

Mass Mobilization in China and Russia: From Unexpected Victories to Unintended Consequences

Elizabeth Plantan

Harvard University

Elizabeth_plantan@hks.harvard.edu

Abstract

Despite the increasingly authoritarian atmosphere in Russia and China, mass protests in both countries are pervasive, including protest motivated by environmental grievances. Existing scholarship often focuses on the sources, spread, or volume of mass mobilization, but few examine how civil society actors themselves evaluate the tactic. How does the state respond to environmentally-motivated mass mobilization? In light of the state's response, how have activists altered their approach to mass mobilization over time? Using case studies and interviews, I find that Russian and Chinese environmental groups approach mass mobilization in distinct ways. Over time, Russian activists have increasingly turned to mass tactics, including coordinated regional protest. Meanwhile, Chinese ENGOS have reduced their formal involvement in such campaigns, limiting visible horizontal linkages between environmental groups. These approaches are shaped by the different historical legacies of mass mobilization in either country, which also shape state perceptions of the threat posed by environmental activism.

Keywords

mobilization – activism – environment – Russia – China

Introduction

Studies of street protest and other forms of mass mobilization have garnered increased attention from scholars of both Russia and China. In China, the uptick in the occurrence of 'mass incidents' since the 1990s has driven some

scholars to focus on analyzing social protest.¹ In Russia, the 2011–2012 electoral cycle of protests also spurred a range of scholarship,² although citizens had been mobilizing on other issues well before this wave of protests against electoral fraud.³ Often, these studies focus on quantifying contention by counting protests, strikes, or online discontent in both countries for analysis of the content of protest claims, its regional spread, the volume of events, or the government's reaction.⁴ While these studies are valuable for understanding the macro-landscape of contention under authoritarianism, and in Russia and China in particular, it can be harder to know from these macro-level numbers how exactly civil society actors (from grassroots activists to professionalized

- 1 See, for example: Kevin J. O'Brien, ed. *Popular Protest in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Andrew C. Mertha. *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Yongshun Cai, *Collective Resistance in China: Why Popular Protests Succeed or Fail*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Xi Chen, *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- 2 Mischa Gabowitsch, *Protest in Putin's Russia* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017); Samuel A. Greene, *Moscow in Movement: Power and Opposition in Putin's Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Karrie J. Koesel and Valerie J. Bunce, "Putin, Popular Protests, and Political Trajectories in Russia: A Comparative Perspective," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28, no. 4 (October 1, 2012): 403–23, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.28.4.403>; Tomila Lankina, "The Dynamics of Regional and National Contentious Politics in Russia: Evidence from a New Dataset," *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 26–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1002329>; Tomila Lankina and Rodion Skovoroda, "Regional Protest and Electoral Fraud: Evidence from Analysis of New Data on Russian Protest," *East European Politics* 33, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 253–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2016.1261018>.
- 3 Samuel A. Greene, "Beyond Bolotnaia," *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 2 (March 1, 2013): 40–52, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216600204>; Graeme Robertson, "Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011–2012 in Broader Perspective," *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 2 (March 1, 2013): 11–23, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216600202>; Graeme B. Robertson, "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009): 528–47.
- 4 Victor Cheung Yin Chan, Jeremy Backstrom, and T. David Mason, "Patterns of Protest in the People's Republic of China: A Provincial Level Analysis," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 41, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 91–107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00927678.2014.936799>; Yao Li, "A Zero-Sum Game? Repression and Protest in China," *Government and Opposition*, September 2017, 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2017.24>; Murray Scot Tanner, "China Rethinks Unrest," *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (June 4, 2004): 137–56; Manfred Elfstrom. "Counting Contention." *Made in China: A Quarterly on Chinese Labour, Civil Society, and Rights*, no. 2 (2017): 16–19; Robertson, "Protesting Putinism"; Lankina, "The Dynamics of Regional and National Contentious Politics in Russia."

NGOs, domestic or international) themselves relate to the tactic of mass mobilization.

In Russia and China, in addition to an uptick in mass mobilization over the last several years, both countries have seen an increase in environmental demands. There have been several major mass mobilization events related to the environment in Russia in the last decade, including a campaign to mobilize volunteers to fight forest fires in 2010,⁵ a mass movement to protect a forest in the outskirts of Moscow,⁶ and more recent protests against landfills and trash incinerators.⁷ In China, environmental protests are also increasing,⁸ and there have been several high-profile mass campaigns on environmental issues, such as against PX (paraxylene) plants in Xiamen and Dalian,⁹ a copper-refinery plant in Shifang,¹⁰ or a wastewater disposal project in Qidong.¹¹ Environmental issues have also caused important mass campaigns on Chinese social media, from public calls for the disclosure of air pollution data in 2012¹² to the viral

- 5 O.N. Yanitsky, "The 2010 Wildfires in Russia: An Ecosociological Analysis," *Sociological Research* 51, no. 2 (March 1, 2012): 57–75, <https://doi.org/10.2753/SOR1061-0154510204>.
- 6 Alfred B. Evans, "Protests and Civil Society in Russia: The Struggle for the Khimki Forest," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 233–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.06.002>.
- 7 Meduza, "The Moscow region's great trash upheaval," 21 March 2018, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2018/03/21/the-moscow-region-s-great-trash-upheaval> (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 8 John Kennedy, "Environmental protests in China on dramatic rise, expert says," *South China Morning Post*, 29 October 2012, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1072407/environmental-protests-china-rise-expert-says> (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 9 Chin-Fu Hung, "Citizen Journalism and Cyberactivism in China's Anti-PX Plant in Xiamen, 2007–2009," *China: An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (April 25, 2013): 40–54; Michael M. Gunter, "The Dalian Chemical Plant Protest, Environmental Activism, and China's Developing Civil Society." In Carol Hager and Mary Alice Haddad eds., *NIMBY is Beautiful: Cases of Local Activism and Environmental Innovation Around the World*. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2015): 138–160.
- 10 Tania Branigan, "Anti-pollution protests halt construction of copper plant in China," *The Guardian*, 3 July 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/03/china-anti-pollution-protest-copper> (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 11 Jian Lu and Chris King-Chi Chan, "Collective Identity, Framing and Mobilisation of Environmental Protests in Urban China: A Case Study of Qidong's Protest," *China: An International Journal* 14, no. 2 (May 18, 2016): 102–22.
- 12 Elizabeth Plantan and Christopher Cairns, "Signaling responsiveness while avoiding vulnerability: Why the Chinese government sometimes relaxes social media censorship," Unpublished manuscript.

dissemination and swift censorship of journalist Chai Jing's documentary on the health effects of air pollution in 2015.¹³

Although environmental issues in Russia and China both have demonstrated the potential to mobilize the masses, there remains a stark difference in how the state treats organized environmental civil society groups. In Russia, environmental groups are often targets of state repressive tactics. For example, the recent 'foreign agent' law has caused many Russian environmental groups to close,¹⁴ making them the sector second most-affected by the law after human rights organizations.¹⁵ However, in China, many studies of Chinese environmental groups recognize that the space for activism around environmental issues remains relatively open.¹⁶ What accounts for this difference in state response to environmental groups between Russia and China? Why, if environmental demands have such a huge collective action potential, are environmental activists and civil society groups not similarly repressed by Chinese leaders? How does the state respond to both environmentally motivated mass mobilization and the activists seen as behind these events? In light of the state's response, how have activists altered their approach to choosing mass mobilization as a tactic over time?

To unpack the answers to these questions, I focus on micro-level case studies of some of the most famous 'pivotal' or 'turning point' cases of environmental mass mobilization in the post-Soviet and post-Tiananmen eras. In the mid-2000s, two of the biggest environmental movements in either country – a

- 13 Shuqin Cui, "Chai Jing's Under the Dome: A Multimedia Documentary in the Digital Age," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 11, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 30–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508061.2016.1269481>.
- 14 Carl Schreck, "HRW Calls Russian 'Foreign Agent' Law 'Devastating' For Environmental Groups," *RFERL*, 21 November 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-hrw-says-foreign-agent-law-devastating-environmental-groups/28868194.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 15 Elizabeth Plantan, "Not All NGOs Are Created Equal: Selective Repression of Civil Society in Russia and China," Unpublished manuscript (2018).
- 16 Timothy Hildebrandt and Jennifer Turner, "Green Activism? Reassessing the Role of Environmental NGOs in China," in *State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China: Serving the People*, ed. Jonathan Schwartz and Shawn Shieh (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 89–110; Peter Ho, "Greening Without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China," *Development and Change* 32, no. 5 (November 1, 2001): 893–921, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00231>; Peter Ho and Richard Edmonds, eds., *China's Embedded Activism: Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement*, (London: Routledge, 2008); Guobin Yang and Craig Calhoun, "Media, Civil Society, and the Rise of a Green Public Sphere in China," *China Information* 21, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 211–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X07079644>.

campaign to protect Lake Baikal from an oil pipeline in Russia and a campaign opposing dams along the Nu River in China – look considerably similar, although there are some subtle differences in the scale of mobilization. However, after the mid-2000s, how Russian and Chinese activists approach mass mobilization and coordinated action became much more distinct. Over time, Russian environmental activists have increasingly turned to mass mobilization and coordinated mass protest across Russia's cities and regions as the most effective tactic. At the same time, Chinese environmental activists – particularly at domestic or international ENGOS – have reduced their formal involvement in such campaigns. Chinese ENGOS have also limited visible horizontal linkages between environmental groups at the international, national, and local levels, which contributes to a lack of coordinated, cross-regional protest of the type seen during the events of Tiananmen. These different approaches to environmental mass mobilization have been shaped by the different historical legacies of mass mobilization in either country, which also shaped state perceptions of the threat posed by environmental activism. This helps to explain why environmental groups are seen as threatening to state stability in Russia, but environmental groups in China are not.

To illustrate how these differences have solidified over time, I compare the mid-2000s cases to two later movements (in the 2010s) to show how environmentalists' attitudes toward mass tactics and coordinated action have changed. This is followed by a discussion of how mass mobilization tactics have continued to evolve in the period after the second set of case studies using material from interviews with environmental activists in both countries. Interview material was collected during several fieldwork trips of varying lengths to Russia and China from 2015 to 2017. Interviews were conducted by the author in the interviewee's preferred language (Mandarin, Russian, or English) and lasted anywhere from 40 minutes to several hours. While not all interviews were conducted under the condition of anonymity, all responses cited here have been anonymized to prevent identifying those respondents who did request anonymity through a process of elimination. A list of cited interviews follows this article.

Adapting to the State: Unexpected Victories and Unintended Consequences

While both Russia and China have seen a recent increase in protest related to environmental demands, divergent histories of the environmental movement have contributed to a difference in the characteristics of these protests and

the state's response. In Russia, the mobilization of environmental grievances has the potential to undermine state stability, as it contributed to the mass mobilization that led to the Soviet collapse and to the swell in protests aimed at more systemic demands during the 2011–2012 electoral cycle. This history of environmental mobilization has both emboldened activists to continue using the tactic and motivated the state to be concerned about the threat posed by environmental groups. In China, however, the violent example of Tiananmen warned all organized civil society groups against being associated with coordinated, mass action. Although protest, including environmental, has increased since the 1990s, it is much more fragmented and localized. In addition, environmental demands are not directly associated with the mass mobilization in 1989, prompting a different response from the authorities since they are not seen as a threat to regime stability. Furthermore, as the case studies will illustrate, organized environmental civil society groups have increasingly backed away from being associated with local, fragmented environmental protest to maintain their privileged status with the state.

Although the history of late-1980s mass mobilization looms large in both countries, the trends in each country did not happen overnight but instead took shape over time. This section examines two sets of case studies – the first set from the mid-2000s and the second set from the post-2011 period – to compare the approaches to mass mobilization of environmentalists in the two countries. How do environmentalists approach mass mobilization? How have those approaches changed over time? In addition to differences in the historical legacy of mass mobilization and the perception of systemic-level threat posed from environmental groups in both regimes, how environmental activists engage with the tactic of mass mobilization differs.

These cases discussed here are widely considered to be “pivotal” or “turning point” cases for the environmental movement in either country by academics and environmental activists alike. Although these are standout cases, they illustrate broader trends in environmental civil society during these two time periods. Furthermore, these cases were often mentioned in interviews with activists either as inspiration for or as a warning against using mass mobilization for environmental campaigns that followed. By examining these cases side-by-side, we can see changes in how formal ENGOS (both foreign and domestic) have approached mass mobilization through an iterative process of interaction with the state. Although the involvement of formal ENGOS is quite similar in the mid-2000s cases, by the 2010s their approach diverges. While Russian environmental activists – whether grassroots, domestic, and international ENGOS – continue to emphasize mass mobilization as a go-to tactic and support each other through horizontal ties, environmental groups based in China

are increasingly wary of being directly associated with mass unrest and minimize horizontal connections.

Case 1 (Russia): Re-routing the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) Oil Pipeline

In December 2004, the Russian government approved Transneft's plans to build the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline stretching almost 4200km from western and central Siberia to the Sea of Japan in the Far East.¹⁷ Earlier plans for a similar pipeline, initiated by Yukos, were shelved after CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky's high-profile arrest in October 2003.¹⁸ Transneft's planned route would pass within 800 meters of Lake Baikal's northern shore, leading some experts to argue that it would take only 40 minutes for an oil spill from the pipeline to reach Baikal and cover a third of its surface.¹⁹ This attracted fierce opposition to the project from environmentalists concerned about the likelihood of a catastrophic oil spill that would quickly reach Lake Baikal, the world's oldest and deepest freshwater lake.

Baikal Environmental Wave (BaikalWave), an environmental NGO headquartered in Irkutsk, became the leader of the local movement against the pipeline. The group had been fighting the pipeline since the initial Yukos plans, but the movement against the most recent iteration of the project came to a peak in 2006. In January 2006, Rostekhnadzor (the Russian Federal Service for Ecological, Technological, and Atomic Supervision) conducted an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the proposed pipeline route, but 43 of the 52 scientists negatively assessed the project. Under reported pressure from Transneft, Rostekhnadzor revised the EIA with 34 additional experts, and this new group produced a positive assessment.²⁰ With this new scientific and environmental approval, the project was to move forward as planned.

17 RIA Novosti, "Nefteprovod Vostochnaia Sibir' – Tixii ocean (VSTO). Spravka," [The Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline (ESPO). Reference guide.] 29 December 2009, <https://ria.ru/economy/20091229/202161419.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

18 Interview 36-RF111815.

19 Artur Skal'skii, "Irkutskie uchenie prizyvaiut obscheshtvennost' k massovym vystupleniam v zaschitu Baikala," [Irkutsk scientists call on the public for mass protests in defense of Baikal.] *Babr.ru*, 17 February 2006, <http://babr24.com/irk/?IDE=27933> (accessed 15 April 2018).

20 *Vedomosti*, "Gosudarstvennaia ekologicheskaiia ekspertiza odobrila stroitel'stvo truboprovoda VSTO," [The state ecological impact assessment approved the construction of the ESPO pipeline], 6 March 2006, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/library/news/2006/03/06/gosudarstvennaya-jekologicheskaya-jexpertiza-odobrila-stroitel'stvo-truboprovoda-vsto> (accessed 15 April 2018).

When the institutionalized mechanism for stopping the project for its environmental impact failed, the task of protecting Lake Baikal from the pipeline fell to civil society groups. A broad coalition of actors, including Baikal Environmental Wave (BEW), Greenpeace, WWF, and other domestic ENGOS in across several regions of Russia, joined forces to defend Baikal from the pipeline.²¹ Some of these groups were informally coordinated through the 'Baikal Movement' (*baikal'skoe dvizheniye*), headed by Baikal Environmental Wave, along with several other local organizations, political parties, and individual citizens.²² Throughout the spring, these actors collected approximately 100,000 petition signatures against the planned pipeline route.²³ The coalition also organized coordinated mass protests in 13 cities across Russia, including Moscow, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, St. Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, and Yekaterinburg.²⁴ Several additional protests were held in Irkutsk, including a protest in late April that attracted an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 people.²⁵

In addition to the mass mobilization within Russia, the group also reached out to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (Baikal was granted World Heritage site status in 1996) to put pressure on the Russian government. In March 2006, the head of the World Heritage Committee sent a letter expressing concern about the project to President Vladimir Putin.²⁶ Furthermore, the activists also had some local political support for their cause. The Irkutsk regional governor, Alexander Tishanin, and the chairman of the Irkutsk regional legislative assembly, Victor Kruglov, agreed that the pipeline would help the region economically, but disagreed with the proposed route because of its threat to Lake Baikal.²⁷

21 Interview 3-RF092515; Interview 36-RF111815; Interview 82-RF070516; Interview 122-RF090316.

22 For a list of the organizational committee members and regional affiliates of the Baikal Movement, see: <http://baikal.babr.ru/?ev=org>.

23 Veronique Mistiaen, "Sacred sea and songs of hope," *The Guardian*, 15 April 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/apr/16/activists.nuclearpower> (accessed 15 April 2018).

24 Irina Petrakova and Dimitrii Koptev, "Baikal – truba," [Baikal – pipeline], *Gazeta.ru*, 21 April 2006, https://www.gazeta.ru/2006/04/21/oa_196975.shtml?updated (accessed 15 April 2018).

25 *Kommersant*, "V Irkutsk proshel ocherednoi miting protiv VSTO," [Another rally against ESPO held in Irkutsk.] 23 April 2006, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/991059> (accessed 15 April 2018).

26 UNESCO, "World Heritage Committee Chairperson Sends Letter to President of Russian Federation Concerning Lake Baikal." Press Release. 24 March 2006. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/242> (accessed 15 April 2018).

27 Regnum, "Vlasti Irkutskoj Oblasti vystupili protiv stroitel'stva nefteprovoda po beregu Baikala," [Irkutsk Oblast authorities expressed opposition to the construction of an oil

On April 26, 2006, at a televised meeting on the social and economic development of the Siberian Federal District in Tomsk,²⁸ Vladimir Putin personally intervened to tell the head of Transneft that the pipeline must be re-routed away from Baikal's northern shore.²⁹ One month after this public excoriation, Transneft announced that the pipeline would be routed 400km north of Baikal, well out of its watershed and the region's zone of seismic activity.³⁰ The environmentalists had won. Marina Rikhvanova, the leader of BaikalWave, was internationally honored for her efforts and awarded the prestigious Goldman Prize (considered the Nobel Prize for environmentalists) in 2008.³¹

Case 2 (China): Halting Dams Along the Nu River

In spring 2003, the Yunnan provincial government and the Huadian Corporation (one of the five largest state-owned power generation enterprises in China) signed a letter of intent for a hydropower development project along the Nu River that would include two reservoirs and 13 dams.³² The Nu River (*Nujiang*) – China's last free-flowing – stretches from its origins in the Qinghai Mountains on the Tibetan Plateau and runs through the Three Parallel Rivers UNESCO World Heritage site in southwestern China before crossing into Myanmar and Thailand, where it is known as the Salween. After Huadian and the Yunnan provincial government submitted the project to the NDRC (National Development and Reform Commission), it was quickly approved.³³ However, there was opposition from within SEPA (the State Environmental Protection Administration),³⁴ which was enough to delay any higher-level

pipeline along the shore of Baikal.] 16 March 2006, <https://regnum.ru/news/607044.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

- 28 For a full transcript and video of the meeting, see: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23569>.
- 29 Lenta.ru, "Putin prikazal otodvinut' nefteprovod ot Baikala." [Putin ordered oil pipeline to be pushed back from Baikal.] 26 April 2006, <https://lenta.ru/news/2006/04/26/pipe/>.
- 30 *Kommersant*, "VSTO proidet v 400 kilometrakh ot Baikala," [ESPO will pass 400 kilometers away from Baikal.] 26 May 2006. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/992151>.
- 31 For more information, see: <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/marina-rikhvanova/>
- 32 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*, 117.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 34 SEPA was replaced by the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) in 2008, but in 2018 the MEP was superseded by the new (and even more powerful) Ministry of Ecology and Environment. For more information on the most recent change, see: David Stanway, "China shake-up gives climate change responsibility to environment ministry," *Reuters*, 13 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-environment/china-shake-up-gives-climate-change-responsibility-to-environment-ministry-idUSKCN1GPoQJ> (accessed 15 April 2018).

approval while waiting for the results of the project's environmental impact assessment.³⁵

As the project sought approval at the national level, a coalition of NGOs in Beijing and Yunnan began to take shape in opposition to the proposed dams. This included Beijing-based ENGOS Green Earth Volunteers (GEV), Friends of Nature (FON), Green Island, the Institute for Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE), Global Village Beijing (GVB), Beijing-based river expert He Daming, and Kunming-based ENGO Green Watershed (GW).³⁶ The two individuals most fiercely involved in opposing the project were undoubtedly Wang Yongchen (the leader of GEV in Beijing) and Yu Xiaogang (the leader of GW in Kunming). From Beijing, Wang Yongchen mobilized journalists, experts, and environmentalists to oppose the plans, which included organizing a petition with signatures from 62 individuals opposing the project that was circulated in the media in October 2003.³⁷ Meanwhile, Yu Xiaogang continued his efforts at the local level, mobilizing villagers affected by hydropower projects along the parallel Lancang (Mekong) River and exposing residents along the Nu River to the impact of the dams on the neighboring river. This included a demonstration of 3,000 villagers affected by the Manwan Dam along the Lancang River that lasted for three days in August 2003.³⁸

The coalition of Beijing and Yunnan-based NGOs also had the support of international groups like International Rivers, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and Oxfam.³⁹ Conservation International and Oxfam even directly financed some of the Chinese ENGOS involved in the Nu River campaign.⁴⁰ The coalition also mobilized global anti-dam groups. At an anti-dam conference in Thailand in November 2003, attended by several of the

35 The history of the Nu River project and NGO opposition from 2003 to 2006 is covered extensively in Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*, 110–149. In addition, many other China scholars have also used the Nu River case in their writings about Chinese environmental politics. I use these sources as background, but also update the case to present day using Chinese and international media sources.

36 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*; Heejin Han, "China's Policymaking in Transition," *Journal of Environment & Development* 22, no. 3 (2013): 322.

37 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*, 119.

38 Ibid, 112.

39 Jie Chen, "Transnational Environmental Movement: Impacts on the Green Civil Society in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 19, no. 65 (June 1, 2010): 503–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670561003666103>; Lei Xie, "China's Environmental Activism in the Age of Globalization," *Asian Politics & Policy* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2011): 207–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-0787.2011.01256.x>; Han, "China's Policymaking in Transition."

40 Han, "China's Policymaking in Transition," 324–325.

NGOs in the coalition against the Nu River project, NGOs from over 60 countries signed a petition that was sent to UNESCO.⁴¹ These efforts of domestic and international civil society actors culminated in Premier Wen Jiabao suspending the project in early 2004 – a landmark achievement for the Chinese environmental movement.⁴² For his role in mobilizing villagers and stopping the Nu River dam project, Yu Xiaogang was awarded a Goldman Prize in 2006.⁴³

However, the saga of the Nu River Project was not yet over. Opponents and proponents of the dams continued their respective efforts, assuming that the plans might be revisited in the future.

In May 2004, Yu Xiaogang led a group of 14 community leaders from the Nu region to visit the Manwan dam site to see the impacts from the hydro-power project.⁴⁴ Later that summer, UNESCO officially expressed its concern about the proposed dams at its 28th session in Suzhou, China.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, dam proponents continued attempts to gain approval for the project at the national level and assure skeptics of its minimal environmental impact.⁴⁶ In 2005, opponents of the dams issued a petition, endorsed by 93 organizations and 459 individuals, calling for the project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) to be made public.⁴⁷ In January 2006, it was revealed that the dam plans had been modified and would now only include four dams instead of the original 13.⁴⁸ The battle between dam proponents and opponents

41 Xiaoyu Yan, "Zhongguo de feizhengfu zuzhi yu zhengfu jiemeng NGO neng baochi duli?," [Can Chinese NGOs and government-affiliated NGOs maintain their independence?], *Shangwu zhouban*, 18 March 2005, <http://media.163.com/05/0318/11/1F4GTQPN00141ASK.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

42 Jim Yardley, "China's Premier Orders Halt to a Dam Project Threatening a Lost Eden," *The New York Times*, 9 April 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/09/world/china-s-premier-orders-halt-to-a-dam-project-threatening-a-lost-eden.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

43 For more information, see: "Yu Xiaogang," Goldman Environmental Prize, accessed 15 April 2018, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/yu-xiaogang/>.

44 Jianguang Tang, "Zhongguo NGO: wo fan dui!," [Chinese NGOs: I oppose!], *Zhongguo xinwen wang*, 7 July 2004, <https://news.qq.com/a/20040707/000599.htm> (accessed 15 April 2018).

45 "Decision 28 COM 15B.9," UNESCO (2004), <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/181>

46 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*, 133.

47 "Chinese Groups Demand Disclosure of Environmental Studies," International Rivers, 31 August 2005, <https://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/chinese-groups-demand-disclosure-of-environmental-studies-3303> (accessed 15 April 2018).

48 Jim Yardley, "China Proposes Fewer Dams in Power Project to Aid Environment," *The New York Times*, 12 January 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/12/world/asia/china-proposes-fewer-dams-in-power-project-to-aid-environment.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

continued, and in 2008 reports confirmed that Huadian was making final preparations to begin building the first of the dams at Liuku.⁴⁹ But in 2009, Wen Jiabao intervened again to halt preparatory work on the Liuku hydropower station, citing an incomplete understanding of the project's environmental impact.⁵⁰

The project was effectively suspended until early 2013, when the leadership transition created a political opportunity for dam proponents. Shortly before the official transition between Wen Jiabao and Li Keqiang as premier, a proposal for five dams along the Nu River was included in the 12th Five Year Plan for Energy Development released by the State Council.⁵¹ Then, in 2014, Premier Li Keqiang announced that China would begin construction on more dams that year to catch up to its hydropower targets – including the possibility of beginning construction on the first of the dams along the Nu River by 2015.⁵² Right after Li Keqiang's announcement, a coalition of 19 Chinese NGOs released an English-language summary of a December 2013 report urging the government to reconsider its reliance on hydropower.⁵³ Construction on the first Nu River dam did not begin by 2015, however, and in January 2016 the Yunnan provincial government officially declared that they were stopping the dam construction in favor of a proposal for a national park.⁵⁴ Environmentalists waited to see if the Yunnan provincial government's decision would be confirmed at the national level. They got their answer in December 2016, when there was no

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- 49 Jiangtao Shi, "Project to dam the Nu River set to move ahead," *South China Morning Post*, 17 February 2008, <http://www.scmp.com/article/626507/project-dam-nu-river-set-move-ahead> (accessed 15 April 2018).
 - 50 Jiangtao Shi, "Wen calls halt to Yunnan dam plan," *South China Morning Post*, 21 May 2009, <http://www.scmp.com/article/680918/wen-calls-halt-yunnan-dam-plan> (accessed 15 April 2018).
 - 51 Jing Li, "Ban lifted on controversial Nu River dam projects," *South China Morning Post*, 25 January 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1135463/ban-lifted-controversial-nu-river-dam-projects> (accessed 15 April 2018).
 - 52 "China to 'declare war' on pollution, premier says," *Reuters*, 4 March 2014. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-pollution/china-to-declare-war-on-pollution-premier-says-idUSBREA2405W20140305> (accessed 15 April 2018).
 - 53 "China's Last Rivers Report," International Rivers, 18 March 2014, <https://www.internationalrivers.org/china%E2%80%99s-last-rivers-report> (accessed 15 April 2018).
 - 54 Yuanhang Hu, "Yunnan jiang tingzhi nujiang xiaoshuidian kaifa tuijin da xiagu guojia gongyuan shenbao," [Yunnan will stop the development of Nu River small hydropower and promote the declaration for Grand Canyon National Park], *Zhongguo xinwen wang*, 25 January 2016, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2016/01-25/7732188.shtml> (accessed 15 April 2018).

mention of dams along the Nu River in the National Energy Administration's 13th Five Year Plan for hydropower development.⁵⁵

Discussion of Cases 1 & 2

The campaign to protect Lake Baikal from the ESPO pipeline and the Nu River anti-dam campaign provide a window into the similarities and differences between how environmental movements operate in Russia and China, particularly in the mid-2000s. Both cases involved a coalition of actors, including local ENGOS, national ENGOS in the capital cities, and even international NGOs with branch offices in the host countries. In both, a large infrastructure project was proposed at a UNESCO World Heritage site in regions with a strong history of environmental activism.⁵⁶ The coalitions used the UNESCO status in their appeals to higher government officials, although, given the timing of Wen Jiabao's 2004 decision to suspend the dam proposal, the pressure from UNESCO seems less important in the Nu River case. The two campaigns were also able to elicit an unprecedented response from top-level authorities – President Putin in the Baikal case and Premier Wen Jiabao (twice) in the Nu River case. The activists also had other actors within government on their side, including the Irkutsk regional governor for the Baikal movement and actors within SEPA for the Nu River movement. Finally, in both cases, key leaders of these movements won international recognition for their efforts. As mentioned previously, Marina Rikhvanova of BaikalWave and Yu Xiaogang of Green Watershed won the prestigious Goldman Prize in 2008 and 2006, respectively.

Despite all of these similarities, the movements also have some key differences, especially in how they approached the issue of mass mobilization. First, while in both cases the groups made use of petitions, the scale and collection of petition signatures starkly differs. In the Baikal case, approximately 100,000

55 Tom Phillips, "Joy as China shelves plans to dam 'angry river,'" *The Guardian*, 2 December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/02/joy-as-china-shelves-plans-to-dam-angry-river> (accessed 15 April 2018).

56 Campaigns to protect Lake Baikal have featured heavily in the history of the environmental movement in Russia, including in the 1960s and late 1980s. See, for example, Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999). In Yunnan, the region's biodiversity and relative poverty attracted international groups working on the environment and development in the 1990s, and for years the region was a hub for environmental civil society groups, both foreign and domestic. See, for example, Timothy Hildebrandt, *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State in China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jessica C. Teets, *Civil Society Under Authoritarianism: The China Model* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

petition signatures were gathered at local rallies in Irkutsk, protests held in other Russian cities, and online. In the Chinese case, the collection of petition signatures was limited and targeted, involving mostly NGOs or other experts, activists, and journalists. Second, there is a clear difference in the NGO coalitions' use of mass protest. The Baikal coalition and its supporters organized coordinated protests in 13 cities across Russia. In fact, members of the Baikal coalition specifically mentioned the importance and effectiveness of this mass mobilization in interviews.⁵⁷ This kind of coordinated, cross-regional mass protest is absent in the Chinese case. However, Yu Xiaogang did have a hand in mobilizing villagers affected by the Manwan Dam to demonstrate publicly in August 2003 and 'privately' (held as a meeting at a restaurant under a tent) on the anniversary in 2004.⁵⁸

Furthermore, the use of mass mobilization in these cases has had some harsh consequences for the local organizations involved. In the Russian case, Baikal Environmental Wave has repeatedly faced pressure for its efforts to protect Baikal at the local level. The group has actively continued its work, including two other notable mass campaigns against a uranium enrichment plant in nearby Angarsk and the Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill (at the time owned by Oleg Deripaska, oligarch and Putin's long-time friend) operating on Baikal's southern shore. During the latter campaign, the group had its offices raided and computers confiscated under the guise of searching for pirated software.⁵⁹ In 2015, the group was labeled a "foreign agent," and, upon fighting the decision in court, the organization and each of its three co-leaders were fined for not registering voluntarily.⁶⁰ Faced with heavy fines and the constraints of operating under the label of 'foreign agent,' the organization decided to formally close in early 2016.⁶¹ Another regional ENGO that had organized parallel local protests against the pipeline also faced increased pressure from the authorities

57 Interview 3-RF092515; Interview 36-RF111815; Interview 38-RF111915; Interview 82-RF070516; Interview 122-RF090316.

58 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*, 112.

59 Clifford J. Levy, "Russia Uses Microsoft to Suppress Dissent," *The New York Times*, 12 September 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/12/world/europe/12raids.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

60 Georgii Ivanushkin, "Baikal'skaia ekologicheskaiia volna oshtrafovana za narusheniye zakona 'ob inostrannykh agentakh,'" [Baikal Environmental Wave was fined for violating the law 'on foreign agents'], *Agentstvo Sotsial'noi Informatsii*, 1 February 2016, <https://www.asi.org.ru/news/2016/02/01/114853/> (accessed 15 April 2018).

61 "Baikal'skaia ekologicheskaiia volna zaiavila o likvidatsii." [Baikal Environmental Wave announced its closure], *Irkutsk Online*, 4 February 2016, <https://www.irk.ru/news/20160204/closing/> (accessed 15 April 2018).

immediately after the victory in 2006; however, this group has managed to recover its reputation and now reports improved relationships with local government officials.⁶² At the time of writing, the group has also not been affected by the 'foreign agent' law, although they have foreign funding.

Although mass demonstrations were not a central feature of the broader anti-dam campaign along the Nu River, Yu Xiaogang's personal efforts at mobilizing villagers did not go unnoticed.

The authorities have repeatedly tried to shut down Green Watershed and other groups have been warned away from working with them.⁶³ In 2006, Yu Xiaogang was initially blocked from traveling abroad to claim his Goldman Prize, although he was eventually allowed to go.⁶⁴ One reason that Yu Xiaogang continues to take risks – including becoming involved in the 2013 anti-PX protests in Kunming⁶⁵ – is because his revolutionary background protects him to some extent from the authorities.⁶⁶ However, although Yu Xiaogang's Green Watershed remains active, the organization has garnered a reputation for being a 'troublemaker' among other NGOs (both foreign and domestic) working in the region. According to an interviewee, some international environmental NGOs are afraid to work with Green Watershed, calling it an 'untouchable' NGO. Furthermore, this same interviewee mentioned that many other NGOs have criticized Green Watershed for destroying the 'honeymoon period' of NGOs in Yunnan.⁶⁷ Echoing this, a representative from an international environmental NGO based in Kunming blamed Yu Xiaogang directly for the changing atmosphere for NGOs and INGOs in Yunnan.⁶⁸ Another respondent at an

62 Interview 122-RF090316.

63 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*, 114–115.

64 Chen, "Transnational Environmental Movement," 522.

65 H. Christoph Steinhardt and Fengshi Wu, "In the Name of the Public: Environmental Protest and the Changing Landscape of Popular Contention in China," *The China Journal* 75 (November 24, 2015): 61–82, <https://doi.org/10.1086/684010>.

66 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*, 144.

67 Interview 114-PRC082216.

68 Mentioned in Interview 116-PRC082316. Note: Although Yunnan was initially a hub for international and domestic NGOs working in development and environmental issues, this atmosphere has changed. Hildebrandt argues that the 1990s through the mid-2000s were the "golden years" for NGOs in the province, after which things tightened. See Hildebrandt, *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State*. Furthermore, Yunnan was the pilot province for new NGO regulations in 2010 that helped to inform the national Overseas NGO Management Law passed in 2016. See, Carolyn Hsu and Jessica Teets, "Is China's New Overseas NGO Management Law Sounding the Death Knell for Civil Society? Maybe Not," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 14, no. 4 (2016): 1–17.

international environmental NGO in Beijing – one that had previously been involved in the mid-2000s Nu River campaign – said that the Lancang (Me-kong) dam issues are now too sensitive for them to work on.⁶⁹ Although Green Watershed continues its activism under the leadership of Yu Xiaogang, its past involvement in mass mobilization has not been without consequences for the organization, its ability to work with domestic or international partners, or the broader atmosphere for NGO work in Yunnan.

From these two cases in the mid-2000s, there is a clear difference between how Chinese and Russian environmental activists approach the tactic of mass mobilization. For those that do engage in mass mobilization – even if those tactics helped them reach their goals in the campaigns – there can still be consequences for the local NGO leaders, their organizations, or the broader atmosphere for NGOs working in that region. These consequences could then inform future movements and their interest in using mass mobilization as a tactic. In general, although both sets of activists learned that mass mobilization can work – Russian activists have continued to rely on organized mass protest, while Chinese activists have learned that loose networks or indirect ties to these sorts of movements may be safer. The second set of cases illustrates these dynamics.

Case 3 (Russia): The Movement to Protect Khimki Forest

One day in April 2007, while taking a walk with her daughter through her favorite section of the Khimki Forest, Khimki resident Evgeniia Chirikova noticed a portion of trees marked for removal.⁷⁰ As Chirikova later discovered, a new super highway linking Moscow and St. Petersburg had been routed directly through the middle of Khimki Forest. The marked trees that she had seen were to be removed for the construction of the highway. Although most Khimki residents were unaware until 2007 of a decision to route the highway through the Khimki Forest, the plan for the route had been officially approved in 2006. The Russian Ministry of Transport had discussed the highway project between Moscow and St. Petersburg for several years, and in 2006, plans

69 Interview 110-PRC081816.

70 Interview with Evgeniia Chirikova, September 18, 2015 (via Skype while the author was in Moscow). Unless otherwise noted, information from Chirikova about the movement is from this initial interview. Chirikova now lives in Tallinn, Estonia after leaving Russia for fear of reprisals. Although the first interview with Chirikova was conducted via Skype, the author also visited Chirikova in person in Tallinn on October 22, 2015. After this, several follow-up interviews were conducted via Skype. Because Chirikova no longer lives in Russia and her fame precedes her, she is identified here. However, all other interview respondents remain anonymous.

started to move forward for construction.⁷¹ On April 28, 2006, then-Governor of Moscow Oblast Boris Gromov issued a decree (No. 358/16) approving the project's intended route through the Moscow region, including through Khimki Forest.⁷² Chirikova learned as much as she could about this situation through Internet resources and then wrote a letter about her concerns to local officials.

After her letter went unanswered, Chirikova and her husband Mikhail Matveev⁷³ started talking about their concerns with their neighbors and other Khimki residents. During the summer of 2007, they printed flyers with information about the problem and started posting them everywhere; these flyers included Chirikova's phone number so that others who were concerned could get in touch. When people started to contact her, a grassroots movement in the local community began to take shape. Several people who later became the most active members of the movement to protect Khimki Forest became involved at this early stage.⁷⁴ At first, this started with local meetings to explain the problem and discuss ways to move forward. The activists also founded their own website, *ecmo.ru*, to host information about the movement and gather petition signatures against the highway project.⁷⁵

With no previous experience as an activist, Chirikova began to reach out to others within the environmental community for much needed expertise and advice. At first, she reached out to national Russian media outlets to cover the story, but when they ignored her, she started looking for local reporters.⁷⁶ Chirikova reached out to Mikhail Beketov, who in 2006 founded *Khimkinskaya Pravda*, an independent, self-produced newspaper that often exposed local corruption. Beketov first wrote about the highway plans and Chirikova's

71 "Trassu Moskva Peterburg mogut nachat' stroit' v 2006," ["Construction could begin on Moscow-Petersburg highway in 2006"], RBK, 11 March 2005, <http://www.rbc.ru/society/11/03/2005/89470.shtml> (accessed 15 April 2018).

72 Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Moskovskoj oblasti. "O merakh po stroitel'stvy skorostnoi avtomobil'noi magistrali 'Moskva – Sankt-Peterburg' i razvitiu svyazannykh s nei territorii Moskovskoi oblasti, No. 358/16." [Decree of the Government of Moscow Region. "On measures to build the "Moscow – St. Petersburg" high-speed highway and the development of associated territories of the Moscow region, No. 358/16."], 4 April 2006.

73 Khimki activists and Chirikova herself were quick to point out that Matveev did much of the coordinating and organizing for the movement behind the scenes, while Chirikova became the public face and speaker for the movement.

74 Interview 4-RF100715; Interview 6-RF100915.

75 Interview 4-RF100715.

76 Interview with Evgeniia Chirikova on May 11, 2016 (via Skype). This follow-up interview was primarily about Beketov's role in the movement.

involvement in the movement against it in July 2007 in a full-page article.⁷⁷ From then on, with Beketov's support, Chirikova had a local media source through which she could spread more information about the nascent movement and its activities.

In addition to finding a local media ally, Chirikova and her growing network of activists also reached out to the local branch offices of transnational environmental organizations, including Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Although neither organization was formally affiliated with the movement, their representatives based in Moscow often offered support through advice, networking, and facilitating the spread of information on a national scale.⁷⁸ During an early consultation with one of these groups, Khimki activists were specifically advised that their best course of action would be to organize large-scale protests to attract more attention to their cause.⁷⁹ The Khimki activists followed this advice, holding periodic rallies and pickets, sometimes in Khimki and sometimes in front of the Ministry of Transport in Moscow, to develop local support from 2007 onward. One activist estimates that there was a core group of 50 to 60 activists at this time, with another 300 to 400 people who regularly would show up to protest.⁸⁰ By the summer of 2008, the activists also began to camp out in Khimki Forest to monitor any potential construction, mirroring tactics of other nearby movements.⁸¹

Although the movement was slowly gaining strength through these methods, the real turning point came out of a tragedy in 2008. Beketov, the local journalist, had been receiving threats for his outspoken criticism of the local Khimki administration. In November 2008, Beketov was attacked and so badly beaten that it put him in a coma.⁸² After this attack, Russian national media outlets started paying more attention to the Khimki movement and increasing their coverage.⁸³ By the end of 2009, Chirikova was well known and the

77 Mikhail Beketov, "Khimchanam razreshat dyshat' cherez raz," ["Khimki residents are allowed to breathe every other time"], *Khimkinskaia Pravda*, 12 July 2007.

78 Interview 3-RF092515.

79 Interview 4-RF100715; Interview 6-RF100915.

80 Interview 4-RF100715.

81 Ibid.

82 Vera Chelishcheva, "Zhurnalists iz Khimok." ["Journalists from Khimki."] *Novaia Gazeta*, 15 November 2008, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2008/11/16/35843-zhurnalists-iz-himok>.

83 As a quick example, RIA Novosti published 5 articles about Khimki before Beketov's attack. The rest of the articles about Khimki (62) were published after the beating. For more information, see: https://ria.ru/trend/forest_Himki_14112008/.

movement was becoming more political.⁸⁴ Chirikova ran for mayor of Khimki against incumbent Strel'chenko in the 2009 local elections. Although Chirikova assumed she would lose (and did), the election campaign gathered more attention to the activists' cause.⁸⁵

By the summer of 2010, the movement had attracted national and international attention.

That summer, logging of trees for the construction on the highway began amid record forest fires around Moscow. Activists in the summer protest camp came into conflict with construction workers and the camp itself was attacked by a large group of masked men in July.⁸⁶ The optics were bad and public attention to environmental issues was aided by the visible smoke throughout the city. At the end of the summer on August 22, several thousand people attended a rally in Moscow's Pushkin Square where rock musician Iurii Shevchuk performed to benefit Khimki Forest.⁸⁷ The benefit for Khimki happened a few days before a U2 concert in Moscow, where U2 frontman Bono invited Shevchuk to sing with him onstage. Shevchuk reportedly sent Bono an open letter about the Khimki Forest movement, and Bono mentioned the issue in several interviews while in Russia. The next day, United Russia issued an appeal to then-President Dmitrii Medvedev, who subsequently announced that plans for the highway were to be suspended while the authorities considered alternatives.⁸⁸ This was largely hailed as a victory for the activists, who were able to reach the highest level of government through their involvement and halt the planned highway.

However, in December 2010 Medvedev announced that the highway route would continue as planned.⁸⁹ Although the activists won some concessions,

84 Interview 6-RF100915.

85 Interview 4-RF071016, follow-up.

86 "Fate of Russia's Khimki Forest Uncertain After Ecologists Attacked, Detained," *RFERL*, 23 July 2010, https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_Police_Detain_Khimki_Forest_Protesters_Near_Moscow/2107674.html (accessed 15 April 2018).

87 "Iurii Shevchuk na mitinge-kontserte v zashchitu Khimkinskogo lesa." ["Iurii Shevchuk at the protest-concert in defense of Khimki Forest"], *RIA Novosti*, 23 August 2010, <https://ria.ru/photolents/20100823/268068268.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

88 For a recounting of the whole Bono affair, see: Julia Ioffe, "Bono vs. Putin," *Foreign Policy*, 27 August 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/08/27/bono-vs-putin/> (accessed 15 April 2018).

89 Michael Schwartz, "Russia Approves Road That Will Run Through Forest," *The New York Times*, 14 December 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/15/world/europe/15russia.html?mcubz=1> (accessed 15 April 2018).

including compensation and a reduction in secondary development along the route, the decision to resume the highway dealt a blow to the movement. After that announcement, it was difficult for Khimki activists to regain the level of momentum that they had the summer before.⁹⁰ But when clearing of trees began in April 2011, the protest camps in Khimki Forest resumed. In June 2011, Chirikova held an 'anti-Seliger' (an alternative to a pro-Kremlin forum at Lake Seliger) in the protest camp that high-profile members of the Russian opposition attended, including Alexei Navalny, Boris Nemtsov, and Sergei Udaltsov.⁹¹ These connections with the opposition movement continued, and Chirikova became a key figure in the post-election protest movement from the December 2011 protests through May 2012. In August 2012, Khimki mayor Strel'chenko resigned and Chirikova again announced her mayoral bid.⁹² Although she lost to Strel'chenko's anointed successor amid allegations of fraud, she came in second place with 17% of the vote.⁹³ From there, however, the movement waned. In early 2013, Beketov died from the injuries he had sustained in the attack five years earlier.⁹⁴ Construction of the highway continued and the new route to Sheremetev airport through Khimki Forest opened at the end of 2014.⁹⁵

Case 4 (China): Online Mobilization and the PM_{2.5} Data Disclosure Controversy

Air pollution is one of the most visible and pervasive environmental problems in China. In 2008, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing began recording and reporting hourly air quality data that included PM_{2.5} – particulate matter measuring

90 Interview 6-RF100915.

91 Julia Ioffe, "Anti-Seliger," *The New Yorker*, 20 June 2011. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/anti-seliger> (accessed 15 April 2018).

92 "Chirikova to Run for Khimki Mayor," *Moscow Times*, 19 August 2012. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/chirikova-to-run-for-khimki-mayor-17116> (accessed 15 April 2018).

93 "Russian elections preserve Putin's dominance, opponents cry foul," *Reuters*, 14 October 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-elections-idUKBRE8gDoGE20121014> (accessed 15 April 2018).

94 Aleksei Lazarev, "Umer zashchitnik Khimkinskogo lesa, zhurnalist Mikhail Beketov," ["Defender of Khimki Forest, Journalist Mikhail Beketov, Has Died"], *МК.ru*, 8 April 2013, <http://www.mk.ru/social/2013/04/08/838151-umer-zaschitnik-himkinskogo-lesa-zhurnalist-mihail-beketov.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

95 "Otkryto dvizhenie po golovnomu uchastku trassy Moskva – Sankt-Peterburg," ["Traffic opens along the main part of the Moscow-St. Petersburg highway"], *M24.ru*, 23 December 2014, <http://www.m24.ru/articles/62987> (accessed 15 April 2018).

less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter – making it more fine-grained than the official Chinese government data.⁹⁶ These readings typically include a value from 0 to 500 known as the air quality index (AQI), which is a composite measure of ozone, particulate pollution (including PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide in the air.⁹⁷ Since the system is based on the EPA's maximum score of 500, when the air quality in Beijing surpassed that threshold in November 2010, the Embassy's Twitter feed accidentally labeled it 'crazy bad' because the programmer never thought it would go beyond the scale.⁹⁸ The release of this information – even without the 'crazy bad' snafu – has been a sore point with Chinese authorities. According to a leaked cable, the Chinese government asked the U.S. Embassy to stop reporting the data in 2009 because it was causing 'confusion' and undesirable 'social consequences' among the Chinese public,⁹⁹ but the United States continued to release its information on Twitter. These air quality reports – and accompanying commentary – also spread on Sina *Weibo* (the Chinese version of Twitter) creating more public awareness of China's air pollution problems.

The discrepancy between U.S. Embassy Beijing's air quality data (which included the smaller PM_{2.5}) and the government's (which only included the larger PM₁₀) became a focal point for public discussion on *Weibo* in late 2011. Although Twitter has been blocked in China since 2009, netizens in China can either circumvent the 'Great Firewall' using a VPN (virtual private network) or access the U.S. Embassy Beijing's data through a different application on their mobile phone or computer and then easily post that information to *Weibo*. Pan Shiyi, Chinese real estate magnate and influential *Weibo* user (a group sometimes referred to as 'Big V' for the 'v' next to their name confirming a verified account), began posting about the difference between the official data and the data released from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. In November 2011, he posted an online poll on his *Weibo* account asking his followers if they thought the

96 After 2008 the monitoring spread to other U.S. consulates across China. For historical air quality data, see: <http://www.stateair.net/>.

97 For more information on the EPA's national air quality standards and AQI monitoring efforts, see: <https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=aqibasics.aqi>.

98 Christina Larson, "Beijing air: 'crazy bad.'" *Foreign Policy*, 19 November 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/19/beijing-air-crazy-bad/> (accessed 15 April 2018).

99 "Embassy Air Quality Tweets Said to 'Confuse' Chinese Public," U.S. Department of State, 10 July 2009, available at: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BEIJING1945_a.html (accessed 15 April 2018).

government should include PM_{2.5} in its official monitoring data – over 90% agreed.¹⁰⁰

Not long after Pan Shiyi's online poll, the government announced that it would revise national air quality standards to include PM_{2.5}, but that the deadline for the mandatory release of that data would be 2016.¹⁰¹ Many environmentalists – including Ma Jun, the director of a domestic ENGO in Beijing that works on pollution data disclosure – expressed their disappointment with the four-year wait for information in the media.¹⁰² Anger over the delay continued, especially since an anonymous government source confirmed that Beijing and Shanghai already had the data on PM_{2.5}, but decided that the 'time was not ripe' (*shiji bu chengshu*) to release it to the public.¹⁰³ Responding to public pressure, the Beijing municipal government announced that it would start releasing PM_{2.5} data in January 2012; however, once released, these measurements were suspiciously lower than the U.S. Embassy readings, which cast doubt over whether official air quality measurements could be trusted.¹⁰⁴ The State Council officially adopted the new national air quality standards that included PM_{2.5} in March 2012,¹⁰⁵ but other 'bad air' days that spring continued to stoke online debate while the public waited for the government to rollout its PM_{2.5} monitoring and data disclosure.

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- 100 Jeremy Page, "Microbloggers Pressure Beijing to Improve Air Pollution Monitoring," *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 November 2011, <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/11/08/internet-puts-pressure-on-beijing-to-improve-air-pollution-monitoring/> (accessed 15 April 2018); Samuel Kay, Bo Zhao, and Daniel Sui, "Can Social Media Clear the Air? A Case Study of the Air Pollution Problem in Chinese Cities," *The Professional Geographer* 67, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 351–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2014.970838>.
- 101 Jiangtao Shi, "New pollution figures on the way ... in five years; Government reluctance to immediately change monitoring methods reinforces criticism it cannot face up to the grim truth of the urban environment," *South China Morning Post*, 24 November 2011, retrieved from LexisNexis Academic database.
- 102 Edward Wong, "Outrage Grows Over Air Pollution and China's Response," *The New York Times*, 6 December 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/07/world/asia/beijing-journal-anger-grows-over-air-pollution-in-china.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 103 Long Li, "Tigao kongqi zhiwu biao zhun, he dai 'shiji chengshu'?", ["To improve air pollution control standards, why wait for 'the time to be ripe'?"], *Guangzhou Ribao*, 3 November 2011, http://news.ifeng.com/opinion/politics/detail_2011_11/03/10381328_0.shtml (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 104 Brian Spegele, "Comparing Pollution Data: Beijing vs. U.S. Embassy on PM_{2.5}," *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 January 2012, <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2012/01/23/comparing-pollution-data-beijing-vs-u-s-embassy-on-pm2-5/> (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 105 Kay, Zhao, and Sui, "Can Social Media Clear the Air?"

The controversy over the U.S. Embassy's continued release of PM_{2.5} data came to a peak in June 2012. On World Environment Day (June 5), Wu Xiaoqing, the Vice Minister of Environmental Protection, demanded that the U.S. Embassy stop releasing its air pollution data. He argued that it was unfair to judge China's air pollution using Western standards, since China was at a different level of development. He also accused the 'foreign embassies' releasing the data (the U.S. was not mentioned by name, but it was implied) of violating the Vienna Convention.¹⁰⁶ The volume of posts related to air pollution surged on *Weibo* right after Wu Xiaoqing's comments. However, despite the tide of (overwhelmingly negative) posts, the rate of censorship was relaxed to accommodate the surge in commentary.¹⁰⁷

On June 13, another government official made an ill-advised statement on the situation. Cui Tiankai, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that instead of pinning their hopes on foreign embassies, Chinese citizens should depend on their own efforts (*zhongguo ren ziji de nuli*) to improve the air.¹⁰⁸ This caused another volume burst in *Weibo* posts. In addition to comments directly critical of Cui's statement, a post by Pan Shiyi was also widely re-tweeted that day – a post that was perhaps intended to agree with the latter part of Cui's statement about personal responsibility, but that was often accompanied by other users' negative commentary about the Chinese government's inaction.¹⁰⁹ However, censorship was again relaxed despite the surge in negative commentary. This suggests that the government censors were willing to cede to public anger on *Weibo* to signal their acknowledgement of public concerns and show their responsiveness to public opinion.¹¹⁰

After the events of June 2012, the government made serious efforts to increase transparency by disclosing more data on air pollution. In October 2012, the Beijing municipal government set up 15 additional official air monitoring stations to release PM_{2.5} data, raising the total to 35 monitoring stations in

106 Ben Blanchard, "China says only it has right to monitor air pollution," *Reuters*, 5 June 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-environment/china-says-only-it-has-right-to-monitor-air-pollution-idUSBRE85408S20120606> (accessed 15 April 2018).

107 Plantan and Cairns, "Signaling responsiveness".

108 "Waijiao bu fu buzhang: Wu jiang kongqi zhuliang gaishan ji wang yu waiguo shiguan," [Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs: Don't count on foreign embassies to improve air quality], *Nanfang Ribao*, 13 June 2012, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-06-13/055624582847.shtml>.

109 Plantan and Cairns, "Signaling responsiveness".

110 Ibid.

Beijing and its suburbs.¹¹¹ By the start of 2013, the Chinese government had set up approximately 500 PM_{2.5} monitoring stations in over 70 cities across China.¹¹² In early 2014, Premier Li Keqiang declared a nationwide ‘war on pollution’ that would prioritize reducing PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ levels.¹¹³ Many have credited the speed and timing of the government’s decision to the rising tide of public opinion on social media,¹¹⁴ and, in particular, the role that Pan Shiyi played in mobilizing public opinion.¹¹⁵

Discussion of Cases 3 & 4

The movement to protect Khimki Forest and the online movement for PM_{2.5} data disclosure again provide an opportunity to compare environmental activism in Russia and China and activists’ differing approaches to mass mobilization tactics. In terms of similarities, these cases represent movements focusing on environmental problems in the capital cities that became the most influential movements in either country at the time.¹¹⁶ They involved the help of national celebrities that are not normally associated with the environmental movement (musician Iurii Shevchuk in the Khimki case and businessman Pan Shiyi in the PM_{2.5} case). Both were also largely grassroots or informal mass movements, but could be attributed to a clear and visible leader (Evgeniia Chirikova spearheading real-world mobilization in the Russian case, and Pan Shiyi mobilizing public opinion online). Although there are some similarities between these movements, their differences illustrate the broader argument about Russian and Chinese environmentalists’ differing approaches to mass mobilization.

First, there is the obvious difference that Khimki activists used real-world mass protest tactics, while the movement for PM_{2.5} data disclosure was based

111 Louise Watt, “Beijing to more accurately monitor air quality,” Associated Press, 7 October 2012, reprinted in *The Washington Examiner*, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/beijing-to-more-accurately-monitor-air-quality> (accessed 15 April 2018).

112 David Roberts, “Opinion: How the US Embassy Tweeted to Clear Beijing’s Air,” *Wired*, 6 March 2015, <https://www.wired.com/2015/03/opinion-us-embassy-beijing-tweeted-clear-air/> (accessed 15 April 2018).

113 “China to ‘declare war’ on pollution, premier says,” *Reuters*, 4 March 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-pollution/china-to-declare-war-on-pollution-premier-says-idUSBREA2405W20140305> (accessed 15 April 2018).

114 Roberts, “Opinion: How the US Embassy Tweeted”; Kristie Lu Stout, “Can social media clear air over China?,” *CNN*, 19 April 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/04/19/world/asia/lu-stout-china-pollution> (accessed 15 April 2018).

115 Interview 56-PRC031016.

116 Interview 3-RF092515; Interview 60-PRC040816.

on the Internet. Although the Internet in China is heavily censored by the government and is far from the 'liberation technology' that some have hoped for,¹¹⁷ it has opened up a space for a new class of 'netizens' to engage in online debate that can have real-world consequences.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, *Weibo*, where the online mass mobilization was taking place, was at its height of popularity as a social media platform from 2011 to 2013.¹¹⁹ Even though there were not protests in the streets, the online movement for PM_{2.5} data disclosure is widely credited as the first time that a social media campaign caused a change in national-level public policy in China.¹²⁰ An interviewee at a TENGU in Beijing also pointed out that this online campaign helped the MEP, which had already set the stage for disclosing PM_{2.5}, but lacked the momentum to push for national policy change without the public pressure on *Weibo*.¹²¹

By contrast, activists in the Khimki case were specifically advised that mass protests in the streets would be the most effective tactic. When local Khimki activists consulted a branch of a TENGU in Moscow, the representative told them explicitly that their best course of action would be to organize mass protests, especially when compared to other options like filing a lawsuit.¹²² One of the Khimki activists credited Medvedev's decision to temporarily suspend the project to the massive protest-concert in August 2010, saying that '[the TENGU] was right – all you need is a lot of people and then everything will come to a halt.'¹²³ In addition to providing advice about mass tactics, other TENGOS and ENGOS in Moscow also visibly and directly supported the movement through a multi-actor coalition. This coalition, 'For the Forests of Moscow Region' (*Za Lesa Podmoskov'ia*), included the grassroots Khimki activists, Greenpeace Russia, WWF Russia, and Moscow-based Russian domestic ENGOS Biodiversity

117 See, for example: Larry Diamond, "Liberation Technology," In Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Liberation Technology: Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

118 Qiang Xiao, "The Battle for the Chinese Internet," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (2011): 47–61.

119 Mentioned in Interview 67-PRC042116. Note: Weibo has since lost its place as the most popular social media platform in China, displaced by WeChat (*Weixin*) in 2013 for a combination of reasons. For more information, see: Matt Schiavenza, "WeChat – Not Weibo – Is the Chinese Social Network to Watch," *The Atlantic*, 30 July 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/07/wechat-not-weibo-is-the-chinese-social-network-to-watch/278212/>.

120 Interview 56-PRC031016.

121 Interview 59-PRC040716.

122 Interview 4-RF100715; Interview 6-RF100915.

123 Interview 4-RF071016, follow-up.

Conservation Center, the Social Ecological Union (SEU), and the Russian Bird Conservation Union.¹²⁴

The formal involvement of TENGOS and domestic ENGOS in a coalition in the Khimki case points to a second crucial difference in the approach to mass mobilization between the two cases. Although professional ENGOS were involved in the Khimki campaign, both foreign and domestic ENGOS in China were reluctant to be directly associated with the mass mobilization on *Weibo*. As another study of this case has pointed out, the key users on *Weibo* were overwhelmingly 'government sources, companies, or famous individuals' – not environmental NGOs or environmental activists.¹²⁵ For example, although Chinese environmentalist Ma Jun was often interviewed in the international press about the PM_{2.5} issue, his presence on *Weibo* during this period was rather muted, and – as others have pointed out – he posted from his individual account instead of from his organization's account.¹²⁶

Interviews with international and domestic environmental organizations based in Beijing re-iterate this distance between the mass mobilization online and traditional civil society actors. One interviewee at a domestic ENGO in Beijing mentioned that although they were watching the online debate and Pan Shiyi's *Weibo* account in particular, they were careful not to be seen as leading the public debate online.¹²⁷ Instead of getting directly involved in the online mass mobilization, this group focused on using the growing awareness to promote their research on PM_{2.5} and make clear that (1) the disclosure PM_{2.5} was necessary, and (2) that the Chinese government – not the U.S. Embassy – should be the ones disclosing it.¹²⁸ Similarly, a TENGU in Beijing adapted their climate change campaign from a more general campaign to one that focused on coal burning (a major contributor of PM_{2.5} emissions) in order to take advantage of public awareness on PM_{2.5} to push for a national policy change on coal consumption.¹²⁹ This group also decided not work directly with either

124 For more information on the coalition, see: "Koalitsiia 'Za Lesa Podmoskov'ia,'" [The coalition 'For the Forests of Moscow Region'], Greenpeace.org, accessed 15 April 2018, <http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/ru/campaigns/forests/valuable-natural-objects/khimki-forest/coalition/>.

125 Kay, Zhao, and Sui, "Can Social Media Clear the Air?," 356.

126 Irina Fedorenko and Yixian Sun, "Microblogging-Based Civic Participation on Environment in China: A Case Study of the PM_{2.5} Campaign," *Voluntas* 27, no. 5 (October 2016): 2090.

127 Interview 56-PRC031016.

128 Ibid.

129 Interview 67-PRC042116.

Ma Jun or Pan Shiyi. The interviewee mentioned that Ma Jun was successfully working on his own for data disclosure, and would not necessarily want to be associated with the TENGU or risk being seen as being ‘disruptive.’ As for Pan Shiyi, he was already under too much government pressure, leading the TENGU to assume that a direct collaboration with him would be “uncomfortable” for them both.¹³⁰ In the PM_{2.5} case, professionalized NGOs kept a careful distance from the online mass mobilization driven by celebrity *Weibo* users – even though they took advantage of the increased public awareness to advance their own causes.

As in the earlier cases in the mid-2000s, the leaders of the mass mobilization in the Khimki case and the PM_{2.5} campaign have faced serious consequences for their activism. Evgeniia Chirikova, the leader of the movement to protect Khimki Forest, fled Russia in 2015, citing threats that the authorities would take her children away from her.¹³¹ Although she now lives in Estonia, Chirikova continues her activism from abroad, running the website *Activatica.org* – which features stories of grassroots mass mobilization from all over Russia – and continuing to advocate for environmental causes throughout the European Union.¹³² In 2013, Pan Shiyi was part of a broader crackdown on *Weibo*’s so-called ‘Big V,’ or verified accounts with massive followings. In September, he gave a timid interview on CCTV (likely under pressure from the authorities) discussing and agreeing with new regulations on the dissemination of false information online (China Digital Times 2013).¹³³ Under the new regulations, an internet user could face up to three years in jail if they post false information that is viewed more than 5,000 times or re-posted more than 500 times – which sent a strong message to *Weibo*’s key influencers.¹³⁴ A combination of these new regulations and changing technology preferences have essentially ended *Weibo*’s time as a forum for lively public debate, with those

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “Environmentalist Flees Russia To Protect Children From Authorities,” RFERL, 20 April 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-activist-flees-to-protect-children/26967906.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

¹³² Based on several regular follow-up conversations between the author and Chirikova about her continued activism.

¹³³ “Netizen Voices: CCTV Reins in Pan Shiyi,” China Digital Times, 13 September 2013, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2013/09/netizen-voices-cctv-reins-pan-shiyi/> (accessed 15 April 2018).

¹³⁴ “Top blogger Pan Shiyi appears on TV amid internet crackdown,” AFP, 11 September 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1308505/top-blogger-pan-shiyi-appears-tv-amid-internet-crackdown> (accessed 15 April 2018).

conversations moving now to WeChat (*Weixin*), which has become the 'preferred medium for provocative online discussion.'¹³⁵

The Last Five Years: The Fate of Mass Mobilization from 2013–2018

The use of mass mobilization tactics and the involvement of formal ENGOs in these latter cases illustrate broader trends in civil society development in both countries over the last five years. In the PM_{2.5} campaign, while professional environmental activists followed the discussion on social media closely, they were careful to distance themselves both from the mass mobilization and from each other. Instead, they used the momentum created by public awareness on PM_{2.5} to push through policy change for their own organizational agendas. This strict 'division of labor' between actors is evident in other environmental campaigns across China. One interviewee described an example of a model of 'loose consensus-based cooperation' between groups on a coal campaign, where an international NGO like NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council) would head up research, a domestic ENGO like Ma Jun's IPE would work on relevant data disclosure, a TENGU like Greenpeace East Asia would do investigative research in the field and raise the public profile of the issue, and, if needed, a domestic ENGO like Friends of Nature would work on related environmental litigation.¹³⁶ In this model, each organization works to its strengths to contribute to a common goal, but without directly collaborating.

For local issues, this model can be modified to help a local ENGO with an environmental problem, but without endangering either the local ENGO or the TENGU for its collaboration. In a case of heavy metal pollution in Yunnan province, a TENGU based in Beijing helped local ENGOs gather evidence of pollution and raise awareness of the issue, then handed that evidence to a domestic ENGO based in Beijing to file an environmental lawsuit; however, on the surface, there was no formal association between the groups.¹³⁷ Sometimes, a TENGU representative recognized, it is safer to do 'unbranded work' with domestic NGOs to protect both parties from 'attracting trouble.'¹³⁸ One local ENGO that is more confrontational said that they had loosely coordinated with a TENGU in Beijing in the past, but they do not formally discuss the connection or use the Internet to contact one another because they know that they are

¹³⁵ "From Weibo to WeChat; The internet." *The Economist*, 18 January 2014, <https://www.economist.com/news/china/21594296-after-crackdown-microblogs-sensitive-online-discussion-has-shifted-weibo-wechat> (accessed 15 April 2018).

¹³⁶ Interview 59-PRC040716.

¹³⁷ Interview 60-PRC040816.

¹³⁸ Interview 59-PRC040716.

being monitored.¹³⁹ Another interviewee agreed that there is lots of ‘under the table’ cooperation between NGOs, instead of broadcasting a formal connection publicly.¹⁴⁰

In addition to reducing visible horizontal collaboration between local, national, and international NGOs, groups are also careful to minimize their association with mass protest. When asked about the recent anti-PX protests across China, one interviewee mentioned that most NGOs are careful not to be directly associated with the anti-PX protests because mobilizing citizens to protest is a ‘political red line.’¹⁴¹ Another interviewee said, ‘If you want to survive [as an NGO] in China, you can’t touch those types of things.’¹⁴² Furthermore, employees at one TENGU in Beijing were explicitly told not to participate in protests once they were hired, lest it reflect back on the organization.¹⁴³ A respondent at a domestic ENGO said they specifically do not engage in ‘campaigning for public pressure’ (i.e. mass mobilization) and instead focus on providing solutions to government and business through a more collaborative approach.¹⁴⁴ Sometimes local domestic ENGOS, like Yu Xiaogang’s Green Watershed, are still involved in local mass campaigns like the anti-PX protests in Kunming,¹⁴⁵ but – as stated before – they do this at their own risk.

Compared to environmental groups operating in China, who work to minimize horizontal collaboration and direct involvement in mass protest, Russian environmental groups, especially after the Khimki movement, provide a stark contrast. Although the Khimki movement failed to stop the highway construction through the forest, it has had a lasting legacy for other local activist movements around Moscow. Several of the activists involved in the Khimki movement continue their activism and help other activists by sharing their experiences.¹⁴⁶ Many activists based in Moscow have consulted directly with former Khimki activists, including those involved in recent movements to protect Moscow parks from illegal infill construction.¹⁴⁷ Even though the highway through Khimki forest was eventually built, the mass nature of the movement was able to elicit a response from the top authorities – a message that has permeated through the rest of civil society. Even outside Moscow, grassroots

139 Interview 114-PRC082216.

140 Interview 67-PRC042116.

141 Interview 59-PRC040716.

142 Interview 116-PRC082316.

143 Interview 69-PRC050616.

144 Interview 57-PRC031716.

145 See, for example: Steinhart and Wu, “In the Name of the Public”.

146 Interview 4-RF100715; Interview 7-RF101115.

147 Interview 84-RF0711316; Interview 85-RF071416.

groups keep Khimki's example in mind when justifying the decision to rely on mass protests as their primary tactic.¹⁴⁸

While many of these Khimki-inspired activists are informal grassroots groups – and some have made the decision to stay informal on purpose after witnessing the effects of the ‘foreign agent’ law¹⁴⁹ – there are still many formal ENGOS and TENGOS operating in Russia that emphasize the continued importance of mass mobilization. In interviews with formal domestic ENGOS, many named mass mobilization as the most effective tactic available to environmental activists in Russia, including ENGOS operating in Moscow, Siberia, Central, and Southern Russia.¹⁵⁰ However, many activists – whether involved in formal NGOs or not – recognize that organizing protests has become more difficult since the 2011–2012 electoral cycle protests.¹⁵¹ One group is no longer participating in or organizing protests after receiving a warning under the ‘foreign agent’ law.¹⁵² Another group, that has successfully fought the ‘foreign agent’ label, has decided not to organize protests on their own, but still gives support to grassroots protest groups.¹⁵³ As mass protests have become more sensitive, some groups are backing away (especially those dealing with the ‘foreign agent’ label), although many still advocate that this is the most effective tactic.

There has been a proliferation of environmental mass movements throughout Russia over the last several years, including movements against urban infill construction in Moscow's parks¹⁵⁴ and mass protests against landfills and trash incinerators.¹⁵⁵ However, while there has been a trend toward more grassroots or informal mass movements,¹⁵⁶ that does not mean that formal ENGOS or TENGOS have backed away from collaborating with them. There are plenty of recent examples of cross-regional collaboration between ENGOS, TENGOS, and grassroots groups. For example, Greenpeace Russia helped to unite Moscow's disparate park movements under one umbrella during the summer of 2016, including organizing coordinated actions across the groups and collecting more

148 Interview 32-RF111215; Interview 104-RF081016.

149 Interview 85-RF071416.

150 Interview 21-RF103015; Interview 22-RF110315; Interview 38-RF111915; Interview 40-RF112215; Interview 41-RF112515; Interview 82-RF070516.

151 Interview 3-RF092515; Interview 4-RF100715; Interview 28-RF110615.

152 Interview 48-RF120315.

153 Interview 22-RF110315.

154 Petr V. Ivanov, “The battle for Moscow,” *Open Democracy*, 5 December 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/petr-v-ivanov/battle-for-moscow> (accessed 15 April 2015).

155 “Russians Protest Against Landfills in Moscow Region.” RFERL, 15 April 2018. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-landfill-volokolamsk/29168277.html> (accessed 15 April 2015).

156 Interview 21-RF103015; Interview 22-RF110315.

than 15,000 online signatures for a petition on the issue to Moscow's mayor.¹⁵⁷ Collaboration between formal ENGOS and TENGOS continues as well. In 2017, Greenpeace Russia, the movement 'Separate Collection' (*razdel'nyj sbor*), and EKA formed a coalition against trash incineration and to promote recycling.¹⁵⁸ These initiatives support and directly link formal ENGOS and TENGOS to the most active environmental protest movements happening across Russia. Although there is some convergence between Russia and China in that mass protest is driven more by informal, grassroots groups, formal NGOs (whether foreign or domestic) in Russia are less afraid of being associated with or directly supporting these movements.

Conclusion

Although Russia and China both have high levels of protest – including protests driven by environmental grievances – the ways in which civil society actors relate to mass mobilization as a tactic differs. In Russia, grassroots groups, formal ENGOS, and TENGOS are more likely to view mass mobilization as a 'go-to' tactic and support each other in their mass campaigns. In China, international and domestic ENGOS generally avoid directly collaborating or getting directly involved in mobilizing people for mass protest – whether online or in the streets. Over time, these distinctions have become even more clear. In the mid-2000s cases, for example, the cross-regional NGO coordination in the movements in both countries was relatively similar. But by the 2010s, Chinese domestic ENGOS and TENGOS were careful to draw an explicit 'division of labor' between their activities to avoid overt horizontal connections between groups. Meanwhile, Russian grassroots groups – who are mostly driving environmental protest in Russia today – continue to partner directly with domestic ENGOS and TENGOS.

These differences in how environmental groups in Russia and China approach the tactic of mass mobilization are shaped by the historical and political context in which they are embedded. First, the historical legacies of mass

157 "Goryachie tochki na zelenoi karte," [Hot spots on a green map], Greenpeace Russia, 3 June 2016, http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/ru/news/2016/03-06-2016_petition_parks_Sobyanin/ (accessed 15 April 2018).

158 "Ekologi ob'edinilis' protiv szhiganiia i za pererabotku otkhodov," [Environmentalists have teamed up against incineration and for the recycling of waste], Greenpeace Russia, 8 February 2017. <http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/ru/news/2017/08-02-protiv-msz/> (accessed 15 April 2018).

mobilization in those two countries have created different associations for the state with regard to environmental protests. The environmental movement was a Trojan horse for other more systemic-level grievances at the end of the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁹ By contrast, environmental grievances were not a driver of the mass mobilization across China in 1989. Second, environmental demands in Russia are inherently systemic – even if a local movement is focused on NIMBY-type grievances, those grievances could affect the stability underlying Putin's *sistema* if they are aimed at a polluting industry or project tied to local or national political elites (for example, Oleg Deripaska's ownership of the Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill or Arkadii Rotenberg's ties to the Khimki forest highway). In China, environmental demands can be separated from systemic grievances, especially since local grievances can expose local-level corruption and help the central government address the problem. As long as NIMBY-style protest does not link up across regions and environmental NGOs separate themselves from the mass protests and from each other, environmental groups will continue to occupy a privileged position among civil society groups in China.

In addition to these two main explanations, choices that environmental activists make about the tactic of mass mobilization further illustrate the differences in state-society relationships between environmental groups and the authorities in Russia and China. Because of the state's attitude toward environmental groups, Chinese environmental groups have been given opportunities that other civil society groups within China might not necessarily have. They are encouraged to collaborate with government officials through informal channels that has the ability to affect national policy change.¹⁶⁰ They have also been encouraged by recent legislation to allow NGOs to take public interest litigation to court.¹⁶¹ With these less confrontational options, mass mobilization – although effective – is not a 'tactic of choice' for formal environmental organizations in China. Environmental NGOs and TENGOS understandably do not wish to risk losing their privilege among civil society groups by engaging directly in mass mobilization. This supports previous findings that environmental NGOs in China are more likely to engage in 'boundary spanning

159 Dawson, *Eco-nationalism*.

160 Jessica Teets, "The Power of Policy Networks in Authoritarian Regimes: Changing Environmental Policy in China," *Governance* 31, no. 1 (December 8, 2017): 125–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12280>.

161 Qian Sun and Jack Tuholske, "An Exploration of and Reflection on China's System of Environmental Public Interest Litigation," *Environmental Law Reporter* 47, no. 6 (2017): 10497–10510.

contention,¹⁶² avoiding outright confrontation, while still engaging in advocacy¹⁶³ as policy entrepreneurs.¹⁶⁴

Meanwhile, because environmental groups are eyed with suspicion for the systemic threat that they may pose to the current regime in Russia, these kinds of opportunities are more closed to them. While there are some groups that have made legal gains in Russia, it remains an area where environmentalists more often fail than succeed.¹⁶⁵ In addition, although there are some institutionalized mechanisms for civil society groups to engage with government officials,¹⁶⁶ environmentalists are often frustrated with their ineffectiveness.¹⁶⁷ This structure – along with examples of successful past mass movements – has reinforced the idea that mass mobilization tactics are the only option.

Of course, a caveat is in order. Not all environmental groups operating in either country are necessarily engaged in advocacy or would want to engage in mass mobilization. There are some environmental groups in both countries that are working on issues that are much less confrontational – such as promoting environmental education, organizing local trash cleanup campaigns, or planting trees. However, all the cases presented here represent advocacy campaigns aimed at affecting policy change. From re-routing a pipeline or a highway, to stopping dams to changing national policy on air quality standards, the four movements discussed here are efforts that align with mass mobilization tactics. Finding a difference between Chinese and Russian campaigns aimed at changing local or national policies, then, is significant. These findings highlight the importance of considering why and how similar civil society groups are treated differently across various authoritarian regimes. Instead of assuming that conclusions from a study of civil society groups in one authoritarian regime necessarily transfer to another, it is important to consider the factors shaping the state's perception of the threat posed by that sector of civil society.

162 Kevin O'Brien, "Neither Transgressive Nor Contained: Boundary-Spanning Contention In China," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 51–64, <https://doi.org/10.17813/mai.8.1.6543n6m111722u42>.

163 Guobin Yang, "Environmental NGOs and Institutional Dynamics in China," *The China Quarterly* 181 (March 2005): 46–66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741005000032>.

164 Mertha, *China's Water Warriors*.

165 Interview 81-RF070216.

166 See, for example: Alfred B. Evans, "The First Steps of Russia's Public Chamber: Representation or Coordination?," *Demokratizatsiya* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 345–62; James Richter, "Putin and the Public Chamber," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 39–65, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.24.1.39>; James Richter, "The Ministry of Civil Society?," *Problems of Post-Communism* 56, no. 6 (November 1, 2009): 7–20, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216560602>.

167 Interview 39-RF112215; Interview 45-RF113015.

Appendix 1: Details for Russia Interviews

| Interview Code | Description | Location* (City/Region) |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| 03-RF092515 | International environmental organization | Moscow |
| 04-RF100715; 04-RF071016 (<i>follow-up</i>) | Grassroots environmental activist | Khimki |
| 06-RF100915 | Grassroots environmental activist | Khimki |
| 07-RF101115 | Grassroots environmental activist | Khimki |
| 21-RF103015 | Domestic environmental organization | Moscow |
| 22-RF110315 | Domestic environmental organization | Southern Russia |
| 28-RF110615 | Grassroots environmental activist | Moscow |
| 32-RF111215 | Informal domestic environmental movement | St. Petersburg |
| 36-RF111815 | Domestic environmental organization | Eastern Siberia |
| 38-RF111915 | Domestic environmental organization | Eastern Siberia |
| 39-RF112215 | Domestic environmental organization | Southeastern Russia |
| 40-RF112215 | Domestic environmental organization | Central Russia |
| 41-RF112515 | Domestic environmental organization | Eastern Siberia |
| 45-RF113015 | Domestic environmental organization | Northern Russia |
| 48-RF120315 | Domestic environmental organization | Northern Russia |
| 81-RF070216 | Environmental lawyer | Moscow |
| 82-RF070516 | Domestic environmental organization | Moscow |
| 84-RF071316 | Grassroots environmental activist | Moscow |
| 85-RF071416 | Grassroots environmental activist | Moscow |
| 104-RF081016 | Grassroots environmental activist | St. Petersburg |
| 122-RF090316 | Domestic environmental organization | Eastern Siberia |

* For those organizations not in St. Petersburg or Moscow, I have listed an approximate geographical region, rather than naming the region specifically, to ensure anonymity.

** Different individual interviews with representatives of the same organization.

Appendix 2: Details for China Interviews

| Interview Code | Description | Location (City/Region)* |
|----------------|--|----------------------------|
| 56-PRC031016 | Domestic environmental organization | Beijing |
| 57-PRC031716 | Domestic environmental organization | Beijing |
| 59-PRC040716 | International environmental organization** | Beijing |
| 60-PRC040816 | Domestic environmental organization | Beijing |
| 67-PRC042116 | International environmental organization** | Beijing |
| 69-PRC050616 | International environmental organization** | Beijing |
| 110-PRC081816 | International environmental organization | Beijing |
| 114-PRC082216 | Domestic environmental organization | Yunnan Province* |
| 116-PRC082316 | International environmental organization | Yunnan Province |

* Name of the province instead of the exact city to preserve anonymity.

** Different individual interviews with representatives of the same organization.