

# Can Independent Media Help Autocrats Suppress Mass Protest?

Anton Sobolev<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UCLA

CERS-HSE, Moscow 2018

# Fake agents

- Kuran (1989), Lohmann (1994): the role of public signals in political behavior
  - The key factor of the decision to act: the ability to learn the distribution of preferences
- “Fake agents” generate informational noise and can complicate political learning

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AT PUSHKIN  
SQUARE. WHAT SHOULD  
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VLADIMIR PUTIN, 2000





СВОБОДУ  
ЭДУАРДУ  
ЛИМОНОВУ



ქვეყნის  
სიღატაკის  
შეწყვეტა













Thread Starter

2 replies to this topic  
Total number of posts: 0  
Registered on: 12/24/2012

21.02. The protest rally Antimaydan.Kr.kr. 300

□ **Irina Z** a » February 19, 2015, 23:40

21.02. Procession-the meeting is authorized under the auspices of the Kr. cross  
**Anti-Maidan "We will not forget . "**

Pick up metro Pushkin 11:45 Up to 15 hours maximum.

We are waiting for everyone who is with us.

Last edited by **Ирина** a on Feb 20, 2015, 20:46; edited 5 times in total.

Classmates <http://ok.ru/komandakastingvariant>

Vkontakte <http://vk.com/club82644710>

Facebook facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/kastingvariant/>



1 replies to this topic  
Total number of posts: 1  
Registered: June 26, 2013

Re: 21.02. The protest rally Antimaydan.Kr.kr. 300

□ **Zibareva Ekaterina** » February 20, 2015, 00:03

Good evening!!!

Write us, please !!! 🍷

We are from the Luhansk People's Republic the hero city of Stakhanov !!! 🍷

. Ekaterina 26 years old

. Anzhelika 39 years old

89 28

Our arrival is 100% !!

Thank you !!! 🍷



**igor123**

1 replies to this topic  
Total Messages: 8  
Registered: July 1 2014

Re: 21.02. The protest rally Antimaydan.Kr.kr. 300

□ **igor123** on **Wed** Feb 20, 2015, 00:18

Born in 1969

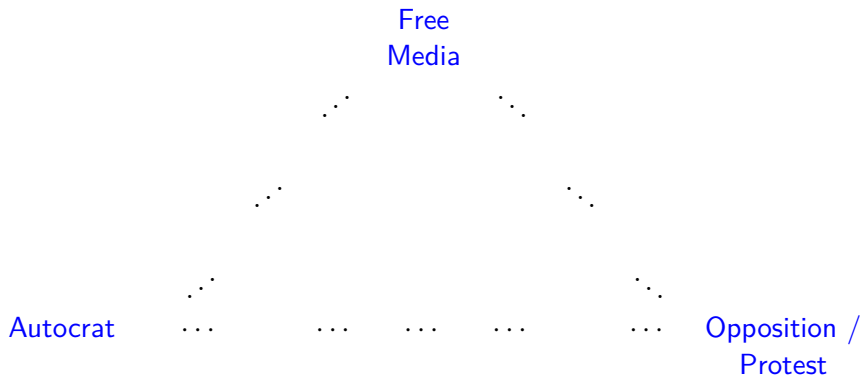
Height 175, size 52, shoes 41

Moskvich, m. Altufevo

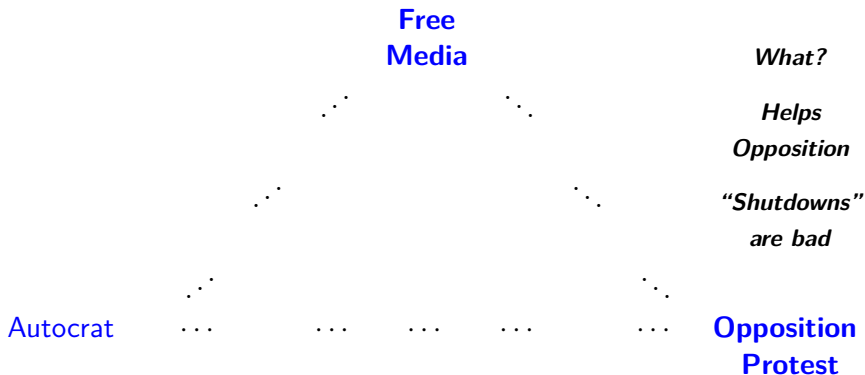
Work with text

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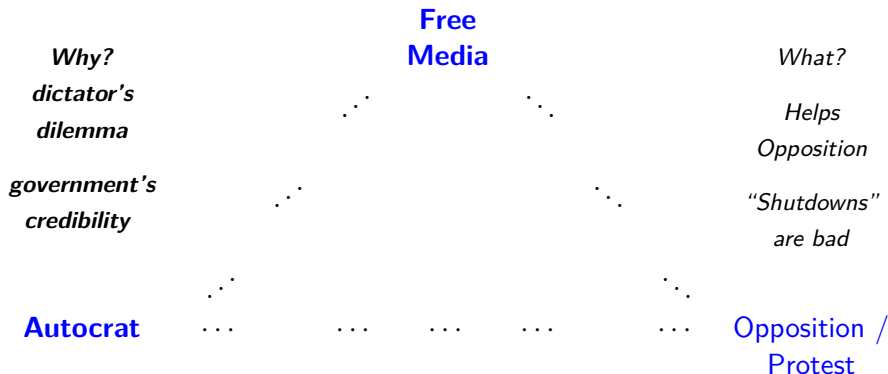
# Autocrats, Media and Opposition



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- Media freedom comes a price:
  - Monitoring capacity
    - state officials, citizens
  - Government's credibility
    - Economic actors, International community

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- Price: negative attitudes ↑ & protest capacity ↑



# This paper

## • Idea

- Some media freedom can help autocrats to forestall anti-regime collective action
- Signal popularity (by staging pro-regime rally)
- Conditions:
  - Media are allowed to transmit observable signal truthfully
  - But cannot conduct independent journalistic investigations

# This paper

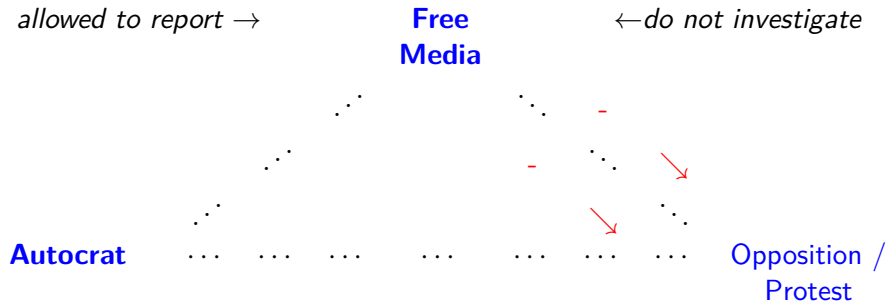
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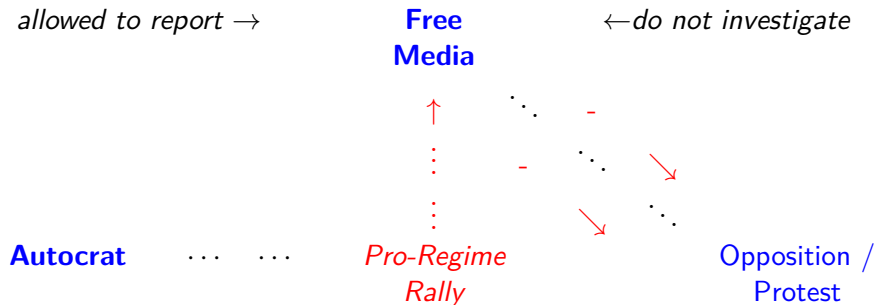
## • Empirical Test

- Local availability of independent radio station *Echo of Moscow* in Russia
- Change in protest activity of dissidents after a pro-regime rally took place in February, 2012

# Argument



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# Mechanism: *Incumbent and Dissidents*

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- ***Incumbent***

- stages pro-regime rally
- popular, moderately unpopular, very unpopular
- True supporters come for free, others - bribed or coerced

- ***Media***

- Independent VS State propaganda (always reports high pro-regime turnout)

- ***Dissidents:***

- Do not believe state propaganda, believe independent media
- Cannot distinguish popular from moderately unpopular (+ bribes)

# Russia's Protests 2011-2012



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-38266529>

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# Russia's Protests 2011-2012

## *Echo of Moscow*



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# Echo of Moscow



# Echo of Moscow

- Independent media usually depend on outside financial sources
- *Echo of Moscow* is profitable
- Broad regional network: 42 cities
- Decision to open the local branch depends on the size of local audience



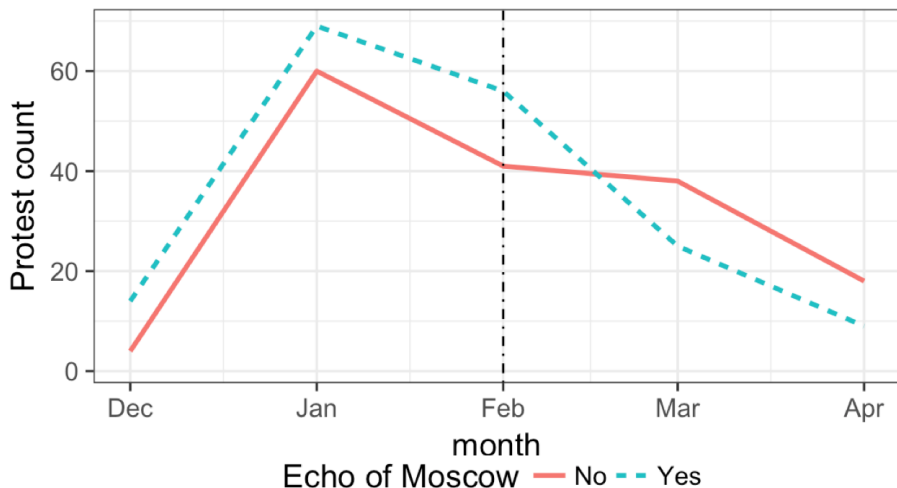
# Echo of Moscow

- Independent media usually depend on outside financial sources
- *Echo of Moscow* is profitable
- Broad regional network: 42 cities
- Decision to open the local branch depends on the size of local audience
- **Key assumption:**
  - *exposure to Echo of Moscow is as good as as-if random conditional on the propensity to satisfy requirements of its management*

# Hypotheses

- ① After pro-regime rally takes place *the **protest turnout** declines more in cities exposed to independent media reports about size of the pro-regime rally;*
- ② After pro-regime rally takes place *the **number of anti-government protests** declines more in cities exposed to independent media reports about size of the pro-regime rally.*
- Two steps:
  - Check if *Echo of Moscow* personnel does not lie about it's decisions
    - Predict availability of the station with bootstrap LASSO selection model
    - Temp in January, Distance to Moscow, Population size
    - Dif-in-Dif while using Inverse Propensity Score Weighting (Imai and Ratkovic, 2014)

# Protest Dynamics



# Results

	Change in Protest Turnout <sup>+</sup>		Change in Protest Count	
	IPW <sup>++</sup>	Unadjusted	IPW	Unadjusted
<i>Echo of Moscow</i>	-0.36** (0.15)	-0.23 (0.19)	-1.51*** (0.52)	-1.31** (0.58)
Constant	-0.21 (0.20)	-0.20 (0.17)	-1.56** (0.74)	-1.814*** (0.54)
Observations	76	76	76	76
Log Likelihood	-100.5	-93.8	-164.8	-152.8
Akaike IC	211.1	197.7	339.6	315.7

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses, \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ,*

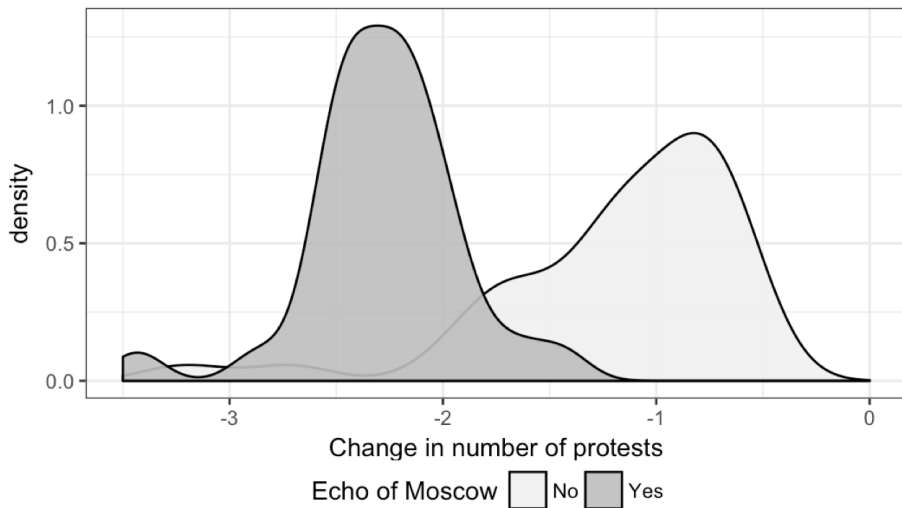
*<sup>+</sup>Protesters per 1000 citizens, <sup>++</sup>Inverse Propensity Weighting.*

**Table:** Effect of local availability of *Echo of Moscow* on change in protest activity

# Protest Dynamics



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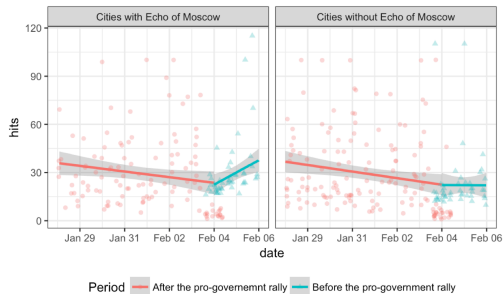
# Threats to Validity

- Timeframe is broad

At the same time,

- In capitals exposed to *Echo of Moscow* the mean protest turnout and the mean number of protests dropped from .88 to .42 participants per thousand citizens and from 3.9 to 1.6 protests, respectively.
- Note:
  - Was Putin strategic?

# Threats to Validity



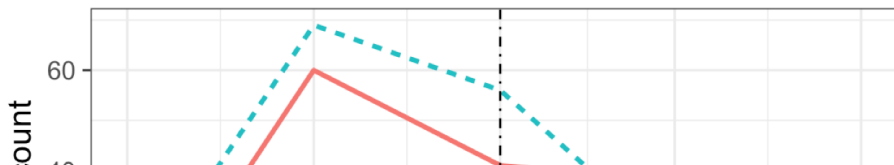


# Results

- Regional capitals with no exposure to *Echo of Moscow* experience the decline in the mean protest turnout and the mean number of protests from .73 to .54 participants per thousand citizens and from 2.9 to 1.7 protests, respectively.

At the same time,

- In capitals exposed to *Echo of Moscow* the mean protest turnout and the mean number of protests dropped from .88 to .42 participants per thousand citizens and from 3.9 to 1.6 protests, respectively.
- Note:
  - Was Putin strategic?



K. Imai and M. Ratkovic, Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series B (Statistical Methodology) **76**, 243 (2014).