Policing, Protests and Extrajudicial Coercion in Putin's Russia

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Abstract:

How do authoritarian regimes perform policing, and how does policing affect collective protest action? This paper uses Russian-language sources, and data on extrajudicial persecution derived from Russian sources, to scrutinize how policing in Russia has been conducted since the 2011/2012 electoral demonstrations. Unlike the case in Western democracies, Russian policing has become increasingly volatile, and the state has compensated for the lack of coercive mechanisms by centralizing and reorganizing its coercive institutions. This, in combination with the prolific campaign to reduce "leverage" (exposure to alleged Western influence), has put the regime on a solidly authoritarian path. In turn, this has reinforced the tensions between coercive capacity and coercive quality, as particularly evident in the policing against the 2018! campaign of Aleksey Naval'ny.

Key words: authoritarianism, policing, protest action

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Introduction

"Policing protests"[1] have gained increasing attention as a specific branch within the literature on social movements. In their broad study of police culture in Western democracies—the interaction between protesters and police—della Porta and Reiter found that protest policing has developed between two sets of opportunity structures: that of stable institutions and changes in police culture and traditions, and that of the "volatile set of political opportunities" arising from protesters dialogue, demands and strategies (della Porta & Reiter, 1998, p. 9). Coining the term "police knowledge" as a key intervening variable regulating the interplay between stable and volatile opportunities, these authors saw "policing" as a central feature in the emerging professionalization of power structures in Western democracies. As noted by G.T. Marx in his Afterword to this work:

> […] Within Western democracies, we have also come a long way in the
> institutionalization of a more tolerant and humane response to those forms of
> organized protest that stay broadly within the realm on non-violence […] protecting
> the right to protest against the political order is defined as the best way of protecting
> it—at least if the political order is broadly defined to involve a set of democratic
> principles, rather than the particular persons or groups in power (Marx, 1998, pp. 253–
> 254)

These assumptions clash solidly with policing practices in authoritarian regimes. First, there are few opportunities for protesters to mobilize and frame grievances; second, policing is

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[1] This term is defined as "police handling of protest events", and encompasses various police strategies to negotiate, defuse and passively contain demonstrations. This is seen as partly entailed in the "professionalization" of police forces, and partly as specific strategies adopted for dealing with escalating situations in situ (dellaPorta and Reiter, 1998).

often volatile, violent, and based on arbitrary use of law. Coercive and extrajudicial policing has become a trademark of transitional regimes that consolidate as authoritarian hybrid regimes. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, regime theories transited from expectations of "democratization" and the emergence of electoral democracies towards *hybrid regimes*—the rise of a "menu of manipulation" and a return to standardized schemes of authoritarian governance. Police oppression and media control stood out as central variables in regime governance; and theorists held that repression was, if not the most salient feature of the new regimes, then at least the ultimate force to be applied if soft coercion failed. To quote some of these works: "[...] electoral authoritarian regimes neither practice democracy nor resort regularly to naked repression" (Schedler, 2002, p. 36); "the state's main assets—that is to say, the state as a source of money, jobs, public information (via state media), and police power— are gradually put in the direct service of the ruling party" (Carothers, 2002, p. 12); incumbents employ coercive power—low intensity or high intensity—to weaken opposition forces and achieve the goal that "low-intensity coercion deter strong opposition forces from emerging in the first place" (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 70). Further, coercive force may be used "informally", by means of proxy institutions such as tax police or other units, to give repression a "legal veneer", enabling repression to be "presented to the world as enforcement of the rule of law rather than repression" (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 28).

This paper draws on assumptions provided in Levitsky and Way's (2010) model of competitive authoritarian regimes (CA) to show how Russia since 2012 has moved towards full-fledged authoritarianism. Decisive in this shift has been that regime's capacity to resist leverage by reinforcing numerous legal restrictions after the 2011/2012 protests.[2] Also

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[2] Examples of weakened leverage include the Law on Foreign Agents (2012) and the Law on Undesirable Organizations (2015), branding NGOs that receive international funding as "foreign agents", and certain named

important is that regime-directed policing has become increasingly comprehensive and massive, as well as more violent. While this could be seen as an ambition running continuously throughout the Putin presidencies—for instance, assuming that policing was a central strategy in Putin's rebuilding of the state apparatus after the Yeltsin period; or, as put by Brian Taylor: "Vladimir Putin made building of this strong state the central goal of his presidency, and he relied heavily on coercive organizations in this endeavor" (Taylor, 2011, p. 2)—coordinated opposition efforts, and the presence of social media, have made instances of policing by far more *visible* than before.

Some corollaries to the Levitsky and Way model are needed. First, contrary to the expectations of the CA model—according to which full-fledged authoritarianism implies that "basic civil liberties are violated so systematically that opposition parties, civic groups, and the media are not even minimally protected," and—subsequently—that "opposition activity takes place underground or in exile" (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 8), the domestic non-systemic opposition in Russia still poses a two-way challenge to the regime. As its mere presence indicates that the regime cannot rule out event-centred mobilization, it runs the risk of applying high-intensity coercion against demonstrators. Also, journalists' use of the social media, and their linkage with opposition mobilization, put the regime's use of coercive power on constant public display, thereby providing the opposition with material for media framing.

Second, "informal" pressures on the opposition forces have been expanded: demonstrators face widespread use of the administrative legal codex, enabling police forces to

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organizations as potential threats to the Russian constitutional order (Flikke, 2018b). In 2015, Putin also signed a Duma amendment to the Law on the Constitutional Court holding that any ruling from the European Court of Human Rights deemed to be in potential conflict with the Russian constitutional order (vaguely defined), can be overruled (Aleksashenko, 2019).

apply direct and extrajudicial coercion, as well as the open use of proxy gangs to intimidate demonstrators. This development reinforces the dilemmas of hybrid-regime policing. Proxy groups that identify with regime objectives are generally more violent and direct in their coercion, and brawls initiated by these outspokenly pro-regime groups have the potential of spiralling into larger events of violence. While coercive policing may involve deliberate use of these proxy groups, also with the explicit purpose of controlling them, this makes the ties of the coercive institutions to these forces more visible, and protest policing less controllable.

This paper aims not to modify CA theories, but to explore empirical evidence underpinning these two corollaries. I agree with Taylor that authoritarian "policing" is worthy of attention, and that it is not a constant: "law enforcement agencies deserve particular attention, both because of their importance, and because of their relative neglect in the statist literature" (Taylor, 2011, p. 11). Moreover, even when the coercive capacities of the state and the regime are considered high, policing is a variable that can affect the performance and perceptions of the regime. Such performance is subject to continuous reforms of the coercive mechanisms and institutes:

> […] the monopoly over legitimate coercion is not achieved once and for all but is rather continuously claimed and contested state power that can grow, recede, or collapse […] references to phases does not mean that only move in one direction […], they can, and do, also move "backward." (Taylor, 2011, p. 14)[3]

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[3] Taylor questions the frequently-made distinction concerning the possibly violent phases of "sovereignty politics": the rise of the state, and the "conventional politics" of maintenance, and claimed control over the state's coercive mechanisms. However, I feel that "policing" in an authoritarian context involves a high degree of "maintenance," entailing also the danger that coercive force may be applied extensively to quell unrest.

A final comment on the linkage to political violence is in order here. Public protests may prove decisive in outing hybrid-regime policing. Indeed, societal opposition events can serve to highlight these capacities, their degree of coerciveness and their impact on society at large. In this paper, I draw on Tilly's understanding of "prohibited performances" as explicitly banned demonstrations and public protests. These may be "non-approved" rallies (*nesoglasovannye mitingi*), spontaneous demonstrations, or "repeated unapproved rallies." While not claiming explicitly that the Russian regime is shifting from being a high-capacity authoritarian regime towards a low-capacity one in which violence is more widespread, I agree with Tilly that the Russian regime since 2012 has "narrowed the range of tolerated performances", perhaps giving rise to events of larger-scale violence (Tilly, 2003, pp. 50–51). This has "drive[n] claimants that have retained their own capacity to act collectively toward forbidden performances, and thus, toward encounters likely to have violent outcomes" (Tilly, 2003, pp. 50–51). However, the "forbidden performances" analysed here have all been peaceful and non-violent. Violence, it seems, stems from the application of regime-driven coercive force, and not from demonstrators.

Therefore, in this paper I systematically scrutinize empirical evidence of extrajudicial persecution initiated by law enforcement agencies against protest events in 2013–2014, and, more specifically, against the Naval'ny 2018! Campaign. My sources are the event chronicles in OVD-Info and Mediazona—two internet-based news agencies, the one initiated by journalist networks (OVD-Info)[4], the other by former Pussy Riot member, Piotr Verzilov

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[4] The *OVD.info* site is an independent human rights media project focusing on political oppression in Russia. It started as a social media project undertaken by the journalist Grigorii Okhotin, who had witnessed arbitrary arrests in the 2011/2012 electoral protest cycles. Cases of violations of individual human rights were published in social media under the hash-tag #OVD-news. The project rapidly developed into an information hub for all

(Mediazona), who in September 2018 became a victim of direct violence.[5] The first section of this paper draws on event-records collected by OVD-Info (available on the web) to provide a sketchy survey of events in 2013–2014, when event recording was in its nascent beginning. I also explore how the term "extrajudicial persecution" was launched by journalist networks to designate one of the primary tools of authoritarian policing. The second part of this paper provides a systematized record of all recorded events of detention, intimidation and fines against volunteers and leaders in the Naval'ny 2018! Campaign, starting from 13 December 2016 to 8 October 2018, drawn from the OVD-info newsfeed.[6]

Coercive Capacity after 2012: Blurring Routine and Exceptional Enforcement

In focus here is *event-recorded policing*, not a state-centred analysis of the structure and coordination of police forces, or their place in the governance of the Russian state and the Putin regime. Still, given the significant changes in the organizations of the state's coercive capacities after 2012, an update is warranted. Indeed, the state has claimed control over the institutions of coercive power also by re-organizing them; the most recent reorganization of

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arrests in Russia, and now conducts daily monitoring of all cases related to political oppression. Its major partner and beneficiary is the human rights organization Memorial, alongside with Public Verdict, which assists in legal consulting. Financing is based largely on donations and crowdsourcing. The project was started in December 2011 amidst the large-scale demonstrations against electoral manipulation and fraud. The site defines three specific branches of monitoring: freedom of speech, freedom of public meetings, and incidents of "political intimidation" (*Politpressing*) – incidents linked to pressure from power agencies, such as the police, the Centre for Combatting Extremism (Centre E), the investigative committee, FSB, the Procurator's Office, the courts, and the Federal Penitentiary System (FSIN). (Ovdinfo.org, 2018b; Soldatov & Borogan, 2017, pp. 141–142).

[5] In September, Verzilov fell into a coma. Later hospitalization and treatment in Germany showed that he had been poisoned by an unidentified substance (Smirnov, Tkachev, & Skovoroda, 2018).

[6] The coding of variables is presented in detail below.

the coercive apparatus has several important implications for post-2011 policing.

Opportunities for protest and dissent have waned since 2012, but opposition to Putinism now seems rooted in a new version of "Russianness" that defies these restrictions. Notwithstanding the regime's efforts to pin the blame for the 2011/2012 electoral protests on "foreign" states seeking to provoke a "colour" revolution in Russia, the reforms and practices fronted in authoritarian policing in the Federation since 2012 have their natural causes in domestic middle-class protests in urban areas, the radicalization of youth who have been losing opportunities for international travel, work and education, and the increasing budgetary costs of international sanctions following the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Indeed, the use of coercive power as well as the recent re-organization of the state's coercive powers have been directed to meet this *specific* protest phenomenon. Since 2012, the Duma has produced more than 50 legal amendments restricting the freedom of expression and the right to demonstrate. In addition, legal acts have re-organized and streamlined the coercive capacities of the state.

The most significant reform came with the establishment of the National Guard (*Natsgvardia*) in 2015. With Putin's former bodyguard, Viktor Zolotov, as the head of a 170,000-strong force designed to fight off street demonstrations (he was also given a ministerial position) checks and balances were emplaced on the government. Also, signals were sent to potential protesters that any deviation from the new set of legal restrictions would be met by a force that was highly trained to meet other challenges than routine policing. Mandated to interfere anywhere in the Federation, the National Guard has been deployed, *inter alia,* as riot police against truck strikes in Russia's Northern Caucasus regions. In March 2017, heavily armed National Guard forces pre-emptively arrested long-haul transport drivers that were preparing collective action against the Platon road-toll system

introduced in Moscow (Pashkova, 2017); and as recently as March 2019,[7] the Natsgvardia raided Moscow's "Food City"—the large Kaluzhka food market (Serkov, Demchenko, & Kostina, 2019). [8] This latter operation was followed by new raids at the shopping centres "Moskva" and "Sadovod" on 11 March 2019, ostensibly to detect illegal immigration and economic crime (Murtazin, 2019).

In sum, the establishment of the *Natsgvardia* has led to a blurring of what Taylor calls "routine" law enforcement blended with "exceptional" law enforcement (Taylor, 2011, p. 3). Organizationally, the *Natsgvardia* has immense powers, controlling the OMON, the internal police forces (MVD), special forces for rapid reaction (SOBR), and the coordination centres for national emergencies. Moreover, as of 2016, the extra-departmental property guard (*vnevedomstvennaya okhrana*) has been placed directly under the National Guard, thus making protection of elite property, individual elites, and strategically important infrastructure a primary task of the *natsgvardeitsy* (Martynov, 2016). In effect, this has meant that the MVD would cease to exist as a separate entity (from 2018), with the *Natsgvardia* supplanting numerous functions of the ministry.[9]

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[7] For an excellent discussion on collective action against this system, see (Østbø, 2017).

[8] An advisor to the Minister of Press in Dagestan encouraged harsh methods, calling for the National Guard to "shred the striking long-haul demonstrators" in the region (Snob.ru, 2017).

[9] The Kremlin claimed that it was not fully aware of the consequences of the re-organization. When questioned whether the *Natsgvardia* would duplicate other functions of various coercive institutions, among those the FSB, Peskov stated: "it's hard to say," but made it clear that controlling demonstrations was among the central functions of the Guard (Martynov, 2016). However, in 2017, Putin decreed that the National Guard should have its own holiday (23rd March), and since 2016, the Dzerzhinskiy Division of the Guard has played a central role in festivals dedicated to fostering patriotism among children and youth, a policy direction that has been active since 2006. (See (Fomina, 2016)

In combination with legal restrictions allegedly designed to reduce "leverage" (derived from the CA model) from the West (NGO legislation, legislation on Undesirable Organizations, media legislation and legislation isolating Runet from the global web), the reforms of the institutes responsible for coercion have clearly pushed the Putin regime in an authoritarian direction. However, such restrictions have not served to quell opposition and protest, and the increasing violence in policing has given protesters new opportunities to frame events as extra-judicial coercion and evident breaches of constitutional rights, as will be shown below.

Protest Networks and the Term "Extrajudicial Persecution"

Before the 2011/2012 electoral protests, there were few Russian-language sources that systematically recorded the rise in coercive policing and political violence in Russia. However, from 2013 and onwards, journalist networks like the Ovdinfo.org and Mediazona.ru have worked systematically to map violent events and events of extrajudicial persecution, as NGO-like lawyers' networks have also been doing. Central documents are the Ovdinfo.org report on political persecution in 2011–2014 (Ovdinfo.org, 2014b); a report by human rights and AGORA lawyer Vitalii Cherkasov, who works in St. Petersburg (Cherkasov, 2014); and a follow-up report written by Dmitrii Kolbasin, a public information specialist at AGORA (Kolbasin, 2018).

These recent reports all focus on the rapid rise in events when extrajudicial coercion and violence have been employed. The 2011/2012 protests and the 2014 annexation of Crimea are singled out as catalysts. For instance, the Cherkasov report indicates that the annexation of Crimea and the unrest in Kyiv inspired organized and violent groups such as the National Liberation Movement (*Natsional'no-Osvoboditel'noe Dvizhenie*, NOD), the Anti-Maidan movement, the Popular Council (*Narodnyi Sobor*, NS), Cossack units and

Orthodox patrols to perform scattered attacks on opposition volunteers, LGBTs and NGO representatives:

> The rhetoric of propaganda awoke aggression in separate layers of Russian society against those the state identified as "national traitors." This escalation has provoked the use of more dangerous methods for putting pressure on dissenters (*nesoglasnye*): threats of violence and physical attacks (Cherkasov, 2014).

The Cherkasov report recorded some 42 attacks, with 100 victims, in the course of 9 months in 2014, most of which were scattered attacks in connection with larger public demonstrations (Cherkasov, 2014). The report also noted multiple events of targeted violence. One such event involved a local ecologist from St. Petersburg, Aleksei Yarema, who was severely beaten up outside his home on 18 April 2014, and was later granted political asylum in France (Fontanka.ru, 2014). Also the follow-up report by Kolbasin noted a clear trend: "violence has become the new norm" of regime governance (Kolbasin, 2018). It noted 200 incidents of violence in 54 regions of Russia; in 2015, 21 incidents were registered, in 2016, 35; in 2017, 77, and in the first eight months of 2018, 80 – mostly as scattered attacks on activists in protest demonstrations (Kolbasin, 2018).

The Kolbasin report also noted a sharp escalation in violent rhetoric from named elite politicians and law enforcement bodies. Examples include the statement by Putin's Press Secretary Dmitrii Peskov, in the wake of the Bolotnaia demonstrations, that "violence against police will be retaliated with the smearing of protesters' kidneys on the streets" (Forbes.ru, 2012; Kolbasin, 2018), and the head of Putin's National Guard, Viktor Zolotov's infamous YouTube video, challenging Aleksei Naval'ny—then imprisoned—to a fist fight, where he

would "turn him into a juicy piece of minced beef" (Mediazona.ru, 2018c).[10]

Alongside with the registration of violent events, journalist networks have also registered events of extrajudicial prosecution (*vnesudebnoe presledovanie*), still the most frequently used method of coercion against demonstrators and protesters. Of these, the 2011–2013 and 2014 OVD-info reports are the most systematic. Operating with clear concepts, these reports signalled the start of regular monitoring of cases of coercive, unregistered violence, outside the framework of the Administrative Codex of Russian legislation.[11] According to the OVD initiators, systematic monitoring of incidents of extrajudicial persecution (*vnesudebnoe presledovanie*) was needed because such mechanisms are low-cost, prolific and can draw on bureaucratic structures and law enforcement structures with a broader repertoire to contain societal developments.

> […] Although the Russian legal codex is constantly amended and broadened in the interest of bureaucrats (*chinovniki*) and law enforcers (*pravookhraniteli*), the Penalty Codex and the Administrative Codex are considered to be too limited as instruments of pressure (*davlenie*). Moreover, the use of these levers leaves multiple documents and evidence. Extrajudicial persecution (*vnesudebnoe presledovanie)* is a far more flexible instrument allowing [the perpetrators] to achieve their aims without excessive bureaucracy (Ovdinfo.org, 2014b).

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[10] As noted in the Kolbasin report, Peskov defended Zolotov's statement by declaring that "any means" could be used to refute "insults and slander" (Rbc.ru, 2018a).

[11] The Russian Administrative Codex is a Soviet-era relic: a separate legislative codex, distinct from the Penalty Codex in stipulating shorter terms of arrest (up to 30 days), fines and other mild punishments for minor violations. See Hendley (2009).

The report launched the term "extrajudicial persecution" as a compound phenomenon, encompassing both violent action from semi-criminal groups and gangs (threats of violence, extortion, destruction of property, attacks and murder), and regime-sanctioned extrajudicial actions by select organs of power (the threat of removing juvenile protesters from their families, exiling foreigners, corporate raiding, and expulsion from schools or workplaces) (Ovdinfo.org, 2014b). In a more detailed list, the journalists identified 14 distinct events that would qualify for being included in the term: attacks with varying levels of violence; arson and destruction of property; preventive talks and intimidation; violent threats; firing and expulsion; corporate raiding; black PR; confiscation of residence permit; threats of losing parental rights; explosions at concerts; cyberattacks; blocking of internet content; restrictions on movement and pre-electoral machinations (Ovdinfo.org, 2014b).

I prefer a more simplified categorization. Extrajudicial persecution constitutes a substantial part of the regime's changing repertoire for suppression; and this also involves events of violence, especially from proxy-groups that sympathize with the regime. Hence, I follow Tilly's twofold definition of collective violence: physical damage inflicted on persons and/or objects (damage implies forcible seizure of persons or objects over restraint or resistance, violent arrests, street violence); and any such act involving at least two perpetrators of damage, with the violence resulting at least in part from coordination among those who perform it (Tilly, 2003, p. 3). In my view, this encompasses events of violence as physical attacks, property damage and excessive force during arrests.

Tilly's understanding of collective violence implies that demonstrators may also be involved in violent events, but in this paper I deal only with police coercion against protesters. There are two reasons for this: first, Russian post-electoral protests have by and large been

non-violent; second, Mediazona.ru and Ovdinfo.org do not map incidents of violence

involving demonstrators as initiators, other than events where regime-sponsored groups instil

provocations that may lead to more forceful arrests. Law enforcement agencies have tried to

prosecute resistance against arrests as "violence," but these cases confirm the volatile use of

law as extrajudicial coercion.[12]

In sum, in the case of Russia, the politics of extrajudicial persecution draws on violent

coercive action applied on the fringes of protest events that have not been sanctioned. Below,

I present the specific variables introduced to measure the effect of policing on collective

protests in Russia.

Extrajudicial Persecution Prior to and During the 2018! Campaign

When its report was issued in 2014, OVD-info was beginning its regular monitoring of events

of extrajudicial persecution (under the *#politpressing* column). A substantial part of the report

was based on nascent data collection from protest events. Table 1 below builds on data from

the first cycles of monitoring; I have coded 235 events collected by OVD-info, all from 2013.

The data were extracted from events monitored in four large cities; later, OVD-info discarded

this practice, and categorized events by federal subjects. The original variables made available

in the files have been kept; events are categorized as approved/ non-approved (*soglasovany*/

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[12] Regarding the use of violent proxy-groups to provoke violence on the part of the protesters, the Ovdinfo.org

report cautioned that it was difficult to establish direct connections between law-enforcement agencies and

violent groups. However, we can assume, with Tilly (2003: 35), that the Putin regime includes *violence*

specialists; further, that the general term "regime" encompasses also informal ties between actors that engage in

violence.

nesoglasovany), with event format, event topic, and organizer. I have introduced a separate variable, "mass-arrest," identifying all events where more than 10 persons were arrested.

Table 1: Organizers and Arrests 2013

		Arrests: fewer than 10 persons	Arrests more than 10 persons	Total
Organizer	Navalny campaign	6	1	7
	Political parties	5	4	9
	Cross-political groups/ committees	27	16	43
	Anti-globalist issue groups	8	2	10
	Nationalists	2	2	4
	NGOs	9	2	11
	Spontaneous/activist-initiated	122	29	151
Total		179	56	235

Legend: The data cover a total of 235 registered incidents in four cities throughout 2013. The cities are Moscow (170 events), St. Petersburg (42), Nizhniy Novgorod (19), and Voronezh (5).

Table 1 shows that political campaigning was not widespread in the immediate aftermath of the 2011/2012 electoral protests. Most mass arrests were conducted in cases with no single identifiable organizer, and as a rule, only where the action was not approved. Table 2 shows the number of arrests of more than 10 persons as a function of approved/non-approved events.

Table 2: Arrests and Authority Approval 2013

		Arrests: fewer than 10 persons	Arrests: more than 10 persons	Total
Authorization	Authorized	9	4	13
	Unauthorized	170	52	222
Total		179	56	235

The OVD-info data do not provide a complete picture of authoritarian policing from this period. Data from 2014–2016 are not available, and only some generalized conclusions are possible. Overall, the data indicate that spontaneous protests often ended in large-scale arrests, and that most events had not been officially approved.

In more general terms, however, event records of this kind indicate that there was a protest potential, and that the authorities would use severe coercive measures to curb protests. Indeed, the 2018! campaign proved this fully. Below, I analyse events derived from the OVD-Info newsfeed #politpressing containing event-based information collected by OVD-info and its 800-number hotline between December 2016 and October 2018. Table 3 builds on seven variables: mass arrests (arrests of more than two persons at large protest events), serious convictions, apprehensions and administrative punishment (up to 30 days), destruction of property (mostly campaign headquarters and confiscation of technical equipment/ campaign equipment), intimidation and fines, and blocking of social media/crowd-funding. These serve to narrow down the 14 variables indicated by Ovdinfo.org, also offering a more precise and case-oriented set of variables than the classifications of "authoritarian coercion" used by the Levada sociologist, Denis Volkov.[13]

Most of these events qualify as extrajudicial persecution, but, indicated above, some events qualify explicitly as *violence* (pursuant to Tilly's definition). Also, although coercion was directed at the 2018! Campaign, some events have involved other political groups, such as Yabloko, Open Russia activists, Vesna activists, Solidarity activists (Nemtsov's movement), and Sobchak activists. Table 4 shows the distribution of events directed at leaders and volunteers in the 2018! Campaign compared with events implicating other political

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[13] Volkov identify four categories frequently used as mechanisms of authoritarian coercion: 1) punishing leaders by putting them into administrative custody and/ or firing them from their jobs; 2) suppressing and paralysing civil society, making independent action more difficult; 3) suppressing independent media sources and other non-state sources (internet media); and 4) defaming activists to strip them of support and empathy (so as to prevent public resonance) (Volkov, 2015, p. 47).

groups and campaigners. Table 4 also contains information about the distribution of

extrajudicial persecution on two groups: FBK/Progress Party and 2018! Campaign leaders

(coordinators), and campaign volunteers.

Table 3: Incidents of Extrajudicial Persecution in the 2018! Campaign (2016–2018)*

Mass arrests (events/ persons)	Long-term convictions (person)	Apprehensions, detentions, administrative punishment (events)	Violence (police or violent groups) (events)	Destruction of property (stands, campaign HQs); confiscation of material (events)	Intimidation, interrogation, fines, psychiatric involvement, home visits (events)	Blocking of social media and crowd-funding (events)
69 (6,578)	12	741	74	181	837	31

Sources: The numbers of people detained in mass arrests in connection with major 2018! Campaign events are

derived from: (Bogdanova, 2017; Krasnikov, 2017; Mediazona.ru, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f,

2018b, 2018h, 2018i; Meduza.io, 2018a, 2018c; Novayagazeta.ru, 2018; Ovdinfo.org, 2017d, 2017f, 2017h,

2017i, 2017j, 2018d, 2018f, 2018g; Sonnaia & Vikulova, 2017); all other incidents from (Ovdinfo.org, 2014–

2018).

* The material is based on 1,584 reported events in 69 federal districts, labelled #Naval'ny and registered at

Ovdinfo.org in the period 13 December 2016– 9 October 2018. Although the 2018! Campaign was effectively

terminated 25 December 2017, when the Central Election Commission denied Naval'ny access to the elections,

collective action and extrajudicial persecution continued when the 2018! Campaign declared a "Voters' boycott"

in January 2018. The categories are not mutually exclusive: one incident may involve several elements of

extrajudicial persecution—intimidation, detention and/or fines; hence, the number of recorded events (1,861) is

higher than n = 1,584. When 10 or more persons were apprehended, the events are registered as "mass arrests".

Table 4: Extrajudicial Persecution of Volunteers, Leaders and Associated Groups**

Volunteer, leader, other groups

	Frequency	%	% valid	% cumulative
Volunteers	1009	63.7	63.7	63.7
Leaders and coordinators	389	24.6	24.6	88.3
Journalists	17	1.1	1.1	89.3

Other groups	136	8.6	8.6	97.9
Bystanders	6	.4	.4	98.3
Volunteers from other groups	7	.4	.4	98.7
Journalists and NGOs	20	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	1584	100.0	100.0	

** Table 4 builds on the statistics gathered for Table 3, but mass arrests are counted as events. The variables have been coded in an SPSS file, with additional information about implicated political groups. The SPSS file also contains information on geographic location of events (divided into the Federal cities St. Petersburg/ Moscow, plus the 8 Federal Regions of Russia).

These figures give an indication of the extent of extrajudicial persecution and violence instigated by law enforcement agencies. However, they cannot say anything about the involvement of politicized patriotic groups in collective violence events, or "thick descriptions" of detentions, arrests and intimidation. Below, I provide some documented examples of this, as well as evidence of possible points of connection between violent groups and agencies of law enforcement.

Example 1: Intimidation by Proxy—Charges against Volunteers and Bystanders
The Saltykov-Tsakunov affairs provide clear examples of the combination of intimidation and detention. These cases have a forerunner in the *Yves Rocher* case against the Naval'ny brothers, which resulted in the imprisonment of Oleg Naval'ny for 3.5 years, while Aleksei Naval'ny walked free. However, several times in 2014–2015, when the latter Naval'ny was gaining in salience and busily forging political alliances, his brother was put in isolation (SIZO) for trivial issues, such as hiding a piece of bread, or for getting out of bed too slowly in the morning. Here the prison authorities were exercising intimidation by proxy—targeting Oleg Naval'ny for minor offences was a calculated measure for putting pressure on Aleksei Naval'ny himself.

As collective action increased in early 2018, with the "Voters' Strike" (*zabastovka izbiratelei*) in January, law enforcement agencies tried to frame a young Naval'ny staff member, Konstantin Saltykov, for violence against the police. Saltykov was walking alongside Naval'ny along the main Tverskaia thoroughfare on 28 January, when police forces suddenly forced Naval'ny into a waiting car. Trying to prevent the violent arrest of Naval'ny, Saltykov was detained as well. On the next day, the young student was imprisoned for 30 days for not having followed the orders of a police officer, and for repeated participation in unsanctioned demonstrations (Mediazona.ru, 2018g). Only days before his administrative arrest of 30 days ended, however, the charges were changed, and Saltykov was placed in detention (SIZO) facing charges of alleged violence against the police. According to Mediazona.ru, it was the police who had beat Saltykov up while in custody. Moreover, documentation provided on Naval'ny's Twitter account shows that as the police were forcibly pulling Naval'ny off the street, Saltykov was trying to prevent this, and was violently detained as well.

In July 2018, the case against Saltykov started. He was one of two volunteers and activists charged with alleged "violence against the police". The second person—Mikhail Tsakunov—had been detained on 5 May in St. Petersburg, on similar charges, although he had not even been in the proximity of the demonstrations. The reason for his arrest was that he and his girlfriend had found an inflatable yellow rubber duck, the protest framers' most potent symbol of the Anti-Dimon demonstrations, and he had wanted to return this to the rightful owner. Upon arrest, he was immediately sent off to SIZO isolation and charged with Paragraph 318 of the Criminal Code (violence/ dangerous behaviour towards law enforcers) (Mediazona.ru, 2018g). Other activists had been arrested on similar grounds. In February

2018, a St. Petersburg activist was jailed for 25 days for displaying a yellow rubber duck in a window at the January demonstrations (Rbc.ru, 2018b).

The intention behind these cases is unquestionably to use young people in order to target Naval'ny and the 2018! Campaign. In September 2018, the NGO Memorial—itself targeted by regime intimidation—entered Saltykov's name on its expanding list of political prisoners in Russia (Mediazona.ru, 2018g).[14] In other words, the law enforcement agencies may have sought to use these as "signal cases" to other youth demonstrators, but it backfired. The event chronicles of Mediazona.ru and Ovdinfo.org have followed such cases closely, showing that the law enforcement agencies and the courts seem embroiled in numerous contradictions. The charges have also varied over time. On the one hand, the courts have relied on the testimonies of law enforcers to frame activists for violence against the police; on the other hand, in the Saltykov case, the law enforcer behind the charges tried to reach a settlement by demanding the sum of RUR 50,000 RUR in compensation from Saltykov for having inflicted "a bruise" (Mediazona.ru, 2018g). In October 2018, the procurator demanded imprisonment for one year (Ovdinfo.org, 2018c). As Saltykov had already spent ten months in SIZO, he was acquitted on 22 October (Meduza.io, 2018d).

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[14] The list of political prisoners in Putin's Russia is steadily growing. Memorial, supported by other NGOs, maintains an updated list of individuals (Memorial, 2018a). Anna Karetnikova, a former member of the Moscow prison observer commissions (ONK), leads this work. As stated on the programme page: "The creation of this program, which is dedicated fully to contemporary political prisoners in Russia, is conditioned by the political system of Russia, which has sown doubts about the validity of the Constitutional principles of independent courts. In the course of many years, we have seen how charges, court processes and convictions against civic activists have been falsified" (Memorial, 2018b). On the crack-down on the ONKs, see (Flikke, 2018a).

Example 2: Extrajudicial Persecution of FBK and Party of Progress Leaders

As indicated in Table 4, volunteers in the 2018! Campaign have borne the main brunt of organized extrajudicial persecution, but coercive violence against the leaders of the FBK has also been prolific. In the 2017 and 2918 campaign years, Aleksei Naval'ny spent about 160 days in administrative arrest; his campaign leader Leonid Volkov, more than 120 days (Meduza.io, 2017c), and FBK-member and Party of Progress leader Nikolai Lyaskin, more than 40 days (Ovdinfo.org, 2017e). Naval'ny has been apprehended on the streets by the police (28 January and 5 May 2018), while his campaign leaders have been snatched off the campaign trail by other agencies.

Law enforcement agencies have used other state agencies to frame, detain and arrest FBK leaders. One example is particularly illustrative—during and after the 28 January 2018 "Voters' Strike" demonstrations, law enforcement officers directed their attention towards the inner core of Naval'ny's FBK group. Already on 29 January 2018, the coordinators of Naval'ny's Moscow campaign headquarters, Sergey Boyko and Nikolay Lyaskin were arrested and were sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention, on grounds of repeated violations of the law on public meetings (par. 8, art. 20.2), and for tweeting calls to join the 28 January 2018 demonstrations (Mediazona.ru, 2018e). The police also put away the FBK lawyer Aleksandr Pomazuyev for ten days, arrested in the FBK offices, and Dmitry Nizovtsev, who was arrested while commenting the live streaming of the demonstrations (FBK, 2018). Police broke into the FBK offices at 9:00 am and simply pulled Nizovstev and Malakhovskaya from their chairs during the actual broadcast. The charges were "disobeying police orders" (Art 19.3).

The raids continued. On 19 February 2018, the police put FBK director Roman Rubanov behind bars for ten days. Arrested at Sheremetevo airport, Rubanov was charged with violating the law for public meetings (Para. 2, Art. 20.2). The procedure was identical to the one used against Yarmysh and Shavedinov: both were inspected by customs officials, and then arrested on grounds of violating the law on public meetings, formally for having planned and conducted the 28 January demonstrations (Mediazona.ru, 2018f).

On February 22 2018, also Leonid Volkov and Aleksey Naval'ny were arrested. Naval'ny tweeted that morning that he had been to his dentist, and, as he was leaving the dental office, seven policemen told him to come with them to the nearest *raion* department. Naval'ny tweeted laconically: "I had a toothache, went to the dentist. Came out and – hello, this is the 2nd operative detachment. You are under arrest. They are taking me to some place" (Mediazona.ru, 2018j). Naval'ny was let off after the police compiled a report indicating "violation of the law on repeated demonstrations", an amendment to the Criminal Code introduced in 2012.[15] According to that paragraph, as the editor of *Novayagazeta.ru* noted, Naval'ny could at any time be called into court, and sentenced to 30 days of administrative detention – as he was in August 2018 (Martynov, 2018). As for Volkov, he was arrested at the airport en route to Ufa, charged with "violation of the rules of organizing public meetings", another amendment in the Criminal Code from 2012.[16] Unlike Naval'ny, Volkov was taken directly to court and sentenced to 30 days in prison. The formal reason bordered on the

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[15] The amendment – paragraph 8, article 20.2 – was inserted into the Criminal Code (KoAP). Under the first draft of this law, the maximum punishment was set to five years; a Russian street activist, Ildar Dadin, had been convicted to three years under this paragraph. He was released in early 2017, and the maximum sentence under the amendment was modified to 30 days' administrative arrest or RUR 150,000–300,000 for citizens.

[16] The amendment stands as Paragraph 2, Article 20.2 in the Criminal Code.

absurd: Volkov was convicted for having re-tweeted a video of the arrest of Naval'ny on 28 January 2018 – in essence, for making it widely known that Naval'ny had been taken, against his will, and imprisoned for 10 days (Mediazona.ru, 2018a).

The January/February action had effectively put behind bars the entire FBK leadership group, as well as Naval'ny's closest campaign officials, Boyko and Volkov. What followed was a classic hybrid regime hijacking of a core resource, Naval'ny's party, the Progress Party. Unlike earlier instances, where the Kremlin had set up spoiler parties to confuse voters at election time (Kynev, 2015), the revolt came from the "inside". The Progress Party was not formally registered as a party, and could thus not run in elections. Moreover, Naval'ny had hedged his bets by building coalitions with existing parties, thus using their resources without exposing his own. Now, however, with Volkov, Yarmysh and Rubanov out of circulation, Naval'ny's former assistant presidential campaign leader, Vitalii Serukanov, posted on his Facebook site on 22 February 2018 that he had submitted a petition for registration of a "Progress Party", a substitute party by the same brand-name as the party Naval'ny himself had long tried to register (Meduza.io, 2018b). Serukanov denied that this party had anything to do with Naval'ny's. Rather, he suggested, the resources of the new party should be drawn from the Civic Position Party of the political technologist, Andrei Bogdanov, who had been instrumental in dismantling both Kasyanov's 2008 presidential ambitions and thwart his attempt to gather all democratically inclined forces around the Union of Right Forces, SPS (Horvath, 2013, pp. 164–170).[17]

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[17] As early as in 2005, Kasyanov was looking for a political party he could use as base for his emerging presidential ambitions: he chose the Democratic Party of Russia (DPR). Bogdanov, then chairman of the party's Central Committee, brought Kasyanov down by packing the 30 November DPR Congress with members from United Russia. Bogdanov also bribed candidates directly to vote against Kas'yanov. Later Bogdanov turned the

Both examples above show the concerted use of extrajudicial persecution in the 2018!

Campaign. In addition to well-established hybrid regime tactics like bureaucratic red tape and

party hijacking, grand-scale use has been made of extrajudicial detentions and attempts at

framing activists and volunteers to dismantle the Naval'ny challenge. The evolution from

spoiler parties to orchestrated raiding of the party from the inside seems conditioned by the

increased use of extrajudicial persecution and violence: In turn, that represents a fundamental

turn away from the assumption of hybrid regime governance—the regime utilizes dubious law

enforcement practices to neutralize a coordinated political challenge. As Naval'ny's actions,

the latest (as of this writing) held on 9 September 2018, continue and evolve, Ovdinfo.org

keeps track of the court cases against what are predominantly young people (Ovdinfo.org,

2018e). Extrajudicial persecution figures in most of these cases—young persons are put in

administrative detention, and then, re-arrested upon leaving. In the follow I examine the use

of violent groups against mass mobilization events, showing how these groups act in

coordination with the law enforcement agencies.

Extrajudicial Persecution and Violent Regime-Sponsored Groups

As mentioned, Ovdinfo.org has noted that some violent groups are sponsored by law

enforcement agencies. On the one hand—these reports hold—these groups respond to

"signals"; on the other hand, they operate with a considerable degree of autonomy. Further,

the reports identify several organizations that are under some kind of auspices on the part of

law enforcement agencies. These organizations should be considered perpetrators and

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DPR into what Horvath has termed a "hitman party", whose sole function was to discredit competing liberal and

democratic alternatives, like Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces, and the Republican Party of Russia.

initiators of extrajudicial persecution and violence, and they work side by side with law enforcement agencies.

Many of these groups had been active before the 2018! Campaign. Of those mentioned in the Ovdinfo.org article on "Titushki" groups in the Russian Federation (Ovdinfo.org, 2015d), the South Eastern Revolutionary Bloc (SERB) seems the most organized one. Formed around a Ukrainian-born Russian, Igor Beketov (aka Gosha Tarasevich), SERB has since 2015 been actively involved in several violent encounters with activists and demonstrators. In 2015, the SERB unit largely of pro-Russian violent entrepreneurs who had fled from Eastern Ukraine (Ovdinfo.org, 2015d). In May and August 2015, SERB activists instigated brawls at the Nemtsov-movement Solidarity's peace demonstrations (for peace in Ukraine); in 2016, they threw a cake in Naval'ny's face, threw faeces on the *Novayagazeta* journalist, Yuliia Latynina, and poured urine on the photographs exhibited in a Jock Sturges event in Moscow, and in 2017, they threw a green detergent substance in Naval'ny's face, nearly blinding him, and tore down the Nemstov memorial plaque on the block of flats where he lived (Meduza.io, 2017b; Ovdinfo.org, 2015b). In the 5 May 2018 "On Nam ne Tsar'" ("He's Not Our Tsar") demonstrations, SERB activists were also active on the fringes, operating in tandem with other violent groups and National Guard units (Litoi, 2018). The police have not investigated any of these incidents. An article produced by Meduza.io indicated that the SERB units were under the direct supervision of operatives of the Center E, a law enforcement agency mandated to (allegedly) fight against extremism (Meduza.io, 2017a).

Of other violent groups that practise extrajudicial and unsanctioned violence and persecutions, the most important ones are the National Liberation Movement (NOD) and the "Anti-Maidan" movement. The dividing lines between these and other groups are blurred.

Igor Beketov started out as a NOD activist, and was active in starting brawls at the 2014 Peace March *(Marsh mira)* (Ovdinfo.org, 2014a). One year later, however, he was arrested as a leader of SERB (May 2015) (Ovdinfo.org, 2015b). However, this is not so much a case of different organizational labels as of a shared mode of operations. NOD has engaged in activities similar to those involving SERB. It engages in provocations (at the Nemtsov Memorial, and on the fringes of larger non-systemic opposition events), and created situations where civic activists are accused of violent behaviour (Ovdinfo.org, 2015a), and has also threatened minority groups. In 2015, an LGBT activist received massive threats from the movement, and defected to Spain, where she was granted political asylum (Ovdinfo.org, 2015c). NOD activists have also appeared at anti-Platon solidarity strikes organized by intellectuals and sympathizers. At one such demonstration held in April 2017 in St. Petersburg, NOD activists positioned themselves close to demonstrators and helped the police to disorganize and arrest six picketers— mostly artists and intellectuals. The NOD activists were not detained, but seemed to be acting in concert with law enforcement agencies (Ovdinfo.org, 2017g).[18]

While the SERB group allegedly has ties to law enforcement agencies, NOD has received open support and endorsement from Duma deputies. Evgenii Fedorov from the United Russia Party has sponsored the movement from the onset; the movement has returned the favour by posting numerous interviews with him on their site (Rusnod.ru, 2018). Moreover, the NOD claims to have many sponsors; its homepage displays the insignias of numerous patriotic organizations, including militant veteran organizations and bikers' clubs.

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[18] According to Russian law, there must be at least 100 meters between picketers. The NOD activist was standing 20 meters from the artist Evgeniia Kulakova, and the police towed her in for this.

True, only a minor share of the incidents in the data collected has involved these perpetrators. Between September 2015 and October 2018, Ovdinfo.org had 64 registered news items involving provocations and brawls with SERB participation, and some of these were directed at non-systemic opposition movements, such as Nemtsov's Solidarity. As for actions committed after the onset of the 2018! Campaign, the most visible attack was the above-mentioned SERB attack on Naval'ny in April 2017. Later in 2017, Naval'ny claimed that there had been four SERB activists involved; he sent a request to the Investigation Committee demanding that their ties with the Center E should be investigated (Ovdinfo.org, 2017b). Lyaskin was also attacked by an unaffiliated perpetrator in September 2017 and received a severe concussion (Mediazona.ru, 2018d). SERB activists have conducted these attacks with impunity. Ovdinfo.org undertook an independent investigation of the April 2017 attack on Naval'ny, and identified the perpetrator as a SERB activist (Ovdinfo.org, 2017c). SERB activists have also found other ways to intimidate the 2018! Campaign. In 2017, they filed a case against Naval'ny for having "spoiled" their celebration of 12 June 2017—Russia's Independence Day, after the election of Boris Yel'tsin as Russia's first President. The SERB leader demanded RUR 1 million RUR in compensation for alleged "moral damage" (*moral'ny ushcherb*) (Ovdinfo.org, 2017a).

After December 2017, when Naval'ny was denied registration, the activities of these groups appear more coordinated. With the two most recent 2018! Campaign events—the Voters' Strike on 26 January, and the "On Nam ne Tsar'" demonstration on 5 May—SERB and NOD activists have been working on the fringes, seeking to provoke violence and frame demonstrators who were later detained by the police. Among those arrested in January, some have been singled out as having been "violent" following "testimonies" from SERB members (Sonnaia & Vikulova, 2017). At the May 2018 protests, these groups took direct action,

working alongside the MVD and Rosgvardiia units in violently dispersing and detaining demonstrators (Litoi, 2018).

SERB has also made numerous attacks on the Nemtsov Memorial. Since 27 February 2015, the place where Boris Nemstov was assassinated has become an important site of mourning and memory for liberals in Russia. The assassination of Nemtsov gave rise to the largest collective action marches in Moscow throughout the period 2015–2018, and served as a unifier of the non-systemic opposition in 2015–2016 (Belyayev, Sabitova, Tirmaste, & Tikhonov, 2016).[19] The Nemtsov Memorial has had broad appeal as a place where Russian citizens can show genuine feelings of sorrow and mourning over the loss of a politician; for regime-friendly patriotic and violent groups, its sheer existence is the red flag waved in front of an angry bull. Moreover, city renovation units, local police and violent entrepreneurs have worked in concert to remove flowers from the site, threatening members of the public who have been protecting it, and demolish and remove photographs, letters and toys that have been placed there. The regime and its sympathizers apparently see the commemoration of a politician who served Russia in the Yeltsin period, and who had consistently warned against

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[19] After the murder, the RPR–PARNAS and Naval'ny's unregistered Progress Party found common ground and adopted a joint electoral strategy to nominate candidates in the 2015 local elections and the 2016 Duma elections. However, local electoral commissions in the five regions where the coalition planned to run sabotaged the nomination processes, and the coalition was allowed to campaign only in Kostroma. As for the 2016 nomination process to the Duma elections, the regime-friendly media channel NTV aired intimate videos of PARNAS-chairman Mikhail Kasyanov and a party secretary having sex, thereby sowing deep and lasting resentment in the ranks of the young politicians in the Naval'ny camp. Moreover, the electronic nomination procedure of coalition candidates planned for April–May 2016 was hacked, and the names of all voters were displayed openly on the Internet.

the violence inherent in Putinism, as intolerable and dangerous. Table 5 below summarizes these attacks, 2015–2018.

Table 5: Violent Attacks and Extrajudicial Action at the Nemtsov Memorial (2015–2018)

Period	Random violence against memorial guards	Police arrests/ detentions/ destruction of the memorial	Violent events causing death
9 May 2015–8 September 2018	12	33	1

SERB activists were involved in several of these attacks. The law enforcement agencies have rarely interfered with their violent action and behaviour, one exception being the arrest of Igor Beketov after attacks on *Solidarity* activists picketing for peace in Ukraine in 2014 (Ovdinfo.org, 2014a). Since then, SERB activists have operated with impunity, and with the deliberate intention of provoking fights. For instance, in 2015, SERB activists approached the memorial and started to provoke the civic guards who were protecting it from demolition by "city renovation" units. One guard recalls:

> On that cold day in March, a group of activists of both sexes came to the bridge and started to tether St. George ribbons to the memorial. They uttered slanderous and provocative things about Nemtsov and the volunteers guarding the place. When I started to remove the St. George ribbons, I was framed as a "Bandera-adherent" and a "fascist". One of the assailants made a move towards the photos and memorials to Nemtsov, and one of ours, Sergei Vyborov, tried to shield them, fearing that they might be damaged. The SERB activist was furious and grabbed his hands; both fell towards the parapet. Some female activists came to the rescue of the aggressor. They grabbed the other volunteer at the memorial and hindered his movements. When we

tried to release their grip, the female SERB activists started to scream that they were

being attacked (Ovdinfo.org, 2015a)

This brawl reveals the *modus operandi* of the provocateurs. Using regime-sanctioned

symbols, they deliberately provoke civic activists into quasi-violent situations which are used

as pretexts for arresting the volunteers. In 2018, the extent of coordination between such

violent entrepreneurs and law enforcement agencies became more evident. At the 5 May 2018

protest, for instance, Anti-Maidan leader Anton Demidov was spotted among the

demonstrators (Litoi, 2018). When the police units started making arrests, the pro-Kremlin

forces provoked brawls on the fringes of the demonstrations, and even assisted law

enforcement agencies in detaining activists (Litoi, 2018).

Some violent groups have remained anonymous. In October 2018, unknown

perpetrators placed the head of a sheep and a funeral wreath at the door of *Novayagazeta.ru*,

warning the editors and the staff of the consequences of continued coverage of protest events

(Ovdinfo.org, 2018a). Regardless, there is ample evidence that violent groups and

entrepreneurs do participate in extrajudicial persecution in Russia. Whereas the exact nature

of their ties to law enforcement agencies is subject to constant speculation and rumours, their

operations have served the purpose of demolishing the Nemtsov memorial, intimidating and

framing the volunteers guarding it, and assisting law enforcement agencies in performing

extrajudicial detentions and arrests. And finally, they have tipped off law enforcers about

alleged breaches of the Law on Foreign Agents (2012/2014).

Conclusions

In this paper, I have provided well-substantiated evidence of the extensive use of extrajudicial

persecution and the rise in violent policing in Russia, noting in particular the careful records

available in the event chronicles of Mediazona.ru and Ovdinfo.org, coupled to the latter's

initial definition of "extrajudicial persecution." A supportive theoretical framework has been

found in the distinction between competitive authoritarian and authoritarian regimes, and

Taylor's (2011) distinction between coercive capacity and quality. Although I have not found

evidence that Russia—to paraphrase Tilly (2003)—has passed from a high-capacity

authoritarian regime towards a low-capacity authoritarian regime, there has indeed been a

transition towards more widespread and unsanctioned use of violence. Protest actions have

served as "forbidden performances" that have repeatedly entailed violent policing, and

centralization and reorganization of the regime's coercive capacities (Tilly, 2003, pp. 50–51).

The "forbidden performances" specifically analysed in this paper are activities and

efforts to uphold a liberal (and nationally oriented) memory policy (the Nemtsov Memorial)

and a non-systemic opposition campaign effort: Aleksei Naval'ny's 2018! Campaign. Such

campaign efforts have not been violent. Quite the contrary: since the Bolotnaia Square

demonstrations in 2012, when Naval'ny and affiliates arranged a spontaneous sit-down action

in order not to be involved in police provocations caused by deliberate crowding around the

metal detectors placed around the square, the non-systemic opposition has taken great care not

to engage in any violent encounters in its collective actions.[20] However, collective action has

triggered violence and extrajudicial persecution on the part of law enforcement agencies and

coordinated actions from violent groups with ties to these structures. In this paper the focus

has not been on the solidity of ties between law enforcement agencies and state organs on the

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[20] The non-systemic opposition paid due attention to the Bolotnaia events in spring 2015, when hosting a round-table concerning an international report on police violence and provocations at this city square. The report had been written by an international investigation team with OSCE participation, which started work in 2013 (Zhelezneva, 2013).

one hand, and violent groups on the other: my point is simply that violence and provocations from these groups can proceed without reprisals from the law enforcement agencies, and the perpetrators can engage in numerous violent actions, whereas civic activists face the severe threat of long-term imprisonment for "repeated violations" of the Law on Demonstrations.

A major finding is that the empirical data, as well as indirect observations stemming from thorough readings of primary source material in the event chronologies, run contrary to expectations generated by widespread theories of hybrid regimes. These theories have held such regimes are careful not to apply excessive pressure on activists and demonstrators, and that the political and electoral fields are kept under tight surveillance. With contentious politics becoming increasingly salient, driven forward by the Naval'ny campaign, evidence of targeted regime-sponsored violence has grown substantially.

This also gives rise to a final point about the consequences of increased collective violence. As *Novayagazeta.ru* journalist Kirill Martynov stated in the spring of 2018: "The opposition sits in custody, their unregistered party brands are being stolen. Why are such measures necessary in a situation where you have an absolute majority of voters and no real challengers in the elections?" (Martynov, 2018) Here I have indicated that the regime, by default, has moved towards excessive violence. Agreeing with Tilly that there are differences in how high-capacity authoritarian regimes and low-capacity authoritarian regimes deal with collective action, I hold that Russia has ended up in a grey zone between the two. This challenges assumptions that hybrid regimes are capable of controlling collective action only by means of selective justice and intimidation. Today's Russian regime has become increasingly prone to use extensive coercive power to quell political protests.

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