



Anti-corruption and opposition in Russia: Digital media and rhetorical strategies of Navalny

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Abstract

What were the main goals in Navalny's political agenda and how did this influence his rhetorical approach? This paper explores how Navalny and his aspirants were disqualified as political candidates in Russian elections, and how this affected his approach to being focused on contentious politics as it became the only viable means to push for political change in the country. Two of his most viral videos are analysed to investigate the rhetorical strategies he used to set frames on the political elite, and the main answers revolved around corruption, theft, and the self-image of Medvedev and Putin. Although there were clear similarities between the two videos, the most recent "*Palace for Putin*" displayed new and more moral, judgmental and offensive methods than the previous "*He is not Dimon to you*". Furthermore, this paper investigates the large-scale protests of 2021 and how public opinion about Navalny has developed in Russia. The expectation was that public opinion would be more favourable in recent times than it has been in the past, largely due to the massive protests which he managed to spark. However, the answer was surprisingly the opposite, as statistics tilted slightly against him rather than the other way around. Part of the explanation to this was that the highest number of people who disapproved of Navalny used state television as their main source of information, as opposed to the majority of the younger population who frequently used the internet, and thereby had a more positive view of him. When examining the protest trajectories, it was possible to find elements of Navalny's political message amongst the people in terms of keywords and phrases that they chanted, evidence of his success above the fact of the protests themselves. The final aim was to review how the authoritarian regime responded to Navalny's contentious politics, and in this regard, it was concluded that both domestic and international pressure moved the regime to increasingly repressive measures against Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and further deteriorated the relationship between the EU and Russia.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the rhetorical and digital media strategies of Navalny, with some focus on the time period 2017, but mostly in the year 2021. This is because two of the main parts of empirical material derive from this period of time, and due to the many recent events in the year 2021 this research will likely yield results which are particularly interesting in our contemporary world. The disposition of the thesis begins with a literature review about the use of digital media among activists and social movements where key concepts and central discussions from prominent authors are presented. This sets up the theme and background for the research questions which are the following:

1. *What rhetorical strategies and metaphors have Navalny employed to advance his political message?*
2. *How have public opinion swayed in favor of Navalny in 2021 and in what way have the used metaphors had a breakthrough amongst the Russian people?*
3. *How has the regime responded to Navalny's digital media and rhetorical strategies during the year 2021?*

The next part deals with defining the precise aim of the research and operationalizing these research questions. This is done by taking up one research question at a time and explaining in detail how it is investigated and operationalized, and how the first question feeds into the other two. After that the theoretical framework of the thesis is outlined, where the methodology of critical metaphor analysis is introduced as well as the main concepts that will be applied during the research. The epistemological approach is briefly summarized at the end, with the key aspects being both interpretative and critical. Moving on from that the next area explores the empirical material along with the methods that are used. The empirical material consists mainly of two videos that became very viral and are packed with rhetorical strategies, the first one being *"He is not Dimon to you"* released in 2017, and the second one is *"Palace for Putin"* from 2021. The method is a discourse analysis of political rhetoric, with elements of critical metaphor analysis to further illustrate Navalny's political agenda. The last part of this section covers the general research approach along with a source critical discussion, before heading into the data analysis.

Here the research questions are reintroduced again with a short discussion of what the analysis will encompass. Most of the effort lies in answering the first research question as it is broader and builds the background of the other two, which are also entirely restricted to the

year 2021 and thereby drastically narrowed down. The analysis follows a logical disposition according to the time lapse of the empirical material to avoid confusion and make it more comprehensible. This means that the first part is the video *“He is not Dimon to you”* from 2017, then a brief conclusion of the 2018 presidential election in relation to this. The following part is an interview with Navalny from 2020 after the attempt on his life to gain better insight into his political agenda and actions, before moving into the most viral video *“Palace for Putin”* from 2021. The data analysis is then concluded with the protest trajectories of 2021 and the repressive measures which the authoritarian regime has taken, including a few statements from high-ranking Russian officials. Lastly, the thesis is summarized with a conclusion of the researched material and the data which was gathered to answer the research questions. This part includes a short discussion about the limits of the study and the most interesting findings.

Chapter 1: Literature review

1.0 The background and objective of selected previous research in digital political media communication

In the field of digital political media communication there has been plenty of research in the past decade, and since the use of internet, apps, and social media only increases with time this trend is unlikely to subside. This requires effort in further narrowing down the scope of literature that is used, and therefore the selected literature in this thesis is mostly oriented towards the use of digital media by activists in authoritarian regimes, with special focus on Russia. In this regard the objective of the literature review is to give an overview of the main themes, patterns, concepts, ideas, and arguments presented by the selected seminal authors on this topic. Furthermore, the goal is also to give context into the choice of research questions that were presented in the introduction and explain the gap of previous studies which this thesis aims to fill.

With that being said, the structure of this review will start with a presentation and explanation of key concepts discussed and used by some of the seminal authors. When that has been achieved there will be an analysis and evaluation of the main arguments and points made by the authors, including a comparison of similarities and differences. This will serve as a good introduction to the central discussions and general topic of this thesis. Moving on from that the next part will cover recurring themes and patterns of earlier studies and investigate the gap

of previous research. The literature review will then conclude with a source critical discussion regarding possible bias, agenda, and/or normative approaches.

1.1 Explaining key concepts

Before delving deep into the arguments and discussions about digital media in a political context, there needs to be an overview of the very frequently utilized terms and concepts in this field of research. Starting with digital activism, a concept which entails all use of digital networks by activists to organize and communicate political messages (Joyce, 2010, p. preface: viii). This includes but is not limited to activism on networks like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook for example. What is not included in this term are networks that are outside the digital realm and therefore not based on the internet, apps, and social media (Joyce, 2010). With the advancement of the internet the social movement research has evolved because practices and frames from activists spread much easier and faster from one country to another (Porta & Tarrow, 2004, pp. 3-4). Building on this the concept of diffusion is an important addition to the social movement's studies. Diffusion is the spread of a movement's ideas and methods among different countries (Porta & Tarrow, 2004, pp. 3-4), meaning that what starts in one country by activists can take root in another.

A digital political campaign is closely intertwined with the concept of digital activism but more specifically refers to the use of digital means by a social movement/organization to advance a campaign for political change (Herasimenka, 2019, p. 26). An example of a digital political campaign was the mobilization of activists during the Gezi protests. The goal was to preserve the Gezi park in Istanbul which had been targeted for demolition and to protest against police brutality. The campaign gained traction through online networks among other platforms and is also a good demonstration of diffusion as the movement began with only a handful of activists and ended with millions of protesters across multiple cities. (Farro & Demirhisar, 2014, p. 177 & 184).

Another example is the "vote smart campaign" by Navalny in St Petersburg 2019, the goal being to influence the electoral outcome of the municipal election, which it also did (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021, p. 76). In this campaign they used the concept of strategic voting, a common occurrence in democracies where the voter is willing to cast their ballot on a secondary choice if their first option is unlikely to win (2021, p. 67). This makes strategic voting into a system that is based on maximizing the impact of each vote, and it is similar to that of the online voter advice applications which aims to guide people in their voting decision. However, there is a difference between using that in a democracy as opposed to an

electoral authoritarian regime which consistently uses means of repression and censorship on its political adversaries. The distinction between full authoritarianism and electoral autocracies is that the latter offers some limited ability to contest the political elite and establishment unlike the former (Dollbaum, Semenov, & Sirotkina, 2018, p. 619). In this sense Russia can be defined as an electoral authoritarian regime. However, after the constitutional changes in 2020 the country is starting to lean more towards full authoritarianism. Nearly one third of all articles in the constitution were revised and the presidential term received a reset, legally allowing Putin to continue as the president for another 12 years (Russell, 2020).

In addition to this there are the important concepts of contentious politics, collective and connective action. Contentious politics is a term coined by American sociologist Charles Tilly and can be understood as a series of actions coordinated by an organization to disrupt and oppose a political elite (Herasimenka, 2019, p. 27). This is closely related to the term collective action which points toward individuals assembling to a common goal for political change and the issues of achieving that (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 749). Connective action however is less known and entails more individualized use of networks and technology independent of a collective or organized effort (2012, p. 749). What this means in practice is the individual's personal need to share ideas, plans, and images on platforms like Instagram or YouTube for instance. This in turn can lead to a certain political post or idea to spread quickly and eventually scale up to a large movement without initially having any established organization behind it (2012, pp. 753-754).

1.2 Evaluation of main arguments, differences and similarities

Now that the key concepts have been outlined it is time to delve into some of the central discussions and main arguments presented by the selected authors on the topic of digital political media communication and activism. Starting with (Åström, Karlsson, Linde, & Pirannejad, 2012) who investigate the surge of e-participation in non-democratic countries and the reasons behind it. In this article the new technology surrounding digital media is described as a double-edged sword in the context of authoritarian regimes. On the one hand there are new opportunities for control, surveillance and repression, but on the other hand there are simultaneously new opportunities for pro-democratic movements to criticize and organize political opposition in a country. The authors claim that economic globalization is the main driving force behind the rapid increase of e-participation in authoritarian states, as opposed to democratic states where domestic factors remain the best predictors (Åström, et al,

2012, p. 148). However, the empirical data gathered in that study showed no evidence that an increase in e-participation would translate into an upsurge of democratic aspirations among the people in a non-democratic country. This conclusion seems unlikely for two reasons: (1) the authors do not take the influence of tech giants into account; (2) recent events based on the use of digital media clearly had a key role in the recent mass protests in Russia.

Another perspective on the role of e-participation and the use of digital media by activists is presented by (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021) who argue that the “smart vote campaign” did yield results in opposing the political establishment and reducing the mandates of the United Russia party. The “smart vote campaign” can be considered to be a digital political campaign as there are no large differences between the strategic voting system that was used in contrast to the online tool vote advice applications (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021, p. 67). Moreover, before the “smart vote campaign” in 2018-2019, Navalny launched a successful campaign revolving mostly around the use of internet in the Duma elections of 2011 where he encouraged people to vote for any party except United Russia, which he referred to as the party of “crooks and thieves” (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021, p. 68).

Similar to the research into the “vote smart campaign” in 2019 there was a study on the 2018 presidential election by (Dollbaum, Protest trajectories in electoral authoritarianism: from Russia’s “For Fair Elections” movement to Alexei Navalny’s presidential campaign, 2020). He also viewed the Duma elections in 2011 as contentious politics which built up the popularity of Navalny and his movement. However, the central focus of the research was not based on the Duma elections in 2011 but on the For Fair Elections (FFE) campaign in 2018 which included the popular video clip “*He is not Dimon to you*” released the year before in 2017. In this study Dollbaum argued that the release of that clip was the main asset in Navalny’s campaign and the foremost strategy in mobilizing people to protest (2020, p. 198). Again, the use of digital media strategies is cemented as being one of the most powerful tools of mobilizing opposition against an electoral authoritarian state like Russia. Both Turchenko & Golosov and Dollbaum used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in their study, although their methods were different. Turchenko & Golosov focused on a theoretical approach with strategic voting and regression analysis (2021, pp. 66-67 & 75), whereas Dollbaum conducted his study through both interviews and data gathering from 2,327 sources of federal and regional news agencies, internet newspapers, TV, and radio (2020, p. 196).

Closely connected to the above-mentioned studies the two authors (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) conducted research on what engages people to take action in a politicized digital world, both in organized and individual terms. Rather than doing a selected case study as the prior two studies did with digital political campaigns in Russia, this study focused on distinguishing between collective and connective action and explaining how both can influence social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, pp. 748-749). Both of these are interacting in a dynamic way, for instance a political organization can become more personalized to its audience and thereby scale the amount of people who share its ideas, message, and/or pictures on social media platforms. This is what the authors refer to as the linchpin of connective action, and their key argument is that more is required than just a classical social movement theory to fully explain and understand this phenomenon (2012, pp. 759-760). Therefore, research into how these adaptations are made by a politically organized collective become interesting, especially the rhetorical strategies implemented to persuade and stir emotions to influence the need for an individual to participate. For example, this participation can involve protests like in the campaign For Fair Elections (FFE) or sharing of video content like “*He is not Dimon to you*”. However, there are more aspects that influence the approach which activists take in their political participation. According to (Porta & Tarrow, 2004, p. 10) social movements do not exist in a vacuum, and the principal influence on their strategies and tactics is directly related to the government’s response.

Both collective and connective action in turn can be linked with the concept of diffusion as the ideas and methods that are used by activists in one country can spread to other regions and countries. This was evident during the Arabic spring which started in Tunis and then spread to other Arabic nations.

1.3 Recurring themes and research gap in digital political media communication

The purpose of explaining concepts and central discussions in the first two sections was not only to make it easier to follow the upcoming text, but it was also because it reveals a pattern and theme amongst the prominent authors. The previous research has been very focused on studying and explaining the use and different strategies employed by activists, organizations, and also individuals in digital media. Furthermore, the tactics of digital political campaigns and how successful they have been is also a common form of research on this topic, like the “Gezi Park movement” (Farro & Demirhisar, 2014). While doing this there is a repeated use of the named concepts, and the main source of knowledge is derived from three literatures,

namely: Social movement studies, platform studies, and finally literature on political communication (Herasimenka, 2019, p. 4). The gap which can be identified is the lack of research into the rhetorical strategies which digital activists and organizations use to persuade their audience, and how successful they are in this regard. Moreover, even though there has been plenty of research into digital activism and digital political campaigns, there has not been any studies on the very recent digital media strategies and organizing of protests by Navalny and the anti-corruption team which occurred in January 2021. Research into rhetorical use and its effect in politics has been done before, an example being *Metaphors of Brexit* (Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit: No Cherries on the Cake?*, 2019). However, it has never to the best of my knowledge been focused and applied on the subject of Navalny and the anti-corruption team in Russia. This thesis aims to fill that gap through the use of critical metaphor analysis on selected videos created by team Navalny on YouTube, and to answer the three research questions.

1.4 Source critical discussion

The topic of digital media, both its use and effect is generally not a polarized subject with strongly opposing ideologies behind it. This is unlike a study into party politics for instance in which a particular bias for one or another side is a common issue. The prominent authors discussed in this literature review do not reveal any bias to a certain group, if anything it would be towards a normative form of conducting the study using similar or the same concepts. All the research covered in this section have mostly revolved around digital media in an authoritarian setting, the only exception being (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) who discussed collective and connective action primarily in democracies. However, the approach to the subject varies as (Åström, et al, 2012) argued that economic globalization was the main factor in the upsurge of e-participation in authoritarian states and that there was no evidence that it increased democratic aspirations among the population in those countries. This is opposed to (Dollbaum, 2020) and (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021) on whose approach the idea of e-participation and use of digital means was directly related to pro-democratic movements in electoral authoritarian states. The key aspect to derive from this is that the approach and constricted study which the authors selected inevitably shaped the possible results that could be found.

Chapter 2: Operationalizing research questions and defining the precise aim of the study

In the literature review it was concluded that previous studies primarily focused on digital activists and what strategies they had in social movements, organizations, and campaigns while using digital tools. The gap that was identified was the lack of research into the rhetorical strategies that these digital activists employ to persuade their audience. Although there have been case studies on this topic with Russia and Navalny, the recent events of 2021 sparked massive protests after the release of the YouTube video *Palace for Putin*, which makes research into this case more topical. This in turn leads us to the first research question:

What rhetorical strategies and metaphors have Navalny employed to advance his political message?

Therefore, the first aim of this thesis will be to explore and interpret the rhetoric and metaphors behind the most viral and successful clips like “*He is not Dimon to you*” and “*Palace for Putin*”. To answer and operationalize this question it is not only enough to gather a set of frequently used metaphors and re-used rhetorical strategies, but also necessary to have something to measure its success to the selected audience. This is where the second research question comes into play:

How have public opinion swayed in favor of Navalny in 2021 and in what way have the used metaphors had a breakthrough amongst the Russian people?

To answer this question it is crucial to have insight in how the Russian people reacted to the videos and the protests that followed. What were some of the key catchphrases and metaphors which Navalny frequently used and emphasized that were also being chanted by the Russian people during the protests? This can be studied by observing the videos and live streams of the protests on the 23rd and 31st of January as well as the 21st of April protests. Through these videos and live streams it is possible to observe as people walked out on the streets and together shared slogans which they yelled time and again. Another way of measuring how public opinion has shifted is to investigate the subjects and questions discussed by Levada-Center which is an independent and non-governmental polling and sociological research organization in Russia.

Answering the first two research questions illuminates the use and importance of Navalny's rhetorical strategies, but it does not resolve the question of how the authoritarian regime in Russia has responded to it. To settle that it brings us to the final research question:

How has the regime responded to Navalny's digital media and rhetorical strategies during the year 2021?

Drawing on previous studies like the ones conducted by (Dollbaum, et al) and (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021) we can note that earlier digital political campaigns were fruitful, at least to some extent. Even though the pressure of the campaigns were not enough to register Navalny as a presidential candidate in 2018 it did significantly increase the political engagement of the younger generation in the country (Dollbaum, et al, 2018, p. 618). Moreover, in the 2019 municipal elections the strategic voting campaign lowered the mandates from the dominant party United Russia (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021, p. 65). In the past the Russian regime responded to this pressure either through reducing the requirements for political parties to be registered and thereby increasing the number of active political parties significantly to make strategic voting less effective; and by refusing to register Navalny as a presidential candidate. Furthermore, another common strategy has been to label the opposition as foreign agents to de-legitimize them as political actors in the country. However, since then the pressure has only increased and so have the repressive measures taken by the authoritarian regime. This could first be noted by the well-known poisoning of opposition leader Navalny in 2020, and after the release of *Palace for Putin* the regime became notably pressured. The most recent effect of this can be seen in a law proposition to label Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation as a terrorist organization whose members can now be sentenced to ten years of imprisonment (Dixon, 2021).

The relation between a social movement and a government's response was pointed out earlier in the literature review, in which (Porta & Tarrow, 2004) argued that this relation was a key factor in how a social movement formed their strategies. This is not strange since the opposing actors have to constantly adapt to each other. When one successful strategy has a breakthrough for activists then the authoritarian regime responds with repressive measures to shut it down, which in turn creates the need for activists to develop new tactics. In 2021 there was a breakthrough in Russia for Navalny and mass protests began. Therefore it is interesting to study what measures the government has taken against the growing opposition in the country and how some of the highest standing Russian officials have responded to the pressure in 2021.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework of critical metaphor analysis

This part of the thesis will outline the theoretical framework that is used in the analysis. The research questions enquire about the use of rhetoric and metaphors which makes the literature about critical metaphor analysis highly relevant. The objective is to begin by defining metaphor and key concepts surrounding this methodology. Moreover, the goal is to discuss the ontological and epistemological aspects to critical metaphor analysis in the context of a political discourse.

2.0 Introducing critical metaphor analysis

“Metaphor is a figure of speech that is typically used in persuasion” (Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*, 2004, p. 7). That is the most foundational form of explanation to what a metaphor is, but more than that a metaphor is a way of communicating a message in a colorful and memorable fashion so that it sticks to the selected audience. There is the common saying that a picture says more than a thousand words and that is what a metaphor is. That is also one of the reasons why it is so persuasive, not only because it conveys a message in a short and concise way, but also because it creates a clear and visible picture in the mind about a subject. With its persuasive ability it is no wonder that it is commonly used in political speeches and applied as a rhetorical strategy to develop a political agenda (Charteris-Black, 2004, pp. 7-8). In critical metaphor analysis there are three main theoretical aspects that build the background of the framework, the first being linguistic/semantic, second pragmatic, and third cognitive. The linguistic part explains meaning in words, the cognitive creates understanding in underlying implications, and the pragmatic offers evaluations behind intentions (2004, pp. 23-24).

2.1 Key concepts in critical metaphor analysis

There are six key concepts that will be used in this thesis and they are the following: (1) Framing and frames, (2) allegory, (3) scenario, (4) script, (5) keywords, (6) embodied simulation.

A frame is a concept of how problems and issues are being presented continuously so that it creates an established view of a subject. When there is a social issue that is being framed in a certain way it also affects the way that people perceive solutions to the problem, therefore framing social issues is an essential tool in a political agenda. For example, in a study by Thibodeau and Broditsky they created a fictional city undergoing a crime wave and used two

different metaphors for describing the issue, one being “beast” and the other “virus”. In the first case (beast metaphor) the people partaking in the study answered that the solution should be imprisonment and control, while in the second case (virus metaphor) the same people responded that the problem should be solved through diagnosis and treatment (Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit: No Cherries on the Cake?*, 2019, pp. 16-17).

Although metaphors can certainly be used as a tool for framing social issues, it is not the only means to achieve that. An allegory is a short story about an event or subject in which the moral of the story serves as a means of persuasion to the issue that is being presented (Charteris-Black, 2019, pp. 18-19). The allegory’s purpose is to inform people on the consequences of a subject or event, which in turn brings us to the concept of scenarios. When the communicator uses an allegory it is typically because they want the audience to visualize a scenario connected to it and the issue which is discussed. Scenarios present a set of assumptions about a possible reality, and what needs to be done to avoid or achieve that (2019, pp. 20-21). Just like allegories and scenarios create a frame on a subject, so does a script but in a different way. A script is a set of events that have a pattern which is predictable but unlike allegories and scenarios it does not convey a moral reasoning or judgement, it simply creates a frame on what happens and what does not happen based on previous events that all occurred in the same way (2019, pp. 21-22).

The last two concepts are keywords and embodied simulation. Keywords are the words that are used frequently in a discourse (2019, pp. 22-23), and it is common to focus on that in a content analysis. However, this thesis will not include a content analysis but rather use the concept to see which specific keywords, metaphors, allegories that are re-used from the empirical material, and if they occur in more than just one video. Lastly, embodied simulation encompasses all of the previously mentioned concepts to explain how these affect your mental state, and how it creates a simulation of feelings. For example, an allegory that is connected to a painful memory can create a simulation in the mind of how that felt (2019, pp. 23-24), which can explain how powerful its effect can be as a tool for persuasion.

2.2 The epistemological approach

This approach is interpretative because its aim is not directly focused on the contents, but rather on the underlying meaning behind it. Furthermore, critical metaphor analysis can work as a complement to critical discourse analysis. This is because metaphors can be used to shed light on underlying social structures, systems, ideas and ideology, and without the critical aspect to it these assumptions can remain in the dark (Charteris-Black, 2004, pp. 29-30). In

CDA the focus is on power structures in a society and to shed light on subjugated knowledge, meaning historical content and social context which is typically masked by a systematized discourse (Delanty & Strydom, 2003, pp. 346-347). The main purpose is to alter the existing social and political order by illuminating the subjugated knowledge that is perpetuated in language use. This same purpose can be found in the pragmatic role of critical metaphor analysis as the metaphors and allegories utilized by the communicator could have intentions of achieving this, which is not too uncommon in a political context.

Chapter 4: Method, material, and source critical reflections

3.0 The choice of method and main empirical material

In the theoretical framework critical metaphor analysis was introduced along with several concepts which lay the foundation of the method. The method is a discourse analysis of political agenda, complemented by the critical aspect and the concepts surrounding metaphor. The choice is based on the selected material and research questions, which consist of rhetorical and metaphorical use in videos mainly from Navalny and his anti-corruption team. Other possible approaches could have been a normal discourse analysis, CDA, or content analysis, but critical metaphor analysis captivates the problem area and subject more thoroughly. This is because the selected empirical material is part of a political agenda and packed with rhetorical strategies, allegories, and metaphors, which critical metaphor analysis covers very well as an approach. The reason for choosing a study revolving around Navalny is not only because it is highly relevant in this time period, but also because he is deemed to be the main opposition leader in Russia.

As mentioned previously, the main part of the empirical material will consist of videos. However, since there are a countless number of videos made and published on Navalny's channel the necessity of selection is obvious. The selection is based on the breakthrough and how viral a video became, and in this respect the first video will be "*He is not Dimon to you*" (Навальный, *Он вам не Димон*, 2017), which was released in 2017 before the presidential election in Russia. Although the research questions revolve mostly around the recent time period of 2021, this video has a similar theme, purpose, and breakthrough as the next selection, which is "*Palace for Putin*" (Навальный, *Дворец для Путина. История самой большой взятки*, 2021). Therefore, the first video serves as a good introduction to the second one, and it is likely that some of the same rhetorical strategies, allegories, and metaphors that

were used in “*He is not Dimon to you*” can be found in “*Palace for Putin*”. This is an important part of the discourse, to find patterns in how the social issues are being framed.

3.1 Operationalizing the theoretical concepts and research questions

To further operationalize the research questions and the theoretical concepts there are live streamed videos of each protest that will be covered in this thesis. The expectation is that this material will to some extent reveal how successful Navalny’s agenda has been. Through the analysis of the two key videos mentioned earlier there should be a sufficient amount of data gathered to understand how the subjects have been framed, along with the metaphors, allegories and keywords that are recurring. Another way of understanding the purpose and agenda of Navalny is through an interview that was conducted in 2020 after he survived the attempt on his life. In this interview Navalny talks extensively about all of this which gives a good insight into his political actions (ВДудь, 2020). This can then serve as a framework when analyzing the livestreams of the protests to see which of these rhetorical style figures took root among the protesters. In this regard some of the key questions that will be investigated revolves around: (1) What slogans did the protesters use, (2) what catchphrases did they chant, (3) what metaphors if any were used, and whether it is possible to find and connect all of this to Navalny’s videos and his political agenda.

Furthermore, to get a closer insight into how public opinion has developed in Russia alongside these events and the gathered data the independent and non-governmental polling and sociological research organization Levada-Center will be used. This site gathers statistics on important events that occur in Russia by asking a certain number of people what their opinion about a given subject is. This can for example be questions related to Navalny or the popularity rate of the President and other high-ranking officials from past to present (levada.ru, Levada-Center Yuri Levada Analytical Center, 2003-2021). Lastly, statements from some of these high-ranking officials in the year 2021 will be examined to see how the authoritarian regime has responded to Navalny’s recent success in stirring political unrest in the country. Among these are the press secretary of President Putin - Dmitry Peskov, and the minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov.

3.2 The general research approach and source criticism

Overall the research approach is a case study on Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation in Russia. The focus is on his rhetorical and digital strategies while leading the political opposition in the country. This includes how Navalny frames social issues, what metaphors, allegories and keywords he uses and to what extent these create an embodied simulation

among the Russian people who participated in some of the protests. Public opinion is also taken into account to a certain extent, with emphasis on questions related to Navalny and the popularity of President Putin and other high-ranking Russian officials. The first demarcations in the research is based on the timeline, where some focus will be placed on the 2018 presidential elections in relation to the video “*He is not Dimon to you*” that was released in 2017 the previous year. However, the primary focus will be on the year 2021 with the video “*Palace for Putin*” and the protests that followed. This means that any time before 2017 is not covered, and that only a limited section of the presidential election in 2018 is included. The second demarcation is based on the approach and focus of the study, which is only qualitative and specifically dedicated to rhetorical and digital strategies alongside selected questions in public opinion and statements from Russian officials. The last limitation is related to how the authoritarian regime has responded to Navalny’s strategies, where only the year 2021 will be taken into account. All in all, through the specific approach, the demarcations and the selected material and time period, this study should yield results that are representative in regard to the research questions.

When it comes to the source critical discussion it is important to emphasize that the empirical material derives mainly from Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that there exists a bias behind Navalny’s political agenda and his purpose. As for the statistics gathered by Levada-center the important aspect to understand is that the number of people included in the quantitative studies they perform is also limited. The fewer number of people that are included in a given study the less it is possible to generalize and vice versa.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

4:0 The aim and disposition of the analysis

The purpose of the analysis is to answer the three research questions that will be reintroduced here:

1. *What rhetorical strategies and metaphors have Navalny employed to advance his political message?*
2. *How have public opinion swayed in favor of Navalny in 2021 and in what way have the used metaphors had a breakthrough amongst the Russian people?*
3. *How has the regime responded to Navalny’s digital media and rhetorical strategies during the year 2021?*

The disposition of the analysis is largely based on the timeline of the analyzed material to avoid confusion. Hence the first part will begin with the video “*He is not Dimon to you*” released in 2017. This part will be covered using critical metaphor analysis and form a background of rhetorical strategies including what has been mentioned before with frames, metaphors, allegories, scripts, and keywords. After that there will be a brief outlook on the 2018 presidential election and what role “*He is not Dimon to you*” played in Navalny’s political agenda. This will be followed up with an interview that Navalny participated in after the attempt on his life to further gain insight into his political agenda and actions. When that has been achieved there will be a solid enough framework to move on to the most viral and impactful video “*Palace for Putin*” released in 2021. It is expected that the data gathered before this part will to some extent apply to “*Palace for Putin*”, finding either the same or similar rhetorical style figures reused. This will then be a sufficient amount of data gathered to answer the first research question, and enough data to begin the investigation of the second research question. Therefore, the next section will be covering all the protests to see what breakthrough Navalny’s rhetorical strategies has had. Moreover, the public opinion statistics will also be included here to see whether it has swayed in favor of Navalny or not. Lastly, to answer the final research question the last section will bring up statements from high-ranking Russian officials and analyze some of the measures that the authoritarian regime has taken.

4:1 Он вам не Димон, (“He is not Dimon to you”)

Navalny begins this video by immediately framing former President Dmitry Medvedev as being “crazy about money” and “as the most corrupt official in the country”. This is followed up with examples like palaces, residences, ancestral estates, yachts, and vineyards both in Russia and abroad. This is then referred to as “Medvedev’s empire” (Навальный, Он вам не Димон, 2017, pp. 0:50-2:37), the word *empire* being perhaps the strongest word for people to associate tremendous wealth and prosperity with. Throughout the video the evidence that is presented consists of footage, documents, and price tags of all assets, which is a rhetorical strategy to build up reliability (ethos) so that the viewers believe what they see. The next part of the framing is concerned with the self-image of Medvedev, in which the claim is that he views himself “as a nobleman of sorts”; and just like Navalny states “what nobleman does not have a mansion”. This is important because self-image is a psychological term, and it is in this context the reasoning and justification which a person has for his actions. This is followed up with a part where the ancestral home is revealed as a huge and opulent dacha, including a vast farm described as an *agricultural empire* (Навальный, 2017, pp. 17:10 - 24:35).

Another approach which Navalny takes frequently over the course of the video is to explain the repeated scheme which Medvedev uses to acquire his assets. Behind every estate, vineyard, and yacht there is a charity foundation which receives the asset as a “gift” from rich oligarchs (2017, pp. 35:30-36:18). The word *gift* in this context becomes synonymous with the word *bribe*, and there are many “gifts”. While covering each asset there is a similar rhetorical style applied: First the evidence is provided in the form previously mentioned (ethos), and then the logical reasoning and arguments follow in the form of connecting the charity foundations to Medvedev (logos). This systematized way of presenting evidence, reasoning, and arguments without an emotional aspect to it turns the communication into a script. This makes it easier for the audience to follow each set of events because of the predictable pattern in it (Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit: No Cherries on the Cake?*, 2019, pp. 21-22), and consolidates the frame with each example.

This is an excellent strategy to build and consolidate the frame of Medvedev as someone with a self-perception as a nobleman with the right to enrich himself. However, without any moral, emotional, and judgemental arguments the audience will likely not feel any indignation, and thereby one of the purposes of the video falls short, which is to stir emotions (pathos). The surprising part is the complete lack of these arguments during most of the video, where only the final and last part includes this rhetorical strategy. In this final part Navalny begins by summarizing the most absurd properties belonging to Medvedev such as the palaces, dachas, yachts and a medieval castle abroad secured through a network of corruption (2017, pp. 46:20 - 49:38). This is the first time the word *theft* is used, which implies a perpetrator and a victim. Thereby Navalny creates a connection between the two words *corruption* and *theft*, which is powerful since the entire scheme is full of corruption and there is someone who clearly pays the price if something is stolen. In this case the perpetrators are the corrupt officials like Medvedev and the ones part of his network, and the victim of the theft is the Russian people.

However, Navalny does not stop here, he builds upon Medvedev and the previously mentioned network and connects it to Putin and the rest of the government. The claim is that the only reason Medvedev can *steal* so openly is because Putin allows it, and he only allows it because he does it himself, only on an even larger scale (2017, pp. 46:20 - 49:38). Navalny then states that Russia is a very rich country, but the people who live there are very poor and, in many cases, cannot even afford medicine; the only question that comes to mind is *where did all the money go?* One famous statement from Medvedev is “денег нет, но вы держитесь” “There is no money, but you hang in there”, and Navalny reiterates this after

bringing up the palaces, dachas, and yachts which provides all the viewers with the answer (2017, pp. 48:20 - 49:38). That statement “There is no money, but you hang in there” became a metaphor which brings corrupt officials to mind, and this forms a connection to the palaces, dachas and yachts as the objects which *all the money went to*. Thereby these objects become metaphors too, not only because of the connection between them and where all the state money went, but also because of the repeated framing by Navalny showing the same type of people being the owners of these types of objects – corrupt officials.

The main conclusion of the video is that the entire system is rotten, and that the people in charge who are responsible have remained in power for 17 years building up this system which enriches the few at the cost of the many. In turn this forms the final frame not only on Medvedev but on the entire corrupt system, along with the ones who pay the price for it – the Russian people. Before ending the video Navalny appeals to the people to not accept what is happening, and to share the video with friends and relatives to overcome the censorship of the state television media (2017, pp. 46:20 - 49:38). This is a brilliant move because it combines the collective action which Navalny built up and links it with connective action. Encouraging each individual to share the content and information to scale up the movement and thereby create a stronger diffusion.

4:2 Summarizing the rhetorical strategies in “*He is not Dimon to you*” and the overall frame

The video had a logical disposition moving from one asset to the other and reviewing it according to a model which can be described as a script. Among the keywords that are used for building up a frame there is empire, palaces, dachas, yachts, corruption, theft, and “gifts” which in this case became synonymous with “bribe”. The main metaphor which connects everything is the statement from Medvedev “there is no money, but you hang in there”, which serves as a spark to ignite indignation. There are four main frames which Navalny designed and these are: (1) Medvedev is crazy about money and is the most corrupt official in the country. (2) Medvedev’s self-image as a nobleman who sees it as his right to enrich himself at the cost of the Russian people. (3) Russia is a rich country yet the people are poor, the reason why “*there is no money*” is because the entire system is corrupt and its officials enrich themselves with palaces, dachas and yachts. (4) Corruption equals theft, and the culprits are Medvedev and the state who *steal* from every ordinary Russian individual.

4:3 A brief outlook on the 2018 presidential election in relation to (“*He is not Dimon to you*”)

In February 2017, a month before “*He is not Dimon to you*” was released, Dmitry Medvedev’s approval rating was just above half of the population (52%). The month thereafter following the video’s publication Medvedev’s approval ratings plummeted to 42% (levada.ru, Levada-Center Yuri Levada Analytical Center – Indicators, 2003-2021), a significant loss of 10% in a very short period of time, and one measurement of Navalny’s success to advance his political message. The same month, March 26th thousands of people went out on the streets to protest in multiple cities across Russia, demanding that Medvedev answer for the accusations of corruption that were presented in “*He is not Dimon to You*” (Dollbaum, *Protest trajectories in electoral authoritarianism: from Russia’s “For Fair Elections” movement to Alexei Navalny’s presidential campaign*, 2020, p. 192). In a study conducted by Dollbaum he asked 910 social media campaign supporters what sparked their interest in Navalny’s campaign with a series of questions. The number one reason among the majority was the video “*He is not Dimon to you*” (Dollbaum, 2020, pp. 198-199), statistics which illuminates the importance of digital media strategies to mobilize social movements in electoral authoritarian states. Although it is clear that Navalny was successful in stirring up the Russian people just prior to the presidential election, the other main goal was to get him registered as a candidate for presidency. Ultimately this objective failed and Navalny was never registered as a candidate, another issue which he faced was the fact that he was not a viable option as a president for a vast majority, where 72% reported that they would not vote for him (2020, p. 198). Part of this can be explained by the massive state propaganda which constantly smeared and opposed him, and by the crime cases that were opened against him. The subject of the controlled state media in Russia is something that Navalny covers in a separate video altogether called “*Parasites*” (Навальный, *Паразиты*, 2020). Since the state media is not a possible forum for Navalny to use, or for any oppositional figure in an authoritarian state, digital media becomes the only viable option to communicate political messages through. To conclude the 2018 presidential election and the effect of “*He is not Dimon to you*” it is possible to state that Navalny was successful in his endeavour to engage the Russian population and spread his political message to a broader audience but failed to frame himself as a viable candidate for the presidential seat.

4:4 Navalny's post-poisoning interview, understanding his political agenda and actions.

In this interview Navalny talks extensively about his experience about being poisoned with the chemical warfare agent novichok. This event garnered international attention towards Navalny and made him famous outside Russia, effectively expanding his influence. It is here where he first starts to frame Putin as someone who is fascinated with mysterious poisonings and the terror which it spreads among people (ВДудь, 2020, pp. 1:03:24 - 1:10:02). This is used as an argument to illustrate how Putin applies methods to spread fear against oppositional figures and to scare people into submission. Furthermore, Navalny expands upon the digital political campaign of “smart voting” which is based on the concept of strategic voting, meaning voting for the second preferred option. In this context the second preferred option is any party and candidate that is not representing Putin's party United Russia. Here Navalny confirms that the strategy ultimately was only about tearing down United-Russia's monopoly, even if it many times meant that the selected candidates were bad choices. He argued that this was because generally a “good” candidate would not be registered, including those of his own party, and because any “bad” candidate would still be better than one from the United-Russia party (ВДудь, 2020, pp. 1:55:48 – 2.00:30). It is clear that the ability to vote for a preferred candidate is severely limited, and many times the only option that remains is to protest vote against the establishment. In Navalny's own case during the 2018 presidential campaign this was also the case as he failed to get registered as a candidate, and since the regime takes such preventive measures, it requires the digital activist to adapt. Just like (Porta & Tarrow, 2004, p. 10) stated that the principal influence on the tactics of social movements is related to the government's response. This creates an understanding of Navalny's political agenda and actions, since he is unable to get himself and his own candidates registered the purpose then shifts to contentious politics in order to harm and reduce the influence of the ruling party in the regime. In turn that influences the digital media and rhetorical strategies used in the videos, as they are not focused on promoting Navalny and his preferred political candidates but rather on revealing large scale corruption throughout the authoritarian state to spark indignation amongst the Russian people.

Chapter 6: Дворец для Путина (Palace for Putin)

The immediate similarity to “*He is not Dimon to you*” can be found at the start of this video where the framing of Putin's character already begins with what Navalny calls a “psychological portrait”. Just as with Medvedev he claims that Putin is “*obsessed with money and luxury*”. The differences is that words like *robbery* and *steal* is already used in the

beginning (Навальный, *Дворец для Путина. История самой большой взятки*, 2021, pp. 0:27 - 5:00), as opposed to the prior video from 2017. Here Putin's past as a KGB agent is brought up including a comparison from when he praised Lenin and communism in that period of time to elevating spirituality in churches and conservatism in contemporary Russia. This is a clear contradiction which instantly brings up the duality and hypocrisy of Putin's character. Adding to that list of characteristic attributes Navalny sets up three more which he refers to as Putin's main life principles: (1) Always say one thing and do another – hypocrisy and lying are effective measures. (2) Corruption is the foundation of trust – the main friends are the ones who have been *stealing* and cheating with you for many years. (3) “There is never too much money” (Навальный, 2021, pp. 5:00 - 8:06).

This is the frame on Putin's character where the keywords are hypocrisy, lies, corruption, money, and stealing, and part of the video's visuals show Putin dressed up as Louis the 16th to further amplify this view. It is clear that Navalny changed his rhetorical strategy to a more offensive stance than before, although he retains certain similarities in his approach. Just like in “*He is not Dimon to you*” the same type of evidence in terms of footage, documents, and price tags are present to build up the reliability (ethos), the only difference is that he uses additional sources with people who were involved in the projects. Although the reasoning and arguments (logos) are presented in a similar fashion as well, the main distinction in “*Palace for Putin*” lies in the harsher tone and use of words. After establishing a background about Putin's character and past, Navalny then begins to explain what he did when he seized power, that is after he created a system of electoral fraud and subjugated state television as well as the courts. This is what he refers to as “the largest operation to seize and milk Russia” where all the loyal corrupt officials were put into the highest places of industry and business, free to *steal* as much as they wanted to as long as Putin received his fair share (2021, pp. 25:50 - 30:40). In the 2017 video he illustrated how rich oligarchs gave “gifts” to charity foundations that were connected to Medvedev; here however the word *gift* does not appear at all. Instead, the word *bribe* is directly used, and Putin along with the corrupt officials who were part of the operation were named as “a gang of bribe-takers and crooks”. Very similar to what he calls United Russia – “*the party of thieves and crooks*”. At this point Putin has already been framed as a money obsessed corrupt thief, and this is even before the actual palace has been displayed.

5:0 The palace in Gelendzhik

Just prior to displaying the palace Navalny takes up Putin's self-image, the exact same style as with Medvedev before showcasing his ancestral home. However, unlike Medvedev whom he claimed viewed himself as a nobleman, Putin's self-image is framed as someone who views himself as a Tsar. To create this image, he first brings up the sheer size of the palace and its surroundings which he calls an entire kingdom, a separate state within Russia which only has one sole ruler – Putin (2021, pp. 25:50 - 30:40). To illustrate its size the small state Monaco is used, which is 39 times smaller than the *kingdom* which Putin owns. Furthermore, another comparison to the absurd and obscene scale of the building is made by stating that it is the new Versailles or the new Winter Palace, which were owned by monarchies in the past. Although these are strong enough arguments on their own to make such a claim, the final and strongest argument is presented when showing a picture of the front gate to the palace. The front gate has the symbol of the old Russian emperors, a golden eagle which is an exact copy of the same one that can be found in the Winter Palace (2021, pp. 48:32 - 54:05). The old emperors of Russia were known to revel in luxury while the people suffered in poverty, and this was considered their right by birth. What makes this even more ironic is that the person who views himself as a tsar in this case once served the ideals of communism, which are two complete polar opposites. This further strengthens the established characteristic of hypocrisy and luxury obsession which was presented earlier in the video. To build upon this frame of the tsar self-image Navalny describes the use of wealth in other very rich people who donated a large amount to things like charity, universities, or hospitals. He then compares it to Putin, who's dream is entirely egotistical and is grounded on 20 years of power, repressive laws and stealing from poor people – and for what? “For gold and marble, for sofas and couches in Louis the 16th style” (2021, pp. 48:32 - 54:05). There is a frequent use of Louis the 16th as an example for comparison, and this is powerful because he is perhaps the most famous figure of obscene wealth and opulence at the cost of his own people. In this sense he becomes a metaphor to describe both the excessiveness and damage which he causes to his subjects. This is then followed up with a short description of the interiors in the palace: Mosaics, frescoes, stained glass windows, a home theatre, and with a special emphasis – an aqua discotheque.

Navalny continues with describing the interiors and uses a detailed architectural plan given to him by one of the important contractors who was infuriated by the insane cost of it all. This is where most of the metaphors would be established, metaphors of excessive and absurd wealth in terms of objects, the same type which was formed in “*He is not Dimon to you*”, only on an

even larger and broader scale. The list of different rooms and objects is so long that all of it will not be mentioned here, only the most absurd which easily takes root in one's mind. Among these objects are the furniture that is purchased from an elitist company known as Citterio Atena (2021, pp. 54:05 - 1:06:37), which supplies super exclusive Italian furniture to a very narrow number of clients, the ones who can afford it that is. A part of showing the absurdity is by putting a price tag on everything, and to make it easier to understand my choice is to convert the purchases from Russian roubles to US dollars which is more internationally known. First off, we have a leather sofa and a dressing table for 27040 dollars each, and then the sofas for guests worth 20280 dollars. Then we have a table with a built-in bar worth 54080 *corrupt* dollars (2021, pp. 54:05 - 1:06:37). When it comes to the built-in theatre Navalny makes a reference to tsarist Russia where the landowners-built serf theatres for themselves, further consolidating the constructed self-image of Putin as well as the connection to Louis the 16th. It is here where he coins the term "crazed emperor" (2021, pp. 1:05:32 - 1:52:50) which fits in very well after displaying all the opulent objects and furniture.

Although these examples are useful for that particular frame, the objects which people are likely to remember most vividly are not the super expensive furniture, but the rare items which there seem to be no apparent purpose of owning. An aqua discotheque and a mud warehouse are two excellent examples of this, where the first mentioned even became a trendy song on YouTube (Карри, 2021). The list of more excessively expensive items continues, but again it is the more "special items" which receive more attention. To illustrate the image of a "crazed emperor" once again the purchases of an Italian toilet brush for 838 dollars and a toilet paper holder for 1243 dollars is shown (2021, pp. 1:15:19 - 1:19:09). Navalny then gives an example to further clarify how much this toilet brush and toilet paper holder costs, in which the combined amount is the annual income of an average Russian pensioner. The phrase "there is no money, but you hang in there" did not age like wine, before it was palaces, dachas, and yachts, now it is toilet brushes and paper holders. However, there is more to it than just the palace and objects; huge lands of vineyards, a super modern winery, a chateau, and oyster farms which Navalny calls Putin's *black sea empire* (2021, pp. 25:50 - 30:40 & 1:19:09 - 1:19:58). That is what it means to "live the life of a real monarch" (2021, pp. 54:05 - 1:06:37), which has been part of the framing throughout the entire video.

The final part is in many ways quite similar to "*He is not Dimon to you*", a speech that is directed to the Russian people. Navalny starts with an allegory from Leo Tolstoy who once described the power structure in Russia: "The villains who robbed the people gathered

together, recruited soldiers and judges to guard their orgy, and are feasting” (2021, pp. 1:47:34 - 1:52:45). This allegory reflects the entire corrupt system which Putin and his officials created. The people were *robbed* so that the *villains* could enjoy their palaces, dachas, and yachts, and any oppositional figure to this is immediately branded as a *foreign agent* to de-legitimize their voice. *Foreign agent* implies a person who is there to disrupt Russian affairs and spread dissent and is therefore a useful term to brand any critic. Another brilliant rhetorical strategy by Navalny is to bring up the main counterargument amongst people and then refute it: “well these have already stolen enough, leave them be or new ones will come and steal again”. Navalny then states that it is clear that they will never have enough (2021, pp. 1:47:34 - 1:52:45), and after all that has been shown throughout the video it becomes difficult to argue against this. The key point comes with the comparison of people in rich countries and poor countries, where the former marches out in protests after the slightest indignation and the latter simply tolerates every indignation. This creates a scenario which points to different outcomes, (1) if we do nothing then this type of rule never ends, (2) if we take to the streets and protest then there is at least a chance for change. Due to repressive measures in authoritarian regimes people are generally afraid of taking this course of action and would rather resign to the belief that eventually the presidential term ends and there will be a change in the political sphere. However, Navalny counteracts this as well when he mentions the referendums which officials in the country held to extend their power whenever their time limit ran out (2021, pp. 1:47:34 - 1:52:45). The most recent one being in 2020 where changes to the constitution were made which resulted in Putin’s presidential term receiving a reset, effectively allowing him to run as the president for another 12 years (Russell, 2020).

5:1 The main conclusions to “Palace for Putin”

This video followed a similar rhetorical path to “*He is not Dimon to you*” in terms of the way that sources were presented to build up reliability (ethos). Even if the reasoning and arguments (logos) were similar as well to some extent it did not follow a script-like course, as each message typically conveyed some moral and/or judgemental value unlike the previous video. This is a key difference in Navalny’s rhetorical strategy and also what made it more offensive and effective in terms of stirring emotions (pathos). There are several frames on Putin made from the beginning to the mid-section, and these are the following: (1) Putin is obsessed with money and luxury. (2) Three main characteristic attributes assigned to Putin are hypocrisy and lying, corruption as the foundation of trust, and a ceaseless desire and need for

money. (3) A self-image as a Tsar and monarch who does not serve the people but rules over his subjects as he sees fit, with Louis the 16th as a comparison. (4) A corrupt thief who rules the country through bribes and steals from the people to enrich himself and those of his corrupt network. A new rhetorical strategy was adopted altogether which I would call amplification, meaning that with each important message that was conveyed there was a comparison which clarified and bolstered it so that the scale could not be misinterpreted. An example of this was the palace and its surrounding areas which was first stated in square meters, and then described as 39 times larger than the state Monaco. Another example would be the combined cost of the toilet brush and toilet paper holder, which was then compared as the same annual amount that the average Russian pensioner receives. This effective method creates an embodied simulation – a clear mental image of how a toilet brush and one toilet paper holder is worth the exact same as what most Russians will receive in an entire year of retirement, a painful and absurd image to say the least.

Chapter 7: The protest trajectories and government response in 2021

As mentioned earlier, one of the main goals of Navalny's political agenda and actions are contentious politics, to disrupt and oppose the political elite. This is because of the preventive measures placed by the electoral authoritarian regime, and after the release of "*Palace for Putin*" Navalny had perhaps his greatest breakthrough. The first protest started on the 23rd of January, which was encouraged at the very start of the video (2021, pp. 0:00 - 0:27). All of these protests were live streamed by his team on a separate channel called Navalny Live, and it is here that the investigation of what breakthrough his political message will be reviewed. The first and most common phrase which the protesters chanted was Путин вор "Putin is a thief" (LIVE, 2021, pp. 10:00 - 10:25), something which Navalny established and continuously repeated through many different forms and frames. A second very common slogan is Свободу "Freedom" (LIVE, 2021, pp. 3:09:23 - 3:09:38) which brings us back to the scenario that was established at the end of "*Palace for Putin*", either do (1) stay at home and tolerate what the regime is doing leading to the same type of rule, or (2) go out on the streets and protest for political change and freedom to hopefully achieve a change. In this sense Navalny was successful among the Russian people in establishing his frame on Putin not only as someone who is corrupt but also someone who is a thief, just like with Medvedev – corruption equals theft. The same phrases of "Putin is a thief" and "freedom" appear in every protest, although there is a new contribution on the 31st of January protest. Here the phrase один за всех, и все за одного (one for all, and all for one) (LIVE, *Свободу*

Навальному! Россия выходит 31 января. Прямая трансляция, 2021, p. 2:17:38) appears, the famous line from the three musketeers.

It is clear that the first protests of 23rd and 31st of January were successful as the people were reinvigorated and the number of people amounted to tens of thousands. The first goal of stirring up the Russian population was a success, but the second goal was to pressure the authoritarian regime enough to free Navalny from his arrest, this was unsuccessful. After a long hunger strike by Navalny another protest was planned on 21st of April, the goal was to assemble half a million, however, this too was unsuccessful and the protests were not as large as Navalny's team had hoped for (*Навальный, Финальная битва между добром и нейтралитетом*, 2021). The repressive and harsh measures of the regime can be one explanation, as people were beaten and thrown into jail during the previous protests. Another explanation can be found in the fact that mostly the young population took Navalny's message to heart, which has been the case before (Dollbaum, Semenov, & Sirotkina, *A top-down movement with grass-roots effects? Alexei Navalny's electoral campaign*, 2018, p. 620). An overview of Navalny's general support looks bleak as 56% disapprove of his actions in February 2021 (levada.ru, *The return of Alexey Navalny*, 2021). However, most of the disapproval can be found in people who mainly use state television as the main source of information as opposed to the internet, something that young people are more prone to use. The conclusion is that the general public opinion has not swayed in favor of Navalny, but some of his frames and metaphors did have a breakthrough amongst the Russian population, as was seen in the protests.

6:0 Repressive measures and statements from high-ranking officials in Russia 2021

The first repressive measure that can be noted happened directly after the return of Aleksey Navalny to Russia, where he was arrested for a suspended sentence which he received in 2014. During his prosecution he uses this as an opportunity to create another metaphor on Putin – “Vladimir the underwear poisoner” (washingtonpost, 2021). Yet another attempt to undermine and belittle Putin who usually likes to present himself as a great and strong geopolitical leader. He was ultimately sentenced to 3,5 years of prison and the Anti-Corruption Foundation claimed that he was being held in a prison known as colony number 2, a place which uses torture like methods on its prisoners (*Навальный, Где Навальный? Тюремный ад для главного врага Путина*, 2021). The second repressive measure which the regime took was against the protesters, who were in many cases beaten and thrown into jail as the demonstrations were not sanctioned by the state and thereby illegal. The third, and

perhaps the most audacious of measures, was the recent terrorist label on the Anti-Corruption Foundation which paired them with the same organizations as al-Qaida, and with a punishment up to ten years of prison (Dixon, 2021).

The pressure which Navalny has caused upon the authoritarian regime in Russia during 2021 have made Putin and his officials more desperate, and now the pseudo-democracy is turning more into what appears as a full autocracy. However, the pressure that the Russian regime sustained from domestic unrest is not the only factor, after Navalny was poisoned with novichok he became more internationally known. That is perhaps one of the reasons to why the EU strongly condemned his arrest and sentence, and new sanctions against Russia was called upon by some MEP:s (ALMQVIST, 2021). This further deteriorated the relations between the two political actors, and after a visit in China the minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov stated that “EU-Russia relations are dead” (Gotev, 2021). The press secretary of the president, Dmitry Peskov responded to the accusations of Putin’s palace as complete nonsense (themoscowtimes, 2021). Furthermore, when discussing organized protests he stated that they were illegal and that they were not originating from the Russian Federation, but from citizens who live abroad (meduza, 2021). A rather typical response, completely disregarding the domestic issues and blaming outside influences as the real denominator. The main take from this is that the rhetorical and digital media strategies which Navalny employed in 2021 were highly successful in provoking a serious and perhaps even desperate response from the regime. The success was not only achieved on a domestic level, but also on the international one as the uproar in the EU further pushed the two actors apart, and discussions of new sanctions began.

Conclusion

The main findings in this study were related to the first research question about rhetorical strategies and metaphors. What can be noted is that the first video from 2017 followed a script-like path, with very few moral and judgmental values employed, with the exception of the end. This came as a surprise as the second video from 2021 vastly differs in this regard. However, the most interesting rhetorical strategy that was found in this study derived from the self-image framing of both Medvedev and Putin. The first mentioned became a “nobleman” with an ancestral estate while the latter became a “tsar” with a palace. Constructing Medvedev’s self-image was not much more extensive than that, as opposed to Putin. The design on Putin’s self-image was very extensive and constantly referenced to Louis the 16th, both in terms of material objects and photoshop visuals. Louis the 16th was used as the main

metaphor for absurd wealth while his subjects suffered, and this was the figure which constantly and purposefully was connected to Putin.

Another supremely interesting finding was the new rhetorical strategy which I referred to as amplification, in which every important message was first stated as it was, and then compared to something more comprehensible and vivid. When it comes to the keywords the primary discoveries are the connections that were made between two words, the first being “*gift*” masked as a *bribe*, and the second being *corruption* which equaled *theft*. The reason why rhetorical strategies are interesting is because the communicator always has an agenda, and the frame, metaphors, and keywords can reveal what agenda that is. In the protest trajectories it was found that “Putin is a thief” was the most common phrase which people chanted, and that confirms the success of Navalny to frame Putin as a thief. Perhaps the most surprising result of all was the public opinion statistics on Navalny where 56% disapproved of him (levada.ru, *The return of Alexey Navalny*, 2021), a result which I believed would have been the opposite. This answers the first two research questions and forms the basis of the last one, how the regime responded to all of this. The most important event happened not long ago, and that was the terror label which the state placed on the Anti-Corruption Foundation, whose members risk ten years of prison.

Studies about Navalny’s activism have been done before, but then it has mainly been about the Duma elections of 2011 and the presidential election of 2018. Dollbaum conducted research on both of these and investigated how the contentious activity was related to each other. One aim of the study was to investigate how Navalny’s popularity was built up and continued to grow, and another was the protests following the release of “*He is not Dimon to you*”, where he found that the video was the main reason that sparked interest in his campaigns. (Dollbaum, *Protest trajectories in electoral authoritarianism: from Russia’s “For Fair Elections” movement to Alexei Navalny’s presidential campaign*, 2020, pp. 198-199). Another study on Navalny was on the efficiency of his “smart voting” campaign, and the strategic voting which it incorporates. The results from this study was that the strategic voting system did work and reduced the mandates of the ruling United Russia party (Turchenko & Golosov, 2021, p. 65). Although my study includes some of these parts, they are not the focus, and therefore it is likely that continued research on the examples above is possible in the year 2021 due to all its events. The main limitation to this research lies in the approach, which is based almost entirely on rhetorical analysis.

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