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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2018: THE STRUGGLE OF PUTIN AND NAVALNY FOR A MEDIA AGENDA

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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2018: THE STRUGGLE OF PUTIN AND NAVALNY FOR A MEDIA AGENDA³

The study analyzes the construction of the network links of Vladimir Putin and Alexei Navalny with various issues of Russian public discussion in the national print media. The theoretical framework is issue ownership theory, according to which political actors have a range of issues that are most strongly associated with them. Ownership by the politician of topics that are perceived as important in the society determines his popularity among the population. In this study, we use the Integrum database, which contains extensive print media archives of approximately 500 Russian magazines and more than 250 national newspapers. We analyze the period from 12.12.2016 to 12.12.2017, i.e., one year after Alexey Navalny's announcement of his intention to participate in the presidential election in 2018. The analysis shows that Putin has more opportunities to form an agenda, as he attracts much more attention from national media than Navalny does. Putin is often mentioned in connection with economic issues and international relations, which attract the attention of the population and are perceived as important, while his activity in these spheres is perceived as successful. Navalny is associated with the issues of corruption, NGOs and civic activism. Corruption is an important topic for Russians, but the low attention of the media to Navalny does not allow him to gain the maximum benefit from owning this story.

Keywords: mass media, network agenda-setting, issue ownership, image of politicians, electoral behavior, public opinion, Putin, Navalny, elections 2018

JEL Classification: Z

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Introduction

Who is Mr. Putin? This question, which later became widely known⁴, was asked by a journalist of The Philadelphia Inquirer at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2000. Indeed, Vladimir Putin became a prominent figure in Russian politics only after he had been appointed prime minister in August 1999, while the international community did not get acquainted with his figure until he became the chosen successor of Boris Yeltsin. A month after these events, there was no clear answer to the question about the qualities that allowed Putin to become the Russian president. Nevertheless, in March 2000, Putin won the majority of votes in the elections.

The rapid increase in Putin's popularity is explained by the fact that he managed to create a public image of a strong leader who is capable of bringing matters in the country under control. He emphasizes personal traits such as being disciplined, young, healthy and sports-oriented. (Treisman 2011, 593). Before he was elected president, he supported the military operation in the separatist region of Chechnya, which allowed him to produce the image of the nation's defender from terrorists who were based in that territory and posed a threat to the Russian population (Rose and Munro 2002, 96–100; Treisman 2011). Moreover, he attracted the support of the citizens by proclaiming the necessity of restoring Russia's status as a great power on the world stage (Colton 2017; Rose and Munro 2002, 205–7). An important factor was the stabilization of the economic situation in the beginning of the 2000s, which in the public eye was associated with Putin's contribution (Colton 2017; Treisman 2011).

Putin's popularity proved to be consistently high; in the last 3 years, his rating has not been lower than 80% ("Odobrenie Organov..." 2017). In the presidential election of 2018, Putin received a record 76.69% of the vote. Nevertheless, Putin has opponents, and one is Alexey Navalny, the founder and the head of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, who expressed the intention to enter the presidential race in 2018. In total, 84 electoral campaign offices were opened in Russian regions, with over 190 000 volunteers participating in the campaign ("Navalny's Website" 2018). However, notwithstanding his team's efforts, in July 2017, 46% of Russians had not heard about the politician ("Protesty i Naval'nyy..." 2017). At the moment, the question "Who is Mr. Navalny?" remains open, similarly to how it was salient in relation to Putin in the year 2000.

Voting behavior researchers distinguish several factors predicting support for a candidate in elections (Tregubov 2017). Voters' actions can be explained by specific features of the country where the elections occur (Norris 2004) and by electoral manipulations and falsifications

⁴ Russian national newspaper "Vedomosti" even labeled the question a historical one (Khimshiashvili, Overchenko, and Tovkaylo 2011).

(Harvey 2016). Furthermore, electoral expectations of the probable winner may produce the incentive to vote for that candidate (Goidel and Shields 1994). According to the theory of economic voting, evaluations of the state of national economy influence the citizens' electoral behavior (Elinder, Jordahl, and Poutvaara 2015; Hansford and Gomez 2015; Rogers 2014). This factor has been a prominent one for explanations of voting behavior in Russia (Treisman 2014). However, in recent years, Putin's rating has fixed at approximately 80%⁵ in spite of economic difficulties, creating the need to seek other factors to explain the Russian president's popularity.

This research constitutes an attempt to evaluate one such factor, namely, media construction of connections between politicians and public agenda issues, which influences voting behavior. Electoral candidates associated with the issues citizens perceive as more important may gain more support in the elections. This study analyzes the network connections of Vladimir Putin and Alexey Navalny with issues discussed in the Russian public sphere. The rationale for such analysis lies in the inequality of those in power and the opposition to "appropriate" public agenda (De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Green and Jennings 2012), as well as substantial differences in the images of the two political actors, their platforms and the audience towards which their propositions are oriented.

Issue ownership theory

Issue ownership theory, originally developed in the 1980s (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996), has become particularly popular over the past few years. In general terms, according to this theory, political parties (political leaders are considered less frequently) have a certain scope of questions that are strongly associated with them (Lachat 2014; Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch 2012), and that, in the eyes of the voters, they can solve most effectively (Stubager 2017). For instance, during the electoral campaigns in the US, Barack Obama owned the healthcare issue, and Donald Trump was associated with law and order (Goggin and Theodoridis 2017).

In spite of the growing number of publications on this topic, approaches to conceptualization and measurement of the issue ownership phenomenon differ considerably (Lefevere et al. 2017; Walgrave, Tresch, and Lefevere 2015). One point of disagreement is the temporal aspect of this phenomenon's dynamics. Some research emphasizes the stability of issue ownership (Seeberg 2017), arguing that it is appropriate to label some questions as "typically Republican" and others "typically Democratic". However, there is an alternative opinion that this kind of association is subject to change (Bélanger 2003; Brasher 2009). One way or another, the question of how the associations of an issue with a political actor form in people's minds remains open.

⁵ T. Frye and his colleagues' research confirms that Putin's popularity is real (Frye et al. 2017).

The formation of issue ownership can be explained by political parties' external communications as well as their media coverage (Walgrave and De Swert 2007). These explanations are not mutually exclusive, however. It is fair to assume that the influence of parties' and presidential candidates' manifestos and propositions is possible through the relevant public discussion in the mass media. Since voters often have no experience of direct interaction with the election candidates, they gain most knowledge about the country's political life from the media (Graber 2004; LeDuc, Niemi, and Norris 2014).

As follows from the discussion above, the reputation of parties and candidates for government offices is essentially an unobtrusive question (Ju 2014; M. McCombs, Graber, and Weaver 1981), which supposes that public opinion is influenced more by mass communication than by personal experience. Therefore, it is important to consider not only public opinion polls when studying issue ownership but also the construction of this phenomenon in the media. At present, such research is scarce, and this article aims to address the gap.

Issue ownership plays a considerable role in political struggle and can facilitate a party's or candidate's victory in elections. For instance, the intensification of discussion on unemployment level raises support of the Democratic party in the US, while the growth of the number of criminal news stories raises the Republicans' popularity (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). An intensified media coverage of the migration issue can contribute to the rise in popularity of anti-immigration parties, and the effect holds when indicators of the country's real economic conditions are controlled for (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007; Burscher, van Spanje, and de Vreese 2015). Such a situation creates incentives for the political actors to associate themselves with the most beneficial issues. The active deliberation of the left parties on cuts in government expenditure and tax increases in reaction to the population's distrust in their ability to balance the budget (Kraft 2017) can be interpreted as an attempt to appropriate other parties' issues. The evaluations of the effectiveness of such issue "stealing" vary: in some cases, parties successfully appropriate others' agenda (Holian 2004), while in other circumstances, such attempts can fail (Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2015). Conceivably, the difficulties in the process of issue appropriation can explain the politicians' intent to speak out on issues associated with their strengths and their opponents' weaknesses (Riker 1993). Thus, electoral candidates can try to attract attention to issues that are most beneficial for them by manipulating the agenda rather than assuring the population of their capacity to solve problems that other political actors are associated with.

Nevertheless, political actors have unequal opportunities to manipulate the public agenda. Incumbent parties have an advantage in this process (De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Green and Jennings 2012). Since the population's perceptions about issue ownership by political actors

are formed predominantly through mass communication, easier access of the political elite to the mass media gives them an advantage in agenda setting (Bennett 1990). It is noteworthy that the impact of owning the agenda can be different for those in power and for the opposition. Thus, the opposition benefits from media attention to issues associated with it and does not lose the support of the population as a result of active deliberation on issues owned by the ruling party (Thesen, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2017). Conversely, parties in power lose votes when the news features issues owned by the opposition but may not benefit from the concentration of attention on problems from their own agenda.

In Russia, the inequality between those in power and the opposition in terms of agenda-setting opportunities can be exacerbated by a limited freedom of the press (Fredheim 2017; Gehlbach 2010; Vartanova 2012). Moreover, the stability of issue ownership noted by many researchers means that politicians and parties that are familiar to the population have advantage in agenda-setting, especially when they have held a governmental office before (and, consequently, have experience of decision-making on important issues). Thus, Vladimir Putin has more opportunities to appropriate most acute issues than Alexey Navalny does.

Issue ownership theory is most often employed to explore associations between political parties and different issues. Such analysis of political parties' agendas is practical when considering a country with a stable and developed party system. In the case of Russia, however, it is more appropriate to apply it to the analysis of political leaders than to the analysis of parties. It is especially reasonable in the context of the growing political personalization, or the tendency to draw more media attention to the political leaders' activities than to political parties and organizations (Balmas and Sheaffer 2013; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Van Aelst, Sheaffer, and Stanyer 2012).

Methodology

This article analyzes the construction of issue ownership by Vladimir Putin and Alexey Navalny in Russian media. The framework for the analysis is a modern modification of the agenda-setting theory (McCombs 1977, 2014), which grants importance not only to the vocabulary and emphases on different aspects of the issue in the media coverage but also to the connections of the discussed problems (McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver 2014). This approach is labeled network agenda-setting. The first projects guided by this theory were concerned with local contexts and based on a comparatively small corpus of material. Later, it was applied to the analysis of the countrywide context. Researchers explored the attention of media and society to issues and the connections between these issues (Vu, Guo, and McCombs 2014). Additionally, some researchers focused on the network agenda-setting in China as a country with limited freedom of the press (Cheng 2016; Cheng and Chan 2015). However, most promising are

comparative network agenda-setting studies. For instance, there have been research attempts to compare the agendas concerning one issue in several countries (Vu, Guo, and McCombs 2014). Most relevant for the current study are attempts to compare the connections of presidential candidates in the US election campaigns in 2012 with several issues on the public agenda (Guo and Vargo 2015; Kioussis et al. 2015).

In this study, we used the material from the printed media “Integrum” database, which contains approximately 500 Russian magazines and over 250 national newspapers, to build network agendas based on the media discussion. The time frame of the analysis was from 13.12.2016 to 12.12.2017, a year after Alexey Navalny declared his intention to participate in the presidential elections in 2018. We analyzed the print outlets indexed by “Integrum”. Regional newspapers were not included in the present research. The article used big data computer-assisted analysis.

Creation of a network requires conceptualization of two key parameters—the nodes and the links between them. We defined nodes as the most important issues in the Russian public agenda. The connections between them were operationalized as simultaneous mentions of two issues in one media message. To define categories for analysis, we took the list of issues used in studies on electoral campaigns in the US (Guo and Vargo 2015; Neuman et al. 2014) as a basis. These lists were then adjusted to suit the Russian context. Issues that are important in the Russian public sphere, such as unemployment, migration, and ecology, were included in the analysis, while other less important categories were omitted. An example of such a category is “the middle class”, as the presence of a middle class in Russia is a subject of heated debates in the academia. Moreover, issues that are important in Russia but are not featured in research on US data, including global trade, religion, and sports, were added to the list of analyzed categories. While forming this additional category list, we used the results of Levada Center opinion polls on the most recalled events of the last month as a source.

The categories included in the analysis, which constitute the nodes of the network, can be grouped based on the society’s subsystems described by Tolcott Parsons (Parsons 1966). The economic system includes the issues of *unemployment, welfare and prices, poverty, energy, business, and global trade*. The political system is represented by *foreign policy, budget policy, government bodies, elections, and terrorism*. The societal system includes topics such as *healthcare, education, public order, criminality, migration, LGBT, women’s rights, demography, corruption, NGO and civic activism, and ecology*. The cultural system is represented by the issues of *religion, art, and sport*.

Each category was operationalized via search queries consisting of several keywords. For instance, to identify publications on the topic “women’s rights”, the keywords *feminism,*

women's rights, abortion, domestic violence, and violence in the family were used; for the topic "budget policy", the keywords were *budget, taxes, excise, government procurement, and pension*.

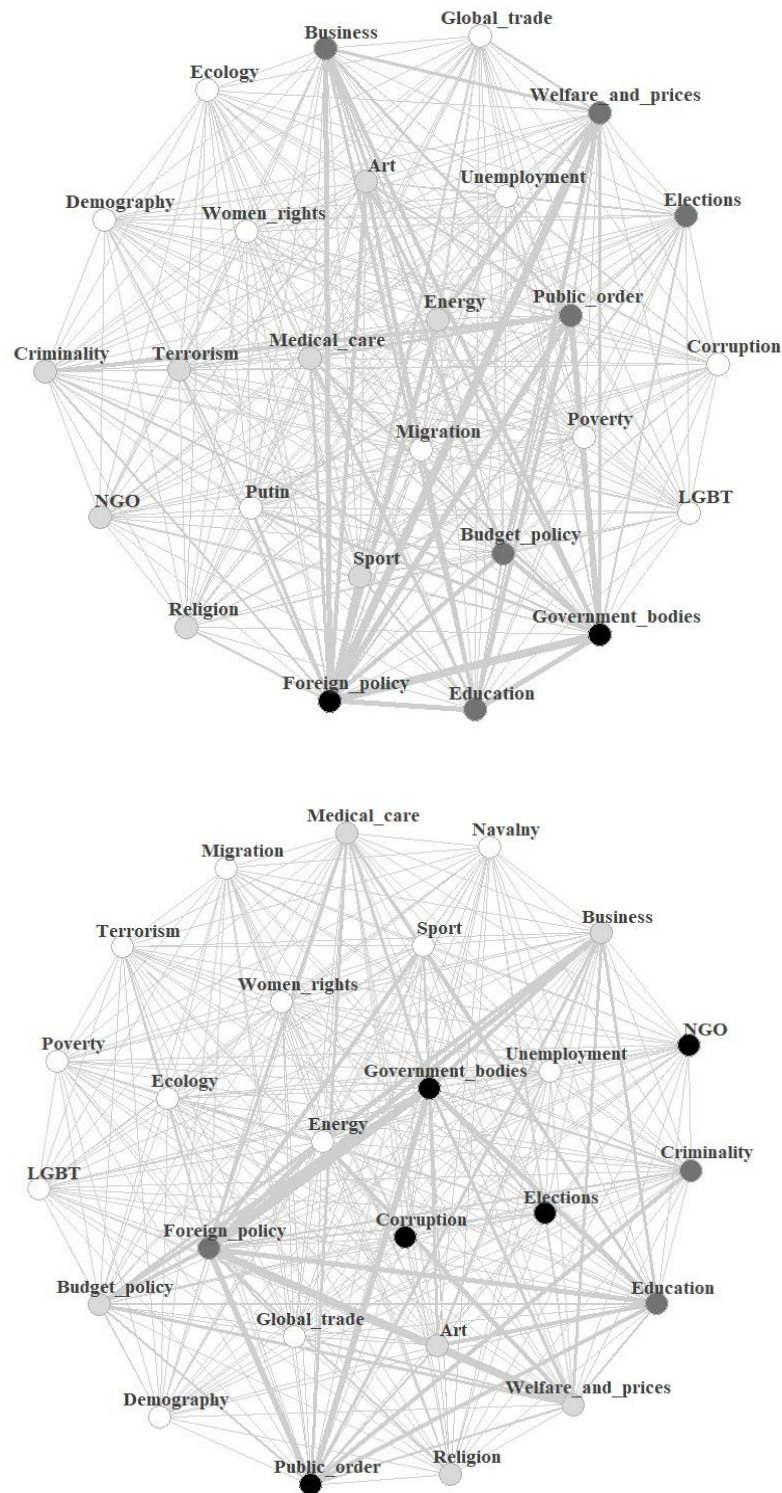
After the networks were designed, the parameter that was most valuable for this research was calculated as eigenvector centrality. This measure works well when calculated on weighted networks, in which the connections may have different strengths (Newman 2004). High eigenvector centrality of a node means that the node is connected with other nodes that are themselves highly central. In our analysis, eigenvector centrality serves as an indicator of how well the issue is integrated and, therefore, how influential it is in the media discussion.

Results

Two networks have been constructed for further analysis and interpretation. The networks reflect the public agendas in Russian media and the connection of issues in the agendas to Alexey Navalny and Vladimir Putin (Figure 1). Both networks are naturally quite dense: all the connections between topics and politicians are present at least once, as the analysis included all national press articles during a one-year period. In contrast, it is rather unlikely that in such a large number of texts no connection would be present between issues. The issues in the agenda are connected to each other to a larger extent than they are connected to the politicians. Foreign policy is mentioned simultaneously with other issues most often (eigenvector centrality=1)⁶; especially strong ties are formed with the issues of public order (0.74) and business activity (0.61). News stories related to government bodies are important in the networked agenda, as well (0.84). The least integrated in the media discussion are the issues of LGBT and women's rights (0.02 for both issues), along with unemployment (0.11). On the whole, such underrepresentation of certain issues, as well as their isolation from the context, can be interpreted as an attempt to deproblematize them (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Yasaveev 2006). For instance, the issue of unemployment is logically connected to several other topics, including welfare, budget policy, and criminality. However, the links between these issues are hardly present in the public discussion. As a result, specific unfavorable issues can be excluded from the public debate, and the public attention is concentrated on other topics.

⁶ Calculated as the average of the issue's eigenvector centralities in the two networks.

The positions of Putin and Navalny in the Russian networked media agenda
(in the period 13.12.2016 - 12.12.2017)



Note: The visualization was constructed by the authors; the thickness of the lines reflects the strength of the connection (the number of simultaneous mentions) between the issues in the national media. The color of the nodes reflects the percentage of mentions of a topic together

with a politician to all the mentions of the politician, from the lightest to the darkest: 0-2%, 3-4%, 5-8%, 9-13%.

As the first step in the analysis, we assessed the relationship between how integrated an issue is in the networked agenda and the strength of its connection to a politician. The aim was to reveal whether a politician is more likely to “own” issues that are also important in the media discussion. Possession of such issues would be a considerable advantage for the politician. Pearson correlation analysis of the eigenvalue centrality of the topic (its integratedness in the public discussion) and the percentage of simultaneous mentions of the politician together with the topic (as compared to the total number of mentions of a politician) was conducted. For both politicians, such correlations proved significant, with the p-value=0.002 for Navalny and 0.000 for Putin. The correlation coefficient for Putin is 0.93, and for Navalny, it is lower, at 0.59. This means that in most cases Putin, unlike Navalny, is mentioned in the context of most important societal issues. First, this means that Putin is more successful in constructing such connections with the public agenda issues that are most beneficial for him, confirming the results of previous studies, which emphasized higher chances of the incumbent to appropriate certain issues (De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Green and Jennings 2012). One could go further and argue that these highly valuable associations are not only the result of Putin’s efforts as a politician but also the outcome of shaping the public agenda through the two-tier media system characteristic of Russia, in which the national media serve the main function of maintaining a positive image of those in power (Dunn 2014). This way, the national media may attempt to make central the issues Putin comments on most frequently.

It is clear that Putin occupies a more visible place in the networked media public agenda than Navalny does ⁷. Nevertheless, the societal issues considered in this analysis play different roles in the agendas of the two politicians. Both political actors have their “own” issues with which they are mentioned most frequently (Table 1). Navalny regularly appears in news connected to the issue of criminality, NGOs and civic activism. In this case, such issue ownership is related to the politicians’ sphere of activities: as the head of the Anti-Corruption Foundation and a constant participant of protest rallies, Navalny is associated with these domains. At the same time, the mentions of the politician in the context of public order and criminality can be partially explained by the legal proceedings where Navalny is involved as the accused. However, it is also probable that this association is a result of the politician’s criticism of the legal system in Russia. One way or another, issue ownership can have either a negative or a positive impact on Navalny’s public image. If the media mention him as a defendant in the criminal trial, this could have a negative impact on the public opinion towards him.

⁷ 159271 vs 22688 mentions in the news stories on the issues considered in the current study.

Table 1

Major issues on networked agendas of V. Putin and A. Navalny

Putin		Navalny	
Foreign policy	13%	Government bodies	12%
Government bodies	13%	Public order	12%
Public order	8%	Corruption	9%
Education	6%	NGOs civic activism	9%
Business	6%	Elections	9%
Welfare and prices	5%	Foreign policy	7%
Elections	5%	Education	5%
		Criminality	5%

Note: The indicator is calculated as the proportion of the number of a politician's mentions in the context of a certain issue to the overall number of a politician's mentions in the media publications about all the issues considered in this study.

Unlike Navalny, Putin regularly appears in the news about business activities, as well as national welfare and the price level. It is reasonable to suggest that possession of the economic agenda is beneficial in contemporary Russia. According to public opinion polls, Russian citizens are most concerned with issues such as price increase, poverty and unemployment (“Samye Ostrye Problemy...” 2017). The confidence in a politician's ability to solve these problems may increase the politician's approval ratings among the population. It could be suggested that the propositions to increase minimum wage, reduce mortgage interest rates and improve Russia's business climate in Navalny's program are aimed at taking over the economic agenda (“Ekonomicheskaya Povestka...” 2017). However, this attempt has encountered criticism, including that of the independent media outlets (Dmitriev, Berg, and Polivanov 2017).

At the same time, Putin as a power holder has an intrinsic advantage in constructing the associations with contemporary public agenda issues. He not only is mentioned in the context of most important issues more regularly but also seems to form connections that represent him as competent in the issues. For instance, reports about improvements in the indicators of economic development (for instance, Russia's position in the Doing Business rating (“Doing Business” 2017)) convince the population to a certain degree that the problems are being solved. As a result, even in the context of decreasing real disposable income, the values of the Consumer Sentiment Index (“Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskie Indikatory...” 2017) and the evaluations of the country's economic performance (“Indeksy Sotsial'nogo...” 2017) are increasingly optimistic. Moreover, when the wording of the question about the changes in the business climate includes Putin's name, it increases the evaluations by top managers of Russian companies (Yakovlev, Levina, and Kazun 2015). We could suggest that Putin has indeed succeeded in constructing a favorable association with economic issues.

Nevertheless, foreign policy events of a conflictual nature often appear to be most remembered by the audience (conflict with Ukraine, sanctions, war in Syria, etc.) (Kazun 2017). Therefore, politicians are interested in being perceived as competent in international relations. In this realm, Putin has more opportunities to influence public opinion. On the one hand, during crisis, when the situation changes frequently, those in power have easier access to verified information, which allows them to participate actively in public discussion on this issue, shaping public opinion (Brody 1991). On the other hand, the president is the main representative of the country in the international arena. This way, it is not surprising that Putin is frequently mentioned in news stories about foreign policy. However, Navalny comments foreign events on occasion, as well.

In addition, several topics on the public agenda are not mentioned together with either Putin or Navalny. The issues of LGBT and women's rights belong to this category⁸. It could be suggested that these issues, currently not included in the public agendas, can be appropriated by some political actor. Ksenia Sobchak, who at the time when this research was conducted had not found her own political platform, may try to occupy this niche. At the convention of the party "Civil Initiative", she declared that "if religious processions and mass outdoor prayers are legal, so should be the opposition's rallies, carnivals and gay prides. If religious marriage is legal, LGBT civil unions should be legal as well" ("Sobchak Sformulirovala..." 2017). Moreover, her electoral program includes propositions about the improvement of women's standing in the society and protection of LGBT rights (items 91-94) ("Platforma..." 2017).

However, the benefit from owning such agenda is doubtful due to the negative attitudes of the population towards homosexuality (during a public opinion poll held in 2016, 82% said homosexuality is never justifiable ("Public..." 2016)). A politician who publicly advocates the rights of minorities and discriminated groups may gain the support of certain citizens but will hardly attract the approval of wider audiences.

It is important to mention that some public agenda issues the citizens perceive as important do not appear on the agenda of either politician considered in this study. For instance, "inaccessibility of many medical treatment types" is mentioned as an urgent issue by a quarter of all Russians ("Samye Ostrye..." 2017), but the topic is associated weakly with both Putin and Navalny. Appropriation of the issue may increase the popularity of the politician who makes an effort to include healthcare in his public agenda.

⁸ Less than 0.5% of the overall mentions of the politicians with the issues in the public agenda.

Discussion

Putin's high approval ratings and his record results in the 2018 presidential election can be explained in various ways. On the one hand, they can be assumed as the rally around the flag effect (Baum 2002; Dinesen and Jæger 2013; Mueller 1970; Norrander and Wilcox 1993)—the consolidation of society under the influence of external conflicts and threats (for example, the conflict with Western countries after the Crimea annexation (Bebler 2015; Hopf 2016) or a number of other foreign policy events). On the other hand, Putin's support may be related to the economic moods of Russians, and his results in the elections may be explained through the theory of economic voting (Elinder, Jordahl, and Poutvaara 2015; Hansford and Gomez 2015; Rogers 2014). Although Russia is currently experiencing economic difficulties, the indicators of economic optimism of citizens remain at a high level. In addition, according to the theories of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann 1984) and preference falsification (Kalinin 2017; Kuran 1995), the results of public opinion polls may be distorted due to the reluctance of Russians to express opinions different from the position of the supposed majority. The results of the elections can easily be explained by large-scale falsifications of results and by the non-admission of alternative candidates to participate in elections.

The issue ownership theory offers an alternative perspective of Putin's popularity. The high frequency of Putin's mentions in media discussions about the most pressing issues can create confidence in Russians that he is able to solve existing problems. As the national leader, Putin has great opportunities for "appropriating" the agenda. This is especially evident in the case of crisis events, when the situation changes quickly and only the president has enough information about it and therefore the opportunity to comment on it (Brody 1991). Responding to the public agenda, the head of state, who has wide access to the media, can express an opinion on issues of concern to the population. As a result, people can believe in the president's competence in solving these problems.

However, the president has the opportunity not only to react to the public agenda but also to manipulate it. The constant presence of the president in the information space allows him to largely determine the main themes of the public debate (Cohen 1995). The statements and, most importantly, the actions of the head of state (Olds 2013) can form a public agenda. In other words, the president not only talks about what is important for people but also shapes the public's views on the important. In Russia, Putin's statements on the economic situation can be considered as a reaction to the relevance of this issue for the population. Public opinion about the economy is partly the result of personal experience (Grant 2014; Ju 2014; Mutz 1992), so people are more difficult to manipulate through the media. Accordingly, the more convenient strategy for the government is to seize this agenda. In contrast, the war in Syria (or other foreign policy

issues) is an event, the image of which is completely constructed in the media (Brown 2015, 2014). Public opinion polls show that this problem worries Russians. Perhaps, the media are problematizing issues convenient for the authorities. This leads to the association of the national leader with the most pressing issues. Thus, Putin "acquires" existing important problems and constructs the significance of others in the media. This allows him to keep issue ownership on the most relevant issues.

This study contributes to the study of the issue ownership of political leaders, not parties. Most of the previous research on this theory focuses specifically on the issues that are associated with parties, whereas in a situation of growing political personalization, the emphasis on specific politicians may be more relevant. In addition, the analysis of the issue ownership of leaders allows us to apply this theory to the interpretation of processes in countries with a less developed party system.

Conclusion

According to much research, parties and politicians in power have more opportunities to appropriate issues that are most favorable for their image (De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Green and Jennings 2012). The results of this study confirm this. Vladimir Putin not only receives more media attention than Alexey Navalny but also is associated with the issues that are more integrated in the public discussion and more acute for the citizens, such as the economic agenda. Having more opportunities to promote his position in the media and actively utilizing them, the acting president manages to create and sustain the image of a politician who is able to overcome economic hardship and settle international conflict. Navalny, who disseminates his ideas predominantly via the Internet, may experience difficulties reaching the wide audience, as television is currently the major news source for 86% of the Russian population ("Doverie SMI" 2016). Nevertheless, Navalny has occupied a certain niche and is associated with anti-corruption and civic activism. Corruption is one of the issues that concern Russian citizens, although it is less prominent than unemployment and price increase. Thus, ownership of this public agenda issue may become beneficial in case Navalny manages to reach a wider audience.

In further research, an attempt to assess the stability of issue ownership in contemporary Russia appears to be a fruitful research task. At the moment, no conclusive evidence about the stability of the phenomenon has been found. Analysis of the Russian case could contribute to this academic discussion. Among other things, it would be interesting to assess what issues Putin was associated with at the beginning of his presidential term. Moreover, further analysis could concentrate on discovering the issues other political actors possess. Comparison of issue ownership by politicians on different media platforms seems a fruitful research area, as well. For

instance, the issues Navalny is associated with may be different in the press and in the blogosphere.

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