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Quantifying Polarisation in Media Coverage of the 2011-12 Protests in Russia

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Abstract: This study seeks to quantify the polarisation of opinion that emerged around the Russian protest movement following the 5 December Duma elections, and shows that the language used by mainstream media to discuss the protesters was substantially more radical than had been the case with previous protests. Polarisation and Mobilisation indicators are used in an attempt to measure the tone of the debate. This constitutes a methodological contribution to the quantification of large datasets. The indicators are made publicly available online. The article attempts to quantify patterns in pronoun incidence to measure the tone of texts, and more specifically how events are mobilised through Othering – the practice whereby the self is given meaning and form in contrast to an Other – in identity-forming rhetoric. The findings suggest that in February 2012 pro-Kremlin media coverage of the protests converged in tone with blogosphere activity.

Keywords**:** Russian elections, protest, polarisation, mobilisation, quantitative methods

Following the 5 December 2011 Duma elections in Russia widespread allegations that the elections were falsified emerged in the Russian blogosphere and opposition media. In the weeks that followed Russians took to the street to voice their discontent. This study attempts to quantify the polarisation of opinion that emerged around the Russian protest movement, and shows that the language used by mainstream media to discuss the protesters was substantially more radical than had been the case for previous protests. A triangulation approach is used to analyse the debate: firstly an analysis of the articles published in one newspaper, Izvestiia, is used to identify possible large changes in official tone and focus, secondly a quantitative study examines which concepts were associated with the protest in different media, and how this changed over time. Finally, Polarisation and Mobilisation indicators are used in an attempt to measure the tone of the debate. This third part constitutes a methodological contribution to the quantification of large datasets. I attempt to quantify patterns in

pronoun incidence to measure the tone of texts, and more specifically how events are mobilised through Othering in identity-forming rhetoric.

Protests are not new to Russia, but Soviet era protests were rarely described to any extent in the press. Modern-day Russia has, with the notable exception of protests against benefit reforms in 2005, seen dormant civic activity since the early 90s. In this context the protests in December 2011, where thousands of Russians protested against falsified election results, were surprising firstly for their scale; commentators and participants alike were left without an adequate vocabulary to describe them.[1] It is a natural process that unknown phenomena are initially labelled generically, in terms of 'us' and 'them', but that over time new names are found, or old labels applied. One term used to describe the protesters is *bolotnye* – [those] from Bolotnaia, named after Bolotnaia[2] Square, the site of the 10 December protest for fair elections. As it became clear that concessions were unlikely, and it became clear the prime minister would win the March presidential elections, the protests took on an anti-Putin tone. The protests were accompanied by pro-regime events, staged to coincide with opposition activities. This was the case for the first time on 24 December, then on a larger scale on 5 February when an event was held at *Poklonnaia Gora* to compete with the opposition's return to Bolotnaia. This study briefly outlines the rise and fall of other labels attached to the protest movement, and demonstrates that the early positive associations and neologisms used to describe the protests had by and large disappeared by the end of January, and that over time they were replaced by a traditional anti-liberal vocabulary. This illustrates how the initial response of attacking opposition leaders and ignoring the demonstrations was replaced by anti-coloured revolutions rhetoric designed to exclude the protesters who were labelled as 'orange', as agents of the West and as representatives of a decadent bourgeois lifestyle, alien to the majority of the population.

A study of pro- and anti-incumbent rhetoric presents an opportunity to quantify Othering in polarising discourse by exploring the portrayal of the protests in the media and blogosphere. I propose that a Polarisation indicator may chart the points at which different media adopted divisive patterns of speech, as well as give insights into both how the protest movement described itself in relation to the regime, and how official discourse branded and distanced itself from the upsurge in discontent. The indicators will identify the degree to which the media shaped the image of the protests and the protesters rather than objectively reporting events. The Polarisation indicator draws on conclusions reached in Psychology studies employing linguistic content analysis which have shown that elevated usage of pronouns labelling an Other as 'them' in conjunction with frequent pronouns contrasting the Other to the self or 'us' is a sign of identity-shaping rhetoric. Labelling of the Other in contrast to the self may be combined with mobilisation; that is, a challenge to the status quo is processed in terms of 'us' and 'them', along with a possible or preferred course of action. In the discussion below I introduce indicators based on pronoun usage to measure the aggregate tone of large bodies of texts. Pronouns were selected because they are a necessary[3] part of speech

[1] For more on previous protests and the role of social media, see: Lonkila, M. (2012). 'RUSSIAN PROTEST ON- AND OFFLINE'. *FIIA Briefing Paper 98*.
[2] From Boloto – mud.
[3] Pronouns may in some cases be elided, and in others used to refer to objects rather than people, but such usage is unlikely to be systematic over a large body of texts.

and therefore feature in large quantities; consequently data can be analysed with much smaller errors than if more specific linguistic markers, e.g. lists of adjectives, were used.

Research Design - Literature review

This article presents tools aimed at revealing patterns whereby groups mobilise events as part of arguments defining an in-group against an out-group. Lacan wrote of the Great Other in whose gaze the viewer gains identity, while Saïd used the term 'othering' in post-colonial studies to describe the process whereby identity is created by emphasising contrasts to another group (Lacan 1977, Said 1978). Studies in critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical applied linguistics and social psychology have all variously highlighted the pronoun as a marker of polarising language, and have variously attempted to use pronouns to identify exclusionary rhetoric.

Within critical applied linguistics Alastair Pennycook, to give but one example, saw pronoun usage as inherently political because pronouns name people and groups. The pronoun 'he' suggests a masculine world which might encompass the feminine. 'We' is always 'simultaneously inclusive and exclusive', as any group to which the speaker expresses commonality is offset by a 'they': 'we Americans, we British we Republicans, we academics, we who care about the planet, we humans, we men, and so on' (Pennycook 1994: 174,175, 176).

Pronoun usage is one element emphasised in Critical Discourse Analyses (CDA) to highlight how language patterns create groups of inclusion and exclusion. CDA follows Foucault in emphasising the 'discursive nature of social relations of power' (Wodak 1996), and aims to expose 'social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized and so on, by language use' (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 10). CDA, 'unabashedly normative' and 'ultimately political', developed a 'toolkit' within which pronouns, and specifically a distinction between 'us and them' may flag discriminatory and prejudicial language (Van Dijk 1993: 252:253, Jäger 2002). The analysis of in- and out-groups created by 'us' versus 'them' is central to analyses of racist language (Reisigl and Wodak 2000). CDA exposes the rhetorical constructs highlighting the 'deviant actions of the Others' (Van Dijk 1993: 265). 'Othering' takes place through language by emphasising 'Our good things' and Their bad things' and de-emphasising 'Our bad things' and 'Their good things' (Teun and Dijk 2006), that is, in sentences involving a large number of personal pronouns.

In recent years a few Russian studies have drawn on CDA to link grammatical features to political speech. For instance Khalatian drew on Wodak's 'we-discourses' in a discussion of how political opponents were framed in pre-election discourse. According to Khalatian, politicians outline an in-group [*krug 'svoikh'*] which distinguishes between the politician and his supporters, and the Kremlin. This in-group is often emphasised using the binary *nash-nenash* (literally: ours-not ours) (Khalatian 2010). Romanova discusses how politicians use 'we' as a 'political tactic' (Romanova 2009), while Reznikova saw the greatest grammatical change in post-Soviet texts as a move away from the agentless constructions that were common in Soviet discourse (Reznikova 2012). These studies examine the language of individual politicians or trace linguistic patterns. There is an awareness that pronouns are a feature of 'we' –

'they' divides in political rhetoric (Sheigal 2000), and that quantifying this would be useful, but no attempts are made to do so (Romanova 2009).

In this the Russian studies reflect a general qualitative preference in CDA. Jäger, for instance, described quantitative methods as useful for recording the 'frequency with which particular arguments emerge', but 'always of less relevance to the significance of discourse analysis than the qualitative'(Jäger 2002: 52). A number of attempts have been made to use methods associated with corpus linguistics in CDA (Hardt-Mautner 1995), but as Gerlinde Mautner noted, 'the techniques of corpus linguistics are not yet generally regarded as being at the core of CDA's methodological canon', and are identified as valuable as 'checks and balances' to avoid cherry picking, as well as handling large volumes of data (Mautner 2009: 122:124). Some linguists have calculated pronoun density as one of a number of linguistic categories that might reveal differences between groups of texts (Louwerse et al. 2004), but it is psychologists who have attempted to quantify links between language and identity.

Psychologists have embraced linguistic content analysis as a means to quantify characteristics of mental states, the assumption being that personality is expressed through speech and that speech can be measured, quantified and generalised. One particularly fruitful avenue has been measuring the relative preponderance of personal pronouns in (mainly English language) texts or speech. Argomon and Koppel found personal pronouns to be favoured by females, and to be a good predictor of author gender (Argamon et al. 2003). Neuroticism, depression and inclination to suicide has been related to increased use of the first person singular together with reduced usage of the second and third person; narcissism also correlates with first person singular pronouns (Raskin and Shaw 1988). Hancock tested and confirmed Knapp et al.'s 1974 hypothesis that liars avoid expressing ownership of their words, finding that liars used 'fewer self-oriented but more other-oriented pronouns' (Hancock et al. 2010: 1,4,17). Similarly, politicians are perceived as more trustworthy when using a higher frequency of personal pronouns (Pennebaker et al. 2003). Periods of social trauma are characterised by a heightened sense of belonging. Pennebaker and Stone showed that following the death of Princess Diana, the use of 'we' increased by 135 percent in online chat rooms, while the use of 'I' dropped by about 12 percent (Pennebaker and Stone 2003: 564). Second person pronouns are used to draw the audience in, to try to impress upon them the relevance of the text. In a study of online references to the occupation of Gaza, second person pronoun usage was shown to be significantly elevated; the authors identified this as a marker of propaganda exhorting individuals to take action (Prentice et al. 2011).

Third person plural pronouns (they, them) are in a number of studies identified as significant indicators of extremism (Hancock et al. 2010: 94). Above average identification of the self in contrast to others is a good indicator of extremism, and this can be measured by quantifying pronoun usage. Elevated usage of 'they' suggests the speaker addresses 'people who they believe share the same world view'. Third person plural usage was found to be one of the most significant features of Al Qaida rhetoric: 'in comparison to other extremist groups, Al Qaida's sense of identity is more strongly defined through an oppositional group or government' (Pennebaker and Chung 2008). While measuring the incidence of 'them' is useful for identifying othering rhetoric, scholars have also identified the presence of a 'we' as significant. Smith showed that a clear idea of both the enemy and the self is a characteristic of

groups that engage in terrorism (Smith 2004: 412-413).' Similarly, critical discourse analysis has tended to emphasise the 'we' side of the 'we-they' binary (Reisigl and Wodak 2000).The studies linking 'we' and 'they' discourses to extremism take as a given that divisive pronouns reflect deep real-world divisions, and seek to establish that the most divisive language correlates with the most aggressive practice. This study, though, examines a spectrum of divisive language, not just hate speech or extremist manifestos.

CDA's focus on context has hindered the sort of analyses undertaken by Pennebaker from being adopted. For instance, Van De Mieroop described pronouns as 'an ideal identity marker', but argued that 'the referents of the pronouns can differ' sufficiently to invalidate comparisons based on quantitative data, and consequently advocated a labour intensive filtering process (Van De Mieroop 2005: 112). Here I propose a tool that reduces the effect of errors due to style, genre, and devices such as rhetorical questions by using a large sample. If there is reason to believe a sample includes a disproportionate number of interviews this can be controlled for by linear regression. It is important to avoid positivism by making *direct* connections 'between the world-view expounded by a text and its linguistic structure' (Simpson 1993: 113). Indicator scores do little more than point to the possibility of a change in tone or the presence of certain hypothesised conditions. Consequently any use of the indicators should feature a triangulation approach 'creating a virtuous research cycle' combining the benefits of large data with keyword analysis and discourse analysis (Baker et al. 2008). In order to facilitate this, I have made available online an application which will compare the density of pronouns in any two given sources, or compare one source to the values calculated for a dataset of 50,000 Russian articles.[4]

The methodology outlined below allows researchers to measure the degree to which an event is used as a polarising reference point, that is, whether the event is linked to 'who we are' or 'who they are'. CDA practitioners recognise that 'ideological practices are polarized on the basis of an in-group versus out-group differentiation' created cumulatively by first and third person pronouns (Teun and Dijk 2006). It is virtually impossible to separate between pronouns marking inclusion or exclusion, as use of 'we' supposes a 'they', and vice-versa. In the case of the Russian protests one might imagine protesters applauding 'our protests' and criticising 'they who support Putin', just as anti-protesters might discuss in critical terms the actions of 'the protesters' and praise 'those who support Putin'. Collectively, the density of othering statements gives an idea of how polarising an event is, but says little about which side is the more aggressive or radical. This is a major limitation of the method proposed; the indicators provide evidence of a change, but only hint at its quality. To establish the direction of the polarisation a close reading of texts is needed.[5]

[4] See http://quantifyingmemory.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/mobilisation-and-polarisation.html
[5] For this reason the script used to calculate the scores also outputs the sentences with the largest number of personal pronouns, allowing the researcher to assess the validity of the findings.

Data Collection

Yandex, the popular Russian search engine, provides a dedicated blog search engine, and this was used to gather blog-data. Newspaper data was collected through the Integrum Central Press Database. Data from 8 December 2011 up to the end of April 2012 was collected. In the blog search more frequent sample points were chosen in December 2011 as events were moving rapidly; from January, when the rhetoric stabilised, a wider time-frame was preferred. The first 50 hits from *Yandex* were downloaded in full, for every four days for the first month, then subsequently every ten days until the end of April. *Yandex* orders blog entries according to popularity measured in number of comments and links to the blog; this method selects the entries most frequently reposted and commented on. This is important, because it means the most reputable bloggers are sampled, and reduces the likelihood of anonymous online hate speech entering the sample (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003). The texts thus obtained were filtered so that only text within two sentences of ‘Bolotnaia’ was retained. All references to unrelated events, as well as html formatting and hyperlinks, were removed. Print-media sources were collected as a reference category. The media sources, drawn from *Novaia Gazeta, New Times, Rossiiskaia Gazeta, Izvestiia* and *Zavtra*, comprised an exhaustive trawl of all mentions from December 2011 to April 2012, and were chosen to reflect the Russian political spectrum. These were processed in the same way as the blog entries. Control samples were collected for blogs as well as for print media. Data from the period 1 January 2000 to 1 October 2011 was used, to avoid sources about the December protests being included in the control sample. In order to find similar subject matter, only articles mentioning ‘protests’ and ‘Russia’ in the same sentence were chosen. The 50 articles ranked the highest by Integrum for each of the newspapers examined were selected; using Integrum’s ranking helped prevent the texts being temporally clustered.

Polarisation and Mobilisation indicators

Based on the literature above, I propose that the rate of second person pronoun usage can form the basis of a ‘Mobilisation index’, while a Polarisation index may be based on the combined number of 1st and 3d person plural pronouns. The index scores are calculated to be between -100 and 100, where 0 denotes a score identical to a reference point. Scores approaching -100 or 100 will be respectively near infinitely larger or smaller than the point of reference. This point of reference may be the sample average if a large number of individual texts are analysed, or a control sample. A control sample should be used when analysing differences between datasets.[6] The core formula is:

$$\textbf{Index} = \textbf{100} - \left(\frac{\textbf{200}}{\textbf{1+(ratio)}}\right)$$

[6] If individual texts are considered, the sample average is the appropriate reference point. The distribution of scores follows a LOG-normal rather than a normal distribution, and consequently the sample mean must not be selected as the sample average. Instead either the mean of LOG values or the median raw value should be used.

In the above formula the ratio is the sample score divided by the reference score. These scores represent pronoun density and are calculated as below:

$$\textbf{Mobilisation score} = \frac{2nd\ person\ plural\ count}{N}$$

$$\textbf{Polarisation score} = \frac{\text{3d person plural count+1st person plural count}}{\text{N}}$$

Any measure of text size may be used for N in the formula above. Normally this would be number of words or characters, though it could also be number of bytes.

Parts of speech may be counted using a batch find and replace application such as Text-Crawler, or Computer Assisted Aided Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software, such as Nvivo or MaxQDA, which allow the search terms to be coded and visualised. Personally, though, I prefer to use regular expressions through the Unix command line utilities grep and awk for data processing, and the statistical package R for data analysis (R Core Team 2012). The formula above may be tested by consulting an application written in R script and hosted on my blog (Fredheim 31.12.2012). This script facilitates triangulation by outputting sentences with the highest incidence of personal pronouns, and gives indicator values comparing any two Russian language sources, or a single source compared to a reference corpus of 50,000 texts.

The following categories were quantified:

- Second person, plural and singular: *ty, vy, tvoy, vash* etc.
- First person plural: *my, nash,*[7] etc.
- Third person plural: *oni, ikh,* etc.

Using pronouns presents different challenges for different languages; in Russian 'we'-'they' relationships may be expressed without using pronouns, as verb endings alone may denote the actor of the sentence. In a small data set quantifying verb endings might give a more sensitive measure than relying on pronouns alone. However, any such quantification process relies on assumptions and estimations which complicate the calculation. In Russian, present- and future-tense endings can be quantified by using a wildcard search and the regular verb endings. Past tense endings are more problematic, as these are identical for the first, second and third person plural. Additionally, past tense plural verbs are frequently used in agentless constructions: *pochemu Tukhachevskogo schitali shpionom?* might either be translated as 'why was Tukhachevskiy considered a spy?', or more literally as 'why did they consider Tukhachevsky a spy?'. When analysing small samples or individual texts, a proportion of the verb endings might be included to act as a corrective for lower-end scores, but this is inherently problematic as using past-tense endings involves sweeping assumptions, and selecting only present-tense endings would create an artificial distinction due to tense between sources.

[7] Only lower-case forms of nash, nashi, etc were included to avoid mentions of the youth group 'Nashi' polluting the data.

In any case, individual texts should not be analysed in this way (unless they are very long), due to the large standard errors when using small values.[8]

The indicator measures how extreme or divisive rhetoric is, and may be used to trace changes over time. In this study no attempt is made to link the Polarisation indicator to violent behaviour; instead it is used as a measure of the degree to which descriptions of opposition activity are polarised. The indicator may be used in conjunction with a count of second person pronouns, as this adds mobilisation to the equation. Elevated second person pronoun usage suggests the author is using persuasive language, aimed at eliciting a particular response from the reader. In the case of the Russian demonstrations, the desired response is likely to be participation or opposition to the demonstrations. It should be noted that the Mobilisation indicator is useful for analysing blogs, but I am less convinced it will provide meaningful results in analyses of print media, as most instances of second person pronouns either occur in interviews, or in figures of speech, such as, 'you could say,...'. For this reason, Mobilisation scores are included for all samples, but only discussed in any detail in relation to blog activity.

An increase in the Polarisation indicator may reflect a change in significance attributed to the event studied, as the source is more emotionally engaged with the subject matter. It may also reflect a change in the editorial line, as more persuasive genres such as interviews or expert opinions are preferred to factual reporting.

Analysis – tone of the pro-Kremlin press

In the section below protester coverage in Izvestiia is analysed to illustrate pro-Kremlin rhetoric. Following the Duma election on 5 December liberal newspapers such as *Novaia Gazeta* celebrated the novelty and potential significance of the protests, but the mainstream press tended to belittle the significance of opposition activity. An interview with Vladislav Surkov in *Izvestiia* is indicative of this early response: rather than acknowledging the protesters' demands, he maintained that change 'is not looming, it already happened. The system has changed.... We are already in the future. And that future is not calm (nespokoino). But there is no need to worry. The turbulence, though strong, is not a catastrophe, but a form (*raznovidnost'*) of stability. Everything will be alright' (Shishkunova 22.12.2011). Two immediate responses coexisted: the number of people protesting at Bolotnaia was widely claimed to be inflated in western and opposition media reports, and people who attended 'were not citizens of Russia', but rather western agents (Ivanov 12.12.2011). At the same time, there was an acknowledgement that the protesters represented "the best part of society" (Birman 29.12.2011). In December Putin apparently mistook the white ribbons worn by the protesters for condoms, and likened the opposition movement to Kipling's *banderlog*. The *banderlog* is an example of a loan word that has taken on a social significance peculiar to Russian: *banderlogi* are a 'parody of nature, caricatures of people, they are half savages, false successors, mindlessly living in the ruins of a foreign city and conceitedly considering it

[8] In general results will be insignificant for texts shorter than a thousand words, or containing fewer than 10 instances. A binomial confidence interval should be used to assess statistical significance. Such a confidence interval is integrated into the script available online.

their own' (Genis 30.07.2010). On 15 December on live television Putin said *banderlogi* acted 'in the interests of a foreign state and foreign money' (15.12.2011b, 15.12.2011a). Initially the protesters were described as a disparate, leaderless and confused mass: 'it is clear what they are against, but not what they are for. At the demonstration at Bolotnaia ... there were representatives of completely diverse [political] views'. Throughout there is a suggestion that the protesters were flirting with very dangerous groups 'because they have no programme, an important part of their party-technology is fraternising with marginal groups of the most diverse hues, from the lowest representatives of the left (*levykhsamogonizkogoposhiba*) to anarchists and nationalists, sometimes barely distinguishable from Nazis ... these people are playing a game very dangerous for everyone, including themselves' (Simonov 15.12.2011). The idea of the protesters as reasonable but misguided is accompanied by a suggestion that they might be absorbed within an adapting Russian political landscape. Hence the tycoon Prokhorov was put forward as the protesters' Presidential candidate, and Dmitrii Gudkov of Spravedlivaia Rossiia spoke of reforming the party to represent the middle class, thus capitalising on Edinaia Rossia's loss in the December elections (Tropkina 10.12.2011). Overall the suggestion was that the protesters were misguided; the real threat was posed by opposition leaders and foreign powers, not the protesters themselves. The tone set by Surkov and Gudkov is one of inclusion, an attempt at harnessing the protest movement, to express it as part of a demographic shift.

A glance at Izvestiia two months later reveals the degree to which coverage was radicalised, both through editorial tone, and by giving voice to strongly anti-protester opinons: 'what solution did the leaders [*vozhaki*] of "Bolotnaia" propose? Firstly, they claim to be the same population, who had their "votes stolen".... the "Bolotniki" still have not decided what to call themselves, but in any case they agree that their voice must be interpreted as *voxpopuli*' (Ivanov 20.02.2012). The change in tone reflects a hardening of stance towards the protest movement, and exclusionary rhetoric sought to tarnish the protesters. Interviews printed in the newspaper featured scathing assessments of the protesters, with the protesters increasingly described as an extreme minority that acted in contradiction to genuine public opinion: 'those who assemble at Bolotnaia square also ignore public opinion when they say "Putin, leave!"'(Abramian 27.02.2012). In this the protesters were characterised as somehow cut off from the real nation, with references to the 'show-business get-together [*tusovka*] at Bolotnaia' (Migranian 23.02.2012). While in December 'political extremism' was mooted as a danger, by February the tried and tested method of labelling the opposition as extreme or radical was plain to see. Nikolai Valuev, the former heavyweight boxer and Duma deputy as of 2011, was but one of those who spoke of the protests giving a platform to political extremists: 'radical parties and politicians, who completely discredited themselves in the past, are attempting to raise themselves on this wave of speeches [*vystuplenia*]. Furthermore, they are collaborating with western countries' special services...' (Valuev 12.02.2012).

Quantitative context analysis

The glance at Izvestiia coverage in December and February is by its nature impressionistic; one might argue that Nikolai Valuev's characterisation of the opposition was unrepresenta-

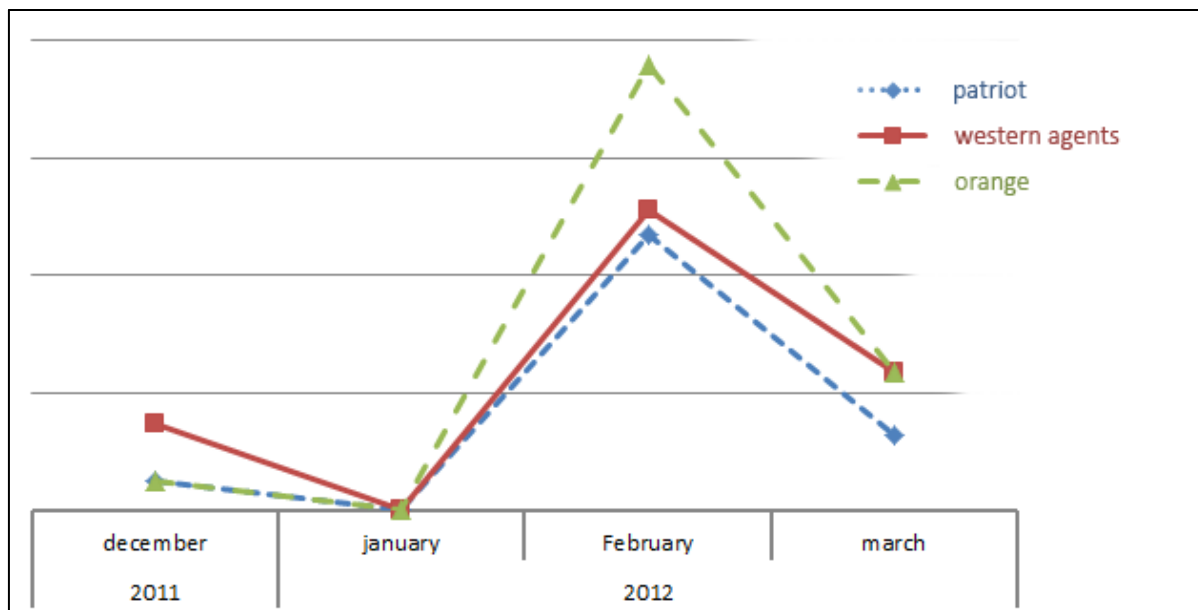
tive, or that had other examples been chosen, a different picture of the debate would emerge. Scholars have employed a range of techniques to ascertain whether discursive shifts are quantifiable and significant, the most notable of which are co-word and keyword analyses. Keyword counts such as the one below show the disproportionate presence or absence of certain concepts, while co-word analyses attempt to contextualise these by creating a map of associations between word pairings (Callon et al. 1986). These might typically be between a noun (e.g. Bolotnaia) and an adjective (bad, illegal, foolish), but as the number of adjectives that might be used is very large, one would only rarely find large numbers of identical word-pairs. Unfortunately, this means that to show statistically significant differences between samples these must be inordinately large. Large samples may be found for analysis of the blogosphere, but the number of texts about the protests in Russian media is more limited. This is one reason why measures of tone using pronouns are more attractive.

The dataset features a number of keywords that are temporally clustered near the beginning of the protests, but then disappeared from the central press' coverage. In particular, references to 'falsification' and 'manipulation' declined sharply. There was also a drop in technological associations: the early reports spoke of mobilisation through Facebook and Twitter, and contained disparaging references to 'internet lemmings' (*setevye khomiachki).* Across the period there was a steady rise in associations that branded the opposition negatively: rather than being *for* fair elections, the protesters were labelled as 'anti' Putin. There was also a sharp increase in references to protesters as 'radical' and 'liberal'. Throughout the period there was a rise in the number of times 'anti' figured in proximity to Bolotnaia, which suggests that while protests were initially described as having a positive focus, for instance achieving fair elections, over time they became perceived as a negative phenomenon. The protesters were frequently characterised as ineffective due to lacking political solidarity, extending no further than a generally anti-Putin position: 'instead of a united anti-Putin front we are seeing a war of all against all' (Ivanov 12.03.2012).

These overall changes, though, mask rhetoric that was briefly activated, especially during January and February 2012, but faded following Putin's victory in the March Presidential election. The anti-protester language appears to be anti-orange, anti-west, and pro-patriotic: references to 'the opposition' and 'those who took part at Bolotnaia' peaked in January; by February the regime had apparently decided how to label them. The clearest example of this is the 'anti-orange' rally held at *Poklonnaia Gora*, but from mid-January until the presidential election an anti-liberal, anti-orange rhetoric was in evidence in the press. This is clear from an upsurge in references to 'western agents', 'disturbances', 'liberasts', 'Russophobes', 'anti-Russian tendencies', 'chaos', 'orange revolution', '*oranzhisty'*, '*banderlogi'*, 'patriots', 'russophobes' etc. This is shown in the graph[9] below; note that only a few of the examples have been included, but that they all follow substantially the same pattern, peaking in February:

[9] These numbers are relative to sample size rather than raw numbers.

Fig. 1: Bolotnaia in pro-Kremlin press



Source: Rolf Fredheim

This rhetoric, whether defensive or offensive, acts as signposts, and shows that the topic discussed in the media was not the issue the protesters sought to address, but rather the credibility of the protesters. It further shows the protesters were by February described as a group, isolated from the people and ignorant of the people's wishes, orchestrated by western secret services, and bent on bringing disorder to Russia. The portrayal of the demonstrators combines Surkov's anti-coloured revolution rhetoric with traditional Russian anti-liberal discourse and a Soviet suspicion of wealth and luxury. Deputy Premier Dmitrii Rogozin, in a statement that evoked the traditional Russian distaste for Moscow, belittled the opposition's 'national idea' as restricted to the 'delights of the glamorous media get-together (*tusovka),* to the desire (*mechta*) of living in a "European Russian national state", as I understand, within the Garden Ring' (Rogozin 31.01.2012).'

The protests online

The internet in Russia is often perceived to be the preserve of the opposition. However, the radical anti-protester rhetoric observed in mainstream media in February was present online from the start, as the protests were cast as part of a coloured revolutions scenario. Notably, in the early stages anti-protester slurs targeted prominent opposition figures, a more easily identifiable target than an amorphous group of protesters. During December there was an unusually large number of references, especially in the blogosphere, to the colour orange, associated with the Ukrainian orange revolution (Fedor and Nikiporets-Takigawa 04.05.2012). The correspondence between Nashi activists leaked by the hacker group Anonymous reveals this was the immediate analogy invoked by defenders of the status quo. To cite but one example from correspondence between two former Nashi leaders, Nikita Borovikov and Vasilii Iake-

menko, something had to be done to avoid repeating 'the Ukrainian maidan' (Borovikov 11.12.2011). References to an 'orange revolution' were, together with 'civil war', used to label the protesters' intentions. The labelling of the protesters as willing to risk bloodshed and anarchy served to present the movement as radical, the purpose being to alienate its moderate powerbase. Here is but one example of how Nashi formulated this in an appeal to Moscow students: 'certain forces, attempting to transform peaceful protests into an orange revolution – civil war. Any reasonable person is against war. Any reasonable person is in favour of development and stability. I am confident that not one of you will sit idly by, as your country is drawn into a civil war.' (Omarov 27.12.2011).

The coloured-revolution rhetoric was mobilised immediately in the blogosphere, the protests being framed as an opportunity for those in favour of an orange scenario to gain a political foothold. It was only later that the protest movement as a whole was cast as favouring these ideas. As demonstrated by Fedor and Nikiporets-Takigawa, there was a proliferation of bot activity in online forums in the days following the elections (Fedor and Nikiporets-Takigawa 04.05.2012). This activity tended to spam individuals associated with the protest movement. Only after December did hostile online activity consistently attack the protesters as a group. In part this can be substantiated by examining the dynamic between references to individual protesters, and different names for the protesters as a whole. The graph below charts all references to Parkhomenko, Yashin, Nemtsov, Akunin, Naval'nyi and Kashin. These individuals, in various ways associated with the protests, were all referred to more frequently in December than at any point in January–April 2012. In contrast to this, references to the opposition groups as '*bolotnye*', '*oranzhisty*', '*kreativnyi klass*', or '*nesistemnaia oppozitsia*'[10] all peaked after December (see Fig. 2).

A spike in references to an individual or group may be a result of their participation in the protests, but most of the time it is the product of smear campaigns where bots automatically flood blogs with negative messages. Because the messages are cut and pasted, and consequently identical, they result in large spikes in graphs. It is striking that references to clearly labelled group of protesters all peak late, at the same time as the especially aggressive rhetoric emerged in the main national newspapers opposition. This shows that aggressive anti-protester labels, such as *oranzhisty*, *liberasty*[11], and 'western agents', all peaked at the end of January-early February and were variously reactivated, though to a lesser degree, immediately prior to the March elections. The graph below has aggregated the scores for these themes to demonstrate that cumulatively slurs and different disparaging labels for the protesters follow a clear pattern in the blogosphere (see Fig. 3).

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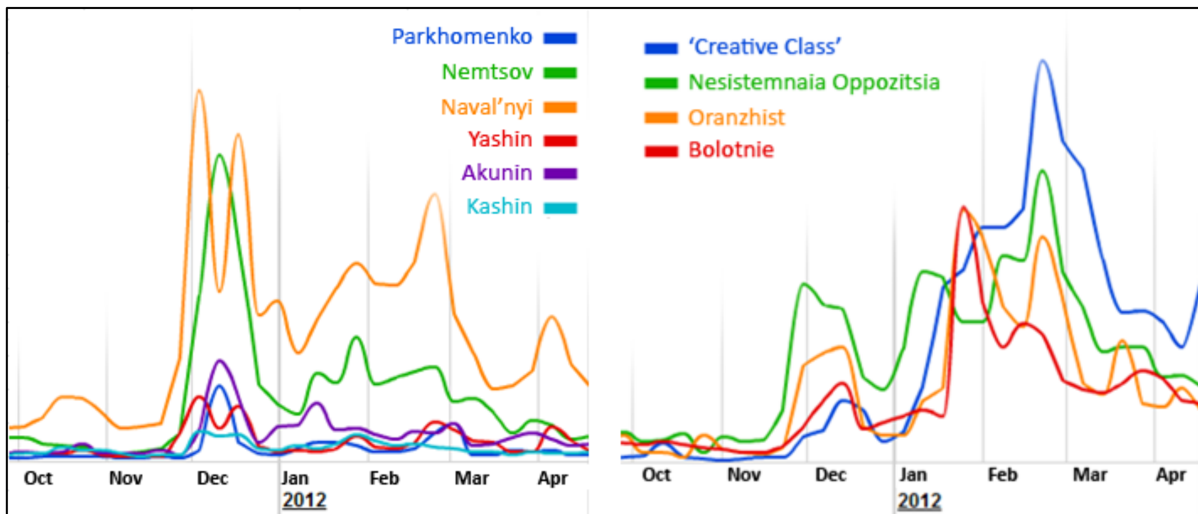
[10] *Oranzhist* is a label applied to those who seek to introduce a Ukrainian-style orange revolution; Richard Florida's Creative Class was popularised in Russia by Surkov as *kreativnyi klass* and used to describe the protesters; *nesistemnaia oppozitsia*, literally the non-system opposition, describes opposition groups not officially sanctioned by the Kremlin.

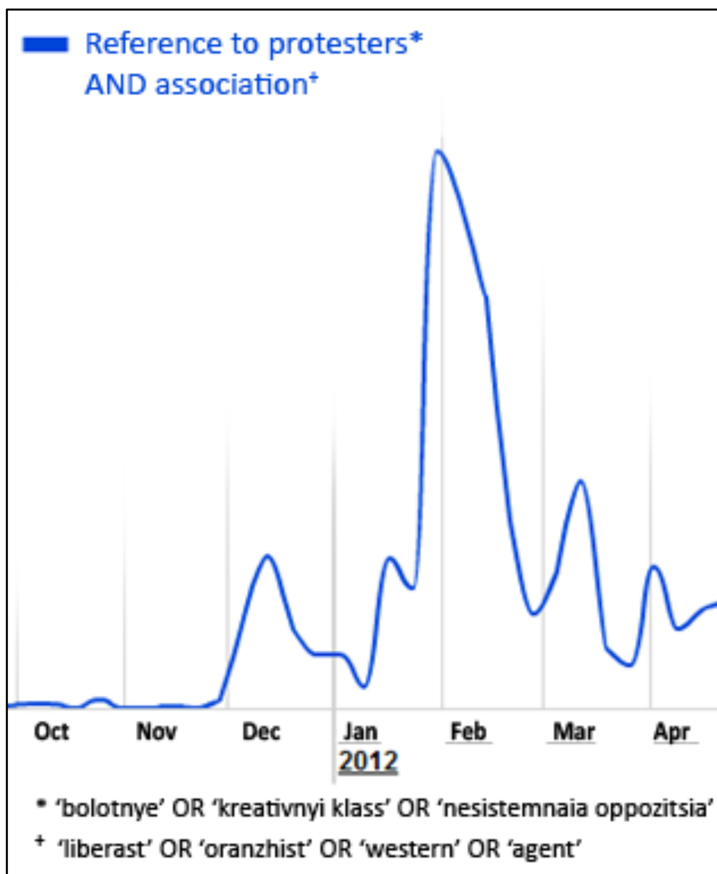
[11] A derogative neologism merging 'liberal' with 'pederast'.

Fig. 2: Opposition figures and labels in blogs



Source: Rolf Fredheim

Fig. 3: Opposition figures and labels in blogs



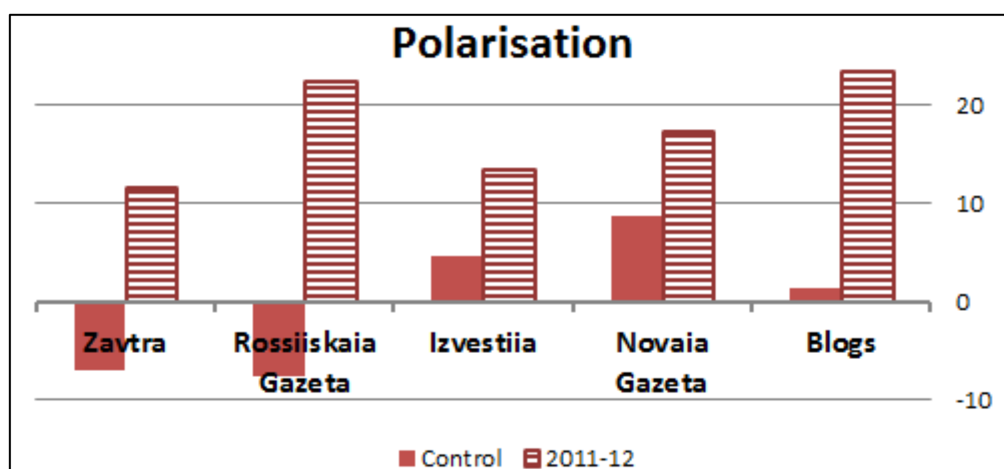
Source: Rolf Fredheim

Both in mainstream media and the blogosphere, then, the most radical rhetoric occurred in February. These findings are corroborated both by the reading of the press, as well as quantitative analyses of key associations.

Analysis – indicators of tone

It is relatively clear from the keyword analysis that both the blogosphere and the pro-Kremlin media hostility towards the protest movement was aggressive and delayed. What follows is an attempt to demonstrate how the indicators developed in the theoretical section may elaborate on the findings above. In order for the indicators to function they must have reference points that give meaning to their scores. The chart below includes the control scores for the respective sources; the control groups comprise a sample of texts about protests from January 2000 to October 2011:

Fig. 4: Polarisation

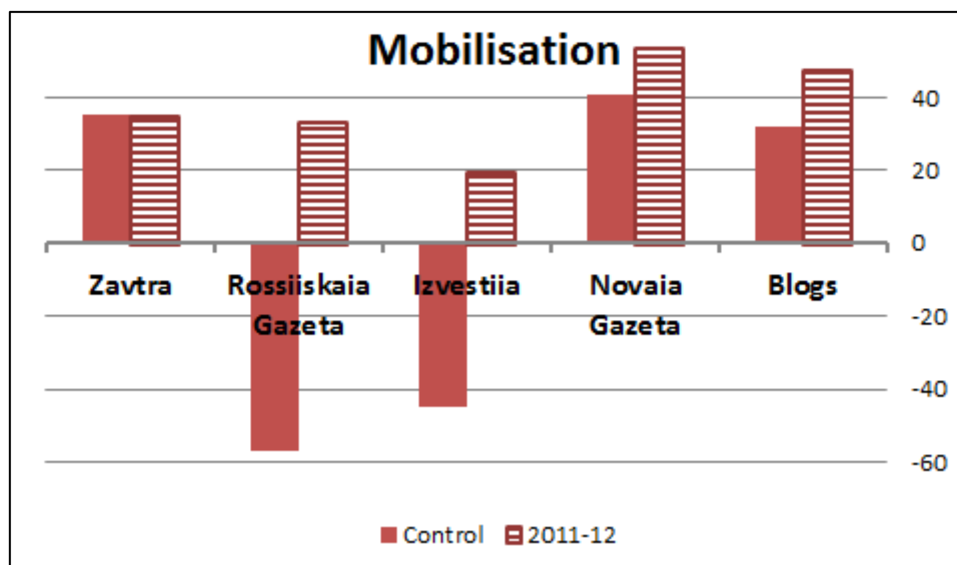


Source: Rolf Fredheim

The table above shows the control samples as well as the data for the 2011-12 protests, relative to the average control sample. Immediately the chart makes it obvious that the recent cycle of protests has seen vastly more polarising language than previous protests did: note how every single sample for 2011-12 is substantially higher than the control values. The control values, averaged around zero, reveal that in the past *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* has been the least polarising in its coverage of protests, while Novaia Gazeta has the highest control score. Blogs, notably, were well within the range of print media, and only just over average. This demonstrates that language in blogs did not follow fundamentally different patterns from that in print media. In the 2011-12 protests the pattern is radically different: here Rossiiskaia Gazeta and blogs are the most polarised sources. It is striking that the normally most balanced newspaper in the set, *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, has both the highest Polarisation score, and the highest increase from the control group. As this publication is also the newspaper in the sample the closest aligned to the Kremlin this constitutes evidence that official rhetoric was highly divisive in response to the protests. Blogs, like *Rossiiskaia Gazeta,* discussed the pro-

tests in new terms; the large change demonstrates that bloggers identified with or against these protests a lot more strongly than previously.

Fig. 3: Mobilisation



Source: Rolf Fredheim

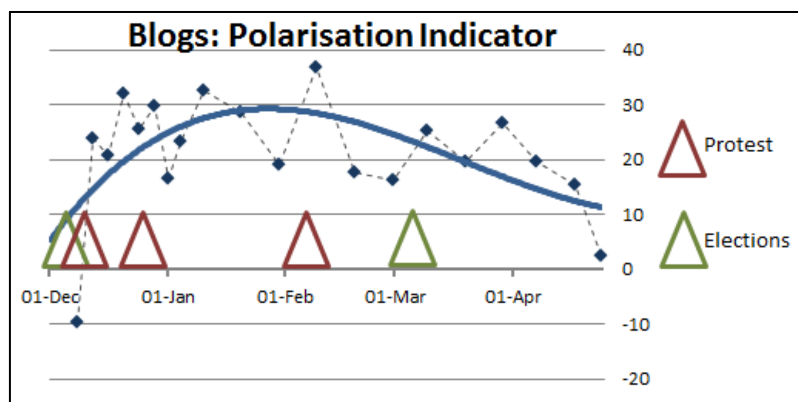
The chart above takes the same format; the control scores are relative to each other, and the scores for 2011-12 are relative to the average control score. The chart reveals that as for Polarisation, so Mobilisation scores have generally increased substantially. In the case of the blogosphere this indicates the internet was used more extensively to mobilise for or against the protests than before. The print media Mobilisation scores are also substantially higher, particularly for the central media where the control scores were near zero. Increased print media Mobilisation scores are more likely to be a result of an increase in persuasive language or interviews than direct exhortations to react to the protests. The scores reflect a quantifiable change in editorial style in all papers except the Communist *Zavtra,* which appears not to have identified more strongly with or against these protests. Most substantially, though, persuasive language has increased dramatically in the pro-Kremlin papers Rossiiskaia Gazeta and Izvestiia. One would expect this period of extensive civil unrest to result in more divisive rhetoric in the media; the fact that the Polarisation and Mobilisation scores for every data set have been substantially higher than their control samples goes a long way to validate the indicators, as it shows consistency across different sources and media.

Analysis of the Blogosphere

A great advantage of this method is that it allows change over time to be visualised. Due to the vastly greater number of blog posts than press articles it is possible to use a smaller time unit when analysing blogs and therefore get a detailed view of how the debate developed. For this reason the graphs below contrast the variation in Polarisation and Mobilisation scores

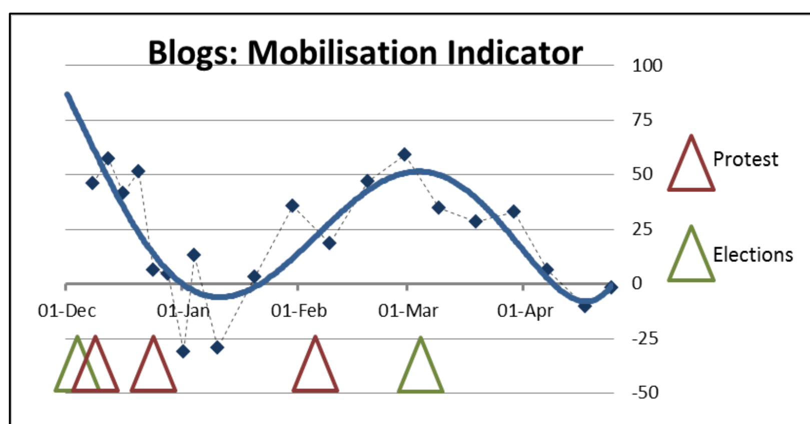
over time for blogs, including key reference points such as the two elections as well as the main protests. The data is plotted relative to the blog control sample:

Fig. 4: Blogs: Polarisation Indicator



Source: Rolf Fredheim

Fig. 5: Blogs: Mobilisation Indicator



Source: Rolf Fredheim

Following the Duma elections there was immediate mobilisation as people took to the internet to express dissatisfaction with the way the elections were conducted, as well as to encourage others to attend the planned rally at Bolotnaia on 10 December. While the Mobilisation score was high immediately following the elections, the Polarisation indicator was below average. By 12 December, the second data-point, the blogosphere discourse had become divisive, at more than twice the control score. Over the next weeks the Polarisation indicator remained high, rising to a peak before the return to Bolotnaia planned for February 5. Mobilisation, though, dropped throughout January before peaking again immediately prior to the March presidential elections, but never regaining the heights immediately following the Duma elections in December. The graphs above reflect the dynamics shown by the graphs charting individuals versus group references – references to opposition activists follow the Mobilisation indicator, peaking in December, fading in January, re-emerging at a lower level in February, then decreasing further (see figure 2). The opposition group labels, though, by and

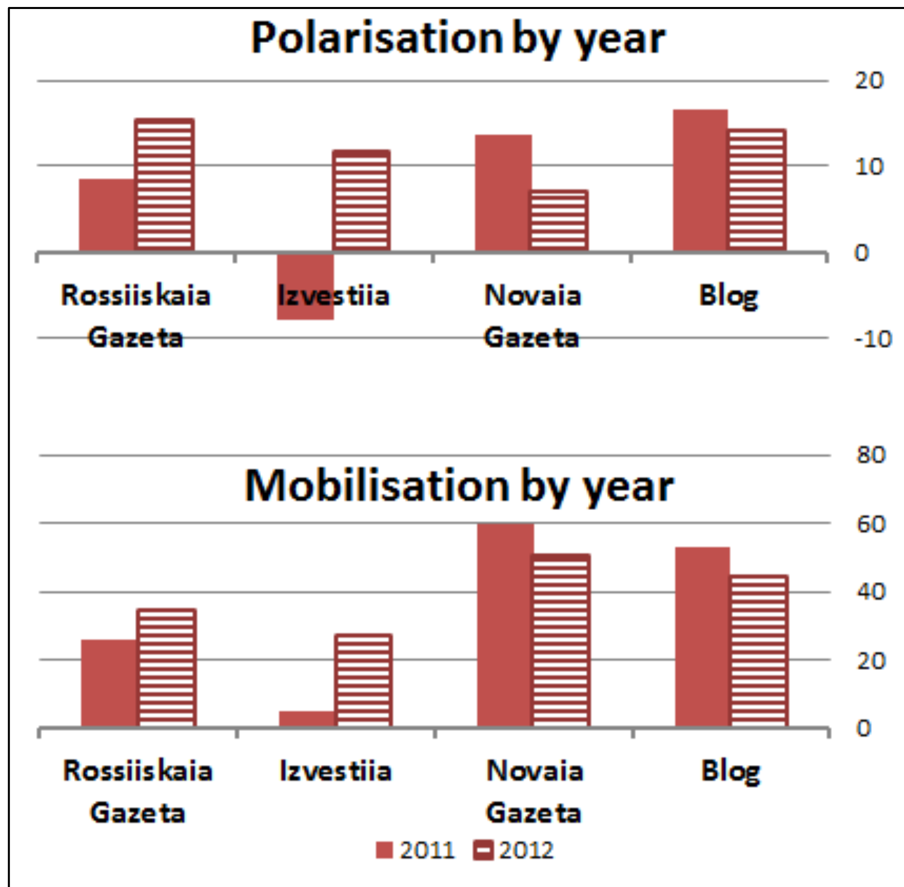
large follow the same pattern as the Polarisation indicator: high values were recorded in December, but higher peaks still were reached in the run up to the Presidential elections in March (see figure 1). There are two patterns here, then: active mobilisation correlates with the actions of individuals, while texts about the motives of the protesters as a group are associated with high polarisation. Mobilisation scores coincide neatly with opposition protests, while Polarisation scores rise steadily throughout December and January. If the Kremlin's strategy was to cast the protesters as extreme radicals, then the Polarisation scores suggest the efforts were fairly successful online. This is reflected in the Polarisation scores proximate to the Bolotnaia protests: the February protest is accompanied by almost three times as divisive language as the December protest, while the Mobilisation score was four times lower. This creates a picture where January emerges as a crucial month – there is little mobilisation to participate in specific action, but the language used in blogs is increasingly divisive, suggesting that a medium initially used for mobilisation had now become the site for a war of words. In January the issue shifted from being the protesters' goals and whether to participate in the protests to a discussion of the protesters themselves. 'Bolotnaia' went from being a symbol to rally against the regime to becoming a label applied to a dissatisfied and unpatriotic domestic minority.

Analysis of print media

The charts below break the data down into an early and a late period in order to explore when Polarisation was the most extreme in Russian print media. It shows that while blogs both had a higher Polarisation indicator and a higher Mobilisation score for 2011 than for 2012, the opposite was the case for all newspapers except the liberal *Novaia Gazeta*. *Izvestiia*, in particular, was slow to adopt polarising arguments, its December score being lower than that of the control sample average. Izvestiia, unlike *Rossiiskaia Gazeta,* initially maintained a relatively objective tone in its coverage.

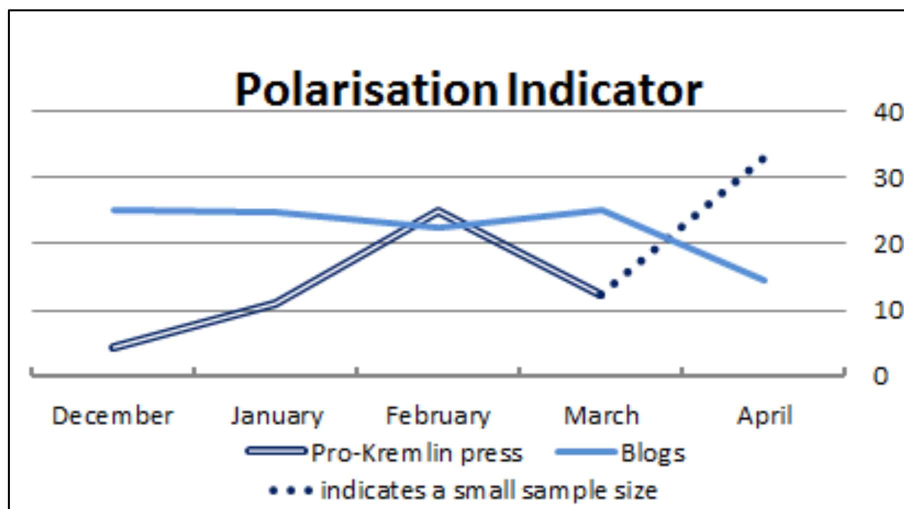
Figure 8 makes another relationship apparent: in February the central press converged with blogosphere activity; indeed, for 2012 as a whole *Izvestiia* and *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* had virtually identical Polarisation scores to the blogosphere. The delayed rise in the Polarisation indicator mirrors the official response to the protests discussed earlier. Breaking the data down further and plotting it graphically reproduces the pattern found in the keyword analysis where February saw more hostile rhetoric in the press:

Fig. 6: Annual scores (relative to average control sample size)



Source: Rolf Fredheim

Fig. 7: Polarisation Indicator



Source: Rolf Fredheim

The peak in the Pro-Kremlin press Polarisation score coincides with the emergence and disappearance of the radical anti-protester speech patterns: both *Izvestiia* and *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* scored substantially higher in February than in either January or March. Interestingly, in February the pro-Kremlin press converged in tone with the blogosphere, a finding which confirmed the suggestions earlier that February saw a more radical rhetoric in the media. The texts from Izvestiia exhibited a more critical approach to the protesters in February than in December; this is captured and quantified by the Polarisation score which rose from -8 in December to 12 in February. The findings above confirm the validity of the Polarisation indicator; it is clear that the aggressive discourse making use of terms such as ‘liberast’, ‘oranzhists’, and ‘western’ agents’ peaked at precisely the period identified by the Polarisation indicator as the most radical. In December, indicator scores were also high, but they were accompanied by high Mobilisation scores, suggesting there was genuine interaction and persuasion taking place. In February Mobilisation scores were much lower, and the blogosphere was dominated by diatribes, the protesters being identified by labels relating not to their goals or demands, but casting doubt on their motives, integrity and patriotism.

Finally, the data tentatively identifies April as a period of even greater polarisation. The sample sizes for April are very small, a reflection of how little significance was attributed to the protests in *Izvestiia and Rossiiskaia Gazeta’s* coverage once Putin had been reelected. The Polarisation scores are very high because the protests were made a point of reference, rather than reported as news. A historicisation of the protest movement, a shaping of how the protests would be remembered thus took place: in April the aggressive rhetoric in evidence in February was all but gone, replaced by a judgement that the movement had failed, was a thing of the past, and that now lessons should be drawn for the future: ‘the radical liberals are again disappointed. Their strategies ... failed’(Chesnakov 26.04.2012). Opinion polls apparently further emphasised the gulf between ‘the wide masses’ and the ‘angry citizens at Bolotnaia’: ‘almost a third of citizens woud ban street protests and marches that “disturb the surroundings or lead to disorder”’, wrote one journalist (Vyzhutovich 06.04.2012). Another commentator attempted to comprehend the protester mindset: ‘why are people unsatisfied? Why do they go to Bolotnaia or Poklonnaia?’(Vladykina 13.04.2012). These examples from April reveal a different, classical sort of Othering, here we see the attempt to understand and explain the Other. This Other is something inexplicable, alien to the ‘normal’ mentality. The indicator, thus, identifies, but is not limited to, periods when hate speech enters mainstream discourse.

Conclusion

The methods showcased above will be applicable not only to studies of Russian media and blogosphere, but to any number of topics and languages, as well as to scholars in memory studies and CDA. In an attempt to make the tools presented here more widely available, a script performing the calculations above has been made available online(Fredheim 31.12.2012). While this script will calculate scores based on any Russian language input, the

results should only be discussed as part of a rigorous triangulation process, due to limitations inherent in the method. Most notably, the method is better suited to discuss aggregate changes in rhetoric, and for this a large sample is needed. It is also vital to choose an appropriate reference category.

The analysis of the blogosphere highlighted a rise in polarisation in January in February; this was reflected in the indicator scores found, the central print media's coverage, as well as the presence of keywords associating the protest movement with western agents or an 'orange scenario'. One notable feature of anti-protester online activity is that initially individual opposition actors were targeted, whereas later on the protesters were treated as a group. This occurred as the protesters were cast as a radical Other, in contrast to the majority of the Russian nation which had peacefully expressed their views by voting. The indicators also captured the subsequent historicisation and by implication denial of the movement.

The Polarisation indicator, the most developed of the two discussed, is demonstrably fairly accurate; this can be seen not only in statistical tests calculating average errors, but also visually, in that virtually every data point for the period of the protests showed substantially elevated polarisation. Especially in the blogosphere where many proximate data points could be collected it was notable how closely these were clustered. The results of the tests indicate strongly that the 2011-12 protests against unfair elections were treated differently from previous large scale demonstrations. Blogosphere, pro-Kremlin press and media aligned with the opposition identified much more strongly with or against these protests than previously. Furthermore, the Mobilisation indicator demonstrated that the language used was not only more divisive, it was also substantially more persuasive than would normally be the case, especially in the pro-Kremlin media.

The findings speak also to the government's handling of the protests. During January there appears to have been a concerted effort to mobilise against the protesters, and in February both pro-Kremlin press and anti-opposition blogs featured strong anti-protester language. Following the election this strong language disappeared. Based on the data collected it is impossible to speculate as to the proportion of blogosphere articles being for and against the protests. It is clear, though, that in December there was a degree of mobilisation that was later not repeated, perhaps because opposition voices were partially drowned out. In Izvestiia and Rossiiskaia Gazeta virtually all opinion pieces were highly critical of the protesters. Over time the degree to which the protesters were referred to as a group separate from the nation as a whole grew. Initially there were some attempts at conceptualising the protest movement as part of a new Russian civil society, but in 2012 official media used traditional anti-Liberal language as a tool of exclusion.

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