



When Elections Subvert Authoritarianism Failed Cooptation and Russian Post-Electoral Protests of 2011-12

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Abstract

Despite the overwhelming control maintained over representative institutions in non-democratic political regimes, some elections and referendums seem to have gotten out of hand. The wave of “color revolutions” (Serbia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan), the referendum failure (Chile), and ruptures within dominant-party systems (PRI in Mexico, KMT in Taiwan) are striking instances of the unintended or unanticipated consequences of “authoritarian” institutions. I endeavor to turn this query into my research question, which may be formulated as follows: when do elections support autocratic rule and when do they play the role of “subversive institution”? When and why does the incumbent turn out to be unable to control the political situation? In my research I would like to look into the conditions under which institutions play a supportive role and under which they produce anti-hegemonic outcomes.

I argue that there is room for further analysis of the “stabilizing versus subversive” conditions as there is still considerable variation in the outcomes among the regimes that are institutionally able to have electoral competition, even while they are “unfree” and are systematically violated. Figure 1 represents the variation of the rate of electoral failure in 321 competitive legislative and executive elections across 71 non-democratic regimes in 21 years. Out of 188 legislative elections, 22 were unambiguously lost by the incumbent’s party; the rate of electoral failure among the executive elections is almost the same – 29 out of 142. Excluding closed authoritarian regimes, hybrid and electoral democracies, there is still a significant variation in electoral outcomes. This variation cannot be attributed solely to the type of political regime or the level of competition; rather, other factors must be at play.



Jury: Prof Hanspeter Kriesi (EUI), Margarita Zavadskaya (EUI), Prof Alexander H. Trechsel (University of Lucerne/EUI, supervisor), Prof Luciano Bardi (EUI), Prof Jennifer Gandhi (Emory University – by videoconference), Prof Grigorii V. Golosov (European University at Saint Petersburg – external supervisor, by videoconference)

Bio

Margarita Zavadskaya is currently a lecturer at the European University in Saint Petersburg, Department of Political Science and Sociology, where she teaches seminars on Comparative Political Economy and Introduction to Quantitative methods for graduate students. Margarita earned her MA degree *Summa Cum Laude* from the European University at St. Petersburg and University of Helsinki (2009). She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Sydney (2014) where she served as Research Assistant for the Electoral Integrity Project (Harvard University, Director – Prof. P. Norris).

From 2014 Margarita acts as coordinator of the Russian sub-national expert surveys in collaboration with [Electoral Integrity Project \(Harvard and Sydney Universities\)](#). From 2016 she will be coordinating the 7th wave of the World Values Survey (Russia).