Partisan Animosity and Support for Undemocratic Behavior: The Case of Russia[*]

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Abstract

When can autocrats subvert democracy without paying electoral costs? Although ideological and partisan attachments are weak in many contemporary autocracies, regime supporters often have a strong emotional aversion toward the opposition, who the regime portrays as traitors. Drawing on the literature on affective polarization, we investigate whether regime supporters who hold such attitudes are less likely to punish regime candidates who behave undemocratically using a vignette survey experiment conducted in Russia. We find little evidence that regime supporters are more likely to excuse most types of undemocratic actions by their copartisan candidates. However, those supporters who express antipathy toward the regime's staunchest opposition—Alexei Navalny and his supporters—are more likely to condone anti-democratic actions that specifically sideline Navalny's movement. Negative affect toward the opposition may thus help explain how autocrats survive the periodic rise of challengers; yet it does not guarantee that they will avoid backlash for undemocratic actions.

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1 Introduction

Electoral authoritarian regimes subvert democratic norms in order to shield themselves from competition. And yet studies show that many citizens support key features of democracy even in electoral autocracies (Pietsch, Miller, and Karp, 2015; Claassen, 2020; Reuter and Szakonyi, 2021; Hale, 2011). This contradiction poses a potential danger for autocratic regimes as many of the undemocratic actions that they take are potentially unpopular. When do authoritarian regimes risk being punished by citizens for undermining democracy? The question is especially salient because most modern dictatorships rely on some degree of (genuine) popular support in order to maintain themselves in power (e.g. Guriev and Treisman, 2022).

A number of scholars have suggested that incumbents who violate democratic norms may escape electoral backlash if their supporters have strong partisan attachments that lead them to excuse or downplay the undemocratic behavior of their copartisan leaders (Albertus and Grossman, 2021; Kingzette et al., 2021; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin, 2021; Orhan, 2022b; Mazepus and Toshkov, 2022; Krishnarajan, 2022; Aarslew, 2023b). In short, voters sometimes appear to place partisanship over democratic principles (Svolik, 2019; Graham and Svolik, 2020). This problem may be particularly acute in polarized societies where fear of the other party taking power is pronounced, such that voters are willing to tolerate undemocratic actions in order to make sure their opponents are defeated.

Using original survey data from Russia, this paper examines whether polarized attitudes, and especially antipathy toward political opponents, lead supporters of autocratic regimes to look past the undemocratic behaviors that their leaders use to tilt the electoral playing field (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Schedler, 2013). We focus specifically on affective polarization, which we define as "the tendency for partisans to dislike and distrust those from the other party" (Druckman et al., 2021, p. 28). Since most contemporary autocracies like Russia deemphasize ideology, promote catch-all policies, and instead seek legitimacy on the basis of performance (e.g. Guriev and Treisman, 2022), ideological attachments to these regimes tend to be weak. Therefore, to study how polarized atti-

tudes condition the willingness of Russian voters to punish incumbents for democratic subversion, we focus on antipathy toward out-partisans—that is, emotional aversion to the opposition—rather than policy disagreement, more narrowly (e.g. Svolik, 2020).[1] We expect that affectively polarized regime supporters will be less likely than other regime supporters to punish regime candidates who engage in undemocratic behavior.

Moreover, while affective polarization may include elements of both in-party attachment and out-party animosity, we draw attention specifically to negative attitudes toward out-partisans since, in addition to being non-ideological, many modern autocracies eschew grassroots party-building. As a result, party identity tends to be quite weak. Support for the regime is often wide, but shallow. Thus, to the extent affective attitudes play a role, we expect it will be those that are focused on negative emotions toward the opposition.

We examine these arguments in the setting of contemporary Russia, an archetypal electoral autocracy. We draw on survey data from an original, face-to-face pre-election survey of over 2,700 voters carried out in September 2021. As we show, most Russians do not hold strong ideological positions and their ideological views do not cohere on opposite ends of a political spectrum (or spectrums). Partisan attachments are also quite shallow, with very few regime supporters reporting strong attachments to the ruling party. At the same time, however, we find relatively high levels of antipathy among regime supporters toward the most staunch segments of the opposition: Alexei Navalny and his supporters.

To test our claims, we conducted a vignette framing experiment that primed survey respondents to evaluate a United Russia (UR) politician who was known to engage in different types of democratic subversion (or no subversion in the control group). After considering the vignette, respondents were asked the likelihood that they would vote for the candidate. The results suggest that voters, including many regime supporters, do generally punish UR candidates for engaging in democratic subversion. For most of the subversion treatments—ballot box fraud, attempting to ban YouTube, banning protests—

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[1]Though, of course, policy disagreement and ideological difference may serve as a basis for affective polarization, they are not required (Mason, 2018a).

we find voters with polarized attitudes[2] are no less likely than others to punish the ruling party for undemocratic behavior. Affective polarization does not seem to affect the propensity of voters to punish regime candidates for illiberal actions that are not framed explicitly as targeting the object of voters' antipathy.

We do, however, uncover evidence that regime supporters who express antipathy toward the regime's staunchest opposition—Alexei Navalny and his supporters—are more likely to condone anti-democratic actions that specifically sideline Navalny's movement. Affective polarization makes voters more likely to sanction banning Navalny's supporters from running for office, a key impediment to his movement's electoral prospects. Thus, to the extent we find evidence of affectively polarized attitudes conditioning voters' responses to undemocratic behavior by incumbents, it is only outpartisan antipathy toward Navalny that has an effect. By contrast, in-party attachment (what some may term "positive partisanship"), appears to offer regime candidates in Russia little protection for undemocratic actions.

While Russia is in many ways different than the democratic countries that have been widely studied in the polarization literature,[3] there are nonetheless some similarities. As in the U.S., out-group animosity in Russia has been increasing in recent years as the regime has turned to a more pro-active strategy of demonizing Navalny and his supporters on state media (alongside growing state media dominance). Just as changes in elite behavior and in the media environment have contributed to rising out-party antipathy in many democratic settings, so too have they contributed to greater polarization of attitudes in Russia, as well.

Pre-war Russia of course also differs in important ways from many other countries studied in the polarization literature. It had lower than average levels of societal polarization—i.e. fewer individuals hold deeply polarized attitudes—and it lacks two (or more) relatively well-matched political blocs. Political beliefs in pre-war Russia were not strongly linked to social identity, as they appear to be in classically polarized countries. Yet even in the absence of deep social bifurcation and in a context with many polit-

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[2]Whether defined in ideological terms, as positive partisanship/in-party attachment, or out-partisan antipathy.

[3]See e.g. Druckman et al. (2021) on these trends in the U.S.

ically disengaged citizens, we find familiar markers of affectively polarized attitudes; moreover, we find that these attitudes shape citizens' acceptance of undemocratic strategies (that they otherwise profess not to support)—though only under certain conditions. When undemocratic actions clearly target the object of their antipathy, regime partisans are more likely to look the other way. Our findings thus demonstrate that while affectively polarized attitudes do not give autocrats carte blanche to undermine democratic norms, fomenting out-group antipathy may enable regimes to specifically marginalize their opponents without suffering significant popular backlash. We thus shift the agenda on affective polarization from the study of how democracy is subverted to how autocrats survive the periodic rise of challengers that occurs in all electoral authoritarian systems.

2 Affective Polarization and Support for Undemocratic Leaders

In recent years, polarization has emerged as a prominent explanation of democratic backsliding in both academic and popular accounts. Indeed, several episodes of democratic erosion, including in Venezuela, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, and the US, appear to conform to this pattern (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018; Haggard and Kaufman, 2021; Chiopris, Nalepa, and Vanberg, 2021; Luo and Przeworski, 2019; Nalepa and Cinar, 2022; Orhan, 2022b). While polarization may undermine democracy in a myriad of ways, we are most concerned in this paper with the notion that voters in polarized societies look past or excuse the undemocratic behavior of co-partisan politicians because their political loyalties "trump" their (possibly real) commitment to democratic principles. This leads them to continue voting for candidates who undermine democratic norms (e.g. Svolik 2019).

The literature on this topic suggests that democracy may be imperiled by two types of polarization: *ideological* (i.e., a profound disagreement over policies) or *affective* (i.e., visceral dislike of opposing parties and their supporters). Although each type of polarization describes a divided society, they may reflect different types of division.

Building on work in social psychology that studies the power of social identities to

shape behavior and emotion (Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000; Brewer and Pierce, 2005; Smith, Seger, and Mackie, 2007; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), and work in political science that portrays party identification as social identity (Mason, 2015; Malka and Lelkes, 2010; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2004; Campbell et al., 1960), some scholars assert that once political identification becomes salient, it can drive political animosity and politicized emotions (i.e., fear, anger). Other scholars suggest that strong attachments to one's party are not necessary for strong feelings of out-partisan enmity to emerge (e.g. Abramowitz and Webster, 2018). Either way, disdain for one's political opponents has the potential to shape political behavior.

Affective and ideological polarization may go together, but there is no theoretical reason to assume that they must. Empirically, because they are endogenous, affective polarization and policy differences are often inseparable. A number of studies suggest that there are voters (and societies) who are affectively polarized, but not ideologically polarized (see Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018; Mason, 2015; Iyengar et al., 2019). A body of recent research in American politics has aimed to cleanly identify the effect of one aspect of polarization or the other (e.g. Dias and Lelkes, 2021; Orr and Huber, 2020; Druckman et al., 2021). In comparative research, Orhan (2022b) finds that affective polarization is positively correlated with the likelihood of democratic backsliding in a cross-sectional sample of 53 countries, while ideological polarization has no demonstrable connection. Similarly, using a conjoint experiment in Turkey Orhan (2022a) finds that affective polarization has a marginally greater effect on support for democratic backsliding than does ideological polarization. Our task here is not to identify the causal effect of out-party antipathy as distinct from policy difference or ideological polarization, but rather to show how affective polarization (however it comes about) affects voters' tolerance for undemocratic behavior by their political leaders.

Scholars have argued that ideological polarization can undermine democracy because intense policy disagreements among political elites push citizens to prioritize their ideological interests over democratic norms (Svolik, 2019). Ideologically polarized partisans, the argument goes, understand that punishing an in-party politician who is violating democratic norms would make it more likely that the policies they oppose will be en-

acted (Graham and Svolik, 2020; Carey et al., 2020). Thus, strong ideologues might continue supporting undemocratic candidates.

By contrast, the argument linking affective polarization to democratic erosion focuses on how strong emotional affect might lead voters to look past the undemocratic behavior of their co-partisans. Strong emotional attachment to one's party, strong emotional aversion to the out party, or both make it psychologically costly to punish one's own party to the benefit of the out party (Albertus and Grossman, 2021; Kingzette et al., 2021; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin, 2021; Orhan, 2022b; Mazepus and Toshkov, 2022; Krishnarajan, 2022; Aarslew, 2023b; Şaşmaz, Yağcı, and Ziblatt, 2022).

In many contemporary authoritarian regimes like Russia, incumbents prefer to deemphasize ideology and instead pursue a catch-all or populist platform (e.g. Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Such regimes often depoliticize the public sphere and ideological attachments are typically weak. To the extent that polarization leads regime voters to look past the undemocratic behavior of incumbents, we believe that it will be the affective sort that matters. Thus, we argue that affectively polarized regime supporters will be less likely than other regime supporters to punish regime candidates who engage in undemocratic behavior.

Most contemporary dictatorships also avoid the type of grassroots party building that characterized mass mobilizational regimes in the 20th century (Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Typified by communist regimes, mass-mobilizational dictatorships used state-administered mass organizations to inculcate society in the official ideology. Most contemporary regimes do not ask their subjects to be ardent supporters, just that they acquiesce. Given the lack of strong partisan ties in autocracies like Russia, we expect that out-partisan animosity—emotional aversion to the opposition—should be more relevant than in-partisan attachment when it comes to excusing undemocratic behavior by regime candidates.

3 Polarization in Russia

3.1 Ideological and Issue-based Polarization

Since its emergence in the late 1990s, Russia's ruling party, United Russia, has sought to dominate the country's party system by pursuing vaguely centrist, or right-of-center, policies under a catch-all platform. A brief glance, in Figure 1, at two decades of survey data on left-right self-placement in Russia shows clearly that there is no trend toward growing ideological polarization. This is consistent with the Putin regime's nonideological character for many years and suggests that Putin's subsequent "conservatism" (Evans, 2015) has had little effect on voters' ideological self-placement. If anything, centrist self-placements have become even more dominant over the period of UR's rule.

Further confirming the impression that ideological polarization in Russia is low, Russians express broad agreement on a variety of policy issues, as shown in Appendix Figure A1. With the partial exception of mandatory vaccination against COVID-19, Russians overwhelmingly take a similar position on issues from the importance of traditional values to raising taxes, addressing inequality, price controls, pension reform, increasing redistribution, and mitigating climate change. This is true even if we compare Putin supporters with supporters of his staunchest opponent, Alexei Navalny. On taxes, social policy, state control of the market, and even traditional values, there is virtually no policy polarization between these two groups.[4] It is also notable that policy preferences dominant among the public do not all align with the policies Putin has pursued: large majorities support price controls, which Putin and United Russia have rejected, and oppose the government's 2018 policy raising the retirement age. Together, this evidence suggests that both policy preferences and issue-based polarization play a less central role in Russian politics than they do in contexts where parties are more programmatic and their platforms more clearly ideological.[5]

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[4]Navalny voters are somewhat more opposed to state-mandated vaccination than are Putin voters, though majorities of both Navalny and Putin voters take the same side of the issue. It should be noted, of course, that supporters of some systemic opposition parties, such as the KPRF have more left-leaning views on economic policy.

[5]The one significant area of policy disagreement between Putin and Navalny supporters is on democracy and Russia's current democratic performance, which we discuss below.

**Figure 1: Russian Political Ideology on Left-Right Scale since 2000**
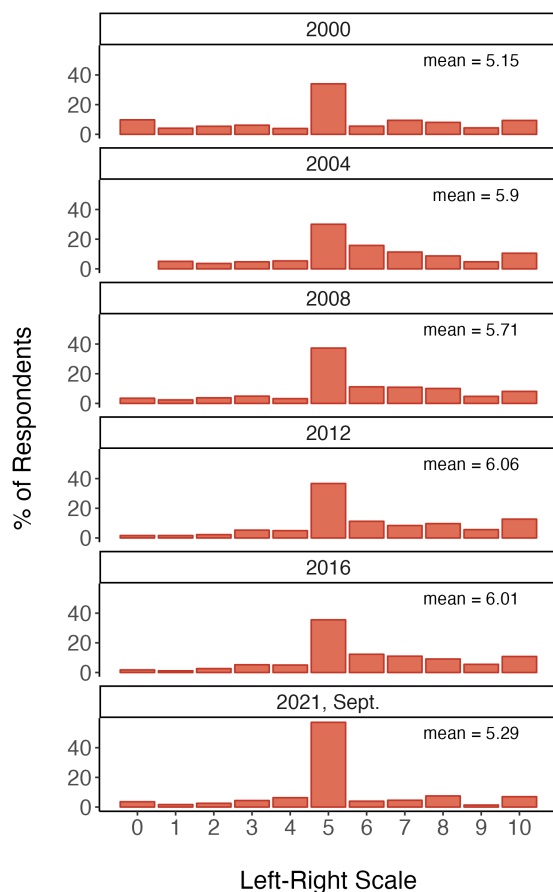
Note: This figure plots respondents from six iterations of the Russian Election Study (RES) conducted from 2000-2021. Respondents reported their left-right ideology on a 10-point scale. The mean for each survey is shown.

Figure 2 affirms some of these points in a comparative context. Using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and our own survey, it places Russia's level of ideological polarization amongst similar data from 54 other countries. The data should be interpreted with caution due to measurement inconsistencies across time, but the figure indicates that ideological polarization in Russia was relatively high at the end of the 1990s, just before Putin took office and when economic reform still dominated the agenda. Since then it has receded, and Russia is now less ideologically polarized than most countries in the CSES.

Further, when it comes to the unacceptability of various tactics used by autocrats

**Figure 2: How Polarized Is Russia in Comparative Perspective?**
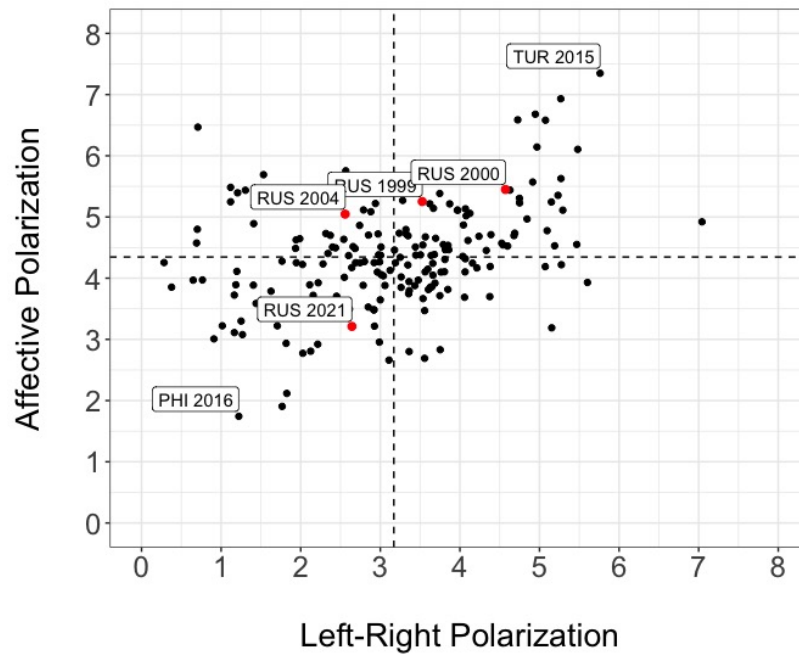
Note: Dotted lines indicate the sample arithmetic means of affective (y-axis) and left-right polarization (x-axis). Replicating and extending Reiljan's (2019) country-level polarization measures, we calculate the affective and left-right polarization scores for each individual in a country (N=54) for a given election (N=170). Individual scores of each political party were then summed and mean values were computed. Finally, all mean values of party scores were weighted with the vote shares of the other parties and all scores were summed.

to gain an electoral advantage, Russians appear largely united. Figure 3 displays attitudes toward a range of electoral tactics among all respondents, respondents who say they would vote for Putin (42% overall), supporters of so-called systemic opposition parties (24% overall), and respondents who say they would vote for Russia's most uncompromising opposition figure–Alexei Navalny (5% overall).[6] The red bars show that overwhelming majorities of all groups reject anti-democratic vote-getting tactics such as organizing 'carousels' to facilitate multiple voting and threatening the jobs of workers who vote the 'wrong' way. Majorities even reject strategies that are less clearly problematic for democracy like distributing food to retirees. In short, both Putin and Navalny

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[6]Systemic opposition parties in Russia are those that are allowed to compete in elections and hold seats in the legislature. This includes the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), Just Russia, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).

voters reject anti-democratic vote-getting strategies when queried directly, and do so in similar numbers. Consistent with this, experimental evidence suggests that when electoral fraud becomes known, it erodes support for the regime among its political base (Reuter and Szakonyi, 2021). Voters appear to blame the regime and its candidates rather than Putin personally (Aarslew, 2023a).

Figure 3: Views on the Acceptability of Various Vote-getting Strategies
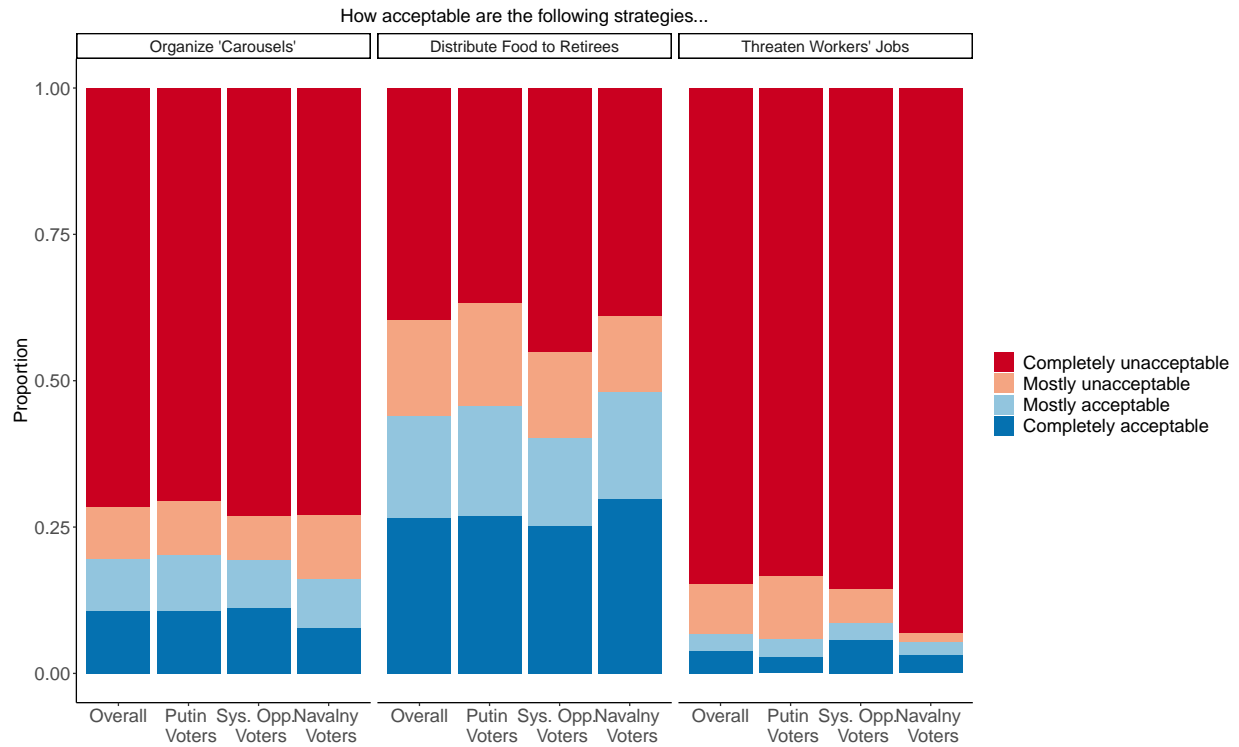
Note: This figure plots the proportion of the sample which believed that different types of mobilizational strategies were acceptable. The samples are then subset into those who would vote for Vladimir Putin, a candidate from the systemic opposition, or Alexei Navalny in a hypothetical presidential election. The "overall" category includes all respondents. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

This is not to say that issue-based preferences play no role in Russian politics or that policy differences do not divide Russian voters. Indeed, attitudes toward the ruling United Russia party have become more polarized in recent years, as shown in Appendix Figure A2. Increasing authoritarianism and heavy-handed tactics by the regime may be driving some opposition voters into a more sharply opposed position.

In particular, there are some clear differences between Putin supporters and oppo-

sition supporters on the issue of democracy and the government's democratic performance. Figure 4 shows expressed support for a democratic political system in Russia overall. As the left panel shows, a large majority of roughly 75 percent across all groups endorse democracy as the most suitable political system for Russia today. Supporters of systemic opposition parties are somewhat less likely than Putin supporters to endorse democracy, whereas Navalny voters are significantly more likely than Putin voters to agree unequivocally that democracy is best (33% vs. 19%, $p < .01$). The right plot, meanwhile, shows that while opposition supporters (especially Navalny supporters) mostly reject the idea of a strong leader who is unconstrained by parliament or elections, a similar share of Putin voters considers such a leader acceptable. There are stark further differences in how opposition and Putin supporters perceive the regime's democratic performance, as shown in Appendix Figure A3, and in their views on the acceptability of measures to curtail freedom of the media and other civil liberties, as shown in Appendix Figure A4.

Responses across these items suggest that while Navalny voters hold a more conventional view of democracy, Putin voters reject blatantly anti-democratic election tactics yet still see democracy as largely compatible with a strong and unconstrained leader. This contradiction raises the interesting question of when and under what circumstances one view prevails over the other. If autocratic incumbents come to believe the public values their strength and disregard the public's reticence about anti-democratic cheating, it suggests they could face backlash.

3.2 Affective Polarization

As Figure 2 suggests, society-wide levels of affective polarization in pre-war Russia were comparatively low. This is largely because relations between Putin supporters and supporters of the systemic opposition (which accounts for most opposition supporters) are not particularly acrimonious. For example, more than half of Putin supporters have either a positive or neutral view of the Communist Party (KPRF) (57%).[7] When asked

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[7]This is from a question that asks respondents to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how positively or negatively they relate toward various parties. Only 8% of Putin supporters said they felt very negatively toward the KPRF (0 on the 11 point scale). Figures are roughly similar on attitudes toward the other parliamentary

Figure 4: Democratic Attitudes
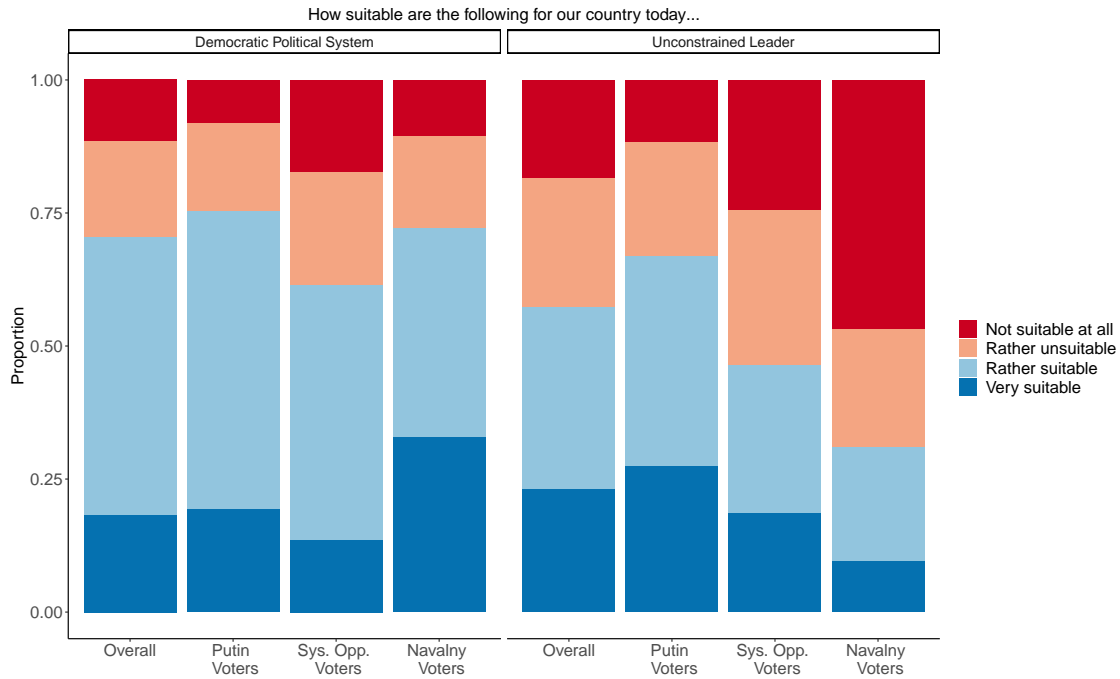
Note: This figure plots the proportion of the sample which believed that different political systems were suitable for Russia. The samples are then subset into those who would vote for Vladimir Putin, a candidate from the systemic opposition, or Alexei Navalny in a hypothetical presidential election. The "overall" category includes all respondents. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

how they relate to supporters of opposition parties in general, a more social measure of negative affect, 55% of Putin supporters said they had either neutral or positive views of opposition supporters (see Appendix Figure A6).[8]

Yet seemingly low-levels of society-wide polarization mask high levels of animosity toward Alexei Navalny and his supporters among Putin voters. Before his poisoning in August 2020, the regime's strategy for marginalizing Navalny was to ignore him. State television was even banned from mentioning his name. After the poisoning, however, the Kremlin used much more charged rhetoric to attack Navalny and his supporters. The regime increasingly played on voters' affect by demonizing its nonparliamentary

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opposition parties, Just Russia and the LDPR

[8]Thirty-nine percent had neutral feelings toward opposition supporters and 16% had positive feelings. When answering this question, respondents may have been reflecting on either supporters of the systemic opposition or supporters of Navalny. As we show below, Navalny is far more disliked, so animosity toward the systemic opposition is likely even less negative than this figure suggests.

opposition. Now labeled a traitor and his supporters branded as a fifth column, Navalny was viewed negatively by almost half of all Russians just before parliamentary elections in September 2021.[9] We asked respondents which words they would use to describe their attitude toward Navalny, from admiration to antipathy (the full question wording is in Appendix section A3), and summarize the results in Figure 5. Among Putin voters, a majority express a negative view of Navalny and very few express a positive view.[10]

Figure 5: Attitudes toward Navalny
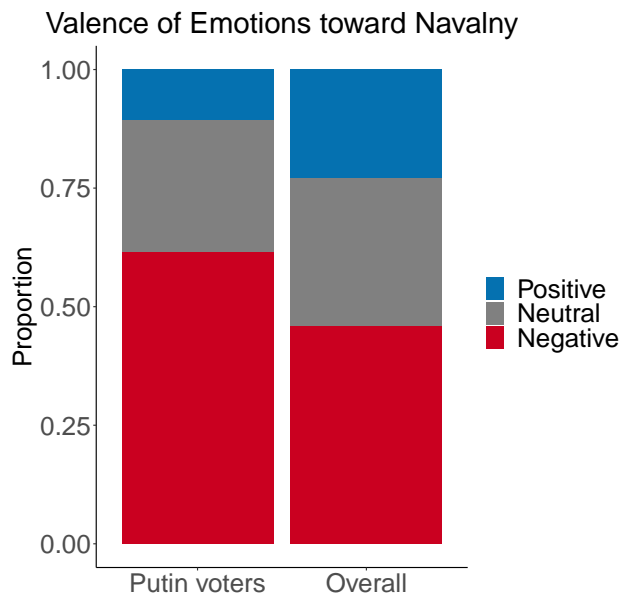
Note: This figure plots the types of attitudes towards Alexei Navalny held among those who would vote for Vladimir Putin in a hypothetical election, and all respondents. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

Among those who expect to cast a vote in the next presidential election, we also find quite polarized views and strong out-party antipathy directed at Navalny supporters.[11] Figure 6 displays responses to a series of items in which we asked respondents to agree

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[9]Note that among nonvoters, representing roughly 1-in-3 Russians, a plurality expressed neutral views, consistent with the notion that animosity is concentrated among partisans.

[10]The breakdown of negative views among Putin voters is the following: 17% expressed disgust, 17% expressed antipathy, 21% said they didn't have anything good to say about him; and 7% said they were wary/unsure about him. Thus, fully 34% expressed extreme dislike of Navalny.

[11]Unfortunately, we did not ask an equivalent set of questions about the character of supporters of the systemic opposition. With limited space on the survey instrument our questions about antipathy toward the opposition focused on the most likely target of such antipathy: Navalny

Figure 6: Animus toward Out-party Supporters
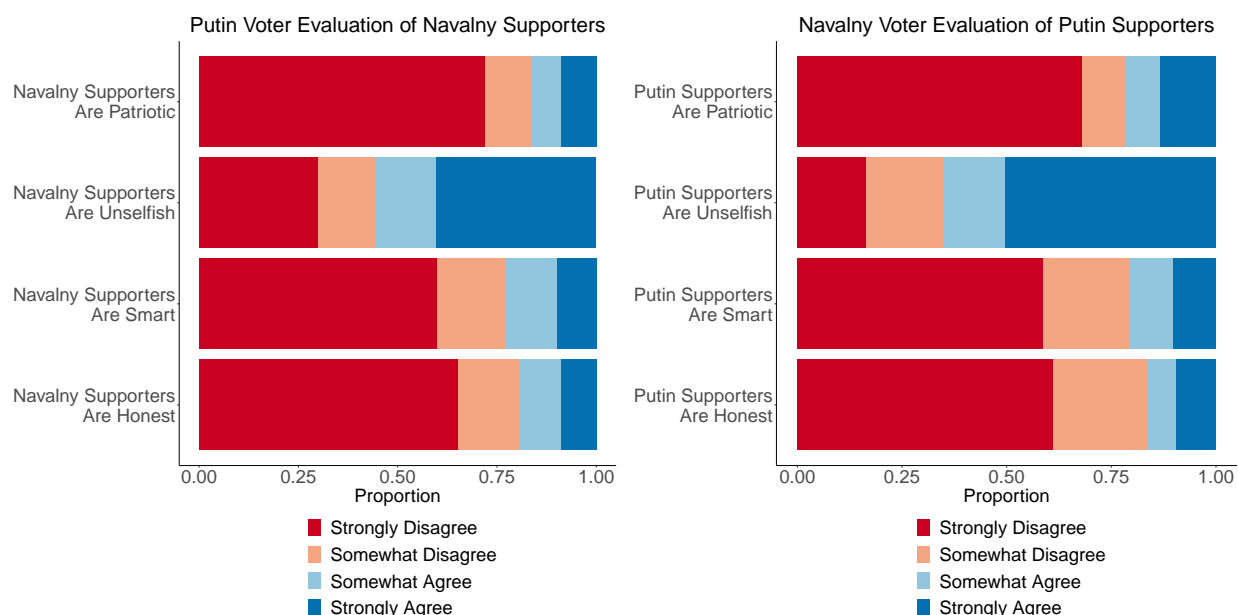
Note: This figure plots animus towards out-party supporters. The left panel subsets to respondents who would vote for Alexei Navalny in a hypothetical election; the right panel subsets to those who would vote for Vladimir Putin. Each group is asked about their views of the supporters of the other candidate. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

or disagree with several statements about out-party (i.e. Putin or Navalny) supporters. So in the left panel, we asked those who expect to vote for Putin (again, 42% overall) about their views of Navalny supporters and, in the right panel, we asked those who would vote for Navalny if he were to be included on the ballot (again, 5% overall) about their views of Putin supporters. The results are striking: large majorities of 75% or more in both groups say that out-party supporters are not patriotic, that they are stupid, and that they are dishonest. Fewer, though still a majority in both groups, say that out-party supporters are selfish.[12]

In sum, then, even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, out-party antipathy was quite widespread among Putin voters with respect to Alexei Navalny and his movement,[13] and among Navalny supporters with respect to Putin.[14] These

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[12]We also asked respondents to rate, on a scale of 0 to 10, how positive or negatively they viewed supporters of Alexei Navalny in general. Sixty-six percent of Putin supporters said they viewed Navalny supporters negatively, with 33% choosing the most negative response option on the scale (0).

[13]Though not the opposition as a whole, see Appendix Figure A6.

[14]As Appendix Table A5 shows, animus towards Putin supporters is quite among all respondents who

affectively polarized attitudes were accompanied by differences in issue positions, particularly on democracy.

Last, alongside this evidence on what might be termed "negative partisanship," it is important to also describe briefly the nature of "positive partisanship" in the Russian context. Though United Russia has dominated Russian politics for roughly two decades, partisan attachments to the regime remain relatively shallow (and were declining over time before the war). While large numbers of voters express support for United Russia (54% answered above the median on a 10 point scale), only 10 percent of voters mentioned UR when asked in an open-ended question to name the party that they would characterize as "my party."[15] In fact, even among UR supporters, only 18 percent named the party in response to this question. Most instead said there was no party that they would call "my party," clear evidence of weak positive partisanship among Russian regime supporters.

4   Framing Experiment

We test our hypotheses about the effect of polarized attitudes on tolerance of anti-democratic actions using a framing experiment placed on the August-September 2021 wave of the Russian Elections Survey. This wave was conducted just prior to the national Duma elections held from September 17-19, 2021 and included 2,750 face-to-face interviews with Russian adults.

The experiment prompted respondents to imagine a future (hypothetical) election for the Duma deputy seat representing their district. In that election, the ruling party United Russia puts forward a 50-year-old male candidate who advocates increasing funding for local schools and building new roads, while also touting his support for a free computer training program for people with disabilities.

After that introductory description, we randomly assign each respondent to one of the five groups (one control and four treatment) shown in Table 1; the proportion of the sample allocated to each group is given on the right. Each of the four treatment

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would vote for any hypothetical candidate from the opposition, not just Navalny.

   [15]This measure is due to Colton (2000).

groups received additional information about the pre-election activities of the candidate, while the control group received none. Each treatment group emphasizes a different class of anti-democratic activity perpetuated by the candidate and collectively reference violations of different core elements of representative democracy, including free and fair elections, freedom of assembly, access to independent media, and the right to run for public office.

The first treatment group is informed that the candidate has a history of organizing *karusels* at polling stations. The term *karusels* refers to illegal multiple voting[16] and is well-known by the general public as a common scheme used to manipulate elections (Bader, 2013). The second treatment group informs respondents that the candidate supports a bill in the State Duma banning any protests in the three months following elections. This legislative action would violate freedom of assembly as enshrined in the Russian constitution, while presumably protecting the incumbent regime from public displays of anger about election manipulations (and their effect on outcomes).

Next, in the third treatment, the candidate is described as supporting legislation to ban YouTube in the country. Long before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, YouTube has been a key medium for Russians to access both entertainment as well as independent information about current events from both domestic and foreign media (Litvinenko, 2021). In the fall of 2021, YouTube was the third most popular web resource (after Google and Yandex) attracting roughly 25 million users per day.[17] For years, politicians have threatened to block the service entirely, oftentimes on grounds that it refuses to take down content unflattering to the regime.[18]

Our final treatment has the candidate supporting legislation to block employees of Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) from participating in elections. As Navalny's prominence and political ambitions grew, so did those of this inner circle.[19] After Navalny's poisoning and imprisonment by the regime, in the summer of 2021, a new federal law was passed, which deemed the FBK an extremist organization, and

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[16]Voters figuratively ride a carousel in and out of the polling booth to vote multiple times.

[17]'Will Russia ban YouTube?' *The Bell*, October 4, 2021.

[18]'YouTube and Instagram face Russian bans', *BBC*, February 14, 2018.

[19]In 2019, FBK's lawyer Lyobov Sobol ran for the Moscow City Duma and preparations were underway for affiliated employees to participate in the 2021 Duma elections.

thereby prevented any of its members from running for office.[20] The framing experiment explicitly references this violation of the rights of opposition politicians.

After the presentation of the vignette, we ask respondents from all groups about the likelihood that they would vote for the hypothetical UR candidate on a scale from 1 to 4, with 4 indicating Very Likely (see Table 1).[21] Our outcome thus gauges whether respondents are more or less likely to support a politician who takes any of these four anti-democratic actions. This pseudo-behavioral measure enables us to better capture any trade-off respondents face in accepting undemocratic behavior by a candidate affiliated with the regime.

At the outset, it is worth noting that antipathy toward Navalny may do little to color regime supporters' views of electoral fraud (and carousels, specifically) in an election where Navalny's organization cannot participate. Both banning protest and banning YouTube, meanwhile, are actions that would disadvantage a broad set of opposition groups, attitudes toward which are not highly polarized. Indeed, banning YouTube would negatively impact not only the regime's political opponents, but ordinary citizens much more broadly. Evidence across these treatments thus sheds light on how much latitude affectively polarized attitudes give incumbents to manipulate the political playing field to their advantage.

Finally, given our theoretical interest in affective polarization as a moderator of our treatment, we control for a wide range of factors that might be correlated with out-party animus and voting behavior. In the analysis, we draw on questions about respondent characteristics (including age, gender, education, income, ideology, and exposure to state media), as well as detailed measures of political preferences, opinions about politicians, perceptions of election integrity, and respect for other democratic principles to better understand how polarization affects voters' reactions to politicians who engage in undemocratic behavior.

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[20]Ullah, Zahra and Anna Chernova. 'Russian court declares Navalny groups 'extremist' ahead of elections'. *CNN*, June 9, 2021.

[21]One potential concern with this experimental design is that, unlike the typical conjoint candidate experiment, it does not present respondents with artificial differences between candidates that would allow respondents to conceal a politically sensitive choice.

Table 1: Experiment Wording and Treatment Assignment

Preamble: Imagine that during the next State Duma elections, a man is nominated by United Russia in your voting district. He is 50 years old and his program focuses on increasing support for local schools and building new roads in the district. He becomes well-known thanks to his support for a government program which provides free computer training for people with disabilities in your district.

		N	%
Control	*No additional information given.*	466	18.9
Treatments:			
#1) Karusels	The candidate organizes karusels at polling stations.	509	20.7
#2) Protests	He supports a bill in the State Duma banning any protests in the three months following elections.	495	20.1
#3) YouTube	He supports a bill in the State Duma banning YouTube in Russia.	479	19.5
#4) Navalny	He supports a bill in the State Duma banning employees of Alexei Navalny's foundation from participating in elections.	514	20.9
Total		2,463	
Outcome :	How likely is it that you would vote for this candidate?		
Scale:	1 - Very unlikely; 2 - Somewhat unlikely; 3 - Somewhat likely; 4 - Very likely		

5 Experimental Results

We plot the main results from the experiment in Figure 7. On average, respondents in the control group (who received no additional information about pre-election activities) were moderately supportive of the UR candidate, scoring a 2.53 on the 1-4 scale. All four of the treatments significantly decrease respondent support for the candidate, with the *karusels* treatment producing the largest negative effect and cutting support by roughly 20%—enough that voters were on average unlikely to vote for the candidate.

We estimate these treatment effects more precisely in Table 2 using multivariate regression and including a set of standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation. Column 1 presents results from a specification with separate indicator variables for each of the four treatment conditions. The point estimates represent the average treatment effect for each treatment relative to the

Figure 7: Main Experimental Results
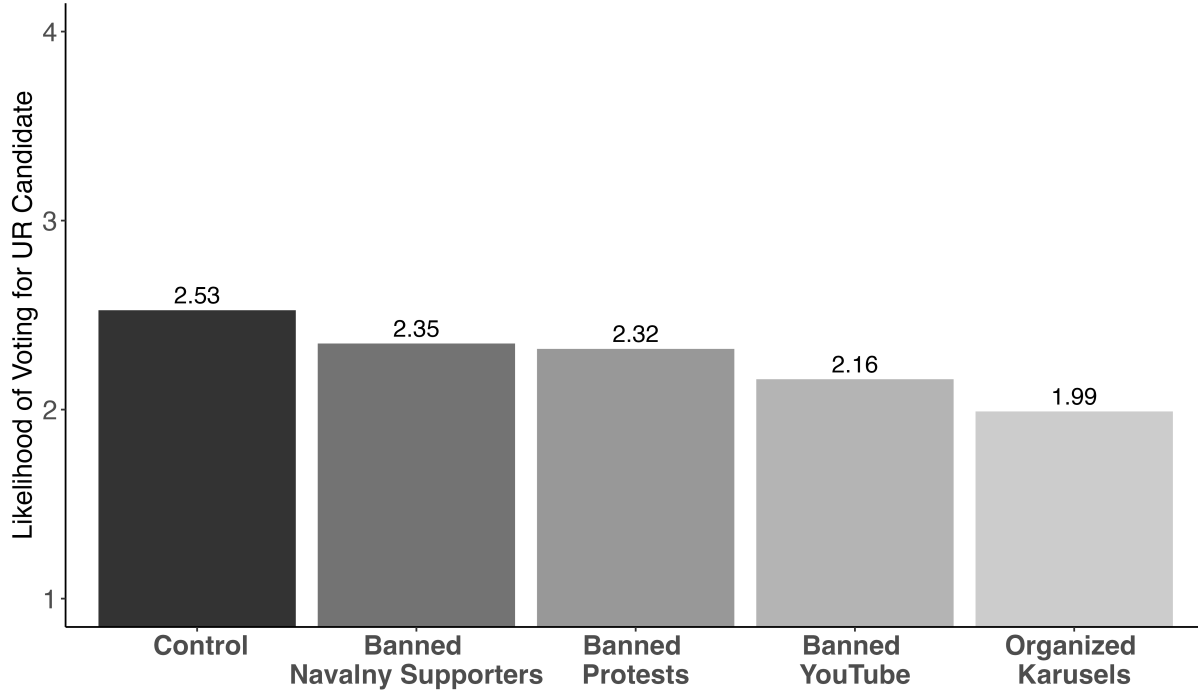
Note: This figure plots the average response of the likelihood for voting for the hypothetical UR candidate per treatment and control groups of the survey experiment.

control condition and confirm the main finding in Figure 7: that respondents react un-favorably to learning about any type of anti-democratic actions committed by the UR candidate.[22] Each point estimate is large and statistically significant, with the treatments referencing organizing *karusels* and banning Youtube producing more of a backlash than the banning of protests or efforts to disqualify Navalny supporters from running for of-fice. In Column 2, we present all four treatments jointly, comparing any anti-democratic activity versus the control. Here, the point estimate represents the difference in the mean value of the dependent variable between those assigned to treatments 1, 2, 3, or 4, on the one hand, and those assigned to the control condition. Together our treatments reduce respondents' willingness to vote for the United Russia candidate by 0.28 units on the 4

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[22]Though note that we cannot benchmark the size of this effect against (nor differentiate it from) the effect of receiving other types of negative information about the candidate, given the design of our exper-iment. A useful next step for future research would be to benchmark, using a conjoint experiment, the size of the punishment effect for undemocratic behavior against that of other negative information which might come to light during a campaign.

point scale–an eight percent decrease. In column 3, we show the effect just among regime supporters, which is the group that is most relevant for the questions posed in this paper. Among Putin voters as well, the treatment strongly reduces support for the hypothetical candidate. For context, the mean reported likelihood of voting for the candidate among Putin voters who were not informed of the candidate's undemocratic behavior was 3.03 on this scale, or just above "somewhat likely." It falls to 2.6, roughly half way between "somewhat likely" and "somewhat unlikely" among Putin voters who are informed of the candidate's undemocratic behavior—a substantively meaningful shift in support that, in effect, puts Putin voters on the fence.[23]

5.1 Affective Polarization and Anti-democratic Actions

Next, we explore whether affectively polarized attitudes moderate the inclination to punish undemocratic behavior just shown. Our primary measure of affective polarization is an index of out-group antipathy towards Navalny and his supporters ($\alpha = 0.73$).[24] Columns 4 and 5 test whether Russians who harbor intense negativity towards Navalny are more likely to overlook anti-democratic actions by their political leaders. Specifically, in column 4, we interact affective polarization with indicators for each of the four treatment conditions, while in column 5 we investigate how affective polarization mediates the effect of the joint treatment (again collapsing all four treatment arms).

None of the interactions except one approach conventional levels of statistical significance; we do not find evidence that more affectively polarized regime supporters are less likely to punish UR candidates who engage in most types of undemocratic behavior. The one exception is undemocratic actions targeted at Navalny, which we discuss in the

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[23]While these results indicate that Russian voters tend to punish regime candidates who engage in activities violating democratic norms and/or rights, still 40 percent of respondents in our experiment did not punish the anti-democratic incumbent—that is, they indicated that they were somewhat or very likely to vote for him anyway. One obvious possibility is that support for democratic principles is weak in this context, and people who failed to punish the incumbent in fact care little about democracy. Interestingly, we find no evidence that even strong agreement with the statement "democracy is the most suitable form of government for Russia" predicts willingness to punish electoral manipulation (see also Svolik (2020)). And though support for a leader who is unconstrained by parliament and elections does correlate with candidate support in our experiment, roughly a third of respondents *vote for* the candidate who tramples on democracy even among those who *disagree* that strongman rule is best for Russia.

[24]As noted above, we lack a full battery of such measures for the parliamentary opposition, but levels of affective polarization toward the systemic opposition are much lower.

Table 2: Experimental Results

	Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-4)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Constant	2.37*** (0.228)	2.41*** (0.219)	2.88*** (0.417)	2.97*** (0.391)	2.92*** (0.403)	2.25*** (0.452)	2.46*** (0.416)
Organized Karusels Treatment	-0.474*** (0.059)			-0.289 (0.383)			
Banned Protests Treatment	-0.159** (0.066)			-0.537* (0.271)			
Banned Youtube Treatment	-0.321*** (0.075)			-0.447* (0.265)			
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.144** (0.068)			-1.05*** (0.311)			
Joint Treatment		-0.275*** (0.055)	-0.439*** (0.092)		-0.600*** (0.216)	-0.147 (0.184)	-0.462* (0.248)
Out-group Antipathy (0-1)				-0.237 (0.234)	-0.239 (0.235)		
Organized Karusels Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)				-0.656 (0.559)			
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Protests Treatment				0.447 (0.378)			
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Youtube Treatment				0.052 (0.379)			
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment				1.12** (0.447)			
Joint Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)					0.270 (0.312)		
UR Scale (0-1)						0.993*** (0.254)	
Joint Treatment × UR Scale (0-1)						-0.421* (0.245)	
Left-Right Scale (0-1)							0.155 (0.335)
Joint Treatment × Left-Right Scale (0-1)							0.180 (0.404)
R^2	0.154	0.139	0.053	0.101	0.045	0.086	0.045
Observations	2,290	2,290	981	876	876	969	797
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sample	All	All	Putin Voters	Putin Voters	Putin Voters	Putin Voters	Putin Voters

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$ This table estimates the treatment effects for the survey experiment on the outcome of whether the respondent would vote for the hypothetical candidate (1-4 scale). All models include standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

next section.

Next, we estimated a model in Column 6 in which we also interacted in-group partisanship (indicated by support for the ruling party) with the treatment. This tests the possibility that in-party feeling–not out-party animus—is the aspect of affective polarization that best predicts reactions to a candidate's undemocratic behavior. As we have argued above, out-group antipathy may be visceral and charged, leading some respondents to support curbing democracy to deny opportunities to a hated opposition candidate, but without any special preference for the current regime. We see clear evidence that regime supporters do punish the regime for engaging in antidemocratic behavior, in line with previous work in Russia (Reuter and Szakonyi, 2021; Aarslew, 2023a).[25] While other studies have concluded that strong partisan attachments lead voters to condone anti-democratic actions that help ensure their group stays in power (Svolik, 2019), in Russia, we do not find that in-partisan attachments lead voters to forgive the undemocratic actions of their co-partisans.

In Column 7, we investigate whether ideological—rather than affective—polarization moderates Russians' responses to undemocratic behavior. Column 7 estimates a model with an interaction between ideological polarization (measured on a left-right scale, normalized 0-1) and the treatment; the coefficient on the interaction is small and insignificant, suggesting that ideology does not condition the effect of the treatment.In Appendix Table A1, we show the results are robust to using the same sample of observations across all of these models by removing any missingness. In Appendix Table A2, we show the results are also robust to controlling for other factors that might be correlated with out-party animus and voting behavior such as attitudes towards democracy and perceptions of democratic performance.

5.2   Antipathy and the Sidelining of Regime Opponents

As noted above, most of the out-partisan antipathy reported by regime supporters in Russia is directed specifically at Navalny and not representatives of the systemic oppo-

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[25]As Appendix Figure A7 shows, this punishment effect is less pronounced among those who do not support the regime, possibly because they are already aware of fraud and expect it. So new information about fraud does not move them (see e.g., the discussion of pretreatment effects in Druckman and Leeper (2012))

sition. Hence, to the extent that opposition parties that frequently cooperate with the regime in parliament and are viewed positively by regime supporters would be disadvantaged, we may find less acceptance of incumbents' undemocratic actions.

To zero in on how antipathy toward Navalny might affect how undemocratic actions that target Navalny specifically are received, we restrict our analysis to the treatment that references banning Navalny supporters from public office. Table 3 reports these results.[26] Column 1 shows that voters with strong out-party animus are more likely to forgive undemocratic behavior and vote for the hypothetical candidate. The coefficient on the interaction term is positive, suggesting that they actually reward him. Columns 2-6 disaggregate our index of affective polarization into its component parts, with each column displaying a different measure. The results are quite consistent across measures. Though the sample size is greatly diminished, the pattern of results is similar; all models have significant positive coefficients with the exception of columns 5 and 6. Finally, to test directly whether people behave contrary to their democratic principles, we limit the sample in column 7 to respondents who say they reject a strongman leader and in column 8 to respondents who say that democracy is the best political system for Russia. Consistent with other findings in the literature, even democratically-minded voters support undemocratic behavior when it targets the object of their antipathy.

Figure 8 complements these results by showing the marginal effects of the Navalny treatment across several key measures of affective polarization. When regime supporters have positive views of Navalny, the effect of the treatment is quite large—sometimes as large as a full point on the 4 point scale. However, when regime supporters express strong emotional aversion to Navalny and his movement, the effect of treatment is indistinguishable from zero, suggesting that such voters are not willing to punish UR candidates for cracking down on Navalny's organization.

In sum, we find little evidence that in-partisan attachments make voters more likely to look past electoral manipulation, but there is some evidence that out-party animus does so. In this way, affectively polarized attitudes abet the efforts of Russia's non-

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[26]In Appendix Table A3, we show the results are robust to using the full sample of respondents, not just Putin supporters.

Table 3: Affective Polarization and Forgiveness for Undemocratic Behavior: The Case of Navalny

| | Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-4) | | | | | | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Constant	3.32***	3.46***	3.08***	3.05***	2.76***	3.29***	3.69***	2.55***
	(0.551)	(0.744)	(0.526)	(0.560)	(0.624)	(0.583)	(1.02)	(0.547)
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.995***	-0.936***	-0.727***	-0.669***	-0.189	-0.760**	-1.08**	-1.48***
	(0.302)	(0.217)	(0.233)	(0.233)	(0.176)	(0.336)	(0.523)	(0.309)
Out-group Antipathy (0-1)	-0.246						-0.357	-0.256
	(0.244)						(0.456)	(0.361)
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)	1.07**						1.36*	1.70***
	(0.431)						(0.725)	(0.414)
Navalny Negativity Scale		-0.163						
		(0.212)						
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Negativity Scale		1.01***						
		(0.331)						
Navalny Suupporters Dishonest			-0.028					
			(0.185)					
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Dishonest			0.549*					
			(0.295)					
Navalny Suupporters Not Smart				-0.166				
				(0.169)				
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Not Smart				0.516*				
				(0.296)				
Navalny Suupporters Selfish					-0.067			
					(0.178)			
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Selfish					-0.137			
					(0.255)			
Navalny Suupporters Unpatriotic						-0.038		
						(0.244)		
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Unpatriotic						0.601		
						(0.375)		
R²	0.058	0.078	0.055	0.046	0.036	0.049	0.093	0.116
Observations	373	347	344	341	321	348	111	264
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$ This table estimates the effect of the Navalny treatment – that is, support for baring members of Navalny's organization from running for office – on voting for the hypothetical candidate (1-4 scale). The control group is the comparison group and the sample is subset to Putin voters. The sample in column 7 further is limited to respondents who say they reject a strongman leader and in column 8 to respondents who say that democracy is the best political system for Russia. All models include standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation as well as Putin approval and exposure to state media. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

Figure 8: Marginal Effects for Selected Subgroups: Navalny Treatment

Marginal Effect of Treatment on Propensity to Vote for UR Candidate
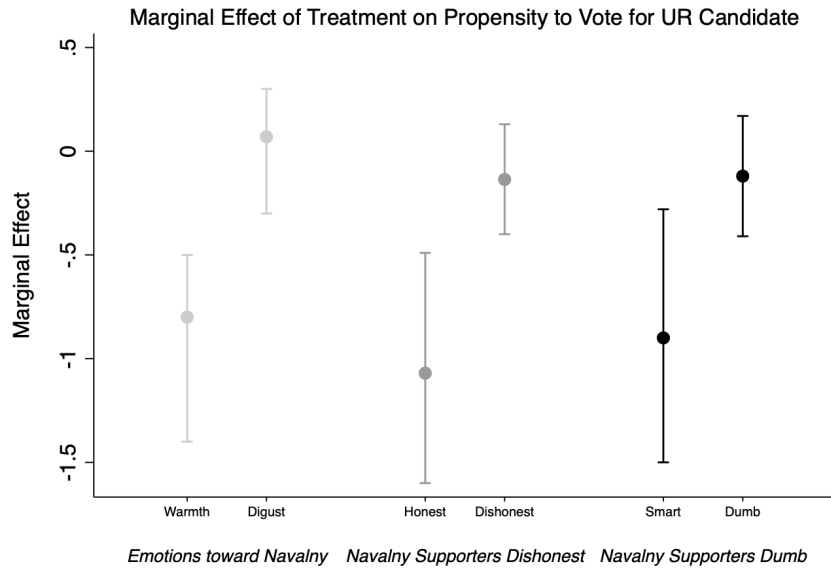
Note: This figure plots the marginal effect of the joint treatment on the propensity to vote for the hypothetical UR candidate at the maximum and minimum values of key measures of antipathy toward Navalny. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Quantities are calculated from the models in Columns 2, 3, and 4 of Table 3, respectively.

democratic regime to sideline challengers by leading a narrow, but politically charged group—strong regime supporters who hold highly negative views of a leading regime opponent (Navalny)—to excuse actions that exclude him from the political process.

At the same time, it is important to note that this same group of highly affectively polarized respondents does not unequivocally condone other actions that attack fair elections, free media, or the right to protest. Positive partisans punish regime candidates that violate democratic norms across all four treatment arms (see Appendix Figure A7). This effect is strongest when regime candidates tamper directly with electoral integrity by organizing carousels. When it comes to actions that undermine other key democratic institutions, even the affectively polarized may be unwilling to accept undemocratic actions for the sake of the ruling party. Their tolerance of authoritarian measures only extends to those that specifically target the object of their antipathy.

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6 Conclusion

Do polarized attitudes make it easier for autocrats to get away with subverting democracy? In this paper, we presented evidence on this question from a large-scale survey experiment in Russia on the eve of parliamentary elections. As a whole, pre-war Russian society had relatively low levels of both ideological and affective polarization. Russia lacks two (or more) evenly matched political blocks, and the relative lack of competition in Russia sets the case apart from many classically polarized countries that are studied in the literature (e.g. the United States, Brazil, Turkey, Venezuela). Vladimir Putin enjoys broad support, and, for regime supporters, the opposition winning office may not seem like a plausible scenario that should warrant the subversion of democratic norms broadly. Before the war, political allegiance was rarely an important part of social identity in Russia, as it is for many in the United States (Mason, 2018b). Many Russian citizens are apathetic about politics, and partisan attachments to United Russia are relatively weak.

And yet, large swathes of the Putin electorate do harbor deep, emotionally charged animosity toward Alexei Navalny, the regime's most uncompromising opposition figure. This negative partisanship leads them to justify certain types of undemocratic behavior by the regime. Our experiment shows that regime supporters who feel antipathy toward Navalny condone anti-democratic actions that sideline Navalny's organization. Regime supporters were not, however, more likely to excuse other types of undemocratic behavior by regime candidates that were less clearly targeted at Navalny and his supporters. Indeed regime voters showed less willingness to condone blatantly authoritarian tactics—like banning protests, outlawing popular media, or cheating on election day—when Navalny was not specifically mentioned. This is particularly interesting given how Navalny's movement is distinct from Russia's systemic opposition. Navalny and his supporters take policy positions, particularly on issues of democratic rights and freedoms, that are much more starkly opposed to the regime than do supporters of the systemic opposition.[27] And whereas regime supporters feel little antipathy toward supporters

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[27]See e.g., Figure 4, and Figures A3 and A4 in the Appendix.

of opposition parties in general, they are much more antagonistic toward supporters of Navalny's movement.[28] In our study, this heightened out-party antagonism, more so than in-party attachment, appears to guide voters' behavior.

Even in depoliticized autocracies with weak partisan ties, negative affect may be a significant driver of political behavior. By allowing autocrats to get away with undemocratic behavior when it becomes known, such animosity may help autocrats survive the periodic rise of challengers, giving them a freer hand to act like autocrats. Surveys suggest, for example, that the invasion of Ukraine has produced widespread affective polarization between supporters and opponents of the war. Like supporters of Navalny, the Kremlin has portrayed the war's opponents as traitors to Russia and a fifth column seeking to advance Western interests. This heightened polarization may lead regime supporters to justify the egregious acts of domestic repression that the regime has since taken. Our findings offer a pre-war glimpse at the dark potential of such dynamics, even in a context where traditional partisanship is limited.

Indeed, leaders around the world are becoming bolder and taking more drastic actions that further autocratization. Autocrats reading the recent political science literature might expect to get away with such actions, given sufficient polarization. They might even expect that stoking partisan animosity would help them to do so. We partially confirm these expectations: animosity toward the regime's staunchest opposition led partisans to reward a candidate who acted to undermine his electoral participation and that of his supporters. However, our findings also imply that there are limits to the effectiveness of such strategies. We find no evidence that either in-party attachment or out-party animus was sufficient to make Russians forgive a regime candidate's undemocratic actions in other areas that political leaders in autocratizing countries commonly attack. Hoping for the first outcome (forgiveness), autocrats may instead encounter backlash.

Whether voters punish undemocratic behavior, of course, also depends on such behavior becoming known. People must become convinced that their political leaders

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[28] Putin supporters' mean score on a 10-pt feeling thermometer is 4.0 for supporters of opposition parties versus 2.7 for supporters of Navalny's movement.

have, in fact, taken undemocratic actions. Partisans acquire and process information differently than others, and citizens' underlying political orientations affect what they know as well as what they make of election fraud (Robertson, 2017). Some types of undemocratic actions are easier to hide from citizens than others. Whereas information about election fraud might be reported only by opposition media, which partisans distrust and are unlikely to consume, legislation is a matter of public record, and people observe the banning of media like YouTube very directly. Each step in the process whereby undemocratic actions become a known fact to citizens in autocratic countries is worthy of further research, as is the role of negative partisanship in electoral authoritarian regimes more broadly. The findings in this paper suggest that partisan antipathy should be studied not only for its effects on democratic backsliding or authoritarian consolidation but also for its importance to autocratic regimes trying to prevent deconsolidation.

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Appendix

A1   Additional Descriptive Statistics on Polarization

A1   Ideological Polarization

Figure A1: Little Evidence of Polarization on Several Prominent Policies
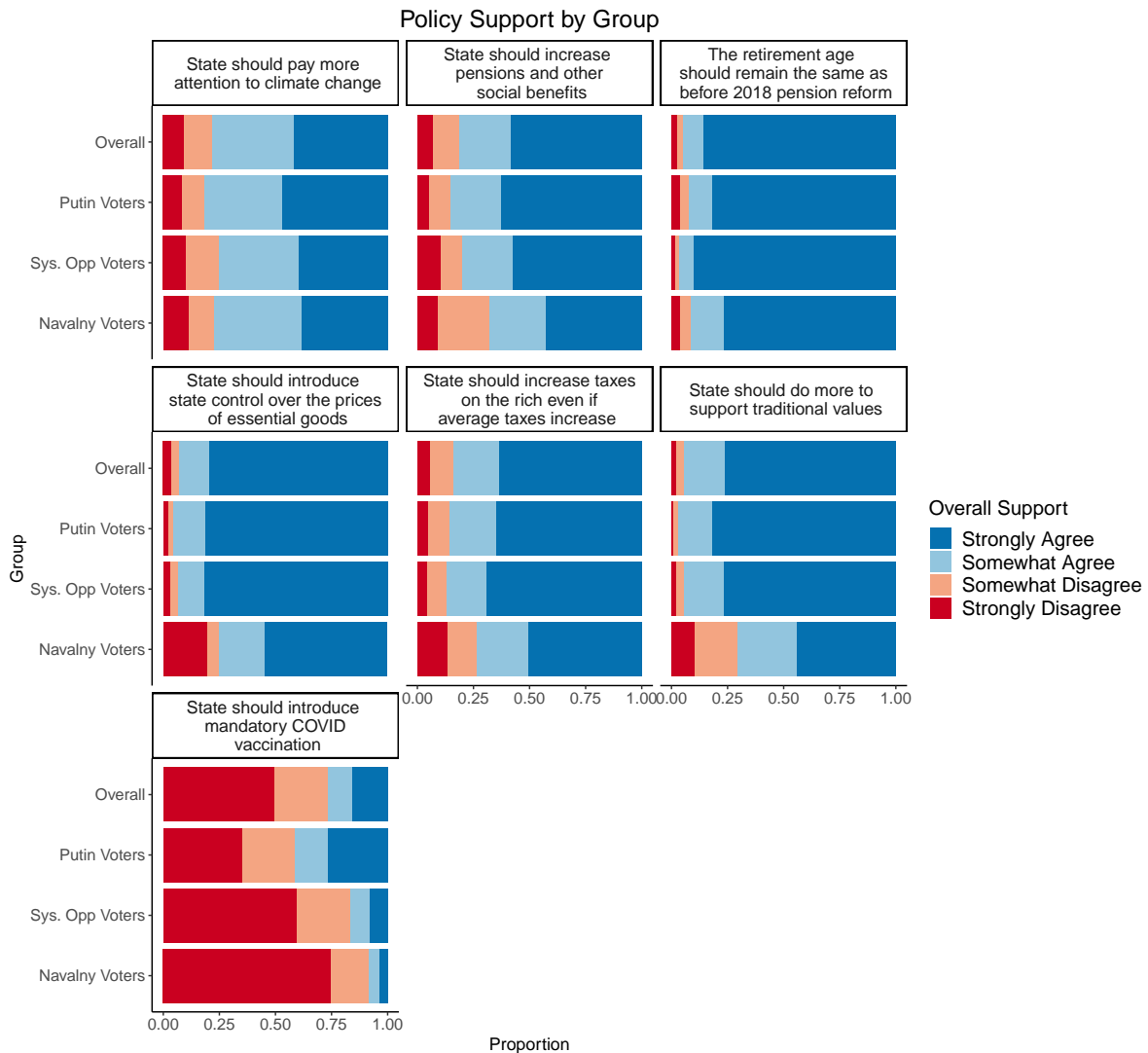
Note: This figure plots the views of respondents on seven major policy issues, based on whether they agree or disagree with the propositions show in each panel. The samples are then subset into those who would vote for Vladimir Putin, a candidate from the systemic opposition, or Alexei Navalny in a hypothetical presidential election. The "overall" category includes all respondents. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

Figure A2: Support for United Russia on 10-point Scale
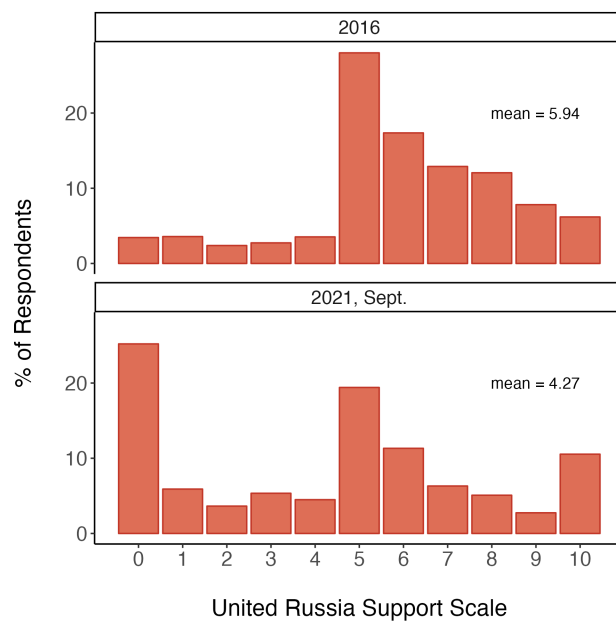
Note: This figure plots respondents' support for the United Russia policy part on a 10-point scale with higher values indicating more support. Data come from two iterations of the Russian Election Studies, 2016 and September 2021.

Figure A3: Perceptions About Respect for Democratic Rights in Russia Today

How do you think the following rights of citizens are respected in Russia today?
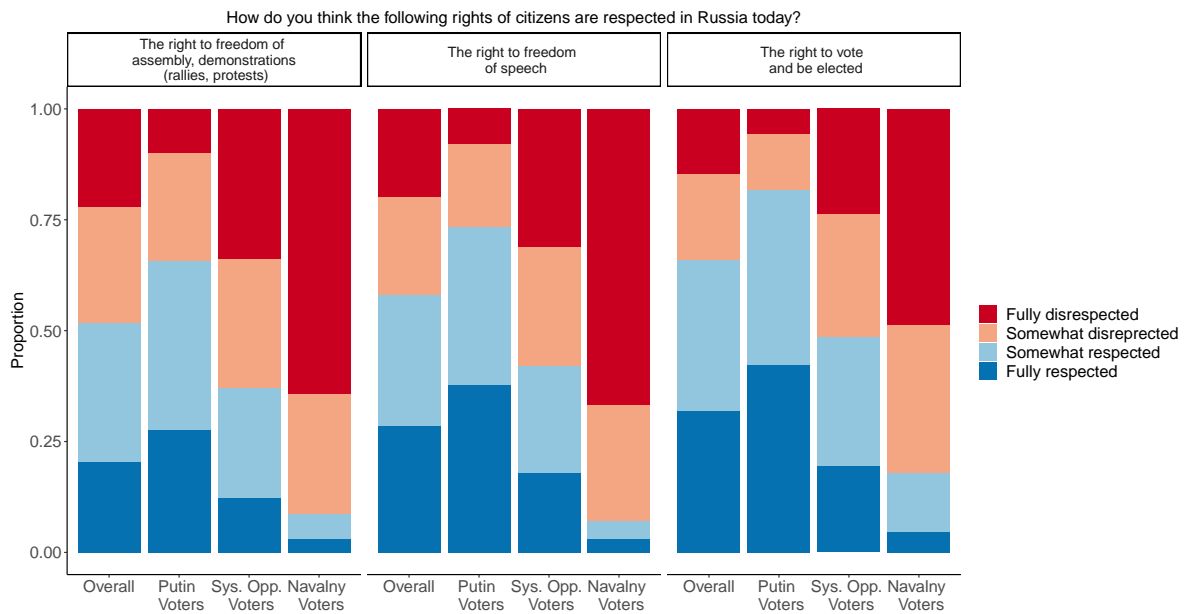
Note: This figure plots the views of respondents on whether democratic rights are being respected in Russia today. The samples are then subset into those who would vote for Vladimir Putin, a candidate from the systemic opposition, or Alexei Navalny in a hypothetical presidential election. The "overall" category includes all respondents. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

Figure A4: Support for Anti-democratic measures

Views on Democracy, Free Media, and Civil Liberties
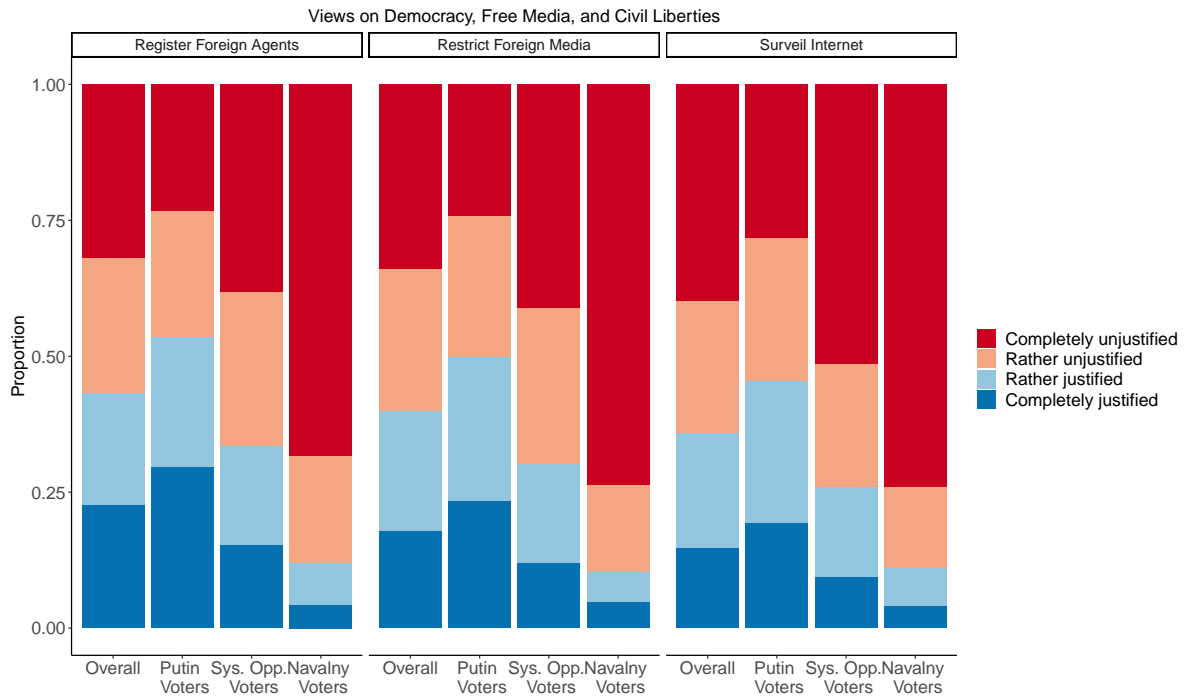
Note: This figure plots the views of respondents on whether the state is justified in adopting anti-democratic measures. The samples are then subset into those who would vote for Vladimir Putin, a candidate from the systemic opposition, or Alexei Navalny in a hypothetical presidential election. The "overall" category includes all respondents. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

A2 Outgroup Aversion

Figure A5: Animus toward Out-party Supporters
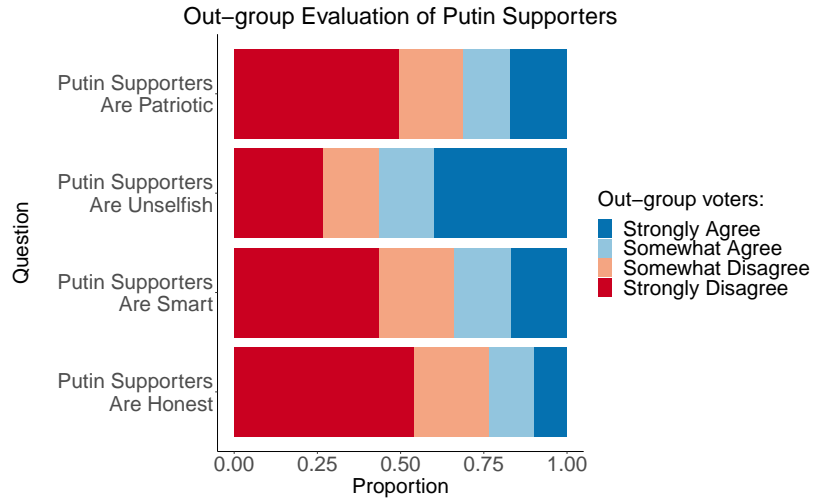
Note: This figure plots animus towards Putin supporters using a sub-sample of respondents who would vote for any opposition presidential candidate in a hypothetical election (as opposed to the figures in the main text where only those who would support Alexei Navalny were included). Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

Figure A6: Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Opposition Party & Navalny Supporters
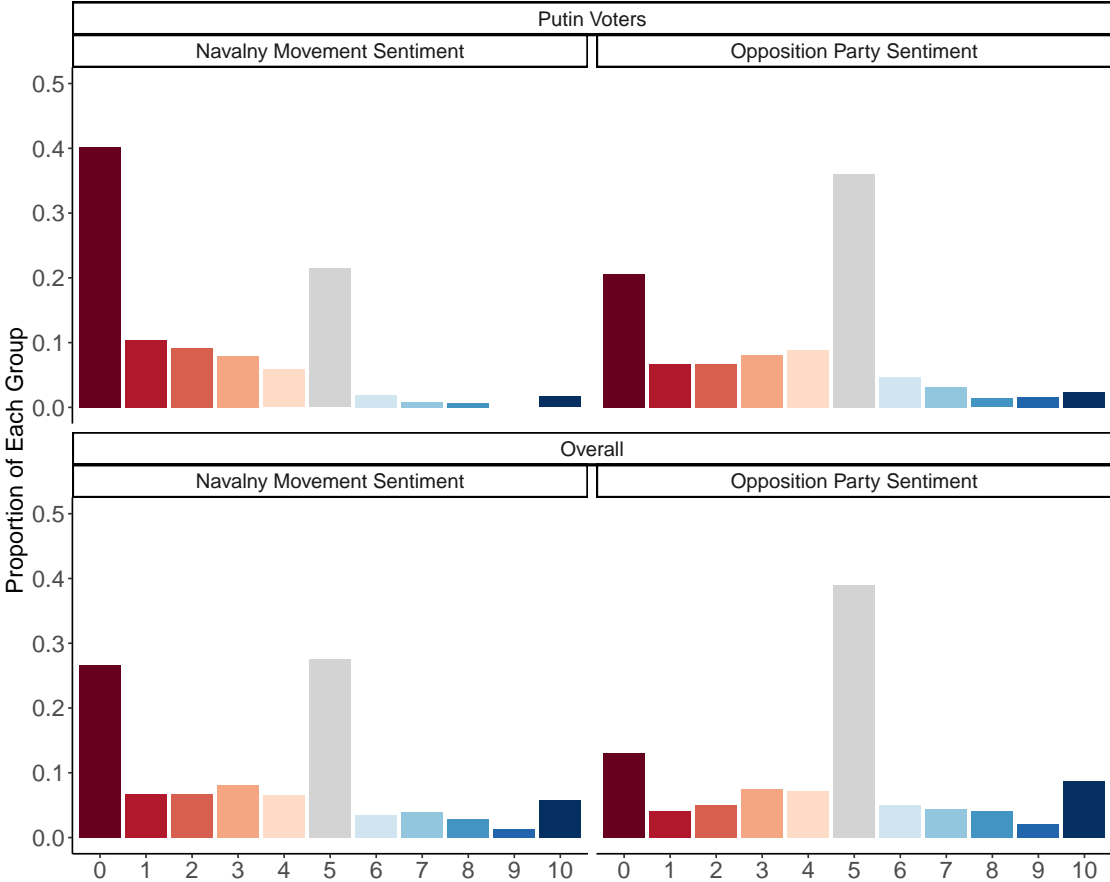
Note: This figure plots ratings of opposition party (right side) and Navalny (left side) supporters on a 10-point scale from "very bad" to "very good." Ratings among Putin voters are displayed in the top row. Overall ratings in the full sample are displayed in the bottom row. The figure shows that feelings toward Navalny supporters are much more negative than feelings toward the systemic opposition. Data come from the Russian Election Study, September 2021.

A2   Framing Experiment Robustness Checks

A1   Heterogeneous Effects by Regime Support

Figure A7: Treatment effects: Comparing Putin Voters and Others
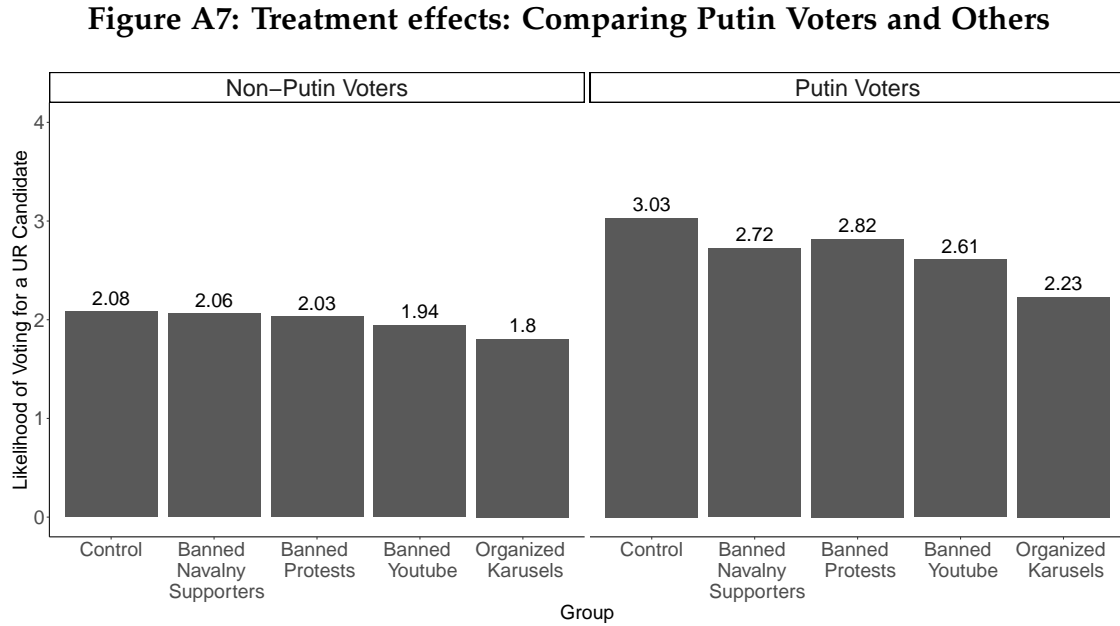
Notes: This figure plots the mean outcomes from the experiment broken out by Putin voters and non-Putin voters. News that the candidate engages in manipulation does not really move non-regime-supporters, because they may already expect that type of behavior. However, for regime supporters, information about regime candidates acting undemocratically tempers their enthusiasm for voting for such candidates. This effect is evident across all four treatment arms, though it is strongest when regime candidates tamper directly with electoral integrity by organizing carousels (resulting in a 26 percent drop in overall support).

A2   Other Robustness Checks

Table A1: Robustness Checks: Sample Stability

	Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-4)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Constant	2.54***	2.50***	2.77***	2.72***	1.99***	2.40***
	(0.426)	(0.442)	(0.412)	(0.439)	(0.471)	(0.437)
Organized Karusels Treatment	-0.660***		-0.363			
	(0.111)		(0.413)			
Banned Protests Treatment	-0.132		-0.495*			
	(0.103)		(0.259)			
Banned Youtube Treatment	-0.330**		-0.373			
	(0.135)		(0.246)			
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.230**		-0.983***			
	(0.108)		(0.318)			
Joint Treatment		-0.343***		-0.592**	-0.117	-0.418*
		(0.095)		(0.225)	(0.236)	(0.241)
Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			-0.276	-0.283		
			(0.230)	(0.230)		
Organized Karusels Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			-0.444			
			(0.602)			
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Protests Treatment			0.506			
			(0.349)			
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Youtube Treatment			0.053			
			(0.347)			
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment			1.07**			
			(0.467)			
Joint Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)				0.346		
				(0.322)		
UR Scale (0-1)					0.936***	
					(0.325)	
Joint Treatment × UR Scale (0-1)					-0.331	
					(0.321)	
Left-Right Scale (0-1)						0.209
						(0.340)
Joint Treatment × Left-Right Scale (0-1)						0.140
						(0.402)
R^2	0.074	0.035	0.087	0.036	0.068	0.041
Observations	739	739	739	739	739	739
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

This table estimates the treatment effects for the survey experiment on the outcome of whether the respondent would vote for the hypothetical candidate (1-4 scale). All models include standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation. In contrast to the table in the main text, this table uses the same sample in each of the models by removing any observations which have missingness on any of the variables that appear in the table or are included as controls. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

Table A2: Robustness Checks: Democracy Controls

	Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-4)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Constant	1.68***	1.70***	1.72***	1.71***	1.42***	1.49***	1.54***	1.50***
	(0.256)	(0.250)	(0.280)	(0.280)	(0.230)	(0.257)	(0.297)	(0.309)
Organized Karusels Treatment	-0.434***		0.042					
	(0.053)		(0.150)					
Banned Protests Treatment	-0.150***		-0.180					
	(0.057)		(0.154)					
Banned Youtube Treatment	-0.292***		-0.305**					
	(0.068)		(0.124)					
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.139**		-0.346***					
	(0.056)		(0.122)					
Believe Right to Vote is Respected (1-4)	0.105***	0.108***	0.099***	0.101***	0.094***	0.089***	0.111***	0.107***
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Believe Right to Protest is Respected (1-4)	0.092***	0.087***	0.093***	0.094***	0.070**	0.078**	0.088**	0.088**
	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.034)	(0.035)
Believe Right to Free Speech is Respected (1-4)	0.051*	0.054*	0.050	0.049	0.040	0.036	0.065**	0.062*
	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.032)
Believe Russia is a Democracy (0/1)	0.181***	0.186***	0.176***	0.179***	0.107**	0.100**	0.155***	0.152***
	(0.046)	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.046)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.050)	(0.048)
Joint Treatment		-0.255***		-0.196**	-0.103	-0.180*	-0.296*	-0.241
		(0.045)		(0.097)	(0.068)	(0.102)	(0.154)	(0.175)
Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			0.227	0.221		-0.002		0.198
			(0.169)	(0.169)		(0.167)		(0.169)
Organized Karusels Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			-0.786***					
			(0.240)					
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Protests Treatment			0.054					
			(0.259)					
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Youtube Treatment			0.028					
			(0.229)					
Out-group Antipathy (0-1) × Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment			0.324*					
			(0.192)					
Joint Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)				-0.095		0.155		-0.030
				(0.166)		(0.160)		(0.175)
UR Scale (0-1)					0.966***	1.00***		
					(0.157)	(0.174)		
Joint Treatment × UR Scale (0-1)					-0.334**	-0.388**		
					(0.163)	(0.182)		
Left-Right Scale (0-1)							0.183	0.292
							(0.224)	(0.225)
Joint Treatment × Left-Right Scale (0-1)							0.111	0.037
							(0.271)	(0.270)
R^2	0.214	0.201	0.231	0.211	0.236	0.243	0.207	0.214
Observations	2,029	2,029	1,834	1,834	2,015	1,825	1,751	1,613
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

This table estimates the treatment effects for the survey experiment on the outcome of whether the respondent would vote for the hypothetical candidate (1-4 scale). All models include standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation. In contrast to the table in the main text, this table includes additional controls about respondents' views of whether democracy is being respected in Russia. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

Table A3: Affective Polarization and Forgiveness for Undemocratic Behavior: The Case of Navalny, Full Sample

	Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-4)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Constant	2.20***	2.28***	2.52***	2.51***	2.63***	2.64***	2.08***	1.65***
	(0.250)	(0.264)	(0.307)	(0.308)	(0.297)	(0.282)	(0.355)	(0.291)
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.298**	-0.254*	-0.202	-0.222	0.117	-0.229	-0.334**	-0.389***
	(0.123)	(0.128)	(0.162)	(0.169)	(0.106)	(0.146)	(0.142)	(0.137)
Out-group Antipathy (0-1)	0.145						0.414***	0.296**
	(0.107)						(0.138)	(0.144)
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)	0.649***						0.485*	0.641***
	(0.194)						(0.250)	(0.193)
Navalny Negativity Scale		0.216*						
		(0.117)						
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Negativity Scale		0.594***						
		(0.216)						
Navalny Suupporters Dishonest			0.070					
			(0.109)					
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Dishonest			0.375*					
			(0.208)					
Navalny Suupporters Not Smart				0.015				
				(0.104)				
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Not Smart				0.417*				
				(0.217)				
Navalny Suupporters Selfish					-0.233***			
					(0.081)			
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Selfish					-0.065			
					(0.160)			
Navalny Suupporters Unpatriotic						0.009		
						(0.106)		
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Suupporters Unpatriotic						0.401**		
						(0.185)		
R^2	0.142	0.144	0.098	0.098	0.104	0.096	0.164	0.163
Observations	2,028	1,927	1,289	1,287	1,241	1,320	904	1,271
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 This table estimates the effect of the Navalny treatment – that is, support for baring members of Navalny's organization from running for office – on voting for the hypothetical candidate (1-4 scale). The control group are all respondents in the control group or any of the other three treatment groups. The sample is subset to Putin voters. The sample in column 7 is further limited to respondents who say they reject a strongman leader and in column 8 to respondents who say that democracy is the best political system for Russia. All models include standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation as well as Putin approval and exposure to state media. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

A3 Key Question Wordings

25. In politics people sometimes talk about left and right. Imagine a scale that runs from
0 to 10, where 0 means left and 10 means right. Where on this scale would you place yourself
(show card 8, one answer)?

Left   Right

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

97 Hard to answer

98 Refuse

74. Parties and politicians use many techniques to attract votes. In your opinion,
how acceptable are the following ways of attracting votes:
(Show card 19, read aloud, mark an answer in each row)

A. Distribute food packets to pensioners during the campaign

1 2 3 4 98 99

C. Tell employees of a local factory that they will lose their jobs if they dont vote

1 2 3 4 98 99

D. Organize "carousels", whereby people are taken in buses to vote multiple times at different
polling stations

1 2 3 4 98 99

{Key}

1 Completely acceptable

2 Mostly acceptable

3 Not very acceptable

4 Completely unacceptable

97 Hard to answer

98 Refuse

22. Now lets talk about different types of political systems and the extent to which they are
appropriate for our country. What do you think: how appropriate are the following political
systems for our country?
(Show card 7, write down one answer per line)
{KEY: 1 (Completely appropriate) through 4 (Completely inappropriate);
8 Hard to Say; 9 Refuse to Answer}

Democratic Political System 1 2 3 4 8 9

A strong leader that is not constrained by either elections or parliament 1 2 3 4 8 9

83. Which of these words would you use to characterize your attitude towards Alexei Navalny?

(show CARD 22, one answer)

1. Admiration

2. Sympathy

3. I can't say anything bad about him

4. Neutral, indifferent

5. Wary, vigilant

6. I can't say anything good about him

7. Antipathy

8. Disgust

98. (DO NOT READ OUT) Hard to say

99. (DO NOT READ OUT) Refuse to answer

40A. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Give your answer on a scale from 1 to 4 where

1 - ''Completely agree'' and 4 - ''Completely disagree.''

{KEY: 1 (Completely agree) through 4 (Completely disagree); 6 Unknown politician;

8 Hard to Say; 9 Refuse to Answer}

(1) People who support Vladimir Putin are patriotic

(2) People who support Vladimir Putin are honest

(3) People who support Vladimir Putin are intelligent

(4) People who support Vladimir Putin are selfish

40B. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Give your answer on a scale from 1 to 4 where

1 - ''Completely agree'' and 4 - ''Completely disagree.''

{KEY: 1 (Completely agree) through 4 (Completely disagree); 6 Unknown politician;

8 Hard to Say; 9 Refuse to Answer}

(1) People who support Alexei Navalny are patriotic

(2) People who support Alexei Navalny are honest

(3) People who support Alexei Navalny are intelligent

(4) People who support Alexei Navalny are selfish

36. Imagine a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means that you support a party with all your heart
and 0 means that you dont support them at all. Using this scale, tell me please, how much
do you support the United Russia party? (Show card 9, one answer)
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

20.Do you support or don't support the activities of Vladimir Putin as president? (one answer)
1. Support
2. Dont Support
97. Hard to answer
98. Refuse

33. Experiment 50/50

Group 1

Tell me please, how do you relate to people who support opposition parties?

Please give your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "very bad"

and 10 is "very good"

Group 2

Tell me please, how do you relate to people who support Alexei Navalny's movement.

Please give your answer on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is "very bad"

and 10 is "very good."