

Columbia University
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences

Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe:
Regional Studies Master of Arts

From Economic Crisis to Political Crisis?:
Changing Middle Class Political Attitudes in Moscow and St. Petersburg, 2008-2012

a final paper
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2013

Chapter I

I. Introduction

In early December 2011, protests began to be held in Moscow that would culminate in the largest public demonstrations since the fall of the Soviet Union. Organized in response to the Duma elections, which were widely viewed as fraudulent, the first protests attracted 5,000-7,000 participants, but grew to 100,000-120,000 participants in the lead-up to the presidential election. Participants in these events brought demands for free and fair elections out into the streets on a large scale for the first time. Similarly, as the presidential election neared, their rhetoric became increasingly critical of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, openly mocking him and calling for his removal from power.

These protests, the scale of their participation and their demands were largely unexpected and even surprising, given that under Putin's leadership, public political participation had been low. Assuming office at the end of the turbulent 1990s, Putin had ushered in an era of stability and economic growth that was accompanied by the centralization of power and a gradual winnowing of civil liberties that increased barriers to participation in political life. In fact, political quiescence so closely followed economic prosperity that scholars and experts theorized that an informal social contract existed, wherein the population stayed quiet and Putin provided stability and growth.

During the 1990s and for most of the Putin era, when protests did occur, they tended to be outside the capital and relatively small in size (Robertson 2013). Protests largely addressed social-economic concerns, including welfare benefits, as with the 2005 pensioners'

demonstrations against the monetization of benefits; labor disputes, as in the Pikalevo protests against unpaid wages in 2009; or other issues, as in the protests against increasing tariffs on imported cars in Vladivostok, where the local economy is driven by auto imports from Asia, in 2008-2009. Following the 2005 demonstrations against the monetization of benefits, protest began to shift toward the capital. With increased centralization, Moscow became the audience for the majority of political claims (Robertson 2013). As protests moved to Moscow, claims became increasingly political; for example, demonstrations were held against certain laws or in support of a specific criminal justice issue (Robertson 2013). Though the electoral cycle protests were in line with this trend, they departed from earlier events, in that they were of a notably larger scale and expressed more overt political demands and dissatisfaction; in fact, later protests were about expressing negative feelings toward the state and the regime leadership, rather than making a specific claim.

Another surprising aspect of the electoral cycle protests was the demographic composition of the participants. Survey data has shown that the crowds at the largest protests in March and February were overwhelmingly comprised of members of Moscow's developing middle class, which is a break from their established behavior. During the 2000s, Russia's developing middle class was considered to be politically apathetic. Gudkov, Dubin and Zorkaia (2009: 44) found that only 6 percent of middle class young people would "definitely like to take part" in political life. Overall, middle class young people exhibited opinions about Russia that were consonant with the Russian population at large, including beliefs about high value of stability in society, the necessity of restoring Russia's reputation as a strong, independent global power, and approval of Vladimir Putin's leadership (Gudkov *et al.* 2009: 66). Even major crises, such as the global financial crisis did not seem to stir the

middle class to political action. What middle class political participation that did occur was limited, and organized around specific goals that were not overtly political at the outset, for example the campaign to save the Khimki forest outside of Moscow.

The 2011-2012 electoral cycle protests seemed to be an abrupt break with the longstanding trend of political apathy. The middle class entered political life in dramatic fashion, with massive, highly publicized and creatively organized street protests. Why did Moscow's middle class suddenly buck their politically apathetic reputation and begin protesting in large numbers?

The announcement that Putin would run for president with Medvedev as his prime minister and the fraudulent Duma elections on December 4, 2011 were the proximate motivation for the protests. On September 24, Medvedev announced at the United Russia congress that he would not seek re-election, but would serve as Putin's prime minister—a switch-up that was known as the *rokirovka*, after the Russian term for castling in chess. The *rokirovka* alarmed and dismayed the public as it effectively conferred the title of President upon Putin and denied the electorate the opportunity to choose between Putin and Medvedev. It was particularly offensive to Medvedev's liberal, Western-looking support base, who had supported Medvedev's rhetoric of rule of law and modernization, and who felt they had been made to look like fools. This group, concentrated in urban areas and drawing from the emergent middle class, formed an anti-electorate, for whom Putin's strongman, traditionalist image and statist politics does not appeal (Belanovsky, 2011: 7). The *rokirovka* laid a foundation of anger, frustration and in some respects nihilism directed at United Russia and Putin. In the lead-up to the Duma elections, opposition parties and activists coordinated a campaign encouraging people to vote for any party other than United

Russia, and a many young people in the Moscow area signed up to work as election monitors. Many of the people who coordinated the earliest protests following the Duma elections would later identify the *rokirovka* as the beginning of the protest movement. This reaction, however, is not necessarily obvious in a country that has never had a transition of executive power that was not heavily managed, with the outcome almost predetermined. This paper in part explores what preexisting political attitudes might have made the *rokirovka* so unpleasant.

The fraudulent Duma elections are a second proximate and most immediate cause for the protests. Held on December 4, 2011, the Duma election featured poorly executed, widespread fraud was widely acknowledged. The OSCE/ODHIR election-monitoring mission judged the vote as bad or very bad in one third of polling stations it observed, and GOLOS, a foreign-funded domestic election monitoring organization, found from statistical analysis that Moscow experienced “massive falsifications” (OSCE/ODHIR 2012: 18; GOLOS 2011: 10). In addition to the official monitors, some Russians volunteered as election monitors, particularly in Moscow. Video clips of fraud captured on cell phones appeared online beginning before voting in Moscow even began, featuring polling stations in Vladivostok. When United Russia officially won a solid victory in Moscow, many people immediately felt that these results were insultingly and obviously fraudulent. One volunteer election monitor in Moscow, Ilya Faybisovich, was forcibly removed from his polling place, and, after venting his frustration to like-minded friends, rapidly organized the December 5 protest, which attracted 5,000 participants (de Vogel 2013). He and his friends accomplished this by using personal networks to recruit the participation of their peers: highly educated; students, creative professionals and entrepreneurs (de Vogel 2013). More successful protests

of increasing size followed, evolving into the group, For Fair Elections. Clearly the Duma election touched a nerve among the emergent urban middle class, but it is not clear why. The Duma election was comparably corrupt as its predecessors, which had passed without major incident. In fact, in the lead-up to the 2011 election, the public had a high expectation of fraud and a low interest in the election in general.¹ It therefore seems possible that longer-term trends might underlie the rejection of the Duma election by the urban middle class.

For this study, I analyze several interrelated hypotheses to address this question. The first asks whether the global financial crisis had a significant effect on the development of protest sentiment. Though it appeared to have no immediate negative impact on Putin's popularity, it is possible that the global financial crisis could have had a longer-term effect as personal finances were impacted over time or the economy failed to recover as quickly as expected. This hypothesis addresses the possibility that the social contract between Putin and the middle class was sundered by the economic crisis. This hypothesis also asks whether the economic crisis might have had a longer term effect on political attitudes, as studies conducted immediately following the crisis have generally concluded that it had no effect on Putin's popularity. The second hypothesis addresses rising interest in liberal democratic issues, for example human rights and corruption. This hypothesis considers whether the values conventionally exhibited by the middle classes in liberal states are becoming more prevalent in Moscow's middle class. Finally, a third hypothesis addresses middle class

¹ "Do you think the upcoming Duma elections will be fair or will fraud and manipulation be used?" Manipulation and fraud – 34%; serious manipulation and fraud – 12%; obstruction – 12%. "Is the Duma election a real struggle for power by parties or is it just an imitation of a struggle, with seats distributed by authorities?" An imitation of the struggle and the distribution of seats in the Duma will be determined by the decision of the authorities – 51% (<http://www.levada.ru/25-11-2011/vybory-v-gosdumu>)

assessments of government effectiveness. Perceptions of government effectiveness—or lack thereof—could be related to calls for free and fair elections. To call for free and fair elections indicates that you believe politicians are using fraud to remain in power and are not doing their jobs well, and that a freely elected official could do it better. Other assessments of government effectiveness may thus have inspired these election-related protests, including the state’s ability to deliver services and to address major issues, such as terrorism. Simply put, if Putin’s popularity stems from positive regime performance, a drop in that support might stem from a negative assessment of regime performance.

These trends will be examined using data gathered over 9 surveys conducted by the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Center (WCIOM) between March 2008 and March 2012 responding to the question “What is the most important problem for the country?” This study will focus on the change over time in the answers of respondents displaying characteristics of the urban professional middle class. This analysis will then be compared with the results of a similar survey of members of the middle class conducted by Graeme Robertson in late February-early March 2012.

My analysis will demonstrate that corruption and red tape, the standard of living, housing and utilities, healthcare and education were of increasing concern to middle class groups in this period. I argue that higher expectations for enhanced quality of life or the escalating issue of corruption might inform concern for these issues. Contrary to expectations, the concerns of the middle class were not significantly different from those of the general population. Members of the middle class did, however, tend to be more critical when assessing all problems. Most critical of all groups were residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, which suggests residents of the capitals, regardless of their socio-economic

status, are more likely to make demands of the state. Finally, I show that participants in the 2011-2012 protests in the major cities shared similar concerns with the general population, but for most, participation in the protests made them significantly more interested in democracy. This result suggests that concern for democracy is highly responsive to current events, rather than a continual concern in citizens' lives.

This paper begins with a working definition of the urban professional middle class and methodological design, then considers in turn results relating to economic, liberal-democratic and state efficacy concerns, and compares these results to the second data set. The final section draws conclusions.

II. Defining Russia's Middle Class

An emergent middle class almost by definition fails to fulfill the criteria by which a middle class is judged in the West. Some typical middle class characteristics or behaviors might clearly be present in the emergent middle class, while other attributes might be less widespread²; thus, it may be difficult to identify an emergent middle class using the same criteria as one might apply to a consolidated middle class. Further muddling the picture are conflicting definitions of and approaches to studying the middle class, particularly in the Russian literature, leading scholars to ask if the class even exists (Beliaeva 1999; Avraamova 2002; Samson and Krasil'nikova 2012). Meanwhile, others have asserted that Russia's middle

² For example, in Russia rates of long-term savings among the middle class, which is expected of a middle class, are very low as compared to other societies.

class is healthy and growing (Ganske 2007), stabilized (Grigoryev and Salmina 2011), embryonic (Gudkov, Dubin and Sorkaia 2009), and simply weak.³

Remington (2011) isolates three main definitional approaches to Russia's middle class. The first definition assesses a spectrum of social markers, for example educational level or income level, but depending on the criteria used to define the middle class, this statistical approach has not yielded consistent results across studies. This approach also cannot be directly related to the so-called middle class values present in other societies. These values are addressed by the second definition, which approaches the middle class as a cohesive social collectivity that acts to bring about historical change in society, for example democratization or modernization; this approach sees the middle class as agents playing a specific societal role. The third definition also sees the middle class as exhibiting a set of values and behaviors, but lacking social cohesion. This normative approach considers such criteria as work ethic and attitudes towards politics. Within and between these three approaches, there is little consensus as to the shape and size of Russia's emergent middle class, but, according to Remington's expansive survey of work on the middle class, most studies found that between 20 to 30 percent of the population might fall into the middle class.

As this study seeks to draw conclusions about changing values and behaviors of Moscow's middle class, and speculates as to its societal role and collective action, I will use the first approach to assessing the middle class, employing a constellation of social markers. This approach was used by Gudkov, Dubin and Zorkaia (2009) in a survey of educated,

³ See Samson and Krasil'nikova (2012) for a survey of major approaches to Russia's middle class.

high-income young people in fourteen of Russia's major cities⁴, which aimed to select respondents who corresponded closely to the middle class of developed countries in the West or who might fall into an eventual established middle class in Russia. This approach recognizes that consensus around a definition of the middle class remains elusive, while allowing us to define what might signal its existence. This comparative definition is bolstered by the fact that the Russian middle class is often viewed on similar terms as that of the United States, because the countries share similar levels of inequality (Grigoryev and Salmina 2011: 5).

For the purposes of the present study, the middle class will be assessed according to four criteria. The first criterion is educational level: respondents must have at least some university-level education, which includes degrees in progress as well as completed degrees. The second is occupation as a businessman/entrepreneur or specialist with higher education. Government officials or administrative authorities might account for a portion of the middle class according to income measurements, but are not included for the purpose of this study, as their dependency on and deep involvement with the state complicates any assessments of their political motivations. The third criterion is self-assessment of purchasing power: respondents able to afford expensive consumer durables. Finally, those with income over 50,000 rubles (US\$1,618) per month will also be considered. This is significantly higher than the mean income of approximately 20,000 rubles (US\$647) per month.⁵ However, the higher income bracket will be used because this study addresses residents of Moscow, who make

⁴ Moscow, St. Petersburg, Voronezh, Nizhniy Novgorod, Perm, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Khabarovsk, Samara, Kazan, Omsk, Rostov-on-Don and Krasnodar.

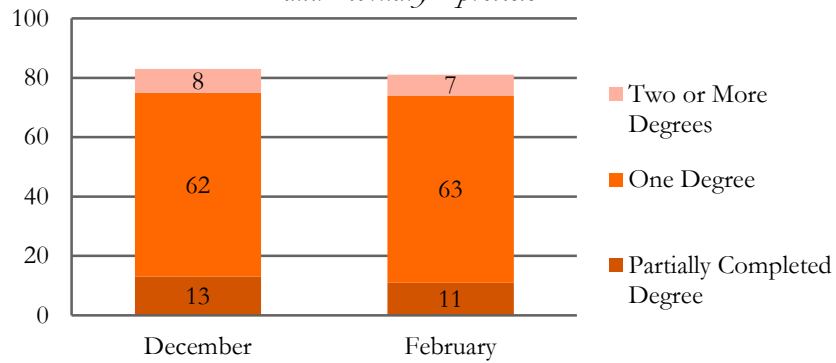
⁵ http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b12_110/Main.htm

significantly more money and have a much higher cost of living than residents outside the capital.

Using these criteria, we can establish that the participants in the protests that marked the 2011-2012 electoral cycle were in fact members of the middle class. The organizers of the protests commissioned the Levada Center to conduct polls during the events held on December 24, 2011 and February 4, 2012. The results clearly establish the participants as middle class. Firstly, participants had a notably high level of education (see figure 1.1). On December 24, 83 percent of participants either had or were in the process of obtaining a university degree.⁶ On February 4, 81 percent had or were obtaining a degree. Their vocational backgrounds (figure 1.2) also fit the middle class profile: 71 percent of participants on December 24 and 59 percent of participants on February 4 identified themselves as specialists, managers or business-owners. When describing their purchasing power (figure 1.3), the largest segment of participants at both protests could afford only moderately priced consumer durables (refrigerator or television set), with 40 percent on December 24 and 41 percent on February 4 describing their economic position in this way. 28 percent on December 24 and 24 percent on February 4 said they could afford a car, slightly more than said they were not able to afford more than the essentials. Data about monthly income was not gathered. Nonetheless, this group clearly fits within our set of social markers.

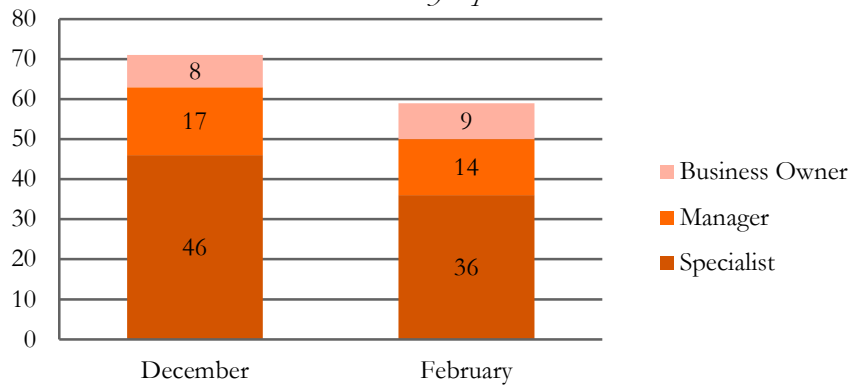
⁶ At both protests, the percentage of participants with partially completed degrees was approximately the same as the percentage who were students, thus it can be assumed that these are not drop-outs but current university students.

Figure 1.1: Level of education of participants in December 24 and February 4 protests



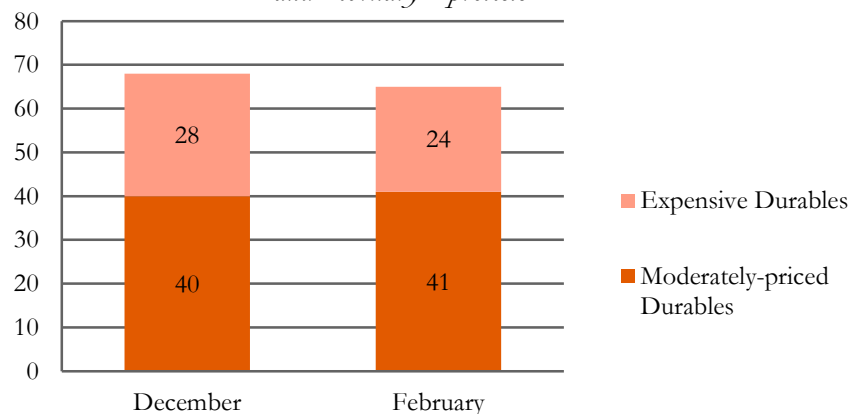
Source: Levada Center, Press Release: Survey at the Meeting on February 4, 13 February 2011, accessed 8 April 2013 <<http://www.levada.ru/13-02-2012/opros-na-mitinge-4-fevralya>>

Figure 1.2: Vocational background of participants in December 24 and February 4 protests



Source: Levada Center, Press Release: Survey at the Meeting on February 4, 13 February 2011, accessed 8 April 2013 <http://www.levada.ru/13-02-2012/opros-na-mitinge-4-fevralya>

Figure 1.3: Purchasing Power of participants in December 24 and February 4 protests



Source: Levada Center, Press Release: Survey at the Meeting on February 4, 13 February 2011, accessed 8 April 2013 <<http://www.levada.ru/13-02-2012/opros-na-mitinge-4-fevralya>>

The protest participants also exhibited a characteristic expected of the middle class that had in large part been absent in Russia: they were politically active. Though political apathy has been observed in Russian middle class through the 2000s, a typical middle class or bourgeoisie has long been seen as a cornerstone of a strong democracy, in that they become involved in politics to protect their rights. These theories envisage the middle class as a social collectivity acting as an agent of historical change.⁷ As members of the middle class become more financially stable, they also become more engaged in politics to protect their interests and property. They thus begin to act as a check on the unconstrained power of the state. This mode of conceptualizing the middle class also adds to the earlier definition a set of expected values and behaviors, including support for the rule of law, government transparency and accountability, and the democratic process. Russia's emergent middle class has not begun to exhibit these values or behaviors on a large scale, even though its members

⁷ See, for example, Seymour Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review*, 53, 1:69–105, March 1959.

are enjoying increased prosperity, its share of society is growing, interest in joining its ranks is increasing, and Putin himself has advocated that the middle class play a more active role in society.

Several explanations have been put forth for the lack of political activity among the middle class. Marshall Goldman (2006) argues that the avenue by which Russia's middle class has accumulated its wealth deviates from the Western standard. In the West, hard work and creativity are seen as instrumental to success in business; the self-made man at the helm of his own enterprise is the ideal. In Russia, the dominant model is that of the oligarchs, who are viewed as stealing their wealth from a complicit government and who met their downfall at the hands of the state. Would-be entrepreneurs constantly encounter red tape and corruption. Both the precedent of the oligarchs and the prevalence of corruption affirm the central and somewhat threatening role of the state in the survival of business enterprises, which discourages businessmen from displaying values or behaviors that challenge the state. Moreover, the state bureaucracy employs a significant and growing portion of what would be the middle class. These people are naturally less inclined to hold or express points of view that might be seen as oppositional.

Belanovsky, Dmitriev, Misikhina and Omelchuk (2011: 42) argue that the economic crises of the 1990s seriously weakened the small, nascent middle class, by eliminating their savings and developing social influence; the middle class is still recovering from this blow (26). They also note that the issue of social transfers is less of a concern for members of the middle class than for the population at large. As public political discourse and protest behavior has in large part been organized around the issue of social transfers, it is possible

that the middle class did not see that avenue as appropriate for the expression of their interests.

One of the most widely referenced explanations for middle class political apathy theorizes an informal social contract between society and Putin, wherein the public is politically quiescent in exchange for stability and economic success. Entering office after the tumultuous 1990s, Putin acted quickly to build the power verticals that re-established hierarchical control of the Kremlin at a national and sub-national level; the power verticals centralized, eliminated open political competition and contributed to the institutionalization of semi-authoritarianism (Gelman 2011: 451). Functionally, the power vertical is constructed as a principal-agent relationship between the center and the regions, where regional elites are free to pursue private interests in exchange for the delivery of electoral results, the prevention of unrest and mass protest, and the achievement of stated policy goals (Gelman, 2011, 456). The power verticals precipitated a contraction of civil liberties, as agents arranged increasingly fraudulent elections and limited opportunity for protest using a broad array of strategies both at the center and in the regions. During this process, however, the Russian economy enjoyed a consistent period of growth driven by rising oil prices, and living standards rose for most Russians. Thus, it appeared that an informal *quid pro quo* had been arranged: the public accepted Putin's steps toward semi-authoritarianism in exchange for increased prosperity, higher standards of living, a respite from economic and political upheaval, and the promise that Russia would return to the great-power status it once had.

This arrangement is commonly described as a social contract between society and Putin, but this euphemism assumes the Russian population shares a collective agency and

particular set of political desires.⁸ Given the limitations on free and fair elections, the obstacles to political participation, restrictions on civil society, and the complexity and obscure nature of intra-elite politics, it is unclear to what extent the public could have resisted Putin's advancement of semi-authoritarianism, had it wanted to.⁹ Further, the notion of the social contract assumes that the public has given up something of value in the compromise, specifically the full array of political and civil freedoms available in a liberal, Western democracy. In fact, Russians did not have a full array of rights to bargain with, as Russia was not a consolidated democracy, though they did experience a perceptible decline in freedoms. Moreover, it is not obvious that Russians placed a very high value on those rights in the first place. As Arkady Ostrovsky has put it, "there is nothing more misleading than to portray Russia as a liberal-minded society suppressed by a nasty bunch of former KGB agents" (2009: 74). Putin's popularity, even considering the relative lack of alternatives, is considerable, and cannot be explained by the theory of the social contract. Nonetheless, the idea of the social contract has been widely discussed in Russia, for example in an extensive 2011 series of articles in *Vedomosti*¹⁰ written by experts who had participated in debates on the issue during the 2011 Perm Economic Forum.

Regardless, through Putin's first two terms as president, the growing middle class in particular was seen as a major beneficiary of stability and growth. Spending new income on

⁸ See also, for example, Makarkin and Oppenheimer (2011) and Greene (2012).

⁹ It is also important to note that the idea of a social contract was not Putin's invention, and the conversation about it predated its association with him. See for example Alexander Auzan (2009), who founded of the Institute for a National 'Social Contract' in 2000.

¹⁰ Articles were published throughout the summer of 2011 in *Vedomosti*, following the 2011 meeting of the Perm Economic Forum. Authors included Sergey Vorobyov, Kirill Rogov, Oleg Chirkunov, Vadim Volkov and Bulat Stolyarov.

luxury goods, durables and foreign travel, the middle class remained absent from political life, although in other countries, the middle class had assumed a larger role in politics as their wealth grew. When the global financial crisis hit Russia in 2008-9, it dealt a serious blow to the stability and growth that many perceived had guaranteed Putin's popularity. Leading economists Igor Yurgens and Yevgeny Gontmakher both predicted the collapse of the social contract: as incomes declined and the economy contracted, the public would protest in large numbers to demand expanded civil rights (quoted in Teague 2011: 422). Arkady Ostrovsky forecasted that the post-financial crisis unraveling of the social contract could cause widespread, intense "upheaval" that could critically destabilize the state (2009: 72). Yet even though small-scale protests around local economic, welfare and labor issues occurred in the regions, it had little effect on Putin's approval rating. Putin's popularity barely decreased from approximately 88 percent approval in September 2008 to a still considerable 81 percent one year later, with a low-point of 74 percent in April 2009, perhaps suggesting that the social contract, if it existed, was more durable than expected.¹¹

III. Hypotheses

Survey data collected between March 2008 and March 2012 will be used to test increasing concern for economic, democratic and state efficacy issues. Respondents (n=1,600) of a variety of backgrounds from across Russia were able to select multiple responses to the question "Which of the following issues are most important to the country?" For the purposes of this study, I will look at responses from (1) respondents with

¹¹ Responses to "Do you approve of Vladimir Putin?", Levada Center Indices, <http://www.levada.ru/indeksy>

three or more years of university; (2) respondents working as businessmen or entrepreneurs, or specialists with higher education, science or culture, excluding state employees; (3) respondents earning 50,000 rubles or more per family member per month; (4) respondents easily able to purchase medium-priced consumer durables or expensive durables; (5) respondents from Moscow or St. Petersburg. Specifically, I will assess problems that were of increasing concern during the time period in question. These results will be compared to the responses of the general population, and a separate survey conducted of members of the middle class, including those that participated in the electoral cycle protests.

I have separated the possible survey responses into three categories, corresponding to these three hypotheses (table 1.1).¹²

¹² Surveys also included five additional answers representing social problems: alcoholism and drug abuse; crime; demographic crisis (births and deaths); state of morality and ethics; and youth development. These responses are excluded from the following analysis, because they encompass issues over which the government has no specific control. While the state has attempted to address all of these issues in some respect, from restricting access to alcohol to offering incentives for having larger families, these problems cannot purely be attributed to the state. It is just as likely that a survey respondent would, for example, blame crime on criminals, rather than the police force, or the state of morality in society on certain social groups, rather than the state. A growing concern for these issues might thus indicate an anxiety about society in general, or social decay or dysfunction, rather than about the state. Some of these problems may also reflect the continuing challenges of the post-Soviet transition; for example, concern over the state of morality and ethics in society has been linked to the end of the state's authority on moral issues (Gorshkov 2012: 85).

Table 1.1: Classification of Responses to “Which of the following issues are most important to the country?”

H.1. Economic	H.2. Liberal-Democratic	H.3. State Efficacy
(a) Delays in payment of salaries*	(a) Corruption and red tape	(a) Pension benefits
(b) Economic Crisis*	(b) Democracy and human rights	(b) Terrorism
(c) Inflation, rising prices of goods and services	(c) Ecology and environment	(c) The situation in the army
(d) Unemployment	(d) Influence of oligarchs on economic and political life of the country	(d) The situation in the education sector
(e) The standard of living of the population		(e) The situation in the health sector
		(f) The situation in the sphere of housing (ZhKKh) and utility services (ZHKU)

* Response option not available for October 2006 and March 2008 surveys.

Response options classed as economic pertain directly to the economy or to directly address economic issues that impact individuals’ lives. Option 1.b addresses economic crisis directly, while three others (1.a delays in the payment of salaries, 1.c inflation and 1.d unemployment) all reflect negative impacts of the crisis in Russia. It is important to note that economic problems might be seen as the responsibility of the state, and thus better framed in the state efficacy category. For the purposes of this study, responses were classed in the state efficacy category only if the state has direct control over the problem in question. In the economic category, the greater systemic issue of the global financial crisis underpins the responses. While unemployment and inflation clearly can be helped or hindered by government policies, their increase was the result of the crisis. Likewise the late payment of

salaries may be attributed to the management or owners of firms, but in a broader sense is only an issue because of the crisis. Moreover, significant evidence suggests that Russians may not have viewed the crisis as the responsibility of the Russian government, because the Kremlin represented the crisis as the product of mainly American malfeasance of which Russia was merely the victim (see Teague, 2011; Feklyunina and White, 2011).

The second category encompasses liberal-democratic concerns that address the protection of citizens' rights and the independent functioning of government. Two responses, 2.a corruption and red-tape and 2.d the influence of oligarchs on economic and political life, pertain to the ability of the state to freely reflect and pursue the interest of the greatest number of citizens, without the obstruction of greed-driven bureaucrats abusing their office or the undue interference of ultra-wealthy businessmen. A third, 2.d, democracy and human rights, is phrased very broadly to encompass a general set of civic and human rights common to democracies. The final option, 2.c ecology and environment, is not necessarily a liberal-democratic concern, but increasingly has become part of that value package in the Russian context. The environmental movement in Russia is strongly connected with issues of corruption and close ties between the state and big business, particularly the extractive industries. Both the state and business have repeatedly wreaked economic damage, at times illegally, with little regard to the impact on citizens' lives. These abuses of power have progressively become the focus of protest and civil society organization, which in some cases have become politicized, with Yevgenia Chirikova's crusade to stop the construction of a highway through the Khimki Forest as the most salient example. On a global level, environmental issues are increasingly discussed in the context of human rights, for example by the United Nations Environment Programme, which asserts

that the “environment is a prerequisite to the enjoyment of human rights” and that environmental protection entails other rights, including access to information and to justice.

The third category addresses the state’s ability to effectively deliver services, administer its programs, and guarantee the security of its people. Four responses address specific branches of government: 3.c the army, 3.d education, 3.e healthcare, and 3.f housing and utilities. Education and healthcare are almost entirely publicly administered; access to these services is guaranteed as a right in the Constitution. Similarly, housing and utilities are heavily administered by the state, though March 2013 will mark the conclusion of the twenty-year long program of housing privatization. Though subject to economic volatility, pensions are administered by the state and, following the monetization of benefits demonstrations in 2005, are very closely linked to state performance. Finally, the last response, terrorism, pertains to the state’s ability to effectively keep its population safe from violent attack.

In summary, our hypotheses are:

- (H.1) Economic issues since the global financial crisis have become an increasing concern for the urban, private-sector middle class, leading to protest activity.
- (H.2) The urban, private-sector middle class was becoming increasingly concerned about liberal and democratic issues leading up to the electoral cycle protests of 2011-2012.
- (H.3) Problems with the efficacy of the state were of increasing concern for the urban, private-sector middle class, which led to a drop in regime support based on performance-legitimacy.

Chapter II

I. The Economy and the Global Financial Crisis

As president from 2000-2008, Putin presided over an economy that was undergoing considerable growth. As Russia emerged from the repeated devastating crashes and skyrocketing inequality of the 1990s, rising prices for oil and natural gas buoyed the economy. By 2008, incomes had risen by 250 percent, poverty and unemployment were falling, and Russia was one of the world's seven largest economies (Feklyunina and White, 2011: 386). Inflation decreased from 100 percent in 1999 to 10 percent in 2006 (Rose and Mishler, 2010: 42). This growth was accompanied by increased foreign direct investment and increased embeddedness in the global financial system, particularly as oil and natural gas exports accounted for an ever-larger share of GDP. Though it is debatable how directly Putin's policies were responsible for this economic growth, the public tended to attribute it to him. Russians viewed economic development as the greatest achievement of Putin's first two terms in office, followed by higher living standards (Feklyunina and White, 2011: 386). Putin himself emphasized his economic successes, making promises of growth in GDP and salaries.

When the global financial crisis hit Russia in October 2008, many of the economic gains of the previous decade were reversed. The centrality of energy exports to the Russian economy meant that it particularly susceptible to crises abroad. As oil prices fell, Russia's GDP plummeted by 13.5 percent, contracting at a rate below even that of 1998 (World Bank Development Indicators). The exchange rate fell, while inflation shot up by 5 percent, leading to a precipitous increase in the consumer price index (Rose and Mishler, 2010: 42;

World Bank Development Indicators). Workers faced unpaid wages and forced leave, and the unemployment rate nearly doubled between summer 2008 and March 2009 (Teague 2011: 420). The crisis was reminiscent of the volatility and hardships the Russian population had endured in the 1990s, and came as a shock to a population increasingly accustomed to prosperity and growth (McAllister and White, 2011: 480). The shock, however, was relatively brief. By mid-2009, the government had managed to arrest the economy's decline. The recession ended a few months later, and, with the stabilization and increase in oil prices that accompanied the recovery worldwide, GDP growth returned to positive territory in 2010 (Teague 2011: 421).

Given that one of the pillars of Putin's popularity was economic growth and prosperity, there was considerable reason to believe that the economic crisis would have a deleterious effect on his support. Feklyunina and White (2011) have argued that support for the Putin regime stems almost exclusively from positive evaluations of the economy, or "performance legitimacy" (387). These evaluations are retrospective as well as prospective; thus any indication of the reversal of economic gains should trigger a deficit in regime legitimacy and a collapse in support. Economic issues frequently give rise to protest around the world, and in the past have correlated increased protest sentiment in Russia. McAllister and White (2011) have applied theories of economic voting to Russia to predict that people most affected by the financial crisis will withdraw support from the regime, particularly if there is clear attribution for the problem (482). Similarly citing the positive effect of economic growth on regime support, the severity of the crisis and the expectation that dissatisfied citizens will seek to replace their leader, Rose and Mishler (2010) assessed regime support using theories of economic voting, while considering factors external to economic

performance, including socialization and evaluations of regime political performance. Chaisty and Whitefield (2012) note that economic crises can give rise to protest when several preconditions are met, such as high income inequality, an inflexible non-democratic regime, and a resource-driven economy, all of which pertain in Russia (189).

The 1998 economic crisis saw a spike in worker strikes, with future events also linked to economic concerns such as wage arrears (Robertson 2007: 784). Concerned over regime support, the Kremlin and political elites carefully orchestrated the public narrative about the crisis to deemphasize the leadership's responsibility. First employing a strategy of denial in early 2008, the Kremlin forbade the press from using the word *krizis*, and Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin promised Russia would escape the crisis relatively unscathed (Feklyunina and White, 2011: 388). When, in Fall 2008, prominent economists Yevgenii Gontmakher and Igor Yurgens wrote editorials advocating for economic reform, forecasting anti-government riots and enjoining the public to demand civil rights in exchange for their economic losses, the Kremlin threatened to prosecute under the law against inciting extremism (Teague 2011: 422). When the crisis became undeniable, threatening the Russian finance sector and reversing growth, the Kremlin deflected the focus from internal issues by blaming the West for its irresponsibility (Feklyunina and White, 2011: 389). The narrative that there were no domestic causes of Russia's troubles and that the Western capitalist model was dangerously flawed had a nationalist flair that played well in the political environment that followed the 2008 war with Georgia (Feklyunina and White, 2011: 390). As the crisis progressed, the narrative shifted toward the more optimistic nationalism of multi-polarity: the world's economy was transforming, and Russia now had the opportunity to emerge as a global leader (Feklyunina and White, 2011: 394). The new Russia would be modernized, retrofitted for its

competitive, democratic future—a trade-off that justified a short period of economic hardship (Feklyunina and White, 2011: 401).

Though the Kremlin may have had reason to be concerned that the economic crisis would trigger unrest, several studies have found that it had a minimal effect on regime support. Given Russia's recent history of economic upheaval, the population seemed more interested in “hunker[ing] down and rid[ing] out the financial crisis as best they could” (Teague 2011: 422). Street demonstrations did not occur, and the incidence of strikes declined during the crisis, reversing a two-year trend (Teague 2011: 423). Positive evaluations of Putin's performance fell only slightly from 81 percent to 79 percent between June 2007 and June 2009 (Rose and Mishler, 2010: 43). Neither survey respondents' negative feelings about their economic position, recent unemployment nor pessimistic expectations for the economic crisis had a negative affect on regime support, though wage arrears had a marginally significant affect (Rose and Mishler, 2010: 49, 52). These results have been interpreted as indicating that Russians have a sociotropic view of the economy, considering the health of the system overall before their personal circumstances.

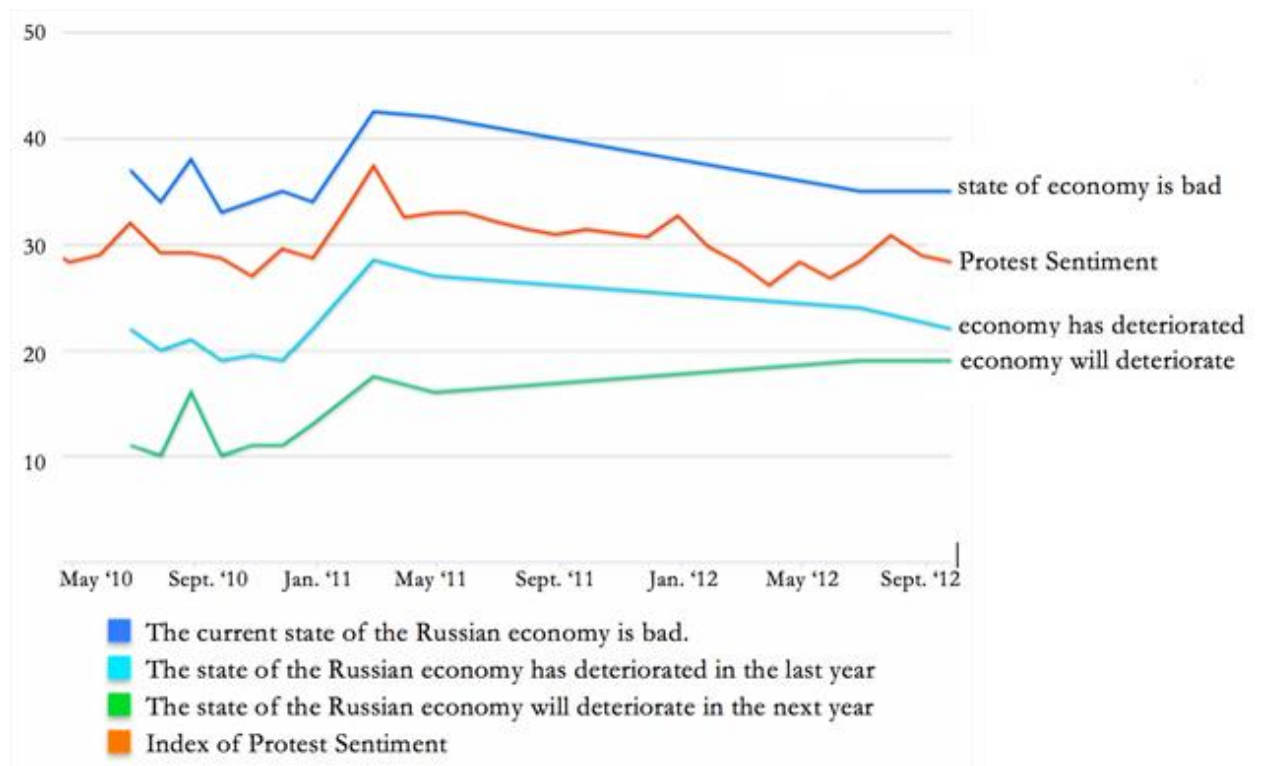
If evaluation of the economy appeared to be the only factor that correlated positively with regime support, we must also ask if Russians negatively evaluated the economy during the financial crisis. Several studies have found that they did not. Rose and Mishler (2010) attribute this finding to socialization: Russians viewed the crisis as a normal event in the economic development of a capitalist system, or an “example of the erratic progress of the national economy,” which, despite its hardships, was preferable to the deprivations of the communist system (Rose and Mishler 2010: 53). Similarly, McAllister and White (2011) found that Russians did not feel the government was to blame for the crisis, nor was it able

to take initiative in the crisis's resolution beyond reacting to new developments (484). This ambivalence may indicate that Russians viewed the crisis as a part of a naturally occurring cycle in a capitalist system. Because the majority of Russians (40 percent) were unable to identify any domestic or foreign agent responsible for the financial crisis, it would seem that the leadership had successfully escaped blame (McAllister and White 486). It would thus appear that the rhetorical maneuverings choreographed by the Kremlin to blame the West, and recast the crisis as an opportunity were a success (Feklyunina and White, 211: 402). As the crisis subsided, it seemed that "to the extent that democracy may be undermined in Russia, it will not be as a consequence of the economic crisis of 2008-9 and its aftermath" (McAllister and White, 2011: 492).

A longer view of the effects of the crisis suggests that the threat might not have been so neatly neutralized. In 2009, several significant demonstrations were held, beginning with those held by car owners and importers in Vladivostok, who objected to protectionist tariff increase on imported cars. This protest culminated in demands that Putin remove himself as Prime Minister. Ultimately, the riot police were dispatched to end the demonstrations. In summer 2009, the workers' rallies were increasing, and protests in the single-factory town Pikalevo drew Putin's attention (Teague 2011: 423-4). January 2010 saw the largest demonstration since the fall of the Soviet Union, when 10,000 protestors in Kaliningrad rallied against unemployment, the rising cost of living and corruption and again demanded Putin's resignation (Teague 2011: 424). Protests continued through 2010 and increasingly encompassed non-economic demands, such as a halt to the construction of a highway through the Khimki forest outside of Moscow. FOM's protest sentiment indicator from

2010 to 2012 (figure 1.4) shows that negative assessments of the economic situation¹³ tend to be correlated with general protest sentiment¹⁴ in the country (FOM).

Figure 1.4: Negative Assessment of Russian Economy, Protest Sentiment Index



Source: FOM Indicators

¹³ Respondents selecting the most negative option for the questions, “In your opinion, the current state of the Russian economy - good, fair or poor?” “Do you think the state of the Russian economy over the past year has improved, worsened or did not change?” “Do you think that in the next year the Russian economy will better, worse or unchanged?” (<http://fom.ru/indikatory.html#?vt=37,47,128,161,164,185,113&cs=125,140,121,117,128>)

¹⁴ FOM protest sentiment index is based on responses to five questions: In the last month did you notice or not notice dissatisfaction, or the willingness of people to participate in protests?; Do you think that in the last month, discontent or people’s willingness to participate in protests has been growing or declining?; What percentage of Russians do you think are now discontent, or willing to participate in protests?; Do you personally feel or not feel resentment, or the willingness to participate in protests?; If next Sunday, where you live, there are rallies, demonstrations and protests, would you take part in them or not?.

These studies on the financial crisis and regime support were conducted, however, before the electoral protests of 2011-2012, when there was relatively little protest activity in Russia. Were economic issues among the factors contributing to emergence of these protests? These protests were mainly comprised of participants with a middle class background, a distinction in part reflective of a specific financial circumstance. The middle class is expected to engage in long-term savings behavior or investment, making them more connected to global financial markets and therefore vulnerable to shocks and may have suffered greater losses. Further, they are much less dependent on the welfare state, so the state is less able to protect their well-being (Chaisty and Whitefield, 2012: 192). They may have thus experienced greater losses during the crisis and correspondingly decreased their support for the regime.

Chaisty and Whitefield (2012) explored the possibility that the crisis impacted middle class evaluations of the regime using survey data gathered in 2009 of a randomized sample of 1500 respondents from across the country. Using a binary logistic regression of factors influencing support for Medvedev or Putin in future elections, they found that although support for the regime decreased among individuals who were personally negatively affected by the crisis, there was no evidence that the crisis politicized the middle class more than the working class (196). This analysis does not take into account, however, significant differences in the impact of the financial crisis on the middle class as compared to the working class that might affect regime support. Given their financial behavior and professional backgrounds, members of the middle class likely experienced the crisis differently from members of the working class. While a factory worker might have suffered wage arrears and unemployment from work stoppages during the worst of the crisis, as

Russia's economy got back on track fairly quickly, these issues would also have been fairly quickly resolved. Comparatively, an entrepreneur with investments in foreign markets would be less likely to suffer from wage arrears or the closing of factories, but would be more likely to experience longer-term effects as the world's financial markets faltering recovery continued to impact investments and international business. For example, foreign direct investment (FDI) in Russia dropped from US\$75 billion in 2008 to US\$36.5 billion in 2009, and had only recovered to US\$52.9 billion by 2011 (Worldbank Databank).¹⁵ While recovery in FDI has been steady following the crisis, by 2011, it had only just reached levels obtained in 2007. The slow recovery in FDI would be more likely to impact private sector employees with higher education and businessmen—two groups of the middle class of particular concern here—who might work for or do business with international firms, than state sector employees of a similar socio-economic position. Further, as the urban middle class exhibits more sophisticated and differentiated ways of managing their money, they were more likely to have been entangled in the global financial crisis and might be expected to report increased concerns about the economy at a later point in crisis (Ovcharova 33). Finally, members of the working class may be more likely to demand that the government meet specific short-term goals, like keeping a factory open, while the middle class might be more likely to expect the government to meet longer-term systemic goals, such as diversifying the economy or stemming inflation. Thus, looking at the changing attitudes of the middle class toward the economy in the several years following the crisis might reveal insights not available in studies conducted in the months immediately following.

¹⁵ See WorldBank Databank <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.CD.WD>>

Finally, the notion that Russians as a whole did not know whom to blame for the crisis does not mean that the educated, urban middle class did not hold the government responsible. Once the crisis had penetrated Russia, the government's rhetoric of blame shifting and denial may have been seen by this group as deceitful, when viewed it in the broader context of the abuses of a paternalistic state (Aron, 2012: 27). Finally, the promised modernization program to speed recovery may have particularly appealed to the middle class, who may have been disappointed when no such program was realized.

The economic issues hypothesis (H.1) is that the financial crisis and related on-going economic issues were becoming increasingly of concern to the urban middle class, leading up to the 2011 Duma election, and led to participation in the protests. We might expect the following specific results. Given their links to the global financial markets, the middle class concern about the economic crisis could have persisted longer than that of other classes and would not have abated in the summer of 2009, when the crisis in Russia ended. Given their professional background, they would not be significantly concerned about unemployment or delays in the payment of salaries, as compared with the general population. Inflation will likely be problematic for all levels of society as rising prices affects everyone, but the middle class, whose members might be less likely to live paycheck to paycheck, might feel the effects later as they increasingly dip into their savings. They may also be dismayed to find that their rubles do not stretch as far when they travel abroad. If Russians evaluate the economy based on their personal financial circumstances, rather than on their perception of the economy as a whole, then they should rate the standard of living of the population as less problematic as the crisis subsides.

II. Liberal Democratic Issues

A second hypothesis (H.2) is that increasing interest in and concern about liberal-democratic issues motivated political participation. After all, the protests demanded free and fair elections, one of the fundamental components of democracy, and took place around the Duma and presidential elections. Further, the strong negative reaction to the *rokirovka*, in which Putin seemed to condescendingly announce his return to the presidency as a foregone conclusion, suggested a rejection of paternalism and a shift toward a more participatory relationship with the state. It could therefore be possible that these protests were the outcome of rising interest in democracy, human rights, and a government motivated by state-building and concern for the citizens' best interests. However, if the protests were a manifestation of liberal-democratic concerns in the urban middle class, it would be a departure from the general trend in Russian society, as for the last two decades, Russians have had deeply conflicted ideas about democracy.

Broadly speaking, Russians lack a clear concept of democracy and its implementation in Russia. To begin with, democracy as a political system itself is poorly understood. Values most commonly identified as democratic include economic prosperity, order and stability, and freedom of speech, press and religion. In a Western context only the latter is likely to be identified as democratic and the two former might occur in a variety of regime types.¹⁶ Further, far more survey respondents selected these three values as emblematic of democracy than selected election of senior government officials. Perhaps because of this definitional confusion, there is little consensus as to whether democracy already exists in

¹⁶ <http://www.levada.ru/archive/gosudarstvo-i-obshchestvo/rossiya-i-demokratiya/chto-takoe-po-vashemu-mneniyu-demokratiya>

Russia and whether it should. A majority of the population continues to feel that Western democracy is unsuited to Russia (table 2.1), yet as of June 2010, 60 percent of respondents felt Russia needed democracy and 16 percent were unsure.¹⁷ In an October 2010 poll, only 34 percent of people felt it was possible to describe Russia as a democratic state, while 19 percent were not able to answer the question.¹⁸ The significant portion of survey respondents who were unable to form an opinion about Russian democracy speaks to a lack of clarity and ambivalence about the term.

Table 2.1: In your opinion, to what extent is suitable for Russia "Western" (i.e., Western European, American) version of the social order?

	May 2000	July 2010
It is a universal form of social organization that is entirely suited to Russian conditions	4%	6%
It is a pattern of social organization that can be adapted to Russian conditions	15%	20%
It is not well suited to Russian conditions and is unlikely to take root in Russia	31%	33%
It is completely unsuited to Russian conditions and is contrary to the way of life of the Russian people	37%	31%
Difficult to answer	13%	11%

Source: Levada Center <<http://www.levada.ru/archive/gosudarstvo-i-obshchestvo/rossiya-i-demokratiya/kak-vy-schitaete-v-kakoi-mere-dlya-rossii-po>>

Why do Russians have such ambivalent attitudes toward democracy?¹⁹ Even twenty years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russians have limited experience with

¹⁷ <http://www.levada.ru/archive/gosudarstvo-i-obshchestvo/rossiya-i-demokratiya/kak-vy-dumaete-nuzhna-li-rossii-demokratiya>

¹⁸ <http://www.levada.ru/archive/gosudarstvo-i-obshchestvo/rossiya-i-demokratiya/kak-vy-dumaete-mozhno-li-skazat-cto-v-rossii>

¹⁹ Scholars have argued that, in the 1990s, while some newly independent republics focused on implementing democratic governance as a rejection of the Soviet system, Russians never included democracy in their priorities for their new state. It was only when the Western democratic model appeared more economically successful that people began to support it (Petukhov and Ryabov, 2006:

democracy in the form of competitive political parties or fair elections. Free, fair and competitive elections have never truly determined the transition of executive power in Russia, as Yeltsin's reelection, Putin's early assumption of the presidency, and to a large extent Medvedev's election in the absence of competition were orchestrated by insider interests. Elections might better be described as facilitating the transfer of power from the incumbent to a pre-selected recipient (Dmitri Furman, quoted in Petukhov and Ryabov, 285). The scope of political life has also been greatly reduced under Putin, who, in the interest of avoiding conflicts with parliament, has consolidated his power with the help of United Russia, the dominant party of power (Gill, 2012: 451).²⁰ In this context, elections function more as a barometer for regime support than an opportunity to vote anyone into or out of office. As Russia's political sphere contracted, the concept of "sovereign democracy" was developed by Kremlin ideologue Vladislav Surkov in 2006 to describe Russia's political

269-270). Insider privatization, the devaluation of the ruble and a sinking standard of living caused widespread disillusionment with democracy as implemented in the 1990s. Yeltsin did not prioritize the building of strong democratic institutions, a problem that culminated in the 1993 armed standoff with the Duma and a redrafting of the constitution that greatly shifted power toward the executive. At the end of the Yeltsin era, people associated upheaval with democracy and exhibited a strong preference for stability, even at the cost of their rights. In January 2000, 81 percent of Russians would rather have had "order, even some violations of democratic principles and restriction of personal freedoms would be necessary to achieve it," rather than democracy.¹⁹ In the next ten years this figure declined only moderately, to a 56 percent.

²⁰ Beginning in 2003, a United Russia-led parliament passing reforms that eliminated gubernatorial elections in favor of presidential appointment, toughened party registration legislation, prohibited of the formation of coalition parties and restructured the electoral system (Gelman, 2006: 552). These reforms drastically reduced the number of political parties, from 35 in 2004 to 6 in 2011, two of which held no Duma seats. Significant resources have been devoted to developing and maintaining popular support for United Russia, against which other parties cannot compete.

system (Surkov 2006).²¹ These factors have all contributed to ambivalent or negative public opinion on democracy in Russia in general.

There is reason to believe, however, that this trend is changing course among the urban professional middle class. Firstly, many members of this group are relatively young, in their 20s and 30s, and were too young to be politically conscious in the 1990s. Instead, they became politically active when Putin was already in office and when Medvedev's election gave the appearance of political debate. They might thus be less likely than the general population to have negative associations with democracy. Still, young people remember the hardships of the Yeltsin-era economic crises, and so value the stability that Putin's leadership has purported to provide. They may thus have passively supported Putin while holding democratic values.

Secondly, in the second half of the 2000s, the urban middle class exhibited increasing concerns over their ability to impact the political system. The study by Gudkov *et al.* (2009) indicated that the majority of well-off, young, private-sector professionals in major cities were not interested in politics and felt unable to impact the political system, while state-sector employees were more likely to follow politics and feel that they could impact the system. Essentially, respondents who were "ready today to be loyal to the authorities" were also "able to take part in political life," while those who were not loyal to the authorities, could not (47). This result might indicate that a lack of interest in politics reduces one's ability to impact politics, but it may also speak to a deeper estrangement from political life.

²¹ Developed as a response to Western pressures for the adoption of liberal policies, the doctrine of sovereign democracy almost tautologically argues that, in spite of various increasingly undemocratic policies, Russia is democratic because it practices a specific form of democracy that embodies the will of the people; it just happens to be a type of democracy that is less liberal—or less democratic—than the democracies of the West.

This survey group overall, regardless of sector and political involvement, found the most lacking feature of Russian politics was “a controllable mechanism of political goal setting (the lack of transparency in the procedure of decision making), which is to say the suppression of any potential for legitimate innovations in society” (Gudkov *et al.* 2009: 47-48). That a lack of transparency is seen as a critical problem for young, urban, well-off professionals suggests that a major need for political expression is going unaddressed. Moreover, this concern might be particularly strong in private-sector employees and people who are not interested in politics—the group that later joined the electoral protests.

Additionally, the financial crisis may have had a secondary impact on attitudes toward the practice of democracy in Russia. Russians who experienced negative impacts of the financial crisis were not less likely to support the regime, but were less likely to positively evaluate democracy in Russia (Chaisty and Whitefield, 2012: 198). This effect was notably stronger among private sector employees with a middle class background, as compared with state sector employees and those with a working class background. State employees with a middle class background who were not negatively impacted by the financial crisis were likely to offer positive evaluations of the regime, suggesting that there are developing divisions within the middle class (Chaisty and Whitefield, 2012: 200). Such a division is supported by the fact that the electoral protest movement was eventually comprised mainly of private sector employees from the middle class. Somewhat similarly, McAllister and White (2011) found that blaming Russian leadership for the financial crisis negatively impacted beliefs about democratic progress in Russia and assessments of the individual’s ability to impact government (though they also found that Russians were likely to blame the crisis on

democracy itself, rather than on the regime in general and in particular did not find Putin responsible) (490).

Finally, the two major proximate causes for the protests —the *rokirovka* and the fraudulent Duma elections—directly speak to issues of representative governance. The announcement of the *rokirovka* was negatively received in large part because it denied the public a choice in who would lead the country and appeared to confer on Putin the title of president months before the election. The urban middle class viewed the switch as an insulting rejection of democracy, suggesting that democracy itself might be of increasing importance to them. This anger at the *rokirovka* led to larger numbers of election monitors at the Duma elections, particularly in Moscow, again suggesting a rising interest in democratic values. Finally, the anger and frustration at thinly veiled fraud employed in the Duma election, particularly in Moscow, might also imply a more general frustration with and concern for the state of democracy in Russia.

These shifts all give reason to believe that middle class Muscovites may have become increasingly concerned with issues of representative and transparent governance in recent years and would thus exhibit a greater concern for liberal-democratic issues leading up to the protests (H.2). The survey response “democracy and human rights” explicitly addresses the issue of Western-style representative government. It also addresses human rights violations, and might respond to high profile human rights related issues, such as the prosecution and death in custody of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

This hypothesis also uses three issues as proxies for concern about the political system and appropriate exercise of state power: (1) corruption and red tape, (2) the influence of oligarchs on political and economic life of the country, and (3) ecology and environmental

problems. The first two proxies, the influence of oligarchs on economic and political life and corruption and red tape, address alternative interests that divert officials from governing in the best interest of their citizens. Under Yeltsin, oligarchs exerted a tremendous influence on the developing state but had few interests beyond the advancement of their own wealth and power.²² Under Putin, the original oligarchs have been cowed—in exile, prison, or simply abstaining from politics—but they have been replaced with a political-business elite that has presented itself as a clan-like “corporation,” running a kleptocratic state (Dawisha, 2011: 335). When oligarchs insert themselves into the operations of the state, the interests of the broader public do not guide officials in their policy-making. Moreover, citizens might be concerned that the state is syphoning public funds into private hands; the prominent activist Alexey Navalny has presented ample evidence of this. An increasing concern about the influence of oligarchs suggests concern about the motivations and incentives of those running the country, and whether they are serving themselves and the ultra-elite, or serving the people.

The linked issue of corruption—the abuse of state power for personal gain—has become increasingly recognized as a pervasive problem, from the enrichment of high-level officials, who might benefit from the country’s lucrative natural resources, to low-level bribery at the hands of state employees including doctors, teachers, building inspectors and law enforcement. When officials work to exploit state resources as well as individuals for private gain, they are likely not governing with the best interest of the populace at heart.

Although a significant share of Russians feel that high-level officials are corrupt, they in large

²² The privatizations that created the oligarchs also created deep inequalities in society that inhibited the development of a middle class, which might have taken a more active role in politics; inequality in Russia remains a serious problem today (Petukhov and Ryabov, 2006: 284).

part view corruption as a norm, and have not historically rated it highly as an issue of concern (Sharafutdinova, 2010: 147). Nonetheless, corruption received a great deal of attention under Medvedev, who launched a sweeping anti-corruption campaign in 2008 that included a variety of reforms and had support from Putin.²³ The campaign yielded little result, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranked Russia 143 out of 180 countries in 2007; in 2011, it ranked 143 out of 182 countries. Corruption is likely to be a particular concern in Moscow, where citizens consume a wider range of media in independent publications and online, and are thus more likely to be aware of corruption.²⁴ Moreover, entrepreneurs and private-sector employees are more likely to be the losers in corrupt transactions, paying bribes to state employees for building permits, fire inspections and other interactions with the state that private enterprise necessitates. Finally, as more members of the urban professional middle class increasingly identify with the West and the international urban lifestyle—manifested, for example, in the attempted replication of New York or London lifestyle in Moscow, or greater interest in emigration—they view bribery and corruption as increasingly backward, anti-Western, and an obstruction to the lifestyle they aspire to.

Finally, the third proxy, ecology and environmentalism, is an issue that has become increasingly politicized after being the object of a great deal of attention by newly-formed and older, *glasnost*'-era civil society groups. Environmental degradation and destruction,

²³ Anti-corruption campaigns themselves can have negative effects on corruption perceptions as well as on attitudes toward the state. Coulloudon (2002) suggests that where regimes are characterized by institutionalized corruption, anti-corruption campaigns can simply raise awareness of the problem, essentially demonstrating the state's inability to fight address the problem and contributing to impressions of state weakness (188).

²⁴ See Sharafutdinova (2010: 156) on factors affecting corruption perception in hybrid regimes.

particularly in major cities, have become symbols of the abuse of state power and lack of consideration for the law as well as citizens' rights (Aron, 2012: 26). Two of the best-known causes are the on-going fight to prevent the destruction of the Khimki forest to accommodate a highway between Moscow and St. Petersburg, led by popular opposition figure Evgeniya Chirikova and ECHO, and the successful campaign to prevent Gazprom from erecting a massive new office building in St. Petersburg in spite of city ordinances that prevent the construction of buildings that would alter the city's historic skyline. A central complaint is the collusion of business interests and the state; Chirikova has said, "we have people in power whose sole goal is personal enrichment at the country's expense" (Aron, 2012: 26). These movements have demanded the equal enforcement of the law, called upon citizens to express their interests by voting and even insisted that Putin remove himself from office. These urban environmental movements can also be seen as responses to economic growth, wherein the public struggles to have a say in the consequences of development of its surroundings (Robertson, 2013). Finally, it can also be seen as related to the increasing interest in urbanism among the professional middle class of the major cities. Urbanism—or, the improvement in urban living conditions, with Western European cities as a goal—has manifested in environmental concerns, such as the interest in parks development in Moscow and bicycling in St. Petersburg. Urbanism has also been expressed more politically as a theory of small deeds, or working for smaller, actionable improvements that have an immediate impact on living standards, rather than abstract political goals that are all but impossible to realize. Thus, all three problems can be viewed as proxies for democracy in that they can all indicate an increasing demand for representation, for the elimination of alternative interests, and for an end to the exploitative use of the state for private gain.

III. State Efficacy

A third hypothesis (H.3) posits that the middle class was not satisfied with how the state was accomplishing the work of governing, in how it keeps citizens safe and administers essential social service sectors, and as a result, stopped supporting the regime and participated in the protests. If support for the Putin regime is, in fact, based on performance legitimacy, assessments of that performance may not be confined to the economic sphere, as earlier suggested. Rather, such assessments could also include considerations of service provision, particularly in a post-communist context where the legacy of the Soviet welfare state remains strong. The problems in this category specifically address pensions, the army, education, healthcare, and housing and utility sectors of the government, and terrorism.

Service delivery includes both continual (for example, the on-going receipt of a pension) and instantiated (for example, visiting a state doctor) interactions with the state, and as such constitutes a major avenue by which citizens interact with the state. In administering services, the state has a series of opportunities to meet or fail to meet citizens' needs. That success or failure can take a variety of forms, depending on the situation and the citizens' expectations. Higher expectations are likely to lead to greater disappointment with state performance. Effective, high-quality and well-administered services, one might imagine, would lead to greater satisfaction with the state. Likewise, when services are poorly administered, frustration and dissatisfaction with the state could easily arise. There is reason to believe that the middle class is dissatisfied with social services, as economic growth has raised living standards, but social services remain of poor quality or prohibitively expensive; their expectations are thus not being met by the state (Gorshkov, 2008: 65).

The primary avenues of service delivery addressed here are pensions, education, healthcare, and housing, all of which are fully or partially administered by the state. Of these, pensions have long been the most controversial. State-administered pensions have been a sensitive issue since the fall of the Soviet Union, as the dissolution of the social safety net and repeated financial crises have left the elderly impoverished. During Putin's first terms as president, a highly unpopular proposal to convert in-kind welfare benefits to cash transfers led to high-profile, sustained protests around the country, organized by pensioners themselves, who expected the state would look after them as the Soviet Union did. These protests were the largest coordinated protest actions seen under Putin, and they ultimately compelled the Kremlin to reconfigure the program, though benefits were in large part monetized. The monetization scheme and attendant protests depressed Putin's popularity to its lowest rating since he took office. The alarm with which the protests were received also demonstrated the difficulty with which the highly centralized regime managed unrest (Chaisty and Whitefield, 2012: 189). Though pensions have been controversial, they are less likely to be a concern of the urban professional middle class, who generally skew somewhat younger, are more likely to exhibit long-term savings behavior, and have higher incomes.

Education, on the other hand, is likely to be a concern of the middle class, as they value education and have pursued advanced degrees. Though Russia is the best-educated country in the world, the quality of education has been decreasing in recent years. According to the Times of Higher Education, Moscow State University, commonly called the best

university in the country, ranked 50th in the world in 2013, down from 33rd in 2011.²⁵

Corruption is widespread at the university level, where an informal market has encroached upon the meritocratic goals of an educational system. Admission, grades and even diplomas might be up for sale. Duma deputies and other notables have been discovered to have plagiarized their dissertations (Lipman 2013). Such an environment undermines the meritocratic objectives of education with pure self-advancement. One of the most common places to encounter corruption in education is at the preschool level, where parents are forced to pay for spots for their children (Rimsky 2012). Private education remains uncommon, so for the majority of a younger demographic likely to have small children, this bribery is likely to be a concern. Accordingly, 63 percent of the urban professional middle class is interested in sending their children abroad for school, and 35 percent would want their children to permanently emigrate (Gudkov *et al.* 2008: 50).

Similarly, state-administered healthcare is rife with shortcomings. Services are ostensibly free or highly subsidized by the state, but the paltry salaries that doctors and medical professionals earn have created a significant market for bribery and opportunity for corruption. Medical services are delivered at costs determined by the doctor, when their cost should be determined by set rates or be free of charge. Services are of low quality, yet private clinics are expensive and out of reach for the average family.

One might expect residents of the major cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, to have complaints about housing; as with any big city, apartments are always too small, too remote and too expensive. In Russia, however, the state continues to be deeply involved in the

²⁵ See Times of Higher Education World Reputation Ranks
<<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2011/reputation-ranking/institution/lomonosov-moscow-state-university>>

administration of housing, via Housing Services (Zhilishchno-kommunal'niye Usługi, or ZhKU) and Housing and Public Utilities (Zhilishchno-kommunal'noye Khozyaistvo, or ZhKKh), which attends to issues such as building maintenance and setting utilities rates. A massive post-Soviet campaign to privatize housing began in the early 1990s. While the majority of housing stock was privatized very quickly, the privatization program only concluded in March 2013, after a five-year extension on applications in 2008, due to a variety of complications. Post-Soviet housing privatization has made 85 percent of the population homeowners, including those who might not have otherwise had the funds to do so (Shomina, quoted in Attwood, 2012: 1).²⁶ This process in part aimed to expand the middle class and increase the number of “stakeholders” in Russian society (Attwood 2012: 904). In reality, housing and utilities have become a controversial issue, as the privatization process underscored inequalities and tax issues, the rising cost of state-regulated utilities spawned demonstrations, and neglect has led to the degradation of housing stock (Attwood 2012: 908). The housing sector has been called the most corrupt by government officials, in part because the potential profits are massive, particularly in major cities, even occasionally giving rise to violence, as in 2011 when the mayor of Sergiev Posad was murdered for investigating corruption related to housing and utilities (*New York Times*, 18 February 2013; *The Moscow Times*, 22 August 2011). For the upwardly-mobile, urban professionals in question, housing is likely to be a sensitive concern; as their position improves, they are likely to seek better housing, which is in short supply in major cities.

²⁶ In general, home ownership is viewed as a characteristic of the middle class; for example, mortgage rates have been used as a barometer for the growth of the middle class in the United States. This is not the case in Russia, as housing privatizations have made a significant portion of the population homeowners at little or no cost.

Beyond service delivery, the state must be effective in keeping its people safe, here measured in concerns about the army and terrorism. For a state and population who proudly remember past Soviet military triumphs and identify a strong state with a strong military, the condition of the armed forces is a paramount concern and is deeply tied with the image of the state. Putin has vowed that he will modernize the Russian military and in his 2012 campaign speeches, promised to devote a staggering \$770 billion its improvement over ten years (Iosebashvili 2012). However the military has faced significant deterioration in the last decades, suffering from outdated technology and poorly implemented funding. Most significantly, problems with the military have been well publicized since 1989 by one of the oldest and best-organized civil society groups, The Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia. This group advocates for reform and draws attention to the significant abuses that pervade the armed forces, such as extreme hazing, even resulting in death; malnourishment of recruits; corruption, and a variety of other offenses, for example leaving behind the bodies of deceased soldiers and declaring them missing rather than dead (see Zdravomyslova 2007). These issues are of even greater concern because Russia has mandatory military service, meaning that young men are often exposed to these abuses. The inability of the state to manage the military to prevent abuses and to safely enlist young recruits is a major problem. There are a variety of possible exemptions to the mandatory service, including enrollment in university, and it is also possible to pay one's way out. The urban professional middle class takes advantage of these exemptions to avoid serving. The efficaciousness of the military might also be in doubt given its inability to stabilize Chechnya, though given the complexity of the situation in Chechnya, that failure is less likely to be attributed to the army.

Similarly, terrorism poses a serious problem, in that repeated terrorist attacks might demonstrate that the state is not able to maintain its own borders or monitor and prevent domestic terrorism, with the goal of keeping citizens safe. There have been a series of terrorist attacks in Russia, mainly since the initiation of the Chechen Wars, including the Nord-Ost Siege in Moscow in 2002, and the Beslan crisis in 2004. Most relevant for this study are the three major attacks occurred in and around Moscow between 2008 and 2011: the derailment of the Nevsky Express train between Moscow and St. Petersburg in November 2009, the Moscow metro suicide bombings in March 2010, and the Domodedovo airport bombing in January 2011. This relatively high incidence of terrorism in the capital might cause alarm and lead citizens to believe that the state is struggling to fulfill its primary responsibility of law, order and safety. However it is possible that citizens would not attribute terrorism to the state, but rather to the terrorists. It is also possible that terrorism would be of greater concern immediately after an attack, but would not remain a high priority once that memory fades.

Regarding all state efficacy concerns, with the exception of terrorism, one might expect the emergence of civil society groups to advocate for citizens' rights and interests that might encourage the state to reform these sectors. This has occurred in limited ways, as in the case of the military and environmental activism against the destruction of the Khimki forest (discussed above) but broadly speaking, civil society remains weak in Russia, in part because of legal constraints. Citizens rarely feel empowered to form or join civil society organizations. For many, the memory of compulsory participation under the Soviet system is still alive, while others simply feel it is not worth the time, money, energy and at times personal risk, when the results are unlikely to be significant. In the absence of electoral

accountability and without civil society, administrative decisions can appear arbitrary, and citizens have few avenues to express their dissatisfaction. With frustrations increasing, citizens are more likely to resort more extreme ways of communicating their dissatisfaction, which can give rise to protests, like the 2005 pension benefits protests.

While the urban professional middle class can financially insulate itself from mandatory military service and are not yet old enough for pensions, they cannot escape the systemic problems of the education, health and housing sectors. Though they may be able to operate independently of the state in other aspects of life—the culture they consume, or the private-sector jobs they hold—in these three respects, the state and its sub-par, often corrupt services are inescapable. It is thus likely that education, healthcare and housing would be of rising concern among the urban professional middle class.

Chapter III

I. Methodology

These hypotheses will be assessed using responses to the survey question, “Which of the following problems do you consider most important for the country as a whole?”. This question was asked of a 1600-person representative sample of the Russian population by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (WCIOM). Due to lack of access to raw data, it was not possible to fully isolate the responses of middle class members in Moscow. Instead, we can look separately at the responses of groups exhibiting single characteristics of the urban middle class. The following analysis is based on analysis of the answers of respondents

in the following groups:

- *Education*: respondents with higher education (at least three years of university, or completed university degree);
- *Vocation*: respondents working as businessmen or entrepreneurs; specialist with higher education in manufacturing, science or culture, not including state employees;
- *Income*: respondents with income of 50,000²⁷ rubles or higher per family member per month;
- *Purchasing Power*: respondents who can easily purchase medium-priced consumer durables (refrigerator, TV); respondents who can easily purchase expensive consumer durables (car, dacha, apartment);
- *Location*: respondents from Moscow and St. Petersburg.

There is a significant caveat to this data, in that we cannot integrate these various middle class criteria to create an ideal urban middle class respondent. These groups must be considered separately. Thus, for example, when we consider the answers of people with higher education, we are looking at people across the country, in all professional sectors, in all income levels, who have higher education. Despite these limitations, this survey data will allow us to look at how these groups' attitudes towards problems have changed over time.²⁸

This section begins with an overview of salient findings. The following analysis then assesses problems that were of increasing concern between March 2008 and March 2012. It

²⁷ Approximately US\$1,575.

²⁸ This study only uses rounds of the survey conducted between 2008 and 2011 for which sufficient information about the sample was available to isolate middle class groups: March 23, 2008; January 11, 2009; September 11, 2010; January 16, 2011; April 10, 2011; June 26, 2011; November 27, 2011; December 25, 2011; March 25, 2012.

then considers the relative levels of concern for problems classified pertaining to each hypothesis, and compares the middle class groups and residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg to the general population. The section concludes with a comparison to another data set collected by Graeme Robertson, in which members of the middle class were asked, “Which of the following are the most important problems facing Russia today?” This survey was conducted online in late February and early March 2012. The possible responses are phrased differently than the options in the WCIOM survey, but are roughly equivalent. I will then compare the responses of groups exhibiting single characteristics of the urban middle class from the WCIOM survey, to those of Robertson’s respondents, who were selected specifically for middle class status. Robertson’s data set will allow inferences about motivations behind participation in electoral cycle protests, as these participants are isolated in the data.

II. Findings

Analysis indicated that problems pertaining to all three hypotheses were of increasing concern for middle class groups, as well as for the general population, between March 2008 and March 2012. Rather than any one of these categories motivating an increase in dissatisfaction with the state, the interplay between them might have led to that result. For example, dissatisfaction with quality of life or the pervasiveness of corruption may tie these issues together.

Among economic issues, the standard of living of the population saw the greatest increase in concern over this period. The increase was greatest among residents of Moscow

and St. Petersburg. Of democratic issues, corruption increased most over the period in question. In this same category, democracy and human rights was among the lowest-rated problems in the whole survey. Evidence from Moscow and St. Petersburg, however, suggests that interest in this issue is dependent on the electoral cycle and on current events. Among state efficacy issues, worries about housing, healthcare and education were increasing, implying dissatisfaction with the state's ability to provide basic social services.

Generally, concerns of the middle class did not deviate significantly from the concerns of the general population. This result might suggest that, despite variation in socio-economic position, members of the middle class do not have priorities that are fundamentally different from those of an average Russian. The difference is more of degree of concern than in kind of concern. This is particularly true of residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, who were the most critical of the state of any group considered here. This result suggests that residence in the capitals, rather than membership in the middle class, is more likely to make one critical or demanding of the state.

III. A Constellation of Problems

Issues that were becoming increasingly important in the lead-up to the December 2011 protests included economic, democratic and state efficacy concerns (table 3.1).²⁹ The problems that had the greatest increase in importance from March 2008 to March 2012 were (1) the standard of living of the population; (2) corruption and red tape; (3) the situation in

²⁹ Social problems (alcoholism and drug abuse; crime; youth development; morality and ethics and demographic crisis) were generally of high concern to middle class groups as well as the general population, yet they exhibited little change over the time period in question.

the housing and utilities sector; (4) the situation in the healthcare sector; (5) the situation in the education sector; and (6) the influence of oligarchs on the economic and political life of the country.

Table 3.1: Issues of Increasing Overall Importance to Middle Class Groups in Russia

Issue	Type of Issue
Standard of living of the population	Economic
Corruption and red tape	Democratic
Housing and utilities	State Efficacy
Healthcare	State Efficacy
Education	State Efficacy
Influence of Oligarchs	Democratic

Firstly, these results indicate that middle class groups are increasingly concerned for their quality of life. Their most important issue in general was the standard of living, an economic concern. Moreover the phrasing of this survey option as “the standard of living of the population” indicates that it is a sociotropic issue for society at large, rather than a personal concern. Increasing worry over the state of the housing, health and education sectors refers back to the standard of living.

Given that the standard of living has risen over the last decade in Russia, it might be possible that this frustration is the result of higher expectations. As the urban middle class has accumulated wealth, it has increasingly been exposed to the Western European and American lifestyle via travel abroad and foreign media. Young urban professionals seek membership in the Western, urban elite culture with which they identify, as exemplified by the general post-Soviet predilection for conspicuous consumption and by the current mania for iPhones and iPads. Increasingly in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the young professional

middle class has isolated itself from the so-called average Russian, in their own restaurants, coffee shops and bars, many of which are London, Brooklyn or Paris-themed. It is common to hear successful young people in Moscow talk longingly about moving abroad, so that they can finally live in a normal country where everything works as it should. This obsession with the West and ability to insulate themselves from the dominant culture may have aggravated these concerns about quality of life, in that their expectations and ideals are consistently disappointed.

Additionally, as urban professionals are more successful, they are likely to expect that their greater earnings would increase their quality of life. Certainly a higher income does improve quality of life, but when services are state-administered, as with education and healthcare, having more money does not necessarily mean access to better quality. For example, all institutions of higher education in Russia are public, and thus subject to the myriad problems that any state agency faces—corruption, mismanagement, political manipulation and so on. In the US, it is common for families from the middle class and higher to send their children to private universities, where their ability to pay for an education allows them to avoid the problems of a public university and ensures their children the college experience of their choosing and in many cases a higher quality education. In Russia, by contrast, it is not possible to opt out of this system without the considerable financial wherewithal and aptitude to go abroad for university. Thus for an upper-middle class family, having more money might result in higher expectations, but does not necessarily result in a better services.

Another possible connection might be corruption, as the housing, health and education sectors have all been impacted by corruption, which is itself the second most

important concern for this group. Corruption became a high-profile problem following the announcement of Medvedev's anti-corruption campaign, as discussed below. It is therefore possible that, as corruption became a national issue of high visibility, people began to see it more frequently in their daily lives. Greater concern for the role of oligarchs, however, suggests that this concern was not limited to the quotidian, but was also leveled at the higher echelons of business and government.

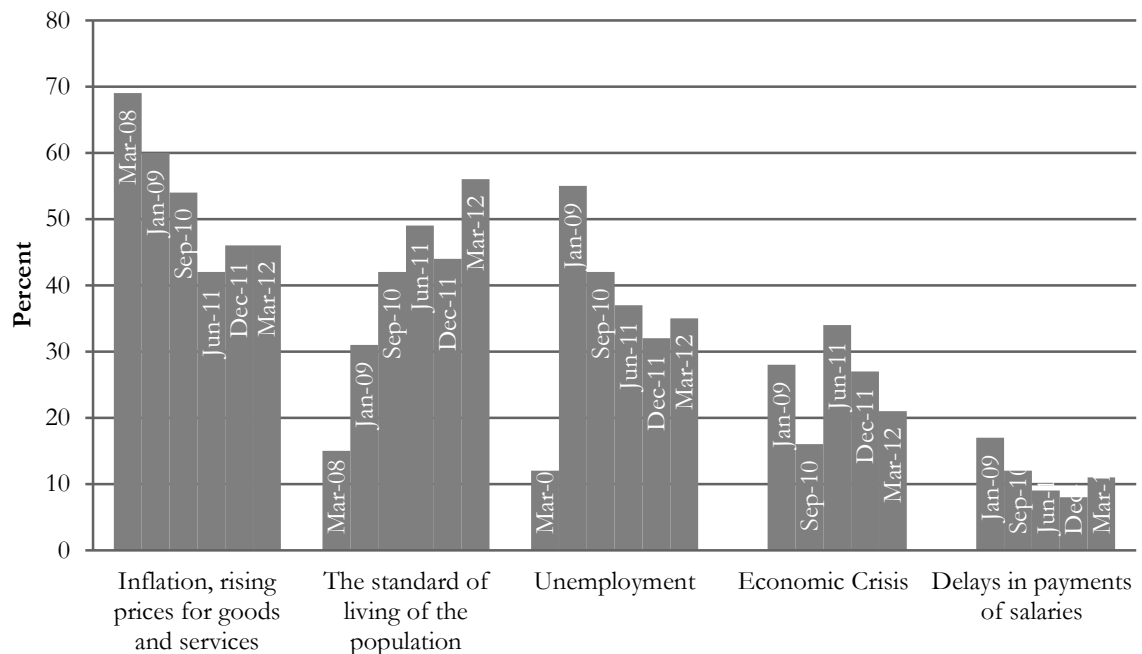
Finally, these results imply that if there was a social contract between Putin and the middle class, there were deep fractures in it before the outbreak of the electoral cycle protests, particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg. If the social contract guaranteed improved living standards, these results indicate that those for whom living standards were most improved—the middle class—felt that this issue was not only unresolved, but increasingly problematic. Likewise, the social contract might have guaranteed a certain standard of living, but when major services administered by the government are of poor or decreasing quality, and might no longer allow you access to a good education, suitable housing or reliable healthcare, it might be difficult to see how the government is upholding its end of the contract. The social contract might have guaranteed that the state would stay out of your life as long as you stayed out of politics, but if corruption increasingly penetrates public services, as well as your personal and professional life, it might be easy to see that as government intrusion with little benefit.

IV. Economic Issues

Respondents with higher education, those working in the specialized private sector,

those earning over 50,000 rubles per month, and those able to purchase moderately priced or expensive durables ranked the economic problems in the following order: (1) Inflation, rising prices for goods and services; (2) the standard of living of the population; (3) unemployment; (4) economic crisis; and (5) delays in payments of salaries. These concerns are represented in figure 3.1, using specialized private sector employees, businessmen and entrepreneurs as a representative example.

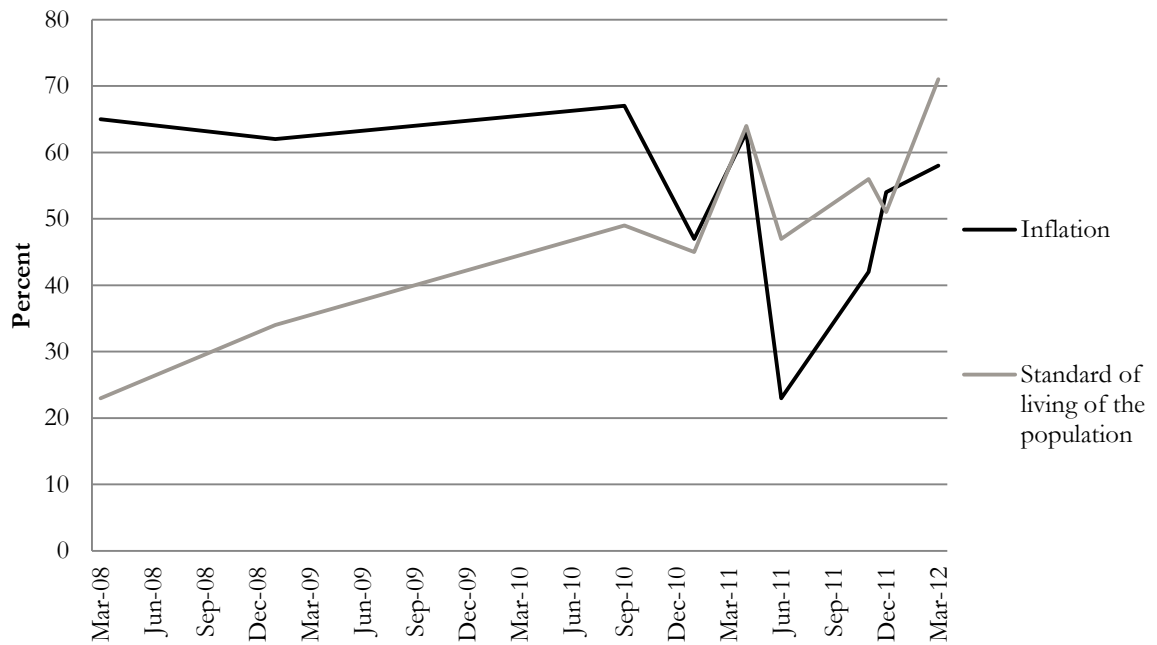
Figure 3.1: Simplified Economic Issues for Specialized Private Sector Employees, Businessmen and Entrepreneurs, March 2008-March 2012



These rankings were the same for the general population.

For Moscow and St. Petersburg residents, inflation was a critical concern for approximately two years following the financial crisis, until it was supplanted by worries about the standard of living in September 2010 (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Concerns about Inflation and Standard of Living, Residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg



Though still considered a significant problem, inflation has been a declining concern across all groups between March 2008 and March 2012; even as the financial crisis played out, worries about inflation continually declined. Over that same period, concern for the standard of living has been steadily increasing. Significantly, in June 2011 and November 2011, concern for inflation was at an all-time low, while concern the standard of living was at a high, particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg, where 56 percent of respondents selected it as a concern.

Concern for the standard of living significantly increased between December 2011 and March 2012, roughly corresponding to the period of the electoral cycle. Indeed, this effect was particularly strong in Moscow and St. Petersburg; in December 2011, 51 percent

of people selected the standard of living as a problem, and by March 2012, 71 percent felt it was an issue.

Also noteworthy here is concern for the economic crisis. This option was first available in the January 2009 round of the survey, at which time it was of significantly higher interest to respondents from middle class groups as compared to the general public. While 23 percent of the general public felt the economic crisis was a problem, 32 percent of residents in Moscow and St. Petersburg and 30 percent of respondents with higher purchasing power selected it in January 2009. While these figures seem low considering the scope of the global financial crisis, they demonstrate that different groups perceived this event differently. Concern for the economic crisis declined until June 2011, when it again became a critical concern, garnering slightly more than 30 percent of responses in all groups, including the general public—an increase of approximately 20 percentage points over the previous round of surveys in April 2011.

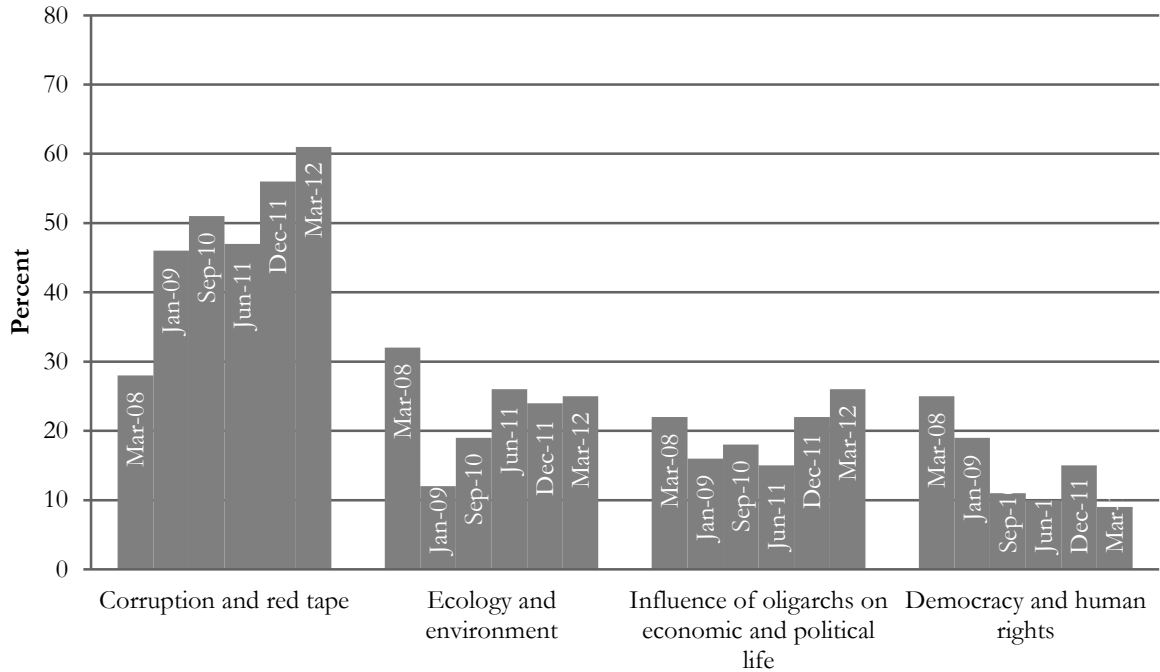
Finally, worry about unemployment and delays in the payment of salaries were both generally decreasing over this period. Unemployment was a more serious problem for the general population than for the respondents from these groups, particularly residents of major cities. Delays in the payment of salaries were a marginal concern for respondents by 2011, and similarly, this issue was less important for respondents from these groups than for the general population.

V. Democratic Issues

All groups, including the general population, ranked the most important democratic

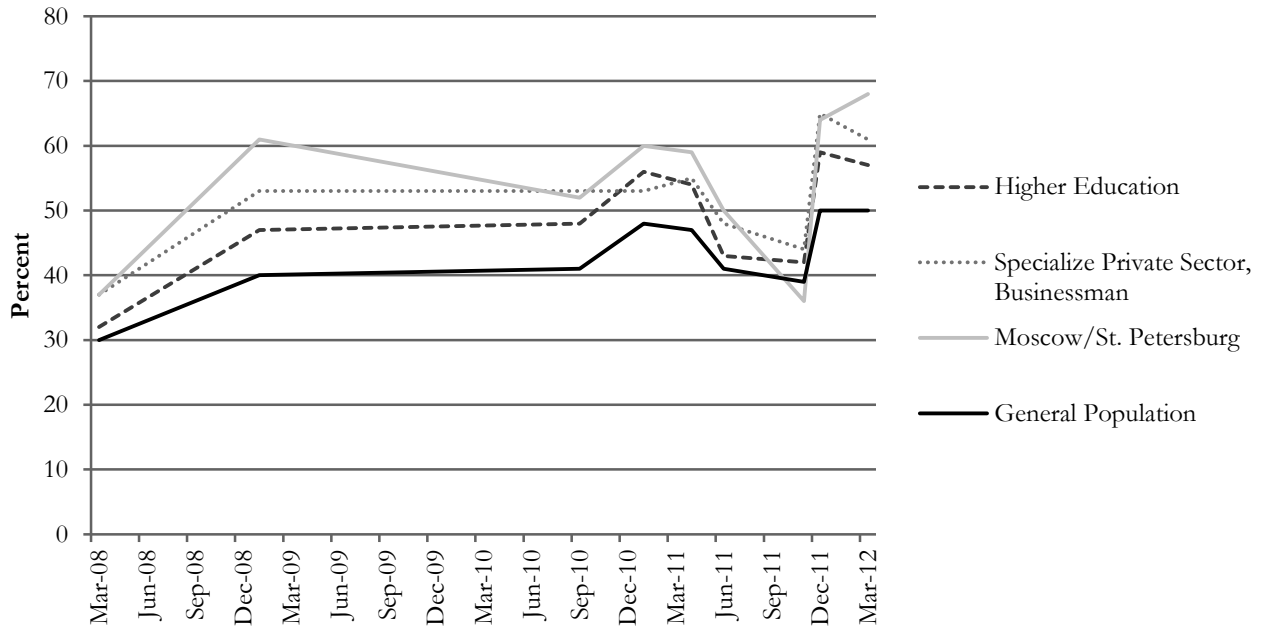
issues as (1) corruption and red tape; (2) influence of oligarchs on the economic and political life; ecology and the environment; and (3) democracy and human rights (figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Simplified Democratic Issues for Respondents with Medium and High Purchasing Power, March 2008-March 2012



For all groups, concern for corruption is significant and increasing. Middle class groups were more likely than the general population to select corruption as a problem. It was of greatest concern to residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg and specialized private sector employees. Though corruption is a highly-rated problem on all surveys, it becomes a much greater concern in December 2011. Before December 2011, concern for corruption was high but relatively constant, with around half of all respondents selecting it as a problem (figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Concerns about corruption



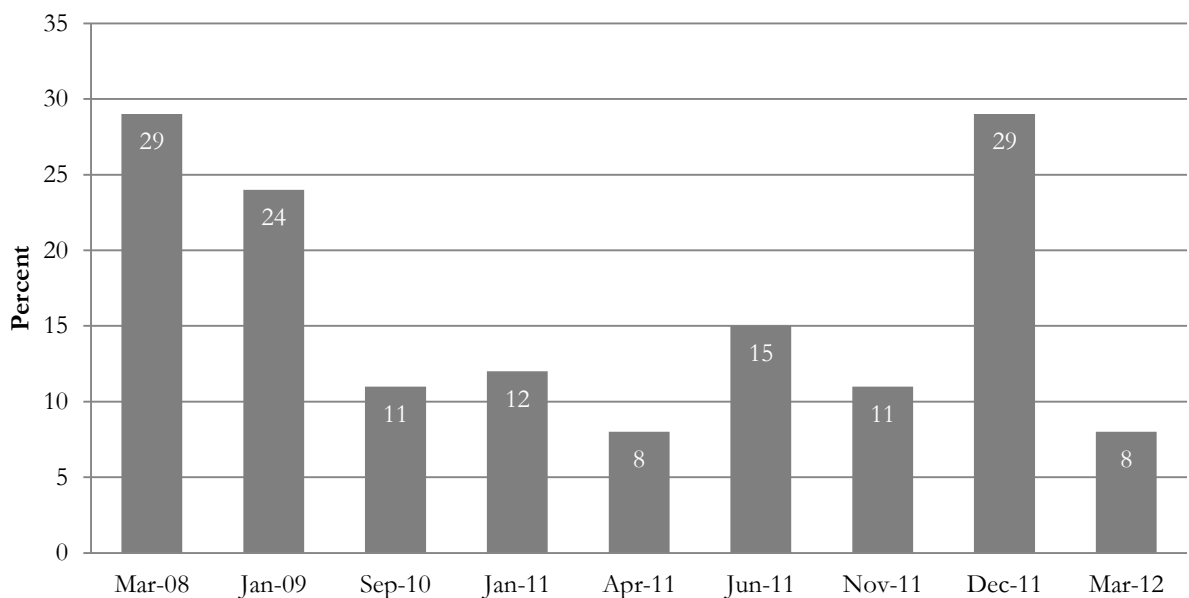
The spike in concern for corruption in December 2011 was not presaged by a rising interest in the issue. Instead, concern for corruption first manifested between the March 2008 and January 2009 rounds of the survey. The May 2008 announcement of Medvedev’s anti-corruption campaign and the programs initiated to mitigate corruption throughout the year are likely responsible for the interest. The announcement of the anti-corruption campaign increased concern in corruption to a similar degree that the Duma elections did; both events led to an increase of approximately 15 percentage points across all groups.

Democracy and human rights was the lowest-rated concern not only of the democratic issues, but was one of the least important of the survey as a whole. Interest in democracy and human rights consistently decreased over the period of the survey for middle class groups and for the population in general. From a peak in March 2008, when

approximately 25 percent of respondents from the middle class groups and 19 percent of the general population were concerned about democracy and human rights, only 7-11 percent of people were typically concerned with this issue by November 2011. Concern was marginally higher for members of the middle class groups as compared with the general population, but not significantly.

For residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, however, the story is slightly different. Concern about democracy and human rights appears linked to the electoral cycle protests. For these respondents, concerns about democracy and human rights reached a low point of 8 percent in April 2011, but then increased to 15 percent by June 2011, to a high point of 29 percent in December 2011, following the fraudulent Duma election (figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: Concerns about democracy and human rights; respondents from Moscow and St. Petersburg



This result suggests that, although democracy and human rights were not an issue of great importance for the general population, there was increasing demand in the capital cities for

democracy.

It also indicates that the priority of democracy and human rights is subject to current events. Though residents of the capital might not view their daily lives in the context of these issues, they are nonetheless able to use them as frameworks for understanding major events, like elections. It would thus seem that the lack of interest in democracy and human rights is not based on a misunderstanding of or unfamiliarity with the terms, but perhaps by the feeling that these concepts are not applicable to every situation or problem with the state.

Despite the surge in interest in democracy and human rights in late 2011, by March 2012 after Putin's victory in the presidential elections, only 8 percent of respondents in Moscow and St. Petersburg selected this issue. This finding implies that concern for democracy and human rights might be linked to a sense of personal political efficacy. Following the Duma elections, protestors called for the invalidation of the election results, and sought to prevent Putin's reelection in March. Both activities might have led to an increase in concern for democracy, but neither aim was successfully achieved. Putin's reelection was perceived as a failure and deep disappointment for the protest movement. The failure to create democratic change appears to have translated to apathy, rather than ongoing concern. If we feel, however, that the importance of democracy and human rights is contingent on a relevant event, this drop-off in interest might be the result of the conclusion of the federal electoral cycle. In other words, if elections lead to an increased interest in democracy, when significant elections are far off, we might expect interest in democracy to decline. We might similarly expect interest to pick up around the next major election, perhaps the upcoming elections for Moscow mayor and city council.

Concern about the influence of oligarchs is slightly higher for the middle class groups than for the general population, and significantly higher for residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg. All groups became more concerned about this issue in the November 2011 survey, exhibiting a 6-14 percentage point increase between June 2011 and November 2011, while concern among the general population in this period increased only 4 percentage points, from 19 percent to 23 percent. That effect was again strongest in Moscow and St. Petersburg, where concern increased from 24 percent to 38 percent. This increase may have been a response to the announcement that Putin would run for president rather than Medvedev, which implied at least backroom dealing, if not the influence of oligarchs. It also coincided with oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov's public announcement in September 2011 that he would depart from the Pravoie Delo political party, a satellite party of power in which he had been a prominent figure. In doing so, he publicly called the party a "farce" controlled by "puppet master" from the Kremlin, Vladislav Surkov (*New York Times*, Sept. 15 2011). These two episodes likely highlighted the role of informal power in Russia's political system.

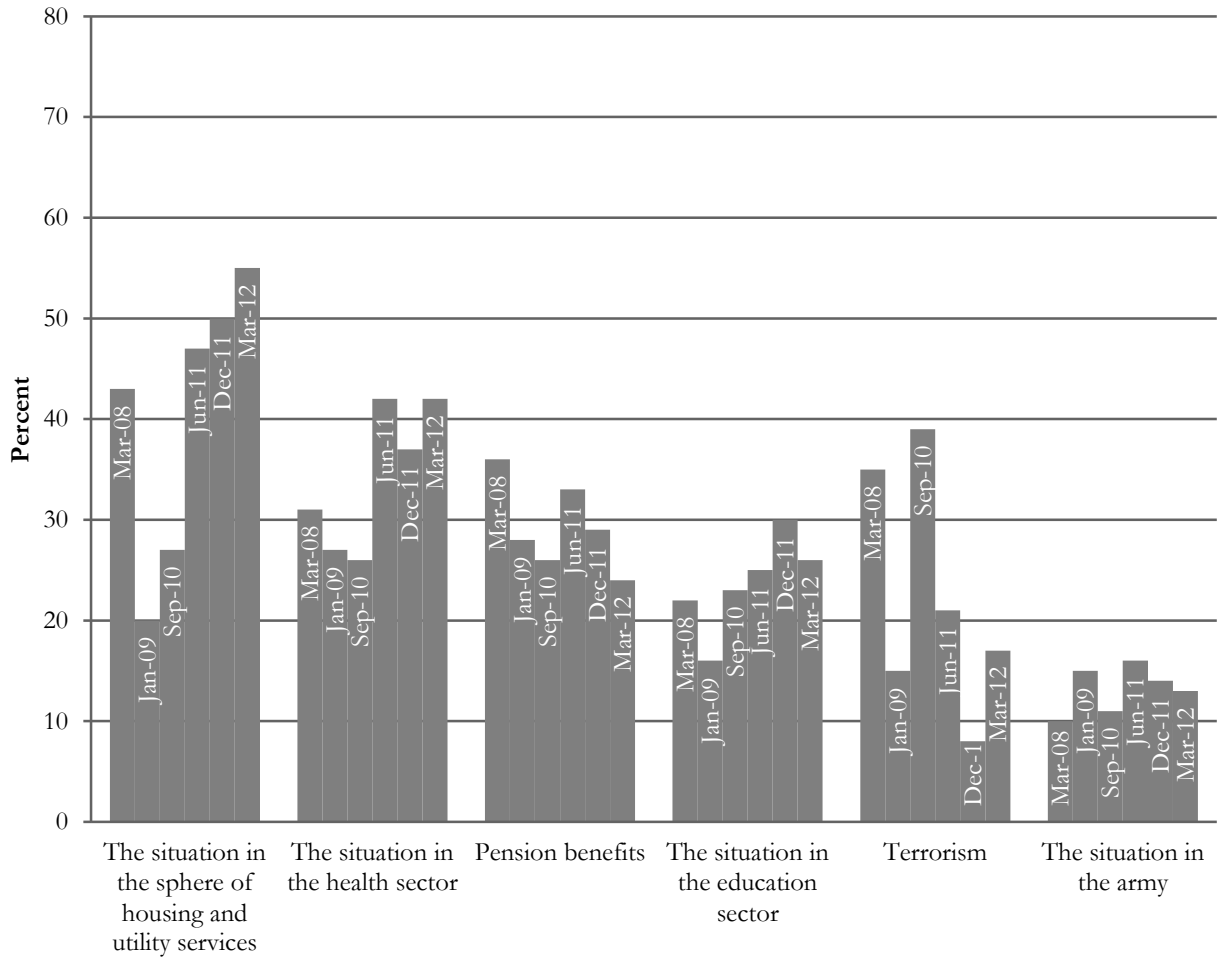
Concerns about ecology and the environment peaked in March 2008 and reached a low point in January 2009, suggesting that the financial crisis led people to temporarily abandon non-essential interests or activities. Consistent with expectations, interest in ecology and the environment among the middle class groups is slightly, though not significantly, higher than that of the general population.

VI. State Efficacy

Of issues related to state efficacy, results were again roughly the same across middle

class groups, with slight variations in responses from residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the general population. Middle class groups, except residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, felt the most important issues were (1) the situation in the sphere of housing and utility services; (2) the situation in the health sector; (3) the situation in the education sector; pension benefits; (4) terrorism; and (5) the situation in the army (figure 3.6).

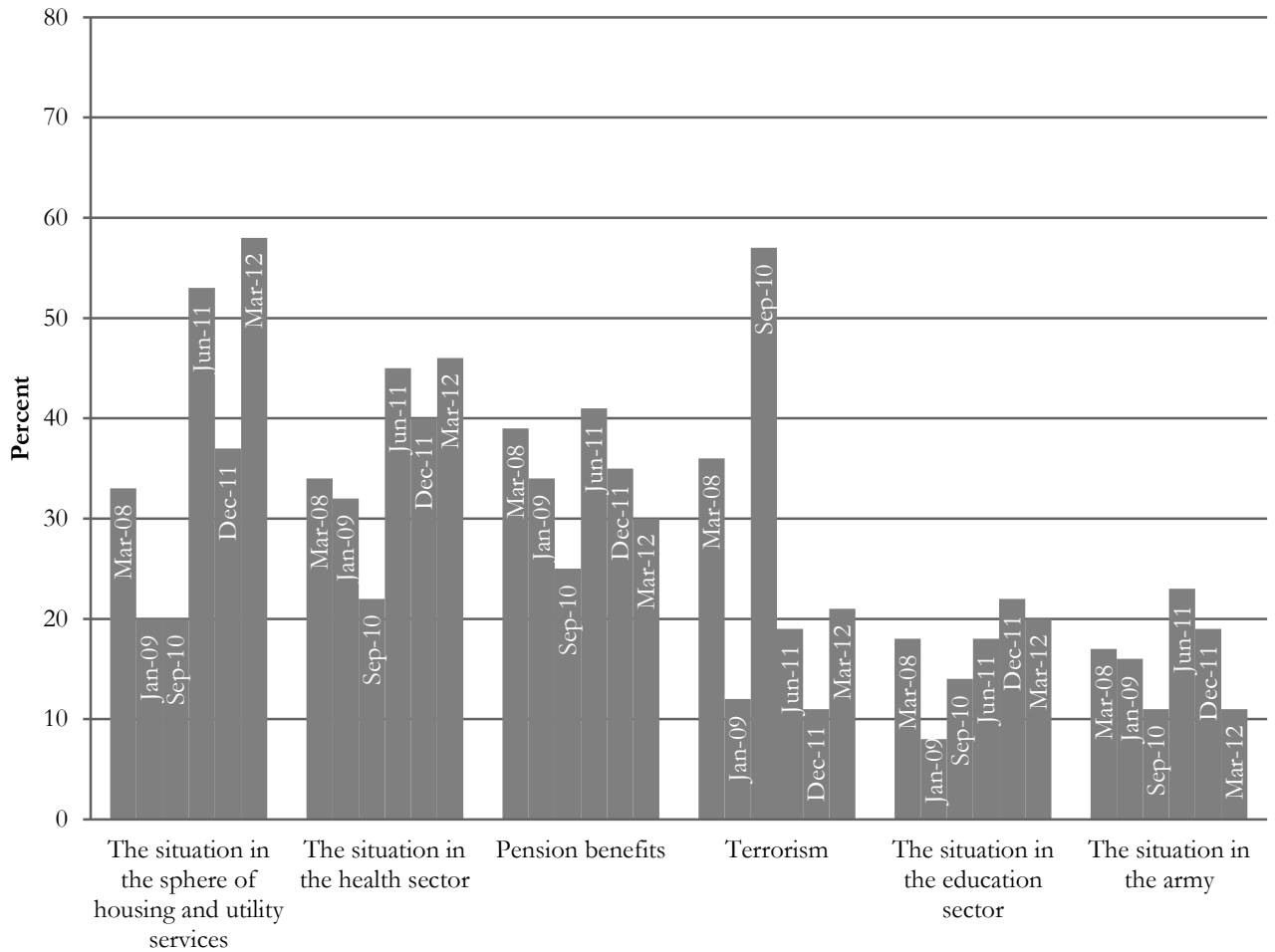
Figure 3.6: Simplified State Efficacy Issues for Respondents with Higher Education, March 2008-March 2012



Residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg and the general population felt terrorism was a

bigger concern than education (figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Simplified State Efficacy Issues for Residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, March 2008-March 2012



Despite some variation, several common trends are apparent here. Three main issues—education, healthcare and housing and utilities—were consistently of increasing concern for middle class groups as well as the general population over this time period. The prominence of these issues may be linked with a greater concern for the provision or poor quality of state services. Alternately, it could reflect a concern with the costs of these services, or the perceived value, if the quality is low or decreasing while the cost is high or

increasing; this explanation might best apply to housing and utilities. By far the biggest issue in state efficacy—as well as one of the most significant in the survey as a whole—was the situation with housing and utilities. Beginning in January 2011, all groups and the general population greatly increased their concern about housing and utilities. It went from an issue that about 25 percent of people cared about in September 2010 to an issue for about 50 percent of people in January 2011. It thereafter remained approximately constant.

Concern for the healthcare sector also increased over the period in question, at a similar rate across middle class groups and the general population. Moreover, healthcare was a concern for a nearly identical share of respondents from middle class group by higher education, private sector professionals, and those earning 50,000 rubles per month, and the general population. Respondents from Moscow and St. Petersburg assessed healthcare much more negatively than other groups beginning in April 2011. At that time, all groups increased their negative evaluations of the healthcare sector, but the increase was greatest for residents of the capital cities, for whom concern about healthcare increased by 22 percentage points to 50 percent.

Education exhibited the weakest increase of the three, increasing around ten percentage points for all groups between January 2009 and March 2012. Of all middle class groups and the general population, education was most of concern to respondents with higher education and private sector professionals with higher education, which is in line with expectations. It was of least concern to residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, of all groups.

Worries about terrorism generally decreased over the time period. Middle class groups, except residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, selected terrorism as a problem as

frequently as the general population did. As might be expected, given that terrorism outside of the Caucasus is concentrated in Moscow, residents of the capitals were more concerned about this issue than others. Concern for terrorism seems responsive to terrorist events, rather than perceptions of the state.

The importance of the payment of pensions was fairly volatile for all groups, but there was virtually no net increase or decrease over the period, suggesting that the issue of pensions will continue to be controversial but might be unlikely to cause enduring dissatisfaction.

The army was of low but consistent concern for all groups including the general population, with one notable exception. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, the army became a concern beginning in June 2011, when 23 percent of people selected it as an issue—a 16-percentage point increase over the previous survey.

VII. The Middle Class Compared to the General Population

Across all surveys, responses from the middle class groups as defined by educational level, vocation, purchasing power and income were roughly consistent. Responses from these groups tended to rise and fall in a similar pattern and to a similar degree. This might suggest that a set of coherent attitudes exists within the middle class, but further analysis with more detailed data is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

In fact, the concerns of the middle class groups and the concerns of the general population were not very different. Table 3.2 ranks issues that were of increasing concern between March 2008 and March 2012. The four issues that have become a bigger concern

for the general population—corruption, housing, the standard of living and healthcare—are also the top four issues that are becoming of greater concern for these middle class groups. Essentially, the main problems that concern members of the middle class also concern Russians in general. This result suggests that the division between the middle class and other segments of Russian society may not be so deep, but instead that there are many common causes or criticisms that society in general might make of the state.

Table 3.2: Issues of Increasing Concern among Russians, March 2008-March 2012

General Population	Higher Education	Specialized Private Sector, Businessmen, Entrepreneurs	Afford moderate and high-priced consumer durables	Monthly income of 50,000 rubles or more	Moscow and St. Petersburg
1. Corruption 2. Housing and utilities 3. Standard of Living 4. Healthcare	1. Standard of living 2. Housing and utilities 3. Corruption 4. Healthcare 5. Education 6. Oligarchs	1. Corruption 2. Standard of living 3. Housing and utilities 4. Healthcare 5. Education 6. Oligarchs	1. Corruption 2. Standard of living 3. Housing and utilities 4. Healthcare 5. Education	1. Housing and utilities 2. Standard of living 3. Corruption 4. Healthcare 5. Education	1. Standard of living 2. Corruption 3. Healthcare 4. Housing and utilities 5. Oligarchs 6. Education

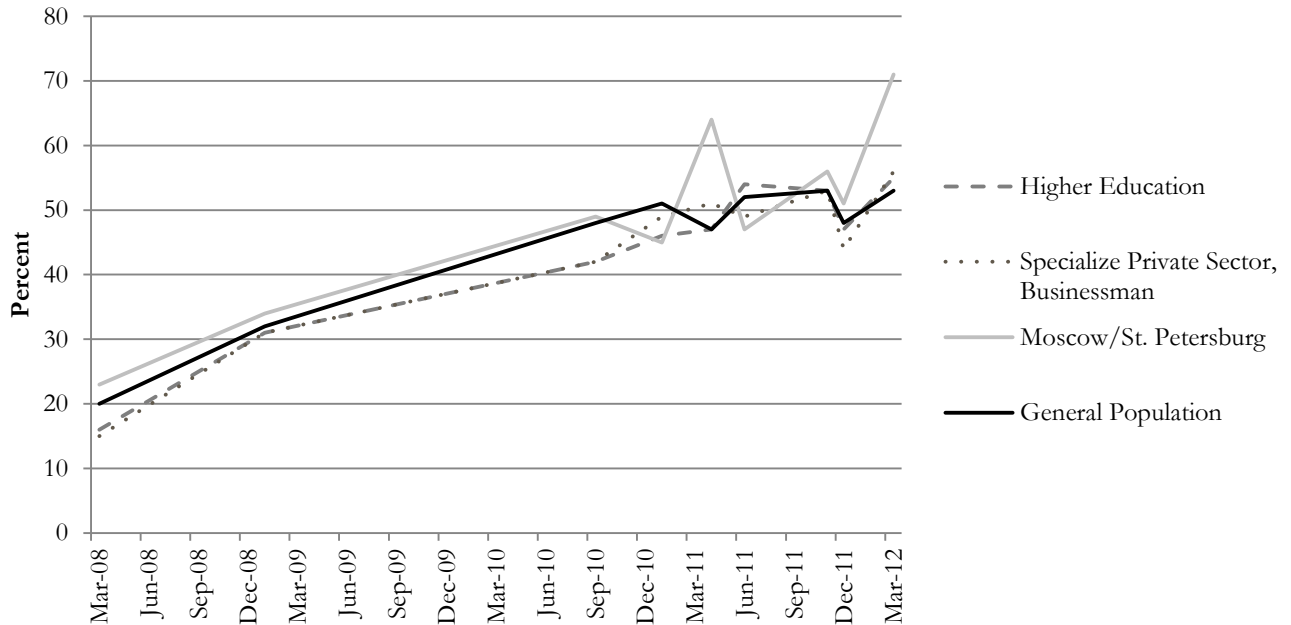
A noteworthy difference here is that members of these middle class groups tend to be more critical than the general population. While the general population only evaluated four problems more negatively over a four-year period, all middle class groups were found five or six issues to be more problematic over the same period. Education and the influence of the oligarchs were increasingly of concern to the middle class groups, but do not register for the general population.

Yet thinking critically about these problems is not only a question of kind, but also of degree. More members of the middle class tended to rate these problems negatively than did the general population. For example, figure 3.4 above compares evaluations of corruption between middle class groups and the general population. Although corruption saw the biggest increase in negative evaluations for the general population, the middle class groups still consistently viewed it as a much more serious problem than did the general population.

VIII. Concerns in the Capitals

Respondents from Moscow and St. Petersburg were generally more critical than members of other middle class groups. A larger percentage of respondents from the capitals tended to identify an issue as a problem for the country, and they were frequently the most negative of the middle class groups. For example, concern for the standard of living of the population significantly increased for all groups including the general population (figure 3.8). Although this issue was of concern to a large segment of respondents, it was typically of higher concern to residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Figure 3.8: Concerns about the standard of living of the population



A similar effect is visible with corruption (figure 3.1). This suggests that residents of the major cities are more likely to identify problems for the country and to be critical of the state than a member of the middle class might be.

Residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg also showed more precipitous increases in concern for several issues over the course of 2011. An example of this is the 20-percentage point increase in concern for the standard of living in April 2011. This trend suggests that residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg might be more reactive to news or current events and are thus better informed than others. Alternatively, they are more networked and more willing to speak to others about their concerns, which could amplify an increase spurred by a news event.

While the concerns of the middle class were generally in line with those of the general population, here I show support for the theory that residents of Moscow and St.

Petersburg hold different attitudes from the general Russian population. This suggests that the experience of living in a major metropolitan capital has a greater impact on one's political views and perception of the state than do indicators of middle class membership, like higher education or higher income. It is therefore possible that residents of major cities might one day play role of constraining government power and advocating for political rights, which is in some theories the purview of a strong middle class. Such a role would make use of the outsize political weight and social capital carried by residents of the capitals, particularly in Moscow.

IX. Middle Class Protest

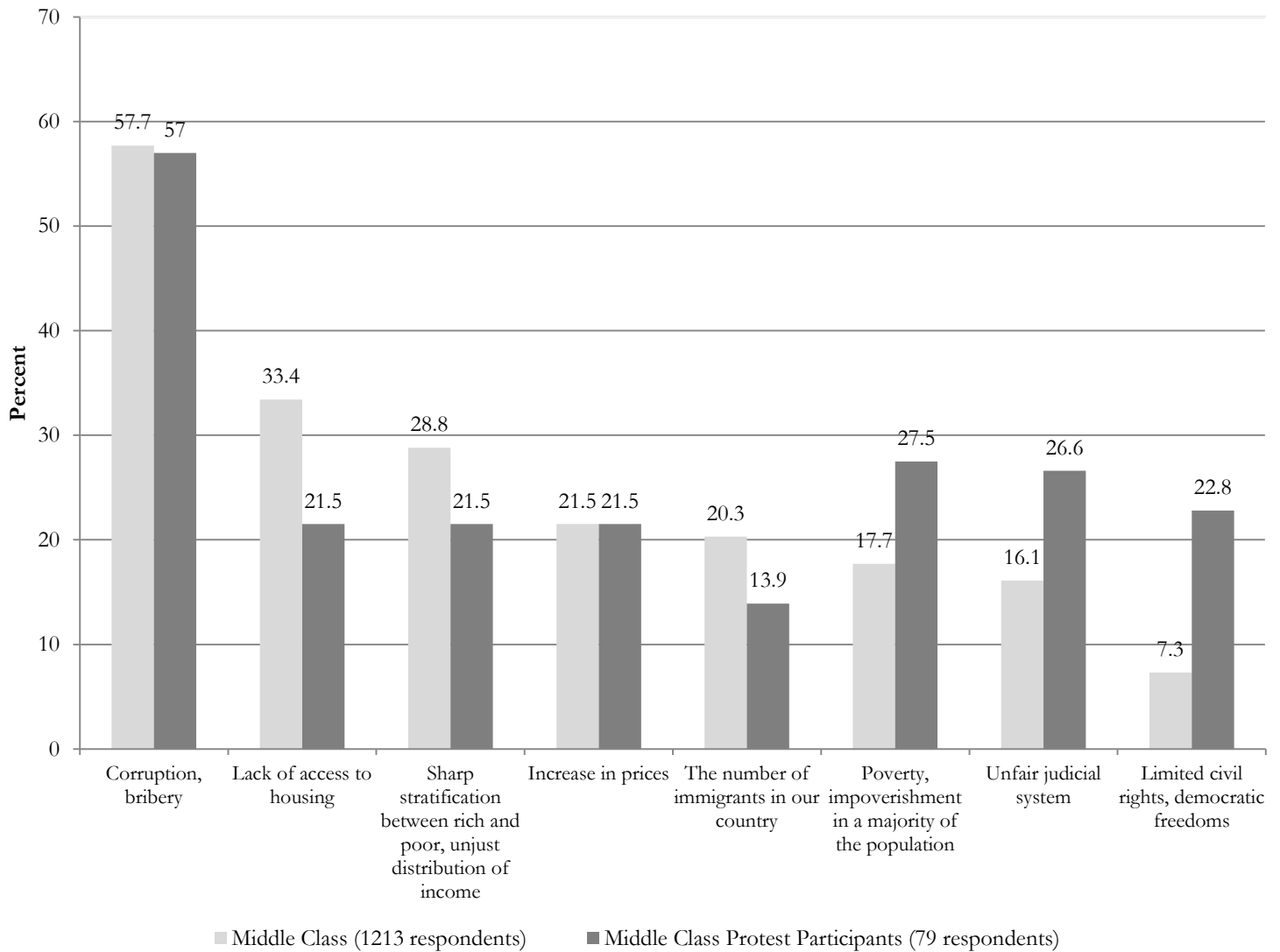
Given the limitations on the data, these surveys can tell us only generally about the concerns of the middle class. They also cannot tell us whether these rising concerns resulted in protest activity, or if other factors were involved. Even as certain concerns were becoming more urgent in Moscow, not everyone who shared those worries participated in the electoral cycle protests of 2011-2012. While those events were larger than earlier protests, they were not particularly large in the when compared to the population of Moscow. Further, these surveys cannot indicate which of these rising concerns might have motivated protest activity at all; for instance, concerns about housing and utilities might not be relevant to participants in demonstrating against election fraud.

Comparing the conclusions drawn from these surveys to an additional data set can shed light on this question. I will do so using a survey conducted online by Graeme Robertson between February 20-March 2, 2012 of 1213 middle class adults. Urban middle

class membership was defined by internet use, at least some higher education, the ability to buy at least some consumer durables, and residence in cities of over 1 million. I will compare results from the WCIOM study to Robertson's responses to the question "Which of the following are the most important problems facing Russia today?". Respondents were able to select up to three issues.

Figure 3.9 presents the top five concerns for the middle class in general, as compared with the top five concerns for middle class protest participants.

Figure 3.9: Five most significant issues, all middle class respondents and middle class protest participants, February-March 2012



Source: Graeme Robertson

Note: For middle class protest participants, three issues tied for the fifth-most significant issue.

Three of these options are roughly consistent with the responses of our middle class groups in the WCIOM data set. Corruption and housing were of significant concern in both surveys. Inflation was also a major issue, but was not increasing in its severity over the

course of the WCIOM surveys and so is not considered here. The stratification between rich and poor and the number of immigrants were not options in the WCIOM surveys.

Economic issues are of concern to both groups. Societal stratification—or inequality—was rated highly by the middle class in general, and was also a top issue for those who attended protests. The importance of this issue makes sense, as the middle class is often framed as the victim of rising inequality; as income poles diverge, the middle class shrinks. This threat, coupled with concern about inflation, suggests that the middle class does not feel economically stable. Corruption, as discussed above, might aggravate this feeling. Unlike the middle class in general, those who attended protests felt that poverty was a more important issue than inequality, though they themselves are not poor. This suggests that, while the middle class in general is concerned with economic issues, those who attended protests view economic issues sociotropically, and are worried about other social groups in addition to their own. While it is unclear if this sentiment predates the protests, the protestors' concern for poverty over their own standard of living underscores again the fragility of the social contract, as it suggests that some people are not satisfied by an increase in their own standard of living, but that prosperity should be shared with everyone. Concerns about corruption and inequality likely resonate with this concern.

The concerns of those who participated in the electoral cycle protests also departed from the middle class as a whole. They were concerned about several of the same issues that the general middle class was, such as corruption, housing and inflation, but protesters also found several democratic issues to be important, specifically the unfair judicial system and limitations on civil rights and democratic freedoms.

It is important to note that concern for the judicial system or for civil and democratic rights was by no means a determinant of protest participation, because these were not the leading issues among participants. We must also ask whether these people held long-standing democratic concerns, or whether attending the protests had impacted their views on democracy. Evidence from the WCIOM data set suggests the latter explanation: concern for democracy and human rights was generally stable and low until the end of 2011, indicating that the protests precipitated a major increase in concern for democracy, particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg. It is thus likely that attending the protests contributed to how these respondents evaluated liberal-democratic problems in Russia.

A look at other available cross tabs using Robertson's data provides additional insight to concerns about the problems of an unfair judicial system and civil and democratic rights. 26 percent of small business owners rated the unfair judicial system as an important problem, one might assume because they regularly encounter it in the course of doing business. This would be a long-standing democratic concern that they face on a regular basis. 26 percent of respondents familiar with GOLOS (a domestic election monitor) also rated the unfair judicial system as an important problem. In this case, we might assume that these respondents are interested in issues of democracy and objected to the unfair judicial system on principle. After participants in the protests, the second largest group that cared about civil and democratic rights was respondents with higher degrees (15.6 percent), which also suggests concern on principle, rather than in response to recent events. The third largest group, again, was respondents familiar with GOLOS (15 percent), which similarly suggests that these people might have had a longer standing awareness and concern for democratic issues. We can thus assume that, while some interest in democratic issues among protest

participants may have been in response to the protests themselves, for others, concern for those issues had been longer-lived.

Chapter IV: Conclusions

This study asks if economic, democratic or state efficacy issues were becoming increasingly problematic for members of the professional middle class in Moscow and St. Petersburg, following the global financial crisis in late 2008 and in the lead-up to the electoral cycle protests beginning in December 2011. It finds that problems pertaining to several of these categories concerned the middle class during the period in question: the standard of living, corruption, housing, healthcare, education, and the influence of oligarchs. I argue two possible explanations for rising concern for these issues. First, these issues might relate to an overall failure to meet middle class expectations of a higher quality of life. Secondly, they might pertain to rising frustration with the interference of corruption in daily life and the state's inability or unwillingness to mitigate corruption. Both explanations suggest that the theorized social contract between the middle class and the state was sundered before the outbreak of protests following the fraudulent Duma elections on December 4, 2011.

Rather than demonstrating a divide between the middle class and the Russian population in general, this study has indicated that the views of these groups are relatively in sync on the major issues named above. The middle class groups in several cases felt more strongly about the issues in question, but on no issue did the responses from the middle class members diverge greatly from the responses of the general population. This result

provides evidence to counter the idea that Russian society is increasingly polarized, and suggests that many basic concerns and values are held in common across the population.

My analysis demonstrated that respondents from Moscow and St. Petersburg felt more strongly about problems in Russia than the general population and than members of the middle class groups. A large share of respondents from these cities typically rated a problem as important. They were also more reactive than other groups, repeatedly displaying a steep increase in concern for a problem over the previous survey round. Particularly, they were concerned by the standard of living and corruption more than any other group. Further, though most survey respondents did not see democracy and human rights as a problem, respondents from Moscow and St. Petersburg displayed increased interest in these issues around the election protests. This suggests that they use these ideas as a framework to understand events in instances where they might directly impact the state, but not as general mode of relating to the state.

A similar survey of middle class residents of major cities who participated in protests indicated that corruption, poverty, an unfair judicial system and limited civil rights and democratic freedoms were their most salient concerns. On the whole, members of the middle class responding to this survey selected corruption, lack of access to housing and the sharp stratification between the rich and poor as their major issues.

These results comprise a picture of a social stratum that is disturbed by rising inequality. This includes economic inequality (the standard of living, poverty and stratification), inequality of power or privilege (corruption, the influence of oligarchs and the unfair judicial system), and inequality of service provision (housing and utilities, healthcare, education). Only in certain contexts is the concern for inequality applied to uneven political

rights, yet this, it seems, is what spurred the electoral cycle protests of 2011-2012. In interviews conducted by the author, the organizers of these protests repeatedly expressed anger, shame and sense of insult that although Russia is a democracy, those who truly hold the power decided the Duma and Presidential elections behind the scenes. Their votes, the fraud revealed, counted for nothing. The idea that their votes should all be counted equally, and that they as a group should have some political power, was a motivating idea for the protests. The greater landscape of pervasive and ever-more troubling inequality helps to explain why that political concern became relevant when it did, and why it brought so many people out onto the streets to advocate for their democratic rights.

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