ELECTIONS, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, AND AUTHORITARIAN RESPONSIVENESS IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

For decades, elections were thought of as the necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. After the end of the Cold War, however, the world witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of regimes that combined the democratic institution of elections with authoritarian practices. Despite the presence of regular and free multi-party elections, these regimes did not liberalize or democratize. However, elections continued to matter and sporadically elections became focal points for social dissent and protest. In a series of three papers, this dissertation examines elections in Russia.

The first paper presents an in-depth analysis of the 2013 Moscow mayoral election. I make the argument that in order to secure the legitimacy that elections can bestow, the authorities in this case promoted electoral competition by helping all the candidates for mayor surmount a high procedural barrier to participation. This paper contributes to scholarship on the manipulation of elections which has previously only considered measures that restrict electoral competition. Elections where authorities promote competition are still unlikely to result in opposition victories but may dampen voter participation.

The second paper uses Albert Hirschman’s Exit, Voice and Loyalty framework and evidence from twenty-nine semi-structured interviews to analyze political participation in an authoritarian state through the experience of individuals running for local political office in Moscow’s municipalities. I find that citizens without substantial previous political experience, but galvanized by anti-fraud protests, ran successful political campaigns with help from civil society organizations and political parties. Counterintuitively, once in office, they adopted hyper-legal strategies to combat corruption and waste.
The third and final paper uses regression analysis to test two explanatory models for electoral competition under authoritarianism: voter preferences and regime manipulation. Relying on an original dataset of protests across Russia’s regions, I find partial support for both models. Previous protest activity both increases electoral competition and provokes more pre-election manipulation of the field of candidates. In addition, voter mobilization in support of regime candidates is especially effective in generating pro-regime results. Replacing long-sitting but economically predatory governors before the election can dampen the impact of voter disapproval again boosting pro-incumbent results.
Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Yana Gorokhovskaia. The interviews conducted as part of fieldwork undertaken in Russia from July to December of 2013 and included in Chapters 2 and 3 are covered by UBC Ethics Certificate Number H13-01613. The dataset of protest used in the regression analysis in Chapter 4 was compiled by the author for the years 2012, 2013, and 2014. Data on protest in 2011 was taken with permission from a dataset compiled by Dr. Tomila Lankina.
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Though many people helped in the research and writing of this dissertation any errors that remain are mine alone.
For my parents, Larissa and Vikenti
Chapter 1

Introduction

“For Russia, there can be no political option other than democracy... We share the universal democratic principles adopted worldwide.”

-V. Putin,
President of Russia

“Today, Russia has no government. Russia is a business. A government works for the people. A business works for itself.”

-Y. Rusakova,
Opposition municipal deputy

Parsing the lessons that could be drawn from three decades of regime change, Valerie Bunce observed that at the beginning of the new millennium “mass publics today have a higher probability than they have ever had of living in a democratic system.” (2000, 704) By that time, democratic institutions had indeed been adopted in most countries around the world. Just as these institutions became common, however, enthusiasm about the spread of democracy was beginning to wane. This was especially evident among disappointed democracy promoters, like Thomas Carothers (2002), who

2 Municipal district council member for Gagarinsky Raion. Interview with author. August, 2013, Moscow.
wrote an oft-cited piece in *Journal of Democracy* about the demise of the “transition paradigm”\(^3\), an end to the expectation that any country moving *away* from authoritarianism was moving *toward* democracy. In fact, scholars of regime change had been speculating about the various pathways of transition from authoritarianism for some time. Writing a decade and a half before Carothers, Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter sketched out three possible end points of transition: some form of democracy, a return to authoritarian rule, or the emergence of a “revolutionary alternative” (1986, 6).

Democracy was not the only or even the most likely result of political transition. In fact, by the time that Carothers had popularized the term “transition paradigm”, scholars had begun debating how to define and conceptualize the political regimes\(^4\) of states which had settled firmly within the “gray zone” (Carothers 2002, 9) between democracy and autocracy.

In the two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of regimes which were “neither democratic nor conventionally authoritarian” (Diamond 2002, 25) grew in an unprecedented way (see Figure 1.1). And academic debate began to focus on whether the world was witnessing a diffusion of different types of democracy or the formation of a new type of authoritarianism. Those who favoured “diminished subtypes” of democracy – illiberal democracy, unconsolidated democracy, limited democracy – categorized states using those attributes of democracy that the regimes lacked (see Collier and Levitsky 1997). A powerful example of this was O’Donnell’s (1994) “delegative democracy” used to describe newly (at that time) installed regimes which he argued were

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\(^3\) O’Donnell is especially critical of Carothers’ characterization of scholarly literature on democratization (see O’Donnell as well Plattner and Diamond in a special response issue of *Journal of Democracy*, 2002).

\(^4\) Throughout this dissertation I use the term “regime” to refer to a state’s political system. A regime is a set of principles, norms, and rules that guide decision making (Krasner 1982).
democracies that were not on the path to becoming representative democracies. In these states, political authority was exercised outside of institutions following socio-political patterns developed before the transition from authoritarianism. At around the same time, scholars also began to use terms such as façade democracy “where the adjective essentially cancels the democratic character of the subtype.” (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 442) These regimes were beasts of a different nature. Here, democratic institutions were not missing crucial elements, such as the surrounding conditions which facilitate the exercise of political choice (see O’Donnell 1996), or being used imperfectly. Instead, “the existence of democratic political institutions, such as multiparty electoral competition, mask[ed] (often, in part, to legitimate) the reality of authoritarian domination.” (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989, xviii)

Figure 1.1 is based on data from version 5 of the Authoritarian Regimes Dataset compiled by Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell. It shows the prevalence of three authoritarian regime types – monarchy, military, and multi-party – over the last 40 years. The number of authoritarian regimes with multi-party elections, defined by Hadenius and Teorell as regimes “that hold parliamentary or presidential elections in which (at least some) independent or opposition candidates are able to participate” (2007, 147), rose dramatically beginning in 1990.
Although earlier scholarship had raised questions as to whether elections could “assume real significance even under conditions of authoritarian rule or civil war” (Karl 1995, 73), the issue was taken up anew, motivated in part by the recognition that, at the international level, democracy as a system of governance had really become the acceptable regime – the only game in town. More and more states declared themselves democratic, instituted regular elections, and allowed multi-party competition. As Figure 1.2 shows, however, turnover of those in power did not always accompany the adoption of elections. In many states with elections, the electoral playing field was manipulated to give incumbents an overwhelming advantage. Marina Ottaway called these regimes “semi-authoritarian” and described them as ...political hybrids...[which] allow little real competition for power, thus reducing government accountability...[yet] leave enough political space for political parties and organizations of civil society to form, for an independent press to function.
to some extent, and some political debate to take place.
(2003, 3)

Andreas Schedler called them “electoral authoritarian” and defined them in a similar way highlighting the fact that these regimes “play the game of multiparty elections…[while] containing the troubling uncertainty of electoral outcomes.” (2006, 3) Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010a) popularized the term “competitive authoritarianism”, describing the same types of regimes. Implicit in each conceptualization was the notion that although a regime loss at the polls was unlikely, it was not impossible. Unlike hegemonic authoritarian regimes, here the opposition was not only allowed to participate, but incumbents could only “ignore them at their peril.” (Goode 2010, 1057) The electoral revolutions that swept Eurasia in the mid 2000s – from Serbia to Georgia to Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan – lent empirical backing to these assumptions. In each case, national elections were the spark which ignited what was hailed at the time as democratic breakthroughs ousting well-entrenched authoritarian leaders. Although none of these electoral revolutions produced lasting democratization (see Kalandadze and Orenstein 2009), they did show that democratic institution like elections could be used as a rallying point for resistance against authoritarianism.

5 Hadenius and Teorell’s category of “limited multiparty regimes” correspond to Levitsky and Way’s “competitive authoritarianism” and Schedler’s “electoral authoritarianism”: “The point is that elections take place where there is a degree of competition between candidates who either represent different parties or who choose to act as individuals. This does not mean the elections in question are otherwise free and fair (we are talking here, after all, about authoritarian regimes).” (Hadenius and Teorell 2007, 147)
Why, when they are so often manipulated, when the incumbent is the presumed winner, do certain elections provoke mass public outrage? Why do autocrats yield to street protests when they could repress them instead? Part of the explanation lies in the power of institutions. Scholars have highlighted the importance of international linkages in constraining the actions of autocrats (Levitsky and Way 2010a) and that of patronage networks in explaining political openings in authoritarian states (Hale 2014). These are salient factors. Even so, domestic institutions matter in hybrid regimes as well.

Institutions are “the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction.” (North 1990, 3) As James March and Johan Olsen have argued for three decades, institutions are not simply arenas for political behavior or transaction. As the rules of the game, they generate shared and enduring expectations about how others will behave. “Political actors act and organize themselves in accordance with rules and practices which are socially constructed, publically known, anticipated and accepted.” (March and
Olsen 1996, 249). These rules – or institutions – are the basis of “a logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1996, 249). They shape behavior. Institutions matter even in states that, unlike Western democracies, do not prioritize close adherence to written, formal, or “parchment” institutions (Carey 2000). In hybrid regimes, formal institutions can be unstable and weakly enforced (Levitsky and Murillo 2009) and may be altered, subverted, and supplemented by informal practices (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Ledeneva 2006). Nevertheless, over time, formal institutions inform expectations even in environments that otherwise lack the rule of law. Institutional standards, for instance that elections be free and fair, influence the way ordinary people judge the quality of their polities (Bratton 2007). Formal rules, such as constitutional term limits, also restrain leaders from seeking to extend their hold on power (Posner and Young 2007).

Institutionalization of a regime is not synonymous with democratization. And democratic institutions do not inevitably lead to democratic polities. However, democratic institutions, because of their capacity to shape the behavior of political actors, are nonetheless important.

The overarching goal of this dissertation is to better understand the ways in which elites and ordinary people respond to democratic institutions in one hybrid authoritarian regime: Russia. In a series of three papers, I examine how ordinary citizens, politicians, and the state participate in regional and local elections. In doing so, I bring together literature on democratization, membership, political strategy, mobilization and protest,

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6 Liberalization – “[a] process of redefining and extending rights” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 7) – can take place within an authoritarian regime. As I discuss in Chapter 2, in response to public protest the government announced measures to facilitate greater political plurality by easing rules around the registration of political parties. As O’Donnell and Schmitter point out, however, liberalization is not synonymous with democratization and is not irreversible.
public opinion, voter preferences, and authoritarian manipulation. This dissertation takes a bottom-up, agency-centered approach, departing from analyses of authoritarian regimes which privilege structural determinants (Levitsky and Way 2012; 2013) – a subject I return to in the Chapter 5. The operating assumption guiding this research is that the presence of democratic institutions in nondemocratic states creates a space for action. The two contrasting quotes describing Russia’s political system that begin this Chapter, one from President Putin and the other from a municipal deputy in Moscow, symbolize this tension. This tension can facilitate action both on the part of the regime to maintain its authority and on the part of opposition politicians and citizens to challenge it. This dissertation examines the complex games between the regime, opposition, and citizens played with regard to the institution of elections.

1.1 Russia’s hybrid authoritarianism

As I discuss in the next section, this dissertation relies on both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, all of the data comes from a single state: Russia. The political system that has consolidated in Russia over the past fifteen years is a case of hybrid authoritarianism – an autocratic system of governance, which relies on democratic institutions as the main mode for officially maintaining political authority. The purpose of this dissertation is not to explain the formation of Russia’s hybrid authoritarian regime (I review the literature that aims to do this below) but instead to closely analyze the

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7 David Collier suggests that being asked “What is this a case of?” is the stuff of doctoral defense lore (1995, 461). In fact, there is some disciplinary ambiguity around what a “case” is. Alexander George and Andrew Bennett define a case as “an instance of a class of events” and “class of events” as “a phenomenon of scientific interest” which can include political regimes, economic systems or leadership styles (2005, 17 - 18). Even a single individual can be a case of several different phenomena: types of treatment, an instance of juvenile delinquency (see discussion in Ragin and Becker 1992, 21). This dissertation examines, through within-case, comparison, and regression techniques, several cases of elections in a country that is, in terms of scholarship on hybrid authoritarian regimes, both “substantively and theoretically significant” (Ragin 1999, 1138).
processes surrounding elections in Russia in order to further develop our understanding of the role and impact of democratic institutions under authoritarianism.

In the fall of 2013, President Vladimir Putin said that “Russia has firmly taken the path of democracy. It is looking for ways to strengthen these democratic foundations.”\footnote{Vladimir Putin’s statement at the Valdai Club, 19 September 2013. “Russia will develop a democratic state, defend Christian values – Putin” Voice of Russia, Interfax. Available on-line: http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2013_09_19/Russia-will-develop-as-democratic-state-defend-Christian-values-and-morality-Putin-2355/ Accessed: 8 June 2016.} This formal commitment to democracy came just a year after tens of thousands of people, crowds not seen since the 1991 coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev, took to the streets in cities around Russia to protest electoral fraud. Before the onset of the 2011–2012 protests, which were dubbed the “Snow Revolution” (Ioffe 2011), most agreed that the authoritarian system which had developed in Russia during Putin’s two presidencies was stable.

The 1990s were a decade of cautious optimism about Russia’s political transition (see McFaul 2001). The mood changed by the early 2000s as the system became more stable and grew gradually more repressive. In a mushrooming literature addressing the question “what went wrong?” scholars identified many different culprits for the emerging authoritarianism. Some explanations were institutional in nature. Steven Fish (2005) suggested that the Russian system was essentially super-presidential and that a weak legislature facilitated the degradation of political competition. In a similar vein, Vladimir Gel’man (2015) argued that a lack of international or domestic constraints allowed elites to tailor the rules of the game to suit themselves. Russia’s rapid but partial economic liberalization was also cited as a source of corruption and authoritarianism (Hellman 1998). Other scholars focused on the weakness of civil society (Howard 2003; Evans et
al. 2006; Sundstrom 2006; Henderson 2011) as well as the disarray and ineffectiveness of Russia’s political parties (Hale 2005; Stoner-Weiss 2002; Ishiyama 1995; White 2013). Eventually this research gave way to analysis of Russia’s new hybrid system, complete with a dominant party – United Russia – acting as a governing vehicle (Reuter and Remington 2008; Reuter 2010), pro-state civic organizations (Hemment 2012; Sperling 2012), as well as growing repression of independent nongovernmental organizations and the media (Plantan 2013; White and Oates 2003; Becker 2014). Despite some optimism about the possibility of liberalization during Dmitri Medvedev’s presidency, two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia seemed to have become “a paradigmatic case of new authoritarianism” (Robertson 2009, 531) that was capable of avoiding the threats that had toppled other autocrats in Eurasia (see Koesel and Bunce 2013).

Just as Putin was set to maneuver back into the primary seat of power in March of 2012, large scale protests erupted across Russia. The protesters were young and old, middle class and educated. Provoked by widely distributed images and videos documenting electoral fraud and outraged that United Russia had been handed another majority in the Duma, they chanted “Putin is a thief!”, “Russia without Putin!” and “We exist!”. Journalists observed that this was a “watershed” moment for Russian politics (Barry 2011a; 2011b; Elder 2011; Bratersky and Krainova 2011). Scholars were equally enthusiastic, announcing that mass protests had “put an end to the postcommunist status quo” (Shevtsova 2012, 19) and that they had “not only weakened but [had] essentially destroyed Putin’s regime” (Krastev and Holmes 2013, 33). We know in hindsight, of course, that the authoritarian system rebalanced. The protest movement, lacking in leadership and concrete political demands (see Gel’man 2013), did not produce turnover
or regime change. And yet, the public’s vocal response to transgressions against the norms of a democratic institution – the heavy-handed rigging of an election – is telling. As Graeme Robertson argues, it is evidence of “the gradual growth of real pressure from below on the sclerotic institutions of Russia’s pseudodemocracy.” (2009, 13) Russians believe in democratic institutions. Asked whether Russia was a democratic country, almost 52% of respondents to the 2012 Russian Election Survey answer “No” (Colton and Hale, 2014). Yet almost the same percentage of people – 49% – said that voting in elections made a difference. It is this friction within the system, between the formal standards and the practices that pervade it, which makes Russia a good case to analyze responsiveness to democratic institutions in a hybrid authoritarian regime.

1.2 Methodology

Researching politics in a hybrid authoritarian regime poses certain challenges. J. Paul Goode points this out with regard to the declining number of studies based on fieldwork in Russia:

fundamental hurdles…are particularly acute when the tools developed for the study of politics tend to assume the benefits and context of open democracy while the object of investigation is sensitive to scrutiny. (2010, 1057)

Goode outlines three principal problems with researching a hybrid or authoritarian regime. First, formal institutions – such as legislatures, the courts, and elections – can be undermined by informal practices, leaving the researcher without the ability to access or analyze the real levers of political power and decision making. Second, interview participants may be difficult to find, unwilling to speak, or delivering the regime-approved “party line”. And third, media reports are often biased or, worse still, self-censored.
I take a mixed-method approach in this dissertation, relying on both quantitative and qualitative techniques guided by each Chapter’s primary research question. I discuss the specifics of method and data separately in each of the three papers. Here I take the opportunity to reflect on the strategies I used to address the three challenges outlined by Goode. Since I am interested in the formal institution of elections, the proposition that this is akin to studying a “catalogue of legal fictions” (Goode 2010, 1057) poses a serious problem for me. Are the outcomes of elections even worth analyzing or are they simply the product of fraud? How can one capture voters’ true political preferences in a system where the influence of votes is diminished by the incumbent’s efforts to skew the electoral playing field in order to win? In places where the grey market and informal practices dominate, how can aggregate economic indicators be trusted to reflect real economic conditions?

My approach to handling these problems is to rely on a variety of sources and supplement less trustworthy indicators with different types of information. For instance, to verify that fraud was not primarily responsible for election outcomes, I read through election observer reports for each region in my analysis and used regression analysis to determine the degree to which voter turnout and voting by absentee ballot affected results. To gauge the political preferences of voters, I relied on a number of different indicators – some produced by the government and others by independent organizations – which could be usefully linked to political satisfaction including ratings of corruption, the performance of previous regional executives, and support of the incumbent political party. Beyond the usual concerns about whether an indicator really captures the substance of a variable which plague most quantitative research, analysis of an authoritarian regime
is further complicated by suspicions about official data. As far as it was possible, I was careful not to accept official claims of veracity and to augment imperfect data.

Goode suggests that interview data is useful “insofar as respondents are not threatened with coercion or violence for participation in the study, or when respondents are not concerned about surveillance.” (2010, 1057). He goes on to point out that in a hybrid regime, foreign researchers seem dangerous and local researchers may be vulnerable to questions about their connections or funding. My own experience with conducting interviews during fieldwork in Russia bears out some of these concerns though, because I am a native Russian speaker, my identity somewhat altered the dynamic described by Goode.

My interviews subjects were local politicians, representing in-system and out-system opposition parties, as well as activists. Most, though not all, were public figures with an active presence in conventional and social media. Few were concerned outright about the exposure or increased attention from the authorities that being interviewed by me could bring. Their frankness in speaking with me was often surprising given the real and everyday harassment they faced and which I document in Chapter 3. This is not to suggest that the repressiveness of the hybrid regime cannot be a concrete obstacle to research. The openness of the political situation had an observable affect on my interviewees during field work. After the campaign season leading up to the United Day of voting on September 8th 2013 was over, there was a palpable decrease in people’s willingness to grant interviews. With public attention on the operation of the election waning, the authorities re-established control. News leaked out in October of 2013 that municipal organs of state authority were collecting information on opposition deputies,
which prompted many of the people I had contacted for interviews to vet me thoroughly before agreeing to meet.

Goode has few proposals in regard to the difficulty of overcoming the fear of surveillance while trying to interview in Russia. He suggests that outsourcing surveys may help “to take the identities of foreign researchers out of the equation” and that “scholars of Russian politics might give some consideration to using the endlessly fascinating Moscow rumour mill as a source of hypotheses” (2010, 1069). In fact, I found unguarded moments at political rallies and meetings to be sources of useful information though this information was often communicated “off the record” and required a time-intensive investment in observational methods of study. I made myself a presence at political events during the mayoral campaign in Moscow in the summer and fall of 2013 and was able to leverage contacts and acquaintances into interviews. Despite my relatively problem-free experience, the reality of politics in a hybrid regime which was at the time positioning itself more sharply against the West did seep into my research. One interviewee, before signing the consent form, half jokingly asked if I was a shpionka – a spy – and then requested not to be recorded. An organizer from a civic organization told me that he thought my email correspondence was most likely being traced because I had spoken to a well-known circle of activists. These were unsettling moments.

Lastly, in open polities, the media is a good though not unbiased or uncomplicated source of information. In hybrid regimes “reporters and editors are frequently subject to harassment, intimidation, and violence, such that outlets may opt for self-censorship to avoid provoking the regime…journalism becomes a site of mercenary political activity.” (Goode 2010, 1058) Self-censorship and repression of media are especially problematic
when the information that is being sought is on events or activities that are expressly directed against the regime. For this dissertation, I constructed a dataset of social, political, environmental and economic protest across Russia’s regions for the years 2012, 2013, and 2014. Though I initially tried to use Integrum World Wide, a database of media sources from states which make up the former Soviet Union, to compile events data, this source proved to be vulnerable to the quality of domestic reporting. Large protests received attention but there was a definite trend in under reporting of smaller, regional events. To collect the data, I therefore relied on self-reporting as catalogued by Namash.ru, a website maintained by a group of sociologists and activists. Each entry on the site was linked to a news item, helping to verify the information. This source was of course biased in other ways. Namash.ru did not reliably report on pro-regime rallies. I discuss how I strove to mitigated this bias in Chapter 4. Other scholars of mobilization in Russia have relied on similar self-reporting websites (Robertson and Reuter 2015; Lankina 2015). The internet has considerably undermined the ability of an authoritarian state to restrict the flow of information. Yet repression, and the insidious impact it has on the media’s ability to report what is happening within a state, continues to pose real hurdles for research.

1.3 Overview

This dissertation takes the form of three inter-related papers. In Chapter 2, I examine the 2013 Moscow mayoral election and accompanying campaign. Using the concept of the uneven playing field in authoritarian elections as a starting point, I suggest that in the pursuit of domestic legitimacy, the authorities used measures to not only limit electoral competition but to also promote it. I focus especially on the newly instituted
“municipal filter” for mayoral candidates and how the regime helped its biggest opposition rival, Alexei Navalny, surmount it. The chapter aids in the development of a more nuanced approach to authoritarian manipulation of elections by suggesting that the effort to balance risk and legitimacy does not only prevent certain actions – ballot box stuffing or outlawing opposition politicians – but it also encourages attempts to appear democratic. The chapter contributes to literature on the purpose of elections and electoral manipulation in hybrid and authoritarian states (Simpser 2013; Gandhi 2008).

Chapter 3 examines political participation in an authoritarian state through the experience of ordinary individuals running for local political office in Moscow’s municipalities. Using Albert Hirschman’s Exit, Voice and Loyalty framework (1970), and evidence from semi-structured interviews, I analyze how individuals without substantial previous political experience channeled their disappointment following the 2011 anti-electoral fraud protests into successful political campaigns. I find that the participation of these individuals was facilitated by civil society organizations and political parties, which helped them to overcome substantial formal and informal barriers to entering organized politics. The chapter contributes to literature on political participation in authoritarian states (see Lust-Okar 2006) which has previously overlooked the motivation of low level non-regime politicians. One of the key counter-intuitive findings of the chapter has to do with the political strategies adopted by these individuals once in office. I find that in contrast to the expectation that individuals would use informal practices to overcome formal obstacles (Ledeneva 2006), many municipal deputies instead adopt a policy of “hyper-legalism”, adhering closely to formal rules as a way to oppose entrenched corrupt practices.
Chapter 4 examines, using regression analysis, the results of 43 gubernatorial elections in Russia’s regions from 2012 to 2014 in order to test the explanatory power of two models of electoral competition: voter preferences and regime manipulation. I find mixed support for both models. In terms of voter preferences, experience with mobilization emerges as an important factor. Relying on a dataset of protests across Russia’s regions, I find that previous protest activity increases electoral competition and provokes more pre-election manipulation of the field of candidates. At the same time, the regime’s efforts to manipulate competition also have a substantial impact on electoral outcomes. Voter mobilization in support of regime candidates is especially effective in generating pro-regime results. And replacing long-sitting governors before the election undermines voter disapproval of previous predatory behavior on the part of the region’s elites. The Chapter helps to bring voters back into the discussion of elections in authoritarian regimes, contributing to recent scholarship which views voters as more than “passive recipients of patronage and manipulation” (Miller 2015, 649). At the same time, the Chapter’s findings reaffirm the performative nature of authoritarian elections and the insidious impact that close links between the regime and economic elites can have on vulnerable populations, suggesting that regimes which can manipulate voters do not need to manipulate votes.

In Chapter 5, I conclude by examining the contributions of this study thematically. I focus on how the findings of this dissertation fit within the growing field of literature on authoritarian responsiveness and what that means for the debate about structure versus agency explanations for regime endurance and change (see Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Levitsky and Way 2013). Few modern nondemocratic regimes can ignore
their citizens and hope to survive. Yet responsiveness is not akin to liberalization or democratization. I suggest that authoritarian regimes are keenly sensitive to public demands, especially in their most vocal form: protest and civil disobedience. The response can take the form of repression or institutionalization (Chen 2012; Bourdreau 2004; Eisenstadt 2004; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007) but it demonstrates that authoritarian regimes have agency in their efforts at self-preservation. Despite the emphasis on the ability of an authoritarian regime to manipulate and respond to public pressures for reform, this dissertation ends on an optimistic note. The recognition of agency and the influence of democratic institutions in nondemocratic settings, indicates that opportunities for substantive political change exist and are within reach of opposition politicians and ordinary citizens.
Chapter 2

Restricting and promoting competition on an uneven electoral playing field: Moscow’s mayoral election

2.1 Introduction

Manipulation of elections in hybrid authoritarian regimes can sometimes produce absurd situations. For example, the runner up in Moscow’s 2013 mayoral election had, only two months before, been convicted of embezzlement in a case described by the European Court of Human Rights as “arbitrary”\(^9\) and had been released based on a petition against the verdict, not from his lawyers, but from prosecution. Despite his legal predicament, or perhaps because of the public sympathy it garnered, this candidate was officially able to raise a larger campaign fund than any of his fellow mayoral hopefuls almost entirely from individual on-line donations (Navalny Report 2013). In authoritarian regimes with elections, autocrats try to reap the benefits of securing political power through the polls while controlling electoral competition. The “menu of manipulation” available to authoritarian rulers is long and varied and scholars have detailed the many

ways autocrats restrict competition (Schedler 2002). Yet almost no attention has been paid to the ways that autocrats may, in the pursuit of electoral legitimacy, promote competition (for an exception see Wilson 2016). Taking a cue from the insights produced by research on “regime juxtaposition” (Gibson 2005), and “scaling down” (Snyder 2001) from the national to the subnational, in this chapter I make an argument for expanding the framework used to analyze the manipulation of elections in authoritarian regimes to include efforts to foster competition. Using evidence from Moscow’s 2013 mayoral election, I show that the authorities helped opposition candidates surmount a high procedural barrier – the municipal filter – in order to secure their participation in the election. The participation of the main opposition candidate, Alexei Navalny, was especially important to the regime given Moscow’s recent history as a center of anti-regime protest. I argue that while the other components of the uneven playing field – media and access to resources – are difficult to alter in subnational elections because they are often set at the national level, legal and procedural obstacles are more malleable. Adding the practice of aiding opposition participation does not fundamentally alter the authoritarian nature of the election. It can, however, demobilize opposition-minded voters and lower overall voter turnout, thereby endangering the very legitimacy sought through an election in the first place.

The chapter is organized as follows: section two reviews the literature on hybrid authoritarian regimes with close attention to existing frameworks for analyzing the manipulation of elections and their neglect of strategies that promote competition. I introduce the lessons that research on “autocratic enclaves” has produced as a way to problematize national-level analyses of authoritarian elections. In section three, I discuss
methodology as well as provide background on the re-introduction of gubernatorial
election in Russia and to Moscow’s municipal politics. In section four, I analyze each
component of the uneven electoral playing field in this important subnational election. In
section five I describe the election’s results and the role of public opinion polling. Section
six concludes.

2.2 Manipulation and authoritarian elections

As I describe in Chapter 1, over the last three decades, the world has seen a
proliferation of authoritarian regimes with democratic institutions. In these regimes,
elections are the “primary means” of gaining political power (Levitsky and Way 2010, 5).
Moreover, rather than simply being formally permitted to participate in elections,
political parties and candidates actually campaign for votes (Schedler 2006). However,
their efforts rarely result in electoral victories as incumbents manipulate the electoral
playing field. Adequately conceptualizing the true difference between electoral
democracies – regimes that meet the minimum standard for procedural democracy but
fail to institutionalize other aspects of a liberal democratic regime – and electoral or
competitive authoritarianism – regimes with elections that fail to meet democratic
standards (see Schedler 2002; Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010) is difficult. Often,
the “empirical reality is fuzzy” (Schedler 2002, 38). In examining this phenomenon,
scholars’ efforts have been devoted to outlining the ways in which an election can be free
but unfair. I describe these efforts below and highlight a thus far overlooked strategy of
manipulation: the promotion of competition. It is important to note here, however, that
the recognition that “elections alone are not enough” (Schedler 2002, 37) and ensuing
work on identifying the degree to which an incumbent’s advantage is a problem for
democracy – how uneven must an electoral playing field be? – has led to a blurring of lines between regime types, which some scholars have found troublesome. Maxwell Cameron (2013), for example, argues that the concept of competitive authoritarianism is insufficiently precise and would benefit from a renewed focus on whether or not there exists a group within the regime that is unwilling to surrender office following a loss at the polls. This is a fair criticism and I return to the implications of analyzing electoral competition in the absence of electoral turnover in Chapter 4. In this Chapter, however, I am concerned with expanding our understanding of the ways elections can be manipulated to generate the appearance of competition.

Elections in nondemocratic regimes serve a variety of purposes. They manage competition over the distribution of state resources in the form of patronage and also vet legislators, contributing to the stability of an authoritarian regime (Lust-Okar 2006). Elections regulate succession at top posts and ameliorate the risk of a coup d’état by providing an alternative route to power (Cox 2009). They are a means to monitor the performance of local officials (Blaydes 2011). Elections help facilitate credible power-sharing arrangements between the authoritarian leader and her allies (Magaloni 2006). They transmit and distort information thereby influencing the subsequent choices and behavior of other political actors (Simpser 2013). And elections can help to co-opt potential opponents by including them in legislative bodies (Gandhi and Przeworski 2008). Most importantly, elections bestow legitimacy (Schedler 2006, 13) and validate the incumbent regime’s exclusive claim to political authority.

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10 See Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) for a comprehensive discussion of the research on authoritarian elections.
11 I use the term legitimacy to describe the purpose of elections in authoritarian regimes throughout this dissertation. It is not an unproblematic concept. Scholars have rightly criticized the assumption that
However, achieving legitimacy through elections is not an easy task. Elections can become “effective focal points” (Tucker 2007, 541) that help citizens, the opposition, and elites overcome collective action problems normally associated with resisting the regime in the course of daily life. For citizens, the limited time frame of elections as well as the international attention they attract can encourage participation in mass public protests that challenge fraud or bureaucratic abuse. For the opposition, the scheduling of elections at regular and predictable intervals allows time for preparation and provides incentive to overcome internal divisions. For elites, elections are an opportunity for defection and the mobilization of independent bases of support (see Bessinger 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2009). Threats from the public, opposition and from within complicate the task of managing elections.

Managing the risk elections pose has been called the “dilemma of elections” whereby “[i]ncumbent authorities…have incentive to maintain the benefits of political competition while attempting at the same time to escape the limits that it imposes on them.” (Petrov et al 2013, 3) Authoritarian elections are a “difficult balancing act” (Schedler 2002, 114) as incumbents seek to “extract the benefits of competition while minimizing the likelihood of loss of control.” (Robertson 2011, 12) In order to accomplish this balance, authoritarian regimes manipulate electoral rules and institutions to “make the political environment less hospitable for those who would contest their power.” (Ottaway 2003, 149)

elections establish democracy or provide real democratic legitimacy (Schmitter and Karl 1991; O’Donnell 1996; Schedler 2002). Yet the fundamental and widely accepted purpose of elections is to sanction political power. Elections are the necessary if not sufficient condition for democracy. They are the starting point. And, importantly for autocrats everywhere, the presence of elections complicates the task of labeling a state as nondemocratic. This is what I mean when I suggest that autocrats seek legitimacy through elections. They seek a shield against domestic as well as international opponents of the regime. I do not wish to suggest that regimes achieve true substantive democratic legitimacy by holding elections.
2.2.1 The uneven playing field

In the “game of elections” (Ottoway 2003), the methods of manipulation can vary considerably. In this section, I focus on a distinct type of manipulation that aims to generate convincingly competitive elections without risking a loss at the polls. Before moving on, however, it is important to note that all theories of electoral manipulation attribute agency and strategy to the authoritarian regime (understood broadly as made up of not only the incumbent leader but her subnational representatives, political party, and elites at all levels of the state and government). Manipulating elections requires deliberate action and strategic choice (see Birch 2011; Simpser 2013; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2002; Ottoway 2003). This does not mean, however, that autocrats always get manipulation right. In authoritarian states, which lack true representative institutions that can aggregate and channel public demands and which represses forums for dissent, voters, the true strength of the opposition, and public opinion are black boxes for the autocrat. To argue that authoritarian regimes act strategically to maintain the status quo is not to say that they act with perfect knowledge or that they are always successful. As I detail in section five, even manipulated elections can be close calls.

Scholars have labeled a variety of different strategies as “manipulation” of elections. Sarah Birch (2011) divides manipulation into three principal dimensions: the manipulation of electoral rules, the manipulation of vote choice (by pressuring voters or excluding candidates) and the manipulation of voting (by falsifying or stealing votes). Alberto Simpser (2013) lists what he calls “common tactics” of manipulation, including vote buying, intimidating candidates, and complicating registration procedures. Andreas Schedler’s (2002) “menu of manipulation” is premised on the “chain of democratic
choice”, which sets out the conditions that must be met in order for elections to fulfil their democratic promise. The chain begins with the empowerment of citizens to elect their leaders and ends with a final, decisive choice that is not subject to reversal by powerful elites. In the middle of the chain are links that mirror tactics outlined by Birch and Simpser, including the ability to freely form voting preferences in a contest open to all who desire to compete and where votes are fairly and accurately counted.

In discussing electoral manipulation in this chapter I rely on the conceptual framework of the uneven playing field as formulated by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010) in their work on competitive authoritarianism. Despite criticisms of this framework as insufficiently rigorous (see Cameron 2013), it has certain advantages for the study of elections in Russia. Levitsky and Way describe the framework in the following way:

We consider the playing field uneven when 1. state institutions are widely abused for partisan ends, 2. incumbents are systematically favored at the expense of the opposition, and 3. the opposition’s ability to organize and compete in elections is seriously handicapped. Three aspects of the uneven playing field are of particular importance: access to resources, media, and the law. (2010a, 10)

First, the incumbent employs the resources and institutions of the state to outmaneuver any challenger. Second, state-controlled media produces biased coverage of the campaign favoring the incumbent with more airtime and positive reporting. Last, any disputes that arise during the campaign or following the election are resolved not by independent arbiters but by a partial electoral commission and judiciary (Levitsky and Way 2010a, 9 – 12; 2010b). This formulation excludes outright voter fraud, instead capturing “how regimes may be undemocratic even in the absence of overt fraud or civil-liberties
violations.” (Levitsky and Way 2010a, 6) This is an important distinction that separates electoral authoritarian regimes from closed or hegemonic authoritarian regimes (on this distinction see Schedler 2002); it separates elections that are a struggle from those which are a sham. There undoubtedly has been fraud in Russian elections in the past (see Enikolopov et al 2013; Myaglov et al 2013; Lukinova et al 2011) yet such fraud has delivered results at the price of legitimacy and provoked large-scale public outrage (Aron 2013; Greene 2013; Lankina and Skovoroda 2013). Because the uneven playing field is framed specifically as a feature of competitive or electoral authoritarian regimes, and not as part of the larger field of electoral malpractice or elections in hegemonic regimes, it makes sense to exclude fraud from the strategies available to the incumbent. This formulation instead draws attention to the ways that autocrats may more subtly manipulate competition by utilizing existing institutions and laws and not contravening them (on this point see Gel’man 2013).

2.2.2 Scaling down and promoting competition

Does electoral manipulation look the same at the national and subnational levels? Literature on “regime juxtaposition” – where “two levels of government with jurisdiction over the same territory operate under different regimes” (Gibson 2005, 103) – has shown that the quality of democracy that citizens enjoy can vary across subnational boundaries. Although much of this research has been devoted to explaining the persistence of “authoritarian enclaves” in democratic states (Gervasoni 2010; Gibson 2005; Benton 2012; Behrend 2011), scholars have also examined the causes of subnational democratization (Bohlken 2016) as well as the appearance of subnational democratic

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enclaves in authoritarian states (see Gilley 2010). The broad lesson to be drawn from this research is that there is no logical reason to expect that regimes will operate uniformly across national, subnational, and local boundaries. Thus far, this assumption has not been applied to work examining the electoral dynamics of hybrid authoritarian regimes.¹³

When the uneven playing field framework is made to travel, a few bounding assumptions can be shed. First, unlike national contests, regional contests rarely take the form of “nested games” or metagames: contests both within and over the rules (Schedler 2006, 12 - 13). At the subnational level, the opposition parties have little hope of changing the “foundational conditions of voting” (Schedler 2006, 13; see also Schedler 2002) and therefore these contests are focused on the struggle for votes instead of the struggle over electoral rules. This point is related to the second assumption that can reversed in an analysis of subnational elections: the ultimate prize is internal not external legitimacy. Subnational contests do not endanger the national regime. As such, the motivation for winning elections is not conditioned by the need to garner legitimacy from the international community – though international actors may still be watching these contests – but by the need to appease domestic audiences. Although this reasoning is a departure from Levitsky and Way’s formulation of the uneven playing field as part of competitive authoritarianism – a regime which was the product of the rising international costs of overt authoritarianism (see discussion 2010, 17 - 19) – it is logically consistent with their argument. Scholars have shown that formal democratic institutions like elections, even when they are poorly used or misused, create democratic expectations

¹³ Although there is a considerable volume of work on the authoritarian nature of Russia’s subnational regimes throughout the 1990s (see Hale 2003; Gel’man and Lankina 2008; Gel’man 2010; Gel’man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Ross 2003; Ross 2007).
among citizens (see Bratton 2007). In subnational elections, the legitimacy that is sought is therefore domestic but equally valuable.

When the uneven playing field framework is applied to the subnational level, it can be expanded, as I argue using evidence from the Moscow mayoral election, to include strategies that promote competition. In subnational contests, an autocrat may manipulate the rules not to keep the opposition out, but to ensure that it participates. As I describe below, during the 2013 mayoral campaign, authorities helped opposition candidates to surmount the very high administrative barriers that have traditionally characterizes elections in Russia (see Gel’man 2013). Thus far, this strategy of encouraging electoral competition has not been seriously considered in existing research on elections in hybrid authoritarian regimes (with the exception of Wilson 2016). However, as these regimes become more institutionalized and narrow the space in which opposition groups and parties can independently campaign and organize – by restricting civil society and gerrymandering electoral rules and institutions – there may eventually be a need to actively encourage competition in order to maintain the value of legitimacy brought about through elections. And as scholars have observed: “the legitimacy of an election in the eyes of citizens is very important for maintaining the regime on which winners depend on for their power” (Rose and Mishler 2009, 122).

2.3 Background and methodology

The 2013 mayoral election in Moscow was made possible by the political reforms spurred on by the mass protests against electoral fraud that swept through Russia during the winter of 2011. Relying on a mix of natural support for the regime by rural residents and dependent populations (the elderly, the poor, public-sector employees), the Kremlin
expected its governing party, United Russia, to secure a majority of seats in the Duma in December of 2011 (see Gel’man 2013 for full discussion). However, the party’s image had been damaged by corruption charges and the regime’s popularity was weakened by Prime Minister Putin’s announcement in September of 2011 that he and President Medvedev would switch posts in March of the following year. The decision was communicated to the Russia public as a long-standing private agreement between the two leaders (see Chapter 3 for interview data detailing public reaction to the announcement). This announcement was followed by two very public demonstrations of discontent: Putin was booed at a boxing match in November and several members of the Duma refused to stand at his entrance a few days later (Englund 2011). Vladimir Gel’man (2013) argues that the Kremlin was unable to see a “negative consensus” forming against the ruling party among the public ahead of the election and did not anticipate mass disloyalty by voters at the polls. The parliamentary election on December 4th was accompanied by online documentation of electoral misconduct in the form of ballot-box stuffing and carousel voting (Schwirtz and Herszenhorn 2011). Election monitors from the OSCE concluded that the election was “technically well administered across a vast territory, but the election was marked by the convergence of the state and the governing party…[which] did not provide the necessary conditions for fair electoral competition” (OSCE 2011, 1). Officially, United Russia maintained a majority of seats in the Duma, winning 49.32% of the vote, but the public’s response to claims of electoral misconduct was immediate. Moscow was at the epicenter of the protest movement against electoral fraud. Protests there began on December 5th with 8,000 people meeting in an unsanctioned action calling for “Russia without Putin!” (Elder 2011). Crowds grew in
meetings held on December 7th, 10th, 17th, 18th, culminating in a march on December 24th in central Moscow which attracted an estimated 80,000 people (Bratersky and Krainova 2011). While the largest crowds were observed in the capital, anti-government protests also took place in eighty-eight other cities across Russia and continued through February, March, April and May of 2012.

The protesters were loosely organized and lacked central leadership despite the presence of well-known anti-regime activists. Gel’m’an (2013) argues that this lack of organizational power on behalf of the opposition constituted a missed opportunity for meaningful political bargaining between the regime and opposition. Nevertheless, the protesters were able to articulate a set of political demands (The Guardian 2011):

1. Freedom for political prisoners;
2. Annulment of the election results;
3. The resignation of the head of the electoral commission;
4. New legislation on the registration of political parties;
5. Democratic and open elections.

The government responded to two of these demands: President Medvedev introduced legislation to bring back gubernatorial elections which had been cancelled in 2004 (Bransten 2004), as well as legislation to loosen the regulations surrounding registration of political parties. The change in policy has been described as “a clear-cut liberalizing concession” (Golosov 2012, 10) though scholars disagree on whether the Russian public, fearing a return to the chaotic decentralization of 1990s, was in favor of reinstating elections for governors or not (Moses 2014, 1396). In any case, the reintroduction of gubernatorial elections meant that Moscow, which, along with St. Petersburg, is both a
city and a region, would have an election for executive office for the first time in a decade.

Moscow is an especially difficult electoral market for Russia’s authoritarian regime. With a wealthier and more middle-class population than anywhere else in Russia, Moscow has traditionally embraced political pluralism. Not only was the city the center of protests against electoral fraud in the winter of 2011, over the last decade, Moscow has become the protest center of Russia. Between 13% and 37% of all protests in Russia took place in Moscow from 2006 to 2014\(^\text{14}\) (data from Lankina 2015 and author; on regional concentration of protests see also Dmitriev 2015; Lankina and Voznaya 2015). Moreover, surveys of protesters in Moscow showed that the demonstrations were made up predominantly of members of the middle-class (Vogel 2013), a population that had previously been largely apolitical but was now mobilizing against the regime. In March of 2012, the general discontent which had been kept alive by semi-regular mass anti-government protests produced a weak showing of electoral support for Vladimir Putin in the presidential election. The capital was the only Russian region where Putin received less than 50% of the vote share. By contrast, the leading independent opposition candidate, Mikhail Prokhorov, received his strongest support, 20.45%, in Moscow – more than in any other region of the country.

The mayoral election was called on June 5\(^{\text{th}}\), 2013 when the appointed mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyanin, resigned. Officially, Sobyanin ran as an independent but his candidacy was approved by President Putin who had also appointed him to the post in 2010. The other five candidates were Ivan Melnikov of the Communist Party, Sergei

\(^{14}\) Chapter 4 contains a detailed discussion of protests trends in Russia’s regions as well as an assessment of the impact of protest on electoral competition.
Mitrokhin of the liberal Yabloko party, Mikhail Degtyaryov of the far-right Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), Nikolay Levichev of the social-democratic Just Russia party, and Alexei Navalny of RPR-PARNAS, a coalition of one of the oldest alternative parties in Russia – the Republican party – and the People’s Freedom Party, which was formed in 2010 by members of Russia’s anti-systemic opposition. The campaign mainly revolved around two candidates: Sobyanin, representing the incumbent United Russia regime, and Navalny, a lawyer and anti-corruption campaigner, one of the main leaders of Russia’s opposition movement, and the man responsible for popularizing the label “Party of crooks and thieves” to describe United Russia. As I discuss further in section four, federal law required each mayoral candidate to pass a municipal filter to register their candidacy. A simple majority was needed to win the election. If no candidate was able to get a majority in the first round of voting, a run-off election was to be held between the two top candidates. The election day was set for September 8th 2013.

2.3.1 Methodology

The analysis presented in this chapter are based on observational study, interview data, polling data as well as news reports. Observational data is “produced by real-world events and processes not subject to the direct control of the investigator.” (Brady and

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15 Anti-systemic opposition is a common term in literature on Russian domestic politics (see Atwal and Bacon 2012; Robinson 2012). Unlike when such a label is attached to extremist or anti-political establishment parties in democracies (see Schedler 1996), in the Russian context, this label is not based on the relationship between the party and society (i.e. populist parties that appeal to voters opposed to traditional or ‘elitist’ politics). Instead, the label denotes the type of relationship between the political party and the regime. In Russia, the Kremlin-backed opposition consists of parties that formally oppose United Russia but actively endorse the policies and pronouncements of the President. These parties, while their leaders run for the highest political offices, do not intend to form a government. The semi-opposition is more actively critical of the regime. It exists outside the ruling elite and aims to join the government, but without enacting major policy changes. On the other hand, the anti-systemic opposition often does not have a presence within federal or regional legislatures and seeks power “precisely because [it wants] to change the way the political system operates.” (White 2012, 219; see also, Gel’man 2005) Anti-systemic opposition parties seek to change the status quo and challenge, both formally and in practice, the regime.
This method involves “direct observation and measurement of actual behavior occurring or recorded live…under naturalistic conditions.” (Schubert 1988, 306) The mayoral campaign ran from 5 June to 8 September, 2013. In my capacity as a researcher, I was in Moscow August 10 – 31 and returned after the election, November 7 – 15, 2013. During my time in the field, I attended a dozen political rallies, including at least one “campaign stop” by each of the four main candidates for mayor.16 At these events, I was able to collect campaign materials and interact with campaign volunteers. Although observation can produce unique data that is unavailable via other methods of data collection, it faces several challenges including reliability and validity. The researcher cannot hope to fully observe an entire political phenomenon even when it is temporally and geographically bounded. Her analysis, therefore, may be influenced by omission bias. In order to address these issues, I used other forms of data collection to supplement observational data. To track public opinion, I relied on polling data from both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. I also conducted twenty-eight semi-structured interviews17 with municipal council members in Moscow and used the Integrum World Wide database, the largest digital archive of news from Russia and the former Soviet Union, to track news reports about the election. I return to the interview data in the next chapter and more detailed information on that data collection strategy can be found in the methodology section of Chapter 3.

16 Sergei Sobyanin did not appear at campaign stops, opting instead for events staged for the media.
17 Information on interviews, the representativeness of the interview sample and interview questions can be found in Appendix A.
2.4 Competing on Moscow’s uneven playing field

The uneven playing field is a tool used by authoritarian regimes in pursuit of electoral legitimacy and to mitigate risk. Levitsky and Way (2010a) have described the uneven playing field as being comprised of unequal access to resource and the media and the unequal application of the law and regulations. Below I analyze the Moscow campaign in light of each of these components. The discussion highlights that two central points. First, in some ways, incumbent advantages in an authoritarian state look very much like incumbent advantages in a democracy. In this respect, Levitsky and Way’s framework should not be used a definite benchmark to determine which regime category a particular state belong to. Second, in general, while most of the components of the uneven playing field operate at the subnational level in the same way as they do at the national level, the uneven application of the law and the use of informal influence in this case actually serves to promote competition instead of hampering it.

2.4.1 State resources

This pillar of the uneven playing field includes material and institutional resources available to the incumbent that are deployed for partisan ends against the opposition: “The incumbent makes widespread use of public finance, employees, or infrastructure in a way that limits the opposition’s ability to compete on reasonably equal footing.” (Levitsky and Way 2010a, 368) In Moscow, in a move that mirrors political tactics common to democratic states, the incumbent took advantage of his prerogative to call a snap election at a time which was most beneficial to him. The incumbent Mayor of Moscow was Sergei Sobyanin. Previous to his appointment in Moscow, Sobyanin had been the governor of Tyumen Oblast – nominated for reelection by the President in 2005
– as well as the head of the President’s Administration. At the time of the election announcement, his term was not due to expire for another two years. This action, which triggered an immediate summer campaign, had arguably three beneficial consequences.

First, Sobyanin resigned at a time when his approval ratings were high, which allowed him to run a campaign taking full advantage of his popularity. According to a survey done by the Levada Center in June of 2013, 27% of Muscovites had a good opinion of Sobyanin and 41% had a fair opinion of him. At the time of the election’s announcement, Sobyanin was also leading all other potential candidates for mayor by a wide margin. Sixty-one percent of those intending to vote, according to the Levada Center, were ready to vote for him compared to just three percent ready to vote for his nearest competitor, Alexei Navalny. Second, the timing of the election, set to take place on the United Day of Voting on the first weekend of September – a time when, traditionally, many urban residents left for summer vacation – meant that the opposition could potentially mobilize far fewer supporters. And lastly, Mikhail Prokhorov, a potential mayoral candidate who had come in second to Putin in Moscow during the presidential election, announced that he would not run on June 13th. The snap election did not give him enough time to transfer his overseas assets to Russian companies in order to be in compliance with a law that prohibited direct ownership of foreign assets by political candidates. The announcement of the election weakened the opposition’s capacity to mobilize its voters and get them to the polls even before the campaign began.

In contrast to campaigns in democratic states, Sobyanin relied on the resources available to him through the apparatus of the state and civic organization linked to the state. While other candidates’ campaigns were staffed by volunteers or people working
for the candidate’s political party, the young people manning Sobyanin’s campaign stands at major landmarks around Moscow, when approached, told me that they worked or volunteered for various youth and athletic clubs run or subsidized by the city and were asked to work for the campaign.\(^\text{18}\) In contrast, Navalny’s campaign “cubes” were manned by enthusiastic volunteers who had travelled from all over Russia to work on the campaign.

In terms of material resources, Sobyanin did not, at least officially, fantastically outspend the other candidates, as had been the case in many previous Russian political campaigns. As reported by the *Moscow Times*, Sobyanin’s mayoral campaign fund totaled 84 million rubles, which was significantly more than the 11 million rubles Sergei Mitrokhin of Yabloko spent or the Communist Party’s Ivan Melnikov’s 20 million (Issue 5182, 2 August 2013). However, Navalny was able to raise over 103 million rubles, with all but 6% coming from individual on-line cash donations (Navalny Report 2013). Nearly half of the money raised was spent on advertising on the Internet, on radio, in newspapers the printing of campaign newsletters to be handed out by volunteers. While, as I describe below, access to television was blocked for all but the Kremlin-backed candidate, Navalny was able to effectively match the regime in material resources.

2.4.2. Media

The second feature of the uneven playing field created in competitive authoritarian regimes is unequal access the media. At the subnational level this pillar can be expected to operate differently from the national level. As I discuss in Chapter 1, reporting is compromised by pressure from authorities and the tendency to self-censor among

\(^{18}\) Personal communication with author, Moscow, August 28th 2013.
Masha Lipman has written extensively about freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Russia. She argues that the Kremlin tolerates critical views and opinions as long as they remain marginalized and do not impact decision-making or policy (Lipman 2010; see also Lipman and McFaul 2001; Becker 2004). Independent newspapers are permitted, as is a largely uncensored Internet, because these outlets have little impact. The situation has become somewhat worse since the invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russian forces in February of 2014. A majority of Russians, 70% according to a 2013 Levada Center survey, rely on state controlled national television stations for news. Moreover, according to the same survey, more than 50% of people think that the main state-controlled television channels deliver, for the most part, unbiased news coverage of national and international events. As Lipman argues:

> The problem with today’s media in Russia is not just that the Kremlin controls national television, but also that those publications that remain uncontrolled do not make a difference, since they operate in a virtually empty space. The real public space is that of national TV, where Kremlin loyalists shape the news. (2005, 324)

Under these circumstances, all non-regime candidates in the Moscow election were at a disadvantage when trying to reach voters via mass media. However, I have no evidence that this was the direct result of the actions of Sobyanin or his campaign. In general, Alexei Navalny was particularly vulnerable in the biased media climate because he was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment on embezzlement charges on July 18th, 2013 and spent the rest of the mayoral campaign awaiting the outcome of an appeal. Thus the only state-media coverage he received was information on his
candidacy for the office of mayor and reporting on his unflattering status as a convicted embezzler.

Yet despite the lack of official media coverage, Navalny had some distinct advantages during this election. First, he had already made a name for himself in the opposition community as an anti-corruption campaigner and blogger. Capitalizing on his growing popularity in Moscow since the 2011 – 2012 protests, Navalny became the *de facto* anti-regime candidate. His candidacy was a clear focal point for both those who actively opposed the regime and those who were merely dissatisfied with it. Though he already had a following on the Internet, thanks to his blog and other anti-corruption sites, Navalny ran his campaign at a grassroots level. Volunteers for Navalny’s campaign were ubiquitous throughout Moscow and handed out over half a million newspapers and flyers (Navalny Report 2013, 24). Navalny himself, in a step that was very unusual for a Russian politician, actively engaged voters making 97 stump-speeches – three a day and five on the weekends – in neighborhoods all over Moscow. In order to diversify his support base, many of Navalny’s appearances were not publicized using social media but instead were promoted by word of mouth to target part of the population, particularly pensioners, who were not on-line.\(^{19}\) Sobyanin, on the other hand, met voters only a dozen times during staged photo-ops and refused to participate in candidate debates.

As a pillar of the uneven playing field, the media is less securely within the grasp of an authoritarian regime and therefore less easily calibrated to the needs of a particular election. There are many television and radio stations as well as

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\(^{19}\) Personal communication with campaign organizer, Moscow, August 14th, 2013.
newspapers, and although they may all implicitly follow the tone set by the regime, few receive direct instructions on their editorial content. During the Moscow campaign, despite the fact that Navalny’s criminal conviction for embezzlement was challenged by the state prosecutor, the media continued to refer to him as an “oppositionist” and “convicted criminal”. However, given the online connectivity of Moscow’s population, state-media coverage of the election may have had only a minor impact on the campaign.

2.4.3 Unequal application of the law and regulations

One of the most prominent pillars of the uneven playing field is the politicization of state and legal institutions “in ways that limit the opposition’s ability to compete on reasonably equal footing” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 368). The courts and electoral commissions are especially important institutions during elections which are suppose to resolve conflicts that may arise between the incumbent and the challenger. When employed as part of the uneven playing field, these institutions hobble the opposition.

While some scholars have suggested that journalistic accounts exaggerate the extent of the Russian judiciary’s subordination to the state, they acknowledge that courts are rarely impartial in politically charged cases (see Popova 2006, 2012; Soloman 2010). Informal signaling from authorities about how a case should be decided is common and perceived to be widespread by the Russian population (see Ledeneva 2008). In line with this general trend, the judiciary played an important role during the Moscow election. A Kirov city court first sentenced Navalny to five years’ imprisonment on an embezzlement conviction – the verdict read by the judge was an almost exact copy of the prosecutor’s complaint – and then released Navalny to await the decision of an appeal of his sentence.
Though some 10,000 people gathered to protest the verdict, it was the chief prosecutor, Sergei Bogdanov, who asked the court to review the appropriateness of the sentence. The regime decided to moderate the use of legal measures against the opposition in order to maintain the appearance of a competitive election though Navalny remained under the threat of arrest or detention throughout the campaign.

Unlike the courts, the electoral commission’s methods for constraining competition are less visible and consist of procedural barriers. In the past, these barriers were comprised of administrative measures taken by the electoral commission, such as ruling that a candidate’s collected signatures could not be authenticated or other paperwork was not in proper order, which disqualified undesirable candidates from elections. In the case of Moscow’s mayoral election, the barrier – a municipal filter – was dictated by legislation and was the focus of much attention during the campaign. However, instead of employing the filter as a mechanism to exclude candidates, the authorities helped candidates surmount this obstacle to participation in order to ensure that the election appeared to be sufficiently competitive.

As mentioned in section two above, gubernatorial elections were resurrected in 2012 in response to calls for more democratic accountability made as part of the anti-electoral fraud protests of 2011. The first mention of the possibility of regional elections was made by Putin in mid-December of 2011 at a meeting with journalists. In laying out his idea for the elections, Putin emphasized that the appointment scheme for governors in place for the preceding seven years had worked well to streamline the administration of government resources and that its usefulness had now ended. Initially, Putin put

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20 There is debate among scholars about whether the appointment process was in fact a success in cementing the power vertical. Moses (2014) argues that Medvedev’s efforts to “professionalize” governors
forward a system whereby the regional parliaments would nominate candidates that
would then be approved via presidential filter before being allowed to stand for elections.
A week later, Dmitri Medvedev reiterated the proposal but did not elaborate on the
proposed election rules. Before the law was passed, however, it underwent some
significant revisions, including the addition of a “municipal filter”. Grigori Golosov
(2012) argues that the additional filter was a response to growing concern within the
regime about the potential risks of open elections in the regions. Golosov suggests that
the mayoral elections of March 2012, which saw the defeat of regime-supported
incumbents by oppositionists in places like Yaroslavl, signaled the dangers of opening up
the regions’ top offices to competition:

The Yaroslavl experience made it quite clear that the regime
could not take either the incumbency advantage or,
especially, United Russia’s ability to identify and nominate
nonincumbent winning candidates for granted after
appointments ended and amid mass dissatisfaction with the
authorities. (Golosov 2012, 11)

As a result, in April of 2012, Medvedev proposed a municipal filter – essentially a vetting
system where candidates had to collect the signatures of municipal deputies in their
region in order to successfully register – as a way to keep out extremist and unknown
candidates, or “crooks” (Golosov 2012, 11), from competing, and possibly winning,
using underhanded “political technologies”. Under this logic, only candidates with a real
connection to regional politics, in the form of local deputies, should run for the post of
governor.

by choosing competent business people with experience in administration over regional loyalists capable of delivering electoral results may have contributed to the 2011 electoral crisis since these governors were unable to deliver pro-United Russia results.
In Moscow, the filter meant that each candidate for mayor had to collect the signatures of 110 municipal deputies. The municipal filter represented a high entry barrier to participation because nearly 64% of Moscow’s municipal deputies either belonged to United Russia or were associated with the party (Mosizbirkom, data aggregated by author). Moreover, the “breadth” requirement of the filter – that the collected signatures had to represent at least 75% of the districts – made the task of collecting signatures more difficult for all non-regime candidates since the majority of municipal councils were dominated by United Russia. Lastly, the signatures had to be individually notarized, which proved to be difficult during a summer campaign that coincided with official summer holidays for all of Moscow’s municipal deputies.

Candidates for mayor, and the political parties they represented, employed different strategies for collecting signatures. Some met with municipal deputies in “forums” in order to explain their platform and ask for support. Alexei Navalny organized groups of independent municipal deputies that canvassed other deputies, hoping for a snowballing of support. The Communist Party, A Just Russia, and Yabloko, along with Alexei Navalny’s RPR-PARNAS agreed on an informal pact to help each other in municipalities where they had more than one deputy to collect the needed signatures in order to register as many candidates in the election as possible. Despite these independent efforts, in the end, only the Communist Party’s Ivan Melnikov, who could rely on the support of 205 deputies from his party, was able to collect the needed signatures on his own. Navalny was able to collect 84 of the needed 110 signatures

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21 Moscow has 124 municipalities with 1817 deputies.
independently (Navalny Report 2013). The municipal filter required a great deal of coordination among the candidates and the municipal deputies and was described by Natalia Chernusheva, a district council deputy for Zyuzino Raion in Moscow as being akin to “holding a race in a pool full of acid.” Other municipal deputies described the process of collecting signatures for the filter as “a farce”, “nonsense” or “a completely artificial obstacle” (Garnachuk; Chernusheva; Pushkareva; interview with author).

In the end candidates were able to pass the municipal filter only with the support of signatures from United Russia deputies, who were told explicitly by the Moscow branch of United Russia to sign in support of opposition candidates. The desire to have all candidates participate and the link between their participation and the fairness of the contest was stated over and over again by authorities, including Sobyanin who said, after the election: “We did everything in our power to help candidates register...We passed the election transparency and fairness exam.” (Lally 2013) Irina Belykh, one of the leaders of United Russia in Moscow told reporters during the election that "[d]espite attacks against the party from Navalny, United Russia will help him pass the municipal filter so that the Muscovites have the maximum range of candidates at the mayoral election in Moscow" (Interfax, 2013). Navalny framed this tactic as a change of heart by authorities in the face of public pressure: “United Russia has itself established this barrier and now, having realized that it hinders the public expression of will, is trying to remove it not just for me alone but for all candidates. If the idea is to remove this barrier, we can’t be against it.” (Interfax, 2013) In providing the needed signatures, the regime lowered the barrier for

participation in order to ensure that a variety of candidates were able to run against the Kremlin-backed incumbent. Had the municipal filter worked as originally intended, only the Communist and United Russia candidates, both unappealing to the opposition movement, would have participated in the election. The regime opened space for more competition; “Navalny’s participation made the election legitimate.” (Rusakova, interview with author, August 2013, Moscow) The promotion of competition by authorities falls outside the usual strategies of manipulation as catalogued thus far by scholars. Nonetheless, as long as the ultimate goal is gaining legitimacy while mitigating the risk of electoral defeat, actions that promote competition are in line with the logic of the uneven playing field and most other manipulation frameworks. After all, “the existence of opposition makes an important contribution to the legitimacy of a polity.” (Wilson 2016, 3) And yet, the active promotion of competition by autocrats can itself endanger this legitimacy. In the case of Moscow, Navalny’s release from prison and acceptance of United Russia signatures, was seen by some as evidence that the election was ultimately a meaningless contest.

2.5 Election result

2.5.1 Public opinion

As anticipated, Sergei Sobyanin won the election. However, the results were somewhat surprising and suggest that while autocrats do their best to calibrate manipulation of elections to achieve the desired result, selecting, as Sarah Birch (2011) argues, the appropriate package of manipulation strategies, they may not do so perfectly. Strategy does not always guarantee a comfortable electoral result. In the case of Moscow, all pre-election forecasts turned out to be inaccurate in both predicting the final vote share.
of each candidate as well as voter turnout. Navalny’s vote share was far larger than anyone expected; he received 27.24%, considerably narrowing the previously predicted gap between himself and Sobyanin. Estimates of support for Sobyanin were also off. A second round of voting – necessary if no candidate received 50% of the vote – was initially discounted as a possibility. However, Sobyanin in fact came close to having to compete in a runoff election, falling far short of the 60 to 65 percent predicted vote share, receiving instead only 51.37%. Most importantly, voter turnout for the election, totaling 32%, was far lower than the expected 45%.

In the week before the election, all three major Russian public opinion polling agencies – the state-run All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VCIOM), the quasi-governmental Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) and the independent non-governmental Levada Center – produced survey results that turned out to be decidedly inaccurate. While the Levada Center did not make pre-election predictions, their surveys showed Navalny had the support of only 18% of those intending to vote. The Public Opinion Foundation’s pre-election prediction forecast a win for Sobyanin with 60% of the vote share. Moreover, all three agencies were remarkably mistaken in their prognosis of the voter turnout. Levada Center surveys showed that between 40% and 50% of people intended to vote, while the Public Opinion Foundation predicted a 45% voter turn out. This prediction was so inaccurate that the director of the FOM, Alexandr Oslon, called it a “sociology fiasco” and said that the Foundation would no longer generate pre-election predictions (BBC Russkaya Sluzhba 2013).

In the end, many fewer people voted than said they would vote. More specifically, many fewer people who had declared their support for Sobyanin voted than said they
would vote. There are two potential explanations for the failure to predict the low voter turnout: demobilized voters and preference falsification. In the aftermath of the election, some political analysts suggested that opinion polls did not accurately reflect the behavior of voters, who, although they may have supported Sobyanin, had no intention of showing up to vote because they were confident in the victory of the Kremlin-backed candidate (A. O., 2013). Cynicism about elections in an authoritarian system may breed voter disengagement over time. The other, perhaps complimentary, explanation for the inaccuracy of pre-election voter turnout predictions is preference falsification by survey respondents. Timur Kuran (1991) identified preference falsification as the divergence between an individual’s publically expressed and privately held preferences. Falsifying preferences is “the act of misrepresenting one’s genuine wants under perceived social pressures.” (Kuran 1991, 17) The concept was used by Kuran to explain the unanticipated and rapid collapse of state socialism in Germany and elsewhere in 1989, where citizens long accepting of the regime seemed to rise up against it almost over night when the political conditions changed and public and private preferences aligned. Preference falsification is related to the concept of social desirability bias, which posits that respondents will answer surveys in the manner that they think will be viewed most favorably by others. However, preference falsification better fits the Russian context because it deals specifically with the expression of public preferences in a repressive political climate. The occurrence of preference falsification is difficult to identify with absolute certainty without conducting pre-election experiments to gage genuine political preferences. However, the concept offers some leverage in explaining why pre-election surveys, conducted by independent and government agencies, were so far off the mark in
predicting both vote share and voter turn out in the mayoral election. Inspired by Kuran’s theory, recent research using survey and electoral data from the 2012 Russian presidential elections found that there in fact is a significant difference between publicly declared and privately held preferences for candidates as well as a significant difference between the publicly declared and the privately held preference to participate in elections (Kalinin 2013, 16). Yet other research has found that support for the regime, or, more specifically, for Vladimir Putin, is genuine and very strong. Using list experiments, Frye et al argue that “the bulk of Putin’s support typically found in opinion polls appears to be genuine” (2015, 2), indicating that Russians reveal their true attitudes to pollsters when asked. However, support for Putin may not translate into support for United Russia or for his regional representatives or the politicians he endorses. I discuss this possibility further in Chapter 4.

2.5.2 A clean election

International observers are rarely present at regional elections. However, election observers from three domestic independent voters’ organizations – Golos, Sonar, and Citizen Observers – as well as election observers from Navalny’s campaign and the Yabloko political party observed the Moscow election. Most complaints centered on administrative violations of electoral procedures such as allowing individuals to vote using temporary registration instead of proof of permanent registration or individuals voting without conditions of complete privacy. Navalny’s campaign subsequently filed an official complaint with a Moscow court seeking to annul the results on the basis of 951 violations, mainly having to do with the practice of at-home voting, which they claimed were sufficient to affect the accurate expression of “the will of voters”. Golos estimated
that Sobyanin’s actual vote share was 49.52% and Navalny’s was 28.53%, a result that would have triggered a run-off vote. Despite some problems, a leader of the Golos monitoring organization, Grigory Melkonyants, called the election “unusually and significantly more honest” (Lally 2013). In addition, although Navalny had originally suggested that street protests were possible if electoral fraud was suspected, in the end he chose not to mobilize his supporters in this manner.

2.6 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have argued, based on evidence from the Moscow mayoral election, that the conceptual framework for understanding the manipulation of elections in an electoral or competitive authoritarian regime, known as the uneven playing field, should be expanded to include strategies that not only restrict competition but also promote it. Elections in electoral authoritarian regimes, unlike closed or hegemonic authoritarian regimes, are used by autocrats to generate both international and domestic legitimacy. This legitimacy is delivered not only through the performance of voting, but also by the active participation of opposition candidates which serves to validate the incumbent regime’s political authority. In Moscow, the authorities acted to help opposition candidates surmount a major barrier to competition: the municipal filter. In so doing, the regime strove to ensure that the election of Moscow’s highest office appeared to be a real contest. Yet, as the almost too-close-for-comfort electoral results in Moscow showed, efforts to maintain the appearance of competition may also carry their own legitimacy costs. Giving opposition candidates a helping hand to stay in the contest may result in voter disinterest, a lower voter turnout, and much narrower margins of victory of regime-backed candidates.
Applying a framework meant to explain contests at the national level to the subnational level also helps to refine the constituent parts of the uneven playing field. At the subnational level, to some degree, both the regime-backed candidate and the opposition are bound by rules set by the regime, which makes altering some aspects of the playing field, the media for one, difficult. It is also important to note that, under closer examination, the framework of the uneven playing field encompasses incumbent advantages that are also common in democratic states, such as orchestrating the timing of an election to take advantage of an upswing in popular support for the government. When this occurs in a nondemocratic regime, however, the purpose of these actions needs to be understood in light of the entire authoritarian structure of the regime. For example, if regime-backed incumbents not only control the timing of an election but also benefit from laws on candidate registration created specifically to hobble the opposition, this institutional advantage is part of the uneven playing field rather than a run of the mill aspect of an incumbent’s advantage. In general, manipulation and the degree of incumbent advantage may not be sufficient to differentiate a hybrid authoritarian regime from a defective democracy. Although in the case of Russia, the application of the framework is less controversial.

Beyond these conceptual clarifications, the Moscow campaign and election had practical consequences for both the regime and the opposition. For the opposition, it proved to be a valuable training ground. Navalny’s campaign had 14,000 volunteers from across Russia. It was well organized and utilized social media to attract and link volunteers. The expertise that Navalny’s campaign was able to attract – media and communications experts, graphic designers, lawyers, community activists, sociologists
and political scientists – was able to not only develop an effective fund-raising strategy, partly supported by business interests and party crowd-funded through on-line donations using YandexMoney, but also produced polling data that more accurately predicting each candidate’s final vote share than the three major public opinion agencies. In addition, approximately 8,000 citizens trained to become election observers as part of the partnership between Navalny’s campaign, Golos, and Citizen Observers. This political experience will prove valuable for future political campaigns conducted by opposition candidates, especially at the municipal and regional level. As mentioned by several individuals during interviews, people involved with Navalny’s campaign used the training they received there to work on municipal elections in St. Petersburg and city Duma elections in Moscow (Galkina, St. Petersburg, 2013; Talichenko, St. Petersburg, 2013; Kozlov, Moscow, 2013, interviews with author).

The Moscow election was a learning experience for the regime as well. The regime was in a relatively comfortable position after the United Day of Voting on September 8th, 2013. Although Navalny challenged the results of the election in court, he largely endorsed the final result in media interviews. Two independent, though not necessarily anti-regime, candidates for mayor were also elected in Petrozavodsk and Yekaterinburg but, in general, pro-regime candidates were successful in most regional elections. Despite the favorable results, it was evident that very low voter turn-out in Moscow and all over the country depressed support for pro-regime candidates. Russian voters appeared to be uninterested in the elections. A Levada Center survey from 2010 showed that 84% of Russians felt that they had no influence on the political process in Russia. No similar survey has been conducted since, but surveys gauging the likelihood of
protest action have shown a marked increase in the number of respondents ready to be involved in protests in 2011 and 2012.\textsuperscript{24} Taken together, these surveys demonstrate a growing alienation of the Russian electorate from the electoral process and a danger that the competitive element of competitive authoritarianism – namely, elections – will become meaningless as a mechanism for the legitimation of power. Scholars have observed that the Putin government is “obsessed” with reading public opinion (Petrov et al 2013, 5). Aleksandr Shmelev has called this tendency “ratingocracy”, noting that the regime is “in constant pursuit of those slogans and measures that gain popularity” (2007, 45). In response to opposition and disenchantment with the electoral process, in October of 2013 a group of senators from the Federation Council proposed new law that would bring back the against all ballot option, eliminated in 2006, for municipal, regional and parliamentary elections. In an explanatory note accompanying the proposed legislation, the United Russia senators reasoned that the “changing political climate” in Russia necessitated that the government be able to objectively analyze “protest minded voters”. Because the media is still firmly under the control of the government, and opposition parties have a difficult time reaching the electorate, the ballot measure, approved by the Duma in January of 2014, aims to both attract otherwise antagonistic voters and siphon votes away from opposition candidates.

\textsuperscript{24} I return to this issue in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3

Exercising voice: Explaining political participation in Moscow’s municipal elections

3.1 Introduction

Hybrid authoritarian regimes, no matter how closely they may resemble democratic polities, lack the quintessentially democratic mechanism of accountability. Rulers are not held accountable, in any meaningful way, to citizens in the public realm (Schmitter and Karl 1991). And yet, these regimes exhibit many other forms of democratic political participation. Scholars have examined the ways in which citizens of nondemocratic polities vote, protest, complain, comply and revolt. Considerably less attention has been paid, however, to why citizens may choose to stand for elected office. Instead, scholars have used “cooptation theory” to explain how elites, both as individuals and groups, can be effectively incorporated into an authoritarian regime (see Malesky and Schuler 2010; Lust-Okar 2006; Reuter and Robertson 2015). The initial choice to enter politics in the context of authoritarian states is underexplored. In this chapter, I aim to offer a way of filling this gap in the existing literature on hybrid authoritarian regimes by analyzing how and why residents of Moscow stood for and won posts as district council deputies in the spring of 2012. Relying on evidence from twenty-nine semi-structured
interviews, I argue that the decision of these individuals to enter the political arena can be seen as a form of “voice”: one of the three possible responses to declining quality, along with exit and loyalty, famously outlined by Albert Hirschman (1970). I suggest that after a long period of private exit through migration and political apathy, some residents of Moscow decided to become involved in organized politics in reaction to both the local problems in their neighbourhoods and the decline national politics as evidenced by the electoral fraud perpetrated during the 2011 parliamentary elections. The participation of these individuals in organized politics was made possible by civil society organizations and political parties, which helped opposition candidates surmount administrative barriers by providing information, resources, and legal help. Once the successful candidates took office, they encountered new obstacles. In order to fulfill their mandates, some of them resorted to what I describe as the hyper-formal application of rules and regulations, which is a counterintuitive finding given established scholarship on the use of informal networks and practices to overcome formal but dysfunctional institutions.

The chapter is organized as follows: section two summarizes Hirschman’s Exit, Voice, and Loyalty framework (EVL hereafter). In section three I apply the framework to trends of political participation in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In section four I describe the structure of local self-government in Russia and Moscow. Section five briefly explains the methodology used to collect data for this Chapter. In section six I examine the reasons for which municipal deputies entered organized politics as well as their experiences within the district councils since election day. Section seven concludes.
3.2 Exit, voice, and loyalty

The framework which Albert Hirschman (1970) puts forward in his influential book, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* has been used to analyze the disintegration and formation of political parties, work satisfaction and even romantic relationships. Hirschman developed the framework to explain consumer responses to the decline of quality in products or services. In his book, he argues that it was possible for managers or those in charge of a firm or organization to address deterioration and return to previous standards of quality. This recovery depends on customers signalling their dissatisfaction through either exit – where customers choose to leave the organization, to stop buying the goods or services – or through voice – where customers explicitly express their dissatisfaction to management or some other responsible authority. Both options are framed as being contingent on the elasticity of demand in the market and on a mix of active and passive consumers. If demand is inelastic, then exit is unavailable and voice lacks credibility. If there are too many options on the market, firms experience mass exit and do not have sufficient time to recover. Thus, both exit and voice require some customers to complain and some to remain. The choice to exercise one option over the other in response to declining quality depends in part on cost. Exit is cheap but, as a binary response, blunt, stripping customers of any potential future influence on the firm. Voice is a riskier and more expensive strategy, based on the customer’s expectations about influence on the firm, but could deliver a nuanced and precise message to managers. Thus, customers could seek satisfaction elsewhere or remain and agitate for improvement in quality. The two options, existing side by side, also effect each other. In fact, Hirschman suggests that the two responses
often work at cross-purposes. The availability of exit atrophies voice as most customers choose the less costly option. Similarly, exit could be taken up by the most responsive customers (i.e. those who care about the decline in quality most), leaving behind “inert” and silent customers and leading to further decline in quality. To be effective, voice also requires some collective action and is therefore plagued by collective action problems. Exit, on the other hand, is individual and silent though arguably less effective in achieving recovery in quality.

Hirschman’s EVL model was inspired by the observation that human societies are unique in the ability to produce a surplus above subsistence levels and therefore cope with “occasional decline as well as prolonged mediocrity” (1970, 6). The model was meant for both economics and politics and was a conscious effort on Hirschman’s part to “demonstrate to political scientists the usefulness of economic concepts and to economists the usefulness of political concepts.” (1970, 19) While exit was the most common choice in the market, voice is the “political action par excellence” (1970, 16), defined as “any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs” (1970, 30). It could be individual or collective, take the form of complaints or protest. Similar to voice, loyalty in Hirschman’s model applies to groups or organizations where exit was unlikely or impossible: the family, tribe, church, and the state. Hirschman argues that loyalty actually makes an individual more likely to choose voice over exit since their “attachment” would make that individual seek out ways to change the organization’s deteriorating path (1970, 77-78). There is disagreement on whether Hirschman meant loyalty as something akin to “brand allegiance” or “group loyalty” (see Barry 1974; Dowding et al 2000). Most scholars interested in politics have taken the
meaning of loyalty broadly, assuming a positive commitment to group welfare, rather than a simple reluctance to leave though this remains the subject of some debate.

Though its popularity has declined in recent years, EVL has been used in political science scholarship to explain the actions of Chinese dissidents (Lee 1972) and more generally the effect of repression on citizen responses (O’Donnell 1986; Scott 1986). After the break-up of the Soviet Union, several scholars examined the evolution of ethnic minority rights and citizenship – particularly the choice to immigrate or assimilate – using EVL, including an analysis of ethnic Russians in Estonia (Evans 1998), “Russian speaking nationalities” in post-Soviet states (Laitin 1995), and ethnic Russians in Ukraine (Bremmer 1994). Hirschman’s framework has been applied to the development of political participation in pre-industrial societies (Ross 1988) and to patterns of political party membership (Eubank et al 1996; Kato 1998). Most recently, Gel’man (2010) has applied EVL to explain the legitimacy crisis of the late-Soviet and early transition period in Russia, focusing on the factors which led to widespread “resigned acceptance of the status quo” among Russians. While some scholars have criticized work employing the EVL framework for its “casual application” and failure to rigorously test the interactions between voice and exit (see Dowding et al 2000 for criticism), Hirschman’s own later adaptation of the framework suggests that EVL has broad application in the political arena.

In explaining how voice and exit came together to aid in the rapid disintegration of the German Democratic Republic in 1989, Hirschman argues that “exit can cooperate with voice, voice can emerge from exit, and exit can reinforce voice.” (1995, 202) This is a departure from his original formulation of EVL in which he argued that exit tended to
undermine voice by acting as a pressure valve, releasing the most dissatisfied customers without remedying deterioration. Early on, this original hydraulic or see-saw relationship between exit and voice seemed to function as expected within East Germany. While the existence of Federal Republic provided a visible and appealing exit option, GDR authorities were able to capture and restrict exit by building the Berlin Wall and instituting strict border security, thereby stemming the tide of out-migration. These limits on exit also had a chilling effect, Hirschman argues, on the use of voice inside the GDR: “not only did building the Wall restrain exit, but it also projected an enhanced willingness to rein in voice.” (1995, 186). Simultaneously, authorities were able to utilize exit strategically to rid themselves of dissidents (i.e. the most alert customers) through regulated migration or forced exile. This manipulation and exploitation of exit atrophied voice (i.e. organized dissent). Much like in the original economic formulation, exit in the GDR was a silent action for decades. Hirschman describes it as a “private decision” and a “private good” (1995, 194). The key change in 1989 was that exit became public. As Hungary and other states abandoned border controls that previously prevented Germans from fleeing the East, exit not only increased in volume but became a public decision. It is here that Hirschman amends his classic model. Instead of making voice less effective, a widely available and attractive exit option actually empowered voice in the GDR. Those who stayed, protested and spoke up for change in the system. In a way, this exemplifies what can happen when a firm fails to be sensitive to exit. Instead of addressing decline in quality, oblivious managers galvanize, through their incompetence, remaining customers into employing voice. Thus, in 1989, exit in the GDR spurred voice rather than atrophied it. Ultimately, Hirschman argues, the GDR disintegrated because it over-relied on exit
and hollowed out its dissident community, paying the “ultimate penalty for the long suppression of both exit and voice.” (1995, 200)

Below, I argue that the EVL framework can be used to offer an explanation for how and why ordinary citizens (non elites) can become involved in organized politics (rather than protests) in an authoritarian regime. I suggest that this involvement can be seen as a form of individual voice – a response to a decline in quality – and that its use depends in part on the presence of opportunities to do so within the political system.

3.3 Exit, voice, and loyalty in Russia

Hirschman’s EVL framework sets out a series of expectations. Decline in quality will lead to two sometimes contradictory and sometimes reinforcing responses from customers: exit and voice. When exit is costless, available and attractive, it will be the response of choice for most customers. Private and silent exit will atrophy voice over time by depriving the firm (or state or party) of the most “alert” (or active) customers. If or when exit becomes public, it will act as a rallying cry and galvanize voice – as it did in 1989 in East Germany. Public exit, as well as previous exercise of collective voice, have a psychological effect. As Hirschman notes: “Being allowed more choice [citizens] become more aware and more desirous to explore the whole range of choices at their disposal…they may well start behaving in general as…vocal members of their community.” (1995, 177 emphases in original) In what follows, I analyze political participation in Russia using the EVL framework. I suggest that first, the decline in the quality of governance and in living standards in Russia has been uneven over time but democratic backsliding has been marked over the last decade. For most people, this decline has motivated two different forms of exit: out-migration or a retreat from politics.
On the other hand, for a small group of people, this decline has motivated a greater involvement within the system through participation in organized politics.

3.3.1 Declining quality?

In the political sphere, quality is a challenging concept to measure. In his article on the end of the GDR, Hirschman (1995) does not actually establish declining quality. Instead, his argument is premised on the attractiveness of exit for East German citizens which resulted from the contrast between the well-performing West Germany and underperforming East Germany. Though cross boarder movement after the fall of the Berlin Wall has become immeasurably easier, Russia has no similarly attractive neighbor to lure unhappy citizens. I therefore focus a few economic and political indicators in order to capture “quality” in the Russian context.

Figure 3.1: Gross national income per capita (in USD), 1991 – 2014*

*World Bank Data 25

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, incomes have increased for most Russians, especially post-2000, in the wake of substantially higher oil prices. Despite this, the country still lags significantly behind other developed nations (see Figure 3.1). Similarly, though the standard of living has improved over the last twenty years, Russia is still in the bottom 20% of performers based on health, housing and personal security indicators. These characteristics are par for the course for a resource-dependent economy as the Russian state’s ability to provide social services is tied to oil and natural gas revenues which now make up 70% of the total goods exports (European Bank of Reconstruction and Development 2012). In terms of quality of governance, Russia’s democratic backsliding is well-known and documented. Analyses of Russia has moved steadily away from notions of illiberal democracy toward a new type of hybrid authoritarianism. Beyond scholarly debates, international non-governmental evaluations of Russia show this trend clearly. Polity IV has categorized Russia as an “open anocracy” since 2005. Freedom House has consistently rated Russia as ‘Not Free’ for the last decade. Russians’ own evaluation of their government are also not favorable. According to Transparency International, a non-governmental organization that measures perceptions of corruption internationally, over 70% of Russians believe that the major institutions of the state – political parties, legislative bodies, the military, and courts – are “corrupt or extremely corrupt”. In sum, according to both economic and political measures, the quality of governance in Russia is declining.

3.3.2 Choosing exit and voice

People have responded to decline in quality of political and economic

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performance in Russia in a variety of ways. Taking my cue from Hirschman, I examine three responses: exit through migration, voice through protest and exit through apathy – or the atrophying of voice. First, mirroring the exodus of the 1990s, over the last six years, emigration from Russia has jumped over ninefold from 32,458 in 2009 to 308,474 in 2014 (the last year data is available) (see discussion in Semenova 2015). However, the impact of this outflow on total population has been mitigated by immigration from former Soviet Republics – the “near abroad” – which has also climbed (see Figure 2.2). Thus, while the state has taken notice of demographic trends, introducing pro-natalist policies to encourage women to have more children, there has not been a GDR-like effort to arrest mass exit on the part of the government.

Figure 3.2: Migration to and from Russia, 1997 – 2014

The media has dubbed this wave of emigration: “disillusioned emigrants”. In many ways, these émigrés resemble dissidents and intellectuals fleeing the GDR as described by Hirschman. For example, in 2014, Leonid Bershidsky, a prominent journalist and author – the founder of Slon.ru, founding editor of Vedomosti, and the first publisher of Russian language Forbes – summed up the mood of disillusioned emigrants in an op-ed published
a few days before he moved to Germany:

Like many of those who are leaving, I was not a rat who jumped ship at the first sign of trouble. I am more a sailor who, seeing that the captain had changed course toward a port of ill repute — and with loudspeakers blaring his intent — quietly, and without panicking, lowered the lifeboat and began rowing toward the port for which all of us had originally set sail. (Bershidsky 2014)

In addition to relying on pro-natalist policies, there is evidence that the Russian state views this emigration as a useful “pressure valve” that rids the system of vocal opponents preventing potential unrest (de Carbonnel 2014). Overall, there is evidence of the exit response among the population to deterioration in the political situation.

While individuals with the resources and inclination to leave are exiting through migration, an smaller proportion of the population is exercising public voice through protest. As I elaborate in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, protests in Russia are rare events (see Lankina 2015; Lankina and Voznaya 2015; Ross 2015). Despite their empirical rarity, abstract support for protest actions is relatively steady. Paradoxically, many see demonstrations as a legitimate expression of dissent, yet few consider participating in them (see Figure 3.3). In fact, mass protests tend to be a response to actions targeting a particular group rather than general violations. For example, in 2005 pensioners across Russia protested against changes to their benefits proposed by President Putin and approved almost without debate by a subordinate Duma (see Petrov et al 2013 for discussion). During the winter of 2011 – 2012, the largest protests since the collapse of the Soviet Union gripped Moscow and other major cities as people demonstrated against electoral fraud (Aron 2013; Green 2013; Robertson 2013). Most recently, in the closing months of 2015, truckers across Russia mounted protests against a new road tax that
many saw as a naked ploy to generate rents for Kremlin insiders (Stephan and Taylor 2015).

*Figure 3.3: Support for demonstrations in Russia*

On the whole, the exercise of public voice through protest in Russia is rare and now actively inhibited by the state through a series of laws that limit freedom of assembly and expression. Much as Hirschman predicted, the combination of available exit through emigration and restrictions on protest, have atrophied voice as a response strategy in Russia. This undermining of voice has been most evident in Russians’ disengagement from political life, a phenomenon which scholars have been interested in since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

3.3.3 Apathy as a form of exit: Are Russians inherently undemocratic?

Scholars have long been concerned with the lack of democratic “feeling” among ordinary Russians, their reticence to join social organization and their general political

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quiescence (see Howard 2002; White and McAllister 2004; Hale et al 2004; Rose et al 2004; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). Several explanations have been offered for the apparent apolitical nature of Russian citizens. The simplest and most enduring explanation for Russian attitudes toward democracy are the so-called cultural theories that emphasize the lasting impact of Russia’s authoritarian traditions, including comfort with order and stability (White 1979), a belief in the importance of strong leadership and autocratic decision making (Tucker 1971; Pipes 1974), and negative attitudes toward political participation stemming from a legacy of mandatory popular mobilizations (Fish 1994). These theories have become less common over the last decade, though they are still occasionally marshalled in analyses of Vladimir Putin’s enduring sky-high approval ratings (see Mishler and Willerton 2003).

Looking beyond culture, some scholars have argued that the underperformance of political institutions after the collapse of the Soviet Union negatively influenced the opinions of Russians and soured them on some aspects of representative democracy (Carnaghan 2001). Proponents of this view, coming from an institutionalist perspective, point out that institutions shape behavior and opinion (see March and Olsen 1984). Russians therefore are no more or less democratic than any other people but may be fatigued and disappointed by the quality of governance which they have experienced over the last two decades. Others have suggested that Russians have turned to more private, direct and previously tested forms of political participation. For example, Lussier (2011) argues that Russian citizens failed to maintain participatory behaviors that could have constrained political elites. As a result, elites were able to respond to constituent demands without strengthening representative institutions or mechanisms of accountability. Henry
makes a similar observation, noting that the preferred method of political participation among Russians – complaint making – is an “isolated activity based on personal grievance embedded in a specific context…[that] serves to…demobilize the public by encouraging individual rather than collective action.” (2012, 252)

Much of the blame for Russians’ indifference to democratic values and politics in general has been placed on the absence or inadequacy of civil society. An active and robust civil society can restrain and monitor the state, engender tolerance and trust, and build “political skills”, and disseminate information. As Larry Diamond observes: “a vibrant civil society is probably more essential for consolidating and maintaining democracy than for initiating it.” (1994, 7) Although non governmental organizations (NGOs) mushroomed after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many funded by international aid, their impact varied (see Sundstrom 2002; 2005; 2006). And as the political regime in Russia became more autocratic during Putin’s first presidency, civil society was first actively regulated through registration and funding schemes that promoted organization with politically acceptable goals, and then was largely taken over by the state with new pro-state mass organizations such as Nashi (Ours) emerging (see Hemment 2012). The type of civil society that flourished in Russia over the last decade therefore is patriotic, elite-driven and state-sponsored.

Organized, popular politics has also been largely missing from the landscape of Russian politics. Political parties –vehicles for involving citizens in the political processes of a state – have also failed to develop in Russia. Instead, during the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political arena was mostly dominated by populist politicians and other “party substitutes” (Hale 2007). This type of political
organization, with many small and transient political parties, was eventually replaced by a dominant party system presided over by United Russia (Reuter and Remington 2009) and maintained largely by the popularity of Vladimir Putin.

In sum, political indifference – a form of costless exit from political life in Russia – punctuated by rare public voice and supplemented by emigration, accounts for much of the response of ordinary Russian citizens to the deterioration of their country’s political and economic situation. Against this backdrop, the choice to actively engage in organized politics with the explicit intention of improving the quality governance stands out in stark relief. The rest of this Chapter examines how and why this choice made by participants in the 2012 municipal elections in Moscow. Instead of leaving, and in addition to protesting, these individuals exercised a different type of voice. Examining their motivations and the obstacles they faced helps to explain the reasons for which citizens of nondemocratic polities may decide to get involved in organized politics.

3.4 Opportunities and constraints: Local self-government in Russia

Before deciding to leave Russia for a brighter port, Leonid Bershidsky first became actively involved in organized politics. He exercised a form of what I suggest is also voice in Hirschman’s EVL framework: he was the campaign manager of Alexei Navalny’s bid for Mayor of Moscow in 2013. Like Bershidsky, in March of 2012 a small but organized group of people also chose voice in the form of active participation in organized politics. University students, housewives, professors, teachers, lawyers, accountants and at least one professional poker player ran for municipal office in Moscow’s 147 administrative districts. The positions were unpaid and the powers of the office they sought were limited. For some protest-minded candidates, the municipal
election represented an opportunity to exploit a “breach in the iron wall” of Russia’s authoritarian regime (Schwirtz 2012). For others, it represented an opportunity to improve the quality of life in the places they lived and a way to connect other disenchanted citizens with the form of government closest to them. To understand their motivation to become involved and the obstacles they faced, I interviewed over two dozen district council deputies elected in the spring of 2012 (see list of interviewees in Appendix A). Before turning to the interviews, I first review below the evolution and structure of municipal government in Moscow and examine why the spring of 2012 presented an ideal time for outsiders to become involved in organized politics.

3.4.1 Local self-government

The structure and powers of local self-government reflect broader trends in decentralization and centralization of political power in Russia over the last twenty years (see Ross 2003). Local self-government, in the form of an elected municipal governing body, is a guaranteed right under Article 12 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Organs of local self-government are independent from organs of the state and carry responsibility of addressing “issues of local importance” according to the Constitution (Article 130). Despite their centrality in the Russian Constitution, the de facto powers of local self-government in Russia have been diminished over time (Ross 2006; Gel’man and Lankina 2008). In Moscow, as well as most other municipalities, bodies of local-self government exist but have been, until very recently, relatively weak. However, the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections in 2012 made district councillors important political gatekeepers.

During the Soviet period, local self-government existed in the form of local
councils, or Soviets, but their power was nominal. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia briefly underwent what scholars have described as a “municipal revolution” (Gel’man 2003), with many forms of local self-government adopted throughout the country (Matsuzato 1999; Kirkow 1997; Hahn 2004). However, the actual powers of local self-government were usurped by regional elites were empowered by Yeltsin’s policy of “contract federalism” which allowed regional governors a great deal of autonomy in the running of their regions in exchange for a patchwork of political support at the federal level (Gel’man 2002; Gel’man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Ross 2007). As with the rest of the country, political power in Moscow was mostly concentrated in the office of the mayor. In 1992, Yeltsin made Gavriil Popov, the first elected mayor, a direct manager of the city, bypassing the City Council and MosSoviet. From 1992 to 1998, the powers of the mayor in Moscow were further expanded to allow him to directly exercise control on three levels of government in the city: office of the mayor, 10 administrative okrugs, and 128 raions (districts) (Gel’man 2003). This structure violated the constitutionally guaranteed autonomy of local self-government from organs of state authority as well as the right of self-government bodies to determine their own form. In December of 2000, the organization of Moscow’s city government was successfully challenged in court by a group of activists. When the Supreme Court upheld this ruling in March of 2001, Moscow’s government enacted new legislation to avoid the districts becoming independent centers of power. The city effectively created two parallel systems of government at the local level (see Figure 3.4). Each Moscow district would now have organs representing state authority (District administration) as well as bodies of self-government (District councils). Most powers to deal with local issues were assigned to
district administrators, incorporating local government into the power vertical. In addition, organs of state authority maintained responsibility and control over local budgets. Local self-government existed in the form of district councils but was largely powerless.

Figure 3.4: Structure of municipal government in Moscow

At the time of these changes in Moscow, local government across Russia was reorganized through a series of legislative reforms. This was the so-called “municipal counter-revolution”, which introduced additional levels of state administration at the local level (okrugs) and almost doubled the number of municipalities in the country (Mokeev 2011). Although officially meant to bring local government closer to the electorate, the new local governing structures lacked sufficient revenue from taxes, relying instead on center for financial transfers. In the mid 2000s, local self-government officially gained purview over more local issues but lacked financial autonomy to meet its new obligations. Self-government was finally and firmly relegated to the periphery of political power in 2004 when the Duma passed a law giving the President the power to directly appoint governors – including the Mayor of Moscow. For nearly a decade, local self-government operated
across Russia but was underfunded and subordinate to regional heads who were themselves appointed and dismissed by the Kremlin. In the winter of 2011, local politics did not seem like a promising terrain for challenging state power in Russia.

In March of 2012, a large number of first-time and opposition-oriented candidates ran in the municipal elections in Moscow. Estimates vary, but as many as 200 independent candidates stood for office. Over seventy won. The results of that election were modest but important. Roughly 35% of those elected as district council deputies in 2012 were not affiliated with United Russia. One month after that election, gubernatorial elections were reintroduced meeting a promise made by President Putin in the wake of the 2011–2012 anti-electoral fraud protests. As discussed in Chapter 2, nominees for governor would now need to pass a municipal filter by collecting signatures of support from between 5% and 10% of district council deputies in their region. In Moscow, this meant that potential candidates for the office of mayor would need to collect at least 110 signatures representing three quarters of the municipal districts. The municipal filter requirement was described by officials as kind of quality control of potential candidates for the office of regional head meant to ensure that candidates had some measure of local support. In reality, in Moscow, as in many other regions, only United Russia candidates had enough district deputies to meet the filter. The party was able to pack district councils with supporters.

After a brief note on methodology, the rest of this chapter examines the election of these non-United Russia district council deputies and their subsequent participation in local self-government to first, identify the conditions that allowed members of the non-
systemic opposition to enter organized politics and second, to examine the reasons for which citizens chose to exercise voice in an authoritarian polity.

3.5 Methodology

In total, I conducted twenty-nine in-person interviews with politicians, former candidates, and activists in Moscow and St. Petersburg between August and November of 2013. In the course of the interviews I posed three central questions:

1. Why did you decide to run for political office in 2012?
2. How did your experience as a member of the district council line up with your pre-election expectations?
3. Would you be participating in the municipal filter mechanism for the mayoral election?28

All interviews were between twenty minutes and two hours in length, conducted in Russian and only two of the twenty-nine were not audio-recorded.

Interviewees were identified and recruited in the following way. Owing to the fact that I was interested in examining why previously politically inactive citizens would decide to run for political office, I sampled from a total pool of independent candidates who ran in Moscow’s municipal elections using lists of “true independents” compiled by activists and widely shared on social media platforms.29 I explain why relying on such a list rather than the official election commission records was necessary in detail in the next section. After cross checking several lists, I came up with 180 possible interviewees. Several districts in Moscow were contested by many independent candidates while a

28 Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.
29 There was more than one such list. Most were identical. I used the one compiled by gorod2012 activists. I screen captured the list from http://serialleming.livejournal.com/25148.html
handful had none. I therefore contacted at least two independent candidates from each
district where independents had run. The breakdown of response rates to interview
requests is recorded in Table A2 in the Appendix A. In addition to former candidates and
politicians, I also made an effort to interview activists involved in organizations or
initiatives that supported these candidates and their campaigns. These informants were
found through the organizations’ or initiatives’ websites.

3.6 At the periphery of power: Exercising voice under authoritarianism

Municipal elections have traditionally been low stakes events in Moscow due to
the limited powers of municipal government. The situation was somewhat different in
2012 when they fell on the same day as the presidential election. At the time, Moscow
was the epicenter of anti-regime and anti-fraud protests and the municipal election
offered a timely point of entry into politics for active or disgruntled Muscovites. In
addition to timing, participation and interest in the 2012 municipal election was cultivated
by opposition political parties as well as civic organizations. These factors combined to
produce the most competitive municipal election in Moscow’s history with with 2.4
candidates running for each post. The election was a modest but important victory for
opposition candidates. The result was a weakening of United Russia’s dominance at the
municipal level in Moscow. In nine districts, enough non-United Russia candidates were
elected to block UR nominations for the head of district council. There were, however,
many obstacles to participation – deliberate efforts by United Russia at misinformation
and procedural barriers to registration – that had to be overcome.

Over four thousand individuals registered as candidates in the municipal election.
Among the candidates, 70 were nominated by Yabloko, 390 by LDPR (Liberal
Democratic Party of Russia), 633 by Just Russia, 817 by the Communist Party. And 2833 were registered as independents (Novikova 2012).\(^3^0\) Of the nearly three thousand independent candidates, 1500 were actually representatives of United Russia (UR). Negative publicity following the parliamentary elections in 2011 had damaged United Russia’s party label. Fearing voter backlash during the municipal election, UR chose not to put forward a list of candidates and instead ran their candidates as independents. To combat the potential confusion that the presence of pseudo-independents on the ballot would cause for voters, a number of local initiatives, including “Our City”, “Association of municipal deputies”, “Muscovite”, and “Solidarity”, distributed two types of lists: a list with the names and districts of oppositional municipal candidates and a list of so-called “two-faced candidates”\(^3^1\) identifying independent candidates who were actually members of United Russia. These lists were posted widely on social media and were also published in some neighborhood newspapers. This grassroots dissemination of information helped fill the information vacuum when the local elections commissions refused to publish information about municipal candidates.

In addition to the lack of information and deliberate efforts to mask the affiliation of United Russia candidates, independent candidates were also vulnerable to procedural barriers. In the run up to the election, the electoral commission disqualified 650 candidates for violating procedural regulations (Novikova 2012; see also Moskovskie Novosti, 10 January). Many were disqualified on technicalities having to do with their registration paperwork. While a few candidates were able to reverse their

\(^{30}\) The actual term is “самовыдвиженцы” or self-nominated.

\(^{31}\) Independent candidates who were actually part of United Russia were called “кандидаты-оборотни”.
disqualifications by appealing to the city courts (Moskovskie Novosti, 16 February), the problem of administrative disqualifications was mostly anticipated by both political parties and activists.

In order to help as many opposition or anti-regime candidates run as possible, opposition parties, including Yabloko and Just Russia, loosened their internal rules concerning the nomination of candidates to permit the nomination of individuals who were not members of the party. This strategic decision solved two problems simultaneously. First, candidates nominated by a political party did not have to collect signatures from local residents in support of their candidacy, which was an attractive benefit for many people because canvassing is not a well-established practice in Russia and remains a deeply uncomfortable experience for many first-time would-be politicians (Chernisheva, interview with author, 2013; Men’shikov, interview with author, 2013; Pushkareva, interview with author, 2013; Rusakova, interview with author, 2013; Chirkov, interview with author, 2013). At the same time, political parties also provided their candidates with access to legal representation in order to proofread their documents and defend against any moves by the local electoral commission to disqualify them on procedural grounds (such as improper paperwork, failing to meet deadlines, quality of signatures). Many interviewees noted that backing by legal experts was crucial in maintaining and defending their candidacy (Rusakova, interview with author 2013).

In order to combat the presence of well-known neighborhood figures like doctors and school principals running ostensibly as independents but actually on behalf of United Russia, opposition political parties recruited individuals already active in their neighborhoods who could leverage their existing name recognition and networks into a
successful campaign (Rusakova, interview with author, 2013; Tkach, interview with author, 2013). Instead of focusing on heads of clinics and principals, Just Russia and Yabloko nominated environmental and urban planning activists deeply involved with community organizations though, as interviewees noted, most had been generally disengaged and disinterested in organized politics (Pushkareva, interview with author, 2013). For example, Yelena Tkach was a well known activist in her central Moscow district who regularly organized residents in defense of the preservation of local buildings with historical significance. Yelena Rusakova was active with the non-governmental organization Memorial and worked on education programs for over two decades in her neighborhood. Both were approached to run for municipal self-government by the political party Yabloko. Not only did the established reputations of these individuals help them be elected, as I discuss below, their neighborhood connections would also prove to be key once they took office.

To help prepare independent candidates for the campaign and their duties as municipal district deputies, independent initiatives, including “Our City”, “Solidarity” and “Association of municipal deputies”, held informational training sessions. These various schools for deputies were advertised on social media with the express purpose of helping anyone opposed to United Russia be elected to municipal office. The training included information on the structure of municipal government in Moscow, the duties of municipal deputies, strategies for campaigning and guidance on procedural requirements for registration as well as suggestions for monitoring voting on election day (Miloserdev, interview with author, 2013; Tkach, interview with author, 2013). Vladimir Garnachuk, a first-time district deputy for Troparyovo-Nikulino Raion described these courses as a
“trampoline” into the world of politics (interview with author, 2013). Konstantin Yankauskus, district deputy for Zyuzino Raion and a member of Solidarity described the purpose of these schools this way:

A person who wants to be involved in politics in Russia, like a person who wants to open a business, will encounter many barriers. You need to submit a packet of specific information to the electoral commission. After you are registered, you need to submit yet another packet of information. You need to follow very specific guidelines when printing your campaign material. A specific way of conducting your campaign [canvassing for signatures], of accounting for your campaign spending …So, in principle, a person running independently, reading all the laws carefully, and wanting to participate will probably miss something. And this will be grounds for disqualification. And so in order to qualify candidates properly – from the perspective of the bureaucratic powers – these initiatives were started. And they played a huge role. (interview with author, Moscow, 2013)

These efforts of civic organizations and oppositional political parties created an opportunity structure that allowed willing individuals to become involved in organized politics at the municipal level. An opportunity structure does not explain, however, why individuals became interested in participating, many for the first time, in organized politics during the winter of 2012. As I argue in sections 3.2 and 3.3, that choice can be viewed as an exercise of individual voice – an individual response to observed decline in quality. The decline in quality that individuals observed was local and national. Some people were motivated to enter organized politics because of problems they observed in the neighborhoods such as corruption and degradation of municipal services. Others were motivated by anger over fraud during the 2011 parliamentary elections or the brazen disregard of voters that was evident during the 2011 announcement that Putin and Medvedev would switch posts – from President to Prime Minister – in the new year. For
instance, Vladimir Garnachuk, a business man in his forties, who had, before 2011, never before even voted, described his motivation to run for municipal office as stemming from anger and frustration of Putin and Medvedev’s rokirovka\[^{32}\]: “And so what now? No one is even going to pretend to ask me?” (interview with author, Moscow, 2013) Yelena Pushkareva stayed up all night on December 4\(^{th}\) watching videos posted on YouTube by activists and observers of blatant ballot box stuffing and other fraud taking place at polling stations around the country. She decided then to become an election observer in advance of the presidential elections in March. While training for that role, she was approached to run for municipal office by Yabloko. Her motivation to become a candidate stemmed not only from her disappointment over electoral fraud, but also from her experience with municipal government in her northern Moscow district of Khoroshyovsky. The mother of three young children at the time, Pushkareva had tried to complain to the municipal administration about the quality of parks and playgrounds in her neighbourhood. Her concerns, and the concerns of other residents she spoke with, were dismissed or rerouted from one government office to the other, a process she described as “footballing” (interview with author, Moscow, 2013). Yelena Rusakova echoed this sentiment saying that residents in Gagarinsky Raion were treated “like enemies” (interview with author, Moscow, 2013). Like Garnachuk, Pushkareva described herself as an apolitical individual, who thought local politics were “boring” and national politics were “highly corrupt”. Yet of the people I spoke with, her path to politics seemed prototypical. Roughly half of the people I interviewed found their way into organized

\[^{32}\] The term for a chess move called ‘castling’ when the castle and king switch to remove the king from danger. This was the popular term to describe the announcement made by Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev that Putin would again become president in 2012 that was made publically seven months before the election (Eglund and Lally 2011).
politics after being trained as an elections observer in the wake of the 2011 parliamentary election. About three quarters said particular problems in their neighbourhood – from the quality of parks, issues with Housing and Communal Services (ZhKKh), battles over infill development (tochachnya zastroika) and a lack of services for pensioners and veterans – had motivated them to run for municipal office. Natalia Chernisheva, a municipal deputy for Zyuzino Raion, summed up why municipal government was a particularly attractive option for residents who wanted to achieve changes in their neighborhoods: “When your roof leaks, you need to get out there, on the wet, slippery surface. You need to solve problems from the top instead of running around below with a bucket collecting dirty water.” (interview with author, Moscow, 2013) There were also, among those I interviewed, individuals who considered themselves to be active members of the organized opposition in Russia and who had participated extensively in opposition activities such as meetings, organizations, and protests. These individuals saw municipal government as the next logical step in their activist trajectory. Konstantin Yankauskas, a district council member of Zyuzino Raion, had been actively involved in opposition politics since 2009 and was a member of the opposition group Solidarity. He laid out his reasons for running for municipal office in this way:

Politics is a battle over power: the right to make decisions or to have input in policy. And everything starts at the municipal level… I believe local self-government is the foundation of government in any political system and we must strengthen that foundation… In order to convince people that the system must be changed you need to have a background (experience) in that system so that you can demonstrate your effectiveness. (interview with author, Moscow, 2013)
Yankauskas’ path from vocal outsider to vocal insider fits within the EVL framework. As new promising avenues of voice open up, the most “alert customers”, or in this case active citizens, utilize them to further their agenda.

These reasons fit fairly well within the EVL framework. Citizens were motivated to exercise voice by an observable decline in quality exhibited in the degradation of the legitimacy of their national politics (electoral fraud) and efficacy of their local politics (corruption). Instead of exiting by leaving the country or simply withdrawing from politics, these individuals chose to run for political office. It should be noted, that as Hirschman expects, the individuals who chose to exercise voice had the resources to make themselves heard. Specifically, beyond the resources and help made available to them by opposition political parties and civic organizations, these individuals were highly educated and well established professionals. Although I did not take a formal census, most of my interview subjects were employed in professional fields: accountants, auditors, professors, teachers and business people. Invested in their neighborhoods, supported by civic organizations and networks, these individuals chose to become, to use Hirschman’s terminology “vocal members of their community”.

3.6.1 The experience from within: “If you’re afraid, don’t do it. If you do it, don’t be afraid.”

I conducted interviews in Moscow roughly 18 months after municipal deputies took office. As such, I was able to ask my interviewees about their experience working within the district councils. I asked them to describe the challenges they experienced as well as any successes they had. Two themes emerged from the responses: first,

33 Vladimir Garnachuk, interview with author, Moscow, 2013.
harassment of independent or opposition candidates was rife and could be physical; 
second, in order to accomplish anything, municipal deputies needed extraordinary levels 
of support from local residents and the ability to rigidly and exactly follow laws and 
regulations. Positive change was possible, but very difficult to accomplish.

Clearly, this part of the story about municipal politics in Moscow does not fit well 
within the EVL conceptual framework. This is in part because, although Hirschman 
claimed that EVL applied equally to economics and politics, the degree of receptiveness 
among firms to calls for change is *ex ante* different from the degree of receptiveness of 
authoritarian governments. Since firms exist in a competitive market place, it is in their 
best interest to fix any decline in quality that may cause them to lose customers. Vocal 
customers, therefore, provide a useful service to firms by alerting them to decline. 
Although authoritarian governments can be quite responsive to public demands (for 
examples see Petrov et al 2013; Bourdreaux 2004; Chen 2012; Eisenstandt 2004; Birch 
2011; Schedler 2013), they tend to resist fundamental or explicit calls to change the 
system of authoritarian governance. This is especially so with measures that aim to 
increase transparency, accountability or control corruption. In a sum, authoritarian states 
resist those social demands that seek to make them more democratic. Therefore, while 
citizens of authoritarian states may still choose, as in the case of Moscow, to exercise 
voice in response to decline in the quality of national and local governance, recovery 
from this decline does not necessarily result from their actions. Hirschman did not 
consider this in his original work on exit, voice and loyalty, nor in his later application of 
EVL to the case of East Germany. There simultaneous voice and exit overwhelmed the 
system. In Moscow, the response to voice has been resistance to change.
While the experiences of the deputies that I interviewed exhibited certain commonalities, they were not uniform. A few deputies described a tense but workable relationship between themselves and the district administration and prefecture. One deputy who ran as an independent but was in fact part of United Russia, and who asked to remain anonymous, described the municipal system of government as “intentionally ineffective” – designed to generate formal replies to resident’s requests (otpiski) without substance – but noted that requests for money for special projects were likely to be approved by the mayor (interview with author, Moscow, 2013). Most deputies observed that the local self-government in Moscow lacked leverage (richagi) over the non-elected organs of municipal government such as the district administration and prefecture which controlled the budget. This was a primary source of frustration for municipal deputies who noted that the district councils rubber stamped directives that came from the office of the mayor without review or debate often even when these directives contained factual or arithmetic mistakes (Rushkareva, interview with author, 2013). Reflecting on his experience within the district council, Garnachuk likened the functioning of the system to “rubber cement”: “You hit it and hit it and you bounce back.” (interview with author, Moscow, 2013) Rusakova observed that in reality, Russia lacked a responsive government: “Today, Russia has no government. Russia is a business. A government works for the people. A business works for itself.” (interview with author, Moscow, 2013) Their experiences was often frustrating and, in a few instances, actually dangerous.
Beyond the use of *kompromat*\(^{34}\) and *cherniy piar*\(^{35}\) during the electoral campaign, a handful of deputies told me about harassment they experienced during their year and a half in office. Yelena Pushkareva was dragged by the arm out of her first council meeting after the municipal election because the chairman of the council was angry that a group of her local supporters showed up to video record the session (interview with author, Moscow, 2013). A female deputy from a central district in Moscow, who wanted to remain anonymous, had her front door slashed after she raised concerns about noise and air pollution in her neighborhood and suggested that parking for cars be prohibited in areas abutting school playgrounds (interview with author, Moscow, 2013). Garnachuk described being followed and filmed constantly. Footage of him was later used in a series of videos accusing him of being, in turn, “a prostitute” and “an immigrant” (from Moldova) (interview with author, Moscow, 2013).\(^{36}\) The most serious incident of harassment happened to Lena Tkach, a district council member of Presnensky Raion. On October 16\(^{\text{th}}\) 2013, a month after I interviewed her, Tkach was violently shoved off the stage by a man at a heated community meeting concerning a planned construction project in her neighborhood. Tkach lost consciousness and was concussed as a result of the incident.\(^{37}\)

And yet those exercising voice were not completely powerless. I found that when active citizens (alert customers) became politicians, their strategic toolkit expanded and

\(^{34}\) Kompromat is compromising material used to blackmail public figures. Often seen as form of ‘suspended punishment’ or a system of mutual restraints (see Ledeneva 2006).

\(^{35}\) Cherniy piar is Black public relations is negative information distributed for the purpose of influencing public opinion (see Ledeneva 2006).

\(^{36}\) Anti-Garnachuk videos are available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kqqg-sGMwoI.

\(^{37}\) The incident was recorded and videos are up on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPO_9ituhLk; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJcy3r3r9t8.
they began to work the system from the inside. This is, in fact, a different response to the
dysfunction of formal intuitions from the one that has traditionally been observed in
Russia. Scholars, most notably Elena Ledeneva (2006) (see also Helmke and Levitsky
2004; Gel’man 2012), have observed that Russians tend to develop alternative informal
institutions and networks to circumvent malfunctioning formal institutions – what
Richard Rose has called an “anti-modern society” characterized by organizational failure
and corruption (2000, 147). This “know-how” helps people to function within an unstable
and sometimes unpredictable system yet it also makes the formal system less amenable to
change. In essence, while informal practice and networks help people survive
dysfunction, they also hollow out the state making it brittle and unstable. This was not,
however, what I found in Moscow. Instead, municipal deputies took a different course of
action. They took up what I will call “hyper-formal” practices. That is, they used their
limited rights as municipal deputies to exercise formal control over other organs of city
government. Instead of appealing to notions of fairness and the rule of law, the deputies
became hyper legalistic in the application of rules. This approach worked best when
combined with the active support of local citizens. However, deputies noted that local
residents were often under informed about local self-government or simply disinterested:
“People’s hands have been slapped away for a long time. They have been told that their
problems will be solved by someone else.” (Garnachuk, interview with author, Moscow,
2013) In addition, the level of organization required for sustained support for initiatives
often exhausted residents. Elena Rusakova observed that while she was able to mobilize
residents in support of certain large initiatives – for instance, the effort to stop the
expansion of Prospect Lenin to allow for more lanes of traffic – people could not be
expected to turn out for every battle between the municipal deputies and the city administration (interview with author, Moscow, 2013).

The formal rights of council deputies within the structure of Moscow’s municipal government are limited as I noted in section 3.4. However, deputies have certain oversight powers that they can use to constrain the unelected organs of government. Yankauskus noted that one of his main goals as a deputy was to inform residents of the right way to make written official complaints. In order to help citizens feel empowered, he would follow up their letters with his own to make sure that the complaints received an answer, utilizing a municipal regulation that stipulated that requests made by municipal deputies had to be answered formally within 30 days (interview with author, Moscow, 2013). This was an effective but very labour-intensive strategy to stimulate government responsiveness to residents and to get residents involved in local government. Another labour-intensive strategy employed by deputies was to use their right to approve the schedule of repairs for their neighborhood and sign off on the work performed in order to limit opportunities for mismanagement of the budget, pilfering and corruption. Mikhail Men’shikov, Elena Pushkareva and Natalia Chernisheva all described how they repeatedly refused to sign off on renovations, road repairs and improvements ordered by the district administration if the work was not done properly or if the companies contracted to do the work overcharged (interviews with author, Moscow, 2013). Without the deputies’ signatures, contractors could not be paid and the district administration was forced to officially review the work performed. Though they could not ensure accountability and transparency within municipal government by controlling the allocation of budget in their neighborhoods, these deputies used their limited
oversight powers to halt, disrupt, interrupt, and subvert everyday practices of corruption. Pushkareva described this as using “the letter of the law to act as a control” (interview with author, Moscow, 2013). The overall effectiveness of these acts of resistance based on the hyper-formal application of rules is relatively low because it depends on the physical presence of the deputies at work sites. Since council deputies are not paid and are prohibited from hiring any help, their ability to be everywhere they are needed is severely limited. Nevertheless, this tactic raises interesting questions about the possibility of democratic resistance within an authoritarian polity.

### 3.7 Conclusion

Over the last twenty years, Russians have emigrated or retreated from politics in response to growing authoritarianism. Four years ago, tens of thousands of people protested against electoral fraud on the streets of Moscow and other large cities. Only four months after those protests, empowered by the training and support offered by opposition political parties and civic organizations, hundreds of ordinary residents of Moscow were able to run for and win municipal office. In this Chapter, I have suggested that these events can be interpreted using the exit, voice and loyalty framework proposed by Albert Hirschman (1970). For years, Russians chose silent and private exit in reaction to decline in the democratic quality of their government. For a brief moment, Russians were able to overcome collective action problems to exercise public voice in reaction to the decline in the democratic quality of their elections. Finally, a small proportion of citizens was able to channel that public voice of protest into private voice: the decision to become involved in organized politics.

Political participation exists in some form or another in nondemocratic states but
its analysis has mostly been confined to issues of cooptation – how and why elites are integrated into dominant parties or the incentives provided to citizens in exchange for their votes – or resistance – when and how people rebel, protest or revolt. EVL allows for a different perspective on political participation in nondemocratic states. It shifts the focus away from elites and incumbents and instead focuses on the political strategies of ordinary individuals living under authoritarianism. It allows for a bottom-up analysis and demonstrates that authoritarian regimes are multifaceted, simultaneously repressing and empowering political participation. The empirical analysis contained in this Chapter is a snapshot of an understudied phenomenon and is meant to offer a first cut at an explanation. EVL offers a sturdy framework for analysis, but as I point out in the last section, it fails to anticipate the reaction of authorities to the exercise of voice by active citizens (alert customers). More importantly, EVL is not sufficient to explain the strategies of municipal deputies in response to opposition they have encountered since taking office.

The hyper-formal application of rules by municipal deputies in order to exert some control over what happens in their neighborhoods is a counterintuitive finding. It departs from the expectations established in the literature on the use of informal networks and practices in response to dysfunctional institutions in former communist states. Instead of utilizing their post-Soviet know-how (Ledevena 2006), deputies opted not to depart from, but to adhere more closely to, the parameters of formal institutions. By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that this strategy points to the importance of formal, ostensibly democratic, institutions within an authoritarian state. Democratic institutions, which scholars have argued provide little more than a façade of pseudo-legitimacy to
nondemocratic states, can become important avenues of resistance for citizens. Here I want to echo the argument made by Daniel Posner and Daniel Young (2007) in regard to the application of presidential term limits in Africa since the 1980s. It is not the case that democracy has arrived in a state simply because formal rules are observed. It is, however, notable when the behavior of incumbents and those in power is constrained by formal rules. Municipal deputies in Moscow, by relying on the strict application of their powers to prevent small acts of corruption and improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods, to paraphrase Posner and Young, have made formal rules begin to matter in ways that they previously had not.
Chapter 4

Testing for sources of electoral competition under authoritarianism: An analysis of Russia’s gubernatorial elections

4.1 Introduction

Elections are now common in nondemocratic states.\textsuperscript{38} Despite early optimism about their liberalizing affects, a wealth of scholarship has shown that they can forestall democratization as well as advance it (Donno 2013; Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Tucker 2007; Kaya and Bernhard 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006; Kalandadze and Orenstein 2009; Lindberg 2006; Brownlee 2009; Thompson and Kuntz 2006; Geddes 2005; Simpser 2013; Lust-Okar 2006; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Schedler 2002). Elections in hybrid regimes have proven to be especially challenging to theories of electoral democratization because rather than destabilizing incumbents, they can instead generate domestic and international legitimacy further cementing autocracy (see Carothers 1997; Diamond 2002; Ottoway 2003; Levitsky and Way 2010). In analyzing elections in authoritarian regimes, the majority of scholarship has tended to view them almost

\textsuperscript{38} Only eleven states in the world do not hold elections (Hyde and Marinov 2011, 3). See Chapter 1 for further discussion of the history of incorporating elections, and other democratic institutions, into nondemocratic polities.
exclusively as elite contests: “nested games” of interlocking competitions within and over the rules (Tsebelis 1990) often decided by the organizational capacity and “meta-game strategies” (Schedler 2013, 255) of the regime and opposition. Voters have mostly been left out of the equation. At first glance, this seems unproblematic. After all, authoritarian regimes with or without elections do not have real representative forms of government in so far as they are not “responsible” to the people that they govern. Thus, despite the presence of elections, voters are often viewed as “passive recipients of patronage and manipulation” (Miller 2015, 649). And yet, numerous studies have shown that in fact authoritarian elections, even in so-called “closed” authoritarian regimes, tend to accommodate social demands as articulated by voters in nuanced ways. Elections help to vet legislatures, efficiently distribute state rents to regime supporters, monitor the performance of local officials and even produce important policy concessions (Lust-Okar 2006, 2009; Shi 1999; Blaydes 2011; Miller 2015).

This chapter investigates the extent to which the outcome of authoritarian elections is “the joint product of voter choices and regime manipulation” (Schedler 2013, 239). Using the results of forty-three gubernatorial elections in Russia’s regions, I test two potential explanatory models for electoral competition: voter preference – which includes economic and political preferences and public mobilization – and manipulation – which includes regime strategies. The analysis shows that both voter preferences and regime manipulation matter, with public protest, pre-election incumbent changes and voter turnout emerging as the main drivers of electoral results. Using an original dataset of protests across Russia’s regions, I find that there is more electoral competition in

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39 I am grateful to Dr. Tomila Lankina for sharing her valuable data on protests frequency and patterns in Russia from 2007 to 2011 with me.
regions with a recent history of political protest. Strategically placing new candidates in potentially vulnerable regions helps to blunt the impact of voter disapproval. And among the regime’s arsenal of strategies for electoral manipulation, mobilizing loyal or vulnerable voters to show up to the polls on election day is the most effective tool for producing convincing incumbent victories.

The results of the analysis presented here are consistent with the findings of scholars who argue that authoritarian elections are largely artificial contests, performing rather than embodying competition. And yet, these findings also demonstrate that the argument is in need of further refinement. Although competition is managed, authoritarian elections are indeed responsive mechanisms. Protests in particular seem to be taken seriously by the regime in the administration of electoral contests. An authoritarian regime’s response to social demands is more nuanced and pre-emptive, its tactics subtler, than has been previously argued.

4.2 Elections and electoral competition in authoritarian regimes

Can there be electoral competition in the absence of democracy? In contrast to totalitarianism, authoritarian regimes allow for a “limited pluralism” – specifically, a “limited, not responsible pluralism…[with] some space for semiopposition” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 44). Many authoritarian regimes, most in fact, manage their semiopposition by holding regular elections at the local, regional, and national levels to fill both legislative and executive offices. These elections fall short of substantive democratic standards. In closed or hegemonic authoritarian regimes, opposition parties and candidates may be officially barred from participating and severe fraud can be common. In competitive authoritarian regimes, also known as electoral authoritarian regimes
(Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2013), however, the picture is murkier. Elections are regularly held, open to all or nearly all participants, are generally viewed as the only legitimate route to power, and explicit fraud can and does provoke anger among citizens. Yet, crucial democratic norms are violated to deliver an incumbent victory. Elections in these regimes are not “fair, free and honest” (Huntington 1991, 7) and are manipulated for “the purpose of containing the troubling uncertainty of electoral outcomes.” (Schedler 2006, 3) In other words, electoral authoritarianism is a system in which incumbents do not usually lose elections but where competition according to electoral procedures takes place.

Scholars have had some difficulty in articulating the specifics of this empirical contradiction. For instance, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way argue that competitive authoritarian regimes can be distinguished from other types of authoritarian regimes with democratic institutions because in them “democratic procedures are sufficiently meaningful for opposition groups to take them seriously as arenas through which to contest for power.” (2010, 7) Here, whether or not elections are real contests depends, at least in part, on the choice made by the opposition to participate. For Andreas Schedler (2006), the distinction between electoral authoritarian regimes and hegemonic authoritarian regimes lies in the value placed by the leaders and the public on elections as the only institutions through which power is accessed. Both specifications agree that, in these contests, the opposition has only as small chance of winning. When the odds stacked against the opposition and alteration of those power is unlikely or even impossible, depending on the willingness of an incumbent to hold onto political office in the event of an electoral loss, is it appropriate to discuss competition?
The analysis contained in this chapter is designed in part to address this question. If regime manipulation generates electoral results, even if voters vote and parties compete, electoral competition is a contradiction in terms. If, however, voter preferences influence electoral outcomes, then whether or not an actual alteration of power takes place cannot be the deciding factor in examining electoral competition. This analysis does not purport to speak to the possibility of turnover of those in power and acknowledges that “the distinction between electoral authoritarianism and democracy hinges on the quality of electoral competition.” (Donno 2013, 704) In analyzing the dynamics of regimes which “inhabit the wide and foggy zone between liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism” (Schedler 2002, 37), I follow the work of Susan Hyde and Nikolay Marinov (2012) by using the term “competitive” as a label for the outcome of those elections where the opposition is allowed, multiple parties are legal, and more than one candidate competes. Decoupling the potential outcome of elections – turnover and perhaps democratization – from the drivers of electoral competition allows for an analysis of the impact of citizen’s demands on authoritarian regimes and can help to explain, in the long run, the durability of certain types of authoritarianism.

In evaluating this important conceptual issue, Russia presents an ideal case. Russia has been described as a paradigmatic competitive authoritarian state and “one of the largest and most successful authoritarian regimes” (Reuter and Robertson 2012, 1026). As with many hybrid regimes, the Russian regime is full of contradictions. Although electoral malpractice – such as pressuring state employees, pensioners and other vulnerable populations to vote and administratively limiting the opposition’s access to campaign finance and media – is common, outright fraud is not and when perpetrated...
has elicited a strong, widespread and negative domestic reaction. Although they are aware of Russia’s democratic deficits, a plurality of Russian citizens still remain committed to participating in elections. Asked whether voting makes a difference, 49.28% of respondents in the 2012 RES study answered affirmatively (Colton and Hale 2014). Opposition parties and candidates, though hobbled by formal and informal restrictions on their capacity for organization, mobilization and participation, continue to actively contest elections, especially at the regional level. Victories are rare but not impossible as the cases of Novosibirsk, Yaroslavl and Yekaterinburg demonstrate. Moreover, new opposition parties, such as RPR-PARNAS, are not only providing voters with a wider array of choices by supplementing established opposition parties such as Yabloko, but also engaging in creative and collaborative campaigning and grassroots fundraising. Despite this activity on the ground, at the federal level, Russia’s regime rating as determined by Freedom House and the Polity Project has worsened over the last five years.

The context and similarities across the forty-three gubernatorial elections examined here present an interesting comparison. Gubernatorial elections in Russia were abolished in 2005 as part of an effort to recentralize the federal system and end regional fiefdoms created under President Yeltsin. Since then, all regional governors as well as republican presidents have been appointed. The decision to resurrect gubernatorial elections was

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40 For example, when asked whether they thought that Russia was a democratic country, 51.78% of respondents in the Russian Election Studies Survey (Colton and Hale, 2014) answered ‘No’.
41 Places where the opposition won against regime-backed incumbents.
42 See campaigning in Moscow and Novosibirsk.
43 Twenty-two of Russia’s federal subjects are Republics. Republics differ from other federal subjects – krais (territories) or oblasts (provinces) – in that they have the right to set their own official language and have a Constitution. The chief executive of each Republic used to hold the title of President. In 2010, an amendment to federal law reserved that title solely for the head of the Russian state.
motivated in part by the wave of anti-fraud and pro-democracy protests that took place in 2011 and also by the failure of unpopular governors to deliver pro-Kremlin electoral results in the regions (Sharafutdinova 2012; Goode 2013). Under these conditions, gubernatorial elections served a dual purpose: they lent validity to the Kremlin’s response to protestors and installed popularly vetted regional leaders.

The restoration of gubernatorial elections came with a set of barriers on competition: a presidential and municipal filter. Political parties would have to “consult” with the President on potential candidates and candidates had to collect signatures from municipal deputies – positions dominated by members of United Russia – in their regions in order to qualify for registration. In addition, the Kremlin replaced almost a quarter of all regional governors in 2012 thereby preventing elections in all but the most secure regions. These administrative barriers are characteristic of the uneven playing field of competitive authoritarian regimes. Competition is allowed in order to generate legitimacy but heavily controlled to guarantee incumbent victory. And indeed, incumbents won in all forty-three elections. Despite this general pro-regime trend, incumbent vote share and electoral competition varied significantly across the regions. Consequently, these elections provide an opportunity to test, in a preliminary way, the potential drivers of electoral competition as well as electoral manipulation under authoritarianism and to further develop our conceptual understanding of competition in competitive authoritarian regimes.
Table 4.1: Measures of competitiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of competition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HH Index: measure of competition</td>
<td>0.396</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>0.648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golosov Score: measure of the effective number of candidates</td>
<td>1.046</td>
<td>0.292</td>
<td>1.085</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold: winner’s vote share above 50% threshold</td>
<td>25.216</td>
<td>10.071</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>41.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several meaningful ways of capturing electoral competition; I have chosen three. The measures are summarized in Table 4.1. Traditionally, in democratic settings, party fractionalization or the number of “effective” parties is used as a measure of the degree of electoral competition (eg. Rae’s party fractionalization index or the Laakso-Taagepera effective number of parties). At their core, these measures rely on the Herfindahl-Hirschmann index of industrial concentration (hereafter HH index).44

Originally used in economics, this measure has been adapted in political science literature and used both in the Russian context and studies of regional elections elsewhere (see Moraski and Reisinger 2003; Afzal 2014). The advantage of using such an index is that it is a probability measure that encapsulates both the number of candidates and their relative electoral strength. The larger the number of candidates and the smaller their individual vote shares, the closer the HH index score will be to 1. The fewer candidates and the more disparate their individual vote shares, the closer the index score will be to 0. For instance, the HH index score for the election in Volgograd oblast where four candidates ran but the incumbent received 88.49% of the vote is 0.214. Bryansk, where two candidates competed in a relatively closer race, splitting the vote 65.22% to 30.83%, has

44 $HH = \frac{1}{\sum(VS_i)^2}$, where $VS_i$ is the vote share of candidate $i$.  

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an HH index score of 0.479. The election in the Republic of Altai, where four candidates ran and the incumbent received just 50.53% scores 0.604.

However, as Grigorii Golosov (2010) has pointed out, the HH index of competition, like other measures of fractionalization, have been mostly applied to elections in established Western democracies. In emerging democracies or electoral authoritarian regimes, fractionalization of party systems tends to fall at two extremes: many small parties in systems struggling to consolidate or electoral landscapes dominated by one party to a degree unthinkable in a democracy. Russia today resembles the latter. Golosov therefore suggests a different formula for calculating the effective number of parties based on the assumption that truly competitive parties are of equivalent sizes. In an election where one party receives 80% of the vote and another receives 20% of the vote, Golosov’s formula suggests that the effective number of parties is 1.25: one winning party and one party one-fourth its size. The scores produced using this measure not only capture the dynamics of highly concentrated party systems, but also are arguably more easily interpreted than the HH index (which in the same election specified above would produce a score of 0.32). I have therefore calculated the effective number of candidates for each gubernatorial election. For comparison, while the HH index gives the uncompetitive election in Orlov oblast a score of 0.202, the Golosov formula produces 1.12 effective candidates in that region. In the Republic of Altai, the HH index score is 0.604, with 2.09 effective candidates according to Golosov’s formula.

\[ N_p = \sum_{i=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{1 + \left( \frac{S_i}{S_i} \right) - S_i} \]

where \( S_i \) is the winning vote share and \( S_i \) are other vote shares.

45 The formula for Golosov’s effective number of parties is \( N_p = \sum_{i=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{1 + \left( \frac{S_i}{S_i} \right) - S_i} \) where \( S_i \) is the winning vote share and \( S_i \) are other vote shares.
Keeping in mind that authoritarian elections are mechanisms that generate legitimacy for the regime and its regional representatives, I include another measure of competitiveness: incumbent vote share above 50%. All gubernatorial elections operated under a two round majority system. Candidates needed to receive 50% in order to avoid a runoff election. Although in a democratic setting a victory with a majority of votes can be described as definitive, receiving 50% in a nondemocratic contest carries different implications. Because the Kremlin made sure to replace weak governors and only allowed elections in ‘secure’ regions, how close each race came to requiring another round is an important measure of electoral competition. As Paul Goode suggests, in the Russian context, “a genuinely competitive election actually appears as a failure for the regime.” (2013:10) And indeed, electoral results varied from comfortable Soviet-style victories for the incumbent in Volgograd oblast with 39% above the runoff threshold, to less overwhelming victories in Moscow with 1.37% above the threshold and in the Republic of Sakha with 8.78% above the threshold.

4.3 Explaining Competition: Voter preferences or regime manipulation?

4.3.1 Voter preferences

If voters have an impact on the degree of electoral competition under authoritarianism, the public’s economic and political preferences should play an important role. Traditionally, studies of democratic elections have pointed to the strong role that economic considerations play in motivating electoral choices. When applied to Eastern Europe and Russia, the economic model of voting behavior has produced mixed but generally positive findings that are in line with traditional theories of retrospective voting. In the mid to late 1990s, Timothy Colton (1996) and others (Clem and Craumer...
2000) found that positive evaluations of economic performance by voters rewarded reformist parties but that the effect was sometimes absorbed by other considerations, such as party affiliation. Similarly, Joshua Tucker (2001), examining economic voting in several post-Communist countries, found that voters held those they considered most responsible for the economic situation in a country – the so-called “primary incumbent party” – accountable at the polls. In line with this trend, Andrew Konitzer (2005) used individual-level and aggregate-level data and an indicator of relative regional economic performance to show that Russian voters not only assess regional economic performance as part of their decision-making process to support or not support an incumbent but also that these individual assessments translated into electoral outcomes. At the national level, using survey results produced as part of the Russian Election Studies (RES), Timothy Colton and Henry Hale (2009, 2014) have confirmed the link between the economy and electoral support. They found that electoral support for both Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections depended at least in part on a positive evaluation of the national economy. Not only did voters seem to evaluate the economy in their voting decisions, they also attributed responsibility for economic performance to the President. Analyzing the 2012 presidential election, Colton and Hale confirmed the presence of this relationship again. Support for Putin was still high but had declined somewhat in light of the economic instability of 2008 and rising concerns about corruption. Daniel Treisman (2011) has also found that the levels of presidential popularity in Russia reflect the public’s evaluation of economic performance; Yeltsin’s popularity suffered as the economy worsened, whereas Putin’s popularity soared when the economy rebounded in the early and mid 2000s.
On the other hand, other research has cast doubt on economic considerations motivating electoral choice in Russia. Steven Solnick (1998) found no connection between economic conditions in Russian regions and outcomes in gubernatorial elections. Likewise, Moraski and Reisinger (2003) found that economic factors, such as average per capita income, had little impact on turnover rates in Russia’s gubernatorial elections during the late 1990s. The region-specific analyses suggest that some relationship may exist between economic performance and incumbent success in Russian regions, although this seems to depend on the type of economic indicators employed. The contradiction between findings on the national level elections, such as Colton and Hale’s (2009, 2014) and Triesman’s (2011), and regional elections, highlights a problematic element of research into voter preferences in Russia. Evaluations of the economy seem to have an impact on presidential approval ratings but the effect on electoral outcomes may be only marginal. Recent work has shown that exceptionally high levels of public support – around 80% - for Putin are genuine and not the product of desirability bias or pro-regime inflation by pollsters (Frye et al 2015). For this reason, Putin may be less vulnerable to retrospective economic voting because of other factors that contribute to his popularity. Governors, on the other hand, may be more vulnerable as Konitzer’s (2005) work would suggest. Yet we cannot be sure because the research on Russian regional elections summarized above is now dated and was undertaken when the political regime in Russia could be described as an emerging or illiberal democracy. This is no longer the case. Certainly, since the abolition of gubernatorial elections in 2005, Russia can be accurately described as a hybrid regime or competitive authoritarian regime. Recent national-level
research signals the importance of economic considerations to voters. It is unclear, however, if the relationship holds in the newly resumed gubernatorial elections.

Relatively little work exists on economic voting in authoritarian regimes, but there is some evidence to suggest that retrospective economic evaluations matter in nondemocratic settings. For example, Schedler finds that incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes suffer at the polls in times of economic growth while incumbents in hegemonic regimes benefit from prosperity (2013, 243-245). Schedler suggests that in hegemonic regimes wealth stabilizes the status quo, while in competitive authoritarian regimes, wealth undermines it by emboldening the opposition and thereby reducing the margin of victory for incumbents. If economic considerations matter to voters even under authoritarian conditions, authoritarian elections may have the same drivers as democratic elections. Incumbents should suffer during economic downturns and prosper when things are going well. If the economic preferences of voters do not influence electoral results, it would suggest that authoritarian elections are less like their democratic counterparts and more likely to be the product of regime manipulation.

I aim to shed light on this by including two economic indicators in the analysis of electoral competition in gubernatorial elections: the lagged regional unemployment rate and change in monthly income for the year previous to the election. Lagged unemployment rate is commonly used to assess the economic well being of a region and reflects its relative performance. A measure of the change in monthly income is included as it is arguably an economic indicator of the region’s economic performance that is more readily and personally felt by voters. I fully acknowledge that neither of these proxies are perfect. Russian authorities and businesses have a history of artificially depressing both
unemployment rates – by keeping people “on the books” without providing them with work – as well as income – by paying a portion of an employee’s salary “under the table” to avoid paying higher taxes and pension contributions. In addition, the time period covered in this analysis – three years of elections – may be too short for the impact of the economy to be sufficiently expressed. Although Russia’s regions vary significantly by income and unemployment levels, the period between 2012 and 2014 was dominated by events of national significance, such as the Olympic Games in Sochi and the annexation of Crimea, which may have diverted people’s attention from the economy. If economic considerations matter, I expect that voters in regions with higher unemployment and lower incomes should vote against the status quo and punish incumbent governors with more competitive elections and narrower margins of victory.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the nature of the regime, there is relatively little current work on political cleavages or political alignment in Russia. Research on voting patterns from the early and mid 1990s suggests that despite the radical evolution of Russian political parties – their tendency to form, split, and disappear – voters’ behavior could be explained by a one-dimensional issue space of “reformist/anti-reformist” sentiment (McFaul and Fish 1996; Myagkov et al. 1997). The prevailing wisdom during this period of time was that Russian political parties were personalistic and undifferentiated (Fish 1995), and that Russian voters lacked partisanship attachment and were in general suspicious of organized politics (see White, Rose, and McAllister 1997). An even grimmer picture emerged during the late 1990s and into the first Putin presidency, when analysis of voting behavior suggested that elites, and regional elites in particular, were largely responsible for the mass support of new political parties such as
Edinstvo and Otechestvo (Myagkov and Ordeshook 2002). However, survey research challenged this view and demonstrated that Russian voters were in fact slowly developing partisan attachment and voting loyalty (Brader and Tucker 2001; Miller, Reisinger and Hesli 1998).

As the political regime in Russia has become more autocratic, research on political support has moved away from examining voter preferences and toward explaining the emergence and dynamics of the newly formed ‘dominant party’: United Russia. Reuter and Remington (2009) argue that Putin successfully made United Russia into a dominant party, defined as a party that has “power over policy making, patronage distribution, and political appointments and uses privileged access to the public purse to maintain its position in power” (2009, p. 503), by coopting and coercing previously independent and powerful regional elites. Over the last decade, the competitive authoritarian regime has become synonymous with the electoral success of United Russia. The regime has maintained United Russia’s electoral dominance by changing laws on the registration of political parties and even resorting to electoral fraud in national elections. Given this situation, it is perhaps unlikely that politically motivated voter preferences will have a significant impact on electoral competition in gubernatorial elections. It is possible, however, that anti-regime sentiment may account for lower vote shares for the regime-backed incumbents, especially after the anti-electoral fraud protest movements of 2011 – 2012. Moreover, since the forty-three gubernatorial elections examined here are the first of their kind in a decade, it is the first time voters would have been able to have a say in choosing the person who occupies their region’s top office. As such, these elections are akin to a referendum on the quality of regional leadership.
previously appointed by the central government. The recent success of opposition candidates in municipal elections in places like Moscow suggests voters motivated to cast their vote against regime-backed candidates can have an impact at the polls. However, gubernatorial elections, with bigger district magnitudes than their municipal counterparts and higher stakes for the regime, may not follow this pattern.

The task of capturing true political preferences of voters in an authoritarian state is not simple. Surveys performed by the Levada Centre and other survey agencies routinely assess support for political parties and politicians. However, most do not control for response bias and the results have been challenged as reporting inflated approval ratings for President Putin. The 2012 RES survey conducted by Timothy Colton used a list-experiment that corrected for the possibility that respondents were falsifying their stated preferences. And indeed, the “corrected” levels of support for Putin were about 10% lower than the explicitly reported support (Colton and Hale 2014, 18-19). Unfortunately, regional samples of respondents that made up this national survey are too small to be used in the present analysis. Scholars have also relied on expert rankings of the democratic “quality” of different regions to assess the political opportunity structure – the possibility for anti-regime mobilization – in different regions (see Lankina 2015). In this analysis, I use the 2006 – 2011 expert rankings for each region included in the sample produced by the Moscow Carnegie Center (Petrov and Titkov 2013). As a proxy for voter preferences, I use electoral results from each region’s last parliamentary elections, focusing on the vote share of United Russia. This is an appropriate measure for this analysis because in each region, the gubernatorial incumbent either represented United Russia or was explicitly endorsed by the ruling party. I hypothesize that if voters’
political preferences matter in authoritarian elections, votes for United Russia in regional parliaments should correlate with stronger support for the incumbents in gubernatorial elections.

I also include the total number of political protests in a region during the two years that precede an election as a proxy for voter preferences. There is a large and growing literature on contentious politics in authoritarian regimes in general (Bourdreau 2004; Chen 2012; Tsai 2008; Slater 2010) and in Russia in particular (Beissinger 2002; Robertson 2009, 2013; Lankina 2015). A substantial part of this work has been devoted to explaining how and why, after such a long period of inactivity, Russians took to the streets to protest against electoral fraud (Gel’man 2013; Aron 2013, Green 2013; Chaisy and Whitefield 2013; Smyth et al 2013). This work is similar to previous comparative work that examined how opposition parties were able to mobilize against regime incumbents in Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan (Tucker 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Koesel and Bunce 2012, 2013). There is reason to believe, however, that protests, beyond toppling regimes, have a subtler but significant impact on domestic politics. Protests have been shown to influence a diverse range of issues from decisions on the appointment of certain legislators to important parliamentary committees (Reuter and Robertson 2015) to the transition from one-party to multi-party autocracy and finally into a democracy (Trejo 2014). The quantity and intensity of protests can be the result of a number of things: levels of socio-economic or political grievances, the density of civil society, or other political-institutional opportunity structures (Lankina 2015). The analysis contained herein does not pretend to explain differing levels of protests across Russia’s regions. Instead, I argue that protests are expressions of public will and therefore
can be treated as an adequate proxy for public dissent. Moreover, since contentious politics in authoritarian regimes is a risky type of public expression of dissent, even relatively low levels of protests should theoretically have some impact.

I expect that the impact of protest on electoral competition, if it exists, should operate indirectly by constraining regime attempts to increase pro-regime electoral margins. This intuition is informed by recent studies of protest and elections in non-democratic regimes. For example, in the context of Russia’s regions, Tomila Lankina and Rodion Skovoroda (2015) have argued that street rallies stayed the hand of local officials from perpetrating electoral fraud during the 2012 Presidential election. Similarly, in a cross-national analysis, Sarah Birch (2011) has shown that protests reduce electoral malpractice as captured by the Index of Electoral Malpractice which relies on election observation reports from 161 elections in sixty-one states over twelve years. Birch argues that protests act as a signal to authorities against resorting to certain types of electoral manipulation. Autocrats tend to select a package of appropriate electoral strategies based on the perception of potential risks to legitimacy that they face. Beyond being loud expressions of dissent, protests are evidence of a latent capacity within the civil society of a state or region to monitor, report, and punish electoral malpractice. Protests can be seen as the tip of an iceberg; evidence that there is a portion of the population that will not abide malpractice. Thus, as Birch notes: “The capacity for popular mobilization and protest ought to be negatively correlated with electoral malpractice.” (2011, 58) In line with Birch’s argument and Lankina and Skovoroda’s research, I expect that because the potential legitimacy costs of manipulation of the electoral outcome are higher in regions
with higher protest activity – nosier regions – elections there should have narrower margins of victory for regime incumbents.

A note of caution is in order here. Using protest levels to analyze electoral competition presents a potential problem of endogeneity. Several scholars (Robertson 2013; Lankina 2004, 2015; Trejo 2014; Reuter and Robertson 2015) have argued convincingly that elites have incentives to mobilize the public, thereby generating protest activity. It can be, therefore, problematic to assume that protests drive electoral competition if mobilization is in fact a strategy employed by the very elites who are competing at the polls. Nevertheless, political protests are intrinsically appealing as a contributing factor to levels of electoral competition. Especially in electoral authoritarian regimes, where institutional forms of resistance are often inaccessible by design, the street is an attractive avenue for influencing and signaling the state. I propose to use protest activity to gauge one aspect of electoral competition where I can best mitigate the possibility of endogeneity. In order to do this, I only analyze the impact of protests on the winner’s vote share above the runoff threshold. Doing so accomplishes two things. First, because the Kremlin appointed all of the incumbents in the elections analyzed here, it is unlikely that these regional elites would organize protests to negotiate with the center as they did before gubernatorial elections were abolished in 2005. Second, I have taken care to make sure that regional protest count does not include pro-government or pro-Putin protests. Since, as Robertson (2013) points out, the Putin regime has become adept at using mass mobilization to demonstrate support for the regime and its policies, these types of “protests” would only cloud the data. I also limit the protest count to two years before the election is called.
Even with these precautions, the analysis remains vulnerable to the influence of omitted variable bias, specifically, the possibility that a third factor – some general level of democracy or aspect of the region’s polity – leads to both more protests and more competitive elections. I employ two measures in the analysis to address this concern. First, the expert rankings of democracy across Russia’s regions produced by the Moscow Carnegie Center capture aspects of each region’s polity that may be expected to affect both protest and competition: political pluralism – particularly, the number and stability of regional political parties – and civil society – including the number and activity of nongovernmental organization. As a second measure, and because the Carnegie rankings are somewhat dated, I also include a dummy variable representing the recent persecution of NGOs in the regions. The logic behind the appropriateness of such a variable is as follows. As mentioned above, after the Colour Revolutions and the Arab Spring, the Russian regime dealt with the perceived threat of “democracy promotion” by civil society and NGOs in two ways. First, by creating a “paternalistic model of civil society” (Wilson 2010, 26) which brought certain NGOs under the state umbrella and promoted their activities through increased funding. And second, by simultaneously fostering a harsher climate for independent and explicitly political civil society organizations through the so-called ‘Foreign Agent’ laws, which restricted foreign funding for NGOs and gave the state broader oversight powers. Elisabeth Plantan describes this as a “dual strategy of selective repression and selective encouragement of domestic civil society.” (2014, 3) Despite the fact that the Foreign Agent law is a piece of federal legislation, its effects have not been uniform across the regions. Plantan (2014) points out that the characteristics of different NGOs – their purpose and religious affiliation – predicts to
some extent whether or not they will become targets of state repression. Some NGOs, for instance, those focusing on overtly political goals such as civil society development or protection of human rights, are much more likely to be subject to state repression than others. Types of NGOs are also not randomly or evenly distributed throughout Russia’s regions. Existing work on civil society in Russia has suggested that NGO development is conditioned by both the presence of foreign donor funding as well as the receptiveness of local governments. Strong, active and connected NGOs tend to emerge in regions with a “supportive local environment” (see Sundstrom 2006). Guided by previous research, I operate under the assumption that NGOs of a similar type will develop more actively in certain regions, either because of a previous streams of funding that focused on certain issues or through a “cascade effect” where one or two strong organizations inspire the creation of others in their wake. I expect, therefore, that some regions will be more densely or, alternatively, more sparsely populated by active agents of civil society which may explain, in turn, levels of protest and, simultaneously, levels of electoral competition. To control for this, I introduce a dummy variable of repression of NGOs into the analysis. This measure does not capture all forms of repression of civil society. It omits idiosyncratic features which may influence the degree to which regime actions such as the suppression of street meetings are more common in one region than another. I believe, however, that this NGO repression measure along with the Carnegie region ratings adequately capture the overall level of democracy in the regions included in this analysis. With these controls in place, and following the logic of electoral malpractice outlined by Birch (2011), I expect that if voter preferences matter in elections in
authoritarian regimes, regions with higher levels of protest activity should have tighter contests because the authorities will avoid obvious and heavy handed manipulation.

Lastly, recent research has posited a relationship between the length of tenure of a governor, his political loyalty, and the economic performance of his region, which can be broadly called the “loyalty-competence tradeoff”. In analyzing corporate raiding, a practice whereby successful private businesses are seized and dismantled using extralegal means, Rochlitz (2014) argues that Russian governors are given a certain amount of leeway by central authorities to engage in corrupt practices if they are able to deliver pro-regime results during elections. Similarly, Reuter and Robertson analyze patterns of gubernatorial appointments and find that while economic performance seems to matter very little for reappointment, “governors who turn in strong UR [United Russia] performances in their regions are likely to be reappointed, while governors who do not are more likely to be replaced.” (2012, 1031) In contrast to China, Russian regional elites are unlikely to be rewarded for good economic or social performance and are discouraged from economic initiatives or innovation (Rochlitz et al 2015). A governorship is a prized “peak of career” position in Russia (Beckley et al 2014) and there is convincing evidence that, during the appointment era, holding the post of governor depended on demonstrating loyalty by delivering electoral results. What implications does this track record of valuing loyalty over performance have for post-appointment era regional elections? On the one hand, one would expect that governors who were perversely incentivized to engage in corrupt practices and neglect economic performance in favor of generating votes should attract voter disapproval when polls are once again made into an avenue for assessing regional executives. Under this logic, long tenures, as evidenced by fewer turnovers in
the post of governors since 2005, should correlate with lower vote shares for the incumbent. On the other hand, governors that have proved to be resilient throughout the appointment era will have well-developed political machines used to delivering electoral results. If this is the case, long tenures should correlate with better results for the incumbent at the polls. For the purposes of the analysis in this chapter, a negative relationship between length of tenure and electoral outcome for incumbent would be evidence for the voter preference model of electoral competition while a positive relationship would be evidence for the manipulation model of electoral competition.

4.3.2 Manipulation

To what degree are authoritarian elections managed by the regime? Authoritarian elections serve a number of purposes. They provide information about the identity and strength of both supporters and opponents of the regime (Geddes 2006; Cox 2008); they can bestow domestic and international legitimacy on the regime (Levitsky and Way 2010); and, indirectly, by influencing both the attitudes of regime supporters as well as opponents, big pro-regime electoral victories can also deter challenger or “nip opposition in the bud” (Simpser 2013, 5). However, to do any of these things, authoritarian elections must first be won. The need to win elections while maintaining legitimacy presents the regime with the so-called “fraudsters’ dilemma”: the manipulation required to generate legitimacy actually damages the legitimacy being sought (Beaulieu and Hyde 2009). Electoral malpractice used to generate pro-regime results must therefore be carefully calibrated. As Sarah Birch (2012) argues, electoral malpractice can take three forms: manipulation of the rules governing elections, manipulation of vote choice and manipulation of vote administration (i.e. fraud). Manipulation of the legal framework
surrounding elections is arguably the best and most “legitimate” form of electoral manipulation since it carries a minimal amount of risk or cost for the regime. Changing how political parties can be registered or altering the electoral formula is an effective way of ensuring pro-regime outcomes that is unlikely to elicit much international or domestic criticism. In Russia, legislation governing regional and national elections has been altered several times. The resurrection of the gubernatorial elections, and well as the procedural rules for nominating candidates, are examples of this kind of manipulation of the rules. However, because this is federal-level legislation, this type of manipulation is unlikely to have an impact on the variation of electoral results among the regions.

The third type of malpractice outlined by Birch – manipulation of electoral administration – which takes the form of outright bans on opposition parties, disenfranchisement of citizens and fraud during in the tabulation of votes, has certainly occurred in Russia (see Enikolopov et al 2013; Myaglov et al 2013; Lukinova et al 2011). In fact, the 2011 Duma elections suffered from widespread voter fraud (Nichol, 2011; Bader, 2013). And yet, election observers have not recorded this type of widespread electoral malpractice in regional elections. While it is improbable to claim that absolutely no electoral fraud, specifically in the form of ballot-box stuffing and fabricating vote counts, took place in the regional elections analyzed here, I rely on the election observation reports produced by the well-respected election monitoring organization Golos to suggest these violations, if they happened, were rare. Golos observers did note many other forms of irregularities, including unbalanced media access for candidates, interference with election observers at polling places, and generally low interest among voters. However, they only deemed violations in two regions – Republic of Altai and
Tyumen – to be serious enough to warrant labeling those elections as “dirty”. During these elections, Golos observers did not report serious electoral malpractice such as ballot box stuffing, carousel voting or vote buying. In most cases, violations did not “distort significantly” the electoral results or interfere with the expression of voter preferences.46

Instead, in Russia’s regions, the second type of manipulation – manipulation of vote choice – is more likely to take place. The manipulation of vote choice aims to alter the formation and expression of voter preferences. The manipulation of the formation of voter preferences happens in the media and through advertising. On the other hand, the manipulation of the expression of voter preferences can be done by limiting or constraining voters’ choice at the ballot box through the intimidation of candidates or the obstruction of their campaigns. As Birch shows, this type of electoral misconduct is the most common type in the former Soviet Union and can be done lawfully through the unequal application of the law by electoral officials (2012, 69). This type of subtle manipulation of the gubernatorial elections by the regime – in the form of the disqualification of candidates and pressure applied to vulnerable populations – was noted by election observers.

In this analysis, I examine electoral manipulation in two separate ways. First, I test for the drivers of state manipulation of voters’ choice through the disqualification of candidates. I assume that higher levels of public dissent, as captured by protests, may make the authorities fearful of the potential for opposition success and lead to higher levels of disqualification of gubernatorial candidates. Using regional protest counts and the percent of candidate procedurally disqualified, I test whether levels of public

46 Golos compiles reports from observers in every region. The reports can be found on the organization’s website golosinfo.org.
mobilization motivate the regime to commit more or less electoral malpractice using administrative, pre-election tactics. I expect that, because disqualification of candidates is a less “risky” type of electoral malpractice, the regime will be more likely to employ this type of manipulation in regions that are electorally vulnerable (i.e. regions with a proven track record of anti-regime mobilization).

In order to test for the effect of manipulation on election results, I use a measure that captures vote choice malpractice – namely, media freedom. The media has been shown to play an important role in the Kremlin’s interaction with citizens (Enikolopov et al 2011; White et al 2005) and in regions with few independent media outlets, electoral competition should be constrained and the winner’s vote margin should be substantial. I also include variables that have been highlighted by election observers and academics as potential sources of malpractice: vulnerable populations, voting outside the polling stations using absentee ballots, and voter turnout. Several studies have found that elections are won in authoritarian regimes not through blatant fraud but because citizens turn out in large numbers to vote for the incumbents (Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2011; Colton and Hale 2009; Lukinova et al 2011). Voters are induced or pressured into participating in noncompetitive elections that deliver victories to the incumbent regime. I expect that if malpractice drives electoral competition, voter turnout should increase the incumbent’s vote share. Golos and other organizations actively involved in electoral monitoring throughout Russia have also sounded the alarm about the use of early and absentee ballots as well as pressure tactics used on infirm or elderly populations who are entitled to at-home voting. To test whether these factors contribute to or diminish electoral competition, I include measures for the population of pensioners and the use of
absentee ballots. I expect that if electoral malpractice is taking place, both variables should drive down competition.

### 4.4 Variables and data sources

Guided by existing work on this subject, I include a series of control variables in my analysis. First, I control for the special Constitutional status of certain regions included in my dataset. I use dummy variables to control for whether a region has the status of a City of Federal Importance and a variable for the percentage of the population in each region that self-identifies as ethnically Russian. Federal Republics are more heterogeneous than other regions in Russia and have been viewed as more politically repressive. On the other hand, Cities of Federal Importance – Moscow and St. Petersburg – have been viewed as far more liberal and cosmopolitan than the rest of Russia. These variables are labelled as Ethnic Russian and Capital, respectively. Various demographic variables are also used as controls. I include the natural log of the population for each region, labelled Population, the urban population, Urbanization, as well as the percent of pensioners residing in each region, Pensioners.

To account for the potential influence of media on electoral competition, I include a variable capturing the degree of media freedom, labelled Media Freedom. The data for this variable is taken from the expert evaluations of media compiled by the Moscow Carnegie Center which is based on the following criteria: the number of media outlets, the size of the audience, the presence or absence of administrative pressures or state

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Cities of federal importance are constituent entities under the Russian Constitution with the same status as other regions such as Republics, Krais and Oblasts. The heads of these cities are elected in gubernatorial elections.
control and the media’s role in the political life of the region (see Petrov and Titov 2013, 6). Media freedom is scored on a scale from 1 – Unfree – to 5 – Free.

As proxies for economic preferences, I use the lagged unemployment rate for each region, labelled *Unemployment*, and the change in average monthly income, labelled *Income*. The data for these variables is taken from the Federal State Statistical Services (RosStat). Data for all proxies for political preferences, including the voter turnout rate – labelled *Turnout*, absentee ballots – labelled *Absentee*, and the previous political support for United Russia as expressed during the regional parliamentary elections – labelled *UR Support*, are collected from the website of the Central Electoral Commission (Izbirkom). Both the Golosov and the Herfindahl-Hirschmann indexes of competitiveness based on these data were calculated by the author. In addition, I include a measure representing gubernatorial attachment to the region as captured by the number of times a governor has been replaced in the last decade. This variable is labelled *Turnover*. I also added a dummy variable, labelled *Repression of NGOs*, capturing whether or not NGOs had been targeted in a given region. The data for this came from a report compiled by the monitoring group Agora.\footnote{I am grateful to Elizabeth Plantan for pointing out this resource. The Agora list is available from: http://openinform.ru/fs/j_photos/openinform_405.pdf} To capture the level of democracy in each region, I use the expert rankings of the regions produced by the Moscow Carnegie Center for the years 2006 – 2011 (Petrov and Titkov 2013). The rankings are based on evaluations of the region on ten categories, including quality of regional elections, corruption, and ‘openness’ of political life, each scored out of 5 points, for a total of 50. Regions included in the present analysis scored between 18 and 41 points, with the mean rating for the regions in the sample just above 30. This variable is labelled *Region Rating*. 

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\footnote{I am grateful to Elizabeth Plantan for pointing out this resource. The Agora list is available from: http://openinform.ru/fs/j_photos/openinform_405.pdf}
Finally, the protest data used in this analysis is collected from the namarsh.ru website which documents protests from across Russia based on daily dispatches, press and online reports. The website was founded by the opposition politician Gary Kasparov and is run by activists. Each protest report is accompanied by a weblink to the press coverage of the event and is therefore verifiable. This data source is vulnerable to under-reporting given the vastness of Russia and the isolation, in terms of media and internet access, of some regions. However, this type of data gathering – relying on activist website and self-reporting – has become common in research on protests in Russia. Graeme Robertson and John Reuter (2015) rely on a similar website – Institute of Collective Action – to gather data for their analysis of the relationship between protests and elite cooptation. These types of websites provide a reasonably accurate picture of protest and mobilization in Russia and are a valuable resource for examining civil society in an authoritarian state. The data on protests for 2012 was collected by Dr. Tomila Lankina and generously shared with the author for the purposes of this analysis. The data for 2013 and 2014 was collected by the author. Dr. Lankina has also published several articles on protest trends in Russia using data collected from this source (2015; Lankina and Voznaya 2015; Lankina and Skovoroda 2014). The Protest variable is a simple count of political protest events from the two years preceding when an election is announced. Two years represents a reasonable period of time when protests would be “remembered” by the local authorities and excluding protests that take place after the election is called also mitigates the risk of reverse causation, whereby the protest itself is a reaction to the electoral campaign or any malpractice that may be observed.
4.5 Analysis and discussion

I ran a series of multivariate OLS regressions to test for the influence of voter preferences and manipulation on electoral competition. To summarize briefly, the analysis shows strong support for the manipulation model of competition with voter turnout having a substantive and statistically significant effect on competition as measured by the three indicators. On the voter preferences side, unemployment and public mobilization in the form of protest both have an effect on levels of electoral competition. Overall, the voter preference model explained between 28% and 36%, depending on the measure, of the overall variance in the dependent variable while the manipulation model explained between 38% and 42%. I discuss each of the results in more detail below, beginning with the voter preference model (see Table 4.2).
### Table 4.2: Voter Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Threshold (vote share above 50%)</th>
<th>Threshold (vote share above 50%)</th>
<th>HH Index</th>
<th>Golosov Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1.126 (1.452)</td>
<td>1.368 (1.552)</td>
<td>-0.00696 (0.0181)</td>
<td>0.00342 (0.0498)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>-1.628 (9.240)</td>
<td>-0.937 (9.880)</td>
<td>0.206 (0.151)</td>
<td>0.444 (0.437)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Russian</td>
<td>-0.0808 (0.148)</td>
<td>-0.0919 (0.145)</td>
<td>0.00166 (0.00159)</td>
<td>0.00216 (0.00324)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>-0.0827 (0.198)</td>
<td>-0.100 (0.194)</td>
<td>0.00303 (0.00215)</td>
<td>0.00925 (0.00865)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression</td>
<td>2.130 (4.407)</td>
<td>1.705 (4.416)</td>
<td>-0.0203 (0.0482)</td>
<td>-0.00719 (0.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region Rating</td>
<td>0.105 (0.507)</td>
<td>0.0872 (0.519)</td>
<td>-0.00488 (0.00629)</td>
<td>-0.0131 (0.0147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td><strong>-0.115</strong>* (0.0393)</td>
<td><strong>-0.116</strong>* (0.0410)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UR Support</td>
<td>0.110 (0.171)</td>
<td>0.117 (0.165)</td>
<td>-0.000734 (0.00207)</td>
<td>-0.00165 (0.00473)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td><strong>-2.270</strong> (1.053)</td>
<td><strong>-2.410</strong> (1.021)</td>
<td><strong>0.0308</strong> (0.0113)</td>
<td><strong>0.0718</strong> (0.0338)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.00141 (0.00119)</td>
<td>-0.00153 (0.00123)</td>
<td>1.23e-05 (1.79e-05)</td>
<td>7.81e-06 (4.15e-05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td><strong>2.460</strong> (1.160)</td>
<td><strong>2.053</strong> (1.008)</td>
<td>-0.0138 (0.0142)</td>
<td>0.00737 (0.0367)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>3.553 (3.483)</td>
<td>-0.0512 (0.0476)</td>
<td>-0.171 (0.114)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>27.14 (30.74)</td>
<td>27.25 (30.26)</td>
<td>0.153 (0.359)</td>
<td>0.574 (0.905)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>0.358</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>0.275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

One of the two proxies for voters’ economic preferences, unemployment, was both substantive and statistically significant at the 0.05 and 0.1 level across the indicators for competitiveness. Growth in the region’s unemployment rate produced more competitive gubernatorial elections. An increase of one standard deviation in the unemployment rate, say from the regional mean of 5.9% to 8.2%, would translate into 5.1% decrease in the
incumbent’s total vote share above the run off threshold. Unemployment also had the expected positive and statistically significant impact on competition as measured by the HH Index and Golosov score. Growth in the average monthly income of residents reduced the incumbent’s vote share above the threshold level though this result was not substantive or statistically significant. The findings with regard to voters’ economic preferences are in line both with earlier work on economic voting in Russia’s regions (Konitzer 2005) and with the proposed link between economic performance and authoritarian regime stability. As Andreas Schedler has argued: “poverty is a source of electoral security in competitive [authoritarian] regimes” (2013, 243). As with their democratic counterparts, incumbents in an authoritarian regime are punished for rising unemployment. Yet the security of their position is also imperiled by increases in per capita income. The universe of cases examined here is relatively small, however, and future work based on a larger number of cases may see the statistical significance of economic preferences weaken.

The impact of political preferences was mixed. Previous support for United Russia in a region decreased competition across all three indicators as expected but the effect was substantively small and not statistically significant. On the other hand, high frequency in the turnover of governors benefited the incumbent according to the Threshold measure of competition. The coefficient was positive, substantive, and statistically significant at the 0.05 level. It remained significant when both the voter preference and manipulation models were combined (see Table B1 in Appendix B).

By including this variable as a proxy for voter preferences, I expected that voters would punish established governors because they were more likely to engage in predatory
behavior against their own regions (Rochlitz 2014; Reuter and Robertson 2012). And indeed, in regions where the governor had been replaced twice, the incumbent received almost 5% more above the runoff threshold than in regions where the governor had never been replaced. Before the return of gubernatorial elections, there was speculation in the media that the Kremlin was trying to ensure incumbent victories in vulnerable regions by replacing weak governors (Brenan 2014). Among the cases included in this analysis, ten governors were replaced by the Kremlin a few months before the election and another three governors were replaced the year before the election. In order to ascertain whether this strategy helped to secure victories, I also included a dummy variable – New – coded as 1 if the governor was appointed the same year as the election or 0 if the governor was appointed any time before the election. The results, as presented in Model 2 in Table 4.2, show that controlling for the Kremlin’s policy of replacing weak governors diminishes the impact of voter dissatisfaction on electoral outcomes. In Model 2, the coefficient for turnover is reduced by nearly half a percent and statistical significance is also reduced to 0.1. It would seem that while voters were prone to punishing long sitting and perhaps predatory governors, the Kremlin was able to anticipate this by replacing these governors before the election.

Finally, mobilization, as captured by protests, had the expected and statistically significant impact on competition. Regions with a history of political protest had more competitive elections with closer winning margins for the incumbent. This result was robust to different specifications of the model. Statistical significance was high, at the 0.01 level, when controlling for factors that could influence both the occurrence of protests and electoral competition, such as the socio-political culture of large urban
centers in Russia. Based on these results, I argue that protest, rather than simply being a proxy for “opposition mindedness” or general popular support for opposition parties in a region, influences electoral competition through a different mechanism. Measures of the overall repression or openness of a region – such as the persecution of NGOs and the ‘democracy score’ of a region – had no independent statistically significant impact on electoral competition. Several studies (see Lankina and Skavaroda 2014; Birch 2011) have posited that protest activity is interpreted by authorities as an indicator of society’s ability to monitor, respond to, and punish electoral malpractice. Outside of the arena of elections, studies have also shown that authoritarian governments are responsive to public complaint making and public protest in general (on Russia see Petrov et al 2013).

Importantly, this type of responsiveness does not necessarily lead to regime liberalization. Instead, autocrats strategically adjust repression and malpractice in light or anticipation of mass public mobilization. Vincent Boudreau (2006) has traced the ways in which authoritarian states in Southeast Asia employ different methods of repression to contain the development of oppositional social movements. Karrie Koesel and Valerie Bunce (2013) have argued that in response to the Arab Spring protests, Russia engaged in “diffusion-proofing”, controlling socio-political institutions that seemed to have enabled protests abroad to prevent them at home. The results of the analysis in this chapter fall in line with this research, suggesting that the frequency of protest makes regional authorities more cautious in the administration of an election. In essence, protest deters electoral manipulation, fostering more competitive elections.

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The coefficient for Protest remained at least three times the size of the standard error and statistically significant at the 0.01 level when other predictors and control variables were dropped from the model (see Table B2 in Appendix B). Variance inflation factors for each predictor were <10 (see Table B4 in Appendix B).
Although the substantive impact of protests on electoral competition was small – for every one additional protest in the two years preceding the election, the incumbent’s vote share would decrease by approximately 0.15%, potential impact of even a small number of protests should be put in perspective given the Russian context.

Protests are relatively rare in Russia. Despite the massive protests during the winter of 2011 – 2012 against election fraud that took place in Moscow and other major cities, public mobilizations remain infrequent events (see Figure 4.1). On average, over the last seven years, there were 8.6 protests per region per year, only 3.4 of which were political in nature. This is down significantly from the heyday of protests, demonstrations, and strikes during the late Yeltsin period (Robertson 2011; 2013). In part, the explanation for this change, as Graeme Robertson and others have pointed out, is the changing nature of both the Russian state and the Russian regime. As the state became stronger and the regime coalesced concretely around a powerful center, protests...
lost their appeal as useful weapons in disputes among elites – a role they played for much of the 1990s and early 2000s when powerful governors fought amongst each other and the center (see Robertson 2011). Instead, protests are now more genuinely ‘grassroots’ events. And, as the Russian regime has become more authoritarian, laws around freedom of assembly and expression have been tightened, as have the funding and regulatory environments for groups that may foster or support protest or independent civil society in general. Non governmental organizations are now subject to complicated registration regulation and regular checks on their funding sources. Spontaneous protests and mobilizations have also become more difficult to organize because of laws restricting how many people may participate, the requirement to register a protest with the local administration and the imposition of steep fines on participants of “un-authorized” protests. As a result, protesters have become creative, expanding their repertoire to include ‘strolls’, bike-rides, and flash mobs that appear, at first, to be uncoordinated events with the intention of taking authorities by surprise. These types of unconventional demonstrations, however, tend to be less effective at clearly communicating demands to the public and make participants vulnerable to arrest, detention or violence. As Lankina and Voznaya note, roughly a quarter of all demonstrations are dispersed through the use of force (2015, 338).
Just as the frequency of protest events has changed, so have protest demands. Although the overwhelming majority of street action is directed at the government or state agencies, most protests are not focused on broadly political themes, but instead tend to split between abstract socio-political demands (e.g. rule of law or anti-corruption) or concrete welfare demands (e.g. housing or medical care) (see Figure 4.2). Political protests tend to generally take two forms, both of which are highly personalized. The first form are memorial rallies held in remembrance of journalists or political figures killed under suspicious circumstances, such as Anna Politkovskaya, or, more recently, Boris Nemtsov. The second are protests demanding the release of political prisoners, which also tend to focus on specific public figures such as the members of Pussy Riot, the
formerly imprisoned oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, or the opposition blogger and politician, Alexei Navalny. Both types of political protests are inherently critical of the Russian regime and authorities. However, neither type expresses broader democratic demands that can build lasting coalitions which would survive the passage of time (or the release of the prisoner). Some scholars, Graeme Robertson for one, have made the argument that the change in protest demands – from individual demands for wages to more abstract demands for greater rule of law – signals a ground shift in the nature of contentious politics in Russia that will prove difficult for the regime to manage. Robertson (2013) argues that the growing array of protest issues (from the environment to civil rights), while not explicitly articulating dissatisfaction with the government, demonstrates more widespread discontent that can provide capital for future protests and manifest itself into mass mobilization more quickly when an event like electoral fraud takes place. This remains to be seen. For now, demonstrations are rare, dangerous and sometimes unfocussed events that have decreased in frequency and become centralized in Moscow and St. Petersburg (Lankina 2015; Robertson 2013). Despite this, the results of this analysis show that protests are clearly important in reigning in electoral manipulation.

In addition to testing whether protests influenced electoral competition, I also tested whether regions with more protest activity experience greater restrictiveness in the registration process for candidates in the election. The hypothesis was that in regions with higher protest activity, more candidates would be disqualified in order to secure electoral victories for the incumbent. In essence, I expected that electoral competition would be ‘managed’ based on the circumstances – in particular, levels of political activity – of the
region. On average, over the three election cycles considered in this analysis and across the regions, approximately 22% of candidates attempting to register were denied registration by regional Election Commissions. This ranged from a 43% disqualification rate in the Republic of Kalmykia to a 14% rate in Samara Oblast. Eleven regions saw no disqualifications at all. Although small and ‘outsider’ parties tended to be the target of disqualification, established parties such as LDPR were also sometimes disqualified.

Only candidates from United Russia were immune from administrative disqualification.

Table 4.3: Effect of protest on disqualification of candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% disqualified candidates</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>-5.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.602)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>14.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Russian</td>
<td>0.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>-0.370*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.219)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region Rating</td>
<td>0.00326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.680)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression</td>
<td>4.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.722)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protest</strong></td>
<td>0.220***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0337)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>99.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(59.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 43
R-squared: 0.350

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The regression analysis (see Table 4.3) confirmed the hypothesis and showed that protest activity did indeed have a substantively small but highly statistically significant
impact on the tendency to disqualify candidates. The influence of protest on electoral malpractice and competition may seem to be contradictory at first glance. Protests both boost competition and intensify the tendency to disqualify candidates. Yet the mechanism through which both results are produced is the same. Sarah Birch argues that autocrats adjust the package of electoral manipulation available to them – changing electoral rules, manipulating vote choice, and manipulating votes – depending on the degree to which they fear the loss of legitimacy during an election opting for “those forms of manipulation that carry the least risk” (2011, 50). As I have already discussed, protest signal the latent potential of a society to monitor and punish fraud or explicit malpractice. These regions also present a potential risk for the regime in the form of greater support for opposition candidates. It follows then, that in regions with more frequent political protests, the regime will try manipulate elections by restricting the field of candidates before the election. This “second-best” strategy is more effective in delivering outcomes than changes to electoral rules yet less risky than outright fraud. This result provides more evidence that authoritarian regimes are responsive to public demand making and that ‘responsiveness’ in the case of authoritarianism does not necessarily have democratizing or liberalizing effects but may instead lead to subtler forms of manipulation of democratic institutions.
In testing the impact of manipulation on overall electoral competition, all of the independent variables performed as expected. Regions with a higher population of pensioners had less competitive elections. Voting by absentee ballots also dampened competition. However, the coefficients on these variables were substantively small and achieved statistical significance only as measured by the Golov score. Media freedom also had the expected effect on electoral competition lowering the incumbent’s vote share though the effect did not reach statistical significance.

Overall, it was voter turnout and not absentee voting that proved to be decisive in influencing levels of electoral competition. As hypothesized, higher voter turnout benefitted incumbents. Controlling for population, urbanization, ethnic makeup, media

### Table 4.4: Regime manipulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Threshold (vote share above 50%)</th>
<th>HH Index</th>
<th>Golosov Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>0.695 (-1.847)</td>
<td>-0.00838</td>
<td>-0.00189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>-11.44* (6.747)</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Russian</td>
<td>0.0516 (0.114)</td>
<td>-0.000771</td>
<td>-0.000978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioners</td>
<td>0.779 (0.471)</td>
<td>-0.00828</td>
<td>-0.0278*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>0.411*** (0.133)</td>
<td>-0.00627***</td>
<td>-0.0100***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Freedom</td>
<td>-1.458 (2.887)</td>
<td>0.00168</td>
<td>0.0790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absentee Ballots</td>
<td>0.377 (0.273)</td>
<td>-0.00300</td>
<td>-0.0131*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-22.43 (20.54)</td>
<td>1.053***</td>
<td>2.430***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>0.424</td>
<td>0.375</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
freedom, and the special regional status of Moscow and St. Petersburg, an increase in by
one standard deviation, 11.6%, would boost the vote share for the incumbent by almost
5% above the runoff threshold. This effect was statistically significant at the 0.01 level
across all three indicators of competition. This finding also remained robust when the two
models, preference and manipulation, were combined (see Table B1 in Appendix B).\footnote{50}

In this chapter, I suggest that voter turnout is a tool used by incumbents to secure
victories. I argue that it is a form of voter manipulation. Yet a correlation between turnout
and regime vote share can be interpreted in two other ways. First, it can signal that voter
fraud in the form of ballot box stuffing or increasing the official number of recorded
ballots is happening. Convincing research on Russia’s most infamous election – the
December 2011 Duma election – has shown that fraud accounted for as much as an 11%
bump in the results for United Russia (Enikolopov et al 2013). In fact, other studies have
also suggested that voter turnout has been “consistently and artificially inflated” in the
Republics since the late 1990s (Myagkov et al 2005, 100; see also Lukinova et al 2011;
Simpser 2013). It is possible, then, that turnout is a proxy for electoral fraud. It is also
possible, however, that voter turnout is driven by genuine support for United Russia and
the regime. Colton and Hale (2009, 2014), using survey research, have recorded growing
affiliation with, and partisan support for, United Russia among voters. Additionally,
contrary to some media speculation, Putin’s popularity and electoral support has been
shown to be both very high and real (Frye et al 2015) suggesting that governors heading
into an election with the Kremlin’s approval could be riding the President’s coattails.

\footnote{50 The coefficient for Turnout remained at least three times the size of the standard error and statistically
significant at the 0.01 level when other predictors and control variables were dropped from the model (see
Table B3 in Appendix B). Variance inflation factors for each predictor were <10 (see Table B5 in
Appendix B).}
Forensic analysis of turnout focusing on patterns in distribution among the precincts to detect fraud is beyond the scope of this chapter. Thus the possibility that turnout was generated by fraud cannot be totally ruled out. However, there is some evidence that suggests that fraud was not a major factor in these elections. The mean turnout across the regions included in this analysis was 44.5%. In 31 of the 43 regions turnout did not reach 50% and no regions reported astronomical turnout of 80% or 90%, which has been pointed to as a clear indication of fraud (Maygkov 2005). Moreover, as I have already argued, election observers from Golos did not report concerns over ballot box stuffing or doctored vote totals. In light of this evidence, I argue that voter fraud did not generate the election results analyzed here.

To determine whether turnout was driven by more engaged regime supporters, I regressed electoral support for United Russia in the region’s last parliamentary election on turnout with appropriate controls. The results, as summarized in Table 4.5, show that while the coefficient for previous United Russia votes is positive, it is small (0.228) and does not achieve statistical significance (p. 0.150), indicating that higher voter turnout, and its effect on electoral competition, is unlikely to be driven by alert pro-regime voters.
Table 4.5: Testing for potential drivers of voter turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Russian</td>
<td>-0.402***</td>
<td>(0.113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>(1.512)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region Rating</td>
<td>-0.355</td>
<td>(0.401)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UR Support</td>
<td>0.228</td>
<td>(0.150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioners</td>
<td>0.814</td>
<td>(0.570)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>56.06**</td>
<td>(20.93)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 43  
R-squared: 0.434

Robust standard errors in parentheses  
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Boosting voter turnout makes sense as a tool for electoral manipulation for two reasons. First, it is a less ‘costly’, in terms of legitimacy, way to win an election since no actual fraud needs to be perpetrated. Second, boosting turnout is also useful for maintaining the image of a secure regime. As Alberto Simpser argues: “even when the winner obtains a large proportion of the vote, a small turnout can make it seem like only a small absolute number of people actually supported the winner.” (emphasis in original 2013, 182). In many new democracies and hybrid regimes, voter turnout decreases after so-called ‘founding elections’ as voters lose interest in day to day politics or are overwhelmed by economic considerations that accompanied regime transition (Kostadinova and Power 2007). Regional elections, which typically do not have “high stakes” or influence “dominant institutions” (Pacek et al 2009), are even less appealing to
voters. And a recent history of electoral fraud can further depress voter turnout (Birch 2000; Simpser 2013, 211 – 220).

Media reports that detail incidents of ‘administrative pressure’ to vote on vulnerable populations, including army conscripts, doctors, teachers, and state employees, are common in Russia (see Chen 2015). Recent survey research has shown that employers actively work to mobilize employees. Frye, Reuter and Szakonyi (2014) found that 25% of surveyed respondents felt pressured by their manager or employer to vote and 15% thought their job security depended on voting for the incumbent (2014, 196). Large state owned firms or firms that primarily sold or serviced the state were especially vulnerable to this sort of clientelistic workplace mobilization of voters. Beyond those employees who felt pressured to vote, about a third of workers that were surveyed also thought that their employer could find out how they voted (2014, 201).

Political mobilization of voters is an old strategy in Russia, with roots in the Soviet system. Not all scholars agree that administrative pressure to vote “accounts for a significant part” of pro-regime results (Colton and Hale 2013, 501) yet some evidence, beyond observer reports and media accounts, exists. The results of the manipulation model presented in this chapter add to this ongoing discussion and suggest that voter turnout is indeed a powerful tool for the regime. Mobilizing some vulnerable parts of electorate effectively preserves the form while destroying the substance of elections.

4.6 Conclusion

In many ways, uncertainty dominates hybrid regimes that combine democratic institutions and autocratic tendencies. This point has been eloquently made by Andreas Schedler: “competition under and over uncertainty [is] the driving force of politics under
authoritarian rule.” (2013, 6) Engaging with this conceptual point seriously, therefore, requires careful attention to authoritarian electoral competition. This is a move that would put us beyond the dichotomous divide between regimes with elections and those without in order to explore electoral competition in regimes that value the legitimating effects of elections. This chapter has aimed to do just that by first identifying three appropriate ways to measure electoral competition in an authoritarian regime and then by systematically testing potential drivers of competition in order to assess to what degree voter preferences and regime manipulation determine electoral outcomes. The empirical results suggest that while manipulation may still largely determine the outcome of elections under authoritarianism, regime elites are responsive to some forms of social demand-making.

In particular, the analysis shows that protests influence electoral competition by decreasing the incumbent’s vote share above the threshold for a runoff round. Given the Russian regime’s preoccupation with controlling freedom of assembly and restrictions on mobilization, these findings further illustrate the delicate balancing act that authoritarian regimes must perform between appeasing social demands by preserving the appearance of genuine electoral competition.

In regard to political and economic preferences, the analysis contained herein suggests that authoritarian elections are more like their democratic, and less like their hegemonic, counterparts. Higher unemployment rates diminish the incumbent’s vote share, making the security of their victory less certain. As in democracies, authoritarian incumbents suffer in times of economic hardship. This finding needs further substantiation with a larger dataset of subnational elections to see if, first, the effect
remains statistically significant, and second, to better compare this regional within-country analysis to national level and across state analysis to examine whether subnational leaders are vulnerable to economic voting in a way that national leaders are not.

Lastly, voter turnout was demonstrated to be a very important driver of incumbent victories in the elections examined here. This topic requires further study and may suggest a more insidious array of electoral malpractice strategies than previously suspected. Although it appears that at-home and absentee voting did not contribute as significantly to determining the election results as election observers had feared, there may be a less obvious but ultimately damaging relationship between economic vulnerability and levels of turnout. Thus what brings people to the polls may be as important as how they vote. Very recent scholarship connecting the mobilization of economically dependent demographic sectors to Russia’s democratic regression (Saikkonen 2016) seems to substantiate this finding but further analysis is needed to establish a clear connection between individual level decision-making under duress and aggregate level electoral results. In any case, as the voter turnout and protest variables show, our understanding of electoral malpractice as well as competition in competitive authoritarian regimes may need to be expanded beyond its current confines.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

“When you find out how it works from the inside, you get even more angry.” 51

-V. Garnachuk,
Opposition municipal deputy

While conducting fieldwork for this dissertation, I lived for a time in a building on the corner of Parashytnaya ulitsa and Prospect Sizova in the Northern district of Primorskii in St. Petersburg. At that intersection, drivers would routinely ignore signs that the road was about to narrow from three lanes to two and instead form six or seven lanes of traffic. The bottleneck became even more chaotic in the fall when heavy rains flooded the shoulders of the road in an annual reminder of the fact that Peter the Great built his European capital on a swamp. I learned how to drive in suburban Ottawa and never got behind the wheel of car in Russia. I understand the rules of the road. But they do not function in Russia the same way as they do in Canada. Rules depend on context for interpretation.

51 Municipal district council member of Troparyovo-Nikulino Raion. Interview with author, August 2013, Moscow.
James March and Johan Olsen have aptly captured this notion in their description of the institutional perspective on politics in which institutions are a “relatively enduring collection of rules embedded in structures of meaning.” (emphasis added 2006, 3)

Institutions also exert an affect on individuals by prescribing what is “exemplary, natural or acceptable behavior” (1996, 251) and guiding action “on the basis of a logic of appropriateness” (1996, 249). Taken together, this understanding of institutions – the rules that govern social interactions – helps to clarify St. Petersburg’s traffic. The rules of the road shape behavior but are rooted in a broader and shared context. For someone socialized outside of this context, the rules are more difficult to grasp even when they seem similar to rules that are well known. The subject of this dissertation, elections in a hybrid authoritarian state, like St. Petersburg’s traffic, shape behavior in both familiar and unfamiliar ways.

In a series of three papers, relying on qualitative and quantitative methods and a variety of data, this dissertation has examined how elites and ordinary people respond to elections in Russia. My purpose had been, as the quote that beings this Chapter suggests, to find out how the system “works from the inside”. Most scholarship to date has focused on national level elections and their significance for regime trajectories. Yet an analysis of subnational elections allows one to consider the internal dynamics of electoral authoritarianism. Understanding these dynamics is important because, although unique in many ways, Russia’s experience with elections is part of a broader phenomenon. As I discuss in Chapter 1, elections have become an important institutional feature of many authoritarian regimes (see Wahman et al 2013). As Dawn Brancati observes:

...[the] proportion of authoritarian states that have institutions conventionally associated with democracy, such as parties
and elections, is on the rise. In the past decade about 70% of authoritarian states held legislative elections and 80% held elections for the chief executive. Furthermore, more than three-quarters of authoritarian states in this period permitted more than one party to participate in these elections. (2014, 314)

In countries like Russia, parties form openly and register freely, candidates compete, and citizens vote. Beyond these familiar contours, however, elections operate much differently than in a democracy. In this concluding Chapter, I revisit the findings of this dissertation and discuss them in light of work on nondemocratic states. I also suggest that this dissertation, by focusing on political institutions and agency, makes a contribution to the growing field of scholarship on authoritarian responsiveness.

5.1 Findings

In this section, I consider this dissertation’s findings thematically. I focus on three primary conclusions: techniques of electoral manipulation, the impact of elections on long-term opposition strength and the multifaceted influence of protest on authoritarian polities.

5.1.1 Manipulation

Elections can be instrumental institutions in authoritarian regimes. They are valuable methods for collecting information and for overcoming the commitment problem faced by authoritarian elites (Magaloni 2008). Yet elections also serve a performative function. A convincing victory can demonstrate the extent of an autocrat’s dominance and thereby discourage defection or revolt (Simpser 2013). The analysis of Moscow’s mayoral election and the gubernatorial elections in forty-three of Russia’s regions contained in Chapters 2 and 4 illustrate different ways that manipulation can
enhance the performative value of elections. Moreover, these Chapters highlight the relationship between the election’s intended audience and the choice of manipulation strategy.

In Chapter 2 I show that, after a high entry barrier for candidate participation was written into the legislation resurrecting gubernatorial elections in 2012, local authorities in Moscow helped opposition mayoral candidates surmount it. Specifically, authorities instructed members of United Russia, which dominates Moscow’s municipal councils, to support opposition mayoral candidates by helping them collect enough signatures to pass the municipal filter. I argue, using evidence from interviews with local opposition politicians, that in the wake of the anti-electoral fraud protests of 2011, the opposition’s participation was needed in order to validate the election and that this tactic of manipulation – the promotion of competition – was used to generate electoral legitimacy. Beyond expanding our understanding of the toolkit of manipulation available to autocrats, the promotion of competition points to the importance of the local audience in considering why and how autocrats choose to manipulate elections.

In examining the drivers of electoral competition in forty-three gubernatorial elections across Russia in Chapter 4, I find that pre-election manipulation explains much of the variation in the winner’s final vote share. Using regression analysis, I demonstrate that the field of candidates is more tightly controlled in noisier protest regions, where authorities disqualify candidates using administrative measures. Together, these findings show that throughout Russia’s regions, both the degree and tools of manipulation are adjusted based on the regimes perception of the local the population.
In light of these findings, and moving beyond the case of Russia, scholars may want to consider the performative value of elections and its implications more closely. As Marsha Pripstein Posusney argues: “Holding contested elections foregrounds the principle that citizens have a right to self-selected political representation.” (2002, 35) A recent history of mobilization in defense of this principle complicates the manipulation of elections and can force autocrats to both expand their manipulation strategies as well as to take action well before election day to secure a victory. Autocrats may liberalize some aspects of elections – perhaps the rules for party registration – but retain control over competition in other ways.

Large scale protests have most recently swept the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Few resulted in regime change; however, the mobilization capacity of civil society actors required to organize protests may alter the calculus of authorities who are tempted to manipulate elections. Scholars have argued that elections in the MENA region provide a valuable safety valve for the release of social demands (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004; Brownlee 2011). Even in the absence of turnover, elections are a visible moment of responsiveness and validation for the incumbent government. Yet they can only achieve this purpose if they are sufficiently convincing contests. Where outright fraud and intimidation can reasonably be assumed to provoke mass public outrage and protest, autocrats may resort to other forms of manipulation.

5.1.2 Opposition strength in the long run

Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik have argued that defeating dictators at the polls during the Colour Revolutions in Eastern Europe depended in large part on whether “oppositionists and their allies were able to use novel and sophisticated strategies to
maximize their chances of winning.” (2010, 47) The strategies that Bunce and Wolchik describe include unifying behind one candidate, mounting nation-wide campaigns, collecting and distributing public opinion polling data, training people to be election observers, conducting voter turnout campaigns and exit polls (see discussion 2010, 67-72). When these strategies were used by the opposition, and in cases where the incumbent regime relied on established tactics of voter demobilization, repression and short-term pay-offs, electoral change occurred. This was the case in Croatia, Georgia, Serbia and Ukraine. As we now know, the impact of opposition campaigns was uneven, and during the wave of Colour Revolutions, both oppositionists and the authoritarian regimes they faced learned from the experiences of their neighbours (see Koesel and Bunce 2013). Yet failure can teach valuable lessons.

In investigating why people became involved in municipal politics in 2012, I found out from interviewees that many of them had first signed up to be election observers in the presidential election after witnessing the fraud perpetrated during the 2011 parliamentary elections. As I argue in Chapter 3, civil society training focused on the prevention of electoral fraud mushroomed into a loose network of groups providing resources for individuals to not only monitor elections but to participate in them as candidates. While the winter protests against Vladimir Putin and United Russia did not ferment into electoral change, they were a catalyst for innovative campaigns and modest electoral victories at the local level. Many of these campaigns introduced the novel strategies highlighted by Bunce and Wolchik, including using organized networks of observers to ensure procedural fairness at precincts, printing and distributing effective campaign literature and coordination among opposition candidates running in the same
districts. One striking aspect of Alexei Navalny’s campaign for mayor, as I detail in Chapter 2, was his use of Western-style strategies. In particular, Navalny held dozens of stump speeches around Moscow in order to engage personally with voters. He recruited thousands of volunteers to man campaign “cubes” around the city (the cubes have since spread to other local political campaigns). And his campaign staff produced regular public opinion polling data which turned out to be more accurate than the projections of leading sociological centers. Accurate and independent polling is another element of successful opposition challenges that Bunce and Wolchik describe. These findings suggest that while electoral victory at the national level in Russia is unlikely in the near future in part due to Vladimir Putin’s popularity, the high capacity of the state and the organizational power of United Russia, opposition strength may be growing in meaningful ways at the local level. Moreover, scholars have thus far largely neglected to trace the impact of opposition challenges during national elections in hybrid authoritarian states to the local level. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus were examples of electoral continuity during the Colour Revolutions; however, each state continues to hold elections for local offices in cities and towns. It would be interesting to see whether the organizational capacity of the opposition developed during these failed national campaigns had any subsequent consequences for local level elections in these countries.

One of the novel contributions of this dissertation is the individual level analysis exploring the reasons why individuals in an authoritarian regime become involved in organized politics. Traditionally, research on political participation in authoritarian polities has focused on two themes: opposition and cooptation. Scholars have examined why individuals risk their safety to protest against autocrats and the conditions under
which these protests can be successful (Beissinger 2011; Kricheli et al 2011; Murdie and Bhasin 2011; Smyth et al 2013; Ulfelder 2005). They have also analysed the ability of autocrats to effectively coopt their opposition (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Geddes 2005; Reuter and Robertson 2015; Malesky and Schuler 2010). Explanations for the initial choice to enter politics as candidates are absent from the literature with the exception of Ellen Lust-Okar’s work on Jordanian elections. Lust-Okar (2006) argues that rent-seeking is the primary motivation for running in authoritarian elections. Because Jordanian politics is dominated by patronage-networks, candidates emphasize their personal connections and their ability to access state resources (or *wasta*) to get elected. This means that elites loyal to the regime are more likely to run than those opposed to it (who cannot trade on their connections). Yet this research does not explain why individuals stand for election to political offices that are unlikely to benefit from regime patronage and are equally unlikely to significantly disrupt the authoritarian status quo. By way of explanation, in Chapter 3, I apply a well-known framework – Albert Hirschman’s (1970) Exit, Voice and Loyalty (EVL) – to the experience of municipal deputies in Moscow. I conclude that the decision to enter the political arena in an authoritarian polity can be seen as a form of “voice” in reaction to both local neighbourhood problems and the decline of national politics.

Village level elections in China would seem to present another testing ground for the EVL framework. The elections began in 1987 on a trial basis and were adopted permanently in 1998 (Zhong and Chen 2002). Unlike elections at the township level and above, self-nominations and independent nomination of candidates for village elections are possible and the process is not strictly subject to Communist Party’s *nomenklatura* list
(Fewsmith 2004). A wealth of research has examined the behavior of voters in these elections as well as the effectiveness of these institutions for replacing corrupt officials and encouraging greater accountability (Chan 1998; Shi 1996; Shi 1999b; Manion 1994). Despite survey research on the motivations of voters in Chinese villages (Zhong and Chen 2002; Jennings 1997; Sho 1996), I am unaware of similar research examining the choice of village council members to enter politics.

5.1.3 Protest

Scholarship on contentious politics in authoritarian states has grown in recent years (see overview of the relevant literature in Chapter 4). As Graeme Robertson explains, protests pose an especially difficult challenge to modern autocrats:

Creating and maintaining the impression of permanence is the essence of authoritarian rule...Consequently, even strong authoritarians who are largely unchallenged are nervous of public opposition. Small acts of protest by relatively isolated groups can quickly grow into major challenges. While it takes millions of voters to signal weakness of a regime in elections, relatively small numbers of protesters in the streets, even in the low thousands, can raise questions about regime invincibility, leading others to join in. (2009, 530 – 531)

In this dissertation, I have followed the work of Robertson and others, notably Tomila Lankina (Lankina 2015; Lankina and Voznaya 2015), in testing the impact of public mobilization on Russia’s authoritarian politics. I conclude the thematic overview of the dissertation’s findings by examining three main effects of protest: policy concessions, electoral competition, and catalyst for further action.

First, in the face of protest, autocrats have more options than to fire on crowds or to flee. And Vladimir Putin has proven to be surprisingly responsive to mass mobilisation in the past. For example, the 2005 “cash-for-benefits” crisis erupted when the
government tried to replace various benefits, such as free utilities and transportation, provided to pensioners, veterans, and other constituencies with lump-sum payments. The proposal was met with large and spontaneous protests across Russia’s regions. The response from the government was immediate: “Panicked, the government moved quickly to compromise. It gave back benefits to some categories of citizens, greatly increased the monetary transfers given to others, and delayed some of the remaining reforms.” (Petrov et al 2013, 13) Even when the target of protests is the regime itself, as it was during the anti-electoral fraud protests of 2011, the response can be policy-driven.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, only days after the first anti-electoral fraud demonstrations, Putin announced that the regulations surrounding the registration of political parties would be changed to allow more, and smaller, parties to participate in elections. He also announced the return of gubernatorial elections. Both proposals were framed explicitly as liberalizing measures meant to appease protesters. In his address to the Federal Assembly on December 12th, 2012, Putin stated that the legislative changes “will make our political system even more fair, open and competitive. And [they] will be the answer to society’s demands for new, bright and independent people to enter politics.”52 As Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter have argued, however, liberalization is not synonymous with democratization:

Authoritarian rulers may tolerate or even promote liberalization in belief that by opening up certain spaces for individual and group action, they can relieve various pressures and obtain needed information and support without altering the structure of authority, that is, without becoming accountable to the citizenry. (1986, 9)

The above seems to be an apt description of the motivations behind the government’s response to the winter protests of 2011.\(^{53}\) O’Donnell and Schmitter further suggest that the spaces opened by liberalization can slowly, and in a cumulative manner, empower broader actions on the part of the opposition – a point that I will return to at the end of this section. Here, I want to suggest that because authoritarian regimes, despite the presence of democratic institutions, lack the responsive structures found in democracies, they tend to be extremely sensitive to mobilization efforts. This is precisely because, as Robertson points out above, autocrats rely in part on their image of indestructability to ward off defection and revolt. Based on Russia’s experience, highly centralized and personalized authoritarian regimes may be the most responsive, in terms of policy concessions, to protests because the executive, usually the president, tends to be solely responsible for policy direction. Accordingly, scholars of African politics, the region most dominated today by personalist or neopatrimonial authoritarian regimes – where the right to rule is ascribed to a person rather than an office (see Bratton and Van de Walle 1994) – should be most likely to experience rapid policy change following protests. I am unaware of existing work that tests such a hypothesis. It would also be interesting to see whether policy changes that result from mass protests are enduring. For example, four years after the gubernatorial elections were reinstated, their scope has been somewhat diminished with some regions choosing indirect methods of electing governors.

Second, in analyzing Russia, scholars have found that protests can discourage electoral fraud (Lankina and Skovorodo 2014) and influence which political parties are given rent-seeking opportunities in regional legislatures (Reuter and Robertson 2015).

\(^{53}\) In many ways, in fact, Russia’s present regime can be described as a “liberalized authoritarianism” or dictablandas (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986).
One of the main contributions of the analysis in Chapter 4 is demonstrating the small but statistically significant and robust impact of protests on electoral competition. Following Sarah Birch’s (2011) logic, I use an original dataset of protests across Russia’s regions to argue that protests are a costly signal to regime elites about the capacity of a region’s citizens to monitor and punish malpractice. By controlling for the repression of non-governmental organizations and the general level of democracy in a region, I show, furthermore, that this effect is not simply the residue of the overall political openness of a region. This finding goes back to why elections are such an important institution in hybrid authoritarian regimes which rely on them for legitimacy. Once elections are held up by autocrats as pillars of democracy, manipulating them becomes more difficult, especially where there is a proven track-record of mass mobilization. Protests may, therefore, over time, narrow the options that an authoritarian incumbent has for managing electoral competition.

Finally, returning to the consequences of authoritarian liberalization, I want to suggest that one of the lasting effects of protests is to generate optimism among people and motivate them to take action in order to achieve political change. In this way, protests may have an indirect and longer term impact on an authoritarian regime. As I have already discussed in the overview of findings, in Moscow, the political opening signalled by mass anti-fraud protests brought previously apolitical individuals into organized politics. The ways in which these people have chosen to operate from inside the political system may be the true enduring impact of protest.

One of the surprising findings in Chapter 3 is that newly elected municipal deputies have begun to fight corruption and other problems by adhering closely to the
letter of the law rather than, as much of the literature on informal practices suggests, by working around the system. In doing so, as I argue in the conclusion of Chapter 3, they are making these municipal offices avenues of resistance. As Andreas Schedler suggests: “inevitably, although to variable degrees, [institutions] contain seeds of subversion…Even if authoritarian institutions work as they are supposed to, absorbing, channeling, dampening, deflecting or dispersing oppositional energies, regime-critical actors may still…appropriate them for their purposes.” (2009, 15) Working an authoritarian system from the inside may, over time, erode the dominance of authoritarian incumbents over the political space. Experience gained within government can help make the opposition a more viable option during elections by giving them political credibility and overcoming voters’ ambivalence to them as outsiders. Thus, the ripple effects of mass protests may be extensive.

5.2 Final words: Authoritarian responsiveness

This dissertation examines how elites and ordinary citizens interact with the democratic institution of elections in Russia. The purpose is to elucidate the causes and consequences of certain political phenomena – manipulation, repression, protest, participation – found in hybrid authoritarian regimes. Although it is informed by the vast literature on democratization, the broader conceptual contribution of this dissertation is to the field of scholarship on authoritarian responsiveness. Specifically, to scholarship that foregrounds agency and institutions. I begin with the assumption that just because authoritarian regimes are not responsible to their populations does not mean that they are not responsive to them. Few regimes can ignore their citizens indefinitely and hope to survive. I follow scholars who have chronicled the many ways autocrats respond to social
demands, including through institutional innovation and repression (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2008; Bhasin and Gandhi 2013; Chen 2012; Eisenstadt 2004). I examine how these responses are mediated by democratic institutions and how, in turn, ordinary citizens respond to the regime. Understanding how authoritarian regimes respond to bottom-up pressures is important because “authoritarian responsiveness appears to be one attempt at…maintaining regime durability.” (Chen et al 2016, 398)

Some scholars are skeptical about the ability of autocrats to engineer their own survival and instead emphasize structural conditions, such as revolutionary violence, in explaining regime durability (see Levitsky and Way 2013). There is no doubt that socio-political legacy, natural resources and the international pressures are important factors in accounting for political stability and change. Often these structural factors limit the range of options available for both authoritarian elites and the opposition. Yet the nature of hybrid authoritarian regimes, in combining democratic institutions and autocratic practices, creates a tension – a political space – in which actors can construct their own opportunities (see concluding discussion in Bunce and Wolchik 2010). A focus on action and institutions, addressing political agency within an authoritarian state seriously, can contribute meaningfully to explanations of regime change. To accept that authoritarianism is responsive and autocrats are strategic actors is not to claim that they are omniscient. Autocrats and oppositionists make mistakes of strategy and coordination.54 Yet examining the political dynamics which are the result of authoritarian responsiveness and opposition agency would, I think, help scholars to stop “chasing events” (Hale 2015, 4) and start explaining them.

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54 Demonstrated most recently by Viktor Yanukovych’s decision to flee Ukraine in the face of pro-Maidan protesters when most scholars of the regions argued his regime would prove durable (see Way 2013).
Bibliography


Appendix A

Interview information

Below is information pertaining to interviews conducted by the author in Moscow and St. Petersburg between August and November of 2013 and used in Chapters 2 and 3 including the name and affiliation of interview subjects, the representativeness of the interview pool and the interview questions.

Table A.1: List of interview subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. S. Baranovsky</td>
<td>District council member of North Izmaylovo Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. V. Men’shikov</td>
<td>District council member of Dorogomilovo Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. I. Fedorovna</td>
<td>District council member of Ramenki Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District council member of Troparyovo-Nikulino Raion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. F. Garnachuk</td>
<td>District council member of Troparyovo-Nikulino Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous district council member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y. V. Tkach</td>
<td>District council member of Presnensky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District council member of Presnensky Raion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. K. Miloserdev</td>
<td>co-organizer and founder of “Our City” initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. A. Chirkov</td>
<td>District council member of Gagarinsky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y. Rusakova</td>
<td>District council member of Gagarinsky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. R. Martnenko</td>
<td>District council member of Lomonosovsky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. S. Yankauskas</td>
<td>District council member of Zvyuzino Raion, Head of Moscow branch of “Solidarity”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Y. Chernusheva</td>
<td>District council member of Zvyuzino Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. E. Semenov</td>
<td>District council member of Cheremushki Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y. T. Sviridov</td>
<td>District council member of Tagansky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. V. Pushkareva</td>
<td>District council member of Khoroshevsky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Telichenko</td>
<td>assistant to St. Petersburg city Duma member and attendee of independent education program ‘School for Deputies’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. L. Fedoseeva</td>
<td>District council member of Obruchevsky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. E. Vdovin</td>
<td>District council member of Timiryazevsky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. A. Smirova</td>
<td>District Council member of Timiryazevsky Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. S. Khokhlovskiya</td>
<td>District council member of Koptevo Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Shurshev</td>
<td>Member of St. Petersburg city Duma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. Kozlov</td>
<td>Activist and organizer of civil education programs in Moscow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District council member of Mitino Raion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. A. Deminko</td>
<td>District council member of Mitino Raion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. M. Markov</td>
<td>District council member of Zamoskvorechya Raion</td>
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V. Yelepeef, ran as a candidate for district council in Moscow
O. V. Galkina, Member of St. Petersburg city Duma

Table A.2: Representativeness of interview sample

<table>
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<th>Total population of sample frame</th>
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<td>Interview requests</td>
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<td>No response to request</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refusal of interview request</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewed, in-person</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews recorded</td>
<td>27</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

List of questions used in semi-structured interviews:

1. Before standing for district council last year, did you have any previous political experience or hold any elected office?
   a. If yes, what kind of experience / office was it? For what period of time?
2. Why did you choose to run in the district council elections?
3. Did you receive help or support from any political parties or civic organizations in the running of your campaign?
   a. Did you receive any training?
   b. Did the help, support or training impact the way you conducted your campaign?
4. What has been your experience in office since the election?
   a. How does your experience differ from your expectations?
   b. What policies/changes have you been able to make?
   c. How much contact do you have with your constituents?
   d. What (if any) obstacles have you encountered?
   e. How much (if any) consultation is there between district councils, district bosses and the mayor’s office?
5. Have you or will you participate in the municipal filter during the mayoral election?
   a. What do you think the impact of the ‘municipal filter’ mechanism will be on the number of candidates that run in the mayoral election?
   b. Will you campaign on behalf of any mayoral candidates?
Appendix B

Robustness checks for models in Chapter 4

This Appendix contains various robustness checks on the models used in Chapter 4 in order to rule out potential collinearity between key explanatory variables. Specifically, I test whether Protest covaries with the general level of political ‘openness’ in a regime and whether Turnout, as an indicator of manipulation, covaries with governor turnover, repression of NGOs and media freedom. In order to show that multicollinearity is not producing unreliable estimates, I provide several diagnostics including stepwise regression for Protest and Turnout and variance inflation factors (VIF) for each of the models.

After performing these diagnostics, I find that multicollinearity is not a problem. The stepwise regression Tables (B2 and B3) show that the coefficients for Protest and Turnout both remain statistically significant and at least twice the size of the standard error as other variables are dropped from the model. The VIF diagnostics (Tables B4, B5 and B6) show that none of the predictors approach VIF ≥ 10.

The Pearson correlation coefficients (Table B7) show that Media Freedom, Repression of NGOs, and the region’s democracy rating (i.e. proxies for regime manipulation) are not highly correlated with Protest. In other words, regime type does not seem to explain the variation in protest levels. However, Capital, a dummy variable for St. Petersburg and Moscow, correlates highly (0.7778) with Protest. Dropping Capital from the Voter Preference model increases Protest’s coefficient by 0.0028477 and
increases the p value from 0.008 to 0.000 suggesting that Capital is appropriately included in the Voter Preferences model and does control for the effect of urban centers on protest frequency. Moreover, stepwise backward selection estimation confirms Unemployment and Protest are the two main drivers in the voter preference model. Footnotes 49 and 50 in Chapter 4 alert the reader to these diagnostics.
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<th>Variable</th>
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Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Table B2: Stepwise regression of protest on runoff threshold dependent variable

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<td>1.834</td>
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<td>(1.656)</td>
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Table B4: Variance inflation factor diagnostic for voter preference model

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Table B5: Variance inflation factor diagnostic for manipulation model

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Table B6: Variance inflation factor diagnostic for combined model

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Table B7: Pearson correlation coefficients with significance levels for all independent variables

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Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1