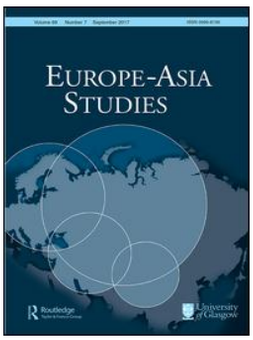

Europe-Asia Studies

ISSN: 0966-8136 (Print) 1465-3427 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ceas20

Legitimising Victories: Electoral Authoritarian Control in Russia's Gubernatorial Elections

Regina Smyth & Rostislav Turovsky

To cite this article: Regina Smyth & Rostislav Turovsky (2018) Legitimising Victories: Electoral Authoritarian Control in Russia's Gubernatorial Elections, Europe-Asia Studies, 70:2, 182-201, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2018.1436697

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1436697

Published online: 09 Mar 2018.

EUROPE-ASIA STUDIES, 2018
Vol. 70, No. 2, March 2018, 182–201

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Legitimising Victories: Electoral Authoritarian Control in Russia's Gubernatorial Elections

REGINA SMYTH & ROSTISLAV TUROVSKY

Abstract

We explore the evolution of the Kremlin's election control strategy in response to the reintroduction of gubernatorial elections in 2012. Our analysis focuses on the evolution of four tools used to engineer electoral competition: auxiliary institutions, subnational punishment regimes, ballot construction, and turnout manipulation. We argue that election managers deploy these mechanisms to maximise victories for state-sponsored candidates while minimising the possibility for post-election protest. The analysis demonstrates that electoral manipulation presents conflicting incentives for the Kremlin and its regional officials. It also shows the critical role that Russia's systemic opposition plays in the electoral management system and regime stability.

In January 2012, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev reintroduced gubernatorial elections in response to the demands of the *Za chestnye vybory* (For Fair Elections—FFE) movement. President Vladimir Putin had abolished those elections seven years earlier in an effort to reassert central state control over regional politics. Yet, the reintroduction of gubernatorial elections raised the spectre of a different type of regime challenge that is increasingly common in electoral authoritarian regimes. Empirical studies suggest that while some democratic institutions such as political parties and parliaments can extend the life of autocratic regimes, elections do not have the same effect. When regime incumbents win by large margins, elections convey regime legitimacy and dissuade opposition organisation. When the opposition senses that incumbent popularity has declined, elections serve as focal points for anti-regime coalition and contestation. In these cases, electoral manipulation can prompt mass mobilisation.

As this description suggests, authoritarian elections create a trade-off between procedural legitimacy and certain victory. To manage this trade-off, autocratic regimes develop menus of manipulation—combinations of mechanisms that preserve incumbent victories without undermining popular perceptions of procedural legitimacy. These mechanisms include outright

The authors are grateful for support from the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER). This article is a product of the research project 'Political Competition in Russia: Sub-National Dimension' carried out by the National Research University Higher School of Economics as part of the 2015 Annual Thematic Plan for Basic and Applied Research. All findings and conclusions in the article are solely the responsibility of the authors.

https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1436697

falsification, formal institutions designed to limit electoral uncertainty, and a wide range of informal institutions and practices including subnational patronage-based punishment regimes, bureaucratic rulings, ballot construction tactics, and turnout manipulation. Yet, implementing electoral management strategies in regional elections can also generate friction between federal and regional officials who have different goals. The regime seeks to win but also wants to forestall post-election protest and gather accurate information about voters' preferences and regional effectiveness. In contrast, regional incumbents want to win at all costs and increase their vote totals to dissuade future competition.

At the same time, regional elections can serve as a laboratory for electoral management strategies that can shape subsequent national elections. This seems to be the case in Russia, where the regime's renovation of electoral rules and strategies secured an overwhelming victory in the 2016 parliamentary elections. We explore the core elements and patterns of deployment of the Kremlin's electoral management strategies in 64 gubernatorial elections in the period 2012–2015. The analysis reveals that different regions have adopted different patterns in response to new technologies, competitive dynamics, resources, and relative power. It also demonstrates that the nature of the management strategy changed over time as the regime altered its policies and institutional structures. The study leads to some counterintuitive findings. We highlight the role of opposition parties in maintaining regime support. We also show that the greatest electoral manipulation occurs in regions where state capacity to win is already very high. Finally, we underscore that while the Kremlin has built increased capacity to deploy strategies that preserve procedural legitimacy over time, this control is challenged in regions where leaders have more autonomy or where the threat of opposition victory is high.

Our argument proceeds as follows. In the next section, we define the risks of electoral competition in contemporary autocracies. We then explore the deployment of different mechanisms of electoral control in the Russian context. First, we look into an understudied aspect of authoritarian institutionalism: the web of auxiliary institutions that constrain competition and compromise competition codified in election laws. We then focus on the informal norms and practices that shape electoral competition, including subnational punishment regimes. Relying on new measures, we analyse the differential deployment of electoral control strategies: ballot manipulation (ballot-packing and ballot-stripping) and turnout manipulation (mobilisation and demobilisation).

Electoral competition, popular threats, and electoral authoritarian stability

Elections pose significant challenges to autocratic regimes. In autocracies, elections serve as focal points—moments in the political process when there is considerably more shared information than usual—that attract the attention of opposition forces (Malesky & Schuler 2011; Simpser 2013). Regime reliance on blatant electoral falsification provides a second potential focal point for popular mobilisation (Tucker 2007; Kuntz & Thompson 2009). Information about falsification can be measured against vote totals, reports of fraud, and manipulation of turnout in order to assess the nature of the process. If personal experiences do not match official outcomes, then there is potential for mass protest.

There is a great deal of empirical evidence that deploying manipulation technologies poses significant risks to autocratic stability (Hyde 2011). As Howard and Roessler (2006) argue, electoral manipulation delivers victories but undermines popular perceptions of procedural legitimacy. In the post-communist context, the colour revolutions that plagued autocratic

incumbents illustrate the danger of rigged elections for regime stability (Bunce & Wolchik 2010; Beissinger 2013). In Russia, the prolonged *Za chestnye vybory* protest cycle was a stark reminder to the Kremlin that electoral falsification could challenge regime stability. Evidence from regional surveys suggested citizens who perceived significant government-backed electoral fraud were most likely to participate in protest events (Smyth 2016). Similarly, the unexpected challenge of the Aleksei Naval'nyi campaign for Moscow mayor in September 2013 reinforced the lessons of the difficulty in controlling competitive elections (Smyth & Sobeleva 2016). In response, the Kremlin introduced new institutional and procedural manipulations to shape electoral competition long before election day and to secure victories without large-scale falsification.

Yet, in federal systems such as Russia, the trade-off between electoral victories and electoral legitimacy creates a tension between the central and regional leaders. This tension reflects the complicated phenomenon of subnational authoritarianism in which the federal centre controls electoral competition in pursuit of its own interests at the expense of the interests of regional incumbents (Ross 2005). The interests of governors in this system are clear. They want to win by large margins in order to maintain power and forestall future competition. Moreover, Russia's majoritarian (two ballot) election system creates significant incentives to avoid a second round of competition where opposition coordination can produce unexpected outcomes and spur increased contestation (Kolosov & Turovsky 1997a). This danger was clear in the 2015 Irkutsk gubernatorial election, in which the incumbent governor lost in the runoff against the candidate expressed by the Communist Party (*Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii*—CPRF).

In contrast, the federal centre—the dominant power in the system—needs electoral legitimacy more than the election of any single incumbent governor. By restoring gubernatorial elections in the wake of large-scale post-electoral protest, the centre hoped to transfer popular expectations for representation and accountability to the regional level. National-level officials argued that reinstating elections would ensure competition and procedural fairness, marked by a significant number of competitors, representation of all main political parties, minimal reports of violations and election scandals, and no post-election protest. At the same time, the goal of legitimacy was tempered by the Kremlin's need to maintain power at every level in order to avoid regional elite defection. This strategy is influenced by the context of centre–region relations embodied in the institutions of Putin's power vertical (Ross & Turovsky 2015). Incumbent governors must accept the Kremlin's decisions on the rules of the game, and in particular, its guidance on electoral management. Regional contests are a test of the incumbents' loyalties and capacities to draw electoral support as well as a predictor of regional support in national elections. As a result, incumbents are under pressure to produce a victory that is accepted by the voters as the foundation for national regime support.

At the same time, regional elections provide opportunities to improve incumbents' electoral performances and to rehearse national electoral campaigns. Yet, it is not always clear how these goals translate into results or what constitutes a 'good' electoral performance for an incumbent governor. Governors often deliver the highest possible vote totals in order to insulate themselves from loss and prove their loyalty to the centre. From the perspective of the centre, this strategy obscures information that is essential for electoral management. In the 2015 elections, federal authorities relied on the pro-Kremlin Foundation for the Development of Civil Society to sanction governors in Samara and Nizhny Novgorod, because they secured an unrealistic 90% of the vote.

At the heart of this discussion is the nature of vote support in electoral authoritarian regimes. While it is clear why regimes manipulate elections, it is less clear why citizens turn out to

vote for autocrats who do not act in their best interests. Empirical studies of autocratic voting demonstrate that some regime support is rooted in material benefits and personal gain. For other voters, support reflects ideological compatibility or congruence between the regime and their own preferences. These mechanisms define the regime's core constituency. Yet, the size of the autocrat's core support varies over time, across levels of election, and even with context. As a result, while this core is important for regime functioning, it is not a reliable instrument to control elections over the long term (Schatz 2009). When the size of the core declines, the regime must manufacture votes, discourage opposition voters, and prompt reluctant supporters through formal institutional incentives, ballot manipulation and mobilisation strategies.

The remainder of this article explores the evolution of Russia's regional electoral management system between 2012 and 2015. The next section explores the role of formal institutions in constraining competition and shaping electoral outcomes. We then turn to explore the survival of punishment regimes—the exchange of benefits for votes—in some of Russia's republics. Finally, we explore the Kremlin's experimentation with strategies of electoral manipulation, including ballot construction strategies and turnout manipulation in gubernatorial elections between 2012 and 2015.

Formal institutions, informal practices, electoral control

The reintroduction of regional elections presented the regime with a new dilemma: managing electoral competition in the context of the diverse conditions that define electoral competition across the federation. As Moraski and Reisinger (2003) demonstrate, the social structures that emerged in the Soviet period shaped a legacy of different regional patterns of electoral competition. In addition, regional populations varied widely in their capacity to mount protest (Robertson 2010; Lankina 2015). Economic conditions and other structural processes such as urbanisation and ethnic cleavages also shape regional electoral patterns (Panov & Ross 2016). In turn, Goode (2010) showed that variation in structural conditions also shaped regional capacity to deal with economic crises. This variation in factors that shape electoral competition implies that legislation designed to shape electoral outcomes must also be flexible enough to deal with regional variation.

The authoritarian institutionalism literature has not paid much attention to the role of overlapping auxiliary institutions in constraining and controlling political competition or the features that increase their capacity to shape outcomes in federal systems. Yet, since 2000, Russia has continuously renovated formal institutional structures in order to capture the evolving strengths of the ruling party and regime resources, and to manage opposition challenges (Reisinger & Moraski 2007; Panov & Ross 2013a; Golosov 2014; Ross 2014). Using institutional amendments from rules regulating party registration to ballot access, the Kremlin has carefully moulded the structure of the opposition on the ballot over the entire electoral process.

These rules target the structure of the party system, which the state shapes through a protracted process that begins long before the election cycle. First, all parties face stringent national-level registration requirements that allow the centre to disqualify potential opposition while increasing the perception of competition by registering many parties that pose no threat or exist only on paper. This manipulation has created a highly fragmented and stratified opposition that consists of three different categories of party organisations. The systemic opposition (SO) consists of three main parties that hold seats in the State *Duma*: the CPRF, the

Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (*Liberal'no Demokraticheskaya Partiya Rossii*—LDPR), and Fair Russia (*Spravedlivaya Rossiya*—SR). The non-parliamentary opposition includes smaller opposition forces not represented in the State *Duma*. This group embraces liberal opposition groups such as Yabloko and PARNAS (*Partiya narodnoi svobody*—People's Freedom Party), as well as some nationalist organisations. Technically it also includes many minor systemic parties, some of them used as spoilers. The non-systemic opposition consists of groups that are often barred from competition because their policy goals and intended reforms would alter the regime's political agenda. In short, while 75 parties were registered in October 2015, far fewer were allowed to actually compete.

In the case of gubernatorial elections, the formal laws also contain flexible mechanisms to adjust to the regional context. Cloaked in claims of empowering local governments, municipal-level rules governing ballot access require potential gubernatorial candidates to collect signatures from elected officials in three-quarters of the sub-regional municipalities (such as townships and *raions*) in the region. Each region can set the level of the filter between 5% and 10% of elected municipal executives and local deputies. Moreover, each local deputy can only sign for one candidate. As Putin's hegemonic party United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*—UR) dominates these bodies, the municipal filter affords the Kremlin a great deal of control over ballot construction.

The choice to impose a lower level threshold under the municipal filter rule can convey more legitimacy to gubernatorial elections. Yet, only 15% of regions chose to impose the 5% minimum threshold, while 23 regions opted to impose the maximum 10% threshold. Notably, regions that adopted lower thresholds tended to be amongst the federation's most authoritarian, including Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Belgorod. Between 2012 and 2015, 29 parties participated in gubernatorial elections, demonstrating the flexibility in the implementation of the restrictions. Another 22 tried to register candidates but did not secure ballot access. The remainder of the registered parties did not participate in gubernatorial elections, revealing their inability to serve as 'technical candidates' (a regime supporter who runs in name only), spoilers, with no real potential to win votes.

The effect of the filter also varies depending on the size of the opposition cohort in these bodies. The CPRF has the greatest representation in municipal assemblies and therefore the greatest capacity to surpass the threshold. However, even for the CPRF, this capacity is severely limited. As a result of these barriers, the systemic opposition faces strong incentives to strike bargains with the regime prior to elections to preserve UR victories in the first round. In Primorsky *Krai*, Omsk, and Vladimir, Fair Russia decided not to nominate a gubernatorial candidate. In return, the incumbent governors nominated SR State *Duma* deputies as their representatives in the Federation Council. In Bryansk, the LDPR candidate withdrew before the 2012 election and was rewarded with a seat in the Federation Council. The same scenario played out in 2015. Similarly, in Orenburg, the LDPR withdrew its candidate after the nomination process in exchange for another Federation Council mandate. In other regions, UR enticed candidates with no prospect of electoral success to remain in the race with promises of appointments after the election. These deals provide the SO a more certain and profitable payoff than participation with the expectation of losing.

These data underscore that the most effective element in all of these institutional strategies is that it delegates crucial decisions about ballot structure to local electoral committees. These politically constructed committees can eliminate candidates on technical grounds by refusing

to certify signatures or citing procedural irregularities. In practical terms, they choose amongst a large number of potential contestants, parties, and candidates, in order to shape a ballot that will undermine opposition unity and eliminate any strong challengers while still including a range of choice and options.

The role of the electoral committees can be seen in the data. Between 2012 and 2015, a total of 292 candidates passed through the municipal filter and completed the campaign. Another 185 nominated candidates (38.8%) did not complete the campaign due to state intervention.[1] Many (139) were denied registration by local electoral commissions. Seven candidates withdrew after successfully registering as a result of criminal investigations or other reasons. In the remaining 39 cases, parties withdrew candidates after registration or failed to complete the registration documentation either because of a political bargain or because of certain failure. In short, the municipal filter provides the regime with a critical tool to shape each ballot, removing threats and packing the roster with toothless competition that offers voters the illusion of significant choice while dividing regime opposition.

Formal rules also play a role in shaping strategies of mobilisation and demobilisation. On the face of it, regulations such as early voting, at-home voting for the sick and elderly, and postal voting make the process available to previously disenfranchised citizens. In reality, these reforms mobilise loyal voters and create the possibility for low-risk falsification of vote totals conducted away from the eyes of election monitors. In contrast, because active demobilisation is a risky strategy, the regime has relied on seemingly innocuous or universally applied formal regulations to allow turnout to decline. The Kremlin's first step was to lower the turnout threshold required to validate elections from 50% to 20%. Subsequent amendments abolished the turnout threshold entirely.[2] New laws moved elections to early September, when holiday weekends and excursions to dachas empty out urban centres and decrease oppositional voters' participation. In addition, this timing ensures that campaigns are largely ineffective, taking place in mostly empty cities, and thus preventing electoral surprises.

The evolution of Russia's electoral framework suggests that studies of electoral authoritarian stability need to pay more attention to these auxiliary institutions, which do much of the work of centralising power and limiting contestation. Yet, despite their influence, formal institutional structures cannot always deliver electoral victories. To further reduce uncertainty, contemporary autocrats deploy a wide range of informal institutions and practices that are designed to limit competition, channel voter support, and ensure regime stability.

Informal mechanisms: managing participation and choice

In addition to the need to pay more scholarly attention to the role of formal institutions in electoral engineering, we argue that the literature on authoritarian institutionalism has

[1]The regime used a number of formal and informal tactics to eliminate candidates, including manipulating the municipal filter, threatening or launching legal investigations against candidates, questioning valid registration documents, or miscounting signatures.

[2]The official codification of the 20% turnout level can be found in revisions to the law 'On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in a Referendum of Citizens of the Russian Federation' (Federal'nyi zakon "Ob osnovnykh garantiyakh izbiratel'nykh prav i prava na uchastie v referendume grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii") Law No. 67-F3, passed 12 June 2002. Turnout regulations were abolished in an amendment to the law (225-FZ) on 5 December 2006. Laws, complete with amendments, are published at: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102076507, accessed 29 January 2018.

so far neglected the nexus between formal and informal institutions. In addition to formal rules, authoritarian regimes develop informal institutions—norms, patterns of behaviour, and exchanges—that extend regime control. These formal and informal institutions frequently interact to alter choices presented to voters on the ballot and also to shape participation. Informal institutions can complement formal structures, or they can substitute for formal controls as in the use of politicised justice to remove promising opposition candidates. In this section, we show how the informal rules governing participation and ballot structure vary across regions as officials balance the dual goals of procedural legitimacy and electoral certainty.

Tragic brilliance: subnational punishment regimes

Patronage is a critical informal institution in the manufacture of authoritarian vote support (Magaloni 2006; Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007). In their analysis of Mexican authoritarianism between 1929 and 2000, Alberto Diaz-Cayeros and his colleagues (2003) provide compelling evidence of the punishment regime established by the hegemonic party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*—PRI). They argue that regimes with developed patronage networks can withhold benefits from citizens if they vote for opposition candidates and parties. As a result of the 'tragic brilliance' of the regime, citizens support authoritarian governments over long periods. Scholars have found similar punishment regime mechanisms at work in Jordan and Egypt (Lust-Okar 2006; Blaydes 2010). Yet, the conditions under which the 'tragic brilliance' arguments hold are fairly stringent and do not apply in all cases of electoral authoritarianism. Fukuoka (2015) makes a convincing case that patronage penetration in the Philippines under the Marcos regime and in late Suharto Indonesia did not rise to the level essential for a punishment regime.

Certainly, on the federal level, Russia's hegemonic political party, UR, is a significant force but does not have the patronage structures essential to operate a similar punishment regime (Panov & Ross 2013b; Isaacs & Whitmore 2014). UR developed a strong pattern of institutional controls over members' career advancement but did not have direct control over regional clientelist networks, contracts, or financial transfers from the centre to the regions (Reuter & Turovsky 2013; Sharafutdinova & Turovsky 2017). Rather than invest in building primary instruments of patronage distribution through the party, the Kremlin continued to supply voter benefits through targeted stipend and wage increases to key constituencies (police, civil service, pensioners). This strategy essentially builds parallel power structures—the federal state apparatus and the dominant party—that divide lower level elites and restrict their capacity to challenge the centre (Remington 2008; Reuter 2017).

As a result of these decisions, there is limited capacity for a national punishment regime in Russia. As Frye *et al.* (2014) demonstrate, just over 15% of respondents in a national survey believed that their material wellbeing was influenced by their decision to turn out to vote. While this constituency provides a significant boost to the regime's electoral fortunes, it is not enough to deliver elections. The exception to this pattern is the ethnically defined republics where structural factors shaped and sustained the legacy of strong subnational machines in some regions (Hale 2005; Sharafutdinova 2013; Goodnow *et al.* 2014).

Lacking the national capacity to build a punishment regime, the Kremlin's electoral managers have resorted to other forms of informal institutions to deliver outcomes without blatantly undermining legitimacy. The next section considers the evolution of two tactics that

have emerged as central to the Kremlin's electoral management strategy: ballot construction and turnout manipulation. This analysis focuses on the trade-offs that different combinations of tactics hold for the competing goals of winning and maintaining procedural legitimacy. It also underscores the tension that can arise between the centre and regional-level officials who have different tolerances to political risk.

Ballot construction: framing voters' choices

Electoral management did not begin with President Putin's rise to power. In the 1990s, the Kremlin engaged in many of these tactics, including packing the ballot with friendly opposition, putting forward technical candidates, and disallowing candidates who potentially posed a threat in order to present the voters with a competitive ballot (Kolosov & Turovsky 1997b; Smyth 1998). As Reisinger and Moraski (2007) show, the Putin regime shaped gubernatorial competition using a wide range of strategies prior to 2004.

The ballot-packing strategy—adding spoilers, hopeless candidates, and loyal opposition to the mix—enhances the value of state resources, fragments the opposition, and generates a sense of competitiveness. In the current incarnation, the Kremlin relies on the SO parties with limited and predictable electoral support whose presence normalises the structure of competition over time and across elections. To ensure their cooperation, the federal centre engages in the small-scale distribution of gubernatorial positions amongst these parties (one position for each of three parties presented in the State *Duma*).

Yet, this ballot-packing strategy is not always reliable, as it leaves the competition open to vote protests and increases the potential for SO party coalitions. Throughout the 1990s, gubernatorial electoral rules included a provision that nullified elections if only one candidate remained on the ballot. To preclude this possibility, it became a common strategy to include a 'technical candidate' in order to hedge against potential SO boycotts in the late stage of elections. This old practice remains in force and provides a mechanism to involve small, loyal parties in the electoral process. In addition, voters can protest by 'voting for anybody but UR' as they did in 2011, a protest replicated in some of the regions in 2015.

The alternative strategy is to 'strip the ballot', by minimising the number of contestants allowed to run and thereby eliminate competition. This strategy is risky because it can signal the regime's discomfort with competition and provides a strong signal of procedural manipulation. Ballot-stripping also provides an opportunity for the opposition to demonstrate and publicise state manipulation close to election day. Thus, the regime prefers to pack the ballot and split support amongst many weak but predictable candidates rather than reduce competition entirely and publicly reveal its weakness.

In addition, regions vary in the registration requirements that they place on candidates in different races (Bækken 2015). Registration regulations allow all regions the capacity to remove candidates from the ballot (Lyubarev 2011). Between 2012 and 2015, the regime used bureaucratic means under the municipal filter regulations, negotiation, cooptation, or blackmail to remove potential challengers from the ballot. A general measure of ballot intervention can be calculated as the percentage of denials/withdrawals relative to the total number of attempts to secure ballot access. For the 2012–2015 period, 38.8% of candidates were denied access. Yet, the number of candidates denied ballot access during the registration process decreased between 2012 and 2015. In 2012, almost half (46.9%) of candidates were

denied access: in 2013, this figure rose to 57.4%.[3] In contrast, in 2014 the number of eliminated candidates dropped to 34.45% declining further to 30.3% in 2015.[4] This change is explained by remarking that the smaller parties stopped their attempts to nominate candidates and also by the centre's efforts to include all SO parties on every ballot—often against the preferences of regional officials.

The offices in the Presidential Administration that manage regional elections engage in systematic ballot-stripping for certain categories of candidates, such as the liberal opposition; Yabloko and PARNAS have had the highest percentage of denials, despite their limited number of attempts to register candidates.[5] The electoral authorities have blocked almost all former high-ranking officials from challenging incumbents, signalling intolerance for elite competition or elite defection.[6] Former incumbents who have fallen victim to these restrictions include two previous governors (Aleksandr Rutskoi in Kursk and Alexandr Chernogorov in Stavropol regions), a former regional prime minister (in Bashkortostan), and a former federal minister of the 1990s (in Altai Republic). In Sakha two former incumbents, a former regional prime minister in the Altai Republic, Vladimir Petrov, and a former regional finance minister, Ernst Berezkin, managed to gain ballot access. Both came in second with strong vote support, illustrating the rational for the decision to limit incumbent participation in most regions.[7]

Our argument is that all regions can limit competition by removing candidates from the ballot, but we do not expect that all regions will use this capacity in the same way. In general, regional officials prefer to include fewer candidates on the ballot in order to ensure a clear victory in the first round. They want to hedge against the vote totals of many weak candidates adding up to 50%, forcing a second round of competition in which coalition or protest is more likely. The Kremlin prefers that regional officials manage competition through a ballot-packing strategy, obscuring the elimination of stronger candidates and thus forestalling charges of uncompetitive elections. While this strategy can introduce uncertainty about the level of support for the state-sponsored candidate, it also precludes coordination amongst opposition candidates and parties. This ballot-packing strategy does not imply that some strong candidates are not denied ballot access, only that a large number of uncompetitive candidates are allowed to run in order to fragment the opposition, draw votes away from the SO party candidates, and maintain the illusion of an extremely weak opposition.

Managing turnout: mobilisation and demobilisation

The mobilisation of friendly voters has also been a staple of Russian political competition since the 1990s. As we noted above, there is significant evidence that this practice has continued

[3]In 2013, this figure was inflated by the large number of first-time candidates without prior political experience who ran as independents in the Moscow mayoral election. All of these candidates failed to meet ballot access requirements.

[4]This analysis is based on the authors' calculations drawn from Central Election Commission reports on the registration process in each district. These data are available at: http://www.cikrf.ru/, accessed 30 January 2018.

[5]Authors' calculations based on data available at the Central Election Commission website, available at: http://www.cikrf.ru/, accessed 30 January 2018.

[6]Candidate biographies, including governmental experience, as well as the status of their registration are available at the Central Election Commission website, available at: http://www.cikrf.ru/, accessed 30 January 2018.

[7]In addition to Central Election Commission data, see Kynev and Goode (2014).

throughout the Putin era (Ross 2014; Panov & Ross 2016). In 2011, Russian social media was full of examples of state mobilisation from citizens being driven in buses from polling station to polling station to employers requiring employees to vote (Smyth & Oates 2015). Frye *et al.* (2014) provide evidence that enterprises engage in mobilisation on behalf of incumbent candidates and that single company towns evidence stronger mobilisation efforts compared to other economic areas. Similarly, in her work on authoritarian welfare states, Forrat (2015) reports that teachers and other state workers face similar mobilisation pressures. These findings show that, in Russia, the capacity to mobilise autocratic support is vested in economic structures. Thus, in the absence of a partisan patronage-based punishment regime, workplace mobilisation provides an important mechanism to manage voter turnout.

Yet, extensive mobilisation efforts are not a constant across regions. For example, Turovsky's (2012) previous work revealed a high correlation between increased turnout and UR's vote margins, hence suggesting that only regions with strong subnational authoritarian systems are able to boost the turnout without increasing electoral uncertainty or the risk of loss. Conversely, regions with more protest (and competition) are those with persistently low turnout rates: this proposition reflects the split in Russia's electoral space between active and loyal regions and regions with low turnout and higher protest activity.

We argue that focusing only on voter mobilisation ignores regime attempts to demobilise voters (Harvey 2016). As the regime's core support dropped, the centre became increasingly willing to tolerate low turnout levels to manage electoral competition. This strategy is less risky than large-scale mobilisation because demobilisation decreases shared knowledge amongst voters who supported opposition candidates. This common knowledge provides a metric to assess the likelihood that the regime employed fraud to secure a victory. As a result, the strategy reduces the risk of post-election protest. This decline is partly due to the universal tendency towards a drop in participation in subnational elections, which are generally perceived as less important than federal elections. According to our calculation, the overall turnout in 64 regions where gubernatorial elections were held in 2012–2015 reached 45.6%, while turnout for State *Duma* elections in 2011 in the same regions was 58.8%. Yet, this tendency cannot fully explain the decline in regional turnout or the subsequent drop in turnout in parliamentary elections in 2016 (Smyth & Soboleva 2016). Nor can it account for the pattern of decline in turnout for gubernatorial elections. In 2015, Arkhangel'sk *Oblast'* (21%) registered the lowest turnout level of any subject of the Federation. Turnout dropped below 30% in four other regions: Smolensk, Vologda, Vladimir, and in the first round of elections in Irkutsk.

Electoral management trade-offs: opportunities, constraints, and the selection of control strategies

The trade-offs between victory and legitimacy create a serious set of decisions for election managers at the national and regional levels. The strategies used to manage these trade-offs in electoral goals have the potential to increase tensions between the federal centre and regional incumbents who face very different incentives. As a result, we expect election managers to employ a mix of strategies in response to the threats, opportunities, and resource constraints of different regions. Relying on the measures described above, we characterise these threats and opportunities in terms of the combination of four strategies described above: ballot-stripping, ballot-packing, friendly mobilisation, and demobilisation.

We argue that the trade-off across strategies is rooted in the variation in their electoral effectiveness as well as variation in their potential to provoke popular backlash. The latter danger arises from the information that management strategies convey about electoral processes to opposition forces, voters, and political elites. Simpser (2013) noted that in the information-rich environment of elections, management strategies have different costs and risks because they let voters know the true support for incumbents and the regime's commitment to competitive processes. At the same time, the literature on authoritarian elections suggests that the optimal outcome for the regime is to produce very high vote totals in order to demonstrate the regime's power and dissuade future opposition. These findings suggest that there is a trade-off between maximising vote totals and the risk of engaging in electoral manipulation that is essential to producing those vote totals.

To examine these trade-offs, we analyse the use of electoral management strategies in Russian gubernatorial elections since 2012. We measure turnout strategies by dividing regions into two groups: those where turnout surpassed 40.2% (the median level of turnout across all elections) and those in which turnout was less than 40.2%. This measure allows for a comparison of changes in mobilisation and demobilisation strategies across subjects of the federation. We measure ballot strategies more directly, counting regions with five or more candidates as engaging in the ballot-packing strategy and those with fewer than five candidates as engaging in the ballot-stripping strategy. We summarise these trade-offs in Table 1, indicating the number of regions that have engaged in each strategy and key cases to illustrate the argument.

Table 1 demonstrates the variation in strategies employed across Russia's regions. We argue that these different combinations in turnout and ballot construction strategies reflect the trade-offs inherent in the centre–periphery conflict of interest. If we define risk in terms of the potential for popular backlash against manipulation, then the Kremlin would prefer to manage elections by packing the ballot and demobilising voters, as these strategies maintain the semblance of competition while still increasing the probability of incumbent victory. However, for regional leaders, this combination of strategies creates the greatest levels of

TABLE 1
REGIME ELECTORAL STRATEGIES IN GUBERNATORIAL RACES, 2012–2015

		Ballot construction	
		Low number of candidates	*High number of candidates*
Turnout	Low turnout	Average number of candidates: 3.9 Turnout: 36.5% Incumbent vote: 26.8% Number of cases: 19 Examples: Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Volgograd, Kurgan, Chelyabinsk	Average number of candidates: 5.2 Turnout: 36.4% Incumbent vote: 26.3% Number of cases: 21 Examples: Moscow, Moscow *Oblast'*, St Petersburg, Vladimir, Pskov, Orenburg, Kursk
	High turnout	Average number of candidates: 3.5 Turnout: 61.9% Incumbent vote: 48.2% Number of cases: 11 Examples: Briansk, Kalmykia, Chukotka, Chuvashia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Altai	Average number of candidates: 5.1 Turnout: 56.9% Incumbent vote: 46.4% Number of cases: 14 Examples: Krasnoyarsk, Mari El, Kemerovo, Rostov, Tambov, Komi, Sakha

Source: Central Election Commission, available at: http://www.cikrf.ru/, accessed 30 January 2018.

electoral uncertainty, since there is significant choice on the ballot and no real opportunity to fix votes. All things being equal, they would prefer a strategy of ballot-stripping to limit competition, and mobilisation to increase support, thereby ensuring their own victory. This strategy is also the riskiest as it provides the most information about electoral manipulation. As a result, we might expect risk-averse regions to split the difference and engage in one risky strategy while complying with central needs on another.

The Table underscores the variation in the implementation of a national electoral management system. Notably, 21 regions adopt the strategy of packing the ballot while allowing turnout to fall. This strategy minimises the risk of popular backlash as it provides a semblance of competition with limited visible efforts to increase regime support. These regions included Moscow and Leningrad *oblasti*, and Arkhangel'sk and Orenburg regions. When systemic opposition parties abstained from participating in the 2015 Orenburg election, the regime included four smaller party candidates in the race to manufacture competition.

In Leningrad *Oblast'*, the strategy worked well, leading to high turnout and more than 80% support for the incumbent governor Aleksandr Drozdenko. The case of Arkhangel'sk region does nevertheless demonstrate that this strategy is not fail-safe. In that region, the unknown candidates of all three SO parties achieved strong results, while the incumbent governor Igor Orlov received only 53.3% of the vote. His campaign provoked public resentment that led to a popular revolt against him.[8] This case underscores that latent opposition can emerge through the campaign process and enhance the vote totals of weak candidates. It also demonstrates that limiting the efficacy of campaigns is an important element of electoral management.

The regions that experimented with high levels of mobilisation in elections during the period under study tended to be those that had traditionally had high turnout, suggesting persistent factors that shape the underlying strategy. These are examples of authoritarian-style managed turnout based on the mass participation of dependent social groups and usually enforced by the manipulation of early voting. In such cases, we see the interconnected growth of both turnout and incumbent support. Only three regions experienced significantly higher turnout in the 2015 gubernatorial elections than they did in 2011 parliamentary elections. All these exceptions were regions with the most effective administrative mobilisation of voters in past elections (Oreshkin 2001; Saikkonen 2017). The correlations in these cases are extremely high: in Kemerovo *Oblast'* (92% turnout and 96.7% voting for incumbent), Tatarstan (84.1% and 94.4%), and Samara *Oblast'* (61.4% and 91.4%). Other regions where turnout appeared to be close to the levels of the State *Duma* elections also had strong support for incumbent governors (Leningrad, Penza and Bryansk *oblasti* in 2015).

Confirming our earlier prediction about the greatest manipulation occurring in the regions where punishment regimes have persisted, the regions that maximise vote margins through manipulation tend to be Russia's republics. The 11 regions that defied the central goal of maintaining procedural integrity and implemented a ballot-stripping, mobilisation strategy include Tatarstan, Chuvashia, Altai, Bryansk, Kaluga and Belgorod. Most of them exhibit mobilisation of friendly votes that produce high and sometimes unbelievable levels of voter support for incumbents coupled with unusually high turnout. Indeed, as predicted, the opposition was passive in these regions and rarely tried to challenge the incumbents.

[8]Local press reported that, while the UR party attributed low turnout and low support to good weather and the holiday, Orlov acknowledged that the results reflected a low level of voter efficacy and promised to immediately replace the entire regional government as a first step to create better ties with the electorate (Gavrilova 2015).

Nevertheless, in regions where electoral victory seemed assured, the authorities were worried by elite defection (non-registration of former regional prime minister Rail Sarbayev in Bashkortostan) and overreacted in Tyumen region, where the CPRF candidate, Pavel Dorokhin, lost his spot on the ballot after criminal investigation resulting from his failure to report a previous conviction.[9]

Unpacking the data reported in Table 1 provides additional insight into the patterns of Kremlin control. Even when regions fail to implement the Kremlin's preferred strategy, they come fairly close to the ideal—including four instead of five candidates or maintaining mobilisation at plausible levels rather than artificially inflating turnout. These data also demonstrate that the Kremlin's capacity to homogenise electoral competition across regions increased over the period studied. The outlier regions—those with two or three candidates—were largely absent from contests in 2012 and 2013 when the level of opposition support was increasing and gubernatorial races were still new. In terms of ballot access, the attempts to frame voting procedure produced an average of 4.6 candidates for the entire 2012–2015 period. This number corresponds to the number of systemic opposition parties plus one or more technical candidates.

Despite this success, there is reason for the Kremlin to be cautious, particularly in periods of decline in regime support. This process of electoral management yielded incumbent victories in all but four elections and produced only three close victories in the first round. Yet, these elections occurred in an environment of increasing regime support. As popular support declines due to economic conditions or unanticipated international events, the regime becomes more vulnerable to vote protests such as the one that marred the 2011 State *Duma* elections and successful electoral management becomes increasingly important. As a result, regional elections are becoming a critical testing ground for shaping national election strategies. Importantly, regional elections also provide the opportunity to test electoral management strategies in the constantly changing political context. As we illustrate in this article, strategies evolved after 2014 when President Putin and UR both saw a significant recovery in their public approval ratings after the 2011–2012 *Za chestnye vybory* protests.

Moreover, these elections demonstrate that, unlike Western elections, increased competition is not enough to increase participation. Aleksei Naval'nyi's 2013 Moscow mayoral election provides a good example of this point. Despite the effective campaign and Naval'nyi's leadership in the FFE movement, the turnout in the first round of the mayoral race barely reached 32%, dropping 29.3 points relative to State *Duma* elections. In contrast, run-off elections serve as a clear focal point for voters, illustrating why elites work so hard to avoid them. This effect was clear in the 2015 run-off election in Irkutsk, where turnout increased from a very low 29.2% in the first round to 37.2% in the second round, securing an opposition victory. This outcome suggests that there is a competitive threshold that drives opposition voters' turnout decisions. Regions with high protest participation can expect low turnout in the face of controlled elections until voters suddenly see the potential for change. The Irkutsk case illuminates the hidden protest potential in depressed turnout, which shows up only when

[9]It was widely discussed that the decision made late in the electoral period reflected some collusion between the incumbent and the regional Central Election Commission as the information was widely available upon registration, see: 'Informatsiya k razmyslheniyu: chem zapomnyatsya tyumenskie vybory', *Tyumen*, 9 September 2014, available at: http://www.tumenpro.ru/2014/09/09/informatsiya-k-razmyishleniyu-ili-chem-zapomnyatsya-tyumenskie-vyiboryi/, accessed 30 January 2018.

the people start to feel that their electoral participation makes a difference. At the same time, while it is barred from electoral competition, the non-systemic opposition continues to work to highlight procedural irregularities in candidate and party registration. In periods of declining regime support, these challenges can increase with very little warning as non-voters emerge as protest voters.

Although further work needs to be done to explore how these tactics have been deployed over time, and across different levels of races, they raise interesting questions about why different regions choose different electoral control strategies. We suggest that these differences are not only a function of capacity but reflect political choices to balance the goals of the centre and regions. Importantly, while the municipal filter provides all regions with the potential capacity to strip the ballot, they do not all use that capacity to engage in what is a risky strategy.

Similarly, all regions have some capacity to mobilise supporters but not all regions use this strategy. It appears that mobilisation is increasingly linked to specific groups of regime supporters rather than increasing overall turnout levels. Yet, some findings are clear in this study. First, as predicted by the literature, regions that have maintained the capacity for punishment regimes have also tended towards the greatest level of manipulation, adopting visible demonstrations of regime power in defiance of the Kremlin's need for more nuanced control. Second, increased support for the Kremlin and its candidates increases its ability to implement a national management regime. Third, competition seems to make the Kremlin more cautious, and foreshadows a reliance on a low visibility electoral management strategy that minimises post-election protest. Finally, this analysis reveals the important role that the SO opposition plays in securing UR victories.

Managing choice: political parties, systemic opposition, and the limits of ballot manipulation

Electoral management strategies appeared to be converging in favour of Kremlin interests in the lead up to 2016 parliamentary elections. Yet, one of the critical findings that emerges from the unpacking of Russia's electoral management strategy is that the Kremlin's current strategy relies heavily on the collaboration of systemic opposition parties who are co-opted by the federal government in exchange for perks of office for their party officials, to build capacity for future elections, or simply to persist in the hostile climate. The data before and after the end of the legitimation crisis in 2014 underscore that the risk of this strategy is embedded in the level of popular support for the regime, its leaders, and UR.

When that support is high, the SO parties afford the Kremlin with the semblance of opposition within predictable boundaries of voter support. On average, in the period studied, CPRF candidates got about 10% of the vote while LDPR and SR each barely topped 4% of the vote. At the same time, there have been examples of SO breakthroughs both in terms of vote support and of coalition-building, underscoring the potential pitfalls of the Kremlin's strategy, particularly as regime support declines. Of the 11 candidates who secured more than 20% of the vote, seven were CPRF members and one was from LDPR. The three other cases were representatives of the non-parliamentary opposition: Vladimir Petrov from Civic Power in the Altai Republic (36.4%), Ernst Beryozkin from Civic Platform in Sakha (29.5%), and Aleksei Naval'nyi of PARNAS in Moscow (27.2%). It is these smaller parties that emerge as wildcards in the regional elections.

Between 2012 and 2015, a more significant and sophisticated strategy of ballot-packing emerged in a majority of races. This strategy involved the three parties of systemic opposition, the CPRF, LDPR and SR, plus the UR candidate and one technical candidate for a total of five contestants. Such SO involvement can create the illusion of authentic representation of different political interests and procedural fairness. As a result, the Kremlin insists on registering SO parties to test their vote potential in the lead-up to national elections.[10] Under this system, the Kremlin's stalwart supporter, the LDPR, took part in almost all gubernatorial campaigns between 2012 and 2015, 61 out of 64 races, or 95.3%. The Kremlin's reliance on the LDPR is not surprising as the party is dependent on the authorities to overcome the municipal filter (it has a tiny number of municipal deputies across the federation). In contrast, the CPRF took part in 53 elections (82.8%), reflecting its status as the strongest party of systemic opposition and the increased probability of its being denied ballot access. Fair Russia only obtained ballot access in 42 cases (65.6%), in part because it did not seek ballot access in many regions, preferring to abstain rather than promote 'hopeless' candidates or to sit out as part of a broader strategy of trading non-participation for other benefits such as seats in the Federation Council.

These aggregate figures also mask increased systemic opposition participation since 2012. CPRF participation increased to 95.2% of campaigns in 2015 compared with 76.7% in 2014. Fair Russia competed in 81% of the elections in 2015 and only 56.7% in 2014. LDPR has been much more consistent in its pattern, competing in 96.7% of campaigns in 2014 and 95.2% in 2015.[11] This increased participation maps to the incentives of each actor in the lead-up to national elections in 2016: the Kremlin's pursuit of legitimation and information on voter and regional elite preferences, and the SO's goals of mobilising its electorate and training future candidates. A notable outlier was the case of Orenburg region, where none of the SO parties ran candidates for governor. In other cases, the ballot presented a choice between pairs of SO parties, usually the CPRF and LDPR. In the three outlier cases, LDPR was the only party of systemic opposition in the elections, while CPRF and SR had only one such case each.

A good example of informal negotiation underpinning that shape of competition is the Novosibirsk region, where communist success in the mayoral race laid the basis for a power-sharing deal with UR: the CPRF refused to run for governor, preferring to avoid any new conflicts with the regime. To avoid opposition voter coordination in response to this deal, regional officials allowed only three candidates to compete. Despite this effort, the LDPR's and SR's nominees drew strong support, including votes that might have otherwise gone to the CPRF. In other cases, this strategy involved pre-election bargains or cases where SO parties served as spoilers. LDPR candidates are often perceived to be spoilers in races against the CPRF. Four regions relied on CPRF spoilers with similar names such as Communists of Russia (*Kommunisti Rossii*—KR) and Communist Party of Social Justice (*Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sotsial'noi Spravedlivosti*—CPSS). These parties also filled out the ballot in cases such as Volgograd and Nizhniy Novgorod where the CPRF did not participate.

Importantly, while SO opposition parties have generally had very limited capacity to mobilise in national elections, they proved more successful when the SO candidate was an

[10]The Kremlin can glean more accurate information from party-list voting for regional legislative elections as these results do not reflect district-level candidate effects, including incumbent advantages.

[11]The calculations do not include the 2012 and 2013 elections because only five elections were held in 2012 and eight in 2013. In contrast, there were 30 elections in 2014 and 21 elections in 2015.

incumbent as in Oryol (2014), Smolensk (2014) and Zabaykalye (2015). In these cases, the Kremlin defied regional leaders and ensured that UR did not challenge the SO incumbent. These candidates had tremendous success, amplifying the vote totals their parties received in the 2011 State *Duma* elections. In Oryol the CPRF candidate got 2.5 times more than the CPRF *Duma* vote; in Zabaykalye, the SR incumbent garnered more than three times the party's support in the earlier election. These increases suggest strong support for incumbent candidates regardless of their party affiliation.

At the same time, tensions between the Kremlin and regional officials can emerge around the selection of stronger or weaker competitors from SO party ranks. Incumbents frequently attempt to block strong candidates in gubernatorial elections. The Kremlin can agree to this type of ballot management or can try to force the governor to confront a more significant test. In 2015, an interesting case emerged in the Omsk region, where the Federal Supreme Court insisted on the registration of a strong CPRF candidate, Oleg Denisenko (Moses 2017). Nevertheless, in most cases included in our study, significant competitors were denied registration, underscoring the Kremlin's limits in tolerating incumbent losses. Decisions appear to be made on a case-by-case basis that can sometimes lead to underestimation of opposition capacity. A clear example was the Moscow mayoral race where incumbent and Kremlin favourite, Sergei Sobyanin, expected to win in a landslide. After the Kremlin's insistence on Naval'nyi's participation, Sobyanin eked out a first-round victory, gathering 51.4% of the vote.[12] Similarly, in Irkutsk region in 2015, the underestimation of public discontent led to the interim incumbent governor's loss in the second round at the hands of the CPRF candidate, Sergei Levchenko.

The role of the SO in the Kremlin's management strategy raises important questions about the relationship between party system structures and electoral authoritarian regime stability. The Russian case suggests that a stable set of nominal opposition organisations enhance authoritarian regime stability over the long term by creating flexibility in the management system. This insight extends previous work suggesting that opposition cooptation is a critical element of all electoral authoritarian regimes governance strategies and that legislatures play a critical role in sustaining these systems.

Conclusion: the evolution of the Putin management system

This article makes three contributions to our understanding of contemporary Russian electoral competition and the functioning of hybrid regimes. First, the study highlights the potential tensions introduced by electoral competition as the Presidential Administration seeks to maximise perceptions of procedural legitimacy while regional officials work to ensure victory. It demonstrates the critical need for the regime's electoral management strategy to

[12]Naval'nyi laid out his plan for surpassing the municipal filter on his Live Journal blog on 19 June 2013. The English version of the post is available at: http://navalny-en.livejournal.com/84355.html, accessed 30 January 2018. When this plan failed to secure the required number of signatures, the Presidential Administration together with Mayor Sobyanin requested UR deputies to support his nomination. Debate over this decision was widely discussed in the Russia press but is summarised by State *Duma* Deputy, Nikolai Rhyzkov (2013).

be nimble not only in the face of changing national conditions but also to adapt to regional variation in social, political, and economic structures. This need to be nimble is part of what drives the regime to combine formal and informal strategies, and flexible laws and patterns of implementation, to ensure electoral victories. It also underscores the role that nominal parties—those that exist in name only and have no organisational structure—play in managing electoral legitimacy over time.

Second, our study raises the possibility that regimes balance exposure to risk and the potential for protest by using different mechanisms of electoral control to produce desired outcomes. Ballot structure and turnout levels provide a toolkit that can be used within the structure of flexible formal institutions to produce victories without inciting protest. The analysis demonstrates that different regions adopt different mixes of turnout and mobilisation tactics, and sometimes defy Kremlin expectations to pursue their own electoral security. We find that, in regions where the opposition is strongest, the Kremlin adopted the strategy that is least likely to provoke post-election protest: packing the ballot with controlled opposition candidates and allowing turnout to decline. In contrast, regions with low electoral uncertainty, often due to the implementation of an electoral punishment regime, choose risky electoral management systems that maximise votes and decrease any risk of electoral loss. This counterintuitive finding suggests one way in which opposition breakthroughs can occur: as competition increases the regime is less capable of imposing strategies that eliminate the possibility of vote protest, opposition coalitions, or boycotts.

Finally, unpacking these mechanisms of electoral management underscores that electoral outcomes are often an artefact of regime strategy and therefore are a very poor measure of regime strength, potential change, or opposition challenge. Given current rules and practices, Russian elections distort true voter and official preferences and exacerbate the information issues at the heart of the dictator's dilemma. Electoral management strategies artificially freeze the party system in configurations that do not represent voter interests. As a result, from time to time, the regime has to 'shock the system' by creating new manufactured opposition or altering electoral rules to provide different types of information while limiting the threat to regime interests.

Placing Russian electoral management in the context of the comparative literature also raises the question of what shapes the regional variation in electoral management strategies and, ultimately, regime stability. Defining electoral management strategies as a set of trade-offs across two dimensions is a new approach to understanding factors that shape election outcomes. This work complements existing studies that explain patterns of regional fraud by focusing on the components of management strategies and the patterns of deployment (Bader & van Ham 2015; Panov & Ross 2016). The next steps in our research are to explore the relevance of this management system over time and to explain why different regions adopt different approaches based on competing political, structural, and demographic differences. We hypothesise that this choice is largely a political decision based on regional factors, the nature of electoral risk, and the effective management of centre–regional goals, and plan future work to explain strategic choices over time and show how these strategies succeed or fail over a longer period.

REGINA SMYTH, Associate Professor of Political Science, Indiana University, Department of Political Science, 210 Woodburn Hall, 1100 East Seventh Street, Bloomington, IN 47405-7110, USA. *Email*: rsmyth@indiana.edu

ROSTISLAV TUROVSKY, Professor, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Lead of the Laboratory for Regional Political Studies, Rublevskoje shausse, 30, bld. 1, apt. 87, 121609 Moscow, Russian Federation. *Emails*: rft777@mail.ru, rturovsky@hse.ru

References

Bader, M. & van Ham, C. (2015) 'What Explains Regional Variation in Election Fraud? Evidence from Russia: A Research Note', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 31, 6.

Bækken, H. (2015) 'Selections before Elections: Double Standards in Implementing Election Registration Procedures in Russia?', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 48, 1.

Beissinger, M. R. (2013) 'The Semblance of Democratic Revolution: Coalitions in Ukraine's Orange Revolution', *American Political Science Review*, 107, 3.

Blaydes, L. (2010) *Competition without Democracy: Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).

Bunce, V. & Wolchik, S. (2010) 'Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes', *World Politics*, 62, 1.

Diaz-Cayeros, A., Magaloni, B. & Weingast, B. (2003) 'Tragic Brilliance: Equilibrium Hegemony and Democratization in Mexico', Hoover Institution, Stanford University, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Barry_Weingast/publication/241628440_Tragic_Brilliance_Equilibrium_Hegemony_And_Democratization_in_Mexico/links/0046352d0a8062dda8000000.pdf, accessed 30 January 2018.

Forrat, N. (2015) 'Shock-Resistant Authoritarianism: Teachers and Regime's Electoral Support in Putin's Russia', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, USA, 16–19 April.

Frye, T., Reuter, O. J. & Szakonyi, D. (2014) 'Political Machines at Work: Voter Mobilization and Electoral Subversion in the Workplace', *World Politics*, 66, 2.

Fukuoka, Y. (2015) 'Who Brought Down the Dictator? A Critical Reassessment of So-Called "People Power" Revolutions in the Philippines and Indonesia', *The Pacific Review*, 28, 3.

Gavrilova, S. (2015) 'Vybory gubernatora: est' nad chem podymat'', *Pravda Severa*, 16 September, available at: http://pravdasevera.ru/politics/-6rto49wu, accessed 30 January 2018.

Golosov, G. V. (2014) 'The September 2013 Regional Elections in Russia: The Worst of both Worlds', *Regional & Federal Studies*, 24, 2.

Goode, J. P. (2010) 'The Fall and Rise of Regionalism?', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 26, 2.

Goodnow, R., Moser, R. G. & Smith, T. (2014) 'Ethnicity and Electoral Manipulation in Russia', *Electoral Studies*, 36, 2.

Hale, H. (2005) *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).

Harvey, C. J. (2016) 'Changes in the Menu of Manipulation: Electoral Fraud, Ballot Stuffing, and Voter Pressure in the 2011 Russian Election', *Electoral Studies*, 41.

Howard, M. & Roessler, P. (2006) 'Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes', *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, 2.

Hyde, S. (2011) 'Catch Us If You Can: Election Monitoring and International Norm Diffusion', *American Journal of Political Science*, 55, 2.

Isaacs, R. & Whitmore, S. (2014) 'The Limited Agency and Life-cycles of Personalized Dominant Parties in the post-Soviet Space: The Cases of United Russia and Nur Otan', *Democratization*, 21, 4.

Kitschelt, H. & Wilkinson, S. (eds) (2007) *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).

Kolosov, V. & Turovsky, R. (1997a) 'Osenie-ziminie vybory glav ispolnitel'noi vlasti v regionakh: stsenarr peremen', *Polis*, 1.

Kolosov, V. & Turovsky, R. (1997b) 'The Autumn and Winter Elections of the Heads of the Executives in the Regions: Scenarios of Changes', *Polis. Political Studies*, 1, 1.

Kuntz, P. & Thompson, M. (2009) 'More than Just the Final Straw. Stolen Elections as Revolutionary Triggers', *Comparative Politics*, 41, 3.

Kynev, A. & Goode, J. P. (2014) 'Russian Local Elections', *Russian Analytical Digest*, 156.
Lankina, T. (2015) 'The Dynamics of Regional and National Contentious Politics in Russia: Evidence from a New Dataset', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62, 1.
Lust-Okar, E. (2006) 'Elections Under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan', *Democratization*, 13, 3.
Lyubarev, A. (2011) 'Electoral Legislation in Russian Regions', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63, 4.
Magaloni, B. (2006) *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico* (Cambridge & New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).
Malesky, E. & Schuler, P. (2011) 'The Single-Party Dictator's Dilemma: Information in Elections without Opposition', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 36, 4.
Moraski, B. J. & Reisinger, W. M. (2003) 'Explaining Electoral Competition across Russia's Regions', *Slavic Review*, 62, 2.
Moses, J. (2017) 'Political Rivalry and Conflict in Putin's Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69, 6.
Oreshkin, D. (2001) 'Geography of Electoral Culture and Integrity of Russia', *POLIS*, 1.
Panov, P. & Ross, C. (2013a) 'Sub-national Elections in Russia: Variations in United Russia's Domination of Regional Assemblies', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 65, 4.
Panov, P. & Ross, C. (2013b) 'Patterns of Electoral Contestation in Russian Regional Assemblies: Between Competitive and Hegemonic Authoritarianism', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 21, 3.
Panov, P. & Ross, C. (2016) 'Explanatory Factors for Electoral Turnout in the Russian Federation: The Regional Dimension', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 24, 3.
Remington, T. (2008) 'Patronage and the Party of Power: President-Parliament Relations under Vladimir Putin', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60, 6.
Reisinger, W. M. & Moraski, B. J. (2007) 'Eroding Democracy: Federal Intervention in Russia's Gubernatorial Elections', *Democratization*, 14, 4.
Reuter, O. J. (2013) 'Regional Patrons and Hegemonic Party Electoral Performance in Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 29, 2.
Reuter, O. J. (2017) *The Origins of Dominant Parties: Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
Reuter, O. J. & Turovsky, R. (2013) 'Dominant Party Rule and Legislative Leadership in Authoritarian Regimes', *Party Politics*, 20, 4.
Rhyzkov, N. (2013) 'The Kremlin is Split over Navalny', *Moscow Times*, 22 July, available at: https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/the-kremlin-is-split-over-navalny-26048, accessed 30 January 2018.
Robertson, G. B. (2010) *The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes: Managing Dissent in Post-Communist Russia* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).
Ross, C. (2005) 'Federalism and Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 13, 3.
Ross, C. (2014) 'Regional Elections and Electoral Malpractice in Russia: The Manipulation of Electoral Rules, Voters, and Votes', *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia*, 3, 1.
Ross, C. & Turovsky, R. (2015) 'Centralized but Fragmented: The Regional Dimension of Russia's "Party of Power"', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 23, 2.
Saikkonen, I. A. (2017) 'Electoral Mobilization and Authoritarian Elections: Evidence from Post-Soviet Russia', *Government and Opposition*, 52, 1.
Schatz, E. (2009) 'The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan', *Comparative Politics*, 41, 2.
Sharafutdinova, G. (2013) 'Getting the Dough, and Saving the Machine: Lessons from Tatarstan', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 29, 2.
Sharafutdinova, G. & Turovsky, R. F. (2017) 'The Politics of Federal Transfers in Putin's Russia: Regional Competition, Lobbying, and Federal Priorities', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 33, 2.
Simpser, A. (2013) *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections: Theory, Practice, and Implications* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).
Smyth, R. (1998) 'Political Ambition, Elite Competition, and Electoral Success in Saratov Oblast'', in Colton, T. J. & Hough, J. F. (eds) *Growing Pains. Russian Democracy and the Election of 1993* (Washington, DC, The Brookings Institution).
Smyth, R. (2006) *Candidate Strategies and Electoral Competition in the Russian Federation: Democracy without Foundation* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).
Smyth, R. (2016) 'Movement Resilience and Patterns of Protest in Contemporary Autocracy', paper presented at the 2016 PONARS Policy Conference, Washington, DC, 23–24 September.
Smyth, R. & Oates, S. (2015) 'Mind the Gaps: Media Use and Mass Action in Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67, 2.

Smyth, R. & Soboleva, I. (2016) 'Navalny's Gamesters: Protest, Opposition Innovation and the Challenge to Authoritarian Stability in Russia', *Russian Politics*, 1, 4.
Tucker, J. (2007) 'Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5, 1.
Turovsky, R. (2012) 'Elektoral'noe prostranstvo Rossii: ot navyazannoi natsionalizatsii k novoi regionalizatsii?', *Politiya*, 3.