Twilight of the Gods?: How the Internet Challenged Russian Television News Frames in the Winter Protests of 2011-12

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Abstract
In the winter of 2011-12, Russian citizens participated in their first large street demonstrations since the early 1990s. This paper looks at a specific element of the internet's role in these protests by examining different news frames in state-run television news, commercial news, and online content for the protests on December 10, December 24, and February 4. The research finds that state-run news admitted only that people were dissatisfied with the political process, while commercial news and the internet were far more critical of political leaders and the regime. Overall, a 'war of frames' emerged, with all of the news sources attempting to either dismiss or support the idea that the protests had significant grass-roots support and represented a legitimate threat to the Putin regime. Online news sources provided not only a broader range of voices and ideas, but also gave important details about the protest events themselves. What emerges from this study is that state-run news will struggle to contain future protests using the same post-Soviet propaganda methods, suggesting that the Russian state will either have to find a more effective way to control information challenges or experience change on the scale of the Arab Spring. This research was funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (*The Internet and Everyday Rights in Russia*, RES-000-22-4159).

Introduction
The Russian internet has created an alternative media sphere, but so far it has failed to redefine the Russian news agenda. Rather, online and traditional media exist in almost completely separate spheres with distinctive levels of state controls, agendas, frames, and audiences. This paper explores how long this state of one nation and two medias can exist without crisis that would entail either a collapse of the reality crafted by the Kremlin or a destruction of online freedom through crackdowns by the Russian state. To explore this state of tension, we examine the difference and interplay (or lack thereof) of traditional broadcast and online framing of the protests surrounding Russian elections in the winter of 2011-12 with a focus on the three key protests in December and the following February. The work uses an archive of television news

from November 2011 through February 2012, recorded and analyzed under one author's direction (Oates) by the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. The newscasts on state-run First Channel and commercial channel NTV are compared with important online news sources concerning the protests. At issue is the contrast in framing among state-run television, which used classic post-Soviet propaganda tactics, the more liberal commercial television, and the online sphere. For the first time in post-Soviet history, the Kremlin's ability to control the news agenda was significantly challenged by not only the scale of the protests, but the way in which the internet was able to disseminate news and evidence of the breadth of the activity.

This analysis revealed three key findings. First, state-run television coverage did evolve over the course of the crises, moving from a frame that ignored the grass-roots nature of the protests over electoral falsification to a frame that included some reference to broader political concerns. At the same time, a 'frame war' developed with the key commercial television news on NTV, which was far quicker to present the three main protests as manifestations not only of protest over political process, but as dissatisfaction with the regime itself. Finally, the internet became an important source of facts and evidence regarding both electoral falsification and the size of the protests, far outstripping its former role as a perceived 'safety value' for political chat employed only by those outside of the political mainstream.

While the Russian state weathered the protests without serious challenge, the study of the coverage of the protests in both online and in traditional media can illuminate some key issues about protest, the internet, and post-Soviet states. How did online framing and agenda setting differ from that of the traditional broadcast media (the state-run First Channel and commercial NTV)? How did the more extensive online coverage affect the framing of the events on television? How did this evolve over the course of the three main demonstrations? What different details, agendas, and frames emerged in online media? Overall, how long can one country survive with two distinctive media spheres and what are the specific pressure points that the internet appears to make most vulnerable in Russia?

The potential of the internet to craft social change
Readers will note we have avoided the word 'revolution' or, indeed, the rather more inaccurate phrases such as 'Facebook revolution' or 'Twitter revolution.' There is an enormous amount of anecdotal evidence that links ICTs to social change, both in small and large ways, but analysis is far more complicated. Part of this is due to the pace and nature of the change in which the production, distribution, and consumption of media content continues to shift dramatically over short time periods. Yet, part of it is also due to ongoing struggle by political communication scholars to isolate the effect of media on social change in general. Media effects are notoriously slippery, in particular as it is so difficult to isolate cause and effect. In other words, consuming a biased news outlet will not sway you to a particular point of view; rather, you probably chose that outlet in response to your pre-existing beliefs. Thus, it will tend to reinforce but not revolutionize, according to Western media scholars. However, most theories of political effects are based on relatively stable political and media systems. The use of media in developing democracies (or emerging authoritarian regimes) is less well understood and almost not understood at all in terms of the new media.

Scholars have identified several ways in which the internet can accelerate and augment political change, in particular in the way in which the internet allows citizens to articulate views as well as network with each other at virtually no cost. Many studies have found, however, that the internet tends to promote 'business as usual' between elites and citizens, with little significant change for the efficacy of political parties, social action groups, or non-governmental organizations (for an overview, see Chadwick, 2006). Arguably, there were few significant examples of the way in which the internet significantly challenged regimes between the 1994 Chiapas uprising that used Email listservs to publicize the repression of indigenous people in Mexico to President Barack Obama's network of online support in 2008. Moving on from the normative argument over whether the internet was good or bad for society, scholars have been busy looking at the effect of the internet on a range of existing social and political arrangements. While there have been interesting findings and a range of new academic outlets for these ideas, traditional politics still seemed to dominate the online sphere until the Arab Spring. Indeed, many were worried that the overall effect of the internet would be to discourage civil society, as people were absorbed into individualized pursuits rather than encouraged into group activities (Putnam, 2000), what Sunstein labeled "information cocoons" (2002). At the same time, the commercial internet appeared to be overwhelming the growth of the civic internet (Hindman, 2008). The speed and tenacity of the use of the internet in the face of a repressive regime alerted not just scholars, but a far broader constituency, to the relative role of the internet in regime change in Egypt and further afield.

The main findings to emerge so far from research into the Arab Spring is that the internet mattered in the redistribution of power, but that its effects are difficult to predict (or replicate) because of the way in which the internet is embedded within political cultures (Howard and Parks, 2012; Heydemann and Leenders, 2011; Trombetta, 2012; Hamdy and Gomaa, 2012; Khamis and Vaughn, 2012; Lewinski and Mohammed, 2012). This was the overall conclusion by looking at the role of the internet in the Arab Spring as weighed against factors including cultural shift, elite behavior, interaction with the Arab traditional mass media, transnational forces for change in the region, rising levels of education, and generational change. A recent study that analyzes the roots of the "digital uprisings" by using public opinion surveys from a few years before the Arab Spring found a key element: When government internet filtering is low, the internet can provide an "equalizing effect" in terms of political knowledge, political participation, and attitudes about the United States and the West in general (Wagner and Gainous, 2013). At the same time, a relatively uncensored internet had a negative effect on trust in government in Middle Eastern countries. While it may be difficult here to separate correlation from causality – i.e. the people who mistrusted the government may have been more inclined to go online to seek out alternatives – the central finding here that internet filtration matters for regime stability.

While authoritarian regimes control the traditional media in a relatively uniform matter (top-down censorship, inculcation of self-censorship, control of media production, repressive media laws, etc.), their approach to new media has been quite varied. China is the central example of heavy control at many levels (MacKinnon, 2011). Yet, as highlighted by reports by groups such as Freedom House, many counties that have highly controlled traditional media tolerate relatively open internet regimes. This was the case in Egypt in 2010 and it was also the case in Russia in

2011. The research by Wagner and Gainous not only suggests that the level of government control online matters, but that internet effects build over time. They were able to identify important attitude shifts that occurred prior to the actual events of the Arab Spring. Again, evidence would suggest that Russia is experiencing a similar phenomenon. In a 2010 survey of 2,017 Russians, those who went online routinely were more likely to support human rights such as freedom of speech, to feel more politically effective, and to be critical of the Medvedev regime (Oates, 2012). In this sense, the stage was set for the internet to play a much more important role in social change. While that change could be affected by many different elements of the internet, including interest aggregation, the articulation of political challenge, influence from other countries, etc., this paper focuses on one element: online information that can challenge the dominant news frame on television.

One Nation, Two Audiences
State-run television has dominated the political sphere in Russia, both during the Soviet era and since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Surveys have consistently identified state-run television as one of the most trusted and authoritative political institutions in the country (Oates, 2013). Commercial television enjoys a much lower level of trust, but the most well-established commercial station called NTV claims it is available for viewership to almost all in Russia.[1] While the Russian authorities have found state-run television to be a particularly effective tool at framing and control of the political sphere, the power of television everywhere is on the wane. Nations around the globe are experiencing a shift in audience from traditional to online news sources.[2] While the adoption and use of the internet vary a great deal among countries, there are global trends shared by nations. In particular, the adoption has been faster and the use wider among the younger generation. This creates a challenging phenomenon for leaders, many of whom struggle to understand the fundamental change in the media ecology. Thus, while leaders can fairly readily understand the concept of a new media *distribution* system online, fundamental changes in *media ecology* such as crowd-sourcing and horizontal information sharing among trusted circles are not something they intuitively grasp. As a result, elites can be slow to understand the power and authority of new media, ranging from blogs to Facebook pages to YouTube. It would almost seem that they cannot grasp the revolutionary shift in news.

While Russian leaders are by no means alone in dealing with fast and fundamental change in the media system wrought by the internet, they face some particularly powerful challenges: very rapid internet adoption in a short time span; a gap between a non-free media and relatively free online sphere; an online/offline divide that reinforces other social cleavages in a country with very distinctive Soviet and post-Soviet divide; and a young generation that matches advanced Western countries in its internet use and skill (for an in-depth discussion, see Oates, 2013). Indeed, it may be a quelling thought to the Kremlin that these are all elements that parallel the conditions in Egypt just before the Arab Spring. Internet use in Russia was reported at about 43 percent of the adult population at the end of 2010, the eve of the Russian winter protests of 2011-12. While this is far below the saturation in the United States or across Western Europe, it represents a huge shift in use as internet usage grew more

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[1] http://www.gazprom-media.com/en/tv.xml?&company_id=47
[2] While the media ecosystem is far broader than that of news, this paper looks specifically at news as a one of the key elements in the media sphere.

than twenty-fold from single digits in penetration in 2000 to the end of 2010. This outstripped the growth rate in any other major European nation. What is particularly interesting is that the Russian government itself is clearly aware of the expanding growth and views it quite positively (Russian Federal Agency on the Press and Mass Communication, 2011). In a government report issued in 2011, Russian authorities compiled a range of data to predict that internet use among those under 40 would reach almost 100 percent by 2015 (Russian Federal Agency on the Press and Mass Communication). In part, this has been fueled by the ubiquity of mobile phones, which are enormously popular in Russia. However, the Russian love of technology and interest in information also drove this growth. While both the report and analyses on website-tracking companies such as Alexis.com show that Russians are more interested in consumer rather then political issues online (as is true virtually everywhere), at the same time they are engaging with a far greater range of sources outside the control of Russian government.

National television remained the most popular media outlet in Russia in 2010, according to the survey of 2017 Russians in 2010. In the survey, only a handful of people (1.5 percent) claimed that they never watched national television. Three-quarters of the population watched national television routinely, 18 percent routinely, and about 5 percent from time to time (seldom or *redko* in Russian). In the same survey, almost half of the respondents replied that they had never been online and only 23 percent reported they went online routinely, 16 percent said they went online sometimes, and 14 percent said they seldom went online. The survey also highlighted generational differences that show a significant shift from television to the internet for younger citizens: While about 82 percent of those 43 and older reported that they watched television routinely, only 66 percent of those 29 or younger did the same. That means that the audience for national television shrinks by 20 percent from one generation to the next. It seems unlikely that their media habits will switch as they age, particularly given the breadth of offerings online. Still, the flagship news program on the state-run First Channel (*Vremya* or *Time*) far outdistanced the news on commercial NTV (*Sevodnya* or *Today*): 78 percent of the respondents in the 2010 survey claimed they watched *Vremya* compared with 53 percent who watched *Sevodnya*.

State-run Russian news relies on its authoritative voice to shape the news agenda and frame key societal issues (or to virtually ignore some, such as the war in Chechnya or endemic bribery at the highest levels, see Oates, 2006). Authoritarian news frames only work if the information is not challenged from other sources. There is symbiotic relationship between First Channel and its viewers, as has been shown in earlier work (Oates, 2006). Although viewers are aware that much of what they see is either biased or highly selective, they often approve of the coverage in the interest of national pride and stability. Thus, they are not attracted to the idea of objectivity (which they claim is mythical at best and at worst another way that people fool themselves) or even balance. The news should 'lead' and not 'follow': Those who are loyal should be rewarded and celebrated with coverage – those who are out of favor should be ignored or vilified through biased coverage.

This paper examines the nightly news on First Channel (*Pervyi Kanal*) and NTV[3] in Russia. These media outlets were selected as First Channel is the most important and watched channel in the country. It is majority owned (51 percent) by the state, with the remaining shares in the hands of investors. However, as many of those investors are state enterprises, it is accurate to say First Channel is controlled by state interests. Many studies, particularly assessments of election coverage, have shown that First Channel is loyal to the Kremlin and its interests. In particular, First Channel is critical during elections, when it glorifies leaders and parties in power (such as Putin and United Russia), ignores or belittles any potential political rivals such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, and attacks enemies of the Kremlin with a ménage of accusations, half-truths, and unflattering framing known as *kompromat* (a Russian abbreviation for compromising materials) (Oates, 2006, see also reports on Russian elections by the OSCE or the European Institute for the Media, archived at http://www.media-politics.com/eimreports.htm). There is a clear legacy in the post-Soviet news on First Channel's *Vremya* as its flagship news program. Despite an ultra-modern, flashy set, the announcers still sit at a large desk and read the news in a rather formal fashion.

NTV is a commercial network founded in 1993. Initially relatively critical of the state, its founder was forced to flee the country after tax police raided the station. Although significantly pressured against criticizing the government and weathering the loss of many prominent journalists over the years, NTV remains more critical and ironic about the Russian political situation than First Channel.[4] Studies have shown significant differences in story choice, approach, framing, who gets to speak on television, the mention of political parties, the amount of time devoted to presidential activities, and other issues between First Channel and NTV flagship newscasts. (Oates, 2006).

The Russian winter protests, 2011-12
By November 2011, there had been no widespread protests or street violence in Russia since President Boris Yeltsin's crackdown on the opposition parliament in 1993. The political landscape had been marked by considerable stability since the appointment of Vladimir Putin as president by an ailing Yeltsin in December 1999. Putin was elected with strong majorities as president in 2000 and again in 2004, marking a departure from the early years of the Russian republic in which unpredictable elections had led to a considerable measure of political struggle. Indeed, the Communists nearly re-took control of the country via presidential elections in 1996 when Yeltsin and his reformers hit a particular nadir of popularity. These years also were marked by increasing manipulation of electoral results, mostly through biased media coverage, and economic fortunes that improved rapidly in the late 1990s and beyond as oil prices continued to climb. The fact that the Putin regime, which essentially continued under President Dmitri Medvedev as Putin served as Prime Minister for the Medvedev administration of 2008-2012, continued to narrow human rights via selected detention of oligarchs, the closing of NGOs, rampant corruption, a dearth of a rule of law, and continuing restriction of freedom in the traditional media. In addition, elections continued to be heavily manipulated by the Kremlin, not only via the state-dominated media but also through electoral law increasingly aimed at

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[3] NTV does not stand for anything.
[4] Although as focus-group respondents on Russian TV have been quick to point out over the years that commercial and state interests are intertwined in Russia due to the corrupt nature of the state.

consolidating state-backed parties at the expense of grass-roots opposition. The only protests were isolated and small, considered to represent such a minority of Russian citizens that protestors were only rarely arrested or even harassed.

Against this backdrop, the rapid and extensive protests about the conduct and results of a single election to parliament in December 2011 caught many observers and analysts off guard. In other work by Oates (2013), seven key factors were identified as significant catalysts for these protests: 1) the failure of state censorship that relied on traditions of self-censorship; 2) an online sphere that was freer than the traditional mass media in Russia; 3) an explosion in internet use in Russia that eroded the dominance of state television; 4) lack of understanding about citizen attitudes and the online sphere on the part of Russian elites; 5) crowd-sourcing; 6) online political networks; and 7) the role of online social entrepreneurs. In this paper, we are interested in the specific issue of news and news framing, which mostly relates to the relative freedom of the online sphere as well as in the eroding dominance of state television. In the pre-internet age, the Russian state could either censor or bully media outlets into not challenging the state on key issues such as corruption among elites, the war in Chechnya, and skewed elections. The internet, however, made it possible not only to tell people about conflicting information (such as obviously manipulated ballot results) but to show them the data itself (such as on the results page of the Central Elections Commission website, in which many results had curious anomalies in favor of the ruling party – such as the 99.48 percent vote for the Kremlin's United Russia party in Chechnya).[5] It is this element of eyewitness evidence (particularly through uploaded videos) that particularly challenges the Russian state's control on information.

An element of political discontent became apparent in Russia after Putin announced his plan in September 2011 to run again for the presidency in March 2012 (the Russian constitution only specifies that the president cannot serve more than two terms *in a row*). As presidential terms have been extended from four to six years, this would make it likely that Putin would be president for an additional 12 years. Although Putin was a popular president and prime minister, there was a sense that this would give Putin the power and mandate that was reminiscent of a Soviet-era leader. This sense of unease grew into palpable anger over clear electoral falsification and manipulation in elections held on December 4 for the lower house of Russia's parliament, the Duma.[6] Pro-Kremlin United Russia won 53 percent of the vote, the Communist Party won 20 percent, A Just Russia (essentially socialist democrats) won 12 percent, and the perennial but ineffective nationalist party called the Liberal-

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[5] This data can be downloaded directly from the Russian CEC website at:
http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100028713304&vrn=100100028713299&region=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100028713304&type=233
[6] Elections for the 450-seat Duma typically are held every four years. All of the seats are allocated via a national party-list contest to all parties than win more than 7 percent of the vote. This barrier was raised from 5 percent in past elections. In addition, half of the seats used to be allocated via single-member district races, which often returned members with no party affiliation. Both eliminating the district races and raising the percent of votes needed to gain seats in the lower chamber have the effect of helping larger parties at the expense of smaller parties and unaffiliated politicians. The Federation Council is the upper house of Russian parliament (technically known as the Federative Assembly) and has not been elected in national elections since 1993.

Democratic Party of Russia won 9 percent. This was not far off the predicted return, but anomalies in returns as well as reports of electoral irregularities were rife.

Some protests appeared spontaneously immediately after polling day on Sunday, December 4. The largest number of arrests (estimated at hundreds) occurred during the early protests, including the detention of noted oppositionist blogger Alexei Navalny along with other opposition figures. A larger protest was quickly organized for December 10 in Moscow under the banner of 'For Fair Elections', managing to gain a sanctioned area to protest in Moscow. Other protests were planned for around the country, aided significantly by the internet. The protest on December 10 was held at Bolotnaya Square in Moscow and attracted the largest number of street protestors since at least 1993. The political framing of the situation started immediately, with Moscow officials claiming just 25,000 protestors and the organizers claiming 60,000. No arrests were made at the Moscow protests and, indeed, protests at this and following demonstrations were minimal (although not doubt very distressing to the individuals involved). Whatever the official number of attendees, it was clear that it was large, that it attracted a broad range of people, and that it mobilized citizens who had been considered to be passive by their own government and political observers alike. Another even bigger protest was held on December 24, with the largest meeting on Sakharov Avenue in Moscow and smaller rallies across the country. Although the movement called for new Duma elections, the removal of the chair of the elections commission, and investigation into the falsification in the Duma elections, none of these demands were ever met. Another set of protest meetings were organized for February 4, again at Bolotnaya Square in Moscow and around the country. Pro-Putin demonstrations started to appear as well, with the largest in Moscow on February 4 with a reported 130,000 participants.

One of the few things that both the government and the organizers agreed on was that each 'For Fair Elections' protest was larger than the last. In sheer numbers, the organizers reported far more (see Chart 1): from 60,000 attending on 10 December, to 120,000 on 24 December, to 160,000 on February 4. Thus, the protest organizers were claiming not only large turnout, but also sharp growth at each protest, as its figures suggest that attendance doubled from December 10 to December 24 and then grew a more modest 33 percent by the February 4 protests. On the other hand, the figures from the government– while admitting that each protest was larger than the last – showed growth of only 11 percent between the first and second protests and an increase of 22 percent for the final protest. The 'war of numbers' did not end there, however: authorities also claimed that there were 138,000 'anti-Orange' or pro-regime supporters at a counter-demonstration on February 4 in Moscow. They also claimed that 130,000 people showed up for a pro-Putin rally in Moscow on February 23 as well as an additional 110,000 on March 4. Putin was re-elected on March 4, with 63.6 percent of the vote.[7]

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[7]http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=10010003179350 9&vrn=100100031793505&region=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=1001 00031793509&type=226

Chart 1: Attendance at Three Major Protests in Russia, 2011-12
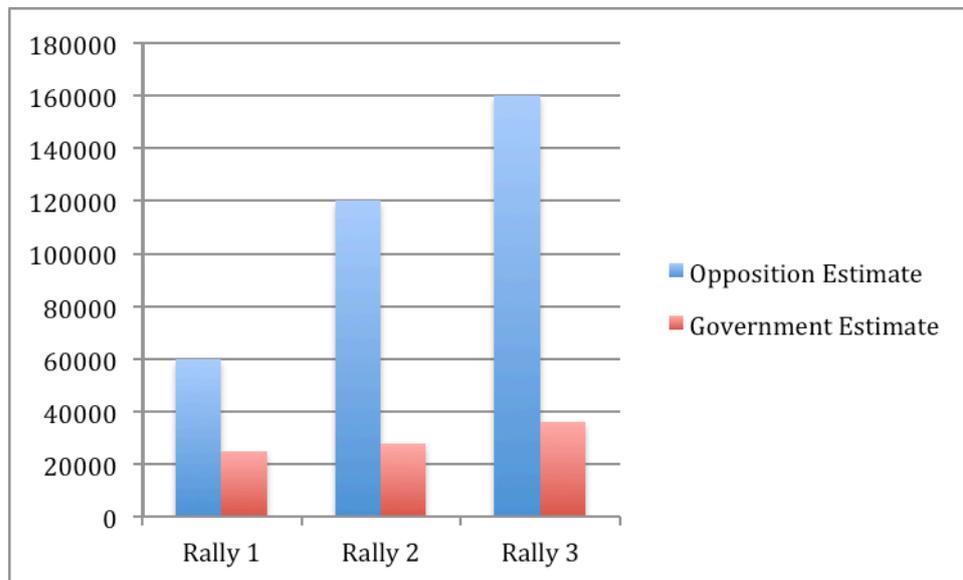
Protest coverage on evening television news and online
A qualitative analysis of protest coverage on the three most significant days of protest in the winter of discontent (December 10, December 24, and February 4) on *Vremya* and *Sevodnya* show how important it is to look beyond minutes of coverage and to discuss how the material is presented in a more qualitative way. This can be achieved by labeling coverage as negative, positive, or even neutral by trained coders. Indeed, coders in Moscow completed coding for affect, although it was clear from training that Western and Russian social scientists had instinctively different definitions of what it means to be 'positive' or 'negative' in a Russian news program.[8] Important elements include placement in the program, which images are used with the story, the tone of the announcers, the word choice, who gets to speak as well as what they get to say. To complement the analysis of protest coverage on major TV news shows, we also looked at how the protests were covered in major online news media during the same three significant days of discontent (December 10, December 24, and February 4). Looking at the prominent news websites Gazeta.ru, Echo Moskvy (which is also a liberal radio station), and Lenta.Ru websites provides an alternative platform for qualitative analysis of the coverage and allows insight into the differences between how the protests were framed on TV and online. Important elements in the analysis include article headlines, which images are used with the story, the tone of the author, the word choice, who gets to speak as well as what they get to say, and sources used for information such as numbers of protesters, etc.

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[8] This became clear during a coding training session in Moscow at the Higher School of Economics in January 2011. It is not that one group is right or wrong in the coding; rather, the affect of a news report tends to resonate very differently with different culture backgrounds (in this case, American and Russia) and even within cultural groups. For example, one could see a report about problems in pension payments as negative for the government, i.e. Putin as prime minister, yet positive if he is shown to be doing something about the issue.

December 10
Both *Vremya* and *Sevodnya* ran the demonstration at Bolotnaya as their top story on December 10. *Vremya* tagged the demonstration as being 'for honest elections' (*za chestnye vybori*), noting that "supporters of various political groups (*sil'*)" attended. The newscast explained that people initially gathered at Revolution Square in Moscow, but complied with a request from authorities that they move to Bolotnaya. Thus, the beginning of the story focused a great deal on logistics, and while the story would circle around and hint at the issues of protests over elections, it provided much more episodic rather than thematic coverage.[9] The coverage focused on the event rather than the ideas and the broader political movement and/or causes of the action. Those who are quoted were skewed more toward 'man in the street' or vox pop, none of whom showed much depth of political observation. A man dressed in soldier's camouflage said: "I'm here to support honest elections." A woman in a headscarf noted, "we are not revolutionaries." A rather comical man claimed he was an "observer." Although he is wearing a white ribbon as the emblem of Russian fair elections, this was not explained or discussed. At Bolotnaya, the camera focused on a young woman with a large bouquet of white carnations, who brought the flowers to show that "the meeting is peaceful," according to the correspondent. There was a rather whimsical young male actor holding aloft a faintly lettered sign calling for people to "love one another" who also voiced the same idea to the reporter. There were some rather fatuous youths also shown on camera, saying the protest was "cool [*klassnyi*]." In other words, this cast of characters suggested that those in the protest were either well meaning or somewhat mindless, at worst silly arty people not beloved by First Channel's audience demographic.

Where is the political rhetoric from Bolotnaya in the *Vremya* coverage? There is virtually none. There is no mention of parties, except for a mild digression about the rather trying behavior of the National Bolsheviks. An observer named Alexander Lukin does have an opportunity to speak on camera, merely noting that he satisfied that "rights" were upheld and that "the people who came here today behaved very well." What one could impute from the coverage was that a wide range of different people showed up to protest, they behaved well, and they supported due process in some way. There was no overt connection between the electoral manipulation in favor of the ruling party and the protests. The rest of the news program covered protests in other Russian cities (including arrests in an "unsanctioned" protest in Khabarovsk); the selection of Sergey Mironov as the presidential candidate for A Just Russia; the arrest of the Southern Ossetian opposition candidate for president: a report on the Nobel Peace Prize winners; the controversy surrounding a film about former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom; and a report on holiday gift shopping.

While *Sevodnya* also led with the Bolotnaya protest on December 10th, this was where the similarity between the two news programs immediately began to diverge. There was a theme of electoral manipulation and the power of elections that ran not

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[9] Media researchers define episodic coverage as news that is focused on the actual events with little to no contextualization. Thematic coverage places the events with a broader context, i.e. cultural or social. For example, murder coverage can be episodic by focusing just on the violent act, the weapons used, description of the victims or it can be thematic if the coverage attempts to place the crime within a broader social frame such as domestic violence, etc.

only through the item about the protest, but throughout the program in general. This was immediately clear in the promos before the first story (the Bolotnaya protests), which included a promo that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation was challenging election results in some regions. The size and unprecedented nature of the meeting were immediately highlighted in the news report, as it was labeled the "largest demonstration in decades" by NTV. The news report pointed out that the white ribbons were the symbol of protest for "honest [*chesnyie*] elections." The news report also mentions (albeit fleetingly) that this was specifically a protest against the results for Kremlin-dominated United Russia. The coverage is far more grounded in the Russian political opposition (although weak, it existed at the time), showing a shot of liberal leader and Kremlin opponent Grigory Yavlinsky speaking and mentioning other opposition figures. Although the metal detectors and people being checked are included in the background of shots, there are far more shots that show the large size of the crowd. There is a mention of political parties, including Yabloko and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, although no actual discussion of the programs, etc., of the parties.

Where the reports from *Vremya* and *Sevodnya* dovetail is in the discussion of who attended the protest. While the *Vremya* report framed those attending as well meaning, but not particularly bright or mainstream, the *Sevodnya* newscast said that a wide range of people attended the protest on Bolotnaya. The quotes from the 'man on the street' were more serious, with one man saying he had attended because "the elections were dishonest [*nechestnye*]" and another using a favorite Russian verb '*obmanivat'* or 'to fool' to ask: "Why are they fooling people?" As the correspondent wraps up the report, he said: "They are not for revolution, but for honest elections." The main message of the report is clear: The protest was specifically motivated by electoral falsification and, although the news report only mentions the ruling party of United Russia in passing, it is clear that the falsification is linked to the ruling regime. In this way, the *Sevodnya* report does not leave the viewer with the vague impression that the protestors were somewhat naïve or wanting to act 'cool' at a demonstration as in the *Vremya* report on the Bolotnaya demonstration.

Parts of the rest of the *Sevodnya* newscast parallel the topics of the *Vremya* newscast of the same night, but there are significant differences in content within those topics. While the brief report on protests in other Russian cities is very similar in content and tone, *Sevodnya* chose to highlight the official release of the election results by the Central Elections Committee in the Russian newspaper of record, *Rossiskaya Gazeta*. This makes a nice segue into a brief story that the Communist Party was protesting the results in Mordovia, Dagestan, Tyva, Chechnya, and Ingushetia as being particularly suspect. In addition, the coverage of party conference of A Just Russia is far more in depth than the announcement on *Vremya* that Mironov was selected as the presidential candidate. The last two stories on *Sevodnya* for 10 December are the coverage of the Southern Ossetia presidential issues and the Nobel ceremony. These again parallel the coverage on *Vremya* in terms of topic, but diverge significantly in content. Most notably, the South Ossetian opposition presidential candidate notes that you cannot ignore an electoral protest if there are enough citizens involved (an idea that certainly had relevance in Russia in December 2011). In addition, the coverage of the Nobel ceremony emphasized that Nobel Peace Prize Winner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf once had to flee her country, but returned to be elected president of Liberia – showing the power of democratic elections to change the powerless to the powerful. The report

notes that she was selected in "honest elections," drawing a clear parallel between the Nobel winner and the efforts of the protestors in Moscow to highlight the issue.[10]

All three online outlets analyzed for this paper live-blogged about the protest, using Twitter, news bites from correspondents, photos and video, as well as curated content from social media users. In addition to the live chronicles, there were a number of stand-alone articles detailing the finer aspects of the discontent.

Gazeta.ru's live-blog documented most of the happenings and speakers at the protest, as well as the flow of people as the demonstration started and ended. There was also video available of some of the speeches at the protest. More detailed reports clearly stated that citizens came out to protest because they disagree with how the Duma elections had been held. Gazeta.ru was quick to point out that this was one of the largest protests in many years, and provided comparative figures for numbers of attendees from the law enforcement and its own correspondents (anywhere from 15,000 to 20,000 on Bolotnaya alone as of 1 p.m. on December 10, later revised to 40,000-50,000 and finally to 100,000 by the end of the gathering). Densely populated Facebook and VKontakte (a Russian social-network site) groups where protesters organized also were mentioned. Gazeta.ru clearly delineated the demands of the protestors: release of all political prisoners, including those arrested in early protests on December as well as earlier ones such as oil oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky; new Duma elections; the resignation of the head of the electoral commission; full access of the opposition to the election; and shifting the presidential elections to a later date.

The protest as described by Gazeta.ru was clearly a gathering of representatives of different political parties and members of the "intelligentsia": writer Boris Akunin, journalists Oleg Kashin and Parfenov as well as opposition member Vladimir Ryzhkov were all quoted as leading the crowd in chants of "When we stand united, we are invincible" and "Russia without Putin!" Smaller parties, including the Communists and the National Bolsheviks, also were mentioned as holding a much smaller protest (circa 300 people) at other venues and not wishing to ally themselves with the mass protest at Bolotnaya. Notably, Gazeta.ru mentioned that at both protests a letter from Alexey Navalny was read, written by him in prison after his arrest on December 5. Also documented was the heavy police presence at Bolotnaya, including police cordons, buses, and a helicopter.

Gazeta.ru's coverage was rather straightforward, framing the protest as a united front of the various opposition forces and other activists, clearly outlining the goals and highlighting the massive scale of the event (citing record numbers of attendees, one of the articles was even titled "Opposition record"). In handful of more analytical pieces, Gazeta.ru highlighted coverage of the protests by other mainstream media, noting that the morning and afternoon news shows on most channels had no mention of the demonstration, and only NTV had an online video report (although as noted above,

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[10] There was also a promo for *USSR – Theft of an Empire,* a documentary about the 1991 coup during the *Sevodnya* broadcast. It is interesting that highlights of the last big street demonstrations in Russia – and their ability to overturn an empire – would be shown at this time. While this could be dismissed as just a coincidence, it points to a need to look more broadly at television content and discussion of protest outside of news programs. Unfortunately, that was beyond the scope of this project.

Vremya had a full report on the protest on the evening news).[11] The NTV journalist and *Sevodnya* host Alexey Pivovarov, who demanded the coming protest be covered and threatened resignation if it weren't, also received a mention. Also highlighted was the scrutiny of the protest by foreign media and organizations as the OSCE and U.S. Department of State sounding warnings to Russian authorities on freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest.

In another commentary, Gazeta.ru presented the Bolotnaya protest as an important sign of emerging civic solidarity, pointing out that many of the attendees were first-time street protesters. Crucially, it saw the protest not as a call to revolution, but as a call for the transformation of the existing order, directed at the authorities. Even though the protest looked political, Gazeta.ru stated, with slogans and politicians present, it was civic in nature, with participants finding their solidarity as citizens, first and foremost, and a sense of righteous indignation aimed at those who were imposing upon their civic rights. The outlet also pointed out that even though the authorities clearly feared the power of the crowd, the protests were allowed to proceed and happened in a peaceful manner, instilling a sense of hope. Another important fact, Gazeta.ru pointed out, was that the frequently squabbling wings of the opposition managed to come together, agree on a strategy, and execute the protests without major quarrels.

Echo Moskvy also live-tweeted the protests on December 10 on its website, in addition to posting video recordings of select moments from speeches as well as publishing details of events and analysis as the protest developed. The protests were clearly framed as "demanding new elections", as evident from several headlines such as "Protest for New Elections" and "First images of "For Honest Elections! Protest." Quite a lot of the Echo Moskvy posts were heavy on photos, keenly documenting the movements of the crowd and the major stages of the protest. Some of the Echo Moskvy contributors presented their experience of the protest in the form of a chronicle, recording what they saw and heard during the protest as it happened, naming key present activists (such as Yevgeniya Chirikova, who was central to protests about development of the Khimki forest land near Moscow), representatives of the right-to-assembly group Strategy 31, the Communist Party, the Solidarity movement, the liberal Yabloko party, nationalists, the Pirate Party, as well as groups of people without a political alliance, such as Moscow State University alumni and schoolchildren. Key speakers, such as writer Boris Akunin, poet Dmitry Bykov, politician Boris Nemtsov, and others were mentioned. Overall, these chronicles described the protests as very peaceful, inclusive, and orderly. Numbers of attendees reported by contributors based on their own estimates varied from 12,000 to 15,000 at the start of the protest to more than 50,000 closer to the end. To quote one of the contributors, an analyst from Moscow, "I was glad to stand there with people of all possible sorts, from all sorts of parties and faiths, men and women, old and young."

The coverage by Echo Moskvy went to some length to describe the reactions of the crowd, both through extensive photo collections, including close-up portraits and photos of slogans and posters, and through contributors' comments. As one contributor concluded, "people have had enough and will not allow themselves to be

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[11] The newscasts analyzed for this paper were the 9 p.m. (Moscow time) broadcast of *Vremya* and the 7 p.m. broadcast of *Sevodnya*. Unlike news in the U.S., nightly newscasts on different networks broadcast at different times rather than simultaneously.

fooled." Another one, after listening to the speakers, realized that "It is clearly time to compete not just for people's voices, but their intellects as well," elevating the level and tone of protest. A short article later in the day contained a photo of the protest resolution and reiterated the key five points in it as mentioned above. While Echo Moskvy coverage was less in-depth and analytical than that of Gazeta.ru, it framed the protest as inclusive, peaceful, and orderly. It used the testimonies of participants and reportage photos to paint a realistic picture of both the scale of the protest and its key messages.

Lenta.ru presented a comprehensive chronicle of the protests on December 10, as it live-blogged the events all day, including short reports from its own journalists interspersed with social media content from other participants from Twitter and Facebook, images of the protest, a map of key locations, and even advice on citizens' rights and dealing with police. In addition to protests in Moscow, Lenta.ru chronicled protests in other cities, although to a lesser extent. The live-blog was very thorough and mostly fact-based or reliant on eyewitness testimony as it was posted to social media or other media's reports, both for the numbers of protesters and for the essence of the speakers' messages. Both politicians and public figures were quoted, discussing the key goals of the protest, but also reminding people why they came out. "If you're here", actress Tatyana Lazareva said, "you have a head with brains on your shoulders, not a head of lettuce." Singer Noise MC pointed out that he was there "not as a musician, but as a citizen who has been lied to" and that holding re-elections was one of the key things the protest sought to achieve. Navalny's letter from prison also was mentioned.

Throughout the day, Lenta.ru offered various estimates of the numbers of attendees, quoting its own correspondents, law enforcement, and other media. As with Gazeta.ru and Echo Moskvy, the numbers changed from 15,000 at the start of the protest to 50,000 and then 80,000 later in the day, noting that law enforcement's version was always lower than that of other onlookers. The mobile service provider MTS was quoted in a story comparing the protest in Moscow to New Year celebrations in terms of the mass gathering of people and the strain of the cellular network. Lenta.ru also noted that the meeting was sanctioned by the city authorities and went off without incidents or violence. Again, the inclusiveness of the event was highlighted, saying that participants and speakers included representatives of various political movements (both those represented in parliament and not), as well as public figures, intellectuals, and others. The final resolution was described in extensive detail, reiterating the key demands of the protesters.

Lenta.ru also devoted some time to an overview of the coverage by major television channels of the protest, noting that the protest report was the key news item on the NTV evening news show, and retelling the story of NTV's Pivovarov, who earlier refused to go on air if the protest was not covered extensively. The story also quoted Parfenov, a veteran Russian journalist and former NTV employee, who spoke at the protest and criticized Russian television for low-quality reporting and demanded that half of the airtime be given to the opposition.

Overall, Lenta.ru framed the protests, both in Moscow and elsewhere, as fairly massive, inclusive, and transparent. The site provided lots of on-the-ground coverage and social media content, including a multitude of photos. Cleverly curated content

from key social networks helped create a sense of the people behind the crowd, and aided in documenting the major points in the protest. At times, Lenta.ru's information served as a kind of guide, explaining what was happening, where it was happening, and what to expect.

December 24
While the estimated size of the protest varied widely between the organizers and the government sources, there was no doubt that December 24, 2011, was a monumental moment in Russian politics. Both *Vremya* and *Sevodnya* covered the December 24th meetings as political events, but the frame was significantly different. While the *Vremya* coverage did evolve somewhat from the attempts to downplay and trivialize the movement in its December 10th newscast and admit that people had political concerns, the emphasis was on a movement for "honest" elections with a call for dismissal of the electoral commission chair. On the other hand, *Sevodnya* led with the statement that this was an "anti-Putin" demonstration. Arguably, neither representation of the event on *Vremya* or *Sevodnya* was particularly accurate. *Vremya* deliberately ignored and even avoided the overt criticism of Putin by the rally organizers, the speakers, and the people in the crowd. On the other hand, while *Sevodnya* picked up on the palpable and unprecedented criticism of Putin, it understandably struggled to articulate how anti-Putin sentiment could be translated into political action.

The first thing that is evident from the December 24th *Vremya* coverage of the protests is how much the news frame at the state-run channel had been forced to shift in two weeks. The news report (which covers 6 minutes and 56 seconds, including the regional protest round-up) quickly labeled the event as being held "under the slogan 'for honest elections'" and stated that the protests were bigger than those at Bolotnaya on December 10th. While *Vremya* did voice the key phrase 'for honest elections', it is significant that the announcer noted it was *under the slogan* [*pod lozungom*] of 'for free elections', giving some distance and skepticism to the idea of the movement. The report noted there were a range of protest participants from different walks of life (artists, scientists, etc.) and mentioned the involvement of political parties. However, the scope of the protest was presented in the Soviet style of blaming the process, rather than the entire system: the anger was 'focused' on electoral commission head Vladimir Churov and the way in which the Duma elections were carried out.[12] Although there was much more political discussion in this report than in the coverage of Bolotnaya on December 10th, *Vremya* still worked to discredit the protest with an emphasis on the fact that the meetings closed down Sakharov Street, by featuring the metal detectors, and interviewing a pair of goofy young protestors from Nizhniy Novgorod who were particularly inarticulate. Indeed, Kremlin critic Nemtsov appeared only in a shot that views him through the threshold of a metal detector, clearly 'framing' him as a dangerous and/or marginal individual. The reporter noted that speeches were being played on a big screen "like a rock concert", resonating with *Vremya's* attempts to portray the meetings as a diversion or indulgence of non-serious citizens. However, this *Vremya* report did acknowledge the speakers (unlike at

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[12] It is interesting to note that the Kremlin was not particularly committed to scapegoats – Churov never lost his post at the CEC and was still chair as of May 2013.

Bolotnaya), even giving airtime to Kremlin opponent Gary Kasparov and others. Kasparov talked about a need for a "thaw [*otipel'*]"[13] and a new "Spring of politics."

In the report on the For Honest Elections protest, *Vremya* used several 'man in the street' interviews. These type of interviews, in Russia and elsewhere, can be used to try to reflect a sort of 'street' opinion. More critically, they also are an excellent way to show 'common people' giving voice to opinions favored by the regime and/or reporters. Here, we can see an evolution from the use of the 'man on the street' from December 10th, in which the comments underlined that people were either somewhat uninformed or merely seeking a thrill at the meetings. The street interviews on December 24th reflected a range of vaguely political opinions, including the need for Churov's resignation, but can be summed up in the comment from one woman who said: "We need to change the political system … but gradually [*no stepenu*]." A round followed the Vremya report on Sakharov Avenue up of meetings in other cities; a meeting of a president's council to discuss complaints about how elections were carried out; and a report on liberalization in the way parties can be registered. This last news item reflected a concession to parties by the Medvedev administration, as it amended a previous law that made it relatively difficult for political parties to register.

The *Vremya* report on December 24th also covered a much smaller rally of about 2,000 people featuring Liberal Democratic (LDPR) leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky on Pushkin Square, a rally of about 50 people in opposition to the meeting on Sakharov Avenue, as well as a meeting in support of the regime and Putin in Nizhniy Tagil. The news then moved on to discuss space debris falling into a house in Novosibirsk, which segued into a story about a need for investment in the Russian space program. The final segments of the program were 'light' news: the marriage of a famous Russian pop singer and a round-up of non-orthodox Christmas around the globe that included an in-depth look at the tradition of Christmas crackers in Britain.

As noted above, the *Sevodnya* newscast for December 24th took a very different tone in the first movements of the broadcast from the *Vremya* newscast on the same day. In addition to tone, the protest coverage was longer (11 minutes and 44 seconds). The demonstration on Sakharov was labeled by *Sevodnya* as a protest "not just against dishonest elections but against Putin [*protiv Putina*]" in the promos for the show and the phrase "against Putin" was repeated in the coverage. *Sevodnya* reported that the demonstrations on Sakharov Avenue were larger than those on December 10th and that estimates for the size of the crowd varied significantly between the organizers (who put the attendance at 120,000) and the Moscow police (who claimed only 33,000). However, the newscast noted, all sources agreed that the Sakharov Avenue protests were larger than those held two weeks previously at Bolotnaya.

The *Sevodnya* reports again emphasized the agenda/demands of the For Honest Elections movement. The newscast also said that there were calls to stop Putin from standing for another term as president. The report noted that several people from the opposition spoke, including Akunin and Navalny. It's interesting that while the state-run news was willing to show Kasparov, who has a relatively small following, they were unwilling to show Navalny. Navalny's authority as a voice for opposition –

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[13] An eerie and/or inadvertent reference to the period of relative liberalization in Soviet society after Stalin's death, a movement that was reversed with the departure of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in 1964.

notably against corruption – had been steadily accumulating online (see discussion about online framing of the protests), but he exploded into national and global prominence during the 2011-12 protests. His notoriety was helped significantly by being arrested after the early December protest.

There were flashes of a deeper political consciousness in the *Sevodnya* report than either in the earlier report from the same channel or in the *Vremya* reports in general. For example, a young woman who is interviewed is holding a sign reading in part "I am a citizen and I defend my own constitutional rights," an unusually broad political statement in a system that has tended to ignore the wider idea of human rights. Although the *Sevodnya* report also pointed out that there were metal detectors, this was not a focus either visually or verbally. Rather, the report stressed that the protest was "not just opposition, but general [*obshchee*]." However, although the presence of political parties (and their flags) was noted, there was no discussion of an alternative to Putin and the Kremlin. This is a case of the media being forced to mirror reality – indeed, there was no realistic alternative to United Russia and Putin at the time. In this sense, *Sevodnya* can note opposition (which is significant) but can really only do so episodically. There is no consolidated opposition or institutional method for opposition at this time. Although the protest organizers were calling for the dismissal of Churov and new elections, it was unlikely that the latter would happen (and indeed even the former did not). Although the government went through a form of review of elections, there was no change in the outcome of the ballot or, indeed, any broader effect on political institutions in Russia. Thus, one could argue either that the protests showed Russians that they had voice and/or that this voice was meaningless. However, political scientists would argue – and the events of the Arab Spring would certainly demonstrate – that finding a voice and venue for protest are the first key elements to regime change. The question remains whether this was a flash of protest -- or a step in the evolution of Russian citizens from relatively passive to relatively active in their civil society.

Some of the *Sevodnya* broadcast was dedicated to counter-propaganda, namely participants laughingly saying that no one paid them to attend, especially not with "American dollars." This was a direct response to propaganda (including some later aired on NTV itself in a documentary) that American influence was linked to the protests. In addition, the reporter was careful to note the scale of the protest, as the camera panned down the length of the huge street to show the mass of people that filled the broad avenue into the hazy distance. There was a discussion that the protest was not funded; indeed the organization and observers were all volunteer.

Sevodnya's trademark style is somewhat ironic and mocking. Thus, it is not surprising that they show one speaker slamming another as Vladimir Tor "apologized" to the crowd for following a "Putin [*putiniskii*]" minister (former Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrov was one of the rally speakers). The announcer noted with a lightly mocking tone that Navalny "in the tradition of the opposition talked about the constitution." The fact that the newscaster felt obliged to introduce Navalny in this way suggests that discussion about the constitution can't be taken seriously – that people understand that the principles espoused in the 1993 Russian constitution have nothing to do with everyday life in the country. The fact that these tensions are being played out on air, albeit somewhat tongue in check, suggest that there may be space for Russian to stop dismissing the idea of inalienable rights and possibly start demanding

some for themselves. However, the announcer's tone about this "tradition of the opposition" suggests there is a long way yet to travel before constitutional rights are something tangible for a critical mass of Russians.

In the December 24th broadcast, *Sevodnya* also covered the LDPR rally on Pushkin Square, albeit with announcer's voice over that of Zhirinovsky and some footage of the LDPR orchestra to trivialize it. The newscast also covered the anti-Sakharov meeting very briefly and then covered a range of For Honest Elections demonstrations around the country. In this coverage, *Sevodnya's* framing came to echo that of the *Vremya* message on both December 10th and December 24th: This is not a "revolutionary" moment for Russia. In Yekaterinburg, a man in the street said that no sort of revolution is needed. Near the end of the report on the regional protests, the correspondent said: "No one wants revolution [*nekto ne khochit revolutsiyu*]." The end of the newscast deals with space debris falling in the Siberia with a sarcastic lead-in ("People in Novosibirsk were the first to learn of the unfortunate fate of a Russian rocket") that leads into a report on the crisis in the Russian space program. The program briefly discusses Christmas Eve in non-orthodox countries and ends with a wobbly "Merry Christmas" in English from an announcer.

The second wave of protests was covered more extensively by all three online media outlets, with Gazeta.ru, Echo Moskvy, and Lenta.ru publishing more discrete stories on the December 24 protests than on the December 10 events. Again, all three outlets live-blogged the protest, combining their own reporting with social media curated content and other media reports to various extents.

Gazeta.ru noted this protest was also peaceful and was larger than the first one, with estimates of 28,000 participants by the police and anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 by other observers. Again, Gazeta.ru stressed the fact that social media played a key role in organizing the protesters, with groups on Facebook and VKontakte containing thousands of those who signed up to attend. The reporters noted a number of new key figures who chose to join the protest, including ex-Finance Minister Kudrin, who stressed the importance of political reform and simplification of the registration procedure for new political parties. A video-speech from activist Sergey Udaltsov, who was in hospital recovering from a hunger strike, was shown on stage. Udaltsov called the gathered crowd the "99%" of Russia, comparing it to Occupy protests. Again, Gazeta.ru framed the protest as concentrating on key ideas of fair elections, the release of political prisoners, and political reform (including a more transparent and accessible process of party registration).

While most of the coverage could be deemed neutral to positive, a summary report mentioned a few scandals that rocked the organization of the second protest. In one case, Gazeta.ru mentioned the pro-government tabloid website LifeNews publishing a transcript and audio of personal phone conversations of Nemtsov, one of the key organizers of the protest, in which he ranted about other high-profile participants and criticized their ideas. Nemtsov called the publishing of his calls illegal and threatened to sue, but LifeNews refused to name their sources. However, those criticized by Nemtsov chose not to escalate the disagreements and said they would not be manipulated by the authorities.

Echo Moskvy live-tweeted the protest on Sakharov Avenue and documented it

extensively with photos and curated social media content, relying on Twitter and Facebook significantly more that during the December 10th event. Using its radio capacity, Echo Moskvy also did live audio streams from Sakharov Street with key speakers and activists, such as former minister Kudrin. Coverage highlighted both larger attendee numbers (30,000 to 100,000, according to various estimates) and the presence of a varied group of high-profile figures, indicating wider acceptance of the protest's ideas. Compared to the coverage of December 10th protests, this time Echo Moskvy showed even more variety and inclusiveness in the protest, together with its clear aims to stand for "honest elections". Crucially, Echo Moskvy offered a number of opinion columns by various public figures, such as Ilya Varlamov and Artemy Troitsky, who both commended the protest and constructively criticized its various aspects, such as the overreliance on "star power" and VIPs. These opinions were balanced by a collection of quotes from social media users who participated in the protest, offering a rounded picture of the events.

Lenta.ru chronicled the protest on Sakharov Avenue throughout the day, again relying on curated social media content, reports from other media and its own eyes on the ground. It highlighted the key demands of the protesters, leading with "let's not give Putin a single vote" in the March 2012 presidential elections. Other demands included a reiteration of the December 10th resolution, which was ignored by the authorities. Crucially, organizers gave a deadline of February 2012 to adopt new party registration regulations. Protesters also voted to create the Moscow union of voters in order to investigate election violations and observe the presidential elections in 2012.

Lenta.ru provided various estimates of the number of protesters, citing organizers' figure of 100,000 to 120,000, noting that police stopped counting after around 60,000 passed through metal detectors. While the actual turnout figure remained elusive, the outlet noted that the density of the crowd was such that police had to stop letting people through the metal detectors for a time and was asked by the organizers to move the cordons back in order to accommodate more attendees. Extensive photo reporting also framed the event as a massive one, with numerous photos of crowds filling the streets. The alternative LDPR meeting was also mentioned.

Lenta.ru also noted the participation of key political and civic figures, such as Kudrin and former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, who supported the call for new parliamentary elections and appealed for transparency. Navalny, who by December 24 had been released from detention, spoke as well, demanding, "power be given to the people, according to the constitution". Navalny also stressed that this was a peaceful protest, but that it should not be ignored by the authorities and that people would go to the streets for as long as necessary. He speculated that the organizers could "bring a million people to the streets" if necessary. Lenta.ru framed the protest as the next in a series of large-scale events, suggesting there was already a set of expectations the protesters and speakers had as well as hinting there were plans to hold more protests. This points to a certain normalization of the idea of the peaceful protest, with scale of the event and the abundance of high-profile leaders serving to reinforce the legitimacy of the discontent.

February 4

If there were a headline for the coverage on this day it would be the Battle of the Crowd Numbers. There were multiple protest meetings throughout Moscow and the rest of Russia on this day just before the launch of the presidential campaign. While *Vremya* led with a pro-Putin rally in Moscow, *Sevodnya* covered both the For Honest Elections campaign and the pro-Putin meeting across town in Moscow in its opening report. While *Vremya* moved to frame the day as a victory for ordinary citizens to express their support for the Putin regime, *Sevodnya* clung to the frame of protest and demand for change. It was harder for *Sevodnya* to sustain this frame, both in the face of the large turnout of pro-Putin forces (whether engineered or not) and the uncontestable fact that the large, ongoing protests had had essentially no effect on 'politics as usual' in the country.

Vremya put the emphasis firmly on the pro-Putin rally in Moscow, claiming that attendance was 130,000 people. There is no one to dispute this figure – while the government and police had consistently given low numbers for attendance at the For Honest Elections rallies, the government had no incentive to underplay the number of their own supporters. In addition, there was no appearance of metal detectors on the report, as there was for reports of large meetings for the For Honest Elections group (one deduces that either they didn't use them – which would be odd given that they are used for the other large meetings – or that they weren't considered an appropriate graphic for a pro-Putin meeting). The report claimed that this is the largest demonstration in the series of meetings and that is shows "great political freedom [*bol'shaya politicheskaya svoboda*]."

This newscast included the finding by the Russian Investigative Committee that the majority of the clips on the internet relating to the 2011 Duma election were "found to be photo manipulated" and were hosted on a server in California (implying US involvement). However, even the *Vremya* announcer pointed out that YouTube is based in California.

There was a huge amount of airtime and direct speech given to Putin on *Vremya* on February 4th, particularly in the way he rebuked officials in Chelyabinsk region for failing to provide adequate housing in the area close to a huge crater. This coverage of Putin, including his severe words for some visibly uncomfortable local officials, can only be understood in the context of post-Soviet campaigning (Oates, 2006). This is the Kremlin signature blend of showing the national leader taking inefficient local government to task, echoing the idea of the Good Tsar. To emphasize the distance between the local officials and the president as a 'man of the people', Putin is shown dressed informally in a wooly sweater while the local officials are in formal suits. There also is extensive coverage of Putin at a meeting to promise help for the locals and the promise of an immediate release of a large amount of funding for social needs such as housing.

The *Sevodnya* coverage differed significantly by framing the For Honest Elections opposition meeting as a legitimate protest while questioning the legitimacy of the pro-government meeting by pointing out its clearly manufactured elements. In particular, NTV reported that sports teams and workers were bussed in (as one man says, against his wishes) to attend the pro-Putin rally in sub-zero temperatures. The coverage of the For Election Elections movement showed that protestors organized themselves into

three columns (liberals, nationalists, leftists/communists), which gives a rather legitimate form to the still somewhat amorphous Russian opposition. In addition to showing speakers, including Yavlinsky, the coverage featured people complaining about the metal detectors and one young man saying there are a way for the government to attempt to "control" them (see comments above about the selective use of man-in-the-street interviews to score political points). While *Vremya* clung to its frame of the For Honest Elections movement as a group with essentially procedural complaints, NTV showed the crowd being led in a "Russia without Putin" chant by Sergei Udaltsov, identified as the coordinator of the Left Front movement. The announcer made the point that the For Honest Elections signs looked "hand-made" (the signs at the pro-Putin rally were clearly professionally printed and NTV shows one in a trash can after the rally). NTV estimated the For Honest Elections crowd at 130,000 and the temperature at -17 degrees centigrade.

Sevodnya also covered many other protest meetings, both pro-regime and anti-regime around the country. It was a somewhat confusing report as it moved among several cities, but this is many ways reflected that somewhat confused nature of the protests themselves. The entire segment on the protests takes almost 15 minutes (14 minutes and 53 seconds) out of a program of 20 minutes and 25 seconds. The rest of the *Sevodnya* newscast for February 4th was spent on a report on Putin in the Chelyabinsk region (far shorter than the *Vremya* report); United Nations' discussions on Syria; and the death of U.S. scriptwriter writer Zalman King.

All three online outlets acknowledged that on February 4, 2012, there were demonstrations and protests held by various political forces in Moscow and elsewhere.

Gazeta.ru posted video of both the "anti-orange" (pro-regime) rally on Poklonnaya in Moscow and the "honest elections" protest on Yakimanka and Bolotnaya. The war of numbers was more pronounced this time, with "honest elections" organizers claiming 120,000 attendees, and the police stating there were at best 36,000. At the same time, police later revised the pro-Putin rally numbers up to 140,000. The competitive frame here emerged as key. Gazeta.ru acknowledged the "anti-orange" rally was organized "as a response" to the "fair elections" one and noted that the large number of participants for the pro-Putin rally was mitigated by the fact that a lot of them arrived in a suspiciously organized manner in buses. Gazeta.ru also quoted reports of people forced to come to the pro-Putin rally (as one man hinted on NTV).

Reporters noted that the opposition rally was more explicitly anti-Putin than in past protests, with crowds chanting "Russia without Putin" and placards with similar slogans making an appearance. While both pro- and anti-rallies were more explicitly political (anti-orange and anti-Western involvement vs. anti-Putin), framing of the "honest elections" rally still had a civic element, with disabled activist and journalist Irina Yasina quoted as saying "We cannot grow our arms and legs back, but we can cultivate conscience and honor in ourselves." This frame of the protest as something more than just a set of political demands resonated throughout the Gazeta.ru coverage of the 2011-12 winter of protest. The February protests also were framed as more geared towards the coming Russian presidential elections on March 4th with key opposition candidates making speeches from the stage in addition to the reiteration of demands to the authorities. Interestingly, Gazeta.ru also made an effort to extensively

document the nationwide scope of protests in February, publishing a special overview of protests all over Russia.

Echo Moskvy also reported on both protests, but as on Gazeta.ru, questioned the legitimacy of the "anti-orange" rally, relaying reports of people being told to come to the gathering by their employers. The slogan of the pro-Putin rally, "we have something to lose" stood in sharp contrast to the "honest elections" protest, which advocated for peaceful change, transparency, and "Russia without Putin." Echo Moskvy also reported on the widespread reach of the honest elections protests, noting events were held in the Far East of Russia, Nizhny Novgorod, and even beyond the country's borders in places such as Brussels.

Documenting the protests with video and photo, Echo Moskvy illustrated the highly managed nature of the pro-Putin rally on Poklonnaya, showing long rows of buses lined up in the streets as opposed to massive crowds walking to Bolotnaya of their own accord. Not much analysis was offered this time, but the abundance of live video and images allowed for a sort of "reality" framing, telling the users to make their own conclusions based on what they saw and heard. This was supplemented with testimonies from participants of rallies, describing slogans, crowds, and speakers.

Lenta.ru chronicles all the February 4th protests with its usual precision, providing a roundup of key figures, slogans, and ideas from both of the major gatherings. Again, the contrast between official estimates of the number of participants with the organizers' estimate is highlighted for the "honest elections" rally as opposed to the pro-Putin rally. Two smaller protests – one with the Liberal Democrats and another in Moscow – also received a mention. Lenta.ru also indicated that this time the "honest elections" rally was more explicitly political in nature, with calls for Putin's resignation and mentions of the coming presidential election at the forefront of the discussion, while the existing demands were reiterated. Again, the peaceful and orderly nature of the opposition rally was noted. The "anti-orange protest" was covered in a very similar way, noting key ideas and speakers, however, accusations that people were bussed into the rally from various Russian cities were published as well.

Lenta.ru also provided an overview of TV coverage, under the heading "TV defrosting", indicating there was more liberal and transparent coverage of this series of protests in comparison to the December ones. All the national channels, noted Lenta.ru, put the protests at the top of their news agenda, while before December they tried to ignore them as much as possible and only gradually gave them more coverage after December 10. It's noted that some of the words that appeared in the news segments, such as "Russia without Putin" slogans, were hard to imagine in pro-government TV news before this time. At the same time, all channels said that the anti-orange rally gathered more people than the Bolotnaya protest, relying only on (much smaller) police estimates. Man-in-the-street comments from the pro-Putin rally on Russia-1 were selected to show that people were here "to rally for a stable country" more so than for Putin, and that they were opposed to the idea of revolutions, indicating the alternative gatherings across Moscow and around the country.

Lenta.ru live-blogged all four rallies in Moscow, but also added coverage of protests

in other cities, broadening the scope of its chronicling to a nation-wide range. Again, content from social networks was used extensively, contributing to an "on-the-ground" feel of the coverage. The coverage contained not only facts and eyewitness information about the protests, but also information about directions, traffic, weather, and advice on how to stay warm, reflecting a normalizing frame for the protests as an expression of civic discontent.

Conclusions

This qualitative analysis of coverage of three large protest days during the Russian 'winter of discontent' shows that there were significant differences among state-run television news, commercial television news, and three important online news sources. To a degree, these findings parallel those by Krasnoboka and Semetko (2006) in their study of different sources on protests in Ukraine about a decade ago, where newspapers were critical of protestors as disruptive to society, television covered protests in a more balanced way, and internet content provided critical thematic framing for the protest events surrounding the murder of an online journalist. In Russia, all three of these key information sources presented different aspects of the protests, although state-run news clung as much as possible to the frame of the protestors as either trivial, relatively small in number, and – most significantly – concerned with the implementation of government rules rather than disgusted with the government itself. Both commercial news and the internet framed the protests as something quite different with much more potential for political impact. In particular, commercial news made an attempt to show the true scope, scale, and character of the events (although as complaints by the NTV journalist suggest, this did come without a struggle in the controlled traditional media sphere in Russia). *Sevodnya* nipped at the heels of the *Vremya* coverage, questioning the low estimate of crowds, framing the pro-Putin marches as engineered, and – most importantly – presenting the 'For Honest Elections' movement as a legitimate political force.

An important part of the story of the 2011-12 Russian protests was how the internet was able to contribute to much fuller coverage of the events. The internet was able to deliver much more detail largely due to its structure: There was a huge amount of space across the three popular news websites to carry a lot of copy that would not fit into the minutes of a national newscast. Thus, there was time to show not only the words of the protestors and their leaders, but also to carry a wide range of citizen journalism as well as key logistical information about the events. At the same time, the Russian internet is not subject to the same controls as the traditional mass media and is free from constraints of censorship – either top-down or the self-censorship practiced by journalists in order to survive in semi-authoritarian states such as Russia. Major websites are subject to scrutiny, pressure, and even the occasional shutdown in Russia, but this was still relatively rare in 2011-12 and even now Runet maintains enough flexibility to make it extremely difficult for the Russian authorities to establish effective 'choke points' under the current system. Although not covered by this study, this richer content about the protests could then be discussed, redistributed, repackaged, and commented upon by millions of Russians online, which is particularly important in terms of inculcating social capital beyond the edges of the protest crowds in Moscow and a handful of other Russian cities in which the protests took place.

Ultimately, the key point is that while state-run news, commercial news, and the

online news sphere are three different realms, the coverage of the Russian winter of discontent shows how there was 'bottom up' influence from the internet onto television. While state-run and even commercial television was constrained by the relatively strong controls on the Russian traditional media, the Russian internet was not subject to these controls. Thus, there was a type of a 'trickle-up' media freedom – as the internet reported on the true scale and meaning of the protests for Russians, this liberated the commercial television to report in a more realistic and positive manner on the protests in terms of citizen mobilization. As commercial news shifted the frame, the state-run news was forced to adjust its frame so as to come close enough to reality to be feasible to the viewer. Thus, the pressure on reporting truthfully and accurately welled up from internet to the state-run news even in a controlled media system. It is difficult to see how this can be avoided in the future without a significant increase in the control of the internet in Russia, suggesting that the Russian state now faces a choice: Either accept the greater engagement of the Russian public in politics or start censoring the internet in a much more methodical and complete way.

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