

Balalaika - Case Study #4 Key Concepts

HIST 3091: Putin's Russia

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Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011-2012 in Broader Perspective

1. There are two views that dominate discourse on protest in post-Soviet Russia. The first is an “optimistic” view that sees recent protests as the beginning of a new, democratic, direction for Russia. The second is a “pessimistic” point of view that doesn’t see these protests as new or groundbreaking at all.
2. The author, Graeme Robertson, argues that neither of these views are especially helpful in understanding the Russian protest cycle and its significance. Instead he offers that we need to put these recent protests into the broader context of protest in the post-Soviet Russia and how it developed. He claims that is less that the optimists portray it to be, but greater than what the pessimists believe it to be.
3. Robertson identifies three key characteristics of protest that were present in the 1990s and the latter half of the 2000s.
 - i. “Repertoire” - How people did protests. It changed from direct action in the 90s to symbolic and creative actions
 1. One of the biggest transitions in protest.
 2. More access to “institutional means” of changing government or policy.
 3. Why the change?
 - a. More institutional organization in Putin Era.
 - b. Improved economic situation.
 - ii. “Location” - Where protests are taking place. A dramatic move from rural, small towns to the capital, Moscow.
 1. Not just about local politics, now more engaged in federal politics.
 2. Why the change?
 - a. Better reporting of protests.
 - b. Demonstrates shift of power to central government.
 - iii. “Demands” - What protesters want. Change from economic demands during the economic crisis of the early 2000s to issues of growth like workers and civil rights and ecological issues.
 1. Why the change?
 - a. Living in a far better economic state than in the 90s.
4. There is a vast difference between the way protest is done in autocratic regimes and in democratic countries. Robertson asserts that Russia is moving towards protest in democratic countries.
5. The protests of 2011-2012 were not one-offs, they were the culmination of years of dissatisfaction and protests coming together into a new wave of protest. This new wave is more similar to the protests found in democratic nations rather than autocratic ones.