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TRANSFORMATION OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS IN RUSSIAN REGIONS
MA thesis

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Tartu 2021

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TRANSFORMATION OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS IN RUSSIAN REGIONS

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Abstract

One of the features of the political environment of modern Russia is the absence of a real separation of powers. Over the past twenty years, the national government has completely subordinated the executive, legislative, and judicial powers. This goal was achieved through the construction of a vertical of power. As a result, the rights of the president and his administration increased, the regions submitted to the Kremlin, and the hegemony of the pro-presidential ruling party in the national and local parliaments was established.

In the early 2000s, Russian regions were independent of the Kremlin; they controlled the regional budget, pursued their policies, and traded. To build a vertical of power for the national government, it was essential to repair local parliaments by introducing the party in power. For this, both violent and illegal methods were used, such as falsifying elections or eliminating political competitors, and more formal ones, for example, changing articles of the Constitution and laws of Russia. From 2003 to 2018, there were more than 200 changes to electoral rules in Russian regions, which ensured the victory of the ruling United Russia party. Since the regions differ from each other in social, political, and economic parameters, the changes in the conduct of elections and the reasons for these changes are different.

In this paper, I attempted to identify the factors of the transformation of electoral systems in Russian regions. Using the theory of rational choice institutionalism as a theoretical framework and logistic regression as a research method, I found out that United Russia and the governors were the leading players who influenced the changes in electoral systems in the regions. It was also possible to find out how political actors influenced the transformation of the components of electoral systems, such as the size of the parliament, the electoral threshold, and the rules by which parliamentarians are elected.

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Introduction

Thirty years of experience in holding democratic elections in Russia during the formation of a new political structure of society opens a new stage in the development of statehood. This makes the analysis of a wide range of problems inherent in elections as an independent political institution among the most urgent tasks of Russian science.

Electoral process in the Russian regions is characterized by many researchers as non-linear and inconsistent, which is reflected in the specifics of the functioning of political institutions. In this regard, it is necessary to understand and assess the nature of the dynamics of the Russian political system, to identify the factors and trends in the formation and transformation of the institution of elections.

The regional aspect of the changes in the political system that have taken place in Russia since the early 1990s testifies to a specific evolution that the Russian political system has made. The formation of a system of separation of powers is traced, when in every region administrations were formed, as well as local parliaments were elected, and somewhere even constitutional courts were established. At the same time, the dynamics of Russian federalism, as it was already possible to find out, did not have a vector character and did not differ in consistency and stability. Nevertheless, the economic base of the Russian territories changed, and the general principles of the organization of power in the subjects of the Federation changed. Elections to regional legislative assemblies have undergone significant changes.

The evolution of federalism in Russia is a period of intense changes, the formation of new institutions, the emergence and further development of elements within the system. The institution of regional and local elections is no exception. However, they are distinguished by a significant distinctiveness compared to elections to federal bodies of state power because each element of the regional and municipal electoral process, starting with the legal status of voters and candidates for elective office and ending with voting procedures, has its own specifics, sometimes quite pronounced.

The study of the functioning effects of political institutions in democracies is a developed research direction in political science. There are a lot of studies including how institutions influence the representation of interest groups and ethnic minorities (Minta

2013; Fessha 2009) which structure of institutions facilitates decision-making (Bonvecchi et al 2017); how institutions support accountability and turnover mechanisms (Rubenstein 2007).

However, there are still gaps concerning the understanding of the role of certain formally democratic institutions under authoritarian rule in political science. One of them is the electoral system (Gandhi and Heller 2018). In some authoritarian regimes (such as competitive or electoral authoritarianism), democratic electoral institutions (regular elections, political parties, electoral systems) are controlled by authoritarian incumbents. They mix these institutions with undemocratic practices (manipulations at various stages of the electoral process or electoral manipulations), guaranteeing the current government victory in elections (Schedler 2006). There are several types of electoral manipulation. Firstly, it is the manipulation of electoral institutions, including electoral systems, when the rules for elections favor certain political actors, while others lose (Ibid). The second type includes the manipulation of voters' preferences and the possibilities of political choice. This type of manipulation, like the first, is usually implemented in anticipation of elections and is associated with influencing voters, parties, and candidates. Examples are censorship in the media, coercion of voters to a specific type of electoral behavior, depriving opposition parties and candidates of the opportunity to participate in elections (Fortin-Rittberger 2014: 100). Finally, the third type is the manipulation of the voting process and the counting of votes, for example, the exclusion of certain voters from the lists of voters, disruption of the work of the voting premises, falsification of election results (Ibid). This is understandably the reason for the electoral manipulations or who benefits from these manipulations. But it is more significant to understand when and under what conditions incumbents and authoritarian leaders use these undemocratic instruments to win in elections.

The case of Russia as an example of an authoritarian state with formal democratic institutions could help answer this question. In the early 2000s, the presidential administration launched reforms to strengthen power (the vertical of power). One of them is a change in the electoral systems in Russian regions. According to the federal law “On the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in the Referendum of Citizens of the Russian Federation” adopted in 2002, from 2003, all regions of Russia

had to elect at least half of the deputies of the legislative assemblies by proportional electoral (Federal Law 67 2002). As a result, different elements of the electoral systems were changed as a method of transferring votes to seats, the threshold percentage, the proportion of deputies elected by proportional formula, and the number of parliamentarians. Moreover, in 2018 the number of changes in these parameters of regional electoral systems has reached two hundred.

The transition of Russian regions to new electoral systems coincided with the consolidation of the electoral authoritarian regime at the state level (Golosov 2011). At the same time, there are numerous differences between the regions concerning demographic, socio-economic, and political parameters. And in some regions, there were significant changes that could help the ruling party to win in the elections and keep the legitimacy. In contrast, in other regions, the reforms of the electoral system were not significant. The research question of MA dissertation is **what factors influence the change in the regional electoral systems in Russia.**

In this research, I will try to study what changes in the electoral systems of Russian regions took place from 2003 to 2018, the reasons for this, and what happened as a result of electoral transformations. Elections in an authoritarian regime are not instruments for the change of power but perform the functions of legitimizing the status quo, controlling political elites, and suppressing opposition (Gandhi 2009). Consequently, the focus of the master's thesis will be on the features of the electoral process in the Russian regions, their differences, and the prospects for the development of electoral systems in conditions of electoral authoritarianism.

Using the theory of rational choice institutionalism and the Vertical of power, I identified the key political actors who could take part in making decisions in changing the electoral processes, namely the national government, governors, and the presidential United Russia. All three players had one common goal of maintaining and strengthening power. It is assumed that the interests in changing the electoral system of the regions were beneficial for critical players at different times. For example, it is expected that at the beginning of the electoral reforms, the national government and United Russia were involved in the transformation of electoral reforms most of all, since at this time, firstly, the beginning of the 2000s is the beginning of building the Power Vertical. The task was

set to implement United Russia into the political environment of the regions and the country, both institutionally and informally. Second, the governors of the Russian provinces were not loyal to the national government, and there was no reason to mobilize them to transform the electoral systems of the regions.

In this paper I took the period from 2003 to 2018, when electoral reforms and elections were carried out in Russian regions. This period was divided into three cycles: 2003-2007; 2008-2013; 2014-2018. Using the logistic regression method, I determined which components of electoral engineering (changes in the electoral system) were transformed in the regions in different electoral cycles, what were the reasons for this, who of the political actors influenced these changes.

The structure of the thesis is the following. The first chapter will focus on theories and scientific literature on the political effects of electoral systems and the reasons for electoral reforms. This section includes a literature review, the main approaches to changing electoral systems, the reasons for these transformations, and how political actors behave under authoritarian regimes. The political environment of modern Russia is also described in detail; the main economic, political, and legal changes in the 21st century are presented in the first chapter. The second chapter will provide the methodology and research design. Dependent and independent variables are identified, main hypotheses are presented, and research methods and sources are described. In the last part of the research, the results of the regression analysis, its interpretation, and the main conclusions on the dissertation and further research prospects are presented.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

More than three decades ago, Arend Lijphart said the “study of electoral systems is undoubtedly the most underdeveloped subject in political science” (Lijphart, 1985). Of course, three decades is not an era, but specific trends in the development of science on a similar scale are pretty distinguishable.

First, the volume of electoral data has increased. At the same time, the access of research community to their processing has become more accessible due to the development of computer technologies. This has led to an increase in the number of works devoted to analyzing various aspects of electoral systems. Second, along with the rise in the number of studies, the quality of scientific products has improved. In addition to descriptive works, analytical ones appeared, built on formal modeling in game theory, as well as statistical analysis of a large amount of empirical data (Grofman, 2016).

Bernard Grofman considers that the study of electoral systems has become a central research area within comparative political science (Ibid). The essential component of such dynamics was the emergence of new directions in electoral research. One of these areas is the study of the reasons for electoral reforms. If a change in individual parameters of electoral systems can lead to fundamentally different political outcomes, then clarification of the circumstances of electoral engineering is extremely important for understanding the sources of stability of political systems. According to Shugart, the study of the reasons for the transformation of electoral systems is a new benchmark for electoral research in the XXI century (Shugart, 2005: 50-52).

Analyzing electoral reforms in a cross-national context requires a more complex theoretical framework and more sophisticated quantification than studying the effects of electoral institutions. Second, there are relatively few cases of electoral reforms when compared with the ever-increasing volume of electoral statistics resulting from the elections (Ibid).

In this section, theoretical approaches to understanding the causes of electoral reforms are analyzed, and promising vectors of scientific research in the field of studying electoral systems as dependent variables are outlined.

1.1. Main approaches to changing electoral systems

Sartori was one of the first who said that the electoral system is “the most manipulated instrument of politics” (Sartori 1968). However, research interest has begun recently in comparative politics. In particular, the number of works has increased, where the question was asked about the factors of transformation of electoral systems in various countries. According to Norris, the reason for the growing research interest in electoral systems as "dependent variables" was the fact that in the 1990s, the issue of electoral reform became the focus of the agenda for Italy, New Zealand, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Israel (Norris, 1995).

According to Benoit, various options explanations of the processes of the emergence or change of electoral systems can be attributed to three categories, depending on what kind of agents were at the origins of electoral transformations: political actors (their personal interests) or non-personalized social, economic or historical circumstances (Benoit, 2004).

Electoral systems changes may be based on also the motives of political actors. Although according to Sartori, electoral engineering can influence the voter and change his behavior, it has consistently been recognized by politicians (Sartori, 1968: 273). As Quintal said, since electoral systems have a direct impact on the distribution of power, and politicians are directly related to this process, the choice of electoral legislation will necessarily be carried out during the negotiation process (Quintal, 1970: 752). This position was also taken by Nohlen, who noted that electoral systems are established as a result of negotiations between opposing political forces (Nohlen, 1984: 221-223).

Among the motives that politicians could be guided by regarding the rules of electoral competition, there may be a desire to realize common interests. In such situations, decision-making agents pursue goals such as ensuring fair representation of social groups, creating conditions for the formation of a responsible and effective government following elections, and designing a system, checks and balances, for example, against the excessive concentration of power in the hands of one political force, etc. Thus, the principle of fair representation of social groups corresponds instead to a proportional electoral system, while the principles of efficiency and responsibility of the

government and, consequently, more excellent controllability, the creation of conditions for the formation of a responsible and effective government following elections, the construction of a system of checks and balances, for example, against the excessive concentration of power in the hands of one political strength, etc. (Horowitz, 2003).

Another focus on understanding electoral reforms provides an approach based on the fact that political actors prefer electoral systems that closely correspond to their private interests. The latter can consist either in the desire to implement a policy-seeking or to obtain an office-seeking. The essence of the differences between these perspectives is as follows. First, being guided by the desire to achieve office-seeking, political actors do not take into account considerations related to creating conditions for the formation of post-election solid coalitions, which would be the basis for the implementation of policy-seeking (Benoit 2004).

1.2. Reasons for changes in electoral systems: rational choice approach

Most of the scholarly papers that looked at electoral reforms from a comparative perspective were written according to rational choice theories. As a result, political parties change the parameters of electoral systems to maximize their representation in legislatures or minimize the costs associated with electoral challenges.

One of the first who drew attention to the fact that electoral systems can be formed under the pressure of the rational considerations of political actors was John Grumm. In the article “Theories of electoral systems”, analyzing the examples of Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, and Germany, he formulated a hypothesis: a proportional electoral system is established where a large number of parties already exist, while plurality or majority formulas, associated with high uncertainty about the winners, will be less attractive to parties in a highly competitive environment (Grumm, 1958: 376).

David Quintal believed that political parties are rational actors seeking to increase their representation in power (Quintal, 1970). According to the researcher, the more successful and influential a party is in elections, the more likely it is to choose disproportionate electoral systems.

Stein Rokkan, relying on the rationalistic paradigm, proposed a theory explaining the reasons for electoral reforms and the widespread use of proportional representation in Europe in the 19th – 20th centuries. According to him, before the First World War, the proportional system was primarily in ethnically heterogeneous states and served to represent minorities. However, after 1918, the requirements for adopting the proportional electoral system were associated with other reasons. Firstly, the growth of the influence of socialist parties due to the expansion of suffrage, and secondly, the attempts of the old parties to maintain their position due to the electoral mobilization of the working class (Rokkan, 1970).

After Rokkan, Carles Boix tried to answer why in the late XIX - early XX century, many Western democracies have moved to proportional representation. Based on statistical analysis, Boix concluded that electoral systems are changed by the ruling parties seeking to maximize their representation. As long as the electoral competition does not change and the current electoral regime is favorable to the ruling parties, the electoral system remains unchanged. However, when the conditions for electoral competition undergo changes (due to the emergence of new groups of voters or a change in the preferences of citizens), the ruling parties can modify the electoral system. When the new parties are strong, and the old ones are not, the latter change the electoral system from plural to proportional, but they do not do this if they are able to coordinate around any one player. When new parties are weak, the system of disproportionate representation persists regardless of the structure of the old party system. Also, Boix concluded that a high degree of ethnic and religious fragmentation, under certain conditions, encourages the adaptation of the proportional electoral system (Boix, 1999: 608-612).

Kenneth Benoit proposed a model for changing electoral systems based on the rational behavior of political actors (parties). The theory developed by him establishes that electoral reforms take place in the process of choosing by political parties such rules of the game that are most consistent with their desire to maximize their parliamentary representation. Parties rank institutional alternatives in descending order in terms of how many seats they can count on. Each party seeks to obtain information that makes it possible to estimate the share of votes that it will receive from each alternative. This information includes both expectations of electoral support and expectations of the effect of institutional rules. Changes in electoral institutions will occur when a political party or

coalition of parties supports an alternative that will bring them more seats than the current electoral system—but provided that they have enough power to enforce the option. Electoral systems do not change when neither the party nor the coalition of parties has the necessary resources to adapt an alternative electoral system or when electoral reform is not perceived as an opportunity to gain additional parliamentary seats (Benoit, 2004).

Bowler, Donovan, and Karp, having studied the attitudes of politicians in Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and New Zealand regarding changing their electoral systems, draw to the conclusion that, first of all, they are driven by a private interest associated with ensuring opportunities for their election or re-election. The winning parties strive not so much to maximize representation in the future but to maintain their positions. Thus, they are focused primarily on minimizing the costs associated with the risk of not being re-elected for a new term. The most attractive strategy for reducing risks for political parties in a democracy is maintaining the status quo. Since the rules for holding democratic elections are usually non-discriminatory and allow the defeat of the ruling party (or coalition of parties), the new government does not have incentives for institutional changes, since it was thanks to the existing rules that it was elected (Bowler, Donovan and Karp 2006).

1.3. Researching electoral reforms

Recently, the rational choice approach to understanding the reasons for electoral reforms has come under criticism. For example, Norris considers this model to be ineffective because the only agents of electoral changes are political parties, and their only motive is to maximize representation. As a research tool for understanding the reasons for electoral reforms, Norris proposed a policy cycle model, which has an advantage over a rational approach in that it identifies a wide range of actors interested in transformations. It presupposes a stepwise process of political adoption solutions (Norris, 2011).

In this model, the decision-making process is considered as a sequence of stages. The first is the definition of the agenda. At this stage, the need for electoral reform is articulated. The main actors are civil society institutions (parties, media, NGOs). The second stage is decision-making. Alternatives are put forward on it, and political

coalitions are formed around them. The main actors are parliamentary parties and the executive branch. In the third stage, the decision is implemented. Finally, in the fourth stage, the feedback function is executed. Moreover, all decision-making phases take place in an environment that imposes historical, social, cultural, and economic constraints on this process (Ibid).

Focusing her attention on the first stage of the political decision-making cycle (setting the agenda), Norris, based on cross-national analysis, concluded that the main factor in changing electoral systems is the lack of legitimacy of political institutions. Citizens' dissatisfaction with the way democratic institutions function contributes to the emergence of the issue of electoral reform on the agenda, which is discussed in detail by the actors who make specific political decisions (ibid: 546).

As noted by Leyenaar and Hazan, in addition to the rational choice approach, the reasons for electoral reforms can also be studied from the point of view of behaviorism or institutionalism. For example, in the behavioral approach, the focus of research attention is not only parties, understood as unified political actors, but also their individual constituents; and the emphasis is not on their rationality but their values and ideologies. In turn, the main focus of the institutional approach is on the extent to which the institutional context encourages or inhibits electoral change. Thus, the authors' main conclusion is a better understanding of the reasons for electoral reforms provides a synthesis of all three approaches: rational, behavioral, and institutional (Leyenaar and Hazan 2011).

All the approaches to the analysis of electoral reforms described so far have been developed based on empirical material from democratic countries. At the same time, the logic of electoral engineering in regimes of electoral authoritarianism also deserves attention since its disclosure is of interest from the point of view of deepening our knowledge of the internal dynamics of such political regimes.

1.4. The concepts of electoral reforms in electoral authoritarianism

Studies of electoral reforms in countries of electoral authoritarianism can be divided into two groups. The first group includes studies of democratic transition, focusing interest on searching for the reasons leading to the formation of democracies in developing countries. The authors of this trend associate the behavior of elites in the process of democratization with dependence on factors of historical development, including the destruction of colonial rule and the formation of authoritarian regimes (Mozaffar et al. 2005).

The incompleteness of nation-building or a general crisis of the social system necessitates stabilizing the political system. Therefore electoral reforms are aimed at consolidating political regime. Among the factors accelerating democratization are also mentioned economic crises, mass protests, the death of a dictator, and a split within the ruling party or group (Geddes 1999).

It is believed that in Eastern Europe, democratization took place as a result of mass protests, and in Latin America, due to the split of the ruling groups. There are also alternative explanations indicating the role of the mistakes of the ruling elites. In reality, however, authoritarian regimes are usually poorly informed about the needs of society, and that is why they allow the creation of democratic institutions. These regimes are unable to predict the results of reforms, and therefore democratization is taking place against the will of the elites (Hale et al. 2017).

Research in this field most often operates with qualitative data that emphasize the features of each specific case. For example, the authors talk about the inextricable link between electoral reforms and reforms of the political system. In addition, this group of researchers more often proceeds from the assumption that democratic institutions, including elections, are capable of promoting democratization even despite the will of the ruling group due to a lack of awareness of the needs of society. At the same time, in this approach, it is customary to proceed from the fact that the movement towards democracy arises primarily due to the conscious choice of the ruling group.

The second group of researchers sees the reasons for electoral reforms in the desire of the elites to ensure the desired result in the elections. This thesis fits into Lijphart's agenda for developed democracies. Using the institutions characteristic of democracy, ruling groups change electoral legislation in order to maintain power, including through the formation of a party system with a dominant party. Such systems allow autocracies to exist long enough without seriously democratizing political life.

In carrying out electoral reforms, the ruling group often resorts to the distribution of economic transfers and rent in order to co-opt potential rivals. As a result, it splits up the opposition and increases coordination costs for it, creates opportunities for more active attraction of loyal voters to polling stations. At the same time, reforms are more likely to be carried out if the elites are confident in their ability to retain power (Golosov 2013).

The authors of this direction are characterized by attention to the influence of changes in the electoral legislation on political processes. They use quantitative methods much more often, focusing on rational choice theory and various varieties of the neo-institutional approach. These researchers usually proceed from the assumption that electoral reforms do not necessarily lead to democratization, since the ruling group is able to predict well the results of its actions and create substitute institutions designed to serve as a kind of brake on democratization. Often such substituents become competitors of political parties and successfully oust them from the "electoral market" (Hale 2005).

Electoral reforms in developed democracies are usually viewed as electoral engineering that does not impede the free expression of citizens' will. Arend Lijphart describes such reforms as changing the "rules of the game" to improve them and not affect their election results (Lijphart, 1994: 139). Noting the high internal homogeneity of electoral systems in developed democracies, he argues that their modifications do not affect the disproportionality of the party system or the effective number of parties. Therefore, it can be said that in developed democracies, electoral systems are not subject to change, and their changes do not distort election results (Ibid: 94).

Researchers of electoral reforms in a democratic transition (Schedler, 2010: 69) traditionally refer to Russia as a country of the "gray zone", to be more specific, Russia is a state experiencing a recession of democratic institutions or making the first attempts

to build democracy. In these states, there are institutions characteristic of a democracy, including elections, but the results of elections do not meet the requirements of democracies (Schedler, 2002: 37). States are often referred to as hybrid regimes or countries of electoral authoritarianism. Other definitions can be found: competitive authoritarianism, dysfunctional democracies, electoral democracy (Levitsky et al. 2002).

These states are characterized by a high degree of volatility in electoral and party systems. In the 1990s and 2000s, such states experienced either stagnation or recession of democratic institutions. Regular elections did not lead to democratization (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). Nevertheless, the electoral reform agenda formulated by Lijphart is used in relation to them.

Electoral authoritarianism includes democratic electoral institutions such as regular elections, political parties, electoral systems. However, one of the peculiarities is that their actual functions are not performed; this is a screen for authoritarian politicians. They can manipulate at different stages of the electoral process and resort to undemocratic practices. The ability to ignore democratic principles gives them a head start in the electoral process (Dahl, 1971: 6-10).

This feature is the key reason it does not allow the regimes of this type to be classified as either electoral or liberal democracies. And the formality in the preservation of electoral procedures distinguishes them from classical autocracies (Schedler, 2002).

For this study, it is necessary to study the papers devoted to electoral manipulation (widespread in the regimes of electoral authoritarianism) and, in particular, the logic of electoral engineering in non-democratic political regimes.

Based on the literature, we can distinguish two approaches to what should be understood by electoral manipulation: formal and substantive campaigns. According to the formal approach, electoral manipulations are understood as illegal actions aimed at electoral fraud. Based on this understanding, Lehoucq described historical examples of electoral manipulations in North America, South America, Asia, and Europe: from fraud voting results and buying votes before manipulating voter lists. However, the problem of the formal approach for comparative research is that electoral laws in different countries are not universal, they do not have an unambiguous interpretation due to ambiguity in

wording, and, in addition, may contradict other (national or international) regulatory documents (Lehoucq, 2003).

According to a substantive approach, electoral manipulation is understood as deliberate violations of electoral legislation by political actors and as manipulation of the electoral process in private interests. The ruling elites and their agents are usually considered subjects of electoral manipulation. For example, Schedler described a "Menu of manipulation" where authoritarian incumbents choose tactics to shift the electoral process in their own from removing opposition parties and candidates to the election race to adopting disproportionate electoral systems and carrying out fraud on election day (Schedler, 2002).

From the point of substantive approach, several types of electoral manipulations can be distinguished. The first type includes manipulation of electoral institutions, including electoral systems, when the rules for holding elections are set so that they systematically favor certain political actors to the detriment of other participants in the electoral process (Birch, 2011). The second type is the manipulation of voters' preferences and political choices. This type of manipulation, like the first, is usually implemented on the eve of elections and is associated with influencing voters, parties, and candidates. Examples include censorship in the media, coercion of voters into specific types of electoral behavior, and depriving opposition parties and candidates of the opportunity to participate in elections. Finally, the third type of manipulation is the process of voting and counting of votes, for example, excluding certain voters from the voter lists, disrupting the operation of voting premises, falsifying the results of voter will (Ibid).

In the monograph "Electoral Malpractice," Birch set a goal to identify factors that encourage incumbents to manipulate the electoral process. According to her, the fear of losing legitimacy restrains the willingness of political leaders to use electoral manipulation. The researcher determined that all types of electoral malpractice are systematically accompanied by the dominance of hierarchical social ties in society. A developed civil society is a barrier to electoral abuse. Simpson considers that electoral manipulations are needed to get the minimum necessary result to maintain authority by the incumbent or incumbent party and prevent potential opponents of the regime from gaining votes/power.

In addition to differentiating the types of electoral manipulations in the scientific literature, it is presented why some incumbents use more manipulations while others use less. In the monograph *Electoral Malpractice* Birch, identifying the factors that induce incumbents to manipulate the electoral process. She used an Index of Electoral Malpractice, constructed from an analysis of the reports of observation missions that worked from 1995 to 2007 in elections in Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe, the former USSR, and Central and South Africa. This index was compiled for each of the three types of electoral abuse identified earlier, i.e., for manipulating electoral institutions, voter preferences, as well as the voting process and counting of votes. According to Birch, the fear of losing legitimacy within the country or abroad is the main factor holding back the readiness of political leaders to resort to electoral manipulation. The researcher determined that all types of electoral abuse are systematically accompanied by the dominance of hierarchical social ties in a given society (the independent variable is the level of corruption); and a developed civil society (the independent variable is freedom of the media), on the contrary, is a barrier to electoral abuse. It has been shown that the quality of electoral integrity will be higher in political regimes with an independent judiciary, free media, and a developed civil society (Ibid).

Simpser, who considered manipulation of voters' preferences, as well as the voting process and counting of votes, has a different position. In his opinion, electoral manipulations are not needed to obtain the minimum necessary result for the incumbent or the Incumbent party to maintain power. The main purpose of manipulation is indirect informational functions related to depriving the electoral hopes of potential opponents of the regime and "keeping in check" political supporters (Simpser, 2013).

Thus, the manipulations will be large-scale. In addition, this opportunity appears in societies where the incumbent's resources significantly exceed the resources of his opponents. If incumbents exist in an environment where resources are distributed among different groups of actors, manipulation will only be used to maintain power. Simpser refined Birch's line of reasoning regarding the logic of electoral manipulation. In essence, the conclusions of their work on the factors that restrain the manipulative potential of the incumbent do not contradict each other.

Thus, Simpser's theory of falsifications is based on the fact that interference in the course of elections is not so much instrumental (a tool for ensuring victory) but informational. Using falsifications, one can create an image of an irresistible political force and influence a vast number of actors, from the opposition to the adherents of the regime, which, in fact, is their primary goal.

Rozenas tried to understand the reasons for manipulating the electoral process in the regimes of electoral authoritarianism before election day. He agrees with A. Simpser's thesis that the incumbent needs elections to demonstrate to other political actors the stability of his position and the presence of support in society (Rozenas, 2016). The signal given through elections will be the more convincing, the higher the real level of support for the incumbent and the lower the level of falsification. At the same time, an unpopular incumbent who won the election solely through manipulation will not be able to send a signal to the political system about the stability of his positions, which is fraught with the loss of power. Thus, the question that arises before an authoritarian incumbent who does not want to lose elections or lose power is what type and volume of manipulations to use during a political campaign in order to show the stability of his regime and reduce the likelihood of losing power. The researcher concludes that incumbents who face a greater risk of losing power before the elections will manipulate the electoral process less than incumbents who are confident in their position since a victory in a rigged the election threatens the first with equally unpleasant consequences as a defeat. The latter will use manipulation as insurance against an unlikely but possible loss.

Therefore, we can conclude that popular and influential incumbents, who do not have obstacles from the organized opposition and do not experience pressure from civil society institutions, have much more opportunities to manipulate the electoral process in their interests—using a vast repertoire of techniques for this, than incumbents, which are less popular and have restrictions on complete freedom of action.

The papers reviewed, except for Birch's study, did not focus on electoral engineering. At the same time, Birch presented only the most general conclusions that cannot be reduced without additional reservations to the phenomenon of the transformation of electoral systems in non-democratic regimes (Birch 2011). However,

several case studies have been devoted to explaining the logic of electoral engineering in autocracies.

Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni described electoral engineering in Mexico under the dominance of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (IRP) (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001). In their opinion, the long-term majority of the IRP in the Mexican Congress Chamber of Deputies was ensured by electoral rules. To obtain a disproportionately large number of IRP mandates, the single-seat constituencies by plurality was used. At the same time, the opposition parties consistently achieved success in multi-member districts according to a proportional system, they did not have incentives to coordinate around single candidates and to form anti-incubation coalitions, since even in total the number of seats they received in parliament was always less than that of the IRP. Thus, this combination of electoral rules allowed for a long time to maintain a leading position, despite the decline in popular support, the economic crisis, and corruption scandals (Ibid: 271).

Tan showed how manipulation of electoral rules helps Singapore's ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP), which provides a majority of seats in the national parliament, despite the decline in popularity that began in the second half of the 1980s (Tan 2013). One of the critical things in maintaining power over the PAP was the 1988 electoral reform, which introduced a bloc vote electoral system in Singapore that yields highly disproportionate results for a large party. However, less disproportionate systems (due to the presence of political opposition in the country) could be risky for the PAP, and the use of other manipulations during voting and counting of votes, allegedly, was unacceptable to the Singapore authorities because of the risk of losing legitimacy (Ibid).

Examples of Mexico and Singapore show that the degree of inclusiveness of electoral systems may be inversely related to the strength of the opposition and the openness of the political regime. Studying the Middle East countries, Lust-Okar and Jamal (Lust-Okar 2002) concluded that in the liberalization stage, when the incumbent loses part of its power relying on the dominant parties, he/she will establish electoral systems that will be favorable to the ruling party and, at the same time, the opposition will be disadvantageous.

Gandhi and Heller also considered the issue of electoral engineering in authoritarian regimes. They put forward a number of assumptions about the dynamics of changes in the rules for holding elections in non-democratic regimes. First, incumbents are the main actors in changing electoral systems in such regimes (Gandhi and Heller 2018). Autocrats may adopt electoral systems that favor them or the incumbent party. Still, at the same time, they may have other strategies for staying in power besides manipulating election rules. They may also face certain restrictions (opposition from the opposition or lack of information on consequences of institutional choice) when using the “rules of the game”.

Therefore, for an incumbent or an incumbent party to keep power and legitimacy, it is necessary to create conditions where the opposition cannot win the election. The use of solid forms of manipulation (propaganda or falsification) can cause protests among citizens. These outcomes could be highly probable in regions with relatively open political systems or higher level of democracy, where independent institutions of civil society, political competition remained, and the population's protest potential was relatively high (Petrov et al 2013). And, on the contrary, in regions where democratic institutions were poorly developed, one could not expect widespread electoral engineering.

This paragraph has provided an overview of how electoral engineering has been studied in the context of authoritarian regimes. Since the transformations of electoral systems in such regimes are associated with the actions of authoritarian incumbents, electoral engineering was considered in the paragraph through the prism of the components of the “menu of manipulations”. At the disposal of autocrats: manipulation of voters' preferences, as well as the voting process and vote counting. The studies reviewed show that the use of authoritarian forms of electoral manipulation is accompanied by a particular set of conditions: the popularity of an autocrat, the weakness of the opposition and civil society institutions, and systematic violations of the rule of law. It can be concluded that electoral engineering may be in inverse relation to the factors associated with tough types of electoral manipulation.

1.5. Political environment of modern Russian Federation

The regions' transition to new electoral systems coincided with the transformation of the Russian political regime (Golosov 2011). Thus, throughout the existence of the Russian Federation, the political system has transformed from Yeltsin's attempts to make a democratic transition in the 90s to the construction of a “vertical of power” by Putin in the 21st century.

The Russian political regime in the 1990s was competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2002). While elections in this type of regime are regular, free from massive fraud, and can even lead to a change in political leadership, the capabilities and resources of government and opposition forces are unequal. Representatives of the government control the media, use administrative resources to their advantage and use various forms of pressure on critics of the regime.

As Levitsky and Way point out, competitive authoritarianism should be distinguished not only from democracy but also from simulated electoral regimes, where the institution of elections exists, but does not matter (Ibid). One of these regimes is electoral authoritarianism. Despite formally competitive elections, the opposition has no chance in a legal struggle to replace the ruling groups, parliament and courts are subordinate to the executive branch, and the media are censored. This type of political regime was established in Russia in the second half of the 2000s.

The last twenty years' main content has been the federal government's desire to restore control over the regional elites and systematic work to weaken them, and the actual creation of a single ecosystem of the national and regional bureaucracy. As a result, the authorities began to limit regional elites and political players in literally everything from electoral rules and procedures to naming. In fact, instead of the previous semi-feudal system, where the provincial authorities received opportunities for omnipotence on the territory of the region in exchange for political loyalty to the sovereign (president), a system of parallel verticals was created closed to various structures in the presidential administration. These verticals also affected the social and political sphere, significantly intensifying in the next period of the actual appointment of governors in 2005-2012 (Kynev 2009).

The main element of the new national policy towards the regions was the electoral reform, which reduced the number of players eligible to take part in elections (for example, the ban on regional parties). Since July 14, 2003, the regions are obliged to elect at least half of the deputies of legislative assemblies according to the proportional system (Federal Law 67 2002). Since 2007, the regions have lost the right to elect their deputies to the State Duma directly: a fully proportional one replaced the mixed system in federal elections. Thus, political parties began to register exclusively at the national level, and opportunities started to be created for direct influence on regional deputies from the center (the national bureaucracy controlled the party bureaucracy, which increasingly influenced the deputies). National parties have become de facto monopolists in nominating candidates, and the number of parties has constantly been decreasing, reaching a minimum of seven parties by 2008. For example, in 1999, 26 parties and blocs took part in the elections to the State Duma, while in 1995, there were 43.

It is essential to understand that the decrease in the number of parties and the prohibition of independent candidates from participating in elections was the national government's will and the presidential administration. Before the total introduction of elections according to party lists in the regions in the last "pre-reform" 2002, the share of nominees of electoral associations among the elected deputies of regional parliaments was only 9.6% (in 2001 it was 14.3%). In fact, these were non-partisan elections (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation 2001).

According to Gel'man, the establishment of electoral authoritarianism in Russia was achieved through three mechanisms: super-presidentialism, centralized subnational authoritarianism, and a dominant party (Gel'man 2015). After Vladimir Putin came to power and the coalition of regional elites was defeated in the parliamentary elections in 1999, the elected president was able to increase his political resources and significantly strengthen his dominance over other participants in the political process. This was facilitated by the favorable situation in world oil prices in the 2000s (Kudrin 2013). As a result, the presidential administration, being the main institutionalized veto player, established control over the executive branch and introduced the United Russia party into the legislative branch at all levels (Roberts 2012: 235). Thus, the president solved the principal-agent dilemma within the "vertical of power". As a result, regional actors were

built into relations with the head of state and actually ceased to represent the interests of the region's citizens.

In the context of the paper, it seems important to consider the political mechanisms that have subjugated regional political regimes. Two circumstances were of crucial importance: introducing the party of power into the regional electoral arenas and the abolition of gubernatorial elections (Schedler 2006). The purpose of these two tasks was to solve the commitment problem of regional elites, first of all, heads of regions to the policy pursued by the central government (Reuter 2009). To this end, the Center needed to increase the attractiveness of the “party of power” among the regional establishment and reduce the benefits of alternative political coordination for its representatives.

However, the introduction of the "party of power" into the regions was not enough for the Presidential Administration to subordinate the political regimes of the regions to its influence. Subsequently, a set of legislative measures was implemented, called in the authoritarian literature adaptation (White 2005), which reduced the alternative party proposal. Among the most important are the increase in the minimum number of political parties to 50 thousand members, the abolition of electoral blocs in elections at all levels, the introduction of a single voting day, and the tightening of the rules for registering candidates and party lists.

The key measure that solved the commitment problem of regional elites to the Center (federal government) was the cancellation of the gubernatorial elections. In order to maintain trust in the central government, the heads of the regions were forced to make efforts to create special conditions that would guarantee the irremovability of the ruling group, to which they were also a member. The consequence of this was a radical strengthening of the positions of the United Russia party in all regional political arenas. The heads of the executive branch were left with no choice but to use its resources as the primary tool for interacting with local elites and achieving their own goals (Gel'man 2015).

Researchers have found that regional policy is determined by factors related to regional leaders' purposeful activity and contextual factors related to ethnicity or the degree of development of democratic institutions (Golosov 2011). Thus, the variables

associated with the dynamics of regional policy should also be considered when analyzing electoral engineering at the level of the Russian regions.

It is important to understand that the decrease in the number of parties and the prohibition of independent candidates from participating in elections was the national government's will and the presidential administration. Before the complete introduction of elections according to party lists in the regions in the last "pre-reform" 2002, the share of nominees of electoral associations among the elected deputies of regional parliaments was only 9.6% (in 2001 it was 14.3%). In fact, these were non-partisan elections (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation 2001).

By subjugating the regional bureaucracy and forcing it to support United Russia, the federal government significantly weakened (and after abolishing the elections of governors almost eliminated) the competition of administrative resources, which replaced the still unformed party competition. Thus, in the 2000s, the party-political regime can be characterized as a regime of total domination of the executive branch, where the ruling party imitating the dominant one plays an auxiliary role in additional structuring of elites at various levels, being in a dependent and subordinate position concerning the executive branch. This system gradually descended lower and lower, from the national to the local level. To a large extent, the peak of forced unification was during the reign of Dmitry Medvedev (President of Russia in 2008-2012), when even the use of party lists in municipal elections became mandatory.

But by 2011, the socio-economic conditions had changed. It became clear that the political restrictions of citizens could cause protests and discontent in the country, which occurred in Eastern Europe in the late 90s and early 90s. In 2011 and 2012, the most massive protests all over Russia over the entire period of Vladimir Putin's rule after the parliamentary and presidential elections took place. As a result, since 2012, the party legislation has been drastically changing towards the registration of the most significant possible number of parties, reducing protest votes.

The national government faced the predictable side effects of these decisions. Gradually, in 2012–2013, along with political technology, fake parties, real new projects, and leaders began to appear; in the regions, representatives of local elites began to leave for new projects, and the influence of all old parties started to weaken (Volkov 2012: 5-

8). Thus, a new wave of cleansing operations and the struggle with the new political leaders began, but they still began to achieve success. The most striking examples of this process were the success of Alexei Navalny in 2013, who received more votes in the elections for mayor of Moscow than all the candidates of the old parties combined, as well as the election of Yevgeny Roizman as mayor of Yekaterinburg (the fourth largest city in Russia by population) (Kynev 2014: 105).

The initial response to this was to diminish the role of parties. This was reflected in the adoption soon of the so-called Klishas law 2013, which reduced from 50 to 25% the mandatory share of deputies of regional parliaments, who were elected according to the proportional system introduced in 2003. For Moscow and St. Petersburg, the requirement for the mandatory use of party lists was completely abolished. This law also completely abolished the requirements, introduced under Medvedev, of the minimum share of deputies elected under the proportional system for local governments. Thus, the tactical decision led to the actual cancellation of the critical electoral reform of the 2000s (Ibid: 53). The authorities have been destroying sites where parties can succeed, and a new municipal reform was announced in December 2013. As a result, the regions had the right to cancel direct elections of mayors without the municipalities' consent, replacing elections with the delegation from settlements.

The 2016 State Duma elections were decided to return to a mixed system (225 deputies by districts and 225 by party lists). In part, these elections meant a return to the electoral formula of 1993-2003. However, even compared with the 1990s, they had several significant differences associated mainly with stricter rules for admission to participation in elections, radically increased qualifications, and minimization of public control. The goal of the reform was to preserve the formal majority of United Russia. In Russian conditions, candidates with either administrative support or independent reliable financial and organizational resources can win in majoritarian districts. But in Russian conditions, such candidates are almost always on the authorities' side. Otherwise little will soon be left of their business. Administrative resources and finances can be replaced by the high personal popularity of a candidate, but it is difficult to find it even for such independent units. Thus, in the elections of deputies to regional parliaments in 2015, United Russia won more than 90% of districts across the regions (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, 2015). The remaining formally lost constituencies

are de facto given by United Russia to close candidates whom the party itself could not nominate for various reasons (for example, image reasons).

Thus, over the 21st century, the national government has been actively building a vertical of power, limiting the possibilities for some political forces to come to power. Therefore, the elections became a formal event to demonstrate to the population and the international community the legitimacy of the ruling party and its supporters.

The paragraph describes the trajectory of the development of the political regime in Russia since the early 1990s. After the abolition of direct gubernatorial elections, the heads of the regions, who were key actors in the political process in the constituent entities of the federation, were integrated into the hierarchical system of relations with the national government and, in addition to their interests, had to take into account the incentives emanating from the national level, which consisted in the fact that in order to maintain the needed to ensure high results for the United Russia party, including in regional elections. The paragraph identified the key players in the transformation of regional electoral systems. It is to them that the theoretical framework of the study will be applied, the description of which is devoted to the next paragraph.

1.6. The theoretical framework of empirical research

Rational choice institutionalism is used as a theory in this study. The algorithm for applying the theory of rational choice institutionalism requires identifying key actors who have the ability to influence the decision-making process, determine their goals and strategies, and identify the set of institutions where these actors function. In this paper, the following are considered as key actors in changing regional electoral systems: the federal executive power (national government), the heads of the executive power of the regions of the Russian Federation (governors), and the political party "United Russia". All three of these actors seem to have a common goal in electoral engineering at the regional level: strengthening the power positions. The national government strategies regarding electoral engineering at the subnational level depended, first of all, on the dynamics of the political process at the country level as a whole, as well as on information about the effects of electoral systems and their individual parameters. The governors' activity concerning electoral engineering appears to have been mediated, on the one hand, by the legislative framework established for the regions by the national government, as

well as their ability to resort to electoral abuses in the interests of the “party in power”. United Russia functioned in conditions of limited opportunities, since, on the one hand, it was a political instrument in the hands of the national government, and, on the other hand, in many regions, the governors controlled the factions of the United Russia party.

This approach was one of the most common theoretical models in political science at the end of the 20th century and remained a popular research tool to this day. Institutions play a central role in the political process: within their framework, interactions between political actors occur. Moreover, as noted in the scientific literature (Gandhi 2008, Schedler 2013), institutions are important in democratic political regimes and regimes of electoral authoritarianism.

The rational choice institutionalism theory in political science goes back to the classical rational choice theory by Downs (Downs 1957) but develops it through the prism of institutions. Thus, researchers using this analytic tool aim to explain policy outcomes by considering actors driven by self-maximizing goals and the institutions where these actors are immersed.

Talking about institutions, it should be emphasized that, according to the new institutionalism, they are both formal (political, legal, economic rules) and informal (generally accepted rules) (North 1990). In the context of studying the political process of modern Russia through the prism of neo-institutionalism, it has to be noted that in Russian politics, informal rules are no less important than formal norms, just as they were in Soviet times (Gel'man 2004).

According to rational choice institutionalism, the political process consists not only of rational actors but also of a set of institutional rules and norms that they interact (Shepsle 1989: 135); these rules and norms restrain their selfish aspirations. Since institutions are associated with implementing specific outcomes, which may be both desirable and undesirable for political actors, the latter may seek to manipulate institutional rules. This statement is important for understanding the essence of rational choice institutionalism: institutions are perceived as structures exposed to the influence of actors facing a change in the status quo (McFaul 1999: 29-30).

Geddes proposes an algorithm for applying the Rational Choice Institutionalism (the rational choice approach) in political science research (Geddes 2003: 191). Firstly, it is necessary to identify the key actors for this study explicitly, that is, those actors of the political process. They have the required amount of resources to be able to influence the decision-making process. Secondly, it is necessary to define their goals and strategies. Thirdly, it is essential to identify the institutions that define the set of available strategies, where the actors choose the most suitable to achieve their goals, depending on the costs and benefits associated with these strategies.

Rational choice institutionalism has been repeatedly applied to analyze political processes in Russian regions (Reuter 2013). It has been used to explain institutional building (McFaul 1999) and regime transformations (Gel'man 2015) at the state level. This theoretical framework is also an analytical tool for electoral authoritarianism regimes researchers (Schedler 2013).

Rational choice institutionalism has advantages over the historical and sociological new institutionalism in this work. The theoretical framework of historical institutionalism is better suited to explaining why institutions reproduce over time than to explain the reasons for their transformations (Peters 2005). There have been more than two hundred changes in the basic parameters of regional electoral systems between 2003 and 2018. If we talk about sociological institutionalism, it diminishes the instrumental nature of actors in developing norms and practices (Hall, Taylor 1996: 951), while the phenomenon of electoral engineering in autocracies considered in this paper is a derivative of the purposeful activity of politicians.

In this paper, the key actors in changing regional electoral systems are the federal executive power (the Federal Center or national government), the heads of the executive power of the Russian Federation regions (governors), and the United Russia party. All three of these actors seem to have a common goal in terms of electoral engineering at the regional level: strengthening their power positions.

The national government, having significantly increased economic resources in the 2000s and gained the opportunity to intervene in political processes at the regional level, began to actively dictate the will of regional actors, including regarding the rules for holding provincial elections. The Center achieved the consolidation of its power

positions at the regional level by introducing United Russia party entities into the political arenas. The Center's strategies regarding electoral engineering at the subnational level depended on the dynamics of the political process at the country level, which was most clearly reflected in the results of federal parliamentary elections, as well as information on the effects of electoral systems and their individual parameters.

Throughout the post-Soviet period, governors were the main centers of power in the constituent entities (Reuter 2013). After the election of heads of regions was canceled, they began to depend on the national government. They were forced to make significant efforts to ensure high electoral results for the United Russia party, which was the primary condition for them to survive in office (Reuter, Robertson 2013: 1032). The governors' activity in relation to electoral engineering was mediated by the legislative framework established by the federal electoral legislation, as well as their ability to resort to other types of electoral abuse in the interests of the "party in power".

United Russia, transformed in the second half of the 2000s into the dominant party (Hale 2006) and being the subject of electoral competition, could also have interests related to the rules for holding elections at the level of regions. As a large party, United Russia would benefit from highly disproportionate electoral systems that would provide additional seats in regional legislatures through their mechanical effects. However, to implement these alleged intentions, United Russia had quite a few opportunities, since it remained only a political instrument in the hands of the national government, which significantly limited its subjectivity, and, in many regions, the offices and factions of the United Russia party were controlled by governors and therefore they did not have their legislative agenda.

The rest of the Russian parties, including the most powerful in the 1990s, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, in the period under consideration (2003-2018) lost resources of influence on the political process of both countries and regions, therefore, in this study, they are not considered as self-sufficient actors.

The paragraph described the rational choice institutionalism theory, which is the theoretical framework of the research. According to the algorithm for applying the theory, the national government, the heads of the regions, and the United Russia party are singled out as key actors in the change in regional electoral systems. Also, in this paragraph, the

institutions were designated where these actors implemented their strategies regarding the architecture of regional electoral systems.

Chapter 2. Empirical Analysis and Results

The dissertation's research question is **what factors influence the change in the regional electoral systems in Russia**. Based on the theoretical framework and scientific background, in this section I formulate research design and hypotheses.

2.1. Research design and hypotheses

In the early 2000s, the national government was building a model of subordination of all regions to the Kremlin, namely the Vertical of Power. It means that it was interested in the control of the executive and legislative branches of the province. By creating a vertical of power, the national government ensured political stability throughout the country. Carrying out political reforms in the early 2000s, which limited the opposition's electoral opportunities, caused a series of protests in many Russian regions (Kynev 2009). A large number of regions did not want to submit to the federal government. It is especially true for national republics and rich regions with a high level of political culture. In these regions, a so-called high level of democracy is recorded, where there is political pluralism, independent media, and a low level of corruption. These regions are prone to protests and expressions of opposition to the national government (Titkov 2013).

In conditions of electoral authoritarianism, the National Government is not interested in such protest actions. Various methods are used to overcome them. On the one hand, these can be violent methods such as repression, arrest of the opposition, declaring political organizations as terrorist groups, etc. But such strategies can ruin the reputation of the authorities both among the electorate and in the international arena. Therefore, incumbents in authoritarian countries prefer to use more formal and institutional tools. In the paragraph "Russian political environment," I described what new electoral rules have appeared in the Russian regions: it can be from the banning of regional parties and the cancellation of gubernatorial elections to the transformation of the electoral system.

In MA dissertation, I suggest that in regions with open political systems (or a high level of democracy), the probability of changing electoral systems is higher than in the non-democratic areas. The level of democracy in the region is the level of development

of the democratic institutions of the Russian region, which include the following factors: media freedom, political pluralism, democratic elections, the independence of the courts, developed civil society, and low corruption.

In this research, I will use the democracy index of Russian regions by Petrov and Titkov from Moscow Carnegie Center (Petrov & Titkov 2013) and regional results of legislature elections in order to operationalize the level of democracy of Russian regions. This rating includes expert opinions on ten socio-political factors, including the level of corruption, openness, democratic elections, political pluralism, media independence, and others. The research of Titkov and Petrov is quite complete and independent since the Moscow Carnegie Center is a regional affiliate of the nonprofit organization Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Therefore, I assume that

H1: the higher the level of democracy in the region, the more changes in the electoral system

In the second half of the 2000s, United Russia became the dominant party (Hale 2006). It could be related to election rules at the regional level as well. According to Gel'man, Russian electoral authoritarianism consists of three parts: super-presidency, centralized subnational authoritarianism, and the dominant party (Gel'man 2008). All of these parts create the "Vertical of power" in Russia (Ibid). The idea of this is centralization and control of Russian regions by the national government (executive branch) through the loyalty of governors and regional parliaments. President Putin implemented this in the 2000s (Roberts 2012: 235). Creating a ruling party would not have been possible without institutional changes and election rules at both the state and regional levels. As a large party of United Russia, highly disproportionate electoral systems would be profitable, supplying it, due to their mechanical effects, with additional seats in regional legislatures.

According to the Vertical of Power, it was crucial to subordinate the regional elites in the person of the governors to the national government and introduce the party of power in local parliaments. Before Putin's rule, governors were key players in the region's politics. They often opposed the Kremlin after the collapse of the Soviet Union (examples: the Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Chechnya, which had two

Chechen wars in the late 1990s). To subordinate the heads of regions to the national government, the governor elections were canceled. Now the head of the region was appointed by the regional parliament, and the President proposed a candidate for this position. Thus, the position of the authority of the region ceased to be elective and became appointed by the President of the Russian Federation. And one of the tasks of the appointed governor was to ensure high results for the United Russia party at all levels of elections, both national and local regional.

In this paradigm, I assume that the governors could ensure the victory of United Russia without the use of falsification, propaganda, and other non-institutional manipulations. Consequently, I believe that electoral engineering was less pronounced in regions headed by governors, who had the resources to mobilize a vast network of loyal electoral manipulation agents at the local level. According to Rundlett and Svulik (Rundlett et al 2016), such a network of faithful subordinate executors of electoral fraud is necessary to organize manipulations with voters' preferences and vote counting. Consequently, the more opportunities the head of the region had to build a hierarchical system of patron-client relations with local actors, the easier it is for United Russia to achieve a high result with the help of complex manipulative techniques, and the need for additional measures to ensure the result for “ party in power,” in particular, through electoral engineering simply would not exist.

While in power for a large number of years, the governor could obtain a sufficient number of agents and networks to ensure high results for the party in power without additional changes in the electoral environment. Accordingly, in the regions where the governor has been in power for a long time, changes in the electoral system are expected to be minimal.

H2: the more the governor rules in the region, the less there will be changes in the electoral system

Moreover, Hale paid attention to the fact that the ability of regional leaders to create and debug political machines based on clientelistic relations with local actors was associated with ethnicity. Governors, especially in republics and regions with a compact population of ethnic minorities, often provided these minorities with particular types of club goods in exchange for their electoral loyalty. As a result, the heads of regions had

agents whose resources could be helpful during the period—election campaigns (Hale 2007: 231). Since governors with a large proportion of ethnic groups in the regions can mobilize the local electorate, I assume that regions with a large number of non-Russian populations are not subject to electoral system transformation.

H3: in regions with a large number of ethnic groups, electoral changes were minimal

The next participant who is interested in transforming regional electoral systems is the ruling party, United Russia. Of course, as a political organization, it cannot be considered as a separate player in the transformation of electoral systems. Still, at the same time, within the framework of the phenomenon of the ruling party, it is the patron of the national government (presidential administration), and this is most interested in creating the most favorable conditions for ensuring the victory of the United Russia at local levels. Accordingly, I assume that in the regions where United Russia won less than 50% of the seats in the parliament (sufficient to control the legislature), the most significant number of changes in the electoral system will take place.

H4: the regions where United Russia won less than 50% of the parliamentary seats, the most significant number of electoral changes were conducted.

It is difficult to say that a total authoritarian regime was built in Russia. According to Levitsky and Way, this is competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky et al. 2002). Formally, in this regime, there are institutions and rules that imply a procedure for changing power. But in fact, the opposition has no chance to win the election due to the lack of independent courts, media, and the rule of law. Moreover, special institutional conditions are created by the central executive branch (president, national government), where parties and independent candidates cannot participate in elections (Golosov 2011). For example, the abolition of electoral blocs and unions, the number increase of party members, the tightening of the rules for registering candidates and parties, etc. At the same time, it is possible to take electoral rules (electoral engineering), making it impossible for political actors to win during elections.

Electoral engineering is the use of parameters of the electoral system, which contribute to the high result of United Russia. As a large party, United Russia takes benefits from a reduction in the number of parliamentarians, small proportional districts, high threshold percentage, as well as methods of transferring votes to seats within the proportional electoral system disproportionately awarding large parties (Colomer 2005: 4-5).

According to Lijphart, a high percentage of the threshold provides more seats for large parties and reduces the proportionality in the assembly (Lijphart 1994). Taagepera and Shugart believe that the size of the district also affects proportional representation. Large districts have more favorable to small parties (Taagepera et al. 1989). Changes in these parameters could provide more votes for the ruling party (United Russia).

In MA dissertation, I will pay attention to changes in electoral systems in the Russian regions. The dependent variable is the change in the electoral system (electoral engineering) in the regions, such as the threshold percentage, percentage of deputies elected by the proportional system, and the number of parliamentarians in the legislature. Also in this paper, the variable Electoral Engineering was designed, which was calculated from the sum of electoral changes (the threshold percentage, percentage of deputies elected by the proportional system, and the number of parliamentarians in the legislature) in the region. Electrical engineering is also one of the independent variables. All data will be taken from regional laws and legal acts on regional elections from 2003 to 2018. For MA dissertation, I will take all Russian regions except Sevastopol and Crimea. 2003-2008: 87 regions; 2008-2013: 83 regions (some regions were united in ones), 2013-2018: 83 regions.

The Vertical of Power construction involves the control of regional parliaments by United Russia. In regions with a low level of democracy (lack of political competition, free press, civil society) and a strong governor, this is easy to provide a large number of votes for the presidential party through voters buying, falsifications, mobilization of the electorate (voters controlled by the government: army, officials, civil servants). On the other hand, in democratic regions, the use of these methods can cause protests. Therefore, the national government must apply more legal tools to ensure the victory of United Russia in more democratic regions.

Units of analysis and observation, time limits of the research

The unit of analysis is the region, and the unit of observation is the electoral system at the time of the given parliamentary elections in the region. The lower chronological limit of the study is 2003, when the first elections were held in compliance with the rule on the election of at least half of the deputies of regional assemblies by a proportional electoral system. The upper chronological limit is 2018. The period 2003 to 2008 is designated as the first cycle of regional parliamentary elections under the “new rules”; the period from 2008 to 2013 is the second cycle, and the period from 2014 to 2018 is the third cycle.

Sources

Information from expert ratings and collections, population censuses, and electronic databases was used to construct independent variables. The data on the degree of the democratic character of the political regimes of the regions were taken from the expert rating of the democratic character of Russian regions of the Carnegie Moscow Center, prepared by Petrov and Titkov. The data on the share of the non-Russian and rural population in the regions were obtained from the materials of the All-Russian population censuses of 2002 and 2010. The results of regional elections and the terms of governors' office were taken from the websites of the regional election commissions. The data for constructing the Electoral Engineering Level was taken from constitutions and legislation on elections and referenda in the regions. The sources of the data were the official portals of the regional executive and legislative bodies, the websites of the regional election commissions.

2.2. Description of dependent and independent variables

In this study, three models were made divided into three electoral cycles into Russian regions. The lower time limit for the study is December 2003, when the first elections to the parliaments of the constituent entities were held with the application of the rules on the election of at least half of the deputies through the electoral system; the upper limit is September 2018.

The period from 2003 to 2007 is the first cycle of elections under the new rules, when the first convocations of regional parliaments were elected, where at least half of the seats went to deputies who were on the list. The period from 2008 to 2013 covers the second cycle; from 2014 to 2018, there is a third cycle.

The empirical research presented in the dissertation is variably focused. Logistic regression was used to analyze quantitative data. A feature of this method, based on probabilistic logic, is that the results obtained with its help reflect the general trend to the studied phenomenon.

The dependent variable is the level of electoral engineering in the Russian regions. As mentioned above, this variable is based on the sum of the parameters of the transformation of the regional electoral system: the number of deputies elected according to the proportional system, the change in the size of the regional parliament and the electoral threshold.

Parameter	Specification	Value
Number of parliamentarians	Increase or maintain size	0
	Size reduction	1
Deputies elected by proportional system	$\geq 50\%$	0
	$< 50\%$	1

Electoral threshold	<= 5%	0
	>5%	1
Max. level of Electoral Engineering		3
Min. level of Electoral Engineering		0

Table 1. *The level of electoral changes in Russian regions*

Summing up all these parameters, the maximum value is 3, which means that the region has made the maximum number of changes to the rules for conducting before the election, and 0 is the minimum. Using the logistic regression method, I set the binary values 0 and 1 for the dependent variable, where 0 is no or minor changes, and 1 is a significant change in the electoral system of the region. Thus, for 0 the level of Electoral Engineering must be 0 or 1; for 1 there is 2 or 3.

In addition, in this study, I will try to find a correlation between specific parameters (change in parliament size, electoral threshold, and the number of deputies elected according to the proportional system) and the independent variables through logistic regression. This will help me understand what factors could influence specific changes in the electoral system in a particular electoral cycle. Thus, I will determine what could have affected the overall change in the electoral rules and a specific parameter.

The independent variables are:

- The level of democracy in the region.
- The number of non-Russian population in the region.
- The term the governor office.
- The past results of the United Russia elections.

To operationalize the level of democracy in the regions, I use the Petrov and Titkov Democratic Regions Ranking from the Carnegie Moscow Center (Petrov and Titkov, 2013). This index includes parameters that determine the level of democracy in the regions of Russia: regional political structure; openness of the political system; democratic elections; political pluralism; independence of the media; the level of corruption; economic liberalization; civil society; turnover of political elites; local government. The maximum value for this is 40, which means the highest level of democracy in the region, 0 is the minimum. Data for this will be used as general continuous from 0 to 40.

The second variable related to governors is the office term of the head of the region at the time of elections, calculated through the difference in years between the start of the governor's office and the election date. It is assumed that in a region where the governor has ruled for many years, changes in the electoral system will be minor since he/she has enough strength to ensure a high result of the party in power. Conversely, a newly hired/elected regional leader will initiate as many changes as possible in the regional system to prove loyalty to the national government. The data will be the number of years from the beginning of the governor's rule to the date of the election.

For the share of the non-Russian population, data was taken from the population census. In the research, I use the percentage of non-Russian population (the value of the variable will be from 0 to 100). It is expected that the more ethnic groups live in the region, then the governor will be able to mobilize the local population to ensure the victory of the ruling party in the elections. Consequently, there will be fewer changes in the electoral system in such regions.

The last variable is the results of United Russia in the previous elections. It is expected that if in the previous elections United Russia won less than half of the seats in the regional parliament, then by the next cycle the local electoral system will undergo drastic changes. Conversely, if United Russia got the majority of seats in parliament, then the election rules will remain the same. Therefore, if United Russia won less than 50% of the seats in the last elections, the variable was coded 1, otherwise 0.

Parameter	Value
The level of democracy (according to index value)	0 - 40
The number of non-Russian population (%)	0 - 100
The term the governor office (years)	0 - ∞
The past results of the United Russia elections	1 (<50% of seats)
	0 (\geq 50% of seats)

Table 2. Measuring independent variables

2.3. Logistic regression results

First cycle of the elections (2003-2007)

As we can see from the table, there is no relationship between the level of Electoral Engineering and the level of democracy, the governor's term of office, the influence of the ethnic population in the Russian regions. These three variables did not in any way affect the change in the size of the assembly, the number of deputies elected under the proportional system, and the electoral threshold. R-squared (CoxSnell & Nagelkerke) is low, too, which indicates that there is no relationship between them.

	Dependent variable: Electoral Engineering Level	<i>Odds ratio</i>
Intercept	-1.053	
United Russia past results	1.348** (0.471)	3.850
The level of democracy	0.003 (0.046)	1.001
Governor's term	0.035 (0.052)	1.035
Non-Russian population	0.006 (0.011)	1.001
Constant	-1.053 (1.633)	
Observations	87	
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.113	
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.151	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 3.1. Logistic regression results for the first election cycle

Most likely, at the beginning of Vladimir Putin's rule and the construction of a vertical of power in Russia, the national government set a great goal to subjugate regional parliaments, regardless of political sentiments and the loyalty of the elites. Thus, until 2002, United Russia had a majority in only 40 out of 87 regions, which was the main reason for transforming electoral systems in the Russian regions. As a result, 77 regional electoral systems were changed during the first cycle of reforms; 46 of them underwent significant changes (more than two changes).

It should be noted that in 54 regions, the governors ruled the areas for more than five years. Despite the fact that the absolute majority of the heads of the regions were in power, this could not affect the massive transformation of electoral systems.

Variable	Value
Total number of regions	87
The number of regions with a strong transformation of the electoral system (two or more reforms)	46
The number of regions with a weak transformation of the electoral system (no reforms or one)	41
Number of regions where UR had a majority in parliaments	40
The number of regions where UR did not have a majority in parliaments	47
The number of regions where the non-Russian population is a minority	73
The number of regions where the non-Russian population is the majority	14
The number of regions where the governor ruled for more than 5 years	54
The number of regions where the governor ruled for less than 5 years	33
Average level of democracy in Russian regions	29,6%
Number of regions with a high level of democracy	34

Number of regions with a low level of democracy	53
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Table 3.2. *Descriptive statistics of the first reform cycle*

At the same time, there is reason to believe that there is a strong relationship between the results of United Russia in the last elections and Electoral Engineering at the regional level. About this, we are told by p-Value what is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, with the decrease results of United Russia, the odds in electoral system transformation increase almost four times (3,8) which suggests that the results of United Russia in the past elections were a crucial factor in changing the electoral systems of Russian regions.

If we look at the results of the regression analysis, where specific parameters of electoral engineering are dependent variables, we will see that the strongest connection is the correlation between the results of United Russia in the past elections and the deputies elected according to the proportional system. This is confirmed by the P-value, which is less than 0.05 and the odds ratio is 3.2, which means that if United Russia does not gain more than 50% of the votes in regional elections during the elections, then the probability of a decrease in the number of elected deputies according to the proportional system increases 3.2 times.

An interesting fact is that there is an relationship between the variables of the non-Russian population and the size of the parliament. The p-value is less than 0.01. The more non-Russian population lives in the region, the more likely it is that the size of the parliament in the region will decrease. It is beneficial for United Russia to reduce the number of parliamentarians as for a large party.

	Dependent variables:					
	Parliament size	<i>Odds ratio</i>	Electoral threshold	<i>Odds ratio</i>	Deputies elected according to the proportional system	<i>Odds ratio</i>
Intercept	-6.104		-1.694		1.043	

United Russia past results	1.251 (0.976)	3.495	0.816* (0.460)	2.262	1.153** (0.572)	3.168
The level of democracy	0.059 (0.079)	1.060	0.038 (0.046)	1.038	-0.017 (0.055)	0.983
Governor's term	-0.058 (0.089)	0.943	0.065 (0.052)	1.066	0.043 (0.063)	1.044
Non-Russian population	0.051*** (0.020)	1.052	0.002 (0.011)	1.002	-0.002 (0.013)	0.997
Constant	-6.105** (3.033)		-1.695 (1.626)		1.044 (1.964)	
Observations	87		87		87	
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.126		0.074		0.063	
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.259		0.100		0.097	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Table 3.3. *Logistic regression results for the first election cycle*

Concluding the analysis of the first cycle, it must be said that the results of United Russia in the past elections had a significant impact on the change in electoral systems in the Russian regions. This variable influenced both the general electoral engineering index and specific parameters, for example, the Deputies elected according to the proportional system.

It is important to understand that at the beginning of the 21st century, the presidential administration and the national government began to squeeze out the "vertical of power" rapidly and subordinate the regional parliaments to the Kremlin. And for this, it was necessary to ensure the victory of the presidential party. Thus, in the second cycle, we will be able to see that United Russia has won 50% + 1 place in most Russian regions.

Second cycle of the elections (2008-2013)

In the second round of elections in the Russian regions, we see that the situation is slightly different from the previous one. This time, also, the non-Russian population does not affect the transformation of electoral systems, and to this list were added the results of United Russia last elections and the level of democracy, which also do not have a dependence on electoral engineering.

	Dependent variable: Electoral Engineering Level	<i>Odds ratio</i>
Intercept	-2.137	
United Russia past results	0.798 (0.572)	2.222
The level of democracy	0.064 (0.053)	1.065
Governor's term	0.112** (0.053)	1.118
Non-Russian population	0.009 (0.012)	1.009
Constant	-2.137 (1.866)	
Observations	83	
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.091	
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.129	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 4.1. Logistic regression results for the second election cycle

By the second cycle of electoral reforms, we see that United Russia received a majority in 54 Russian regional parliaments. This means that the federal government has achieved its goal in just five years of reforms. However, even though United Russia had legislative power in many regions, the rules for holding elections were actively changed in this cycle. For example, in 58 areas, two or three reforms took place, the most popular of which is a decrease in the number of deputies elected according to a proportional system (60 regions) and an increase in the electoral threshold of more than 5% (74 areas).

Variable	Value
Total number of regions	83
The number of regions with a strong transformation of the electoral system (two or more reforms)	58
The number of regions with a weak transformation of the electoral system (no reforms or one)	25
Number of regions where UR had a majority in parliaments	54
The number of regions where UR did not have a majority in parliaments	29
The number of regions where the non-Russian population is a minority	69
The number of regions where the non-Russian population is the majority	14
The number of regions where the governor ruled for more than 5 years	36
The number of regions where the governor ruled for less than 5 years	47
Average level of democracy in Russian regions	30,2%
Number of regions with a high level of democracy	36
Number of regions with a low level of democracy	47

Table 4.2. *Descriptive statistics of the second reform cycle*

Unlike the first cycle of reforms, from 2008 to 2013, the term of governorship influenced the change in electoral systems. It is worth noting that during the second cycle,

there is a strong correlation between the governor's term and the change in electoral rules; P-value is less than 0.05 (P-value<0.05). I assumed that the long reign of the governor would not in any way affect the transformation of the electoral system. Moreover, one of the hypotheses of this study said that there is minimal electoral transformation before elections in regions where a governor has ruled for a long time. However, the analysis results show us that if the governor has been in power for many years, the probability that there will be changes in the election rules in the region is high (1.2). An interesting fact is that there were 36 such governors, and in these 30 regions, there have been significant changes in the electoral systems. It means that during the second cycle of reforms, regional governors took a significant part in transforming the electoral system of the regions. Most likely, this was influenced by the fact that the gubernatorial elections were canceled when the head of the region was no longer elected by citizens and began to be appointed directly by the president of Russia. To show loyalty to the Kremlin, the governor had to ensure the ruling party's victory, and for this, the rules for holding elections in the regions were probably changed.

At the same time, if we look at the regression analysis results of independent variables and individual parameters of electoral engineering, we will see that there are not many correlations between them. There is only one significant relationship between the governor's term and the electoral threshold. The regression analysis results tell us that the head of the region rules, the more the probability that the electoral threshold in the province will be higher than 5%. High electrical thresholds are beneficial for large parties such as United Russia. And this cycle again confirms the fact that the governors were strong players who participated in the transformation of electoral systems in favor of the Kremlin.

There is a weak relationship between the Electoral threshold and United Russia past results, as well as Electoral threshold and Non-Russian population. However, it is still impossible to conclude that there is a pattern between these variables within the framework of this study.

	Dependent variable:					
	Parliament size	<i>Odds ratio</i>	Electoral threshold	<i>Odds ratio</i>	Deputies elected according to the	<i>Odds ratio</i>

					proportional system	
Intercept	-3.305		-4.730		-0.349	
United Russia past results	1.193 (0.852)	3.296	1.960* (1.166)	7.101	-0.556 (0.558)	0.573
The level of democracy	-0.011 (0.087)	0.988	0.140 (0.088)	1.150	0.055 (0.055)	1.056
Governor's term	-0.025 (0.081)	0.975	0.452** (0.216)	1.571	0.052 (0.050)	1.053
Non-Russian population	0.030* (0.018)	1.030	0.037* (0.021)	1.037	-0.015 (0.012)	0.985
Constant	-3.306 (3.156)		-4.730 (3.020)		-0.349 (1.905)	
Observations	83		83		83	
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.079		0.188		0.079	
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.168		0.380		0.114	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Table 4.3. *Logistic regression results for the second election cycle*

In general, the second cycle of electoral reforms coincides with the first (after the 90s and 00s) mass protests in Russia in 2011-2012. The protests were caused by the discontent of the population of rigging during the presidential and parliamentary elections (Robertson 2013). To prevent a massive number of uprisings, the national government decided to implement a number of electoral reforms, including at the regional level. Moreover, in this cycle, there is reason to believe that the national government used the power of the governors to carry out reforms. The results of the analysis show that in

regions where the governor has been in power for many years, the likelihood of an electoral reform increases. The national government, regional governors, and United Russia continue to create institutions and rules to ensure the victory of the ruling party. Thus, by the third election cycle, the hegemony of the pro-presidential party will absolutely strengthen in the Russian establishment. I came to these conclusions as a result of the analysis of the next cycle.

Third cycle of the elections (2014-2018)

The results of the analysis show that independent variables do not have a significant impact on changes in electoral systems in Russian regions, namely the level of democracy in the region, the number of non-Russian population in the region, the term the governor office, the past results of the United Russia elections. However, the ruling party did not need the transformation of electoral systems by the third cycle as a whole, since by this period, United Russia had won a majority in local parliaments in 80 and 83 regions. This means that, in fact, the conditions that were created during the 1st and 2nd cycles contributed to the achievement of the goal of the United Russia of control of regional parliaments.

	Dependent variable: Electoral Engineering Level	<i>Odds ratio</i>
Intercept	-0.136	
United Russia past results	0.743 (1.290)	<i>2.101</i>
The level of democracy	-0.011 (0.050)	<i>0.988</i>
Governor's term	-0.061 (0.065)	<i>0.941</i>
Non-Russian population	-0.025 (0.016)	<i>0.975</i>
Constant	-0.137	

	(1.694)
Observations	83
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.044
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.069
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5.1. Logistic regression results for the third election cycle

Moreover, it should be noted that significant electoral changes (two or more) occurred only in 17 regions in the third cycle, making it difficult to determine what factors influenced the transformation of electoral engineering due to the lack of a statistically significant number of variables.

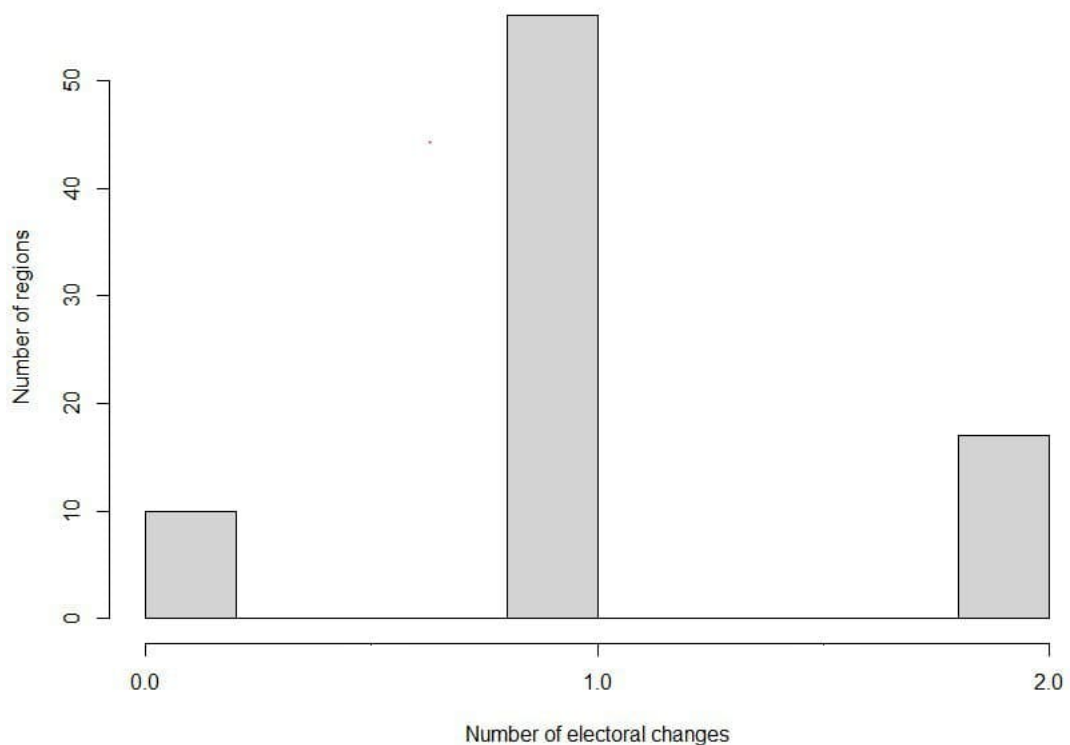


Figure 1. Number of electoral changes during third cycle

Variable	Value
Total number of regions	83
The number of regions with a strong transformation of the electoral system (two or more reforms)	17
The number of regions with a weak transformation of the electoral system (no reforms or one)	66
Number of regions where UR had a majority in parliaments	80
The number of regions where UR did not have a majority in parliaments	3
The number of regions where the non-Russian population is a minority	69
The number of regions where the non-Russian population is the majority	14
The number of regions where the governor ruled for more than 5 years	45
The number of regions where the governor ruled for less than 5 years	38
Average level of democracy in Russian regions	30,1%
Number of regions with a high level of democracy	36
Number of regions with a low level of democracy	47

Table 5.2. *Descriptive statistics of the third reform cycle*

By the third cycle, the national government has absolutely achieved its goal and received an electoral majority in almost all regional parliaments. Changes in electoral systems during this period of time were minimal, so it is difficult to find reasons for their transformation. By 2014-2018, a system had been established that promoted the ruling party to win elections without fraud legitimately.

Despite the fact that there are no correlations between the general electoral engineering of the regions and the independent variables, we can notice the relationship between the EE components with them. For example, it is worth noting that there is a strong inverse relationship between the non-Russian population and deputies elected

according to the proportional system. The p-value is less than 0.01, and the odds ratio is 0.96. It allows me to conclude that if the majority of the population in the region is Russian, then the likelihood that more than half of the deputies in parliament will not be elected according to party lists rises to 0.96.

	Dependent variable:					
	Parliament size	Odds ratio	Electoral threshold	Odds ratio	Deputies elected according to the proportional system	Odds ratio
Intercept	-2.401		-3.827e+00		4.683	
United Russia past results	1.422 (1.325)	4.145	-15.790 (2,211.711)	1.388322e-07	15.750 (2,154.559)	6920510
The level of democracy	0.024 (0.061)	1.024	0.077 (0.058)	1.080	-0.075 (0.060)	0.927
Governor's term	-0.064 (0.083)	0.937	-0.041 (0.082)	0.959	0.040 (0.087)	1.040
Non-Russian population	0.002 (0.013)	1.002	0.001 (0.012)	1.001	-0.039*** (0.012)	0.961
Constant	-2.402 (2.093)		-3.827* (2.021)		4.684** (2.131)	
Observations	83		83		83	
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.024		0.043		0.202	
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.045		0.074		0.317	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Table 5.3. Logistic regression results for the third election cycle

By the third round of elections, United Russia won a party majority in all regions except three districts. Significant changes in the electoral system took place only in 17 areas. By this time, there is no reason to change the rules for holding elections since the legislative power of the Russian regions has become controlled by the national government. Factors such as the results of United Russia in the last elections, the level of democracy, the non-Russian population, and the rule of governors did not significantly impact the overall transformation of electoral systems in the regions. At the same time, some of them, for example, the non-Russian population have a relationship to such parameters of Electoral Engineering as Deputies elected according to the proportional system. By this cycle, the ruling party has become the leading political force in the legislative branch at both the national and regional levels.

Conclusion to the empirical part of the research

For 15 years, United Russia has transformed from a minority party into a political force that controls national and regional parliaments. During this time, the party was able to subjugate almost all regions of the Russian Federation (legislative and executive powers), strengthening the position of the national government. In the empirical part of the study, I made an attempt to determine the factors that allowed United Russia to become the only real force in the political arena in the Russian regions.

During the first cycle of regional elections, the main reason for the change in electoral systems was the past results of the United Russia elections. In regions where the ruling party received less than 50% of the vote, the probability of a transformation of the rules for holding elections increased. Moreover, this is especially pronounced in the parameter "Deputies elected according to the proportional system". As it is known, disproportionate systems are beneficial for large batches. And in regions where United Russia did not receive a majority, the number of deputies who can be elected from party lists decreased. The logistic regression results tell us that in the first cycle of electoral reforms, the main reason for the transformation of electoral systems in the region is the receipt of a minority in parliament by United Russia.

During the second cycle, the situation changed. At this time, it is worth noting that as a result of the analysis, I was able to find a relationship between the term of the governor's office and changes in Electoral Engineering. During the second cycle, if the

governor has been in power for many years than, the electoral system's likelihood of transformation increases. It means that the heads of the region and had a significant impact on the changes in the electoral rules. The heads of the regions played an important role in the transformation of the electoral threshold - the results of the analysis tell us about this.

By the third cycle, United Russia received most seats in regional parliaments in almost all regions. Thus, the national government achieved its goal and no longer needed major electoral systems that would help the government win local elections. At the same time, several patterns have occurred in this cycle as well. For example, in regions where the Russian population dominates, disproportional electoral systems prevailed (the number of deputies who can be elected according to the proportional system decreased).

Thus, we see that in different cycles of regional reforms, the factors that stimulated changes in electoral systems differ. In the first cycle, these were essentially the past results of the ruling party. In the second round, it was the term of governors' rule; in the third cycle, there were no significant changes in the electoral systems, and the level of democracy in the regions did not played a unique role during all rounds of elections.

Conclusion

The 2002 electoral reform transformed the electoral systems of the regions and the political environment in Russia. All regions in the period from 2003 to 2018 changed the electoral rules to facilitate the collection of a large number of votes for large parties.

Based on the listed areas of scientific literature and using rational choice institutionalism as a theoretical basis, groups of actors were identified that could influence the transformation of regional electoral systems, as well as their motives were modeled regarding the direction of changes in electoral institutions. Among these actors were identified: the national government, heads of regions and the party "United Russia". All these actors, through electoral engineering, could pursue the goal of creating favorable conditions for United Russia to obtain maximum parliamentary representation based on the results of regional elections. But, at the same time, their possible actions in this direction could depend on institutional constraints.

In the paper, four hypotheses were put forward concerning the connection of the above-mentioned actors with the logic of electoral engineering at the regional level. Hypothesis testing was carried out using logistic regression applied separately to each of the three rounds of regional parliamentary elections. This approach made it possible to trace the trends of electoral engineering, taking into account the factor associated with the imposition of the political process at the country level as a whole on regional election campaigns within each of the cycles.

The results of the United Russia party in the elections in the Russian regions up to 2003 strongly influenced the transformation of electoral systems into local parliaments. It is demonstrated by the results of the analysis for the first electoral cycle. At the same time, neither the level of democracy in the region, nor the proportion of ethnic groups contributes to changing the rules for holding elections.

In the second cycle of regional elections, governors played a unique role in transforming electoral systems. In particular, we found out that the more years the governor has been in power, the more likely it is that electoral reforms will take place in the region. Thus, the head of the region ensures high results for the ruling party, proving his loyalty to National Government. As before, the presence of ethnic groups did not

affect the changes in electoral systems. Also, the results of the United Russia party in the last elections and the level of democracy did not affect the transformation of the election rules.

In the third cycle, I did not find a significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables. In general, it should be said that cardinal reforms were not needed by the third cycle of electoral elections. By 2014, United Russia had secured a parliamentary majority in 80 of Russia's 83 regions. Moreover, according to the analysis, only 17 regions underwent a significant transformation, making it difficult to draw statistically significant conclusions due to the small number of variables.

The conclusions of the dissertation research contribute to understanding the logic of the transformation of electoral systems in regimes of electoral authoritarianism. In the course of the study, electoral engineering was analyzed in terms of individual components of electoral systems and at the level of the electoral system as a whole, for which a level was designed that reflects the level of electoral engineering in Russian regions. Based on the statistical analysis, it was concluded that, under certain conditions, electoral engineering could be important even in non-democratic regimes, where elections do not serve as a mechanism for the change of power but serve incumbents' purposes maintaining their positions of power.

The findings of the research obtained are of scientific significance since most of the other studies on the topic of electoral engineering in autocracies, being carried out mainly within the framework of the case study strategy, were descriptive and were not focused on proposing hypotheses for cross-national research projects that would be devoted to logic transformation of the rules for holding elections in political regimes of electoral authoritarianism.

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Appendix 1

Logistic regression results for all election cycle. DV is Electoral Engineering Level

	Dependent variable: Electoral Engineering Level. First cycle	<i>Odds ratio</i>	Dependent variable: Electoral Engineering Level. Second cycle	<i>Odds ratio</i>	Dependent variable: Electoral Engineering Level. Third cycle	<i>Odds ratio</i>
Intercept	-1.053		-2.137		-0.136	
United Russia past results	1.348** (0.471)	3.850	0.798 (0.572)	2.222	0.743 (1.290)	2.101
The level of democracy	0.003 (0.046)	1.001	0.064 (0.053)	1.065	-0.011 (0.050)	0.988
Governor's term	0.035 (0.052)	1.035	0.112** (0.053)	1.118	-0.061 (0.065)	0.941
Non-Russian population	0.006 (0.011)	1.001	0.009 (0.012)	1.009	-0.025 (0.016)	0.975
Constant	-1.053 (1.633)		-2.137 (1.866)		-0.137 (1.694)	
Observations	87		83		83	
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.013		0.091		0.044	
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.151		0.129		0.069	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Appendix 2

Logistic regression results for all election cycle. DVs are Electoral Engineering components

	Dependent variables for the first cycle						Dependent variables for the second cycle						Dependent variables for the third cycle					
	Parliament size	Odds ratio	Electoral threshold	Odds ratio	Deputies elected according to the proportional system	Odds ratio	Parliament size	Odds ratio	Electoral threshold	Odds ratio	Deputies elected according to the proportional system	Odds ratio	Parliament size	Odds ratio	Electoral threshold	Odds ratio	Deputies elected according to the proportional system	Odds ratio
Intercept	-6.104		-1.694		1.043		-3.305		-4.730		-0.349		-2.401		-3.827e+00		4.683	
United Russia past results	1.251 (0.976)	3.495	0.816* (0.460)	2.262	1.153** (0.572)	3.168	1.193 (0.852)	3.296	1.960* (1.166)	7.101	-0.556 (0.558)	0.573	1.422 (1.325)	4.145	-15.790 (2,211.711)	1.388322e-07	15.750 (2,154.559)	6920510
The level of democracy	0.059 (0.079)	1.060	0.038 (0.046)	1.038	-0.017 (0.055)	0.983	-0.011 (0.087)	0.988	0.140 (0.088)	1.150	0.055 (0.055)	1.056	0.024 (0.061)	1.024	0.077 (0.058)	1.080	-0.075 (0.060)	0.927
Governor's term	-0.058 (0.089)	0.943	0.065 (0.052)	1.066	0.043 (0.063)	1.044	-0.025 (0.081)	0.975	0.452** (0.216)	1.571	0.052 (0.050)	1.053	-0.064 (0.083)	0.937	-0.041 (0.082)	0.959	0.040 (0.087)	1.040
Non-Russian population	0.051*** (0.020)	1.052	0.002 (0.011)	1.002	-0.002 (0.013)	0.997	0.030* (0.018)	1.030	0.037* (0.021)	1.037	-0.015 (0.012)	0.985	0.002 (0.013)	1.002	0.001 (0.012)	1.001	-0.039*** (0.012)	0.961

Constant	-6.105** (3.033)	-1.695 (1.626)	1.044 (1.964)	-3.306 (3.156)	-4.730 (3.020)	-0.349 (1.905)	-2.402 (2.093)	-3.827* (2.021)	4.684** (2.131)
Observations	87	87	87	83	83	83	83	83	83
R-squared (CoxSnell)	0.126	0.074	0.063	0.079	0.188	0.079	0.024	0.043	0.202
R-squared (Nagelkerke)	0.259	0.100	0.097	0.168	0.380	0.114	0.045	0.074	0.317

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

