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## ***A valuation approach to the Russian liberal establishment consolidation***

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**Abstract:** *The article studies contemporary Russian liberal establishment from the point of view of the main actors' propensity to consolidate. The authors identify distinguishing features of liberalism in Russia that determine the possible trends of cohesive interactions between the key actors and conclude that the main driver of consolidation is the protest and opposition to the current regime which is supported by the majority of population who tend to stigmatize the liberal activists due to that reason. The evidence of relatedness fluctuation is derived using the linkage index, introduced by the authors. The index is calculated using the results of actors' discourse analysis based on social networks data (Twitter): mutual mentions and their contextual sentiments are taken to weigh pairs of actors regarding their unanimity or contradiction. Dynamic interpretation of calculated indexes of consolidation in the two broad periods, different in levels of information pressure from the mainstream media, provides evidence of consolidation change, and allows to identify key drivers of cohesion and attributable followers. The authors apply social network analysis techniques to verify the findings and to determine tiers of key liberal actors and their clusters. Concluding remarks provide interpretation of empiric study results and links to further development of consolidation research methodology.*

**Keywords:** *Russian liberalism; consolidation; liberal establishment; linkage index; measure of consolidation*

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## Introduction

Liberal values in developed countries are uniform to greater extent, but such a uniformity led to the degrade of liberalism as a movement in the West, since “liberal tag” gets more often in use by different sorts of opposition and even by the radical wing of policymakers like nationalists. The mentioned degrade, however, did not affect Russia, the political forces of which have less in common with true liberal ideas: during the 2016 parliamentary election campaign “Yabloko” was the best of all the liberal-dedicated parties to gain only 2% of the vote, as well as the highest ever result reached by a liberal party in Russia was far back in 1993 with Yabloko’s 7.86% of the vote.

Since liberalism in Russia is synonymic to opposition, the liberal parties are thought to be suppressed by the ruling party and its satellites, as well as by different executive bodies. The main purpose of pressing – hypothetically – is to eliminate the chances for liberal establishment consolidation, thus minimizing its chances for any significant representation in the national or regional parliaments. Mass media, especially those controlled by the government, are used as an instrument for stigmatization of liberal movement leaders. We distinguish two waves of media propaganda and assume that the “media-pressing” plays a significant role in making the liberal establishment cooperate and consolidate or, vice versa, to estrange or disintegrate.

*The research hypothesis:* political consolidation of heterogeneous actors sharing the same values exists, can be distinguished and quantified. *The objective* is to determine and measure the relatedness (degree of consolidation) between the actors of liberal establishment.

Design of the research includes literature review and establishing a proper theoretic background, determining the concept and factors of political actors’ propensity to consolidate or disintegrate. Theoretic study is followed by empiric research that required the introduction of consolidation and estrangement quantifiers. We selected the key actors of the Russian liberal establishment and ran a panel content-analysis of their messages in social networks (Twitter) containing mutual mentions and contextual sentiment (i.e. positive, neutral or negative connotation). Individual and common consolidation indices for the different periods were calculated afterwards to verify the progress (or absence of it) in the liberal wing consolidation. We used Social Network Analysis techniques to identify actors who drive consolidation or estrangement, as well as the most important agents of influence, and to measure their relatedness in terms of clusters identification to establish the most probable “pivot of consolidation”.

### 1. Literature review: the conceptual basis for the Russian liberal establishment consolidation studies

In different countries and different time periods liberalism was understood diversely. In the contemporary United States, for example, the Democratic Party claims to be the liberal one, but at the same time they advocate an increase in

taxation, a progressive income tax rate, an increase in the amount of social support provided by the state, and an increase in the number of regulations (Ohanyan & Androniceanu, 2017). All this contradicts the classical understanding of the liberalism back in times to the John Locke ages. Likewise, in Russia liberalism has acquired several new forms; it tracks back to the late Soviet years of “perestroika”, when the word “liberals” was used to tag the opposition of the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union while the party bonzas were denoted as “conservators” for rejecting any reforms. Such an interpretation of liberalism is still actual in the modern Russia: liberal is synonymic to opposition both in words and deeds (White, 2013).

The discrepancy between essential concepts of the liberal ideology and its reflection in the Russian discourse is being widely discussed by researchers. Some provide proof for the mismatch between theoretic background of liberalism and its reflection in Russia indicating the absence of sound and comprehensive liberalism but the presence of “liberal” tag-holders who belong to a separate social group, which is commonly associated to the stereotype of the militant idealists.... ignoring the fact that democratic freedom is a special model of human relations, but not a state of mind (Revyakina, 2013) (Ciobanu at al., 2019). E. Chebankova, as well, notes that Russian liberalism is often studied, understood, and presented through the prism of the radical liberal opposition [and] must be studied through the prism of two competing trends – moderate pluralist and monistic radical (Chebankova, 2014). This latter logic is shared by the foreign researchers (. D. White – an expert in Russian liberalism studies – derives similar conclusions on the empirical expression of the Russian liberalism and provides a possible explanation why the things are like they are: “Russian political culture is incompatible with notions of liberalism and democracy” (White, 2013). Still, the multitude of D. White’s papers provides distinct and clear vision of the matter in focus, as well as initiates an intense discussion that resulted in E. Chebankova’s conclusion that Russian liberalism is a family of ideologies rather than an integral standalone ideology – neatly according to Gray’s attitude towards it. Just as liberal regimes cannot be identified by a range of essential properties, so liberal theorists and thinkers are not alike in having common ideas (Kubak et al., 2018). It is a basic error to search for the essence of something as heterogeneous and discontinuous as the liberal tradition (Gray, 2000).

In today’s general discourse, the liberal movement in Russia denotes the current regime’s active opposition which proclaims and promotes the so-called “Western values” like parliamentarism, the supremacy of law, a market economy based on private property, minority rights protection, tolerance, multiculturalism, etc. (Rubinskiy, 2009), (Vasile, Androniceanu, 2018). In this study, the “liberal establishment” denotes the leaders or actors of the so-called “non-systemic opposition” who actively declare parliamentary and/or presidential ambitions: the actors discussed and described in (Laruelle, 2014) or (White, 2013). Therefore, our study will not consider several significant actors, e.g. A. Kudrin, the former Minister of Finance, whose ideological standings and public discourse are close to

liberal platform (Prime. Business News Agency, 2011), since he disclaimed his parliamentary and presidential ambitions.

We should also introduce the phenomenon of consolidation which is a broad concept that includes both informal and formal types of temporary or permanent political integration. As for the permanent and formal integration, it is characterized by uniformity of procedures and by the presence of unanimously agreed managing body that stands as a distinct institution. Verification can be found in (Sandbrook, 1996), who noted, attributable to democracy, that “the consolidation of democracy entails, above all, the institutionalization of parties and party systems”. Bringing parallels to liberal consolidation, we can quote the widely known citation referring the results of the consolidation process: the complex system of institutions, rules and incentives that have become “the only game in town” (Randall & Svåsand, 2001). Yet, that consolidation can be opposed to liberal and democratic movement and illiberal forces become “the only game” at ease (Hadiz & Robison, 2005). Given the latter, liberal consolidation “point of no return” is the evolution from scattered and disjoint actors to an institution that is widely recognized and supported by the majority of the liberal cohort. It also requires resolving the problem of leadership, which is approached in this paper in line with the logic of van de Walle who argues that opposition cohesion is a function of probability to win an election and is an explanation why activists tend to lead “their own” smaller parties or groups with more distinct local benefits rather than to lead the united liberals (van de Welle, 2006).

Yet, the Russian liberal establishment major actors seem to be reluctant to integrate, thus showing their weakness and fostering the intra-liberal competition which undermines overall chances to obtain any significant representation in Duma or even in regional parliaments. Otherwise, efficient attempt to unite their electoral base would be more fruitful in terms of votes distribution.

The problem of liberal establishment disjoining factors identification has been actual since early 2000s. The liberal actors insist that the major negative influence comes from mass media, the mainstream of which is controlled by the government or its satellites. According to the liberals, this is the media that stigmatize the liberal forces and propagate negative connotations thus influencing the *vox populi*. In this concern, control over information flows becomes an important instrument of placing a directed influence on a voter's perception of political agenda and reshaping the public opinion. Identifying the liberal establishment as opposition to the current regime, one can assume that the Government is interested in further stigmatizing the liberals who demand a change in the political administration. Presumably this could undermine the liberals' voting appeal among the wide audience and bring in some discord to the liberal establishment insiders.

## 2. Empiric study of the liberal establishment consolidation

### 2.1 Methodology, assumptions and constraints

Several research steps were undertaken to identify and measure the extent of the Russian liberal establishment consolidation. At the first stage, the main actors of the liberal establishment were identified. Actors were defined as individuals or groups that had influence on the process of making and implementing decisions within the political system: the ones that “do matter” in terms of political dynamics and somehow presented in the mainstream media, i.e. known to the broad audience. Basically, the actors include both individuals and institutions (NGOs, NPOs, political parties, etc.).

At the second stage, content-analysis of the actors’ Twitter accounts was held to determine presence or absence of cross-referencing between those actors in the context of their publications on Twitter (tweets). The task was to filter positive, neutral or negative mentions of each other.

Since, due to the lack of the necessary statistic data, there is no way of effective evaluation of the influence that individual or institutional actors have on the establishment, content analysis screened Twitter accounts of the main liberal organizations in Russia and their leaders as well. Those include political parties, such as “PARNAS”, “Yabloko” and “Partiyaprogressa” (*Party of Progress*; unregistered), public organizations – “Fond Bor’by s Korruptsией – ACF (*Anti-Corruption Foundation*), “Otkrytaya Rossiya” (*Open Russia*), and personalities – Mikhail Kasyanov (former Prime Minister, leader of PARNAS party), Ilya Yashin (Russian politician, former member of PARNAS party), Boris Nemtsov (former Deputy Prime Minister, co-founder of PARNAS party), Grigori Yavlinsky (co-founder of Yabloko party), Alexey Navalny (leader of ACF and Party of Progress, political activist) and Mikhail Khodorkovsky (exiled Russian businessman, believed to be the wealthiest man in Russia in 2003, founder of Otkrytaya Rossiya).

The third stage was to determine the nature and amount of links between actors using social network analysis techniques for the two periods: 2011 thru 2013 (“normal” information background – after 2010-2011 electoral campaign), and 2014 thru 2016 (“peak” information background – prior to the next electoral cycle). For each period, network graphs were derived to show links between the subjects, making it possible to provide evidence of consolidation and its change. Each period with its specific layout was analyzed using formal quantitative procedure to evaluate both the links between individual pairs and the overall consolidation of the Russian liberal establishment. Moreover, it would be logical to compare not the two basic time intervals, but rather “background” indicators of consolidation and “peak” (analysis of Twitter accounts in periods, when informational throw-in, such as propaganda film publication, has place). However, Russian segment of Twitter turned out to be scant on reactions.

## 2.2 Cross-reference content analysis

We scanned the contents of the selected actors' tweets throughout 2011-2016 to find mutual mentions and derived 486 valid tweets as the result. The mention-tweets that did not match the relevant context were ignored since they provided no evidence of distinct and intended linkage. Besides, each tweet has been analyzed for sentiment (negative, neutral or positive) in which an actor was mentioned. Additionally, we normalized the quantity of tweets since various actors were different in their activity in Twitter: e.g., A. Navalny had more than 100,000 tweets, while M. Kasyanov had a bit more than 4,000. We introduced the linkage index to run the procedure of normalization:

$$L = \frac{p-n}{t},$$

where L– linkage index,

p – amount of actor *j* positive and neutral mentions made by actor *i*

n – amount of actor *j* negative mentions made by actor *i*

t – total amount of actor *j* mentions made by actor *i*

A summary of references throughout the 2011-2016 is present in Table 1, as well as the introduced index values: a larger index means greater positive extent of communication and greater amount of links means a greater connection between actors.

**Table 1. Total references (2011-2016)**

Actor	Reference to	Linkage index	Amount of links	Actor	Reference to	Linkage index	Amount of links
Kasyanov	ACF	1	1	Kasyanov	Nemtsov	0	1
Open Russia	ACF	0,5	16	Open Russia	Nemtsov	0	1
Yashin	ACF	0	4	Yabloko	Nemtsov	0	3
ACF	Kasyanov	1	1	Yashin	Open Russia	0,333	3
Yashin	Kasyanov	0,5	6	Navalny	Open Russia	0,25	24
Open Russia	Kasyanov	0,2	10	ACF	PARNAS	1	1
Yabloko	Kasyanov	0	4	Yabloko	PARNAS	0,727	11
Navalny	Kasyanov	-1	3	Yashin	PARNAS	0,273	44
Yashin	Khodorkovsky	1	2	Khodorkovsky	PARNAS	0	4
PARNAS	Khodorkovsky	0,75	12	Open Russia	PARNAS	-0,125	8
Kasyanov	Khodorkovsky	0,667	3	Navalny	PARNAS	-0,186	43
Navalny	Khodorkovsky	0,647	17	Kasyanov	Yabloko	0,3	10
Nemtsov	Khodorkovsky	0,5	4	PARNAS	Yabloko	-0,083	12

Actor	Reference to	Linkage index	Amount of links	Actor	Reference to	Linkage index	Amount of links
Yabloko	Khodorkovsky	0,4	5	Nemtsov	Yabloko	-0,2	5
Nemtsov	Navalny	1	3	Navalny	Yabloko	-0,561	41
Yashin	Navalny	0,773	22	Open Russia	Yabloko	-0,636	11
Kasyanov	Navalny	0,556	9	Yashin	Yabloko	-0,844	32
PARNAS	Navalny	0,458	24	Nemtsov	Yashin	1	5
Open Russia	Navalny	0,2	5	Navalny	Yashin	0,722	18
Yabloko	Navalny	-0,143	21	Kasyanov	Yashin	0,333	3
Navalny	Nemtsov	1	10	Open Russia	Yashin	0	11
Yashin	Nemtsov	0,5	10	Yabloko	Yashin	-0,5	2

(Authors' own contribution)

Taken in general, M. Khodorkovsky looked like the most favorable candidate to head the liberal establishment, since all pairs where he was mentioned derived positive linkage index value (6 pairs, 0.66 average linkage, total of 43 mentions). M. Khodorkovsky is also the only actor who has no negative linkage value to other actors. A. Navalny was mentioned 84 times having 5 positive linkage values out of 6. Considering only positive linkages he scored 0.597 per 63 mentions. The only negative linkage is in pair with Yabloko that mentioned him 21 times with the score of (-0.143).

Yabloko turns out to be the outsider and the least probable candidate to head liberals since most actors tend to mention it negatively (-0.465 average linkage per 101 mentions), except for M. Kasyanov (0.3 linkage index per 10 mentions). The main opponents of Yabloko are I. Yashin (-0.844), Otkrytaya Rossiya (-0.636) and A. Navalny (-0.561).

The most often cited agent is PARNAS mentioned 44 times by I. Yashin and 43 times by A. Navalny. Together with Yabloko, PARNAS shares leadership in the total number of mentions by the selected actors (111 times each), followed by A. Navalny (84 times total).

A preliminary conclusion can be made that M. Khodorkovsky seems to be the least criticized and least rejected consolidation agent. The same role is generally attributable to A. Navalny. To analyze changes in the liberals' propensity to consolidate we tested the discourse in two different time intervals. Table 2 provides a vision of change in pairs' linkages in the two reviewed periods.

**Table 2. Absolute change in linkages between 2011-2013 and 2014-2016**

Actor	Reference to	$\Delta L$	$\Delta$ Amount	Actor	Reference to	$\Delta L$	$\Delta$ Amount
Kasyanov	ACF	1.00	1	Open Russia	Nemtsov	0.00	1
Yashin	ACF	1.00	4	Yabloko	Nemtsov	0.00	-3
Navalny	Kasyanov	-1.00	3	Yashin	Nemtsov	-0.56	-8
Open Russia	Kasyanov	0.20	10	Navalny	Open Russia	0.25	24
ACF	Kasyanov	1.00	1	Yashin	Open Russia	0.33	3
Yabloko	Kasyanov	-2.00	0	Navalny	PARNAS	0.35	35
Yashin	Kasyanov	0.00	-2	Open Russia	PARNAS	-0.13	8
Kasyanov	Khodorkovsky	0.50	-1	ACF	PARNAS	1.00	1
Navalny	Khodorkovsky	0.23	5	Khodorkovsky	PARNAS	0.00	4
Nemtsov	Khodorkovsky	0.00	0	Yabloko	PARNAS	-0.23	-1
PARNAS	Khodorkovsky	0.30	-8	Yashin	PARNAS	-0.16	12
Yabloko	Khodorkovsky	-1.75	-3	Kasyanov	Yabloko	-0.20	0
Yashin	Khodorkovsky	0.00	0	Navalny	Yabloko	-0.47	-1
Kasyanov	Navalny	-0.35	1	Nemtsov	Yabloko	1.00	3
Nemtsov	Navalny	0.00	-1	Open Russia	Yabloko	-0.64	11
Open Russia	Navalny	0.20	5	PARNAS	Yabloko	0.83	0
PARNAS	Navalny	-0.83	-14	Kasyanov	Yashin	-1.00	1
Yabloko	Navalny	-0.72	-3	Navalny	Yashin	0.01	4
Yashin	Navalny	0.38	-4	Nemtsov	Yashin	0.00	3
Kasyanov	Nemtsov	0.00	-1	Open Russia	Yashin	0.00	11
Navalny	Nemtsov	0.00	0	Yabloko	Yashin	-1.00	0

(Authors' own contribution)

Dynamic interpretation indicates that M. Khodorkovsky in the “peak” period of information pressing had 7 mentions less, yet he received 5 more mentions from A. Navalny whose linkage to M. Khodorkovsky increased by 0.23 points. Mentions by Yabloko changed dramatically to negative (-1.75 points) while M. Kasyanov and PARNAS showed more sympathy (+0.3 and +0.5 respectively).

As for A. Navalny, the “peak” period made PARNAS, Yabloko and M. Kasyanov more often use negative connotations mentioning him that can indicate the decrease of trust and authority. Navalny himself became less optimistic towards M. Kasyanov (minus 1-point change of linkage index) and Yabloko (-0.47 points change) but indicated greater enthusiasm towards M. Khodorkovsky (+0.23), PARNAS (0.35) and Otkrytaya Rossiya (0.25).

Yabloko was the one to turn negative to all the other agents. The most drastic change happened in its discourse addressing M. Kasyanov (-2 points which means the change from the maximum possible linkage to minimum possible linkage), M. Khodorkovsky (-1.75 points) and others. We see that in 2014-2016 the liberal establishment mutual linkages changed mostly negatively thus indicating the less consolidation level than it used to be in 2011-2013.

The general level of actors' propensity to consolidate was also estimated using the extended representation of the linkage index:

$$L = \frac{p_1 - n_1 + p_2 - n_2 + \dots + p_i - n_i}{k}$$

where L is the consolidation index,

p – is amount of positive mentions,

n– amount of negative mentions,

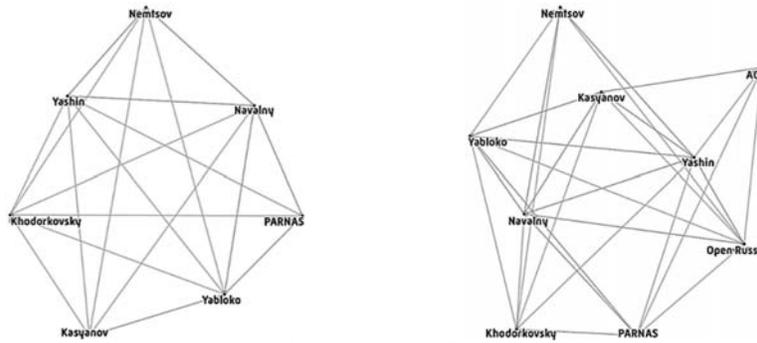
k– total number of pairs of actors.

For the period of 2011-2013, the consolidation index was 0.255, while for the period 2014-2016 – 0.215. The delta of the index was -0,04, which can be interpreted as a slight decrease in the level of consolidation of the whole movement. Still, the dynamic interpretation can be investigated by the means of social network analysis that allow to obtain quantifiers of an integral change in actors' consolidation.

### 2.3. Social Network Analysis

The general representation of the network allows to get an idea of frequency, strength and nature of the connections between actors based on their positioning in an imaginary geometric space, where the distances between actors are interpreted as a characteristic of the connection density: the closer the actors are to each other, the stronger is the connection between them, regardless of context (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Network graph of actors' interactions in 2011-2013 (left) and in 2014-2016 (right)**



(Authors' own contribution)

As we see, in 2011-2013 Russian liberal movement did not have distinct leaders, given the relative distance of the actors and the absence of central players. The network of interactions between actors in 2014-2016 shows three key actors (Navalny, Kasyanov and Yashin) that shape up the central triangle surrounded by the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of actors and linkages, supposedly less significant. At the same time, clear leadership, judging by the location of actors in the geometric space, does not belong to anyone specific, since the center of gravity is located inside the triangle formed by the three key actors. On the other and, explicit outsider can be identified with less effort: it is ACF (not a party and can hardly ballot a candidate), plus the furthest Nemtsov (deceased) and Khodorkovsky who seems to act like a “puppeteer” preferring to refrain from direct involvement to the political process.

The network characteristics can help confirm or reject the formulated assumptions considering the leadership. The «outsiders», in addition to visual remoteness from the center of the network, are characterized by lower values of prestige indices (“In-Degree” or the number of incoming linkages – mentions by other actors). In addition, this is emphasized by high values of the local clustering coefficient: Nemtsov and Khodorkovsky in 2014-2016 have the biggest values (0.700 and 0.733 respectively), which means they are the least capable of making a group “centered” by them since this indicator allows to determine how related are the neighbors of the actor, not counting the actor itself, i.e. the higher the value, the more disintegrated the actor is (see *Table 3*).

**Table 3. Generalized characteristics of the actors’ network of interactions**

Actor	Prestige of the actor	Influence of the actor	Betweenness centrality	Local clustering coefficient
2014-2106				
Yashin	5	8	4.133	0.518
Open Russia	2	7	3.133	0.619
Kasyanov	5	5	2.000	0.533
PARNAS	6	3	2.000	0.533
Navalny	6	7	1.467	0.571
Yabloko	6	5	1.467	0.619
Khodorkovsky	6	1	1.133	0.733
Nemtsov	3	4	0.333	0.700
ACF	3	2	0.333	0.583
2011-2013				
Yashin	2	6	1.000	0.600
Navalny	5	5	1.000	0.533
Kasyanov	2	4	0.000	0.700
Yabloko	5	4	1.000	0.567
Nemtsov	3	4	0.000	0.650
PARNAS	3	3	0.000	0.667
Khodorkovsky	6	0	1.000	0.667

(Authors’ own contribution)

Attention is drawn to the indicator of betweenness centrality, which is the biggest for I. Yashin in 2014-2016 and significantly exceeds the values of the other two supposed leaders. It is generally accepted that betweenness centrality is the most appropriate measure to determine the extent of an actor's ability to direct information flows and propagate information efficiently; "this is a measure of an actor's size of social capital"(Siemens, 2005). Therefore, outside the context of interactions between actors, we can conclude that 2014-2016 became a period of change for the liberal establishment which ensured hierarchisation –shaping up the two tiers of actors, at least in terms of their public discourse we face a group of distinct "leaders of opinion". Yet, the aggregate characteristics of the interaction space changed insignificantly and changed to worse considering the consolidation as a desired outcome: in 2014-2016 network became less dense (0.619 to 0.583), and actors – relatively more distant from each other.

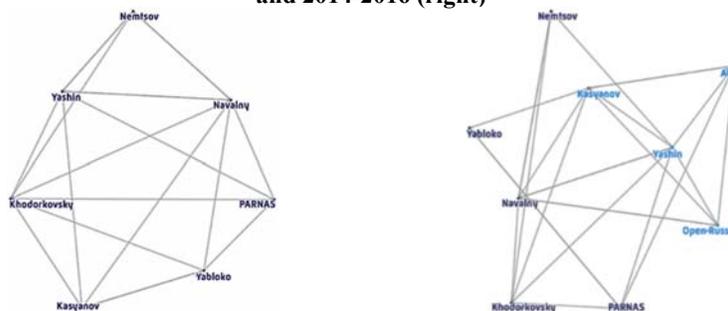
Nevertheless, and surprisingly, the overall density decreased because of consolidation (which can be more accurately described as clustering): actors condensed around some centers that moved away from each other thus allowing for the increase of average distance and the decrease of overall density. Network clustering effects allow for the proper verification: in 2011-2013 the whole network was a single cluster, whereas in 2014-2016 two clusters are distinguished: Cluster 1 –Navalny and Nemtsov, Khodorkovsky, Yabloko and PARNAS around him; Cluster 2 –Yashin and Open Russia, Kasyanov, ACF, focused around him. These clusters are characterized by closely the same density (0.70 and 0.75 respectively), which is generally higher than the overall network characteristic.

The previously determined "triangle" or the 1<sup>st</sup> tier of actors now transformed to the two poles (yet they are not opposed to each other), while Kasyanov appears to be only a part of Yashin's cluster.

Some comments are required due to the controversy of Navalny's cluster contents. We should note that such a division into clusters must not be interpreted as a conscious "desire" of respective actors to consolidate. It is known that Navalny and Yabloko are much likely not to become partners for obvious reasons: Navalny was excluded from Yabloko and since then has been criticizing them – we see it from the content analysis. One possible explanation is a similar pattern of behavior, similar ways of disseminating information through these actors.

For the context-oriented study of the actors' relatedness we separated pairs with positive and negative mentions, afterwards the network was redesigned, and metrics were recalculated. The evolutionary representation of the network of positive linkages between actors is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Network graph of positive connotations between actors in 2011-2013 (left) and 2014-2016 (right)



(Authors' own contribution)

It is obvious that the network of 2011-2013 as well as in the generalized presentation does not allow us to single out any key actors, whereas in 2014-2016 the consolidating agents are evident: Navalny and Yashin, who “lead” the two clusters and shape the first tier of the liberal establishment and address impacts of consolidation (see *Table 4*).

Table 4. Generalized characteristics of the actors' network of positive interactions

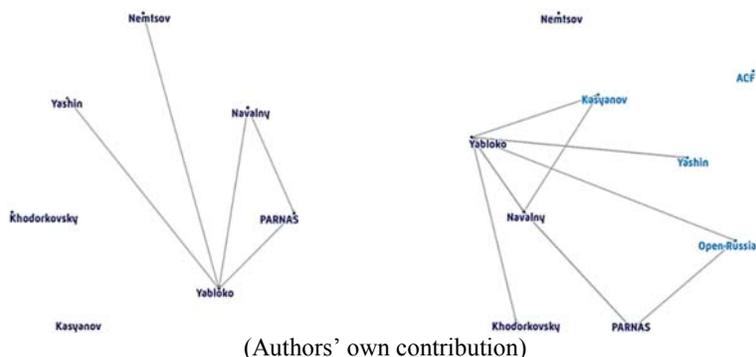
Actor	Prestige of the actor	Influence of the actor	Betweenness centrality	Local clustering coefficient
2014-2016				
Yashin	2	6	9.967	0.333
Kasyanov	3	4	10.200	0.300
Navalny	4	4	2.733	0.350
Open Russia	2	3	0.667	0.583
Nemtsov	1	3	0.000	0.667
PARNAS	3	2	4.467	0.167
ACF	3	2	1.500	0.333
Yabloko	2	1	0.500	0.000
Khodorkovsky	5	0	3.967	0.400
2011-2013				
Yashin	2	5	1.833	0.400
Yabloko	1	4	0.500	0.417
Kasyanov	2	3	0.500	0.500
Navalny	5	3	3.333	0.400
Nemtsov	2	3	0.000	0.667
PARNAS	2	2	0.500	0.500
Khodorkovsky	6	0	3.333	0.467

(Authors' own contribution)

It should be noted that in terms of centrality, the most significant «positive» actors from the position of the relative value of their social capital in

2014-2016 were M. Kasyanov and I. Yashin, whereas in 2011-2013 the leader in this indicator was A. Navalny. Again, evidence of consolidation, as in the generalized view, can be seen in declining network density, which indicates the formation of groups or clusters within it, from 0.476 to 0.347. As the average distance between actors increases (1.061 to 1.309), there is a significant decrease in relative density of the network due to clustering effects that derived two distinct clusters. Therefore, we can conclude that, from the point of view of positive consolidation, 2014-2016 years are positively different from 2011-2013 in terms of revealing the actors that were most active in generating positive impulses. The same interesting is the negative aspect of interaction between actors, which provides a mismatch between them (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Network graph of negative connotations between actors in 2011-2013 (left) and 2014-2016 (right)**



Notably, in 2011-2013 two actors stand aside from negative connotations, while Yabloko is criticized by the four other actors and this criticism is unilateral. In 2014-2016, criticism of Yabloko became mutual: its degree of prestige and influence was almost equal, whereas the centrality of this subject increased twofold (from 10 to 21). Given the latter we conclude that Yabloko during the whole period of interest acted as the driver of disintegration or as the “Apple of discord” (Yabloko means “apple” in Russian), while consolidating others to be unanimous in criticizing Yabloko.

Still, the two “leaders of discourse” – A. Navalny and I. Yashin – appear to consolidate the discourse and public opinion, while the discrepancy between words and deeds leads the liberal establishment the different way. The September 2017 election in Moscow discovered that Yabloko, widely stigmatized by “discourse leaders”, acted as a true consolidator under initiatives of D. Gudkov who declared the mayor of Moscow ambitions and organized the coalition “Ob’edinennyyedemocrats” (the United Democrats) to participate in municipal election, which included Yabloko, PARNAS and Otkrytaya Rossiya. The coalition

electoral campaign was a success compared to previous results of opposition elsewhere in Russia.

### 3. Conclusions

From the research hypothesis point of view, we can conclude that the liberal establishment makes attempts to consolidate, but different actors chase different goals, that is why the nominal leaders are set aside by 2<sup>nd</sup> tier actors who succeed in liberals' cohesion. Social Network Analysis techniques allowed to determine the pivots of consolidation that were the most significant agents of influence during a certain period. Since our panel study entailed years 2011 thru 2016, further verification by actual 2017 data indicated that the consolidation patterns were not stable as outsiders like Yabloko (according to the results above) took gain of consolidation during the September 2017 electoral campaign in Moscow thus becoming a key consolidator within the liberal establishment. The main conclusion upon this verification can be the following: the panel study must be longitudinal and include more actors, even those who do not match the criteria of "centrality" in terms of placing an influence on other actors.

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