

Political Cycles and Electoral Fraud in Russian Regions

Final report

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Non-technical summary

This article argues that the outcomes of national-level elections in Russian regions are crucial to the likelihood of regional governors being re-appointed for the next term, and that delivering satisfactory results for the ruling party may have different importance to a governor depending on the stage of his term at which elections are held. Governors approaching the expiration of their terms have stronger incentives to deliver better results for the ruling party or pro-government candidate.

By exploiting exogenous variation in the starting dates and length of Russian regional governors' terms of office, this article finds that the ruling party or candidate obtains up to 6 additional percentage points in its victory margin in national-level elections held 6 months before the expiration of a governor's term than in elections held two years prior to the end of the term.

To identify the source of the extra votes, the following potential explanations for the results are tested:

- 1) Voter Mobilization. Governors may use resources to stimulate turnout among potential ruling party supporters, such as government employees. There is a weak evidence for this explanation. The results suggest that voter mobilization can explain no more than half of the additional votes.
- 2) Electoral fraud. Governors may initiate electoral manipulation. This hypothesis is tested using two distinct regional-level measures of fraud, but find no supporting evidence.
- 3) Economic tools. Governors may attempt to obtain extra votes by affecting voters' income through money transfers, salary increases for civil servants, etc. Using data from the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey, an income measure is constructed for the test and the analysis finds no convincing evidence for this explanation either.

Main findings:

- 1) Russian regional governors signal their loyalty to the ruling party and to the president by delivering higher results for the party in national-level elections.
- 2) Governors approaching the end of their terms and facing a re-appointment decision deliver more votes to the ruling party.
- 3) Mobilization of ruling party supporters is used to deliver the extra votes, but not exclusively.
- 4) Electoral fraud and income-affecting tools are not widely used by governors.
- 5) Further research is needed to fully understand the mechanism that generates additional votes.

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