

A person is performing on a stage, illuminated by colorful spotlights. The background features a large Russian flag. The overall atmosphere is vibrant and energetic.

# MAKE SOME NOIZE: RAP AS A FORM OF POLITICAL PROTEST IN RUSSIA

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# RAPPING DISSSENT IN RUSSIA

- 2019 saw the largest protests across Russia—primarily in Moscow—since those on Bolotnaya Square in 2011-2012
- Consisted largely of youth
- One of the most popular music genres among youth today is rap
- Rappers have been suffering suppression from state authorities
- Rappers were present at the protest
- With this in mind...



# IS RAP AN EFFECTIVE FORM OF POLITICAL PROTEST?

- Since rap politicized in the early 2010s, rappers have become active in political engagement, mobilizing their young followers alongside them

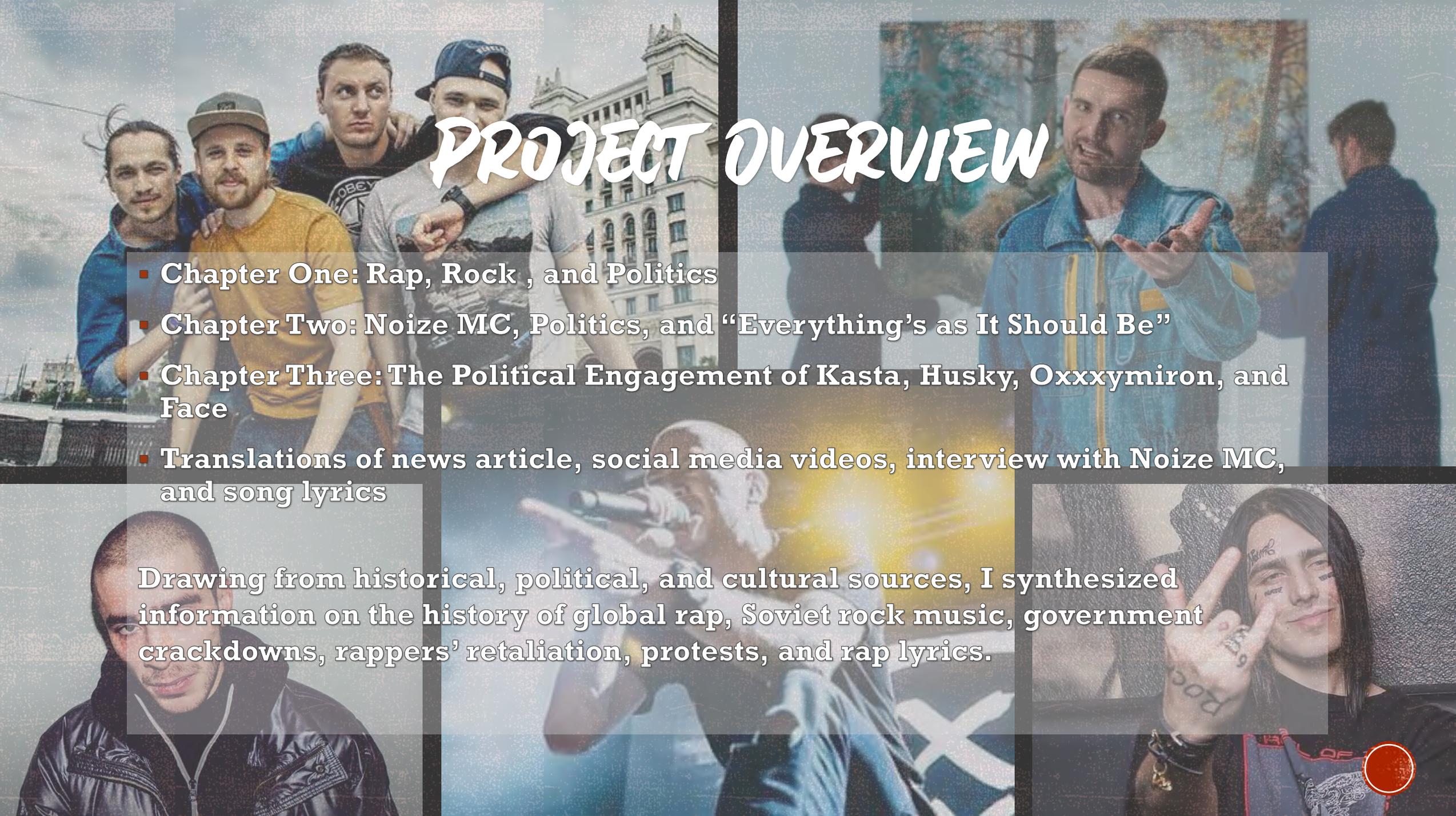
*Big question:* Is rap is a form of political protest and if so, how do rappers use it?

*Yes,* my research finds that *rap is an effective form of political protest*, and that rappers engage in three primary ways: producing political songs, interacting with fans on social media, and participating in protests.



Top: Noize MC (Ivan Alekseev)  
Bottom Left: Oxxxymiron (Miron Fyodorov)  
Bottom Right: Face (Ivan Dryomin)





# PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Chapter One: Rap, Rock , and Politics
- Chapter Two: Noize MC, Politics, and “Everything’s as It Should Be”
- Chapter Three: The Political Engagement of Kasta, Husky, Oxxxymiron, and Face
- Translations of news article, social media videos, interview with Noize MC, and song lyrics

Drawing from historical, political, and cultural sources, I synthesized information on the history of global rap, Soviet rock music, government crackdowns, rappers’ retaliation, protests, and rap lyrics.



# RAP ROCK AND POLITICS

- Part of global hip-hop movement
- Parallels to Soviet rock movement
  - State censorship, music genre from abroad, voice of truth, music of the youth

## *Rap in Russia*

- Politicized in 2010s as it popularized
- Stepped away from party music and began reflecting everyday struggles of ordinary citizens
- Began tackling overtly political themes such as government corruption and war





Husky (Dmitry Kuznetsov) detained after forced concert shut-down



President Putin with pro-Putin rapper Timati (Timur Yunusov)

# THE WAR ON RAP

- In response to rappers' increasing displays of dissent and their immense popularity, the authorities began cracking down on the artists
- President Vladimir Putin said that “rap rest[s] upon three pillars: sex, drugs, and protests.”
- The authorities frequently employ three methods: concert cancellations, cooptation, and censorship
- In 2018, many hip-hop artists suffered concert cancellations, the most notorious of which was the arrest of the Siberian rapper, Husky, resulting in the solidarity concert *I Will Sing My Music*



Solidarity concert held for Husky after his arrest



# UNIFICATION AND MOBILIZATION

- However, the suppression of rap backfired
- Artists and fans united behind cries of violations of freedoms of speech and expression—leading to a spike in the politicization of rappers since 2017
- The government is unable to control rap because of the internet, which further deepens hip hop's foothold in culture
- Thus, rappers were influential during and after the 2019 summer protests
- The presence of rap in mainstream culture and artists' willingness to discuss politics signifies the Kremlin's inability to control rap music and sweep dissidence under the rug





# NOIZE MC

- Ivan Alekseev is a rock-rap artist
- He has been using his music to speak out against societal and political issues for many years
- Became famous from participation in rap battles and the release of “Mercedes S666” in 2010
- Cover “Everything’s As It Should Be” by Civil Defense’s Egor Letov
  - Punk-rock group from the 1980s
  - Cover released September 10, 2019
  - Overwhelmingly positive reception



# EVERYTHING'S AS IT SHOULD BE

- Attacks state corruption and the people's willingness to turn a blind eye to it
- Split into five sections: dehumanization by the state, police brutality and corruption, fear and danger propagated by the state, anti-protestors blaming dissidents for making things worse, and conformity because, after all, "everything's as it should be"
- Opens with a warning from President Putin in 1996, in which he cautions against leaders who have too much power
- Raps in front of alternating famous Russian paintings: Apotheosis of War, The Bathing of the Red Horse, The Three Botarys, The Last Day of Pompeii, and Morning in a Pine Forest



*"Tomorrow she'll buy LEGOs at the mall / For her nephew's birthday / In the set there will be a prison truck and three men / Two cops on one— everything's as it should be"*

*"For others to be afraid, beat your own people harder"*





# РОЇ КАК В ПОЛІ

Noize MC's release of "Everything's as It Should Be" is a form of political protest because it connects past protest movements (Soviet rock) to the present, points out flaws in the current system, and because of the context in which it was released (following a summer of record-breaking protests).



# THE ARTISTS AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

## Kasta

- Formed in the 1990s and consist of four core members.
- They politicized when they resurged in popularity in 2017 for their political tracks “Them” and “Skrepy.”
- Following the summer of record-breaking protests in 2019, they released a political album, including a new rendition of the Russian national anthem.
- Example of new wave of politicization among rappers.



## Husky

- Dmitri Kuznetsov is the most famous rapper from Siberia and the Far East.
- His debut music video and first hit, “October Seventh” (2011) was named after and released on Putin’s birthday. It criticizes the ruling regime, and he released a song of the same name and nature in 2019.
- Most famous for his arrest in 2018 after his concert was forced to shut down. He performed on the street for fans and was arrested, resulting in the solidarity concert *I Will Sing My Music*.
- Behavior is more akin to non-activist hip-hop artists.





## Oxxxymiron

- Miron Fyodorov is a well-spoken battle rapper credited with bringing Russian rap to the global stage.
- Over the summer of 2019, he attended the August 10<sup>th</sup> protest on Sakharov Avenue, and he posted a video and resources encouraging his fans to attend.
- The following fall, he recorded a track with an arrested protestor, Samariddin Radzhabov.
- He represents rappers' use of social media and their ability to influence fans to mobilize.

## Face

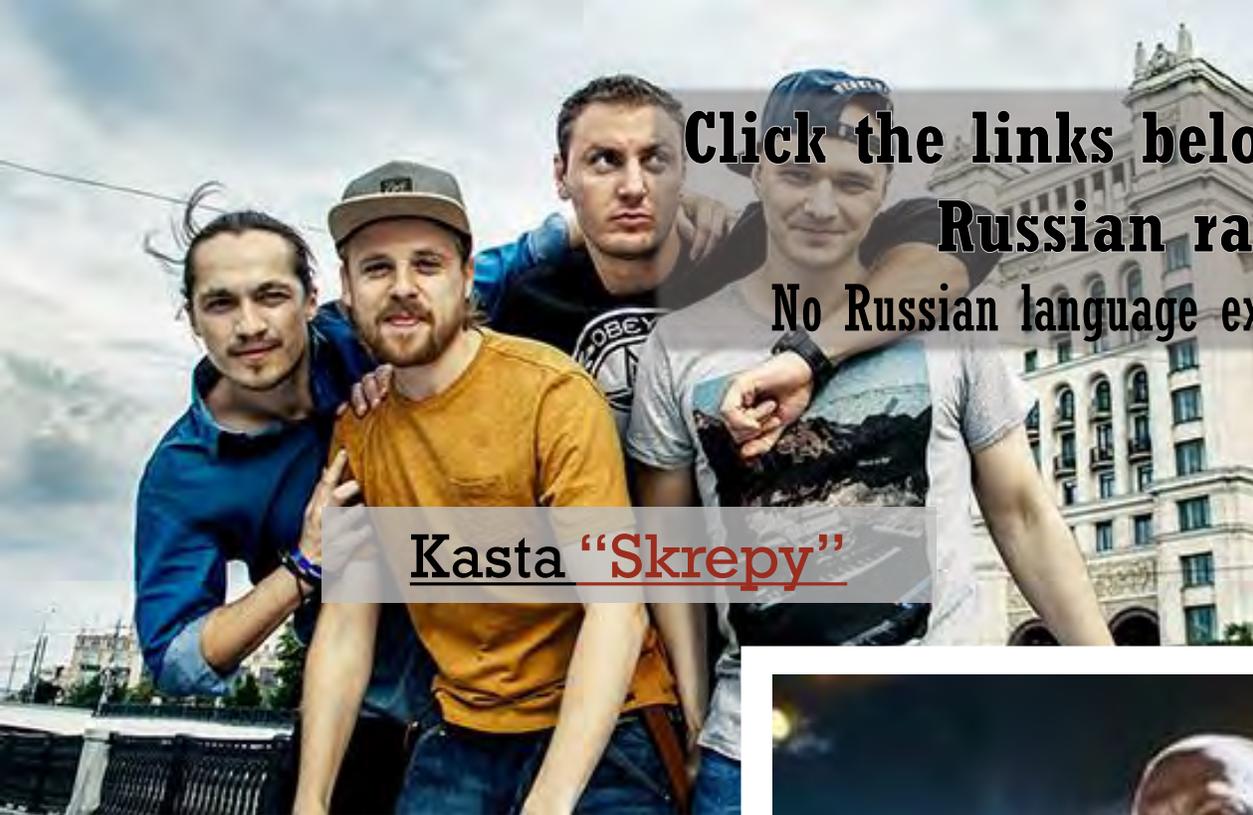
- Ivan Dryomin is a wildly popular rapper, notorious for his crass lyrics.
- He is a self-proclaimed face of the youth.
- After suffering concert cancellations in 2017, he released an all-political album criticizing corrupt authorities.
- In 2019, he performed during the August 10<sup>th</sup> protest on Sakharov Avenue, expressing a commitment to freedom of speech.
- Face exemplifies the increasing mobilization of youth against the ruling regime.



# CONCLUSIONS

- Russian rap is deeply ingrained into rich histories of cultural protest, both in Russia and abroad.
- Government is unable to control rap—attempts have been undercut in part because of the internet and youth's deep love of the genre and artists.
- Rap's immense popularity enables rappers to bring awareness of societal and political issues to their fans.
- Rappers participate in politics in three ways: social media presence, explicitly political songs, and direct participation in protests.
- Hip hop is one of the most popular music genres today, and rappers will remain an influential force in Russian politics for the foreseeable future.





Kasta “Skrepy”

Click the links below to watch political  
Russian rap in action!

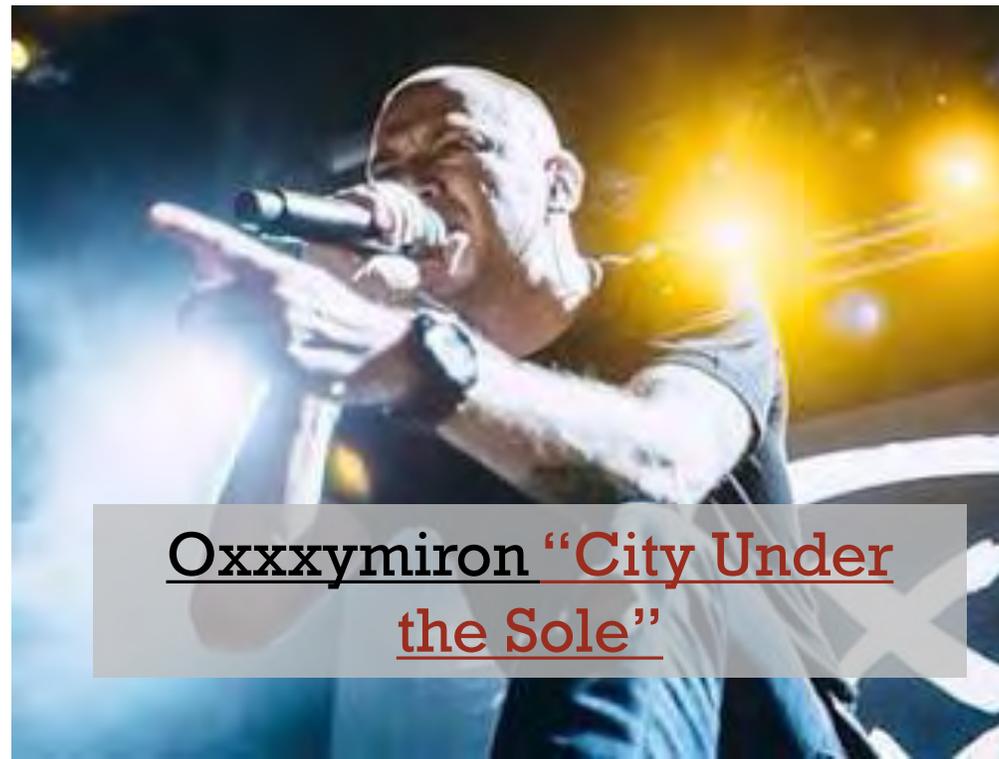
No Russian language experience needed to enjoy



Noize MC “Everything’s As It  
Should Be”



Husky “October 7<sup>th</sup>”



Oxxxymiron “City Under  
the Sole”



IC3PEAK “Death No  
More”