Why allow local elections? Mobilization, manipulation, and the abolition of Russian mayoral elections

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Abstract

Local executives in electoral authoritarian regimes can perform important regime-sustaining functions, including by delivering votes to the ruling party at election-time. Furthermore, when local executives are themselves elected, regimes can benefit from improved legitimacy and efficiency in local government. Yet elected local executives may be more autonomous, creating principal-agent problems and increasing the risk that opposition groups can gain office. How do authoritarian governments manage this tension? Prior research on Russia shows that elections are used to co-opt strong local mayors, while weak mayors are replaced with appointed managers. This paper argues that strong mayors are more likely to see elections canceled if their local machine is not delivering manufactured electoral support to the national party, while weak mayors are unlikely to be targeted. This hypothesis is supported using data from 207 Russian cities, including election-forensic estimates of the severity of election manipulation in each city. The findings improve our understanding of cooptation of local leaders in electoral authoritarian regimes.

In 2013, an opposition candidate—Yevgeny Roizman—defeated the ruling-party candidate in the mayoral election for Russia's fourth-largest city of Yekaterinburg. As mayor, Roizman took visibly opposition positions on sensitive issues; shortly after taking office, for example, he joined a public protest in support of Russians facing trial for participation in 2012 protests against election fraud.[1] Throughout ongoing clashes with the regional administration, the ruling party moved first to strip the mayor's office of most of its powers, and then to abolish direct mayor elections.[2] Yet other opposition-oriented mayors met a gentler fate; for example, a popular opposition mayor of Yaktusk was pushed out of office by the regional authorities without resorting to the abolition of elections.[3] And elections have been abolished in scores of cities across the country with non-opposition mayors.

[1] Znak, "Roizman Becomes the Only Russian Mayor to Take Part in Protests in Support of Those Arrested in the "Bolotnaya Case"".

[2] Meduza, "Direct Mayoral Elections Are Abolished in Yekaterinburg," 2018.

[3] Meduza, "A Glitch in the System: The rise and fall of Sardana Avksenteiva, once the most popular mayor in Russia," January 2021.

Since 2004, Russia's local government structure has followed a hybrid model—with some cities permitted to elect their mayors, while others are led by non-elected city-managers. Cross-national and temporal variation in the selection regime for local executives allows for a test of authoritarian governments' motivations for allowing (or prohibiting) local elections. Previous research by Buckley et al[4] and Reuter et al—[5]on whose data collection this paper is partially based—argues that the ruling party in Russia cancelled local elections in places where mayors were relatively weak. In cities where mayors controlled strong local political machines, by contrast, mayors were able to deter changes in the selection regime.

This paper builds on their pathbreaking work by further incorporating the ruling party's incentives into the theory. The model presented by Reuter et al (2016) holds that ruling parties will generally prefer appointed local leaders, but may use the institution of local elections to co-opt stronger local elites into the party's overall political machine. In this paper, I argue that ruling parties' incentives are somewhat more complex. In particular, the likelihood that elections are canceled in a city hinges on the way the local elites' political machine is being used, not solely on its size or strength. Mayors with strong local political machines are likely to be targeted for replacement by city managers if they are not using their political resources to channel votes to the ruling party. By installing appointed city managers in such cities, the ruling party can gain control of a powerful political machine and turn it to their own ends. By contrast, weak mayors are relatively easy to remove, but taking over their machine likewise brings little benefit. As a result, they are less likely to be targeted.

I test this theory by collecting precinct-level election results for 207 cities across Russia, for the six national elections held between 2003 and 2012. I use this data to estimate the level of pro-United Russia electoral manipulation in each city for every election, using election forensic models. As a result, it is possible to identify which cities are home to political machines that are driving votes for the ruling party, which are shirking, and which are driving votes away from the party. The results show that mayors with strong local political machines who do not use those machines to benefit United Russia are the most likely to be replaced by appointed city managers—more likely, in fact, than mayors with weak political machines.

These results are important for understanding the role of elections in non-democracies, and also have implications for the study of election manipulation. Several closed authoritarian regimes have chosen to permit multi-candidate elections for local office, including China and Saudi Arabia. The decision to allow democratic contestation at the local level, even in a highly authoritarian context, highlights the benefits that authoritarian rulers believe local elections can generate.[6] However, opening local posts up to contestation also produces risks; it raises the possibility that opposition groups may capture local office and challenge the incumbent national elite,[7] and may intensify principal-agent problems as local elites become

[4]"Elections, Appointments, and Human Capital: The Case of Russian Mayors".

[5]"Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

[6]Martinez-Bravo et al., "The Rise and Fall of Local Elections in China: Theory and Empirical Evidence on the Autocrat's Trade-Off".

[7]Lucardi, "Building Support From Below? Subnational Elections, Diffusion Effects, and the Growth of

more autonomous. This paper improves our understanding of how governments and ruling parties balance the benefits and risks of these elections.

First, the findings emphasize the benefits that local elections produce for authoritarian stability, since local elections are likely to be maintained unless mayors are harming the ruling party through inaction or opposition. In this way, it builds on previous work by showing how ruling parties respond when co-optation by election has failed. Second, it shows a means by which ruling parties can integrate powerful local political machines into a national structure, while still maintaining the legitimation and other benefits of holding elections in regions with more fragmented political machines. The threat that the ruling party may abolish local elections may help keep other local political machines headed by elected mayors loyal to the regime. Finally, the results show that ruling parties are able to monitor their local agents' success at manipulating election outcomes, with implications for principal-agent models of election manipulation.[8]

1 Subnational elections in non-democracies

There is a long and growing literature that attests to the benefits that non-democratic regimes can gain from holding elections, including multiparty elections.[9] These elections help incumbent regimes detect and respond to areas of discontent in the population,[10] often through co-optation of opposition actors.[11] The dominant party's hold over the bulk of patronage resources, in addition to other advantages over the electoral and media environments, allows it to co-opt ambitious politicians to the detriment of genuine opposition groups.[12] By establishing understood rules for gaining access to power and spoils, they reduce the risk of intra-elite conflict and create incentives to deliver votes for the dominant party.[13] Winning elections, especially by large margins, helps to ensure cooperation from other members of society.[14] By helping mitigate the risk of internal challenges to the regime, and—sometimes—reducing the risk of popular revolt, multiparty elections can help resolve the twin problems faced by all non-democratic regimes.[15]

To generate these benefits with minimal risk, of course, multiparty elections must be sufficiently biased in favor of the ruling party.[16] Erosion of the ruling party's patronage advantage can lead to destabilizing outcomes,[17] as can an unexpectedly poor showing for the ruling

the Opposition in Mexico, 1984-2000".

[8] Rundlett and Svolik, "Deliver the Vote! Micromotives and Macrobehavior in Electoral Fraud".

[9] Brancati, "Democratic Authoritarianism: Origins and Effects".

[10] Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*.

[11] Gandhi and Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats"; Reuter and Robertson, "Legislatures, Cooptation, and Social Protest in Contemporary Authoritarian Regimes," 2015.

[12] Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose*, 2007; Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*.

[13] Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*; Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism".

[14] Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*; Simpser, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections*.

[15] Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*.

[16] Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.

[17] Greene, "The political economy of authoritarian single-party dominance," March 2010; Hale, *Patronal*

party that reveals new information about its weaknesses.[18] Strategic behaviors by the opposition may also increase the likelihood of democratic breakthrough in an election.[19]

Research on the benefits and risks of non-democratic elections has primarily focused on the national environment. Recently, however, researchers' attention has increasingly has turned toward the role that subnational elections play in sustaining or undermining authoritarian government. Several benefits have been identified. More competitive local elections increase citizens' trust in political leaders,[20] and allow ruling parties to gain information about the electorate and to recruit local leaders who can build linkages between voters and higher-level regime insiders.[21] Local elections allow governments to recruit higher quality local leaders, and to better implement popular policies, albeit at the cost of some control.[22]

At a more basic level, local executives have considerable influence in their territory, which national ruling parties often seek to incorporate into national political machines. Local mayors may have discretion over access to social welfare policies or public jobs, making them important brokers for clientelistic exchange.[23] Mayors may also have legal and enforcement powers that allow them to pressure or reward businesses and other groups in exchange for political support. For example, in Russia, school principals are dependent on the municipal government for their careers; pressure from the city government through the principals has led to schoolteachers forming a major component of the ruling party's election-manipulation strategy.[24] As will be discussed in more detail below, Russia's ruling party has for these reasons invested considerable resources in bringing local politics more firmly under the control of the 'power vertical' with its apex at the Kremlin.[25]

On the negative side of the ledger, local elections carry risks for authoritarian incumbents just as national ones do, in part due to local leaders' influence over voters in their territories. With their independent power bases, local elected officials can resist pressure from political higher-ups, leading to principal-agent problems that reduce the efficiency of vote-mobilization efforts.[26] Similarly, the existence of independent local elites creates the possibility that those

Politics, 2014.

[18] Pop-Eleches and Robertson, "Information, Elections, and Political Change".

[19] Bunce and Wolchik, "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes"; Howard and Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes".

[20] Manion, "Democracy, Community, Trust: The Impact of Elections in Rural China," 2006.

[21] Manion, "'Good Types' in Authoritarian Elections: The Selectoral Connection in Chinese Local Congresses," 2017.

[22] Martinez-Bravo et al., "The Rise and Fall of Local Elections in China: Theory and Empirical Evidence on the Autocrat's Trade-Off".

[23] Mares and Young, "The Core Voter's Curse: Clientelistic Threats and Promises in Hungarian Elections," 2018; Mares and Young, "Varieties of clientelism in Hungarian elections," 2019; Núñez, "Do clientelistic machines affect electoral outcomes? Mayoral incumbency as a proxy for machine prowess"; Szwarcberg, *Mobilizing poor voters : machine politics, clientelism, and social networks in Argentina*, 2015.

[24] Forrat, "Shock-Resistant Authoritarianism: Schoolteachers and Infrastructural State Capacity in Putin's Russia".

[25] Gel'man and Ryzhenkov, "Local regimes, sub-national governance and the 'power vertical' in contemporary Russia"; Golosov, Gushchina, and Kononenko, "Russia's local government in the process of authoritarian regime transformation: incentives for the survival of local democracy".

[26] Stokes et al., *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism*; Szwarcberg, *Mobilizing poor voters : machine politics, clientelism, and social networks in Argentina*, 2015; Szwarcberg, "Building a Following," 2013.

officials may defect to opposition parties, or attempt to form their own in defiance of the national ruling party;[27] in Russia, the early post-communist national elite learned this lesson the hard way as they barely fended off a challenge from the regional party Fatherland-All Russia party in the 1999 legislative election.[28] Moreover, the very existence of subnational elections can create an opportunity for opposition parties to win locally, develop a resource base over time, and eventually challenge the ruling party.[29]

In non-democracies, the national government can abolish subnational elections in order to avoid the problems that elected local officials may create. This approach has been taken by diverse authoritarian regimes: Russia abolished gubernatorial elections between 2004 and 2012,[30] in addition to mayoral elections in many communities from 2004 onward, military governments in Latin American ended mayoral elections in order to facilitate their political programs,[31] and mayors were appointed under the Suharto regime in Indonesia.[32] In many countries, local leadership roles continue to be filled by traditional leaders like chiefs or headmen; only about a third of such positions worldwide are elected, with the remainder being filled by appointment or inheritance.[33] Appointment of local executives is also the historic norm in single-party dictatorships, as well as in modern monarchies like Saudi Arabia.[34] Authoritarian countries which have established elected mayoralities for the first time could, if they found it to be in their interest, abolish them as well.

There is thus wide variation in the degree to which non-democratic governments permit local executive elections, and a theoretical expectation that allowing (or prohibiting) local elections carries both benefits and risks. Why, then, do some ruling parties allow elections, others appoint local executives, and some pursue a hybrid approach? The question has important implications for authoritarian stability, given that subnational actors may help sustain or subvert national authoritarian governments. An important explanation for this variation is provided by Reuter et al,[35] upon whose work this paper builds. They argue that subnational elections are more likely to be held in places where local elites control significant political resources, as a means of co-opting those elites into the national political machine. However, as argued in more detail below, this theoretical lens is limited—in particular, it

[27] Aspinall and Hicken, "Guns for hire and enduring machines: clientelism beyond parties in Indonesia and the Philippines"; Aspinall, "WHEN BROKERS BETRAY: Clientelism, Social Networks, and Electoral Politics in Indonesia"; Berenschot, "The Political Economy of Clientelism: A Comparative Study of Indonesia's Patronage Democracy"; Camp, "Cultivating Effective Brokers: A Party Leader's Dilemma"; De Kadt and Larreguy, "Agents of the regime? Traditional leaders and electoral politics in South Africa".

[28] Colton and McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy*; Gel'man, "Party Politics in Russia: From Competition to Hierarchy".

[29] Lucardi, "Building Support From Below? Subnational Elections, Diffusion Effects, and the Growth of the Opposition in Mexico, 1984-2000".

[30] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments in Authoritarian Regimes," 2012.

[31] Eaton, "Decentralization's Nondemocratic Roots: Authoritarianism and Subnational Reform in Latin America".

[32] Martinez-Bravo, "The Role of Local Officials in New Democracies: Evidence from Indonesia".

[33] Baldwin and Holzinger, "Traditional Political Institutions and Democracy: Reassessing Their Compatibility and Accountability".

[34] Kraetzschmar, "Electoral rules, voter mobilization and the Islamist landslide in the Saudi municipal elections of 2005".

[35] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

does not account for the ways in which elected mayors are utilizing their resources prior to reform.

2 Theory

Reuter et al[36] argue that subnational elections serve a dual purpose in non-democratic regimes: assuaging local elites by granting them greater autonomy, and co-opting them into the national elites' larger political machine. However, these two goals may frequently be in tension. By the nature of co-optation in an electoral authoritarian regime, successfully co-opted elites must utilize their resources to generate electoral support for the ruling party.[37] Yet, from the perspective of the national leadership, co-optation of local actors is plagued by principal-agent problems, driven by the difficulty of monitoring subordinates and punishing those who shirk. As a result, elected local elites who have an independent power base can rely on their greater autonomy from the center to deliver a less-than-maximal level of electoral support for their supposed patrons—thus diverting more resources for their private gain—or support opposition actors.

I argue that appointment regimes for local executives are primarily a means of exerting greater vertical control over a local political machine—the industries, businesses, workers, and social groups which depend on the local executive for benefits as clients. In theory, exercising this control could be used in two ways. It could primarily be used to undermine pro-opposition local machines, by displacing elected opposition leaders with appointed pro-regime executives. Alternatively, it could be used to mitigate principal-agent problems between national political elites and nominally pro-regime local executives, by replacing disloyal elected clients with more easily monitored appointees.

As discussed in the review of the literature above, local executives can be a crucial link in the patronage networks that non-democratic governments rely on to deliver votes. They can benefit from local information about regime supporters, opponents, and swing voters, and can use their formal and informal powers to channel support to the ruling party. However, due to these advantages, they have opportunities to siphon resources for their own political fortunes or private gain. Along these lines, prior work has shown that local intermediaries like mayors, village heads, and chiefs generate better electoral results for the dominant party when they are dependent on the state for their position than do those with more independent power bases in their localities.[38] More independent brokers may sell their services—that is, their ability to deliver votes from their network of clients—to the highest bidder, weakening parties and increasing electoral volatility.[39]

[36] Ibid.

[37] Gandhi and Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism"; Gerschewski, "The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes".

[38] Gottlieb, "Explaining Variation in Broker Strategies: A Lab-in-the-Field Experiment in Senegal"; Martinez-Bravo, "The Role of Local Officials in New Democracies: Evidence from Indonesia"; Nathan, "Electoral Consequences of Colonial Invention: Brokers, Chiefs, and Distribution in Northern Ghana".

[39] Novaes, "Disloyal Brokers and Weak Parties".

The risk of broker defection leads patrons to invest more in preserving their existing networks, rather than more efficiently distributing resources to expand their pool of clients.[40] In environments where leaders have less ability to monitor local brokers' electoral performance, the latter have incentives to underdeliver—[41]expending less effort mobilizing voters and likely diverting more resources to their own private consumption.[42] Moreover, a growing literature finds that these principal-agent problems are endemic in the process of manipulating elections generally.[43] As a result, national leaders face a problem—even local executives who publicly proclaim support for the ruling party, and preside over electoral victories for that party, may be under-utilizing their resources and depriving the ruling party of votes it might capture with a more loyal agent. Appointment regimes may allow ruling parties to reduce agency loss and more effectively deliver those votes.

Principal-agent problems are driven by two factors: asymmetry of preferences and asymmetry of information.[44] Appointed local executives who owe their position to party higher-ups are likely to have preferences that are more closely aligned to their principals than elected officials for two reasons. First, unlike with elected mayors, political leaders have direct influence over who is nominated and approved to the city manager position. This makes it more likely that local executives will be allies and dependents of higher-level officials, as has often been the case for Russia's appointed city managers.[45] Second, appointed city managers can be easily removed from office by higher-level officials, while elected mayors cannot. By making it easier to remove recalcitrant local executives, an appointment regime helps align the incentives of the local executive with those of the higher-level patronage network. Elected mayors who shirk in converting political resources into votes for the national party are partially shielded from reprisal, giving them room to make greater personal use of their resources. They can remain in office, and potentially rise politically, by expanding a network of lower-level brokers and developing an independent power base. On the other hand, with limited protection from reprisal and few outside options, appointees have stronger incentives to maximize the national party's rate of return from local political resources. As a result of having less leverage in the principal-agent dynamic, appointed managers are likely to be more willing to mobilize their clients and resources on their patron's behalf.

Appointment regimes for local executives are therefore not a means of co-opting individual mayors, since executives would have greater independence under an election regime. However, an appointment system can be a means of capturing the local political machine and putting it under the supervision of officials more closely aligned with the ruling party. In places like Russia, where political success is dependent on controlling the largest network of

[40]Camp, "Cultivating Effective Brokers: A Party Leader's Dilemma".

[41]Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin, "Parties, Brokers, and Voter Mobilization".

[42]Carlson, "Distribution or Diversion ? Distribution of Local Public Goods in the Presence of Clientelist Brokers".

[43]Harvey, "Principal–Agent Dynamics and Electoral Manipulation: Local Risks, Patronage and Tactical Variation in Russian Elections, 2003–2012"; Rundlett and Svolik, "Deliver the Vote! Micromotives and Macrobehavior in Electoral Fraud".

[44]Holmström, "Moral Hazard and Observability"; Shavell, "Risk Sharing and Incentives in the Principal and Agent Relationship"; Miller, "The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models".

[45]Buckley, Garifullina, et al., "Elections, Appointments, and Human Capital: The Case of Russian Mayors".

clients, mayors are often machine bosses.[46] Elected Russian mayors "base their own support on long-nourished ties with local economic elites," allowing them to control significant sources of revenue and patronage.[47] The national ruling party may find these resources to be a tempting target, if they are not already being deployed to the party's benefit.

Launching an attack on the local machine boss by changing an existing electoral regime to an appointment system may harm the machine's capacity to deliver electoral support up the network, which could deter such an attack. This is due to the logic of patronal politics identified by Hale——[48]in which the struggle for control over patronage resources can intensify principal-agent problems——as well as to the importance of information and reputation to clientelistic exchange.[49] However, these costs are mitigated in two ways. First, reduced efficacy of the local machine is no cost to the ruling party at all if the local machine had previously been devoting resources largely to the opposition or to the local executive's personal electoral fortunes. Second, the ruling party can use its resources and influence over the appointment regime to develop patronage relationships between the local political machine and regional actors more closely aligned with the national leadership. Over time, new leadership can take over the resources of the old machine and turn it to the support of the ruling party.[50]

In Russia, as in other authoritarian systems, this new boss is likely to be the regional governor acting as an agent of the central government. Regional governors in the Russian case were able to use their numerous formal and informal levers of influence over the municipalities to induce city legislatures to convert elected mayoralities to council-manager systems in most large Russian cities.[51] City managers in Russia are hired and fired by the local council in conjunction with the regional governor; given that governors actively seek to influence the local councils,[52] this arrangement makes it highly likely that managers will be creatures of the regional government. And indeed this is the conclusion drawn by qualitative study of Russian city politics under city managers.[53]

An example from Russia (outside the time period studied here) helps illustrate this dynamic, showing how it takes time to dismantle and reconstitute local patronage networks. In 2013, an opposition-party mayor won the mayoral election in the regional capital of Petrozavodsk, prompting the regional administration to attempt to remove her and abolish elections there.

[46] Ledyaev and Chirikova, "Power in Local Russian Communities: Patterns of Interaction Between Legislative and Executive Branches of Local Government".

[47] Moses, "Russian Mayors Embattled," 2008.

[48] *Patronal Politics*, 2014.

[49] Nichter, *Votes for survival: relational clientelism in Latin America*; Stokes et al., *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism*.

[50] Golosov, "The territorial genealogies of Russia's political parties and the transferability of political machines".

[51] Buckley, Garifullina, et al., "Elections, Appointments, and Human Capital: The Case of Russian Mayors"; Moses, "Russian Mayors Embattled," 2008; Reuter et al., "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

[52] Moses, "Russian local politics in the Putin-Medvedev Era," 2010.

[53] Ledyaev and Chirikova, "Power in Local Russian Communities: Patterns of Interaction Between Legislative and Executive Branches of Local Government"; Vydrin, "Siti-Menedzheri v sisteme upravlenia munitsipalnymi obrazovaniyami (City Managers in the Municipal Management System)".

Initially, the mayor was protected by a majority faction in the city legislature; both the mayor and the majority deputies were part of the locally powerful patronage network of two businessmen-politicians. The regional administration launched a series of criminal investigations against the family and associates of the two local patrons, ultimately culminating in the arrest of one and the exile of the other. Turchenko quotes a local journalist as saying, "As a result, [the local] coalition began to collapse and lost its influence in the Petrosovet [local council]. . . and the members of the coalition in the Petrosovet started to look for a new patron."[54] Consequently, the local legislature became loyal to the regional authorities, who voted in 2015 to abolish local executive elections and to recall the mayor. The individual selected as city manager had only a limited background in local politics, and announced in her first interview after taking office that she would work closely with the regional authorities and the local council together, and that the regional government had just provided funds for road repairs in the city.[55]

The preceding discussion can be summarized as follows. Appointment regimes for local executives allow for greater vertical control over local political machines, and can result in more effective electoral mobilization for the ruling party. Ruling parties will benefit most from appointment regimes in cities where the local political machine is highly consolidated, but the machine is under-delivering electoral support for the party. In addition, ruling parties stand to benefit more from taking over highly consolidated local machines than less consolidated ones. This suggests the following hypothesis.

> Hypothesis 1: For cities with highly consolidated local political machines, a shift to an appointment regime is more likely in places where the machine is failing to generate high levels of votes for the national leadership.

Finally, it is also possible that cities with opposition mayors may be attractive targets for an appointment regime, to remove an opposition figure and capture local political resources. However, they may also represent especially risky targets, since ousting elected opposition actors in this way could prompt a backlash. Faced with such an attack, local elites can attempt to use their political machines to mobilize clients in opposition to the ruling party.[56] Appointed executives may be perceived as less legitimate than elected ones,[57] and to the extent that citizens and civil society groups feel that abolishing an elected office to undercut an opposition figure reduces regime legitimacy, it could further drive protest.[58] In practice in Russia, abolition of local elections in response to an opposition victory has been relatively rare, and can result in significant negative public attention.[59] And though the circumstances are distinct, the removal of an elected opposition-party governor from office in Khabarovsk Krai led to large and sustained anti-regime protests.[60] Based on these theoretical expectations and empirical observations, I predict that opposition control of the mayoral office

[54] Turchenko, "The rise and fall of local self-government in Petrozavodsk," 166.
[55] Koshleleva, "First Exclusive Interview with the New Mayor of Petrozavodsk".
[56] Robertson, *The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes*.
[57] Blakkisrud, "Governing the Governors".
[58] Thyen and Gerschewski, "Legitimacy and Protest Under Authoritarianism".
[59] Turchenko, "The rise and fall of local self-government in Petrozavodsk".
[60] Troianovski, "Protests Swell in Russia's Far East in a Stark New Challenge to Putin".

is likely to have a negative effect on shift to appointment regime, compared to pro-regime control.

> Hypothesis 2: Cities with opposition mayors are less likely to experience cancelation of elections than cities with nominally pro-regime mayors.

In sum, cities with more consolidated local machines are more likely to be targeted by the ruling party for takeover, but only if those machines are not being used by incumbent elected mayors to benefit the ruling party. Mayors who have consolidated strong political machines in their cities and who *do* use their machines to deliver votes to the ruling party are more likely to have their election regimes retained.

3 Data and methods

To test these hypotheses, I build on the data on Russian mayoral elections collected by Reuter et al.[61] I then used automated web-scraping techniques to collect precinct-level election results from Russia's Central Election Commission for each of the cities, for the national elections from 2003 to 2012. I do not include national elections beyond this window, due to the adoption of an additional law on local government in 2014 which further changed the institutional position of the municipalities relative to the center and the regions.[62] The number of precincts per city ranges from approximately 200 in the smallest cities to over 3,000 in the largest, per election year. Each election year includes approximately 90,000 precinct-level observations.

Using this dataset, I employ an election forensic technique developed by Myagkov et al—[63]in which a strong positive relationship between precinct-level turnout and a party's absolute vote-share is seen as suspicious—to estimate the level of election manipulation in each city in each election. The measure is described in more detail below, in the section on explanatory variables.

3.1 The Russian case

3.2 Dependent variable

The dependent variable in this study is the same as that used by Reuter et al——[64]a binary variable indicating whether or not a city has had its electoral selection regime canceled in a given year. That is, the variable elections canceled takes on a value of 0 for all years

[61] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

[62] Moses, "Putin and Russian Subnational Politics," 2015.

[63] *The Forensics of Election Fraud*.

[64] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

prior to the shift to appointed city mayors, a value of 1 for the year in which elections were canceled, and a value of 'NA' for all subsequent years. Since the dependent variable is binary, all models are logit regressions with standard errors clustered by city. As in the paper by Reuter et al,[65] including base, square, and cubic terms for the time since current mayor took office allows for a consideration of the effect of time on the probability of experiencing treatment in a way that is equivalent to a Cox proportional hazards model.[66]

3.3 Explanatory variables

Testing the theory described above requires an operationalization of executives' effectiveness in delivering electoral support for the ruling party. Simply using the raw vote-share for United Russia or Vladimir Putin (or Dmitry Medvedev in 2008) in each city would likely be an inappropriate operationalization of this concept. United Russia, and to a larger degree President Putin, have genuine bases of support in the population, which may vary across cities. Moreover, different cities and regions of Russia are characterized by variation in the degree of elite consolidation and subnational authoritarianism; this results in relatively wide variation in the party's electoral support.[67]

Given this heterogeneity in electoral support for the ruling party across Russia, vote-share is likely to weakly correlated——if at all—with local executives' efforts to deliver votes. An executive in a competitive city with less authoritarian control may expend considerable effort and resources to boost the party's electoral fortunes, while still producing a low margin of victory. An executive in a region with high social control or high natural support for the ruling party may expend few resources and coast to a wide margin of victory. One approach to correct for this could be to use a set of covariates to estimate a baseline level of support for United Russia in each city, and then determine whether the actual result exceeds or falls below this threshold; Reuter and Robertson[68] take this approach in a study of Russia's regions. Taking that approach could lead to mis-specification of the baseline model, especially in the context of cities, where covariate data is less available. Instead, I measure a local executive's effort on behalf of the ruling party using election forensics to estimate the level of pro-regime electoral manipulation in each city.

Specifically, I use a multilevel model with random slopes and intercepts to model each city's precinct-level absolute vote-share for the regime's presidential candidate–Vladimir Putin in every election year except 2008, when Dmitry Medvedev took his place–as a function of precinct-level turnout. Absolute vote-share is the number of votes for a candidate divided by the total number of registered voters, and is distinct from relative vote-share–the number of votes for a candidate divided by the number of votes cast. A large positive regression coefficient relating the candidate's absolute vote-share to turnout suggests that the candidate is systematically generating more votes from the pool of voters in high turnout areas than

[65] Ibid.

[66] Carter and Signorino, "Back to the future: Modeling time dependence in binary data".

[67] Panov and Ross, "Volatility in Electoral Support for United Russia: Cross-Regional Variations in Putin's Electoral Authoritarian Regime," 2019; Panov and Ross, "Sub-National Elections in Russia: Variations in United Russia's Domination of Regional Assemblies," 2013.

[68] "Subnational Appointments in Authoritarian Regimes," 2012.

in low turnout areas. The variable *lagged turnout coefficient* is the city-level regression coefficient for turnout on absolute vote-share, and applies to the city for each observation year until the next presidential election (when it is updated).

A large, positive coefficient for absolute vote-share on turnout is suspicious under the assumption that precincts are roughly homogenous across the territory being evaluated. For example, a large coefficient could be generated if a particular demographic groups tends to support one party, turn out at a higher rate than other groups, and cluster within a subset of precincts—a false positive. When precincts are homogenous, or appropriate statistical controls are in place,[69] large, positive coefficients are suggestive of an effort to inflate the candidate's results though vote-buying, ballot-stuffing, fraud, clientelist mobilization, or other measures. This assumption of homogenous precincts is especially plausible in this study, where the analysis is largely confined to relatively small cities, compared to studies where precincts are grouped nationally or by region. As an additional precaution, some of the included control variables help control for factors such as the city's size proportional to its region and its average income level, which may influence turnout patterns or internal diversity.

Figure 1 uses a comparison of two cities' results in the 2011 election to illustrate the variable. Each point represents a precinct; the slope of the line represents the regression coefficient linking turnout and absolute vote-share for the ruling party. The left panel shows results from precincts in Velikij Novgorod, a regional capital and one of Russia's oldest cities. Though there are a few outliers in the city, the tight cluster of precincts in the lower left of the plot—indicating both modest levels of turnout and low absolute vote-share for United Russia—suggests no systematic relationship between the two variables. The right panel shows data from Volgodonsk, a city of about 170,000 residents in southwestern Russia. Here a distinctly suspicious pattern is visible. A higher proportion of precincts show high levels of turnout, and these are systematically correlated with higher absolute vote-share for United Russia. Put informally, in precincts where about 80 percent of people turned out to vote, about sixty percent of eligible voters voted for United Russia; this is more than triple the proportion of eligible voters who supported the ruling party in precincts where only 50 percent turned out. The random slopes in the multilevel model generate this turnout coefficient for each city in the sample, for each national election from 2003-2012.

Two other explanatory variables are included. First, the margin of victory for the incumbent mayor in the most recent election is taken from the Reuter et al[70] dataset. Second, mayor's partisan affiliation is coded using data from Buckley et al.[71] Here, mayoral partisanship is operationalized as a dummy variable for ruling-party membership. That is, mayors belonging to United Russia are coded as 1, with all others—opposition, independents, and those with unknown affiliation—are coded as zero. This approach maximizes available observations while making a distinction between mayors who are publicly affiliated with the ruling party and those who are not.

[69] Deckert, "Patterns of Fraud".

[70] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

[71] "Staying Out of Trouble : Criminal Cases Against Russian Mayors".

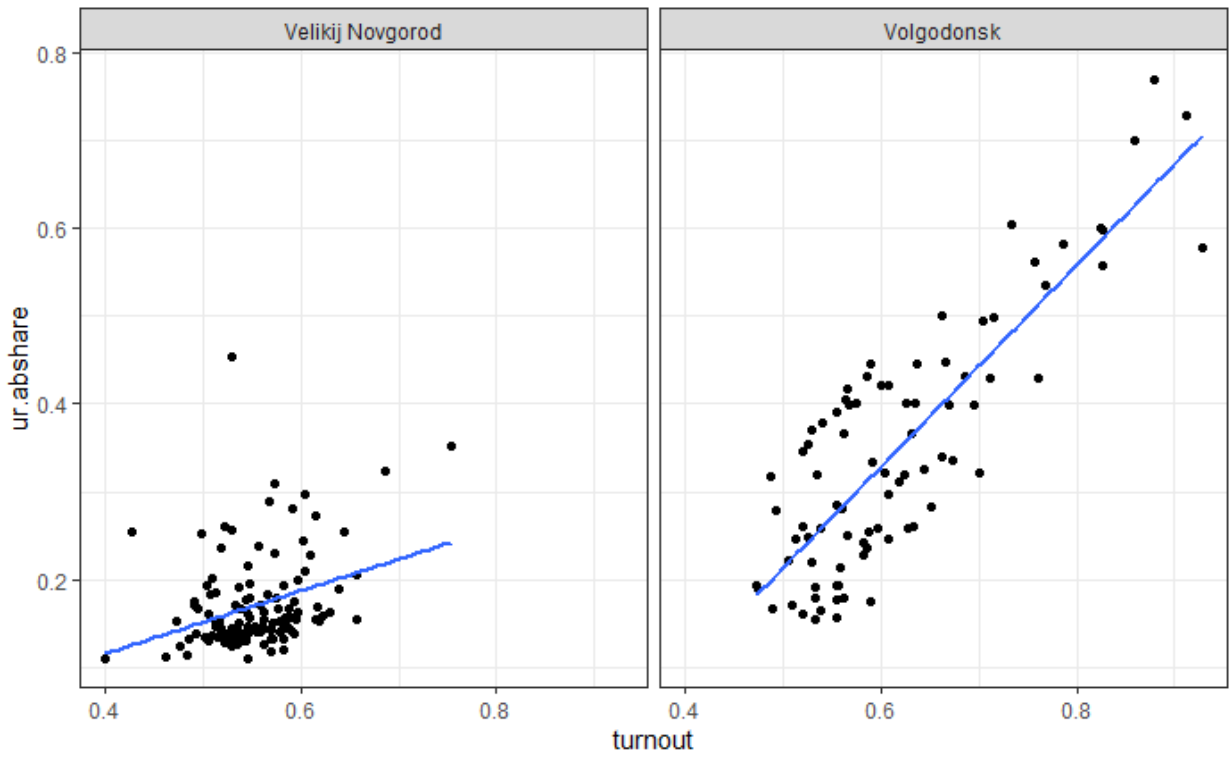

Figure 1: Election manipulation coefficients

Through much of the 2000s, formal partisan affiliation was rare for mayors. Before the gradual absorption of regional and local political machines into United Russia, local politics was largely characterized by non-partisan patronage; locally powerful leaders campaigned and governed as independents, relying on their own political resources.[72] In 2005, for example, only about twenty percent of heads of municipal administrations belonged to a party.[73]

3.4 Control variables

Control variables are identical to those used by Reuter et al,[74] with two additional variables. With regard to the local political balance of power, controls include a dummy variable indicating a United Russia majority in the town council, as well as the margin of victory for United Russia in the regional legislature. To capture the extent of civil society openness in the city, some models include the pre-reform rating of civil society development taken from expert surveys conducted by Petrov and Titkov.[75] Other structural factors are captured by the average salary in the city, and the population size of the city relative to the population of the region in which it is located. Finally, Reuter et al include dummy variables marking each two-year period in the dataset, as well as the base, squared, and cubed values of the length of each mayor's tenure in office in years. In addition to these controls, I add an indicator of the type of elected mayor in the city. Russia's mayors may be 'strong' types responsible for all executive policy, or 'weak' types that largely preside over the city council: a dummy variable constructed from data in Buckley et al[76] captures this distinction. Lastly, I include the ruling party's most recent presidential vote-share in that city, since this could provide an alternative indicator of local elite performance which may trigger executive reform.

4 Results

The results of this analysis are presented in Tables 1 and 2, along with the figures below. The first table presents two models that do not include control variables based on the partisan make-up of the regional legislature—a variable for which there is considerable missingness—while the three models in Table 2 include these controls. While omitted from the table to improve readability, all five models include cubic polynomials for mayoral tenure and two-year fixed effect dummies included in Reuter et al's[77] models to account for time effects. All models also cluster standard errors by city.

[72] Golosov, "The territorial genealogies of Russia's political parties and the transferability of political machines".

[73] Ross, "Municipal reform in the Russian Federation and Putin's "Electoral vertical"".

[74] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

[75] *Democratic Ratings of the Regions from the Carnegie Moscow Center*.

[76] "Staying Out of Trouble : Criminal Cases Against Russian Mayors".

[77] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

Table 1: Logit models of election abolition

	1	2
Most recent margin	-17.917***	-24.363***
	(5.397)	(7.581)
Upward manipulation (lagged)	-2.277	-1.762
	(1.757)	(2.072)
Most recent margin x Mayor party (UR)	36.281***	46.691***
	(8.953)	(11.256)
Mayor party (UR) x Up. manip (lagged)	7.941*	8.614*
	(4.089)	(4.507)
Margin x Upward manip. (lagged)	14.896***	19.584***
	(5.333)	(7.214)
Strong-type elected mayor	-0.119	-1.061
	(1.221)	(1.601)
UR presidential vote-share (lagged)	-2.627	-2.953
	(2.979)	(3.534)
UR council majority		0.869*
		(0.448)
Populaton proportion		-1.152
		(1.344)
Avg. salary (log)		1.320**
		(0.531)
Civil society rating (1991)		-0.439
		(0.280)
Margin x Mayor party (UR) x Upward manip. (lagged)	-38.282***	-48.445***
	(10.482)	(12.848)
Num.Obs.	620	531
AIC	294.2	239.5
BIC	369.5	333.6
Log.Lik.	-130.100	-97.773
Cubic time polynomials	Y	Y
Two-year dummies	Y	Y

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

Note:
* = $p < .1$, ** = $p < .05$, *** = $p < .01$

Table 2: Logit models of election abolition

	3	4	5
Most recent margin	-33.630***	-25.877***	-32.005***
	(10.972)	(7.838)	(10.906)
Mayor party (UR)	-12.861**	-11.961**	-14.341**
	(5.778)	(4.810)	(5.901)
Upward manipulation (lagged)	-1.667	-3.773*	-3.343
	(2.372)	(2.180)	(2.568)
Most recent margin x Mayor party (UR)	72.536***	57.491***	73.289***
	(17.585)	(13.500)	(17.842)
Mayor party (UR) x Up. manip (lagged)	15.236**	14.079**	17.115**
	(7.529)	(6.153)	(7.713)
Margin x Upward manip. (lagged)	27.832***	24.878***	30.853***
	(9.863)	(7.286)	(9.850)
Strong-type elected mayor	-2.512	-0.664	-1.711
	(1.557)	(1.350)	(1.549)
UR presidential vote-share (lagged)	-6.420	-6.392	-6.483
	(4.475)	(4.024)	(4.625)
UR council majority	1.113**		1.160**
	(0.560)		(0.557)
Populaton proportion	-2.278		-2.915*
	(1.734)		(1.765)
Avg. salary (log)	1.322**		1.488**
	(0.634)		(0.658)
Civil society rating (1991)	-0.582*		-0.587
	(0.347)		(0.360)
Regional election margin	1.390	5.460**	5.550**
	(1.574)	(2.218)	(2.467)
Reg. margin x Mayor margin		-9.500*	-13.289**
		(5.115)	(6.083)
Margin x Mayor party (UR) x Upward manip. (lagged)	-78.792***	-61.925***	-79.976***
	(20.754)	(16.115)	(21.126)
Num.Obs.	403	438	403
AIC	179.2	205.3	176.2
BIC	263.1	282.9	264.1
Log.Lik.	-68.580	-83.673	-66.079
Cubic time polynomials	Y	Y	Y
Two-year dummies	Y	Y	Y

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

Note:
* = p < .1, ** = p < .05, *** = p <.01

The tables show largely consistent effects for control variables, with appointment regimes less likely to occur in regimes with more developed civil societies, and more likely to occur in wealthier cities. A majority for United Russia on the city council is also positively associated with abolition. In most cases, Reuter et al[78] did not find these controls to be significant; in these models, however, they are significantly correlated with reform in plausible directions.

Since the effects of interest are captured as interaction terms in the models, they are best understood using marginal effects plots. In all cases below, the values set for conditioning variables reflect one standard deviation above and below the mean of that variable. Figure 2 shows the results of Model 2. In the top row, the probability of abolition is shown for ruling-party and non-ruling party mayors, conditional on local political machine strength and on the level of *upward manipulation*. The upper-right panel shows that, for United Russia mayors with strong local machines, the odds of abolition are significantly higher when they are struggling to deliver votes for the national leadership. In the bottom row, the marginal effect of *upward manipulation* is shown conditional on *mayor's margin* and party status. The right-hand panel shows that, for United Russia mayors who are struggling to deliver manufactured votes, the likelihood of abolition increases significantly wth the strength of the mayor's own machine. However, this relationship is not detected for those whose machine is more successful in generating votes. In general, no significant effects are detected for non-UR mayors. Figure 3 shows similar results, with the inclusion of additional region-level controls.

Taken together, the results show that non-UR mayors face a low predicted probability of abolition that remains the same across all levels of mayoral margin and upward electoral manipulation—contrary to the expectations of Hypothesis 2. A very different pattern appears for non-opposition mayors. When these mayors preside over relatively weak political machines, they are unlikely to face abolition and do not run risks any higher than their opposition counterparts. As mayors' local strength increases, the risk of abolition increases dramatically at low-levels of upward manipulation. A strong mayor with a 75-point local margin faces an estimated 38-percent chance of abolition if their efforts to deliver votes for the national leadership that falls one standard deviation below the mean (see Figure 2). An identical mayor who delivers manipulation at a level one standard deviation *above* the mean, by contrast, faces almost no risk of abolition. These results add important context to the expectation from prior work, that the ruling party would leave strong mayors in elected positions. Here we see that some strong mayors do, in fact, avoid abolition—but only if they are successfully coopted into deploying their resources to support national patrons.

5 Discussion

Where local elites are strong in political resources, Reuter et al[79] argue, authoritarian governments will be more likely to permit an electoral selection regime for the local executive. In their model, this arrangement assuages these strong local elites by granting them some independence. However, this model only works for authoritarian leaders if local elected elites

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

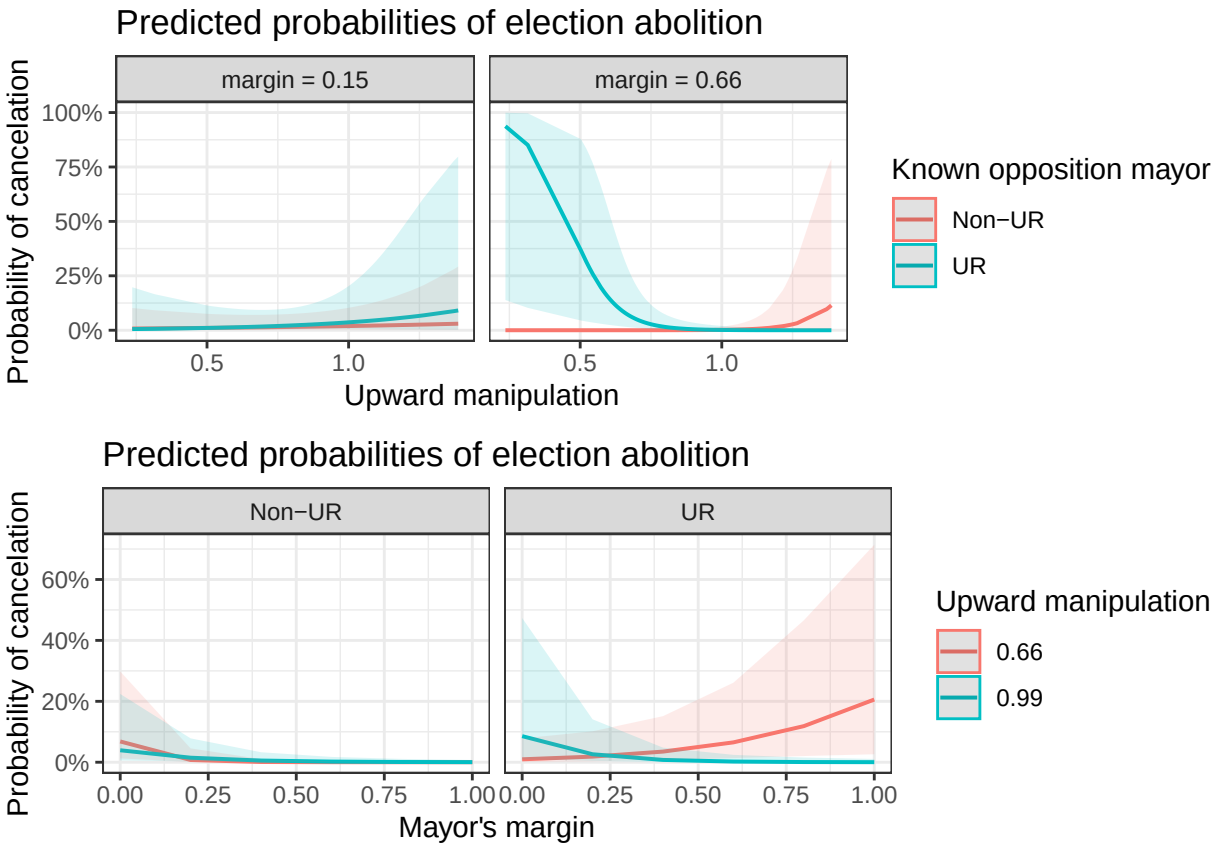

Figure 2: Predicted probability of election abolition (Model 2)

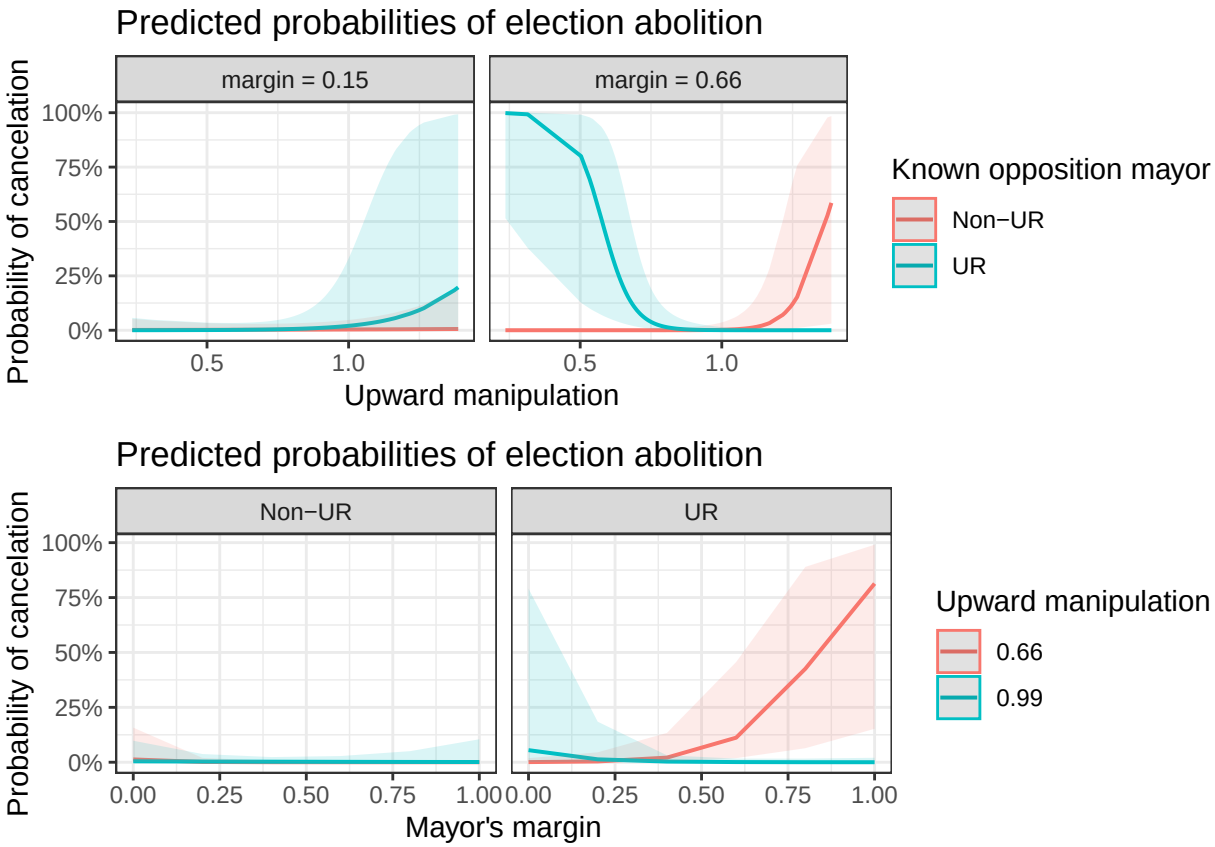

Figure 3: Predicted probability of election abolition (Model 5)

are successfully co-opted into the national political machine——that is, if they utilize their resources to deliver votes for the ruling party in national elections. If an elected mayor with a powerful political machine is not using those resources to benefit the ruling party, then the benefits of removing the elected mayor may outweigh the costs.

Strong mayors who do not use their political machines to the ruling party's benefits are tempting targets for three reasons. First, a strong, autonomous local political machine under the control of an elected mayor represents a threat—the machine may be used against the interests of the incumbent regime in the future, by challenging a pro-regime governor, diverting local resources away from national political leaders' interests, or by lending support to a rival group of elites. Second, the cost of any disruption to the political machine caused by the reform is minimal for the ruling party—it wasn't receiving the machine's manufactured votes in the first place. Third, a powerful local machine controls a rich pool of votes that, once taken over, can be utilized to bolster the incumbent regime. Strong mayors who are not using their powers to deliver votes to the national ruling party are, in other words, not worth their keep.

These results raise at least two questions that point to future research. First, why are opposition mayors not targeted? A strong opposition mayor may seem like an even more tempting target, given that such a mayor's resources are directly harming the ruling party electorally. While specific causal mechanisms of regime-opposition dynamics are not tested here, several are plausible and could be the subject of future research. For mayors from the liberal, non-systemic opposition, a strong margin of victory could be indicative of 'genuine' political support in the city—that is, support not motivated by patronage. Such mayors would not be attractive targets for electoral abolition; they do not preside over a political machine that could be acquired, and removal could provoke a backlash among their supporters.[80] However, such mayors are exceedingly rare. Ross[81] finds only three mayors from liberal parties across Russia.

In fact, during this period, most opposition-party mayors were members of the systemic opposition, and of these by far the largest share belong to the KPRF.[82] In the early post-communist period, the KPRF owed its political support to older and rural voters, as well as to political resources inherited from the social and economic structure of the Soviet Union.[83] KPRF mayors are likely to preside over their own political machines, just as independent mayors, but they are further protected by their connection to the national party. It is worth noting, in this context, that despite its 'systemic' nature, the KPRF can still apply genuine pressure to the ruling party, as when its activists took part in regional protests against election-rigging in 2011 and 2012, while other systemic parties were more easily co-opted.[84] Letting KPRF machines be, then, may be an extension of the effort to extend spoils

[80]For an extreme example of this, consider the months-long protest wave sparked by the removal of an elected governor from the systemic opposition in Khabarovsk in 2020.

[81]"Municipal reform in the Russian Federation and Putin's "Electoral vertical"".

[82]Ibid.

[83]Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia?*, 2005.

[84]Dollbaum, "Curbing protest through elite co-optation? Regional protest mobilization by the Russian systemic opposition during the 'for fair elections' protests 2011–2012".

opportunities to KPRF leaders in exchange for tranquility.[85] It should be noted, however, that in recent years support for the KPRF has become more reminiscent of main opposition parties in other non-democracies—more urban, and more educated.[86] This could indicate a decline in machine-based support for the party, and an increase in 'genuine' opposition support for the party. Further research is needed to untangle the relationships between these factors and the unlikelihood of election abolition in opposition-run cities.

Second, why is it that—at least in the Russian case—overall presidential vote-share does not appear to affect the likelihood that mayoral elections will be abolished, while the much harder-to-observe level of electoral manipulation does? It is possible that central elites face the same challenges when evaluating local mayors as they do when evaluating governors:[87] some executives operate in territories that are naturally favorable to the opposition, while others are naturally favorable to the ruling party. This means that raw vote-share is an unreliable signal of the executive's level of effort, and central elites must look deeper to determine whether an executive is in fact using the resources at their disposal to generate votes effectively. Future research might investigate whether their are circumstances when raw vote-share is more influential in elites' decision-making.

Finally, these findings provide some insight into how ruling parties in electoral authoritarian regimes weigh the costs and benefits of local elections. Here, it is important to note that these results are subject to certain scope conditions, since they cover a single country during a relatively narrow time period. During this period in Russia, the Kremlin was pursuing a centralizing policy aimed at building up the ruling United Russia party, weakening regional governors and oligarchs, and reining in the national media. For much of this period, Vladimir Putin's personal popularity provided a stabilizing force for the regime. In this context—one of increasing but not yet consolidated authoritarianism—the results suggest that regimes may largely tolerate the risk that opposition mayors will be elected, in exchange for the regime-legitimation benefits that such a risk brings. Instead, abolition of local executive elections is aimed at bringing control of local patronage networks and political machines under the control of the center, in order to redirect those resources toward generating votes for the ruling party.

6 Conclusion

While sometimes the focus of less attention from scholars than more visible developments at the national and regional level, local politics are not overlooked by authoritarian ruling parties. Local leaders are the last layer in the pyramids of linked actors that connect the national elite to voters. Delegating power to elected local authorities can bring legitimation and efficiency benefits to ruling parties, but can also create a site for contestation by opposition parties locked out of national power. As such, losing access to local political resources

[85] Reuter and Robertson, "Legislatures, Cooptation, and Social Protest in Contemporary Authoritarian Regimes," 2015.

[86] White, "Shifting Votes on Shifting Sands: Opposition Party Electoral Performance in Dominant Party Authoritarian Regimes".

[87] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments in Authoritarian Regimes," 2012.

can significantly weaken ruling parties over time, as former elites from Mexico's PRI could attest.[88] Ruling parties must thus balance their incentives, choosing how much autonomy to grant local officials.

Previous work by Reuter et al,[89] upon which this paper builds, has emphasized the role of elections in accommodating strong local elites. By permitting strong local elites to retain their own power bases, they argue, the national leadership hopes to co-opt local elected officials so that they will use their political machines to deliver votes to the ruling party. As a result, they predict that cities with the strongest local mayors will be permitted to retain their mayoral elections. However, this argument provides a partial answer to the question of how ruling parties balance the benefits and costs of local elections. In particular, it does not consider the the possible failure of co-optation that is possible in the context of manipulated elections, where principal-agent problems abound.[90]

Where local executives have greater knowledge about their machines, territories, voters, and electoral capacity than their ostensible patrons do, they may have incentives to shirk rather than delivering as many votes as possible to the national party. Incorporating this dynamic into the theory of subnational elections in non-democracies leads to the prediction that *under-performing* political machines will be targeted for abolition of elections, not weak ones. A mayor's powerful local machine that is failing to deliver votes for United Russia represents a large pool of potential votes for the next election, if a more dependent boss can installed at the top of the local patronage network. Abolishing elections and installing city managers who are dependent on party higher-ups for their position can help solve the principal-agent problem in such cities, which creates an incentive for ending elections in cities with strong local machines but poor resource-mobilization on behalf of the regime.

This proposition is tested using election-forensic models to estimate the level of election manipulation in favor of the regime across cities in Russia over time. Models using these estimates as measures of local machine-mobilization on behalf of the ruling party support the theory summarized above: strong mayors with poor records of delivering manufactured votes for the regime are at a high risk of losing their electoral base. By contrast strong mayors who loyally deliver votes are rarely targeted, along with weak mayors, and mayors who are not formally members of the ruling party.

The results are important for understanding the development of the dominant-party regime in Russia, by showing in greater detail how the ruling party integrated local political machines into the larger patronage structure. They also have broader implications for understanding elections and election manipulation beyond the Russian case. For instance, the results suggest that ruling parties are able to assess the effectiveness of their clients in delivering election manipulation—no small task, given clients' greater local information, the covertness of their efforts, and their incentives to misrepresent. While not eliminating principal-agent

[88] Lucardi, "Building Support From Below? Subnational Elections, Diffusion Effects, and the Growth of the Opposition in Mexico, 1984-2000".

[89] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

[90] Rundlett and Svolik, "Deliver the Vote! Micromotives and Macrobehavior in Electoral Fraud"; Harvey, "Principal–Agent Dynamics and Electoral Manipulation: Local Risks, Patronage and Tactical Variation in Russian Elections, 2003–2012".

problems, which can still hinge on risks of exposure for election-manipulating agents,[91] this does suggest that ruling parties can overcome them in part through monitoring and punishing non-compliance. Election manipulation is likely to be more resilient to increasing competition than previously understood.

Moreover, these results suggest that authoritarian governments are more robust that might be expected under the Reuter et al[92] model. By abolishing elections where strong local political machines are not sufficiently supporting the regime, the ruling party directly increases its own electoral strength, removes a possible site for opposition contestation, and sends a signal to other mayors that their elected position is at risk if they do not adequately support the regime. By contrast, allowing the strongest mayors to retain their elected posts, as predicted in previous work, generates a higher risk that such localities could throw their political resources behind a rival elite coalition or opposition party.

Additional avenues for research remain. In particular, it remains to be seen precisely why opposition-run cities seem to be spared the shift to appointed city managers. That result highlights possible scope conditions for the project, and indicates the importance of comparing the Russian case—where competition is relatively low—to other hybrid regimes. It may be the case that regimes where the opposition is more assertive are more likely to see opposition mayors removed from power and appointees put in their place. Further research could investigate these and other possibilities.

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[91] Harvey, "Principal–Agent Dynamics and Electoral Manipulation: Local Risks, Patronage and Tactical Variation in Russian Elections, 2003–2012".

[92] "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections".

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