### FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE "PROTEST VOTING" IN THE RUSSIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: MULTILEVEL MODELING

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Submitted to Central European University

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2014

#### ABSTRACT

Despite increasing interest in protest voting in recent years, the option "against all" has received little attention in scholarly research. This thesis aims at filling the gap in the literature. In contrary to previous research I analyze protest voting behavior on the county level. Specifically, the research paper aims at establishing what factors influence the level of protest voting in Russian counties on parliamentary elections. The analysis is mainly focused on "political" as well as "economic" factors. The results demonstrated that in those regions, where the electoral competitions in elections is high and in most economically developed regions, the level of protest voting is also high. That could be attributed to the fact that in these regions voters have more possibilities to participate in electoral process. So, they are actively using these possibilities and cast a protest vote more often.

#### **AKNOLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Assistant Professor Levente Littvay for his support, encouragements, vital guidance and immense patience. I am also thankful to Constantin Manuel Bosancianu for his great help with statistical problems. Last, but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to Eszter Timar for valuable remarks regarding the structure and the grammar of my thesis.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Voters have different options when making an electoral choice. They can vote for their preferred candidates, they can vote for the most popular one or they can ignore elections altogether. In some countries, most of which are new democracies, there is another available option on a ballot – the option "against all". This option provides voters with an opportunity to express their discontent with all candidates in an active manner, as opposed to just abstaining and ignoring elections.

In the last decade Russian Federation became a "laboratory" for various effects of changes in the electoral system. In a situation of "electoral authoritarism" the electoral reforms are seen as attempts by the ruling party to change the "rules of the game" in its favour. At the same time, there is a lack of research about effects of the electoral reforms. Since the "against all" voting became popular in 2000s many observers see its abolishment as an additional step in limiting the electoral choices available to voters and as a way to improve electoral results of the ruling party. In the light of that, the research project, devoted to one part of the electoral system, namely, the option "against all" seems very relevant.

Recent events in Russian politics make the topic of protest voting even more significant. People who are dissatisfied with the current political situation in the country begin to express their discontent in a public, active manner. After the last parliamentary elections in 2011 people in the largest Russian cities started taking part in mass protests. This situation is similar to the whole meaning of the protest voting – expressing discontent in an active manner, in contrast with just ignoring the elections.

It is worth noting that despite the relevance of the topic, there has been very little

research done on the protest voting in Russian election. Most of the research papers present the analysis of the most common patterns of the protest voting (the percentage of protest vote has increased in 2003 elections, comparing to 1999; the protest voting was higher in the singlemember district part of the electoral system, rather than on the party-list part of the electoral system). No researchers make an attempt to connect the protest voting in elections to other forms of political protest. Moreover, the researchers do not make attempts to study the protest voting dynamics at a more detailed level (Ahremenko 2004; Lubarev 2004; Anohina, Meleshkina 2004; McAllister, White 2008; Oversloot, Holsteyn 2002; Dmitriev, Kislova 2000). They mostly analyze similar factors of protest voting and most of research papers are very descriptive in their nature. The factors that researchers identify are typically structural ones: people of Russian nationality tend to vote "against all" while people of other nationalities do not; there are more protest voters in the northern regions, rather than in the southern; those who live in the urban areas tend to vote "against often" more often than those, who live in the rural areas (Oversloot H., Holsteyn J., 2002; Ahremenko 2004; Lubarev 2004; Anokina and Meleshkina 2004). Besides, most of researchers use quite simple methodological tools in their analysis, such as correlation analysis (Anohina and Meleshkina 2004, Ahremenko 2004) So, there has been little research done, aiming at analyzing pattern of protest voting behavior at a more detailed level, incorporating various groups of factors. Therefore, I am interested in establishing, what factors have the most significant impact on protest voting in Russian elections.

It is necessary to stress, that in all previous research papers, the dynamics of the protest voting were analyzed only on a regional level. In my research, I am going to change the research strategy and analyze the protest voting dynamics in a more detailed manner. Contrary to the previous studies I will take counties, not regions as the units of analysis.

So, in this thesis I am aiming at analyzing the factors that influence the protest voting dynamic in the most significant way in Russian 2003 parliamentary elections. I will mainly focus on two groups of factors: economic and political.

As previous research on voting behavior in post-communist countries has established, people in post-communist countries mostly rely on economic factors to guide their decision for which party or candidate to vote for (Shevchenko 1998). The retrospective theory of electoral behavior states that people vote according to the level of economic development under the current government. Thus, if economic situation has improved, they will vote for an incumbent (or incumbent party). On the other hand, if economic development has deteriorated, voters will "punish" the incumbent and vote for an alternative candidate or a party (Roderick, Rivers 1984). While, of course, the option "against all" could be not the only form of expression of voter's dissatisfaction (they can vote for alternative parties), considering the fact that the option provides more clear possibility to express the dissatisfaction, I would assume, that in a situation of dissatisfaction voters will be using this option more often.

On the other hand, people could also react to the situation in political arena. In a situation, where there are no suitable candidates with whom voters can identify themselves with, they could be more inclined to choose the "against all" option. Alternatively, the research of voter participation demonstrates that close races tend to increase different levels of voter's participation, including turnout. In this case, high levels of political competition could bring more people to the polling station and, as a result, result in an increase of protest votes. So, based on these theoretical grounds, there can be a reverse relationship between electoral competition and levels of protest voting: the higher level of competition there is in the region, the higher levels of protest voting will be.

To identify which factors have the most significant impact on protest voting behavior I will be using multilevel modeling. The multilevel model is used to predict the values of certain response variables based on a function of an explanatory variable on across multiple levels. (Luke 2004). The reason for choosing multilevel modeling comes from the structural properties of the data, as well as from theoretical grounds. I am using data on two different levels – regional and county level. The nested structure of the data implies that the observations are not independent from one another. In this case, using simple linear regression analysis would mean violation of the main assumption that the observations are not independent from one another. In using allows for correlated error structures. I use a large number of cases in my analysis (about 20 000 counties). So, significant results can be drawn from multilevel model.

This thesis adds to the previous research in two respects: first, I use statistical analysis that allows to investigate protest voting pattern at different level of analysis, which was never used before in the previous research; second, in contract to previous research that analyzed mostly structural factors, I look at a different variables that could have a significant impact on protest voting behavior.

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 gives overview of the previous research on protest voting in Russian elections and gives critical assessment of methodological problems in the previous research. Then a brief historical overview of the option "against all" in Russian electoral system and protest voting pattern are discussed. Chapter 2 gives overview of two classic theories of electoral behavior. After then a discussion on how the two theoretical concepts could be applied at analyzing voting behavior in post-communist countries follows. The chapter finished with discussion of how the two theories could explain protest voting dynamics in

Russian elections. In Chapter 3 I provide a description of hypothesis, possible explanation of protest voting dynamics, data I collected and operationalization of factors that influence protest voting. The last section of the chapter focuses on methodological tools that are used to analyze protest voting factors. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the results of analysis. In the Conclusion section I summarize the findings of the research.

# CHAPTER 1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THE OPTION "AGAINST ALL" ON THE BALLOT

#### 1.1. State of the field

It is worth noting that despite the relevance of the topic, there has been very little research done on the protest voting in Russian election. Most of the research papers present the analysis of the most common patterns of the protest voting: the percentage of protest votes has increased in 2003 elections, comparing to 1999; the protest voting was higher in the single-member district part of the electoral system, rather than on the party-list part of the electoral system. (Ahremenko 2004; Lubarev 2004; Anohina, Meleshkina 2004; Dmitriev, Kislova 2000).

Ahremenko (2004) focuses on descriptive analysis of the protest voting. She identifies the following patterns of voting for the "against all" option. The voters in the northern regions are more inclined to vote "against all", then voters in the southern regions. In those regions, where there is a higher proportion of citizens with Russian nationality, there is a higher tendency to vote for the "against all" option. In the authors' opinion, the most significant factors that influence protest voting dynamics are "national" and "geographical" factors. So, protest voting reflects the specific "electoral culture" in the Russian regions.

Meleshkina (2004) draws attention to a slightly different set of factors that influence protest voting in Russian regions. She uses data on mayoral elections and finds out that the protest voting is higher in those regions, where the regional political regimes are less democratic. Citizens feel like they are loosing their democratic freedoms and do not have enough choice among political candidates. Consequently, they vote "against all". Furthermore, the more administrative pressure there is in a region, the higher the levels of protest voting will be there. Although, the methodology that the author implements seem to simplistic. She uses simple correlation analysis, which is not enough to draw such strong conclusions about the effect of various factors on protest voting.

A slightly more sophisticated analysis of the dynamics of protest voting on the regional level offers Hutchenson (2004) in the article "Disengaged or Disenchanted? The Vote Against All in Post-Communist Russia". He tries do answer the question, in what regions there is a more significant part of protest electorate. To answer this question he constructs a "regional index". The results of the analysis demonstrate that northern regions tend to vote "against all" more often. There is also a higher proportion of protest electorate in those regions, where the proportion of people with Russian nationality is higher. Hutchenson also analyses the relationship between protest voting and the types of regional electoral systems. He finds out that the protest voting is higher in smaller regions as well as in the majoritarian electoral systems. Thus, when voters feel that they can have a more significant impact on the election results they are more inclined to use the "against all" option. Moreover, the author also focuses on the individual characteristics of the protest electorate. He finds out the protest electorate is young, has high levels of education and lives in the urban areas.

McAllister and White (2008) implement a different from the other studies methodological tools in analyzing protest voting in their article "Voting against all in post communist Russia". They implement mass survey studies. However, the results of their analysis does not differ from the previous studied. They find the same characteristics of the protest electorate – those who are more inclined to vote "against all" are young, well-educated, live in the urban areas and are interested in political issues.

So, most of the research on protest voting focuses on the structural characteristics of the electorate. Most of the researches analyze similar factors of protest voting. These factors are

usually sociological ones (Such as geographical factors, age, nationality and level of education). Little research has been made of the political factors that could influence the dynamics of protest voting. The death of the literature on protest voting could be, perhaps, explained by the difficulties with methodological tools available to analyze "against all" option (one of them are surveys, but since the option "against all" was abolished a long time ago that seems quite difficult to do). Besides, in previous years the interest of the researchers was focused on political parties, which draw higher percentage of the votes. But now, when there are plenty of research about the voting for political parties, in a situation of dissatisfaction among the electorate and increasing number of protest votes, the analysis of the "against all" option seems very relevant.

#### 1.2. "Against all" option on the ballot

The option "against all" gives voters an opportunity to send a clear signal of their dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in the country. Unlike spoilt ballots or voting for the oppositional parties, "against all" option is less ambiguous.

The "against all" option exists in a very limited number of countries. Most of these countries are new democracies and post-soviet countries. It existed in Belarus from 2000 to 2011 and in Ukraine until 2011. A version of the "against all" option existed in France (vote blanc), In Spain and some Latin American countries. In United States there was only one state that introduced this option in 1967 – Nevada (Damore, Waters, Bowler, 2011)

The option "against all" appeared on the electoral ballot in Russia in 1993. It is considered to be a "relic from the Soviet times". Back then there were only two available options on the electoral ballot. In other words, voters could only vote for one candidate or could not vote for this candidate, crossing candidate`s name on the ballot. In the early 1990s the new laws

("Decree of the president on parliamentary elections", 1993), reforming the electoral ballot were introduced. Voters could now vote for various alternative candidates. The authors of the electoral reforms decided to keep the practice of "protest voting" and included the option "against all" on the ballot. According to laws that were adopted few years later (Decree of the President of Russian Federation  $N_{2}$  1626 "About elections to Federal Council of Russian Federation", 11 October, 1993), elections could be declared invalid if the majority of voters choose this option.

The per cent of the votes, casted for the "against all" option depends, to a large extend, on the level of elections. The highest levels of protest voting are in the regional elections. Several times the mayoral elections were cancelled because of the high levels of protest voting. The highest levels of protest voting happened at the mayoral elections in Ulianovslaya oblast in 2004 (25, 16 per cent).

The levels of protest voting are usually higher when regional elections coincide with federal elections. As it is well-known, the turnout is usually higher in the federal elections. In case of coincidence of regional and federal elections, a group of voters, which would not have came to the polling station otherwise comes to cast their vote. Some researchers argue that in this case, voters simply do not know for which candidate to vote for and choose the "against all" option instead.

In parliamentary elections the levels of protest voting are usually not very high. In presidential elections in 2000 the option "against all" gained 1,88 per cent and in 2004 elections -3, 46 per per cent.

In the State Duma elections, the protest voting is a bit higher then in presidential elections. In the 1999 parliamentary elections 3,30 per cent of the voters casted a vote for the

"against all" option. In 2003 parliamentary elections – 4, 7 per cent.

It is important to note that effects of protest voting are quite paradoxical and do not always follow the logic of the expression of the discontent of the voters with the available candidates. The "against all" option is supposed to help citizens to channel their dissatisfaction of the political parties or candidates. The option should help people in making their discontent heard in the government and influence the election outcomes. In practice, however, the effects of the protest voting often are exactly the opposite. G. Golosov (2004) in the article "Fabricated majority" conversion of votes into seats in Russian 2003 parliamentary elections", demonstrated that in parliamentary elections the votes for the "against all" option are redistributed to the political parties, which overcame the electoral barrier. So, the votes for the option "against all" actually benefit the ruling party.

However, the situation is different in the regional elections. The per cent of voting for the "against all" option is usually much higher than in parliamentary elections (about 6 per cent in average). Besides, in majoritarian electoral systems the expression of the discontent by voting for the option is more simple and straightforward to the voters, than in the proportional electoral system (used in Russian parliamentary elections). It important to stress that not very high percentage of votes for the option "against all" is necessary for the elections to be declared invalid. Even a small percentage of the protest votes could lead to the cancellation of the elections. The effects of the protest voting in single member districts depend, to a large extend, on the electoral system used in the regions. For instance, the plurality systems it is important to consider the number of candidates contending for the seat and how much votes every candidate gets.

In the system of absolute majority, when only two candidates compete in the elections and

the race is a close one even a small percentage of protest vote could be sufficient to make elections invalid. For instance, such a scenario happened in the elections of the head of the administration in Aginski Buriatsky region in 1996. The option "against all" gained only 4 per cent. However, no of the two candidates gained the majority of votes (Lubarev 2003).

In the 2006 the option "against all" was abolished from the electoral ballot. The group from Tversk legislative assembly proposed a new piece of legislation, in which they argued for abolishment of the option "against all" in elections at all levels. The abolishment of the option raised significant public debate. The proponents of the legislation argued that abolishment of the option is necessary for raising of political activity and interest among the electorate (although, it is unclear, how the reduction of the electoral choice would help in making the electorate more politically active). Gruzlov, the speaker of the State Duma argued that the abolishment of the option would make voters make more informed choices and vote for the political parties (McAllister I., White, S. 2008) The opponents of the abolishment of the option argued in return that the "against all" option provides voters with a unique opportunity to send a clear signal to the government that the situation is no longer acceptable to them. So, it is an important element of the democratic system and abolishment of this option would mean the reduction of the democratic rights, available to citizens. Meanwhile, the media argued that the main reason for the abolishment of the option "against all" from electoral ballot was its popularity and support by the voters, especially in the local and regional election. In the situation, when voting for this option could gain the majority of votes and lead to the cancellation of elections, it was beneficial for the ruling party to abolish the "against all" option from the ballot.

Recently, there has been a lot of public debates about whether or not return the "against all" option on the electoral ballot. In particular, then-president Dmitrii Mendeved argued for returning the option on the ballot, since a lot of voters came to the polling station and casted a vote for any other party rather then the ruling party "United Russia". The need for the option seems quite logic, since the ruling part began to loose electoral support. (Web newspaper "Polit.ru", "Medvedev does not exclude returning the "against all" option on the electoral ballot", 05.12.2012)

In light of the recent debates about whether "against all" option should be returned to the electoral ballot, it seems interesting to investigate what factors influence voter's decision to cast a protest vote. Does the option helps in voicing voter's discontent of deteriorating economic conditions? Do people dissatisfied with small electoral competition and absence of acceptable candidates choose this option more often? In the thesis I try to give answers to these questions. The next chapter gives overview of the theories of electoral behavior and discusses possible factors that could have an impact on protest voting behavior in the Russian electorate.

#### **CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL PART**

In the following chapter I will offer a brief overview of the three "classic" theories of electoral behavior – "sociological model", "psychological" model and models of economic voting. Although there are three major theoretical concepts, I will mainly focus on theories of electoral competition and the phenomena of economic voting. The reason for that is that the data is available only for operationalization of these two concepts. There are no variables available of the sociological characteristics of the electorate.

There is an overall consensus among researchers of voting behavior that theories of electoral behavior that were initially developed to explain voting behavior in democratic countries are applicable to explain the post-communist electorate. However, there is some disagreement about each of the theories` explanatory power in analyzing voting behavior in post-communist countries (Golosov 1998). So, I will also analyze to what extent each of the theories could explain voting behavior in Russian elections. After that I will apply each of the theories to explanation of "protest voting".

#### 2.1. Sociological model

The "sociological model" was developed by "Columbia school" of Paul Lazarsfeld. The researches aimed at answering the following question: how public opinion in presidential political campaigns changes in time? Using panel surveys, the researchers studied Elmira, New York, during the 1948 Presidential election. The results of their research project were rather unexpected. As it turned out, voters have clear ideas for what party they would vote for long before the political campaigns starts. Their choices are also stable over time (Bartels 2008). The research demonstrated that approximately half of the electorate makes decisions about which

party to vote for before the start of election campaigns. About 30 per cent of the electorate make decisions during the candidate's nomination campaigns. The remaining small part of the electorate makes decisions later, during campaigns. Usually, this group of voters is less interested in political affairs and, consequently, does not have clear ideas for which candidates to vote for. So, political campaigns have little effect on voter's opinion. Instead, political campaigns activate and reinforce preferences that voters already have. (Lazarsfeld 1994).

Among the key finding of "Columbia school" was that social groups have a large influence on voting. Usually, voters do not make efforts to understand complex political problems. They make voting choices based on opinions of people, who belong to their closest social groups. In a situation where voters cannot make sense out of complex political affairs, they rely on opinion of people they trust (their most close social connections). So, social groups to which people belong to have a significant impact on their voting choice and political preferences. (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954. P. 115)

Family has especially strong impact on voting preferences. The influence of family on political views begins early in life, even before people reach voting age. It is especially strong among young voters. For instance, about 75 per cent of the people, who voted for the first time, voted the same way as their parents did (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, P. 89). Large part of these voters does not change it's political preferences later in life. This "inheritance" of political preferences could be further reinforced by voters` social status. In this way, if a person moves to a higher social status than that of his parents, he is more inclined to change his political preferences. On the contrary, if a person has the same social status as his family members, than his voting preferences have higher probability to remain unchanged. (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, P. 90). But at the same time, the "primary social groups", to which people belong

to, consist not only of the family members, but also of his closest friends and colleagues. There is little disagreement about political affairs in these groups. Most of the discussions people have about political problems happen in informal situations, such as people's homes, offices or bars. It happens between people who are similar in their social status and convictions. These discussions include exchange of mostly mutually agreeable points. Thus, these networks of personal associations are usually homogeneous in their nature. In this way, republicans tend to have more republican friends, rather than democrats. The more homogeneous are the social groups in which voters are embedded, the more they strengthen voter's political preferences (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, P. 100-115).

Furthermore, voting intentions are strongly correlated with class, religion and residence. Knowledge of these characteristics allows predicting voting intentions. In this way, for instance, rich, protestant citizens are more inclined to vote for republicans. (Lazarsfeld 1994)

So, voting behavior serves as social adjustment and is an "expressive" motivation for vote choices. The researches of "Columbia school" stress that voting choices are "matters of sentiment and disposition rather than reasoned preferences" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, P. 311)

One of the major contributions to the "sociological model " was made by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). In the book "Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives" they focus on explaining formations of different party systems. They identified four cleavages that emerged after the Industrial Revolution. According to them, these cleavages influenced and determined the development of the European parties. There are two types of cleavages – territorial and functional. The first group includes the church/state division as well as subject/dominant culture. The second group includes the division between workers and owners

as well as secondary/primary economy division.

The recent research on cleavage politics has emphasized the fact that electorate and political parties have changed in contemporary democratic countries. People became more independent in their voting choice. Traditional group divisions based on class, religion and territory has become less important. The weakening of traditional social identities in the 1960s made it more difficult to identify separate, distinct sectors of the electorate. Moreover, the emergence of "catch – all" parties has challenged the previous notion of a party as a representative of particular sectors of society. Economic growth made party programs less divisive and appealing to all the electorate. Mass media facilitated the ability of party leaders to appeal to the electorate as a whole, rather than appealing to their core constituencies alone. Rather than focusing on mobilization of their core constituencies, "catch – all" parties began focusing on attracting a wider audience. As a consequence, ties between parties and particular segments of society became less strong. (Katz and Mair 1995)

Yet, other researchers point out that while there is a decline in traditional cleavages. It does not necessarily mean an end of structuration of politics by social division. Instead, they argue, a new kind of cleavage structures emerge. In particular, a so-called "value cleavage", meaning the opposition between materialist and post-materialist values of the citizens. Dalton (2002) points out that there has been a decline in class alignments in recent years. He demonstrates that the nature of cleavage politics is changing. "Electoral politics is moving from cleavages defined by fixed social groups to value and issue cleavages that identify communities of like-minded individuals" (Dalton, p. 174). Yet, others are more optimistic. Martin Elff (2007) in the article "Social Structure and Electoral Behavior in Comparative Perspective: The Decline of Social Cleavages in Western Europe Revisited" argue that, although the impact of class on voting is in

decline, the division between religious and secular people still has a significant impact on voting choice in most countries in Western Europe under study.

No consensus either exists on the casual mechanism underlying the cleavage formation. Researchers distinguish two main approaches: "bottom-up" and "top-down" (Bellucci and Heath 2012). According to the former approach, the changes that occurred within the electorate, such as increasing secularization, increasing social mobility, the availability of higher education raised the cognitive capacity of voters, expanded their political awareness and made them more individualistic in their voting choices. Consequently, voter's position in the class structure became less significant predictor of the voting choice in advanced industrial societies (Dalton 2006). Furthermore, the recently emerged cleavages, such as "value cleavages" replaced the traditional ones and made them less relevant (Kriesi 1998). The second, "top-down" approach, on the contrary, stresses that changing nature of cleavages is a consequence of party politics and elite mobilization strategies. Thus, in case political parties differ in their policies along cleavage dimensions, there will be much stronger cleavages in the electorate (Oskarson 2005).

Yet, other researchers argue that the previously mentioned two approaches miss an important explanation. Namely, a linkage between parties and organized society. Bellucci and Heath (2011) in the article "The Structure of Party-Organization Linkages and the Electoral Strength of Cleavages in Italy, 1963–2008" argue that in Italy the dynamics of cleavage voting could not be explained by social change or change in party policies. The authors introduce a new explanatory variable – "interlocking of parties and cleavage specific social organizations" (Bellucci and Heath, P. 133). They argue that the linkage between parties and social organizations are a major part of the process of translating membership in a particular social group into support for political parties. In this way, cleavage politics are reinforced when social characteristics of voters

are consistent with cleavage related organizational characteristics of political parties. And, on the other hand, when there is little consistency in voter's social characteristics and organizational characteristics of political parties, cleavage politics will be weaker.

#### 2.2. "Sociological" model and Russian context

There are some problems in applying the "sociological" model to Russian electorate. The problems are connected with the fact that this model was first developed to explain the voting behavior in stable democratic contexts. In the post-communist countries, though, the situation is quite different. There is no clear owners/workers division as opposing the most western countries. Moreover, the connection between sociological characteristics and voting preferences is not very straightforward and clear (Golosov 1997). The unclear patterns of electoral preferences in Russian electorate led some researchers to believe that sociological models offer little explanation to the voting behavior in post-communist countries. For example, Yulia Shevchenko creates a model which explains the voting choice in Russian elections and basically excludes the "sociological" model from her analysis. He justifies her decision by the fact that in post-communist countries voters are "free of the social and predefined factors" (Shevchenko 1998).

G. Golosov (1996) made an attempt to assess the extent to which each theory could be applicable to post-communist electorate. He finds that "sociological" model has the least explanatory power among three "classic" theories of electoral behavior, but still, could be applied to explain the voting patterns in post-communist countries. Kirill Kalinin (2006) tries to apply the concept of sociological cleavages of Lipset and Rokkan to explain voting patterns in Russian electorate. He concludes that this concept has little significance in post-communist contexts. Based on regression analysis he finds out that there is little connection between sociological cleavages and

voting choice.

#### 2.3. (Socio-) Psychological model

The "psychological" model was developed by the researches from Michigan University, led by Angus Campbell in 1960s. Instead of focusing on the root causes of vote choice like the "sociological "model did, the "psychological" model focused on immediate cognitive motives of voting.

"Psychological" model offered criticism of the previous model. Columbia school was criticized for overestimating "structural voting" due to measurement errors. Social characteristics do not change over a certain period of time, but the election results and voting for parties do. Consequently, the fluctuations from election to election could not be attributed and explained only by social characteristics (Campbell 1960, P.16-17).

According to "psychological model", vote choice is an expression of long-standing predispositions toward political parties. Identification with a certain party creates a "perceptual screen" through which voters make evaluations of the candidates and make voting choices (Campbell 1964, P. 133). Voter's party identification is rather stable and do not change over time. Party identification is also closely connected with the level of interest in politics. Thus, voters, who are most interested in political affairs, have more strong party identifications (Campbell 1964).

Researchers distinguish long-term and short-term factors that influence voting behavior. Although "psychological model" stresses the importance of party identification on electoral behavior, it also points out that there are short-term factors that influence voting choice. In this way, voters who have always been voting for one party could change their opinion in one election. Nevertheless, they could return to the party that they identify themselves with in the next elections (Campbell 1960).

The "psychological model" quickly gained popularity not only in the United States, but also in Europe. Comparative researches found out that there are long-term party identifications that influence voting behavior not only in United States, but also in many European countries as well (Golosov, Meleshkina 2001).

However, the model was criticized in a few ways. One of the most important criticisms was that partisanship has been declining in most Western democracies in recent decades. For example, analyzing fifteen party-systems in Europe, Schmitt and Holmberg (1995) find out that party attachments were declining in most European party-systems.

As a consequence of these criticisms, there appeared modifications of the "psychological model". Revisionist school of thought views party identification in a slightly different light, than the classic approach did. From the revisionist perspective, party identification is a "running-tally of evaluations" that is constantly updated according to political parties' positions on various issues and personal evaluations of party performance (Fiorina 1981). Lodge, Steenbergen and Brau (1995) argue that citizens are responsive to political campaign information. In their view, voters adjust evaluations of the candidates in response to their assessments of campaign messages. The authors challenge the traditional assumption in the political science research that voter's ignorance about political events leads to inability to recall campaign events. In contrast to the previous studies that stress memory-based assumptions in political behavior, the researchers build an online model of a responsive voter. According to this model, when voters form impressions about candidates, they act as "bounded rationalists" and simplify their evaluation by

making conclusions based on immediate information they receive during the political campaigns. The assessments of candidates then are integrated in the "online tally" that hold voter's overall evaluation of candidates. Later, when making a decision for which candidate to vote for individuals use this summary impressions. Thus, campaign messages have a rather significant effect on the voter's judgments. So, the researches hypothesize that if citizens establish and update their "online tally" of evaluations in response to new pieces of information and make judgments based on the summary evaluations that would indicate that voters are responsive to immediate campaign information. The experimental method which the study uses supports this hypothesis. The results demonstrated that campaign messages in making their evaluation of the candidates. This responsiveness is not reflected, though, in the recollection of political campaigns. After a delay voters seem to be unable to remember facts from political campaigns. So, recall plays a rather insignificant role in voter's evaluations of candidates.

More recent research, however, demonstrates that when forming their evaluations of the candidates, individuals may use both, memory-based and on-line processes. Kim and Garrett (2011), for example, propose that the two processes work together in complementary ways in political decision making. The study testes the "hybrid model" empirically by employing US presidential primary debate as an informational stimulus. The results of the analysis give evidence for their model. Individuals did use the memory-based and on-line processes simultaneously. They also found out that running tallies had stronger influence on the formation of individuals attitudes about candidates then did the memory tally.

The scope of this research does not allow for more detailed discussion of the recent developments in the literature on psychological model of voting behavior. While the general

discussion of this theoretical approach contributes to understanding of the major developments in literature on psychological model, more specific discussion on the connection between electoral competition and voting behavior is more relevant for this research.

#### 2.4. Electoral competition and voting behavior

Political competition has long been considered as a necessary condition for a wellfunctioning representative democracy (Przeworski 1991; Schumpeter 1942). There has been a lot research made on the subject of electoral competition and its connection to voter participation.

The theoretical assumptions underlying the link between the level of voter participation and the closeness of the elections go back to Downs (1956). He suggested that the decision to vote is a rational calculation of the utilities that the voter expects to get from elections. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) further developed a model, which explained the costs and benefits of voting. One of the main implications from their framework was that the voters would be more inclined to vote if they felt that they have more chance to influence the election results. Thus, since the cost of voting is very expensive, voters are more likely to vote in competitive elections, because they feel they have an opportunity to influence the election outcomes in a more significant way.

Although these assumptions have been criticized on different grounds (Schwartz 1987; Coate and Conlin 2004), some recent research has sound support for the proposed theoretical assumption (Robert et al 2007; Blais 2000). Blais (2000) found out that across many states, electoral competition is associated with increased levels of voter participation. He looked at a number of factors that could influence turnout, including socioeconomic environment, institutional setting and the party system. The latter group encompasses such factors as number of parties and competitiveness of party system. His hypothesis was that the closer the elections are, the higher turnout will be in these elections. Blais tests this proposition using data on 324 elections in 91 countries and finds support for the proposed hypothesis. He reports that closeness in elections does have an impact on the level of voter's participation. Thus, the gap of 10 points between winning and second candidates reduces turnout by 1.4 points. Garmann (2014) also tests the proposition that electoral competition increases voter turnout. He uses data on 280 city mayor elections in Germany and finds empirical support for this hypothesis. The results demonstrate that indeed, the expected decrease in the electoral competition results in decrease in electoral participation. G. Simonovits (2012) tests the "Downsian Closeness Hypothesis", which implies that voters are more likely to vote when they think that the chance that they will influence the election is bigger. Thus, they will be more likely to vote in close elections. Simonovits tests this theoretical assumption using data on two-round elections in Hungary in 20002 and 2006. He tests the following hypothesis: "expected closeness of runoff elections in single seat districts proxied by the closeness of the first round race, increases turnout". The results of the analysis give support for this proposition. Thus, in those districts, where the elections were close in the first round, the electoral participation was higher in the runn-off. Robert et all (2007) also found out that close races increase voter participation, but the results are only significant for knowledgeable citizens. McDonald and Tolbert (2012) focus on the perceptions of the electoral competition on voting behavior in U.S. 2006 House elections. They found that while the actual levels of electoral competition do not seem to have an impact on the turnout, the perceptions of electoral competition do matter. In this way, voters who believe that electoral competition is higher in their districts are significantly more likely to vote in House elections.

#### 2.5. "Psychological" model and Russian context

Most researchers point to some difficulties in applying the concept of "party identification" to the post-communist electorate (Golosov 2003). This seems quite obvious. According to the "psychological" model, party identification develops during quite long period of time and is influenced by the processes of family socialization. Thus, party identification develops through at least few generations. But during the Communist rule there was no competitive party-system. Considering the fact that process of Russian voter's socialization happened exactly at this time, it seems quite paradoxical to talk about the stable party-identification (Golosov, Meleshkina 2001). Moreover, newly formed political parties in post-communist societies are usually characterized by organization instability. There is also a lack of stable and predictable political preferences among voters. People usually change their preferences from election to election (Meleshkina 200).

Consequently, some researchers conclude that "psychological" model could not be applied to post-communist electorate. For example, Meleshkina (2000) points out to the inconsistency of political preferences of Russian electorate and concludes that there is no stable and clear party-identification among them.

Other researchers, while agreeing that party-identification among Russian electorate is rather weak, nevertheless point out that they have psychological allegiance not to the political parties, but toward more broad political blocks (Golosov 2003). This kind of "political identification" is rather stable and do not change during the sequence of elections (Malutin 1998). So, in this interpretation, the "psychological model" could be applied to the post-communist electorate. Moreover, Golosov (1996), testing the explanatory power of each model in Russian elections, finds out that this model has best explanatory power out of three "classic" theories of electoral behavior.

#### 2.6. Economic voting

The major contribution to the development of "economic voting" was made by A. Downs. According to Downs, voter is a rational individual. He is able to assess the benefits which he can get from voting for each party. Consequently, he will choose the party, which benefits him the most. He mostly pays attention not to the candidate's campaign promises, but to the past performance of the government (Downs 1957).

It would seem that voters in Downsian concept are required to be able to process very large amounts of information. In reality, though, voters do not have this ability. It is very hard and time-consuming for voters to assess all party-programs. Moreover, voters act in a situation of lack of a full information and have to act in a situation of uncertainty. How, then, voters could make rational decisions? As a way to make decisions more simple and easy Downs views ideology, by which he understands how voters see the most preferable structure of society. Voters would vote for those parties that are more close to their political views. Rather than carefully assessing all the party programs, rational voter assess the ideologies and make decisions based on this assessment (Downs 1957 P. 141-142).

So, voting in this model has an instrumental meaning. Contrary to the two previous model of electoral behavior, voters make decisions based on benefits that they can get from voting for a certain party, not the expression of commitment or identification with them.

One of the models, incorporated in the economic voting is the "retrospective voting", which was initially developed by Morris Fiorina. State of the economy is a valence issue (Almost every citizen have similar preferences for low inflation or high economic growth, for instance). Changes in economic conditions (or perceptions of them) lead to changes of voting outcomes. Voters do not have deep and sophisticated knowledge of political affairs. Nevertheless, they have information about the economic conditions under the last administration. Consequently, they vote to "punish" the current government if the economic situation is unacceptable to them. And, on the contrary, they will vote for the incumbent, if the economic conditions were satisfactory.

One of the pioneering researches in this field was made by Kramer (1971). He finds out that changes in real disposable income explain about half of the variance in U.S. congressional elections. Goodhart and Bhansali (1970) also find out that changes in inflation and unemployment explain changes in poll results about the voting support of government party in Great Britain.

Since it is obviously impossible to summarize hundreds of scholarly articles and books on the subject of economic voting, I will mainly focus on the relatively recent articles about the economic voting in the post-communist countries. As Nadeau, Niemi and Yoshinaka (2002) have demonstrated in their article "A cross-national analysis of economic voting: taking account of the political context across time and nations", the influence of economic conditions on voting varies a lot between countries. The authors argue that the extend to which economic factors influence voting behavior depends on political context of the countries. In those countries, where citizens can clearly assign responsibility for economic performance to the government, they will be more likely to "punish" incumbents and vote them out of the office. On the contrary, in countries, where voters do not see a clear government's responsibility for economic situation, the strength of economic voting will be less significant.

There results of studies on economic voting in post-communist countries present various results. Most of the studies demonstrate that there is presence of economic voting in post-

communist countries. Dutch (1995) found out that poor economic performance led citizens punish governments in three post-communist countries – Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Anderson (2003) found out support for the economic voting model in Hungarian 1994 parliamentary elections. The government coalition had significant losses because of the prorating economic conditions in the country, such as declining leaving standards and higher levels of unemployment. Dutch (2001) also found support for the economic voting in Hungarian elections. The results of his research demonstrate that those voters, who evaluated economic situation as a negative one, were unlikely to vote for the incumbent party. Thus, among 37 per cent of voters, who perceived the economic situation as a negative one 87 per cent indicated that they will not vote for the incumbent. Dutch also tests the connection between trust in institutions and information and economic voting. He finds out that voters that have higher levels of trust and have a positive evaluation of the economy have a higher tendency to vote for incumbent than do voters with lower levels of trust and information.

A. Roberts in the article (2008) "Hyperaccountability: Economic voting in Central and Eastern Europe" investigates the results of 34 elections in ten Central and Eastern European countries. The results of his analysis reveal what he calls "hyperaccountability". In most all the countries under study, there were high levels of electoral accountability and voters "punished" incumbents for poor economic performance. The indicators of unemployment were the most significant predictor of economic voting. Governments, which were responsible for high levels of unemployment, had significant losses of vote shares in the elections. Another interesting finding was that despite the fact that some governments had relatively impressive economic indicators, they were still "punished" by the voters. The author proposes the following explanation for this phenomenon. Under communist rule citizens had limited ability to voice

their dissatisfaction. Among these possibilities were voting against the incumbent or abstaining from elections. Even after the transition, voters still had little possibilities to show the government that the situation in the country is no longer acceptable to them. Consequently, elections became one of the few places where voters had a chance to make their voice of discontent heard.

Yet, other studies find that economic voting is relatively insignificant in post-communist countries. Tucker (2006), for instance, found out that economic voting is mediated by how voters perceive political parties, rather than the performance of incumbents. Thus, there is evidence that "Old Regime parties" perform better in those areas of a country, where economic situation was worse. Better economic condition benefited those parties that were associated with transition from communism, which the author labels "New Regime parties".

#### 2.7. "Economic" voting and Russian context

Problems in the economy, which usually follow the transition from Communist past, stimulate the economic voting. In this case, the election results could serve as indicators of successful economic policies of the government. The central role of the government in authoritarian systems strengthens the implication that it is the government that should be responsible for the results of the implemented policies. Consequently, the concepts developed by the economic voting theory could correspond with the context of post-communist countries.

Using the model of economic voting for explaining the voting patterns in post-communist electorate, Kitchelt hypothesizes that voters in new democracies vote egocentrically and perceptively, since they are hoping that the economic situation will improve in the future. This hypothesis is criticized by many researchers. For instance, G. Golosov (2003) is skeptic about

the fact that voters in new democracies, which have very little practice of voting in competitive elections could rationally calculate the consequence of their voting choices. Furthermore, the empirical studies of post-communist electorate refute this hypothesis and demonstrate that in post-communist countries the economic voting usually retrospective and sociotropic (Gibson, Cielecka 1995).

So, the economic voting offers considerable explanatory power in describing voting behavior in post-communist countries. Y. Shevchenko (1998) in her development of the model which explains the electoral behavior in Russian elections uses the economic voting as her main theoretical concept. She argues that this model focuses more on the individual factors of the vote choice, not the influence of the sociological factors. It is especially relevant in Russian context in light of the lack of stable party-identification and sociological cleavages.

#### 2.8. Theories of electoral behavior and "protest voting"

#### 2.8.1. Psychological model

The concept of "party identification" plays a central role in the "psychological model" of electoral behavior. So, I would assume, that "protest voting" in this concept means voicing discontent against worsening political situation in the country. Protest voting could mean dissatisfaction with all available candidates on the ballot or be directed towards the lack of electoral competition, for instance. Voters could not find the suitable candidate with whom they could identify themselves and, consequently, vote "against all" candidates. This situation could also be strengthened by the fact that there is little consistency in political parties, participating in elections in Russia. Some parties take part only in one election and disappear in another. Some change their names or join other electoral blocks or parties. In such situation of uncertainty, it is

more difficult to the voters to identify themselves with a certain political party. Small choice available for the voters could make this problem of finding the "right" candidates even more difficult for voters.

In this research, by "political" factors I mean the characteristics of the regional political systems (in different regions in Russia there are different types of electoral systems, as well as different level of democratization). In a situation, when voters do not have an opportunity to participate in elections in an effective manner (when the competitions in elections is low, for instance) they will protest more often. So, the levels of protest voting will be higher, the lower the level of competition is in the regional elections.

Recent research on voting behavior in Russian elections already investigated this issue. Anohina and Meleshkina (2004) propose that regional political regime has a significant impact on protest voting on mayoral elections. The authors hypothesize that small choice between candidates, unequal conditions for electoral competition and lack of institutional channels of voicing the dissatisfaction would lead to higher levels of protest voting. The results of their research find support for this proposition. So, it is interesting to investigate, whether the same connection between political competition exists in parliamentary elections in Russia.

However, it is important to note, that the connection between political competition and protest voting could go in the opposite direction. The literature on political competition and voter participation states that high levels of political competition increase various levels of electoral participation, drawing more voters to the polling stations. (Garmann 2014; Blais 2000) So, the alternative explanation, based on the literature on political participation could be that the levels of protest voting would increase if the there a close races in a county. High levels of electoral competition mean that voters feel that they have an opportunity to influence the elections results

in a more significant way. As a consequence, more people would go the polling station.

#### 2.8.2. Economic voting

The explanation of protest voting within a frame of economic voting seems rather straightforward. According to the concept of economic voting, there is a linkage between economic situation (or perceptions of economic situation) in a country and voting outcomes. Voters assume that the government is responsible for the current state of affairs in the country. Consequently, they will vote the current government out of office, if the economic conditions became worse off.

So, according to the theories of retrospective voting, voters tend to protest against an incumbent party if the economic situation has deteriorated. Based on this theoretical perspective, the hypothesis is that the high level of economic development is negatively correlated with the level of protest voting. In is necessary to note that the option "against all" is not the only form of expression of voter's dissatisfaction (they can vote for alternative parties, for instance). However, considering the fact that the option provides more clear possibility to express voter's dissatisfaction, I assume that in a situation of dissatisfaction voters will be using this option more often.

# CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY, DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

#### 3.1. Research question and hypotheses

The paper seeks to answer the following question – *what factors influence protest voting in parliamentary elections on a county level?* 

The two main groups of factors that influence protest voting are economic and political. The economic theory of voting points out that voters asses the current economic situation in their regions and assume that the government is responsible for the current state of economic situation. Consequently, they will vote out of office the current government, if the economic condition became worse off. Since the "against all" option provides the most straightforward way to voice the voter's dissatisfaction, I hypothesize that in those regions, where the economic conditions are worse off, there will be also higher levels of protest voting.

At the same time, protest voting could mean voter's reaction to the political situation in the country. The connection between protest voting and political factors could go in two different ways. On one hand, it would be logical to assume that voters will be more likely to choose "against all" option, if the levels of electoral competition are small. With small choice of acceptable candidates, facing a situation when voters can not find a candidate that would represent their views, they will be more likely to choose "against all" option. On the other hand, theories of electoral behavior link high political competition to increased levels of voter participation. So, when voters are presented with varied choice of political candidates and there are high levels of electoral competition and high standard of electoral democracy in the regions, voters could be more inclined to go to the polling station, since they have more possibility to effect the outcome if elections. Competitive elections not only give voters a higher possibility to influence the outcome of elections, they also make electoral campaigns more interesting. In this case people who intend to vote "against all" could be more eager to express their opinion in elections.

So, the he hypotheses are the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** If the economic conditions have worsened in some regions, the voters will be more inclined to vote "against all" candidates or parties in these regions.

**Hypothesis 2.** The levels of protest voting will be higher in those regions, where the levels of competitions are lower.

#### 3.2. Data and operationalization of variables

To answer the research question it is necessary to identify and operationalize the explanatory and response variables. The **response variable** is a percentage of the votes cast by "against all" option in parliamentary elections on a county level. There are four **explanatory** variables in the model. Two variables that were operationalized in the framework of the psychological theory of voting behavior are characteristics of political system (on a county level). *Level of opposition* was calculated by adding percentage of the votes cast for three major opposition parties: "Yabloko", Communist party and Liberal democratic party (LDPR). *Difference between first and second candidates* was calculated by subtracting the percentage of the votes casted for the second candidate from the percentage of the votes casted for the winning candidate. Two other variables were operationalized in the framework of the economic model of voting behaviour. The two variables, measuring the level, of economic conditions on the regional level include *level of GDP* and *level of unemployment* (for one year before the elections, since

voters assess economic conditions retrospectively). When included in the model, the level of GDP was rescaled by dividing by 10000 and unemployment was rescaled by 10. The rescaling was needed because of the large difference in variance between GDP and other variables in the model.

The data on the election results on the regional level is taken from the database on election results, provided by Grigorii Golosov ("Russian electoral statistics". Center in support of democracy and human rights "Helix"). The data on the election results on the levels of counties is taken from the online database provided by Shpilkin.<sup>1</sup> The economic variables are taken from the online database of the "Federal state statistics service".<sup>2</sup> It is important to note some of the limitations of the data. The data on the county level is available only for the 2003 parliamentary elections. There is no data available on the economic statistics prior to the 2000 year. Due to the lack of the data available, I will only analyze the 2003 parliamentary elections, as well as mayoral elections from 2000 to 2003.

#### 3.3. Methodology: Multilevel modeling

The main objective of this research is to determine the influence of economic and political factors on protest voting in Russian elections. This research is cross-sectional and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Institute for Human rights. (URL: <u>http://hrights.ru/index.htm/</u>)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Database on electoral statistics of "Federal State statistics service" (URL:< <u>http://www.cikrf.ru/</u>>)

multilevel in design. I use the data on two different levels: regional level and county level. In Russia each of 89 regions there are administrative-territorial entity called counties. So, counties are clustered within regions. So, the need for multilevel model comes from the structure of the data. Multilevel model is a statistical model, which is applied to data, which include variables on more than one level. The goal of the multilevel model is to predict the values of certain response variables based on a function of an explanatory variable on across multiple levels (Luke 2004). The model that I am constructing measures protest voting on the level of counties as a result of political variables measured at the county level, as well as economic variables measured on the regional level. So, the model will include two levels.

The first justification for using multilevel modeling comes from theoretical grounds. The hypotheses are constructed at multiple levels, so multilevel modeling is needed to test the propositions. Another justification for using multilevel modeling comes from structural properties of the data. The nested structure of the data implicates that the observations are not independent from each other. In this case, using simple regression analysis would not be the best solution, since the major assumption of ordinary least squares that the observations are independent from one another will be violated. The multilevel model relaxes this assumption and allows for correlated error structures. So, multilevel models will estimate unbiased errors (Luke 2004). So, for these reasons multilevel modeling was chosen to test the hypothesis.

### CHPTER 4. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

#### 4.1. Multilevel model

Before analyzing the relationship between protest voting and various factors that could influence it, the extent to which these variables varied by region was explored. Region-level variability would justify the need for multilevel approach to modeling protest voting behavior.

The formal measure of proportion of variance in the response variable that is accounted for by level-2 groups is provided by interclass correlation coefficient (ICC). The ICC for the protest voting percentage is 0.36. Than demonstrates that regions account for 36 % of the variability of protest votes. This relatively high ICC gives evidence that multilevel model, incorporating variables on the regional level could be useful. The relatively high ICC value also suggests that the observations are not independent from one another. One of the major assumptions of a linear regression model is that the observations are independent from one another. Taking into account nested structure of the data and relatively high ICC value, this assumption is obviously violated. Multilevel modeling relaxes the independence assumption. (Luke 2004).

The multilevel model was tested using R version 3.1.0 and the nlme package. The model includes the percentage of votes, casted for the "against all" option on the county level as a response variable and the following explanatory variables: the level of opposition in the county, difference between 1<sup>st</sup> and second candidates in the county, the level of GDP and unemployment on the regional level.

The standard multilevel approach was used (Luke 2004, Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).

First, a null model was built to determine the extent to which protest voting behavior is influenced by general region-level characteristics. From the null model the ICC (0.36) was calculated, which is mentioned above. Then, a model was constructed than included only level-1 (county) predictors (level of opposition and difference between first and second candidates). Then region level variables were added in a two-level model. The variables added were characteristics of the economic situation in the regions: level of GDP and level of unemployment. The results of the two-level multilevel model are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Multilevel model estimates of effects of level of opposition, difference between first and second candidates, level of GDP and unemployment on percentage of protest votes on the Russian 2003 parliamentary elections

Level 1 Coefficients		
Difference	- 0.081311	-18.995*
Opposition	- 0.053011	-5.814*
Level 2 Coefficients		
GDP	0.062454	2.130*
Unemployment	- 0.655063	-2.928*

#### Variables Coefficients t-ratio

The main results that could be drawn from the multilevel model are that level of unemployment and difference between first and second candidates are the most significant predictors of protest voting.

First of all, these results do not support the initial hypothesis that people react to the worsening economic situation by expressing their discontent in a clear manner and voting "against all". Contrary to this assumption, people in more economically developed regions are more likely to cast a vote for the "against all" option. One of the explanations of this situation could be that those voters, who lose their jobs and find economic condition unsatisfactory tend to vote for oppositional political parties, instead using "against all" option. When facing the problematic economic situation, people give their vote for alternative political party that can influence the state of affairs in the country. Oppositional political parties usually attract higher percentage of votes that the "above all" option, so voters have a higher chance to influence the situation and not wasting their votes by choosing "against all" option. This situation could also be explained by the fact that unemployed voters, searching for a job and struggling with hard economic conditions simply do not pay that much attention to the political developments in their regions as do voters in more economically developed regions. This group of voters simply does not go to the polling stations. Their attention is drawn much more to the efforts of finding new job, rather then delegating this responsibility to their representatives. This explanation seems especially relevant if one takes into account a rather undeveloped tradition in Russia of relying on politicians to solve people's problems. The results also suggest that voting dynamics in parliamentary elections is similar to voting pattern in presidential elections. Previous research has established that more economically developed regions tend to be more "oppositional" ones, while in rural areas people tend to vote for Putin, leader of the "ruling party". The results

demonstrate that there is a similar pattern in parliamentary elections. Voters in more economically developed regions are more willing to challenge the existing status quo, while people, living in regions with poor economic conditions are less eager to cast a protest vote.

Another factor that has significant impact on protest voting is the difference between first and seconds candidates. So, the results support the hypothesis that the higher competition there is in a county, the higher level of protest will be there. It seems that close races do indeed increase voter participation and make people more eager to express their opinion in the elections. In those regions, where the competition is high, voters also tend to voice their discontent more often. This situation could be linked to the fact that in those regions, where there is a higher competition in elections, levels of democratic procedures are also higher. In this situation, voters feel that they could influence the outcome of election in a more significant way and vote "against all". Previous literature already empathized the fact that when voters feel that they could have a higher impact on the elections results, they tend to use the option "against all" more often. Hutchenson (2004) analyses protest voting dynamic in different electoral systems. He reports that voters are more likely to cast a protest vote in majoritarian electoral systems as opposed to proportional ones. He explains this situation by the fact that in majoritarian systems voters feel that they have more chance to influence the election results. Proportional systems, on the other hand, increase "positive" voting, since against all vote does not usually have a significant impact on the election results and could sometimes even benefit the winning party.

So, the results support the theoretical concepts that electoral competition will increase if voter perceive races as very competitive. At the same time, this result contradicts previous literature on protest voting. Anohina and Meleshkina (2004) propose that regional political regime has a significant impact on protest voting. Small choice between candidates, unequal conditions for electoral competition and lack of institutional channels of voicing the dissatisfaction would lead to higher levels of protest voting. Authors test this proposition on mayoral Russian elections and find evidence for their hypothesis. The more democratic political regime was in the regions, the less likely were voters to cast a protest vote. Hutchenson (2004) also tests a proposition that the small choice between candidates on the electoral ballot would lead to higher levels of protest voting. However, he does not find any evidence for this proposition. There is no connection between number of candidates and protest voting. However, he uses the different measure of electoral competition, than the one that is used in this research. He simply takes the number of political candidates on the electoral ballot, which is not the very accurate measure of electoral competition. So, obviously, the dynamics of protest voting varies in different levels of elections.

However, the results do complement the previous literature on protest voting behavior. The overall pattern, which could be drawn from the results is that people are more likely to vote "against all" in more developed regions, where there are lower levels of unemployment, the economic conditions are high and the level of electoral competition are also high. The results fall in line with previous literature on protest voting in Russian elections. Previous research (Hutchenson 2004; McAllister and White 2008) has established that voters with high levels of education, living in urban areas and voters who are more interested in political affairs tend to vote "against all" more often. I focused on different set of factors that have an impact on protest voting behavior. They seem to complement the previous research. Not only voters tend to use the "against all" option in areas with high levels of information and education, but also in economically developed regions, with high levels of democratic standards. In these regions, voters have more opportunity to stay involved in political affairs and influence the election results. The analysis suggests that voters quite actively use these opportunities.

The results also fall in line with the debates between political observers on consequences of abolishment the "against all" option from the electoral ballot. Some of them argued that abolishment of the option would lead to further decline in turn out, since voters would have a more limited choice (McAllister I., White, S. 2008). The results support the proposition that active citizens, interested in political affairs use the "against all" option more often when provided certain opportunities (such as higher levels of electoral competition). In this case, it would see logical that the abolishment of the option could lead to further decline of turn out.

#### CONCLUSION

In this thesis I analyzed factors that influence protest voting in Russian parliamentary elections on the county level. Taking counties, not regions as the units of analysis (contrary to the previous research on protest voting in Russian elections) provides a more precise measure of protest voting behavior, since economic and political variables vary considerably within Russian regions. I focus on two groups of factors – economic and political. Multilevel model that I use to test the proposed hypothesis allows accurately predict the values of response variable (namely, percentage of votes casted for the "against all" option) based on a function of explanatory variables across two levels.

Previous research mostly focused on structural characteristics of protest electorate, such as age, nationality, level of education and interest in politics. I analyze protest voting dynamics from a different perspective. I've tried to answer the question, whether certain situation in the regions, such as poor economic conditions or small electoral competition would make people more eager to express their dissatisfaction with all political parties presented on the electoral ballot.

The results of the analysis give rather unexpected results. First of all, the results do not support the initial hypothesis, stating that in those regions, where economic situation have worsened, there will be higher levels of protest votes. On contrary, voters in more economically developed regions, with lower levels of unemployment are more likely to cast a protest vote. Second, voters are also more likely to vote "against all" in those counties, where there are higher levels of political competition.

So, the following picture emerges. Voters, living in most economically developed

regions, with high levels of democratic standards and competitive electoral politics tend to use the "against all" option more often.

Close elections make voters more interested and engaged in political processes. Not only voters feel that they have a higher probability to influence election outcome, they also become more engaged and interested in political affairs. Even considering the fact that a relatively small percent of protest votes (comparing to the votes for the oppositional parties) won't make a significant difference in parliamentary elections, nevertheless people are more active in voicing their discontent. They are more willing to bear the costs of going to the polling station to express their disappointment with the available options on the ballot in a situation when elections are close and therefore more heated. Furthermore, more economically developed regions tend to be the most "oppositional" ones. In these regions voters are obviously given much more opportunities to stay informed and interested in political affairs of their country, as well as more chances to have their voices heard through elections. The result suggest that in those regions where there is a favorable situation, allowing voters to have more opportunities to express their opinion, elections are more competitive and the electoral process is fair, voters are using the opportunities to participate in political affairs more often. So, sustaining high level of economic growth, good living conditions and having fair and competitive elections leads to a situation, when voters are more eager to express their opinion and challenge the existing status quo, even if the chances of changing the election results are not that high. The results suggest that "against all" option is quite popular among the active part of the electorate, who are not indifferent to the situation in their country. In this respect, abolishment of the "against all" option seems a significant limitation of choice, available to the voters.

Although the current analysis gives detailed picture of factors that influence protest

voting behavior across counties in Russia, there are several ways to improve and complement the analysis. It is important to note certain limitations caused by the data availability. I focused only on two theories of electoral behavior – economic voting and psychological model. I did not consider any factors in the framework of sociological model. There are two reasons for that. First, as been noted earlier, previous research has already analyzed such factors as age, nationality or level of education. Consequently, it seemed more relevant to focus on a different set of factors that could contribute to a more clear understanding of protest voting behavior. Second reason comes from data limitations. There is no data publicly available on sociological characteristics of Russian electorate. Moreover, the data on economic and political variables is only available for the 2003 parliamentary elections. Thus, the time frame of this research is limited to 2003 parliamentary elections. Obviously, one of the ways to improve the research would be to add the sociological characteristics in the model. Another way to complement the analysis would be to use additional methodological tools, such as case studies or survey data on individual level of analysis.

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