

# Protests - a threat to the security of the state or an expression of civil rights?

A qualitative content analysis of the Russian media – state-dependent and independent – covering the events of the “protests-2021”

Daria Negrei

# Abstract

Protests are a common way for citizens to express their grievances and can occur in almost every regime. Each state reacts to protests in different ways – some listen to citizens' demands and adjust their policies, others resort to forceful methods, but in one and the other case, the media occupy an important place among the tools of response. This becomes especially evident in non-democratic or hybrid regimes, where state-dependent media become a propaganda tool and independent media are repressed.

This thesis embarks from the standpoint that the news media play a significant role in protests representations, and different media portray them differently. Intending to enhance our understanding of protests in Russia, the present thesis investigates how the state-dependent and independent media depicted the “protests-2021”.

By utilizing the theories' synthesis – securitization theory and framing theory, guiding concept, and inductive qualitative content analysis, this thesis demonstrates how different media, with the means of different frames, portrayed the “protests-2021” and how such frames reflect de-securitizing moves attempted by the media. With a strong focus on analysis, this work seeks to contribute to the study of protests from a qualitative perspective, thereby paying attention to *what* and *how* is said about protests in different media.

*Key words:* protest, Russia, qualitative content analysis, framing, securitization  
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# 1 Introduction

When looking back at Russian history, one can observe that its development after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was not steady. Being a succession state of the USSR, Russia took over not only international debt but the Soviet past, which affected the development of post-Soviet Russia in various areas. Having survived its independent emergence and so-called “turbulent”, “wild”, or “dashing” ‘90s, Russia has been living under the Putin era for more than twenty years by now. Further undemocratic developments aggravated by uncertainty about the future, particularly as regards the end of Putin’s fourth term as president and 2024 presidential elections, remain a serious concern among Russian citizens that intermittently escalate into riots and protests, generating various discussion about the end of the Putin era (see Monaghan 2012; Kim 2012; Colton 2017; Hawn & Tack 2021).

Russia's political system is often characterized as a hybrid regime (Robertson 2010; Petrov et al. 2014). It implies that “political competition is officially legal but heavily skewed by the strength of authoritarian institutions and the weakness of independent organizations” (Robertson 2010: 2), or simply it contains elements common to democracy and autocracy. However, in the Global Democracy Index (Democracy Index: In sickness and in health? 2020), Russia belongs to the authoritarian states, taking 124<sup>th</sup> place in rank as Ethiopia and Niger neighbours. Being a citizen of the Russian Federation, I share the view of political scientist Ekaterina Shulman that Russia belongs to a hybrid regime or an imitation democracy: “there are elections, but the transfer of power does not take place, there are legal opposition parties, but they hardly oppose anyone, there are several media outlets, but there is no freedom of speech” (Kukushkina 2017). Over the past few years, it has become especially noticeable how elites have tried to stay in power by resorting to various means – from changing the Constitution and the constant tightening of legislation in areas that either or differently relate to civil rights and freedom of speech to the attempts to ‘strangle’ the opposition, declaring all dissents foreign agents and extremists. Such a development of events cannot but affect the lives and attitudes of citizens, and at certain points, as mentioned above, all this results in an open expression of discontent – rallies, protests, strikes. However, how does a state with a weak democracy react? This is one of many questions that gave rise to this thesis.

Although protests in Russia were viewed from different angles, not many pieces of research have focused on how hybrid regimes respond to protests in media. I will try to explain. To stay in power, the hybrid regime elites must control the essential components of the regime or the “dilemmas of hybrid regime governance”: elections, mass media, and the state (Petrov et al. 2014: 2). Leaving other two components to other scholars, I view mass media as a soft power tool and assume

that propaganda in the case of Russia is often directed at its people, and I wonder how hybrid regime react to protests in mass media considering that protests are a direct threat to the stability of power of elites. However, Russia is not an absolutely authoritarian state, and therefore there is still independent media in it, which expands research interests. From my experience, I know how different the perception of the situation in Russia is between people who receive information from various media. The fact remains that various media present information differently, but there is practically no research on this topic in Russia. How do media in hybrid regime react to protests? Does the state use controlled media in its propaganda? To what extent and from what position are protests covered? Is there a difference between the way protesters are presented in different media? Did state-affiliated media move protests along the spectrum into the securitization segment? All these questions will be narrowed down in the following section to pose the research questions of this study.

## 1.1 Background

This subsection will provide an insight into the Russian media sphere, mainly how this sphere is controlled by the government and the state of affairs with independent media in Russia. The second part of the subsection describes the “protests-2021”, the reasons behind them, and explains the interrelation of protests and Alexei Navalny.

### 1.1.1 Introducing to Russia and its media sphere

Despite its differing positioning, the Russian political system brings together democratic and authoritarian traits, and the dominance of particular traits depends on the ruling elites who make a choice according to circumstances (Denisova 2017). The choice of the elites is not limited only to the political sphere but also includes the media sphere, which is of very interest to this study.

Russia takes 149<sup>th</sup> place out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF 2020), and its place has been declining on the scale since the beginning of the 2010s due to the trend aimed at regulating the media, in particular, a significant expansion of the powers of Russian state bodies (especially Roskomnadzor [The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media]) (Reuters 2016: 10). This trend is also manifested in the adoption of the law on “sovereign Internet” or so-called “sovereign Runet” (Bill №608767-7: 2018), which, nevertheless, is often viewed precisely as ideologically grounded - a belief in a hypothetical cyber threat from the West - and not a technical (Polovinko et al. 2019). This law is one of the consequences of the policy of tightening control of the media by the state, which began after the anti-government protests of 2011-2012, that also includes taking control of independent news outlets or destroying them; imprisoning journalists and bloggers; the frequent practice of

accusations of NGOs and media outlets being branded as “foreign agents”; impunity for murders and attacks on journalists (RSF Russia 2020). For example, one of the most notorious events of 2020 was the self-immolation of journalist Irina Slavina, who for a long time was under state pressure for publishing materials objectionable to the state (Bumaga 2020). Before the incident, Slavina wrote on Facebook: "I ask you to blame the Russian Federation for my death." (ibid.). No criminal case was initiated into the death.

There are a lot of such examples of state control over the media. The government interprets the laws at its discretion, resorting to physical and psychological pressure against objectionable media representatives. During the Putin era, around 45 journalists were accused of crimes related to their publication, and more than 30 media workers were charged with crimes not related to texts or statements (Lindell et al. 2020). Dealing with dictator’s dilemma, which is “created by the development of new media that increase public access to information, promote discussion and mobilisation, and become problematic for the state” (Shirky 2011 in Denisova 2017: 977-978), the Russian government is taking mentioned above steps, that can be shortly defined as increased state control of major media outlets, economic pressure on private parties, and a series of restrictive laws – leverage to define what can and cannot be published.

Without regard to the depressing situation with freedom and independence of the media in Russia, they still exist. One of the features of such media is their prevalence on the Internet because the rest of the information flows are somehow more controlled by the state. Access to specific information by subscription can also be considered a distinctive feature since these media do not receive subsidies from the government. The existence of independent media in a hybrid regime cannot be called easy since the government constantly strives to prohibit the existence of such media, which, in its opinion, are a threat, but in fact, often provide citizens with access to information that is hidden by the government or is deliberately ignored.

This study focuses on the online news market since data suggest that the popularity of the TV as the leading news source is constantly decreasing as well, as it loses trust among respondents (Deloitte 2020). Moreover, the prevalence of the independent media on the Internet is also an important factor. A significant contribution to Russian media studies is made by Andrey Simonov and Justin Rao (2020), who analysed 48 online news outlets in terms of consumers’ ideological preferences in the news coverage and provided a classification of these outlets based on the media ownership information, evidence of the indirect influence, and interviews with media professionals. The resources selected for this study corresponds to the “government-controlled news outlets” and “independent news outlets” categories of the mentioned research (Simonov & Rao 2020: 53).

## 1.2 2021 protests

The “protests-2021” began in January and were caused by several reasons. As Andrei Kolesnikov (2021) wrote: “The protests of 2021 are, by their nature, a



continuation of the 2011–2012 protests—a civil movement for the modernization of state and society—but at the same time, they differ greatly”. The main difference is a clear understanding among protesters of the inevitability of repression and the unwillingness of authorities to engage in dialogue (ibid.). Another difference is the protests’ geography: from various sources, it is reported that the protests took place in more than 100 cities of the country (Kommersant 2021), while others wrote about almost 200 cities (Meduza 2021).

As was mentioned, there are several reasons for the “protests-2021”, and the main one is related to the jailed Russian opposition leader and founder of FBK (Foundation for Combating Corruption), Alexei Navalny, who was detained upon his return to Russia on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January from Germany where he was being treated for the effects of poisoning that took place in August 2020. Since the end of August 2020, all of Russia has been following the events unfolding around Navalny. Bewilderment and shock, in the beginning, gave way to anger and deep indignation among people when German Chancellor Angela Merkel confirmed what was discovered by German doctors: Navalny “was poisoned with a Soviet-style Novichok nerve agent in an attempt to murder him” (Nasr & Osborn 2020). This study, omitting details of the development of events during the treatment and stay of Alexei Navalny in Germany, focuses directly on the “protests-2021” events.

As was reported after the first protest day in January: “tens of thousands of Russians rallied in support of the jailed opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny on Saturday in the biggest nationwide showdown in years between the Russian authorities and critics of the Kremlin” (Troianovski et al. 2021). This was aggravated with a joint investigation between Bellingcat and The Insider, in cooperation with Der Spiegel and CNN, published on the December 14, that “has discovered voluminous telecom and travel data that implicates Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) in the poisoning of the prominent Russian opposition politician Alexey Navalny” (Bellingcat 2020). The findings also suggest that the surveillance started in 2017 when Navalny announced his intention to run for president of Russia. Perhaps, the fact that the president Vladimir Putin and his press secretary Dmitry Peskov confirmed the fact that FSB was ‘looking after’ the oppositionist for his ‘statements calling for a violent change of government’ and the fact that he gets ‘the support of the US intelligence services’ (Foht 2020) had an impact on protests tone among citizens. Another influential factor is a video “Putin’s palace. History of the world’s largest bribe”, which was released two days after Navalny’s arrest and several days before the first protest day by members of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), the head of which Navalny is. In this video, Navalny argued that “an opulent property [...] was constructed for Russian President Vladimir Putin with illicit funds of \$1.35 billion, provided by members of his inner circle, and that Putin is the real owner of the palace” (Roache 2021). The cross-cutting theme of the video is corruption – the reason for many protests in Russia, including the “protests-2021”. Even though according to experts, the investigation did not bring down the rating of Vladimir Putin, it had an effect on citizens – 17% of respondents changed their opinions of Putin for the worse (Levada Center 2021).

The “protests-2021” are still ongoing (at the moment of writing, the following protest action was set for April 21). This paper focuses on three days of protests – January 23 and 31 and February 14. These three days are the days on which protests took place directly across the country and were coordinated by the headquarters of the FBK. Thus, this makes it possible to exclude the entry of other protest actions in this period, the reason for which was other grounds. It is also worth mentioning that the protests on February 14 were of a different kind – it was a flash mob with flashlights; however, it was still a continuation of the full-blown actions of January 23 and January 31. Nevertheless, the precise timeframe of this study will be discussed in another chapter.

Another significant fact related to protest activity in Russia is the dichotomy between the Article 31 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Federal Law of June 19, 2004 No. 54-FZ "On Assemblies, Meetings, Demonstrations, Marches and Picketing". The Article 31 states: “Citizens of the Russian Federation shall have the right to assemble peacefully, without weapons, hold rallies, meetings and demonstrations, marches and pickets” (the Constitution of the RF 1993: Chapter 2, Article 31). This implies that the Constitution of the Russian Federation enshrines guarantees for the exercise by citizens of the right to hold a public event. As for the Federal Law (19 June 2004: No. 54-FZ), which is “based on the provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Federation”, it states the following: “public event - an open, peaceful action accessible to everyone that is implemented as a rally, meeting, demonstration, march or picketing or by using various combinations of those forms that is undertaken at the initiative of citizens of the Russian Federation, political parties, other public or religious associations, including with the use of vehicles” (ibid.: Article 2). Meanwhile, this law regulates the procedure for organizing and holding such an event, which in practice means that “all public events involving more than one person must be agreed in advance with the authorities” (Smirnova & Shedov, 2019). In other words, this law is needed in order for the authorities to help the organizers in comfortable and safe ways exercise their constitutional right and to provide an opportunity for everyone to express their opinion. However, in practice, it is an instrument of influence in the hands of the authorities, which undermines not only constitutional law but also the civil rights of citizens because refusal to approve a public event automatically makes the event unauthorized (see Kuzina et al. 2020). Hence, one can observe a contradiction between the Constitution and the Federal Law, and this is an essential fact because the “protests-2021” were not authorized, and this nature of protests will later affect the methodology of this study.

### 1.3 Aim and research questions

Thereby, having outlined the main components of the situation around which this research is being built and reflecting my range of interests, I aim to contribute – from an interpretive position – to understand better how protests actions presented in different Russian news media.

Having laid out my motives for this study, I formulate the research questions as follows:

*“How were the “protests-2021” portrayed in the state-dependent and independent media?”*

In line with this question, the paper will cover the following sub-questions:

Sub-question I:

*“What frames were utilized in the media?”*

This question will be answered with the means of framing theory and the method utilized in this research, and by finding and extracting the frames, I will be able partially to answer the main question. The main contribution here is to find out what these frames can tell us about the “protests-2021” described through the prism of the state-dependent and independent media.

Sub-question II:

*“How do media frames reflect de-securitizing moves?”*

The answer to this question will be given by answering the previous question and synthesising this work's theories and guiding concept. Providing the partial answer to the main question, the main contribution of this question is to ascertain how the state-dependent media, given authoritarian tendencies in the government, seek securitizing moves and how the independent media under pressure seek desecuritizing moves. The guiding concept plays a significant role in answering this question because I anticipate a tension between protests as civil right movements and as a danger to security, again, based on the existing trends in the development of the state.

The purpose of this study is *not* to give a comprehensive review of framing in Russian media but to reflect what frames and how they were used in portraying the “protests-2021” and how the de-securitizing moves can be reflected through the frames.

## 2 Theoretical framework and literature review

The chapter is focusing on theories utilized in the study. The theoretical framework of this research will be presented as a combination of framing theory and securitization theory. The framing theory was chosen due to the very research interests and research questions – to define frames utilised by the media. This theory contributes to understanding frames per se and the development process of framing in the media and provides a base for the analysis process in this research. The choice of the securitization theory is justified by Russia's authoritarian tendencies and the research question of this study. Besides this theory being complementary to the framing theory, it also contributes to applying securitization in media, which received little attention.

The first sub-section of this chapter sheds light on framing theory and its application in the literature and focuses on media framing – the key theoretical element of this study – and mainly describes how media framing was utilized in protests studies in general and in Russia, inter alia. The following sub-section is focused on the securitization theory, its theoretical assumptions, and special attention is paid to the political sector. The next sub-section introduces the guiding concept of this study – security and liberty trade-off, and the final sub-section describes theory synthesis and how this combination can be beneficial for the research.

### 2.1 Framing literature

This section will review the framing concept.

Frame theory is commonly associated with a Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman and his book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*; however, Gregory Bateson – a British-American anthropologist – is “credited with originating the term frame, using it to explain how people organize and understand the messages in communication” (Yan 2020: 47). Moreover, according to Entman et al., Walter Lippmann is “arguably the progenitor of framing theory” (2009: 178).

Framing is how people conceptualize their day to day experience, how they think about a particular thing, how the sense of the world is made (Saleem & Mian 2014; Yan 2020; Chong & Druckman 2007). People interpret the world around them through their “primary frameworks” that can be presented “as a system of entities, postulates, and rules” or may have “no apparent articulated shape,

providing only a lore of understanding, an approach, a perspective” (Goffman 1986: 21). Distinguishing between natural and social frameworks, Erving Goffman infers: “we tend to perceive events in terms of primary frameworks, and the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied” (1986: 24). Nevertheless, frames can describe how people perceive daily life and many other spheres of life, including politics. Walter Lippmann wrote: ‘Of public affairs, each of us sees very little, and therefore, they remain dull and unappetizing, until somebody, with the makings of an artist, has translated them into a moving picture’ (1922: 104 in Entman et al. 2009: 179). This idea seems to be the most complete, and therefore it is a starting concept in the understanding of framing in this study. In other words, ‘framing’ in this study is the way of conceptualising the “protests-2021” by the media, the way the media “translated” events and made sense of them.

Dietram Scheufele claims that framing researches are very different in their theoretical and empirical approaches due “to the lack of a commonly shared theoretical model underlying framing research” (1999: 103). This can be observed in a variety of field where framing processes are utilized. Some of them are a discourse analysis by Teun A. van Dijk and his book *Text and context: explorations in the semantics and pragmatics of discourse* in which he describes frames as “the set of propositions characterizing our conventional knowledge of some more or less autonomous situation (activity, course of events, state)” (1977: 99) and provides examples of different frames; an artificial intelligence field represented by Marvin Minsky and his work *A Framework for Representing Knowledge* in which he defines frame as “a data-structure for representing a stereotyped situation” (1974: 1); a political science field with a focus on social movements (for an overview, see Benford & Snow 2000). Erving Goffman, who is behind the popularization of *frame analysis* in interpretive sociology (Schäfer 2017: 2-3), defined frame as: “definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements” (1986: 10-11).

There are more examples of how framing is used in researches; however, this paper is focused on the media, and thereby the following section will explain how this concept was utilized in media studies.

### 2.1.1 Media framing

Media framing is one more field where framing analysis found wide application. In media and communication research, the concept can be a helpful tool for analysing and understanding how media frame or construct reality. Media framing inextricably linked with social constructivism, and “news content is ‘a socially created product, not a reflection of an objective reality’” (Shoemaker & Reese in Yan 2020: 42). It is also often associated with agenda-setting theory because initially, the agenda studies “tested the degree to which media influence public perception of reality” (Yan 2020: 50), and it is sometimes subsumed in what is called “second-level agenda-setting or attribute agenda-setting” (McCombs et al. in

Yan 2000: 51). However, some researchers do not share this perspective, claiming a few aspects of difference (see Yan 2020: 51-52).

Received much attention, media framing has been studied from different angles, including discourses, media effect on movement's mobilization, public opinion and attitude, news construction, etc. (e.g. Druckman 2001; Chong & Druckman 2007; Matthes 2009; Smith et al. 2001; Iyengar 1991; Entman 1993). The most common approaches to media framing include the following: a qualitative approach, a manual-holistic approach, a manual-clustering approach, and a computer-assisted approach (see more Entman et al. 2009).

One of the most prominent researchers in this field, Robert Entman, provided the following definition for how media's frames of interpretation for the audience is provided: "[framing] involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (1993: 52). Hence, it can be observed that Entman includes several elements or, as they called later in his paper, "framing functions" that constitute a frame (Entman 1993: 52). The author also notes that there are "at least four locations" frames are presented in: "the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture" (ibid.). Later in his book *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* Robert M. Entman provided the following definition of framing: "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/ or solution" (2004: 5). Thereby, Entman's approach implies that the way certain events are presented in the media can affect understanding these events by the audience.

Utilizing Entman's frame concept, Matthes and Kohring suggest an alternative approach to content analysis of media frames, defining frames as patterns that are formed by mentioned above variables which "systematically group together in a specific way" (2008: 264), and this pattern can be "identified across several texts in a sample" (ibid.). For this means, a hierarchical cluster analysis is employed.

A significant contribution in media framing was made by Dietram A. Scheufele, who classified approaches to framing "along two dimensions: the type of frame examined (media frames vs audience frames) and the way frames are operationalized (independent variable or dependent variable)" (1999: 103). Having analysed and evaluated previous studies, the author has structured them in a single typology table, which can serve as a helpful addition to this study in terms of structuredness and adherence to a particular framing approach.

Media framing implies that particular frames are employed, which leads to why some frames are utilized and others are not. The simple answer that comes to mind is that journalists (or news producers) define these frameworks. Fengmin Yan offers three influential aspects (2020). The first aspect implies that "journalists' values, beliefs, experiences, political attitudes and religious orientations play a vital role in dealing with news content" (Shoemaker & Reese in Yan 2020: 53), and this, therefore, is reflected in the way the information is interpreted, and frames are made. Nevertheless, the choice is affected by many factors and constraints (ibid.). The second aspect that can affect the choice of specific frames is outside sources by

a discourse of which journalists or journalists' framings are affected, and these sources are represented by elites, interest groups and social movements (Garragee & Roefs 2004, D' Angelo 2002, Entman & Rojecki 1993 in Yan 2020: 53). Eventually, media becomes an arena of confrontation between different meanings and ideas supposed to construct reality in a particular way. In the end, the third aspect influencing frames' choice is a cultural context. Each society has its values that become norms, and therefore news in this society will be constructed following familiar symbols, which in turn leads to a variety of how the same news can be interpreted and covered in different societies (Yan 2020: 54). "Goffman (1981) also emphasized the culture-dependent nature of frame by treating it as 'a central part of a culture'" (ibid.). Hence, the cultural context cannot be neglected while conducting frame analysis.

Thereby, considering the vagueness of framing studies, the following section will narrow it down to see how media framing was implemented in protests studies.

### 2.1.2 Media framing of protests

As demonstrated, media and political elites play an essential role in constructing the social reality, especially when they are the only source of information for citizens. When it comes to social movements and protests specifically, this issue becomes even more important since media can influence movement in many ways.

Media framing of social movements has been examined from many perspectives. The book *Demonstrations and Communications: A Case Study* by James D. Halloran, Philip Elliott and Graham Murdock "explored the discrepancy between the media's representation of anti-Vietnam protests in the UK and the reality on the ground" (McCurdy 2012: 245) and findings demonstrated that despite a peaceful message of the demonstration the media concentrated on individual episodes of violence, even though later the actual message was conveyed to the audience, albeit in a distorted form (Rosengren 1972). Craig Murray et al. (2008) analysed British media coverage of anti-war protests in 2003; Riddle et al. (2020) focused on media segregation in protest at the police killing of Michael Brown coverage; Smith et al. (2001: 1398) analysed media bias in coverage of protests in Washington and confirmed the previously stated assumption that "even when movement organizers succeed at obtaining the attention of mass media coverage, the reports represent the protest events in ways that neutralize or even undermine social movement agendas". While some scholars studied what effects media coverage has on movements (Baylor 1996; Entman & Rojecki 1993; Cooper 2002), including its effect on audience support (Kilgo & Mourão 2021), others focused on the concept of the protest paradigm in the news coverage (e.g. Lee 2014; Leopold & Bell 2017; Oz 2016) and framing practices employed by media (Watkins 2001; Boykoff 2006).

Tim Baylor (1996), utilizing the constructionist model by William Gamson, analysed what effect media attention has on protests, specifically American Indian Protest from 1968 to 1979. Several important factors affect the framing of certain events and cannot be controlled by the movement. Among them are the class bias,

commercialization of the media that may be connected with audience interest, lack of understanding of the situation by the media for its full coverage. The media can, in fact, hinder the mobilization of the movement due to many factors. In this particular case, Baylor concludes: “The very process of news gathering, and framing issues suggests that a distorted and incomplete picture of a movement's message and goals will result from media coverage” (1996: 251).

Tao Papaioannou (2020) researched protest coverage, applying framing analysis, and focused on the 2013 Cypriot anti-austerity protests and their framing in national media and challenged the protest paradigm assumptions. The findings suggest that the protest paradigm can be let loose under certain circumstances – large and peaceful protests that the media cannot ignore, protest’s goals, distinguishing between protesters and marginalized units (Papaioannou 2020: 3304). However, although the media had a positive representation of the protest, “many critical issues with mobilizing consequences were ignored” (Papaioannou 2020: 3305).

Thereby, the media framing of the protest research field is quite extensive, and “social movements and the media are interdependent” (Baylor 1996: 242). Further, I focus on the media framing of protests in the Russian case.

### 2.1.3 Media framing of protests in Russia

This section will focus on the Russian case of studying protest from media framing and provide some examples. This field is somewhat limited because protests in Russia are viewed not from their coverage in the media or framing by the media. More often, protests are examined from the point of view of protests’ effect on political attitude (Frye & Borisova 2019; Tertychnaya & Lankina 2020), of electoral politics (Dollbaum 2020), comparative studies of political and generational changes among protesters over time (Gel’man 2017) and changes in the shapes of protests (Robertson 2013), or in terms of a detailed description of the protests (Gabowitsch 2016).

Borrowing framing issues from Snow and Benford (1992), Lankina, Watanabe, and Netesova (2020) analyzed coverage of protest during the 2011–2013 protest cycle in Russia utilizing the disorder frame and freedom to protests frame, the basis of which is taken from the work by Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997: 567) in which the authors “examined the effect of news frames on tolerance for the Ku Klux Klan”. Implementing a content analysis method and relying on a broad data collection, Lankina et al. tested four hypotheses regarding large-scale protests’ media framing in terms of media manipulation (disorder) and learning effect, and in term of “how autocrats will respond to protests that do not have the regime as its key target” (2020: 143) – frame it more or less likely in terms of disorder. The findings suggest that the “state-controlled media provide substantial coverage of mass protests even when they openly target the regime” (ibid.: 156), and this is caused by the inability to pretend that it did not happen. Another conclusion highlights that “Russian state-controlled media do resort to both media control, and



manipulation tactics” (ibid.: 157), and the choice directly depends on the reason for the protest and its aims.

Another work in this field investigated how media and authorities responded to several noticeable protest campaigns in Russia in 2013-2017 (Frolov et al. 2018). Even though the authors do not clearly state the usage of framing concept, it is evident that besides demonstrating that mostly so-called “liberal” media were covering protest events (ibid.: 113), the paper also tries to illustrate in what way federal media – if they did – framed certain protest events. The findings suggest that this state of affairs may be related to “the growing tendency to distinguish between “new” media and “traditional” media” and “the specifics of interaction between government officials and civil activists” (ibid.).

Anna Popkova (2014) conducted a comparative analysis of pro-government and oppositional media coverage of protests in Russia in December 2011 and their places in RuNet (Russia Internet). Focusing on “ideological analysis” and utilizing “a qualitative textual analysis based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 in Popkova 2014: 102), the author provided a detailed description of different approaches in covering events of December 2011 in two types of media. For example, in oppositional media, “the main reason for the protests was the falsified election”, while in pro-government media, it was highlighted that participants of protest ‘claimed that the elections were falsified’ (Yershov & Dergachev, 2011 in Popkova 2014: 104). Moreover, oppositional media provided detailed information and “presented the diversity of political views among the protesters as a sign of a healthy debate” (Popkova 2014: 107). In contrast, pro-governmental media “marginalized the protests and focused on discussing the official election results as undisputed” and “the diversity of political views among the protesters was presented as a weakness” (ibid.).

Other studies examined, for example, consideration of the political and non-political component of public opinion expression in modern Russia on the example of the protest actions of 2017-2019 (Beksheneva & Yagodka 2020); participation of adolescents in protest movements in 2011-2012 and 2017-2018 (Erpyleva 2020); the reaction of the authorities to political mobilisation in Russia and the presidential campaign of Alexei Navalny in 2017-2018 (Semenov & Popkova 2020).

Hence, accumulating the above information, this study pursues an attempt to contribute to expanding this field of research on the example of framing media protest in Russia.

## 2.2 Securitization theory

The securitization theory is a theory that was developed by the Copenhagen School of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde and others (Stritzel 2014: 11) in the 1990s. Expanding “analytical horizon” by including new sectors besides traditional ones – political and military, and moving “the referent object... beyond the state to incorporate other actors such as institutions, human individuals and groups, and even the biosphere” (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2015: 5), Buzan, Wæver and de

Wilde set out a new framework for security studies. In addition to the two mentioned traditional sectors, the new analytical horizon included the economic, the societal, and the environmental sectors of *security* (Buzan et al. 1998: 22-23). Security is “survival in the face of existential threats, but what constitutes an existential threat is not the same across different sectors” (ibid.: 27). In other words, security diversifies in its forms.

To securitize something means to move a particular issue beyond the field of ‘normal politics’ into the security realm, presenting this issue as “an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure” (Buzan et al. 1998: 24). Thereby, securitization is “a more extreme version of politicization” (ibid.: 23).

The vital role in securitization is assigned to a speech act through which a particular issue is constructed as a threat employing a securitizing move. “By saying the word, something is done (like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship)” (Wæver 1988; Austin 1975: 98ff. in Buzan et al. 1998: 26). Another important unites of securitization are the referent object – a thing that is threatened (traditionally a state), a securitizing actor – the one who securitizes an issue, and a functional actor – actor affecting the dynamic of a sector (ibid.: 36). Moreover, the audience should accept an existential threat for securitization to work. In other words, for something to be “securitized” and not to be only a “securitizing move”, it should be accepted by the audience, and the acceptance here implies that the existential threat has to “gain enough resonance for a platform to be made from which it is possible to legitimize emergency measures” (ibid.: 25). What is also important to mention is the notion that security is a self-referential practice and does not necessarily imply the existence of a real threat (ibid.: 24).

Moreover, security studies can be approached objectively or subjectively. The former implies an objective measurement by which an explicit threat can be defined, but it is still unclear how to define it due to different perceptions of an existential threat by people, states, and nations (Buzan et al. 1998: 30). The latter – a subjective approach where actors determine the security – “is not fully adequate” (ibid.: 31). Securitization is intersubjective because, as was mentioned earlier, for it to be successful, acceptance by the audience should take place. In other words, securitization is not decided by the securitising actor only; it is not isolated in someone’s mind, but it is a part of the discursive and constructed realm, and thus security “rests neither with the objects nor with the subjects but among the subjects (ibid.).

Thus, summarizing the above, it can be noted that, in Wæver’s works, as stated by Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, successful securitization requires some conditions that affect securitization’s success. These conditions are called ‘felicity conditions’ (Wæver 2000: 252 in Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2015: 96) and can be shortly summarized as the following: “an existential threat is presented as legitimating the use of extraordinary measures to combat that threat” (ibid.); securitizing actor should be in an authoritative position to convince an audience of threat’s presence; the existential threat is easier to be presented as such when “objects associated with the issue carry historical connotations of threat, danger and harm” (ibid.). These conditions can be easily applied to traditional

sectors; however, it may be problematic with the media since journalists can carry out securitization on an individual level, and these actors will not fulfil conditions. Notwithstanding, in defence of this study, it should be emphasized that the analytical tool of securitization seeks to avoid focusing on the individual level due to its over-expansion of the meaning of security (Wæver 1995 in Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2015: 99). Thus, individual journalists are not considered securitizing actors.

Despite its obvious usefulness, especially in the environmental sector, securitisation should not be regarded as an exclusive good; on the contrary, a particular situation must be resolved differently without constructing a threat. More security does not imply it to be a good thing. According to Wæver, it is better “to aim desecuritization: the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere” (Buzan et al. 1998: 4). Desecuritization is also studied within securitization theory, however, to a lesser extent. Desecuritize something means “shifting issues from the realm of emergency politics back into the realm of ‘normal’ political deliberation and haggling” (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2015: 101). Hence, desecuritization is the reverse process of securitization.

This study is primarily concerned with de-securitizing moves and not securitization; however, the theoretical background is needed to explain to the reader the place of a de-securitizing move in this theory.

### 2.2.1 The political sector

Securitization theory applies to different sectors, and the political sector is one of them. According to Buzan et al., security in the political sector is “about the organizational stability of social orders(s)”, and the core concern of this sector is the “threats to state sovereignty” (1998: 141). Despite its linkage with the military sector – these two sectors are constituents in traditional security studies – the political sector is concerned with nonmilitary threats which do not fall within the definition of measures used in the other four sectors.

As was mentioned above, a state is traditionally the main referent object though not the only one in this sector, and the government is referred to as a securitizing actor, and here the confusion rooted in the relationship between state and government arises. Buzan et al. note: “the government can try to use rhetoric about the security of the state when more reasonably there is only a threat to the government itself” (1998: 152). For example, when the ruling elites are threatened by the protest movement that opposes their tyranny, this is viewed not as a threat to the regime but as an existential threat to the state as such. This is a common characteristic of weak states where “basic institutions as well as ideologies are often challenged, and political violence is extensive” (Buzan et al. 1998: 146). Moreover, when weak states’ leaders make such moves, their authority will be questioned (ibid.). This is an important note in this research where – as supposed – the Russian elites act on this scenario, and Russia is considered a hybrid regime.

## 2.3 Guiding concept

Since this study focuses on such a complicated topic as protests and utilizes theories' synthesis, discussed in the following subsection, I decided to shortly address the security vs liberty debates and define it in terms of the guiding concept of this study. The guiding concept in this study is neither a part of theories nor a predetermined frame. It is a benchmark that represents a helpful tool for the methodology used in this study and interprets the results and answers the questions posed.

These debates are often presented in terms of national security and civil liberties – balancing the needs between these two.

Jeremy Waldron highlighted: “Security is certainly connected with the public enjoyment of public order” (2012: 31); however, it should not be seen as a communal good and should be tied to the physical safety of individual men and women (*ibid.*). In other words, it is a matter of the safety of an individual; it is about harm and survival. However, looking into the Russian case and all the tendencies, it can be assumed that the government regards security as a public good – it is provided equally, it is non-exclusive and non-competitive. It is not anymore about harm and survival, but it is imposed on every citizen. Protesters are seen as a threat to stability, and protests' leaders are seen as foreign agents whose main task is a violent change of power. Everything is aggravated by the regime that exists in Russia – a hybrid regime with tendencies towards authoritarianism. In authoritarian regimes, civil rights are circumscribed, political opponents of the regime are intimidated, and the government often resorts to reprisals, which in state rhetoric are considered necessary measures to maintain order and ensure the safety of citizens. The common trade-off between security and liberty (civil rights) is corrupted: protesters are advocating their civil rights of protests, freedom of speech in the state, while the government takes these rights away in the name of the security of the state sovereignty, thereby outweighing the balance of security vs liberty in its favour.

## 2.4 Theories synthesis

The described above theories having some similarities can be combined to benefit the study. Securitization theory, particularly the Copenhagen School, “has given very little attention to the role of the media” (Mortensgaard 2020: 141), and media framing is important in this research; that is why the combination of theories is beneficial when answering the research questions.

There have been attempts made bridging two theories (e.g. Watson 2012; Rychnovská 2014; Vultee 2011). Watson, for example, argues that these theories “are compatible and based on strongly overlapping theoretical and normative commitments” (Watson 2012: 280), and securitization can be view as a “subfield”

of framing. Vultee, in turn, uses framing in explaining securitization as a media frame and “the social and cultural conditions under which securitization is introduced, amplified or played down” (2011: 77). Expressing the idea that media can be a securitizing actor, the author, however, mentions: “Not all media securitize all things equally. It is entirely possible, if not commonplace, for one set of media actors to be pushing an issue toward the securitized end of the spectrum even as another is pushing it back toward the domain of normal politics” (ibid.: 83). These two theories are also united by the focus on the construction of meaning through discourse. Based on the ideas of Vultee, I use the theoretical foundations to determine what can be considered as frames in this study, how to define de-securitizing moves from the theoretical perspective, and in general, I interpret the results of the analysis findings from the point of view of theoretical synthesis to give answers to the research questions posed.

Thereby, building onto these ideas, the research is concerned not with a real security threat but the construct of the threat. According to Vultee, the media frame and security frame are an organizing principle used by politicians and aggravated by media to influence public perception in a certain way (2011: 78). Hence, the audience perception depends on the type of media frames used, and media frames themselves can be recognised as cognitive shortcuts that help people easily process the information and make judgements quicker. Accordingly, state-affiliated and independent media will frame the protest movement differently – as an existential threat or as a struggle for freedom, for example, and thereby resort to securitization and desecuritization practices.

Researches utilizing the securitization theory are primarily concerned with liberal-democracies and/or very Eurocentric (e.g. Curley 2004). For example, Vuori noticed: “The majority of both critics and appliers of the theory seem to assume that the theory is only applicable in democratic societies” (2008: 66). Thereby, it seems problematic to apply it to authoritarian states; however, it is not so. A significant impact on this issue is made by Ulla Holm, who argues that in authoritarian states, it is “not easy to analyse who is securitising what, or how successful ‘securitization’ is”; however, it is feasible because even authoritarian regime “has to legitimise its use of extraordinary measures” (2004: 219). Thus, it may be challenging to distinguish ‘normal’ politics in Russia since the overwhelming majority of opposition has been suppressed (Holm 2004: 219); however, given the fact that Russia is a hybrid regime (it retains features inherent in democracies), considering the fact that independent media still exist, and applying theoretical synthesis and guiding concept to interpret the analysis result, it is implementable in this study.

## 3 Methodology

This chapter represents the ontological and epistemological position of the study – what assumptions it is based on and what epistemological debates exist for the method chosen in this research. The following sub-section describes the method – qualitative content analysis and explains the inductive approach of this method. The next sub-section explains the data collection strategy, including a short description of media and timeframe. Data collection is followed by the coding sub-section focused on textual units of analysis – sampling units, recording/coding units, and contextual units and it outlines the coding process providing some examples of textual units. The last rubric of the chapter is dedicated to the method’s limitation discussion in particular focusing on trustworthiness.

### 3.1 Ontology and epistemology of qualitative research

Ontological and epistemological positions of research and a researcher play a vital role because they relate to the study's aim, methodology, theory, analysis, and the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. In other words, ontological and epistemological clarity is essential because these positions “shape what it is we think we are doing as political scientists, and also how we do it, and what we think we can claim from our results” (Lowndes et al. 2018: 173).

Qualitative researches incorporate different approaches and different disciplinary and intellectual traditions that are based on various philosophical assumptions. It all leads to various ways of analytical strategies. This study is based on anti-foundationalist (also called constructivist/relativist/idealist) ontology, thus acknowledging that no objective reality exists and the world is socially constructed (Lowndes et al. 2018). No reality exists in the ‘real’ world outside of the individual’s consciousness, and reality is “fundamentally mind-dependent: it is only knowable through the human mind and through socially constructed meanings, and no reality exists independently of these” (Ormston et al. 2014: 5). For example, a journalist portraying an event does it according to their worldview that comprises beliefs, values, various standpoints, and it all constructs a distinctive reality not only of this journalist but all the readers who will view this through a constructed frame but also their mindset. The same happens when a securitizing actor defines a thing in terms of security – it is an existential threat from the actor’s point of view, a constructed threat. Furthermore, this securitizing move is open to subjective interpretation by the audience, and the securitization is only conducted when the audience shares and accepts this threat per se according to the audience’s reality. In

this research, the analysed frames are conceived through “individual or collective reconstructions coalescing around consensus” (Guba et al. 2005: 194). What also worth mentioning is the fact that this ontological position implies that there is a ‘double hermeneutic’ (Giddens, 1987 in Lowndes et al. 2018: 9; Habermas 1984 in Cohen et al. 2005: 28) – the observer (researcher) is interpreting the actors’ interpretations, i.e. there are two understanding levels. This, in turn, leads to the next position to be defined – epistemology.

In general, two epistemological positions are positivism and interpretivism. However, some scholars distinguish between or utilize more positions – positivist, interpretivist, and critical (Marsh et al. 2018: 184; Neuman 2014: 96; Hesse-Biber 2016: 5). The positivist and critical approaches are rejected in order for the ontological and epistemological coherence of the study. Hence, since “many constructivists espouse an interpretive epistemology” (Parsons 2018: 75), this study also adopts an interpretivist epistemology. The interpretivist epistemology is about understanding and interpreting the world, and, as the ontology it is adherent to, it is concerned with ‘understanding’. The importance of this concept can be traced back to Immanuel Kant and his argument that direct observation is not the only way to obtain knowledge of the world; instead, this knowledge is based on ‘understanding’ or interpretation by human (Ormstron et al. 2014: 11). Other significant researchers who highlighted the importance of ‘understanding’ are Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber, and the latest was interested to “build a bridge” between two epistemological positions – positivist and interpretivists (ibid.: 12).

Thereby, applying qualitative content analysis, it is vital to highlight that this method's epistemological assumptions are debated between scholars. Moreover, “the literature on qualitative content analysis does not explicitly address the role of epistemology” (Drisko & Maschi 2015: 91).

## 3.2 Method

There had been said a lot on the of qualitative and quantitative methods. It is commonly accepted that the qualitative method refers “to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” while quantitative research “refers to counts and measures of things” (Berg 2009: 3). In this research, a qualitative content analysis method will be used. The main goal of this type of analysis is to describe the meaning. Qualitative content analysis, as Wildemuth notes, “goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from text to examine meanings, themes, and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text” (in Goodman 2011: 23).

Margrit Schreier highlighted three main features of the qualitative content analysis method: it reduces data, is systematic, and flexible (2014). The first feature implies the reduction of the number of materials in order to focus on specific aspects of meaning related to the overall research question, and the number of those aspects is limited by the number of categories that a researcher can handle. The second feature refers to analysing every single part of materials in order to avoid looking

at the materials through the researcher's expectations; a particular sequence of steps to be taken while analysing; and a need for the coding to be carried out twice to test the quality of the category definitions. Lastly, the last feature of this analysis means that "the coding frame should always be matched to the material" to provide an accurate description of the materials (ibid.: 171).

There are two approaches to content analysis of frames: inductive and deductive. The inductive approach implies analysing articles with an open frame: the aim here is "to reveal the array of possible frames, beginning with very loosely defined preconceptions of these frames" (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000: 94). The deductive approach entails a set of frames that later will be verified within the text. It is important here "to have a clear idea of the kinds of frames likely to be in the news, because the frames that are not defined a priori may be overlooked" (ibid.: 95). Claes H. de Vreese noted: "Scholars have argued in favour of applying concise, a priori defined operationalizations of frames in content analyses" (2005: 53). However, as Sandelowski (in Drisko & Maschi 2015: 86) emphasised, "in contrast to basic content analysis, researchers typically inductively generate codes from the data rather than apply deductively generated codes derived from prior theory and research", which leaves room for a choice made by analysts as long as s/he is aware of each approach's drawbacks. In support of this, Schreier argues that "researchers may use inductively created or deductive generated approaches to coding or a mix of both" (in Drisko & Maschi 2015: 87).

There is little consensus about frames' identification in media. For example, Entman suggested that frames can be defined "by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (1993: 52), while Gamson and Modigliani (1989 in de Vreese 2005: 54) offered a 'media package', and focused on identifying metaphors, exemplars, catch-phrases, depictions, and visual images as framing devices. Hence, frames' identification should be paid great attention to, especially in an inductive approach where frames are not predefined.

In this study, inductive content analysis will be utilized. In this approach, "data moves from the specific to the general, so that particular instances are observed and then combined into a larger whole or general statement" (Chinn & Kramer 1999 in Elo & Kyngäs 2008: 109). The inductive approach implies open coding – rubrics describing the content are extracted while the analyst reads the text, and later they are collected and categorized (Elo & Kyngäs 2008: 109-111). Even though this study is based on theories' synthesis and includes guiding concept and provides the literature review, it is still of an inductive nature because there are no predefined frames leading the analysis and the theories themselves are not frames, and the analysis is open to how texts speak to the researcher. Put another way, as Thomas (2006: 239) cited in Azungah (2018: 391) highlighted, in the inductive qualitative analysis 'although the findings are influenced by the evaluation objectives or questions outlined by the researcher, the findings arise directly from the analysis of the raw data, not from a priori expectations or models'. It is also worth to mention that "active engagement, knowledge and understanding of the material, and



linguistic competence of those involved in the category formation” is of great importance in qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019: 100).

### 3.3 Data collection

This section will elaborate on types of the state-dependent and independent media chosen and provide their short characteristic. The timeframe utilized in the data collection process will be explained.

#### 3.3.1 State-dependent media: Rossiyskaya Gazeta (RG) and RT (Russia Today)

State-dependent media in this research imply not only government-owned but also state-funded and influenced by the government media.

RT is a state-controlled, state-funded Russian television channel called the Kremlin’s propaganda outlet (Ioffe 2010) or Russia’s English-language propaganda outlet (Aleem 2017). Its government-controlled nature is based on its ownership structure. The pro-state position of the media affects the nature of the material and the specifics of publications – a rare non-pro-state publication has a chance to appear in the news feed of the media, and if it does, it will be subjected to obvious criticism. For this study, the news feed website of RT will be used.

Rossiyskaya Gazeta is a daily social and political newspaper that was founded by the government of the Russian Federation. It has the status of an official publisher of regulatory legal acts. Hence, the nature of this media excludes any possibilities for opposition opinions to appear in the news feed.

#### 3.3.2 Independent media, Novaya Gazeta (NG) and Dozhd (TV Rain)

Novaya Gazeta is a socio-political newspaper considered the most Kremlin-critical paper in the Russian media landscape (Euro topics 2020). It is owned by NG’s publication team (76%), Alexander Lebedev (14%) – a Russian businessman and Mikhail Gorbachev (10%) – a Russian and former Soviet politician. NG is an independent news outlet “because of the ownership by journalists and no reports of being influenced by the government” (Simonov & Rao 2020: 54).

Dozhd is a Russian independent television channel that was founded in 2010 and is owned by journalist Natalya Sindeyeva. As was noticed, “tvrain’s TV channel was taken off the air by the major cable systems after covering 2011 street protests” (Simonov & Rao 2020: 54). It is defined as independent for the same reasons as NG.

#### 3.3.3 Timeframe

For this study, I decided to focus on three specific dates – January 23, January 31, and February 14 – when protests took place.

However, due to natural curiosity, I first decided to check how many articles were written by these media during the month, thereby bringing a partial quantitative dimension to this work. The results showed that in the period from January 17th (the day of Navalny's returned to Russia) to February 17th (three days after the last protest), an impressive number of articles ( $n = 846$ ) was found according to my queries, among which slightly more than 10% ( $n = 110$ ) of all articles belonged to the state-dependent media. At this stage, doubts arose that for this study, there would not be enough materials to analyse the state-dependent media in a sample of specific days of publications, and it was decided to extend the timeframe. The ultimate timeframe includes nine days in total: the day before, the day of protests, and the day after. I believe this allows of covering of more articles, the main topic of which are protests. It is also expected that there will not be much difference in how the media cover the protests because I assume that the strategy of framing them in a specific way was defined long before the protests – the agenda for protests is not formulated the day before. This is a long-term practice that may change slightly with the onset of a new protest cycle, but its foundations remain unchanged. Thus, I do not admit that the media have radically changed their attitude towards the protests during these nine days. In this case, it is appropriate to draw parallels with literature and define the extended timeframe of each protests days as the development (the day before), the culmination (the protest day), and the denouement (the day after): January 22 – January 24, January 30 – February 1, February 13 – February 15.

### 3.4 Coding process

This sub-section focuses on the coding process, explaining each step – sampling, recording, coding, codes creation, and merging into categories – with excerpts from analysed articles of state-dependent and independent media. Having understood the coding process, the reader can refer to the appendices, which present tables that include more excerpts from the articles, in order to familiarize themselves with the process further.

Although qualitative content analysis takes an established position among other methods, there are “no systematic rules for analysing data” (Elo & Kyngäs 2008: 109). Nevertheless, there are three main steps to be addressed: preparation, organizing, reporting (ibid.). The first step of the analysis was to move texts from the database to a different document and transcribe them to create highly organized documents. The second step was to read texts several times in order to gain an understanding, the main ideas and main points. Next, the sampling unit was divided into recording units, and each article was analysed separately in order to identify coding units, codes, and categories. After this point, “one may choose categories as the highest level of abstraction for reporting result” (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz 2017: 94), or there is a possibility to create themes by combining categories. Thus, I

decided to unite categories into themes (frames) which will be discussed in the analysis chapter.

The preparation phase begins by selecting the units of analysis, and in content analysis, there are “three kinds of units deserve distinction: sampling units, recording/coding units, and context units” (Krippendorff 2004: 98). These three units will be addressed below.

### 3.4.1 Sampling units

Due to the different specifics of newspapers chosen (mainly related to the frequency and size of publications), sampling units may be considered *unequally informative*. Thereby, the sampling technique question should be addressed.

There are several types of sampling, and the researchers must decide on a specific one for the study’s coherence. For this study, systematic sampling – described by Klaus Krippendorff (2004) – with some modifications was utilized. Applying systematic sampling, the analysts “selects every  $k$ th unit from a list after determining the starting point of the procedure at random” (Krippendorff 2004: 115). First, the starting point of the procedure was not determined at random – the choice of the initial timeframe was made consciously and with the reasons. Secondly, considering that “the interval  $k$  is a constant” (ibid.), some exceptions for sampling were made to avoid its biased orientation. In other words, it was noted that there is a cyclic regularity in one of the newspapers (Rossiyskaya Gazeta) – no articles about protests are published on the protest days, and, considering  $k$ , all samples from this newspaper would be excluded due to the nature of  $k$ . Hence, for this particular newspaper, the time frame was expanded.

For this study, the four presented state-dependent and independent media data were collected using the Russian media database Integrum. Since these protests were directly related to Alexei Navalny, search terms “protest\* (протест\*) and (и) Navaln\* (Навальн\*)” were considered at first. However, referring back to the background section, I want to remind that these protests were not authorised, which means that it can be assumed that this fact affected the way the state-controlled media pictured the protests. Thus, the search terms, besides mentioned ones, were expanded and included “illegal\* or unauthorize\*” (“незаконн\* или несанкционированн\*”).

The final search query was the following: “(protest\* or (illegal\* or unauthorize\*)) and Navaln\*” (протест\* или (незаконн\* или несанкционированн\*)) и (Навальн\*). The total number of articles for the mentioned month time frame was 846 ( $n = 846$ ). I decided to apply this timeframe to avoid the “disappearing” of some articles from the analysis timeframe. In other words, I decided to secure the analysis data collection process.

The next step was to sort these articles according to the timeframe and the following criteria:

- this study is focused exclusively on text samples, therefore all ‘extra’ materials – videos, photos, streams – were excluded;

- the accessibility of materials is an important factor for the study to be verified and checked by those interested – all materials available only by subscription were excluded;
- those materials that were concerned with any topic rather than protests and in which protests were a sub-theme or were not directly addressed were also excluded;
- finally, the modification of systematic sampling was attempted.

Accordingly, fulfilling the conditions that define sampling units – no biased connection between units and representativity of the individual sampling units (Krippendorff 2004: 99), the final sampling unit included 74 articles ( $n = 74$ ) for a nine-day study timeframe.

### 3.4.2 Context units

Context units are “*units of textual matter that set limits on the information to be considered in the description of recording units*” (Krippendorff 2004: 101). The context units are needed to analyse coding units correctly, and they may be as big as the recoding units (or even exceed them in certain circumstances). In this study, context units are presented as big paragraphs and used when needed. For example, at a certain point of the re-coding process, doubts may arise about the analysed part of the text – was the coding unit extracted correctly with preservation of the primary meaning? For these purposes, it will be necessary to refer to a bigger paragraph or the full text (recording unit) from which this paragraph was taken to analyse it in a general context.

### 3.4.3 Recording/coding units

Recording units are contained in sampling units and can be defined as “units that are distinguished for separate description, transcription, recording, or coding” (Krippendorff 2004: 99). Recording units are smaller than the sampling units, making it easier for the researcher to analyse the data. At this stage, it is significant for the coder to be familiar with the phenomenon they are working on – not only to be able to consider it in a social context and to know the language of texts and its nuances, but to know specifics of the society in which these texts were created.

However, there is clarification between the recording and the coding units of this study needed. An individual article from the newspaper presents the recording unit in this study; hence, the sampling unit contains multiple recording units (Kuckartz 2014: 45). The coding here refers to the segment of text that the code will be assigned to, and ideally, the coding unit “should only fit one category” (ibid.). The coding unit of this study is a part of a text (a paragraph or a sentence) from an article (recording unit) which contains the central meaning of a part of the recording unit in a compressed format.

I will provide examples of the recording/coding process below, but first, it is worth demonstrating what the whole coding process looked like:

Sampling unit →	Recording units →	Coding units →	Codes →	Categories →
selection of a set of articles from the database following the specified criteria	separate articles from the sampling unit prepared for coding	segments of chosen recording unit that contains the main idea of a paragraph/sentence in a compressed format	descriptive labels prescribed to coding units that accumulate the meaning in several words	denominations for combining extracted codes

Almost all of these steps were used to code a single article, and categories were not the last step – they were later combined into themes (frames), which will be discussed in the analysis chapter of this thesis. Moreover, despite the presence of pre-fixed units that were identified for facilitation of the analysis’ process understanding, sometimes, as Kuckartz (2014: 46) noted, “segments emerge in the process of coding”, which makes it not a linear process as it may seem – some data was obtained after a certain percentage of articles were coded, sometimes codes were formulated from recording units, and the context units played a significant role in the coding process. Finally, I want to draw attention to the fact that that the excerpts I provide in this work are not comprehensive and do not pretend to represent the whole picture of the coding process; they were randomly chosen by me solely for demonstration purposes of the analysis process, the only motivation was to include as many examples of textual units as possible. Further, I provide examples for the recording/coding process steps.

*State-dependent media.* Separate articles present recording units, but due to the rather extensive size of the articles themselves (1747 Russian words for the longest article in the state-dependent media), I use only one excerpt (Table 1.) in this section in order to explain the coding process to the reader:

**Table 1.** Extraction of coding units from the state-dependent media article

Recording unit (an article)	Coding units
To keep the snow from turning red. Competent actions of law enforcement officers allowed to avoid serious accidents.	- keep the snow from turning red, competent actions of officers, no serious accidents
Last Saturday in Moscow and in some Russian cities, street actions that were unauthorised by the authorities took place.	- unauthorised street actions took place in Moscow and cities
Their organizers demonstratively ignored numerous warnings from doctors, local authorities, and the prosecutor's office about a complete ban on holding crowded processions and gatherings during a pandemic.	- organizers ignored warnings about ban on holding crowded processions and gatherings during a pandemic
The risk of a massive spread of the infection did not stop the organizers.	- the risk of infection did not stop them

Moreover, they were not going to agree on anything or anyone. And they openly declared that their goal was a provocation.	- organizers openly declared - their goal was a provocation
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This excerpt (Table 1.) is from the Rossiyskaya Gazeta’s article called “To keep the snow from turning red” («Чтобы снег не стал красным»). A feature of not the only article, but also the newspaper itself, is ‘talking headlines’, which often demonstrate the author’s attitude to what is happening. For example, this title uses ‘red’ for ‘blood’, and in conjunction with the first sentence, it reads like a description of the actions of the police that did keep the snow from being covered in blood. In the second paragraph, I omit the words “last Saturday” because they do not play an essential role for the coding unit, the article falls within the time frame, and we know when protests took place. Similarly, in the following paragraph, I do not include a listing of those from whom the warnings were issued since my goal is to reduce the recording unit leaving only the necessary. Opening words are also usually not included in the coding unit, playing a connecting role between sentences in the text.

*Independent media.* Similar to the procedure presented above, here I also use only one excerpt (Table 2.) from the independent media article to explain the coding process:

**Table 2.** Extraction of coding units from the independent media article

Recording unit (an article)	Coding units
Besieged Boulevard ring The siloviki smashed peaceful rallies throughout the centre of Moscow and did not spare journalists.	- Besieged Boulevard ring - the siloviki smashed peaceful rallies, including journalists
The rally in support of Alexei Navalny in Moscow began two hours earlier. Already at noon, police officers began to detain people on Pushkinskaya Square, who were still standing alone with posters.	- the rally in support of Navalny - police officers detained people standing alone with posters
And a couple of hours later, when there were already so many people that it was only possible to move close to each other, the police and the National Guard went on the attack: the protesters were hit with truncheons - on the heads, legs, backs, in the face.	- many people, moving tightly to each other - the police went on the attack: blows fell with truncheons on the body
The siloviki provoked a stampede, which has never happened at any of the last protests - when even journalists shout "help!"	- the siloviki provoked a stampede - journalists shout "help"
According to Reuters, at least 40,000 people gathered for the rally in Moscow. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the figure is ten times less.	- at least 40 thousand people (Reuters) -the Ministry of Internal Affairs – gathered ten times fewer people

This excerpt (Table 2.) is from the Novaya Gazeta article called “Besieged Boulevard ring” («Осажденное Бульварное кольцо»). The Boulevard ring is a

district of Moscow that encircles the historical centre of the city. Thus, the author of the article described the siege of the centre of Moscow. I kept the word ‘siloviki’, which can be translated as “people of force” because it demonstrates the attitude of the article’s authors to the law enforcement officers and their actions. The time when the protest started was not vital and was omitted in coding units. Hence, in each paragraph, I tried to convey the central meaning of what was written, preserving the fundamental meanings and deliberately neglecting those, the deletion of which did not affect the primary sense.

In a like manner, all recording units were transferred into coding units with no interpretation involved. The interpretations of titles here are provided for the reader to become more familiar with how the coding process goes. The reader can find more examples of the recording/coding process in Appendix 1.

### 3.4.4 Prescribing codes

After the recording/coding stage, the next step was to prescribe codes to coding units. Codes are descriptive labels and are “tools to help researchers reflect on the data in new ways” (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz 2017: 96); it accumulates the meaning in several words. Very little interpretation is available at this stage, and re-reading and re-coding are essential.

*State-dependent media.* I continue with the same excerpt and coding units prescribing codes to them (Table 1.1.):

**Table 1.1.** Prescribing codes to coding units of the state-dependent media article

Coding units	Codes
- keep the snow from turning red, competent actions of officers, no serious accidents	- competent actions of officers
- unauthorised street actions took place in Moscow and cities	- name of actions - unauthorised, street
- organizers ignored warnings about ban on holding crowded processions and gatherings during a pandemic	- organizers ignored warnings on a pandemic
- the risk of infection did not stop them	- focus on the spread of coronavirus
- organizers openly declared - their goal was a provocation	- description of the organizers' goal – provocation

Very little interpretation is needed at this stage. For example, the phrase ‘to keep the snow from turning red’ and the following sentence was coded as “competent actions of law enforcement officers” because I considered the fact that there was no blood on the snow as a merit of law enforcement officers. At this stage it was extremely important to consider context units to prescribe codes correctly because sometimes one sentence out of context can lead to a completely different code. I

was also marking my thoughts in the margins throughout the entire coding process – this helps to reduce the level of bias significantly.

*Independent media.* Similar to the procedure presented above, here I continue with the same excerpt and coding units (Table 2.1.):

**Table 2.1.** Prescribing codes to coding units of the independent media article

Coding units	Codes
- Besieged Boulevard ring - the siloviki smashed peaceful rallies, including journalists	- actions of siloviki – smashed rallies, journalists, besieged area
- the rally in support of Navalny - police officers detained people standing alone with posters	- a rally in support -actions of police officers –detention of single people
- many people, moving tightly to each other - the police went on the attack: blows fell with truncheons on the body	- many people - physical tightness - police action - went on the attack, blows with truncheons
- the siloviki provoked a stampede - journalists shout "help"	- actions of siloviki - provocation of a stampede, journalists under attack
- at least 40 thousand people (Reuters) -the Ministry of Internal Affairs – gathered ten times fewer people	- number of participants - different sources

Creating codes for the independent media, I also transferred the primary sense of the coding units and put it in several words. Thus, the ‘besieged Boulevard ring’ turned into a ‘besieged area’ and was included in code “actions of siloviki”. The precise number of participants did not play a significant role and was prescribed a “number of participants”; however, the fact that more than one source was specified plays a role, and therefore it was reflected in the code.

As highlighted, the coding process was not linear – I was re-coding during the whole process, constantly referring to the context units. In the same way, codes were prescribed to coding units for the rest of the articles, and the reader can find more examples in Appendix 2.

### 3.4.5 Combining codes into categories

The next step of the process was to combine all codes into categories. For this purpose, I created a separate table in which a particular colour belonged to each category, and later the extracted codes were ‘painted’ into this colour. I will not demonstrate the colourful range of colours here but will only display to which category I have classified the codes found in the excerpts of the articles I am considering. The additional categories for the rest of the articles can be found in Appendix 3.



*State-dependent media* (Table 1.1.1.):

**Table 1.1.1.** Combining codes into categories of the state-dependent media article

Codes	Categories
- competent actions of officers	- actions of law enforcement officers
- name of actions - unauthorised, street	- description of the protests
- organizers ignored warnings on pandemic	- Navalny's supporters – headquarters
- focus on the spread of coronavirus	- coronavirus
- description of the organizers' goal – provocation	- Navalny's supporters – headquarters

Since the categories' names are not fully representative, I provide their description to explain what exactly they imply and why specific codes were included in different categories:

*description of the protests* – characterization of the protests in terms of their name and a brief description;

*active actions of the participants* – direct description of actions of the participants, in this case exclusively related to the order and law violation;

*who is Navalny* – characteristic of Alexei Navalny and his role in protests;

*Navalny's supporters – headquarters* – exceptional description of staff members (organisers) and activities around and by them;

*actions of law enforcement officers* – actions of the police and other services during protests and the period of preparation for them;

*coronavirus* – covers actions of violation of the order by protesters, the threat of illness, and it is also indicated as the reason why the authorities did not approve the actions;

*opposition and participants of the actions* – description of a comprehensive picture of protests in terms of organisation, progression of protests, and characterization of the “opposition” as a single organism;

*the USA and the West* – description of Russia's relations with Western countries, in particular the United States of America, and their role in the protests;

*children and protests* – focus on the threat to the life of children due to participation in protests and the state's obligation to protect children from opposition and protests;

*the aftermath* – consequences of protests, including physical consequences for participants/police and criminal proceedings;

opinions of authorities and experts – quotes from the government and experts.

*Independent media* (Table 2.1.1):

**Table 2.1.1.** Combining codes into categories of the independent media article

Codes	Categories
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- actions of siloviki – smashed rallies, journalists, besieged area	- the actions of the security forces
- a rally in support	- description of the protests
- actions of police officers –detention of single people	- the actions of the security forces
- many people	- description of the protests
- physical tightness	- feelings, symbols, images and moods
- police action - went on the attack, blows with truncheons	- the actions of the security forces
- actions of siloviki - provocation of a stampede, journalists under attack	- the actions of the security forces
- number of participants - different sources	- description of the protests

All singled out codes from all independent media articles were also grouped into the following categories:

*description of the protests* - characterization of the protests in terms of their name and a brief description;

*protesters' actions* - direct description of actions of the participants, in this case describing both legal and illegal actions;

*who is Navalny* - characteristic of Alexei Navalny and his role in protests;

*Navalny's supporters – headquarters* – exceptional description of staff members and activities around them;

*actions of law enforcement officers* – actions of the police and other services during protests and the period of preparation for them;

*opposition and participants of the actions* – description of a comprehensive picture of protests in terms of organisation, progression of protests, and characterization of the “opposition” as a single organism;

*feelings, symbols, images and moods* - a description of feelings and moods among the protesters, the distinctive symbols of the protest, literary techniques used to describe the protests;

*children and protests* – the role of children in protests;

*the aftermath* – consequences of protests, including physical consequences for participants/police, criminal proceedings, and intimidation of participants;

*the reaction of the authorities* - the reaction of the authorities (not only opposition-minded) to the protests, predominantly presented in the form of direct quotations with rare comments from the authors of the articles.

Thereby, after analysing the entire sample of articles and examining each textual unit, I obtained data that will be further analysed and interpreted and with the help of which answers to research questions will be given.

### 3.5 Limitations

The main complaint about this method is its reliability and validity. In terms of validity, the main problem is that “it is fairly difficult to tell how the frames were extracted from the material” (Matthes & Kohring 2008: 259). It is also common to “reinvent the wheel” while identifying media frames (D’Angelo & Kuypers 2010: 46 in Linström & Marais 2012: 27). These authors note that the process itself can be very challenging when “no easy coding scheme into which textual units can be sorted is evident” (ibid.: 37). This question was addressed above to help the reader understand the process of sampling and division into textual units. Another limitation is related to the concern that ‘there is a danger in this kind of lone-scholar analysis that the identification of a set of possible frames can be done arbitrarily’ (Tankard 2001: 98 in Matthes & Kohring 2008: 259). In terms of reliability, the main threat is the differentiation of frames extraction across researchers. In other words, an inductive approach and a limited selection of materials make it almost impossible to reproduce the results.

Hence, despite all the attempts to make the analysis process as transparent and understandable as possible, it is essential to keep in mind that the very nature of this method doubts the applicability of these characteristics, and there is a need to bring up debates about the applicability of reliability and validity in qualitative content analysis. The following section will elaborate on this issue.

### 3.6 Trustworthiness

In many qualitative content analyses, validity and reliability – traditionally used in quantitative analysis – are used. However, the question of validity and reliability in qualitative content analysis is not always raised, and – if it is – there is no one fixed way of addressing these issues. For example, in some studies, the Cohen’s kappa statistic (Mayring 2000 in Drisko & Maschi 2015: 107) or triangulation are used, while in others, a different language of addressing validity and reliability is presented, such as “*credibility, accuracy of representation, and authority of the writer*” (Agar 1986 in Krefting 1991: 215). Since there is an abstraction process involved in the coding, it is important to provide as much detailed description of the process as possible because from the perspective of validity the “readers should be able to clearly follow the analysis and resulting conclusions” (Schreier 2012 in Elo et al. 2014: 1). Nevertheless, it is common for qualitative content analysis to address trustworthiness – a concept addressed first by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 that replaced validity and reliability (Cypress 2017: 254). The aim of trustworthiness is “to support the argument that the inquiry’s findings are ‘worth paying attention to’” (Elo et al. 2014: 2).

Trustworthiness has four main components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Later the fifth component was added – authenticity. In the field of addressing these components and trustworthiness overall, one of the most prominent works done by a group of authors who described trustworthiness for the main phases of qualitative content analysis – preparation,

organization, and reporting the results (Elo et al. 2014). Based on this work, the trustworthiness of the current study is being addressed.

*Credibility.* In order to ensure the credibility of the research, the most appropriate data collection method should be applied. For this study, the data was collected using the Russian media database Integrum, applying a specific search query with a particular timeframe for different types of media. Hence, it is believed that the most appropriate data for answering the research questions was collected. Another important notion here is the self-awareness of the analyst that is essential for credibility (Koch 1994 in Elo et al. 2014: 4). As the author of the study, at each stage of analysis, I asked myself questions related to my subjective position, which could influence the result in the interpretation process, to critically assess the influence of my standpoint of view on the analysis process.

*Dependability.* This component implies “the stability of data over time and under different conditions” (Elo et al. 2014: 4). Here the question about the best sampling strategy is discussed. It is essential for the analysts to make a conscious choice as well as to describe sampling in order for the reader to judge the trustworthiness of sampling. In this study, a modified systematic sampling was applied, and the principles and criteria of this sampling were explained. Additionally, the question of the meaning units was also addressed for the readers to evaluate the trustworthiness of the analysis.

*Conformability.* This component refers to the organisation phase of analysis. Conformability of findings implies that “the data accurately represent the information that the participants provided and the interpretations of those data are not invented by the inquirer (Polit & Beck 2012 in Elo et al. 2014: 5). This may be regarded as the weakest part of this study because there was only one researcher conducting analysis what makes it problematic to assess conformability, although the interpretation was grounded in the data and not the researcher’s viewpoints. However, some scholars highlighted that in the inductive qualitative content analysis, “the credibility of the analysis can be confirmed by checking for the representativeness of the data as a whole” (Thomas & Magilvy 2011 in Elo et al. 2014: 5). Returning to the data while analysing to check if the interpretation is truthful, the researcher later represents the results to people “familiar with the research topic, who then evaluate whether the results match reality” (Elo et al. 2014: 6).

*Transferability.* The fourth component refers to reporting result phase and implies “the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups” (ibid.). With a detailed description of different characteristics – culture, context, etc. – and a research process, the analyst can indicate the possible way of transferability, but it is always down to the reader’s judgment – “the reader makes the transferability judgment because you do not know their specific settings” (Korstjens & Moser 2018: 122). Finally, the results have to be reported “systematically and carefully, with particular attention paid to how connections

between the data and results are reported” (Elo et al. 2014: 6) to demonstrate credibility and ensure trustworthiness, which will be demonstrated through findings of the analysis.

Hence, being aware of these components and paying particular attention to them during the analysis process, I tried to improve the trustworthiness of this study and inductive qualitative context analysis in particular.

## 4 Analysis

This section is devoted to analysing and interpreting the data obtained from the coding process. Here I will present themes into which categories were combined to interpret them as frames used by each media type. Themes are frames in this study because, as I stated earlier, frames in this study represent how the media conceptualized the “protests-2021” and how the protests were translated and made sense of by the media for the public. The first and the second sub-sections provide findings obtained in the state-dependent and independent media coding process, respectively, and explain the content of each frame used, paying attention to the categories included in themes. After focusing on the media findings, I bring all material into the discussion section to answer the research questions.

### 4.1 Findings from the state-dependent media

After all the articles were analysed and all codes were combined into categories, these categories were united into the following themes:

**Protest outline:** description of the protests, opposition and participant of the action.

**An argument against protests and for order:** coronavirus, opinions of authorities and experts.

**The rule of law as the dominant factor:** actions of law enforcement officers, the aftermath.

**The existential threat to security, stability, and sovereignty:** active actions of the participants, the USA and the West, who is Navalny, Navalny’s supporters – headquarters, children and protests.

Below I will present these themes, paying attention to the categories that have been assigned to them:

*Protest outline.* This theme includes a descriptive characterisation of protests. In the analysed state-dependent media, protests were characterised as unauthorised, illegal, unlawful, and rarely the reasons or purposes of the protests were mentioned. The term ‘protest’ itself was changed to action, rally or mass event. Perhaps, in this way, the state-dependent media tried to avoid the appearance of negative associations in the reader with the word ‘protest’ – an expression of disagreement with the authorities, for example, and to avoid focusing on Alexei Navalny as the central figure in the protests. Significant emphasis was placed on the small number of participants, and the only source of the number was data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As for the protests on February 14, parallels were drawn with the

revolutions in other countries where flashlights were used, thereby transparently hinting at what such an action could lead to. It has been repeatedly noted that these protest actions are staging, the peaceful nature of the actions is a lie, and in general, the protests have failed.

As for the second part of this themes, the opposition was pictured as provocateurs who take advantage of people's fatigue, attracting them to actions and whose main goal is to denigrate the state and undermine the regime. Participants of the actions were described as aggressive-minded elements, and only once was there a less negative description of the situation when people did not resist their detention and some of the participants were organised from the point of view of the existence of the route of the action. Nevertheless, more than once, it has been pointed out that the opposition is linking with NATO, which is a threat to Russia, its future and stability, and that the opposition will stop at nothing, sacrificing children for the sake of its interests. Even though this category may seem as belonging to the last frame, I included it in this frame because most parts of this category were not related to security.

*An argument against protests and for order.* More than once, the coronavirus was mentioned as the main reason why the approval or authorisation of the actions was refused. It was also pointed out that because of the mass events, there is not only the threat of infection but also a repeated lockdown, and the need to comply with coronavirus restrictions had been mentioned with recurring frequency.

All opinions of authorities and experts were pro-governmental, which seems reasonable due to the nature of the media. In other words, opinions were expressed that the reason for the protests is people's dissatisfaction with life, for which they blame the "bosses". Moreover, Navalny and his actions are the reason for the sanctions against Russia, and in general, Navalny is an insignificant figure; the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the West is openly going against Russia, supporting the opposition, which in turn is a direct threat to Russia. All opinions and statements fit into so-called state-dependent media discourse which continues the anti-protest rhetoric of the state and referring to the law to justify every action by the authorities.

*The rule of law as the dominant factor.* First of all, it is worth noticing that the actions of law enforcement agencies were presented in a positive light: the police help, ensure order, it is sustained and benevolent, handed out tea and masks. The articles analysed did not say anything related to police brutality against protesters or violation of the order by the police, only once attention was drawn to the use of force by the police against journalists, but in the following sentence, the fact that these journalists were real representatives of the press has been questioned. The merit of the police was noted in the context of the absence of serious incidents.

As for the aftermath, the major part of the articles focused on criminal proceedings, i.e. all the cases mentioned were related to the use of violence by protesters against law enforcement officials, hooliganism, vandalism, as well as violations of coronavirus restrictions and calls on social networks to participate in

protests. All of this was supported by a detailed discussion of injuries of varying severity sustained by law enforcement officials.

*The existential threat to security, stability, and sovereignty.* In the analysed articles from the state-dependent media, Alexei Navalny was mainly called a “blogger”, which demonstrates that he is not considered a political opponent of the Kremlin (at least on the pages of articles). These media did not skimp on definitions for Navalny – Berlin patient, the project of the West, Trojan horse, a puppet acting out a performance, including with his poisoning. Navalny’s supporters were mentioned in the context of their detention, accused of disseminating misleading information about protests and calls for youth and children to participate in protests, and their ties to the United States and the West were seen as a threat to the stability of the state. The involvement of children was viewed from the point of view of the danger not only for their lives, but also for the future of the country as a whole: participation in the protests will not allow building a beautiful Russia "not named after Navalny, but named after yourself" (Vityazeva 2021). The protests were also compared to the Euromaidan as if demonstrating what consequences are behind such actions and that they pose a threat to the future of Russia.

The *demonisation* of protesters was originated throughout all articles – participants were exclusively portrayed as provocateurs, vandals, and aggressors. Their every action was considered from the point of view of the violation of law and order. Protestors beat police officers, threatened vehicle drivers, called for violence on social media, used snowballs and stones as weapons. Thus, the protesters' actions were opposed to the actions of the police like an antithesis and had never been mentioned in a positive light.

As for the last component of this theme, the US and the West were mentioned in the context of excessive attention to events in Russia. Western media had been accused of providing false information about the protest, supporting Navalny, and double standards towards Russia. A significant part of the articles was devoted to the discussion and condemnation of the behaviour of the United States. In particular, the United States were accused of supporting the involvement of children in protests and supporting the protests themselves. It was stated that the United States are directly involved in organising these protests and highlighted that the United States are a threat to the internal security of Russia, and they plan to destabilise the situation in Russia. Moreover, it was argued that there is a direct threat to Russian sovereignty from the United States and NATO and that Alexei Navalny receives direct support from the United States.

Hence, one can observe that state-dependent media portrayed the “protests-2021” in terms of contrasts: police pitted against protesters, the opposition is opposed to the state, the collective West is opposed to Russia. Furthermore, an attempt was obvious to present all police actions from the point of view of ensuring security in conditions when there is a direct threat to the country's stability, sovereignty, and security.

## 4.2 Findings from the independent media



After all the articles were analysed and all codes were combined into categories, these categories were united into the following themes:

**Outlines of protests:** description of the protests, children and protests, the aftermath.

**Opposition leaders:** who is Navalny, Navalny's supporters – headquarters.

**Response to protests from authorities:** actions of law enforcement officers, the reaction of the authorities.

**Expression of civil rights by citizens:** protesters' actions, opposition and participants of the actions, feelings, symbols, images and moods.

I will present findings according to themes, paying attention to the categories that have been assigned to them:

*Outlines of protests.* In the analysed articles, protests were characterised as action in support, unauthorized action, all-Russian, specifying the protests' goals - Navalny's freedom, the government's resignation, and the unwillingness of people to put up with injustice, and the peaceful nature of the protests was highlighted. The mass character of the protests was repeatedly mentioned as the main instrument of the opposition, and data on the number of participants was provided from several sources, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As for the action on February 14, the main task was to maintain a sense of the ongoing protest cycle and the unity of people. A distinctive feature of this theme is that these newspapers mentioned the constant monitoring of the number of detained.

As for the role of children in protests, thus, according to the public monitoring commission (PMC) representatives, many of the detained minors did not participate in the actions but were passers-by, and their detention is necessary for the police only for the formation of a case against the opposition on call in children to participate in the actions. Among the consequences were mentioned the initiated criminal cases against the protesters, fines for calling for rallies, hospitalisation of protesters. Moreover, the PMC representative noted the forgery of protocols in police stations and the inability to defend one's rights in court even if there is evidence since the court is almost in any case would be on the side of the law enforcement officer.

*Opposition leaders.* In the independent media, Alexei Navalny was called "politician", "oppositionist", or "opposition politician", and his release was among the main topics or purposes of the protests. As for the headquarters, not only the actions of the authorities concerning the detention of the members of the headquarters were mentioned, but there was also criticism of the headquarters: criticisms of organising actions were noted – people did not fully understand what exactly to do and where to go while protesting. Among the positive fact, compensation for the fines of the detainees by the headquarters was noted. Members of the headquarters were also mentioned in the context of the "sanitary case" – a series of criminal cases for violation of sanitary and epidemiological norms during the protests.

*Response to protests from authorities.* In these media, a broader picture of events is presented, which covers many episodes of preventive measures taken by the state and the police in relation to opposition-minded citizens. It is important to note that this media did not focus exclusively on the use of violence by the police but also reflects positive moments when the police helped the participants, joked with protesters, supervised the protests. Nevertheless, the primary police response was their brutality towards protesters – beating with truncheons and kicking, using electric shocks, disregarding press rights and beating of journalists, promiscuity of detentions, and deliberate creation of crowding. Thus, police actions were not exclusively negative, but extreme brutality and sadism were noted.

As for the second part of this theme, the media provided direct quotes from government officials, mostly leaving them without comments, thereby reflecting the state's position that can be found in the state-dependent media findings. As for the less senior government officials, their opinions were not always pro-opposition, as could be expected. They noted that violations were on both sides, that protesters and organisers violated coronavirus restrictions, and that Navalny was not the main topic of protests anymore for a long time. It was also mentioned that under the pretext of protecting children, the authorities neutralise the position by opening criminal cases related to calls for minors to participate in actions. As for the US and the West, the position of foreign media was presented as excerpts from articles.

*Expression of civil rights by citizens.* The actions of the protesters were highlighted as a statement of fact. They included both the legal expression of their rights and the violation of the law, for example, the launch of rockets and smoke bombs, attacks on police officers (which, however, were often described in the context of attempts to protect people from detention), throwing snowballs at the police, and going out onto the road. It was noted that there were provocateur's among protesters, but in general, the events described were presented as the unity of the people and another attempt by the citizens to express their disagreement with the authorities and unwillingness to put up with injustice. The release of Navalny was not always presented as the dominant theme of the protests. An important role in the analysed articles was played by various comparisons and literary turnover, the described feelings, images, and symbols that, according to the authors, were presented at the protests. For example, the confrontation between the people and the authorities was compared with a confrontation between Harry Potter and Voldemort, good and evil; the symbols of protests were songs, golden brushes (a reference to the FBK investigation) and blue panties (a reference to the poisoning of Navalny); events were compared with the Battle on the Ice, with the Storming of the Bastille, with the awakening from a coma.

Hence, one can observe that independent media resorted to less polarity, reflecting both negative and positive actions among the protesters and the police and described the “protests-2021” in terms of combating injustice, struggle for rights and freedom; however, this will be discussed in detail in the following section.

### 4.3 Discussion

After presenting findings from both types of media, it is time to discuss them and address the research questions of this study. The primary purpose of this study was to find how the “protests-2021” were portrayed in different Russian media. From the findings, one can observe a significant difference in the representation of the “protests-2021” between two media types. While the state-dependent media provided exclusively pro-state vision, the independent media attempted to dilute the opposition view with government statements. They also used different frames in order to translate the “protests-2021” into the language of their targeted audience – ensuring the order and legality in conditions of threat to security or expression of civil rights in conditions of disagreement with the authorities – and to conceptualise them in terms of their agenda. It is obvious that frames in the state-dependent media were affected by the outside sources represented by elites, interest groups, or the government, which was mentioned in this thesis before. As for the independent media, I assume the frames were affected by the protests themselves. Thereby, I will elaborate more on these issues, answering the research questions below, starting with sub-questions, and discuss what these results provide us with.

*“What frames were utilized in the media?”*

I argue that both media portrayed the “protests-2021” in different frames that correspond with guiding concepts suggested in this study – security and liberty or a corrupted trade-off between security and liberty. Despite the overlapping names of frames, their content, as was demonstrated above, is strikingly different.

The state-dependent media used frames of *existential threat, for the legality, and against protests* and framed the “protests-2021” not as a manifestation of civil rights of citizens (the constitutional right) but as an infringement and threat to security, especially in the context of open confrontation with the West, linking Navalny and his supporters to the West, and explained all measures of law enforcement officers in terms of ensuring public order and public safety. The state-dependent media avoided mentioning police brutality and emphasized the brutality of protesters, thereby justifying *rare* episodes of violence against citizens – the police took actions against those who broke the law. Such frames and tactics can probably work as propaganda aimed at those who support the current government or do not go to rallies. However, it will undoubtedly raise doubts among those who attended the “protests-2021” or followed them from non-state sources. This also can be view as a logical continuation of the authoritarian tendencies observed in Russia, among which internal propaganda occupies a vital place and where security prevail over liberties.

These frames are inextricably linked to the *existential threat* frame, in which not only the mentioned categories were assigned, but also other categories, since the issue of threats to security and stability was raised repeatedly, including when describing the opposition as a whole, the aftermath, and in opinions of experts. This

frame runs through all the articles, making it clear to the reader that the “protests-2021” are organised by the US, which seek to undermine the regime in the country, using Alexei Navalny and the opposition as tools. It also demonstrates that protests are a sign of revolution, followed by poverty and hunger; protests not only do not change anything but, on the contrary, endanger children, statehood and sovereignty; the “protests-2021” can be viewed as treason because the opposition organised them with the help of the West. I also find it curious that trying to belittle the figure of Alexei Navalny, calling him a “blogger”, the state-dependent media nevertheless mention him in the context of the threat. Thereby, using the above frames, the state-dependent media, on the one hand, deliberately underestimate the significance of the “protests-2021”, and on the other hand, since they cannot ignore these protests because of their appearance, they demonise them and portray them in terms of a threat. All of these can be interpreted from the point of view of the government’s fear for its future in the face of demands for changes.

At the same time, independent media used frames of *civil rights, opposition leaders, authorities’ position*, which can be related to liberty guiding concept. The focus is on the forms of expression of rights, the agenda of protests, and the independent media portrayed the “protests-2021” not only through the opposition prism, but also through the government position, which to a certain extent inspires confidence in the reader, or at least provides a broader picture from which the reader draws conclusions. This finding also corresponds with conclusions made by Anna Popkova, whose qualitative research on protests 2011 in Russia was mentioned before, namely that the independent media “presented the diversity of political views among the protesters as a sign of a healthy debate” (Popkova 2014: 107). Protest actions are viewed as the exercise by citizens of their constitutional right when it is no longer possible to seek compromises with the authorities. Of course, not all citizens manifest their position in accordance with the law, which is also reflected in this frame. The main message of this frame is that people are tired of lawlessness and injustice, and they took to the streets to defend their right to a better life. In this context, it is of no small importance that this frame is not concentrated exclusively on the figure of Alexei Navalny; for most of the participants, the “protests-2021” for the release of Navalny became an excuse to took to the streets for what worries them. The following frame – *opposition leaders* – is focused on Navalny and his supporters, and unlike in the state-dependent media, Alexei Navalny is seen as the oppositional leader and a politician who can compete with the Kremlin, even though he cannot unite all of the opposition around himself.

The last frame represents the “protests-2021” in terms of measures taken by the authorities. In my opinion, this frame is helpful as it shows the reader a more realistic picture of the protests than in the state-dependent media. Is there at least one protest where the police did not use violence, and the participants only provoked and violated the law? The independent media, utilizing this frame, show that protests are somewhat familiar in hybrid regimes, excesses and violations exist on both opposing sides, but in general, it is a commonplace practice of expressing one’s position.

Thereby, through the frames used, we can observe how the state-dependent media is converting internal political discourse into foreign policy by covering

protests in terms of their relationship with the West and presenting them as a threat to the state, while the independent media keep them at the level of internal political discourse.

*“How do media frames reflect de-securitizing moves?”*

I argue that de-securitizing moves by the state-dependent and independent media can be observed through the frames they used. Media here are securitizing actors, and the findings support Vultee’s argument that “not all media securitize all things equally” (2011: 83). Considering the answer to the previous sub-question and the findings obtained, I believe that state-dependent media – and the government through them – attempted securitizing move of the “protests-2021” under the pretext of public order and safety, including children, specifically with the means of the *existential threat* frame. They created an agenda in which citizens expressing their constitutional right are presented as opponents and underminers of security and the regime. At the same time, to justify police brutality, it is presented in the context of the rule of law, thereby normalising police violence and brutality – that is completely ignored in state-dependent media – necessary for ensuring public order. Here we could observe the confusion rooted in the relationship between state and government – “the government can try to use rhetoric about the security of the state when more reasonably there is only a threat to the government itself” (Buzan et al. 1998: 152). By linking Navalny and his supporters with the West, the state-dependent media (the government) directly stated that the protests were organized by the West, in particular, the US and that this was a direct threat to the state’s security and stability, and the state here can be viewed as a referent object. Thereby, combining all frames, state-dependent media attempted a securitizing move of the “protests-2021” to securitize them as a threat to the stability and sovereignty of the state, when in many respects, the protests are a threat to the government itself: the primary goal of the Russian opposition is to change the current government. However, I should mention that it is not the aim of this study to investigate if the securitization took place because there is not enough data on the audience response to the state-dependent media position, and in this case, I can only argue that a securitizing move was attempted with the means of identified frames.

At the same time, through the independent media frames, we can observe a desecuritizing move of the “protests-2021”. Even though very little said about desecuritization, it can be understood as “shifting issues from the realm of emergency politics back into the realm of ‘normal’ political deliberation and haggling” (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2015: 101). Hence, I argue that independent media presented the “protests-2021” as a fight for civil rights with the means of utilised frames. Representation of “protests-2021” as a commonplace practice and description of them as a protests cycle also helps in terms of desecuritizations because it clarifies that this is how the changes can take place – consistency, duration, unity of people and compliance with the law. The independent media, opposing the state-dependent media vision about protests being a threat to the state, shift “protests-2021” from the securitization sector to the politicization sector, back to ‘normal politics’. Diversity of expert’s opinions,

variety of data and representativeness in describing events can also be seen as signs of desecuritizing move. In other words, the “protests-2021” were presented as a logical continuation of the protest cycle and, in particular, the events associated with Alexei Navalny, and were inscribed in the country's political landscape, keeping them in the politicization sector.

In answering this sub-question, I believe there is no need to know if securitization took place to find if the desecuritizing move was attempted. As long as we can observe the securitizing move, we can argue – based on the analysis and the theory – that the independent media attempted the desecuritizing move to counterbalance the state-dependent media framing process of “protests-2021”.

*“How were the “protests-2021” portrayed in the state-dependent and independent media?”*

After answering two sub-questions that contributed to this question, the answer can be provided for the study's main research question.

The “protests-2021” were framed dissimilarly in two different media, despite overlapping categories and frames. Probably, at the moment of posing this research question, the reader could have assumed that the state-dependent media would be “against” the protests, and the independent media – “for” the protests. However, the analysis showed the extent to which the former media opposed the “protests-2021” and the latter – supported them. In the portraying process of the “protests-2021”, one can also observe signs of de-securitisation, which was carried out following the proposed concept: the state-dependent media portrayed the protests not only in terms of threat but also in terms of ensuring security, thereby infringing on liberty, while the independent media focused on the exercise by citizens of their rights (‘normal politics’) and focused on liberties.

What do these answers tell us about how things are, and what do they give us in terms of researching protests in Russia? First of all, through this analysis, clear examples were demonstrated of how the same events are presented so differently in the state-dependent and independent media. Thus, using qualitative analysis, I answered the question “*how*” and demonstrated that sometimes a quantitative analysis of the mentioning of the word “protests” in the media might not be enough for analysis because it is crucial in what context this word is used. Secondly, this research demonstrated the aggravating position of democracy in Russia in the media sphere and other spheres – opposition, civil rights, and freedom of expression. The government represses the independent media and propagates the only possible point of view – the state one – through the controlled media, thereby using them as a tool to influence citizens and to combat elements objectionable to the regime, as demonstrated by the frames reflecting the securitising move. Such actions are undoubtedly detrimental to freedom of expression in Russia, and in such conditions, the existence of the independent media that seek to present events in a broader and more multifaceted way than the state media do is under a big blow. Finally, the use of theories synthesis in this study contributes to the literature in terms of expanding the theory of securitization in the media sphere and the assertion that the media is one of the most important influencing factors in hybrid regimes that shows more

and more signs of authoritarian states. Media in such conditions become the mouthpiece of the state and the opposition and portray events with the help of frames that meet the state's agenda or the opposition. Unable to end the “protests-2021” once and for all, the government, through the media, tries to portray “dull and unappetizing” public affairs (Lippmann 1922: 104 in Entman et al. 2009: 179) according to the agenda, in this case, presented in terms of danger and threat to stability and sovereignty of the state, thereby attempting the securitizing move, while the independent media seek to present them as a manifestation of ‘normal politics’ attempting desecuritising move as a counterweight.

## 5 Conclusion

The emphasis in this thesis, as well known by now, has been on the qualitative representation and interpretation of how the “protests-2021” are framed in Russian media and how the attempted de-securitizing moves can be characterized in terms of these frames. The reason to use the qualitative method is that quantitative analysis prevails in Russian’s protests studies, while qualitative analysis is almost neglected. I do not deny the fact that it is helpful to know how often and how much state-dependent and independent media write about protests, but I argue that it is even more important to know exactly *how* and *what* they write about them.

Considering the problem from this side, I tried to answer the questions from the point of view of how the “protests-2021” in Russia are depicted in different media and from the point of view of what frames were used and how to use them to characterize de-securitizing moves. I believe that such a formulation of questions and the answers to them contribute not only to the theory of securitization, in which not enough attention was paid to the media but also to the study of protest activity in Russia, qualitatively analysing the data of the media in the conditions of autocracy and “tightening the screws” in the sphere of media control and control over opposition activity.

While I was working on this research, there have been drastic changes in Russia that directly affect the media and opposition. First, the top independent media outlet Meduza was given a label ‘foreign agent’, to which the attention of the EU was drawn and it “urged Moscow to end its ‘systematic infringement’ of basic rights and freedoms for the political opposition and other Russians” (RFE/RL 2021). Second, the Moscow City Court restricted the activities of Navalny’s funds on the claim of extremism marked as “state secrets” (Foht et al. 2021). This implies the liquidation of the organisation and the cessation of all its activities, and the likely consequences for everyone who provided any support to the organisation, or, for example, its symbolism can be recognised as extremist and equated with the swastika.

Thus, in real-time, one can observe how the Russian regime tries to stay in power, suppressing any dissent. In this context, the analysis of media articles seems reasonable, as its results demonstrate not only the tools that elites use in their quest to stay in power, including propaganda against their people and equating the opposition with NATO agents that threaten sovereignty, stability and security of the country, but also shed light on how independent media work in such conditions.

In order to fully utilize the qualitative method for studying protests, it would be of value to investigate a larger timeframe once this protest period in Russia is over. It would also be valuable to attract more analysts to improve the trustworthiness of such studies. In general, further qualitative research in this direction can be redirected to investigating how specific frames used in the media shape the vision



and determine protesters' actions and those who oppose protests. Another feasible way of the development of research in this area relates to the field of securitization, namely, whether the government carried out the securitization of protests after taking securitising moves in the controlled media, for example, on the example of 2011-2013 protests and the subsequent tightening of laws related to the holding of rallies and demonstrations, as well as controlling the work of the media.

## 6 Executive summary

This study has scrutinised how the “protests-2021” are framed in the Russian state-dependent and independent media. The following summary shall give an overview of my research interest, the relevance of the topic, and the analysis results.

In this study, the research interests were related to my personal experiences about what was happening in Russia during my abroad period. An important role was played by the fact that many of the media, which I preferred, were subjected to crackdowns and eventually ceased to exist over the past years. Providing support to independent media and organisations in Russia to the extent I could, being not in the country, I decided to take a closer look at exactly how different media write about protests in order to understand further what tools they use to promote their point of view and find support among citizens. For this needs, I chose the ongoing protests cycle called the “protests-2021” in this study and focused on several protest day of January and February. I chose the framing theory, and in the context of all the events related to the poisoning and imprisonment of Alexei Navalny, with the persecution of opposition members, with a change of the Constitution and with the upcoming elections, what demonstrates the fear of the authorities to lose power, I decided to combine the framing theory with the theory of securitization.

The research questions asked *what* frames were utilized, *how* they could be used to characterized de-securitizing moves, and *how* the “protests-2021” were portrayed in state-dependent and independent media, and the research aimed to contribute to the Russian protest study field.

The initial timeframe of this study included three main dates – protests’ days: January 23, January 31, February 14, and later was expanded to include a day before the protest day and the day after, which led to the final timeframe of nine days.

After collecting all articles on these days with the Russian database Integrum, I coded all articles using the inductive qualitative content analysis, combined all codes into categories, and united categories into themes (frames) in this study. The process was not linear and was time-consuming; however, the finding obtained provided a large amount of material to analyse. The issue of trustworthiness has also been raised in the study and is, I believe, fully addressed.

The next step was to analyse the findings from both media using theories synthesis and guiding concepts and provide answers to research questions. The results demonstrated a significant difference in how the media presented protests, in what context the frames were used, and made it possible to trace an attempt of de-securitizing moves.

I concluded from my analysis that the state-dependent media used the existential threat frame to portray the “protests-2021” as a danger to stability, sovereignty, security, children, and, most importantly, the state when in fact, the danger exists to the government. Thereby it was considered an attempt to justify the authorities’

reaction to the protests in terms of security, undermining the trade-off with liberty, and was viewed in term of the securitizing move. In contrast, the independent media used the frame of civil rights and portrayed protests in terms of the fight for liberty, freedom, better life. Their strategy was to provide a more realistic picture of the protests, citing the government sources on a par with independent experts and opposition supporters, and to present a diverse perspective on the protests, thus presenting them in terms of 'normal politics', which is seen as a desecuritizing move as opposed to a securitizing move in the state-dependent media.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Extraction of coding units

**Table 3.** State-dependent media articles

Recoding units	Coding units
***** The siloviki managed to drive out the crowd from Pushkin Square.	***** - the siloviki drove out the crowd
After that, the protesters split into several groups. One of them occupied the staircase of the Circus building on Tsvetnoy Boulevard.	- the participants were divided into groups - one occupied the staircase of the building
From there, people began to throw snowballs and firecrackers at passing cars. Damaged one paddy wagon.	- people began to throw passing cars with snowballs and firecrackers, damaged the paddy wagon
But the most unpleasant thing is that the driver of the special services car was injured. The car was first pelted with snowballs and then kicked.	- people threw snowballs at the special services car, started kicking it
As a result, the glass of the car shattered, and a splinter hit the driver in the eye, seriously injuring him.	- the driver was injured - the glass of the car was broken, and a splinter hit the driver in the eye
***** Stocks are falling The small number of Sunday actions and competent actions of law enforcement officers allowed to avoid serious accidents.	***** - Stocks are falling - the small number of actions, competent actions of police, avoiding serious accidents
Sunday events obviously did not meet the expectations of the organizers of the illegal actions.	- events did not meet the expectations of the organizers of illegal actions
Despite the massive injection of appeals and promises to organize a large-scale public action into social networks, they did not receive much response from citizens.	- massive stuffing of appeals into social networks - a special response from citizens they didn't get
Even in multi-million Moscow, according to the capital's Ministry of Internal Affairs, about two thousand people took to the streets.	- in Moscow - the Ministry of Internal Affairs - about two thousand people

<p>There are more journalists than participants. In almost all regions, there were almost more police officers, national guardsmen and journalists who took part in illegal actions.</p>	<p>- there were almost more policemen, national guardsmen and journalists who took part in illegal actions.</p>
<p>In some regions, no one came out at all.</p>	<p>- in some regions, no one came out.</p>
<p>***** For help - to Washington. Probably, something similar was predicted by the blogger's associates. It is not for nothing that they are already asking the West to interfere in the affairs of Russia, come up with some other sanctions, and somehow punish those who interfere with them. They themselves are not very successful.</p>	<p>***** - for help - to Washington - something similar was predicted by the blogger's associates - they are already asking the West to interfere in the affairs of Russia, to come up with sanctions, to punish those who interfere</p>
<p>A request to foreign countries for help from the point of view of law is a serious thing. Alexander Malkevich, the first deputy chairman of the Russian Public Chamber's commission on mass media, in a conversation with journalists, called the request of the Anti-Corruption Fund (included by the Russian Ministry of Justice in the list of foreign agents) to the United States to impose sanctions against Russian citizens as treason. And he reminded about the need to adopt an analogue of Logan's law in Russia.</p>	<p>- A request to abroad is a serious thing - First Deputy Chairman of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation Commission on Mass Media called the request of the Anti-Corruption Fund to the United States to introduce sanctions against citizens of the Russian Federation by treason</p>
<p>***** Experts do not exclude that the actions of the US Embassy may act as a kind of "rehearsal to destabilize" the internal situation in the Russian Federation, including on the eve of the parliamentary elections, which are scheduled for September 2021.</p>	<p>***** - the actions of the United States - a "rehearsal to destabilize" the internal situation in the Russian Federation, on the eve of the parliamentary elections</p>
<p>"This is a swing before the elections to the State Duma. At the same time, there is every reason to believe that the policy of the Biden administration will place special emphasis on the so-called human rights issues and the export of "their democratic values", said Blokhin.</p>	<p>- This is a swing before the elections... reasons to believe that the Biden administration's policies place particular emphasis on human rights issues and the export of "their democratic values" (opinion)</p>



**Table 4.** Independent media articles

Recoding units	Coding units
***** In response to the beatings by the security forces, protesters began throwing snowballs at them.	***** - in response to beatings, protesters start throwing snowballs at the police
On this basis, disputes arise between the demonstrators: some asks to stop throwing something at the security forces, the other is indignant at this - they say, do not you see how they treat us.	- disputes arise between the demonstrators: some ask to stop, the other is indignant - "you do not see how they treat us."
People from Strastnoy Boulevard are squeezed out towards Trubnaya Square. Thousands of protesters gathered there.	- people are being squeezed out, thousands of protesters have gathered
Near the Moscow Nikulin Circus, someone threw a smoke bomb, a caustic gas is felt in the air. People occupied both sides of the road on Tsvetnoy Boulevard.	- someone threw a smoke bomb, a caustic gas is felt in the air, people occupied the road
The staircase leading to the circus is also full of demonstrators, they turn on flashlights on their phones, cars passing by honk, some of them play the song "Everything will pass" by the Pornofilms group, which has become one of the main symbols of protest over the past year.	- the stairs are packed with demonstrators, flashlights on phones are turned on, cars honk, the song "Everything will pass" sounds - a symbol of protest
***** The first battle of a new era: how the authorities are punishing in advance for the January 23 rally.	***** - The first battle of a new era: the authorities punish in advance
All over Russia, there are detentions and arrests of Navalny's supporters, a campaign is underway to neutralize opposition sentiments in schools and universities.	- All over Russia there are detentions and arrests of Navalny's supporters - a campaign to neutralize opposition sentiments in schools and universities
By all indications, the Kremlin has planned a military operation for Saturday - an operation that will have serious political consequences and in which the authorities will be ready to use force against unarmed people.	- a military operation is planned in the Kremlin for Saturday - serious political consequences, the authorities will be ready to use force against unarmed people
The events of last year in Belarus only spurred the Kremlin's sense of danger.	- Events in Belarus spurred the Kremlin's sense of danger
***** "Only 10% - 18 years and younger": sociology of a protest rally in Moscow.	***** - sociology of a protests rally in Moscow
An unauthorized protest rally continues in the centre of Moscow, the participants of which are in favour of the release of Alexei Navalny from prison.	- An unauthorized protest rally in favour of the release of Alexei Navalny continues

<p>According to OVD-Info, 513 people have already been detained, and 1614 people in Russia as a whole. Actions are taking place or have already taken place in other large cities.</p>	<p>- OVD-Info - 1614 people in Russia as a whole have already been detained</p>
<p>Political scientist and economist Alexei Zakharov spoke about who represented today's Moscow protest. Zakharov cited data from a survey conducted by the White Counter volunteer association, which is counting participants in rallies and marches.</p>	<p>- Political scientist and economist - data from a survey conducted by the White Counter</p>
<p>According to this poll, the January 23 rally leads to the number of people participating in the protests for the first time - 44%. The median age of participants is 31, with only 10% of the total being 18 or less.</p>	<p>- the number of people participating in the protests for the first time - 44%. The median age is 31, only 10% - 18 or less.</p>
<p>***** Reaction to light. The opposition plans a flash mob with flashlights.</p>	<p>***** - reaction to light, flash mob with flashlights</p>
<p>Instant response from the authorities: it is the dastardly West that wants to blind naive Russians. And in general, we will forbid to shine in the evenings.</p>	<p>- the authorities' reaction - the dastardly West that wants to blind naive Russians, we will forbid to shine in the evenings</p>
<p>On Valentine's Day, people can go out to their own backyards, turn on flashlights on mobile devices and line up in the shape of a heart - as a sign of support for Alexei Navalny and all Russian political prisoners.</p>	<p>- flash mob - in the shape of a heart - as a sign of support for Alexei Navalny and all Russian political prisoners</p>
<p>This seemingly quite harmless action caused a wave of indignation among the Russian authorities: Presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova and State Duma Deputy Speaker Pyotr Tolstoy have already spoken about it.</p>	<p>- seemingly quite harmless action caused a wave of indignation among the Russian authorities</p>
<p>Maria Zakharova believes that the action of FBK (the organization is included by the Ministry of Justice in the list of "foreign agents" - Ed.) with flashlights is organized under the influence of the West.</p>	<p>- Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova - the action of FBK is organized under the influence of the West</p>

## Appendix 2: Prescribing codes to coding units

**Table 3.1.** State-dependent media articles

Coding units	Codes
***** - the siloviki drove out the crowd	***** - security officials droved people out
- the participants were divided into groups - one occupied the staircase of the building	- participants in groups, occupied the stairs
- people began to throw passing cars with snowballs and firecrackers, damaged the paddy wagon	- protesters' actions – threat to traffic safety, damage to property by protesters
- people threw snowballs at the special services car, started kicking it	- protesters' actions - throwing snowballs and kicking the car
- the driver was injured - the glass of the car was broken, and a splinter hit the driver in the eye	- protesters' actions - injured driver
***** - Stocks are falling	***** - a descriptive pun on the unpopularity of the protests
- the small number of actions, competent actions of police, avoiding serious accidents	- paucity - competent actions of security officials
- events did not meet the expectations of the organizers of illegal actions	- expectations of organizers are not met
- massive stuffing of appeals into social networks - a special response from citizens they didn't get	- calls for participation - no response from citizens
- in Moscow - the Ministry of Internal Affairs - about two thousand people	- the number of participants is very small
- there were almost more policemen, national guardsmen and journalists who took part in illegal actions	- few participants
- in some regions, no one came out	- unpopularity of protests
***** - for help - to Washington	***** - link between protests and the United States
- something similar was predicted by the blogger's associates - they are already asking the West to interfere in the affairs of Russia, to come up with sanctions, to punish those who interfere	- Navalny – blogger - Support for Navalny and supporters in the West
- A request to abroad is a serious thing - First Deputy Chairman of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation Commission on Mass Media called the request of the Anti-Corruption Fund to the United States to introduce sanctions against citizens of the Russian Federation by treason	- FBK support from the West - treason - link between protests and the United States

<p>*****</p> <p>- the actions of the United States - a "rehearsal to destabilize" the internal situation in the Russian Federation, on the eve of the parliamentary elections</p>	<p>*****</p> <p>- US supports protests - plan to destabilize Russia</p>
<p>- This is a swing before the elections... reasons to believe that the Biden administration's policies place particular emphasis on human rights issues and the export of "their democratic values" (opinion)</p>	<p>- rocking - US-sponsored protests</p> <p>- the US' human rights - the pretext under which they interfere in politics</p>

**Table 4.1.** Independent media articles

Coding units	Codes
<p>*****</p> <p>- in response to beatings, protesters start throwing snowballs at the police</p>	<p>*****</p> <p>- protesters' actions - snowballs to the police</p>
<p>- disputes arise between the demonstrators: some asks to stop, the other is indignant - "you do not see how they treat us"</p>	<p>- disputes between participants about snowballs</p>
<p>- people are being squeezed out, thousands of protesters have gathered</p>	<p>- many people</p>
<p>- someone threw a smoke bomb, a caustic gas is felt in the air, people occupied the road</p>	<p>- protesters' actions - smoke bomb, occupied the road</p>
<p>- the stairs are packed with demonstrators, flashlights on phones are turned on, cars honk, the song "Everything will pass" sounds - a symbol of protest</p>	<p>- unity of people</p> <p>- support from drivers</p> <p>- the song as a symbol of protest</p>
<p>*****</p> <p>- the first battle of a new era: the authorities punish in advance</p>	<p>*****</p> <p>- description of protests – battle</p> <p>- a new era - an era of change</p>
<p>- all over Russia there are detentions and arrests of Navalny's supporters</p>	<p>- preventive measures by the authorities - arrests of Navalny's supporters</p>
<p>- a campaign to neutralize opposition sentiments in schools and universities</p>	<p>- under the pretext of protecting children – neutralizing the opposition</p>
<p>- a military operation is planned in the Kremlin for Saturday - serious political consequences, the authorities will be ready to use force against unarmed people</p>	<p>- the response to the rally is a Kremlin military operation</p> <p>- threats to human rights from the authorities</p>
<p>- events in Belarus spurred the Kremlin's sense of danger</p>	<p>- events in Belarus as the Kremlin's fear of events in Russia</p>
<p>*****</p> <p>- sociology of a protests rally in Moscow</p>	<p>*****</p> <p>- sociology of protest</p>

- an unauthorized protest rally in favour of the release of Alexei Navalny continues	- description - unauthorized protest action - the goal is the release of Navalny
- OVD-Info - 1614 people in Russia as a whole have already been detained	- number of detainees
- Political scientist and economist - data from a survey conducted by the White Counter - the number of people participating in the protests for the first time - 44%. The median age is 31, only 10% - 18 or less.	- participant poll  - about half - for the first time - low number of minors
***** - reaction to light, flash mob with flashlights	***** - protest form - flash mob with flashlights
- the authorities' reaction - the dastardly West that wants to blind naive Russians, we will forbid to shine in the evenings	- the authorities see the influence of the West in the action
- flash mob - in the shape of a heart - as a sign of support for Alexei Navalny and all Russian political prisoners	- the purpose of the action is to support political prisoners
- seemingly quite harmless action caused a wave of indignation among the Russian authorities	- the description of the action is quite harmless - the authorities reacted - important politicians spoke out
- Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova - the action of FBK is organized under the influence of the West	- Ministry of Foreign Affairs - action at the suggestion of the West

### Appendix 3: Combining codes into categories

**Table 3.1.1.** State-dependent media articles

Codes	Categories
*****	*****
- security officials drove people out	- actions of law enforcement officers
- participants in groups, occupied the stairs	- opposition and participants of the action
- protesters' actions – threat to traffic safety, damage to property by protesters	- active actions of the participants
- protesters' actions - throwing snowballs and kicking the car	- active actions of the participants
- protesters' actions - injured driver	- active actions of the participants
*****	*****
- a descriptive pun on the unpopularity of the protests	- description of the protests
- paucity	- description of the protests
- competent actions of security officials	- actions of law enforcement officers
- expectations of organizers are not met	- description of the protests
- calls for participation - no response from citizens	- Navalny's supporters – headquarters
- the number of participants is very small	- description of the protests
- few participants	- description of the protests
- unpopularity of protests	- description of the protests
*****	*****
- link between protests and the United States	- the USA and the West
- Navalny – blogger	- who is Navalny
- Support for Navalny and supporters in the West	- the USA and the West
- FBK support from the West - treason	- the USA and the West
- FBK support from the West - treason	- Navalny's supporters – headquarters
- FBK support from the West – treason	- Navalny's supporters – headquarters
- link between protests and the United States	- the USA and the West
*****	*****
- US support protests - plan to destabilize Russia	- the USA and the West
- rocking - US-sponsored protests	- the USA and the West
- the US' human rights - the pretext under which they interfere in politics	- the USA and the West

**Table 4.1.1** Independent media articles

Codes	Categories
***** - protesters' actions - snowballs to the police	***** - protesters' actions
- disputes between participants about snowballs	- opposition, participants of the action
- many people	- description of the protests
- protesters' actions - smoke bomb, occupied the road	- protesters' actions
- unity of people	- opposition, participants of the action
- support from drivers	- description of the protests
- the song as a symbol of protest	- feelings, symbols, images and moods
***** - description of protests – battle	***** - description of the protests
- a new era - an era of change	- feelings, symbols, images and moods
- preventive measures by the authorities - arrests of Navalny's supporters	- the actions of the security forces
- under the pretext of protecting children – neutralizing the opposition	- government reaction
- the response to the rally is a Kremlin military operation	- government reaction
- threats to human rights from the authorities	- aftermath
- events in Belarus as the Kremlin's fear of events in Russia	- feelings, symbols, images and moods
***** - sociology of protest	***** - opposition, participants of the action
- description - unauthorized protest action	- description of the protests
- the goal is the release of Navalny	- description of the protests
- number of detainees	- description of the protests
- participant poll	- opposition, participants of the action
- about half - for the first time	- opposition, participants of the action
- low number of minors	- opposition, participants of the action
***** - protest form - flash mob with flashlights	***** - description of the protests
- the authorities see the influence of the West in the action	- government reaction

- the purpose of the action is to support political prisoners	- description of the protests
- the description of the action is quite harmless	- description of the protests
- the authorities reacted - important politicians spoke out	- government reaction
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs - action at the suggestion of the West	- government reaction