

From civic protest to political reform: the case of Russia

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ABSTRACT: The article is focused on the set of mass protest meetings in Russia in 2011-12s, which led to substantial shifts in its political system. To understand the case, the article analyzes the changes in international and domestic contexts. An analysis of global and national contexts of these meetings-turned-movements, their values and goals, disposition of forces, and phases of its development the author came to the following conclusions: (1) contemporary Russian society is split into numerous adversarial groups: the central vs. the provincial; the ‘new middle-class’, a challenger of the above changes, vs. the adherents of stability; the TV-people vs. the internet-people; the internationalists vs. the patriots; the radical patriots vs. the responsible nationalists; (2) a network-based protest movements are being rapidly formed nationwide; (3) in their efforts to spearhead these movements the old-model democratic oppositionists fall behind the network leaders both ideologically and tactically; (4) the government is stepping up pressure on the opposition forces, while the changes in the political system it offers are more of cosmetic character; (5) the emergent ‘new middle-class’ is yet too small and politically immature to initiate the overcoming of fundamental duality in the historical evolution of Russian society: a modernization breakthrough – a slow and painful retreat – a new head start.