

Faking Turnout, Not Loyalty: How the Hidden Demobilization of the Citizenry Helped Russia's Electoral Autocracy Maintain Dominance at the Polls¹

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Abstract

It is commonly assumed that most people living in autocracies fake their loyalty to the regime. Contrary to this conventional view, this article claims that the most prevalent and consequential form of preference falsification in today's electoral autocracies may be turnout over-reporting. Using data from the 2012 Russian Election Study, the article shows that the highly lopsided elections in these regimes naturally discourage citizens – including regime sympathizers – from voting. But this demobilization of the electorate occurs covertly, because non-voters have strong incentives to falsely claim they have cast a ballot. Thus, the most reliable voters in these settings come from constituencies pressured by the regime to mobilize in its support. Analyzing a unique set of list experiments, the article shows that the hidden demobilization of Russia's electorate helped Vladimir Putin to secure a landslide victory in the 2012 presidential election, despite the unprecedented protest wave that preceded it.

Keywords: Preference Falsification, Electoral Authoritarianism, Turnout, Demobilization, Russia

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A key assumption in the study of authoritarianism is that people most frequently lie about their support for the ruling regime (Havel and Keane 1985; Kuran 1991; Wintrobe 2007). Though never systematically tested, this expectation became ingrained during the decades-long focus on totalitarian regimes, which resorted to extreme measures to coerce their citizens into complete obedience (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965). This assumption has a clear intuitive appeal: as disloyal individuals could hardly survive, let alone thrive in totalitarian dictatorships, even the regime's enemies had to pretend they supported the system.

But is this the case in today's far less imposing authoritarian regimes? Unlike the all-controlling totalitarian dictatorships, contemporary autocracies primarily stay in power by *demobilizing* their populations (Linz 2000). They sustain minimal "winning coalitions" (de Mesquita et al. 2003) and strive to keep the rest of society apathetic and removed from politics. Electoral autocracies – the most widespread and persistent form of non-democracy today (Schedler 2013) – are the prime example. For the most part, these regimes seek to manipulate people's political participation, not their loyalties. They use clientelistic inducements and coercion to push their "winning coalition" constituencies to turn out to vote. And they discourage dissatisfied citizens from doing so by preventing viable opposition alternatives from emerging, and by projecting an image of electoral invincibility (Magaloni 2006).

But despite its appeal and significance, the demobilization theory of electoral authoritarianism has never been directly validated with public opinion data. A key reason for this is preference falsification. This article claims that the incentives and pressures created by the demobilization strategy of electoral autocracies make citizens of these regimes inclined to lie about their turnout more than about their loyalty to the regime. The logic is simple: only people with oppositional preferences have incentives to falsify their vote choices, while everyone, including regime supporters, is prone to falsify his or her turnout – to abstain from voting while claiming to have

cast a ballot. This is because electoral outcomes in autocracies appear predetermined, discouraging their supporters, opponents and other citizens from investing the time and energy to vote. Electoral authoritarianism, as Schedler (2013, 107) shrewdly characterized it, “is a system in which opposition parties lose elections.” In such circumstances, only individuals who are cajoled to vote with clientelism, coercion and propaganda and other pressures have strong motives to cast a ballot.

I test these propositions with data from the 2012 Russia Election Study (RES) survey, which was carried out after the 2012 Presidential elections in Russia. The key advantage of this survey is that it contains a set of list experiments that allow respondents to provide anonymous answers on sensitive voting behaviors. Using list experiment data and direct survey questions from the RES survey, I compare the extent to which Russian survey respondents falsely reported their turnout in the 2012 presidential elections and their support for the regime candidate Vladimir Putin. I also estimate the key predictors of these behaviors and their political impact by performing multivariate analyses with the list experiment estimates.

Two additional reasons make the 2012 RES survey uniquely suited for this analysis. First, Russia under the reign of Vladimir Putin has been one of the most robust, genuinely popular (Frye, Gehlbach, and Marquardt 2016) and influential electoral autocracies, which others have sought to emulate (see e.g. Caryl (2015)) For this reason, behavioral patterns observed in Russia could be more broadly generalizable to other cases. Second, the Russian popular attitudes captured in the 2012 RES survey were shaped by a protest wave that posed an unprecedented challenge to the Putin regime. Spurred by mounting popular dissatisfaction with the stagnation and corruption of the system that Putin established, as well as Putin’s brazen decision to return to the presidency after serving the constitutionally-mandated two terms, hundreds of thousands of Russian citizens joined mass protests after the highly fraudulent Parliamentary elections in December 2011 (Dmitriev 2015). Not only was the scale of this protest unseen since before the Soviet Collapse in

1991, but it seemed to erode Putin's previously unwavering popularity – just as he was campaigning for his controversial return to the presidency (Treisman 2014). Exploring the patterns of turnout and turnout falsification at this point of maximum strain for the Putin regime offers a unique opportunity to identify the most important levers with which it maintained control over society – in particular, the extent to which it depends on the demobilization of important strata of society.

This article proceeds in five parts. The next section briefly recounts the relevant findings in the literature on electoral turnout and preference falsification in democracies and autocracies. In the third and fourth sections of the paper, I develop the theoretical framework and discuss the data and methods used to test its propositions empirically. The fifth section presents the results from the empirical analysis and discusses their implications.

The Determinants of Turnout and Turnout Misreporting in Democracies and Autocracies

The study of electoral turnout has been defined by two fundamental puzzles: (1) why people ever bother to vote; and (2) why so many individuals lie they have voted? In particular, the literature has long struggled to explain what motivates people to cast a ballot, given the infinitesimal chances that a person's vote will affect the electoral outcome, and that the voter would receive benefits outweighing her costs of casting a ballot (for a review, see Feddersen (2004)). On the most basic level, researchers have found that voter turnout has closely correlated with age, gender, income levels and education – variables that determine the resources and constraints motivating individuals to vote (Smets and van Ham 2013). Another core finding has been that members of partisan and interest groups and constituencies invested in the election outcome tend

to vote at a greater rate than other citizens (see e.g. Abramson and Aldrich (1982) and Coate and Conlin (2004)). Studies have also found that citizens of democracies turn out to vote because they enjoy a “consumption benefit” from voting, fulfilling a sense of civic duty (Blais 2000). Conversely, not performing one’s civic duty of voting can lead to censure, creating social pressures to vote (Noelle-Neumann 1984).

The second major issue plaguing the study of electoral turnout in democracies has been the pronounced tendency to over-report voting. Studies that directly cross-validate survey responses with lists of registered voters have found that between 10 and 40 percent of survey respondents in democracies have falsely claimed they voted (Karp and Brockington 2005; Selb and Munzert 2013; Silver, Anderson, and Abramson 1986). Holbrook and Krosnick (2010) obtain similar results using list experiments.

The questions of why people vote and why they lie when they do not are both more puzzling and more consequential in authoritarian regimes. Electoral autocracies maintain power by manipulating elections (Schedler 2006), but they do this most effectively when oppositional constituencies, and societies at large, are demobilized and apathetic (Linz 2000), and the actual voter turnout is relatively low (Myagkov, Ordeshook, and Shakin 2009). As result, most electoral autocracies that have collapsed have done so when significant numbers of previously demobilized citizens become motivated to turn out and vote and protest against the incumbents (Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Lindberg 2009; Tucker 2007).

Despite this apparent significance of genuine electoral turnout in autocracies, the literature has paid relatively little attention to this phenomenon. In particular, it has not studied this issue with methods and data that account for turnout falsification. This approach has produced two contradictory sets of findings. On one hand, electoral studies relying on direct survey questions about turnout in autocracies have found it has been driven by the same demographic factors and

attitudes as in democracies: older age, higher education and income, religiosity, the sense of civic duty, beliefs that voting makes a difference, party loyalties, trust in the institutions of the system, and willingness to protest against it (Booth and Seligson 2009; Lawson and Klesner 2004; White and Feklyunina 2011).

But on the other hand, studies of clientelism, repression and propaganda have shown that the effects of these demographic factors and political beliefs on turnout are heavily distorted in electoral autocracies. For instance, it is well-established that electoral authoritarian regimes disproportionately target poor, less educated voters with clientelistic inducements and outright vote buying, inducing them to vote in disproportionately greater numbers than in democracies (Blaydes 2006; Çarkoğuglu and Aytaç 2015; Magaloni 2006). Such manipulative tactics also distort the voting inclinations of various partisan groups. In particular, electoral autocracies seek to actively discourage turnout among large opposition-minded constituencies by winning extraordinary electoral margins to create a sense that voting for the opposition is futile (Magaloni 2006). Paradoxically, these machinations decrease the incentives to vote voluntarily not just for opposition supporters, but also among regime sympathizers, who stay home as they become convinced that the incumbent will win anyway. As result, most of the vote buying in hybrid regimes may in fact be turnout buying, aimed to stimulate “lazy” or alienated regime supporters and “persuadable” others to vote (Nichter 2008).

These pressures create a major inferential problem for studying political participation in electoral autocracies. They not only alter the turnout of large constituencies, but that they also encourage these groups to misreport they have voted. Thus, if left unaccounted for, these preference falsifications may lead us to grossly overestimate actual turnout levels in electoral autocracies, and misunderstand the true purpose and effectiveness of the manipulative tactics used

by these regimes. More broadly, we cannot validate the demobilization theory of electoral autocracy if we do not adjust for turnout misreporting.

Turnout and Turnout Misreporting in Electoral Autocracies: A Theoretical Framework

The Scope of Turnout Misreporting

We assume that people living in dictatorships most commonly lie about their allegiance to the regime because this seems to be the area where they face the greatest pressure. The classical understanding of autocracy, on which we rely on almost unconsciously, defines it as a system that uses repression to ensure the loyalty of its citizens (Wintrobe 2007). From this perspective, it is only natural to expect that ordinary people most readily feign allegiance to these regimes.

A more nuanced view of contemporary authoritarian rule, however, argues that such regimes are most concerned about shaping their citizens' political participation, not their loyalty (Linz 2000). There is a practical reason for this: persuading nearly everyone to endorse a non-democratic regime is incredibly costly and difficult to sustain over the long run. But if a sufficient number of people can be swayed to support the regime, and if enough can be deterred from opposing it, authoritarian rule can be maintained with far less repression. Indeed, authoritarianism can be maintained by winning elections, as demonstrated by the spread of electoral autocracies since the end of the Cold War.

The demobilization theory of authoritarianism therefore implies a very different pattern of preference falsification. In particular, citizens of electoral autocracies should be more likely to misreport their turnout than their loyalty to the regime. There is one core reason for this: if the

population as a whole is demobilized, electoral autocracies should only pressure a portion of it to display loyalty: their “winning coalition” of core sympathizers and more easily “persuadable” others. On the other hand, *everyone* living in these regimes is pressured to alter their turnout preferences. Supporters are goaded to vote and opponents are discouraged from doing so. Because turnout pressure is the most wide-ranging, turnout falsification should be too.

And the reasons for lying about one’s electoral participation in these regimes do not end there. Voters in electoral autocracies are also susceptible to the standard incentives to falsely report turnout that we observe in democracies: norms of participation and civic duty, group loyalties, and so on. Adding up all of these various motives suggest that turnout falsification should be the most misreported behavior in electoral autocracies. These arguments can be summarized in the following hypothesis:

H1: Voting turnout is the most misreported behavior in electoral autocracies as such regimes apply the greatest pressure in this area.

The Drivers of Turnout and Turnout Misreporting in Electoral Autocracies

For autocracies, preference falsification is doubly dangerous: it may not only diminish the regime’s popular support, but could also do so surreptitiously, potentially blindsiding dictators and overwhelming their capacity to respond. This issue is so threatening for electoral autocracies, that, as Kalinin (2017) shows, the vote fraud these regimes commit is to a large extent used to compensate for the estimated preference falsification in surveys.

From the standpoint of the demobilization theory of authoritarian survival, the most subversive “betrayals” in this sense do not involve people who change their voting preferences: say, groups that were previously loyal to the regime but suddenly turn against it. Instead, the biggest surprises

occur when constituencies with well-established leanings unexpectedly mobilize (or demobilize) to cast a ballot. Electoral autocracies are caught unawares when unenthusiastic regime supporters stay home on election day, thinking the incumbent will prevail anyway. These regimes are challenged when their previously demoralized opponents became emboldened to cast ballots for “anyone but the incumbent,”² and when the vast mass of apolitical independents suddenly decide to register their protest by doing the same. None of these constituencies expect (or wish) to depose the regime with their actions. Yet, the accumulation of their small acts of defiance can expose the regimes’ weakness, and initiate a cascade of further mobilization against it (Lohmann 1994; Scott 1990, 192).

This suggests a different model of rebellions in autocracies from than one originally proposed by Kuran (1991). The revolutionary bandwagons that topple these regimes arise not when many individuals reveal their dislike of the regime. They do so when constituencies with long-standing grievances suddenly mobilize against their authoritarian masters, while regime sympathizers become reluctant to support them. To prevent such scenarios, autocracies must primarily be able to manipulate people’s mobilization, not their loyalties.

This dynamic creates two contradictory imperatives for electoral autocracies. On one hand, to avoid electoral surprises and revolutionary bandwagons, these regimes must, keep their societies as apathetic and demobilized as possible. On the other hand, they must also rally enough voters to credibly signal they are backed by the majority of the population (Simpser 2013, 185). This is the

² In Russia’s 2011 parliament election, this sort of call to vote for anyone but the regime party (branded as the “party of swindlers and thieves” by the opposition) mobilized a significant pro-opposition vote, and greatly diminished the winning margin of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party (Gel’man 2015, 118).

key reason why, I argue, autocracies must rely on coercion to mobilize electoral support. As result, these should be a clear pattern of turnout in electoral autocracies: the most reliable voters in these regimes will be disproportionately drawn from constituencies that are most exposed to authoritarian tactics like clientelism, propaganda and repression.

In Russian case, which is the main empirical focus of this paper, workers in state-dependent enterprises have been the most common target of such pressures (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014). The Kremlin has used similar clientelistic tactics and paternalistic appeals to cajole other large and vulnerable voting groups, dependent on state support – pensioners, farmers, students, residents of smaller communities and the like (see Golosov (2013)). Another key target audience for electoral mobilization are the viewers of Russia’s regime-controlled TV channels (Enikolopov, Petrova, and Zhuravskaya 2011). In the barren political landscapes of electoral authoritarian regimes, constituencies such as these should have the greatest rates of genuine turnout and the lowest rates of turnout misreporting, simply because they have been most “incentivized” to vote.

Blunt coercion, clientelism and propaganda have not been the only instruments in the Kremlin’s manipulative toolkit. Above all, its spinsters turned Putin’s broad popular appeal into one of the most powerful instruments for rallying support for the Russia’s electoral authoritarian regime (Rose 2007). By harnessing social desirability pressures to conform with majority opinions, they transformed Putin’s carefully staged popularity into another instrument of mobilization. Thus, like citizens who are coerced, bribed, brainwashed into voting, individuals who believe that Putin is genuinely supported by the majority should have higher rates of electoral turnout and lower rates of turnout falsification.

In stark contrast to these manipulative pressures, I argue that the conventional turnout boosters in democracies – such as partisanship and political engagement – have a weaker influence in electoral autocracies like Russia. Ironically, pro-regime partisanship may even have a

demobilizing effect. The reason is simple: because they lack coherent ideologies and programmatic visions and instead rely on clientelistic policies (Schedler 2013), electoral autocracies attract less committed, opportunistic followers, who are prone to free ride when it comes to voting. The same opportunism should also make regime supporters particularly inclined to lie they have cast a ballot.

From the perspective of the demobilization theory, electoral autocracies should generally deter politically engaged and informed individuals from voting. Because of the manifest political manipulation and corruption in electoral autocracies, there is an oft repeated observation that the more one knows about politics in these regimes, the more cynical he or she becomes. Translated to the electoral realm, this cynicism should produce lower turnout and higher turnout misreporting among the more politically engaged.

We can summarize these arguments in the following two hypotheses:

H2: The constituencies most exposed to authoritarian and social desirability pressures have the highest turnout and lowest rates of turnout misreporting in electoral autocracies;

H3: Pro-regime partisans and politically engaged individuals in general have a significant tendency to over-report their turnout in electoral autocracies.

Turnout and Turnout Misreporting Among Dissatisfied Individuals

The most direct implication of the demobilization theory is that authoritarian regimes primarily stay in power by discouraging their potential opponents from participating in politics. If this is indeed the case, disgruntled individuals in electoral autocracies should be particularly prone to shun the polls. Feeling alienated from the current system and powerless to challenge it at the ballot box, people who have more negative views of the regime – or are dissatisfied with the political, economic and social conditions in the country – should be naturally inclined to abstain. Such

individuals are also particularly likely to lie they have voted. Disgruntled citizens may misreport turnout to avoid censure, express their frustration, or claim they have performed their civic duty.

Apart from voting (and abstaining), dissatisfied individuals in electoral autocracies can express their grievances through contentious action. This raises a key question: are people who support protest in autocracies less likely to vote? Understanding the relationship between voting and protest is particularly important in contexts like Russia's 2012 presidential election, when Putin's regime was challenged by an unprecedented wave of contentious action. But to estimate the true impact of contentious sentiments on turnout, we must control for preference falsification. This is because radicals who support contentious action and shun elections may still overreport turnout when responding to direct survey questions.

This last set of propositions is captured in the following hypotheses:

H4: Individuals with political, social and economic grievances, and more negative views of electoral authoritarian regimes, will have lower levels of turnout and higher rates of turnout misreporting;

H5: After accounting for turnout misreporting, individuals who support contentious action in electoral autocracies will be less prone to vote.

Methods and Data

To test this paper's propositions, I use data from the 2012 Russia Electoral Study survey, carried out after the country's presidential elections held on March 4 2012 (Colton et al. 2014).³ The 2012 RES is an in-person survey is based on a stratified representative nationwide sample of 1,682 respondents, and has a battery of 142 questions similar in format to the American National Electoral Studies. It was implemented by the ZAO Demoscope organization, which has been performing the fieldwork for the two most reputable and sophisticated scientific panel survey series in Russia commissioned by Western scholars since the early 1990s: the Russia Electoral Studies and the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey.⁴

Apart from its timing, a key advantage of the 2012 RES is that it contains a set of list experiments that allow respondents to anonymously report their choices and behavior on key sensitive issues, including whether they voted for Vladimir Putin and whether they have cast a ballot in the 2012 presidential election. List experiments seek to elicit truthful answers to sensitive questions by providing lists of preferences and behaviors to survey participants, and asking them to say *how many* they endorse or participate in, but *not which ones*. Respondents are randomly assigned to a control group, which receives a list with only non-sensitive items, and a treatment group that contains one additional, sensitive item. Because the control and treatment group lists are otherwise identical, any meaningful differences between the mean number of items chosen from them has to be due to respondents choosing the additional sensitive item.

³ The survey fieldwork was carried out between April 1 and May 18th 2012.

⁴ The details of the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey can be found at <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/rlms-hse> (accessed on 6/27/2017).

In Appendix I of the Online Supplement to this paper, I provide the full wording of the relevant list experiments from the 2012 RES, as well as the distribution of responses to these experiments and the direct questions on the sensitive items. To produce valid estimates, the list experiment technique relies on two core assumptions (see Blair and Imai (2012) and Glynn (2013)): (1) that the presence of the sensitive item in the treatment group does not change the responses to the non-sensitive items (no design effects assumption); and (2) that survey participants do not falsify their preferences on the sensitive item when responding to list experiments (no liars assumption). I examine whether these assumptions are satisfied in the 2012 RES turnout list experiments using a procedure proposed by Blair and Imai (2012). These tests and other diagnostics that I discuss in detail in Appendix II the Online Supplement do not detect any clear violations of the key assumptions in the RES 2012 list experiments.

To examine this paper's propositions in a multivariate setting, I employ the 2012 RES list experiments in two ways. First, to identify the key predictors of turnout and turnout falsification, I estimate models with list experiment responses as dependent variables. Second, to examine the impact of turnout and turnout misreporting on regime support, I estimate a model where list experiment responses are employed as predictors. I obtain these estimates using the estimation techniques developed by Blair and Imai (2012) and Imai, Park, and Greene (2015), respectively. These methods rely on a statistically efficient maximum likelihood estimator that can be generalized beyond simple linear models.

As predictors in these analyses, I use two groups of variables from the 2012 RES data. First, I include the standard demographics used in turnout models in democracies, like respondents' gender, age, education, social class, urban residence, as well as indicators of partisanship and interest in politics. Second, I examine turnout factors unique to electoral authoritarian regimes. In particular, I test the effectiveness of the regime's turnout pressures against the main targets of

clientelistic inducements in Russia – particularly employees in companies dependent on the state budget (the so called *budzetniki*) and pensioners – using dummy variables denoting if respondents identified themselves as such. I also estimate the effects of the Kremlin’s propaganda on turnout with dummy variables denoting whether respondents use television as their main information source. To gauge the impact of social pressures stemming from the perceived public support of the regime, I use an indicator of whether respondents believed that majority of Russian citizens approve Vladimir Putin’s performance in office.

Finally, I include several measures of disaffection with Russia’s economic and political system. To account for economic discontent, I use an indicator denoting whether a respondent characterized the state of Russia’s economy as “bad.” I estimate the impact of protest using a dummy variable that indicates whether respondents agree with the protest actions under the “Russia without Putin” slogan. To account for the possibility that high levels of perceived electoral manipulation depress voluntary voter turnout (Dominguez and McCann 1998; Simpser 2013), I use respondent evaluations of election fairness for the March 2012 elections in Russia. I provide summary statistics for these variables in Appendix III of the Online Supplement to this paper.

Empirical Analysis and Results

This paper claims that, contrary to established wisdom, more people living in electoral autocracies lie about their turnout than about their loyalty to the regime. The logic is simple: only individuals with pro-oppositional or neutral outlooks are prone to falsify their vote choices, while everyone – including regime supporters – has incentives to abstain from voting and falsely claim to have participated. This is a byproduct of the demobilizing nature of contemporary electoral autocracies, which suppress political competition to turn their electoral victories into foregone conclusions.

To test this proposition in the Russian case, I compare the proportion of respondents who misreported their turnout in the 2012 presidential election to those who falsely claimed to have voted for Vladimir Putin. The results provide an important clue about the genuineness of Putin's electoral support. When asked directly, 52.2 percent of those polled in the 2012 RES survey answer they have cast a ballot for Putin (95% confidence interval of [49.8, 54.5]). In turn, in the non-obtrusive list experiment questioning, 43.3 percent of respondents (95% confidence interval of [35.1, 51.8]) admit to voting for Putin – or about 9 percentage points fewer than to the direct question. This rate of falsification is non-trivial, but still relatively small compared to Putin's genuine support in 2012. It is also very close to the list experiment estimate of falsified approval of Putin obtained by Frye, Gehlbach, and Marquardt (2016) three years later, when Putin's ratings peaked at almost 90 percent after the wildly popular Crimea annexation (they hovered at slightly above 60 percent in 2012). This suggests that the rates of false support for Vladimir Putin – as measured by list experiments – have been relatively low and remarkably stable across these two very different contexts.

In contrast, the rates of turnout falsification in Russia’s 2012 Presidential elections were much higher. When asked directly, 77.5 percent of the 2012 RES survey respondents insisted they have voted in the presidential elections (95% confidence interval of [75.5, 79.5]). According to the list experiment estimates, only 56.5 percent of the 2012 RES survey respondents (95% confidence interval of [47.5, 66]) have actually done so. The discrepancy across these two modes of questioning suggests that 21 percent of Russians have lied they have voted – about 2.3 times more than those who falsely claimed to have voted for Putin. Taken together, these results, strongly support hypothesis 1 that citizens of Russia’s electoral autocracy were more likely to misreport their turnout than their loyalty to the incumbent.

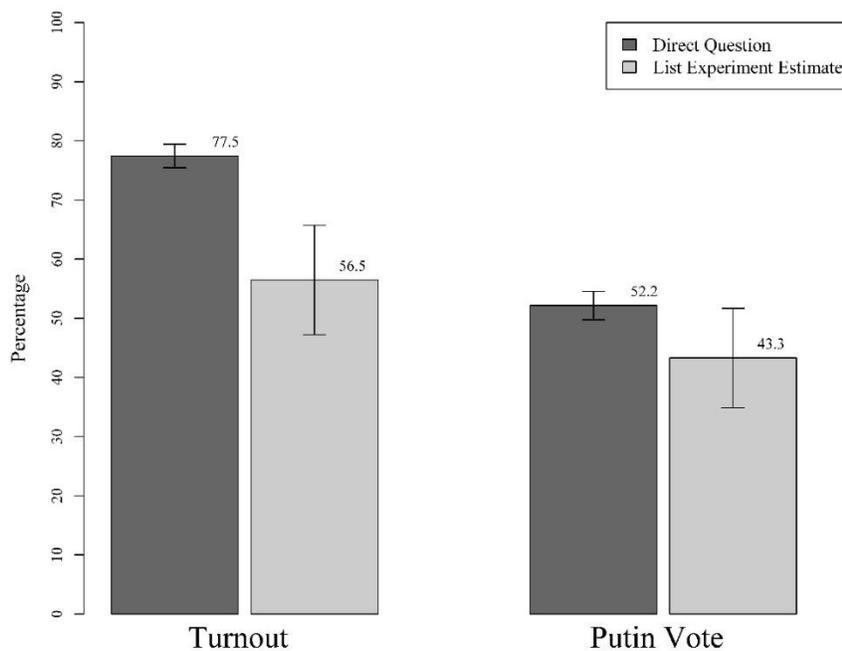


Figure 1: List Experiment and Direct Response Estimates of Turnout and Vote for Vladimir Putin 2012 Presidential Elections

*Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

But is this result driven by the demobilizing nature of electoral autocracies? If this is the case, even supporters of these regimes will have strong incentives to shun the polls and lie they have voted. In regimes with non-competitive elections, only individuals “incentivized” with patronage, coercion, propaganda and other authoritarian and social pressures will have strong motives to vote. To test these propositions, summarized in hypothesis 2, I estimate multivariate models of turnout in the 2012 Russian presidential elections with the predictors described in the previous section. Specifically, I estimate two separate models: one using a direct self-reported measure of turnout and another with the list experiment estimate.⁵ As these models only differ in the obtrusiveness in which they collect responses to the sensitive question, significant discrepancies in their results capture the rates of turnout misreporting.

I provide the estimated coefficients and standard errors of these models in Appendix III of the Web Supplement. As these results are cumbersome to interpret directly, I present them graphically below. In particular, I display the predicted probabilities of turnout across different levels of a given predictor using estimates from both the direct and list experiment models. Figure 2 shows the predicted turnout levels across the staple demographic factors used in turnout models in democracies: education, social class (as defined by income levels) and age. The point estimates for turnout in each education, class and age sub-group in the graphs are represented by circles, triangles and squares; the error bars around them capture 95% confidence intervals obtained with Monte Carlo simulations. To provide some sense of the size of these groups, I also list the

⁵ The results for the direct measure of turnout are obtained with a logistic regression model; those for the list experiment estimates are from a binomial logistic regression model, estimated with the “list” package in R, developed by Blair and Imai (2014).

percentages of respondents belonging to each of them in the parentheses next to each sub-graph title.

The most basic implication of the demobilization theory of authoritarianism is that electoral turnout in these regimes should be highest and turnout misreporting lowest among constituencies most exposed to authoritarian and other pressures to vote. Other factors, like income, education, age, partisanship and interest in politics, should not boost turnout as they do in Western democracies. The results in the first two panels Figure 2 are consistent with this thesis. Education and social class, in particular, seem to have had little effect on turnout in Russia's 2012 election. According to the results in the top panel of Figure 2, individuals with different levels of schooling had virtually the same levels of actual turnout and turnout misreporting (the former is captured by the list experiment estimates, and the latter in the differences between the list experiment and direct question estimates). Similarly, as we can see from the middle panel in the graph, the estimated rates of voting and turnout falsification among lower and middle class respondents, who constitute almost 96 percent of the Russian population, are statistically indistinguishable from each other.⁶ Only the turnout trends across age groups, displayed in the bottom panel of Figure 2, stand out from this pattern. Based on the list experiment results, the over 50 age group has a predicted turnout rate of 87 percent – about 20 to 25 percent more than the first two age cohorts – and a turnout misreporting rate of practically zero. This seems to be in line with the tendency for voting to increase with age, which is regularly observed in democracies.

⁶ In turn, the members of Russia's tiny upper class have significantly lower actual turnout levels and particularly high turnout misreporting of 40 percent – contrary to patterns typically observed in stable democracies.

But a closer scrutiny shows that such behavior among Russia's older respondents may not a simple product of their unique habits and preferences. Instead, it reflects a broader pattern of higher genuine turnout among more vulnerable groups, regularly exposed to authoritarian pressures. In particular, as I show in Figure 3, the demographic groups with the highest actual turnout rates in Russia, according to the list experiment estimates, have been pensioners – a constituency that was the prime target of regime propaganda, patronage and coercive mobilization throughout Vladimir Putin's reign (Golosov 2013). With over 90 percent predicted turnout, Russia's vast pensioner cohort (reaching 40 percent of the population) was clearly a key voting bloc in the 2012 election. So were Russian females – the primary targets of Vladimir Putin's core media image of a vice-free macho figure (Sperling 2014) and populist state largesse in the form of childcare and family benefits (Rotkirch, Temkina, and Zdravomyslova 2007). According to the list experiment estimates in the bottom panel of Figure 3, women had predicted turnout rates a whopping 50 percentage points higher than their male counterparts. And unlike non-pensioners and males, who had average turnout falsification rates of about 20 and 40 percent, respectively, Russia's pensioners and females had practically negligible turnout overreporting rates.

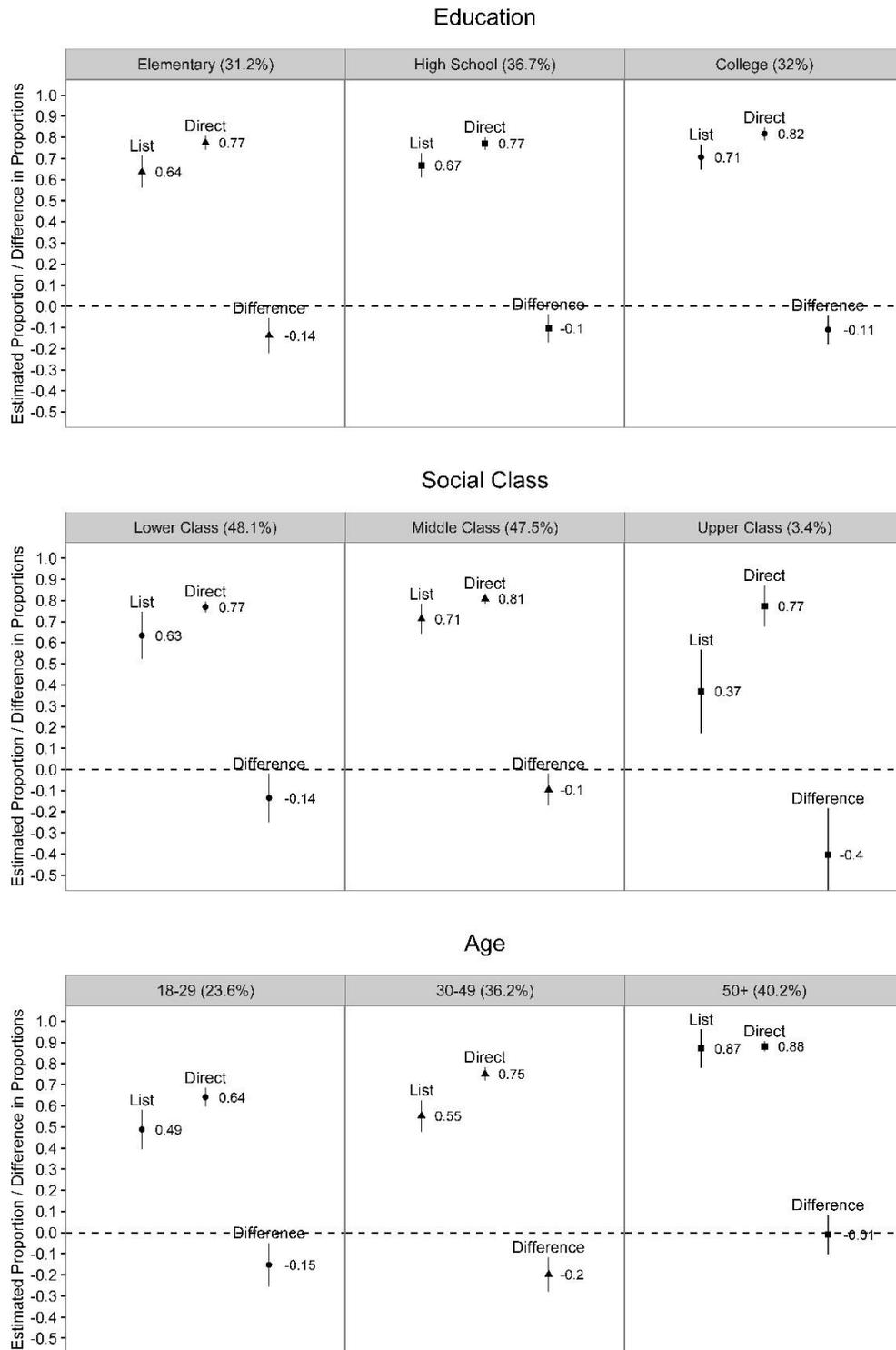


Figure 2: Direct Measure and List Experiment Estimates of Turnout and Turnout Misreporting by Age, Education and Social Class

*Note: % respondents in each respective category in parentheses. Point estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

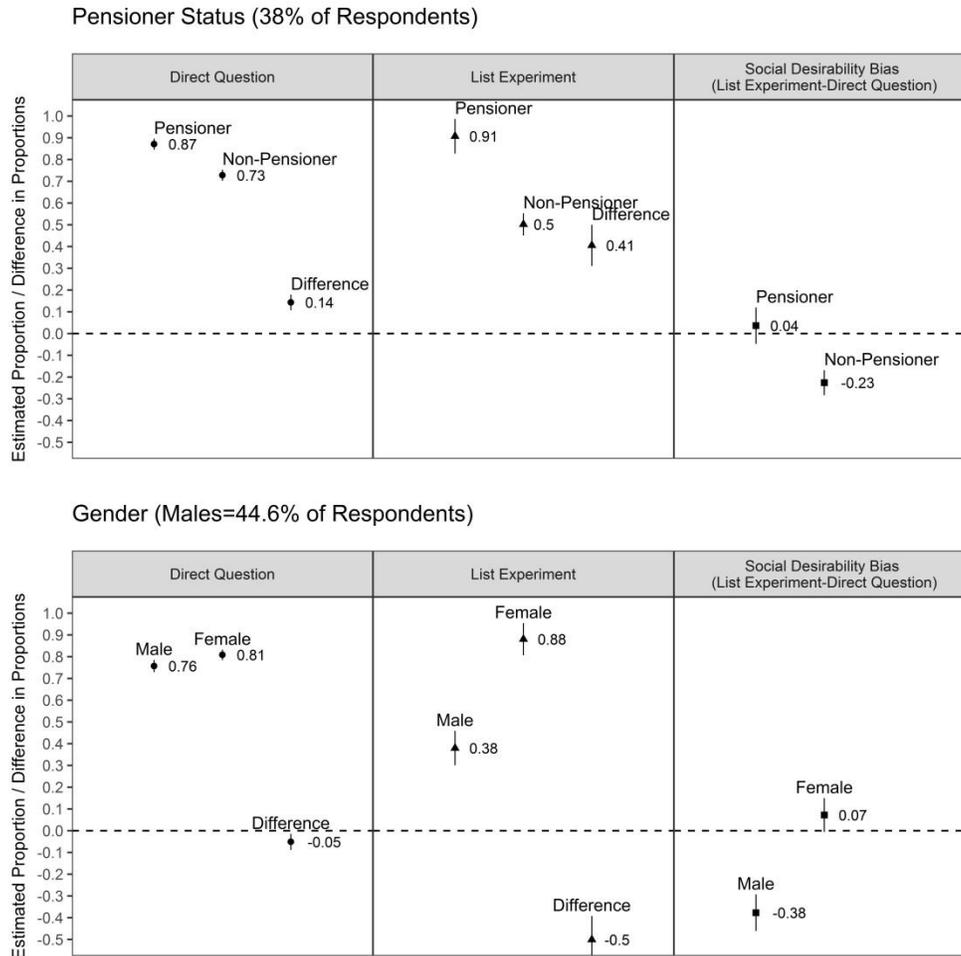


Figure 3: Direct Measure and List Experiment Estimates of Turnout and Turnout Misreporting by Pensioner Status and Gender

*Note: Point estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

But the most compelling evidence that Russia’s voters are primarily mobilized with authoritarian pressures comes from the turnout patterns of individuals most blatantly affected by these tactics. I display these in Figure 4. The top panel of the graph shows the predicted probabilities of turnout and the turnout misreporting rates among Russia’s *byudzetniki* – state employees and other individuals dependent on the state budget – the constituency most systematically coerced to rally in support of Putin’s regime. The list experiment estimates suggest

that the *byudzetniki* had predicted turnout of nearly 90 percent and miniscule turnout falsification rates. Respondents not dependent on the state budget, in contrast, had list experiment turnout estimates of less than 60 percent, and reported 17 percent higher turnout when asked directly.

But could there be other reasons for such behavior? An alternative explanation could be that Russia's *byudzetniki* turn out in such high numbers not because of authoritarian pressures, but because of their programmatic attachments to Vladimir Putin's statist regime, which they believe best represents their interests. To explore this possibility, I look at how the *byudzetnik* variable alters the estimated effect of a direct measure of election-related workplace pressure. The results of this analysis, which I present in full in Appendix IV the Online Supplement, show that when the *byudzetniki* dummy is left out, respondents facing workplace pressures had almost 20 percent higher turnout (80 vs. 63 percent) in the list experiment model. However, when the *byudzetniki* control is included again, poll takers reporting electoral pressure from their employers have the same unfeigned turnout rates as the other respondents. This suggests that working in a state budget-dependent organization fully absorbs the impact of workplace pressure on turnout, and that the exceptionally high electoral participation of this constituency is not a product of its members' ideological preferences and free choice.

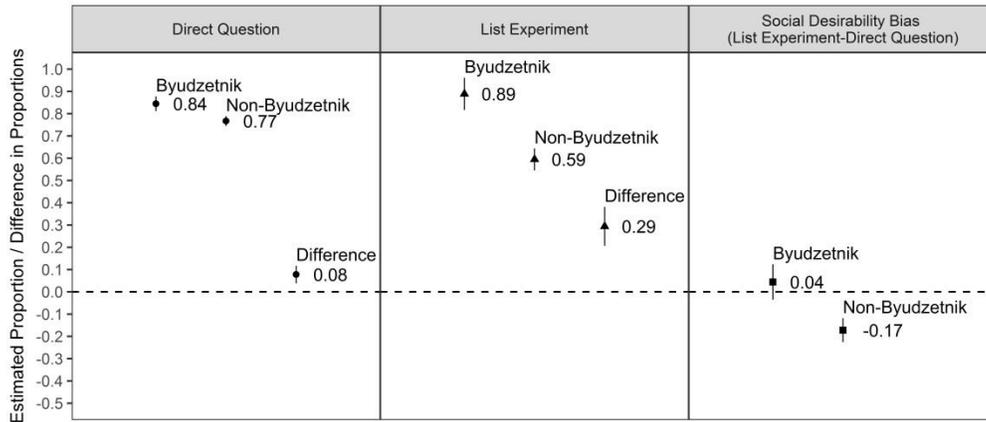
Reliance on television – the Kremlin's chief propaganda tool – as a main information source has an analogous, though somewhat smaller effects on turnout, as we can see from the estimates in the middle panel of Figure 4. The list experiment estimates suggest that the great majority of Russian respondents who primarily got their information from television (84 percent) had a 26 percentage points higher predicted turnout than those who relied on alternative information sources

(primarily the internet).⁷ Television viewers also had turnout falsification rates of about 9 percent – much lower than the 26 percent among consumers of alternative information sources – making them a much more reliable voting bloc.

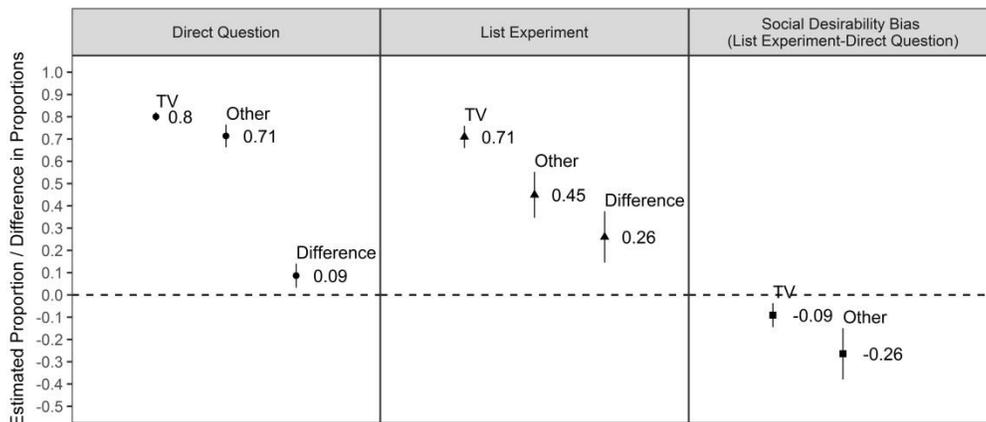
Finally, the bottom panel of Figure 4 shows how respondent beliefs that the majority of Russians approved Vladimir Putin’s actions impacted turnout in the 2012 election. Social pressures to conform to majority opinion of this sort also exist in democracies. But in electoral autocracies, they are amplified and otherwise distorted by incumbents to pressure individuals to vote in their favor. The results in the bottom panel of Figure 4 suggest that this tactic was highly effective in Russia. According to the list experiment estimates, respondents who believed that the majority of Russians sincerely approve Vladimir Putin’s actions had considerably higher predicted turnout than those who did not (76 vs. 56 percent) and lower turnout misreporting rate (3 vs. 20 percent). The belief that Putin had high popular approval did not just mobilize people to turn out; the overwhelming majority of those who shared this belief also voted for Putin in the 2012 presidential election. I show this in a separate set of direct question and list experiment models of Putin’s vote, the results of which I present in Appendix V of the Online Supplement.

⁷ 11 percent of the 2012 survey RES respondents used the internet as their main source of information, making it the main alternative information outlet.

Byudzetnik Status (25.1% of Respondents)



Main Information Source (TV=83.9% of Respondents)



Believe that Putin is Supported by Majority (47% of Respondents)

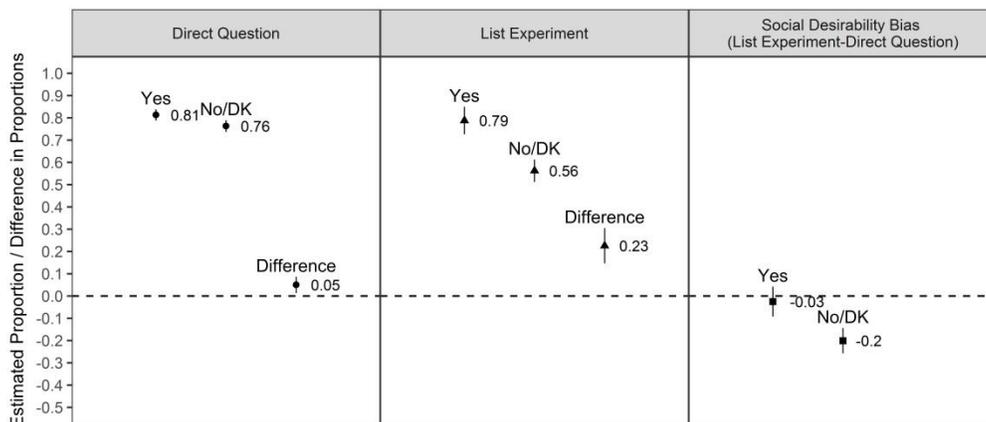


Figure 4: Direct Measure and List Experiment Estimates of Turnout and Turnout Misreporting by “Byudzetnik” Status, Primary Information Source and Beliefs About Vladimir Putin’s Popularity

*Note: Point estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

Taken together, these findings provide compelling evidence that the most reliable voters in Russia's 2012 presidential elections came from constituencies exposed to the greatest authoritarian and social desirability pressures. But what about the other voters? If this paper's theory is valid, the key effect of electoral authoritarianism will be to discourage voting among everyone not affected by such pressures. This demobilization effect should have a particular impact on politically informed and engaged individuals – including the regime's supporters. Convinced of the non-competitiveness of the election and opportunistically supporting the incumbent, they should be more inclined to stay home and lie they have cast a ballot.

I explore these propositions in Figure 5, which plots the predicted turnout and turnout misreporting by partisanship and levels of interest in politics. The patterns we observe in these graphs provide strong support for hypothesis 3. According to list experiment estimates in the first panel of Figure 5, respondents who declared some or high interest in politics had 27 and 28 percent *lower* predicted turnout than poll takers who said they had little or no interest in politics. The more politically attentive respondents also had much greater rates of turnout over-reporting (24 and 16 percent for the some and high interest groups, respectively, as opposed to 7 percent for the little or no interest group). In other words, the most numerous and reliable voters in Russia's 2012 presidential election were individuals with the lowest interest in politics. This behavior is exactly the opposite from what we observe in democracies, and is consistent with the demobilization theory of electoral authoritarianism. The low competitiveness of Russia's authoritarian elections demobilized the more informed and politically engaged individuals. To secure its decisive victories in this situation, the regime drummed up its votes by pressuring vulnerable constituencies who care little about politics.

The results in the bottom panel of Figure 5 provide further support for this thesis. Above all, they show that regime supporters were most likely to fake their turnout. The estimates indicate that

the self-declared sympathizers of the pro-regime United Russia party had a turnout falsification rate of 19 percent, as opposed to 10 percent among independents and only 7 percent for opposition supporters. This brings the list experiment predictions of turnout among regime sympathizers to levels only 5 percent higher than those of the politically uncommitted independents (69 vs. 64 percent, respectively). Clearly, Russia's electoral autocracy had a significant demobilizing effect on many of its self-declared supporters, as predicted by this paper's theory.

Opposition party sympathizers, in contrast, have a much higher mean turnout level of 83 percent, and statistically insignificant turnout falsification. At first glance, this appears to contradict the thesis that electoral autocracies demobilize their opponents. But this is not the case. Opposition parties in electoral autocracies typically survive by adopting radical stances that attract a modicum of popular support from fringe constituencies (Greene 2007). Hence, the relatively small groups of hard-core opposition party supporters do not necessarily represent the views and behavior of the much larger pool of disgruntled individuals that might vote against the regime if better alternatives were available.

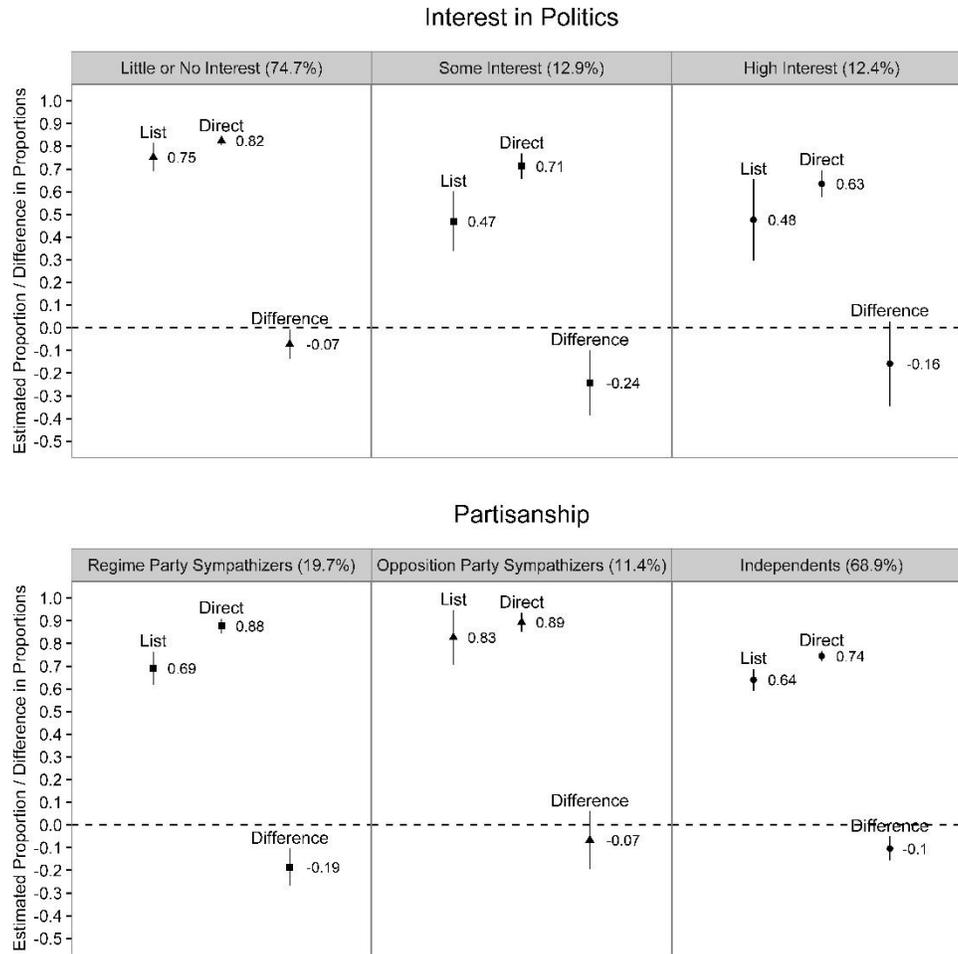


Figure 5: Direct Measure and List Experiment Estimates of Turnout and Turnout Misreporting by Interest in Politics and Partisanship

*Note: Point estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

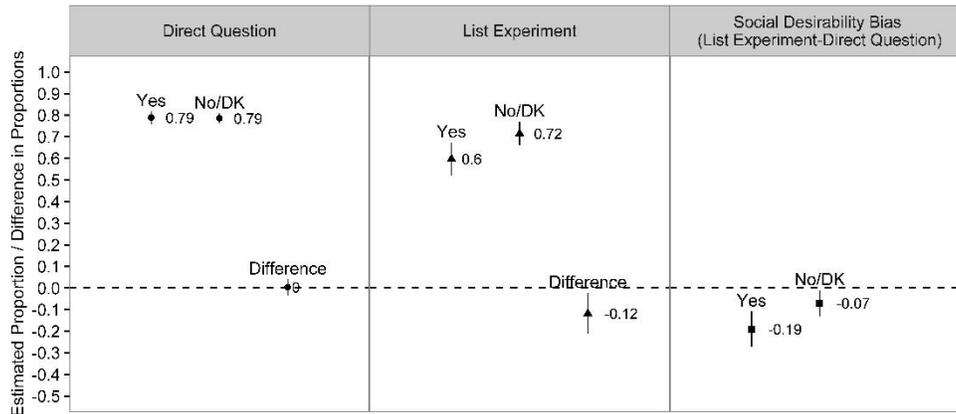
I show this in Figure 6, which displays the turnout and turnout falsification levels among the two key dissatisfied constituencies in the Russian 2012 presidential election: (1) respondents who had negative assessments of the Russian economy; (2) those who supported the protests for fair elections, which posed an unprecedented challenge to Putin’s rule during his re-election campaign.

The first panel of the graph shows that when asked directly, respondents who had negative assessments of Russia’s economy appear to have the same mean turnout rates as those who did not

(79 percent). But this congruence is a product of turnout falsification. A comparison of the direct and list experiment estimates reveals that almost 20 percent of the respondents who believed that Russia's economy is in a bad shape falsified their turnout, while only 7 percent of those who had positive, neutral or uncertain assessments did so. Thus, in reality, economically discontented individuals in Russia's electoral autocracy were significantly less likely to vote in the 2012 presidential election. According to the list experiment estimates, they had predicted turnout probability 12 percentage points lower than those who thought the Russian economy was doing fine or were uncertain (60 vs. 72 percent turnout).

We observe similar, though somewhat smaller effects on turnout among respondents who supported the protests for fair elections. The list experiment estimates in the bottom panel of Figure 6 suggest that these respondents had a 9 percent lower predicted turnout than individuals who were against the protests, or were unsure (60 vs. 69 percent). Almost half of this difference owed to the larger rate of turnout falsification among protest supporters (15 percent as opposed to 11 percent in the other group). On the whole, these results indicate that individuals dissatisfied for either economic or political reasons were less likely to participate in Russia's 2012 presidential elections. And direct survey responses could not detect the demobilization of these individuals because they were far more prone to falsely claim they voted, as predicted by this paper's theoretical framework.

Believes Russian Economy is in Bad Shape (37.8% of Respondents)



Agree with Election Protests (28.7% of Respondents)

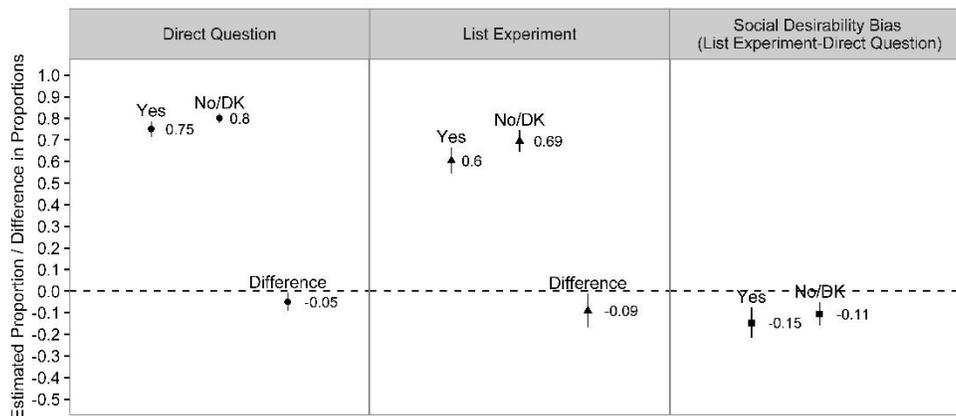


Figure 6: Direct Measure and List Experiment Estimates of Turnout and Turnout Misreporting by Negative Assessments of the Russian Economy and Support for the Protests for Fair Elections

*Note: Point estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

I perform an additional, more direct test of the demobilization thesis by examining whether Vladimir Putin had lower approval ratings among individuals who did not vote in the 2012 Russian presidential election. For this purpose, I estimate models of Putin’s approval ratings with direct and list experiment measures of turnout as predictors. I obtain the results for latter model with the

maximum likelihood estimator described in Imai, Park, and Greene (2015). The full results from these estimates are available in Appendix VI of the Online Supplement.

In Figure 7, I depict the predicted effect of turnout on the original scale of Putin's approval, which ranges from completely disapprove (-2) to fully approve (2), with approve some and disapprove some (0) as the middle category. These results once again underline the importance of turnout misreporting and the pitfalls of not accounting for it. According to the estimates obtained with the direct measure of turnout, voters and non-voters give Putin virtually the same average approval ratings. Both are very close to the full sample mean approval rate of 0.56, or roughly halfway between the neutral and the "somewhat approve" responses, and are statistically indistinguishable from each other. However, we get a different result in the list experiment model, which captures the effects of turnout falsification. Here, Putin's mean approval among non-voters is almost 0.2 points lower than that of the voters – a difference that is statistically significant at the 95 percent level. Specifically, Putin's average approval rating among those who voted in the 2012 election rises to 0.63, while it drops to 0.44 among non-voters – values that are now almost significantly above and below the full sample mean (at the 95 percent level).

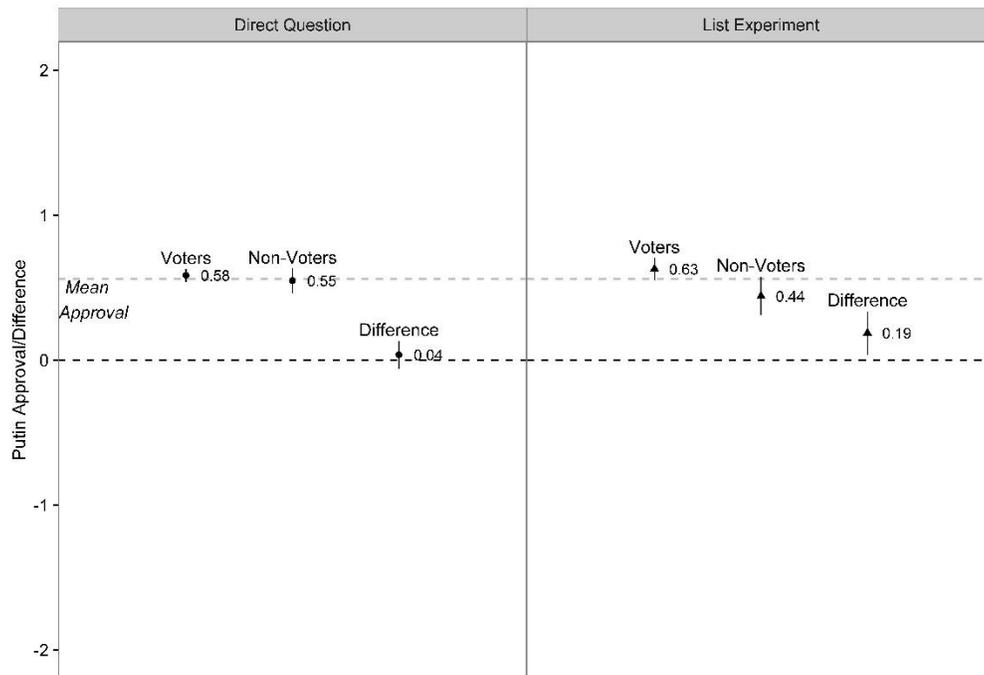


Figure 7: The Effect of Turnout on the Approval of Vladimir Putin (Direct Question and List Experiment Estimates of Turnout)

*Note: Point estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

We can draw two conclusions from these results. First, they further support the demobilization theory of electoral authoritarianism. Russians who did not vote in the 2012 presidential election had mean approval ratings of Vladimir Putin edging toward the neutral “approve some and disapprove some,” while voters were closer to the unambiguous “approve” category. And it is likely that these results still overestimate Putin’s approval among non-voters because they rely on a direct measure of approval, which may be inflated in Russia’s authoritarian circumstances. Either way, the approval gap between voters and non-voter confirms a key premise of the demobilization theory of authoritarianism: that on average, people who have more negative views of these regimes and their leaders tend not to participate in elections. And this demobilization of dissent is still

considerable even when these regimes face protest waves, as Russia's electoral autocracy did in 2012.

Second, none of this would be apparent without accounting for turnout misreporting. The approval gap between voters and non-voters in Russia's electoral autocracy was hidden from plain sight because individuals with more negative appraisals of Vladimir Putin have tended to over-report their turnout. This confirms that turnout falsification has played a key role in the demobilization of disgruntled constituencies in Russia during the 2012 election. As I discussed in the preceding sections, faking electoral participation in such regimes gives an opportunity for dissatisfied individuals to safely behave in accordance with their frustrations with the system and the perceived lack of better alternatives at the polls. However, this kind of behavior also makes elections safe for autocracies. As long as discontent individuals stay home on election day, these regimes can maintain power through the ballot box and with a minimum resort to coercion, assuming a veneer of democratic legitimacy.

Conclusion

This article claims that for the most part, contemporary electoral autocracies maintain power not by enforcing loyalty among their population, but by discouraging participation in politics. Citizens of electoral autocracies have few incentives to vote because the various incumbent machinations and the lack of acceptable opposition alternatives make elections non-competitive. Convinced they cannot affect the outcome, even regime supporters in these societies are naturally inclined to shun the polls. But the demobilization is considerably more pronounced among

individuals dissatisfied with the current order. Deterred by what they consider to be sham elections, these individuals are far more likely to stay home on election day.

Against this backdrop, only authoritarian pressures – such as the regime’s coercion, clientelism and propaganda – can reliably motivate large numbers of people to turn out. But such authoritarian pressures also stimulate non-voters to lie they have cast a ballot. As these regimes’ lazy supporters, opportunistic beneficiaries and dispirited opponents all have strong incentives to falsify their turnout, the demobilizing nature of electoral autocracies cannot be observed with standard survey measures.

To validate these claims, the article draws on a unique set of survey list experiments, conducted in the wake of Russia’s 2012 presidential election. Exploiting the ability of list experiments to elicit a higher rate of truthful responses, I show that the turnout in these elections was much lower than what Russian survey-takers reported when asked directly. Despite the unprecedented protest wave that swept Russia before the presidential election, many dissatisfied voters – including those who supported the protests – have shunned the polls and falsely claimed they have cast a ballot. This not only prevented Russia’s budding protest movement from bandwagoning into a larger rebellion, but also allowed Vladimir Putin to win a landslide victory with almost 64 percent of the vote. Still, Putin’s towering majority was not achieved with the mobilization of his regime’s professed sympathizers, many of whom lied about participating in the election. Instead, the most reliable participants in the 2012 presidential contest in Russia belonged to constituencies most exposed to the regime’s mobilization pressures: employees in state budget-dependent organizations, pensioners, consumers of TV news and the like.

These findings have significant implications for our understanding of electoral autocracies. First, they confirm the main premise of demobilization theory of electoral authoritarianism: that these regimes’ innate ability to discourage citizens from voting – and to engage in politics more

generally – may be the key to their resilience. Breeding apathy and revulsion from politics among disgruntled citizens is far easier than enforcing loyalty. To paraphrase the old adage, all it takes for autocracy to prevail is for citizens who are dissatisfied with it to do nothing. So even low-capacity autocracies can use popular disengagement from politics to win elections. And as people tend to hide their non-participation, even highly manipulated elections can be used to maintain an appearance of democratic legitimacy and to further demobilize these regimes' opponents.

Second, this paper's findings add to the mounting evidence that electoral autocracies mainly use their manipulative tactics – coercion, clientelism, propaganda and others – to motivate their estranged supporters and persuadable others to cast a ballot. While empirical studies have reported such behavior with increasing regularity, we know little about the broader reasons why electoral autocracies expend such effort and resources into turnout buying and coercion. By highlighting the demobilizing nature of electoral authoritarianism, most of which is hidden from direct observation, this paper provides an important insight into this puzzle.

This study has two limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, despite the anonymity of their responses, poll takers topics in autocracies might still falsify preferences in list experiments on sensitive topics. The standard diagnostics show no indication that this was the case in the current study, but we still cannot exclude the possibility due to the relatively low statistical power of these tests. Hence, to get a more accurate account of response falsification, future research might supplement list experiments with other techniques for eliciting truthful responses to sensitive questions, like endorsement experiments and randomized response methods. Second, because this paper draws empirical evidence from a single election cycle in the Russian case, we need to further examine the broader generalizability of its findings. While the fact that Putin's regime served as a template for other electoral autocracies provides some assurance that patterns

observed in Russia will apply elsewhere, this can only be verified with additional studies of other cases.

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