**Protests in Russia:**

**The Example of the Blue Buckets Society**

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**Introduction**

The scholarly literature on semi-authoritarian, or hybrid, political regimes has grown greatly since the early years of this century. There is a consensus among scholars that elections usually are not an important means of expressing the interests of citizens under such a regime, since the political leadership has learned how to manage elections in a way that sharply restricts the degree of real competition presented to the voters. However, even if elections are little more than exercises in legitimation, there may be other opportunities for citizens to seek satisfaction for their demands under a semi-authoritarian regime. For example, some citizens may take part in protests as they appeal for solutions for their problems. In fact, even though protests certainly take part in more democratic political systems, it is possible that protests may be an even more important means of interest articulation under a semi-authoritarian government (or even under an authoritarian government) because of the lack of meaningful alternatives in the electoral process and the absence of real debate in parliamentary forums.

Even though the political regime of Russia assumed a semi-authoritarian character within a few years after Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, and the Putin leadership recently has further tightened the limits on competition and discussion, citizens of that country have continued to hold many protests, and indeed the number of protests in Russia probably has grown since the first years of this century (Evans 2016, 110). We should note, however, that to direct attention to the importance of protests in Russian politics is not to suggest that such activity by citizens poses a direct challenge to the stability of that country’s political regime. It is important to distinguish between two types of protests that have occurred and continue to take place in Russia under Putin. The first type of protests consists of those demonstrations that are focused on demands for change in the essential features of the national political regime, such as those calling for the protection of human rights and the fulfillment of the promise of democracy. In some Western countries, journalists and politicians primarily devote attention to protests of that type in Russia, and assume that the participants in such events are following the legacy of the dissidents in the Soviet Union, and perhaps even hearken back to the example of the liberal intelligentsia of Tsarist Russia. It seems likely that such a perspective on protests in Russia as giving voice to a hunger for freedom is most prevalent in the United States, and that it reflects a distinctively American optimism about the spread of democracy to other countries. For Americans and many others in Western democracies, those in Russia who share their values, with an emphasis on individual rights and personal freedom, are greatly appealing. Many in the West may assume that such advocates of democracy speak for Russian society as a whole, voicing the aspirations of the people of their country.

In reality, however, most of the protests in Russia are not of the type that has just been described. Most of the protest movements that appear in that country do not spring up when groups of citizens are motivated by violations of the principles of democracy. Most protests in Russia take place when groups of citizens are aroused to complain about actions by government officials or businesses (or both in collaboration) that have a damaging impact on the daily lives of those citizens (Evans 2015a, 22), touching on the raw nerves of those who feel that they are being treated unjustly and with a lack of respect. People who usually have been politically quiet and passive can suddenly become discontented and noisy if a local government locates a garbage dump near their neighborhood, or if local officials give permission for the construction of a tall apartment buildings near their homes, or if they learn that new construction will encroach on a park where they often stroll, or if a new tax will make it difficult for them to do business in the area of the economy in which they operate. Typically the protests of this type originate in response to social and economic issues that are important in the work or living conditions of groups of people.

Protests of this type can be distinguished from those of the first type in a number of ways. First, the issues on which such protests concentrate are defined primarily in terms of concrete, specific problems and not in relation to basic, abstract principles of democracy and individual rights. The orientation of the protesters in such cases is essentially defensive, in the sense that they respond to actions by government or businesses that disrupt the conditions to which citizens have become accustomed, and they seek to defend rights that those citizens have regarded as established. Second, the targets of complaints usually are local officials (often seen as collaborating with businesses), and less often are officials in the central government. If the protesters complain about the performance of particular officials in the national government, they never criticize the most important official, the President of Russia. Indeed, if demonstrators’ demands cannot be satisfied at a lower level, they almost always appeal to the president, Vladimir Putin, to intervene and solve their problems. If any statements by Putin seem to provide a basis for solving the problems that are the basis of their complaint, they are sure to use Putin’s words to enhance the legitimacy of their cause. Unlike the participants in protests by groups in the democratic opposition, those taking part in protests of the second type never call for Putin to leave power. Third, Russians who take part in protests of this type state their demands in a way that makes it clear that they are seeking changes in specific policy choices or policy implementation, and not fundamental change in the nature of their country’s political regime.

To understand the difference between the two types of protest movements that have been described above, it is helpful to refer to the concept of *resonance* in social movement theory. Scholars who have developed theory in that area of research argue that a social movement is more likely to win support from a group of people if the frame, or framework of interpretation, that it presents in order to put an issue in perspective resonates with the values and attitudes of the members of that group (Snow and Benford 1988). In other words, a frame needs to fit with the thinking of its potential base of support in order to be convincing to people in that base. In Russia, the movements that call for change in the nature of the political regime and justify their goals by invoking the principles of democracy present a frame that is most likely to resonate with citizens who are highly educated and live in large cities (Evans 2016, 115), though it does not appeal to all of the people who have those characteristics. Those movements were able to draw surprisingly large numbers of people to protests in Moscow during the winter of 2011-2012, and to bring smaller numbers of people to protest demonstrations in other cities in Russia at the same time. During the subsequent years, however, the crowds of people taking part in such protests have become much smaller. In contrast, the frames of movements that seek the redress of grievances that have arisen out of problems that people feel on a more practical level often resonate quite successfully with Russians of varying social characteristics, including those with lower levels of education, most of whom would have no hope of making their political system more democratic. In other words, the frames of protest movements of that type can win the support of members of the usually silent majority in Russia, who make up the base on whose support Vladimir Putin relies to ensure political stability. This paper will focus on an organization that has been successful in drawing on the energy of discontented citizens in Russia, as its frame has resonated very well with a substantial number of people and it has had an impact on policy making in the area on which it has focused. That organization is the Society of Blue Buckets (*Obshchestvo Sinikh Vederok*) and its leader is Petr Shkumatov.

**The Rise of the Blue Buckets Society**

The founding of the Blue Buckets Society followed several years of activity by organizations of owners of automobiles in Russia. In 2005 the news that the government of Russia was considering a proposal for banning cars with right-side steering wheels stimulated the creation of the organization *Svoboda Vybora* (Freedom of Choice) (Lonkila 2011, 295; Greene 2014, 171). Many citizens of Russia, especially among those living in the eastern part of their country, had bought used cars that were imported from Japan, because those autos were generally of high quality and were sold at competitive prices. In each of those cars the steering wheel is on the right side, since they were made for use in Japan. The popularity of such imported automobiles was seen as cutting into the sale of cars that were manufactured in Russia (though it must be recognized that many other vehicles from foreign companies are also popular in Russia). Svoboda Vybora organized opposition to the proposed ban on the autos with right-side steering. The Internet was important for that organization in mobilizing activity by those who were alarmed by the possibility of the adoption of such a law (Lonkila 2011, 305). Svoboda Vybora organized drive-by demonstrations by motorists in a number of Russian cities to protest against that proposal. Those processions with convoys of cars in city streets attracted attention from the mass media, including television stations. The government did not impose major punishments on those who took part in such protests, and it did back away from the proposal to ban the autos with right-side steering. Thus Svoboda Vybora had provided an example of successful protests by an organized group of Russian citizens. That example was followed soon after, when a court’s decision in Altai Territory, which found Oleg Shcherbinskii responsible for causing an accident on a highway that resulted in the death of the governor of that territory, aroused indignation across Russia. The protests against that decision, including auto processions in many cities, led to the reversal of the decision against Shcherbinskii, freeing him from prison (Lonkila 2011, 295; Greene 2014, 177-178). That case added another example of successful protests by the drivers of automobiles in Russia.

As the number of cars in Russia has increased since the early 1990s and traffic on that country’s streets and roads has grown heavier, the behavior of the drivers of cars of the elite has become an issue that evokes strong emotions. Anyone occupying a position high in the state, or anyone with the financial resources sufficient to claim such a privilege, could have a *migalka*, or flashing blue light, attached to the roof of his or her vehicle. Those who were in cars that were equipped with migalki could flaunt their ability to violate the laws of traffic that others were supposed obey, and thus could move past those stuck in the *probki*, or traffic jams, that became ever more common in large cities, and sometimes assumed epic proportions. Also, the behavior of the drivers of cars with migalki often endangered the lives of those in other autos, and there were cases in which ordinary citizens died as the result of flagrantly reckless driving by those behind the wheel of luxury vehicles with migalki. In 2010 one man decided to make a statement by taking a small blue bucket of the sort with which a child might play, taping it to the roof of his car, and driving on the streets of his city in that car. Another person made a video recording of that auto, and a well-known blogger who thought that the video was hilarious sent it out through the Internet, attracting many viewers (Greene 2014, 198).

Petr Shkumatov had earned degrees in science and was a member of the Federation of Auto Owners of Russia (*FAR*). He says that the experience that caused his awakening took place when he was walking across a street, the mirror of a passing car knocked him down, and the driver of that car did not stop to ask about his condition (Shkumatov 2012). In April 2010, after Shkumatov saw the video of the auto with the blue bucket on its roof, he founded the Blue Buckets Society, whose stated goal was equal rights for all motorists (Greene 2014, 198-199; Alekseeva 2014). (It should be noted that the Federation of Auto Owners still is operating, and that several other organizations of automobile owners also exist in Russia, though some of them may not be very active.) From the start his organization zeroed in on the migalka as a symbol of inequality, which it sees as reflecting the arrogance of those in authority in Russia and their contempt for the mass of citizens of their country (Shkumatov 2012; Morozov 2014). Shkumatov declared that his society sought to “restore justice” on the roads of Russia (Shkumatov 2013). So in the terminology of social movement theory, for the Blue Buckets Society the principal “frame,” or framework of interpretation of events, is a justice frame, emphasizing the value of equality, as represented by the equality of all people when they are on the roads of Russia (Morozov 2014). Shkumatov has said that the main factor that provokes his indignation is *bespredel*, or the lawlessness of the authorities (Edvokimova 10-21-2014). His organization complains that the arrogance of the elite is reflected in the problem that the leaders “will not listen” to the voice of the people, even though those leaders are supposed to serve the people (Iakov 2014). Thus the head of the Blue Buckets charges that the blatant disrespect that is shown toward average citizens on the roads by members of the elite is compounded by the disrespect that is shown toward their opinions.

When Shkumatov founded the Blue Buckets Society, its main demand was that the government sharply decrease the number of cars for which migalki were permitted. That society suggested that only police cars and other emergency vehicles should be allowed to have the blue lights and sirens. Members of the Blue Buckets Society took part in driving demonstrations, as a line of cars with blue buckets attached to their roofs would move at a moderate pace along a city street (*Moscow News* 2010). The police generally were puzzled about how to react to such actions. Some participants, including Shkumatov, were arrested, but they were soon released. He has said that being arrested was unpleasant for him at first, but after a while it no longer bothered him (Shkumatov `2012). There was no major punishment for those who participated in such protests. In 2012 Vladimir Putin signed a decree that reduced the number of cars that were authorized to bear migalki from 965 to 569 (Buranov 2014). That measure made a concession to the main demand of the Blue Buckets, but Shkumatov said that he was disappointed with its scope, since Putin earlier had promised that only dozens, not hundreds, of official autos would be allowed to have the migalki (BBC Monitoring 2012). Sergei Kanaev, the head of the Federation of Auto Owners of Russia, called the decree a “small victory.” In general, Kanaev is less confrontational toward the political authorities than is Shkumatov.

The Blue Buckets also complained about the closing of roads for the motorcades of political leaders. Sometimes a major route would be blocked off for hours, as motorists waited impatiently until a caravan accompanying a high-ranking official passed by. Shkumatov suggested changes to ameliorate the problem, such as reducing the number of road closures and notifying local people in advance before a road was closed off (Buranov 2012). Within a few years the government took steps to decrease the number of times that routes would be closed off to allow leaders to pass through at high speeds. Official spokespersons announced that Vladimir Putin had decided to work at his home outside Moscow as much as possible, and that Dmitrii Medvedev, the Prime Minister, had begun to commute to the capital in a helicopter (Elderguardian 2012). Later it was announced that Putin would also use a helicopter to go from his residence to Moscow, as a landing pad had been built in the Kremlin, and that Medvedev was riding in a helicopter when he traveled around Moscow to attend events (Hoyle 2013). Shkumatov’s reaction was to say that those changes were welcome. Again the highest political leaders had taken steps that showed their awareness of problems that had been identified by the Blue Buckets Society.

**Paid Parking and Evacuators in Moscow**

Since 2012 the issue addressed by the Blue Buckets that has attracted the most publicity is that of paid parking in major Russian cities, above all in Moscow. Neither during the centuries of Tsarist rule nor in the time of the Soviet state was Moscow designed to cope with a large number of cars (Siegelbaum 2008; Richard 2015). The Soviet regime did not envision widespread private ownership of autos, and instead placed primary emphasis on the development of public transportation in large cities. However, in the post-Soviet years the level of ownership of cars in Moscow has risen rapidly, in general consistency with a trend all across Russia (Maltseva 2014). The era in which there were relatively few cars on the streets of Moscow, and most of them were black or green Volgas, is gone. The number of cars per 1,000 inhabitants in Moscow is now higher than in London, and is second only to New York among the major cities of the world (Maltseva 2014). By 2016 it was reported that individuals and institutions in Moscow owned about five million automobiles (Dobriukha 9-27-2016; *Vecherniaia Moskva* 2016), and the sale of cars in that city had increased in that year after slower sales during the previous year (Buranov 1-19-2017). In 2017 the Department of Transportation of the city of Moscow estimated that the increase in the number of autos in that city for each year averaged 120,000 (Bragin 2017). (For a number of years before 2016, the increase had probably been in the range of 300,000 to 450,000 per year [*Moskovskii komsomolets* 2016]). As a result, traffic on the streets of Moscow has increased at a steady and apparently inexorable rate (Borodina2014). Some independent organizations report that in terms of auto traffic, Moscow now is one of the most congested cities in the world (Kravtsova 2013; Richard 2015). In 2017 INRIX reported that, among thirty-eight major cities of the world, Moscow had the second largest average number of hours that each driver spent in traffic jams, and Moscow was first among the cities of Europe on that measure (*Kommersant* 2017). Also, there are far more cars in Moscow than parking places (Ivushkina 2014), so particularly in the center of the city, for years it has been common to see cars parked partly or entirely on the sidewalk, or in other inappropriate or even illegal places.

Sergei Sobianin became the Mayor of Moscow in September 2010, and he brought changes in transportation policy. He has tried to decrease people’s reliance on cars, especially in the center of the city, and has sought to encourage more people to use public transportation in Moscow (Maltseva 2014; Buranov, 10-21-2015). Sobianin has spoken openly of the need to create conditions in which drivers will be convinced that “it will be more convenient to move to public transportation instead of personal transportation” (Remchukov 2016). The most controversial change under Sobianin has been the introduction of paid parking on the streets. (Paid parking also has been brought to other large cities in Russia.) One observer has said that Sobianin’s goal is the “deautomobilization” of Moscow (Kashin 2016), and another has argued that the mayor seeks the “accelerated exclusion of autos” from his city (Shchukin 2016). The first paid parking was instituted on certain streets in the central part of Moscow on November 1, 2012, and the area in which payment for parking is required has expanded in stages since that time (Ivushkina 2014; Buranov 9-17-15; Sergeeva 2016). The fee for parking is higher on streets closer to the center of the city, and the fees have been raised over time (Buranov 8-10-2015; Buranov 11-15-2016). As the area of paid parking has expanded to include areas farther from the center, residents of those neighborhoods have voiced vehement opposition to that change and have engaged in a series of protests, with deputies of the Moscow City Duma (legislative body) taking part in some of those rallies (Sorokin 10-20-2014; *Kommersant* 2015; *Moscow Times* 2015; Sidorov 2015; Lomakin 4-21-2016; Gruniunishkin 2016; Buranov 11-3-2016; Kriuchkova 2016). On one occasion, those residents directed a complaint against the change to the Administration of the President of Russia (*Novye izvestiia* 10-15-2015). The Blue Buckets Society has been one of the organizers of the protests (Buranov 12-8-2014), and Petr Shkumatov has expressed support for the demands of those who oppose the expansion of the area of paid parking. He headed the group that presented the petition to the presidential administration (*Novye izvestiia* 10-15-2015).

Further fuel has been added to the fire of indignation against Moscow’s policy on parking by the practice of evacuation of cars, which began on September 15, 2013 (Edvokimova 6-30-2014). The practice consists of the removal of cars that are parked in violation of the city’s rules; in each case a crane that is attached to a truck lifts a car onto the flatbed of the truck, which takes the car away. Because of the profile of such trucks, in which the crane and the flatbed roughly resemble jaws, they are known in popular parlance as *krokodily*, or “crocodiles.” According to a report in 2014, over 300 of those evacuators were operating in Moscow, and they took away about 800 cars every day (Krutilina 2014). *Kommersant* has reported that from September 2013 to April 2014 the evacuators carried away 64,000 cars (Buranov 4-10-2014). When evacuations began, the unfortunate driver whose automobile had been removed had to go to an office to fill out a form and pay a fee, and then go to the place where the evacuated cars were kept in order to collect the vehicle. Usually the driver had to wait in line for hours both to pay the fee and then to reclaim the car. It is easy to imagine the reasons for great resentment and anger against the policy of evacuation of cars.

One highly publicized case became the symbol of resistance to that policy. On October 15, 2014, Konstantin Altukhov returned to his car on a street in Moscow near the Teplyi Stan Metro Station to discover that the vehicle was being removed. He climbed into the car, sat down in the driver’s seat, and refused to get out. Since a law prohibited the driver of the truck from driving away with the car on his truck while a person was sitting in the car that was on the bed of his truck, there was an impasse (Edvokimova 10-17-2014). A crowd gathered around the evacuator, and soon was joined by Petr Shkumatov and other activists, along with journalists with TV cameras. Mr. Altukhov had searched the web with his smartphone to find Mr. Shkumatov’s telephone number and had used that phone to call him and start spreading the word about what was happening. It was said that people in the crowd around the truck praised Mr. Altukhov as a hero, and he became widely known as *Parkmen*, or “Parking Man,” in an imitation of the titles of fictional superheroes. The news about the incident spread like wildfire while it was taking place (Edvokimova 10-21-2014), both through the Internet and through traditional broadcast media. After more than twenty hours of the standoff, from 3:40 pm on Wednesday to 1:55 pm on Thursday, the driver of the evacuator relented and left Mr. Altukhov and his car on the street. Soon journalists reported that other drivers in Moscow and other cities of Russia had begun to copy Altukhov’s example (Edvokimova 10-23-2014).

The Blue Buckets Society has placed a high priority on the issue of paid parking, especially in relation to parking in Moscow, and Petr Shkumatov’s thoughts about that issue have frequently been quoted in Russian newspapers. He has not expressed opposition in principle to requiring payment for parking in the center of Moscow or any other large city in Russia. However, he does argue that the financial penalties for parking violations in the capital are too high (Kazakov 2014; Buranov 3-14-2015), that the procedure for reclaiming a car that has been evacuated is too laborious, and that the process of appealing a fine for an alleged violation that the driver feels was mistaken is too complicated and difficult (Edvokimova 1-31-2013). Shkumatov has suggested that cars be removed by the evacuators only if they are parked so as to block public transportation or cause a great deal of inconvenience in other ways, and not if they are parked illegally without creating such practical problems. He has proposed that the money that is collected in fines for parking violations be dedicated to cover the costs of building new parking garages, as is the practice in some countries in Western Europe (Ivushkina 2014). He has criticized the slow pace with which the city is creating new parking spaces and has said that the charges for the use of parking garages are too high (Buranov 4-2-2015). As the fees for parking have been raised, Shkumatov has asserted that wealthy people can easily afford to pay to park in the center of the city while average citizens find the cost prohibitive, has charged that Moscow is becoming a city “not simply for rich people, but for very rich people” (Kriuchkova 2016) and has complained that Sobianin and the head of his department of transportation “in fact are defending the rights of the rich” (*Pravda 20*16). His words give another example of his organization’s tendency to rely on a justice frame to criticize the policies of local and regional officials.

Some Russian newspapers often quote Shkumatov on any issues related to traffic and parking, and they usually call him an expert on such matters. His narrative of the story of the enforcement of paid parking and the evacuation of autos in Moscow alleges that the main force behind the policies of the city government is greed (Buranov 5-20-2013; Sorokin 11-12-2014). In other words, he says that the city is trying to make money by requiring drivers to pay for parking. He contends that the evacuation of cars is a business, in which private companies that have contracted with the city government make a great deal of money (Edvokimova 6-30-2014). That assertion implies that there is something shady in the relationship between those companies and the city administration. Viacheslav Lysakov, who earlier had become prominent as the leader of Svoboda Vybora and now is a deputy in the State Duma (the lower house of the national legislature) as a member of the ruling United Russia Party, has agreed that the evacuation of cars serves the goal of earning money for the government of Moscow (Buranov 3-14-2015). Shkumatov also has denounced the inefficiency of the process of evacuation of autos, complaining that the laborious steps in which drivers stood in line to reclaim their vehicles were “almost torture” (Edvokimova, 6-30-2014).

The government of Moscow offers a very different narrative of the introduction and expansion of paid parking, which it has promoted with a large-scale advertising campaign (Semenova 2014). According to the city’s executive leadership, paid parking was required for the purposes of facilitating the flow of auto traffic on the busiest streets, lowering the number of accidents, and reducing the number of violations of parking regulations (*Novye izvestiia* 9-17-2015). The head of the city’s administration of parking has insisted that the policy of paid parking is successful (Sorokin 2015). Maksim Liksutov, a deputy mayor of Moscow who heads the city’s Department of Transportation, declared that his department also considered paid parking successful, and would not cancel its plan to widen the area in which that policy would be implemented (Edvokimova 12-8-2014). The press service of the Ministry of Transportation has said openly that the city authorities are more competent than the residents of Moscow to resolve questions concerning paid parking (*Novye izvestiia* 10-15-2015). An official in the office of the mayor of the city reiterated the mayor’s goals for transportation, and said that the residents who complained about the city’s policies in “simply did not understand the advantages of paid parking” (Buranov, 10-21-2015). The mayor, Sergei Sobianin, has not backed down from placing a top priority on the development of public transportation, which will require that the number of people in cars in Moscow every day should decrease by 600,000, with the same number of people switching to the metro and other forms of public transportation (Karavaev 2013). The mayor’s narrative reflects a technocratic outlook that places primary emphasis on the value of efficiency and is intended to present an image of highly professional leadership. Shkumatov has sought to undermine the credibility of the city’s narrative by accusing the departments of the city government that are responsible for traffic and parking spaces of extreme unprofessionalism and incompetence (Voronov 4-25-2015; *Novye izvestiia* 10-15-2015).

There have been indications that the unpopularity of Moscow’s policies on paid parking and the evacuation of cars have evoked some concern on various levels in the state. Viacheslav Lysakov, the member of the Duma who was mentioned earlier, and who is also an officer of the All-Russian Popular Front (ONF), openly criticized the transportation policy of Moscow, complaining that the city’s administrators had exceeded their proper authority (Churakova 2015). Some other deputies of the Duma proposed abolishing payment for the evacuation of automobiles, and one of those deputies said, “evacuation should have a civilized character, and not be barbaric, as it now is” (Kazakov 2014). Some members of the Duma introduced a bill that would require notifying the owner of an automobile by e-mail or phone before taking it away (Runkevich and Malii 2014). Some deputies in that house of the national legislature demanded that the city of Moscow return parking fines that had improperly been imposed on motorists (Runkevich and Malai 2015). Another proposal that was introduced in the Duma would require cities to give a discount for the prompt payment of fines for parking violations (Sivkova and Kazakov 2015). Some inter-district procurators (prosecutors) in Moscow announced that their investigation had found that there were “very crude violations of law” in the enforcement of paid parking in that city (Voronov 4-25-2015). The MVD (ministry controlling the police) of Russia and the procurator of Moscow revealed that they had found serious violations in the work of the Administration of Moscow’s Parking Space (Buranov 10-1-2015). The Public Council of the Main Administration of the MVD of Moscow (of which Petr Shkumatov is a member) requested that the city’s procurator check on the legality of evacuations of cars, and a member of the president’s Council on the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights (SPCh) charged that the practice of evacuation of autos in the capital violated rights that are guaranteed in the Constitution of Russia (Ivushkina 2015). There was growing heat on the government of Moscow, and there was evidence that dissatisfaction among many members of the public had provoked divisions within the political elite. Mikhail Vinogradov, a political commentator, thought that Russia’s top national leaders had adopted a wait-and-see approach on the issues that had arisen from Moscow’s transportation policy, and were declining to commit themselves until they could see whether the protests would grow into something big (Churakova 2015).

The government of the capital city did make some conciliatory gestures in response to the fierce criticism of its actions. In 2013 the administration of the city admitted that there had been problems in the implementation of paid parking, and promised to make some concessions (Buranov 5-18-2013). In November 2013 Maksim Liksutov, the deputy mayor of Moscow who heads the city’s department of transportation, held a meeting with local residents and municipal deputies of the city’s Duma to discuss policy in that area (Karavaev 2013), and he promised to consider the demands of those citizens, although he reaffirmed that the city’s government considered paid parking to be successful, and would widen the area in which it would be enforced. In 2014 the city simplified the procedure for a motorist to reclaim a car that had been taken away by an evacuator (Krutilina 2014). Petr Shkumatov’s interpretation of that change was that speeding up that procedure was intended to increase income for the city’s budget. The city created a web site that could be used for appealing parking fines, in response to complaints about the slowness of the process of handling such appeals (*Novye izvestiia* 2014). In October 2015 the government of Moscow also instituted a policy permitting free parking at night on some streets in spaces that are marked by signs prohibiting parking (Buranov 10-13-2015). Shkumatov reacted by commenting that such a policy should have been adopted earlier, as it had been in effect in St. Petersburg and Ekaterinburg for some time (Buranov 10-31-2015). The city also announced another change, promising that an evacuator would not move a car if its owner was present (Borodina 12-18-2015). In 2016, after prodding by some members of the national Duma, the city adopted a policy allowing the owner of a car that had been taken away to reclaim it right away and pay for the evacuation later (Voronov and Kurnosova 2016; Afanas’eva 2016). Also, the city began to give a discount to motorists who paid the fee for evacuation immediately (Lomakin 7-11-2016). Despite those concessions, it was clear that the executive leadership of Moscow remained firmly committed to the main direction of the policy on transportation that the mayor had chosen.

It was also evident that at the national level there were some voices in favor of concessions to automobilists. Some members of the Duma had submitted a proposal for legislation limiting the evacuation of automobiles to cases in which cars actually obstruct traffic on a street, or are parked on a sidewalk (Buranov 3-14-2015), though ultimately the Duma could not reach a compromise on that subject, and decided not to restrict evacuations (Buranov 5-19-2015). Some members of the Duma presented the draft of a law that would require a city government to “coordinate” (*soglasovat’*) the creation of any new paid parking with local residents (*Novye izvestiia* 10-13-2015). In October 2015 Igor’ Shuvalov, a First Deputy Prime Minister, announced a new plan that was intended to decrease traffic accidents and traffic jams; that plan would allow the traffic police to use videos from motorists as sources of information about reckless driving (Buranov 10-31-2015). The idea of allowing the police to make use of drivers with video cameras (*videoregistratory*) to assist them in dealing with dangerous behavior by irresponsible drivers had been suggested by Shkumatov repeatedly (Buranov 4-13-2012; Buranov 10-16-2015), so the plan that was unveiled by the government included an idea that the Blue Buckets Society had proposed. In April 2016 Vladimir Putin signed the law that encompasses Shuvalov’s proposal and obliges the courts to consider photos and video recordings from citizens as evidence (Buranov 4-27-2016). Shkumatov praised that legislation. In June 2016 the government of Russia announced the creation of an Internet portal to which citizens could send photos or videos revealing violations of the traffic laws (Zolotukhina 2016). In April 2015 Aleksandr Ageev, the chair of a committee in the Duma, had prepared the draft of a law that would create the office of ombudsman for drivers in the national government (Ivushkina 2015; Petrov 2016). He noted that organizations of car owners had “constantly come forward with criticisms of the policies of local authorities” and added, “their position has not been taken into account” by local governments. Obviously, if such an office were created, that move would be an attempt to coopt the leadership of the movement of dissatisfied motorists, which is represented by organizations such as the Blue Buckets Society.

A proposal for an additional means of regulating traffic that recently has provoked vigorous debate in Russia is the suggestion of allowing a city to require drivers who want to enter its territory, or its central area, to pay to do so. In April 2016 the government of Russia introduced the draft of a law that would permit the legislative body of a region or a city to adopt such a regulation (Buranov 4-18-2016). In July *Kommersant* reported that there was a “stormy, negative reaction” to that proposal, which Shkumatov termed a “criminal” draft law (Buranov 7-1-2016). Commentators thought that the proposal had been introduced in response to a behind-the-scenes request from the government of Moscow. In November 2016 the Duma’s Committee on Transportation voted to recommend that the bill be considered by the Duma (Buranov 11-30-2016). The Deputy Minister of Transportation said that requiring drivers to pay to enter the central part of a large city had proved successful in some foreign countries (Buranov 12-16-2016). Members of the opposition parties in the Duma denounced the proposal angrily (Ozerova 2016). In response to criticism of the bill, it was amended in March 2017 so that paid entry could be required only in “the historical center” of a city (Churakova 2017). That change did not placate Shkumatov, who pointed out that the determination of what constituted a historical center would be left up to the legislative assembly of a city or region, and that each of those bodies is dominated by the executive branch of the city or regional government, so that the chief executive at the corresponding level would in effect be free to impose paid entry at any time (Buranov 3-14-2017).

The national political leadership has been relatively cautious in its reaction to the rise of Shkumatov’s organization. Occasionally a few officials have complained about statements and actions of the Blue Buckets. One official in the government of Moscow charged that “some citizens” who criticized the city’s parking policy were “consciously dis-informing people, trying to gather some sort of political dividends” (Buranov 9-30-2015). Igor’ Zubov, a Deputy Minister of the MVD, accused those who had introduced a legislative initiative supported by the Blue Buckets of stimulating “social dissension” with the intention of undermining the stability of the state (Buranov 5-15-2014), which was a very serious allegation. In March 2015 Deputy Prime Minister Dmitrii Rogozin introduced proposed legislation in the Duma that would include driving processions in the same classification with other types of protests, and would require those who plan demonstrations by drivers to receive permission from local authorities in advance (Razuvaev 3-18-2015; Voronov 4-2-2015). There would be stiff punishments for those who held protests on the streets in violation of that requirement. After the parliament passed that bill, Putin signed it into law in March of 2016 (Litovkin 2016). It may be noted, however, that such legislation probably has not made much of a difference, since protests by caravans of drivers were already implicitly covered by the existing legislation on protests. Viacheslav Lysakov and some others in the Duma have argued that more strict regulation of demonstrations by motorists is necessary in order to prevent a “Maidan” in Russia (Voronov 4-2-2015; Razuvaev 9-25-2015), or an imitation of the events in Ukraine in 2014. Though such statements come close to accusing Shkumatov and others in the Blue Buckets Society of being disloyal to Russia, that accusation has been made much more openly and emphatically against activists in the political opposition that has directed criticism against Vladimir Putin. Shkumatov has not been subjected to the degree of harassment that has been directed against Aleksei Naval’nyi. On one occasion, when two members of the Blue Buckets Society were beaten up by thugs in St. Petersburg, Shkumatov remarked that it was the first time that members of his society had been attacked in that way (Alekseeva 2013), and no other assaults on members of the Blue Buckets have been reported by the press since that time.

In the early stages of the movement that produced the protests in favor of “honest elections” in the winter of 2011-2012, Shkumatov was active in that movement. He was one of the speakers at major rallies in Moscow in December 2011 (Shkumatov 2012). He was one of the founders of the League of Voters that emerged from the protests against election fraud, and served as a member of the governing council of that league (BBC Monitoring 2-22-2012). But during the subsequent months he stopped taking part in the protests of the political opposition, as he told me in an interview in Moscow in June 2012 (Shkumatov `2012). He explained that he considered those protests to be part of a “struggle for power,” and said that he did not want to be involved in that. In an interview by a journalist he expressed his judgment that protests of that sort are “ineffective” (Edvokimova 10-21-2014), implying that they do not produce concrete results. Sergei Kanaev, the head of the Federation of Auto Owners, told me that he too had taken part in the protests against election fraud in December 2011, but had later ceased doing that (Kanaev 2012). In June 2012 Kanaev described his relationship with the government of Russia as “very good.” Both Shkumatov and Kanaev have decided to continue to concentrate almost exclusively on issues that are of direct importance to motorists. None of Shkumatov’s statements quoted in the press have directly criticized Vladimir Putin, the current President of Russia, or, for that matter, Dmitrii Medvedev, the former president and current prime minister. One statement in the web site of the Blue Buckets Society has declared that the organization does not care who is the president of Russia, and that it is indifferent to whether Putin, Medvedev, or a leader of the opposition is in power (Web Site 2015). However, Shkumatov’s remarks about the fundamental nature of the political regime in Russia are scathingly negative. We should note that the Blue Buckets organization has not applied for grants from the presidential administration. It reportedly receives almost all of its financial support from donations that are made online (Shkumatov 2012).

**Conclusions: Competing Narratives and the Importance of Salience**

The Blue Buckets Society carries out protests that clearly are consistent with the features of the second type of contentious activity that was described in the first part of this paper. In the first place, the problems on which that organization focuses are related to problems from which many Russians suffer in their everyday lives, as they see vehicles with flashing blue lights pass by while the cars of average people crawl along slowly, or as they find notices of evacuation in the places where they left their cars. The complaints by the Blue Buckets Society reflect a primarily defensive orientation, since they react to unwelcome changes that have been inflicted on average citizens by the elite of their country. Second, the targets of that society’s complaints are people who are below the highest level of authority, such as an official in a city, the governor of a region, an official in an executive agency, or a rich business executive. Petr Shkumatov, the head of the Blue Buckets Society, never criticizes the President of Russia; in fact, Shkumatov very rarely mentions him, avoiding any direct challenge to Vladimir Putin. Third, Shkumatov deliberately separated himself from the democratic opposition in early 2012, and his organization advances narrowly focused demands for specific policy changes, such as a reduction in the number of vehicles with migalki, a halt in the expansion of the area of a city in which paid parking is instituted, or the construction of more parking garages in large cities. The goals that Shkumatov and his society emphasize as their priorities do not include transformation of the fundamental nature of the political regime in Russia. Yet the Blue Buckets activists are constantly competing with the regime as each side strives to convince the Russian public to accept its frameworks of interpretation of events that play out every day.

In an attempt to shape the perceptions of the Russian public, the state continually presents its *narratives* of trends and events (Smyth and Oates 2015, 283), and disseminates those narratives through the mass media, most importantly through the television networks that it controls. In Russia those in political authority have much less control over the Internet, which means that the state’s narratives are not guaranteed as great a degree of dominance in online channels of communication (Oates 2014, 290). Thus the Internet can enhance the opportunity for independent individuals and groups to challenge the political regime’s narratives on various subjects (Smyth and Oates 2015, 287). In addition, there may be a gap between a narrative that the state has created and popular perceptions of reality, which can be based on people’s personal experiences (Smyth and Oates 2015, 286), and such a gap may create an opportunity for a group to challenge the state’s telling of the story.

In the example of the issues raised by the introduction of paid parking in Moscow, the narrative of the city government is one in which professional competence is said to make the capital’s transportation system operate more efficiently. As a result of the introduction of paid parking, traffic will move more smoothly on central streets, there will be fewer traffic jams, and there will be a more favorable setting for pedestrians. That narrative fits an *efficiency frame*, a framework of interpretation that regards efficiency as the primary value that should guide decision makers. In contrast, the narrative found in the statements by Petr Shkumatov as the leader of the Blue Buckets Society is one in which the implementation of the policy of paid parking is driven by greed. In that narrative, the government of Moscow seeks to increase its income at the expense of citizens, makes deals with companies that use the evacuation of cars to extort money from drivers, and fails to consider the wishes of residents of the city. Shkumatov also alleges that the authorities in the capital structure policies to cater to the interests of rich citizens, with implicit contempt for the needs and wishes of the majority of people in their city. That narrative is based on a *justice frame*, which emphasizes the importance of treating citizens fairly, based on the assumption that the equal rights of people deserve respect.

The Internet has been helpful for the Blue Buckets Society from the time when that organization was founded, and it has provided some of the channels for dissemination of information about paid parking and evacuations of cars in Moscow. The incident featuring the sit-in by Konstantin Altukhov vividly illustrated the Internet’s capacity to accelerate communication and to convey information almost immediately to a broad range of people. Also, the web site of the Blue Buckets Society, which disseminates statements from many participants, and Shkumatov’s pages in social media such as VKontakte and Facebook, where he posts comments almost every day, are used to communicate narratives that all together make up an alternative to that propagated by the political leadership. We also should note, however, that Petr Shkumatov is quoted frequently in some of the traditional mass media. His opinions are often included in some of the more independent newspapers in Russia, such as *Kommersant* and *Novye izvestiia*, and from time to time are found in articles in *Izvestiia*, which is less independent from the state, in newspapers such as *Komsomol’skaia pravda* and *Moskovskii komsomolets*, which are not associated with the political opposition and have wide circulation, and even occasionally are quoted in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, which is the main newspaper of the government. (*Novaia gazeta*, which most faithfully represents the viewpoint of the liberal intelligentsia, has shown less interest in the issues emphasized by the Blue Buckets, but it did run a story based on an interview with Shkumatov.) It is not surprising that an article in a newspaper recently referred to him as the “ubiquitous (*vezdesushchii*) Petr Shkumatov” (Butuzova 2017). The newspaper articles that quote Shkumatov often refer to him as an expert on traffic and parking. Many of those articles also quote statements by Sergei Kanaev and the leaders of other organizations of motorists. Thus channels of communication in the traditional media complement the means of communication in the Internet that are used by the leaders of organizations of motorists. That means that organizations such as the Blue Buckets Society have a variety of means of circulating narratives that challenge the state’s narratives.

While the Blue Bucket Society’s narratives have challenged the narratives authored by the political regime, they also have generated pressure to alter the hegemonic narrative (Smyth and Oates 2015, 287). Samuel Greene (2014, 201) has observed that when the state wants to avoid seeing protests get out of control and it gives in to some demands from a movement of discontented citizens, “the state cannot appear to be giving in, and so it . . . spins the movement’s achievements as its own.” We have seen that to be true in the interaction between the state and the Blue Buckets Society. The political authorities have made concessions that have given partial satisfaction to the demands of that organization. In 2012 Vladimir Putin issued a decree that reduced the number of vehicles bearing the hated flashing blue lights, or migalki (Buranov 10-26-2016). The spokespersons for the President and Prime Minister of Russia have disclosed that those leaders now travel to Moscow in helicopters, decreasing the number of official motorcades that block traffic. The central government recently adopted a strategy in which civilian drivers with video cameras will serve as auxiliaries for the traffic police, implicitly accepting a suggestion that the Blue Buckets Society had offered for several years. The government of Moscow has simplified the procedure by which a driver can reclaim a car that has been taken away, and now allows free parking at night on some streets for residents in housing that is nearby, or twenty-four hour parking for local residents who pay an annual fee (Lomakin and Karavaev 2016; Buranov 12-12-2016). In November 2015 the parking administration of Moscow announced another change in policy, specifying that autos would be evacuated only from spaces which warned that the cars of violators would be removed from those spaces (Buranov 12-18-2015), though the number of places with such signs was increased later (Buranov 1-19-2017). In February 2016, deputies of the Communist Party in the Duma proposed a law that would require local government to consult the residents of a neighborhood before introducing paid parking there (Buranov 2-9-2016), though that bill seemed to have little chance of winning the support of a majority of deputies. We should recognize that when the state makes concessions to the demands of an organization and presents that organization’s achievements as its own, it implicitly confers legitimacy on that organization. In such cases the state also makes it possible for the members of that organization to feel that their efforts have achieved concrete results, which is a crucial asset for any organization.

We should be aware, however, that on the issues associated with autos and parking in Moscow, the Blue Buckets Society has not by any means achieved complete success in pursuing its goals. The government of the city remains resolute in its commitment to radically reducing the use of cars in the city, especially in and around the center of Moscow. The Blue Buckets Society has a fundamentally different perspective. Petr Shkumatov accepts the necessity of paid parking in the downtown area, but he also advocates the construction of more underground parking garages. That has not happened; on the contrary, the number of spaces for autos has decreased in central ` Moscow in recent years (Shchukin 2016; Buranov 11-8-2016), in what Shkumatov has denounced as “a catastrophic reduction of parking places” (Rebrov 2016). In contrast to his view, officials in the city government have said that they consider the current quantity of parking spaces in the city to be optimal (Dobriukha 2016). Maksim Liksutov, the deputy mayor of Moscow who heads the city’s Department of Transportation, has disclosed that there will be “a constant tendency” of further expansion of the area of the city in which drivers have to pay to park their automobiles (Kavalerova 2016). The outlook of the government of Moscow under Sergei Sobianin is paternalistic, as reflected in the city administration’s assurance to a journalist that “all these innovations are for the good of the residents of the city” (Buranov 12-1-2016). In effect, the officials who determine policy in the city are telling the people over whom they exercise authority, “We know what is good for you better than you do.” There also is a decidedly technocratic strain in that thinking, as was evident in the reasoning by an official in Moscow in favor of unpopular changes in transportation policy: “We need to get used to that, and no sort of public protests will stop scientific and technological progress” (Buranov 11-30-2016). Officials in the government of Moscow are fond of citing examples of foreign experience, such as that of cities in other countries that have adopted measures to restrict the number of automobiles in areas within their boundaries, to justify the policies of Russia’s capital with respect to transportation. Sergei Sobianin’s administration has even sent high-ranking officials to Singapore twice to learn more about the regulation of auto traffic in that densely populated city.

Petr Shkumatov represents an alternative point of view, since he contends that the thinking of the government of Moscow today is fundamentally similar to that of the Bolsheviks a hundred years earlier. He argues that the “fanatical (*uporotyi*) urbanism” that he sees in the leaders of Moscow and some other cities in Russia today is reminiscent of the “fanatical Bolshevism” of Lenin’s party in 1917, in the sense that each attempts to construct “a utopian, beautiful world,” even though in each case, moving toward that utopia “makes very many people suffer, even though they do not deserve that” (Shkumatov 2017). It is paradoxical that, on the national level in Russia, Vladimir Putin accuses his internal opponents of being devoted to foreign models, while he presents himself as the defender of domestically based traditions and practices that he says are cherished by the majority of people in his country, but the government of Moscow under Sergei Sobianin refers to foreign models of urban transportation policy to justify decisions that provoke objections from the majority of the residents of that city. The fundamental incompatibility between the goals of Sobianin’s administration and those advocated by Peter Shkumatov explains why the Blue Buckets Society has not been able to change the basic direction of the transportation policy of the city of Moscow. Yet as we have seen, that organization has helped to exert pressure that has resulted in some compromises in policies.

The Blue Buckets and their allies have attracted attention at the national level, as indicated by Vladimir Putin’s statement about paid parking in Moscow in a press conference in December 2015. When he was asked about the issues regarding paid parking in that city, he responded by saying that he did not know the details of that situation, but he maintained that paid parking was introduced in areas of Moscow only after consultation with the deputies, or members, of the councils of the small districts in which was being considered (Putin 2015). Three times, in different ways, he suggested that only the deputies of those districts had the right to decide on whether fees for parking could be required in their districts. In December 2016 Maksim Liksutov, the official in Moscow’s government who is responsible for transportation policy, insisted that “every paid place [for parking] was introduced in the city by a decision of municipal [district] deputies” (Kavalerova 2016). Yet, in many articles in the press, deputies of various district councils have reported that in fact their councils never were asked to vote on whether paid parking would be instituted in their districts (Buranov 12-22-2015; Buranov 12-25-2015; Buranov 2-9-2016; Lomakin 4-21-2016; Gruniushkin 4-28-2016; Raspopova 2016). One of those deputies characterized the allegation that his council had been consulted on that issue as purely phony (Buranov 12-26-2016). We may infer that perhaps Putin’s comments on paid parking in Moscow were intended to make the authorities in the government of Moscow aware that they should be more sensitive to the wishes of the public, and to try to convince the motorists of that city that he was not responsible for the impact of paid parking in their city. Putin also implicitly gave further evidence to suggest that there is a degree of tension between the mayor of Moscow and some officials in the national government over questions concerning transportation policy in the capital city.

The growth of tension in the political elite in relation to certain issues that have been touched on in this paper implies that Blue Buckets Society has achieved some success in gaining recognition for its narratives and competing with the narratives of those in positions of authority. Can the competitive viability of that organization be explained by the technological change that has led to the development of the Internet and the growth of its use in Russia? Though the capability of reaching potential supporters through the Internet has been very important for the Blue Buckets Society, Sarah Oates (2014, 280) makes the point that the audience is “a key factor” in determining “the efficacy of media outlets,” including those in the Internet. With that observation Oates touches on the concept of resonance, which, as we have seen, refers to a factor whose role is emphasized by social movement theory. For a social movement’s frame to gain acceptance from the audience that is its main potential source of support, it is necessary that the movement’s frame should resonate with that audience, which means that it must be consistent with the attitudes and values of those whom it views as potential supporters. Similarly, for an organization’s messages through the Internet (and through traditional media) to have a substantial impact, the narratives and frame that are communicated by that organization must resonate with groups in the public.

It is likely that the Blue Buckets Society’s frame has resonated successfully with many people in its target audience, consisting of the owners of automobiles in Russia. If that were not true, leaders in government probably would not have made concessions to the demands of that organization, and newspapers probably would not have sought out the head of that organization to ask for his opinions on questions of interest to people who have cars. And if the messages of that organization did not resonate with a target audience, it would be difficult to explain why people continue to participate enthusiastically in protests that support demands that are articulated by the Blue Buckets. It is likely that the resonance of that society’s narrative can be attributed in large part to the personal experiences of many Russians. When a narrative is grounded in the immediate, everyday experiences of a large group of people, that factor limits the state’s ability to manipulate their perceptions and to persuade them to accept another narrative. Also, the justice frame that underlies the narratives of the Blue Buckets Society seems to resonate well with most Russians. The theme that all citizens have an equal right to be treated by the state with

justice, or basic fairness (*spravedlivost’*), seems to appeal to the majority of Russians much more than the argument that individual freedom should be protected in a democracy, which is the central message of the political opposition in Russia.

The concept of *catalyzing events,* which Sarah Oates discusses (2013, 149), can give us more insights into the conditions that influence the rise and fall of the momentum of an organization like the Blue Buckets. The catalyzing events that prepared the way for the emergence of the Blue Buckets Society included the proposal to ban cars with steering on the right side and the infamous decision by a judge in the case in which Oleg Shcherbinskii was a defendant. The protests by motorists in response to those events showed that drivers could join in conspicuous demonstrations, and that their actions could have an impact on the decisions by the people in power. Also, a series of traffic accidents in which people in average cars died or were injured because of the arrogant driving of those in luxury cars aroused resentment that increased support for the narrative of Petr Shkumatov and his associates. The blocking of streets to make way for the motorcades of political leaders further intensified the perception that ordinary drivers were being treated with contempt. But more recently, the catalyzing event that has done the most to enhance the credibility of a narrative from the Blue Buckets has been the introduction of paid parking in large cities in Russia, and especially in Moscow. Realizing that your car has been taken away by an evacuator, spending money to pay a fine and cover the cost of the evacuation, and spending hours going through the process of reclaiming your car should be sufficient to make a person likely to accept the Blue Buckets’ interpretation of the conduct of the city government. The protest by one driver, Konstantin Altukhov, who refused to leave his car while it sat in the jaws of a *krokodil*, was a small individual story that created memorable imagery that intensified the impact of the larger narrative.

While resonance with the values of a target audience is crucial in winning acceptance for an organization’s narratives and its underlying frame, we should be aware that resonance may not always remain constant. The degree of resonance of a particular narrative may change at any time, since the attitudes of a target audience may change, and the salience of the values that are reflected in the narrative may increase or decrease. If the salience of those values is lowered, the audience’s receptivity for the narrative that is offered by an organization will probably decrease. In response to the large-scale protests in Moscow (and the smaller protests in many other cities in Russia) from December 2011 to February 2012, the political regime took a number of steps, including the adoption of some new legislation, evidently with the intention of creating more unfavorable conditions for protests. Most importantly, the regime intensified its emphasis on a narrative in which there was a division between those Russians who were loyal to their country and supported the state, on the one hand, and those who were disloyal to Russia and took part in the protests, on the other hand (Evans 2015b, 419). That narrative was based on a

nationalistic frame of reference, and it showed that the regime had adopted a strategy of preempting the attention of the target audience, consisting of the vast majority of Russians. The regime achieved considerable success in implementing that strategy even before 2014, but the catalyzing events that raised its success to a new level were the sudden replacement of the president of Ukraine, Russia’s annexation of the Crimean peninsula, Russia’s involvement in the civil war in two provinces in eastern Ukraine, and the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia by a number of Western countries. The leadership’s nationalistic narrative overpowered the narrative with which the political opposition was identified, as was shown when an overwhelming majority of Russians approved of the annexation of Crimea, and when most Russians continued to endorse that move three years later (Volkov 2017).

That narrative is based on a frame in which the values of national security and national pride occupy the central place. While the state may find it difficult to convince its audience of the credibility of narratives that are not consistent with their personal experiences, such as those on the roads of their country, most Russians have had no immediate, personal experience of events in Ukraine, so the state had greater freedom to shape the perceptions of those events by most citizens of Russia, especially since the state could use the national television networks to communicate its narrative. It seems apparent that for most Russians the chain of catalyzing events that had begun in Kiev in February 2014, and the state’s narrative that presented a particular interpretation of the meaning of those events, had the effect of raising the salience of the value of national security. In those circumstances, the state hoped, evidently with considerable success, to decrease the salience of the values attached to democratic rights and freedoms that were most highly valued in the narrative offered by the political opposition (and were the basis of the goals of human rights organizations). The indirect means of suppressing opposition by gaining more support for the narrative that was propagated by the political regime apparently had a more powerful effect than the direct means of suppression by legal and administrative mechanisms.

Yet while the nationalistic narrative has overwhelmed some narratives that were generated outside the state, it has not had a strong impact on others. It has not drowned out the narratives that the Blue Buckets Society has offered. It would be difficult to convince people that rude and dangerous driving by a person behind the wheel of a vehicle with a blue light on its roof makes Russia more secure. It also would be difficult to persuade most residents of Moscow that carrying away cars that are parked in violation of city ordinances and requiring the owners of those cars to pay stiff fees to get their cars back is a way of protecting their country from sinister plots that were hatched in western capitals. One of the reasons that the Blue Buckets Society is still able to find a receptive audience for its narratives is that those narratives have not been overwhelmed by the state’s nationalistic discourse. Though it would be foolish to predict that the activity of the Blue Buckets Society cannot possibly be weakened by any stratagems that the political regime might employ in the future, the activists of that organization have the advantage of grounding their appeal in the everyday experiences of most Russians, and they can be assured that those experiences will continue to create new reasons for discontent. The story of the Blue Buckets Society should remind us that the movements that carry out protests in contemporary Russia vary greatly, and although almost all of them face serious challenges, not all of them labor under conditions as unfavorable as those encountered by the groups that see themselves in the dissident tradition and call for fundamental political transformation.

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