

Civic Culture and Political Collective Action in Russia

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Russia did not witness mass public protests since *Perestroika* and a few turbulent years that followed. The society was content to relegate politics to the elites while being preoccupied by adjustment to the new realities and later enjoying a degree of economic prosperity. However over fifteen years of political tranquility suddenly ended when tens of thousands took to the streets in Moscow and other major Russian cities to protest alleged electoral fraud and demand democracy and the rule of law.

We argue in the paper that these rallies manifested a significant cultural shift in the Russian society which is a predictable outcome of economic development, accumulation of human capital, and globalization. The process of value change remained latent (although detectable by surveys) until a political “shock” of grand electoral fraud which sparked a massive spontaneous reaction. The rallies have signaled increased strength of the Russian civil society and its ability to resolve the political collective action problem and form coalitions across the political spectrum in support of democracy and the rule of law. This credible signal of a value shift will be a long-lasting factor of Russia’s political development, affecting expectations and ultimately actions of masses and elites alike.

1. Who control Russian institutions: public choice vs. public interest?

In the post-communist Russia dramatic institutional change occurred rapidly in a period of time which was very short by any historical comparison. Furthermore, after the collapse of the old regime, institutional transformations unfolded mostly spontaneously, without any “master plan” and implementing agency in charge. Both elites and the society at large were given a chance to shape this process, since the Russian political system at the time was nominally a democracy.

However no pre-existing system of representation, such as conventional political parties, was in place to communicate societal preferences into the policy-making process. The capacity of the Russian society to hold governments accountable was extremely limited due to a lack of proper experience and more generally of the civic culture which is usually accumulated by a history of democratic governance and self-rule (Putnam et al., 1993; Tabellini, 2010). The first generation of the Russian reformers opted for a “spontaneous” process of institutional change whereby the institutions of market democracy would emerge essentially on their own, propped by privatization and political and economic freedoms.

These expectations however have failed to materialize due to a capture of the Russian institutional reforms by business elites known as the *oligarchs*. In accordance with the general pattern observed

across nations and periods of history, elites were opposed to establishing an “open access order” which ensures non-discriminatory protection of economic and political rights, access to markets and resources, and level playing field (North et al., 2007; Rajan and Zingales, 2004). Instead a “limited access order” had emerged based on institutions of rent-extraction which reallocated resources and wealth to the elites from the rest of society. In particular, contrary to earlier held expectations (Boiko, Shleifer and Vishny, 1996) the oligarchs showed no interest in secured property rights (Polishchuk and Savvateev, 2004) and competitive market economy more generally (Hellman 1998; Polishchuk, 2012). Without democratic checks and balances, such institutional regime remained politically uncontested for almost a decade, protracting Russia’s transitional recessions. In the meantime the support for democracy forcefully displayed during the Perestroika years waned quickly, yielding to widespread cynicism, apathy, mistrust in political institutions, and withdrawal from public life.

The initial appreciation of democracy was fragile due to its largely “instrumental” motivation, based on the expectations that the political institutions common for the developed world would bring comparable levels of prosperity (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Frustration of these expectations left the Russian democracy socially debased. More deep and sustainable “intrinsic motivation” of support for democratic institutions which is based on the appreciation of rights and freedoms per se was extremely thin since Russia’s political and economic history did not foster the accumulation of such values.

In the early 2000s the oligarchs have ceded control of Russian institutions and public policies to a newly consolidated bureaucracy, but this did not alter the pattern of the society’s resignation from the policy process. The basis for a new order was a “social contract” that provided for steadily rising incomes and welfare bankrolled by “resource manna” in exchange for political loyalty of the masses. For most of the decade that ensued, the Russian economy grew at impressive rate and the benefits of the growth trickled down to the grassroots in the form of steadily rising wages, retirement benefits and other sources of income for large swaths of the population. In the meantime the economic and political institutions, suppressed by the “vertical power”, continued to deteriorate, as evidenced by the indexes of the rule of law, government accountability, and corruption prevention (Fig.1)

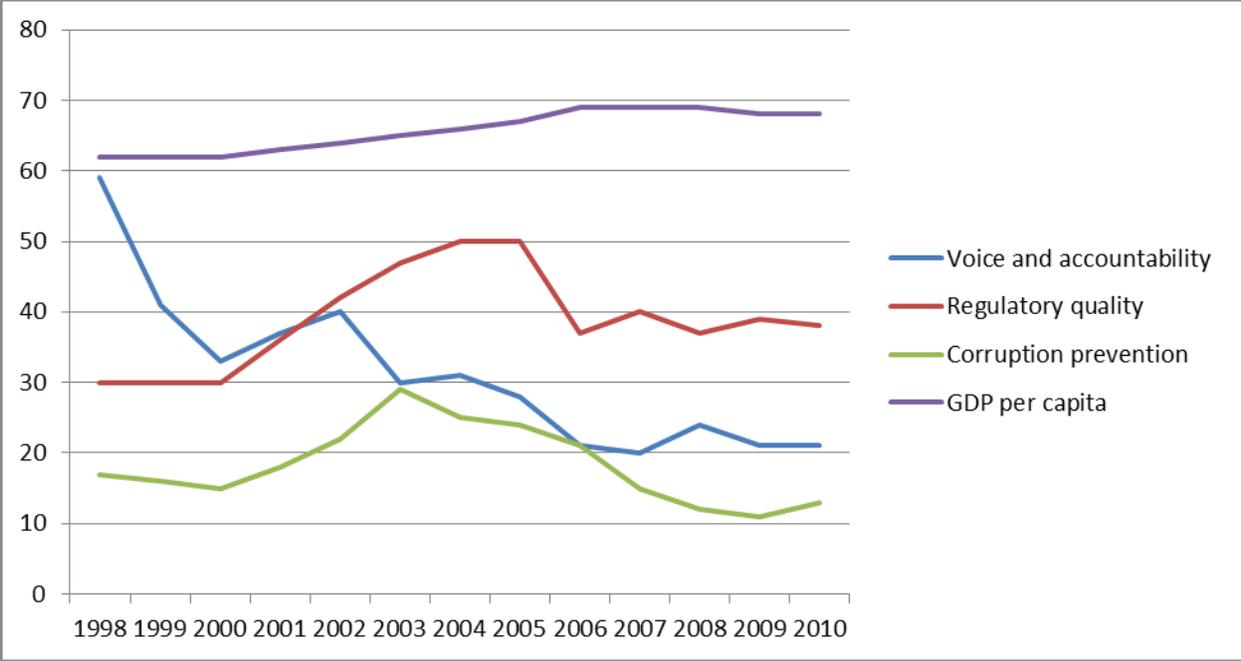


Figure 1. Economic growth and institutional dynamics in Russia (sources: World Bank, “Governance Matters” project)

The ruling elites showed little interest in human capital accumulation and hence in modernization of public education and health care systems, as well as in the development of competitive markets and protection of property rights. The institutional preferences of democratically unaccountable elites were distorted by a “resource curse”. During the last decade about 1/3 of Russia’s GDP was generated by the oil and gas sector, and such economic structure adversely affected the quality of institutions and public sector governance. Natural resources reinforce elites’ preferences for limited access order: protection of property rights and rule of law were perceived by the elites as obstacles to appropriation of resource wealth. Even if such institutions carry no immediate threat to elites’ interests, they are of low value for the elites and hence do not get sufficient attention, and government resources are spent elsewhere. A case in point is support to small and medium firms – abundance of natural resources is shown to stall reforms required to advance the SME sector (Amin and Djankov, 2009). In Russia after the deregulation reform in the early 2000s there were no further noticeable efforts to remove the still numerous barriers to SME development (Doing Business, 2011); as a result, the sector was stagnating and declining by the end of the decade.

Public education and health care are other examples of lower priority institutions for elites who can receive such services privately and, as it has become common in Russia, abroad. Even if such institutions are of some value for the ruling class, the latter could have much stronger needs in club goods that are essential for elites but of little direct significance for the rest of society. If elites’ economic interests are concentrated in the resource industries, one could expect an emphasis on institutions and public factors of production which are highly important for this sector (e.g. financial infrastructure, pipelines, and security and police services), while other institutions receive lesser attention.

Such institutional distortions did not upset the political equilibrium of the 2000s which showed significant resilience and weathered through the shock of the 2008 economic and financial crisis more or less unscathed. Commodity prices after a sharp decline recovered to comfortably high levels, defusing immediate economic threats to the regime. Still, economic challenges were looming large, including a lack of restructuring away of the natural resources to the manufacturing sector and high tech industries, rapidly deteriorating and clearly inadequate infrastructure, capital flight, mounting fiscal imbalances, including a pension system crisis, and serious demographic problems caused by aging population and shrinking labor force.

Surprisingly to many, a threat came from an unexpected direction, reflecting a shift in social values, rather than economic discontent.

2. Value shift: causes and evidence

The growing mismatch between the level of incomes and the conditions of social and institutional infrastructure caused tension in the Russian economy and society. When public goods and private consumption are complements to each other, rising income strengthens the demand for commensurable supply of public goods. Sociological studies point out to a strong consensus in the Russian society over the need to urgently improve the infrastructure, protection of the environment, health care, education, personal safety effective administration of justice (Society and Government, 2012) – all these are all examples of undersupplied public goods.

Inadequacy of publicly provided education and health care made the Russian middle class to seek such services from private sources, and, increasingly, abroad. Foreign countries also provided more attractive opportunities for investments (including real estate), conducting business, and even resolving commercial disputes. The appeal of these advantages as well as better protection of rights and freedoms, and broader career and human development prospects prompted massive emigration from Russia, especially of better educated, more entrepreneurial and ambitious individuals. In Hirschman's (1970) terminology, lacking proper voice over public policy matters, such individuals exercised the exit option. Those who chose to stay felt growing anxiety, uncertainty, a lack of legal protection and influence over public affairs (Volkov, 2012).

The above described economic incentives were concurrent with a graduate value shift in the Russian society. The chaotic transition of the 1990s undermined trust in public institutions in the Russian society, and prompted massive escape into informal private networks (Rose, 1995). However a degree of prosperity brought about by the economic growth of the past decade has set in motion counteracting trends that surfaced at unexpectedly massive protest actions in the course of the last year.

Modern history gives ample evidence that economic development, improved well-being and the accumulation of human capital sooner or later come at odds with non-democratic regimes. How exactly economic development fosters democracy remains a subject of intense debates in the literature. Lipset (1959) argued that increased wealth, education, urbanization, improved communication and strengthening of the middle class all bode well for the emergence and

sustainability of the democratic institutions. An empirical analysis by Przeworski and Limongi (1997) leads to the conclusion that democracies could be exogenous (outcomes of random “shocks”, such as wars, crises etc.) but the odds of their long-term survival and proper performance are much higher in wealthier societies. In other words, economic development in and of itself doesn’t herald the advent of democracy but rather “prepares” societies for democratization.

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) use several waves of the World Values Survey data to argue that economic development produces important cultural changes whereby “survival values” predominant in economically backward societies are replaced by self-expression and individual autonomy values. The latter in their turn are best accommodated under democratic political institutions that guarantee civil and political rights necessary to exercise individual autonomy. When such values are widespread and broadly shared in a non-democracy, “... demand for freedom exceed[s] the institutional supply of freedom [and] self-expression values operate as a social force that closes the gap between formal and effective democracy” (pp. 9-10). According to such theory, the causal link from development to democracy indeed exists and operates through evolving values. This view builds upon the vast literature that emphasizes the importance of civic culture for success and sustainability of democracy (Almond and Verba, 1989; Putnam et al., 1993; Weingast, 1997; Tabellini, 2010) and supplies a “missing link”, i.e. that the requisite cultural traits are brought about by economic development.

Another link between development and democracy is the accumulation of human capital (Lipset, op. cit). Education enables individuals to better understand their interests and how those are affected by various public policies, more clearly articulate views and reach compromises. Education is shown to be strongly correlated with civic participation and culture (Almond and Verba, 1989) and democratic performance (Barro, 1999). Furthermore education promotes socialization – it improves interpersonal skills (Glaezer, Ponzetto and Shleifer, 2007) and otherwise increases social capital (Putnam and Helliwell, 1995) broadly understood as the capacity for collective action.

Finally, democratization is advanced by “spillovers” of democratic values, practices, and experience from other countries and societies. Persson and Tabellini (2006) argue that the strength of national democratic institutions is positively associated with (and indeed affected by) the incidence of democracy in the neighboring countries. By expanding this argument one could expect that globalization, including the Internet and massive international travel, also driven by economic development and growing incomes, could strengthen the demand for democracy.

All of the above arguments point to a gradual and probably uneven process of value change driven by a decade-long robust economic growth in Russia, rapid spread of post-secondary education, and the rise of international travel and Russia’s overall integration in the global economy. These processes were concurrent with a steady suppression of democracy in Russia both de jure, through changes in electoral laws, and de facto, by the elimination of genuine political competition. This far-reaching reduction of the democratic space met little organized opposition. Episodic protests of any significance were sparked by blotched reform attempts (such as the ill-conceived and poorly implemented idea to replace various entitlements in kind by monetary transfers) which were promptly reversed to prevent the discontent from spreading.

Still, surveys data point out to accumulation of civic culture in Russia, although this process could be slow and highly uneven across the country. Some evidence is provided by the European Social Survey for 2006 and 2008 (the only survey waves for which Russian data are presently available). Even for a relatively short two years period the survey has registered a statistically significant increase of several civic culture indexes, such as interest in politics, voting in national elections, and importance of mutual help and concern for others (Fig. 2).

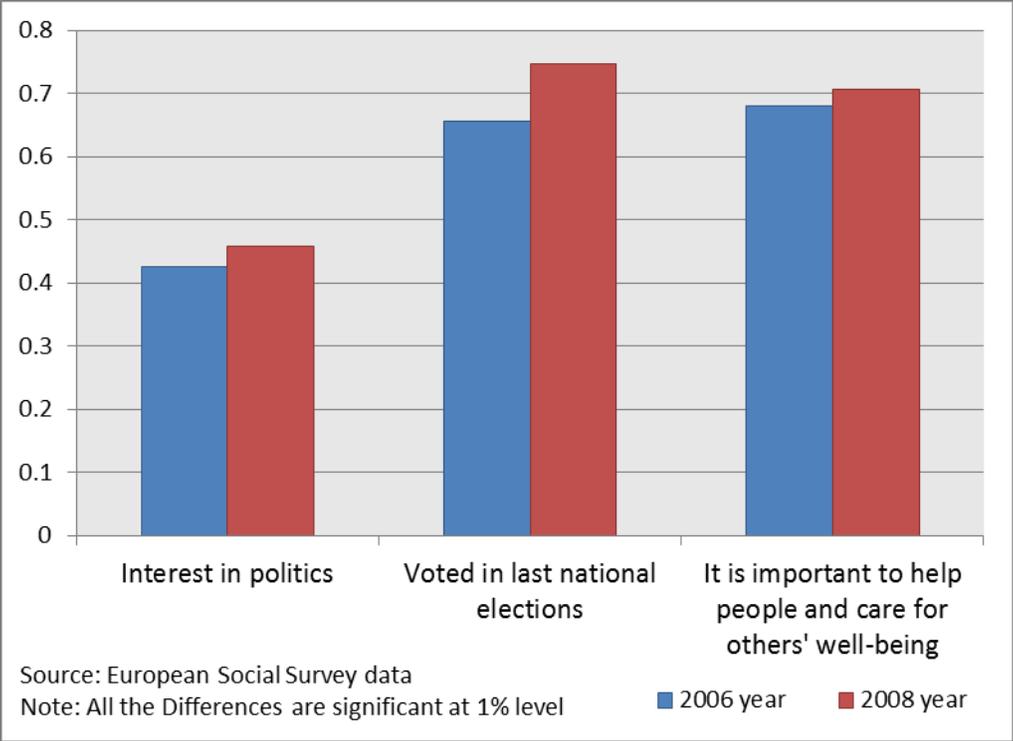


Figure 2. Dynamics of civic culture in Russia, 2006-2008.

Another source of data is the GeoRating project which is modeled after the World Values Survey program. Survey-based measures of civic culture generated by this project are based on answers to the questions as to whether respondents feel responsible for the situation in their cities and regions, and whether they are prepared to enter broad social coalitions for a common cause. It is shown that higher levels of civic culture are associated with better performance of subnational governments and higher level of the overall satisfaction with conditions in respondents' cities (Menyashev and Polishchuk, 2011).

According to Tikhonova (2011), modernization is commonly interpreted in today's Russia as equality before the law and protection of civil and political rights. It is argued that such sentiments are brought about not only by deep mistrust in the current courts and law-enforcement system, but also by a profound norms and values transformation across the Russian society.

3. Political collective action

Inferences about norms and values could be drawn from surveys as well as from actions prompted by such norms. While a number of surveys conducted over the last several years indeed indicated a value shift, until the fall of 2011 it remained latent and did not trigger political actions of any significance and visibility. Apart from isolated economic unrests caused by the fallouts of the 2008 crisis, and environmental and heritage protection movements, political protests (e.g. regularly held “Marches of Dissenters”) remained very limited in numbers, easily contained by police, and hardly raising much open support in the society.

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) argue that there is an inevitable delay before latent “cumulative variables” reflecting value change turn into highly visible “break variables”. Such delays are caused by a collective action problem – effective protests or other forms of political participation require coordinated participation of a significant number of individuals, which could be difficult to achieve even if potential participants share the causes and objectives of such collective action.

Broad agreement in a society over the importance of democratic principles, which is often considered as a synonym for civic culture, is essential for democratic performance (Almond and Verba, 1989). Weingast (1997) argues that shared values which emphasize rights and freedoms make democracy and the rule of law “self-enforceable” in that an attempt of those holding public offices to exceed their power and transgress what is considered appropriate limits for government triggers massive protest which make such attempts unsuccessful and hence protect democracy from subversion. While this view could explain stability of well-entrenched democracies, it is less helpful in understanding the process of democratization when there is a transition to democracy from an authoritarian status quo. Even if there has been a value shift in a society making it more appreciative of democratic principles, this is an important necessary, but far from sufficient, condition for democratization, since it is not quite clear how and why *individually held* pro-democracy values and aspirations, even if broadly shared, would result in a *collective action* necessary for regime transformation. Various authors acknowledge the importance of such collective action problem for understanding a transition to democracy (see e.g. Inglehart, Welzel, 2005; Acemoglu, Robinson, 2006), but rarely explain how it could be resolved.

The collective action problem (Olson, 1965) arises around joint provision of a public good which could be obstructed by the temptation to free-ride, i.e. abstain from the collective efforts while reaping the benefits of public goods irrespective of participating in its provision. Free-riding can be avoided by offering various “selective incentives” which limit access to a public good or subject free-riders to sanctions; otherwise it could paralyze the provision of public goods, especially in the case of large number of potential beneficiaries/contributors, when the costs of reaching and implementing a Coasean agreement become prohibitively high.

Political collective actions when public goods to be delivered are pro-social public policies or even democratic institutions such as the rule of law, free and fair elections, etc., have a number of specific features, some of which exacerbate the collective action problem, whereas others facilitate its solution. Thus, the cost of participation in a protest action could be rather high (police brutality, arrests, prosecution, threats of being blacklisted, etc.). On the other hand, participants of pro-

democracy movements are often motivated not just by the desire to see a regime change, but also by the sense of civic duty to actually take part in such activities (Almond, Verba, 1989; see also Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). Most of political collective action literature (reviewed in e.g. Fowler and Kam, 2006) deals with voting behavior and in particular explains the voting paradox, i.e. the participation in elections despite of negligible probability to affect the electoral outcome, by assuming *social* preferences when an individual is motivated not only by her personal benefits from the desired election results, but also by the benefits to the rest of society.

A more suitable approach to analyzing *protest* action is to assume that potential participants draw satisfaction (“utility”) not only from the outcome, if any, of such action, but also directly from taking part in it. This assumption, common in economic theories of pro-social behavior (see e.g. Benabou, Tirole, 2006), is used e.g. in philanthropy studies where it is assumed that participation in charitable activities causes “warm glow” which could have considerable economic value (Andreoni, 1990). The “warm glow” concept appears to be a good match of the idea of civic duty and as such could be usefully employed in political collective action analyses.

However protest actions differ from philanthropy in that in the latter case the cost of participation (equal to the value of the donation) is independent of the number of participants, whereas in the former it declines when the number of those taking part in protests grows. The larger is the turnout, the less likely is police violence and other repressions, as well as the feeling of representing a marginal and isolated group rather than a mainstream movement expressing broadly shared needs and sentiments. Consequently there is increasing returns to scale in political collective action – as the number of participants rises, so does the appeal for others to join. This “positive numerical externality” is in sharp contrast with the conventional collective action problem where an increase in the number of contributors increases the appeal to free-ride.

There were several attempts in the literature to capture the above relationship. Tullock (1974) argues that the decision to join a revolution – the extreme form of a political collective action – depends on the comparison of costs and benefits (including reputational benefits) of resp. joining the revolution or siding with the regime that it challenges. Massive participation in a revolutionary movement makes the regime’s survival less likely and by affecting the above costs-benefits calculations could cause a “bandwagon effect” when the number of participants swells further. Kuran (1989) enriches the theory by assuming that individuals have idiosyncratic predispositions to take part in a political collective action, but their actual decision to join depends on the (anticipated) number of other participants. This could lead to multiple rational expectation equilibria, in which the number of participants could be either very small (or zero), despite of widely shared grudges against the status quo, or vice versa, large enough to ensure the success of political collective action. Each of such stable equilibria has its own gravitation area, and is a modest change raises participation above a watershed tipping point, it triggers a chain reaction and causes a sharp participation upswing which was difficult to anticipate from the initial low-level equilibrium.

Participation in political collective action (such as e.g. voting) could also be a response to peer pressure when it is expected that such participation will leave a favorable impression of an individual on those around him, and vice versa non-participation could lead to rebuke and

ostracism (Benabou, Tirole, 2006). Under certain conditions participation in political collective action could become a *convention*, defined as “a pattern of behavior that is customary, expected and self-enforcing” (Young, 1996, p. 105). If the values that prompt participation in a political action are highly regarded in a certain social group, group members might have the incentive to signal the adherence to such values by joining the action irrespective of whether such values are indeed intrinsic or not. In such cases participation in collective action could be driven, at least in part, by the conformity mechanism (Bernheim, 1994).

The above discussion summarizes as follows. First, a sharp upswing of participation in political collective action, such as protest movement, could be preceded by a gradual latent accumulation (deepening and widening) of the values that drive such action. Second, the action could be sparked by a “shock” that would serve as a “value multiplier” – e.g. by a regime’s shocking (pun intended) action that contravenes the accumulated values in a particularly egregious way. Third, to release such increased collective action potential, there should be an “assurance device” – a way to convince potential participants that participation in the action will be sufficiently massive. Fourth, participation can be boosted by turning into a “convention” in certain segments of the society. We argue that all of these mechanisms were present in the Russian 2011-2012 protest movement.

4. Russian protests as political collective action

As stated earlier in the paper, until the end of 2011 protest actions in Russia remained isolated and numerically insignificant. All of that suddenly changed after the elections to the State Duma held on December 4, 2011. Prior to the elections opinion polls registered a noticeable decline of the popular support for the ruling party, the United Russia; it was broadly expected that such decline would be customarily “corrected” by electoral manipulation and fraud (Volkov, 2012).

What sparked the protests?

An important tipping point in the public opinion was the announcement made in September 2011 that President Medvedev and Premier Putin would swap jobs. Such maneuver, immediately dubbed *rokirovka* (castling) was met by many in Russia with frustration and anger, as it thwarted hopes for genuine political competition and Russia’s evolution to a “democracy without objectives” (Collier, Levitsky, 1997). Forthcoming elections offered an opportunity to protest the move at the ballot box. To prevent rigging of the elections that would conceal such protest, a massive election monitoring campaign involving watchdog NGOs such as *Golos* (Voice), grassroots networks (most prominent among them *Grazhdanin-Nabliudatel’* (Citizen-Observer), and a number of media outlets was launched.

During the elections observers witnessed massive abuse and fraud. Statistical analysis of elections results corroborated such evidence collected at the grassroots: startling anomalies of the distributions of election data across electoral districts lead to a downward adjustment of the electoral support of the United Russia from the officially reported 49% down to 34% (Shpil’kin 2011; see also Klimeka et al., 2012). It was particularly important that thousands of vivid eyewitness accounts of blatant and egregious violations were promptly put in the public domain

through the Internet. Facts and evidence sharing was an essential, but far from the only function that the Internet played in mobilizing Russian protest movement.

Infuriated and energized by the electoral fraud “shock”, the post-election rally held on December 5, 2011, drew thousands of participants – many times more than the turnout of previously held protest actions. Recruitment through the Internet played an important role in this first show of force of the Russian civil society.

The first rally of the series that ensued, despite of being still relatively small – a few thousands of participants in comparison to hundred thousand plus at the peak of the movement a few months later – played an important catalytic role on at least two counts. First, it has produced an assurance that even an impromptu protest action lacking proper organization and planning could draw a sufficient number of participants to put in motion the above described economy of scale effect leading to a high-participation equilibrium. Second, it introduced to Russia the practice of internet-based political mobilization which was heretofore massively and successfully employed elsewhere in the world.

The role of the web

Russia has become one of European leaders in Internet use. According to the Public Opinion Foundation, the percentage of adult population using the Internet at least monthly has increased from 23% in 2007 to 46% in 2011, and of those doing it on a daily basis – from 10% to 33%. For younger people and educated urban population using the Internet has become nearly universal. Internet has risen in significance as a means of communication (primarily through social media, most prominent among them – Facebook, *Vkontakte* and Twitter), as well as a source of information and the only remaining channel for independent media in the country. All of the above made the Internet a powerful facilitator and booster of political activities in Russia, following the global pattern prominently displayed in the Arab World (Ghannan, 2012), Europe (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, Valenzuela, 2012), and elsewhere the former Soviet Union (Lysenko, Desouza, 2012).

Internet facilitates political collective action by several means and channels (see e.g. Anduiza, Gantjoch and Gallego, 2009), all of which have been present in Russia. First, it circulates relevant factual information, both collected at the grassroots and from movement organizers and opinion leader; second, helps coordinate logistical details such as time, venue, and format of political activities; third, by means of pre-registration provides an assurance of turnout and thus creates rational expectations sustaining a high-participation equilibrium; and fourth, produces network-based conventions that could be sources of peer pressure to participate in political activities.

The Internet could dramatically reduce the costs of political participation and increase its geographic scope. It offers effective opportunities for recruitment and could trigger “contagion” processes often observed in social networks. The Internet could shape or modify personal and group identities that would foster off-line political participation (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002). Garrett (2007) stresses the role of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) in affecting mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing structures of political movements (in the latter case ICT help articulate common objectives and agenda of a movement).

ICT advance group formation and retention and promote the sense of collective identity and belonging to larger communities where individuals share the same grievances. Web-based networks are less hierarchical and more resilient to attempts to suppress the flow of information than traditional social organizations and movements. Furthermore different channels and instruments of the web, such as internet sites, blogs, and social media, complement and reinforce each other by creating powerful synergy (Lysenko and Desouza, 2012).

Scholars of the Russian Internet (Runet) as a factor of collective action arrive to similar conclusions (Alexanyan et al., 2012). They notice the reduction of risks and costs of the participation in civic life and observe that "... the prospect of joining many like-minded individuals in expressing discontent with the status quo could mark a significant shift in the perceived benefits of engaging in civic and political affairs" (p. 4). While initial on-line expression of political protest is less risky (and costly) than off-line, it signals widespread discontent and makes subsequent off-line participation, through the mechanism described above, perceived as less risky, too.

The Russian history of digitally-based collective action started out well before the 2011-2012 elections, and includes numerous environmental, anti-corruption, disaster relief, community-building etc. campaigns. Of particular significance is the capacity of the Runet of "... bottom-up agenda-setting ... eroding the influence of the government in the overall media ecosystem" (p. 7). Such capacity is invaluable in providing an opportunity for collective action in an otherwise tightly controlled political and information space.

After the first post-electoral protest rally on December 5, 2011, the use of the Internet for political mobilization has become much more organized and systematic. Special Facebook and V Kontakte pages were opened to announce rallies' times and venues, and pre-registration counters displayed in real time the growing numbers of those who had decided to take part or were considering doing so. All other means of web-based communication were also deployed. As a result, according to Levada Center's polling, about 1/3 of rallies participants mentioned social media as a source of information about the event, and almost twice that many learned about the rallies from other Internet resources. The Internet was also used for debating the agenda and format of political actions (Volkov, 2012), and subsequently for selecting coordinating bodies of the protest movement.

Civic culture as protests' driver

Is there evidence that accumulation of civic culture played a role in the surge of political activities in Russia? At least two arguments support such claim. First, electoral fraud, perhaps of lesser magnitude, is by no means new to Russia (see e.g. Myagkov, Ordeshook, 2011), but at earlier elections it was tolerated by the society and did not result in public protests of any visibility and significance. It is likely that a value shift explains the dramatically different reaction last time around – new values are inconsistent with institutionalized electoral fraud.

The second argument can be found in the multiple indications produced by surveys of protest participants that civic culture is indeed widespread among them and motivates their participation, In agreement with Inglehart and Welzel (2005), VTSIOM's survey of the participants of June 12,

2012 protest rally revealed that 78% of respondents consider self-realization as an ultimate value which they put ahead of stability in life. In the same poll where representatives of the “creative class”, white collars and students were dominant groups, 42% were protesting against the present political system, and 18% were expressing their “civic position”(VTSIOM press-release 2056, 2012). A poll held by the Levada Center at a yet another protest rally, on September 15, 2012, revealed the following top concerns of the participants: disintegration of public institutions, corruption and theft in government (39%) and lawlessness, arbitrary actions of government, violation of rights and freedoms (35%). In the same survey, the respondents identified the following top priorities for Russia: independent court (44%) and free and fair elections (35%), ahead of the demands of social justice (33%) and equality of citizens before the law (32%). (Levada-Center press release, September 17, 2012). The clear emphasis on basic institutions maintaining rights, freedoms and administration of justice indicate high level of civic maturity.

A survey of over 600 participants of the *OccupyAbai* protest camp that was set in downtown Moscow in the summer of 2012 revealed these political priorities and preferences with stark clarity (Djachkov, Makar’in, Polishchuk, 2012). Over 90% of respondents mentioned the need to strengthen or protect fundamental institutions, such as courts, media, clean government, and voting rights as top priorities of their movement; the rule of law was mentioned most frequently. Such consensus over the vital importance of the institutional foundations of market democracy is particularly remarkable, given the social mix of the campers, over half of whom were young people (25 years and less) representing vastly divergent political views ranging from anarchism and Trotskyism to nationalism and monarchism. It is also noteworthy that while the *OccupyAbai* movement was quite obviously inspired by (and modeled after) its famous predecessor, *Occupy Wall Street*, economic problems and the demand for greater equality, dominant on the agenda of the *Occupy Wall Street* and its numerous replicas throughout the western world, were much less prominent in the case of *OccupyAbai*, being mentioned 2.5 times less frequently than basic institutional reforms (Fig. 3).

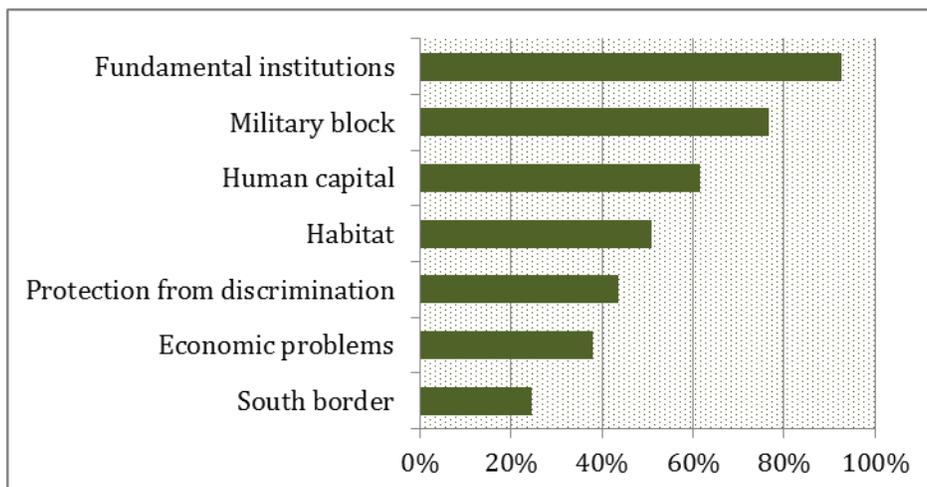


Figure 3. Concerns of *OccupyAbai* participants (% of the sample).

Peer pressure

It was argued earlier that participation in pro-social activities could be driven by a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic motives – the former reflecting individual's innate preferences and values, and the latter – responding to various external pressures and/or in anticipation of desired or unwanted feedback. An extreme version of extrinsic motivation is narcissism which is often observed by psychologists and sociologists studying protest movements (see e.g. Gitlin, 2012). There is evidence that higher narcissism rate and lower self-esteem predict higher levels of online social activity (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ryan and Xenos, 2011).

What was the intrinsic-extrinsic breakdown in the Russian political protests and were there evidences of narcissist behavior that would cast doubts over purity and sincerity of protesters' motives? As it was just stated, available survey data, including those supplied by Levada Center and VTSIOM, indicate the sense of civic duty, outrage over the electoral fraud, and disagreement with the political status quo more generally, as main motives of participation in political protests. It is possible however, that respondents were reluctant to acknowledge other, perhaps less noble, if not altogether embarrassing, rationales. To address the possibility of such bias, the authors in collaboration with Ruven Enikolopov and Maria Petrova conducted in June 2012 a survey of Russian Internet users, as well as those visiting popular web portals Forbes.ru and Slon.ru, to gauge their attitudes to political activities and rationales of those participating in political actions (Enikolopov, Makar'in, Petrova and Polishchuk, 2012). We used in the surveys the *list experiment* techniques which enable to draw statistically sound conclusions from non-randomized samples with possible selection biases. List experiments have become a popular tool of empirical studies in sociology and political sciences when there is a risk that even in anonymous polling respondents could be reluctant to elicit truthful answers to “sensitive” questions (e.g. on attitudes to minorities; see Blair and Imai, 2012).

Survey results have confirmed the hypothesis that the free-riding rationales (“I was doubtful whether it is worth my attending a rally since there would be a lot of people anyway”) played no noticeable role in the decisions to take part in protests or refrain from participation. Somewhat unexpectedly, the strongest *non*-participation motive was non-conformism (“I did not want to follow the fashion and join the crowd”) (Fig. 4), which is an indirect confirmation that political activities have become a social custom. This is particularly clear from the motives to take part in protest rallies, as revealed by list experiments (Fig.5). Almost half of attendees indicated that their decision was motivated by the fact that many among their friends did the same. 25% were motivated by the opportunity to tell about their participation to friends and acquaintances, whereas 10% were looking forward to sharing their participation experience through social media.

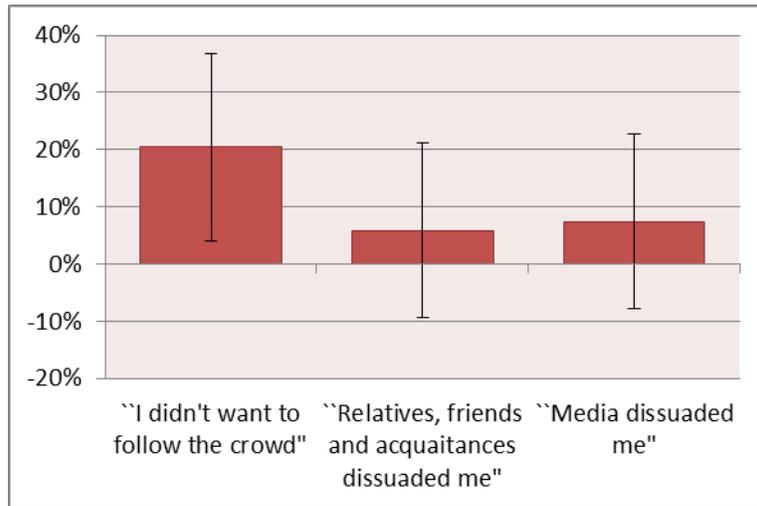


Figure 4. Rationales not to participate in the meetings (bars represent 10% confidence intervals).

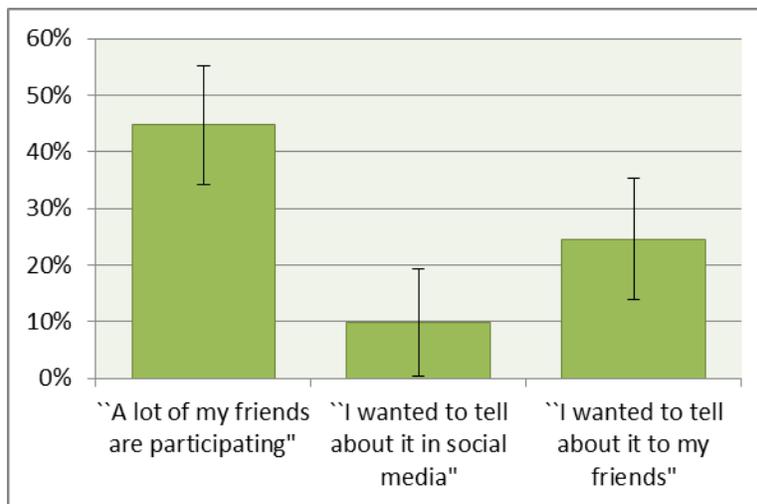


Figure 5. Rationales to participate in the meetings (bars represent 10% confidence intervals).

One way to interpret these findings is to view them as indication of herding behavior and widespread conformism, with some presence of narcissist motives. If true, these could be signs of volatility of the protest movement. However, another possible interpretation is that participation in political collective actions has acquired features of a social norm, at least in some segments of the Russian society, and, as it happens with other kinds of pro-social behavior, peer pressure creates powerful extrinsic motivation which reinforces and augments intrinsic ones, produced by cultural changes of a post-industrial society. It is true however that such "peer pressure booster" could turned out to be "pro-cyclical", increasing the amplitude of the protests' ebbs and flows.

Social capital and common cause

Social capital is usually defined as a combination of cultural traits, customs, and behavioral patterns that facilitate collective action (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 1998). Main ingredients of social capital are trust, values, and social networks. While social capital is usually considered as a valuable development resource, and vast empirical literature supports this view, this general statement is subject to a number of important qualifications. One of those is the distinction between bonding and bridging stripes of social capital (Putnam, 2000). In the former case social capital is confined to narrow groups with small radius of trust (Fukuyama, 1995), limited morality (Platteau, 2000), and exclusive social networks closed to outsiders (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000), whereas in the latter it is not restricted to small groups, norms are applied non-discriminately, and networks transcend social divides. Bridging social capital provides foundation for broad and inclusive coalitions which jointly produce “public goods” for the society, whereas bonding social capital facilitates self-organizations of narrow interests seeking exclusive “club goods” for group members.

Bridging social capital powers political participation that seeks institutions and policies serving encompassing societal interests such as accountable governance, efficient delivery of public services and nondiscriminatory protection of rights and freedoms. Bonding social capital is mobilized to pursue different kinds of political goals, i.e. policies that serve exclusive narrow interests of various groups and factions in the society. The distinction between political functions of bonding and bridging social capital and prevalence of those in a society is of critical significance for the quality of governance and democratic performance (see e.g. Putnam, 1993; Nannicini et al., 2011). In particular concerted actions of citizens across social divides are essential for defending democracy from “divide-and-rule”-type attempts to subvert it (Weingast, 1997). Is it also true for efforts to advance democracy currently underway in Russia?

Russian protests of 2011-12 were remarkable in their ability to unify political activists across the spectrum, including its fringes (nationalists, monarchists, anarchists and *antifa*). “Negative consensus” (Gel’man, 2012) among all oppositional forces that emerged before the last Duma election (“vote for any party other than the United Russia”) survived well into the post-election protest movement. Representatives of various political forces through their presence in the organizing committee of protest rallies and on the ground were able to reach an agreement over the preeminence and priority of the establishment of democracy and the rule of law in Russia (Volkov, 2012). Thus suggests the presence of bonding social capital as the driving force of 2011-2012 political actions.

The results of our aforementioned survey support this hypothesis. Survey data reveal distinct patterns of web connections and communication among the respondents, at least those who are Facebook users (for Live Journal and Twitter we have observed similar, albeit less pronounced, regularities). One distinction is in the number of Facebook “friends” and the number of “friends” with whom a respondent communicates on a regular basis – these are indexes of bridging social capital. Another one of the “density” of respondent’s “friends”, measured as the probability that two

friends chosen at random are connected with each other; high density is an indication of compact close-knit networks typical for bonding social capital.

According to survey results (Table 1), there is statistically significant positive correlation between the indexes of bridging social capital and participation in protest rallies, whereas such correlation with our proxy of bonding social capital is negative and also significant. Furthermore higher stock of bridging social capital amplifies peer pressure to join political collective action. Bridging social capital raises the expectation of cooperation in the society; bonding social capital has the opposite effect. Those with higher stocks of bridging social capital obtain information about protest actions from the Internet and day-to-day communication, and ignore official media sources; for those with higher indexes of bonding social capital the reverse is true.

Table 1. Table of correlations between Facebook usage variables and other variables related to the protests.

	Facebook: friends density	Facebook: friends number	Facebook: friends number regularly communicated with
Attended at least one meeting	-0.0660***	0.0704***	0.1100***
Number of meetings attended	-0.0717***	0.1039***	0.1542***
Friends' participation	unsignificant	0.3155***	0.2694***
Observed incidents of cooperation	-0.0751***	unsignificant	0.0564**
Source of protest information: TV/radio	0.0484*	-0.0955***	-0.0709***
Source of protest information: social media	-0.1063***	0.1328***	0.1116***
Source of protest information: everyday communication	-0.0602**	0.1875***	0.2095***

Source: data collected from survey on Slon.ru and Forbes.ru with the help of Timburon Research company

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The above findings unequivocally confirm that bridging social capital indeed provides a foundation for political protest movement in Russia. Increased prominence and significance of bridging social capital is a yet another telltale sign of cultural changes underway in the country, moving it away from the patterns of early 1990s when most of social capital was of obsolete "anti-modern" type (Rose, 1995) mobilized to find private alternatives to public institutions and services instead of raising voice to fix those institutions and demand better performance from government. It appears that cultural transformations not only increase the appreciation of rights and freedoms in the society, but enhance the *collective* capacity to defend those by political means.

5. Something happened ...

So far the string of public protests has produced rather limited results. Some of protesters' key demands – cancellation of the rigged election results and investigation and prosecution of those responsible for electoral fraud – were ignored. Although some political concessions have been made to stop the protest wave, such as the return of gubernatorial elections and simplified registration of political parties, they are unlikely to significantly upset the control of "vertical power" of the Russian political system. The presidential elections that took place on March 4, 2012 were mired with violations comparable, if not exceeding, those observed three months earlier at the elections to the State Duma. In the meantime protest rallies in Moscow (and elsewhere in Russia) were held regularly, and their turnout peaked at over 100,000 on December 24, 2011 on Prospect Sakharova and was in gradual decline thereafter. Regime's loyalists (and some opponents) increasingly often express the opinion that the protests have fizzled without any tangible impact.

While this could be true, the political campaign launched in December 2011 has produced perhaps *intangible*, but still quite important results – it has played a *signaling* role by affecting perceptions and expectations among the elites and the masses about the new level of empowerment of the Russian civil society and its increased capacity to act collectively in pursuit of its economic and political interests. Since strategic political behavior is based on the anticipated reaction – support or resistance – of various courses of action, changed expectations could be of direct practical significance.

According to Inglehart and Welzel (2005), "massive and intense freedom campaigns demonstrate civilian power against a coercive state, implying that the regime will be confronted with high suppression costs" (p. 218), and such upward readjustment of costs will enter into the elites' risks calculations. While there is no direct and systematic evidence that the Russian political establishment is yet in a process of such risk reassessment, our data indicate that, perhaps more importantly, Russian civil society's *self-signaling* was effective and has resulted in the civil society's greater confidence in its collective ability to be a political actor protecting its interests.

Indeed, the rallies have had a dramatic impact on the perception of their participants of the contemporary Russian society – full $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants covered by our web survey have reconsidered upward their expectations of the number of line-minded people around them. An upward readjustment, although of much smaller magnitude (20%) has also occurred in the general

Runet population. This compares to less than 5% of downward readjustment both for participants of the rallies and the general Runet audience (Fig. 6).

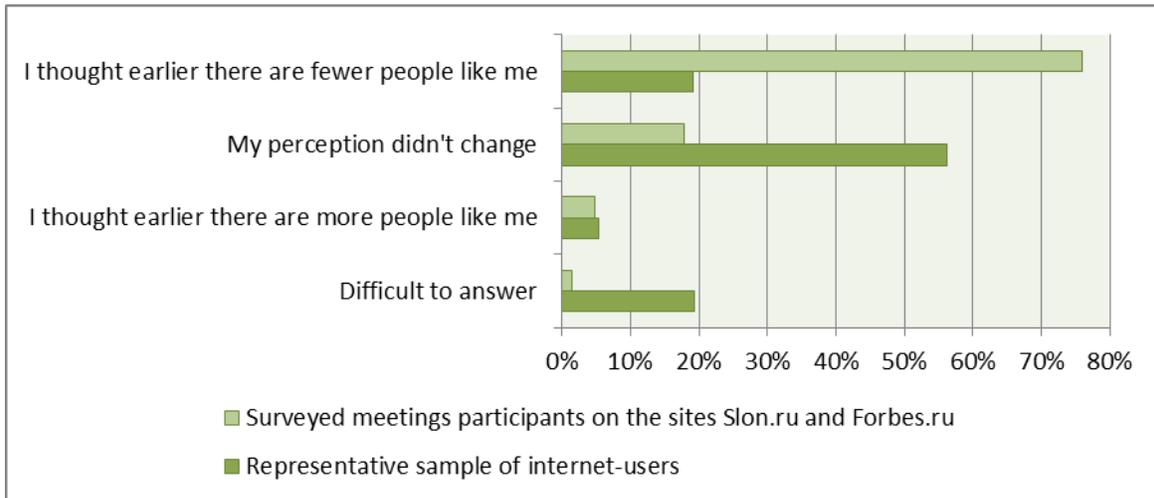


Figure 6. Have the meetings influenced your perception of the number of like-minded people?

Of equal significance is the reassessment of the capacity for collective action in the modern Russian society – by almost 80% of the for participants of the rallies, and 25% for the Runet in general. Almost no one among the participants has reassessed such capacity downwards, ; whereas for the Runet in general such reassessment was confined to 7% (Fig.7).

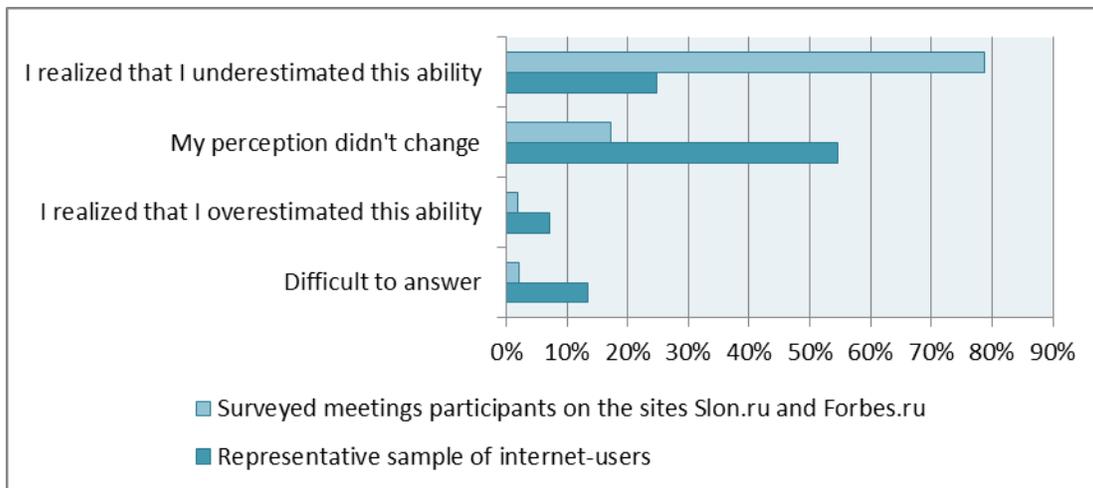


Figure 7. Have the meetings influenced your perception of cooperation abilities of the others?

Notice that social and political theories predict the change of individually held values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005) and the increased willingness and ability of individuals to work collectively in accordance to such values (Lipset; Shleifer Glaeser) as cultural outcomes of economic development and human capital; accumulation. Apparently both of those cultural change processes have been unfolding in Russia over perhaps as long as a decade, but neither elites nor masses were fully aware of their scope and pace. The rallies have made it public knowledge and reassured the Russian civil

society of the two key ingredients of effective political participation – the steeply increased incidence of modern civic values, and the increased ability of value bearers to act collectively for a common purpose.

Such awareness will be an important factor for future political collective action. Recall that the propensity to take part depends on the expected number of other participants, and after the rallies such expectations are much more optimistic than before. Put differently, the rallies have helped to move from a value shift to a belief shift, and this is going to significantly facilitate political consolidation in the future.

The belief shift alone however is insufficient to sustain political collective action indefinitely – it requires specific causes (“shocks”) to be triggered, or clearly articulated, credible and practical agenda. The protest campaign of 2011-2012 has exhausted the electoral fraud issue without any tangible results, and the haphazard coalition of social movements and activists was unable to offer a new agenda to sustain the movement. Alexei Navalny’s appeal to attend protest rallies routinely as one goes to work is unlikely to sustain the turnout, since “protests for the sake of protests” would add little to the signals already sent, and hence would be of limited “marginal value”.

New events capable of re-energizing the protest movement could be social, economic, political, or all of the above. It is conceivable however that the new beliefs alone could have far-reaching implications and effect economic and political behavior and eventually economic outcomes. Our survey has registered one striking example of such effect. More than 20% of those who took to the streets are less willing to emigrate from Russia than they were before the protest campaign, whereas 13% are more inclined to leave the country. The positive balance could be ascribed to the increased assurance of the capacity of the Russian civil society to play a more prominent role in shaping the country’s future, and hence of the greater attractiveness of such future for protest participants (Fig. 8). VTSIOM’s data also reveal a declined propensity to leave the country – in June 2011 39% of younger Russians were contemplating emigration, whereas in March 2012, at the peak of protest campaign, this number dropped to 25%.

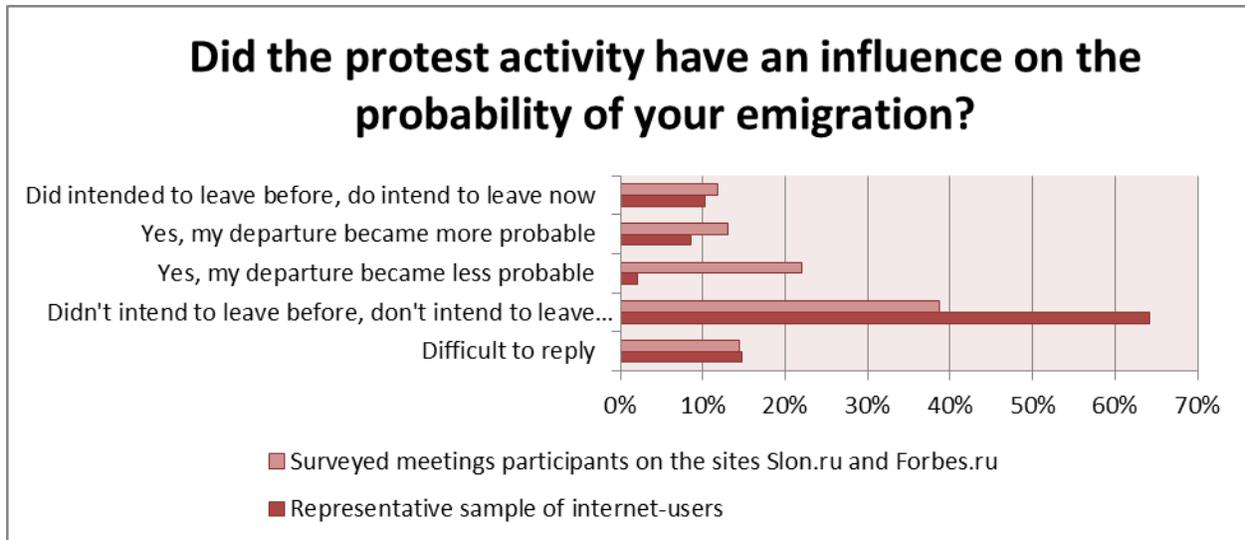


Figure. 8. Impact of the protest on the propensity to leave Russia

Elites could also be re-adjusting their expectations, taking into account the new social and, eventually, political realities. According to Inglehart and Welzel, "... elites [do not] operate in a vacuum ... their actions are usually conditioned by more deeply rooted social forces such as those tapped by mass self-expression values" (p. 211). At least some of economic and political elites could start factoring in a scenario with more political competition, greater government accountability, stronger rule of law and better protection of rights and freedoms. Such expectations could prompt elites' investments into the anticipated change, triggering a process of "institutiolization" involving courts, elections, legislatures, political parties, bureaucracy etc. (Tommasi, Scartascini, 2012) and changing those in the direction indicated by the newly empowered civil society.

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