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BRINGING OTHERS INTO LINE:
DISCOURSE ON THE ROLES WITHIN THE RUSSIAN OPPOSITION - A REGIONAL GLANCE

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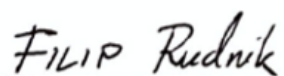**Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public**

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Abstract

The theoretical scholarship differentiating between various types of opposition entities, coined originally in the West, was successfully applied to the Russian political habitat. Known mostly as the 'non-/systemic opposition' cleavage, the given categorization is being employed by both punditry and academia.

This research aims to add the practical perspective on the subject. Although the differentiation is solidly present within the political discourse, it remains not clear how the engaged actors – politicians, activists, scientists – make sense of it. The thesis analyses 14 in-depth interviews with public figures from Nizhny Novgorod, Russia. The non-/systemic categorization in given study is perceived through the post-structuralist lens as the cleavage operates within the political discourse and it is exercised as a political tool. By analysing the way in which the discourse is operated, the goal of the research is not only to define what constitutes the categories but also on the means of political fight connected to it. The cleavage is perceived as a tool to include/exclude, a source of identity and therefore a point of potential resistance.

Among the pre-existing variables driving the categorization, the study finds that within the Russian depoliticized habitat factors such as ideology, perception on the past and employed political tools do not determine the political player's place on the discussed matrix. The thesis reveals that the uniting factor for all the non-systemic forces lays in the approach towards the existing system. Additionally, due to the employed post-structuralist theoretical framework, the contribution reveals the political science vocabulary's impact on public life. The findings hopefully indicate usefulness of the discursive analysis of the politicised language as it might answer questions on how the political challengers try to exercise their limited power within a skewed political field.

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(1) Introduction

The period between December 2011-July 2013 – named *Bolotnaya Revolyutsiya* or the 'Snow Revolution' in English-speaking world – saw a tidal wave of protests that swept across Russian capital and other regional cities. Russian citizens, mostly in big cities, went to the streets to manifest their dissent with electoral frauds and Putin's return on the presidential post. Although these rallies were far from being the first massive demonstration in the Post-Soviet Russia, they were predominantly focused on political demands, what stood in a sharp contrast with economic-based manifestations that were organised before.[1] The Snow Revolution was proclaimed to be a trigger for political awakening of young, socially-aware urbanites for whom the Putin-built regime lost its legitimacy.[2] That social group, concerned with issues of corruption and civil liberties, was positioned in opposition to economically-oriented ordinary folk of peripheral Russia. Whereas the given cleavage simplifies the issue, it was '*deep and here to stay*'.[3]

This first robust internal challenge was countered by the authorities with a plethora of countermeasures that eventually terminated the legitimacy crisis. To disfranchise the 'angry urbanites', the Kremlin resorted to a strategy with an aim to '*co-opt, intimidate, and disable*' the opposition. The last method manifested itself within the realm of discourse, when the state-aligned media portrayed the protests as inspired and instigated by foreign powers, reinforcing the notion of 'enemy within'. Accordingly, the power centre effectively bolstered social conservative values to keep the 'alien Westerners' at bay.[4] The aforementioned cleavage was actively deepened by the authorities, who labelled the protesters as financed by external forces and aiming at transforming protests into the 'colour revolution'.[5]

Even though the protests were massive in their ranks, they have failed to reach any of the protests' objectives – both short-term such as Putin's resignation and long-term goal of reconstruction of the whole system.[6] One of the cause standing behind the weakening of the opposition is seen in poor relations between the systemic and non-systemic opposition.

[1] G. B. Robertson, 'Russian Protesters: Not Optimistic but Here to Stay', <u>Russian Analytical Digest</u>, 115 (2012), pp. 2–4.
[2] D. Trenin, L. Shevtsova, A. Arbatov, M. Lipman, A. Malashenko, N. Petrov, A. Ryabov, 'The Russian Awakening', (2012), <u>Carnegie Moscow Center</u>, https://carnegie.ru/2012/11/27/russian-awakening-pub-50125, consulted on 22.04.2020.
[3] Robertson, 'Russian Protesters: Not Optimistic but Here to stay'.
[4] D. Triesman, 'Can Putin Keep His Grip on Power?', <u>Current History</u>, Vol. 112, No. 756 (2013), p. 251.
[5] Y. Shishkunova, 'Vladislav Surkov: „Sistema uzhe izmenilas'", <u>Izvestiya</u> (2011) https://iz.ru/news/510564, consulted on 22.04.2020.
[6] D. Trenin, L. Shevtsova, A. Arbatov, M. Lipman, A. Malashenko, N. Petrov, A. Ryabov..

During the rallies, the systemic opposition – containing the non-ruling parties present in the State Duma (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation [KPRF], the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia [LDPR] and Just Russia [SR]) – confronted the perpetual dilemma: how to find a balance between challenging the current authorities and supporting the system in which they are located. Ultimately, the representatives of parliamentary parties reinforced an accusation of triggering the 'colour revolution', widening the divide and discrediting the forces of 'angry urbanites'.[7] Joining the ranks of non-systemic entities – mostly unregistered, marginal and non-parliamentary politicians – was perceived as problematic and harmful. With an exception of some members of the Just Russia, both of the branches of the opposition did not manage to forge any alliance and remained on separate sides. The bottom-line of that divide should be seen in constant blaming each other of faults and flaws, leading to further waning of the anti-regime forces.[8]

Paraphrasing Robertson, since then the cleavage between the non-systemic and systemic opposition is 'deep and here to stay'. The longevity of these categories is particularly visible on the occasion of every major political turbulence. Although the ruling elite successfully capitalized on the Russia's annexation of Crimea what resulted in rocketing of Putin's approval ratings and bolstering patriotic attitude within the society, the further developments might bring back the opposition forces back onto the political scene.[9] Throughout the years, the so-called 'Crimea effect' fades away, overshadowed by economic difficulties addressed by socioeconomic reforms envisioned by Putin in 2018 and 2019 state addresses.[10]

A disagreement with the government-fostered direction in which the country is heading was exemplified by series of massive protests spanning across all Russia. The manifestations demanded: cracking down on state-level corruption (2017-2018), stopping the hike of the national retirement age (2018) and allowing the independent candidates to participate in the Moscow City Duma election (2019). These events once again evoked the existence of the non-/systemic opposition categories as they forced every political force to react – either to join the manifestations or criticize gatherings. Furthermore, the rallies

[7] 'KPRF i LDPR nazvali mitingi na Bolotnoy "oranzhevoy prokazoy"', RBK, (2011) https://www.rbc.ru/politics/14/12/2011/5703f0799a79477633d3b167, consulted on 22.04.2020.

[8] R. Turovsky, 'The Systemic Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes: A Case Study of Russia's Regions', in C. Ross (ed.) Civil Society Awakens? The Systemic and Non-Systemic Opposition in the Russian Federation: National and Regional Dimensions, (L.: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 121–37.

[9] S. A. Greene, G. B. Robertson, Putin v. the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 121-125.

[10] T. Sherlock, 'Russian Society and Foreign Policy: Mass and Elite Orientations After Crimea', Problems of Post-Communism, 67.1 (2020), pp. 1–23.

revealed an interesting dynamic on the side of Russian opposition, when representatives of the parliamentary parties participated in the events organized by activists of hostile political affiliations. In the case of the Moscow City Duma election, the non-systemic branch united with the systemic actors not only on the streets, but also on the electoral ballot.[11]

Nevertheless, these temporal consolidations do not mean that we are about to encounter a reconfiguration of parameters constituting the non-/systemic differentiation. Instead, the aforementioned developments indicate vagueness of the used concept. As it is depicted in the cases of anti-regime rallies of recent time, the parliamentary parties engage themselves in criticism of the regime that expands beyond the scope of 'tolerable' for the authorities. By the same token, some of non-system politicians were elected into municipalities or regional parliaments – therefore, it can be argued that they constitute the system itself. Due to the concept's flexibility, the dichotomy proved to be a serious political tool which helps one player to deprive other's right for participation in politics. Just like the protesters from 2011-2013 rallies were referred to as 'angry urbanites', certain actors might be blamed of being a part of the corrupted system based on their shady interplay with the authorities.

As pointed out by Ivan Bol'shakov, the non-/systemic cleavage remains a variation on different scientific matrices coined in the Western literature, which is simply insufficient to make a clear distinction within the opposition domain.[12] After the protests of 2011-2013, the discursive role of that differentiation started to be prevalent, constructing a frame that overarches a vast array of political forces on Russian political scene. The categories became to be used as a point of reference by which one is able to discredit his/her rival and improve the status of oneself in the same time. Additionally, an accusation of being 'systemic' or 'non-systemic' might be based on the multitude of factors, which are not necessarily reflected in political theory.

Because of the conceptual confusion that emerged around the categorization, it is possible that main indicators created in academic literature have lost their significance 'on the ground'. Embarking on that predication, I propose to research both categories from the perspective of engaged actors, mostly politicians. Therefore, the main research question is the following: which factors condition the distinction between non-system and system opposition from the perspective of involved actors?

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[11] I. Bol'shakov, V. Perevalov, 'Consolidation or Protest? 'Smart Voting' in Moscow Elections', The Journal of Political Theory, Political Philosophy and Sociology of Politics *Politeia*, 96.1 (2020), pp. 50–73.

[12] I. Bol'shakov, 'The Nonsystemic Opposition', Russian Politics & Law, 50.3 (2012), pp. 82–92.

(1.1) Research aim and tasks

To examine the phenomenon of the non-/systemic cleavage, I conduct a single-case study dedicated to the Russian opposition. A motivation to choose that particular country comes from different reasons:

1) A debate on the role and capabilities of the opposition in that country is interwoven with the non-/system distinction. Discussed categorization remains one of the most used descriptors both in academia as in punditry, what indicates its relevance.[13]

2) The gap between established concepts and empirics is prevalent and oversimplifies the issue. Applying one set of pregiven parameters leads to conceptual confusion as it does not necessarily meet the reality, proving the alleged invalidity of aforementioned categories.[14] Thus, embarking on inquiry by basing it on opinions of involved actors – politicians and public figures in Russia – might be crucial in solving that puzzle.

3) A discursive aspect of the non-/systemic differentiation was overlooked in the opposition-focused scholarship. Approaching that theoretical framework with focus on its 'performative' role will shed a new light on concepts and reveal their power dimension behind: how do they leave an imprint on Russian political scene.

4) Recent political developments in Russia, bolstered by the proposal of constitutional amendments in January 2020, creates a new reality which needs to be addressed by engaged opposition forces. The fieldwork conducted in that country will update the existing expertise and might fixate the moments of change.

5) The scholars' focus on federal level – constituted by politicians in Moscow and Saint Petersburg - omits regional developments. The opportunity to research Nizhny Novgorod, a centre regarded as peripheral, fills that gap.

To sum up, coining rigid criteria differentiating between the non-systemic and systemic opposition actors was aimed at ordering various political entities along theoretical lines. In other words, the categorization was ushered into the world of Russian political science and journalism with a quest to 'label' anti-regime forces for the sake of their clarification. However, the embarking point of my inquiry is reversed. As the non-/systemic cleavage is already well-set within the reality, I propose to research this distinction from an internal perspective – namely, how do public figures perceive these ideal categories, what

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[13] Systemic and Non-Systemic Opposition in the Russian Federation: Civil Society Awakens?, C. Ross (ed.), (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015).
[14] Bol'shakov.

constitutes them from their point of view? Fixing the way of how the engaged actors make sense out of it will help the academia to acquire a deeper insight on the habitat of Russian opposition. Additionally, standpoints derived from the fieldwork will validate the factors driving the categorization – it might be the case that some of them, coined in the theory before, are 'out of touch' with reality.

Moreover, tackling the issue with simultaneous focus on the discourse and produced language underlines a peculiar interplay between the non-systemic and systemic opposition as they simultaneously compete and cooperate with each other. To find out more about this reciprocity and where the above-mentioned borderline lays, the task will contain construction and measurement of key aspects for placing various political entities along the cleavage. That angle will shed a light on the discourse, treating it as a formative point of reference for politically involved Russians. In this case, a significance of that research goes beyond the context of Russian Federation since it reveals the mechanism of shaping the reality by certain set of labels which has to be addressed by political forces – either by reinforcing or rejecting them.

(1.2) Research questions

The main question I raise in that research is:

Which factors are conditioning the distinction between the non-system and system opposition from the perspective of involved actors?

In order to grasp the dynamics behind the categorization I examine also several sub-questions:

1) Do the main indicators created by theory – i.e. ideological dimension or employed strategy – determine to which category an actor belongs? If yes, then which of the indicators are decisive?

2) Is there any factor which is not present within the theory but appears as crucial from empirical point of view?

3) To what extent are the categories of non-/systemic opposition incorporated in the politically involved actors' activity and their self-images? Does the cleavage influence political engagement by creating a certain reality framed by the discourse?

4) Do the political developments impact the non-/systemic differentiation? In other words, how politically involved actors react to new challenges, do they shift their position on the non-/systemic cleavage?

(1.3) Outline of the thesis

Prior to answering the aforementioned questions, I provide a reader with the theoretical part outlined in Chapter 2. Firstly, I present an existing literature on theoretical frameworks differentiating between the opposition actors with their empirical difficulties. Focused on emerging intricacies while applying the theory to empirics, I propose to interpret the discussed cleavage through the postmodern understanding of discourse. The unit finishes with the concept of 'depoliticization' which turned out to be crucial if one seeks to analyse the Russian opposition scene.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology employed in that research. It presents the main data sources and methods of gathering information with the details regarding study population and questionnaire construction. Then it briefly introduces the Thematic Analysis as a way of used method of data analysis. The chapter concludes with the research limitations that emerged in the course of studying the subject.

Before the thesis starts its analysis part, a short Chapter 4 with a contextual background of the fieldwork location – Nizhny Novgorod – is presented. An urgency of putting that within my dissertation appeared during the period of data collection as Nizhny's local peculiarities would be treated as one of the factors influencing the discussed non-/systemic differentiation.

Finally, Chapter 5 aims to analyse and present the collected data. It is divided into several sections, which were created along predefined independent variables: a fostered ideology (**IV1**), a standpoint on the authority (**IV2**), a means of political activity (**IV3**) and a perception of the past (**IV4**). After discussing every single of them, subchapters are concluded with a brief interpretation of the variables' impact on the dependent variable, which constitutes the object of inquiry – the level of 'systemness'; position on the non-systemic/systemic matrix (**DV**).

Ultimately, I sum up by confronting the theoretical framework and the analysis and provide an answer to the research questions. Moreover, I propose directions in which the further discussion should be moving in order to push the scholarship forward.

(2) Theoretical framework

Possible changes within any regime can be initiated by the action of certain actors. Of the variety of possible rhetoric, opposition politicians often base their political agenda on prospective systemic transformation. They foster postulates which vary in degree, presented as a complete renewal or mere technical reconfiguration. Additionally, the strategies of concrete opposition actors might be also different – starting from a change from within, through democratic bargaining with the power centre, ending on tactics which seek support on the street without the authorities' permission. In fact, the theory on the opposition as a political phenomenon provides us with numerous variations on the way how to categorize political entities based on a plenitude of constituting variables.

Hence, in this chapter I present a theoretical background of my thesis which will serve me as a metaphorical scaffolding when analysing the collected data. The order is following – first, I discuss the two main Western frameworks dividing the opposition into certain groups (coined by Juan Linz and Giovanni Sartori). Then I deliberate on the inevitable inconsistencies that arise when one applies the aforementioned matrices to Russian context. In order to solve these deviations, Russian punditry and political science also came up with an updated version of categorizations which I also briefly present. However, due to the gap between the theory and empirics, I propose a different perception of the aforementioned categories. This approach, constructed on works of post-structuralist thinkers dedicated to power-knowledge relations and 'normalizing' role of discourse, enables a researcher to grasp the idea of scientific frameworks as subjectifying and identity-constructing. Eventually, forced by my empirical findings, I introduce another theoretical and binary concept - 'de-/politicization', which finds its particular usefulness in analysing the collected data and links the discursive dimension of my research. An examination of that scaffolding allowed me to construct a preliminary research puzzle in a graphic form, where I outline the variables I intended to research during the data collection (Figure 1.0 in Annexes section).

(2.1) Western matrices discerning between the opposition actors

The vocabulary of comparative politics came up with classifications in order to differentiate between various opposition parties and/or groups to facilitate an analysis of party systems in scholarship on democratization. Two of them divided the opposition players

into following categories: 1) disloyal, semi-loyal and loyal[15], 2) system and anti-system opposition.[16] Despite the fact that these matrices employ different prefixes, they do underline the common features of analysed political parties. To start with, both of the categorizations emphasis the specific nature of the party with the centre. The latter should be understood as a system, government or regime. The particular link which connects a challenger to the incumbent remains a quality under the inquiry – the nature of approaching the centre is the factor which leads us to analytical conclusions and defines the category of an actor.

Under the lens of the first paradigm provided by Juan Linz, the 'disloyal opposition' encompasses political forces '*that question(s) the existence of the regime and aim at changing it*'.[17] That particular entity is defined along the lines of its approach towards the current ruling system and describes the regime as invalid and illegitimate. In order to change the regime, that opposition actor might exploit a variety of means, stretching from political violence to peaceful electoral participation. On the contrary, features assigned to the 'loyal' opposition are participation in the lawful political process, a rejection of violence, and a public commitment to the achievement of power only by electoral means.[18] That framework also provides an in-between entity, called 'semi-loyal opposition', which can be crucial in the systemic tug-of-war. Linz argues that 'semi-loyal opposition' is indicated by '*a willingness to encourage, tolerate, cover up, treat leniently, excuse, or justify the actions of other participants that go beyond the limits of peaceful, legitimate patterns of politics in a democracy.*'[19]

Interestingly, Linz notes that his framework can be based upon non-democratic regimes, which leads to a certain revaluation of opposition actors' behaviour. In democracy, both disloyal and semi-loyal groupings are located on the borderline of the political spectrum, drawing support from limited social groups, and thus they are able to increase their ranks only during crisis situations. An autocratic regime, however, changes the picture substantially. Through a manifested urge to transform a political system, a disloyal opposition might adhere to an alternative ideology – potentially extremes such as fascism or communism, but also a democratic one. Thus, the proponents of democracy might find

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[15] J. J. Linz, A. C. Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 72.

[16] G. Sartori, P. Mair, Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis, (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2005), pp. 117-120.

[17] J. J. Linz, *Crisis,* Breakdown & Reequilibration, The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 27.,

[18] Linz, pp. 36-37.

[19] Linz, p. 32.

themselves on the fringes of the political spectrum. Linz underlines that in the situation of a systemic legitimacy crisis which erodes autocratic stability, semi-loyal and disloyal groups tend to present themselves as defenders of democracy, claiming that they're loyal to other concepts, which should be a situated above the regime – e.g., 'the will of the people', 'the country', 'the community', etc.

A less nuanced but also helpful classification comes from the seminal analysis of party systems by Giovanni Sartori. As in Linz's approach, the defining feature of any political entity is also based on its perception of the regime. Sartori's frame is based on the notion of 'systemness', leading to the binary categories of anti- and system party. In his works, the Italian researcher provides us with two definitions of an 'anti-system' party. The first one, named as 'broad', encompasses all political actors who share the same common political core, which is defined as an attempt to delegitimize the current regime. The specific strategies employed in their endeavours against the regime do not matter – they might stretch from a principal refusal of participation in politics to active street protest or electoral competition. What is crucial in identifying the opposition as anti-system is a mere negative perception of the ruling centre, which forces them to undermine the power of the regime. Sartori also notes the possible distinction between the anti-system party leadership and its supporters. While the former might be isolated and positioned as social outcasts within the political discourse, their sympathizers could be active voters and protesters. The motifs behind the political engagement of both groups – leaders and supporters – can also differ: '...*the party leadership can be ideologically motivated, whereas the rank and file may simply lack bread.*'[20] The source, however, for the anti-system attitude stays the same – both for temporal, one-case protest groups and for long-lasting parties fostering the agenda of rigid ideology (e.g., fascists).

Sartori breaks down the broader definition into a narrower one, to a certain 'core' of anti-systemness – its willingness not to change the government itself, but to change the very essence of government, the rules of its governance: '*its opposition is not an "opposition on issues" (so little so that it can afford to bargain on issues) but an "opposition of principle"*'.[21] That definition introduces a crucial element of the anti-system party in a narrow sense: a belief structure which does not fit into the existing political order - an 'extraneous ideology', which locates its proponents far away from the regime's mainstream. This feature characterizes parties which operate 'outside the system', such as revolutionary parties,

[20] Sartori, Mair, p. 117.
[21] Sartori, Mair, p. 118.

although an anti-system party may participate in the system politics as well. To illustrate that case, Sartori brings up the example of major Communist parties in western Europe during the Cold War period. [22] However, Sartori's framework focuses on the objective content of the party's ideology, without taking into account the system itself. Therefore, as Giovanni Capoccia notes, an 'anti-system party' was perceived as a threat to democracy, while Sartori's lens, as mentioned earlier, was predominantly used in the reality of Western democratic systems.[23]

Once researchers started to apply non-/system opposition classification to non-democratic regimes, the suitability of it turns out to be quite limited. As seen in analyses of political developments in Central-Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the institutional flux triggered by the wave of democratization made the categories of pro-regime and opposition forces highly unclear. In the period of unstable clash between post-communists and former anti-communist opposition, defining which of these group contend with the system remained vague, never mind the question of what the 'system' really consisted of.[24] The problematic issue of defining system and opposition is not confined by European borders, the scholarship has come across similar difficulties when applying these frameworks to parts of Africa. Examining countries ruled by neopatrimonial leaders in the 1990s, all of the parties that had been advocating democracy should be considered as anti-system parties once they carried an extraneous ideology. Moreover, in non-democratic framework the playing field for both government and opposition is significantly different from democratic one – and so are the preconditions for a party's functioning. In neopatrimonial regimes, despite its actual geographical location, the authorities' continuous ability to mobilise violent means without limit to suppress political opponents makes the use of force not anti-systemic, but rather an integral part of the system. Therefore, it can be suggested that violent resorts used by opposition do not go beyond the rules of the system.[25]

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[22] Sartori, Mair, p. 118.

[23] G. Capoccia, 'Anti-System Parties: A Conceptual Reassessment', Journal of Theoretical Politics, 14.1 (2002), p. 10, pp. 9–35.

[24] P. G. Lewis, 'The Repositioning of Opposition in East-Central Europe', *Government and Opposition*, 32.4 (1997), pp. 614–30.

[25] A. Mehler, 'Political Parties and Violence in Africa: Systematic Reflections Against Empirical Background.' in M. Basedau, G. Erdmann, A. Mehler (Eds.), Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Sub-Saharan Africa (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007): 194-223.'

(2.2) Troublesome application of matrices within Russian context

Applying both frameworks – Linz's and Sartori's – in the current Russian context might be found perplexing. Once we adopt one of these ideal classifications, certain players can be placed in-between, leaving us with a gap between theory and empirics; parties can explicitly reject the current political regime, yet simultaneously accessing some extent of its power on a sub-national level. By this practical engagement, an anti-system organization legitimizes the whole system, what can be seen as incongruence. Moreover, concrete political actors can switch their status accordingly to the exercised strategy. Finally, the Russian authorities' repressive policies implemented towards their challengers – called the 'politics of fear' by Vladimir Gel'man[26] – significantly impact the oppositional habitus, making it less similar to its equivalent within the Western framework of liberal democracy.

The scholarship and punditry on the Russian opposition created its own categories, which resemble the aforementioned lenses and divide the Kremlin's opponents into two groups – non-systemic and systemic actors. Because of the binary nature of the Russian classification, this matrix echoes Sartori's more than Linz's. Non-/systemic opposition difference stresses out a relation to the system – therefore, according to the Russian concept, a non-systemic opposition falls in line with Sartori's definition of the anti-system opposition. However, the specificity of the Russian context also focuses on some other features. Within the discourse, there are two ways of fixing the gap between opposition parties.

The first classification is based on two aspects: 1) a formal one, which means the official registration as a political party and its presence in the systemic structures, such as the State Duma, 2) an informal one based on contacts with the ruling group. By the same token, non-systemic parties, excluded from the political order by virtue of non-registration and a lack of communication channels with the power centre, are forced to conduct their activities on the basis of unconventional methods of political struggle.[27] The formal 'entrance' to the ruling mainstream ticks all the boxes of Sartori's system/anti-system classification – once the party allocates itself a position within the power structure, it is forced to play by the rules set by the authorities and do not foster the agenda of transforming the whole regime. The systemic actor in the Russian context, placed in the system, cannot really foster an 'extraneous ideology', simply because of its need to act along the lines of the power centre.

[26] V. Gel'man, 'The Politics of Fear: How the Russian Regime Confronts Its Opponents', Russian Politics & Law, 53.5–6 (2015), pp. 6–26.
[27] Bol'shakov.

Therefore, Sartori's 'narrow' definition of the 'anti-system' party based on the ideological principles should be treated as similar to the 'non-systemic' party from Russian discourse.

Another basis for differentiating between Russian systemic and non-systemic opposition was provided by Russian scholar Vladimir Gel'man, who sees it in self-positioning by certain forces. The agenda of non-systemic opposition must include an aim to transform, or at least fundamentally renew the system, whereas systemic actors might compete with the incumbent party in some spheres but, for various reasons, do not seek to dismantle the grounds of regime.[28] That classification found itself particularly useful among journalistic contributions circulating after 2011-12 Moscow protests, when pundits forecasted a substantial reform of the political discourse. Systemic part of the opposition has been labelled as 'compromisers' (*soglasheteli)*, while non-systemic as 'irreconcilable' (*nieprimirmyie*).[29]

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, theoretical frameworks constructed to analyse the Western democracies might be of limited effectiveness outside of their original research geographies. Once outside its original environment, the apparatus blurs the picture. If we consider a non-systemic opposition (irreconcilable and stripped out of possible links with the power centre) as an equivalent of the Sartori's anti-system party, it presupposes the ideological distance of that entity towards the current regime. To confront the authorities ideologically, a challenger needs a clear perception of hostile values – whereas in Russia the reality is far from it. An overarching ideology of Putin's regime is still a matter of scientific debate. Its complexity was plainly manifested in the intellectual discussion on the impact of Ivan Ilyin's philosophical thought on the Russian president's beliefs.[30] While Putin's inner circle is certainly exposed to certain paradigms - symbolised by the exaggerated role of Dugin's eurasianism or Ilyin's ambiguous far-right ideas - a mere focus on their influence is far from sufficient. The ideology of *Putinism* – first coined as a derogatory term in the West, recently acclaimed as an innovative 'global political lifehack' by Vladislav Surkov[31] - should be highlighted as 'a force of its own', with an ability to cherry-pick the contradicting

[28] V. Gel'man, 'Trudnoye Vozrozhdeniye Rossiyskoy Oppozitsii', <u>Pro et Contra</u>, No. 1—2, 2014, pp. 106—123.
[29] I. Tyutrin, A. Luk'yanov, 'Oppozitsiya: novaya sistema koordinat - Solidarnost', (2012) https://www.rusolidarnost.ru/novosti-glavnoe-2012-02-24-oppozitsiya-novaya-sistema-koordinat, consulted on 12.02.2020.
[30] M. Laruelle, 'In Search of Putin's Philosopher', <u>RIDDLE, (2018),</u> https://www.ridl.io/en/in-search-of-putins-philosopher, consulted on 01.03.2020.
[31] 'Putinizm kak politicheskiy layfkhak', <u>Aktual'nyie kommentarii</u>, (2019), http://actualcomment.ru/putinizm-kak-politicheskiy-layfkhak-1910141011.html, consulted on 01.03.2020].

references whenever it finds it useful to do.[32] It is necessary to assert that, however incongruent and unstable the current Russian state's vision of values may seem, it is still exercised as an ideology, embraced by the political elite and Russian society to some extent. Its fluid nature is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the lack of a rigid system might not be seen as convincing from an intellectual point of view. Nevertheless, the flexibility stemming from its incoherence makes an attempt to ideologically challenge it – be it from the right-wing or left-wing sides of the spectrum – significantly harder. At the same time, researchers of the Russian political elite underline various ideological streams along with the confronting groupings within the Kremlin.[33] The heterogeneity of the elite – containing Putin's team, so-called 'liberals' and different branches of *siloviki* to name the most well-known ones – creates a hard-to-define mix.

Along with the unclear ideological parameters of the authorities, the situation becomes even more complicated when we shed a light on the Russian opposition. All the requirements of Sartori's 'anti-system opposition' – a real ideological distance between the system and a political challenger – are met by the successor of Eduard Limonov's National-Bolshevik Party, an unregistered party called The Other Russia. When we look at the so-called liberal stream of the Russian opposition, the cleavage between the anti-system and system parties becomes more obscure. The leading and most recognized party with affiliation to liberals at the dawn of Post-Soviet Russia, Yabloko, due to its engagement with the system in the late 1990s and a lack of clear opposition to the autocratic tendencies of late Yeltsin and early Putin era, is still placed somewhere in-between the opposition matrix.[34] Past links with the system concern other parts of liberal bloc, and diminish their credibility when it comes to ideological purity.[35] The label of a vague political entity – neither fish nor fowl – might be a serious burden for certain political parties if one is interested in positioning itself as a principled challenger of the system.

Just as for the non-systemic opposition, the systemic element is also far away from fulfilling the requirements raised by both Sartori's framework and Russian non-/systemic discourse once we put engaged actors under examination. For instance, the Communist Party of Russian Federation (KPRF), deriving its direct roots from the Communist Party of Soviet

[32] K. C. Langdon, V. Tismaneanu, <u>Putin's Totalitarian Democracy: Ideology, Myth, and Violence in the Twenty-First Century</u>, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), p. 94.

[33] M. Zygar', <u>Vsya Kremlevskaya Rat': Kratkaya Istoriya Sovremennoy Rossii,</u> (Moskva: Intellektualnaya Literatura, 2016).

[34] H. Hale, 'Yabloko and the Challenge of Building a Liberal Party in Russia', <u>Europe-Asia Studies,</u> 56.7 (2004), pp. 993–1020.

[35] Bol'shakov.

Union, competes with the current system in a meaningful way from an ideological point of view. By fostering the socialistic agenda and ushering postulates embedded within the Marxist theory, contemporary Russian communists might be easily located as ideologically distant to the system. On the other hand, KPRF is widely perceived as a core pillar of the systemic opposition bloc. As a part of the permanent parliamentary opposition, the field of possible criticism of the authorities is significantly skewed, which forces communists and other parties in the State Duma to compromise with the power centre.[36] However, contemporary political science has proved that positioning the systemic opposition towards the system is more ambiguous; in the past, KPRF several times joined ranks with non-systemic opposition forces as a sign of a desire to retain core supporters and present themselves as genuine competition for the authorities.[37]

[36] G.V. Golosov, 'Russian Opposition: Inside or Outside the System?', OpenDemocracy, (2011), https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russian-opposition-inside-or-outside-system, consulted on 12.02.2020.
[37] D. Armstrong, O.J. Reuter, G.B. Robertson, 'Getting the Opposition Together: Protest Coordination in Authoritarian Regimes', Post-Soviet Affairs, 36.1 (2020), pp. 1–19.

(2.3) Discursive aspect of the non-/systemic opposition cleavage

Although aware of the aforementioned incongruencies deriving from the complexity of reality and specificity of the Russian political scene, we cannot simply assert the futility of the theoretical classifications. It can be argued that Sartori's framework – although somewhat reconfigured and with the local 'flavour' added – has successfully settled within the Russian political, both scientific and journalistic, discourse. Once the binary differentiation between systemic and non-systemic opposition is being pronounced by scholars, pundits or politicians, the abstract and scientific matrix starts to leave an effect on reality. Politically engaged actors find themselves confronted by imposed terminology, which forces them to react, thus leading to the reproduction of the discourse and its vocabulary. Hence, a certain reality is being produced, setting particular power-relations in the meantime. To analyse that, it would be helpful to employ the theories of postmodern thinkers, namely Michael Foucault and Judith Butler and their take on the power aspect of knowledge and its normative function.

As the binary categories of non-systemic and systemic opposition are derived from scientific discourse, it is possible to examine power structure in a similar manner to how Judith Butler approached the construction of gender in her noteworthy *Gender Trouble*. Following Foucault, Butler concludes that power often comes from the statements defining what is genuine, natural, factual and – the most important for that inquiry – scientific. Those in power (more on power below) are constructing categories for a discourse that then justifies established power. Constructed identity categories – with their special task to stabilise the discourse – are then enacted through practices that produce the realities, which we can identify and perceived as given. To put in simple words, we need to bear in mind that dichotomous oppositions – or any other discursive frame – are not created only as an attempt to order distinctive entities and fixate the possible rupture moment, but also as a means to *make* these objects of inquiry behave in an expected way. Therefore, if we are located within the discourse, the discourse tells us *what* we are and, accordingly, *who*.

Moreover, Butler introduced the pivotal term of 'performativity' – denoting the particular speech act that create a certain reality, categorise an individual or group and allow others to witness the signified difference. Performative acts constitute the 'natural' order (obviously the natural not in a pure sense, but denoting what is *seems* to be natural), constrained by a prior produced frame. Discussing gender, Butler underlines that this construct is ' *something that one becomes – but can never be – then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial*

thing or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort'.[38] All of these identities – class, gender, political group – are cultural fictions with an ability to produce the effects of identity. It is crucial to underline, however, that Butler does not state the identity as a source of a set of acts, languages and the whole 'performativity'. It should be understood as a reversed action instead: identity is created by given performative acts that together form the hegemonic 'ideal'. This approach opens up a political space for the proliferation of categories and the breakdown of norms.

To briefly illustrate the 'performativity' within the political realm, we can bring an example of an alleged non-systemic politician, who name-calls a certain political figure as a 'systemic' opposition. His exploitation of the term 'systemic' and its reference to the theoretical matrix while describing reality reinforce the discourse and make it appear as natural and obvious. For instance, we witness that in the case of one of the Yabloko's leader, Grigory Yavlinsky, who claimed that all of the parties represented in the State Duma are mere regime's puppets: 'Representatives any of these parties fully and unconditionally share all the mains of Putin's policies'.[39] Yavlinsky reproduced the category of 'systemic' opposition by the reiteration of its definition – the ideological proximity of 'compromising' parties is not distant, their visions are similar. The available responses of the name-called actor might prolong that discursive game, either reinforcing it – by accepting the created label – or challenging it by plain rejection.

This approach introduces the Foucauldian understanding of power. Power, in his perception, is understood as a ubiquitous force, acting on various levels through discourse, knowledge and so-called 'regimes of truth'. Butler adds that power operates at the conjunction between human activity and meaning, producing in language what the speech *'claims merely to represent'*.[40] These 'regimes of truth' (*epistemes* using Foucault's words) – established discourses with stabilizing and normalising roles within society – are constantly reinforced and redefined through various institutions; education systems, the media, etc. Foucault argues that this constant bargaining and negotiating status of societal truths will never reach the absolute, final aim. The overarching *epistemes* are replaced one after another in an endless process of securing power. Although in that regard the theory resembles Louis

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[38] J. Butler, <u>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</u>, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 112.
[39] G. Yavlinskiy, 'Zhertvy plebiscita'', (2018), https://www.yavlinsky.ru/article/zhertvy-plebistsita/, consulted on 10.03.2020.
[40] S.A. Chambers, T. Carver, <u>Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics</u>, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 38-39.

Althusser's 'interpellation' mechanism conducted by ideological state apparatuses, Foucault famously notes that the power created by *epistemes* should not be conceived of as an utterly negative phenomena forcing human beings to do things against their will: '*We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact, power produces; it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production*'.[41]

In his works, Foucault pays attention to the relations of 'subjectivity' which emerges whenever discourse is being established. The 'subjectivation' – the process of creating subjects – captures the ambiguous role of Foucauldian power; produced and accepted norms impose themselves on the society, forcing them to follow prior set registers and limiting their field of activity. On the other hand, being a defined 'subject' enables to resist it. Subjectivation – even if laid down artificially and by external forces – permits political mobilization, augments mutual identification and solidarity.

To make this assertion clearer, it is crucial to look to Foucault's later texts. The French philosopher in his *History of Sexuality* elaborates his thoughts on power and provides a more specific understanding of the discourse and his catchphrase 'power/knowledge'. These notions find themselves particularly helpful when it comes to research on the impact of scientific frames on politics and its intertwined nature with performativity. Discourse is a channel through which knowledge and subjects are formed – but, at the same time, it opens a possible field for resistance and reformulation of current power structures: '*We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart*'.[42] The discursively created process of subjectivation is one of constraint and limitation – but, on the other hand, created labels may have an uniting force. In the case of Foucault's inquiry on sexuality, one of the examined terms with a role of subjugation was homosexuality – and Foucault underlined its ambiguous character as well. '*Without homosexuals there would be no homophobia and no gay-bashing, but there would also be no gay bars or gay pride marches*', as one of researcher on Foucault remarks.[43] Subjugation of homosexuals was

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[41] M. Foucault, <u>Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison</u>, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 194.
[42] M. Foucault, <u>The History of Sexuality</u>, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 100-1.
[43] C. J. Heyes, 'Subjectivity and power', in D. Taylor (ed.), (Durham: Acumen, 2011), p. 160.

aimed at discrediting them and putting them outside of the normalized frame – but, in the same time, it has created certain fields for their political mobilization enabling them to bend the edges of norms.

This notion of power - as seen in the creation of spaces outside of a framework which seeks to dominate an objective reality - is possible only in the case if we cease to understand power as being 'wielded' by someone, be it individuals, classes, or institutions. Actors engaged in power-play are established and reformulated discursively. A disciplinary form of power has been differentiated by Foucault from the sovereign power technique – the latter derived from the prior defined power centre of state or monarch, with a clear source. The roots of disciplinary power, so the one with influential role of discourse, is distributed and dismembered and hence harder to locate.

Along with the double-sided nature of Foucauldian discourse, his approach underlines the necessity of knowledge for the exercise of power: *'No body or knowledge can be formed without a system of communications, records, accumulation and displacement which is in itself a form of power and which is linked, in its existence and functioning, to the other forms power. Conversely, no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge'*. [44] The phrase 'power/knowledge' underlines the fact that knowledge is inseparable from power. Built upon scientific research, an established knowledge about, for instance, sexual differences between boys and girls signals to us that this sexual division is obvious, that it denotes the clear fact how things are. The particular issue of objective sexuality was challenged by the aforementioned Judith Butler, who followed Foucault's path. In *Gender Trouble*, the American thinker concludes that notions of nature and naturalness, stability and being stable, are merely human projections, assigning certain hierarchy and values from a realm that is claimed to be beyond political judgement – but in the same time, the ongoing reinforcement of fixed categories proves that it is an essentially political act within a specific historical time.

To conclude, the postmodern lens should be treated as a particularly fruitful means of examining Russian opposition. Once the binary category of non-/system opposition is well-established within the discourse, it is possible to look on the usage of that term by engaged actors themselves. Moreover, the complexity of the Russian political reality – which makes sorting into ideal classifications tricky – corresponds with the claim that meeting all of the demands of an academic matrix is never fully viable due to the nature of power relations,

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[44] A. Sheridan, <u>Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth</u> (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1980), p. 283.

which are ubiquitous and appear in every moment of social relations. When we try to impose definitions of certain categories, we witness a particular resistance from those who are being put under 'subjugation' at the same time. Accordingly, the ambiguous character of that process – and establishment of a particular scientific frame should be perceived as one form of it – underlines the existence of a field where subjects might embark on rejecting their subjective role. From the perspective of the power centre, the representatives of the non-systemic opposition are placed beyond systemic playing field due to their lack of certain legitimizing features like MPs in the state parliament. In other words, the discourse excludes their rights to partake in the regular policymaking. On the other hand, a political actor perceiving the system as harmful or unjust with his/her banner self-identifying as a non-systemic opposition might - as the double-sided nature of power allows to do it - transform his/her exclusion into an asset. Butler's notion of 'injurious speech act' - labelling a participant with a name that might throw him/her outside of the 'normalised' frame[45] - may be embraced by the excluded and turned into the part of their identity. Moreover, if these definitions are not permanent, it is viable to examine their fluid nature and the way in which political players make sense out of the discursive cleavages. By researching the discourse produced by political actors, fixing the changes of language and attitude towards other participants, we would be able to answer whether the main indicators from academic literature are present within the discourse, and which of them are considered to be decisive. Finally, the undertaken inquiry might try to track the construction of the political player's identity within the discourse, namely how do they reshape it.

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[45] J. Butler, <u>Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative</u> (New York: Routledge, 1997).

(2.4) Depoliticization

Both actors from the non-systemic and systemic 'oppositions' do not operate in a vacuum as the discourse manifests its Janus face – inclusive and exclusive in the same time. One of the manifestations of that 'double-edged sword' might be seen in the process of depoliticization. The scholarship on Russian politics points out that features of that phenomenon started to be visible with the moment of Putin's rise to power. Depoliticization was a conscious choice of the Russian authorities to skew the political field for the broad spectrum of political parties perceived as 'troublemakers. In other words, because of discursive exclusion along the depoliticization, some actors do not possess an access to real decision-making. That assumption will find its usefulness in analysis of the findings, being also linked with the non-/systemic cleavage.

As it is put by Jenny Edkins, the political scene is depoliticized if there's no possibility to challenge the current situation, i.e. any alternative narratives on how the power system should be managed are not visible within the horizon of political deliberation. The authorities, as a result, have a free hand in portraying their ruling as of merely technical/mechanic character, deprived of its 'political' layer.[46] Following that thought, the label of 'political' is located beyond the system as the power centre is lacking that element. Therefore, every vision that challenges the current authorities is the one that ruins a neutral and apolitical management of power. The imposed binarity of de-/politicized differentiation brings us back to the other discursive constructs as Schmittian 'the Other' or the cleavage between the non-/systemic opposition, i.e. has an ability to exclude certain participants discursively.

The scholarship on it clearly underlines the ambiguous way of depoliticizing strategy in Russian context. Putin's strategy of restoring the subjectivity of the state after the period of 'dashing 1990s' (*likhyie devyanostyie)* resulted in freezing a power competition beyond rigid frame determined by the presidential centre. Depoliticization took place in three spheres: business, mass media and civil society, imposing the business norms into the domain of governing what resulted in enlargement of the state possibilities in regulating the political process at the expense of less normative contenders.[47] Against this background, the non-systemic opposition embarked on its attempt to reclaim the 'depoliticized' realm – to engage

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[46] J. Edkins, Poststructuralism & International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In, (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

[47] A. Makarychev, 'Politics, the State, and De-Politicization: *Putin's Project Reassessed*', Problems of Post-Communism, 55.5 (2008), pp. 62–71.

themselves into politics on an even level with the authorities and point out the systematic flaws. As indicated by Kuznetsova and Mikhailov, that process accelerated after 2012. Back then, the strategy of electoral boycotting – portrayed by the campaign 'Against everyone' (*Protiv vsekh*), which meant to reveal the illegitimacy of the system as a whole – turned out to be a failure. That realization forced the non-systemic politicians to reformulate their goals and tactics.[48] Interestingly, marking the post-2012 period as a time of depoliticization's augmentation coincides with a view of the 'Snow Revolution' as strengthening the discursive role of the non-/systemic opposition cleavage.

Bearing in mind Linz's framework in which the opposition category is defined by the employed means of the actor – to what extent the discussed political entity exploits 'extra political' measures and is one eager to go beyond the limits of legitimate activity patterns delineated by the system – it is feasible to treat the opposition strategy as an attempt to break the depoliticized discourse. The non-systemic opposition is placed beyond systemic playing field – hence it is excluded from decision-making – not only due to the lack of an access to parliaments, but also because of the depoliticization. According to Kuznetsova and Mikhailov, the non-systemic opposition is being collated with the system. The former is assigned by 'chaos' that contradicts the 'stability', as a 'deviation' from the 'norm' or the 'politicized' against 'technocratic'. The non-systemic entities partially follow that logic, as they position themselves against the 'depoliticized' domain of official decision-making, ushering the 'real politics' back to its former habitat. The perception of the non-systemic parties as 'politicizing' is crucial when looking at their initiatives, proving the importance of discursive dimension of Russian political realm once again.

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[48] O.A. Kuznetsova, D.A. Mikhailov, 'Rossiyskaya Nesistemnaya Oppozitsiya v kontekste strategii depolitizatsii', Razvitie Territoriy, 2 (12), (2018), consulted on 13.02.2020.

(3) Nizhny Novgorod – Contextual background

To start the analysis of insights provided by respondents, it is essential to draw a basic outlook of the political scene of Nizhny Novgorod and take a look on local preconditions for opposition activity. This chapter provides a quick review of the secondary literature devoted to the Post-Soviet political developments in the city, which found to be crucial in examining the data. Picturing the scene before embarking on data collection was necessary to possess some prior knowledge on Nizhny's peculiarities in order to enable a researcher to raise in-depth questions during interviews. Additionally, presenting a brief overlook of the past might be of help for a reader once my interviewees referenced preceding events pretty often. The analysis of their insights, including personal opinions on certain developments, needs to be reinforced by deepened knowledge. We need to be aware, however, that the simple examination of chronology is far from being sufficient to explain the political setting of Nizhny Novgorod and interpret respondents' answers.

Arkady Giershman, a popular Russian urban expert and blogger, notoriously stated that Nizhny Novgorod – due to its dilapidated roads and inept attempts to renovate the public sphere – manifests a seldom case of a town that turns itself into a village.[49] That external perspective, asserting peripheral status with present unfulfilled ambitions, is also reflected in opinions of locals. Nizhny's expert community on its internet platform 'Polit-NN' points out a vast array of flaws and ill-strategies leading to detrimental effects for the city as a whole. Compared with Moscow and other regional capitals from the electoral point of view, NN is depicted as a place having a 'provincial nap', preventing it from metaphorical awakening due to the incompetence of local opposition.[50] The fieldwork's starting year 2019 was described as a period of 'political repressions' due to the detainment of local power broker, Oleg Sorokin, and arrests of other public figures, what led in the experts' opinion to the further stagnation of the local political picture.[51]

This outlook of Nizhny signalises two focal points that might be retrospectively seen as the causes of that political lethargy. Both of them appeared during the data collection. Firstly, examination of the legacy of Nemtsov and his departure to Moscow was presented by my respondents as a formative moment for the political scene, influencing the society's

[49] A.Giershman, 'Nizhny Novgorod. Kak gorod prevrashchayetsya v derevnyu', (2016), https://gre4ark.livejournal.com/323851.html, consulted on 24.03.2020.
[50] V. Buzmakova, 'Nizhny Novgorod: net prichin dlya optimizma', (2019), http://www.polit-nn.ru/?pt=comments&view=single&id=5613, consulted on 27.05.2020.
[51] V. Lysov, 'Pobeda ostalas' za byurokratiey', (2020), http://polit-nn.ru/?pt=comments&view=single&id=5989, consulted on 27.05.2020.

perception of liberalism and reinforcing the societal apathy. Linear causality presented in a narrative about the Russian 'authoritarian U-turn' - stating that liberal policies of the 1990s exemplified by young Nizhny Novgorod region's governor were halted and replaced by the rigid power-vertical - is just one of competing narratives on the past.[52] From the opposite angle, the wide-spread resentment towards the period of the 'dashing 90s' shared by proponents of centralising reforms implemented by Vladimir Putin resulted in the simplistic perception of the 'power vertical' as a successful remedy for regional bad governance, corruption and constant fighting between local power brokers. In fact, subordinating regional regimes by federal centre led to the partial reproduction of local elites and their survival. Therefore, prospects for improving the quality of provincial governance proved to be uncertain.[53]

Both of these narratives are far from being explanatory, thus I propose to treat them as the points of reference for the further inquiry over respondents self-positioning. Interviewees' views on the past often set up a trajectory of their further political preferences. While approaching them, one witnesses that these contradictory narratives often intersect with each other – through the process of voluntary or subconscious simplifying, contesting or overlooking a chronological series of events. Hence, it would be useful to follow Foucauldian notion of the 'history of the present'.[54] Examining the past might be effective in explaining the present but has its own limitations. As Foucault argues, one cannot define a particular and finished path with an ability to determine someone's identity, thus searching for pure origins or linear track is pointless. Instead of writing down the casual history of the Nizhny's political realm, it is more crucial – and feasible in the same time – to pinpoint appearing 'historical' narratives and try to examine how respondents make sense out of them.

[52] H. Hale, 'The Nemtsov Vote: Public Opinion and Pro-Western Liberalism's Decline in Russia', Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization, 24.1 (2016), pp. 69–87.
[53] V. Gel'man, S. Ryzhenkov, 'Local Regimes, Sub-National Governance and the 'Power Vertical' in Contemporary Russia', Europe-Asia Studies, 63.3 (2011), pp. 449–65.
[54] Foucault, Discipline and Punish, pp. 30-31.

(3.1) The 'dashing 1990s' – a phantom of democracy

The region of Nizhny Novgorod in the 1990s was portrayed as an exception within the whole Russian Federation thanks to his young and dynamic governor, Boris Nemtsov. As one of the most outspoken supporter of market reforms and liberal policies, Nemtsov was praised both by the West and president Boris Yeltsin. The governor's figure embodied a glimmer of hope that Russia might turn itself into full-fledged democracy in the Western understanding.[55] Despite that notable opinion of Nizhny as a showcase of Russian liberalism, the scholarship on the transformation period proves that this viewpoint is far from reality. In fact, the subnational setting during that time might be described as 'pluralism by default'[56], meaning that no single group was able to become a dominant player. Nemtsov-led region promotion as a pioneer of democratic and free market reforms only obscured the serious internal clashes between various groupings. After governor's departure to Moscow – along with his associates, the most distinguished Sergey Kiriyenko among them – the existing regional model was challenged by his political enemies. The chain of elections triggered by the power vacuum and stretching from 1997 till 2002 (both on gubernatorial and mayoral levels) were characterized by high level of competition and 'mud-slinging' used to mobilise voters. Employed 'political technology' included deliberate spoilers on the ballot, false accusations and direct threats from the federal centre. As a result, it led to the voter's disillusionment towards the political elite and decrease in the quality of local governance: '*Drawn into the open rivalry between economic-political networks, the public sense that they are constantly being manipulated and come to view the electoral process as a mechanism of power struggle rather than a process through which the common will is expressed*'.[57]

Just as in the case of the myth portraying Nizhny as a liberal and democratic outpost, researchers on the period following the Nemtsov's departure to Moscow note that the backdrop of constructing the 'power vertical' across Russian regions was intricate, to say the least. In fact, contending the political competition – by stripping extra-systemic candidates of the right to be put on the ballot in order to stabilise the public order and improve the governance - appeared already before power takeover by Putin in 2000. NN example is

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[55] A. Mommen, 'Boris Nemtsov, 1959-2015: The Rise and Fall of a Provincial Democrat', <u>Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratizatio</u>n, 24.1 (2016), pp. 5–28.

[56] For that term see: S. Levitsky and L. A. Way, <u>Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[57] G. Sharafutdinova, 'Why Was Democracy Lost in Russia's Regions? Lessons from Nizhnii Novgorod', <u>Communist and Post-Communist Studies</u>, 40.3 (2007), pp. 363–82.

particularly illustrative as the skewing of possible playing field for inconvenient actors was initiated by former local elite after its promotion to the federal level.

A power vacuum that appeared after 1997 after Nemtsov's departure was still supervised by former power holders, what was shown in March 1998, when snap election of Nizhny Novgorod mayor took place. Entrepreneur Andrey Klimentiev, who in the past was part of Nemtsov's trusted circle, won that electoral race. Prior to that, he turned himself into the most outspoken critic of the former governor and then vice deputy prime minister due to their conflict over finance management of regional funds that ultimately led to sentencing Klimentiev in 1997. Needless to say, businessman didn't plead guilty and accused Nemtsov of orchestrating the unfair process.[58] Klimentiev's electoral triumph was called by Nemtsov as '*serious mistake, first and foremost on the part of the Oblast authorities*' and noted that the mistake '*must be corrected by legal means*'. [59] Ultimately, the local Electoral Commission claimed the results invalid due to the procedural infringements and Klimentiev was arrested again.

The Nemtsov-Klimentiev affair should be perceived as one of the cases forecasting the inconvenience of direct elections for the ruling elite, what led to the exploitation of non-electoral, administrative means for securing the stable power on the regional level all over Russia.[60] The narrative claiming that the 'power vertical' was manufactured merely by Putin is therefore far from reality – in fact, top-down control over the region was already spearheaded by Nemtsov after his appointment for federal deputy prime minister. Accordingly, the image of the 1990s NN as a democratic island within the Russian Federation is far from reality due to overexploitation of negative campaigning that reinforced an electoral apathy among voters.

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[58] 'Delo Nemtsova-Klimentyeva v Nizhnem Novgorode', Kommersant', (1997) https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/176566, consulted on 19.03.2020.

[59] Mommen.

[60] I. A.-L. Saikkonen, 'Variation in Subnational Electoral Authoritarianism: Evidence from the Russian Federation', *Democratization*, 23.3 (2016), pp. 437–58.

(3.2) Technocratization despite local passions

On the regional level, the phenomenon called in the academia the 'power vertical' means the series of domestic reforms leading to power centralization and increasing the political influence of the federal structures on Russian regions, limiting the scope of decision-making for local elites. The ultimate goal of these revisions constituted in stabilizing the local separatism and securing the legitimacy of the federal centre.[61] This narrative asserting the alleged robustness of Putin's policies which were supposed to address the aforementioned flaws is also dubious. Throughout the last 20 years frictions on the level of regional authorities did not disappear. The last power struggle, focused on the figure of the local power holder and former mayor Oleg Sorokin, proves that the 'power vertical' is not sufficient to discipline the bold challengers. On the contrary, it might be argued that one of the inherent features of the current setting are concealed clashes within the elite on local levels. In 2017, Oleg Sorokin - a former mayor of Nizhny and an influential figure – was accused of corruption and consecutively sentenced.[62] According to the media reports, cleansing of the ranks of regional and city administration from the people connected to Sorokin is still ongoing, constituting the last known implosion in the local administration.[63]

The described background of the group clean-ups within the elites corroborates flaws in the structure of the power vertical. The current elite governing Nizhny – spearheaded by the governor Gleb Nikitin – was preceded not only by the detention of Sorokin, but also by the resignation of the previous governor, Valerii Shantsev. In September 2017 – months before the presidential election and almost a year before the FIFA World Cup – the decision of governor's removal was signed by the Russian president. The timing proved the urgency of the issue and indicated Kremlin's discontent over the regional authorities due to the abundance of conflicts between local power holders, governor's office and presidential representative. The cleansing of local elite became even more justified after Sorokin's arrest and revealed the extent of his patronage network. Both cases of Shantsev and Sorokin – along with numerous instances of similar top-down corrections – are depictive for the argumentation of leaky character of the 'power vertical' under local circumstances. The goals

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[61] A. E. Chirikova, 'The Power Vertical in the Assessments of Regional Elites: The Dynamics of Change', Russian Politics & Law, 48.1 (2010), pp. 40–57.
[62] 'Byvshiy glava Nizhnego Novgoroda Oleg Sorokin prigovoren k 10 godam kolonii', (2019), https://www.interfax.ru/russia/653396, consulted on 20.03.2020.
[63] 'Kak rushilis' kar'ery storonnikov Sorokina iż-za ego aresta', NewsNN, (2019), https://newsnn.ru/article/general/10-07-2019/kak-rushilis-kariery-storonnikov-sorokina-iz-za-ego-aresta, consulted on 20.03.2020.

to consolidate the regional elites by eradicating corruption and improving governance quality appear to be far from reached. Alleged robustness of the system was tested by lone wolves like Klimentiev and Sorokin, leading to the reproduction of illicit practices, which are resilient to changes from the federal level.[64]

The post-Shantsev's order was exemplified by the arrival of Gleb Nikitin, former deputy federal minister of trade industry, completely external to Nizhny realities and illustrative for the wave of 'young technocrats' that started to take governor positions from 2017. The 'technocratization' of that post might be perceived as a transition in a post-political direction, in order to create an appearance of governor as an administrator, not politician. However, as Vladimir Gel'man notes, '*to call themselves technocrats – it's to manifest surrounding, that I don't deal with elections but with economic development, creating jobs, construction sites. But the experience shows that regional officials of executive power were not taking care of the governance quality or economic development, but precisely of politics.*'[65]

The current scenery underlines the political layer of the tasks assigned to a governor. The federal centre – although the direct election of governors has been reintroduced – has an upper hand in dismissing the regional leaders and, therefore, is able to create a main pillar of any local elite. Additionally, the initial apolitical and technocratic appearance is distorted by the federal directives that must be implemented by governors in the regions. The period of conducting the fieldwork coincided with the decision of General Council of the United Russia party to assign 13 governors with a new role – a head of local party unit.[66] The governor of Nizhny Novgorod region Gleb Nikitin was among them.[67]

Despite the imposed 'power vertical', the 'technocratization' of the authorities and numerous reshuffling within the local elite (indicated by the cases of Shantsev or Klimentiev), a common feeling of stagnation is still prevalent, what would be reflected in collected interviews. Its roots should be seen both in the ambiguous legacy of the 1990s and regular internal conflicts which regularly lead the local political scene into turbulences.

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[64] A. Makarychev, 'Pluralism without Democracy, Vertical without Power: From Gorʹkii to Nizhnii Novgorod … and Back?', <u>Slavic Review</u>, 77.4 (2018), pp. 957–77.

[65] 'Novykh rossiyskikh gubernatorov nazyvayut "molodymi tekhnokratami". Chto eto znachit?', <u>Meduza, (2020)</u> <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/02/15/novyh-rossiyskih-gubernatorov-nazyvayut-molodymi-tehnokratami-chto-eto-znachit, consulted on 20.03.2020.

[66] '"Edinaya Rossiya" reshila naznachit' 13 gubernatorov glavami regional'nykh otdeleniy', <u>Novaya Gazeta,</u> (2019), https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2019/10/24/156384-edinaya-rossiya-reshila-naznachit-13-gubernatorov-glavami-regionalnyh-otdeleniy, consulted on 24.04.2020.

[67] 'Gleb Nikitin vozglavil regional'noe otdelenie "Edinoy Rossii"', <u>Kommersant',</u> (2019) https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4135522, consulted on 24.03.2020.

Deriving from that, it is crucial to underline the ambiguity of the 'power vertical'. The top-down subordination was not entirely initiated by Putin, as we can see its sprouts already in the late 1990s. Moreover, the expansion of the federal control over regions that started in the course of the Putin's domestic reforms is not fully resilient to subnational power grabs, as it was illustrated by numerous examples of the past clashes within elite groupings.

Both of the provided pinpoints – the 'dashing 1990s' with Nemtsov's legacy and the 'power vertical' with its inherent elite conflicts - were broadly brought up by respondents in the course of interviews. Although the perception of the past as formative for the non-/systemic cleavage is not present within the theory, I decided to treat that as a possible variable for determining the category of interviewed respondents. Their standpoints on the past developments may impact their relation towards the theoretical categories and their identity. In other words, the way of how respondent's 'make sense out of the past' will be visible in their assessment of the thing they want to challenge – a system – and, possibly, their discursive self-positioning.

(4) Methodology

As it was noted, the aforementioned theoretical frameworks might not reflect the reality with its intricacies. Thus, the thesis is aimed at deepening the knowledge about the non-/systemic opposition cleavage by researching the perception of it among politically involved Russians. My analysis deals mostly with qualitative insights, which contains an inherent discursive layer – hence the 'performative' aspect of the inquiry through postmodern lens. In order to examine it, I propose the following methodology which is presented in this chapter.

(4.1) Data sources and methods

The main data provider is constituted from the numerous semi-structured and open-ended interviews with current political figures, representatives of opposition parties and less formal groups (unregistered parties, political movements or independent activists). Additionally, the data set is diversified by interviews with political scientists from the universities of Nizhny Novgorod in order to add another, less biased, layer. The method was chosen as appropriate due to the fact that the subject of inquiry lays in the qualitative perception of the Russian opposition shared by chosen politically engaged individuals. Interviewing both groups forced every respondent to self-reflection, hence providing personal and subjective insights on how they position both categories (non- and systemic opposition).

During the time of conducting the fieldwork, I also attended various political gatherings as a researcher. In the course of my fieldwork, the interviewees were referring to them as the examples of a vibrancy of the regional political life. In my thesis I included speeches and statements from three local manifestations: *Delo no.: Vecher v podderzhku polizaklyuchennikh* (a discussion about the political repressions with human rights activists and former convicts)[68], *Mityng v pamyati Borisa Nemtsova* (a manifestation commemorating Boris Nemtsov)[69] and *Net vechnomu Putinu* (a picket against the proposed constitutional amendments).[70] As the recordings from these events are available on the Internet, quotes

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[68] 'Delo no.: Vecher v podderzhku politzaklyuchennikh (03.11.2019)', <u>Youtube</u>, recording avaliable at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUBGtvwlAeM&feature=emb_logo&fbclid=IwAR3u7yV_rxjJ65n1xWIttpv DFI_TzjevtiEWZnVeGCVkanOr9guTHC8yvdk, consulted on 28.05.2020.

[69] 'Mityng v pamyati Borisa Nemtsova', <u>YouTube</u>, recording available at: <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_7czv5PztQ&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0DcZgNyyw4UDoFicxAWjg</u> <u>O1Ri2nxcqAdxuUo4ZN-I8jOiI8xSYfJnWyaM</u>, consulted on 28.05.2020.

[70] 'Pikety protiv popravok v konstitutsiyu (vechnogo Putina) v Nizhnem Novgorode 2020, <u>Youtube</u>, recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miNIMVUGZpU&feature=emb_logo, consulted on 28.05.2020.

from them will be brought up as a supplementary source and an additional facet of my analysis. Transcriptions of them were analysed by using the same method as in the case of interviews.

(4.2) Study population

The scope of the interviews is limited to the regional level of Nizhny Novgorod – the interlocutors are mainly scholars, politicians and activists who live in the city. Basing my own research on the interviews always contains a peculiar compromise between experts' and political figures' knowledge versus unbiased real data. Nevertheless, interviewing activists and politicians from various groups would prevent the research from the danger of being tendentious. Moreover, my main task is to study the perspective – how these actors are projecting themselves and others - which is per se qualitative. As the topic of the research is wide and might be perceived as abstract, open-ended interview is the best method, giving time for interviewees' deliberation and narrowing down the subject of inquiry.

A total of 14 interviews was conducted from October 2019 to May 2020. The selection criteria were based on whether a participant has a public profile – scientific or political. In the case of the latter, an interviewee should be active within the public zone of Nizhny's politics or activism – or, at least, had such experiences in the past. There were no requirements for age, gender or political affiliation – however, it remained important to me to cover as broad political spectrum as it was possible. When it comes to getting in touch with interviewees, it was relatively easy to recruit participants from the academia thanks to the assistance of both of supervisors. However, a lack of a database with existing contacts among politically involved locals impacted the velocity of collecting the data. Once first respondents were reached, I employed a snowballing method with a simultaneous 'cold call' method of recruitment via social media platforms like Telegram, Facebook, VKontakte. As the opposition landscape in Nizhny Novgorod should be regarded as relatively small and enclosed group, what turned out to be helpful in accessing the interviewees was being 'recommended' by the previous respondents. It also built an initial, mutual trust that facilitated the data collection process and guaranteed the confidentiality of the accessed information in the eyes of respondents.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic and a particular culture of mistrust in Russia, the conversations were done in a face-to-face manner or via Skype. Audio-recording was used in order to facilitate the process of collecting and coding the data. However, in many cases I

was confronted by reluctance of some interviewees to be recorded – that's why during some meetings I was taking notes only. All of the interviewees were ensured about the confidentiality of the interviews. Some participants, due to the fact that they claimed to be politically persecuted in the past, preferred to remain anonymous. Due to that, I decided to reference all of the interviewed politicians and activists by using only their political affiliations in order to secure their privacy. Furthermore, I decided to code also the names of interviewed scholars as they often reflected – maybe subconsciously – political views that might impact their careers. Meetings were arranged in offices, at universities and random public places in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia. Each of them lasted approximately 1 hour, however some of them had to be expanded, depending on the respondent. Participants were asked to sign a Consent Form and an Information Sheet in Russian. All participants were aware of the possibility to withdraw at any time in the course of the interview and after. A complete list of respondents is attached in the Annex 1.

(4.3) Interview questions

The questionnaires were prepared beforehand – they contained a set of broad questions on personal and partisan perception of the discussed theoretical distinction. Based on the collected data, I categorized different ways that these individuals have organized their operational politics. Respondents were asked whether the theoretical matrix influence their activity, how do they perceive the 'system' and Russian political scene as a whole, where do they position themselves within it. Moreover, my enquiry tried to shed a light also on activities of my respondents – what they regarded as political, how do they try to manifest their opposition towards the system. In the case of interviewed scholars, the questions were dealing with their personal – based on their insights and knowledge – take on the topic.

When it comes to the politicians and activists, it was crucial for me to be aware of their personal affiliation in order to examine a possible impact of it. The interviews took into account their standpoints and preferences in order to derive patterns on how the self-positioning influence the viewpoint on the discourse. The set of questions for politicians and activists were split into two group questions – the first one was dedicated to the theoretical and broad understanding of the non-/systemic cleavage, while the second focused on interviewee's personal activities. It is due to the fact that their practical engagement might be more insightful that their understanding of the theoretical framework. Moreover, some of respondents were not well-versed into the theory – therefore it required a certain flexibility

for me as a researcher to ask less theory-driven questions. Therefore, every single questionnaire was adjusted to the interlocutor, covering the initiatives of his/her party or grouping in order to gather information via practical lens of my interviewee. That included serious preparations before every conversation.

(4.4) Analysis method

As a method of analysing data I have chosen the so-called Thematic Analysis (TA), one of the most common forms of analysis in the realm of qualitative research.[71] Based on that approach, the purpose when collecting data is to identify and organize patterns of meaning (called themes) within a given data set. That process might be conducted in two ways – inductively or deductively. Due to the fact that my research is theory-driven, respondents' input was predominantly approached deductively. Using pre-existing theory and seeking its reflection in insights provided by respondents might have been seen as biased once the concepts are predetermined and therefore a researcher may force things to make them fall in line. However, when re-reading collected data, I was aware of the possibility that some themes might have been overlooked in theory. Thus, an inductive approach was also exploited – and indeed, I manage to derive one pattern which will be introduced in the analysis chapter.

The analysis process was the following. Firstly, all the notes and transcriptions of audio recordings were re-read several times in order to underline the appearance of searched topics – key-issues connected to the pregiven variables. Then, I generated codes in order to group the themes and their emergence in texts. Thirdly, based on group of meanings, I searched for relationships between the codes, across respondents and topics. Eventually, I drafted a report which served as a basis for writing down the analytical chapter.

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[71] V. Braun, V. Clarke, 'Thematic Analysis.', in H. Cooper et al. (eds.) <u>APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol 2: Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological</u>, (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2012), pp. 57–71.

(4.5) Limitations

One of the biggest limitations that is inherent for that kind of research lays in its qualitative nature. Due to the fact that my fieldwork is based on insights provided by politically involved figures, it raises a question of the extent of possible scientific correlations that might be derived from it. However, as my aim is to study the perspective shared by certain subjects (in that case my respondents), thus the qualitative approach should be regarded as suitable. Nevertheless, setting the data collection within a certain time and place – Nizhny Novgorod in 2019/2020 – imposes limitations given by relatively small study group. Therefore, findings of my research should be cross-validated by other case studies dedicated to Russian opposition in order to enhance the scientific authority and push the scholarship further.

Another pitfall that had to be addressed beforehand was connected with creation of a consistent guideline for interviews – a model, which would help me in decoding the respondents' insights. As some of the respondents were not very well-acquainted with the theoretical context of my research, it was my task as a researcher to formulate questions in an understandable way. In the same time, even if they were not able to provide clear definitions on – for instance – what determines the non-systemic opposition, it was crucial for me to restrain from applying any bias by asking additional, 'directing' questions. Due to the abstractness of the research topic, open-ended interview was consciously chosen as a method that grants respondents a time for deliberation.

The aforementioned mutual trust was crucial in conducting that research. As it stands, the research topic could have made some of the respondents hesitant to participate in an interview – and, as it turned out, some of the contacted activists turned down the offer, possibly because of their suspicions regarding the aim of the research. Additionally, a part of respondents was reluctant to talk about their political activism explicitly due to the lack of trust towards the researcher. It was addressed by the second-round of interviews, conducted with those who haven't provided sufficient insights in the course of the first meeting. Also, a significant group of the respondents did not want to be voice recorded – in this case I was able to only take notes. Given that obstacle, I tried to minimize the risk of losing the data or its distortion by transcribing the notes and storing it in a digital format immediately after the interview was conducted. Every verbatim citation of any respondent is brought up in the exact same way he/she said it – after translating it into English of course.

In regard to my interviewees, I aimed at balancing between the political affiliations of them – what, in my opinion, was reached. However, another obstacle laid in preserving the proportions between representatives of the non-system and system opposition. It needs to be stated that that balance was not achieved due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the interview period for systemic politicians was planned on March and April, the schedule was disrupted by self-isolation regime imposed by regional and federal authorities. Furthermore, the March directive issued by the University of Glasgow put a halt to human research due to the health threat. Therefore, I decided to narrow down the focus of my thesis, limiting it to the perception of the non-systemic opposition since I have not managed to collect the data from representatives of systemic opposition (with an exception of KPRF). However, as it turned out, the number of conducted interviews (14) provided me with a sufficient data set to answer my research question in a proper manner.

(5) Analysis

In the following chapter I begin the analysis of the data collected during my fieldwork. The section starts with a brief overlook on the respondents' standpoint on the existence of a non-/systemic opposition cleavage, analysing the used language and its performative aspect. Then I present following units discussing every of the preidentified independent variables. In these subchapters I seek to research what impacts the dependent variable and the main object of the inquiry – the level of 'systemness', the position on the non-/systemic matrix (**DV**).

Prior to the data collection, I singled out three independent variables derived from the theoretical frameworks appearing in both Western and Russian scholarship. These factors were compared with the collected data in order to assess if they impact the dependent variable.

1) **Independent variable no. 1 (IV1)** – the political player's ideology, whether the propagated set of values and fostered vision play a determining role in defining who constitutes a non-systemic and systemic actor; if the ideological distance between challengers' worldviews and officially-acclaimed standpoints makes a difference.

2) **Independent variable no. 2 (IV2) -** the approach towards the ruling centre, perceived along the lines of Sartori's differentiation between an 'opposition on issues' or 'opposition of principle', what can be also described by Russian confrontation between *soglashateli* and *neprimirynie*. In other words, whether a certain political force seeks to transform the system completely or just change the country's political direction without a transformation of applied rules.

In the case of these two variables, I start with assessing the influence of ideology (**IV1**) within the non-systemic camp. Then I look at to what extent the discursive hostility towards the ruling authorities (**IV2**) conditions the dependant variable (**DV**). Afterwards I turn my focus on the systemic camp trying to find out how my respondents define the systemic opposition – what determines its existence and role. Additionally, I present a brief subchapter on the case of KPRF as a particular case exemplifying constant repositioning along the discursive parameters.

3) **Independent variable no. 3 (IV3)** – the exercised political strategy, understood as the dis-/loyal opposition matrix of Linz, in which the 'loyal' part of the opposition (in Russian context a systemic one) participates only in lawful political process, while the 'disloyal' (non-systemic) side employs less normative methods with the purpose to undermine the regime.

Using the concept of 'depoliticization', I put under examination a third variable which is derived from the theory. In the subchapter devoted to its role, I assess to what extent the chosen political strategy **(IV3)** is pregiven by a position on the discussed cleavage.

4) **Independent variable no. 4 -** the perception of the past, how do respondents assess the two essential periods and political phenomena: **1)** the 'dashing 1990s' and **2) the** creation of the 'power vertical' by Putin. Because of the fact that almost every interviewee mentioned these two points, I have chosen to analyse the related statements in order to find out whether the opinion on them conditions the dependant variable.

Throughout the course of fieldwork, the interviewees broadly referred to the past political developments. As I signalised before, these numerous statements forced me to include the interviewees' perception of the past as a new independent variable that might condition their political choices. In that case, I employed an inductive method of thematic analysis, in which respondents' insights served as a basis for probing a new assumption.

(5.1) Performative role of the discussed cleavage – the name-calling of the non-systemic opposition and its implications

When asked about the implications of the non-/systemic cleavage, respondents with a background in academia indicated the performative role of it. However confusing and feeble the given matrix is, they pointed out the creation of a certain reality along this categorization. The discourse reproducing the categories of the opposition creates invisible borders, which can be exploited by political actors. Every actor who participates in the debate assigns new meanings to it, reinforces the given definitions or dilutes them. Asked about the implications of the non-/systemic cleavage, scholar [S5] remarked:

'I don't particularly see that difference (the non-/systemic opposition cleavage – FR) *as an important one, it's more an example of political discourse among certain political players than a scientific concept. Unfortunately, in our circumstances* (Russian ones – FR)*, it sometimes happens that some concepts are transferred from the political discourse to the analytical-scientific one and dominate that latter realm. Afterwards they move back to the political sphere, with the credit of academic quality'.*

What [S5] mentions here – the scientific origins – corresponds with Butler's assertion that frameworks with methodical underpinnings appear as natural, and therefore their stabilizing role is more robust. The participator [S5] also noted that the liquid nature of these categories hints at the very nature of the current Russian regime: *'Our regime is hybrid, there's a hybrid mass-media, hybrid warfare, hybrid wars with Ukraine and the West, so hybridity exists also within the political structures'.*

Even when placed in a political discourse with blurred definitions, the respondents highlighted the exploitation of discursive categories as a tool:

'The terms systemic and non-systemic opposition are used for the sake of discourse. In a situation when the systemic opposition is weak, the non-systemic opposition might position itself as an alternative thanks to these categories.' [S3]

'[the differentiation] is important for political actors, who don't possess huge resources and possibilities. It serves as an excuse for their limited capabilities. If it's impossible for them to partake in elections, if they do not have access to the mass-media, then they can accuse the other part of the opposition of back-door links. That's how it can be exploited.' [S5]

While answering the questions about a real basis for driving the discussed categorization, some of the respondents resorted to name-calling of other political groupings. The way they were naming various political groupings pointed out the normalizing task of used categories, underlining the aforementioned performative implications. My interlocutors broadly remarked on how the mainstream discourse portrays the opposition and quite often used performative features of it by themselves.

Asked about the capabilities of the non-systemic opposition, [S1] called *'aggravation of clashes'* as the only viable strategy for these politicians, which might be interpreted as a euphemism for the ignition of political violence. These assertions correspond with other participants' reflections of the way that the state-aligned media portray the non-systemic opposition. [P2-Libertarians] stated that the members of unregistered parties are presented as those, who do not follow the rules and employ '*roguish methods (zhulicheskiye metody)*'. The respondent underlined that official media repeatedly accuses the non-systemic opposition of lacking a positive agenda – which eventually leads to the conclusion that anti-system politicians do that merely with the aim of '*showcasing*' (*popiyarits'ya*) and does not find support among citizens: '*Ultimately, the narrative says that these guys disturb our work [the work of the Kremlin - FR]*'. Furthermore, [P5-exNavalny] noted that according to the state-aligned media and their narrative, non-systemic politicians organize protests because '*they haven't got anything else to do*'.

This argument is congruent with the remarks made by [S4] who regarded the lack of a positive rhetoric – interpreted by him as a '*serious political programme*' – as a major shortcoming of the non-systemic opposition:

> '*They base their activity on mud-slinging, on underlining what's negative, while one always can offer a positive agenda. Let it be completely different, radical – but constructive and positive. Anyone might witness the opposite approach by observing the white-ribbon politicians – their brains are only capable of yelling about the totalitarian regime, that everything's bad.*' [S4]

Interestingly, the participants were aware of that standpoint even without mentioning the remarks made by [S4]. Similar narratives were brought up by three of the interviewees – [P2-Libertarians], [P5-Drugaya Rossiya] and [J1]. Moreover, in their view, the way of portraying the non-systemic opposition by the state media carries a detrimental effect for politically engaged youth, especially concerning those with radical standpoints.

> '*Political repressions and exclusion forced radicals to move under the surface. Regions aren't Moscow, people here cannot afford themselves that degree of freedom as in capitals.*' [J1]

[P6-Drugaya Rossiya] complained that in society's view the non-systemic opposition is identified only with the activities of Navalny, while the radicals were pushed into a stream of subculture, being name-called as '*fascists, Nazis or commies*' (*krasnopuzyi*). Meanwhile, [P2-Libertarians] indicated the looming threat of radicalization of the youth:

> '(...) *those small structures, both antifascists and far-right radicals, are very similar to each other and face similar problems. They cannot conduct their own activity within the law; therefore, they radicalize.*' [P2-Libertarians]

As an example of this process, the respondent pointed out the case of the FSB office bombing in Arkhangelsk, allegedly perpetrated by students in retaliation for tortures against Russian anarchists and anti-fascists.[72] [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] also added that this discursive, excluding activity, forces people to locate themselves beyond the normalized margins, pushing them into the underground: '*repressions make activists even more convinced*'.

Reflected by the activists connected to the non-systemic opposition, all of the anti-regime forces are portrayed as one by the state-aligned media. During the interview, [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] mentioned the phrase coined by Vladislav Surkov that '*the lemons and apples grow on the same branch* (*limony i yabloki rastut na odnoy vetke*)', which in his opinion catches the mainstream discourse of the non-systemic opposition. Despite the political affiliations and contradictory standpoints, proponents of national bolshevism – thus belonging to the broad left-patriotic camp – and western-alike liberals are lumped together due to their alleged destabilizing purposes.

> '*Because of the cooperation with Strelkov and other nationalists, we are blamed of being the agents of the American Department of State, that we're on the Western payroll – just like liberals. But it does not make sense to put Navalny, liberals and Drugaya Rossiya into one box.*' [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]

That negative perception of the non-systemic opposition along the lines presented by the aforementioned respondents was repeated by the interviewed scholars: [S1] and [S4]. Defining the ultimate aim of the non-systemic opposition as an ignition of '*petty, civil wars*' by [S1] corresponds with portraying the opposition activists as troublemakers. It echoes the

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[72] 'Nie pil, ne kuril: chto rasskazivayut o vzorvavshem bombu v FSB v Arkhangelske', BBC News Russkaya Sluzhba, (2018), https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-46044944, consulted on 11.04.2020.

numerous statements that appeared after the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine and continues until now, bolstered by the 2014 Euromaidan in Ukraine. Before that, Russian state officials spanned the narrative about Western-backed 'colour revolutions'. According to that narrative, the non-systemic opposition ignites similar upheavals in order to destabilize Russian Federation. Therefore, it is essential for officials to prevent them.[73] The label of colour revolution instigators is gladly employed by state-aligned media when it comes to major unrests and manifestations of political discontent. Illustrative was the case of the Moscow 2019 summer protests. One of the new faces of liberal opposition, connected to Navalny's lawyer Liubov Sobol', had to dismiss the charges of being a newcomer and starting an 'orange plague'.[74]

The line of that argumentation was continued by [S4] who stated that the non-systemic opposition propagates the idea of 'quasi-democracy' and referred to the non-systemic politicians as an 'element'.

'That element – and we will prove that to our students – constitutes the fifth column, which is exploited by other huge players to destabilize the political situation in Russia, with far-reaching idea to fracture Russian Federation.' [S4]

The non-systemic opposition, as well, is financially supported by the West.
'I've seen American maps, I know how the American consulate in Yekaterinburg works, why do they conduct contests like "United States of Siberia". We're aware of it, we know that these people lead hostile policy by financing all these white-ribbons NGOs'. [S4]

Not all of the interviewed scholars regarded the non-systemic opposition as an existential threat to Russian state. Remaining academic interviewees limited themselves to a description of opposition activity by stating how marginal – due to various circumstances – the non-systemic politicians are. However, what is interesting is the fact that the two aforementioned political scientists treated these political players as hostile elements, which should be excluded from the discourse due to their harmful policies. Obviously, the factor conditioning that negative perception might be seen in personal political preferences of the

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[73] 'Putin Says Russia Must Prevent "Color Revolution"', <u>Reuters</u>, (2014), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-security-idUSKCN0J41J620141120, consulted on 14.04.2020.
[74] Facebook profile of Liubov Sobol, available at: https://www.facebook.com/soboll.ru/posts/2379562695634920/, consulted on 14.04.2020.

respondents, but it is vital to notice that the emotionally embedded version of discourse made its way into academia. Since the 'fifth column' label is primarily used in order to discredit the political opponent, its exploitation by scholars proves that this politically influenced version of the discourse colonized the academic circles and distorted the once-scientific categorization of the non-/systemic opposition.

When it comes to the discussion on the role of the non-/systemic cleavage within the opposition forces, the used language turned out to be also crucial. In the course of my fieldwork, participants bargained over the label of who constitutes the 'true' opposition. The discussed theoretical differentiation stood as a focal point of this vivid debate and served as a basis to deprive certain players of 'anti-regime credibility'.

The participators who identified themselves with that political spectrum – [P1-ONA], [P2-Libertarians], [P3-Partiya Peremen], [P4-Yabloko] – broadly deliberated on the topic what it means to be a real antagonist of the system. [P4-Yabloko] stated that being part of the non-systemic opposition is a 'badge of honour', understood as a quality of particular importance for the electorate. That label is applied for the political actors who are '*active, brave, it means that they try. On the contrary, for some people a systemic opposition is intertwined with repressions and official flaws*'.

Although [P4-Yabloko] identified themselves with the non-systemic part of opposition, assigning the party to that side was not that clear for other respondents. As indicated by [P2-Libertarians], Yabloko is financed from the state budget because of its MPs in local parliaments. Moreover, according to the participant, the party's presidential candidate Grigori Alinsky only '*pretended to be a candidate*' in the last election. Therefore, they should not be categorized as belonging to the real non-systemic opposition.

Likewise, [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] pointed to Yabloko as dependent on the system due to its financial support from the budget, resulting in its existence as '*the most loyal towards the authorities among all the non-systemic entities*'. The respondent claimed also that Navalny's Foundation Against Corruption is based on hypocrisy and exploits honest volunteers, while coordinators and the organization's executive earn money. In their opinion, the existence of financed structures within the non-systemic oppositions casts a shadow on politicians' intentions.

An activist connected to the non-governmental feminist organization ONA [P1-ONA] went even further by claiming that only informal political entities should be perceived as the pure non-systemic opposition. According to [P1-ONA], activist networks are challenging the regime not only because of their agenda, but also because of their structure, which contradicts

the 'traditional' forms of organizing. ONA shares the features of a decentralized political movement: there is no leading board, decisions are made democratically. The group is not registered; therefore, it should be regarded as a true non-systemic player. By the same token, Yabloko and Navalny's Anti-corruption Foundation should only partially be regarded as non-systemic, due to their status as legal entities, with revenue sources and clear hierarchies. The conditions for being non-systemic in both formal and ideological terms are met, according to [P1-ONA], by grass-roots movements focused on single issues as environmental rights.

The remarks of the respondents and their analysis through the 'performative' lens enables us to fixate an interesting discursive development. Firstly, that the 'updated' version of the non-/systemic differentiation contains nowadays features created only for the sake of political rivalry, despite its scientific origins. The discussed frame was initially constructed by scientists in order to differentiate between the various political players and introduce an order into the discourse. Once it left the confines of scientific debate, it became surrounded by additional qualities created in other domains – by journalists and political actors themselves. The case of [S1] and [S4], for whom the non-/systemic cleavage denotes the differentiation between the troublemakers and legit politicians, unwittingly proves that the categorization became significantly harmed and moved further from its academic roots. On the other hand, perceiving the label of 'non-systemic' as a 'badge of honour' for politicians is also meaningful. For some, a purely theoretical and scientific cleavage started to stir the emotions, being connected to one's perception of good and bad.

Moreover, that distortion proves that the academia should be treated also as one of the sources of the normalizing power once it is engaged into the construction of identity for various collective players. Academic categories leave imprints on the non-scientific discourses – but the process might also be of reversed direction. In the instance of the two discussed scholars ([S1] and [S4]), the exclusion of non-systemic players it is strongly reinforced as the accusations of being the 'fifth column' or proponents of 'colour revolutions' clearly reflect Butler's notion of 'injurious speech act'.[75] Because of this distortion of the categorization and the influence of punditry on it, many might perceive the defining factor for the non-systemic opposition as 'troublemaking' (just as the quoted scholars did). Nevertheless, since that feature is not feasible to conceptualize in scientific terms and is conditioned by subjective perception, adding it to the scientific puzzle is not valid. On the other hand, however, fixating the phenomenon adds another layer to the debate and reveals

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[75] Butler, Excitable Speech.

additional discursive mechanisms with certain real repercussions as indicated by respondents: radicalization and feelings of exclusion.

(5.2) Role of ideology (IV1) among the non-systemic opposition

The fact that some of the respondents dwelled upon the definition on who belongs to the 'real' opposition validates approaching the categorization of non-/systemic opposition via focus on discourse. In order to grasp the idea of how respondents understand the core of the differentiation, they were asked about the ideological features of the opposition in contemporary Russia. Confronting the theory with respondents' standpoints, it turned out that the role of ideology is far from being a decisive variable for defining the position on the non-/systemic matrix.

'The non-systemic opposition stands for radical changes. It can be divided into the left-patriotic and liberal blocs', noted [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]. According to the participator, the basis for defining who represents the non-systemic opposition lays in the variation of the approach towards the system. This answer corresponds with Sartori's division - in other words, whether it is an 'opposition on issues' or 'opposition of principles'. Indeed, all of the interviewees identifying themselves with the non-systemic opposition shared similar opinions on the current regime. Some of the respondents doubted if it was even correct to use the term 'opposition' in the case of systemic parties if they do not want to transform the system.

While examining the role of ideologies, we can notice a particular feature that differs Russian political system from Western ones. According to [S5], the main aim of the Russian oppositional parties is not to gain power, but to present an alternative to the incumbent regime.

> *'Parties are often designed not to seize power, but to oppose the centre. Because we don't have a model for it, there's no circulation of power or elite exchange – there might be some reshuffles between leaders, transformation of standpoints, but the monolithic group stays the same. That's why parties are forced to present a substantial alternative.'* [S5]

Based on that opinion, the 'opposing' (*opponirovat'*) aim – pointing out the regime's flaws, delegitimizing any political force that constructs the system and presenting a competing vision instead of trying to enter the system and change it from within – influences

every political party when it comes to its strategy. The ideological 'shade' of certain political force does not matter as the set of values propagated by the authorities is blurry as well. Based on the quoted remark, we can see that the non-systemic opposition employs Manichean differentiation in the discourse, beyond any political dogmas. [P4-Yabloko] underlined that '*under authoritarian circumstances there are only two sides: black and white*'. The 'bad guys' are those who follow the rules of a corrupt system, while the contenders '*share the same core values*'.

While the term 'core values' might indicate possible common points in ideologies among the non-systemic opposition parties, this impression turns out to be misleading if we look at the respondents' definition of it. In this case, 'core values' denote a dissent towards the system. Even if the propagated changes are depicted as 'cardinal', 'principal' or 'radical', the very essence of these propositions remains personalistic in character and without the presence of any concrete ideology. The perception of the system among the non-systemic opposition is negative, therefore the demand to oust the incumbents is being pronounced and constitutes the feature that unites them. To put it bluntly, this stays for the 'core value' of the non-systemic opposition.

However, the ideological factor is not without importance. In Russian circumstances, standpoints of a political challenger impact the reasoning behind the contestation. [P2-Libertarians], asked about refusing to pursue a career via officially recognized parties, answered that he does not want to participate in '*pseudo-parliamentarian system that cannot find society's approval*', calling the current regime an '*animal system*'. Meanwhile, the participant from the left-patriotic bloc [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] (as the respondent categorized his organization) stated that the state was captured by oligarchs and serves only them, not the people – therefore the elites should be replaced.

It is crucial to underline the fact that the ideological factor – as it is described by the frameworks applied for liberal democracies with the role of 'extraneous ideology' – is not suitable to apply to the Russian non-/systemic opposition. That variable here serves another purpose. Political principles impact the discourse and intensify the blame-game among the challengers. To illustrate that, representatives of the left-patriotic bloc [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] see liberal ideas as an 'original sin' that directly resulted in creation of the current system with its inherent flaws. Liberals, by the same token, get as good as they get - stating that the agenda of left-patriotic camp captured the ruling groups and therefore that part of opposition should be blamed for creation of the regime:

'When we look at the left-wing radicals – such as Limonov or Udaltsov – we see that the movements initiated by them are ideologically aligned with the authorities. In the 2000s and 2010s the ruling elite was getting closer to these radicals. And now their ideologies do not differ.' [S5]

The opinion shared by [S5] reflects the narrative fostered by members of liberal bloc, which claims that Russian authorities captured the values of left-patriotic branch of opposition. According to them, post-2014 developments – the annexation of Crimea and aggravation of anti-Western attitude – serve as a proof.

To conclude, the ideological factor – to what extent presented values are 'external' to the regime – should not be regarded as defining for the non-/systemic opposition differentiation. Both camps of the non-systemic opposition (liberal and left-patriotic, to use the differentiation brought by the respondent) perceive themselves as principal contenders, being equally discredited by the state-aligned discourse, despite their contradicting ideologies. Liberals claim that they are disqualified because of their label of Westerners and 'traitors', while left-patriotic forces are portrayed as radical marginals and placed beyond the possible operational framework. Moreover, as respondents remarked, competing narratives within their ideological dimensions are exploited as a tool among the non-systemic political players in continuing the rivalry between themselves. Their sets of values might impact the way in which they criticise the government, but they do not decide about the level of 'systemness' to that extent as the next discussed variable.

(5.3) Approach towards the system (IV2) within the non-systemic opposition

The common denominator of non-systemic entities is not the 'opposition of principles' in an ideological sense but reflected in the perception of the system as a regime resilient to changes from the outside. Slogans which unite the opposition are focused on the demand to oust the current elite, a pattern which continues to reproduce itself from the 1990s until today. The borderline separating both sides of the opposition is visible once the non-systemic politicians assign themselves with a certain degree of irreconcilability.

'What differentiates the non-systemic opposition from the systemic one? I think that we (the non-systemic forces - FR) present our views on what is happening more boldly, we are not afraid. Communists, for instance, have some agreements with the

authorities about quotas in the representative institutions. We are conducting a real political struggle and do not parley with anyone.' [P8-Navalny]

This particular feature – echoing the Russian matrix between 'compromisers' and 'irreconcilables' – appears in the reality especially when it is triggered by massive protests that arouse around certain issues. The period of my fieldwork coincided with a debate on the constitutional amendments, which in the perception of respondents constituted another focal point that makes the non-/systemic opposition cleavage clear.

'This categorization works in reality. The constitutional amendments are just another example of it. The parties agreeing with them prove that they are a part of the system. Those who don't fall in line with the proposed changes are outside. The former legitimizes the existence of the regime – if they wouldn't have agreed to it, they weren't be inside of it.' [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]

The proposed changes in the constitution challenged the existing contenders and forced them to formulate a counter-narrative. In Nizhny Novgorod, the initiative 'No to Putin forever' (*Net vechnomu Putinu*) emerged. Initially it was designed as a regular weekly protest in the city centre. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the activity has continued on the Internet.

The protests, which have been attended by some of the participants partaking in this study, had according to their own assessment resulted in the emergence of new possibilities for a construction of a uniting frame for the non-systemic opposition. Asked if the proposed amendments, resetting the clock on the Constitution's limit of two presidential terms for Putin, have changed the oppositional landscape, [P3-Partiya Peremen] answered that it has certainly created a new dynamic.

'I feel that until now nobody really tried to unite various [political - FR] forces in a joint effort. Now a big perspective is opening up, not in narrow circles (tusovki), but with gatherings for all of those who demand changes.' [P3-Partiya Peremen]

Interestingly, the first event under the slogan of 'No to Putin forever' was attended by numerous organizations, predominantly from the left-wing spectrum, including the local unit of KPRF.[76]

The protesters' rejection of constitutional amendments can be wrapped up into three demands: freedom, fair elections and dismissal of Putin. The majority of slogans used on banners had a mocking character, pointing out the contempt shared by the authorities towards the Russian population.[77] It is illustrative that the most pressing claim – toppling the current elite – is the widely shared common point for the whole non-systemic opposition and, in the same time, constitutes a demand the individual change at the top level of elite. As it was visible at the federal level during the Moscow 2019 rallies, controversial political decisions undertaken by the ruling centre aggravate the opposition forces and make them claim the necessity of an elite replacement. This request urges the non-systemic opposition to unite despite their competing affiliations.

When it comes to the systemic part of the contenders, developments such as constitutional amendments constitute an acid test for their role within the system. It was particularly visible during the protests against the pension reform in 2018 – my interviewees from the non-systemic opposition admitted that the presence of KPRF was positively assessed and animated the wave of protests.

Therefore, a defining factor for the non-systemic opposition is the 'opposition on principles' understood as an agenda propagating a transformation of the current system by getting rid of the current authorities. That element appears above the surface in moments of exceptional citizens' mobilisation triggered by certain political developments – as Moscow protests in 2011/12 or pension reform in 2018. Additionally, the ideological point of departure for raising a dissent – be it from the left- or right-wing side of political spectrum – does not make a difference.

The categorization based on the Sartori's criteria of 'opposition on principles' and 'opposition on issues' remains valid in the Russian context with some reformulation of it. Due to the political trajectory of the Russian political scene, the non-systemic parties interpret the current system as a closed circle of officials that needs to be toppled down in order to reform the country. That premise should be treated as a common denominator for the

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[76] Facebook group of the protest's organizers, available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1565101993654836/, consulted on 14.04.2020.

[77] 'Pikety protiv popravok v konstitutsiyu (vechnogo Putina) v Nizhnem Novgorode 2020, Youtube, recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miNIMVUGZpU&feature=emb_logo, consulted on 28.05.2020.

non-systemic opposition and as a source of identification. Approaching this factor from that point of view, one can say that the non-systemic representatives' attempt to transform their discursive exclusion into an asset enables them to unite. The aforementioned 'badge of honour' – a label of the non-systemic opposition – is directly derived from a clear antagonism between the system and its contenders.

(5.4) View on the systemic opposition, its ideology and relationship with the system (IV1, IV2)

If the non-systemic opposition is defined by its willingness to transform the current system, then by the same token the systemic opposition should be an 'opposition on issues'. According to Sartori's framework, the latter is supposed to advocate for a change within the given political framework. This explanation seems to be plausible when looking at the insights of my respondents. Examining the role of the parliamentary parties, they did not single out any other factor than demanding an ouster of the elite as a uniting frame for the 'real' opposition. One might think, however, that the standpoint of the systemic part of the opposition among non-systemic 'colleagues' is totally adverse. Nevertheless, the interviewees showed a more nuanced approach in describing the tasks of the parliamentary parties.

Obviously, some of the interlocutors did not regard them as opposition at all. *'There's no systemic opposition. I cannot see any difference between these parties, it is an artificial construct to create the picture of an opposition'*, remarked [P5-exNavalny]. The participant called these parties a '*pocket opposition*' (*karmannaya oppozitsiya*), stating that its deputies *'are being fed, well-treated, the centre strokes their heads'*. The respondent underlined their financial dependence on the incumbent authorities, which in his opinion makes the systemic opposition less critical towards the authorities.

Due to that connection with the ruling centre, some of the respondents from the non-systemic part of the opposition claimed that their ability to cooperate with parliamentary parties is significantly limited. This view was shared by following interviewees: [P2-Libertarians], [P3-Partiya Peremen], [P4-Yabloko] and [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]. They perceive the prospects of a partnership with parliamentary parties as an immoral access to the system that would lead to the discreditation of the 'real' opposition. The main role of the systemic parties, in the respondents' perception, is to create a fake appearance of political deliberation confined by democratic standards.

Interestingly, two of the interviewed scholars remarked that the artificiality of the debate – a lack of acute disagreements between the parties of the systemic opposition and limited society's knowledge about the differences between these groups – has a purpose, which is to elevate the popularity of the governing party. Asked how United Russia can cope with free falling popularity ratings, [S3] he answered: *'Even if United Russia is unpopular, the systemic opposition is not attractive either'*. Another respondent stated that the matrix of non-systemic opposition is applied to Russian circumstances with an aim of spreading a feeling of democratic process within the society:

'There is a social contract – between the broad society and the elite – and there's an internal elite contract, the latter is more decisive. Inside of it (the elite – FR), various groupings compete with each other along the already designed rules. This is a combination like a Rubik's cube, it is comfortable for everyone inside the elite. But for the nation – for the broad mass of the society – it is crucial to show that there's some sort of process going on, and that they participate in it. It is done to maintain the political stability, to prevent protests and so on.' [S4]

Another respondent underlined the fact that the lack of charismatic leaders within the ranks of the systemic opposition ultimately leads to the realization that there is no alternative to the regime. In the words of [P5-exNavalny], the electorate of the United Russia is not ideologically driven at all, people support the ruling party due to the lack of alternative: *'if not for them, then for whom?'*. A similar opinion was reflected in the following statement:

'United Russia has never been highly popular. I have never seen a zealot of that party, people support them not because they participate in their events, but because they don't participate in gatherings organized by the other parties.' [P3-Partiya Peremen]

Following this argument and linking it with the reasoning of [S4] about faking a serious political debate, the similarity of standpoints among the parliamentary opposition parties benefits the ruling group. Its contenders in the State Duma do not produce any alternative narrative, thus their existence might be perceived as futile. Other respondents underlined that the 'melting' of the systemic parties into one indiscernible magma connects these actors with the system at the expense of them. According to [P4-Yabloko], in society's

eyes the systemic opposition might be also seen as responsible for state-conducted repressive policies and domestic shortcomings.

When it comes to the ideological dimension as a defining feature of the systemic opposition, that feature was mentioned only by one of the non-systemic interlocutors. [P3-Partiya Peremen] stated that all the parties present in the State Duma share an *'anti-liberal consensus, a unity on the basis of 'great Russia' view and anti-Westernism'*. As [P3-Partiya Peremen] pointed out, this is the condition that needs to be met in order to be included in the political mainstream.

Additionally, the gap between the systemic and non-systemic opposition manifests itself not only via the perception of the system. My respondents reflected upon the electoral law, which constitutes a serious obstacle for their activities. Although the legislative aspect is not a theme of my thesis, participants' insights on it contained one ideology-related remark.

The representatives of the non-systemic parties – those who were unregistered – mentioned procedures of registering their parties. Two of my respondents ([P2-Libertarians][P2-Drugaya Rossiya]) talked about multiple rejections of applications to register their groups due to minor technical issues. According to them, it is a systematic state policy in order to limit the political competition for those who are regarded as troublemakers. [P2-Drugaya Rossiya] described the last rejection as unfounded:

> '*the last attempt was repealed due to the fact that the party's programme (ustav) did not correspond with the democratic legislation – however, it was deliberately written in the way to resemble the KPRF's programme in order to pass that threshold.*' [P2-Drugaya Rossiya]

This statement reflects the fact that ideological dimension is of secondary importance in Russian politics, which falls in line with the decisive role of the approach towards the system as a main variable influencing the level of 'systemness'.

(5.5) Systemic opposition exemplified by KPRF

Among all the parliamentary parties, my respondents referred to KPRF as the party with the broadest manoeuvring field within the system. By analysing the provided insights and comparing them with remarks made by the interviewed communist respondent, I try to

shed a light on the political and discursive ambiguity of the communists' position. It highlights a particular discursive bargaining conducted by KPRF.

The interviewed communist deputy [P7-KPRF] presented the systemic opposition – including his own party – as a political force with the ability to compete with the current regime because of its official status. The participant compared their activity, lawful and democratic, with a '*senseless and merciless*' (*bessmyslennyi i besposhchadnyi*) rebellion – which, according to the respondent, is what the non-systemic opposition does. Interestingly, a representative of KPRF allowed himself to rant the current authorities and called the other parliamentary parties (LDPR and *Spraviedlivaya Rossiya*) a fake opposition. Moreover, [P7-KPRF] remarked that the Communist Party has a far higher support among Russian population than the Russian elites 'draw' in elections in the process of electoral infringements.

> '*The Russian Federation should be called a colony divided in half by global imperialism and international capitalism. It is like a new Mongol yoke – the current governors of Russia pay their tribute to their masters in the West. It is visible where they put their money – in offshores. It is visible where their children live – in the West. Our ruling elite is not national at all. As the Bible says, ye shall know them by their fruits.*' [P7-KPRF]

It is noticeable that this rhetoric resembles ideological narratives fostered by *Drugaya Rossiya* and other left-wing unregistered movements (the antagonistic approach towards Western imperialism and capitalism), whereas the individual element of the critique (demanding the elite replacement due to its corruption) is reminiscent of Navalny's speeches. Despite these commonalities, [P7-KPRF] reserved the role of real opposition only to its own party.

The interview took place shortly before the vote on the constitutional amendments in the local Duma, what was preceded by some changes in the local legislation. In December 2019, the regional assembly changed the electoral regulations, passing a law abolishing election to the local Duma in Nizhny Novgorod by party-list proportional representations. Prior to that, MPs were elected via mixed system – part of them by party-list, another part by majoritarian representation. The regional assembly voted in favour of full shift to majoritarian representation and shortening the bench of municipal Duma – from 47 MPs to 35. The decision was harshly criticized by regional factions of LDPR and KPRF in the

regional assembly, arguing that it will lead to the detachment of parliament members from their electoral base and constitutes an attempt to conceal the low rating of the United Russia.[78] Additionally, the KPRF-supported legislative initiative to restore the direct election of Nizhny's mayor was rejected by the United Russia-led majority in the regional assembly.[79] In the opinion of [P7-KPRF], the aforementioned changes in the electoral regulations and preservation of indirect mayoral elections are 'undoubtedly' undertaken in order to consolidate the regime and United Russia's dominant status.

> *'This is an attempt to freeze the system for 2000 years or more by turning off the institutional democracy, with local governance among them. Just like the institution of referendum, which is completely destroyed. It is a total stupidity.'* [P7-KPRF]

It is unclear to what extent the respondent was honest in criticizing the government-led policies – the participant was aware of the anonymous status in the research. Nevertheless, one can argue that the constitutional amendments might signalise some changes in the rhetoric of KPRF. [P7-KPRF] called the constitutional amendments and controversies around their implementation a 'second milestone', while the first one was the 2018 pension reform. In participant's opinion, these developments have forced people who were formerly politically indifferent to wake up once '*the need for protest is huge*'. [P7-KPRF] stated that the system might be disrupted once the third 'milestone' is reached – when the authorities '*overplay themselves and hence initiate a crisis*'. Asked why KPRF participates in changing the constitution (the communists on the federal level added some corrections into the final version of the amendments), [P7-KPRF] answered that '*the constitutional reform constitutes a floodgate, through which we can run our water to break it, this is a conditional game*'.

Therefore, the political developments of 2019/2020 should be discussed as exemplification of how the discourse is transformed by political actors in reaction to various events. The anti-government harangue performed by [P7-KPRF] unwittingly resembles the rhetoric of Navalny, especially regarding the critique of corruption and hypocrisy of the elite. By reinforcing this discourse, KPRF changes the discursive reality, in which the party moves

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[78] 'Gordumu priveli v sistemnyi vid', Kommersant', (2020), https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4199368, consulted on 08.04.2020.
[79] 'Edinorossy blokirovali zakonproyekt o pryamikh vyborakh merov v Nizhegorodskoy oblasti', KozaPress, (2020), https://koza.press/news/9066, consulted on 08.04.2020.

from the centre of the system onto the verge, making the anti-regime self-positioning more feasible and acute.

The term 'systemic opposition' might be read along the lines of co-optation – that the power centre, in this case the Kremlin and the ruling party, has successfully subjected the political entities and made them 'pawns' of the political system. Applying a Foucauldian lens, we can approach this category from another angle and emphasize the role of the 'systemic opposition' as a pillar sustaining the system itself. KPRF, constituting the biggest and the most influential group among the parliamentary ones, should not be overlooked as an entity on which the power centre relies. The communists' presence legitimizes the system as a whole. As my respondents remarked, this puts a certain burden on the systemic opposition, especially after the pension reform, when the political dynamics in Russia accelerated substantially. Three of my interlocutors ([S2], [P3-Partiya Peremen], [P4-Yabloko], in describing the role of systemic opposition, went back to the 2011/12 Russian protests triggered by electoral violations. According to them, that was the moment when the political scene witnessed an attempt to enter the real anti-government discourse by parts of systemic opposition. Although KPRF spearheaded by its leader Gennady Zyuganov remained reserved towards the liberal organizers of the 2011/12 protests, he remained sympathetic to all of the protesters.[80]

'That was the moment, when the systemic opposition noticed a flaw in the system – therefore they joined and tried to change it. Once the system is broken, they do not support it. Within the collapsed system their role is simply non-existent.' [P4-Yabloko]

[S2] reflected that the systemic part of the opposition cautiously observes the activity of the non-systemic opposition in order to capture their momentum and flag it as their own. On the regional level it is particularly visible in the case of KPRF, which – according to the majority of my respondents – is the only political force with the real ability to mobilize its supporters, as it was visible during the protests against the pension reform.

Communists, however, engage themselves into street activities with caution – especially if protests are organised by the non-systemic groupings. [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] stated that the cooperation between the National Bolsheviks party and the communists was

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[80] 'Gennadiy Zyuganov: ya vsey dushoy s temi, kto byl na Sakharova i Bolotnoy', <u>Svobodnaya Pressa,</u> (2011), https://svpressa.ru/politic/article/51396/, consulted on 28.05.2020.

feasible on a regional level in the early 2000s, but since then the relationship has turned hostile. The respondent pointed out the case of the communist-organized action against closing down a paediatric surgery hospital in the Avtozavod district.[81] The gathering was also attended by activists from *Drugaya Rossiya*. According to the respondent, the organizers asked the police to kick them out. The activist concluded that situation by saying *'How is it possible to cooperate with them, if they're turning us in to cops?'*. That incident was brought up also by another respondent which used it as an example of KPRF's relatively high mobilising capabilities.

> *'Sometimes they (communists – FR) gather protesters, there is some defined issue that they can use to mobilize and catch a momentum, sometimes they do, sometimes not. Political organisation.. I won't speak about issues of federal agenda like pension reform, but there was a protest against closing a hospital in Avtozavod district. Somehow no one managed to seize that opportunity, but they did – very quickly.'* [P8-Navalny]

Another event, an ecological protest that took place in the town Balakhna[82], was also attended by the local KPRF. Organised by eco-activists and the movement 'For Clean Russia', the gathering turned into a scene of political rivalry. *'They (communists – FR) joined the protest with 20 flags, to create the impression that they are the hosts'*, said [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]. Public partnership between the officially-recognized party and a 'sect' (description of *Drugaya Rossiya* made by [P7-KPRF]) is out of the question: *'We do exchange information between us and them, but not publicly. They (communists – FR) are afraid to lose credibility in the eyes of authorities'*, underlined [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]. In the perception of [P7-KPRF], the National Bolsheviks are marginals with the aim of ultimate destruction, while the real opposition is constituted by KPRF and liberal groupings (according to the communist respondent).

To conclude, we can assert that the discursive category of non-/systemic opposition also exists as a reality for the systemic opposition. KPRF politicians are aware of the distinction – thus they engage themselves into bargaining over advantages and disadvantages

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[81] 'Khirurgiya Vskryla Protest', <u>Kommersant'</u>, (2019), https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4164081, consulted on 09.04.2020.
[82] 'Topit' Nizhny ili ne topit'? Vodnyi protest v nizhegorodskoy oblasti', <u>MBKH Media,</u> (2019), https://mbk-news.appspot.com/region/topit-nizhnij-ili-ne-topit-vodnyj-protest-v-nizhegorodskoj-oblasti, consulted on 09.04.2020.

of either reinforcing the anti-regime rhetoric or discrediting the 'marginals'. In the opinion of the [P7-KPRF], Communist Party constitutes a real contender due to the fact that they possess capabilities to foster their own agenda. By the same token, the non-systemic interviewees claimed that the link with the centre determines the parliamentary opposition and proves its fake character.

It is crucial to notice the fact that, despite the marginalization and exclusion of non-systemic groupings from the mainstream discourse, the non-systemic part of the opposition remains a vital point of reference for those, who are regarded as a 'pocket opposition'. In other words, the non-systemic part of the opposition sets an agenda to which the parliamentary parties are reactive. By its defining factor – a negative approach towards the system, a willingness to transform it starting with the ousting of the incumbents – the non-systemic actors set parameters which are then addressed by parliamentary parties.

This discursive tug-of-war reveals itself in moments of controversial political developments. Those focal moments – called by [P7-KPRF] as 'milestones' – are capable of rattling the political scene and therefore might be exploited by the systemic opposition to catch the anti-regime outrage at the expense of the non-systemic parties. However, the parliamentary parties are engaged in that interplay in an attentive manner. On the one hand, as I laid out in the theoretical chapter, joining the anti-regime protests by systemic politicians results in a necessity to bargain between maintaining its profiteering connection with the authorities and preserving its oppositional role in the eyes of the public. On the other hand, harsh and overt critique of the government performed by the parliamentary parties – who possesses a broader audience and easier access to the media landscape in comparison to non-systemic groupings – might push the discourse boundaries further. To put in another way, what has been regarded as a taboo and impossible to pronounce within the official debate might cease to be considered as forbidden.

The aforementioned local initiative of 'No to Putin forever' exemplifies that assumption. Organized by a vast array of activists without registered labels, the event was also attended by representatives of KPRF. As signalised by the name of the protest, a majority of the banners displayed criticism towards the system through the explicit name-calling of the president of the Russian Federation. The personalistic dimension of criticism towards the Kremlin, as we have established in the chapter dedicated to the characteristic of the non-systemic opposition, constitutes a core feature of the non-systemic opposition and decreases the level of 'systemness'. By reshaping the discourse through reinforcement of this parameter, the role of systemic opposition is not only questioned but also calls for its

adjustment – to either jump on that anti-regime bandwagon or discredit it. In the case of 'No to Putin forever', the systemic party of KPRF joined the protest and reinforced the rhetoric of non-systemic groups. Because of that diffusion between oppositional actors, the stabilizing role of the discourse that existed before might be disrupted. To put it differently: those, who were excluded, may find themselves at the centre of creating the opposition main narrative.

(5.6) Exercised strategy of political players (IV3)

Another factor defining the prefixes of the opposition according to the secondary literature is constituted by the type of activity which certain political actors employ. Juan Linz coined a term of 'disloyal opposition' which in this context can be identified as the non-systemic opposition. According to him, the disloyal contenders possess a variety of political tools to undermine the regime: from normative ones like electoral participation to less traditional ones, including political violence. However, the 'loyal' opposition – the systemic one in Russia – is perceived as the one committed to seizing power in a lawful way.

I identified three particular strategies used by the non-systemic opposition which were regarded by my respondents as crucial for their status: 1) educational and investigative activity, 2) single picket protests and mass gatherings, 3) capturing the 'technical' issues and politicizing them. Nevertheless, my inquiry led me to an assumption that the employed political methods in Russian context are mostly conditioned by external factors such as the reality of political field and its skewed character. In the opinion of my interviewees, the means of political fight chosen by certain actors is determined by that actors' position, not the other way around. Being part of the non-systemic opposition (or disloyal, a matter of terminology) puts certain players into the prior defined box that equips him/her with concrete tools, i.e. feasible measures to use. [S1] noted that the non-systemic and systemic opposition operate within '*two separate vocabularies*', referring to their different fields of possible actions.

In other words, the limited realm for the activity of the non-systemic groupings forces them to follow less normative tactics. [P5 – exNavalny], when asked about the aim of the non-systemic opposition nowadays, underlined the crucial role of raising social and political awareness among Russian society instead of achieving certain concrete goals as entrance to the local Duma.

'We need to develop critical thinking. Being in the opposition accelerates that process since even leaders need to be checked. Supporters of Gudkov, Yavlinsky or Navalny are the first, who verify credibility of their leaders.' [P5-exNavalny]

The respondent indicated the digital videos produced by opposition figures as one way to raise consciousness about civic duties, naming the successful YouTube channels of Alexei Navalny and Mikhail Svetov (the most prominent member of Libertarian Party). In his opinion, that field is particularly hard to capture by the systemic parties or the ruling centre once there's no single politician who would be able to create quality content in a manner that would be attractive to young people.

The educational activity of this branch of the opposition is not confined by cyberspace. Almost all of the respondents identifying themselves as non-systemic mentioned some kind of knowledge-spreading initiatives as a part of their movement. [P1-ONA] brought up examples of public lectures on domestic violence, which were followed by brainstorming sessions on violence prevention and introducing laws countering the occurrence of domestic violence. According to the respondent, it has been deemed a successful way of trying to advocate for change.

'People don't know that they can write protest letters or sign petitions, that's why we have created a template with instructions on what to do in order to send a letter to the State Duma or other officials, in accordance with our constitution and legislation.' [P1-ONA]

Similar actions are conducted by other groups – [P2-Libertarians] mentioned the annual 'Readings of Adam Smith' lecture, while [P3-Partiya Peremen] pointed out a non-governmental and ecological project 'Nizhny Novgorod – an ecological capital' (*Nizhnii Novgorod – ekologicheskaya stolitsa*). [P2-Libertarian] sees public events as defining trait of the non-systemic opposition in connection to the non-governmental sector of society:

'We perceive ourselves as a part of civil society constituted by various NGOs that work as groups of interests, be it feminist or ecological ones. In our party we have gun rights and cryptocurrency advocacy groups who are educating people on these topics.' [P2-Libertarians]

Another activity focus chosen by the non-systemic players is concentrated on semi-professional anti-corruption investigations and publication of their results on the Internet. This trend is illustrated by the YouTube videos of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation – the most famous one being '*On vam ne Dimon*' revealing the corruption schemes connected to Russian PM Dmitry Medvedev, which brought people to the streets across Russia in March 2017.[83] Nizhny's unit of the foundation follows the same pattern but on a regional level, which can be exemplified by an investigative video about an MP in the city Duma, a member of the United Russia, who allegedly exploited his authority to gain economic benefits.[84] In other materials, a footage depicts how MPs have rigged citizen's signatures via their real estate companies.[85] Although the former video was removed from the YouTube service after a complaint, this type of action - conducting private investigations and revealing the results publicly - is aimed at discouraging people to vote for the ruling party. According to [P8-Navalny], the main task of these investigations is not to discredit certain politicians or parties, but to enlighten citizens.

> *'There's a cliché in Russia that says that the member of parliament are millionaires, cool guys, driving cabriolets - a person to whom the law does not apply. Our job is to shatter that image. To show that an MP is a political representative that needs to represent people's interests, who cannot drive around in a cabriolet and with criminal impunity. People do not know this, they are politically illiterate, we need to show them what their money is spent on, they should know that it is the population that finances them [politicians – FR]!'* [P8-Navalny]

The method of collecting semi-professional investigative materials is not only employed by associates of the Navalny's foundation. The interviewed Yabloko's members [P4-Yabloko] stated that they had conducted their own investigation, casting light on the flaws of the local authorities.

Except for focusing on education and investigation, the non-systemic groupings also organise more normative political actions, such as public gatherings. One of the distinctive

[83] 'Starsheklassniki tantsevali i smeyalis' sredi policeyskikh kordonov', <u>Kommersant',</u> (2017), https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3254291, consulted on 16.04.2020.
[84] '"Mussornyy korol"', edinoross i deputat Vadim Agafonov', https://shtab.navalny.com/hq/nn/3523/, consulted on 17.04.2020.
[85] 'Kak deputaty zarabatyvayut Milliony na Nizhegorodtsakh', <u>YouTube,</u> video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_JwlYt6jKA, consulted on 17.04.2020.

features of the Russian public landscape is the phenomena of single picket protests (*odinochnyi piket*). According to the law of the Russian Federation, one does not need to notify the authorities in order to hold a single picket protest. Because of this, single picket protesting is widely employed by Russian citizens in order to pronounce their dissent with state-led policies. Because of the ban to hold political gatherings on the main pedestrian street of Nizhny Novgorod, single pickets are the only feasible way to protest in spots where protesters' voice might get some attention.

All of the respondents from the non-systemic part of the opposition had personally (or their organisation had) taken part in single picket protest at least once. However, the interviewees were also aware of the drawbacks of this method.

'A single person, standing on the street with a banner, might look sad and the action would be counter-effective. Therefore, it needs to be done properly, as a chain of protesters, just like in the case when people were protesting against the arrest of Moscow journalist, Ivan Golunov.' [P4-Yabloko]

[P3-Partiya Peremen] was even more reserved about the efficiency of protesting this way, comparing it to traditional mass gatherings: '*In the eyes of the public, single pickets look like meetings of mentally disordered people. Obviously, assemblies with party balloons look more serious*'. Moreover, a single protester is often perceived as being on someone's payroll, [P5-exNavalny] said.

According to [S2], the Internet-based investigations and single picket protests reflects the main fields for possible activity of the non-systemic opposition. The respondents indicated the Internet and street as the only way of anti-regime forces to formulate their dissent. Nevertheless, public gatherings organised by unregistered parties are not capable of calling a wide mass of society to protest. According to the local journalist [J1], the only exceptions in recent years, were two separate manifestations: the anti-corruption gathering in 2017 and the one aggravated by the pension reform in 2018. The former event, based on rough estimates mentioned by [J1], gathered more than a 1000 people, which should be regarded as an achievement given the local circumstances. The protests against the pension reform were also of relatively big size due to the KRPF's ability to mobilise its supporters and willingness of non-systemic activists to participate in an event organised by a systemic party.

The public gatherings organised by the non-systemic opposition are of limited success due to local activists' ineptness, said one of the scholars [S1]. According to him, their scope of possible actions is '*close to zero*'. Because of their unwillingness to enter the system due to its 'ethics', the non-systemic political actors try to ignite '*petty civil wars*'.

> '*The only capability possessed by non-systemic opposition is its attempt to create a social mass focused on protesting, without obeying the law – as can be exemplified by the Moscow protests last summer. They count on an aggravation of clashes.*' [S1]

However, the respondents self-identifying with the non-systemic opposition seemed to be aware of their limits. When asked about what is feasible to achieve, some of them started to point out various obstacles in their activities. What is illustrative is that their statements indicated a vast array of internal clashes and animosities – they blamed each other of being '*lunatics*', creating '*a closed society for liberal wannabes*', to mention just a few of the accusations. These kinds of conflicts are inherent, however, for the Russian opposition as a whole both on federal and on local levels.

Bearing in mind the limitations for the non-systemic activities, I asked my respondents what issues can be solved by their activities. One of them [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] stated that the local opposition might manifest its presence in relation to problems that he called '*technical*', such as everyday citizens' worries occurring within the public sphere of the city and region: cleaning the streets from snow, repairing pavements and renovating the urban area. These issues are tightly linked to the environmental problems. Most of the respondents claimed that the eco-agenda (*ekopovestka*) is currently gaining broader societal attention, which might be exploited by the non-systemic opposition forces to gather traction among the youth. [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] stated that '*eco-movements are reaching a momentum, now various political groups are joining them*', exemplifying that with the case of the protests against building a landfill in the Arkhangelsk region.

According to the participant, this was the moment when a vast array of political parties – despite their contradicting affiliations – realised the importance of an environmental rhetoric. That case illustrated the possibility of union between conflicted groups, united in a joint effort against the state-led policies – a movement with a clearly defined goal of blocking the construction of a landfill in the north of the country. In the opinion of another respondent [P3-Partiya Peremen], the 'No to Putin forever' protest should be viewed as a similar case. Due to the clear, well-defined aim and a lack of ideological background it facilitated the

process of uniting political forces from different verges of the political spectrum, the activist said.

All of these diversified measures undertaken by non-systemic contenders - educational activity, semi-professional investigations, single picket protests and the reformulation of mass gatherings – might be explained by the circumstances created by the Russian political system. Although the period of relative 'liberalization', signalized by the last Medvedev's presidential address in 2012, introduced a mitigation of law requirements related to party registration,[86] my respondents still complained about the closure of the existing political system. Their perception of the system's inflexibility must be seen as a factor that grants them less normative political tools, as the initiatives indicated above. However, the legislative restrictions do not constitute a mere cause to extra political activity conducted by the non-systemic opposition. Political actors' pursuit of their aims via 'non-traditional' actions could be also explained by the mechanism of depoliticization, as described in the theoretical chapter.

The activities of the non-systemic opposition – all the aforementioned actions which might not be always regarded as purely political and therefore should not be performed by politicians – might be perceived as a conscious tactic to break the depoliticized discourse. If a protest against the construction of a landfill is described as a 'technical issue', then its organizers are eradicated from the layer of 'politics'. Their action is placed within the dispute of neutral and apolitical character; therefore, they are not presented as political contenders.

In order to regain that lost influence, non-systemic actors try to 'politicize' different themes and therefore restore their status as politicians. Employing this narrative, the discussed landfill is not only a problem of structural mismanagement, but an example of corruption scheme plotted by the current elite. Ecological issues, used as an example here, are particularly useful. Manifested care for the environment enhances the accusation against the elites which are presented as culprits of pollution.

Due to the fact that the main determinant for the non-systemic opposition is the negative assessment of the system– an overt willingness to topple down the current elite - it is crucial to notice that the 'politicization' follow these lines. The main base for questioning the system is of personalistic character that enables various branches of the opposition to unite, putting ideological differences aside. A dispute over competing political visions takes place within the opposition ranks and it is presented as a quality that differentiates the non-systemic

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[86] R. Sakwa, 'Questioning Control and Contestation in Late Putinite Russia', Europe-Asia Studies, 67.2 (2015), pp. 192–208.

opposition from the systemic one. Vivid and ideology-driven debates – exemplified by arguments within the *Drugaya Rossiya* coalition in the late-2000s or *Koordynacionnyi Sovet Oppozitsii* in 2011/12 – are portrayed by non-systemic actors as platforms of genuine politics, in contrast to the indiscernible parliamentary parties. Accusing the systemic politicians of hollowness of their discussions should be treated as another attempt to recapture the 'political' essence and, at the same time, a by-product of the 'depoliticization' process. Inadvertently, the gap that differs the non/-systemic opposition transposes another discursive and polarized categorization: de-/politicized. Representatives of the non-systemic branch claim that their activities are of political substance, what stands in sharp contrast with the systemic politicians. According to that narrative, members of the parliamentary parties constitute a fig leaf of quasi-political debate, creating only an appearance of democratic deliberation.

To conclude, the depoliticized reality significantly conditions the scope of activity for the non-systemic opposition. The respondents claimed that their methods of contending the current authorities are not a matter of free choice, but a result of the situation when the traditional ways of parliamentary and electoral competition remain partially blocked for them. Based on that, we can argue that the political player's strategy cannot determine the 'systemness' fully as it works also the other way around. Being the non-systemic part of the opposition forces its members to exploit less normative ways due to the given legislative circumstances, discursive exclusion and depoliticization. Examining the political strategy as an independent variable influencing the level of 'systemness' needs to take into account the nature of discussed public habitat as it draws a more detailed picture of the research puzzle. Examining Russian political landscape as a depoliticized sphere sheds a light on causes standing behind employing less normative political strategies of the opposition.

(5.7) Perception of the past (IV4)

Although not present in the secondary scholarship on the political opposition, I decided to examine respondents' perceptions of the past, treating it as an overlooked independent variable that impacts the level of 'systemness'. Based on the contextual background outlined earlier, I look on the perception of Nemtsov's legacy and the implementation of the 'power vertical'.

(5.7.1) The 'dashing 1990s' – a phantom of democracy?

When asked about local peculiarities conditioning the political activity, almost all participants depicted NN as a wannabe centre of the region, while the city's prospects of improving its status in the country remains rather vague. The respondents claimed that not much has been left from the vibrant civil society of the 1990s. In the opinion mostly shared by members of the non-systemic opposition, Nizhny has always been under the influence of the security and military sectors due to its past status as a closed town until 1990. Politicians and activists indicated that the reason behind the ineptitude of the oppositional ranks, was due to Nemtsov's decision to engage into federal politics, which led to a brain drain of the local elite. [J1] depicted the city as a centre of defence procurement, inhabited predominantly by state employees (*byudzhetniki*) and mortgage payers (*ipotechniki*) – who were apathetic and unable to manifest their dissatisfaction. Additionally, there's a lack of charismatic leaders around which the opposition or political challengers can gather – such as the cluster of activists in Moscow or, as mentioned by three interlocutors, Yevgeny Roizman, the former mayor of Yekaterinburg. On top of this, the close proximity to Moscow can be considered as a serious disadvantage for a local political development: *'Moscow drains brains of those, who are active and want to achieve something. It is a tomb for both business and political activity',* said [J1]. According to [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]*,* Nizhny is particularly controlled by the federal centre because of its closeness to Moscow. Due to its special status in the USSR, the interlocutor called the city a '*red and police town*', underlining the particular role of the military industry in it. [P5-exNavalny] also pointed out the '*haunting*' memory of Gorkii – '*The city was closed for more than 60 years, people still remember that time, the stability of it, and they compare it with the 1990s and the chaos back then*'.

The negative perception of the past was widely shared by my respondents, both among scholars and political figures. Only one interviewee [P5-exNavalny] did not reflect on the negative aspects of the 1990s: '*I lived a perfect life in the 1990s. I could read, listen to and watch anything that I wanted. Now, unfortunately, people think that a sandwich is better than a right to vote*'. A majority of the interviewed people, however, stressed the drawbacks of the political life back then. Across the whole political spectrum – be it liberal, left-wing, systemic or non-systemic politicians – they all agreed that Nemtsov's privatization policies we disastrous and that they only exacerbated the 'dirty' conflicts among the regional elites. [S3] stated that Nemtsov's departure has had a negative impact on the public development of NN:

'The city with – both subjectively and objectively - local traditions and ambitions was overshadowed by the conflicts between the governor and mayor, or the mayor and city manager'.

The connection between the liberals and misery of the 'dashing 90s' was present in almost all of the interviews – the aforementioned scholar (S3) pointed out that the term 'liberal' became an insult, thus reinforcing the negative perception of every political party that positions itself in association with this part of the political spectrum. Therefore, the legacy of Nemtsov is also regarded as negative. [P4-Yabloko] stated that the negative opinion about the liberal bloc is still prevalent – however, as the respondent asserted, the state-aligned narrative about liberalism encompassed also the other political players, creating a wide-spread definition of politics as a '*dirty job*' (*gryaznaya polityka – gryaznoe delo*). Therefore, people do not cling to political brands anymore, as they carry an emotional meaning. '*People want to locate themselves outside politics',* the interviewee highlighted. The participants identifying themselves as liberals ([P3-Partiya Peremen] [P4-Yabloko]), claimed that today's representatives of the liberal option should not be held accountable for the shortcomings of the 1990s. Furthermore, in their opinion, the 'real' liberals should not be identified with the so-called 'liberals' within the government.

Interestingly, the respondents located on the other side of the opposition bloc – left-patriotic, as they call themselves – share a significantly different perception of the events of the 1990s. In their opinion, the demise of a liberal agenda never happened. The interviewed communist [P7-KPRF] perceived Nemtsov's input in the Kremlin as decisive for the further pursuit of liberal policies on a federal level. This interpretation goes hand in hand with the remarks made by another respondent [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]: '*The state nowadays is governed by and for neoliberal oligarchs, everything is made for their benefits*'. According to the interviewee, the Russian 'common folk' is tired of that political direction and simply '*does not understand liberals*'.

Although contradictory, the interviewees' perceptions of the 'dashing 1990s' and Nemtsov's heritage are inefficient for explaining the positioning of the opposition along the non-/systemic line. The way in which the respondents 'made sense' out of the past reflected their political attitude, but no-one really acclaimed Nemtsov and his governing in the region as a success. The awareness of the negative results of the governor's departure to Moscow went across the political spectrum – shared by both left-wing and liberal politicians from both

registered and unregistered political groups. Particularly distinctive was the fact that Nemtsov's local heritage does not constitute any point of reference for Nizhny's liberals. During the public gathering commemorating his assassination, which was organised by Yabloko on February 29th 2020, the speakers focused on the federal aspect of former governor's activities and private memories connected with him, without wide mentioning of his tenure as a local administrator.[87] Nemtsov was commemorated mainly as a vocal opponent of the Putin regime and as a human rights advocate.[88]

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[87] Speakers from Liberalnyy Klub Nizhnego Novgoroda, FBK, Libertarians, people from various NGOs such as Golos.

[88] 'Mityng v pamyati Borisa Nemtsova', YouTube, recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_7czv5PztQ&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0DcZgNyyw4UDoFicxAWjg O1Ri2nxcqAdxuUo4ZN-I8jOiI8xSYfJnWyaM, consulted on 28.05.2020.

(5.7.2) 'Technocratization' despite local passions

Perhaps the implementation of the so-called 'power vertical', launched by Vladimir Putin at the start of his presidency, might shed a light and provide us with some patterns regarding the formative nature of the opposition? As a real facet of the 'power vertical' on the regional level, my respondents pointed out numerous local elite scandals regularly breaking out in the local administration. [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] stated that the aforementioned Klimentiev-Nemtsov fight and forced resignation from the mayoral office was the first case of internal clashes and signalised the nature of the 'power vertical': '*It was a sign that any appointee, governor or mayor might be dismissed in any moment by the federal top*.'

Another example - the case of former mayor, Oleg Sorokin - was mentioned by [P3-Partiya Peremen].89 The respondent stated that the fall of Sorokin's clique was a way of cleansing the city administration of his associates:90 '*The ousting of Sorokin's associates is still undergoing, but the authorities want to keep it away from the public*'.

Furthermore, the participant underlined that the current administrators indicated the drawbacks done by Sorokin's group and presented them as a basis for justifying the sack of of the ex-mayor's cronies. As an illustrative example of the way in which the authorities explain how they provide improvements after the period of bad governance of their predecessors, [P3-Partiya Peremen] described the case of the unlawful construction site in close proximity to 'Alexeeyev's house' in the city centre. 91 The building used to be inhabited by the famous Soviet hydrofoil ships designer and regarded as an object of cultural heritage.

> *'The construction nearby the Alexeeyev's house – from the point of view of the current authorities – constitutes a comfortable example of the inefficiency of former elite.'* [P3-Partiya Peremen]

The ongoing process of 'technocratization' among the regional elites was also addressed by the respondents. The interlocutors underlined the discrepancy between the alleged technical role of the governor and real political tasks on the ground. Theoretically – and in accordance to the 'power vertical' - a governor exemplifies the federal preferences and

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89 To get more information on the case, see above in theoretical chapter, p. 26.
90 'Kak rushilis' kar'ery storonnikov Sorokina iż-za ego aresta', NewsNN..
91 In 2011, the small site near the Alexeeyev's house was sold with approval from the city Duma. As an expertise has shown, it violated the city law and initiated local protests. More on that: 'Stroitelstvo mnogoetazhki mogut vozobnovit' u doma konstruktora Alekseyeva v Nizhnem Novgorode', KozaPress, https://koza.press/five/8908, consulted on 20.03.2020.

introduces them into practice. Additionally, he is the mediator that pursues the goal to neutralize the centrifugal aspirations of local power holders. According to [S1], a technocratic governor should fulfil the tasks of '*apolitical corporative manager*'. In a similar tone, [S2] stated that a regional leader is meant to be a '*technical executive*' of a top-down decision stream.

The technical and managerial aspect of the 'power vertical' seems to not be corresponding with the reality. In October 2019, numerous regional leaders were appointed to new roles as heads of the local units of the United Russia party. The governor of Nizhny Novgorod oblast, Gleb Nikitin, was among them and became a chairman of the ruling party in the region. The politicized character of that development has been highlighted by the fact that the ruling party enjoys exceptionally low approval ratings.92 The respondents interpreted appointments as a politically motivated attempt to revive United Russia's approval. The link between the party and an efficient governor might result in renewed positive opinions of the ruling party. According to [J1], governors find themselves in an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, they answer to the citizens, although at the same time they need to secure a sufficient number of votes to preserve United Russia's dominance – and the pressure on regional heads of the party is even stronger now.

[S3] called this process 'an agony' of the party and underlined the different aspects of this process:

> '*These 40-50-year-old technocrats were expelled from Moscow. And if you're not in Moscow, then you mean nothing. This is an attempt to exploit the governors' skills in order to secure the party's rating and find out which one of them would manage.*' [S3]

Despite the fact that the political reality of Nizhny has undergone significant transformations since the 1990s and it currently exemplifies the top-down tendency of 'technocratization', participants shared a common feeling of lack of significant change. '*The local politics is like a rural theatre (sel'skiy teatr), the same people as 8 years ago*', remarked [P3-Partiya Perement]. [P6-Drugaya Rossiya] said that local parliament merely gives the impression of a legislative body, while in real terms '*it's just a circus, designed for*

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92 'Reyting "Edinoy Rossii" upal do minimuma za poslednyie 14 let', <u>Vedomosti,</u> (2019), https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2019/07/12/806476-reiting-edinoi-rossii, consulted on 24.04.2020.

those with financial and administrative resources'. [P7-KPRF] pointed out the fact that United Russia has an overwhelming majority and is able to block every initiative raised by KPRF – and that this is not likely to change because of the closed nature of the system.

The impression of a stagnating political scene in Nizhny was shared by all of the interlocutors. Limited possibilities of entering the elite without prior connections precludes the opposition forces from engaging into decision-making process by any means other than co-optation and reproduction within the power elite. According to the collected data, the negative perception of the 'power vertical' and assertion of its ineptitude was commonly stated by the respondents – even by the representative of KPRF. Thus, the opinion on the implementation of the 'power vertical' cannot be regarded as condition for the level of the 'systemness'.

The legacy of the 1990s and the creation of the 'power vertical' were highlighted as the origins of Nizhny's political stagnation. The chosen pinpoints do not provide us with significant distinctions between the contenders and cannot be interpreted as key-formative for their positioning. However, as we have seen during this analysis, the minor differences that were signalised – whether one perceives the flaws of the 'dashing 1990s' as entangled with the liberal agenda or not, whether one sees the 'power vertical' as a closed system full of corruption or some sort of a 'game' – partially builds the self-identification of political challengers but without determining the significant impact for their 'systemness'.

(6) Conclusions

At the beginning of the thesis, I made a claim that employing a poststructuralist lens in the examination of the scientific non-/systemic cleavage might shed light on their differentiation, as a point of reference and source of identity. With the *Bolotnaya Revolutsiya* of 2011-2013 augmenting the confrontation between the opposition and the authorities, a discourse focused on the political challengers started to be used more often. Every political turmoil that occurs on the Russian political scene brings back the discursive gap between the systemic and non-systemic contenders.

Bearing in mind the limitation imposed by my study population, the research focuses mainly on the non-systemic opposition. Based on the data set, I underlined the two emerging camps (left-patriotic and liberal) that has to be included in the research on Russian political landscape as that differentiation fixates the abundance of the non-systemic forces. Describing the determinants of the 'real' non-systemic opposition, respondents indicated the fact that belonging to that category is a value in itself and elevates the status of a certain entity assigned to the term. The feature shared by the political opponents of the regime is a common hostility towards the incumbent authorities and urge to topple them down, even beyond accepted means – contrariwise to the systemic actors, who are involved in bargaining with the system.

Although the whole group of the non-systemic opposition might lack its rank-and-file, I argue that their role increases in significance since the *Bolotnaya Revolutsiya*. The internal micro-dynamics of these groups produce a discourse that often ends up as captured by the systemic opposition or the authorities. Therefore, neglecting that aspect in the scholarship on Russian politics might result in certain overlooks. In order to address the main research questions and single out the decisive factor conditioning the level of 'systemness' (**DV**), an analysis of open-ended interviews was carried out. The thesis focused on the following question: which factors are conditioning the distinction between the non-systemic and systemic opposition from the perspective of involved actors?

As it is shown throughout the analysis chapter, indicators created in the theory do not necessary provide us with a satisfying outcome. The dimension of ideology (**IV1**), coined by Sartori's concept of 'external ideology' in relation to state-fostered values, turned out to be insufficient for determining the level of 'systemness'. Firstly, the differences between political entities within the non-systemic branch of the opposition are substantial and cannot be wrapped up into a common set of values. Secondly, the state-fostered ideology is hard to

describe – thus, there is no clear and consistent ideological point of reference to confront. The 'core values' term, named by the quoted respondent as a uniting frame for the non-systemic opposition, carries a different message and does not relate to any ideology.

Another element singled out within the theory sees the difference in strategy employed by political contenders (**IV3**). The issue of choosing the political strategy was explained by the respondents as caused by conditions imposed by the ruling regime, not as a free choice. Due to the 'depoliticization' of the Russian political field, the non-systemic opposition is forced to employ less normative tools, and their self-chosen status of non-/systemic cleavage conditions the exploited political strategy (not the other way around). Therefore, assessing the 'systemness' based on the pre-designed variables – ideology and strategy – is far from being sufficient. Furthermore, as indicated in the sub-chapter dedicated to the role of KPRF, systemic entities also might reproduce the discourse of the non-systemic roots, which obscures the clear-cut definition even more.

Answering one of the sub-questions, I decided to include a factor that was not present within previous theory – the perception of the past (**IV4**), which was broadly mentioned by the respondents. Although that variable turned out to be influential when it comes to assigning a certain actor to concrete political camp on an ideological dimension, it did not determine the level of 'systemness'. Respondents shared common negative standpoint on the period of the 1990s and the instalment of the 'power vertical' launched by Putin's regime.

One of the interviewees portrayed the Russian non-systemic opposition as sharing the aim of 'opposing' instead of trying to transform the system from within. Due to the skewed field of their political activity, challengers embark on a task to delegitimize any political force that constructs the system and present a substantial alternative. Their strategy is to paint the conflict in white-and-black shades, exploiting the Manichean disjunction between us and them. This feature of the Russian opposition corresponds with perceiving the standpoint on the system (**IV2**) as a defining variable for the level of 'systemness'. What overarches the non-systemic opposition is the hostility towards the system. Willingness to transform the whole political setting constitutes a feature that, in the opinion of respondents, determines the non-systemic opposition.

It is questioned to what extent the trait – the negative perception of the system – remains a stable point of identity for the actors who identify themselves with that label. What is the necessary extent of the proposed transformation? Is it a question of the incumbent individuals embodied by Putin or the whole legislative setting that needs to be overturned?

Nonetheless, that broad 'net' encompasses various political entities and enables them to formulate a simple agenda and engage in joint efforts.

This leads us to the sub-question regarding the creation of a reality framed by the discourse. Respondents, being aware of the existence of the non-/systemic cleavage, perceived it as a concrete point of reference and identity. Confronted by the state-led narrative about 'marginals' or 'radicals', opposition actors started to treat the label of 'non-systemic opposition' as a source of self-identity. It does not leave an imprint only on the way in which the non-systemic politicians operate, but also on the systemic ones, what is related to the last posed question. The political developments impact the non-/systemic differentiation as they animate the whole political scene. As my respondents claimed, the harsh criticism towards the government raised by the non-systemic politicians needs to be addressed by the parliamentary parties in order not to be regarded as Kremlin's pawns. Therefore, the discourse produced by non-systemic parties and then supplied by systemic groupings might push the boundaries further and put the non-systemic contenders in the centre of a discursive agenda towards the system. What has been regarded as a taboo and impossible to pronounce within the official debate might cease to be perceived that way as that narrative would be augmented by systemic and mainstream politicians (respondents regarded KPRF as the most likely parliamentary party to do that).

My attempt to tackle the issue by employing a poststructuralist vocabulary sheds a new light on the scholarship about Russian opposition once it underlines the ambiguous nature of discursive tools: name-calling and exclusion. Approaching the issue from this angle has allowed me to treat the discursive exclusion as a possible point of resistance for the non-systemic opposition. That label turned out to be an asset for some (the 'badge of honour' brought up by the respondent). Discourse power-relations and bargaining over words occur in both directions. The 'injurious speech act' via labelling rivals is exploited by the non-systemic opposition towards the system and systemic opposition as well.

The qualitative approach and analysis of insights provided by the specific study group conducted in the provincial city highlighted the local context. The regional circumstances should be taken into account while making comparative parallels with opposition landscape from other countries. The thesis underlined certain exceptionalities of the Russian environment – its 'depoliticized' character and 'opposing' aim of the opposition to mention just a few. Revealed conditions standing behind the activity of opposition parties address the question why the frameworks created for liberal democracies do not fully apply in the given

area. Assessing the scene as a scene for employment of discursive tools provides a substantial step in understanding the dynamics behind the Russian political landscape with a particular focus on language through a Foucauldian lens.

In order to further the scholarship, it is recommended to examine the strategies of the opposition from the perspective of produced language. This might uncover possible junctures emerging in the middle of the non-/systemic gap – especially as a reaction to political crises. Moments of potential consolidation of both branches of the opposition should be traced discursively, namely who animates the produced political word interplay. Also, due to the 'depoliticization' and variety of employing political strategies, the research on Russian opposition has to be conducted in an 'out of the box' manner as used means is often not normative for political rivalry understood in a Western sense.

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Annexes

Annex A) The list of respondents

Code	Location	Date	Affiliation
Scholar 1 [S1]	Nizhny Novgorod	7 November 2019	Nizhny Novgorod branch of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration
Scholar 2 [S2]	Nizhny Novgorod	23 January 2020	Nizhny Novgorod Dobrolyubov State Linguistic University
Scholar 3 [S3]	Nizhny Novgorod	31 January 2020	Lobachevsky State University of Nizhni Novgorod
Scholar 4 [S4]	Nizhny Novgorod	12 March 2020	Lobachevsky State University of Nizhni Novgorod
Scholar 5 [S5]	Skype	27 March 2020	Russian Political Science Association
Politician 1 [P1-ONA]	Nizhy Novgorod	15 November 2019	Feminist Movement *ONA*
Politician 2 [P2-Libertarians]	Nizhny Novgorod	21 November 2019	Libertarian Party of Russia
Politician 3 [P3-Partiya Peremen]	Nizhny Novgorod	6 December 2019	*Partiya Peremen* (formerly)
Politician(s) 4 [P4-Yabloko] (interview conducted in Yabloko's office, other members of the party – except the interviewee - were participating)	Nizhny Novgorod	15 January 2020	*Yabloko*
Politician 5 [P5-exNavalny]	Nizhny Novgorod	1 February 2020	The Anti-Corruption Foundation - Navalny's HQ in Nizhny Novgorod (formerly)
Politician 6 [P6-Drugaya Rossiya]	Nizhny Novgorod	6 February 2020	*Drugaya Rossiya*
Politician 7 [P7-KPRF]	Nizhny Novgorod	3 March 2020	Communist Party of Russian Federation
Politician 8 [P8-Navalny]	Skype	25 April 2020	The Anti Corruption Foundation – Navalny's HQ in Nizhny Novgorod
Journalist 1 [J1]	Nizhny Novgorod	24 January 2020	Independent outlet

Annex B) Graphic depiction of the research puzzle

- **A scheme before the data collection**
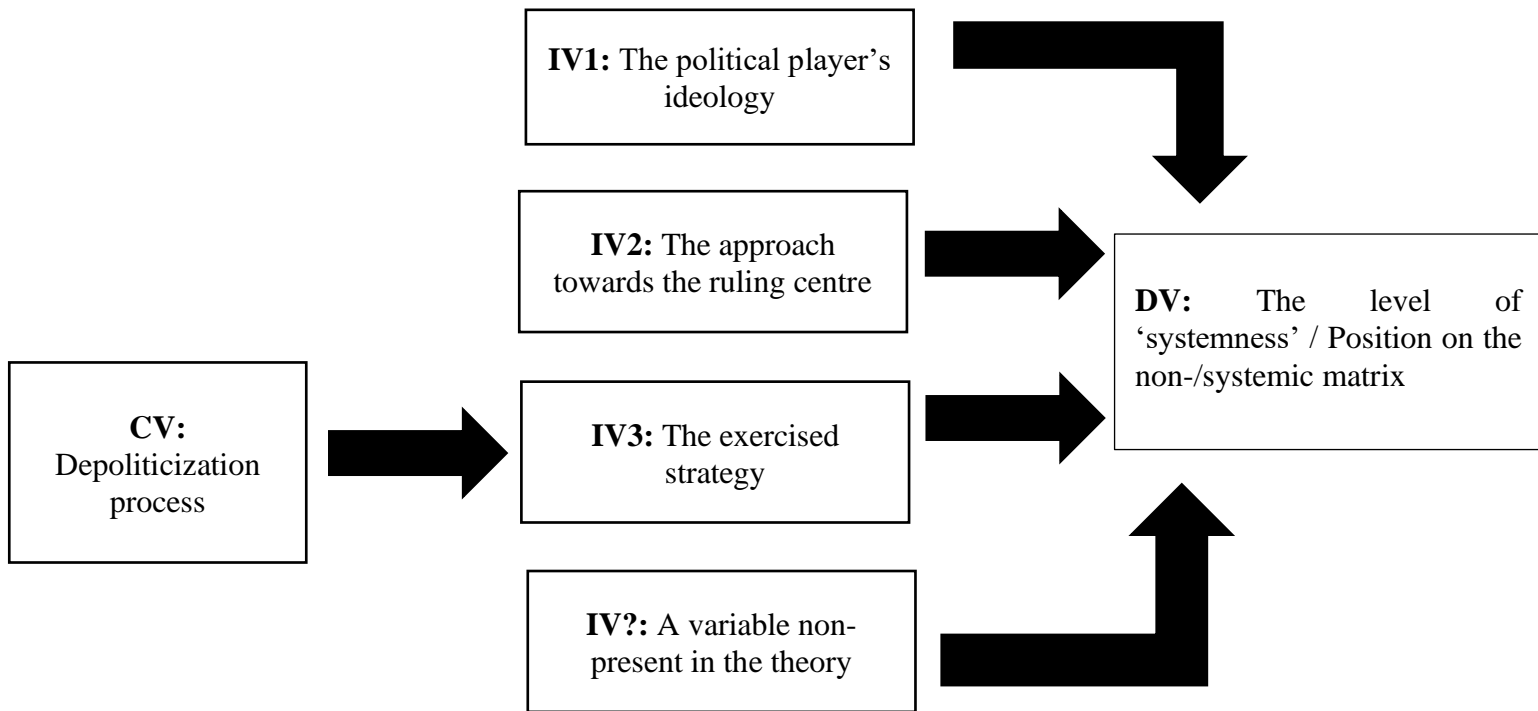
- **An updated version after the data collection**
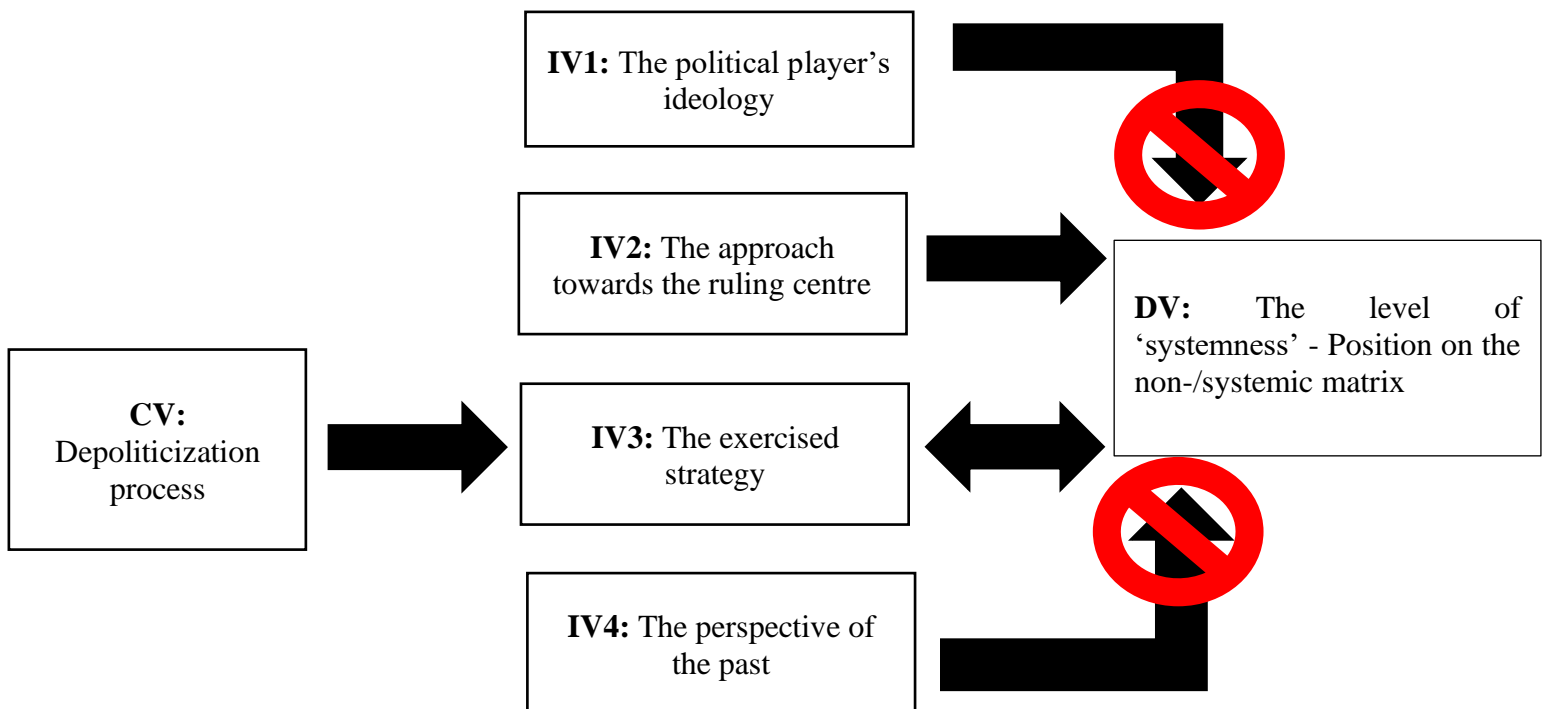
Annex C) Consent Form and Plain Language Statement

University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL & POLITICAL SCIENCES

Consent Form

Title of Project: Bringing others into line: non-system and system opposition discourse as a political tool
from Russian perspective
Name of Researcher: Filip Rudnik

Basic consent clauses, statement format

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement/Participant Information Sheet for the above
study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. I
agree to take part in this research study.

Confidentiality/anonymity clauses

I agree / do not agree (underline as applicable) to include my
name in the overall list of interviewees. ☐

I agree / do not agree (underline as applicable) to be named
in the research and give consent for my quotes to be attached
with my name.
☐

I acknowledge that any participant, if he / she restricted his
/ her name from being explicitly stated in the research, will
be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from
the research. ☐

Consent on method clause

I consent for the interview being audio-recorded. ☐

Signature Section

Name of Participant …………………………………… Signature ……………………………………………..

Date …………………………………

Name of Researcher ………………………………………… Signature ……………………………………………..

Date …………………………………

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL & POLITICAL SCIENCES

Согласие на проведение интервью

Название исследования: Bringing others into line: non-system and system opposition discourse as a political tool from Russian perspective

Исследователь: Filip Rudnik

Я подтверждаю, что я прочитал(а) и понял(а) Plain Language Statement вышеуказанного исследования, и у меня была возможность задать дополнительные вопросы.

Я понимаю, что моё участие является добровольным, и что я могу отказаться от него в любое время без объяснения причин. Я соглашаюсь принять участие в этом исследовании.

Я принимаю следующие условия проведения интервью: в случае моего несогласия с использованием моих действительных персональных данных будет использован псевдоним. Кроме того, любая информация, которая может меня идентифицировать, будет изменена для защиты моей анонимности (место работы, возраст и т. д.)

Я соглашаюсь / не соглашаюсь (ненужное зачеркнуть) с тем, чтобы включить моё имя в общий список собеседников.

Я соглашаюсь / не соглашаюсь (ненужное зачеркнуть) с тем, чтобы быть упомянутым в исследовании и связать мое заявления с моим именем.

Я соглашаюсь / не соглашаюсь (ненужное зачеркнуть) с тем, чтобы интервью было записано в формате аудиозаписи.

Имя участника:………………………………… Подпись: …………………………………………..

Дата: …………………………………

Имя исследователя:……………………………………… Подпись: …………………………………………..

Дата:…………………………………

College of Social
Sciences

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL & POLITICAL SCIENCES

Plain Language Statement

Study title: Bringing others into line: non-system and system opposition discourse as a political tool from the Russian perspective

Researcher Details: Filip Rudnik – a postgraduate student in the Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (CEERES) programme at the University of Glasgow.

Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to participate in this research study, conducted by Filip Rudnik and supervised by Dr Roman Golubin (Lobachevskiy University in Nizhny Novogrod) and Prof Andrey Makarychev (University of Tartu).

Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear of if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

It is expected that the research will further understanding of Russia's political system. Many commentators talk of a distinction between 'systemic' and 'non-systemic' opposition (i.e. opposition located within formal political structures and opposition outside of formal politics). I, however, wish to examine this issue further, by speaking directly with people involved in Russian political life.

The study therefore seeks to learn from the practical experiences of people involved in Russian politics at a regional level – in the city of Nizhni Novgorod.

Why have I been chosen?

You are someone involved in political life and who has an active public profile (either through social media, news media or through your institutional channels). You are therefore well placed to offer insights into how you have organised your activity and how you have (not) interacted with various 'systemic' and 'non-systemic' structures.

Do I have to take part?

The participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without having to give a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in an interview (no longer than 1 hour). If you agree, the interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, I will analyse the transcript (or notes if you do not agree to audio recording)

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Prior to the interview, all participants will be asked if they are either happy to be named in the study, or if they would like to remain anonymous. If you request anonymity, your real name and personal details will not be used. Instead, you will be referred to by pseudonym.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will write up the findings from my study in the form of a Master's dissertation. A copy of the research will be stored in the University's database for archival purposes. I may also use the data to write conference papers and/or analytical journal articles.

Who is organising and funding the research? (If relevant)

I am a student with a full studentship from the CEERES consortium, a group of eight universities. For further details see their website: http://ceeres-erasmusmundus.eu/

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by the University of Glasgow's Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information

Filip Rudnik – rudnik.filip@gmail.com

CEERES programme coordinator Dr Ammon Cheskin – Ammon.cheskin@glasgow.ac.uk

Supervisor at Nizhni Novgorod Dr Roman Golubin – golubin@unn.ru

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the School of Social and Political Science's Ethics Officer Susan Bachelor, email: Susan.Batchelor@glasgow.ac.uk

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL & POLITICAL SCIENCES

Объявление о проведении исследования

Название исследования: Bringing others into line: non-system and system opposition discourse as a political tool from the Russian perspective

Исследователь: Филип Рудник – студент Университета Глазго, магистерская программа Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (CEERES)

Приглашение

Вас приглашают принять участие в исследовании, проводимом Филипом Рудником под руководством к.и.н. Романа Голубина (УНН им. Лобачевского) и профессора Андрея Макарычева (Тартуский университет).

Пожалуйста, уделите некоторое время внимательному прочтению следующей информации. Если при ознакомлении у Вас возникнут вопросы, пожалуйста, обращайтесь ко мне для получения подробной информации.

Цель исследования:

Ожидается, что исследование увеличит понимание политической системы Российской Федерации. Ряд экспертов говорит о разграничении системной и несистемной оппозиций (т.е. оппозиции, находящейся внутри формальной политической структуры, и оппозиции вне классической политики). Я хотел бы подробнее исследовать этот вопрос через непосредственное общение с людьми, связанными с политической жизнью РФ.

Таким образом, исследование направлено на ознакомление с практическим опытом людей, принимающих участие в российской политике на региональном уровне, а именно в Нижнем Новгороде.

Почему меня выбрали?

Вы являетесь личностью, связанной с политической жизнью и имеющей активный политический профиль в социальных сетях, СМИ или институциональных каналах. Поэтому у Вас есть все возможности для того, чтобы дать представление о том, как Вы организовали свою деятельность и (не)взаимодействовали с различными «системными» и «несистемными» структурами.

Должен ли я принимать участие?

Участие полностью добровольное. Вы можете отказаться от участия в любое время без объяснения причин.

Что будет, если я приму участие?

Вас попросят принять участие в интервью, которое продлится не более одного часа. Если Вы дадите свое согласие, интервью будет записано в качестве аудиозаписи. По окончании интервью я проанализирую стенограмму или заметки, если Вы не согласны на аудиозапись.

Будет ли моё участие в исследовании анонимным?

Перед интервью всех участников спросят, хотят ли они быть упомянутыми в исследовании или предпочтут остаться анонимными. Если Вы предпочтете анонимность, Ваши личные данные не будут указаны, а вместо настоящего имени будет использован псевдоним.

Что будет с результатами интервью?

Результаты исследования будут реализованы в форме магистерской работы. Также полученные данные могут быть использованы при написании научных статей.

Кем проводится это исследование?

Я – студент консорциума CEERES, в состав которого входят восемь университетов. Для более подробной информации перейдите по ссылке: http://ceeres-erasmusmundus.eu/

Кто рассмотрел исследование?

Исследование было рассмотрено Комитетом по этике Университета Глазго.

Контакты для получения дополнительной информации:

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Если у Вас возникнут сомнения относительно проведения этого исследовательского проекта, Вы можете связаться с сотрудником Комитета по этике Школы социальных и политических наук Сьюзен Батчелор по указанной ниже электронной почте:

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