

The Politics of Propaganda in Putin's Russia: A Study on the Treatment of Alexei Navalny

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Abstract

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During the Putin presidency, the Kremlin has tailored its propaganda to target opposition agents who pose a threat to the regime. This paper utilizes text as data methods to analyze the Kremlin propagandization of Alexei Navalny following his poisoning in August 2020. It first emphasizes the role of propaganda in present day Russia and links Kremlin propaganda to Alexei Navalny. This paper next analyzes and compares news articles on Alexei Navalny from the state-controlled news sources, *RT*, and *Sputnik News*, as well as from the independent news sources, *RBC*. This analysis further delves into the differences between state-controlled news source based on language of publication (English vs Russian). Findings from this research project indicate that the Kremlin utilizes three propaganda techniques to effectively transform opposition agents into the Kremlin's own propaganda tools, specifically using figures such as Alexei Navalny to promote its own domestic and foreign policies. The paper concludes with speculation into the further use of text as data methods to better understand how the Kremlin propagandizes opposition agents to achieve Putin's goals and ambitions.

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Introduction

On August 20, 2020, Alexei Navalny, lawyer, activist and most recently politician, boarded a plane bound for Moscow. He was on his way home after helping local opposition politicians campaign in the provincial city of Tomsk (Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021, 2). Navalny would never make it back to Moscow, not that year. Unknowingly, he was about to join a prestigious club, the group of opposition figures that the Russian state has attempted to silence. Yet Navalny was different; he survived the assassination attempt, opening a new chapter in his political career, one tragically ending with him behind bars. But who is Alexei Navalny? Lawyer, activist, politician – yes. Propaganda tool – depends on who you ask.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was hope for a new Russia, a Russia propelled into the future, one that would join the world economy and would offer its people opportunity and prosperity. Over the past twenty years, under President Vladimir Putin, these hopes have all but vanished, only to be kept alive by opposition figures like Alexei Navalny. Yet, why has the Kremlin let him survive this long? Why was he allowed to gain a name for himself and an international following? On the surface it looks as if they do not consider him a legitimate threat, but the answer is deeper than that. In this opposition figure, the Kremlin saw an opportunity, the ability to take Alexei Navalny and mold him into their own propaganda tool, forever tied to the West. In their eyes he became the ‘corrupted’ spokesperson for the Western cabal intent on destroying all things Russian.

This thesis explores Kremlin strategies and techniques through a case study of Alexei Navalny following his attempted assassination on August 20, 2020. It utilizes text as data methods to create a survey of Russian media and identifies three primary methods utilized by

state-controlled media to formulate their propaganda: deflection, conspiracy, and slander. The culmination of this study is a deeper understanding of why and how the Kremlin uses Alexei Navalny, and potentially future opposition figures, as a tool to promote their own propaganda and distort the truth. The first section of this thesis explores the existing literature to establish the Kremlin's desire to create propaganda, its effect on society and common examples of propaganda. This is followed by a brief history of Alexei Navalny's relationship with the Kremlin. The second section introduces my research questions and initial hypotheses, followed by a section on my methodology. Next, I discuss my findings in my analysis and finally discuss the larger applications of this study in my conclusion.

Literature Review

The primary aims of this literature review are to establish a foundation for the current state of Kremlin Propaganda within the Russian Federation and to introduce the main actor of my case study, Alexei Navalny. This following section includes literature that focuses on the reasons behind Kremlin propaganda, propaganda disseminated by local actors, censorship techniques, conspiracy theory and Navalny's troubled relationship with the Kremlin itself. The culmination of the following literature lays the foundation for why and how the Kremlin has been able to transform Alexei Navalny from an opposition figure into a present-day propaganda tool.

State of Propaganda within Putin's Russia

The adept use of lies and false narratives is paramount to understanding the current state of propaganda and information within the Russian Federation. Timothy Snyder describes the adept use of historical events to define a new legacy for the Russian Federation, a legacy that

seeks to destroy the rule of law within the nation itself (Snyder 2018a, 18). Snyder presents *the politics of inevitability*, a sense that the future is just a continuation of the present and that the future of a nation is already predestined, cementing the belief that nothing can be done to change its course (Snyder 2018b). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West believed that Russia had become a blank slate, ready to be molded into a capitalist democracy, as that was the prevailing economic ideology. The past twenty years has shown that this was not the case and Snyder's *politics of inevitability* broke down, being replaced by what he calls the *politics of eternity*, a force that does not promise a better future for a nation, but centers around a single nation and its cyclical history of victimhood (Snyder 2018b). It is within this framework that Snyder explains the Kremlin's necessity to create fictional narratives to promote its victimhood stating: "The politics of eternity requires and produces problems that are insoluble because they are fictional. For Russia in 2012, the fictional problem became the designs of the European Union and the United States to destroy Russia" (Snyder 2018a, 51). It is imperative to understand Snyder's framework in relation to the study, as it serves as the foundational reason behind the amount of effort the Kremlin exerts to dominate the information landscape and promulgate its own *legitimate* narrative of Russia's past, present and future.

It is not enough to simply state that propaganda exists, we must understand how propaganda affects society at the lowest and most important level, the individual. Peter Pomerantsev delves into the creation of propaganda and its impact on the individual. He identifies Russia as not a country in transition, but a postmodern dictatorship that uses the language and institutions of democratic capitalism for authoritarian ends (Pomerantsev 2014, 42). The constant stream of lies and flipping of narratives affects how the individual sees and values the truth, merging reality and fiction into one distorted narrative, a narrative often

arbitrarily chosen by the creators of propaganda. Pomerantsev explains that these narratives and lies have no backing in real politics and are simply used to keep the average citizen thinking that something larger is happening (Pomerantsev 2014, 6). He further concludes his narrative on the topic by stating that in ‘Reality Show Russia’ you are able to say anything you want as long as you don’t follow the corruption trail, a trail that our protagonist Alexei Navalny put his life on the line to expose (Pomerantsev 2014, 67).

To better understand what is published online, it is crucial to understand how the Kremlin ‘censors’ the internet. Simply put, it does not. The methods of complete removal of online material are outdated and archaic. Soldatov and Borogan go into depth on present Russian methods towards online censorship. They explain that the Kremlin’s technique for online censorship is two-fold, first by physically owning the internet infrastructure to install surveillance devices, and secondly by utilizing web-filtering to blacklist problematic webpages. The Russian agency responsible for internet governance, Roskomnadzor, is responsible for governing the website blacklists, with its chief insisting that these blacklists were only used to combat pornography and other illegal enterprises (Soldatov and Borogan 2015, 197). This form of censorship is mostly ineffective, and allows for larger publications, such as the independent newsgroup *RBC*, to remain largely unscathed by internet regulation.

In an era of social media and instantaneous access to information, the Kremlin cannot simply ignore problematic and controversial events. According to Paul and Matthews, the current Russian approach to propaganda is built upon the Soviet Cold War techniques of obfuscation, yet has adapted rather successfully to the contemporary information space (Paul and Matthews 2016). These techniques focus on creating a “Firehose of Falsehood,” a mass dissemination of misinformation that construes and dilutes the legitimate narrative, making the readership

question the ‘truth.’ To create a persuasive narrative, the Kremlin focuses on disseminating their propaganda through a variety of different sources whose arguments, while different, point to the same conclusion. It is simply an understanding that, within propaganda, quantity is much more effective than the quality of the arguments. This propaganda must further be continuous and repetitive, as according to Paul and Matthews, repetitive messages from multiple sources are more persuasive to a readership, especially if interest is low (Paul and Matthews 2016).

In his work *Fortress Russia: Conspiracy Theories in the Post-Soviet World*, Ilya Yablokov introduces the historical importance of conspiracy to the Russian state. The use of conspiracy is not a newfound concept to the Putin regime, and, in fact, takes its roots in Imperial Russia following the Crimean War. Following Great Britain and France’s intervention in the conflict, the Russian state and elites started to identify and build the “Us vs Them” narrative, a conspiracy that has transcended centuries (Yablokov 2018, 15). Conspiracy was utilized by conservative elements in the government to better understand the liberal changes occurring under Tsar Nicholas II. These changes, most notably the abolishment of serfdom, were perceived as a way for the West to corrupt and destroy Russia (Yablokov 2018, 16). The binary world of the Bolsheviks marked a distinctive increase in the intensity of the “Us vs Them” conspiratorial thought, invoking beliefs that Soviet Union was a nation under siege from all sides. According to Yablokov, the post-war era following the defeat of Nazi Germany led to a mass proliferation of anti-West conspiracy (Yablokov 2018, 21). This rich and multi-faceted history of conspiratorial thinking laid the foundation for present day conspiracy within Putin’s Regime.

Yablokov further comments on the reasons behind current Kremlin decisions to invoke and spread conspiracy theory. He recognizes the Kremlin as the major instigator of anti-Western conspiracy as it continues to legitimize its own policy, domestic and abroad. Yet how does the

Kremlin disseminate this conspiracy? Yablokov pinpoints a specific media outlet that plays an instrumental role - *RT*¹. According to Yablokov, *RT*'s international coverage was more willing to offer prompt coverage on Navalny's poisoning than any domestic news sources, using humorous dismissals of the story to diminish its seriousness, followed by an attack on *Bellingcat*'s² journalistic integrity (Yablokov 2022, 101). The brazen and unverified publications by *RT*, and its sister network *Sputnik News*, often invokes the 'injustices' that Russia suffers from the West and attacks the legitimacy of political institutions while "claiming to be champions in the freedom of speech" (Yablokov 2022, 102). These claims are further supplemented by the staff's willingness to use conspiracy theories to discuss the present state of Russia. This continuum of conspiracy is present throughout Navalny's coverage in the period following his poisoning, setting the stage for understanding how Kremlin-controlled news sources formulate and present false narratives.

Scott Radnitz adds to Yablokov's work on conspiracy by emphasizing the presence and promulgation of conspiracy within the Russian Federation. According to Radnitz, conspiracy is used as both preemptive and reactive tool by the Kremlin. Preemptive forms of conspiracy aim to delegitimize threats against the regime's narrative while reactive conspiracies are promulgated when state propaganda falls short. (Radnitz 2021, 174). Russian state conspiracy takes a different form based on the party at fault. For example, incidents such as MH17³ and Russian election meddling led to the creation of conspiracies that utilized obfuscation to dilute Russian

¹ *RT*, formerly known as *Russia Today*, is a state-funded news organization that publishes in both Russian and English.

² *Bellingcat* was the first news organization to release an investigation into the how the Kremlin approved the poisoning of Alexei Navalny.

³ Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 (MA17) was shot down on July 17, 2014, while flying over Eastern Ukraine.

attribution, while in cases such as protests, where the Kremlin is not inherently at fault, the Putin regime creates a more logical consistent conspiratorial narrative (Radnitz 2021, 184; 2021, 185).

Navalny's tumultuous relationship with the Kremlin

Alexei Navalny, 45-year-old Russian lawyer, opposition leader and anti-corruption activist hailing from the Moscow suburb of Butyn, now sits within a Russian prison awaiting his nine-year term in a Russian penal colony. To an outsider it looks as if he is defeated, yet his morale seems high through his characteristically witty tweets.

“9 Years. Well, as the characters of my favorite TV series “The Wire” used to say: “You only do two days. That’s the day you go in and the day you come out” I even had a T-shirt with this slogan, but the prison authorities confiscated it, considering the print extremist (Reuters 2022).”

Navalny was not always a sidelined actor and, prior to his return to Russia, positioned himself as a formidable opponent to President Vladimir Putin. Dollbaum, Lallouet and Noble present a comprehensive history of Alexei Navalny and his career as a lawyer, activist, and politician. In 2007, the young lawyer began his career by buying minority shares in large Russian companies to access the annual consumer reports. This is where he begins to question the transparency of Russian companies and notices the blatant level of corruption within these private organizations. Most famously at the 2008 shareholder meeting of Russian oil giant Surgutneftegas; Navalny went on stage and asked the company’s management, “Who owns Surgtuneftegas?”, a line of questioning unheard of for one of the world’s most private oil companies (Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021, 21). This inquiry is reflective of Navalny’s future career, a career that would elevate him to the adversary of the untouchable, Vladimir Putin.

As a politician Alexei Navalny was able to gather enough support to demand respect from the Kremlin. His first and last time on the ballot came in the snap elections for the Mayoral position of Moscow in 2013. Initial polls had Navalny estimated to only receive 8% of the votes, and while he eventually lost the position, officially the young politician received 27.24% of the vote (Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021, 85). This was unexpected for a politician running on his own party and solidified him as a new leader of the Russian opposition.

Following his arrival onto the public stage, the Kremlin has had a tumultuous relationship with the anti-corruption lawyer. Despite Putin's tightening grip of the independent media landscape through the Yarovaya Law and Foreign Agents Act⁴ and the abandonment of the guise of democracy after the July 3 referendum⁵, Alexei Navalny continued to expose governmental corruption and even goes after Vladimir Putin himself (Troianovski 2019; Neuman 2020; Navalny 2020). Alexei Navalny's documentaries exposing governmental corruption have put the state in an awkward position. As Anastasia Kazun puts it, the media cannot simply ignore inconvenient issues, and must decide how to cover Alexei Navalny in the press. Historically, the Kremlin has decided to employ the old tactic of silence in their traditional forms of media, such as print and television, marked only by the occasional smear campaign of the opposition figure (Kazun 2019). We do not know the exact moment when the Kremlin ordered the hit on Alexei Navalny, or what was the final trigger that led to the Kremlin employing the tried-and-true tactic of assassinating the opposition, but Dollbaum et al. claim that in 2020 the Kremlin changed their

⁴ The Yarovaya Law and Foreign Agents Act are key pieces of legislation that repress independent media sources within Russia. The first forces any internet company operating within Russia to maintain their servers on Russian soil and allow the FSB unrestricted access to their servers. The Foreign Agents Act forces news sources that receive any form of foreign money to register as a Foreign Agent, limiting what they can publish without Kremlin retaliation. Retaliation that takes the form of raids, arrests, and closure of their news organizations.

⁵ Following this referendum, the Kremlin enacted sweeping constitutional changes including President Putin's ability to run for two more consecutive terms.

tactics towards Navalny and decided that it was time for him to be gone for good. (Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021, 172).

On August 20, 2020, Alexei Navalny was poisoned by a Novichok nerve agent on a flight from Tomsk to Moscow. The flight was grounded and Navalny was taken to a hospital in Omsk, eventually being evacuated by the German government to Charité hospital in Berlin to recover (Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021, 1–5). The attempt on Alexei Navalny’s life has solidified him in the pantheon of Russian opposition agents, yet he did not decide to simply live out his days abroad. In 2021 Navalny released a new film that exposed Putin himself and his personal engagement in governmental corruption (Navalny 2021). Shortly after the release of *Putin’s Palace*, Alexei Navalny returned to Russia and was arrested by Russian authorities, ultimately culminating in his most recent sentencing of nine years in a maximum-security penal colony (*The Moscow Times* 2022). Amidst an unlawful Russian invasion of Ukraine, Alexei Navalny has remained on the center stage of the Russian opposition and most recently has released a special CNN documentary that exposes the Kremlin’s direct involvement in his attempted assassination and his tragic fall from politician to prisoner (Roher 2022).

Case Selection and Preliminary Hypotheses

In the modern era, individuals have limitless access to more information than our predecessors could imagine. Our unlimited access puts states in a precarious position; their systems of control and governance were never meant to deal with a population that has such immediate connection with the rest of the world. These analog systems of governance, built for a different era, have undergone incredible amounts of strain as seen with the global population’s ability to mobilize at a moment’s notice. How can a state adapt to deal with the information

world? How can authoritarianism of the past transform to successfully control a population with knowledge of the freedoms experienced by others? These questions brought me to this thesis topic, as I tried to answer the question of how Russia under Vladimir Putin can modernize and control such a vast and heterogenous population. It was along this path that I encountered Alexei Navalny and his career as an activist, lawyer, and politician. This brave individual has sacrificed everything to fight against authoritarianism and corruption within his home country. As an American, I struggle to understand and relate to his willingness to launch himself against a state whose government has nonchalantly disposed of many men who stood in his shoes before him. Yet Navalny has been successful and gained support over the past decade. Why did the Kremlin allow him to gather this attention both domestic and abroad? Why not simply dispose of the troublesome element early in his career? It was this line of internal questioning that brought me to the realization that the Kremlin does not view Navalny as simply an opposition agent who threatens Putin's legitimacy, yet it views him as a tool. A figure that they can distort and mold through their propaganda to push their own agenda.

This study seeks to find out how the Kremlin uses opposition agents as their own personal propaganda tools. The following research project utilizes text as data methods to survey Kremlin propaganda regarding Alexei Navalny. Through this survey I expect to identify the methods and techniques used by the Kremlin to achieve the goals of their propaganda techniques. Prior to data collection, I developed initial hypotheses concerning how the Kremlin will portray its nemesis compared to how he is portrayed by independent organizations in both English and Russian language.

Russian state media portray Alexei Navalny in a more negative light than independent media sources. This portrayal is characterized by how each source refers to his position within the Russian political world.

Russian State media abstains from attributing the poisoning of Navalny to the Kremlin, instead blaming it on foreign actors. Independent media sources acknowledge the potential that the Kremlin was behind the attack.

Russian State media does not acknowledge the protests that followed Navalny's arrest, while independent media sources cover the demonstrations in their news cycle.

State media printed in Russian is more critical of the West than its English printed counterparts. News printed in Russian utilizes xenophobia of the West to fabricate and replicate news sources that English speaking audiences would find conspiratorial and offensive.

Methodology

Data Selection

In this study I chose to analyze a variety of Russian owned and operated news publications. Each publication is representative of a different aspect of Russian foreign looking media, a critical factor when looking for evidence of international Kremlin outlook. I further narrowed down my data selection to include news sources published in either Russian or English. Eventually I landed on three news companies, providing me with three separate datasets: *RT* (russian.rt.com), *Sputnik News* (sputniknews.com) and *RBC* (rbc.ru). *RT* is infamously regarded as a direct mouthpiece for Kremlin officials and is published in both Russian and English. Russian articles from *RT* are catered towards Russian speakers living

outside the Russian Federation. This places the *RT* in the Russian language, state-controlled category [see Figure 1]. *Sputnik News* is a state-owned news source that publishes in multiple languages targeting speakers outside of the Russian Federation. Their mission statement includes that *Sputnik News* covers global political and economic news targeting an international audience (sputniknews.com). For this research project, I chose to analyze English articles from *Sputnik News*, placing the source in the English language state-controlled category [see Figure 1]. The final news source chosen for this project is the independent, Russian-only publication *RBC* (RosBiznesConsulting). This media giant publishes on a wide range of topics, yet self-admittedly specializes in business and economic news. *RBC* was chosen as it is representative of an independent news source outside of Kremlin influence that caters to educated Russian speakers domestic and abroad. These factors place *RBC* in the Russian language section of the source selection matrix. [see Figure 1]

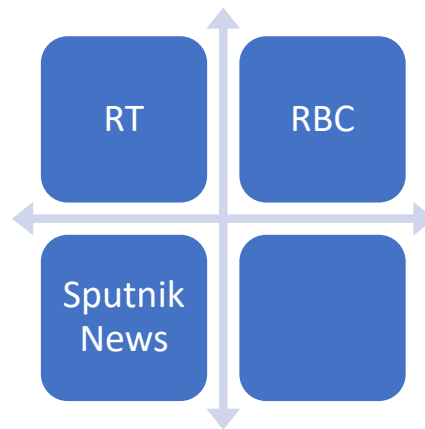


Figure 1: The x axis represents media control, with the far right as independent and the far left as government controlled. The y axis represents language, with Russian at the top and English at the bottom.

For this project I chose to set a data collection range between the dates August 20, 2020, and December 1, 2021. These dates were chosen to specify the period from Navalny's poisoning to when I completed data collection. During this period Navalny received higher than normal media coverage, allowing for the collection of a large diverse sample size across all three of my sources.

Finally, all the data collected and analyzed came from all articles falling under the search term "Navalny" and "Навальный" in English and Russian sources, respectively. I decided to use only his last name as opposed to the full name, Alexei Navalny, as I found that many articles did not refer to his first name and therefore fell out of the search parameters. The selection of Navalny allowed me to collect a more comprehensive and larger dataset.

Data Collection

Following the selection of the news sources and search parameters, I began the process of data collection. To collect news articles effectively and in an efficient manner, I wrote a web-scraping program through Python utilizing the extensions Selenium and Newspaper. This program acted as human user individually clicking on each news article and copying only the text into a separate .csv file. The results of this web scraping culminated into three separate data sets, one from each news source. Resulting .csv files included the link, title and text for each article falling in this period. *RT* yielded 1173 articles, *RBC* – 2225 articles and *Sputnik News* – 537 articles [See Figure 2]

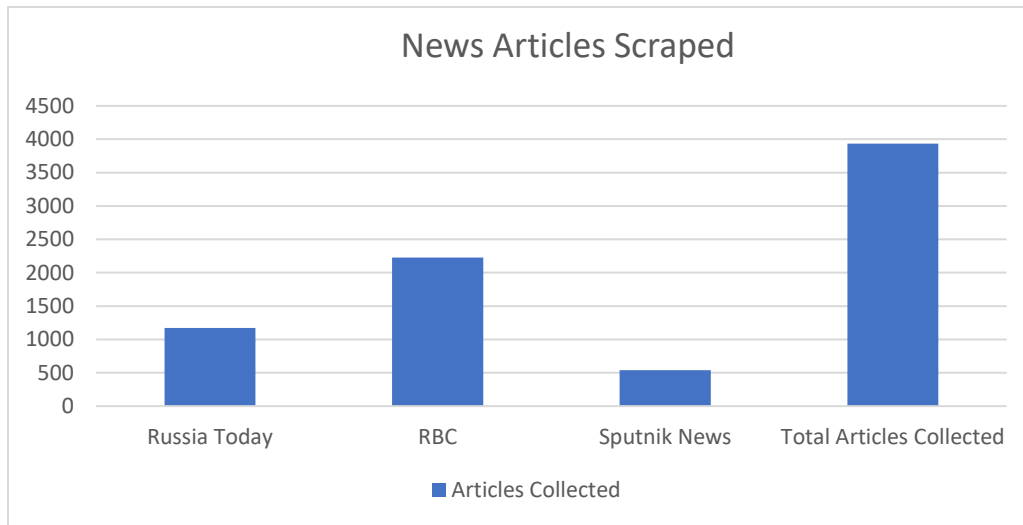


Figure 2

Following data collection, I began to manipulate the data utilizing NLP (natural language processing) techniques in Python. At this point I decided to split my datasets and analyze the titles and text separately, as this allowed me to gather insight and compare word frequencies present in titles and texts within the same news publication. The next step is to apply tokenization and define each feature, which in this case is each individual word from the dataset. One initial challenge was the tokenization and treatment of Russian text. Unlike English, Russian utilizes a case system in which each noun and adjective decline to that case and verbs conjugate to reflect person and tense. If untreated, it is impossible to gain accurate frequency counts for words due to the same word being counted differently depending on its case. To overcome this challenge, I implemented a process known as lemmatization and applied it to each dataset. This reverted all nouns and adjectives to their *lemma* form.⁶ To maintain consistency with dataset manipulation I further applied lemmatization to my English language datasets. Following lemmatization I continued the tokenization process, transforming each token to lowercase and removing all punctuation and symbols. This resulted a dataset of unformatted text. The next step

⁶ The *lemma* form of nouns, adjectives, and verbs is the nominative singular or infinitive form respectively.

was to remove all tokens that have no intrinsic meaning known as stopwords.⁷ Utilizing two premade stopword dictionaries, I removed all stopwords in both English and Russian. To remove any stopword that was overlooked by the dictionaries, I looked through the most frequent terms and extended the stopword dictionaries to include any terms or punctuation that was initially overlooked in the tokenization phase. The last step of data collection and manipulation was to pull the frequency of the top 40 unigrams and top 30 bigrams for each of the six datasets and plot them based on frequency, allowing me to visualize and compare each dataset.⁸ [See Appendix]

Limitations

The primary limitations of this study fall within the chosen news sources themselves. By only analyzing online news articles I am selectively excluding any television news, the most consumed media source within the Russian Federation. While I had kept an analysis of Russian television news in consideration, the task presented itself to be too daunting for a masters thesis and is more suited for a doctoral dissertation or larger research project. Other limitations and problems arise in the analysis of English documents, as documents published in English are not necessarily written by native English speakers. This can lead to inconsistencies when looking at word count, as it might not be as accurately reflective of opinion when compared to articles written by a native speaker. The final limitation is the amount of information to be gathered from word count itself. While proving to be a valuable metric in generating a comprehensive overview of the corpus, it is restrained by lacking potentially important context within each article. Due to this I recommend utilizing word frequency analysis alone to create a survey of the Russian

⁷ Stop words include conjugations, articles and other words that had no value to the greater understanding of these datasets.

⁸ Initially I looked through the top 100 terms and found that terms falling outside the top 40 and top 30 did not have a large enough representation to prove effective for my analysis.

propaganda sphere and a good starting point for deeper text as data analysis such as sentiment analysis and topic modeling.

Analysis

The first part of my analysis aims to determine the accuracy of my initial hypotheses that were established prior to data collection. I will utilize term frequency to generalize the response to the hypotheses, and then delve into specific articles to provide deeper insight into the validity of my hypotheses. Following this exploration into the initial hypotheses, this section will identify and analyze the distinct strategies utilized by the Kremlin in their attempt to transform Alexei Navalny into a propaganda tool.

Russian Language State Controlled Media vs Russian Language Independent Media.

Russian state media portrays Alexei Navalny in a more negative light than independent media sources. This portrayal is characterized by how each source refers to his position within the Russian political world.

Both Russian language state controlled and independent media sources, *RT*, *RBC*, and *Sputnik News*, provide valuable insight into the Kremlin propaganda machine both domestically and abroad. The first hypothesis relates to the overall opinion of Alexei Navalny presented by Russian state media. This is potentially the most difficult idea to prove as it is massive in scope and opinion is inherently subjective. One strategy to gauge this opinion is to look at the terms used to refer to Navalny himself. Alexei Navalny is a practicing lawyer and aspiring politician, yet in the Kremlin-influenced news sources he is not referred to as such. His anti-corruption organization is only acknowledged in circumstances where the news piece is criticizing its actions, or claiming it is a foreign agent acting against the Russian people (*RT* 2021c). The

Kremlin's propaganda machine instead chooses to diminish his importance within Russian society and repeatedly uses the term 'blogger' to refer to him, if they choose to refer to him by name at all (Batyayev 2021; Ekimenko 2021). In one instance, *RT* printed an interview transcript from Vladimir Putin. In this interview, the president refused to refer to Navalny by name, instead referring to him as "the patient" or "the man."⁹ Vladimir Putin is known to choose his words tactfully and deliberately. The use of these adjectives over Navalny's name reflect the Kremlin's continuing attempts to undermine Navalny's legitimacy and stifle his personal political ambitions. Putin's choice to abstain from saying Navalny's name is a conscious decision to not recognize the threat that Alexei Navalny poses to the Putin regime.

Unlike *RT*, *RBC* continuously refers to Alexei Navalny as a member of the legitimate Russian opposition. The results of my frequency analysis further fortify this support with the term "Opposition Leader, Alexei"¹⁰ being found at an extremely high frequency. After further inspection of individual articles, it is apparent that *RBC* uses the term 'opposition leader' as Navalny's preposition, over the Kremlin favorite, 'blogger' (*RBK* 2021b). Russian independent news further legitimizes Navalny and his anti-corruption mission by focusing on his team at the Anti-Corruption Foundation. Unlike *RT*, who simply refers to FBK¹¹ as Navalny's extremist organization, *RBC* covers the actors and leaders in the organization and focuses primarily on their persecution by the Kremlin and other Russian law enforcement. For example, *RBC* wrote pieces that highlight the director of the FBK, Ivan Zhdanov and the difficulties he experienced after being placed on the FSB watchlist (*RBK* 2021c). *RBC* further focuses on minor agents in Navalny's organization, often questioning the constitutionality of their arrests and the repeated

⁹ Translation my own. Original text: "пациент" "человек"

¹⁰ Translation my own. Original Text: "оппозиционер, алексей"

¹¹ Фонд Борьбы с Коррупцией (Anti-Corruption Foundation)

decision for the police to detain them without evidence or charges (RBK 2020b). While RBC does not expressly come out to support Navalny, and makes every effort to remain neutral, their decision of what to cover expressly portrays a dramatically different angle of Navalny than that of RT's coverage of their favorite, 'blogger.'

Russian State media abstains from attributing the poisoning of Navalny to the Kremlin, instead blaming it on foreign actors. Independent media sources acknowledge the potential that the Kremlin was behind the attack.

In Western media, the Kremlin, and sometimes even Putin himself are attributed to the poisoning of Navalny by the Novichok nerve agent. Initially, I expected that the Kremlin would first deny the instance of poisoning and then further deny any attribution of the 'alleged' poisoning. After looking at the results and pulling out specific articles that deal with Navalny's poisoning, I can confidentially say that my assumptions were only partially correct. RT consistently published speculation behind German doctors finding traces of a Novichok nerve agent, constantly claiming that German authorities refused to provide substantial evidence for such an event. RT embarked on a full-scale disinformation campaign regarding the poisoning. At the bottom of many articles, specifically dealing with Nord Stream 2, RT contributors included a small section on the 'alleged' poisoning of Navalny. In every one of these small sections (often copied word for word from earlier articles), RT questioned and denied the possibility that Navalny was poisoned. This denial and claim of Russian innocence parallels Putin's historic strategy to claim innocence before quickly changing the topic of conversation at hand (Snyder 2018a, 164, 180). In some cases, these small sections included different stories on what happened and provided 'proof' of Russia's innocence. These claims often were isolated incidents and did not see the light of day after their initial publishing. One example of these claims is that

Belarussian intelligence services intercepted a phone call between Berlin and Warsaw, where it was disclosed that the evidence of poisoning was falsified (*RT* 2020a). In all the articles published afterward there was no follow up on these Lukashenko's claims.

Following the German-led investigation into the poisoning of Navalny, the international community called upon the Russian Federation, and specifically Vladimir Putin, to acknowledge the poisoning and launch their own internal investigation. While the RF launched a brief investigation that unsurprisingly was resolved with no findings, they were quick to attribute the 'alleged' poisoning to international actors. This directly contradicts my initial hypothesis that the Kremlin would abstain from placing any attribution on foreign actors, as my initial thinking was that any attribution would legitimize the events and solidify the fact that Navalny was poisoned. I previously mentioned Putin's historic strategy of denial and deferral, which was particularly apparent in the annexation of Crimea (Snyder 2018a, 181). Regarding the poisoning of Navalny, *RT* began to attribute this event to the United States and create the narrative of an American conspiracy; a plot that would increase US oil and natural gas exports to Europe at the expense of NordStream 2. As experts in propaganda, *RT* quickly found explicit quotes from former US President Donald Trump that condemned the construction of the pipeline. Citing the former president, *RT* showed a precedent for this anti-Russian behavior and consistently alleged attribution of the poisoning to the United States (*RT* 2020b). Through conspiracy, a method of disinformation continuously used by the Kremlin, Russian authorities captured and transformed a narrative that not only proclaims their innocence but further invokes anti-Western sentiments among its readers.

Russian independent news holds a different attitude to the poisoning of Navalny. Unlike the Kremlin attributing the events to the West and denying their happening altogether, *RBC's*

coverage of the event was neutral, comprehensive and the new source abstained from blaming any individual party. *RBC* further presented the facts and interviews with specific doctors from both countries, Russia and Germany, specialists from OPCW¹² and representatives from both FBK and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*RBK* 2020a). Simply put, it was non-biased coverage that one would expect from a reputable news establishment. While *RBC*'s coverage of the poisoning does not come at any surprise, it highlights the stark contrast between Russian independent and state-controlled news, emphasizing the extreme levels of propaganda exhumed by the state apparatus.

Russian State media does not acknowledge the protests that followed Navalny's arrest, while independent media sources cover the demonstrations in their news cycle.

Following the arrest of Alexei Navalny, protests erupted throughout many Russian cities, leading to the largest number of detainments in modern Russian history (*Human Rights Watch* 2021). Despite the mass demonstrations protesting the government's decision to arrest Alexei Navalny, state-run news organizations simply avoided covering the protests; evidence of which is found within the lack of mentions of the term "protest"¹³ in *RT*. The only mentions of these demonstrations are framed in a negative light, referring to the movements as "unauthorized actions"¹⁴ and condemning these protests as evidence of hooliganism. These demonstrations further led to criminal cases on the charges of the use of violence against a representative of the authorities, deliberate destruction or damage to property, hooliganism, and obstruction of the

¹² Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

¹³ Translation my own. Original text: "протест"

¹⁴ Translation my own. Original text: "несанкционированные акции"

movement of vehicles and pedestrians, endangering the life and safety of citizens (*RT* 2021a).¹⁵ While these protests were in fact mentioned and covered by the state-controlled media, it is only through a definitively negative light.

State coverage of the protests often deflects away from the protests themselves in favor of implicating some level of Western influence. One case that was consistently repeated throughout the news sources is the involvement of Swedish, German, and Polish diplomats in the demonstrations (Katkov 2021). Following the protests these diplomats were summarily expelled from the country. Western nations involved in the scandal condemned Russia for the expulsions, blaming them on using the incident to increase tensions between Russia and the West (Times 2021). *RT*'s coverage of the protests following Navalny's arrest attempt to strip any legitimacy from peaceful demonstrations, and further implicate the West in any form of anti-Kremlin activity.

In contrast to *RT*'s attempts to ignore or deflect from the events of January 2021, *RBC* focused on the mass protests. This is evident in the high word frequencies found within my analysis. The word counts for "Protest"¹⁶, "Actions, Protest"¹⁷, "Actions, January"¹⁸ and "Unsanctioned, Actions"¹⁹ were disproportionately high in the word frequencies, indicating a strong focus on these events by the news organization. Upon further inspection of specific articles that dealt with the protests offered raw footage of protestors fighting with the police, resisting arrest and the use of force by the Russian police force (*RBK* 2021a). In general, on this

¹⁵ Translation my own. Original text: «Применение насилия в отношении представителя власти», «Умышленные уничтожение или повреждение имущества», «Хулиганство», «Воспрепятствование движению транспортных средств и пешеходов, ставящее под угрозу жизнь и безопасность граждан»

¹⁶ Translation my own. Original Text: "протест"

¹⁷ Translation my own. Original Text: "акции, протест"

¹⁸ Translation my own. Original Text: "акции, январь"

¹⁹ Translation my own. Original Text: "несанкционированные, акции"

topic *RBC* stays consistent with its journalistic integrity and holds an unbiased attitude when writing on the incidents, supporting my initial hypothesis that *RBC* would cover the events unlike their government-controlled counterpart, *RT*.

Russian Language State Controlled Media vs English Language State Controlled Media.

State media printed in Russian is more critical of the West than its English printed counterparts. News printed in Russian utilizes xenophobia of the West to fabricate and replicate news sources that English speaking audiences would find conspiratorial and offensive.

One of the primary goals behind choosing various sources in different languages is to gauge the impact that target audience has on Kremlin propaganda. Almost immediately it became apparent that Alexei Navalny's coverage differs by government-controlled news sources and language of publication. *RT*, who targets a Russian speaking audience is aggressive in their coverage of the United States and liberally throws out accusations of US involvement in Russian affairs. This is primarily seen within the coverage of the NordStream2 pipeline. *RT*, without evidence, directly ties the United States to the strained relationship between Russia and the EU following the arrest of Navalny. They blame the United States for using the situation of Navalny's poisoning to exert pressure on Germany to buy American natural gas and cripple the Russian economy(*RT* 2021b). *RT* further goes onto attack American sanctions, making bizarre historical allegories to US sanctions in the Soviet Union and citing US economic imperialism, even stating that the Russian people are sick of rubbery American chicken (Shafraan 2021).²⁰ As if these opinion pieces were not callous enough, *RT* further goes on to consistently question the

²⁰ Chicken as a symbol of American imperialism is reflective of the "Bush's Legs" initiative implemented in 1990.

sovereignty of Germany itself, claiming it as a vassal state or tributary of the United States and Great Britain, claims that would certainly not progress Russo-German efforts towards completing the NordStream2 pipeline (Shafran 2020).

Unlike its Russian language counterpart, state-controlled news sources published in English are much more diplomatic in their coverage of the United States and Germany. This is most notable in the coverage of the NordStream2 Pipeline. *Sputnik News* articles under the headline “Navalny” are quick to shift the focus to Russo-German cooperation in the face of US opposition to this partnership. In these stories, Navalny is used as a tool to shift the focus of the English readership to garner support for the completion of NordStream2 and paint the United States as the primary driver behind deteriorating Russo-German relations. Unlike the Russian sources which paint Germany as simply a US vassal, *Sputnik News* consistently commends Angela Merkel and describes her as a clear-headed leader who promotes Russo-German cooperation, with no mentions of her condemnation of Russia following the poisoning of Navalny (*Deutsche Welle* 2020; Serebriakova 2020).

Upon further examination, my findings confirm my initial hypothesis that Russian language state-sources are inherently more brash than their English counterparts. Both English and Russian language sources use Navalny simply as a tool, a jumping off point into the true ambitions behind their propaganda. While both languages use Navalny as a segue into other topics, it was surprising to see the vast difference behind the language and tone used in both publications. Russian published sources were much more callous, opinionated, and aggressive than their English counterpart. I speculate that this is due to the target audience of each publication. *RT* looks to push Kremlin propaganda onto the Russian diaspora and domestic Russian populations, groups of people that typically lack access to non-Russian governmental

organizations. This gives RT the freedom to publish misinformation which little to no backlash, as opposed to *Sputnik News* which much be more diplomatic when reaching their English-speaking readership.

Strategies of Kremlin Propaganda

Through this exploration of Kremlin coverage on Alexei Navalny, I was able to pinpoint and pull out three distinct strategies that the Kremlin employed in their propagandizing mission. It is important to understand that these three techniques are not found in unique instances or articles but are craftily interwoven into all Russian propaganda. The three techniques are as follows:

- 1) Deflection
- 2) Conspiracy
- 3) Slander

I define deflection as the effort for the Kremlin to utilize a topic as a jumping off point to another topic that fits their own personal agenda with the goal of confusing the readership and diminishing the importance of the original topic. This tactic was ubiquitous in any coverage of Alexei Navalny following his poisoning. Almost every article on *RT* and *Sputnik News* under the tag line “Navalny” (in English and Russian respectively) was not actually about Navalny. The typical layout was a small introduction mentioning the poisoning and Navalny’s name, followed by a picture of the NordStream2 pipeline under construction and an article emphasizing the importance of the NordStream2 and the potential US sanctions. This decision is not incidental, it is strictly to deflect attention away from Alexei Navalny himself. Readers click a headline about Navalny’s poisoning and end up reading about the great economic achievements of the NordStream2, or the continuous threat of US sanctions in their attempt to destroy Russia, with

little to no mention of Navalny's health and condition. It was as if the writers of these articles are under strict instructions to write on Alexei Navalny without writing about Alexei Navalny.

Another similar example is the use of media within the state-controlled news sources. After randomly selecting around fifty articles from my corpus of *RT*, I was only able to find a single picture of Alexei Navalny. Every other picture was a cycle of five or six construction photos of the pipeline, Angela Merkel, or Russian foreign ministers. Once again, this conscious decision to avoid showing the reader a picture of Alexei Navalny in an article with Navalny in the headline is purely to pull the reader's attention away from the opposition figure, effectively redirecting that attention to what the Kremlin deems important. The constant deliberate stream of articles under the headline "Navalny" that do little to talk about Navalny is a direct indicator for the Kremlin's desire to deflect away from problematic topics, shedding light on one cog in the larger propaganda machine.

Conspiracy, the tried-and-true mode of propaganda, is interwoven into the Kremlin's narrative on Alexei Navalny following his poisoning. In my text analysis I was able to locate a recurring conspiracy: the United States and in particular, Donald Trump, are responsible for the positioning of Alexei Navalny in their efforts to destroy future Russian economic prosperity. These claims have no legitimate backing yet continue to portray Russia as the victim of a Western cabal set on its destruction. Throughout this affair, the Kremlin continued to use conspiracy that falls in line with the Kremlin's anti-Western narrative.

Smaller conspiracies continued to supplement the greater narrative: the US orchestrated Navalny's poisoning. These conspiracy theories often came in the form of one-off claims and were subsequently dropped. Examples of such conspiracies are Lukashenko's claim that he intercepted a phone call confirming the CIA involvement in Navalny's poisoning, or that the

German government itself planted the water bottles that contained evidence of Novichok. Sometimes these minor claims were followed up in subsequent articles, but overall, they peter out. While the articles almost never cite any legitimate source material for these minor conspiracies, the articles are an effective form of clickbait that follow a single pattern: slightly differing repetitive stories that all result in promoting a single overarching conspiracy – the Western cabal set on destroying Russia.

The final strategy is the use of slander by state-controlled media sources. I define slander as an attempt to attack actors, states, individuals, and institutions, with the sole purpose of diminishing legitimacy. These often-petty attacks typically have no credible backing and are aimed purely at damaging the reputation of their targets. Slander was continuously used in Kremlin news following Navalny's poisoning, referring to protestors as hooligans, Alexei Navalny as a simple blogger, and the German federation as a US vassal state. Language plays an important role in slander as each publication tailors its news to its readership. For example, articles published in Russian were particularly critical and quick to slander German and American institutions, politicians, and governments, while English publications typically only resorted to general anti-Western sentiment. Out of all the strategies the use of slander is the most likely to invoke the emotions of the consumer, promulgating xenophobia, the vilification of the West and feelings of Russian victimhood.

Conclusion

Over the course of this study, I aimed to answer the overarching question of how the Kremlin was able to transform Alexei Navalny from an opposition figure into their own personal propaganda tool. This was achieved in four steps: Create a corpus of news articles on the topic of

Alexei Navalny. Analyze the most frequent terms in this corpus to create a survey of Navalny's media coverage. Delve into individual articles across each news source to discover how state-controlled and independent media differ in their coverage of Navalny, and finally use these differences to locate distinctive tactics used to create and disseminate propaganda.

When I began this project, I thought that Navalny's coverage would be limited in state-controlled media sources, but I was quickly proven wrong. *RT* and *Sputnik News* published articles daily on Alexei Navalny from the time of his poisoning to almost a full year after his arrest. Whether Navalny is releasing a documentary accusing Putin, or simply sitting in prison, the "Firehose of Falsehood" is always flowing, spitting out false narratives interwoven with unverified conspiracy theories and slandering their enemies, with the goal of pulling the reader's attention away from the Kremlin's nemesis. Recently I was watching Navalny's CNN documentary, when someone turned to me inquiring as to why Navalny was still around after all these years. Why not get rid of Navalny before anyone knows his name? To answer this question, we must turn to Snyder's politics of eternity, an artificially created dimension where the Kremlin controls the truth, distorting what is real and what is not. It is only here that the state can look to recognize their nemesis as an opportunity, a tool to push their own agenda, to continue their modern day "Twilight Zone."

The application of text as data is new in the field of political science. This project opens the door for future research and application of more advanced text as data methods, such as sentiment analysis and topic modeling. The integration of these methods with traditional qualitative analysis can reimagine how we look at opposition agents and more clearly view the Kremlin's relationship with them. This project was further limited to an analysis of Alexei Navalny in a small timeframe. If this period and data set were expanded, it would be possible to

track how coverage of Alexei Navalny has changed over time and at what points he receives more attention from Kremlin sources. These points of time should be further compared to larger domestic and international events to see the affects of external pressure on Kremlin propaganda. Finally, Alexei Navalny is not a one-off opposition figure. He comes from a deep history of Russian opposition agents and is an integral part in the larger narrative of Kremlin opposition.

Propaganda is everywhere and increasingly difficult to separate from legitimate news sources. As Americans, we emphasize the importance behind the freedom of information and fight against censorship. While this is a foundational part of the American identity, it opens our country to potentially subversive elements from hostile states. The identification of Kremlin propaganda techniques in this study emphasizes the Kremlin's determined goal to create misinformation for audiences domestic and abroad. I suggest that this study be applied to any potential policies that promote journalistic integrity and fight against the outsourcing of malicious propaganda, a Russian export that has increasingly infiltrated and threatens foreign institutions.

Alexei Navalny is a tragic figure, his bravery, and efforts to fight against authoritarianism must not go in vain. The Kremlin took this figure and attempted to mold him into their own propaganda tool, but they made one fatal flaw: their failed assassination. This blunder propelled Alexei Navalny to the forefront of international consciousness, galvanizing international support for his amnesty. The Kremlin's failure opened a new opportunity for Navalny, one that he has capitalized on as a Sakharov Prize winner and his namesake documentary winning the Sundance Film Festival. Alexei Navalny has joined the pantheon of great Russian opposition leaders, a position well-deserved.

Over the course of this study, we learned how the Kremlin propagandizes its opposition agents. Through the tactful blend of deflection, conspiracy and slander, the state-controlled news sources attempt to neutralize what they deem threatening and mold it into a tool, whose sole purpose is to advance the ultimate goals of the Putin regime. We live in an era where access to information has made it impossible for the regime to ignore uncomfortable incidents and its perceived threats. This study illuminates the modern tactics that the Kremlin employs to deal with controversial and potentially destabilizing events and figures. It is critical for the Western observers to understand these tactics to predict the next steps of an increasingly unpredictable Putin regime.

Appendix

Empirical Findings: Word Frequency

RT – Russian (1173 Articles) (08/20/2020 – 12/01/2021) (Search Term – “Навальный”)

TITLES			
Unigram	Frequency	Bigram	Frequency
навалный	675	ситуация, навалный	152
россия	284	северный, поток	55
ситуация	191	мид, россия	41
прокомментировать	135	санкция, против	37
санкция	119	против, россия	37
фрг	98	навалный, мид	31
мид	97	'изза', 'ситуация'	31
дело	81	прокомментировать, ситуация	30
против	72	дело, навалный	29
заявлять	70	отравлени', навалный	27
сша	65	инцидент, навалный	23
изза	65	навалный, россия	23
суд	60	новый, санкция	22
фбк	58	санкция, изза	22
поток	58	ситуация, вокруг	21
новый	55	дело, клевета	21
северный	55	вокруг, навалный	20

рассказывать	51	штаб, навалальный	18
германия	51	россия, изза	17
путин	47	глава, мид	15
называть	46	россия, навалальный	15
призывать	45	прокомментировать, заявление	15
заявление	44	кремль, прокомментировать	14
лавров	43	изза, навалальный	14
озхо	41	дело, против	13
оценивать	40	алексей, навалальный	13
глава	39	санкция, сша	13
врач	39	отношение, россия	13
кремль	39	вводить, санкция	13
москва	37	фбк, навалальный	12
запрос	34		
захаров	33		
отношение	32		
отравление	32		
отвечать	31		
запад	28		
клевета	26		
песок	26		
меркель	25		
инцидент	24		

ТЕХТ			
Unigram	Frequency	Bigram	Frequency
навальный	5057	алексей, навалный	1669
россия	3916	северный, поток	569
алексей	1832	борьба, коррупция	324
российский	1765	ситуация, алексей	317
дело	1689	мид, россия	311
год	1681	фонд, борьба	306
свой	1629	ппо, слово	303
заявлять	1558	птакже, тема	287
ситуация	1337	иностраннный, дело	271
германия	1336	ситуация, навалный	266
весь	1329	иностраннный, агент	260
страна	1157	риа, новость	259
москва	1126	ситуация, вокруг	251
отношение	1118	отношение, россия	250
человек	1100	уголовный, дело	242
санкция	1052	министерство, юстиция	238
вопрос	945	решение, министерство	230
говорить	923	юстиция, рф	230
решение	920	агент, решение	229

сказать	915	глава, мид	227
сша	864	выполнять, функция	224
организация	829	функция, иностранный	223
отмечать	824	санкция, против	223
мид	817	официальный, представитель	219
слово	813	вещество, группа	215
наш	812	реестр, нко	214
президент	798	нко, выполнять	214
глава	787	включать, реестр	213
сторонна	772	vladimir, putin	205
стовиться	765	штаб, навальный	204
время	752		
сообщать	717		
рф	682		
фонд	679		
новый	669		
европейский	662		
иностраннй	651		
против	641		
суд	635		
вещество	630		

RBC (РБК) – Russian (2225 Articles) (08/20/2020 – 12/01/2021) (Search Term – “Навальный”)

TITLES			
Unigram	Frequency	Bigram	Frequency
навалный	933	главный, новость	96
россия	302	новость, рбк	95
дело	200	отравление, навалный	93
акция	195	дело, навалный	68
изза	185	санкция, против	65
санкция	181	акция, протест	49
заявлять	172	против, россия	49
москва	161	изза, навалный	47
суд	150	штаб, навалный	45
сообщать	147	поддержка, навалный	44
называть	134	новый, санкция	37
митинг	127	северный, поток	36
сша	119	ситуация, навалный	33
рбк	118	главное, ночь	27
путин	117	главное, день	27
против	111	акция, поддержка	27
отравление	107	nord, stream	26
главный	107	россия, изза	26
новость	98	навалный, кремль	25

протест	97	санкция, изза	24
мид	93	сми, узнавать	24
задерживать	88	акция, январь	24
глава	87	санкция, сша	23
кремль	87	правозащитник, сообщать	23
новый	81	изза, отравление	22
главное	78	уголовный, дело	22
петербург	69	москва, задерживать	20
день	69	навальный, навальный	19
германия	68	навальный, песок	19
отвечать	67	заявлять, отсутствие	18
фбк	61		
песок	56		
поддержка	54		
байден	52		
полиция	52		
объяснять	50		
лавров	50		
врач	49		
штаб	48		
фрг	48		

ТЕХТ			
Unigram	Frequency	Bigram	Frequency
навалный	5582	алексей, навалный	1897
россия	3622	оппозиционер, алексей	756
год	2405	санкция, против	377
алексей	2152	уголовный, дело	369
сообщать	2025	ппо, слово	359
заявлять	1964	акция, протест	358
дело	1907	риа, новость	321
рбк	1789	vladimir, putin	288
москва	1715	борьба, коррупция	273
российский	1625	северный, поток	267
суд	1565	фонд, борьба	262
человек	1543	отравление, навалный	255
акция	1461	дмитрий, песок	245
оппозиционер	1450	несогласованный, акция	244
свой	1282	право, человек	242
санкция	1255	несанкционированный, акция	241
сша	1194	говориться, сообщение	235
сказать	1131	штаб, навалный	234
президент	1123	акция, поддержка	220
слово	1115	против, россия	218
отношение	1065	ст, ук	214

отравление	1029	президент, россия	208
страна	996	сообщать, рбк	195
время	963	палексей, навальный	194
организация	935	отношение, россия	193
против	921	иностраннный, дело	191
весь	898	районный, суд	190
германия	881	ива, рош	189
январь	876	экстремистский, организация	185
глава	861	овд, инфо	181
власть	835		
задерживать	828		
новый	820		
становиться	794		
решение	789		
данные	778		
сотрудник	766		
отмечать	753		
вопрос	713		
проходить	704		

Sputnik News – English (537 Articles) (08/20/2020 – 12/01/2021) (Search Term – “Navalny”)

TITLES			
Unigram	Frequency	Bigram	Frequency
navalny	259	nord, stream	59
russia	154	navalny, case	55
russian	96	alexei, navalny	21
us	88	foreign, ministry	16
sanctions	71	foreign minister	14
case	66	opposition, figure	13
nord	59	sanctions, russia	12
stream	59	russia, sanctions	11
moscow	56	figure, navalny	11
eu	56	alleged, poisoning	10
german	50	russia, foreign	10
biden	47	russian, opposition	10
foreign	44	russia, navalny	9
germany	42	navalny, poisoning	9
berlin	42	anti, russia	8
new	37	new, sanctions	8
putin	34	charite, hospital	8
Kremlin	29	uis, sanctions	7
poisoning	26	unauthorised, rallies	7

calls	23	moscow, court	6
alexei	21	state, department	6
lavrov	21	eu, sanctions	6
opcw	20	state, depart	6
ministry	19	poisoning, navalny	6
state	19	sanctions, navalny	6
claims	18	navalny, treated	6
alleged	18	probe, navalny	5
minister	18	russian, embassy	5
opposition	18	human, rights	5
hospital	15	anti, russian	5
video	15		
anti	14		
west	14		
uk	13		
court	13		
situation	13		
ambassador	13		
figure	13		
unauthorised	13		
investigation	12		

TEXT			
Unigram	Frequency	Bigram	Frequency
navalny	275	alexei, navalny	77
russian	256	nord, stream	58
russia	184	opposition, figure	57
us	136	russian, opposition	51
sanctions	97	foreign, ministry	36
foreign	95	russian, foreign	35
german	94	figure, alexei	33
moscow	94	alexey, navalny	30
alexei	78	foreign, minister	27
opposition	72	united, states	23
case	66	navalny, case	21
germany	62	alleged, poisoning	21
nord	59	sanctions, russia	19
stream	59	joe, biden	18
poisoning	59	us, president	16
figure	58	dimitry, peskov	16
ministry	57	european, union	16
president	57	german, government	14
eu	55	vladimir, putin	14
new	53	spokesman, dimitry	14
european	49	joins, us	13

government	41	president, joe	13
biden	40	emergency, landing	13
state	39	secretary, state	12
omsk	38	first, hour	12
berlin	37	city, omsk	12
minister	36	charite, hospital	12
alleged	35	us, sanctions	11
one	34	stream, gas	11
sputniknews	33	gas, pipeline	11
hospital	33		
alexey	32		
project	32		
putation	31		
first	31		
united	31		
opcw	29		
evidence	29		
political	29		
day	29		

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