researchers writing about it: controlled democracy, money autocracy, hybrid regime and virtual politics are just a few examples.[2] Even Russian observers close to the political leadership usually agree that the system has little relation to Western-style democracy.[3] They argue instead that Russia is developing a form of democracy that best suits Russian conditions, that democracy must be introduced gradually because of the prevailing conditions, and that the population is not ready for it.

Putin, Medvedev and democracy

When Putin or Medvedev talk about the importance of introducing democracy, they thus have numerous reservations. Having averred the importance of democracy in his article 'Forward, Russia!' in September 2009, Medvedev went on to stress that it was not a matter of returning to the kind of 'permanent revolution' that characterized the 1990s:

> Hasty and ill-considered political reforms have led to tragic consequences more than once in our history. They have pushed Russia to the brink of collapse. We cannot risk our social stability and endanger the safety of our citizens for the sake of abstract theories.[4]

When meeting a number of Russian and international academicians he had invited to discuss democracy in September 2010, Medvedev began by stating that democracies were more vulnerable than totalitarian states and warned against using democracy as a means of undermining the sovereignty of states.[5] Putin also tends to stress the advantages of democracy while at the same time warning of

[2] For an overview, see Anderson, Richard D. (2010) 'When the Center *Can* Hold: The primacy of politics in shaping Russian democracy', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 397. See also Wilson, Andrew (2005) *Virtual Politics – Faking democracy in the post-Soviet world* (London, Yale University Press).

[3] Indeed, a point is made of the way in which it differentiates Russia from the West. Hayoz, N. (2012) 'Globalization and Discursive Resistance: Authoritarian power structures in Russia and the challenges of modernity', in Jonson, L. and White, S. (eds) *Waiting for Reform Under Putin and Medvedev* (London, Palgrave), pp. 19–37.

[4] Medvedev, Dmitrii (2009) 'Rossiia, vpered! Statia Dmitriia Medvedeva' [Forward, Russia! Dmitrii Medvedev's article], *Prezident Rossii*, 10 September 2009, on the internet: http://www.kremlin.ru/news/5413 (retrieved 16 August 2011).

[5] Presidential Administration (2010) 'Vstrecha s vedushchimi rossiiskimi i zarubezhnymi politologami' [Meeting with Leading Russian and Foreign Political Scientists], *Prezident Rossii*, 10 September 2010, on the internet: http://www.kremlin.ru/news/8882 (retrieved 13 September 2010).

the danger of proceeding too rapidly and thereby putting stability at risk.[6] Both Putin and Medvedev have successfully presented the 1990s as a cautionary example. This rhetoric often found a sympathetic ear among the population, at least until the autumn of 2011.

Widespread apathy among voters

The parliamentary election of 2011 was no more democratic than the previous election. During the run-up, a frequently heard phrase quoted by experts and commentators was 'It's not how the people vote that is important but how the votes are counted' – a quote usually attributed to Stalin.[7] This testified to a deeply rooted scepticism towards the election.[8] According to a survey by the Levada Centre, a similar attitude could be discerned among the general public, although not perhaps in so explicit a form. As a rule, around 80 per cent state that politics does not interest them. There is however a tendency for public opinion to adopt a more positive attitude as elections approach; people are then more inclined to reply that there is some point to the elections after all. Many go and vote in the end.[9]

Under the constitutional amendment adopted in late 2008, the Duma elected in 2011 will sit for five years (2011–2016) instead of four and the president will hold office for six years (2012–2018) instead of the previous four.[10] Formally speaking, laws and other regulatory documents pertaining to the 2011 election differ little from those found in most Western democracies. At a practical level, however, there are significant differences. A number of legislative amendments have resulted in fewer parties being allowed to contest the election and to campaign on the same terms as the United Russia party. (For a summarized presentation of the parties, see Table 1.)

[6] See, for example, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation (2010) 'Predsedatel Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii V.V. Putin posetil Muzei stanovleniia demokratii v sovremennoi Rossii im. A.A. Sobchaka' [Putin Visited the Anatolii Sobchak Museum for Democracy in Modern Russia], *Pravitelstvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 10 February 2010, on the internet: http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/9460/ (retrieved 22 August 2011).

[7] Interviews in Moscow, 16–20 May 2011.

[8] Ibid. See also White, Stephen (2011) 'Elections Russian-Style', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 4, p. 537.

[9] Interview with Lev Gudkov, 19 May 2011. See also the analysis in McAllister, Ian and White, Stephen (2011) 'Public Perceptions of Electoral Fairness in Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 663–83, and White, Stephen and Feklyunina, Valentina (2011) 'Russia's Authoritarian Elections: The view from below', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 579–602.

[10] 'Federalnyj zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii o popravke k Konstitutsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 30 dekabria 2008 g. N 6-FKZ "Ob izmenenii sroka polnomochii Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Gosudarstvennoi Dumy"' [Federal Law of the Russian Federation on Changing the Russian Federation's Constitution, 30 December 2008, No. 6-FKZ 'On Changing the Terms for the President and Duma of the Russian Federation'].

Table 1. Parties in the parliamentary elections on 4 December 2011[11]

Party/ **Party leader**	**Seats in 2007 Duma**	**Seats in 2011 Duma**	**Short description**	**Result** **in 2007 election (% of vote)**	**Result** **in 2011 election (% of vote)**	**Support in opinion polls November 2011**
United Russia (*Yedinaia Rossiia*) Vladimir Putin	315	~238	Power party that has dominated Russian politics. Registered in the 2011 elections.	64.1	49.54	53% of those who intend to vote for a party; 42–45% of the electorate
Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) Gennadii Ziuganov	57	~92	Heir to the Soviet Communist Party. Registered in the 2011 elections.	11.6	19.16	20% of those who intend to vote for a party; 13% of the electorate
Russia's Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) Vladimir Zhirinovskii	40	~56	Party with nationalistic rhetoric. Registered in the 2011 elections.	8.2	11.66	12% of those who intend to vote for a party; 10% of the electorate
A Just Russia (*Spravedlivaia Rossiia*) Sergei Mironov	38	~64	Party created by the Kremlin to attract leftist voters. Registered in the 2011 elections.	7.8	13.22	9% of those who intend to vote for a party; 7% of the electorate
The Right Cause (*Pravoie delo*) Andrei Dunaiev	–	–	Party created by the Kremlin to attract rightist voters. Registered in the 2011 elections.	–	0.59	1–2% of those who intend to vote for a party; 1–3% of the electorate

[11] The table is based on data from the Duma (www.duma.ru), information on party websites and opinion polls by the Levada Centre, which measures support in percentage of those who intend to vote for a party, and by FOM and VTsIOM, which both measure in percentage of the electorate.

Table 1 (contin.). Parties in the parliamentary elections on 4 December 2011

Yabloko Sergei Mitrokhin	–	–	Liberal party that was created around Grigorii Yavlinskii. Registered in the 2011 elections.	1.6	3.3	1–3% of those who intend to vote for a party; <1–1% of the electorate
Russia's Patriots (*Patrioty Rossii*) Gennadii Semigin	–	–	Party with socialist-patriotic programme. Registered in the 2011 elections.	0.9	0.97	<1–1% of those who intend to vote for a party and even less of the electorate
Party for Popular Freedom (*Parnas*) Mikhail Kasianov Vladimir Milov Boris Nemtsov Vladimir Ryzhkov	–	–	A democratic coalition with unclear programme. Was denied registration for the 2011 elections.	–	–	<1–1% of the electorate

Sources: Preliminary election result on 4 December 2011, 'Predsedatel TsIK Rossii V.E. Churov oglasil predvaritelnye rezultaty vyborov" [The Chairman of Russia's TsIK, V.E. Churov, Announced the Preliminary Results in the Elections], *Central Electoral Commission*, 5 December 2011, on the Internet: http://cikrf.ru/news/cec/2011/12/05/predv.html (retrieved 7 December 2011); and opinion polls from the Levada Centre (percentage of those who intended to vote for a party), VTsIOM and FOM (both give percentage of the entire electorate)

Note: There are 450 seats in the Duma. Voter turnout on 4 December 2011 was 60.2 per cent.

The party system

Moreover, the Presidential Administration has sought to create an opposition in which parties such as A Just Russia on the left and Right Cause on the right would offer those not wishing to vote for United Russia an alternative that does

not represent a challenge to the political leadership.[12] From a Kremlin perspective, however, both of these party projects foundered in 2011 when the respective party leaders proved difficult to control. The scandals that surrounded these parties exposed the Kremlin's level of control for all to see – especially when a former senior official in the Presidential Administration openly described in an interview how A Just Party had been set up in accordance with Kremlin instructions.[13] The liberal opposition has been weakened, however, and did not offer any real alternative in the elections of 2011–2012. It is often referred to as 'the opposition outside the system', a term designed to make clear that the parties concerned are not represented in the Duma, but one that the parties themselves use to emphasize their independence.

'Administrative resources'

Russia's political leadership also makes use of what it calls 'administrative resources', i.e. exploits its position of power. This may involve practices such as state-owned enterprises or public organizations backing certain candidates and undermining the election campaigns of others. All five national TV channels are controlled by the state or by stakeholders close to the political leadership.[14] Although Medvedev has expressed annoyance at the way United Russia has exploited its position, the outcomes of local elections earlier offered little hope of change at the 2011 and 2012 elections. When Valentina Matvienko stood for election to the St Petersburg city council in two constituencies, administrative resources were used so effectively that over 95 per cent voted for her – despite the fact that it was clear to all that Matvienko would never use her seat on the council but had simply been voted in so that she could be made speaker of the upper legislative house, the Federation Council. A high turnout at the poll was assured by means of concerts organized in conjunction with the voting, a guarantee of free health checks for all who voted, and the fact that cadets at a local military academy turned up to vote. Nor was anyone informed where the vote was to be held until the last minute, except for those who had been mobilized to vote for Matvienko.[15]

[12] March, Luke (2009) 'Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and parastatal opposition', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 504–27.

[13] Interview with Aleksei Chesnakov, Tropkina, Olga (2011) '"Spravedlivaia Rossiia", kotoruiu poteriali' ['A Just Russia' that We Lost], *Izvestiia*, 30 August 2011, on the internet: http://www.izvestia.ru/news/498981 (retrieved 16 September 2011). See also March, 'Managing Opposition…', pp. 504–27.

[14] White (2011) 'Elections Russian-Style', pp. 532–5.

[15] Bashlykova, Natalia (2011) 'Valentina Matvienko "proshla" v Sovet Federatsii' [Valentina Matvienko 'Passed' into the Federation Council], *Kommersant*, 22 August 2011, on the internet: http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1756239 (retrieved 22 August 2011). See also Kamyshev, Dmitrii (2011) 'Doshli do rechki' [They Have Reached the River], *Vlast*, No. 31 (8 August 2011), pp. 10–14.

Irregularities at the polls

Numerous irregularities have been identified in connection with the parliamentary election of 2007 and the presidential election of 2008.[16] Ensuring high figures at national elections is important to Putin, Medvedev and United Russia, since this lends a significant legitimacy both to the political leadership and to the political system as a whole. It is the individual who is the key, and Putin's strong showing at the polls and his ability to deliver a convincing election result go a long way to explaining why he enjoys such a vaunted position of power, even among the elite.[17] A two-thirds majority in the Duma in 2007 also enabled United Russia to dominate parliamentary affairs and to push through changes to the constitution. In the 2011 election, United Russia lost ground but nevertheless retained a majority in the Duma (with 238 seats, according to preliminary results). Many reports of ballot rigging ensued, along with demonstrations against the election outcome. It is nevertheless worth noting that the election figures corresponded very closely to those in the opinion polls conducted beforehand, including polls by independent institutes (see Tables 1 and 4).

Putin's support among the electorate

The economic crisis in 2008–2009 had only a marginal effect on Putin's poll ratings[18] and he continued to enjoy strong support in the autumn of 2011. However, it is possible that the beginning of a downward trend can be detected there. Compared with the peak in the figures during and after the 2008 war in Georgia, the difference was considerable; according to the Levada Centre, 58 per cent stated in August 2008 that they would vote for Putin in the 2012 election, while three years later only 39 per cent gave him their support.[19] Moreover, there was reason to believe that the figures also reflected the absence of viable alternatives, a 'low-intensity popularity'.[20] In the autumn of 2011 came the first firm signs that the political leadership was no longer in total control of public opinion, e.g. when Putin was booed at a martial arts event in Moscow.[21]

[16] Lukinova, Evgeniya, Myagkov, Mikhail and Ordeshook, Peter C. (2011) 'Metastasised Fraud in Russia's 2008 Presidential Election', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 603–21; and White, 'Elections Russian-Style', pp. 538–52.

[17] Interview with Nikolai Petrov, Moscow, 19 May 2011.

[18] Rose, Richard and Mishler, William (2010) 'The Impact of Macro-Economic Shock on Russians', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 38–57.

[19] Levada Centre (2011) 'Medvedev ili Putin: za kogo budut golosovat rossiiane v 2012' [Medvedev or Putin: Who will the Russians vote for in 2012?], *Levada Tsentr*, 26 August 2011, on the internet: http://www.levada.ru/press/2011082603.html (retrieved 5 September 2011).

[20] Interview with Lev Gudkov, Moscow, 19 May 2011. See also Gudkov, Lev (2011) 'Inertsiia passivnoi agitatsii' [Inertia of Passive Agitation], *Pro et Contra*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 20–42.

[21] Vendil Pallin, Carolina (2011) 'The Russian Elections – Putin Inc. out of sync?', *RUFS Briefing*, No. 10. See also Liik, Kadri (2011) 'On the Qualities of Russian Teflon', *ICDS Analysis* (Tallinn,

However, according to Aleksei Levinson at the Levada Centre, there is no evidence that Putin's ratings are falling significantly; the variations are, in his analysis, normal fluctuations that have been observed earlier in Putin's career. At the same time, he also points out that even among the loyal Putin supporters, 45 per cent believed in 2012 that a new leader could emerge to take Putin's place in 2018.[22]

Putin and United Russia have been keen to prevent the emergence of a proper opposition. The 'colour revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine made the Kremlin even more aware of the danger of an opposition movement. Shortly after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, Russia experienced its own wave of protests in January/February 2005, when old-age pensioners in particular demonstrated against the monetization of social benefits.[23] This caused the political leadership to further curtail press freedoms and opportunities for the opposition to grow strong, a process that Putin had already set in motion shortly after becoming president.

Putin's All-Russian Popular Front

The fact that United Russia was losing ground and looked unlikely to provide sufficient 'pull' leading up to the presidential election was probably one of the reasons why Putin announced in May 2011 that he had decided to create the All-Russian Popular Front. The idea was presented in the kind of theatrical setting that recalled Soviet party congresses of the 1970s. After a long speech at an inter-regional conference on behalf of United Russia, Putin announced his proposal to establish a popular front so that 'all who are united by a common desire to strengthen our country, by a search for the best possible solutions to the problems we face, will be able [to do so] within the framework of a common platform'.[24] His proposal was met with resounding applause and well-rehearsed

ICDS), 2 December 2011, on the internet: http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/failid/Kadri%20Liik%20-%20On%20the%20Qualities%20of%20Russian%20Teflon.pdf (retrieved 8 December 2011).

[22] Levinson, A. (2012) 'Chuvstva i nadezhdy storonnikov Putina' [The Feelings and Hopes of Putin's Supporters], *Vedomosti*, 30 October 2012, on the internet: http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/55525131/chuvstva_storonnikov_putina (retrieved 26 November 2012).

[23] Robertson, Graeme B. (2009) 'Managing Society: Protest, civil society, and regime in Putin's Russia', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3, p. 532. See also Horvath, Robert (2011) 'Putin's "Preventive Counter-Revolution": Post-Soviet authoritarianism and the spectre of velvet revolution', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, pp. 1–25; and, on how public opinion was affected in 2005, Rose and Mishler, 'The Impact of Macro-Economic Shock…', p. 45.

[24] Prime Minister of the Russian Federation (2011) 'Predsedatel Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii V. V. Putin prinial uchastie v Mezhregionalnoi konferentsii partii "Edinaia Rossia" na temu "Strategiia sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Yuga Rossii do 2020 goda. Programma na 2011–2020 gody"' [The chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin took part in the Interegional Conference of the United Russia party, 'Strategy for Social-Economic Development in Southern Russia until 2020. Programme for 2011–2020'], *Pravitelstvo Rossiiskoi*

expressions of support from United Russia representatives.[25] The launching of Putin's popular front clearly shows that United Russia is primarily a party that is dependent on those in power rather than a party along the lines of the Community Party of the Soviet era.[26]

Table 2. Levada Centre: 'Have you heard of the "All-Russian Popular Front", now created around United Russia on the initiative of Vladimir Putin?' Figures in the table represent percentages of those polled.

	May 2011	**June 2011**	**August 2011**
Follow the development of this question intently	3	4	3
Have heard a lot about this	14	17	17
Have heard something, but do not know what it is about	30	30	39
Hear about this for the first time	54	49	41

Source: Levada Centre (2011) 'Vybory v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu' [The Elections to the Duma], *Levada Tsentr*, on the Internet: http://www.levada.ru/vybory-v-gosudarstvennuyu-dumu (retrieved 17 October 2011).

Table 3. Levada Centre: 'What is your attitude to the creation of the "All-Russian Popular Front"?' Figures in the table represent percentages of those polled.

	May 2011	**June 2011**	**August 2011**
Entirely positive	7	6	5
Predominantly positive	33	32	29
Predominantly negative	22	22	24
Very negative	11	10	10
Unable to answer	27	30	32

Source: Levada Centre (2011) 'Vybory v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu' [Elections to the Duma], *Levada Tsentr*, on the Internet: http://www.levada.ru/vybory-v-gosudarstvennuyu-dumu (retrieved 17 October 2011).

Federatsii, 6 May 2011, on the internet: http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/15104/ (retrieved 13 May 2011).

[25] Ibid.

[26] See also the thorough analysis of United Russia in Roberts, Sean P. (2011) *Putin's United Russia Party* (London, Routledge).

The All-Russian Popular Front quickly encountered problems since only a fifth of the population seemed to know what it was, and support for it was anything but strong (see Table 2 and Table).

Table 4. Opinion polls before the presidential elections and the result on 4 March 2012
Figures in the table represent percentages of those polled (see also note below table).

Candidate	Levada Centre I (31 Jan.)	Levada Centre II (31 Jan.)	VTsIOM (12 Feb.)	FOM (18–19 Feb.)	Result
Vladimir Putin	56%	63%	55%	50%	64%
Gennadii Ziuganov	14%	15%	9%	9%	17%
Vladimir Zhirinovskii	8%	8%	8%	6%	6%
Sergei Mironov	4%	5%	5%	3%	4%
Mikhail Prokhorov	5%	5%	6%	5%	8%
Dmitrii Mezentsev (not reg.)	<1%	<1%	–	–	
Grigorii Yavlinskii (not reg.)	2%	2%	–	–	
Will destroy the ballot paper	1%	1%	–	1%	
Will not vote	<1%	–	8%	9%	
Do not know	11%	–	9%	18%	

Sources: Levada Centre (2012) 'Metodologiia analiza elektoralnykh ustanovok izbiratelei' [Methodology for Analysing the Electorate's Attitude before the Elections], *Levada-Tsentr*, 31 January 2012, on the Internet: http://levada.ru/print/31-01-2012/metodologiya-analiza-elektoralnykh-ustanovok-izbiratelei (retrieved 22 February 2012); VTsIOM (2012) 'Elektronalnyi reiting politkov" [The Voters' Rating of Politicians], *VTsIOM*, on the Internet: http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=168 (retrieved: 22 February 2012); and FOM (2012) 'Prezidentskie vybory 2012 g.' [The Presidential Elections 2012], *Dominanty*, No. 7, 23 February 2012, on the Internet: http://bd.fom.ru/pdf/d07pv12.pdf (retrieved 23 February 2012). Central Electoral Commission (2012) 'Predvaritelnye itogi golosovaniia na vyborakh Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii' [Preliminary results in the Russian Federation

Presidential Elections], *Tsentralnaia izbiratelnaia komissiia*, 5 March 2012, on the Internet: http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/2012/03/05/chyrov_1.html (retrieved 5 March 2012).

Note: The different opinion poll institutes ask questions and present results differently. A hyphen (–) in a column denotes that the alternative was not available in the opinion poll. Neither VTsIOM nor FOM adjusted their results for the voters who said they did not intend to vote at all, that they would vote for another candidate or had not decided. The Levada Centre usually adjust their results for these, since this gives a better picture of what the election results will be. To illustrate the difference, the Levada Centre presented its results in different variants on 31 January 2012. Two of these are represented in the table above. In both variants the question was: 'Will you vote in the Russian presidential elections, and if yes, who would you vote for if the following candidates were included on the list?'. However, in Variant I the alternatives 'I will destroy the ballot paper', 'I will vote, but do not know for who', 'I will not vote' and 'I do not know' were included, while they were not in Variant II.

Compared to the presidential election in 2008, when Dmitrii Medvedev got 71 per cent of the votes, Putin's result was somewhat weaker than Medvedev's four years earlier. Voter turnout was 65 per cent, which was higher than that in the parliamentary election three months earlier (60 per cent) but lower than that in the presidential election in 2008 when 70 per cent of the electorate voted.

Allegations of fraud

The parliamentary elections were accompanied by a flood of allegations of fraud, ballot stuffing and so-called election carousels. Election fraud did occur in 2011 but probably not on a grander scale than in 2007.[27] Interestingly, large segments of the population –not least the urban middle class –were this time of the opinion that election fraud had indeed been present.[28] This change in public opinion rather than increased ballot stuffing had repercussions for the political developments in 2012. It was also a reason why the Kremlin announced a series of measures to hinder fraud on election day. The most noticed as well as the most costly of these measures was the installing of Web cameras in all polling stations. This would allow anyone to monitor elections on the website www.webvybory2012.ru.

Ratings for Putin and United Russia

Putin's high ratings just before and after the presidential election only took a few months to turn down again. In August 2012, the Levada Centre and another opinion polling company, Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie (FOM), registered the

[27] Wilson, Kenneth (2012) 'How Russians View Electoral Fairness: A qualitative analysis', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 1, pp. 145–68.

[28] On the view of earlier elections, see for example, McAllister, I. and White, S. (2011) 'Public Perceptions of Electoral Fairness in Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 563–83. On the public opinion of the 2011 elections, see Gudkov, L. (2012) 'Rossiiskie parlamentskie vybory: elektoralnyi protsess pri avtoritarnom rezhime' [The Russian Parliamentary Elections: The electoral process in an authoritarian regime], *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia*, No. 1, January–February 2012, p. 11.

lowest ever trust in Putin.[29] According to the Levada Centre, 48 per cent had a positive view of Putin in mid-August 2012 while 25 per cent had a negative view. In May 2012, just after the presidential election, the ratings were 60 and 21 per cent respectively.[30] FOM conducted their survey at about the same time (11–23 August 2012) and 45 per cent expressed trust in Putin and 23 per cent no trust.[31]

United Russia fared much worse. In August 2012, 45 per cent of respondents agreed with the proposition that United Russia is a 'party of swindlers and thieves' (see Table). Admittedly, almost as many said they did not agree with the description, but the percentage of respondents that considered United Russia as a 'party of swindlers and thieves' is striking when considering United Russia's election result in 2011 less than a year earlier. That so many agreed with the proposition could be interpreted as an indication of the Internet having played a role in forming Russian public opinion since the phrase was initially coined by Aleksei Navalnyi on the Internet.

Table 5. Levada Centre: 'Do you agree with the view that United Russia is a party of swindlers and thieves?' Figures in the table represent percentages of those polled.

	Apr. 2011	Sep. 2011	Dec. 2011	Feb. 2012	Jun. 2012	Aug. 2012
Certainly agree	8	12	13	15	18	15
Rather agree	23	20	24	21	24	30
Rather disagree	30	28	29	30	28	30
Certainly disagree	15	22	17	17	12	12
Unable to answer	23	18	18	17	18	13

Source: Levada Centre (2012) 'Yedinaia Rossiia i Narodnyi Front' [United Russia and the Popular Front], *Levada Tsentr*, 28 August 2012, on the Internet: http://www.levada.ru/28-08-2012/edinaya-rossiya-i-narodnyi-front (retrieved 19 September 2012).

[29] Glikin, Maksim (2012) 'Reiting Putina – na minimume' [Putin's Ratings Are at Minimum Level], *Vedomosti*, 17 August 2012, on the Internet: http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/294381/rejting_putina_na_minimume (retrieved 17 August 2012).

[30] Levada Centre (2011) 'Medvedev ili Putin: za kogo budut golosovat rossiiane v 2012' [Medvedev or Putin: Who will the Russians vote for in 2012?], *Levada Tsentr*, 26 August 2011, on the internet: http://www.levada.ru/press/2011082603.html (retrieved 5 September 2011).

[31] FOM (2012) 'Politicheskie indicatory' [Political Indicators], *Dominanty*, No. 32, 16 August 2012, on the Internet: http://bd.fom.ru/pdf/d32ind12.pdf (retrieved 22 August 2012).

United Russia fared somewhat better when it came to the question whether the respondents trusted it; in August 2012 a total of 48 per cent said they certainly trusted (11%) or rather trusted (37%) United Russia (see Table). The All-Russian Popular Front, meanwhile, appears to have made little or no impact in the minds of most Russians. If anything, the attitude towards the 'Front' cooled from being rather tepid just before the presidential elections. Not only had the number who said they trusted it diminished, but the intensity of both trust and non-trust had gone down, while the number of respondents who did not express an opinion had gone up from 6 per cent in February 2011 to 32 per cent in August 2012 (see Table).

Table 6. Levada Centre: 'Do you trust the party "United Russia"?' Figures in the table represent percentages of those polled.

	February 2012	**August 2012**
Definitely yes	13	11
Rather yes	34	37
Rather no	22	21
Definitely no	21	19
Unable to answer	11	12

Source: Levada Centre (2012) 'Yedinaia Rossiia i Narodnyi Front' [United Russia and the Popular Front], *Levada Tsentr*, 28 August 2012, on the Internet: http://www.levada.ru/28-08-2012/edinaya-rossiya-i-narodnyi-front (retrieved 19 September 2012).

Table 7. Levada Centre: 'Do you trust the All-Russian Popular Front?' Figures in the table represent percentages of those polled.

	February 2012	**August 2012**
Definitely yes	22	4
Rather yes	20	21
Rather no	18	20
Definitely no	34	21
Unable to answer	6	32

Source: Levada Centre (2012) 'Yedinaia Rossiia i Narodnyi Front' [United Russia and the Popular Front], *Levada Tsentr*, 28 August 2012, on the internet: http://www.levada.ru/28-08-2012/edinaya-rossiya-i-narodnyi-front (retrieved 19 September 2012).

What then was new in the 2011 and 2012 elections? The Kremlin-loyal party United Russia as well as the All-Russian Population Front were struggling to maintain their positions in public opinion. At the same time Putin's ratings remained impressive and the support that United Russia still enjoyed in public opinion and among the electorate probably mainly reflected his popularity. There is little evidence that the parliamentary elections in 2011 were falsified to any greater extent than previous elections. What had changed was the public perception of elections, and this triggered both protests and measures by the Kremlin to try and increase the degree to which the presidential elections were perceived as legitimate. In fact, establishing the presidential elections as legitimate became more important than achieving a couple of extra percentage points of votes for Putin, who no doubt was well aware that his high ratings made election fraud on the actual day unnecessary.

Society and Civil Society

As noted above, the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine marked the beginning of efforts to prevent a similar course of events in Russia. Organizations such as the Nashi youth movement were created to stage mass demonstrations in support of the constitutional order and against foreign influence/interference. The aim was to sway public opinion and engage in dialogue with the masses.[32] New laws were also passed regulating the activities of civil society. All non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were suddenly required to register with the authorities, and there were many official reasons for refusing them permits for their activities.[33]

Weak civil society

In Russia, civil society in the usual sense – non-profit organizations free from government interference – mainly consists of NGOs supported from abroad. Most Russian organizations are dependent on and allied with the state or with local or regional holders of power. Many in fact are the successors to organizations that operated back in the Soviet era, including trade unions, local cultural centres and trade associations. Many of these play an important role in mobilizing the community, e.g. at election time on behalf of United Russia and the political leadership currently in power. Independent grass-roots organizations tend to grow up around specific policy issues and rapidly disappear. Only in exceptional cases have they had any political impact.[34] The various Soldiers' Mothers organizations fighting mainly for conscripts' rights are one example of a movement that is independent of the state and has a long tradition; while it has made some impression on Russian politics, it is partially divided and is often obstructed in its work, mainly by the Ministry of Defence.

Media under Kremlin control

Thus civil society is underdeveloped while at the same time the Kremlin exercises a great deal of control over the national media. In 2011, Russia was once again rated 'non-free' by Freedom House in its annual report on press freedoms around the world; the same rating has applied ever since the 2003 report. Among the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe,

[32] Quoted in Horvath (2011) 'Putin's "Preventive Counter-Revolution"', p. 15.
[33] Ibid., pp. 18–19.
[34] Averkiev, Igor (2011) 'Nabrosok obshchestvennoi aktivnosti v Rossii" [A Sketch of Societal Activity in Russia], in Lipman, Maria and Petrov, Nikolai (2010) *Obshchestvo i grazhdane v 2008–2010 gg* [Society and Citizens 2008–2010], Carnegie Moscow Center Working Papers, No. 3 (Moscow, Carnegie Moscow Center), pp. 45–8. See also Uhlin, Anders (2009) 'Rysslands civilsamhälle' [Russia's Civil Society], in Jonsson, Anna and Vendil Pallin, Carolina (eds) *Ryssland – Politik, samhälle och ekonomi* [Russia – Politics, society and economy] (Stockholm, SNS), pp. 182–204.

three rated lower than Russia in 2011 (Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).[35] Freedom House called attention to a number of circumstances showing that the media in Russia cannot be described as free, e.g. a judicial system that allows itself to be used to persecute independent journalists while failing to investigate and prosecute murders and cases of assault, the fact that reporters are increasingly practising self-censorship, and continuing state control of 'virtually all media'.[36]

Several studies have noted the media's lack of freedom in Russia.[37] A free press exists to some extent, and radio channels such as Echo of Moscow (*Ekho Moskvy*) are allowed to operate fairly freely, but they only reach a limited section of the population, mainly the educated middle classes in metropolitan areas. This group prefers to obtain its information from the Net editions of independent newspapers, and also follows independent blogs of various kinds. Dmitry Muratov, chief editor of *Novaia gazeta*, even suggested in May 2011 that there are in fact two parties in Russia: the 'TV Party' and the 'Internet Party'.[38] In his analysis, the overwhelming majority of the Russian population belonged to the TV Party in that they received most of their information from the television, while a minority, primarily educated young people in big cities, used the Net for such purposes. In fact, however, television remains the dominant source of news information in Russia even among young Internet users. For Internet reports about, for example, corruption to reach a larger audience at all, they have to reach the television news as well.[39]

Quasi-institutions

To create an impression of political accountability and to obtain information about the mood of the population and about how policies may be effectively pursued, the Russian leadership has established a number of institutions, or substitutions, in place of democratic channels that might lead to demands for

[35] Freedom House (2011) 'Freedom of the Press 2011: Global press freedom rankings', *Freedom House*, 2 May 2011, on the internet: http://freedomhouse.org/images/File/fop/2011/FOTP2011GlobalRegionalTables.pdf (retrieved 3 May 2011).

[36] Deutsch Karlekar, Karin (2011) 'Press Freedom in 2011: Signs of change amid repression', *Freedom House*, 2 May 2011, on the internet: http://freedomhouse.org/images/File/fop/2011/FOTP2011OverviewEssay.pdf (retrieved 3 May 2011).

[37] See, for example, Lipman, Maria (2009) 'Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia', *Chatham House, REP PP 09/01*, January 2009, on the internet: http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/13290_300109lipman.pdf (retrieved 4 May 2011).

[38] 'Osoboe mnenie' [In My Opinion], 19.08–19.45 (Moscow time), *Ekho Moskvy*, 10 May 2011. There are five national channels: Pervyi kanal, Rossiia and TV-Tsentr, which are all state-owned, and NTV and REN-TV, which are owned by Gazprom, Severostal and Surneftegaz – companies that are close to the Kremlin.

[39] Volkov, Denis (2012) 'The Internet and Political Involvement in Russia', *Russian Education and Society*, Vol. 54, No. 9, pp. 62–77.

accountability (see Table).[40] The Kremlin, for instance, conducts its own opinion polls, some of which are never published. Russia thus has a number of institutions that imitate those that usually link leaders and led; these are quasi-institutions supposed to compensate for weak parties, controlled media and a parliamentary body that in practice fails to scrutinize executive power.[41] For example, in a bid to revitalize United Russia and to identify the most promising candidates for high office, a selection process in the form of a 'nomenklatura list' was introduced prior to the Duma election, based on the American model featuring 'primaries'.[42] State-controlled media feature carefully managed press conferences and phone-in programmes as well as various consultative councils, and opportunities for citizens to direct grievances to the president through state offices have all been created as substitute mechanisms for the population to hold their political leadership accountable and influence politics.

Opportunities for demanding political accountability

None of these substitute institutions, however, enable the citizenry to demand accountability of the executive branch, which means that they are weak and that the country's leadership is constantly having to seek new channels and invent new quasi-institutions.[43] On occasions when power holders and civil society have nevertheless engaged in dialogue, the channels that ought to be used for this – such as parliament or political parties – have largely been ignored.[44]

[40] Petrov, Nikolai et al. (2010) 'Overmanaged Democracy in Russia: Governance implications of hybrid regimes', *Carnegie Moscow Center, Carnegie Paper*, No. 106, February 2010, on the internet: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/overmanaged_democracy_2.pdf (retrieved 27 April 2011).

[41] Whitmore, Sarah (2010) 'Parliamentary Oversight in Putin's Neo-patrimonial State: Watchdogs or show-dogs?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 6, pp. 1004–7.

[42] Prime Minister (2011) 'Predsedatel Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii V.V. Putin provel zasedanie Federalnogo koordinatsionnogo soveta Obshcherossiiskogo narodnogo fronta, posviashchennoe podvedeniiu predvaritelnykh itogov praimeriz' [The Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, V. V. Putin, Held a Meeting in the Federal Coordinating Council of the All-Russian Popular Front in Order to Draw the First Conclusions of the Primaries], *Pravitelstvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 23 August 2011, on the internet: http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/16272/ (retrieved 26 August 2011).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Petrov, Nikolai (2011) *Rossiia-2010: menshe stabilnosti, bolshe publichnoi politiki* [Russia-2010: Less stability, more open politics], Briefing, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace).

Table 8. Weakened institutions and their substitutions

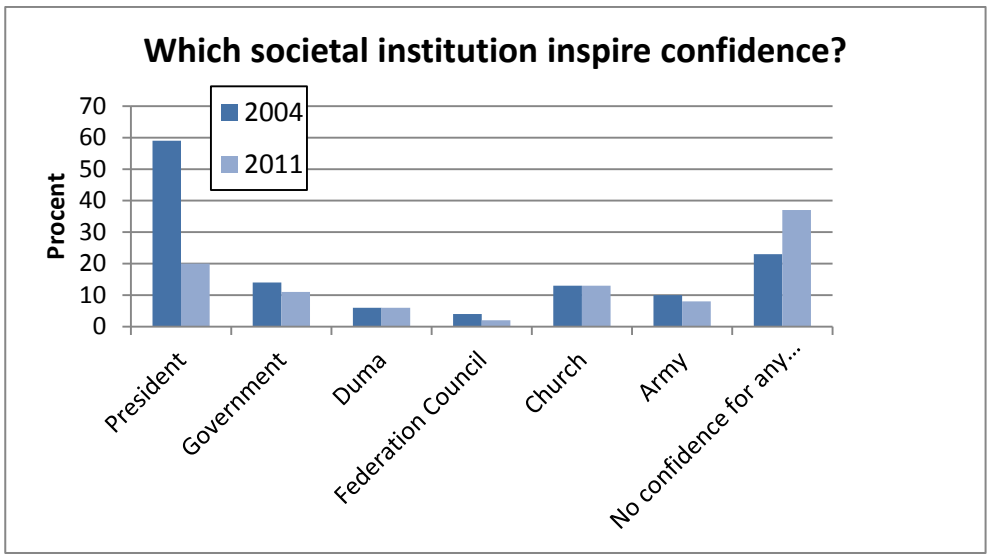
Institution	**Substitution**
Duma (lower house of Parliament)	The Public Chamber (and public councils attached to ministries and state services and agencies) Consultative councils Commissions under the president
Federation Council (upper house of Parliament)	State Council and Presidium Legislative Council
Political parties	A 'loyal' opposition in the form of controlled parties State companies Regional political organizations Primary elections All-Russian Popular Front Nomenklatura list for promising civil servants
Independent media	Official offices for receiving views and complaints from citizens Regional networks for letters from citizens FSB (Federal Security Service) and other security services Opinion polls State-controlled media
Government	Presidential Administration State companies Security Council Centre for Strategic Research

Source: The table is an adjusted version of the table in Petrov, Nikolai et al. (2010) 'Overmanaged Democracy in Russia: Governance implications of hybrid regimes', *Carnegie Moscow Center, Carnegie Paper,* No. 106, February 2010, on the Internet: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/overmanaged_democracy_2.pdf (retrieved 27 April 2011).. For example, primary elections, the All-Russian Popular Front, state-controlled media and the nomenklatura list have been added.

Trust and social capital

Meanwhile, trust in state institutions has declined significantly; this can be clearly deduced from the indexes published regularly by, for instance, the Levada Centre, FOM and VTsIOM,[45] but also from the survey published in October 2011 by the Romir research group (see Figure 1). Furthermore, opinion polls and research suggest that trust overall is low in Russian society even between individuals. In an international survey of trust in 24 countries conducted in 2007, respondents were asked about whether they trusted other people. Russia ranked 19 of the countries in this study (see Table).[46]

Figure 1. Support for societal institutions in 2004 and 2011 according to opinion-poll company Romir



Source: Romir (2011) 'Tsifry i fakty: Dolia rossiian, ne doveriaiushchikh obshchestvennym institutam, vyrosla za sem let s 23% do 37%' [Numbers and Facts: The share of Russian citizens who do not trust any societal institutions has risen from 23% to 37% in seven years], *Romir – Press-tsentr*, on the Internet: http://romir.ru/news/res_results/827.html (retrieved 13 October 2011).

[45] See the indexes of VTsIOM for the president, prime minister and government, on the internet: http://wciom.ru/172/ (retrieved 17 October 2011), and the indexes of the Levada Centre for the prime minister and government, on the internet: http://www.levada.ru/indeksy (retrieved 17 October 2011).

[46] Gudkov, Lev (2012) 'Sotsialnyi capital i ideologicheskie orientatsii' [Social Capital and Ideological Orientations], *Pro et Contra*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 16–17, on the Internet: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProEtContra55_6-31.pdf (retrieved 27 August 2012).

The study of social capital and the role it plays in society is a field that is attracting increasing attention in Russian sociology. The level of social capital in society is usually connected to the level of trust in a society and to the level of participation in organizational work. When it comes to trust, Russian society is often referred to as 'atomized', in other words a society with an exceptionally low degree of trust in institutions but also between individuals.[47] (See also Table.) Recent research also suggests that one of the things that set Russia apart from West European countries is the low level of participation in organizations.[48]

In spite of this, it is worth underlining that one kind of voluntary participation in societal work has been growing. There has been increasing evidence of self-organization in, for example, helping out to extinguish forest fires, assisting in alleviating the consequences of flooding and searching for missing children.[49] This self-organization is usually spontaneous and organized through the Internet as well as facilitated by mobile phones. There is little evidence of this evolving automatically into more stable organizations, but volunteer efforts are often described as more efficient than the government's. This could be the reason why United Russia launched a draft law that aimed to regulate volunteer efforts. One of the authors of the draft law, Svetlana Zhurova, senator in the Federation Council, underlined that the intention was not to organize or introduce restrictions on this activity,[50] but critics quickly suspected that the draft law in fact was intended to increase control over these volunteer efforts. (Furthermore, there are examples of effective crowdsourcing on the Internet; see the section on Politics on the Internet below.)

[47] The Russian sociologist Emil Pain even refers to Russian society as 'one of the most atomized in the modern world', Pain, E. (2012) 'Socio-Cultural Factors and Russian Modernization', in Jonson, L. and White, S. (eds) *Waiting for Reform under Putin and Medvedev* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan), p. 102.

[48] Bykov, I. A. (2011) 'Sotsialnyi kapital i politika v Rossii: portret na fone Yevropy' [Social Capital and Politics in Russia: A portrait against a European background], *Politeks*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 111–12.

[49] For examples, see Lipman and Petrov (2010), pp. 17–18, 81–2, and Lebedev, K. (2012) 'Volontery razbodiat Rossiiu' [Volunteers Waken Russia Up], *gazeta.ru*, 19 July 2012, on the Internet: http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2012/07/19_e_4686229.shtml (retrieved 8 October 2012).

[50] United Russia (2012) 'Zhurova: Proekt zakona o volonterskoi deiatelnosti stanet stimulom dlia razvitiia blagotvoritelnosti' [Zhurova: The draft law on voluntary activity will be a stimulus for the development of charity], *Yedinaia Rossiia*, 29 May 2012, on the Internet: http://er.ru/news/2012/5/29/zhurova-proekt-zakona-o-volonterskoj-deyatelnosti-stanet-stimulom-dlya-razvitiya-blagotvoritelnosti/ (retrieved 8 October 2012).

Table 9. Trust between individuals

Answer to the question: 'With which statement are you the most in agreement?' (% of respondents)			
Country	**A+B**	**C+D**	**Rating**
Average	*42*	*58*	
Norway	81	19	1
Sweden	74	26	2
New Zealand	69	31	3
Switzerland	68	32	4
Finland	67	33	5
Australia	64	36	6
Japan	61	39	7
Flanders (Belgium)	48	52	8
Czech Republic	48	52	9
South Korea	46	54	10
Israel	43	57	11
Slovenia	39	61	12
Taiwan	39	61	13
France	39	61	14
South Africa	37	63	15
Latvia	34	66	16
Poland	30	70	17
Uruguay	29	71	18
Russia	**28**	**71**	**19**
Dominican Republic	27	73	20
Mexico	26	74	21
Croatia	19	81	22
The Philippines	17	87	23
Chile	13	87	24

Source: International survey conducted within the framework of International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in 2007; available in Gudkov, Lev (2012) 'Sotsialnyi capital i ideologicheskie orientatsii' [Social Capital and Ideological Orientations], *Pro et Contra*, Vol. 16, No. 3, on the Internet: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProEtContra55_6-31.pdf (retrieved 27 August 2012), p. 16.

Note: Distribution of answers 'With which statement are you most in agreement?':

A – 'You can trust people almost always.'
B – 'You can usually trust people.'
C – 'In relations with most people you need to be careful.'
D – 'In relations with people you need to be wary, you cannot trust people completely.'

A growing urban middle class

The greatest transformation, however, in Russian society has been the emergence of an urban middle class, which in turn is a result of the sustained economic growth from about the year 2000. There is a multitude of ways of defining what constitutes a middle class. Those interested in consumption habits, for example, usually focus mainly on income criteria. In sociological research, where, for example, political preferences are the focus of interest, other criteria are usually added to economic ones, such as self-identification, professional status and education. A teacher or doctor in Russia tends to be a low earner while having a higher education and considering him- or herself a member of the middle class. Here, we are interested in political preferences and Internet habits and have therefore opted for a multi-criteria definition of the middle class used by acknowledged Russian sociologists.[51] Before the economic crisis in 2008–2009, the proportion of the middle class in society was estimated at about a third of the adult population, 40 per cent of the economically active population and almost half of the population in urban centres, most notably Moscow.[52] There is also a notable correlation between the presence of a middle class and Internet penetration, which is greatest among well-off, young urban dwellers, accounting for the digital divide between big cities and the countryside (see the section on the Internet in Russia and politics on the Internet below, pp. 35ff).

Indeed, a number of research reports and articles have focused on how the urban middle class and Moscow is becoming a country of its own inside Russia. In 2012 the director of the Regional Research Programme at the Independent Institute for Social Policy, Natalia Zubarevich, divided the country's population sociologically into four Russias, where the first Russia was that of major cities (more than 500 000 inhabitants) representing 30 per cent of the population. In the 'First Russia' lives Russia's middle class and 35 million Internet users, the

[51] For a detailed description of the methodology for measuring the middle class referred to here, see Tikhonova, N. E. and Mareeva, S. V. (2009) *Srednii klass: Teoriia i realnost* [The Middle Class: Theory and Reality] (Moscow, Alfa-M), ibid., pp. 75ff. For an overview of different sociological schools of thought on the middle class in Russia and in the West, see ibid., pp. 15–74.
[52] Ibid., p. 93.

section of the population that wants change. White-collar workers dominate this Russia and the small business sector is large by Russian standards.[53]

The second Russia, according to Zubarevich, consists of medium-sized industrial cities with 20 000–300 000 people, sometimes larger with 300 000–500 000 people or even 700 000 in the case of the industrial city of Toliatti. These cities have a predominately blue-collar worker population and many of the industries that they depend on are inefficient and could be in for a difficult test if Russia were to be hit by a second economic crisis, and this could result in massive social protests. The second Russia worries about questions like employment whereas it is considerably less interested in the problems that the first Russia is experiencing. About 25 per cent of the population lives in the second Russia and of these, about 10 per cent live in monocities, i.e. cities that are entirely dependent on a single industry. The third Russia consists of the population living in small cities and localities. They make up about 38 per cent of the population, but the average age is high and the propensity for protest is low. The third Russia makes its living largely from farming and is not very affected by politics in Moscow or even a new economic crisis. The fourth Russia is the population living in the North Caucasus and makes up less than 6 per cent of the population. It differs from the rest of Russia in that the problems of instability continue to plague the region, the large cities that exist are not really industrialized as they are in the rest of Russia and education levels are low. The region as a whole, furthermore, is dependent on transfers from the federal budget.[54]

Zubarevich made her division into four Russias mainly to discuss which groups in society could be expected to launch protests in the event of a new political crisis, but her analysis is also interesting when compared to data on Internet penetration in larger cities compared to minor localities (see Table below). Internet penetration in larger cities is well above average (47 per cent) in the first Russia, especially in Moscow and St Petersburg where it is above 60 per cent. In the third Russia it is around 20 per cent and in the second Russia just below average.

High Internet penetration is just one of the many features of the urban middle class that set it apart from the rest of the population. The middle class has a different consumption pattern, and has invested more in increasing its human capital (education and training) as well as in real estate. This makes members of the middle class more economically autonomous from the authorities than the rest of the population. They also tend to have more time for leisure, and they travel abroad and engage actively in searching for information that is not state-

[53] Zubarevich, Natalia (2012) 'Perspektiva: Chetyre Rossii' [Perspective: Four Russias], *Vedomosti*, 30 November 2011, on the Internet: http://vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/273777/chetyre_rossii (retrieved 27 August 2012).
[54] Ibid.

controlled. These features of the middle class are especially pronounced in Moscow, setting it apart from the rest of Russia.[55]

The Centre for Strategic Research (CSR) in 2011 detected distinct evidence of a mounting political crisis in Russia. In two studies that the CSR published that year, the conclusion was that there was increasing conflict potential inside Russian society and that this was intimately connected to the emergence of a growing Russian middle class which had been able to grow and prosper thanks to the strong economic growth since 2000.[56]

Taking into account the sociological data on Moscow, it was hardly surprising that it became the centre for organized massive protests beginning in late 2011. The demands following the elections in 2011 and 2012 focused on gradual reform, fair elections and the rule of law.

Putin's electorate still constitutes the majority of the population and has earlier proved ready to forgo political freedom and the rule of law in favour of continued subsidies.[57] However, an additional study by the CSR published in May 2012 suggested that this electorate was also becoming increasingly disenchanted with Putin's policies and the lack of rule of law. Most importantly, it did not appear to believe in the current political leadership's ability to deliver results in terms of tangible improvements in policy areas such as housing, health care and education, to mention but a few, and trust in institutions was low.[58] This report had been commissioned by Aleksei Kudrin's Civil initiative and the data

[55] Belanovskii, S., Dmitriev, M. and Misikhina, S. (2010) 'Srednii klass v rentoorientirovannoi ekonomike: pochemu Moskva perestala byt Rossiei? [The Middle Class in a Rent-Oriented Economy: Why has Moscow ceased to be Russia?], *Spero*, No. 13 (Autumn–Winter 2012), pp. 60–86.

[56] Belanovskii, S. and Dmitriev, M. (2011) 'Politicheskii krizis v Rossii i vozmozhnye mekhanizmy ego razvitiia' [The Political Crisis in Russia and Possible Mechanisms for Its Development], *Fond 'Tsentr strategicheskikh razrabotok' (CSR)*, November 2011, on the Internet: http://www.csr.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=307:2011-03-28-16-38-10&catid=52:2010-05-03-17-49-10&Itemid=219 (retrieved 21 May 2012); and Belanovskii, S., Dmitriev, M., Misikhina, S.and Omeltjuk, T. (2011) 'Dvizhushchie sily i perspektivy politicheskoi transformatsii Rossii' [The Moving Forces behind and the Future for Russia's Political Transformation], *Fond 'Tsentr strategicheskikh razrabotok' (CSR)*, November 2011, on the Internet: http://csr.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=344%3A2011-12-01-11-40-29&catid=52%3A2010-05-03-17-49-10&Itemid=219&lang=ru (retrieved 14 February 2012).

[57] Ibid., pp. 21ff.

[58] Centre for Strategic Research (2012) 'Obshchestvo i vlast v usloviiakh politicheskogo krizisa' [Society and Power in Conditions of a Political Crisis], Report by experts of the CSR to the Committee for Civil Initiative, May 2012, available in connection with the publication of an interview with Mikhail Dmitriev, *Vedomosti*, 24 May 2012, on the Internet: http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1779345/ustalost_zrelost_konfrontaciya?full#cut (retrieved 25 May 2012).

were based on focus group interviews in smaller towns,[59] the second Russia, to use Zubarevich's division of Russia's population.

[59] Granik, Irina (2012) 'Alekseiu Kudrinu sozdali politicheskii krizis' [A Political Crisis Created for Aleksei Kudrin], *Kommersant*, 25 May 2012, on the internet: http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1942180 (retrieved 25 May 2012).

The Internet

The early Russian Internet

In 1989, the Demos cooperative at the Kurchatov Institute for Atomic Energy became the first Internet service provider (ISP) in the Soviet Union, using the domain name '.su'. Another ISP originated at the Kurchatov Institute in 1992 under the name of Relkom (www.relcom.ru). The .ru domain was, however, formally introduced only in April 1994. In 2011, four companies dominated the Russian ISP market: Rostelekom, MTS, Vympelcom and Megafon.[60]

Today, the '.ru' domain is the dominant one, and it is still growing faster than the Cyrillic domain zone '.рф', introduced in 2010 (see Table 10). According to a survey conducted by REG.ru in November 2011, 45 per cent of users use the Latin Web address rather than the Cyrillic one if a website has dual addresses; 35 per cent use both and only 11 per cent prefer the Cyrillic one.[61]

The Internet in Russia is sometimes referred to as Runet, although the term is rarely defined. Some use it to designate the '.ru', '.su' and '.рф' domains, others to refer to all Russian-speaking or Russia-oriented traffic on the Internet. Regardless, the Runet term has an ideological subtext, used to convey an image of an Internet partitioned into national zones. Ronald Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski point out that such national zones can strengthen the degree of control that the government can exercise over Internet contents.[62]

[60] NITs Ekonomika (2011) 'Otraslevoi doklad "Internet v Rossii: Sostoianie, tendentsii i perspektivy razvitiia"' [Branch Report 'The Internet in Russia: Current situation, tendencies and future development'], *Federalnoe agenstvo po pechati i massovym kommunikatsiiam (Rospechat)*, on the Internet: http://www.fapmc.ru/magnoliaPublic/rospechat/activities/reports/2012/item6.html?print=true (retrieved 16 August 2012), p. 13.

[61] The survey results were summarized in NITs Ekonomika (2011) 'Otraslevoi doklad', p. 23.

[62] Deibert, Ronald and Rohozinski, Rafal (2010) 'Control and Subversion in Russian Cyberspace', in Palfrey, John, Rohozinski, Rafal and Zittrain, Jonathan (eds), *Access Controlled: The shaping of power, rights, and rule in cyberspace* (Cambridge, MIT Press), pp. 15–34.

Table 10. Domain names by country code top-level domains on 20 September 2012

Country code top-level domains (ccTLD)	Year of introduction	Number of domain names	Increase per day in 2011
.su	1990	107 714	113
.ru	1994	3 999 832	4 833
.рф	2010	827 811	575
Total:		4 935 357	5 521

Source: *Tekhnicheskii tsentr Internet*, on the Internet: http://www.tcinet.ru/statistics/ru (retrieved 20 September 2012).

Internet penetration

In the first half of 2010, there were almost 25 per cent more Internet users in Russia than in the corresponding period the previous year, and almost 50 per cent of the population aged 18 or over stated that they had used the Internet the previous month (see Figure 2).[63] Russia comes fairly high in the UN's ranking of IT penetration since 2008 in various countries – in 47th place out of 152 countries in 2010.[64] Although there is every reason to interpret such numbers with caution (for example, when sociologists excluded users who use the Internet only to send and receive emails they arrived at the lower figure of 28 per cent in 2010)[65] use of the Internet has grown quickly in Russia.

By 2011, broadband had become the main way of connecting to the Internet in Russia. Broadband penetration was 36 per cent in early 2011 while it was 82 per cent in Moscow. However, connecting through ADSL remained popular in cities with a well-developed system for stationary phones as well as in cities where this was the only available option.[66]

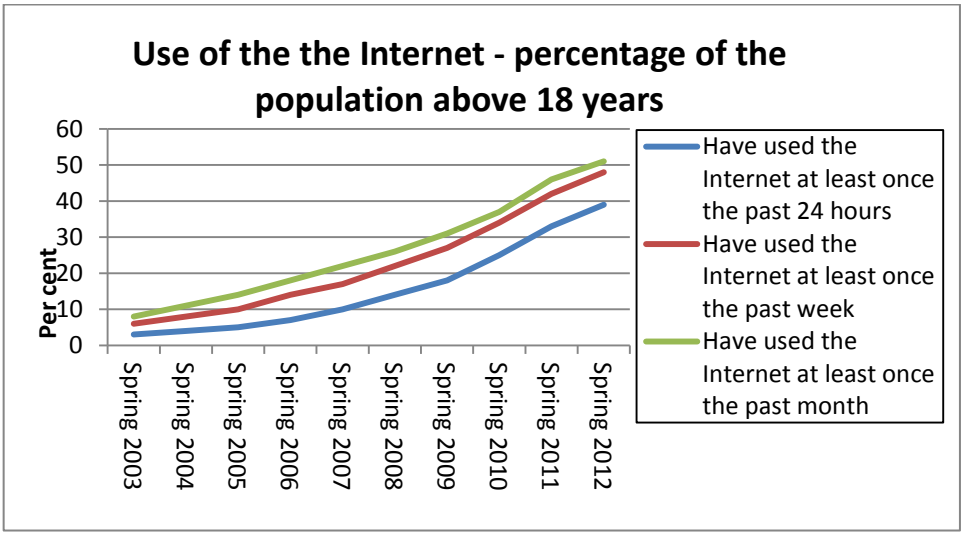
[63] Lipman, Maria and Petrov, Nikolai (2010) *Obshchestvo i grazhdane v 2008–2010 gg*. [Society and Citizens 2008–2010], *Carnegie Moscow Center Working Papers*, No. 3 (Moscow, Carnegie Moscow Center), p. 13.

[64] International Telecommunication Union (2011) *Measuring the Information Society*, on the Internet: http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/idi/2011/Material/MIS_2011_without_annex_5.pdf (retrieved 26 October 2011), p. 13.

[65] Volkov, Denis (2012) 'The Internet and Political Involvement in Russia', *Russian Education and Society*, Vol. 54, No. 9, p. 51.

[66] NITs Ekonomika (2011) 'Otraslevoi doklad', p. 9–12.

Figure 2. Internet usage in Russia 2003–2011 according to FOM



Source: FOM (2012) 'Internet v Rossii' [The Internet in Russia], *Analiticheskii biulleten*, No. 37 (spring 2011), on the Internet: http://runet.fom.ru/Proniknovenie-interneta/10507 (retrieved 20 September 2012).

Moscow and St Petersburg have exceptionally high Internet penetration compared to other regions in Russia (see Table). These were also the cities where Internet use was the cheapest (21 RUR per Mbit/s compared to, for example, 52 RUR in the city of Tambov) and where bandwidth was the highest: 16 Mbit/s in Moscow and 17 in St Petersburg while those living in the Far Eastern Federal District had to make do with 1 Mbit/s. Furthermore, the use of Smartphones, iPads or similar handheld devices to connect wirelessly to the Internet is most common in Moscow.[67]

[67] Yandex (2012) 'Razvitie interneta v regionakh Rossii – vesna 2012' [The Development of the Internet in the Regions – Spring 2012], on the Internet: http://download.yandex.ru/company/ya_regions_report_spring_2012.pdf (retrieved 20 September 2012).

Table 11. Internet penetration in different cities and localities in spring 2012

City/locality	Internet penetration (%)	Share of Internet users in Russia (%)
Moscow	64	11
St Petersburg	61	4
City of 1 million or more	49	9
City of 500 000–1 000 000	43	10
City of 100 000–500 000	42	22
City of less than 100 000	35	26
Village	21	19
Russia	47	

Source: FOM (2012) 'Internet v Rossii' [The Internet in Russia], *Analiticheskii biulleten*, No. 37 (spring 2011), on the Internet: http://runet.fom.ru/Proniknovenie-interneta/10507 (retrieved 20 September 2012).

Politics on the Internet

The political role of the Internet should not be exaggerated; most of what is available is entertainment-oriented in Russia as in other countries.[68] The Internet is most frequently used to search for information. Yandex is the top search engine (www.yandex.ru), closely followed by Google (www.google.ru), which has surpassed Mail.ru and Rambler. The second most popular activity is file sharing, followed by various forms of communication, e.g. email and chats. Social networking started growing in Russia in 2007–2008. Some of the most popular services in 2011 were Vkontakte (vk.com), Odnoklassniki (odnoklassniki.ru), Facebook, Livejournal and Liveinternet as well as Mail.ru and Twitter.[69] In 2011, the number of Russian-speaking accounts on Twitter reached 1 million, and about 370 000 Russian tweets were sent each day (8 per cent of which were re-tweets).[70] Even among the young Moscow-dwellers who are the most active on the Internet, few take an interest in political activities on the Internet.[71]

Furthermore, it should be stressed that far from all political activity on the Russian Internet is democratically oriented. Nationalist, Islamist, Russian Orthodox and Nazi political groups are all to be found, as are conspiracy theorists of various political convictions.

Political functions of the Internet

The political science literature has identified several roles that the Internet can play in politics. Following Farrell's review, three such mechanisms are useful to understand the consequences of the Internet for Russian politics:[72]

1. Effects on the *transaction costs* of collective action. Online tools can make it easier or cheaper to communicate with others. Thus, actions that used to require central organization and considerable resources might now be possible to coordinate in a decentralized and cheap manner online.
2. Sorting effects, or *homophily*. Communication on the Internet can affect not only how we interact, but also with whom. Whereas in the past it was difficult for people with unusual interests to find and interact with

[68] Morozov, Evgeny (2011) *The Net Delusion: The dark side of Internet freedom* (New York, Public Affairs), pp. 57–9.
[69] NITs Ekonomika (2011) 'Otraslevoi doklad', pp. 47–56.
[70] Yandex (2011) *Tsifry i fakty pro Tvitter* [Numbers and Facts about Twitter], August 2011, on the Internet: http://download.yandex.ru/company/figures/yandex_on_twitter_summer_2011.pdf (retrieved 20 September 2012).
[71] Volkov (2012) 'The Internet and Political Involvement in Russia', p. 58.
[72] Farrell, Henry (2012) 'The Consequences of the Internet for Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 15, pp. 35–52.

each other, the Internet has made it a lot easier. Not only has the number of people one can communicate with increased, but the search mechanisms necessary to find them have also improved dramatically.

3. Effects on *preference falsification*, i.e. the tendency to conceal one's preferences in social settings. In many circumstances, not revealing political views is a way of avoiding social discord. In an authoritarian state, the regime may be widely loathed, yet everyone puts on a smile for everyone else for fear of the consequences of revealing their true preferences. If, in such a society, a new arena arises, e.g. on the Internet, where preferences can be revealed without dire consequences, this can quickly change the general view on the popular support for the government.

As will be evident, these mechanisms can all be observed in the Russian context, where the Internet has become an important channel for several political activities, not least since other sources of information have traditionally been state-controlled.[73]

However, we could also extend Farrell's mechanisms with a few additional perspectives that go beyond the rational choice perspective on politics:

4. The *visibility* concept, originally introduced by John B. Thompson[74] to understand the interplay between politics and television, but more recently expanded to the Internet by Roger Silverstone[75] and Peter Dahlgren.[76] This logic of visibility can be a threat to those in power, as they are increasingly scrutinized by citizens. However, it could also be an opportunity, as it offers a way to shape one's public image, for instance by replacing traditional censorship with a strategy aimed at marginalizing opposition with a flood of messages spun the other way around.
5. The *interactivity* factor, i.e. the fact that traditional one-way communication from the rulers to the ruled (e.g. on television) is being replaced by the two-way communication of the Internet. Interactivity changes the dynamics of communication, and offers new opportunities

[73] Petrov, Nikolai (2011) *Rossiia-2010: menshe stabilnosti, bolshe publichnoi politiki* [Russia-2010: less stability, more open politics], Briefing, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace).

[74] Thompson, J. B. (1995) *The Media and Modernity: A social theory of the media* (Cambridge, Polity Press).

[75] Silverstone, R. (2007) *Media and Morality: On the rise of the mediapolis* (Cambridge, Polity Press).

[76] Dahlgren, P. (2009) *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, communication and democracy* (New York, Cambridge University Press).

for criticism and citizen journalism. This means that traditional media strategies may have to be reinvented.

6. Finally, the Internet can change the *meaning of politics* as such. Social networking on the Internet, blogging etc. realign the borders between the public and the private sphere, giving private actions such as Facebook 'likes' and similar expressions of sympathy an impact on public discourse. Indeed, the more a government imposes repressive laws, such as the Russian ban on 'homosexual propaganda', the larger the set of actions that takes on a political meaning becomes.

While concepts 4–6 do not generate precise *predictions*, as we shall see they are highly useful to help us *understand* developments in Russia's political landscape.

Information and debate on the Internet

As an arena for finding out and distributing alternative information as well as for debate, the Internet in Russia very much centres around media outlets such as Lenta.ru, Ekho Moskvy, *Novaia gazeta*, Kommersant FM, *New Times*, *Vedomosti*, TV Dozhd and FinAm.[77] These radio and television stations, newspapers and magazines do not reach much further than Moscow through traditional broadcasting and print. However, through the Internet they reach a wider audience at the same time as they provide forums for comments, debate and online voting on topical questions. The way these new media engage the public over the Internet can be contrasted with the failure of traditional state-controlled radio and TV to make use of the new *interactivity* of digital media. This *interactivity divide* is useful in helping us to understand Muratov's 'TV Party' and 'Internet Party' dichotomy described above.

As an example, on the radio channel Ekho Moskvy it is possible to listen to programmes both live and after a programme has been on the air. Transcripts are often published online, there is an iPhone app, and the audience is invited to call in to ask questions, comment, rate the programme as it is being aired and vote on issues online or through SMS. The station features a number of high-profile bloggers, uses Twitter and has a page on vKontakte.

Still, it should be noted that the Internet and sites such as Ekho Moskvy are very much an arena of the urban middle class. The degree to which this section of Russian society lives in a separate world from that of Putin's electorate (cf. Zubarevich as cited above) is intensified not only by the way in which the two groups tend to turn to their own outlets but also by their unwillingness even to visit the other group's information sphere (homophily). As a case in point, recent

[77] Kelly, John et al. (2012) 'Mapping Russian Twitter', *Berkman Center Research Publication*, No. 2012-3, March 2012, on the Internet: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2028158 (retrieved 12 October 2012). See also Greene, S. (2012) 'Twitter i rossiiskii protest: Memy, saiti i mobilizatsiia' [Twitter and the Russian Street: Memes, networks and mobilization], Tsentr izucheniia internet i obshchestva, *Robochie materialy TsIIO*, No. 1, May 2012, p. 8.

research shows that, while news-related hash tags on Russian Twitter have a single distinct pattern of propagation, political hash tags on the other hand display several different patterns of propagation, depending on the different sub-communities that spread them.[78]

Appeals for action on the Internet

The Internet as a means of lowering transaction costs when appealing for action has become increasingly important. For example, the Facebook page Mirnoe shestvie za chestnye vybory. 4 fevralia (Peaceful March for Honest Elections, 4 February) encouraged people to come to a demonstration on 4 February and provided maps and other information about the event.[79] The poster for the meeting was the picture on the Facebook page as well as closely resembling the picture used by the Twitter account Za chestnye vybory (For Honest Elections) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Poster 'March For Honest Elections'

The Internet has also served as an arena for protest against abuse of power. Aleksei Navalnyi, a lawyer by training, has specialized in exposing corruption,

[78] Barash, Vladimir and Kelly, John (2012) 'Salience vs. Commitment: Dynamics of political hashtags on Russian Twitter', *Berkman Center Research Publication*, No. 2012-9, April 2012, on the Internet: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2034506 (retrieved 7 November 2012).

[79] Facebook (2012) 'Mirnoe shestvie za chestnye vybory' [Peaceful March for Honest Elections], *Facebook*, on the Internet: http://www.facebook.com/events/212286018856867/ (retrieved 12 October 2012).

for instance by buying a minimal number of shares in an enterprise in order to gain access to its documentation. Navalnyi's blog, in which he exposes corruption and abuses of power, attracted considerable attention and became a successful example of crowdsourcing on the Internet.[80] In February 2011, he launched the RosPil website for the purpose of scrutinizing dubious state procurements. By February the same year, people who supported this initiative had already donated RUR 6 million over the Internet. A counter on the right of the website showed in red the value in roubles of procurements exposed on the site and the value in green of those that had been cancelled after this exposure. On 8 April 2011, procurements totalling RUR 418 billion had been made public knowledge through RosPil, and of these procurements worth RUR 337.5 billion had been withdrawn.[81] According to a study published by the Center for New Media and Society, Navalnyi's blog postings had a negative effect on the stock performance of the state-controlled companies that he wrote about.[82] He has also played a prominent role in most protest actions in Moscow and during 2012 emerged as one of the most colourful opposition leaders. Navalnyi's activities have not gone unnoticed by government officials, and several attempts have been made to institute legal proceedings against him.[83]

A good example of the new *visibility* of Internet activism is the appeal posted by police officer Aleksei Dymovskii. In a film clip, he urged the country's leaders to combat abuse of power within the police and confessed that he himself had helped fabricate charges in order to fulfil production targets set for his unit.[84] Dymovskii was fired and threatened with prosecution, but the attention his clip attracted was enough to make the Ministry of the Interior feel obliged to at least give the impression that it was taking the matter seriously. Dymovskii's appeal also inspired others to post similar film clips.

On the Internet, the Russian public can follow the protest actions organized by the 'Blue Bucket Brigade' to highlight Moscow dignitaries' use of flashing blue lights and priority lanes to avoid traffic jams. To protest against this fast-growing practice, actions are organized whereby car owners place blue toy buckets upside down on the roof of their car and drive very slowly through central areas of the

[80] Navalnyi, Aleksei (2011) 'Navalnyj – Finalnaia bitva mezhdu dobrom i neitralitetom' [Navalnyi – The final battle between the good and neutrality], *Navalnyi – LiveJournal*, 4 April 2011, on the Internet: http://navalny.livejournal.com/ (retrieved 4 April 2011).

[81] RosPil (2011) 'Glavnaia' [Home Page], *RosPil*, 8 April 2011, on the Internet: http://rospil.info/ (retrieved 8 April 2011).

[82] Enikolopov, R., Petrova, M. and Sonin, K. (2012) 'Do Political Blogs Matter? Corruption in state-controlled companies, blog postings and DDoS attacks', *Tsentr Izucheniia interneta i obshchestva*, on the Internet: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2153378 (retrieved 8 October 2012).

[83] See *Kommersant Vlast*, No. 6, p. 25 and No. 12, p. 25.

[84] Dymovskii, Aleksei (2009) 'Obrashchenie maiora Dymovskogo' [Major Dymovskii's Appeal], *YouTube*, 6 November 2009, on the Internet: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxkMldDLgPw&NR=1 (retrieved 4 April 2011.

city. The general public can upload images and give details of malpractice by politicians and officials on the 'Blue Bucket Society' (*Obshchestvo Sinikh Vederok*) website,[85] and information of this kind is also posted on the website of *Moskovskii komsomolets* under the heading 'War on the Blue Lights'.[86]

Other examples of appeals on the Internet are calls for volunteers in connection with, for example, flooding or forest fires (see p. 29 above) and requests for practical help, for example, who can help with printing facilities or who has someone's telephone number. The RosUznik project was created to help those arrested during protests with legal advice and lawyers. The project both crowdfunds legal aid and offers an arena for appeals for participation in protests and for practical help.[87]

The Internet has also come to fulfil a function of documenting what happens at demonstrations and during, for example, police raids. Thus, activists have contested police claims about the low numbers of participants in demonstrations using pictures and movies. This fight over turnout numbers can be expected to affect preference falsification – the threshold to protest becomes lower the more co-protesters there are. There are also a number of examples of activists documenting police brutality. When Navalnyi's apartment was searched, an appeal went out for people to gather outside and document the event, aiming to prevent the police from planting evidence. When the news service Ura.ru was raided by the authorities on 27 September 2012, a bambuser live broadcast link of the raid was tweeted.[88]

What 'flies' on the Internet

Certain appeals, certain information and certain debates spread more quickly than others on the Internet. When something strikes a note that resonates with public sentiments and grievances, the Internet pages and tweets about this topic spread almost without effort. It seems that precisely the abuse of privilege that hits car owners and the inability of the authorities to satisfy the demands for effective governance when it comes to traffic and car ownership have propelled a considerable section of the middle class into political activity. This is logical in that new forms of consumption develop into demands for rule of law.[89]

[85] Obshchestvo Sinikh Vederok (2011) 'Svezhie zapiski' [Latest Notes], *LiveJournal*, 29 August 2011, on the Internet: http://ru-vederko.livejournal.com/ (retrieved 29 August 2011).

[86] Moskovskii Komsomolets (2011) 'Voina migalkam' [War against the Flashing Lights], *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 25 August 2011, on the Internet: http://www.ng.ru/politics/2011-08-29/1_opposition.html (retrieved 29 August 2011).

[87] RosUznik, on the Internet: http://rosuznik.org/ (retrieved 12 October 2012); and https://twitter.com/RosUznik (retrieved 12 October 2012).

[88] 'Maski-shou v office #uraru' [Show of Masks at #Uraru's Office], *bambuser*, 27 September 2012, on the Internet: http://bambuser.com/v/3014070 (retrieved 27 September 2012).

[89] Talk given by Mikhail Dmitriev at the Stockholm School of Economics, 27 August 2012. See also Dmitriev, Mikhail and Misikhina, Svetlana (2012) 'Potreblenie i spros na instituty v protsesse

There are a number of examples of protests connected to car-related grievances, from protests in the Russian Far East against increased import tariffs on Japanese and Korean cars in December 2008 to a battle over ownership of garages in St Petersburg.[90] One of Russia's most active bloggers and tweeters, Danila Lindele, described in 2012 how he had arrived in Moscow with no intention of getting into politics. An incident when he was late for work because of the practice of halting traffic to give priority to dignitaries was his introduction to becoming a civil activist. He started with posting a text with the Blue Bucket Brigade.[91] By 2012 his blog, 'The Diary of a Man Who Wants to Live in a Normal Country', was among the 100 most read in Russia (85th place in September 2012).[92]

Culture and politics on the Internet

Art, literature and music have also been used as channels of discontent.[93] Kseniia Sobchak, one of Russia's most famous television anchors and 'IT girls', became politically active in 2011–2012 and her Twitter account is among the most popular in Russia (rated number four in October 2012 by Yandex).[94]

In October 2011, a song by popular musician Andrei Makarevich – who in the Soviet era was the lead figure in the rock band Mashina Vremeni – became one of the most popular clips on YouTube.[95] The song describes how a fictitious small town prepares for a visit by Putin, and according to Makarevich was intended primarily as a criticism of the way many people bow their heads to

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stanovleniia rossiiskogo srednego klassa' [Consumption and Demands on Institutions in the Process of a Russian Middle Class Emerging], *Spero*, No. 16, Spring–Summer 2012, pp. 59–78.

[90] *Vesti Primore*, 15 December 2008, on the Internet: http://ptr-vlad.ru/news/ptrnews/9916-po-svidetelstvam-ochevitdcev-akcija-avtomobilistov.html (retrieved 21 September 2012); and Lonkila, Markku (2011) 'Driving at Democracy in Russia: Protest activities of St Petersburg car drivers' associations', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 2, pp. 291–309.

[91] Lindele, D. (2012) 'Putinu, Vladimiru Vladimirovichu' [To Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin], Ekho Moskvy Blog, 10 August 2012, on the Internet: http://echo.msk.ru/blog/danilalindele/920031-echo/ (retrieved 21 September 2012).

[92] Lindele, D. (2012) 'Zhurnal cheloveka, kotoryi khotet zhit v normalnoi strane' [Diary of a Man Who Wants to Live in a Normal Country], LiveJournal, on the Internet: http://d-lindele.livejournal.com/ (retrieved 21 September 2012); and Yandex (2012) 'Reiting blogov runeta' [Rating of Runet Blogs], Yandex, on the Internet: http://blogs.yandex.ru/top/?page=2 (retrieved 24 September 2012).

[93] Jonson, Lena (2011) 'Ryskt samhällsklimat i förändring' [Russian Society Is Changing], *Östbulletinen*, No. 1, on the Internet: http://sallskapet.org/ostbulletinen/-ostbulletinen_nr_1_2011.pdf (retrieved 19 October 2011), pp. 3–6.

[94] Yandex (2012) 'Reiting blogov Twitter' [Rating of Runet Twitter [???] Blogs], *Yandex*, on the Internet: http://blogs.yandex.ru/top/twitter/ (retrieved 12 October 2012).

[95] YouTube (2011) 'Makarevich. K nam v Kholueevo priezhaet Putin' [Makarevich. Putin Comes to Our Kholueevo], *YouTube*, 13 October 2011, on the Internet: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g35ALkh3G4E (retrieved 19 October 2011).

authority. He also wrote on his blog that, while life was not always good under Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev, 'you didn't feel that you were being humiliated'.[96] The following year, Makarevich wrote an open letter published by *Moskovskii komsomolets* in which he criticized the ever-present corruption and the level it had reached.[97] Shortly after its publication, the *Moskovskii komsomolets* site began experiencing malfunctions. The newspaper itself did not hesitate to identify the critical letter as the cause of this denial of service attack.[98]

Yuri Shevchuk, the frontman of a popular rock band, DDT, had previously criticized Russia's lack of democracy and press freedom at a meeting with Putin in St Petersburg.[99] Also, following the 2011 parliamentary election, a popular crime writer, Boris Akunin (a pseudonym for writer Grigory Chkhartishvili), urged people via his blog to boycott the presidential election in March 2012 and also directed an appeal to Putin urging him to step down, as follows:

> I feel sorry for you.
>
> I say this without any sarcasm whatsoever. One doesn't have to be Nostradamus to predict your future. […]
>
> A fight is beginning in the country. Resigning in a good way will already be too late by then, and you will give orders to shoot and blood will flow, but you will be removed all the same.
>
> I honestly do not wish you the same fate as Muammar Gaddafi. […][100]

The most noticed cultural opposition movements in 2011–2012, however, were the art group *Voina* (War) and the feminist 'punk group' Pussy Riot. Voina even won the prestigious *Innovatsiia* (Innovation) state art award on 8 April 2011 for a controversial installation. It had painted a 65-metre phallus on the traffic lane of a bridge in central St Petersburg. When the bridge opened at night the phallus

[96] Makarevich, Andrei (2011) 'Blog – segodnia' [Blog – Today], *snob.ru*, 14 October 2011, on the Internet: http://www.snob.ru/profile/5134/blog/42075 (retrieved 19 October 2011).

[97] Makarevich, Andrei (2012) 'Otkrytoe pismo Prezidentu Rossiiskoi Federatsii V.V. Putinu' [Open Letter to Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation], *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 6 August 2012, on the Internet: http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2012/08/06/733856-otkryitoe-pismo-makarevicha-putinu.html (retrieved 7 August 2012).

[98] Moskovskii Komsomolets (2012) 'Otkrytoe pismo Andreia Makarevitcha Putinu stalo prichinoi sboiev v rabote saita mk.ru' [Makarevich's Open Letter to Putin Caused the Service Interruptions to the mk.ru Site], *Moskovskii komsomolets*, on the Internet: http://www.mk.ru (temporary static site replacing all other contents, retrieved 24 August 2012)

[99] YouTube (2010) 'Shevchuk i Putin' [Shevchuk and Putin], *YouTube*, 30 May 2010, on the Internet: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtyQHfNc3nk (retrieved 19 October 2011).

[100] Akunin, Boris (2011) 'Nachinaetsia interesnoe' [It Is Getting Interesting], *Radio Echo Moskvy*, 6 December 2011, on the Internet: http://echo.msk.ru/blog/b_akunin/836697-echo/ (retrieved 7 December 2011).

rose right across from the office of the FSB (the Federal Security Service), where it remained during the hours the bridge was open.[101]

Pussy Riot

Another factor that makes some Internet phenomena more powerful appears to be when the authorities' response to something is perceived to be out of proportion. This can be interpreted as a failure of the government to understand the logic of *visibility*. The most prominent example of this is the feminist self-professed 'punk group' Pussy Riot, which became known to the Russian and international public after its so-called punk prayer (perhaps better described as a performance than a punk song) in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in February 2012. Their 'punk prayer' ('pank moleben') '*Virgin Mary, Banish Putin!*' was filmed and posted on YouTube, just like their previous performances. Three members of Pussy Riot, Mariia Alekhina, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, were arrested in March 2012 and charged with hooliganism. Public opinion was initially overwhelmingly against the performance of Pussy Riot. Most people thought it a tasteless thing to do and an act of disrespect to the Russian Orthodox Church.[102]

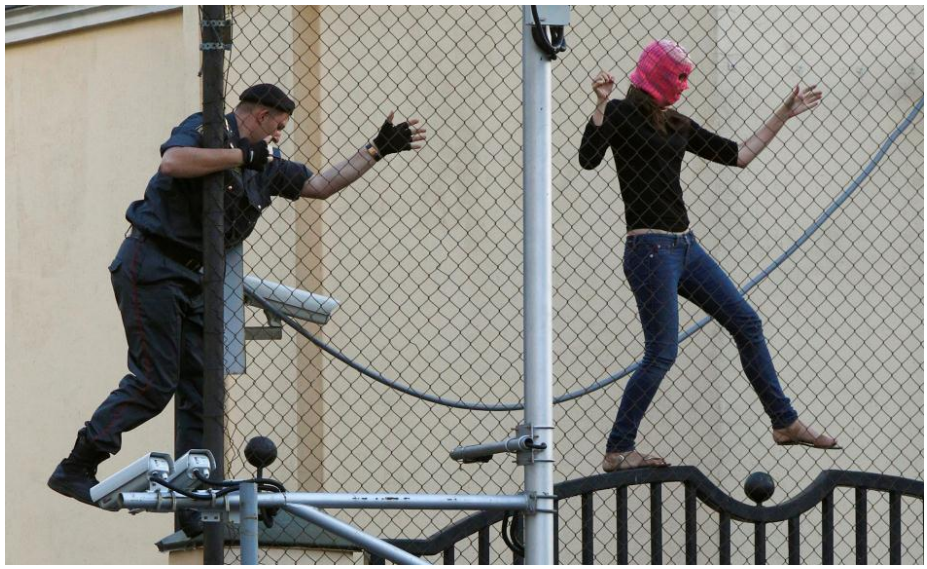
During the entire trial, the three members of Pussy Riot maintained that their performance had a political message rather than a religious one and the trial was followed by opposition-minded bloggers from precisely this perspective, while the opponents of Pussy Riot emphasized the extent to which their punk prayer had offended religious feelings. There were also demonstrations outside the court on the day of the trial both in support of Pussy Riot and in support of the Russian Orthodox Church.[103]

[101] Jonson, op. cit., pp. 3–4.

[102] Levada Centre (2012) 'Nakazanie uchastnitsam gruppy Pussy Riot tret rossiian sochla adekvatnym' [A Third of Russians Consider the Punishment of the Group Pussy Riot Adequate], *Levada Center*, 2 October 2012, on the Internet: http://www.levada.ru/02-10-2012/nakazanie-uchastnitsam-gruppy-pussy-riot-tret-rossiyan-sochla-adekvatnym (retrieved 3 October 2012).

[103] See also Vendil Pallin, C. (2012) 'The Political Aftermath of Pussy Riot: A sowing of dragon's teeth', *RUFS Briefing*, No. 15, September 2012.

Figure 4. A civil activist being chased by Russian police into the premises of the Turkish Embassy

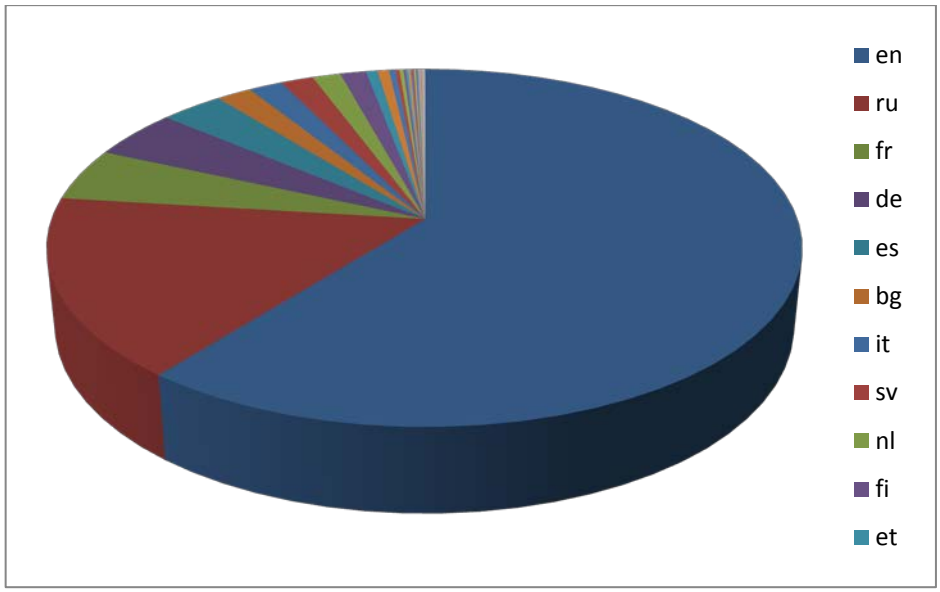


A civil activist wearing a balaclava was chased by Russian police into the premises of the Turkish Embassy after having protested against the conviction of the members of Pussy Riot on 17 August 2012. In doing so the police officers had crossed out of the area of Russian jurisdiction and were asked to leave the embassy. The activist, Tatiana Romanova, was, however, apprehended and charged with resisting arrest later upon leaving the embassy.

The trial, moreover, had international repercussions in that pop icons such as Madonna and Paul McCartney came out in support of Pussy Riot. On the day of the verdict, 17 August, there were actions of support in a number of cities across the world, with activists sporting the balaclavas which had become Pussy Riot's emblem. An analysis of the Twitter flow related to Pussy Riot on 17 August reveals that a majority of the postings were made in English, testifying to the international interest in the trial (see Figure 5). Russian tweets come second, followed by French, German and Spanish tweets.

Again, it is useful to evoke the notion of *interactivity* here to understand the turn of events: most probably, Russian authorities could not foresee the international repercussions that the Pussy Riot case had. They failed to appreciate the kind of dynamics that is illustrated in Figure 5 – if they had, things would probably have been handled much more quietly.

Figure 5. Quantitative analysis of languages on Twitter about Pussy Riot on 17 August 2012



Source: Westling, Anders (2012) 'Quantitative Analysis of Twitter on the Day of Pussy Riot Trial', 17 August 2012, preliminary analysis at FOI.

In September 2012, Pussy Riot were awarded the LennonOno grant for peace for bringing to attention the importance of freedom of expression and among the internationally famous people who criticized the trial was the Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The British actor and writer Stephen Fry wrote an open letter of support to the three members of Pussy Riot, to be conveyed through Amnesty International, and published it on Twitter. A Russian opponent of Pussy Riot in turn criticized Fry for this and asked how many Russian words he knew. Fry immediately retorted, in Russian, 'freedom and justice, for example', something that was duly noticed and appreciated by Russian liberal tweeters (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Twitter conversation of Stephen Fry on Pussy Riot on 21 August 2012

Source: Excerpt from Stephen Fry's tweet, 21 August 2012, on the Internet: https://twitter.com/stephenfry/with_replies (retrieved 24 September 2012).

Memes on the Internet

Some features on the Internet quickly acquire a life of their own – they 'fly' over the world with the speed that only broadband communications can provide. Other features refuse to fly, are unable to reproduce themselves and die in the shadow of the Internet world. The *meme* concept was coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976:

> Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.[104]

An illustrative example of a Russian Internet meme was the expression 'party of swindlers and thieves' (*partiia zhulikov i vorov*) that was first coined by Aleksei Navalnyi but quickly acquired a life of its own. On the Internet and Twitter, United Russia was rarely referred to as anything else than the Party of Swindlers

[104] Dawkins, Richard (2006) *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 30th anniversary edition), p. 192.

and Thieves by opposition-minded bloggers and Twitter users. In the election campaign humorous variations on the theme abounded, not least as a result of the announcement of a competition of the best Party of Scoundrels and Thieves poster by Aleksei Navalnyi on 24 February 2012.[105] The images used the image and slogans of United Russia and tended to use a bear or a rat to symbolize the party. The bear is the animal used by United Russia while the rat was an addition by bloggers (see figures 7–10).

An important factor in becoming popular on the Internet is the ability to use humour. Some of the memes appeal to a broad audience precisely for this reason. Humour is, moreover, something that is most difficult for the authorities to use successfully on the Internet (or even generally). Political humour has a long tradition in Russia and the Soviet Union and to a trained Russian eye it signals opposition.[106]

[105] Navalnyi, A. (2011) 'Ladno, davaite obiavim konkurs EdRo-plakata' [OK, let's announce a competition for the best UnRu-poster], *Navalnyi – Livejournal*, on the Internet: http://navalny.livejournal.com/556796.html (retrieved 19 September 2012).

[106] Jonson, L. (2012) 'Med humorn som vapen' [Armed with a Sense of Humour], *Internationella studier*, No. 1, pp. 12–14.

Figure 7 and Figure 8. United Russia posters as a response to the competition announced by Aleksei Navalnyi

Figure 9 and Figure 10. United Russia posters as a response to the competition announced by Aleksei Navalnyi

Note: Figure 9 – 'Dear tenant! For your convenience we have built a voting system for the coming March elections. Now, in order to cast your vote on the United Russia party you will not have to go to the polling station. Just carry on doing your favourite things and we will steal your vote. Your thieves and scoundrels'; Figure 10 – United Russia – Every 4 years we deceive 143.2 million people. Thank you for your patience. Vote for any other party – change the situation in the country'.

Sources: The posters were reproduced on a number of websites. See, for example, Ufimskii zhurnal, on the Internet: http://journalufa.com/1014-final-konkursa-plakata-edinaya-rossiya-partiya-zhulikov-i-vorov.html (retrieved 19 September 2012) and Novyi region, on the Internet: http://www.nr2.ru/moskow/322164.html/print/ (retrieved 19 September 2012).

Government Internet Strategy

The fact that the Internet provides an opportunity to 'let off steam' within the political system, and that it has not spread much beyond urban areas, may be one of the reasons why the Kremlin has not chosen to impose stricter controls on its content:

> The Internet fulfils the role of 'the kitchen', where you can growl and complain about those in power. This function, 'letting off steam', is useful to the power holders, but the government makes sure that the 'growling' does not cross a line beyond which 'offline activity' begins.[107]

The Internet may also provide an independent source of information for the executive branch of government. However, foreign support to oppositional bloggers and tweeters has aroused suspicion among those in power in Russia.[108]

Regulation and Disturbances

The first, second and third generations of Internet control

It is important to recognize that the Russian government is no newcomer to using the Internet for its own purposes. Deibert and Rohozinski from the *Open Net Initiative* (ONI) observe that the Internet in former Soviet states has traditionally been fairly open, and governments have refrained from blocking it. Instead, they argue, Internet control in the post-Soviet area is more sophisticated, and is actually a few generations ahead of blocking regimes by focusing rather on forming and shaping opinion. This can be done in many ways, not all of which are as obvious and prone to provoke criticism as explicit blocking of particular sites. The ONI identifies three generations of Internet control:[109]

1. First generation: Filtering and blocking (servers, domains, IP addresses, key words) is not the most popular strategy in the post-Soviet countries and is mostly found in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
2. Second generation: The creation of a legal and normative environment where government actors can selectively deny the public access to information on the Internet if and when it is 'needed'. This includes one overt and one covert part:
    - Overt: Laws that enable control, including criteria for acceptable contents (e.g. the Russian 'blacklist' law of 2012), harsh laws against slander and libel (e.g. the 2012 renewed

[107] Lipman and Petrov (2010) *Obshchestvo i grazhdane*…, p. 14.
[108] Morozov (2011) *The Net Delusion*, p. 13.
[109] Deibert and Rohozinski, op. cit.

Russian criminal libel law with its 5 million roubles fine) and sweeping national security provisions that can be invoked.

- Covert: Putting pressure on Internet service providers (not least those owned by the government itself). The results of such pressure are difficult to track to the government, and they can easily be confused with or claimed to be purely technical errors. This includes distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks in conjunction with specific events.

3. Third generation: At this stage, government measures are not taken to *deny* access to information, but rather to *compete* for attention with counter-information. Sophisticated methods such as Internet surveillance and data mining can be used to achieve maximum efficiency, and to demoralize and discredit opponents.

Regulating, monitoring and developing the Internet

A number of Russian ministries and agencies are involved in regulating and developing the Internet in the country. As in other policy spheres, a ministry (*ministerstvo*) has a policy role representing an 'ideological level'. Services (*sluzhby*), usually under the purview of a ministry, perform controls and supervise a policy area whereas agencies (*agentury*) have the authority to manage state property and are tasked with providing state support for citizens as well as companies and organizations.[110] Commissions (*kommissii*) are usually interdepartmental and primarily play a coordinating function, but with one ministry playing a lead role. When it comes to regulating the Internet, the Ministry for Communication and its subordinated services, agencies and one commission play key roles:

- The Ministry for Communication, Minkomsviaz (*Ministerstvo sviazi i massovykh kommunikatsii*) is responsible for overall regulation and development of the Internet in Russia.

- The Federal Service for Supervision of Telecommunications, Information Technology and Mass Communication, Roskomnadzor (*Federalnaia sluzhba po nadzoru v sfere sviazi, informatsionnykh tekhnologii i massovykh kommunikatsii*) is responsible for monitoring the Internet, handing out licences to Internet providers and registering Internet media. This was the service that became responsible for the 'Runet Blacklist' in September 2012. According to amendments made in the Law 'On the Protection of Children from Information Causing Damage to Their Health and Development', Russia was to create a list of

[110] Odnokolenko, O. (2004) 'Vsia vlast – Direktory' [All Power to the Directors], *Itogi*, No. 45 (9 September 2004), p. 12.

websites that contained harmful information. The law allowed the blocking of IP addresses rather than stating specific URLs that were to be blocked.[111]

- The Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications, Rospechat (*Federalnoe agenstvo po pechati i massovym kommunikatsiiam*) provides state services concerning the Internet.

- The State Commission for Radio Wave Frequencies (*Gosudarstvennaia kommissiia po radiochastotam*) plays a role when it comes to mobile Internet since it is responsible for handing out radio frequencies.[112] The above agencies and services are all coordinated by the Ministry for Communication and the State Commission for Radio Wave Frequencies is attached to the ministry.

Additionally, it should be pointed out that the FSB is mainly responsible for the operations of SORM II, the Russian 'Legal Interception' system used by several law enforcement agencies to intercept and analyse the contents of telecommunications within Russia.

Mainly, Russia has used the Civil Code and the Penal Code to curb unwanted contents on the Internet, not least the federal law 'On Counteracting Extremist Activity'.[113] With the introduction of amendments in 2006, the list of incidences of extremism was made even more extensive and with the inclusion of a fourth section in article 15, 'the author of press, audio, audiovisual or other material (work) intended for public use and containing at least one of the signs enumerated in article 1 of the present Federal Law' could be made responsible according to the law.[114]

A tougher attitude in 2012

During 2012, there was increased evidence of a toughening of the authorities' attitude towards the opposition's activity on the Internet. In Freedom House's report *Freedom on the Net 2012*, Russia was awarded the status 'partly free', but was also – together with six other states (Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Libya, Azerbaijan,

[111] Rozhkov, R. and Korchenkova, N. (2012) 'Roskomnadzor vyrval internet-stranitsy' [Roskomnadzor Tore out Internet Pages], *Kommersant*, 27 September 2012, on the Internet: http://kommersant.ru/doc/2031243 (retrieved 27 September 2012).

[112] NITs Ekonomika (2011) 'Otraslevoi doklad', p. 7.

[113] Rogoza, J. (2012) 'The Internet in Russia: The cradle of civil society', *OSW Commentary*, 21 March 2012, on the Internet: http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2012-03-21/internet-russia-cradle-civil-society (retrieved 2 April 2012).

[114] Federal Law No. 114-FZ, 25 July 2002, available in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 30 July 2002, on the Internet: http://www.rg.ru/2002/07/30/extremizm-dok.html (retrieved 11 October 2012). Amendments were published by *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 29 July 2006, on the Internet: http://www.rg.ru/2006/07/29/ekstremizm-protivodejstvie-dok.html (retrieved 11 October 2012).

Pakistan and Rwanda) – identified as a country 'at particular risk of suffering setbacks related to Internet freedom in late 2012 and in 2013'. Among the factors that Freedom House pointed to as worrying were increased DDoS attacks, and the use of smear campaigns and extra-legal intimidation. The string of changes to legislation that impeded Internet freedom and 'questionable criminal prosecutions' of prominent bloggers were also factors that Freedom House considered cause for concern.[115]

The new laws, draft laws and regulation as well as amendments to existing laws that introduce restrictions on freedom of speech are often connected to legislation on extremism, religion and the safety of children. For example, the federal law 'On the Protection of Children from Information Causing Damage to Their Health and Development' was amended on 28 July 2012. It was made explicit that it concerned material on the Internet and a requirement to post warnings containing age limits along the lines of '6+', '12+', '16+' for children over six, 12 and 16 years of age and '18+' for adults only.[116] The amendments resulted in a much-publicized decision to change the times when the Soviet cartoon series featuring a wolf that smokes was broadcast, so that it was aired after 11pm, and led a number of bloggers to put e.g. '22+' or '33+' after their names. The prevailing confusion as to how the law was to be enforced made it difficult to use against websites that were not media outlets. Roskomnadzor had indicated that some content could be justified by the context or if a film or programme had a 'high cultural value'. As a result, newspapers and magazines as well as radio and television channels took decisions to scrap or move material without really knowing whether it was necessary.[117]

In September 2012, Roskomnadzor published a draft regulation for establishing a 'blacklist', a list of domains and websites on the Internet that would allow the authorities to identify Internet pages that contain forbidden information. According to the regulation, there were three categories of information that would warrant placing domains and websites on the list: information on how to produce, distribute, obtain or use narcotics; information containing pornography involving children; and information about how to commit suicide or encouraging

[115] Freedom House (2012) *Freedom on the Net 2012: A global assessment of Internet and digital media – Summary of findings*, on the Internet: http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files-/inline_images/FOTN%202012%20FINAL.pdf (retrieved 24 September 2012), p. 13. See also Freedom House (2012) *Freedom on the Net 2012 – Russia*, on the Internet: http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Russia%202012.pdf (retrieved 25 September 2012).

[116] Federal Law No. 139-FZ, 28 July 2012, published in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 30 July 2012, on the Internet: http://www.rg.ru/2012/07/30/zakon-dok.html (retrieved 10 October 2012).

[117] Ponomareva, Yulia (2012) 'Media Law Criticized', *The Moscow News*, 3 September 2012, on the Internet: http://themoscownews.com/russia/20120903/190177192.html (retrieved 10 October 2012).

suicide.[118] These categories did not really elicit debate, but the manner in which domains and even ISPs could end up on the list did. It was above all the Federal Drug Control Service (*Federalnaia sluzhba po kontroliu za oborotom narkotikov*, FSKN), the Ministry for Internal Affairs and the Federal Service on Costumers' Rights Protection and Human Well-Being Surveillance (*Federalnaia sluzhba po nadzoru v sfere zashchity prav potrebitelei i blagopoluchiia cheloveka*, Rospotrebnadzor) that were to decide which domains and websites to include on the list and there would no longer be a requirement for a court order. Instead, the decision to block contents would be made by an anonymous expert group.

Commenting on the blacklisting of sites on the Internet, the chair of the Duma Committee on Information Policy and Communication, Aleksei Mitrofanov, stated on 9 October 2012 that it had become necessary to 'erase' content on the Internet. He also claimed that the Internet would be 'softly' regulated and that there would be no 'Chinese wall'. However, his comparison with the notoriously corrupt traffic police (GAI, Gosudarsvennaia Avtomobilnaia Inspektsiia) probably did little to mollify Russian Internet users.

> Now there are tens of millions of [Internet] users in Russia alone and this means that on this road we need to introduce some kind of GAI and to establish certain rules.[119]

Once the law (Federal law 139) came into effect on 1 November 2012, a new wave of criticism arose. Columnist Yuriy Revich in *Novaya gazeta*, having noted that the law remains fuzzy in key definitions and that it will probably need constant revision if it is to work, drew the conclusion that this vagueness is probably intentional:

> This means that those who initiated the law are trying to regulate a high-tech sector that is shaping the face of the modern world, using the methods of an army sergeant, who has learned the hard way that punishing the entire platoon even if only a single soldier is guilty is the best way to maintain discipline.[120]

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[118] The draft regulation 'O edinom avtomatizirovannoi informatsionnoi sisteme "Yedinyi reestr domennykh imen, ukazatelei stranits saitov v seti "Internet" i setevykh adresov, pozvoliaiushchikh identifirovat saity v seti "Internet", soderzhashchie informatsiiu, rasprostranenie kotoroi v Rossiiskoi Federatasii zapreshcheno"' [On a Unified Automatic Information System 'Unified List of Domains, Site Pages on the Net "Internet" and Net Addresses That Make It Possible to Identify Sites on the Net "Internet" That Contain Information Forbidden to Distribute in the Russian Federation'] was published by the Ministry for Communication in September, on the Internet: http://minsvyaz.ru/common/upload/proekt_post.pdf (retrieved 10 October 2012).

[119] Gazeta (2012) 'Mitrofanov pro regulirovanie internet: ne budet ni kitaiskoi steny, ni polnogo gulialova po bufetu' [Mitrofanov on Regulating the Internet: There will be neither a Chinese Wall, nor total freedom to do whatever one pleases], *gazeta.ru*, 9 October 2012, on the Internet: http://m.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2012/10/09/n_2564177.shtml (retrieved 10 October 2012).

[120] Novaya gazeta (2012) 'Feldfebelia v adminy dam! Vstupil v silu zakon o "chernykh spiskakh" v internete' [I'll Give a Sergeant to Serve You as Admin! The Internet 'Black List' law has come

Criticism concerning the vagueness and opacity of the law's application was echoed in a Lenta.ru editorial that concluded that, under Federal law 139, even the website of the ruling United Russia party could probably be banned for its favourable account of euthanasia.[121] Internationally, comments were similarly critical, with *Reporters Without Borders*, for example, concluding that 'no political will exists to resolve the law's contradictions and to eliminate those that pose threats to freedom'.[122]

There is no way to obtain the entire list of blocked contents; instead Roskomnadzor has established a website where it is possible to enter a Web address manually and find out whether it is in the register or not (see Figure 11). The site also allows anyone to report sites – and even individual email messages and chat conversations! – for inclusion in the registry. If Roskomnadzor finds the material offensive, the hosting service is contacted and has to inform the owner within 24 hours. If the contents are not removed within 24 hours, the relevant IP address, URL or domain name is entered in the registry. According to a press release on 7 November 2012 from Roskomnadzor, more than 7 000 websites had been reported by Internet users so far. Of these 199 related to narcotics and were handed to the FSKN; 72 related to suicide and were handed to Rospotrebnadzor.[123] Furthermore, concerns have been voiced about the fact that the only way for Internet service providers to adhere to the law is by using deep packet inspection (DPI) technology. This represents a new step in Internet control, in that not only the 'headers' of data packets (i.e. addressing information) are inspected, but also the actual contents. While this allows surgical precision in filtering, DPI is also highly intrusive, allowing the contents of emails, Web pages and so on to be transparently read by the regulating authority.[124]

The Russian authorities do not act in a void, however. With increasing obstacles and disturbances appearing for Internet users in Russia, users have become increasingly skilful in avoiding them or at least mitigating their effects. For example, Internet users learned to move their profiles quickly or duplicate them

into effect], novayagazeta.ru, on the Internet: http://www.novayagazeta.ru/columns/55230.html (retrieved 7 November 2012).

[121] Lenta.ru (2012) 'Podsudnyi den' [Judgement Day], on the Internet: http://www.lenta.ru/articles/2012/11/01/reestr (retrieved 7 November 2012).

[122] Reporters Without Borders (2012) 'Internet Access Barred as Wave of New Legislation Threatens Freedom of Information', on the Internet: http://en.rsf.org/russia-internet-access-barred-as-wave-of-01-11-2012,43627.html (retrieved 7 November 2012).

[123] Federal Service for Supervision of Telecommunications, Information Technology and Mass Communication (2012) 'Blok-post nachinaet deistvovat' [The Checkpoint Is Becoming Effective] (press release 7 November 2012), on the Internet: http://www.rsoc.ru/press/publications/-news17208.htm (retrieved 7 November 2012).

[124] Soldavot, A. and Borogan, I. (2012) 'The Kremlin's New Internet Surveillance Plan Goes Live Today', *Wired*, 1 November 2012, on the internet: http://www.vedomosti.ru/tech/news/-1569901/fsb_obeschaet_ochistit_runet_ot_vozdejstvia (retrieved 30 November 2012).

on Western social networks when popular blog forums such as LiveJournal were subject to DDoS attacks.[125]

Figure 11. The zapret-info.gov.ru site, where it is possible to see if a site is on the 'blacklist'

[125] Sidorenko, Alexey (2011) 'Society and the State on the Internet: A call for change', in Lipman, Maria and Petrov, Nikolay (eds) *Russia in 2020: Scenarios for the Future* (Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), pp. 574–5.

Competition

How the Kremlin uses the Internet

The Kremlin has become increasingly skilful at exploiting the Internet medium for its own political ends, in the style of third-generation Internet control. Putin, Medvedev and government ministries have used the Net to encourage citizens to express their opinions, expose corruption and call attention to abuses of power. This could be interpreted as a willingness on the part of Russia's political leadership to boost popular influence in the country, but it should probably rather be seen as a way of presenting the leadership as pro-technology, forward-looking and sensitive to the voice of the people. It is also in this context that the creation on 30 June 2012 of a Directorate for Using Information Technology and Developing Electronic Democracy inside the Presidential Administration should be analysed.[126] The fact that a political leadership adjusts to the realities of the cyber age should not be taken to mean that it is undergoing democratization.[127]

It would also be naive to ignore the fact that the Internet offers a further means of gathering information about the population, e.g. via Russian-based social media like vkontakte.ru and odnoklassniki.ru. The SORM II legislation, which forces telephone companies and Internet service providers to install the equipment necessary for the FSB to monitor their traffic, is one potent tool,[128] even if both the constitution and other legislation formally require a court order for such surveillance.[129] Following the election in December 2011, it became clear that email exchanges and other forms of private correspondence had been gathered illegally, when these were 'leaked' to the press to discredit opposition leaders.[130] There were also a number of well-publicized IT attacks on several opposition websites on 4 December 2011, and on 8 December one of the founders of

[126] 'Ob upravlenii Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii po primeneniiu informatsionnykh tekhnologii i razvitiiu elektronnoi demokratii' [On the Directorate of the President of the Russian Federation for Using Information Technology and Developing Electronic Democracy], Presidential Decree, No. 918, 30 June 2012.

[127] Morozov (2011) *The Net Delusion*, p. 90.

[128] See Deibert and Rohozinski, op. cit.; and Alexanyan, K. et al. (2012) 'Exploring Russian Cyberspace: Digitally-mediated collective action and the networked public sphere', *Berkman Center Research Publication*, No. 2012-9, April 2012, on the Internet: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2014998 (retrieved 7 November 2012).

[129] Ukolov, Roman et al. (2008) 'Rodina znaet' [The Motherland Knows], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 10 April 2008, on the Internet: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2008-04-10/10_odnoklassniki.html (retrieved 28 February 2011).

[130] See, for example, Earle, Jonathan (2012) 'Youth Group Leader in Leak Scandal', *The Moscow Times*, 3 February 2012, on the Internet: http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/youth-group-leader-in-leak-scandal/452277.html (retrieved 8 February 2012).

vkontakte.ru, Pavel Durov, declared that he had no intention of giving in to the demands of the FSB to block opposition groups on the network.[131]

A second-generation Internet control amendment to the Penal Code, making 'libel' into a criminal offence and punishable with a fine of up to 5 million roubles, provoked a great deal of debate, not least since this had been made into an administrative offence by Dmitrii Medvedev only a year earlier.[132] The Duma wanted to make anonymous libel on the Internet illegal by this amendment. Bloggers were quick to point out that the law would in fact be very difficult to implement and that the government would probably find ways to prosecute unwanted critics anyway, with or without such a law. However, the law sent a political signal in a society where it was the mass of new and amended legislation rather than individual acts of law that was intended to make critics more cautious.

Another initiative in the Duma is amendments to federal legislation that would make it illegal to offend religious beliefs or feelings, with penalties of a fine of up to 300 000 RUR (about 6 000 euros) or up to three years in prison. It led the radio anchors Maria Gaidar and Aleksandr Pliushchev, on Ekho Moskvy, to observe that this would create the paragraph of the law according to which Pussy Riot had in fact already been sentenced.[133]

Information campaigns using the covert second- and third-generation measures are difficult to prove and document, because they involve a mix of surveillance, interaction and physical action to harass and disrupt an opponent. Still, when it comes to third-generation measures, it is clear that Russia has most of the necessary tools. Apart from the SORM II system, another Russian third-generation measure was exposed in August 2012 in *Kommersant*, which published the contents of a secret 30 million RUR tender from the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) for a computer system for conducting 'massive dissemination of information messages in designated social networks with the purpose of forming public opinion'. While the SVR is supposed to be active only outside of Russia, the sources cited in the *Kommersant* article pointed out that the same techniques could certainly be used to affect Russians active on the Runet as well.[134] Indeed, this is just a logical improvement over using manual labour to

[131] Ekho Novosti (2011) 'FSB okazyvaet davlenie na administratsiu krupneshei rossiiskoi sotsialnoi sete "vkontakte"' [The FSB is putting pressure on the administration of "vkontakte", the largest Russian social network], *Radio Ekho Moskvy*, 8 December 2011, on the Internet: http://echo.msk.ru/news/837284-echo.html (retrieved 8 December 2011).

[132] Federal Law No. 141-FZ, 28 July 2012, available in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 1 August 2012, on the Internet: http://www.rg.ru/2012/08/01/kleveta-dok.html (retrieved 11 October 2012).

[133] Razvorot (utrennyi), *Ekho Moskvy*, 25 September 2012, 09.01-11.00 (Moscow Time). See also Vendil Pallin, Carolina (2012) 'The Political Aftermath of Pussy Riot: A sowing of dragon's teeth', *RUFS Briefing*, No. 15, September 2012.

[134] Kommersant (2012) 'Razvedka botom' [Intelligence Using a Bot], August 27 2012, on the Internet: http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2009256 (retrieved 7 November 2012).

spread pro-government comments on Web forums and social networks, a practice epitomized in China by the '50 Cent party' (from the alleged payment per comment) and known in Russia as 'Web brigades', although their existence and extent are unclear.[135] Furthermore, the work on creating a separate Cyrillic segment on the Internet can be seen as a third-generation measure aimed at extending control and improving traffic monitoring without actually having to block very much. The idea of national zones is popular throughout the post-Soviet space.[136]

The International Dimension

There is also an international dimension worth mentioning. Since 1998, Russia has been pushing in international arenas for what it calls 'international information security' (*mezhdunarodnaia informatsionnaia bezopasnost*). The work has mainly taken place in the United Nations, and has resulted in a number of General Assembly resolutions on the topic 'Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security'.[137] As a part of this work, Russia is also promoting a Convention on International Information Security, a concept version of which is available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[138]

This approach is interesting, because it highlights the importance the Russian political leadership (from Yeltsin, through Putin and Medvedev and back to Putin again) attaches to these questions. The fact that the main forum chosen is the United Nations General Assembly First Committee, which deals with disarmament, is also telling: Russia looks on these issues as military matters; information war (between sovereign states) is to be avoided by UN conventions (between sovereign states).

The definition of information security given in the Russian draft convention merits attention: 'a state in which personal interests, society, and the government are protected against the threat of destructive actions and other negative actions in the information space'. This is quite different from the more technically oriented definition 'confidentiality, integrity, availability of data' that is commonly used in the West. Russia goes far beyond technology and into politics in the definition it is advocating. This is perhaps most evident in article 4 of the

[135] Freedom House (2011) 'Freedom on the Net 2011', pp. 9–10, *Freedom House*, on the Internet: http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN2011.pdf (retrieved 7 November 2012).
[136] to ??? Deibert and Rohozinski, op cit.
[137] United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, on the Internet: http://www.un.org/disarmament/topics/informationsecurity/ (retrieved 7 November 2012).
[138] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Convention on International Information Security (Concept)', on the Internet: http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/6912-ce36aa5f1e92c32579250035bebd!OpenDocument (retrieved 7 November 2012).

proposed convention, where one of the 'main threats to international peace and security in the information space' is identified as 'actions in the information space aimed at undermining the political, economic, and social system of another government, and psychological campaigns carried out against the population of a State with the intent of destabilizing society'. This wording is probably best understood against the background of the colour revolutions in post-Soviet countries and the Arab Spring. If these events are seen as being engineered by foreign clandestine interests, as is not uncommon in Russia, the draft convention can be seen as an attempt to avoid similar events on Russian soil (cf. also the Akunin appeal to Putin cited above).

Furthermore, Russia's international political aims in seeking what it sees as information security collide with freedom of speech as it is commonly understood in the West. In September 2012, Russia, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan proposed an international code of conduct for information security, stating that states should enter into international agreements to cooperate 'in curbing the dissemination of information that […] undermines other countries' political, economic and social stability'.[139] This wording highlights the conflict between the values of free speech and stability. The proposal was condemned by Reporters Without Borders as an attempt to legitimize censorship.[140]

One interpretation of the Russian drive for international conventions on information security is that it constitutes a way of imposing constraints upon foreign states perceived to be competitors, in order for Russia to be able to catch up.[141] An argument in favour of this hypothesis is the fact that, while Russia is campaigning internationally against states developing their capabilities for information warfare (for instance, the concept convention obliges the parties to 'take action aimed at limiting the proliferation of "information weapons" and the

[139] Letter dated 12 September 2011 from the Permanent Representatives of China, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/66/359). See also the statement by FSB Deputy Director Sergei Smirnov at the meeting of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in late March 2012: 'Within the framework of cyber security, we need to secure our society from the activity of western security services or security services, who would like to inflict some kind of harm on us. … We know that western security services are creating special units to study this problem…' He then referred to the Arab Spring and went on to say that: 'Either way, these are new technologies that western security services use to create and maintain constant tension in societies. And the goals are serious – all the way to toppling a political regime that exists or existed in these countries.' 'FSB obeshchaet ochistit runet ot vozdeistviia zarubezhnykh spetssluzh' [The FSB Promises to Clean the Runet from the Influence of Foreign Special Services], Itar-TASS in *Vedomosti*, 27 March 2012, on the Internet: http://www.vedomosti.ru/tech/news/1569901/-fsb_obeschaet_ochistit_runet_ot_vozdejstvia (retrieved 3 December 2012).

[140] Reporters Without Borders (2011) 'Freedom on the Net 2011', p. 7, on the Internet: http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN2011.pdf (retrieved 7 November 2012).

[141] Giles, K. (2011) '"Information Troops" - A Russian Cyber Command?', Cyber Conflict (ICCC), 2011 3rd International Conference on, pp. 1–16.

technology for their creation'), it is clearly developing its own abilities in this arena. The SVR tender cited above for technology to influence public opinion through social networks is a case in point. Furthermore, in 2011, the Russian Ministry of Defence released a conceptual document for military information operations.[142]

[142] Ministry of Defence (2011) 'Kontseptualnye vzgliady na deiatelnost Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi federatsii v informatsionnom prostranstve' [Conceptual Points of View on the Activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the Information Space], on the Internet: http://ens.mil.ru/science/publications/more.htm?id=10845074@cmsArticle (retrieved 7 November 2012).

Conclusions

The 2011 parliamentary election and 2012 presidential election in Russia sparked street protests on a scale not seen since the fall of the Soviet Union. Large segments of the population, primarily the urban middle class, were convinced that the elections were fraudulent. While this was undoubtedly the case, there is little evidence to suggest that the fraud was any worse than had been the case in the parliamentary election of 2007 and the presidential election of 2008. It is a long-established part of Russian political culture that those in power make use of 'administrative resources' for personal gain and to perpetuate their power. What had changed was the *public perception* of elections – something that triggered both protests and measures from the Kremlin to try and make the presidential elections seem more legitimate.

Traditionally, public perceptions in Russia have been largely shaped by television – the only mass medium with a nationwide reach. All five national TV channels are controlled by the state or by stakeholders close to the political leadership. With a week civil society and very low levels of trust, the government has been able to exercise a great deal of influence over perceptions and opinions. Ever since 2003, Russia has been rated 'non-free' by Freedom House in its annual report on press freedom in the world.

However, at least sections of Russian society have undergone significant change in the past decade: an urban middle class has emerged as a result of the sustained economic growth from about the year 2000. Many features set this urban middle class apart from the rest of the population – one of them being high Internet penetration and the resulting ability to form opinions based on other information than that served up by the government-controlled media.

The political role of the Internet should not be exaggerated; most of it is entertainment-oriented in Russia as in other countries. Furthermore, it should be stressed that far from all political activity on the Russian Internet is democratically oriented.

However, some typical Russian political uses of the Internet has been observed over the past few years:

- Obtaining and distributing information as well as providing an alternative forum for debate.
- Appeals for action including everything from crowdsourcing and asking who can provide practical assistance to invitations to demonstrations.
- Documenting what happens at demonstrations and during police raids by filming, taking photographs or simply tweeting what is happening. This is not least a protective measure for those involved.

The interrelation between Russian politics and the Internet is a methodologically difficult area, where it is difficult to establish causal relations. One reason why it is difficult to ascertain the role of the Internet is that it typically grows in parallel with other patterns of change; social, political, economic and technological. This makes it difficult to establish whether the growth of the Internet has indeed played a role for street protests and other political events, or if these would have occurred anyway, e.g. as a consequence of a growing middle class.

Nevertheless, there are two main reasons why the impact of the Internet on Russian politics should be taken seriously. First, a number of plausible *mechanisms* for the impact of the Internet on politics have been discussed in the literature, and these mechanisms offer plausible explanations for a number of phenomena observed in Russia.

Second, the Internet policy of the Russian government and its responses to political activism online suggests that there is a belief within the top political leadership that the Internet has the potential to play a political role. This is particularly true of the elaborate employment of second- and third-generation Internet control observed by the *Open Net Initiative* and others, e.g.:

- The use of the Civil Code and the Penal Code to curb unwanted contents on the Internet, particularly using the federal law 'On Counteracting Extremist Activity'
- The 'blacklist' law of 2012
- The criminal libel law with its 5 million RUR fine
- The ability of the government to use put pressure on ISPs
- The SORM II legislation, which forces telephone companies and Internet service providers to install the equipment necessary for the FSB to monitor their traffic
- The SVR tender for a computer system for conducting 'massive dissemination of information messages in designated social networks with the purpose of forming public opinion'.

The same belief is also evident on the international arena, where the Russian efforts to bring about an international convention on information security again suggest a conviction on the Russian side that the Internet has the potential to spread information that could undermine political, economic and social stability. This world view needs to be taken seriously by anyone striving to understand Russian political decision-making.

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