

Federal and Subnational Elections in Russia: Coherence and Divergence in Electoral Outcomes

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Abstract

This article examines the differences between Russian voting at federal elections and regional legislature elections, both combined and conducted independently. The authors analyse these differences, their character and their dynamics as an important characteristic of the nationalisation of the party system. They also test hypotheses about a higher level of oppositional voting and competitiveness in subnational elections, in accordance with the theory of second-order elections, as well as the strategic nature of voting at federal elections, by contrast with expressive voting during subnational campaigns. The empirical study is based on calculating the differences in votes for leading Russian parties at subnational elections and at federal elections (simultaneous, preceding and following) from 2003, when mandatory voting on party lists was widespread among the regions, to 2019. The level of competitiveness is measured in a similar way, by calculating the effective number of parties. The study indicates a low level of autonomy of regional party systems, in many ways caused by the fact that the law made it impossible to create regional parties, and then also by the 2005 ban on creation of regional blocs. The strong connection between federal and regional elections in Russia clearly underlines the fluid and asynchronous nature of its electoral dynamics, where subnational elections typically predetermine the results of the following federal campaigns. At the same time, the formal success of the nationalisation of the party system, achieved by increasing the homogeneity of voting at the 2016 and 2018 federal elections, is not reflected by the opposing process of desynchronisation between

federal and regional elections after Putin's third-term election. There is also a clear rise in the scale of the differences between the two. At the same time, the study demonstrates the potential presence in Russia of features common to subnational elections in many countries: their greater support for the opposition and presence of affective voting. However, there is a clear exception to this trend during the period of maximum mobilisation of the loyal electorate at the subnational elections immediately following the accession of Crimea in 2014–2015, and such tendencies are generally restrained by the conditions of electoral authoritarianism.

Keywords

nationalisation of party system – second order elections – subnational elections – strategic voting – inflation in party system

1 Introduction¹

This research is dedicated to the study of differences between how the Russian electorate votes in elections for regional and federal parliaments on party lists. The key concepts applied in this study include those of the nationalisation and inflation of party systems. A high level of nationalisation of politics involves mostly national socio-political divides² being more important for voters than local splits and conflicts.³ Thus, the level of diversity and extent of competition evident in elections in different regions of the country are directly dependent on the level of nationalisation of the party system: “Competitiveness is here an indicator of homogeneous electoral forces across the country”.⁴ If there is a high level of nationalisation, then all regions of the country will display similar

1 The results of the project “Subnational tier of political and party systems: comparative analysis”, carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University) in 2020, are presented in this work. This article partly uses an issue of preprint published online by NRU HSE: Turovsky R., Sukhova M. Similar or Different? Exploring the Gap Between Federal and Regional Elections in Russia / NRU Higher School of Economics. Series PS “Political Science”. 2017. No. WP BRP 55/PS/2017.

2 Seymour M. Lipset, Stein Rokkan, and Immanuel M. Wallerstein. *Party systems and voter alignments: cross-national perspectives*. (New York: Free Press, 1967).

3 Daniele Caramani. *The Nationalisation of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 60.

4 Ibid.

features regarding the party system and citizens' electoral behaviour, coinciding with the characteristics of the broader national party system.

Scholars see nationalisation as a historical process leading towards more or less united and spatially homogenous party systems. Such processes have been thoroughly studied in the United States and Western Europe. The literature finds the main result of this process in the unification of electoral support across the state. Some scholars focus on the possible barriers to nationalization⁵ such as polyethnic composition of the population, federalism, use of a majority electoral system, strong presidentialism, weakness of parties, among others.⁶

Inflation is usually understood as the opposing force to nationalisation. In this instance, a difference appears between the levels of competitiveness in regional and national elections,⁷ while competitiveness at a national level, under the approach to assessing inflation accepted in Western literature, can only be larger, and the focus is on the degree of this difference. Western scholars usually use only national elections to measure the level of inflation, both overall and region-to-region.

In our opinion, an in-depth study of the nationalization and inflation of party systems must factor in the electoral results of party activity at subnational and local elections. We believe that subnational elections are a significant criterion for the nationalisation of politics in general and the party system specifically. It is these elections that can express the particular features of local splits and conflicts, which are smoothed over during the period of national elections. At the same time, both the very meaning of subnational elections and their degree of autonomy may vary across different political systems, both in terms of the presence of distinct parties and social movements and in terms of the specific behaviour of the voters themselves.

It is clear to see that subnational elections are a more meaningful part of social life in federative states, as well as in the autonomies of decentralised unitary states. We consider the presence of significant differences between subnational elections in terms of the number and nature of the participants,

5 Grigorii Golosov, Ivan Grigoryev. "Natsionalizatsiya partiynoy sistemy: rossiyskaya spetsifika (Nationalization of party system: Russian specific)", *Politicheskaya nauka (Political science)*, no. 1 (2015): 128–156.

6 Pradeep Chhibber, Ken Kollman. *The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

7 Gary W. Cox. "Electoral Rules and Electoral Coordination". *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 2 (1999): 145–161.

as evidence of the nationalisation of the party system, and its potentially incomplete and unfinished character.

At the same time, the degree of autonomy of subnational elections can differ even within federations, based not only on the level of decentralisation, but also on the structure of political systems, as well as the rules of the game developed over the course of history. These factors are also what leads to differences between the autonomies of regional political systems. Namely, in some countries subnational elections are held on the same day as federal ones, and the electoral processes are seen as unified and mutually connected. At the same time, other countries seek to separate federal and regional elections, and even deliberately do not allow them to be combined. In presidential systems such as the USA, the combination of federal and regional elections is a common practice as a result of the importance of the contest over the presidency, whereas regional actors can gain votes by supporting a popular presidential candidate (the coattail effect).⁸ But in other places, regional elections may be conducted separately, and even their lists of participants may differ greatly, to the point that parties with regional candidates emphasise at those elections that they are acting completely independently. This autonomy of regional party systems can be seen in Canada, for example.⁹

Russia's case is interesting due to its diversity of patterns for conducting subnational elections. For many years, regional elections were conducted according to their own schedules, caused by the lack of a single date for the first elections to the regional legislatures after the 1993 dissolution of the councils elected in the Soviet years. The very first regional elections could be conducted in December 1993, on the day of the elections to the first post-Soviet parliament, the State Duma, but the majority of regions conducted theirs in 1994 or even later, choosing the dates for themselves. Further on, due to the different dates of the second elections (initially the first regional legislatures were supposed to be elected for two years, but they later gained the right to extend their terms), and also because of the differences in the lengths for which legislatures were in power (normally for four years, but eventually this was universally extended to five years), the timetable for regional legislatures elections became somewhat chaotic.

After President Vladimir Putin's accession to power and the creation of the dominant party United Russia, as well as a compulsory changeover of elections

8 Jonathan Rodden, Erik Wibbels. *Retrospective voting, coattails, and accountability in regional elections*. (Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2005).

9 Eve Hepburn "Small Worlds in Canada and Europe: A Comparison of Regional Party Systems in Quebec, Bavaria and Scotland". *Regional & Federal Studies* 20, no. 4–5 (2010): 527–544.

to regional legislatures to the mixed system (i.e. mandatory election of at least half of candidates on party lists, whereas previously deputies were elected in majoritarian districts in virtually every region¹⁰), the federal center became more interested in combining federal and regional elections. This practice allowed the authorities to consolidate their efforts to promote United Russia. In order to accomplish this, the practice of “single election days” was introduced, two at first (spring and autumn), and then only one (October, then September). The transition to two single election days took place in 2006, when the regional elections were held on March 12 and October 8, and then to one single election day in 2012, when regional elections were held on October 14. Since 2013, the single election day has always been in September. In order to encourage the combination of federal and regional elections, the law was amended to permit the terms of regional legislatures to be greatly shortened or extended, which led to an increase in combined elections in 2011. Despite this, it proved impossible to transform the existing chaotic schedule into a strict practice of conducting federal parliamentary and regional elections on one day every five years. At best, it was possible to institute a single election day for each year, and tie as many regional elections as possible (though this was still far from all of them) to the federal Duma campaign.

As a result, Russia is a good example of a country with regional elections which are variously held in combination with federal ones and independently, every year and in considerable numbers. This presents an opportunity to study electoral behaviour of two fundamentally different types: combined elections a priori lead to a similarity of results, but without necessarily rendering them identical. Separate elections are a purer example of subnational voting, which should demonstrate clearer differences, and can be compared to both preceding and following federal campaigns. In addition, the time lag between subnational and national elections allows us to see to what extent their results fit an overall national trend.

In this way, Russia's case makes it possible to examine many subnational campaigns taking place at different times, both those combined with federal ones and those held separately. At the same time, the standardisation of membership of participants in regional elections, as imposed deliberately by the federal authorities, has restricted the autonomy of subnational voting. Thus, the more flexible rules in effect at the very first stage of the mixed system's introduction in 2003–2004 (and in the few regions where elections on party lists had already been taking place on the regions' own initiative) permitted

10 The share of deputies that needed to be elected on party lists was later reduced to at least a quarter.

the participation of local political movements and blocs created by various parties and groups. These participants were often more powerful than the national parties. However, the Kremlin recognised this to be a genuine threat to the establishment of United Russia, and introduced a ban on the participation of regional blocs in elections in 2005. Since then, only the regional branches of national political parties take part in elections, and without a right to join into blocs. Of course, the new rules drastically reduced the potential for oppositional voting, though they did not by any means prevent differences between election results for the same parties at elections at different levels.

2 Second-Order Elections within the Process of Nationalisation of the Party System

Scholars periodically turn their attention to the question of why electoral behaviour differs between elections at different territorial levels, but one cannot say it is well-studied. In our opinion, the best approach to research on subnational elections is the second-order election theory, which inherently applies to all elections except the national, which are considered to be less significant for the common voter.¹¹ The first studies, based on the European Parliament elections, were conducted in the 1980s¹² and 1990s,¹³ and more have continued to take place since. Then, scholars began to also consider subnational campaigns within the framework of this theory, in particular when studying turnout,¹⁴ motivations behind voting,¹⁵ and the dependence of regional campaigns on federal ones,¹⁶ among others. As studies on second-order elections indicate, they differ not only by their lower turnouts, which is fairly obvious,

11 Michael Marsh, Slava Mikhaylov. *European Parliament elections as second-order national elections: A review of the evidence*. (Trinity College Dublin: mimeo, 2008).

12 Karlheinz Reif, Hermann Schmitt. "Nine second-order national elections—a conceptual framework for the analysis of European Election results." *European Journal of Political Research* 8, no. 1 (1980): 3–44.

13 Michael Marsh. "Testing the second-order election model after four European elections." *British Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 4 (1998): 591–607.

14 João Cancela, Benny Geys "Explaining voter turnout: A meta-analysis of national and subnational elections." *Electoral Studies* 42 (2016): 264–275.

15 Sophie Marien, Ruth Dassonneville and Marc Hooghe. "How Second Order Are Local Elections? Voting Motives and Party Preferences in Belgian Municipal Elections." *Local Government Studies* 41, no. 6 (2015): 898–916.

16 Robert Liñeira. "Second-Order Elections: Everyone, Everywhere? Regional and National Considerations in Regional Voting." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 46, no. 4 (2016): 510–538.

but by particular features of electoral choice: greater presence of oppositional voting (the government's parties perform worse, while small and radical parties perform better) and competitiveness. The researchers also highlighted the cyclical nature of the influence of second-order election effects. They are generally more intense during the middle of the first-order elections' electoral cycle (FOE midterm) and weaken as the elections approach.¹⁷ Such hypotheses can be tested in Russia, despite restrictions related to the composition of participants in subnational elections, which drastically reduce the regional party systems' degree of autonomy, especially when one factors in the overall conditions of electoral authoritarianism.¹⁸

The reasons for the relatively oppositional character of subnational voting may be related to two processes. Firstly, voting in subnational elections between national campaigns grants the voter an opportunity to express their attitude towards the central government. Thus, regional elections can be a means to punish the ruling party, so to speak, if it loses the electorate's trust, as often happens after elections and the formation of the government. Such peculiarities of electoral behaviour are typical for Western democracies,¹⁹ which makes the leading party actors keenly interested in electoral campaigns during the inter-election period, which become both an indicator of electoral trends and a battlefield. Secondly, subnational elections may be closely tied to the local agenda, especially if they take place separately from national campaigns, and doubly so if they have a different list of participants. This greatly influences the participants' choices of message, as well as the composition of the candidate lists. As a result, the same parties can play their own distinct roles within the context of the local agenda, which may have a positive or negative influence on their support, and thereby drastically influence the structure of electoral preferences.

The potential increased oppositional character of subnational voting, as well as its shift in favour of actors who successfully work with the local agenda, can also be seen from the perspective of strategic and sincere voting. Based on this perspective, as regional voting is less significant on a national scale, it is distinguished by greater sincerity, resulting in support for "unusual" actors and weakening leaders. In our study we apply the concept of "strategic

17 Karlheinz Reif, Hermann Schmitt. "Nine second-order national elections—a conceptual framework for the analysis of European Election results." *European Journal of Political Research* 8, no. 1 (1980): 3–44.

18 Grigorii Golosov. "The Regional Roots of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia", *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (2011): 623–639.

19 Robert S. Erikson, Mikhail G. Filippov. "Electoral balancing in federal and sub-national elections: the case of Canada". *Constitutional Political Economy* 12, no. 4 (2001): 313–331.

voting”, based on the understanding that “A voter is considered to be ‘strategic’ or ‘sophisticated’ if she maximises expected utility by casting a ballot for a candidate who does not rank first in her preference ordering”.²⁰ Thus, voters vote strategically when they try to maximise the effect of their vote, rather than following their political or ideological preferences. A voter may vote for more established, weightier political figures, even though their personal preference may lie with weaker candidates or smaller parties. Strategic voting as a concept has been the subject of a significant volume of research regarding mixed electoral systems, in which the differences between strategic and sincere voting patterns in proportional and plural (SMD—single member district) systems were analysed.²¹ We hypothesise that when voting in federal elections, voters are more inclined to strategic electoral behaviour, and consequently, when voting at a regional level, voters are more inclined to sincere electoral behaviour.

In line with this pattern, competitiveness in subnational elections may rise as a consequence of protest nature of local voting, as well as the presence of local actors who either do not participate in federal elections or receive extremely few votes as a result of strategic voting. The differences in competitiveness between federal and regional elections also lay a foundation for alternative means of measuring inflation in party systems.

In this research we will take our own approach to studying inflation. Instead of the regional characteristics of national elections, we will use results from elections to regional parliaments in constituent entities of the Russian Federation. According to this approach, competitiveness in elections held at different territorial levels may differ significantly, and it is interesting to gain an understanding of where there is more competitiveness—at national elections or regional elections. To measure this competitiveness we use indicators of the effective number of parties (ENP) calculated in two variants: a classical ENP indicator as developed by Laakso and Taagepera,²² and the one further developed by Juan Molinar,²³ in which competitiveness is calculated taking into account the role of the dominant party.

20 Federico Ferrara, Erik S. Herron, M. Nishikawa. *Mixed Electoral Systems: Contamination and its Consequences*. (Springer 2005): 80.

21 Robin Farquharson. *Theory of voting*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969); Richard D. McKelvey and Peter C. Ordeshook. “A General Theory of the Calculus of Voting” in J. F. Herdon and J. L. Bernd (eds) *Mathematical Applications in Political Science*: 32–78. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972).

22 Markku Laakso, Rein Taagepera. ““Effective” number of parties: a measure with application to West Europe”. *Comparative Political Studies* 12, no. 1 (1979): 3–27.

23 Juan Molinar. “Counting the number of parties: an alternative index”. *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 4 (1991): 1383–1891.

In terms of traditional measurements, based on the results of federal elections across different subjects of the federation, we can consider the process of the nationalisation of the party system in post-Soviet Russia to have formally succeeded. Despite the country's great spatial diversity, the presence of a drive to form an all-national party system was clear from the very beginning. In our opinion, this indicated the dominance of the all-national agenda, relating to the conduct of reforms and the different parties' views on the future of the country, over regionalist and nationalist trends. At the very first State Duma elections, in 1993, the result of the proportional system vote was that "nearly all parties demonstrated highly-nationalised patterns of electoral support";²⁴ although nationalisation under majoritarian voting was low since many parties were incapable of "recruiting even a remotely meaningful number of single-mandate candidates".²⁵ This was followed by a gradual growth in nationalisation, accelerating after 2000 with the creation of a dominant party and the extension of party list voting to elections in the subjects of the federation. The consolidation of the federal and regional levels of the party system made it possible to reach the peak of party system nationalisation by the 2007 parliamentary elections, which were also notable for the highest level of support for United Russia in the party's history. It is worth noting that the 2007 and 2011 elections were conducted solely according to the proportional system, and so "the level of nationalisation of all parties which met with any degree of success in 2007 and 2011 was exceedingly high".²⁶

In this way, the dominant party became the chief catalyst for nationalisation. This was a forced nationalisation, stemming from an inability to create regional parties and blocs; nevertheless, "even this kind of nationalisation, despite being forced in nature, unquestionably encouraged the integration of the periphery, whose representatives began to more actively involve themselves in the activities of the federal-level parties, and thus also promoted the consolidation of the party system."²⁷ When studying Russia, we have to remember all the major and minor steps undertaken by the regime to unify the party system. These were the new law on parties, choices to favour the formation of

24 Grigorii Golosov, Ivan Grigoryev. "Natsionalizatsiya partiynoy sistemy: rossiyskaya spetsifika (Nationalization of party system: Russian specific)", *Politicheskaya nauka (Political Science)*, no. 1 (2015): 146.

25 *Ibid.*, 147.

26 *Ibid.*, 150.

27 Rostislav Turovsky. "Elektoral'noe prostranstvo Rossii: ot navyazannoi natsionalizatsii k novoi regionalizatsii? (Russia's Electoral Space: From Enforced Nationalization to New Regionalization?)", *Politiya* 66, no. 3 (2012): 4.

big national parties while actually prohibiting regional and ethnic parties,²⁸ the consolidation of regional elites within United Russia since its creation in 2001, the spreading of party list voting through the regions and partly to municipalities since 2003, the ban on electoral coalitions in the regions since 2005, the ban on “against all” voting,²⁹ the establishment of a single voting day, and frequent coincidence of federal and local elections on this day since 2011. However, even at its very dawn at the beginning of the 1990s, Russia’s party system was not especially chaotic and it would be incorrect to exaggerate the spatial diversity of voting. All these measures mentioned above enforced the process of nationalisation rather than creating it.

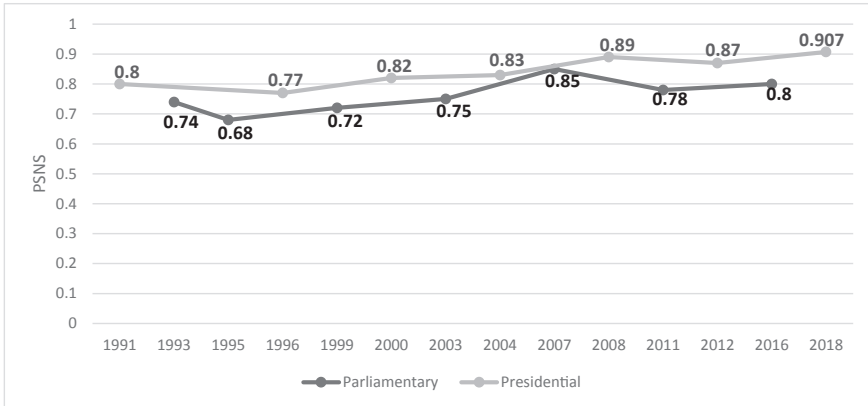
Further on, the growth of protest voting in Russia following the 2008–2009 financial crisis led to a rise in spatial diversity, which led to lower indicators for nationalization at the 2011 parliamentary elections due to an uneven decrease in support for the active government. However, the 2016 parliamentary elections and the 2018 presidential elections saw new peaks of nationalisation. In terms of all-national measurement of nationalization, discounting subnational elections, these data demonstrate the success and virtual uninterruptedness of the nationalisation process.

However, in order to investigate the nationalisation of the party system more deeply, we need to examine subnational elections. We consider replication of national and subnational electoral patterns to be a more complex feature of nationalisation. From this point of view, real nationalisation also means coherence of voting patterns and competitiveness scores across all the tiers of elections in the state.

We have analysed the results of the subnational elections conducted in Russia since the introduction of compulsory party list voting in 2003. In our study, we calculated the average arithmetic indicators for voting for leading political parties at elections to regional legislatures and the federal parliament. In order to obtain accurate comparisons, for each comparison we took a sample of subjects of the federation in which elections to regional legislatures were conducted in a given year, and compared the latter with the same sample’s elections to the federal parliament (as opposed to comparing them with

28 The federal law “On Political Parties” (which went into effect on July 14, 2001) stated that only regional branches of federal parties could participate in regional elections (with parties having branches in at least half of Russia’s subjects). According to the initial version of the law, the regional branches needed to have at least 100 staff in over half of RF subjects, and at least 50 for the rest. A federal law from December 20, 2004, raised these requirements to 500 and 250 staff respectively, with regional branches to be present in at least 45 Federation subjects.

29 The law removing the “against all” option was passed by the State Duma on June 30, 2006.



GRAPH 1 Nationalisation of the party system at parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia from 1991 to 2018

Note: For our index of nationalization, we use an index calculated via the sum of reverse coefficients of inequality in territorial support for individual parties (Gini coefficients), weighted in accordance with the size of these parties: Mark P. Jones, Scott Mainwaring. “The Nationalization of Parties and Party Systems: An Empirical Measure and an Application to the Americas”. *Party Politics* 9, no. 2 (2003): 139–166. Calculations made by the authors.

the result in the country as a whole, i.e. across all regions). In each case, we calculated the arithmetic mean of support for each of the four leading parties (United Russia, CPRF, LDPR and Just Russia) within the context of the region sample relevant to each election year.

3 Analysis of Combined Elections

First, we compare the results of voting at the combined federal and regional elections for the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2016 campaigns. For the 2003 elections, it is possible to use a sample of seven subjects of the federation which held elections to the regional legislatures simultaneously with the federal elections. The comparison indicates that at combined regional elections, the lowest results were those for United Russia (by 4.86 percentage points) and LDPR (by 1.6 points). At the same time, the CPRF benefited from the regional elections to an extent, leading by 1.89 points. Overall, we see that the results of the federal and regional elections conducted on the same day were not completely identical, but showed clear differences. In the conditions in which the 2003 elections took place, these differences resulted both from a more visible oppositional character of regional voting in the Communists’ favour and from voting for

various minor parties in the regions, including the regional blocs which were still permitted at the time (such as Ulyanovsk Oblast's "The People for Frolych" electoral bloc, which took second place in elections to the Legislative Assembly, and the "Ulyanovtsy" bloc, which took eighth place).

The 2007 campaign, the most successful in United Russia's history, featured a higher level of consolidation of votes for the party at the federal elections. There, United Russia gained 2.96 points more than at the regional legislature elections being conducted in eight RF subjects at the time. Conversely, all the other parties were more successful at the subnational elections. This is most obvious for the then-new Just Russia party (by 2.95 points), as well as the CPRF (by 2.38 points). The LDPR, which had had a poorer performance at the 2003 regional elections, this time exceeded its results at those regions' federal elections by at least 0.05 points.

Thus, the 2007 elections demonstrated, for the first time, the higher level of oppositional voting in simultaneous regional campaigns. It may be that part of the electorate, while voting for the popular dominant party at the State Duma elections, simultaneously gave its vote to the politically similar A Just Russia, or the more clearly oppositional parties in the regional legislatures. This suggests a greater sincerity in voting on the subnational level, and a strategic decision at federal party elections to vote for the leading party, associated with Putin, who was personally at the head of its list. It is also worth noting that the LDPR's position became stronger. As a leader-oriented party, the LDPR had traditionally had a poorly-developed regional network. However, the proliferation of party list voting in RF subjects after 2003 led to reinforcement and invigoration of its local branches, and thus in turn, to relatively good results at subnational elections as well. Based on the numbers, the three parliamentary opposition parties diverted votes not only from United Russia, but also from a variety of small parties which lacked meaningful positions in the regions or did not take part in the regional elections at all.

The most interesting feature of the 2011 campaign was a minimal difference between federal and regional elections. The elections were held simultaneously in 26 subjects of the federation, in accordance with the increasing practice of combining federal and subnational campaigns. The consolidation of both levels' elections, and the increased strength of the four parliamentary parties within the regions, gradually led to a virtually complete disappearance of differences between them during simultaneous voting. This also promoted a decrease in the overall number of parties, leaving only seven. Thus, as a rule, voters were presented with the same list of participants at both federal and regional elections. To our thinking, this loss of differences was an indicator of

successful nationalisation of the party system, but this was an enforced nationalisation, presenting the same selection of parties and barring autonomous regional actors from elections.

It is noteworthy that even under these conditions, the differences remained the same, if on a smaller scale. United Russia was more successful at federal elections by 0.3 points, while the three parliamentary opposition parties were slightly more successful at elections to regional legislatures: LDPR by 0.92 points, A Just Russia by 0.88 points, and CPRF by 0.56 points. The fact that the nature of the differences was unchanged despite the reduction in scale demonstrates the strength of the opposition in regional voting. Thus, the overall trend of increasing oppositional voting in 2011 was a little stronger in the regions. The parliamentary opposition parties were able to siphon votes from both United Russia and the two minor parties that performed poorly in the regions, the liberal Yabloko and the nationalist Patriots of Russia.

Finally, the 2016 elections were notable for a new rise in support for United Russia across the country as a whole, but had an ambiguous outcome in terms of the nationalisation of the party system. Looking only at the election results on a national level, one finds a greater level of spatial homogeneity: the level of party system nationalisation at the 2016 elections was 0.8, whereas at the 2011 elections it had been 0.78. However, on comparing the federal and regional elections, we can see that the differences between them increased once again. And the regional sample became the largest one in the entire history of combined elections, reflecting the greater frequency of such electoral combinations. It now included 39 subjects of the federation, i.e., almost a half of the total number.

The trends in differences between federal and regional election results remained the same in 2016. United Russia's results were 1.17 points lower at elections to regional legislatures. Meanwhile, CPRF's results were predominantly higher at subnational elections (by 2.12 points), followed by A Just Russia's (by 2.04 points) and LDPR's (by 0.58 points).

Thus, looking at the examples of all the combined federal and regional elections in Russia, we can see that at the elections to the federal parliament, the electorate was consolidated around the dominant United Russia party, which can be interpreted in terms of strategic voting, that is, voting for the leading party being supported by Putin. The subnational elections, however, demonstrated a higher presence of oppositional voting, confirming the conclusions about second-order elections drawn from other countries' examples. The differences involving higher subnational results were demonstrated both by CPRF, the most oppositional party, and A Just Russia, which is closer to the

Kremlin, both being parties with stronger regional organisations. By comparison, LDPR was weaker at regional elections in 2003, and subsequently showed only a small difference in favour of regional campaigns, due to its lower level of activity within the regions. If we compare the campaigns, we can hypothesise that at subnational elections, the parties of the parliamentary opposition may gain votes both from United Russia and, conversely, minor parties with poor regional representation. We can also observe a gradual formation of a more nationalised party system, with a decrease of differences between voting on the two levels of elections, up until 2011, but then a shift to a trend of new differentiation between them until 2016, which rules out the notion of a one-way process of nationalisation of the party system in Russia.

TABLE 1 Results of combined regional and federal elections

	2003	2007	2011	2016
United Russia, federal elections	51.80	67.54	43.59	49.98
United Russia, regional elections	46.93	64.59	43.3	48.81
United Russia, difference	-4.86	-2.96	-0.3	-1.17
CPRF, federal elections	11.06	11.06	19.14	13.16
CPRF, regional elections	12.94	13.44	19.70	15.27
CPRF, difference	1.89	2.38	0.56	2.12
LDPR, federal elections	11.02	7.28	14.04	15.66
LDPR, regional elections	9.45	7.33	14.96	16.24
LDPR, difference	-1.57	0.05	0.92	0.58
A Just Russia, federal elections	-	6.96	15.76	6.97
A Just Russia, regional elections	-	9.91	16.64	9.01
A Just Russia, difference	-	2.95	0.88	2.04

4 Analysis of Separate Elections

The study of separate federal and subnational elections serves as an important test of the autonomy of regional party systems. As we have mentioned, in Russia, the number and composition of participants in regional election campaigns can differ from those in federal elections, but from 2005, these differences are not so great as to allow us to describe regional party systems as highly autonomous. Taking into account the ban on regional parties and blocs, these systems generally involve small national parties which either do not present their lists in all regions, or lack the ability to organise a campaign despite formally participating in the regional election. This tends to moderately increase the votes gained by larger oppositional parties within the regions. Given that regional elections in Russia are annual, observing separate subnational elections also allows us to analyse the similarity and evenness of national and regional trends during the period between federal campaigns, i.e. over four or five years. If the regional campaigns fit the national trend, this is more evidence of the consolidation of the party system.

The first inter-election period of 2004–2007 (including the spring 2007 regional elections, which were conducted before that year's federal campaign) was characterised by the promulgation of a mixed electoral system throughout the regions, and the strengthening of United Russia's positions. The oppositional parties, on the one hand, also gained the ability to participate in party list elections, whereas under the previous majoritarian system it had been more difficult for them to gain places in regional legislatures. On the other hand, their popularity decreased. If we begin by comparing the results of the regional campaigns with the 2003 federal elections, we can see that during the inter-election period, United Russia's positions were strengthened, and after a fall in 2004, its results improved with every year (Table 2). The opposition demonstrated more ambiguous trends. LDPR's results were worse at regional elections than at federal ones. CPRF, while weakening on the one hand, consolidated the remnants of the shrinking protest electorate on the other. As a result, in 2004 it performed more poorly than at the 2003 parliamentary elections, but then performed better in the other years.

TABLE 2 Results of separate regional and federal elections^a

	United Russia, differ- ence from preceding federal elections	United Russia, differ- ence from following federal elections	CPRF, differ- ence from preceding federal elections	CPRF, differ- ence from following federal elections	LDPR, differ- ence from preceding federal elections	LDPR, differ- ence from following federal elections	A Just Russia, differ- ence from preceding federal elections	A Just Russia, differ- ence from following federal elections
2004	-5.90	-34.62	-0.15	1.62	-5.36	-0.97	-	-
2005	1.63	-24.35	5.04	5.39	-3.11	-0.1	-	-
2006	5.58	-21.75	0.09	2.35	-5.35	-1.5	-	-
2007	7.41	-16.64	3.57	4.16	-2.19	0.67	-	6.31
2008	-5.84	9.78	2.72	-4.81	-0.71	-4.44	3.05	-1.36
2009	-7.03	5.46	5.45	-2.53	0.74	-2.25	2.58	-2.42
2010	-11.96	4.78	6.74	-1.63	2.95	-1.03	4.41	-1.69
2011	-15.54	-2.42	6.93	-0.63	4.00	0.71	7.10	2.49
2012	5.56	1.8	-6.68	-1.87	-4.65	-4.75	-4.51	0.82
2013	4.93	1.97	-6.87	-2.57	-4.41	-7.01	-7.22	0.61
2014	5.1	4.44	-5.91	-3.11	-2.07	-3.77	-4.34	1.41
2015	12.94	12.4	-8.2	-2.41	-3.84	-6.92	-3.53	1.55
2017	3.14	-	-1.62	-	-2.81	-	1.58	-
2018	-7.12	-	6.85	-	-0.77	-	2.2	-
2019	-11.82	-	2.35	-	4.75	-	2.61	-

a Sample sizes used for separate elections: 2004 – 8 subjects (excluding regions where the elections were conducted on the same day as the presidential ones); 2005 – 18 subjects (excluding the Taymyrsky (Dolgano-Nenetsky) Autonomous District due to the later unification of RF subjects into a single Krasnoyarsk Krai); 2006 – 17 subjects; 2007 – 16 subjects (excluding regions where elections were conducted together with State Duma elections); 2008 – 5 subjects (excluding regions where elections were conducted on the same day as the presidential ones); 2009 – 12 subjects; 2010 – 14 subjects; 2011 – 12 subjects (excluding regions where elections were conducted together with State Duma elections); 2012 – 6 subjects; 2013 – 16 subjects; 2014 – 11 subjects (excluding Crimea and Sevastopol due to the inability to compare with previous elections); 2015 – 11 subjects; 2017 – 6 subjects; 2018 – 16 subjects; 2019 – 12 subjects.

If we compare the 2004–2007 regional elections with the 2007 federal campaign, the most successful for United Russia, we can see that its results were in fact always worse at regional elections, and gradually approached those for the 2007 parliamentary elections. Here, too, LDPR almost always demonstrated

worse results in the regions than on the national level, with the exception of spring 2007. By contrast, the Communists always had better results in regional campaigns than in the federal campaign. A Just Russia, first participating in regional elections in spring 2007, also fits this trend.

Overall, the 2004–2007 period displays a gradual process of consolidation of a loyal electorate on a national scale, becoming more clearly visible with every year. The regions supported and reproduced this process, without contradicting or altering the overall trend. This is why, after the 2004 difficulties caused by the high activity of the regional blocs, United Russia's results in regional elections were better than in the preceding parliamentary elections and worse than in the following ones, gradually approaching those of the last. At that time, LDPR proved that regional elections were its weak point, generally demonstrating worse results than in either federal campaign. Meanwhile, CPRF presented itself as a party stronger on the subnational election level than on the federal.

The post-2007 national trend was shaped by a new rise in oppositional feelings, together with the appearance of a new party at elections: A Just Russia, which was loyal to the Kremlin, but expressed criticism of United Russia, which attracted a portion of the disaffected electorate.

As one can see from the comparison of regional campaigns with the 2007 federal elections, United Russia was already beginning to lose support in 2008–2009, and the financial crisis caused an even more drastic shift in public mood, which expressed itself as poorer results in 2010 and spring 2011. The Communists, however, experienced a gradual rise in regional support. A Just Russia also showed markedly improved results. In addition, there was an important new trend in the form of an improvement in LDPR's regional positions. Thus, during Medvedev's presidency, the regions followed the general trend of increasing oppositional feelings, which expressed itself most vividly after the crisis, in 2010–2011, as a delayed effect of public discontent.

If we compare the results of the regional campaigns with the 2011 “year of protest”, it is interesting that the peak of regional protest was reached in spring 2011, whereas the results of the federal elections in December of the same year were slightly less unfavourable for United Russia. Of the opposition, CPRF demonstrated a gradual improvement, but every year, they were worse than at the more successful 2011 federal elections. LDPR and A Just Russia displayed parallel trends, with the caveat that in spring 2011, they performed even better in the regions than at the federal elections.

Thus, we can see that the regional elections in Russia in the following inter-election period of 2008–2011 generally followed the national trend, this time of decreased electorate loyalty after the financial crisis and Putin's temporary

departure from presidential office. In a reversal of the previous electoral cycle, United Russia always performed worse in the regions than at the preceding federal elections, and better than the following ones, with the symptomatic exception of the regional campaigns that immediately preceded the federal campaign in 2011 and were the least successful for the party of power. The CPRF distinctly followed the opposite trend, with regional results better than the federal ones in 2007, and worse in 2011. For LDPR and A Just Russia, the highly successful spring 2011 elections were a natural deviation from the general trend, being even more successful than the following federal campaign.

The overall national trend during the next inter-election period in 2012–2015 was characterised by a new rise in support for United Russia (with a clear peak in 2015). At the same time, there was a fall in support for CPRF, LDPR, and A Just Russia. A comparison of regional elections with the 2011 federal campaign indicates that United Russia was once again becoming stronger at the subnational level, sharply and significantly, from 2012 after Putin's victory at the presidential elections and the beginning of his third term. Conversely, CPRF's positions declined, also drastically and swiftly, with the two other systemic opposition parties also weakening on the regional level. In this way, we are left with a new reversal of previous trends: United Russia's rise and the opposition's fall, both displaying themselves as soon as 2012.

However, in comparing the regional elections with the 2016 federal campaign, we discover a completely new phenomenon. It appears that the smooth development of the previous trends was disrupted by the fact that United Russia performed better at the regional elections than at the following 2016 federal elections. In other words, its results were consistently better at subnational elections than at federal ones. This was particularly prominent in 2015, the year after the accession of Crimea, which caused a rise in patriotic and loyalist mood within the country. In terms of the opposition, we observe the opposite for CPRF and LDPR, which were always more popular at federal elections than at regional ones. At the same time, A Just Russia always performed more poorly in the regions than at the 2011 federal elections, but still better than at the 2016 federal elections, where it was barely able to enter parliament.

An analysis of the 2012–2015 inter-election period demonstrates new and contradictory tendencies directly related to the nationalisation of the party system. The dominant party always performed better at subnational elections, which may be seen as a result of the major mobilisation efforts following the unsuccessful 2011 federal campaign and a change in leadership responsible for the Kremlin's domestic policy, as well as the subsequent reinforcement of the party network and an overall increase in citizens' loyalty. However, we do not see successful regional elections indicating a successful following federal

campaign, even though based on precedent, they should deliver the party of power significant support. In other words, the pattern of correspondence between national and regional trends that had established itself after 2005 was broken for the first time when the subnational level of elections became more successful for United Russia than the federal, which also contradicted the usual model of strategic voting. It is likely that the extended inter-election period (in 2011, the parliament was elected for five years, rather than four as previously) made it impossible to maintain the trends beneficial for the party of power, despite a burst of support for the regime in the middle of the period, in 2014. As a result, United Russia became the party with the greatest degree of support at subnational elections, and vice versa for CPRF and LDPR (only A Just Russia lost so much support that the 2016 federal elections merely continued its negative trend).

The new inter-election period, commencing after the 2016 parliamentary campaign, can so far only be compared with the previous federal elections. Overall, it demonstrates a new national cycle of decreased support for the party of power, which, as our study indicates, foreshadows less than encouraging results for the Duma campaign. But 2017 did not yet present results similar to the previous inter-election period: the party of power received great support at regional elections, while CPRF and LDPR received less (though the trend did not apply to A Just Russia, which, like United Russia, received more favourable results at regional elections). This seemed as if it would foretell a new positive trend for the party of power (as well as for A Just Russia, which is close to the ruling elites), and serve as a reminder of the powerful regional structures they had created in previous years.

However, after the 2018 presidential elections that led to Putin's triumphant election for a fourth term, the situation began to change, likely as a result of such highly unpopular decisions as the launch of the pension reform. 2018 saw the beginning of a rise in the regions' oppositional voting, and at the 2018–2019 elections, we can observe United Russia's indicators at the subnational level falling steadily below the national ones. At the same time, voting for CPRF and A Just Russia at subnational elections increased compared to the 2016 federal elections (as noted above, this began to apply to A Just Russia in 2017, and to the Communists a year later). As for LDPR, its results began to worsen in 2018, but in 2019 they were already considerably better than at the 2016 parliamentary elections. Thus, by 2019 the situation was fully analogous to that of the 2009–2011 inter-election cycle, when United Russia was losing votes in the regions while all three systemic opposition parties were gaining them.

We conclude that a comparison of the results achieved by the party of power and parliamentary opposition in simultaneous regional and federal elections

clearly shows a consistent trend: United Russia always gains a higher percentage of the vote in federal elections than at regional elections. Opposition parties, in turn, receive a higher percentage of the vote in regional elections than in federal elections. This can be explained by the concept of strategic voting as described in this study. Voters in federal elections tend to vote for a tried and tested major political player able to ensure state stability. In regional elections, however, they are more likely to vote more sincerely according to their personal preferences, and take into account local mismanagement which is usually associated with regional authorities. Thus, the regional agenda is usually more problematic for the electorate, which is why the level of discontent with the authorities is higher at a regional level than at a federal level. Voters who cast their ballots strategically select the party of power in federal elections and opposition parties in regional elections. This is particularly pronounced in combined elections, in which the theory of strategic voting defines the relationship between the different types of vote that are cast on any one day.

Interestingly, these observations do not extend throughout the entire inter-election period, i.e. they do not apply to those regional elections that do not take place alongside federal elections. We cannot claim that United Russia always receives a lower percentage of votes in regional elections in the inter-election period than in federal elections before and after the period. By contrast, in 2012–2015, United Russia becomes the only example of a political party receiving more votes in regional elections each year by comparison with its performance in the preceding and following federal elections. We believe this indicates a more effective mobilisation of a loyal electorate during the separate elections of 2012–2015, which were almost always held amid falling turnout and reduced support and mobilisation for the parliamentary opposition.

5 Analysis of Inflation and Competition at Elections of Different Levels

Next, we conduct a comparative analysis of competitiveness and, accordingly, the phenomenon of inflation at federal and regional elections in Russia. In this section, we calculated the effective number of parties (ENP) using both Laakso-Taagepera and Juan Molinar methods. In order to analyse the difference in degrees of competitiveness, we compare data for regional and federal elections—held concurrently and in the inter-election period—by calculating the simple average ENP for the regional sample each year.

Let us start by analysing the degree of competitiveness in combined federal and regional elections. We will calculate the indicators of electoral inflation in our version, i.e. in the form of the difference in degree of competitiveness, by using the difference between the average regional and federal ENP for the same regional sample as explained above. The higher the ENP, the higher the election competitiveness, and consequently a positive difference indicates that competitiveness may be higher at a regional level.

If we calculate ENP using the Laakso-Taagepera method, we see that in 2003 and 2007 competitiveness at a regional level was higher than at a federal level, while in 2011 and 2016 the reverse was the case. That said, in general, the amplitude of this difference indicates a high degree of coincidence in the level of competitiveness in combined elections, though with the 2003 elections showing a larger gap. We also compare the same data using the Molinar method. This is similar to the previous one; the only difference is that the range of differences is significantly lower due to features of its formula. Using the Molinar index for all elections under review, we see higher competitiveness at a regional level than at a federal level except for the 2011 elections. Clearly, this is due to differences between the two methods. The Laakso-Taagepera index is more sensitive to the number of election participants (some of them receiving extremely low results), while the Molinar index works better when the elections involve one clearly dominant player.

Based on this, one can conclude that the difference in degree of electoral competitiveness for combined elections at different territorial levels is rather small. But the trends in differences are of significant interest. The 2003 and 2007 campaigns clearly testify to a higher level of competition in regional elections, while the following 2011 elections show the reverse situation with their increased sympathy towards the opposition. Regarding the 2016 results, the different methods for calculating ENP deliver a different result, which means it is not always possible to come to a clear conclusion. If the Molinar methodology is applied, since it is better suited to situations in which there are dominant parties, one can conclude that competition rises again in election campaigns at a regional level. Overall, we observe that at the stage of forming a system with a dominant party, regional elections are usually, though not always, more competitive. There is also an unstable trend of reducing scale of inflation, which was smallest in 2008 and 2011 (the 2016 elections give contradictory results here as well).

TABLE 3 Level of competitiveness at combined regional and federal elections

	2003	2007	2011	2016
Effective number of parties, Laakso-Taagepera formula, federal elections	3.89	2.17	3.68	3.49
Effective number of parties, Laakso-Taagepera formula, regional elections	4.29	2.28	3.52	3.39
Effective number of parties, Laakso-Taagepera formula, difference	0.4	0.11	-0.16	-0.1
Effective number of parties, Juan Molinar formula, federal elections	2.15	1.16	2.52	1.85
Effective number of parties, Juan Molinar formula, regional elections	2.3	1.24	2.43	1.98
Effective number of parties, Juan Molinar formula, difference	0.15	0.08	-0.09	0.13

Separate elections, as one might expect, display more complex trends. After 2003, with the consolidation of a loyal electorate, and later with the absence of regional blocs, we observe an unambiguous decrease in competitiveness in 2006 and 2007, whereas in 2004 and 2005 the trend was not so straightforward, and in 2004, both indicators actually demonstrated a rise in competitiveness (exactly coinciding with the participation of regional blocs and greater variety in the list of participants). As expected, subnational competitiveness was always higher than in 2007. Thus, regional campaigns were always more competitive than the following federal elections, and could sometimes even be

more competitive than the preceding ones (as was the case in 2004), prior to the introduction of limitations on participation in regional elections.

After the 2007 federal elections, the regional elections fit into a smoother national trend and became more competitive than the preceding ones, and less competitive than the following ones. The spring 2011 regional campaign serves as an exception, with higher competitiveness according to the Laakso-Taagepera ENP.

During the period after the 2011 parliamentary elections, and throughout Putin's third term, the competitiveness of regional elections was unambiguously lower than at the preceding and following federal elections in 2014 and 2015, i.e. after the accession of Crimea, when the Russian electorate's loyalty reached a new peak. Prior to that point, the trends were less straightforward. Thus, in 2012, after Putin's election for a third term, the competitiveness of regional elections increased significantly, but was close to the level of the future federal elections in 2016. In 2013, different methods of measuring the effective number of parties give considerably different results, but overall demonstrate a trend in favour of increased competitiveness, which later ended after the events of Crimea.

TABLE 4 Level of competitiveness at separate federal and regional elections

	ENP, Laakso-Taagepera formula, difference from preceding elections	ENP, Laakso-Taagepera formula, difference from following elections	ENP, Juan Molinar formula, difference from preceding elections	ENP, Juan Molinar formula, difference from following elections
2004	0.37	3.7	0.7	2.49
2005	-0.49	2.48	0.36	1.9
2006	-1.03	2.19	-0.41	1.34
2007	-1.83	1.09	-0.58	0.79
2008	0.28	-0.63	0.28	-0.50
2009	0.29	-0.45	0.25	-0.55
2010	0.65	-0.34	0.43	-0.51
2011	1.04	0.08	1.07	-0.04
2012	-0.21	-0.06	-0.21	0.01
2013	0.72	0.71	-0.13	0.31
2014	-0.25	-0.32	-0.47	-0.3
2015	-0.76	-1.03	-0.82	-0.66

TABLE 4 Level of competitiveness at separate federal and regional elections (*cont.*)

	ENP, Laakso-Taagepera formula, difference from preceding elections	ENP, Laakso-Taagepera formula, difference from following elections	ENP, Juan Molinar formula, difference from preceding elections	ENP, Juan Molinar formula, difference from following elections
2017	-0.18	-	-0.08	-
2018	0.29	-	0.66	-
2019	0.3	-	0.29	-

In summarising the study of inflation in the Russian party system, we can conclude that its level is quite low overall. In 2004, immediately after the introduction of the mandatory mixed electoral system, there was a natural burst of regional competitiveness, soon followed by its artificial reduction by restricting the number of participants in elections. The following inter-election period demonstrated a process of new growth in regional competitiveness shared by the entire country until spring 2011. A distinctive feature of the 2012–2015 inter-election period was that the subnational level of politics amplified the overall trend of a new reduction in competitiveness, as a result of which the regime's consolidation in 2014–2015 led to minimal levels of competitiveness specifically at regional elections. Later, the 2016 federal elections increased electoral competitiveness, and that trend was continued by the regions, but not immediately. First, the 2017 elections did reduce the competitiveness of regional elections. However, in 2018 and 2019, regional elections once again became more competitive than federal ones, reflecting a new rise in oppositional mood in society. The level of inflation in and of itself is unstable, and fluctuates between electoral cycles. It is impossible to conclude that there is a single unidirectional process of increase or decrease in levels of competitiveness at federal and regional elections.

6 Conclusion

A study of Russian regional elections demonstrates a low level of autonomy of regional party systems, which is further decreased by artificial limitations introduced by the federal center. As a rule, regional elections during the

inter-election period generate trends which subsequently determine the outcomes of federal campaigns. Thus, regional campaigns foreshadowed the regime's success at the 2007 federal elections and, to a lesser extent, the 2011 elections. Only the 2016 federal elections did not follow regional trends, instead demonstrating a new rise in inter-party competitiveness after its context-specific decrease caused by a burst of support for the Russian state after the accession of Crimea.

In this regard, it is impossible to draw a definitive conclusion on which type of election is more competitive in Russia. An intuitive belief about more natural and independent processes of regional party system formation is validated by examples of increased competitiveness on the subnational level in 2004, as well as spring 2011, 2013, and after the 2016 elections. This can be explained by the presence of independent regional actors (until the ban), as well as protest inclinations in the regions, including those caused by local issues. However, this trend is challenged by the directly opposing example of successful consolidation of the regional loyalist electorate in 2014 and 2015. During combined elections, the federal campaign is usually the less competitive, but once again, not always. In a similar way, the increased oppositional voting in subnational elections always expresses itself during mixed campaigns, which also indicates a clear presence of strategic voting at federal elections, but separate elections are dominated by divergent national trends, while in certain periods, the regime was able to ensure a high degree of loyalty in regional voting.

This study of the nationalisation of the party system, which factors in subnational elections, has demonstrated significant differences from the conclusions one might draw from studying spatial homogeneity of voting at federal elections. The results of federal and regional elections did become much more similar after the ban on regional blocs in 2005, and electoral trends did match much more closely, but this trend continued even after the 2007–2008 federal electoral cycle, when Russia saw a new rise in oppositional mood, which took the form of a rise in inter-regional differences during federal-tier voting in 2011–2012. A comparison of federal and regional campaigns during that period, meanwhile, indicates a continuation of closer trends and similar results. Where analysis of the 2016 and 2018 federal elections demonstrated a new fall in inter-regional voting differences, subnational processes present a different picture, reducing the closeness of electoral trends and widening the gap between results, which we can still see today. Thus, studies of subnational elections allow us to take a new look at the process of forced nationalisation of the party system in Russia, and question its results so far.