Putin's Performance Dilemma –
Is the Perception of the Economy Losing Relevance in Russia?

The Russian protests in 2011-12 made many commentators speculate if significant changes are under way concerning the legitimising role that the perception of the economy plays. Relying on a mixture model method, the authors identify a latent class in Russian society whose trust is independent of their perception of the economy. These people have high political trust and are more likely to be supporters of the governing party, satisfied with the economy, and uninterested in politics. This implies that the declining relevance of economic satisfaction is evidence of the regime gaining legitimacy and not losing it.

Keywords: Russia, protests, public opinion, trust, mixture model

Introduction

The events of 2011-2012 in Russian politics may have caused considerable confusion for most casual Russia watchers. At the State Duma elections on December 4, 2011, the Kremlin's *Edinaya Rossiya* (United Russia – UR) party gained 49.32 percent of the vote – an enviable result by all Western standards, but a considerable decline of support if contrasted with the result four years earlier when the UR won 64.3 percent. Meanwhile, a new opposition movement was forming, and the largest demonstrations since the dissolution of the USSR were held. Tens of thousands of people marched on the streets of Moscow protesting against (alleged) electoral frauds and Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency. Previously, marginal and marginalised opposition politicians gave speeches in front of the crowds. The demonstrations were also reported on national public television. Critics of Putin celebrated the awakening of Russian society and applauded the end of political apathy, at least among the young and highly educated new generation (Clover 2011).

Yet, the scope of the new anti-regime movements was limited. There were few significant demonstrations outside Moscow, and young and highly educated people were overrepresented in the protests. In other words, few older, provincial or poorly educated people supported the movements. There is also some evidence that people with more support

for authoritarian leadership were more supportive of the protests (Chaisty and Whitefield 2013). Subsequently, the regime was quick to respond and organised its own pro-Putin rallies (Weir 2012). On March 4, 2012, the then Prime Minister of Russia, Putin, was re-elected to the presidency with more than 60 percent of the popular vote, and the interest in protests gradually faded.

Thus, a crucial question is whether these events reflect significant changes in the attitudes of at least some groups of Russian society. Several commentaries on the protests speculated whether sustained economic development could increase concern for post-materialistic or democratic values in answering this question. Although the Russian middleclass had been notoriously weak and alienated, its members were expected to become agents of positive social and political changes – both the pro-government ideologues and the opposition (Remington 2011). It has been hypothesised that perhaps a considerable increase in living standards could reduce the pragmatic concern for economic well-being and, thus, create room for more ideological concerns. The protests appeared to provide evidence that these theories were reasonable.

Most notably, even Putin stated in a newspaper article implicitly reacting to the protests that the development of a middle class that was not concerned exclusively with its own well-being was an important achievement of his political activity (Putin 2012). Commentators critical to Putin's regime went further and emphasised that the protests revealed that a new social group developed that was more critical and had higher democratic standards than the rest of society (Makarkin 2011; Zubarevich 2012). "The most advanced or modern part of Russian society" is told to be antagonised by the regime to the extent that they decided to take action (Shevtsova 2012, 21) and "managed to overcome [their] notorious incapacity for collective action" (Krastev and Holmes 2012, 42).

The emergence of such critical social groups is best explained as a consequence of a performance dilemma of the Russian political elite. Theory suggests that authoritarian regimes legitimising their rule with their performance might lose their source of legitimacy once they deliver the promised goods (Huntington 1991). Accordingly, economic prosperity during the 2000s could reduce concern for the economy and increase attention to democratic values for certain groups in Russia.

Importantly, however, prosperous years could have the opposite effect as well. Perhaps groups that were preoccupied with surviving the turbulent '90s were gradually won over by the remarkable political and economic consolidation of the Putin years. These people

could become ideological supporters of the regime, believing in its legitimacy independent of the country's economic performance. This hypothesis of a "performance boon" offers little to explain the anti-regime protests. It raises the possibility, however, that the massive pro-regime rallies benefitted not only from enormous "administrative resources" but also from the support of a genuine social basis.

Thus, the main goal of this paper is to assess whether little concern for the economy with respect to the legitimacy of the regime characterised some parts of the Russian society before the protests. We argue that evidence for this would be a crucial departure from previous accounts about state-society relations in Russia. It could also highlight *one* factor contributing to the protests, which would have important consequences for Russian politics. We measure legitimacy with a political trust index and suggest that genuine social differences should lead to meaningful variance in it. We find that the perception of the economy in fact has little relevance for a substantial part of Russian society as their trust attitudes are independent of their satisfaction with the economy. People in this group believe the regime to be legitimate, strongly support the UR party, and are actively engaged in politics.

Our paper has three important contributions. First, our findings have important implications for Russian politics, highlighting the fact that Putin's legitimacy may not be as dependent on the state of the economy as it is usually claimed (Rose, Mishler, and Munro 2006; Treisman 2011). It is also important to note that we failed to identify the trends in the public opinion that contributed to the protests. While these trends must be present, the fact that they are not large enough to manifest in a large nationally representative sample implies that the newly emerged opposition movements may lack a significant social base. Second, it provides some new insights into Russian public opinion by inspecting the heterogeneity in society, thus emphasising the importance of addressing questions about differences in public opinion on a subnational level. Third, it demonstrates how new, advanced statistical methods can be used effectively to scrutinise heterogeneity in society.

An important conceptual side note: Protesters were referred to as members of a "new middle class" or the "creative class", first by commentators (Barry 2011; Bilevskaya 2008; Makarkin 2011) and consequently by academic papers (Chaisty and Whitefield 2012; Treisman 2014). This terminology is somewhat unfortunate as there is little evidence so far that the newly emerged social group satisfies the usual criteria for a social class as established in social science (Remington 2011). Our references to the (new) middleclass are meant to establish a clear link to these scholarly and media discussions. However, we remain agnostic

about the question whether the protesters constitute or signal the birth of a new social class in Russia. Our aim is more modest: We seek to demonstrate that a considerable number of people do not judge the regime's legitimacy based on their economic satisfaction.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the political context of the protests is briefly described. Second, we unfold the theoretical foundations of the performance dilemma. Third, we test our hypotheses by inspecting population heterogeneity. Finally, some concluding remarks will be made.

The protests in the context of Russian political dynamics

Theories about the emergence of new social groups (a "new middle class") and, consequently, about the declining legitimising role that economic performance plays (i.e., a performance dilemma) emerged together with the rise of the anti-regime protests in Russia. It is thus crucial to have a good understanding of the details and political relevance of the protests. We offer a brief explanation of the events before discussing the theoretical foundations of our hypotheses.

On September 24, 2011, the reigning president, Dmitry Medvedev, announced at the 12th Congress of United Russia that Putin was returning to the presidency in March 2012 (JRL 2011). This fact dominated the campaign before the Duma elections on December 4, 2011, in which the ruling United Russia party received only 49.32 percent of the votes, losing 77 mandates (almost 25 % of its seats) compared to the results in the previous elections. Even more importantly, the opposition managed to organise the largest mass demonstrations in Moscow against the incumbent regime since the demise of the Soviet Union. Tens of thousands of people gathered in the streets urging for free and fair elections and for Putin's retirement.

These protests meant a paradigm shift in contemporary Russian society in at least two ways. First, large public demonstrations were held despite the general collective action dilemma of protests (Olson 1982). Moreover, the problem of motivating people to engage in collective action was previously amplified by Russians' strikingly little willingness to participate in protests, even if they deemed protests highly probable to occur in the near future (Rose, Mishler, and Munro 2006, 85). Second, opposition leaders could also benefit from the publicity given by the mass protests and its broadcasts. Even though Putin won the presidential elections with a majority of the votes in the first round, the elections were given a

new flavour by Mikhail Prokhorov, a controversial oligarch receiving almost 8 percent of the votes, thus being the third-most popular candidate.

Another important consequence of the protests was the rise of Alexei Navalny. Navalny first gained public attention by suing partly state-owned Russian companies for failing transparency regulations in 2010. He famously invented and popularised the epithet "party of crooks and thieves" about UR, created some popular initiatives such as Rospil, monitoring government procurements, and established the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which raises money for anti-corruption initiatives. As Navalny became an important leader of the protest movements in late December, he urged no less than one million people to gather on the streets of Moscow (Tsvetkova 2011). While he failed to activate such masses, the formerly not too famous anti-corruption activist became a nationally and internationally known anti-Kremlin leader.

It is thus understandable why the events caused considerable excitement both in Russia and abroad; yet, it remains unclear what caused this tipping point in Russian politics.[1] Why did crowds of mostly alienated, apolitical Russian society appear on the streets? One of the most widely stated arguments builds on the composition of the protesters. Surveys conducted on the protests showed that many young people went to the streets. As on-the-spot surveys of Levada Centre has shown, roughly one quarter of the sample was below the age of 25 and two-thirds of all protesters were below 40. These people were also highly educated. More than 80 percent of the respondents had completed at least three years of higher education (Levada Centr 2012). Moreover, the protest movements were concentrated in the largest cities of Russia and were particularly successful in Moscow. These facts led to the conclusion that the protests indicate important social differentiation in Russian society.

A Performance Dilemma Unfolded

Naturally, the argument that protests signal fundamental changes in Russian society became particularly popular among critics of the Kremlin. However, there is also considerable theoretical support for the hypothesis stating the legitimising role of the economy may be low for substantial parts of the society. First, we define legitimacy and review previous works describing its state in Russia. Second, we discuss how new groups with distinct political attitudes could emerge in post-Yeltsin Russia. We argue that the evolution of socio-economic cleavages in Russian society is an important prerequisite of our hypothesis concerning the changing role of economy-focused legitimation. Finally, we provide two theories on how

decreased pragmatic concern for the state of the economy in emerging social groups could make room for both anti-regime and pro-Putin ideological motivations.

Legitimacy is defined as a certain degree of acceptance of a political system as good and right; that is, in accordance with the normative preferences of the citizens (Meyer 1994). It is important to distinguish between two sources of such attitudes. Input-oriented legitimation is based on democratic procedures such as free and fair elections and an even playing field for all political actors. Output-oriented legitimation, however, aims at building legitimacy based on the performance of the regime and on the outputs it provides for the members of society (Scharpf 1999). Evidently, economic prosperity, stability, and development contribute to positive sentiments towards the incumbent regime.

The current Russian regime clearly fails to deliver legitimacy based on input-oriented legitimation (Gel'man 2010). Even though all democratic institutions and procedures are respected formally, Russia is seldom regarded as a democracy (Freedom House 2013; Marshall and Cole 2011). Moreover, a high and growing share of the society perceives the political system as undemocratic. The share of people who believe that recent elections fail by democratic standards and are not free and fair has grown considerably from 35 percent in 2008 to 60 percent in 2012 (Volkov 2012). These input legitimacy concerns have definitely contributed to the protests. Fraudulent elections have been a significant force fuelling protest activities in Russia before (Robertson 2010). Moreover, the 2011 Duma elections have been effectively monitored by bottom-up initiatives, which demonstrates the motivation around elections for higher political participation (Bader 2013).

Similar challenges face other authoritarian regimes too, which is why growing attention in the literature has lately been devoted to the challenges of regimes not abandoning democratic practices altogether but clearly failing by democratic standards (Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; 2010; Schedler 2006). Authoritarian regimes often have to rely heavily on output-oriented legitimation to compensate for the deficiencies in input-oriented legitimation. Russia is a particularly good example as it is very well established and has empirically consistently demonstrated that support for the incumbents has relied on perceptions of the economy for the past 25 years (Colton and Hale 2009; Duch 1995; Reisinger, Miller, and Hesli 1995; Rose 2007; White and McAllister 2003; Chaisty and Whitefield 2012).

Rose, Mishler, and Munro provide evidence from 14 waves of nationally representative surveys between 1992 and 2006 that "evaluations of the current national

economy had an exceptionally strong influence on support for the current regime" (2006, 164). Treisman complements these findings with an elaborate time-series analysis on data from over 80 surveys and finds that "perceptions of the state of the Russian economy and of families' own finances do a good job of predicting both the decline in Yeltsin's rating and surge and plateau in Putin's" (2011, 591). McAllister and White (McAllister and White 2008) skilfully demonstrate how the highly successful UR campaign in 2007 was centred on the economic achievements of Putin. Moreover, economic slogans were prominent in both Putin's ("doubling the GDP") and Medvedev's ("modernisation") presidency (Bor 2011).

Output-oriented legitimisation focusing on economic performance was all the more important as it appealed essentially to the entire Russian society. Russia suffers from notoriously weak social cleavages that have posed a considerable burden on the development of democracy and facilitated the shift towards populist politics (Ahl 1999; Fleron Jr. and Ahl 1998). Partly, this is the heritage of Soviet rule, which had a strong negative effect on the development of stable social cleavages: "The weak and peculiar stratification of Russian social structure … established very different 'conditioning perimeters' around political life than those evident in many other – particularly nonsocialist – cases" (Fish 1995, 99). Particularly, it made it "difficult to develop a democratic class struggle [in Russia]" (Lipset 2001, 8). In other words, before we can turn to the discussion about alternative sources of legitimacy, first, we need to demonstrate that the conditions for a decrease in the importance of output-oriented legitimation and for the emergence of new social groups are increasingly present in Russia.

The most important socio-economic trend contributing to a reality in which the role of output-oriented legitimacy is decreasing is the remarkable economic growth that Russia experienced throughout the 2000s. The decade before the protests in 2012 witnessed an 59.2 percent increase in GDP *per capita* based on PPP (from $14,629 in 2002 to $23,299 in 2012 in constant 2011 international dollars), and a more than twofold decrease in levels of poverty (from 24.6 % of the population in 2002 to 10.7 % in 2012 at the Russian poverty line) (The World Bank 2016). In a relatively short time, standards of living improved impressively. Consequently, substantially less people were preoccupied with strictly material problems, and more attention could be paid to "ideological" considerations. This argument parallels Inglehart's (2001) famous thesis about economic growth contributing to the development of post-materialistic values, although we are more uncertain about the potential content of these values.

Importantly, economic development did not affect all parts of Russian society equally. Zubarevich (2012) argues that the years of economic prosperity contributed to the emergence of substantial socio-economic cleavages that divide Russian society into four different categories: 1) inhabitants of large cities, 2) inhabitants of small cities and towns, 3) inhabitants of villages, and 4) ethnic minorities and people in peripheral territories. There are considerable differences between these four groups in education, occupation, state dependence, and vulnerability to the economy. The first group stands out with the highest average education and most independence from the state and the performance of the economy. Importantly, these social differences may have an effect on views of legitimacy and, more broadly, political culture and participation.

We thus argue that it is reasonable to expect that the economic growth and the inequalities in its effect created the socio-economic foundations for the emergence of distinct social groups. These groups are less preoccupied with the pragmatic concerns of everyday living. Below, we first describe how this could increase the role of democratic values and contribute to a legitimacy deficit or even anti-regime sentiments. Then, we propose that the same socio-economic factors could also increase support for pro-regime ideologies, improving the legitimacy of the regime.

Although Russian authorities relied heavily on economic development to legitimise their political regime, output-oriented legitimation also has its own perils. People may accept autocratic measures in order to obtain higher living standards or in other ways benefit from the performance of the regime. Yet, once the promised economic growth does contribute to better living conditions, the reasons for tolerating an undemocratic rule evaporate. Huntington calls this the "performance dilemma": "The legitimacy of an authoritarian regime was also undermined if it did deliver on its promises. By achieving its purpose, it lost its purpose. ... It promoted uncertainty and conflict within the regime about what new purposes it should pursue" (Huntington 1991, 55).

It is easy to see how the performance dilemma hypothesis fits the narrative of the protests. According to this claim, Putin's initial popularity and his regime legitimacy rested on output-oriented legitimation. Russians struggling under harsh conditions agreed to consider Putin's covertly, yet clearly undemocratic system legitimate to the extent that they viewed it as improving the economy and increasing standards of living. Those benefitting the most from the development, however, were increasingly less willing to sacrifice their freedom and grew increasingly critical of Putin's rule. These people (Zubarevich's first

group) finally took action in 2011-12 to voice their concerns on the streets. Therefore, we test the hypothesis stating that for social groups active in the protest movements (young, highly educated people living in large cities), output-oriented legitimation plays a smaller role.

H1: Young, highly educated people living in large cities are less likely to base their legitimacy evaluations on their perception of the economy compared to the rest of society.

This hypothesis has very explicit expectations about the demographic characteristics of the critical social groups. However, the performance dilemma could be a valid concern for the authorities even if it is not directly related to the protest movements. Consequently, we test a less specific hypothesis, which could still reveal that the decreased role of pragmatic concerns contributed to the emergence of critical ideologies. To do so, we distinguish between two (latent) groups in Russian society: those for whom economy still plays a large role in evaluating the legitimacy of the regime and those who rely on other arguably ideological factors. To emphasise the crucial difference between the two groups, we name the former group the "pragmatic salience group" and the latter the "ideology salience group". As the performance dilemma hypothesis implies that members of the ideology salience group focus specifically on democratic values, the second hypothesis states that they are more negative of the regime's legitimacy.

H2: The ideology salience group is more critical of the regime's legitimacy than the pragmatic salience group.

Huntington's performance dilemma builds on the assumption that economic growth increases the salience of democratic values and input-oriented legitimacy. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that for some (other) people, prolonged high economic performance may increase the salience of pro-regime ideologies. The "performance boon" hypothesis thus suggests that because of the economic growth, people become more supportive of the political regime's other efforts as well. Although emphasising the importance of increasing the standards of living has been a crucial feature of Putin's legitimation efforts, it was not an exclusive narrative. Putin also called for, and was later championed for, the establishment of a "power vertical" that strengthened the state. They introduced the concept of "sovereign democracy", signalling both internally and

internationally that Russia aspires to regain some of its former power. Several other examples could be brought from Putin's famous macho image (standing in sharp contrast with Yeltsin's weakness) and large military parades. Overcoming the economic turmoil was clearly not the regime's only purpose, and the Kremlin was eager to establish other goals, which substantial parts of society shared. Consequently, if economic growth reduced the salience of pragmatic concerns for standards of living, it could contribute to a more general support for the regime's other goals. Our final hypothesis thus states that members of the ideology salience group are not critical democrats but devoted supporters of Putin.

H3: The ideology salience group is *less* critical of the regime's legitimacy than the pragmatic salience group.

In the following, we provide statistical tests for all three hypotheses. The empirical analysis of this paper is based on data from the fifth round of the European Social Survey (ESS Round 5 2010). The fieldwork of the Russian survey of the fifth round was conducted between December 24, 2010 and May 14, 2011. The data – consisting of 2,595 cases – is based on a national representative sample. These data are especially interesting as it captures the state of the attitudes relatively closely, 7-12 months before the beginning of the protests. They thus allow us to test our hypotheses regarding social structures prior to the protests. However, the data do not reflect potential attitude changes due to the announcement of Putin's return, the elections, or the protests. Explaining the attitudinal foundations of the protests is beyond the aim of this paper.

Population Heterogeneity in Russia

Institutional Trust in Russia

We argue that political trust is the most appropriate variable available to measure if substantial changes in Russian society took place or not. Trust is understood here as a person's assessment of whether a political institution will act to her advantage or not. This definition modifies Gambetta's (2000, 217) influential conceptualisation, to unite the benefits of various understandings of trust. It accepts the arguments of the rationalistic school of trust that people do assess political institutions rather than simply projecting to institutions their

own general intention to trust or distrust. However, it also relaxes the requirements of whether a person should be able to assess a particular action of a political institution to develop a trust attitude, in line with the so-called moralistic account of trust (for more on the rationalistic and moralistic understandings of trust, see Fisher, van Heerde, and Tucker 2010; Jones 1998; Nannestad 2008).

Trust has a number of advantages against alternative dependent variables, such as support for the regime or leaders' popularity indices. First, political trust reflects more profound relations than mere support (Easton 1965; 1975). While support can be highly volatile, changes in trust reflect more substantial transformations. Second, more detailed information is available on trust than on support as questions on trust in different political institutions are regularly included in surveys; thus, a broader scope of attitudes can be scrutinised. A factor analysis has shown that a single latent variable, which we call institutional trust attitudes, explains most variation in people's perception of the trustworthiness of political institutions. Accordingly, a trust index, constructed of the first factor loadings of five institutional trust variables (parliament, parties, politicians, police, and legal system) is used in our analysis.[2]

Our preliminary analysis of the trust index provides final empirical support for the importance of hypotheses concerning the changing role of the economy. We find that arguments claiming that the protests signal that the regime's legitimacy is particularly low among large groups of Russian society are likely to be overconfident. We find very little variation in institutional trust between social groups defined by standard socio-economic variables. We scrutinise stratified mean values of the trust index determined by generation, education, and population size. Reactions to the protests claimed that young, highly educated city dwellers had allegedly become more critical of the regime. We divide the Russian society into six categories based on the historical periods they were socialised in marked by the name of the period's leader. Doing so, we develop Levada's (2001) division of generations and assume that people's political socialisation begins at the age of 15 (Rose and Carnaghan 1995). Population size is measured by respondents' own assessment of the type of settlement they live in, with three categories: large cities (and its suburbs), small towns, and villages. As regards education, we distinguish between people who completed nine years of education or less, people with secondary education, and people with tertiary education. Finally, we create a "protester" dummy, which combines the three variables and distinguishes

between those who belong to the category most likely to delegate people to the protests in all three variables.

FIGURE 1 APPROXIMATELY HERE

Figure 1 depicts the stratified means for the latent trust index. It demonstrates that none of the social groups are negative outliers in their trust. There is no evidence that the protesters were fuelled by concerns about the regime's legitimacy prevalent in their larger social groups. In general, the conclusion from these values is that there are rather small differences between social groups defined by age, education, and population size of their place of residence. That said, people with low education and the elderly socialised under Stalin have substantially and significantly higher trust in the political institutions.[3]

The Analysis

Both our theoretical discussion of the performance dilemma and performance boon hypotheses and the empirical inspection of trust levels imply that the question whether the protests in Russia signal profound changes in social structures should go beyond the analysis of levels of legitimacy. Thus, we now turn to the test of our hypotheses regarding the sources of legitimacy and particularly the role that the perception of the economy plays. To tap the perception of the economy, we rely on a question asking about the respondent's satisfaction with the economy. This variable measures socio-tropic assessments of the economy, which is more relevant for politics than "pocketbook" evaluations both in Russia and other countries (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; Rose, Mishler, and Munro 2011; Treisman 2014).

Again, the first hypothesis proposes a more moderate relationship between trust and satisfaction with the economy for groups most active in the protest movements. This is tested with a model regressing the trust index on three socio-economic variables (age, education, and population size) and satisfaction with the economy. Interaction terms of the socio-economic variables and the satisfaction variable are included to see if the effect of economic evaluations varies between social groups. We expect the young, highly educated, and city dwellers to be more likely to belong to groups active in the protests. Accordingly, higher age, lower education, and smaller population size of residence should increase the legitimising role of perceptions of the economy. For ease of interpretation, we define the categories high education and residence in cities as the baseline. Significant positive coefficients in the interaction terms would provide support for our hypothesis. Although the theory implies that each of these socio-economic variables should increase the likelihood that a respondent

belongs to a social group valuing economic performance less, it is true that the protesters were characterised by all of them. Consequently, we also rerun the model with the "protester" dummy variable to indicate respondents who are young (less than 35 years old), highly educated and live in a large city. Again, using the category more likely to contain protesters as the reference group, we expect that non-protesters will have a higher correlation between satisfaction with the economy and trust. A model excluding the interaction terms is shown to demonstrate the true effects of the socio-economic variables.

TABLE 1 APPROXIMATELY HERE

It is of no surprise that satisfaction with the economy has a substantial and highly significant positive effect on trust (see Table 1, model 1). The more people are satisfied with the Russian economy, the more they trust the political system. This is in line with other findings in the literature. In this model, of all the socio-economic variables, only age has a statistically significant effect on trust; yet, even this factor is very small as average trust increases by only 0.17 points for every ten years of increase in age. None of the interaction terms in models 2 and 3 are significant, indicating that there is no evidence for H1. No group in Russian society – defined by age, education, and population size – differs statistically from the others to the extent that they let their satisfaction with the economy influence their trust attitudes. In fact, the coefficient for satisfaction with the economy in model 3 can be interpreted as the relationship between trust and perception of the economy for the social groups most likely to be active in the protests. Even among these groups, the difference between the trust evaluations of the respondents most and least satisfied with the state of the economy is estimated to be six points on an 11-point scale. Finally, including the interaction terms into the model does not alter in any meaningful ways the coefficients of model 1, nor does it improve the model fit. We thus fail to find any support for H1. The positive effect of satisfaction with the economy is largely unanimous through all groups of society.

Failing to provide convincing support for the first hypothesis highlights the fact that scrutinising heterogeneity in the society with strong assumptions about where to find social cleavages may lead to failure. However, this does not necessarily mean that there are no differences in the society, but these differences may be hard to pre-specify between latent groups.

FIGURE 2 APPROXIMATELY HERE

To best be able to test if there is a sizeable proportion of the population for whom trust is unrelated to economic evaluation, that is, if there is an ideology salience group (H2

and H3), we built a mixture structural equation model (Lubke and Muthén 2005). This allows for the simultaneous estimation of each person's overall level of trust with a factor and the relationship of satisfaction with the economy with this trust factor for multiple latent classes of people. Figure 2 shows the model. In calculating the results of the model, we used Maximum Likelihood estimation with the Mplus 7.1 software (Muthén and Muthén 2012).

TABLE 2 APPROXIMATELY HERE

Table 2 shows results from three models. The first model is estimated for the whole sample, ignoring the possibility of multiple classes of people in the population. In line with H2 and 3, the second model estimates two latent classes of people. This allows one parameter – the relationship between satisfaction and trust – to differ across the latent classes. For the ideology salience group, the relationship between trust and satisfaction is restricted to 0, while in the latent class of the pragmatic salience group, it is freely estimated. The estimated relationship for the pragmatic salience group is, as expected, a positive correlation. In other words, the logic of this approach is the opposite of standard multiple regression models with interaction terms. Above (testing H1), we pre-specified groups and investigated whether the relationship between the key independent and dependent variables is different in these groups. Here, we first define the pattern of the relationship between the two key factors. Our theory implies that this could be either no correlation between trust and satisfaction with the economy or the standard positive correlation between the two. Consequently, we let the model sort people into either the no-correlation group or the positive correlation group.

The most important indicator of the quality of these mixture models are their fit. If the specified relationships capture a real tendency, the model with latent classes fits better the data than the one without it. Table 2 includes both AIC (Akaike information criterion) and BIC (Bayesian information criterion) measures of the relative quality of statistical models. [4] They are used to acknowledge that there is often no single best or true model because of the well-known trade-off between parsimony and goodness of fit. These measures provide a data-based choice for model selection. Smaller values of AIC and BIC imply better models. Both the AIC and BIC estimates show that the model with two classes fits better than the model with one class and is therefore the better model to describe the data.

FIGURE 3 APPROXIMATELY HERE

The relationship between trust and satisfaction with the economy for the two latent classes are depicted in Figure 3. The 338 respondents (15.9 %), sorted to the ideology salience group with no significant relationship between satisfaction with the economy and the

trust index have remarkably high trust on average; 7.3 points, which is especially striking if we compare it with the mean trust value of the pragmatic salience group, which is only 2.5. The mean difference between the trust values of the two latent classes is highly significant ($p<0.001$). This is a clear sign that the ideology salience group trusts the regime more. This is convincing evidence for H3 and against H2. Despite the fact that the regime's legitimacy is still to a great extent built on economic prosperity, there are people whose trust is independent of their views of national economy.

TABLE 3 APPROXIMATELY HERE

Finally, in model 3, we add predictors of class membership, which also further improves model fit.[5] Our intention is to reveal the main characteristics of the ideology salience group. Socio-economic variables (age, level of education, population size of residence, gender) are included in the model along with the most common explanatory variables of trust. These are satisfaction with economy, support for United Russia party, general trust in people, interest in politics, voting in last elections, doing social work and being an internet user. We present these predictions in Table 3.

The results provide firm evidence for the performance boon hypothesis. Participants are more likely to belong to the ideology salience group if they support the UR, are interested in politics, voted in the last elections, and trust other people in general. These variables underscore the ideological basis of this group. They are active supporters of the regime and have a favourable idea about their fellow Russians. Importantly, we also find that higher satisfaction with the economy is also a significant predictor of ideology salience. This hints that the declining relevance of perception of the economy is related to the economic growth witnessed in the 2000s. People in the ideology salience group tend to be older and are more likely to only have a primary education. Finally, somewhat surprisingly, the model implies that they are more likely to be using the internet frequently despite the Runet being the most important forum for anti-regime discussions.[6]

Conclusions

In this article, we endeavoured to address the question of whether demonstrations signalled substantial cleavages in Russian society, particularly concerning the role of perceptions of the economy in legitimacy. We agreed with commentators that the performance dilemma hypothesis – suggesting that economic prosperity could lead to output-oriented legitimation having a lower relevance is an appealing theoretical interpretation of the events in Russia.

However, we also proposed an alternative hypothesis called the performance boon. This proposed that while economic performance could reduce the role of output-oriented legitimation, it may simultaneously increase people's support for the regime's ideology. In fact, our results support the latter hypothesis. The perception of the economy is changing relevance; however, not with the effect that most would anticipate. Instead of increasing the salience of democratic values, it creates room for more pro-Kremlin sentiments. Below, we discuss some implications of these findings.

The political relevance of the ideology salience group is in the fact that they may form the core social basis of the regime. Evidence shows that they are both highly interested and actively engaged in politics. The regime may rely on these people in campaigns or in organising pro-regime protests. Importantly, as this support rests on ideological (as opposed to pragmatic) foundations, it is relatively stable and independent of fluctuations in the state of the economy. That said, two factors limit their influence. First, the group is not that large; it is a bit more than a sixth of our sample. Second, this is a latent social group. Although they are more likely to identify with and vote for the UR party, it is not clear how easy it is to identify its members. Organising these supporters may require considerable administrative resources.

Although we argue that the presence of the ideology salience group is important, we also need to acknowledge that the bulk of Russian society (around 84 %) still belonged to the pragmatic salience group in 2011. This finding complements recent works suggesting that the political costs of the global financial crisis in Russia may have been larger than initially expected (Chaisty and Whitefield 2012; Treisman 2014). However, members of the pragmatic salience group appear to be underrepresented among the politically active. Despite their large numbers, their role is limited not only until the economy is doing well, but also as long as the Russian society remains largely apolitical.

The protests of 2011-12 brought a new flavour to Russian politics but ultimately failed to change it. Moreover, this paper has found no evidence that they signal substantial changes in Russian society. There is no evidence that the social groups securing the manpower of the protests – the young, highly educated, and city dwellers – are more critical than the rest of the society. They trust political institutions to a similar extent, and they also largely base their evaluations on their satisfaction with the economy. With this, a new puzzle emerges regarding the social origins of the protests. On the one hand, output-oriented legitimation remains important on a national scale, even among groups that became active in

the protests. On the other hand, those who eventually raise their voice concerning the lack of input-oriented legitimacy are less affected by the crisis than other parts of society.

Our study has some important limitations. Although we believe it reflects the most important elements of the discourse, our operationalisation of the "new middle class" is not ideal. Future studies should rely on more precise variables and larger sample sizes that would enable analysing the public opinion of politically important subsets of the data. This paper is also limited to the analysis of the pre-protest social structures. More studies focusing on the attitudinal changes in the years around the protests need to be performed. These may help to explain why the protests occurred and what effects they had on the popular opinion. As more data become available, patterns in the public opinion should be assessed and benchmarked against the pre-protest baselines exhibited in the study at hand.

We firmly believe that this paper contributes to the literature. It is the first to identify a group in Russian society that considers the regime to be legitimate independently of their perception of economy. It explores the social environment prior to the protests and fails to find empirical support for a hypothesis widely accepted as an important factor contributing to the rise of opposition movements. Finally, the theoretical, empirical, and methodological knowledge obtained by this paper should provide useful insights for further research on Russian politics, population heterogeneity, and, more generally, state-society relations in non-democratic contexts.

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Notes

1. However, some argue that the protests were not unexpected and can be interpreted as a "continuation of long-term trends in the Russian protest scene" (Robertson 2013).

2. Trust factors were scaled to the original metric of the indicators by fixing one of the loadings to 1 and allowing the variance to be estimated freely. Factor loadings are reported in the Appendix.

3. It is also interesting to note that even though Russians generally have low levels of trust, in a comparative perspective, Russian trust levels are not particularly low. Ukraine, Bulgaria and even Slovenia have lower trusts on average.

4. For a non-mathematical methodological overview, see Burnham and Anderson 2004.

5. In similar analyses of latent population heterogeneity, it is more customary to not restrict the various classes and simply estimate the results for the various classes that emerge from the data. This is a more exploratory approach used by people without specific expectations. The challenge with this approach is to find the most appropriate number of latent classes, which is usually done through careful assessment of the model fit with different number of classes. Despite our ability to achieve a better model fit through this technique, we opted for a different route as we had specific hypotheses to test and therefore restricted the models to test our specific hypotheses. Our models fit better than the model that does not account for population heterogeneity, and the results are revealing.

6. As a robustness check, we re-run our model including two-way interactions of the three socio-economic variables. None of the interactions came out significant. Re-running the model with a three-way interaction between these variables led to problems with singularity in the model because of the low power. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that there is no evidence in our data for the performance dilemma hypothesis; social groups involved in the protests are not less likely to fall in the pragmatic salience group.

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Appendix

APPENDIX TABLE 1 HERE

APPENDIX TABLE 2 HERE