

## Elections in Russia: 2012

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**Dr David White** ([/staff/profiles/government-society/white-david.aspx](http://staff/profiles/government-society/white-david.aspx)), Lecturer in Politics, presented a paper at a roundtable on 'Elections in Russia: 2012' at the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham.

The roundtable was hosted by the Centre for the Study of European Governance at the University of Nottingham and attracted a well-informed and enthusiastic audience of academics and postgraduate students from Nottingham and beyond. Other speakers included Dr Edwin Bacon, Reader in Comparative Politics at Birkbeck College, London and Dr Nataliya Danilova from the University of Nottingham.

Dr White spoke on the wave of political opposition protest which has swept across Russia following the flawed parliamentary elections of December 2011. Not only have people demonstrated against electoral violations, they have also shown their displeasure at the prospect of a third presidential term for Vladimir Putin.

This presentation, was partly based on research fieldwork in Moscow in 2010 when Dr White interviewed a number of key figures from the democratic opposition movements, Solidarity and the Party of People's Freedom (PARNAS) including former parliamentary deputy, Vladimir Ryzhkov, the charismatic youth activist, Ilya Yashin and the veteran human rights campaigner and former Soviet dissident, Lev Ponomarev.

Dr White concluded that whilst Vladimir Putin will be returned for a third term as President in the elections on 4<sup>th</sup> March the political landscape in Russia has changed. Support for Putin has decreased and political opposition is becoming more vocal and much better organized.

Dr White also touched on the use of humour in political opposition protest. One good example from Russia is the 'toy protests' which have taken place in the Siberian city of Barnaul. Refused permission by the local authorities to hold opposition rallies (not uncommon in Russia) activists instead staged a protest of toys in which Lego and Playmobil figures stood in the snow and held up tiny placards proclaiming the elections as fraudulent and calling for Putin to step down. For more details see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/26/doll-protesters-problem-russian-police> (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/26/doll-protesters-problem-russian-police>) and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2012/feb/20/toys-protest-siberia-video> (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2012/feb/20/toys-protest-siberia-video>)

The use of such absurdist humour to prick the pomposity of authoritarianism is a very Russian phenomenon and one Dr White intends to research further in the future.

The roundtable was also something of a reunion of CREES alumni. Dr Edwin Bacon is now Reader in Comparative Politics at Birkbeck College, London and the roundtable was chaired by Dr Bettina Renz who gained her PhD from CREES in 2004 and is now a politics lecturer at Nottingham. Other former 'CREESniki' present were Dr Nick Baron of the history department at Nottingham and Dr Rick Simon from the politics department at Nottingham Trent University.

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