

Introduction

This dissertation looks at the Russian protest movement of 2011/12, a social movement in response to the conduct and results of the parliamentary election that took place on 4 December 2011. The protests that followed the election were the largest protests in Russia since the end of the Soviet Union. This movement has awoken the political consciousness of Russian citizens, especially the younger middle-class urbanites of Russia's largest cities. The socio-economic groups represented at these events have come to the realisation that they want more than the financial means this political regime can offer them. They want freedom. This movement surprised most observers of the region; with many Russian analysts writing only months before that they were sceptical that Russians would take to the street in protest. It is its surprising nature that makes the movement so interesting and unpredictable. After a promising start, the protests have become few and far between with thinner crowds than at its peak of an estimated 50,000 people at Bolotynaya Square in December 2011.

The movement has had minimal impact in the sense that essentially none of its demands have been met. A key demand of the movement was that the head of the electoral commission, Vladimir Churov, should resign. This never came to pass and he remains in his position. This, along with the limited and negative portrayal of the movement in Russian mainstream media, means the protest movement has been effectively labelled unsuccessful. This dissertation does not attempt to determine if the movement was a success or not, but to show that the movement has had a significant impact on the political regime in ways that may not be obvious yet but have the potential to cause significant historical changes. This chapter will outline the goals and design of this research, as well as provide a review of the literature that informed the dissertation.

Research Question, Aims and Motivation

The research question of this dissertation is '*How has the Russian protest movement Of 2011/12 affected change in Russia's political regime?*' The guiding purpose of this research is not to decide if the protest movement has, or has not been successful, but to analyse the effect the movement has had on the political regime in terms of the political processes triggered by social action, and the political opportunities that were born from this social movement. This research has been carried out using Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow's theoretical framework for analysing social movements, as

well as using empirical evidence of the change caused by the protest movement within the Russian political regime.¹ The motivation behind this work is the desire to uncover and highlight certain outcomes of the Russian protest movement that I believe to have been undervalued in much of international and Russian media representation and political analysis. When carrying out preliminary reading for this research, a gap in the social movement literature presented itself. Most scholarly research into social movements is focused on how a movement begins and what happens throughout, and little attention is paid to the effect social movements have on reform and changes in political regime. This is an area that will be further explored in the literature review section. Thus, the aim of this research is to attempt to fill this gap in the literature, adding to the theoretical literature in this field as well as to the empirical studies of this particular region and political situation.

I have identified three areas for analysis that have experienced change since the start of the protest movement: the awakening of the Russian citizen, the de-legitimisation of political institutions, and fracturing among the political elite. I believe this will be an original approach as it will bring together evidence and testimony of the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2011 and 2012 and the protests that followed them as well as the impact these events have had on important Russian political institutions and the Russian people, applying Tilly and Tarrow's theoretical approach to this evidence. The result will be an analytical and theoretical approach that will add to the analyses of the recent protest movement in Russia as well as to the work of social movement theory in general.

Research Outline: methodology, data collection, structure

Due to limitations of time and capacity, this work is primarily focused on events taking place in Moscow, with some references to St. Petersburg and other Russian cities. The protest movement has not officially ended but the timeline in used in this dissertation for describing the protest movement is from September 2011 until June 2012. This timeline has been chosen because the original cause of the movement was to protest the unfairness of the elections and, as a result, it is during this time period that the movement was the most heated. The analysis of the effects of the protest movement

¹ Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow. *Contentious politics*. Vol. 10. *Boulder, CO*: Paradigm

goes beyond this time frame up to May 2013. I would like to briefly clarify some of the terminology used in this dissertation. The first note on terminology I would like to make is about the term ‘*opposition*’. Within the Russian context, the term opposition is used for members of officially sanctioned opposition parties as well as non-sanctioned ones, or people without a political party such as protest leaders who are referred to as opposition leaders. “The media have coined the terms ‘systemic’ and ‘non-systemic’ to distinguish between parties which are registered – and thus recognised by the state – and parties lingering in an institutional limbo because the state refuses to recognise them. This distinction applies to opposition parties as well.”² This is a distinction that has been adopted by academics and analysts as well and will be used in this dissertation to clarify which kind of opposition is being discussed. This is important because systemic opposition parties in Russia are not considered to be true opposition parties like the ones you find in the Western models of democracy. The second term to be clarified is ‘*regime*’. In this dissertation the term political regime is used as an umbrella concept that covers the various political institutions and actors that form the political control in Russia. This includes President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the government, the upper and lower chambers of parliament, and the party of power ‘United Russia’.

Methodology and Data

The research process of this dissertation has applied selected aspects of the methodology set out by Tilly and Tarrow’s social movement theoretical framework, as per their 2006 book, *Contentious Politics*. The method of empirical analysis is used to gather new data and testimonial evidence from various sources to assess the effects of the protest movement on the political regime. As this is currently an on-going process, and there are continuously new developments, few secondary literature sources have been relevant enough to use. The contemporary aspect of this topic is what makes this approach unique and hopefully the source of original analysis.

Statistical data has been used to provide further evidence to support claims made in this dissertation, sourced mainly from the Yuri Levada Analytical Centre³, as well as from the Russian electoral commission (CEC), and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

² Aleksandr Kynev, ‘State Duma elections 2011 and the marginal role of Russian parties. Part 2’, European Union Institute for Security Studies, 14 November 2011, <<http://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/state-duma-elections-2011-and-the-marginal-roleof-russian-parties-part-2/>> . [Accessed: 22 March 2013].

³ In all future references: The Levada Centre.

Structure

This dissertation begins with a comprehensive review of the literature that has been used to in the development of the research design and research process (Chapter One). Within the literature review, the purpose of this research will be further explained by reviewing the existing social movement literature. An explanation of the key concepts and their significance to this research will be given in the first chapter, as well as a further examination of the sources used for empirical research and secondary analysis.

The second chapter entitled *Social Movements, Change, and Political Regimes*, provides the contextual backbone of this dissertation. This chapter applies Tilly and Tarrow's methodology for analysing a social movement to the description of the protest movement, including explaining the background and causes for the protests.

The third chapter, *The Russian Protest Movement and Its Political Opportunity Structures*, includes a thorough examination of the three areas of change I have chosen to analyse. The fourth chapter *Outcomes* provides an analysis of the potential developments of the political opportunity structures identified in Chapter Three. Following this is the concluding section of the dissertation, which provides a summary and assessment of the project.