

The Systemic Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes: A Case Study of Russian Regions

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Introduction

The study of political opposition in authoritarian regimes has traditionally focused on pro-democracy movements.¹ The formation of such movements and their attempts to come to power, sometimes through the revolutionary overthrow of the regime, has been extensively covered in the political science literature. Recently much interest has been drawn towards the so-called 'colour revolutions' which took place in some post-communist states, and the revolutionary protest movement of the 'Arab spring' (May 2008). The focus of such studies has largely centred on the goals of the non-systemic opposition whilst far less attention has been paid to the important role of the systemic opposition.²

For many scholars the systemic opposition is very easy to condemn; it is often seen as a mere puppet of the regime. In this chapter I argue that the role of the systemic opposition in authoritarian regimes has largely been misunderstood, under-valued and under-theorised. This chapter provides an analysis of systemic opposition in Russia and its regions. The main aim of the chapter is to examine the opposition from a new perspective which sees it not as an alternative to, but as an integral part of, the system and even as a support element of the regime. In terms of ideology, almost any opposition can be pretty anti-systemic; in other words, ideological division is not a valid reason to differentiate the systemic opposition from the non-systemic opposition. The systemic opposition, in contrast to the non-systemic opposition, is accommodated within the existing system. There can

1 This article is prepared as part of the programme of fundamental research conducted by the Laboratory for Regional Political Studies of National Research University – Higher School of Economics (project 'Structural Analysis of Regional Political Regimes and Electoral Space').

2 The definitions of both systemic and non-systemic (or anti-systemic) opposition have not been coined properly in academic science. In my opinion, systemic opposition is the kind of opposition in an authoritarian regime which has some limited access to power, agrees to play by the rules imposed by the governing elites, and supports more or less regular formal and informal connections with them. The non-systemic opposition seeks a radical change of the regime and usually has no positions in power at all (often being presented by officially unrecognised or banned organisations). But it can also be marginalised and weak.

be robust opposition in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. However, the non-robust, acquiescent type is only found in authoritarian regimes.

Recent events in Russian politics after Putin's return to power in March 2012 have made the study of the systemic opposition even more important. The recent transformation in the political system have come about as a response to the challenges thrown up by Medvedev's presidential rule and the mass protests following the 2011 Duma elections. Firstly, there was a need to overcome the instability and uncertainty within the ranks of the federal elite and the decision-making process which were created under the dual leadership of Putin and Medvedev (the so called 'tandem') in the period 2008–12. The system had to become mono-centric once again. This partly explains why we have witnessed a new wave of controlling institutions, long lists of plans, strategies, goals, and efficiency measures which have either been proposed or supported by Putin. Secondly, and most importantly for this research, has been the rise of the mass protest movement which has led to yet further repression and authoritarian control from the Kremlin.

Rational-Choice Institutionalism

In my view the most appropriate theory to understand the systemic opposition is that of rational choice institutionalism (Shepsle, 2008). The analytical paradigm we use concerns the rational behaviour of oppositional actors who aim to maximise their political profits under the current conditions. From the rational perspective, the award of profits within the system gives more opportunities and fewer risks than the struggle for power at the national level where there are zero chances of victory. Elements of sub-national power can be the kind of profits the systemic opposition needs most and successfully achieve one way or another. However such rationalism does not mean that the actors will simply agree with the rules and play the loyalty game: they can try to promote their ideas and overcome the boundaries set by the regime and then wait to see what will happen in those cases where they transgress the rules. In this scenario the opposition will put forward alternative policies and criticise the regime. Here, we can see that it is possible to have both competition and authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

To understand the practices of this system it is important to see it from both sides. From the side of the authorities it is a constant process of setting rules, creating boundaries and punishing those who step out of line. The authorities produce both control mechanisms and limited opportunities for political actors. All political institutions are placed under the control of loyal parties and groups. In the present system this means the inclusion of regional governors, mayors, regional and municipal deputies into United Russia, and United Russia's and regional governors' control over the distribution of the spoils which come with such posts. A number of methods are used to enforce the Kremlin's control over these institutions. Thus for example, the Kremlin has control over the registration of parties and candidates at the elections, and control over the counting of votes. If the process is not totally

failsafe and some candidates who have not been approved by the authorities are able to come to power, the regime can instigate criminal or corruption charges against them and use other forms of pressure to force them to resign.

Setting the rules of the game when it comes to control and punishment is a practice that allows the authorities to control the opposition (March, 2009). Since the rules are purposefully unclear, the opposition never knows whether it will be rewarded or punished. The practice of manufacturing uncertainty is also very important as it makes the opposition more cautious in its actions. In other words if you want to keep the opposition on its toes the rules of the game must never be made too clear and transparent.

The question we research concerns the strategy employed by the systemic opposition which we see as being one of adaptation to the authoritarian system and seeking to maximise its political resources within set limits. One interesting point of research is the behaviour of members of the systemic opposition who know that whilst it is impossible for them to win elections at the federal level there may still be opportunities to score victories at the sub-national level.

The Systemic Opposition and Gubernatorial Elections

The gubernatorial elections of September 2013 have become a pivotal point for this system (Karandashova 2014). Their analysis is especially interesting if we study them in terms of Schedler's (2006) concept of 'nested games' which is a key component of the theory of electoral authoritarianism. The most important game is where electoral rules and practices are used to consolidate the governing elite through a process of incorporating members of the opposition into the political system in exchange for their loyalty.

The mechanism of the opposition's inclusion is based on the municipal filter which is the main and very high barrier for candidates' registration at the gubernatorial elections. The municipal filter means that each candidate running for governor and applying for registration should collect a certain number of supporting signatures from the municipal deputies and municipal heads. The regional authorities choose the exact share of signatures needed for registration between 5% and 10% of municipal deputies and elected municipal heads. But the most difficult requirement is the need to collect signatures in three-quarters of the municipal councils in towns and municipal districts.

Currently, the municipal barrier blocks the registration of almost all the candidates nominated by political parties except for those nominated by United Russia. The rare exceptions in some regions are Communist and Just Russia candidates. This means that only those parties who have struck a pre-electoral deal with the authorities can compete in the gubernatorial elections. It should also be remembered that independents are not allowed to compete in gubernatorial elections except for in a few regions including Moscow and Kirov region (and in these regions they should not only overcome the municipal barrier but they also

need to collect a set number of voters' signatures). The selection of candidates becomes a crucial informal procedure because there is no formal way to overcome the barrier by campaigning in the region and bidding for the support of the municipal deputies. Only those selected in discussions and bargaining procedures with the federal and regional authorities can become candidates.

The Legitimacy Problem

An extremely high barrier to access the political market through the gubernatorial elections not only boosts the willingness of parties to cooperate but also creates a very important problem concerning the legitimacy of authoritarian elections. This problem is both practical and also controversial in terms of political theory (Howard and Roessler, 2006). For the electoral procedure this is one more nested game which troubles the authorities. The legitimacy problem in an authoritarian regime can be solved only by means of authoritarian management. Procedural legitimacy is determined by the size of the turnout, the number of participants and their political status. As the 2012–13 elections show, the desired turnout should be over 40%, and the number of candidates no less than four (Tables 6.1 and 6.2).

Table 6.1 Electoral turnout at the 2012 and 2013 gubernatorial elections

Region	Turnout at the 2012/2013 gubernatorial elections	Turnout at the 2011 State Duma elections (difference gubernatorial 2012/2013 elections/State Duma 2011 elections)
Amur (2012)	36.77%	54% (-17.23)
Belgorod (2012)	59.47%	75.44% (-15.97)
Bryansk (2012)	46.94%	59.83% (-12.89)
Novgorod (2012)	42.80%	56.48% (-13.68)
Ryazan' (2012)	43.51%	52.66% (-9.15)
Khakasia (2013)	37.81%	56.21% (-18.4)
Zabaykalye (2013)	33.19%	53.58% (-20.39)
Khabarovsk (2013)	33.83%	53.12% (-19.29)
Vladimir (2013)	28.51%	48.79% (-20.28)
Magadan (2013)	32.25%	52.49% (-20.24)
Moscow oblast' (2013)	38.51%	50.82% (-12.31)
Moscow City (2013)	32.03%	61.31% (-29.28)
Chukotka (2013)	64.41%	79.1% (-14.69)

Source: Calculated by the author from data published on the Central Electoral Commission website: www.cikrf.ru

The very limited and clearly unfree nature of gubernatorial elections leads to very low turnout, as can be seen from Table 6.1. Compared with the federal elections, turnout for the gubernatorial elections was 10–20 points lower and varied from 28% in Vladimir Region to 64.41% in Chukotka; obviously this reinforces the legitimacy problem. However the limited public support for United Russia means that there is a risk of electoral failure if the turnout rises. Hence we have two competing concepts of turnout management. In the 2000s, the authorities preferred to boost turnout as the socio-economic situation was improving and fears of opposition success decreased to near zero. The results of federal elections regularly displayed a very high correlation between a rise in turnout and support for United Russia (Turovsky, 2012). In other words the politically passive part of society voted loyally for United Russia as it was satisfied with the economic situation. In recent years the practice of low turnout has become more typical due to the fear of protest mobilisation and the decline in the support for United Russia. The aim of the authorities is to encourage (coerce or bribe) only the loyal part of the electorate who are dependent on the authorities (such as pensioners, bureaucrats, workers in the social sphere and other employees paid from the state budget etc.) to the ballot box.

Table 6.2 Participation of candidates and parties at the 2012–2013 gubernatorial elections (on the date of voting)

Region	Number of candidates	CPRF*	LDPR**	Just Russia	Other parties
Amur (2012)	4	+	+	+	0
Belgorod (2012)	4	0	+	0	2
Bryansk (2012)	2	+	0	0	0
Novgorod (2012)	3	0	+	0	1
Ryazan' (2012)	4	+	+	0	1
Khakasia (2013)	5	+	+	+	2
Zabaykalye (2013)	4	+	+	+	1
Khabarovsk (2013)	4	+	+	+	0
Vladimir (2013)	7	+	+	0	4
Magadan (2013)	4	+	+	+	0
Moscow oblast' (2013)	6	+	+	+	2
Moscow City (2013)	6	+	+	+	2
Chukotka (2013)	3	0	+	+	0

Source: Central Electoral Commission website: www.cikrf.ru, author's calculations. [accessed 12 February 2014]

Note: *Communist Party of the Russian Federation ** Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

Under conditions of low turnout the regime tries to partially solve the legitimacy problem by increasing the participation of members of the systemic opposition (Table 6.2). In 2013 all major parties were allowed to take part at the gubernatorial elections, while in 2012 this participation was more limited. The idea is to enhance the competition but at the same time ensure the victory of the incumbents. However, this leads to a difficult situation when United Russia municipal deputies are forced to support candidates from competing parties. In the most extreme case in Moscow, United Russia gave some of its nomination signatures to Alexey Navalny who is one of the leading members of the opposition.

It should be mentioned that the federal centre is more interested in solving the legitimacy problem than the regional authorities. Initially, the very idea of gubernatorial elections was aimed at raising the public responsibility of regional governors before their citizens and creating more effective channels of feedback. According to the electoral rules there has to be a second round if no candidate receives 50% in the first round. In Russian practice, this rule is considered dangerous for the incumbent due to the risk of oppositional consolidation in the second round (as elections in the 1990s showed; see Kolosov and Turovsky, 1997).

On one hand Russia's gubernatorial elections seem to be a case of electoral authoritarianism aimed at ensuring victory of the incumbents. On the other hand this is a more complicated phenomenon which may be termed sub-national authoritarianism within a hierarchical power system (on federalism and electoral authoritarianism see Ross, 2005). In this system the federal centre tries to control electoral competition in its own interests rather than that of the regional incumbents. In other words, the federal centre as a dominating power in the system needs the legitimacy of elections a little bit more than it needs the legitimacy of each individually elected governor. In a hierarchical system the federal authorities need to constrain the legitimacy of elected governors which means that they are not allowed to get too many votes and not much more votes than President Putin. That is, a victory with 60–70% should be enough. That means that the federal centre insists on the participation of all or almost all parties represented in the State Duma, which is again about their inclusion into the system.

However the policy of including the systemic opposition into the system of gubernatorial elections has clear drawbacks. The first of these is the low interest of those parties who consider that they have no chance to win. Second is the low turnout due to very low-level campaigns (it also should be remembered that since the voting takes place on the second Sunday of September the main part of the campaign takes place in the holiday month of August). Despite attempts to boost the participation of parties at the 2013 elections, incumbents showed very high results (Table 6.3). But even the case of relatively high and robust competition in Moscow could not wake up many voters. This is still an electoral authoritarianism system, even if it provides some allowances for the participation of candidates of the systemic opposition. And in fact the policy of procedural legitimisation of gubernatorial elections (supported in some regions such as Moscow by a relatively fair electoral procedure) failed due to the very low interest of both parties and

voters. The key problem is the unfree selection of candidates in the first place, which brings into question the validity of the elections.

Electoral Thresholds

One of the ways to legitimise the gubernatorial elections is to implement a relatively low electoral threshold. At the moment the breakdown shows that 23 regions use a 10% threshold, 5 regions – 9%, 10 regions – 8%, 22 regions – 7%, 7 regions – 6%, and 15 regions – 5%. In other words the regions themselves use slightly different strategies and many of them cling to the lower threshold. It is important to mention that some of the openly authoritarian regions use a 5% barrier (e.g., Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Belgorod). In Moscow it was lowered to 6%. However, the choice in favour of the most restrictive rules in the strongest oppositional regions can also be made, as shown by the case of St. Petersburg. Actually all the parties of the systemic opposition are interested in the elimination of the municipal filter since it not only makes them 'too systemic' (dependent) but it looks odd in the eyes of the public. Regional authorities and United Russia are also not happy at playing this game of artificial legitimisation which makes them support the opposition by providing municipal signatures.

The failure of procedural legitimisation of gubernatorial elections with the help of the systemic opposition has made the authorities turn to other methods of legitimising its sub-national power by increasing its levels of public support and accountability. A very important question with regard to the legitimacy of authoritarian elections is the quality of support given to the authorities, not just the quantity. Recent trends show that under conditions of low turnout the support of incumbents to a large degree results from the mobilisation of the state dependent social groups. In a really competitive environment the support of incumbents becomes much more fragile (as Moscow mayoral elections showed in 2013). However, the systemic opposition at the gubernatorial elections is too dependent to make the competition really fierce and attractive to voters. The incumbent always has an advantage at the start of electoral campaigns due to the absence of competition in the period between the elections. Very rarely have any of the representatives of the opposition sufficient resources to carry on the political struggle beyond the short period of the electoral campaign. Moreover control over the selection of candidates creates a situation whereby the most popular candidates can be banned from participation both formally and informally. Under such circumstances the authorities seek other ways to legitimate sub-national power by means of performance legitimisation (by the introduction of efficiency evaluations and ratings, solving local socio-economic problems etc.). However, this part of the legitimisation process is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Thus, whilst the gubernatorial elections may have brought the systemic opposition closer to the regime it has not been given sufficient rewards and the regime has not solved the problem of authoritarian legitimacy. In this situation the strategies of both authorities and systemic opposition need to be analysed more thoroughly.

The Strategy of the Regime

From our point of view the strategy of the authorities is based on three pillars: dominance, patronage and distribution. Considering the dominance strategy, we suppose that Russia does not have a typical regime with a dominant party (Remington, 2008); rather, this is a multi-tier regime of dominant actors striving for control over all the non-dominant actors. It may seem that the regime which has created a dominant party (United Russia) should work in the interests of only this party but as with the case of sub-national electoral authoritarianism, Russia has a more complex regime. The dominant party is not fully reliable in terms of its public support and inner conflicts. That is why the regime encourages the systemic opposition to win some votes and a share of the dominance strategy (in contrast to more typical dominant party systems, see Magaloni, 2006).

There are two dimensions of the patronage strategy. Firstly, the central authorities manage regional competition and legitimacy trying to keep it at a certain mid-level because in a hierarchical system the regional powers should be relatively strong and legitimate but also dependent and weak in terms of centre-regional relations. The central authorities try to decide what kind of competition the regions should be permitted. Secondly all territorial levels of authority try to control all the parties. Such patronage creates an underdeveloped and peripheralised party system where parties are weak, dependent, opportunistic and originate from influential groups of elites or are purely personalistic (Hale, 2006).

The strategy of distribution is also very interesting to study as it considers the very important choice of inclusion/exclusion (Blaydes, 2011). The regime is much more restrictive for the systemic opposition when it comes to regional executive power. However, it has started the process of distributing some of its powers to the opposition in regional executives. Firstly, the (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) was granted the post of Governor of Smolensk Region in 2012. In 2013 it was the turn of Just Russia after the party showed its full loyalty and received the Governorship of Zabaykalye as a reward. At the same time the Communist Part of the Russian Federation (CPRF) in 2013 had lost its last Governor in Vladimir Region. However, in 2014 the CPRF regained its Governorship in Oryol Region, which is the native region of its party leader, Gennady Zyuganov. However, the new party of systemic opposition Civic Platform has been blocked from participating at the gubernatorial elections because of the risk of splitting regional elites.

Despite the return of gubernatorial elections the President keeps the position of dominant distributor as he appoints temporary governors when their term expires and this starts the whole process long before the election campaign itself. The spread of this practice has been eased somewhat by the adoption of a universal single day for all gubernatorial elections in September (even although the terms of the governors expire throughout the year). In 2013 the president made four changes of governors, one in favour of Just Russia. However, granting gubernatorial posts to other parties is very painful and potentially dangerous as it threatens to undermine the consolidation of the political system in the regions. This was clearly seen in

Zabaykalye where United Russia and the clientele of the former Governor were forced to support the new governor, a member of Just Russia, who had no roots in the region. This is hardly a practice which can be practiced on a major scale. As we have seen, new parties have not been allowed to hold gubernatorial posts, as the example of Civic Platform demonstrates.

Municipal Elections

On the municipal level the politics of distribution is harder to implement as elections at this level tend to be more competitive (due to fewer restrictions), and if it is a city manager model (when no popular mayoral elections are held) the governor as the regional dominant actor is not interested at all in giving this post to other parties. What we have witnessed is the gradual eradication of communist mayors who have been forced to resign after being accused (often falsely) of corruption. In recent years the CPRF has lost a number of its towns. Among the regional capitals tiny Naryan-Mar was won by communists in 2012, followed by the prominent case of Novosibirsk in 2014 (no wonder that the mayor-elect Anatoly Lokot' was keen to show his loyalty to the regime). Among other cities and towns communist mayors were recently forced to resign in Novocheboksarsk and Pervoural'sk. In 2013, a harsh anti-corruption campaign hit the administration of Berdsk which was also led by a communist.

The reason why municipal executive power is almost closed to the systemic opposition can be found in sub-national authoritarianism which we consider to be more straightforward compared to the more flexible and sophisticated system operating at the federal level. Regional governors are not interested in any distributive policies at the mayoral level. However a small-scale distribution policy (supported by the federal authorities) takes place at the municipal level. Novosibirsk is one of the few cases. In 2013 Yekaterinburg mayoral elections were won by Civic Platform candidate Roizman who took advantage of splits within the local elites and protest voting. However in Yaroslavl' Civic Platform mayor Uralshov fell victim to a criminal investigation. Mayoral elections are freer than gubernatorial, but this means that the elites pressurise the systemic opposition and its candidates to ensure their own victories and do not play the distribution game.

Thus, executive power at all levels is all but closed for the systemic opposition except for a few cases (CPRF, LDPR and Just Russia governors) or tolerated (for a small number of elected communists and others municipal heads). However, the very existence of such cases makes the systemic opposition hope for fruitful cooperation and search for opportunities to win or to be selected (or permitted) to win sub-national elections. The best opportunities to accommodate the systemic opposition are present in the weaker and less powerful legislative branch of power. Here, the policy is less restrictive given its lower importance. Thus, for example, opposition parties hold posts such as deputy speaker committee or commission heads in approximately half of the regions (Reuter and Turovsky, 2012). Further, in even more regions they will hold the post of deputy head of legislative committees or commissions.

The authoritarian regime in Russia relies on distributive politics aimed at the accommodation of the systemic opposition. The federal dominant actor distributes the posts of candidates for gubernatorial elections in order to increase the legitimacy of elections and also distributes gubernatorial posts, albeit rarely in the interest of other parties. The regional dominant actor very often distributes spoils in legislative bodies but usually blocks the opposition from winning the post of mayor in order to keep the 'power vertical' intact.

Strategies of the Opposition

Let us now analyse the strategies of the oppositional actors taking into consideration our hypothesis that they will seek to maximise their profit within given limits. The electoral strategies come first (Smyth, 2006). One of the crucial choices is between boycott and participation. The most irrational is the strategy of boycotting the elections and it is thus very rare since it does not generate any profits. You cannot draw much public attention via this method and thereby enhance popular support. This is no more than a losing game. Where it was practiced by the CPRF in Belgorod in 2012, it was more related to the party's lack of resources. In other words, strong actors have never boycotted elections in Russia.

The strategy of electoral participation even if it is only 'formal' in nature is more rational. It pleases the authorities by legitimising the elections and gives the parties of the systemic opposition the opportunity to once again mobilise their voters. All in all, this is far better than nothing at all. In the case of non-participation there is a risk of allowing the electorate to vote for another party and the boycotting party loses its party identification and loyal supporters. Table 3.1 shows that the choice of electoral participation was made by the systemic opposition and the authorities in 2013.

However as we mentioned earlier the strategy of participation at the gubernatorial elections does not fully pay off. Usually candidates of the systemic opposition receive poor support, and many of them stay away from active campaigning. Other elections are more important, giving the opposition candidates the chance to win mayoral positions and deputies' mandates, in addition to receiving spoils in legislative bodies where distributive policies are implemented.

Another choice facing the systemic opposition is whether to criticise the regime or be totally loyal (with some variations in-between). This decision is much more complicated as it involves different and conflicting rationalities. The strategy of harsh criticism can bring more votes but creates risks of conflict with the authorities leading to the potential blockade of further activities and other punishments. The strategy of loyalty gives better chances of winning out in distribution policies (such as spoils in legislatures), but has the obvious risk of poor electoral performance. If the popularity of a loyal party is too low, the authorities will hardly take much effort to help it.

Table 6.3 Results of the 2012–2013 gubernatorial elections

Region	United Russia candidate/ results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	CPRF candidate/results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	LDPR candidate/results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	Just Russia candidate/ results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	Candidates of other parties
Amur (2012)	77.28% (Kozhemyako)/43.54% (+33.74)	9.99% (Kobzyov)/19.18% (-9.19)	8.12% (Abramov)/20.97% (-12.85)	2.56% (Zharovskiy)/10.28% (-7.72)	None
Belgorod (2012)	77.64% (Savchenko)/51.16% (+26.48)	None	12.43% (Gor'kova)/9.65% (+2.78)	None	Patriots of Russia – 4.12% (Zapryayaylo); Right Cause – 3.6% (Kushnaryov)
Bryansk (2012)	65.22% (Demin)/50.12% (+15.1)	30.83% (Potomskiy)/23.31% (+7.52)	None	None	None
Novgorod (2012)	75.95% (Mitin)/34.58% (+41.37)	None	10.43% (Mikhaylov)/11.48% (-1.05)	None	Patriots of Russia – 10.63% (Zakharov)
Ryazan' (2012)	64.43% (Kovalyov)/39.79% (+24.64)	21.92% (Fedotkin)/23.58% (-1.66)	9.01% (Sherin)/15.06% (-6.05)	None	Right Cause – 2.98% (Perekhvatova)
Khakassia (2013)	63.41% (Zimin)/40.13% (+23.28)	8.66% (Chumchev)/23.63% (-14.97)	9.94% (Sobolev)/16% (-6.06)	3.62% (Dudko)/13.67% (-10.05)	Communists of Russia – 5.63% (Brazauskas); Patriots of Russia – 4.78% (Bykov)
Zabaykalye (2013)	None (support for Il'kovskiy)/43.28%	11.74% (Merzlikin)/18.64% (-6.9)	10.13% (Kulieva)/19.18% (-9.05)	71.63% (Il'kovskiy)/14.1% (+14.25 UR+FR)	Civic Position – 2.77% (Balagur)

Table 6.3 Concluded

Region	United Russia candidate/ results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	CPRF candidate/results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	LDPR candidate/results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	Just Russia candidate/ results of party in 2011 Duma elections (difference)	Candidates of other parties
Khabarovsk (2013)	63.92% (Shipot)/38.14% (+25.78)	9.73% (Postnikov)/20.49% (-10.76)	19.14% (Furgal)/19.82% (-0.68)	3.99% (Yaschuk)/14.1% (-10.11)	None
Vladimir (2013)	74.73% (Orlova)/38.27% (+36.46)	10.64% (Bobrov)/20.53% (-9.89)	3.88% (Sipyagin)/12.93% (-9.05)	None	Civic Position – 2.48% (Karrukhin); Right Cause – 1.96% (Kolesnikov); KPSS – 1.77% (Anchugin); Patriots of Russia – 1.6% (Shubnikov)
Magadan (2013)	73.11% (Pechenyi)/41.04% (+32.07)	14.84% (Ivanitskiy)/22.75% (-7.91)	5.32% (Plotnikov)/17.37% (-12.05)	4.57% (Shubert)/11.61% (-7.04)	None
Moscow oblast ³ (2013)	78.94% (Vorobyov)/32.83% (+46.11)	7.72% (Cheremisov)/25.54% (-17.82)	2.52% (Shingarkin)/14.34% (-11.82)	1.83% (Romanovich)/15.87% (-14.04)	Yabloko (Gudkov) – 4.43%; Patriots of Russia – 2.27% (Komeyeva)
Moscow City (2013)	51.37% (Sobyanin, formally independent)/46.62% (+4.75)	10.69% (Mel'nikov)/19.36% (-8.67)	2.86% (Degtyar'ov)/9.45% (-6.59)	2.79% (Levichev)/12.14% (-9.35)	RPR-PARNAS – 27.24% (Naval'niy); Yabloko – 3.51% (Mitrokhin)
Chukotka (2013)	79.84% (Kopin)/70.32% (+9.52)	None	9.8% (Vasina)/11.24% (-1.44)	7.43% (Chernen'kiy)/5.4% (+2.03)	None

Source: Compiled by the author from data published on the Central Electoral Commission website: www.cikrf.ru [accessed 12 May 2014]

In fact the most rational policy of the systemic opposition should be to try and create a balance between these two strategies in order to get both votes and distribution profits. Both criticising and expressing loyalty can be rational, as criticising may be converted into not only formal representation but also spoils (as a concession of the authorities), and as loyalty does not always dissatisfy the voters – most of whom do not care about the collaborative policies of their favourite parties. Besides spoils are considered by systemic parties as a prize won in the battle and not as a result of collaboration. No parties ever refuse spoils if they are proposed. The strategy of harsh criticism/conflict is widespread but limited to electoral campaigns and can be combined with loyalty; in other words oppositional parties often find themselves moving back and forth on the 'conflict – loyalty' range.

The Long-Term Strategies of the Opposition

There are four long-term political strategies of the opposition. The first is the strategy of electoral mobilisation which is adopted in order to keep the core electorate. To achieve this, the party should participate in elections as much as possible. Electoral participation becomes a sort of a 'training' ground. However, such a strategy has its drawbacks. Among them is the erosion of electoral support which cannot be reproduced too many times if the party regularly shows to its potential supporters that it has no chance of winning. The formal participation of a party in a contest where the winner is predestined and its competitors show no real signs of a genuine challenge may lead to the disaffection of voters.³ The results of the most recent regional elections in 2012 and 2013 have led to a decrease in support for the 'old' systemic opposition, whilst support for newly created opposition parties, many of which have been created by the Kremlin, is on the rise (Shishorina, 2014). This means that the strategy of electoral mobilisation cannot be effective without even a small number of victories under a party's belt.

However the mobilisation goal sometimes cannot be achieved if the conditions of participation are too restrictive or the party does not have a strong candidate. In these cases the party can participate with so called technical candidates and/or spoilers. Technical candidate should be passive in the campaign and ensure the legitimacy of the election if other candidates withdraw. On the contrary the

³ The CPRF lost votes in all 16 regions where legislative elections were held in 2013 as compared with 2011 State Duma elections (and it increased its support only in 4 regions as compared with their previous regional elections). Nowhere had it got 20% of the vote or more. LDPR showed tiny growth in 1 region in comparison with the federal elections and in 4 regions with the regional elections (maximum result was 16.55%). Just Russia lost votes everywhere as compared with the previous federal elections and experienced growth in 3 regions as compared with the previous regional ones (with a maximum of 16% of the vote).

spoiler should be active, split the electorate and/or criticise the more powerful oppositional competitor (usually spoilers are used against the CPRF).

A second strategy is to seek representation in the State Duma, i.e. acquire a slice of power at the national level. There are many opportunities here. One of these is electoral, as for example in those cases where United Russia loses some of its support (at the State Duma elections it received 64.2% in 2007 and 49.3% in 2011). Another comes from the spread of party list voting to the municipal level. Municipal elections are particularly important for the systemic opposition as they increase the number of deputies and factions and strengthen the parties' territorial networks. For older and more experienced parties this is a chance to hold on to their key constituencies. Whilst they may be prevented from entering gubernatorial elections each major opposition party can potentially create large and growing networks of deputies and factions at the local level.

Nevertheless, the participation of the systemic opposition is still limited at the sub-national level. Regional legislatures are formed in the interest of the dominant party (United Russia) whilst other parties have very small factions. Given the relatively small number of regional deputies, this sometimes means that only one deputy is elected on a party list (or 2–4 deputies in a faction). Only the CPRF has been able to overcome the electoral threshold in the bulk of elections (in 2013 it achieved this with the exception of two regions).⁴ Recent electoral losses for the systemic opposition have made the domination of United Russia in regional legislatures even stronger. As for the municipal level, the federal centre refused to make party lists voting obligatory for all municipalities. For a short period of time it was obligatory for city/town councils where the number of deputies exceeded 20, but in 2013 this obligation was also lifted. As a result the number of deputies from the systemic opposition in sub-national assemblies may be stopped from growing.

The third strategy is to develop the careers of party activists. Surely such careers can be made within the party ranks. But the party needs both deputies' mandates and spoils in the assemblies to show its members that they have real future within the party. This strategy partly coincides with the dominant actor's distributive policy. However it is clear that only a small number of activists can become deputies and even lesser number can win any spoils. So many activists remain dissatisfied and this makes them come and go, thereby destabilising local party structures.

The fourth and final strategy of the systemic opposition is to consider politics as business. This means that the party structures are engaged in both legal and illegal fund-raising. Parties are often accused of selling their support (such as literally selling places in their party lists to *ad hoc* sponsors) and their informational resources (for discrediting campaigns). Such activity gives them financial resources but simultaneously makes them vulnerable to accusations of selling-out their policies to the highest bidder. All of the preceding political

⁴ LDPR got less than 5% in 5 regions and Just Russia failed (with less than 5%) in 7 regions out of 16.

strategies lead to the inclusion of the systemic opposition, making it play by the rules and bargain for profits.

Conclusion

The current growth in the number of parties creates new conditions of structural dominance. The paradox is that more opportunities to participate mean even fewer opportunities to win. In other words, the party system becomes even more fragmented while the non-systemic opposition undermines the popularity of those oppositional parties who participate at the elections. The strategy of the authorities to increase formal competition has turned into the fragmentation of the opposition and even greater domination of United Russia. Recent gubernatorial, legislative and mayoral elections show that the idea of a united opposition is a myth. Each party works out its own strategy and the unification of forces is irrational since it does not create more chances to win. For example, potentially the most successful centre-left alliance of the CPRF and Just Russia has never been created at gubernatorial elections. The rationality of authorities is clearly coined in the everlasting maxim 'divide and rule' while the parties of the systemic opposition stand only for their own interests.

The inclusion of the opposition into an authoritarian system with the dominant actor seems to be the rational strategy for both sides, if one 'iron' rule is obeyed: no opposition party or alliance is given the chance to win national elections. This rule works well for Russia and there is little or no perspective of it changing. As a result the more or less short lifecycles of parties and their leaders make them opportunistic.

The resulting dissatisfaction of the part of the voters and political activists has evoked an interest in the non-systemic opposition and created a 'systemic–non-systemic' divide where both sides accuse each other of faults and inadequacies. But this divide should not be exaggerated. In our definition the non-systemic opposition refers to those parties and social movements which are not legally registered. But the non-systemic opposition is also very fragmented (both ideologically and organisationally) and not so popular as to become a real political force. Moreover many of its leaders in fact want to become systemic, to head legal parties, participate in elections, etc. Given the fact that the registration of parties and selection of candidates is a managed process this means that such leaders are ready to bargain for the conditions of their inclusion. The participation of one of the leaders of the non-systemic opposition, Alexey Navalny, in the Moscow mayoral election of 2013 is a good example of a candidate being registered according to the decision of the Kremlin and with the help of signatures of support from United Russia. In our opinion, the non-systemic opposition is not a serious challenge to the systemic opposition. The non-systemic opposition is comprised of a mixture of die-hard anti-systemic radicals and potentially systemic actors (such as newcomers, defectors, etc.) seeking their place in the system.

The concept of opposition is itself a very controversial term and the classic 'power – opposition' divide in the Russian regime is a misleading analytical framework. In fact, all of the registered parties are part of one political system with their roles and functions which provide the system with extra stability. In my view, they should be considered as non-dominant actors with a limited access to power. I posit that the analysis of the opposition in Russia is more relevant in terms of non-dominant systemic actors while the idea of a non-systemic opposition does not make much sense. All major parties have their relations with the authorities and try to bargain for more favourable conditions and positions in power. All of the non-dominant actors pursue a rational strategy which combines opposition to the regime with political opportunism and collaborationism.

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