

# Reducing Protest Through Elite Co-optation? Parliamentary Opposition Parties and Political Protest in Russia's Regions

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## List of Abbreviations and Abbreviated Party Labels

DV	<i>dependent variable</i>
GDP p.c.	<i>gross domestic product per capita</i>
GRP p.c.	<i>gross regional product per capita</i>
IRR	<i>incidence rate ratio</i>
IV	<i>independent variable</i>
N	<i>number of cases</i>
OLS	<i>Ordinary Least Squares</i>
p	<i>p-value</i>
r	<i>Pearson's r</i>
r <sub>s</sub>	<i>Spearman's rho</i>
s <sup>2</sup>	<i>variance</i>
sd	<i>standard deviation</i>

Label	Party name (English)	Party name (transliterated Russian)
CPRF	<i>Communist Party of the Russian Federation</i>	<i>Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii</i>
CPSU	<i>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</i>	<i>Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza</i>
FAR	<i>Fatherland-All Russia</i>	<i>Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya</i>
JR	<i>A Just Russia</i>	<i>Spravedlivaya Rossiya</i>
LDPR	<i>Liberal Democratic Party of Russia</i>	<i>Liberal'no-Demokraticheskaya Partiya Rossii</i>
LDPSU	<i>Liberal Democratic Party of the Soviet Union</i>	<i>Liberal'no-Demokraticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza</i>
OHR	<i>Our Home is Russia</i>	<i>Nash Dom – Rossiya</i>
RC	<i>Russia's Choice</i>	<i>Vybor Rossii</i>
UR	<i>United Russia</i>	<i>Edinaya Rossiya</i>

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# 1. Introduction

In December 2011, mass protests broke out in Russia. Evidence of widespread electoral fraud brought tens of thousands to the streets, speaking out against the results of the parliamentary elections on 4 December. Starting in Moscow on the day after the elections, the emerging movement quickly spread across the country, bringing together long-standing political activists and apolitical citizens. Observers spoke of an “awakening” of Russian society (Trenin et al. 2012) and asked whether there could be a “coloured revolution” (Wolchik 2012). However, as impressive as the pictures of thousands of protesters in the streets of Moscow were, the protests slowly but steadily died away facing a mixture of targeted repression, a few policy concessions and disunity on the side of the opposition. Although the immense creativity and solidarity that the movement had spurred did not leave the country unchanged (Gabowitsch 2013), the “snow revolution” (Field 2011) clearly was no revolution.

But why was there no immediate result? Why could the opposition not pressurize the government into recalling the elections or initiating meaningful reforms? Some say that the reason lies not only in the state’s repressive reaction and the ideological differences among the protestors, but also in the fact that during the 2000s large parts of the Russian opposition have *de facto* been turned into pillars of the regime (e.g. Turovsky 2015). In less than a decade, a dominant party regime was erected on both the federal and the regional level, coupled with an electoral law designed to keep contenders out of the political arena (Golosov 2011). Parties that wanted to retain their ability to win seats in the legislatures had to adapt to the new implicit rules, which boiled down to a choice between *de facto*-loyalty and marginalisation (Gel’man 2008). The parliamentary opposition parties – the *Communist Party of the Russian Federation* (CPRF), the *Liberal Democratic Party of Russia* (LDPR) and the social democratic party *A Just Russia* (JR) – are therefore often regarded as co-opted: they enjoy continued participation in the political institutions and the benefits that this status entails without seriously challenging the dominance of the central executive and the ruling party *United Russia*. Therefore, the parliamentary opposition was not regarded by many as a reliable ally in the protest wave of 2011/12.

Such reasoning resembles the insights of the recent comparative literature on the stabilisation of authoritarian regimes. Autocrats, so the argument, use democratic institutions such as parliaments to co-opt the elites of opposition groups: by providing opportunities for personal gain and limited policy influence, institutions restrain elites from mobilizing regime-threatening protest. While plausible, this proposition has seldom been tested in a systematic way for the Russian case. In the context of a protest movement that mobilized political discontent across societal and political boundaries, this study therefore investigates the question whether privileged participation in political institutions reduces protest by the Russian parliamentary opposition.

The concrete behaviour of opposition parties and their followers is heavily understudied, particularly in the Russian regions (March 2012b: 242). And although the literature often uses rational-choice-inspired arguments of co-optation to explain the opposition's alleged harmlessness, it seldom makes these claims explicit and empirically testable. Using regions as the units of analysis, this study provides a way to gather systematic evidence on such propositions. Moreover, this study seeks to overcome the elite bias present in most studies on the Russian parliamentary opposition: most works do not differentiate between (1) the actions of the party elite and (2) the behaviour of the party's activists. In order to differentiate between these two levels, the study asks:

*What effect does co-optation in regional parliaments have (1) on the organisation of protest events and (2) on the actual behaviour of activists of the Russian parliamentary opposition?*

In order to investigate this question, a novel data set was assembled by the author. It contains data on co-optation arrangements in regional parliaments, protest by parliamentary opposition parties and their activists, as well as various control variables. It is based on several existing datasets, including protest data collected by Gabowitsch and colleagues (see Gabowitsch 2013).

The study is structured as follows. First, the theoretical foundations are laid out: Chapter two gives a brief introduction into the conceptual world of authoritarianism (2.1), before the main theoretical argument is presented: democratic institutions prolong the life of authoritarian regimes through a variety of incentives, including the co-optation of oppositional groups (2.2). After a

review of the existing empirical literature on the topic (2.3), the research on “coloured revolutions” is briefly introduced. This section demonstrates that keeping the opposition from organising sustained protest campaigns can indeed save autocrats from losing power (2.4). After a wrap-up section that underlines the gaps in the existing research (2.5), two chapters outline the empirical background of the case at hand.

Chapter three – the first chapter on the empirical background – is dedicated to the authoritarian restructuring that occurred under Vladimir Putin’s first two terms as president. The chapter cannot give a comprehensive account of all elements of this transformation. Instead, it focuses on the party system, sketching the status quo in the late 1990s (3.1) before tracing the creation of the dominant party *United Russia* (3.2). The following section outlines the history and main characteristics of the three parties that prominently figure in this analysis and argues for researching their behaviour more thoroughly (3.3). Finally, an overview of the party system in the late 2000s complements the picture (3.4). Chapter four – the second chapter on the empirical background – briefly introduces the protest movement in the context of which this analysis is conducted. It presents some suggestions as to why protest broke out precisely in 2011 (4.1), sums up the main characteristics of the protesters (4.2) and addresses the (few) studies that have dealt with the role of the parliamentary opposition in the protests (4.3). Chapter five conducts the empirical analysis. It delineates the hypotheses as they emerge from the theory and the empirical background (5.1), outlines the reasoning behind operationalisation, specific hypotheses and control variables (5.2), discusses the data basis and its limitations (5.3) as well as the methodology (5.4), before section 5.5 presents the results. Finally, chapter six discusses the findings and the limitations of the study.

The findings reveal that parties of the Russian parliamentary opposition react very differently to the incentives set by co-optation in the regional parliaments. Whereas the number of leadership posts has no effect on party protest by the CPRF, protest by the LDPR and *A Just Russia* is significantly reduced in regions where its elites are co-opted. This result calls for a more nuanced approach towards the study of the conditions of stabilizing authoritarian regimes through

democratic institutions: If different groups react differently to the same incentives, more research into the precise factors that lead parties to disregard such arrangements will certainly boost our knowledge on the stability of authoritarian regimes.

## 2. Institutions, Stability and Protest in Authoritarianism – the Theoretical Framework

How do democratic institutions work to stabilize authoritarian regimes? This chapter summarizes the arguments and results that previous research has developed to answer this question. It is structured as follows: Section 2.1 discusses different typologies of authoritarian regimes and specifies the absence of competitive elections as the central feature that defines authoritarianism. In section 2.2, the main theoretical argument is presented: democratic institutions provide incentives that structure the behaviour of various actors – including elites of the opposition –, leading to more predictable and stable rule. Section 2.3 reviews the extant empirical literature on the topic, while section 2.4 underscores the relevance of research that investigates connections between the opposition and the ruling group in authoritarianism: regimes that allow opposition to exist may face turmoil and overthrow in case the opposition is not sufficiently incorporated. Finally, section 2.5 summarizes the arguments and makes the connection to the empirical part of the analysis.

### 2.1 Authoritarianism: What Are We Talking About?

Autocratic rule<sup>1</sup> by definition is not democratic. The defining criterion for non-democracies in the relevant literature is the absence of competitive elections (Svolik 2012: 24). This seems trivial, but it is the first and most important distinction that has to be made when delimiting the analytical framework of a study on authoritarianism. Before this simple negative definition will be

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<sup>1</sup> Linz (1975) analytically separated *autocratic* and *authoritarian* regimes, with the latter being a subtype of the former. However, these two terms are used interchangeably in the recent literature (see e.g. Hadenius and Teorell 2007). This may be due to the fact that totalitarianism, the second subtype in Linz' work, has largely disappeared in political reality and is thus no longer needed as an analytical category. This work follows the recent trend to use the terms interchangeably.

substantiated, we briefly sketch the most important distinctions that have been made *within* the heterogeneous world of authoritarianism.

Non-democratic rule comes in many shapes and forms. Over the course of the past decades research has moved from the recognition of this basic fact towards several typologies that distinguish various forms of authoritarianism. Linz' (1975) differentiation of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes was the first of these works. Yet, acknowledging that the concept of totalitarianism was too narrow to capture a significant number of real existing cases, while the term *authoritarianism* was too broad to be of analytical value, Linz and Stepan (1996) added *sultanism* and *post-totalitarianism*. All of these categories, however, were unsystematic and some were even modelled on single countries (Hadenius and Teorell 2007). Soon, new typologies emerged, which can be grouped in two camps.

The first camp differentiates between regimes on a qualitative basis. The first and still most influential of these is Barbara Geddes' (1999) account. Like Linz, she introduces a distinction by regime type, identifying (1) personalist, (2) military, and (3) single-party regimes. Hadenius and Teorell systematised Geddes' account, claiming that the decisive difference between these regime types is the way in which autocrats gain power. They thus come up with three major types: (1) monarchies, (2) military dictatorships and (3) electoral regimes. The last category is broken down into (3.1) regimes without parties, (3.2) regimes with a single party and (3.3) regimes with limited multi-party systems, in which usually one party has a hegemonic status (Hadenius and Teorell 2007: 147-48). The authors call their distinction "qualitative". One could also call it "nominal", since the collection of non-democratic regimes cannot be fully ordered by placing them on a continuum.

The second camp differs in this regard, as it groups non-democratic regimes along a single dimension: competitiveness. The most influential accounts that still dominate the scene were advanced in the beginning of the 2000s. Larry Diamond (2002) came up with the category of *hybrid regimes* that are located between fully democratic and completely closed authoritarian polities without any political

pluralism. One of Diamond's hybrids are *competitive authoritarian* regimes – a regime type specified by Levitsky and Way (2002, 2010).

In competitive authoritarianism, incumbents systematically violate democratic norms: they repress the opposition and independent media, abuse state resources for political means and sometimes manipulate elections (Levitsky and Way 2002: 53). Nevertheless, democratic institutions provide “an important channel through which the opposition may seek power” and must thus be taken seriously (Levitsky and Way 2002: 54). This distinguishes competitive authoritarianism from a form of electoral authoritarianism, in which democratic institutions are mere facades and where the opposition (although it is allowed to exist) stands no chance of electoral success. Such polities have been called *hegemonic authoritarian* regimes (Howard and Roessler 2006: 367).

The literature reviewed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 uses concepts from the first camp of typologies to hypothesize about what institutional setup benefits the longevity of authoritarian regimes. It asks, for example, whether the existence of a pro-regime party makes a regime more stable (e.g. Magaloni 2008a). However, the basic criterion for deciding which regimes are to be included in the analysis, comes from the second group. In the work of Gandhi (2008) and Gandhi and Przeworski (2006, 2007), authoritarian regimes are simply defined as polities in which incumbents cannot be removed from power by popular elections (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006: 1, also Svobik 2012: 20). This criterion reintroduces a sharp dichotomy between democracy and “dictatorship” (Gandhi 2008), which the previously presented typologies sought to overcome. Yet, this apparent tension between dichotomous and continuous concepts can be eased with the help of the decision tree by Howard and Roessler (2006).

The authors pose a series of ordered questions to a political system in order to assign it a space in the continuum between democracy and autocracy. First, the mere presence of elections is determined. A polity without elections is labelled *closed authoritarian*. The second question asks whether elections are contested. If not, regimes are labelled *hegemonic authoritarian*. Third, the authors ask whether the contested elections are free and fair. Regimes that fail this test are *competitive authoritarian*. The fourth and final criterion is the presence of “freedom,

pluralism and the rule of law”, which distinguishes *liberal* democracies from mere *electoral* democracies (Howard and Roessler 2006: 367).

This typology bears a decisive advantage: It preserves the empirical differences that exist in the world of autocratic regimes, but at the same time it includes the analytically clear criterion that is used by the authors discussed below to identify their units of analysis. This criterion is the presence of contested elections. The line is thus drawn between competitive authoritarianism on the one hand and hegemonic authoritarianism on the other. In other words: for a regime to be included in the list of authoritarian regimes to which the arguments about stabilisation through democratic institutions apply, it has to be an instance of hegemonic or closed authoritarianism.

While the idea is analytically clear, in practice it can be difficult to distinguish between competitive and hegemonic authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2002: 54). Where exactly is the empirical boundary between *unfair* and *uncontested* elections? It is the task of chapter three to provide a plausible answer to this question in the case of Russia. Before, however, we turn to the central theoretical argument.

## 2.2 The Theoretical Argument

This section asks what effect formal democratic institutions have in authoritarian contexts. Before turning to the arguments presented in the comparative literature, a few words on the theoretical basis of such arguments are in order. Most of the works discussed below operate with a distinct understanding of institutions, albeit without making it explicit. This understanding is based on rational choice institutionalism – one of three “new institutionalisms” (Hall and Taylor 1996) that emerged in the social sciences during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this tradition of thought, institutions are understood as (mostly formal) “collections of rules and incentives” that structure individual behaviour and thereby influence the outcome of political processes (Peters 2011: 44). Individuals in this approach are conceptualized as rational actors who act strategically so as to obtain the greatest possible benefit from any decision they take (March and Olsen 1984: 736). What counts as a benefit is defined by the individual’s preferences,

which are largely exogenous to the context in which individuals act (Hall and Taylor 1996: 944).

Rational choice institutionalism assumes that political outcomes are an aggregate of strategic individual choices based on considerations of personal utility. These choices are often made within an institutional environment that opens up pathways for strategic action and closes down others. Hence, if designed consciously, institutions can be used to create patterns of individual behaviour and thus to manipulate political outcomes (Peters 2011: 61). This type of reasoning was developed in democratic contexts, but its general appeal has inspired scholars to transfer it to authoritarian settings.<sup>2</sup> It lies behind the arguments of a stabilizing effect of institutions in autocratic regimes (Gerschewski 2013: 16). In this school of thought, dictators are conceptualized as rational designers of incentive-generating institutions. Ideally (from the autocrat's perspective), these incentives produce outcomes that are in the autocrat's pre-defined interest – namely to stay in power and reap the fruits of office.

There is consensus in the literature that autocrats face two challenges to their rule (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, Svobik 2012). First, they may be overthrown by members of their inner circle in a coup d'état. Second, their rule may be challenged by a mass uprising. Consequently, autocrats have to adopt measures to guard against each of these threats. Svobik (2012) dubs the first one a “problem of authoritarian power-sharing” and the second a “problem of authoritarian control” (Svobik 2012: 7-10). While democratic institutions play a role in both of them, the literature maintains that these problems demand different solutions (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007: 4). Thus, each of them will be addressed separately.<sup>3</sup>

*Authoritarian power-sharing.* The inner circle of an autocratic regime is often called the “ruling coalition”<sup>4</sup> (Magaloni 2008a), defined as the “set of individuals

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<sup>2</sup> For a typical generalisation of this sort see Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2011).

<sup>3</sup> To be sure, democratic institutions are not the only instruments that autocrats use to stabilize their rule. As conceptualized by Gerschewski, they build their power on three interrelated “pillars”: repression, legitimacy and co-optation (Gerschewski et al. 2012, Gerschewski 2013). Institutions are primarily used for the latter function – co-optation.

<sup>4</sup> Bueno de Mesquita and Smith use the term „winning coalition“ (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011: 4).

who support the dictator and, together with him,<sup>5</sup> hold enough power to guarantee a regime's survival" (Svolik 2012: 5-6). In case that the ruling coalition presents a credible threat to the autocrat, he must take measures to keep the ruling coalition from conspiring to replace him. Here, formally democratic institutions such as parties, elections and legislatures play a major role.

Several studies have found that authoritarian regimes with one or more parties and a legislature survive longer than non-institutionalized regimes (Geddes 1999, Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, Magaloni 2008a, Ezrow and Frantz 2011, Svolik 2012). One suggested explanation is that institutions facilitate the management of elite conflict, leading to more stable rule (Geddes 1999: 122). Examining the underlying causal mechanisms more closely, Svolik suggests that formal rules within parties and legislatures provide the ruling coalition with two advantages: First, misperceptions of the autocrat's actions often grow into conflicts that destabilize the whole power-sharing arrangement (Svolik 2012: 94). Formalized procedures prevent such misperceptions by creating transparency.

Second, formalized rules allow the ruling coalition to easily detect when the ruler does not comply with his pledge to "share the spoils of joint rule" (Svolik 2012: 94). This incentivises the ruler not to acquire a greater share of the available rents than previously agreed upon. The argument is thus one of self-restriction in exchange for stability: If an autocrat must fear a coup by his ruling coalition, he decides to give up some of his ability to rule completely arbitrarily and binds himself with institutions. In exchange, his leadership is less often contested and the whole ruling coalition survives longer.<sup>6</sup> In summary, legislatures and parties are thought to facilitate decision-making and conflict resolution among the ruling

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<sup>5</sup> The male pronoun was chosen consciously. As Gandhi and Przeworski (2007: 17) show, the overwhelming majority of authoritarian leaders in recent history have been men.

<sup>6</sup> A case in point is the problem of leadership succession. Changing leadership is a dangerous moment for authoritarian regimes: it creates uncertainty and provides opportunities for counter-elites to try and seize power unconstitutionally (Ezrow and Frantz 2011: 5). Parties and legislatures give leaders and the ruling coalition a "sense of collective security", thereby facilitating constitutional leadership succession and thus stabilizing the regime. Parties work as platforms for the controlled selection of successor candidates, while parliaments increase the utility of parties by providing a forum for discussion and offer functions to monitor whether the succession is carried out as planned (Ezrow and Frantz 2011: 7-8). Illustrative cases are Mexico under the PRI and China. Both countries had highly formalized procedures of succession which contributed to their enormous stability and, as a consequence, their prolonged existence (Svolik 2012: 85-8).

elite (Boix and Svobik 2013) and thus to provide a solution to the “problem of authoritarian power-sharing” (Svobik 2012: 10) However, there is another explanation for the longer lives of institutionalized autocracies.

*Authoritarian control.* Parties and legislatures are thought to facilitate the incorporation of larger sections of society into the regime. This is essential for two reasons. First, vital tasks such as political mobilisation and the recruitment of loyal and competent administrators require access to a broad section of the population (Svobik 2012: 164). Second, the incorporation of ideologically divergent groups into the regime reduces the risk of a popular uprising (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007).

There is a consensus that pro-regime parties are effective instruments of patronage. They are used to distribute spoils to loyal followers and thus help to create a broad support base (Brownlee 2007). Through parties, material benefits can be directly allocated, but parties also offer job opportunities (Reuter and Turovsky 2014) and privileged access to state structures (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009).<sup>7</sup> While the allocation of such benefits would also be possible on an ad-hoc basis, a party has two distinct advantages. First, it is more credible than non-institutionalized transfers because it signals the continuity of the autocrat’s commitment (Magaloni 2008a). In turn, a party also increases the commitment of regime supporters by hierarchically assigning services and benefits (Svobik 2012: 172). Young members are expected to invest their resources in the organisation, and only when they reach a certain step on the career ladder they receive access to the full benefits of party membership. This mechanism encourages long-term investments in the party and thus in the regime (Svobik 2012: 164).

This process is called co-optation, which shall be defined as “the capacity to tie strategically relevant actors [...] to the regime elite” (Gerschewski 2013: 22). It may come in various forms, including the selective distribution of resources flows and employment opportunities to selected actors or groups of actors (Svobik 2012: 11-12). In exchange for such privileges, the autocrat expects the targeted

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on how elections can fulfil this function of benefit distribution see Blaydes (2008).

actors not to “exercise [their] power to obstruct” (Shleifer and Treisman 2000: 8-9) and to use their resources in the interest of the regime.

Svolik argues that such co-optation by a pro-regime party is most efficient in the case of individuals who are ideologically proximate to the ruling group (Svolik 2012: 183). However, providing access to selective benefits may also be a sensible way to co-opt regime outsiders. Ezrow and Frantz maintain that regime-sanctioned opposition parties are controllable channels to supply politicians of the opposition with career opportunities, motivating them not to rebel (Ezrow and Frantz 2011: 4). Lust-Okar follows the same reasoning when she maintains that parliaments provide short-cut access to the executive and to jobs for their members (Lust-Okar 2006: 6). Indeed, given the very limited policy making power of most authoritarian parliaments, the prospect of gaining a share in the rents generated by the authoritarian regime is often the greatest motivator to participate in elections and seek parliamentary office (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009: 409).

Being part of an officially approved institution may thus translate into direct economic benefits. Since office holders are closely connected to the centres of decision making, they “are more likely to obtain permits and licenses expediently, to bid successfully on public contracts, and to circumvent government restrictions” (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009: 410). Reuter and Robertson (2015) add that the presence in parliament allows oppositional actors to lobby for their own business interests and secures them immunity from criminal prosecution. In exchange for such privileges, co-opted oppositional elites are expected to diffuse protest sentiment among their followers (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 237). Thus, personal benefits “invest [opposition forces] with a stake in the ruler’s survival” (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007: 2), contributing to regime stability.

With the joy of rents comes the fear of losing them. In other words, the incentive to behave loyally, i.e. to suppress anti-regime mobilisation and to use one’s resources in the interest of the regime, is even greater when the office holder must fear to lose his or her post in case of deviant behaviour. This rationale is present in the study of Reuter and Robertson (2015: 237), who suggest studying

specific parliamentary rules with respect to their co-optation potential.<sup>8</sup> They argue that leadership positions, such as committee chairs and vice-speakerships, offer greater personal benefits than ordinary mandates. In the authors' case (subnational legislatures in Russia), such positions can be assigned and withdrawn by simple majority, which is usually held by the ruling party *United Russia* (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 239). Accordingly, an opposition deputy can be punished on the spot. This, they follow, creates a particularly strong incentive for loyal behaviour (p. 242).<sup>9</sup>

A second way to co-opt political actors of the opposition is by policy concessions.<sup>10</sup> Especially in autocracies with a relatively strong opposition (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006), autocrats might have to allow selected groups to participate in policy formulation. Legislatures are an effective instrument for this, because they provide a structured environment where dissent can be voiced and compromise can be worked out – all within limits controlled by the regime (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007: 4). The hypothesised effect is the same as in the case of rent distribution: In exchange for limited policy influence, opposition groups will refrain from stirring unrest (Malesky and Schuler 2010: 482). Parliaments where oppositional actors are present should thus contribute to regime stability (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007: 5).

Parties and legislatures are by no means the only institutions used to maintain stability in authoritarian regimes.<sup>11</sup> However, the discussion in this section is restricted to the roles that formal democratic institutions play in authoritarian regime stabilisation. It has been argued that institutions structure the incentives of (1) the ruling coalition, (2) regime supporters and (3) oppositional forces,

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<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Malesky and Schuler call for research designs that are able to incorporate the vast differences of procedures and their effect on co-optation patterns in authoritarian legislatures (Malesky and Schuler 2010: 485).

<sup>9</sup> This mechanism counters Magaloni's criticism that rent-based co-optation theory cannot explain why a co-opted opposition member would not use the newly gained resources against the regime (Magaloni 2008b).

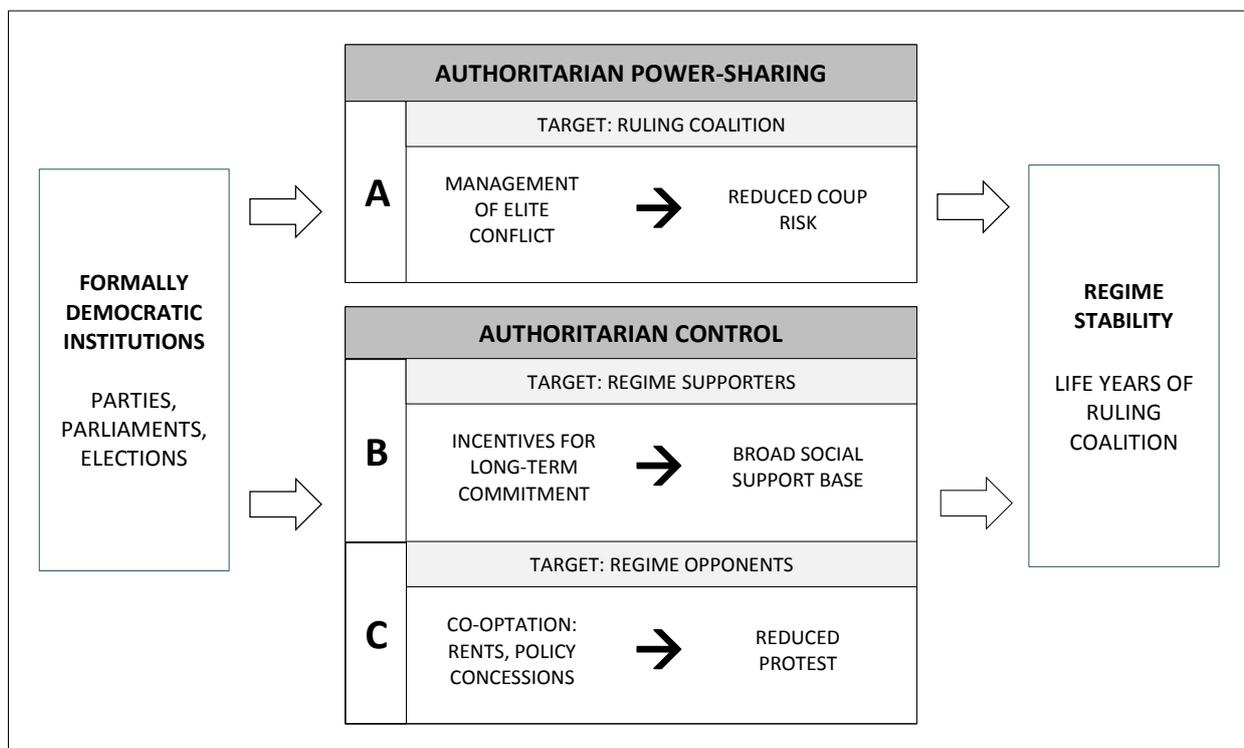
<sup>10</sup> This review focuses on co-optation. However, it should be noted that democratic institutions also play a role in generating legitimacy. As Geddes points out, autocrats frequently win (rigged and/or unfair) elections, signaling legitimacy to the population and potential challengers (Geddes 2005: 19-20). Furthermore, allowing oppositional forces to participate in formal institutions, even if their role is entirely dependent on the regime's goodwill, creates legitimacy in itself; see, for instance, Gandhi and Przeworski's account of communist Poland (2006: 14).

<sup>11</sup> For instance, reliable property rights ensuring that the assets of important actors are protected can be vital for authoritarian stability (Haber 2002).

contributing to increased regime stability. First, parties and legislatures make processes more transparent, reducing the risk of misinterpretations that lead to coups. Second, by offering structured career opportunities, pro-regime parties encourage long-term investment in the status quo. Third, institutions also guard against rebellion from below. Following rational choice institutionalist reasoning, parliaments and parties can create incentives for oppositional actors to modify their behaviour. If offered rents or a limited say in policy formation, individuals may be “encapsulated” by the regime (O’Donnell 1979: 91). These co-opted individuals or groups in turn “demobilize their supporters” (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 235). Less protest, so the argument, means a lower risk for regime breakdown (Svolik 2012: 4).

Figure 1 summarizes the train of thought. The next section presents results of the empirical literature that tested the arguments advanced above. For each body of work, we refer to figure 1 for the respective causal pathways. The section also discusses some shortcomings of the extant research.

FIGURE 1. STABILIZING AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME WITH DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS – A SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS



Source: author, based on the reviewed literature

## 2.3 The State of Research: Effects of Democratic Institutions in Authoritarianism

The previous section has revealed several causal pathways that link formally democratic institutions to prolonged regime survival. Despite the fact that the literature identified at least three different causal mechanisms, there is little specific research on each of them. Most often, authors conduct large-N cross-national studies, correlating the presence of legislatures and parties with the duration of the respective ruler or the longevity of the ruling coalition as a whole (Pepinsky 2014). The authors of such studies emphasize that different causal mechanisms may be at play but seldom differentiate between these mechanisms in their designs: Geddes (1999) finds that single-party regimes have the longest survival rates, as does Magaloni (2008a), who in addition finds roughly the same results for multi-party regimes with a hegemonic pro-regime party. Ezrow and Frantz (2011) and Wright and Escriba-Folch (2012) also find a stabilizing effect of legislatures. Gandhi, by contrast, finds no significant statistical effect of legislatures on regime durability (2008). This however, may be due to her operationalisation: focusing on the tenure of individual authoritarian leaders in her dependent variable, Gandhi misses the stabilizing effect of well-institutionalized leadership succession (Svolik 2012: 88).

Svolik (2012) moves away from such highly aggregated designs and tries to grasp the different causal mechanisms. In one model, he differentiates between the presence of legislatures and parties on the side of the independent variable and focuses on the risk of coups (path A in figure 1), finding that both institutions significantly reduce it (Svolik 2012: 190). In another model, he plots the mandate share of the ruling party against the durability of a ruling coalition, revealing a strong positive correlation. These results support his theoretical argument: pro-regime parties encourage long-term commitment, pro-longing the life of an authoritarian ruling coalition, while a broader support base should have a stronger effect (path B in figure 1). Gandhi (2008) and Wright (2008) find effects of co-optation in institutions on economic growth. Such policy effects are logically located between the elements of path C in figure 1, as they may be instrumental in maintaining low protest levels.

While somewhat more receptive for different causal mechanisms, such research still operates on a fairly abstract level. Pepinsky (2014) identifies two problems with such approaches. First, such studies are prone to a specific type of endogeneity problem because they do not account for the circumstances under which institutions developed. He rightly argues that conditions, which were responsible for the emergence of institutions, can also be the true cause of regime stability – in which case institutions themselves would not have explanatory force. Using a cross-regional instead of a cross-national design can help to amend this problem (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 238). Second, Pepinsky criticizes the tendency of most studies to stick to observables such as the mere existence of parliaments instead of scrutinizing their concrete workings (Pepinsky 2014: 650). Yet, such generality is of course largely due to the fact that authoritarian politics “tend to play out behind closed palace doors” (Ulfelder 2005: 315). This makes it extremely difficult to test concrete mechanisms, as plausible as they may be (Malesky and Schuler 2010: 482). The few recent studies that try to overcome this obstacle are thus all the more valuable.

Some studies look inside authoritarian institutions while they refrain from testing the specific effects of co-optation. Sheng (2009) observes that leaders of China’s regions that are more prone to resistance (e.g. due to a strong economy or ethnic fractionalisation) are more likely to be incorporated in the central leadership organs, suggesting that authorities deliberately offer them increased access to rents and prestige. In the same vein, Wong (2012) finds that influential business elites in Hong Kong are awarded preferential political representation to incentivise them not to withdraw their capital from the domestic market – since such a move could pose a long-term threat to regime stability.

Malesky and Schuler (2010), by contrast, analyze co-optation as well as behaviour. They observe that delegate behaviour in the Vietnamese parliament conforms to the predictions of co-optation theory: Deputies who have more to lose (financial aid for their region or their individual ties to the central authority) are less active and critical than their more independent colleagues. However, the authors do not connect delegate behaviour with protest levels, as co-optation theory suggests (path C in figure 1). This is what Reuter and Robertson (2015)

aim at in their study, presenting “the *first direct* evidence of legislative cooptation’s effect on social protest” (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 236, italics added). In their work on the Russian Communist Party, they find a significant negative correlation between the number of leadership posts that the party holds in a regional legislature and the number of protest events that it organises in the respective region, lending evidence to the argument of path C.

While providing valuable insights, the work by Reuter and Robertson evokes two questions. First, is protest on regional matters really relevant to regime survival? Taking into account that successful regime overthrow often begins by oppositional victories in the provinces (Wolchik 2012: 69), it does make sense to study the regional level. However, one wonders whether regional institutions are also effective in curbing protest of *national* relevance with a distinct anti-regime stance, which is arguably the form of protest most important for regime overthrow. Second, did the authors choose a suitable indicator for protest mobilisation? Reuter and Robertson’s dependent variable is the number of protest events organised by the regional party elite (see chapter 4). However, to measure party protest in times of cross-societal mobilisation, it may not be enough to count protest events conducted by opposition parties. If co-optation is to exert a decisive influence on protest levels, co-opted party elites have to be able to keep their activists from joining *any* protest activity. This study argues that the number of party activists who turn up at protest events – no matter who organised those events – should therefore be taken into consideration. To test whether there is a difference between the effect of co-optation on (1) organised events and (2) on the number of activists, both indicators of protest mobilisation are included in the analysis (see chapter five).

It is the aim of this study to contribute to the promising but still underdeveloped research on concrete institutional effects on oppositional behaviour in authoritarian regimes. However, before delving into the empirics of the case at hand, the next section provides some arguments for the relevance of this undertaking. What happens if the opposition is not sufficiently kept at bay (by institutions and otherwise)? If tolerated opposition overcomes its collective action

problems it may quickly grow into a vital threat for an authoritarian regime. The cases of the “coloured revolutions” tell this story convincingly.

## 2.4 The Power of Protest: Coloured Revolutions and the Threat of a United Opposition

“Coloured revolutions” is an umbrella term for a well-researched series of (attempted) democratic transitions in the post-communist sphere between 2000 and 2005. Large scale protests based on shared grievances lie at the heart of all explanations of successful cases (Tucker 2007: 535). Yet, the literature recognizes that mass protests are by no means a sufficient condition for the overthrow of authoritarian leaders. As Way (2008) argues, structural factors play a decisive role. Way (2008) and Levitsky and Way (2010) identify two critical features that make regimes vulnerable to pressure from below: (1) extensive ties to the West, which expose the country to more effective forms of political conditionality and (2) a weak state apparatus. In accordance with the arguments developed above, they stress the strength of the ruling party, the devices for repression and the state’s control over the economy (see also Radnitz 2010) as key sources of a regime’s ability to withstand revolutionary attempts.

Yet, such structurally oriented accounts better explain failed revolutions than successful ones: a weak state apparatus is no sufficient condition for its own defeat. A second strand of literature thus identifies factors that are instrumental if a regime’s vulnerability is to be used to the opposition’s advantage. Most of such agency-centred accounts highlight the importance of elections, especially fraudulent ones in triggering mass protest (Beissinger 2007, see also Anderson and Mendes 2006). Elections provide focal points for the mobilisation of grievances held against the authorities (Tucker 2007), set the stage for elite competition (Hale 2005) and hence present opportunities for strategic alliances between radical and moderate opposition parties and movements (Trejo 2014). Thus, Bunce and Wolchik developed an “electoral model” that sketches the common core of all coloured revolutions: a concentrated campaign of a unified opposition supported by a network of pro-democracy NGOs that cooperates during the whole electoral campaign, carries out large-scale monitoring on

election day and conducts non-violent, colourful and creative mass protest events (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). With the financial and logistic support of public and private Western donors, such strategies diffused across Eastern Europe (Beissinger 2007), establishing elections as the standard arena to coordinate protest (Silitski 2008).

The diffusion of the electoral model, however, did not escape the authoritarian incumbents of the region. In addition to keeping their repressive apparatus in shape, some conduct deliberate measures to prevent the diffusion of the electoral model and to so avoid the fate of their unfortunate colleagues abroad. Incumbents in Belarus (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 201) and Azerbaijan (LaPorte 2015) have adapted to the colourful threats to their rule and continue to discredit the opposition, handicap NGOs and control media access. Russia too adopted such measures, partly as an explicit response to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (Finkel and Brudny 2012). In line with the arguments presented in this chapter, some observers (e.g. Turovsky 2015) hold that formal democratic institutions have been used to split and co-opt the Russian opposition in order to undermine broad and coherent oppositional activity – the core feature of successful regime overthrow. After a brief wrap-up in the next section we will move on to an empirical test of this proposition.

## 2.5 Concluding Note: Work to be Done

After a brief discussion of various typologies of authoritarian regimes and a working definition of the concept, this chapter presented three basic arguments concerning the effect of formally democratic institutions in authoritarian contexts. In short, institutions prolong the life of a ruling coalition by (1) managing elite conflict and ensure orderly leadership succession, (2) creating a broad support base in the population through incentives for long-term commitment, and (3) co-opting parts of the opposition with rents and policy concessions, leading to reduced protest levels.

Empirical tests of these arguments have provided strong evidence for the claim that “institutions matter” (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007: 15). However, research has yet to figure out exactly in what way. The secretive nature of

authoritarian regimes makes detailed analyses of the supposed mechanisms often impossible. For this reason, only a handful of in-depth analyses on co-optative arrangements inside authoritarian institutions and their effects on concrete behaviour have been conducted.

It has to be kept in mind, however, that institutions do not support regime stability *per se* (Svolik 2012). For instance, as section 2.4 has shown, elections are often weak spots of authoritarian regimes because they provide opportunities for the opposition to organise targeted protest. Furthermore, multiple parties represent a latent danger to regime survival: parties may be co-opted, but if they change their calculations of costs and benefits of regime overthrow, cooptation proves worthless and the opposition rebels (Teorell 2010: 10). Indeed, Teorell shows that multi-party regimes are more likely to democratize than single-party regimes (Teorell 2010: 131).

In sum, any dictator is best off when he rules unconstrained. If he allows institutions to be present, this already reflects a certain vulnerability (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Svolik 2012), which may contain the seed of the regime's eventual demise. If used wisely, though, the incentive structures of institutions can prolong an authoritarian regime's life. Today's Russia is a case in point. When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, he could not simply eliminate the democratic institutions that he inherited, even if he had wished to do so. Instead, the institutional rules were manipulated so as to use them to the greatest advantage. This led to a transformation of competitive authoritarianism into a form of hegemonic authoritarianism. Chapter 3 traces that process of institutional modelling under Putin, focusing on the party system.

### 3. Building Hegemony: The Authoritarian Restructuring of the Russian Party System

The early 2000s in Russia were a period of political and administrative (re)centralisation. The strengthening of the central state and the establishment of tight top-down political control were among the most important objectives of Putin's first two terms as president (Sharafutdinova 2013). Welcomed initially as an important step to stabilize the highly fragmented political sphere, the reforms

pushed the “pendulum” toward authoritarian consolidation (Gel’man 2006). This chapter traces the fundamental restructuring of the Russian political sphere. Of course, it is impossible to provide a comprehensive account of all elements of this transformation. For instance, the Kremlin brought central parts of the economy (Hale 2005) and important media outlets (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008: 70) under its control to consolidate its political monopoly. Neither of these aspects will be covered in detail. Instead, the chapter focuses on the transformation of the party system from one in which “parties lose elections into one in which *opposition* parties lose elections” (White 2014: 62, italics added).

The chapter serves two purposes. First, it argues that during this transformation, Russia crossed the line between merely *unfair* elections and *uncontested* elections. It therefore meets the decisive criterion of the institutionalist literature for a polity to be included in the list of authoritarian regimes (see section 2.2). Accordingly, the theories of stabilizing effects of democratic institutions on authoritarian settings can be applied. Second, the chapter provides information on the parliamentary opposition parties whose regional behaviour will be the focus of this analysis.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Section 3.1 first gives some background on party politics in the late 1990s, leading to an assessment of Russia’s regime characteristics in the time when President Putin took office in 2000. The next two sections trace the fundamental changes that were implemented in the following decade, focusing on the developing hegemony of the ruling party *United Russia* (3.2) and the associated marginalisation of the political opposition (3.3). Finally, section 3.4 gives a summary of what the political sphere looked like in 2011 when the system was unexpectedly challenged from below.

### 3.1 The Party System of the 1990s

The party system that evolved in Russia after the transition from state socialism was characterized by instability and high fragmentation. Scholars have advanced several explanations for party weakness, most of which are based on the institutional design. First, the super-presidentialist constitution with a directly elected and powerful president did not provide strong incentives for the central

executive to rely on parties (Smyth 2012: 121). Parties did not play a formal role in the formation of the government, and when party candidates were included in the executive, it was the result of an individual decision (McFaul 2001: 1163). President Yeltsin himself chose to stand above party politics (Golosoov 2004: 39): He recruited his team based on personal loyalty rather than party affiliation (Rose 2001: 216) and often by-passed the Duma with his decree power (Smyth 2012: 118). Second, the sequencing of legislative and executive elections incentivised ambitious individuals to use the parliamentary elections as a “de facto primary” to test their appeal to the electorate before standing for presidency a few months later (Smyth 2012: 120). Parties thus were used as vehicles for individuals (Hutcheson 2003: 14), while strong independent organisations could only undermine individuals’ ambitions (Smyth 2012: 120).

Third, the electoral system partly worked to parties’ disadvantage. Half the parliament’s seats were allocated by simple majority in 225 single-member districts (SMD) instead of party lists (White 2014: 64). In the SMDs, independent candidacy was allowed (Smyth 2012: 121). SMD races propelled a vicious circle of party-marginalisation: without powerful national organisations to rely on, candidates had to find the resources for their campaigns elsewhere and turned to regional politicians or businesses for campaign support.<sup>12</sup> The result was a strong influence of non-partisan actors on federal and regional politics, which further weakened the importance of national parties (Slider 2001: 227).

Fourth, due to the ban on most political activity during Soviet times, only the newly formed *Communist Party of the Russian Federation* (CPRF) could rely on any organisational roots. As a consequence, it quickly established itself as the major opposition party (Hale 2014: 84). In 1995 and 1999, it even managed to command the largest faction in parliament, though it could never achieve a majority (see Golosoov 2004: 38-43). The two other instances of party continuity in the 1990s were the right-wing nationalist *Liberal Democrats* (LDPR) and the social liberal party *Yabloko*. The LDPR shocked the political establishment with a party list vote of over 21% in 1993, making it the second largest faction. After

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<sup>12</sup> In the regions, legislatures could entirely be elected on SMD basis, the result being an even less important role of parties in regional politics (Hutcheson 2003: 39). Indeed, in the regional parliaments, only a minority of seats were held by party representatives (Golosoov 2004: 73-74).

that initial success, its figures halved and dropped to single digits in 1999 (Golosov 2004: 43),<sup>13</sup> but it never disappeared. Likewise, *Yabloko* early established its electoral niche, but due to little resources and some strategic mistakes could not reach out to a broader section of the population (Smyth 2012: 118).

Apart from these three political forces, the party landscape was highly fragmented and very volatile. In the 1995 parliamentary elections almost half of the voters were unrepresented in parliament because their chosen party failed to cross the 5% threshold (Hutcheson 2003: 17). In the 1990s, an average of 50% of the voters abandoned the party they had voted for in the previous elections (Rose 2001: 218). Existing parties were often loose associations centred around a single person (Slider 2001: 224) and lacked both regional penetration and a clear ideological core (Smyth 2012: 218).

As a consequence, the party system did not reflect societal cleavages (Whitefield 2001: 237) and was unable to guarantee democratic accountability (Rose 2001: 217). Therefore, despite the general competitiveness of elections (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008: 69), political pluralism was “feckless” (Gel’man 2006). This characteristic of a young democracy’s political system was diagnosed by Thomas Carothers (2002). It denotes a polity in which democratic standards are established but “democracy remains shallow and troubled”: Political participation is limited to election times, politicians are perceived as corrupt and alternations of power do not bring about major changes, leaving the public unhappy with democracy in their country (Carothers 2002: 10-11).

Paradoxically, this situation was not only dissatisfying from a normative point of view. A fragmented and volatile party system was also an obstacle to anyone who sought complete control over the political agenda. To be sure, privileged media access, an unfair electoral process (Levitsky and Way 2002) and super-presidentialism allowed the central executive to dominate the political process despite existing electoral competition. This dominance, however, was

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<sup>13</sup> Due to formal exclusion in 1999, the party in the 1999 parliamentary elections participated as the ‘Zhirinovskiy bloc’ that was named after the party leader (Gel’man 2006: 547).

always insecure. Yeltsin's team tried several times to create a "party of power"<sup>14</sup> as an instrument to control the legislative branch. Yet both Kremlin-backed projects – *Russia's Choice* (RC) and *Our Home is Russia* (OHR) – failed at the ballot boxes and thus did not supply the executive with a dominant force in parliament (Hale 2014: 88). Moreover, due to the strong presence of regional and business elites in politics and the generally weak central state, there was a constant threat of elite defection. The most serious case was the electoral bloc *Fatherland-All Russia* (FAR), which secured the support of powerful regional governors in 1998/9 (McFaul 2001: 1166) and threatened Yeltsin's political position. The Kremlin countered it with *Unity* that – with much help from Kremlin-friendly media – secured the executive a last-minute victory in the 1999 elections (Golosov 2004: 41).

In sum, parties played a subordinated role in Russian politics in the 1990s. Top officials were almost never party-related (Gel'man 2008) and both federal and regional parliaments were to a considerable extent filled with deputies who were accountable to regional executives or business elites rather than voters and party headquarters. And while elections were competitive, democratic accountability was low. From the Kremlin's point of view, such a situation was less than perfect: Its hegemony remained vulnerable amid ineffective "parties of power", the ever-present threats of rebellion from the regions and weak elite cohesion. All of this made politics for the central executive unpredictable and difficult to control. With Putin's accession to power, this was about to change.

### 3.2 The Rise of the Ruling Party – a Lesson in Institutional Engineering

As Gel'man (2006) remarks, the 2000s saw the transformation of the party system from "feckless pluralism" to dominant power politics. This transformation of course involved much more than the creation of a new party. Here, however, we focus on the formation of *United Russia* (UR) as one of the Kremlin's main instruments to dominate Russia's political sphere (Sakwa 2010). The

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<sup>14</sup> Parties of power are conceptualized as organisations that 1) are established by the central executive, 2) are largely non-ideological, and 3) receive massive support from state resources (Gel'man 2006: 551).

transformation involved (1) ensuring the new party's loyalty to the Kremlin, (2) turning regional executives into reliable vote-deliverers and (3) eliminating oppositional challenges through changes in party and electoral legislation. This section summarizes the main developments in these areas.

*Unity*, the loose coalition established by Yeltsin's team to counter *Fatherland-All Russia*, fared surprisingly well in the 1999 parliamentary elections. This was due to a combination of factors: a media campaign in Yeltsin-friendly television channels that discredited the challengers (Hale 2014: 89), the vote generating capacities of region capital mayors who were mobilized for *Unity* (Smyth 2012: 122), and the rapidly rising popularity of then prime minister Vladimir Putin who officially endorsed *Unity* three weeks before the elections (Slider 2001: 233). After Putin's subsequent election as president in March 2000, *Unity* was rebuilt into the next "party of power" – this time, however, a much more successful one.

*Unity* secured the support of many independents and deputies of FAR in the Duma (Hale 2014: 89), which was enough for a majority coalition (Gel'man 2006: 551). In early 2002 it officially merged with FAR under the new name *United Russia* (UR). In 2003, largely due to the president's personal popularity, UR created an absolute majority in parliament (Gel'man 2006: 551). It received only 38% of the party list vote but was very successful in the SMD races, partly as a result of securing the governors' support (Golosov 2013: 475). With the establishment of UR, Putin could rely on a loyal force in parliament to pass his legislative proposals (Gel'man 2008: 918). Loyalty to UR, in turn, was rewarded. For instance, long-standing members received lucrative parliamentary posts (Reuter and Turovsky 2014), while increasing the number of standing committees provided more channels for distributing spoils in parliaments (Remington 2008: 961).<sup>15</sup>

With the importance of UR advancing, it had to be ensured that the party would not develop an independent life that could threaten the central executive's hegemony. Therefore, UR was kept under tight external control: key decisions were made by people outside the party hierarchy (Gel'man 2006: 553). Putin,

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<sup>15</sup> This finding is consistent with Svoboda's (2012) hypothesis about the incentive structures of pro-regime parties.

moreover, made sure that UR – instead of himself or the government – received the blame for failed policies. In 2005, UR was forced to take responsibility for the monetisation of social benefits (Kynev 2006), which had produced widespread street protest (Petrov et al. 2013: 13). In sum, UR was an instrument of the “administrative regime” (Sakwa 2010: 165), which at all times retained control over party affairs and political decisions more generally. UR was a state-party, but Russia – in contrast to Soviet times – was not a party state (Gel’man 2008: 922).

Until 2007, UR was established as a dominant force also in the periphery (Gel’man 2008: 919). Gaining control over the political landscape of the regions was a major step in the consolidation of authoritarianism (Sharafutdinova 2013: 360). In the 1990s, several heads of regional executives (governors) had successfully bargained with Yeltsin for special treatment (Orttung 2011). Being able to extract large privileges from the centre, some governors had established their own autocracies which threatened the political and economic unity of the country (Orttung 2004: 21-23). Putin’s policies therefore were aimed at bringing back control to the central state, an undertaking deemed almost impossible at the time (Sharafutdinova 2013: 359). However, he largely succeeded. A few of the introduced changes deserve special mention. First, in 2000, an intermediary level of seven (later eight) federal districts were introduced to systematize Moscow’s oversight of the governors’ activities (Orttung 2004). Second, the government cut the region’s fiscal independence by shifting tax income back to the centre (Orttung 2004: 44). Third, the upper house of parliament, where governors had often vetoed federal law (Slider 2014: 159), was reformed in 2002 to impair the governors’ destructive potential (Remington 2003). Governors, structurally weakened by these measures, were finally deprived of their independent source of legitimacy when Putin abandoned direct gubernatorial elections in 2004 (Slider 2014: 160).

The question why the governors, deemed so powerful in the 1990s, did not resist the measures that forced their regimes into the president’s “power vertical”<sup>16</sup>, is still debated (Sharafutdinova 2013). There is consensus, however,

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<sup>16</sup> The term “power vertical” usually refers to the highly centralized decision making structure that was established in the 2000s and was decisively strengthened with the abolition of gubernatorial elections in 2004 (Pomeranz 2009: 179).

that the subordination of the governors' political machines<sup>17</sup> was decisive for the establishment of UR's dominance in regional politics (Golosov 2011b). The removal of direct elections had produced incentives for governors to join UR (Gel'man 2008: 919). And indeed, Reuter and Robertson (2012) show that over-performance in generating votes significantly decreases a governor's likelihood of being replaced.

The centralizing measures, combined with UR's growing electoral appeal due to economic recovery and Putin's personal popularity (Hale 2011: 265) produced a staggering level of electoral dominance: at the end of the 2000s – in addition to UR's absolute majority in the federal parliament –, 90% of governors and 84% of mayors in regional capitals were UR affiliates and the UR faction controlled majorities in 80 out of 83 regional assemblies (Panov and Ross 2013: 738). This shows that, although initially a costly investment, UR proved worthwhile for the integration of elites (Gel'man 2006: 553) and thus for securing nationwide electoral support. However, guaranteeing the Kremlin's control over the ruling party and ensuring elite loyalty was only half of what it took to establish such a level of dominance. Political challengers had to be controlled or kept out of the political arena altogether.

The entry to the political playing field was the subject of important institutional changes. In 2004, the law for the registration of new parties was amended. The minimum number of members was increased from 10,000 to 50,000 and a majority of regions each had to provide at least 500 members (up from 100) (Chaisty 2012: 283). Regional party branches had to exist in two thirds instead of 50% of regions (Gel'man 2006: 552). The law not only effectively barred new actors from entering the political arena, but it also forced existing parties to re-register under the new conditions (Gel'man 2008: 919). Accordingly, between 2005 and 2009, the number of officially registered parties decreased from 37 to six (Golosov 2014a: 277). Furthermore, the participation in elections through electoral blocs was prohibited in 2005 and the threshold for national elections was raised from 5% to 7% of the vote (Gel'man 2006: 552).

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<sup>17</sup> The term "political machine" is defined as a "political organisation that mobilize[s] electoral support by trading particularistic benefits to citizens in exchange for their votes" (Golosov 2013: 460).

The opposition parties that survived these changes faced increasingly unfair conditions of competition. Media coverage greatly benefitted UR, state employees and students in many cases received voting instructions (White 2014: 68-69), regional and local administrators engaged in large-scale vote buying (Golosov 2013) and vote fraud greatly increased between 2003 and 2007 (White 2014: 69), also in regional elections (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008: 71). At the same time, reformed electoral systems strengthened the role of the remaining parties in the legislatures. A law from 2003 obliged the regions to allocate at least half of the regional legislature's mandates by proportional representation. In the party lists, no independent candidates were allowed (Golosov 2014a: 277). Concerning the national parliament, the mixed electoral system was abolished in 2007 in favour of complete proportional representation (White 2014: 65). These measures strengthened the position of the remaining opposition parties vis-à-vis independent candidates in parliaments (Golosov 2004: 267), but they also boosted the presence of UR (Gel'man 2008: 919, Hutcheson 2003: 39).

While some observers in the early 2000s had initially welcomed institutional restructuring to reduce the fragmentation of the party system (Gel'man 2006: 546), it soon became clear that stability came at the price of political dominance. The subjugation of regional executives under the president's "power vertical" and the deliberate cutback of party competition cemented the central executive as the single locus of political initiative. In this authoritarian transformation, *United Russia* was the Kremlin's most valuable asset. Capitalizing on the president's personal popularity, it facilitated the distribution of spoils to a large number of individuals and groups, incentivizing loyalty and vote delivery. The maneuvering space for oppositional actors, in turn, was not eliminated but severely restricted. The next section introduces the parties that survived this restructuring of the political arena.

### 3.3 What Role for the Opposition?

Although the electoral process was largely brought under the control of the central executive and from the mid-2000s no oppositional victories above the local level were to be expected (Levitsky and Way 2010: 200), oppositional

parties continued to participate in the political process. This section introduces the three main opposition parties that were present in the federal and regional parliaments in late 2011 – the CPRF, the LDPR and *A Just Russia*. For each of these, a subsection summarizes the party's formation, organisational structure, political orientation and electoral performance before assessing its role in the political order and its position towards the ruling party when protests broke out in December 2011. It must be noted in advance, however, that research on Russian opposition parties is substantially underdeveloped – especially after the 1990s (March 2012b: 242). Therefore, even basic facts such as the number of members or information on the organisational structure may be outdated or non-existent. Furthermore, while some have analyzed the parties with regard to their relation to the Kremlin (Wilson 2005, Gel'man 2008), systematic analyses of the parties' actual behaviour are virtually absent. This has to be kept in mind, both as an explanation for sometimes insufficiently detailed description and as an argument for the relevance of the present study.

### ***3.3.1 The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)***

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was banned in 1991 (March 2002: 134). After the fall of the Soviet Union, local organisations of the party continued to gather and after the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation had lifted the ban on regional CPSU activity in November 1992, the party re-emerged as the Russian heir to the CPSU under the new label *Communist Party of the Russian Federation* (Hale 2014: 83). Due to its ideological and organisational inheritance, the party had a decisive advantage. It thus was able to develop a large regional network of branches, to quickly increase its membership to a claimed 500,000<sup>18</sup> (March 2002: 137) and to use its large base of followers to conduct labour-intensive election campaigns (Golosoov 2004: 117).<sup>19</sup> For these reasons, it was able to capitalize on the widespread social discontent of the early transition years and establish itself as the major opposition party of the 1990s

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<sup>18</sup> Today, the party claims to have 160,000 members (CPRF 2015), which is consistent with the official numbers from 2008, when the ministry of Justice registered 158528 members (Chaisty 2012: 286).

<sup>19</sup> After entering parliament in 1993 (11.6% of the party list vote), the CPRF used its newly gained staff for building and strengthening local ties (March 2002: 138), establishing itself until 1995 as the most developed regional party (Golosoov 2004: 84).

(March 2002: 134). However, a lack of financial resources and air time (White 2014: 70) as well as a decidedly anti-communist climate in politics and the media disadvantaged it vis-à-vis the presidential camp of liberals (March 2002: 263).

Organisationally, it largely reintroduced the structures of the CPSU (March 2002: 136). Higher bodies of the party are consistently elected by lower ones: the electoral chain reaches down to the basic units, the “primary party organisations” (Hutcheson 2003: 59). In contrast to most other parties, the (re-)foundation of the CPRF was to a large extent based on the work of grassroots activists. This resulted in significant autonomy of regional and local party bodies, which was subsequently laid down in the party statutes (March 2002: 144): Orders of higher bodies must be implemented (Hutcheson 2003: 70), but decisions of the lowest level (except concerning personnel) cannot be overruled by higher bodies when they are consistent with the statutes (Hutcheson 2003: 59). Compared to other parties, thus, the local CPRF organisations display a relatively high independence from its leadership in day-to-day practices, which may plausibly affect the behaviour of its activists.

The vivid and independent party life at its base also illustrates the fact that there is considerable internal debate and even a culture of criticism (Hutcheson 2003: 71). The major cleavage runs between National Bolshevism and Marxism: while internal programmatic documents are still dominated by traditional Marxist-Leninist dogmas, the party leader Gennady Zyuganov stresses a Russophile version of Bolshevism with strong social conservative elements (March 2012a: 133).<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, although the ideological roots in Marxism-Leninism help to keep the party together amid outside pressure (Golosov 2014a: 275), they also work to the party’s disadvantage. Its inability to abandon Stalinist dogmas and symbols, its continuous nationalist orientation and its uncompromising anti-Western position precluded a social-democratic self-renewal on the example of other communist successor parties (March 2002) and excluded a stable association with forces of the centre-left (March 2012: 135). Yet, despite its Soviet nostalgia and its initial stance as an “anti-system” party, it accommodated to the new democratic rules of the game in the late 1990s, when it accepted private enterprise

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<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive account of the party’s distinct version of nationalism see Beichelt (2009).

(Hale 2014: 83) and presented itself as an in-system opposition party that defended workers' interests from inside the political institutions (March 2012: 235).

The CPRF scored its greatest electoral success in the late 1990s. In the 1996 presidential elections, Gennady Zyuganov received 40% of the vote, and in 1995 and 1999, the CPRF formed the biggest Duma faction (35 and 26% of seats respectively). In these days, it acquired its core electorate among the “losers of transition” (March 2012: 135), consisting of older, less educated and less well-off citizens, often residing in the rural parts of the country (Hutcheson 2003: 20-21). Where regional elites adhered to the CPRF, its electoral support was particularly strong. Hence, UR later purposefully co-opted these governors into its structures (Golosov 2014b).<sup>21</sup> The rise of UR also posed an ideological problem to the CPRF: Putin, like the CPRF, capitalized on feelings of loss and the desire for order, but transformed them into a more convincing state patriotic rhetoric than the backward-looking CPRF was able to do. Furthermore, the economic upturn of the 2000s diminished the protest electorate (March 2012a: 135). As a consequence of these developments, the CPRF's electoral support declined sharply in the early 2000s, reaching barely 12% in 2003 and 2007. Under the given internal and external circumstances, observers hence concluded that the CPRF was unable to extend its support beyond its Soviet nostalgic core electorate (Golosov 2011b: 636).

The shift from an anti-system opposition towards the acceptance of parliamentary politics in the mid-1990s (March 2002: 234) was followed by the establishment of closer connections to the central executive. In 2000, the CPRF reached an agreement with the pro-Kremlin coalition to share committee chairmanships in parliament (Gel'man 2008: 925). Due to increased elite contact and opaque funding sources, the party increasingly came to be viewed as corrupt and compromised, especially among the left outside the CPRF (March 2012: 136). Furthermore, the rapprochement with the executive also concerned policy positions. For example, between 2000 and 2001 the CPRF voted for a majority of

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, in Kemerovo, where governor Aman Tuleyev defected from CPRF to UR, the CPRF vote of 48.5% in 1995 went down to 7% in 2007 (Golosov 2014b: 473).

the Kremlin's legislative proposals on centralizing measures (Beichelt 2009: 521). It was still critical on several policy areas – for instance, it accused Putin of failure to eradicate the oligarchic structure of the resource sector (Beichelt 2009: 520) and blamed him for the economic crisis in 2008/9 (March 2012b: 244). But in contrast to Yeltsin, whom the CPRF had tried to impeach (Sharafutdinova 2013: 368), Putin was neither regarded nor treated as a fundamental enemy (March 2002: 243). By contrast, the CPRF regularly backed actions of the president, particularly concerning foreign policy (March 2012a: 136).

These changes may partly be explained by the same factors that spurred the party's electoral decline. First, Putin's return to great power politics and his moderate nationalism stole the CPRF's thunder (March 2002: 240). Second, improving economic conditions for the broad population diminished the party's incentives to present itself as a fundamental opposition force. However, the significant "taming" of the CPRF – concerning both rhetorics and behaviour – must also be understood as a consequence of the Kremlin's measures to weaken the opposition's general strength. It is plausible to argue that the party's leadership understood the new implicit rules: If parties do not want to be completely marginalized, they have to refrain from actions that challenge the distribution of power (Gel'man 2008: 925).

Therefore, the dominant view is that over the 2000s the CPRF grew from the strongest and most radical opposition party into one whose oppositional stance was largely "cosmetic" (Gel'man 2008: 925). While it continued to be the most active concerning the organisation of street protests, March maintains that it deliberately stays away from broad opposition coalitions that could threaten the regime (March 2012b: 250). It combines overt rhetorical criticism of the regime with occasional direct praise of the president and continuous participation in the regime's decreasingly democratic institutions, providing them with legitimacy (Turovsky 2015). In short, in times of authoritarian restructuring, the CPRF has opted for *de facto* loyalty – in exchange for being accepted as part of the officially licensed political system.

As plausible as this interpretation is, two objections can be raised. First, it is based on surprisingly little empirical evidence. Some point out the party's dubious

connections to the Kremlin (Wilson 2005) and its non-cooperation with other legislative opposition forces (Turovsky 2015). Most other works anecdotally describe the rhetorical and behavioural moderation that occurred over the 2000s without engaging in systematic inquiry. Yet, as March (2012a) points out, there is little real knowledge about the CPRF's financial resources and its real relations with the Kremlin. We also lack in-depth studies on party identification and the CPRF's electorate. Furthermore, its regional activity is highly understudied (March 2012a: 131-32). Reuter and Robertson have conducted the first cross-regional investigation of the party's protest behaviour, finding a negative correlation between the regional elite's co-optation in the regional legislatures and the protest events the party organises (Reuter and Robertson 2015). In order to provide a solid basis for the wide-ranging conclusions drawn in the literature, more such investigations are needed.

Second, the dominant perspective of a co-opted, tamed party is highly elite-centred. However, while its leadership may have chosen not to threaten the political status quo, its electorate does not vote for the CPRF to express support for UR or Putin. Asked why they voted CPRF in 2011, 42% named their support for the CPRF's programme – which was highly critical of the government (March 2012b) – and 23% maintained that they cast a protest vote (Colton and Hale 2014). It is thus reasonable to assume that a significant proportion of the electorate takes the party's critical rhetoric at face value and endorses it to achieve profound political change. If the party leadership fears that rocking the boat will have higher costs than continued loyalty (Gel'man 2013: 8), then the question is whether it succeeds in demobilizing its radical supporters. When the overall protest potential of a party is to be estimated, therefore, the actual behaviour of its activists should not be disregarded. This study addresses both shortcomings of the extant research, by providing an insight into the party's regional protest behaviour and specifically taking into account the party activists.

### ***3.3.2 The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)***

Since its foundation in the late days of the Soviet Union the *Liberal Democratic Party* is suspected to receive support from the Kremlin. Founded in 1989 by Vladimir Zhirinovsky (who allegedly had connections to the secret

service), the LDPSU was officially registered as the first opposition party in the Soviet Union in 1990 (Luchterhandt 1994: 120). According to Anatoly Sobchak, mayor of St. Petersburg in the 1990s and one of Putin's political mentors, the authorities supported the group as a controllable alternative to the CPSU (Luchterhandt 1994: 120). Zhirinovskiy himself denied involvement with the KGB but conceded that his party was privileged by the authorities because it wanted to keep the Soviet Union together.<sup>22</sup>

In the beginning, this was the sole difference between the LDPSU and the other emerging democratic groups and parties. As Zhirinovskiy maintained in 1990, his programme was "like everybody else's: perestroika, free market, and democracy" (quoted in Golosov 2004: 24). During 1991, he frequently appeared in television, which observers interpreted as continuous privileging vis-à-vis the other democratic parties (Luchterhandt 1994: 124). Zhirinovskiy's surprisingly good result in the first presidential elections of the Soviet Union in 1991 (almost 8% of the vote) was the first building block of the party's later success. A second element was the party's strategic shift to nationalism that let it stand out from the democratic alternatives (Golosov 2004: 24). Benefitting from a ban on all other nationalist forces in 1993 (Luchterhandt 1994: 131) and from Zhirinovskiy's aggressive and effective rhetoric, the LDPR established itself as the most ardent and vocal nationalist party in the country. In the aftermath of the very successful 1993 elections (23% of the party list vote) it organisationally emancipated itself from the Kremlin (Luchterhandt 1994: 127), built a vast organisational network in the regions (Golosov 2004: 85-88, Korgunuyuk 2010: 235) and increased its membership base. While it claimed to have 600,000 members in the early 2000s (Beichelt 2009: 516), the official number of around 155,000 appears to be more realistic (Chaisty 2012: 286).

Organisationally, the LDPR is the most leader-centric of all major Russian parties (Chaisty 2012: 289). Not only does its iridescent founder and leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy claim authorship of hundreds of party publications (Hutcheson 2003: 75)<sup>23</sup> and is virtually the only face of the party's electoral campaigns. Zhirinovskiy's dominance is also reflected in the party statutes: as

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<sup>22</sup> See the TV interview with the journalist Vladimir Pozner from 2010 (Pozner 2010).

<sup>23</sup> In 2003, Zhirinovskiy claimed to have produced more material than Lenin (Hutcheson 2003: 75).

chair of the highest party body he names the vice-chairmen, the editor-in-chief of campaign material and can remove the heads of regional organisations. The central apparatus oversees the regional conferences. In turn, a regional coordinating council controls the district and town conferences (Hutcheson 2003: 60). Thus, local party organisations are structurally very limited in their capacity for action, which should be reflected in the activists' behaviour.

Ideologically, the party views itself as centrist, liberal and patriotic (March 2012b: 245) but has maintained a fierce nationalist, chauvinist stance. It continuously calls for military intervention in the post-Soviet sphere, demanding imperialist great power politics (Beichelt 2009: 517). At the very least, Russia should once again control the territories of the former USSR (Koman 1996: 290), but preferably those it had in 1900 (Kipp 1994). Demands for the re-establishment of national greatness are often voiced in racist, sometimes anti-semitic rhetoric (Beichelt 2009: 517). Yet, although extremist in its foreign policy suggestions, the party ideology has proved relatively flexible in other regards (Golosov 2014). A survey from 2006 showed that the Russian public was unable to determine the LDPR's stance on several domestic policy dimensions (VCIOM 2006). This confusion may be a result of Zhirinovskiy's extreme "statist populism", promising low taxes, a strong public sector, free discussion and state control of the press all at the same time (Korgunuyuk 2010: 236). A recurring thread, however, is the party's concurrent allegation of a corrupt elite (see March 2012b: 245) that continues to rob the country's natural wealth, while the simple (ethnic) Russian is left starving (see, e.g. Zhirinovskiy 2003, 2007, 2011).

While in-depth studies of the party's electorate are scarce, some studies suggest that the LDPR receives the majority of its votes from poorly educated, young and middle-aged males of non-urban residence (Hutcheson 2003: 23, White 2012: 360). Eatwell adds that the initial success of the party was also based on the support of elite sectors who felt threatened by the collapse of state order, e.g. the military (Eatwell 2002: 6). Zhirinovskiy himself in 2010 described the typical LDPR voter as one who is disappointed by both communism and what followed after its demise (Pozner 2010). Hale (2010), however, maintains that there *is* no typical LDPR voter: the vote share that the party receives is relatively

stable – usually between 5 and 15% in federal and regional elections –, but the composition of the party’s voters differs with each election (Hale 2010: 267). Perhaps, the high share of protest votes – 38% of the LDPR voters in 2011 – lends support to this thesis (see Colton and Hale 2014).<sup>24</sup> Whether we conclude that the LDPR has a core electorate or not, there is a consensus that in its current state it is not able to drastically expand its electoral support. As in the case of the CPRF, one reason for the LDPR’s stagnation is the fact that Putin addressed some of the LDPR’s key concerns such as a strong, centralized state and a more assertive foreign policy (Beichelt 2009: 520).

Despite its capacity to gather the protest vote, the LDPR has always been suspected of maintaining connections with the Kremlin (Hale 2014: 85) – to a much larger degree than the communists. Indeed, it is evident that Zhirinovsky’s furious rhetoric seldom attacks Putin directly. Although very critical of UR and the state bureaucracy, the LDPR has given regular credit to the president’s actions (March 2012: 246). As Beichelt observes, Zhirinovsky’s personal loyalty to Putin is consistent with his power-focused nationalism, which requires “paying homage to an authoritarian leader” (Beichelt 2009: 521). Furthermore, the Duma faction often votes in favour of the governing party’s proposals (Hale 2014: 85). In 2000, that was the case in 85% of votes (Beichelt 2009: 520). For that reason, some go as far as calling the LDPR essentially a “virtual party” (Wilson 2005, see also Hale 2014: 91) that fakes an oppositional stance but in fact cooperates with the authorities.

Gel’man calls the party the “most valuable and long-standing” asset of the Kremlin, because it discredits the Kremlin’s real opposition – i.e. communists and liberals – and attracts dissatisfied voters without challenging the status quo (Gel’man 2008: 920-24). With reference to Wilson (2005: 119-50), Gel’man thus groups the LDPR in the middle of a pie with three levels that signify the degrees of loyalty to the Kremlin. UR as the Kremlin’s main instrument is located on the first level, the second level is filled by UR’s “satellites”, the LDPR and *A Just*

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<sup>24</sup> However, as we shall see below, 2011 was a special year for Russian politics. It is thus doubtful whether it is possible to generalize survey findings from this year.

*Russia*, while the third level is occupied by the CPRF and the liberal opposition (Gel'man 2008: 920).

Again, this view is plausible (more plausible than in the case of the CPRF), but the objections raised in the previous subsection apply also in the case of the LDPR, albeit in a qualified way. First, the LDPR is even more understudied than the CPRF. Existing research is as leader-centric as the party structure. We do not know much about the party's electorate, its activists or its protest behaviour. Studies that link the alleged cooptation of the party to its actions, particularly during political crises, are thus in urgent need.

Second, as in the case of the CPRF, elites and party supporters should be disentangled. People do not vote LDPR to support UR or the Kremlin. Indeed, even if the party is understood to be an instrument of the regime, we must assume that at least a portion of its supporters are dissatisfied with the political reality and want to change it: to fulfil its function as a buffer, the LDPR needs to attract voters that without it would turn to more radical alternatives. It thus follows from conceptual reasons that we must assume that a significant number of voters has good reason to take part in protests. However, the knowledge we have about the strict top-down organisation of the party structure suggests that local party organisations and activists may be less independent from the directives of their regional headquarters who in turn are answerable to the central apparatus. This organisational difference to the more independent local CPRF structures is likely to be apparent in the protest behaviour of party activists. More concrete hypotheses on this matter will be developed in chapter five.

### **3.3.3 *A Just Russia (JR)***

In contrast to the CPRF and the LDPR, who have been continuously present on the Russian party scene since the early 1990s, *A Just Russia* (JR) is a relatively new phenomenon. Moreover, there is this time no doubt that the Kremlin was involved in the party's foundation. Its predecessor was the nationalist centre-left electoral bloc *Motherland*. The Kremlin had initiated it in 2003 together with CPRF defectors (Hale 2014: 92). It was intended to split the CPRF's vote, to provide a second route for elite recruitment (March 2011: 7) and to capture the

votes on the centre-left who supported Putin personally but were skeptical of UR's neo-liberal policies (March 2009: 512-14). The CPRF's support did decline, but *Motherland* was more successful than envisaged by its founders, which inspired its leaders to become more independent (Golosov 2014a: 276). *Motherland's* most dangerous figures were fired (Gel'man 2008: 923) and its remains were fused with two minor parties, the *Russian Party of Life* and the *Russian Pensioners Party* in 2006 (March 2009: 505). This was the birth of *A Just Russia*.

Reflecting the Kremlin's intention to create a "second leg" as a reserve to UR, as Kremlin strategist Vladislav Surkov announced in March 2006 (March 2009: 511), the party chair was given to Putin's close ally Sergey Mironov. However, the party did not only include pure loyalists. Several oppositional activists were involved in the party's creation since it allowed them to lobby for social change without directly challenging the regime (Gabowitsch 2013: 125). After JR's creation, Putin publicly welcomed its emergence at a press conference in early 2007 (Sestanovich 2007: 136). Subsequently, the party was allowed to recruit the regional elites that were reluctant to join UR (Golosov 2011b: 636).

However, it turned out that JR had been given a job that it was unable to fulfil: the first task, gathering the protest vote, required too much opposition than was acceptable for the second task – being a second party of power (March 2011: 8). When the regional elections in 2007 saw no decline in the CPRF's share but JR received up to 15%, threatening in some cases UR's dominance (March 2011: 8), the double-strategy was dropped. Putin decided to personally head UR's party list for the federal elections of 2007, leaving no doubt which was the preferred party of power, and JR was no longer allowed to recruit discontented regional elites (Golosov 2011b: 636).

Having started out as a "regime party" (Beichelt 2009: 515), JR distanced itself from the Kremlin after 2007. While it did not turn into a fundamental opposition force it did develop both a credible political programme and a critical stance toward the ruling party. Ideologically, JR combines a programme of socio-economic equality with demands for political liberalisation (March 2011: 8). With the onset of the financial and economic crisis of 2008/9 it called for social

protection instead of bank rescuing, a real-estate tax and a generally progressive tax system. It also explicitly demanded political changes, such as re-introducing direct gubernatorial elections and a lower electoral threshold – indeed, it saw the roots of the crisis in the de facto single-party monopoly (March 2012b: 248). Observers have thus noted that, despite its history, JR had the potential to become a genuine political alternative, since among the Russian parliamentary parties it is the least based on personality and has the most serious political programme (March 2011: 10).

Unfortunately, little is known about JR's organisational structure. It has branches in all Russian regions and, according to official data from 2008, has over 400,000 members – almost three times the official numbers of the much older and regionally rooted CPRF (Chaisty 2012: 286). Likewise, we lack in-depth studies on the party's electorate. In contrast to the male-centred LDPR but quite like UR and the CPRF, it is supported by both genders alike. In 2007, it drew slightly more of its support from urban dwellers and people with higher education than the other parties presented so far (White 2012: 360). In 2011, 31% of its supporters voted for it for programmatic reasons with another 23% casting a protest vote. However, the fact that 30% of the those who identify as JR supporters voted for Putin in the 2012 presidential elections indicates that the Kremlin's initial strategy of providing an alternative for pro-Putin but anti-UR voters did in fact play out to a certain extent (see Colton and Hale 2014).

Accordingly, JR's criticism in 2010/11 was largely confined to UR with few direct attacks on Prime Minister Putin (March 2012b: 247-8). Despite its general support for civil liberties, it even joined the government's initiative to tighten control over dissent: in 2009, together with UR and the LDPR it voted in favour of stricter legislation on street protests, though it later withdrew its support (March 2012b: 250). However, when societal disenchantment with the Putin/Medvedev team grew in 2011 (see below) and Mironov was sacked as chair of the upper house of parliament, JR tried to capitalize on the growing protest mood. It advanced a programme that declared "absolute opposition" to Putin's government (March 2011: 10) and lifted its ban on criticism of the central leadership (Hale 2014: 94).

In all, the party since its inception has attempted to strike a balance between serious democratic opposition and not too obvious loyalty that secured it continued tacit support from the Kremlin (March 2011: 8). In the regions, it sometimes actively protested violations of democratic standards (March 2012b: 251) and during the months of heightened protest mobilisation in 2011 it tried to establish itself as a real alternative. However, the party elite was cautious not to go too far, as a recent example illustrates. Having provided a platform for the outspoken Putin critics Gennady Gudkov and his son Dmitri since 2006, it excluded them in 2013 after they had actively taken part in the organisation of anti-regime protests in 2012 (Lenta 2013).

For apparent reasons, JR is thus regarded as a satellite party (Gel'man 2008), a regime party (Beichelt 2009) or a para-statal party (March 2009) – and rightly so. Nevertheless, one should not refuse to study it. Both its regional behaviour and its activists have seldom been the object of systematic investigations. Moreover, elite calculations may change. As March notes, the growing protest mood in 2011 set incentives for the opposition to capitalize on the protest vote (March 2011: 10). In other words, although Russian parliamentary parties might not want to overthrow the system in which they have found a relatively comfortable space, it is plausible that they try to use widespread anti-regime sentiments to extract better conditions (Turovsky 2015). Thus, studies that do not take for granted the parties' loyalty but instead investigate the conditions under which party elites and activists engage in protest and under which they stay loyal (see Semenov et al. 2016) will no doubt advance our knowledge of Russian politics.

### 3.4 The Russian Party System in the Late 2000s

We have seen that over the course of the 2000s, the Russian political sphere was fundamentally restructured. The party system turned from a more or less competitive but highly fragmented and volatile pool of short-lived organisations into a stable arrangement with one dominant party and three second-order forces (Golosov 2011b: 636). While shortly after Putin's accession to power Levitsky and Way (2002) had classified Russia as an instance of competitive authoritarianism, in the course of the decade competitiveness was reduced up to

the point where “key organisational sources of vulnerability” had been eliminated (Levitsky and Way 2010: 200), leaving virtually no room for an electoral challenge to the regime. Although selected opposition forces continued to participate in elections, the results on federal and regional levels were predetermined. Therefore, one can argue that Russia moved from a phase of competitive authoritarianism in the early 2000s toward a form of hegemonic authoritarianism in the late 2000s.

Accordingly, analysts today differentiate parties in Russia primarily by their degree of loyalty to the Kremlin rather than their ideological stance (Gel'man 2008: 920). There is, on the one hand, the so called “systemic” opposition, consisting of the CPRF, the LDPR and JR (e.g. Reuter and Robertson 2015). They regularly participate in the regime’s institutions – for which they had to pay the price of diminished independence. Critical rhetoric is tolerated, as long as it does not continuously attack the political leadership, but destabilizing actions are forbidden. On the other hand, there is the “non-systemic” opposition (see e.g. Smyth et al. 2013). It consists of the marginalized political groups and parties that are usually not represented in parliament and – with few exceptions – do not participate in elections. Their ideological orientation ranges from social liberalism (*Yabloko*) and conservative market liberalism (*Union of Right Forces*) to extreme ethnic nationalism (e.g. the *Russian National Unity*). The term “non-systemic” does neither reflect ideological distance to the ruling party nor non-acceptance of democratic institutions (Bol'shakov 2012). Instead, it denotes those forces who have chosen marginalisation over loyalty (Gel'man 2008: 925).

However, the divide is less clear than it seems. As Turovsky remarks, many liberal party leaders are not principally opposed to participating in the electoral process (Turovsky 2015: 20), even though it lacks democratic quality. For example, the moderate and democratic nationalist Alexey Naval'ny, who had been one of the most active figures in the anti-Putin protests in 2011/12, participated readily in the Moscow mayoral elections in 2013 – and achieved the impressive result of 27% (White 2014: 63). To equate the non-systemic opposition with radical nonconformists, who rather stay marginalized than legitimate the defunct institutions through their participation, is thus too simplistic.

Moreover, it was argued in the preceding sections that the systemic (i.e. the parliamentary) opposition should not be completely disregarded as a force for (gradual) change e.g. through participation in anti-regime protest. First, even though they may have accepted their position in the status quo, that does not preclude targeted protest action and strategic cooperation with non-parliamentary forces to improve the conditions of their existence (Turovsky 2015). Second, even if the national party elites do not want to rock the boat, it is unclear if they succeed in taming their regional branches who might want to use protest sentiment for their own purposes. Here, the organisational structure of the party is arguably a decisive factor. Third, elites (federal or regional) may not always be able to control their activists. If party supporters take the critical rhetoric of their electoral choice at face value, they *a priori* have to be regarded as potential protesters. It is the task of researchers to identify the conditions under which such protest may take place and which mechanisms work to preclude it.

For these reasons, the present study investigates the regional participation of the parliamentary opposition in anti-regime protest. It does so based on neo-institutionalist reasoning, connecting the arguments of authoritarian stabilisation with the empirics of Russia's recent '*for fair elections*' protest movement. Chapter four briefly sketches the relevant aspects of that movement, before in chapter five the empirical analysis is conducted.

#### 4. Protesting for Fair Elections

The resilience of the carefully redesigned political system was tested in late 2011, when hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets after a parliamentary election that they claimed was falsified. Most comparative research designs on Russian regional protest cover longer periods and different political contexts (Robertson 2011, Greene 2014, Lankina 2015, Reuter and Robertson 2015). By contrast, this study focuses on the first three months of the protest movement between the parliamentary elections on 4 December 2011 and the presidential elections on 4 March 2012. This bears the advantage that the national political context is held constant, thus increasing comparability of the cases (Snyder 2001). That context is introduced in this chapter. First, section 4.1

summarizes the answers to the question why it was precisely the 2011 elections that sparked mass protests. The next section (4.2) tries to capture the socio-demographic characteristics and the political orientations of protesters both in the metropolises and the regions. Finally, section 4.3 outlines the role that the parties of the parliamentary opposition played in the protests.

#### 4.1 Why Now? Reasons for the Outbreak of Protest

What triggered the mass protests? Although explaining complex social action such as street protest is always difficult, there is a consensus that several developments in Russian society created a basis upon which the movement could take hold. First, the accession of Medvedev to the president's office had sparked hopes of gradual political liberalisation and economic modernisation – at least among the more educated, urbanized parts of society (Gel'man 2013: 5). Second, the use of online media and social networks had exploded over the preceding years, while the authorities had not taken decisive action to control this emerging alternative public space (Oates 2013). “Online social entrepreneurs” (Oates 2013: 25) had acquired a large base of followers whom they could easily activate. Third, observers have noted a rise in apolitical activism over the late 2000s. These networks played a role in mobilizing protesters (Volkov 2011, Lanskoj and Suthers 2013: 75), most of whom had never taken part in decidedly political activities before (Gabowitsch 2013).

In 2011, economic growth had slowed down and falsified regional elections had produced a series of scandals (Volkov 2011: 76), but it became clear that the political system was not about to be reformed. Instead, the ruling party did not offer anything but cosmetic changes (Gel'man 2013: 7). Relying on the honest support of peripheral voters and the traditional apathy among the educated, the authorities did not notice that the political institutions were gradually slipping into a legitimacy crisis (Volkov 2012: 77). In addition to the growing anger about limited policy influence and the feeling of fading economic stability, a particularly incautious move of the ruling elite triggered a certain mood of resistance before the elections: In September 2011, president Medvedev announced that he was not going to stand for office again, making room for Putin's third term. This decision

deeply disappointed those who still had hoped for gradual change (Volkov 2012: 77).

Sensing the widespread disaffection, the anti-corruption activist Alexey Navalny thus called for a negative consensus. He encouraged to “vote for any party except UR” (Gel’man 2013: 7) to express disagreement with the political standstill. This turned out to be an effective strategy. On December 4, the ruling party officially received 49.3% of the vote – minus 15 percentage points (CEC 2011). However, it secured an absolute majority of mandates. While it is difficult to assess the exact extent of fraud that took place on election day (White 2014), the result invited speculations that only electoral fraud saved UR from losing its position to rule almost without constraints. At any rate, a massive voluntary election monitoring campaign and advanced online technology allowed detecting and communicating instances of fraud on an unprecedented scale (Reuter and Szakonyi 2012). The overwhelming amount of evidence created the perception of a “stolen election”: in a poll conducted in December 2011, 45% claimed that the elections were conducted in a “not very honest” or “completely dishonest” way (White 2014, quoted from Gudkov et al. 2012: 29). It was this perception that, above all else, brought people to the streets during the following months.

## 4.2 Who, where and what?

When it was announced that United Russia had managed to secure an absolute majority in the Duma, several thousand protesters and many prominent opposition figures gathered in Moscow on 5 December to complain about what they thought was an illegitimate election result (Greene 2013: 42). In the following months, a wave of unexpectedly creative protest, quickly termed the *for fair elections* movement, swept the country. Traditional meetings with flags and banners took place, but so did flash mobs, human chains, car processions, sit-ins and an entirely new protest form: “nano-meetings” of toy figures in places where the authorities had banned real demonstrations (Gorbenko 2012: 49). Content-wise, the protests were equally innovative. Mostly humorous, often sarcastic banners (Makarychev 2013) mocked the head of the Central Electoral Commission Vladimir Churov or made fun of Putin’s allegations that their protest

was paid by foreign forces (Gabowitsch 2013: 67). All sorts of jokes appeared about the 49% of the vote that United Russia received by official counting, and protesters targeted the “party of crooks and thieves”, as Alexey Navalny had prominently dubbed it (Gabowitsch 2013: 398), in countless slogans.

In terms of absolute numbers, Moscow was the epicentre. Several thousand protested on 5 December, followed by a mass rally on 10 December, in which between 25,000 (police estimate) and 80,000 (organisers’ estimate) took part. On 24 December and 4 February, two more mass rallies took place with up to 120,000 and 160,000 participants respectively (Robertson 2014: 124-5). In Moscow, the majority of participants were young or middle-aged and the gender-balance was skewed toward the male side. Over 60% of demonstrators identified their political outlook as “democratic” or “liberal”, 80% of those polled had higher education and around 70% came from higher-income groups (Volkov 2012: 74-5). These numbers show that the early protest in the capital was dominated by a relatively well-off middle class (see also Yanitzky 2013).

Regional protest was less middle-class centred (Hagemann and Kufenko 2016). Indeed, comparatively poor towns in Western Siberia were among those with the highest protest turnout per capita (Gabowitsch 2013: 82). Other than that, little is known about systematic variation of protest organisation and turnout across Russia’s regions during the protest cycle of 2011/12. Sobolev (2012) finds positive effects of population concentration and the regional level of democracy on the size of the biggest protest demonstration in the given period – a finding supported in Lankina’s (2012) investigation of regional protest between 2007 and 2012. Focusing on the *for fair elections* movement, Hagemann and Kufenko (2016) stress that regional income-inequality was a significant predictor of the likelihood of protest emergence and add that the level of education was as important for protest turnout in the regions as it was in Moscow.

Both in the metropolises and in the regions, the first three months were the most intense phase of the protests. During this time it seemed that “Russia’s political landscape had altered and that political opposition was not as marginalised as it had previously appeared” (White 2013: 583). Yet, after the presidential elections on 4 March, participation in rallies and other forms of

protest gradually declined. Organisational weakness and ideological differences among the opposition were important factors, but the Kremlin had also recovered from its initial shock (Robertson 2014: 125). It organised several counter-demonstrations of UR supporters (Smyth et al. 2013), engaged in discreditation campaigns, tightened street protest regulations and increased repression (Wolchik 2012: 68). At a Moscow demonstration in May 2012, dozens of people were detained and several first-time protesters received multi-year prison terms after doubtful court proceedings (Lipman 2014: 184-5). The message was clear: anti-regime protest is a dangerous undertaking (Robertson 2014: 126).

Therefore, the period between December 2011 and early March 2012 seem like a sensible period to choose if one is interested in anti-regime protest that transgresses socio-demographic and ideological milieus. For an investigation of the parliamentary opposition, the period bears an additional conceptual advantage. With the presidential elections ahead, the parties needed to mobilize support for their respective candidates. They thus had an incentive to capitalize on the widespread discontent by echoing the claims of the protesters and supporting the movement with their own resources (see Gabowitsch 2013: 169). This incentive is constant for all regional party branches because the whole party should benefit from a better result at the presidential elections. Under such conditions, it is more plausible to assume that reduced regional protest activity of a party is really attributable to region-specific factors. So, what roles did the parliamentary opposition parties play in the protest movement? The next section summarizes the few existing findings on the topic and leads over to the empirical analysis.

### 4.3 The role of the parliamentary opposition

Before the elections, parties had recognized that they stood to benefit from the growing dissent and spoke out more clearly against the regime (Gel'man 2013: 8). Yet, in the immediate aftermath of the elections, parties seemed as surprised by the upsurge of protest as the governing elite. Some pre-arranged demonstrations on 7 December by Yabloko and the CPRF were seized by non-affiliated protesters (Gabowitsch 2013: 168). That aside, protest rallies in the big cities were organised to a large extent on an ad-hoc basis. Many people took

central organisational roles who would normally abstain from political activities (Volkov 2015: 41-2). Mobilisation took place almost exclusively through online channels (Yanitsky 2013: 13, see also Greene 2013). While they did try to channel the political mobilisation in their direction, parties thus played a secondary role at best – at least in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

In the regions, parties were late joiners, but since the second wave of big rallies starting on 24 December, they were more actively involved. Party symbols started to become usual sights at demonstrations, and all three parliamentary parties organised their own protest events. The CPRF was generally the most active of the three. In many places, it tried to adapt to the rhetoric of liberals and nationalists, presenting itself as a unifying force (Gabowitsch 2013: 168). Furthermore, it also engaged in protest activities in poor regions where the non-parliamentary opposition and spontaneous apolitical activists failed to mobilize – for instance in the Caucasian republic of Daghestan or in south-west Siberian Kurgan (Gabowitsch 2013: 169). In the case of JR, the protests caused increased factionalism inside the party: some deputies took on an active role in the protests, providing the events with extra legitimacy and media coverage, while others abstained (Volkov 2015: 38).

And indeed, the parliamentary elections presented the opposition parties with a dilemma. On the one hand, they could align with the protest movement to try and reap the fruits of public discontent in the presidential elections. On the other hand, they had something to lose: not only did they fear to be stripped of their spoils of co-optation arrangements in federal and regional institutions. They also had just secured a tremendous success at the polls – in spite of all falsifications. Therefore, they feared to lose out in case new elections would be called (Gel'man 2013: 8). The KFPR leader Gennady Zyuganov thus condemned the election process on television, but when his party received several leadership posts in the new parliament, he fell silent (Robertson 2014: 124). While this is first evidence for the general hypothesis advanced in the next chapter, it is anecdotal – as is most of the evidence of party involvement in the protests.

Semonov et al. (2016) undertake the first systematic investigation of the topic. In a paired comparison of two Russian regions, they investigate the effect of

party-specific and region-specific factors on the approach that regional party branches chose towards the *for fair elections* movement. Identifying three possible strategies (hostility, engagement and abstention), they argue that party institutionalisation (i.e. roots in society and electoral support) is a precondition for a party to take an active role in the protests (i.e. to display either hostility or engagement). The level of co-optation (using Reuter and Robertson's (2015) operationalisation), in turn, determines whether it acts hostile towards the movement or collaborates with it. However, the authors do not make sufficiently clear their empirical indicators of the parties' strategies, nor do they sufficiently differentiate between the party elites and their activists. Nevertheless, the general reasoning behind the causal model is plausible and will be taken into account in the research design of this study.

In sum, we have to admit that we still know little about the parties' role in the protest movement. There is evidence that this role was secondary in the metropolises but stronger in the regions. Moreover, there was considerable regional variation in parties' take on the protests. Co-optation and institutionalisation have plausibly been put forward as driving factors of such variation. It is the task of this empirical analysis to test the effect of co-optation in a cross regional setting. We turn to this in the following chapter.

## 5. Empirical Analysis

The preceding chapters have introduced the main theoretical argument and have given an overview of the relevant empirical background for the case under study. On that basis, this chapter presents the research design and the results of the empirical analysis. Its first four sections introduce the research design. After stating the hypotheses in general terms as they emerge from the material presented thus far (5.1), the operationalisation of the concepts will be discussed, leading to the hypotheses in their final form (5.2). Section 5.3 is dedicated to the data and the process of data gathering, discussing in detail their strengths and weaknesses. Section 5.4 presents the methodological approach, discussing the choice of the subnational level as the level of analysis and introducing the statistical procedure, before section 5.5 presents and discusses the findings.

## 5.1. General Hypotheses

Recalling the theoretical arguments, we can advance the following hypotheses in a general form. We expect *less protest mobilisation by opposition parties in those regions where their elites are co-opted through the regional political institutions*. Following institutionalist reasoning, we assume that party elites are able to “demobilize their supporters” (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 235) if it is in their interest to do so. We test this assumption by providing two different indicators for protest mobilisation. Specifying the claim advanced above, we thus expect (1) *less elite-led protest mobilisation by opposition parties in regions where the regional party elites are co-opted* and (2) *a smaller number of protesting party activists in regions where the regional party elites are co-opted*.

As we have seen, the parties considerably differ from each other in terms of their electorate, their relationship with the central executive and their organisational structure. It is reasonable to expect these differences to have an effect on the parties’ behaviour in the studied context. The CPRF’s local branches are relatively independent. The LDPR, by contrast, is organised in a tight top-down structure, leaving little maneuver space for local party organisations. If co-opted regional elites do not want protest to arise, it is assumed that they do not engage in protest activities themselves and give orders to the local branches to keep activists off the streets. If regional elites, in turn, hope to gain from protest, they will provide their resources for protest activities and will try to mobilize their local activists. In the case of the hierarchically structured LDPR, such orders should have a greater effect on the activists’ behaviour. We thus expect (3) *a stronger effect of co-optation on activists’ protest behaviour in the case of the LDPR than in the case of the CPRF*. Since little is known about the organisational structure of JR, it is not possible to make a prediction for JR concerning the third hypothesis. This part of the empirical analysis therefore has explorative character.

## 5.2 Operationalization, Specific Hypotheses and Control Variables

The first part of this section turns the concepts established so far into measurable indicators. We begin with the independent variable, co-optation, and

then turn to the dependent variable, party protest, which is split into two indicators – elite-led protest and protest by party activists.

### ***5.2.1 Operationalization of key concepts: co-optation and party protest***

*Independent variable (IV).* So far, co-optation has been dealt with in a fairly abstract way. It was conceptualized as selective incentives provided to opposition elites in order to give them “a stake in the ruler’s survival” (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007: 2). But how can it be measured? Since parliamentarians enjoy privileges already qua formal status, all of the reviewed works on co-optation in authoritarian contexts feature parliaments as a central institution where co-optation takes place. The few existing studies that investigate co-optation mechanisms in greater detail also focus on parliaments (Malesky and Schuler 2010, Reuter and Robertson 2015, Semonov et al. 2016). Consequently, this study takes the same approach, using co-optation schemes in Russia’s regional parliaments as the independent variable.

But what exactly counts as a co-optation scheme? In this, the analysis follows Reuter and Robertson (2015). In order to measure party elite co-optation, the authors count the number of leadership positions that a party controls in the regional legislature. Leadership positions are conceptualized as the offices of speaker, vice-speaker and the chairs of standing committees, since those positions offer increased control over the agenda, greater rent-seeking opportunities and more staff (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 237). Moreover, in Russia’s legislatures, these positions are assigned by simple parliamentary majority (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 239) and are not tied to the term period. Therefore, in contrast to simple mandates, holders of such positions benefit from their offices solely at the mercy of the parliamentary majority. As rational choice institutionalism suggests, they should be keen not to provoke their own dismissal and thus abstain from potentially destabilizing actions such as protest mobilization. Accordingly, the independent variable in this analysis is the *number of leadership positions that an opposition party holds in the regional legislature*<sup>25</sup> between December 2011 and 4

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<sup>25</sup> Certainly, it would be preferable if more sophisticated measures of regional co-optation could be included – such as personal connections between executive figures and party elites. Unfortunately, though, the research on Russian regions has not yet produced other quantifiable measures of co-

March 2012. Since the argument rests on the assumption that the ruling party can dismiss oppositional deputies from their leadership posts (which creates the incentive to demobilize their activists), it follows that the sample consists only of those regions where *United Russia* controls a majority of seats in parliament.

*Dependent variables (DV).* The argument holds that co-optation of party elites in regional legislatures results in reduced party protest. In contrast to previous works, this study measures protest with two distinct indicators in order to distinguish elite-led protest from the actual presence of party activists at protest events. The measure for elite-led protest mobilization is modelled on Reuter and Robertson (2015), who investigated protest by the CPRF between 2007 and 2012. Their protest variable is the number of protest events (strikes, demonstrations, hunger strikes etc.) officially conducted by the CPRF per month in any given region. Adapted to the cross-sectional design of this study, the first dependent variable is thus the *number of protest events organised by parliamentary opposition parties per region* in the three months under study. A protest event can be broadly defined as “a collective public action by a non-governmental actor who expresses criticism or dissent and articulates a societal or political demand” (Rucht et al. 1992: 4). However, the practical choice of which events to include is pre-determined by the dataset (see 5.3).

Reuter and Robertson (2015: 237) are interested in the *general* effect of co-optation on elite decisions to mobilize for protest. For that undertaking, their measure is well-suited. The present analysis, however, is driven by an interest in *exceptional* situations of cross-societal protest sentiment – since these situations are the most likely to lead to regime breakdown (see section 2.4). During the period under study, a majority of protest events was organised and carried out by non-partisan actors, but party-affiliated activists often appeared nevertheless. If party protest would be conceptualized solely as activities that were organised (i.e. registered and conducted) by the parties’ regional branches, all those other events would be missed. The resulting picture of party protest could be skewed: The

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option. If a cross-regional quantitative design is the desired approach, one has to work with certain conceptual restrictions. However, measuring co-optation in the legislatures is justified in the Russian context since they are the only political institutions where oppositional forces are systematically represented.

findings could indicate a negative effect of co-optation on party protest without taking into account party activists that ‘capture’ events organised by other actors (see Gabowitsch 2013: 168). If co-optation is really to have a stabilizing effect, party elites must be able to persuade their supporters to abstain from *any* protest activity. Therefore, we include a second indicator that aggregates the number of party activists present at all demonstrations, marches etc. in a given region – no matter who organised the event. This way it should be possible to account for party protest mobilization beyond concrete party events.

To this end, photographic and video material from the protest events is coded to capture the approximate number of present activists who are recognizably affiliated with a political party. Party affiliation is assumed when a demonstrator displays unambiguous markers that associate him or her with a given party – i.e. scarfs, overcoats, hats, banners or flags with party symbols or slogans. If several photos of a protest event are available, only one image is used for coding in order to avoid double counting of the same person. Each event is assigned an approximate number of recognizable party activists: 1-2, 5, 10, 20 or 50 activists. The numbers for each protest event are then aggregated to obtain a number for each party in any given region. This measure has obvious limitations, which will be discussed in the data section (5.3). However, since its inaccuracies are unlikely to vary systematically across the regions (see 5.3), it provides a rough but utilizable indicator of party protest. The second dependent variable is thus *the aggregated number of recognizable party activists per region*. Table 1 in chapter 5.5 summarizes the concepts and their indicators used in this study.

### ***5.2.2 Specific hypotheses***

Having turned the central concepts into measurable variables, the three empirical expectations introduced in section 5.1.1 can now be specified. First, we expect a generally negative correlation between party co-optation and party protest in the regions:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The more leadership positions an opposition party holds in the regional legislature, the less protest events the party organises in that region.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: The more leadership positions an opposition party holds in the regional legislature, the less party activists are present at the protest events in that region.*

Both hypotheses will be investigated in a general model, which considers all opposition parties taken together, and in separate models that treat each party individually. Furthermore, due to the differing organisational structure, we expect that the regional party elite of the LDPR is better able to control the party activists' behaviour than the regional CPRF elite.<sup>26</sup> Assuming that incentives work equally for both party elites, this should be reflected in the relationship between co-optation and protest by party activists:

*H<sub>3</sub>: The stricter the party hierarchy, the stronger the negative correlation between co-optation and protest by party activists. Therefore, the expected negative effect of co-optation on protest by party activists is stronger in the case of the LDPR than in the case of the CPRF.*

The next section introduces several control variables.

### **5.2.3 Controls: reasoning and operationalisation**

In the statistical analysis, it is advisable to control for several factors that could themselves influence the size of party protest in a given region. Two of these factors will be controlled for by case selection: First, as already mentioned, all regions in which UR does not have a majority in the regional parliament are removed from the sample. Second, the city of Moscow is excluded: here, the central party organs are most certainly involved in protest mobilisation, which would confuse the picture. The rest of the potentially influential factors are controlled for by adding variables to the statistical model. These factors can be grouped in two categories: demographic or socio-economic variables and characteristics of the political process.

*Demographic and socio-economic factors.*<sup>27</sup> The choice of the socio-economic variables is based on similar studies on the occurrence of regional

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<sup>26</sup> Due to a lack of literature on the organisational features of JR, the party is not considered in the third hypothesis (see 5.1).

<sup>27</sup> All socio-economic control variables are taken from a publically available data set provided by the *International Center for the Study of Institutions and Development* at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow (see appendix and the web sources in the reference section).

protest in Russia. The first control variable is the *number of inhabitants* (see Reuter and Robertson 2015: 242). *Ceteris paribus*, larger regions should display more protests and more protesters. Second, Sobolev (2012) finds a negative effect of the *gross regional product* (GRP) on regional protest, and so do Reuter and Robertson (2015) in their study of regional CPRF protest. Therefore, the overall economic performance of the region is taken account of, measured by the GRP per capita in 2011. A third control variable measures the degree of *urbanisation* of each region. Reuter and Robertson (2015) do not find any effect of urbanisation, however, it is theoretically plausible to include the measure: in rural contexts, the organisation of protest events may be more difficult than in urbanized settings. Fourth, a measure of the *ethnic composition* of each region is included – measured by the percentage of Russian citizens. Russia has a number of “ethnic republics” with a high share of inhabitants of non-Russian ethnicity. Many of these regions bargained for higher independence from the centre in the 1990s (Sharafutdinova 2013) and established regional authoritarian regimes with high degrees of repression. Despite re-centralizing policies under Putin, repression is still higher in ethnically defined regions (see Zubarevich 2012). Reuter and Robertson (2015) therefore use the ethnic composition of a region as a measure for repression, which may negatively affect protest behaviour. This study follows their suggestion.

*Political process.* The second group of control variables concerns the specificities of the regional political context. First, regional parties may more actively mobilize for protest when they expect to gain from it in upcoming elections (Trejo 2014). Therefore, we include the *number of municipal elections* in each region held between March and June 2012, i.e. in the immediate future of the period under study.<sup>28</sup> The data come from the official website of the Central Electoral Commission and were assembled by the author.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Theoretically, municipal elections held in January or February 2012 could also affect protest mobilisation. However, because such elections were held in the middle of the period under study, they cannot be regarded as causes of all party protests that took place within that period. The cross-sectional nature of the data cannot handle such specificities. Fortunately, since there were only three municipal elections held in January and February 2012 across all of Russia, they could safely be excluded.

<sup>29</sup> See appendix and the web sources in the reference section.

Second, a party's electoral strength may positively affect its protest potential: the greater the pool of supporters, the more protests and protesters can we expect. Electoral support is also one of the dimensions used by Semonov et al. (2016) to measure a party's regional institutionalisation – which they found to positively affect its protest potential.<sup>30</sup> To capture this dimension, we include the official *vote share* that each party received at the national parliamentary elections<sup>31</sup> in December 2011 in the respective region. The data come from the Central Electoral Commission. For this to be a valid indicator of a party's electoral strength one has to assume with Reuter and Robertson (2015: 241) that “elections are not completely falsified”. This assumption must be treated with caution – especially in the given context of protests against an allegedly “stolen election”. However, the official data are the only indicator available for all regions.

Lastly, we include an indicator of *press freedom* in the regions, assuming that regional media that can operate under fewer restraints will report more freely about allegations of electoral fraud and about protests in other regions, possibly stimulating protest by parties and their activists. The data come from the Glasnost Defense Foundation's map for freedom of the press in the Russian regions for the year 2010. The rating classifies regions on a four-point scale. The scale has been recoded so that higher numbers represent greater press freedom.

It would be desirable to include more variables that specifically affect party protest. However, there is still very little systematic research on party protest in the given context. The present analysis can therefore be regarded in many respects as a preliminary study, which should be expanded by further investigations. The results should thus be interpreted with due caution. Table A1 in the appendix summarizes descriptive statistics of all presented variables.

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<sup>30</sup> Semonov et al. (2016: 85) measure institutionalisation with a complex index that includes measures of electoral support, membership and financial capabilities. Due to lacking data for most regions the index cannot be reproduced for this study.

<sup>31</sup> We use the results of national elections as an indicator to measure regional party support because in several regions the last regional elections had taken place several years before. Region-level surveys were not available.

## 5.3 Data

This section outlines the data sources and discusses their limitations. We begin with a detailed description of the process of data gathering and add a discussion of the unavoidable inaccuracies that the chosen approach introduces, arguing that it nevertheless can lead to valuable insights on the protest behaviour of political parties.

### ***5.3.1 Data gathering***

*Independent variable.* Data on the distribution of leadership posts in the regional parliaments were gathered by the author. Two principal ways to determine the office holder were developed. The preferred way was to use first-hand information from the regional legislatures. Most websites of regional parliaments provide access to databases with passed legislation. These databases were searched for decrees (“postanovlenia”), with which the assembly appoints deputies to leadership positions by simple majority vote. A time period from the election of the particular parliament (usually, leadership positions are appointed in the first or second session) until mid-2012 was covered. If that approach was impossible due to dysfunctional or lacking databases, a time-restricted online search of regional newspaper articles and other dated documents was conducted. Searching specifically for documents that dated from the exact period under study ensured that any change of position was noticed.

As Reuter and Robertson (2015) observe, though, change in leadership positions during a parliamentary term occurs only very rarely. Replacements of an oppositional deputy by a deputy of the ruling party or vice versa during or immediately after the period under study would have to be coded separately because such changes could indicate a punishment or reward. Among the few replacements observed in the period under study, no such delicate changes occurred. In those 24 regions that elected their parliaments simultaneously to the national elections on 4 December 2011, positions were filled through December. In one of these cases (Perm territory), leadership positions were appointed in January 2012. However, these cases were not treated differently to regions in which leadership posts had been distributed before December 2011, because the

theoretical argument is equally valid: oppositional politicians who would like to be considered for leadership positions have an incentive to behave loyally. In the two ways described, and drawing upon a data set from April 2013 for backup<sup>32</sup> where possible, data on leadership positions in 80 out of 83 regional parliaments could be gathered.

*Dependent variables.* The first dependent variable is the number of protest events organised by each parliamentary opposition party per region. The data is taken directly from a dataset compiled by Gabowitsch and Sveshnikova (used in Gabowitsch 2013). The authors do not formally define protest events, but their choice conforms to the definition advanced above.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, they included all collective public events that were linked to the protest against the outcome of the parliamentary elections. The database includes marches, rallies, car processions, spontaneous gatherings and “nano-meetings” (see 4.3). The latter were excluded.<sup>34</sup> The authors drew from several types of sources in order to circumvent media bias: they included information from regional press reports, but also from blogs and party websites. The dataset contains information on 547 protest events in the studied period. It lists date, place, type and, in 44% of cases, also the organiser of the event.

The number of missings in the category of the organiser, which is central to the present study, is thus relatively high. Hence, the data may underestimate the absolute number of protest events organised by political parties – simply because that information was not presented in the consulted sources and could thus not be included in the dataset. This fact is certainly regrettable, and for future analyses it

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<sup>32</sup> The dataset was provided by Rostislav Turovsky from the Higher School of Economics, Moscow. It contains information on the holders of speakerships, vice-speakerships and committee chairs of regional legislatures in April 2013. With the help of documentation available online, it was checked in every single case whether the same persons that occupied the leadership positions in April 2013 did already hold them in the beginning of December 2011, i.e. before the outbreak of protest. If that was the case, it was assumed that the respective persons held their position continuously throughout the period under study. In all other cases, including those in which a regional election took place between December 2011 and April 2013, documents available online were searched for information on the office holder in the beginning and the end of the period under study in the way described above.

<sup>33</sup> A protest event was defined as “a collective public action by a non-governmental actor who expresses criticism or dissent and articulates a societal or political demand” (Rucht et al. 1992: 4) – see section 5.2.

<sup>34</sup> These toy demonstrations do not feature human beings – instead, single activists put up a number of toy figures with protest banners and post pictures of the “demonstration” on social media websites.

should be considered to retrieve the data directly from party websites on the example of Reuter and Robertson (2015). However, there is no reason to believe that the missings vary systematically across regions. In other words: It is unlikely that factors that would explain party protest also influences whether this particular piece of information was reported in the source. Therefore, although the absolute number of protest events organised by political parties may be underestimated, the regional variation is likely to be reported fairly accurately.

The second dependent variable is the aggregated approximated number of recognizable party activists per region. The variable was coded by the author relying on the same dataset. The authors archived all original reports on the protest events. Consultation of these sources combined with additional online research provided usable visual coverage of 91% of the listed events. The material of each event was coded as described in section 5.2, and the obtained numbers were aggregated to obtain an approximate figure of party activists present at protest events per region in the given period.

Naturally, the resulting figure is not to be taken as the real number of participating party activists – for two reasons. First, there are obvious limitations in the quality of the visual material. For instance, the angle of the camera may not capture the entire crowd. Second, everybody who shows party insignia can be plausibly thought of as a party activist but certainly not all activists who are affiliated with a party display its symbols. Therefore, we can assume that the indicator significantly underestimates the real number of protesting party activists. For both reasons, the indicator is not a representation of the absolute number of party activists – rather, it should be understood as a *relative marker*. Assuming that the factors influencing the inaccuracies of the visual material (camera angle, timing of the shot, etc.) vary randomly, the relative differences between the aggregated numbers per region should give an idea of party protest variation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> It is possible that the way in which party activists present their party affiliation at protest events varies with the type of party: Communists may have other protest rituals than followers of the LDPR. This factor, however, does not produce variance at the regional level and can therefore be disregarded – at least when parties are studied separately.

### 5.3.2 *Using press reports for protest research*

Both dependent variables use a dataset that is partly based on regional news coverage. Newspapers are commonly used as the “basic material” in quantitative protest research (Hutter 2014: 349) – although it is known that press reports introduce bias of various sorts. Earl et al. (2004) review the methodological literature on newspaper-based protest research and distinguish between two kinds of bias. First, newspapers are selective. Research has shown that selection is shaped by a variety of factors. The first one concerns characteristics of the event: big, violent events are more likely to be covered, and so are events that attract counter-demonstrations or large numbers of police (Earl et al. 2004: 70). The second factor concerns characteristics of the news agency: local newspapers have shown to be less selective than national ones. Third, coverage also differs with the issue that is protested: general concerns are more likely to be reported on than particularistic demands (Earl et al. 2004: 70).

In addition to the problem that not all events are covered, existing coverage may be inaccurate. The authors call this a “description bias” (Earl et al. 2004: 73). Hard facts of the protest event such as date, place or the number of participants are often subject to omission errors (as is the case with the *organiser* variable in the present study). Moreover, the attention of reporters may be drawn to spectacular occurrences such as violence and arrest, resulting in inaccurate description (Earl et al. 2004: 73). In all, relying on newspaper sources unavoidably introduces bias of some sort. According to Hutter, no standard solution to this problem exists – in each case, the selection of sources has to be discussed and defended anew (Hutter 2014: 352). However, Earl et al. (2004) provide some guidance: Using multiple types of sources minimizes selection bias and triangulating<sup>36</sup> sources helps to evade description bias.

Evaluating the data of the present study in light of these findings allows for cautious optimism – for three reasons. First, the authors of the dataset deliberately gathered data from various sources (newspapers, social media, blogs and party websites) in order to avoid selection bias. Second, newspaper reports stem from

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<sup>36</sup> In social movement studies, triangulation is referred to using multiple sources for one piece of information - in this case, a protest event (see Diani 2007: 181).

local or regional papers that should be less selective in their approach than national media. Third, the authors use multiple sources for the same event wherever possible. On average, the information on each event is based on 1.98 sources.

Nevertheless, one should treat results based on this type of data with caution. The literature quoted in Earl et al. (2004) is predominantly concerned with democratic contexts. Whether the conclusions can be transferred to authoritarian regimes with restricted press freedom is unclear. It is plausible that a restrictive information sphere leads to decreased coverage of protest events. Accounting for regional variation of press freedom does not solve the issue entirely, since a positive effect of press freedom on party protest can mean two different things: (1) as argued above, increased press freedom may lead to more reports on electoral fraud, sparking more protest. Alternatively, (2) higher press freedom may just increase the number of available articles on protests with the absolute number of events staying the same across regions. In the framework of this study, this issue is insoluble. However, the data follows Beissinger's advice as closely as possible: in politically unstable circumstances, he argues, one should aim for "a 'blanketing strategy', utilizing multiple sources and multiple types of information whenever they are available" (Beissinger 2002: 476). While this encourages the hope for a fairly accurate depiction of the protest landscape, results should nevertheless be interpreted with great caution.

## 5.4 Methods

This section is divided into two parts. The first one justifies the choice of the regional perspective on methodological grounds and addresses several questions that arise in that context. The second part outlines the particularities of the chosen statistical procedure.

### *5.4.1 Regions as the units of analysis*

Taking sub-national entities as the units of analysis in a comparative research design has several methodological advantages compared to a cross-national design. First, it mitigates the "whole-nation bias" so present in the comparative literature, which often subsumes a heterogeneous landscape in a single number

(Snyder 2001: 94). Second, and more importantly, it serves to control for various potentially influential factors such as political culture, the legal environment and national historical trajectories by holding them constant. This way, a most similar systems design is approximated (see e.g. Collier 1991: 16-17), facilitating the attribution of the outcomes of interest to the independent variables put forward in the theory (Snyder 2001: 96).

For all its merits, certain conditions must be respected if the sub-national approach is to be employed successfully. Most importantly, the assumed causal processes should take place on the sub-national level as well (Snyder 2001: 95). Transferred to the present case, this condition results in two problems – one concerning the independent and one concerning the dependent variable. First, do regional legislatures have enough policy influence to provide office holders with decisive advantages for rent-seeking? After all, the re-centralizing policies of the 2000s transferred many powers from the regions back to the centre (Ross 2010). However, Reuter and Turovsky (2014) find that regional legislatures in 2011 still were attractive lobbying targets for local businesses: 30% of firm directors who conduct face-to-face lobbying preferred the regional legislature for their endeavours (Reuter and Turovsky 2014: 666). Moreover, another study found that between 2001 and 2010, 48% of regional deputies themselves were businessmen (see Reuter and Robertson 2015: 238). Both findings suggest that legislation passed in the regions does affect businesses considerably, bolstering the assumption that privileged access to that legislation can indeed be used for rent-seeking purposes.

Second, do regional party branches carry out protest mobilisation without interference from the central party headquarters? This assumption follows from the research design, which treats all units of analysis as independent cases, but it seems questionable (at best). If the central leadership of a party would like to use protest for its purposes or downplay it as a result of strategic calculations, they might give corresponding orders to the regional branches. Thus, the protest behaviour of the regional party is not only a function of regional factors but also of decisions made at the top. Yet, based on the region as a unit of analysis, the research design cannot accommodate the potential influence from a higher

administrative level. It is therefore a factor that biases the results of the study to an unknown degree.

However, it can be argued that orders to increase or decrease protest are given out equally to all sub-national branches of a party. If the central party elite seeks to achieve a certain goal it would not make sense to restrict their instructions to a subset of regions. If that assumption is made, one can argue that factors, which cause regional party elites to neglect or follow central orders, are indeed *regional* factors – such as the regional strength of the party or its ties with the authorities. In statistical terms, there is no omitted-variable bias under this assumption because the factor influences all units in the model to the same degree. Whether the assumption corresponds to reality cannot be clarified in this study. Indeed, it poses an important research question for further studies. For the moment, however, it is plausible enough to proceed.

#### ***5.4.2 The statistical procedure***

Since in the period under study no theoretically relevant changes in the distribution of leadership posts in the regional parliaments occurred, no time series analysis is necessary. Instead, a simple cross-sectional analysis is conducted. However, the peculiarities of the data of the dependent variables necessitate a special procedure. Both dependent variables in this study are typical instances of count variables. Such variables trace how often things occur in a given geographical or temporal frame – and therefore only consist of non-negative integers (Cameron and Trivedi 2013: 1). A second characteristic of count variables is that their distribution is often highly skewed (Allison 2009: 49). If linear regression models such as OLS are performed under such conditions, results may be inaccurate and biased. Therefore, count variables are often analysed with non-linear procedures based on the Poisson distribution or the negative binomial distribution (Long and Freese 2014: 481).

In the Poisson distribution, the variance equals the mean (Long and Freese 2014: 482). In many instances of count data, however, the variance is greater than the mean: there is greater variance in the event counts than the Poisson distribution predicts. This phenomenon is called overdispersion (Long and Freese 2014: 482). Applying a Poisson-based procedure may result in too small standard

errors, leading to systematic overestimations of statistical significance (Allison 2009: 57, for an example see Long and Freese 2014: 518). In such cases it is advisable to use the negative binomial distribution, which corrects for the presence of overdispersion (Allison 2009: 61). As can be gathered from table 1 in section 5.5, overdispersion is present in all distributions of the dependent variables: in all cases the variance is greater than the mean. Therefore, the statistical procedure employed is the negative binomial regression. This procedure is often used in quantitative studies that deal with protest data (see e.g. Meyer and Minkoff 2004, Hendrix et al. 2009, and also Reuter and Robertson 2015). Using the negative binomial regression instead of OLS has consequences for the interpretation of the regression coefficients and the assessment of the model fit. These specificities are outlined in the next section along with the discussion of the empirical results.

## 5.5 Results

This chapter presents the results of the empirical analysis. In section 5.5.1, basic measures of the dependent and independent variables are presented and the protest behaviour of the three parties is assessed in absolute numbers. In section 5.5.2, bivariate correlations are outlined, before section 5.5.3 presents the results of the multivariate regression analysis. Section 5.5.4 sums up the results and discusses problematic aspects of the findings.

### *5.5.1 Descriptive statistics*

Due to data availability and the exclusion of several regions for conceptual reasons (as discussed in 5.2), 76 out of 83 regions are included in the analysis. In order to present a coherent picture, all of the following descriptive statistics are restricted to that sample. First, a brief note on the distribution of the independent variable is in order. It has to be kept in mind that only regions are included where UR holds a majority of mandates in the regional parliaments. There is no requirement for the majority party to share leadership posts (Reuter and Robertson 2015: 239). Thus, any leadership post that an opposition party holds can be

understood as a concession.<sup>37</sup> On average, the CPRF controls 0.5 leadership posts per regional parliament. JR follows suit with 0.38 posts per region. The LDPR controls still less posts with a regional average of 0.25 (see table 1).

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

function	operationalisation	party	min	max	mean	sd	s <sup>2</sup>
Independent variable	Number of leadership posts in regional parliaments	CPRF	0	3	.5	.80	.65
		LDPR	0	2	.25	.49	.24
		JR	0	4	.38	.78	.61
		Σ	0	7	1.13	1.61	2.60
Dependent variable I	Number of protest events organised per region	CPRF	0	5	1.45	1.3	1.69
		LDPR	0	3	.59	.84	.70
		JR	0	2	.16	.43	.18
		Σ	0	5	2.05	1.52	2.31
Dependent variable II	Aggregated number of recognizable party activists present at protest events per region	CPRF	0	126	23.59	24.95	622.72
		LDPR	0	36	6.25	9.76	95.26
		JR	0	70	6.09	11.47	131.63
		Σ	0	177	35.93	37.06	1373.7

notes: 76 of 83 regions; sd = standard deviation; s<sup>2</sup> = variance

Table 2 lists the protest events organised by the parties under study between 4 December 2011 and 3 March 2012. Here, two observations emerge: First, the three parties participated in the organisation of approximately a third of all protest events held in the given period. This is systematic evidence for Gabowitsch's conclusion that parties were more important for regional protest than previously thought (Gabowitsch 2013: 168-69). Second, the difference between the three parties is striking. The CPRF is by far the most active of the three. It is involved in the organisation of 23% of all recorded events. The LDPR is substantially less active, being responsible for only 45 events – 9.4% of the total number. Lastly, JR participated in the organisation of twelve protest events which comes down to 2.5% of the total protest recorded.

<sup>37</sup> To be sure, the distribution of leadership posts could simply be determined by the strength of the opposition party in parliament. However, a correlation of the number of posts with the share of mandates that a party holds in the regional legislature reveals only moderate correlation coefficients ( $r = .41, p < .001$  for the CPRF;  $r = .16, p > .10$  for the LDPR;  $r = .30, p < .001$  for JR). This suggests that there are other reasons for awarding parties with leadership posts than its share of mandates.

TABLE 2. PROTEST EVENTS PER OPPOSITION PARTY

	absolute	relative
All events	481	100%
organised by		
CPRF	110	22.9%
LDPR	45	9.4%
JR	12	2.5%

notes: 76 of 83 regions. Period covered: 4/12/2011 – 3/3/2012

This first impression is substantiated by the descriptive statistics of the central variables (see table 1) – also concerning the second variable, party activists. It has to be stated again that this variable does not count the actual number of party activists who participated in protest events. It is the aggregated number of party activists who were *visually recognizable* as party affiliates. The real number of mobilized party activists will be much higher for all three parties. Therefore, the means of the second variable are not informative as absolute numbers. If parties are compared, the data largely confirm the picture of table 2, with the differences between the CPRF on the one hand and the other two parties on the other hand slightly increasing. On average, 23.6 CPRF activists were counted per region with a maximum of 126. By contrast, the LDPR's and JR's averages are both slightly over six – which is only about 25% of the CPRF's numbers. Interestingly, JR displays a maximum of 70 while the maximum of the LDPR is 36 – despite similar averages. This points to differences in protest distribution: JR seems to have few spots of rather high mobilisation and many instances of no mobilisation at all, while the protest behaviour of the LDPR activists appears to be more evenly distributed. The standard deviations ( $SD = 9.76$  for the LDPR and  $SD = 11.47$  for JR) speak the same language.

Taken together, these first findings support the conjecture advanced above that the CPRF is the most active of the three forces in terms of protest. On both indicators, it outnumbers the other two parties by far. However, there is considerable regional variation in the protest behaviour of all three parties that has yet to be explained. Even in the case of JR, which hardly organised any protest, the case of highly concentrated activity of party activists calls for an explanation.

The next section investigates bivariate correlations between the independent and the dependent variables.

### 5.5.2 Leadership posts and party protest: bivariate correlations

We first consider the results of the general model (“all parties” in table 3). The independent variable in this model is the added number of leadership posts of all three parties. Correspondingly, the dependent variables are the added number of protest events and the added number of activists. In accordance with  $H_1$ , there is a negative correlation ( $r_s = -0.07, p > 0.10$ )<sup>38</sup> between leadership posts and protest events. Contradicting  $H_2$ , however, a positive correlation exists between leadership posts and protesting party activists ( $r_s = 0.09, p > 0.10$ ). At first glance, this indeed allows the interpretation that party elites can control the organisation of protest events better than they can control the behaviour of party activists. However, both coefficients are rather small and fail to reach statistical significance.

TABLE 3. CORRELATIONS OF LEADERSHIP POSTS AND PARTY PROTEST (SPEARMAN’S RHO)

	all parties		CPRF		LDPR		JR	
	events	activists	events	activists	events	activists	events	activists
leadership posts	-0.07	0.09	0.04	0.12	-0.18	-0.20*	-0.02	-0.02

Notes: N = 76; \* p < 0.10

When the parties are analysed separately, marked differences emerge between them. In the case of the CPRF, leadership posts correlate positively with both indicators of protest mobilisation, with the correlation being stronger in the case of the second DV ( $r_s = 0.04, p > 0.10$  and  $r_s = 0.12, p > 0.10$ ). At first glance, the relationship between leadership posts and CPRF protest thus does not seem to be shaped by co-optation; the results call to reject  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ . Interestingly, the second correlation coefficient suggests that, in the case of the CPRF, leadership

<sup>38</sup> Instead of the commonly used Pearson’s  $r$ , in this analysis Spearman’s  $\rho$  ( $r_s$ ) is used for bivariate correlations. Spearman’s  $\rho$  is functionally very similar to Pearson’s  $r$ . Technically, it calculates Pearson’s  $r$  based on ranks rather than continuous values. It therefore takes account of the ordinal nature of the data. Furthermore, in contrast to Pearson’s  $r$ , it respects the non-normal distribution of the variables (see Gibbons 1993).

posts are positively associated with protests by party activists (for a possible explanation, see below).

The results for the LDPR paint a very different picture. Both indicators of protest mobilisation correlate negatively with leadership posts ( $r_s = -0.18$ ,  $p > 0.10$  and  $r_s = -0.20$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ), lending empirical support to  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ . In the case of the second dependent variable, the correlation is significant at the 10%-level. It appears that co-optation in regional parliaments indeed influences the protest behaviour of the party. The fact that both protest indicators correlate almost equally with the independent variable suggests that mobilizing efforts indeed reach down to party activists.

In the case of *A Just Russia*, we find negative correlations between leadership posts and party protest on both indicators ( $r_s = -0.02$ ,  $p > 0.10$  and  $r_s = -0.02$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ). However, the correlation coefficients are too small to infer a substantive relationship between the variables. These substantively and statistically insignificant results can be explained with the party's general reluctance to engage in protest. As section 5.5.1 has demonstrated, JR's protest activity is restricted to a few regions. This means that in many regions where JR has no leadership posts, it is not engaged in protest either – contrary to what the theory generally predicts. In this case of an extremely skewed distribution of the dependent variables, leadership posts alone cannot explain the instances where protest does arise. To control for other potentially influencing factors, a multivariate regression will be conducted in the next section.

$H_3$  predicted a difference in the effect of co-optation on protest by party activists between the CPRF and the LDPR. And indeed, the effect in the case of the LDPR is negative and statistically significant, whereas the effect in the case of CPRF is not statistically significant. This difference lends first tentative support to  $H_3$ .

In summary, the bivariate correlations show a mixed picture. There clearest finding is certainly that the protest behaviour of the parties is differently influenced by co-optation. While there is first tentative evidence that co-optation indeed reduces party protest by the LDPR on both indicators, it does not seem to negatively affect the CPRF's activities. In the case of JR, no conclusions can yet

be drawn: correlations are negative but lack strength and statistical significance. It was suggested that this may be the result of extremely skewed dependent variables. The next section tries to ease this problem by controlling for other influence factors in a multivariate analysis.

### ***5.5.3 Leadership posts and party protest: the full models***

In the following, the results of the multivariate regressions are reported. Table 4 shows the findings. First, the general model is discussed in full. Then, parties are looked at individually. It has to be stated before, though, that the interpretation of coefficients in negative binomial regressions is not as intuitive as in the case of OLS-regressions (Hendrix et al. 2009: 24). For ease of interpretation, therefore, incidence rate ratios (IRR) are displayed. IRRs denote the expected rate of change in the dependent variable for each one-unit increase of the respective independent variable – holding all other variables in the model constant (Costello et. al 2015: 97-98). Accordingly, they are to be understood as factor changes (Long and Freese 2014: 360). For this reason, IRRs do not have negative values: An IRR between 0 and 1 indicates a *reduction* in the value of the DV with a one-unit increase of the IV, while an IRR above 1 indicates an *increase* in the DV with a one-unit increase of the IV. For example, in the case of a dichotomous independent variable, an IRR of .70 indicates that the expected value of the dependent variable is 30% lower when the IV has the value 1 than when it has the value 0 – under the condition that the other variables are held constant (see Reuter and Robertson 2015: 242).

TABLE 4. NEGATIVE BINOMIAL REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF OPPOSITION PARTY PROTEST

	all parties		CPRF		LDPR		JR	
	events	activists	events	activists	events	activists	events	activists
<i>leadership posts</i>	0.89* (0.06)	0.94 (.07)	0.96 (0.11)	1.12 (0.15)	0.50 (0.21)	0.22** (0.14)	0.39* (0.20)	0.38** (0.14)
<i>party vote share</i>	1.01 (0.01)	1.03*** (0.01)	1.01 (0.02)	1.06** (0.02)	1.08* (0.05)	1.14* (0.10)	1.21** (0.10)	1.23*** (0.08)
<i>municipal elections</i>	1.13* (0.08)	0.98 (0.12)	1.22*** (0.09)	1.10 (0.13)	0.87 (0.18)	0.74 (0.28)	0.91 (0.34)	0.83 (0.27)
<i>press freedom</i>	1.25* (0.17)	1.28 (0.19)	1.30* (0.20)	1.31 (0.22)	1.18* (0.23)	1.74* (0.59)	0.23** (0.17)	0.92 (0.30)
<i>(Log) population</i>	1.35*** (0.15)	1.26*** (0.42)	1.41*** (0.19)	2.74*** (0.46)	1.28 (0.26)	3.23*** (1.34)	3.63*** (1.74)	2.98*** (1.19)
<i>percent urban population</i>	0.98** (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)	0.98 (0.01)	0.98 (0.01)	0.96** (0.02)	0.98 (0.03)	0.94 (0.04)	1.05 (0.03)
<i>(Log) GRP p.c.</i>	1.00 (0.17)	0.96 (0.22)	1.05 (0.22)	1.04 (0.26)	0.99 (0.32)	0.95 (0.52)	2.78 (2.07)	1.07 (0.53)
<i>percent Russian</i>	1.00 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	0.97 (0.02)	1.01 (0.12)	1.01 (0.02)
<i>constant</i>	2.67 (5.18)	23.13 (59.12)	0.89 (2.15)	5.31 (14.89)	2.11 (7.38)	35.11 (200.75)	3.02e <sup>-06</sup> (0.00)	0.002 (0.01)
N	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.11	0.05	0.11	0.07	0.08	0.04	0.20	0.06
LR Chi <sup>2</sup> -Test	32.09***	34.74***	25.43***	43.04***	12.11	14.34*	14.22*	23.57***

Notes: incidence rate ratios with standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; in the models for individual parties, the variable *party vote share* is the vote share of the respective party.

### *The general model*

Concerning the effect of leadership posts on party protest, the multivariate model substantiates the presumptions of the bivariate model. Leadership posts have a significant negative effect on protest organisation, while the effect on party activists is smaller in substance and not statistically significant. The IRR for the first DV (0.89,  $p < 0.10$ ) should be interpreted in the following way: for each additional leadership post that any opposition party receives in the regional legislature, the overall number of protest events conducted by parties is reduced by 11% (if all other variables are held constant). The results of the general model thus lend support to  $H_1$  but suggest rejecting  $H_2$ .

Next, we briefly turn to the control variables, among which multicollinearity was absent throughout.<sup>39</sup> First, the *strength of the opposition parties* measured in their combined vote share is considered. In contrast to the first DV, the IRR for the second DV (1.03,  $p < 0.01$ ) is highly significant. For each additional percentage point, the number of activists increases on average by 3%. The results indicate that a greater pool of party voters positively influences the number of protesters, but not the number of protest events suggesting that electoral strength does not measure institutionalisation as much as it measures the supply of activists. Second, upcoming *municipal elections* positively influence the organisation of party protest ( $IRR = 1.13$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ) but have no effect on protesting party activists ( $IRR = 0.98$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ). This again is plausible since municipal elections are of concern to the party elites who organise protest, not to the rank and file.

Third, *press freedom* has a significant positive effect on organised protest ( $IRR = 1.25$ ,  $p < 0.10$  and  $IRR = 1.28$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ) but for the activists, the effect is insignificant. This finding is puzzling, since potential protesters should be more affected by freer coverage than protest-organising party elites. The findings are more plausible if the index of press freedom is treated as an indicator of regional authoritarianism: In more liberal regions, more protest events can be organised because the authorities are more willing to grant their permission. Such an interpretation, however, would require a more sophisticated theoretical and empirical foundation than it is possible to offer at this point. Fourth, a region's *population*<sup>40</sup> has a robust and substantive positive effect on both DVs. Fifth, surprisingly, *urbanisation* has a significant negative effect on protest organisation

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<sup>39</sup> Multicollinearity, (i.e. the degree to which a control variable is linearly predicted by the others), can be tested with the help of the variance inflation factor (VIF) (see Fox 1997: 338-343). Cut-off-values of the VIF indicate when a problematic degree of multicollinearity exists. Conventionally, this value is a VIF of 10, a conservative alternative is a VIF of 5. As a test of all models in this study shows, the VIF for all control variables consistently lies below the conservative cut-off value (see Table A3).

<sup>40</sup> Since the variable has been log-transformed in order to reduce the effect of extreme cases, IRRs cannot be interpreted similarly to the other variables. Yet, the results of both models allow concluding that – as predicted – a higher population increases party protest. Log-transformation of control variables such as population and GDP is standard in similar research designs (see Reuter and Robertson 2015; Hendrix et al. 2009). As far as the effects of the main IV (leadership posts) are concerned, models with non-transformed variables for population and GRP yield very similar results (see table A2 in the appendix).

but none on protesting activists. The effect, however, is marginal in substance. Finally, neither *GRP per capita* nor the *ethnic composition* of a region have any influence on party protest.

Lastly, two measures for the goodness of fit are discussed – McFadden’s pseudo- $R^2$  and the Likelihood-Ratio Chi<sup>2</sup>-test. The first is used to compare the models with each other; the second assesses the strength of each full model individually. In non-linear procedures, there is no coefficient of determination identical to  $R^2$ , but several “pseudo- $R^2$ ”-measures have been devised (Cameron and Trivedi 2009: 457). The pseudo- $R^2$  reported here is McFadden’s  $R^2$ , which can be interpreted analogously to  $R^2$  as the proportional reduction of error in the present model compared to the null model (Menard 2000: 20).<sup>41</sup> If used on the same dataset, higher values of McFadden’s  $R^2$  indicate better model fit (Cameron and Windmeijer 1996: 209). The results show that the general model discussed here fares better when explaining protest organisation than when explaining activists’ behaviour (pseudo- $R^2$  of 0.11 vs. 0.05). Both values seem relatively low, indicating overall poor model fit. However, values of this pseudo- $R^2$  are lower than the values of the common  $R^2$ , with values between 0.2 and 0.4 representing very good model fit (Backhaus et. al 2006: 449).<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the result of 0.11 can be treated as a moderate model fit.

OLS-Models are often complemented by an F-Test that tests the null hypothesis that all regression coefficients are not different from zero. A similar test is conducted here on the basis of the chi-square-statistic (Scott and Freese 2014: 88). Both models show test statistics of high significance ( $p < .01$ ), indicating a low likelihood that all coefficients are simultaneously equal to zero.

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<sup>41</sup> In parallel to the usual  $R^2$ , it is based on a comparison of two models – one with the all regressors included and without. In contrast to  $R^2$  it compares the -2-log-likelihood statistics of the two models instead of the sum of squares (Menard 2000: 20). As Menard notes, however, the -2-log-likelihood statistic is equal to the sum of squares used to compute the ordinary  $R^2$  in OLS regressions, which renders McFadden’s  $R^2$  mathematically and conceptually close to  $R^2$  (Menard 2000: 20).

<sup>42</sup> This characteristic was confirmed in an analysis of the performance of various pseudo- $R^2$ -measures (UCLA 2011).

### *Party-specific models*

Because of the great inter-party differences, the general model may obscure more than it elucidates. It is therefore important to investigate each party individually. To facilitate the comparison between the parties, the results for each independent variable will always be discussed for all three parties before turning to the next IV.

First, the effect of the main independent variable, *leadership posts*, is considered. The results show that co-optation in regional parliaments has no effect on the CPRF's protest behaviour. Consistent with  $H_1$ , there is a negative relationship between leadership posts and organised party protest, but it is marginal in substance and statistically insignificant ( $IRR = 0.96, p > 0.10$ ). For the second DV, the relationship is positive and equally insignificant ( $IRR = 1.12, p > 0.10$ ). Both  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  must thus be rejected. This contradicts Reuter and Robertson's (2015) findings on the CPRF. One possible explanation for this difference challenges the underlying argument. Reuter and Robertson (2015) do not differentiate between protest events of regional and those of national importance. Perhaps, regional co-optation schemes are not sufficient to keep the party from conducting protest with national appeal. Either for ideological or for tactical reasons, protest against the election results might just have been too important for the personal considerations of regional elites to play a role. This would indicate that in cases when silencing protest is most important for the regime (i.e. in cases of nation-wide cross-societal mobilisation), regional co-optation arrangements do not always perform their desired function.

By contrast, in the case of the LDPR, co-optation appears to work. The multivariate regression largely confirms the results from section 5.5.2. Leadership posts have a substantive effect on both protest variables. An increase in one post reduces the number of protest events by 50% and the number of protesting activists by 78% (holding all other factors constant). The first correlation barely fails to reach statistical significance ( $p = 0.104$ ), while the second is significant at the 5%-level. The results therefore unequivocally support  $H_2$ . When compared with the results for  $H_2$  in the case of the CPRF, this finding also lends support for  $H_3$ : activists' behaviour is more affected by co-optation in the case of the LDPR.

$H_1$ , by contrast, formally has to be rejected. Yet the substantively strong correlation and the fact that it is close to statistical significance may serve as tentative evidence in favour of  $H_1$  – particularly taking into account the relatively low number of cases ( $N = 76$ ). It would be desirable to test this hypothesis with more cases, preferably using time series data.

For JR, a similar picture emerges. Holding constant other influence factors allows discerning the effect of leadership posts on protest organisation even in this case of a highly skewed distribution. The results show that an increase in one leadership post is associated with a reduction of 61% of protest events ( $IRR = 0.39, p < 0.10$ ) and 62% of protesting activists ( $IRR = 0.38, p < 0.05$ ). Both IRRs are statistically significant. Therefore the results are supportive of  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ . It has to be kept in mind, though, that also in regions where JR was not co-opted, JR-protest was relatively rare. Co-optation through leadership posts therefore seems to be only one of many factors inhibiting regional protest by *A Just Russia*.

Next, we briefly turn to the controls to discuss the most important results. First, unsurprisingly, *party vote share* has a continuously positive and almost always significant effect on party protest. In the case of the CPRF, only the effect on activists' participation is statistically significant ( $IRR = 1.01, p > 0.10$  and  $IRR = 1.06, p < 0.05$ ). This is evidence for the conjecture advanced above that in the case of the CPRF, the behaviour of party activists is more independent of the regional party elite, leading to a greater divergence of the two indicators than in the case of the LDPR. The same can be observed considering the effect of upcoming *municipal elections*. They only have an effect on the CPRF, and here only on the organisation of protest ( $IRR = 1.22, p < 0.01$  and  $IRR = 1.10, p > 0.10$ ). This lends tentative evidence to the proposition that – in the case of the CPRF – the two indicators indeed measure different things: it is plausible that elites in regions with upcoming elections have greater incentives to organise protest events to show their oppositional stance to their electorate – whereas activists do not have more reason to protest in such regions.

*Press freedom* has a generally positive effect on party protest, which is significant in most cases (the second DV of the CPRF is an exception). However,

it negatively affects the protest behaviour of JR – a puzzling finding that has no ad hoc explanation. Similarly, *population* continuously increases party protest (with the exception of first LDPR model, where the coefficient is not significant). The results for urbanisation are more interesting: we observe a negative (though marginal) correlation between the percentage of urban dwellers and party protest, which in the case of the first LDPR model is statistically significant. This could be interpreted as first systematic evidence for Gabowitsch’s hunch that parties were more active protest organisers in rural regions, whereas the non-aligned protesters dominated the urban sphere (Gabowitsch 2013: 168-69). Finally, neither *GRP per capita* nor the *ethnic composition* have any effect on party protest.

The pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> measures indicate that the models explaining protest organisation fare better than those explaining activist behaviour. Furthermore, the numbers indicate generally poor to moderate model fit, with the first model of JR standing out with a pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.20. These results suggest that, while several indicators no doubt have explanatory value (leadership posts are among them for the LDPR and JR), there are many influencing factors that this analysis has failed to uncover. Likewise, the LR Chi<sup>2</sup>-Test generally assigns the models statistical significance but calls to reject the first LDPR model. This, however, should not be interpreted as a rejection of each single regressor but rather as a rejection of their combination: There are simply too many insignificant coefficients included. If the variables for GRP per capita and ethnic composition are removed, the overall model acquires statistical significance. This supports the observation that there is still much to learn about what exactly motivates parties of the opposition to take part in protest. Certainly, a research design that takes the individual party activists as the unit of analysis would increase our knowledge of this matter.

#### ***5.5.4 Discussion of the main findings***

*H<sub>1</sub> – leadership posts and protest organisation.* When all parties are taken together, the data support the first hypothesis. An increase in the number of leadership posts is associated with a moderate and statistically significant reduction of the number of organised protest events in the period under study. This could be considered proof for the validity of the theoretical argument that co-optation moderates the behaviour of oppositional forces. However, one should not

leap to conclusions. If the parties are studied individually, marked differences among them come to the fore. It turns out that the reduction of organised protest per additional leadership post in the case of the CPRF is small and statistically insignificant. For the CPRF,  $H_1$  must therefore be rejected. Instead, the effect in the general model is carried by the LDPR and JR, which both display substantive reductions of organised protest in regions where their elites are co-opted.  $H_1$  must be formally rejected in the case of the LDPR, however, the coefficient is on the verge of statistical significance and the effect is substantively strong. For JR,  $H_1$  can be accepted with a 10%-error probability. However, JR was identified as a not very protest-prone force even where it is not co-opted. The striking difference between the parties has important consequences for the actual potential of regional co-optation schemes to stabilize the regime: If co-optation only works to demobilize some forces but not all, it may not reduce the overall protest level in a meaningful extent. However, over the long run, it may hamper cooperation between different actors of the opposition, thereby impeding joint oppositional campaigns – which is a vital task for autocrats willing to survive in power.

*H<sub>2</sub> – leadership posts and protesting party activists.* The general model reveals no effect of leadership posts on the number of protesting party activists. This could be interpreted as showing a real difference between the indicators used: While co-opted party elites indeed refrain from organising protest, their activists still take to the streets. Again, one should be cautious with such an interpretation. Disaggregating the parties shows even more striking differences between them than in the first case. For the CPRF, the effect is positive (yet insignificant),<sup>43</sup> while for both other parties, there is a substantive and significant negative effect. This suggests that the LDPR and JR are indeed able to mobilize

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<sup>43</sup> The latter finding is puzzling at first glance, but it can be explained with a third variable: party strength in parliament. As shown above, the correlation between the number of leadership posts and the mandate share in the regional parliament is strongest for the CPRF ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ). The share of mandates also happens to significantly correlate with the number of protesting CPRF activists ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ). This finding stands in marked contrast to the correlations for the LDPR ( $r = .05, p > .10$ ) and JR ( $r = .10, p > .10$ ). Therefore, if co-optation incentives do not play out on the CPRF elites (for reasons still unknown), it is not surprising that regions with more CPRF leadership posts display more activist protest – since these are the regions where the CPRF is strongest in the regional parliaments and therefore has both a greater support base and greater access to resources for mobilisation. Certainly, more sophisticated techniques should be used to test this supposition – particularly because the coefficient gives no clear orientation due to its statistical insignificance.

and demobilize their activists according to their calculations. The conclusion of this finding is the same as before: Co-optation of party elites in regional parliaments seems to affect the protest behaviour of activists differently, depending on the concrete party. It has no bearing on the communists, which suggests that on its own, regional co-optation is unable to meaningfully reduce protest mobilisation in times of wide-spread political discontent.

*H<sub>3</sub> – A stronger negative effect on activists’ protest for the LDPR than for the CPRF.* The results give empirical support to *H<sub>3</sub>*. While the connection between leadership posts and activists’ protest is strong and statistically significant for the LDPR, it is insignificant for the CPRF. The findings support the hypothesis that the LDPR succeeds at demobilizing its activists where it does not expect to gain from street protest. Even if the CPRF elites tried the same with their activists, the results show that such attempts did not bear fruits. *H<sub>3</sub>* can therefore be regarded as confirmed. However, this finding in itself says little about the real cause of that difference. *H<sub>3</sub>* postulates that the result is caused by the differing organisational structure: While the LDPR has a strict top-down hierarchy, local CPRF branches are more independent from their regional leadership and protest more freely. While this is theoretically plausible, the research design does not allow for a firm conclusion because the hypothesized causal element (party structure) is not part of each statistical model but varies only *between* the models. Any other difference between the parties or their activists could be equally responsible for the observed difference. A promising avenue for further research is to develop research designs that better capture the organisational factor.

For the sake of completeness, two challenging interpretations shall be discussed. First, instead of evidence for less centralisation in the CPRF’s structures, the fact that regional co-optation has no effect on the CPRF’s party protest (as opposed to the LDPR) could also signify *greater* centralisation. If only this result is considered, it is possible to conclude that orders from the CPRF’s national headquarters were simply carried out by regional and local organisations – effectively bypassing the interests of the regional elite. In light of this interpretation, the LDPR’s regional branches, whose protest *is* affected by regional co-optation levels, look more autonomous. Without knowledge of the

concrete orders of the party headquarters it seems that we cannot decide which of the interpretations is correct. Second, the results would more clearly support  $H_3$  if we observed a significant negative effect of co-optation on the first indicator in the case of the CPRF. In that case, we could conclude that the elite's mobilisation efforts are shaped by co-optation but that they do not reach down to the activists – in contrast to the LDPR. In the present situation where the CPRF's co-optation has no effect on either of the indicators, a rival interpretation could be that regional elites *do* fully control their activists but that their behaviour is simply not guided by the incentives of personal co-optation.

These caveats underline the necessity of developing research designs that can (1) disentangle effects playing out at different administrative levels and (2) focus on the mobilisation process itself. However, it shall be argued here that the multivariate regression provides empirical arguments against both challenging interpretations: First, the results for the control variables have shown that the CPRF's party protest is affected by regional factors – co-optation in the legislatures simply does not happen to be one of these factors. Therefore, it is plausible to suspect that the CPRF's protest levels are not merely a function of the central party's orders. Second, the results for the control variables do differ between the indicators: the vote share only affects the second indicator, while municipal elections only affect the first. It would thus be implausible to assume complete control of activists by their regional party elites.

To conclude, the findings of this analysis can be summarized in four points. First, in absolute terms, the CPRF was more engaged in the protests than the other two parties. Second, one reason for this difference may be the diverging susceptibility of the parties to the incentives of co-optation in the regional legislatures. Where LDPR and JR are co-opted, their protest decreases markedly, which is not the case for the CPRF. The results thus confirm the categorisation of the three parties made in the literature: while the CPRF still counts as the most serious parliamentary opposition party, the LDPR and JR conform to their labels as largely harmless “satellites” (Gel'man 2008), whose elites can be kept from mobilizing against the regime with the help of material incentives. Preventing

certain actors from engaging in protest, co-optation therefore appears to play a role in hampering joint oppositional campaigns.

Third, the results have shown that differences between the parties seem to be more important than differences between the two indicators. It was expected that activists would use protest events of other groups to show their discontent on the streets even when their regional party elites chose not to participate in protest activities. For the LDPR and JR, both indicators largely show the same results respectively. For these parties, the data thus refute such speculations. Yet, in the case of the CPRF, there is greater variance between the two indicators, with some variables affecting the first, others affecting the second dependent variable. Judging on the basis of this data, the CPRF therefore not only looks more like a serious protest force but also seems to have more autonomous activists. Supplying two separate indicators for party protest has therefore proven useful only for the CPRF. However, as the CPRF is the most important in-system force when it comes to protest capacity in Russia, it does indeed make sense to separate activists from protest events in further analyses.

Fourth, although the results of this systematic cross-regional analysis do contribute to the understanding of party protest, it should be kept in mind that the statistical models generally show moderate and sometimes poor model fit. This indicates that there is much more to learn about why parliamentary opposition parties and their activists take part in or abstain from protest. For instance, the measure of co-optation could be extended to instances of institutional incorporation beyond parliamentary posts. This would require elaborate qualitative research but it could yield more specific hypotheses, leading to more secure conclusions. Also, the connections between parties and non-parliamentary groups in a region should be considered more seriously, as better connections may increase participation of party-activists at non-party events. Ideally, such improvements would be complemented with individual-level data of party activists and regional party elites. Both could be integrated in a multi-level research design to reveal the role of regional and individual factors in shaping a regional protest landscape – and ultimately to assess the likelihood of regime-threatening protest.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis posed the question how co-optation in regional parliaments influences the protest behaviour of parliamentary opposition parties in Russia's regions. As the recent comparative literature on the stability of authoritarian regimes postulates, the incorporation of oppositional groups into a regime's political institutions bolsters a regime's stability: institutional representation provides privileges to oppositional elites, motivating them to demobilize their radical supporters – which in turn reduces the risk of a violent overthrow. Following this line of reasoning, it was expected that party protest is weaker in regions where the opposition controls lucrative posts in the regional legislatures.

To answer the research question, the analysis proceeded in the following way. First, the comparative literature on regime stability was reviewed. Chapter two revealed a variety of ways in which democratic institutions such as parties and parliaments serve authoritarian purposes: (1) they reduce the probability of coups by providing more transparent rules of the game, (2) they create a broad support base by providing incentives for long-term engagement and (3) they serve to co-opt oppositional forces by providing selective incentives for party elites to demobilize their supporters. The latter mechanism was identified to be of particular importance in times of protest mobilisation across the political spectrum: as the research on the “coloured revolutions” in post-socialist countries demonstrates, these instances of cross-societal mobilisation are most dangerous to authoritarian regimes.

In a next step, chapter three has demonstrated how over the 2000s the Russian competitive authoritarian regime (a regime with unfair, but contested elections) was turned into a hegemonic authoritarian regime in which the results of elections are largely pre-determined. The most important element of this transformation was the creation of a dominant party under the control of the central executive and the complementary marginalisation of the opposition. The existing literature holds that the surviving oppositional forces – the Communists (CPRF), the Liberal Democrats (LDPR) and *A Just Russia* (JR) – accepted the dominance of *United Russia* and do not undertake sustained action to challenge the status quo in exchange for the permission to compete for seats in the legislatures. However,

such far-reaching conclusions are still based on surprisingly little systematic evidence.

Not only is the concrete behaviour of the Russian parliamentary parties seldom studied in detail. In addition, existing research displays a form of elite-bias: In accordance with the elite-centred institutionalist literature from which they take their theoretical inspiration, existing studies do not differentiate between party elites and their activists on the ground. Measuring party protest only by counting protest events conducted by opposition parties, as existing studies do, may distort the picture: Party followers, who take the critical rhetoric of their party seriously, may join other demonstrations or protest spontaneously. This measurement problem appears particularly acute when political discontent evokes protest sentiment across societal and political boundaries. As chapter four revealed, the *for fair elections* movement, which emerged after the parliamentary elections of 2011, united demonstrators of various political backgrounds. It therefore appeared as an appropriate context to test hypotheses about the effects of co-optation on party protest.

In a final step, chapter five developed a research design that fused the theoretical arguments with the empirical specificities of the Russian case. The independent variable (co-optation) was operationalized as the number of leadership posts that each opposition party controls in the regional parliaments. The dependent variable (party protest) was split into two indicators to differentiate between distinct forms of protest mobilisation: (1) the number of protest events organised by each of the three parties per region and (2) the number of party-affiliated protesters present at regional protest events. For each of the two indicators, a separate hypothesis was devised.  $H_1$  postulated that in regions where oppositional elites control more leadership posts, parties organise less protest events.  $H_2$  held that in regions where oppositional elites control more leadership posts, less party activists are present at regional protest events. Finally, a third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) claimed that the effect of co-optation on the activists' behaviour (the second of the two indicators) was stronger in the case of the LDPR as compared to the CPRF, because the former is much more hierarchically structured, which suggests that regional elites can control activists more easily.

The results of the negative binomial regression revealed marked differences between the three studied parties. In the case of the CPRF, no effect was found: Whereas party protest is shaped by factors of the regional political process such as the number of upcoming municipal elections or the level of press freedom, co-optation of regional party elites has no effect on party protest. This stands in striking contrast to the two other parties. With each additional leadership post that the LDPR and JR control in regional legislatures, the average number of protest events and protesting activists per region is substantially reduced (with the first indicator for the LDPR failing to reach statistical significance by very close margins). In the case of the Communists, therefore, the hypotheses that postulate a negative effect of institutional co-optation on party protest ( $H_1$  and  $H_2$ ) must be rejected, while they can be generally accepted for the other two parties.

The results also support  $H_3$ . They indeed show a strong negative effect in the case of the LDPR and a positive and insignificant effect for the CPRF. This suggests that the LDPR's regional elites mobilize and demobilize party activists according to personal calculations, whereas the CPRF's activists protest more independently. However, whether this is a consequence of differences in the party structure, as suggested in the hypothesis, cannot be answered with certainty. The question of how organisational factors influence party protest therefore provides an important avenue for further research.

Before a final assessment of the results can be put forward, we must urge the reader to interpret them with due caution. Chapter five discussed several shortcomings of the data – as well as the conceptual concern that the research design treats regional party branches as independent entities and thus cannot accommodate the influence of national party headquarters. With these precautions in mind we may ask what the results tell us (1) about the empirical case at hand and (2) about the underlying institutionalist theory.

Turning to the first of these questions, we can assert that the results largely confirm the (mostly anecdotal) insights provided by the existing research. Although even the CPRF is sometimes regarded as virtual opposition, the other two parties are viewed as less threatening to the status quo. The results provide strong systematic evidence for this position. Not only is the CPRF the most active

of the three in terms of absolute protest organisation, it is also not affected by regional co-optation. By contrast, co-optation does reduce protest in the case of the other two parties, suggesting that it at least partially fulfils its function to impede joint oppositional protest. However, co-optation seems not to be the only factor that inhibits protest by these two parties. Especially JR was shown to be largely inactive even in regions where its elites were not co-opted. Additionally, as the general model has shown, the overall reduction of protest events per leadership posts was moderate, and co-optation did not reduce the overall number of protesting party activists. For these reasons, it is doubtful whether co-optation in regional legislatures made a substantial difference in the overall party protest turnout. Therefore, future research is needed to uncover other factors that inhibit party protest and the co-operation of parties with protest movements.

This leads to the second question: What do we learn about the underlying theory? We deliberately chose the most intense phase of the protest movement as the period of investigation, because it is during such phases of cross-societal mobilisation when co-optation of oppositional forces is most important to autocrats. If co-optation keeps the opposition from rebelling under such circumstances, it will do so anytime. However, we observed that selective incentives for the party elites have different effects depending on the investigated party. This suggests that co-optation works better for some groups than for others. The difference between the parties is therefore an important finding that could inspire researchers to investigate the characteristics of party elites that leads them to fall prey to co-optation schemes – and the conditions under which they resist such incentives. More research should also be invested in the question what factors shape the relationship of party elites and activists. This study has suggested that it is the organisational structure of a party that influences the activists' behaviour. If further research would confirm and extend these findings, it could lead to an important correction of the generalized view with which institutionalist theories usually treat their objects of analysis.

Lastly, it has to be conceded that the difference between the two indicators of protest mobilisation was marginal. Only the general model revealed a meaningful difference between the two dependent variables. When the parties were

investigated separately, this difference disappeared: Each party displayed fairly similar results for the effect of co-optation on both measures of party protest. However, the case of the CPRF tentatively suggests that the differentiation of the dependent variable was not futile: the effect of co-optation on organised events was negative, whereas the effect of co-optation and activists' protest was positive. While neither of the coefficients reached statistical significance, this difference calls to invest further resources in the examination of the still much understudied relationship of party elites and party activists in today's Russia.

Finally we turn back to our research question: what effect does regional co-optation have on protest by Russian parliamentary opposition parties? The preceding chapters have attempted to give a comprehensive answer to this question. For now, if summarized in one sentence, it can be stated that the effect of co-optation on party protest varies with the concrete party under investigation – and to a certain extent also with the indicator that is used to measure party protest. This analysis is therefore a call to a more nuanced view of the causes and conditions of authoritarian regime stability.

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## Online data sources:

Vybory deputatov Gosudarstvennoy Dumy Federal'nogo Sobraniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii shestogo sozyva [Elections of the deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, sixth convocation], issued by the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation:

[http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100028713304&vrn=100100028713299&region=0&global=1&sub\\_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100028713304&type=233](http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100028713304&vrn=100100028713299&region=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100028713304&type=233) (checked 24.04.2016)

Calendar of upcoming elections in each Russian region, issued by the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation:

<http://www.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom> (checked 24.04.2016)

ICSID database on economic and political indicators for the Russian regions, issued by the International Center for the Study of Institutions and Development at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow:

dataset: <https://iims.hse.ru/en/csid/databases> (checked 24.04.2016)

codebook:

<https://iims.hse.ru/data/2016/01/11/1134755487/ICSID%20economic%20database%20Codebook%20v1.2.1en.pdf> (checked 27.04.2016)

Map of regional press freedom 2009/2010, provided by the organisation *Glaznost Defence Foundation*:

<http://www.gdf.ru/map/> (checked 24.04.2016)

## Appendix

TABLE A1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF ALL VARIABLES

function	operationalization	party	min	max	mean	sd	s <sup>2</sup>
Independent variable	Number of leadership posts in regional parliaments	CPRF	0	3	.5	.80	.65
		LDPR	0	2	.25	.49	.24
		JR	0	4	.38	.78	.61
		Σ	0	7	1.13	1.61	2.60
Dependent variable I	Number of protest events organised per region	CPRF	0	5	1.45	1.3	1.69
		LDPR	0	3	.59	.84	.70
		JR	0	2	.16	.43	.18
		Σ	0	5	2.05	1.52	2.31
Dependent variable II	Aggregated number of recognizable party activists present at protest events per region	CPRF	0	126	23.59	24.95	622.72
		LDPR	0	36	6.25	9.76	95.26
		JR	0	70	6.09	11.47	131.63
		Σ	0	177	35.93	37.06	1373.7
control	Regional share of votes for each oppositional party in 2011 national parliamentary elections (in percentage points)	CPRF	2.96	32.5	20.0	5.4	36.83
		LDPR	.03	22.9	12.8	4.0	27.55
		JR	.19	28.5	13.7	5.6	38.01
		Σ	5.71	64.21	46.48	14.67	215.17
	Share of seats in the regional parliament (in percentage points) <sup>1</sup>	CPRF	0	28	11.55	5.46	29.80
		LDPR	0	18.2	5.70	4.02	16.17
		JR	0	34.7	8.33	5.69	32.40
		Σ	2	47	25.58	10.04	100.94
	Number of upcoming municipal elections between March and June 2012		0	6	.38	.91	.83
	Freedom of the press (4-point scale)		0	2	.92	.66	.44
	Population (in millions)		.04	6.91	1.65	1.28	1.64
	Urbanization (% urban population)		27.7	95.5	69.5	12.0	144.29
	Log Population		-3.16	1.93	.19	.87	.76
	GRP per capita (in 100.000 rubles)		.62	6.91	1.65	1.28	1.65
	Log GRP per capita		11.03	15.18	12.37	.67	.45
	Ethnic composition (% Russian population)		.8	97.3	77.88	24.36	593.72
Overall number of protest events per region <sup>2</sup>		0	16	6.33	3.79	14.36	

Notes: 76 of 83 regions; sd = standard deviation; s<sup>2</sup> = variance; <sup>1</sup> This variable was not used as a control. It was used to calculate bivariate correlations between mandates and organised protest events, see section 5.5.3; <sup>2</sup> This variable was not used as a control. It was used to calculate the share of party-organised protest events in the total number of events, see section 5.5.1.

TABLE A2. ALTERNATIVE NEGATIVE BINOMIAL REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF OPPOSITION PARTY PROTEST (NON-LOGARITHMIC VARIABLES FOR POPULATION AND GRP P.C.)

	<b>all parties</b>		<b>CPRF</b>		<b>LDPR</b>		<b>JR</b>	
	events	activists	events	activists	events	activists	events	activists
<i>leadership posts</i>	.88* (.06)	.91 (.07)	.95 (.11)	1.09 (.17)	.48* (.20)	.26** (.16)	.42 (.22)	.34*** (.12)
<i>party vote share</i>	1.01 (.01)	1.04*** (.01)	1.01 (.02)	1.06** (.03)	1.09* (.05)	1.15* (.09)	1.18** (.09)	1.24*** (.09)
<i>municipal elections</i>	1.12* (.08)	1.01 (.14)	1.21** (.09)	1.10 (.15)	.86 (.18)	.71 (.28)	1.02 (.34)	.88 (.30)
<i>press freedom</i>	1.28* (.17)	1.39** (.22)	1.34* (.20)	1.41* (.25)	1.19 (.28)	1.81* (.60)	.29* (.19)	1.02 (.34)
<i>population</i>	1.17** (.07)	1.52*** (.17)	1.18** (.08)	1.60*** (.18)	1.13 (.16)	1.63* (.44)	1.16** (.30)	1.52* (.37)
<i>percent urban population</i>	.99 (.01)	1.01 (.01)	.99 (.01)	1.01 (.01)	.97** (.01)	.99 (.03)	.96 (.03)	1.06* (.03)
<i>GRP p.c.</i>	.94 (.03)	.90*** (.03)	.95 (.03)	.91** (.03)	.95 (.05)	.88 (.07)	1.01 (.08)	.92 (.07)
<i>percent Russian</i>	1.00 (.01)	.99 (.01)	1.00 (.00)	.99 (.01)	.99 (.01)	.98 (.02)	1.01 (.02)	1.01 (.02)
N	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.11	.05	.11	.06	.08	.03	.15	.06
LR Chi <sup>2</sup> -Test	32.09* **	34.74***	25.01***	35.27***	12.64	12.30	10.84	21.15***

Notes: incidence rate ratios with standard errors in parentheses; \* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01; in the models for individual parties, the variable *party vote share* is the vote share of the respective party.

TABLE A3. VARIANCE INFLATION FACTORS FOR ALL MODELS<sup>1</sup>

	<b>all parties</b>		<b>CPRF</b>		<b>LDPR</b>		<b>JR</b>	
	log	non-log	log	non-log	log	non-log	log	non-log
<i>leadership posts</i>	1.21	1.23	1.11	1.12	1.16	1.19	1.22	1.22
<i>party vote share</i>	2.76	2.77	1.73	1.72	2.92	2.75	1.86	1.87
<i>municipal elections</i>	1.13	1.13	1.11	1.11	1.12	1.12	1.15	1.15
<i>press freedom</i>	1.26	1.25	1.16	1.15	1.21	1.20	1.22	1.22
<i>population</i>	1.26	1.15	1.23	1.10	1.30	1.20	1.19	1.09
<i>percent urban population</i>	2.08	1.64	2.08	1.65	2.11	1.74	2.08	1.64
<i>GRP p.c.</i>	1.57	1.18	1.55	1.15	1.78	1.29	1.54	1.14
<i>percent Russian</i>	2.61	2.63	2.12	2.14	2.43	2.40	1.88	1.90

Notes: VIFs displayed. <sup>1</sup> This table does not differentiate between the two dependent variables because the VIF only concerns the independent variables – values would thus be the same for both models. However, we differentiate between the two versions of the control variables *population* and *GRP p.c.* (logarithmic vs. non-logarithmic versions, see table A2); in the models for individual parties, the variable *party vote share* is the vote share of the respective party.