

Crafting Elections under Authoritarianism

Electoral manipulation as an authoritarian response to
uncertainty in Russia's regional legislative elections



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This thesis is dedicated to the city of Penza, the origin of my interest in Russian politics, and a place which my father thought to be the most loved by gods, for nothing ever happens there.

Abstract

Authoritarian elections are becoming a common phenomenon, at the heart of which lies a range of manipulative practices designed to perpetuate authoritarian victory. This dissertation examines the patterns in electoral manipulation and probes the existence of a systemic logic behind the use of such tactics in Russia. Conventional wisdom assumes that authoritarian elites engage in manipulation from a position of strength - they spot opportunities to exercise their power over a weak electorate and interfere with elections in order to obtain impressive results that serve to stabilise and prolong authoritarian rule. In contrast, this dissertation proposes that authoritarian regimes interfere with elections out of weakness - manipulation is a way of overcoming uncertainty over how voter sentiments will translate themselves at election time in difficult electoral contexts.

The study narrows down the concept of manipulation to four major strategies (electoral fraud, candidate exclusion, spoiler candidates and voter mobilisation), and uses a wide range of electoral and candidate data, citizen reports and court cases. Focusing on the sub-national elections to Russia's regional legislatures, the thesis argues that there emerge common intra-regional trends in the use of electoral manipulation, which point to the existence of a regime-wide logic. Specifically, the dissertation explains how uncertainty affects the strategies adopted, with a particular focus on how strategies vary across urban and rural districts. I argue that electoral uncertainty increases with the level of urbanisation, and subsequently examine the extent to which the deployment of manipulative strategies varies according to the urban-rural divide. As a result, this thesis seeks to enhance our understanding of electoral authoritarianism by identifying the contexts in which certain strategies of manipulation are more likely to be used.

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Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Turkey) <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>
FZ	Federal Law <i>Federal'niy Zakon</i>
GAS	State Automated System <i>Gosudarstvennaya Avtomatizirovannaya Sistema</i>
GRP	Gross Regional Product <i>Valovoy Regional'niy Product</i>
KPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation <i>Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii</i>
LDPR	Liberal Democratic Party of Russia <i>Liberal'no-Demokraticheskaya Partiya Rossii</i>
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PR	Proportional Representation
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Mexico) <i>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</i>
TsIK	Central Election Commission <i>Tsentral'naya Izbiratel'naya Komissiya</i>
UN	United Nations

Transliteration

The following transliteration system is used in this thesis. Exceptions have been made in relation to popular Russian names.

Cyrillic	Latin alphabet
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а	a
б	b
в	v
г	g
д	d
е	e
ё	e
ж	zh
з	z
и	i
й	y
к	k
л	l
м	m
н	n
о	o
п	p
р	r
с	s
т	t
у	u
ф	f
х	kh
ц	ts
ч	ch
ш	sh
щ	sch
ъ	"
ы	y
ь	'
э	e
ю	yu
я	ya

Introduction

‘Lack of fairness to an opponent is essentially a sign of weakness.’
- Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 1931

Elections, the lifeblood of democracy, have long been a curious companion of authoritarian regimes. Indeed, if one were to write a manual for a prospective modern autocrat, establishing elections would likely feature as a key recommendation, given that electoral institutions appear to prolong the survival of non-democracies in the long term (Geddes, 2005; Knutsen, Nygård & Wig, 2017). The emergence of electoral authoritarianism¹ as the most common formula for non-democratic rule in the world today (Schedler, 2002: p.48; Miller, 2017: p.3) suggests that this partnership has consolidated in recent times. Yet despite the persistent bond, the inner workings of these quintessentially democratic institutions in the context of modern authoritarianism remain poorly understood (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009), particularly when compared to their institutional cousins in advanced democracies, which have been, traditionally, a prime area of focus in political science.

The present thesis seeks to contribute to this relatively nascent field of research on the phenomenon of authoritarian elections, and to respond to the call for greater investigation of the ‘micro-level dynamics’ (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009: p.404) within these institutions. Specifically, its focus is on a set of behaviours which dominates the

¹ Authoritarian regimes with regular pluralistic elections for the chief executive and legislature (Schedler, 2002). The concept of electoral authoritarianism is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

electoral process in authoritarian regimes - *electoral manipulation*. Broadly, this refers to the interference with the freedom and fairness of elections, with the intent to control the formation, expression and impact of voter preferences.² Manipulation is a fundamental feature of authoritarian elections - since elections in democracies are the mechanism that place the political reins (*kratos*) in the hands of the citizenry (*demos*), interference of this kind is the very action that makes this mechanism, and the regime, non-democratic. Yet, thus far, this core dimension of authoritarian electoral behaviour has been poorly measured and rarely studied as a dependent variable (Morse, 2012).

In seeking to shed more light on this subject, the present study carries two key aims. The first is to break down the seemingly monolithic exterior of electoral manipulation through the exploration of a range of different manipulation strategies, and the variation in their use. The second aim is to probe further the existence of a logic to electoral manipulation - that is, to go beyond describing the practice of electoral manipulation by asking *why* authoritarian rulers employ such tactics. Whilst it may be tempting to view manipulation as simply the exercise of power by the rulers over the ruled, the words of the anarchist political activist, and life-long rebel, Emma Goldman, cited above, give pause for thought. To what extent is the exercise of this power driven by the regime's sense of its own weakness?

These two broad aims of the dissertation are materialised through the study of regional elections in the Russian Federation - a prominent electoral authoritarian regime (Ross, 2011, 2014, 2018; White, 2017), with vast territory, a massive population and considerable influence on the international stage. The decision to focus on this

² The concept of electoral manipulation is broken down and discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2

country case and level of elections was inspired by the revelations in Russian electoral politics, which occurred in 2011. Before proceeding further with presenting the research design for the thesis, it is important to outline this chain of events and explain why the Russian case was particularly revealing of a major gap in research.

1.1 Russian elections 2011: manipulation exposed?

On 4th December 2011, approximately 2,800 elections were held across Russia, amongst which were the general election to the national parliament (the State Duma), as well as elections to regional parliaments in approximately a third of Russian regions (27 out of 83 regions).³ In advance of this campaign, most observers assumed that the dominant party, United Russia, would secure another strong electoral performance at all levels of government, following what was thought to be a fairly predictable process in Russia's electoral authoritarian regime. Such expectations stemmed from the widely documented and systematic practice of electoral manipulation in Russia, which altered the electoral playing field in favour of the authoritarian political actors, thereby making elections a particularly laborious, and in most cases futile, process for any political forces competing against the regime (Levitsky & Way, 2010). The dominant party was expected to once again benefit from its favourable access to the media, vast range of financial and logistical resources, affiliation with key national political leaders, and preferential treatment by the state administrative bodies.

Contrary to these expectations, however, the outcomes of this vote delivered a significant blow to the dominance of the regime - both in terms of electoral results,

³ For the full list of elections, see Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, 2011a.

when United Russia secured less than 50 percent of the vote to the national legislature and lost 77 seats (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, 2011b), and beyond, when a wave of protests, unprecedented in its dimensions for the post-Soviet era, gathered momentum across the country (The Economist, 2011). Altogether, for many observers, this had been 'a nearly unimaginable scenario' (Lally & Englund, 2011) only a few months prior to the election.

From the perspective of the opposition and protesters, the events of December 2011 were significant because they exposed electoral malpractice and manipulation on a wide scale (OSCE, 2011; Golos, 2011) - thus, opening up the opportunity for regime change at a maximum, or the beginning of nation-wide awareness and dialogue on electoral integrity at a minimum. However, from the perspective of researchers on authoritarian elections, the discovery of electoral fraud in Russia is 'perhaps the least interesting lesson' (Hale, 2011: p.2) of the 2011 elections.

Instead, this case should be considered pivotal for another reason. As mentioned earlier, the instances of manipulation in the context of Russian elections were neither new nor unexpected (Myagkov, Ordeshook & Shakin, 2008, 2009; Levitsky & Way 2010; Mebane & Kalinin, 2010; Lukinova, Myagkov & Ordeshook, 2011). Prior to 2011, however, manipulation was accompanied by overwhelming regime *victories* - thus, researchers were primarily concerned with diagnosing and describing electoral malpractice, so as to prove the hollowness of election results in Russia. By contrast, December 2011 presented a novel electoral configuration - widespread manipulation occurring alongside relatively huge electoral *losses* for the regime. Such a combination, however, shed new light on the nature of manipulation in Russia's electoral

authoritarian regime, exposing fraudulent tactics as being neither omnipotent nor omnipresent.

Consider the variation in United Russia's performance during the December 2011 elections to Russia's regional parliaments. Its electoral achievements ranged from the impressive 91 percent of the party list vote in the Republic of Mordovia, through to the more moderate score of 54 percent in Tyumen' oblast', and the relatively disappointing proportions of the vote secured in Republic of Karelia, as well as in the Sverdlovsk and Murmansk oblasts (around 30 percent of the party list vote in each region).⁴ Moreover, the lower results were not only disappointing relative to other regions, but also relative to previous performance in regional legislative elections within the same regions.⁵

Whilst the brazenly high result in Mordovia became a focal point for those seeking to expose the audacity of electoral manipulation in Russia, it is the breadth of variation in results which should interest scholars of authoritarianism. If electoral manipulation is a tool available to authoritarian elites in Russia, why was it not used to generate consistent impressive electoral outcomes for the regime? Why didn't the authorities compensate for low electoral support by stuffing ballot boxes or 'adjusting' the vote tally to the desired levels once all votes had been cast in every region? A system designed to perpetuate authoritarianism through mass-scale electoral violations should

⁴ United Russia secured 30, 33, and 33 percent of the party list vote in Karelia, Sverdlovsk and Murmansk regions, respectively. Results obtained by the author, using the GAS *Vybory* database of the Central Election Commission (TsIK) of the Russian Federation.

⁵ When comparing the party list outcomes from the December 2011 regional legislative elections with those from the previous regional legislative electoral cycle (2006/2008) in the five regions discussed here, the scale of the electoral loss is highlighted further. For example, whilst United Russia maintained its high level of support in the Republic of Mordovia (around 90 percent of the party list vote in 2007); by 2011, its share of the vote reduced considerably in Tyumen (where it won over 65 percent of the party vote in 2007), Sverdlovsk (over 58 percent in 2008), and Murmansk (over 42 percent in 2007) oblasti, and Republic of Karelia (over 39 percent in 2006).

have been able to secure the desired results in any event - the fact that it didn't manage to do this consistently, suggests that the use of manipulation in Russia may be more nuanced and constrained than previously assumed.

A look at the *intra*-regional variation in regime performance in December 2011 suggests that the nuances in the use of electoral manipulation may not be occurring at random and cannot be simply attributed to the variation between subnational regimes (Saikkonen, 2016), as a pattern in the results appears to persist even in the face of regional differences. Specifically, the results of the regional parliament elections that year sketch out an urban-rural divide - within the same region, United Russia tended to secure higher percentages of the vote in the countryside than it did in the cities.

In Sverdlovsk oblast', for example, United Russia secured just 26 percent of the party list vote in the regional capital city, Yekaterinburg, which is even lower than the already modest (by United Russia standards) result of 33 percent for Sverdlovsk region as a whole, as mentioned earlier.⁶ Indeed, during the Sverdlovsk oblast' regional legislative elections, most of the areas where United Russia received less than 30 percent of the vote were situated in Yekaterinburg city⁷, including the area⁸ with the worst performance for the party (23 percent of the vote). The highest level of party list support for the regime during these elections, by contrast, was secured in a largely rural area, Taborinskiy rayon, where United Russia won 57 percent of the vote.

⁶ Average percentage in Yekaterinburg calculated by the author, using the party list results obtained from the *GAS Vybory* database of the TsIK of the Russian Federation.

⁷ 12 out of the 18 districts where United Russia scored less than 30 percent of the party list vote were located in Yekaterinburg (Ibid.).

⁸ Listed as 'Yekaterinburg - Kirovskaya (Oktyabr'skaya Chast')' (Ibid.).

This trend seems to repeat itself even in regions with the most suspicious-looking election outcomes. For example, in the earlier mentioned regional legislative elections in the republic of Mordovia, the average level of support for United Russia in the party list vote was 84 percent amongst the urban districts situated within the region's capital city, Saransk, compared to 94 percent average for all other electoral districts in the region.⁹ Moreover, the lowest level of United Russia support for a single district in this region - 68 percent of the vote - came from an electoral district at the heart of Saransk city. In the context of the astronomical electoral supermajorities in Mordovia, this difference is startling. If we assume that the results of over 90 percent were most likely achieved through manipulation, it is puzzling that even the Mordovian regional authorities, who appear to have no qualms about manipulating to the extreme, did not eliminate variation across the urban-rural dimension.

The December 2011 elections therefore represent a significant development in contemporary Russian politics because they brought about two sets of revelations. First, the real lesson of 2011 has been the exposure of the limitations, rather than the potency, of electoral malpractice. As the first glitch in Russia's political machine, December 2011 has shown that manipulation can no longer be seen as a tool that automatically generates consistent authoritarian supermajorities in every electoral context. With this, our earlier assumptions about the inner workings of electoral authoritarianism have been brought into question. As summarised by Hale (2011: p.2):

...the events of the last month reveal that the political system is not built to perpetuate complete and total vote falsification with no heed to public opinion. Instead, the ruling authorities' success remaining in power for over a decade has been based more on a combination of genuine popular support and the muscular manipulation of the political system...

⁹ Averages calculated by the author, using the party list results obtained from the national TsIK GAS *Vybory* database. The location of districts was established by the author, using the official summary report published by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Mordovia (2012).

As such, these elections have highlighted a degree of vulnerability in electoral authoritarianism.

Building on this, the second revelation of 2011 is the trend of *consistent inconsistencies* - the intra-regional discrepancies along the urban-rural divide that seem to persist across different regions. This pattern does more than just offer further confirmation of Hale's (2011) argument that electoral authoritarianism in Russia is sensitive to the electorate. It points to an opportunity to refine further these conclusions by highlighting urbanisation as a potential key to decoding the logic in the foundations of authoritarian power.

If authoritarian success is built on a combination of popular support and manipulation, then the variation across the urban-rural divide seems to be capturing some kind of interaction between the above-mentioned pillars of power. The earlier-described pattern in results cannot be purely reflecting lower levels of support in urban areas compared to the rural communities, since we know that the 2011 elections were widely marred by electoral malpractice across the country. For a similar reason, it is difficult to conclude that the results show that electoral manipulation is concentrated in the countryside whilst elections in urban areas are left untouched, since, in the aftermath of December 2011, citizen and observer reports of malpractice flooded in from the cities and the countryside alike.

Therefore, could these results be reflecting the use of different tactics of manipulation, with different degrees of control over results, in the countryside compared to those in cities? If so, why might this be the case? To what extent is this

pattern indicative of a voter-centred logic in the use of electoral manipulation in Russia?

1.2 Existing research on the logic of electoral manipulation

This section reviews the ability of existing research to pinpoint and explain such a logic, if it exists in contemporary Russia today. Overall, this field remains in a relatively nascent stage at present, and is restricted by a number of problems relating to definitions, measurement and empirical evidence. As a result, whilst scholars have made considerable advances in the study of electoral manipulation, existing work offers only tentative explanations for the Russian case.

1.2.1 The relative absence of electoral manipulation from the main debate on authoritarian elections

The scholarship on authoritarian elections has been dominated by the debate on the functions fulfilled by these institutions. Researchers have uncovered multiple mechanisms through which elections appear to sustain authoritarianism - they serve as useful tools that can signal regime strength and deter opponents (Geddes, 2005; Malesky & Schuler, 2008; Simpser, 2013); co-opt elites (Boix & Svolik, 2009) and the opposition (Lust-Okar, 2005); serve as arenas of patronage distribution (Blaydes, 2006; Lust-Okar, 2006); generate information on the strength of the opposition and regime loyalty (Magaloni, 2006; Cox, 2009); and provide domestic and international legitimacy (Schedler, 2002). At the same time, it has been recognised that elections retain danger for autocrats - they open up the possibility of defeat; serve as a focal point for protest

mobilisation (as seen in the Colour Revolutions and the Arab Spring); can bring about gradual regime change through incremental improvements in democracy (Lindberg, 2006; Hadenius & Teorell, 2007); and their introduction has been found to destabilise authoritarian regimes in the short term (Knutsen, Nygård & Wig, 2017).

The focus of this main strand of research on authoritarian elections has, therefore, been trained on elections as an end - a buttress to the persistence of authoritarian regimes, or a mechanism of vulnerability. These are fundamental discoveries, however, they offer little insight into the Russian case because the 2011 elections seem to straddle the thin line between friend and foe for Russia's authoritarian regime. On the one hand, this cycle of elections delivered relatively disappointing results, damaged the legitimacy of the regime, and mobilised regime opponents. These events also accentuated the image of Russia as an authoritarian regime, meaning that subsequent elections attracted greater domestic and international scrutiny, and liberalising concessions¹⁰ were required to reduce the potency of criticism. On the other hand, no regime change took place, and United Russia continued to dominate legislatures at all levels of government.

The questions raised in the previous section, however, were not about the *effect* of elections on the persistence of authoritarianism and how this is achieved, but about the coexistence of regime strength and weakness, which is somehow linked to urbanisation. As such, this requires a focus on an earlier stage of dynamics in authoritarian elections - it is not a question of what role neither free nor fair elections

¹⁰ A range of electoral reforms were pursued in 2012, the most notable of which include the return of the direct elections of regional executives (Federal Law №40-FZ), the reduction of barriers for the registration of political parties (Federal Law №28-FZ), and the reduction in the number of voter signatures required for the registration of candidates (Federal Law №41-FZ).

play in sustaining or undermining authoritarianism, but the reasons why authoritarian actors make elections neither free nor fair in the first place, and the ways in which they subsequently manage to combine popular support with manipulation. This stage may reveal some further clues about the relationship between authoritarian elections and democratisation, yet it has not been the main focus of the research on authoritarian elections thus far.

1.2.2 Problems of definition: 'what'

Existing research on authoritarian elections is further limited by the relative lack of clarity and consensus regarding the definition of electoral manipulation (Birch, 2011:p.29; Morse, 2012; Simpser, 2013: pp.32-38).

Whilst this process, as the means through which elections become neither free nor fair, is crucial to most studies of authoritarian elections, much of the work in this field adopts a fairly flexible approach to its definition. Many researchers treat electoral manipulation as a fluid concept involving a huge spectrum of options ranging from ballot box stuffing to more long-term actions taken to skew the distribution of resources (such as the media) in a way that unfairly favours authoritarian political actors. This approach largely reflects the complex nature of this phenomenon - the tactics of electoral manipulation across the world are so 'varied and artful' (Lehoucq, 2003: p.245), that, as argued by Birch (2011), there might exist 'as many types of electoral malpractice as there are elections' (p.28).

As a result, however, the conceptual boundaries and distinctions within this term are often unclear. Electoral manipulation is frequently treated as a synonym for

electoral fraud, vote rigging, corruption, clientelism and patronage (Simpser, 2013: p.32). Even Morse (2012), in his thorough review of the major research on electoral authoritarianism, whilst highlighting the need for more rigorous measurement of and attention to different forms of electoral manipulation, nevertheless uses the terms ‘manipulation’ and ‘fraud’ interchangeably (p. 168). Other scholars go as far as including state-sponsored repression as an additional tactic of manipulation available to authoritarian rulers (Bhasin & Gandhi, 2013; Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018).

The Russian case, however, cannot be explained adequately through this approach. Instances of relatively low results indicate limitations in the use of certain types of fraud (such as forgery during the vote counting process), however, there is reason to believe that those elections were still not free from other forms of manipulation, such as forced voting or discrimination against opposition candidates.¹¹ Therefore, this case suggests that manipulation entails multiple decisions for authoritarian elites, which may be affected by a number of different considerations at election time. Explaining the Russian case on the basis of fluid or partial definitions therefore risks overlooking a number of important micro-level factors which affect these decisions differently, and encourages the persistence of erroneous general assumptions on manipulation.

Some valuable attempts to crystallise the definition of electoral manipulation must be acknowledged, however. In particular, Andreas Schedler’s ‘menu of manipulation’

¹¹ For example, during the earlier-mentioned ‘disappointing’ regional legislative elections in Sverdlovsk and Murmansk oblasts in 2011, the election monitoring association Golos received 113 and 36 reports relating to manipulation, respectively (as published via the *Golos Karta Narusheniy (Map of Electoral Violations)* database). The low results suggest that the use of electoral fraud may have been limited, yet the allegations reported to Golos pertained to a wide range of suspicious activity, including the campaign process and the forced turnout of voters. Whilst this information does not capture manipulation perfectly, it nevertheless serves as an indicator of the likely complexity of electoral malpractice in this context.

represents one of the most detailed and comprehensive theoretical contributions in this respect (Schedler, 2002).¹² This menu refers to the set of potential options for manipulation from which authoritarian rulers select certain strategies in order to help them skew the playing field and secure electoral victory. These options correspond to and target the seven links of the democratic chain of choice¹³, that must all remain intact at election time in order for elections to be considered democratic. Among such actions are: the exclusion of rivals, opposition fragmentation, redistribution of important resources such as the media in favour of authoritarian elites, disenfranchisement, electoral fraud, voter intimidation and mobilisation, and the reversal of electoral outcomes.

Whilst the range of manipulative tactics outlined in this framework does not necessarily form a complete and all-encompassing set of all possible options of electoral manipulation, the 'menu' framework nevertheless represents an important contribution to this topic because it provides us with a clear set of the most frequently used and major strategies of manipulation. On the one hand, it would be virtually impossible to classify and empirically analyse the logic behind each possible sub-type of electoral manipulation. On the other hand, the variety of manipulative actions and social relations mean that it is not appropriate to treat electoral manipulation as one big aggregate strategy. Conceptualising manipulation in terms of a menu of the major strategies corresponding to the major effects upon the steps on the democratic chain of

¹² This framework serves as one of the theoretical foundations for this thesis and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

¹³ These links refer to the ability of elections to offer genuine political empowerment; operate under the freedom of supply and demand; remain inclusive and insulated from outside pressure; maintain bureaucratic integrity during the vote count and result in irreversible outcomes.

choice may therefore represent a happy medium, which helps us to appreciate and account for the complexity of behaviours that fall under this definition.

Despite the potential conceptual utility of the 'menu of manipulation', however, this approach has largely been applied in debates on the identification and classification of electoral authoritarian regimes, rather than studies of the determinants of the manipulation itself. In other words, most of the attention has been paid to the range of options on the 'menu' and their significance for democracy, instead of their appeal to the authoritarian actors making the selection.

1.2.3 Problems of measurement: 'whether'

The explanatory power of current research is further weakened by problems of measurement (Morse, 2012:p.168). Even amongst the few studies which treat electoral manipulation as a dependent variable, many works use opaque aggregation and debatable measures as indicators of the combined levels of electoral manipulation in a given context. Due to the covert nature of manipulative behaviour (the fact that those engaged in manipulation are actively seeking to erase all evidence of their actions) the most common of such measures of manipulation tend to arise from the information which the regime is forced to make open to the public - official aggregate election results and voter turnout figures.¹⁴ These measures are problematic, however, because they represent a combination of too many complex social processes, in addition to manipulation itself. Therefore, the overall result and turnout percentages cannot answer the questions raised at the end of the previous section of this chapter, as they

¹⁴ Research using official results and turnout data as a measure of manipulation in the context of Russian elections, as well as the problems linked to this, are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

are an aggregate of the interaction between voter preferences and regime interference - in other words, we do not know whether the lower levels of support for United Russia are the outcome of the voters' greater capacity to overcome manipulation, the regime's decision to stop using manipulation, or some combination of both. Inconsistencies in official results thus point to important questions, but do not provide the answers.

More sophisticated usage of election results during investigations of manipulation - such as the 'forensic'¹⁵ approach (Mebane, 2006; Myagkov, Ordeshook & Shakin, 2009; Mebane & Kalinin, 2010) - comes closer to establishing instances in the use of manipulation. However, the ability of such works to explain the Russian case is nevertheless limited since these tactics can only be applied to identify cases of large-scale falsification of election results, and therefore cannot explain the full complexity of the logic of manipulation (the use of other types of strategies) in Russia.

Meanwhile, studies adopting a more comprehensive approach, using more detailed information (such as observer reports, citizen perceptions, and assessments of electoral legislation and its application) to capture the use of manipulation, have produced a wealth of discoveries about the quality of democracy and the multitude of ways in which elections are crafted to the benefit of authoritarian actors in Russia today (Lindberg, 2006; McAllister & White, 2011; Ross, 2011; Kynev, 2014). However, this work tends to be more diagnostic in nature, concerned primarily with identifying manipulation as a symptom of authoritarianism, rather than explaining the patterns in its use.

¹⁵ This approach is evaluated in greater detail in Chapter 3.

1.2.4 Problems with the level of analysis: 'where'

Existing research therefore struggles to explain the curious electoral inconsistencies revealed during December 2011 in Russia because it relies on broad definitions and measures which only partially capture the nuances of behaviour observed in this case. In addition to this, specific investigations into *intra*-regional patterns of manipulation in the context of Russian regional legislative elections are largely non-existent.

The few studies which attempt to investigate more specific sub-types of Russian electoral manipulation and to use multiple measures are focused on the national level of elections, typically treating entire regions as units of analysis (Harvey, 2016). Whilst some researchers are beginning to use rayon-, precinct- and polling station-level data to analyse patterns in electoral manipulation (Goodnow, Moser & Smith, 2014; Bader & van Ham, 2015; Skovoroda & Lankina, 2017; Moser & White, 2017), they remain focused on the national elections and employ key explanatory variables that are measured at the regional level. Existing research is therefore dedicated to explaining inter-regional differences in manipulation during elections to the State Duma and the Russian presidency, rather than the dynamics of manipulative behaviour in regional level elections.

Crucially, given their focus on higher levels of analysis, such approaches are unable to engage with the earlier discussed interesting *intra*-regional patterns in Russia. Existing work, whilst generating insights into the differences between regions, is therefore ignoring the similarities between them, meaning that we do not know whether a common regime-wide logic underpins manipulative behaviour even in a context of regional differences. This problem is not resolved by the few studies which

focus specifically on regional elections in Russia, however, as this work prioritises the identification of manipulation (Golosov, 2011; Ross, 2011, 2018), maintains a focus on inter-regional differences (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018), or treats manipulation as an independent variable altogether (Reuter, 2013; Golosov, 2015; White, 2016).

1.2.5 Possible explanations

In sum, at present, the field of research into the patterns and determinants of electoral manipulation remains in its nascent stages. The lack of conceptual clarity, more comprehensive measurements and focus on the lower levels of analysis amongst studies of electoral manipulation mean that no single attempt to probe the presence of the specific, earlier-mentioned, 'consistent inconsistencies' in Russia's electoral landscape exists today. This is not to say that no viable explanations can be put forward on the basis of existing research, but that such explanations are broad and have been subject to limited or no testing, particularly in the context of Russian regional politics. With these key caveats in mind, this section nevertheless identifies some possible initial answers emerging from the existing literature, which can be divided into two competing camps: first, explanations which view manipulation as an exercise of regime strength; and second, those which see manipulation as arising out of regime weakness.

Within the first strand of literature, authoritarian elites emerge as powerful political actors who use a wealth of resources to exploit a range of vulnerabilities in society. This perspective owes much to the analyses of largely macro-level dynamics which emphasise resource asymmetries between the regime elites and other actors within authoritarian systems, alongside a playing field skewed in favour of regime incumbents (Greene, 2007). From this perspective, electoral manipulation is seen as a

default feature of electoral politics under authoritarianism, so much so, that the key question seems to be not so much why authoritarian elites decide to use manipulation, but rather what stops them from manipulating elections some of the time.

For example, this default nature of manipulation is implied in the influential work of Simpser (2013), which highlights the fact that manipulation is often used brazenly and occurs in situations where authoritarian incumbents would have won without electoral interference. As a result, it is argued that the logic behind the use of manipulation is linked to signalling strength - overwhelming electoral victories obtained through manipulation serve to indicate regime power, popularity and the futility of opposition to other political actors.

Beyond this, scholars have argued that the perceptiveness of voters and their potential to mobilise in protest to electoral malpractice represents one factor which may sway regime elites away from manipulation. For example, Bhasin and Gandhi (2013) find that in the months preceding an election, regimes scale back on repression of ordinary citizens and instead are more likely to direct state repression at opposition leaders during this time - the proposed argument being that the incumbents resist repressing the voters during this time because doing otherwise would risk a loss in the levels of support at election time, and reduce the legitimacy of the election. Meanwhile, Smyth and Turovsky (2018) have found that authoritarian actors change their strategies of manipulation depending on the perceived likelihood of post-election protests. Similarly, Birch (2011) finds that economically powerful (e.g. resource-rich) regimes are more likely to engage in electoral manipulation when they feel that they can get away with it - in other words, when legitimacy costs are low due to the relative weakness of important checks, such as the voters, the media or international actors.

In addition, it has been proposed that social structure can act as an obstacle to manipulation. For example, it is argued that higher levels of turnout and support for regime candidates amongst certain categories of voters are the outcome of manipulation tactics targeting those whose 'votes are more easily bought and [whose] reliance on state patronage is higher' (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009:p.409), as well as those voters who are more easy to monitor. Notably, these tend to be poorer and rural citizens (Lust-Okar, 2006; Magaloni, 2006; Blaydes, 2006; Tezcur, 2008). By contrast, the low levels of participation and regime support amongst urban, middle-class voters (Magaloni, 2006; Malesky & Shuler, 2008) are considered to be indicative of the fact that this group of voters is less susceptible to manipulation and experience lower costs if they support the opposition. Electoral manipulation is therefore expected to occur in the more rural and poor constituencies, as they are more favourable environments for clientelistic and coercive electoral behaviour, and therefore areas where the resource-rich regime is at its strongest.

The second strand of literature relates to the regime capacity to win elections and emphasises the role of regime weakness in driving electoral manipulation. It is proposed that authoritarian elites manipulate elections with the primary aim of winning, and thus electoral manipulation is expected to take place in electoral contests which are particularly close, where the regime feels vulnerable. In other words, a regime may be more likely to reduce the competitiveness of an election through electoral manipulation in response to either an increase in the opposition's ability to mobilise the electorate at election time or a reduction in its capacity to do the same (Schedler, 2009a:p.198). For example, studies of electoral manipulation under PRI in Mexico have argued that manipulation was more likely to manifest itself in the most competitive, urban districts and when the PRI began to suffer problems at election time

(Dominguez & McCann, 1996; Lehoucq, 2003:p.249-251). This strand of research carries strong links to the literature on the classification of modern authoritarian systems, which argues that such regimes are plagued by problems of electoral and institutional uncertainty, meaning that 'dictators are notoriously insecure' (Schedler, 2013:p.22). From this perspective, electoral manipulation therefore emerges not as a default practice underpinning authoritarian rule but as a strategic tool for intervention at critical points of uncertainty for the regime.

The two strands of literature therefore offer opposing interpretations of the logic behind the use of electoral manipulation. Another way of conceptualising this divide is to consider it in terms of ability versus need - the first perspective expects the regime to manipulate elections because it *can* (and to withdraw from manipulation where it cannot), whilst the second perspective expects the regime to manipulate at times where it *needs* extra support.

In sum, the first explanation envisages a strong regime which seeks to maximise the exercise of its power of manipulation over weaker voters and opposition actors, but occasionally is not able to do so. By contrast, the second explanation sees a vulnerable regime seeking to compensate for a tough electoral environment, reducing manipulation when the prospects of victory are more certain. Crucially, these two strands of literature have identified opposing empirical realities when it comes to manipulation across the urban-rural divide in authoritarian states. Whilst the first explanation expects manipulation to be used more in rural areas, where voters are more vulnerable and less likely to mobilise in protest - by contrast, the second explanation expects manipulation to be more frequent in urban areas, which are more competitive and risky electoral environments for authoritarian incumbents.

Which of these explanations offers the best account of the logic of electoral manipulation in Russia? Without alleviating the earlier-mentioned problems of conceptualisation, measurement and level of analysis, it is difficult to establish which of these broad perspectives describes the Russian case most accurately.

Specifically, electoral manipulation is a behaviour that takes on 'a panoply of forms' (Lehoucq, 2003:p.251) - each form must therefore be considered on an individual basis before we can make sweeping conclusions about why manipulation occurs. Moreover, while intuitively, the contrast between the 2011 urban and rural intra-regional results in Russia, as discussed earlier, seems to be in line with the explanation emphasising regime strength, results and turnout percentages, as 'an artefact of regime strategy' (Smythe & Turovsky, 2018:p.198), are not precise indicators of the types of strategies used or whether they have been used at all. Each strategy of manipulation must therefore be investigated on the basis of more comprehensive sets of data before we can reach more confident conclusions. Finally, the intra-regional variation evident in the 2011 elections in the Russian case, has thus far been discussed selectively in this chapter - thus it is necessary to establish these patterns in a more systematic manner.

Without further disaggregating the concept of manipulation, obtaining more data at the sub-regional level and going beyond pure results and turnout percentages as measures, therefore, we still cannot be sure which of these explanations come the closest to capturing the logic of manipulation in the Russian case. Yet, as discussed earlier, existing research has been found wanting in these respects, and thus further investigation is required.

1.3 The proposed approach and argument

In sum, the events in Russia exposed the possibility that there exists a logic to electoral manipulation. On the basis of existing research, two compelling, but also competing explanations can be put forward - however, at present, it is difficult to determine which of them most accurately captures the dynamics at play in Russia. This is largely driven by the problem of imperfect information, as much of what we want to know about the dynamics of electoral manipulation involves the study of informal undercover processes, which are notoriously difficult to define, detect and quantify. However, the predominant focus on higher levels of elections and explanations centred around the differences between relatively large sub-national units also mean that there exists a considerable gap in the research on the micro-level behaviours which remain constant throughout the regime.

This dissertation therefore seeks to advance our understanding of why authoritarian elites employ tactics of electoral manipulation by deconstructing the process of manipulation into four major strategies, utilising a wider range of manipulation indicators, and focusing on the intra-regional level of analysis. At the heart of this study are broad concerns regarding whether authorities in electoral authoritarian regimes vary their use of electoral manipulation tactics, and, if so, the extent to which patterns in the use of electoral manipulation at the sub-regional level in Russia reflect dynamics of regime strength or weakness.

In particular, the thesis is interested in exploring the intra-regional variation in the use of electoral manipulation across the urban-rural divide, as this dimension of social structure emerges as a significant factor in two competing broad explanations of

electoral manipulation, albeit in conflicting directions. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, existing research on voting behaviour in Russia and other parts of the world points to a divide in the preferences of urban and rural voters, that suggests that urban areas in Russia are populated by voters who are significantly more sceptical, if not hostile, towards the contemporary regime, than their rural counterparts.

Therefore, there is much evidence to suggest that if elections were free and fair, these more urban constituencies would become tough battlegrounds for the regime at election time. Although urbanisation is not the only factor which accounts for voting behaviour and the level of electoral competitiveness in Russia today, in the context of authoritarianism (which is plagued by problems of information) and weak electoral infrastructure (Smyth, 2006) inherited from the post-Soviet transition period, the thesis argues that urbanisation becomes an important signal of electoral risk to authoritarian elites who are known to behave strategically and adapt to diminish threats (Gandhi, 2008; Koesel & Bunce, 2013).

As a result, the thesis proposes that the second explanation, describing manipulation as being driven primarily by regime weakness and fears of electoral losses in the context of greater uncertainty, more accurately captures the logic of electoral manipulation at this level of politics in Russia.

1.4 Research questions

The dissertation seeks to explore the validity of the proposed explanation through three related research questions:

- 1) *Does the use of electoral manipulation vary according to urbanisation?*
- 2) *If so, how?*
- 3) *Is this relationship consistent across different strategies of manipulation?*

The first research question aims to establish in a more systematic manner whether manipulation does indeed vary across rural and urban contexts, as suggested by the Russian case. The second question seeks to uncover the direction of this relationship, if it exists. Are rural areas more likely to experience manipulation than urban areas, or vice versa? A key component of the analysis relating to the first and second research questions is the use of data other than voting and turnout percentages - the aim is not to explore further the patterns in election results but to uncover whether other, more refined indicators of manipulation reveal a similar story, and to consider with whether the the patterns in the use of manipulation are aligned with the weakness-oriented explanation discussed earlier.

The inclusion of the third research question is intended to add nuance to our understanding of the logic behind the use of electoral manipulation. Strategies of manipulation can seek to fulfil different aims - some, such as fraud, may be useful for subverting voter preferences, whilst others, such as mobilisation, can be used to magnify voter preferences. Finding similar or diverging patterns for separate strategies may, respectively, reveal additional proof of or limitations to the four broad theoretical

explanations discussed earlier, and indicate greater complexity in the decision-making processes of authoritarian elites.

1.5 Research design

The dissertation addresses the three research questions by examining the use of electoral manipulation in the context of Russia's regional legislative elections. In contrast to most of the work in this field, the thesis will focus on the *intra-regional* analysis of elections at this level, in an attempt to uncover common micro-level electoral behaviour at the heart of Russia's electoral authoritarian regime.

This section provides further background information on Russia as an authoritarian regime and Russian regional legislatures as the subject of elections, before outlining details about the specific cases selected for the purposes of analysis. The section then discusses the methods and data used in this study.

1.5.1. Case selection

Country case: Russia

Russia is a prime example of electoral authoritarianism, where a democratic institutional skeleton supports an unmistakably authoritarian political body. Formally, the Constitution of the Russian Federation sets out the foundations for liberal democracy: free and fair elections at all levels of government, including the national executive and legislature, as well as regional and local government; and the protection

of ‘universally recognized principles and norms of international law’¹⁶ relating to human rights and civic freedoms¹⁷. In practice, however, the regime falls short of these standards, as summarised by Vladimir Gel’man (2014:p.504):

...most scholars agree that Russian politics under Vladimir Putin has been marked by such pathologies as outrageously unfair and fraudulent elections, the coexistence of weak and impotent political parties with a dominant “party of power,” a heavily censored (often self-censored) media, rubber-stamping legislatures at the national and sub-national levels, politically subordinated courts, arbitrary use of the economic powers of the state, and widespread corruption.

Russia, therefore, serves as an appropriate context for the study of electoral manipulation in authoritarian elections. Selecting an electoral authoritarian regime (as opposed to more closed authoritarian states, such as China, where elections exist but nevertheless play a minor political role) is particularly useful for such an investigation because electoral empowerment is at its highest under this form of authoritarianism - pluralistic elections are the ‘defining institution’ (Schedler, 2015:p.6) of this regime type and represent the sole source of legitimacy for rulers in this context. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, electoral authoritarian regimes are also the most common amongst modern authoritarian states. Generating insights into electoral dynamics in such a context could, therefore, reveal much about the core sources of authoritarian dominance relevant to a large number of countries across the world.

Specifically, the present study of the Russian case represents a ‘plausibility probe’ of the general hypothesis that electoral uncertainty, as measured through urbanisation, affects the use of electoral manipulation in electoral authoritarian regimes. The Russian case is well-suited to such an investigation for a number of reasons.

¹⁶ Chapter 2, Article 17 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

¹⁷ Articles 17-64 of the Constitution outline the protection of key civic liberties such as freedom of speech and organisation; property rights; and the principle of the rule of law.

First, the public availability of a wide range of relevant data in Russia, means that this case offers the opportunity to refine the measure of electoral manipulation as a dependent variable through further segmentation of this concept into a set of more narrow strategies, and through utilising data that looks beyond the aggregate percentages reported in official election results. The Russian government makes public a wealth of detailed electoral data via the official online database run by the Central Election Commission (*GAS Vybory*) - this relates not only to the official aggregate vote and turnout tallies, but also the detailed information on political candidates, campaign processes, electoral districts and polling stations. In addition, the official websites of the central, regional, and local electoral commissions, as well as those of the regional legislative assemblies, contain archives of original documentation and reports relating to previous elections (including records of complaints and inquiries into accusations relating to electoral manipulation). Additional official information is also made public by other branches of government - for example, official court documents and reports can frequently be found on the official websites of various local, regional and national courts. Finally, the activity of civil society organisations and initiatives in Russia has generated additional data - for example, the online database *Map of Violations* run by the election monitoring association Golos maintains a systematic record of accusations of electoral manipulation.

The level of detail and range of available data (and data sources) in the Russian Federation means that this case represents a valuable window into the functioning of the typically opaque mechanism of authoritarianism, and a rare opportunity for the triangulation of data on electoral manipulation. The Russian case therefore opens up the possibility of not only probing deeper into a process which is *deliberately* obscured

by the actors engaging in it, but also one that is carried out in the context of authoritarian opacity.

Second, the Russian Federation carries considerable international significance, particularly when it comes to bolstering authoritarianism in other countries. The Russian regime not only serves as an example for emulation for regime actors in other electoral authoritarian states, it also actively engages in the promotion of authoritarianism (Ambrosio, 2009; Tolstrup, 2009). Indeed, scholars focusing on the phenomenon of authoritarian learning have highlighted Russia's role as a 'black knight'¹⁸, encouraging and aiding other authoritarian regimes (Lebanidze, 2014; Tolstrup, 2015). If the Russian model of authoritarianism is a major political export, greater understanding of this case may thus result in conclusions which are applicable to the multiple other authoritarian regimes taking lessons from the Russian Federation.

Third, the political-administrative set-up of the Russian Federation means that this country represents a particularly valuable 'laboratory' (Reuter, 2013:p.106) for the study of electoral authoritarianism, and thus enhances the generalisability of conclusions derived from a single country case. In terms of political structure, Russia is a federal state, divided into 83 regions¹⁹ and three levels of government: national, regional, and local. This federal set-up reflects high levels of inter-regional diversity in terms of geography, socio-economic characteristics (Zubarevich, 2009; Golyashev & Grigoryev, 2014) and politics (Petrov & Titkov, 2010:pp.19-55; Petrov & Titkov, 2013).

¹⁸ This term refers to a country which provides support (such as economic, diplomatic, military, technological/expert, and other assistance) with the aim of propping up and enabling the survival of authoritarian governments (see Levitsky & Way, 2010, p.41).

¹⁹ At the time of writing, Crimea and Sevastopol' are included in the official count of Russian regions, bringing the total up to 85 regions. Due to the controversial status of these areas, these two regions have been excluded from the total stated here.

Researchers frequently operate at the regional level, since doing so allows for the possibility of assessing the effects of a wide range of socio-economic and political factors, whilst controlling for context (such as the origins of electoral authoritarianism, legacy of the former regime and cultural factors), since the regions are nevertheless situated within the same national regime.

At this stage, it is important to clarify the way in which the Russian regime is conceptualised in this dissertation. Broadly speaking, a political regime can be understood as the formal and informal system or method of government, rather than the specific individuals in office (Siaroff, 2009:pp.12-13). The present study follows the approach advocated by Reisinger and Moraski (2017:p.199), by viewing the Russian national regime as resting on 83 'regional struts', where:

'... each strut is a political relationship involving interdependence between the Kremlin and a regional leadership that is in large measure responsible for ensuring the proper electoral outcomes.'

Presently, these interdependent relationships are asymmetrical, skewed in favour of the national leadership - however, the regions continue to represent significant political units in the Russian Federation, with considerable variation persisting amongst regional regimes (Saikkonen, 2016; Reisinger & Moraski, 2017). This relationship between the national and regional regimes leads this dissertation to view the survival strategies of regional regimes as being aligned with, and influenced by, the goals of the Kremlin. This assumption is further supported by existing research which highlights the commitment of regional elites to the institutions of the national authoritarian regime (Reuter & Remington, 2009); emphasises the role of the dominant party (United Russia) as an institutional guarantee encouraging the regional elites to recognise that their interests are best served through loyalty to the national regime (Reuter & Turovsky, 2012); and highlights the gradual transformation of regional

leadership from 'subnational patrons' in charge of political machines to a more subordinate group of technocrats with weaker ties to the regions (Buckley et al., 2012; Reuter, 2013). For this reason, although the key decision-makers over the use of electoral manipulation in regional legislative elections are expected to be primarily *regional*-level regime actors, their primary aim of continued regime survival is not viewed independently of the national political regime, since the political fortunes of the national and regional regime actors are linked together through a number of authoritarian institutions which transcend the regional regimes.

This is not to say, however, that regional regimes do not vary in terms of their approach towards and internal constraints surrounding their delivery of these goals, as well as their relative deference to the national regime. Thus, existing research points to the fact that although, today, subnational regimes in Russia represent instances of electoral authoritarianism, and are thus in line with the national political regime, they nevertheless vary in terms of competitiveness, and can be separated further into competitive and hegemonic sub-types of electoral authoritarianism (Saikkonen, 2016). For this reason, as discussed earlier in this chapter, much of the existing work on authoritarian elections in Russia has sought to take advantage of this combination of subnational variation within a broader, unifying national context, by examining inter-regional patterns of behaviour.

In line with this research, the present study views the Russian electoral authoritarian regime as a multi-level political beast, and acknowledges that sources of variation can be found at all levels of the political system by adopting a multi-level research strategy. However, the present thesis argues that the utility of the Russian case as a laboratory can be extended beyond the examination of the regional-level sources of

variation in authoritarian behaviour — probing further into the variation *within* regions offers the opportunity for an even more clinical isolation of electoral manipulation, since it allows us to spot the ways in which elections proceed in largely the same way *despite* broader regional differences, whilst still keeping the bigger, national context constant.

In other words, the present study proposes the plausibility probe of a common logic to electoral manipulation, which persists across different demographic and geographic contexts, and sub-types of electoral authoritarianism. Despite being a single country case, Russia represents a valuable opportunity for this type of research because it contains considerable variation at the regional level, and, (as will be discussed below) a large pool of election cases situated within a relatively short time period. However, whilst the investigation does adopt a multi-level view of the Russian political regime and does control for regional units, its interest is not in unravelling further the subnational *causes* of variation per se.²⁰ In order to uncover such a logic, if it exists, it is necessary not only to control for regional units, but, more importantly, to examine the *intra*-regional patterns of behaviour.

Level of elections: Regional Legislature

Regional elections are a fruitful subject for analyses focusing on electoral manipulation because they represent instances of complex electoral management across an entire region. Each election is a self-contained campaign comprising tens of electoral districts (constituencies) and hundreds of candidates. Unlike the national

²⁰ Indeed, as discussed earlier in this chapter, existing research on electoral manipulation in Russia has already made large inroads into accounting for the regional-level differences in the patterns of manipulation.

elections, where each region represents just one segment of the overall campaign, regional legislative elections are complete cases, limited to one region. This is not to say that regional elections are entirely isolated²¹ - rather, it is to say that regions represent different types of cases, depending on the level of legislative election under consideration. To use a military metaphor - if, in a national election, a region represents one battle for the national legislature (a part of the contest for the overall control of the national Duma), in a regional election, the region represents the war for the regional legislature.

The timing of these elections further opens up the opportunity for research. The frequency of elections to regional legislatures is determined by individual regions - typically, they take place every five²² years, with the exception of by-elections. Crucially, these elections are staggered across the country, meaning that regional parliaments are elected each year but in different regions of Russia. Thus, whilst focusing on the national legislative election level allows us to observe just one instance of election management every five years, the regional legislative level offers 83 instances separated over regular, shorter intervals during the same period. This means that regional legislative elections represent an opportunity to trace patterns of electoral manipulation in a more continuous manner, across repeated interactions within an authoritarian regime.

²¹ For example, the same campaign tactics and materials could be used by political parties in multiple regions, whilst manipulation strategies could be exported by politicians and civil servants as they relocate regions.

²² The exact duration of regional parliamentary terms varies across regions, and is permitted to be between two and five years, according to the Federal Law №67-FZ (Chapter 1, Article 8.1). In practice, most regions have opted for five-year terms.

Before proceeding further with the discussion of the specific cases selected for analysis, it is important to clarify the role of the regional legislature as the institution up for election, and therefore to highlight the significance of regional legislative elections in the Russian context. Whilst the precise structure of regional government is determined individually by each region, the overall nature of sub-national power in Russia remains the same across all 83 regions and comprises the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. The regional executive (the Governor or the President) is either directly elected²³ or appointed by the regional legislature. Meanwhile, the legislative branch of government at the regional level, typically referred to as a legislative assembly or a state council, represents the highest legislative body in every region.

The functions of regional legislatures are broadly similar across all regions, and include: the power to debate and ratify the regional budget and socio-economic development projects put forward by the regional executive; the introduction of regional taxes and fees; the power to hold a vote of no confidence in the executive branch of regional government; the appointment of regional deputy-executives and other key regional posts, such as the Justices of the Peace and the public procurator; the oversight of regional property; and the establishment of the regulations and timing relating to regional and local elections and referenda.

Most legislatures are headed by a Chairman of the Assembly or the State Council, who forms a Presidium (comprising the Chairman and his deputies, and a small number of deputies elected by the legislature). This group is subsequently tasked with supporting the legislative process through the preparation of the legislative sessions;

²³ Subject to candidacy 'filters' (Schrek, 2017).

oversight of questions before they are put to the Floor; and the co-ordination of legislative committees and commissions. Each regional legislature also contains a number of permanent committees²⁴, whose job is to review questions and subjects for debate before they are put to the entire legislature.

The regional legislature therefore represents a key institution within the regional political mechanism. Despite the dominance of the executive at the regional level of government, the regional legislature, as a separate branch of government, nevertheless can act as an important check on the executive - as has been the case in a large number of regions during the early 1990s and, more recently, in the experience of regions such as Irkutsk, Kirov, Vladimir and Tula oblasts, and Altai krai.²⁵ In addition to this, regional legislatures represent a meaningful arena for competition, and a platform for influencing public policy. This is evident from the vast financial sums that candidates invest into their electoral campaigns.²⁶ A further indicator of this comes from a survey of Russian regional firms in 2011, in which thirty percent of the firm directors reported that they preferred to lobby the regional legislature for the advancement of their business interests (Reuter & Turovsky, 2014: p.666).

Taken together, these characteristics of Russian regional legislatures make the elections to these bodies a meaningful focus for analysis, which offers the opportunity

²⁴ Typical areas of focus for permanent committees within this regional institution are: Budget, Taxes and Finance; Economic Policy, Investment and Enterprise; Local-Government; Social Policy; and Deputies' Ethics.

²⁵ See Regions.ru, 2003; Baysarov, 2005; Dugina, 2008; Fokin, 2013; Aleksandrova, 2013.

²⁶ For example, in 2018 regional legislative elections in Irkutsk oblast', the top ten largest campaign funds for individual candidates ranged from 1.75 million and 5 million roubles, or approximately £20,000-£58,000 (IrkutskMedia, 2018). To put this number into perspective, this sum is close to the average house price in the region's capital city, Irkutsk.

to probe the existence of similarities between multiple attempts to manage campaigns through manipulation in a wide range of contexts.

Sample of cases

The analysis in this thesis is based on a set of 18 regional legislative election campaigns²⁷ occurring in different regions of Russia between 2010 and 2013. These elections relate to 18 regions, which amounts to just over a fifth of all Russian regions.

These cases were selected in two stages. The first stage of selection took place on the basis of the convenience sampling method, where regions were identified as candidates for selection on the basis of data availability and the fact that they took place within the given time period. At the second stage, regional elections were selected on the basis of the maximum variation purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is an appropriate approach in this instance because this study represents a plausibility probe, seeking a greater depth of information about a small heterogeneous population (Teddlie & Yu, 2007:p.83), and the lack of data on electoral manipulation in this context requires additional time- and resource-intensive data gathering, which means that it is not possible to examine the entire population under the present time and resource constraints. Crucially, the maximum variation sampling technique was selected in order to capture regional-level diversity, given the broader aim of identifying the intra-regional patterns which persist despite inter-regional variation. Finding common patterns across this diverse set of regions would therefore enhance the generalisability of any findings. The entire population of electoral districts (constituencies) within this

²⁷ These are full elections of the entire regional legislature. No by-elections were included in the sample.

set of 18 regional legislative elections is used during the investigation, which means that there are a total of 390 cases at the lowest (intra-regional) level of analysis, which is of primary interest to this thesis.

The decision to focus on the time period of 2010-2013 was driven by the aim of establishing continuing patterns in electoral manipulation. Given the commonly perceived status of December 2011 elections as an extraordinary event, regional legislative elections which occurred during this phase are situated at the heart of the time period selected for the purposes of the present study. In order to explore whether any logic of manipulation is not limited to this potentially unique national context, regional legislative elections occurring immediately before and after December 2011 are included in the sample. Therefore, the chosen elections may be considered in terms of three broad groups. First, those elections taking place from 2010 until December 2011²⁸ - a time of relative authoritarian stability and continued United Russia dominance, which had been growing since the early 2000s. Second, regional legislative elections which coincided with the notorious national election of December 2011. Third, the campaigns which took place in 2012 and 2013 - a period of relative liberalisation in response to citizen protest activity, but also the restabilising of the regime, despite the high level of cynical sentiments amongst the electorate.

²⁸ The last round of regional legislative elections before December 2011 took place in March 2011

The 18 regional legislative elections selected originate from the following regions:

Republic:

- Republic of Adygeya
- Republic of Altay
- Republic of Komi

Krai:

- Krasnodarskiy Krai
- Kamchatskiy Krai

Oblast':

- Belgorod Oblast'
- Kemerovo Oblast'
- Leningrad Oblast'
- Magadan Oblast'
- Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast'
- Novgorod Oblast'
- Penza Oblast'
- Rostov Oblast'
- Sverdlovsk Oblast'
- Tomsk Oblast'
- Tver' Oblast'
- Ulyanovsk Oblast'
- Vladimir Oblast'

Table 1.1 groups the cases according to the timing of elections, and summarises some key geographic, socio-economic and political characteristics. Figure 1.1 visualises the geographic location and dispersion of these elections across Russia. As can be seen from this information, overall, there is a great degree of variation in the regions' status (krai, oblast', republic), as well as geographical size and distance from Moscow, regional wealth (as measured through the Gross Regional Product), population, and political life prior to the 2010-2013 cycle of regional legislative elections (such as the levels of support for the regime during 2008 presidential elections and scores on the Petrov and Titkov (2013) democracy rating).

For example, in terms of population, the regions in the sample range from 157 thousand people in Magadan oblast' to over 5 million people in Krasnodar krai. Similarly, in terms of geographical size, they range from the relatively small republic of Adygeya (7.8 thousand km²) to the vast Kamchatskiy krai (464.3 thousand km²). Kamchatskiy krai is also the region most distant from Moscow, located on the far East

of the country, in contrast to Tver' and Vladimir oblasti, which are the immediate neighbours of the greater Moscow region. The regions also vary in terms of ethnicity - from Nizhniy Novgorod, Belgorod and Kemerovo oblasti with overwhelmingly Russian populations (over 92 percent of the regional population are classed as Russian), to the republics of Adygeya, Altay and Komi where greater proportions (more than 38 percent) of the regional population are not of Russian ethnicity. Furthermore, there is considerable fluctuation in regional wealth within this sample - from the relatively wealthy republic of Komi to regions with relatively low levels of regional income (republics of Adygeya and Altay, and Penza oblast').

One possible limitation of this sample of cases, however, is that the cases of republics in this group of regions all pertain to elections which took place before December 2011. The reason for this was that the republics in the later time periods did not easily match the initial convenience sampling criteria (timing, and availability of data), however, efforts were made to make the regions in the post-December 2011 groups as maximally varied as possible - including the selection of 'krai' regions as alternative types of regional status to the oblast', as well as variation in terms of a number of other variables (as outlined in Table 1.1).

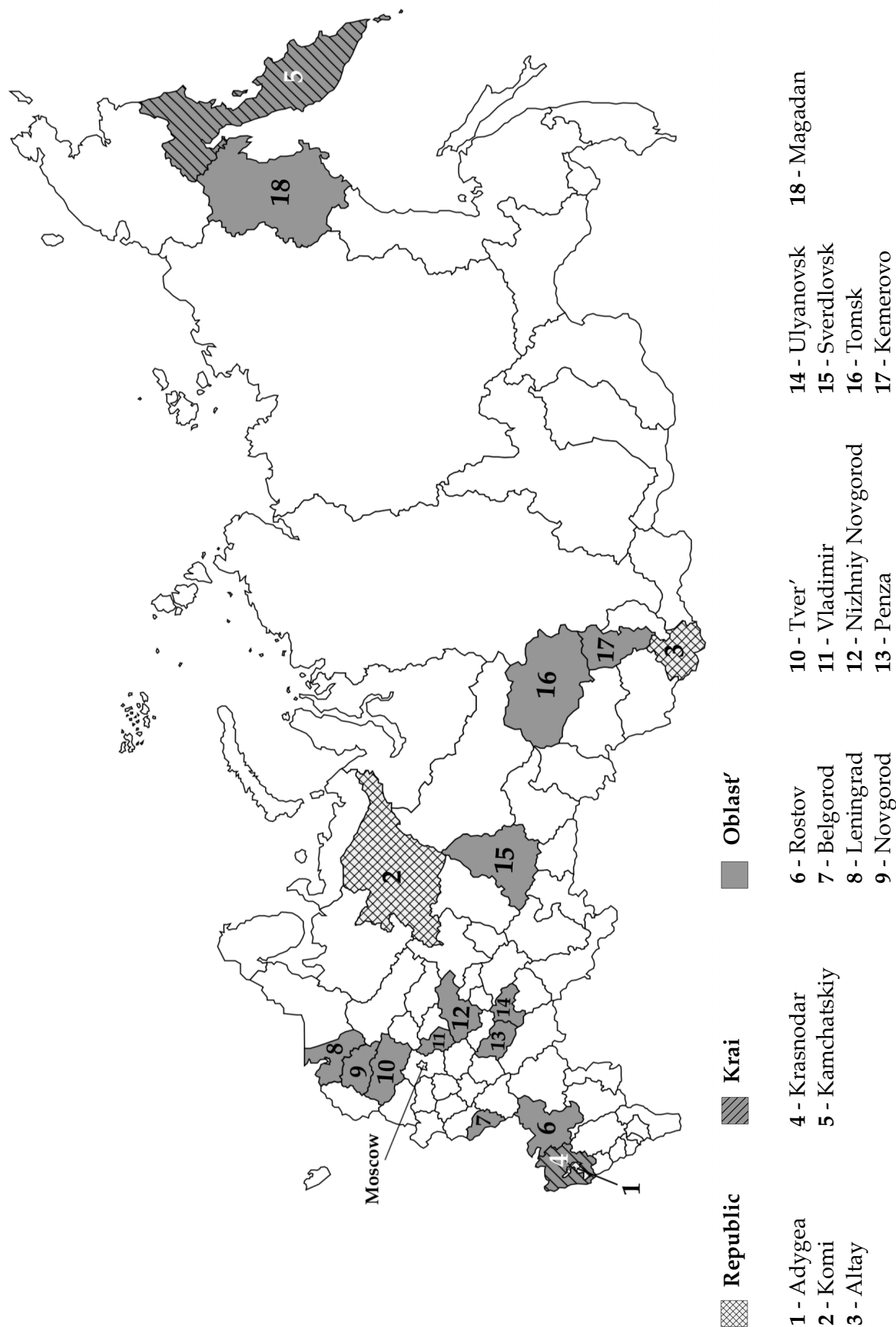
Table 1.1 Key characteristics of the regions sampled

Region	Population (2010, Thous.)	Urban Population (2010)	GRP per capita (2010, roubles)	Distance from Moscow (km)	Size (Thous. km ²)	Russian Ethnicity (%, 2010 Census)	Democracy (2006-2010)	2008 Presidential Election (% vote for Medvedev)
From 2010 until December 2011								
Republic of Adygeya	440.4	51%	104,921	1669	7.8	62%	25	69.77
Republic of Altay	206.2	28%	105,050	3641	92.9	56%	31	73.82
Republic of Komi	901.6	77%	389,064	1515	416.8	62%	34	71.74
Belgorod Oblast'	1,532.7	66%	259,173	695	27.1	92%	25	68.96
Magadan Oblast'	157	95%	368,734	7110	462.5	81%	29	63.07
Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast'	3,310.6	79%	194,945	439	76.6	94%	37	61.84
Tver' Oblast'	1,353.5	75%	161,039	167	84.2	87%	34	67.57
December 2011								
Kamchatskiy Krai	321.8	77%	315,364	11876	464.3	78%	32	69.39
Leningrad Oblast'	1,712.7	66%	293,342	651	83.9	87%	36	70.19
Novgorod Oblast'	634.1	71%	200,033	606	54.5	88%	32	65.81
Sverdlovsk Oblast'	4,398	82%	240,247	1667	194.3	86%	42	68.98
Tomsk Oblast'	1,045.5	70%	272,208	3500	314.4	88%	37	64.12
2012-2013								
Krasnodar Krai	5,225.8	53%	193,055	1539	75.5	87%	30	75.06
Kemerovo Oblast'	2,763.4	85%	224,969	3482	95.7	92%	24	70.51
Penza Oblast'	1,386.2	67%	113,970	709	43.4	84%	27	71.40
Rostov Oblast'	4,279.2	67%	147,710	1226	101	89%	26	76.94
Ulyanovsk Oblast'	1,292.4	73%	134,828	893	37.2	70%	30	66.93
Vladimir Oblast'	1,444.6	78%	151,311	190	29.1	89%	34	64.05
National Average	1,721	74%	261,804	-	206	81%	30	70.28

Sources: Socio-economic and geographical data taken from Rosstat; Democracy rating from Petrov & Titkov, 2013; Election data obtained from Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation.

Note: Democracy scores refer to the combined regional score in the expert rating on democratization (compiled by Petrov & Titkov, 2013), which is based on 10 indicators (each measured on a 1-5 scale). Lower scores indicate lower levels of democracy.

Figure 1.1 The geographic location of the regions sampled



Notes: Created with mapchart.net

Regarding the key variable of interest to the present study - urbanisation - the regions also vary considerably, given the relatively high level of urbanisation in Russia on average (from the republic of Altay where just 28 percent of the population are classed as urban residents, to Magadan oblast', where the proportion of urban residents stands at 95 percent). Finally, the regional political life is also varied - from the relatively 'democratic' Nizhniy Novgorod, Tomsk and Leningrad oblasti to the more authoritarian Kemerovo, Belgorod and Rostov oblasti, along with Adygeya republic. The final column in Table 1.1 also provides information of the average level of support for the regime during the last presidential elections (2008) before the round of regional legislative elections under investigations - thus, the regions also vary in terms of regime loyalty (from regime strongholds in Krasnodar krai and Rostov oblast', to the relatively lukewarm support (for Russia) in Nizhniy Novgorod oblast').

We can thus be confident that the elections selected for the purposes of the present study took place in a diverse range of regional and national circumstances - therefore, the existence of common approaches to electoral manipulation *within* these cases may be considered as strong indication of a regime-wide logic to this type of electoral behaviour.

1.5.2 Methods

The thesis is based on a mixed method approach - more specifically, it relies on the 'nested analysis' method, as advocated by Lieberman (2005). This method involves the combination of large-N quantitative analyses with qualitative small-N investigations, where the cases selected for the latter originate from the larger sample used in the former. The major advantage of using this strategy lies in its 'synergistic

value' (Lieberman, 2005: p.435) - the combined effect of these two approaches is expected to be greater than if they were used independent of each other.

This approach is particularly well-suited for the study of opaque processes such as electoral manipulation. The advantage of quantitative analyses is that they allow the systematic identification of broad patterns at the intra-regional level, with more rigorous controls for effects at the higher levels of grouping (regions). At the same time, the opaque nature of manipulation means that quantitative research continues to rely on proxy measures, which ultimately reduces the validity of conclusions. A qualitative approach is therefore useful for digging deeper into the observed relationships and answering any questions left open by the statistical analysis, as well as for corroborating earlier findings through other types of data. The mixed-method approach can, therefore, boost the accuracy of this type of investigation and help to generate more nuanced insights.

1.5.3 Data

The dissertation relies on a wide range of data: information on electoral districts and election results provided by the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation and numerous regional electoral commissions; population data taken from the Russian Census of 2010²⁹; information on individual candidates and parties from the national and regional Central Election Commission's online databases (*GAS Vybory*); citizen reports of electoral violations received by the election-monitoring association Golos³⁰;

²⁹ This data was accessed via the *Vserossiyskaya Perepis' Naseleniya 2010 (Russian Census 2010)* database run by Rosstat (Russian Federal State Statistic Service).

³⁰ These reports are published by Golos via the *Karta Narusheniy (Map of Violations)* database.

court cases relating to electoral violations from the online database *RosPravosudiye*³¹; official complaints made to and investigated by regional and federal electoral commissions; official documents published by regional legislative assemblies; a small number of interviews³² with regional politicians and former electoral commission members; and media reports. Further detail on the specific data used for the analyses of individual electoral manipulation strategies will be provided in the first parts of each empirical chapter of the thesis.

At the heart of the investigation are multiple original datasets (created by the author). The first dataset contains information on all 390 electoral districts (constituencies) in the sample of 18 regional legislative elections. This includes information on the percentage of urban residents, as well as election data³³ (various types of turnout and election results, candidate registration figures, and spoiler candidates identified by the author) for each constituency.

The key explanatory variable *Urbanisation* was constructed³⁴ using official census data, and therefore adopts the definitions of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ used by the Russian

³¹ A non-commercial search engine and database containing over 87 million court cases, sourced from the official websites of Russian courts, who are required to make public the outcomes of court cases by law.

³² These interviews (as listed in the bibliography section of the dissertation) were used to add interesting details to the discussion in the context of the paucity of information under authoritarianism, rather than serving as primary data for the investigation.

³³ Taken from the online database of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation

³⁴ This data was constructed for individual districts through a three-step process. First, information on the localities (rayons) included within each electoral district was collected from official publications of regional electoral commissions in each region. Second, rayon-level data for each region was obtained from the Russian Census of 2010. Third, the rayon census data was grouped and aggregated according to electoral districts. In cases where rayons were spread across more than one electoral district, weighted averages were constructed.

Federal State Statistic Service (Rosstat). According to this classification, citizens are categorised as urban residents if they reside permanently in cities and urban settlements, and rural if they reside in all other types of settlements (Rosstat, 2010). Urbanisation is measured as the percentage of urban residents within each constituency in the sample. Percentages are used in order to avoid obscuring the possible existence of an urban-rural continuum (Lichter and Brown 2011; Lichter and Ziliak 2017; Scala & Johnson, 2017) during large- n quantitative analysis.³⁵ However, since elections are a game of majority, electoral districts are broadly understood as being predominantly urban if *Urbanisation* scores are greater than 50 percent, and predominantly rural, if otherwise.

Information on candidate registration and spoiler candidates was drawn from a second original dataset comprising the biographical information, party affiliation and electoral performance of all candidates who competed in the elections sampled. Individual candidate biographies are currently provided by the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation and the official websites of the regional assemblies. However, at present this data is not aggregated into any comprehensive dataset that includes detailed coding on the personal characteristics and registration status of candidates. The data published by the Central Election Commission was therefore compiled into a large- N dataset and coded according candidate gender, education, occupational background, political experience, as well as party affiliation

³⁵ This variable is divided into quartiles for the purposes of the analysis in Chapter 3, however, since the statistical techniques (last-digit analysis) used in this chapter are sensitive to the size of n - quartiles are therefore used to divide the sample of cases in groups of equal proportions along the urban-rural continuum. To maintain consistency and make comparable the conclusions from both analytical parts of the chapter, the qualitative analysis in Chapter 3 also summarises the data in terms of the four quartiles of *Urbanisation*.

and the election outcome. This dataset represents the most detailed sample of information on the contestation and composition of Russia's regional legislatures.

The third dataset consists of official election counts for all polling stations within the electoral districts in the sample (over 20,000 in total), including the last digits of various voting tallies.³⁶ This dataset will be used as part of the analysis in the empirical chapter on electoral fraud as a strategy of manipulation (Chapter 3).

1.6 Areas beyond the scope of the present study

Federal, inter-regional and local levels of analysis

The thesis is concerned with identifying intra-regional patterns to manipulation, and treats each regional legislative election as a self-contained campaign in which the object of the authorities was to secure the overall dominance of United Russia within the regional legislature. The thesis is therefore interested in how, in pursuit of this larger aim, the regime manipulated the elections for individual seats within the legislature, particularly whether the contests for the seats representing the more urban constituencies experienced different levels of manipulation to those from the more rural areas. The elections pertain to regional legislative assemblies, and thus the thesis cannot establish intra-regional variation during the national level of elections, where electoral districts are different. The level of analysis, similarly, does not extend to the comparison of elections to various local government bodies within a region, as these are separate campaigns with their own micro-level dynamics.

³⁶ The official results for polling stations were obtained from the *GAS Vybory* database of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation.

Although the statistical analysis in the thesis comprises multi-level models which include regional-level controls, the models do not include specific regional-level independent variables, as the present study is not concerned with explaining why the use of electoral manipulation varies between regions - only to confirm whether intra-regional variation remains despite bigger regional differences.

The effectiveness of manipulation

Given the earlier critique of existing research which utilises measures that cannot distinguish between the use and the success of manipulation, the dissertation is concerned with isolating the logic behind the decision to *use* manipulation at election time. If any patterns are established following this investigation, further research is necessary in order to confirm whether various strategies of manipulation are actually effective in bringing about electoral victory, once deployed. This would require additional data on the capacity of the electorate to spot and overcome such interference with the democratic process, as well as statistical testing of the links between the use of electoral manipulation and the ultimate outcomes of electoral contests.

The causal mechanism behind urbanisation

Urbanisation typically correlates with a range of other indicators, including education and economic development. The thesis therefore treats urbanisation as a proxy indicator for a range of these potential social dynamics, but it is not concerned with establishing which precise feature of urban areas may be affecting the use of electoral manipulation. Given the nascent stages of research in electoral manipulation, the thesis is exploratory in nature, seeking to establish greater clarity on whether we

are, indeed, observing instances of electoral manipulation, and whether regime authorities appear to be sensitive to electoral contexts when employing such tactics. Existing research on the division of electoral attitudes and behaviour along urban-rural lines is used to generate assumptions about what the level of urbanisation may indicate to authoritarian elites about the electorate, and therefore underpins the theoretical framework driving the thesis (as set out in Chapter 2). However, this thesis is not concerned with probing further into why voter sentiments vary across the urban-rural divide.

1.7 Structure of dissertation

The thesis consists of seven chapters, including the present introductory chapter. Chapter 2 discusses the concept of electoral manipulation and the relevant theoretical perspectives stemming from existing research on authoritarian elections, before proposing a theoretical framework for the logic of electoral manipulation in Russia, and the hypotheses stemming from this.

Chapters 3-6 are dedicated to the analysis of four specific strategies of electoral manipulation in Russia's regional legislative elections: electoral fraud; candidate exclusion; voter mobilisation; and the use of spoiler candidates. Each chapter tackles a different strategy, however, a similar structure is largely followed within: first, each chapter defines the strategy under investigation and establishes it as an example of electoral manipulation, before outlining any contributions and limitations of existing research on this topic; second, quantitative methods are used to probe the existence of broad patterns in the use of this strategy in our sample of elections; third, qualitative information is used to zoom in on and confirm the relationship between electoral

uncertainty (as measured through urbanisation) and electoral manipulation. Thus, Chapter 3 probes the use of electoral fraud (forgery of election results) in the sample of regional legislative elections; Chapter 4 explores the tactic of excluding opposition candidates from competing in elections via the tool of electoral commissions; Chapter 5 investigates the patterns in coercive and co-optive voter mobilisation (participation in elections); and Chapter 6 examines the presence of spoiler candidates with extraordinarily similar names to those of regime opponents. Chapter 7 concludes.

Literature and Theory

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundations of this study and is divided into six sections. Section 1 presents two diverging strands of literature on the positive and negative effects of elections in authoritarian regimes, before arguing that, collectively, this research points to the paradox of electoral dualism in electoral authoritarianism, which may be driving the logic of electoral manipulation in this context. Section 2 introduces and refines the concept of electoral manipulation. This section sets out four key strategies of manipulation in the context of Russian regional legislative elections, which will serve as the focus for investigation in later chapters of this thesis. Section 3 considers the possible significance of the urban-rural divide for electoral manipulation, by drawing on insights from the literature on the urban-rural political cleavage in Russia and other countries. Section 4 ties together the insights from the preceding sections and proposes an actor-centric theoretical framework, that attempts to explain the use of four strategies of electoral manipulation in Russia's regional legislative elections 2010-2013. This section sets out key hypotheses, corresponding to the four strategies of manipulation, the examination of which will serve as the structure for the four subsequent chapters of the thesis. Section 5 briefly outlines alternative explanations and the findings we might expect to see according to these perspectives, before discussing the limitations of these approaches. The final section concludes.

2.1 The role of elections: dichotomy or dualism?

An important starting assumption of this study derives from the theoretical considerations on the role that elections play in authoritarian regimes. As the following discussion will show, scholars have highlighted a number of seemingly contradictory roles fulfilled by authoritarian elections. However, instead of being problematic, this range of functions is in fact indicative of the dual nature of elections in authoritarianism - elections entail a trade-off between control and legitimacy, as a result of which they have the potential both to sustain and to undermine authoritarian regimes.

The thesis subsequently treats this dualism of elections under authoritarianism as the background to electoral manipulation, since the manipulative behaviour of authoritarian actors in this context is assumed to be driven by the need to maintain a balance between these two desirable but incompatible features in the trade-off. The theoretical framework which emerges towards the end of the present chapter proposes that these concerns lie at the heart of the logic of electoral manipulation, as it represents a type of behaviour that aims to make more certain the continuation of authoritarian control but does so at the risk of reducing regime legitimacy. As a result, electoral manipulation is not expected to be omnipresent, but follow patterns which are indicative of careful, systematic management, and attempts to achieve balance.

This section outlines the two opposing strands of literature on the role of elections under authoritarianism, before discussing the way in which the investigation of electoral manipulation in electoral authoritarian regimes, such as that in Russia, is better served by uniting the insights from this literature.

2.1.1 Separating the literature

What is the purpose of elections? As a pillar without which the functioning of a democratic system becomes unimaginable, elections have traditionally been associated with democratic regimes. In a democracy, elections represent an opportunity for the expression of the 'will of the people' - they are first and foremost a mechanism for selecting and empowering the representatives who will subsequently act on behalf of the electorate, as well as a means to hold those representatives accountable. Under conditions of freedom and fairness, the major functions of elections are known to include: preventing tyranny; legitimising a political system; installing officials into political office; presenting the electorate with choices among candidates and policies; fostering representation, responsibility and responsiveness; serving as occasions for popular involvement; improving political awareness and education amongst citizens; and developing and maintaining party systems (Katz, 1997: pp.100-107). In short, democratic elections are a tool of popular political participation, social choice, representation, empowerment, and control over political elites.

Yet elections have also long accompanied authoritarianism - it is well known that even some of the most closed authoritarian regimes, such as the Soviet Union, have claimed to operate on the basis of elections. How, then, do elections become an authoritarian, rather than a democratic, institution? The precise function of elections in authoritarian regimes is subject to considerable debate, partly because different insights are generated by scholars focusing on very different types of elections (local/national, executive/legislative) and different authoritarian regimes.

It is, however, possible to divide the literature on the role of authoritarian elections into two major, and seemingly conflicting, camps. The first group of literature argues that elections play an overall democratising role, with the potential to result in liberalising outcomes and to eventually *undermine* authoritarianism (Lindberg, 2006; Howard & Roessler, 2006; Hadenius & Teorell, 2007; Lindberg, 2009).

By contrast, the second, wider, strand of literature argues that elections serve as an important instrument through which authoritarian incumbents hold on to power and *prolong* their rule. Within this literature on the regime-supporting role of elections, scholars have proposed a number of mechanisms through which elections serve to the benefit of authoritarianism, which may be summarised into five functions.

The first function is that of legitimacy - elections are used to show that the authoritarian rulers have a legitimate claim to power which is based on popular will (Waterbury, 1999; Schedler, 2002). The second function is informational - elections may provide authoritarian incumbents with information on the bases of support for and opposition towards them, as well as information on the loyalty, competence and the relative performance of their own cadres (Magaloni, 2006; Birney, 2007; Blaydes, 2008; Cox 2009). Linked to these is the third, signalling, function - election results are powerful indicators of regime strength (both, in terms of popular appeal and the strength of the coercive and/or manipulative regime apparatus) (Geddes, 2005; Malesky & Schuler, 2008; Simpser, 2013). Fourth, elections are considered to be important tools for elite management and the co-optation of elites, opposition and voters (Lust-Okar, 2005; Boix & Svolik, 2009; Cox, 2009). Fifth, elections provide the opportunity for dialogue between voters and public officials, and can help to increase voter efficacy (Manion, 1996; Shi, 1999). The extent to which authoritarian elections

actually fulfil these five functions is thought to depend on variation in election and regime type, as well as timing and electoral rules (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009:p.406-7).

The two groups of literature are seemingly in conflict with one another. Whilst the first strand of research is in line with the much-criticised 'transition paradigm' (Carothers, 2002), which holds that countries in the grey zone between closed autocracies and democracies are nevertheless transitioning towards democracy, the second strand strips elections of their association with democracy entirely. As a result, one might be tempted to conclude that there exists a clear dichotomy of elections under authoritarianism - those with democratising potential, and those that strengthen authoritarianism.

2.1.2 Uniting the literature: uncertainty under electoral authoritarianism

As argued in the previous chapter, however, both strands of research suffer from their restricted focus on the end point of elections - democratisation or prolonged authoritarianism. As a result, it could be argued that they are missing a common origin - the mechanism and principle of elections, as the means of granting citizens the opportunity to express a preference over how they are to be ruled, remains constant, regardless of the outcome of these preferences.

Looking at authoritarian elections from this perspective, the two approaches emphasising the opposing (regime-subverting and regime-supporting) roles of elections under authoritarianism are not necessarily as incompatible as they may seem at first. In fact, this scholarly divide may be simply reflecting two possible outcomes of a dilemma that lies at the heart of this regime type: how can rulers maintain stable

authoritarian control at the same time as claiming to have political legitimacy on the basis that they have surrendered this control to the citizens?

Whilst this question may be a major source of concern to most authoritarian regimes, it is especially problematic for rulers in electoral authoritarian systems, such as that in Russia, due to the nature of the contemporary context within which these regimes operate and the volatility of elections as a source of legitimacy. As will become clear from the discussion below, in this context, the answer to the question of whether elections become an authoritarian ruler's institutional ally or a democratising foe appears to depend heavily on his ability to solve the above dilemma and achieve some kind of balance between manipulation and electoral legitimacy.

Consider the fact that the starting point for any type of political rule is the question of legitimacy - what is the popularly accepted source of the rulers' authority over the ruled? In the past, authoritarian regimes and their elites could draw legitimacy from a number of sources, such as ideology (for example in communist regimes), national interest (military dictatorships) and the ruler's hereditary status (monarchies), amongst others. Although many of these regimes, such as the Soviet Union, operated under an electoral guise, elections in authoritarian contexts were mostly seen as being nothing more than symbolic authoritarian rituals characterised by fraud, a complete absence of any real competition, and the predictable selection of regime-favoured candidates. This state of affairs was made possible precisely because such authoritarian systems were founded on legitimacy drawn from other sources beside elections (in the Soviet case, for example, an important source was the Communist ideology), which, when taken together with other factors such as the repressive power of the regime, meant that for a very long time suppression of competition and extreme manipulation of the electoral

process entailed fairly low risks for undermining the legitimacy of a regime and therefore its stability. The resulting artificial nature of authoritarian elections meant that these institutions received relatively little scholarly attention compared to other aspects of authoritarian politics, such as the executive, state capacity, bureaucracy and regime elites.

By contrast, today's post-Cold War era of popular participation exerts greater pressures for democracy from both domestic and international actors, meaning that the most persuasive and widely recognised form of regime legitimacy comes from elections. The majority of today's authoritarian regimes are therefore forced to draw on elections as the *sole* source of their legitimacy and formally abide by the electoral rules of the game.

Contrary to some of the earlier expectations of those exerting such pressures, however, elections *can* coexist with authoritarianism because, in purely institutional terms, elections are not necessarily a major obstacle for authoritarian rulers - as mentioned earlier, elections are frequently manipulated and, as the second strand of the literature on authoritarian functions of elections indicates, they can facilitate a number of processes which actually help to strengthen the regime. However, the potential of elections to work in favour of authoritarian incumbents nevertheless depends on the extent to which the electoral process and its outcomes are accepted by the voters and political rivals - this requires careful management, regardless of the function fulfilled by elections.

For example, in order for elections to be useful indicators of regime strength, the rulers must manage to make this signal credible without opening themselves up for

serious defeat, or to maintain a level of ignorance, fear and/or apathy regarding electoral violations amongst the ruled. Similarly, costly co-optation and patronage distribution cannot extend to everyone, thus authoritarian rulers must manage to neutralise the hostility of those left out. Likewise, information on the strength of the opposition is only useful in so far as the regime manages to prevent this from becoming a signal of its own weakness. Finally, legitimacy also requires credibility, which means that the rulers must manage both to avoid defeat in elections that are 'too' free and fair, and defeat by elections that are not free and fair enough.

This is where elections become problematic for authoritarian rulers - legitimacy in this context depends on the credibility of electoral outcomes, whilst credibility in turn depends on the persistence of at least some degree of competition, freedom and fairness.³⁷ Taken together, this means that if authoritarian incumbents wish to remain in power, their options for manipulation, however impressive, are nevertheless limited.

This point echoes the work of Andreas Schedler (2009b), who argues that electoral victory through manipulation entails a loss in legitimacy for the authoritarian rulers - when these losses outweigh the benefits of manipulation (for example, when the voters and the opposition have enough motivation to organise mass protests after an election), elections destabilise the regime and may lead to the removal of authoritarian

³⁷ This is not to say that electoral legitimacy necessarily resides *purely* in the freedom and fairness of elections - for example, voters may accept the legitimacy of manipulated electoral outcomes if they perceive the final result to be a broadly correct capture of voter preferences and power relations within a regime, despite some irregularities. However, increasingly, researchers are highlighting the importance of electoral integrity for continued voter engagement and support for the system. For example, Simpser (2012) finds that electoral manipulation under the PRI in Mexico ultimately served to discourage citizens from voting. More recently, Reuter and Szakonyi (2018) find that, amongst voters in Russia, many of the strongest supporters of the regime nevertheless expect free and fair elections, and withdraw their support from the ruling party candidates when the latter are found to have engaged in fraud.

rulers from office. According to Schedler, the divide in the literature on the role of elections in authoritarian regimes is precisely the reflection of the tension between legitimacy and control that is inherent to these political systems. Their differences arise from the fact that work focusing on the beneficial functions of elections for authoritarianism does so in terms of a 'probabilistic' assertion, whilst work emphasising the democratising power of elections in this context follows a 'possibilistic' assertion (Schedler, 2010:p.78).

In other words, most of the time, when the benefits of manipulation are in balance or outweigh the losses in legitimacy (for example, in the context of weak civil society or when the levels of protest sentiments and mobilisation are low), elections help to prolong authoritarian rule. By contrast, when elections are widely perceived as fraudulent and their results are not considered to be legitimate, it is possible for them to become a catalyst for liberalisation and democratization, as voters and the opposition become mobilised in protest to overt and severe electoral manipulation. It thus seems that there exists a trade-off at the heart of electoral authoritarianism - authoritarian rulers cannot enjoy the benefits and the legitimacy offered by electoral institutions without taking on the risk and uncertainty that these institutions bring.

In short, authoritarian elections appear to entail a peculiar possibility, which carries major consequences for the role of this institution in such a regime - their results may or may not be accepted by voters and the opposition due to the fact that such elections necessarily involve manipulation. Moreover, this possibility is at its strongest and most dangerous under electoral authoritarian rule, where the sole source of political legitimacy comes from elections. This is in stark contrast with democracy, another political system which relies on elections to justify authority, but where the voters' and

other political actors' acceptance of the electoral verdict and defeat is in many ways part of the system's very definition.

Authoritarian elections therefore involve double the uncertainty that exists in a democracy - first, uncertainty over the outcomes of an election, and second, stemming from the authoritarian incumbents' attempts at reducing the former through manipulation, there exists uncertainty over the acceptance of those results. This means that electoral authoritarian leaders have a two-fold aim at election time - not only how to win an election, but also how to win it credibly, so as to claim legitimate authority and ensure regime stability.

Recent events have shown that this assumption is relevant for the study of Russian elections, as losses in legitimacy appear to be a major and very real source of concern for Russia's authoritarian incumbents.

First, the experience of colour revolutions triggered by electoral fraud in a number of neighbouring post-Soviet countries would undoubtedly have served as important lessons in this respect. It is no secret that leading Russian politicians possess serious concerns over these developments, and have stepped up their efforts to avoid a similar chain of events at home.³⁸ Whilst their reasons may be framed in terms of threats to national interests, there can be no doubt that that Russia's authoritarian rulers are aware of the magnitude of the potential threat to their power that would stem from a comparable loss in legitimacy.

³⁸ See for example, Korsunskaya, 2014

Furthermore, the earlier-discussed domestic wave of protests following the December 2011 elections to the State Duma showed that the potential of Russian citizens to mobilise and protest against electoral manipulation is real, thereby acting as a further stark reality check for Russia's authoritarian rulers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these protests resulted in the relaxation of a number of rules which have previously been introduced with the intention of manipulating elections and skewing the playing field in favour of the Kremlin and the United Russia political party, including the return of regional governor elections and changes to the restrictive law on parties (for example, a reduction in the minimum number of members needed to register a party from 40,000 to 500 in 2012).

Response of this kind only further highlights the fact that the threat posed by the protests was taken seriously by the authoritarian rulers and that it was recognised that the levels of manipulation and control over future elections needed to be reduced in order to maintain regime stability. Thus, it is appropriate to assume that losses in legitimacy in Russia are a very possible risk for its authoritarian rulers, and that considerations over legitimacy play an important role in driving the behaviour of authoritarian actors in the Russian electoral arena.

2.1.3 Uncertainty under authoritarianism: implications for electoral manipulation

This expectation about the aims of the authoritarian ruling elite at election time carries major implications for the research questions driving the present study. Specifically, the need to balance the certainty of authoritarian victory with the

perceived legitimacy of electoral outcomes carries two key implications for the authoritarian incumbents' decisions over the use of electoral manipulation.

First, if elections are to be deemed legitimate instruments for investing power, they cannot be reduced to the status of ceremonies returning preselected candidates through extreme manipulation but must instead retain at least some image as platforms for real contest. Some uncertainty over electoral outcomes must therefore remain, which means that manipulation is unlikely to occur to the same extent everywhere. In other words, authoritarian power in successful electoral authoritarian regimes must be founded on a combination of genuine popular preferences and limited electoral manipulation. This conclusion is seemingly in line with the initial lessons revealed by the December 2011 elections in Russia, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The second implication extends beyond this, however, in that the limits to manipulation are not expected to be random. If electoral manipulation is a costly endeavour in terms of legitimacy and resources, it is likely that the regime will engage in manipulation when these costs are worth the potential gains in terms of certainty over the prospects of electoral victory.

Thus, the dualism of authoritarian elections, through forcing authoritarian rulers to balance electoral control with legitimacy, necessitates a logic to electoral manipulation.

The next two sections of this chapter seek to unravel this logic further on the basis of insights from existing research on electoral manipulation and voter behaviour. Specifically, the discussion will first break down the definition of electoral manipulation into a menu of four narrower strategies most frequently used in the

context of Russian elections, before arguing that the urban-rural divide captures key differences in voting behaviour amongst the Russian population. Taken together, it is argued that urbanisation serves as a key indicator of voter sentiments to the ruling elites in Russia's electoral authoritarian regime, which subsequently informs their calculations of the costs and benefits associated with using the various strategies of electoral manipulation. As such, it is proposed that urbanisation, as a signal of electoral uncertainty for the regime, is key to understanding the logic of electoral manipulation in Russia.

2.2 Electoral manipulation

Thus, the starting insight, deriving from the division in the literature on authoritarian elections, is that electoral manipulation, in regimes where elections are the main source of political legitimacy, is a complex process that requires careful balancing and calculations from the regime elites. This section seeks to build on this assumption by breaking down the concept of electoral manipulation further, via the framework of the 'menu of manipulation'. It begins with a general discussion of the concept of electoral manipulation and the 'menu' approach, before refining this framework further and identifying four specific strategies of manipulation frequently employed in the Russian context.

2.2.1 Conceptualising electoral manipulation

What is electoral manipulation? As discussed in the previous chapter, manipulation is broadly understood as the interference with the freedom and fairness of elections,

with the intent to direct the formation, expression and impact of voter preferences in one's favour.

Manipulation is not a monolithic concept - there exist numerous strategies for delivering serious blows to the freedom and fairness of an election in order to sway the playing field to one's advantage. The opaque nature of manipulation, however, makes this diversity problematic for researchers, as it reduces conceptual clarity and thus makes systematic and comparative analyses difficult.

The work of Andreas Schedler (2002) has made the greatest inroads into alleviating this problem, and serves as an important starting point for the identification of manipulation processes in the present study. Schedler (2002) proposes that whilst democratic norms cannot be '*perfectly* realised everywhere, even in advanced democracies' (p.38), it is nevertheless possible to outline a chain of democratic choice that must remain intact in order for elections to qualify as democratic.

This chain consists of seven conditions that must each be fulfilled (Schedler, 2002:pp.39-41). First, elections must offer *empowerment* - the political office offered through elections must hold real decision-making authority. Elections must also be based on *free supply* and *demand* - equality of access to the electoral arena and the freedom to join and support conflicting parties, candidates and policies, as well as the freedom to form preferences through the availability of and access to diverse sources of information. Elections must be *inclusive* (universal suffrage) and citizens must be *insulated* from pressure when expressing their preferences at the ballot box. Elections also require bureaucratic *integrity* - votes must be counted honestly and weighed

equally. Finally, election results must be *irreversible* - the elected representatives must be able to assume office and exercise their lawful powers.

Schedler argues that elections become non-democratic when authoritarian incumbents attempt to impinge on any (and frequently more than one) of these seven dimensions of democratic choice through a set of actions that are understood under the umbrella term of electoral manipulation. He proposes that there exists a 'menu of manipulation' corresponding to the seven links outlined above, from which authoritarian rulers select certain strategies in order to skew the playing field and secure victory.

First, authoritarian rulers may limit the decision-making power of elected officials by introducing *reserved positions and domains* which hold the real power in a regime, thereby reducing the elected positions to a more subordinate role. Second, regarding restrictions on supply, rulers can *exclude* their rivals from electoral contest - either through repression, or, more often, through banning and disqualifying parties and candidates at election time. Similarly, authoritarian rulers can seek to *fragment* the opposition by encouraging splits and defection through bribery or harassment of members of opposition parties, or by designing institutions that encourage fragmentation (such as extreme forms of proportional representation or even full bans on political parties as a form of organisation, which would result in the proliferation of independent and unaffiliated candidates).

Third, authoritarian rulers can manipulate demand by interfering with the formation of voter preferences. This can be achieved by creating a drastically *unfair playing field* by restricting the opposition's access to media, informational and financial

resources, whilst using the state resources (such as state funding and state-owned media) to their advantage. The fourth option for manipulation is to control the composition of electorate through both *formal and informal disenfranchisement* (such as the persecution and elimination of certain social groups, identification and registration methods which discriminate against certain groups of citizens, and barring voters from polling stations).

Fifth, authoritarian rulers can resort to *voter intimidation and clientelist control* of voters in order to affect the expression of voter preferences at the ballot box. Sixth, authoritarian rulers can resort to *electoral fraud*. Seventh, rulers can attempt to *reverse the outcomes of the elections* through a coup or by informally subordinating the elected representatives through ‘authoritarian tutelage’.

This framework serves as an important theoretical starting point for the present investigation, as it represents one of the most comprehensive attempts at classifying the manipulative strategies pursued by authoritarian rulers in their quest for success at election time.³⁹

To what extent, then, do the strategies pursued by authoritarian rulers in Russia reflect this menu of manipulation? First, it is clear that in the Russian case, some of these manipulation options are ignored by the authoritarian incumbents. However, this

³⁹ A small number of alternative typologies have been proposed by researchers in recent years - most notably, in the work of Birch (2011) and Cheeseman & Klaas (2018). Schedler’s ‘menu’ has been selected as a theoretical foundation for this dissertation because it offers a superior compromise between structure and flexibility, when compared to these alternative frameworks - Cheeseman & Klaas’s framework represents a very restrictive list of just six strategies (some of which, such as gerrymandering, are too specific and therefore exclude a myriad of other options for manipulation), whilst Birch’s threefold typology is too broad, allowing the aggregation of many distinct strategies (with potentially different incentive structures) under just three main forms of manipulation.

is actually in line with the assumptions outlined in the previous section - the options ignored undermine the credibility of elections in the most overt (and unacceptable) way and therefore carry the largest legitimacy costs. The first of the options avoided by the Russian authoritarian incumbents is the undermining of the effects of elections through reserved positions - although the balance of power in Russian politics is in favour of the executive and his administration, other elected positions have retained their decision-making powers, and elections remain the only legitimate gateway to such authority. Second, formal disenfranchisement of voters is nonexistent in Russia as the country operates under universal suffrage, whilst analyses of electoral manipulation practices remain largely silent on informal disenfranchisement, which suggests that this is not a major tactic employed by the regime. Third, the outcomes of elections are meaningful and are accepted by the authoritarian rulers.

The use of other manipulation strategies mentioned by Schedler is widespread, however. During elections for all levels of government, candidates and parties frequently find themselves excluded from elections due to arbitrary registration procedures (Baekken, 2015; Ross, 2018); fake opposition candidates and parties take part in electoral races with the intention to fragment the opposition or spoil their chances of victory (Golosov, 2015); mobilising pressures are exerted on voters (Harvey, 2016); and accusations regarding electoral fraud and forgery are frequent (Lukinova, Myagkov & Ordeshook, 2011).⁴⁰ Furthermore, a 'web of auxiliary institutions' (Smyth & Turovsky, 2018:p.183), including legislation relating to various electoral, registration and funding rules, as well as the concentration of the media in the hands of the Kremlin, distort the playing field and serve in favour of the regime candidates and

⁴⁰ For more detailed summaries of the full range of manipulation see Wilson (2005); Buzin (2007); Ross (2011, 2014, 2018).

parties, most notably United Russia. The Russian menu of manipulation therefore initially appears to consist of a reduced version of the original menu that targets four out of the seven chain links (freedom of supply, freedom of demand, insulation of the expression of voter preferences and bureaucratic integrity), and involving five out of the eight major strategies proposed by Schedler.

However, simply acknowledging and categorising the strategies of manipulation into a neat menu does not allow us to narrow the focus enough to proceed with the investigation of the patterns in the use of electoral manipulation. In order to explore the logic of manipulation through a more systematic analysis, it is important to refine the menu of manipulation further.

It might be more useful to separate the original classification into two major levels - first, the wider regime level, and second, the micro-level of the electoral arena. The first level seems to be the aggregate level of manipulation, encompassing the institutional and organisational structure of the regime including electoral rules, legislation on party set-up and funding, ownership structure of the national media, and other already-existing legal and economic arrangements. Based on information at this level, we can know prior to an election that a regime is authoritarian and that the playing field is uneven.

The second level is a micro-level of manipulation, referring to the more immediate actions taken within the electoral arena during the election period itself, such as the exclusion of candidates through the arbitrary application of registration rules; introduction of spoiler candidates to fragment the opposition; ballot rigging; and voter mobilisation, amongst others. Compared to manipulation at the first level, we know

the precise degree of manipulation, and therefore the actual competitiveness of an election, only during the election period itself, as well as immediately after the votes have been counted.

Dividing manipulation strategies in this way means that we are in effect separating the short-term 'active' manipulation (the direct choices and actions of individuals at election time) from the long-term 'systemic' manipulation (operating all of the time, primarily through rules). This conceptual divide helps to explain why the competitiveness of individual elections and the chances of different authoritarian candidates can vary within a regime, even though, in the wider context, manipulation remains at the same level.

In seeking to explore the logic behind authoritarian victory at the level of regional legislative elections, this thesis effectively controls for the national-level of manipulation and narrows its focus to the behaviour of actors in the regional electoral arena. As a result, it is primarily concerned with exploring the patterns in the use of strategies belonging to the 'active' micro-level menu of manipulation. Crucially, conceptualising the menu of manipulation in terms of these two levels, highlights the appropriateness of an actor-centric approach to such an investigation. Manipulation within the electoral arena is more than just a matter of rules that skew the playing field in favour of regime incumbents; it is the active application or violation of such rules by regime actors. As such, manipulation of this kind should be treated as a type of electoral behaviour, and it is therefore worth investigating further whether it appears to be driven by calculations of legitimacy and victory costs, as discussed in the preceding section of the present chapter.

2.2.2 The proposed 'menu of manipulation' in Russian regional legislative elections

Following this adapted version of Schedler's menu of manipulation, and based on the insights stemming from existing research on the practice of electoral manipulation across Russia, it is possible to conclude that the 'active' menu of manipulation at this level consists of the following major strategies:

- 1) *Electoral Fraud*: distortion of results through false votes (such as ballot-box stuffing) and dishonest counting procedures
- 2) *Exclusion of Rivals*: arbitrary refusal of candidate registration or elimination of a candidate from the race, seemingly based on genuine violations in electoral procedure
- 3) *Distorting Supply Through Fragmentation*: the use of spoiler parties and candidates
- 4) *Distorting the Level of Participation*: voter mobilisation

It is important to note that these strategies are not equal in terms of their aims or overall costs to the authoritarian ruler. Electoral fraud, such as ballot-box stuffing, is the crudest form of manipulation because it carries very high risks for the credibility of elections if its existence is uncovered. This risk is high because fraud on mass scale is visible (either through absurdity and inconsistencies in official figures or through mass complaints and reports on violations of electoral integrity) and uniformly considered unacceptable by voters and election participants, making this a very costly strategy in

terms of legitimacy. At the same time, fraud is in many ways the most appealing option of manipulation because it carries fairly low implementation costs (particularly in terms of time and financial considerations) and the highest benefits of manipulation because it gives the authoritarian elites the maximum control over electoral outcomes through the artificial creation of the results.

Refusing to register a candidate is the next form of manipulation in terms of sophistication because it takes on a legal guise (which is a bonus when compared to the indisputable illegality of fraud). The potential benefits from this type of manipulation are high if this tactic is successful because excluding opponents reduces the uncertainty over electoral outcomes significantly and involves fairly low implementation costs. However, it nevertheless offers less control over election results than fraud because there is no guarantee that a powerful and experienced opponent will commit the bureaucratic or campaign errors that would legally merit the rejection of his candidacy. At the same time, the potential costs in legitimacy remain high because this tactic is still very visible to the electorate and the opposition, and therefore risks attracting negative attention from these actors.

Third, the entry of spoiler parties and candidates is a more subtle strategy because not every voter will be able to recognise this tactic, and it is difficult to prove that the intentions of a real individual, or an entire party, are fake. However, this strategy carries considerable implementation costs because it involves sponsoring an additional electoral campaign, the costs of which can only increase if the authoritarian elites wish to increase the credibility of a spoiler candidacy. In addition to this, the degree of control over elections results afforded by this strategy is lower than that offered by the

two previous tactics as there is no guarantee that a spoiler candidate will attract enough votes to significantly damage the chances of a political rival.

Finally, voter mobilisation is the most sophisticated option of manipulation in this set because it is more subtle, diffuse (involving large numbers of atomised actors) and difficult to prove, thereby carrying the least risks for the credibility of election outcomes. At the same time it is very costly as it involves the cooptation of a large number of individuals either through the delivery of private goods or through channeling material resources in other ways (such as through the provision of voter transport to the polling station), whilst use of the secret ballot nevertheless ensures that some uncertainty over the voting figures remains. Furthermore, universal forms of voter mobilisation (attempts to increase voter participation through general mobilising drives, without targeted payoffs or repression) can also be costly because they may unintentionally encourage the participation of voters who are hostile towards the regime.

In addition to this, it is important to note the different intentions behind the tactics discussed above: electoral fraud seeks to undermine the expressed voter preferences; candidate exclusion and the use of spoiler candidates seek to distort the formation and expression of voter preferences; and voter mobilisation seeks to enhance the expression of voter preferences. These strategies, therefore, not only operate at different stages of the chain of democratic choice, but also carry 'negative' and 'positive' implications for voter preferences - notably, voter mobilisation stands out as the only 'positive' strategy, in that it actively promotes such preferences.

Overall, the differing aims, costs and benefits of these strategies mean that authoritarian elites in Russia possess a wide-ranging menu of manipulation that offers different levels of costs to legitimacy and control over electoral outcomes. Therefore, investigations of the logic of manipulation must remain sensitive to the concept of electoral manipulation and study each strategy individually.

The present investigation is particularly interested in examining whether the decision to use each strategy from this menu of manipulation hinges on electoral context. It is proposed that the balance between the costs to legitimacy and gains in electoral certainty for authoritarian actors changes alongside shifts in voting behaviour, and thus the use of manipulation is tailored accordingly. Specifically, it is hypothesised that the value of gains in electoral certainty begins to outweigh the legitimacy costs for the regime in areas populated with hostile voters, where there exist high levels of electoral risk for the regime - as a result, authoritarian actors are expected to be more likely to turn to electoral manipulation, particularly the 'negative' strategies from the menu above, in such instances.

Therefore, the next section of this chapter considers the other component crucial to the proposed logic of manipulation - electoral context. Specifically, it argues that existing research points to the urban-rural divide as a powerful indicator of underlying voter sentiments in Russia's electoral landscape, and thus it is proposed that urbanisation may align with authoritarian considerations over the use of electoral manipulation.

2.3 Urbanisation as an indicator of voter behaviour

This thesis proposes that urbanisation is a crucial indicator of electoral risk for Russia's regime elites in the context of poor information under authoritarianism, and as such it informs their decisions over the use of the costly strategies of manipulation discussed above. This assumption is based on insights from research on voting behaviour across the world, as well as studies specific to Russia, which are discussed in this section of the chapter.

2.3.1 The significance of the urban-rural divide across the world

Electoral authoritarian regimes, as hybrid political systems, involve components of both democracy and authoritarianism - a combination which sees formally democratic institutions, most notably elections, operating in the context of authoritarian manipulation. As a result, the role of voter preferences in electoral authoritarian elections cannot be discarded completely - indeed, given our starting assumption, the influence of electoral manipulation is not all pervasive, and it cannot radically distort the concerns of every single voter. Thus we would expect that to an extent, the bases on which voter preferences are formed are able to withstand systemic manipulation and subsequently do carry some electoral impact. This section discusses the divide of voter attitudes across the urban-rural continuum in many countries the world, and argues that research consistently confirms the salience of urbanisation as an indicator of voter preferences.

The urban-rural divide in voting behaviour has long been recognised, beginning with the seminal work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) which highlighted the role of social structure in determining voting behaviour and identified the urban-rural dichotomy as one of the four key social cleavages which have been crucial to party formation in Western Europe. Today, research on voting behaviour across the world continues to highlight differences between urban and rural voters. Researchers on US elections have repeatedly uncovered the impact of urban-rural residence on American politics and election outcomes. Although the political geography of United States often focuses on inter-state differences, according to Fisher (2014), 'the red versus blue election-night maps mask the sometimes large urban-rural divide within states' (p.176). Thus, rural voters have consistently been found to be more likely to vote Republican, even in the 'blue' Democrat states, whilst urban voters are more likely to support the Democrats, even in the 'red' states (McKee, 2008). Moreover, this divide appears to be growing in contemporary American politics (McKee, 2008; Morrill and Webster, 2015; Scala & Johnson, 2017). Whilst the United States may be an advanced democracy and therefore subject to different regime dynamics when compared with the electoral authoritarian system in Russia, the presence of urban-rural differences in such a diverse federation carries important implications for Russian politics as it highlights the persistence of the urban-rural divide *within* federal units, even in the face of vast inter-state contrasts. The American case can therefore generate valuable insights for the study of intra-regional dynamics in another diverse federation, such as Russia.

The American urban-rural dynamics are echoed in the experience of other large states with complex territorial divisions, such as that of Canada, where, similarly, rural voters tend to be less progressive and more socially conservative than their urban counterparts (Blais, 2002; Cutler & Jenkins, 2002). Scheiner's (1999) study further

highlights the continued relevance of the urban-rural cleavage beyond the advanced democracies of North America and Europe, arguing that an approach emphasising urban-rural differences offers the greatest explanatory power when it comes to understanding the voting behaviour in Japan. Similar to the trends in USA and Canada, Japanese urban voters were found to be more moderate and less tied to supporting conservative politicians.

Urban-rural differences represent a key feature of electoral politics in developing democracies, too. In the post-Soviet space, researchers have drawn attention to signs of a growing urban-rural cleavage in Slovenia (Tiran, 2011) and Georgia (Sichinava, 2017). Interestingly, in many African democracies, where the vast majority of the population tend to be rural residents, urban and rural citizens are nevertheless starkly divided in their willingness to support incumbent politicians - incumbents have been found to perform consistently poorly in the cities, whilst enjoying high levels of support in the countryside (Jeffries, 1998; Harding, 2010; Resnick, 2011; Koter, 2013).

Crucially, the urban-rural divide is visible even in many modern authoritarian states. In particular, rural voters appear to be a key constituency for authoritarianism. For example, in Turkey, the ruling party AKP enjoys particularly high levels of support in rural communities (Gürel, Küçük & Taş, 2018). Malaysia, which is classed as a hybrid regime (Levitsky & Way, 2010), experienced electoral 'tsunamis' in 2013 and 2018, which eventually ended 60 years of rule by the United Malays National Organization, UMNO. Urbanisation has been strongly associated with this development, with many observers linking this result with the long-term trend which saw the proportion of Malaysia's urban population increase from 34.2 percent in 1980 to 71 percent in 2010 (Bowring, 2018). The work of Wei et al. (2015) has argued that this

weakening of authoritarianism was largely brought about by an 'urban wave', which has been growing since at least 2008. These authors found that in 2013, the urban constituencies generated strong support for the opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat, whilst rural areas continued to overwhelmingly support the authoritarian incumbent coalition, Barisan Nasional. The impact of urbanisation on electoral politics in Malaysia was subsequently found to be larger than that of other major social factors, including ethnicity.

The global trends therefore point to a consistent pattern of division between urban and rural constituencies when it comes to voter preferences. Urban voters appear to be more progressive than their rural counterparts, as well as being more hostile towards incumbents. Crucially, this trend appears to apply to a wide range of regime types, including electoral authoritarianism.

2.3.2 The urban-rural divide in Russia

In the past, many scholars have argued that the development of political cleavages in Russia has been severely inhibited by the Soviet legacy and post-Soviet political development. Some have proposed that the Soviet experience resulted in the eradication of many social divisions which structured the direction of electoral competition and party system development in advanced Western democracies (Ost, 1993; Ahl, 1999; Rose, Tikhomirov & Mishler, 1997). Others have argued that only one major political cleavage managed to emerge in post-Soviet Russia - the division in attitudes towards political and economic liberalism (Kitschelt, 1992).

More recently, scholars have concluded that whilst ideological and programmatic policy stances based on social and political cleavages are not entirely nonexistent, they are not of sole (or necessarily primary) importance for voter preferences and politics in Russia. Vladimir Gel'man (2008), for example, has argued that 'the role of ideology as a product in Russia's electoral market has shrunk' (p.921). The deprivations of the transition period have made the electorate more susceptible to pragmatic concerns over issues such as order, economic and political stability, the demographic crisis and international security - much of Putin's and United Russia electoral success has therefore been attributed to campaigns lacking in ideology and emphasising these pragmatic appeals (Gel'man, 2008; Smyth, Lowry & Wilkening, 2013).

Moreover, assessments of politics at the regional level, which are particularly relevant for this study, further highlight weak levels of ideological and party alignment in Russia. Kynev (2014) has argued that although in recent years political reforms in Russia have strengthened the role of parties and the level of party representation in regional legislatures, the ideological and social differences between these parties are not very large. The differences among parties at the regional level stem more strongly from the types of elite groups located within these parties, rather than the parties' formal ideological position (as advocated at the federal level). As a result, it is common to see frequent migration of politicians between ideologically distant parties, whilst some have concluded that there is little coherence in party labels at the regional level as the same parties can differ significantly across regions (both in their formal positions and their elite composition).

This research may therefore lead to the initial conclusion that there are unlikely to be many differences in the sentiments held by urban and rural citizens in Russia today.

However, the weakness of party affiliation and ideology in Russian politics is not necessarily conclusive proof of the notion that there exist no meaningful political difference between the urban and rural electorates.

Notably, there exists much work which has indicated that the early arguments on the weakness of political cleavages in Russia were shortsighted, by highlighting the presence of a number of cleavages based on income, urban/rural, religious, ethnic and regional lines of division, as well as attitudes towards nationalism, and economic and political liberalism after the transition period in Russia (Whitefield, 2002; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2009). Furthermore, despite their weaknesses, Russian parties today can nevertheless be systematically separated according to coherent ideological and policy issue positions reflecting some of these cleavages (Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2009).

Crucially, a division between the attitudes of urban and rural voters in Russia can be traced, beginning from the 1990s. Previous research, for example, has found that urban voters were more likely to hold a pro-reform outlook and support President Yeltsin during the 1990s, whilst voters in rural areas tended to be more conservative and anti-reformist, thus more closely aligning with the Communist Party (Belin & Orttung, 1997; Clem & Craumer, 1995; McFaul, 1997). The explanations behind this divide were linked to other socio-economic variables associated with urbanisation (age and education), as well as clientelistic ties, with some researchers considering the pro-Yeltsin stance of many urban voters to be the outcome of their greater entrenchment in clientelistic machines, due to their proximity to a region's political centre (Berezkin, Myagkov & Ordeshook, 1999).

Writing in 1997, Clem & Craumer concluded that the urban-rural divide 'separates the [Russian] population along political lines perhaps more distinctly than any other single factor' (1997: p.379) Beyond the 1990s, however, the urban-rural divide appears to have persisted, albeit with slightly different directions. Most recently, Claypool et al (2018) have uncovered evidence which suggests that there exists a link between urbanisation and support for authoritarian leaders in Russia - rural identity was found to reduce the likelihood that an individual would vote for candidates other than Putin, with rural residents being 63 percent more likely to stay at home on election day than to vote for a candidate who is not Putin. Given that other recent work has found that citizens' views on Putin are an important predictor of party support (Hutcheson & McAllister, 2017), the favourable support for Putin amongst the rural voters can be taken as an indicator of their similarly favourable view of the regime and United Russia, as the party of power.

Thus, contemporary urban-rural divide in Russia appears to have transformed since the 1990s, with rural voters now being more pro-regime than their urban counterparts. This development can be attributed to two factors. First, the surge in regime support in rural areas may be driven by the fact that pro-government and regime parties have boosted considerably their campaign efforts in the countryside after the 1990s. Second, this transformation is also in line with a shift in the regime's position relative to other actors in Russian politics. Thus, during the 1990s, the Russian regime was on the progressive and liberal side politics in the context of a transition where the previous status quo was an authoritarian communist system - by contrast, during the 2000s, the regime has entrenched itself as the authoritarian status quo, hostile to many progressive and liberal ideas. In this sense, it is possible to interpret the corresponding shift in the pro-regime stances of urban and rural voters as an indicator of the

continuation of a more consistent theme of division - rural voters tend to be more conservative in their political attitudes than urban voters.

Mamonova's (2019) work on rural residents in Russia supports the latter point. She finds that Russian villagers possess a number of 'conservative peasant values', including those relating to traditional family structure and the notion of a strong household leader (*khozyain*). Moreover, her work on rural protests and political engagement (2016) argues that there persists a degree of 'naive monarchism' amongst rural residents in Russia, where rural voters continue to approach the regime in positive terms even when voicing their grievances. This behaviour, it is argued, echoes 'the myth of tsar-deliverer' (Ibid:p.319) in which rural voters directly address the benevolent president Vladimir Putin in the hope that he interferes and punishes the corrupt local authorities. These traditional aspects of the rural citizens' outlook are subsequently thought to explain their preference for strongman leadership, and authoritarianism.

Interestingly, the divide between urban and rural electorates is not limited to political attitudes but appears to extend to political participation. Researchers have identified urban voters as being less likely to turn out to vote in both presidential and parliamentary elections in many post-Soviet states, including Russia (Hesli et al., 1999; O'Brien & Wegren, 2002; Kostadinova, 2003), which appears to support a more general 'decline of the community model' (Verba & Nie, 1972) holding that political participation decreases as one moves from the tight-knit communities in the countryside to the vast and impersonal cities.

2.3.3 The utility of urbanisation as an indicator of electoral uncertainty for authoritarian actors

Broadly speaking, the significance of urbanisation as an indicator of voter sentiments, might be attributed to the fact that it captures the sorting of the population along a number of attributes which may ultimately be responsible for generating differences in voting behaviour (Wilkinson, 2019). For example, education, the most widely recognised predictor of voting behaviour, correlates with the urban-rural continuum (Shishkin, 2004; Smolentseva, 2007; Zhang, Li & Xue, 2015; USDA, 2017; Campbell, 2019). Similarly, existing research points to the salience of urban-rural spatial sorting in terms of many other electorally-significant dimensions, such as personality⁴¹ (Jokela et al., 2008; Jokela et al., 2015) or ethnicity (Parker et al., 2018). As a result, the urban-rural divide may be capturing important differences in voter behaviour because populations tend to be sorted into groups of better educated, diverse, and more 'temperamentally liberal' (Wilkinson, 2019:p.5) individuals in urban areas, and groups of more homogenous individuals, with a conservative disposition and lower levels of education, in the countryside.

Another important dimension which may explain why the urban-rural divide captures the division of the electorate into groups of urban sceptics and more regime-loyal rural voters relates to population density and proximity. Cities are more densely populated than the countryside - this feature of urban life brings a number of challenges for authoritarian regimes.

⁴¹ For example, research in political psychology emphasises the role of 'open' and 'closed' personality types as correlates of voting behaviour. (Rentfrow et al., 2009; Mondak, 2010; Johnston, Lavine & Federico, 2017).

For example, density can enable crime (Glaeser & Sacerdote, 1999), increase the strain on public services and infrastructure, and present threats to public health (as urban activity results in air and water pollution, and proximity aids the transmission of disease). Population density, therefore, can bring about costly social problems, which require effective public management. As proposed by Glaeser and Steinberg (2016), the precise 'social costs of density depend on the quality of government' (p.7), and thus, rising social costs may serve as an indicator of government incompetence. Moreover, tighter proximity to social facilities has been found to raise citizen expectations of government, meaning that urban residents have been found to be more likely to convert their dissatisfaction with social challenges into discontent with regime performance, than rural voters (Krishna & Schober, 2014; Brinkerhoff et al., 2018).

In other words, greater population density and proximity in urban areas makes voters raise their expectations of governments, and enables them to better monitor government performance and the delivery of public goods. This feature of urban life may explain the higher levels of scepticism and readiness to abandon support for the status quo among urban voters.

In addition, more densely populated areas reduce a number of barriers for opposition actors because they facilitate coordination (Harding, 2010) and boost the effectiveness of campaign resources. For example, costs of campaigning may be lower in cities, because parties can reach a densely-populated audience much faster and to a greater extent whilst canvassing in person, whilst the same can be said for even a small number of campaign materials (such as billboards in busy urban districts) (Conroy-Krutz, 2009; Boone & Wahman, 2015).

Together, the dynamics of population density and spatial sorting, although far from an exhaustive list, might explain the earlier-discussed commonalities in voter behaviour along the urban-rural divide across the world. The precise accuracy of urbanisation as an indicator of voting behaviour, as well as the possible mechanisms behind this, are not of primary interest to the present study, however. Instead, the salience of the urban-rural divide for the purposes of the present investigation lies in its *informational value* to regime actors operating in the context of relative information scarcity under authoritarianism. The remainder of this section, therefore, focuses on connecting this structural factor with the role of agency, by considering why urbanisation represents a particularly attractive proxy measure of electoral uncertainty from an actor-centric perspective.

A growing body of literature on authoritarian learning has greatly advanced our understanding of the dynamics behind continued authoritarian survival by highlighting the importance of an actor-centric approach for the study of authoritarianism. Specifically, research in this field has drawn attention to the strategic foundations of authoritarian politics - for example, in their study of Russia and China, Koesel and Bunce (2013) find that authoritarian leaders are vigilant political actors, who monitor and take pre-emptive actions to reduce the risk of international diffusion of anti-authoritarian mobilisation. It thus follows that authoritarian actors might be expected to adopt a similarly vigilant approach by monitoring and containing domestic threats to regime survival - including, electoral vulnerabilities. Indeed, many strategies of electoral manipulation (such as candidate exclusion or the inclusion of spoiler candidates in an electoral race) represent similarly pre-emptive actions to reduce domestic risks.

Electoral vigilance requires the regime to possess extensive information on voter sentiments, so as to be able to identify the challenges to electoral victory - yet, such information is scarce, particularly in an authoritarian context.⁴² Moreover, the gathering and processing of information on voters are costly activities in any political system. The national census is perhaps the best source of information on the demographic characteristics of voters - however, the utility of this information is limited for electoral purposes, since the gathering of this data takes place every ten years, and the outputs are not necessarily easy to digest for regime strategists because the data is not organised in terms of the (frequently-changing) constituency boundaries. In the relative absence of reliable information at a low cost, authoritarian actors might be expected to resort to using information shortcuts to identify electoral vulnerabilities.⁴³

It is plausible that urbanisation represents one such shortcut for the regime. This can be justified on two fronts. First, urbanisation itself can be seen as a factor hindering the process of information gathering for the regime, as large, densely populated urban areas are less vulnerable to authoritarian monitoring, since the sheer volume of people, and 'the hidden nooks and crannies that always exist in large cities' (Glaeser & Steinberg, 2016:p.9), make urban areas beyond the reach of most authoritarian actors.

In other words, cities and towns are considerably more opaque to regime actors, which,

⁴² This is not to say that information is entirely non-existent - rather, that detailed information on the population is not available on a systematic scale. As a starting point, consider the fact that authoritarian regimes cannot even rely on previous election data as a robust indicator of likely voter sentiments, since previous election outcomes may have been achieved through multiple layers of manipulation.

⁴³ For example, the literature on voting behaviour in liberal democracies has long recognised the significance of shortcuts for rational actors in low-information contexts (Lupia, 1994; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Ansolabehere et al., 2006)

in itself, contributes to uncertainty over the underlying distribution of voter sentiments in such areas.

Second, whilst other voter characteristics might represent more nuanced predictors of voting behaviour than urbanisation, and thus better signal the levels of electoral uncertainty for the regime, under the assumption of bounded rationality, urbanisation may nevertheless be more appealing as an indicator to authoritarian actors because it represents a more 'user-friendly' proxy measure of electoral risk.

It could be argued that, as an indicator, urbanisation is more than just a set of data points - unlike many other demographic and socio-economic indicators, the physical dimensions of urbanisation are much more easily identified. Urbanisation can be physically seen and felt by election managers when they travel through the countryside during campaign periods - it is visually identifiable through lower population density, and the preponderance of private housing with plots of land in rural areas, as opposed to high-rise apartment blocks in urban centres. Moreover, indicators of urbanisation are built into the geographical names of settlements (such as 'village' or 'city'), and, therefore, considerable information on the composition of the electorate may be obtained simply by looking at the boundaries of a given constituency.

The same cannot be said for other, albeit more powerful, predictors of voting behaviour, such as education. The operation of the latter into regime calculations requires considerable statistical computations because education is less tangible as an indicator, since it is a quality dispersed amongst hundreds (or thousands) of human subjects. Moreover, education may become increasingly more time-consuming and

difficult to measure, as the level of aggregation decreases (for example, moving from the general level of education in a given region to that in a given constituency).

Furthermore, education is just one of many other predictors of voting behaviour. In order to build a comprehensive assessment of electoral risk, on the basis of the likely voter sentiments in a given constituency, political elites need to collect and compute information on a wide range of dimensions. The spatial sorting captured by urbanisation is therefore an advantage in such circumstances, since it means that one indicator can simultaneously shed light on the distribution of multiple social attributes.

In other words, urbanisation represents a much more readily available source of information on the electorate, which makes it especially appealing to decision-makers operating in contexts of limited information and resources.⁴⁴ Thus, there is reason to argue that urbanisation would likely feature in two types of inferential shortcuts, identified in the field of cognitive psychology, and thought to be commonly used by political elites - the heuristics⁴⁵ of *availability* and *representativeness* (Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982; Vis, 2018).

The availability heuristic relates to a process where, when assessing the likelihood of something occurring, people tend to focus on and attribute 'the greatest evidentiary weight' (Weyland, 2010:p.1153) to the most vivid and immediate information. As summarised by Weyland (2010:p.1153):

'For instance, drivers who tear down the highway and see a car crash tend to slow down, impressed by the mishap; thus, a single accident immediately affects their thoughts and

⁴⁴ In other words, if we assume bounded rationality

⁴⁵ Broadly defined as 'methods for arriving at satisfactory solutions with modest amounts of computation' (Simon, 1990:p.11)

behavior, although by strictly logical standards, it should not significantly change their calculations of the benefits and risks of speeding.’

Thus, when it comes to calculating the probability of regime victory in a given district, we might expect authoritarian actors to base their decisions on the most vivid characteristics of an area, with urbanisation likely being high on this list due to its considerably more tangible symptoms (as discussed above). Furthermore, greater effectiveness and visibility of campaigns in more densely populated urban areas may lead to more bitter memories of electoral competition in urban districts for the regime.⁴⁶ Moreover, when authoritarian actors think about citizen hostility to the regime, protests are likely to represent some of the most vivid examples of these sentiments - these events, however, particularly in their most dramatic form and scale, are most likely to take place in cities. In other words, the availability of information on urbanisation might make examples of negative expressions of voter sentiments more likely to ‘stick’ to urbanisation (as opposed to other possible indicators, such as education) in the minds of authoritarian actors, whilst these vivid negative memories can subsequently play a powerful role in informing the calculations of these individuals.

Meanwhile, the representativeness heuristic might explain how urbanisation becomes part of a regime-wide logic of electoral manipulation. People use this heuristic (which, in itself is informed by the availability heuristic) when assessing the degree to which one situation or phenomenon resembles another, tending to overestimate regularity in data, and to base their judgments on distorted inferences, as a result.

⁴⁶ In addition, since population density increases the *visibility* of opposition campaigns, regime actors may *perceive* the level of threat from the opposition as being greater in such areas, since they, too, are part of the audience exposed to opposition campaign materials (such as billboards).

Vivid examples of threats to regime victory in a small number of urban cases may lead political actors to conclude that all urban areas are inherently challenging for the regime, and thus bias their decisions over the use of electoral manipulation.

In sum, even if urbanisation does not perfectly predict voter behaviour, there are strong grounds to argue that it nevertheless serves as a powerful indicator of electoral risk (and therefore uncertainty) for the human regime actors who are trying to calculate the regime's chances of electoral success.

2.3.4 Summary

In short, urban voters appear to be less likely to participate in elections, and to be more hostile towards the regime when they do. By contrast, existing research suggests that rural voters are not only more positive towards the authoritarian status quo, they are more likely to operate on the basis of just two options for decision at election time - a choice between casting a ballot in support of the regime, or staying at home. These contrasts between urban and rural areas in Russia are of key importance to the present investigation, given the curious signs of variation observed in the December 2011 case in Russia.

The thesis proposes that this divide informs the decisions over the use of manipulation in the context of Russia regional legislative elections, as the urban/rural status of a constituency indicates the potential level of risk to authoritarian victory. This is because urbanisation both obscures and reveals voter behaviour - population density inherent to urbanisation makes the detailed monitoring of certain segments of the population (urban residents) virtually impossible for regime actors, yet by itself,

urbanisation is also one of the most accessible types of information on the population, and thus particularly useful under conditions of bounded rationality. This study therefore assumes that these features of urbanisation mean that regime actors will feel less certain about their prospects of victory in the more urban contexts.

The next section of the chapter combines the insights from the present and the preceding sections, and proposes a series of hypotheses relating to the logic of electoral manipulation in Russia today.

2.4 The proposed logic of electoral manipulation

In sum this chapter has thus far argued that electoral manipulation represents the regime's attempt to reduce uncertainty over victory at election time, which is nevertheless constrained by concerns over the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. Specifically, the use of manipulation is assumed to be driven by calculations over the relative costs in terms of legitimacy and resources, and the relative gains in terms of electoral certainty. Existing research on electoral manipulation and voter behaviour was subsequently used to shed further light on the likely forms of manipulation, and the information which may serve as a useful indicator of electoral context in contemporary Russian elections. Specifically, a menu of four major strategies of electoral manipulation was proposed: electoral fraud; candidate exclusion; the use of spoiler candidates; and voter mobilisation. Furthermore, urbanisation was identified as a key source of information on voter attitudes in Russia today, with urban voters emerging as a more hostile type of electorate for the regime than the rural residents.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation has proposed that the December 2011 elections revealed that authoritarian power in Russia appears to be founded on some combination of genuine popular support and manipulation. This thesis argues that, together, the insights above can be used to explain a key part of this combination.

Both types of uncertainty inherent to authoritarian elections - the uncertainty over electoral victory and the uncertainty over the acceptance of electoral outcomes as legitimate - mean that, ultimately, the paucity of information on the priorities of the electorate presents a great source of worry for elites in electoral authoritarian regimes. When manipulating elections, authoritarian actors are therefore forced to show restraint, in order to balance victory with legitimacy in the context of this double uncertainty - however, this balance might be expected to shift if additional information on the intentions of the electorate comes to light. In other words, as regime actors become more confident of the preferences of the electorate, they might be more willing to prioritise the protection of legitimacy over victory, or vice versa - this would entail reductions or increases in the use of manipulation, respectively.

For example, if the regime became aware of increased capacity for electoral monitoring and willingness amongst citizens to organise in protest against electoral violations, the use of manipulation might be curbed further, as electoral victory may not be worth the expected damaging losses in legitimacy. Similarly, all other things being equal, information about the increased willingness of citizens to vote against the regime at election time might increase the use of manipulation, as concerns over the diminishing prospects of electoral victory might begin to outweigh the risks to legitimacy. In other words, additional information on voter behaviour may reduce

some of the uncertainty over legitimacy or electoral victory, and with it, may alter the calculations over the use of electoral manipulation.

Based on the discussion in the previous section, this dissertation argues that urbanisation has the potential to serve as one such source of information for the regime in Russia. It is proposed that urbanisation appears to capture a divide in voter behaviour, and thus can serve as a key indicator of electoral uncertainty for the regime. The thesis therefore proposes that decisions over whether or not strategies of electoral manipulation should be deployed are structured by urbanisation - the regime is expected to make different decisions over the use of electoral manipulation in urban and rural areas, as it responds to the different challenges of electoral uncertainty in these contexts. Since manipulative strategies do not serve the same purpose - some, such as fraud, undermine voter preferences, whilst others, such as mobilisation, boost the expression of voter preferences - it is expected that the decision over whether or not a specific strategy should be used is the outcome of an interaction between the type of the manipulative strategy and the type of electoral uncertainty indicated by urbanisation in a given district.

Specifically, two types of challenges relating to electoral uncertainty are proposed,. First, there exists uncertainty over whether there are enough regime supporters for regime victory in a given electoral district - in other words, there exists uncertainty over voter preferences. On the basis of the earlier discussion in this chapter, it is proposed that urban voters are the most hostile towards the regime, and thus uncertainty over regime electoral victory is expected to heighten as urbanisation increases. As a result, the regime is expected to be more likely to use the types of manipulative strategies that target voter preferences in more urban areas.

It is not enough to have confidence in the preference of the electorate, however, as voter attitudes are meaningful only if they are expressed on a ballot. Thus, the second type of electoral uncertainty concerns voter participation - will the regime supporters turn up on election day? Thus, even in electoral strongholds, some electoral uncertainty remains for the regime. As a result, it is proposed that the regime will increase its use of the types of manipulative strategies that seek to boost the expression of all voter preferences in areas which are dominated by regime supporters. Earlier, this chapter has argued that rural voters are most likely to be loyal to the regime in Russia - thus, it is expected that the use of this form of manipulation will be greater in rural areas.

The thesis therefore argues that the regime prioritises the reduction of electoral uncertainty, uses urbanisation as an indicator of this and tailors its use of electoral manipulation accordingly. At the same time, concerns over legitimacy are not expected to be absent entirely from the calculations of regime elites in Russia. Specifically, the thesis proposes that the regime dilutes the risks to legitimacy by reducing the use of the manipulative strategies that target voter preferences in rural areas, since it can afford to allow greater independence to voter preferences in these areas due to pre-existing high levels of genuine popular support, and therefore greater certainty over electoral victory.

Thus, it is argued that electoral manipulation in Russia interacts with the level of urbanisation in a given electoral context, and results in the earlier-mentioned combination of genuine popular support and electoral violations that help to sustain authoritarianism in Russia today.

2.4.1 Hypotheses in brief

This argument will be tested through four chapters investigating the four strategies from the earlier-discussed menu of micro-level electoral manipulation: electoral fraud; candidate exclusion; the use of spoiler candidates; and voter mobilisation. The hypotheses driving each investigation will be discussed in greater detail in each chapter, and thus they are outlined only in brief here.

In general, the hypotheses can be divided into two categories, depending on the aims of the manipulation strategy in question. The first group relates to the strategies which seek to *subvert* voter preferences - that is, tactics which seek to undermine, dilute or prevent the expression of anti-regime preferences at the ballot box. Such strategies include *electoral fraud* (the illegal falsification of electoral behaviour), *candidate exclusion* (refusal to allow the participation of opposition candidates), and *the use of spoiler candidates* (candidates whose reason for entering an electoral contest is to reduce the chances of victory for another). In addition, *selective types of voter mobilisation* - increasing participation amongst specific, small groups of the electorate through coercive means or clientelistic vote-buying - are also included in this category.

Overall, the use of these strategies of manipulation is expected to increase alongside urbanisation. The justification for this is that these strategies are both 'negative' in their aims, serving to reduce the power of hostile sentiments, and costly in terms of resources and potential losses in legitimacy. These strategies are therefore expected to be used sparingly. If the regime is preoccupied with increases in electoral uncertainty and uses urbanisation as an indicator of this, we would expect to find these strategies

to be deployed more frequently in urban areas, where antipathy towards the regime is at its highest and the costs are worth the gains in electoral certainty.

The specific hypotheses are as follows:

- **Chapter 3 (H1):** *Electoral fraud is more likely to occur in urban, rather than rural, electoral districts.*
- **Chapter 4 (H2):** *The strategy of candidate exclusion is more likely to be used in urban electoral districts*
- **Chapter 5 (H3):** *Spoiler candidates are more likely to be used in urban electoral districts*
- **Chapter 6 (H4.2):** *Selective voter mobilisation through coercive means is more likely to occur in urban electoral districts.*
- **Chapter 6 (H4.3):** *Selective voter mobilisation through clientelistic vote-buying is more likely to occur in urban electoral districts.*

By contrast, in the second category of electoral manipulation is the strategy of *universal voter mobilisation* (increasing the level of voter participation indiscriminately), which carries a 'positive' aim - the enhancement of voter sentiments. This strategy approximates the legal turnout drives in advanced democracies, and therefore carries the lowest costs in terms of legitimacy out of all the strategies under investigation in the present thesis. At the same time, the indiscriminate mobilisation of voters is risky in terms of electoral victory, since hostile segments of the electorate could be unintentionally mobilised through regime efforts. Therefore, if the Russian electoral authoritarian regime prioritises the reduction of electoral uncertainty and uses urbanisation as an indicator of this, we would expect to find this strategy to be

deployed more frequently in rural areas, so as to ensure that the high levels of support for the regime will definitely translate into votes on election day.

Thus, the following hypothesis is also proposed in the final empirical chapter of the thesis:

- **Chapter 6 (H4.1):** *Universal voter mobilisation through external voting is more likely to occur in rural electoral districts*

2.5 Weakness vs strength: alternative explanations

The proposed argument and hypotheses described above represent just one interpretation of the insights discussed earlier in this chapter. As mentioned in Chapter 1, much of existing research offers the opposite implications for the potential significance of urbanisation for electoral manipulation. Namely, alternative explanations would expect to find that electoral manipulation is more frequently used in the more rural areas, where the costs of manipulation are at their lowest due to greater levels of poverty and the susceptibility of rural residents to clientelistic and coercive pressure, and where the monitoring of behaviour is easier due to the smaller size of rural communities (Lust-Okar, 2006; Magaloni, 2006; Blaydes, 2006; Tezcur, 2008; Malesky & Shuler, 2008).

Moreover, the more hostile nature of the urban electorate might lead one to argue that the risks to legitimacy are simply too high in urban areas to justify an increase in the use of electoral manipulation. If the regime is concerned with balancing electoral victory with legitimacy, one might expect to find that it reduces the use of electoral

manipulation in urban areas because it is more likely to be caught out by and suffer the discontent of sceptical urban voters. Conversely, the risks to legitimacy might be lower amongst rural communities, as they are more favourable environments for the clientelistic and coercive ties that might prevent voters from organising in protest to electoral malpractice - as a result, it may be more prudent for the regime to cut its losses in the cities and focus on establishing electoral victory through the concentration of manipulation in rural areas.

Thus, it could be argued that even if electoral context, as indicated through urbanisation, informs the use of electoral manipulation, the logic pursued might be the opposite - electoral manipulation is expected to decrease as urbanisation increases. Ultimately, these explanations are founded on the assumption that authoritarian actors engage in manipulation on the basis of strength - in areas where regime resources can go a long way towards swaying voters, who are otherwise lacking independence and are not actively hostile. By contrast, the hypotheses proposed earlier in this chapter are based on the assumption that the use of electoral manipulation is driven by a sense of weakness - the regime is more likely to manipulate elections when it fears a poor electoral performance.

This thesis proposes that the weakness-oriented perspective is more appropriate to the explanation of electoral manipulation in electoral authoritarian regimes. Since they serve as the sole gateway to legitimate power, the purpose of elections in such regimes is first and foremost to generate victory for the regime, so as to maintain the regime's hold on power. Whilst legitimate electoral outcomes are important for the continued survival of the regime, ultimately, if given the choice between annihilation through free and fair elections and victory following an unfair contest, it is likely that authoritarian

regime elites would prefer the latter, since doing so entails at least some chance of holding on to power. Therefore, it might be assumed that high levels of electoral uncertainty⁴⁷ are especially worrying for elites in electoral authoritarian regimes.

The weakness-based hypotheses proposed above also represent the optimal balance of risks for the regime. By using the most costly (in terms of legitimacy) strategies of manipulation primarily in the toughest electoral contests (urban districts), and reducing the use of manipulation in electoral strongholds (rural districts), the regime would be balancing out concerns over legitimacy and electoral victory effectively. Electoral results achieved on the basis of this approach would therefore entail a more genuine victory in the countryside and a 'protected' victory through manipulation in the cities. Such a strategy spreads the risks and the gains of manipulation, and is therefore successful on two fronts - the protection of electoral victory and the protection of regime legitimacy. Regime opponents seeking to discredit electoral outcomes in their entirety would therefore find it difficult to make their case when faced with the relatively clean electoral processes in the countryside.

By contrast, strength-based explanations imply a more dangerous combination for the regime. By using the most costly strategies of manipulation in regime strongholds (rural districts) and reducing manipulation in the more difficult electoral contexts in cities, the regime would risk results that combine electoral losses in urban areas with unnecessarily illegitimate electoral victory in the rural areas. Such a strategy would

⁴⁷ Electoral uncertainty can relate to a number of different outcomes, such as loss (failure to secure plurality of the votes); failure to secure a majority; or failure to secure a super-majority. This investigation operates on the assumption that elections in Russia are not 'loss-proof' - due to the long ongoing multi-layered manipulation efforts, it is difficult to establish the extent to which any constituency is truly a 'safe' seat in the absence of manipulation. Therefore, at its highest levels, electoral uncertainty is understood as the concern over the regime's ability to secure a plurality of votes.

therefore increase the risks to regime survival if faced with opponents seeking to discredit electoral outcomes since the regime loses all grounds to justify its hold on power.

As rational actors, regime elites might be expected to pursue a strategy that is in line with the weakness-based explanations, since this minimises the costs of and maximises the gains from electoral manipulation. As a result, this thesis has opted to explore the weakness-based hypotheses, as discussed. However, finding the opposite patterns to those expected by the hypotheses, would serve to support the strength-based explanations.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has drawn together insights from a wide range of literature into a theoretical framework for the investigation of the logic of electoral manipulation in the context of Russian regional legislative elections.

In sum, the thesis argues that authoritarian elites engage in electoral manipulation primarily in response to electoral weakness. This proposal is founded on assumptions relating to the paradox inherent to authoritarian regimes where elections are the sole source of legitimate power - regime survival requires both the presence and a notable absence of electoral manipulation in order to secure electoral victories with maximal legitimacy. In pursuit of the balance between legitimacy and assured victory, authoritarian elites are therefore expected to display a consciousness when it comes to electoral manipulation - the need to use such tactics sparingly means that authoritarian actors must employ manipulation only in instances of maximum utility. The chapter

has argued that this utility is tied to electoral uncertainty, as the preservation of electoral success is the priority for actors in electoral authoritarian regimes. Therefore, the optimal logic of manipulation in such contexts entails the concentration of manipulation in hostile electoral contexts which represent the biggest threat to regime victory, and the restraint from manipulation in electoral strongholds where there exists genuine support for the regime. Strategies of electoral manipulation which boost the expression of voter preferences indiscriminately are the only exception to this rule, and are expected to be used more frequently in the areas most loyal to the regime, so as to reduce the remaining electoral uncertainty regarding voter participation.

The chapter has argued that urbanisation serves as a key indicator of voter sentiments for the regime in Russia today - urban areas represent the more hostile electoral contexts, whilst rural areas display great levels of genuine regime support. Therefore, it is hypothesised that the use of 'negative' manipulation strategies will increase alongside urbanisation, whilst the 'positive' strategy of universal mobilisation will be more present in rural areas - collectively, this logic of manipulation captures the regime's attempt to balance the taming of urban antipathy with the harnessing of genuine popularity in the countryside.

Electoral Fraud

‘It is not the voting that’s democracy; it’s the counting.’
 - Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers*, Act I

Free and fair elections are the pillar of democracy, if not human rights.¹ In the absence of either freedom or fairness, elections are reduced to meaningless signposts of authoritarianism. For this reason, many might agree with Tom Stoppard in that the organisation of open and honest electoral procedures is perhaps of greater democratic importance than their results. In this context, electoral fraud is a menacing term and perhaps the most evocative out of the four strategies of manipulation under consideration in the present study. Accusations of fraud can stir up powerful sentiments, spark mass protests, such as the Colour Revolutions of the mid-2000s and the Arab Spring of 2011, and incite violence, as has been the experience of many African states. Moreover, the ongoing need to combat fraud is a spectre that haunts even some of the most advanced democracies.² Destroying both freedom and fairness, fraud is commonly perceived to be the primary threat to electoral integrity, and therefore, democracy and all it represents.

¹ Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlines free and fair elections as a human right: ‘The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures’. UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, Paris.

² For example, in recent years, concerns over electoral fraud have been making headlines in both the USA and the United Kingdom. See White & Johnston, 2017; BBC News Online, 2017.

In the realm of authoritarianism and the 'grey zone' of hybrid regimes, electoral fraud is frequently singled out as the single biggest causal factor behind authoritarian dominance at election time. A burgeoning literature illustrates the various ways in which freedom and fairness of elections can be constrained to the advantage of authoritarian incumbents. Fraud is assumed to be omnipresent or 'metastasised' (Myagkov, Ordeshook & Shakin, 2009:p.29) in authoritarian regimes to the extent that genuinely popular authoritarian incumbents are believed to have engaged in fraud even though they would have secured victory without it.³ Any analysis of regime dominance in such electoral contexts therefore cannot afford to ignore the role of electoral fraud in perpetuating the authoritarian status quo. For this reason, fraud shall be the first strategy explored by the present study and the focus of the current chapter.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the overarching aim of the present thesis is to examine whether the strategies from the 'menu' of manipulation are used indiscriminately, or whether their use entails a more careful consideration of context and risks by the regime. The theoretical framework proposes that these strategies are neither random nor omnipresent - instead, the decisions to employ each one are driven by a consideration of the benefits associated with reducing uncertainty around election outcomes and the potential losses in legitimacy associated with greater control over this uncertainty. It is proposed that the level of urbanisation serves as an important indicator of uncertainty for the regime, and thus the use of manipulation strategies varies across rural and urban districts. The present chapter therefore represents the first test for the overarching hypothesis that urbanisation affects the likelihood that the

³ Such as the PRI in Mexico before the 1980s and numerous elections in Russia, including the presidential elections that saw the victory of Vladimir Putin and Dmitriy Medvedev. See Simpser, 2013:p.170

regime will resort to using a strategy of electoral manipulation, by examining patterns in the use of electoral fraud in the context of Russian regional legislative elections. More specifically, as outlined in Chapter 2, the present analysis is concerned with examining whether electoral fraud, as a 'negative' strategy that seeks to *distort* voter preferences, is more likely to be employed in districts with high levels of urbanisation, which represent contexts of greatest uncertainty over genuine electoral victory for the regime.

The chapter is divided into five sections. Investigations of electoral fraud are severely limited by the problems relating to definition, detection and measurement - therefore, the first section will clarify the definitions. This section will also discuss the most appropriate tools for the detection of fraud in our sample - a combination of electoral 'forensic' tools and official legal complaints. Building on this, the second section will set out the approach adopted in this study and the hypothesis driving the investigation. The third part of the chapter will analyse the last-digit frequencies in official election data in order to examine whether suspicious patterns indicative of one type of fraud (falsification of results) are present in our sample of regional elections, and whether this varies with urbanisation. Part four adopts a more comprehensive perspective on fraud tactics through the examination of official court cases relating to fraud allegations. The final section summarises the findings of the preceding analyses.

3.1 Defining and detecting electoral fraud

It is important to note that any investigation of electoral fraud is far from straightforward and is likely to generate only cautious conclusions. This stems from a threefold problem at the heart of fraud: definition, detection and measurement (Myagkov, Ordeshook & Shakin, 2009). This section reviews these issues, before setting out the analytical approach adopted later in this chapter.

3.1.1 Definition of electoral fraud

Despite the power of this term and its implications, the meaning of ‘fraud’ varies across contexts and individuals. For some, electoral fraud evokes images of election-day conspiracy - faceless bureaucrats acting out the order to subvert the will of the people by making up desired vote counts on the spot, or illegal voters attempting to sway the outcome through their participation. For others, it is an all-encompassing term that takes into account a range of actions aiming to distort the electoral process both before and during election day - in such instances, the four strategies of manipulation selected for further inspection in the present study can all be understood as ‘fraud’.

Existing scholarship offers little clarity on this matter, as too many works make the assumption that the reader shares their conceptualisation of this term and rarely specify the boundaries of their definition in detail. The lack of a coherent conceptualisation of ‘fraud’ is a major stumbling block for research - absent a precise definition and application of this term, it becomes difficult to track progress and gaps

in literature, as well as to assess the utility of various academic contributions in this field.

The present study conceptualises fraud in a narrow sense: the criminal violation of electoral rules on polling day which results in 'forged' electoral outcomes. By 'forged' outcomes, it is meant that the official results are not the precise summaries of voter preferences as expressed at the ballot box on polling day but instead contain an element of 'fiction' as a result of the criminal deception committed by officials and/or other actors. 'Fraud' is therefore understood narrowly as a synonym for 'forgery'. This conceptualisation means that electoral fraud is treated as just one option in the 'menu' of electoral manipulation, rather than representing the menu itself. By contrast, as a reminder, the broader concept of manipulation is understood as the various actions aimed at interfering with elections in order to control the formation, expression and impact of voter preferences - these actions are multiple in nature, can take both legal and illegal form, and can occur before, during and even after election day.

The benefit of this approach is that this reduces 'fraud' to a more tangible range of actions that most would agree directly violate the basic rules protecting the integrity of electoral outcomes. For example, the following violations all fall under this definition: artificial 'correction' of voting counts by officials without regard to actual ballots; flooding the ballot box with packs of ballot papers in support of a regime candidate; the same individuals voting more than once at different locations or assuming the identity of another voter. Meanwhile, the 'grey zone' of violations - that is, actions where it is more difficult to draw the line between criminal activity and legal rights, deception or simply the exploitation of loopholes and opportunity - are considered separately under the umbrella of 'manipulation'. Such actions might include using

legal means to obstruct the registration of rival candidates, having greater access to mass media and other resources, mobilising voters, among many other options, some of which shall be explored in greater detail in the later chapters of this study.

Even within the narrow conceptualisation of fraud as the criminal forgery of electoral behaviour on election day, however, there exists a wide range of tactics which might be pursued by a variety of corrupt actors. To refine this definition further, this chapter will first narrow its focus in terms of the *actors* under investigation, in order to capture the systemic and regime-driven types of electoral fraud, as opposed to the sporadic violations committed by private individuals at a micro-level. Specifically, the present investigation of fraud will be limited to the illegal electoral behaviour of a set of actors operating within a system which is formally designed to guard the electoral process but in practice has been made subservient to the regime - the members of electoral⁴ commissions.

The next sub-section considers in greater detail the system of electoral commissions and explains its relevance to the study of systemic electoral fraud in Russia.

3.1.2 Electoral commissions and the opportunities for electoral fraud in Russia

According to Diamond and Molino (2004: p.25), in elections, 'the single most important institutional guarantee of freedom and fairness...is an independent and

⁴ Conventionally, such bodies are known as 'electoral' commissions - however, these bodies in Russia refer to themselves as 'election' commissions in official translation into English. The terms 'election' and 'electoral' are therefore used interchangeably when discussing such commissions in this dissertation.

authoritative electoral commission'. The Russian Federal Law №67-FZ ('On the Basic Guarantees of the Electoral Rights') formally agrees with this statement by specifying that 'elections and referenda are organised and led by commissions'⁵, which must be independent and protected from the interference of any other branches of government. In practice, however, the Russian system of electoral commissions is vulnerable to exploitation by the regime.

Overall the Law outlines six major types of electoral commissions:

- *Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation*
- *Regional* electoral commissions (one for each of the 83 regions)
- *Territorial* (rayon, city and other) commissions
- *Municipal* electoral commissions
- *District* electoral commissions
- *Precinct* electoral commissions (polling stations)

Table 3.1 summarises the characteristics of each type of electoral commission. As can be seen from this table, the Russian system of electoral commissions is a complex one. The commissions vary according to their responsibilities, powers, the territories under their jurisdiction, and the processes through which they are formed. The system follows a loose hierarchy, at the head of which is the Central Election Commission - the overarching body in charge of elections in Russia. Whilst it is directly responsible only for the organisation of federal-level elections, its broader responsibilities involve the monitoring and managing of all electoral processes across the country, with all lower ranking commissions being accountable to this central core.

⁵ Article 3, Section 7 (Federal Law №67-FZ, 12.06.2002).

Table 3.1 Summary characteristics of Russian electoral commissions

Type	Number	Area	Duration	Main Responsibilities	Average Number of Members
Central	1	Russian Federation	Permanent Full-Time Paid Basis, 5 year terms	- Monitors protection of electoral rights and electoral law in the country - Organises national-level elections - Controls and provides oversight for all other electoral processes - Prepares proposals for changes to the electoral legislation - Analyses and publishes information and analytical reports on elections	15 members: 5 appointed by the Federal Duma 5 appointed by the Federation Council 5 appointed by the President
Regional	83	Region of the Russian Federation (sub-national)	Permanent Full-Time Paid Basis, 5 year terms	- Monitors protection of electoral rights and electoral law in the region - Organises elections to regional-level government - Controls and supports all electoral processes and lower-ranking commissions across the region - Confirms the composition of territorial commissions in the region	Between 10 and 14 members: Half appointed by the Regional Executive Half appointed by the Regional Legislature
Territorial	Around 2,800	Cities and raions	Permanent, 5 year terms	- Responsibilities can be passed to or taken from municipal commissions, as above. - Monitors protection of electoral rights and electoral law across the territory in question - Organises elections to municipal government - Receive and check final election results from lower-standing commissions	Between 5 and 14 members: Appointed by the Regional Commission, at least half at the recommendation of certain political parties
Municipal		Municipal rayons; city districts; rural and urban settlements	Permanent, Paid basis, 5 year terms	- Responsibilities can be passed to or taken from territorial commissions, depending on the relative sizes of Municipal and Territorial commissions. - Monitors protection of electoral rights and compliance with electoral law across the municipality - Organises elections to municipal government	Between 6 and 12 members, depending on the size of the municipal area: Appointed by the Municipal Legislature at the recommendation of certain political parties, and the regional electoral commission
District	Varies	Single- or multi-member majoritarian electoral districts	Temporary, expire 2 months after publication of election results	- Monitors protection of electoral rights and compliance with electoral law across the district in question - Collaborates with other commissions in the organisation of elections in the district - Registers candidates and confirms the wording of the ballot - Determines and publishes official electoral results in the district - Supports and reviews complaints about precinct commissions	Number of members decided by regional legislation. Appointed by the next highest standing electoral committee - at least half of the appointments at the recommendation of certain political parties.
Precinct	Over 40,000	Polling Stations	5 years (as of 2012)	- Confirms list of registered voters - Prepares electoral venues - Provides absentee ballots - Counts and declares election results in the precinct	Between 3 and 16 members, depending on size of precinct. Appointed by the territorial commission, at least half at the recommendation of certain political parties

As at March 2019. Sources: Law 'On the Guarantees', [Buzin 2007](#), and the Central Electoral Commission Official Website

At the sub-national level, Regional Commissions are the region-specific heads of the commission hierarchy. They are directly responsible for the organisation of elections to regional government, including the regional legislatures - and, echoing the Central Election Commission, they are responsible for controlling and monitoring all electoral processes taking place within their region.

At the next level are the territorial and municipal electoral commissions which are responsible for the organisation of elections to local government (municipal bodies), and for controlling and monitoring all other electoral processes taking place within their given area. The relative positions of these commissions in the overall hierarchy varies across regions and depends on the relative size of the areas in question. Next, district electoral commissions are temporary - they concern the electoral process within a specific constituency, created for a specific election and dissolved two months after the announcement of official election results, unless their actions attracted official complaints. Finally, the lowest level of electoral commissions in Russia is the precinct, or the polling station, level. These are the smallest commissions which deal with the smallest populations of voters - however, they are also the most immediate to the election process by virtue of being the polling stations which receive and count the ballots on election day.

This broad hierarchy is further underlined by a vertical structure of power and responsibilities amongst the commissions - commissions higher on the list outlined Table 3.1 are able to reverse and amend the decisions, as well as to broadly control and regulate the activity of the lower-ranking commissions. Moreover, as demonstrated in the final column of Table 3.1, the territorial, district and precinct-level commissions are also formed by other electoral commissions further up in the chain.

What windows and mechanisms for fraud might exist within such a system?

Multiple opportunities are opened up by the organisational basis of the commissions themselves. Despite their formally independent status, the commissions remain vulnerable to influence and pressure from the regime, and in practice maintain a strong link to the executive branches of government across the country. Meetings between the President and the chairmen of the Central Electoral Commission, where the latter report on the success of the most recent elections to the former, have become part of the political routine in Russia.⁶ In many instances, regional electoral commissions are located in the offices of regional executive administrations. Furthermore, the commissions are reliant on the state for their funding and their formation is heavily influenced by the regional and legislative branches of government (which are all dominated by United Russia).

This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that some commissions, such as the district commissions, are formed on a temporary basis, and many commission members (especially in the territory, district and precinct electoral commissions) work on a primarily voluntary (unpaid) basis (Ignatenko, 2013). This serves to reduce the levels of professionalism and experience in commissions, and makes them more reliant on other branches of the state, as well as the higher-ranking commissions which are already heavily influenced by these branches.

The following description, given by a former member of a precinct electoral commission⁷, when asked about how they became appointed to their position in 2013, exemplifies this:

⁶ See, for example, Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia, 2016.

⁷ Anonymous, 28.07.2019. Saratov.

'As the chair of the residents association in my apartment block, I go to the local administration frequently, to complain about the company that manages our building. I conduct myself politely, unlike some others, so I have built a good relationship with [one local government official]. Once, he offered me to go to the local elections as an observer on behalf of the Just Russia party, for 1,500 roubles... To be honest, I didn't care much for local elections, and I don't support any party... but for money, why not help out? [The elections were] clean and orderly from what I could see. Next year, he invited me to become a temporary member of the [precinct electoral commission during the] elections to the regional parliament. This was a more serious position with greater remuneration - I was flattered to receive this invitation.'

It should be noted that this commission member was a low-income pensioner, with no previous political experience or election training. Furthermore, the respondent admitted that at the end of both election days, they voted for Just Russia for the only times in their life, 'out of respect' for the offer of the position and the payment. The comment, therefore, further highlights the lack of experience amongst the lowest ranks of the commissions system, and suggests the existence of clientelistic loyalties between commission members and political actors.

The ease with which the neutrality of electoral commissions can be swayed through the appointment of loyal individuals, and the opportunities for fraudulent action that this represents, are further highlighted in recent scandalous cases of fraud. A recent extreme example of this occurred in 2016, during the national, regional and local legislative elections in Krasnoyarskiy Krai, where the vice-chair of a territorial commission in the region was the wife of the local United Russia candidate running for office in the same area - meanwhile, the election observer sent on behalf of United Russia was also the candidate's daughter (Il'chenko, 2018). As a result of their involvement, it was estimated that 1729 ballot papers with votes for all three levels of

government were illegally dropped into the ballot box by these two women (Vlasov, 2019).

It thus follows that whilst the creation of electoral commissions might be an important step in ensuring the integrity of elections, it becomes less meaningful if these bodies are not able to build up expertise and obtain true independence from any other branches of government - after all, at one stage even the Soviet Union witnessed the operation of over 2 million electoral commissions staffed by over 9 million officials (Buzin, 2007: p.23). As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that the vast majority of serious fraud allegations in Russia today are made against electoral commission members themselves (Vlasov, 2019).

Whilst the earlier quote from the interview with the former precinct commission member shows that parties other than United Russia can also sway the neutrality of election officials, it is important to note that such individuals are vastly outnumbered within commissions by those with strong ties to the regime. This happens not only because United Russia is permitted to nominate members to act officially on the party's behalf in every commission, but also because the appointments to the remaining places, whilst not officially affiliated with any parties, must nevertheless clear the government filter (Table 3.1) - either directly (approval by the regional or local branches of government) or indirectly (appointment by higher-ranking electoral commissions, which themselves are appointed by regional or local governments). Thus, regime dominance at all levels of government in Russia translates to regime dominance within the electoral commissions system.

This dominance subsequently means that the regime possesses the greatest capacity for committing electoral fraud on a national scale, when compared to all other political actors in Russia. The numerical advantage on election day not only means that there are more regime actors to observe and scrutinise the behaviour of non-regime commission members, thus limiting the opportunities for the latter to commit electoral fraud without being noticed. It also means that the regime might find it easier to divert the attention of the small minority of non-regime members away from the ballot box and thus create opportunities for fraud - for example, by making the only non-regime commission member leave the polling station temporarily in order to oversee the process of home voting. Moreover, the hierarchical structure of the electoral commission system offers an additional check in favour of the regime, since the higher-ranking commissions (which are appointed by regional and local governments) can overrule the decisions of other commissions and reject complaints.

In sum, electoral commissions in Russia are integral to ensuring the smooth and immaculate running of the election process. The complex system of commissions creates multiple checkpoints for enforcing the legal requirements designed to protect the integrity of elections on election day, specifically with respect to checking the validity of each vote, handling of the ballots, and counting of the votes. It would be difficult for outside actors to clear these hurdles on a regular basis and forge electoral behaviour on a mass scale. Systemic fraud in Russia should therefore be understood in terms of the continued failure to resolve the age-old dilemma: 'quis custodiet ipsos custodes?'⁸ The vulnerabilities inherent to the institutional design of electoral commissions in Russia compromise the neutrality of electoral commission members,

⁸ Who guards the guardians?

and therefore open the gates to regime-wide fraud that is carried out by the guardians themselves.

This study therefore defines systemic fraud as the illegal acts of forgery and deception carried out by election officials over any aspect of the voting process on polling day. The precise actions through which this form of manipulation may manifest itself are vast in number, however, they can be broadly divided into three groups, corresponding to the key stages at which election officials act as the gatekeepers of democracy:

- *Initial access to a ballot paper:*

Election officials committing deception over an individual's right to vote, such as by handing out ballot papers to those voting more than once or on behalf of others, as those arriving with missing or false documentation.

- *Interim custody of the ballot box:*

Election officials violating (or allowing others to violate) the integrity of ballot boxes whilst these are under their care. Examples of this include the unlawful premature opening of ballot boxes in order to view, add or remove ballot papers.

- *Processing ballots after closing:*

The forgery of electoral outcomes during and/or immediately after the counting process, such as through the fabrication of final vote count figures or through the addition and/or removal of ballot papers during the count.

Therefore, opportunities for fraud exist at each stage of the voting process in Russia - from the handing out of ballot papers to voters, to the handling and protection of ballot boxes, and the counting of votes by officials after polling stations close. The next sub-section reviews the ways in which illegal actions that fall into these categories can be detected and measured.

3.1.3 Measuring fraud in the context of Russian regional legislative elections

Understanding fraud as criminal deception on election day means that academic investigations begin to approach the realm of criminal investigations, albeit with neither the powers nor the resources of the latter. Illegal activity, given the high level of risk, is by nature covert and unless our own eyes view the events, evidence is partial at best. Electoral observers and voter reports may shed some light but the majority of such activities would be taking place away from eyewitnesses. Moreover, issues relating to human error, the reliability and impartiality of any secondary accounts as well as the absence of any systematic data on this front further complicate the questions of detection and measurement.

Therefore, due to the clandestine nature of this activity, it is impossible to measure fraud directly. Nevertheless, many attempts have been made to arrive at a proximate measure of this process - from using expert and citizen surveys, exit polls and observation reports (Van Ham, 2014), to approaches focusing on 'election forensics' (Mebane, 2006; Myagkov, Ordeshook & Shakin, 2009). This section reviews two types of data employed for the detection and analysis of suspicious patterns of

behaviour on polling day - the first relates to the use of numerical election data, such as vote counts and turnout percentages, as published in official reports; and the second relates to qualitative accounts, such as those presented in court cases and public complaints.

Official Election Data

One major approach advanced by the existing literature is to use anomalous turnout figures (turnout levels that are higher than the mean turnout in an election by at least one standard deviation) as a proxy measure indicative of electoral fraud (Bader & Van Ham, 2015). One major limitation of this approach, however, is that it relies heavily on the assumption that turnout in a non-fraudulent election follows a normal distribution across polling stations on the day of the vote. Yet there are many reasons to argue that we should not expect turnout to be normally distributed in the Russian case, as voters in different types of constituencies might have different sources and degrees of motivation for turning out to vote, which means that we would expect the turnout to be particularly high in certain types of constituencies but not in others.

In particular, it is possible to argue that people in more rural constituencies have a stronger motivation to turn out to vote than those living in more urban constituencies. First, the number of people attached to a polling station in rural areas tends to be much smaller, and the communities are more closely knit, so in the context of administrative pressure, it may be harder for an individual to avoid turning out to vote without being noticed. Whilst high turnout figures in such an instance would not be free of manipulation (as administrative pressure was exerted upon the electorate), they would

not necessarily be indicative of electoral fraud (such as ballot-box stuffing) as the turnout represented the genuine number of people showing up to vote.

Second, the peculiar nature of the Russian elections as a kind of social event may further explain higher levels of turnout in more rural areas. Reports⁹ of stalls selling quality products at low prices outside polling stations, as well as other features of the election day, such as the tradition selling of buffet snacks (such as pastries) within the polling station itself and the presence of musical and other entertainment, suggest that a typical election day in Russia is perceived by many as a kind of social event. In the context of relative scarcity of goods and social dispersion in the countryside, the consumer and social opportunities at the polling stations on election day might act as factors boosting turnout in rural areas. In more urban districts, the appeal of these features of the typical Russian polling day is arguably weaker as voters have greater and more regular opportunities to purchase such goods or attend entertainment events on a day-to-day basis.

As a result, turnout figures might appear to be 'abnormally' high for some districts, even in the absence of fraud. As we cannot be confident of the fact that the distribution of turnout under 'free' elections in Russia would be normal, it makes sense to exclude turnout as a possible measure of electoral fraud.

⁹ Observers of the 2015 Gubernatorial elections in Kaliningrad, for example, reported the operation of stalls selling foodstuffs such as potato, buckwheat, sugar and pasta at reduced prices outside polling stations (Golos, 2015).

Another good example of the consumer and social opportunities on election day can be seen in the online report of the 2016 Federal Duma elections in Novosibirsk by Agafonov, Rudnev & Lokhov (2016).

Relying on turnout figures in other measures - such as testing for large and positive coefficients of the relationship between turnout and the share of pro-regime vote (Myagkov, Ordeshook & Shakin, 2009) - is similarly problematic because the turnout statistics not only do not allow us to distinguish between different tactics relating to fraud, but may also include the effect of other strategies of manipulation which are drastically different to those understood under the present definition of fraud.

A growing section of the literature on fraud tactics advocates an alternative method of 'electoral forensics' to assess election results in terms of the statistical distribution of digits, as based on Benford's law (Mebane, 2006; Leemann & Bochsler, 2014). This technique is particularly useful for the detection of falsifications in final election results - that is, vote count figures fabricated by election officials. Benford's work showed that digits in data generated by real natural and social processes tend to follow a specific frequency distribution (Benford, 1938). By contrast, fraudulent data which has been fabricated by people tends to deviate from this distribution, because individuals cannot pick truly random digits when tasked with producing a set of random numbers, regardless of how careful their attempts are (Mosimann, Wiseman & Edelman, 1995). Benford's law therefore suggests that it might be possible to detect instances of reported vote counts forged by officials behind closed doors.

Recent scholarship has advocated focusing on the last digits of vote counts in particular, as a means of assessing the integrity of electoral results, as these numbers are less context dependent (Diekmann, 2007; Beber & Scacco, 2012; Leemann & Bochsler, 2014). For example, the frequency of digits at the end of a number will be less restricted by the total size of the electorate - unlike the requirements for the first-two digit tests of Bedford's Law which state that data must have at least four digits

(Nigrini, 2012). Furthermore, when fabricating numbers, individuals tend to focus primarily on the first digits, which specify the magnitude of the overall figure, but when it comes to the last (rightmost) digits they have less incentive to strategically select one specific number over another and will thus tend to generate a more 'noisy' (Beber & Scacco, 2012: p.218) digit. These final digits are expected to follow a uniform distribution in naturally occurring data - that is, each digit (0-9) is expected to occur in almost equal proportion. When this distribution is not uniform (some digits occur significantly more frequently than others), it is assumed that the data reveals a suspicious pattern that merits further investigation.

Overall, whilst a wide range of electoral data can reveal interesting and suspicious patterns indicative of fraudulent behaviour, last-digit analysis appears to be the most optimal approach towards detecting and measuring mass-scale fraud, when using official electoral statistics. It is by no means a perfect measure, since it generates insights which are relevant to just one specific tactic - the falsification of official figures after the count. However, this statistic is also the most sensitive to fraudulent behaviour of all other indicators, since it is very unlikely that the suspicious non-random patterns in naturally occurring social data of this kind can be explained by anything other than corruption.

Qualitative accounts

Official election data therefore offers some windows of opportunity for investigations of fraud. However, the covert nature of criminal activity is very much designed to leave minimal evidence behind, which means that clear-cut mass patterns of fraud are unlikely to emerge from aggregate information. Moreover, certain types of

fraudulent behaviour, such as the handing out of ballot papers to those not eligible to vote, are virtually impossible to quantify since they leave no numerical trace. This is not to say that investigators should give up all hope, however, as descriptive accounts of events provided by citizens and election observers can serve to fill in some of these information gaps.

The sources of qualitative information on the use of fraud in Russian regional elections are multiple - including observer reports, official statements made by politicians, electoral commission complaints and court cases. This information must, of course, be treated with caution, as allegations are easy to make but difficult to prove. Given the gravity of fraud allegations, the most robust sources of qualitative information appear to be the summaries of court cases relating to charges of electoral fraud - in other words, the examination of the alleged instances of fraud within the Russian legal system.

The legal backdrop to this type of data filters out unfounded allegations to a greater extent than other types of accounts - claimants must be committed to proving the instances of fraud, given the costly process of legal disputes, and must present at least some form of evidence or witnesses, declaring the information to be true under penalty of perjury. Furthermore, there is no anonymity granted to claimants in the court cases relating to electoral fraud - this increases accountability for one's allegations, which may make observers more measured in their assessments. Information about the author of an account also gives us greater insights into the potential bias at play. Moreover, as participants from both sides have to defend their case, a wealth of detailed information is reported in the case files, and researchers have access to multiple perspectives on an event. Finally, unlike the summaries made by political

actors and election monitoring organisations, which are based on the accounts of others and therefore often represent a secondary reports of information, court cases entail statements by those who have witnessed fraudulent behaviour first-hand.

Qualitative accounts taken from court case summaries are not without their limitations, however. As with most qualitative data, these documents are rich in empirical detail but offer limited scope for generalisation. The lack of anonymity also serves to hinder the availability of such data, as citizens may actively avoid escalating their complaints to the court system for fear of reprisals in an authoritarian context, once their names are made public. The relatively rare occurrence of such cases means that researchers have to think carefully about how representative these events are of the typical practices of manipulation - indeed, there is room to argue that the fact that enough fraudulent behaviour has been registered, in order for an allegation to make it into the legal system in the first place, makes each court case relating to fraud an unusual instance of this type of manipulation.

Finally, a degree of self-selection is present in this type of data - to an extent, a set of court cases can be indicative of the factors that encourage voters to make formal complaints (including individual-level factors), rather than the factors that encourage the regime to engage in electoral manipulation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the launching of court cases does not automatically take place in the epicentres of urban activity in a given region, so we might expect this type of data to be relatively robust for the purposes of the present investigation.

Specifically, the Russian Federal Law №67-FZ 'On the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights' stipulates that the nature of the court with which complaints should be lodged

depends on the level of the electoral commission responsible for the alleged violations of election legislation.¹⁰ Thus, accusations pertaining to the work of the Central Election Commission should be lodged with the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation; and claims of violations at the regional and district levels (during regional legislative elections) should be lodged with the regional courts (the highest judicial body in the region, typically located in the regional capital). Whilst such forms of complaints will ultimately be lodged in urban areas, it must be noted that these courts impose considerably high barriers for the entry of cases - not only in terms of legal fees but also the scope of documentation requiring to justify that the responsibility for official conduct in a given instance lies at the higher levels of electoral commissions.

However, legal complaints pertaining to the work of all other commissions (including the precinct commissions operating at the lowest, polling station, level), are required to be lodged in the first instance with smaller, district, courts, local to the area in which the commissions in question operate, and where the alleged electoral violations took place. Complaints are subject to lower barriers to entry in these courts, which are located lower down in Russia's judicial hierarchy, and which can be situated, both, in predominantly rural and predominantly urban settlements. This legal stipulation therefore increases the reliability of court cases as a source of data for the measurement of electoral manipulation across the urban-rural divide, since we would not expect the residency of complainants to be an advantage that predetermines the distribution of court cases along the urban-rural continuum.

¹⁰ Federal Law №67-FZ, Chapter X, Article 75.2.

Overall, whilst the detection and measurement of electoral fraud appears to be difficult, it is not entirely impossible. Amongst the quantitative indicators based on official electoral data, last-digit frequencies from official election figures appear to capture fraudulent behaviour with the greatest degree of accuracy. Meanwhile, summaries of court cases relating to allegations of electoral fraud emerge as the most robust qualitative accounts. Both of these measures entail major limitations, however. The statistical assumptions and the large volume of data in an analysis of last-digit frequencies may increase our confidence in the fact that we are observing truly fraudulent behaviour - however, it also risks narrowing our focus down to just one specific type of fraud. By contrast, qualitative data offers insight into a wider range of fraudulent activities - however, the extent to which one could confidently reach generalisable conclusions on causation on the basis of this information is limited. Therefore, investigations of electoral fraud appear to be well suited to a mixed-method approach, where the combined strength of these measures may go some way towards reducing their individual limitations.

3.2 The approach adopted in the chapter

Given the multitude of access points for electoral commission members intending to commit fraud, and the covert nature of this behaviour, it is difficult to explore the patterns in the use of fraud as a tactic of manipulation in one systematic way. Based on the challenges discussed thus far, the chapter does not claim to utilise precise measures and to uncover absolute proof of fraud in this context but instead seeks to establish reasonable grounds for suspicion, which will then serve as the basis for further

analysis. Thus, the approach adopted in this study is to examine the extent to which a range of evidence points to *suspicious* behaviour on election day in our sample of regional legislative elections, and to explore whether these *suspicious* patterns correspond to the level of urbanisation in a given electoral district.

On the basis of the insights generated from the earlier review of the issues relating to definition, detection and measurements, the chapter will adopt a two-pronged approach towards the investigation of fraud as a strategy of electoral manipulation in Russian regional legislative elections. The first part of the chapter represents an attempt to study the suspicious patterns indicative of electoral violations in a systematic manner across the sample of 18 regions. This entails a large-N quantitative analysis of patterns relating to one final access point available to electoral commission members during the voting process - the counting of votes. Specifically, the focus will be on identifying patterns which may be indicative of post-factum falsification of electoral outcomes - the reporting of false numbers on official election return sheets. If such patterns are identified in the election data provided by the electoral commissions in our sample, then the chapter will proceed to assess the extent to which these correspond to the level of urbanisation in a given electoral district.

The second part of the analysis in this chapter will adopt a broader definition of fraud, as the violation of legal regulations relating to the voting process on election day. Specifically, this relates to the violations outlined under Article 142 of the *Russian Criminal Code*, and Article 5.22-24 of the *Russian Code of Administrative Offences*.¹¹ This

¹¹ Article 141 of the *Russian Criminal Code*, which also relates to violations of elections, is not included in this analysis as it largely relates to the protection of the electoral commissions themselves - in other words, commissions and their members are treated as the object of violations under this legal provision, rather than the actors committing the offence.

part of the analysis will examine the court cases relating to allegations of such offences in our sample of regional elections, and assess the extent to which the occurrence of such instances corresponds to the level of urbanisation amongst the residents of the relevant electoral districts. This small-N approach offers fewer opportunities for a systematic analysis of fraud - however, its aim is to complement the narrower definition (falsification of results) employed in the first part, and to explore whether broader, qualitative indicators of fraud nevertheless echo the statistical patterns present in the data on vote counts.

Thus, the approach entails the combination of large-N analysis with a narrow focus on just one subtype of electoral fraud, and small-N analysis with a broader conceptual treatment of fraud. The two analytical parts of the chapter must not be treated in isolation from each other, however, but as a body of evidence which amounts to a more comprehensive picture of fraud as a manipulation strategy. The main benefit of this twofold approach is that, whilst it allows us to stick to a fairly rigid and focused definition of 'fraud', it nevertheless acknowledges that the precise ways in which such fraud can manifest itself are not necessarily constant over time and place - therefore, the approach remains sensitive to context, yet provides some opportunity for generalisation.

The next sub-section sets out the main hypothesis linking both parts of the analysis in this chapter.

3.2.1 Hypothesis

The hypothesis driving the present investigation is based on three key assumptions about the nature of electoral fraud as a strategy of electoral manipulation.

The first assumption is that, electoral fraud is a 'negative' strategy of manipulation in the sense that its primary aim is to distort, or undermine, voter preferences. Actors engage in electoral fraud when they feel that they have not received enough votes to fulfil their aim - whether this is meeting the minimum threshold for victory, securing a majority, or achieving a supermajority that signals regime strength. Electoral fraud therefore undermines the preferences expressed by those voters who chose to support non-regime actors at election time, since the addition of forged votes in support of the regime dilutes the collective impact of all other expressions of popular will.

The second assumption is that electoral fraud is a powerful tool for reducing the uncertainty over electoral outcomes. At its extreme, through the fabrication of numbers on official return sheets, electoral fraud destroys uncertainty over the likelihood of victory in its entirety, since the regime effectively becomes its own electorate. Other variations of fraud, such as ballot-box stuffing, might not entail the same absolute control over uncertainty, however, their impact is nevertheless considerable, since regime actors possess exact knowledge about a proportion of the votes cast before the count begins. Due to the fact that fraud, as defined in this chapter, is committed largely by the election officials themselves, the principle of the secret ballot does not represent a great obstacle to the pursuit of reduction in electoral uncertainty through this strategy. Fraud therefore affords regime actors the greatest control over election results,

when compared with the other strategies on the menu of manipulation investigated in this dissertation.

The third assumption is that electoral fraud carries high legitimacy costs. Electoral fraud, as defined in the present study, does not belong to the 'grey' zone of manipulation strategies because it entails explicitly illegal activity - this means that once caught, corrupt actors will find it difficult to defend their actions, whilst citizens will find it easier to mobilise around clear instances of electoral violation. Ultimately, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, allegations of fraud can spark waves of mass protest with the potential to topple regimes.

Taken together, electoral fraud is therefore assumed to be a strategy of high gains and high risk. Compared to other strategies examined in this dissertation, fraud offers the regime the greatest degree of control over electoral outcomes and the opportunity to reduce the electoral potency of opposition candidates. Such power comes at a great cost in terms of legitimacy, however, if the regime is caught engaging in electoral fraud on a mass scale. Therefore, this dissertation proposes that regime actors, whilst attracted by the electoral security that fraud offers, will nevertheless use this strategy sparingly, for fear of igniting popular hostility and triggering regime change.

In line with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, the thesis seeks to test the argument that under such conditions, authoritarian actors will make the decision to use manipulation on the basis of regime weakness - in tough electoral contexts where the fraudulent gains in electoral outcomes are worth the risks in legitimacy. As discussed in the preceding chapter, urbanisation is assumed to serve as a major indicator of electoral sentiments to the regime, with urban areas deemed to be more

hostile at election time. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed for both parts of the analysis in the present chapter:

H1: Electoral fraud is more likely to occur in urban, rather than rural, electoral districts.

The remainder of this chapter consists of the two-fold analysis of the suspicious patterns and the extent to which these correspond to the level of urbanisation in our sample of regional legislative elections in Russia. The next section of the chapter begins with the analysis of last-digit frequencies as a possible indicator of falsification in precinct return sheets.

3.3 Last-digit analysis

The analysis in this section is limited to one specific fraud tactic - the falsification of official election reports by electoral commission officials - and uses large-n data to examine whether this tactic is indeed frequently used in the Russian context, as well as whether this varies across urban and rural areas. As discussed earlier, this section represents only a partial investigation into the use of fraud, and will be supplemented by qualitative case studies evaluating the use of other fraudulent methods in the next part of the chapter.

This section consists of four further segments. The first discusses the data to be used in this analysis. The second sub-section describes the initial patterns emerging from the data through a series of non-parametric (Chi²) tests on the distribution of last-digits in our sample. The purpose of this non-parametric analysis is to describe generally the suspicious nature of the data, and, therefore, to confirm the suitability of last-digit

analysis as a technique for further investigation of the determinants of electoral fraud in our sample. The third segment presents the results of multinomial logistic regression analyses of last digits, which examine the relationship between urbanisation and the use of electoral fraud. The final section briefly summarises the findings.

3.3.1 Data

In order to explore the extent to which official election reports published by electoral commissions indicate potentially false figures, this study will examine the patterns in the last-digit frequencies of official electoral data.

Specifically, I shall focus on the final digits of counts for six types of data presented in official election returns:

- *Registered voters* (the total number of citizens eligible to vote in an election)
- *Turnout* (the total number of ballots cast)
- *United Russia vote count* (the total number of votes cast for United Russia)
- *KPRF vote count* (the total number of votes cast for KPRF)
- *Just Russia vote count* (the total number of votes cast for Just Russia)
- *LDPR vote count* (the total number of votes cast for LDPR)

The data is collected at the lowest level of the electoral commission hierarchy - the precinct electoral commissions (polling stations) - as this is the most likely level for falsification due to its immediate proximity to the voting and counting processes. For each type of data, the precincts with fewer than one hundred counts were excluded

from the analysis, as the assumption on the uniform distribution of last-digits in non-fraudulent data requires each figure to comprise a minimum of three digits.¹²

Overall, the sample is fairly large - over 20,600 polling stations situated in 390 electoral districts in the regions in our sample. Given that each polling station publishes two separate reports - one for the majoritarian race and another for the proportional party list election - the overall number of cases is 41,480. The reports from the majoritarian and proportional parts of the election are included in the dataset as separate cases, despite the fact that they can come from the same polling station and relate to the same group of voters. The justification behind this decision relates to the fact that each voting report represents a separate opportunity for falsification by officials and will not necessarily contain the same counts, as voters can make different decisions about participation or split their vote across the two systems.

The sources for this data are the official election results presented by the Central Election Commission and the relevant Regional commissions, published online via their respective official websites. The reports on all 41,480 majoritarian and proportional elections within each of the 390 districts were downloaded individually from the official website before being collated into one original dataset by the author.

¹² This follows the research on the uniform distribution of last-digits in other three-digit data types, such as the 'Pick 3' Maryland Lottery. See Mosimann et al., 2002: pp.76-77.

3.3.2 Preliminary examination of data: non-parametric last-digits tests

General trends

First, a general examination of the distribution of last digits in the whole sample was performed through a series of Chi2 tests, where the null hypothesis is that the distribution of last digits is uniform and the election data are therefore unlikely to have been fabricated by a human actor.

Table 3.2 presents the outcomes of these tests. As can be seen from the statistically significant likelihood ratio statistics, the distribution of last digits was found to be non-uniform for each type of count published in the polling station reports, with the exception of the Just Russia vote count. As we would expect the last digit distribution of naturally occurring social data to be uniform, this finding suggests that on aggregate, the data in our sample of 18 regions reveals suspicious patterns when it comes to the official figures stating the total number of registered voters, turnout, and votes cast for United Russia, LDPR and KPRF.

Table 3.2. Last-digit Tests (likelihood-ratio Chi2) for registered voters, turnout, and vote counts for the main parties

	Registered Voters	Turnout	UR Vote	KPRF Vote	Just Russia Vote	LDPR Vote
Chi2(9)	43.22***	28.53***	24.31***	16.76*	11.31	27.50***
p-value	<0.001	0.001	0.004	0.053	0.255	0.001
n	41,480	39,905	34,969	13628	8707	6550

***Rejection of H0 at the 1% level; **Rejection at the 5% level; *Rejection at the 10% level

Further inspection of the kinds of last-digits that tend to be over- or under-represented cast additional doubt upon the integrity of the election reports in our sample. Figures 3.1-3.6 graph the relative frequencies of each last digit for the six types of data under investigation. The horizontal lines represent the expected frequency for each digit - if all digits have the same likelihood of appearing last, then, proportionally, the frequencies of each last digit should amount to 0.1 (or 10 percent) of the total frequency. Thus, the further away the bars are from the expected frequency line of 0.1, the more suspicious the pattern of last-digits.

As can be seen from these graphs, the last-digit '0' tends to be reported more frequently than might be expected for all six types of data. In addition, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 also demonstrate a higher than might be expected frequency for the last-digit '5' when it comes to the count of registered voters and turnout. This prevalence of 0s and 5s suggests that the drivers of this data are human actors who tend to have a decimal vision of the world, rather than random natural social processes. It is also interesting to note that amongst the vote counts for the four parties (United Russia, KPRF, Just Russia and LDPR) the frequency of digits greater than 5 tends to be lower than might be expected. As such, these initial overviews suggest that these three types of data may have indeed been fabricated by election commission officials during the counting process.

Figure 3.1. Relative frequency of last-digits (Registered Voters)

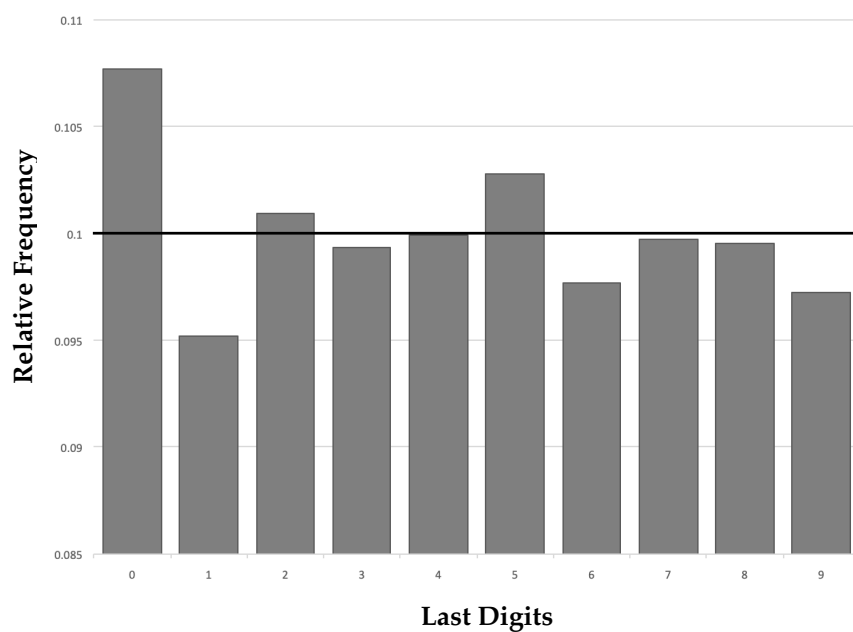


Figure 3.2. Relative frequency of last-digits (Turnout)

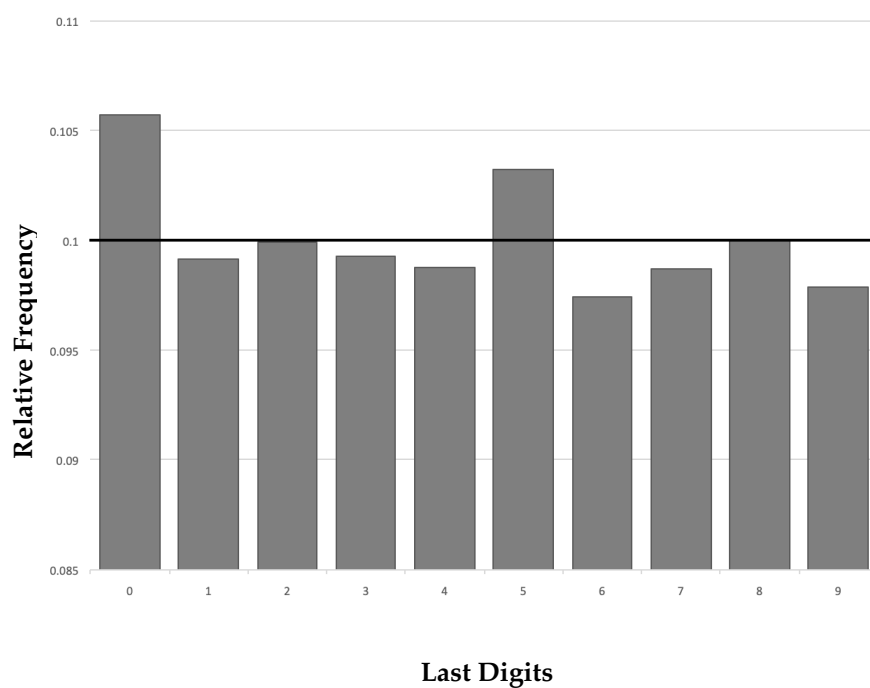


Figure 3.3. Relative frequency of last-digits (Vote Count for United Russia)

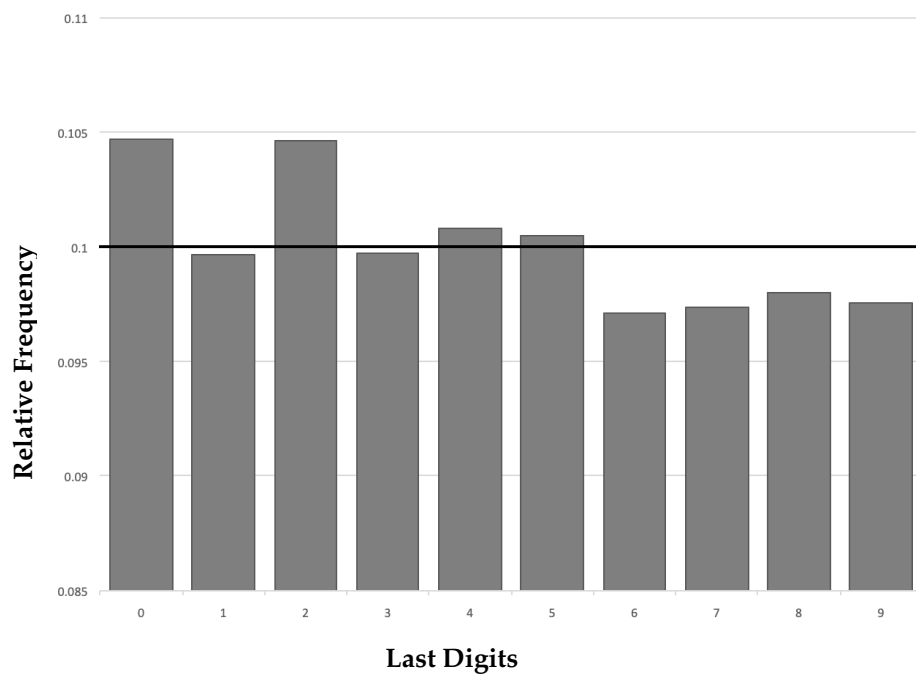


Figure 3.4. Relative frequency of last-digits (Vote Count for KPRF)

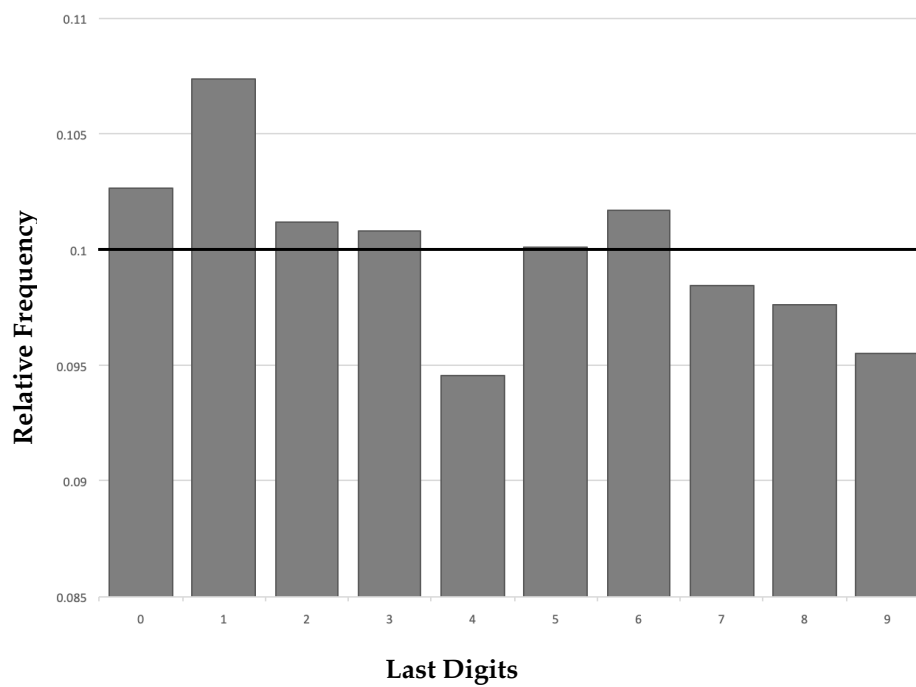


Figure 3.5. Relative frequency of last-digits (Vote Count for Just Russia)

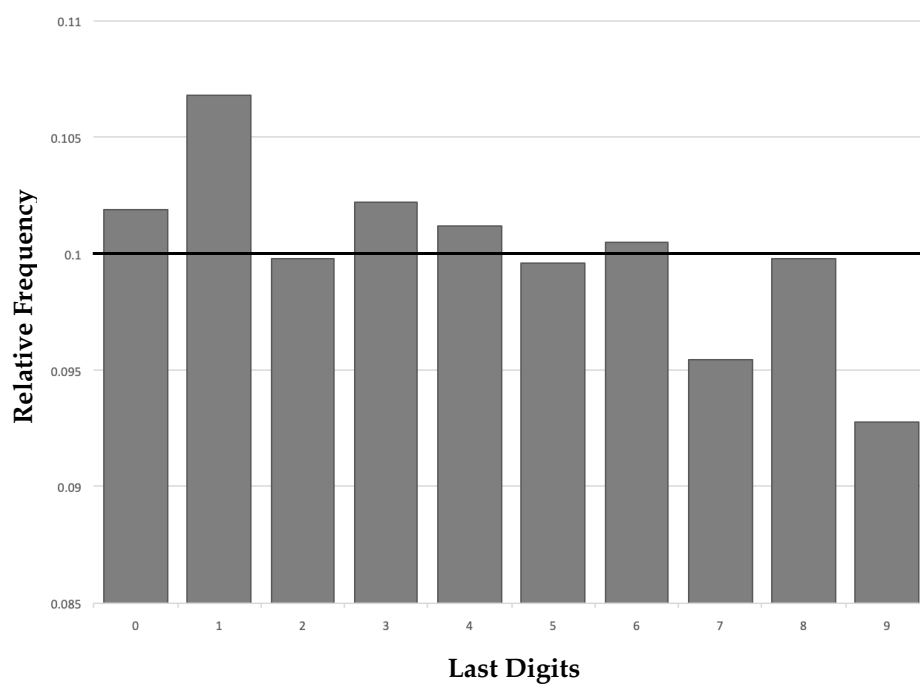
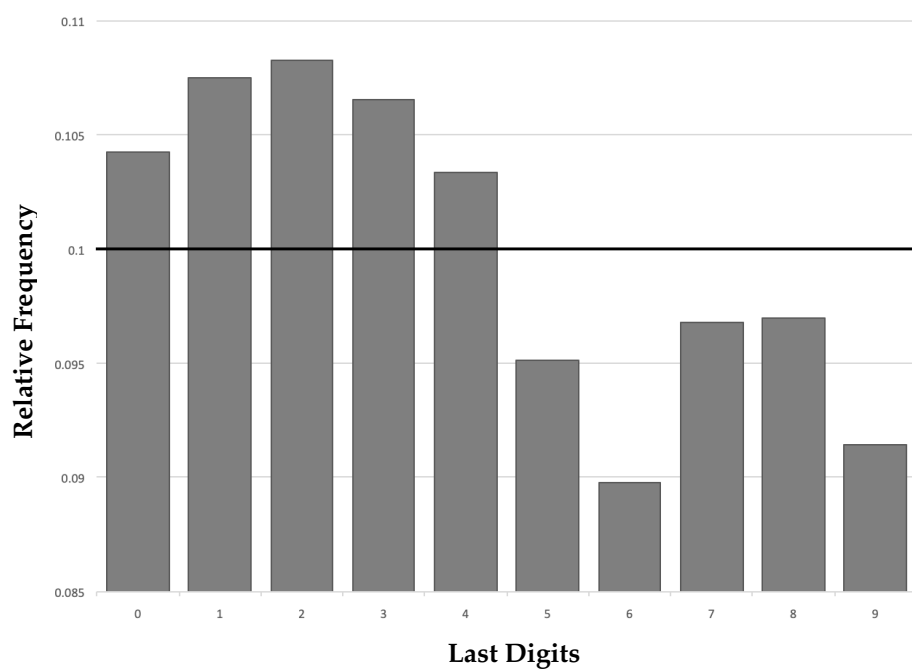


Figure 3.6. Relative frequency of last-digits (Vote Count for LDPR)



Next, a series of Chi2 tests were performed on sub-groups within our sample, in order to examine whether suspicious trends persisted across different electoral contexts.

Trends across quartiles of party support

In this section, I compare the distribution of last-digits across different levels of party support for four main parties in our sample - United Russia, KPRF, Just Russia and LDPR. The expectation is that the distribution of last-digits in naturally-occurring social data should not vary between those elections in which parties secure high levels of support and those in which they secure low levels of support. The measures for party support represent the percentages of the vote secured by a given party at a given polling station. The sample was divided into quartiles for the purposes of this analysis - the first quartile representing the bottom 25% of the data (the bottom quarter of polling stations in terms of electoral support for a given party), and the fourth quartile representing the top 25% of the polling stations. Quartiles were used because last-digit tests are sensitive to the size of n - separating the sample into more proportionally equal groups will therefore help to reduce the possibility that differences in distributions are driven by fluctuations in sample size, whilst enabling the comparison of last-digits across different levels of the variable of interest (percentages of the vote secured by each main party).

Table 3.3 reports the last-digit test outcomes for the same types of election data but divides the sample into quartiles, according to the percentage of votes secured by United Russia, as reported by each polling station. These tests show that the official figures on the number of registered voters, turnout counts and vote counts in support

of United Russia consistently reveal suspicious non-uniform last-digit distributions amongst those polling stations which have reported United Russia as securing supermajorities with 76 percent of the vote or more (fourth quartile). In addition, last-digit distributions of registered voter counts appear similarly strange for polling stations in which United Russia secured an overall majority with 57 percent of the vote or more (third quartile). For other categories of United Russia support, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected for these three types of data, and the distributions are therefore assumed to be uniform.

Interestingly, Table 3.3 also shows that the results of the last-digit tests on the opposition vote counts (vote for KPRF, Just Russia and LDPR) demonstrate a slightly different trend across the different levels of United Russia support. Unlike the data on registered voters, turnout and United Russia vote, none of the vote counts for the three opposition parties demonstrate suspicious last-digit frequencies amongst the polling stations with the highest level of United Russia support (fourth quartile). By contrast, the distributions of last-digit frequencies appear suspicious for the vote counts of Just Russia and LDPR parties in areas with relatively moderate United Russia victories (second quartiles of the United Russia vote).

Table 3.3 Last-digit tests (likelihood-ratio Chi2) for election figures across different levels of United Russia support

UR vote (percent)	Registered Voters	Turnout	UR Vote	KPRF Vote	Just Russia Vote	LDPR Vote
<i>First Quartile</i> (0-40% of the vote)	10.80	9.85	16.82	7.56	4.90	8.85
<i>n</i>	10361	10003	8420	7003	5643	3988
<i>Second Quartile</i> (41-56% of the vote)	5.96	9.40	5.27	11.18	19.15**	19.80**
<i>n</i>	10364	9743	8165	3853	2268	1791
<i>Third Quartile</i> (57-75% of the vote)	22.78***	14.84	7.04	29.36***	6.03	13.50
<i>n</i>	10358	9728	8601	2043	652	541
<i>Fourth Quartile</i> (76-100% of the vote)	53.80***	62.97***	18.80**	6.81	9.47	12.15
<i>n</i>	10360	9873	9747	727	143	227

***Rejection of H0 at the 1% level; **Rejection at the 5% level

These patterns, however, are likely affected by the *n* for each opposition party, which diminishes as the percentage of the vote secured by United Russia increases. For example, KPRF vote counts contain fewer than 1000 cases in the fourth quartile of the United Russia vote, whilst Just Russia and LDPR contain fewer than 500 cases in the fourth quartile and fewer than 1000 cases in the third quartile. Given the sensitivity of these Chi2 tests to the size of *n*, it is possible that suspicious patterns also exist within the vote counts for the opposition across the precincts in the fourth quartile of the United Russia vote, however, the small size of *n* prevents the emergence of statistically significant conclusions.

Nevertheless, amongst the second highest category of polling stations in terms of United Russia support (third quartile), the KPRF vote counts appear unusual. Moreover, the fact that the opposition (KPRF, Just Russia and LDPR) vote counts amongst the precincts with the *lowest* levels of United Russia support (first quartile) do *not* appear to show signs of suspicious behaviour, despite the much larger size of n than the same vote counts in precincts located in the second quartile of the United Russia vote, suggests that the more impressive victories for United Russia are achieved at the cost of their opponents.

Figures 3.7-3.12 provide visualise these findings by graphing the frequencies of each last digits for those counts which have been found to be suspicious in Table 3.3. The combination of non-uniform last-digit distributions and high United Russia percentages therefore tells us that official election statistics are questionable primarily in those areas where United Russia performs well. The finding that suspicious figures correspond to the electoral fortunes of the regime party suggests that the aggregate patterns in Table 3.2 are unlikely to be either a Type I error or the outcomes of officials' general incompetency in tracking totals. As a result, we can be more confident that the examination of last digits represents an important opportunity for the exploration of fraud as a method of manipulation.

Figure 3.7 Relative frequency of last-digits (Registered Voters) for polling stations in the Fourth Quartile of United Russia vote (>76%)

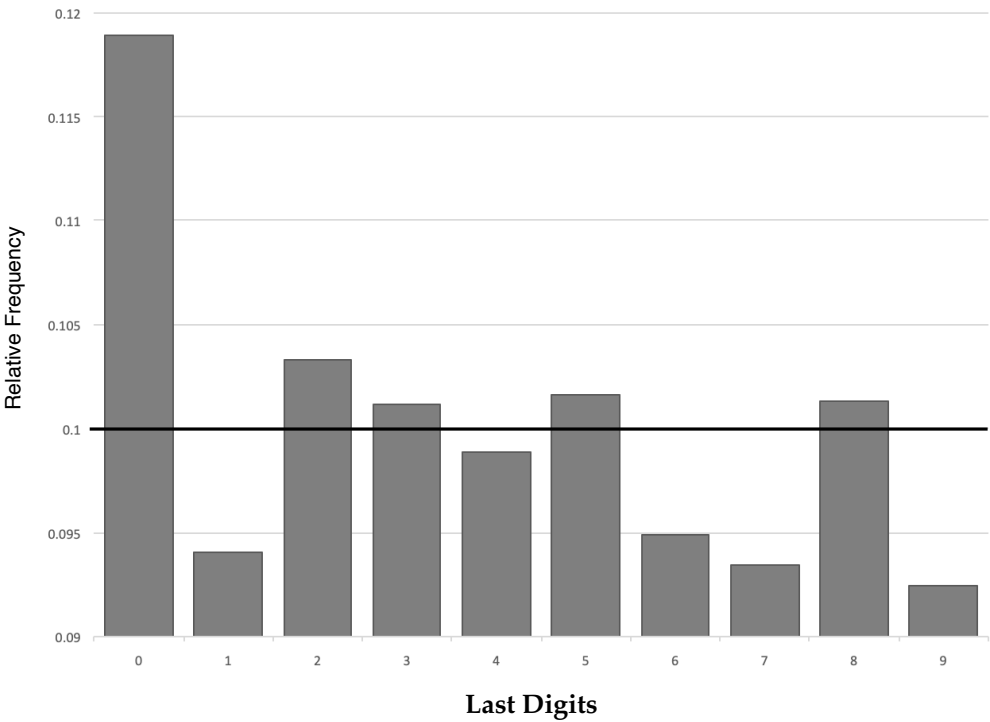


Figure 3.8 Relative frequency of last-digits (Turnout) for polling stations in the Fourth Quartile of United Russia vote (>76%)

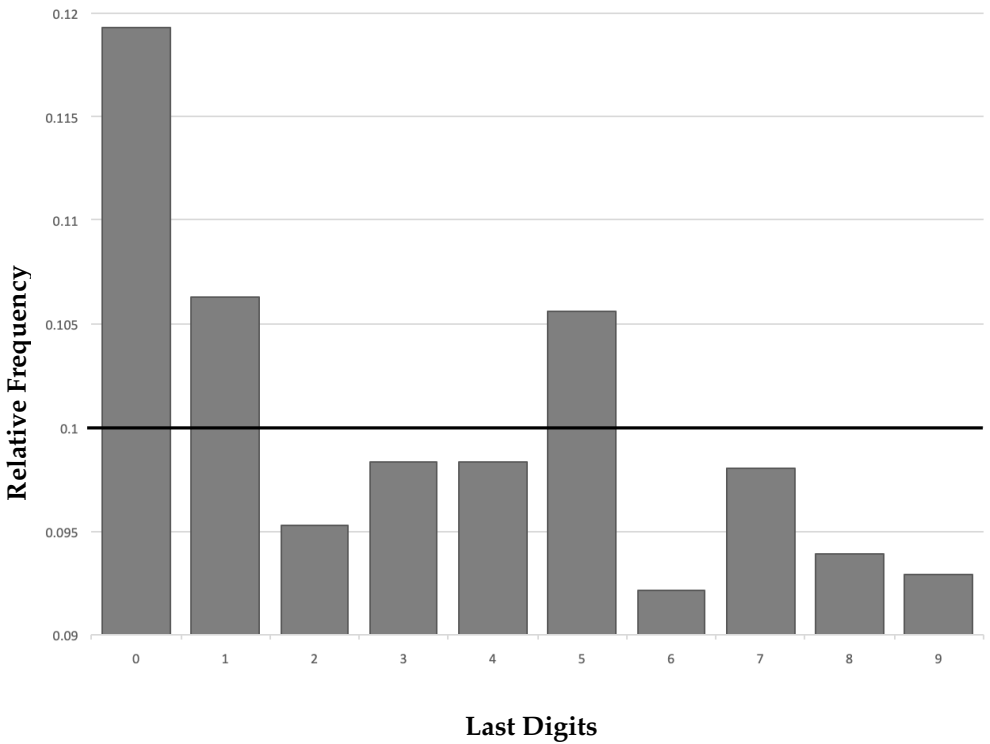


Figure 3.9 Relative frequency of last-digits (United Russia Vote Count) for polling stations in the Fourth Quartile of United Russia vote (>76%)

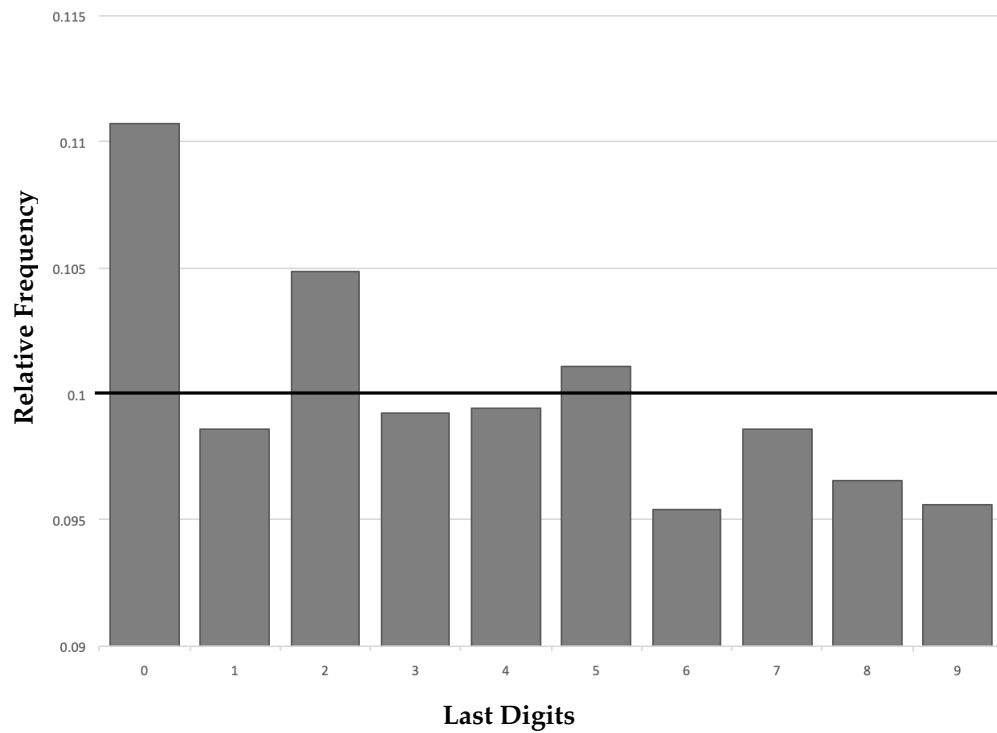


Figure 3.10 Relative frequency of last-digits (KPRF Vote Count) for polling stations in the Third Quartile of United Russia vote (57-75%)

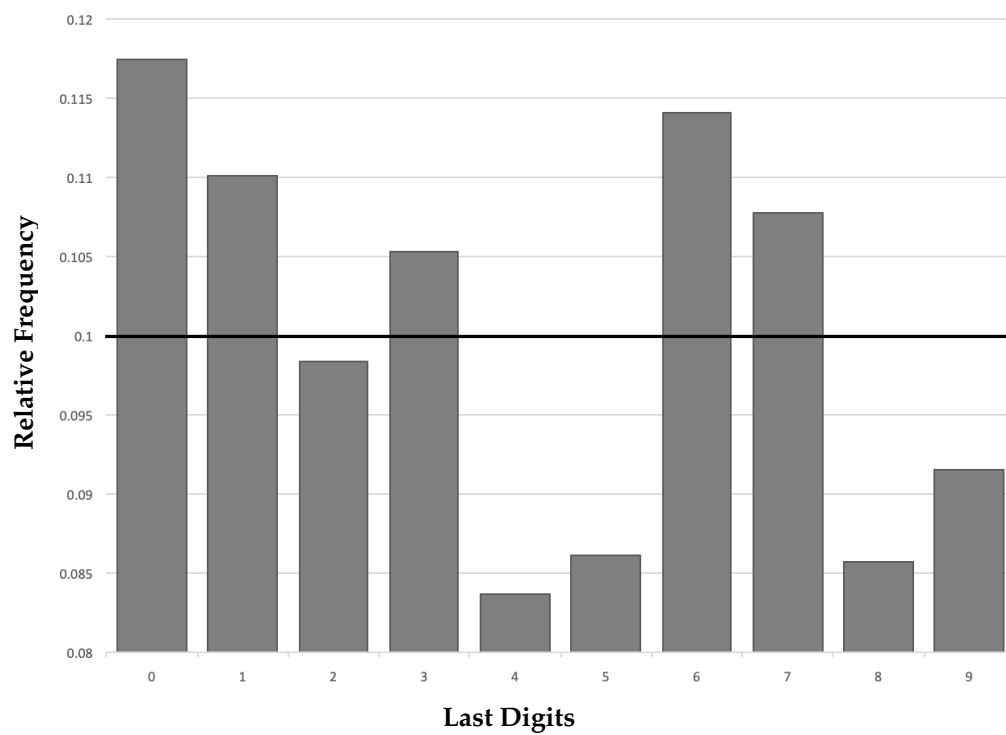


Figure 3.11 Relative frequency of last-digits (Just Russia Vote Count) for polling stations in the Second Quartile of United Russia vote (41-56%)

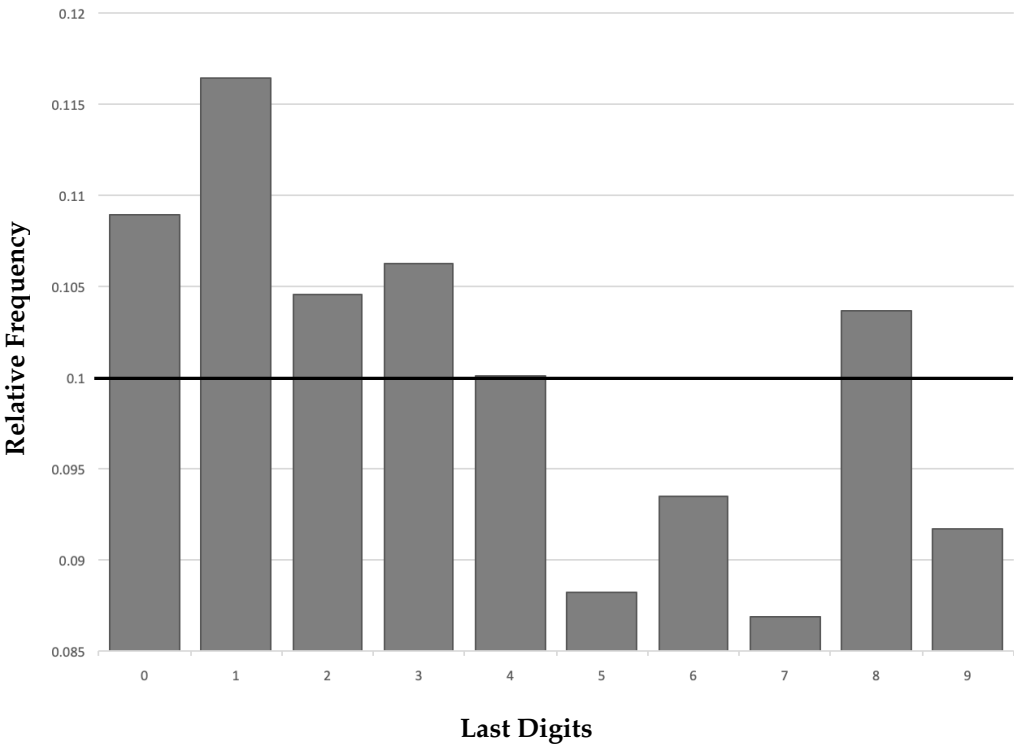
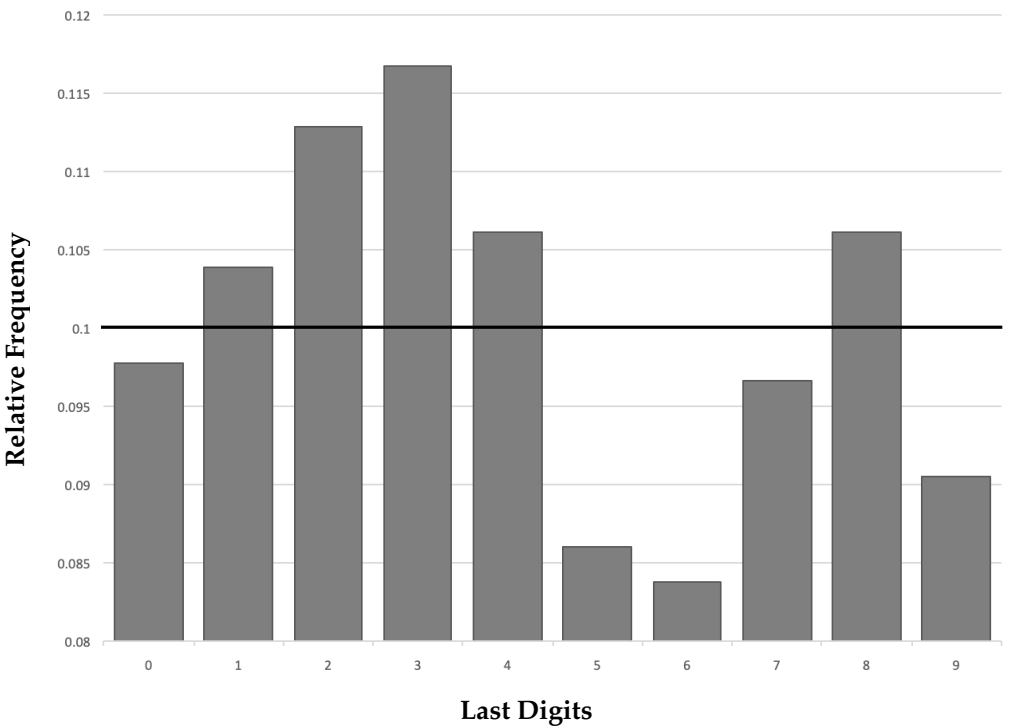


Figure 3.12 Relative frequency of last-digits (LDPR Vote Count) for polling stations in the Second Quartile of United Russia vote (41-56%)



Finally, Tables 3.4-3.6 present the results of Chi2 tests according to quartiles of the vote received by KPRF, Just Russia and LDPR, respectively. These findings confirm the conclusions drawn from Table 3.3 in that they reveal a reverse, and therefore complementing, trend in fraudulent patterns. Specifically, whilst the precinct return sheets showed suspicious distributions of last-digit frequencies in those precincts where United Russia scored the *highest* proportion of the vote (fourth quartile of United Russia vote), when it comes to dividing the precincts in terms of the opposition vote, suspicious patterns manifested themselves amongst those precincts where opposition parties scored the *lowest* proportion of the vote (first quartile of opposition vote counts).

For example, the results of the last-digit tests across different quartiles of KPRF support, as presented in Table 3.4, show that the vote counts of KPRF and Just Russia show signs of irregularity when the KPRF party secured the lowest proportion (17 percent or less) of the vote in the precincts in our sample (first quartile of the KPRF vote). Similarly, in Table 3.5, amongst the precincts in the first quartile of the Just Russia vote (where the party received 18 percent or less), the vote counts for the Just Russia party demonstrate a non-uniform distribution of last-digit frequencies. Moreover, registered voters, turnout and United Russia vote counts, also appear to follow an unusual distribution in areas where Just Russia performed poorly. Table 3.6 confirms a similar trend for the last-digits in LDPR vote counts, which appear suspicious amongst the first and second quartiles of the LDPR vote for the precincts in our sample.

Table 3.4 Last-digit tests (likelihood-ratio Chi2) for election figures across different levels of KPRF support

UR vote (percent)	Registered Voters	Turnout	UR Vote	KPRF Vote	Just Russia Vote	LDPR Vote
<i>First Quartile</i> (3-17% of the vote)	10.71	14.38	6.13	16.16*	16.88*	10.99
<i>n</i>	3407	3399	3404	3407	1763	1536
<i>Second Quartile</i> (18-23% of the vote)	4.61	6.46	6.62	13.10	15.29*	12.02
<i>n</i>	3407	3403	3404	3407	2076	1787
<i>Third Quartile</i> (24-30% of the vote)	14.38	14.97*	2.47	7.15	10.88	8.85
<i>n</i>	3407	3405	3394	3407	1627	1236
<i>Fourth Quartile</i> (31-89% of the vote)	6.51	10.24	14.09	8.78	7.91	7.20
<i>n</i>	3407	3394	3176	3407	976	757

***Rejection of H0 at the 1% level; **Rejection at the 5% level; *Rejection at the 10% level

Table 3.5 Last-digit tests (likelihood-ratio Chi2) for election figures across different levels of Just Russia support

UR vote (percent)	Registered Voters	Turnout	UR Vote	KPRF Vote	Just Russia Vote	LDPR Vote
<i>First Quartile</i> (3-18% of the vote)	15.00*	7.51	5.68	5.17	23.38***	6.00
<i>n</i>	2177	2173	2173	1774	2177	1313
<i>Second Quartile</i> (19-24% of the vote)	8.13	19.41**	14.97*	14.33	11.02	7.26
<i>n</i>	2178	2166	2174	1646	2178	1090
<i>Third Quartile</i> (25-30% of the vote)	5.86	18.57**	11.97	6.22	7.54	3.32
<i>n</i>	2176	2171	2158	1618	2176	1215
<i>Fourth Quartile</i> (31-98% of the vote)	1.64	6.39	3.78	6.03	4.10	5.58
<i>n</i>	2176	2173	2111	1404	2176	1232

***Rejection of H0 at the 1% level; **Rejection at the 5% level; *Rejection at the 10% level

Table 3.6 Last-digit tests (likelihood-ratio Chi2) for election figures across different levels of LDPR support

UR vote (percent)	Registered Voters	Turnout	UR Vote	KPRF Vote	Just Russia Vote	LDPR Vote
<i>First Quartile</i> (4-13% of the vote)	15.12*	3.99	12.48	11.47	6.29	20.98**
<i>n</i>	1638	1634	1636	1362	1139	1638
<i>Second Quartile</i> (14-16% of the vote)	9.36	10.58	3.66	4.24	9.70	20.28**
<i>n</i>	1637	1637	1637	1473	1380	1637
<i>Third Quartile</i> (17-19% of the vote)	6.10	14.78*	16.45*	2.78	15.50*	12.30
<i>n</i>	1638	1635	1637	1411	1307	1638
<i>Fourth Quartile</i> (20-70.5% of the vote)	5.29	12.90	7.18	8.44	7.75	4.32
<i>n</i>	1637	1618	1622	1070	1024	1637

***Rejection of H0 at the 1% level; **Rejection at the 5% level; *Rejection at the 10% level

Crucially, unlike the trends for the fourth quartile of United Russia shown in Table 3.3, none of the counts reported by precincts in the fourth quartiles of either the KPRF, Just Russia or LDPR support demonstrate fraudulent distributions of last-digit frequencies.

Therefore, this data shows that falsified figures on electoral reports tend to result in high levels of support for United Russia, and low levels of support for the three main

opposition parties examined here. Moreover, huge results for United Russia tend to be accompanied by the falsification of registered voter and turnout tallies, which may indicate that the regime is not only interested in electoral victories, but also in signalling the legitimacy of such victories through high levels of voter participation. Taken together, these results show that the electoral data in our sample is not only subject to fabrication by officials, but, crucially, that such fabrication occurs primarily on behalf of the regime, rather than being fragmented across a multitude of political actors.

Trends across electoral systems

Table 3.7 reports the likelihood-ratio statistics of last-digit tests across the majoritarian and proportional systems. These results reveal some mixed trends across the two types of elections. The last digits of the total number of registered voters and vote counts for United Russia continue to demonstrate a non-uniform distribution for both types of election systems, which suggests that these counts were likely subjected to falsification in both majoritarian and proportional contests. By contrast, the counts for KPRF and Just Russia votes do not reveal suspicious patterns for both parts of the electoral system.

Table 3.7 Last-digit tests (likelihood-ratio Chi2) for election figures across majoritarian and proportional contests

Election Type	Registered Voters	Turnout	UR Vote	KPRF Vote	Just Russia Vote	LDPR Vote
Proportional System	20.79**	17.78**	17.07**	7.92	7.94	25.06**
Majoritarian System	23.76***	14.47	17.75**	12.13	12.48	14.81

***Rejection of H0 at the 1% level; **Rejection at the 5% level

Interestingly, the turnout counts and the vote counts for LDPR reveal suspicious non-uniform patterns only for the reports relating to the proportional party list races. Given that all the regions in the sample used the mixed electoral system and the same polling stations were responsible for counting and reporting on election statistics for both types of races, these results suggest that the proportional election reports were likely to have been falsified in a more extensive way than the majoritarian outcomes for these two types of data. One possible explanation for this pattern in the turnout figures specifically is that the proportional results serve as a stronger signal of regime strength and legitimacy, as the closed party list system reduces the influence of individual candidate-level factors and indicates the strength of the party brand - as a result, the officials may be particularly likely to falsify the figures relating to turnout which carry a 'signalling' function of strength and legitimacy.

Summary

Overall, the results of the Chi2 tests discussed above reveal some interesting patterns. First, all six types of data from the official precinct returns sheets demonstrate irregularities indicative of falsification, which suggests that this narrow type of fraud does occur in Russian regional legislative elections. The prevalence of last-digit '0', and to an extent, last-digit '5', in the frequency distributions examined above, confirms further the assumption that these irregularities come as a consequence of fraudulent activity carried out by human actors. Second, the persistence of non-uniform distributions of last-digit frequencies in precincts with particularly high percentages of the vote granted to United Russia, and low percentages of the vote granted to the three opposition parties, indicates the regime-driven nature of fraudulent electoral behaviour in this context. These features of the data confirm that the analysis of last-

digit frequencies is an appropriate approach for the study of fraud in Russian regional elections.

3.3.3 Regression analysis of last-digits

This section analyses last-digit fraud through a series of multinomial logistic regression models that seek to test whether the last-digits of statistics relating to registered voters, turnout and vote counts co-vary with urbanisation. Specifically, the multinomial logistic regression models estimate, for each of the digits 1-9, the likelihood that a given figure from the official precinct electoral returns sheet will end in said digit, and compare this to that of the digit '0'.¹³ In naturally-occurring, non-fraudulent, social data we would not expect to find statistically significant differences between the probabilities of any last-digits. Significant coefficients for any last-digits would therefore show that the independent variable co-varies with suspicious patterns indicative of fraud.

Dependent Variables

Overall, the analysis entails six multinomial logistic regression models, with the aim of investigating whether urbanisation co-varies with suspicious patterns in the distribution of last-digit frequencies. The six models correspond to the six different types of data under examination, with each one treated as the dependent variable in separate models - Registered Voters, Turnout, and the Vote Counts for United Russia, KPRF, Just Russia and LDPR.

¹³ This approach follows Skovoroda & Lankina, 2017.

Using the same dataset, six dependent variables to measure fraud as the falsification of official electoral returns were constructed for six separate models. Table 3.8 summarises the dependent variable for each model. To remind the reader, the minimum figure of 100 for each count was chosen on the basis of previous studies which have confirmed the uniform distribution of last digits in non-fraudulent data types containing three digits and above (Mosimann et al., 2002: pp.76-77).

The dependent variables take the same format but are based on different figures from the official electoral return sheets published after all the votes have been counted in each precinct. As before, these figures are: the count of eligible voters (*Registered Voters*); the turnout count (*Turnout*); and the counts of the votes received by United Russia (*United Russia Vote*), KPRF (*KPRF Vote*), Just Russia (*Just Russia Vote*) and LDPR (*LDPR*).

Table 3.8 Summary descriptions of dependent variables

Models	Dependent Variable	Description
M1	<i>Registered Voters</i>	The last digits (0-9) of registered voter counts reported by individual polling stations, with at least 100 registered voters.
M2	<i>Turnout</i>	The last digits of turnout counts (total number of valid ballots) reported by individual polling stations, with at least 100 registered voters and a minimum turnout of 100 voters.
M3	<i>United Russia Vote</i>	The last digits of United Russia vote counts reported by polling stations with a minimum United Russia vote count of 100 votes.
M4	<i>KPRF Vote</i>	The last digits of KPRF vote counts reported by polling stations with a minimum KPRF vote count of 100 votes.
M5	<i>Just Russia Vote</i>	The last digits of Just Russia vote counts reported by polling stations with a minimum Just Russia vote count of 100 votes.
M6	<i>LDPR Vote</i>	The last digits of LDPR vote counts reported by polling stations with a minimum LDPR vote count of 100 votes.

Each dependent variable is a categorical variable, recording only the final digit of the larger full number reported by a precinct for a given statistic. Thus, in total, there are ten categories of last digits, ranging from 0 to 9. In each model, the last digit '0' was used as a reference category - it is expected that humans, who adopt a decimal view of the world, tend to have a bias for multiples of 10, which subsequently end in 0. Therefore, the comparison of other last-digit probabilities against that of last digit '0' is particularly interesting - if the last digit 0 is statistically different from the other digits, particularly if it is *more* likely to come up than other digits, then we can be even more confident of the fact that we are witnessing figures which are the artefacts of human beings, rather than natural social outcomes.

Key Independent Variable and Hypothesis

The key independent variable is *Urbanisation* - a district-level variable, measured as the percentage of urban residents within each constituency in the sample.¹⁴ For the purposes of this chapter, this variable was treated in terms of quartiles (following the approach adopted in the preliminary analyses of last-digits across party support in the preceding section of this chapter). Thus, the first quarter comprises the polling stations located in the most rural areas (districts in the lowest quarter of *Urbanisation* values in the sample) - the fourth quarter, by contrast, comprises the polling stations located in the top 25% of districts in terms of *Urbanisation*. As before, the reason behind the use of quartiles is that this approach reduces the likelihood that differences in last-digits are driven by fluctuations in the size of *n*.

¹⁴ As discussed in Chapter 1 the dissertation

The dependent variable thus codes polling stations as 1 if they are situated in an electoral district which falls into the first quartile of urbanisation (0-40% of resident are urban), 2 for the second quartile (41-64% of resident are urban), 3 for the third (65-91% of residents are urban), and 4 for the fourth (92-100% of residents are urban). The most rural locations are therefore coded as 1 and the most urban locations are coded as 4. In the regression models below, the first quartile is used as a reference category.

As a reminder, the hypothesis to be explored during the statistical analysis that follows is:

H1. Electoral fraud is more likely to occur in urban electoral districts

In support of this hypothesis, I would expect to find statistically significant differences in the relative probabilities of last digits amongst the precincts located in districts with high levels of urbanisation (third or fourth quartile), and the absence of such statistically significant differences amongst precincts located in the more rural districts (first quartile). In particular, I would expect to find that official figures are more likely to end in 0 than in other digits amongst the most urban electoral contexts - correspondingly, I would expect that no such difference exists amongst the most rural electoral contexts. This would indicate that official figures are more likely to be rounded according to a decimal logic, and therefore suggest that suspicious behaviour is taking place in the more urban areas.

Control Variables

As socially-occurring data is expected to have a uniform distribution of last-digits, there are no control variables for potential non-fraudulent factors. The model does include controls for other factors that might influence the officials' decisions to manipulate election returns, however.

The variable *Majoritarian Dummy* is a binary variable where a case is coded as 1 if it represents an election report from the majoritarian race, and 0 if it comes from a proportional party list race. Given the Chi2 tests in the earlier section, it is possible that officials might have different incentives to falsify majoritarian and proportional tallies, as the former attributes greater weight to individual candidates, whilst the latter might serve as a stronger indicator of regime support overall and may therefore serve a higher signalling purpose.

As the main hypothesis hinges on the assumption that the regime is driven by concerns over electoral weakness and uncertainty, and uses urbanisation as an indicator that the regime could perform poorly at election time - it is important to include other potential indicators of competitiveness which are not linked to urbanisation as control variables in the model. Given the salience of incumbency as an electoral resource that can reduce the competitiveness of an election, I include a control variable *Incumbency Dummy*, which is a binary variable coding a case as 1 if the district was contested by an incumbent United Russia candidate (regional legislator), and 0 if otherwise.

In addition, the models control for the year of election by including the variable *Year*, which consists of four categories for each year of election in our sample (2010-2013), and uses 2010 as a reference category. This variable also controls for the simultaneous occurrence of national elections alongside the regional contests in our sample (which occurred in 2011 and 2012). It is possible that the incentives to use fraud change when regional elections take place at the same time as those to the national executive and/or legislature, as regime actors are under greater pressure to maintain a strong electoral performance in the context of higher levels of citizen participation and scrutiny. This variable also controls for the electoral earthquake of 2011, and the potential transformation in regime strategies following the protests of 2011.

Results

Amongst the six models, the regression results did not reveal any statistically significant findings in the models where *Turnout* (M2), *United Russia Vote* (M3), *KPRF Vote* (M4) and *Just Russia Vote* (M5) were treated as dependent variables.¹⁵ Therefore, since we cannot reject the null hypothesis, we must conclude that there exists no association between urbanisation and suspicious patterns indicative of falsification in these cases.

Models M1 (*Registered Voters*) and M6 (*LDPR Vote*), however, revealed some interesting patterns in last-digit frequencies, with respect to urbanisation. The results of each model are discussed separately, below.

¹⁵ Tables with the results of these regressions can be found in Appendix A.

M1 Results: Registered Voter Counts

Table 3.9 presents the results of the multinomial logistic regression for M1, where the dependent variable relates to the last-digits of *Registered Voters* and the data comprises the full set of precincts.

The significant coefficients for '4 vs 0' and '8 vs 0' for the fourth quartile of *Urbanisation* show that registered voter counts were significantly less likely to end in digits '4' or '8' than the digit '0', when comparing the most urban districts to the least urban districts in our sample. In other words, registered voter counts seem to be more likely to end in '0' than either '4' or '8' in the most urban areas than they are to do so in the most rural areas in our sample.

Table 3.9 Last-digit falsification in Registered Voter Counts (M1)

Last Digits	1 vs 0	2 vs 0	3 vs 0	4 vs 0	5 vs 0	6 vs 0	7 vs 0	8 vs 0	9 vs 0
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)									
- 2nd quartile	1.070 (.080)	1.133 (.100)	1.058 (.090)	1.046 (.089)	1.086 (.087)	1.041 (.093)	1.013 (.086)	.999 (.088)	1.116 (.096)
- 3rd quartile	.997 (.092)	1.024 (.097)	.885 (.084)	.944 (.086)	.934 (.078)	.987 (.086)	1.026 (.093)	.902 (.081)	.947 (.097)
- 4th quartile	1.015 (.084)	1.040 (.091)	.898 (.074)	.860* (.074)	.897 (.075)	.972 (.084)	.946 (.081)	.852** (.068)	.914 (.081)
<i>Incumbency</i> <i>Dummy</i>	.981 (.058)	.997 (.065)	.989 (.063)	.883** (.051)	.990 (.056)	.952 (.060)	.931 (.061)	.925 (.057)	.934 (.060)
<i>Majoritarian</i> <i>Dummy</i>	1.000 (.022)	.984 (.019)	.970 (.021)	.989 (.019)	.998 (.020)	.977 (.020)	1.011 (.021)	.992 (.020)	.995 (.023)
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)									
-2011	1.034 (.109)	1.015 (.099)	.895 (.087)	.889 (.081)	1.036 (.102)	.952 (.103)	.997 (.097)	1.022 (.113)	1.135 (.139)
-2012	.898 (.108)	.910 (.105)	.840 (.097)	.845 (.091)	1.019 (.111)	.862 (.102)	.855 (.096)	.930 (.109)	.948 (.128)
-2013	.897 (.100)	.899 (.092)	.809** (.087)	.863 (.081)	.941 (.096)	.848 (.095)	.910 (.099)	.935 (.108)	.983 (.126)
Constant	.911 (.109)	.944 (.107)	1.143 (.127)	1.175 (.118)	.985 (.107)	1.039 (.127)	1.020 (.120)	1.059 (.122)	.934 (.121)
<i>N</i>	41476								
Wald X2 (45)	91.13								
<i>p</i> value	0.06								

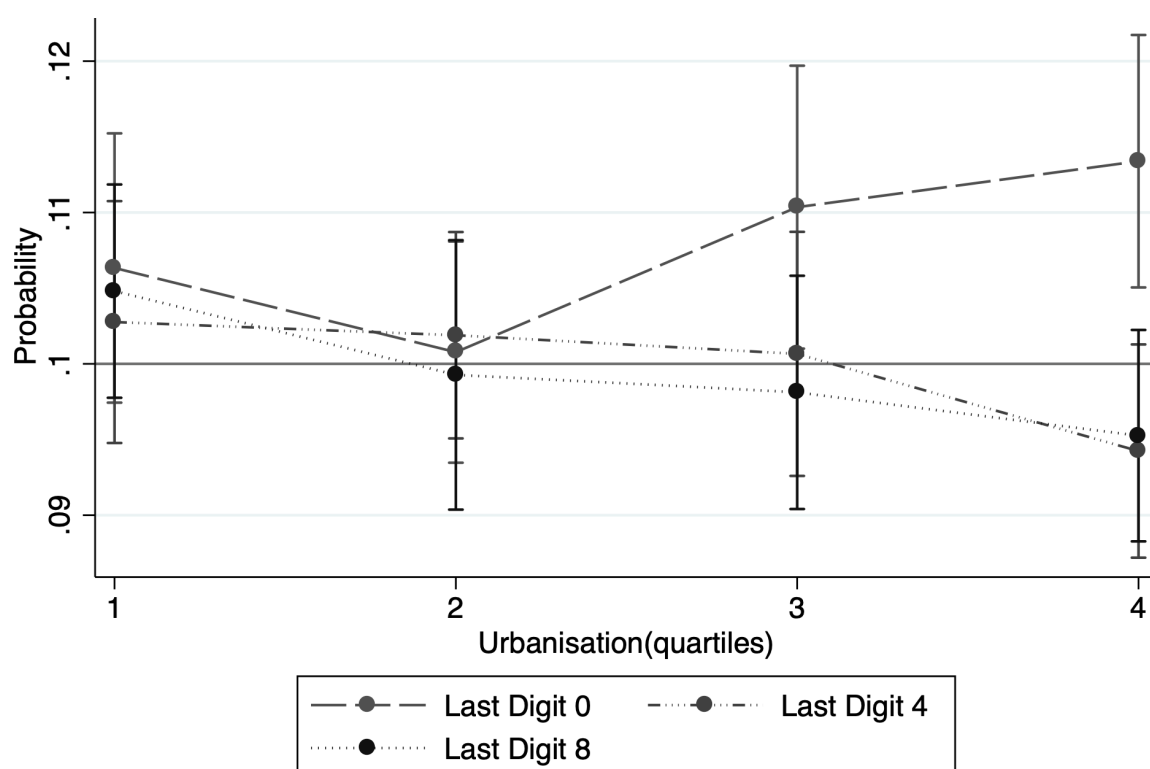
Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses (district clusters). Multinomial logistic regression.

Odds Ratios reported

***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1

Figure 3.13 visualises this finding by plotting the average adjusted predicted probabilities of last digits '0', '4' and '8' in *Registered Voters* across quartiles of *Urbanisation*. Table 3.10 details the values of these probabilities in terms of percentages.

Figure 3.13 Predicted probabilities of last-digits 0, 4 and 8 in Registered Voters (M1) by quartiles of Urbanisation with 95% confidence intervals



Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

Table 3.10 Predicted probabilities of last-digits 0, 4 and 8 in Registered Voters (M1) by quartiles of Urbanisation (percentages)

Urbanisation	Last-Digit 0	Last-Digit 4	Last-Digit 8
First Quartile (0-40% urban)	10.6*** (0.5)	10.3*** (0.4)	10.5*** (0.4)
Second Quartile (41-64% urban)	10.1*** (0.4)	10.2*** (0.3)	9.9*** (0.5)
Third Quartile (65-91% urban)	11.0*** (0.5)	10.1*** (0.4)	9.8*** (0.4)
Fourth Quartile (92-100% urban)	11.3*** (0.4)	9.4*** (0.4)	9.5*** (0.4)

Standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01

Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

The solid horizontal line shown on the graph indicates the expected probability of any last-digit in naturally-occurring social data - if the distribution of last-digit frequencies is uniform, we would expect the probability of any digit to be featured as the last digit to be equal to 0.1. As can be seen from this graph, amongst the most urban areas in our sample (fourth quartile of *Urbanisation*), the probability of last-digit '0' is not only statistically higher than might be expected under the assumption of a uniform distribution, but it is also statistically different from the probability of last-digits '4' and '8'. The graph therefore indicates that last-digit '0' is more likely to be overrepresented amongst registered voter counts in the most urban areas in our sample (fourth quartile of *Urbanisation*, where at least 92 percent of the residents are classed as urban). Overlapping confidence intervals for predicted probabilities at the other quartiles of *Urbanisation*, show that there exists no statistically significant difference in the relative probabilities of these three digits at lower levels of urbanisation.

This finding is in line with the expectations outlined under the hypothesis *H1*, since it indicates the use of last-digit fraud amongst the most urban districts. The statistically significant overrepresentation of last-digit '0' in the registered voter counts reported by the precincts in the fourth quartile of urbanisation is particularly interesting, as it points to the prevalence of a decimal logic in these numbers.

Next, Table 3.11 presents the average marginal effects of urbanisation, which show the average changes in the probability of observing each digit as the level of urbanisation increases. The absence of statistically significant average marginal effects of urbanisation on the probability of observing last-digit '0' means that even though urban districts were found to over-report '0', the model does not find that '0' per se is more likely to be reported as the last-digit in the more urban than in the rural areas. In

other words, from this, we can see that the effects of urbanisation on the probability of last-digits are largely *relative* - that is, urbanisation co-varies with the probability of last-digits '4' and '8' relative to that of 0. It is not that precinct reports from the most urban districts are more likely to end in zero than that from the most urban districts, but that the most urban reports are more likely to end in zero than digits 4 and 8 when compared to the most rural districts.

Table 3.11 Average marginal effects of Urbanisation on the probability of observing last-digits in the Registered Voters counts (percentages).

<i>Last Digits</i>	<i>Urbanisation Quartiles</i>		
	2 vs 1	3 vs 1	4 vs 1
0	-0.6 (0.59)	0.4 (0.68)	0.7 (0.63)
1	0.1 (0.52)	0.3 (0.59)	0.8 (0.52)
2	0.7 (0.59)	0.6 (0.62)	1* (0.58)
3	0.02 (0.58)	-0.8 (0.61)	-0.4 (0.58)
4	-0.1 (0.55)	-0.2 (0.59)	-0.9 (0.55)
5	0.3 (0.59)	-0.3 (0.61)	-0.4 (0.59)
6	-0.1 (0.54)	0.2 (0.51)	0.4 (0.55)
7	-0.4 (0.56)	0.6 (0.63)	0.1 (0.58)
8	-0.5 (0.58)	-0.7 (0.54)	-1.0* (0.51)
9	0.6 (0.55)	-0.2 (0.60)	-0.2 (0.52)

Standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.1

Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

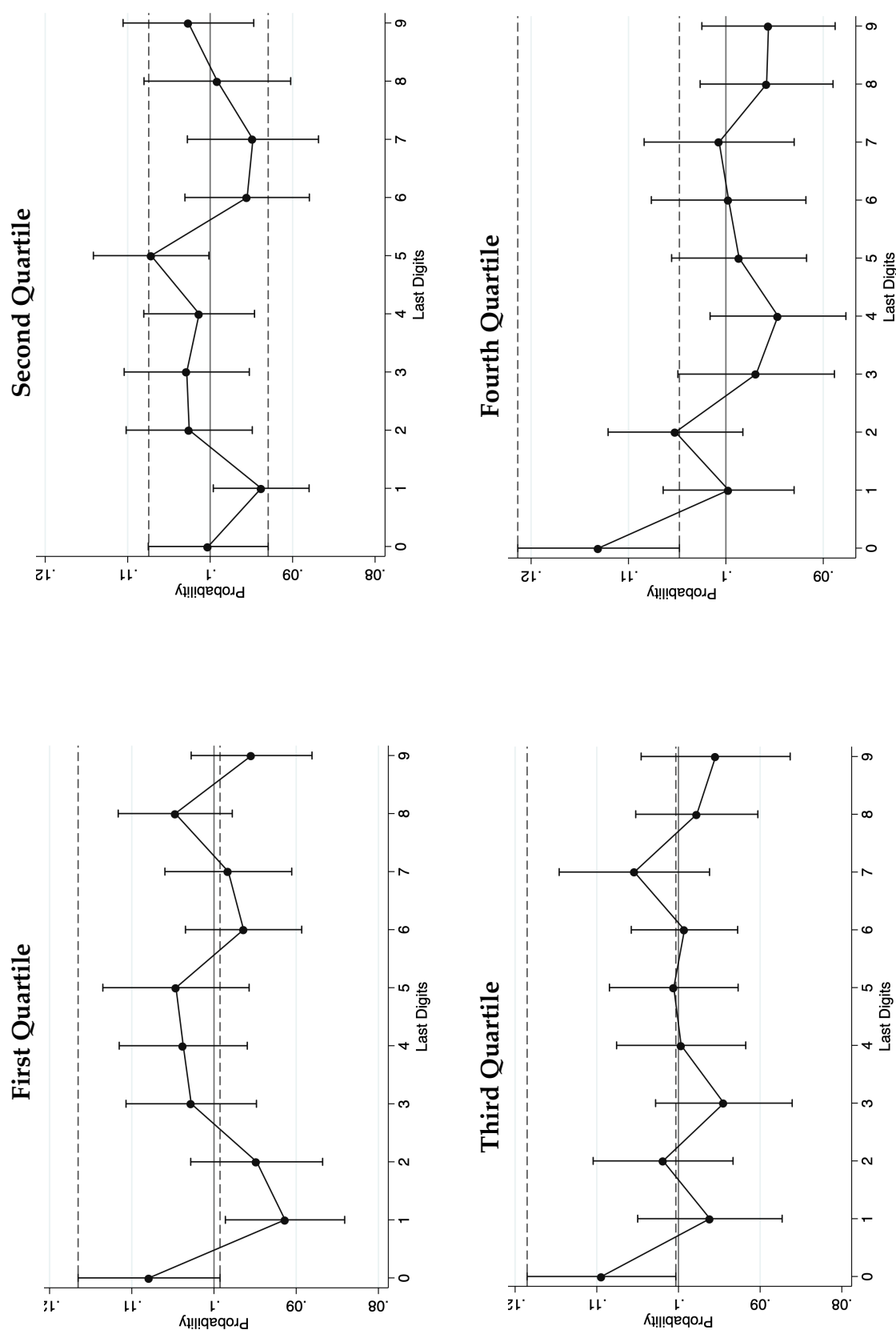
Figure 3.14 plots the probabilities of each last-digit separately for each quartile of *Urbanisation*, in order to illustrate this relative effect further. The solid horizontal line at

0.1 represents the expected probability of each last-digit in non-fraudulent data, whilst the dashed horizontal lines represent confidence interval boundaries of the predicted probability of last-digit '0'. Those confidence intervals of last-digits 1-9 which do not include these lines indicate that the respective predicted probability is statistically different from either 0.1 and/or the probability of last-digit '0'.

The graphs in Figure 3.14 confirm the non-uniform distribution of last-digit frequencies amongst the reports from precincts in the fourth quartile of *Urbanisation*. Specifically, we can see that the probability of last-digit '0' is statistically higher than 0.1 and higher than the probability of last-digits '4' and '8' in the fourth quartile of urbanisation. In addition, the graph of probabilities for the fourth quartile of urbanisation shows that the probability of last-digit '0' is also statistically higher than that of last-digit '9'. These differences in the likelihood of last-digits are therefore in line with the expectations outlined under *H1*, since they show that official electoral data in the most urban areas of our sample demonstrates signs of falsification.

In the graphs of probabilities for the first, second and third quartiles of urbanisation, we can see that only in the third quartile of urbanisation, the probability of last-digit '0' is statistically higher than 0.1. However, the fact that the confidence intervals for the probabilities of every other last-digit (1-9) overlap with that of last-digit '0' shows that we cannot conclude that the probability of other digits is statistically different from that of '0'. The same is true of the last-digit probabilities in the second quartile of urbanisation.

Figure 3.14 Predicted probabilities of last-digits 0-9 in *Registered Voters (M1)* for each quartile of *Urbanisation* with 95% confidence intervals



Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

In the first quartile of urbanisation, the probability of last-digit '0' is not statistically different from 0.1 or that of other last-digits, with the exception of last-digit '1'. The probability of last-digit '1' is statistically lower than 0.1, which suggests that some non-uniformity indicative of fraud may be present in the data from the less urban areas in our sample. The absence of a significant coefficient for '1 vs 0' for the fourth quartile of *Urbanisation* in Table 3.10, however, shows that the first and fourth quartile of urbanisation do not differ statistically in terms of the probability of last-digit '1' compared to that of '0'. On balance, therefore, the first quartile of urbanisation does not appear statistically to follow a suspicious pattern in the distribution of last-digits.

Finally, the post-estimation tests for the model presented in Table 3.12 show that the fourth quartile of *Urbanisation* is the only independent variable in the model which is jointly statistically significant for all last-digits, which means that we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no association between last-digit frequencies and the fourth quartile of urbanisation (compared to the first quartile).

Table 3.12 Wald Tests for model M1 (*Registered Voters*).

IVs	M1 (<i>Registered Voters</i>)
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)	
- 2nd quartile	4.96
- 3rd quartile	6.49
- 4th quartile	15.81*
<i>Incumbency Dummy</i>	7.39
<i>Majoritarian Dummy</i>	6.38
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)	
-2011	10.88
-2012	8.51
-2013	8.05

Chi2 reported.

H0: There is no association between a dependent variable and the 10 categories of last digits (All coefficients associated with given variable are jointly equal to 0).

Rejection at *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$

Overall, the results above indicate that urbanisation co-varies with last-digit fraud in the counts of registered voters.¹⁶ Specifically, last-digit '0' tends to be over-reported in the most urban districts in our sample, particularly when compared to the frequency of digits '4' and '8'. This finding is in line with the hypothesis (*H1*).

¹⁶ These results were robust to the inclusion of regional dummy variables (with Penza oblast' as a reference category, due to its proximity to the national average on a range of socio-economic and political scores).

Table 3.13 presents the results of the multinomial logistic regression for M6, where the dependent variable refers to the last-digits of the vote counts for the LDPR party. Overall, all three quartiles of *Urbanisation* demonstrate a statistically significant difference in terms of the relative likelihood of last-digits '2', '3', '5' and '6', compared to that in the first quartile. Interestingly, the odds ratios are greater than 1, which indicates that the digits with significant coefficients are *more* likely to be reported than zero amongst the more urban areas than amongst the least urban areas. In other words, these results show that last-digit '0' is over-reported in the most *rural* areas in our sample (first quartile of *Urbanisation*).

Table 3.14 presents the significant results in terms of the average adjusted predicted probabilities of last-digits '0', '2', '3', '5' and '6' for each quartile of *Urbanisation*. As can be seen from this table, in the first quartile of *Urbanisation*, the predicted probability of last-digit '0' is 12.1 percent, which is considerably greater than the probability of 10 percent expected under the assumption of a uniform distribution of last digits. Moreover, the predicted probability of last-digits '2', '3', '5' and '6' are considerably lower than 10 percent and therefore suggest the under-reporting of these digits amongst the reports produced by precincts in the first quartile of *Urbanisation*. Amongst the other quartiles of *Urbanisation*, the predicted probability of last-digit '0' is very close to 10 percent, which does not appear to be suspicious - however, some of the digits are over-represented amongst the higher quartiles of *Urbanisation*, such as last-digit '2' in the fourth quartile (12.9 percent probability) and last-digits '3' and '5' in the second quartile (12.1 and 11.4 percent, respectively).

Table 3.13 Last-digit falsification in LDPR Vote Counts (M6)

Last Digits	1 vs 0	2 vs 0	3 vs 0	4 vs 0	5 vs 0	6 vs 0	7 vs 0	8 vs 0	9 vs 0
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)									
- 2nd quartile	1.049 (.241)	1.208 (.320)	1.733** (.434)	1.310 (.297)	1.580** (.339)	1.368 (.400)	1.248 (.294)	1.043 (.250)	.936 (.261)
- 3rd quartile	.931 (.169)	1.340 (.300)	1.528** (.313)	1.093 (.216)	1.333* (.226)	1.580* (.387)	1.340 (.284)	1.071 (.215)	1.133 (.255)
- 4th quartile	.950 (.172)	1.718** (.395)	1.411 (.307)	1.019 (.207)	1.160 (.224)	1.556* (.379)	1.007 (.225)	.933 (.197)	1.078 (.254)
<i>Incumbency</i> <i>Dummy</i>	.975 (.113)	.988 (.115)	1.046 (.133)	.890 (.111)	.911 (.123)	.991 (.122)	.752** (.092)	1.100 (.125)	1.042 (.140)
<i>Majoritarian</i> <i>Dummy</i>	.904 (.097)	.879 (.089)	.883 (.101)	1.170* (.108)	1.098 (.121)	1.005 (.109)	.919 (.109)	.971 (.106)	.937 (.105)
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)									
-2011	1.291* (.195)	.874 (.131)	.947 (.161)	1.276 (.198)	1.324 (.247)	1.130 (.208)	1.182 (.218)	1.322 (.230)	.969 (.140)
-2012	1.779 (.781)	1.204 (.585)	1.454 (.680)	.923 (.421)	1.460 (.544)	1.490 (.635)	.763 (.403)	.660 (.500)	.423 (.318)
-2013	1.418 (.355)	1.058 (.228)	.824 (.211)	1.009 (.228)	1.067 (.307)	.834 (.220)	.800 (.231)	1.247 (.334)	.838 (.205)
Constant	.909 (.176)	.827 (.181)	.757 (.156)	.767 (.153)	.594 (.122)	.533** (.149)	.895 (.207)	.710* (.141)	.854 (.204)
N	6550								
Wald X2 (45)	185.89								
p value	<0.01								

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses (district clusters). Multinomial logistic regression.

Odds Ratios reported

***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1

Table 3.14 Predicted probabilities of last-digits 0, 2, 3, 5 and 6 in Registered Voters (M1) by quartiles of Urbanisation (percentages)

<i>Urbanisation</i>	Last-Digit 0	Last-Digit 2	Last-Digit 3	Last-Digit 5	Last-Digit 6
First Quartile (0-40% urban)	12.1*** (1.3)	8.6*** (1.3)	8.5*** (1.3)	8.8*** (1.0)	7.0*** (1.3)
Second Quartile (41-64% urban)	9.9*** (1.2)	8.5*** (1.0)	12.1*** (1.4)	11.4*** (1.2)	7.8*** (0.9)
Third Quartile (65-91% urban)	10.1*** (0.7)	9.6*** (0.5)	10.8*** (0.6)	9.8*** (0.7)	9.2*** (0.6)
Fourth Quartile (92-100% urban)	10.5*** (0.6)	12.9*** (0.7)	10.5*** (0.7)	8.9*** (0.6)	9.5*** (0.5)

Standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01

Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

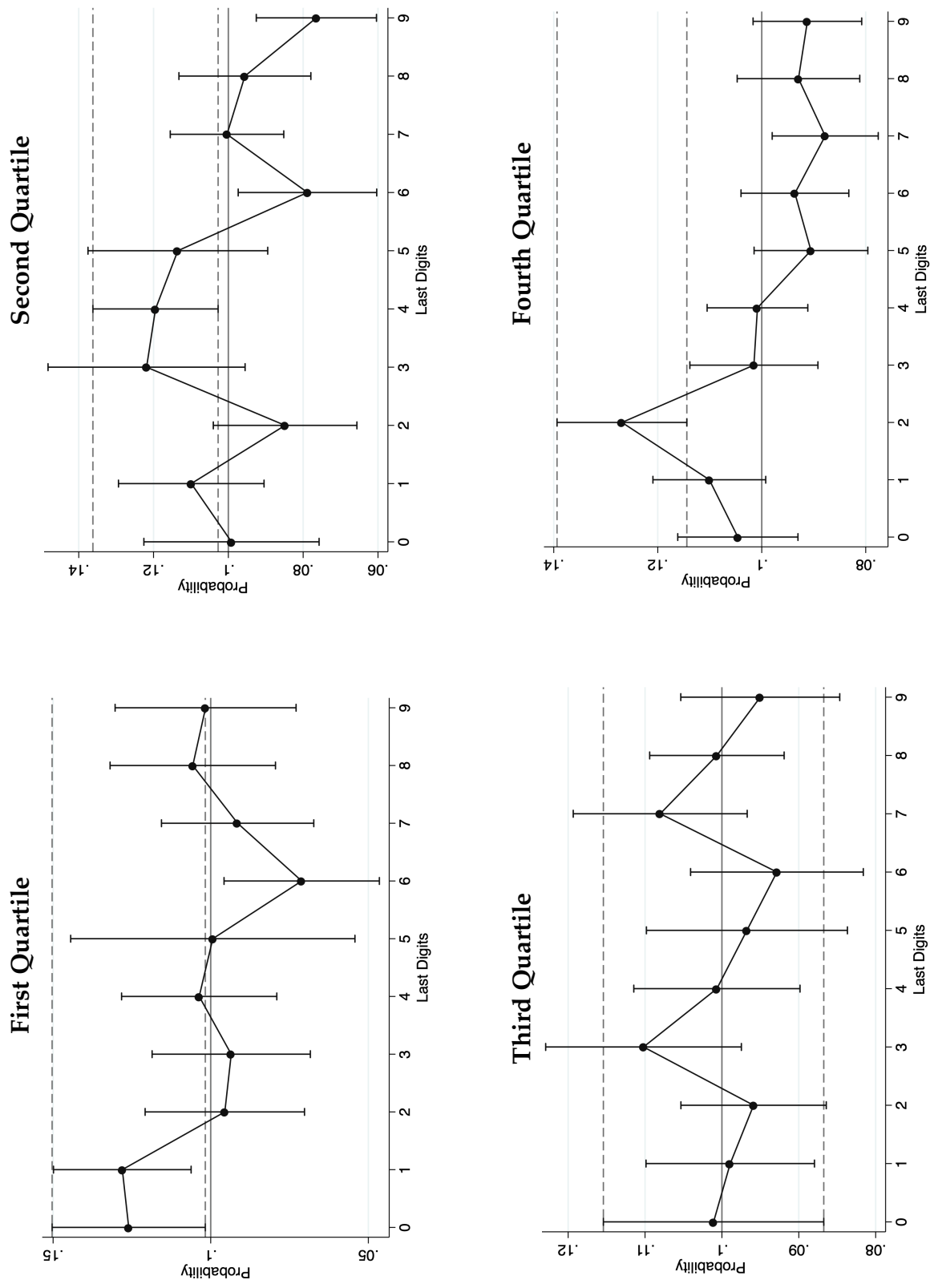
Thus, it appears that two types of suspicious patterns are emerging in this data.

First, the last-digits in the first quartile of *Urbanisation* appear to vary in their probability of being reported in a way that is particularly indicative of human interference - the over-reporting of last-digit '0' at the cost of other digits. By contrast, the patterns in the other quartiles of *Urbanisation* entail a less suspicious likelihood of last-digit '0' at the same time as the over-reporting of other last-digits - in other words, some last-digits are over-reported at the cost of digits 1-9. Interestingly, the predicted probabilities for these digits in the third quartile of *Urbanisation* appear to be the least suspicious, as they come very close to 10 percent.

The graphs in Figure 3.15 visualise this finding. As before, the solid horizontal line represents the expected probability under a uniform distribution of last digits (0.1 or 10 percent). The dashed horizontal lines represent the boundaries of the confidence intervals for last-digit '0' in the first quartile of *Urbanisation*, last-digit '4' in the second quartile, and last-digit '2' in the fourth quartile. Thus, it can be seen that in the first

quartile of *Urbanisation*, the probability of last-digit '0' is statistically higher than the 10 percent expected under a uniform distribution. Meanwhile, in the second quartile, we can see that last-digit '4' is significantly over-reported, whilst digits '6' and '9' are under-reported, and the predicted probability of last-digit '0' is more in line with the uniform assumption. Similarly, in the fourth quartile, it is clear that the probability of last-digit '0' is not statistically different from the 10 percent expected under the assumption of a uniform distribution, yet the last-digit '2' is statistically over-reported and appears more frequently than most other digits. In the third quartile of *Urbanisation*, the dashed horizontal lines represent the boundaries of the confidence intervals for last-digit '0' - as can be seen from this graph, the relative probabilities of each last digit do not appear to be statistically significant, and thus the pattern does not appear to be suspicious.

Figure 3.15 Predicted probabilities of last-digits 0-9 in *LDPR Vote Count (M6)* for each quartile of *Urbanisation* with 95% confidence intervals



Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

Next, Table 3.15 presents the average marginal effects of *Urbanisation*, which show the average changes in the probability of observing each digit as the level of urbanisation increases. As in model M1 earlier, the absence of statistically significant average marginal effects of urbanisation on the probability of observing last-digit '0' means that even though rural districts were found to over-report '0', the model does not find that '0' per se is more likely to be reported as the last-digit in the more rural than in the urban areas. Therefore, the increased likelihood of last-digit '0' in the first quartile of urbanisation is *relative* to that of other digits, rather than that of last-digit '0' in the other quartiles of urbanisation.

However, the absolute probability of other last-digits nevertheless varies with urbanisation. For example, as *Urbanisation* increases from the first to the third quartile, the probability of observing '1' as the last-digit in LDPR vote counts is expected to decrease by 2.9 percentage points. The Table also shows that, on average, last-digit '3' is 3.6 percentage points more likely to be reported by the precincts in the second quartile of urbanisation than those in the first. Similarly, last-digits '2' and '6' are, on average, more likely to be reported by the precincts in the fourth quartile urbanisation than the first (by 4.3 and 2.5 percentage points, respectively).

Looking at the graphs in Figure 3.15, the effects reported in Table 3.16 seem to capturing the over-reporting of last-digit '1' in the first quartile of urbanisation when compared to the third quartile, as well as the under-reporting of last-digit '6' in when compared to the fourth quartile. Moreover, they also capture the over-reporting of last-digit '2' in the fourth quartile of *Urbanisation* compared to the first quartile, and the over-reporting of last-digit '3' in the second quartile of urbanisation, relative to the first quartile.

Table 3.15 Average marginal effects of *Urbanisation* on the probability of observing last-digits in the *LDPR Vote Count* (percentages)

<i>Last Digits</i>	<i>Urbanisation Quartiles</i>		
	2 vs 1	3 vs 1	4 vs 1
0	-2.2 (1.8)	-2.0 (1.5)	-1.5 (1.6)
1	-1.8 (1.6)	-2.9** (1.3)	-2.2 (1.4)
2	-0.1 (1.6)	1.0 (1.6)	4.3*** (4.3)
3	3.6** (1.8)	2.3 (1.4)	2.0 (1.5)
4	0.8 (1.6)	-1.0 (1.5)	-1.2 (1.5)
5	2.6 (1.6)	1.0 (1.2)	0.1 (0.1)
6	0.8 (1.6)	2.2 (1.4)	2.5* (1.4)
7	0.2 (1.6)	1.1 (1.5)	-1.1 (1.5)
8	-1.6 (1.7)	-1.2 (1.6)	-2.1 (1.6)
9	2.3 (1.7)	-0.5 (1.6)	-0.6 (1.6)

Standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1

Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

Table 3.16 reports post-estimation tests for this model. All three quartiles of *Urbanisation* appear to be jointly statistically significant for all last-digits, which means that we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no association between last-digit frequencies and these quartiles of urbanisation (compared to the first quartile).

Table 3.16 Wald Tests for model M6 (LDPR Vote Count)

IVs	M6 (LDPR Vote)
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)	
- 2nd quartile	20.02**
- 3rd quartile	19.72**
- 4th quartile	21.04**
<i>Incumbency Dummy</i>	16.21*
<i>Majoritarian Dummy</i>	12.74
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)	
-2011	23.50**
-2012	15.08*
-2013	11.85

Chi2 reported.

H0: There is no association between a dependent variable and the 10 categories of last digits (All coefficients associated with given variable are jointly equal to 0).

Rejection at *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$

In addition, the control variables *Incumbency*, as well as the 2011 and 2012 categories of *Year* (compared to 2010) appear to be significant in our model. Judging by the significant coefficients reported in Table 3.12, however, it seems that the variation in the likelihood of last-digits for the control variable *Incumbency* is largely limited to the lower likelihood of last-digit '7' relative to that of '0' amongst elections contested by a regime incumbent compared to that contested by newcomers. Similarly, for the control variable *Year*, the significant effect appears to be largely constrained to the increased probability of observing last-digit '1' compared to that of '0' in 2011, when compared with 2010.

Overall, the combined results for model M6 relating to the LDPR vote counts demonstrate mixed insights into the effect of urbanisation on the likelihood of the use

of fraud.¹⁷ On the one hand, the three upper quartiles of urbanisation have revealed statistically significant differences in the probabilities of some last-digits relative to that of '0', when compared to the precincts in the first quartile. In particular, reports from precincts in the second and fourth quartiles of urbanisation display suspicious characteristics, in that the probabilities of some last-digits are, both, statistically higher than the expected probability of 10 percent, and statistically higher than that of many other last-digits 1-9. This initial finding lends support to *H1* which expects fraudulent patterns to appear amongst the more urban areas.

Further investigation, however, has revealed that the probability of last-digits in the first quartile of urbanisation is also suspicious. In particular, in the first quartile of urbanisation, last-digit '0' was significantly over-represented relative to that of last-digit '6' and statically higher than the expected probability of 10 percent, under the assumption of uniformity. The over-representation of last-digit '0' at the expense of other digits is particularly suspicious, as discussed earlier, since it is indicative of the subconscious human preference for multiples of ten. Therefore, this finding is contrary to the expectations outlined under *H1*, since it points to the use of fraud in the most rural areas in our sample.

Furthermore, the pattern in the likelihood of last-digits reported by precincts in the third quartile of urbanisation does not appear to be suspicious, the last-digits do not show statistically significant differences in probability from each other and come very close to the expected probability of 10 percent, individually. Combined with the patterns for the other quartiles of urbanisation, this finding suggests the existence of a

¹⁷ As for M1, these findings were robust to the inclusion of regional dummy variables (with Penza oblast' as a reference category, due to its proximity to the national average on a range of socio-economic and political scores).

non-linear relationship between urbanisation and the use of fraud when it comes to LDPR vote counts - fraudulent patterns appear amongst the lowest and highest levels of urbanisation, but do not emerge amongst the precincts situated in areas of moderately high urbanisation (65-91% urban residents, or the third quartile).

Taken together, these findings show that falsification of LDPR vote counts occurred both in the most urban and the most rural areas in our sample. This finding, therefore, does not offer support to hypothesis *H1*, as there appears to be no difference in the likelihood of the use of fraud across these contrasting levels of urbanisation. However, the results offer some interesting insights into the likely different levels of legitimacy concerns expressed by actors operating in the countryside compared to those enraged in fraudulent action in the towns and cities. Specifically, the increased probability of last-digit '0' in the first quartile of urbanisation may be interpreted to signal that those fabricating in the countryside seem to have been less concerned about the scrutiny of figures, and thus at ease with using '0' as the last-digit. By contrast, those forging counts in the more urban areas (second and fourth quartiles) appear to have been more worried about how the fabricated figures might be perceived, and thus may have 'over-compensated' by using seemingly less suspicious digits, such as '2' and '4'.

Thus, whilst the patterns discussed above may not be indicative of a different logic when it comes to decisions over the use of electoral manipulation between rural and urban areas, they may nevertheless be revealing of a different logic when it comes to the *way* in which fraud is used as a strategy of electoral manipulation. As such, these results underline the argument that authoritarian actors attempt to balance electoral uncertainty with legitimacy, and use urbanisation as an indicator of potential risks to this equilibrium.

Beyond this, further investigation is required in order to establish precisely why LDPR is the only party whose vote counts appear to have a different likelihood of being interfered with at different levels of urbanisation. One possible explanation might be that, since electoral falsification takes place *after* the voting process has finished, urban-rural patterns in electoral fraud emerge in LDPR vote counts because urbanisation is a particularly neat predictor of LDPR support. In other words, it is possible that the concentration of LDPR supporters mirrors the urban-rural continuum in a much closer way than that of other parties, which carry a more broad appeal as opposition actors - hence, electoral falsification, through shadowing the strong 'genuine' results for this party, may also display urban-rural patterns.

Moreover, the party's status as a threat to the regime might, in fact, fluctuate across the urban-rural dimension considerably more than that of the other parties considered here. Although electoral manipulation makes it difficult to make accurate claims about the true distribution of party support across urbanisation, traditionally, LDPR has been thought to enjoy stronger levels of support in the countryside (Hutcheson, 2005). It would thus make sense for the regime to target this party through electoral falsification more frequently in the most rural areas than in the more mixed settlements, since the level of votes secured by LDPR in the former may have been especially threatening to the regime.¹⁸ However, even in the cities, where support for LDPR might be expected to be at its weakest, falsification of LDPR vote counts may have remained an appealing option to regime elites, nevertheless. Assuming that electoral falsification can be used by regime actors to boost, as well as to reduce, vote counts for opposition parties, it is

¹⁸ This does not necessarily mean that falsification would occur solely in instances where LDPR had secured more votes than the regime - the regime may also find it desirable to suppress the vote counts for LDPR in rural areas even if the party does not win a plurality of votes, so as to avoid signalling the viability of this party as a political alternative with the biggest chance of beating United Russia in future elections.

possible that LDPR vote counts in the most urban areas demonstrate signs of falsification because the regime 'redistributed' some of the votes from other opposition parties to the relatively electorally-weak LDPR in such context - possibly in an attempt to signal the fragmentation¹⁹ of the opposition.

Further investigation into the predictors of LDPR support is, however, required before more firmer conclusions might be reached on this question.

3.3.4 Summary

Overall, the findings from this part of the chapter offer mixed support for the hypothesis (*H1*) that electoral fraud is more likely to occur in more urban electoral districts. All six types of data (*Registered Voters*, *Turnout*, and the *United Russia*, *KPRE*, *Just Russia* and *LDPR vote counts*) demonstrate suspicious patterns in our sample, which suggests that the technique of post-count fabrication of electoral outcomes is used frequently in the context of Russian regional legislative elections. In terms of the co-variation between urbanisation and the use of this tactic, however, the results vary, depending on the type of data under investigation.

On the one hand, the fabrication of the *Turnout* and the *United Russia*, *KPRE*, and *Just Russia* vote counts does not appear to correspond with different levels of urbanisation in our sample, and thus the null hypothesis of no association cannot be rejected with respect to these types of data.

¹⁹ So as to avoid any single opposition party emerging as a unifying challenger to the regime in future elections, for example.

On the other hand, the results of the multinomial logistic regression for the counts of *Registered Voters* and *LDPR Vote* have revealed some interesting patterns. The fabrication of registered voters appears to co-vary with urbanisation, with the most urban areas demonstrating suspicious patterns in the probabilities of last-digits, and the statistically significant over-reporting of last-digit '0', when compared to the least rural areas in our sample. These results, therefore, offer support to hypothesis *H1*, and indicate that this type of fraud is more likely to be used in the most urban areas.

The falsification of LDPR vote counts demonstrates a different trend, however, in that, both, the most rural and the most urban areas in our sample had demonstrated suspicious patterns in this type of data. Moreover, the absence of suspicious patterns in the LDPR vote counts amongst precincts in the third quartile of urbanisation suggest that the relationship between urbanisation and the use of electoral fraud may not be linear when it comes to this type of data. These results are therefore contrary to the expectations set out by the hypothesis *H1*.

There is some variation, however, in the types of digits that tend to be over-represented in the first, second and fourth quartiles of urbanisation - with last-digit '0' being over-reported in the most rural areas, whilst digits '4' and '2' are over-reported at the cost many other digits (with the exception of '0') in the second and fourth quartiles, respectively. As a result, urbanisation may feature in the calculations of regime actors when it comes to LDPR vote count fraud, albeit seemingly linked to the *way* in which a strategy is used, rather than the decision over whether or not to use the strategy in the first place. As such, the patterns in the LDPR vote counts in our sample indicate that considerations over legitimacy are important to the regime.

In sum, the results in this part of the chapter indicate that micro-strategies of fraud vary in their link to urbanisation. Specifically, the counts of *Registered Voters* appear to be the only type of data whose fabrication is more likely in the most urban areas, as expected under the hypothesis *H1*. What might account for this?

One possible explanation as to why the *Registered Voter* count stands out as the only type of data linked to urbanisation could be that this is the only type of count which is formulated *before* election day, since electoral commissions must publish the details of electoral districts and polling stations (including the size of the electorate) in advance. By contrast, all of the other five counts (turnout and the vote counts for each party) investigated thus far in this chapter, only become known *after* the counting process has finished. As a result, the fabrication of these five types of counts might take place in response to *existing* genuine voter preferences, whereas the fabrication of registered voter counts might happen on the basis of urbanisation as an indicator of the *potential* voting behaviour.

As hypothesised in the later chapters of this thesis, urban voters are expected to be subjected to greater levels of electoral manipulation as the regime seeks to enhance its prospects of victory, and thus the voter preferences expressed at the ballot box are not expected to represent a clear manifestation of the urban-rural divide. As a result, it is plausible that the fabrication of turnout and vote counts may be more sensitive to individual precinct outcomes, which, in turn, may not necessarily be linked solely to urbanisation but other factors, such as the effectiveness of other strategies of manipulation or the competitiveness of a contest in terms of the quality of candidates. This would subsequently explain the lack of association between urbanisation and the use of fraud.

As an insight into the logic of vote count fabrication, consider the following description of the process of falsifications from an interview²⁰ with a former secretary of a rayon electoral commission during the Gorbachev era:

'There was an unspoken understanding over which candidate should win... As the counting was coming to an end, the chairman began to swear and announced that the candidate still needed some number of votes. So, somebody adjusted the reports quickly and added packs of ballot papers. Not much was added - just enough to ensure victory. Although, we then sent everything up the chain to the next commission, so others may have added small amounts later, too. Who knows...'

Whilst this quotation refers to a different period of Russian politics, it may nevertheless be insightful in terms of the logic in the falsification of vote counts - even in the closed Soviet regime, where elections were not the sole source of political legitimacy, officials did not falsify results by default but in response to the disappointing voter preferences expressed on election day. Moreover, it is likely that such practices may have been inherited by the current system of electoral commissions in Russia.

Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the fabrication of registered voter counts took place before the counting process, when the regime was still *uncertain* about its prospects of electoral victory - by contrast, the fabrication of the other, turnout and vote, counts took place after the counting process, when the regime was *certain*, and disappointed, about its electoral performance.

²⁰ Anonymous, 08.08.2018. Penza.

It is difficult to confirm precisely why the fabrication of registered voter counts features as an option on the regime's menu of fraudulent tactics. The most likely explanation for this is that artificially inflating the size of the electorate creates room for ballot-box stuffing in the electoral paperwork.²¹ At the same time, existing research into the determinants of voter turnout highlights the consistent effect of electorate size on the the likelihood that voters decide to participate on election day. Specifically, larger populations are associated with lower levels of turnout, most likely because voters attribute less political power to a single ballot as the number of such ballots increases.²² Thus, the falsification of registered voter counts may also represent the regime's attempt to discourage voters from turning out on election day. From this perspective, the preponderance of this type of falsification amongst urban areas is in line with the broader approach adopted in this dissertation - the regime appears to be manipulating with the aim of reducing the risk that the more hostile segments of the population will be successful in undermining regime victory in a given district.

In sum, the fabrication of the registered voter count is the only type of data relevant to the logic proposed by the present thesis - under conditions of electoral uncertainty, the regime deploys electoral manipulation in the most urban contexts, since it perceives the risks to victory to be especially high in such areas. The strange patterns in the total registered voters likely represent the regime planning in advance to record or cast fraudulent ballots on behalf of 'dead souls' - citizens who either do not exist or do not have the right to vote - in urban districts. The inclusion of these voters (whose lack of

²¹ Since the number of voters marked as having voted on the electoral register must match the number of ballots cast, it may be necessary for fraudulent officials to 'budget' ahead for a number of fictitious voters or 'dead souls' in total registered voter counts. Attributing fraudulent ballot papers to real voters on the electoral register is risky, since officials cannot reliably know whether the voter has committed to their decision of not turning up to vote at the polling station until after voting closes.

²² This point is addressed in greater detail in Chapter 6 of the dissertation.

eligibility would be difficult to identify and disprove) would therefore inflate the total count of registered voters, and result in the 'neater' figures ending in 0.

By contrast, when there exists certainty about electoral outcomes, such as that after the counting has finished, the regime no longer has need for urbanisation as a proxy measure of voting behaviour, since it possesses precise information. As a result, the use of fraud becomes more tailored to individual electoral contexts and the association with urbanisations weakens. Crucially, the fact that the analysis above did not find any evidence of a negative relationship between urbanisation and electoral fraud means that the strength-based explanations discussed in the preceding chapters do not receive any support. Specifically, we might have expected that even under conditions of absolute certainty over electoral outcomes, the regime might have refrained from the use of fraud in the more urban areas, given its limited strength in negation the greater risks to legitimacy in these contexts.

This combination of findings therefore supports the weakness-based explanation emphasising the role of uncertainty and urbanisation as an indicator of the latter, as proposed by the present thesis.

The next section of this chapter moves on to examine the use of fraud beyond the narrow tactic of the fabrication of official figures on precinct electoral return sheets. This section will adopt a more comprehensive approach to electoral fraud by examining the nature and origin of court cases relating to criminal violations at election time.

3.4 Analysis of court cases as a broader measure of fraud

Thus far, last-digit analysis of official vote reports in the sample of 18 regions selected for examination reveals that falsified reports of total registered voters are associated with urbanisation. As such, these results suggest that the use of fraud relating to this type of data is more likely to occur in urban districts.

However, the analysis has also revealed that not every type of suspicious data is associated with urbanisation, which suggests that urbanisation is not the only factor that informs the decision to utilise fraudulent tactics. Moreover, the large-n analysis has been able to tap into just one specific technique of fraud - instances where officials write down false data during or immediately following the counting process. It does not tell us whether the same is true for other methods of fraud, such as ballot-box stuffing (electoral commission members putting multiple false ballot papers into the ballot box) or voter identity fraud (commission members allowing those who are not eligible to vote on election day). Yet, as discussed previously, due to the covert nature of fraudulent behaviour, it is difficult to acquire large scale, systematic data that would allow for the investigation of fraud in all its manifestations.

Thus in this part of the chapter, I seek to complement the quantitative analysis from the previous section and build a more comprehensive picture of electoral fraud in the context of Russia's regional legislative elections through a series of case studies examining the complaints relating to fraud, and whether these vary across the urban/rural divide.

3.4.1 Data

To collect the information from fraud-related court cases in our sample of regions, I used the online database RosPravosudiye - a search engine of official court decisions - to gather all decisions published by the courts relating to the regional legislative elections in the sample. This archive is reliable and comprehensive, as it contains only the original, officially published court case outcomes, sourcing these from the official websites of various courts in the Russian legal system, and containing over 87 million cases. To identify cases relating to fraudulent behaviour, I searched the RosPravosudiye system for court cases relating to Article 142 of the *Russian Criminal Code* (Falsification of election documents), Article 142.1 (Falsification of election results), and Article 142.2 (Illegal issue and receipt of election ballots). I also searched the system for cases relating to Article 5.22 (Illegal issue and receipt of election ballots) of the *Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation*.

The search revealed 14 court cases related to allegations of fraud, occurring in 8 out of the 18 regions in the sample. It must be noted that the courts ruled against the claimants in all but 2 of these cases, and thus cannot be deemed to be a collection of officially proven instances of fraud. Nevertheless, given the fact that these complaints have been taken all the way through to the costly legal arena, we can be confident that these cases represent the most serious allegations, where complainants felt they had enough evidence to make a case.

These court cases will therefore form the main focus for analysis in the third part of the present chapter.

3.4.2 Preliminary examination

The central hypothesis driving the present chapter states that electoral fraud, as a tactic that distorts voter preferences, is more likely to be utilised in urban, rather than rural, areas. To examine whether this hypothesis is supported by our data, I researched and identified the electoral districts from which the complaints made in each of the 14 court cases in our sample had originated.

Table 3.17 presents the urbanisation levels for each case in our sample. At a first glance, the results do not appear to offer clear-cut support to our hypothesis, since, although a considerable proportion of cases (6 out of 14) originated from districts with peak levels of urbanisation (fourth quartile of *Urbanisation*), four out of fourteen cases of fraud originated from the most rural districts (first quartile), which amounts to just under a third of court cases in our sample.

Table 3.17 The set of court cases under examination, according to level of urbanisation

Region and District Number	Urbanisation
Fourth Quartile (92-100% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	
Kamchatskiy Krai, District 1	100% urban
Kemerovo oblast', District 8	100% urban
Rostov oblast', District 8	100% urban
Rostov oblast', District 29	100% urban
Nizhniy Novogorod oblast', District 4	99% urban
Tomsk oblast', District 1	92% urban
Third Quartile (65-91% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	
Krasnodar Krai, District 40	81% urban
Leningradskaya oblast, District 5	65% urban
Second Quartile (40-64% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	
Krasnodar Krai, District 39	59% urban
Krasnodar Krai, District 12	49% urban
First Quartile (0-40% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	
Krasnodar Krai, District 38	40% urban
Penza oblast', District 13	40% urban
Rostov oblast', District 4	39% urban
Rostov oblast', District 4	39% urban

Moreover, the only two cases of proven fraud - where the courts found the defendants guilty - occurred in a predominantly rural area, where just 39% of the population are classed as urban residents according to the official Russian census data. Purely judging from these proportions alone, it is therefore difficult to conclude that urbanisation affects the use of fraud - indeed, if we considered only the proven allegations, then we might be tempted to argue that fraud is associated with rural localities. As a result, it seems that political actors do not resort to fraud exclusively in

urban areas, and the practice may be indeed be widespread in the context of Russian regional legislative elections.

The initial glance into these most serious accusations of fraud does not therefore appear to support either the main hypothesis driving this chapter or the results of the last-digit analyses above. However, looking beyond the boundaries of the quartiles to the actual percentage scores of *Urbanisation* for each case, it is notable that no allegations of fraud in this sample have originated from purely rural districts - for example, those districts where no residents have been classed as urban. A degree of urbanisation therefore persists throughout our sample, which merits further investigation. In particular, upon closer investigation of the electoral contexts within which these 14 instances of fraud took place, some interesting patterns begin to unravel. More specifically, if we examine the resources of United Russia candidates and take into account the nature of the opposition confronting the regime in these areas, some similarities emerge amongst the rural districts in our sample. Thus, two out of the four cases from the first quartile of *Urbanisation* are connected with elections which could be classified as competitive in the Russian context, based on the distribution of resources amongst the regime and opposition candidates. In addition, the other two of these most rural cases stand out as anomalies due to the affiliations of the election officials committing fraud, and should therefore be excluded from this analysis.

As uncertainty over electoral outcomes increases with competitiveness, the trend amongst this sample of court cases is therefore in line with the broader argument proposed in this thesis, which emphasises uncertainty as the primary driver of regime behaviour when it comes to decisions over the use of electoral manipulation. Whilst urbanisation is an indicator of greater competitiveness, and therefore increased

electoral uncertainty for the regime, it is not the only indicator of this for the regime. Thus, this thesis does not expect that all rural areas will provide the regime with high degrees of electoral confidence and will therefore be free from electoral manipulation. Rather, it proposes that electoral manipulation will be used more often in urban areas because high levels of uncertainty are more likely in such districts - however, some rural areas may nevertheless be highly contested and thus demand the deployment of electoral manipulation from the perspective of regime actors. The trend of mostly urban districts in our sample, alongside a small number of very competitive rural districts, is therefore in line with the central argument of this study.

In the next section, I present five cases originating from the predominantly rural districts (where less than 50% of the population are classed as urban residents) in our sample, and explain the similarities with respect to competitiveness amongst three of them in detail, before explaining why the two other rural cases should be considered as anomalies and excluded from the data.

3.4.3 Examining the rural cases in detail

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is important to be clear about what is meant by the distribution of resources. Electoral resources are understood to be the qualities and 'all of the things necessary to run an effective campaign' (Smyth, 2006: p.59). Whilst the salience and value of electoral resources can depend on a number of factors, it is nevertheless possible to discern a set of resources which are likely to be useful regardless of context. These include financial, logistical/organizational, reputational, social capital, and incumbency-related resources. Campaigns cost a lot of money to run, so financial resources are crucial to electoral competition in any context.

Furthermore, every successful campaign requires headquarters, support staff and activists, printing, transport, campaign venues, etc, so resources relating to these logistical/organizational issues will always be useful. Name recognition and status can serve to cut the costs from other resources. Social capital can help to flourish the personal vote, which is based on more unconditional voter loyalty. Incumbency related resources bring a great advantage to candidates due to name recognition, and administrative resource in the Russian case. Individuals who possess vast resources outlined above would be in a good position to win at election time.

Whilst such resources are difficult to measure precisely, candidate occupational backgrounds represent a valuable source of information which may be used as a proxy measure for these criteria. In the context of Russian elections, much of a candidate's electoral power, and therefore resources, derives from their occupation. For example, an individual's financial capabilities are strongly linked to their occupation. Similarly, different professions offer individuals varied access to logistical support and opportunities to connect with the electorate - for example, those working for party or civil society organisations have access to activist and membership support, as well as the use of the organisation's logistical materials (such as transport or printing facilities) and venues. Reputation is also strongly linked to vocation as an individual's biggest public achievements are often related to their field of work. Furthermore, occupational background can also serve as an important source of information on candidate capacity to deal with political problems from the perspective of the electorate.

For this reason, when attempting to establish the balance of resources between regime candidates and their rivals, I prioritised the factors of the candidates' incumbency status and occupational backgrounds. Where possible, I supplemented

this with additional research on the candidates' popular standing, political activities and campaign performance in the run up to election day using local newspapers, political blogs and online news agencies.

On the basis of this research, Table 3.18 visualises all 14 court cases according to four dimensions of increasing risk and uncertainty, as determined by the distribution of resources between the regime and its opponents. This ranges from contexts with relatively low risk, where the regime possesses vast resources in the face of weak opposition, to areas of greater concern to the regime, due to a more balanced distribution of resources between regime candidates and their rivals. As can be seen from this table, the majority of cases in our sample are located in the top two levels of uncertainty (on the right side of the table). Furthermore, the two rural cases located in the category with *low* levels of uncertainty are the anomalies, which should be excluded from the data - thus, all of the most rural cases (first quartile) originate from electoral contexts characterised by high levels of electoral uncertainty for the regime. The persistence of only overwhelming urban or peak urban cases (third and fourth quartiles) in the categories relating to the two lowest levels of uncertainty suggests that urbanisation is nevertheless used as an additional indicator by the regime. The remainder of the discussion in this section analyses the rural cases in our sample to confirm these conclusions.

Table 3.18 The set of court cases under examination, according to level of uncertainty

LOW ←		UNCERTAINTY →		HIGH
Strong Regime Resources Weak Opposition	Moderate Regime Resources Weak Opposition	Strong Regime Resources Considerable Opposition	Moderate Regime Resources Considerable Opposition	
Fourth Quartile (Peak Urban - 92-100% Urbanisation)				
	Kamchatskiy Krai №1 - 100% urban	Kemerovo №8 - 100% urban	Nizhniy Novgorod №4 - 99% urban	
		Rostov №8 - 100% urban	Tomsk №1 - 92% urban	
		Rostov №29 - 100% urban		
Third Quartile (Overwhelmingly Urban, 65-91% Urbanisation)				
Krasnodar №40 - 81% urban	Leningradskaya №5 - 65% urban			
Second Quartile (Mixed, 41-64% Urbanisation)				
		Krasnodar №39 - 59% urban	Krasnodar №12 - 49% urban	
First Quartile (Overwhelmingly Rural, 0-40% Urbanisation)				
** Rostov №4 - 39% urban - KPRF defendant			Krasnodar №38 - 40% urban	
** Rostov №4 - 39% urban - Unaffiliated defendant			Penza №13 - 40% urban	

** Perpetrators are opposition actors

First, district №13 in Penza oblast' was one of the rural areas (with 40% of residents classified as urban) in our sample where a formal accusation of fraud was made in court.²³ The complainant was the leading opposition candidate (KPRF party) in the district - Aleksey Shishkin - who accused the electoral commission at two polling stations within the district of a number of technical errors designed to obscure the ballot counting process, his illegal removal from the polling station, as well as the stuffing of false ballots into a transportable ballot box used to enable external voting (when voters request to vote at home due to mobility issues and ill health).

The accusation of ballot stuffing, in particular, was made on the basis of a discovery by another observer at the polling station, who noticed that, towards the end of the day, when no voters were inside the polling station, a member of the electoral commission was writing something in the lists of voters, whilst a pile of voter requests for external voting were laying in front of her. The observer subsequently inspected the paperwork and found 16 requests for external voting made by people whom she knew personally, as a local resident, and who could not have possibly made the request. The electoral commission member subsequently agreed to remove these 16 votes from the vote count for United Russia, albeit claiming that she was simply making the most of a quiet moment at the polling station by writing up verbal requests for external voters from earlier in the day.

The court found that the technical errors and the removal of Shishkin were, indeed, against the law. However, on the basis of witness statements (mostly members of the electoral commission and observers/representatives of United Russia), the court

²³ *Appeal*: Penza Regional Court, 2013

Original Court Decision: Penza Regional Court, 2012

decided that no ballot stuffing had occurred, seemingly accepting the defendant's claim that a 'misunderstanding' had occurred. Notably, no voters appear to have been questioned as part of the investigation. On the basis of these decisions, the court ruled that the election in question could not be deemed as illegitimate as the errors committed by the electoral commission were not found to have been influential enough to bring 'distortion to the characterisation of elections as free and true'. This case therefore highlights the difficulties faced by observers in Russia when it comes to proving electoral fraud, both in terms of their inability to overpower the numerous witnesses from the electoral commissions and observers on behalf of United Russia, and the fact that it is unclear how many violations of electoral law must take place before an election can be deemed illegitimate.

In terms of the electoral context behind this allegation of electoral fraud, it is clear that United Russia was contesting this seat in the context of moderate competition. First, the candidate put forward by the party, Aleksandr Lomovtsev, possessed considerable electoral resources, but was not without limitations. As the CEO of a regional publishing business - which specialises in the printing of newspapers, magazines, posters and other similar products - Lomovtsev undoubtedly had access to impressive financial and logistical resources. Indeed, his declared personal income in 2013 (the year after the regional legislative election) was 1.8 million roubles (PenzaNews, 2018).

However, there are many reasons to argue that these resources alone were not enough to guarantee a victory. First, Lomovtsev was contesting the legislative seat as a newcomer and thus did not have the powerful resources associated with incumbency at his disposal. Second, his newcomer status, alongside the fact that he did not have

any previous political experience (for example in local government), meant that he also possessed relatively weak name recognition in the area and could not present a proven record of service to the community. Linked to this was the fact that Lomovtsev did not reside in the rural area itself and his place of work is located at the heart of the region's capital city, Penza, situated over 100km away from the centre of the electoral district. Moreover, even based on his declared personal income - data which is frequently a conservative representation of politicians' true financial power in Russia, as much of the wealth is typically registered under the names of family members - Lomovtsev's financial resources are modest when compared to other United Russia regional legislators in Penza, where the top five (of 18 deputies in the assembly) declared a personal income ranging between 27 million - 151 million roubles in 2013 (PenzaNews, 2013). As a regime candidate, Lomovtsev therefore possessed some advantageous resources but these do not appear enough to be able to neutralise any challenge comfortably.

Turning to examine the opposition in this district, we can see that Lomovtsev did have to compete against a serious contender. The main rival to the regime was a KPRF candidate, Aleksey Shishkin, who was also the plaintiff in the court case discussed above. The complaint and its subsequent pursuit through the Russian court system, including appeals, indicates that Shishkin was an active and vocal member of the opposition. Shishkin possessed more modest financial resources than Lomovtsev - his occupation being a much smaller-scale entrepreneur operating in the retail sector.

However, the KPRF candidate did have one advantage over United Russia's Lomovtsev - political experience. As a member of the local legislature for Nizhnelomovskiy rayon, Shishkin was known in the largest locality situated in the

regional legislative electoral district №13, representing over half of the district's electorate.²⁴ As a local MP, as well as a local resident, Shishkin was therefore well known for his service to the community and fearless campaigns for local issues, such as the improvement of local roads and taxation.²⁵ Moreover, just seven months prior to the regional legislative elections, Shishkin had successfully, though narrowly, beaten an incumbent United Russia candidate in local elections, thus proving himself to be a serious contender capable of shaking up the status quo.²⁶ Interestingly, even the disputed results in the polling station from which the court case originated confirm this: Shishkin had secured 273 votes for this area, compared to Lomovtsev's 300 votes, thus losing out by just 27 votes (Penza Regional Court, 2013). In this context, the technical errors committed by the electoral commission members, as well as the 16 controversial votes spotted by an observer and subsequently discarded from United Russia's pile, do not appear as trivial as posed by the courts.

Following the investigation above, it becomes clear that the situation in Penza oblast's district №13 was fairly competitive. Whilst United Russia presented a strong front through a candidate endowed with impressive financial and logistical resources, Lomovtsev was nevertheless lacking in other resources, notably those relating to

²⁴ Nizhnelomovskiy rayon contained 34,489 out of 62,950 voters (55 percent) registered in the electoral district at the time of the regional legislative elections in 2012 (Penza Regional Legislative Assembly, 2012: p.8).

²⁵ For example, on a local online forum, a few months prior to the regional legislative election, many respondents expressed a positive view of Shishkin as a candidate who fights for his constituents, citing his work on pushing for road improvements as an achievement. On the same forum, 47 out of 52 respondents indicated that they support Shishkin's political work. Whilst this source must, of course, be treated with caution, the fact that a topic on the work of a local candidate in a rural location with just over 1,000 constituents generated over 385 responses is arguably impressive and indicative of Shishkin's name recognition nevertheless (Nizhnelomovskiy Forum, 2012).

²⁶ Shishkin beat the United Russia incumbent, Aleksandr Pronchev, by just 49 votes (575 and 526 votes, respectively) (according to the *GAS Vybory* database run by the TsIK of the Russian Federation).

incumbency and local reputation, which the opposition did possess. Moreover, Shishkin's proven record of electoral success and commitment to campaigning increased uncertainty further for the regime.

Interestingly, the situation in Penza is echoed in other fraud cases from rural districts. District №38 in Krasnodar krai perhaps comes the closest to the experience in Penza. Originating from an electoral district with a similar level of urbanisation to that discussed above (40% of residents classed as urban) and taking place during the same national cycle of regional legislative elections in October 2012, this story is also one of moderate competition. Just like Lomovtsev in Penza oblast, the United Russia candidate in district №38, Vladimir Verstunin, was the chief executive of a large business in an urban location - a major construction company in the seaside resort town of Anapa. Indeed, through his occupation, Verstunin had access to financial resources that were even greater than his counterpart in Penza's district №13.²⁷ Verstunin did perhaps have greater name recognition and social capital than his counterpart from the previous case, as approximately two years before the regional election, he served as the ataman of the Anapa rayon Cossack Association - an organisation consisting of 23 primary cossack communities, including 2040 registered serving cossacks (Kubanskiy Kazachiy Vestnik, 2010; Municipality of Anapa City, 2019). Just like Lomovtsev, however, Verstunin was limited by his status as a newcomer to politics, with no prior experience in either the regional or the local legislatures, and thus did not have the advantage of resources associated with incumbency. Thus once again, the resources of the United Russia candidate were considerable but not at their maximum.

²⁷ His declared personal income in 2014, for example, was almost 18 million roubles, making him the tenth wealthiest regional legislator in Krasnodar Krai Regional Legislative Assembly (Krasnodar Krai Legislative Assembly, 2014; Yuga, 2015).

Although Verstunin's resources were arguably somewhat greater than that of Lomovtsev, this United Russia candidate also faced a more experienced and recognised rival. Amongst the five candidates challenging the regime in this district, the representative of KPRF party, Ivan Mel'nikov, was already an incumbent regional legislator, having secured his seat through the proportional party list race during the previous round of regional legislative elections. Mel'nikov's chances were, however, weakened by the inclusion of an additional spoiler candidate into the race - a pensioner by the name of Nikolay Mel'nikov, confusingly, running on behalf of another communist party, KPSS. Nevertheless, the fact that an inexperienced spoiler candidate was able to pass through the tough filter of candidate registration indicates that the original Mel'nikov was considered a credible threat. Opposition to the regime was further boosted through the inclusion of a Yabloko party candidate in the race. Whilst the Yabloko candidate was less threatening to the regime in this case - a small scale individual entrepreneur with no prior political experience - GOLOS reports of electoral violations on election day suggest that this candidate was nevertheless an active and vocal member of the opposition, who was forcibly removed from the polling station after he and his observers allegedly spotted an instance of ballot box-stuffing.²⁸

Similar to the case in Penza, accusations of electoral fraud in Krasnodar therefore originated from a fairly competitive context in which the regime put forward a strong, but nevertheless untested, candidate, whilst the vocal opposition possessed moderate electoral resources and experience. Interestingly, by the next round of regional legislative elections in Krasnodar krai, Verstunin had lost his place as a United Russia candidate. Having lost out in the party primaries and publicly complained to the party

²⁸ Reports ID 25314 (8.50pm, 14.10.2012), and ID 25009 (4.28pm, 14.10.2012), published on the *Kartya Narusheniy (Map of Violations)* database run by Golos.

about the need to ‘increase control over the running of primaries ... and vote counting’ (Smertin, Silantyeva & Neneshil, 2017), Verstunin was forced to run for re-election as an independent candidate and subsequently lost to his United Russia rival. This not only indicates the limited electoral appeal of Verstunin but also suggests that the regime was always aware of this limitation, deciding to avoid the risk five years later.

This theme of the competitive playing field similarly continues in the third rural case in our sample. In district №12 in Krasnodar krai, even though the United Russia candidate possessed vast electoral resources, most notably as the incumbent regional legislator for the area, having to take on six other candidates in his race, of whom 4 were serious contenders, was nevertheless a challenge. The latter included an independent candidate and a candidate from KPRF, both known for their service within the area as local legislators. In addition, United Russia had to contend with two businessmen candidates from Just Russia and Yabloko. Perhaps the most clear indicator of the competitiveness of the election in this district lies in the final results. Even in the context of alleged fraud, the United Russia incumbent could not stretch beyond the psychologically important barrier of 50 percent, obtaining 49 percent of the total vote. Interestingly, just as in Krasnodar district №38, the United Russia incumbent from this case was unsuccessful in clearing the party’s candidate selection barrier during primaries at the next round of regional legislative elections in 2017 (Gruba, 2017).

Based on these findings, the three cases can be categorised as instances of relatively high levels of uncertainty, and therefore risk, for the regime. This pattern suggests that although the more rural districts are not immune to the use of fraud, this tactic tends to

be employed particularly in instances of increased competition combined with doubts over the strength of the regime's own candidates.

Two rural cases in our sample do not follow this pattern, however. Both cases relate to the same incident of ballot forgery which occurred in district №4 in Rostov oblast, where 39% of the population were classed as urban residents and the resources of the United Russia candidate outnumbered those of his opponents. The candidate, Andrey Kharchenko, was an experienced politician already holding regional legislative office, as well as the manager of a large state organisation, the Rostov Regional Pension Fund. Further indicator of his high standing, both within the party and the region, is the fact that upon becoming re-elected to the regional assembly in 2013, Kharchenko was appointed as the Vice Chairman of the legislative assembly, as well as the head of a key committee on the regional budget, taxation and property. Although Kharchenko faced a large number of rivals in the race (six other candidates), none of them came anywhere close to commanding the same sorts of occupational resources by Russian candidate standards. Amongst them were two pensioners, one lawyer, one welder, one small scale entrepreneur, and, suspiciously, a driver employed by Kharchenko's own organisation, the Rostov Regional Pension Fund. Only one candidate from KPRF, the welder at a local manufacturing plant, had any previous political experience, as a legislator in local government.

Most interesting, however, is the nature of these two court cases itself. In particular, the fact that these cases represent the only two instances of proven fraud - in both cases the defendants were found guilty - stands out as a rare outcome. According to the case files, two members of the electoral commission at polling station, each one defending herself in a separate court case, had conspired to commit fraud by forging ballots and

voting on behalf of others. They were caught in relation to just three ballots - one commission member confessed that she illegally provided the other with the ballots, who subsequently wrote her own passport number under the details of three voters and proceeded to vote instead of these individuals 'due to tiredness' (Sudebniy Uchastok 3, 2013). The women were subsequently fined 2,000 roubles and 1,500 roubles, respectively.

As an instance of a clear violation of electoral integrity in a rural district with strong prospects for United Russia, these cases are puzzling in their contradiction to the pattern identified earlier. The case files themselves were fairly cryptic, with most key details, including the address of the polling station in question and even the address of the court blanked out as sensitive information, there exists little additional information in these files which might shed further light on why these cases do not match the earlier examples. As outliers, however, it is important that we learn as much as possible about the context behind the use of fraud in these instances.

Using the only source of information that was not censored by the courts - the names of the defendants and the building number within which the polling station commission was situated - I thus conducted further research and managed to locate the polling station in question (№820). After looking at the official statement on the composition of the electoral commission in question, I found information on the appointment of both defendants as members of this commission, which, helpfully, provides additional background information on each member (Territorial Election Commission of Kamenskiy Rayon, 2013). From this document, it becomes clear that the defendants were not affiliated with United Russia - in fact, one of them was the official representative of the KPRF party on the electoral commission, whilst the other was an independent member. Curiously, these cases therefore highlight the fact that those

associated with the regime are not the only political actors engaging in electoral manipulation in Russia's regional legislative elections. The political affiliation of the defendants also most likely explains the guilty verdicts from the courts.

For the purposes of the current analysis, therefore, the two cases discussed above may be considered to be exceptions that prove the rule, as the political affiliations of the defendants mean that no legal complaints were made against the regime from the less competitive rural electoral districts in our sample. As such, the earlier finding that allegations of fraud in rural areas tend to be associated only with instances of increased competition and uncertainty still stands.

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter sought to investigate the use of electoral fraud in the context of Russian regional legislative elections. The first part of the chapter discussed the complexities of defining, detecting and measuring fraud, before arguing that the investigation of this strategy of electoral manipulation is best served by a mixed-method analysis which focuses on the actions of the officials within the electoral commission system.

The second part of the chapter adopted a quantitative approach to examine the use of one narrow type of electoral fraud - the fabrication of official data on precinct electoral returns. Specifically, the analysis investigated the patterns in the distribution of last-digits in six types of official electoral figures - *Registered Voters*, *Turnout*, *United Russia Vote*, *KPRF Vote*, *Just Russia Vote* and *LDPR Vote*. Whilst the non-parametric tests have found patterns consistent with falsification for each type of data, only the falsification of the *Registered Voters* count was found to co-vary with urbanisation.

Given that this type of data is the only official figure published prior to an election, and therefore before the regime sees the outcome of the voting process, the association between urbanisation and the falsification of registered voters is therefore of particular significance to this thesis, given its emphasis on electoral uncertainty as the primary driver of the regime's engagement with manipulation. The positive association between urbanisation and last-digit *Registered Voters* fraud is in line with the expectations of hypothesis *H1*, and therefore supports this dissertation's central argument that urbanisation informs the regime's calculations over the use of electoral manipulation, due to its role as a key indicator of electoral uncertainty for the regime. Thus, the regime appears to prepare for fraud in advance of election day in urban districts, where uncertainty is expected to be at its highest, by fabricating the total number of the registered voters to allow for the extra illegal votes to be cast and/or counted on election day itself.

The lack of an association between urbanisation and last-digit fraud for other types of data suggests that the regime does not use the same logic for all sub-types of fraud. This is further indicated by the different types of last-digits which tend to be over-reported in LDPR vote counts by precincts from different quartiles of urbanisation. Those in the first quartile of urbanisation are more likely to over-report last-digit '0' relative to other digits, whilst those in the second and fourth quartiles tend to over-report digits other than '0'. This chapter has argued that this is indicative of the varying degrees of concern relating to legitimacy experienced by regime actors in these areas - thus, the overuse of '0' by those operating the countryside suggests that they are less concerned about how the fabricated figures might be scrutinised by outsiders; whilst the prevalence of digits other than '0' in the cities suggests that regime actors might be

trying to consciously fabricate data which looks legitimate, unintentionally over-compensating for certain last-digits, as a result.

Crucially, the lack of any association between urbanisation and last-digit fraud amongst all types of data which are fabricated once the counting process is over (turnout and vote counts) serves to support further this dissertation's central argument relating to the relationship between electoral uncertainty and manipulation. These types of data are fabricated in the context of certainty, when regime actors possess accurate information about voter preferences in the form of official results. As a consequence, the lack of association between urbanisation and electoral fraud in these instances suggests that urbanisation is no longer required for its role as an indicator of uncertainty for the regime, and the use of electoral is more nuanced in direct response to the expressed preferences. In other words, these findings, or rather, the lack of them, suggest that urbanisation is strongly linked to the sense of uncertainty, and thus support the argument that it serves as an indicator of potential voting behaviour by the regime.

This discrepancy in the significance of urbanisation as a factor determining the use of electoral fraud is in line with the weakness-based explanation proposed by this thesis - however, it does not support the competing strength-based explanations. According to the latter, we should not expect the effect of urbanisation to disappear when it comes to the use of last-digit fraud for turnout and vote count figures, since, unlike uncertainty, regime strength and concerns over legitimacy do not change with these figures. Thus, strength-based explanations would expect to find not only a negative relationship between urbanisation and last-digit fraud, but also the persistence of this relationship for all types of data.

Finally, the third part of this chapter complemented the large-n analysis of one narrow sub-strategy of fraud with the qualitative analysis of court cases relating to criminal electoral violations. This approach allowed for the capture of a wider range of sub-strategies relating to fraud, and a more detail assessment of the relationship between uncertainty and manipulation. Overall, the findings in this part of the chapter confirmed the conclusions from the preceding section. Specifically, urban districts tended to dominate amongst these court proceedings. Although a small number of rural cases were nevertheless present in our sample, further investigation revealed that (with the exception of two anomalous instances) all of them pertained to situations of high electoral uncertainty for the regime. The findings from the third part of the chapter therefore offer further confirmation for this dissertation's emphasis on the role uncertainty in structuring the decisions over the use of electoral manipulation. Thus, although manipulation is expected to be more likely to be used in urban districts, the findings of the qualitative analysis demonstrate that the regime does not hesitate to use these tactics in rural districts, provided that high levels of electoral uncertainty are present.

Candidate Exclusion

In the previous chapter, we have seen that there exists variation in the use of electoral fraud during regional legislative elections in Russia, and that this variation is associated with the level of urbanisation in electoral districts. Thus far, the present investigation has therefore uncovered some evidence in support of the view that decisions over the use of electoral manipulation strategies are made after considering the extent of uncertainty over electoral outcomes, with urbanisation being a key indicator of such uncertainty for the regime. Electoral fraud, however, lies at the extreme end of electoral manipulation because it can destroy both uncertainty and legitimacy. Having direct control over results naturally means absolute control over the odds of victory, and therefore the total removal of uncertainty - at the same time, resorting to forgery means that the 'rules of the game' are no longer observed by the regime, and thus exposure of fraud would remove all legitimacy from these controlled outcomes. For this reason, modern authoritarian elites may prefer to use the other, less extreme, tactics of candidate exclusion, spoiler candidates or voter mobilisation to alter their odds of electoral dominance. The remaining chapters of this thesis are therefore concerned with exploring the extent to which urbanisation continues to affect the likelihood that these less extreme strategies of manipulation will be employed in the context of Russian regional legislative elections.

The present chapter begins this examination by exploring the patterns in the use of candidate exclusion as a tactic of electoral manipulation. Candidate exclusion is

understood to occur when individuals are prevented from running for political office at election time as a result of unfair rulings by authorities. Compared to fraud, this strategy carries a different set of costs and benefits relating to uncertainty and legitimacy. On the one hand, as an extreme way of reducing competition, both in terms of numbers and quality, the exclusion of rival candidates removes much of the uncertainty over electoral outcomes and shifts the odds in the regime's favour considerably. There is very little uncertainty over victory if the regime's key rivals are not amongst the options offered to voters on election day. On the other hand, the legitimacy costs associated with this tactic are considerably lower than those of electoral fraud, as the justifications for candidate exclusion always carry seemingly legal foundations. Concerns over legitimacy of the electoral process do not disappear entirely, however, which means that the electoral authoritarian regime in Russia cannot employ this tactic to exclude every single rival. Regime elites must therefore apply moderation and be selective about their targets.

Yet whilst the frequent use of candidate exclusion methods in Russia is widely documented, less is known about these reasons behind the regime's decision to either employ or avoid candidate exclusion methods. This chapter is interested in tapping into this authoritarian logic of manipulation by exploring whether patterns in the use of candidate selection echo those of electoral fraud. The central question to be answered is therefore: to what extent does urbanisation in a given electoral district affect the likelihood that non-regime candidates will be excluded from the race by the authorities? In a similar vein to the previous chapter, it is hypothesised that districts with higher levels of urbanisation are more likely to experience instances of candidate exclusion.

The discussion will proceed as follows. First, an overview of what is meant by candidate exclusion will be presented, alongside an explanation of how this tactic is operated in Russian elections, especially at the regional legislative level. Particular attention will be paid to Russia's legal framework on candidate registration and the ways in which these rules can be applied to electoral practice by the relevant authorities. The combination of these two factors is considered to create the perfect environment for the selective exclusion of 'unfavourable' candidates by the regime. In the second part of the chapter, the patterns in the use of candidate exclusion tactics will be explored through quantitative analysis, using an original large-N dataset on the eighteen regional legislative elections in the sample. Finally, the third part of the chapter will present two cases - one at the regional-level and the other at the intra-regional, district-level - which illustrate in detail the patterns uncovered during quantitative analysis. The conclusion will then summarise the findings.

4.1: The process of candidate exclusion in Russia

How might the regime ensure that undesired rivals do not appear on the final ballot on election day? There are a myriad of ways to exclude competitors from the race: ranging from legal obstacles to registration, to coercive measures such as physical threats and even murder. The present examination of candidate exclusion in Russia will limit its focus to the legal tools for exclusion primarily because it is impossible to examine the use of coercive measures in any meaningful and systematic way, given the sensitivity of this topic and the opaque nature of the behaviour it entails.

The legal means of candidate exclusion in Russia are closely linked to the process of candidate registration - the only legitimate reason why someone's name may not be

allowed to appear on the final ballot on election day is because the individuals in question have been unable to meet the legal requirements necessary for the registration of candidacy or they have violated campaign rules.

In short, every individual hoping to occupy an elected political office in Russia must first register their candidacy with the relevant electoral commission before their name can appear on the official ballot. This procedure forms a standard and necessary step in the journey of most political candidates across the world, including those seeking political office in advanced democracies. In general, we would expect to see that failure to meet the basic personal requirements¹ for political candidates set out under electoral law, would justify the officials' decision to refuse registration to any prospective candidates. Similarly, provision of false information, errors in the way that the relevant paperwork is filled out or submitted to the electoral commission, and violation of campaign rules, are all commonly accepted further grounds for the rejection of candidate applications or their subsequent disqualification from the race. These basic conditions for the registration of prospective candidates hold true for virtually all democratic states.

Where the Russian system of candidate registration differs from its counterparts in advanced democracies, however, is in terms of the complexity of the legal requirements and the subsequent application of this legal framework. In contrast to the relative clarity of instructions to prospective office-seekers and the professional neutrality and independence of electoral authorities in advanced democratic systems, this stage of a candidate's political journey in Russia takes the form of a challenging labyrinth of legal requirements, which is carefully supervised by administrative and legal officials loyal

¹ Such requirements might be citizenship status, deposit payment, proof of identity, etc.

to the regime. This combination proves to be lethal for the political ambitions of many because it allows for a myriad of legally-sound reasons for the rejection of candidate applications to be arbitrarily invoked by electoral authorities against those deemed to be 'unsuitable' by the regime.

Below, I discuss these two key pillars of the Russian candidate registration process - the legal framework and its selective interpretation by the authorities - in closer detail and explain how they enable the Russian authoritarian elites to use candidate registration as an opportunity to exclude political rivals from the electoral arena.

4.1.1: The legislative framework on electoral registration, as a background factor enabling candidate exclusion in Russia

First, it is important to be clear about the nature of the legal framework supporting the candidate registration process in Russia and how it opens up the opportunity for candidate exclusion. Russian regional legislative elections are supported by a complex system of legal provisions which interact at national and regional levels. The overarching piece of legislation setting out the requirements for all elections in Russia is the Federal Law №67-FZ 'On the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in a Referendum of the Citizens of the Russian Federation'. Whilst this federal law is the main legal pillar supporting the electoral process in Russia, it nevertheless relies on a system of other federal, sub-national (regional) and local laws for further clarifications of candidate requirements for each type of election in the country. Further provisions for elections to the regional legislatures are therefore found in numerous other pieces of legislation, many of which are unique to each region and type of election. In some regions, rules specifying the proper procedure for elections

are set out in a single document, whilst in other regions, one would have to consult multiple pieces of legislation concerning very specific aspects of election procedure.

A further level of complexity is added to the Russian electoral framework as a result of frequent amendments. The Federal Law №67-FZ has been subject to multiple amendments since the emergence of an electoral authoritarian regime in Russia - for example, electoral procedures have been amended 17 times between 2003-2007, 29 times in between 2007-2011 (including 14 times in just two years between 2008 and 2009), and 31 times between 2011-2016.²

Regional legislation has been subject to similar waves of amendments, partly in response to federal legislative changes which require all relevant lower level legislation to be brought up to date as soon as possible. Some have noted, however, that changes to the federal-level legislation are not the sole factor accounting for the huge volume of regional-level amendments. For example, Vladimir Oblast' changed its regional electoral legislation 20 times during one legislative term between 2005 and 2009, which is a record by regional standards, even in the context of frequent national-level amendments (Lyubarev, 2011).

According to Lyubarev (2011), many of the regional-level amendments are just as much down to the 'creative spirit' of *regional* legislators as they are down to the requirements to comply with *federal* legislation. The timing of the amendments to the rules on election procedures within each region suggests that this multitude of adjustments is aimed at creating additional confusion for all participants of the election

² As listed on the version of the law published on the Official Legal Information Portal, <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102076507> [Accessed 23 January 2016].

process rather than at clarifying federal requirements. For example, only six out of the 65 regional legislatures elected between October 2006 and March 2010 made *no* changes to their electoral legislation less than a year before campaigning started (Ibid.). The majority of these regional assemblies opted to amend regional-level electoral legislation at short notice - indeed, 27 regions reviewed their electoral laws less than a month before campaigning started.

This complex legal framework and the tradition of frequent changes mean that overall there exists considerable opportunity for confusion about the registration process from the perspective of candidates - each electoral contest varies across the country as well as from the one preceding it, making it difficult to acquire knowledge and experiences of the various rules guarding this process. The resulting outcome is an electoral 'mine-field' (Baekken, 2015: p.63) for prospective office seekers which is intensified through the selective interpretation of these frameworks by the relevant authorities.

Broadly speaking, as of writing in 2019, this mine-field of registration requirements for candidates entails the following process. Each aspiring candidate for regional legislative office must submit a series of declarations, forms and documents of proof regarding their personal details (passport, citizenship and residence requirements), education, occupation and place of work, previous convictions, and proof that they do not possess or use any foreign bank accounts and financial services. In addition to this information and supporting documents, a further mandatory requirement is for candidates to produce proof that they are supported by sections of the electorate.

At the regional level, this electoral support can be established in two ways. First, parties and candidates can prove that they enjoy electoral support if their electoral performance during previous elections to other levels of government reached a minimum degree of success, as set out by law.³ Second, if a candidate is independent or the party did not meet the requirements at the national legislative elections, they can nevertheless register to participate in the regional legislative elections if they are able to produce a required minimum number of citizen signatures in support of their candidacy.

This requirement to prove existing electoral support already skews the playing field in favour of within-system parties, United Russia being the primary one amongst them, because proving electoral support through previous election results is considerably less dangerous to a candidate's registration prospects as these facts cannot be disputed. By contrast, the collection of signatures represents a major bureaucratic headache for political actors, not only because the process is costly in terms of resources, but also because signatures make a candidate more vulnerable to the authorities. The more signatures an individual has to collect, the greater the

³ As at December 2016, Article 35, Section 1 of this federal law states that electoral support can be demonstrated through either of the following:

- At least one candidate from the candidate's federal party list was allocated a seat in the Federal Duma at the time of the last elections to this body - or if his party received no less than 3 percent of the vote in the proportional part of the national legislative elections.
- During the last federal elections, the candidate's party won a seat to the national legislature from the region where the regional legislative elections are currently being held, or if it secured at least 3 percent of the vote in that region's majoritarian national legislative election.
- The candidate's party was successful in winning seats in the party list proportional contest during the last regional legislative elections, or if it received at least 3 percent of the vote.
- The candidate's party was successful in winning seats in at least one municipal legislature (local government) within the region in question, or secured no less than 0.5 percent of the vote during the last municipal legislative elections in the region.

chances of a mistake (however minor) being made during their collection, which in turn means greater risk of issues with application being uncovered by the authorities.

The strict requirement for signatures is further exacerbated by the fact that the legal specifications for this process are fairly confusing and spread out across different pieces of legislation. As of December 2016, the Federal Law №67-FZ 'On the Basic Guarantees', stipulates that the number of signatures required to register candidates or candidate lists must be 0.5 percent of the registered electorate in a given electoral district and must not be fewer than 10 signatures (Article 37, Section 1). The actual number of signatures required for candidate registration, however, varies across the country depending on the size of the electoral district and the level of office up for election. For example, two million signatures are required for an individual to register as a candidate for the President of the Russian Federation and these signatures must be well spread across the country, with no more than 50,000 signatures accepted from one region (Federal Law №19-FZ 'On Elections of the President'⁴). The number of signatures necessary to register a candidate in a majoritarian district for the Federal Duma is 3 percent of the electorate registered within that district (Federal Law №67-FZ⁵).

The implications of this legal framework for the strategy of candidate exclusion is that the regime has access to a range of legal instruments and justifications to deny many political hopefuls of their right to participate in elections. In sum, the legal framework surrounding the process of candidate registration in Russia is set up in such a way as to create as many legal 'traps' and filter points as possible. It is spread out

⁴ Article 36, Section 1 (As at December 2016)

⁵ Article 37, Section 1.2

across a number of different pieces of legislation, at all levels of the political system, frequently amended and sets out a long list of prerequisites that must be fulfilled by all those seeking to contest a political office. This is in many ways the ideal legal backdrop to the tactic of candidate exclusion as it increases the likelihood that individuals will commit mistakes along the way and opens up the possibilities for interpretation, if their mistakes are not very apparent.

Below, I discuss how these legal provisions are interpreted and applied into practice by the multiple authorities in Russia in ways that serve to exclude undesirable candidates and skew the playing field in favour of the regime.

4.1.2: The selective application of legislative rules as the mechanism of candidate exclusion

According to Baekken (2015), it is possible to broadly divide the reasons behind the refusal of registration into three categories:

- 1) Too large a percentage of the collected signatures are found unsuitable
- 2) The candidates' registration documents contain errors or contradictions
- 3) The candidate has violated certain Russian laws in the pre-election campaign

First, let's turn to the problem of supporting signatures. Initially, the requirement to collect a certain number of signatures in support of one's candidacy was introduced as a measure to stop those who were not serious or genuine about their pursuit of political office. Over time, however, this specification has turned into an additional filter for candidate exclusion. Justification for the denial of registration on the basis on

problems with the collected signatures is based on finding a considerable percentage of the signatures submitted to be unsuitable following expert evaluation.

Signatures can be found unsuitable and therefore not counted on the basis of two possible reasons - they can be found to be 'invalid' (*nedeystvitil'niye*), or 'forged' (*nedostovernniye*) (Federal Law №67-FZ⁶). The justification behind declaring that a signature is 'forged' is pretty straightforward - expert evaluation must have concluded that it was signed by a different person than the one claimed. By contrast, the federal law outlines 14 possible reasons for finding a signature 'invalid'. These reasons relate to the timing of signature collection (whether it was outside the allowed period of time), the extent to which the signatories meet the legal requirements (relating to their citizenship, age, electoral rights, etc.) and whether they have falsified any personal information, as well as the formatting of the document on which the signatures appear (such as whether it bears the necessary stamps and verification by the relevant authorities, etc.).

Further specifications are frequently outlined in regional-level legislation within each region, which increases the difficulty of submitting signatures further. A recent post on a prominent blog documents an example of this practice being used to reject an entire party candidate list for the party Citizen Initiative in regional and local elections in Kaluga oblast' in 2015 (Varlamov, 2015). A major reason behind the rejection of the signatures in support of the party's candidates in this case was the fact that the official identification details of many of those who provided their signatures were not supported by the information on file at the Federal Migration Service (FMS) when checked by the electoral commission. Specifically, the information provided by FMS

⁶ Article 38, Section 6.1

was out of date and even when citizens offered to attend the electoral commission in person with their passports and confirmation that they indeed signed the sheets, the commission identified the signatures as invalid and suggested that any grievances should be taken up with the FMS through the courts (a process that would likely take longer than the election period). Another major mass rejection of signatures, as reported by the blog, occurred when all 62 signatures collected by a single activist were deemed to be invalid because the activist did not provide an accurate address for himself. Upon closer inspection, the activist listed the precise house, street, city and region details but failed to specify the *rayon* (sub-district of the city). The fact that these address details were identical to those listed as his official permanent residence in his passport (which also did not specify the *rayon*) was not accepted as a legitimate excuse and all the signatures collected by this activist were deemed invalid.

The second major category of reasons for rejection of candidacy relates to errors in the candidates' documents. Some of the most shocking anecdotes include female candidates being refused registration because their higher education diplomas listed their maiden names and therefore could not serve as proof of education status under their new married names, and one man being refused on the grounds that the distance between the margin and the photograph on his supporting documents was 4.5mm instead of the expected 5mm.⁷ It is important to note that such errors are often identified in a selective way. For example, in 2013, a list of party candidates for KPSS (generally considered to be a 'spoiler' party targeting the KPRF) in Arkhangelsk oblast' included one candidate who had died almost four months before the list was compiled and submitted to the commission - despite this, the list was initially able to clear the

⁷ These events occurred in Vladimir and Ryazan' oblasts during regional and local elections in 2013 (Yakovleva, 2013).

registration barrier in this region (Kynev, Lyubarev & Maksimov, 2014: p.62). This inconsistency between the capacity to pay attention to minor details in one instance and the failure to spot major errors in others suggests that legislation is followed selectively, and that its application may be guided by the party affiliation of the candidate under review.

Finally, candidates can lose their registered status if they are found guilty of misconduct during the campaign process. Russia's tough 'anti-extremism' regulations are often used to censor campaign content and to remove vocal candidates (Baekken, 2015: p.65). In addition to this, minor violations in campaign publications can similarly be used to cut short political aspirations. Aleksander Siyakin, a Federal Duma deputy and United Russia member, has previously highlighted examples of candidates losing their registered status due to the misuse of images in their campaign publications (Pakulina, 2015). For example, he described a Just Russia candidate, Yevgeniy Pisarev, who lost his candidacy because he placed photographs of kindergartens (without official recognition of their authorship or indicating the author's consent for the use of images) next to photos of himself in his campaign materials, as a means of illustrating his slogan 'If there will be kindergartens - there will be children'. Similarly, a Yabloko candidate in Vladimir in 2015, Ilya Kosygin, lost his candidacy for using logos of social media platforms in his campaign materials.

Interestingly, Sidiyakin also listed many other examples which echo the minor discrepancies in candidate documents outlined above, yet drew the conclusion that the law on candidate registration is improving with time and that each candidate must simply invest in a team of legal experts in order for this not be an obstacle. To an extent, he is, perhaps, right - after all, it is the candidate's own responsibility to inform

themselves of relevant requirements and use their resources strategically, whilst the bureaucratic traps present in the Russian legislation on candidate registration are not entirely unusual for complex pieces of legislation, notorious for setting out detailed standards and leaving loopholes (neither of which can be easily understood by non-specialists), that can be found in most countries. However, the fact that the electoral commissions do not seek to alleviate this problem by providing maximum guidance and support in the correction of errors, but instead use all possible loopholes, however minor, to remove candidates rivalling the regime, shows that the process of candidate registration in Russia is predatory and must be treated as a mechanism for electoral manipulation.

The stories of candidates who could not get through the barrier of registration and the regularity with which these are reported to be occurring during elections to all levels of government across Russia are therefore not typical of those in advanced democratic systems, and are indicative of manipulative intent, which merits further investigation. The remaining parts of this chapter shall therefore treat candidate exclusion as a method of electoral manipulation and will proceed to explore the patterns in the use of this strategy across the 18 regions in the sample, as well as the extent to which they vary according to district-level urbanisation.

4.2 Exploring patterns of candidate exclusion

4.2.1 Data and method

For the purposes of the present analysis, I constructed an original large-N dataset, containing individual-level data on all 2,392 candidates that attempted to participate in

majoritarian races in the regional legislative elections in our sample. This data was taken from 2,392 official candidate biographies provided by the Russian Central Election Commission via its official website. These biographies provide information on candidate age, gender, education, occupation, incumbency in regional or local legislatures, and whether the individual was able to register successfully as a candidate with the relevant electoral commission. District-level data on urbanisation was taken from the same original dataset on all 390 electoral districts in the sample as that used in the previous chapter on electoral fraud.

The investigation shall be limited to majoritarian candidates for two reasons. First, from a practical perspective, it is not possible to attribute specific electoral districts to all proportional-race candidates as the party-list system means that parties can use different systems to group their candidates within a region. For example, whilst some parties propose as many groups as there are electoral districts within a region (each group containing three different candidates), other parties (particularly those that struggle with candidate recruitment) opt for fewer groups of candidates, meaning that the same candidates could be featured in the proportional ballots in more than one district. The second reason is that the link between the candidate and the district is much weaker in the party-list parts of the elections. Candidate names feature only briefly on the proportional ballot and are largely obscured by the name of their party.

The proportional ballot does not feature any additional details on individual candidates other than their names - by contrast, majoritarian ballots outline a brief candidate biography to voters. Moreover, excluding one proportional-race candidate does not necessarily reduce the number of opponents for the regime, as parties put forward candidates in groups and can therefore rely on the successful registration of

other candidates in order to remain on the ballot. When a party loses so many candidates that it is unable to put forward individuals in enough districts and is subsequently forced to withdraw from the election, the effect is ultimately regional, rather than district-level, and is therefore not of interest to the present investigation which is concerned primarily with variation within rather than across regions.

To examine the extent to which urbanisation affects the likelihood of candidate exclusion, I will use a three-level mixed-effects logistic regression model. This decision was based on the hierarchical nature of the dataset: 2,392 individuals nested within 390 electoral districts, which are situated in 18 regions.

4.2.2 Conceptualising candidate exclusion as a dependent variable

Candidate exclusion through legal means in the context of Russian regional elections is understood as an instance in which an individual has been prevented from participating in the electoral arena (in other words, their name did not make it onto the final ballot) as a result of legal and/or administrative rulings.

The first step in the construction of candidate exclusion as the dependent variable is therefore to determine which individuals in the sample can be considered to have been excluded. The information provided by the Russian Central Electoral Commission is useful for this purpose as it sheds some light on the progress made by each individual in this respect. Overall, there are four types of candidates in terms of registration status in Russia, according to the Commission. They are: *'Registered'*; *'Refused Registration'*; *'Lost Registered Status'*; and *'Candidacy Withdrawn After Registration'*. Table 4.1 summarises each category below.

Table 4.1. Categories of candidate registration status

Registration Status	Explanation
<i>Registered</i>	Individual was successful in registering as a candidate and their name appears on the final ballot on election day
<i>Refused Registration</i>	Individual was refused registration by the relevant authorities because their application did not meet the legal requirements
<i>Lost Registered Status</i>	Individual was initially successful at securing registration but this was later taken away by the relevant authorities, either because their application was found invalid or they violated campaign rules
<i>Candidacy Withdrawn After Registration</i>	Individual was initially successful at securing registration but subsequently withdrew their name from their race of their own accord

Given the constraints on time and resources, it would be virtually impossible to analyse the extent to which the reasons behind all instances where a candidate's name did not make it onto the final ballot were well-founded. On the one hand, a candidate's name may be legitimately missing from the ballot if they have genuinely violated the requirements set out under the electoral laws - on the other, their absence from the contest could have been determined by arbitrary administrative decisions. Similarly, a prospective candidate might not have made it to the final ballot stage as a result of a voluntary decision to step down from the race due to personal reasons, or following external coercive pressure to withdraw.

Regarding the first problem, there is room to argue that an attempt to discern between a 'legitimate' refusal on grounds of rule violation and an arbitrary and targeted decision by the authorities would be fruitless in the first place as the motivations to refuse registration are always presented in legitimate terms by the relevant authorities. Refusals relating to candidate registration are always justified with reference to official electoral rules and legal codes, and it would be difficult to judge which of these justifications were truly valid. The discussion in Part I of this chapter

highlighted that this is indeed the intention behind the careful design of the legal framework on candidate registration in Russia. The broad range of requirements for registration set out in the legislation, as well as the relative lack of clarity on how to meet these requirements means that it is potentially possible to find flaws in the applications of any candidates.

The fact that administrative/legal rulings refusing registration disproportionately affect rival candidates to the regime - indeed in the sample of 18 regions used in this study, no candidates from United Russia were refused registration and none lost their registration status - suggests that the registration process is primarily a tool of electoral manipulation rather than order. The data on candidates who were refused registration or who lost their candidate status may therefore be considered a useful proxy for measuring candidate exclusion as a strategy of manipulation as every single prospective candidate belonging to either of these two categories did not make it onto the final ballot purely as a result of legal rulings against them.

To control for the second potential problem, I will not consider individuals who withdrew their candidacy of their own accord (the final category in Table 1) as excluded candidates, even though their names also did not make it onto the final ballot. The motivation behind doing so is that individuals who chose to step down from the race did not do as a result of legal rulings against them. As the focus of this chapter is on the regime's use of *legal* instruments to exclude candidates from the electoral arena, this data is therefore not relevant for the purposes of the present analysis. Removing these individuals from the count of excluded candidates therefore keeps the focus on the legal means of candidate exclusion and controls for some other

factors which could explain why an individual's name did not make it onto the final ballot, such as personal circumstances or covert coercive pressure.

To sum up, individuals in the 'Refused Registration' and 'Lost Registered Status' categories were considered to be removed from the race through legal means, and therefore counted as instances of candidate exclusion.

Using these data on the candidate exclusion status of individual hopefuls, I then constructed the dependent variable *Candidate Exclusion*. The unit of analysis is the individual hoping to run for regional legislative office. Candidate exclusion is measured as a binary variable where individuals were coded as 0 if they were successful in becoming registered, and 1 if the individual was either refused registration by officials or lost their registered candidate status following an official ruling. Individuals whose names did not make it onto the ballot after they withdrew voluntarily from the race were included in the 0 category.

Individuals who have been identified as 'spoiler' candidates (see discussion in Chapter 6) have not been included in the construction of the binary dependent variable, as the logic behind the officials' decision to allow or refuse registration will relate more to the strategy and target of spoiler candidates rather than the desire to use candidate exclusion to increase odds of victory. Due to the fact that all individuals affiliated with United Russia were successful at becoming registered, and given that the analysis is concerned with exploring instances of manipulative exclusion that targets regime rivals, all United Russia candidates were excluded from the sample. The total number of individuals in the dataset is therefore 1,876.

4.2.3 Key independent variable and hypothesis

The main variable of interest, *Urbanisation*, is the level of urbanisation within a given electoral district. As explained previously, this is measured as the percentage of urban residents within an electoral district, using the Russian Census 2010 data provided by the Russian Federal Statistics Service. Further details on the sources and the process of construction for this main predictor can be found in Chapter 1.

Overall, in line with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, candidate exclusion, as a strategy of manipulation that seeks to distort and even prevent the formation of certain voter preferences, is expected to be used more often in contexts of greater uncertainty over electoral outcomes for the regime. The main argument of the thesis is that urbanisation serves as a major indicator of this uncertainty, given the more hostile sentiments of urban voters. The main hypothesis to be explored in the present analysis is therefore the following:

H2: The strategy of candidate exclusion is more likely to be used in urban electoral districts

In order to find support for this hypothesis, I expect to see that the likelihood that a non-regime candidate is excluded by electoral commissions will increase as the level of urbanisation of an electoral district increases.

4.2.4 Control Variables

A number of control variables at the individual level have been included in the model - these data were all taken from the official candidate biographies made available by the Central Electoral Commission via their online database.

An individual's level of education may affect their personal ability to navigate the highly technical field of registration requirements, and fill out the paperwork in the correct manner. The model therefore includes the control variable, *Candidate Education*, which refers to an individual's level of education. This data is self-reported to the electoral commission - candidates must provide documentation as proof of their qualifications. This variable is constructed in terms of four categories - No Secondary (individual did not complete high school education); Secondary (individual completed high school education only); Further (individual acquired further education after completing high school); Higher (individual completed university-level education). The lowest level of education (No Secondary) is used as the reference category.

Next, political experience and prominence may also affect a candidate's likelihood of being rejected. Candidates who are already serving as elected representatives may have learned from their experience during the previous election and therefore be better prepared to deal with the standards expected by the electoral commissions.

Alternatively, their prominence in regional politics may discourage election officials from using tactics of candidate exclusion, as doing so risks attracting unfavourable attention to the regime close to election day and may carry considerable legitimacy costs (if the incumbent opposition candidate is able to mobilise his supporters into a protest). The variable *Incumbency* is therefore included as a control for these possible

dynamics. This is a binary measure, which codes electoral districts as 1 if the candidate is currently serving as a regional legislator, and 0, if otherwise.

Finally, political parties may provide additional support (legal experts, administrative staff and grassroots activists) that increases the likelihood that a candidate will pass through the registration filter successfully. Moreover, as discussed earlier, more prominent parties, which have high levels of success at the national level of elections, have considerably fewer barriers relating to signature collection at registration time. Membership of the systemic parties may therefore be an advantage that increases a candidate's chances of successful registration - by contrast, membership of more minor parties or the absence of any party affiliation (independent candidates) may place individuals at a disadvantage and increase the likelihood that they will suffer exclusion. As a result, I include the variable *Candidate Party* as a control for the factor of party affiliation. This is a categorical variable, classifying individuals according to whether they are affiliated with the Communist Party (KPRF), the Liberal-Democrat Party (LDPR), the Just Russia Party, other minor parties, or whether the individual ran as an independent candidate. The most popular systemic party with the largest level of organisational party resources - KPRF - is used as the reference category.

As the present investigation is interested in exploring the variation at the intra-regional district level, no region-specific independent variables are included in the model. The multilevel model therefore controls for regional effects but does not seek to explain this cross-regional variation, as discussed in Chapter 1 of the thesis.

4.2.5 Results

Table 4.2 presents the outcomes of the mixed effects logistic regression. We can see that the likelihood of candidate exclusion is affected by factors at various levels of the hierarchical dataset. At the individual level, the model shows that neither education nor previous political experience of regional legislative office affects the likelihood of candidate exclusion. It thus seems that an individual's inability to secure registration as a candidate is less likely to be the outcome of their personal inexperience or incompetence when it comes to paperwork. By contrast, party affiliation does appear to play an important role. Whilst there does not appear to be a statistically significant difference between the three 'system' parties (KPRF, LDPR and Just Russia) when using KPRF as a reference category, affiliation with smaller parties and the decision to run as an independent candidate appear to increase the log odds of a candidate being unsuccessful at registration time. This finding suggests that the Russian system of candidate registration is stacked against non-system candidates.

The central finding of this model is, however, at the district level, and supports the hypothesis driving the present investigation: the level of urbanisation significantly increases the log odds of a candidate being excluded from the race. In other words, the model suggests that candidates hoping to contest regional legislative office in more urban districts have a higher chance of being refused registration by the electoral commission officials. This finding suggests that there is indeed a logic behind the use of candidate exclusion as an electoral manipulation strategy, and this logic is sensitive to the perceived urban characteristics of the electorate.

Table 4.2. The determinants of candidate exclusion

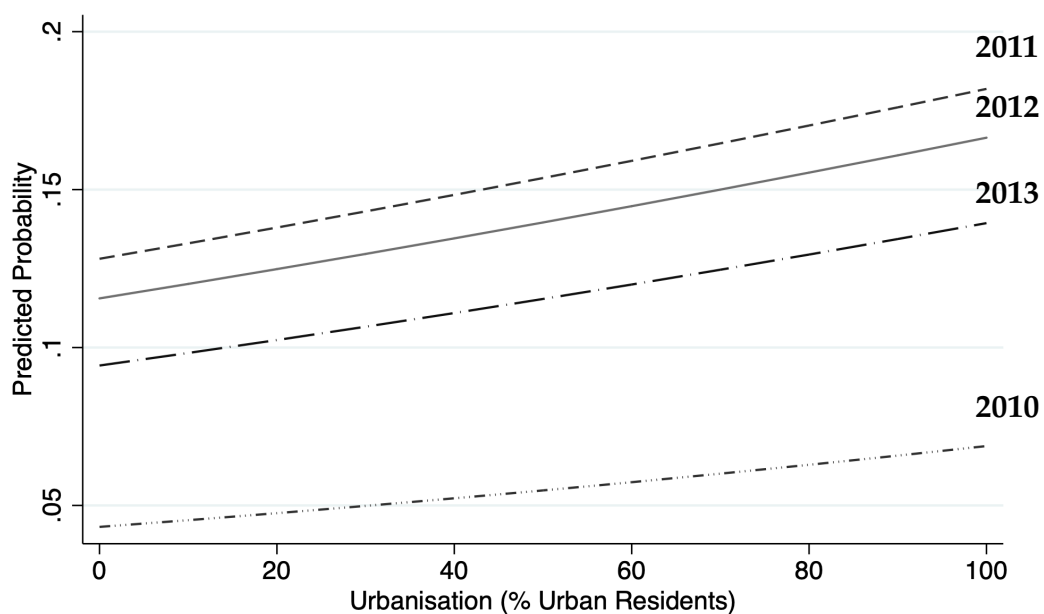
	M1
<i>Candidate Education</i>	
No Secondary	
Secondary	.584 (.415)
Further	.487 (.336)
Higher	.455 (.303)
<i>Candidate Party</i>	
KPRF	
LDPR	1.675 (.899)
Just Russia	1.761 (.925)
Independent	12.248*** (5.575)
Other	45.090*** (19.413)
<i>Incumbency</i>	.886 (.457)
<i>Urbanisation</i>	1.728** (.473)
<i>Year</i>	
2010	
2011	3.931*** (1.652)
2012	3.394** (1.834)
2013	2.577** (1.240)
Constant	.006*** (.006)
Random Effects	
Region-level	0.421** (.134)
District-level	.335** (.238)
LR Test vs Logistic	(Chibar2) 10.10 (p=.006)
Wald X ²	223.87 (p<0.01)

Mixed-effects logistic regression, odds-ratios reported.
N = 1876
Standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01; **p<0.05

Amongst the other control variables, the likelihood of candidate exclusion appears to be affected by the year during which the regional legislative elections took place. Specifically, candidate exclusion was more likely in 2011, 2012 and 2013 than it was in 2010. As a result, it seems that the regime did not reduce its reliance on this tactic after the political earthquake of 2011 - this might be explained by the legal basis behind candidate exclusion, which reduces the costs of this strategy in terms of legitimacy and thus makes this tactic less risky to use even at times of increased scrutiny from opponents.

Figure 4.1 visualises the main effect of urbanisation on the predicted probability of candidate exclusion, by year. As can be seen from this graph, the predicted probability of candidate exclusion increases with urbanisation for each year in our sample of elections, although the relative levels of probability vary across years.

Figure 4.1. Predicted probabilities of Candidate Exclusion across Urbanisation by Year



Notes: Other explanatory variables at observed values.

Thus, for 2010, the predicted probability of candidate exclusion in districts with 100 percent urban population is 2.6 percent higher than that in purely rural districts (0 percent urban population). In later years, this difference is even greater at 5.4 percent in 2011, 5 percent in 2012, and 4.5 percent in 2013. Whilst the likelihood of candidate exclusion is predicted to be at its highest amongst the most urban districts (100 percent urban population) during every year of election in our sample, considerable differences for the predicted probability of candidate exclusion in for the most urban districts must nevertheless be noted. Thus, the model expects that the predicted probability of candidate exclusion in a district characterised by 100 percent urbanisation is 11.3 percent higher in 2011 than in 2010. Similarly, when compared to that of 2010, the predicted probability of this event is 9.7 percent higher in 2012, and 7 percent higher in 2013.

These findings ultimately confirm the importance of uncertainty for the use of electoral manipulation. Whilst the positive effect of urbanisation is in line with the hypothesis *H2*, the differences driven by the year of election (*Year*) can also be interpreted from the perspective of uncertainty. Thus, in 2010, when the regime was at its most stable and the level of electoral uncertainty was relatively low, the likelihood of candidate exclusion was at its lowest. By contrast, during the two years characterised by high levels of instability and electoral uncertainty, in the wake of the international challenges to authoritarianism during the Arab Spring in 2011 and the change of national leadership with the return of Vladimir Putin as a presidential candidate in 2012, the likelihood of candidate exclusion was at its highest. Finally, as the regime stabilised in 2013 and electoral uncertainty reduced, the likelihood of candidate exclusion similarly decreased.

Whilst it is possible that urbanisation is a significant predictor of candidate exclusion because urban districts see a larger number of candidates putting themselves forward for office, taken together, the findings in this model suggest that the effect of urbanisation is unlikely to be a mechanical⁸ one - first, since the dependent variable is measured in terms of an *individual's* chances of exclusion⁹, and second, since individuals appear to be excluded primarily for their political status (party affiliation) rather than political 'quality' (education and experience)¹⁰. Thus, if the larger candidate pool size of urban districts were to have an effect, it would ultimately point to the hand of political actors, and thus underline the above conclusions relating to uncertainty - regime actors are ultimately uncomfortable with electoral risk, and seek to protect their chances of victory by pre-emptively reducing the competitiveness of an election.

Although the model does not include any region-specific variables, the significant region-level random intercepts suggest that there exists a pattern of regional differences in the use of candidate exclusion as a strategy, even when controlling for individual- and district-level factors. In other words, factors relating to the regional-level characteristics appear to influence the likelihood of candidate exclusion being used. Identifying this regional-level variation is important and shows that the multi-level method is an appropriate approach to employ when analysing this data - however, the primary concern of the present study remains with district-level factors (urbanisation) and thus the precise factors driving this regional-level variation shall not be explored further at this time, but should be addressed in future research. Crucially,

⁸ For example, the higher the number of candidates in a district, the higher the probability that at least one instance of candidate exclusion occurs.

⁹ Meaning that number of opportunities for candidate exclusion remains constant for each observation

¹⁰ Meaning that it is unlikely that urbanisation is significant because it attracts a higher volume of additional 'lower-quality' candidates.

the model shows that levels of urbanisation in a given district influence the likelihood of candidate exclusion even in the context of this regional-level variation. In other words, it suggests that intra-regional patterns of candidate exclusion remain similar, despite inter-regional variation.

4.3 Candidate exclusion and uncertainty: case studies

It thus follows that a rise in the levels of urbanisation increases the likelihood that a candidate will be rejected by electoral commissions at the registration phase in a given district. Given what we know about preclusive nature of Russia's candidate registration laws and their selective application at the hands of commission officials, we can conclude that this finding points to a relationship between urbanisation and another option on the 'menu of manipulation'. In other words, the identified pattern suggests that calculations of urbanisation are important to those engaged in electoral manipulation in Russia's contemporary authoritarian regime. This finding supports the central argument of this thesis which states that urbanisation serves as an informational shortcut to these actors - the urban/rural divide is a useful indicator of voter preferences and political attitudes, and therefore likelihood of victory, which subsequently informs the regime's decision to engage in manipulation. Moreover, the positive nature of this relationship supports the argument that manipulation strategies that aim to distort voter preferences are more likely to be used in areas where the voters are perceived to be sceptical and therefore a threat to the regime's electoral dominance is tangible.

In this part of the chapter, qualitative analysis will be used to complement the findings identified above. The aim of this section is twofold: first, to demonstrate the

practice of candidate exclusion as a strategy of manipulation; and second, to hone in on the link between the use of this strategy and urbanisation in greater detail. The advantages of qualitative methods in this respect are that they enable us to examine specific cases in greater detail and to ground the general numeric patterns identified earlier into multidimensional contexts. Moreover, exploring a wide range of qualitative material - including official documents published by the election commissions, regional and local court documents, as well as local newspaper reports - represents a valuable opportunity to verify the quantitative data and the patterns that emerge from it.

The analysis in this section shall be divided into two parts. The first part will demonstrate the key findings of the multi-level models by exploring the patterns of candidate exclusion in one region - Ulyanovsk oblast'. The second part will then zoom in on one specific electoral district in this region - district 14 - and trace the process of candidate exclusion in this area. This includes a detailed exploration of the justification behind the electoral commission decisions, in order to illustrate the mechanism of candidate exclusion as a manipulation strategy. The reason for selecting this region and one of its districts is that these cases typify the relationship uncovered in the quantitative part of the analysis and serve as useful practical illustrations of the dynamics of candidate exclusion as a strategy of manipulation. In addition, many of the characteristics of this region and the district approximate the national average in Russia and therefore boost our ability to generalise from these cases. Ultimately, however, the purpose of this discussion is to hone in on the pattern identified in the quantitative analysis and trace the typical candidate exclusion process in Russia's regional elections.

Before proceeding with this analysis, it is important to clarify this study's use of the terms 'regime' and 'non-regime' candidates. Whilst affiliations of this kind are complex, this chapter relies primarily on a formal distinction between the two - regime candidates are understood as those who, at the time of running for office, are formally affiliated with the governing party, United Russia, whilst non-regime candidates is a category that captures all other types of actors. The latter group does, therefore, contain considerable variation - from individuals who are actively challenging the government, and are thus 'unfavourable' to the regime, to those who can be more accurately understood as belonging to the pseudo-opposition. The study relies on another formal measure - party labels - to make this distinction, with KPRF party membership serving as a particularly strong signal of opposition to the regime.¹¹ However, where possible, further details on the most likely disposition of non-regime candidates will be sought from additional sources of data (such as reports in the media).

4.3.1 Intra-regional patterns of candidate exclusion: the case of Ulyanovsk

Oblast'

The multi-level model identified regional-level factors as being important earlier in this chapter, however, it also showed the district-level relationship between urbanisation and candidate exclusion holds across all regions. As the present study is primarily concerned with exploring intra-regional district-level, rather than regional-level, dynamics, focusing on one region offers some control over regional-level variation. The benefit of selecting Ulyanovsk oblast' as a case for this purpose is that the region holds positions that are very close to the national mean and median on a

¹¹ The second largest party in Russia's political landscape, which, in recent years, has 'geographically and demographically reoriented itself' towards opposition votes (White, 2019:p.10)

number of socio-economic indicators, which leaves some room for generalisation. With the exception of its status as the birthplace of Vladimir Lenin, Ulyanovsk can be described as a typical Russian city, with average scores across a range of socio-economic measures. With a population of over 644,400 (more than 77 percent of whom are ethnically Russian) and an area of around 300,000 km², the region occupies a middling position amongst Russia's regional capitals - 22nd place in terms of population and 38th place in terms of geographical size.¹² In the few years prior to the regional legislative elections of 2013, this city was located in a region with a middling ranking in terms of democracy - sharing the 37th-46th place in the Petrov and Titkov (2013) democracy rating for the period of 2006-2010. Crucially, Ulyanovsk urbanisation levels are high - in 2013, during the year of the regional legislative elections, more than 96 percent of the city's residents were classed as urban dwellers by the Russian Federal Statistics Service.¹³ The city and the region within which it is located therefore come close to the national average.

Elections to the entire regional legislative assembly of Ulyanovsk oblast' were held in September 2013. The assembly consisted of 36 legislative seats, with 18 seats elected through the FPTP system and the other 18 seats elected through a party list proportional system. In the majoritarian elections, 8 out of 18 districts (or 44 percent) saw at least one candidate rejected during the registration process. The fact that candidate exclusion occurred in just under half of the region's districts indicates that this tactic is not a guaranteed feature of all regional-level elections in Russia but is used

¹² Data as at 2016; obtained from *Regiony Rossii* database run by Rosstat (Russian Federal State Statistic Service).

¹³ Data obtained from the *Pokazateli Munitsipal'nykh Obrazovaniy* (Municipal Entity Indicators) database run by Rosstat.

somewhat sparingly. This suggests that we are right to ask questions about the conditions that surround the decision to use this option of manipulation.

A closer look at the urbanisation levels of these 18 districts shows that the pattern of candidate exclusion across the region is largely in line with that identified in the earlier analysis in this chapter. Figure 4.2 groups all districts according to the percentage of urban residents in each and indicates the number of districts which experienced at least one instance of candidate exclusion. This chart shows that no districts in the region had a population where urban residents represented less than a quarter (0-25 percent) of the district population. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the first column in Figure 4.2, in six districts (or a third of all majoritarian districts), rural residents represented the majority of the population (urban residents comprised less than 50 percent of all residents). Amongst these six districts, *no* instances of candidate exclusion were recorded. *All* instances of candidate exclusion therefore occurred in districts where the majority of the population (50 percent or more) were urban residents (columns 2 and 3 in Figure 4.3). This division clearly echoes the finding from the qualitative analysis of the wider sample of regions.

Figure 4.2. Candidate exclusion according to district *Urbanisation* in Ulyanovsk Oblast'

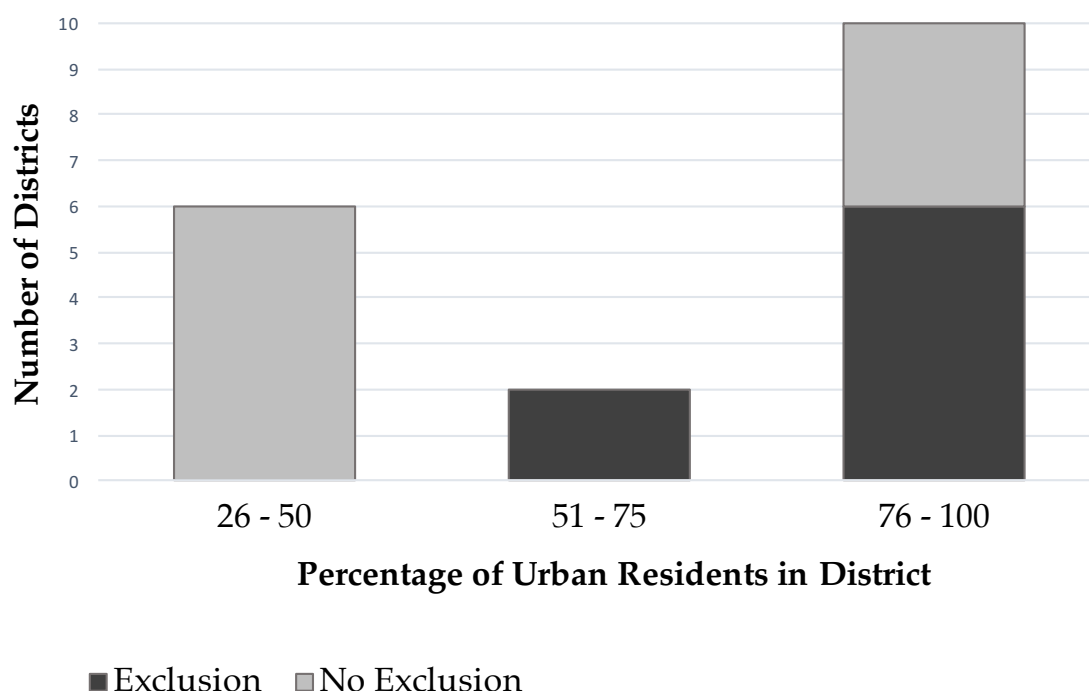


Table 4.5 presents a summary of candidate exclusion in the eight majoritarian districts. As can be seen from this table, 6 out of 8 (or three quarters of) districts with candidate exclusion were situated in the region's capital - Ulyanovsk City. Moreover, in terms of the number of individual candidates excluded, 10 out of 12 (or 83 percent) of excluded candidates sought to contest the regional legislative seats situated in this city. Districts in Ulyanovsk City were also more likely to see more than one candidate fail during the registration process.

Table 4.5. Districts experiencing candidate exclusion in Ulyanovsk Oblast'

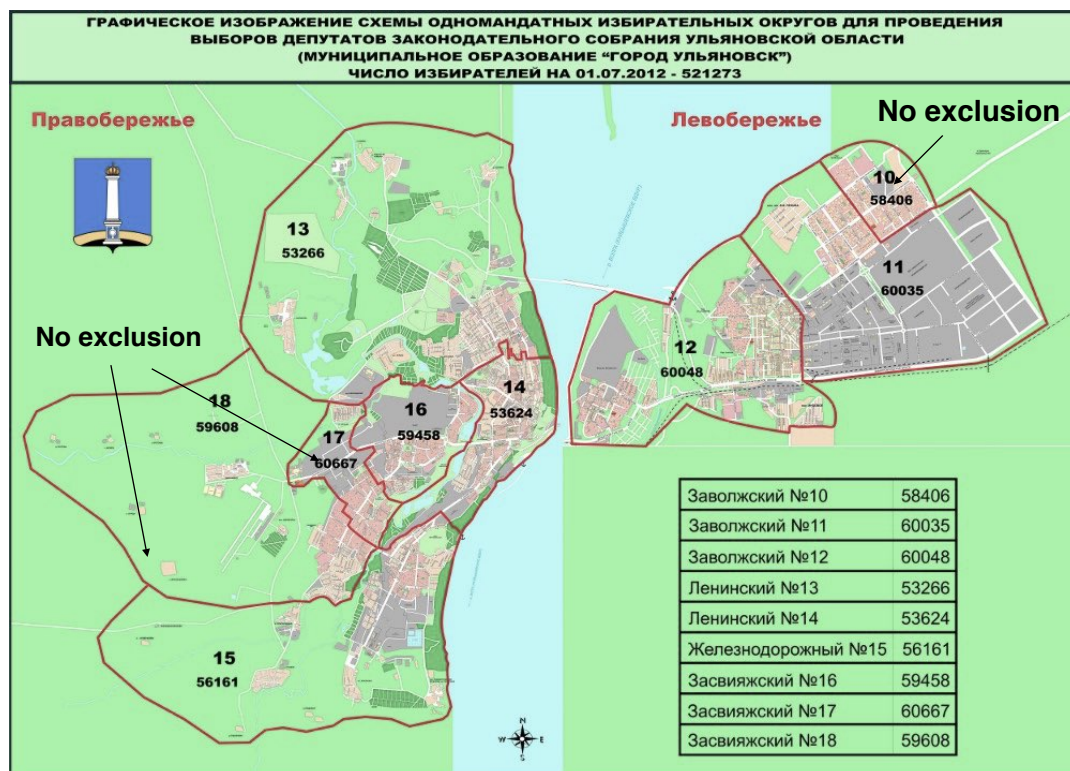
District Number	Number of Candidates Excluded	Share of Urban Residents	Affiliations of Excluded Candidates	Location of District in Region
2	1	57%	Yabloko	Veshkaymskiy Rayon; Inzenskiy Rayon; Bazarnosyzganskiy Rayon
8	1	66%	Civic Platform	Part of Melekesskiy Rayon; Novomalyklinskiy Rayon; Part of Dimitrovgrad City
11	1	99%	Independent	Ulyanovsk City
12	1	99%	KPRF	Ulyanovsk City
13	3	94%	Independent; Patriots of Russia	Ulyanovsk City
14	2	93%	Civic Platform; Just Russia	Ulyanovsk City
15	2	89%	Independent	Ulyanovsk City
16	1	97%	Just Russia	Ulyanovsk City
Total Districts: 8	Total Candidates: 12	Average: 87%		

This concentration of candidate exclusion is striking, given the proportion of the majoritarian districts located in this area. As can be seen from Figure 4.3, in 2013, the city was divided into nine electoral districts of roughly equal population (with approximately 53,000-60,000 registered voters in each district). Collectively, these Ulyanovsk city districts represented half of the eighteen electoral districts up for election, and approximately 52 percent of eligible voters, in the region overall. The share of candidate exclusion instances in this area was therefore greater than may have been expected, given the electoral weight of these districts in the region overall.

Indeed, almost every district located in Ulyanovsk city experienced at least one instance of candidate exclusion. The exceptions include districts 10, 17 and 18.

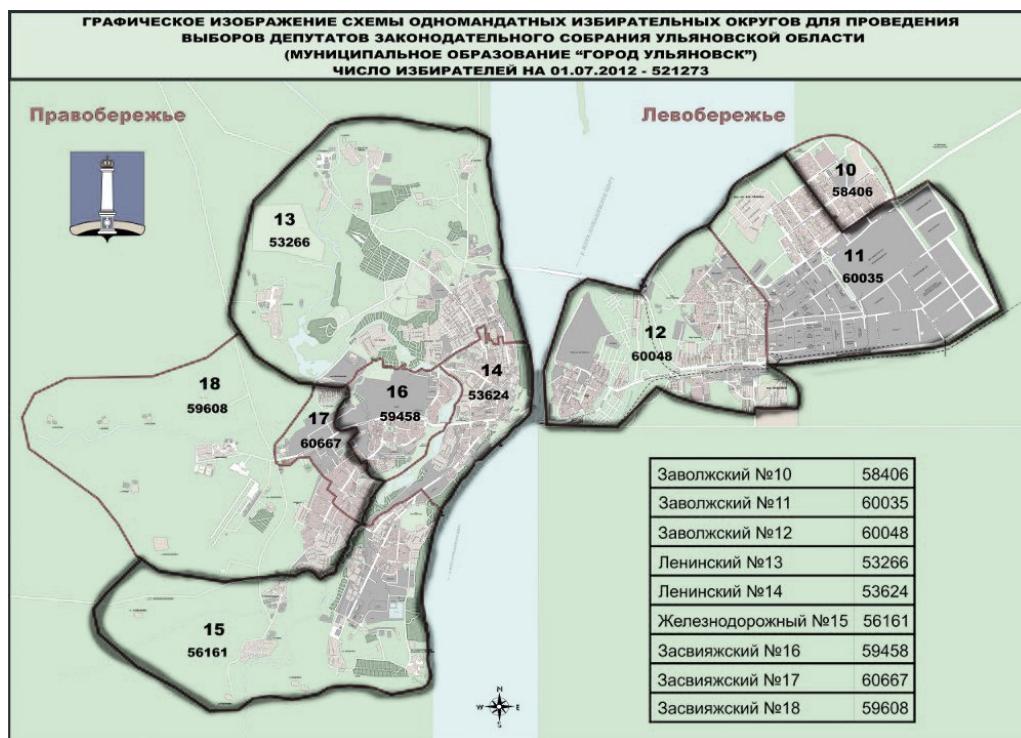
Interestingly, as can be seen from Figure 4.3, two of these districts - district 10 and 18 - are situated on the outskirts of the city, with district 18, in particular, appearing to be more sparsely populated. The vast majority of the districts at the heart of the city, therefore, experienced at least one instance of candidate exclusion during its regional legislative elections. Figure 4.4 highlights the boundaries of these Ulyanovsk districts with candidate exclusion to illustrate this point further. This distribution of candidate exclusion in Ulyanovsk oblast' is in line with the findings identified earlier in this chapter. Exclusion was not only limited to districts where the majority of the population have been classed as urban residents, but it was also heavily concentrated in an area that represents the peak of urbanisation in the region - Ulyanovsk city. Moreover, the number of excluded candidates per district appears to have been higher in this area. This pattern therefore echoes the positive relationship between urbanisation and candidate exclusion identified in the wider sample of regions.

Figure 4.3. Map of electoral districts in Ulyanovsk City (as used for Regional Legislative Elections 2013)



Source: Legislative Assembly of Ulyanovsk Oblast', 2013

Figure 4.4. The boundaries of districts with instances of candidate exclusion in Ulyanovsk city.



It is interesting to note that the three districts which experienced the highest number of rejected candidates - districts 13, 14, and 15 - are all neighbouring districts. The three districts cover two key city areas (administrative divisions): the Leninskiy and Zheleznodorozhniy rayon. Together, these areas cover the entirety of Ulyanovsk's 'old' city and the city centre, and therefore represent the peak of urban life in the region. According to the official website of the Ulyanovsk City Administration (2017), Leninskiy rayon is the 'heart of Ulyanovsk city' and represents its 'student and scientific centre', where thousands of students attend a range of further and higher education institutions. The name of the rayon, after Vladimir Lenin, is in itself indicative of the key significance of this area.

In addition to this, the three districts also seem to have shared a similar political outlook in the years preceding the regional election. For example, if we examine the electoral outcomes of federal level elections in 2011 and 2012 (which were the most recent elections experienced in the region by the time of the regional legislative election year in 2013), it becomes clear that this trio of districts represented areas with the lowest levels of support for the regime in the region. In Leninskiy rayon, (which is covered by districts 13 and 14), for example, 51.6% of the voters in this district supported Vladimir Putin.¹⁴ Zheleznodorozhniy rayon had managed to produce a similar figure, with Putin securing 51.4% of the vote in this area. Together, these areas represent the two lowest shares of the vote in favour of Putin in the region as a whole. The KPRF party leader, Gennadiy Zyuganov, by contrast, was able to amass considerable support in these areas with 27% of the vote in Leninskiy and 27.4% in Zheleznodorozhniy. Interestingly, Mikhail Prokhorov also performed well in these

¹⁴ All results for the Presidential Elections 2012 were taken from the *GAS Vybory* database run by the TsIK of the Russian Federation.

areas, securing 8.9% of the vote (the highest share amongst other districts in the region) in Leninskiy and 7.3% in Zheleznodorozhniy. Moreover, a year earlier, during the 2011 elections to the Federal Duma, United Russia actually came second in Leninskiy rayon with 28.9% of the vote, trailing behind the winners, KPRF, by almost 2 percentage points (KPRF secured 30.5%) - whilst in Zeleznodorznyi rayon, United Russia had managed to secure victory only by one percentage point.¹⁵ In the same elections, Just Russia attained third place in both rayons, with 18.9% in Leninskiy and 20% in Zheleznodorozhniy.

This insight into the tough political climate in the three urban districts with the highest levels of candidate exclusion in the region again is in line with the central argument of this thesis. Urbanisation appears to be closely linked to lower levels of regime support amongst voters - given that the multi-level model identified a positive association between urbanisation and candidate exclusion earlier in this chapter, this combination offers support to the argument that the regime engages in the distorting practices of manipulation out of concerns over the likelihood of election victory.

Urbanisation, however, is not the only factor appearing to correspond to instances of candidate exclusion. At the individual level, party affiliation appears to be a particularly strong determinant of candidate exclusion. Amongst targets of exclusion were independent candidates, as well as candidates affiliated with established 'systemic' opposition parties (KPRF, Just Russia and Yabloko) and other recognisable parties with some political experience (Civic Platform and Patriots of Russia).

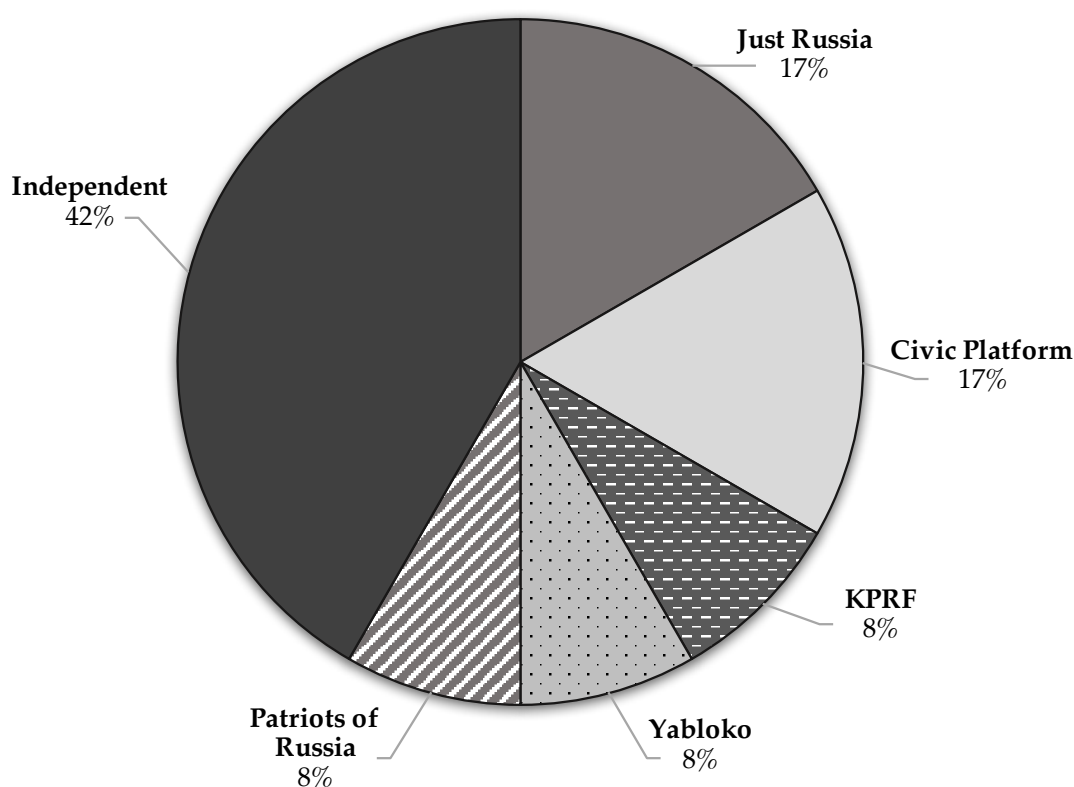
¹⁵ All results for Federal Duma Elections 2011 were taken from the *GAS Vybory* database run by the TsIK of the Russian Federation.

Figure 4.5 charts the proportion of candidates rejected, according to their party affiliation. As can be seen from the chart, the majority of these candidates were affiliated with parties - this pattern therefore deviates from the patterns of affiliation in the wider sample of regions, where the biggest proportion of rejected candidates were independent candidates. This difference is most likely down to the fact that Ulyanovsk region saw a very low number of candidates putting their names forward as independent - just six hopefuls. However, it is important to note that out of these six none made it to the ballot on election day - five were refused registration, and the sixth did not proceed with registration and did not submit any supporting documents despite initially putting himself forward. The rejection rate amongst those candidates who presented documents to the election commissions in Ulyanovsk oblast' was therefore 100 percent. This indicates that independent status nevertheless served as a disadvantage to candidates during the registration process in this region - and thus, the overall pattern of party affiliation is still in line with that in the wider sample of regions.

Nevertheless, the high proportion of party affiliated candidates in Ulyanovsk region is striking in that it suggests that the logistical support and professional expertise of these experienced party organisations was not enough to support individuals in their ambitions for office. This further highlights the sheer scale of the challenge presented by the registration process in the context of Russian regional elections. Interestingly, many parties are also missing from the list of those experiencing at least one instance of candidate rejection. Notably, none of the rejected candidates were affiliated with United Russia - however, the absence of other parties is also curious (Figure 4.6). Overall, there were 13 parties participating, including United Russia - and five of these experienced at least one instance of candidate rejection. Amongst notable absences

from the list of exclusions were candidates from many 'new' parties, such as the Communists of Russia (KPKR)¹⁶, VOLYA, Party of People's Freedom, and the Party of Peace and Unity. In particular, the Communists of Russia put forward the largest number of candidates by a non-systemic party (15 out of 18 districts), even beating Yabloko (who put forward 9 candidates) - yet despite the party's relative lack of experience and organisational resources, all candidates had successfully cleared the hurdle of registration. On a similar note, the only 'systemic' party not to have lost any candidates in this region was LDPR - which might be indicative of the relationship between the regional branches of these parties and the regime.

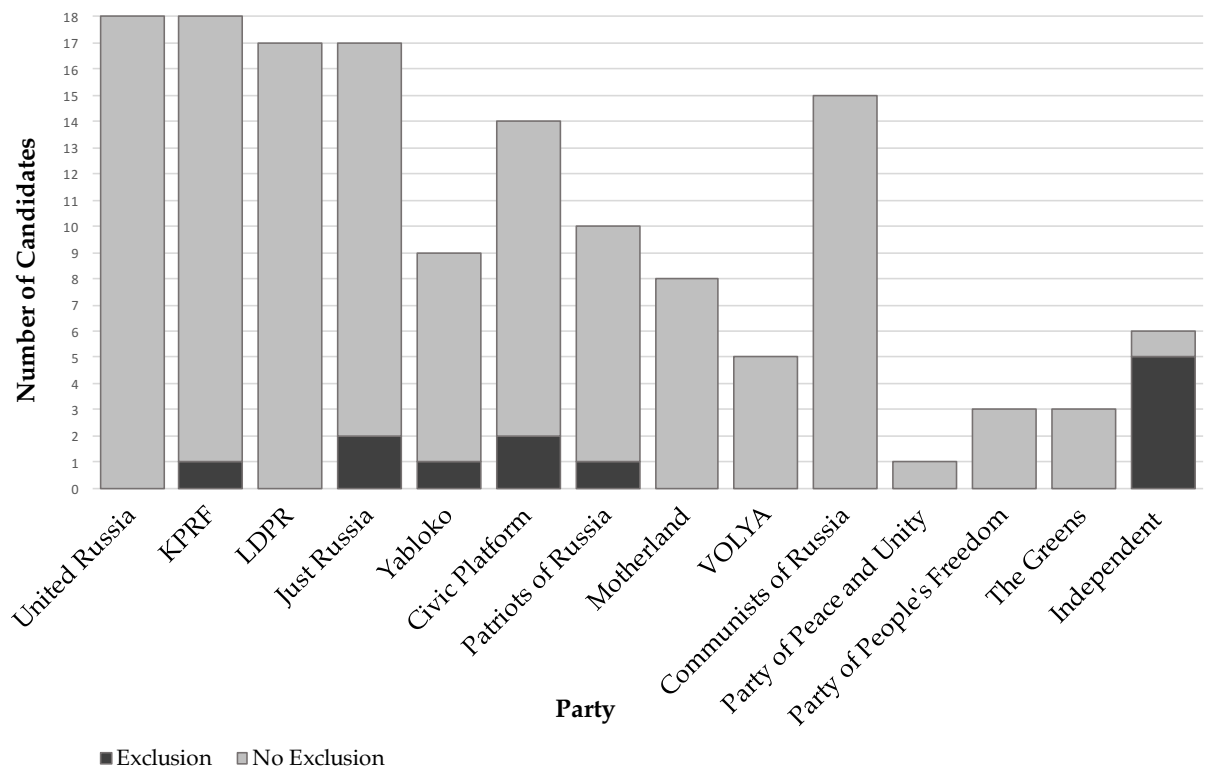
Figure 4.5. Party affiliations of rejected candidates in Ulyanovsk oblast'



¹⁶ Not to be confused with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF). The Communists of Russia party (KPKR) is a separate organisation, which was established in 2009 and was first officially registered by the federal authorities in 2012. It is largely considered to be designed to steal votes from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) through confusion and policy assimilation.

For further information on how this party seeks to distinguish itself from the KPRF, see Communists of Russia Political Party, 2019.

Figure 4.6. Party affiliations of majoritarian candidates in Ulyanovsk oblast'



In addition to the data on candidates' levels of education, political experience and party affiliation, one further way of exploring the extent to which candidate rejections were the outcome of the candidate's individual ability to overcome hurdles is to examine whether electoral commissions identified any initial problems with the documentation submitted by candidates in districts which were registered as having experienced zero candidate exclusion in our quantitative model. Amongst the ten districts which experienced no candidate exclusion, only one candidate received a notice identifying problems with his registration documents from the electoral commission - and he was able to successfully address all errors and secure registration. It thus follows that the absence of candidate rejections in other districts was not the result of those candidates being more able to clear every single hurdle presented by the commissions. Indeed, the opposite appears to be the case - the candidates in these regions experienced virtually *no* problems with registration. As the candidates in the

other districts simply didn't face the same obstacles, this leads us to conclude that the primary factor driving these patterns of candidate exclusion are situated at the district, not individual, levels.

Overall, the situation in Ulyanovsk oblast', a region with average socio-economic scores and geographic characteristics in Russia, represents a good reflection of the findings identified in the second part of this chapter. It reveals a clear trend of association between urbanisation and instances of candidate exclusion, thus offering support to the central hypothesis driving the present investigation. Some individual-level factors do play a role in determining the likelihood that a candidate will be excluded during the registration process party - in particular, party affiliation appears to be a strong determinant of candidate exclusion, which may serve as further indication of the manipulative character of the vast majority of candidate exclusion in our sample.

4.3.2 The process of candidate exclusion in urban districts: the case of

District 14, Ulyanovsk

District 14 has been selected for further examination because it represents the peak of urban activity, both in the region and the city. The vast majority of its residents (over 93 percent) are classed as urban residents. The district lies in the centre of Ulyanovsk city, and overlaps parts of two of the city's administrative areas - Leninskiy rayon (which is also home to the neighbouring electoral district 13) and Zheleznodorozhniy rayon (which it shares with the neighbouring electoral district 15). The discussion on districts 13-15 has already highlighted the central role of these two administrative areas

for both the region and city - however, it is important to note that the majority of the features that make these areas central are located within the boundaries of district 14.

District 14 lies at the heart of the 'old' city and as the historical centre, it is home to major city tourist spots, including the memorial complex 'Lenin's Motherland', which consists of 20 museums and exhibition venues.¹⁷ Locals and visitors flock to the district's 'Noviy Venets' Boulevard - the city's largest and most popular promenade, boasting picturesque views over the river Volga.¹⁸ The vast majority of the city's universities and further education institutions are also located in district 14, including the region's largest institution, Ulyanovsk State University, which is attended by over 11,000 students.¹⁹ In addition, the city's 'central' street - Goncharov Street - is also located in this district. This street and the surrounding area are a major hub for the retail sector in the region, as typical of most city centres. One indicator of the economic importance of this area is that the city's most prestigious hotel - the Hilton Garden Inn - selected this street as a prime location in 2010 (Andrianova, 2015). Furthermore, given the fact that proximity to the centre is a key factor that contributes to the value of a property and represents a typical feature of the more 'elite' types of properties in Russia (Asaul, Ivanov & Starovoytov, 2009: p.46; Latyshova & Rogozhina, 2015: p.15), the central location of district 14 means that the district is also home to some of the

¹⁷ Information on the location of this complex and its components was taken from the official website of the *State Historical and Memorial Complex 'Lenin's Motherland'*. Available from <http://www.ulzapovednik.ru/> [Accessed 11 October 2017].

¹⁸ Description based on the information provided in Leninskiy Rayon Administration (Ulyanovsk), 2017.

¹⁹ The total number of students for the 2016-2017 academic year was 11,960 (Ulyanovsk State University, 2017).

highest priced accommodation in the city (and the region).²⁰ Finally, the regional legislative assembly and the regional governor's office are also located in this district, which gives this area a symbolic significance.

It is clear, then, that as an urban centre, district 14 represents the nucleus of social, cultural, education, political and economic activity - not only in Ulyanovsk city, but the region overall. As such, we might expect that this is reflected in the characteristics of its electorate. For example, the high property prices suggest that a high proportion of the residents in this district might reasonably be expected to be relatively wealthy.

Similarly, the large number of universities and further education institutions suggests that the district might also have a sizeable student population, which could mean that not only might the voters in this district have relatively high levels of education but also a large proportion of them could be more prone to holding progressive political outlooks. Whilst there is no district-level data for population income levels, the 2010 census data is a useful proxy indicator of the education levels amongst the district's electorate, which supports this conclusion. According to this source, district 14 has one of the highest levels of education in the region - of those district residents aged 15 and above, approximately 269 people per thousand possess a

²⁰ A basic indicator compiled by the online property search engine Domofond.Ru (2017) appears to support this argument. In October 2017, for example, the most expensive properties of Ulyanovsk city were located in the Leninskiy and Zheleznodorozhniy rayons (priced at 45,678 roubles and 39,114 roubles per squared metre, respectively) - the two areas that partially fall within the boundaries of district 14. Similarly, average rental prices in these areas are the highest in the city (15,804 roubles and 12,368 roubles, respectively). Whilst this data must be treated with caution, as it is based primarily on the figures stated in online advertisements and does not take into account newly-built properties, it is nevertheless a useful insight that backs up the claims in the academic literature listed above.

higher education diploma, which is far higher than the regional average of approximately 185 people per thousand.²¹

Furthermore, the central location and historical significance of this district means that it is not dominated by heavy industry and its large state-owned enterprises (which are often used as vehicles for mobilisation and coercion at election time (Frye, Reuter & Szakonyi, 2014)), which means that its voters likely enjoy greater independence from the state at the time of election. Such dynamics would therefore mean that the electorate is likely to contain a higher proportion of the kinds of dangerous ‘sceptics’ identified in the literature on electoral authoritarianism - well-educated, middle-class voters who are more able to scrutinise the regime’s record and are more open to considering alternatives, whilst at the same time being less susceptible to state influence or the regime’s attempts at co-optation (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009: p.409). Indeed, as has been mentioned during the overview of regional patterns in Ulyanovsk oblast’, district 14 was part of the areas with relatively low levels of support for the regime during both the presidential elections of 2012 and the Federal Duma elections of 2011.

Whilst there are many factors which might make individuals more sceptical at election time, it is important to note that many of them can be linked to the individual’s residence in the urban centre, as this discussion has indicated thus far. The fact that the urban status of this district positively aligns with a difficult political climate for the regime therefore supports the expectations by the research on the urban/rural divide discussed in the theoretical chapter of the present thesis.

²¹ The figures for education figures were calculated by the author using the data provided via the Russian Census 2010 database (Rosstat).

The troubling demographic picture of this district for the regime was further exacerbated by the tough opposition candidates contesting regional legislative office in this area. By far, the biggest challenger to the regime in this district election was the KPRF candidate, Aleksey Kurinniy - referred to, by some, as the 'local Naval'niy' (Pertsev, 2013). A deputy in the regional legislature, incumbent since 2004 (previously elected through the party list proportional race), and the head of the Ulyanovsk regional clinical centre for specialised medical care, as well as the Ulyanovsk central ambulance hospital until 2010, Kurinniy had established a strong professional reputation and possessed a wealth of political experience by the time of the regional legislative elections in district 14 in 2013. These vast personal resources were further complemented by the organisational resources of the KPRF - as discussed in Chapter 2, the party with the second largest organisational resources in Russia, after United Russia.

Kurinniy also came second during the 2010 mayoral elections in Ulyanovsk city and therefore represented a credible threat to the regime in this core urban district (RBC, 2010). Moreover, there can be little doubt over Kurinniy's tense relations with the regime in Ulyanovsk region - one indicator of the lack of positive relations with the local branch of the United Russia party or the administration is that Kurinniy had actually been a member of United Russia in 2003 but abandoned the party soon after, following disagreements. The magnitude of Kurinniy's threat to the regime cannot be overstated - by 2016, he secured second place in the regional gubernatorial elections with 25.5% of the vote, and eventually won a seat in the Federal Duma during elections in the same year, after beating the United Russia candidate by a margin of less than one percent (Gorbunov, 2016).

Ultimately, Kurinniiy went on to win the district seat in 2013, outpacing the United Russia candidate by 4 percent in this majoritarian race. This represented a particularly bitter loss for the regime, as the United Russia candidate was an experienced incumbent and served as the vice-speaker of the regional legislative assembly. One indicator that this was a genuine victory by a genuine opponent is the fact that Kurinniiy was fired from his post as head of the regional ambulance hospital almost immediately after the announcement of the electoral results of his victory (Titov, 2013).

In sum, district 14 represents exactly the kind of district that we would expect to experience instances high levels of candidate exclusion according to our hypotheses. An urban centre, characterised by sceptical voters who have already demonstrated their relatively low levels of enthusiasm for the regime, combined with the strength of the major regime opponent, meant that the district represented high levels of uncertainty over electoral outcomes for the regime and therefore posed a high risk situation with respect to maintaining electoral dominance. According to our hypotheses, in such an extreme uncertain environment, the regime is expected to have abandoned concerns over legitimacy and engaged in candidate exclusion as a means of manipulating electoral outcomes.

The volume of candidate exclusion in this district appears to support this argument. As can be seen from Table 4.6, in total, the district saw nine individuals hoping to contest the legislative seat in the majoritarian election to the regional legislative assembly in 2013. Of these, two candidates - belonging to Just Russia and Civic Platform parties - were unsuccessful at passing through the registration process and were rejected by the local electoral commission. In addition to this, five other candidates experienced difficulties during the registration process, however, all of

them were eventually successful in securing registration. Overall, then, 78 percent of the district's candidates experienced obstacles during the registration process and 22 percent were unable to secure registration. This is a high level of candidate exclusion when compared to the regional average - both in terms of successful rejections and attempts at exclusion (bearing in mind that the earlier discussion revealed that in the 10 districts with no successful candidate exclusion in the region, only one candidate experienced some difficulty during the registration process).

Table 4.6. Candidates and candidate exclusion in District 14

	Candidate Name	Party	Rejected?	Difficulties?	Vote Share
1	Aleksandr Bragin	Party of People's Freedom		✓	4%
2	Tamara Dmitriyeva	United Russia			37%
3	Marina Gondarenko	Yabloko		✓	4%
4	Oleg Kalmykov	Just Russia	✓	✓	
5	Olga Kharitonova	Civic Platform	✓	✓	
6	Aleksey Kurinniy	KPRF		✓	41%
7	Svetlana Leontyeva	LDPR			5%
8	Svetlana Marinina	VOLYA		✓	5%
9	Yevgeniya Sapozhnikova	Communists of Russia		✓	4%

4.3.3 Tracing the process of candidate exclusion as an instance of manipulation

In this part of the analysis, I attempt to trace the process of candidate rejection in our chosen case in order to demonstrate the manipulative characteristics of this action. As such, this approach complements the finding identifying the discrepancy amongst parties in the Ulyanovsk region when it comes to candidate exclusion (thus indicating

selective application of regulations), whilst also possessing the advantage of greater detail. This analysis is based on original research and uses official electoral commission and court documents. It also serves as an opportunity to verify the assumptions that the candidate exclusion coding used in the quantitative models accurately captures manipulation (as opposed to instances of genuine errors committed by candidates).

The central district of Ulyanovsk city, district number 14 in Leninskiy rayon, saw the rejection of two party candidates from Just Russia and Civic Platform. In this section, each instance of rejection will be traced in greater detail.

First, an assessment of the reasons behind the rejection of the candidate for Civic Platform, Olga Kharitonova. Ultimately, this candidate was unable to secure registration due to minor bureaucratic errors which were exploited by the electoral commission members by making it as difficult as possible for the candidate to correct them in time. According to the official notice published by the territorial electoral commission of Leninskiy rayon in Ulyanovsk city, the documents supplied by candidate Kharitonova were found to have serious errors that required immediate correction.²² Specifically, the commission found one error, which meant that the documents submitted by the candidate not meet the legal criteria for registration: the candidate's patronymic (middle name) on her passport did not match the patronymic details specified in the documents outlining the Civic Platform party's decision to nominate Kharitonova as its candidate in district 14.

²² Postanovleniye №62/198-2 (Territorial Electoral Commission of Leninskiy Rayon (Ulyanovsk), 2013a).

Upon closer inspection, it appears that the cause for concern was down to one letter - the official patronymic 'Vitalyevna' was misspelt as 'Vitalyena' in the document outlining the decision of the party committee, and was thus missing the letter 'v'. Vitalyevna is a common patronymic in Russia and the letter 'v' forms part of the standard suffix '-yevna' - thus, this missing letter should not have given major cause for concern that the candidate was committing identity fraud. Nevertheless, this missing letter was used to present a major obstacle to candidate Kharitonova, who was asked to correct this error and resubmit party documents that matched her passport details. Having failed to meet the deadline by one day, Kharitonova was subsequently refused registration by the electoral commission.²³

This case illustrates the legal foundations behind the manipulative strategy of candidate exclusion well, as the official reason behind the rejection of Kharitonova's candidacy was legally sound - the individual in question missed the official deadline for the resubmission of documents in support of their candidacy. However, a closer look reveals that the electoral commission did everything they could to make it difficult for Kharitonova to meet these requirements. Leaving aside the fact that the reason cited for Kharitonova to invest extra effort was arguably a petty bureaucratic error, it was the timing of the documentation provided by the electoral commission that, ultimately, had cut short the candidate's political ambitions. The official notice of the errors in Kharitonova's documentation was served on the 13th July 2013 - legally, this was sound, as this date was the latest possible date that the electoral commission could inform the candidate of extra requirements. According to regional and federal legislation at the time, the electoral commissions had to inform candidates of errors

²³ Postanovleniye №64/207-2 (Territorial Electoral Commission of Leninskiy Rayon (Ulyanovsk), 2013b).

that needed further attention no later than three days prior to the final electoral commission meeting that would decide over whether the candidate should be granted registration.²⁴ In Kharitonova's case, this meeting was scheduled for 11.15am on the 17th July 2013 and thus 13th July was exactly three days prior to this final meeting.²⁵

The first problem with this timing was that the candidate was not given adequate time to address these errors and source new documentation that matched her passport details. Legally, these new documents had to be resubmitted no later than one day prior to the final electoral commission meeting.²⁶ In practice, because the electoral commission notice was served at its latest possible date, the candidate had just two days (three days if including the day on which the notice was served) to find this documentation and provide it to the agents in question.

The second source of problems in the timing was that the 13th July was a Saturday. There is no information to confirm whether this meant that candidate Kharitonova received the notice on this exact day or whether this was simply the publication date of the communication and she received the notice slightly later. Regardless, because the notice was served on a Saturday and the latest possible date for resubmitting the documentation, according to the legislation outlined above, was therefore a Monday (15th July), the candidate had only one working day to find new accurate documentation and resubmit it to the electoral commission. In omitting the word 'working' from its specification of at least three days notice, the official regional and federal legislation thus used the vague wording of legislation to the disadvantage of

²⁴ Ulyanovsk Regional Law №102-ZO, 20.07.2012

²⁵ Postanovleniye №62/198-2 (Territorial Electoral Commission of Leninskiy Rayon (Ulyanovsk), 2013a).

²⁶ Ulyanovsk Regional Law №102-ZO, 20.07.2012

the candidate. This situation represents a good illustration of the problems with the legislative framework on candidate registration in Russia and the resulting arbitrary interpretation (as discussed in part I of the present chapter) that enables local electoral commissions to engage in manipulation.

The third source of problems in the timing was that no precise schedule was outlined in the official notice served to Kharitonova. The notice specified the timing for the final meeting (Wednesday 17th July) but it did not specify the exact deadline for the resubmission of the accurate documentation. It was assumed that the candidate is knowledgeable about the timing set out in the regional and federal legislation and could calculate backwards the deadline from the details of the final electoral commission meeting. The legislation stipulates that new documentation must be submitted no later than one day prior to this meeting. Kharitonova, submitting on Tuesday 16th July, interpreted 'one day' as the day immediately preceding the meeting, whereas the legal understanding of this notice meant that the deadline was, in fact, Monday 15th July. The wording of the notice was thus left deliberately vague and suggests that the commission did not do all that it could to support the candidate during the registration process. In fact, the decisions taken by the commission clearly made the logistics more difficult than they needed to be.

Exactly a week later, a similar fate awaited a Just Russia candidate in the same district, Oleg Kalmykov. On Saturday 20th July, at the latest possible date (three days before the final electoral commission meeting on his candidacy), Kalmykov was served with a notice outlining a number of irregularities in his candidate documents. Given the number and range of these documentation problems, it is shocking that the

candidate was given only three days (of which only one was a working day) to address these issues and resubmit the correct paperwork.

Overall, the commission found five faults with Kalmykov's documentation²⁷:

- 1) Insufficient proof of his place and position of employment
- 2) Inaccurate details of education - the word 'professional' was missing from his official higher education status
- 3) The protocol on his candidacy provided by the Just Russia party did not include any of his details (such as date of birth, address, place of work, citizenship, previous convictions) - although information on all of these details was submitted to the electoral commission
- 4) Details of his personal income did not set out the branch address of his bank
- 5) He did not attach a stamped and verified reference from his bank proving his account balance alongside his personal income statement

Considering that the adjustment of this documentation required the candidate to attend and secure a quick response from three separate organisations - the bank, the party and his place of work - the fact that he was only given one working day for this purpose is striking. Nevertheless, an examination of further communication from the electoral commission reveals that Kalmykov did manage to address most of the issues flagged up in this original notice. However, this was still not enough to avoid rejection. At the final meeting, the electoral commission still found two inadequacies in Kalmykov's paperwork - the commission was not convinced that it had sufficient proof

²⁷ Postanovleniye №65/219-2 (Territorial Electoral Commission of Leninskiy Rayon (Ulyanovsk), 2013c).

of his place of employment and concluded that the version of the candidate's address details specified on the Just Russia's party protocol was not accurate.²⁸

Kalmykov appealed the decision in court but lost the case. The details of the case, however, reveal a similar picture of petty bureaucratic standards and difficulty of meeting the timing deadlines to that of Kharitonova's case.²⁹ It emerges that the reason why the commission was not satisfied with Kalmykov's proof of employment was down to the fact that the last entry in the candidate's official Employment Record Book³⁰ stated that the candidate was *leaving* his previous position to work at the specialised Olympic Reserve School 'Sparta' (his place of employment at the time of application to candidacy). However, because the Employment Book did not have another entry stating that he had *begun* his work at the School, it was deemed insufficient proof of employment by the courts. Kalmykov presented a verified reference from the human resources at the School, which stated that he was currently employed as the *director* of the School, as further proof of his employment - however, this was not found to be enough by the courts.

Regarding the paperwork provided by the Just Russia party, the new document was found to have fatal inaccuracies in the candidate's address details - the official details did not list the rayon (district) in which the candidate's home address was located. It transpires that Kalmykov then provided the electoral commission with a new party document in which the rayon accurately stated - however, just as Kharitonova, he

²⁸ Postanovleniye №66/238-2, (Territorial Electoral Commission of Leninskiy Rayon (Ulyanovsk), 2013d).

²⁹ Official Court Ruling, Case №3-8/2013 (Ulyanovsk Regional Court, 2013)

³⁰ In Russia, each citizen must possess an Employment Record Book (*trudovaya knizhka*), which is an official personal and verified document, documenting all previous positions and places of employment of its owner during their lifetime.

missed the deadline by submitting this paperwork the day before the final meeting, which does not qualify as a day's notice. Similarly, this confusion was likely the outcome of the fact that the original electoral commission notice did not provide a specific deadline for the resubmission of documents but assumed that the candidate was knowledgeable of the deadlines specified in regional and federal legal legislation, and could work these out based on the date on the final electoral commission meeting.

Overall, these two instances of candidate rejection are in line with the earlier discussion of the minefield of obstacles presented by the legislative framework on candidate registration and the way in which this is exploited by electoral commissions seeking to remove 'undesirable' candidates from the final ballot. It is important to note that both of these candidates were affiliated with experienced political parties - therefore, even the organisational and administrative support from their parties was not enough to clear the petty hurdles of registration.

4.3.4 Other attempts at candidate exclusion in the district

Overall, there were nine individuals who put themselves forward as candidates in district number 14 in Ulyanovsk city. Two of these individuals were eventually refused registration - their cases have been outlined in detail above. However, in total, the electoral commission served notices of errors in documentation requiring further action on five other candidates, in addition to the two who were rejected above. These five candidates, however, were able to successfully address the issues and eventually secured registration. Notably, the only candidates who received no further warnings from the electoral commission of the district were - Svetlana Leontyeva of LDPR, and Tamara Dmitriyeva of United Russia. Given the fact that many of the rejected

candidates and those who experienced attempts of rejection were experienced political figures with the support of experienced political parties, this pattern is once again indicative of the selective application of legislative requirements on candidate registration, which is the main justification for this study's consideration of these tactics as instances of manipulation.

The reasons cited in the five other notices served were similar to those served on the two unsuccessful candidates. For example, the candidate for Yabloko was requested to present a document proving her change of surname, as her diploma issued in her maiden name. She was also required to provide details on the voting figures for her candidacy during the party's internal candidate selection process, as well as the number of Yabloko party delegates required to be present in order for such decisions to meet the quorum, as specified in the party's constitution. One of the errors that required further action from the candidate for the Party of People's Freedom was an inconsistency between the place of work listed in his party's documents and than listed in the reference from his place of work - one listed his position as 'general ecologist', whilst the other simply stated 'ecologist'.

It is important to note that, similarly to the experiences of candidates Kalmykov and Kharitonova, most of these other candidates were served notices on Saturday and were effectively given one working day (Monday) to resubmit their documents. There were only two exceptions from this pattern: Aleksander Kurinniy from KPRF and Svetlana Marinina from the VOLYA party. Given the challenge presented by Kurinniy, it is initially surprising to see that, although he was subject to attempts at candidate exclusion, he was given unusually 'favourable' conditions in terms of timing.

However, it is possible that Kurinnii received this relatively favourable treatment precisely because he represented the biggest threat to regime's fortunes - unfair treatment at the hands of the electoral commission may not have been worth the risk of vocal protest from an opponent who was capable of mobilising major sections of the electorate in the area. As such, this finding would represent a fascinating discovery that the relationship between urbanisation and candidate exclusion is non-linear: the regime appears to have been willing to sacrifice legitimacy costs in the face of extreme uncertainty over electoral outcomes, but only up to a certain point. In this instance, it would appear that the regime ultimately swayed on the side of legitimacy concerns when faced with prospects of extremely high legitimacy costs. Ultimately, it seems that the regime may therefore be willing to sacrifice victory over legitimacy - being unable to come up with legal justifications for candidate rejection after providing its biggest rival with a more reasonable timeline for correction may have cost the United Russia its seat in this instance.

Regarding the VOLYA party candidate, it is likely that the notice was served during a weekday to this particular candidate because the party represented the most visible challenge to Kurinnii. According to Lyubarev, VOLYA party at the time was considered to be one of the left-wing challengers to the KPRF and was deemed capable of delivering blows in majoritarian elections due to the personal charisma of its leader, Svetlana Peunova (Lyubarev, 2013). Incidentally, the VOLYA candidate eventually came third in the district race (in terms of total number of votes received) - given the proximity of the two leading candidates (a margin of four percent), this was a considerable share of the vote that could have been significant in allowing the KPRF candidate to claim a more secure victory. It thus appears that offering a more favourable timeline to the VOLYA candidate could have been the regime's attempt to

balance out the risk associated with granting a similarly lenient timeline to the regime's biggest challenger in this district.

4.3.5 Summary

Overall, the examination of district 14 in Ulyanovsk city has uncovered information that largely supports the argument that urbanisation and the use of candidate exclusion manipulation strategies are linked. The urban city centre was characterised by sceptical voters, who manifested their relatively hostility towards the regime during previous federal level elections, which is in line with the expectations set out by the comparative literature on political behaviour (Chapter 2). The stakes were raised further by the presence of a competent and electorally-strong rival, which meant that the regime was presented with a very real risk of losing the incumbency in this district. In an attempt to distort voter preferences and negate the risk of loss, the regime actively engaged in candidate exclusion tactics in this district, which affected nearly all of those seeking to contest office.

The detailed analysis of the justification behind the rejection of two key candidates from Just Russia and Civic Platform parties, as well as the attempts at rejecting the others, have shown that there can be little doubt of the manipulative nature of this action. This deeper examination thus confirms that the patterns identified in the quantitative analysis earlier reflect an accurate picture of the use of candidate exclusion in the context of Russia's regional legislative elections.

4.4. Chapter summary

This chapter sought to examine the patterns in the use of candidate exclusion as a strategy of electoral manipulation in Russian regional legislative elections. The multi-level statistical analysis in the second part of the chapter has identified a positive relationship between the use of this tactic and the level of urbanisation in an electoral district, which persists despite region-level differences. This points to the existence of common intra-regional patterns linked to urbanisation, and therefore indicates the existence of a regime-wide logic to electoral manipulation.

The detailed analysis of candidate exclusion in Ulyanovsk oblast' and Ulyanovsk city in the third part of the chapter has confirmed these findings from the multi-level model. Candidates were more likely to be excluded in the region's most urban districts, and, given that the candidate registration processes and success rates in this region demonstrate signs of malpractice, we can be more confident that we are, indeed, observing a relationship between urbanisation and a tactic of electoral manipulation. Previous election outcomes in these urban districts have indicated that they represent difficult areas for contestation, which further supports a key assumption of the theoretical framework driving this thesis - urban districts represent contexts of particularly high levels of uncertainty over regime victory relative to their rural counterparts.

Crucially, the positive direction of the relationship between candidate exclusion and urbanisation indicates that the alternative explanations discussed in Chapter 2 have not received broad support from the data under examination. It appears that the regime is prepared to risk suffering legitimacy costs by engaging in manipulation in the districts

populated by the urban voters, who we might assume are more likely to identify and vocalise their protests over instances of manipulation than the rural voters. It is important to note, however, that the case of District 14 in Ulyanovsk city does indicate that legitimacy concerns may not have been disregarded completely by the regime, as the most 'dangerous' candidate challenging the regime (A. Kurinniy from KPRF) received a more reasonable, if not favourable, treatment from the electoral commission officials during the registration process than other, less prominent, challengers. This sign of a potentially non-linear micro-level logic to electoral manipulation deserves further investigation in future research.

The conclusion of the present chapter is therefore that the regime largely prioritises reducing uncertainty over victory and engages in manipulation in urban contexts which are risky in terms of legitimacy but seemingly even riskier in terms of possible electoral losses. When the regime is more certain of the mobilising capacity of powerful opponents, however, it appears that manipulation is less likely to be used - the amount of manipulation required to ensure a victory in such a context does not seem to be worth the clear damage that such actions would deliver to the regime's image and legitimacy.

Spoiler Candidates

The focus of the present chapter is on another strategy of manipulation that approximates genuine electoral participation but nevertheless works to distort voter preferences and electoral integrity: the use of spoiler candidates.

By manipulative spoiler behaviour the present study understands the addition of artificial alternative candidates into the electoral race. Specifically, these candidates have no serious ambitions for victory - they are the electoral 'clones' of other established political contenders, seeking to use this resemblance to damage, or 'spoil', the electoral standing of the original actors. This behaviour is manipulative because it represents an unscrupulous means of exerting covert influence over the expression of voter preferences. The aim is not to provide genuine representation for voter grievances but to neutralise the electoral impact of hostile electoral sentiments by diffusing them across an artificially inflated number of options. Voters are therefore tricked into supporting spurious candidacies at the ballot box instead of the genuine contestants whose position comes closest to their views, which increases the chances of victory for their least preferred candidate. Crucially, managing elections through the use of this spoiler strategy is an option of manipulation available only to authoritarian elites in Russia because spoiler candidates require regime approval at the time of registration (as shown in Chapter 4).

In line with the themes of the preceding chapters, the aim of this chapter is to establish broad patterns in the use of spoiler tactics in our sample of regions, and to examine the extent to which these patterns relate to the urban/rural divide. To remind the reader, the thesis is concerned with exploring the extent to which the manipulative behaviour of electoral authoritarian regimes is driven by uncertainty over electoral outcomes. It is posed that the greater levels of scepticism amongst voters in urban constituencies increase the level of electoral uncertainty for the regime, and will therefore encourage actions that subvert and distort voter preferences in these areas. By contrast, the greater levels of regime loyalty in the countryside reduce uncertainty over regime victory, and are expected to encourage actions that promote voter preferences in rural areas. Thus, the overarching hypothesis to be explored in this chapter is that spoiler strategies, as a distorting type of manipulation, are more likely to be used in areas where the majority of the voters are urban residents.

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section will outline the definition of spoiler behaviour as a strategy of electoral manipulation, and discuss the general use of this tactic in the Russian context. The second section will set out the hypothesis driving the present investigation. The third section will examine the patterns in the use of identical spoiler candidates. Due to the relatively small number of such cases in our sample, this analysis will adopt a qualitative approach that aims to trace the use of manipulative spoiler tactics across the urban-rural divide in Russia and explore the degree of electoral uncertainty surrounding the contests in which such spoilers were used. The final section will summarise the findings and their implications for the theoretical framework proposed by this dissertation.

5.1 Spoiler behaviour as a strategy of electoral manipulation

This section justifies the inclusion of spoiler behaviour into the authoritarian 'menu of manipulation'. The first part of the discussion sets out the definition of spoiler strategies and proposes that instances in which genuine candidates are 'cloned' by others, particularly with respect to their name, represent clear examples of spoiler behaviour. The second part of this section discusses the relevance of this definition in the Russian context.

5.1.1 Defining and identifying spoiler strategies

Research on electoral competition has shown that voters casting their ballots with choices over candidates represents only one stage of decision-making that ultimately affects electoral outcomes. By the time that each voter receives a ballot paper with a set of options on the day of the election, decisions taken by other actors within the electoral arena - candidates and parties - have already begun to shape results. Some of the most influential decisions at this candidate stage, particularly in Russia, include deliberations over whether or not to run for office, with whom to affiliate, which district to contest, and how to conduct a campaign (Smyth, 2006:p.71). In examining spoiler behaviour, this chapter focuses on the attempt to manipulate the outcome of elections through one key decision at the candidate stage - the decision to run for office.

Literature on electoral competition emphasises that a candidate's decision 'to enter an election can affect its outcome even in situations where the candidate is not the winner of the election' (Dutta, Jackson & Le Breton, 2001:p.1013). This is most notable

when candidates with similar positions on key issues decide to participate in the same contest - in doing so, they run the risk of splitting the vote between themselves and inadvertently make it easier for another candidate with an opposing view to win instead. Thus, when the entry of a party (or candidate) C into the electoral arena causes 'party A to defeat party B even though party B would have won in a two-candidate race' (Buchler, 2001:p.214), a spoiler effect is thought to occur. The party C, typically a minor actor, would, in this instance, have 'spoiled' the electoral prospects of the more established party B and boosted the chances of the opposition through its entry because it attracted votes away from party B.

Defined as such, spoilers are not necessarily instances of manipulation, if the latter is understood as an attempt to interfere with the formation and expression of voter preferences through unscrupulous means. For example, it is plausible that candidates may hold similar positions on key issues but still disagree on what might be 'the best way to implement their common goals' (Elkind, Faliszewski & Slinko, 2011:p.529), and therefore feel compelled to contest the seat. Additionally, in contexts where 'electoral infrastructure' is weak (such as in Russia, prior to the consolidation of electoral authoritarianism), participants with similar positions are largely guilty of coordination and cooperation failures (Smyth, 2006:pp.37-42). The spoiler effect in such instances, whilst representing a poorly calculated decision that costs other actors in terms of votes, would nevertheless be a by-product of genuine electoral competition.

However, voters aren't the only actors in the electoral arena who possess preferences - candidates, as citizens, have preferences over other candidates, too (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996; Besley & Coate, 1997). The fact that an additional entrant can help the prospects of one candidate but damage that of another means that the

decision to run for office can be used by candidates as a targeted tool for manipulating electoral outcomes in their preferred direction. This is what formal models of electoral competition have termed the problem of *strategic candidacy* - situations in which candidates who have 'no chance of winning [nevertheless] enter the fray simply in order to influence the outcome of the election' (Dutta, Jackson & Le Breton, 2001:p.1015). Spoiler behaviour as a strategy of electoral manipulation is therefore understood in this light, where the manipulative element stems from the intent of the minor candidates deciding to join the race. Manipulative spoilers are more than just minor candidates whose presence results in vote-splitting - they enter the race primarily to reduce the chances of victory for other contestants, thereby aiming to influence outcomes over existing options rather than to present genuine options of representation.

Identifying spoilers in this sense is problematic. It can be difficult to discern between genuine electoral competition and manipulative spoiler behaviour, if minor candidates can split the vote of established candidates and aid the victory of others without necessarily intending to act as a spoiler. The identification of manipulative spoiler behaviour therefore depends on our ability to gauge intent. This is likely to be limited, since, in order to be effective and divert votes away from others, manipulative spoiler candidates must convince voters that they represent a genuine alternative, and are therefore unlikely to admit openly to seeking to undermine the democratic process.

Certain types of manipulative spoiler tactics are not very subtle, however. In particular, under one variant of spoiler behaviour - candidate 'cloning' - the manipulative intent of spoiler candidates may become more visible. First introduced by Tideman (1987), 'cloning' is generally understood to be the presence of two or more

very similar candidates in a single race, to the extent that they are 'arbitrarily close to one another in some shared perceptual space in which voters locate candidates' (p.186).¹ Whilst voters may perceive candidates to be close to one another on the basis of many different characteristics, at its most extreme, candidate cloning complicates the voters' ability to distinguish between election participants through the replication of the most basic aspects of candidate identity - a candidate's name, as it appears on the ballot paper.

The present chapter therefore seeks to reduce the methodological problems associated with identifying spoiler intent by limiting its analysis to the identical 'clone' candidates and parties, as based on the most extreme cloning of candidate names. Whilst this behaviour is not unique to authoritarian regimes², the spoiler strategy forms part of the authoritarian menu of manipulation when it is systematically used by the regime to neutralise potentially threatening opposition challengers.

¹ Tideman (1997:p.185) draws on personal experience to provide a classic example of this:

'When I was 12 years old I was nominated to be treasurer of my class at school. A girl named Michelle was also nominated. I relished the prospect of being treasurer, so I made a quick calculation and nominated Michelle's best friend, Charlotte. In the ensuing election I received 13 votes, Michelle received 12, and Charlotte received 11, so I became treasurer'.

² Advanced democracies have witnessed these practices in the past. For example, in 1994, Richard Huggett, a candidate running under the Liberal Democrats party label, was able to secure over 10,000 votes in the European elections in the Devon and East Plymouth constituency in the UK (Cooper, 1994). His presence in the race was costly for the Liberal Democrats party, which lost the election in the same constituency by just 700 votes. Similarly, in 1997, Huggett attempted to run for election in the Winchester constituency under the name 'Gerald Maclone' against the health minister Gerald Malone (BBC News, 2014a). Huggett's behaviour was not found unlawful during a High Court challenge instigated by the Liberal Democrats, however, it nevertheless resulted in the introduction of the Registration of Political Parties Act in 1998, which prohibits candidate registration under names designed to cause confusion with established political parties (BBC News, 2014b).

5.1.2 Spoiler tactics in Russia

In Russia, the authoritarian regime has been accused of engaging in a variety of such spoiler strategies, starting with the creation of 'satellite' opposition parties that sought to split the vote of other opposition forces (Gel'man, 2008: pp.922-923). The more extreme type of spoiler behaviour mentioned above - the use of identically-named candidates - is widespread at all levels of elections and includes entire parties, as well as individuals.

The contemporary Russian party system, for example, includes many relatively new parties with names that bear extraordinary similarities to those of more established parties. For example, the established Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) is frequently confronted with contenders from the Communists of Russia party. In the past, KPRF has had to battle candidates from the Communist Party of Social Justice, whose abbreviation, KPSS, is identical to the abbreviation of the original Communist Party of the Soviet Union, widely understood to be the Soviet ancestor of KPRF.

Other established opposition parties have also faced similar threats from spoilers in the past. For example, Just Russia is frequently confronted by parties with similar elements in their title, such as the Party of Social Justice. Meanwhile, another opposition party Civic Platform is closely resembled by spoiler parties such as Civic Strength and Civic Position.

At the individual level, it is not uncommon to see candidates with identical surnames (and occasionally even similar first names) to be contesting a seat in the same

constituency, frequently in combination with similarly-sounding party labels. For example, in the recent elections to the Federal Duma (2016), the incumbent legislator from the opposition Party of Growth, Oksana Dmitriyeva, was confronted with another Civic Strength party candidate named Oksana Dmitriyeva, and an additional spoiler candidate in the form of Olesya Dmitriyeva from the Green Party. At the regional level, 2013 elections to the regional legislature in Ulyanovsk almost saw three candidates with the identical surname 'Biryukov' contesting a legislative seat in the same constituency. The candidate Ilya Biryukov from the established Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) was facing the prospect of taking on both Ivan Biryukov from the Communists of Russia and Viktor Biryukov from the Motherland party, until he was eventually denied registration by the electoral commission. Following his removal from the race, the other 'Biryukovs' coincidentally declared their decision to withdraw from the electoral contest of their own accord.

It is important to note that it is difficult to trace these instances of identical spoilers directly to the regime - for example, candidates from United Russia never engage in this practice. Similarly, many of the spoiler parties mentioned above are associated with the political technologist Andrey Bogdanov (and his Centre of Political Technologies), who has lost all official association with United Russia in 2004 (Kynev, Lyubarev, & Maksimov, 2014: p.60). Moreover, the presence of identically-named spoilers preceded the emergence and consolidation of the contemporary electoral authoritarian regime in Russia. Indeed, this tactic became most associated with the 1998 elections to the legislative assembly of Saint-Petersburg when, under the advice of a Moscow political technologist Aleksey Koshmarov, the governor's team put forward numerous candidates with identical names to challengers from the Yabloko party, who were affiliated with the ex vice-governor and therefore stood in direct opposition to the

regional executive at the time (Mulin, 2007). During these elections, Sergey Mironov (the future leader Just Russia party), for example, had to compete against two spoiler candidates with identical surnames to his own. The use of this spoiler strategy subsequently became widespread across Russia during the late 1990s and early 2000s, culminating with the shocking case of the Federal Duma elections 2003 which saw two candidates with the surname KPRF (the official abbreviation of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation) running for office in two separate constituencies of Ryazan' oblast', both having legally changed their original surnames shortly prior to the election (Rodionov, 2003).

The absence of an explicit affiliation between identical spoilers and the contemporary regime, however, does not mean that such a link does not exist. Despite its origins in the political culture of the 1990s, today, the use of identical spoiler tactics is very much associated with the authoritarian regime in Russia. The main reason for this is the fact that each candidate must first overcome the filter of candidate registration operated by the local electoral commissions that hold close ties to the regime, as discussed in Chapter 4 of the present thesis. Given the volume of obstacles relating to the process of registration presented to non-regime candidates, it is extraordinary that so many spoiler candidates, many of whom lack political experience and extensive logistical party support, are able to secure registration in Russia today. Moreover, although United Russia does not directly engage spoiler candidates amongst its ranks, as highlighted by the leader of KPRF, Gennadiy Zyuganov, in the aftermath of the 2016 Federal Duma elections, no spoilers engage with United Russia at a systematic level either - in the context of mass similarities between the names of many 'opposition' parties, no political parties resembling the name of United Russia (such as

United Russian Federation or, perhaps, United Rus') exist (Tkhagushev & Bragin, 2016).

The use of spoilers is a tactic that is therefore available almost exclusively to the authoritarian regime in Russia today, and thus merits further examination as a strategy from the authoritarian menu of manipulation. The next section presents the hypothesis driving this investigation of the use of spoiler (clone) candidates in the context of Russian regional legislative elections.

5.2 Hypothesis

The hypothesis underpinning the present chapter is based on three key assumptions about the use of spoilers as a strategy of electoral manipulation.

The first assumption is that, the use of spoilers belongs to the group of 'negative' strategies of manipulation, alongside electoral fraud and candidate exclusion, as discussed in the previous chapters. The primary aim of this strategy is to dilute the support for certain candidates by misleading the voters - candidate clones are a way of diverting votes away from genuine politicians, and thus serve to reduce their targets' chances of victory. As such, this strategy of manipulation is expected to be used against regime rivals, so as to diminish their electoral strength and increase the likelihood of regime victory in return.

The second assumption is that the use of identical spoilers carries considerable costs. First, the use of identical spoilers entails legitimacy costs because it amounts to visibly suspicious candidate behaviour. This tactic is visible because candidate names are

publicly available and feature prominently on the ballot paper, and, crucially, in reports of election results. Yet it seems irrational that candidates would choose to run for office in the same district as other, identically-named individuals, since doing so risks hindering their own chances of success - particularly, if the latter are well-known in the area and/or are affiliated with major parties. Thus, coincidentally-named candidates draw the attention of observers. Moreover, although the use of spoiler targets specific candidates, the ultimate target of such tactics is the electorate, who are being tricked into voting for the wrong individual. As such, voters might be more able to organise in protest to this form of manipulation - the feeling of being duped may serve as a powerful emotive driver for action, whilst the very visible nature of this tactic of manipulation may further encourage protesters because it reduces the burden of proof.

Second, spoiler candidates are costly in terms of resources. Individuals with identical names to genuine candidates must be compensated for their time and effort either financially, or in terms of patronage. In addition, the greater the regime's commitment to minimising the costs in legitimacy, the greater amount of resources must be invested into the electoral campaign of the spoiler candidate. In other words, if the regime wants to protect itself against accusations of manipulation after an election, it must invest some resources into making the spoiler candidate seem credible - at the very least through setting up a campaign fund and producing a number of election materials, even if these never get distributed to voters.

Thus, the costs of this strategy are considerable. Moreover, there is no guarantee that these costs will be worth the pay-off in terms of the reduction of electoral uncertainty. Ultimately, it is likely that only a minority of voters will be tricked into voting for the

‘wrong’ person, and it is difficult to predict whether this minority will be enough to sway the election in the regime’s favour.

The third assumption about this strategy of electoral manipulation, however, is that the costs discussed above are not entirely prohibitive. Crucially, even if spoiler candidates cause a post-electoral storm, the lack of any official affiliation with United Russia makes it difficult for protesters to prove the spoilers’ links to the regime. In addition, the fact that the spoiler-effect hinges on a candidate’s name means that the regime does not have to make spoiler campaigns match genuine campaigns in terms of resources - if anything, such spoilers are more effective the less is known about them, as the voters might be more likely to vote for them when they’re not expecting two candidates with the same name.

Taken together, the use of spoiler candidates is therefore assumed to be a strategy of moderate gains but high visibility. Whilst spoiler tactics can serve to divert votes away from specific candidates, the considerable costs associated with the use of this strategy mean that the regime cannot afford to use make this strategy a default. Crucially, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which almost all elections could contain an individual with an identical name to another candidate, as this would represent a very visible (and unusual) intervention in the democratic process, and therefore carry a considerable degree of risk for the regime. At the same time, the costs are not so high as to prevent the use of this strategy altogether - thus, it is likely that this tactic will be used, albeit sparingly.

In line with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, this thesis proposes that the use of identical-spoiler tactics will be restricted to contests in which the regime

senses its own electoral weakness - tough electoral contexts where even modest reductions in the electoral standing of regime opponents are worth the costs. Given this dissertation's treatment of urbanisation as a major indicator of electoral sentiments to the regime, with urban areas being seen as tougher electoral battlegrounds for the regime, this proposed argument will therefore be tested in terms of the following hypothesis:

H3: Spoiler candidates are more likely to be used in urban electoral districts

The next section of the chapter proceeds with the qualitative analysis of the instances of identical spoilers in our sample of regional legislative elections.

5.3 Analysis of the use of candidate spoilers in Russian regional legislative elections

5.3.1 Method and data

To confirm, for the purposes of the present study, the spoiler strategy, in the context of the authoritarian menu of manipulation, is understood as an attempt to split the opposition vote through the introduction and successful registration of individuals and parties which bear identical or extraordinarily similar names to other established candidates and/or parties.

In order to identify spoiler candidates, this chapter relies on the same dataset used in Chapter 4 (Candidate Exclusion). This dataset was constructed by the author and

consists of information on all candidates seeking to compete for office in our sample of regional legislative elections - including names, party affiliation, educational and occupational backgrounds, and previous political experience at the regional or local levels of government. This data was taken from the official candidate biographies published by the Russian Central Election Commission, and made available through the online database *GAS Vybory*. This data was used to identify the instances of identical spoilers. Further details on campaign spending of individual candidates were obtained from the archives made public on the official websites of the 18 regional electoral commissions in our sample. Additional information on the relative electoral standing of target and spoiler candidates was collected through national and regional newspapers and online media outlets, as well as election monitoring reports and political blogs.

Based on the definition above, an individual was identified as a spoiler candidate if they possessed an identical or virtually identical name to another established candidate in the same district race.³ In addition, only those 'spoiler' candidates who have been successful in securing registration were included in this measure, as this means that they have been effectively vetted and approved by the regime (which could always have used the complicated system of registration to arbitrarily remove such individuals from the race, as discussed in the candidate exclusion section above). It is important to emphasise the spoiler's registration status and his target's status as a member of the opposition, as these elements ensure that the recorded instance of spoiler behaviour is linked with the authoritarian regime rather than other political actors (as may have been the case during the late 1990s and early 2000s).

³ Thus, individuals with identical surnames to candidates in other districts but the same region were not included in this measure, since they were not competing directly with each other.

Overall, out of 390 districts in the sample used for the present study, 26 elections (across 14 out of 18 regions sampled) saw at least one spoiler candidate with an identical name or a name that was so close to that of another established candidate that it might cause confusion for the voters. Of these, four spoilers targeted United Russia candidates, however, none of them made it onto the ballot, thus proving the effectiveness of the electoral commission as a filter for threats to the regime. 22 attempts to target opposition candidates with spoilers were therefore seen in 20 districts across 11 out of the 18 regions sampled, however, five of these spoiler candidates were not able to pass through the filter of registration. Thus, there are 17 identical spoilers in our sample, which come from 16 separate electoral districts across 10 out of the 18 regions sampled. These spoilers were able to successfully register as candidates without impediment and targeted established members of the opposition.

The next sub-section reviews these instances in more detail, in order to confirm the spoiler status of the candidates identified.

5.3.2 Overview of selected cases

To confirm the consistent application of the terms ‘identical’ and ‘extraordinarily similar’, Table 5.1 presents the names of the identical spoilers and compares this with those of their targets. In all of these cases, voters therefore had to be absolutely certain of many additional details about their preferred candidate if they wished to make an accurate choice. The details necessary to distinguish between candidates would include the candidates’ first names, party label, and, potentially, even the candidates’ occupational background.

Table 5.1. Identical spoilers (individuals) in majoritarian districts

	Region, District, Year	Name of Target (Party)	Name of Spoiler (Party)
1	Magadan, 6, 2010	Igor' Novikov (Just Russia)	Sergey Novikov (Independent)
2	Tver', 19, 2011	Vladimir Ulyanov (Just Russia)	Vadim Ulyanov (Independent)
3	Sverdlovsk, 22, 2011	Marina Sokolova (Independent)	Marina Sokolova (Independent)
4	Leningradskaya, 5, 2011	Yelena Yakovleva (Independent)	Yelena Yakovleva (Independent)
5	Krasnodar, 3, 2012	Gennadiy Grigorov (KPRF)	Anton Grigorov (Communists of Russia)
6	Krasnodar, 4, 2012	Ivan Chuyev (KPRF)	Vladimir Chuyev (KPSS)
7	Krasnodar, 24, 2012	Aleksandr Baturinets (Yabloko)	Yuriy Baturinets (Right Cause)
8	Krasnodar, 38, 2012	Ivan Mel'nikov (KPRF)	Nikolay Mel'nikov (KPSS)
9	Krasnodar, 41, 2012	Georgiy Sukach (KPRF)	Petr Sukach (KPSS)
10	Vladimir, 4, 2013	Aleksey Firsov (Yabloko)	Semyon Firsov (Independent)
11	Vladimir, 13, 2013	Mikhail Krasnov (Just Russia)	Vladimir Krasnov (Communists of Russia)
12	Ulyanovsk, 3, 2013	Viktor Chekushkin (KPRF)	Aleksey Chekushkin (Communists of Russia)
13	Ulyanovsk, 6, 2013	Andrey Ivanov (KPRF)	Vladimir Ivanov (Communists of Russia)
14	Ulyanovsk, 12, 2013	Ilya Biryukov (KPRF)	Ivan Biryukov (Communists of Russia)
15	Ulyanovsk, 12, 2013	Ilya Biryukov (KPRF)	Viktor Biryukov (Motherland)
16	Ulyanovsk, 16, 2013	Roman Loginov (KPRF)	Aleksandr Loginov (Motherland)
17	Rostov, 16, 2013	Gennadiy Bulatov (LDPR)	Vyacheslav Bulatov (Party of Spiritual Transfiguration)

This confusion would have been particularly severe for voters in districts number 22 in Sverdlovsk oblast' (2011) and number 5 in Leningradskaya oblast' (2011), where both the first and the second names of the spoiler and target candidates were identical, and where both candidates had no party affiliation (Independent). In these cases, voters

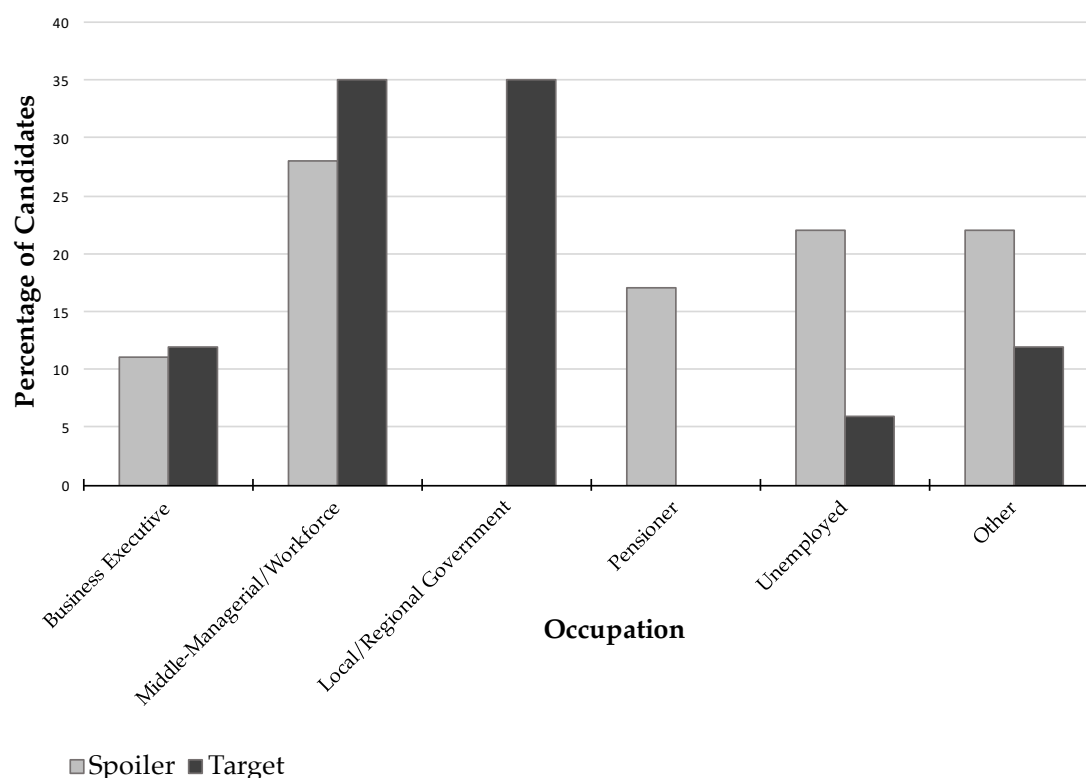
might have had to rely on knowing the patronymic names of their preferred candidates, or other details, such as their occupational background. Although this information is provided on the ballot paper and usually displayed on boards located at the entrance to the polling station, it is nevertheless plausible that many voters were casting their ballots under an extremely high level of risk of error. This state of affairs may have been further exacerbated by the practice of manipulating the order of names on the ballot paper so as to maximise the level of confusion for the voters (Kynev, Lyubarev & Maksimov, 2014: pp.127-128).

Further confirmation of the 'spoiler' status of the candidates listed in Table 5.1 can be found in the official reports on their occupational background, political experience and, in some cases, campaign spending. Figure 5.1 illustrates the occupational backgrounds of the 17 spoiler candidates and 16⁴ target candidates listed above.

Overall, those belonging to the target category tend to be more likely to be politically experienced and employed in a position of responsibility than those in the spoiler category. As can be seen from this graph, a significant proportion of individuals classed as target candidates were employed at either the local or regional levels of government (this category includes those elected to office, as well as their aides) - by contrast, not a single individual from the spoiler category possessed political experience of this kind. Furthermore, seven of those classed as spoiler candidates declared themselves as being either unemployed or retired at the time of registration - by contrast, just one target candidate stated that he was unemployed.

⁴ The number of target candidates is lower than the number of spoilers because the KPRF target candidate in Ulyanovsk district 12 (Ilya Biryukov) had to compete against two individuals with the identical surname to him. See Table 5.1

Figure 5.1. Occupational backgrounds of spoiler and target candidates (individuals) in majoritarian districts



A similarly stark contrast in the profiles of target and spoiler candidates emerges if we examine the reported levels of campaign spending. Unfortunately, this data was only available for 12 out of the 17 spoiler candidates in our sample, however, it is nevertheless insightful. The average amount of money reported as having been spent during the elections by spoiler candidates is 2,036 roubles - indeed, nine out of the 12 candidates about whom we possess information, reported as having spent zero amount of money during their campaign. This figure is remarkably low when compared to the average spending amongst the 11 target candidates in the same regions for whom this data is available - this stands at 39,984 roubles on average.

Given the previously discussed challenges surrounding the process of candidate registration at this level of elections in Russia, it is striking that the vast majority of the

unusually named candidates with no political experience and low levels of financial resources were able to overcome such obstacles. Meanwhile, three out of the 16 genuine and serious candidates targeted by the individuals listed in Table 5.1 were eventually denied registration by the electoral commission - two of these candidates had political experience in the form of occupying seats in local legislatures at the time of application for candidacy.

Overall, the 17 successfully-registered identical spoiler candidates listed in Table 5.1 represent approximately 81 percent of the total pool of identical spoiler candidates who sought to target members of the opposition (including those who did not necessarily succeed at the registration stage). If we take a closer look at Krasnodar Krai, it becomes apparent that this represents an unusually high success rate in terms of candidate registration. In this region, 100 percent of spoiler candidates targeting the opposition were successful in securing registration at election time. By contrast, 92 percent (47 out of 51) of (non-spoiler) candidates seeking election under an independent label were *rejected* at registration time during the very same elections (Kynev, Lyubarev & Maksimov, 2014). Such sharp contrasts further highlight the role of the electoral commissions in enabling the regime's use of spoiler strategies and therefore confirm authoritarian involvement in the decision to utilise this strategy of manipulation.

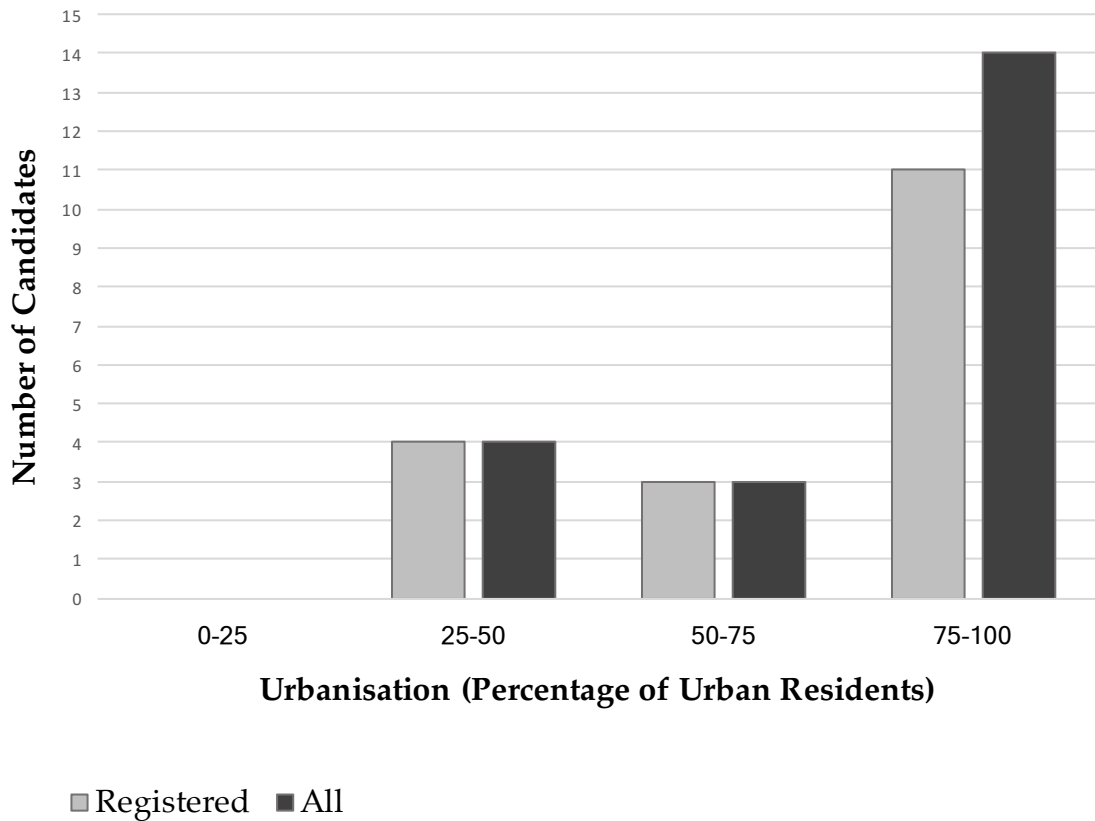
Overall, the above summary has shown that identical spoiler tactics at the individual level are still very much in use at the regional legislative level of elections in Russia, although limited in frequency. The next section proceed with an examination of the electoral contexts within which spoiler candidates emerge in our sample of regional legislative elections.

5.3.3 Initial impressions: spoiler behaviour and urbanisation

The discussion above has confirmed the spoiler intent of identical candidates identified in our sample and further highlighted regime involvement in allowing these individuals to run for office. I now turn my attention to exploring the extent to which the level of urbanisation within a given electoral district is responsible for affecting the authoritarian elites' decision to introduce a spoiler candidate to a contest.

Figure 5.2 illustrates the distribution of spoiler candidates according to the level of urbanisation in their electoral district. As can be seen from the final columns on this graph, most of the registered spoiler candidates ran for election in predominantly urban areas. Of these, eleven registered spoiler candidates appeared in districts where more than three quarters of the residents were urban. Just four registered spoilers appeared in districts with predominantly rural populations (where urban residents constituted less than 50 percent of residents). It is noteworthy that no spoilers were used in districts where almost all citizens were rural residents (where urban residents constituted 25 percent of the population or less). In fact, the population of the most rural district in this sample (district number 6, Ulyanovsk, 2013) still consisted of 36 percent of urban residents. Each instance of spoiler behaviour thus occurred in a district where at least a third of the population was classified as urban.

Figure 5.2. The distribution of spoiler candidates targeting members of the opposition according to district level of *Urbanisation*



Overall, this general pattern supports the hypothesis *H3* driving this investigation, as the number of spoiler candidates is at its highest amongst the most urban districts in our sample. However, further investigation is required in order to confirm that these patterns are not simply reflecting the preponderance of urban districts in our sample.

Thus, in the next sub-sections, I analyse in greater detail the rural and urban instances of identical spoilers. Specifically, the aim is to trace and compare the level of electoral uncertainty experienced by the regime in these contests. Given this dissertation's central argument that uncertainty over the prospects of victory is the key driver of the regime's decision to engage in electoral manipulation, I would expect to

find that the rural cases in our sample were characterised by high levels of electoral uncertainty and therefore represent exceptions rather than the norm.

In order to trace the level of electoral uncertainty, this chapter will focus on three major dimensions that might affect the balance of power within the electoral arena: the regime; the opposition; and the constituency. As the use of spoilers is a candidate-oriented strategy, in order to assess the first two dimensions, I will focus on tracing the strength of individual regime candidates relative to that of the candidates targeted by the spoilers. For the third dimension, I will examine the changes in boundaries and, subsequently, levels of urbanisation of, as well as any pivotal political developments specific to the individual districts.

5.3.4 The use of spoilers in predominantly rural districts

I first turn to examine the four cases which represent the minority in our sample and run contrary to the expectations of *H3*: districts where the majority of the population are classed as rural residents but which witnessed the use of spoiler tactics.⁵ These districts were: number 38 in Krasnodar Krai 2012; numbers 3 and 6 in Ulyanovsk oblast' in 2013; and number 16 in Rostov oblast' in 2013. As discussed above, the discussion in this sub-section is divided into three sections: analysis of regime candidates; target candidates; and the wider district electoral context

⁵ These districts are those, where less than 50 percent of the residents are classed as urban residents

Regime candidates

Regime candidates are understood to be those individuals who are officially affiliated with the United Russia political party. Overall, the profiles of these candidates were modest by regime standards and, as will become clear later in this chapter, are considerably less impressive than their counterparts in the urban districts in our sample of spoiler cases.

Consider the following quote⁶ from a senior, long-serving regional politician and key figure in the United Russia party within one of the regions in our sample, as an indicator of the type of candidates about whom the regime feels most confident:

'A few years ago, I didn't even have enough money to pay for printer paper [yet, I still] won because people knew me... A person (as for example, those who we are currently selecting for elections) must be 'clean', easily recognisable, well-known, having achieved something in his life... For example, he [is] the director of an enterprise, not [somebody with influential parents]; he pays wages, cares about people, provides social support to veterans and the disabled - a socially-responsible individual. They may say good things about him in another city...'

Candidate biographies can be used to gain insights into whether individuals matched this description at the time of election.

First, consider the level of political experience possessed by the regime candidates in the rural districts in our sample. Given the salience of incumbency as an electoral resource in the Russian context - overall, 93% of the regime incumbents running in

⁶ Anonymous, 16.07.2012. Penza.

majoritarian districts were re-elected in our full sample of 390 districts - we would expect that the regime possesses greater certainty over electoral victory when its candidates are incumbents. Moreover, previous political experience at either the regional or local levels of government would indicate that the candidate is 'well-known' and 'socially-responsible'. Yet, in two out of these four predominantly rural districts - district 16 in Rostov and district 3 in Ulyanovsk oblast' - United Russia candidates were newcomers with no previous political experience at either the regional or local levels of government. Thus, in half of the rural districts in this sample, the regime was approaching the election with as-yet untested individuals.

Amongst the two districts with incumbents - district 6 in Ulyanovsk oblast' and district 38 in Krasnodar Krai - the additional political experience did not necessarily reduce the level of uncertainty for the regime, either. First, in district 6 of Ulyanovsk oblast', the incumbent legislator had only occupied his seat for two years prior to the election, having first won the seat during a by-election. Thus, the extent to which this candidate was able to amass a strong record of public service is debatable.

Second, in Krasnodar Krai, the incumbent legislator, Vladimir Verstunin, was widely unpopular with local rural residents, who have actively vocalised their opposition to his candidacy in advance of the regional elections. For example, the following lines are quoted from the message sent by residents of the rural settlement Vityazevo in Krasnodar Krai to the regional legislative assembly at the time:

'We... have been outraged by the actions of [the regional legislator] Verstunin over the ten years he has been serving in the regional assembly. We... have seen nothing good from [him],

*aside from empty promises... He uses his mandate only for his selfish aims and for his enterprise 'OOO Merkurii'.*⁷

The message goes on to accuse the incumbent legislator of land-grabbing and the failure to fix the problem of sewage leaking into local waters (caused by the poor planning and construction carried out by his own enterprise in the area). Local media reports also alleged that the incumbent candidate had forced United Russia to accept his bid for re-election, under threat that he would seek to contest the seat under the banner of Just Russia, if refused United Russia candidacy (Natsional'niye Interesy, 2017). Interestingly, in the next round of regional legislative elections in 2017, Verstunin had lost his United Russia candidacy during the party's primaries - an outcome accompanied by aggression (such as tyre-slashing and the throwing of green dye over election officials) by cossacks allegedly mobilised by Verstunin (Golos Kubani, 2017). Therefore, there is considerable reason to conclude that the level of uncertainty over regime outcomes was considerable for the regime in this district in 2012, despite the fact that the United Russia candidate was an incumbent.

Beyond incumbency, occupational backgrounds can serve as a further indicator of candidate qualities, resources and social standing. Although all four candidates came from business executive backgrounds, thus matching the preference expressed by the interviewee, the characteristics of the companies headed by these individuals were fairly modest by regime standards. Two of the rural-area regime candidates worked as the executives of medium-sized companies in the construction sector, and another served as the executive of a medium-sized agricultural business. Moreover, in one of these districts (district 16 in Rostov oblast'), the company directed by the United Russia

⁷ As cited in Yug Times, 2017; Golos Kubani, 2017; and Natsional'niye Interesy, 2017.

candidate was, in fact, situated in the region's capital city (Rostov-on-Don), rather than the rural district contested by the regime candidate. The social link between these candidates and the electorate in their chosen districts is therefore modest, at best, if measured through occupation - in Rostov, this link appears to be especially weak.

The only exception in this sense was in district number 6 in Ulyanovsk oblast', where the regime candidate was the executive of Gazprom in Ulyanovsk oblast', which is undoubtedly a position of considerable reputation, influence and financial resources.

Overall, there are reasonable grounds to argue that the regime candidates in the rural districts in our sample did not fill the regime with confidence at election time. Out of the four areas, district 6 in Ulyanovsk oblast' appears to have been the most favourable for the regime in this respect, yet, as will become clear later in this chapter, further issues complicated the prospects of victory for the regime in this area.

Target candidates

Next, we can compare the quality of the candidates who were targeted by spoiler tactics in these districts. In all four rural districts, the targets of spoiler tactics were candidates with some previous political experience or a strong link to politics. For example, in district 38 of Krasnodar, the target was an incumbent regional deputy; in Ulyanovsk district 3, the target was an aide to a regional legislator; in Ulyanovsk district 6, the target candidate was an experienced opposition activist who had already established recognition in the area after running as a candidate in a by-election just two years earlier; and in Rostov district 16, the target candidate was the executive of a local municipality. This pattern of political experience shows that in three of these districts,

the target candidates were in fact *more* politically experienced than United Russia deputies and stood to benefit from the advantages associated with incumbency at the time of election.

The factor of incumbency accounts for the occupational backgrounds of these individuals - three of these four individuals were employed at the regional or local levels of government on a full-time basis. The exception was once again district 6 in Ulyanovsk, where the target candidate's full-time occupation was in a middle-managerial position at the large 'Ulyanovsk Mechanical Plant No. 2'.

It thus follows that in these four rural districts, the regime was faced with considerable opposition candidates, who met the regime's own criteria of 'well-known' and 'socially-responsible' individuals better than most of the United Russia candidates in these areas. Thus, it could be argued that the resources and experience of target candidates outweighed those of regime candidates, which, in turn, increase the level of uncertainty around electoral outcomes for the regime in the rural districts in our sample.

Constituency context

Overall, an examination of recent changes to the boundaries and recent political developments within each of these rural constituencies points to further sources of uncertainty for the regime in these areas.

First, the constituency design of the regional assemblies linked to three of the four rural districts had experienced considerable transformation since the previous elections

to this level of government - district 38 in Krasnodar Krai, district 16 in Rostov and district 3 in Ulyanovsk oblast'. More specifically, in advance of these elections, the regional legislatures related to these districts experienced a reform of constituency boundaries after national-level legislation introduced minimum requirements for the size of regional legislative constituencies, as determined by the size of the regional population. In other words, regional legislative assemblies in these instances have all had to increase the number of constituencies and redraw the boundaries prior to the elections in our sample. As a result, three of the four rural districts in our sample represented entirely new constituencies with fresh combinations of the regional population, which suggests that a degree of uncertainty surrounded elections in these areas.

Moreover, the socio-economic context within two of these districts actually saw an increase in the level of urbanisation when compared to the way in which the area was divided in the previous round of regional legislative elections. Thus, district 38 in Krasnodar Krai saw the unification of Anapa city, which had been previously split up across two electoral districts and combined with other more rural areas of the region. Although only 40 percent of the residents in this new district are classed as urban, overall, the district, for the first time, represented the entire Anapa city and no additional rural areas beyond it. The rural status of this city thus largely stems from from its unusual characteristics as a tourist resort with a warm climate, seaside location, fertile lands and private properties, instead of the industrial and dense population typically associated with urban centres. In this instance, it is therefore possible that the official characterisation of the city by the Russian Federal Statistical Service actually masks the otherwise urban character of the area because it cannot take into account the nuances of a tourist city.

The second district which experienced a relative increase in its level of urbanisation was district number 16 in Rostov. As a result of the need to increase the number of legislative mandates, a major territory characterised primarily by rural residents was taken away from this district to create a new constituency - this subsequently boosted the overall proportion of urban residents within this area, even though rural residents continued to represent the majority.

Thus, in half of the rural districts in our sample, the levels of urbanisation had actually increased since the previous round of regional legislative elections. This finding therefore offers further support to hypothesis *H3*.

The only district which did not change in its composition when compared to previous elections, was district number 6 in Ulyanovsk, which continues to stand out within this group of primarily rural constituencies. Further investigation into the history of regional legislative elections in this area, however, point to an interesting set of circumstances which may help to explain the peculiar pattern demonstrated by this district. More specifically, this case in many ways represents an unusual example because it was characterised by a political scandal not long before the regional legislative elections in 2013.

Previously, a United Russia regional deputy, who won this seat during an earlier round of elections in 2008, was forced to leave office due to major misconduct. Following an investigation, this original regime legislator, who also held an executive post at a major regional-level medical centre in addition to his duties as a regional deputy, was found to have artificially enhanced the cost of new hospital equipment by almost twice its actual cost (thus taking an extra 32.5 million roubles from the regional

budget), in addition to earning more than 2.5 million roubles as a result of illegally charging patients for his services. The incumbent deputy was subsequently found guilty of fraud, receiving a fine of 100,000 roubles a three-year suspended sentence in 2011. Naturally, this scandal resulted in his removal from public office and a by-election in 2011, just two years before the next full round of regional legislative elections in 2013. The Communist Party candidate Andrey Ivanov, campaigning on an anti-corruption platform, used this by-election as an opportunity to increase his own reputation in the district, and made considerable electoral progress, securing almost 20 percent of the vote. This candidate was subsequently the target of spoiler tactics in the following round of regional legislative elections in 2013. The scandal delivered a major blow to the reputation of the regime in this predominantly rural area and helps to explain why the candidate (who was first elected in the by-election of 2011 and subsequently ran for re-election in 2013) put forward by the regime was a particularly 'heavyweight' contender, as discussed above, and may further explain the decision to engage in spoiler behaviour as an additional way of swaying the balance of strength in regime's favour.

Summary

Overall, the rural districts in this sample stand out for their relatively high level of uncertainty over regime electoral victory prior to election day. Regime opponents, as targets of spoilers, in all four cases commanded considerable reputational resources and political experience. By contrast, regime candidates were either newcomers or incumbents running in districts with high levels of voter antipathy, where United Russia politicians showed a poor record of commitment once in office. Moreover, the constituency boundaries had been redrawn for most of these districts, with half of the

districts experiencing increased levels of urbanisation, as a result. Taken together, these three dimensions mean that the regime had plenty of reasons to be nervous about its electoral performance even though the districts were largely rural in nature, overall. The rural cases in our sample stand out as instances of high electoral uncertainty for the regime, and are therefore in line with the central argument of this dissertation.

5.3.5 The use of spoilers in predominantly urban districts

The next section adopts the same approach as above to analyse the thirteen urban areas in our sample.

Regime Candidates

Overall, the regime candidates in the urban districts in our sample appear to possess an abundance of impressive professional qualities and electoral resources.

First, a significant share of these individuals were in possession of incumbency-related resources at the time of election. In six districts, the regime candidate was an incumbent seeking re-election, and in three other districts, the regime candidate was an incumbent at a local level of government seeking to move up to the regional level. In other words, in more than two thirds (69 percent) of these districts the regime candidate already occupied elected office at either the sub-national or the local levels of government in the region. Given the salience of incumbency as an electoral resource in the Russian context, as discussed earlier, it can be argued that most of the regime candidates in urban districts stood to enjoy considerable direct advantage stemming from the strong administrative, logistical and reputational resources associated with

incumbency. It is therefore somewhat surprising that spoiler tactics were deemed necessary to boost their chances.

Figure 5.3 illustrates the proportions of various occupational backgrounds of the thirteen regime candidates in predominantly urban districts. As can be seen from this graph, the occupations of the regime candidates in urban districts can be summarised in terms of just four categories: business executives; education professionals; regional government employees; and those involved in local government. The majority of United Russia candidates (over 60 percent) held executive positions in large business companies. These included figures such as the executive of 'Magadanenergo', which is responsible for supplying electricity to the residents of Magadan oblast'; the executive of 'Nelidovskiy DOK' in Tver oblast', one of the biggest timber processing plants amongst the regions located in the Central Okrug⁸ of the Russian Federation; the executive of 'Rosnefteservis', which manages the maintenance of oil wells; and the executive of 'ZiO-Met', a large company specialising in the manufacture of metal in Vladimir oblast'. All of the companies headed by the regime candidates were large in size and thus constituted key players in the regional (if not the national) economies. Amongst other occupational categories, one candidate held an executive position in the education sector as the rector of one of the biggest national academic institutions in its field, Kuban State Agrarian University, in Krasnodar Krai. The remaining candidates were employed in the sphere of local and regional government - two individuals served as full-time regional legislators, one candidate held a deputy ministerial position at the regional level, and another served as the head of a local municipality.

⁸ The Central Okrug is one of seven federal groups of regions, known as federal okrugs, in the Russian Federation and consists of ten regions, including Moscow city.

Overall, this information reveals that the regime has put forward a strong set of candidates with huge professional and political reputations in these urban districts. All regime candidates in urban districts are regional-level leaders, who, in many cases, combined influential posts in major regional organisations alongside elected office at sub-national and local levels of government (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.3. Occupational backgrounds of regime candidates in thirteen urban electoral districts

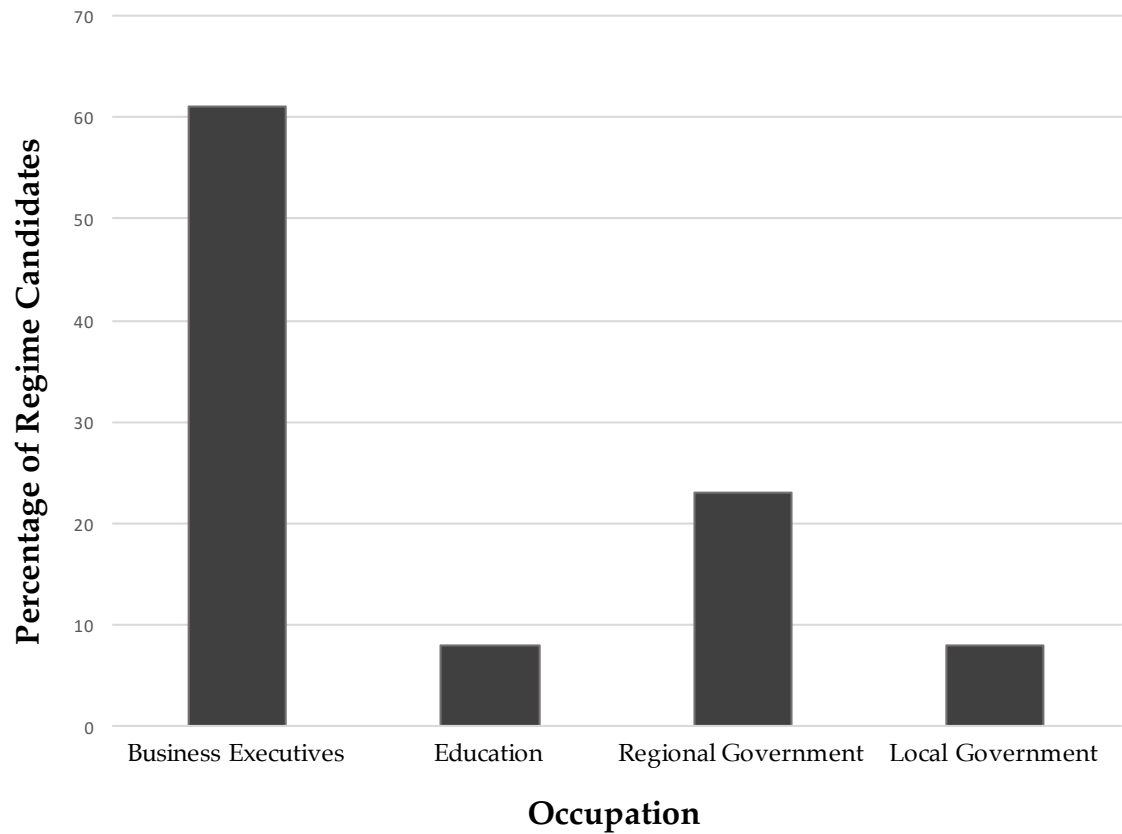
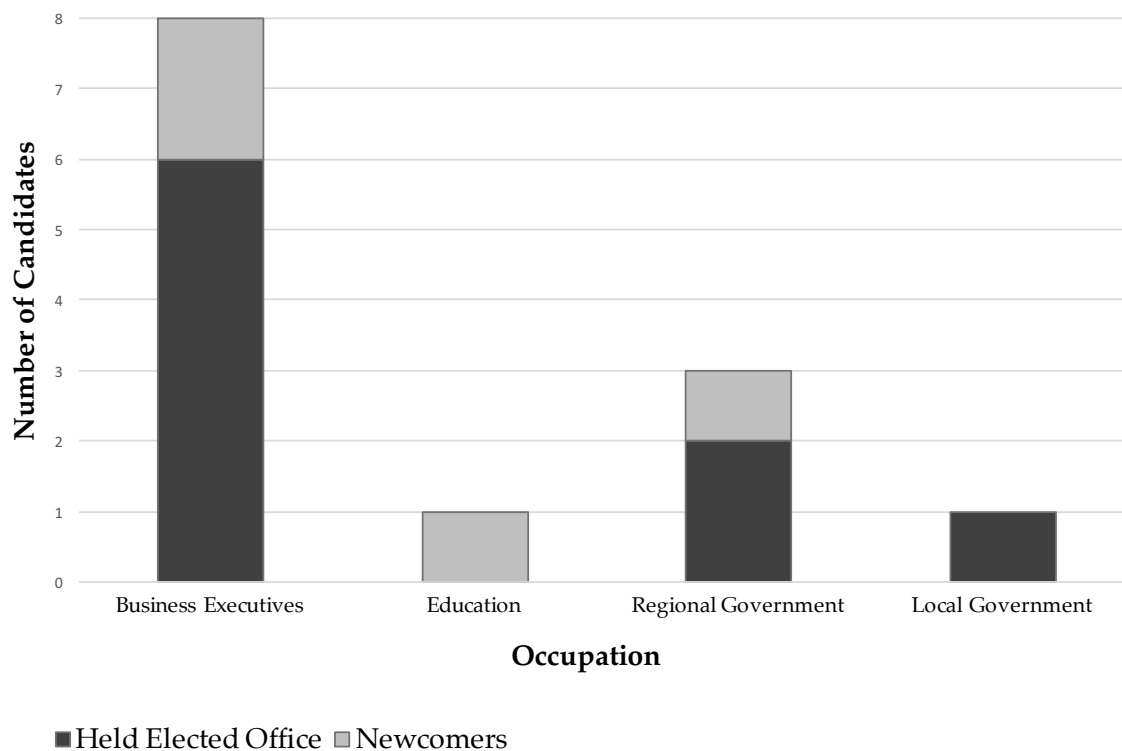


Figure 5.4. Frequency of incumbency across occupational backgrounds of regime candidates in thirteen urban electoral districts



Although there exists no consistent data on election spending for all of the districts examined above, in the five districts for which the data is available, it is interesting to note that the average spend of United Russia candidates (from their personal fund, not including potential additional support they may have received from the party) was 676,451 roubles. This is a huge sum of money if we bear in mind that the average annual wage in Russia in the period between 2010 and 2013 was 251,424-359,280 roubles. This figure is further indication of the relatively vast financial power of regime players in these urban district.

Thus, it seems that, in contrast to that for the rural districts in our sample, in terms of the dimension of regime candidates, there do not appear to emerge strong grounds to argue that these districts represented high levels of uncertainty for the regime. The

sections below proceed to examine whether additional sources of uncertainty could be found amongst opposition candidates and the broader constituency context.

Target candidates

In terms of incumbency, six out of 13 candidates (or 46 percent), were occupying elected office at either regional or local levels of government at the time of election. Of these individuals, two candidates were existing regional legislators and four had been elected to local government. It thus follows that although a large proportion of the target candidates in rural districts had the advantage of incumbency, overall, the majority of these individuals (54 percent) possessed no political experience or incumbency resources at the time of seeking election. In addition to this, the majority of those in elected positions previously won their seat through the proportional party list race, rather than as a result of direct victory in the majoritarian district, which suggests that their *personal* electoral standing was nevertheless weaker than that of the United Russia incumbents, who had all won their previous seats in majoritarian races.

Figures 5.5 and 5.6 illustrate the professional backgrounds of target candidates. The occupations of these candidates were more varied, whilst at the same time, significantly more modest than those of their United Russia counterparts. Only two candidates came from business executive backgrounds and they headed lesser known local small and medium-sized companies. The biggest occupational group (almost a quarter of target candidates) consisted of middle-level managers in regional companies. Candidates employed in the education sector similarly occupied much less influential positions compared to the regime candidates - for example, the head of the economics faculty at a small local campus of the Maykop State Technological

University in Krasnodar, and the director of the further education institution, Ulyanovsk Electromechanical College.

In addition, official reports on campaign spending for the five districts where this information was available, the average spend by target candidates was 67,460 roubles. This figure represents approximately a tenth of that spent by the regime candidates in the same districts and puts the disparity between the resources of the two sets of candidates into further contrast.

Figure 5.5. Occupational backgrounds of target candidates in thirteen urban electoral districts

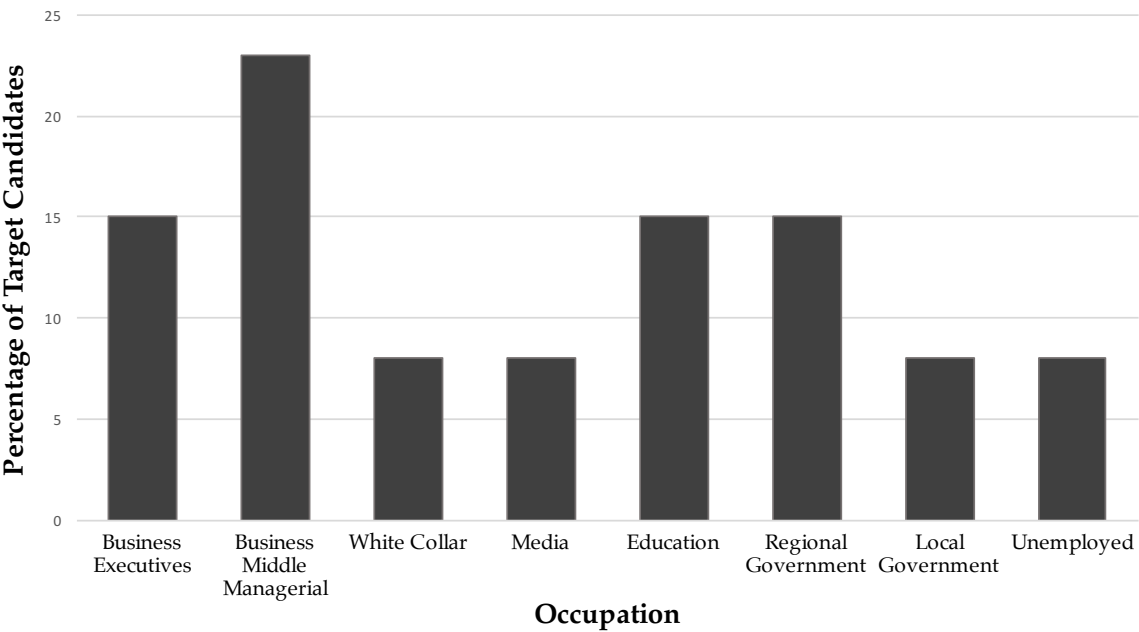
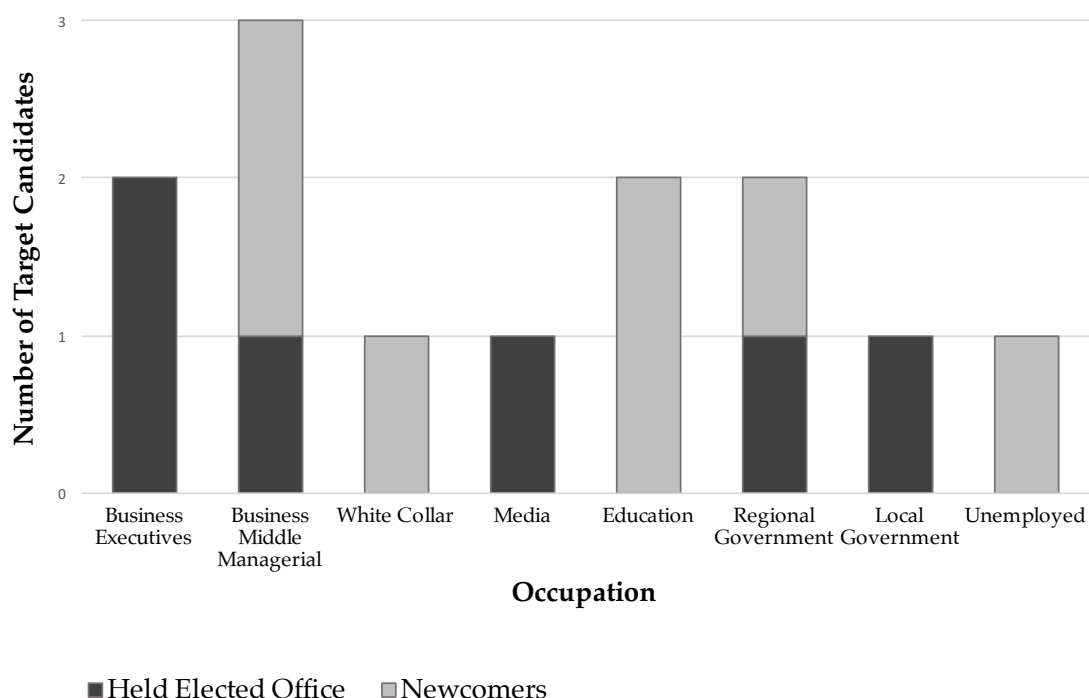


Figure 5.6. Incumbency across occupational backgrounds of target candidates in thirteen urban electoral districts



Overall, based on the information above, it appears that the targets of spoilers in urban districts did represent serious contenders for office at the time of election, however, their qualifications and resources were dwarfed by those of regime candidates. The levels of uncertainty stemming from this dimension were, therefore, once again considerably lower than that relating to the rural cases discussed earlier in this chapter.

Constituency Context

Overall, none of the urban districts in our sample were characterised by recent political scandals or high levels of citizen complaints against individual incumbent legislators. Information on previous electoral performance of the regime, as well as the final outcomes of the election contested during the year in question, reveals that the

urban districts represented a moderate level of challenge to the regime: the regime had a persistent record of victory in these areas, however the winning percentages were far short of the staggering heights enjoyed by many other areas across the country. It is interesting to note that, despite the relative strength of regime candidates in these districts, as discussed above, the average percentage of the vote secured by United Russia candidates in these districts was nevertheless just 44.6 percent, which is just short of a majority of the votes. Indeed in four of these urban districts, United Russia candidates failed to secure 50 percent of the vote, and they barely made it over the 50 percent threshold in three other urban districts.

Summary

It thus follows that in the urban districts in our sample, neither the regime candidates, nor the target candidates or the wider constituency context, generated considerable levels of uncertainty for the regime, particularly when compared to the trends identified amongst the rural districts, earlier. Below, more detailed descriptions of two urban districts summarise the typical patterns exhibited by the urban districts in our sample.

First, district number 19 in Tver' oblast' regional legislative elections in 2011 typifies the pattern of low uncertainty, with respect to the three dimensions discussed earlier. Overall, this district was predominantly urban, surrounding the town of Nelidovo, where 71 percent of the residents characterised as urban. United Russia was in a position of relative strength in terms of electoral resources and candidate quality in this district. The regime candidate, Ruslan Lebedev, was the executive of Nelidovskiy DOK

(the major timber processing plant mentioned earlier) and a serving deputy in the regional legislative assembly.

Meanwhile, a candidate from Just Russia, Vladimir Ulyanov, as well as his spoiler, an independent candidate named Vadim Ulyanov, were also contesting the seat in this district. As can be seen, not only did both candidates possess identical surnames, but they also carried very similar first names. The Just Russia candidate held a middle managerial position at a medium-sized business and no political experience at either the regional or local levels of government. The official record about the independent candidate Vadim Ulyanov states that he was unemployed, possessed no previous political experience at the time of election and declared a campaign fund to the total of 1,000 roubles. This information suggests that the independent candidate was therefore acting as a spoiler targeting the Just Russia candidate, who had serious intention of running for office. According to official reports, United Russia's candidate spent 200,500 roubles, which was around 12 times larger than that spent by the Just Russia target, who spent 16,000 roubles. The electoral results saw the target of the spoiler receiving 13 percent of the vote, and the spoiler candidate securing 3 percent. United Russia candidate won 53 percent, thus only just making it over the symbolic threshold for majority support.

The second example comes from district number 3 in Krasnodar krai regional legislative elections in 2012. The district represented a section of the regional capital, Krasnodar City, a large city located close to the tourist resorts by the Black Sea in the southern part of the Russian Federation, with a total population of over 800,000. Over 90 percent of the district residents were considered urban.

There, the regime candidate was the rector of Kuban State Agrarian University, whose campuses and halls of residence are situated in the district under question. Also running in the district was the Communist Party candidate Gennadiy Grigorov and another candidate with an identical surname, Anton Grigorov. The latter was also a member of the Communists of Russia party, which added an additional layer of confusion for the voters and therefore increased the spoiler effect. The target of the spoiler tactics worked in a middle managerial position at a local medium-sized construction company, whilst his spoiler challenger had direct links to the administration through his middle managerial position at the regional branch of the Federal Cadastral Chamber (state agency tasked with housing and land management). The difference in the size of campaign funds for these three candidates was staggering: according to official reports, United Russia candidate spent 1,685,000 roubles; Communist Party candidate spent 90,000 roubles; and the spoiler Communists of Russia candidate spent 0 roubles. In addition to this, the district saw five other candidates make it onto the ballot on election day, and two other candidates were refused registration prior to the election. United Russia's Trubilin went on to secure victory at the polls, with 69 percent of the vote, whilst the Communist Party candidate gained 8 percent and his spoiler received 2 percent.

Despite some differences, the above cases tell the same story. Overall, in both instances, United Russia was fighting elections in challenging districts but nevertheless was entering the contest from a position of relative strength. In Tver', the incumbency, business executive position in a major company and the financial capacity of the regime candidate combined to a set of resources that far outweighed those of his rivals, and crucially, the target of the spoiler. In Krasnodar, the occupational background of United Russia candidate afforded him considerable influence over many residents in

the district (students), provided him with a strong platform for campaigning and reputation, and generous financial resources, which, again, outweighed those of his rivals and the target of the spoiler. Moreover, in Krasnodar, the regime candidate also stood to benefit from the use of another strategy - candidate exclusion - and potential for mobilisation through his influence at the University.

5.4 Chapter summary

Overall, further investigation into the two groups of urban and rural districts experiencing spoiler behaviour in our sample has revealed some interesting trends.

First, urban districts with spoilers far outweigh the number of rural districts in our sample. Not only did most of the spoiler activity take place in districts where more than two-thirds of the population were classed as urban residents, no spoiler behaviour was found amongst the other end of the urbanisation spectrum (districts where more than two-thirds of the population were classed as rural residents). In addition to this, even amongst the four districts with a majority rural population, two cases actually entailed an *increase* in the of urbanisation when compared to the previous round of elections in that area. These patterns are in line with the expectations of the hypothesis *H3* and suggest that urbanisation is, indeed, one factor which affects the calculations of regime elites when it comes to the use of manipulation strategies.

The detailed examination of the key players and constituency characteristics revealed some further interesting similarities within groups, as well as some differences between the urban and rural districts. Specifically, the set of candidates and constituency context within rural districts appears to have carried a greater deal of

uncertainty for the regime than that in urban districts. Many of the districts were largely newly-reformed constituencies which experienced as yet untested combinations of voters and newcomer regime candidates, alongside experienced opponents. Those rural districts which did not follow this trend (such as district 6 in Ulyanovsk and district 38 in Krasnodar) were nevertheless tough battlegrounds for the regime due to a recent history of political scandals and voter disillusionment.

By contrast, the urban districts in our sample saw a more varied combination of regime and opposition candidates, alongside relatively more stable constituency contexts. Overall, the regime candidates in urban areas represented a much more dependable set of individuals, whose resources vastly outweighed those of their rivals. As such, the level of electoral uncertainty stemming from these three dimensions was fairly low amongst the urban districts in our sample.

Combined, these findings offer support to the central arguments driving this dissertation. The preponderance of urban districts amongst this set of cases of spoiler behaviour supports the hypothesis that urbanisation increases the likelihood that a strategy of manipulation will be used. Moreover, the fact that only relatively *low* levels of uncertainty could be traced along the three dimensions relating to candidate and constituency contexts amongst the *urban* districts in our sample further supports the argument that urbanisation *itself* is used as a key indicator of uncertainty for the regime. In other words, the results show that it is not enough for the regime to possess a strong candidate in the face of weak opposition and a relatively stable constituency backdrop in order for the regime to feel confident about victory in urban areas - the use of spoilers in such contexts suggests that the fact that the election is taking place in an urban area is a cause of concern in itself. Thus, this contrast between urban and rural

districts with spoilers in our sample further confirms the role of urbanisation as an indicator of electoral risk, and, therefore, a key determinant of electoral manipulation.

Rural cases of spoiler behaviour in our sample do, of course, show that manipulation is not limited solely to urban areas. However, the fact that spoiler tactics in the countryside were used only in cases of regime weakness, unusual for such constituencies, suggests that spoiler strategies are employed in these contexts only in exceptional circumstances. As such, these instances offer further support to this dissertation's weakness-based explanation of the logic of electoral manipulation.

Voter Mobilisation

The present chapter concerns the final option on the menu of manipulation explored in the current thesis: voter mobilisation. In line with the theme of the previous chapters, the central question explored in this part of the study relates to whether the use of manipulative mobilisation varies across rural and urban areas. In the discussion that follows, three types of manipulative mobilisation are initially identified in the context of Russian regional elections. The first is the process of *external voting*, where election officials exploit a provision in the Russian electoral law by literally bringing the ballot box to voters, under the guise that they received requests for this service due to the voters' ill health and mobility issues. The second is *coercive* mobilisation, where some voters are placed under pressure or threatened with sanctions in order to make them engage in the type of electoral behaviour preferred by the regime. Finally, the third type of manipulative mobilisation is *clientelistic*, where some voters are offered payoffs or targeted material benefits as a part of either a direct or a presumed exchange for certain actions at election time.

The key argument to be tested in this chapter is that the regime invests differently into mobilising rural and urban voters because rural voters represent core regime supporters, whilst urban areas contain higher levels of the more hostile segments of the electorate. Whilst high levels of electoral participation are important for signalling regime strength and legitimacy, mobilising the urban electorate indiscriminately is likely to be dangerous for the regime's electoral prospects. Therefore, just as for the

three tactics of manipulation explored in the previous chapters, it is argued that the use of manipulative mobilisation by the regime will be calculated and will vary across urban and rural contexts.

Central to the analysis in this chapter is the assumption that voter mobilisation can be divided into two broader categories in this context - it can be *universal* (general drives aiming to raise the level of election-day participation amongst the citizens, without knowing much about their background), and it can be *selective* (more targeted drives to mobilise individuals or specific groups of citizens, such as students or employees of one organisation). It is argued that the three types of manipulative mobilisation fall under different categories.

Thus, external voting is considered to be a form of universal mobilisation, as it is legally available to a wide number of citizens who are dispersed across the region, and the regime does not possess detailed information on their individual backgrounds or voting preferences. By contrast, the coercive and clientelistic types of mobilisation are selective because they target small and specific groups of individuals, and do not have legal basis.

As a result, diverging hypotheses relating to these types of mobilisation shall be explored in this chapter. The first is that universal mobilisation (external voting) is more likely to occur in *rural* than in urban districts. As the external voting process is a useful tool for increasing general turnout but one which does not afford the opportunity to guarantee that the additional votes cast will be in support of the regime, it is likely that its use will be higher in areas containing primarily loyal regime supporters. The discussion in Chapter 2 outlined the relatively high levels of regime

support amongst rural citizens when compared to their urban counterparts in Russia, and thus it is hypothesised that the proportion of those voting at home will be higher in *rural* districts.

The second hypothesis is that selective types of voter mobilisation (coercive and clientelistic) are more likely to be used in *urban* districts than in rural areas. Given that both coercive and clientelistic mobilisation afford a greater degree of control over the voter preferences expressed on the ballot but at the same time entail considerable costs, meaning that the regime cannot afford to coerce or distribute payoffs to all voters universally, it is likely that its use will be prioritised in areas where the level of uncertainty over victory is at its highest (urban districts).

The reason behind these diverging expectations is that voter mobilisation differs greatly from the previous strategies of manipulation explored in this study because it *enhances* voter preferences, rather than distorting or obstructing them. As a result, it is the riskiest strategy on the menu of manipulation under consideration in this study in terms of its potential to reduce electoral uncertainty - mobilising hostile groups of the electorate could serve to enhance anti-regime preferences, and therefore result in electoral losses. Therefore, mobilisation is expected to be used with caution, and universal types of mobilisations such as external voting are expected to be used only in areas where the regime can be confident of genuinely high levels of support amongst the electorate (rural districts).

It is important to note that as with most strategies of manipulation, there are considerable difficulties with measuring voter mobilisation. Whilst the problems of fraud related to the difficulty of permeating through to the hidden illegal activity, the

problem with strategies in the 'grey zone' of the menu of manipulation stem from the fact that it is difficult to isolate the illegal aspects of the actions associated with these strategies from their legal cores. Much of the quantitative data available therefore conflates legitimate processes with those of manipulation, and may only serve as an approximate measure at best. Similarly, qualitative information is often difficult to verify. Therefore, as in the preceding analyses, this chapter relies on imperfect information - however, through the combination of a mixed-method approach and multiple independent types of data the analysis in this chapter seeks to tie partial evidence together into a bigger picture, and therefore to advance our understanding of the potential logic behind the use of mobilisation as a strategy of electoral manipulation.

The chapter consists of six sections. The first section sets out the foundations for this analysis - it provides a definition of voter mobilisation as a method of manipulation and presents the three types of manipulation typically seen in the context of Russian regional legislative elections. The second section reminds the reader of the overarching hypotheses relating to the three strategies of manipulative mobilisation under consideration. The third section proceeds with the examination of the use of external voting. This part of the chapter uses voter and observer reports from the election monitoring association Golos in order to establish the process of external voting as a method of manipulative mobilisation, before proceeding with a quantitative analysis of the extent to which external voting varies across urban and rural areas. The fourth section of the chapter will analyse the use of coercive mobilisation, whilst the fifth section will examine the use of clientelistic mobilisation in our sample of regions. Due to the sensitivity and lack of transparency surrounding both of these methods of mobilisation, the analyses in sections four and five will be based on qualitative data -

reports of electoral violations submitted to the Russian election monitoring association, Golos. The final, sixth, section will summarise the findings and conclude.

6.1 Mobilisation as a form of manipulation

Overall, voter mobilisation is a staple feature of the electoral process across a range of political regimes, including advanced democracies. High turnout figures are valued because they boost the legitimacy of electoral results and reflect high levels of citizen participation, whilst low turnout is thought to be indicative of 'democratic ill-health' (Diamond, 2015:p.152). Yet voter participation has been declining worldwide, with established democracies not exempt from this general trend, making voter mobilisation a concern for most candidates (World Bank, 2017:pp.227-228; International IDEA, 2016). In democracies, a range of campaigns have sought to tackle this problem (Sims, 2015; Lyons, 2016; Banks, 2019). These campaigns are further complemented by the mobilising function carried out by political parties (Aldrich, 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

In the United Kingdom, for example, it is common for candidates and parties to use their own cars to drive voters who experience difficulty with reaching the polling station directly to the given location (Parliamentary Education Service, 2007:p.7). Aside from the general contribution to boosting the overall turnout, such actions undoubtedly carry a degree of strategic calculation, as candidates and parties may stand to benefit from the mobilisation of certain categories of voters. In particular, senior citizens are frequent recipients of mobilisation resources due to their inclination to be more engaged in politics and propensity to vote for certain types of parties over others. In Canada, for example, courting senior voters and actively helping them to

make it to the polling station on election day forms a major part of some party strategies, with one senior Liberal Party MP admitting that ‘a big part of [her] vote is making sure [she gets her] seniors out’.¹

Voter mobilisation is therefore an integral part of the competition in places where elections are deemed to be free and fair. However, it can play an equally important role in perverting the democratic process in authoritarian contexts. When mobilisation carries coercive or co-optive elements - if it is accompanied by pressure, threats or pay-offs - it becomes part of the authoritarian menu of manipulation. The use of these types of mobilisation strategies is well-documented in the literature on authoritarian electoral practices. Research on voting behaviour in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America has highlighted the ability of authoritarian regimes to mobilise sectors of the electorate through the mechanism of clientelistic interactions, where votes are exchanged for patronage (Blaydes, 2006; Lust-Okar, 2009; Magaloni, 2006; Brusco, Nazarena & Stokes, 2004; Stokes, 2005; Wantchenkon, 2003; Wantchenkon & Vicente, 2009). Similarly, voters in authoritarian regimes can come under considerable pressure to turn out to vote. Coercive methods are wide-ranging, and can include direct threats, such as those of economic or employment-related sanctions (Blaydes, 2006; Frye, Reuter & Szakonyi, 2014), as well as the introduction of practices that effectively hold citizens captive and offer no choice over participation, such as the arrangement of collective trips to polling stations by government agencies and state-dominated enterprises (Allina-Pisano, 2010).

Overall, voter mobilisation can thus serve both as an integral part of democratic electoral competition and a major mechanism for sustaining authoritarianism. This chapter is concerned with exploring the latter type of mobilisation, and will therefore

¹ Judy Sgro, as cited in Friesen & Ibbitson, 2011

ignore the general public campaigns for increasing voter awareness and turnout in Russia, even though these are led by an authoritarian regime. Voter mobilisation will be understood as a strategy of manipulation if voters engage in electoral behaviour, particularly turning out to vote and voting for the party of power, as a result of the pressure exerted and/or the co-optive pay-offs offered by the regime. The remainder of this section discusses the practice of manipulative voter mobilisation in Russia and narrows the definition down to three tactics frequently employed in this context: abuse of external voting procedure; coercive pressure; and clientelistic vote-buying.

6.1.1 Voter mobilisation in Russia

Voter mobilisation can occur through numerous mechanisms in the Russian context. Some of the efforts to increase voter participation levels are more in line with those of political actors in advanced democracies. As has been mentioned in Chapter 3 on electoral fraud, election day in Russia is often characterised by a range of ‘attractions’ designed to entice voters to visit the polling station. Buffets, musical performances, stalls selling produce, and other entertainment are frequent accompaniments to the ballot-box since the Soviet period, and are encouraged by the regime (Galimova, 2017). As discussed previously, these features elevate the status of elections to a *prazdnik* (a holiday or a celebration), particularly in areas of relative scarcity and isolation, and might go some way towards explaining why certain districts (such as rural areas) may report much higher levels of turnout than others. In general, however, these efforts can be considered to lie outside the menu of manipulation because they represent open attempts to boost the overall level of participation and citizen engagement, and contain neither elements of pressure nor the delivery of particularistic benefits.

Similarly, Russian political parties echo their democratic counterparts by carrying out a mobilising function. United Russia, the dominant party of power, operates a fairly extensive network of primary (82,631) and local (2,595) branches across the country (United Russia Political Party, 2019). Moreover, the party boasts over 2 million members (Nagornykh & Sinergiyev, 2016; Ria Novosti, 2016), which represents approximately 1.8 percent of the electorate². These figures are comparable to, and in many cases outshine, those of parties in many advanced democracies - for example, a recent government report has estimated the total party membership levels for the *three* largest parties in the UK to be around 1.6% of the electorate in 2018 (Audickas, Dempsey & Keen, 2018).

In authoritarian contexts, political parties have the potential to expand far beyond the basic mobilising function of democratic parties and become major tools of mass mobilisation, serving to increase turnout and support for the regime. According to Stokes (2005), parties in authoritarian contexts can drive the manipulative kind of voter mobilisation by permeating the social networks of voters through extensive, branching organisations, in order to affect and monitor voters' decisions at the ballot box. In the Russian case, however, political parties do not have such a wide-reaching mobilising effect due to their relatively weak grass-roots organisation and low levels of voluntary activism (Hale, 2006; Bader, 2011). Whilst the membership and organisation figures of United Russia may appear impressive relative to many political parties in advanced democracies, they still fall far short from the kind of extensive networks necessary to permeate society and drive mass mobilisation. For contrast, consider the fact that the Chinese Communist Party operates with party membership of over 88 million, or 6.5

² Calculations based on the size of the electorate in January 2016, which stood at 111,724,534 (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, 2016).

percent of the population, and relies on over 3.8 million grass-roots branches across the country.³ Moreover, there is much debate regarding the extent to which United Russia's membership figures reflect genuine citizen engagement and support, with experts highlighting the fact that the figures include numerous state-sector employees who have not necessarily joined the party because they strongly identify with it but because they were forced or viewed it as a career necessity (Bader, 2011). Other expert assessments of United Russia and its voter linkages have concluded that the party serves as an effective tool for the mobilisation of *elites*, rather than voters (Kynev, 2010).

It is therefore difficult to conclude that voter mobilisation, as a strategy of manipulation, is predominantly carried out through political parties and their networks in Russia today. However, other reported means of mobilising voters in Russia are undoubtedly more dangerous for the democratic process. The remainder of this section identifies three frequently reported forms of manipulative mobilisation used in Russia today - the abuse of the external voting process; coercive pressure; and clientelistic vote-buying. These tactics shall subsequently serve as the subject for analysis later in this chapter.

6.1.2 External voting

One major way of mobilising voters in Russia is through the abuse of the external voting process, where citizens can vote at home in the presence of electoral commission officials. The main piece of electoral legislation in Russia, the Federal Law №67-FZ ('On the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights'), stipulates that individuals may be granted

³ Membership figures for 2015 taken from Lockett, 2017. Branch figures for 2010 taken from Gore, 2013

special dispensation to place their ballot into a transportable box outside a polling station (usually at their home address) if they have 'reasonable grounds' for doing so. These grounds are fairly restrictive - the voter must prove that their mobility is severely limited due to disability or illness. On the day of the election, the relevant electoral commission sends out small delegations of officials, carrying ballot boxes to the list of addresses, which are compiled once the written voter requests have been verified. The number of these delegations is usually very small and they are expected to visit each address on their list, which reflects the expectation that external voting should be carried out only in exceptional circumstances and therefore applies to a small number of people.

In theory, this aspect of voter mobilisation is in line with the earlier-mentioned practices (such as the personal transportation of voters to polling stations) carried out by political parties and candidates in advanced democracies. The aim behind this legal provision is to defend the principles of democracy by ensuring that all voters have access to the electoral arena, regardless of their personal circumstances and disabilities. In practice, however, the proportion of the electorate voting externally can be very high, which serves as grounds for suspicion.

For example, in Tambov Oblast', 18.2 percent of the ballots were cast into transportable ballot boxes during the regional legislative elections in 2011, and 16.7 percent of the ballots were similarly cast externally during the 2011 regional legislative elections in Tver' oblast' (Golos, 2011a). This means that one in five people in Tambov and one in six people in Tver' regions did not vote at a polling station.⁴ More recently,

⁴ There are no postal vote provisions in Russia, which means that all of these people physically casted a vote into the ballot boxes delivered to them by election officials.

in Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast in 2016, some polling stations had fewer ballots cast in the official building than through external ballot boxes (Golos, 2016; Slavina, 2016). Moreover, the general levels of external voting across the country have been largely increasing alongside the consolidation of the electoral authoritarian regime. For example, for presidential elections in 2000 the ballots cast into transportable ballot boxes represented around 4.9 percent of the total ballots cast, in 2004 this figure was around 6.8 percent, by 2008 it was 7.7 percent, and 8.6 percent by 2012.⁵ Interestingly, the 2018 presidential election appears to deviate from this trend, with 6.8 percent of the total ballots being cast into transportable boxes⁶, which, although may be indicative of a relaxation in the level of electoral manipulation in the context of heightened scrutiny driven by post-protest sentiments and tense international relations, is nevertheless a relatively high figure that matches the levels during the peak of power for the regime in 2008.

The suspicion aroused by these trends and statistics appears to be justified when observer and voter reports regarding the practice of external voting are taken into account. A wide range of information on this process has been published by the Golos election monitoring association. As will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, these numerous observer and individual voter reports it becomes clear that external voting forms a major component of manipulative voter mobilisation. Whilst the law requires individual voters to submit written requests prior to election day, in practice, many delegations from electoral commissions visit vulnerable voters according to lists prepared by various social organisations responsible for their care - such as social services agencies, veteran organisations, and even hospitals.

⁵ Figures calculated by the author on the basis of the official electoral reports obtained from the *GAS Vybory* database run by the TsIk of the Russian Federation.

⁶ Ibid.

These tactics are illustrated by the following quote⁷ from an interview with a temporary precinct electoral commission member from one of the regions in our sample:

'Every time there is an election, delegates from the electoral commission come to visit my mother, to help her vote at home... She has never sent a written request; they have an official list of pensioners in our area, I think, particularly those aged over 75, and so they visit every elderly person according to this list. My mother is able to walk to the polling station, but she simply enjoys the visit. Once, they even phoned her in the afternoon to say: "We have noticed that you haven't yet visited the polling station today - would you like for somebody to come over?" I have no clue how they know this but, perhaps, it is helpful to the older generation.'

Furthermore, many reports mention the fact that even when commissions visit those individuals who requested external voting, it is common for delegation officials to pressure other, fully able, members of the household to vote externally, too. In the absence (or forgery) of previously submitted written requests from such voters, this practice exerts pressure on individuals to vote and therefore violates the principle of voluntary electoral participation. In addition, given the lack of observers during these missions and the vulnerability of many voters, it is also possible that election officials pressure voters or campaign on behalf of regime candidates during the voting process. The use of transportable ballot boxes has therefore become associated with efforts to forcibly mobilise the electorate in line with the manipulative definition of voter mobilisation utilised in the present chapter. On this basis, external voting shall be examined as the first type of manipulative mobilisation in the present chapter.

⁷ Anonymous - interview with the author, 23.07.2018, Penza.

6.1.3 Coercive mobilisation

Another major mechanism of manipulative mobilisation uncovered by research is the voters' place of employment. The work of Frye et al. (2014) has highlighted the ways in which the workplace can resolve collective action problems for authoritarian elites and serve as an effective vehicle not only for increasing turnout but also support for regime candidates. This kind of mobilisation falls under the authoritarian definition of the term used in the present chapter because it is accompanied by coercive efforts, where employees are threatened with sanctions as severe as wage cuts, delays in promotion, or even dismissal, if they do not comply with the requests from their employer. Furthermore, the manipulative character of this type of mobilisation manifests itself in the violation of two key principles of democracy, enshrined in the Russian Constitution: the secret ballot and the principle of voluntary voting. Linked to this is a further problem regarding the absence of wide-ranging and neutral political information, as the workplace often serves as a place for one-sided agitation and employees can be told explicitly which candidate they should vote for.

In practice, this type of mobilisation can take many forms. The most effective way that employers can direct and monitor mass voting behaviour through the workplace is by declaring election day a working day (even though this usually falls on a Sunday). Until 2017, employees were subsequently be forced to obtain absentee voting permits⁸ (which grant the right to vote at any polling station in the region) and vote directly at

⁸ These permits grant individuals the right to vote away from the polling station assigned to them on the basis of their permanent place of residence. Absentee ballots have been the subject of a huge number of allegations relating to electoral manipulation over the years, and their use was cancelled on these grounds in 2017. This cancellation does not remove the possibility of voting at the workplace altogether, however, as voters can still vote at a different location to their assigned polling station by simply applying to be added to the electoral register at another location in advance of an election.

their place of work. This is a particularly worrying practice as employers are not only able to monitor the turnout of individual employees but potentially even monitor the voters' choice itself (thus violating the secrecy of the ballot). Expert and observer reports have noted that even when they arrive individually, some voters ask for proof of turnout at the request of their employer (Buzin, 2015). Other measures aiming to mobilise voters through the workplace include the hire of mass transport (such as coaches) and driving employees to polling stations. On this basis, the second type of manipulative mobilisation examined in the present chapter is the practice of coercive mobilisation, either through the workplace or other organisations where voters find themselves dependent on others, such as places of study.

6.1.4 Clientelistic mobilisation

Finally, Russian elections have been regularly the subject of allegations of clientelistic vote-buying. According to Nichter (2014:p.316), this is understood as:

'... the distribution of rewards to individuals or small groups during elections in contingent exchange for vote choices. Rewards are defined as cash, goods (including food and drink), and services. Post-election benefits, employment, public programs and transportation to the polls are not considered rewards.'

This process typically occurs as a 'face-to-face [transaction] between agents of the ruler and the voter' (Frye, Reuter & Szakonyi, 2018:p.7). The types of rewards which have been reported as being offered to voters range in their magnitude. Some vote-buying attempts seem to be surprisingly low in value. For example, during the 2018 regional executive elections in Krasnoyarsk krai, Golos observers were able to verify that some voters were offered to sell their vote in exchange for alcohol (Golos, 2018). Similarly, in Nizhniy Novgorod, United Russia candidates were reportedly buying votes through the distribution of granulated sugar (Golos, 2015a). Frequently,

individuals report being offered cash sums in exchange for turning up and voting for a specific candidate on election day.

For example, during the 2017 regional legislative elections in Novosibirsk oblast', the regional branch of KPRF published video and audio recordings of allegedly United Russia agents offering 250 roubles in exchange for voters' passport details and agreement to turn up and vote for the United Russia candidate, Aleksandr Boyko (Dorogin, 2017). Vote-buying in Russia has also been reported to take more 'creative' forms, such as that in Udmurt Republic in 2015, when one voter reported that she received a receipt confirming the payment of her outstanding balance (2,339 roubles) with a utility company 'Energosbyt Plyus', on the back of which, the words 'Deputy Chechin' (the incumbent United Russia candidate contesting the election) were written by hand (Golos, 2015a). The receipt also showed signs that this payment was just one in a line of many that was being deducted from a large sum by the same payer. Moreover, vote-buying is often surprisingly blatant. For example, multiple reports state that votes in Russia are often bought alongside official contracts of employment (Gogin & Lushnikova, 2012; Golos, 2015a; Barkov, 2018). In such instances, voters are officially 'hired' as temporary campaigners and are paid a lump sum (around 300-500 roubles) for their 'services' relating to the promotion of United Russia - this is then accompanied by verbal agreements relating to turning out and casting a vote in support of a specific regime candidate.

Finally, research on mobilisation in the workplace has also shown that co-optive elements play an important role in increasing voter participation and support for the regime in Russia. According to Frye, Reuter and Szaknoyi (2014), employers can act as brokers in the clientelist exchange between the regime and the voters - as well as using

coercion, they can exert both co-optive pressures by offering benefits in exchange for turnout and support.

On the basis of these reports, clientelistic vote-buying mobilisation emerges as a staple feature of many Russian elections and must therefore be included in any analysis of manipulative mobilisation in Russia.

6.2 Hypotheses

In sum, three main types of manipulative mobilisation emerge in the Russian context: the abuse of the external voting procedure; coercive pressure; and clientelist vote-buying. The remainder of this chapter will focus on analysing the extent to which variation in the use of these three strategies during regional legislative elections follows the urban-rural divide in Russia. Before proceeding with the empirical discussion, this section seeks to remind the reader of the three overarching hypotheses relating to each form of manipulation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, voter mobilisation differs from the other strategies explored in this thesis because it entails a wider range of activities, some of which carry an *enhancing*, rather than a subversive, effect on voting preferences. Candidate exclusion and the use of spoiler candidates aim to distort, diffuse and undermine hostile preferences amongst the electorate immediately before and during an election, whilst electoral fraud seeks to do the same immediately after the electoral process is over. By contrast, mobilisation is concerned with transforming passive preferences into meaningful ballots, and therefore boosts the voice of the citizenry. Moreover, voter mobilisation also carries greater costs than the other strategies of manipulation because

it entails not only the costs associated with losses in legitimacy and the need to co-opt election officials (as with other strategies), but also considerable investment of material resources related to payoffs and the monitoring of multiple actors.

In addition to this, of the four strategies under consideration in this thesis, mobilisation offers the least control to authoritarian elites at election time, as the mechanism of the secret ballot largely prevents the regime from absolute monitoring of the final action taken by the mobilised voters and therefore opens up the opportunity for voter defection. Thus, a principal-agent problem lies at the heart of manipulative mobilisation, as recognised by numerous works focusing on vote-buying and voter intimidation (Lehoucq, 2007; Schaffer & Schedler, 2007; Wantchekon & Vicente, 2009; Frye, Reuter & Szakonyi, 2018). Taken together, these aspects of voter mobilisation mean that regime elites, as rational actors, might be expected to weigh up the costs of enhancing voter preferences through manipulative mobilisation against the benefits of additional votes. As a result, we would expect their decisions to be sensitive to electoral context and thus there to exist a considerable degree of variation in the use of this strategy at election time in Russia. However, as explained below, the three types of manipulative mobilisation under consideration in this chapter are not expected to follow the same pattern.

Manipulation through the external voting mechanism is essentially a turnout drive, in which voters struggle to escape the ballot box as it is brought directly to them. Compared to the coercive and clientelistic forms of manipulation, external voting seems to be the least costly for the regime in terms of resources, as it operates on the basis of a legal mechanism for which provisions have been made in the regional budget, and, just as with the strategies analysed in the preceding chapters, it primarily

requires the co-optation of election officials who are already heavily dependent on the regime. The legal foundations of this behaviour also reduce legitimacy costs significantly and make it easier to mask the manipulative intent behind this action through the arbitrary interpretation and application of legal provisions, in event of allegations from opponents. At the same time, because this type of manipulation is carried out by regime officials and is therefore openly associated with the government, the degree of pressure which can be exerted upon voters through this method is nevertheless limited, if the regime does not wish to inflict considerable legitimacy losses upon itself.

In other words, beyond pressuring voters to participate even when they did not plan on doing so and perhaps agitating on behalf of the regime, officials will likely struggle to violate the secret ballot and to ensure forcibly that each new participant casts a vote in support of the authoritarian incumbents, on a mass scale. This means that the regime must have confidence that the vast majority of the voters mobilised through this method would vote for the regime of their own accord even under the conditions of the secret ballot. Yet there exist major information problems for the regime when it comes to external voting, as it cannot possibly obtain information on the political attitudes of every individual. This is especially true if those individuals are the neighbours or family members of genuine external voters, whose votes are unexpectedly 'captured' by election officials during their visits.

In this sense, manipulation through the abuse of the external voting mechanism is a *universal* strategy - it is a general turnout drive that mobilises citizens without knowing much about their background and social ties. Relying on the use of such a strategy across the country could be very risky for the regime, however, as it could

unknowingly be bringing the ballot box directly to its worst opponents, and therefore be enhancing hostile voter preferences. Therefore, the regime may be confident of increased voter participation as a result of this strategy, but it cannot be confident that this will subsequently translate into increased votes in its favour.

As such, we would expect the regime to reduce its use of this strategy in contexts where it cannot be certain of existing support amongst voters, and increase the use of this strategy when it is more confident that the majority of voters are more positively oriented towards it. Given the central assumption of this thesis that urbanisation serves as a major indicator of inherent voter sentiments for the regime, and, indeed, the fact that one of the few pieces of information that officials possess on each external voter relates to their place of residency at the time of the election, this thesis proposes that the use of manipulation through external voting will vary along the urban-rural divide. Specifically, given the assumption that urban districts are populated by large numbers of voters who are apathetic towards the regime at best, and actively hostile at worst, we would expect that these areas entail higher levels of uncertainty over voters' behaviour and will therefore be less likely to be the subject of mass manipulation through the abuse of the external voting process.

Thus, the section analysing the use of external voting in the context of Russian regional legislative elections will explore the following hypothesis:

H4.1: Universal voter mobilisation through external voting is more likely to occur in rural electoral districts

Whilst external voting is considered a universal type of mobilisation, the coercive and clientelistic forms of mobilisation are both *selective* because they entail targeted threats and the delivery of particularistic benefits to individuals or small groups of people. Unlike during external voting, the regime possesses far more information on the voters mobilised through these means - for example, due to the role played by the workplace and other social organisations in these forms of mobilisation, the regime may have greater insight into the voters' socio-economic status or level of education, which are typically treated as major predictors of voting behaviour across the world. Moreover, these strategies allow for the opportunity to not only increase the level of participation but also to *shape* voter preferences through leverage, whether this is through a carrot or a stick. Therefore, these two strategies are similar in their logic but vary primarily in the type of inducement exerted on voters - coercive mobilisation entails a negative inducement, whereas clientelistic vote-buying brings positive inducements.

The principal-agent problem persists for both of these forms of mobilisation, as voters can betray their promises to regime brokers through the secret ballot. However, given that explicit agreements lie at the heart of these tactics, the regime possesses greater leeway to monitor actively not only voter turnout but also the nature of the vote itself, when compared to that during external voting. In addition, it possesses a greater range of instruments for the purposes of such monitoring. These instruments come largely in the form of conditions attached to the agreement. In coercive mobilisation, threats are the main factor driving compliance, with existing research showing that 'severe and credible threats may mitigate the need for costly forms of active monitoring of voters' (Frye, Reuter & Szakonyi, 2018:p.2).

In other words, when faced with severe threats, voters have been found to be more likely to comply even in the context of a secret ballot, in order to avoid the risk of those threats becoming a reality. Whilst many argue that vote-buying 'does not have a clear vote-enforcement mechanism' (Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009:p.294), advances in smartphone technology have increased the brokers' ability to monitor compliance, with many reports of voters being asked to provide photographic proof of their completed ballot paper (Frye, Reuter & Szakonyi, 2018:p.7). Moreover, the secret ballot can be violated following the co-optation of election officials, who could monitor turnout and even vote choice, as well as by asking voters to obtain absentee ballots and fill out the ballot paper under supervision (Ibid.). Thus, whilst not all-reaching, the regime nevertheless possesses a greater degree of control over voter preferences when it comes to the coercive and clientelistic forms of mobilisation - these strategies allow for the shaping of and greater monitoring of compliance when it comes to voter preferences.

At the same time, these forms of mobilisation are more costly than mobilisation through external voting. Vote-buying entails some form of payments to voters, which requires considerable material resources. Similarly, multiple brokers acting on behalf of the regime and monitoring compliance also require (potentially larger) payments. For example, as much of the electoral coercion in Russia takes place through the workplace, the regime must offer some type of clientelistic rewards to compliant employers, such as large businesses, which could come in the form of preferential treatment when it comes to assigning key contracts (Frye, Reuter & Szakonyi, 2014). In addition to this, the illegal nature of these strategies carries greater legitimacy costs for the regime, should it ever be caught. This is especially true for coercive mobilisation - whilst vote-buying could be deemed acceptable by many voters where such practices are

widespread (Gonzalez Ocantos et al., 2014), intimidation and repression are particularly noted for their potential to ignite public anger (Collier & Vicente, 2012).

As a result, we would expect both of these forms of manipulation to be used sparingly and primarily in instances where the costs are worth the gain in electoral terms.

This thesis proposes that urban areas are precisely such environments. Given that these areas represent a tougher battle and higher levels of uncertainty over electoral victory for the regime, the additional votes in support of the regime would be especially decisive in such contexts. By contrast, in rural areas, where the regime enjoys higher levels of electoral support and therefore lower levels of electoral uncertainty, additional votes, whilst serving a signalling function, would nevertheless not make a huge difference to election outcomes. Given the high costs associated with coercive and clientelistic mobilisation, we would expect that regime elites would prioritise the deployment of these strategies in urban areas, where each additional votes carries a greater value to that in the rural constituencies.

Therefore, the following set of hypotheses is proposed:

H4.2: Selective voter mobilisation through coercive means is more likely to occur in urban electoral districts.

H4.3: Selective voter mobilisation through clientelistic vote-buying is more likely to occur in urban electoral districts.

The remainder of this chapter concerns the analysis of the patterns in the use of the three forms of manipulative mobilisation discussed here. Thus, the next section of the chapter begins with the analysis of manipulation through the external voting mechanism.

6.3 Analysis of external voting

This part of the chapter concerns the first type of manipulative mobilisation identified earlier - the abuse of the external voting processes. The investigation proceeds in three stages. First, I will first carry out a preliminary examination of the reports on electoral violations relating to the process of external voting, as published by the election monitoring association, Golos. The purpose of this work is to demonstrate that the external voting procedure is subject to frequent manipulation and suspicious behaviour, thus justifying its inclusion in the present study of manipulation. Moreover, the review of Golos reports is also designed to confirm the fact that external voting figures primarily indicate instances of manipulative mobilisation, rather than other strategies from the 'menu of manipulation' (specifically, electoral fraud). In the second stage of this investigation, I will examine whether mobilisation through external voting varies across urban and rural contexts, by carrying out a mixed-effects regression analysis. The final stage of this section summarises the discussion.

6.3.1 External voting as a measure of manipulative mobilisation

External voting is measured as the percentage of the number of the ballots cast into transportable boxes⁹, as a percentage of the total ballots cast in each district. This figure was calculated using the data taken from the official election figures published by the Russian Central Election Commission¹⁰.

This measure is not perfect. External vote counts will contain a number of 'legitimate' votes - ballots cast without pressure at the voluntary request of the voter. However, given the restrictive conditions under which voters should be granted permission to vote externally, this number is expected to be relatively low and shouldn't be subject to major variation both across and within regions. Yet, as shown in Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3, in our sample of regions, there exists a considerable amount of variation in the levels of external voting, which raises suspicions.

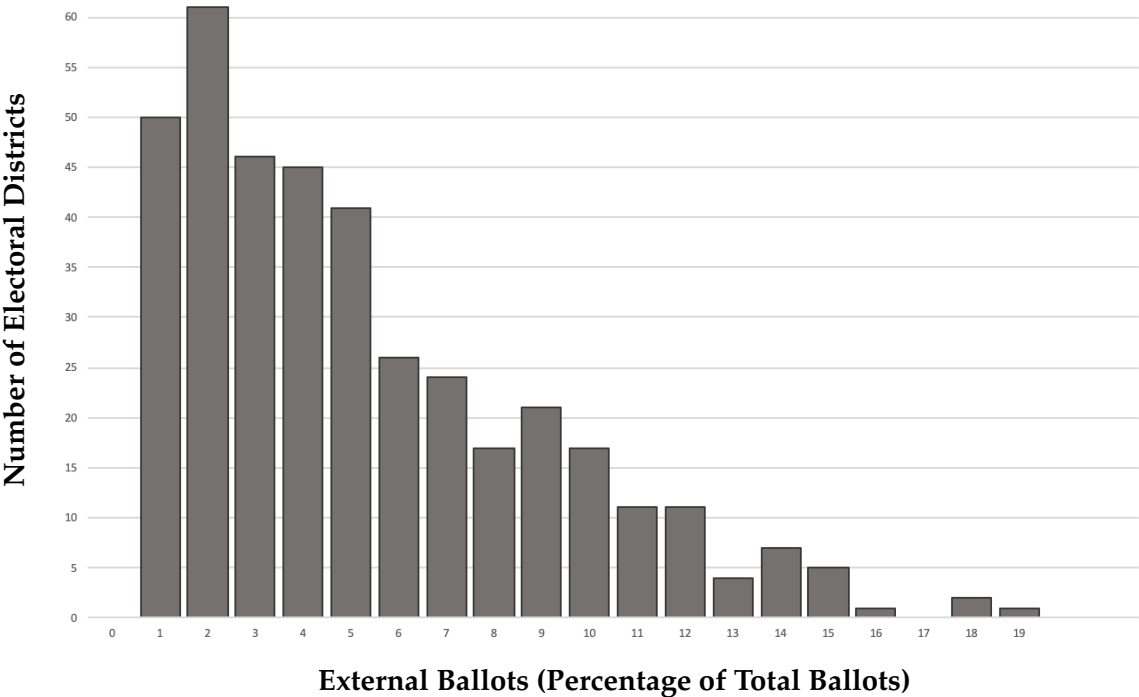
From Figure 6.1, it can be seen that there exists considerable variation in the level of external voting in our sample of electoral districts. Whilst the vast majority of the districts (202 out of 390) reported relatively low levels of external voting (below 5 percent of the total ballots cast), a considerably high number of cases (188 districts) saw more than 5 percent of the ballots cast into transportable ballot boxes externally. Notably, 59 districts in our sample reported extraordinarily high levels of external voting (more than 10 percent of the total ballots cast), which is equivalent to a rate of at least one in ten voters. The peak level of external voting was attained in one district, where 19 percent of the total ballots were cast into transportable boxes, which is

⁹ The boxes taken to each address by the external voting team

¹⁰ As before, this refers to the online database *GAS Vybory*.

equivalent to one in every five ballots. Arguably, even the external voting level of 5 percent seems high, as it would imply that one in twenty people in those districts would have experienced such severe physical difficulties that they would not have been able to get themselves to a polling station on election day.

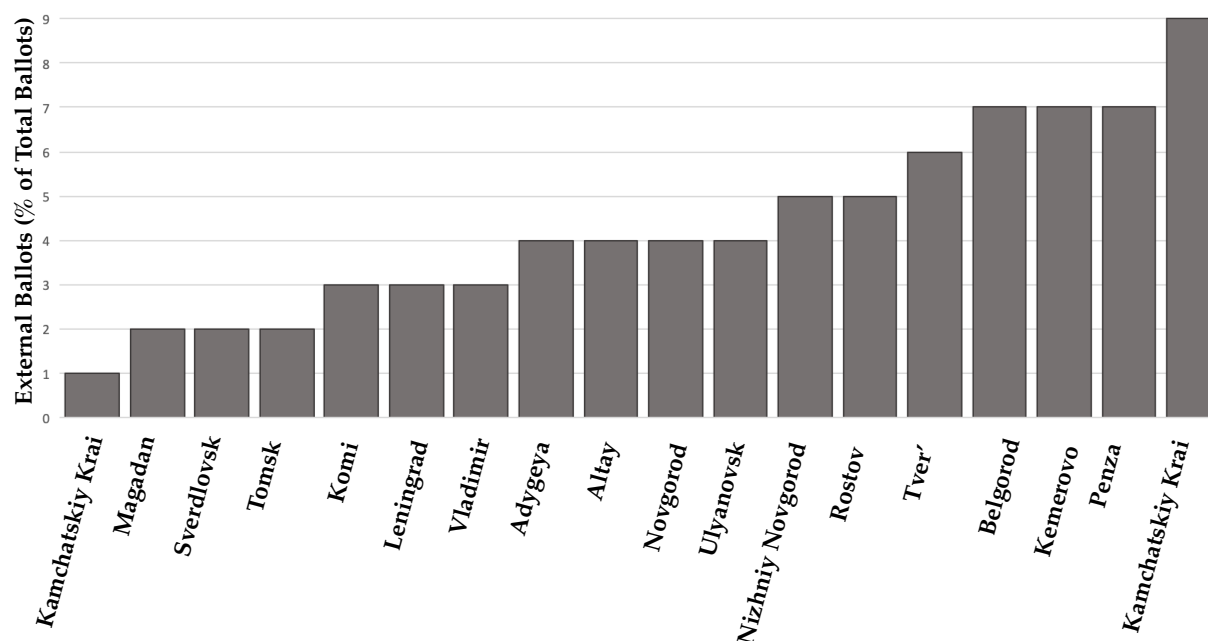
Figure 6.1 The frequency of external voting levels, across electoral districts



In Figure 6.2, we can see that the levels of external voting also vary across the regions in our sample. External voting represented the highest proportion of the total ballots cast in Krasnodarskiy Krai (9 percent of the ballots), followed closely by Belgorod, Kemerovo and Penza oblasts (all at 8 percent). Whilst the overall contrast between regions does not appear to be drastic (the difference between the highest and the lowest levels of external voting at the regional level is 8 percent), as above, these figures represent deceptively high amounts of external votes. Thus, from our sample, it appears that almost one in ten voters in Krasnodarskiy Krai were severely limited in

terms of their physical mobility on election day, which seems to be an extraordinarily high proportion.

Figure 6.2 The average levels of external voting, across regions



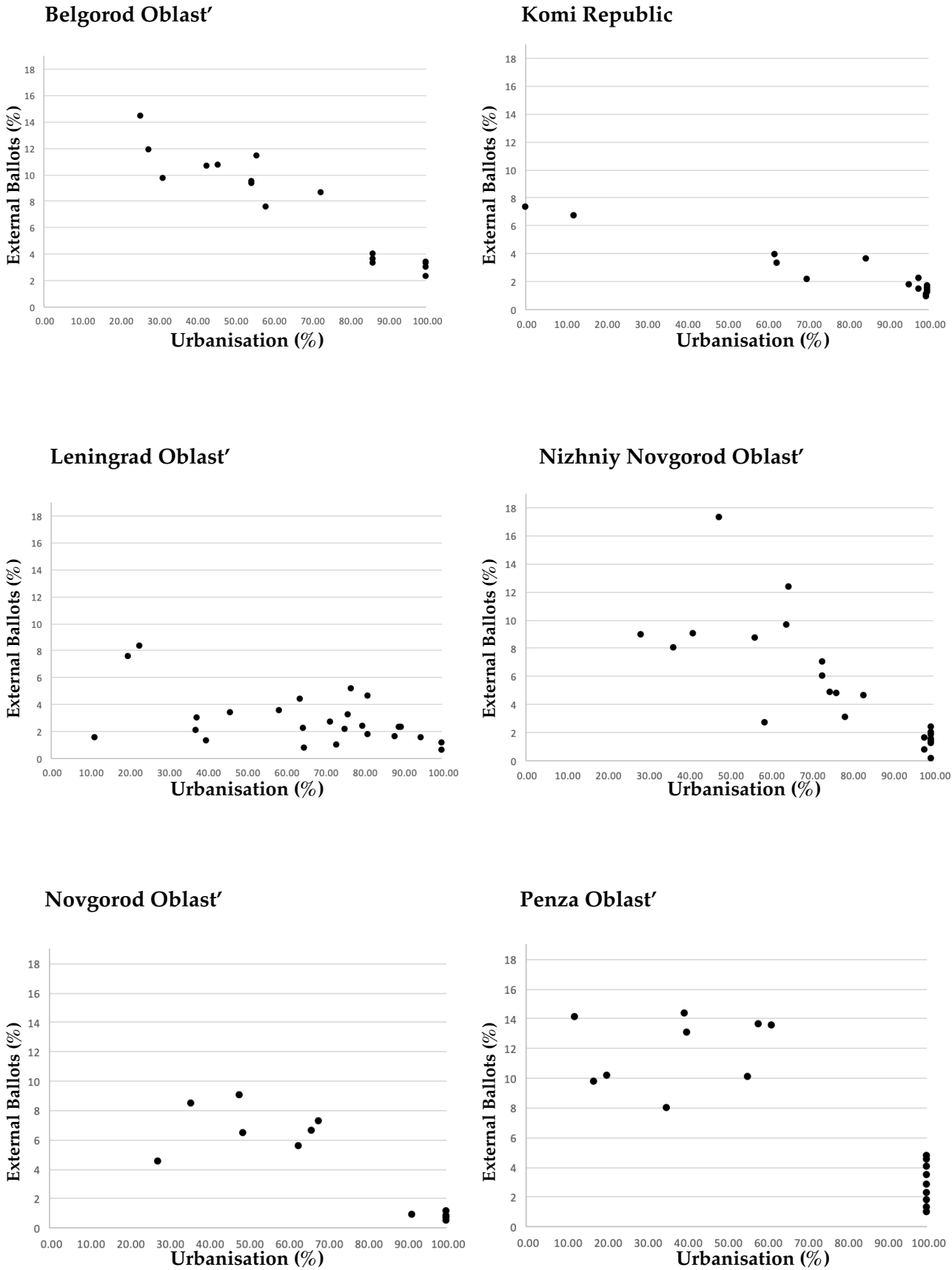
Interestingly, in 11 out of the 18 regions in our sample, we can see some initial signs of a possible intra-regional relationship between urbanisation and the level of external voting. Figure 6.3 graphs the relationship between urbanisation and external voting within each of these 11 regions. From this, we can see that the majority of the regions in our sample demonstrate interesting internal variation which points to a possible negative relationship between urbanisation and external voting.

Overall, the patterns emerging from Figures 6.1-6.3 appear suspicious. The levels of external voting appear to be relatively high, given the extraordinary nature of this legal provision. Moreover, the level of external voting fluctuates considerably, both, across regions and within them. These patterns therefore merit further investigation, and the

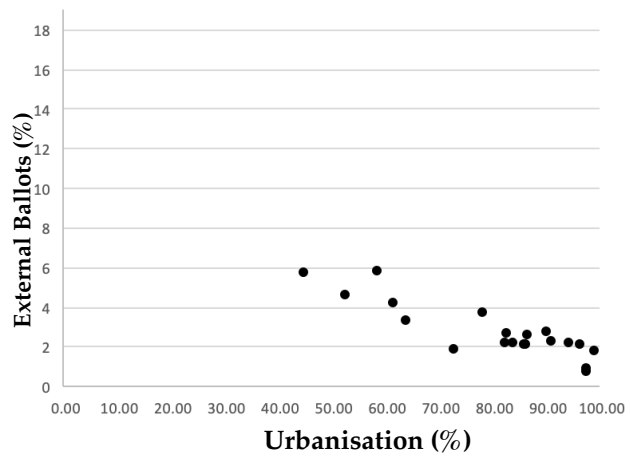
initial relationship between urbanisation and external voting appears to be a promising indicator of support for *H4.1*. However, the different levels of external voting at the regional level, and the absence of a striking negative visual trend in the plots for 7 out of the 18 regions in our sample, indicate that a mixed effects model is most appropriate for the regression analysis later in this section, as it is necessary to control for the existing regional-level variation.

One possible explanation for the variation displayed in Figure 6.3, may be that rural areas may contain greater proportions of elderly people (many of whom might require external voting support), as the younger generations migrate away from the countryside into urban centres in search of greater economic opportunities. However, it is important to bear in mind that external voting provisions are applicable to a wide range of voters, including many different age groups, which means that there are numerous individuals in need of external voting support in urban centres, too. For example, hospitals with large populations of patients of all age groups (none of whom are able to make it to the polling station on election day) are more likely to be located in urban areas, and it is unlikely that rural areas have higher concentrations of disabled voters (for reasons other than old age). This point is made by the journalist and political observer, Sergey Titov, who argues that these patterns suggest that either the Russian countryside is disproportionately populated by severely disabled voters, or the regime is engaging in 'home delivery' voting (Titov, 2018).

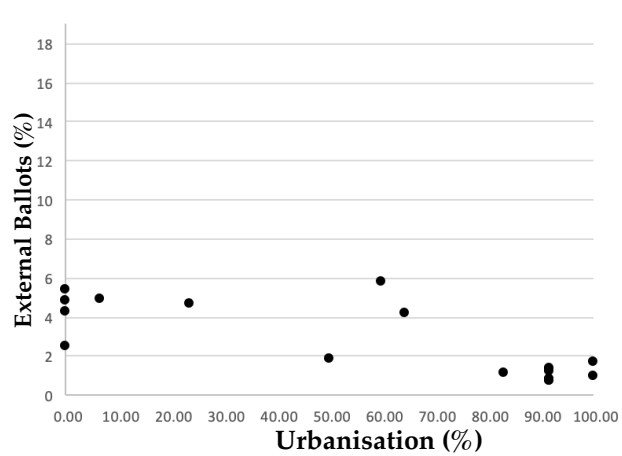
Figure 6.3 External voting with respect to the level of urbanisation (by region)



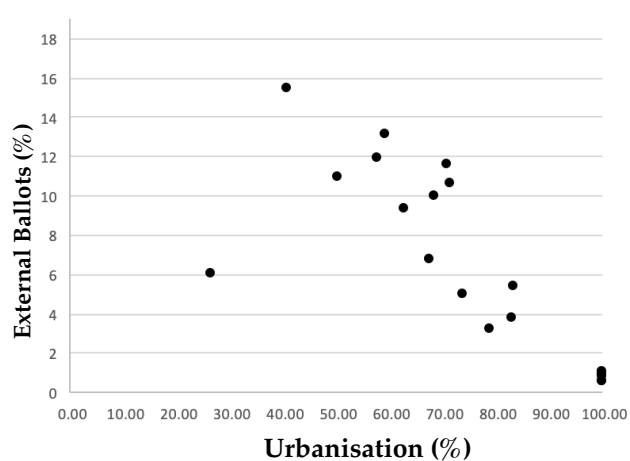
Sverdlovsk Oblast'



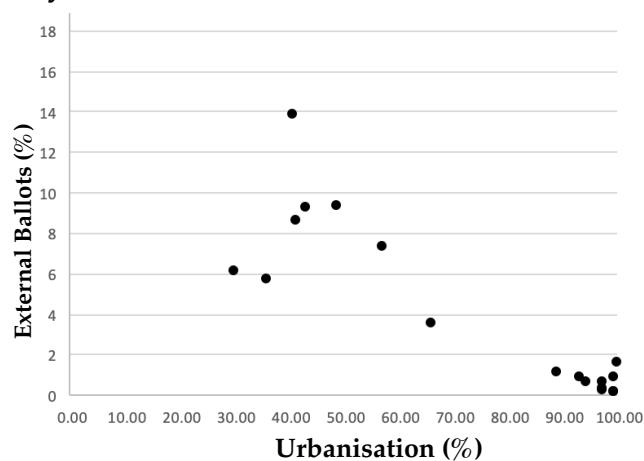
Tomsk Oblast'



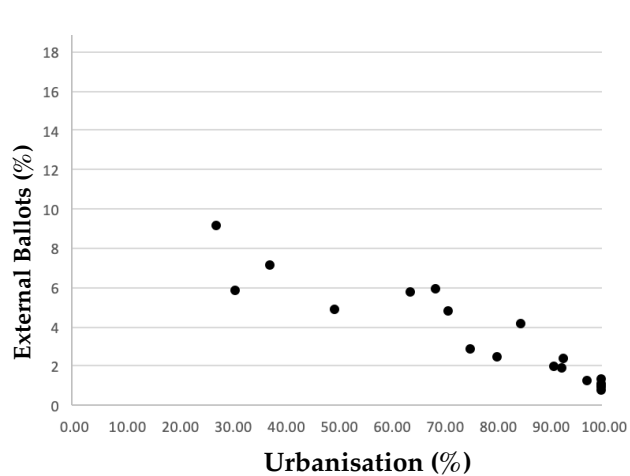
Tver' Oblast'



Ulyanovsk Oblast'



Vladimir Oblast'



Moreover, if the regime administrations are pursuing the goal of increasing universal turnout and are simply using external voting processes as a substitute for weak party organisations, we would expect to see high proportions of external votes in urban areas because this strategy would be more cost-effective - given the greater number of eligible urban voters and their proximity to one another (due to greater population density in urban areas), more people could be reached within a shorter space of time by a delegation from the electoral commission in a densely populated city than in the vast Russian countryside. Thus, there is much reason to expect that external voting levels should not vary greatly across rural and urban contexts in the absence of manipulation.

In addition, if the regime administrations are pursuing the goal of increasing universal turnout and are simply using external voting processes as a substitute for weak party organisations, we would expect to see high proportions of external votes in urban areas because this strategy would be more cost-effective - given the greater number of eligible urban voters and their proximity to one another (due to greater population density in urban areas), more people could be reached within a shorter space of time by a delegation from the electoral commission in a densely populated city than in the vast Russian countryside. Thus, there is much reason to expect that external voting levels should not vary greatly across rural and urban contexts in the absence of manipulation.

However, another potential limitation of using official counts of external voting as a measure of mobilisation is that, given the absence of observers during external vote missions, it is possible that external ballot boxes may be subjected to ballot-stuffing and therefore may serve as vehicles for electoral fraud. Whilst this is important to note, the

capacity of external ballot boxes to act as vehicles for mass-scale fraud is nevertheless limited. One such limitation is that external voting is expected to represent a minority proportion of the votes cast, given the small numbers of voters who would meet the relevant criteria, which means that it is difficult to stuff transportable boxes with huge numbers of ballots that would help the regime to secure a large margin of victory. Second, external ballot boxes are accompanied by lists and declarations of voters, containing a number of personal details including their address, all of which can be verified if considerable suspicions arise. Thus, although this does not prevent electoral fraud from occurring completely, the major mechanism of manipulation exercised during this process is nevertheless the pressure of participation exerted onto genuine voters, rather than electoral fraud.

It is important to note, however, that external voting as a measure is distinct from the two types of mobilisation explored later in this chapter because the voters eligible for this provision cannot be pressured or monitored by their employer whilst voting at home, as these voters are either unemployed or temporarily on sick-leave, and thus physically away from the mobilisation dynamics that might be happening in the workplace. In addition, because mobilisation through external voting originates from the electoral commissions themselves and could not be done without their support, the link between the regime and this strategy is much closer, which means that it is also partially controlling for the mobilising efforts of other political parties and candidates.

Nevertheless, in order to reduce the doubts over the extent to which external voting figures are an appropriate indicator of manipulative mobilisation, I examined the nature in which this procedure is mentioned in reports on electoral violations, as

published by the election monitoring association, Golos.¹¹ In total, I found 19 reports concerning the process of external voting originating from our sample of regional legislative elections. Whilst these reports have not been verified, collectively, they add weight to the argument that external voting figures are an indicator of voter mobilisation as a method of electoral manipulation.

Many of these reports (ten) concerned violations of the general procedure surrounding this part of the election and raised questions relating to access for observers. In particular, it seems that election commissions are often opaque in their dealing with the information on the voters registered to vote at home. Temporary members of the electoral commissions and observers reported that they were refused access to the register of external voters, or that the register did not exist - in one urban area of Krasnodar, 74 people had managed to vote externally before such a list even appeared.¹² Whilst this could be a sign of incompetence on the part of full-time election commission members, the fact that this lack of transparency persisted in multiple districts and regions, is nevertheless suspicious.

One report from a member of the electoral commission serves as further indication that these errors were not without intent.¹³ On election day at Dinskaya stanitsa (Cossack village), situated within an entirely rural electoral district of Krasnodar Krai, the commission member expressed his intention to monitor the external voting process for the area. As the official cars were being loaded, the commission member was forced

¹¹ The reports were obtained from the associations' database *Karta Narusheniy (Map of Violations)* run by Golos.

¹² Reports of this nature include: ID 25586, ID 25437, ID 25435, ID 25068, ID 25000, ID 24854, ID 24796, ID 25282. ID numbers taken from the *Karta Narusheniy* database.

¹³ Golos Report ID 25619

to give up his space in the official car with the transportable ballot box to other commission members and an observer from United Russia - instead, he was reassured that he would be transported in a second car. The second car never came, however, and officials refused to provide the route of the external voting delegation to the commission member, and thus he was unable to follow the group in his own vehicle. Upon their return at the end of the day, the commission member claimed that the transportable ballot box was 'full... of ballots for the candidate from the "ruling party"'. Meanwhile, at another polling station in Krasnodar city, an observer noted that the external voting team left with a considerably higher number of ballot papers compared to the number of voters planning to vote externally. When election monitoring officials attempted to check that the number of the ballot papers prepared was appropriate to the number of voters listed in the external register, the document was 'torn out... of the hands of observers and [other] commission members' by the secretary of the electoral commission.

Actions of this type mean that observers could not verify the accuracy of the ballot numbers in external ballot boxes and could not confirm whether only those who signed up officially to this service in advance of election day had cast their vote. Whilst these reports do not serve as definite proof that the system of external voting was abused by the authorities, they nevertheless raise important suspicions around this process, which offer some justification for treating the external voting data as instances of manipulation.

Some reports, however, make much bolder accusations of electoral violations during external voting. These come from a broad spread of regions and years, and mostly confirm the same message of mobilisation: the external voting process is used to

generate greater numbers of votes than expected based on voluntary requests from the electorate alone. In one report from Krasnodar Krai, an electoral commission member representing Just Russia had referred to the external voting process as an 'open hunt' for voters, reporting that commission officials had driven to voters who were not on the official register of external voting requests.¹⁴

Another report from an electoral commission member in Krasnodar Krai states that officials had greatly increased the number of external voters (instead of approximately 80 votes, the total number of ballots received externally was closer to 400), by allowing many young people to vote externally.¹⁵ Similarly, in Rostov oblast, an electoral commission member, who was able to observe the external voting process, had reported that many of those who had voted externally told him that they never made any special requests, with one voter even submitting a written statement to this effect.¹⁶ The same report also claimed the the external voting register displayed signs that it was compiled in a single effort by officials using other official lists from state welfare agencies, rather than over a prolonged period of time in response to sporadic requests from voters - for example, the voters on this list appeared to have conveniently submitted their requests in order of their address location. In Tver' oblast, the regional hospital was reported to have compiled lists of patients who were not expected to be discharged from the hospital before election day and subsequently pressured these individuals to sign off on requests to vote externally, at the hospital itself.¹⁷

¹⁴ GOLOS Report ID 25618

¹⁵ GOLOS Report ID 25622

¹⁶ GOLOS Report ID 27055

¹⁷ GOLOS Report ID 4611

Taken together, the Golos reports indicate that the electoral commission officials are suspiciously protective over access to the paperwork and the process of external voting. The direct statements from voters and observers suggest that these suspicions are not without reason, as officials have been reported to expand the number of external voters without reasonable grounds. The reports therefore offer support to the argument that external voting presents a method of manipulative mobilisation in the context of Russian regional legislative elections. Interestingly, none of the reports in our sample have stated that voters experienced the pressure to vote for United Russia whilst being pressured to vote externally - this may serve as further indication of the fact that external voting represents a more universal type of mobilisation that does not allow for extensive control over voter preferences.

6.3.2 Regression analysis

This section of the chapter will explore whether variation in manipulative mobilisation through the abuse of the external voting processes follows the urban-rural divide by carrying out regression analysis of the patterns in our sample of regional legislative elections. This analysis uses a two-level mixed-effects regression model. As discussed in the preceding chapters, this is a suitable approach for the purposes of the present investigation, as the data is nested within regions, which could account for a large proportion of the variation. The main unit of analysis in this model is the electoral district, which refers to the individual constituencies for each regional legislature in our sample. This must not be confused with polling stations, as utilised in Chapter 3 of the thesis, which refers to the building within which votes are cast on election day. As described earlier in the thesis, there are 390 electoral districts in total in our sample. For

the purposes of this analysis, I constructed an original dataset, using official election data from the online database of the Russian Central Election Commission.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is *External Voting*, which refers to the percentage of the ballots cast into transportable ballot boxes at election time. This is the same measure as that discussed earlier in this section. The precise percentage figure was calculated by the author, after raw numbers were obtained from the official election reports available via the Central Electoral Commission database. It is a legal requirement for all official reports of election outcomes to provide this information, therefore the data was available for all electoral districts in our sample. The mixed electoral system used in Russian regional legislative elections means that each district receives two reports of turnout and results - one for the majoritarian, and the other for the proportional races. In order to avoid the unnecessary repetition of data, I used election reports from the majoritarian race only, as it is unlikely that turnout will fluctuate hugely between the two races (ie. that voters would express their preference on only one part of the ballot on a mass scale). Moreover, given the manipulative nature of the external voting process, we would expect that election officials exert equal levels of pressure to participate in both sides of the election.

Key Independent Variable: Urbanisation

The key explanatory variable under investigation in this section is the level of urbanisation within an electoral district. This is measured as the percentage of urban residents within each electoral districts, as calculated by the author on the basis of the

Russian Census data from 2010. This district-level data on urbanisation was taken from the same original dataset on all 390 electoral districts in the sample as that used in the previous chapters.

Controls

Despite the prevalence of manipulation, the figures on external voting nevertheless represent a form of turnout, as they include many legitimate voters who made a voluntary request for external voting on the grounds of limited personal mobility on election day. This feature of the data makes it necessary to control for other factors that might be driving voter turnout in general.

Overall, existing research on the determinants of turnout using aggregate-level data (as opposed to individual-level and experimental studies) has identified a wide range of factors that might affect the voters' decision to turn out and cast a vote on election day. These can be broadly grouped into three categories: institutional, socio-economic and political.¹⁸ The fact that all cases in the sample are situated within the same national unit means that the major institutional factors - compulsory voting provisions, registration processes, and the electoral system - are the same for each election and therefore do not require further controls. The control variables therefore relate to the potential socio-economic and political determinants of turnout.

In terms of socio-economic factors, given the scarcity of socio-economic data at the electoral district level, it is difficult to control for factors such as population stability and homogeneity. Similarly, it is impossible to factor in previous turnout patterns due

¹⁸ This division follows the approach adopted by Geys, 2006

to the frequent alterations of constituency boundaries that have taken place between regional legislative elections. It is, however, possible to control for one of the biggest socio-economic characteristics associated with turnout - population size, as measured by the total number of registered voters in each electoral district. Larger populations have previously been found to be associated with lower levels of turnout, generally considered to be the result of voter sentiment about the probability that their vote can make a difference (Geys, 2006:pp.642-643; Owen & Grofman, 1984; Mueller, 2003).

In other words, it is possible that voters calculate that the bigger the size of the electoral community, the smaller the probability that their vote can make a difference to the election results, which may sway many residents of populous areas away from the turning out to the polling station on election day. To control for this possible relationship in our sample, I include the variable *Log Population* in the regression models below. This is the natural logarithm of electorate size (total registered voters), which was calculated using the data published by the Russian Central Electoral Commission.

In the political category of control variables, first I include a measure of the closeness of competition, which has been found to be a major determinant of turnout in existing literature on this topic (Geys, 2006). Turnout may be higher for marginal contests in which the outcome is expected to be very close, or difficult to predict. It is possible that the expected proximity of electoral outcomes might stimulate voters to turn out to vote as they might perceive the probability of their vote influencing the result to be considerably higher in such instances (Matsusaka & Palda, 1993). Alternatively, tight electoral contests might also encourage greater investment in mobilisation from political parties and elites seeking to make the most of the

opportunity for victory. In the Russian case, it is possible that regime elites may make greater use of the manipulative voter mobilisation strategies in contexts of greater electoral uncertainty, so as to minimise their risk of defeat. As one control for the perceived probability of regime victory, I therefore include the variable *Incumbent*, which is a binary measure of whether an incumbent was running for re-election in a given district (coded as 1 for incumbents, and 0 for all others). This is driven by the argument that incumbency acts as a considerable resource adding to the weight of a candidate, and may subsequently affect voter calculations about the probability of their vote making a difference. This data was constructed using individual candidate biographies published by the Russian Central Electoral Commission.

Furthermore, I control for political fragmentation, by including the number of candidates contesting a seat within each district - this variable is named *Number of Candidates*. Literature expectations on the relationship between fragmentation and turnout are mixed: on the one hand, fragmentation can have a positive effect because it widens the voters' opportunity for identification with a candidate / party, whilst on the other, a larger number of contestants might increase information costs for voters and turn them away from the electoral arena (Geys, 2006:pp.649-650).

Finally, campaign expenditure has been identified as another possible political factor affecting turnout (Ibid:pp.648-649). Unfortunately, the data on campaign expenditure within each district has been made publicly available for only a few regions in our sample, thus expenditure cannot be controlled for directly. However, certain types of candidates may be more likely to have higher campaign spending levels due to their vast financial resources. In particular, business executive candidates, who are common in Russia, are largely thought to be benefitting from their vast material resources at

election time, which might translate into higher election expenditures. For this reason, I include a dummy variable - *Business* - which codes United Russia candidates as 1 if they hold a business executive post, and 0 if otherwise.

In addition to the above variables, I control for the *Year of Election* (dummy variables for each year, with 2010 as the reference category). The inclusion of this factor helps to control for the possibility that the relative calculations for the authoritarian elites may vary depending on different national and international contexts, as well as the occurrence of national-level elections at the same time as the regional legislative contests.

Results

Table 6.1 presents the results of a two-level mixed-effects regression model, as discussed above. As can be seen from this, urbanisation was found to have a statistically significant effect upon the proportion of voters casting their ballot externally. The model predicts that as an electoral district moves from completely rural to completely urban, the proportion of the electorate voting externally should decrease by 5 percent. Given that the proportion of external voting tends to remain low on average (with most districts reporting external voting levels of less than 5 percent, as seen in Figures 6.1-6.3 earlier), this predicted decrease is of considerable magnitude. This finding is therefore in line with *H4.1*, and suggests that considerations relating to rural and urban characteristics of the electorate are important in driving the mobilisation of voters through external ballots.

The size of the electorate appears to be important for the levels of external voting in our sample of elections. The positive nature of this effect runs contrary to expectations

of democratic literature - it appears that voters are more likely to vote externally in larger electoral communities. In addition to this, the number of candidates appears to have a statistically significant effect, suggesting that greater fragmentation decreases the level of external voting.

However, the magnitude of this effect is fairly low, with external voting decreasing by 0.03 percent for each additional candidate. Amongst other control variables, neither incumbent nor businessman candidates appear to affect the levels of external voting in our sample. However, the year dummies suggest that, external voting does vary across time, as this form of mobilisation was higher in 2012 than that in 2010. 2012 was arguably the most vulnerable year for the regime in Russia during the time period selected in our sample, as it was marked by the aftermath of the 2011 protests and heightened scrutiny of regime actions. Moreover, this was also the year of the presidential elections which saw the return of Vladimir Putin as a candidate to the post of the President. Therefore, the increase in the level of mobilisation through external voting is likely reflecting two types of behaviour.

Table 6.1. Determinants of voter mobilisation (multi-level)

	I	II
Constant	.044*** (.0001)	.011 (.037)
Urbanisation		-.050*** (.004)
Log Population		.007*** (.004)
Incumbent		-.001 (.003)
Number of Candidates		-.003*** (.001)
Business		.004 (.003)
Year of election (2010 ^a)		
2011		-.013 (.008)
2012		.027** (.011)
2013		.002 (.010)
Random Effects		
Region-level variance	0.0004 .0001	0.0001 (.00005)
ICC	30%	14%
LR Test vs Logistic Regression (Chi-bar-squared statistic reported)	112.82 ($p<0.0001$)	25.46 ($p<0.0001$)

Notes: Mixed-effects logistic regression, odds-ratios reported. Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$

$N = 390$

First, it could indicate genuine increases in turnout, as the presidential elections are seen as a more significant event in the Russian political calendar and subsequently attract a higher level of interest from the voters, which may spillover onto the regional legislative elections held at the same time. However, the model expects that external voting increases by 2.7 percent in 2012, when compared with that in 2010, which seems

a considerable increase. For example, as shown earlier in Figure 6.1, in just under a third of the districts in our sample (111 out of 360 districts) external voting amounted to less than 2 percent of the total ballots cast. An increase of 2.7 percent in external voting in such areas would therefore amount to more than doubling the level of this type of participation. Therefore, it is possible that this figure captures not only genuine turnout but also increased manipulation. Therefore, the second dynamic which may be reflected in the result for the 2012 year dummy is the regime's need to regain legitimacy and win convincingly at this pivotal time for Putin by demonstrating high levels of engagement from the citizenry. Moreover, given the finding that external voting in this sample is more likely to occur in rural areas, and this dissertation's central assumption that these areas are dominated by regime supporters, the trend for 2012 could also indicate that rural voters represent a key pillar of authoritarian power in Russia today, as the regime appears to increase its efforts to mobilise loyal segments of the electorate during electoral cycles that include the contestation of the presidency.

Finally, the ICC shows that without any district-level predictors, 30 percent of the variance is explained at the regional-level. Once the individual predictors are added, the ICC shows that only 14 percent of the variance is explained at the regional-level, which indicates that the district-level factors included in this model go some way towards explaining the variation in the levels of external voting in our sample. This finding further underlines the relevance of a multi-level approach, as well as highlighting the importance of paying attention to intra-regional patterns. In sum, we can conclude that the negative relationship between urbanisation and external voting persists even in the face of inter-regional differences. As such, this finding points to the existence of a regime-wide logic of manipulation.

6.3.3 Summary of analysis

In sum, this section has described the patterns in the use of external voting drives in our sample, and has justified the inclusion of this tactic into the menu of manipulation explored in this thesis. Whilst the data on external voting does not capture perfectly mobilisation as a strategy of manipulation (as the data includes instances of legitimate voting, as well the possibility of electoral fraud), there are considerable grounds to believe that the primary mechanism and aim of this process nevertheless relates to manipulative voter mobilisation. The regression analysis subsequently uncovered a negative relationship between urbanisation and external voting, thus offering support to the overarching hypothesis (*H4.1*) that universal mobilisation through the abuse of the external voting procedure is less likely to take place in urban districts. Before we can conclude what this finding means for this dissertation's overarching argument that the Russian regime engages in manipulation on the basis of its calculations of its own weakness, it is necessary examine whether the patterns in the use of the other two types of manipulative mobilisation diverge from those of external voting, as expected by this thesis. The next section therefore continues the analysis but changes the focus to the patterns in the use of coercive mobilisation.

6.4 Analysis of coercive mobilisation

It is virtually impossible to quantify instances of coercive mobilisation in the context of Russian regional legislative elections as, just as with other strategies of manipulation, almost no systematic or verified data exists on this subject. As a result, the analysis in this section adopts a qualitative approach, and entails the examination

of allegations made to the election monitoring association Golos. This information was obtained from the organisation's Map of Violations (*Karta Narusheniy*) online database, which represents a wealth of crowd-sourced information on the practices of electoral manipulation in the form of citizen and observer reports.

One downside of these reports is that they have not been verified, which means that this information must be treated with caution. However, we are unlikely to collect more credible data on these processes because of the sensitivity of the issues under examination. Individuals experiencing electoral coercion of this sort are unlikely to make official complaints and use their full names publicly, which could have aided investigation, as they fear sanctions once exposed, and cannot guarantee that the biased electoral commissions and courts.

This is illustrated through the responses of electoral commissions to official complaints of this nature in the rare instances that voters risk challenging their superiors publicly. For example, during the regional legislative elections in Belgorod oblast in 2010, a complaint was made to the Central Electoral Commission that students were being pressured to vote at a university in Belgorod city (Russian Central Electoral Commission, 2011:p.139). In its response, the Central Electoral Commission published the name of the complaint author and simply stated that, according to electoral legislation, Russian citizens have the right to abstain from voting, as well as legally being able to obtain an absentee permit to vote at a different polling station to the one near their home. The response contains nothing about an investigation into the matter but simply formally reminds the author of their 'right to inform the Electoral Commission of Belgorod Oblast [and the] police organs about... the pressure to participate and the violations of citizens' rights to vote in the upcoming

elections by university authorities'. The anonymity offered by Golos is therefore an advantage that turns these reports into rare insights into instances of selective mobilisation.

After examining all reports relating to the regional legislative elections in our sample of regions, I found 52 reports on the Golos database which can be classified as examples of attempts at coercive selective mobilisation. A report was classified as an instance of coercive mobilisation if it stated that members of an organisation pressured their subordinates to engage in a certain type of electoral behaviour (including turning out to vote, voting for a regime candidate, or obtaining absentee permits) with no indication that positive inducements were made.

Representing each year from those available in the database for our sample (2011-2013) and originating from ten regions, many of these reports tell a similar story taking place in each regional legislative election - certain groups of voters are pressured into electoral action by their superiors within organisations upon which they are dependent for work or study. Typical electoral action reported includes being forced to obtain absentee permits and vote at their place of work or study instead of the polling stations near their homes, being explicitly told to vote for United Russia and its candidates, having to force relatives to turn out at election time, being driven to polling stations en masse, and, in extreme cases, having to submit photographic proof of voting or hand over their absentee permits to someone else. Such behaviour is clearly an instance of manipulation as it interferes with the voters' right to independent decision-making and the secrecy of the ballot, let alone setting up opportunities for potential electoral fraud. Despite our inability to verify each individual report, taken

collectively, this data points to coercive mobilisation within organisations as a standard feature of Russian regional legislative elections.

This revelation is not necessarily a new discovery - as discussed previously, the use of workplace mobilisation, for example, is widely documented in the Russian context. The present chapter is concerned with establishing not only how mobilisation is used as an option on the menu of manipulation by Russia's regional elites, however, but also whether its use varies across rural and urban contexts. Therefore, as the next stage, I established the electoral district locations from which each report originated - six reports did not provide enough detail to enable me to locate the organisation in question, and thus the total sample of reports relating to coercive mobilisation was reduced to 46.

Looking at the electoral districts from which these 46 reports originate, it becomes clear that tactics of coercive selective mobilisation are a feature of urban elections - every single one of the reports in our sample came from a predominantly urban electoral district, where more than 50 percent of the population have been classed as urban residents, according to the official Russian census data. Just over half of these reports (24 reports) originate from the capital cities of these regions. The prevalence of regional capitals is somewhat expected, given that these cities represent the largest and most prosperous urban areas in each region, with vast opportunities for employment and study. However, the almost even split between regional capitals and other, smaller, cities and towns indicates that coercive selective mobilisation is nevertheless diffused across a range of urban areas within regions. In other words, such tactics are not just a feature of the biggest cities, but urban areas as a whole - this finding lends support to

the argument that urbanisation informs the decisions made by regime elites regarding electoral manipulation.

Table 6.2 summarises the reports according to the levels of urbanisation - the reports are divided across four quartiles of *Urbanisation* (as in Chapter 3), so as to better summarise the relative range of locations from which these reports originate, and highlight the relative preponderance of urban districts amongst them.

Table 6.2 Golos reports of coercive mobilisation (according to level of urbanisation)

<i>Urbanisation</i>	Number of Reports
First Quartile (Overwhelmingly Rural, 0-40% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	0
Second Quartile (Mixed, 41-64% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	3
Third Quartile (Overwhelmingly Urban, 65-91% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	18
Fourth Quartile (Peak Urban, 92-100% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	25

The tables below categorise the Golos reports according to the organisations named and how many times each type of electoral action is reported within this sample of data. From Table 6.3, we can see that, although business represents the largest category of complaints, it appears that the key pillars of the state - education, health, security and political administration - are used to control electoral behaviour. Taken together, reports from these organisations represent 61% (28 reports) of the sample.

This makes the absence of rural districts from complaints even more curious - even if we might expect urban areas to be overrepresented in terms of mobilisation within business companies since these are mostly located in urban centres, vast numbers of

state institutions continue to provide important services in the spheres of health, education, security and political administration across the regions, regardless of whether the location is urban or rural. One possible explanation for this is that rural voters are less likely to report instances of coercive mobilisation in the workplace - for example, due to lack of internet access. Furthermore, if the reason why regime elites approach rural and urban voters in a different way is because the latter are more sceptical and likely to protest in response to electoral violations than the former, then the silence from the countryside is somewhat expected. However, rural voices are nevertheless heard in other types of Golos complaints, such as those regarding the external voting process discussed earlier in this chapter. Moreover, the lack of even a single rural complaint of this nature is striking.

Table 6.3 Golos reports of coercive mobilisation (according to type of organisation)

Type of Organisation	Number of Reports
Business	18
Schools and Kindergartens	7
Universities	6
Military and Police	6
Political Administration	6
Hospitals	3

Table 6.4 presents the types of electoral behaviour required from voters subjected to coercive selective mobilisation mentioned in the 46 reports in our sample.¹⁹ If we compare this to the nature of the earlier-discussed complaints on the process of

¹⁹ Note: Some of the reports are counted more than once in this table as they specify more than one type of required action

external voting, it becomes clear that this is a very different type of mobilisation attempt. Most notable is the fact that none of the external voting complaints mention voters being pressured into voting for United Russia. Indeed, such complaints are mostly about numbers - officials either seeking or allowing votes from those who are not on the initial register of external voters. By contrast, the 46 complaints reviewed above detail the regime's attempt to exploit links of dependency amongst voters for the purposes of generating more votes for the regime party - in other words, the majority of these reports indicate that this was not a pursuit of votes for votes' sake.

This finding further confirms the assumptions outlined in the second section of this chapter, which relate to the purposes of each of the three strategies of manipulative mobilisation under consideration. The lack of complaints regarding pressures of vote choices during external voting, combined with the large number of complaints relating to the number of voters participating through this mechanism, points to the turnout-maximising role of this strategy. By contrast, the complaints relating to the pressure to vote for United Russia in reports of coercive mobilisation, underlines the fact that this strategy not only enhances existing voter preferences, but actively shapes them in the direction preferred by the regime. This feature of the two types of manipulation is central to the hypotheses proposed in section two of the present chapter, and therefore this finding lends some indirect support to these.

Table 6.4 Types of electoral action requested from voters (Golos reports)

Most Common Types of Action Reported	Number of Reports Mentioning
Forced to Vote for United Russia	32
Forced to Vote with Absentee Permit at a Polling Station	12
Forced to Vote with Absentee Permit at Work	8
Forced to Report Back After Voting	8
Forced to Pressure Relatives	4
Forced to Hand In Absentee Permit	2

Just over half of the reports (32 reports) mention that voters received explicit instructions to vote for the ‘party of power’, which is evidence of direct association between the regime and the mobilising organisations outlined in Table 6.2. These instructions to vote for United Russia are not simply a promotion of the party as part of election campaigning. The reports specify that voters felt under pressure to vote in this way, with many threatened with sanctions for non-compliance, such as the withholding of wages and bonuses, or even loss of employment. Whilst in reality it would be very difficult for those in positions of authority within these organisations to check whether their subordinates did indeed vote in the ‘correct’ way - for example, ballot papers cast into the ballot box have no identifying features - electoral commissions do keep a register of voters who have turned out to vote in each polling station, which leaves some room for voters to doubt the implausibility of their

employers checking their compliance.²⁰ The psychological effect of threats and a potential paper trail should therefore not be underestimated.

Moreover, instructions to vote for United Russia are rarely reported as simply words that are unaccompanied by other actions or demands from the organisations. Typically, we see that voters have been driven to polling stations en masse or forced to vote at their place of work. Some voters (seven reports) were even asked to report back to their superiors as ‘proof’ of their compliance - either verbally immediately after voting or by showing photographs of their ballot papers and votes for United Russia. The reports below serve as examples that illustrate these combinations across a range of organisations and regions.

ID 26553, Ulyanovsk city (Ulyanovsk Oblast’ elections, 2013):

‘Soldiers were brought over to the [polling station] and publicly ordered to vote for Dmitriyeva (United Russia candidate).’

ID4579, Tomsk city (Tomsk Oblast’ elections, 2011):²¹

‘Today, it’s gotten to the point where some [students] are asked to show the curators photos of ballots... where a tick must be placed in the required box. Those who will not do so are threatened with a reduction in marks, eviction from their halls of residence, and problems relating to their studies.’

²⁰ Other evidence of this can be found in the regime’s own (unintended) admissions in response to official complaints. For example, in one official complaint to the Central Election Commission, during regional legislative elections in Belgorod oblast in 2010, it was reported that electoral commission officials provided the names of those who haven’t yet voted to a bus driver who was tasked with transporting voters to the polling station (Russian Central Election Commission, 2010:p.139).

²¹ Quote taken from video attached to the report in which two students report on electoral coercion within Tomsk universities.

ID3253, Tver' city (Tver' Oblast' elections, 2011):

'At the Tver' department of education they are pushing [employees] to vote for United Russia - dismissal from work otherwise. The campaigning is done by the head of department himself, as well as by other representatives of the United Russia party.'

ID 5935, Nizhniy Tagil (Sverdlovsk Oblast' elections, 2011):

'On the morning of 1st December, the chief executive of Tagilenergo... held a meeting with the heads of subdivisions [within the company] and tasked each one of them with checking on their subordinates. Specifically, each [employee] had to call before midday on the 4th December and report that they have voted for United Russia.'

These reports therefore indicate that the purpose of mobilisation through the workplace or place of study is to directly interfere with the voters' preferences at election time through the restriction of their rights to independent decision-making and the secrecy of the ballot. Further evidence of the interfering intent behind this type of selective mobilisation is the fact that organisations in this sample are not necessarily interested in enabling pure turnout per se. Only three reports do not mention whether voters were informed explicitly to vote for United Russia despite explaining that voters were placed under pressure to participate at election time. During all other instances reported to the Golos database for our sample of regions, voters received clear instructions to support the regime when pressured to turn out on election day to vote either at their place of work and study or elsewhere. Given that the backdrop for each instance in our sample is an urban district, the findings from the discussion above suggest that although tactics of manipulative mobilisation are used in urban areas, they vary from those in rural districts due to their selective, and frequently coercive, nature.

6.5 Analysis of clientelistic mobilisation

The Golos database is also a useful source of reports on the third type of mobilisation that offers incentives, rather than punishments, to voters in exchange for their participation and support for the regime at election time - a more clientelistic mechanism for driving voters to certain types of electoral behaviour through vote-buying.

In order to examine whether this type of mobilisation is prevalent in the context of Russian regional legislative elections, and, crucially, whether it is employed differently across rural and urban areas, I gathered together all reports that cited offers of material benefits to voters at election time for our sample of regions. To distinguish this from general policy promises typically made during election campaigns, the reports were considered to be indicative of clientelistic mobilisation if they cited targeted payoffs, or promises of such payoffs immediately after election time, to individuals or specific groups of voters, not the wider population. In total, there were 43 reports which qualified for this definition of mobilisation. I then divided these reports into two further groups: first, instances of a direct offer of material benefits in return for various types of electoral behaviour; second, instances where material benefits were provided to voters close to election day in association with the regime but not necessarily with an agreement that voters would engage in pro-regime electoral behaviour. Below, I examine the features of each type of clientelistic mobilisation in our sample of regions in greater detail.

First, some voters have been offered a direct exchange of material benefits (typically lump sum payoffs) in return certain types of electoral behaviour, such as voting for United Russia or voting elsewhere with an absentee permit instead of the polling station near their home. Just over half of the 43 reports (23 reports) fall into this category and come from eight regions in our sample.

Based on those reports which state the exact amount of money offered to voters to cast their vote in support of United Russia, it appears that the average price of a vote in support of the regime is 811 roubles - with actual amounts stated ranging between 300 and 3,000 roubles. The highest figures were offered to some employees at two large energy and natural resource enterprises in Sverdlovsk oblast'. The largest sum, a 3,000 rouble bonus, was offered to some employees alongside instructions to vote for United Russia at the giant copper manufacturing company, Uralsktromed. The second largest sum, 1,500 roubles, was reportedly offered to employees of the Beloyarsk Nuclear Power Station, who also had the option of taking the day off instead. Most other reports of this nature state that individuals were offered somewhere in the region of 300-500 roubles per pro-regime vote, with the majority of those targeted appearing to be students and pensioners. Given that the average Russian pension by the end of 2011 was around 8,500 roubles per month²², whilst the average student stipend that year was between 1,200- 2,000 roubles per month²³, these seemingly small sums represent considerable payoffs in proportion to the average income of these two groups.

²² Official figure of 8,529 roubles per month published by the Russian Ministry of Health, as cited in Ria Novosti, 'Srednyaya pensiya v RF k kontsu 2011 goda sostavit bolee 8,5 tys rubley', *Moscow Ria Novosti*, 22.09.2010, <https://ria.ru/economy/20100922/278282707.html>

²³ A.Lyubova, L.Romashkina, 'Nuzhna li studentu stipendiya?' *Perm Online Portal 59.ru*, 20.01.2011, <https://59.ru/text/gorod/355747.html>

It therefore seems that those acting on behalf of the regime are prepared to target both the more costly full time employees working in the largest companies and most lucrative industries, as well as the low-income voters who may be willing to accept more modest payoffs.

Amongst other payments, the average price offered in exchange for the use of an absentee permit to vote at another location within the region - either by the voters themselves or by others on their behalf (which amounts to electoral fraud) - was 357 roubles in this sample. Other types of electoral behaviour carried a higher price tag - for example, students in Novgorod city were reportedly offered 2,000 roubles to work as election observers, whilst students in Tomsk city were offered 6,000 roubles to commit electoral fraud by voting in different electoral districts using 6 passports belonging to other individuals.²⁴

Not all instances of such direct exchanges involved cash, however. For example, employees of a major steel pipe-producing plant, Novotrubniy Zavod, in Pervoural'sk city (Sverdlovsk oblast) were offered to obtain absentee permits and be transported to a polling station at a summer camp outside the city (using their absentee permits as entrance passes onto the bus). Once they voted at the camp, each employee was able to enjoy 'paintball, football, skis, tea, pancakes, shashlik [barbecue] virtually for free'.²⁵ On a more modest level, a United Russia regional legislator promised to deliver apples to elderly women residing in the resort town of Yeysk in Krasnodar krai immediately before the regional legislative election in October 2012. Nine days before election day, soldiers, under the military command of a United Russia candidate for local elections,

²⁴ Novgorod Report ID 5884; Tomsk Report ID 3653

²⁵ Report ID 7748

delivered the apples - in return, the elderly women promised to support United Russia at election time.²⁶ Similarly, in the town of Staraya Russa (Novgorod oblast'), it was reported that a woman asked local residents if they were planning to turn out and vote for United Russia during the regional legislative elections. Those who indicated their intended support for the party were given a lottery ticket with a 'guaranteed prize', as well as the chance to win large prizes such as televisions, fridges and microwaves.²⁷ Interestingly, the author of the Golos complaint attached a copy of the lottery ticket²⁸ - from this image, we can see that the ticket, rather cryptically, states that 'you will be able to find out where you can collect your gift after voting on the 4th December'. On election day, the author of the report found out from a member of the electoral commission at his polling station that gifts could be collected from a nearby Department of Social Security.

Taken together, these reports confirm the presence of clientelistic mobilisation in the context of Russian regional legislative elections. Crucially, as already indicated by the fact that each of the examples above describes mobilisation in cities and towns, this type of mobilisation is overwhelmingly urban in nature in our sample of regions. Just as the pattern of coercive selective mobilisation discussed earlier in the chapter, reports of clientelistic exchanges of this type originate largely from urban districts, and cover both regional capital cities and smaller towns. The urbanisation levels relating to these reports are summarised in Table 6.5.

²⁶ Report ID 24363

²⁷ Report ID 11214

²⁸ This image can be found in Appendix B.

Table 6.5 Golos reports of clientelistic mobilisation (according to level of urbanisation)

<i>Urbanisation</i>	Number of Reports
First Quartile (Overwhelmingly Rural, 0-40% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	0
Second Quartile (Mixed, 41-64% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	1
Third Quartile (Overwhelmingly Urban, 65-91% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	10
Fourth Quartile (Peak Urban, 92-100% <i>Urbanisation</i>)	32

The finding that mobilisation through clientelistic vote-buying appears to occur primarily in urban areas offers support to the third hypothesis explored in this chapter, which expected to find this tactic of selective mobilisation predominantly in urban districts.

Interestingly, it also appears that clientelist tools of this kind are not used exclusively by United Russia. As stated in one report from a student who was successful in becoming a temporary electoral commission member during Tomsk oblast' regional legislative elections in 2011:

ID 3653, Tomsk city (Tomsk oblast', 2011):

'... when I applied to become a member of the electoral commission, my classmates came along with me. There weren't enough spaces for one of them, and he was offered 'alternative' work: to vote for Just Russia for 500 roubles. We both applied via the student recruitment agency 'Panda'...'

Whilst it is virtually impossible to generalise from just one report of this kind, its existence nevertheless suggests that United Russia may also be forced to compete with

other actors in the cities, which suggests that the level of uncertainty over outcomes in urban districts may be even higher than assumed on the basis of the patterns in voting behaviour (discussed in Chapter 2) alone.

6.6 Chapter summary

The above discussions have therefore shown that there are three major manipulative ways of mobilising voters in Russia. Interestingly, the results above have shown that manipulative mobilisation efforts target different group of voters, depending on whether mobilisation is selective or universal in nature. Thus, in contrast to the voter mobilisation efforts of the Soviet period, which pursued the goal of universal electoral participation as the ultimate symbol of legitimacy, the contemporary Russian electoral authoritarian regime appears to be more engaged with mobilising only certain sections of the electorate. One explanation for this is the relative weakness of grassroots party organisations mentioned earlier, which may serve as the main obstacle to wider mobilisation efforts. This thesis, however, argues that this pattern largely betrays a major point of concern for authoritarian elites: turnout is desired only if it has a corresponding effect on regime support levels.

This chapter has argued that universal mobilisation efforts are particularly dangerous in the context of electoral authoritarianism - they might awaken and activate the sceptical and politically-sophisticated sections of the electorate that will go on to support the opposition. Therein lies an interesting paradox of electoral authoritarianism - the regime relies on both turnout and apathy from the electorate for its continued survival. The results of the analysis focusing on one form of universal

mobilisation in the Russian context - external voting - indicate that the regime appears to be aware of this, as this tactic of manipulation appears to be used most frequently in rural areas, which are most likely to be populated by voters loyal to the regime.

By contrast, in urban districts, which are characterised by higher levels of electoral uncertainty for the regime, authoritarian actors appear to reduce their reliance on the 'positive' tactic of universal mobilisation - this chapter has argued that this is indicative of the regime's desire to avoid mobilising hostile elements within the electorate, unintentionally. Instead, the chapter has found that the 'negative' strategy of selective mobilisation - specifically, its coercive and clientelistic forms - is judged to be most appropriate in urban areas by the regime. It was argued that this difference in approach is explained by the selectivity and the 'negative' nature of the coercive and clientelistic mobilisation strategies - such tactics are better suited to areas with greater levels of hostility towards the regime in voter attitudes, as they allow the regime to interfere and alter existing voter preferences either through pressure or additional incentives for voters, without mobilising indiscriminately.

As a result, the findings of this chapter confirm the significance of electoral uncertainty as a determinant of electoral manipulation, as well as urbanisation as an indicator of such uncertainty, which is in line with the theoretical expectations outlined in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated a topic which lies at the heart of most discussions on authoritarian elections, and carries the power to incite mass protest and violent action - and yet, it is also a topic that has been the subject of systematic analysis in relatively few studies. Electoral manipulation is a fascinating aspect of electoral behaviour, and we are still only beginning to uncover the dynamics behind it.

The dissertation sought to advance our understanding of the manipulative practices under electoral authoritarianism through the exploration of the patterns of electoral manipulation in Russia's regional legislative elections. The analyses in the preceding chapters have revealed that manipulation is neither random nor as widespread as it is often assumed. Instead, the use of manipulation varies across different electoral contexts. The key finding of the study is the relationship between urbanisation and the use of four strategies of electoral manipulation in Russia today. Urban districts have been found to be more likely to be exposed to most of the four strategies from this menu of electoral manipulation than rural districts. The major exception appears to be the tactic of mobilising voters through external voting, with these practices having been found to result in increasing the participation of voters in rural districts more than in urban areas.

The thesis has argued that, collectively, these insights from the four empirical chapters point to the existence of a logic behind the use of electoral manipulation - the

regime appears to engage in these practices on the basis of uncertainty over its prospects of electoral victory. This conclusion is centred on the assumptions that urban voters in Russia are less likely to be loyal supporters of the regime than those residing in rural areas, and that, in the context of scarce information, urbanisation subsequently serves as a key indicator of the likelihood of victory for regime elites (as outlined in Chapter 2).

In this context, the findings of this thesis are consistent. The use of the most distorting, 'negative', types of manipulation - electoral fraud, candidate exclusion, spoiler candidates, coercive mobilisation, and clientelistic vote-buying - was found to be more likely in urban areas, which suggests that the regime engages in manipulation in order to minimise the electoral damage inherent in urban voter preferences. By contrast, manipulation through external voting - a 'positive' strategy which indiscriminately enhances, rather than distorts voter preferences - was found to be used more in rural areas, which suggests that the regime is concerned with making sure that its projections of victory, based on the high levels of genuine support in the countryside, become a reality.

These behaviours appear to be two sides of the same coin, as the patterns suggest that the regime is ultimately seeking to compensate for its weaknesses - the risk of low levels of support in the city, and the risk of low turnout amongst loyal supporters in the countryside.

The sections below review the main findings from each chapter of the dissertation, before proceeding to set out the implications for scholars and political actors in both Russia and beyond, and discussing some possible directions for future research.

7.1 Summary of findings

7.1.1 Electoral fraud

The first empirical chapter of the thesis explored the use of electoral fraud in the regional legislative elections in our sample. Last-digit analysis of official figures stated in final election reports has shown suspicious distributions, which suggests that this data was subjected to the heavy hand of human beings. Overall, six types of official electoral data were analysed - registered voter count, turnout and the vote counts for the four largest parties in Russia (United Russia, KPRF, Just Russia, and LDPR).

Non-parametric tests showed that the distributions of last digits were not universal for all figures, as should be the case in naturally occurring social data, which points to the highly likely possibility that many of the figures had been artificially constructed and written down post factum by the very election officials who have been trusted with maintaining the integrity of the elections. Moreover, these suspicious patterns corresponded to particularly high levels of United Russia support, and particularly low levels of support for the other parties. This finding suggests that supermajorities for United Russia, as well as the heavy losses for the other parties, are likely to have been achieved with the aid of electoral fraud.

The multinomial regressions have revealed that the decision to fabricate these data does not follow the same logic for all six types of electoral counts, however. Thus, the patterns in the last-digits of four types of data - turnout, and the vote counts for United Russia, KPRF and Just Russia parties - were found to have no association with either

the key explanatory variable of urbanisation, or the control variables. The regression model M6, where the last-digits of LDPR vote counts were treated as a dependent variable, produced some statistically significant results in relation to urbanisation and the factor of incumbency - however, upon further inspection, suspicious patterns were identified at most levels of urbanisation (including the most rural and the most urban ends of the spectrum). As a result, this chapter concluded that there exists no association between urbanisation and last-digit fraud for these five types of electoral data.

Regression analysis of last-digits in registered voter counts, however, revealed a trend that was in line with the overarching hypothesis of this thesis. Precincts from the most urban areas in our sample were the only group where the relative likelihood of last-digits was found to be suspicious. Moreover, the last-digit '0' was more likely to appear, relative to other digits (particularly digits '4' and '8'), in the reported counts of registered voters in urban areas. In other words, amongst districts where United Russia secured a majority, urban areas were more likely to contain data that appears to be a product of decimally-inclined human beings rather than the outcome of a social process. This finding therefore offered support to the hypothesis that the use of 'negative' strategies of electoral manipulation increases with urbanisation.

The chapter argued that the discrepancy between registered voter counts and the other five types of electoral data is, in itself, in line with the expectations of this dissertation. Specifically, as the only type of data that is likely to be forged before the counting process on election day, registered voter counts are subject to expectations relating to electoral uncertainty. By contrast, the other five types of information are fabricated after the counting process has been completed, and thus under the

conditions of absolute certainty about electoral outcomes. The positive relationship between urbanisation and the former, and the lack of any association between urbanisation and the latter, therefore show that urbanisation is used as an indicator of electoral risk by the regime, the need for which disappears when more precise information becomes available.

Further investigation of the broader practices of electoral fraud beyond falsification, as alleged through court cases, offered further support for the argument that urbanisation affects the decisions over the use of electoral fraud. Amongst the court cases in our sample, only two rural districts saw complaints about regime-driven fraud filed through the court channels.¹ The preponderance of urban districts in our sample thus further confirms the link between urbanisation and the use of electoral manipulation.

Crucially, the small number of rural cases of fraud originated from elections with relatively competitive environments, characterised by unusually high levels of uncertainty over the regime's prospects of victory. Therefore, even these rural instances of fraud are in line with the broader argument of this thesis, which emphasises the reduction of electoral uncertainty as the key priority for the regime, which subsequently drives the use of electoral manipulation.

Overall, these insights are in line with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 of the thesis, which proposed a weakness-oriented explanation of the logic of electoral manipulation - the regime appears to be deploying distorting tactics of

¹ Two other court cases came from rural locations, however, they were subsequently discarded from the analysis because they related to fraud committed on behalf of the opposition, and therefore pertain to a different type of electoral manipulation logic.

manipulation in areas where it is particularly worried about being able to secure genuine victory.

7.1.2 Candidate exclusion

The second empirical chapter focused on the practice of candidate exclusion. After reviewing the regulations surrounding the process of candidate registration and the application of these regulations by the electoral commissions, the chapter made a strong case for why we should consider those hopefuls who have been unsuccessful in registering as a non-regime candidate as having been excluded from the race through manipulative means.

The statistical analysis subsequently found that individuals were more likely to be excluded from the race in urban, rather than rural, districts, even when controlling for personal- and regional-level factors. Further investigation through the case of Ulyanovsk oblast' and Ulyanovsk city confirmed these broad patterns, and demonstrated the consistently unfair treatment of opposition candidates during the process of candidate registration in urban areas. These insights therefore echoed those from Chapter 3 on electoral fraud, as they indicate that yet another distorting tactic of electoral manipulation is more likely to manifest itself in urban districts. As such, the chapter similarly supports the theoretical framework driving this study - the greater use of candidate exclusion in urban constituencies, which are assumed to be areas of particularly high uncertainty over regime success, suggests that decisions relating to the menu of manipulation are linked to the regime's concerns over victory.

7.1.3 Spoiler candidates

The third empirical chapter examined the use of spoiler candidates, who carry virtually identical names to genuine regime challengers. Due to the small number of such cases in our sample, the chapter adopted a qualitative approach by examining in closer detail the electoral contexts in which candidates clones were able to secure successful registration.

Overall, the analysis concluded that the use of spoiler candidates is linked to the level of urbanisation in an electoral district, as spoilers were present predominantly in urban constituencies. Moreover, even amongst the small number of the more rural districts with spoiler candidates, some districts had experienced increased levels of urbanisation when compared to previous elections, after the reconstruction of district boundaries.

In addition, the findings of this chapter offer further support to the broader argument that electoral uncertainty is a key determinant of electoral manipulation. The use of identical spoilers in rural districts tended to occur against the backdrop of relative electoral weakness for the regime - lacklustre regime candidates competing against experienced and well-known opponents, either in areas that are characterised by high levels of voter disillusionment or in newly-formed constituencies. Echoing the trends identified in Chapter 3 on electoral fraud, the small number of rural instances of spoiler tactics were therefore all characterised by unusually high levels of competitiveness, and therefore electoral uncertainty, for the regime.

Urban districts with spoiler candidates, by contrast, were less competitive with respect to the quality of regime and opposition candidates, as well as recent constituency-level political developments, compared to the rural areas. This chapter argued that this discrepancy between the urban and the rural districts in our sample points to the fact that urbanisation is used primarily as an indicator of *voter* sentiments, rather than the quality of the opposition. The regime felt the need to manipulate elections through the use of spoilers even when it seemingly already possessed an advantage in terms of candidate qualities and resources - thus, it was argued that the nature of urban voters is in itself a constant source of uncertainty for the regime. As such, this finding confirms the role of urbanisation as an indicator of the underlying electoral risk for the regime.

7.1.4 Voter mobilisation

The final empirical chapter of the thesis examined the patterns in the use of voter mobilisation. Specifically, three types of manipulative voter mobilisation were identified in the Russian context: the abuse of the external voting process; coercive pressures; and clientelistic vote-buying.

Overall, the use of these strategies of manipulation followed diverging patterns, in respect to urbanisation. Specifically, a negative association between urbanisation and manipulation through external voting was identified - the percentage of those casting their votes into transportable ballot boxes was found to be greater in rural areas. By contrast, the use of, both, coercive and clientelistic forms of manipulation was found to be greater in urban areas.

This thesis has argued that this difference is down to the different aims inherent to these forms of manipulation. Coercive and clientelistic types of mobilisation are 'negative' variants of electoral manipulation, in that they seek to interfere and alter existing voter preferences either through pressure or through additional incentives for voters. By contrast, manipulation through external voting entails a more 'positive' approach, as it makes it easier for voters to participate at election time. As a result, it makes sense for these strategies to be concentrated in opposing types of districts - 'negative' forms of mobilisation are more appropriate for those districts where it is necessary to dilute the hostile sentiments of the electorate, whilst the 'positive' forms of mobilisation are more suitable to those areas where there exist high levels of genuine support for the regime, which could be boosted even further. The findings are consistent with this logic, since they confirm the greater use of selective ('negative') mobilisation in the hostile, urban areas, and greater use of universal ('positive') mobilisation in the loyal, rural areas.

7.1.5 In sum

Overall, this thesis has examined the use of a wide range of strategies of electoral manipulation in the context of Russian regional legislative elections. Taken together, the findings from the four empirical chapters in this dissertation point to a consistent theme - electoral manipulation is used in response to electoral uncertainty.

This theme is evident from the trends of positive association between urbanisation and the use of electoral fraud, candidate exclusion, spoiler strategies and selective types of voter mobilisation. Given the assumption that the level of electoral uncertainty increases with urbanisation (due to the lower levels of genuine support for the regime

amongst urban voters), this positive trend indicates that the use of manipulation becomes more likely when the level of uncertainty is high. Electoral manipulation is not completely restricted to urban areas, of course - however, the rare instances of manipulation in the rural areas nevertheless conform to the above theme, as these electoral contexts were found to be characterised by high levels of competitiveness, and therefore, electoral uncertainty, for the regime. In other words, this thesis has shown that urbanisation is treated as a key indicator of electoral uncertainty by the regime, even if it is not the only source of such uncertainty.

Finally, the only strategy of manipulation which has demonstrated a negative association with urbanisation - universal mobilisation through external voting - is nevertheless in line with the theme of this thesis, since this, too, points to the regime's prioritisation of electoral uncertainty. The key difference here, however, is that the authoritarian actors are more certain about the pro-regime nature of voter preferences in the countryside - the biggest electoral risk in such contexts is that these loyal rural voters will decide to stay at home on election day, and thus this genuine popular support will not translate into meaningful ballots. Universal mobilisation in the countryside should therefore be seen as the regime's attempt to maintain its confidence in its electoral performance by helping loyal voters to cast their votes in its favour.

7.2 Implications for electoral authoritarianism

The main claim of the dissertation is therefore that authoritarian elites engage in manipulation primarily in the context of relative electoral weakness - it is the very real fear of losing an election that drives these actors towards manipulation within this

arena. This section discusses the ways in this claim fits in with existing research on electoral authoritarianism and the corresponding insights for this field of study.

7.2.1 Uncertainty, legitimacy and electoral authoritarianism

The dissertation offers support to existing research that emphasises the role of uncertainty in driving political behaviour within electoral authoritarian regimes (Schedler, 2013). Specifically, this thesis has found that the regime responds strategically to electoral uncertainty, and thus manipulation appears to be an instrument for the reduction of the risks stemming from this.

As such, this dissertation supports the arguments made by Andreas Schedler, who first highlighted the two types of uncertainty inherent to electoral authoritarian regimes: uncertainty over electoral victory, and uncertainty over legitimacy (the likelihood that election results will be accepted by the opposition and the citizenry). Schedler referred to these two forms of uncertainty as the ‘first-order’ and ‘second-order’ threats, respectively (Schedler, 2013:p.259), and argued that the first-order threats are managed through manipulation, whilst the second-order threats are situated in the future and can be provoked *by* manipulation. The findings of this thesis confirm Schedler’s ranking of these two types of uncertainty, in that the regime appears to be prioritising the reduction of electoral uncertainty in the short-term, over the long-term implications of these actions for legitimacy.

This is not to argue that the Russian regime ignores concerns over legitimacy entirely. By finding that electoral manipulation is used with restraint, and therefore does not represent the default electoral strategy for the management of elections in our

sample, this thesis shows that authoritarian elites are pursuing a strategy that serves to alleviate the dilemma at the heart of electoral authoritarianism. By decreasing its use of manipulation in rural areas where it already enjoys genuine popularity, the regime reduces its legitimacy costs, and with it the second-order uncertainty, without bearing major costs in terms of the uncertainty over victory. In other words, the fact that manipulation is not omnipresent and is largely targeted at urban constituencies suggests that the regime prefers to spread legitimacy risks across all electoral districts by combining genuine popularity in the countryside with constructed electoral victories in the cities.

However, these concerns over legitimacy nevertheless emerge as a secondary priority for the regime. Ultimately, by concentrating electoral manipulation in urban districts, the regime is opting to undermine the legitimacy of elections precisely in those areas which are most likely to be populated by the sceptical voters and hostile observers, who would be willing to mobilise in protest to electoral malpractice. This approach therefore risks 'aggravating the very threats [the regime] strives to contain' (Ibid.:p.265).

As such, the present study argues that there does exist a logic to electoral manipulation, which is driven by the regime's unease over electoral weakness and uncertainty. This logic is short-sighted, however - when it comes to the management of elections, regime elites appear to prefer to chance the future, instead of suffering losses in the present.

This conclusion may be particularly relevant for opposition actors in electoral authoritarian regimes. If the regime values gains in first-order certainty *over* those in

the second-order, effective opposition strategies may be best served by the reverse logic. Opposition actors should seek to increase the level of competitiveness and uncertainty for the regime not so much with the short-term aim of winning at election time, but with the aim of raising the second-order uncertainty over legitimacy for the authoritarian incumbents. If the regime responds to tough electoral contexts with increased manipulation, it follows that the presentation of high-calibre candidates and proactive campaigning, even in regime strongholds, might put pressure on incumbent actors to raise the level of manipulation across a wider range of electoral districts, and thus suffer greater costs in terms of legitimacy. In other words, even if opposition actors stand to lose in such contexts, it is better to lose in an election characterised by high levels of electoral malpractice than to give the regime the opportunity to claim victory through legitimate support.

Alternatively, under conditions of scarce resources, opposition actors might be better served by concentrating their monitoring and scrutiny efforts in the most competitive contexts, where regime loyalty is expected to be at its lowest. Doing so entails two possible benefits. On the one hand, heightened scrutiny in such areas might reduce the incentives for electoral manipulation, and therefore help to protect the electoral standing of regime rivals. On the other hand, even if the regime proceeds to act on its first-order priorities, such an approach might have a greater chance of detecting manipulation, and therefore raise legitimacy costs for the regime. The results of this thesis show that in Russia, greater monitoring and scrutiny should be concentrated in urban districts - however, observers should nevertheless remain sensitive to the relative quality of regime and opposition candidates, as well as recent political developments, in rural constituencies, too. The characteristics of such districts

might be different in other electoral authoritarian regimes, however, since the factors increasing or reducing uncertainty may vary across national contexts.

7.2.2 The role of voters in authoritarian elections

Assessments of modern authoritarian regimes and elections tend to focus primarily on the interactions of elite actors, which risks overestimating regime strength. The present study, in identifying the significance of urbanisation in accounting for the patterns in the use of electoral manipulation, has shown that social structure can shape authoritarian politics. As such, this thesis serves as a reminder to scholars of authoritarian elections that voter attitudes, preferences and behaviour should not be underestimated, even under conditions of authoritarian control. Indeed, the results of the present study suggest that the regime authorities themselves may be one step ahead of many political observers because they are already sensitive to voter preferences, and therefore highly aware of the regime's areas of weakness. Those seeking to exploit regime weakness and undermine the power of authoritarian control should therefore heed precisely the same dynamics.

The thesis offers support to the vast amount of existing research which argues that the urban-rural cleavage remains one of the major drivers of electoral politics across the world today. Although the present study does not claim to find that urbanisation is a predictor of voting behaviour in Russia, the analysis suggests that it is treated as such by the regime elites themselves.

Thus, a further implication of this work is that social factors, through structuring electoral competition, are also structuring authoritarian behaviour. In the Russian case,

where the urban-rural divide seems to approximate the patterns of pro- and anti-regime sentiments amongst the electorate, that same divide is particularly informative for manipulative behaviour. The conclusions of this dissertation therefore imply that studies of authoritarian elections must not only pay attention to the determinants of voting behaviour, as is the practice for electoral studies in advanced democracies, but also analyse regime expectations of this behaviour and how these link to specific strategies pursued by the regime. In other words, in order to understand why elections can serve to sustain authoritarianism, greater investigation is required of the authoritarian political technologists and the types of social data they collect, in order to capture the interaction between voter preferences and regime expectations.

7.2.3 Electoral manipulation

This study has confirmed that there exists a variety of options on the authoritarian menu of manipulation. Moreover, it has argued that, although the logic underpinning manipulation remains constant, the contexts within which individual strategies are more likely to be used nevertheless vary, due to the differing aims, as well as the variation in the costs and benefits, associated with each tactic. This carries two types of implications for those interested in the study and the detection of electoral manipulation.

First, the findings of this study highlight further the importance of breaking down the definition of electoral manipulation into more precise tactics. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, manipulation is frequently treated in general terms by scholars of electoral authoritarianism, with the concept of ‘electoral fraud’, in particular, often

being conflated to include a myriad of actions that take place before, during and after the electoral process.

Some important steps towards the development of a typology of electoral manipulation have undoubtedly been made (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005; Calingaert, 2006; Birch, 2011), including Schedler's (2002) 'menu of manipulation', which served as the foundation for the theoretical framework adopted in this dissertation. A common theme uniting these existing approaches is that they categorise electoral malpractice on the basis of the key stages of the electoral process² - the findings of this study, however, suggest that future attempts should also take into account the differing rationale behind the tactics of manipulation. For example, typologies should take into account the effects that each tactic carries upon the formation, expression and impact of democratic choice. Specifically, this thesis proposes that the 'positive' (vote-enhancing) or 'negative' (vote-distorting) effects of individual strategies should be considered during the construction of such typologies in the future. In addition, tactics could be further disaggregated according to their costs and benefits in terms of electoral uncertainty and legitimacy.

Temporally-structured typologies are valuable in that they serve as a guide that allows observers to narrow their focus onto the typical opportunities for electoral violations at each key phase of the electoral process. The inclusion of a dimension relating to the costs/benefits and the negative/positive effects of typical strategies

² For example, Schedler's 'menu' refers to different stages on his 'chain of democratic choice' (2002). Calingaert's (2006) typology relates to four key stages of the electoral process - voter registration, electoral campaigning, election-day procedures', and the counting process. Similarly, Birch's (2011) typology of electoral malpractice is similarly based on 'a temporal flow of the electoral process' (p.29), and consists of three overarching dimensions - the legislative framework; the vote choice of individual voters; and the administrative process.

could further aid election monitoring, as it would allow the focus to be narrowed further onto the specific electoral contexts most likely to be subjected to electoral manipulation.

This links to the second set of implications stemming from this study - the findings of this dissertation suggest that those seeking to uncover electoral malpractice would be best served by concentrating scarce resources in response to the level of competitiveness in a given electoral context. Thus, in the most competitive areas, particularly those where the levels of anti-regime sentiments are at their highest, greater attention should be diverted to the detection of tactics which seek to distort voter preferences. This study has argued that such tactics include electoral fraud, candidate exclusion and the use of spoiler candidates. By contrast, in less competitive areas, where voters tend to be more loyal towards the regime, observers should increase their monitoring efforts in respect to strategies that aim to enhance voter preferences - such as universal voter mobilisation.

Revising the typologies of electoral manipulation in these respects would therefore allow for more effective investment of resources in the struggle for electoral integrity. Greater sensitivity to the logic of electoral manipulation would mean that observers could concentrate their efforts on detecting malpractice not only when it is most likely to occur, but also when it is the most meaningful to the regime.

7.2.4 A note on the generalisability of findings

Overall, the present study represented a plausibility probe of the general hypothesis that the logic of electoral manipulation is centred around the regime's sense of electoral uncertainty, as measured through urbanisation.

Russia was a suitable case for the focus of such an investigation, due to the multi-level nature of its political system, which enables the identification of common patterns in the context of relative regime variation at the regional level. As the analysis ultimately focuses on a single country case, however, the findings may be of greatest relevance to countries which share similar characteristics to Russia at the national level - post-Soviet electoral authoritarian states with multi-level systems of government. The finding of intra-regional patterns which persist across regional boundaries in Russia, in particular, suggests that the same logic of electoral manipulation is expected to operate in different sub-variants of electoral authoritarianism (competitive or hegemonic) in such post-Soviet states. In other words, even if the post-Soviet electoral authoritarian regimes vary in terms of their overall levels of competitiveness, we might expect their approaches towards the management of competition through electoral manipulation³ to follow the same logic at their core.

The Russian case, however, still has much more to offer. Future work could attempt to boost the generalisability of the present findings - for example, through conducting a more comprehensive (albeit time- and data-intensive) examination of electoral manipulation in the full set of Russian regions, and including more detail (regional-level variables) at the higher levels of observation groupings in multi-level models.

³ That is, *when* to use manipulation, rather than *how far* to take it

Alternatively, another fruitful approach might be through a more detailed comparative case study analysis of a handful of carefully-selected Russian regions.

It is possible to argue, however, that the relevance of the experience of one authoritarian state is not necessarily limited to only those countries which share certain essential features with the state in question. Indeed, some scholars, such as Geddes (1999), have argued that all authoritarian regimes are too different from one another to enable precise systematic comparison. Nevertheless, as indicated by the burgeoning literature on the subject of 'authoritarian learning' (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017), this does not prevent authoritarian states from deriving lessons from the experience of other regimes. Reisinger and Moraski's (2017) study of the Russian regions has shown that effective practices of authoritarianism (particularly in terms of the delivery of votes in support of the national regime) spread horizontally, from region to region, as regional political machines tended to learn from their immediate regional neighbours. Moreover, Koesel and Bunce's (2013) study of authoritarian learning in Russia and China has highlighted the fact that authoritarian regimes take into account the experiences of other countries, even when the likelihood of similar events occurring at home is perceived to be very low by other observers. Thus, for example, despite lacking competitive national elections, China adopted a similar strategy of democratic diffusion-proofing in response to the Colour Revolutions, to that of Russia.

Therefore, given the influential status of the Russian Federation, it is possible that the Russian logic of electoral manipulation may be more common to authoritarian states than might first appear, since authoritarian states with inherently different national characteristics may nevertheless have sought to learn from and emulate the Russian example.

The main conclusion stemming from the findings of this dissertation is therefore that the validity of the argument that electoral manipulation is driven by calculations of electoral uncertainty, may reasonably be considered great enough to merit the greater investment of time and other resources into more comprehensive, cross-country comparative studies of electoral manipulation.

7.3 Insights into Russian politics

This section outlines the ways in which this thesis contributes to the understanding of authoritarian politics in Russia today.

7.3.1 The foundations of authoritarian power in Russia

The findings of the dissertation are largely counter-intuitive, given the patterns in official election results. It has long been noticed that United Russia tends to win significantly higher proportions of the vote in rural areas than it does in urban constituencies, which is also true for the elections in our sample.⁴ Many have previously interpreted this pattern of supermajorities as being indicative of greater manipulation in the countryside, which is in line with the explanations that treat manipulation from the perspective of regime strength - it is often assumed that impressive performance in rural areas was the outcome of a resource-rich regime

⁴ More detail on the electoral performance of United Russia in our sample of regions can be found in Appendix C, which illustrates the share of the regime vote across urbanisation for each region in our sample.

exploiting the most vulnerable groups in society, whose votes are cheaper to buy and control.

However, by showing that the regime is more likely to engage in manipulation in urban areas, the findings of the present study imply that, paradoxically, the regime invests considerable effort into manipulating those contests in which it subsequently secures lower proportions of the vote. The thesis therefore confirms the arguments made by Hale (2011), as cited in Chapter 1 - authoritarian power in Russia appears to be founded on the combination of genuine popular support and electoral manipulation. This dissertation has expanded on this argument by showing that this combination is not random, but is carefully constructed and managed by regime actors.

It thus seems that the keys to the perpetuation of electoral dominance of authoritarianism in Russia are twofold. First, the regime depends on the continuation of high levels of support in the countryside. Second, the regime depends on the continued acceptance of electoral outcomes amongst urban voters. A shift in either of these dimensions would therefore result in significant destabilisation for electoral authoritarianism in Russia today.

7.3.2 Strengthening democracy

Aside from the exploration of the possible causal logic behind electoral manipulation, this thesis has discussed the typical means through which the four strategies of manipulation tend to occur in Russia. This section reviews the implications of this for those seeking to reduce the opportunities for manipulation.

A recurring theme throughout the opening sections of the four empirical chapters of this thesis has been the role of the electoral commissions as enablers of electoral manipulation. Whether manipulative behaviour entails the criminal violations of the electoral code, the mobilisation of voters through the external voting process, or the arbitrary application of candidate registration regulations in order to exclude genuine rivals and aid the registration of spoiler candidates - electoral commissions are a key component of the mechanism of electoral manipulation in Russia. Therefore, reform of these bodies is vital for the strengthening of democracy in this context. Specifically, greater independence from the state must be sought for this institution. This could be achieved through the creation of more permanent commission places, greater professional training provided to officials, and the regulation of the recruitment process.

This applies also to the members and observers appointed to electoral commissions on behalf of the opposition parties. Interviews with former electoral commission members appointed by major opposition parties suggest that opposition actors may not be maximising their opportunities for electoral vigilance. Individuals representing the opposition on electoral commissions must be recruited through more formal and independent means, and receive more thorough training to enable them to monitor the every stage of the process effectively.

The dissertation found that official figures totalling the number of registered voters in a given district display suspicious patterns indicative of fabrication, particularly amongst urban districts. Whilst official counts relating to turnout and candidate vote shares receive much attention from those seeking to detect electoral fraud (Myagkov, Ordeshook & Shakin, 2009; Skovoroda & Lankina, 2017), the counts of registered voters remain largely overlooked by observers. Yet, this form of fraud may be reduced through more effective verification of the electorate lists. Calingaert (2006, p.148) suggests the following approach as one example of this:

‘Assessment of voter registration lists is straightforward, though rather labor-intensive. It requires contacting a random sample of voters selected from the voter rolls and checking the accuracy of their listed information. Voters who cannot be located at their registered address probably are ineligible.’

In addition, by highlighting suspicious patterns in the use of external voting provisions, the present study points to the importance of verifying the lists of external voters prior to election day. Specifically, the potency of this tactic could be reduced through a more rigorous examination of the existence and the validity of the formal requests for such provisions made by voters before polling day, particularly in rural areas where the use of this strategy is more attractive for the regime. This could force the regime to limit its reliance on this strategy or to leave behind a more considerable paper trail, which could make it easier to prove violations of electoral regulations relating to this process in future.

Furthermore, the persistent use of bold tactics of manipulation such as the registration of identically-name spoiler candidates suggests that these strategies are still seen as lucrative by manipulators. Greater efforts into raising public awareness

about the presence of a spoiler candidate in the race and the manipulative intentions of such candidates are therefore required in order to reduce the effectiveness of these actions and minimise their appeal in the future.

Moreover, the results of this thesis suggest that election monitors should concentrate on making the public aware of the anticipated types of manipulation on election day particularly in the most competitive (therefore, mostly urban) districts. As discussed earlier, the Russian regime is taking a considerable risk by manipulating elections in areas populated by the most sceptical and hostile voters

On election day

The details emerging from the Golos reports suggest that independent observers are frequently few in number on election day, and must make potentially costly decisions over which aspect of the electoral process they wish to observe. As discussed in the preceding sections of the present chapter, the findings of this thesis may help to alleviate this problem, since they imply that observers in rural districts should prioritise accompanying and monitoring the actions of external voting delegations, if resources are stretched. By contrast, observers in the more urban districts should focus on overseeing the integrity of the ballot box and the counting process within polling stations.

After election day

The assessment of court cases in Chapter 3 on electoral fraud has also highlighted the lack of the effective enforcement of electoral law in Russia, since the courts

delivered verdicts of guilt and punishment only in those instances where allegations of fraud related to individuals acting on behalf of the opposition. The subordination of the legal system is a problem that cannot be solved by election monitors, and pertains to the system-level manipulation discussed in Chapter 2. However, greater professionalisation and proactivity from opposition electoral commission members, alongside a more targeted approach to election monitoring, as discussed above, may serve to generate greater pressure and evidence for enforcement.

7.4 Directions for the future

This section briefly discusses the ways in which the insights generated by this dissertation could be expanded and built upon in the future.

7.4.1 The urban/rural divide

Existing research on voting behaviour in advanced democracies points to the existence of a continuum, as opposed to a dichotomy, when it comes to the urban-rural divide amongst voters (Lichter and Brown 2011; Lichter and Ziliak 2017; Scala & Johnson, 2017). Future research should therefore use alternative measures of urbanisation, in order to probe further the extent to which the use of electoral manipulation corresponds to urbanisation. For example, urbanisation could be coded in terms of a greater variety in the types of settlements, such as capital cities, small- and medium-sized towns, 'monotowns', and the suburbs. Detailed case studies of electoral manipulation in these settlements could generate more nuanced conclusions about the role of urbanisation as an indicator of electoral uncertainty for the regime.

In addition, given the salience of the urban-rural divide in voting behaviour across the world, as discussed in Chapter 1, it would be interesting to see whether the relationship between urbanisation and electoral manipulation exists in other electoral authoritarian regimes.

7.4.2 Electoral manipulation toolbox

Researchers on electoral malpractice are beginning to conceptualise manipulation in terms of a 'toolbox' of options through which authoritarian leaders vary and select the strategies best suited to their needs (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018; Smyth & Turvosky, 2018; Ross, 2018). As discussed earlier in this chapter, future work should seek to improve the existing typologies by combining the temporal approach relating to the different stages of the electoral process with dimensions capturing the relative appeal of each strategy.

Moreover, the present study has investigated the decisions over the use of the four major strategies from this 'toolbox' in isolation from each other. There is much room for future work to build further on this by examining the decisions to use one strategy of manipulation relative to each other. Specifically, under what conditions would the regime be willing to use all four strategies of manipulation investigated in this dissertation, and, crucially, to what extent does the likelihood of this co-vary with urbanisation?

7.4.3 Types of elections and sources of electoral uncertainty

The dissertation has focused on one type of elections (to regional legislative assemblies) in one modern electoral authoritarian regime. Future research must expand on this by comparing patterns for manipulation during elections for other levels of government, situated in a wider range of national contexts.

The urban/rural divide seems to be linked to competitiveness, and therefore electoral uncertainty for the regime, in Russia - however, even if the logic behind the use of electoral manipulation remains the same for other elections and regimes, urbanisation might not be used as an indicator of uncertainty by all authoritarian actors in all contexts. Therefore, it is also important to also expand our understanding of the types of information likely to be used as indicators of competitiveness by authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, it is important to explore the extent to which the proposed logic of electoral manipulation holds during elections with particularly high levels of the second-order uncertainty relating to legitimacy.

7.5 Final thoughts

The dissertation has examined the use of electoral manipulation strategies in the context of Russian regional legislative elections during the period of 2010-2013. The findings of this study remain relevant for contemporary Russian politics, however,

judging by the patterns emerging from the most recent round of elections (8th September 2019) in Russia.

The hostility of the urban electorate has never been so underlined as it has during the 2019 elections to the sub-national institution in Russia's capital - the Moscow City Duma - where disillusioned urban voters had actively engaged in Navalny's 'smart voting' strategy⁵, many 'simply to spite the system'⁶, resulting in an electoral blow that wiped out a third of the seats held by United Russia and secured the victory of 20 opposition candidates (out of a total 45 seats).⁷ Moreover, recent reports have drawn attention to the mass surveys and opinion polls commissioned by the regime, the results of which are available only to regime actors. For example, RBC reported in September 2019 that such surveys were conducted on the eve of the regional legislative elections in the city of Sevastopol', thought to be a tough urban battleground characterised by high levels of intra-elite rivalry (RBC, 2019). One question asked participants explicitly to identify themselves as either the supporter or opponent of the regime (*vlast'*), or as an undecided voter. Reports of this kind therefore further confirm the regime's continued concerns over electoral uncertainty - whilst the closed nature of such survey outcomes suggests that information on the expected preferences of the electorate is highly prized, and intended to inform solely the electoral behaviour of the regime actors in Russia today.

⁵ Navalny's 'smart voting' approach encouraged citizens to cast their vote in favour of the most popular opposition candidate in a given district, regardless of their actual personal preference, aiming 'to unite [the opposition] forcibly from below' (*'prinuditel'no obyedinit'... snizu'* - A. Navalny, as cited in Mukhametshina & Kornya, 2019).

⁶ *'Prosto nazlo sisteme'* - political scientist A. Gallyamov, as cited in Mukhametshina & Kornya, 2019.

⁷ This represents the biggest victory for the opposition in this legislature in recent times - in 2009, for example, 32 out of 35 seats in this assembly were held by United Russia legislators.

In addition, the regime appears to continue to rely on the manipulation strategies considered in this dissertation. Whilst some have argued that the use of electoral fraud has waned since 2011⁸, allegations of violations relating to fraud nevertheless continue to flood in from opposition parties and observers.⁹ Recent research has confirmed that candidate exclusion remains a major tool used to manipulate elections in Russia today (Ross, 2018; Smyth & Turovsky, 2018) - most recently, Grigoriy Golosov has argued that regime authorities removed 'everything which had been alive'¹⁰ from the regional executive elections in September 2019 (Mukhametshina & Kornya, 2019). Similarly, identical spoiler candidates continue to appear (Moskovskaya Gazeta, 2019). Finally, voter mobilisation tactics continue to thrive. For example, most recently, reports from Penza oblast' have highlighted the continued use of selective coercive and clientelistic mobilisation tactics targeting students, pensioners, and state employees in Penza city - whilst 8 candidates to the Penza City Duma declared a hunger strike over the abuse of the early-voting processes through manipulative mobilisation (Malyshev, 2019).

Despite this dissertation's focus on an earlier round of elections, the findings of this study therefore continue to be relevant for Russian politics today. In sum, the main conclusion of this thesis is that, to paraphrase the Roman philosopher Seneca, authoritarian behaviour, such as electoral manipulation, ultimately springs from weakness. The ongoing reliance of Russian authoritarian actors on the same tactics of manipulation suggests that these strategies remain effective, and thus, the Russian authoritarian regime today continues to master its weaknesses.

⁸ A. Buzin cited in Garmonenko, 2019.

⁹ For example, as at 10 September 2019, 11 criminal cases have been opened, just two days after the September 2019 elections, whilst electoral results in multiple precincts across the country are expected to be nullified due to the gravity of allegations (RBC, 2019).

¹⁰ *'Snyali s vyborov vse, chto bylo zhivym'*

Appendices

Appendix A

Table A.1 Last-digit falsification in Turnout Counts (M2)

Last Digits	1 vs 0	2 vs 0	3 vs 0	4 vs 0	5 vs 0	6 vs 0	7 vs 0	8 vs 0	9 vs 0
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)									
- 2nd quartile	.826 (.062)	1.119 (.093)	1.063 (.080)	.888 (.074)	1.037 (.081)	1.014 (.076)	.932 (.080)	1.001 (.079)	.956 (.076)
- 3rd quartile	.930 (.072)	1.043 (.093)	1.056 (.082)	1.041 (.078)	1.042 (.085)	1.027 (.076)	.982 (.078)	1.000 (.078)	1.031 (.082)
- 4th quartile	.929 (.068)	1.148 (.091)	1.080 (.074)	1.051 (.072)	1.061 (.077)	1.050 (.075)	1.015 (.074)	1.060 (.078)	1.020 (.069)
<i>Incumbency</i> <i>Dummy</i>	1.032 (.058)	.978 (.060)	.962 (.052)	.969 (.057)	.999 (.057)	1.022 (.058)	.952 (.058)	1.058 (.061)	.954 (.058)
<i>Majoritarian</i> <i>Dummy</i>	1.001 (.032)	1.053* (.032)	.993 (.030)	1.007 (.031)	.983 (.030)	1.030 (.032)	.983 (.029)	1.005 (.030)	1.000 (.033)
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)									
-2011	1.008 (.078)	.986 (.091)	.931 (.077)	.922 (.082)	1.024 (.090)	1.075 (.085)	.983 (.083)	1.022 (.083)	.936 (.091)
-2012	1.076 (.102)	.999 (.107)	.956 (.091)	.920 (.101)	1.130 (.110)	1.056 (.102)	.898 (.090)	.999 (.098)	.903 (.103)
-2013	1.020 (.087)	.923 (.091)	.847* (.075)	.875 (.084)	.989 (.093)	1.000 (.083)	.960 (.089)	1.025 (.090)	.858 (.090)
Constant	.975 (.092)	.892 (.087)	.999 (.092)	1.039 (.102)	.925 (.091)	.844* (.077)	1.022 (.010)	.886 (.084)	1.039 (.115)
<i>N</i>	39225								
Wald X2 (45)	92.56								
<i>p</i> value	0.052								

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses (district clusters). Multinomial logistic regression. Odds Ratios reported. Results do not change when regional dummy variables are included.

Table A.2 Last-digit falsification in United Russia Vote Counts (M3)

Last Digits	1 vs 0	2 vs 0	3 vs 0	4 vs 0	5 vs 0	6 vs 0	7 vs 0	8 vs 0	9 vs 0
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)									
- 2nd quartile	.984 (.066)	1.043 (.065)	.976 (.070)	1.016 (.074)	.966 (.062)	.976 (.064)	1.041 (.072)	1.123 (.077)	1.027 (.083)
- 3rd quartile	1.016 (.984)	.965 (.058)	.977 (.070)	1.053 (.075)	1.054 (.068)	.947 (.068)	1.031 (.072)	1.087 (.075)	.984 (.077)
- 4th quartile	.984 (.062)	.987 (.063)	.986 (.070)	.990 (.070)	1.109 (.069)	.983 (.067)	.977 (.066)	1.086 (.073)	.093 (.074)
<i>Incumbency</i> <i>Dummy</i>	1.036 (.050)	1.007 (.047)	1.018 (.048)	1.029 (.054)	1.013 (.047)	1.031 (.052)	.983 (.047)	.999 (.049)	.964 (.051)
<i>Majoritarian</i> <i>Dummy</i>	.895 (.041)	.922 (.042)	.935 (.043)	.901 (.044)	.916 (.042)	.958 (.046)	.927 (.042)	.979 (.050)	.963 (.044)
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)									
-2011	.858 (.067)	.952 (.074)	1.018 (.081)	1.018 (.080)	1.029 (.086)	.972 (.076)	.969 (.081)	.968 (.070)	.907 (.087)
-2012	.778 (.066)	.918 (.071)	.950 (.083)	1.007 (.085)	1.081 (.100)	.926 (.078)	1.028 (.091)	1.004 (.080)	.911 (.097)
-2013	.846 (.070)	.985 (.080)	1.071 (.090)	1.101 (.091)	1.104 (.095)	.979 (.079)	1.009 (.086)	.976 (.075)	.947 (.096)
Constant	1.158 (.105)	1.082 (.090)	.974 (.090)	.950 (.089)	.932 (.088)	.985 (.085)	.968 (.089)	.899 (.075)	1.043 (.121)
<i>N</i>	34933								
Wald X2 (45)	69.82								
<i>p</i> value	0.551								

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses (district clusters). Multinomial logistic regression. Odds Ratios reported. Results do not change when regional dummy variables are included.

Table A.3 Last-digit falsification in KPRF Vote Counts (M4)

Last Digits	1 vs 0	2 vs 0	3 vs 0	4 vs 0	5 vs 0	6 vs 0	7 vs 0	8 vs 0	9 vs 0
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)									
- 2nd quartile	1.033 (.146)	1.026 (.131)	1.028 (.137)	1.246 (.166)	.949 (.135)	.870 (.127)	1.050 (.151)	1.181 (.166)	1.163 (.146)
- 3rd quartile	1.114 (.136)	.961 (.126)	1.109 (.142)	1.287 (.171)	1.187 (.156)	1.106 (.146)	.952 (.137)	1.134 (.138)	1.082 (.144)
- 4th quartile	1.104 (.128)	1.126 (.132)	1.195 (.146)	1.293 (.153)	1.295 (.159)	1.156 (.140)	1.147 (.141)	1.261 (.149)	1.194 (.140)
<i>Incumbency</i> <i>Dummy</i>	1.040 (.073)	.987 (.082)	.934 (.075)	.913 (.072)	1.005 (.082)	.957 (.075)	1.021 (.079)	.940 (.073)	.926 (.074)
<i>Majoritarian</i> <i>Dummy</i>	.939 (.066)	1.040 (.073)	.933 (.063)	.960 (.069)	.997 (.072)	.975 (.075)	.980 (.069)	1.014 (.080)	1.007 (.071)
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)									
-2011	1.006 (.097)	1.005 (.110)	.949 (.098)	.870 (.085)	.903 (.104)	.987 (.114)	.885 (.103)	.949 (.094)	.908 (.102)
-2012	1.147 (.157)	1.007 (.140)	1.014 (.145)	.911 (.139)	.943 (.145)	1.071 (.164)	1.020 (.151)	.884 (.132)	.853 (.141)
-2013	1.124 (.136)	1.029 (.158)	1.040 (.154)	.951 (.145)	.856 (.125)	.988 (.150)	.953 (.147)	.949 (.135)	.775 (.114)
Constant	.938 (.122)	.923 (.129)	.965 (.136)	.877 (.130)	.911 (.132)	.960 (.145)	.976 (.146)	.874 (.124)	.969 (.136)
<i>N</i>	13628								
Wald X2 (45)	84.64								
<i>p</i> value	0.146								

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses (district clusters). Multinomial logistic regression. Odds Ratios reported. Results do not change when regional dummy variables are included.

Table A.4 Last-digit falsification in Just Russia Vote Counts (M5)

Last Digits	1 vs 0	2 vs 0	3 vs 0	4 vs 0	5 vs 0	6 vs 0	7 vs 0	8 vs 0	9 vs 0
<i>Urbanisation</i> - 1st quartile (reference)									
- 2nd quartile	1.194 (.213)	.882 (.170)	1.068 (.190)	1.108 (.230)	.899 (.144)	1.207 (.252)	1.107 (.218)	1.219 (.207)	1.402 (.276)
- 3rd quartile	1.110 (.194)	.829 (.138)	.933 (.140)	1.068 (.160)	1.020 (.162)	1.351 (.255)	1.219 (.211)	1.283 (.213)	1.226 (.218)
- 4th quartile	1.086 (.182)	.787 (.132)	.835 (.130)	1.148 (.180)	1.030 (.159)	1.147 (.221)	1.184 (.209)	1.157 (.193)	1.293 (.232)
<i>Incumbency</i> <i>Dummy</i>	1.104 (.106)	1.013 (.099)	.981 (.098)	.981 (.098)	1.035 (.111)	1.069 (.104)	.968 (.090)	.956 (.090)	.967 (.099)
<i>Majoritarian</i> <i>Dummy</i>	1.016 (.093)	.980 (.098)	.964 (.088)	.912 (.090)	.928 (.086)	1.068 (.103)	.931 (.092)	.880 (.083)	.944 (.095)
<i>Year</i> - 2010 (reference)									
-2011	1.168 (.152)	1.256 (.193)	1.211 (.159)	1.151 (.186)	1.345** (.176)	1.286* (.171)	1.134 (.146)	1.168 (.140)	1.336* (.212)
-2012	2.543*** (.806)	1.685* (.522)	1.435 (.542)	1.907*** (.459)	1.424 (.771)	1.893* (.619)	1.990** (.562)	1.893** (.557)	1.905** (.600)
-2013	1.205 (.233)	1.195 (.249)	1.092 (.215)	.823 (.193)	1.231 (.284)	1.078 (.238)	.942 (.181)	.947 (.165)	1.178 (.248)
Constant	.746* (.119)	.969 (.193)	1.019 (.169)	.863 (.140)	.776 (.128)	.622** (.125)	.768 (.134)	.797 (.148)	1.178 (.248)
<i>N</i>	8707								
Wald X2 (45)	138.21								
<i>p</i> value	0.002								

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses (district clusters). Multinomial logistic regression. Odds Ratios reported. Results do not change when regional dummy variables are included.

***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1

Appendix B

Figure B.1 Lottery ticket

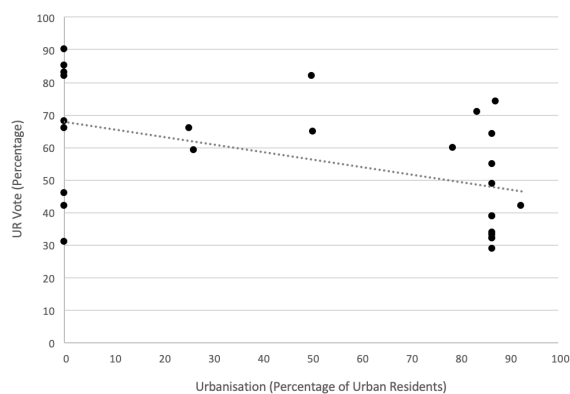


A copy of the image uploaded by the author of a report regarding manipulative voter mobilisation cited in Chapter 6 - as found in report ID 11214, via the *Golos Karta Narushenniy* database.

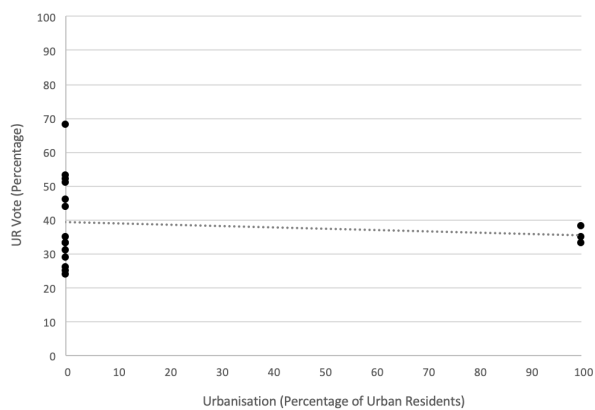
Appendix C

Figure C.1 United Russia vote compared to the level of urbanisation (by region)

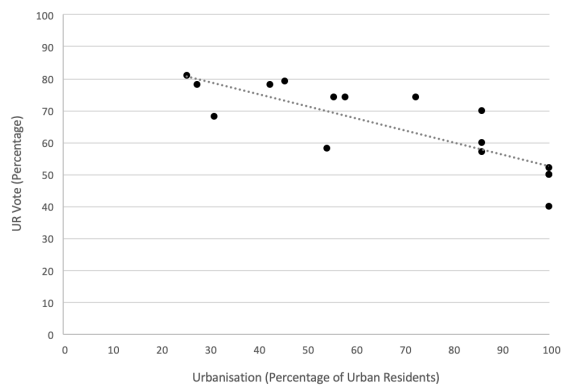
Adygeya Republic



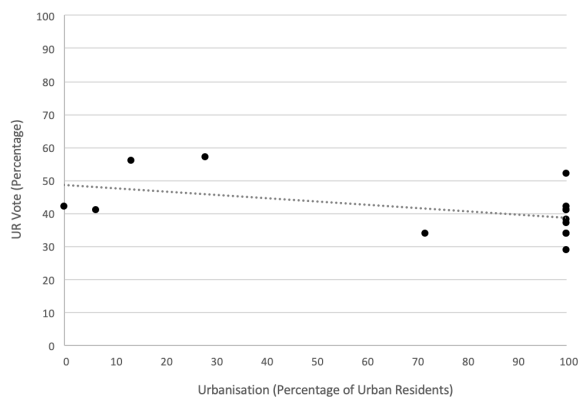
Altay Republic



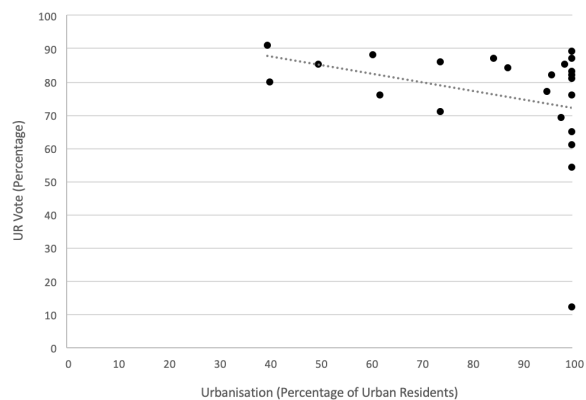
Belgorod Oblast'



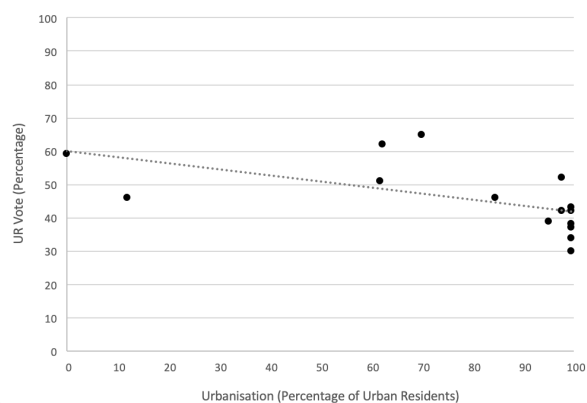
Kamchatskiy Krai



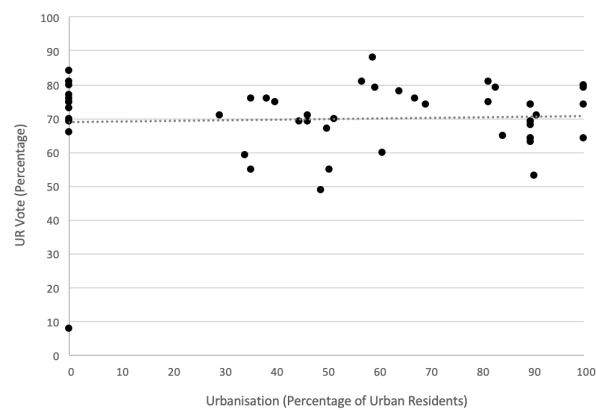
Kemerovo Oblast'



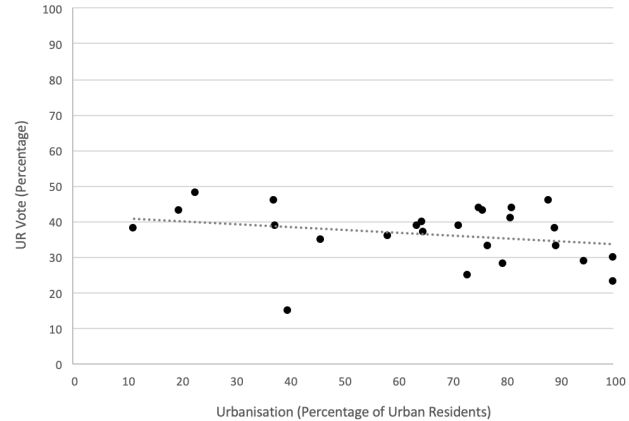
Komi Republic



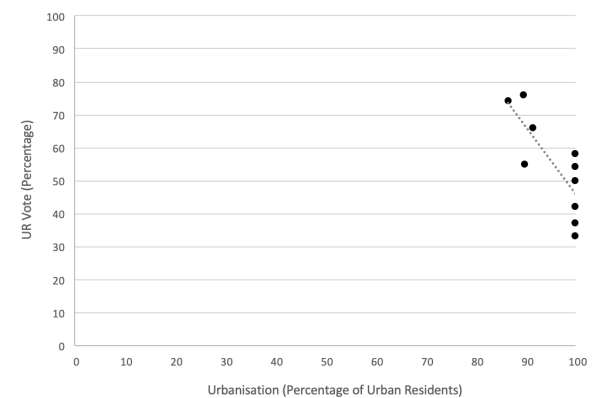
Krasnodarskiy Krai



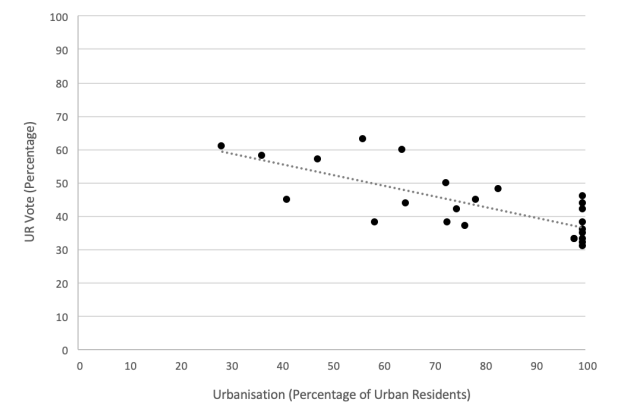
Leningrad Oblast'



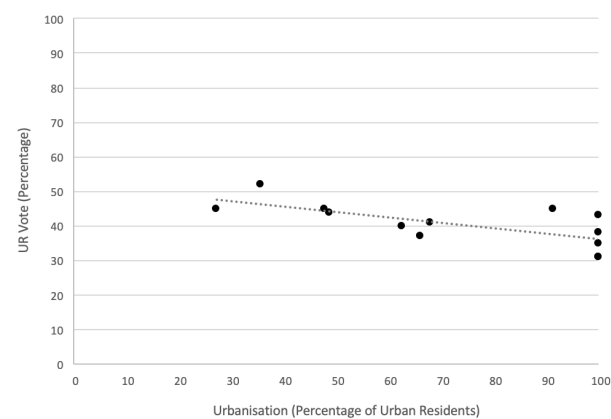
Magadan Oblast'



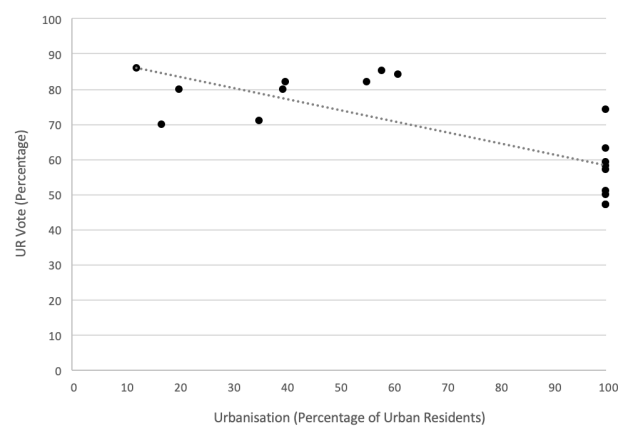
Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast'



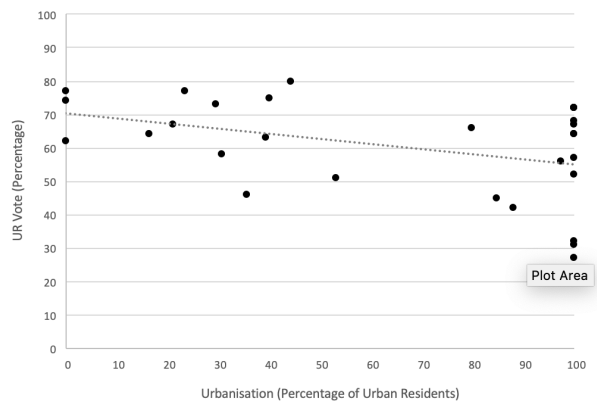
Novgorod Oblast'



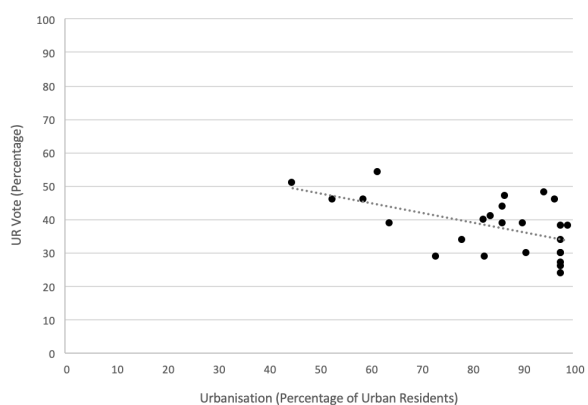
Penza Oblast'



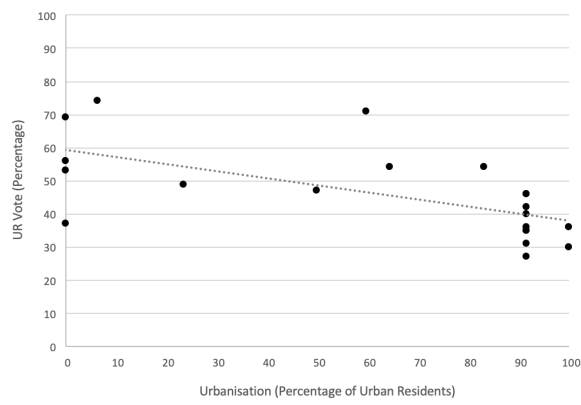
Rostov Oblast'



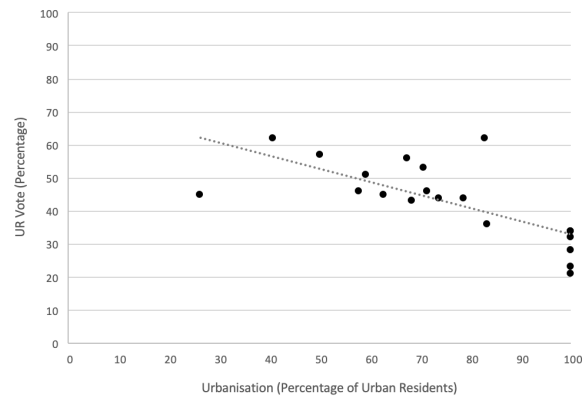
Sverdlovsk Oblast'



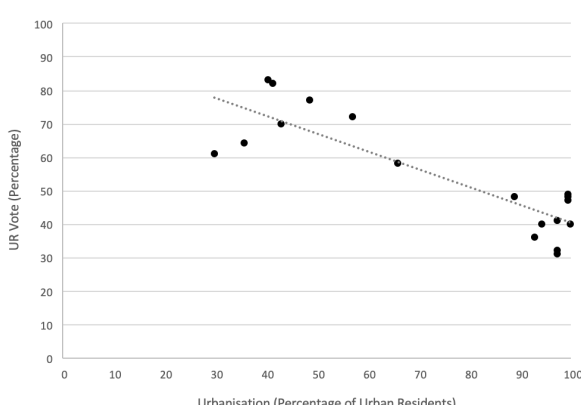
Tomsk Oblast'



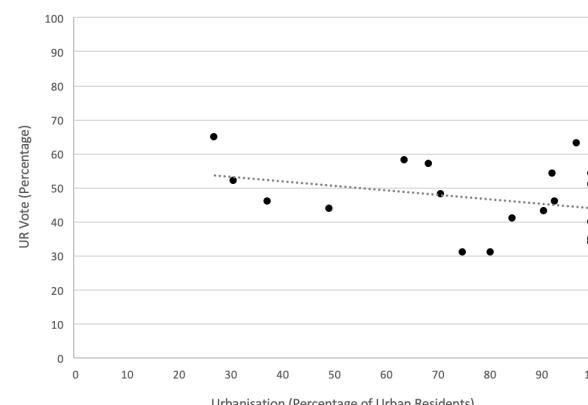
Tver' Oblast'



Ulyanovsk Oblast'



Vladimir Oblast'



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