Title: Glasnost 2.0 or Cyber Curtain? Web-based Strategies of Political Communication in Contemporary Russia

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Recent world events have shown that new media technologies are neither "democratic" nor "authoritarian" by nature or design. Depending on a variety of factors – cultural, political, and technological – they have the capacity to both aid and suppress revolution. That being said, Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, social networking and crowdsourcing sites nearly always begin as alternative spaces and, as such, naturally attract oppositional voices. In the United States political blogging grew out of frustration with mainstream coverage of the television and print media for being (from either left or right) too "mainstream." This has especially been the case in Russia, where Vladimir Putin and associates have maintained tight control over print media and broadcast television especially. Be it in the transformation of the ruling United Russia party into the "Party of Swindlers and Thieves," in government-sponsored watchdog sites launched in the wake of mass demonstrations, or in behind-the-scenes hacking and "bot" attacks, at key moments in the 2011–2012 election cycle the RuNet has been at the center of political maneuvering. This paper examines the rhetorical and technological anatomy of a variety of such episodes and initiatives to reveal competing visions of the internet's role in contemporary Russian politics. Looking at a variety of case studies, I suggest the models often rely on different types of public political communication and employ different technological and rhetorical strategies to promote their views – on glasnost, on public expression, and on the rightful place of the internet in these processes. Particularly as the Russian internet continues to grow and compete with mainstream broadcast media for the public eye, how public virtual space comes to be designed will have a considerable impact on the political language – and, indeed, the polity itself – in years to come.