

# Russia's Grey Revolution



*The 2011-2012 Russian protests and the  
precedents of protest in post-Soviet Eurasia*

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## ABSTRACT

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This study places the 2011-2012 Russian protests within the framework of Eurasian mass-civil mobilisation. Researchers have examined the shared and divergent properties of these events, commonly labelled ‘colour revolutions.’ However, research has not employed the experience of the colour revolutions to understand the current civil unrest in Russia. Drawing on existing research, this study generates a ‘colour revolution’ framework and applies it to the case study of the 2011-2012 Russian protests. This approach allows the Russian protests to be analysed in relation to ‘colour revolutions’ in societies that are geographically, politically and historically proximate. This study finds that the current protests are the immediate result of perceptions of extensive electoral fraud. However, the underlying drivers are gradual socio-economic shifts toward the growth of the middle class, and the increasing predisposition of the Russian government towards a ‘managed democracy.’ This thesis concludes that based on the idiosyncrasies and political diversity of the Russian pro-democracy protests, it must be considered a “Grey Revolution” – a mix of colours. Due to these factors it is unlikely that the movement will succeed in its goals in the short term. However, the need for future research to focus on the longer-term prospects of this ‘Grey Revolution’ is clear.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
E.U.	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

# INTRODUCTION

## *Russia's Grey Revolution*

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### *Posing the problem*

Over the previous decade, the 'colour revolutions' have served as a defining feature of politics across the post-Soviet world. Fronted by the youth and the emerging middle class, these episodes are as much a product of the hopes and aspirations of the new generations as they are a legacy of the old. Their backers have been domestic political and economic elites seeking change in the national leadership, generally one that is of benefit to themselves, but also that is often positive for democratic development. Foreign organisations and governments have also intervened to support these 'democratic awakenings,' though with varying magnitudes from case to case. These colour revolutions have been upward markers in the oscillating post-Soviet democratisation process that began in 1991, and which has often seemed otherwise stagnant and in some cases regressive. The authoritarian incumbents of post-Soviet Eurasia have come to fear such instances of mass civil mobilisation, and with good reason. Mass anti-authoritarian protests spear-headed by young, urban, educated and relatively prosperous men and women have, in recent decades, been a harbinger of the overthrow of many authoritarian regimes in Europe, Asia and Latin America. The formats of these middle class rebellions have changed over time and location. The colour revolution represents a unique 'way of doing things' in present day post-Soviet Eurasia.

Identifying the exact nature of colour revolutions has been the focus of some effort in the academic community. A central question has been whether these events have any real relationship with the 'classic' examples of revolution, of which the 1917 Russian Revolution



is a prime example. A second subject of academic effort has been identifying the root causes and processes of the colour revolutions while accounting for their idiosyncrasies. Several notable academics have attempted to do this, primarily via comparative studies of the four 'successful' colour revolutions. Chronologically, these are the 2000 White Revolution in Serbia, the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. Michael McFaul (2005) and Taras Kuzio (2008) in particular have enumerated the common features of colour revolutions, making them suitable for application as a framework of analysis.

Into this sequence of Eurasian mass mobilisations and colour revolutions have emerged the mass protests in the Russian Federation. They have followed the controversial 2011 legislative election that re-elected, with parliamentary majority, United Russia (*Yedinaya Rossiya*) - the 'party of power' of the current Russian President, Vladimir Putin. Like the other colour revolutions, the mass street demonstrations were sparked by reports of extensive electoral fraud. These protests represent the largest mass mobilisation of the Russian citizenry in decades. Also unique are the grievances of the protesters, which are largely political and directed at the Federal government, and even at Putin himself. Previous protests in Russia have largely emerged out of economic discontent, and have generally been directed at lower levels of government, such as regional and metropolitan. In this sense the current wave of protests across Russia is unique, and bears more resemblance to the colour revolutions than to anything that has occurred in the country previously.

Where have these new Russian protests come from? What is their historical, political and societal basis? And what can the experiences of the colour revolutions tell us about their meaning and where they, Russian society, and the Russian state are heading? In light of where the colour revolutions have already taken certain countries in the post-Soviet Eurasia

region, these questions are of crucial importance to academics, regional analysts and policy-makers. Answering these questions is the central purpose of this study.

### *The argument in brief*

Alluding to the naming tradition of the colour revolutions, this study dubs the Russian post-electoral protests the ‘Grey Revolution.’ It does so for two reasons. First, while often perceived as a colour, grey is also indicative of the absence of colour. This represents the relatively diverse political composition of the protesters, who have been represented by a variety of colours including white (the middle classes and liberals), red (leftists and communists) and black (anarchists and nationalists). Furthermore, the mixing of colours usually yields some form of grey. Second, the orthodox understanding of grey is not as a colour, but a shade. This accounts for the idiosyncrasies of the Grey Revolution when compared to other colour revolution events. However, this study argues that these nuances are natural to the colour revolution phenomenon, as they are a product of a country’s unique state and civil attributes interacting with the modular democratic ideology of the colour revolutions. In other words, ‘applying’ the ideas of the colour revolution in different states is bound to generate country-specific processes due to the state and social conditions inherent in that particular state. However, my study argues that these differing processes are not distinct enough to render each event incomparable to the next.

From this argument the study constructs a model for understanding colour revolutions from the work of both McFaul and Kuzio. Under the guidance of this model, the relevant state and civil attributes of Russian Federation are derived from its present-day form. The application of the model to these attributes yields insights into the origin, and the short- and

long-term prospects of the Grey Revolution. Most prominently, the growth and development of the middle class and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the Russian state are pulling Russia in opposite directions. That is not to say that electoral fraud was not a cause, but rather that this civil destabilisation has deeper roots. With Russia's continual economic development, the middle class is unlikely to stop growing as a proportion of the population. Thus the relative placidity of the current pro-democracy movement, as well that of Russia as a society and state are dependent upon how the political elite chooses to resolve these conflicting trends. This is the second central argument of my thesis. Beyond this it is sufficient to say that both the model used and case studies chosen (Russia) are modest in scope. However, if deemed successful, this model could be used to review the situation of Russia in future years, as well as be applied to mass civil mobilisation events in other post-Soviet Eurasian states.

### *The organisation of this thesis*

The purpose of this study is to contextualise the Grey Revolution within the broader norms and trends of Eurasian mass civil mobilisation. Chapter 1 reviews previous understandings and academic works concerning the colour revolutions. From this, the pre-conditions and processes of colour revolutions are derived, accounting for both 'successful' and 'failed' instances. A model for analysing colour revolutions is enumerated from the work of McFaul and Kuzio.

Chapter 2 examines how judgements of 'success' and 'failure' can be made within the context of colour revolutions. Also reviewed are the methods by which the semi-autocratic incumbents of Eurasian states can influence the calculus of success and failure via specific

strategies designed to counter the revolutionary's strengths and play to their weaknesses.

Chapter 3 recounts the history of the Russian pro-democracy protests. From this, the study derives the state and civil attributes of the Russian Federation that are necessary for an analysis using the colour revolution model. The most important and prominent derived attributes are highlighted and analysed further.

Chapter 4 takes a broader perspective on the Grey Revolution. It applies the model enumerated in Chapter 1 to the state and civil attributes derived in Chapter 3, before taking a holistic view of the current protests.

This study concludes by reviewing its findings and noting their implications for the Russian Federation. Further, it reflects upon the colour revolutions more generally and notes how this study could be used to guide future research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The anatomy of a colour revolution*

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Analysis of the current events in the Russian Federation should be contextualised within the broader regional trends in post-Soviet<sup>1</sup> Eurasia that have been observed and documented over preceding years by a variety of scholars and academics. These events of mass protest and popular mobilisation have most commonly been attributed the label of a ‘colour revolution,’ taking the name of the colour commonly employed by associated protesters and movement supporters in order to display allegiance and lend a sense of unity to their political and civil actions.

The immediate antecedents of the colour revolutions are the first generation of post-communist revolutions. Most commonly labelled as the ‘revolutions of 1989,’ these events precipitated the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, beginning with the Warsaw Pact. In chronological order, these mass civil mobilisation events removed authoritarian Communist regimes in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. More recent instances such as the White (also known as ‘Bulldozer’), Rose and Orange revolutions in Serbia<sup>2</sup>, Georgia and Ukraine respectively, are not directly comparable to the events of 1989 given the time elapsed between them, changes in domestic socio-political conditions and evolution of regional and international dynamics. However, there is an important

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this analysis ‘post-Soviet’ will be taken to mean all communist states previously under the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, not just the former Soviet Union itself.

<sup>2</sup> Though referring to Serbia as a ‘post-Soviet’ state may be a contested notion (at least after the Tito-Stalin split of 1948), Serbia does fall into the definition of a ‘post-communist’ Eurasian state. Furthermore, the disintegration of Yugoslavia has led to closer ties between Serbia and the former Soviet states, reinforcing this relationship, especially in light of Russian support of Serbia during the NATO intervention campaign in the former Yugoslavia. As such this analysis shall treat Serbia as a marginally ‘post-Soviet’ state.

aesthetic and symbolic relationship to be recognised between them in terms of broader regional societal traditions and political development trajectories.

It is not the purpose of the wider thesis to approach the study of the events in Russia in a detached and segregated form, but rather to effectively integrate them into the broader phenomenon of mass civil unrest, mobilisation and ‘colour revolutions’ that have come to dominate the recent socio-political histories and development trajectories of post-Soviet Eastern Europe and Eurasia. As such, the selection of the Russian Federation as the primary subject of this case study can be justified first on account of it being the most recent in this regional trend progression. Second, it can be justified on both its geopolitical importance and its implications, which, unlike the other successful and failed colour revolutions are not only domestic and regional in nature, but global as well.

While the previous White, Rose and Orange revolutions did undoubtedly impact upon regional norms and global perceptions, Russia’s role as a regional geopolitical power and global political player, as well as its geographic, demographic and economic size, in addition to its significant military capabilities, make for an altogether broader and wider-reaching set of regionally and globally significant consequences that could result from the outcome of current events. Further, events of the ‘colour revolution’ archetype in Russia and the other states of the post-Soviet periphery can be distinguished from apparently similar developments elsewhere in the world, such as the recent wave of unrest, regime change and ‘revolution’ in Middle Eastern states such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. This is primarily due to the large political, historical and cultural differences that exist between these countries and post-Soviet Eurasia. Continuing with the same example, political power in the mentioned Middle Eastern countries is foremost rooted in the national military structure, while political power in most post-Soviet states, including the Russian Federation, tends to derive from a broader set of

referent sources, notably the security and intelligence apparatus (Chausovsky, 2011).

The list of notable scholars who have contributed to the topic of mass civil mobilisation in post-Soviet Eurasia includes Taras Kuzio, Henry Hale, Elena Korosteleva, Andrew Wilson, (current United States ambassador to the Russian Federation) Michael McFaul, David Lane, Theodor Tudoroiu, Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, among others. Some have analysed the phenomenon through single-country case studies, others through comparative method, and others still through all-encompassing approaches, such as framing colour revolution events as the products of a regional or global democratic diffusion. Drawing upon the theories and practical applications of these previous studies and research projects creates a notable advantage, insofar as it provides a consistent and adaptable theoretical base that is suitable for analysing and defining current protest events in the Russian Federation. This is especially important as analysis of these protests and their implications is currently lacking in the broader literature, due to their recent and ongoing nature.

Hence what needs to be foremost incorporated into a forward analysis of the contemporary Russian Federation is distance, both in the geographic and cultural sense, as well as the 'distance' represented by the passing of time. Such a need can be identified by tracking the evolution of the literature itself. For example, the difference between the generally positive and optimistic literature during the political peak of colour revolution events (2003-05), the more uncertain tone of analyses immediately following this period (2006-07), and the more pessimistic and sceptical tone of later analyses (2008-present) is readily identifiable and self-evident among the breadth of relevant studies. Such changes may reflect differences in scholarly opinions and approaches, but they are also undoubtedly

influenced by the changing realities on the ground.

In terms of geographic and cultural distance, it should be noted that Russian policy makers and power-brokers were most concerned with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, a primarily Orthodox Christian country of 45 million people with strong historical and cultural ties to Russia, a sizable (17.3% of total population) Russian diaspora, and a long contiguous geographic border with the Russian Federation. Comparatively, the Tulip Revolution in the similarly post-Soviet state of Kyrgyzstan, a primarily non-Slavic Muslim country with a population base of 5.5 million, a small Russian minority (9.1% of total population) and no shared geographic border with the Russian Federation, elicited a much more subdued response from the Russian leadership, to the point of ambivalence (Wilson, 2009). It is thus intuitive that it was the Orange, not the Tulip or Rose Revolutions that most affected the concerns and psyche of many Russian policy makers, power-brokers and their public supporters, as to this day pro-government and ‘anti-revolutionary’ groupings in the Russian Federation are commonly (and often in a self-described manner) referred to as “anti-Orange” forces.

Time is also a factor that needs to be accounted for in a framework analysing mass civil mobilisation in the Russian Federation. The lack of a mass-derived elite rotation in post-Soviet Eurasia since the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan is indicative that conditions in the region, and within the individual post-Soviet states themselves, have changed. That is not to say however that a regional social or political democratic tendency has been rendered permanently stagnant or stamped out. As has been noted earlier, developments in the former Soviet geopolitical space have always been highly dynamic and rarely static.

The most readily evident conclusion seems to be that the authoritarian regimes in the region have successfully learned, at least temporarily, how to counter the structurally modular



example that the colour revolutions generally seem to follow.<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing democratic political forces in countries like Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and even Georgia certainly seem to have lost some traction and momentum. However, it seems highly unlikely that, questionable self-descriptors aside, both pro- and anti-democratic forces in the region have halted the consistent revision and evolution of their strategies and counter-strategies (Hale, 2006, p306)

It can thus be said that while the original model of the 2000 White Revolution may no longer be the strict format democratic and anti-authoritarian trends take in the region, their primary pre-conditions and central processes remain the same, and to some extent, inherent in their composition (Finkel and Brudny, 2012a, p2). It is therefore important to derive lessons and analytical tools from previous instances of successful and failed colour revolution events, in order to prudently analyse the central features of the current protests in the Russian Federation, and account for any distinguishing nuances.

With this in mind, analysing and deriving the pre-conditions and processes of colour revolutions, as ‘successful’ mass civil mobilisation events in post-Soviet Eurasia, as well as those of their less successful counterparts, serves as the central focus of this section.

### **The nature of colour revolutions: The non-revolutionary revolutions**

The term ‘revolution’ is a contested one. Its interpretation is dependent upon the chronologic and geographic context of the revolutionary event. As a concept, ‘revolution’ has evolved since the era of ‘classic’ revolutions, Marx’s so called “locomotives of history” (Tudoroiu,

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<sup>3</sup> For a summary of the authoritarian ‘learning’ and ‘diffusion’ arguments see: Finkel and Brudny (2012), ‘No more colour! Authoritarian regimes and colour revolutions in Eurasia’; Hale (2006), ‘Democracy or autocracy on the march? The colored revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism’; Korosteleva (2012), ‘Questioning democracy promotion: Belarus’ response to the ‘colour revolutions’

2007). The divergent experience of the colour revolutions makes it clear that analysis of these events demands the creation of a theoretical framework beyond the classical conceptions of revolutions (Hale, 2006, Lane, 2008, Lane, 2009).

The search for such a theory can begin in the era of post-Soviet and post-Communist studies, in the transitional features identified by Timothy Garton Ash. These are characterised by the “increasing blurring of the line between reform and revolution,” creating what he refers to as a “non-revolutionary revolution” in some places, and “refolutions” or “revelections” in others. Ash’s conceptions of revolution in the post-Soviet Eastern European state are best summarised by Farideh Farhi as “largely urban events [that] combine an insistence on non-violence, or the ‘well considered use of violence,’ with the creative use of civil disobedience guided by an opposition elite, calculated pleas to world public opinion through the use of electronic media, attention and pressure from the outside world, and a readiness to negotiate with power holders while refusing to be coopted” (Farhi, 2003).

More contemporary studies of revolutions can move us closer still to the goal of a unitary and universal definition for colour revolutions and similar regional mass civil mobilisation events. As Lane points out, to make a truthful interpretation of a colour revolution is to acknowledge two realities in these events. First, that the revolution did not originate entirely from ‘below,’ but also from the elites or counter-elites ‘above.’ And second, that the results of these revolutions have led to re-alignments in foreign policy and shifts in some domestic power balances, but not to an overall systemic change, as ownership of property and distribution of wealth have been left largely intact (Lane, 2009). Observing that the colour revolutions were usually led by elites who had been present and active within the governmental and socio-political structures they were trying to either seize and control, Lane concludes that these events bear some resemblance not only to revolutions, but also to

what one can traditionally define as a ‘coup d’état’ – a rotation of elites (Lane, 2009, p119).

This type of event has a high level of elite or counter-elite participation, and a reasonably high level of mass involvement by the general public, but primarily of an ‘audience’ type. The goals of the dissenting group(s) is to redress immediate and potentially longer-standing public grievances, promote the objective of transformation within government and potentially some entrenched non-governmental state features, and to achieve this through a process of partial or complete elite renewal rather than a full-scale reconstitution of the political and economic order. Nevertheless, significant and large-scale changes short of a full revolution in the socio-political order are still a focus and goal of this type of movement. Dissatisfaction with stagnant or falling standards of living, health care provision and affordability, distribution of wealth and land assets, and unemployment often form a significant proportion of the grievances lodged against the entrenched elite by dissenting groups (Lane, 2009, p120).

Thus it is clear that while colour revolutions do bear an aesthetic resemblance to earlier instances of revolutionary activity on the European continent, there are some fundamental differences in both their origins and (non-ostensible) outcomes when analysed comparatively with ‘traditional’ examples of revolution. Most notably, the colour revolution hybridises the concept of a revolution with those of the electoral process and state reform, reminiscent of Ash’s conceptions of ‘refolutions’ and ‘revelections.’ Given that the definition of ‘revolution’ has consistently evolved and changed as new and divergent events have transpired in the course of world history (Goldstone, 2001, p120), it is not out of place nor against consistency to view the ‘colour revolutions’ as modern archetypes or formats of the ‘classic’ revolutions. Indeed, modern definitions accommodate for various revolutionary ‘types,’ including the primarily urban-based ‘colour revolution’ typology that combines

popular mobilisation elements with elites wishing to reform and replace existing political and governmental structures (Goldstone, 2001, p143-144). Additionally, the colour revolution archetype meets three antecedent requirements for a modern form of revolution, which are (Goldstone, 2001, p142):

- a) Efforts to change the political regime that draw on a competing vision (or visions) of a just order;
- b) A notable degree of informal or formal mass mobilization, and;
- c) Efforts to force change through non-institutionalized actions such as mass demonstrations, protests, strikes, or violence

Hence, while acknowledging that there is some debate surrounding the suitability of labelling these events ‘revolutions,’ this thesis will continue to refer to ‘colour revolutions,’ or alternatively, ‘instances of mass civil mobilisation,’ for this kind of event in post-Soviet Eurasia. Wherever the theoretical delineations of the colour revolutions are ultimately drawn, the concept of a revolution as a rapid change in leadership occasioned by a popular uprising continues to be etched in the cultural memory of the people living in post-Soviet Eurasia.

### **Reaching the tipping point: The prerequisites of a colour revolution**

There is general agreement that the primary causes of colour revolutions are socio-economic imbalances experienced by the population combined with a set of discontented elites who find the current balance of political power to be disagreeable. Their alliance and collective action are sparked off by a grievous and transgressive display of political corruption,

typically electoral fraud (D'Anieri, 2006, Hale, 2006, Lane, 2009, McFaul, 2005, Tudoroiu, 2007). At some point in the process the protest either succeeds or fails at reaching the “tipping point” (D'Anieri, 2006), the point at which there is a sufficient number of participants for the success of a colour revolution or similar event. In this case, the participants are those individuals and elites for whom the perceived or potential benefits of dissent against the ruling regime outweigh the perceived or potential costs. They are opposed to the current ruling elite, though not necessarily the state itself.

The tipping point concept derives from the threshold model of protest and is based on the work of economist and game theorist Thomas Schelling. It can be defined as the quantity of protesters required for a colour revolution or similar event to become successful. Once this requisite quantity is reached, the movement can be said to have become ‘safe’ or ‘self-perpetuating.’ A protest movement that has successfully reached its individual and unique tipping point either succeeds outright or ‘snowballs’ exponentially in size until it does; a protest movement that fails to do so stagnates and eventually declines.

Conceptually, the tipping point is also an aggregated function based on the sum of the utility payoffs of each protester. Individuals are generally sensitive to the costs and benefits of participating in protest events, and are likely to weight these risks and their potential rewards based on a unique utility function. For example, increases in the size of the protest group have a positive effect on an individual’s willingness to protest, via diluting the likelihood of individual oppression by the number of people participating. Such an increase also has a less measurable but equally important psychological and symbolic effect upon popular perceptions of legitimacy and success probability. This concept was conveyed particularly well by Oleksandr Omelchenko, Mayor of Kyiv during the height of the Orange Revolution, who told movement leader and future Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko “*If*

*you bring out 100,000 I'm with you, we'll take power in one day. If it'll be 99,000 I won't be with you''* (Wilson, 2005, p125).

Other sources increasing the success probability of a movement, such as greater international attention and support can also positively sway the individual 'willingness to protest.' Conversely, factors such as the ability and resolve of security forces to use violence against protesters and movement supporters, and the willingness of the judiciary to serve entrenched political elites and impose harsh sentences for civil disobedience and dissent, can act to negatively impact this function (though it may actually act to embolden the most committed participants of the movement). Also, most internal state attributes, such as the security and intelligence services, are under the control of elites, potentially both those loyal to the government and those committed to the opposition. This has led some to suggest that the balance of elites is equally, if not more, important than the balance of protesters (i.e. anti- and pro-government demonstrators), and that the actions of elites play a decisive role in determining whether or not a colour revolution or similar movement reaches its tipping point (D'Anieri, 2006, p333).

The primary drawback of the tipping point concept is that by its nature, it is only quantifiable in retrospect after the successful occurrence of a colour revolution (D'Anieri, 2006, p334). In the case of a failed instance only the highest protester quantity to the point of failure is determinable. While this means that the concept has limited predictive capacity, it does not detract from its explanatory function.

The tipping point serves only as the 'smoking gun' for an instance of Eurasian mass civil mobilisation, the state and society in question must also possess certain attributes upon which the initial mass of the protest group is founded (Kuzio, 2008, McFaul, 2005). This analysis employs the features of the colour revolution as enumerated by McFaul (2005) and

Kuzio (2008) in this and subsequent chapters.

In a comparative sense McFaul's enumeration (acknowledging earlier instances in other Eastern European nations) focuses directly on the White, Rose and Orange revolutions, and on the more immediate and internal factors inherent within the state. Kuzio's list takes a somewhat broader view as it accounts for events in the Eastern Europe region and former Soviet periphery more generally. By this token, Kuzio's enumeration also allows for a longer-term societal view by incorporating concepts of civic nationalism and an evolving "return to Europe" mentality among the population (Kuzio, 2008, p100). As part of this broader and longer term outlook, Kuzio's framework additionally incorporates external factors and foreign assistance to would-be or existing civil opposition groups (Kuzio, 2008, p106-107). This thesis employs the individual observations made by McFaul and Kuzio to generate a ten point framework/model that is both inward and outward looking, and that accounts for both shorter and longer term causes and factors:

1. *A competitive semi-autocratic or -authoritarian state regime that allows enough space in the political sphere for the existence of a democratic opposition* – Also commonly described as a "competitive authoritarian" regime (Kuzio, 2008, p99, McFaul, 2005, p7), a system that combines elements of authoritarianism and democracy.
2. *A 'return to Europe' national sentiment or civic nationalism that assists in mobilizing civil society* – Especially groups pre-disposed to hold these sentiments, such as youth, pro-democracy groups and nongovernmental organisations (NGO's).

The current youth represent the first non-Communist generation as their political culture was minimally influenced by communist and Soviet politics. The desire to 'return to Europe' can be a general socio-political undercurrent or generated by external incentives, such as EU membership (Kuzio, 2008, p100, 108).

3. *A preceding political event or crisis that has weakened the incumbent regime –*

Most commonly, the immediate crisis is the result of a transgressive instance of electoral fraud, though holdover factors from longer-lived controversies can also be influential (Kuzio, 2008, p100). This includes the ability of the opposition to bring public attention to the event or crisis, such as publicising evidence of fraudulent electoral results (McFaul, 2005, p10).

4. *A media independent and capable enough to effectively convey the instance of the falsified vote or other transgression to the broader public –*

This requisite degree of independence can apply to both the freedom of media organisations and to the freedom of independent journalists (McFaul, 2005, p7-8)

5. *A pro-democratic capital city –*

In instances of colour revolutions, the national capital has generally served as the focal point. Belgrade in Serbia, Tbilisi in Georgia and Kyiv in Ukraine were all the main 'battlegrounds' of their respective colour revolutions, all with wholly national implications (Kuzio, 2008, p101-102).



6. *An unpopular incumbent and/or ruling elite* – Falling popularity of the incumbent leadership and its supporting elites has been a consistent feature in their decline and reduction in ability to undemocratically influence the outcome of the contested election (Kuzio, 2008, p102-104, McFaul, 2005, p8-9). The legacy of major scandals and controversies often accompanies this decline (Kuzio, 2008, p102)
  
7. *A charismatic opposition candidate* – To varying extents, the anti-authoritarian movements of post-Communist Eurasia have rallied around a charismatic opposition candidate. Typically a member of the national elite, this individual must be able to effectively convey themselves as a viable future leader, but also lack the corrupt past that is most often popularly and negatively associated with political leaders in the region (Kuzio, 2008, p104).
  
8. *A relatively united and organised opposition that is capable of mobilizing tens of thousands or more demonstrators* – The opposition must display unity in the overriding cause of overthrowing the incumbent regime, though not necessarily any ideological unity per se. As such, even the appearance of unity may be sufficient at the time (McFaul, 2005, p9). In most instances to date, the opposition only genuinely united on the eve of the democratic breakthrough, motivated by a heightened prospect of success and under pressure from youth, NGO's and civil society (Kuzio, 2008, p105).
  
9. *Division among the ruling regime's coercive apparatus* – Defined as the split among

the “guys with guns.” This includes segments of the state’s military, police and security forces, which diminish the ability of the incumbent to use violence as a form of repression (McFaul, 2005, p14).

*10. Foreign intervention and/or support* – Foreign governments and organisations can intervene with varying levels of directness. External support can include the funding of NGO’s opposed to the incumbent, political and financial support of opposition figures and pressure via bilateral or multilateral political instruments.

### **The process of a colour revolution**

The colour revolutions have been noted by many scholars for their repetitive character and *modular* nature (Beissinger, 2007, Finkel and Brudny, 2012a, Korosteleva, 2012), a set of consistent features and processes that seem to have diffused from one instance to the next.

The most often cited progenitor of this series of consecutive political upheavals is the successful 2000 White Revolution in Serbia, which ousted the semi-autocratic nationalist regime of President Slobodan Milošević (Beissinger, 2007, p270). The Georgian Rose, Ukrainian Orange and the Kyrgyz Tulip Revolutions are generally listed as its successful descendants. These instances were followed by a ‘second generation’ (2005-2009) of attempted, similarly modular revolutionary attempts in Russia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Moldova, all of which failed to varying degrees (Korosteleva, 2012, p38).

The most commonly identified source of this spread are revolutionary or anti-

authoritarian organisations that have learned and/or emulated the tactics and techniques of similarly minded groups elsewhere in the region. Beginning with the Serbian youth group ‘Otpor!’ (‘Resistance!’), and spreading onwards to ‘Kmara!’ (‘Enough!’) in Georgia, ‘Pora!’ (‘It’s time!’) in Ukraine and ‘KelKel’ (‘Shining of the good’). Similar organisations have also existed in Eurasian states that have not experienced a colour revolution, such as ‘Zubr’ (‘Bison’) in Belarus and ‘Oborona’ (‘Defence’) in Russia. Though these groups often feature youth as the forefront and as “ground troops,” they are often supported (either covertly or openly) by an entrenched group of national elites (Lane, 2009, p116-117). Evidence exists of comprehensive cooperation and a transfer of experience and protest strategies between these revolutionary groups. Members have often travelled to states where such actions had previously succeeded, most notably Serbia and Georgia, to learn the ‘technologies’ and tactics necessary for this form of mass-inspired civil mobilisation (Korosteleva, 2012, p38).

These organisations can be said to be followers or students of the *democratic revolutionary handbook* (Rakhmanova, 2006), a metaphorical term for the particular mix of strategies and tactics native to colour revolution youth organisations, with the express aim of mass civil mobilisation. These elements are structured around three central necessitating pillars: the unification of various diverse indigenous opposition groups, an adherence to non-violent tactics and the creation of a carefully planned short- and medium-term political strategy. While the underlying theme of such activity is to remove corrupt and aspiring autocratic governments, the mere will to do so is not in itself enough. Specific techniques employed by these groups include fund-raising from Western organisations, creating memorable and ‘marketable’ organisational names and symbols (especially for transmission via media channels), combining agitation and propaganda (*agitprop*) with public relations, and using the aforementioned techniques to simultaneously get out the protesters and the vote

(Rakhmanova, 2006). The ability of these tactics and strategies to plug into the socio-political structures of a variety of similar states is primarily what accords them their modular nature. The interplay of these modular tactics with state and civil attributes, exempting some local deviations, generates a reasonably predictable sequence of events, as summarised by Tudoroiu (2007, p336):

1. a fraudulent national election;
2. efficient independent monitoring and rapid publicizing of the fraud;
3. opposition's decision to protest against electoral fraud without questioning the country's political and constitutional frameworks;
4. opposition's success in mobilizing large numbers of citizens (the opposition was well organized but not necessarily united, at least in the early phases of the protest);
5. regime's denial of the fraud and decision to impose official electoral results;
6. a division within the regime's repressive apparatus preventing mass violence;
7. massive protest demonstrations forcing the regime's leader to acknowledge his defeat;
8. installation of a new, 'revolutionary' national leadership, reinforced by quickly organized complementary elections;
9. new leaders' claim to build democracy, promote reform, and fight corruption accompanied by arbitrary actions against some members of the former regime (usually under charges of corruption);
10. increasingly visible survival of previous regime's non-democratic pattern?

The initiation or progression to a certain point of the aforementioned process does not guarantee the success of a colour revolution. Nor does the success of these groups automatically lead them to accede to power and install insurmountable safeguards for a newly

generated or restored democracy. For example, the original colour revolutionary group, Otpor!, obtained only 1.6% of the total vote when it was transformed into a parliamentary party in 2003. This excluded it from any seats in the Serbian parliament (the minimum prerequisite for party representation is 5%), subsequently leading it to be absorbed into the Serbian Democratic Party (*Demokratska Stranka*). The Ukrainian group Pora! suffered a similar fate, with its party wing ‘Yellow Pora’ attaining only 1.47% of the vote and no seats in the 2006 Ukrainian parliamentary elections. It was disbanded shortly afterward, with the majority being absorbed into the ‘Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defence Bloc’ alliance.<sup>4</sup>

Events in former Soviet States have also been mixed, the “second wave” of colour revolutions noted earlier failed to produce much success, and the legacies of the successful Rose, Orange and Tulip revolution have all been thrown into varying levels of doubt. Nevertheless, what defines and affects the success and failure of a colour revolution event is not a clear cut or singularly definitive concept. The specificity and nuances of such judgements and how they can be made are covered in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion: A framework for understanding mass civil mobilisation in post-Soviet**

### **Eurasia**

This section has outlined the causes and processes that underpin a colour revolution or similar event in post-Soviet Eurasia. The nature of a colour revolution as a “non-revolutionary revolution” indicates that the analytical tools used for classifying, categorising and tracking classical examples of revolutions are insufficient or inappropriate for application to recent events in Russia and its post-Soviet neighbours. As such, this analysis has generated a hybrid framework for determining whether a country possesses the necessary state and civil

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<sup>4</sup> Party data is available from the Ukrainian Centre for Political Information: [http://da-ta.com.ua/mon\\_mainnews/916.htm](http://da-ta.com.ua/mon_mainnews/916.htm)

attributes to allow for an instance of mass-based, elite-inspired governmental rotation following the colour revolution model. This model will be applied in subsequent chapters, and will form a part of the wider analysis of the ongoing instance of mass civil mobilisation in the Russian Federation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Measuring the 'success' and 'failure' of colour revolutions*

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The colour revolution phenomenon is often divided into two periods or phases. The 'first generation' of revolutions (2000-2005) produced the 'successful' White, Rose, Orange and Tulip revolutions. At the very least, these instances were effective in ousting incumbent semi-autocratic regimes and generating a democratic breakthrough within their respective nation states (D'Anieri, 2006, Kuzio, 2008, Simecka, 2009). The 'second wave' (2005-2009) of attempted colour revolutions in the post-Soviet states of Azerbaijan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Belarus produced no notable successes (Korosteleva, 2012, p38).

One interpretation of this discrepancy is that the remaining authoritarian regimes in the region, through their own form of learning and autocratic 'regional diffusion,' have learned how to prevent the successful outcome of a colour revolution or similar form of mass civil action. In this scenario, the *cadre* of regional ruling autocrats or semi-authoritarians effectively 'caught up' to the tactics employed by the 'colour forces' sometime during the intersecting period between generations (2005-2006), and subsequently internalised and employed techniques that effectively prevent or critically beleaguer the successful outcome of colour revolutions (Finkel and Brudny, 2012a, pp8-9). While the element of authoritarian learning is a significant explanatory factor, it is important not to neglect that colour revolution events possessed a significant internal basis to which external elements of support and opposition, such as elements of democratic diffusion, attached themselves. It is also notable that the 'first generation' of colour revolutions featured approximately as many unsuccessful instances as successful ones, and those successful instances were often preceded

by at least one significant but failed prior attempt (D'Anieri, 2006, p339).

With these facts taken into account, the question of what defines the 'success' and 'failure' of a colour revolution becomes critical. It is important to separate the ostensible claims and rhetoric of all actors from their real-world outcomes, desired or otherwise. Under scrutiny, the claim made by the revolutionaries and their supporters, that the ultimate outcome of this type of mass civil mobilisation event is a popular people's revolution that installs a western-style liberal democracy from below, does not represent the outcomes of these efforts to date (Finkel and Brudny, 2012a, Hale, 2006, Lane, 2008, Lane, 2009, Tudoroiu, 2007). Likewise, the oft-made claim by ruling regional autocrats, aspiring or otherwise, that they are taking 'necessary' repressive measures in order to prevent a foreign coup d'état attempt formulated by the United States and/or its NATO allies does not represent a realistic assessment, given that the overwhelming source of the support for these movements are typically elites native to the state in question (D'Anieri, 2006, Hale, 2005, Lane, 2009, Tudoroiu, 2007). That is not to say that these sentiments do not have some grounding in the realities of colour revolutions. It is no secret that Western governments and institutions have, since the end of the Cold War, supported 'pro-democratic' forces via NGO's and other groups throughout much of post-Soviet Eurasia (Obydenkova, 2012, Wilson, 2006). However, the notion that the West can use its own transplanted or regionally native NGO's as proxies for the overthrow of popular governments is a questionable one (Wilson, 2006, p31). Additionally, although the outcomes of the 'successful' colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan have been less than a Western-style liberal democratic ideal they did, at least temporarily, encourage a pro-democratic trend within these states (Kuzio, 2008).

Following on from such debates, this section firstly reviews and analyses what



determines the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a colour revolution event, and how such judgements can be made. Secondly, the methods and significance of the preventative strategies ‘learned’ and employed by semi-autocratic governments in the region via ‘autocratic diffusion’ (Korosteleva, 2012, p38) are examined and scrutinised. Both elements are subsequently complemented by an analysis of democratic development precedents and trajectories in the post-Soviet Eurasia region.

### **Revolutionary success and failure contextualised within post-Soviet Eurasia**

Conditions for the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a colour revolution are difficult to segregate from the theoretical framework and academic assumptions that underpin their analysis. As noted in the preceding chapter, the immediate determinant of whether a colour revolution event grows or fails is the ‘tipping point’ mechanism and its constituent and contributing factors (D’Anieri, 2006, p334). From this basis, it needs to be determined what the results of this success or failure are, as it is their short- and long-term legacies that ultimately imbue colour revolutions with significance and meaning. Regional trends have shown that even a ‘failed’ instance can create conditions for a success later on (D’Anieri, 2006, p339). Conversely a ‘successful’ event can still be tarnished by a legacy of shortfall or failure (Tudoroiu, 2007, p316). These represent the two dynamics by which the colour revolutions enact change; *replacement* of the ruling elite, and the typically subsequent *reform* of the state and of the political system. Returning to Ash’s typology, colour revolutions become a combination of a ‘revellection’ and a ‘refolution.’

There are two methods by which to judge the outcomes of colour revolutions. The first is to benchmark the purported aims of these events against their actual results (i.e.

measuring the success of the *reform* dynamic). The second is to implicitly acknowledge the distinction between their underlying rhetoric and confirmed outcomes, namely that the typical and inevitable outcome of ‘successful’ events is elite rotation (i.e. measuring the success of the *replacement* dynamic). These two methods of benchmarking colour revolutions are not conflicting, and are complementary if it is acknowledged that each operates to a different time scale and frame of analysis, as replacement and reform do.

Elite replacement is the most evident indicator that an instance of colour revolution or Eurasian mass civil mobilisation has succeeded in its immediate and implicit aim (D'Anieri, 2006, p336 , Lane, 2009, p118). In the cases of Serbia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the incumbent leaderships, as embodied by their leaders Slobadan Milošević, Eduard Shevardnadze and Askar Akayev respectively, were replaced by a new combination of elites who were, at least ostensibly, more facilitating toward democratic processes and ideals. In Ukraine, the favoured candidate of departing and highly unpopular President Leonid Kuchma was not elected after the Orange protesters forced a fair re-run of elections. As post-Soviet states are generally presidential or semi-presidential political systems, elite rotation can be evidenced by changes in positions of power such as the presidency, prime-ministership and other key government posts.

Unlike the largely self-evident process of elite transition, the effects of medium- and longer-term democratic reforms at the national political and societal level are less tangible, and thus more reliant on hybridised subjective/objective index-type measures. Time-line and index data measuring democratic governance is available from the annual Freedom House *Freedom of the World* publication, which is based on an assessment of political rights (electoral process, political pluralism and participation, functioning of government) and civil liberties (freedom of expression and belief, associational and organisational rights, rule of

law, personal autonomy and individual rights) on a seven point scale, ascending from ‘most free’ to ‘least free.’ The most recent report (Freedom House, 2012a) classifies Ukraine as “partly free” (PR4, CL3), Georgia as “partly free” (PR4, CL3), Kyrgyzstan as “partly free” (PR5, CL5) and Russia as “not free” (PR6, CL5). This shows that these states (excluding Russia) have lost some of the democratic gains they made through their colour revolutions, though not all. In the year preceding their respective colour revolutions Ukraine was classified as “partly free” (PR4, CL4 in 2003), Georgia as “partly free” (PR4, CL4 in 2002) and Kyrgyzstan as “not free” (PR6, CL5 in 2004). Allowing two years for a ‘refolution’ to take place, all these states had made notable gains in democratic and civil development with Ukraine classified as “free” (PR3, CL2 in 2006), Georgia as “partly free” (PR3, CL4 in 2005) and Kyrgyzstan as “partly free” (PR5, CL4 in 2007) (Freedom House, 2012b).

Attempts have also been made to correlate the intensity and success probability of Eurasian mass mobilisation events with economic measures, most notably gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and the Gini income inequality coefficient. While economic grievances have been a contributing factor to the motivations and rhetoric of many anti-autocratic protests and movements, attempts to establish a direct correlation between the absolute or relative values of these economic figures and revolutionary occurrence, success and intensity have proven to be weak or inconclusive (Lane, 2009, pp125-126). Of great significance however, is the role of economic variables in shaping social conditions, such as contributing to the grievances of dissenting groups and the formation of a middle class.

‘Indices of freedom’ possess relevance not only by defining the pre- and post-conditions of colour revolutions, but also by identifying underlying trends in democracy development across a cross-section of post-Soviet Eurasian states. Trend and static measurements can be used in congruence to demonstrate the degree of freedom and

authoritarianism a state system exhibits at any point in time, as well as the trajectory and magnitude of its movement in an authoritarian or democratic direction. This data and its derived implications will be utilised in subsequent sections, in conjunction with other frameworks and assessments.

### **Authoritarian learning and counter-strategies**

Since their first generation, the colour revolutions have had a significant impact upon the political positions, decision making psyche and policy adaptations of the remaining post-Soviet Eurasian semi-authoritarian regimes (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b, Korosteleva, 2012, Wilson, 2009). Much like the aforementioned modular nature of the colour revolutions, the responses adopted by various regional autocrats have also displayed characteristics of modularly and cross-border diffusion. In Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and other post-Soviet states where serious attempts at mass-inspired elite rotation have either failed or not occurred altogether, this particular mix of preventative policies has come to be labelled as ‘anti-colour insurance’ (Finkel and Brudny, 2012a, p2). The particular balance of ‘instruments’ selected from the available repertoire of ‘anti-colour insurance’ has, much like the tactics of pro-democracy protesters and *democratic revolutionary handbook*, been adapted to fit national conditions and the specific needs as perceived by ruling autocrats. Factors that impact upon this particular mix include the perceived magnitude of the threat to regime survival, nuances of the national economy and political culture, and the relative strength of the incumbent vis-a-vis pro-democracy groups (Finkel and Brudny, 2012a, p2).

The Orange Revolution in particular has been cited as the main impetus for the development of such policies, especially in the territorially adjacent and culturally related

post-Soviet states of Russia and Belarus (Wilson, 2009, p371). While there is evidence to suggest that many ‘anti-colour insurance’ policies such as limiting the funding and freedom of NGO’s, restriction and nationalisation of media outlets, and crackdowns on opposition figures, were spurred on by fears arising out of the Orange Revolution, some of the groundwork for such policies had been laid *prior* to the mass-civil mobilisation events in Ukraine. For example in May 2004, a full six months before the Orange Revolution, President Putin had argued that grants from influential foreign foundations had unduly influenced the functioning of many Russian NGO’s (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b, Putin, 2004). In other post-Soviet states, such as Belarus and Kazakhstan, political development in an authoritarian trajectory had proceeded largely uninhibited since their national independence from the USSR (Freedom House, 2012b). As such, authoritarian responses have always featured in the various calculi of colour revolutions. Their tendency over time to become structured and identifiable is a departure from the reactive and on-the-fly responses of earlier aspiring autocrats such as Milošević and Shevardnadze, and can be more easily incorporated into the analytical structure of frameworks addressing elite rotation and mass civil mobilisation events in Eurasia.

‘Autocratic diffusion’ and authoritarian learning (Korosteleva, 2012, p38) can be most accurately conceived of as originating from two modes of transmission: formal and informal cooperation between semi-autocratic states, and independent learning from the successes and failures of similar regional regimes (parallel development). Regardless of the specifics of how a particular policy was learned or transferred, authoritarian regimes in the region have come to rely upon at least one type of policy from five policy forms or ‘streams:’ isolation, marginalisation, distribution, repression and/or persuasion (Finkel and Brudny, 2012a, p6).

An authoritarian regime can *isolate* itself by limiting access to foreign NGO’s,

denying visas to election observers and other ‘threat’ officials, and restricting and censoring sources of external communication such as media outlets. *Marginalisation* of the opposition can be achieved via the tightening of election legislation such as electoral percentage thresholds, limiting the movements and media access of opposition figures, and adopting elements of negative propaganda against pro-democracy groups and activists. *Distribution* can be affected through rewarding and strengthening loyal groups, whilst attempting to bribe or buy off opposition forces. The regime can *repress* the opposition through legal and illegal (covert) instruments, such as show trials, imprisonment and ‘disappearances.’ Finally it can also attempt to *persuade* the population through appeals to national unity and identity, casting democracy as alien to the national culture and by portraying pro-democracy and anti-government groups as agents of undue and negatively-motivated foreign influence (Finkel and Brudny, 2012a).

These five strategic archetypes seek to negatively impact upon the pro-democratic arithmetic of the ten factors of revolutionary success enumerated in the first chapter. Related political and state devices have also, demonstrably, been utilised by the Putin/Medvedev Presidency prior and concurrent to the ongoing protest events in the Russian Federation (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b). The applicable features of these will be incorporated into the wider analysis of the Russian mass civil mobilisation in the third chapter.

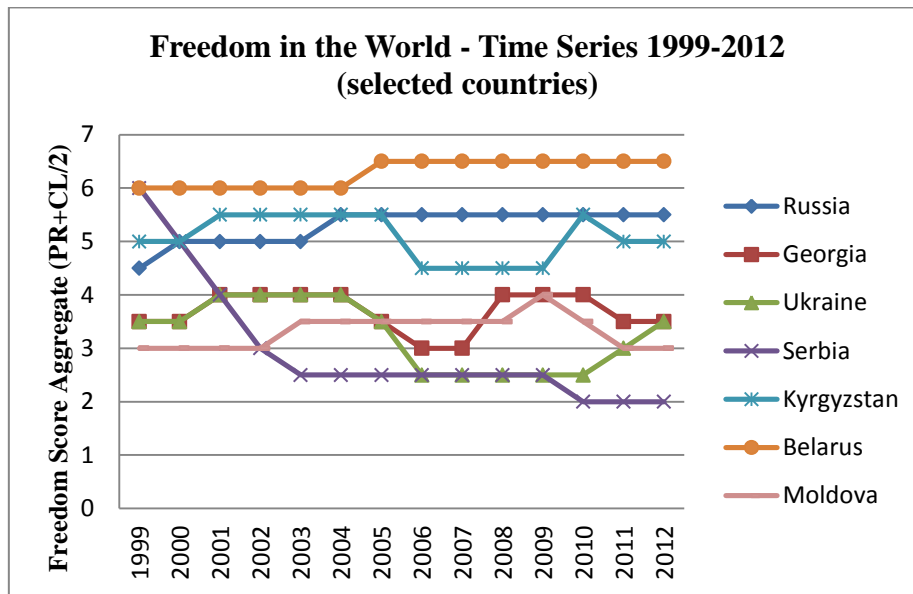
### **Democratic development trajectories in post-Soviet Eurasia**

Debates persist about the legacy and longer-term consequences of the colour revolutions (Hale, 2006, Kuzio, 2008, Lane, 2009, Tudoroiu, 2007). Also, the events in the Russian Federation are themselves ongoing in nature. Given these limitations, it is sufficient for now

to acknowledge three points or 'lessons learned' through the experiences of the colour revolutions. First, these events have generated democratic trends of varying longevity, predominantly though not limited to the states that have experienced a 'successful' colour revolution. Second, that current protest action in the Russian Federation is occurring in an environment that is arguably more oppressive than the conditions present in Ukraine and Georgia, though at a similar degree of political oppression as was present in Serbia and Kyrgyzstan during their respective colour revolutions (Freedom House, 2012b). And third, that many revolutionary attempts were preceded by failed prior attempts; the Orange and White Revolutions in particular were successors to similar but failed attempts of comparable size and aim (D'Anieri, 2006).

Overall, the colour revolutions have generated trends toward democratic development within the states in which they have occurred 'successfully.' The long-term security of these democratic gains continue to be marked by uncertainty (Lane, 2009, Tudoroiu, 2007), especially as conditions in many states continue to oscillate toward and away from their original notable gains in democratic development. A time-series analysis of the Freedom in the World index supports this interpretation:

Figure 2.1 Time-series of Eurasian democracy, 1999-2012



Source: Freedom House (2012b)

A broader understanding of the phenomenon would also note that it has inspired pro-democracy activists and movements across much of post-Soviet Eurasia, even in countries where the original ‘modular’ interpretation of colour revolutions is not ostensibly conducive to them, such as in Kyrgyzstan. From this perspective, the colour revolution phenomenon has induced a net-positive effect on Eurasian democracy, regardless of the success and failure of individual instances or attempts (Hale, 2006, p317). The example of Kyrgyzstan serves to evidence a second broader point, namely that the degree to which the incumbent is predisposed to use overtly belligerent and oppressive methods finds its strongest positive correlation with the predisposition toward violence of anti-incumbent groups, rather than the likelihood of revolutionary initiation or success. This point is corroborated by more recent colour revolution events, such as the attempted ‘Twitter’ or ‘Grape’ Revolution in Moldova (The Economist, 2009). As such, the Kyrgyz and Moldovan protests featured more violence



than the relatively non-violent Rose and Orange revolutions. (Kimmage, 2005, The Guardian, 2005)

There is a strong case to be made that overtly belligerent attacks and ruthless oppression of NGO's and civil society by autocratic regimes in Eurasia may in-fact be having a self-attenuating effect on their political strength. The incumbent autocrat inadvertently generates this backlash as a by-product of utilising the oppressive measures noted in the preceding section. This happens either by increasingly destabilising the societal consensus and status quo upon which these policies are based, decreasing the perceived legitimacy and popularity of the incumbent, or by disrupting the cycle of democracy/autocracy that often allows such regimes a continued and popularly accepted existence (Dmitriev and Treisman, 2012, Hale, 2006, p306, Myers, 2006, Wilson, 2009). A prudent analysis of current events in the Russian Federation must acknowledge these regional socio-political trends.

What is also clear from *figure 2.1* is that in the current mixed-regime political environment of post-Soviet Eurasia, the particular degree of authoritarianism a state exhibits does not seem to correlate with the relative gains in democracy generated by a mass civil mobilisation event. The cases that featured the most (Serbia) and least (Kyrgyzstan) gains in democracy were also comparatively the most authoritarian states at the time of their respective colour revolutions.

Insofar as colour revolutions are 'events' in their own right, the cycle of democracy/autocracy in the region also indicates that they can be viewed a democratic 'peaks' in a national and/or regional oscillation. It is openly acknowledged by many Eurasian pro-democracy or anti-autocratic activists that they have to 'lose before they can win.' Such sentiment was echoed by Alexander Milinkevich, a prominent opposition figure during the mass civil mobilisation against the 2006 elections in Belarus questionably won by incumbent

autocrat Alexander Lukashenko, who in hearkening back to Poland’s anti-communist Solidarity movement noted: “The authorities could do nothing. Martial law was imposed. And that was the beginning of the end” (Myers, 2006). Milinkevich is not referring to the collapse of communism and triumph of Solidarity in 1989, but rather the seemingly hopeless days of 1980 during Lech Walesa’s campaign of dissent. A survey of notable regional instances of mass civil mobilisation appears to uphold this thesis:

*Table 2.1 The colour revolutions summarised*

<b>Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Attributed Name</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
1996-1997	Serbia	-	Unsuccessful
2000	Serbia	‘Bulldozer or ‘White’ Revolution	Successful
2001	Ukraine	-	Unsuccessful
2003	Georgia	Rose Revolution	Successful
2003	Azerbaijan	-	Unsuccessful
2004	Ukraine	‘Orange’ Revolution	Successful
2005	Kyrgyzstan	‘Tulip Revolution’	Successful
2005	Azerbaijan	-	Unsuccessful
2005	Uzbekistan	‘Cotton Revolution’	Unsuccessful
2006	Belarus	‘Denim Revolution’	Unsuccessful
2009	Moldova	‘Grape’ Revolution	Unsuccessful

*Sources:* D’Anieri (2006); Korosteleva (2009); The Economist (2009)

Less significant attempts have been made across much of post-Soviet Eurasia, including in Russia and Kazakhstan where groups were inspired by the success of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (Korosteleva, 2012, p38). Thus, as a trend, an unsuccessful instance could be a momentum generator for more notable and/or successful events later on. Authoritarian oppression could thus simply be delaying the inevitable, or serving as an incubator that keeps down smaller and current movements, eventually allowing even larger and/or more successful movements emerge. Also, given the more significant costs associated with civil opposition to regimes willing to use belligerent and overtly oppressive measures, such as in Serbia or Russia, the existence of a significant anti-authoritarian movement may be even more suggestive of a larger (but for the time frightened into passivity) support base for such movements than in a state where oppression is less institutionalised, such a Georgia or

Ukraine.

### **Conclusion: Defining the success and failure of colour revolutions**

This section has highlighted the oscillating and sometimes ambiguous nature of the colour revolutions. Of note has been how and on what basis the judgement of the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a colour revolution type event can be made, both in the shorter- and longer-terms. Also covered has been how the various oppressive tools and methods employed by post-Soviet Eurasia’s remaining autocrats have sought to impact the variables of the colour revolution calculus in their favour. Tracking the consequences of these oppressive methods within the context of present day Eurasia has shown that the most significant effect of these tactics has been to increase the predisposition of opposition groups toward violence, rather than impacting their emergence or success. Additionally highlighted has been the dualistic nature of colour revolutions, both as events in their own right and as ‘upward’ markers in a longer trend progression of state attributes toward and away from democratic development. The lessons learned from previous cases of colour revolutions, as well as from their underlying regional trends, are essential to an informed analysis of the Russian protest events. In the Russian context, the underlying political and societal trends are the crucial variable, whether the aesthetic features of previous colour revolutions, such as naming and symbolism, are used or not. The Russian events in themselves should be treated as an indicator of the current state of democratic development in the post-Soviet Eurasia region.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Russia, Putin and the protesters*

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The pro-democracy demonstrations in the Russian Federation are unprecedented not only due to their size, but also their demographic composition and the nature of their grievances. Large-scale protests are not unknown in Russia's recent history. Up to tens of thousands mobilised across Russia in 2005-2006 to protest a series of unpopular welfare and housing reforms (RFE/RL, 2012). Smaller protests featuring some of the groups participating in the current mass mobilisation, known collectively as the 'Dissenters March(es),' took place in 2007 (Stolyarova, 2012) with some activity continuing into 2008. Though communist, nationalist and liberal youth protesters (including *Oborona*) have featured in prior protests in Russia, it is the swelling of the current protest action ranks by the younger, urban middle class that has particularly distinguished these demonstrations from earlier such examples in Russia. This group has also come to form the protests' leading element (Kramer, 2011). Such demographic changes bring these demonstrations in-line with previous events in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, among others. Additionally, the somewhat abstract demands made by the protesters, such as fairness and democracy, stand in contrast with the more tangible and material grievances that have underpinned previous large-scale protest actions in the country.

Given the generally negative Russian perceptions of the colour revolutions, even among the youth (Kuzio, 2006, Mendelson and Gerber, 2005), some of the groups which currently make up the anti-government protests have either purposefully or incidentally chosen not to overtly associate themselves with the language and symbolism of the colour revolutions. Nevertheless, a large 'anti-Orange' demonstration has been held in addition to pro-government or pro-Putin counter-protests, led primarily by the Kremlin supported youth

group *Nashi* (meaning ‘our [people]’ in Russian). These ‘anti-Orange’ protesters ostensibly claim that they are for ‘fair elections’ and some even for ‘a Russia without Putin,’ but also oppose the occurrence of a colour revolution in Russia. Similar to earlier instances of colour revolutions, many participants in such pro-incumbent or anti-revolutionary demonstrations were incentivised to swell the ranks by promises of monetary reward, free food and popular entertainment (Barry and Kramer, 2012, PolitOnline, 2012).

In many respects, the Russian Federation forms the political, economic and historic core of post-Soviet Eurasia. As such these protests can be studied as an instance of Eurasian mass civil mobilisation or ‘colour revolution,’ whether certain aesthetic trappings are employed by the opposition or not. As noted in Chapter One, one core feature of Eurasian mass mobilisation events is that they are not static in nature, and have generally found a nuanced and somewhat unique national expression derived from the state, civil and cultural attributes of the countries in which they take place. Likewise noted in Chapter One was the importance of the distance represented by time. The current Russian protests constitute the latest episode in the regional sequence of protest and dissent first begun by the 2000 Bulldozer/White Revolution in Serbia and somewhat coincidentally, the white ribbons worn by some Russian protesters have been the closest attribute to a ‘colour’ the symbolism of these demonstrations has come to feature (Elder, 2011d). Given that the time elapsed from that event is now more than a decade, it seems intuitive that pro- and anti-incumbent groups in Russia would have internalised many of lessons accrued from previous ‘colour revolution’ events in the region. Key Kremlin strategist and seminal theorist of ‘sovereign democracy’ Vladislav Surkov admitted as much at the end of 2011, noting that “the system has already changed” (Kramer, 2011). As such these protests can be used as a litmus to test the balance of the relationship between these two broad forces, both in Russia and in the Eurasia region

more broadly.

This section applies the frameworks and ‘lessons learned’ outlined in the preceding chapters. The purpose is both to analyse the 2011-2012 Russian anti-incumbent protest actions in their own right, as well as contextualise them within broader Eurasian trends of democratic development and civil dissent. First evaluated are the current civil attributes of the Russian Federation, most notably the features of the protest group and the condition of the civil society under which it operates. This is followed by an attribute analysis of Russia’s nominally independent and regionalised state, and government use of the authoritarian counter-strategies outlined in Chapter Two. The chapter concludes by summarising the attributes it has derived.

### **The path to dissent: A history of the 2011-2012 Russian protests**

The 2011-2012 Russian protests were sparked by allegations of electoral fraud committed in the 2011 Russian legislative elections. Most of the alleged fraud was purportedly committed in favour of the incumbent party, United Russia (*Yedinaya Rossiya*), the ‘party of power’ (Kunov et al., 2005, Makarenko, 2011, p280) of the then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and then-President Dmitry Medvedev, who have since swapped roles following the 2012 Russian presidential election. As such, the leading figures and personalities of the party, most prominently Putin himself, have quickly become a focal point for much of the frustration and criticism levelled at the incumbency by the protesters. At stake in the legislative elections were all 450 seats in the Russian lower house, the *Duma*. United Russia’s popular vote declined in these elections by 14.98%, decreasing party representation in the Duma from 315 to 238, a net loss of 77 seats. Nevertheless, accusations of wide-spread electoral fraud

persisted, resulting in the first major anti-Putin protest on December 10 at Bolotnaya Square. The primary organising element of these protests was a Facebook event titled ‘Saturday at Bolotnaya Square’ (*Subota na Bolotnoi Ploshadi*), which by December 8 had attracted more than 30,000 stated as ‘attending’ (Herszenhorn and Barry, 2011). As with all the anti-incumbent protests to date, obtaining an impartial and accurate estimate of protester numbers on the day is difficult, Moscow police reported an attendance of approximately 25,000, while protest organisers claimed a peak participation of 50,000-60,000 (Barry, 2011a).

The Bolotnaya protests had grown around an initial core of organisers critical of the Putin presidency and the monopolisation of the electoral system by United Russia. Leading figures of these initial protests included prominent politician and Putin critic Boris Nemtsov, who had variously served in the Federation Council (the upper house of the Russian parliament) and as an adviser to Orange Revolution leader Viktor Yushchenko, and prominent political activist Alexey Navalny, whose anti-corruption oriented blog posts and famous denunciation of United Russia as the ‘party of crooks and thieves’ has earned him credit from many for sparking the initial mass of the protest movement (Barry, 2011b, Elder, 2011a). These protests took place after election day, on December 5, and continued on for two days, attracting approximately 5,000 participants at their peak. Given their immediacy, it seems appropriate to label these actions as the ‘core’ of the initial protest mass.

Several larger and smaller protests have taken place since Nemtsov and Navalny’s initial demonstrations and ‘Saturday at Bolotnaya Square.’ The two largest occurred under the ‘For Fair Elections’ label. The first was held on 24 December 2011 with approximately 80,000 people in attendance at Moscow’s Academician Sakharov Avenue. As with Saturday at Bolotnaya Square, estimates of attendance made by police and organisers seemed to conflict with reports made by more impartial observers. Police turnout estimates put the

number of demonstrators at approximately 28,000, while organisers claimed up to 120,000 in attendance. The second 'For Fair Elections' protest brought 120,000 demonstrators back to Bolotnaya Square on 4 February 2012. Police claimed a highly deflated figure of 38,000, while organisers put forward the somewhat overestimated number of 160,000. In addition to Navalny and Nemtsov, the list of prominent speakers at these rallies included:

- Gennady Gudkov - Political figure and member of the A Just Russia party.
- Garry Kasparov - Public figure, political activist and former World Chess Champion.
- Mikhail Kasyanov - Former Prime Minister under Putin and a leader of Russia's liberal opposition.
- Alexie Kudrin - Finance minister of Russia under Putin and Medvedev, 2000-2011. Asked to resign by Medvedev in 2011.
- Kseniya Sobchak - Prominent Russian socialite and daughter of Putin's political mentor, former Saint Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak.
- Sergei Udaltsov - Prominent political activist and leader of the Left Front movement, who has since become a leading figure in the anti-Putin protests.
- Grigory Yavlinsky - Liberal politician, former Deputy Chairman of the council of ministers of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) and leader of the Yabloko party.

Overall the rallies featured prominent speakers from a cross-section of Russian



society including activists, politicians, journalists, writers, scientists and musicians. Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev sent his support to the December 24 rally. Also among the crowd was presidential candidate and oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, though he did not speak.

Moscow has featured as the predominant focus of the anti-Putin protests. Nevertheless, smaller parallel protests have taken place in conjunction with the main demonstrations in the capital. For example, ‘Saturday at Bolotnaya Square’ was billed to feature parallel demonstrations in 88 Russian towns and cities. Though an overly-ambitious target, significant protests were recorded in many Russian cities including St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Vladivostok, Kazan, Omsk, Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Kaliningrad, Novosibirsk, Khabarovsk, Tomsk, Kazan, Perm, Kurgan, Kazan and Krasnoyarsk. A summary of notable anti-incumbent protests to date is given in *Table 3.1*, these figures are *not inclusive* of protester numbers outside of Moscow.

*Table 3.1 Summary of all major pro-democracy or anti-incumbent protests to date*

Name	Date	Attendance (per police)	Attendance (per organisers)	Attendance (per other sources)	Venue (maximum capacity)
-	5-7 December, 2011	-	-	5,000 <sup>5</sup>	N/A (various venues across Moscow) <sup>5</sup>
‘Saturday at Bolotnaya Square	10 December, 2011	25,000 <sup>6</sup>	50,000 <sup>6</sup>	30,000 - 60,000 <sup>10</sup>	Bolotnaya Square (101,000) <sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> ELDER, M. 2011c. *Russian police and troops clash with protesters in Moscow* [Online]. The Guardian. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/06/russian-police-troops-moscow-protest> [Accessed 12 June 2012].

<sup>6</sup> ELDER, M. 2011b. *Rally Defying Putin’s Party Draws Tens of Thousands* [Online]. The Guardian. Available: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/world/europe/thousands-protest-in-moscow-russia-in-defiance-of-putin.html?scp=1&sq=thousands&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/world/europe/thousands-protest-in-moscow-russia-in-defiance-of-putin.html?scp=1&sq=thousands&_r=0) [Accessed 12 June 2012].

<sup>7</sup> RIAN. 2011c. *Сколько человек может вместить проспект Сахарова в Москве* [Online]. RIA-Novosti. Available: <http://ria.ru/infografika/20111223/524373513.html> [Accessed 12 June 2012].

-	17-18 December, 2011	1,500 <sup>8</sup>	-	5,000 <sup>8</sup>	Bolotnaya Square (101,000) <sup>7</sup>
'For Fair Elections'	24 December, 2011	28,000 <sup>9</sup>	120,000 <sup>10</sup>	80,000 <sup>10</sup>	Academician Sakharov Avenue (96,000) <sup>11</sup>
'For Fair Elections'	4 February, 2012	38,000 <sup>12</sup>	160,000 <sup>12</sup>	120,000 <sup>12</sup>	Bolotnaya Square (101,000) <sup>7</sup>
'Big White Circle'	26 February, 2012	-	-	30,000 <sup>13</sup>	The Garden Ring (?)
'For Fair Elections'	10 March, 2012	10,000 <sup>14</sup>	25,000 <sup>14</sup>	-	Novy Arbat Street (?)
'March of Millions'	6-7 May, 2012	-	-	20,000+ <sup>15</sup>	N/A (various venues across Moscow)
'March of Millions'	12 June, 2012	15,000 <sup>16</sup>	50,000 <sup>16</sup>	-	Pushkin Square (?)
'Russia Without Putin'	15 September, 2012	-	-	50,000+ <sup>17</sup>	N/A (various venues across Moscow)

<sup>8</sup> GAZETA. 2011a. *Митинг Яблока за честные выборы на Болотной закончился, очевидцы говорят о 5 тысячах участников* [Online]. Available: [http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2011/12/17/n\\_2138378.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2011/12/17/n_2138378.shtml) [Accessed 12 June 2012].

<sup>9</sup> THE HUFFINGTON POST. 2011. *Thousands Protest In Moscow Against Election Fraud* [Online]. Available: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2011/12/24/thousands-protest-in-moscow\\_n\\_1168659.html?ref=uk](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2011/12/24/thousands-protest-in-moscow_n_1168659.html?ref=uk) [Accessed 12 June 2012].

<sup>10</sup> BRATERSKY, A. & KRAINOVA, N. 2011. *Rally Suggests Protest Mood Is Growing* [Online]. The Moscow Times. Available: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/rally-suggests-protest-mood-is-growing/450414.html> [Accessed 12 June 2012].

<sup>11</sup> RIAN. 2011b. *Сколько человек может вместить проспект Сахарова в Москве* [Online]. RIA-Novosti. Available: <http://ria.ru/infografika/20111223/524373513.html> [Accessed 17 August 2012].

<sup>12</sup> GAZETA. 2012. *Митинг За честные выборы на Болотной площади закончился: 120 тысяч, следующий будет 26 февраля* [Online]. Available: [http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lastnews/2012/02/04/n\\_2191809.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lastnews/2012/02/04/n_2191809.shtml) [Accessed 17 October 2012].

<sup>13</sup> AMOS, H. & SAWER, P. 2011. *Russian protests: December 10 as it happened* [Online]. The Telegraph. Available: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/8947840/Russian-protests-live.html> [Accessed 14 June 2012].

<sup>14</sup> LENTA. 2012a. *Митинг "За честные выборы" на Новом Арбате завершился* [Online]. Available: <http://lenta.ru/news/2012/03/10/over/> [Accessed 17 August 2012].

<sup>15</sup> BARRY, E., SCHWIRTZ, M., KATES, G. & TIKHOMIROVA, A. 2012. *Arrests and Violence at Overflowing Rally in Moscow* [Online]. The New York Times. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/07/world/europe/at-moscow-rally-arrests-and-violence.html> [Accessed 7 September 2012].

<sup>16</sup> THE GUARDIAN. 2012. *Russians turn out in their thousands to protest against Vladimir Putin* [Online]. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/12/russians-thousands-protest-vladimir-putin> [Accessed 17 August 2012].

<sup>17</sup> GRANI.RU. 2012. *Мэрия согласовала "Марш миллионов" 15 сентября* [Online]. Available: <http://grani.ru/Politics/Russia/activism/m.206257.html> [Accessed 17 September 2012].

### *Pro-Putin and 'anti-Orange' demonstrations*

Several rallies have also been staged in support of the incumbency, mostly as a response to the pro-democracy and anti-Putin protesters. The early examples of these rallies occurred on 4, 6 and 12 December 2011, and were organised by the pro-Kremlin youth group *Nashi* (Sulimina, 2012). Attendance was smaller than the rival pro-democracy protests, with a recorded peak of approximately 15,000 attendees on 4 December. Outside observers reported that some demonstrators were seemingly forced to attend (Schwartz, 2011). As these rallies already drew upon the regions for many of their participants, there were no examples of such demonstrations outside Moscow (Sulimina, 2012).

The Nashi protests were followed by two larger demonstrations. The first on 4 February 2012, titled the 'Anti-Orange Protest,' was ostensibly a demonstration against a possible colour revolution in Russia. Police reported the inflated attendance figure of 138,000-150,000, while outside observers, including the Russian state's own media channel RIA-Novosti reported the real figure to be 'much lower' (Oliphant, 2012). Additionally, the protesters were reportedly incentivised by the promise of monetary reward, free food and popular entertainment (Barry and Kramer, 2012, PolitOnline, 2012). Such tactics are reminiscent of events in earlier colour revolutions. For example, similar incentives were used by the incumbent pro-Yanukovich Party of Regions during the Orange Revolution, in order to draw its 'supporters' to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. In some cases participants were reportedly coerced by threats of firings and job-loss, though this was denied by pro-government media sources (PolitOnline, 2012). Regardless of over-estimates and inaccuracies, this protest demonstrated that Putin does have a support base and popularity among Russians. Putin himself admitted as much on both points, telling an interviewer from the Interfax news agency that while some demonstrators may have been forced to attend by

their employers, administrative pressure alone could not have gathered such a quantity of people (Barry and Kramer, 2012). The demographic base of the ‘anti-Orange’ rally was generally older and more working class relative to the pro-democracy demonstrators. Primary attendees included state employees, the Patriots of Russia Party, the Trade Union of Russian Citizens, the Pensioners Union of Russia and the Russian Union of Afghanistan Veterans.

The Defender of the Fatherland Rally on 23 February 2012 possessed many similarities with the anti-Orange Protest. The key speaker was Vladimir Putin himself, who gave a highly patriotic speech denouncing the influence of outsiders and their domestic agents, presumably a reference to NGO’s and the pro-democracy protests. As with the previous event, some participants at this rally were reportedly forced to attend by their employers, while some younger participants noted that they had been paid to attend and were told that they were going to a ‘folk festival’ (BBC, 2012a). No significant parallel rallies were recorded in other Russian cities. A summary of notable anti-incumbent protests to date is given in *Table 3.2*.

**Table 3.2** Summary of all major pro-incumbent or anti-orange protests to date

Name	Date	Attendance (per police)	Attendance (per organisers)	Attendance (per other sources)	Venue (maximum capacity)
-	4 December, 2011	-	-	15,000 <sup>18</sup>	Revolution Square, Manezhnaya Square
-	6 December, 2011	-	-	5,000 <sup>18</sup>	Manezhnaya Square, Triumfalnaya Square

<sup>18</sup> SULIMINA, A. 2012. *The empire strikes back* [Online]. The Moscow News. Available: <http://www.themoscownews.com/politics/20111208/189271247.html> [Accessed 22 August 2012].

Constitution Day Rally	12 December, 2011	-	-	“thousands” <sup>18</sup>	N/A (various venues across Moscow)
‘Anti-Orange Protest’	4 February, 2012	138,000 – 150,000 <sup>19</sup>	-	“much lower” (than 138,000) <sup>19</sup>	Poklonnaya Hill (193,000) <sup>20</sup>
‘Defender of the Fatherland Day’ Rally	23 February, 2012	130,000 <sup>21</sup>	-	-	Luzhniki Stadium

### ***Extent of electoral fraud***

The true extent of the electoral fraud committed in the 2011 legislative elections is difficult to gauge. No independent exit polls were conducted concurrent with the elections. The final outcome was, however, broadly consistent with the pre-election opinion polling conducted both by the independent Levada Center and the state-owned All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM or VCIOM). Some results were evidently fraudulent, such as the 99.48% vote United Russia obtained in the Chechen Republic (RIAN, 2011a, Grove, 2011). Similarly untenable results of over 90% for United Russia were reported in the neighbouring North Caucasus Republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia (Grove, 2011).

The State Central Election Commission, headed by Vladimir Churov claimed it had investigated 1686 reports of voting irregularities, of which it said only 195 (11.5%) constituted true and genuine reports of fraud (Lenta, 2012b). The incumbency chose to support this position, with Putin’s press secretary Dmitry Peskov declaring that the combined

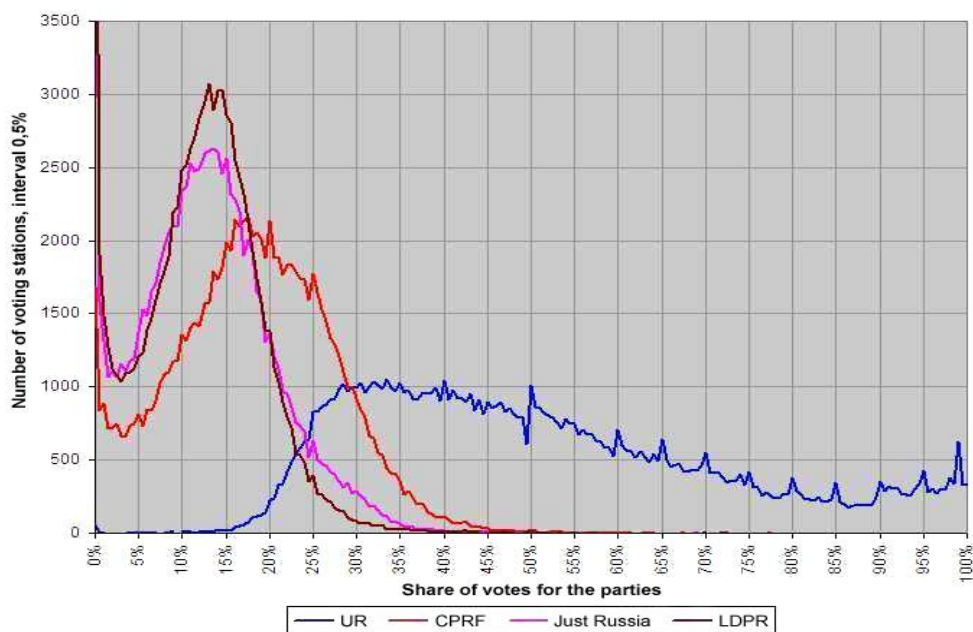
<sup>19</sup> OLIPHANT, R. 2012. *Anti-Putin protests return to Moscow's freezing streets* [Online]. The Telegraph. Available: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/9061502/Anti-Putin-protests-return-to-Moscows-freezing-streets.html> [Accessed 11 August 2012].

<sup>20</sup> RIAN. 2012b. *Сколько человек вмещает Поклонная гора* [Online]. RIA-Novosti. Available: <http://www.ria.ru/infografika/20120203/555840256.html> [Accessed 9 September 2012].

<sup>21</sup> BBC. 2012a. *Putin tells stadium rally 'battle' is on for Russia* [Online]. British Broadcasting Corporation. Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17136644> [Accessed 25 August 2012].

effect of all falsifications could not have impacted the vote by more than 0.5% (Forbes.ru, 2011b). Comprehensive statistical analyses applied to the election data hints that the official position is understated (Shpilkin, 2011). The most peculiar feature of the United Russia vote is its non-Gaussian (i.e. not a ‘bell curve’) distribution, which is an extremely unusual electoral profile, even more so as the vote profiles of all other parties in the election tended to conform to this distributive rule. The second irregularity seems to be that the United Russia vote ‘peaks’ at multiples of five in booths where votes for the party exceeded 50% of the total votes cast, indicating that a component of the party’s vote was planned “from above” to deliver a certain result (e.g. 60% for United Russia or 75% for United Russia). A third is that turnout seems to be overly high, especially in booths with high percentage returns for United Russia, though this is less verifiable as it can partially be explained by the existence of ‘electoral enclaves’ (PolitOnline, 2011). A graphical representation of all three trends as derived from electoral data is given in *figure 3.1*

**Figure 3.1** Graphical representation of share of party vote experienced at a certain quantity of polling booths



Source: Shpilkin (2011)

This analysis confirms the claims made by independent observers on election day of carousel voting, purposeful mis-reporting of vote counts by election officials and ballot stuffing (Echo, 2011, Forbes.ru, 2011a, Gazeta, 2011b). These observations were also backed up by the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions gathered by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Among other things the report noted the election was “slanted in favour of the ruling party as evidenced by the lack of independence of the election administration, the partiality of most media, and the undue interference of state authorities at different levels,” concluding that these facts on the ground did not provide the “necessary conditions for fair electoral competition” (OSCE, 2011, p1).

Thus we can conclude with some confidence that electoral fraud did occur in the 2011 Russian legislative elections, in some cases on an extensive basis. What is more difficult to ascertain is whether the level of electoral fraud was sufficient to significantly affect the final outcome. Returning to the statistical analysis conducted by Shpilkin, even if the vote for United Russia is adjusted to its hypothetical ‘no fraud’ Gaussian distribution, it still remains the most dominant party in the election (Shpilkin, 2011). The results of this maximum ‘de-frauding’ are summarised in *table 3.3*. As can be further noted, even in these circumstances, no party outside the four already elected to the Duma manages to breach the minimum electoral threshold.

To some extent these observations return us to the colour revolutions. As is hinted at in the OSCE report, the electoral fraud is in itself only a ‘smoking gun,’ while the underlying motivator of the dissenting parties could be put down to the state and civil attributes that led to this fraud being underreported and passively accepted by Russian society in the first place. In this case, the oppositions’ most evident underlying grievance is with the political environment in which these elections are conducted (and rigged) and with the system of

government that administers them. Both are perceived as biased and unfair from inception, with President Putin serving as a figurehead and focal point for criticism. Also, as with earlier instances of mass civil mobilisation in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, what may be more important is not so much the mathematical extent of the fraud, but the public perception of electoral fraud itself, and feelings of mistrust, humiliation and betrayal it fosters within the popular conscience, especially within the newly (re-)established and growing middle class. The subsequent sections explore the dynamics of these state and civil attributes.

**Table 3.3** Results of the 2011 Russian legislative election, and adjusted figures removing vote fraud

<b>Party</b>	<b>Electoral Result</b>	<b>Adjusted Result</b>
A Just Russia	13.24%	17.69%
Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)	19.19%	25.63%
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)	11.67%	15.60%
Patriots of Russia	0.97%	1.30%
Right Cause	0.60%	0.80%
United Russia	49.32%	34.43%
Yabloko	3.43%	4.56%

Source: Shpilkin (2011)

### **Analysis: Civil Attributes**

At street level, the composition of the Russian opposition movement can appear to be *ad-hoc* and politically unnatural. A broad survey of protester demographics reveals the participation of communists, far-right nationalists, far-left social democrats as well as more niche groups such as environmental and minority rights activists. Vladimir Putin has derided the demonstrators as “leaderless,” and compared their lack of ideological unity to a “Brownian motion,” each component going its own way (Zaks, 2011). Yet as noted earlier, it has been the en masse participation of the urban middle class that distinguishes these protests from previous similar instances in the Russian Federation. Their participation has instilled a moderate tone into the demonstrations and swelled protester numbers into the tens and



hundreds of thousands. This political awakening of the nascent middle class reflects a significant, though gradual, shift in the socio-economic fabric of Russian society.

Putin's argument is certainly tenable. In the minds of many, political groupings such as communists and far-right nationalists are not easily reconciled as committed democrats. However, to say that these groups have no unifying element may be missing the point. For the most part, the protesters in their various guises represent political and social groupings that have in a sense been 'crowded out' of the system by United Russia's electoral and governmental monopoly. This in itself is a powerful unifying factor. If nothing else, many of these groups hold the perception that they would achieve better outcomes under a genuinely fair and democratic environment. The variety of the dissenter's composition in many ways reflects the diversity of Russia's nascent civil society, and of any civil society. It is not necessarily a weakness in the goal of removing the incumbent regime, though may prove to be less workable in a hypothetical 'after the fact' scenario. Nevertheless, in their first meeting at Bolotnaya Square, these seemingly disparate groups did manage to produce a unified set of demands by which to hold the incumbency to account (The Guardian, 2011):

1. Freedom for political prisoners
2. Annulment of the (legislative) election results
3. The resignation of Vladimir Churov, head of the election commission and official investigation of vote fraud
4. Registration of the opposition political parties and new democratic legislation on parties and elections
5. New democratic and open elections

It can hence be noted that the Russian political system is becoming increasingly contradictory to the aspirations and interests of the most politically engaged sections of society. Taking the most significant component, the urban middle class, as an example, its list of grievances include: dissatisfaction with the lack of social mobility, bureaucratic and police pressure on the private sector, lack of opportunity to influence the ‘political machine,’ and the archaic form of communication between state and society. In the Russian scenario this amounts to what could be regarded as a “nonpartisan protest” (Makarenko, 2011, p289). That is not to say that the protest movement is completely decoupled from the party system, many participants are active politicians, some even sitting deputies in the Duma. Rather, it is that the short-term goals of the pro-democracy movement are such that while extensive parliamentary representation would be a boon, it is not a necessity (and at this point, possibility). Unfounded also are stereotypes of the protesters as a financially privileged upper class who, after a symbolic discharge of their civic duty retreat “into their lavish apartments, Jeeps, and Land Cruisers, departing on shopping trips to London and Paris, and embarking on expeditions to the Brazilian rainforest or on South African safaris” (Aron, 2012, pp1-2). Instead surveys reveal a much more humble demographic with only twenty-eight percent being able to buy a car, forty percent being able to buy some expensive things (i.e. a television and refrigerator) but not a car, twenty percent having only enough money for food and clothing, and the remainder having issues obtaining money even for those things (Aron, 2012, p2)

Thus what has formed out of these civil attributes is a sort of ‘grey revolution,’ a colour revolution devoid of a distinct colour. Noting that the protesters have already managed to extract some (albeit tokenistic) concessions from the incumbency, their inability to coalesce around a particular colour seems beside the point. As the colour revolutions have

tended to be conducted *against* a comparatively pro-Russian opponent, this has usually resulted in nationalists (those wishing to assert their national identity as distinct from the Russian domination experienced in Soviet times) and communists (those wishing to return to an idealised Soviet time, and thus the Russian sphere of influence) ending up on different sides of the power struggle. The dynamics of a similar situation in Russia must by their nature be different. As it is the dominant regional power, in the Russian scenario, nationalists, communists and the middle classes can present a unified front against the ‘party of power’ without compromising their political legitimacy. There is no genuinely pro- or anti-Russian side to take. Also given the lack of electoral success organisations such as ‘Otpor!’ and ‘Pora!’ attracted once they were converted into a political party form, and the experiences of the Rose and Tulip revolutions, the degree of pluralism inherent within the political system does not appear to be a prime variable at this nascent stage of the pro-democracy movement.

So then are the current socio-political convulsions a case of Russian society distancing itself from the regime, or is the regime isolating itself from society by resorting to increasingly oppressive measures? This trend could be said to exhibit some bi-directionality, especially in light of recent attempts by the Kremlin to crack down on visible displays of dissent, but the former explanation does appear to be the overriding one. Polling carried out by the Levada Center helps to demonstrate such underlying changes in the dynamic Russian society, a society that is arguably changing faster than its government. For example, in 2001, 34% of Russian said they supported the concept of ‘one strong ruling party,’ by the end of the decade this proportion had halved to 17%. Conversely support for a pluralistic system, with ‘two or three big parties’ or more ‘relatively small parties’ rose from 45% to 68%. These trends are demonstrated in *table 3.4*, figures are in percent

**Table 3.4** Survey question: “How many political parties are necessary in Russia today?”

	<b>Sept. 2001</b>	<b>Apr. 2004</b>	<b>Sept. 2004</b>	<b>Oct. 2005</b>	<b>July 2006</b>	<b>Apr. 2007</b>	<b>June 2008</b>	<b>Oct. 2009</b>
One strong ruling party	34	34	34	38	32	30	32	17
Two or three big parties	41	41	44	39	42	46	45	59
Many relatively small parties	4	8	6	4	5	7	8	9
In general, we do not need political parties	9	7	6	7	7	6	6	4
It is difficult to answer	13	11	9	12	14	13	10	11

Source: Makarenko (2011)

Russian society can thus be said to be moving toward a more democratic outlook at a moderate pace, though only a small proportion have thus far taken their grievances to the street. Taken on its own, the middle class stratum is the most open in its cynicism toward the political sphere and lack of belief in the bureaucracy’s ability to listen and actuate their aspirations. By their own admission, members of United Russia are experiencing increasingly serious difficulties communicating with this group of people (Makarenko, 2011, p289-290). Yet, as a class, this group of people is likely to keep increasing as a proportion of the overall population as Russia continues to develop economically. Longer-term prospects certainly exist.

### ***Where is the tipping point?***

Just as in the Orange Revolution several years earlier, the concept of a tipping point resonates within the collective psyche of the current opposition movement, and has done almost from its moment of genesis. One of the central messages sent to potential participants prior to the Bolotnaya Square demonstrations was that “If 5,000 people go out on the street, they will be

dispersed; if 50,000 go out, the police will stand silently; and if 500,000 go out, then the police will take their side.” (Herszenhorn and Barry, 2011). The size of the Russian demonstrations have been comparable to those of the early Rose, Orange and Tulip revolution demonstrations (D'Anieri, 2006, p341-345), but smaller if enumerated as a proportion of the metropolitan (i.e. Muscovite) or national population. Given that the tipping point is more intelligible as a relative rather than an absolute, it seems that even the current maximum reliable estimate of the largest protest to date - 120,000 - is not nearly large enough to effect change on a large scale, though it has certainly been large enough to concern many in the incumbent government. 500,000 may not be an inaccurate estimate however, as that was the peak number of protesters present in both Belgrade and Kyiv during the White and Orange revolutions respectively. These numbers were reached by drawing people from outlying cities and regions from across the geographic extent of Serbia and Ukraine, into the capital. Arguably, Russia's expansive geography and far greater relative distances make this much more difficult to implement in the current context, though it could theoretically double the quantity of demonstrators in Moscow if it was achieved.

### **Analysis: State Attributes**

The Russian Federation is a semi-presidential Eurasian state. The OSCE has made note of Russia's contemporary political system as one marked by the “convergence of the State and the governing party” (OSCE, 2011, p1). Yet it is important not to forget that the current Russian system has not developed overnight or even wholly under Putin's watch. Rather, it is the product of decades of pre- and post-Soviet history. Much of the groundwork for the current system was laid immediately following the collapse of USSR. The early Yeltsin years had already supplied a telling hint of the balance of power to come in the form of the 1993

political gridlock between the president and Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, the national parliament of the time. In the ensuing constitutional crisis Yeltsin established the predominance of the Presidency over the legislature through a mixture of ‘soft’ appeals to the people and ‘hard’ military force. While the military had only chosen to support Yeltsin in the eleventh hour, a precedent had nonetheless been set. As Yeltsin’s handpicked successor, Putin can be understood as continuing and consolidating the dominant position of the presidency and the executive branch of government, not least of all by working around term limit statutes.

United Russia and the various facets of the Russian government thus share ‘space’ in the policy arena that would be unusual (and generally ‘undemocratic’) in a Western context. Out of favour oligarch and well known critic of the Kremlin Mikhail Khodorkovsky once famously described this approach as the “Singapore Model,” telling the Times that it is “a term people understand in Russia these days. It means that theoretically you have a free press, but in practice there is self-censorship. Theoretically you have courts; in practice the courts adopt decisions dictated from above. Theoretically there are civil rights enshrined in the constitution; in practice you are not able to exercise some of these rights” (Mortished, 2003). This may be a slight over-comparison of the two systems. As the current situation shows, in Russia there is less emphasis placed on *what* rights one may exercise, and more on *when*. Putin himself has said that the protests by “active, mainly young people” were “good to see,” and that in some sense the “Putin regime” could take credit for their newly found sense of civic freedom. The justification for the subsequent crackdown on political dissent comes from the perceived hijacking of the legitimate grievances of this group by external (i.e. Western) foes or ‘foreign agents’, who wish to foment unrest and instability within Russia for their own political and economic gain (Schwartz and Barry, 2011). Putin further justified this

action by noting that the protesters and some foreign governments were acting “in accordance with a well known scenario” (i.e. colour revolution) and that “people in our country do not want to see the situation escalate to what happened in Kyrgyzstan, or in the recent past in Ukraine” (Putin, 2010).

Putin is partially correct. The ‘Putin regime’ has indeed created an economic space in which the incomes of some Russians have risen, and out of which a nascent, largely urban, middle class has emerged. This was helped in no small part by increasing economic rents derived from a skyrocketing global oil price, generating large profits for Russia’s newly re-nationalised oil industry, two luxuries the Yeltsin government did not have throughout the 1990’s (Gaddy and Ickes, 2011, pp176-177). In fact, the middle class hypothesis provides a fitting explanation as to why there was a seeming burst of social demand for democratic ideals followed by two decades of relative dormancy and ambivalence out of which Russian society is only beginning to emerge. The average real incomes of Russians only returned to the level they were at in 1991 sometime in the period of 2006-2007 (Rogov, 2011, p126). Furthermore, January 2011 marked the first time since Soviet collapse that the presidential approval rating had become decoupled from national economic performance. Up to this point, public approval ratings had generally followed Russia’s economic fortunes, since that point economic sentiment has remained static but support for Putin and Medvedev has fallen (Dmitriev and Treisman, 2012).

While the 1990’s is a decade that is remembered fondly by many in the West, few Russians would share such a view. Such are the scars left on the collective psychology of Russian society by the declining standards of living, plummeting life expectancies and economic uncertainty that defined that decade, that the overall social (and governmental) preference for order still far exceeds the demand for democratic idealism. Polling carried out

by the Levada Center asked Russians which was of greater importance: “order, even if it means violating democratic principles, or democracy, even if it means giving free rein to destructive elements.” The results are summarised in *table 3.5*. Even today, an absolute majority prefers order, in spite of the hopes for a pluralistic political system displayed earlier in *table 3.4*. In this way, there is still real support for the ‘party of power’ from a significant portion of the Russian population (Makarenko, 2011, p281).

**Table 3.5** Survey Question: “What is more important? Order, even if it means violating democratic principles, or democracy, even if it means giving free rein to destructive elements?”

	1993	2000	2004	2006	2007	2009	2010
Order	75	81	75	68	68	59	56
Democracy	11	9	13	11	18	18	23
Difficult to Respond	14	10	12	21	15	22	21

Source: Rogov (2011)

Yet while the ‘Putin regime’ has raised incomes it has also, subtly, drawn back some of the pluralistic and democratic state attributes Russia gained in the wake of Soviet disintegration. The reform of the Federation Council in 2000-2001, the “Yukos affair” in 2003 (resulting in the arrest of the previously quoted Mikhail Khodorkovsky and a step in the nationalisation of the Russian oil industry), and the abolition of the popular election of regional governors in 2004 (Makarenko, 2011, p280), have all moved the semi-authoritarian Putin government away from the growing section of Russian society that favours democratic development.

The ‘party of power’ duality has had certain implications for the function of United Russia. By design it is a political instrument formed out of a consensus by the national political and business elite, creating a single-channel system for the expression of political interests that persists to this day (Makarenko, 2011, p280). Being active in both the political



and bureaucratic spheres has made it a jack of all trades, but master of none. This ‘big tent’ approach in attempting to include a maximum range of Russia’s political and bureaucratic life has, somewhat ironically, left the party with a weakness it shares with the pro-democracy demonstrators. Primarily, this is due to the lack of a strong ideological base. The question of what true principles the party has outside of electing and supporting Putin and his allies is a valid one to ask. Surkov’s ideological concept of ‘sovereign democracy’ and the creation of the youth group *Nashi* have been attempts to remedy this weakness and plug the gaps, arguably meeting a limited degree of success thus far. It is also of little surprise that key figures in the party, most notably Putin himself, have at least for now become a replacement for ideology within United Russia.

If the OSCE is taken at its word, the weakness and ideological vacuum United Russia has experienced at the party level has also been transposed to the bureaucratic level, and thus to the apparatus of government itself. The apparent back-and-forth and indecisiveness on display by the current government may be a hint at this, though it may also simply be a reflection of the regime not knowing how exactly to react. Various sources within United Russia have posited the perceived liberal drift of the Medvedev era as responsible for the current civil unrest, some have even blamed the former president for waking up “this new Russian revolution” (Barry, 2012a). This claim is largely unfounded, not least of which due to the lack of real civil reforms under Medvedev and the “tandem” nature of the shared leadership with the then Prime Minister Putin. It is, at the very least, just as likely that the back-and-forth between Putin and Medvedev is designed to give the appearance of plurality under the top-down Putin regime (Grove, 2012). Reconciling the increasingly divergent interests of those within the system will continue to be a formative feature of Russian state attributes as the incumbency attempts to strike a balance between giving the appearance of

progress without ceding too much control due to pressure from the outside. Most recently, the state has enacted legislation greatly limiting the freedom and external funding for NGO's, while at the same time implementing reforms liberalising the electoral space, which among other things reduces the required number of members for political party status from 40,000 to 500 (Ostroukh, 2012). This carrot and stick mentality is likely to continue as a response to the real and perceived causes of the recent pro-democracy demonstrations.

### *Dynamics in the Russian regions*

In the wake of recent events, Russia's regions have been noticeably docile relative to the national capital. In one sense this is unsurprising given the centrality of the capital in any event of this form in Eurasia (Kuzio, 2008, pp101-102). On the other hand, the low overall density and geographic sprawl of Russia's 143 million people make the regions arguably more important than they were in Serbia, Georgia or Ukraine, whose populations are far more geographically concentrated. Common stereotypes of regional Russians from both inside and outside the country cast this section of the population as "politically apathetic conformist, who is resentful of pampered Muscovites, socially conservative, generally pro-Putin, suspicious of the West and nostalgic for Soviet order" (Dmitriev and Treisman, 2012). Recent studies of this group have served to dispel this myth. While showing that regional Russians are, for now, less predisposed to street protest, their level of discontent with the current government and political system is similar to that of urban Russians. The source of this discontent is different to that of the urban population, with government corruption and ineptness at providing basic services figuring most prominently in this group's grievances. This difference in attitudes is not all the product of some vastly different rural-urban psychological dichotomy, but rather one of living conditions and immediate concerns. As one

survey respondent lamented: “what can one say about a global struggle [against corruption] when you can’t drive because the road is full of potholes?” Furthermore, support for Putin in the regions grows seemingly thinner by the months, and any further deterioration in economic conditions would cause many ‘non-protesters’ to revise their position (Dmitriev and Treisman, 2012).

In this sense the discontent felt by regional Russians may have more in common with the 2005-2006 welfare and housing reform protesters than it does with the current pro-democracy movement. Nevertheless these two positions are in no way contradictory. A more accountable and democratic state would arguably decrease corruption and improve the delivery of state services and economic assistance. The challenge for the anti-Putin movement is thus to form a workable coalition with the regions, the challenge for the Kremlin is to maintain the wedge it has placed between these two groups to prevent this from happening. Here too then, prospects for the future exist.

### *Changing the system*

Kremlin strategist and architect of ‘sovereign democracy’ Vladislav Surkov has spoken of a system that has “already changed,” further noting that the “tectonic structures in society are shifting, the social fabric is taking on a new quality” (Adomanis, 2011, Kramer, 2011). At face value such statements seem to be an attempt by the government to calm and co-opt Russian society, most particularly its most politically active elements, while holding true to his government’s ‘divide and rule’ mentality. For example, in one interview Surkov referenced the demonstrators as adhering to the colour revolution mentality and “using all the newest revolutionary methods,” whilst admitting that at their core the protests were

“completely real and natural” (Adomanis, 2011) and a response to a government that had grown “deaf and stupid” over the years. In another interview however, Surkov had derided the same movement as “annoyed urbanites” (Kramer, 2011). Yet the Kremlin and its policy architects have also implicitly changed ‘the rules’ by learning from the colour revolutions and adopting policies aimed at biasing the outcome of these events in favour of the incumbency. These policies are derivatives of the five archetypes of authoritarian learning noted in Chapter Two: isolation, marginalisation, distribution, repression and persuasion.

The Putin government has, through the majority of its administrative duration, chosen to partially *isolate* itself, mostly from the European Union and the ‘West.’ The recent ‘foreign agents’ bill tightening non-domestic funding regulations for Russian NGO’s engaged in “political activity,” requiring these organisations to declare themselves as “foreign agents” and present quarterly reports to the government, is the latest in a history of such legislative measures first begun in 2004 (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b, p17, Sussman, 2010, p139). The primary aim of these efforts is to restrict the activities and funding of independent Russian NGO’s perceived, rightly or wrongly, as being proxies for external interests, and thus to attain a measure of control over the civic sphere and civil society.

The regime has *marginalised* opposition figures primarily through electoral reform legislation enacted in 2005-2006, which raised the electoral threshold from 5% to 7% and eliminated the single member district components of the Russian electoral system. Recent reforms signed by outgoing President Medvedev, which are designed to appease the protesters, have reversed some aspects of the earlier 2005-2006 changes, including significantly lowering the previously noted numerical requirements for party registration and re-establishing the electoral threshold at 5% (Ostroukh, 2012). Whether or not such reforms will return the system to its more pluralistic 1993-2003 form remains to be seen, though they

are not likely to have any major impact on United Russia's governmental monopoly. As noted earlier, the incumbency has also attempted to marginalise the opposition via a state media campaign putting forth the narrative that the 'legitimate grievances' of the pro-democracy demonstrators have been being hijacked by external powers wishing to control and take advantage of Russia.

The incumbency has a significant degree of control of the *distribution* of political power in the Russian political system. All of the political parties currently represented in the Duma: United Russia, A Just Russia, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) are to a varying extent 'Kremlin' parties. Members who get out of line are often 'punished,' with the recent expulsion of A Just Russia deputy and supporter of the anti-Putin demonstrations Gennady Gudkov serving as a tangible example (Astrasheuskaya and Grove, 2012).

*Repression* of the opposition has taken many forms. Using the aftermath of the anti-Putin protests as the most recent example, the regime has passed new legislation multiplying penalties for protesters who take part in demonstrations that injure people or damage property by a factor of 120. The potential fine for an individual alone exceeds the average Russian's annual salary, and can be applied even to demonstrators who obtain a permit but violate any of its terms (Herszenhorn, 2012). Protest leader Alexey Navalny has been made the subject of embezzlement investigation, a case that had been investigated and dropped years prior by prosecutors in the Kirov region (BBC, 2012b). Furthermore, on 11 June 2012, the night before the June 12 protests, the homes of Sergei Udaltsov, Alexey Navalny, Kseniya Sobchak and other leading figures in the protest movement were raided and searched, with seizures of property including literature, funds, lists of supporters and electronic equipment (Barry, 2012b).

*Persuasion* may be the technique in which the incumbency has invested the most resolution. The central focus of these efforts has been the attempt to create a national ideology that is an appealing popular alternative to the values promoted by the colour revolutions. Recognising the critical role played by the youth in the colour revolutions, Kremlin strategists founded the pro-government *Nashi* youth organisation. Nashi's founding doctrine argues that external forces hostile to Russia will always strive to dominate Eurasia, and certain internal 'enemies' will seek to return Russia to the corrupt chaos of 1990's oligarchical capitalism or to establish a fascist regime. As such it is the role of Nashi to defeat this unnatural alliance of liberals, fascists, Western sympathisers, ultra-nationalists and international organisations, who have been brought together solely by their shared hatred of Putin. In doing so it becomes the role of Nashi to preserve Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, foster the development of a domestically grown civil society, modernise the state, and to accomplish all this on Russia's terms (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b, pp19-20).

A second pillar of the Kremlin's persuasion strategy has been the creation of an ideological rationalisation for Russia's current mode of governance, Vladislav Surkov's ethos of 'sovereign democracy.' At its core, this ideology is a rejection of Western liberal democracy as applicable to the Russian Federation. Surkov asserts that Russia is not a Western democratic country with a history of liberalism and a focus on individual rights, but rather a continental European nation with established traditions of collectivism and a strong state. In such a system the collective realises its aspirations and sovereign will through the strong state, which in turn protects the people from the excesses of corrupt domestic elites (i.e. oligarchs) and foreign powers (i.e. NATO). On the other hand, attempts to establish (or re-establish) a communist or ultra-nationalist regime would plunge the nation back into a failed Soviet-type bureaucracy with an inept state and rising ethnic tensions across the

country (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b, p28). Such a philosophy is designed to have majority appeal, especially in light of the chaotic 1990's and the oligarch-dominated Yeltsin era. Sovereign democracy also taps into the common Russian cultural belief that a strong state is required to keep together a country as large and diverse as Russia. In this way, Surkov's sovereign democracy is an attempt to create a new, post-Communist ideological basis for national unity, as well as casting out rival sources of legitimacy and power, such as Western liberalism, as alien to the national culture.

### **Conclusion: The central features of Russia's Grey Revolution**

This section has catalogued the history and features of Russia's 'Grey Revolution.' It has explained the defining features and morphology of the protest movement as a product of Russia's particularly unique state and civil attributes acting within the framework of an instance of Eurasian mass civil mobilisation. The Russian pro-democracy protests have also allowed us begin updating the 'rules of the game' for colour revolutions, though these outcomes are still far from clear. The subsequent chapter integrates these derived state and civil into the framework of Eurasian mass civil mobilisation established in Chapter 1.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The broader perspective*

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The Grey Revolution has had a noticeable impact on political norms, both within the Russian Federation and in the other states of post-Soviet Eurasia. This effect has been generated by virtue of the Grey Revolution's occurrence, rather than its outcomes. Prior to now, the effects of regional mass civil destabilization events have flown into Russian Federation from other Eurasian states, the 'periphery' of the former Soviet Union. In the present day, Russia often refers to this geographic grouping as its 'near abroad,' and retains significant political, economic and cultural interests in these countries. The Grey Revolution is unique in that it has reversed the 'flow' of colour revolution, which now emanates from the 'core' of the former USSR, Russia itself, into the old 'periphery.' By any measure, the Russian Federation is the most geopolitically significant post-Soviet Eurasian state to have experienced a colour revolution type event.

Three main paths of development are possible as a result of the Grey Revolution. In the first scenario, the demonstrations cause the Russian state to look inward and stimulate democratic reform domestically. This scenario has a net positive effect on Eurasian democracy by virtue of focusing Russian geopolitical interests away from the periphery, and by the diffusion of colour revolution-type democratic idealism through (and throughout) the region's most dominant and largest state. Conversely the insecurity caused by the mass protests could lead the Russian government to a perceived need to assert itself politically. This would most likely manifest itself through crack-downs on political opposition domestically, and a heightened level of diversionary political intervention in the states of the near abroad. This would have a net negative effect on Eurasian democracy as Russia itself



would trend further toward authoritarianism, while doing the same to other states in the region by encouraging the development of controllable, Russian-backed dictatorial regimes. In the third scenario, events can develop in either direction (or at least appear to), before returning to a balance similar to current conditions and norms.

Adjoined to all these scenarios is the fate of Russia's nascent pro-democracy movement. Though it appears that protest activity has peaked, a large core group has persisted in spite of crack-downs and the tightening of laws regulating protests. Significantly, it is looking increasingly likely that the Putin regime will have to contend with the existence of a permanent opposition movement (Weir, 2012).

This chapter accounts for the broader implications of Russia's Grey Revolution. The Russian protest events are evaluated by application of the ten point framework for Eurasian mass civil mobilisations enumerated in Chapter One. The section concludes by taking a longer-term view of Russian civil development and noting the capacity of the current protests to impact domestic and regional political norms.

### **The colour revolution model applied to the Grey Revolution**

A comparative analysis of the Grey Revolution to other similar instances in the 'near abroad' is justifiable and beneficial as it integrates the Russian protest events into the broader framework of Eurasian mass civil mobilisations. Analysing the foundations of the Russian protests within the colour revolution framework can help us understand the movement's underlying strengths, weaknesses and potential consequences. Also, such a comparison can not only help us derive the implications for the Russian Federation, but also provides us with a snapshot of the current state of democratic development in post-Soviet Eurasia.

This section takes an all-encompassing view of the colour revolutions, and generates a comparative analysis by returning to the ten point framework enumerated in the first chapter. The attributes of the Russian events are sequentially analysed and assigned a rating for their degree of adherence to colour revolution norms as expressed by the framework, (+/+) for a strong adherence, (+/-) for a moderate adherence or partial adherence, and (-/-) for weak or insufficient adherence. The score generated by the average of strong adherence (i.e. the sum of '+') and weak adherence (i.e. the sum of '-') can subsequently be used as a base measurement of the strength of the Grey Revolution's connection to colour revolution norms, the relevance of its experience for the other post-Soviet states, and its applicability in updating the framework to present day realities.

A positive aggregate score would imply the general applicability of the colour revolution framework to the pro-democracy protests in the Russian Federation, and their relevance in updating regional precedents of protest and dissent. A neutral aggregate score would suggest some adherence and applicability of the Grey Revolution to regional norms, but with the caveat of requiring additions and qualifications. A negative aggregate score implies a weak relationship to the precedents built by previous Eurasian mass mobilisation events, and would suggest that the Russian pro-democracy protests would be better analysed within a theoretical framework distinct from other anti-authoritarian movements in post-Soviet Eurasia.

The analysis proceeds by the framework's original numerical order as it was developed Chapter One:

*A competitive semi-autocratic or -authoritarian state regime that allows enough space in the political sphere for the existence of a democratic opposition*

Overall, the current Russian political system exhibits a greater degree of authoritarianism than either the Georgian system in 2003 or the Ukrainian in 2004, and a similar degree to that of Serbia in 2000 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (Freedom House, 2012b). Though a democratic opposition does demonstrably exist, its parliamentary presence is fragmented and minimal. Furthermore, no parties pushing for genuine and significant democratic change (i.e. Yabloko, Right Cause) managed to gain representation in the 2011 Russian legislative elections. ‘Managed’ outcomes were however the electoral results in all colour revolutions, forming the spark for the initial mass of protest activity. (+/-)

*A ‘return to Europe’ national sentiment or civic nationalism that assists in mobilizing civil society*

Russia is a European society (Graham, 2011, p5), though a ‘Eurasianist’ strand seeking to establish Russian identity as separate from that of Europe is still a powerful feature of the national ideological landscape. The reinforcement of Russia’s identity as “historically and culturally a party of Europe” in Surkov’s ‘sovereign democracy’ and Putin’s own statements, show that the Eurasian isolationist view has fallen out of favour with the leadership (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b, p28).

Russia’s relationship is occasionally fractious with some of its E.U. neighbours, especially in light of what the Putin government sees as Western meddling in its affairs through the funding of ‘destabilising’ NGO’s (Finkel and Brudny, 2012b, p27), and the planned (and reformulated) NATO deployment of SM-3 anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defence

interceptors in Poland and the Czech Republic, which Russia perceives as a threat to its national security (Waterfield, 2012). Even so, for its part the Russian government has extended seemingly genuine offers of cooperation in the military (Eckert and Bryanski, 2012), political (Hallbach, 2012) and economic spheres (Taylor, 2012). Putin himself has spoken of a need for a balanced form of European integration to take place, envisioning a greater degree of cooperation in the future, and a common economic zone from “Lisbon to Vladivostok” (Hallbach, 2012, Taylor, 2012, Pop, 2010). There are early signs of reciprocation on the part of the E.U. (Rühe et al., 2010). For their part, the majority of the pro-democracy demonstrators advocate a democratic state that is more aligned with European normalcy. (+/+)

***A preceding political event or crisis that has weakened the incumbent regime***

The current crisis is the result of electoral fraud committed in favour of the ‘party of power’ - United Russia. Some longer-term controversies continue to follow the Putin government, including several high-profile domestic and international assassinations of dissidents and opposition journalists. Many have attributed the blame on the Russian government, or even Putin himself. Though Russia’s international reputation has oscillated throughout the past decade, Putin has never appeared domestically less popular than today. (+/+)

***A media independent and capable enough to effectively convey the instance of the falsified vote or other transgression to the broader public***

Information about the occurrence of electoral fraud has been analysed and publicised both by the international media, and some liberal Russian outlets. Furthermore, the internet has

featured prominently in the mobilisation and organisation efforts of the Russian protests, most notably Alexey Navalny's anti-corruption blog and the organisation of the first major protest, 'Saturday at Bolotnaya Square' via a Facebook 'event.' The majority of Russians still receive their information through television sources, which are state owned and generally biased in favour of the government. However, recent trends in Russia indicate that the population is diversifying away from television and state-owned outlets as primary sources of news and information. For those who have continued to watch, public trust in the state television media has also been experiencing a declining trend (The Moscow Times, 2012). (+/-)

#### *A pro-democratic capital city*

Moscow has featured as the focal point of the pro-democracy protests. It is also the only region of the Russian Federation where Vladimir Putin did not receive above 50% of the vote in the 2012 presidential elections. (+/+)

#### *An unpopular incumbent and/or ruling elite*

The Putin regime has enjoyed widespread, popular majority support in Russia (Lane, 2009, p130). However, the popular approval rating of the presidency and prime minister have both declined since the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections, though both still exceed 50%. In the same Levada Center survey, only 22% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to vote for Putin in 2018, and only 7% said they would support Medvedev. Approximately half of respondents (49%), indicated that they wanted someone new, while 22% were undecided (RIAN, 2012a). (+/-)

***A charismatic opposition candidate***

In spite of the participation of many well-known public figures in the pro-democracy protests, a single, charismatic and unifying opposition leader (i.e. a Russian manifestation of a Saakashvili or Yushchenko) has not (yet) emerged. (-/-)

***A relatively united and organised opposition that is capable of mobilizing tens of thousands or more demonstrators***

The opposition has shown itself capable of mobilising tens of thousands of people, and has displayed unity in the cause of overthrowing the regime. Opposition groupings in the other colour revolutions have featured various degrees of unity. Some opposition coalitions have disintegrated over time, others have persevered. Still, the diversity of Russia's current opposition represents a nuanced expression of such a coalition. (+/-)

***Division among the ruling regime's coercive apparatus***

There appears to be no major division in Russia's coercive apparatus, either security or military. Though United Russia and its associated elite appears to be less united than in the preceding years, with some friction appearing between the prime ministers office and the presidency, large scale divisions have not eventuated (Grove, 2012). (-/-)

### *Foreign intervention and/or support*

It is of little secret that certain Russian NGO's, including those supporting civil reform and democratisation, have received funding from overseas sources. Of particular controversy was the 17 January 2012 sojourn of the United States Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, by leaders of the opposition. Visitors on the day included Boris Nemtsov, the current leader of the Yabloko Party, Sergey Mitrokhin, and Oksana Dmitriyeva, the deputy head of A Just Russia. This led some in the Russian media and government to suggest that the opposition was 'taking orders from the U.S. embassy.' Explanations for the visit from the opposition leaders themselves have been sparse (Sadovskaya and Beloborodova, 2012). For the most part, external support for the Russian pro-democracy movement has been of mostly been of an immaterial and symbolic nature (+/-)

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The framework analysis of the Grey Revolution produces an aggregate score of **+1 (+11/-9)**. This indicates that the colour revolution framework is reasonably applicable to events in the Russian Federation. Overall, the situation in Russia is more reminiscent of the White and Tulip revolutions than it is of the Orange and Rose. Nevertheless, the Russian protests are a well-fitting progression in the broader regional trend of 'colour revolutions.'

### **Conclusion: The Grey Revolution's adherence to regional norms**

This chapter has taken a broader perspective on the implications of the Grey Revolution for Russian social development and the precedents of mass civil mobilisation in post-Soviet Eurasia. The interrelatedness of the colour revolutions and Russia's nascent pro-democracy movement means that the Grey Revolution has significance as an episode in the wider regional trajectory of democratic development. With greater hindsight, it will be possible to gauge this impact more clearly and make any required refinements to the colour revolution framework. While the final outcome of the protest movement is resigned to the future, it can be noted that it has stimulated a 'carrot-and-stick' pattern of democratic and authoritarian reforms in the Russian Federation.



## Conclusion

### *The Grey Revolution as an example of Eurasian protest and dissent*

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#### *Implications for the Russian Federation*

The current development trajectory of the Russian Federation has resulted in a scenario where the middle class continues to grow as a proportion of the population, while the political ‘space’ in which they exist is continually reduced by the Putin ‘regime.’ In other words, these two socio-political trends have been moving in opposite directions and this Grey Revolution has been a first major point of their ‘convergence.’ Exempting any major national or global economic depressions, the Russian middle class will continue to develop and grow. Likewise, barring any significant changes in leadership and political culture, the Russian incumbency appears relatively secure to continue in its development of a ‘managed democracy.’ Both of these socio-political shifts have been tectonic, slow but significant. They also provide an underlying explanation as to why events have only reached the fifth step of Tudoroiu’s aforementioned sequence of a colour revolution, “regime’s denial of the fraud and decision to impose official electoral result,” and have not managed to proceed to the sixth, “a division within the regime’s repressive apparatus preventing mass violence.” The longevity and seeming permanence of this new formation of pro-democratic forces is a function of this ‘growth in stalemate’ effect. This is the first major conclusion that can be drawn from my study.

The second would be to say that it is likely that this ‘point of convergence’ is not likely be the last, and that the actions of the Russian state from now may very well frame how future instances play out. The regime could actuate the promises of democratic reform put forth by President Medvedev after the 2011 legislative elections. This could be achieved by

denying the Grey Revolution it's 'revellection' but allowing for a 'refolution.' The alternate combination is far less likely, though a hypothetical election that is verified as 'fair' by respected internal and external monitoring organisations could greatly soften the presently tense social mood in Russia, and under current conditions, keep the Putin/Medvedev tandem in power with a reduced parliamentary majority. The third option for the incumbency is to ramp up its campaign of repressive tactics and negative propaganda against the democratic opposition in an 'all or nothing' attempt to stamp it out. This is unlikely to be a viable strategy in the long-term, as the current pro-democracy movement has developed organically rather than being the wholesale product of one political party or ideology. Given that the demand for democratic reform will only rise as the country develops economically, an increasing degree of repression will also be required over time. Previous experiences of Eurasian mass civil mobilisation show that the primary effect of such a strategy is not decreasing the size of the opposition (though this may happen to some extent), but rather to increase its propensity for violence as more peaceful options are gradually rendered ineffective or inaccessible. The fourth scenario is to pursue the current 'carrot-and-stick' approach, which is likely to eventually result in any of the other three scenarios dependent upon the balance and composition of the 'carrots' and 'sticks.'

Interconnected with the decisions of the state is the fate of the nascent Russian pro-democracy movement. Here too some conclusions can be derived from my study. First, the protests are unlikely to elicit change in the short-term. Based on the colour revolution framework analysis conducted in Chapter 4, we can posit a few reasons for this. The first is that to date, a strong, politically viable, and charismatic leading figure has not (yet) emerged. Second, a split in either the national political elite or the coercive apparatus has not eventuated. This is largely due to Russia's political culture, itself a product of not years but

decades of Soviet and Russian history. Though the political elite has never appeared more dis-unified, the bulk of it has not yet learned how to engage in unified and independent action without orders from ‘above.’ A similar precedent applies to the military, which has largely been subordinate and lacks any unifying political ambition of its own. Without this elite support, even the largest reliably estimated protest size to date, 120,000, is too small to succeed without it. At the same time this quantity has proven to be too small to draw in a significant amount of elite support to the protesters’ cause. One of these dynamics needs to change if the current stagnation is to be resolved by the civil (as opposed to state) side, and reaching anything close to a ‘snowball effect’ or ‘tipping point’ becomes a feasible prospect for the opposition.

The longer-term is where the protests have a greater chance to elicit success. While the demonstrators are hardly representative of what Alexander Herzen once referred to as a “senseless and merciless Russian rebellion,” their adherence to the colour revolution ethos of non-violence has broadened the movement’s middle class appeal, and has granted it potential longevity, as well as some backers of prominent standing in Russian society. As events in Serbia and Ukraine have shown, mass civil mobilisation that appears to fail at the time can lay the groundwork, and instil in civil society the necessary motivations for success later on. As such we must view the Russian protests, and indeed all colour revolutions, as markers in a process of democratisation rather than singular events or episodes. Given that the Grey Revolution is a manifestation of the socio-economic development of Russian society, even the most belligerent and outright attempts to oppress its current format would not remove the underlying social sentiments that brought it into being. A positive outcome of these protest events would be a ‘quiet revolution’ that leads to democratic reforms in the Russian political system. This requires the implicit recognition on the part of Russia’s political elite that the

concerns and aspirations of Russian society are slowly but inevitably changing. Failure to do so would likely lead to further civil conflict and unrest, an outcome that arguably is in the best interest of Russian society to avoid.

### **Implications for colour revolutions and potential for future research**

The colour revolutions have had a net positive effect on Eurasian democratic development. Serbia's decade of successful democratic reform and Georgia's recent free and fair parliamentary elections are a testament to this fact. The fate of Ukraine's Orange Revolution appears less certain, though a fair run through of the upcoming 28 October parliamentary elections would to some degree confirm that the country is on a similar development path to that of Georgia. Even instances that have 'failed,' such as Moldova's recent Grape Revolution, seem to have contributed positively to national democratic development trends.

As the first event of this kind in Russia, the nascent Grey Revolution has more in common with Serbia in 1997 and Ukraine in 2001 than it does with the revolutions in those countries three years later. With greater hindsight, the task for future scholarly research would be to use the Russian protest events to update the colour revolution framework. If Russia is indeed at the threshold of its own 'colour revolution' process, a foreseeable second task for researchers would be to track and measure the democratic development trajectory of the Russian Federation in the years ahead.

\* \* \*

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