

## **Shoring up Power: Electoral Reform and the Consolidation of Authoritarian Rule**

Jennifer Gandhi, Emory University  
Abigail L. Heller, Emory University  
Ora John Reuter, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

### **Abstract**

Why do autocrats adopt proportional representation (PR)? Conventional wisdom suggests autocrats should prefer majoritarian electoral rules because they favor large parties. Yet, since 1945, autocrats have been almost three times more likely to institute reforms towards PR than majoritarianism. Existing literature suggests incumbents institute PR to divide the opposition. We explore another motivation: executives switch to PR to ensure discipline among allies. We argue that such reforms are most likely when autocrats have a particular need to impose discipline — when ruling parties are nascent. Empirically, we examine the conditions under which changes to PR are likely with cross-national data from all electoral autocracies between 1945 and 2012. Additionally, we investigate a prominent case — the 2005 switch to PR in Russia — to illustrate the mechanisms and show how the reform solved the problem of control, allowing the Kremlin to focus on selecting electorally strong candidates.

### **Keywords**

Electoral systems, autocracies, electoral manipulation, proportional representation

**Word count:** 9,738

## **Introduction**

Most contemporary autocracies allow for multiparty competition in legislative elections, and they frequently change their electoral rules. During the post-World War II period, 38 percent of autocracies made rule changes compared to only 19 percent of democracies (Barberá 2013). In changing the rules, the usual goal is to disadvantage the opposition by either deterring electoral coordination or minimizing opposition seat share within the legislature. Autocrats with dominant parties frequently change the rules in order to reinforce their dominance (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001; Lust-Okar and Jamal 2002). Without an established ruling party, autocrats may prefer to maintain their position by fragmenting the opposition and staying above the political fray (Barberá 2013; Higashijima and Chang 2016; Lust-Okar and Jamal 2002). Alternatively, dictators who anticipate that nothing can be done to preserve their power may choose the electoral rules that best provide some insurance to them and their political allies (Boix 1999; Negretto 2006; Rokkan 1970).

Maximizing seats at the expense of opposition parties undoubtedly is a large part of the story behind electoral rule manipulation by incumbents. But another part of the story — one that has been comparatively neglected — is the use of rule changes to manage and control the autocrat's coalition. Autocrats govern with the help of elites who lend important political and economic resources to support the regime. Often, these elites and the autocrat cement their relationship through a regime party, which must contest elections against opposition parties (Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2017). In this context — partisan elections contested by a regime party — the autocrat needs elites within his coalition who can win elections as legislative candidates. They must be able to beat opposition candidates by virtue of their popularity, charisma, name-recognition, skills or efforts at campaigns, or resources. But these same characteristics make

these types of elites — strong elites — difficult to control. Strong elites can use their personal resources to defy party leaders and extract costly concessions from the autocrat. Ideally, the autocrat would prefer to have elites with the resources to win elections for the regime party, but who are also willing to respect party decisions regarding nominations and campaign strategies and, once elected, comply with the government’s legislative agenda. In other words, the autocrat wants to avoid having to sacrifice electoral performance for loyalty among his elite coalition.

That autocrats have two constituencies to manage — the opposition and their own coalition — complicates the choice of electoral rules. Regarding the opposition, the autocrat wants to create rules that advantage his own candidates and disadvantage the opposition. In other words, the goal is seat maximization. Regarding his own coalition, the autocrat wants to ensure that he has members who will help win elections and fall in line during the electoral and legislative process. Here the goal is control. The dilemma is that typically seat maximization is best accomplished by majoritarian systems, such as single-member district plurality (SMDP), while control is best achieved through proportional representation (PR), especially with closed lists.<sup>1</sup> So how do autocrats manage these competing imperatives? What are the conditions under which they choose proportional over majoritarian systems?

We argue that when autocrats have not yet consolidated their position vis-à-vis elites, they are focused on the problem of achieving control and consequently, more likely to choose PR at that point. Moreover, we argue that PR enables autocrats to avoid a performance-loyalty trade-off among those elites who associate with the regime. Tight control over nominations under PR incentivizes party candidates to remain legislatively compliant after the election. Armed with this

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<sup>1</sup> As we discuss below, our arguments apply both to closed-list and open-list PR (though slightly better to closed-list PR). But since open-list PR is extremely rare in autocracies (Brazil and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are the only cases, to our knowledge), we often use the shorthand “PR” or “proportional representation” to refer to closed-list PR.

institutional stick to command loyalty, the autocrat can recruit strong elites as candidates to increase his party's chances of winning, without fear that these elites will pose a problem later in the electoral or legislative process.

We provide cross-national evidence demonstrating that autocracies are more likely to adopt PR in the early years of their regime parties, precisely when their problems of control are more pronounced. We then examine a prominent case — Russia — and demonstrate that the problem of control was an important motivating factor in the switch from a mixed to a proportional system in 2005. We also show that once closed-list PR was adopted, United Russia, the regime party, focused on recruiting strong candidates who could help the Kremlin win elections. In doing so, it used the previous electoral performance of potential candidates as a guide to their prospective electoral strength. With control over the nomination process, party leaders would not need to use loyalty as a criterion for drawing up electoral lists.

Recent work on electoral reform recognizes that seat maximization is not the only goal motivating the choice of electoral rules: party leaders have also promoted the adoption of PR to increase party cohesion through control over the nomination process (Cox et al. 2019). It is precisely for this reason that party backbenchers may resist electoral rule changes (Leeman and Mares 2014; McElwain 2008). This work is focused on established democracies with little attention to this problem in autocracies. However, scholars of Russian politics have noted similar motivations in the 2005 switch to PR (Moraski 2007; Remington 2006; Smyth et al. 2007). Our cross-national analysis shows that controlling electoral and legislative coalitions is a problem that is confronted by many autocratic rulers and the Kremlin's solution to it — the adoption of PR — is not unique. Furthermore, work on the 2005 electoral reform has focused on United

Russia's desire for loyalty in their legislative members. But our evidence shows that the electoral viability of candidates was an equally important criterion in candidate selection.

Using various forms of evidence, we show that autocrats choose PR under certain conditions to create coalitions composed of members who are both electoral winners and legislatively compliant. As such, an institution — the electoral system — has important effects on leader-elite relations within autocracies. “Parchment rules,” in fact, can sometimes condition relationships that are fundamentally founded on brute force (Gehlbach and Keefer 2012; Reuter 2017).

### **Manipulation of Electoral Rules under Autocracy**

A legislative majority enables the autocrat to make laws and change the constitution in order to implement his agenda. To generate legislative majorities, it helps to have a well-resourced organization with candidates who can attract votes. In other words, a regime party composed of elites who have the economic and political resources that are necessary to obtain votes. Social and political networks can be useful in coordinating donors to support campaigns, in recruiting activists to mobilize voters, and in persuading or pressuring voters for support. Material resources can be used directly to buy votes. The personal reputation or charisma of candidates can also serve as an important resource for attracting votes. But the same resources that make elites valuable — whether as candidates or behind-the-scene supporters — also make them difficult to control. Elites with social, political, and economic resources can behave as independents or form their own factions in elections. In the 1980s, a leftist faction within Mexico's long-dominant *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) formed a separate party, the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), which constituted the regime's most serious

electoral challenge during its 71-year rule (Magaloni 2006). Similarly, dissident legislators within the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) first formed a legislative faction and eventually broke off to form *Semangat 46* in the late 1980s as a challenge to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the ruling party. Strong elites may even join the opposition within the legislature. Kim Sŏng-gon, a leader of the Gang of Four and the Democratic Republican Party in South Korea, tried to challenge General Park Chung Hee by joining the opposition in a vote of no confidence against the Home Minister (Greitens 2016). How, then, can an autocrat induce a set of powerful elites to work towards collective electoral and legislative goals? What set of incentives enable the dictator to have a coalition of both well-resourced *and* compliant elites?

One way is through partisan control over electoral nominations. By determining which candidates can appear on the ballot, parties can wield enormous influence over candidates, inducing them to support collective goals, such as the party's reputation, rather than personal ones, in elections (Carey and Shugart 1995; Chang and Golden 2007). Once candidates have won seats, they also have incentives to comply with the legislative agenda of the party if they hope to secure re-nomination. Finally, control over inclusion and placement of candidates on the ballot also enables the party to set up rules and procedures that rationalize the process of candidate selection. With few options to circumvent the party's selection of candidates, elites are left with little choice but to comply with the demands of the autocrat and party leaders if they continue to value their legislative seats.

Electoral rules vary in the degree to which they enable parties to control nominations and candidates to defy their decisions. In systems without primaries, majoritarian rules give central party leaders the ability to choose candidates. But this control is contingent on a strongly centralized party apparatus that has effective control over local nomination processes. In weak

party systems, nomination processes are prone to capture by local elites, such as governors, oligarchs, landowners, and the candidates themselves. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, for example, such local notables were a constant thorn in the side of party leaders who were trying to induce party-line votes within parliament (Cox 1987). Similarly, in Yeltsin-era Russia, the regional branches of pro-presidential parties were controlled not by the president's team, but by powerful regional governors and financial-industrial groups, who used their control to install their own clients as SMDP candidates (Hale 2006; Reuter 2017). These control problems are made harder in majoritarian systems where central party leaders must coordinate and monitor nominations across many single-member districts. Without a strong nationalized party, party leaders find it difficult to control candidates and deputies.

Such problems are further exacerbated by the fact that — relative to proportional systems — majoritarian rules incentivize the cultivation of a personal vote (André et al. 2016). Once elected, candidates can then use that personal vote as leverage against party leaders. Popular deputies can credibly threaten defection if central control becomes too stringent. Often a small registration fee and/or a collection of signatures is enough to secure ballot access as an independent or candidate of another party. Such threats are particularly credible in party systems that lack a strong programmatic basis.

Closed-list PR, in contrast, is an institutional mechanism that provides executives and party leaders strong control over nominations.<sup>2</sup> Larger districts make it much harder for local

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<sup>2</sup> Our discussion focuses on the distinction between majoritarian and closed-list PR systems. These are by far the two most common electoral formulas used under autocracies, but it is worth mentioning how these arguments might apply to other, less common electoral formulas. Party leaders have less control over candidates in open-list PR than they do under closed-list PR, because there are stronger incentives to cultivate a personal vote in the former. Yet the higher district magnitude makes any form of PR more compatible with party control over nominations than majoritarian systems. In addition, the possibility of defecting and running as an independent gives SMDP candidates leverage that PR candidates — on open or closed lists — lack. In some open-list PR systems, the party does not control its own ballot. Leaders in such systems — which are extremely rare under autocracy — would have less

notables to pry ballot control from the hands of party leaders. It also provides disgruntled would-be candidates with little maneuvering room to get on the ballot in defiance of their parties' decisions. Once leaders determine inclusion and position of candidates on the party electoral list, they wield enormous power over the political fate of candidates. This control provides strong incentives for candidates to follow party strategies in elections and once elected, to follow the party line in legislative voting. After adoption of PR in Western Europe, for example, contemporary observers noted that proportional representation "strengthened the influence of parties and weakened that of personalities," resulting in more compliant legislators and more cohesive parties (Cox et al. 2019: 106). Once the executive and party leaders have this stick in hand, they are free to select candidates who have the resources and skills to win elections. Parties do not need to sacrifice electoral quality for loyalty among those individuals who agree to run as candidates.

As useful as PR is in managing legislative coalitions, it does have its limits. PR is rarely the optimal rule to achieve seat maximization. Its proportionality reduces the seat bonus to large parties (i.e., the ruling party) and enables smaller parties to achieve representation. In other words, while PR affords leaders ways to control their own coalitions, it also enables the opposition to gain a foothold within the legislature. Majoritarian systems, in turn, are usually the most expedient rule for transforming a limited number of votes into a disproportionate share of legislative seats (Boix 1999; Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001; Rokkan 1970). But as discussed, in the absence of strongly centralized parties, majoritarianism makes coalition management

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control over candidates than leaders in other types of PR, but for the reasons sketched above, SMDP systems may give leaders even less control.

much more difficult. So under what conditions should autocratic leaders choose one system over the other?

We argue that when the problem of establishing control among elites — who can help in generating votes — is especially vexing, leaders will opt for PR. And while many factors affect the ability of regime leaders to control elites, among the most important is party organization. Regimes with strong ruling parties have more control over local elites and local nomination contests. But parties, when nascent, are unlikely to have strong control over nominations. When the ruler is first organizing his elite coalition within the confines of a political party, elites often have relatively strong bargaining power (Reuter 2017). It is precisely in these situations that leaders may find PR appealing — through control of the candidate selection process, leaders can shift the balance of power in their favor. This argument leads to our first hypothesis.

*Rule choice hypothesis:* Autocrats will be more likely to choose PR when their ruling parties are relatively new.

Autocrats want to exercise strict control over candidates and legislators, but also attract quality candidates who can help them win elections. PR is a system that allows them to resolve this trade-off in their favor: of the elites who are willing to join with them, leaders can choose quality candidates — those with resources and popularity — and still ensure that they are well-disciplined through control over the party list. This use of PR follows a distinct logic from others which emphasize the use of PR to divide the opposition (Higashijima and Chang 2016; Lust-Okar and Jamal 2002). If this reasoning is an additional motivation for establishing PR, an observable implication for candidate selection emerges.

*Candidate selection hypothesis:* Once autocrats have adopted PR, electoral viability will be an important criterion for candidate selection.

In the following section, we use cross-national evidence to investigate the rule choice hypothesis. Our focus then turns to a prominent case — Russia — for two reasons: to illustrate the mechanism behind the rule choice hypothesis and to test the candidate selection hypothesis. Our findings concur with studies of the case that emphasize how adoption of PR enabled Putin and United Russia to exert more control over elites. But we also demonstrate that the institutional control over nominations enabled the Kremlin to run candidates who were both high quality (i.e., capable of attracting votes) and compliant.

### **Choosing the Rules: A Cross-National Analysis**

Not only do many autocrats use PR, but it appears to be gaining in popularity over time. Of the 35 major electoral reforms under autocracy that occurred between 1945 and 2012 (data discussed below), 26 moved the electoral system to incorporate more seats chosen by PR rules. The choice of closed-list PR may be good for exerting control over the autocrat’s coalition. But it does not necessarily solve the problem of the opposition. Majoritarian rules, rather than PR, are more likely to give regime parties a seat bonus. This points to a tension in achieving multiple goals. So when might autocrats prioritize the problem of controlling the coalition? We argue autocrats will use PR to consolidate their power over local elites when they most need it — when their power vis-à-vis these elites is relatively low. Leader-elite relations are more likely to be tipped in favor of the latter when the regime lacks strong institutional mechanisms (e.g., a well-developed party) with which to control elites.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> To say that elites are strong is not to say that the state is democratic. Autocratic rulers have wrangled with rebellious elites, who were either too strong or too costly to repress outright, especially where the central state is weak or early in a regime’s rule (e.g., Migdal 1988; Reuter 2017).

Our cross-national analysis utilizes a dataset of 438 national-level, lower house elections in dictatorships between 1945 and 2012.<sup>4</sup> We focus on only those regimes for which the trade-off between seat maximization and coalition management is meaningful — dictatorships with regime parties that compete against other parties electorally.<sup>5</sup> We exclude regimes with no parties such as Kuwait and Belarus and single-party regimes such as Paraguay in the 1940s and 1950s. In addition, the executive must have clear formal or informal ties to the governing party.<sup>6</sup> Finally, since our argument assumes that survival in power is a primary goal for leaders, the sample includes only those elections held under the auspices of an incumbent executive with the intention of remaining power — indicated by his candidacy in a concurrent presidential election or his party’s participation in the legislative election.<sup>7</sup>

In the analysis, our dependent variable is *Change Towards PR*, taking a value of one if the electoral system was changed in a proportional direction between the previous and current elections (when both elections are held under the same regime) and zero otherwise.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, this variable is coded as one if the electoral system was changed from a majoritarian to a fully proportional system, a mixed to a proportional system, or a majoritarian to a mixed system. Thus, we exclude from these models observations for which the previous electoral system was already fully proportional, resulting in 271 observations.

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<sup>4</sup> We identified elections through NELDA (Hyde and Marinov 2012) and Barbará (2013), also consulting secondary sources to ensure complete coverage. The electoral system data comes from V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2016), the Database of Political Institutions (Keefer 2012), and Barbará (2013). Where these sources were missing or disagreed, we used secondary sources.

<sup>5</sup> Thus, we assume that if the regime has a party it is trying to strengthen that party. Regimes without parties are excluded from the analysis. These regimes have demonstrated they either do not want or are unable to build a party.

<sup>6</sup> This criterion excludes elections held under executives with no ruling party, or executives who support coalitions of parties without any clear favorite (e.g., monarchs in Morocco and Jordan).

<sup>7</sup> This criterion excludes transitional elections in which a military or caretaker government held the election as a means of transferring power to someone else.

<sup>8</sup> Coding reforms that occur only within a regime is conservative but allows us to ensure we are not miscounting changes made by an outgoing regime as instituted by a new regime. However, the main results are consistent if we instead code changes that occur across regimes (this alternative also significantly increases the sample size).

Because regime parties play such a critical role in influencing the shape of leader-elite relations, our independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether or not the regime party is less than ten years old — *New Party*.<sup>9</sup> Our expectation is that an established — older — regime party will have developed institutional levers by which party leaders can enforce discipline, mitigating the need for PR. Consequently, other things equal, regimes with a new party should be more likely to adopt PR.<sup>10</sup>

We use a dummy variable rather than a continuous measure of age of the regime party because our theory suggests that regimes with new parties behave differently than regimes with old parties. We should expect decreasing marginal returns from age and our theory is not designed to explain differences between parties that are, for example, twenty years old versus those that are fifty years old. Nevertheless, the results are robust to using a continuous measure for regime party age (see appendix).

Some models include additional control variables. First, we include an indicator for whether a country was a British colony at any time — *Former British Colony*. A history with British administration could affect not only the electoral system used (most former British colonies use majoritarian systems), but also elite strength via the level of political decentralization. Second, we include *Presidential*, which is equal to two if the regime is presidential, one if the regime is semi-presidential, and zero if parliamentary. Leaders of presidential regimes may find it easier to push reforms of the rules through the legislature. Third, we control for whether the election is the *First Multiparty Election* after a period of single party rule since a period of single party rule can affect the institutionalization of the party as well as

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<sup>9</sup> Coded from the year of the party's founding, using secondary sources. For parties with superficial name changes, we take the founding date of the predecessor party in contrast to parties with more substantive transformations. For parties with large organizational breaks or party mergers that resulted in substantively new parties, we take the founding date of the substantively new party.

<sup>10</sup> In the appendix, we show that our results are robust to codings of *New Party* with varying thresholds.

the ability of the leader to change the electoral system. Fourth, we include a battery of regional dummies since institutions, such as electoral systems, may diffuse across regions. Finally, we also control for the regime’s performance in the previous election with *Previous Seat Share* or *Previous Vote Share* since poor performance against the opposition (i.e., lower shares) may push leaders towards maintaining majoritarianism.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1 shows how changes towards PR are distributed across our binary indicator of party age, conditional on the previous election not using a fully proportional system. When the party is less than ten years old, 23 percent of these cases switched towards PR. When the party is more than ten years old, only 6 percent of cases did. In the appendix, we show the association between age of regime party and changes towards majoritarianism.

Table 1: Association between Age of Regime Party and Changes towards PR

|                          |   | <i>New Party</i> |              | Total         |
|--------------------------|---|------------------|--------------|---------------|
|                          |   | 0                | 1            |               |
| <i>Change Towards PR</i> | 0 | 201<br>93.93%    | 44<br>77.19% | 245<br>90.41% |
|                          | 1 | 13<br>6.07%      | 13<br>22.81% | 26<br>9.59%   |
| Total                    |   | 214<br>100%      | 57<br>100%   | 271<br>100%   |

Each cell reports the number of observations and column percentages.

Table 2 shows the effect of the (dichotomized) age of the regime party on the probability of an electoral reform towards PR. For ease of interpretation, linear probability models are presented, but the results are robust to using logistic regression. In all models, standard errors are clustered by country since observations are not independent within each country.

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<sup>11</sup> Regional and former British colony controls come from Cheibub et al. (2010) and our own coding. Unless otherwise noted, the remaining data is our own coding based on secondary sources.

Table 2: The Effect of Party Age on the Probability of a Change towards PR

|                                  | Dependent variable: <i>Change Towards PR</i> |                     |                     |                    |
|----------------------------------|--|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
|                                  | (1)  | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                |
| <i>New Party</i>                 | 0.167**<br>(0.063)                           | 0.196***<br>(0.067) | 0.232***<br>(0.075) | 0.114<br>(0.071)   |
| <i>Former British Colony</i>     |  | -0.057<br>(0.047)   | -0.056<br>(0.051)   | -0.093<br>(0.065)  |
| <i>Presidential</i>              |  | 0.014<br>(0.025)    | 0.019<br>(0.028)    | 0.016<br>(0.028)   |
| <i>First Multiparty Election</i> |  | 0.167<br>(0.102)    | 0.213*<br>(0.123)   | 0.219<br>(0.144)   |
| <i>Americas</i>                  |  | 0.039<br>(0.055)    | 0.027<br>(0.048)    | 0.046<br>(0.085)   |
| <i>Asia</i>                      |  | -0.078<br>(0.047)   | -0.058<br>(0.043)   | -0.073<br>(0.054)  |
| <i>Europe</i>                    |  | -0.018<br>(0.083)   | 0.074<br>(0.125)    | 0.516**<br>(0.204) |
| <i>Oceania</i>                   |  | -0.081**<br>(0.040) | -0.091**<br>(0.045) | -0.082*<br>(0.045) |
| <i>Previous Seat Share</i>       |  |                     | -0.0001<br>(0.001)  |                    |
| <i>Previous Vote Share</i>       |  |                     |                     | -0.001<br>(0.002)  |
| Constant                         | 0.061***<br>(0.014)                          | 0.078**<br>(0.036)  | 0.079<br>(0.077)    | 0.184*<br>(0.105)  |
| Observations                     | 271  | 271                 | 242                 | 169                |
| Clusters                         | 69   | 69                  | 66                  | 53                 |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.0536                                       | 0.1009              | 0.1303              | 0.1907             |

Notes: All models are linear probability models. Standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. Models exclude observations with a fully proportional electoral system in the previous election. In models with regional controls the excluded category is Africa. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Consistent with our theory, Table 2 shows that regimes with parties less than ten years old are between 17 and 23 percent more likely than regimes with older parties to increase the proportionality of their electoral systems. With nascent, weak party institutions that cannot fully constrain cadres, executives are more likely to use rule changes as a tool to manage them. In some specifications, regional dummies are significant: dictatorships in Oceania are more likely to maintain majoritarian rules, while those in Europe may be more likely to institute proportional rules. While the results in columns 3 and 4 indicate that the regime's previous electoral

performance matters little, we note the drastic reduction in sample size when *Previous Vote Share* is included. (The reduced sample likely accounts for the lack of significance on the *New Party* coefficient in column 4 as well.) In the appendix, we present additional results from Markov Transition models which also confirm the importance of the party's age in determining the switch to proportionality. When elites are more powerful vis-à-vis the dictator, the dictator is more likely to manipulate rules out of concern for his coalition rather than the opposition.

### **Ensuring Performance and Loyalty: The Case of Russia**

Our arguments are well illustrated by the case of Russia. At a time of high political uncertainty, President Yeltsin had hedged his bets and decreed the use of a non-compensatory mixed electoral system in October 1993. Half of the 450 Duma members were elected by party list under proportional representation while the other half were elected through single-member district plurality. Duma members later voted to retain the system in the interests of preserving their individual reelection prospects (Remington and Smith 1996). Consequently, this system was used for four Duma elections in 1993, 1995, 1999, and 2003.

During this period, both opposition and pro-government forces within the Duma were highly fragmented. The Communist Party constituted the main opposition and made its strongest showing in 1995 with 35 percent of the seats, only to see this steadily diminish to 12 percent by 2003. Between 1993 and 2002, the pro-government side of the chamber also was fractionalized, forcing the Kremlin to rely on shifting coalitions of small parties and amorphous factions of independent deputies in order to pass its legislative initiatives. Although Yeltsin sympathizers — or at least those who could sometimes be convinced to sympathize — constituted a majority in the chamber, corralling these deputies created enormous headaches for the Kremlin. Ad hoc

bargaining and unpredictable log rolls, thus, were essential features of the Kremlin's legislative strategy.

SMDP deputies were particularly difficult to control. Russian SMDP deputies defected from the position of their parliamentary group at higher rates than their party list counterparts (Kunicova and Remington 2008; Thames 2005). SMDP deputies developed personal votes such that their nomination and reelection did not depend on being in the good graces of party leaders. Moreover, many, if not most, were controlled by powerful financial-industrial groups (FIGs) and governors' political machines. As Hale (2006) argues, these regional political machines and FIGs supplied SMDP candidates with all the resources and branding they needed to secure reelection. With the support of these "party substitutes" many SMDP deputies felt little need to join a party's legislative faction and those that did join were not beholden to party leaders.

The fragmentation of the pro-presidential camp also created electoral problems. Since nominations were not centrally controlled, Yeltsin sympathizers often found themselves in competition with each other. Such coordination failures led pro-regime forces to lose races they otherwise would have won.

This situation began to change in the Third Duma (1999–2003). In 2002, a new, pro-presidential coalition emerged in the Duma. Called United Russia, the new coalition was a merger between the existing pro-presidential party, Unity, and a centrist party, Fatherland-All Russia (OVR), which had represented the interests of powerful governors in the 1999 elections. Despite the formation of this new coalition, the Kremlin's control problems were far from solved. Although members of Unity voted with the President almost 90 percent of the time, the Kremlin still found itself having to bargain on key votes with independent deputies and factions

of undependable SMDP deputies. Russia's Regions, for instance, a centrist coalition of SMDP deputies, voted with Putin just 70 percent of the time (Remington 2006).

In the 2003 State Duma elections, United Russia (UR), which had been turned into a political party, won big. Buoyed by a resurgent economy, high oil prices, and Putin's surging popularity, the party won 223 seats, just short of a majority. But it was soon able to attract a large number of independents, giving it a constitutional majority.

Although there was now a clear party-based pro-presidential majority, the problem of control lingered. Friction between former Unity and OVR members bubbled under the surface. Over a quarter of United Russia's faction had been elected as independents and 61 percent of its faction was composed of SMDP deputies, many of whom were clients of powerful and unruly regional governors. Indeed, although party unity within United Russia was high, instances of defiance came almost exclusively from SMDP deputies. Barely a year old, the institutional capacity of United Russia was limited (Reuter 2017). Thus, the Kremlin had ample reason to worry that the coalition could unravel, especially if the good times turned bad.

In this setting, the Kremlin decided to implement two centralizing reforms. Using a terrorist attack in the North Caucasus as a pretext, Putin proposed in September 2004 to eliminate the direct election of regional governors and to replace the Duma's mixed electoral system with a fully proportional one. The new electoral law, passed in 2005, stipulated that all 450 members would be elected on closed party lists in a single nationwide district.

The obvious goal of the electoral reform was maximizing control over deputies (Moraski 2007; Remington 2006). It was proposed as part of a broader set of centralizing reforms, which, according to Putin, were aimed at reducing the power of "regional clans."<sup>12</sup> As one advisor to

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<sup>12</sup> See Moraski (2007). For full interview with Putin, see "Interv'yu Vladimira Putina Rossiiskim Telekompaniyam 19 Noyabrya 2004 goda" <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=117281&tid=24881>.

Vladislav Surkov — deputy head of the presidential administration and the reform’s chief architect — later wrote: “The transition to a proportional system was conceived as a way to weaken regional leaders and strengthen the party system, with the aim of further centralizing power” (Ivanov 2008: 126).

It is also clear that the goal was not seat maximization. Monte Carlo simulations in Smyth et al. (2007) show that UR stood to gain fewer seats under PR than it would under a mixed system. The simulations also demonstrate that it was much easier to predict the total number of seats that UR would win under a PR system. As Smyth et al. conclude, the Kremlin was trading “seats for certainty” (2007: 130).

It is true that even prior to the rule change, United Russia was able to achieve a high degree of party cohesion in the Fourth Duma (2003–2007) — including over most SMDP members. But it is also clear that much of this was due to Putin’s high popularity. Deputies had strong political incentives to align themselves with the President’s new party. But the days when the Kremlin could not control its own coalition still loomed large in the rear-view mirror, and no one could be sure that those times would not return if the executive’s approval ratings fell. As Remington observes:

If the president’s future parliamentary allies enjoyed a less-than-overwhelming majority and depended on single-member district deputies for support, then the Kremlin might again have to make costly concessions to local interests... Even if the all-PR system brought more opposition members into the Duma, the president would not have to expend political capital on bargaining with SMD[P] members of the pro-presidential majority (Remington 2006: 25–26).

For party leaders, there also were concerns about making the system so dependent on the charisma and reputation of one person. In 2002, Surkov laid out this case at a meeting of UR leaders: “We need to look to 2008; we will survive until then somehow... The president may

leave (we will not stop him) and then what will happen? Some extreme left or extreme right president may come to power... We could make a mistake and not win. We can't just be on artificial respiration and an I.V. all the time.”<sup>13</sup> The change to PR was seen as a way to guarantee the loyalty of UR members and put the party on a firmer footing in both the electoral and legislative arenas.<sup>14</sup>

### **Having and Eating the Cake: Construction of the 2007 United Russia Party Lists**

The switch to PR provides autocrats with more control, but it is also a way to avoid the performance-loyalty trade-off among elites who are willing to join the regime. Because control over the nomination process under PR helps to ensure loyalty, autocrats can focus on selecting candidates who have the resources to help the regime win elections. This is our candidate selection hypothesis, and we test it using Russia — after the switch to PR in 2005 — and examining the construction of the UR party lists for the 2007 Duma election.

With future legislative loyalty ensured, the Kremlin could focus on constructing electoral lists that would attract the most votes. Under Russia's PR system votes are allocated to parties proportionally in one, nationwide district, but, in addition to fielding a national list that appears on every ballot, parties are obliged to divide their party list into regional groups (for the 2007

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in “Odinokii Paravoz” *Ekspert*, February 25, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Although not analyzed here, recent electoral reforms in Russia are also consistent with our framework. In 2014, the Kremlin changed the electoral system back to a mixed system ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections. This change makes sense in light of our argument. By 2014, UR had become well established and the independent power bases of regional elites had all but been eliminated. The Kremlin did not need to use the electoral system to ensure control and could focus instead on seat maximization, a goal it was acutely focused on after suffering a jarring dip in popularity following the 2011–12 protest wave. The regime's popularity surged after the annexation of Crimea, but cratered again in summer 2018, following an unpopular pension reform. In this setting, the regime has tested the idea of reducing the number of PR seats still further (see “Vlast' testiruyet noviye pravila vyborov d Gosdumu 2021” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. 6 February 2019). For the fall 2019 regional elections, three regions reduced the share of seats allocated by PR to less than 50 percent. In July 2019, rumors emerged that the Kremlin was considering reducing the share of PR seats in the next Stata Duma to 25 percent (see “Putin Seeks to Lock in Parliament Control” *Bloomberg*. 12 July 2019).

elections, the number was 80).<sup>15</sup> Although voters can cast only one party-level vote (i.e., they are not allowed to make preference votes for candidates as in open-list systems), the ballots contain the list of candidates for each party's respective regional group.

Under such a system, United Russia had an incentive to fill their regional lists with candidates who could help the party win. And, on average, the most desirable candidates were the former SMDP deputies. SMDP deputies had experience running in — often very competitive — elections. Additionally, they had name recognition and political connections in their districts.

The Kremlin had always wanted this type of candidate on its lists but often had difficulty recruiting them. After all, such deputies had traditionally preferred to retain their autonomy and run their own races. Even if they did join the regime party, the Kremlin and party leaders worried about their loyalty, as discussed previously. After the rule change, however, such autonomy was no longer an option. Thus, we argue that United Russia would seek to use this opportunity to bring more of these electorally strong candidates into its fold. Strong candidates were more likely to win seats, maintaining the ruling party's electoral and legislative dominance, which, in turn, would help keep these candidates within UR's fold. Consequently, we hypothesize that the Kremlin would not only seek to place incumbents on its 2007 list, but that it would prioritize placing SMDP incumbents on its list.

In order to explore this part of our argument, we utilize a dataset of all United Russia members who ran for seats in either the 2003 or 2007 Duma elections. We are able to identify whether the 2003 candidates ran as SMDP or PR candidates and every individual's placement on the 2007 federal and regional PR lists. We demonstrate that when it made the rule change to

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<sup>15</sup> The exact number and geographic composition of these groups is determined by the parties themselves. After seats are allocated to parties in the national district, parties then divide their national seat total among these regional lists in proportion to the number of votes received by the party in each regional group.

closed-list PR, the Kremlin was able to shape its 2007 PR lists to prioritize candidates who had shown their ability to win. Specifically, we show three results consistent with our argument.

*Winners' inclusion result:* For the 2007 lists, the Kremlin aimed to include the 2003 winners (SMDP or PR) as opposed to 2003 losers.

*Winners' placement result:* The Kremlin placed the 2003 winners on the top part of the lists (in comparison to new entrants).

*SMDP placement result:* Among the 2003 SMDP candidates, vote share was positively correlated with higher placement.

We discuss each of these results, in turn.

#### *Winners' inclusion result*

According to our theory, the Kremlin should aim to include those who had won in 2003 (whether in an SMDP seat or on the 2003 PR list) on their 2007 PR list at higher rates than candidates who lost their 2003 elections. Moreover, among 2003 winners, SMDP candidates should be more likely to be included on the 2007 list than PR candidates given their name recognition and electoral resources (such as established political machines). To test these implications, we construct a dichotomous indicator, *PR List 2007*, which takes a value of one if the individual is included in UR's 2007 party list and is zero otherwise. This is our dependent variable.

Using constituency-level electoral results and UR's electoral list, we construct a dichotomous variable, *Ran SMDP 2003*, which takes a value of one if the UR member ran under SMDP and zero if the individual ran under PR in 2003.<sup>16</sup> Using Reuter's (2016) Database of Russian Political Elites, we identify which of these individuals actually obtained seats in the

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<sup>16</sup> Constituency-level electoral results are from Carr (n.d.) and United Russia's 2003 PR lists are from the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (n.d.). Several candidates ran for both SMDP and PR seats in 2003; we treat them as SMDP candidates.

Duma after the election. Our binary variable, *Won 2003*, takes a value of one if the UR candidate obtained a seat in the Duma after the election and zero otherwise. By interacting these two variables, we can compare the prospects of inclusion on the 2007 PR list across four groups of 2003 candidates: SMDP winners, SMDP losers, PR winners, and PR losers.

However, there may be other things that affect both the likelihood an individual is included on the 2007 list and the likelihood they won in 2003. For this reason, we include a number of controls in the analysis. First, we add controls for past electoral success other than in the 2003 Duma elections. We include dichotomous indicators for whether the individual held elected office at the federal, regional, or local levels ever before (*Elected in Past*) or just prior to the 2003 election (*Elected Recently*). In addition, the Kremlin may have felt a need to coopt candidates with ties to the business community given their deep pockets and frequency of participation (Gehlbach et al. 2010; Szakonyi 2018). To account for this, we include dichotomous indicators for whether the individual has a background in business (*Business*) or was on the board of directors for a large firm (*Board*) just prior to the election. Finally, we include a proxy for whether or not an individual was the client of a governor. We code those deputies who worked in the regional administration of a governor as *Governor Clients*.

Table 3 shows the effect of winning in 2003 and of candidacy type on inclusion on the 2007 party list. We report linear probability models for ease of interpretation, but the results from logistic regressions are substantively similar. The results shown here include only individuals who were members of UR at the time of the 2003 election, but the results are robust to including people who switched to UR during the Fourth Duma (2003–2007).

Table 3: Effect of Winning in 2003 and Candidacy Type on Inclusion on the 2007 Party List

|                          | Dependent variable: <i>PR List 2007</i> |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                          | (1)                                     | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 | (5)                 |
| <i>Won 2003</i>          | 0.410***<br>(0.051)                     | 0.389***<br>(0.052) | 0.316***<br>(0.061) |                     |                     |
| <i>Ran SMDP 2003</i>     |   | 0.099*<br>(0.050)   | -0.091<br>(0.099)   | 0.198***<br>(0.062) | 0.193***<br>(0.062) |
| <i>Won 2003*Ran SMDP</i> |   |                     | 0.255**<br>(0.115)  |                     |                     |
| <i>Elected in Past</i>   |   |                     |                     | -0.154**<br>(0.062) |                     |
| <i>Elected Recently</i>  |   |                     |                     |                     | -0.136**<br>(0.061) |
| <i>Business</i>          |   |                     |                     | -0.096<br>(0.065)   | -0.105<br>(0.065)   |
| <i>Board</i>             |   |                     |                     | 0.116<br>(0.081)    | 0.121<br>(0.081)    |
| <i>Governor Client</i>   |   |                     |                     | -0.161*<br>(0.086)  | -0.185**<br>(0.086) |
| Constant                 | 0.213***<br>(0.042)                     | 0.191***<br>(0.043) | 0.234***<br>(0.047) | 0.674***<br>(0.060) | 0.658***<br>(0.058) |
| Observations             | 374                                     | 374                 | 374                 | 252                 | 252                 |
| R <sup>2</sup>           | 0.1478                                  | 0.1565              | 0.1677              | 0.0763              | 0.0720              |

Notes: All models are linear probability models. Standard errors in parentheses. Models 4 and 5 exclude losing 2003 candidates. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

The results from columns 1–3 show that having proven to be a winner in 2003 is clearly important for inclusion on the 2007 list. For both PR and SMDP candidates, the likelihood of being included on the 2007 PR list is higher if they have won in their respective 2003 races. The results from the interaction model in column 3 show that amongst PR candidates, winning in 2003 is associated with an increased likelihood of being included on the 2007 list of 31.6 percent. For SMDP candidates, winning a seat in 2003 is associated with a 57.1 percent (31.6 + 25.5) increase in the likelihood of being included on the 2007 list.

Among the 2003 winners, competing under SMDP is also correlated with an increased likelihood of inclusion on the list for the next election. Column 3 shows that winning SMDP candidates are substantially more likely to be included on the 2007 PR list than winning 2003 PR

candidates — amongst winners, running in an SMDP race corresponds to an increase in the likelihood of appearing on the 2007 PR list of 16.4 percent ( $-9.1 + 25.5$ ). Moreover, the results from columns 4 and 5 (comparing 2003 SMDP winners to 2003 PR winners) confirm that 2003 SMDP winners are more likely to be included on the 2007 PR list than 2003 PR winners, even controlling for other factors that may influence candidate selection for the Kremlin — past electoral success, ties to the business community, and ties to governors.<sup>17</sup> Overall, these results demonstrate that 2003 winners (and in particular, SMDP winners) were clearly being singled out for inclusion on the 2007 party lists.

#### *Winners' placement result*

Next, we investigate how winning in 2003 affects placement on the 2007 party lists. According to our theory, the Kremlin should aim, not only to include 2003 winners on the list for the subsequent election, but also to place these proven winners higher on the list than new entrants.

The 2007 party list was composed of the federal list and regional lists that vary in size from 4 to 27 positions. In order to construct a valid measure of ranking on these lists however, we need to take into account UR's practice of using *paravozy*, or the "locomotives." UR frequently places prominent officials, celebrities, and politicians on the top of its lists even though these candidates have no intention of taking seats. The placement of these candidates at the top of the list is designed to persuade as many voters as possible to vote for UR.

Any list ranking of candidates for our analysis should omit these "locomotives" since they are not real candidates to become deputies. We identify 89 of them, remove them from the

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<sup>17</sup> The control variables included in models 4 and 5 are only coded for those who won in 2003, which is why *Won 2003* and the interaction term are excluded.

sample, and construct indicators of rank that take into account this omission.<sup>18</sup> We construct two dependent variables for this analysis: *Top Half Placement* takes the value of one if the candidate was ranked in the top half of his or her respective regional list and is zero otherwise, while *Top Third Placement* is an analogous indicator for whether the candidate was included in the top third of the regional list (after excluding “locomotives”). In all models, we include only those who ran in 2007.

We take several approaches with the placement analysis. Table 4 shows the effect of winning in 2003 on placement on the 2007 party lists. In this part of the analysis, the primary variable of interest is *Won 2003*, which takes a value of one if the individual won a seat in 2003 and zero otherwise. For new entrants, this variable takes a value of zero since they did not run in 2003. We also include indicators for the type of 2003 candidacy: *Ran SMDP 2003* takes a value of one if the individual ran for a constituency seat in 2003 and zero otherwise, while *Ran PR 2003* takes a value of one if the individual ran on the 2003 PR list. For the models that include these 2003 candidacy-type variables, the excluded category is new entrants in 2007.

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<sup>18</sup> We exclude all locomotives (who could have appeared anywhere in the top three spots of a regional list) in the results shown here, but the results are similar if we exclude only locomotives in the top spot of the regional lists (there were 70 such individuals), which is a proxy for coding only governors as locomotives.

Table 4: Effect of Winning in 2003 and Candidacy Type on Placement on the 2007 Party List

|                      | Dependent variable:       |                     |                     |                            |                     |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                      | <i>Top Half Placement</i> |                     |                     | <i>Top Third Placement</i> |                     |                     |
|                      | (1)                       | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                        | (5)                 | (6)                 |
| <i>Won 2003</i>      | 0.411***<br>(0.046)       |                     | 0.265**<br>(0.134)  | 0.344***<br>(0.042)        |                     | 0.360***<br>(0.123) |
| <i>Ran SMDP 2003</i> |                           | 0.406***<br>(0.058) | 0.155<br>(0.140)    |                            | 0.332***<br>(0.053) | -0.011<br>(0.128)   |
| <i>Ran PR 2003</i>   |                           | 0.384***<br>(0.059) | 0.151<br>(0.132)    |                            | 0.292***<br>(0.055) | -0.025<br>(0.121)   |
| Constant             | 0.316***<br>(0.026)       | 0.310***<br>(0.026) | 0.310***<br>(0.026) | 0.173***<br>(0.023)        | 0.174***<br>(0.024) | 0.174***<br>(0.024) |
| Observations         | 466                       | 466                 | 466                 | 466                        | 466                 | 466                 |
| R <sup>2</sup>       | 0.1460                    | 0.1414              | 0.1485              | 0.1252                     | 0.1091              | 0.1253              |

Notes: All models are linear probability models. Standard errors in parentheses. All models include only those who ran in 2007 and exclude all locomotives. For models 2, 3, 5, and 6 the excluded category is new entrants in 2007. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

The results in Table 4 demonstrate that winning in 2003 is correlated with a higher likelihood of placement in the top half or top third of the 2007 list, even controlling for candidacy type. We further explore these results in Table 5. Here, we create indicators for every type of candidate on the 2007 lists. *SMDP Winner 2003* takes a value of one if the individual ran in a constituency seat in 2003 and won and is zero otherwise, while *SMDP Loser 2003*, takes a value of one if the individual ran in a constituency seat in 2003 and lost. *PR Winner 2003* and *PR Loser 2003* are coded analogously for those who ran on the PR list in 2003. Thus, in these models, the excluded category is 2007 new entrant.

Table 5: Effect of 2003 Candidacy Type and Outcome on Placement on the 2007 Party List

|                         | Dependent Variable:       |                            |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
|                         | <i>Top Half Placement</i> | <i>Top Third Placement</i> |
|                         | (1)                       | (2)                        |
| <i>SMDP Winner 2003</i> | 0.623***<br>(0.182)       | 0.758***<br>(0.162)        |
| <i>SMDP Loser 2003</i>  | 0.353*<br>(0.191)         | 0.194<br>(0.170)           |
| <i>PR Winner 2003</i>   | 0.388***<br>(0.061)       | 0.326***<br>(0.055)        |
| <i>PR Loser 2003</i>    | -0.018<br>(0.156)         | -0.086<br>(0.139)          |
| Constant                | 0.351***<br>(0.024)       | 0.197***<br>(0.022)        |
| Observations            | 466                       | 466                        |
| R <sup>2</sup>          | 0.1404                    | 0.1608                     |

Notes: All models are linear probability models. Standard errors in parentheses. All models include only those who ran in 2007 and exclude all locomotives. The excluded category is 2007 new entrant. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Again, the results in Table 5 confirm that winning in 2003 is associated with a higher likelihood of favorable placement on the 2007 list relative to new entrants. However, we also see that those who won a constituency seat in 2003 are more likely than those who won a PR seat in 2003 to be included on the list.

#### *SMD placement result*

Finally, we examine how vote share in the 2003 constituency races affected placement on the 2007 party list. Our theory suggests that higher vote shares in the 2003 SMDP races should be associated with higher placement on the 2007 list. For this analysis, we therefore use the same dependent variables (*Top Half Placement* and *Top Third Placement*) from the previous analyses. Our main independent variable of interest is *Vote Share 2003*. However, the effect of vote share may be contingent on a number of other factors. Most obviously, whether or not a candidate won in 2003 is related to both vote share and placement on the 2007 list. Therefore, we include as a

control an indicator for whether or not the individual won their constituency race, *Won 2003*.

Additionally, the effect of vote share on placement could be contingent on how competitive the constituency race was in 2003. Thus, we include a control for the number of other candidates that an individual faced in 2003 (*# Other Candidates*). Finally, we include a control that captures the importance of the constituency in which a candidate ran — the number of voters in that constituency, standardized (*Standardized # Voters*).

The results are shown in Table 6. Once again, we use linear probability models for ease of interpretation and exclude all “locomotives”, but the results are similar using logistic regression or excluding only the “locomotives” in the top spot on the regional lists. Additionally, we limit the sample to those who ran for a constituency seat in 2003 and ran on the PR list in 2007.

Table 6: Effect of 2003 SMDP Vote Share on Placement on the 2007 Party List

|                              | Dependent variable:       |                    |                    |                            |                    |                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                              | <i>Top Half Placement</i> |                    |                    | <i>Top Third Placement</i> |                    |                     |
|                              | (1)                       | (2)                | (3)                | (4)                        | (5)                | (6)                 |
| <i>Vote Share 2003</i>       | 0.008**<br>(0.003)        | 0.008**<br>(0.003) | 0.008*<br>(0.004)  | 0.010***<br>(0.004)        | 0.010**<br>(0.004) | 0.013***<br>(0.004) |
| <i>Won 2003</i>              |                           | -0.168<br>(0.226)  | -0.169<br>(0.229)  |                            | 0.085<br>(0.264)   | 0.112<br>(0.262)    |
| <i># Other Candidates</i>    |                           |                    | -0.011<br>(0.020)  |                            |                    | 0.042*<br>(0.022)   |
| <i>Standardized # Voters</i> |                           |                    | 0.023<br>(0.062)   |                            |                    | 0.039<br>(0.071)    |
| Constant                     | 0.452***<br>(0.141)       | 0.576**<br>(0.218) | 0.685**<br>(0.321) | 0.111<br>(0.165)           | 0.048<br>(0.256)   | -0.455<br>(0.368)   |
| Observations                 | 73                        | 73                 | 73                 | 73                         | 73                 | 73                  |
| R <sup>2</sup>               | 0.0739                    | 0.0812             | 0.0883             | 0.0957                     | 0.0970             | 0.1420              |

Notes: All models are linear probability models. Standard errors in parentheses. All models include only those who ran in 2007 and exclude all locomotives. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Table 6 shows that, consistent with our theory, vote share in the 2003 SMDP races is positively correlated with placement in the top half or top third of the 2007 list across all specifications. A 1 percent increase in vote share is associated with an increase in the likelihood of favorable placement between 0.8 and 1.3 percent. Given that the vote share variable ranges from 2.8 to 82.5 percent, favorable placement for some candidates was near certainty.

## **Conclusion**

Legislative elections require the executive in autocracies to juggle a number of tasks. They must maximize their seat share for which a majoritarian electoral system may be useful. But they also must build and manage a dependable coalition of party members who can win elections — with resources, name recognition, and effort — yet still be loyal to the executive’s legislative agenda once they win office. Proportional systems are better suited to accomplishing this goal. What problem will autocrats focus on solving and hence, what electoral system will they choose? We argue that when facing unruly elites, leaders will use whatever means are at their disposal to bring discipline to their coalition. This makes PR a more likely choice when the regime party is new and thus when elite strength vis-à-vis the leader is high.

Proportional systems not only help in managing party members, but they also allow leaders to evade loyalty-performance trade-offs among their agents. Centralized control over the nomination process ensures loyalty among legislative party members, enabling leaders to focus on recruiting candidates who can best help them win elections. In the end, PR is useful in building a strong regime party with members who are capable of winning elections, but still legislatively compliant.

Cross-national comparisons as well as a closer look at the case of Russia support these arguments. But the 2005 switch to a proportional system in Russia also shows that the choice of electoral systems is just one of several institutional strategies within an autocrat's arsenal to tame the power of elites within his coalition. The very act of building a regime party was designed to constrain elites, as was the decision to change the selection of regional governors from election to appointment. While we have focused on the causes and effects of a specific rule, we recognize that institutions come in bundles, giving leaders an incentive to change many of them at one time. Nevertheless, we highlight this little-recognized motive for adopting PR and the fact that parchment rules still play an important role in regimes where brute force governs politics.

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## Appendix

This appendix provides some supplemental details and statistical analyses referenced in the main text. First, we provide descriptive statistics for the variables included in the cross-national analysis. These statistics are shown in Table A1.

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics — Cross-national Data

| Variable                           | Obs. | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min.  | Max. |
|------------------------------------|------|--------|-----------|-------|------|
| <i>Change Towards PR</i>           | 361  | 0.072  | 0.259     | 0     | 1    |
| <i>Change Towards Majoritarian</i> | 361  | 0.025  | 0.156     | 0     | 1    |
| <i>New Party</i>                   | 438  | 0.283  | 0.451     | 0     | 1    |
| <i>Party Age</i>                   | 438  | 27.733 | 24.293    | 1     | 122  |
| <i>Former British Colony</i>       | 438  | 0.304  | 0.460     | 0     | 1    |
| <i>Presidential</i>                | 438  | 0.477  | 0.776     | 0     | 2    |
| <i>First Multiparty Election</i>   | 438  | 0.064  | 0.245     | 0     | 1    |
| <i>Previous Seat Share</i>         | 350  | 69.493 | 23.386    | 2.762 | 100  |
| <i>Previous Vote Share</i>         | 261  | 63.304 | 21.405    | 14.3  | 100  |

The main cross-national results presented in Table 2 in the paper use *Change Towards PR* as the dependent variable. Here, we also consider *Change Towards Majoritarianism*, which is coded as one if the electoral system was changed to increase the majoritarian nature of the system (changes from proportional to mixed, proportional to majoritarian, or mixed to majoritarian) and is zero otherwise.

Table A2 is analogous to Table 1 in the paper. It shows how changes towards majoritarianism are distributed across our binary indicator of party age. The sample consists of autocratic election years where the previous election was held under PR or a mixed system. Although the data on majoritarian changes is sparser, the pattern of changes is highly consistent with our theory. Of the nine majoritarian changes that have occurred, only one occurred when the regime party was newly formed. The other eight occurred under established regime parties.

With so few observations, we omit statistical analyses (analogous to those in Table 2 in the paper) regressing *Change Towards Majoritarianism* on *New Party*. While the direction of the effect is consistent with our theory, the coefficients are not statistically significant given the small sample size.<sup>19</sup>

Table A2: Association between Age of Regime Party and Changes towards Majoritarianism

|                                       |   | <i>New Party</i> |              | Total         |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------|--------------|---------------|
|                                       |   | 0                | 1            |               |
| <i>Change Towards Majoritarianism</i> | 0 | 110<br>93.22%    | 32<br>96.97% | 142<br>94.04% |
|                                       | 1 | 8<br>6.78%       | 1<br>3.03%   | 9<br>5.96%    |
| Total                                 |   | 118<br>100%      | 33<br>100%   | 151<br>100%   |

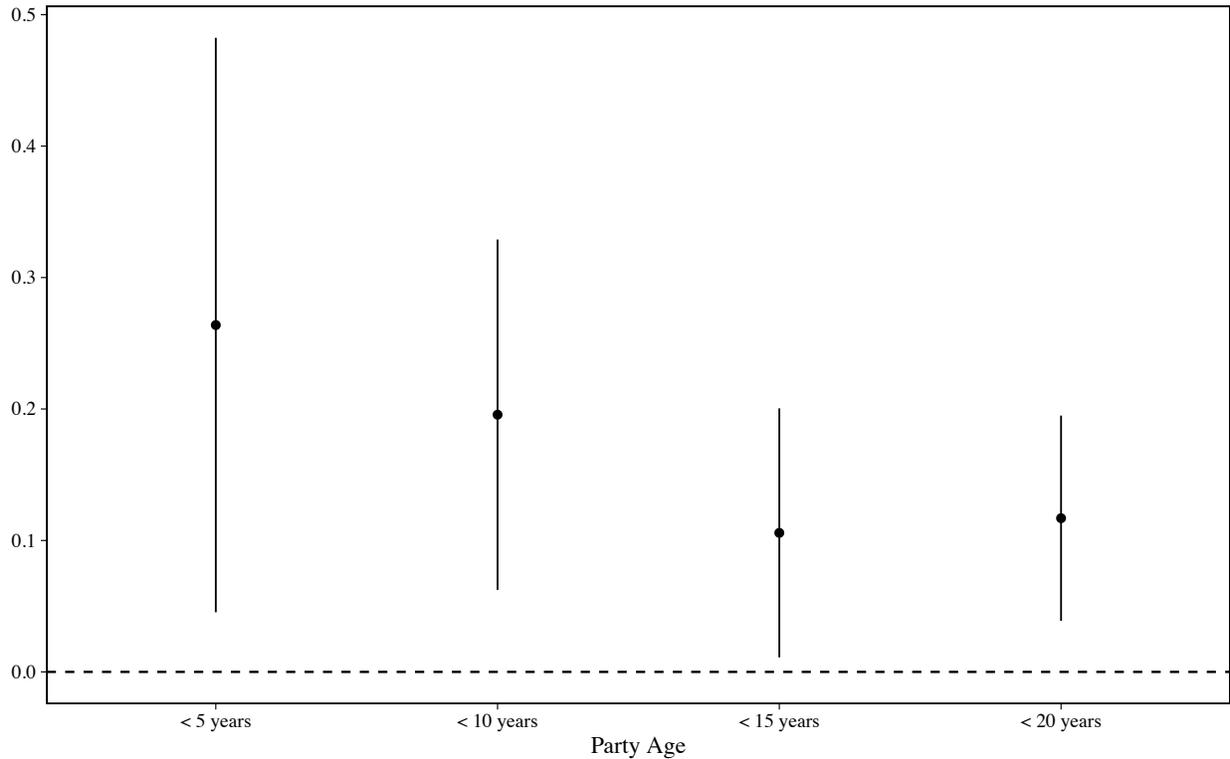
Each cell reports the number of observations and column percentages.

The main results in Table 2 of the paper use a dichotomous version of *New Party* that is one if the party is less than 10 years old and zero otherwise. In Figure A1, we display point estimates and confidence intervals of additional models to demonstrate that the results are similar using other reasonable cut-points to identify new parties. The results are not sensitive to our coding of *New Party* — in each case, new parties are associated with an increased likelihood of a change towards proportional representation.

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<sup>19</sup> Results available upon request.

Figure A1: Point Estimates and Confidence Intervals for *New Party* with Varying Cut-points



Results from linear probability models regressing *Change Towards PR* on *New Party* for various cut-points with main controls (excluding previous seat/vote share). 95% confidence intervals shown. Standard errors are clustered by country and models exclude observations for which the previous election used a fully proportional system.

Table A3 shows results that are analogous to Table 2 in the paper, but we replace the dichotomous *New Party* variable with a continuous measure of *Party Age*. Crucially, the interpretation of *Party Age* is different — unlike with *New Party*, a negative coefficient on *Party Age* supports our theory that new parties are more likely to change their electoral systems towards PR. Consistent with the main results in Table 2, Table A3 indicates that *Party Age* is negatively correlated with the probability of a change towards PR, as expected.

Table A3: The Effect of Party Age (Continuous) on the Probability of a Change towards PR

|                                  | Dependent variable: <i>Change Towards PR</i> |          |         |          |
|----------------------------------|--|----------|---------|----------|
|                                  | (1)  | (2)      | (3)     | (4)      |
| <i>Party Age</i>                 | -0.001*                                      | -0.002** | -0.002* | -0.001   |
|                                  | (0.001)                                      | (0.001)  | (0.001) | (0.001)  |
| <i>Former British Colony</i>     |  | -0.063   | -0.054  | -0.093   |
|                                  |  | (0.048)  | (0.051) | (0.063)  |
| <i>Presidential</i>              |  | -0.002   | -0.003  | 0.006    |
|                                  |  | (0.023)  | (0.026) | (0.026)  |
| <i>First Multiparty Election</i> |  | 0.137    | 0.211   | 0.209    |
|                                  |  | (0.102)  | (0.127) | (0.144)  |
| <i>Americas</i>                  |  | 0.049    | 0.050   | 0.053    |
|                                  |  | (0.066)  | (0.063) | (0.096)  |
| <i>Asia</i>                      |  | -0.041   | -0.015  | -0.061   |
|                                  |  | (0.045)  | (0.042) | (0.054)  |
| <i>Europe</i>                    |  | 0.008    | 0.093   | 0.565*** |
|                                  |  | (0.101)  | (0.156) | (0.207)  |
| <i>Oceania</i>                   |  | -0.079** | -0.085* | -0.087   |
|                                  |  | (0.038)  | (0.044) | (0.053)  |
| <i>Previous Seat Share</i>       |  |          | -0.001  |          |
|                                  |  |          | (0.001) |          |
| <i>Previous Vote Share</i>       |  |          |         | -0.002   |
|                                  |  |          |         | (0.002)  |
| Constant                         | 0.143***                                     | 0.178*** | 0.212** | 0.259**  |
|                                  | (0.039)                                      | (0.058)  | (0.096) | (0.117)  |
| Observations                     | 271  | 271      | 242     | 169      |
| Clusters                         | 69   | 69       | 66      | 53       |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.0145                                       | 0.0605   | 0.0739  | 0.1786   |

Notes: All models are linear probability models. Standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. Models exclude regimes with a fully proportional electoral system in the previous election. In models with regional controls the excluded category is Africa. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Table A4 shows the results of Markov Transition models in which the dependent variable is *Electoral System*, coded 3 if proportional, 2 if mixed, and 1 if majoritarian. Because institutions are sticky, *Lagged Electoral System* is a significant determinant of the current year's rules. The results also show that no matter what electoral rules existed in the previous year (assuming that it summarizes the institutional history), having a nascent party increases the likelihood of a proportional system.

Table A4: Markov Transition Models

|                                    | Dependent variable: <i>Electoral System</i> |                     |                     |                     |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                                    | (1)   | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 |
| <i>New Party</i>                   | 0.418**<br>(0.172)                          | 0.461***<br>(0.170) | 0.561***<br>(0.196) | 0.304<br>(0.191)    |
| <i>Lagged Electoral System</i>     | 0.917***<br>(0.022)                         | 0.882***<br>(0.030) | 0.890***<br>(0.031) | 0.834***<br>(0.050) |
| <i>New Party * Lag. Elec. Sys.</i> | -0.125*<br>(0.066)                          | -0.143**<br>(0.066) | -0.176**<br>(0.073) | -0.095<br>(0.078)   |
| <i>Former British Colony</i>       |   | -0.084<br>(0.060)   | -0.075<br>(0.063)   | -0.151<br>(0.093)   |
| <i>Presidential</i>                |   | 0.013<br>(0.033)    | 0.017<br>(0.036)    | 0.007<br>(0.043)    |
| <i>First Multiparty Election</i>   |   | 0.101<br>(0.122)    | 0.145<br>(0.156)    | 0.122<br>(0.170)    |
| <i>Americas</i>                    |   | 0.096<br>(0.064)    | 0.074<br>(0.053)    | 0.087<br>(0.084)    |
| <i>Asia</i>                        |   | -0.113*<br>(0.065)  | -0.095<br>(0.062)   | -0.108<br>(0.081)   |
| <i>Europe</i>                      |   | 0.034<br>(0.100)    | 0.089<br>(0.111)    | 0.274**<br>(0.109)  |
| <i>Oceania</i>                     |   | -0.123**<br>(0.059) | -0.139**<br>(0.067) | -0.124*<br>(0.067)  |
| <i>Previous Seat Share</i>         |   |                     | -0.0002<br>(0.001)  |                     |
| <i>Previous Vote Share</i>         |   |                     |                     | -0.001<br>(0.001)   |
| Constant                           | 0.169***<br>(0.045)                         | 0.246***<br>(0.072) | 0.236*<br>(0.125)   | 0.434**<br>(0.169)  |
| Observations                       | 361   | 361                 | 329                 | 246                 |
| Clusters                           | 90  | 90                  | 86                  | 68                  |
| R <sup>2</sup>                     | 0.7877                                      | 0.7974              | 0.8139              | 0.8036              |

Notes: Standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. In models with regional controls the excluded category is Africa. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Finally, Table A5 presents descriptive statistics for the variables used in the Russia analysis. Note that due to differences in the relevant samples for the different analyses, some results in the paper use slightly different versions of these variables (see the table notes).

Figure A5: Descriptive Statistics — Russia Data

| Variable                         | Obs. | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min.   | Max.  |
|----------------------------------|------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|
| <i>PR List 2007</i>              | 826  | 0.729  | 0.445     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Top Half Placement</i>        | 826  | 0.393  | 0.489     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Top Third Placement</i>       | 826  | 0.291  | 0.454     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Won 2003*</i>                 | 826  | 0.403  | 0.491     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Ran SMDP 2003<sup>†</sup></i> | 826  | 0.266  | 0.442     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Ran PR 2003</i>               | 826  | 0.285  | 0.451     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>SMDP Winner 2003</i>          | 826  | 0.039  | 0.193     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>SMDP Loser 2003</i>           | 826  | 0.038  | 0.190     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>PR Winner 2003</i>            | 826  | 0.174  | 0.380     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>PR Loser 2003</i>             | 826  | 0.153  | 0.360     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Vote Share 2003</i>           | 212  | 39.008 | 16.555    | 2.8    | 82.5  |
| <i>Elected in Past</i>           | 413  | 0.717  | 0.451     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Elected Recently</i>          | 388  | 0.601  | 0.490     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Business</i>                  | 426  | 0.589  | 0.491     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Board</i>                     | 367  | 0.270  | 0.444     | 0      | 1     |
| <i>Governor Client</i>           | 826  | 0.059  | 0.236     | 0      | 1     |
| <i># Other Candidates</i>        | 212  | 7.467  | 2.837     | 1      | 19    |
| <i>Standardized # Voters</i>     | 212  | 0      | 1         | -3.979 | 2.429 |

Notes: \*This version of the variable is used in Table 4 of the paper (a slightly different version is used for Tables 3 and 6). <sup>†</sup>This version of the variable is used in Table 4 of the paper (a slightly different version is used for Table 3).