Faculty of Business Studies and Economics

University of Bremen

Doctoral Thesis

Papers on the Political Economy of Authoritarianism

A thesis submitted to the Doctoral Commission Dr. rer. pol. of the University of Bremen in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Dr. rer. pol.

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Date of submission: 06.04.2023

Date of colloquium: 05.07.2023

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Bremen, 2023

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis discusses several important and less studied aspects of the political economy of authoritarian regimes and draws on the study of Russia, one of the most prominent contemporary non-democracies. An introductory chapter presents the overarching theoretical framework of the dissertation and the state of research, it elaborates on the case of Russia and offers an overview of research questions, main findings, contributions, and limitations. The introductory chapter is followed by three empirical papers that focus on the interplay between authoritarian political institutions and economic and societal outcomes. Chapter 2 joins the ongoing debate over the effect of authoritarianism on environmental performance. Chapter 3 examines individual expectations and intended behavior of the Russian public when faced with the prospect of authoritarian persistence or political change. Chapter 4 seeks to broaden the scholarly understanding of how autocratic elites use legal repression to advance their ends. The thesis makes a theoretical, empirical and methodological contribution to the research field and to the understanding of Russian authoritarian politics and at the same time invites further scholarship on the political economy of non-democracies.

Keywords: authoritarian regimes, Russia, political institutions, socio-economic outcomes

Chapter 1

1. Introduction: on the Political Economy of Authoritarianism

1.1. Introduction

According to the Freedom in the World Index which ranks 210 countries and territories according to their political and civic freedom, 66 countries were classified as not free or authoritarian[1] in 2021 (Freedom House 2022), while other 60 were partly free and were vulnerable to collapsing into authoritarianism. Last year saw the worst global freedom score since 1997 that was driven by dramatic regressions in a number of countries throughout the world. The Covid-19 global pandemic, with its withdrawal of civil liberties, increased surveillance and multiple restrictions, has also contributed to this trend. Besides, economic successes and international clout of authoritarian China help promote the alleged superiority of its system over that of the Western democracies, which can potentially result in a further rollback of democracy across the world (Bell 2016; Gilley 2012). So, despite the decades-long crusade for democratization by the West and attempts to complete a historical process of democratic transition, authoritarian regimes still persist.

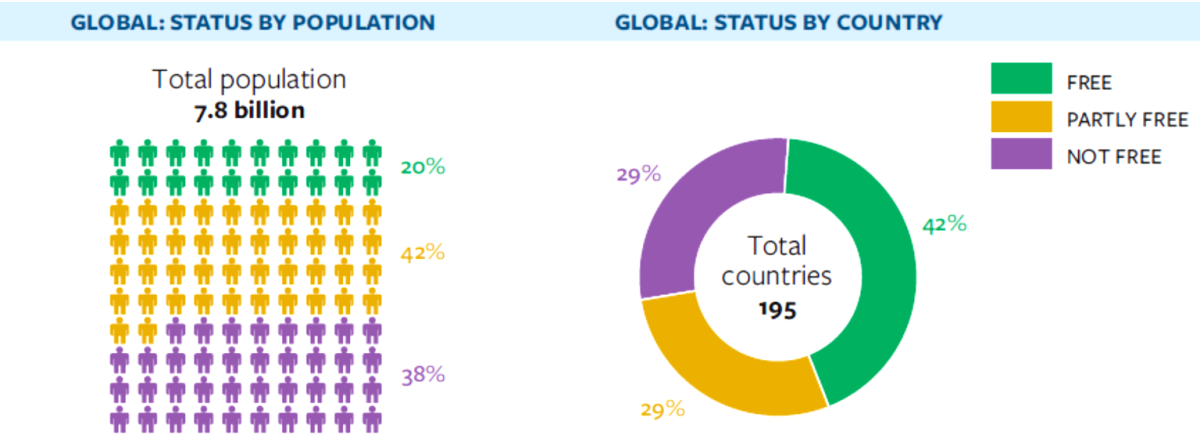

Figure 1: Freedom in the World. Source: Freedom House (2022)

Given this pervasiveness and resilience of autocracies as well as their influence on international affairs, the global economy and the lives of almost a third of the world population, it is of paramount importance to understand the logic of authoritarian politics and its implications. The

[1] In this thesis, the terms 'authoritarian regime, dictatorship, autocracy and non-democratic regime' are used interchangeably. Types of authoritarian regimes and their distinction from democratic regimes will be discussed in Section 1.2

ongoing war waged by Russia on Ukraine highlights the dangers and unpredictability of unchecked authoritarian rule.

This dissertation addresses a number of issues that are relevant to the study of autocracies. Since the inherent objective of every autocrat is to maintain and consolidate their authority (Svolik 2012), how does this aspiration to stay in power (as well as incentives and choices of the authoritarian elite in general) affect the regime's trajectories and its policies and economic and social outcomes? Which role do formal and informal institutions play in maintaining the status quo? How are decision-making processes under authoritarianism different from the ones in democratic states? Why do we observe such a variance in durability and socio-economic performance across non-democratic regimes?

The thesis consists of this introductory chapter and three papers that discuss several aspects of the political economy of authoritarianism, that is, the interplay between political institutions and economic systems under autocracy. The papers study the effect of authoritarian political institutions on economic and societal outcomes on the example of Russia, one of the most prominent examples of long-lasting authoritarianism. The dissertation seeks to make a theoretical and empirical contribution to the existing scholarship on authoritarianism, and while drawing on the Russian case also allows making some generalizations about authoritarian regimes. The research might also have practical implications and be useful in policy research, as disentangling the complexity of mechanisms and motivations that are at play in an authoritarian regime is an important step to the understanding of the rationale behind decisions and policies made there.

This introductory chapter of the dissertation is organized as follows. Section 1.2 presents the state of research on the political economy of authoritarianism. The Section elaborates on main themes and theories in the political economy of non-democracies as well as on some empirical findings that are relevant to the dissertation. Section 1.3 presents the case of Russia, its political, institutional and economic characteristics. It also explains the choice of this particular authoritarian regime as the focus of the three papers. Section 1.4 introduces the research design of the studies: sources of the data and methodological approaches used to analyze it. It also offers an overview of the three remaining chapters of the dissertation and explains their connection to each other. Section 1.5 shows contributions and limitations of the dissertation and draws some conclusions.

1.2. The Political Economy of Authoritarianism: State of Research

1.2.1. Authoritarianism and its types

There is an extensive body of literature that explores different features of authoritarian regimes in the modern world. Before delving into the multifaceted nature of authoritarianism, it is first necessary to define this concept and distinguish it from other regime types. Authoritarian regimes are political systems with limited political pluralism and without either extensive or intensive political mobilization and participation, "in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones" (Linz 2000, 2001, 57). Authoritarianism differs fundamentally from democracy where all members are equally entitled to participate in the state's decisions about its policies (Dahl 2015). Juan Linz (2000, 2001) also points out that, unlike totalitarianism, authoritarian regimes do not have a guiding dominant ideology but pragmatically exploit generic values and mentalities, such as nationalism, patriotism, economic growth or order. Two further distinctive characteristics of authoritarian politics are a lack of an independent authority with the power to enforce agreements among key political actors and an ever-present threat of violence (Svolik 2012). The cutoff point between democracy and autocracy is however often disputed, which is reflected in a plethora of indices that measure political regime types (for example, Polity, Freedom House and V-Dem).

There also exists within-regime heterogeneity. Despite many common features, authoritarian regimes are not homogeneous but comprise different sets of formal and informal institutions, i.e. 'rules of the game' that define, enable and constrain the behavior of individuals and organizations, and structure incentives in political, economic and social exchange (North 1990). Empirical studies demonstrate that some authoritarian regimes are more likely to initiate international conflicts (Weeks 2012), are able to show better economic outcomes (Wright 2008) or better quality of government (Charron and Lapuente 2011) than others.

There are ongoing debates about how to measure autocracy and its subtypes, about which parameters to use in order to distinguish among them.[2] Scholars offer several typologies of non-democratic regimes based on different institutional patterns and characteristics. Barbara Geddes (1999), using a game-theoretic portrayal of the incentives facing elites, distinguishes personalist, military, and single-party regimes, as well as amalgams of these pure types. Single

[2] Chapter 2 also addresses this difficulty of measuring authoritarianism but with a focus on the subnational level in Russia.

party regimes are those dominated by one party (for example, the Communist Party in China), personalists regimes - by an individual leader (for instance, Vladimir Putin's Russia), and military regimes – by the military elite (for example, Myanmar). Wahman, Teorell and Hadenius (2013) base their classification on the institutions that determine three different modes of accessing and maintaining political power: hereditary succession, the actual or threatened use of military force and popular elections. They identify five main autocratic regime types: monarchies, military and electoral regimes (no-party, one-party, and multi-party). Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010) focus on kinds of networks and groups ('inner sanctums') that dictators create to mitigate the threat that comes from the elites: monarchies relying on kin or family networks, military dictatorships with their juntas and civilian dictatorships where power lies within a smaller institution, for example, a political bureau.

The end of the Cold War saw a proliferation of hybrid regimes – a distinct regime type that is situated between liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism, i.e. they have some features of democracy but are inherently non-democratic (Bogaards 2009; Brownlee 2009; Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010; Snyder 2006). Schedler (2002) calls them electoral authoritarian regimes. While popular elections are primarily associated with democracies, electoral autocracies also hold elections and tolerate some political competition, but with severe restrictions of most democratic norms. They thus seek "to reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty" (Schedler 2002, 37). Electoral authoritarianism can be further disintegrated into competitive authoritarian and hegemonic electoral regimes, although the distinction between the two is rather nuanced (Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010).

Levitsky and Way (2002, 2006, 2010) offer a detailed description of competitive authoritarian regimes which have become very common in the contemporary world. There exist formal democratic institutions (multiple parties, elections etc.) and the opposition has opportunities to legally contest for power. However, the playing field is heavily tilted in favor of incumbents, so that regime rivals do not have equal access to resources, the media, and the law. As a result, the electoral competition is real but unfair. Unlike competitive autocracies, in hegemonic electoral regimes there is little or no real competition and pluralism, the opposition is restricted and democratic institutions tend to serve as a mere façade (Diamond 2002; Morse 2012; Roessler and Howard 2009). There is prominence of a single dominant or hegemonic party that wins more than 70 or 75% of the vote or seat share, as it was the case with the Institutional

Revolutionary Party in Mexico that for decades used popular elections to reaffirm its dominance (Donno 2013; Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2013).

Another typology of nondemocracies was proposed by Guriev and Treisman (2022). They argue that alongside classic repressive autocracies of the past (dictatorships of fear) there now emerged a new type of autocracy – dictatorships of spin (or informational autocracies). Spin dictators do not use intimidation or overt repression to stay in power but instead try to build an image of a strong and competent leader and to win people over by deception. Key elements of spin dictatorships are "manipulating the media, engineering popularity, faking democracy, limiting public violence, and opening up to the world" (Guriev and Treisman 2022, 13). Viktor Orbán in Hungary (2010–present) and Lee Hsien Loong in Singapore (2004–present) are modern day examples of spin dictators.

The placement of Russia, the focus of the dissertation, within these typologies will be discussed in Section 1.3. as well as in the three dissertation papers.

1.2.2. Regime transition and authoritarian survival

The line between different regime types is thin and fragile and regime transformations have been a common occurrence over the centuries. A number of studies focus rather broadly on the process of democratization, i.e. a political process of establishing or enlarging the possibility of democratic participation and liberalization (Přibáň 2012), and consider paths and conditions for a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The breakdown of an authoritarian regime can occur through reforms initiated from above by the elites, for example, when facing a threat of revolution, through a coup or gradual disintegration of the regime (Linz 2000). It does not necessarily entail the onset of democratic transformation, and modern history is full of examples of ill-fated democratizations. Foundations of a nascent democratic system are fragile and the democratization process can be reversed, as it happened in Russia in the 1990s. From 1972 to 2003, 77% of transitions from authoritarian government resulted in another authoritarian regime (Hadenius and Teorell 2007). There is no compelling explanation why some authoritarian states were able to cross the democratic threshold and did not regress to an autocratic rule, while others continued along the non-democratic path for decades.

There are many factors that promote, retard or obstruct transition. Some argue that transitions are more likely during recession as economic crises prompt regime changes (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Przeworski et al. 2000). Once transition has occurred, however, the likelihood and sustainability of democratic government increases with

the level of economic development, and multiple studies demonstrated the effect of economic growth on political liberalization and democratic performance (Boix and Stokes 2003; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Diamond 1992; Huntington 1993; Lipset 1959). There have been, however, a number of deviant cases that do not fit this paradigm, for example, the formerly authoritarian Asian 'tigers' and contemporary China. Przeworski and Limongi (1997), though also demonstrating that the chances for the survival of democracy are greater in countries above a certain level of development, offer a less deterministic approach and show that development does not necessarily breed democracy and dictatorships can persist for years in wealthy countries.

Scholars also study international or external influence on democratization. Levitsky and Way (2006, 2010) show that differences in success of democratic transition across countries in the post-Cold War era can be explained by their relationship to the West. They focus on two dimensions: Western leverage (governments' vulnerability to external democratizing pressure) and linkage to the West (the density of economic, political and other ties to Western democracies). Different levels of linkage and leverage have affected democratization trajectories of countries. The Czech Republic, for example, thanks to its dense ties to the West and susceptibility to and domestic support of external democratizing pressure, successfully transited to a democracy. In Russia both leverage and linkage were relatively low and the impact of these external factors was limited.

There is no guarantee that democracy, established or newly acquired, will be sustained. Alongside the process of democratization there is an opposite process of democratic backsliding or autocratization, which is a "substantial de-facto decline of core institutional requirements for electoral democracy" (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1096; Norris 2017). Autocratization has been recorded for a number of countries around the world in the past 20 years, from Turkey and Russia to Poland and Hungary, and even established democracies, like the USA, turn out to be not completely immune to this trend. Figure 2 shows democratization and autocratization trends from 1900 to 2017 and suggests that authoritarian reversals outnumbered countries undergoing democratization in the 2010s. It has been argued that the process of democratic backsliding has changed, though. If before democracies were subverted through 'classic' dramatic coups d'état or the blatant election-day vote fraud, today they face more covert forms of backsliding where changes are more incremental (Bermeo 2016; Svolik 2015; Waldner and Lust 2018). This includes the gradual concentration of power in the executive ('executive aggrandizement'), with infringements of civil liberties, judicial

independence and freedom of the media, as well as strategic manipulation of elections, i.e. giving strategic electoral advantages to the incumbents through harassment of the opposition or voter intimidation (Bermeo 2016; Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018). Lührmann and Lindberg (2019, 1108) empirically test this argument and find that "about 68% of all contemporary autocratization episodes starting in democracies are led by incumbents who came to power legally and typically by democratic elections". Some of these episodes are instances of 'autocratic legalism', a concept addressed in Chapter 3. Autocratic legalism means that charismatic leaders use their democratic mandates and legal means to hijack constitutions and undermine crucial accountability institutions, as it happened in Hungary, Venezuela or Russia (Dixon and Landau 2021; Scheppele 2018).

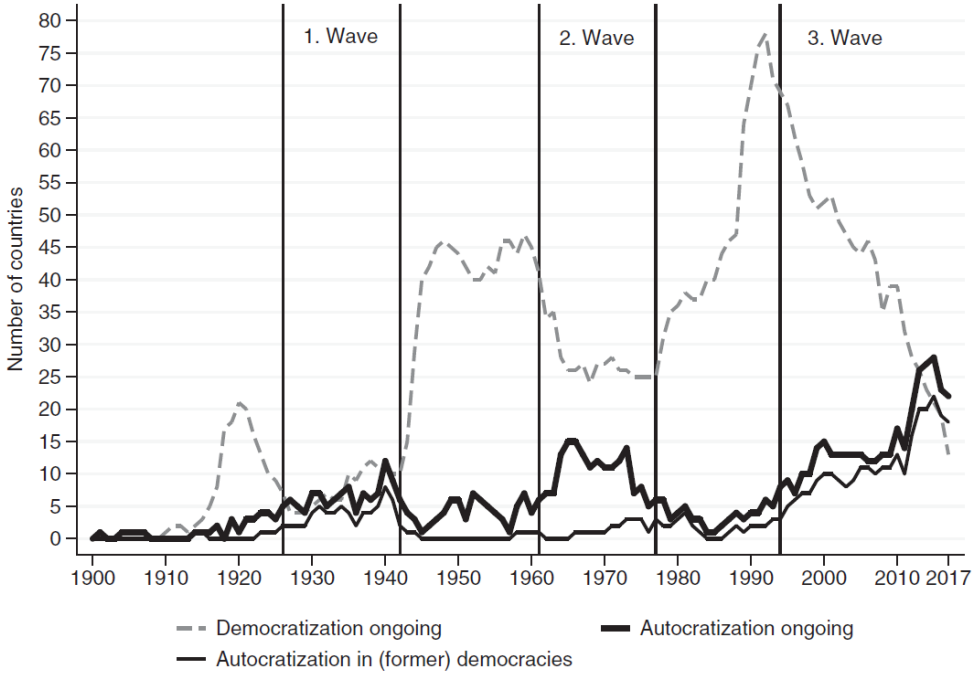

Figure 2: Waves of democratization and autocratization, 1900-2017. Source: Lührmann and Lindberg (2019)

Although both economic factors and external democratizing pressure are important in explaining divergent paths of autocracies, it has been widely established in the literature that it is political institutions and elites' choices that structure the behavior of political actors in autocracies and affect the durability of regimes and their propensity to democratize (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001; Bratton and Walle 1997; Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 2007; Geddes 1999). Institutional differences across autocracies have direct consequences for their survival. Some scholars argue that certain kinds of authoritarianism are more resilient and stable while others are more susceptible to transition (depending on the typology used). Geddes

(1999) finds that single-party regimes are most enduring, even in the face of serious exogenous shocks. Similarly, Hadenius and Teorell (2007) show that a nondominant-party limited multi-party system has the strongest chance of becoming democratic, while Brownlee (2009, 515) finds that competitive authoritarian regimes (as compared to closed autocracies) are "not especially prone to losing power but are significantly more likely to be followed by electoral democracy".

The following section will discuss in detail which strategies autocrats use to prevent regime change and to stay in power.

1.2.3. Strategies of authoritarian survival

Inherently, the goal of every authoritarian government is to keep their grip on power and prevent regime overthrow while maximizing rents (Magaloni 2008). The threat to regime survival can come from both within the elite and from the masses. It is therefore of paramount importance for autocrats to keep both in check. The literature on authoritarian regimes, both theoretical and empirical, examines mechanisms and tactics that an autocrat employs to remain in power. These can be quintessentially authoritarian practices (for example, violent pressure on political opponents and media censorship) and deviations from democratic institutions (for example, vote rigging in the elections). Broadly speaking, autocrats rely on repression, legitimation and co-optation to stay in power. These authoritarian survival strategies constitute the theoretical basis of Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

To achieve regime stability, autocrats can resort to repression of both their political opponents and the wider population by raising the costs of political participation (Gehlbach, Sonin, and Svolik 2016; Wintrobe 2000). Repression is "the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions" (Davenport 2007, 2). Repression thus often entails violation of basic human rights, like freedom of expression and association. State coercion has been one of the backbones of dictatorships for centuries to prevent revolutions and coups (preventive repression) and to punish dissenters in the midst of or after the insurgency (responsive or reactive repression) (Dragu and Lupu 2021). History is full of examples of repression, for instance, mass purges in Stalin's Russia where not only potential rivals within the elite were purged but whole social groups were repressed based on principles like wealth, ethnicity or religion (Conquest 1968; Getty 2002). Although

repression through political terror and restrictions on civil liberties reduces the likelihood of regime overthrow in a given year (Escribà-Folch 2013), repression within the elite is also found to increase the propensity of intra-elite coups (Bove and Rivera 2015). Repression can also be costly and incur international sanctions or lower economic productivity (Xu 2021). So, as mentioned above, modern autocrats or spin dictators generally refrain from ostentatious violent repression, like extrajudicial killings, and instead resort to more subtle forms of coercion, for example, legal repression. It involves selective and partisan application of the law when certain individuals or organizations are, for instance, criminally prosecuted on libel charges (Levitsky and Way 2010). Anticorruption can be a further potent instrument of legal repression, as is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Even a threat of legal repression can work as an efficient deterrent to the opposition. The value of this type of repression is that the regime can present it to the public as enforcement of the rule of law rather than repression. It thus does not undermine the legitimacy of the regime, which is another important pillar of authoritarian stability.

Even authoritarian regimes need to uphold some veneer of legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens in order to survive. Gerschewski (2013, 18) argues that "legitimation seeks to guarantee active consent, compliance with the rules, passive obedience, or mere toleration within the population." An autocrat can obtain this popular support and justify his rule by pursuing certain legitimation strategies, performance-based and identity-based (Gerschewski 2013; Kailitz 2013; von Soest and Grauvogel 2017; Tannenberg et al. 2021). As also argued in Chapter 3 and 4, good economic performance of the state with a decent standard of living as well as provision of physical security contribute to the legitimacy of the regime (Gilley 2009). Citizens thus participate in a quid pro quo social contract – they receive economic and social security in exchange for their consent and compliance. Identity-based legitimation strategies can focus on the personality of the leader and emphasize his charisma and other outstanding personal characteristics that help achieve stability and prosperity. They might also include different ideological claims, primarily nationalistic and religious, and stress the uniqueness or superiority of the current political order.

Another legitimation strategy is rational-legal (or procedural) that relies on formal institutions, like elections, and other rule-based mechanisms (von Soest and Grauvogel 2017). As mentioned above, electoral autocracies have become a wide-spread phenomenon in the modern world. Many autocracies, having at their disposal unrestricted monopoly of violence and an arsenal of legitimation strategies, still maintain nominally democratic institutions. How do they

help autocrats retain power? This is one of the recurrent questions that the literature on authoritarian regimes seeks to answer (Boix and Svolik 2013; Bove and Rivera 2015; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 2007; Reuter and Robertson 2015).

Legislatures, elections and other democratic institutions are used not merely as window dressing or rubber stamps but they are strategically used by autocrats to consolidate support through cooptation. They help induce cooperation from the populace and thus ward off the threat that comes from mass protests and insurgencies. As put by Gandhi and Przeworski (2007), legislative and partisan arrangements are a strategic response on the part of dictators to two basic problems of governance: how to thwart rebellion and how to induce cooperation from the population. They show that autocrats coopt a broad set of actors by sharing spoils (privileges and monetary rewards) or by making policy compromises by allowing institutions like a legislature that encapsulates some opposition or even multiple parties. They also find that the degree of institutionalization depends on the perceived strength of the threat to the regime (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). Evidence of this strategic use of cooptation in authoritarian regimes has been documented, for example, for Vietnam (Malesky and Schuler 2010), China (Manion 2014), Turkey (Yilmaz, Shipoli, and Demir 2021), Egypt (Sika 2019) and Russia (Reuter and Robertson 2015).

According to empirical evidence, however, leaders in authoritarian countries are more likely to be overthrown through a coup initiated by regime insiders, rather than by a popular uprising, so the major challenge to authoritarian survival comes from the ruling coalition (Svolik 2012). Since there are no real competition and third-party checks on decisions that the autocrat takes, political leaders in autocracies are unable to credibly commit to honoring their promises ex post (Gehlbach, Sonin, and Svolik 2016; North and Weingast 1989). After the position of the autocrat has been secured with the help of different actors, the leader might be tempted not to reward his supporters after all. This incentive to defect puts the autocrat in danger of being challenged and overthrown. Institutions have been shown to help alleviate these commitment problems vis-à-vis the ruling coalition (Acemoglu, Egorov, and Sonin 2008; Myerson 2008). Magaloni (2008), for example, considers how the dictator is able to solve the commitment problem by striking a power-sharing deal with the ruling elite and by delegating authority to autocratic political parties over the long run. This helps his supporters ensure that he does not renege on his promises. Similarly, Boix and Svolik (2013, 301) show how formal political institutions have the potential to facilitate stable power-sharing: “regular interaction between the dictator and his allies in high-level, deliberative, and decision-making bodies within

authoritarian parties and legislatures results in greater transparency" and allows his allies to monitor the dictator's compliance.

Authoritarian elections are another important mechanism to ensure regime durability, which might seem counterintuitive. Electoral contestation poses a serious dilemma for authoritarian governments. On the one hand, incumbents run a risk of losing power if they allow fair competition. On the other hand, overtly repressing rivals or stealing elections might be costly (Levitsky and Way 2010). Despite this challenge, elections, even when flawed, give authoritarian leaders a veneer of legitimacy, both at home and abroad. They are also used for information acquisition and cooptation of elites or larger groups within the society (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Cox (2009) develops a model showing that elections can reduce asymmetries of information between the autocrat and his rivals: by knowing how popular he is, the autocrat can then bargain with the opposition accordingly, which helps lower the probability of violent turnover in autocracies. He also offers empirical evidence that leaders of multi-party autocracies are more likely to leave office electorally and less likely to exit violently than leaders in other regimes. Little (2017) offers another game-theoretic model that explains that incumbents hold non-competitive elections to either signal strength to their rivals or gather information about the regime's popularity. Reuter et al. (2016) find that mayoral elections in Russia are held to assuage powerful subnational elites that have significant political resources that leaders want to coopt. Elections are also a way to distribute rents and promotions among the regime insiders. For example, parliamentary elections in Egypt were used by the regime for the distribution of the spoils to important groups within Egypt's political elites (Blaydes 2010).

Electoral manipulation that involves techniques like ballot stuffing and intimidation of voters or candidates is an inherent part of authoritarian elections – even in competitive autocracies elections are neither completely free nor fair. For instance, autocrats use electoral intimidation in the workplace to win elections by inducing employers to threaten workers with dismissal or cuts in salary so that they vote in a certain way (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019). Interestingly, electoral fraud is sometimes practiced in situations when it is not actually necessary for victory and is perpetuated in full view of the public. Simpser (2013) argues that the purpose of electoral manipulation is not to simply get more votes but to ultimately consolidate and monopolize political power by influencing subsequent choices and behaviour of different actors. However, when electoral manipulation is too blatant, it can help solve the collective action problem faced by the citizens in autocracies and can prompt them to participate in anti-regime protests (Tucker 2007), as it happened in Ukraine in 2004 or in Russia in 2011.

Moreover, authoritarian governments rely on a system of bureaucratic monitoring and evaluation to control subnational officials, and a number of studies examine performance incentives, political appointments and career prospects of regional bureaucrats. Just as with other institutions, there are marked differences in incentives structures along the authoritarian spectrum. In China career advancement of regional officials is dependent on their economic performance, i.e. they are encouraged to induce productive investment and are rewarded for generating high growth figures (Li and Zhou 2005; Rochlitz et al. 2015; Yao and Zhang 2015). However, political connections and loyalty are also becoming important for cadre promotion in China (Jia 2022). In Russia one can observe a divergence between formal criteria (i.e. promotion of economic development) and informal requirements, based on policy priorities of the ruling elites (Rochlitz et al. 2015). In general, performance incentives of Russian regional officials do not emphasize growth, but, instead, the main appointment and evaluation criteria are their loyalty to the regime as well as their ability to mobilize support for the ruling party United Russia *(Edinaya Rossiya)* and to keep the opposition in check (Buckley and Reuter 2019; Libman and Rochlitz 2019).

Autocrats also heavily use media control and manipulation of information to entrench their power. Multiple studies focus on media control as a means of persuasion through propaganda that is aimed at the formation of beliefs and preferences, or focus on the role of censorship in demobilizing a dissatisfied public (Gehlbach, Sonin, and Svolik 2016). In totalitarian regimes of the past, like Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia, propaganda was the main tool of control and ideological indoctrination. Censorship was pervasive and overt: private newspapers were banned, journalists were intimidated. In modern autocracies, however, information control is usually subtler and is aimed at boosting the leader’s popularity and his image of public-spiritedness (Guriev and Treisman 2022). For example, the Chinese subnational governments whose legitimacy and promotion prospects heavily rely on good economic performance manipulate GDP statistics to their favor, especially in the years of a political turnover in a province (Wallace 2016). The effect of state propaganda on individual attitudes and behavior thanks to the invocation of certain reference points is also discussed in Chapter 3.

Modern digital technologies are becoming another potent tool of censorship and monitoring, at the same time being a venue for dissent. On the one hand, the Internet and social media are shown to help social groups organize collectively and to increase protest activity (Diamond 2010; Enikolopov, Makarin, and Petrova 2020; Steinert-Threlkeld et al. 2015). On the other hand, given this prominence of social media in social protests in the past two decades,

authoritarian leaders respond to this cyberthreat by cracking down on the Internet through comprehensive legislative or ownership control or extensive firewalls and monitoring systems (Chen and Yang 2019; Qiang 2019; Smyth and Oates 2015; Vendil Pallin 2017). Along with these broad efforts to ensure control over cyberspace, there are also more specific and targeted mechanisms at play. For example, King et al. (2013) show strategic use of social media censorship by the Chinese government. They find that the government is more likely to censor social media posts related to calls for social mobilization than posts criticizing the regime. Digital innovations are also increasingly used for digital surveillance. Autocrats use innovations in big-data analytics and artificial intelligence for preventive repression to neutralize opponents before they can present an actual threat to the regime (Dragu and Lupu 2021). They can now automate control over the opposition, as well as monitor and track their activities in a less intrusive and more efficient way (Kendall-Taylor, Frantz, and Wright 2020). Authoritarian China is no doubt the frontrunner in the field of digital surveillance and manipulation of information (Xu 2021). The social-credit system which is being introduced in China is the pinnacle of this authoritarian digitalization. It is a massive database where citizens are assigned a comprehensive score that considers their financial and personal behavior. Individuals or companies deemed 'untrustworthy' are subsequently banned from certain state benefits. The system is thus designed to steer the behavior of citizens and to control every aspect of their lives (Kendall-Taylor, Frantz, and Wright 2020; Kostka 2019; Kostka and Antoine 2020; Qiang 2019; Strittmatter 2020).

Many other facets of non-democratic politics that help autocrats sustain the status quo are widely researched in the literature: corruption and patron-client networks (Baturo and Elkink 2016; Chang and Golden 2010; Chen and Kung 2019; Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019; Gel'man 2022; Ledeneva 2013; Pei 2016; Sakwa 2020; Szakonyi 2018), reliance on the military and the security services (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003, 2009; Petrov 2016; Petrov and Rochlitz 2019; Soldatov and Rochlitz 2018), reliance on informality and personal ties (Ledeneva 2008; Michailova and Worm 2003), weak property rights and state predation (Frye and Yakovlev 2016; Gans-Morse 2012; Rochlitz 2014; Volkov 2002) etc.

These varied institutions and authoritarian practices can explain not only resilience or demise of an autocracy but also account for different socio-economic outcomes between democratic and non-democratic regimes as well as among authoritarian states. The idea that authoritarian institutions can have a direct effect on socio-economic outcomes constitutes the core argument of the dissertation, and will be addressed in the following section of the introduction.

1.2.4. Authoritarian institutions and socio-economic outcomes

Vast evidence has been accumulated in the social sciences that suggests that political institutions, informal norms and elites' choices affect the regime's longevity and its chances of democratic transition. Similarly, there is a burgeoning body of research that testifies to the impact of institutions on socio-economic outcomes and the quality of governance. As argued by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012, 43), "as institutions influence behavior and incentives in real life, they forge the success or failure of nations". Still, some scholars point to further factors that might lead to the rise and decline of nations, such as social capital, political culture, historical legacies, climate and geography or trade policy (Diamond 2013; Gallup, Sachs, and Mellinger 1999; Sachs et al. 1995; Weber 2012). Others voice concern about various kinds of endogeneity (Frye 2012) – a possibility of reverse causality (i.e. economic reform promotes institutional development) or a risk of omitted-variable bias (for example, Kopstein and Reilly (2000) show that geographical proximity to the West has exercised a positive influence on the construction of viable market economies in post-communist countries).

Nevertheless, the general consensus in the literature is that institutions and agency-driven incentives are pivotal in explaining social, economic and environmental performance in countries around the world. Differences among institutions and incentives therefore account for cross-country variation in economic growth, investment, state capacity, public goods provision etc. (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2005; Acemoglu and Robinson 2001, 2012; Fukuyama 2014; Gehlbach and Keefer 2011, 2012; Keefer and Knack 1997; Knack and Keefer 1995; North 1990; Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi 2004).

Quality of governance

Central to the performance of the state is the quality of its governance, which is "a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not" (Fukuyama 2013, 350). Good governance involves effective government (bureaucratic) performance, an adequate regulatory framework, ability to control corruption and adherence to the rule of law (Gel'man 2022). The quality of governance matters because it determines how well the state apparatus functions, how efficiently it can implement policies and deliver results. Authoritarian regimes are not necessarily governed badly (for instance, in Singapore), and, conversely, democracies do not always display good governance: the impact of regime type on the quality of governance is not straightforward and empirical evidence on the matter is mixed. For example, some studies demonstrated a nonlinear, J- or S-

shaped relationship between democracy and the quality of governance: at earlier stages of democratization or lower levels of democracy the effect on the quality of governance is negative but with democratic consolidation or at high democracy values comes better governance (Bäck and Hadenius 2008; Sung 2004). Charron and Lapuente (2010, 445, 2011) find that the effect of regime type is conditional on the level of economic development: "poorer countries have higher quality of government under authoritarian rule while moderate-to-wealthier countries perform better under democratic rule". They explain their finding by considering different social demands and expectations of citizens (demand side) and different institutional incentives of rulers (supply side – for example, autocrats' time horizons) across the political regime and income spectrum. Chang and Golden (2010) explore within-regime heterogeneity in terms of corruption and find that personalistic autocracies, like those in post-colonial Africa, are more prone to corruption.

Melville and Mironyuk (2016) study the same effect of democracy/autocracy on the quality of institutions, but only for post-Soviet countries. Interestingly, they find a linear relationship between the two: there are no post-Soviet autocracies with high quality institutions. They show that the quality of institutions is negatively associated with the extraction of political and economic rent. Rent monopoly is an ultimate goal of these autocratic governments, and they therefore have no incentive to reform institutions that allow rent-seeking and rent distribution through patron-client channels. In the same vein, Gel'man (2022) argues that this opportunistic behavior of rent-seekers and their drive for maximization of rents are the main reasons why institutions of bad governance (or 'extractive' institutions) are built and sustained. Hence, there is untamed corruption, poor quality of state regulations and poor bureaucratic performance, and the 'unrule' of law.

Authoritarian institutions and economic performance

Well-performing institutions are found to be conducive to sustainable economic growth, and secure property and contract rights and an established rule of law are of primary importance to stimulate productive activities, innovation and investments in both physical and human capital (Zhuravskaya and Guriev 2010). Constraints on the executive can provide investors with a guarantee that their property rights will be respected ex post and their assets will not be expropriated via predatory behavior or sudden policy changes (North and Weingast 1989). Political constraints may also "reduce politicians' ability to give away economic benefit through political channels (rent-seeking behavior) and so provide incentives for citizens to invest in economic production rather than rent-seeking activity" that causes economic

dissipation and suboptimal use of resources (Krueger 1974; Wright 2008, 336). On the contrary, arbitrary application of the rule of law and threats of property rights abuses result in a situation when "productive investments are not undertaken, and opportunities for economic growth go unexploited" (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2005, 430). It follows that those countries with a set of more robust and benevolent institutions (that is predominantly an attribute of a democratic regime) are expected to be more affluent. It has indeed been found that democratic institutions are more conducive to sustainable economic growth by more actively promoting economic reforms and providing broad-based public goods (Acemoglu et al. 2019; Papaioannou and Siourounis 2008; Persson and Tabellini 2006).

Much of the debate around the interplay between economic development and institutions has juxtaposed democracies with dictatorships (Przeworski et al. 2000), or developed states with developing countries (Keefer and Knack 1997). Some non-democracies, however, have managed to attract large amounts of private investment and produce high growth figures. So recently scholars have started to look at specific institutions *within* authoritarian regimes to explain these phenomena and stark differences in performance among them that are in fact higher in dictatorships than in democracies (Gandhi 2008; Gehlbach and Keefer 2012; Wright 2008). Chapter 3 of this dissertation also seeks to contribute to this debate.

Gandhi (2008), for example, provides empirical evidence that broadened dictatorships with a higher degree of institutionalization experience higher rates of growth. She argues that institutions provide a framework for negotiations and cooperation between the regime and interest groups, and when the latter have some access to decision-making – however limited – they may be more willing to make costly and longer-term investments. Wright (2008), using a taxonomy of autocracies, shows that military and single party regimes are more dependent on domestic investment and not on natural resource revenue like personalist regimes and monarchies, and therefore have an incentive to establish binding legislatures that constrain their own power and increase growth and investment. Gehlbach and Keefer (2011, 2012) similarly show that some institutions, like the institutionalized ruling party, regular leadership transitions, and the presence of multiple candidates in single-party legislative elections, help attract domestic investments. These institutions alleviate the risk of expropriation by the state by allowing members of the ruling group to organize collectively and thus curbing opportunistic behavior by autocrats.

Another important variable that might yield some explanation of different economic success rates across non-democracies are choices and motivations of dictators that are often

unobservable and might bias our assessments of the effect of institutions on growth (Clague et al. 1996; Olson 1993; Wright 2008). Conventional wisdom would predict that elites in an autocracy that have unrestricted coercive power would seek to use their superior access to the political system to further entrench and enrich themselves, their families and their friends (Fukuyama 2014), and would generally disregard the economic well-being of their country. There can exist, however, 'enlightened' dictators who prioritize growth, and there have been several examples of authoritarian leaders, for example, in East Asian states, who were motivated to develop the economy and to open up to foreign investments and technological innovations. According to Gandhi (2008, 4), "the contrasting development trajectories of South Korea and Zaire, for example, are often attributed to the differing priorities and attitudes of their leaders". So, while some ruling elites are more concerned about consolidation of authority and maintaining the status quo, there are 'developmental' dictators who for some reason choose to promote economic growth. There have also been several cases when autocratic leaders, such as, for example, Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, embarked on a reform agenda at the beginning of their rule but soon became increasingly preoccupied with the consolidation of their authority.

Olson (1993), Clague et al. (1996), and McGuire and Olson (1996) offer one explanation of such divergent motivations. According to their theory, it is the time horizon of the individual autocrat (or occasionally the ruling clique) that governs his (or their) choices and policies, and is the main determinant of property and contract rights and subsequent economic performance. They argue that an autocrat with a low survival probability will choose to seize any easily confiscable assets and will not invest in the legal infrastructure. By contrast, a secure rational autocrat (Olson's 'stationary bandit') with a long-time horizon has an encompassing interest in his domain: he has an incentive to respect property and contract rights and provide a peaceful order because this increases productivity, promotes growth and allows him to maximize his tax collections.

Another insightful framework that sheds light on how contrasting forms of formal and informal institutions produce variations in economic performance is the social order taxonomy proposed by North, Wallis and Weingast (2009). In their attempt to explain differences in the levels of economic development of countries they distinguish between two types of social order that are driven by a fundamentally divergent logic – limited access order (LAO) and open access order. Open access orders are economically developed countries that rely on institutionalized open access to political and economic resources, impersonal exchange, competition and the rule of

law that helps deter violence directly by changing the payoffs to violent behavior. Although mature natural states, i.e. limited access orders, may have a similar set of formal institutions, they almost inevitably arrive at different outcomes. The reason for this is that elite groups in LAOs impose restrictions on competition and deny other actors access to valuable political and economic assets as a way to generate rents and maintain their privileges. LAOs (with Russia, for example, fitting well the LAO pattern) feature an imperfect institutional environment with a weak rule of law, insecure property rights and limited ability of regime outsiders to participate in decision-making, which stymies development and helps explain generally poorer performance of authoritarian regimes. To facilitate transition from a limited to an open access order and hence to a more stable, prosperous and efficient society, it is therefore important to promote institutional arrangements that emphasize impersonality and open access.

Social performance

What follows from the discussion above is that authoritarian regimes that are marred by corruption, rent-seeking and property rights abuses tend to underperform economically. However, autocracies still rely on their output performance as one of their legitimation strategies. They also require resources to coopt elites, to induce cooperation from the population, to reward loyalty and to finance repression (Allina-Pisano 2010; Croissant and Wurster 2013).

Nonexclusive public goods provision is one of the ways to ensure regime longevity by coopting citizens and increasing their satisfaction with the regime. The empirical record as to whether democracies or autocracies provide better welfare is not consistent. With few exceptions (see, for example, Ross (2006) and Truex (2017)), empirical papers show, however, that public spending, public goods provision, human development and social performance are lower in autocracies (Acemoglu et al. 2019; Avelino, Brown, and Hunter 2005; Brown and Hunter 1999; Deacon 2009; Franco, Álvarez-Dardet, and Ruiz 2004; Gerring, Thacker, and Alfaro 2012; Ghobarah, Huth, and Russett 2004; Kudamatsu 2012; Lake and Baum 2001; Zweifel and Navia 2000) but with some within-autocratic regime heterogeneity (Hollenbach 2021; McGuire 2013). Deacon (2009) shows that democracies on average perform better for four public goods: safe water, sanitation, roads and public schooling. Relatedly, McGuire (2013) studied infant mortality, an important indicator of social performance, and its relationship to regime types for 155–180 countries from 1972 to 2007. He found that democracies, especially more established ones, and, interestingly, single-party autocracies have lower infant mortality while other authoritarian subtypes have a positive effect on infant mortality. The explanation

both Deacon (2009) and McGuire (2013) offer follows the logic of the selectorate theory of Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005): autocracies, where the winning coalition is small, do not have many incentives to offer nonexclusive welfare but instead they target transfers to politically influential groups.

Still, all non-democratic governments supply certain public goods like public schooling, basic healthcare and police, and adopt different welfare policies. For instance, in the 2000s the Chinese government adopted rural pensions and medical schemes, which were developed and promoted by different central and local actors, to support economic growth (Duckett and Wang 2017). Despite the risk that can come from having a well-educated population, authoritarian countries also provide public education. They do it to appeal to the middle and upper-classes (Hanson and Sokhey 2021), to increase labor productivity and stay competitive on the global market (López-Cariboni and Cao 2019) and ultimately to prolong their rule (Perry 2015). Jennifer Pan (2020) also describes this latter motivation for welfare provision by autocratic states. She shows that redistribution in China follows a distinctive pattern: the Chinese government uses ad hoc benefits to preempt small-scale social disruptions and mostly target these benefits selectively at individuals who have greater potential to disrupt social order. Xu (2021) also looks at China but focuses on the effect of digital surveillance on nonexclusive public goods provision. Autocrats face a choice between cooptation and repression of opponents. Digital surveillance allows autocrats to identify individual opponents and targetedly repress them which makes broad redistribution cost-inefficient: Xu finds that digital surveillance has a negative effect on welfare spending. Oil exporting authoritarian states similarly use their oil revenues to sponsor welfare and prevent regime change. Oil wealth is associated with increased social spending and is found to decrease the likelihood of anti-regime protests and regime failure (Morrison 2009; Smith 2004; Wright, Frantz, and Geddes 2015).

This redistribution to citizens in non-democratic states is often framed as a social contract or an authoritarian bargain. It is "an implicit arrangement between ruling elites and citizens whereby citizens relinquish political influence in exchange for public spending" (Desai, Olofsgård, and Yousef 2009, 93) or for economic stability (Makarkin 2011). Such social contracts have existed in Thailand (Hewison 2004), in Egypt (Ibrahim 2021) and other countries of the Middle East (El-Haddad 2020; Hinnebusch 2006; Meijer 2017), South Korea (Kang 2002) and Post-Soviet states (Allina-Pisano 2010; Cook and Dimitrov 2017). For instance, Lukashenka has used external energy income from oil and gas transit to fund the

social contract in Belarus and to manage relations with the Belarusian electorate (Balmaceda 2014).

Environmental quality

Climate change and other ecological problems present major challenges to governments around the world. They threaten not only people's livelihoods but whole national economies. However, ensuring environmental quality is difficult. It is another important public good whose provision depends on a variety of factors. For example, using different environmental indicators such as deforestation, air and water pollution, CO_2 emissions, empirical studies showed the existence of an environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC), i.e. an inverted U-shaped association between environmental degradation and economic growth (Apergis and Ozturk 2015; Buitenzorgy and Mol 2011; Dinda 2004; Grossman and Krueger 1995; Lean and Smyth 2010; Orubu and Omotor 2011; Panayotou 1997). Most of EKC studies acknowledge, however, that the relationship between GDP and environmental quality is not straightforward and a number of other factors (most notably regime type and institutional quality) come into play that can either weaken or strengthen the income effect (Bhattarai and Hammig 2001).

While some scholars find that democracy can flatten the EKC and thus lower the environmental price of economic development (Bernauer and Koubi 2009; Buitenzorgy and Mol 2011; Li and Reuveny 2006), others are not able to find a robust significant effect of democracy (Bättig and Bernauer 2009) or claim that it, on the contrary, accelerates environmental degradation (Midlarsky 1998). Li and Reuveny (2006) report that democracy, measured with POLITY IV data, has a positive (although varying in size) effect on five aspects of environmental disruption – CO_2 and NO_2 emissions, deforestation, land degradation, and organic pollution in water. Buitenzorgy and Mol (2011), using deforestation as a proxy for environmental degradation, find the highest deforestation rates in countries in democratic transition, compared to autocracies and mature democracies.

While democracy is in general associated with better environmental quality, even within democratic as well as authoritarian regimes there is a variation in terms of environmental outcomes. For instance, military regimes and monarchies result in a country's poor performance in achieving sustainability (Wurster 2013). Eichhorn and Linhart (2022) similarly show that there is significant heterogeneity within autocratic regimes in terms of different environmental outcomes: monarchies again perform worse than other authoritarian subtypes while for some environmental indicators hegemonic autocracies even outperform democracies.

As with other indicators of state performance, researchers explain this variation by focusing on institutional quality and institutional arrangements of a given country or a group of countries. Better policies are expected to reduce the environmental price of economic growth while the institutional framework might affect the ability to monitor environmental degradation (Panayotou 1997). Povitkina (2018) tests whether the relationship between democracy and CO_2 emissions, established in earlier research, is moderated by the level of corruption. The results show that more democracy is only associated with lower CO_2 emissions when the level of corruption is low. If corruption is wide-spread, democracies are not likely to perform better than authoritarian regimes. Relatedly, democracy is found to positively affect the establishment of protected areas in a country but this effect is weakened by inequality (Kashwan 2017).

So, some aspects of governance like inequality and corruption can undermine the democratic dividend in environmental performance. It is also argued that different interest groups, such as voters and corporations, have more influence on the decision-making process in democracies (Dryzek 1987; Midlarsky 1998). As a result, democracies might be slow in addressing environmental problems because they have to weigh different interests and face resistance from stakeholders and veto players (Wurster 2013). A concept of eco-authoritarianism or authoritarian environmentalism was proposed in response to these concerns over democratic environmental governance. It was first developed and advanced in the 1970s – with arguments, stemming from Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968). Early eco-authoritarians believed that in order to save scarce resources and to prevent environmental calamities societies and individuals have to put constraints on themselves that is hardly possible in liberal democracies. So, governments should be empowered to overrule people's myopia and self-indulgence and to take action, even when it means the adoption of some authoritarian practices (Shahar 2015). These arguments reemerged in the 2010s when the prospect of the environmental crisis became particularly palpable. Authoritarian environmentalism was suggested as a top-down and non-participatory model of environmental policy making and policy implementation that can arguably produce faster and more tangible outcomes (Beeson 2010, 2018; Gilley 2012). New eco-authoritarians primarily draw their inferences from China that has made certain progress to improve its environmental quality in recent years. However, policy implementation in China is often problem-ridden and achieved at the expense of human rights and people's livelihoods which demonstrates limitations of authoritarian environmentalism. Chapter 2 joins the ongoing debate about the effect of political

competitiveness on environmental quality and expands on the concept of authoritarian environmentalism focusing on the case of Russia.

The following section of the introduction will elaborate on the authoritarian regime in Russia - the focus of the dissertation papers, and demonstrate how issues discussed above apply to the Russian case.

1.3. The Political Economy of Russia

1.3.1. Why focus on Russia?

There is a plethora of autocratic regimes around the world these days, ranging from competitive autocracies, like Hungary, to military regimes, like Myanmar. This dissertation, however, focuses on Russia, and there is a number of good reasons that justify the choice. Russia is a compelling story to tell and an insightful case to study. First, Russia is a durable autocracy with established authoritarian institutions and an entrenched political regime. Vladimir Putin has been de facto President of Russia since 1999. The constitutional amendments that came into effect in 2020 undermined the transition of power in the country: while the President's mandate used to be limited to two consecutive terms, the changes to the Constitution discounted Putin's previous presidential terms and allowed him to run for office in the 2024 and 2030 elections. This regime persistence has had many implications domestically and internationally over the past 20 years, as will be discussed below. So, Russia offers an interesting setting to investigate how a drive for the consolidation of authoritarian power and regime stability can affect a country's development, and how a highly-developed country with an urbanized, well-educated population can produce suboptimal socio-economic outcomes due to bad governance.

Second, Russia is also a good example to illustrate different authoritarian features, strategies and practices as well as individual choices and incentives under autocracy. Most of the concepts and phenomena described in the State of Research section have a bearing on the Russian case. Repression, cooptation, legitimation, propaganda or extractive institutions are all well present in Russia. Although Putin's personal characteristics or Russia's unique historical legacies are often put forward to explain Russian politics, Russia is in fact a typical authoritarian regime where a set of institutions and actors' choices determine the course the country takes. When looking at where Russia fits in the regime typologies, Russia has been classified as an electoral authoritarian regime (Gel'man 2012; Golosov 2011; Kailitz and Stockemer 2017; Smyth 2020) or a competitive autocracy (Levitsky and Way 2010). It has also been described as an informational autocracy or a spin dictatorship (Guriev and Treisman 2022). It is moreover a

personalist autocracy where major decisions are taken by one person who relies on a small inner circle of close friends and trusted allies (Frye 2021). Russia is also what North at el. (2009) coined a limited access order (as opposed to an open access order) that restricts access to organizations to elite groups as a way to create rents. This multifacetedness of the Russian political system, on the one hand, can produce conceptual disagreements (for example, whether Russia is a kleptocracy) but, on the other hand, it allows for many ways and perspectives to study the country.

Third, although Russia lost much of its international stance and economic weight when the Soviet Union collapsed, the country still matters. It has to be taken into account due to its sheer landmass and population size, its large stockpile of nuclear weapons and energy and mineral resources. The fact that all this is underpinned and affected by the authoritarian personalistic rule makes it imperative to understand underlying institutional arrangements, main stakeholders and trends. Besides, Russia (that is, its elites) cannot give up its imperialistic aspirations and the image of itself as a great power subordinate to none. These ideas of grandeur and exceptionality have led to probably the worst armed conflict Europe has seen since World War II, the war in Ukraine.

Fourth, from the methodological standpoint, Russia, until recently, was one of the easier authoritarian countries to study. There were some clear advantages of doing research on and in Russia. Russia is a federal state that comprises 85 regions that are extremely heterogeneous in every respect – economically, ethnically, culturally, geographically and in distribution of natural resources. There are also different levels of political competitiveness across the regions despite the Kremlin's efforts to centralize political authority (Panov and Ross 2013, 2019). This offers an excellent opportunity for within-country cross-regional comparisons. Having clear-cut levels of government – federal, regional and local – is another feature of Russia that facilitates research. Moreover, Russia, being an autocracy, was still relatively open to research, even on some sensitive topics. Unlike scholars studying China or the Middle East, 'Russianists' faced few constraints from the Russian authorities to do fieldwork – it was generally possible to access the archives and conduct in-depth interviews there. Survey data was also easily available. There were (and so far still are) several reputable market research companies, like the Levada Center, that did high-quality face-to-face public opinion polls in Russia. Although the quality of statistical data was sometimes questionable, it was nonetheless readily available to researchers. Doing Russia research has already been becoming more and more problematic over the past couple of years but the situation deteriorated dramatically in February 2022 with

the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The major political isolation of Russia that followed the invasion has severe consequences for fieldwork and empirical research on Russia and has raised a big question mark about the future of Russian studies in general (Gel'man 2023; Lankina 2023; Rosenfeld 2023; Zavadskaya and Gerber 2023).

1.3.2. Russia's authoritarian durability

Unlocking Russian politics and explaining its authoritarian tendencies have been a subject of extensive scholarship. Some observers turn to different historical and cultural legacies – tsarist and Communist – to understand modern Russia. They argue that post-Soviet trajectories in politics, economy and society were shaped by experiences of the past, such as serfdom, the lack of private property, central planning and excessive repression (Beissinger and Kotkin 2014; Libman and Obydenkova 2021; Pipes 1992; Pop-Eleches 2007). For example, Libman and Obydenkova (2013) demonstrate how higher levels of the Communist Party membership in the Russian regions in the 1970s and 1980s are associated with higher levels of corruption there in the late 2000s. Relatedly, Etkind (2011, 2015) emphasized Russia's resource dependency and hyper-extractive state that can be traced to centuries ago. Trying to explain Putin's popularity and public support for authoritarianism, others point to distinct attitudinal and cultural characteristics of Russians, for example, by referring to a 'Homo Sovieticus' or a Soviet man personality type, that have arguably hindered the democratization process in Russia (Gessen 2017; Sharafutdinova 2019). At the same time some commentators blame personally Vladimir Putin and his cronies for building the authoritarian kleptocratic state in Russia (Dawisha 2014) while others emphasize the low leverage of the West and Russia's immunity from external pressure (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Russia is indeed in many ways unique but its route to authoritarianism is not. As in many other cases, it is a combination of institutional choices and agency-driven incentives that has helped create and sustain autocracy in Russia. A leader comes to power and thanks to economic successes becomes ever more popular. Backed by popular support and free from external constraints, he becomes a legalistic autocrat – he slowly weakens democratic institutions, such as courts and political parties, and curbs civil liberties. Without strong political institutions and real opposition, the ruler keeps consolidating power in his hands using an arsenal of authoritarian survival strategies (Frye 2021). Eventually this commitment to maintaining stability and perpetuating the status quo becomes the main objective of the political system, along with rent extraction.

The collapse of the Soviet Union caused major havoc in the state economy, administrative system and social sphere. State capacity dwindled and the state was captured by oligarchs: weakened institutions in Russia were not able to fight the attempts of different actors to capture and 'privatize' the rent flowing from formerly state-owned property (Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann 2003; Volkov 2002; Yakovlev 2006). Valuable assets and control over enterprises ended up in the hands of few oligarchs, while credibility of the government and formal institutions was severely undermined. Vladimir Putin, after coming to power in 1999, managed to reassert the authority of the state and to offer social security to the public. In the 2000s Russia experienced high levels of economic growth thanks to high oil prices and economic reforms. Living standards improved and so did public infrastructure. Daniel Treisman (2011) shows that it was mainly these positive economic developments that boosted Putin's popularity. When the Russian economy slowed down and contracted in the 2010s, foreign policy 'successes', such as the annexation of Crimea, had a 'rallying around the flag' effect and bolstered popular support for the regime (Frye 2019; Hale 2018). Putin's high approval ratings are one of the backbones of the regime stability and sources of its legitimacy. According to opinion polls, Putin's approval rating has almost never been below 60% since 2000 (see Figure 3), and independent research has also found this popularity to be real (Frye et al. 2017).

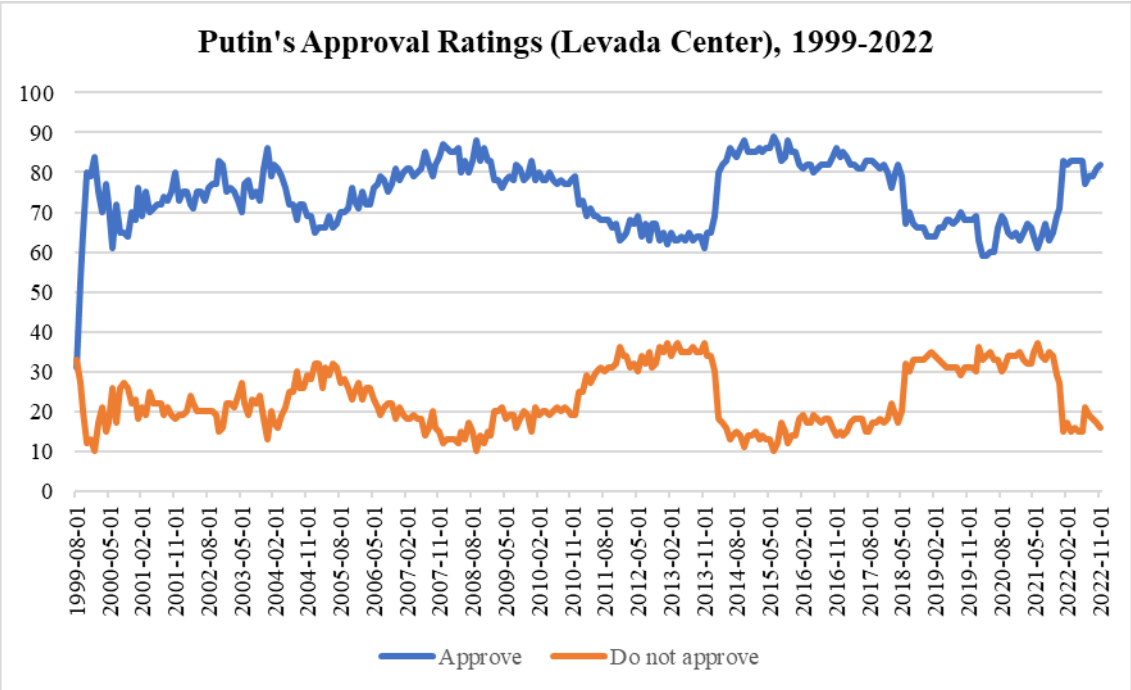

Figure 3: Vladimir Putin's approval ratings, 1999-2022. Monthly data from the Levada Center

This popularity allowed Putin to get away with dismantling formal institutions or subordinating them to his political authority while undercutting the competitiveness of political processes.

Constitutional processes and institutions, like quasi-legitimate elections and legislatures, still exist as there are clear advantages for autocrats in keeping them, as was discussed earlier. Reuter and Robertson (2015), for example, demonstrate how key opposition elites can be coopted with rents and legislative positions and in return refrain from mobilizing their supporters against the regime. The result is a 'dual state' in Russia, a synthesis of "authoritarian managerial practices and democratic proceduralism" but often the arbitrary political authority prevails (Sakwa 2020).

Just as other autocracies, the Russian state has always relied on repression. Until around 2012, however, heavy-handed repression was rare and other tools of power preservation, like performance legitimation, seemed sufficient. Since 2012 when Vladimir Putin resumed office the screws on political opponents, independent media etc. have been tightened. Russia as an informational autocracy has given way to a dictatorship of fear. There have been stricter limits on mass protests but also many instances of targeted repression against political opponents, for example, against Boris Nemtsov and Alexei Navalny.

The regime relies heavily on loyal security services for coercion and consolidation of power. Already since Vladimir Putin's first presidential term the power of the Russian security services (*siloviki*) expanded dramatically: between 2000 and 2008 spending on the security services as a percentage of GDP almost doubled (Cooper 2016), and a large number of top-level positions in the government became staffed with (ex-)*siloviki* handpicked by Putin from among his confidants (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003, 2009; Renz 2006; Soldatov and Rochlitz 2018). The Arab Spring, popular protests in Russia in 2011-2012 caused by the fraudulent elections to the State Duma in December 2011 and the events in the Ukrainian Maidan in late 2013-early 2014 led to a further expansion of the law enforcement agencies in Russia. This culminated in the establishment of the National Guard, an independent military force of about 340 000 employees, several months before the 2016 State Duma elections, as an instrument to counter riots and anti-regime threats. These expanded coercive capacities have also been used to exercise a closer control over officialdom, for example, through a 'deoffshorisation' campaign, and to prevent potential coups within the elites that resulted in dismissals of a number of top-level bureaucrats (Petrov 2016; Petrov and Rochlitz 2019; Sakwa 2020). The increased role of the *siloviki* was also visible in frequent decentralized corporate raiding attacks and business expropriations (business capture by the state) in the 2000s that later evolved into more centralized rent-seeking and control over the economy by the ruling elites (Belton 2020; Rochlitz, Kazun, and Yakovlev 2020).

The Kremlin resorts to more subtle forms of coercion, like legal repression, using economic or legalistic pretenses to justify repression (Frye 2021). "For my friends anything, for my enemies, the law" – this is the guiding principle of this politicized legal system (Hendley 2009; Popova 2012; Solomon 2010). For instance, between 2012 and 2022, 9% of Russian governors lost office because they were accused of a crime. Although the overt motivation is to rid the bureaucracy and political elites of unscrupulous officials, there are still elements of a political purge of unwanted opponents (Rochlitz, Kazun, and Yakovlev 2020; Szakonyi 2018). This issue is the focus of Chapter 4.

Manipulation of information and propaganda are further tools widely used by the regime to achieve autocratic ends, as shown in Chapter 3. Most Russians still get their information from the state-controlled media and are fed carefully framed stories projecting a regime-friendly political reality. For example, instead of censoring economic facts, the major state-run TV network in Russia tactically shapes those facts: bad news is not censored, but blamed on external factors, while good news is systematically attributed to government officials to emphasize their competence (Rozenas and Stukal 2019). Belmonte and Rochlitz (2019) similarly show how the Kremlin exercises its control over the media to strategically reactivate negative collective memories from the turbulent 1990s before important elections, in order to create political support for the status quo. The regime also uses symbolic appeals to nationalism and tradition to "harness a set of shared preferences on the side of the incumbent regime" (Smyth, Sobolev, and Soboleva 2013, 26). There is a pronounced reliance on the notion of Russia as a great power and defender of traditional values. The anti-Western rhetoric - contrasting us with them - plays a major part here, as well as the promotion of conservative traditional values (moral and ethical) that are rooted in the Orthodox religion and Russia's imperial past. These values have to be strengthened and protected from those who stand against them, and usually the contemporary West is perceived as a source of this danger (Chapnin 2020). This discourse of traditional morality is translated into a political rhetoric of solidarity, patriotism, and pride in the country's heritage but also distrust of foreigners (Agadjanian 2017).

The crackdown on the Internet and the media remains severe. In the Reporters without Borders' index of press freedom Russia ranked 155th out of 180 countries in 2022 worldwide.[3] In Russia a relatively disinterested attitude of the government to the Internet changed to a cyberphobia after the mass protests of 2011 that were mobilized and coordinated via Russia's lively social

[3] https://rsf.org/en/index

media (Smyth and Oates 2015; Soldatov and Borogan 2015; Vendil Pallin 2017). Since then, a succession of laws and regulations has been passed that aim to eliminate the threat of opposition movements and social unrest. The so called 2012 blacklist law that was initially designed to block websites related to child pornography and drugs later allowed the authorities to shut down websites that would encourage unsanctioned meetings and incite extremism within hours and without a court ruling.[4] A 'sovereign internet' law enacted in November 2019 enables the Kremlin to utilize a kill switch to cut Russia completely off from the worldwide web in a case of emergency.[5] This comprehensive legislative control is accompanied by increasing control through the ownership of media and Internet networks and infrastructure (Vendil Pallin 2017), with an example of a pro-Kremlin takeover of the Russian independent newspaper Vedomosti in 2020. With the start of the war in Ukraine the censorship and misinformation have become overwhelming.

Russia is an electoral autocracy, that is, it still holds regular elections for executive and legislative offices. The playing field, however, is significantly tilted in favor of regime insiders. A range of tactics, such as voter intimidation, candidate filtering, ballot box stuffing, vote buying, gerrymandering etc., is used to get this edge over opponents, both on Election Day and before (Bader and van Ham 2015; Enikolopov, Makarin, and Petrova 2020; Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019; Szakonyi 2022). Russia is notorious for electoral manipulation, and every election since 1991 has been rigged (Bader and van Ham 2015). Blatant electoral fraud can be costly, it can alienate regime supporters and mobilize the opposition but too little fraud can result in suboptimal election results. For instance, the Kremlin manipulates institutions and laws in a way that rival candidates are banned from running in elections. Szakonyi (2022) shows that 9.6% of 106 236 Russian mayoral candidates were denied the possibility to run for office in 2005-2019. This candidate filtering (or selective registration of candidates), however, was overwhelmingly concentrated among independents and members of non-systemic opposition parties. This strategy helps tip elections in favor of incumbents and at the same time does not provoke as much public disapproval as blatant fraud. Another common strategy of ensuring electoral victory is workplace mobilization of voters. A quarter of workers in Russia have experienced coercion by their employers to go to the polls and vote for pro-government candidates (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014). Especially prone to voter mobilization are state-

[4] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/12/censorship-row-russian-internet-blacklist, https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-signs-bill-blocking-websites-that-incite-rioting-promote-extremism-1388416128

[5] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50259597

owned enterprises, the state bureaucracy and firms with immobile assets that are vulnerable to regulatory sanction or expropriation. Related to this is the use of 'administrative resource' when the regime threatens to withhold public goods and entitlements if voters do not support specific candidates (Allina-Pisano 2010). This theme of election manipulation is also touched upon in Chapters 2 and 4.

Summing up, there are many strategies that the autocratic regime in Russia employs to preserve the status quo and monopolize the rents. However, autocracies are not unitary actors despite the concentration of power in the hands of the few, and autocrats have to manage relationships with other important stakeholders (Kofanov et al. 2022).

1.3.3. Actors and their interrelation

Although Vladimir Putin is at the center of power relations in Russia, he does not rule the country single-handedly. Decisions and policies are a product of interaction among different players: the ruler, the political and bureaucratic elites at different levels, business elites and the mass public who have their specific expectations, interests and incentives. The relationship among different actors in Russia has been dynamic, and their weight and role have changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s the state was weak and decentralized, and two groups of actors used this weakened state capacity to gain on influence: regional governors and oligarchs (Stoner-Weiss 1999; Yakovlev 2006). On coming to power, Vladimir Putin had to grapple with these two powerful groups which at the same time were disorganized and could not form a united front. Putin coopted some networks of oligarchs and governors by redistributing spoils from increased oil revenues, and also relied on the increasingly influential security services to consolidate his power (Frye 2021). The infamous Yukos affair and the cancellation of gubernatorial elections in 2004 are illustrative of Putin's win over his economic and regional rivals.

Russia is a very large federal state that entails complex principal-agent relationships between the center and subnational governments (Gelman 2010; Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Ledyaev and Chirikova 2019; Sharafutdinova 2010). The Kremlin inevitably faces problems of informational asymmetries, monitoring and control because of divergent incentives of actors at the different levels of government (Libman and Rochlitz 2019). The 2000s saw the establishment of a so-called 'power vertical' as a way to deal with the principal-agent problems. It is a hierarchical model of governance which implies subordination of regional and municipal levels of authority to the federal center and informal exchanges between them (Gel'man 2022;

Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Sharafutdinova 2010). This power vertical also involves private business and is present within sectors and agencies (Gel'man 2022). Rents and delivery of votes for United Russia in the elections are main resources in these exchanges. As mentioned earlier, one of the most important informal performance criteria of Russian subnational elites is their ability to mobilize their political machines to harness votes for the ruling party (Libman and Rochlitz 2019). So, the governors keep their jobs and access to rents while the Kremlin gets electoral support for United Russia (Reuter and Robertson 2012). The power vertical allows the Kremlin to exercise control over all levels of government but it often malfunctions. For instance, it results in 'the politics of redundancy' because "parallel hierarchies in charge of control and monitoring emerge at various layers of the power vertical" (Gel'man 2022, 36). This in turn can lead to inter-agency rivalries, for example, between agencies within the Russian security services. A relationship between different levels of government (central, regional and local) also often remains difficult - a finding that is confirmed by my research in Chapter 4. When local elites refuse to be fully subordinated to the regional authority, this can produce clashes between governors and mayors for political and economic resources and can subsequently result in a dismissal or legal repression of uncooperative mayors (Golosov, Gushchina, and Kononenko 2016; Libman and Rochlitz 2019). A further example of the failure of the power vertical is the Kremlin's inability to elicit truthful information from the bureaucracy and ensure policy implementation. This is visible in a very poor implementation (albeit with some regional variation) of the May Decrees, a set of economic, demographical and other targets issued by the President in 2012 (Ross, Turovsky, and Sukhova 2022). Or in the regional governments' mis(under)reporting of Covid-19 statistics, including mortality rates, to the federal center (Kofanov et al. 2022).

A related feature of Russian inter-actor relations is patronalism or patronal politics that involves the personalized exchange of rewards and punishments through networks of actual acquaintance (Hale 2014). It emphasizes the importance of personal connections and dominance of the informal over the formal. As argued by Hale (2017, 30), "when push comes to shove for individual actors in the system, personal connections tend to trump issue positions, ideology, or even identity". The rewards and punishments are distributed by patrons to their dependent base of clients. Patron-client relations in Russia are hierarchical networks that have with time evolved into a single-pyramid system with Vladimir Putin having supreme patronal power. Similarly, Ledeneva (2013) calls this blend of informal personal networks and influences with formal hierarchies a *sistema*. Informality indeed runs deep in Russia. For

instance, business interactions continue to rely on networks and personal relations (referred to as *blat* or *sviazi* in Russia) to secure goods and services which implies a continued exchange of favors and reciprocal obligations (Ledeneva 2008; Michailova and Worm 2003). Connections to public officials offer entrepreneurs preferential treatment, insider information and access to resources that increase firms' revenues (Puffer and McCarthy 2011; Szakonyi 2018).

These top-down relationships are affected by powerful horizontal forces. As of before the war in Ukraine, the Russian 'establishment' was formed by four meta-factions that disagreed on issues of social and economic policy, security and Russia's place in the world (Sakwa 2020). These four interest groups are the liberals, the *siloviki*, the neo-traditionalist conservatives and the Eurasianists, and the influence of each of these groups over policy formation has fluctuated over the past 20 years. Putin acts as a broker between them making sure that none of these factions would become too dominant. However, as discussed above, the security services and their top functionaries, such as the secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, have lately had the upper hand in the policy-making process influencing key decisions.

The relationship with another major actor - the mass public – is also carefully managed by the regime. The economic successes of the 2000s allowed the state to offer citizens a social contract - provision of public goods and some financial security in exchange for political disengagement and quiescence (Makarkin 2011; Sakwa 2020). Stability seems to matter greatly both to the public and the Kremlin. Russian monotowns are a good example of this social stability/public goods provision tradeoff or informal exchange (Crowley 2016; Greene 2018). There are still more than 300 of these single industry/company towns, a legacy of Soviet industrialization. Many city-forming enterprises show low productivity and efficiency and present a significant challenge to diversification and restructuring efforts. They are nonetheless kept afloat because of the 'aggressive immobility' of the locals and the ruling elites' fear of social unrest (Greene 2018). People who live there depend on city-forming enterprises for their employment and many of the local services. The closure of one factory may thus lead to unemployment and undermine social stability which the regime tries to avoid at any cost. Additionally, monotowns are an important source of votes for United Russia since firms, being dependent on the state, can rally their workers at election time to cast their ballots for the ruling party (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014). The economic downturn in the 2010s made it more difficult for the regime to hold up its end of the social bargain: the pension reform with the retirement age increase was symptomatic of this failure. Some citizens responded by reassuming autonomy and self-

reliance and by falling back on their networks of localized interpersonal relationships (Greene 2017). The consent of others was regained by the regime's appeal to people's emotions and nationalist sentiments. Besides, there is a very large portion of the population (apart from those living in monotowns) that depends on the state and benefits from the status quo, like employees in the state sector and bureaucracy (Kovalev 2021; Rochlitz 2014; Rosenfeld 2017). Rosenfeld (2017), for example, found that Russia's middle-class state-sector employees are much less likely than their private-sector counterparts to mobilize and engage in protest activities.

All in all, the relationship among different actors works in a way that helps the regime persist. This emphasis on regime stability, however, reproduces bad governance and has been responsible for many social and economic woes that have plagued Russia for years.

1.3.4. Authoritarian institutions and performance in Russia

The case of Russia speaks well to the literature on the effect of authoritarian institutions and practices on socio-economic outcomes. Russia is locked into its limited access order status – a distinctive political-economic order that serves self-interests of the political elite, with the main goal being the extraction and maximization of rent. The objective is also to confine the benefits of rent distribution to a small circle of insiders. They deliberately create and perpetuate institutions, rules and norms that hinder access to resources to non-elite groups and at the same time produce bad governance (Gel'man 2022). Although in the early 2000s the government pursued social and economic reforms, later the main priority of the ruling elite became the pursuit of their opportunistic interests and of political stability. Zhuravskaya and Guriev (2010) argue that the Russian leadership does not have incentives to establish well-functioning institutions because they promote competition and may undermine the distribution of natural resource rents.

This bias toward regime insiders has real consequences - Russia ranks low on all major indicators of the quality of governance, like the rule of law, government effectiveness, regulatory quality or control of corruption (Frye 2021; Gel'man 2022). Corruption is rampant in Russia - in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index Russia ranked 136th out of 180 countries in 2021 (Transparency International 2021). Since about 2009 the government has taken steps to fight low-level corruption: incidents of corruption by public officials decreased (Schulze, Sjahrir, and Zakharov 2016) and control of corruption slightly improved (see Figure 4). It did not improve economic growth or business climate, however, because petty bureaucratic corruption simply translated into a more centralized mode of

predation by state agencies and the ruling elites (Rochlitz, Kazun, and Yakovlev 2020). Besides, the anticorruption push with often arbitrary charges and convictions increased pressure on the bureaucracy and on business, disincentivizing corruption but also any risky but potentially productive decisions and actions. This trend has fitted well in the existing system of incentives for the law enforcement agencies, a so-called *palochnaya sistema*, where employees are encouraged to investigate and clear as many cases as possible (McCarthy 2014; Paneyakh 2014). Regulatory pressure has been repeatedly ranked among top obstacles to doing business in Russia (Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs 2021). Although tax and custom regulations have been simplified over the years, business is still struggling with opaque and inordinate amounts of legislation that increase transaction costs and decrease operational efficiency (Kusznir 2016). This again fuels corruption: faced with a myriad of oft-changing regulations companies may choose to resort to bribery to solve regulatory problems and to get things done (Chadee and Roxas 2013; Duvanova 2007).

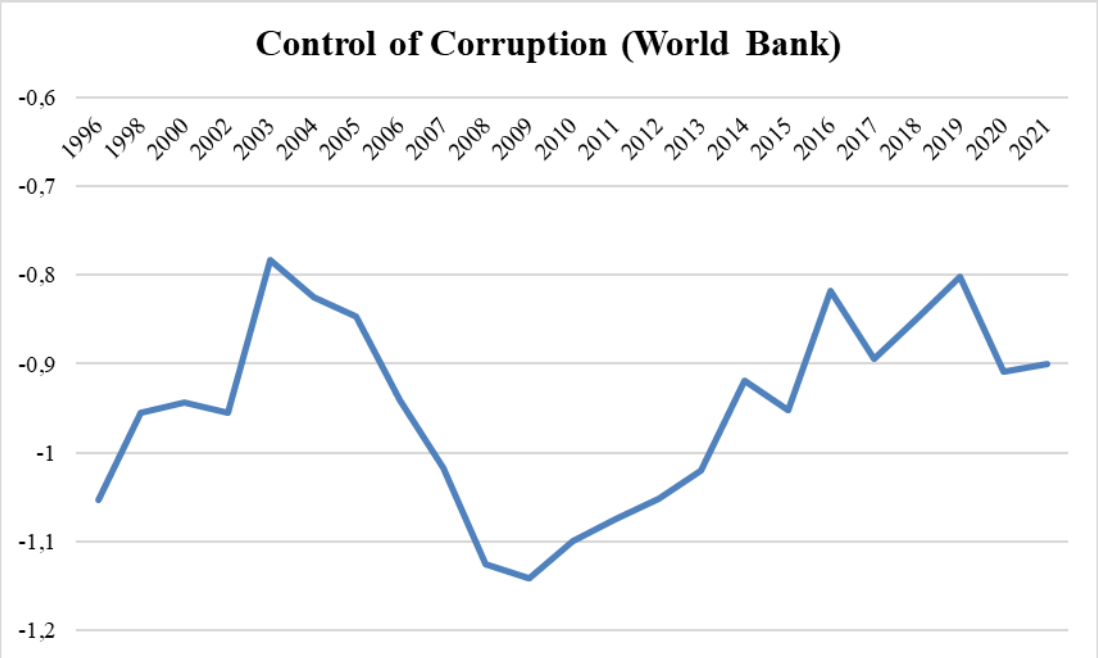

Figure 4: Control of corruption in Russia in 1996-2021 (index from -2.5 to +2.5). Source: World Bank

Property rights security remains highly volatile, and with consolidation of authoritarian power in Russia, the problem of credible commitment is aggravating. Since the late 1990s various state agencies have indulged in predatory behavior and hostile takeovers through extortion, unlawful arrests and threats of violence (Frye and Yakovlev 2016; Gans-Morse 2012; Rochlitz 2014; Volkov 2002). Criminal charges brought against a businessperson are often a way to

blackmail them into surrendering their business. A prominent example of a recent corporate raiding attack is the 2016 takeover of the oil company Bashneft by the state conglomerate Rosneft, headed by Putin's close associate Igor Sechin (Frye 2021). The unrule of law and property rights abuses have created a complicated terrain for domestic and foreign investors and severely undermined investments and growth (Iudin and Porosenkov 2022; Kapeliushnikov et al. 2013; Marques et al. 2020).

The importance of informal connections or ties to the 'right' people has a similar negative effect. As mentioned above, personal connections to politicians and public officials tend to significantly increase a firm's revenues and profitability (Szakonyi 2018). However, these relations disadvantage unconnected firms, complicate market entry, particularly for foreign companies, and impede competition (Kusznir 2016; Slinko, Yakovlev, and Zhuravskaya 2005). Rochlitz et at. (2021), for example, demonstrate how Russian bureaucrats from investment promotion agencies in Russian regions are likely to favor companies affiliated with United Russia and discriminate against those linked to the opposition party 'Yabloko'.

The crackdown on the media, the Internet, NGOs and academic research that prevents censorship- and fear-free communication chips away at the confidence in the Russian market too. It also undermines prospects for growth because a free flow of ideas and information exchange are crucial for technological innovation and economic development. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has torpedoed opportunities for a productive dialogue and points of contacts between Russia and the West. Economic sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 are bound to have a long-term impact on the Russian economy. The brain drain caused by a massive emigration of mostly well-educated and young Russians will also take its toll on the future development of the country.

All this, along with issues like Russia's heavy reliance on natural resources revenues, wrong bureaucratic incentives that do not prioritize growth and poor policy implementation, is responsible for economic stagnation in Russia. Russia's GDP per capita has stopped growing in the past decade, as Figure 5 shows.

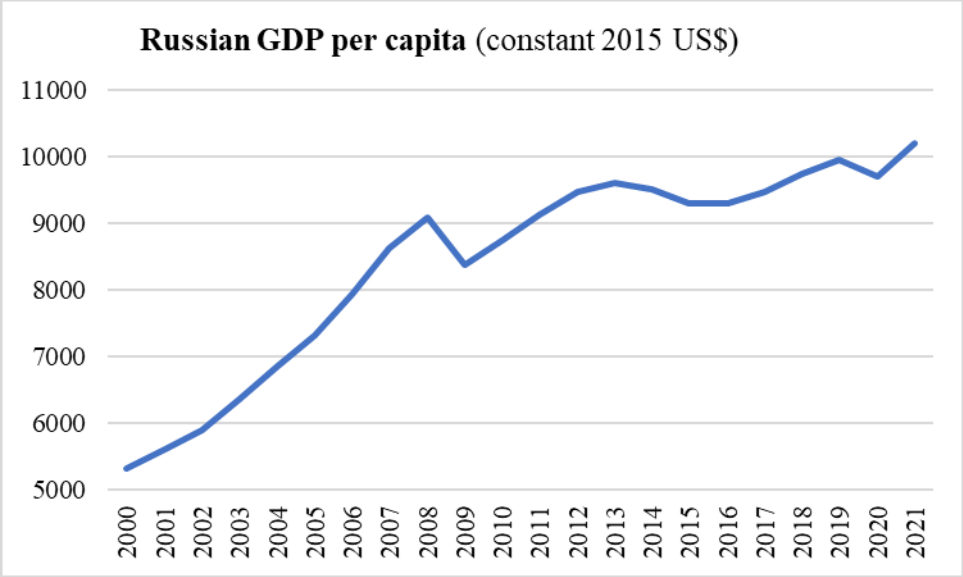

Figure 5: Russia's GDP per capita in constant 2015 US$, 2000-2021. Source: World Bank

The poor state of the Russian economy certainly relates to poor social performance and chronic under-provision of healthcare, education, and other social services (Sokhey 2020). The rural-urban divide is striking as well as Russia's great inequality.

The same is true for environmental performance - Russia is lagging behind in aligning societal development with ecological restrictions (it ranked 112th in the 2022 Environmental Performance Index). Environmental protection in Russia has never been given the priority it warranted. In the Soviet Union industrialization and militarization of the economy contributed to declining environmental quality (Feshbach and Friendly 1993; Henry and Douhovnikoff 2008). From the mid-1990s there was a further systematic eroding of national environmental institutions and their authority (environmental deinstitutionalization or 'de-ecologization') (Henry and Douhovnikoff 2008; Mol 2009; Newell and Henry 2016; Poberezhskaya 2015). During Dmitry Medvedev's term in office (2008-2012) with his focus on 'modernization', there seemed to have been an increase in interest in environmental topics. In May 2008 the Ministry of Natural Resources was renamed the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and best available technologies were promoted to encourage industry to embrace clean and energy-saving technologies (Martus 2017). In contrast, during his presidency, Vladimir Putin has not been involved in substantive environmental policy development but he has rather used environment as a tool and a source of regime legitimacy (Martus 2021).

Despite the declared commitment to address environmental issues, the government pays them insufficient attention. The climate inaction is particularly striking, given that Russia is the world's fourth-largest carbon-emitter and second-largest producer of oil and gas combined, and

is warming more than twice as fast as the world's average rate.[6] Global warming remains on the periphery of Russian discourse although it has massive economic implications and is responsible for major ecological incidents in Russia, like forest fires in Siberia that raged across an area the size of Belgium in 2019, or the thawing permafrost and the recent massive oil spill in the Arctic city of Norilsk, which smelter complex is the largest SO_2 emission hotspot in the world.[7] Chapter 2 highlights this urgency to address environmental issues by focusing on the problem of household waste in Russia.

The Russian population has grave concerns about socio-economic and ecological problems as seen from public opinion polls, but the regime does not seem to be committed to reacting to these challenges. There have been a few success stories and 'pockets of effectiveness' in the past 20 years when the government pushed certain priority projects or developmental programs - policy successes are after all helpful to boost regime legitimacy and justify the status quo (Gel'man 2022). There have been some regional achievements, for example, in Tatarstan or Belgorod (Nikulin, Trotsuk, and Wegren 2017; Yakovlev et al. 2020) where regional governments promoted development, or at the level of certain agencies – Russian Central Bank has been credited for Russia's ability not to collapse under the Western sanctions. Most of these success stories are however short-lived and are like a needle in a haystack of government inefficiency and mediocre performance. After all, reforms and real changes in institutions and developmental patterns may interfere with the status quo. There is also a lack of a consistent long-term vision of the country's future and a lack of understanding of what constitutes a modern economy and a progressive society (Sakwa 2020).

1.4. Dissertation Milestones

1.4.1. Research design: data sources and methodological approaches

The three papers of this dissertation, though united by the common theme of the political economy of authoritarianism and by a focus on Russia, use different sources of data and different methodological approaches. The thesis is based on a multi-method approach, where the research design is determined by the specific research question and cases addressed in the respective paper. The thesis incorporates empirical, experimental and qualitative approaches

[6] https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/09/19/why-russia-is-ambivalent-about-global-warming

[7] https://www.greenpeace.org/international/press-release/23819/global-so2-air-pollution-hotspots-ranked-by-greenpeace-analysis/
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/world/europe/russia-siberia-yakutia-permafrost-global-warming.html;
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/05/in-siberian-fuel-spill-climate-change-is-seen-as-major-factor-a70494

and uses both primary and secondary data. Two papers have a focus on subnational politics in Russia while the third paper offers a perspective at the national level.

Table 1: Overview of the dissertation papers

Chapter	Title	Research question	Level	Data sources	Method
2	Environmental Politics in Authoritarian Regimes: Waste Management in the Russian Regions	Are more authoritarian regions in Russia better at tackling the problem of waste management?	Regional	Government statistics, open Internet sources	Empirical
3	Authoritarian Durability, Prospects of Change and Individual Behavior: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Russia	How does the prospect of an autocrat remaining in office affect individual expectations and behavior?	National	Public opinion survey	Experimental
4	Politicized Corruption and Models of Legal Repression of Local Elites in Russia	How is anticorruption used to repress Russian mayors, and what are common models of legal repression of local elites?	Local	Government statistics, media reports, open Internet sources	Qualitative

The first paper (Chapter 2) empirically studies environmental performance of Russian subnational governments in the field of municipal solid waste and its relationship to a number of indicators, most importantly political competitiveness. The data used in the paper is regional-level and covers all Russian regions, except for Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol, for the period 2012-2019. The data was collected on 22 indicators, with 11 left in the final analysis. Since the paper uses panel data, a fixed effects model was employed as an estimator after a number of tests had shown that the choice was well justified in the conceptual and statistical sense.

The sources of the data were government statistics (by the Russian Federal State Statistics Service – Rosstat, by the Federal Treasury and by the Central Election Commission), official websites of regional administrations, as well as the Integrum media database that offers access to regional media outlets. Unfortunately, regional and municipal statistics in Russia are not always reliable (Kofanov et al. 2022). Regarding the data on the dependent variable, the share of recycled household waste, one can see significant fluctuations in the share of recycled waste

in a number of regions in 2012-2019. A quality check of this recycling data was therefore carried out: the Rosstat data was compared with information from annual environmental reports that all regional governments have to hand in and with information from media sources about recycling facilities and their capacities. The regions where there was no match were dropped out in one of the models, and a robustness check was run with this smaller sample of 62 regions.

The operationalization of several concepts used in the study presented some challenges. While measuring the level of economic development by GDP per capita (or GRP, gross regional product, when looking at the subnational level) is a common practice in social sciences, operationalizing institutional quality or political competitiveness is not so straightforward. It can be particularly problematic when one considers the regional level which is less explored and where data is less easily available or less reliable.

For example, the rating of regions' investment attractiveness by the Rating Agency Expert was chosen as a measure of institutional quality of Russian regions. Several indices of institutional quality have been developed for Russian regions that combine different sets of indicators with a focus on different aspects of regional institutions, for example, the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey (BEEPS) project or the index of entrepreneurial climate produced by the business association 'Opora Rossii' (Baranov et al. 2015). However, the RA Expert rating was found most suitable for this particular study, as unlike other indices it covers all Russian regions and is available for all years under observation.

The main explanatory variable in the study is political competitiveness or the degree of authoritarianism. The paper assumes that there is a meaningful regional variation in the level of authoritarianism that can be captured by the share of votes cast for the ruling party United Russia. It has to be acknowledged that this variation is becoming less pronounced as Russia is rapidly sliding into an outright dictatorship. Despite the consolidation of autocracy, one still observes that regions differ in terms of political competitiveness and in the types of political regimes that operate there. As argued by Panov and Ross (2019, 269), "these variations in the type of polity have affected electoral support for United Russia, which is much higher in the more authoritarian regimes". The hegemony of the party of power varies from region to region, as witnessed by different levels of electoral support for United Russia (Panov and Ross 2013, 2019, 2021; Rosenberg, Kozlov, and Libman 2018). Authoritarian elections are designed to ensure the victory of the ruling party but despite electoral fraud, candidate filtering, voter intimidation etc. systemic opposition parties in some regions still manage to get a large share of votes in the elections. In Yaroslavl, Khabarovsk and Komi United Russia got less than 30%

of votes in the 2021 State Duma elections. Although systemic opposition parties are loyal to the Kremlin and the political landscape is monopolized by United Russia, this inability to ensure landslide victories is indicative of differences in administrative resources and coercive capacities of the ruling party and of certain gaps in the scope or depth of authoritarianism in some regions. Other possible measures that relate to the independent variable, the degree of authoritarianism, were considered, for example, Petrov-Titkov index of regional levels of democratization (Buckley and Reuter 2019; Rochlitz, Mitrokhina, and Nizovkina 2021). However, the index was developed in 2013 and might no longer hold true for all regions. So, in the absence of other indicators, the United Russia vote share was therefore the best measure with available data that could capture (at least to a certain extent) political competitiveness in the region.

The second paper (Chapter 3) is based on data from an original nation-wide survey experiment that was carried out by the Levada Center, the best regarded polling company in Russia, in May 2021. Experimental methods have become increasingly popular in the social sciences in the past few decades, and many studies have adopted different survey methodologies using experimental designs (Blair et al. 2013; Blair, Imai, and Lyall 2014; Card et al. 2012; Frye et al. 2017; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997; Rosenfeld, Imai, and Shapiro 2016; Wallander 2009). The use of experiments allows making more precise, causal claims about the nature of relationship between variables of interest. It is particularly valid when studying sensitive topics (for example, corruption or political beliefs) as it allows to reduce possible biases and to more accurately measure attitudes and intended behavior (Rosenfeld et al. 2016). The major advantage of these techniques is that embedding experimental designs within surveys allows to "combine the distinctive external validity advantages of the representative public opinion survey with the decisive internal validity strengths of the fully randomized, multifaceted experiment" (Sniderman and Grob 1996, 378).

The survey experiment was designed following the literature on survey and factorial survey experiments (Auspurg et al. 2015; Auspurg and Hinz 2014; Mutz 2011) and previous studies that used a similar approach (Buckley et al. 2016; Frye 2019; Goudriaan and Nieuwbeerta 2007). 1600 respondents were randomly assigned into four equally sized groups, three treatment groups and one control group. The treatment groups were presented with three hypothetical scenarios, briefly describing outcomes of the 2024 Russian presidential elections with three possible winners. Then, all respondents were asked to answer 8 questions about their expectations and intended behavior. So, the measured outcome is in fact an intention rather

than an actual behavior. However, a number of empirical studies validated survey experiments against real-world behavior having found a strong association between real-life behavior and intentions reported in the survey (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Rosenfeld, Imai, and Shapiro 2016).

The survey data received from the Levada Center contained responses to 8 questions in the experiment as well as basic socio-demographic information, such as age, gender, Internet consumption, and financial status. The analysis of the data yielded interesting results that are discussed below.

The third paper (Chapter 4) adopts a qualitative approach to identify common models of legal repression of Russian local elites via politicized corruption. The paper's analytical framework is based on the interaction of two factors, the mechanism of selecting the city top executive and the presence of political motives. Three identified models have a distinct logic and follow certain common scenarios.

The paper uses two main data sources. First, it draws on an original database of Russian mayors from Buckley et al. (2022). The database contains biographical information on mayors of Russia's 220 largest cities with population over 75000 people between 2002 and 2018. It also includes information on their party affiliation, on whether they were appointed or elected and on whether at some point they faced criminal charges. The data was collected by a team of research assistants from a variety of sources. For example, in order to identify mayors who were criminally prosecuted, research assistants used Google and Yandex, the main search engine in Russia, to check all 1051 mayors' names and relevant search terms (arrest, charge, court case, etc.). Later, they gathered and coded all required data on the identified criminal cases, using media reports and official documents. For the purposes of the present study, 84 mayors out of 1051 in the dataset were selected and included in the analysis. These are mayors who, first, were criminally prosecuted on corruption-related charges. The second criterion was that the arrest occurred while the mayor was still in office. About 30 further mayors in the database faced criminal charges but these cases were not included as they did not fit these selection criteria.

Second, the coded quantitative data on the 84 mayors from the database was complemented by detailed accounts of these criminal cases that were later compiled in a 120-page long dossier. The detailed information on charges, case timeline, its background, sentence and penalty, as well as on possible motivations for starting criminal proceedings, was collected from national,

regional and local media outlets, using Integrum media database. Both data sources were then combined to distinguish three models of legal repression and to illustrate them with examples.

1.4.2. Overview of the dissertation papers

Environmental politics in authoritarian regimes: Waste management in the Russian regions

Chapter 2 seeks to further scholarly understanding of environmental performance under autocracy. It focuses on Russia and on the urgent but insufficiently understood problem of waste management which has been a focal point for protests and policy reform in the country in recent years. Overall, Russia shows very poor performance in terms of municipal solid waste management – only up to 7% of household waste is recycled while the rest is sent to landfill sites without any proper treatment. Although the problem of waste management presents a major challenge to all Russian regions, there are noticeable differences across the regions in terms of recycling. The chapter examines factors that can explain this variation and primarily studies the effect of political competitiveness on the ability of regional governments to address this particular environmental challenge.

Previous empirical research has demonstrated that democracies tend to be more conducive to environmental quality (Bernauer and Koubi 2009; Buitenzorgy and Mol 2011; Li and Reuveny 2006). This chapter, however, draws on the concept of authoritarian environmentalism that postulates that authoritarian governments can have an advantage in mitigating environmental risks due to their top-down non-participatory approach to environmental policy making and policy implementation (Beeson 2010; Gilley 2012). The concept has not been widely applied to the case of Russia but the authoritarian nature of Russian governance relates well to this concept.

As shown above, despite a high degree of centralization, Russia's regions also display considerable institutional diversity and variation in their levels of political competitiveness or the degree of authoritarianism (Panov and Ross 2013, 2019). Although all Russian regions are authoritarian regimes, some regions are more competitive and others are more hegemonic (Buckley and Reuter 2019; Panov and Ross 2013). The degree of authoritarianism is operationalized as a share of votes cast for United Russia in the State Duma elections. The paper hypothesizes that more authoritarian regions in Russia are better able to solve the problem of waste management, that is, to recycle more household waste.

The paper finds that there is a positive and statistically significant association between the share of recycled waste and the vote share of United Russia in the parliamentary elections. So, more

authoritarian regions are more likely to recycle a higher share of municipal solid waste. A possible explanation, if viewed through the lens of authoritarian environmentalism, is that more authoritarian regions might have more coercive and administrative capacities to implement policies. Besides, their non-participatory approach to policy making and implementation with few veto players can help better respond to the waste management problem. The paper, however, acknowledges that there might be alternative explanations for the finding. For instance, more authoritarian regions might be more likely to fudge their official statistics, including environmental data, similarly as they are also more prone to engage in electoral fraud. Because of the unavailability of data, it is however impossible to robustly test for this or other potential mechanisms, which opens up a number of interesting avenues to explore in future research.

Authoritarian durability, prospects of change and individual behavior: Evidence from a survey experiment in Russia

Chapter 3 investigates what effect the prospect of an authoritarian leader staying in power for the foreseeable future has on individual behavior and expectations. Russia offers an interesting setting to explore this question: a nation-wide referendum in Russia in July 2020 and subsequent constitutional amendments allowed Vladimir Putin to run for two more consecutive terms in office. So, there is a distinct prospect that Putin, who has been de facto president of Russia for the past 22 years, could take part in the 2024 and 2030 elections and stay in power until 2036. The study connects first to the literature on the importance of propaganda and manipulation of information in autocracies (Belmonte and Rochlitz 2019; Rozenas and Stukal 2019). It also draws on the previous research that could help explain why individuals might prefer the status quo or seek political change (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005; Carvacho et al. 2013; Chan et al. 2013; Magun and Rudnev 2010; Perry 2020; Rosenfeld 2017; Tversky and Kahneman 1991). These individual preferences for stability or change can in turn determine subsequent behavior, for example, the likelihood to invest or emigrate.

To empirically study this question, a survey experiment was carried out in Russia in May 2021. Three treatment groups were presented each with a different hypothetical scenario of the 2024 presidential elections in Russia. In the first treatment Vladimir Putin wins the presidential race again. The second hypothetical winner is a young representative from the political opposition with a program of economic and political reforms. In the third treatment Putin's close associate and Russia's defense minister Sergei Shoigu wins the elections. The scenarios represented, first, no regime or leadership change, second, both regime and leadership change, and, third,

leadership change but with regime continuity. Then all respondents were asked to imagine they had to make some important decisions at this point of time and were asked questions about the likelihood of them joining a business venture, getting additional education, accepting a job with the government, investing money from a lottery win, or leaving the country permanently. After a small reminder of the treatment, they were also asked several questions about Russia's development prospects and biggest challenges for Russia in the future.

The study looks at the overall effect of the treatments and heterogeneous effects for four background characteristics in particular: political orientation (support for Putin or not), age, education, and income. The analysis offered interesting insights into expectations and attitudes of Russians. Irrespective of their background characteristics, all respondents agreed that economic stagnation will be a bigger problem if Putin wins the elections than in the other two scenarios. Interestingly, Putin supporters were still significantly more likely to invest in a business venture under Putin than under Shoigu or a young winner representing the opposition. One possible explanation for this finding is the fear of political unrest and instability as a result of political change – an idea actively promulgated on Russian state TV.

Another finding shows that government opponents as well as younger, better educated and wealthier citizens are less willing to work for the government, are more willing to emigrate and are in general more concerned about the country's development in the Putin treatment. This rather negative outlook of the most economically and socially active section of the population on the situation in the country shows that Putin's regime legitimacy that was long based on economic stability and his own popularity may no longer hold (Frye 2021; Makarkin 2011).

Politicized corruption and models of legal repression of local elites in Russia

The third paper continues the theme of authoritarian survival and actors' incentives under autocracy. The study combines the literature on elite repression, corruption as well as on local politics in Russia to explore how legal repression via politicized corruption functions at the local (city) level in the country and to identify common models of this legal repression.

In Russia about 10% of mayors of its larger cities are prosecuted for corruption-related offences, including mayors affiliated with the ruling United Russia party (Buckley et al. 2022). Mayors are charged with bribe-taking or abuse of office, even though quite often fractional disputes or personal grudges lie at the core of criminal proceedings. As also demonstrated by previous research on China (Li 2019; Lorentzen and Lu 2018; Zhu and Zhang 2017), corruption can be politicized and selectively used as a stick rather than as a carrot, and allegations of

corruption become a useful tool of legal repression of elites (Levitsky and Way 2010). Legal repression takes advantage of some of institutional shortcomings of Russia - wide-spread corruption, the unrule of law with the legal system subordinated to the political authority, as well as wrong incentives given to courts and law enforcers (McCarthy 2014; Popova 2012; Rochlitz, Kazun, and Yakovlev 2020; Sakwa 2020; Schulze, Sjahrir, and Zakharov 2016; Solomon 2010).

The study uses data on 84 mayors of Russia's largest cities, both appointed and elected, who were accused of corruption-related crimes between 2002 and 2018. The cases follow distinct scenarios and motivations, and two factors seem to be responsible for major distinctions among them - whether there was an indication of political motives behind the arrest and whether the mayor was appointed or popularly elected. Based on the interaction of these two variables, I identify three following models of legal repression of Russian mayors: politically motivated purge and struggle, and state (bureaucracy)-driven repression. Most cases of legal repression under observation are cases of struggle that involve an elected mayor and political motives – an elite conflict between the mayor and other elites, most often the regional authorities and personally the governor. This shows how legal repression can be used to sideline political opponents, punish disloyalty (in the case of United Russia mayors) and reverse the election results. Since removal of an appointed mayor is possible through legal means, there are few cases when the arrest of an appointee is politically motivated (purge). The third type of legal repression where there is no apparent intra-elite conflict is state (bureaucracy)-driven. Here the motivation is to fight corruption and legitimize the regime (Gilley 2009; Seligson 2002) but it is also connected to another prominent feature of the Russian system, namely its bureaucratic performance incentives, where law enforcement agencies are under pressure to keep arrest numbers high to meet their performance targets and get promoted (McCarthy 2014; Paneyakh 2014). After having presented the models, I proceed to illustrate them with concrete cases of legal anticorruption repression.

I also demonstrate how legal repression, driven by a desire to get rid of an opponent, to create a veneer of legitimacy or advance your career, contributes to local elite replacement and produces certain changes in local institutional arrangements.

1.5. Conclusion

More than a third of the world's population lived in non-democratic countries in 2021 (Freedom House 2022). In this day and age this persistence of authoritarianism seems astonishing. But as history shows, authoritarian regimes can last for decades and transform into another autocracy, while democracies can backslide and join the ranks of dictatorships. Authoritarian countries are driven by a very specific logic based mostly on power preservation and rent maximization (Magaloni 2008). Autocracy is at the same time a pluralistic category: non-democracies are heterogeneous and vary in terms of their institutional frameworks, elite's incentives and modes of maintaining power. Some, like competitive autocracies, may have a set of institutions similar to those of democracies but informal practices nonetheless often override formal rules (Levitsky and Way 2010). Different combinations of these institutional forms are responsible for varying regime longevity and varying socio-economic outcomes across authoritarian regimes. In general, however, autocrats foster institutions and beliefs that help perpetuate the status quo but are economically counter-productive, are inimical to the free flow of ideas and innovation and produce bad governance (Acemoglu et al. 2019; Gel'man 2022; Papaioannou and Siourounis 2008; Persson and Tabellini 2006). The reluctance of the incumbents to forfeit their 'rights' for rents and to open access to economic and political resources to regime outsiders is responsible for underperformance of most autocracies.

As described in Section 1.2, research on the political economy of authoritarianism conversely discusses a multitude of relevant issues, for instance, the impact of political competitiveness on environmental quality, the effect of lingering authoritarianism on wider socio-economic outcomes, as well as elite repression as one of the strategies of autocratic survival. The present thesis joins the ongoing debate over these issues and makes certain contributions to their study.

Regarding the contribution to the first issue - political competitiveness/environmental performance nexus - my research in Chapter 2 studies the effect of authoritarianism on the problem of household waste management at the regional level in Russia – a topic that has not yet been thoroughly investigated despite its urgency. I find that more authoritarian regions in Russia are likely to recycle a higher share of household waste. Overall, the finding contradicts much of the research on authoritarian performance that shows that autocracies tend to underperform. It corresponds, however, to the idea of authoritarian environmentalism, a concept that has been mostly applied to the case of China. While extending models and concepts to encompass other cases can be construed as 'conceptual stretching' (Collier and

Mahon 1993; Sartori 1970), the concept was both insightful and useful to frame the paper on Russia.

As far as the second topic is concerned, the effect of authoritarian durability on wider socio-economic outcomes, Chapter 3 moves the focus from institutions or elites and rather examines individual expectations and intended behavior of the Russian public. It shows how differently people perceive different political alternatives depending on a number of background characteristics, and how individual preferences for the status quo or political change can potentially affect individual economic or social behavior, like their willingness to invest or emigrate. The Chapter finds that the population is unanimously concerned about the state of the Russian economy under Putin, but there are major divides among Russians along political lines on a number of other issues. It might also offer some new explanation of why unpopular authoritarian regimes might be less economically successful. Moreover, the study recognizes a bias towards elite-centered approaches in area studies and political economy in general (Lankina 2023), hence its focus on people's individual attitudes and expectations.

Chapter 4 contributes to the research on elite repression by focusing on a lesser studied topic of legal repression of political and bureaucratic elites. I show that there are three distinct models of legal repression of Russian local elites where anticorruption is selectively used to get rid of political rivals, punish disloyalty and reverse the election results. It is alternatively used as a legitimation strategy and a way to fulfill performance requirements. I also demonstrate how this agency-driven anticorruption prosecution - driven by animosity and individual aspirations - interferes with formal processes of elite turnover and subsequently contributes to the consolidation of power by the regime and its insiders. The study also highlights several important features of Russian authoritarian politics, such as the arbitrary use of law and its subordination to the political authority, contentious intra-elite relations, the unrestrained power of the security services and wrong bureaucratic incentives.

Central to the dissertation is also the acknowledgement that authoritarian politics cannot be understood by looking solely at structures and institutions - intentions and incentives of different actors are equally important for the study of a specific authoritarian context. The dissertation draws inferences from the case of Russia, a competitive personalist autocracy. Although post-Soviet Russia has been a focus of extensive research for three decades, the dissertation papers elaborate on several aspects of Russian authoritarian politics that have not been thoroughly studied yet. They offer, for example, some new insights into incentives and behavior of the elites and the mass public in Russia.

Apart from this theoretical and empirical contribution, the thesis makes a methodological contribution to the research field. Methodological approaches used in the dissertation papers range from a qualitative typology building to statistical panel data analysis. They also use a variety of data sources with both numeric and textual data – primary survey data, government statistics, media reports and different Internet sources. The dissertation is also unique in that each paper focuses on actors at a different level – individual attitudes from a national public opinion survey, environmental performance of regional governments and elite dynamics at the local (municipal) level.

However, the dissertation has some limitations. Its scope is quite broad and each paper focuses on a specific topic. Although this offers insights into different aspects of Russian politics, this probably did not allow to thoroughly investigate each observed phenomenon. For example, instead of concentrating exclusively on environmental politics in Russia throughout the dissertation, only one paper studies this topic. Still, this opens avenues for future research directions and more in-depth investigations, given availability of data and access to the field. Another limitation is that due to the unavailability of data in the paper on waste management (Chapter 2) it was not possible to test alternative mechanisms that could explain the results. A plethora of variables that could potentially be of interest was considered but in the end they could not be included in the analysis because the regional level data was lacking. Again, future research might broaden the scope of the analysis and test alternative explanations.

Despite these limitations, the dissertation advances our understanding of authoritarian Russia. The country is now undergoing a major crisis, domestically and internationally, and facing numerous challenges. However, the chances of regime change and of democratization in the near future appear slim. Russia is also quickly closing up and research on Russia is likely to become more complicated in the future. However, it remains crucial for the academic community and policy makers alike to understand the inner workings of the country's political and economic systems and implications of the elites' choices. Chapter 3, for example, offers a glimpse into the public opinion in Russia shortly before the war in Ukraine. It shows that economic stagnation is a major concern of the Russian population. The economic burden of the war and the sanctions can and most probably will at some point reflect badly on the already low quality of life of ordinary Russians which might further upset the authoritarian bargain. It will be interesting to witness whether nationalist sentiments, shifting blame to the West and Putin's popularity will be enough to sustain regime legitimacy when the economy plummets.

The lessons learned for Russia can also be useful for the study of other autocracies. Although Russia has many unique characteristics, it is still in many ways a typical autocracy. For instance, legal repression has been a widely used tool of coercion in many authoritarian regimes, in Singapore (Rajah 2012), Egypt (Moustafa 2007) and Turkey (Bali 2012). So, Chapter 4 could be of relevance to scholars who study a similar topic in another context.

To conclude, the study of authoritarianism and its implications remains of paramount importance for social scientists and different stakeholders in politics and economics. Although there is a growing agreement that there exists a bias towards Russia studies in East European/post-Soviet research, disregarding Russia completely might be an oversight. It is after all one of the largest and most powerful autocracies in the world, so it is necessary to keep track with the country's developments and understand the mechanisms at play. The dissertation makes its modest contribution in this regard and invites additional research on Russia and the political economy of authoritarianism.

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Chapter 2

2. Environmental Politics in Authoritarian Regimes: Waste Management in the Russian Regions

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Abstract

Russian regions exhibit significant variation in their waste management efforts, despite the urgency of the problem and the importance of waste management for all regional governments. To examine this variation, we apply the concept of authoritarian environmentalism, which suggests that authoritarian governments have distinctive capabilities for tackling certain environmental challenges. Analysis of a regional panel data set for the period 2012–2019 shows that our measure of the degree of authoritarianism – the share of votes for the ruling party United Russia in parliamentary elections – has a strong positive effect on the share of recycled waste in the Russian regions. This result indicates that more authoritarian regions tend to recycle more household waste than less authoritarian regions. However, it could also be the case that more authoritarian governments are simply more likely to manipulate their environmental statistics to show better environmental performance.

Keywords: authoritarian environmentalism, waste recycling, Russia, subnational politics

JEL: Q53, Q58, P48, R58

Publication

This article has been published in *Russian Politics* 8(3): 305-330, 2023.

doi:10.30965/24518921-00803002

2.1. Introduction

There is unambiguous evidence that the environmental challenges the world is now facing can have catastrophic consequences for national economies, political systems and people's livelihoods. There is an ongoing debate in scientific and policy circles about what determines environmental performance and, more specifically, whether democratic or authoritarian systems can provide a more comprehensive and effective solution to ecological problems. Although empirical studies have found that democratic systems are more conducive to environmental protection (Bernauer and Koubi 2009; Buitenzorgy and Mol 2011; Farzin and Bond 2006; Li and Reuveny 2006), scholars have advanced the concept of authoritarian environmentalism, pointing to various deficiencies of democratic governance (Beeson 2010; Gilley 2012; Shearman and Smith 2007). Authoritarian environmentalism emphasizes intrinsic characteristics of authoritarianism that arguably make it easier to overcome the difficulties of organization and mobilization that are inherent in democracies, and thus to more successfully mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation. In turn, authoritarian environmentalism is argued to further entrench and propagate authoritarian practices. China is the most conspicuous example of state-led, non-participatory authoritarian environmentalism. China promotes its image as an 'ecological civilization' and its commitment to environmental protection. Though there has indeed been some progress in China's 'go green' policies, it has been achieved through authoritarian (and often draconian) measures (Li and Shapiro 2020). But as humanity is facing an impending environmental crisis, this authoritarian approach to environmental governance may present an attractive alternative to gridlock-prone democratic approaches to fighting climate change.

The present study applies the model of authoritarian environmentalism to shed light on the case of Russia, another authoritarian state. It is a useful way to frame our argument and to explain environmental politics under autocracy. Russia is an electoral authoritarian regime and, despite high levels of power consolidation and centralization, there are still differences in the entrenchment of authoritarianism across Russia's regions. We make use of regional variations in the degree of authoritarianism – as measured by vote share for the ruling party United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*) in parliamentary elections – to study its effect on subnational environmental performance, particularly the environmental problem of household waste.

Waste accumulation and disposal is a major global challenge. Every year, the world generates more than two billion tons of municipal solid waste (MSW), of which at least 33% is not managed in an environmentally safe manner (World Bank 2018). This poses a major threat to

public health and the environment, as poorly controlled waste disposal has negative impacts on air, soil, groundwater, and marine ecosystems. Countries vary greatly in their environmental performance, and particularly in their approaches to waste management. Russia lags behind most developed and many developing countries with regard to waste management. In 2019 only as much as 7% of municipal solid waste was recycled while the rest was transported to landfill sites, many of which are unauthorized open dumps (in the EU, 48% of municipal waste was recycled on average in 2019[8]). Russia ranked 122nd in the 2020 Environmental Performance Index on its controlled solid waste metric, which refers to the percentage of household and commercial waste that is collected and treated in an environmentally safe manner (Wendling et al. 2020). While certain environmental problems are more urgent in some regions than in others (for example, recurrent forest fires in Siberia and the thawing permafrost in the Russian North), the problem of accumulation and disposal of MSW has become particularly pertinent to all Russian regions in recent years (Vinitskaia et al. 2021).

The topic of waste disposal has become widely discussed and politically charged in Russia, and has been repeatedly addressed during the annual Q&A television broadcast *Direct Line with President Vladimir Putin*. Russian regional top executives (governors) are assessed by the federal center according to how well they are able to deal with the problem of waste management.[9] A number of nationwide opinion surveys have revealed much public concern over the issue of garbage disposal: respondents name it as the second most urgent environmental problem after air pollution, with more than a third of them voicing dissatisfaction with the waste management system in their region.[10] A 2020 survey by the Levada Center, a Russian independent polling organization, showed that the number of people who considered waste disposal to be one of the biggest environmental challenges increased from 8% in 2010 to 17% in 2019.[11] Public dissatisfaction with it has spilled into many protests across the country in recent years, with people voicing serious concerns about the environmental safety of existing landfills, plans to create new landfill sites and incineration facilities, and illegal dumping. On February 3, 2019, protests under the slogan 'Russia is not a dump' were held in about 26 regions across Russia.[12]

[8] European Environment Agency, https://www.eea.europa.eu/ims/waste-recycling-in-europe.

[9] https://rg.ru/2021/02/04/putin-utverdil-kriterii-ocenki-gubernatorov.html.

[10] https://www.rbc.ru/politics/06/02/2019/5c59b1709a79478082250bcb.

[11] https://www.levada.ru/2020/01/23/problemy-okruzhayushhej-sredy/.

[12] https://www.rbc.ru/society/03/02/2019/5c56fe4c9a7947c0698465c2.

The logical solution to this mounting problem is promotion of waste sorting and recycling as well as reduction of landfill use, which has been a common practice in most developed countries. This is a declared objective of the waste management reform that started in 2019 and is being implemented in all Russian regions. While some regional governments have worked to improve their waste management systems, others have failed to do so. This is puzzling considering the importance of waste management for all regional governments and the urgency of the problem for the Russian population as reflected in public opinion polls. Therefore, we study environmental performance of regional governments in Russia by focusing on their efforts to mitigate the waste problem. Drawing on the literature on authoritarian environmentalism, we examine *whether more authoritarian regional governments in Russia are better able to solve the problem of waste management*.

We use regional-level data for the period 2012–2019, with the percentage of recycled MSW in the region as our measure of environmental performance. We find that the share of votes for the ruling party United Russia in the parliamentary elections significantly and positively affects the share of recycled waste in the region. This result suggests that, in line with the concept of authoritarian environmentalism, more authoritarian regions can provide a more effective response to the problem of household waste. However, we also acknowledge that the regions with a higher share of votes for United Russia may more often engage in electoral fraud and might also be prone to fudging environmental statistics. These results are nevertheless informative, as they provide an avenue for more refined analysis of environmental policies at the regional level in Russia and may facilitate further discussion of environmental politics in authoritarian contexts. This study contributes to the debate over the effect of political factors on environmental performance by positioning itself within the scholarship on authoritarian environmentalism and by focusing on variation within one country rather than on cross-country comparisons.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, we review the concept of authoritarian environmentalism. Next, we discuss the application of this concept for examining the case of Russia, and introduce our main hypothesis. We then provide an overview of waste management politics in the Russian regions. In the next section we describe our data and methodology, and then present and discuss the results. In the final section we draw some conclusions.

2.2. Theorizing Authoritarian Environmentalism

A large body of empirical and theoretical literature has focused on factors that influence environmental quality. For instance, a number of papers have investigated the effect of economic development and demonstrated a negative relationship between GDP per capita and environmental degradation when income reaches a certain level – what is known as the environmental Kuznets curve (Apergis and Ozturk 2015; Apergis and Payne 2009; Buitenzorgy and Mol 2011; Grossman and Krueger 1995; Lean and Smyth 2010; Orubu and Omotor 2011; Panayotou 1997). Another important and heavily debated determinant of environmental performance is the type of political system, i.e. whether democratic or authoritarian systems perform better with regard to environmental protection.

Empirical studies have shown that democracies, with their civil liberties, freedom of the media and electoral accountability, are likely to have better environmental outcomes (Bernauer and Koubi 2009; Buitenzorgy and Mol 2011; Farzin and Bond 2006; Li and Reuveny 2006). Democracies also tend to have well-performing institutions (for example, secure property and contract rights and an established rule of law) that are found to affect the ability to monitor and mitigate environmental degradation (Ibrahim and Law 2016; Lau, Choong, and Eng 2014; Panayotou 1997). When one considers within-regime-type heterogeneity, however, different subtypes of authoritarian regimes perform differently in the provision of public goods, including environmental protection, and for some environmental indicators hegemonic autocracies even outperform democracies (Eichhorn and Linhart 2022).

Some scholars have also highlighted aspects of democratic governance that could be detrimental to environmental quality. It is argued that decision-making in democracies is more heavily influenced by interest groups than in authoritarian regimes. Although the impact that different actors and interests have on policymaking in autocracies is non-negligible in many cases, it is constrained in comparison to democracies (Carlitz and Povitkina 2021). Dryzek (1987) maintains that profit-oriented corporate interests in capitalist democracies support democratic leaders in their ascent to power and then can influence policies, not necessarily to the betterment of the environment. Another argument is that democratic politicians must be sensitive to various concerns of their constituencies, and are sometimes compelled to respond first to economic concerns of the public rather than to environmental imperatives (Midlarsky 1998). Madden (2014), for example, demonstrates that the number of veto players in OECD countries negatively affects climate-policy adoption. As a result, democracies are believed to be slow in responding to environmental problems and in implementing unpleasant but

necessary policies because of resistance among different stakeholders and veto players (Wurster 2013).

A concept of eco-authoritarianism was proposed in response to these concerns over democratic environmental policymaking. In the 1970s the problems of growing population and ecological degradation were attracting increasing attention, and scholars began calling for drastic measures to ensure the survival of humankind (Heilbroner 1974; Ophuls 1977). They argued that, in order to prevent ecological catastrophe, societies and individuals have to curb their appetites and put constraints on their activities. However, individuals in liberal democratic societies are resistant to the imposition of limits on their behavior. As a consequence, environmental progress may hinge on authoritarian governments that can effectively enforce rules and implement necessary changes (Shahar 2015). These arguments initially gained little traction, but they surfaced again in the 2000s. While admitting that authoritarian regimes so far had established a poor track record of protecting the environment, the concept of authoritarian environmentalism was again put forward as an alternative approach to environmental policymaking and policy implementation (Beeson 2010, 2018; Gilley 2012).

It is both a prescriptive and descriptive public policy model that has two dimensions. First, it is a top-down policy process that is dominated by an autonomous central state and is non-participatory in nature. The environmental decision-making process is concentrated within a few government agencies, and only a limited number of social actors are allowed to participate in the production of environmental knowledge and policies. The innovation of environmental technologies and the implementation of environmental protections are also tightly controlled by the state (Y. Li and Shapiro 2020). The second aspect of this state-led environmentalism is the restriction of individual liberties through the outlawing of environmentally unsustainable forms of behavior. This relates to the repressive nature of an authoritarian state where coercive means are used to achieve environmental ends. Since many veto players are excluded from the process, this top-down approach to environmental protection can arguably make it easier to provide an effective and concerted response to environmental problems, especially those that are politically challenging. The model thus emphasizes the centrality of the state and its coercive power (Li and Shapiro 2020).

The model of authoritarian environmentalism represents an ideal type (Lo 2015; Martus 2021). It does not exist in a pure form but the concept has been applied to a number of authoritarian countries, including Singapore (Han 2017; Ortmann 2016), Vietnam (Bruun 2020; Bruun and Rubin 2022), Thailand and Myanmar (Simpson 2013; Simpson and Smits 2018), Kazakhstan

(Wu 2022) and, most notably, China. China is characterized by a mono-centric, top-down and non-participatory environmental policy process. The central government started administrative reforms in 2018 to increase state capacity in environmental policy and improve environmental bureaucracy, and consolidated power under the roof of the new Ministry of Ecology and Environment (Kostka and Zhang 2018). Although mid-level environmental activism is still present and tolerated by the authorities, under Xi Jinping the involvement of environmental NGOs in policy processes and high-profile campaigns became more limited, especially after the 2017 Chinese Foreign NGO Law (Demchuk et al. 2021; Plantan 2018; Teets 2018). Moreover, harsher punishments were introduced for violations of environmental protection regulations and for nonfulfillment of environmental targets by local officials (Kostka and Zhang 2018).

Although China has achieved certain progress in terms of environmental quality – for example, in the field of green technologies – observers have noted certain limitations of China's authoritarian environmentalism (Beeson 2018; Eaton and Kostka 2014; Gilley 2012; Li et al. 2019; Lo 2015). Despite the concentration of executive authority, policy implementation is dispersed and is often distorted and undermined at the local level. The central authorities often fail to enforce implementation and to control local officials, resulting in major gaps between stated policy goals and outcomes. Besides, environmental protection is often achieved at the expense of human rights and people's livelihoods when, for example, people are forcibly resettled because a new dam is built. These crackdowns and restrictions of civil liberties (with the help of modern digital surveillance tools) are carried out in the name of environmental protection but they in fact help consolidate the authoritarian regime. The state actively exploits its successes in environmental protection to boost the popularity and legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (Gilley 2012; Li and Shapiro 2020).

2.3. Environmental Politics in Authoritarian Russia

In this paper we apply the concept of authoritarian environmentalism to another authoritarian country: Russia. With a few exceptions (Martus 2021; Wu and Martus 2021), the model has not been considered when discussing environmental governance in Russia. Russia and China, this pattern for authoritarian environmentalism, differ in many respects, for example, in terms of state engagement with environmental governance (Martus 2021) or with environmental activism (Plantan 2018). Still, the model of authoritarian environmentalism is a useful lens through which to examine environmental politics in authoritarian Russia. Besides, in the past decade the drive for centralization and consolidation of power under Xi Jingping and Vladimir

Putin has led to certain convergences, for example, in the system of bureaucratic appointments with a more frequent cadre turnover and reliance on 'outsiders' (Remington et al. 2022). While subnational officials previously had different performance incentives – economic growth in China and the ability to mobilize support for the ruling party in Russia (Buckley and Reuter 2019; Li and Zhou 2005; Libman and Rochlitz 2019; Rochlitz et al. 2015; Yao and Zhang 2015) – political connections and loyalty are also becoming important for cadre promotion in China (Jia 2022).

The nature of environmental policymaking in Russia is also inherently top-down and non-participatory, which corresponds to the concept of authoritarian environmentalism. There is little cooperation between the authorities and non-state actors such as environmental activist groups. The environmental movement in Russia has found it difficult to organize collectively and engage in the policy process (Wu and Martus 2021), and the NGO laws passed by the Russian state between 2006 and 2015 significantly restricted the outreach of environmental activists and complicated their operations. Many Russian civil society organizations also rely on financial support from the state – despite crackdowns on the civil society, the state provides funding to NGOs, thus buying their loyalty (Bederson and Semenov 2021). Scholars have also noted a hierarchical model of governance present in Russia that is sometimes described as a 'power vertical' (Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Sharafutdinova 2010), with all lines of authority coming from the Kremlin. Major environmental policies originate at the federal level and are then brought down to the regional and local levels to be implemented. Such was the case with the country's waste management reform, which was initiated by the central government to respond to the waste crisis, but which the regions are tasked with carrying out.

Russia offers a compelling setting to study the concept of authoritarian environmentalism. By exploiting subnational variation in Russia, we can test whether authoritarian regimes can indeed produce an optimal response to environmental problems and whether *more authoritarian regions in Russia are more likely to better tackle the problem of waste management by having a higher share of recycled waste.* First, Russia exhibits considerable regional variation in terms of waste management efforts, as will be discussed below. Furthermore, unlike China, Russia is an electoral authoritarian regime (Gel'man 2012; Golosov 2011; Kailitz and Stockemer 2017; Smyth 2020) – being a 'personalist autocracy' (Frye 2021), it still holds regular elections for executive and legislative offices. The country is what Richard Sakwa (2010) calls a 'dual state': a confluence of a constitutional state with formal institutions (multiple parties and elections) and an administrative regime with its informal practices and

personalized networks. Although elections are not free, we can observe considerable diversity across the subnational political landscape (Panov and Ross 2013; 2019), that is, in the *degree of authoritarianism*. This is evident in the varying levels of support for the ruling party, United Russia. For example, in the 2016 State Duma elections, United Russia received 85% of votes in the Republic of Mordovia while its vote share was only 38% in Khabarovsk Krai. Electoral results at the regional level allow us to tease out which effect the degree of authoritarianism has on regional environmental performance, that is, waste management efforts in Russia's regions.

Focusing on subnational variation within one country allows us to better isolate the effect of political competitiveness on environmental performance while holding constant certain national-level parameters. Some empirical papers have studied the effect of non-economic factors on environmental outcomes at the subnational level in autocracies. For example, Carlitz and Povitkina (2021) found that there is a negative relationship between higher levels of interest group activity and water and air quality at the district level in Vietnam. Wu and colleagues (2018) examined the impact of performance assessment and public participation on four kinds of pollutant emissions in 31 Chinese provinces in 2004–2015. To our knowledge, this paper is the first to study the relationship between environmental outcomes and the degree of authoritarianism at the subnational level in Russia.

2.4. Waste Management in the Russian Regions

The poor system of waste management, where over 90% of household waste today is disposed of in landfills or open dumps, is a legacy of the Soviet Union. According to the Russian statistics service Rosstat, over the past decade, generation of MSW in Russia has increased by 25%, and this trend is unlikely to reverse. In 32 out of Russia's 85 regions existing landfill capacities will be exhausted by 2024 (in 17 of them by 2022), with no capabilities of building new ones (Russian Accounts Chamber 2020). As it stands, overflowing landfills often do not meet the requirements of environmental legislation, raising concern over contamination of groundwater and pollution of air and soil with poisonous decomposition gases. The waste crisis sparked numerous grassroots protests across the country in the late 2010s, but the protests were localized and not well coordinated. The success rate of the protests varied from case to case: protests around the Yadrovo landfill in Moscow Oblast in 2018 eventually prompted the closure of the site in 2020.[13]

[13]https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/news/2020/12/15/851031-v-podmoskove-zakrili-musornii-poligon-yadrovo.

Despite the generally low engagement of the Russian state with environmental issues, the magnitude of the household waste problem has become so apparent in recent years that the federal authorities finally decided to offer a large-scale response by launching a full-fledged country-wide waste management reform in 2017.[14] However, the start of the reform was delayed until January 2019 due to slow development of accompanying regulatory acts at the federal level, after which the regions were unable to make necessary preparations in time. The reform is carried out within the scope of two federal projects: Clean Country and the Integrated System for Municipal Waste Management, which are part of the national project Ecology 2018–2024. Clean Country aims to mitigate accumulated environmental damage and includes closure and recultivation of landfills. The main objective of the Integrated System for Municipal Waste Management is to create a high-tech well-functioning infrastructure for the recycling of household waste in order to increase the share of recycled (or 'utilized') waste to 36% by 2024 and to limit the use of landfill sites to disposal of unrecyclable waste. The executor of the Integrated System for Municipal Waste Management is a public company, the Russian Environmental Operator, created in 2019 to administer the reform. It is tasked with streamlining the haphazard waste management systems in the regions and bringing under control local MSW enterprises that have been part of the shadow economy for the past 30 years (Dregulo and Khodachek 2022).

At the federal level, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and its regulatory body Rosprirodnadzor are two institutions in charge of overseeing the system of MSW. At the subnational level it is Rosprirodnadzor local branches and ministries or departments in regional and municipal governments that are responsible for MSW. To start the reform, all regions were expected to develop a regional program and a territorial plan for waste management, to choose one or several regional operators responsible for the whole cycle of waste collection and disposal, and to determine a tariff or fee that the population in the region would pay for waste collection. Main sources of funding for the waste management system are federal and regional

[14] The issue of waste disposal was first addressed in the 2012 state program Protection of Environment. Some of the target indicators pertained to the share of recycled household waste, with increases over the years. Other policy documents include the 2012 "Foundations of State Policy of Environmental Development of the Russian Federation until 2030" and the 2017 "Strategy of Environmental Safety of the Russian Federation until 2025." The main legal documents concerning waste management are 1998 Federal Law No. 89 "On Production and Consumption Waste" and 2002 Federal Law No. 7 "On the Protection of the Environment." Among other issues, the former outlines tasks and powers of different levels of government, with regional and local governments responsible for on-the-ground implementation of federal policies and management of the whole waste disposal system.

budgets (through the Ecology project), private investments, waste collection fees paid by households, and the environmental tax paid by companies that fail to utilize their industrial waste. Given the regions' budgetary constraints, they can also apply for federal subsidies to meet the targets set by the Ecology project. One of the eligibility criteria is the attraction of private investments for MSW infrastructure projects (Dregulo and Khodachek 2022).

Three years after the start of the reform, most commentators agreed that the reform was stalling and had not yet produced the expected results. Some of the reasons for this are a lack of efficiency and coordination of both federal and regional authorities, the absence of regulatory mechanisms, and a lack of investments in the recycling infrastructure (Dregulo and Khodachek 2022; Masyutina and Paustyan 2022; Tatarenko, Petrova, and Lonitskaya 2020). However, policy implementation – that is, "actions taken by governmental actors to carry out a public policy decision" (Ryan 2015, p. 520) – is decentralized and regions have some discretion in setting and acting on their environmental agenda. While the central government develops the overarching framework for MSW and sets the main objectives, it is regional and local governments that are responsible for the practical implementation of federal environmental policies and management of the whole waste disposal system (Martus 2020). Although, unlike China, the bureaucratic incentives system in Russia does not prioritize social and economic performance of regional officials (Rochlitz et al. 2015), there is still a variation in policy outcomes across Russia's regions.

In fact, there have been some sporadic regional efforts to tackle the problem of MSW across the country since the early 2010s. While at the national level the authorities have often failed to effectively organize actors and resources, a number of regional governments over the past years have developed various approaches to solving the waste problem. Some regions, for example, Kamchatka, Zabaikalsk and Krasnodar Krai, are under particular time pressure to act, as their landfill capacities are nearly exhausted. A number of regions perform well in terms of coverage of the population with availability of recycling bins (for example, the Republic of Mordovia) but have zero or limited recycling facilities, while others (for example, Krasnodar Krai) have a waste recycling plant but hardly any waste sorting. Regions with a relatively small population, such as the Komi Republic, do not generate sufficient household waste to make recycling an attractive investment project and instead transport their MSW to other regions for recycling.

For instance, in Kamchatka Krai a recycling plant was built by local businessmen before the official start of the reform in 2018. However, there was no organized system of waste sorting

in the region, so all waste had to be separated by workers at the plant. Because it was not possible to recycle everything at the plant, 350 tons of paper were sent to a neighboring region each month. In addition, 100 tons of plastic were sent to Moscow Oblast, which is more than 6,000 kilometers away.[15] In 2019, waste sorting was launched in the region and several dozens of yellow containers for plastic first appeared there.[16] In another example, the first waste recycling plant in Krasnodar Krai was built in Sochi as a requirement for hosting the 2014 Olympics.[17] Its operation was inefficient because household waste was not separated but instead transported to a landfill site located 300 kilometers away from the city.[18] A similar situation arose in Zabaikalsk Krai, where a waste recycling plant was built in 2012, but due to a lack of financing it was opened only in 2015 and closed nine months later.[19]

The Komi Republic and the Republic of Mordovia have made waste sorting widely available. In Saransk, the capital of Mordovia, every household has access to nearby recycling bins; the local waste operator Remondis (a German company) introduced the first containers in the city in 2012.[20] In Komi there are around 1,300 containers for plastic and paper in different parts of the republic. However, neither region has any recycling plants, so all collected recyclable household waste is transported to other regions such as Nizhny Novgorod and Penza, while the rest goes to local landfills. There have been plans to build a recycling facility in Mordovia and two waste sorting plants and four incinerators in Komi, but the implementation has been very slow because of the lack of investment and disagreements with local authorities and activists.[21] Although some of these regional efforts might seem haphazard, we still observe that some regions perform better than others and were in fact taking measures to solve the waste problem even before the reform began in 2019 (see Appendix Figure 1).

2.5. Method and Data

Dependent variable

As mentioned above, we are interested in teasing out the effect that different levels of authoritarianism have on the environmental performance of regional governments in the field

[15] https://mir24.tv/news/16374469/vtoraya-zhizn-musora-na-kamchatke-iz-othodov-delayut-trotuarnuyu-plitku.
[16] https://www.kamchatinfo.com/epicentre/detail/33843/.
[17] https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2208568.
[18] https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4680992.
[19] https://www.chita.ru/news/153108/.
[20] https://www.idelreal.org/a/28504423.html.
[21] https://komi.aif.ru/society/jkh/destruktivnyy_element_horosha_li_novaya_shema_utilizacii_musora
https://www.e-mordovia.ru/glava-rm/novosti/artyem-zdunov-poruchil-srochno-pristupit-k-vypolneniyu-plano/.

of waste management. Our dependent variable is the percentage of municipal solid waste in the total amount of generated waste that has been transported to recycling facilities (*log Share of Recycled MSW*[22]). We calculate it using official data from government statistics (Rosstat), specifically yearly regional data on the generation of municipal solid waste and on the amount of MSW transported to recycling plants (in thousands of m^3). Because waste recycling was declared a key to solving the waste disposal problem in Russia and is one of the main indicators in the national project Ecology, we use this measure as a proxy for regional waste management performance. Official regional and subnational statistics in Russia are not always consistent and reliable. Across our recycling data we observe that some regions seem to have had quite a consistent recycling policy over the last 10 years (for example, Lipetsk Oblast), while in other regions there are noticeable fluctuations in both generation and recycling of MSW. We checked the quality of the data on the amount of MSW transported to recycling facilities by going through annual environmental reports compiled by regional governments, as well as official and media sources.

Independent variable

Our main explanatory variable is the degree of authoritarianism. All of Russia's regions are electoral authoritarian regimes, but there are still different levels of regime competitiveness, with some regions being more competitive and others more hegemonic (Buckley and Reuter 2019; Panov and Ross 2013, 2019; Rosenberg, Kozlov, and Libman 2018). There are regimes with a higher level of political competition, such as Sverdlovsk Oblast and Perm Krai; regions with quasi-authoritarian regimes, like Kemerovo and Tatarstan; and also personalistic dictatorships in the republics of the North Caucasus (Rochlitz, Mitrokhina, and Nizovkina 2021). We measure the degree of authoritarianism by the regional-level election results for the United Russia party in the State Duma elections (*log UR Duma Vote Share*). It is a commonly used measure for the political competitiveness of Russian regions or, in other words, for the degree of authoritarianism (see, for example, Rochlitz, Mitrokhina, and Nizovkina 2021).

The share of votes cast for the dominant party can well capture a government's authoritarian power. Regional politicians are expected by the federal center to signal their loyalty by delivering a high number of votes to United Russia in federal elections. To produce the required

[22] Since its distribution is skewed, we log-transformed the dependent variable to normalize the distribution. Because some of the values were equal to 0, we added 1 before a log-transformation. In general, we performed the log-transformation of variables to normalize their distribution; see histograms in the Appendix.

electoral results, regional governments must have powerful political machines and sufficient bureaucratic capacity in order to mobilize voters, silence dissent and ultimately rig the elections. For example, they must have enough leverage to engage their clientelist brokers, such as local state enterprises' employers, to mobilize political support for their patrons among their employees (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014, 2019). They thus ensure high turnout, which is found to be positively correlated with a high share of votes for United Russia. At the same time, regional elites must possess coercive capacities to exert pressure on the civil society, block alternative messages, ban opposition candidates from the elections and punish defectors.

Control variables

There are many additional factors that can potentially influence environmental performance at the subnational level. To isolate the effect of our main variable of interest from other possible explanations, we include a number of controls in our analysis. Building on existing research, we include a measure of wealth of the region: gross regional product per capita (*log GRP per capita),* taken from Rosstat data. As mentioned above, the level of economic development is often used to explain environmental performance. In addition, higher income is associated with post-material values when people start "to prioritize climate change mitigation among other public policy issues and demand it from the elected leaders" (Povitkina 2018, 419). There is significant variation in income levels across Russia's regions. For example, GRP per capita in the Republic of Khakassia in 2019 was more than 15 times lower than that of Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, and its territory is one tenth of the size of Khanty-Mansi Okrug.

Since it has also been argued that the quality of institutions matters greatly in mitigation of environmental risks (Bhattarai and Hammig 2001; Culas 2007; Povitkina 2018), we examine how the quality of regional institutions relates to our dependent variable by using the rating of regions' *Investment Attractiveness* by the Rating Agency Expert. The RA Expert rating covers all Russian regions and is available for all years under observation. The rating combines two components (investment risk and investment potential) and accounts for such factors as quality of public administration and political and legal risks. The index rates all regions along the maximum potential/minimum risk–low potential/extreme risk scale. As an alternative measure of institutional quality, we also use *Crime Rate* in the region, that is, the number of crimes per capita, from Rosstat data.

To capture environmental performance at the regional level, it is also necessary to consider measures relating to governors' characteristics. The stability of a regime can be the basis for

successful implementation of long-term public policy. As argued by Olson (1993), a secure rational autocrat with a long time horizon has an encompassing interest in his domain and wants it to prosper. Eaton and Kostka (2014) find, for example, that in China the frequent cadre turnover disincentivizes local officials to implement long-term complex environmental policies, especially when their outcomes are not easily visible. Frequent turnover may also lead to disruption and even a complete remaking of policies. Ross and colleagues (2022) show that the length of time a governor has been in office positively affects the implementation of federal policies (for example, the 2012 May Decrees of President Putin). They argue that the longer the governor's tenure is, the more cohesive and consolidated regional elites are, which helps in implementing decisions coming from above. Thus, we expect that regions with longer-serving governors are likely to recycle more household waste. Our proxy for regional political stability is governors' turnover (*Number of Governors*, *2012–2019*). The same can be true for governors with strong personal ties to the region. Our regional ties measures are two dummy variables: whether the governor was born in the region (*Governor Born in Region*) and whether the governor worked in the region prior to assuming office in the last five years (*Governor Worked in Region*).

It has also been shown that subnational government capacity to implement environmental policy depends on available organizational resources, namely funding and human resources (Ryan 2015). We therefore include two measures of regional governments' bureaucratic capacity: regional spending on environmental protection as a share of the consolidated regional budget (*log Share of Environmental Spending*, based on Federal Treasury data) and the share of bureaucrats relative to the region's total population (*log Share of Bureaucrats*, Rosstat data). We also control for the level of urbanization (Rosstat data), *Urban Share*[23], since it is associated with higher levels of waste accumulation. Moscow alone, with its population of over 12 million people, produced 14% of all household waste generated in Russia in 2019.

Method

Our analysis focused on the period 2012–2019. We chose 2012 as our starting point because the problem of waste disposal was first addressed in the state program Protection of Environment in 2012. The years under observation end at 2019 because the data for a number of our indicators is not yet available for 2020. The data we use is regional-level and covers 83 Russian regions (excluding Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol). Our baseline sample,

[23] We do not perform a log-transformation with this variable, as its distribution resembles normal.

however, includes 78 regions since we excluded Russian atypical regions – four autonomous okrugs and the autonomous oblast – that are remote and have a very small population. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables included in the analysis.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, N=624

Variable	Min.	Max.	Median	Mean	Std. dev.
Share of Recycled MSW, %	0	100.00	0.10	9.07	17.72
UR Duma Vote Share, %	29.5	99.54	46.09	50.96	15.63
GRP per capita, rubles	77877.2	2407929.4	311819.8	374750.1	257529.5
Investment attractiveness	1	12	6	6.14	2.71
Urban Share, %	28.79	100	71	69.64	13.11
Share of Environmental Spending, %	0.01	3.68	0.17	0.22	0.27
Number of Governors, 2012-2019	1	4	1	1.31	0.55
Governor Born in Region	0	1	0	0.49	0.5
Governor Worked in Region	0	1	1	0.56	0.5
Crime Rate, %	0	3.65	1.45	1.51	0.53
Share of Bureaucrats, %	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.01

As we have panel data and want to account for region-specific unobserved heterogeneity, the ordinary least squares (OLS) method is not a suitable option, as it provides biased estimates. Fixed-effects models take care of unobserved time-invariant characteristics. As a result, the estimated coefficients of these models cannot be biased because of omitted time-invariant variables, which is important in our case.[24] To assess the appropriateness of fixed- and random-effects models, we conducted the Hausman specification test. Since the *p*-value in the Hausman test is smaller than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis that the random-effects model is more appropriate than the fixed-effects model (Wooldridge 2012). The results of the pooled OLS and random-effects models are displayed in Model 1 and Model 2 in Table 1 in the Appendix. We thus chose the fixed-effects (within) model as our estimator, clustering standard errors by region.

[24] We ran a number of tests to make sure that a fixed-effects model better fits our data. An *F*-test showed that time-fixed effects are needed. A Lagrange Multiplier Test has similarly confirmed the need to use a time-fixed-effects model, yielding a *p*-value of less than 0.05. In our fixed-effects models, we use a two-way effect, as it considers both individual and time effects in the panel data.

The empirical model builds on the following equation:

$$\ln(\text{MSWShare})_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln(\text{URShare})_{it} + \beta_2 X_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} + \lambda_i$$

where *i* stands for region, *t* for year, *ln(MSWShare)* is a natural logarithm of our dependent variable *Share of Recycled MSW*, β_0 is an intercept, *ln(URShare)* is log-transformed *UR Duma Vote Share, X* is a vector of the control variables, ε is an error term and λ_i is region-specific effects.

2.6. Results and Discussion

Our main results are presented in Models 1 and 2 in Table 2. A graphical representation of Model 1 results can also be seen on the coefficient plot in Figure 4 in the Appendix. Each column in Table 2 presents the estimates of an association between our dependent variable, the share of recycled waste, and our main explanatory variable, the degree of authoritarianism, controlling for a number of confounding factors. In Model 1 we have our baseline sample of 78 regions in the period 2012–2019. Because the waste management reform started in 2019 and the regions thus received an extra incentive to promote recycling, in Model 2 we exclude the year 2019 as a potential external shock to ensure that our results remain robust.

Table 2: Relationship between waste recycling and authoritarianism

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
log UR Duma Vote Share	1.791* (0.739)	1.629* (0.707)	1.476* (0.744)	1.032† (0.601)	1.787* (0.730)	1.715* (0.755)
log GRP per capita	-0.970 (1.042)	-0.889 (0.992)	-0.608 (1.021)	-0.780 (0.895)	-0.954 (1.032)	-1.103 (1.062)
Investment Attractiveness	-0.008 (0.060)	0.054 (0.064)	-0.007 (0.060)	-0.082† (0.049)		-0.006 (0.059)
Urban Share	0.128** (0.042)	0.127* (0.052)	0.118** (0.042)	0.097 (0.134)	0.126** (0.042)	0.120** (0.043)
log Share of Environmental Spending	0.187 (0.495)	0.328 (0.704)	0.018 (0.467)	0.413 (0.498)	0.189 (0.479)	
Number of Governors, 2012-2019	-0.018 (0.172)	-0.128 (0.180)	-0.090 (0.163)	-0.132 (0.185)	-0.010 (0.172)	-0.223 (0.170)

Table 2 continues

Governor Born in Region	0.051 (0.231)	-0.025 (0.257)	0.173 (0.217)	0.080 (0.256)	0.063 (0.229)	0.062 (0.229)
Governor Worked in Region	0.259 (0.189)	0.174 (0.222)	0.153 (0.184)	0.086 (0.220)	0.253 (0.186)	0.253 (0.188)
Crime Rate					0.160 (0.228)	
log Share of Bureaucrats						-1.258 (1.015)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of regions	78	78	83	62	78	78
Observations	624	546	664	496	624	624
R2	0.045	0.046	0.034	0.033	0.046	0.049
Clustered standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$. Dependent variable: Share of Recycled MSW (ln), ln: natural logarithm; FE: fixed effects.						

In both models we observe a positive and statistically significant effect of *UR Duma Vote Share.* This indicates that regions with a higher share of votes for the United Russia party in the State Duma elections are more likely to recycle more of their municipal solid waste. In Model 1 the *UR Duma Vote Share* coefficient estimate is 1.79, so we can expect that, other things being equal, with a one percent increase in the share of votes for United Russia the share of recycled waste will increase by 1.79%. This result supports our hypothesis that regions with a higher share of votes cast for United Russia in the parliamentary elections would have a higher recycling share. To further check the robustness of our results, we ran a regression with our full sample of 83 regions (Model 3 in Table 2). *UR Duma Vote Share* is still positive and statistically significant. As mentioned earlier, our data shows that there have been spikes and drops in both generation and recycling of MSW in a few Russian regions across the years (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). Although there might be some logical explanations for these sudden changes (such as closure and reopening of recycling plants), we ran another robustness check by excluding the regions where the fluctuations were impossible to explain, which left us with 62 regions (Model 4). We still see the effect of *UR Duma Vote Share*, although it is less pronounced.

Turning to the results on the control variables, we see a positive and statistically significant effect of *Urban Share*. This indicates that more urbanized regions are more likely to recycle their household waste. Not only do urban centers generate a higher amount of waste than rural

areas, but existing landfill capacities can be limited in densely populated regions while procuring land for treatment and disposal is becoming more difficult and expensive. This was the case in Arkhangelsk Oblast, where people protested heavily against the authorities' plans to build a new landfill for Moscow solid waste near the local village of Shiyes in 2018–2019.[25] We do not find any significant effect of our other control variables on the recycling share. Contrary to our expectations, personal ties that the governor has to the region and political stability do not result in better environmental performance, at least with regard to recycling. *GRP per capita*, *Investment Attractiveness* and *Environmental Spending* are not statistically significant. In Model 6 in Table 2, we used our second indicator of bureaucratic capacity, *Share of Bureaucrats*. In Model 5 we also used our alternative measure of institutional quality, *Crime Rate* in the region. These alternatives also did not yield any significant results.

Summarizing our results, we found a positive and statistically significant effect of United Russia regional-level results in the Duma elections on the share of MSW that is transported to recycling facilities. This finding suggests that environmental governance in Russia, at least in the area of waste management, can relate to the concept of authoritarian environmentalism. If we view our results through the prism of authoritarian environmentalism, one possible interpretation of our finding is that more authoritarian regions might have more administrative and coercive capacities to implement policies if they choose to do so. That is, if they decide to promote waste recycling in the region, they may find it easier to impose these decisions on local actors than those in more democratic regions where regional authorities might have to balance different interests. And given the non-participatory nature of policymaking and policy implementation in more authoritarian regions, with little public deliberation, these regions could produce a quicker response to the waste management crisis.

We are nevertheless aware that there are other possible mechanisms that might explain the relationship that we found. For example, more authoritarian regions might be more prone to manipulate their official statistics and report better performance in their environmental data. Russia is notorious for electoral fraud (see, for example, Enikolopov et al. 2013). Election manipulation is indeed widespread and has been present in every election since 1991 (Bader and van Ham 2015). However, the scope of fraud varies across regions. Two important predictors of election manipulation in Russia are high turnout and high vote share for the ruling party United Russia (Bader and van Ham 2015; Moser and White 2017; Skovoroda and

[25] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/19/world/europe/russia-putin-landfill.html.

Lankina 2017). Because more authoritarian regions have higher levels of vote rigging, we might expect that they are also more likely to fudge their environmental data. To check if this was the case, we examined the propensity for electoral fraud in the region to see whether regions with more vote rigging might also manipulate their recycling data. Since we had electoral fraud data only for the 2016 parliamentary elections,[26] we ran an OLS regression for 2016 (Table 2 in the Appendix). We found no effect of electoral fraud, but the result is inconclusive due to a lack of data. Environmental performance is after all a multifaceted issue, and monocausal explanations may not be sufficient to capture its complexity.

2.7. Conclusion

This study addresses the underexplored topic of environmental politics at the regional level in Russia. To identify determinants of regional environmental performance, we apply the concept of authoritarian environmentalism (which previously was mostly used in China studies) to Russia. We focus on waste recycling – a particularly important issue for environmental protection in Russia – making use of the significant variation across Russian regions in terms of recycling, support for the ruling party United Russia, income level and other parameters.

The problem of accumulating and poorly managed MSW has significant economic and ecological implications. Efficient waste management, especially in urban areas, is thus essential to ensuring sustainable development. Russia is heavily affected by this problem, with the generation of household waste steadily rising over the years due to increased consumption and urbanization (336,000 m^3 of household waste in 2020 compared to 210,000 m^3 in 2007). Landfills and open dumps in Russia cover an area of 4 million hectares, which is comparable to the territory of Switzerland or the Netherlands.[27] We therefore focused on waste management and examined the ability of regional governments in Russia to address this particular environmental challenge. Building on the existing literature and the model of authoritarian environmentalism, we hypothesized that more authoritarian Russian regions will be likely to have a higher share of recycled household waste.

Authoritarian environmentalism is a top-down, non-participatory approach to environmental governance that has arguably been responsible for improvements in China's domestic environmental quality in the past decade. We take advantage of the variety in the degree of

[26] Calculated by Sergey Shpilkin, https://liberal.ru/lm-ekspertiza/anomalnye-i-normalnye-statisticheskij-analiz-itogov-dumskih-vyborov.

[27] https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/articles/2020/09/22/840840-trudom-pererabativaemie.

authoritarianism across Russia's regions and regular national elections to empirically test the theory of authoritarian environmentalism. Supporting our predictions, the results show that more authoritarian regions (regions where United Russia fared better in the Duma elections) are likely to transport a larger share of their municipal solid waste to recycling plants. A number of robustness checks proved our findings to be solid. The results suggest that more authoritarian governments, on average, are better able to tackle the waste problem than less authoritarian regimes. However, we also acknowledge that there could be other possible explanations for the relationship that we found. For example, authoritarian governments can be better at faking environmental statistics, just like they are better at ensuring high electoral support for United Russia. We considered other possible confounding factors (for example, the activity of civil society in the region to measure the influence of interest groups on environmental performance), but we could not include them in our analysis because of the unavailability of data.

Applying the concept of authoritarian environmentalism to the Russian context is an interesting avenue for exploring factors that might influence the environmental performance of subnational governments. Future research might broaden the scope of our analysis and test alternative mechanisms. Provided that there is available regional data, focusing on other environmental indicators such as air quality and including other institutional measures may offer further insights into the processes of environmental policymaking and policy implementation in authoritarian regimes.

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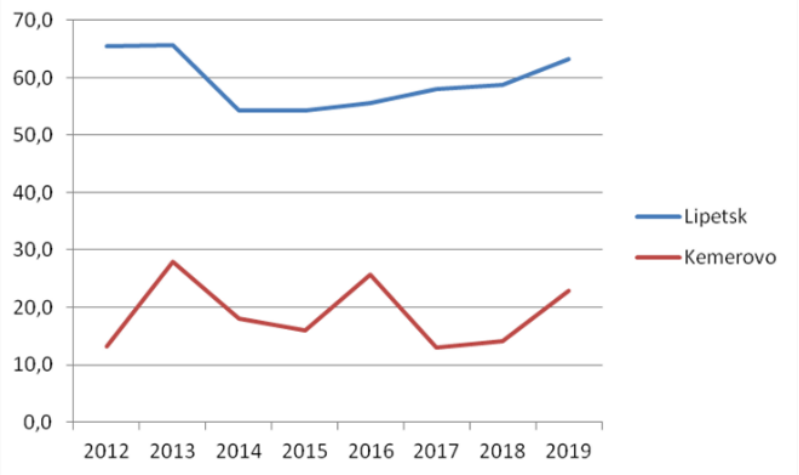
Appendix

Figure 1: Share of recycled waste in Russian regions, 2012-2019



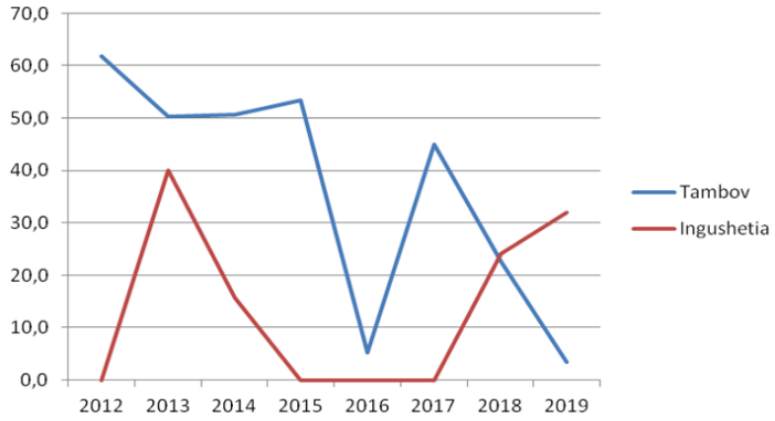


Figure 2: Distribution of variables

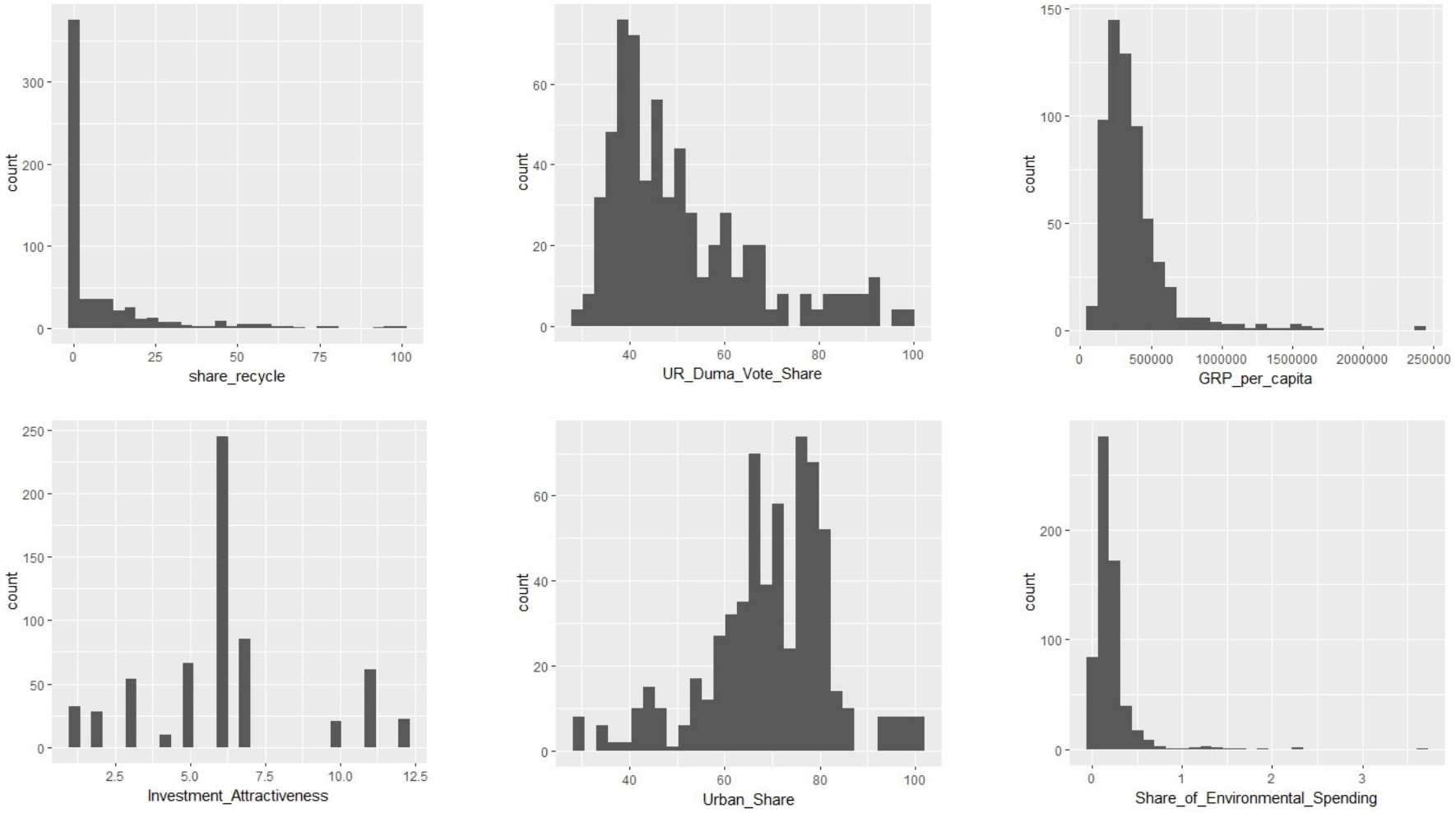
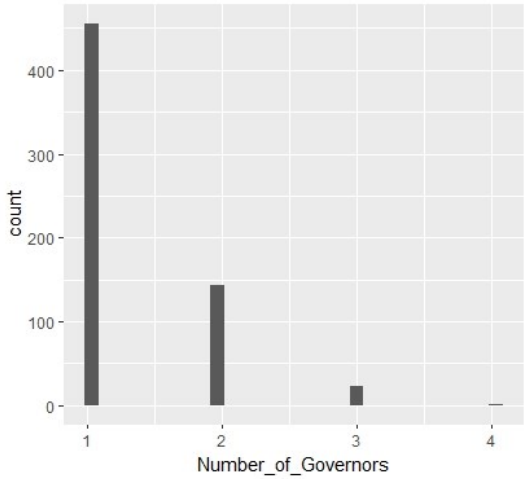
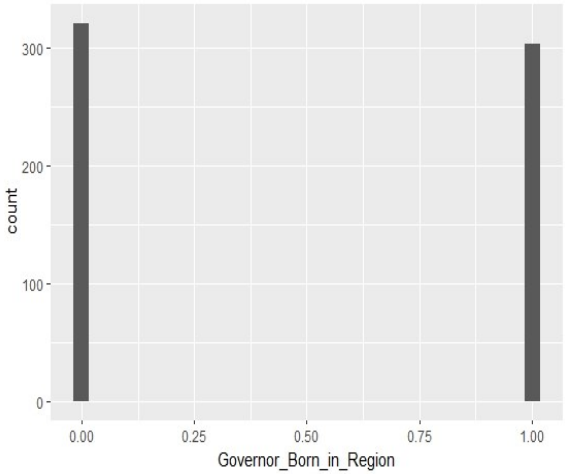


Figure 2 continues





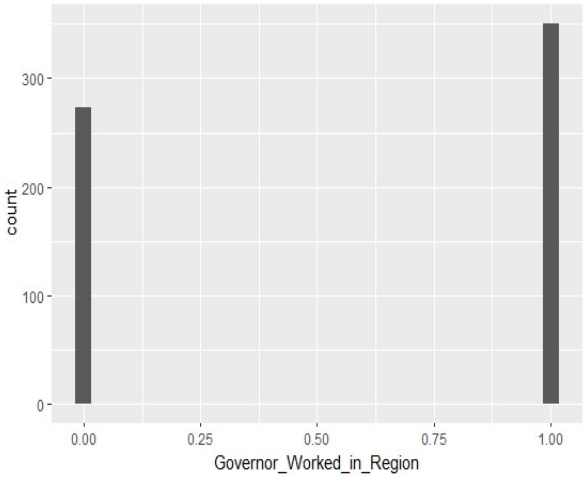
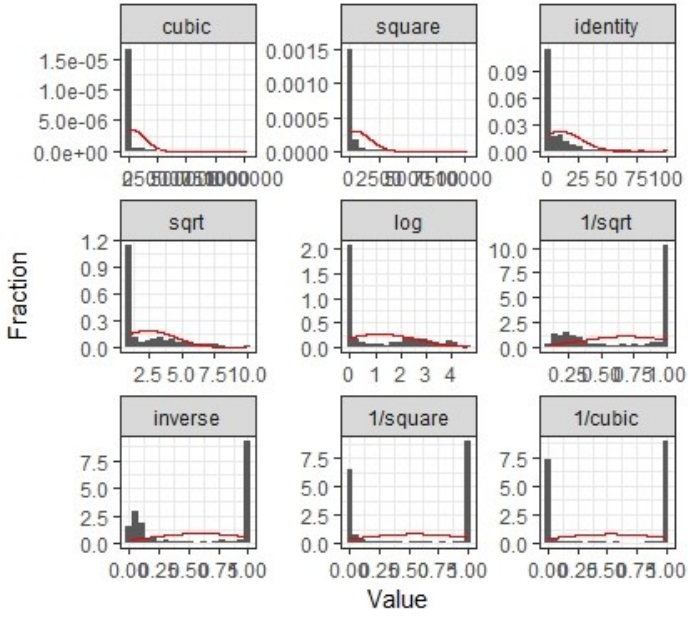
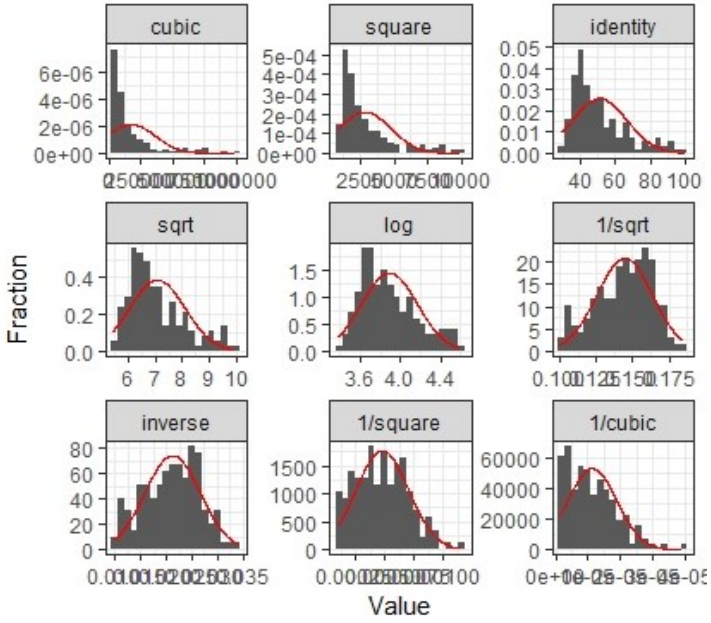


Figure 3: Ladder-of-powers histograms of logged variables

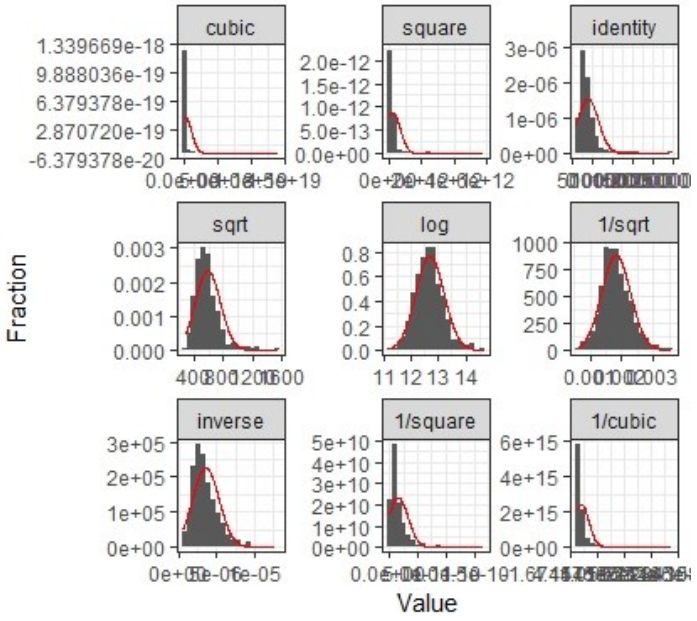


Share of Recycled MSW

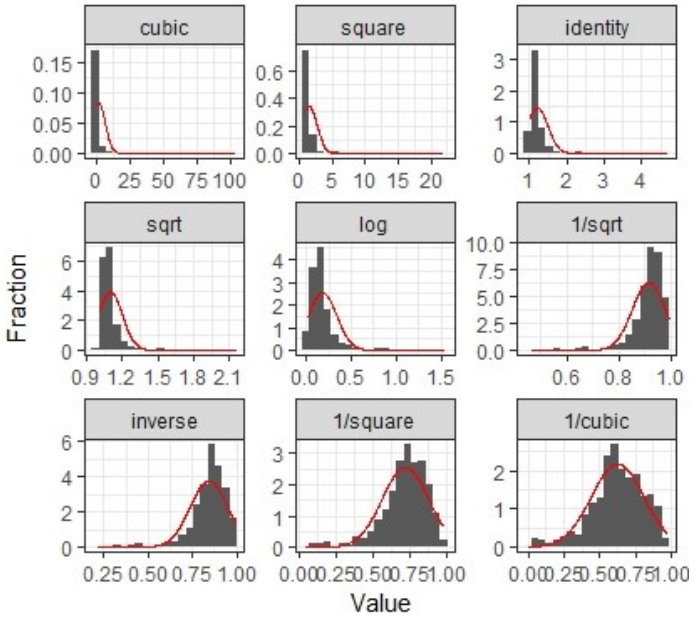


UR Duma Vote Share

Figure 3 continues

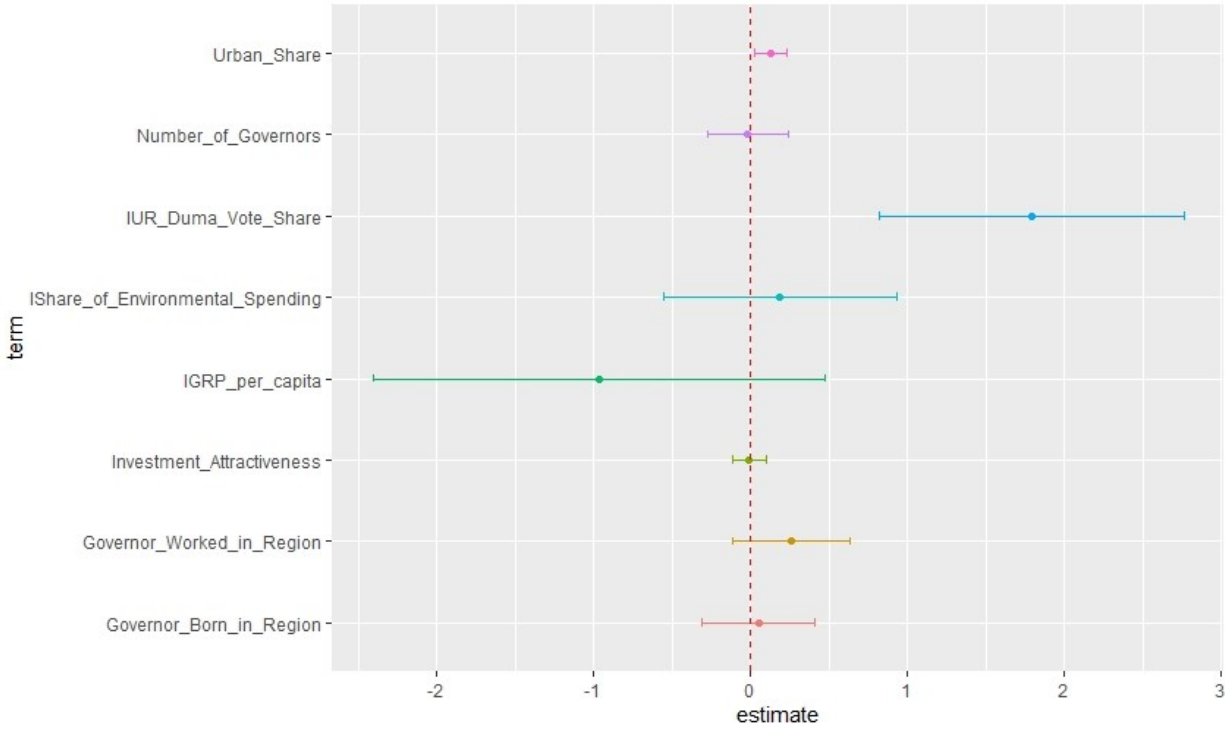


GRP per capita



Share of Environmental Spending

Figure 4: Coefficient plot: Model 1



Notes: Dependent variable: Share of Recycled MSW (l), l: natural logarithm.

Table 1: Relationship between authoritarianism and waste recycling (OLS, Random and Fixed effects)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
log UR Duma Vote Share	0.297 (0.243)	0.823* (0.364)	1.791* (0.739)
log GRP per capita	-0.124 (0.162)	-0.072 (0.289)	-0.969 (1.042)
Investment Attractiveness	-0.174*** (0.023)	-0.098** (0.038)	-0.008 (0.060)
Urban Share	-0.005 (0.006)	0.012 (0.012)	0.128** (0.042)
log Share of Environmental Spending	0.439 (0.357)	0.616† (0.355)	0.187 (0.495)
Number of Governors, 2012-2019	-0.345** (0.119)	-0.058 (0.120)	-0.018 (0.172)
Governor Born in Region	-0.091 (0.127)	0.031 (0.159)	0.051 (0.231)
Governor Worked in Region	-0.004 (0.125)	0.109 (0.162)	0.259 (0.189)
Constant	3.064 (2.286)	-1.909 (3.795)	
Year FE	No	No	Yes
Region FE	No	No	Yes
Time Controls	Yes	Yes	No
Number of regions	78	78	78
Observations	624	624	624
R2	0.131	0.077	0.045
Clustered standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$. Dependent variable: a share of recycled MSW (ln), ln: natural logarithm; FE: fixed effects.			

Table 2: Relationship between electoral fraud and waste recycling

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Electoral Fraud	-0.113 (0.131)	-0.200 (0.206)
log UR Duma Vote Share		0.636 (1.379)
log GRP per capita	0.283 (0.488)	0.256 (0.505)
Investment Attractiveness	-0.174** (0.052)	-0.179** (0.055)
Urban Share	-0.039† (0.022)	-0.039† (0.023)
log Share of Environmental Spending	-0.302 (1.644)	-0.053 (1.745)
Number of Governors, 2012-2019	-0.474† (0.282)	-0.465 (0.284)
Governor Born in Region	-0.565 (0.342)	-0.584 (0.356)
Governor Worked in Region	0.088 (0.349)	0.093 (0.352)
Constant	2.661 (5.636)	0.745 (6.569)
Number of regions	78	78
Observations	78	78
R2	0.185	0.188
Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$. Dependent variable: a share of recycled MSW (ln), ln: natural logarithm.		

Chapter 3

3. Authoritarian Durability, Prospects of Change and Individual Behavior: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Russia

Olga Masyutina, Michael Rochlitz, Koen Schoors, Yulia Khalikova

Abstract

How does the prospect of an autocrat remaining in office affect individual expectations and behavior? To answer this question, we implemented a survey experiment in Russia in May 2021 by treating respondents with three hypothetical outcomes of the 2024 Russian presidential elections – Vladimir Putin remaining in office, his close associate Sergei Shoigu winning the elections, or a young reformer becoming president. Respondents then had to answer a range of questions on individual expectations and intended behavior. We find that respondents agree on economic stagnation being a concern under Putin, but not under the two political alternatives. For most other questions, we find a strong division along political lines, as well as – less systematically – with respect to income, age and education. Most importantly, we find that pro-regime respondents were more likely to invest and be economically active under Putin, despite concerns about economic stagnation. Our results show the importance of regime legitimacy for individual incentives, and provide an explanation why unpopular authoritarian regimes might be less economically successful.

Keywords: authoritarian durability, individual attitudes, economic incentives, survey experiment, Russia

JEL: D84, P16, P52

Publication

This article has previously been published as a working paper:
Rochlitz, Michael, Olga Masyutina, Koen Schoors, and Yulia Khalikova. 2023. "Authoritarian durability, prospects of change and individual behaviour: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Russia". Working paper 2023/1061, Department of Economics, Ghent University.

3.1. Introduction

A central characteristic of most authoritarian regimes is that their ruling elites try to stay in power and prevent leadership change (Svolik 2012; Wood and DeLuca 2012). In such regimes, access to political and economic opportunities is often limited or blocked for regime outsiders, resulting in what North et al. (2009) call 'limited access orders' (LAOs). This lack of opportunities can lead to economic stagnation, especially if as a consequence of the LAO, citizens have limited incentives to invest, start a business, or develop their abilities and skills through higher education or vocational training (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Besley and Ghatak 2010; North et al. 2013). In the long run, economic stagnation and the absence of prospects for political change can lead to a brain drain, when in particular younger and better qualified citizens decide to leave, further accelerating the country's economic decline (Docquier and Rapoport 2012; Gibson and McKenzie 2011).

In rare cases, however, what we call authoritarian durability – an authoritarian leader remaining in power for a long period of time – can also co-exist with positive economic outcomes. Examples include such authoritarian developmental states as China since 1978 (Li and Zhou 2005; Libman and Rochlitz 2019), South Korea from the 1960s to the 1980s (Amsden 1989; Lee 1992), Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek (Wade 2004), or Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew (Ortmann and Thompson 2014). In all these countries, the absence of political change does not seem to have negatively impacted economic incentives. Why does a lack of political change in authoritarian political settings sometimes negatively affect individual incentives, and sometimes not? To investigate this question, we carried out a survey experiment in May 2021 to see how the prospect of an authoritarian leader remaining in office as compared to potential leadership change can affect expectations and incentives of ordinary citizens. We focus on Russia, a country with an authoritarian regime that has de facto been ruled by the same leader, Vladimir Putin, since late 1999.

In July 2020, a referendum introduced a constitutional amendment that made it possible for Vladimir Putin to participate again in presidential elections in 2024 and 2030. In case of an election victory, Putin would be able to stay in power for additional 12 years, until the year 2036.[28] The referendum made it obvious that Vladimir Putin and his regime had a clear intention to stay and

[28] Before the referendum, Vladimir Putin would have been constitutionally obliged to step down as president in 2024, as the constitution only allowed the president to remain in office for two consecutive terms.

maintain the status quo (Hutcheson and McAllister 2021), providing us with a good opportunity to test how citizens react to the prospect of political stagnation.

In our survey experiment we split our respondents into four groups and treated three of them with hypothetical outcomes of the 2024 elections. In the first scenario, Vladimir Putin wins the elections, and remains in office for additional 6 years. In the second scenario, Putin's close associate Sergei Shoigu becomes president, representing regime persistence but leadership change. In the third scenario, "a young representative of the opposition with a program of economic and political reform" wins the elections, representing both leadership and regime change. A fourth group received no treatment, and acted as our control group.

After the treatments, we asked respondents how likely they would – in the hypothetical scenario they were presented with – make a number of individual and business-related decisions, such as joining a business venture, getting additional education, accepting a job with the government, investing money from a lottery win, or leaving the country permanently. After a small reminder of the treatment, we then also asked a number of questions on Russia's development prospects, and what respondents considered to be the biggest challenges for Russia in the future. Our survey design permits us to investigate both the effects of our treatment on individual attitudes and expectations, as well as some of the underlying determinants of the attitudes we find, by studying if respondents with different background characteristics reacted differently to our treatments. We look at four background characteristics in particular: political orientation, age, education, and income.

We find that for a small number of questions, respondents – irrespective of their background characteristics – reacted homogeneously to our treatments, while for most other questions they were divided, in particular along political lines. Respondents agreed that if Vladimir Putin stays in office, economic stagnation will be a more pressing matter than if Putin is replaced by Sergei Shoigu or a young reformer.[29] There also seemed to be a consensus that economic stagnation was by far the most important problem the country was facing in May 2021, more important than geopolitical tensions, climate change, political instability, or political repression. With respect to intended economic behavior, we find a case of what one might term 'cognitive dissonance', in particular for pro-government supporters. While all respondents were concerned about economic

[29] This evaluation of the economic performance of the Russian government is in line with the assessment of most expert observers, who generally assert that Russia's government in the years before 2021 lacked a plan of how to end economic stagnation (Aleksashenko et al. 2021; Rochlitz 2021; Yakovlev 2021).

stagnation under the Putin treatment, government supporters were nevertheless significantly more likely to indicate an intention to invest under Putin, as compared to the other two scenarios. We argue that fear of political unrest and instability as a result of political change – an argument often made on Russian state TV – could be a reason why pro-government respondents were less likely to indicate a willingness to invest under a new government than under Putin.

A second important finding is that those groups that are particularly relevant for the functioning of a modern economy – people under 30 years of age, respondents with a university degree, and respondents with incomes above a certain threshold – were also more concerned about the development of the country under Putin. Following Yakovlev (2021), a possible interpretation of this finding is that respondents who are more economically active were also more frustrated by the lack of political and economic reforms during the years before 2021.

Our study relates to several different strands of literature, which we briefly present in Section 3.2, to motivate our research hypotheses that are outlined in Section 3.3.2. First, our results highlight the importance of propaganda for the economic survival of authoritarian regimes. Without government control over the media and over public discussions of the economy, a fear of economic stagnation can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, if individuals hesitate to invest because they expect the economy to decline. One way for the authoritarian government to avoid such a scenario is to blame bad economic news on external factors, while attributing good news to domestic politicians, a strategy the Russian government is indeed actively pursuing (Rozenas and Stukal 2019). Another potential strategy is to present alternative political and economic scenarios as even worse than the status quo. In this, we connect with a literature that examines the importance of expectations and counterfactual thinking for human behavior and economic outcomes (Benabou and Tirole 2002; Dessi 2008; Gennaioli and Shleifer 2010). We combine these ideas with insights from papers that study the strategic manipulation of political reference points, to understand why certain respondents might exhibit preferences for the authoritarian status quo (Belmonte and Rochlitz 2019, 2020; Gerber and Zavisca 2016; Malinova 2021). Our paper offers initial evidence that a fear of political change and of the potential ensuing chaos might be a driver of economic behavior in autocracies, a hypothesis that warrants a more in-depth study in the future.

By focusing on the behavioral effects of the 2020 constitutional amendments in Russia, our paper also speaks to the literature on autocratic legalism. While previously autocrats gained power

predominantly via coups or revolutions, modern autocrats rely on legal ways to stay in office (Dixon and Landau 2021; Scheppele 2018). Among them, the most common way is evasion of presidential term limits through constitutional amendments or constitutional review (Versteeg et al. 2020). By focusing on Russia's 2020 constitutional amendments, our paper studies public reactions to the possibility of an autocrat staying in power for a long period of time, using legalistic ways.

In addition, our paper speaks to a more general literature that investigates the effects of uncertainty on decision-making and risk-taking, a literature on the effects of surveillance and control on individual incentives and behavior, as well as studies from political psychology that look at individual-level determinants of preferences for democratic or authoritarian forms of government – literature that we discuss in more detail in Section 3.2. Finally, our study also yields important insights into how various potential political alternatives were evaluated by Russian citizens in May 2021, a couple of months before the onset of the big crisis caused by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. These findings are of particular interest for scholars of authoritarian and Russian politics, and can be used as a basis to better understand the evolution of public opinion in Russia before and during the Ukraine war of 2022.

Our paper is organized as follows. Section 3.2 provides a brief overview of the relevant literature, and introduces the context of our study. Section 3.3 outlines the design of our experiment, presents our research hypotheses, and describes our estimation strategy and data. Section 3.4 presents the results, and Section 3.5 concludes with a discussion of the implications of our findings.

3.2. Literature

3.2.1. Authoritarian durability and individual incentives

How does the prospect of an autocrat remaining in office for the foreseeable future affect individual incentives, attitudes, and behavior? We divide our discussion of the literature into two sections – one outlining potential explanations why respondents might have positive expectations and be more economically active under the status quo, and one outlining potential explanations for the opposite scenario.

Preferences for the status quo. When evaluating the present, an important role is played by the reference points used as a point of comparison (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Such reference points are often taken from individual or collective memories (Benabou and Tirole 2002; Dessi 2008;

Gennaioli and Shleifer 2010). Collective memories, however, can be strategically manipulated by the state through propaganda (Fouka and Voth 2022; Ochsner and Roesel 2019). In Russia, the state-controlled media has systematically presented the politically more competitive but economically disastrous 1990s in a negative light, while Vladimir Putin's authoritarian rule is presented as a guarantor of political stability (Belmonte and Rochlitz 2019; Malinova 2021). Sometimes, political reference points are also selected from neighboring countries, when, for example, the political system of Ukraine during the 2000s and 2010s was described as unstable and chaotic in the Russian government media (Gerber and Zavisca 2016). Government propaganda can thus suggest reference points that make the status quo appear in a more positive light, as compared to reference points that could induce a desire for political change.

Another related reason why individuals might prefer an autocratic status quo are patterns such as risk aversion, status quo bias, or endowment effects (Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1991; Samuelson and Zeckhauser 1988; Tversky and Kahneman 1991). Individuals might prefer a secure status quo to an uncertain political alternative, even if this political alternative could be politically and economically more attractive (Magun and Rudnev 2010; Matovski 2018). Especially investors with close economic ties to the state might fear expropriation in the case of political change (Frye and Yakovlev 2016). This can then be reflected not only in political preferences, but also in behavior such as a preference to invest under the status quo, rather than under an uncertain and potentially risky political alternative.

Finally, individuals might also simply be part of the selectorate and benefit under the current regime, and therefore support the status quo (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2010). For Russia, this has been documented for regime insiders benefiting from a kleptocratic state (Aslund 2019; Dawisha 2014), employees in the bureaucracy (Libman 2012) and state-dependent sectors (Rosenfeld 2017, 2020), as well as workers in the state-controlled media (Kovalev 2021; Schimpfossl and Yablokov 2014) and the security services (Galeotti 2016; Rochlitz 2014; Rochlitz, Kazun, and Yakovlev 2016).

Preferences for political change. There is, however, also a substantial literature that shows how authoritarian institutions can negatively affect economic behavior, incentives and productivity. As individuals become frustrated with a lack of possibilities and economic stagnation, demand for political change might increase. A number of papers – with data mainly from China – document a

negative association between authoritarian leadership and work outcomes, with respect, for example, to employee voice (Chan 2014; Li and Sun 2015), creativity (Guo et al. 2018), or employee performance (Chan et al. 2013; Schaubroeck, Shen, and Chong 2017; Shen, Chou, and Schaubroeck 2019). Similar effects of authoritarian control on creativity and incentives have been observed for science and research sectors in authoritarian political contexts (Graham 2013; Karpa, Klarl, and Rochlitz 2022; Perry 2020; Schulte 2019). For our study, we would expect these negative effects to be particularly strong for those respondents that are more likely to show economic initiative, i.e. younger, better educated and wealthier respondents.

Apart from these indirect effects, age, education and income can also have a direct impact on political preferences. Studies on emotion recognition have found, for instance, that older individuals might be more susceptible to authoritarian messages, as a result of an age-related deterioration of emotion recognition, verbosity, and the ability to detect lies (Ruffman et al. 2016). Education can have similar effects, for example, through higher political awareness or higher levels of personal security (Carnevale et al. 2020; Croke et al. 2016; Geddes and Zaller 1989). The effects of income and social class on preferences for authoritarian institutions have also been examined in an extensive literature. Carvacho et al. (2013) provide a good summary of the debate, finding that both lower education and lower income are positively associated with higher levels of prejudice and preferences for right-wing authoritarianism. Finally, contrary to the selectorate theory, there might also be instances where extensive government predation has pushed entrepreneurs into the arms of the political opposition, as documented, for example, by Junisbai (2012).

While this review necessarily remains incomplete, its intention is to illustrate that the effects of authoritarian durability on individual behavior and preferences for political change are not straightforward and predetermined. The purpose of our study is to examine these effects within a unified framework by looking at a specific example – the Russian Federation in May 2021.

3.2.2. Country context

Russia in the year 2021 is a particularly suitable context to investigate the questions we have in mind. It is an electoral autocracy, de facto ruled by the same person, Vladimir Putin, since late 1999. While the outcomes of authoritarian elections such as those in Russia are usually known beforehand, these elections are also a tool to create regime legitimacy (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). They therefore have to maintain a veneer of legality and credibility, which however also

introduces an element of uncertainty that makes unexpected electoral results highly unlikely, but not impossible.

In this context, we conducted a survey experiment that presented respondents with three hypothetical outcomes of the 2024 presidential elections. The most likely outcome was Vladimir Putin running again and winning the elections, remaining in power for additional 6 years. A less likely, but plausible alternative would be the election of Sergei Shoigu, the current minister of defense, as a pro-regime replacement of Vladimir Putin. Shoigu is one of the most trusted and long-term associates of Putin (Burkhardt 2022; Karasik 2000). In 2021, he was Russia's second most popular politician, and one of the public figures most often mentioned as Putin's likely successor.[30] Our third hypothetical outcome was the victory of a "young representative from the political opposition with a program of economic and political reforms". Although less likely than the other two scenarios, the fact that neighboring Ukraine has been ruled since 2019 by a young reformer, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as the political activism of Alexey Navalny in Russia itself made such an outcome not altogether implausible.

Our survey experiment took place 10 months after the 2020 nationwide referendum had legalized the possibility for Vladimir Putin to run again in presidential elections. The possibility that the current political situation might persist in its current form for a long time to come was thus very present on people's minds. At the same time, however, the poisoning of Alexey Navalny in August 2020, as well as his miraculous survival and subsequent investigative videos about the assassination attempt and Putin's alleged palace at the Black Sea had introduced the concept of a potential young political contender from the opposition to a larger Russian audience (Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021). In this context, we intend to test how being presented with one of these hypothetical outcomes can affect expectations, attitudes and potential behavior of individual citizens.

3.3. Experimental Design

3.3.1. Treatments

We implemented our survey experiment in May 2021 as an addition to the monthly omnibus survey of the Levada Center, a well-respected and independent Russian polling and sociological research organization. The Levada Center conducts its survey every month, with a representative sample of

[30] See, for example, https://istories.media/investigations/2021/09/06/ministr-s-malenkim-kultom-lichnosti/

about 1600 Russian citizens. Following the literature on survey and factorial survey experiments (Auspurg et al. 2015; Auspurg and Hinz 2014; Mutz 2011), we added our experiment to the end of the survey, and split the sample into four equally sized groups of roughly 400 respondents each, for a total of 1620 respondents (Table 1).

Table 1: Treatments, N = 1620

Treatment	Treatment Text	Observations
Regime persistence	Putin	398
Regime persistence but personnel change	Shoigu	447
Regime and personnel change	Young reformer	378
Control group	No treatment	397
Total		1620

Three of these groups were provided with a description of the hypothetical outcome of the 2024 presidential elections, with either Vladimir Putin, Sergei Shoigu or a young reformer winning the presidential race.[31] The fourth group did not receive a treatment, and acts as our control group. Following the treatments, we asked respondents to imagine themselves in the hypothetical situation described in the treatment, and then asked them a number of questions about their expectations and their potential behavior.

3.3.2. Survey questions & research hypotheses

Survey questions. The survey questions were split into three groups. The exact wording of all questions can be found in section A1 of the Appendix. The first group of 5 questions related to individual, mostly business-related behavior. Here our objective was to test how the prospect of regime persistence, as compared to regime persistence but personnel change, and regime change, would affect the degree to which respondents were willing to actively participate in the *economy*. After the first group of questions, we briefly reminded respondents about our treatment. The second group of 2 questions was then intended to measure how our treatments affected respondents' expectations about the *future*. Here we asked if respondents had positive or negative expectations about Russia's future development, and if they expected economic or political protests to take place

[31] The text of our 3 treatments, both in an English translation and in original Russian, can be found in section A1 of the Appendix.

in the next five years. Finally, in our last question, we asked respondents to select a maximum of three *problems* that they would be most concerned about, out of a list of 7 problems. This should permit us to see both which problems were considered most pressing by our respondents, as well as under which of our treatment scenarios respondents were most concerned about a specific problem.

Hypotheses. The effects of regime persistence or change are identified by differences in stated behavior, assessments and concerns that, as a result of the randomized distribution of the treatments among the respondents, can be attributed directly to our experimental treatments. We test four main hypotheses. Our first hypothesis is that the effect of our treatment is conditional on the respondent's support of, or opposition to, Vladimir Putin. We hypothesize that in the case of regime continuity, Putin supporters will more actively engage in the economy, will have more positive expectations about the future, and will be less concerned about potential problems than regime opponents. We expect this effect to be less strong or reversed, in case when a young reformer comes to power. As discussed in section 3.2.1, we expect this to be the case for two principal reasons: either regime proponents profit directly from the regime, or they are worried about potential political disorder or uncertainty, as a result of regime change. We then also test for three additional hypotheses, namely differences in indicated behavior with respect to age, education, and income. Following our discussion in section 3.2.1, we assume that younger, better educated and wealthier respondents will be less willing to invest but be more likely to emigrate and have negative expectations for the future under the political status quo.

To test these hypotheses, we divide the sample for each given hypothesis into two groups: respondents that are younger or older than 30 years, those who have spent at least some time at a university or have only obtained secondary education, and respondents with an available monthly income below or above 25 000 rubles per family member or dependent.

3.3.3. Estimation strategy & data

Depending on our outcome variable being a binary or an ordered categorical variable, we use either a logit or an ordered probit regression. The equation below shows our estimation strategy, with *Treatment* being the treatment as outlined in Table 1 for individual *i* in region *r*, *Individual Characteristics* being a vector of control variables that includes information on gender, age and education, *Mood* being the response to a question by the Levada Center that measures the respondent's mood on the day the interview was conducted, and *Financial Situation* being the

response to a question about whether the individual financial situation of the respondent had improved or worsened during the previous year. Our coefficient of interest is β_1, measuring the effect of our experimental treatment on the outcome variable. We also include a dummy for Russia's 8 macro-regions, to account for differences in answers by respondents located in different parts of Russia, and cluster our standard errors at the regional level.

$$Outcome_{ir} = \beta_1 Treatment_{ir} + \beta_2 Individual\ Characteristics_{ir} + \\ + \beta_3 Mood_{ir} + \beta_4 Financial\ Situation_i + \beta_5 Macroregion_i + \varepsilon_{ir}$$

In our principal estimations (as reported in Section 3.4, and – for the full experiment – in Section A2 of the Appendix), we always compare the treatment group to the full sample. As a robustness check (right-hand side of Section A2 in the Appendix), we then also compare every treatment group only to the control group. With two exceptions that we discuss in Section 3.4, the results we get for both empirical strategies are very similar. All variables used in this study come from the same Levada omnibus survey conducted in May 2021 that we added our survey experiment to. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for our variables, and Table 3 displays the results of a balance test for our 3 treatment groups. With very few exceptions, there do not seem to be any statistically significant differences between our three treatment groups and the control group. Thus, we can assume that the randomization strategy was successful.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (treatment groups)

Variable	Full Sample Mean/SD	Putin Mean/SD	Shoigu Mean/SD	Opposition Mean/SD	Control Mean/SD
Gender (% female respondents)	54.9	55.0	55.9	50.8	57.7
Age (years)	45.4 (16.3)	45.5 (16.7)	45.1 (16.5)	45.9 (16.5)	45.2 (16.3)
Education (% higher education)	28.3	26.9	29.1	30.2	27.2
Personal situation during the last year (% of respondents with improvement)	14.4	13.8	16.1	13.8	13.6
Monthly income (Russian rubles)	46511.3 (38351.2)	44459.2 (29914.3)	45164.2 (34576.1)	45800.6 (45373.0)	50908.0 (42195.9)
Approval of Vladimir Putin as president (% of respondents approving)	65.1	64.1	65.6	64.8	66.0
Voted for Vladimir Putin in March 2018 (% of respondents)	68.02	64.23	67.39	68.75	72.03

Table 3: Balance Test (Welch's t-test; p-value (not adjusted) in parentheses)

Variable	Putin-Ctrl.	Shoigu-Ctrl.	Opposition-Ctrl.
Gender (% female respondents)	0.754 (0.451)	0.513 (0.608)	1.925 (0.054)
Age (years)	-0.328 (0.743)	0.056 (0.955)	-0.615 (0.539)
Education (% higher education)	0.101 (0.919)	-0.605 (0.545)	-0.908 (0.364)
Personal situation during the last year (% of respondents with improvement)	-0.088 (0.929)	-1.023 (0.307)	-0.062 (0.950)
Monthly income (Russian rubles)	2.350 (0.019)	2.018 (0.044)	1.545 (0.123)
Approval of Vladimir Putin as president (% of respondents approving)	0.475 (0.634)	-0.121 (0.903)	0.082 (0.935)
Voted for Vladimir Putin in March 2018 (% of respondents)	0.893 (0.372)	0.354 (0.723)	0.586 (0.558)

To split the sample into supporters and opponents of Vladimir Putin, our measure of regime support, we use a question about the approval of Vladimir Putin from the Levada baseline survey. We code respondents as *regime supporters* if they indicate that they "in general approve of the activities of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia". In our sample, this is the case for 65.1% of respondents, while 33.3% do not approve of Putin's activities as president, and 1.5% remain undecided. As a robustness check, we then also use the share of respondents who indicate to have voted for Vladimir Putin in the presidential elections in March 2018. Although the sample is much smaller for this second variable (only 982 instead of 1620 observations, as not all respondents voted in 2018, and some decided not to reveal for whom they voted), we obtain roughly similar results in our estimations when using this alternative measure of regime approval.

One potential concern with our experimental design could be that our respondents were hesitant to answer truthfully, due to the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Russian state, or because of some kind of social desirability bias. This could lead to inflated results when asking, for example, about approval of Putin's activities as president, or about having voted for Putin in the 2018 presidential elections. However, in a survey experiment about Putin's popularity that combined a list experiment with direct questions and also used data from the Levada Center, Frye et al. (2017)

find no evidence of social desirability bias or inflated answers. In our study, the results we obtain both for the approval of Vladimir Putin as president (65.1% of respondents) and having voted for Putin in 2018 (68.02% of respondents) also seem to be relatively realistic, given that the official vote share of Vladimir Putin in 2018 was 77.5% of the electorate, a number that is likely to be somewhat inflated due to electoral fraud (Kobak, Shpilkin, and Pshenichnikov 2018). We therefore remain confident that the answers we obtained provide us with a reasonably realistic picture of actual public opinion.

3.4. Results

3.4.1. Expectations for the future

How does the prospect of an authoritarian leader remaining in office for the foreseeable future – as compared to the promise of political change – affect expectations about the future?[32] To answer this question, we asked respondents to evaluate Russia's development prospects in the next 10 years, with respondents having the option to choose among 'negative', 'rather negative', 'rather positive' and 'positive' as an answer. Figure 1 shows how our three treatments affected the answers to this question.

We find a weak negative effect of the regime persistence (Putin) treatment for the full sample. When looking at heterogeneous treatment effects, however, we find a clear and strong division along political lines, as well as strong heterogeneous effects for age, education and income. While regime proponents have a somewhat more positive view of the future under Putin than under a young reformer, for regime opponents the effect is the opposite, albeit much stronger. At the same time, younger and better educated respondents seem to have a significantly more positive view of Russia's development prospects under a young reformer, while Putin remaining in office significantly increases the likelihood that young, better educated, and also comparatively wealthier respondents hold negative expectations. The 'Sergei Shoigu' treatment combining regime persistence but personnel change, on the other hand, does not seem to affect expectations in a measurable way.

[32] While Section A1 in the Appendix presents all questions of our survey experiment in the order they were asked, in this section we first focus – for the sake of our argument – on overall expectations for the future, then on economic behavior, and finally on a number of additional behavioral responses and perceived problems.

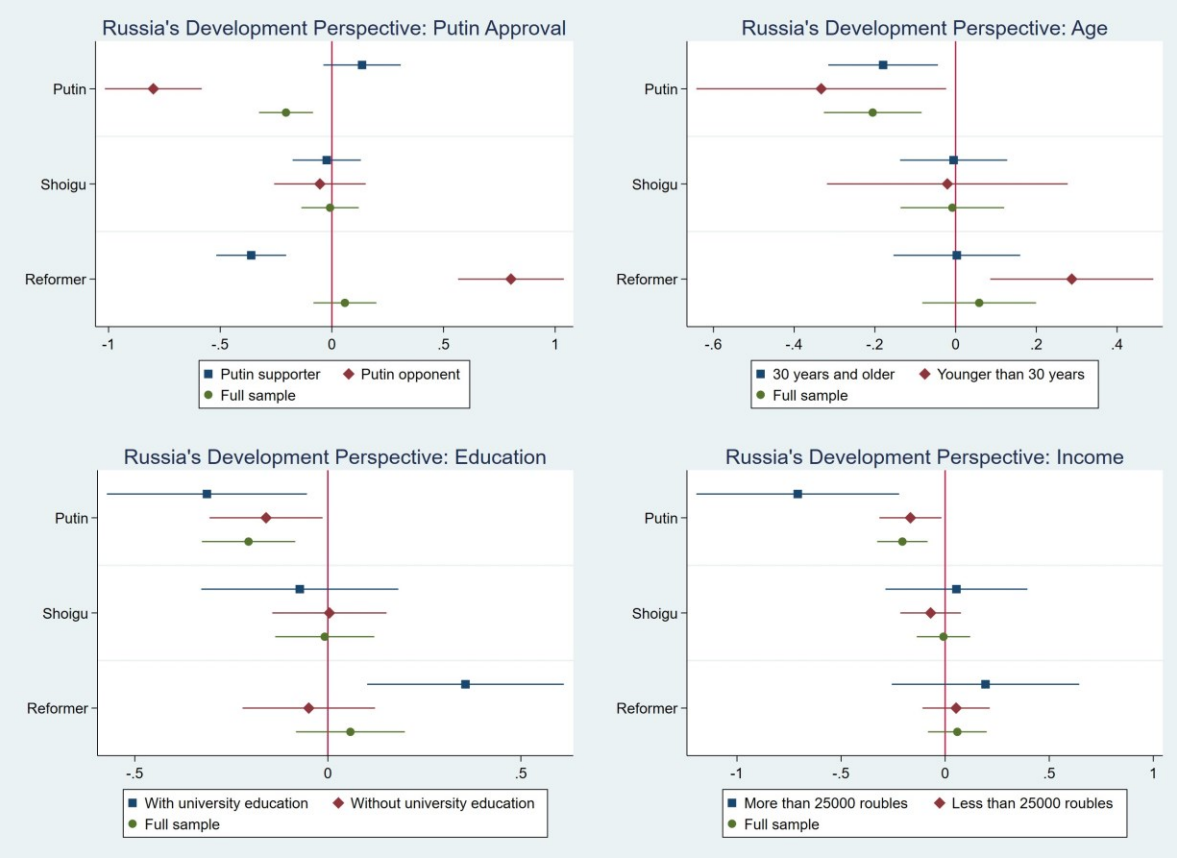


Figure 1: How do you evaluate Russia's development prospects in the next 10 years? (1 = negative, 2 = rather negative, 3 = rather positive, 4 = positive; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; ordered probit, 95% confidence interval)

While Figure 1 shows expectations about the overall development of the country, Figure 2 looks specifically at the effect of our treatments on expectations about economic development. As illustrated in question 7 of Section A1 of the Appendix, respondents had the option to select up to three out of a list of seven problems they would be most concerned about, given the hypothetical scenario they were treated with. Table 4 shows the seven available options, and indicates the concerns that were selected most frequently, providing a picture of the type of problems Russians seemed to worry about most in May 2021.

Table 4: Problems Russians are concerned about (May 2021)

Problem	Full sample	Putin-Supporter	Putin-Opponent
Climate change	28%	30.6%	23.1%
Economic stagnation	**48.3%**	**44.2%**	**56.5%**
Rising tensions with the West	29.1%	31.1%	26.3%
Political instability	17.7%	18.1%	17.2%
Decline of Russia's influence in the world	34.7%	33.3%	37.7%
Political repression and persecution	10.7%	6.3%	19.8%
Decline of traditional values	24.9%	25.2%	24.1%

Both for the whole sample, as well as for the respondents approving and disapproving of Vladimir Putin, the problem that was chosen by far most often was economic stagnation, which was indicated by almost 50% of respondents. Next in line came 'decline of Russia's influence in the world', 'rising tensions with the West', and 'climate change', which were all selected by about 30% of respondents. 17.7% of respondents were concerned about political instability. Interestingly, while only 6.3% of Putin supporters were worried about political repression and persecution, almost 20% of Putin opponents selected this option as a concern.

Figure 2 shows that irrespective of political orientation, age, education or income, respondents were significantly more likely to select 'economic stagnation' as a concern when treated with the Putin scenario, as compared to the reformer scenario. Under the reformer treatment, younger respondents were actually significantly *less* likely to choose economic stagnation as a potential concern. As before, the Shoigu treatment had no significant effect on expectations.

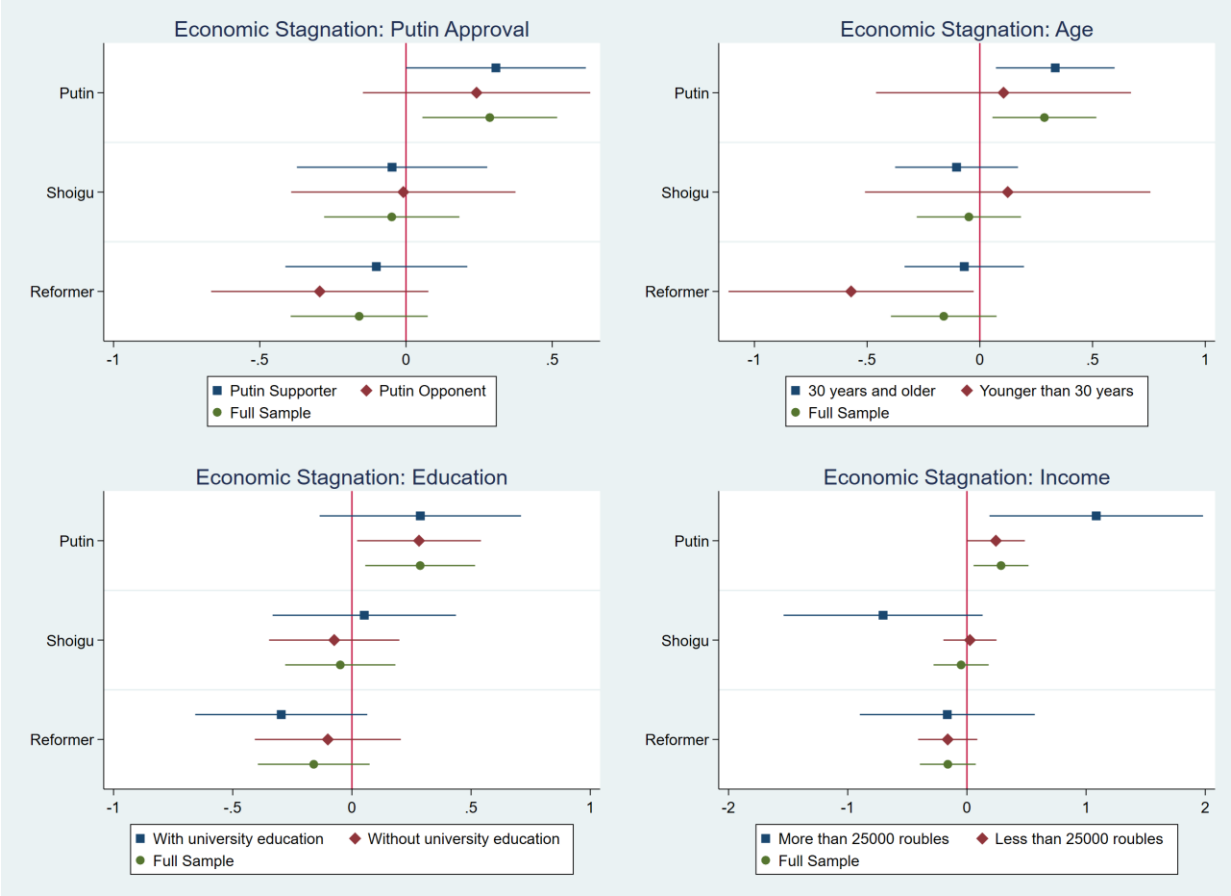


Figure 2: Economic stagnation as a potential concern (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit, 95% confidence interval)

Taking the results of Figures 1 and 2 together, we find that expectations about Russia's overall and economic development are especially negative under the Putin scenario by those citizens who play a particularly important role in a modern economy, i.e. individuals who are young, highly educated, and have a higher income. If we assume that expectations translate into actual economic behavior, these results could become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and could constitute a potentially serious problem for the Russian economy. Interestingly, however, the results we find for intended economic behavior are less clear than those for expectations about the future, with expectations not always translating into intended behavior.

3.4.2. Intended economic behavior

We use two principal questions to gauge the effect of our treatment on the willingness of individuals to invest. In the first question, we asked respondents how likely they would say yes, if a friend asked them to become a partner in a new business venture. Figure 3 shows the results. While

the results for the full sample are not significant, Putin proponents are significantly more likely to join the business of a friend under Putin, and significantly less likely to do so under a young reformer.

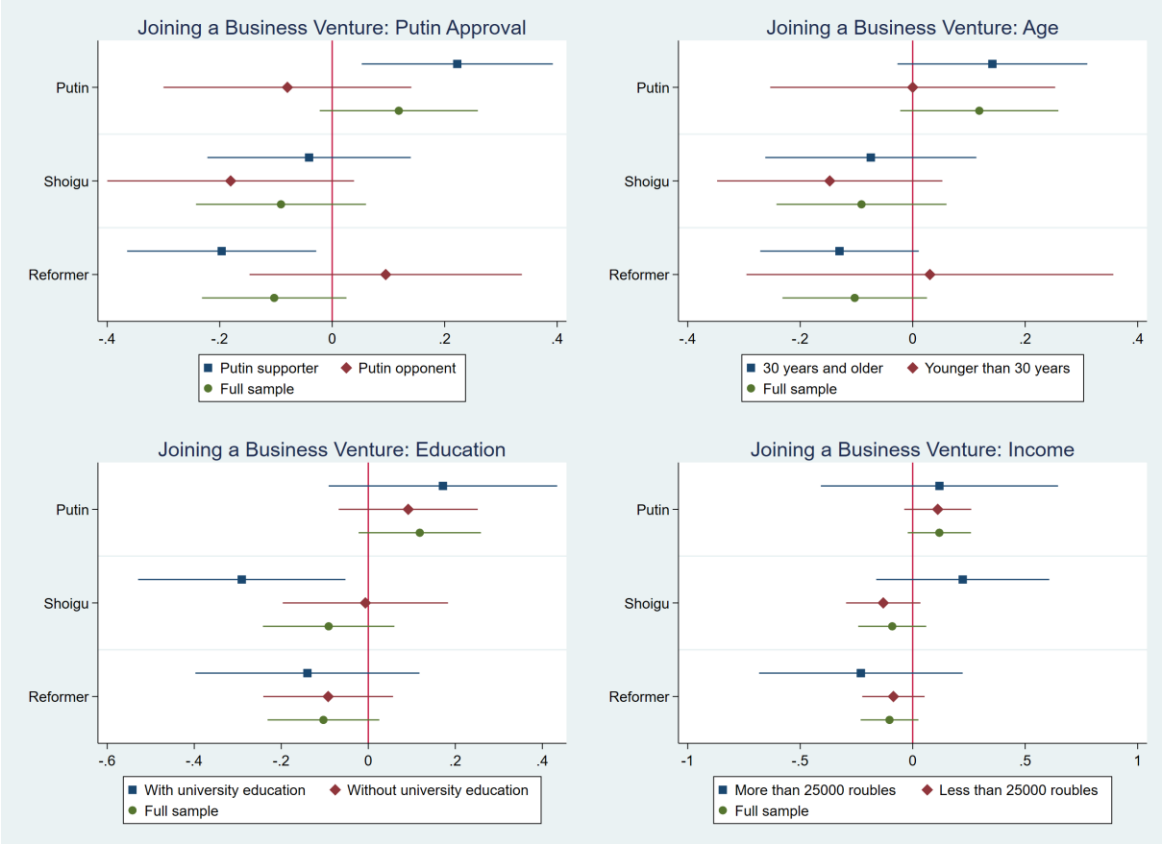


Figure 3: If a friend asked you to become a partner in a new business venture, how likely would you say yes? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit, 95% confidence interval)

For our second question, respondents were asked to imagine that they had won 2 million rubles in a lottery, and were then offered a range of options how to spend the money. Question 5 in Section A1 in the Appendix indicates all available options, and Figure 4 shows how our treatments affected the likelihood that respondents selected the option 'to invest into your own business'. The results are very similar to those of Figure 3, although here we also find a significant and positive effect of the Putin treatment for the whole sample, and for respondents that are 30 years and older, in addition to the positive effect for Putin supporters.

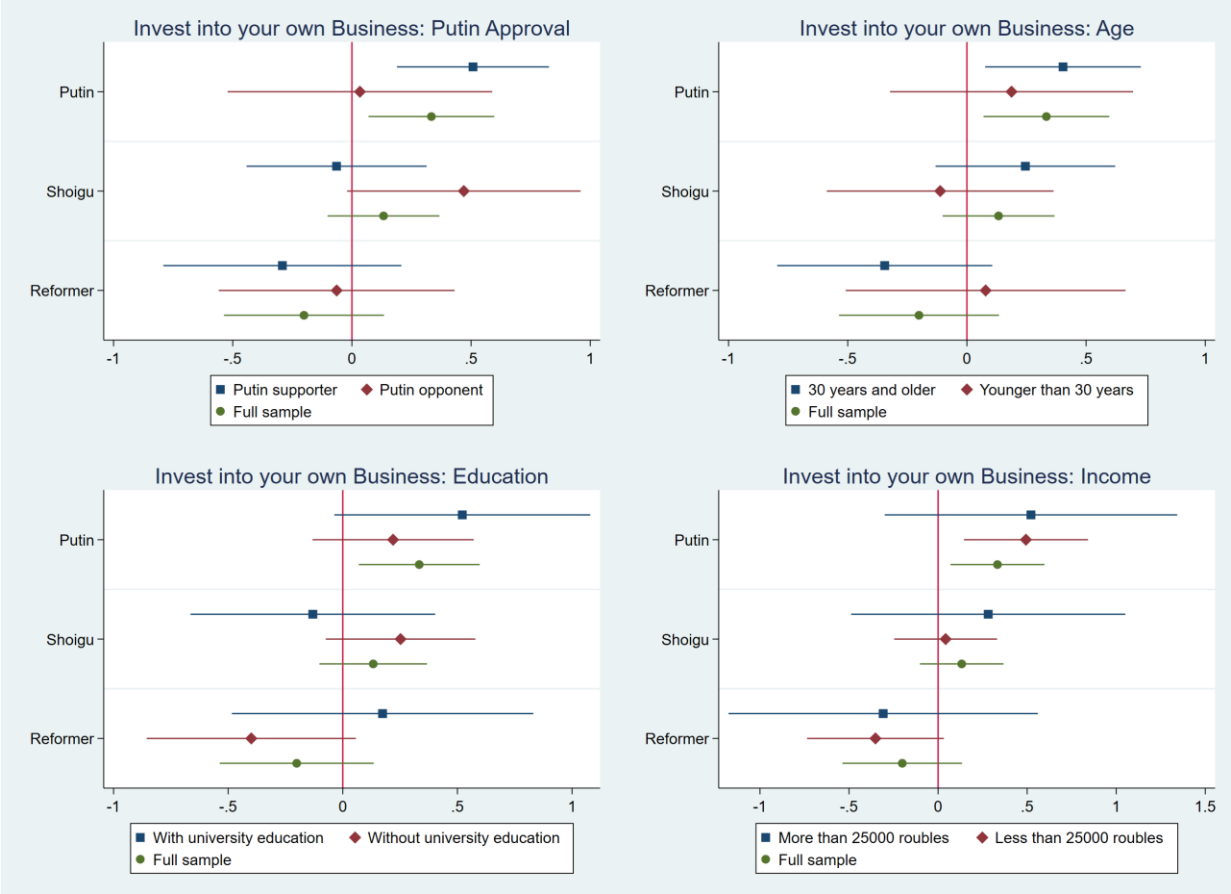


Figure 4: If you won 2 million rubles in a lottery, how likely would you invest them into your own business? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit, 95% confidence interval)

Interestingly, although in Figure 2 all three groups are more likely to expect economic stagnation under the Putin treatment, the same treatment *increases* the likelihood to invest for Putin supporters in Figures 3 and 4. Even for government opponents, economic expectations do not seem to be reflected in intentions to invest. What we find seems to be a sort of cognitive dissonance, with expectations not being in line with indicated intended behavior. Below, we look at one possible explanation for this apparent paradox.

3.4.3. Fear of political instability as a potential determinant of investment decisions?

To better understand our results, we test if fear of political instability – as a result of political change – could be a reason why respondents are more likely to invest under Putin, rather than under a new government, even though they anticipate worse economic outcomes in this scenario. Such an explanation is not implausible, as the theme of political instability as a result of political change is very

present in the Russian government media. State-controlled TV in particular frequently equates the politics of the 1990s in Russia, or political change in neighboring countries such as Ukraine, with economic and administrative chaos, while the relative absence of political competition under Putin is described as a source of stability (Belmonte and Rochlitz 2019, 2020; Gerber and Zavisca 2016; Malinova 2021; Shakrai 2015). As a large majority of Russians still get their information mainly from TV, fear of political instability could thus be one reason for being more willing to invest under Putin, despite worse economic expectations.

We test this hypothesis from two different angles. In a first question, we asked if respondents considered it likely that economic and/or political protests would take place in their locality during the next 5 years. While 31% of respondents expected protests to take place, 63% considered this to be unlikely, and 6% were uncertain how to answer. Figure 5 shows how our treatments affected the responses. While there are no effects for the full sample, and no heterogeneous effects by age, education or income, we find that Putin supporters are significantly more likely to expect protests under a young reformer, while Putin opponents are significantly less likely to do so under this scenario.

As a second question, we look at the likelihood that respondents selected the option 'political instability' as a potential concern, in answer to the question about future problems presented in Table 4. As can be seen in Figure 6, most effects are not statistically significant. There does however seem to be a pattern that political instability is less of a concern under Putin, especially for younger people, and that Putin supporters are more concerned about instability under a young reformer than Putin opponents.

Overall, both figures suggest that fear of political instability might indeed be a possible explanation why Russians – and in particular government supporters – are more hesitant to indicate an intention to invest under a new government than under the political status quo.

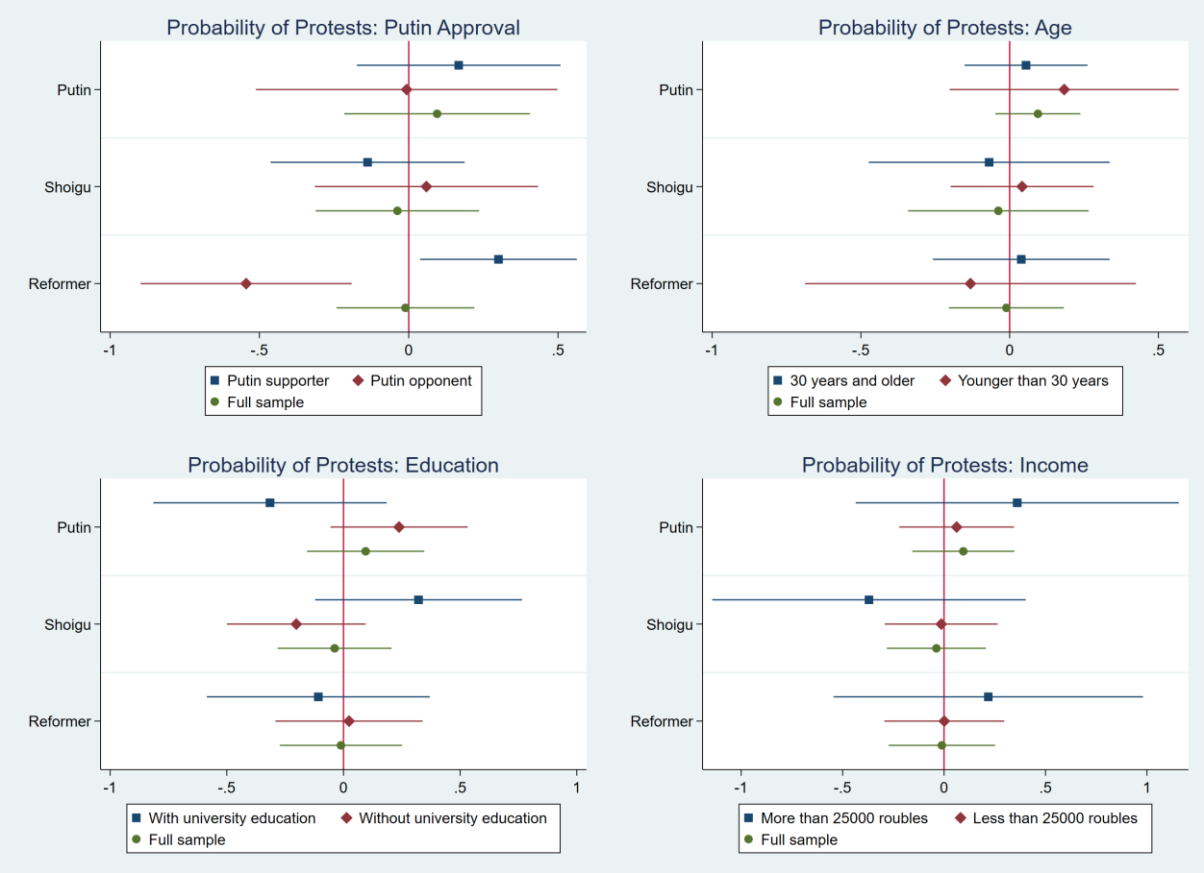


Figure 5: Probability of political and/or economic protests (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit, 95% confidence interval)

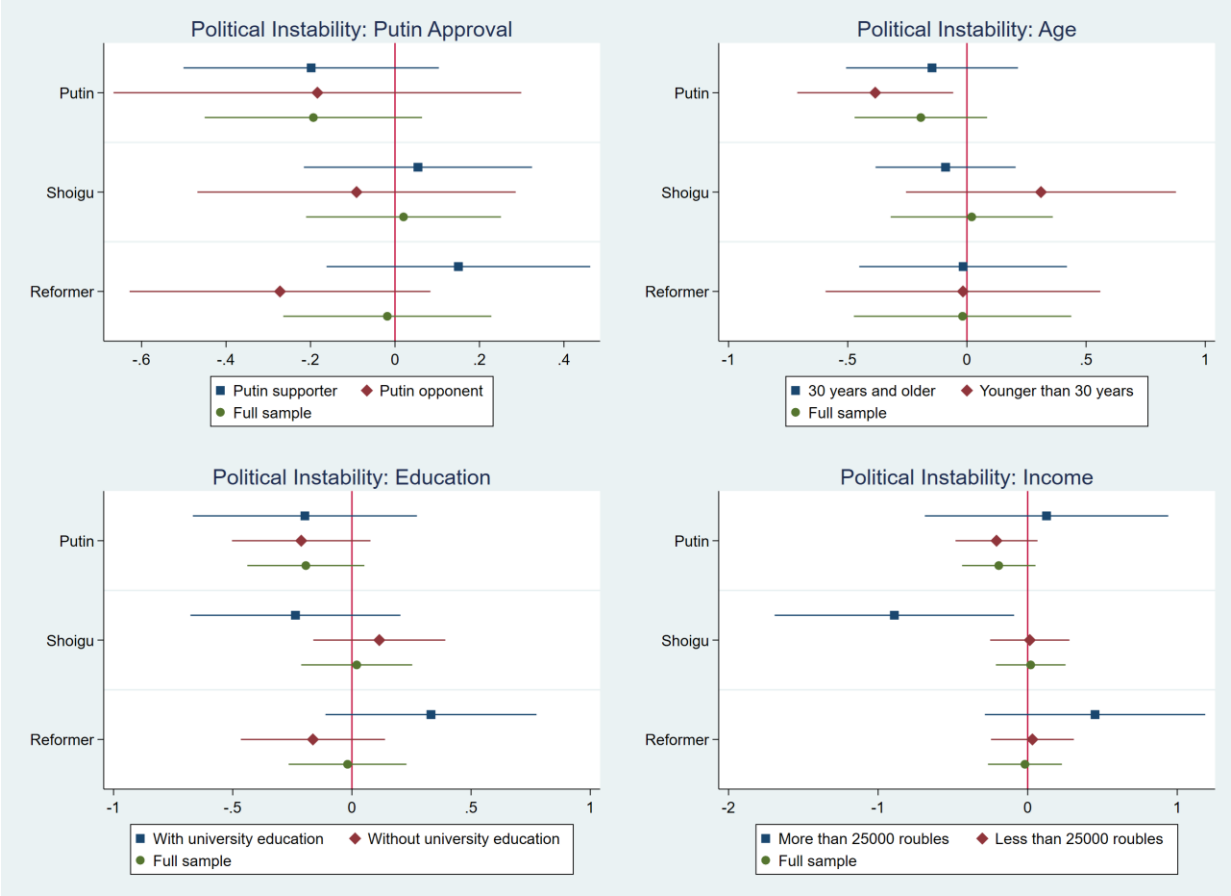


Figure 6: Risk of political instability (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit, 95% confidence interval)

3.4.4. Additional behavioral responses

In addition to investment behavior, we also investigated a range of additional behavioral responses, by asking respondents about their intentions to take a stable government job, emigrate, invest into additional education, and about their use of different – more or less risky – options to save money from a lottery win.

Working for the government. What can a willingness to accept a 'permanent, stable position in the public service' tell us about individual behavior? We interpret a positive answer in two different ways, leading to two testable hypotheses. If you expect the economy to stagnate, a stable government job could seem more attractive, ceteris paribus. If this is the case, we would assume that respondents who hold more negative expectations about economic development under a given scenario will be more likely to take a government job under the same treatment. A second explanation could be linked to a belief in the ideal of 'public service'. If you support the government currently in office

and expect it to advance the country into a positive direction, you might also be more likely to decide to work for the government, ceteris paribus.

Our results provide evidence for the second hypothesis, but not for the first. In Figure 7, we split the sample into respondents who indicated that they are concerned about the development of the economy, and in those who were not concerned. There do not seem to be any statistically significant differences between both groups, even though respondents who are not worried about the economy seem to be more willing to work for the government under a young reformer. Figure 8 shows that while Putin opponents are significantly less likely to indicate a willingness to work for the government under Putin, they are significantly more likely to do so under a young reformer, as are younger and better educated respondents. These results also contradict our first hypothesis, i.e. that in an economic situation that is expected to worsen, respondents would be more likely to accept a government job. Instead, we find that in particular younger and better educated respondents are significantly *more* likely to work for the government when they expect the economy to perform *better*, i.e. under a young reformer. One possible explanation could be that in a situation that offers a better overall development prospect, or with a government in office that one approves of, working for the government appears to be more attractive – a reasoning in line with the idea that under certain conditions, working for the government or 'serving the public' might be something worth doing (Perry and Hondeghem 2008). Figure 8 also clearly indicates the economic cost of authoritarian stagnation in terms of human capital, as younger and highly educated respondents seem much more willing to work for the government under a young reformer than under Putin or Shoigu.

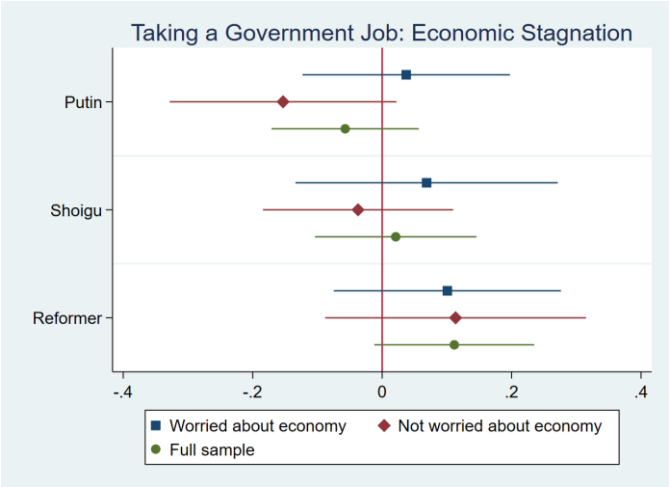


Figure 7: How likely is it that you would decide to take a permanent, stable position in the public service, if the opportunity presented itself? (Sample split into respondents who do and do not worry about the economy; logit, 95% confidence interval)

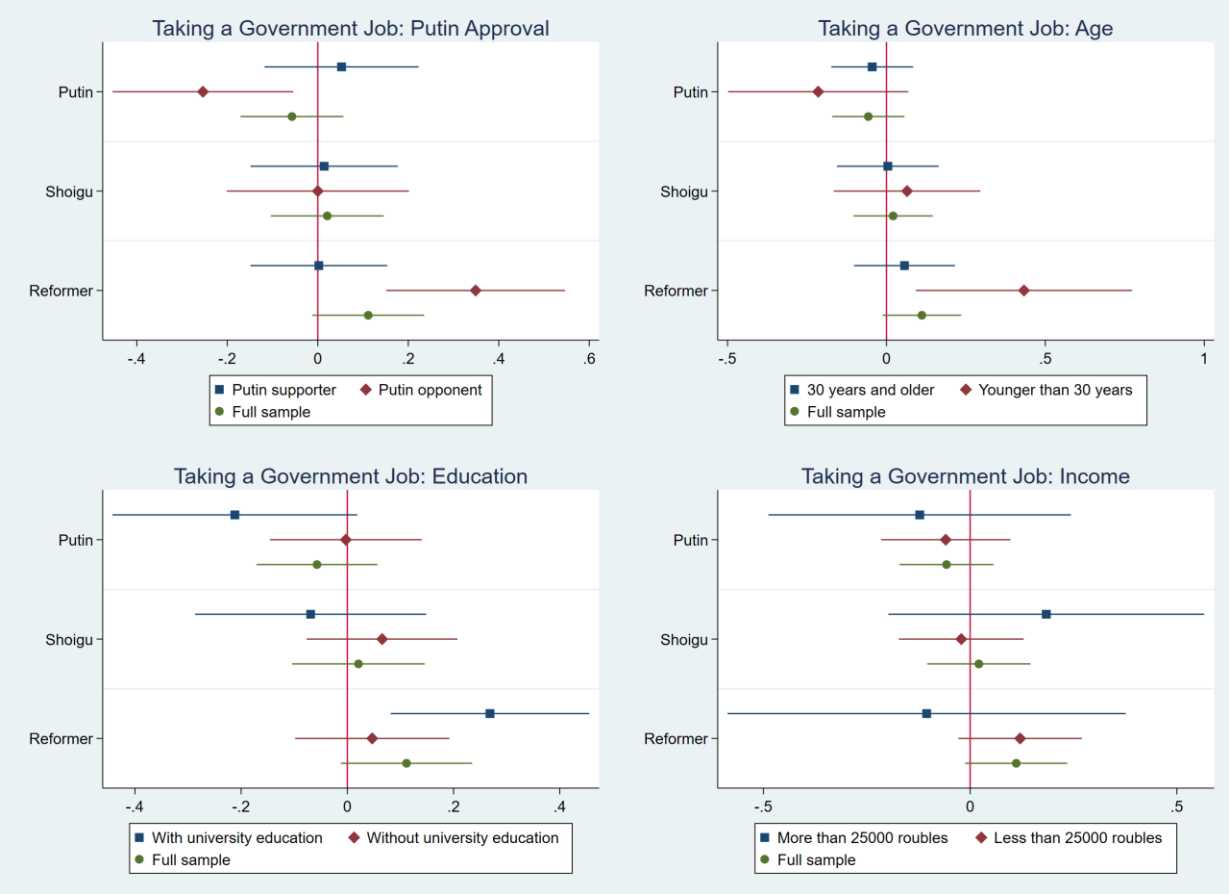


Figure 8: How likely is it that you would decide to take a permanent, stable position in the public service, if the opportunity presented itself? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit, 95% confidence interval)

Risk of brain drain. How do different political scenarios affect intentions to emigrate? Is there a risk of a brain drain, in the case of regime persistence? As can be seen from Figure A4 in the Appendix, this is one of two questions for which our two empirical strategies – taking the whole sample, or only the control group as a reference group – lead to slightly different results.[33] While we find that all three treatments increase the likelihood of regime opponents to emigrate – potentially indicating a general frustration with politics – there do not seem to be any systematic heterogeneous effects for age, education or income.

We then take an additional analytical step, by looking specifically at the group of respondents who have university education and are younger than 30, to test for the possibility of brain drain. Figure 9 shows a clear division along political lines for the Putin treatment, while the other treatments have no significant effect. Young and highly educated respondents are indeed more likely to emigrate under the Putin treatment, but only if they disapprove of Putin. Young and highly educated regime supporters, on the other hand, seem to be slightly more likely to stay in the country under the Putin treatment, as compared to the other two treatments, although here the effect is not significant.

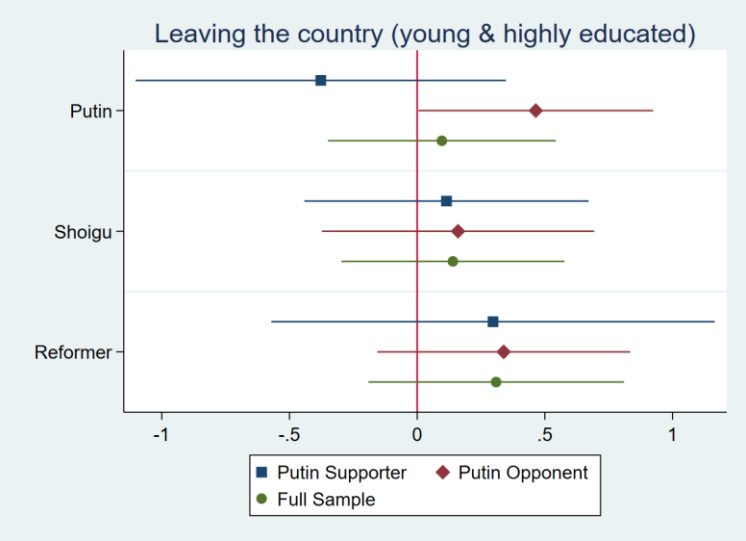


Figure 9: Testing for brain drain (Question: "How likely would it be that you would leave Russia permanently for another country?"; 396 observations (respondents younger than 30 years with higher education); only control group as reference group for each treatment; ordered probit, 95% confidence interval)

[33] This seems to be the case as all three treatments significantly increase the likelihood that government opponents indicate a willingness to emigrate, as compared to the control group, so that when looking at the whole sample, the effects for each individual treatment are no longer significant.

Investing in human capital. Do different political scenarios affect the likelihood that respondents plan to get additional education? As shown in Figure A3 in the Appendix, we do not find any significant effects, although there seems to be a trend that respondents are more likely to continue their education under a young reformer than under Putin. There also do not seem to be any heterogeneous effects of our treatments for this question.

Saving behavior. Finally, we also look if our treatment had an effect on respondents choosing more or less risky options when investing or saving a windfall from a potential lottery win, such as investing in foreign or domestic shares, opening a bank savings account, converting rubles into dollars, or renovating their apartment, as well investing into leisure activities such as travel. As can be seen from answers to question 5 in section A2 of the Appendix, for almost all of these questions our treatments did not have a significant effect.

3.4.5. Political expectations

At the end of our study, we asked respondents about Russia's position in the world, and the likelihood of political repression to increase. As shown in Figure 10, there is a clear difference along political lines with respect to the fear that Russia might lose its influence in the world. While Putin supporters were significantly more concerned about this issue under a young reformer, Putin opponents were afraid that Russia's influence in the world might decline if Putin stays in power. We did not find any heterogeneous effects with respect to age, education or income.

Finally, we asked respondents if they were worried about 'political repression and persecution' as a potential problem in the future. Interestingly, as in the case of the brain drain (Figure A4 in the Appendix), here as well *all* our treatments increased concerns about political repression among government opponents, as is shown in Figure A18 in the Appendix, while all treatments *reduced* concerns about repression among government supporters. Figure A18 also shows that younger people and those with a higher income are worried about repression under the Putin treatment, but not under the other two treatments, a result in line with what we find for concerns about the general development of the country in Figure 1.

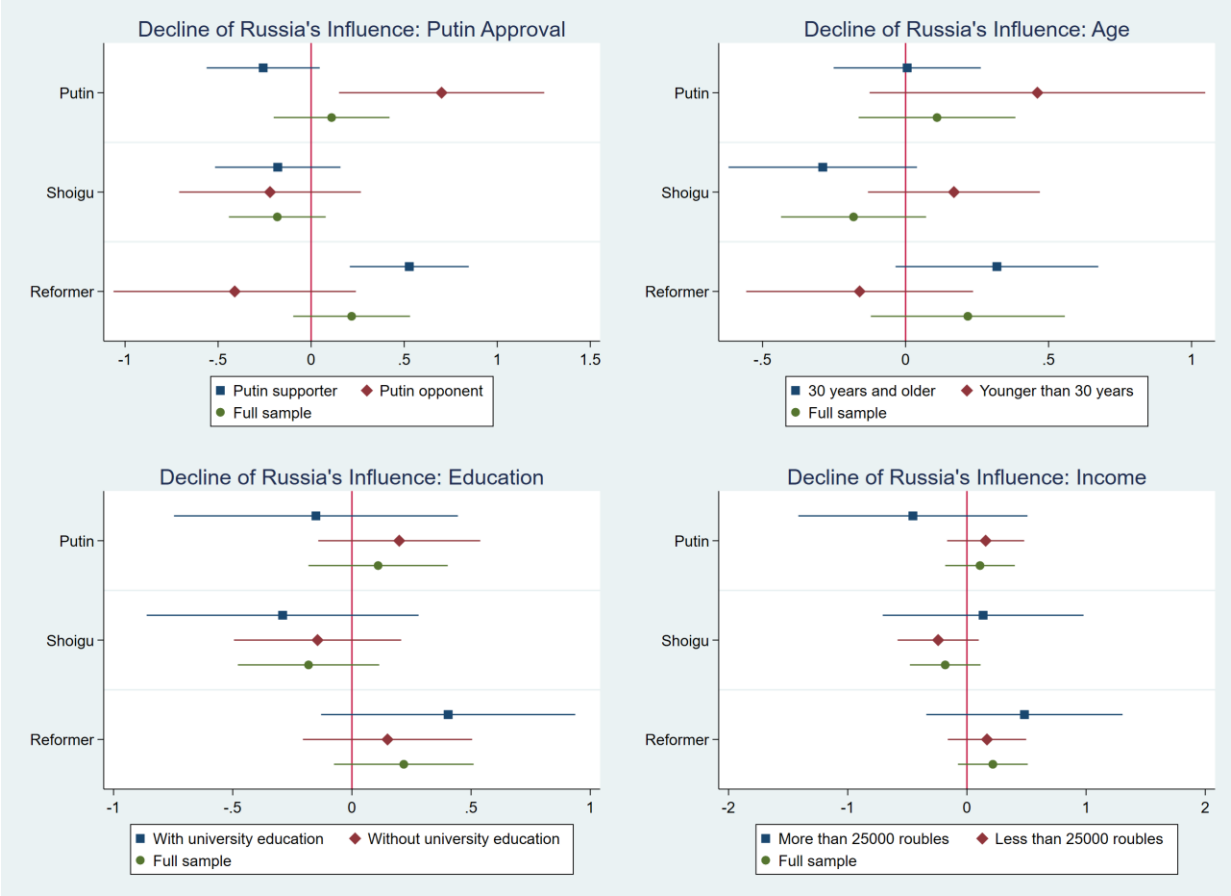


Figure 10: Risk of Russia losing its influence in the world (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit, 95% confidence interval)

3.5. Conclusion

Imagine an authoritarian country where a change of the constitution makes it likely that the current ruler will remain in office for at least another six years. How will this affect expectations and behavior of individual citizens? We test this question for Russia in the year 2021. We find that while all citizens were worried about economic stagnation under Putin, government supporters remained more likely to indicate their willingness to invest, potentially because they feared that a political alternative might produce even worse outcomes. They also trusted Putin to defend Russia's position in the world. Government opponents, on the other hand, were considerably concerned about the development prospects of the country, economic stagnation, as well as Russia's future position as a major political power, should Putin remain in power. We also find that government opponents as well as younger, better educated and wealthier citizens indicated a much lower willingness to work for the government, as well as a higher willingness to emigrate, showing how the Putin regime had

lost support among the most economically active parts of the Russian population.

While our results show the picture of a country divided along political lines, we also find that *all* Russians in May 2021 - irrespective of their political affiliation - shared some very similar concerns, in particular a worry about economic stagnation, should the current government remain in power. Subsequent events have shown that these concerns were not without foundation. While our study clearly indicates that Russian citizens in 2021 were significantly more concerned about economic stagnation than about geopolitics, in February 2022 Putin decided to sacrifice Russia's economic development in favor of taking a high-stakes geopolitical gamble.

It seems that in the short run and as in 2014 (Hale 2022; Kazun 2016), the gamble paid off as Putin managed once again to divert attention from economic concerns. Since February 2022, his approval ratings have increased significantly, leading to another 'rally-around-the-flag' effect (see Figure 11). This time, however, survey results might be less trustworthy, due to a significant increase in political repression. It also remains unclear if in light of the increasingly difficult military situation in Ukraine, the partial mobilization declared in September 2022, and growing economic difficulties, Putin's approval ratings will remain high for long.

As shown by Hale (2018), in particular a growing awareness of the economic costs of the Ukraine war might have the potential to significantly dampen the war's positive effect on support for Putin, once the effects of the massive economic sanctions will start to be felt. As this time the economic crisis is likely to be an order of magnitude more severe than in 2014, and its effects are likely to be more visible and long-lasting, there is a high probability that the current rally effect might be considerably shorter. The incumbent regime's political future will then depend on how long it will remain able to divert attention - through propaganda, repression or foreign conflict - from the fundamental economic concerns that seem to be shared by a large part of the Russian population.

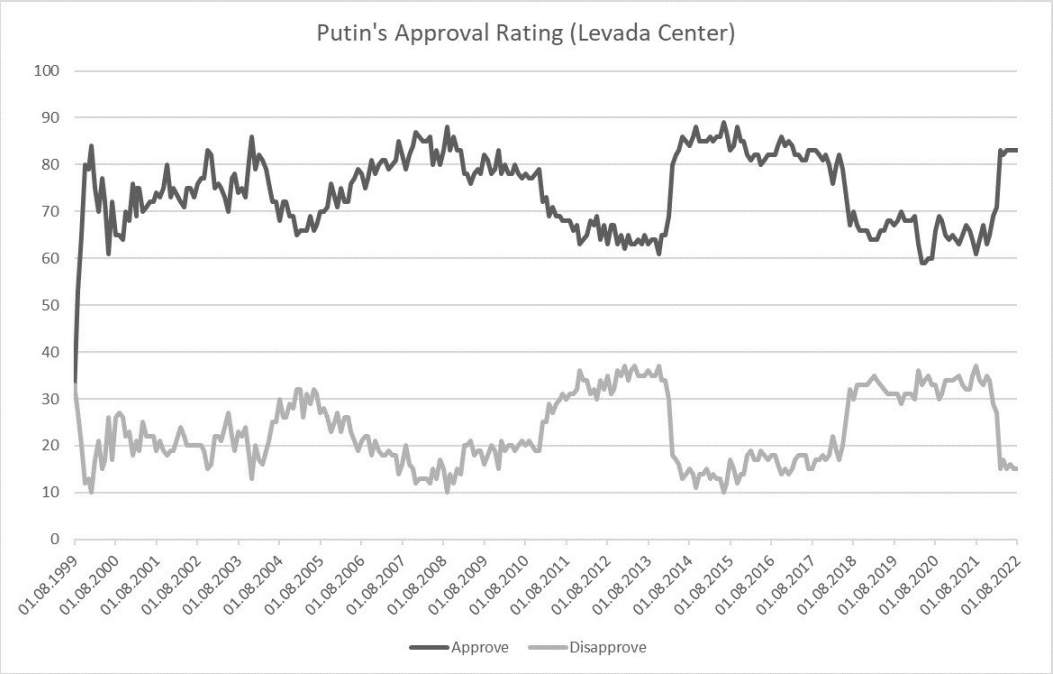


Figure 11: Approval ratings of Vladimir Putin, 1999-2022. Source: Levada Center

More generally, our findings - regime supporters indicating more willingness to invest under the status quo, despite negative economic expectations - show how regime legitimacy can be closely associated with individual economic behavior, and therefore also with the resilience of autocratic states. In other words, if a regime and its leader are popular, the prospect of having a strong leader in power for the foreseeable future might not necessarily have a negative effect on individual investment decisions and behavior. If, however, support for the regime is waning, as has been the case, for example, in Belarus, the negative effects of a lack of prospects might come to outweigh the positive effects of regime stability. Regime legitimacy and public support for the leader could thus be an important factor to explain why some authoritarian regimes fare better economically than others.

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Appendix

A1. Survey Questions

A1.1. Translation of the survey experiment into English

Treatments

Treatment 1 (A): The President of Russia is elected for a six-year term. The next presidential elections will be held in Russia in 2024. The 2020 Constitutional amendments will allow incumbent President Vladimir Putin to run for office again. Let's say that Vladimir Putin wins the elections and stays in office for one more term. Now imagine that at that point of time you need to take an important decision about your future, and answer the following questions.

Treatment 2 (B): The President of Russia is elected for a six-year term. The next presidential elections will be held in Russia in 2024. Let's say that a young representative from the political opposition with a program of economic and political reforms wins the elections. Now imagine that at that point of time you need to take an important decision about your future, and answer the following questions.

Treatment 3 (C): The President of Russia is elected for a six-year term. The next presidential elections will be held in Russia in 2024. Let's say that Sergei Shoigu, the Minister of Defense and a United Russia member, wins the elections. Now imagine that at that point of time you need to take an important decision about your future, and answer the following questions.

Control scenario (D): Imagine that in a couple of years you will need to take an important decision about your future, and answer the following questions.

Survey Questions

1. If a friend asked you to become a partner in a new business, how likely is it that you would say 'yes'?
2. How likely is it that you would decide to take a permanent, stable position in the public service, if the opportunity presented itself?
3. How likely is it that you would decide to continue your education, for example, by acquiring a new qualification?
4. How likely is it that you would leave Russia permanently for another country?
   (a) highly unlikely

(b) unlikely
(c) likely
(d) highly likely
(e) *(do not read out)* difficult to say

5. If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? *Choose up to three answers*

(a) Improve my living conditions
(b) Buy shares of a Russian company
(c) Buy shares of a foreign company
(d) Open a savings account in a bank
(e) Convert rubles into dollars
(f) Invest in my own business
(g) Take a trip around the world
(h) *(do not read out)* difficult to say

6A. We remind you that we are talking about the year 2024, and Vladimir Putin has just been reelected president of Russia. Taking this into account, how would you evaluate Russia's development prospects in the next 10 years?

6B. We remind you that we are talking about the year 2024, and a young representative from the political opposition with a program of economic and political reforms has just been elected president of Russia. Taking this into account, how would you evaluate Russia's development prospects in the next 10 years?

6C. We remind you that we are talking about the year 2024, and Sergei Shoigu has just been elected president of Russia. Taking this into account, how would you evaluate Russia's development prospects in the next 10 years?

6D. How would you evaluate Russia's development prospects in the next 10 years?

(a) positively
(b) rather positively
(c) rather negatively
(d) negatively
(e) *(do not read out)* difficult to say

7A-C. In this hypothetical scenario, which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? *Choose up to three answers*

7D. In your opinion, which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? *Choose up to three answers*

(a) Climate change
(b) Economic stagnation or decline
(c) Deterioration of relations with the West
(d) Russia losing influence in the world
(e) Political instability
(f) Political repression and persecution
(g) Decline of traditional values
(h) *(do not read out)* difficult to say

8. Taking into account your evaluation of the economic and political future of Russia, how likely do you think are economic and/or political protests in your town/village in the next 5 years?

(a) likely
(b) unlikely
(c) *(do not read out)* difficult to say

A1.2. Original Russian version of the survey questions

Treatments

Вариант 1 (A): Президент России избирается сроком на шесть лет. В 2024 г. в России состоятся очередные президентские выборы. Поправки к конституции, принятые в 2020 г., позволяют действующему президенту Владимиру Путину вновь участвовать в выборах. Предположим, что Владимир Путин одержит победу и останется у власти еще на один срок. Представьте, что в это же время вам нужно будет принять решение относительно вашего будущего, и ответьте, пожалуйста, на несколько вопросов.

Вариант 2 (B): Президент России избирается сроком на шесть лет. В 2024 г. в России состоятся очередные президентские выборы. Предположим, что на выборах одержит победу молодой представитель оппозиции с программой экономических и политических реформ. Представьте, что в это же время вам нужно будет принять решение относительно вашего будущего, и ответьте, пожалуйста, на несколько вопросов.

Вариант 3 (C): Президент России избирается сроком на шесть лет. В 2024 г. в России состоятся очередные президентские выборы. Предположим, что на выборах одержит победу действующий министр обороны РФ, член партии Единая Россия Сергей Шойгу. Представьте, что в это же время вам нужно будет принять решение относительно вашего будущего, и ответьте, пожалуйста, на несколько вопросов.

Вариант (D): Представьте, что через пару лет вам нужно будет принять решение относительно вашего будущего, и ответьте, пожалуйста, на несколько вопросов.

Survey Questions

1. Если ваш знакомый предложит вам стать партнером в новом бизнесе, насколько вероятно, что вы согласитесь?
2. Насколько вероятно, что вы решите устроиться на постоянную, стабильную позицию на государственной службе, если вам представится такая возможность?
3. Насколько вероятно, что вы решите продолжить свое образование, например, получив дополнительную квалификацию?
4. Насколько вероятно, что вы решите уехать из России в другую страну на постоянное место жительство?

(a) Очень маловероятно
(b) Маловероятно
(c) Вероятно
(d) Очень вероятно
(e) *(не зачитывайте)* затрудняюсь ответить

5. Если вы выиграете в лотерею 2 млн. руб., что вы сделаете с этими деньгами? *Отметьте не более трех ответов*

(a) Улучшу жилищные условия
(b) Куплю акции российской компании
(c) Куплю акции зарубежной компании
(d) Открою сберегательный счет в банке
(e) Конвертирую рубли в доллары
(f) Инвестирую в собственный бизнес
(g) Отправлюсь в кругосветное путешествие
(h) *(не зачитывайте)* затрудняюсь ответить

6A. Напоминаем, что мы говорим о 2024 годе, и Владимир Путин только что был переизбран на пост президента России. С учетом этого, как вы оцениваете перспективы развития России в ближайшие 10 лет?

6B. Напоминаем, что мы говорим о 2024 годе, и молодой представитель оппозиции с программой экономических и политических реформ только что был избран на пост президента России. С учетом этого, как вы оцениваете перспективы развития России в ближайшие 10 лет?

6C. Напоминаем, что мы говорим о 2024 годе, и Сергей Шойгу только что был избран на пост президента России. С учетом этого, как вы оцениваете перспективы развития России в ближайшие 10 лет?

6D. Как вы оцениваете перспективы развития России в ближайшие 10 лет?

(a) Положительно
(b) Скорее положительно
(c) Скорее отрицательно
(d) Отрицательно
(e) *(не зачитывайте)* затрудняюсь ответить

7A-C. В этом гипотетическом сценарии, какие из нижеперечисленных проблем будут беспокоить вас больше всего в ближайшие 10 лет? *Отметьте не более трех ответов*

7D. По вашему мнению, какие из нижеперечисленных проблем будут беспокоить вас больше всего в ближайшие 10 лет? *Отметьте не более трех ответов*

(a) Изменение климата
(b) Экономический застой или спад
(c) Обострение отношений с западными странами
(d) Ослабление позиций России на мировой арене
(e) Политическая нестабильность
(f) Политические репрессии и преследования
(g) Упадок традиционных ценностей
(h) *(не зачитывайте)* затрудняюсь ответить

8. Учитывая вашу оценку экономического и политического будущего России, насколько возможными вы считаете экономические и/или политические протесты населения в вашем городе/сельском районе в ближайшие пять лет?

(a) вполне возможны
(b) маловероятны
(c) *(не зачитывайте)* затрудняюсь ответить

A2. Survey Results: Full Version

In this section, we present the full results for the survey, for every question and for both empirical strategies – the treatment group compared to the whole sample, and only in comparison with the control group.

Treatment effects are presented without heterogeneous effects (full sample), as well as with respect to political orientation, age, education and income.

Figure A1: Question 1: If a friend asked you to become a partner in a new business, how likely is it that you would say 'yes'? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; ordered probit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

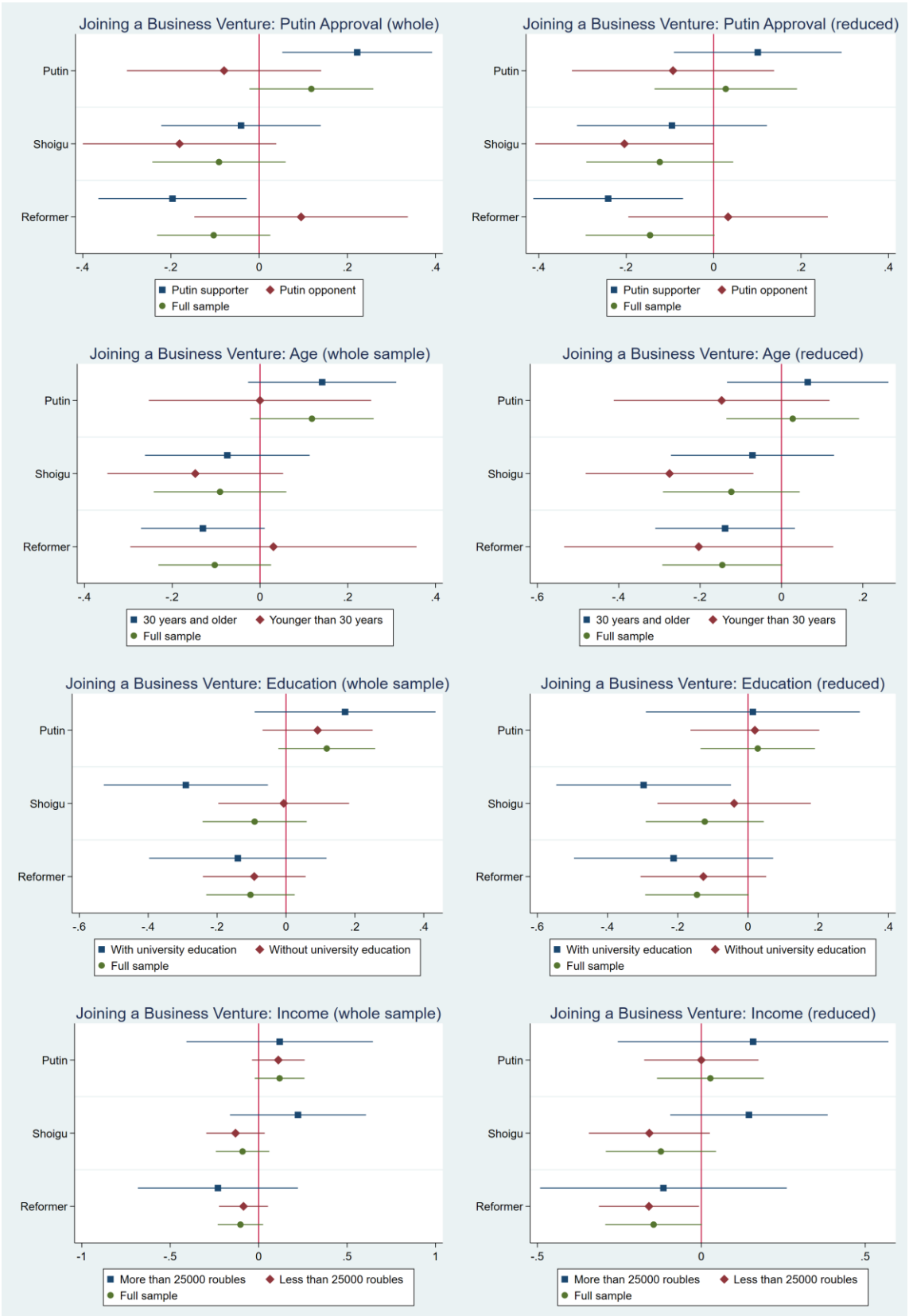


Figure A2: Question 2: How likely is it that you would decide to take a permanent, stable position in the public service, if the opportunity presented itself? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; ordered probit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

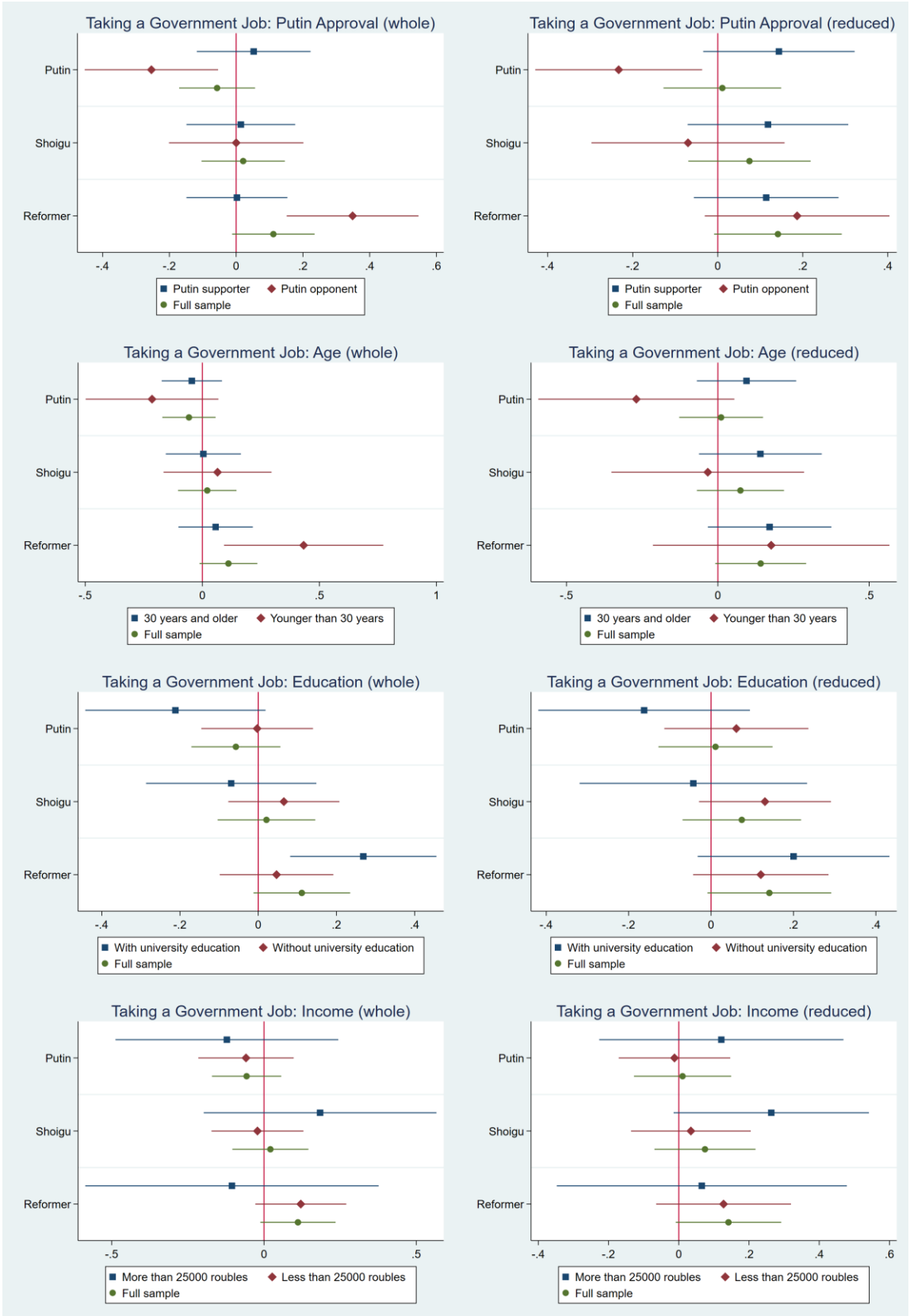


Figure A3: Question 3: How likely is it that you would decide to continue your education, for example, by acquiring a new qualification? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; ordered probit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

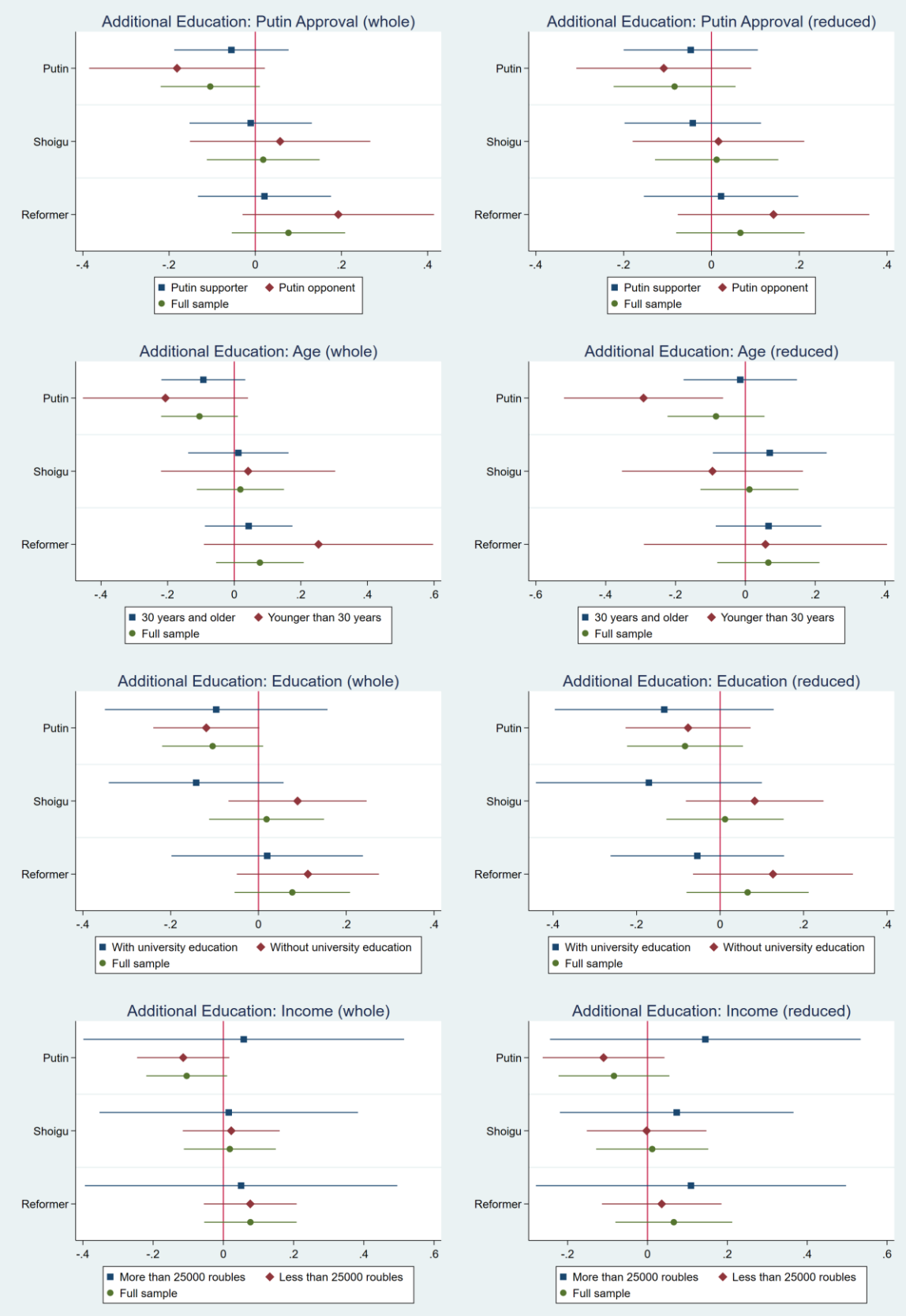


Figure A4: Question 4: How likely is it that you would leave Russia permanently for another country? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; ordered probit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

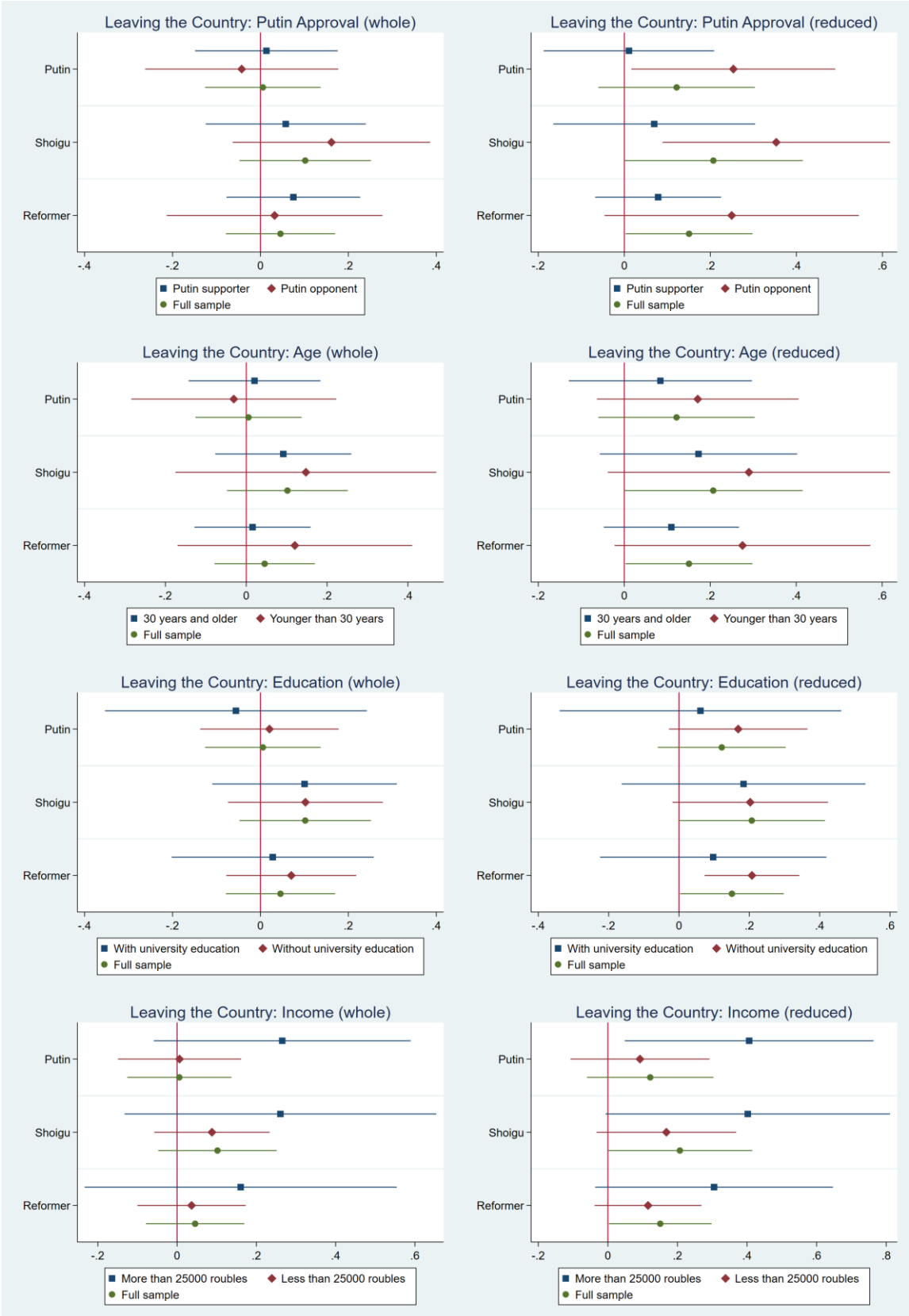


Figure A5: Question 5.1: If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? Probability that "improve my living conditions" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

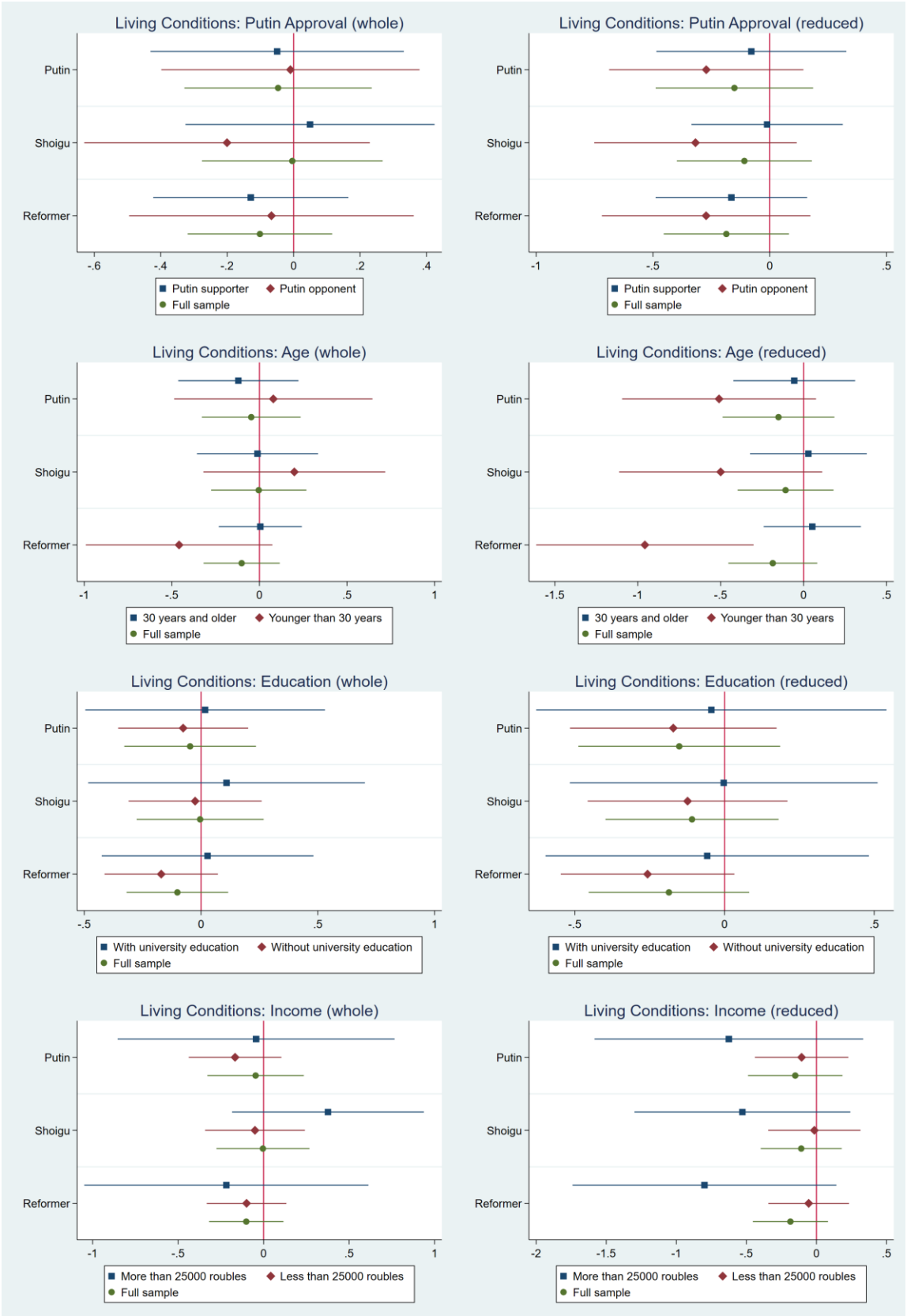


Figure A6: Question 5.2: If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? Probability that "buy shares of a Russian company" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

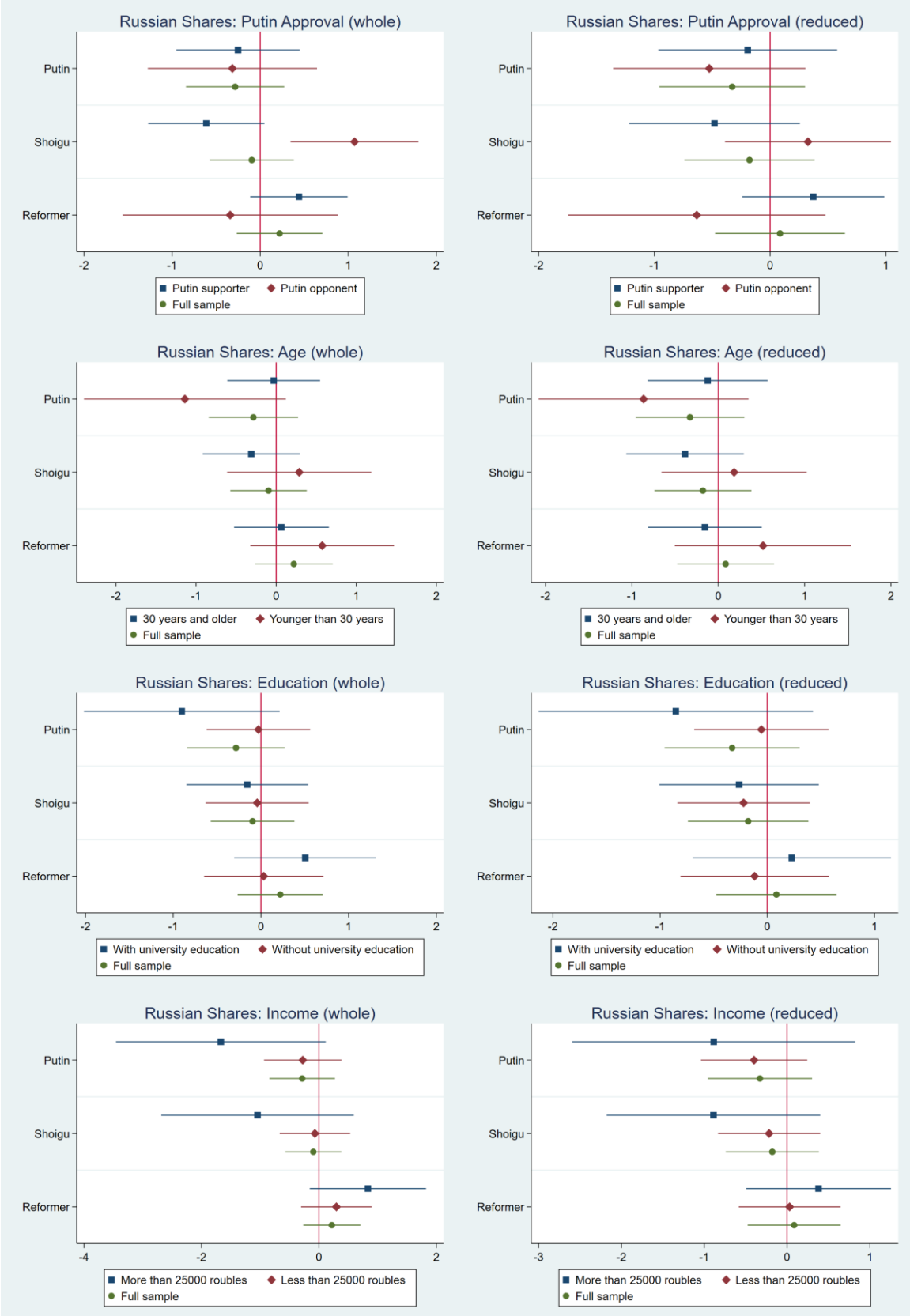


Figure A7: Question 5.3: If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? Probability that "buy shares of a foreign company" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

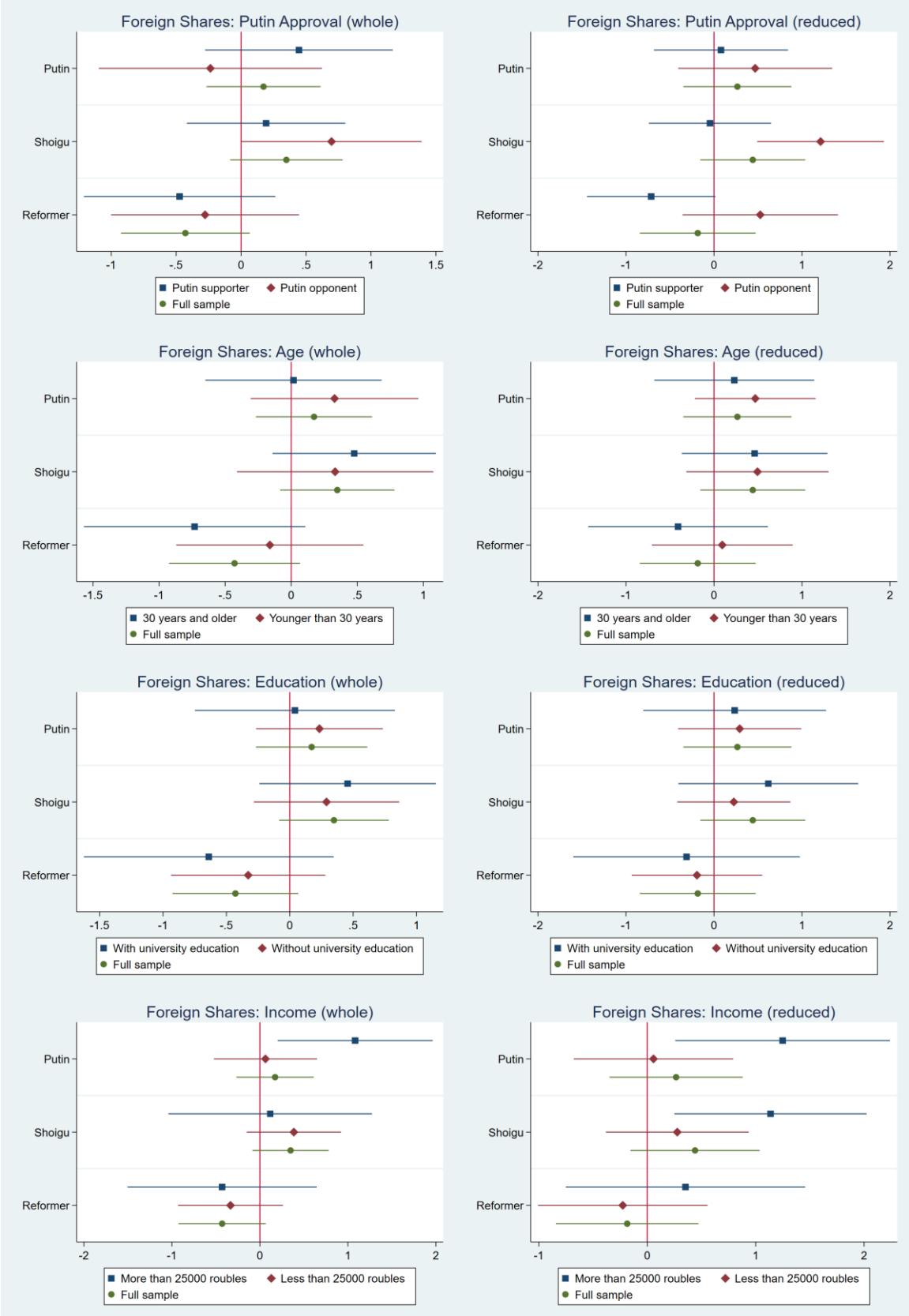


Figure A8: Question 5.4: If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? Probability that "open a savings account in a bank" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

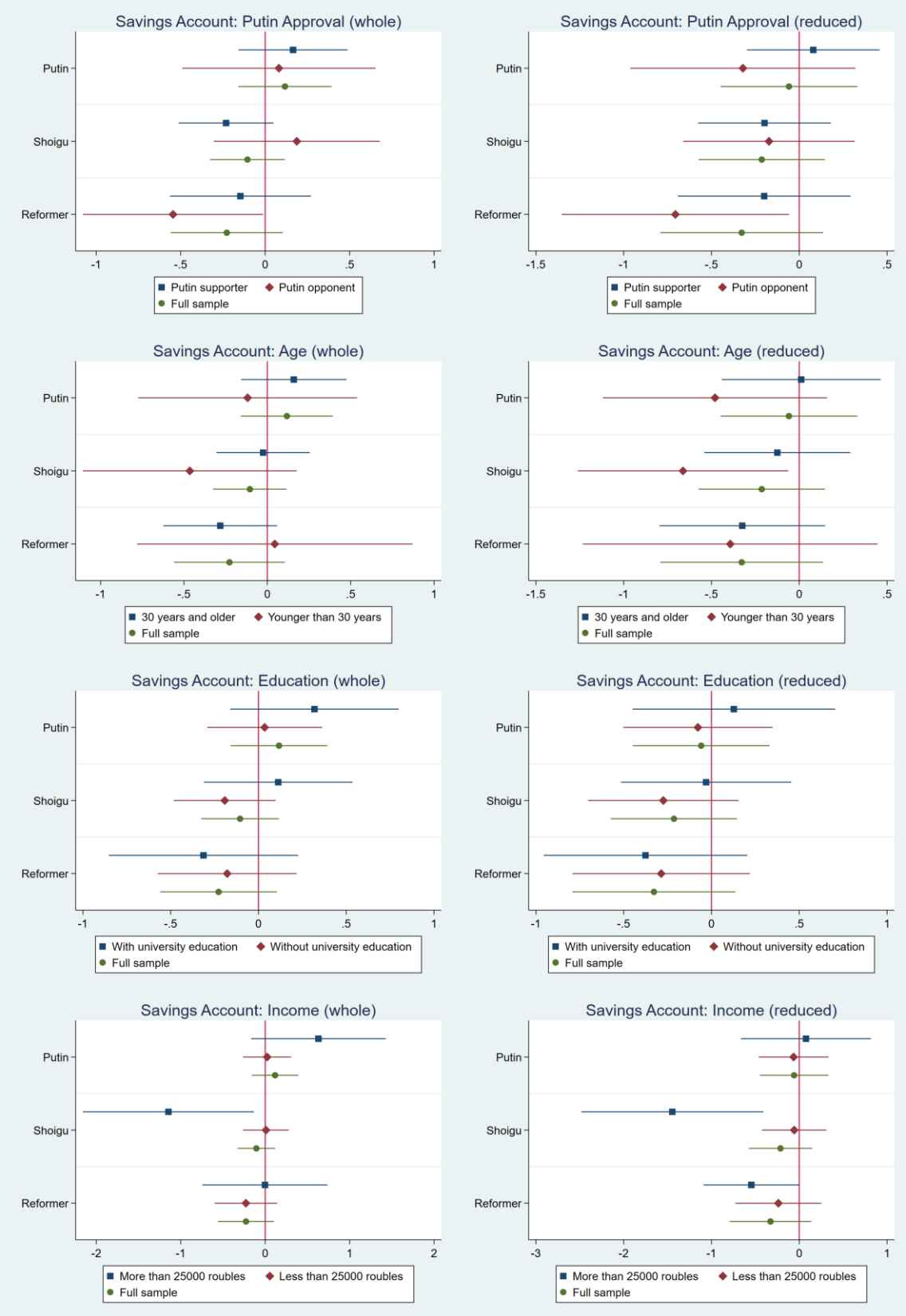


Figure A9: Question 5.5: If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? Probability that "convert rubles into dollars" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

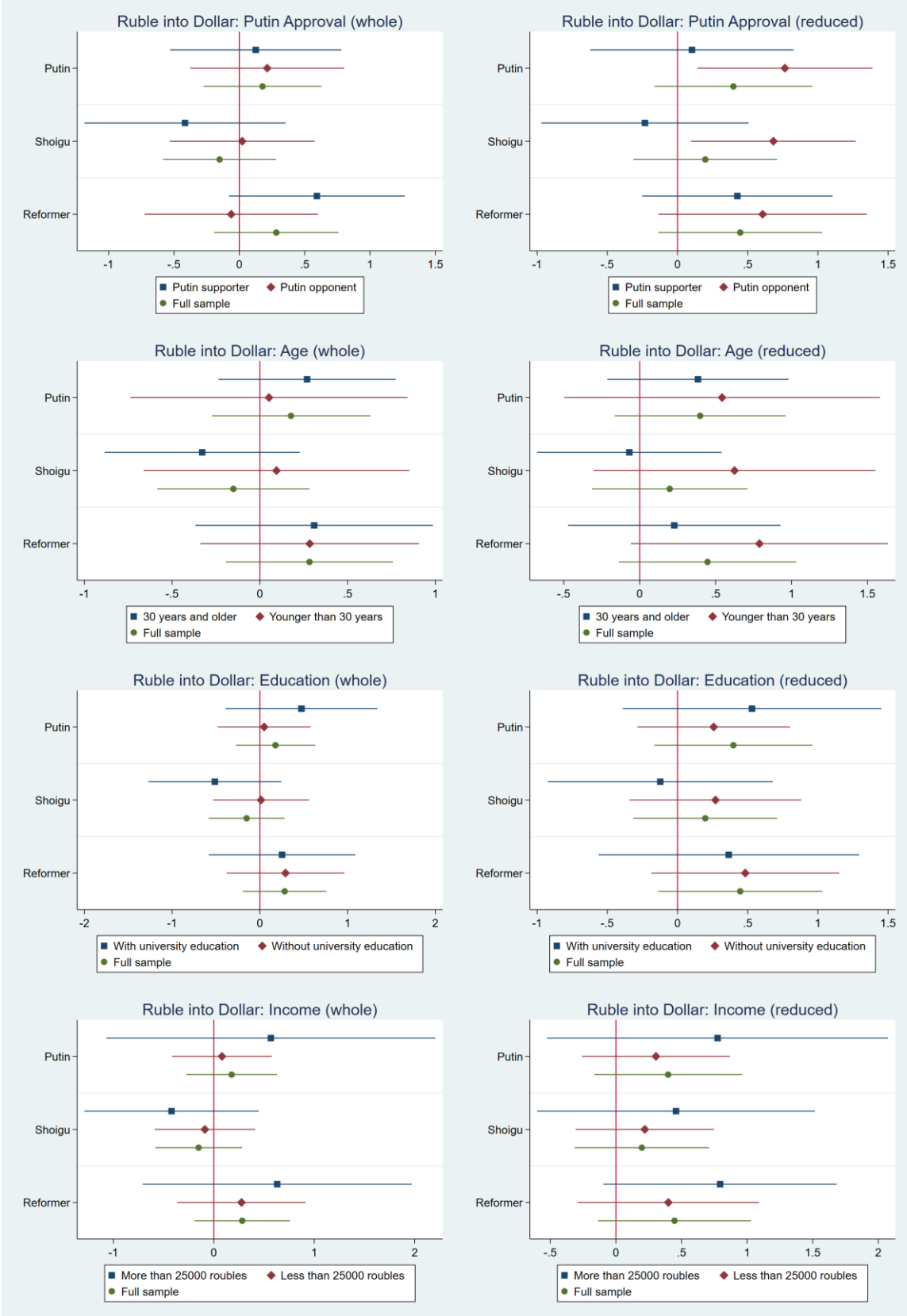


Figure A10: Question 5.6: If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? Probability that "invest into your own business" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

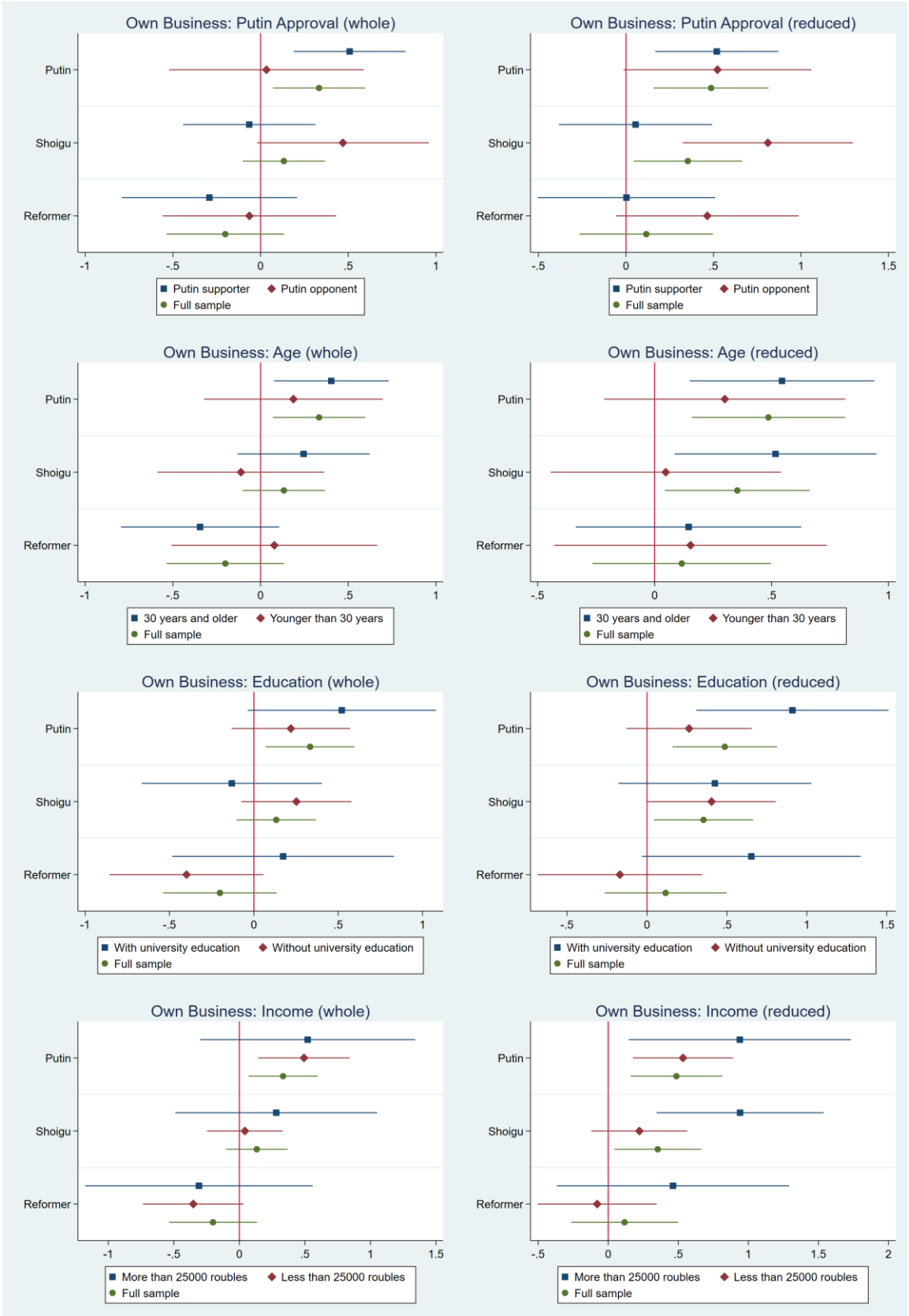


Figure A11: Question 5.7: If you win 2 million rubles in a lottery, what will you do with this money? Probability that "take a trip around the world" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

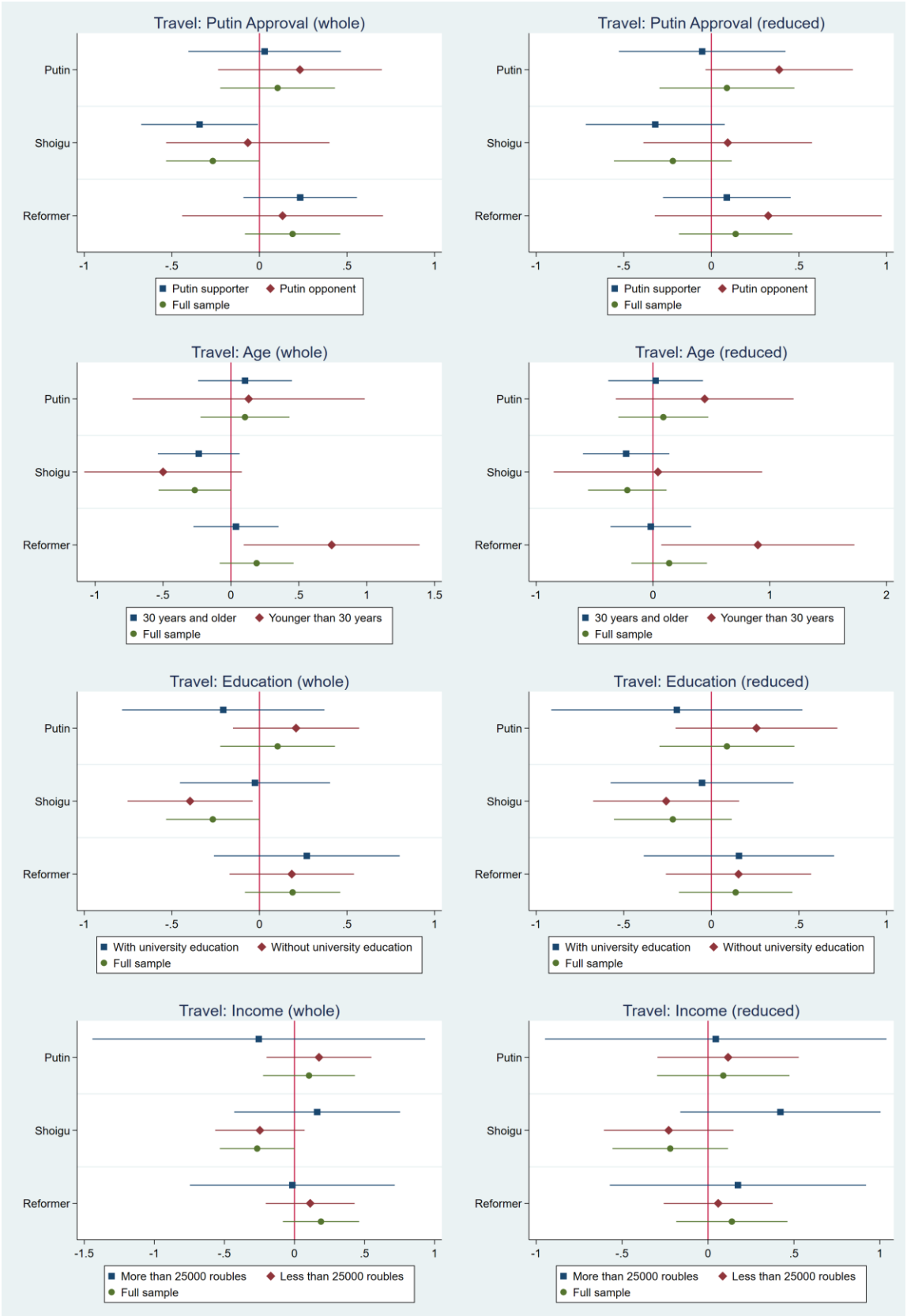


Figure A12: Question 6: How would you evaluate Russia's development prospects in the next 10 years? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; ordered probit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

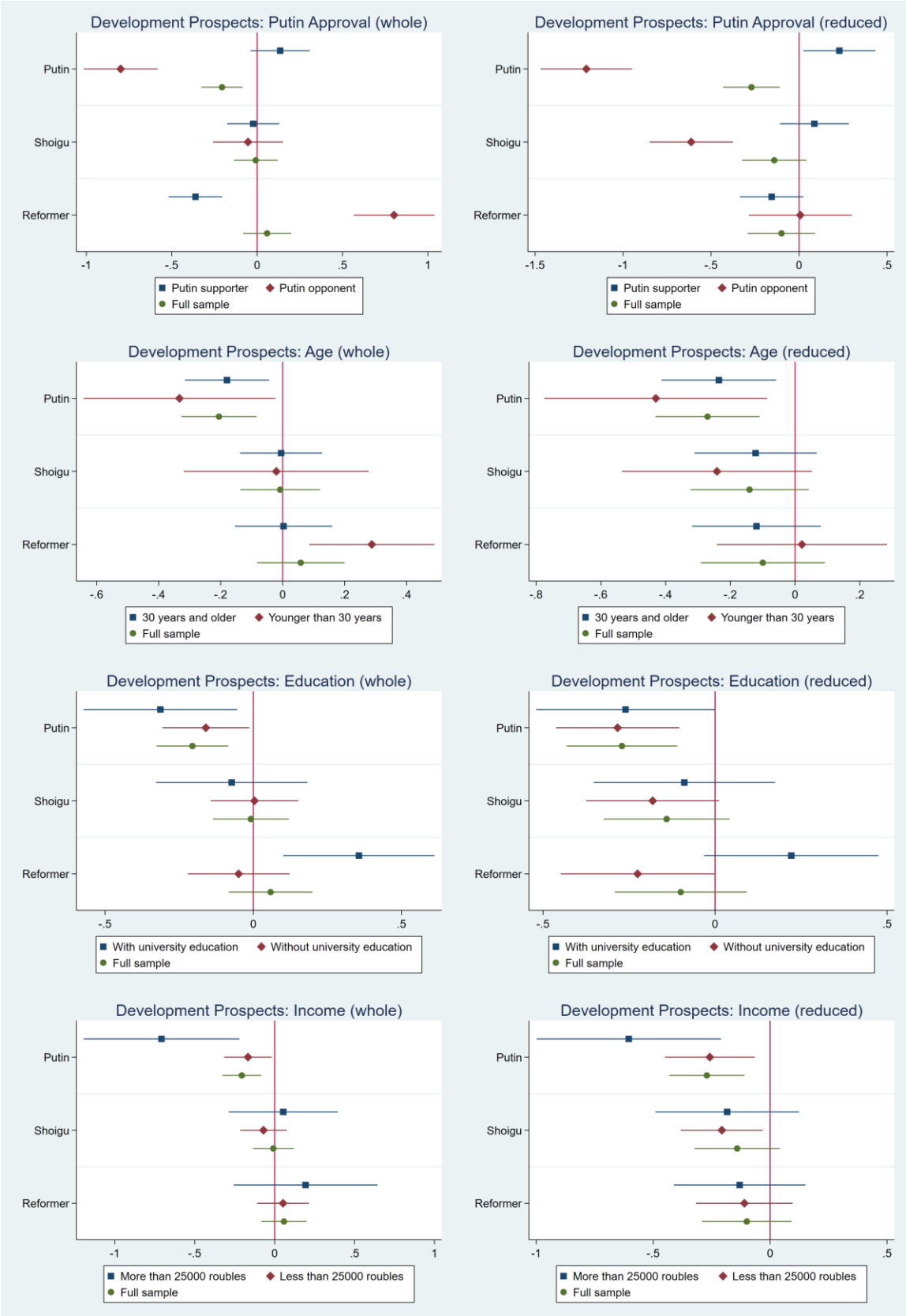


Figure A13: Question 7.1: Which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? Probability that "climate change" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

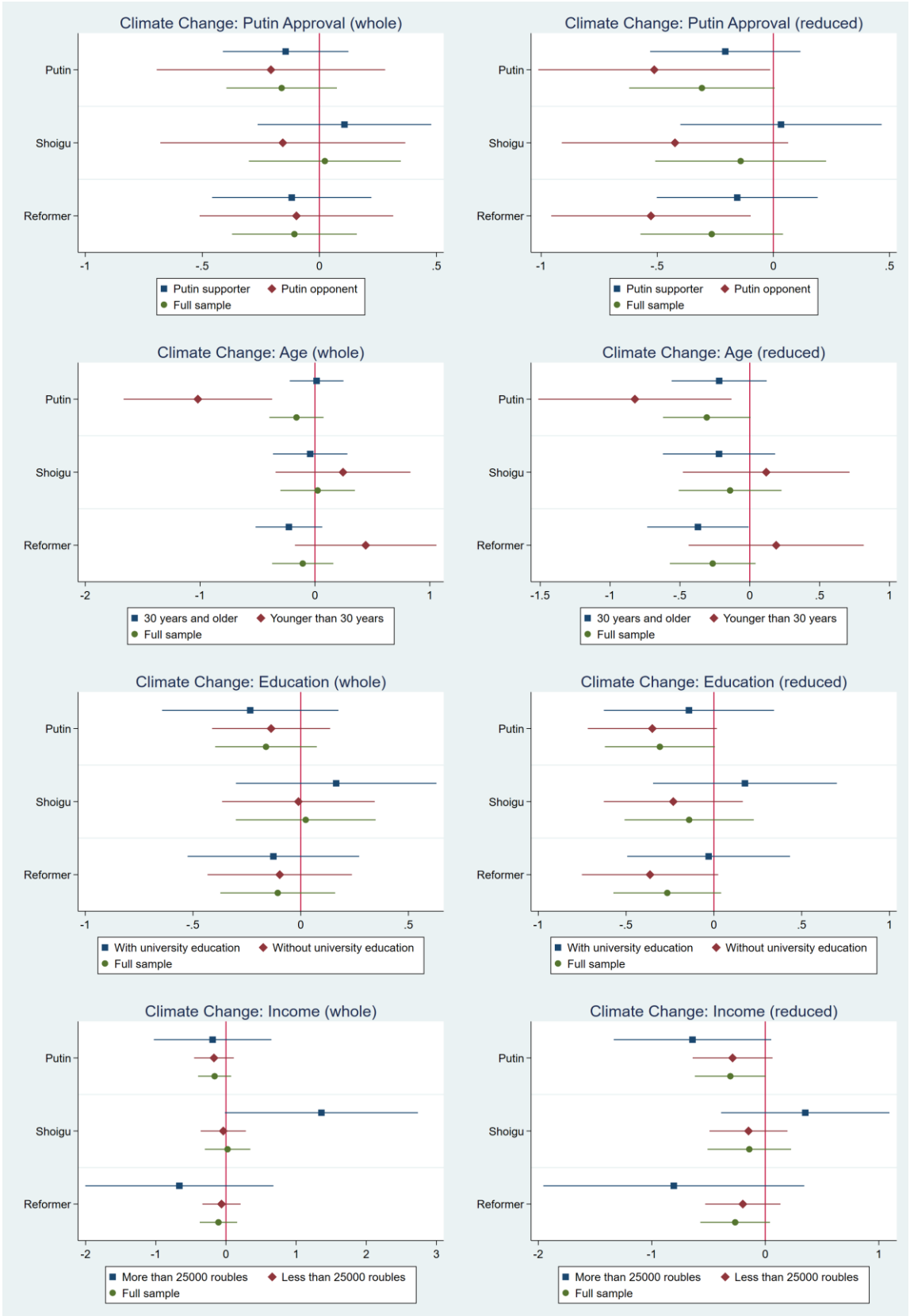


Figure A14: Question 7.2: Which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? Probability that "economic stagnation" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be chosen; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

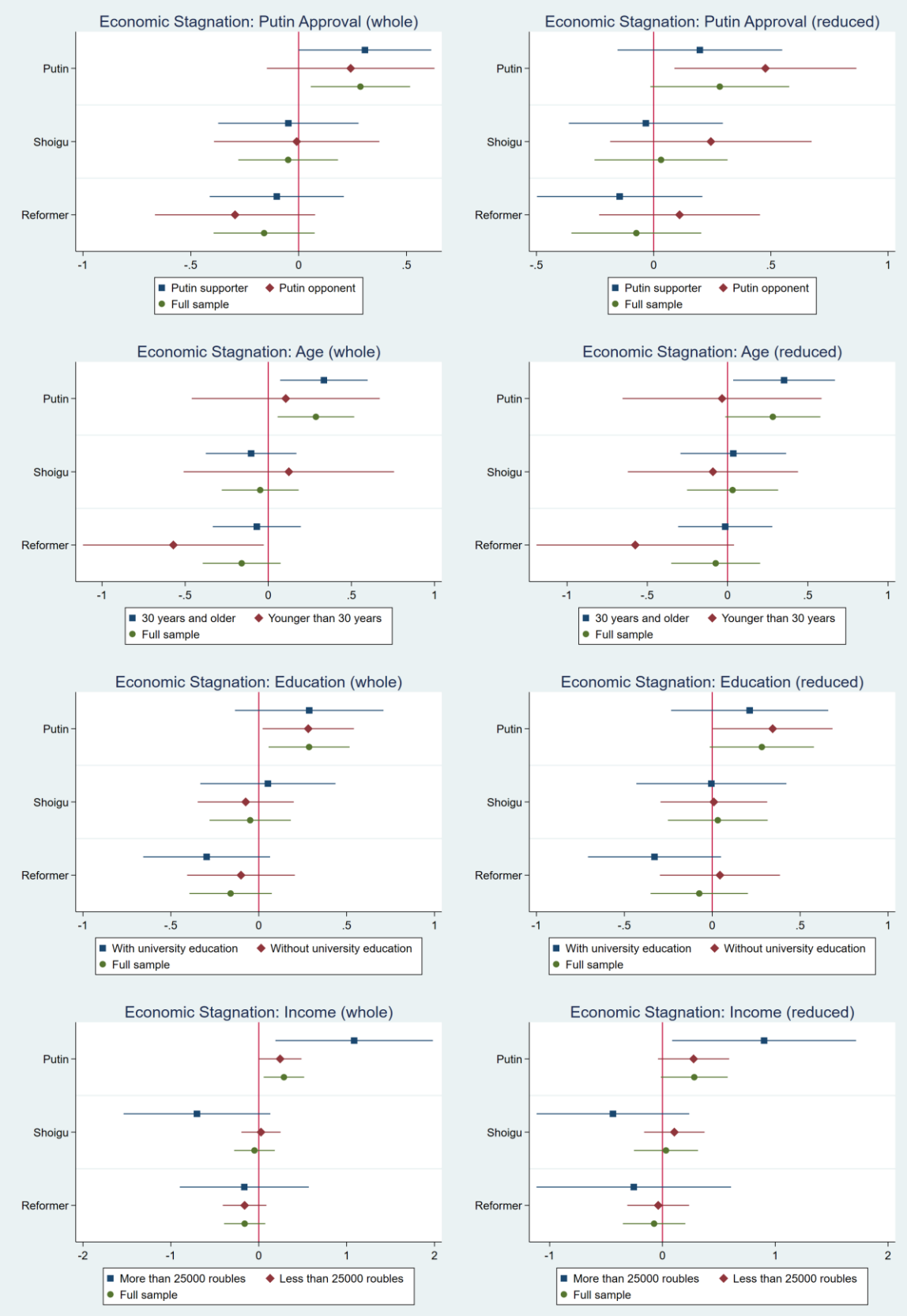


Figure A15: Question 7.3: Which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? Probability that "deterioration of relations with the West" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

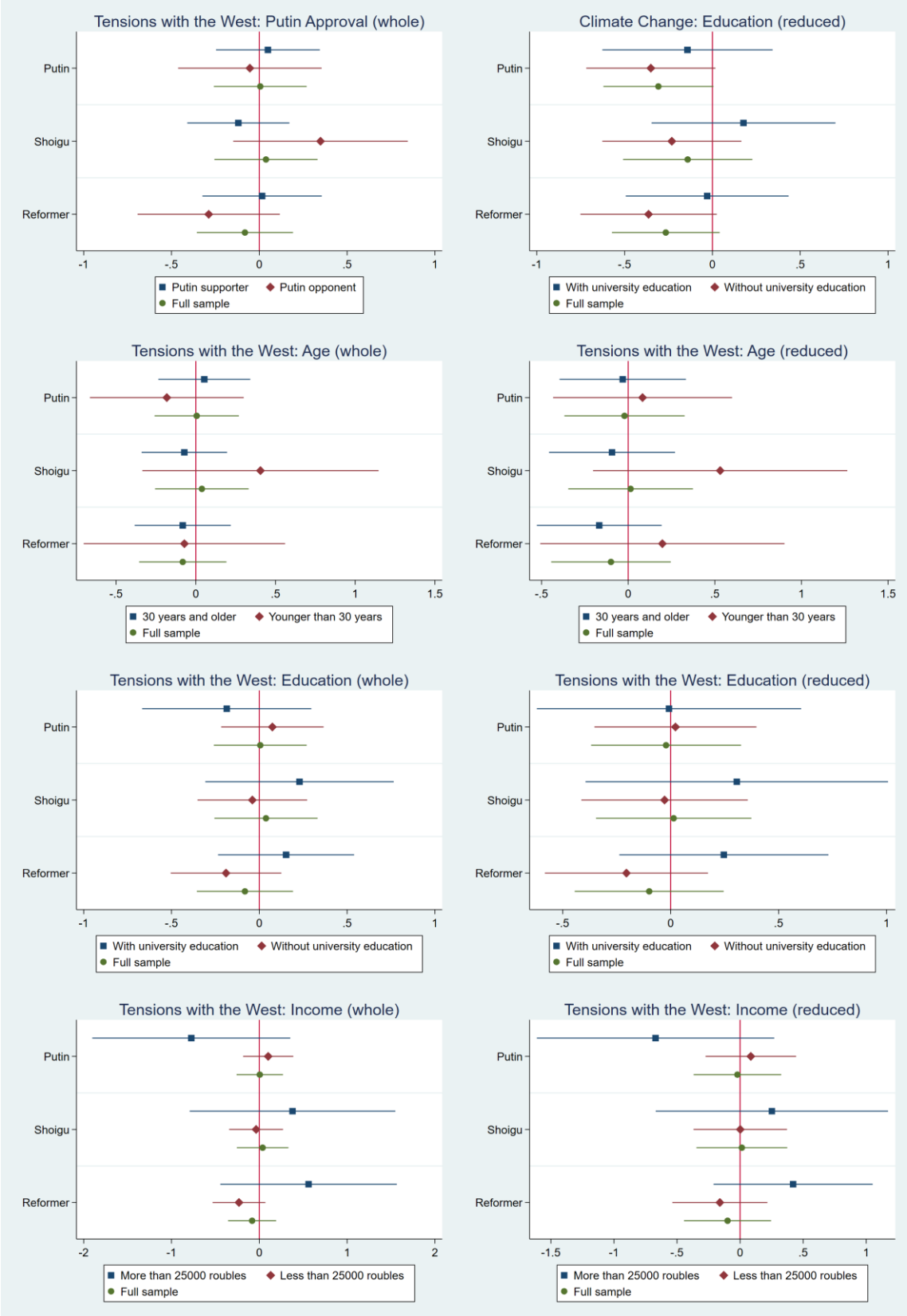


Figure A16: Question 7.4: Which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? Probability that "Russia losing influence in the world" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

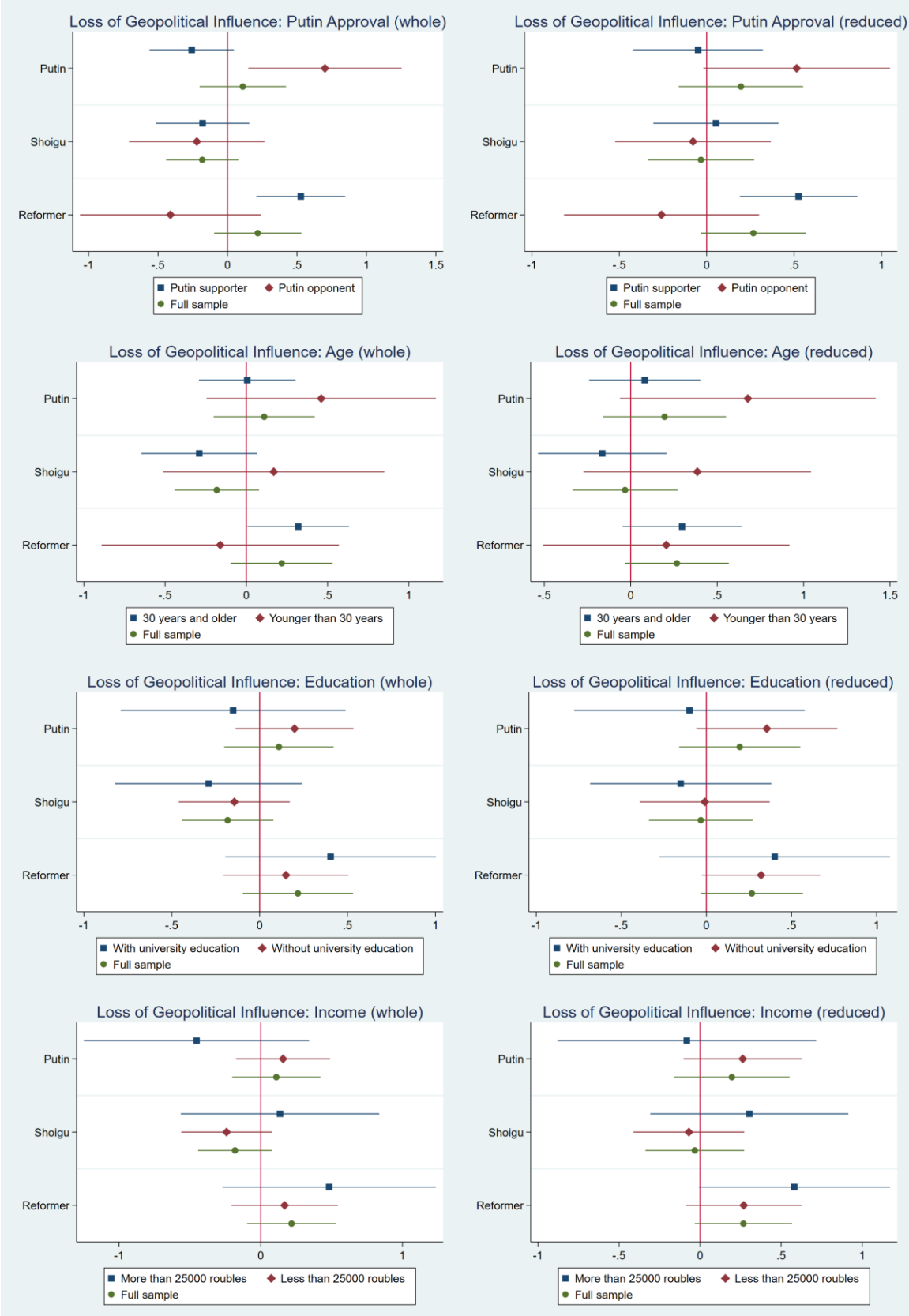


Figure A17: Question 7.5: Which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? Probability that "political instability" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

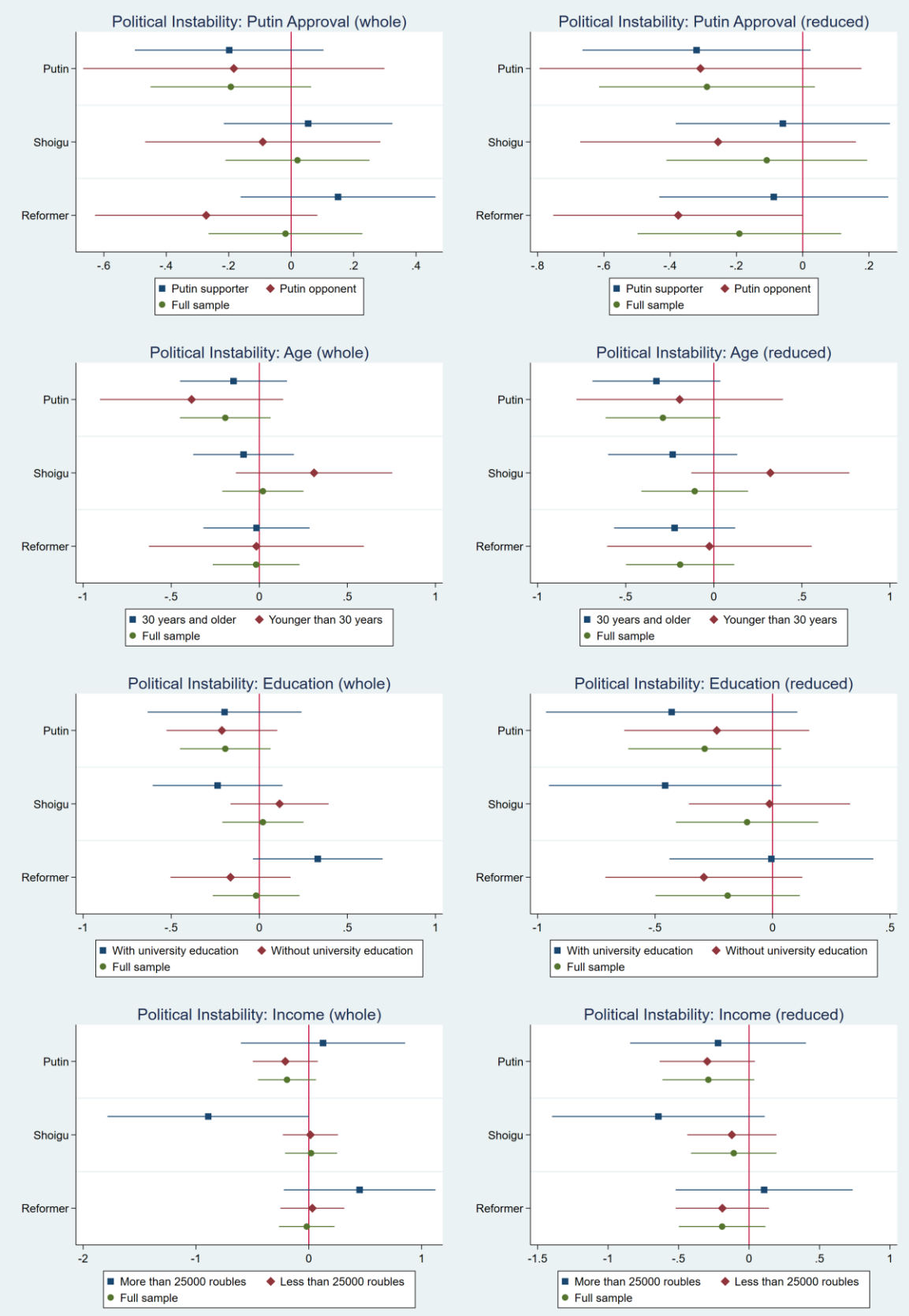


Figure A18: Question 7.6: Which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? Probability that "political repression and persecution" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

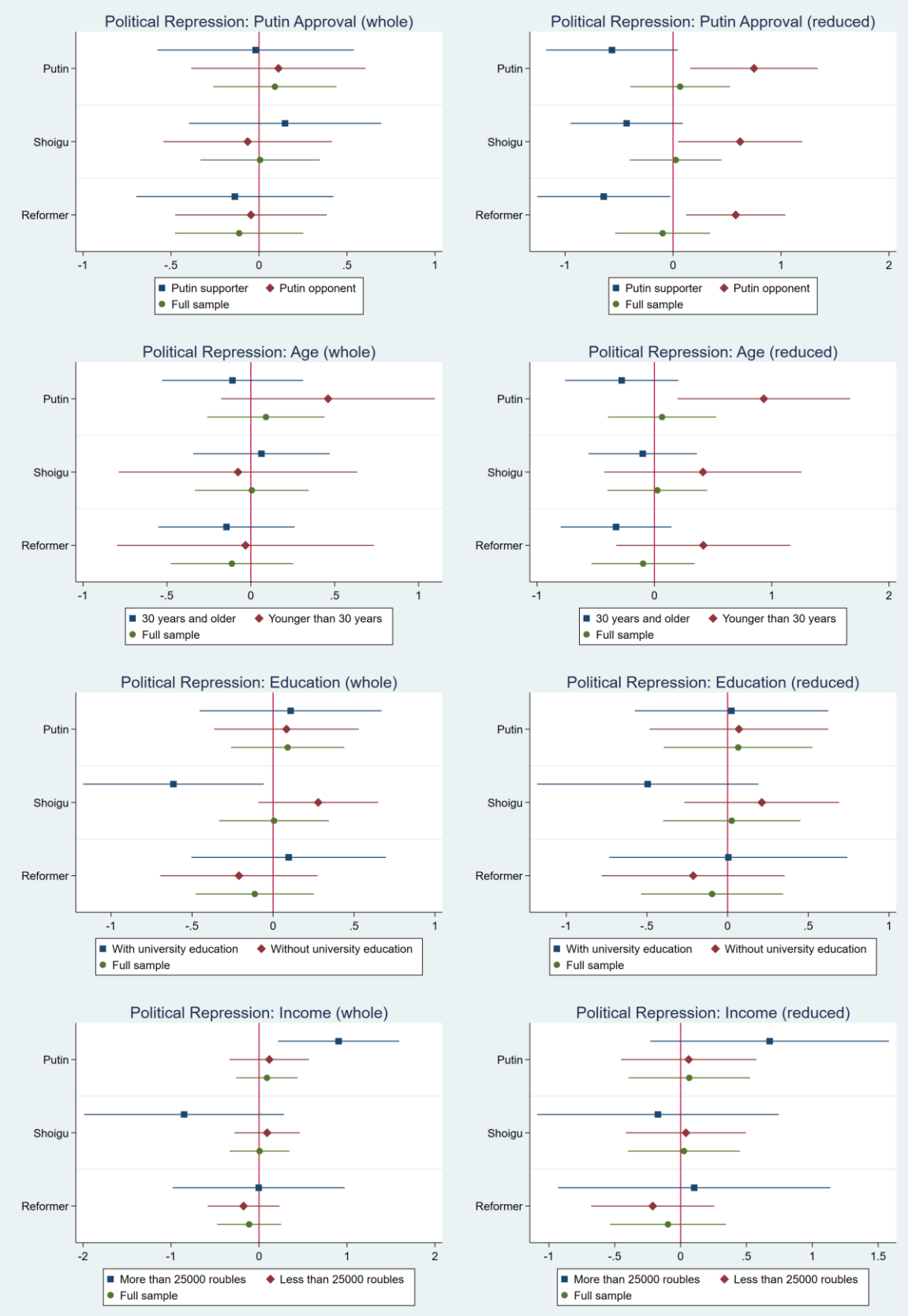


Figure A19: Question 7.7: Which of the following problems would worry you most in the next 10 years? Probability that "decline of traditional values" will be selected. (Up to three out of seven possible answer options can be selected; heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; logit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)

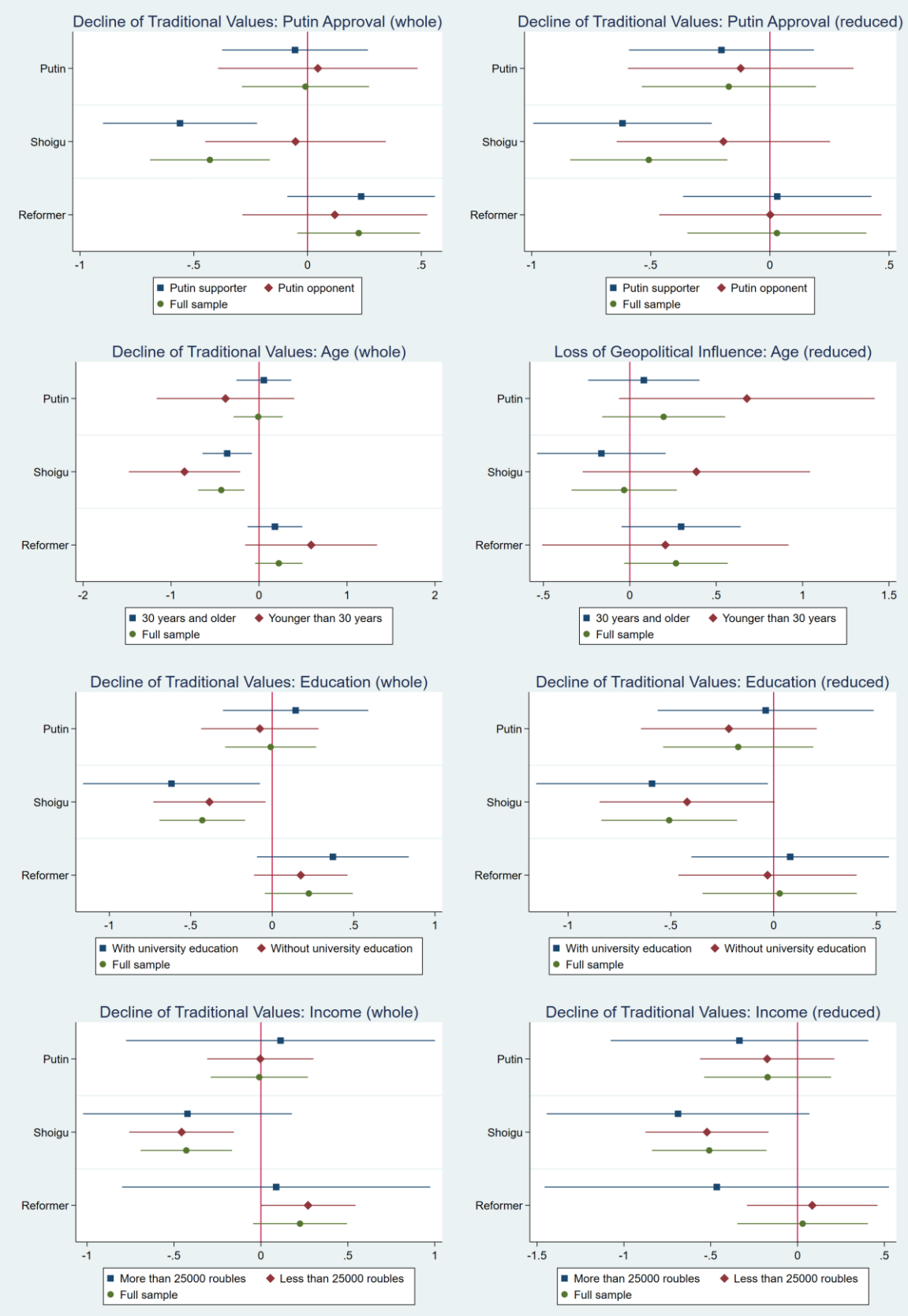
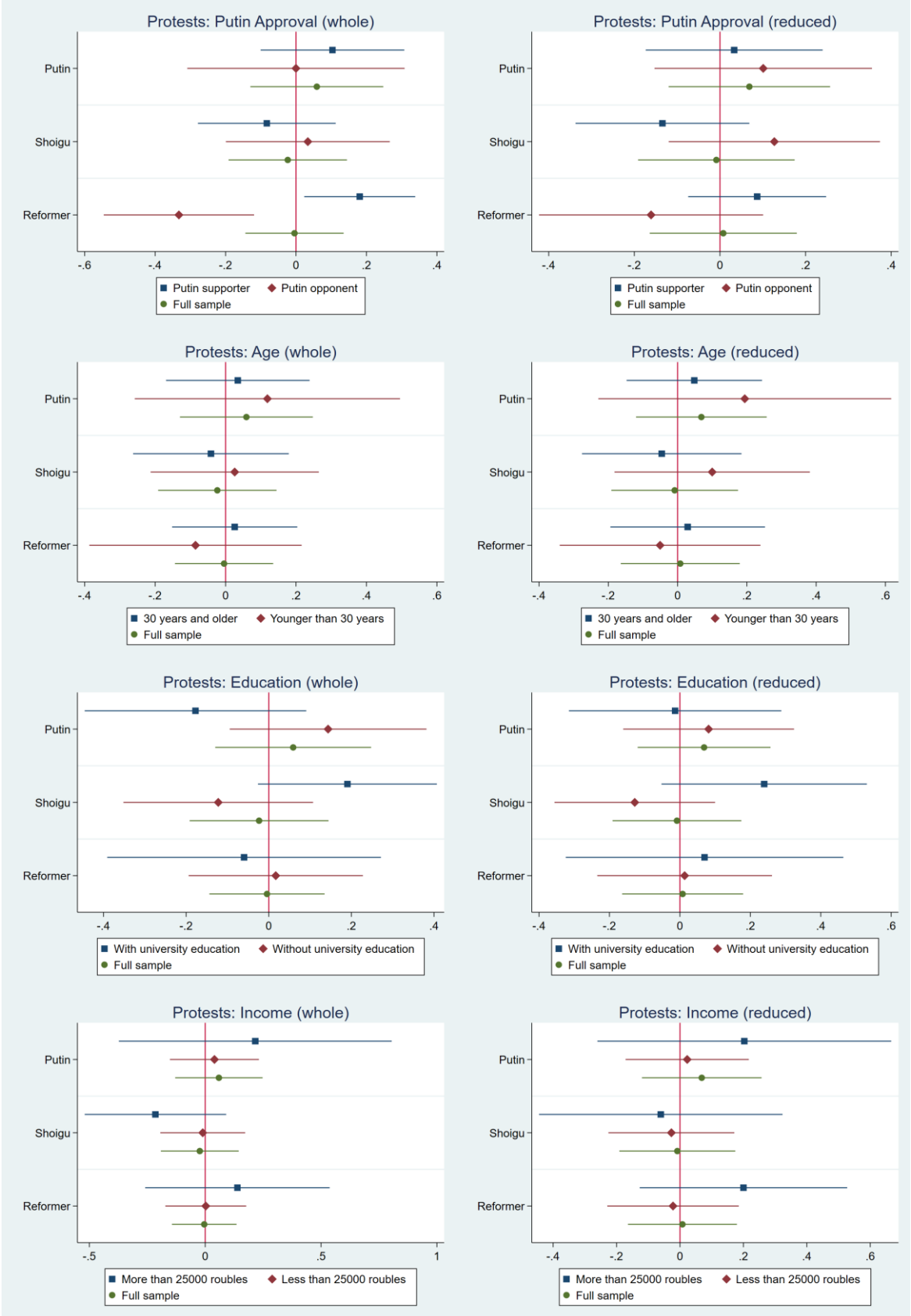


Figure A20: Question 8: Taking into account your evaluation of the economic and political future of Russia, how likely do you think are economic and/or political protests in your town/village in the next 5 years? (Heterogeneous effects by Putin approval, age, education and income; ordered probit; 95% confidence interval; whole sample & only treatment and control group)



Chapter 4

4. Politicized Corruption and Models of Legal Repression of Local Elites in Russia

Olga Masyutina

Abstract

Authoritarian regimes widely use elite repression to preserve power and resolve elite conflicts for access to rents or high office (Bove and Rivera 2015; Davenport 2007; deMeritt 2016; Escribà-Folch 2013). Modern autocrats, however, tend to refrain from violent coercion and instead resort to 'legal' repression, i.e. arbitrary (although often technically correct) use of the criminal justice system (Guriev and Treisman 2022; Levitsky and Way 2010). Prosecution of elites on corruption charges is an increasingly popular strategy of this legal repression. In this paper I study legal repression via politicized corruption focusing on criminal anticorruption cases against local top executives in Russia. Since about 10% of Russian mayors were criminally prosecuted between 2002 and 2018 (Buckley et al. 2022), focusing on the local level offers an opportunity to explore this phenomenon with more variance and a larger population of cases (N=84). I build my analytical framework by looking at the interaction of two factors – whether there was an indication of political motives behind the case and whether the mayor was appointed or popularly elected. I show that different combinations of these factors produce three models of anticorruption repression of local elites – struggle, purge and state (bureaucracy)-driven repression, which are driven by a different logic. I then illustrate these models with detailed examples of criminal cases against Russian mayors, based on media reports and social media posts, to better understand the functioning of legal repression and the use of politicized corruption. I also show how legal repression becomes a contributing factor to local elite rearrangements, alongside formal institutionalized ways of elite replacement via regular elections and (re)appointments.

Keywords: corruption, legal repression, elites, Russia, local politics, elite replacement

JEL: D73, P25, K42

4.1. Introduction

Political elites present the most viable threat to the survival of autocrats (Svolik 2012). In order to ward off these internal threats and to ensure regime continuity, autocrats often resort to elite repression (Bhasin and Gandhi 2013; Bove and Rivera 2015; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005; Davenport 2007; deMeritt 2016; Escribà-Folch 2013). Using economic and legalistic pretenses to justify repression is an increasingly common strategy that allows modern autocrats to sideline their opponents without alienating the public (Frye 2021). This strategy of legal repression involves arbitrary (although often technically correct) application of law (Shen-Bayh 2018, Levitsky Way) and has been recorded for a number of authoritarian states, for example, for, Singapore (Rajah 2012), Egypt (Moustafa 2007) and Turkey (Bali 2012). The value of this type of repression is that the regime can present it to the public as enforcement of the rule of law rather than repression. Anticorruption, i.e. repression of elites using allegations of corruption, has become one of the more popular tools of legal repression. In general, the authoritarian regime faces a dilemma when it comes to fighting corruption. On the one hand, corruption (or access to it) is often used as a reward and a way to coopt the elites (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Hollyer and Wantchekon 2015; Wintrobe 2000; Zhu and Zhang 2017), so some corruption can be tolerated to ensure loyalty of political elites and bureaucrats. On the other hand, corruption undermines economic performance and public trust in the regime (d'Agostino, Dunne, and Pieroni 2016; Cieślik and Goczek 2018; Della Porta 2018; Mo 2001; Morris and Klesner 2010), so some authoritarian regimes, most notably Xi Jinping's China, have chosen to stamp out excessive corruption to try to reduce the economic and reputational harm caused by elite predation. However, at the same time corruption can be politicized, exploited and manipulated to punish disloyalty and persecute political rivals (Darden 2008; Li 2019; Schulze and Zakharov 2018; Zhu and Zhang 2017). It can thus be applied in a selective and targeted way and used not as a carrot but as a stick.

Russia offers a good setting to study this selective use of anticorruption in the legal repression of elites. The combination of the politicized legal system, the wide spread of corruption and frequent elite conflicts and power struggles for access to rents or high office have resulted in many instances of anticorruption elite repression in Russia, also at the subnational level, among the regional and local elites. In the past two decades arrests of regional governors and other top officials on corruption charges have become a common occurrence in Russia. For instance,

between 2012 and 2022, 9% of Russian governors lost office because they faced criminal charges.[34]

The same is true for local executives (Buckley et al. 2022), and in this paper I study elite repression via politicized corruption in Russia focusing on the local (city) level. First, local politics in Russia is underexplored but it offers many insights into the workings of an authoritarian system. Unlike the upper levels of government, there is also more political competition at the local level. Besides, there is still a diversity of subnational institutional arrangements - Russian mayors can be elected or appointed. This allows me to examine whether legal repression is used differently with regard to appointed and elected top executives. Finally, the focus on the local level offers a larger population of cases - I use data on 84 heads of Russia's largest cities who were criminally prosecuted on corruption-related charges between 2002 and 2018. I draw on an original database of Russian mayors from Buckley et al. (2022) that I expanded for the purpose of the current study. I complement this quantitative data with a dossier containing detailed information about all 84 criminal cases, based on newspaper reports, official documents and other sources.

I combine this data and the literature on elite repression, corruption and local politics in Russia to identify common models of legal repression of local elites via politicized corruption. My analytical framework is based on the interaction of two factors – the presence of political motives and the mechanism of selecting the city top executive – that I argue are responsible for major distinctions among the criminal cases. I find that different combinations of these factors produce three distinct models of anticorruption repression of local elites – struggle, purge and state (bureaucracy)-driven repression. I then illustrate the models with detailed examples of mayors' arrests to get a comprehensive picture of how corruption is selectively used to repress local elites and how its application varies across the models. I also demonstrate how this anticorruption repression becomes a contributing factor to local elite replacement.

This study contributes to the scholarly understanding of non-violent elite repression in modern autocracies that place a higher value on regime legitimacy and thus tend to refrain from overt repression (Guriev and Treisman 2022). They instead use the judicial and law enforcement systems that are subordinated to the political authority as an instrument of repression. The paper also highlights the multifaceted nature of corruption, its carrot-and-stick use and its manipulation to repress elites. Finally, this study provides new insight into authoritarian politics

[34] https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5501394

at the subnational level in Russia, for example, into local elite replacement via criminal prosecution.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I introduce the literature on elite repression and corruption that underpins the study. I then present the case of Russia and offer a brief overview of its (anti)corruption policy, legal system and local politics. Third, I describe my data and my analytical approach. Fourth, I present the results of my analysis and then discuss and illustrate the models. Finally, I draw some conclusions.

4.2. Literature Review

There is a number of survival strategies that autocrats can employ (Bove and Rivera 2015; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2010; Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Gerschewski 2013). This can involve, for example, cooptation of a broad set of actors by distributing spoils or making policy concessions (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 2007; Malesky and Schuler 2010; Manion 2014; Sika 2019), or power-sharing (Boix and Svolik 2013; Svolik 2012). In modern 'informational' autocracies cooperation of the population is also induced by the use of propaganda and censorship. Instead of instilling fear into the masses, the information is manipulated in a way to boost the leader's popularity, to create and maintain an image of him as a competent and beneficent leader (Guriev and Treisman 2020, 2022). After all, performance legitimacy, i.e. the ability of the regime to offer economic prosperity and social security, is a key to regime stability (Gerschewski 2013; von Soest and Grauvogel 2017).

However, these strategies of power preservation sometimes fail or do not suffice. Autocrats can then choose to resort to repression that has been one of the backbones of dictatorships for centuries. Extensive literature on political repression offers historical accounts of well-known purges (for example, in Stalin's Russia, see Conquest (1968) and Getty (2002)) as well as theoretical and empirical insights into how, when and why authoritarian rulers use repression (Bhasin and Gandhi 2013; Bove and Rivera 2015; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005; Davenport 2007; Escribà-Folch 2013; Gerschewski 2013; Guriev and Treisman 2022; Wintrobe 2000). Repression, however, can be costly and incur international sanctions, provoke protests or lower economic productivity (Xu 2021). So today autocrats generally refrain from violent repression (like extrajudicial killings) and use more subtle forms of coercion like legal repression, taking advantage of the politicized legal system. Here courts help prosecute individual challengers, deter future threats to the ruler and thus stabilize authoritarian control. They "do not merely provide legal cover for autocratic behavior, they also generate shared beliefs in legitimate authority" (Shen-Bayh 2018, 350). Legal repression can include the use of libel or defamation

laws against journalists and the press or criminal prosecution against dissidents to demobilize political activists (Levitsky and Way 2010; Moustafa 2014; Shriver, Bray, and Adams 2018).

Legal repression is also used against the elites that constitute the main threat to authoritarian survival: leaders in authoritarian countries are more likely to be overthrown through a coup, rather than by a popular uprising (Bove and Rivera 2015; Svolik 2012). Elites can also present another challenge to regime stability when their actions, for instance, excessive corruption, can undermine performance legitimacy and erode public support for the regime (De Vries and Solaz 2017; Della Porta 2018; Morris and Klesner 2010; Seligson 2002). On the one hand, bad governance, including poor control of corruption, is a feature of many non-democracies (Bäck and Hadenius 2008; Chang and Golden 2010; Melville and Mironyuk 2016; Pei 2016; Sung 2004). The autocratic regime often intentionally maintains bad governance to regulate opportunities for corruption and to facilitate rent extraction (Gel'man 2022; Hollyer and Wantchekon 2015). Behavior of individual elites can be steered by manipulating their access to corruption - condoning corruption enables the autocrat to coopt the elites and reward their compliance (Buckley et al. 2022; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Hollyer and Wantchekon 2015; Wintrobe 2000; Zhu and Zhang 2017). Fjelde and Hegre (2014), for example, empirically show that autocracies and hybrid regimes with high levels of corruption are more stable than their low-corruption counterparts. On the other hand, excessive corruption undermines economic performance and the regime's ability to govern efficiently (d'Agostino, Dunne, and Pieroni 2016; Cieślik and Goczek 2018; Mo 2001; Rochlitz, Kazun, and Yakovlev 2020; Zakharov 2019), with the effect of corruption on economic growth being especially pronounced in autocracies (Gründler and Potrafke 2019). It can also be damaging to the carefully maintained public-spirited image of the leader - unlike with other problems it is hardly possible to blame corruption on external factors (Rozenas and Stukal 2019).

Anticorruption prosecution of elites is an increasingly popular strategy of legal repression to tackle these threats to the status quo by making use of the dependent judiciary and law enforcement. A growing number of papers on anticorruption campaigns study which actors are targeted with anticorruption or when anticorruption efforts intensify. They also discuss the rationale behind the anticorruption drive, often juxtaposing two major motivations - repressing political rivals and stamping out bureaucratic corruption (Griffin, Liu, and Shu 2021; Jiang and Xu 2015; Li 2019; Lorentzen and Lu 2018; Wedeman 2017; Zhu and Zhang 2017). Policing corrupt behavior can be costly in terms of supporters' potential defection and difficult in the absence of constraining institutions (Hollyer and Wantchekon 2015; Hualing 2015) but the fight against elite predation can be effective and have a positive impact on economic performance

(Carothers 2022). It also helps legitimize the regime and increase public trust in the existing political system (Gilley 2009). However, the anticorruption drive is often found to be politically motivated and used to consolidate power (Li 2019; Zhu and Zhang 2017). For example, in the case of China, some commentators pointed to the fact that the anticorruption drive disproportionally affected people disconnected from the top leadership and helped remove some of Xi Jinping's potential rivals (Goh, Ru, and Zou 2018; Jiang and Xu 2015; Li 2019; Lorentzen and Lu 2018). Lorentzen and Lu (2018) find that of 322 top provincial leaders, none of those with personal connections to Xi Jinping were arrested while those with ties to three 'big tigers' - Zhou Yongkang, Ling Jihua and Su Rong - were much more likely to be investigated. Corruption can thus be both a carrot and a stick – it can become not only a reward for loyalty but a powerful leverage against those who engage in corruption and a punishment for perceived disobedience or disagreement (Darden 2008). Thus, concerns for power preservation as well as intra-elite competition for power positions and privileges at different levels of government can lead to the politicization of corruption (Bågenholm 2009; Zhu and Zhang 2017). This selective manipulation of corruption can be traced not only in China but in other authoritarian regimes, for example, in Saudi Arabia (Kirkpatrick 2019; Rahman 2020) or Russia.

4.3. Anticorruption and Local Politics in Russia

Russia is a competitive personalist autocracy (Frye 2021; Levitsky and Way 2010; Smyth 2020) where a constitutional or normative state with formal institutions coexists with an administrative regime that relies on informal personalized relations and denies access to valuable political and economic resources to regime outsiders (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009; Sakwa 2020). Although there is still some appearance of the supremacy of law and the autonomy of courts, the administrative regime often prevails. As a result, the legal system is subjected to political control and serves the interests of the incumbents (Popova 2012; Sakwa 2020; Solomon 2010). A feature of this system is telephone justice (*telefonnoye pravo*) - informal pressure exerted on the judiciary to influence formal procedures, decision-making or the outcome of a case. It is the manifestation of the principle "for friends we have everything, for enemies we have law" that makes a clear distinction between supporters and opponents or between insiders and outsiders for the benefit of the former (Hendley 2009; Ledeneva 2008; Popova 2012). In this, the regime also heavily relies on loyal security services (*siloviki*). In fact, in recent years coercive capacities of law enforcement agencies have expanded significantly and have been used to exercise a closer control over the officialdom (Petrov 2016; Petrov and

Rochlitz 2019; Sakwa 2020; Soldatov and Rochlitz 2018). In Russia this trend has fitted well in the long existing incentives system for the law enforcement agencies, a so-called 'stick system' *(palochnaya sistema)*. There an employee's performance is assessed quantitatively, the main indicators being the number of cases cleared and investigated, as well as their comparison to the previous reporting period (McCarthy 2014; Paneyakh 2014). Law enforcement officers are therefore under pressure to keep these numbers high and to open more criminal cases.

As in other non-democracies, corruption is used both as a carrot and a stick vis-à-vis the political and bureaucratic elite, and allegations of corruption are a popular tool in the arsenal of strategies of legal repression. Corruption is endemic in Russia - in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index Russia ranked 136th out of 180 countries in 2021 (Transparency International 2021).[35] The Russian public is also wary of corruption: corruption was the second top problem after 'increasing prices' that concerned the respondents of a 2022 public opinion survey by Russia's best-regarded independent polling company the Levada Center – 38% of respondents picked this answer.[36]

While corruption is deemed essential in securing loyalty of bureaucrats in the administrative hierarchy (Schulze and Zakharov 2018), since about 2009 the government has taken some steps to fight corruption, mostly low-level petty corruption (Obydenkova and Libman 2015; Rochlitz, Kazun, and Yakovlev 2020; Schulze, Sjahrir, and Zakharov 2016). Between 2015 and 2017 "122,000 corruption related crimes were registered, leading to 45,000 convictions, of whom 4,500 were law-enforcement staff, 400 were politicians and 3,000 were officials" (Sakwa 2020, 96). Although in many instances it was a genuine anticorruption push to legitimize the regime, anticorruption was still applied selectively and some cases were arguably politically motivated. There have been quite a few high-profile cases of this anticorruption repression in the past two decades when businesspeople or public figures who openly opposed the regime or showed disloyalty were prosecuted for corruption-related crimes. To name a few – businessman Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and former Governor of Ivanovo Oblast and government minister Mikhail Men. Many top regional and local executives were not spared this selective manipulation of corruption. In fact, about 10% of mayors of larger Russian cities were charged with corruption-related crimes between 2002 and 2018 (Buckley et al. 2022) and most of them lost their office and were replaced.

[35] Chang and Golden (2010) also find that personalistic and personalistic-hybrid regimes (that include Russia) are more prone to corruption than other regime types.
[36] https://www.levada.ru/2022/03/10/strahi-i-problemy-rossijskogo-obshhestva/

There is a complex hierarchical principal-agent relationship between the higher levels of government (central and regional) and the local level in Russia, often referred to as the power vertical (Gelman 2010; Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Ledyaev and Chirikova 2019; Sharafutdinova 2010). Although local (city) officials do not present a direct threat to the federal elites, large urban centers have always been cradles of political protests and showed lower level of support for the ruling party United Russia (UR) (Buckley et al. 2022). They are also important socio-economic actors. So, keeping them in check and having compliant chief executives are important for maintaining political stability and harnessing political support for the ruling party. The regional-local relations, i.e. relations between governors and mayors, mirror center-regional interactions in that they are complex and vary from constructive and nonconfrontational to unproductive and contentious. In some cases, local political regimes become integrated into the regional political machine and lose their autonomy. In other cases, local governments refuse to be fully subordinated to the regional authority which results in clashes between governors and mayors for political and economic resources that are mostly concentrated in urban centers (Golosov, Gushchina, and Kononenko 2016; Libman and Rochlitz 2019). Such elite conflicts are sometimes resolved when one party uses their resources and connections to the security services to criminally prosecute their opponent using allegations of corruption.

As mentioned earlier, motivations for the use of anticorruption to repress elites are diverse. It is nearly impossible to disentangle possible reasons for launching the case – whether it is a genuine anticorruption case, an arrest prompted by political rivalry, a punishment for disloyalty or simply excesses of the *siloviki*. However, a close examination of each of 84 cases that I undertake in this study helps to a certain extent dissect anticorruption prosecution of local elites in Russia. In the following sections I develop my analytical framework and identify common models of legal repression via politicized corruption.

4.4. Data and Analytical Framework

The study relies on two main data sources. First, I draw on the original dataset of 1051 Russian mayors from Buckley et al. (2022), which includes mayors of Russia's 220 largest cities with population over 75 000 people between 2002 and 2018. From this population of Russian mayors, I use and expand the data on 84 mayors of Russia's largest cities who were charged with non-violent, corruption-related offences, such as abuse of office or taking a bribe, between

2002 and 2018.[37] Given the wide spread of corruption in Russia, these cases are positive instances of the selective use of anticorruption. The dataset includes the mayors' biographical information, party affiliation and terms in office. Since there are different selection mechanisms for the highest executive office at the local level[38], I also distinguish between appointed and elected mayors (head of the city) and include appointed city managers who are responsible for economic affairs in cities with the dual executive system. Besides, the dataset contains coded information about specific criminal charges brought against the mayors, about whether the mayor was convicted or acquitted and in the case of conviction - the given sentence.

Second, I complemented this quantitative data with detailed accounts of the criminal cases against these 84 mayors that were collected from national, regional and local media outlets, using Integrum media database. While some cases received wider coverage (for example, when an elected opposition mayor was involved), I was still able to go through eight to ten news reports about each case and compile a comprehensive dossier. It contains background information about each case, the specific charges, the timeline of the criminal proceedings and the sentence. When reading the media reports, I also paid special attention to whether there was any indication of foul play, that is, whether the case was allegedly politically motivated. This allowed me to see if the initiation of the case was connected to an elite conflict between the mayor and either local or regional elites. Some basic information on the prosecuted mayors and charges against them can be found in Table 1 in the Appendix.

[37] There were a few other criminal cases in this larger dataset but since they were not economic crimes, I excluded them from the study. Only mayors who were charged while in office were included in 84 cases. In about 25 other cases mayors were charged within two years after having left office.

[38] The system of elite replacement in Russia has undergone many changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today there are two standard modes of local elite replacement in Russia – top local executives are selected for office either via appointments or popular elections. Cities can choose between holding direct mayoral elections and several models of appointment, and they can have a single or dual executive system. In single-executive cities the head of the city is elected by popular vote; in cities where there are two chief executives, the "head of municipality" (mayor) can be either popularly elected or appointed by the city council, while the "head of administration" (city manager) is always appointed on a competitive basis by a special commission (Buckley et al. 2014; Golosov, Gushchina, and Kononenko 2016). Since the early 2000s, however, a number of laws and policy initiatives have been designed to centralize the political authority and strengthen the central state by weakening the powers of subnational governments and at the same time by placing loyal agents in the regions (Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Libman and Rochlitz 2019; Ross 2010; Torikai 2022). This policy of centralization led to cancellations of mayoral elections in many Russian municipalities that resulted in an increasing number of mayors of Russian cities being appointed (Reuter et al. 2016). Although elections still take place in some cities, they are not truly competitive and free, with massive electoral fraud, crackdown on the opposition, voter intimidation, candidate filtering etc. (Bader and van Ham 2015; Enikolopov et al. 2013; Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019; Szakonyi 2022). In cases when cadres are appointed, the main appointment criterion is their loyalty to the regime and their ability to mobilize support for the ruling United Russia party (Buckley and Reuter 2019; Libman and Rochlitz 2019; Reuter and Robertson 2012).

Since I have a small-N sample, I do not attempt to establish a causal relationship between certain factors, like mayors' personal characteristics and the chance of being accused of a crime. Instead, I try to identify common models of how corruption charges are strategically used for legal repression of local elites. The analysis is based on the interaction of two factors - the mechanism of selecting the mayor and the presence of political motives. They are a departure point that to a large extent can explain major distinctions among the cases and the rationale behind each case.

First, it is the way the mayor was selected for their office, i.e. whether they were appointed or popularly elected. There is often an eye-catching difference between the cases against appointed and elected mayors so I split them by selection mechanism. When looking at elected mayors, I also distinguish between oppositional, independent and United Russia (UR) mayors.

Among 84 cases in the dataset there are 26 appointed and 58 popularly elected mayors, although in the whole population of Russian mayors appointed mayors significantly outnumber elected mayors. Of the elected mayors, 21 ran in elections as candidates of the ruling United Russia party, 13 were oppositional mayors (although three of them joined UR at some point after their election), and 24 were independent (two of them can be considered oppositional because they ran against UR candidates). So, in fact there are 26 appointed, 24 United Russia, 12 oppositional and 22 independent mayors in the dataset. Appointed mayors include both heads of the city and city managers (in cases when a city has two top executives). Figure 1 shows time distribution of mayor arrests.

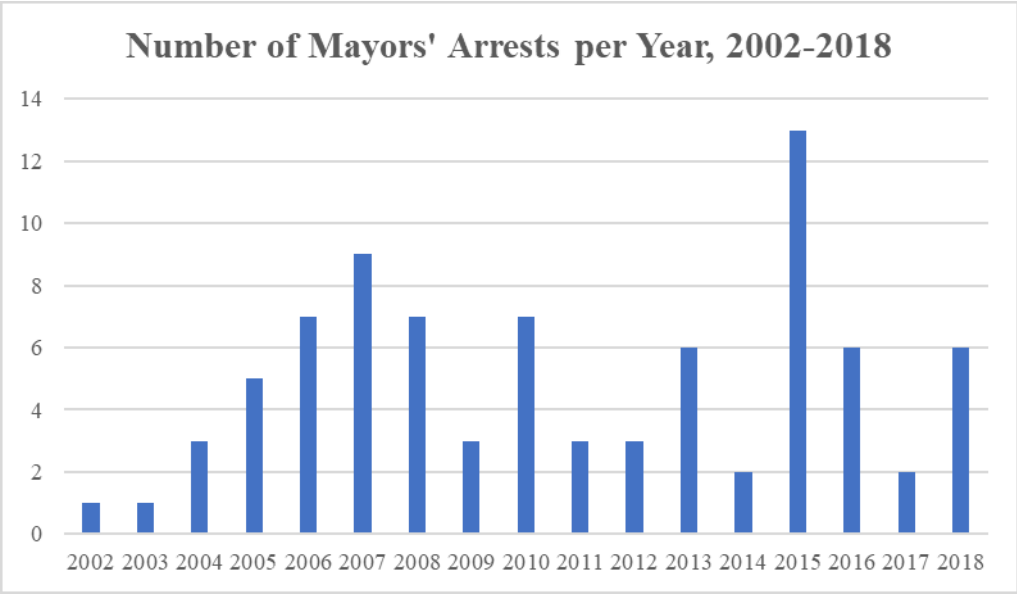


Figure 1: Frequency of mayors' arrests (N=84) per year, 2002-2018

The second factor is the presence of political motives – for example, an intra-elite power struggle or a punishment for disloyalty. When there is an indication of a political power struggle between the mayor and local or/and regional elites, one has grounds to question the motivation for opening the criminal investigation. I therefore further divide the cases according to whether there were political motives involved when the mayor was prosecuted. One important caveat is that I rely on media reports when I evaluate each case and claim it to be politically motivated. While in some cases the evidence presented in the media is overwhelming, in others it is more difficult to ascertain the fact that the mayor's arrest was linked to his or her disagreement with the governor, for example. The presence of political motives, however, does not automatically mean that the mayor was innocent of the crime, so even when the case can be viewed as political, it does not mean that the mayor was not corrupt. It is not the goal of this study to establish genuineness of each case. Rather, I demonstrate that instead of turning a blind eye to the crime, as it is customary in Russia, the authorities chose to prosecute the mayor.

4.5. Results and Discussion

Different combinations of these two factors produce three distinct models (see Table 1 below). Every case consists of several stages and begins with the initiation of the case and ends with a sentence or an acquittal. Cases involving elected mayors tend to attract more public and media attention, to have wider consequences and to result in changes in the local political regime.

Table 1: Models of legal repression of local elites

Selection mechanism			
Political motives		*Appointed*	*Elected*
	Yes	Purge (5)	Struggle (49)
	No	State (bureaucracy)-driven repression (30)	

I combine two groups of cases where I observe no political motives in a model of 'state (bureaucracy)-driven repression' because here the motivation appears to be inherently the same in both groups – to hit the anticorruption performance target. There are 30 cases of state (bureaucracy)-driven repression in the dataset – a combination of either appointed or elected mayors and no apparent political motives. There are no opposition mayors among these cases. These cases of repression are prompted either by a genuine drive by the state to punish corrupt officials and thus boost regime legitimacy or by the set of performance incentives *(palochnaya*

sistema) that law enforcers and courts face. The use of anticorruption in these cases is still selective however.

Models that I dub 'purge' and 'struggle' include cases that are driven by politically motivated decisions of individuals – decisions to resort to anticorruption repression to punish a non-compliant mayor or sideline a political rival. Struggle constitutes the bulk of the cases. It means that when it comes to elected mayors, in the majority of the cases there had been some political motives when the corruption case was initiated. It could be a conflict with regional authorities (or personally with the governor) – the most common case, or struggle for power in the city or with local council deputies. Explicit business-related conflicts involving a mayor are rare. Even when the criminal case is initiated because of a complaint from a local businessperson, the reason is usually political rather than economic. Unlike legislature deputies who can still be firm directors or business executives while holding elected office (Szakonyi 2018), mayors cannot officially run or be involved in business ventures. This could be one of the explanations why I observe few economically motivated criminal cases.

There were 9 'genuine' cases as far as the 58 elected mayors were concerned, i.e. in 49 instances there were some speculations of other reasons for initiating the case. At the same time, out of 26 appointed mayors in 21 cases there was no indication of political motives in the media while only five appointed mayors were purged. Some descriptive statistics are presented below in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, Anticorruption cases against Russian mayors, 2002-2018

Variable	Number
Criminal cases:	84
Closed	15
Acquitted	2
Sentenced	67
Mayors:	84
Appointed	26
Elected	58
Oppositional	12
United Russia	24
Independent	22
Models:	84
Struggle	49
Purge	5
State(bureaucracy)-driven repression	30
Regions with arrests	43
Cities with arrests	51

When looking at the proportion of elected and appointed mayors who were charged with crime, non-elected mayors are less likely to be arrested in the first place - 7% of appointed mayors compared to 20% of popularly elected mayors (Buckley et al. 2022).

How could one explain this disproportionate anticorruption prosecution and the salience of political motives with regard to elected mayors? The power of popularly elected mayors has been weakened in the past two decades due to the introduction of the double-executive system and the pressure from the regional authorities (Moses 2013). Nonetheless, elected mayors (even regime-affiliated) are more independent as they draw their legitimacy from public support and still have some discretion to make decisions and carry out policies, some of which might contradict those of regional elites. Initiating a criminal anticorruption case can be the only way to undermine this legitimacy, punish a political rival and oust the elected mayor from office before his or her term ends.

Unlike elected mayors, appointed mayors can be more easily removed from office since the authorities have powers to legitimately make them resign. Therefore, regional elites or/and United Russia do not have to resort to repression if they seek to remove an unwanted appointee from office. Besides, non-elected mayors are predominantly affiliated with United Russia and thus readily associated with the ruling party by the public. So, it is unlikely that the authorities would charge appointed mayors with corruption unless they have a good reason to do so, for example, when there is a conspicuous case of corruption that cannot be hushed up. Finally, since appointed mayors are mostly chosen from among UR candidates, they are normally vetted by the governor and are dependent on the party for their reappointment. They therefore have an incentive to signal their loyalty by following the prescribed line and avoiding conflicts with other elites. Therefore, there are several reasons why there most likely will not be any outright political motives when a case against an appointed mayor is launched.

In all but two cases (when the mayor was acquitted in the end) the arrest was followed by the mayor's removal from office and local elite rearrangements. The 12 cases against the opposition mayors are quite telling. Three of these mayors were replaced by UR affiliated mayors - a UR candidate and two independents supported by the party - who won the elections that were held after the opposition mayors had been indicted on corruption charges. In nine other cases the cities where the opposition mayor was arrested permanently cancelled mayoral elections. In fact, 29 cities out of 51 that had elected mayors switched to appointments after the mayor had been arrested. As mentioned above, there are some clear benefits for the regime, and the regional authorities in particular, to have appointed mayors. Interestingly, in the case of two

elected mayors in the dataset, one of the causes of the disagreement with the governor was their protest against abolishing mayoral elections. Consequently, the anticorruption repression of mayors also contributes to local elite replacement and results in agency-driven changes in local political regimes. It becomes another way of elite turnover, alongside formal institutionalized ways of elite replacement via regular elections and (re)appointments.

The three models are distinct as they have different combinations of the variables of interest. They are similar in that anticorruption is applied selectively and used strategically in all cases, no matter what the exact motivation is or whether the mayor was appointed or elected. To examine the models closely and illustrate them with examples, the following section offers a more detailed discussion of several cases of anticorruption repression of Russian mayors.

4.6. Models of Anticorruption Repression of Local Elites

4.6.1. Struggle

Most instances of anticorruption repression in the dataset are cases of struggle when elected mayors were accused of corruption and when there was an indication of political motives behind the charge. Arguably, the incentive was to remove them from office before their term ends. It does not necessarily mean that these mayors were innocent of the crime they were accused of, however. Although oppositional mayors were major targets of repression, a few UR-affiliated and independently running mayors who were supported by United Russia also became criminally prosecuted on corruption charges. Being a member of United Russia did not automatically grant a mayor immunity from prosecution, especially if his or her political rival had more resources and connections to use the telephone justice. The fact that in half of the cases mayors were at loggerheads with more powerful regional authorities at the moment of their arrest can attest to that.

The cases against oppositional mayors seem to be rather straightforward, i.e. the objective was to reverse the election results. The arrests of UR mayors are more nuanced and varied in their motivation. For example, there were two interesting cases in Astrakhan and Voskresensk when UR mayors were accused of electoral fraud by their opponents from *Spravedlivaya Rossia* (Just Russia) Party which produced quite a splash in the media and among the locals.[39] They were both charged with bribery, probably to draw attention away from the vote rigging and not to let opposition or independent candidates succeed (there were appointed mayors after that).

[39] https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2342801, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2010/07/21_a_3399939.shtml

Another curious case was against Rybinsk UR mayor Yury Lastochkin - an intra-elite conflict in which Denis Manturov, Minister of Industry and Trade, and Sergey Chemezov, the CEO of Rostec Corporation, a state-owned defense conglomerate, were allegedly involved.[40] Rostec forced Lastochkin to sell the shares of his business 'Saturn' (an aircraft engine manufacturer) to 'Oboronprom', a Rostec subsidiary. Immediately after the capture, Lastochkin's team was ousted from Saturn and later the mayor was accused of taking a bribe and arrested. Besides, the investigation started in June 2013 during the election campaign in Rybinsk. Lastochkin won the elections but was forced to quit, and in 2015 was sentenced to 8,5 years in prison. A similar case involved Nefteyugansk mayor Viktor Tkachev. He eventually admitted his guilt but there were speculations in the press that he was connected to Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Yukos oil company and fell victim to full-fledged investigations into Yukos and its subsidiaries.[41]

One of the most conspicuous cases of struggle was the arrest of Yevgeny Urlashov, mayor of the city of Yaroslavl. Urlashov was a member of United Russia but he left the party in 2011. He ran as an independent candidate in the mayoral elections in the city in spring 2012 and had a clear anti-United Russia campaign agenda. On April 1, 2012, he had a landslide victory over a UR candidate, getting 70% of all votes in the second election round.[42] It was a major success of the Russian opposition that suggested that the anti-Kremlin mood that engulfed Moscow and other large Russian cities after the fraudulent parliamentary elections in late 2011 started to spread into provincial towns. Urlashov was highly critical of the ruling party and in 2012 joined the Civic Platform opposition party led by Russian oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov. In April 2013 Sergey Yastrebov, governor of Yaroslavl Oblast, offered Urlashov to run on United Russia ballot in the regional elections in September 2013 but Urlashov refused.[43] Instead, at an opposition rally three months later Urlashov announced that he intended to run for governor. A few days after that, on July 3, 2013, Urlashov together with two of his aides was detained on charges of soliciting a bribe. Sergey Shmelev, a local businessman and a city council deputy from United Russia, accused Urlashov of trying to extort a bribe from his company that had won a public tender earlier. A similar accusation by another local deputy, businessman and UR member Eduard Avdalyan followed two days later.[44] The arrest produced a big popular backlash in the city – on July 16 several thousand people gathered in the center of Yaroslavl to show their support to Urlashov and protest his innocence. Many public figures, including

[40] https://www.yarnews.net/news/show/yaroslavl-region/13661/mer_rybinska_yurij_lastochkin_-_o_zakazchikah_svoego_dela.htm, https://76.ru/text/gorod/2022/04/22/71274473/
[41] https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/547888
[42] https://meduza.io/feature/2016/08/03/12-s-polovinoy-let-evgeniya-urlashova
[43] https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/08/03/651556-bivshii-mer-kolonii
[44] https://www.rbc.ru/politics/03/08/2016/579ef6ff9a7947073b6a4893

opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Alexei Navalny, appealed to the authorities to stop the prosecution that they believed was politically motivated.[45] Urlashov pleaded not guilty and claimed that he had been set up by his political rivals.

The trial lasted three years and finally, on August 2, 2016, a district court in Yaroslavl found Urlashov guilty of the charges. Urlashov was given an extremely harsh sentence of 12.5 years in a high-security penal colony and a fine of 60 million rubles.[46] The verdict itself set a clear warning not only to the regime critics but also to public officials in general to beware of the long arm of the Kremlin telephone justice. After his arrest Urlashov was suspended from office but formally continued to be mayor of Yaroslavl until January 2017 when his sentence came into force. There were several interim mayors while Urlashov was on trial. In December 2014 the regional parliament voted to cancel direct mayoral elections in Yaroslavl and introduced the dual-executive system in the city.[47] Urlashov's successor Sleptsov was a United Russia member and appointed.

4.6.2. Purge

There are only five cases of appointed mayors in the dataset where there were speculations of ulterior motives for starting the investigation. As argued before, there are few reasons why political motives would drive the anticorruption repression of non-elected mayors but I still observe several outlier cases. I call them 'purge' because instead of following the legitimate way of dismissing the unwanted mayor, the mayor was also repressed. In one case in Sergiev Posad[48] there was a conflict between two heads of the city – the mayor and the city manager. In another, Aleksey Alekseev[49], a city manager in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, was charged with abuse of power to allegedly prevent his reappointment (he was a well-respected person, and the locals seemed to like him so they had to find a reason to fire him).

An interesting case of politically motivated repression against an appointed mayor is the case of Pavel Plotnikov, who was the mayor of Yoshkar-Ola, the capital of the Mari El Republic. Plotnikov was detained and charged with bribe-taking on December 3, 2015. According to the investigators, in June 2014 Plotnikov, who was then head of the city's municipal property committee, received an apartment as a bribe for patronage from local businessman Alexander

[45] https://www.svoboda.org/a/25184498.html
[46] https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-36955579
[47] https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2014/12/141212_yaroslavl_elections_cancelled
[48] Sergiev Posad, a town in Moscow Oblast, is notoriously 'reckless' with its mayors – since 2002 four of them were criminally prosecuted and one, Evgeny Dushko, was killed by a local organized crime group in 2011.
[49] https://lenta.ru/news/2014/08/22/alekseev/ , https://kam24.ru/news/main/20170710/49870.html

Turuev.[50] He also allegedly helped Turuev get 24 garages in Yoshkar-Ola and got three of them as a bribe. Later Plotnikov was also charged with illegal entrepreneurship – setting up a company and managing it through intermediaries - while being a government official. The charges were mainly based on a testimony of Turuev, a former business associate of Plotnikov's. Turuev was a son-in-law of Dmitry Turchin, a well-connected top-level regional official who was the head of the Mari El republican administration and had many business ventures in the region.[51] Some media outlets speculated that Plotnikov refused to protect Turchin and Turuev's business interests[52], so Turuev decided to eliminate him. He was planning contract killing of Plotnikov in early 2015 but was apprehended by the security services and sentenced to 8 years in prison for the attempt on Plotnikov's life in May 2016.[53] Because of the scandal, Turchin had to resign in February 2016. Although Plotnikov might as well be guilty of corruption, the criminal prosecution against him was likely a payback for his unwillingness to cooperate with Turchin and for Turuev's prison sentence. Plotnikov pleaded not guilty but on September 6, 2018, the court sentenced him to 10 years in a penal colony and a 34 million ruble fine.[54] In 2019 a further criminal case was opened against Plotnikov where Turuev again accused him of another bribery incident, and in February 2021 Plotnikov got four additional years in prison.[55] Right after Plotnikov's arrest in December 2015, the city council appointed a new mayor Evgeny Maslov who has headed the city of Yoshkar-Ola since.

4.6.3. State (bureaucracy)-driven repression

As mentioned above, corruption remains a major problem in Russia. Research shows that fighting corruption can be a powerful legitimation strategy and a way to improve economic performance (Carothers 2022; Gilley 2009) so an anticorruption drive is in fact a well-justified government policy. There are 30 cases of state (bureaucracy)-driven repression in the dataset. These cases of repression appear to have no political motives behind them and hence can be considered an anticorruption effort on the part of the authorities.

One of the examples of this state-driven repression is the arrest of Orenburg mayor Evgeniy Arapov. Evgeniy Arapov, a United Russia member, was elected the head of Orenburg city by the city council in October 2015. On August 14, 2018, Arapov was detained and charged with

[50] https://pasmi.ru/archive/131041/
[51] https://ch.versia.ru/pavel-plotnikov-nazval-glavnyx-zakazchikov-csveogo-ugolovnogo-dela
[52] https://www.mk.ru/politics/2019/11/19/eksmer-yoshkaroly-plotnikov-obyavil-golodovku-ischerpal-sposoby-zashhity-prav.html
[53] https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2016/05/23/n_8670455.shtml?updated
[54] https://www.marpravda.ru/news/assosiations/byvshiy-mer-yoshkar-oly-prigovoren-sudom/?lang=ru
[55] https://www.idelreal.org/a/31300419.html, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4702786

bribetaking.[56] According to the investigative committee, on May 19, 2018, Arapov's deputy Gennady Borisov received a bribe of 600 thousand rubles for patronage from a managing director of one of Orenburg construction and real estate companies. 400 thousand rubles of this money went to Arapov. Around the same time, he received a one-room apartment as a bribe from a local businessman, with an estimated price of 1.3 million rubles.[57] Later Arapov was also accused of setting up a company through a figurehead that signed lease contracts with the city administration and then subleased the municipal property to local businesspeople, thus having received about 14 million rubles in profit in six years. During a search in the mayor's office, more than 4 million rubles in cash was found that could not be accounted for. The court arrested some of his property (registered through his relatives), including three cars and shares in various companies.

The arrest of Arapov did not provoke much public reaction, despite the fact that he was local and had been in the local government since 2004. The case was relatively widely covered in the media - Orenbung is after all a large city with half a million inhabitants and a capital of Orenburg Oblast that has a rather developed industry base - but none of the media outlets referred to any political motives. Arapov did not admit his guilt but the evidence presented in the court was overwhelming. In August 2020 he was sentenced to 4.5 years in a high-security penal colony and a 15 million ruble fine.[58] Besides, he cannot hold public office for five years. Since Arapov was arrested, there has been a succession of mayors in Orenburg. In four years, there have been four heads of the city (two of them acting), with the current one, Sergei Salmin, elected by the city council in March 2022.

Still, I do not claim that corruption charges are necessarily authentic in these cases or that there was no covert motivation for initiating them. After all, out of the whole population of Russian mayors only these 30 were arrested for corruption so the targeting was still selective. However, unlike the cases of struggle and purge, these 30 cases of anticorruption repression against appointed and elected mayors do not appear to be politically motivated. Rather, they are connected to the state-driven anticorruption push (often arbitrary and non-transparent), the lack of external controls over law enforcement and judicial processes and the specific evaluation system used to assess the performance of the Russian *siloviki*.

An eye-catching example of rogue uncontrolled anticorruption is a case against Smolensk city manager Konstantin Lazarev. Lazarev was appointed the head of the city administration of

[56] https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5b7305749a7947bf326ba6ba
[57] https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4531674
[58] https://www.ural56.ru/news/655230/

Smolensk in 2010. A year later, in September 2011, Lazarev was accused of an attempt at fraud and abuse of power and got arrested. Allegedly there was a collusion between Lazarev and a Moscow construction company – Lazarev was to receive a five-million-ruble bribe from the company to help it win public tenders worth billions of rubles.[59] In early 2014 Lazarev was exonerated and received a compensation from the state.[60] As it turned out, the bribery incident was set up by corrupt *siloviki* who fabricated the case against Lazarev. Lazarev was one of the first victims of an anticorruption racket by operatives of the Main Directorate for Economic Security and Anticorruption Enforcement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. They falsified information and provoked officials to take bribes to boost their performance output and get promoted. Later the corrupt *siloviki* officers involved in the arrest were themselves charged and sentenced to time in prison.[61] What follows is that although state (bureaucracy)-driven repression is not politically motivated unlike other two models of legal repression, the use of anticorruption is similarly arbitrary.

4.7. Conclusion

This paper seeks to shed some new light on legal repression of political and bureaucratic elites - one of the less studied strategies of authoritarian survival. It also examines the role of corruption as a powerful means of legal repression. I focus on criminal prosecution of local elites in Russia as it allows to study the phenomenon of anticorruption repression with more variance and a larger population of cases. Legal repression via politicized corruption is widely used to repress regime opponents as well as to punish disloyalty of regime insiders. After all, almost one tenth of Russian political elites, both at the regional and local level, lose office before their term ends because they become accused of an economic crime. Legal repression in Russia takes advantage of the judicial and law enforcement systems which are subordinated to political authority and are given wrong incentives. By focusing on the interaction of two factors, the mechanism of selecting the city top executive and the presence of political motives, I distinguish between three models of anticorruption repression: two politically motivated, purge and struggle, and one which is state (bureaucracy)-driven. This approach offers useful insights into the functioning of repression in Russia and idiosyncratic motivations that drive this repression.

[59] https://smolgazeta.ru/daylynews/7584-konstantinu-lazarevu-predyavili-obvinenie-v.html
[60] https://rg.ru/2014/02/06/reg-cfo/lazarev.html
[61] https://smolnarod.ru/sn/obidchiku-eks-glavy-administracii-smolenska-skostili-srok/

I find that most cases in my dataset fall under the model of struggle. It entails that elected mayors are more likely to have contentious relations with other elites which might be the reason why they are disproportionately targeted with politicized corruption. Even affiliation with United Russia does not always help a mayor avoid being arrested if they are in the party's bad books or if their political rival is more powerful. In these cases, anticorruption prosecution is politically motivated and used to oust elected mayors from office and thus to reverse the election results: disloyal or oppositional mayors are replaced by loyal pro-regime mayors. Second, since most arrested mayors lost office as a result of their arrest, legal repression has contributed to local elite rearrangements and produced certain changes in local institutions: in many cases popular elections were cancelled and replaced by appointments after the mayor's arrest. Having appointed city executives who are predominantly regime-affiliated and more easily managed help ensure that the regime keeps its grip on power.

30 instances of state (bureaucracy)-driven repression showcase the use of corruption for the purpose of regime legitimation and individual promotion. Because the Russians are generally wary of public officials and concerned about corruption, the anticorruption charges brought against politicians and bureaucrats have played into the hands of the Kremlin. Russia's 'informational autocracy' has used it in its propaganda to promote an image of public-spiritedness and competence. However, growing repression is slowly turning Russia from a 'dictatorship of spin' into a 'dictatorship of fear' (Guriev and Treisman 2022). In the current environment subnational officials are under increasing pressure to be loyal but also to deliver results. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic the central government has chosen to shift much of responsibility and blame down the power vertical, to regional and local officials, while more often using 'sticks' than 'carrots' with subnational bureaucrats. These developments also connect well to the system of performance incentives for law enforcers which might make the phenomenon of anticorruption repression and subsequent agency-driven elite replacement even more wide-spread in the near future.

Although every autocracy is unique, looking at the case of Russia allows to draw some conclusions about the multi-purpose use of corruption and legal repression. This study emphasizes once again the complexity of authoritarian politics and contributes to several strands of literature, for example, to research on anticorruption campaigns that has so far mostly focused on the case of China.

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Appendix

Table 1: Anticorruption cases against Russian mayors (N=84), 2002-2018

Name	Region	City	Term in office	Selection mechanism (last term)	Date of arrest/ charge	Charge	Case outcome	Type of repression (purge=1, struggle=2, state-driven=3)	Elections cancelled after arrest (mayor appointed =0, yes=1, no=2)
Achkasov, Mikhail	Krasnodar Krai	Achinsk	1999-2006	oppositional (Zubov Block), switched to UR	25.11.2006	Abuse of office	2 years of probation	2	2
Alekseev, Aleksey	Kamchatka Krai	Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky	2012-2014	appointed (city manager)	28.05.2013	Exceeding official authority	3 years of probation, a fine of 35 million rubles	1	0
Arapov, Evgeny	Oregburg Oblast	Orenburg	2010-2018	appointed (city manager)	14.08.2018	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	4.5 years in a penal colony, a fine of 15 million rubles	3	0
Belov, Sergey	Nizhny Novgorod Oblast	Nizhny Novgorod	2015-2017	appointed (city manager)	19.03.2015	Neglect of duty	a fine of 100 thousand rubles	3	0
Bestuzhy, Igor	Stavropol Krai	Stavropol	2011-2012	appointed (city manager)	02.02.2012	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	9 years in a penal colony, a fine of 500 million rubles	3	0

Biryukov, Vasily	Stavropol Krai	Kislovodsk	2006-2009	independent	07.04.2008	Exceeding official authority	3.5 years of probation	2	2
Bobryshev, Yury	Novgorod Oblast	Veliky Novgorod	2008-2018	United Russia	06.05.2015	Exceeding official authority, failure to comply with a court ruling, neglect of duty	case closed	2	1
Bogdanov, Mikhail	Perm Oblast	Solikamsk	1997-2005	independent	15.04.2005	Exceeding official authority	3 years of probation	3	2
Bukharmetov, Radik	Republic of Bashkortostan	Salavat	2009-2011	appointed (city manager)	30.12.2010	Exceeding official authority	a fine of 200 thousand rubles	1	0
Bukin, Viktor	Moscow Oblast	Sergiev Posad	2014-2015	United Russia	01.07.2015	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	8 years in a penal colony, a fine of 4 million rubles, government employment ban for 10 years	3	1
Bulavinov, Vadim	Nizhny Novgorod Oblast	Nizhny Novgorod	2002-2010	United Russia	15.10.2010	Abuse of office	case closed	2	1
Burulov, Rady	Republic of Kalmykia	Elista	2000-2008	United Russia	01.03.2008	Abuse of office	4 years of probation, government employment ban for 3 years	2	1
Danilyuk, Aleksandr	Smolensk Oblast	Smolensk	2010-2013	appointed	28.05.2013	Exceeding official authority	case closed	3	0
Demin, Andrey	Republic of Karelia	Petrozavodsk	1998-2002	oppositional (Yabloko)	01.04.2002	Exceeding official authority	3 years of probation	2	2

Derfler, Artur	Altai Krai	Rubtsovsk	2004-2008	independent	06.03.2005	Neglect of duty, abuse of office, forgery	acquitted	2	2
Didenko, Nikolay	Sverdlovsk Oblast	Nizhny Tagil	1991-2008	independent	26.09.2008	Neglect of duty	case closed	2	2
Donskoy, Aleksandr	Arkhangelsk Oblast	Arkhangelsk	2005-2008	independent	05.12.2006	Using a document known to be forged	3 years of probation	2	2
Fedorova, Tatyana	Nenets Autonomous Okrug	Naryan-Mar	2012-2017	oppositional (KPRF)	17.10.2016	Abuse of office	case closed	2	1
Golenischev, Yury	Kamchatka Krai	Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky	2000-2003	oppositional (KPRF)	01.11.2003	Neglect of duty, abuse of office	4 years of probation	2	2
Grazhdankin, Nikolay	Novgorod Oblast	Veliky Novgorod	2002-2007	oppositional (Democratic Party), switched to UR	06.07.2007	Exceeding official authority, misappropriation of state funds	a fine of 280 thousand rubles	2	2
Grigoriadi, Vladimir	Chelyabinsk Oblast	Miass	2000-2004	oppositional (Russian Party of Pensioners)	12.05.2004	Receiving a bribe on a large and very large scale	8 years in a penal colony, a fine of 1 million rubles	2	1
Ischenko, Evgeny	Volgograd Oblast	Volgograd	2003-2006	United Russia	30.05.2006	Exceeding official authority, abuse of office, illegal entrepreneurship	1 year in a penal colony	2	2
Istomin, Vyacheslav	Chelyabinsk Oblast	Kopeisk	2011-2016	United Russia	01.07.2016	Receiving a bribe on a large scale	4.5 years in a penal colony and a fine of 5 million rubles	3	1

Kachan, Nadezhda	Krasnoyarsk Krai	Kansk	2012-2018	appointed	23.06.2017	Neglect of duty	3 years of probation	3	0
Kachanovsky, Eduard	Smolensk Oblast	Smolensk	2009-2010	independent	26.02.2010	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	4 years in a penal colony, a fine of 300 thousand rubles	2	1
Kalmykov, Yury	Moscow Oblast	Sergiev Posad	2011-2012	appointed (city manager)	11.11.2011	Exceeding official authority	case closed	1	0
Kamenev, Arkady	Perm Oblast	Perm	2000-2005	independent	12.02.2005	Embezzlement	3 years of probation, government employment ban for 2.5 years	2	2
Kasyanov, Aleksandr	Orel Oblast	Orel	2006-2009	oppositional (KPRF)	01.01.2006	Concealment of financial resources or property	2.5 years in a penal colony	2	1
Klementyeva, Irina	Chuvashia Republic	Cheboksary	2016-2017	appointed	18.05.2017	Abuse of office	5 years in a penal colony	3	0
Kondrashov, Oleg	Nizhny Novgorod Oblast	Nizhny Novgorod	2010-2015	appointed (city manager)	11.02.2015	Abuse of office	case closed	3	0
Korobkov, Nikolay	Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug	Noyabrsk	2003-2009	independent	23.05.2007	Exceeding official authority	3 years of probation	3	1
Krupin, Aleksey	Ivanovo Oblast	Kineshma	2014-2016	appointed	29.02.2016	Receiving a bribe on a large scale	9 years in a penal colony, a fine of 28 million rubles	3	0
Kursakov, Nikolay	Komi Republic	Syktyvkar	2011-2013	appointed	21.08.2012	Embezzlement	5 years in a penal colony	3	0

Kuzmin, Dmitry	Stavropol Krai	Stavropol	2002-2007	independent	04.12.2007	Exceeding official authority, abuse of office	escaped (left Russia)	2	2
Kuznetsov, Aleksandr	Tambov Oblast	Michurinsk	2015-2018	appointed	15.06.2018	Abuse of office	4 years of probation	3	0
Larionov, Vladimir	Altai Krai	Rubtsovsk	2011-2016	appointed (city manager)	01.08.2015	Exceeding official authority, attempt at embezzlement	2 years of probation, government employment ban for 3 years but sentence was dropped due to amnesty	3	0
Lastochkin, Yury	Yaroslavl Oblast	Rybinsk	2009-2013	United Russia	24.10.2013	Misappropriation of state funds, receiving a bribe on a very large scale	8.5 years in a penal colony, a fine of 140 million rubles	2	2
Lazarev, Konstantin	Smolensk Oblast	Smolensk	2010-2011	appointed (city manager)	01.09.2011	Attempt at fraud on very large scale, exceeding official authority	acquitted	3	0
Lebedev, Oleg	Tver Oblast	Tver	2003-2008	United Russia	26.03.2008	Perverting the course of justice	1.5 years in a penal colony	2	1
Limansky, Georgy	Samara Oblast	Samara	1997-2006	United Russia	20.06.2006	Exceeding official authority	case closed	2	2
Makarov, Aleksandr	Tomsk Oblast	Tomsk	1996-2006	independent	06.12.2006	Abuse of office, complicity in extortion	12 years in a penal colony	2	2
Mamatov, Pavel	Ryazan Oblast	Ryazan	1996-2005	oppositional (KPRF)	13.07.2004	Abuse of office	2 years of probation,	2	1

							government employment ban for 2 years		
Minakov, Nikolay	Tula Oblast	Novomoskovsk	1996-2008	appointed	02.04.2009	Exceeding official authority, forgery by an official	a fine of 300 thousand rubles, government employment ban for 2 years	3	0
Morozenko, Aleksandr	Moscow Oblast	Korolev	1996-2009	independent	01.05.2009	Misappropriation of state funds, refusal to provide information	3 years of probation, a fine of 500 thousand rubles, government employment ban for 3 years	3	1
Mosievsky, Anatoly	Altai Krai	Biysk	2006-2011	independent	27.04.2010	Abuse of office	3 years of probation, government employment ban for 3 years	2	1
Musaev, Musa	Republic of Dagestan	Makhachkala	2015-2018	appointed	29.01.2018	Exceeding official authority	4 years in a penal colony	3	0
Nikolaev, Vladimir	Primorsky Krai	Vladivostok	2004-2007	independent	27.02.2007	Exceeding official authority	4.5 years of probation	2	2
Oblogin, Viktor	Altai Republic	Gorno-Altaisk	1992-2017	United Russia	14.06.2016	Exceeding official authority, fraud	4 years of probation	2	1
Parkhomenko, Andrey	Jewish Autonomous Oblast	Birobidzhan	2010-2015	United Russia	19.02.2015	Abuse of office	4 years of probation, government employment ban for 3 years	2	1

Parshikov, Gennady	Republic of Bashkortostan	Salavat	2005-2008	appointed	01.03.2008	Exceeding official authority	case closed	3	0
Persianov, Sergey	Moscow Oblast	Sergiev Posad	2006-2009	United Russia	01.12.2008	Exceeding official authority	case closed	2	2
Plotnikov, Pavel	Mari El Republic	Yoshkar-Ola	2014-2015	appointed	01.12.2015	Receiving a bribe	10 years in a penal colony, a fine of 17 million rubles	1	0
Polumordvinov, Oleg	Astrakhan Oblast	Astrakhan	2015-2018	appointed (city manager)	01.10.2018	Exceeding official authority	fine of 300 thousand rubles	3	0
Posdeev, Ivan	Komi Republic	Syktyvkar	2011-2015	appointed (city manager)	24.09.2015	Exceeding official authority, embezzlement, abuse of office	3 years of probation, a fine of 100 thousand rubles	1	0
Potapov, Ilya	Novosibirsk Oblast	Berdsk	2011-2015	oppositional (KPRF)	01.05.2013	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	10 years in a penal colony, a fine of 500 million rubles	2	1
Potapov, Igor	Tula Oblast	Novomoskovsk	2005-2009	appointed (city manager)	02.04.2009	Exceeding official authority, forgery by an official	4.5 years of probation, government employment ban for 3 years	3	0
Prasolov, Vladimir	Rostov Oblast	Taganrog	2012-2016	oppositional (Just Russia)	22.12.2015	Abuse of office	1 year in a penal colony	2	1
Priz, Nikolay	Krasnodar Krai	Krasnodar	2000-2004	oppositional (KPRF)	01.08.2004	Exceeding official authority	3 years of probation, government	2	2

							employment ban for 2 years		
Pushkaryov, Igor	Primorsky Krai	Vladivostok	2008-2017	United Russia	01.06.2016	Abuse of office, receiving a bribe on a very large scale	15 years in a penal colony, a fine of 500 million rubles	2	1
Rogachev, Yury	Tambov Oblast	Tambov	2015-2016	appointed	19.10.2016	Abuse of office, forgery by an official	3 years of probation	3	0
Ruditsa, Sergey	Primorsky Krai	Ussuriysk	2000-2014	United Russia	05.04.2015	Neglect of duty	a fine of 80 thousand rubles	2	1
Savintsev, Igor	Altai Krai	Barnaul	2010-2015	appointed (city manager)	29.06.2015	Exceeding official authority, attempt at embezzlement	4 years of probation	3	0
Sdvizhkov, Evgeny	Yaroslavl Oblast	Rybinsk	2004-2007	independent	07.06.2007	Abuse of office, receiving a bribe on a large scale	7.5 years in a penal colony but sentenced revoked after appeal in 2011	2	2
Serov, Aleksandr	Irkutsk Oblast	Bratsk	2010-2011	oppositional (KPRF)	03.02.2011	Receiving a bribe on a large scale	5.5 years in a penal colony	2	1
Shakhov, Oleg	Moscow Oblast	Khimki	2012-2014	independent	11.11.2014	Exceeding official authority	probation of 6 years	3	1
Shestopalov, Vladimir	Stavropol Krai	Pyatigorsk	2004-2005	independent	27.12.2005	Misappropriation of state funds	2.5 years of probation	2	1
Skvortsov, Vladislav	Kamchatka Krai	Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky	2004-2011	United Russia	29.11.2010	Exceeding official authority	a fine of 150 thousand rubles	2	1
Sleptsov, Yury	Moscow Oblast	Voskresensk	2003-2010	United Russia	20.06.2010	Exceeding official	a fine of 18.1 million rubles,	2	1

						authority, receiving a bribe	government employment ban for 3 years		
Sokovykh, Viktor	Lipetsk Oblast	Elets	1993-2010	independent	01.04.2010	Abuse of office	case closed	3	2
Solntsev, Viktor	Kursk Oblast	Zheleznogorsk2	2007-2016	United Russia	28.07.2008	Exceeding official authority	case closed	3	2
Stolyarov, Mikhail	Astrakhan Oblast	Astrakhan	2012-2013	United Russia	01.11.2013	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	10 years in a penal colony and a fine of 500 million rubles	2	1
Sudeykin, Valery	Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug	Khanty-Mansiysk	2001-2007	United Russia	24.09.2007	Exceeding official authority	case closed due to expiration of limitation period	2	2
Tarasov, Evgeny	Chelyabinsk Oblast	Ozyorsk	2011-2012	appointed (city manager)	21.06.2012	Embezzlement	4.5 years in a penal colony	3	0
Tashkinov, Vladimir	Irkutsk Oblast	Ust-Ilimsk	2010-2015	oppositional (Just Russia), switched to UR	24.04.2015	Receiving a bribe on a large scale	11 years in a penal colony, a fine of 30 million rubles	2	2
Tkachev, Viktor	Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug	Nefteyugansk	1999-2005	United Russia	03.02.2005	Exceeding official authority	4 years of probation	2	2
Tretyakov, Aleksey	Perm Oblast	Chaikovsky	2014-2018	independent running against UR	01.03.2018	Exceeding official authority	3 years in a penal colony, released on probation	2	1

Upyryev, Anatoly	Moscow Oblast	Sergiev Posad	2003-2008	independent	01.03.2006	Property damage by fraud or breach of trust	a fine of 200 thousand rubles	2	2
Urlashov, Evgeny	Yaroslavl Oblast	Yaroslavl	2012-2017	independent running against UR	03.07.2013	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	12.5 years in a penal colony, a fine of 60 million rubles	2	1
Utkin, Nikolay	Samara Oblast	Tolyatti	2000-2007	independent	08.05.2007	Receiving a bribe on a very large scale	7 years in a penal colony	3	2
Yakunichev, Aleksey	Volgograd Oblast	Vologda	1995-2008	independent	31.08.2007	Abuse of office, misappropriation of state funds on a large scale	4 years of probation	2	2
Yaraliev, Imam	Republic of Dagestan	Derbent	2010-2015	United Russia	12.02.2015	Exceeding official authority	case closed	2	1
Zaitsev, Aleksey	Rostov Oblast	Novoshakhtinsk	2005-2007	independent	01.01.2007	Exceeding official authority, forgery	2.8 years of probation	2	2
Zherzdev, Vadim	Tula Oblast	Novomoskovsk	2009-2018	appointed (city manager)	03.06.2018	Abuse of office	2 years in a penal colony	3	0
Zhukov, Vladimir	Irkutsk Oblast	Angarsk	2012-2014	independent	01.03.2014	Embezzlement	4 years of probation, government employment ban for 2 years	2	2

Appendix A: Personal contributions to the papers of the cumulative dissertation

Introduction: on the Political Economy of Authoritarianism (Chapter 1)

Chapter 1 is an introductory part of the dissertation. It was written solely by me.

Environmental Politics in Authoritarian Regimes: Waste Management in the Russian Regions (Chapter 2)

This paper is joint work with Dr. Ekaterina Paustyan and Grigory Yakovlev. The paper was conceived by Dr. Paustyan and me, with both authors contributing equally to all steps of the process. Most of the data collection and coding as well as the writing up of the paper, including the literature review, was conducted by me while Dr. Paustyan carried out the data analysis and offered feedback. Grigory Yakovlev contributed to data collection.

Authoritarian Durability, Prospects of Change and Individual Behavior: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Russia (Chapter 3)

The project was conducted together with Prof. Dr. Michael Rochlitz, Dr. Yulia Khalikova and Prof. Dr. Koen Schoors. Prof. Dr. Michael Rochlitz, Dr. Yulia Khalikova and I conceptualized and designed the survey experiment. Data acquisition was carried out by me while further stages of the paper were joint work of all four co-authors. Prof. Dr. Koen Schoors provided financial resources for commissioning the survey.

Politicized Corruption and Models of Legal Repression of Local Elites in Russia (Chapter 4)

This paper was written by me as a sole author. The paper benefited from comments and suggestions from my colleagues as well as participants of the workshops where it was presented.

Appendix B: Erklärung über die Anfertigung der Dissertation ohne unerlaubte Hilfsmittel

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass diese Arbeit ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt worden ist und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt wurden.

Ich erkläre ferner, dass die den benutzten Werken wörtlich und inhaltlich entnommenen Stellen als solche kenntlich gemacht wurden.

Eine Überprüfung der Dissertation mit qualifizierter Software im Rahmen der Untersuchung von Plagiatsvorwürfen ist gestattet.

Bremen, den 5. April 2023

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Olga Masyutina

Acknowledgements

In the past year it has become increasingly challenging in many ways to study Russia but also to be a Russian. The country that I always felt a strong attachment to and curiosity for has been involved in a war of aggression against Ukraine. Although my fondness for Russia has greatly waned, the interest remains. This dissertation is a result of my fascination with this one of the more intriguing and controversial countries in the world but it is also a statement about how damaging - both domestically and internationally - the current authoritarian regime in Russia is.

This dissertation is a product of three years of doctoral research at the University of Bremen and amalgamation of efforts, feedback and support of many wonderful colleagues and friends that I have met in different countries throughout the years.

In October 2014 I (quite by accident) started working at the International Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (ICSID) at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, a research institute headed by Andrei Yakovlev and Timothy Frye. Five years that I spent at ICSID was quite a life-changing experience. There I met a group of dedicated and enthusiastic researchers who studied different aspects of Russia's political economy, and I was inducted into the international community of Russia scholars. It is thanks to them that my layperson interest in Russia gained some scientific ground and became more profound. It is there at ICSID that I met my supervisor and friend Michael Rochlitz. I am grateful to Michael for giving me the opportunity to do a doctorate and to move to Bremen, the city that became a second home to me in this turbulent time. Michael is also a paragon of inspiration and enthusiasm - his devotion to work and his sincere, joyful passion for research and Russia are boundless and infectious. Seeing him teach or present his research has always been highly motivating.

I am indebted to my second supervisor Heiko Pleines for his support and his steadying influence. It was so important to know that I could count on him for feedback and encouragement. Despite being often overwhelmed with work and lately with the war, Heiko always found time for me, he kept me on track and had my back. It is no wonder that Heiko has been voted the best supervisor at the University of Bremen, I feel very lucky that he agreed to take me on as his doctoral student.

At different stages of my doctoral research, I benefited greatly from insights of my colleagues and participants of scientific events where I was fortunate to present my work. During my time in Bremen, I have been surrounded by wonderful people who made all my PhD experiences

truly memorable and a little easier. I greatly appreciate the support of Jutta Günther who is a remarkable person and a powerful role model, full of encouragement and conviction. I would like to thank my brilliant colleagues from the working groups of Jutta Günther and Michael Rochlitz - Masha, Ann, Matheus, Jarina, Jessica, Marcel, Katya Vorobeva, Philip, Susanna and David - for our lunches in the University Mensa, games nights, for enjoyable and inspiring chats on our office floor and many nice moments spent together. Marcel was extremely kind answering my questions and helping out, and Masha patiently endured my spontaneous visits to her office for a chat. I was also happy to get to know Hanna and Marina, Luis, Tobi, Michel, Kehinde and Tobias. I always felt welcome and at home in the warm and friendly environment of our working groups. Bremen also introduced me to some good friends – Frederik, Klaus, Jonathan and Rebecca – with whom I hope I will stay connected in the future.

The road of my doctoral studies has been bumpy and winding, and I doubt that I would have arrived at this final destination without Mareike zum Felde. Her unwavering loyalty and kindness have helped me through. My friends and co-authors Katya Paustyan and Yulia Khalikova are two other people whose support I cannot emphasize strongly enough. I would like to thank Katya for her patience and quiet encouragement as well as for a rewarding experience of writing a paper together. My friendship with Yulia has been a source of much laughter, comfort and lively discussions where we have shared our ideas, worries and aspirations.

As mentioned above, my interest in academic research and Russia as a research focus was first awakened during my work at ICSID in Moscow. I am therefore grateful to Andrei Yakovlev and Timothy Frye and all my colleagues at the Center, first of all to my fantastic office mates Nina Ershova and Fabian Burkhardt. It was a privilege to be part of ICSID.

There are also several close friends who accompanied me throughout the years – friends I made years ago during my studies in Moscow, Siegen and Coimbra. Despite being separated by time and space, I have always felt their support and affection. Many thanks to Lydia, Olya, Tanya and Dina in Moscow and Liya, Webby, Nathalie and Tereza in Germany, Brazil, Thailand and the Czech Republic.

And finally, I would not be where I am today without my parents, Liudmila and Sergey. They have always been there for me and done their best to ensure that I am a strong, independent and fulfilled person.

These years in Bremen have been a real rollercoaster but I would not have missed it for the world!