



# The Political Voice

by Undergraduates for Undergraduates in the UF Department of Political Science  
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# The Political Voice

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## Letter From the Editor

Dear PV readers,

Thanks for looking at this semester's fourth issue of the Political Voice. I still can't believe we have already cranked out four times as many issues in one semester, but we made it possible with hard work and dedication. I'm so thrilled to have worked with great writers and students of political science. While we work together to publish quality work for you, the reader, we also learn along the way. It is our goal to develop a political voice as a publication and become better and better with time and experience. I hope you have enjoyed each issue of the PV thus far and always look forward to reading the next.

Sincerely,  
*Kristen Morrell*  
PSA Historian



## Letter From the President

Dear Reader,

As the semester comes to a closing, our edition of the Political Voice this week is smaller. The strong ideas and quality of these writers' thoughts, however, are what make me so proud of this issue. Politics and world affairs do not stop for exams, and each article touches on very current and real issues that we as emerging political scientists are thinking about even as our finals loom. I am thrilled to be a part of a work that maintains its integrity throughout the semester and hope that you gain some knowledge in the time you spend reading our publication. This issue is truly about finding our political voice and displaying these convictions to the University of Florida. Happy Reading!

Sincerely,  
*Alefa Lyne*  
PSA President





The Doha Conference:  
Creating a United Syrian Opposition

by Jeff Abalos

Sunday, Nov. 4, marked the beginning of a week-long conference in Doha, Qatar, intended to establish a unified Syrian opposition. The impetus for this conference was a plan known as the Syrian National Initiative, also being called the Seif-Ford Initiative, and was developed by Riad Seif, a former member of the Syrian National Council’s (SNC) executive council, and Robert Ford, the U.S. ambassador to Syria. On Wednesday, Nov. 7, it appeared that the conference would be a failure, as representatives of the National Coordinating Committee, the Syrian Democratic Platform and several other opposition groups rejected the plan. That same day, the Daily Telegraph quoted Jamal al-Wa’ard, a SNC military representative, as saying that the “idea of a bigger coalition initiative has failed.”

The SNC remains one of the few opposition groups, as of Friday Nov. 9, that is striving to achieve the creation of a larger oppositional body in Doha. Although several events at the SNC’s general convention which convened Wednesday, Nov. 7, belie that fact. First, the SNC voted against supporting the proposed Syrian National Initiative. Riad Seif also lost his seat on the SNC’s executive council in a shake-up of leadership believed to be directly correlated with Seif’s support of the Syrian National Initiative.

The Syrian National Initiative is structured to create a ruling assembly of 50 members, a military council and a judicial council. The hope is that the various Syrian oppositional groups can come together to facilitate a more efficient application of foreign aid and present a unified front to the international community. Reuters reported that a source inside the meetings of the Doha Conference expressed a desire for any newly formed oppositional front to eventually take control of Syria’s embassies and seat at the United Nations.

As of this writing, Nov. 9, various representatives of the Syrian opposition are still meeting in Doha. Reuters also quoted their source inside the meetings as saying “we will not leave today without an agreement. The body will be the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people.” It is also becoming clear, according to Reuters, that the SNC has changed its stance on the Syrian National Initiative and is now striving to ensure the success of the Doha Conference. The Economist has noted concerns that the SNC is becoming increasingly divorced form the realities on the ground though. Any such oppositional front with a large proportion of power in the hands of the SNC would thus necessarily be non-representative of the greater revolution. The dissonance between supposed oppositional leaders and the military realities on the ground is an important concern for those interested in the creation of a unified Syrian opposition. If a unified front is created in Doha, it will be meaningless if it does not address the complexities of military power in the street and provide avenues for the co-option and representation of leading oppositional military organizations, such as the Farouq Battalion which is active in the Northern part of



The support of the Syrian street is crucial for any united oppositional body.

the country.

One thing is certain. If the Syrian opposition desires more action and aid from Western nations, it will need to eventually form a unified front that presents objectives and espouses beliefs that will alleviate Western fears of radical movements within the opposition. Weak promises of mere monetary support from the United States provide little incentive for militia commanders on the ground to support a unified front. The Daily Telegraph quoted one diplomatic source, commenting

on a hypothetical ‘unified’ front dominated by the SNC but not representative of the military realities on the ground, as saying that “it may secure more funding but at this point in the Syrian war it [is] not about how much money you pump into this, it is about winning the support of the street to regain control. And the street does not support them.” It remains to be seen whether this knowledge will be understood by those seeking to both create a unified front and bring an end to this violent conflict. ■

On Nov. 6 2012, millions of Americans went to the polls to vote. Most were focused on voting for their favored candidate for the Presidency, but also included on the ballots in most states were races for the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

The result of these races, while not garnering as much attention as the battle for the presidency, will also be quite influential in shaping the next several years of American politics.

The 112th Congress, seated in January 2011, has received some of the lowest job approval ratings in U.S. history. A Gallup poll in February 2012 showed that just 10 percent of Americans approved of the job that Congress was doing. At the end of 2011, Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) created a graph that succinctly described exactly how unpopular the 112th Congress was at the time. Among a list that included such elements as the Internal Revenue Service, President Richard Nixon at the height of the Watergate scandal, the United States becoming Communist and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, only Castro was more unpopular than the 112th Congress. According to data from VoteView.com, this Congress is also the most politically polarized Congress since the Reconstruction era of the late 19th Century.

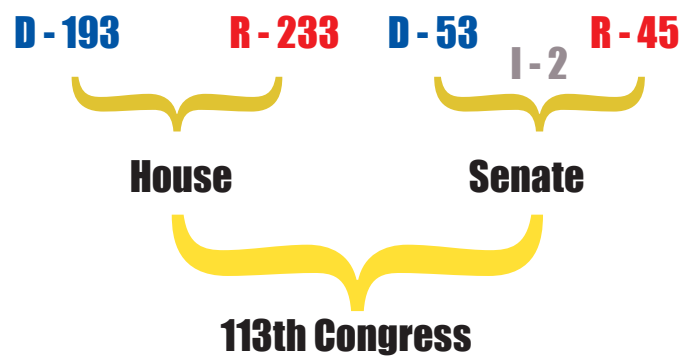
The 113th Congress, which will be seated in January 2013, may suffer from many of the same problems. While the 2012 elections have been widely regarded as a good night for the Democratic Party, Congress has not changed that much. The Democrats gained seats in both houses of Congress,



but it will not be enough to dramatically affect the makeup of the Legislative Branch. The Senate will remain under Democratic control, but without the supermajority of 60 seats needed to defeat filibusters, the Republicans will continue to frustrate the efforts of the president’s party. In the House of Representatives, the seats lost by the Republican Party were not enough to reverse its majority.

The gains made by the Democrats, particularly in some of the most competitive and anticipated races, can be viewed as a showing of support by the American people for their platform and a rebuke to the Republicans, but it does not change the facts on The Hill. In his second term, President Obama and Congress will have

to work together effectively to handle the myriad of challenges that face the nation. They will have to do this despite the government remaining divided and deeply partisan. The American people can only hope that the spirit of cooperation which failed to materialize over the past two years will be found and the two parties will be willing to work around their differences for the good of the nation. ■





# Manipulation Through Money: Election 2012

by Frances Chapman

The close of the 2012 American presidential election not only marks a final indication of the nation's presidential preferences, but also the cessation of a barrage of campaign advertisements. For over a year, a string of presidential candidates bought commercials on television networks and countless websites, such as YouTube and Facebook, all with the purpose of convincing the American public that their campaign is based not upon mere rhetoric, but a course for the future of the United States of America. However, in the slurry of political propaganda and inevitable talking points, it became quite simple for Americans to grudgingly accept the presidential candidates' attempts to influence their vote as "the norm." Yet at the close of this spectacle, we may now elucidate the magnitude of manipulation through the campaigns' wealth.

The Center for Responsive Politics has estimated that \$5.8 billion was spent throughout the election season for all campaigns in America and \$2.5 billion was allocated to the presidential elections. According to the Federal Election Commission, \$1.8 billion was spent in the 2008 presidential election, which roughly doubled the amount spent in the 2004 presidential election. While in the past candidates could rely on limited funds by individuals, special interest groups and public funds to finance their campaigns, the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* ruling in 2010 has allowed for the creation of SuperPACs, permitting unlimited spending by corporations and unions. Furthermore, "social welfare" groups have supplemented the production of ads, which, according to *National Public Radio*, are tax-exempt groups that can spend an unlimited amount to issue advocacy and have no obligation to disclose their donors. This new method of funding has allowed individuals to circumvent the \$2,500 limit on donations to a presidential candidate for each election, and the \$5,000 restriction toward Political Action Committees, according to *National Public Radio*. This has facilitated the

contribution of millions of dollars to the elections by individuals, such as Sheldon and Miriam Adelson, who, also according to *National Public Radio*, added roughly \$30 million dollars to the election in support of Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney throughout the year.

This profuse flow of money has facilitated not only the funding of the offices, transportation and other logistical aspects of the campaign, but also countless advertisements which were able to blanket swing states. A political tracking group, Kantar Media CMAG, recorded that between April 10 and Oct. 22, \$577,569,920 was spent on negative advertisements (which constituted 80 percent of advertising slots with 881,988 ads produced) and that \$77,001,280 was spent on positive advertisements (which constituted 20 percent of slots with 132,496 advertisements produced). However, while the magnitude of this spending might not surprise many Americans, how this money

could be utilized in everyday society is more veiled. According to *The Huffington Post*, the nearly \$6 billion spent in the 2012 elections equates to the prevention of four million malaria deaths, one month's mortgage payment for six million Americans, the cleaning of the Niger delta oil spill six times over, and in light of Hurricane Sandy, nearly half of FEMA's budget. *MDG Advertising* also evaluates the campaign spending by comparing it to the 2,357,723,577 elementary school lunches the money would be able to fund, the 1,079,471 households paying for personal insurance and pensions, or to the 120 elections in the United Kingdom the sum would have provided.

Regardless of how campaign funds could've been used to develop society rather than produce candidate messages, limited restrictions on financial campaign contributions will enable Americans to continue influencing the future of this country through the depth of their pockets. ▢



## World Watch

### Britain and the EU Budget: Is it About More Than Just Money?

By Melissa-Melody Marcan

Last week, Britain's Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron experienced a great symbolic defeat in the House of Commons. The Labour Party joined more than 50 euro-skeptic members of Cameron's own party in demanding budget cuts during the upcoming European Union (EU) budget talks to be held in Brussels on Nov. 22 and 23.

The motion, which passed by 307 votes to 294, is not legally binding, but according to the German news source Deutsche Welle, the Members of Parliament (MPs) expect Cameron to act upon it once negotiations begin.

The vote puts Cameron in an incredibly uncomfortable position on both the domestic and EU level. Over the past weeks, the British prime minister has made it clear that he would use his veto power if necessary. However, according to Deutsche Welle, the MPs do not agree with Cameron's proposed inflation adjusted freeze of the EU budget; they demand "real-

term reductions." Deutsche Welle reports that Conservatives like Mark Reckless argue an increased EU budget cannot be justified in the face of domestic austerity measures. Basically, if Britain needs to make cuts, so should the EU.

Last week's vote raised several red flags. Traditionally, the Labour Party has not been associated with a euro-skeptic stance. Its overwhelming support for the motion comes as a surprise. According to Deutsche Welle, Cameron described the Labour Party's move to join the Conservative euro-skeptics in its efforts as "rank opportunism." In addition, the Guardian reported that some Conservatives did not support the motion to spite the Labour Party. Essentially, Cameron can no longer rely on his Conservative cabinet colleagues.

The Guardian goes as far as to say that, to the British euro-skeptics, the EU budget is not only about money but it also stands as "a symbol of the perfidy of the EU itself." Especially in

light of recent talks of Britain possibly holding a referendum in the future to leave the EU, the importance of Cameron's defeat cannot be overemphasized.

Needless to say, Britain's rebellion is not well received by many states.

Many Eastern European countries such as Poland depend greatly on EU funding for economic development, which is why Poland's anger comes at no surprise. According to Deutsche Welle, Polish conservative Jacek Saryusz-Wolski said that Britain is "ruining every chance for compromise" and causing "despair" among countries dependent on EU funding. He further stated that "you cannot be a member of the club, agree to pay the fee, and then after entering the club and having the meal, leave without paying."

Harsh criticism also comes from Cameron's own coalition partner Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats. The Guardian reported Clegg warning about possible consequences by saying that "what you will never achieve is by stamping your foot and saying: 'Well, we want to be part of this club, but we kind of unilaterally want to rewrite the rules of the game and we want to pick and choose unilaterally what we're going to sign up to.' It's just not a realistic approach and my worry is there's a much shorter leap from that to an outright crisis which would leave the UK fully marginalized or even out of the European Union than people seem to imagine."

In my opinion, Britain is walking on thin ice at the moment. The last thing the EU needs at this point is internal uproar while trying to convey to the financial markets that the EU27 can agree and work together. If Britain continues to drift further and further away from the European integration project, it will not only negatively affect the EU but Britain itself will also suffer. ▢



# controversy over the trial of punk band **PUSSY RIOT** continues as one member is set free

by Alexandra Chopenko



Since the appeal on the decision of the trial of the Russian feminist punk band Pussy Riot was postponed, the international and Russian media appear to have lost their interest in the futures of the three sentenced women. The appeal on the court's decision to jail the members of the band for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred or hostility," as a result of their performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, had been originally set for Oct. 1. One of the members, Yekaterina Samutsevich, dismissed her lawyer citing "differences in opinion," effectively postponing the hearing. One of the lawyers defending the band, Nikolai Polozov, speculates that the dismissal was purposely done to push back the appeal, but did not cite reasons as to why such a move would be effective. When the hearing took place on Oct. 10, the result was somewhat surprising; Samutsevich's jail term was suspended and she was freed. Her lawyer made a case that she was escorted out of the church before she even removed her guitar to take part in the "punk prayer" the band was set to perform. While supporters cheered for Samutsevich's return as she left the courthouse, the other two convicted members, Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, have been sentenced to attend women's prison camps in Perm and Mordovia respectively. Both are currently sentenced until March 2014. Their lawyers suggested that the women follow the example of Samutsevich and refuse the lawyers' services if it means avoiding jail time. Although the lawyers have

stressed the fact that both women have young children, it did not sway the court's decision. Tolokonnikova and her team of lawyers is said to have been working on a regional court appeal to postpone her sentence until her four-year-old daughter is a teenager. During the trial, members of the band stated multiple times that their performance was an attack on the Putin regime and not on the Church; this statement was emphasized during multiple interviews with the freed member conducted by both Russian and international news sources. Despite these statements, a Levada Center poll reports that 42 percent of Russians consider the punk prayer an attack on the Russian

Orthodox Church. Only 19 percent see it as a protest against Putin. While no definitive statement made by the current president was attacked in the band's song, Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev has expressed concern for the long sentence to which the women have been subjected. He says that they have been in prison long enough and should be released. ■



All photos by Denis Bochkarev



# DEFINING PUTIN'S PRESIDENCY

*By Richard Vieira*

Last November, Forbes.com ranked Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was then Prime Minister, as the second most powerful individual in the world. Ahead of corporate titans such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, Putin has also ascended above religious figures such as the Pope and other influential leaders, only to be ranked lower than U.S. President Barack Obama. So how has Mr. Putin achieved such influence? The Russian president's abrupt rise to power can be analyzed with a number of questions: How has Vladimir Putin dealt with issues such as human rights and economy? How and why does he intend on retaining power? Will his style of governance transform Russia's role in the world? Or has it already? These are questions that will help define Putin's presidency.

To better understand his legacy, it is first important to know how Mr. Putin accepted the job as Russia's leader. After former President Boris Yeltsin resigned, Vladimir Putin became acting president. As a KGB agent operating in Berlin and later a participant in the ruling Yeltsin administration, Vladimir Putin was largely unknown to the Russian public when he stepped in as acting president. Many have speculated that Putin owes his positions as prime minister and president to a small group of Russian oligarchs desperate to appoint a successor to Boris Yeltsin. Masha Gessen, a biographer of the Russian president, argues this point with confidence, "A tiny group of people, besieged and isolated, were looking for someone to take over the world's largest landmass, with all its nuclear warheads and all its tragic history." Regardless of how democratic the selection of Vladimir Putin was, his record as KGB agent-turned-president speaks for itself. In what many call a "hybrid regime," President Putin has secured power and favor amongst the Russian people with a wide array of tactics.

Upon winning the presidency, the unlikely leader utilized the threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Russia to rally citizens behind the extermination of what could've been a false threat. On Sep 10, 1999, the LA times published an online article describing the famous Moscow apartment bombings, which resulted in the death of hundreds of people. Russian authorities quickly blamed Chechen rebels without any causal link and consequently launched military operations in Chechnya. The consolidation of presidential power didn't stop here, however. Since then, Putin has been accused of warranting the arrest and murder of a number of Russian dissidents including those oligarchs that prospered during the reign of the Yeltsin administration. Besides receiving criticism for such human

rights abuses, Putin's political actions are also under question.

To keep a tight grip on power, Putin has navigated his way around the Russian constitution in order to serve more than two terms as president. Appointing Dimitri Medvedev as president and

**"Vladimir Putin has changed the nature of the Russian presidency by expanding executive power to silence any opposition and tightly regulate the country."**

assuming the role of prime minister in 2008 allowed Putin to run for a third presidential election, which he won in May of this year. Many have argued that because of his tendency to annihilate opposition and hesitance to surrender power, Vladimir Putin has ensured himself a permanent position as president. This has caused uproar amongst Russians. In September of this year, The Huffington Post published an online article which noted that estimates regarding the protests in Moscow had reached 500,000. These protests have existed largely in response to Putin's reelection and the imprisonment of the anti-Putin punk rock band Pussy Riot. However, it is not

safe to assume that the Russian president is alone. According to a Levada poll, Vladimir Putin's approval rating has dropped but still remains above 60 percent. This same poll suggested that in 2007, a staggering 85 percent of Russians approved of the president's performance. But this

approval is tied only to economic wealth as Russia's dependence on oil continues and many speculate what political events may occur despite promises of economic reform.

Vladimir Putin has changed the nature of the Russian presidency by expanding executive power to silence any opposition and tightly regulate the country. There are doubts that Russia will exist without the direction of this former intelligence agent anytime in the near future. However, with a falling approval rating, mass protests and falling oil prices, change may be imminent. ■







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