# New Forms of «Soft Repression» in Russian Regions: the Case of Article 282

by

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# Abstract

What can subnational units tell us about the dynamics of repression? In this thesis, I argue that the scholarship on repression has to look at the variation of the means of repression on the subnational level, especially in the case of low-scale, or "soft" repression. Based on the case of the implementation of Article 282 of the Criminal Code in 80 Russian regions, the study aims at defining the key regional factors which determine the differences in how frequent the Article was used in these subnational units.

Firstly, I expect that regions with higher degrees of social dissent have more intensive use of repression. This claim is consistent with the existing body of research on the relationship between protests and state repression. Secondly, I propose that the stronger the subnational political machines are, the less repression occurs in the regions. This statement is supported by the literature on subnational authoritarianism and studies of political machines on the local level. Lastly, my quantitative analysis attempts to find how local political regimes influence the frequency of repression implementation. The last hypothesis is supported by recent studies on the diffusion of repression.

Unfortunately, the results of the quantitative analysis provide either no or little support for the hypotheses. However, the case studies of Russian regions demonstrate some interesting aspect of regional politics which was not captured by the indicators in the regression analysis. Thus, it leaves prospect for further studies of various forms of repression on the subnational level.

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# Introduction.

In December 2018, Vladimir Putin signed the amendments partially decriminalizing Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code. Highly debated in Russia and abroad, the article called "Incitement of Hatred or Enmity, as Well as Abasement of Human Dignity" is one of the measures of policy combating extremism (Maida 2017). The controversy of this article stems from the fact that the legislation attempting to reduce the violence and aggression towards various minorities is simply a new means of "soft repression" in real life ending with arrests of those who post harmless content online (Ferree 2004). More fields of everyday life became controlled by the Article in 2014, when the online space was included as a potential source of extremism. Although the motivation behind the implementation of the Article itself was questioned by the NGOs, media and some politicians, a brief look at the statistics does not show a consistent picture across the whole country. While the official data demonstrates zero criminal cases under Article 282 in some Russian regions, others hit the mark of almost 100 court sentences.

The scholarship on repression always portrays the central institutions of the state as the main initiators of coercion of all the types. There is no substantial study that looks at the lower administrative and territorial units of the countries to study the subnational dynamic. Meanwhile, the use of repressive tools can differ between the subnational units that have a significant level of autonomy. This is an empirical puzzle I work with in my MA thesis and the results provide a new framework for the analysis of repression. Thus, my research question is: *Why are the tools of "soft repression" implemented differently on the subnational level in the authoritarian states? What regional factors determine the differences?*

In this research, I consider Article 282 before its partial decriminalization as a tool of "soft repression", a non-violent and less noticeable technique of reducing the visibility of the

views opposing the current political system. Based on the case of Russian regions and the use of this Article, I want to conduct an analysis that relies on the existing knowledge of why certain types of repression occur and tries to introduce a novel way of measuring the intensity of repression through the strength of regional political machines.

I will analyze the dynamics of the implementation of Article 282 in Russian regions to determine the factors that can explain the differences in how frequently criminal cases are initiated on a subnational level. The planned time frame is supposed to cover the period from the first amendments to the Article that included the users of online social networks as potential targets of the implementation of the Article (beginning of 2014) till the latest amendments (December 2018).

This research contributes to the studies of new and emerging forms of repression. The new perspective through which I try to look at the phenomenon of repression can contribute not only to the scholarship on the related field through merging various theoretical approaches, but also to the decision-makers, as well as in the various NGOs. This thesis has the following structure. The first chapter summarizes two theoretical frameworks important for my research, studies on repression and scholarship on subnational authoritarianism and political machines. Next chapter outlines the research design. It is followed by a short overview of the repression in post-Soviet Russia and the history of Article 282, in particular. The two last chapters are devoted to the twofold empirical analysis based on which I draw my conclusions in the final remarks.

# Chapter 1. Theoretical background.

As the main focus of my master thesis is political repression in competitive authoritarian regimes, in this chapter I make a review of the literature that helps me to conceptualize the terms and identify relevant causalities for the research. First, I focus on the roots of the definition of state repression and further scientific contributors. After I look at the main questions related to the topic followed by the classifications of repressions introduced by a different scholars. Against the background of different conceptualization approaches, I provide important modifications of the key terms which are significant for the definition of the variables. The second part of the chapter demonstrates the reasons behind studying subnational units and is followed by the description of the main determinants of the differences in the subnational authoritarianism in Russian regions. This part contributes to the identification of the new hypotheses for the research. Finally, I introduce the three hypotheses based on the presented scholarship.

## 1.1. Whats and Whys of scholarship on repression.

*Definition.*

One of the first definitions of repression was given by Goldstein in his book on political repression in the United States. According to him, the repression could be defined by the state actions violating First Amendment-type rights like freedom of speech, assembly, travel, association, to boycott or peacefully picket (1978).

In his revision of the definition, Davenport (2007) pays more attention to the lack of interconnection between the notion of state repression and the areas of study which have always been crucial for the social science disciplines. He also wants to highlight that the set of repressive tools the states rely on is more diverse and this fact increases overlapping

characteristics among different regimes which use them. He includes "a wide variety of coercive efforts employed by political authorities to influence those within their territorial jurisdiction" into his conceptualization of repression (3). Repressive actions are usually perceived by scholars as a state response to the potential threats to their rule in society (Sullivan 2016). The specification of the addressee of the repression makes it closely related to the attempts made by the state authorities to prevent themselves from any association challenging the current regime.

Repression is one of the three main factors (the other two are co-optation and legitimation) that provide authoritarian regimes with stability (Gerschewski 2013). Although some scholars criticize Gerschewski's research for taking into account individual, instead of joint, effects of the factors (Schneider и Maerz 2017), in my own research, I will focus only on the repressions as well. The reason behind this choice is the attempt of the thesis to make a detailed within-case analysis of the implementation of repression with further identification of differences between subnational units.

*Variety of repressions, variety of typologies.*

The literature on the diversity of repression tactics used by the states has been expanded recently. Regarding the forms of repression, there are several studies that provide different classifications. They can be based on the type of threat to the regime imposing negative sanctions, or on the tools that are used to implement certain repression. One of the basic divisions of the broad definition of repression includes two major forms of violations: limitation of the rights and civil liberties and the violation of physical integrity (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014).

However, some studies prefer to classify repression on the basis of more complex indicators relevant for modern political systems. One of the most well-known measurements is presented by Way and Levitsky. In their work, the authors define two types of coercion in

autocratic states (2006). The introduction of the new indicators helps them to explain the different scenarios of authoritarian survival in the post-Soviet states and provides my research with the crucial terminology. According to the authors, repressions (in their text – coercion) could be of high and low intensity and are measured in two dimensions. Scope includes the channels that help the state apparatus to get to all the levels of society (393). Cohesion stands for how the leader of the state can seek support from the units of the state apparatus (394). After the Cold War, high-intensity coercion became a less attractive option for authoritarian rulers due to the increased international pressure (392). However, the limits given by the new world order can lead to a more diverse toolkit of less evident forms of repression. Thus, the classification within the notion of low intensity coercion can be expanded.

In his recent article based on the cases of repression in Russia, Rogov (2018) introduces a two-dimensional classification of political repressions. One criterion is based on the techniques of the repression, which could be administrative, criminal and informal prosecution. Another point of differentiation between various forms of repression is based on its main targets. This axis includes activity-centric, person-centric and organization-centric forms of repression (155-158). The additional target is highlighted by Rogov separately; he draws attention to the use of repressions against the elites of the regime.

Other sources either focus on the specific types of repression or criticize currently existing limitations. In the context of changing rules of repression, some scholars pay attention to the preemptive action taken against dissidents (De Jaegher и Hoyer 2019). The increased use of arrests as the means of repression is also the topic of growing interests in the research area. The main contribution within this scholarship is made by Jennifer Earl who studied the influence arrests have on the degree of participation among the members of social movements. She pays attention to the increasing popularity of arrests as the most effective means compared to police violence  While repressions are seen to be a backbone of

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authoritarian rule, there is a lack of case studies of repressions and repressive policies in different kinds of authoritarian regimes and their interaction with other mechanisms of authoritarian sustainability. As Russia has demonstrated a transition from 'soft' electoral authoritarianism to its more 'hard' version during Putin's third term in office, the role of repressions has increased. What are their scope and functions in Russia during this reverse transition? This article offers an analysis of the causes, types and mechanisms of repressions, and presents various ways of measuring their scale as well as the sources and means of their legitimation within the framework of an electoral regime. It shows that the regime prefers to demonstrate its high repressiveness—its willingness and propensity to repress—but in a limited number of cases; it also describes the role of -repressive populism, namely presenting repressions as a necessary response to multiplying threats, as well as the scope and function of counter-elite repressions. The latter are seen as no less important than political repressions in the regime's reverse transition, and as the main leverage of redistribution of power and institutional rearrangement in its course (Earl 2005). Although she gives a specific context of arrests in the protest marches, the research provides a new perspective of how they can become a new source of suppression which is more costly and influential for those who get detained (129).

The scholarship mentioned above gives one the basic understanding of the development of the term "state repression" in social sciences. There are several details among the studies I want to pay attention to. Most of the articles mentioned justify the use of the case of Article 282 as the form of repression. Literature points to the new repressive tools which are closer to the everyday life and easier to apply. Thus, one should also look at who the Article intimidates in the first place. Information about people convicted under its implementation is the example how new forms of repression work. It influences ordinary people, most of whom are not politically active. It is less visible as it attracts less media attention, it involves

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policing and arrests and makes people think twice about the costs of being active in online social media. Therefore, in addition to the typology of targets by Rogov I suggest to add the category of ordinary people which follows the development of studies of repression and leads to the concept which is crucial for this work.

### *New Conceptualization?*

In this part of the chapter, I would like to focus on the two notions in the studies of repression which could replace the well-known term and suggest new ways of studying the tools of regime survival. One of them was widely applied in the studies of new social movements, the other one is more relevant in the context of Russia.

A significant contribution to the conceptualization of different forms of repression was made by Ferree and her concept of 'soft repression (2004). With the expansion of the literature on the new social movements, it became questionable if the concept of "repression" was able to follow up on the changes in social sciences (139). That is why the author introduces the concept of 'soft repression" which is, contrary to the well-known hard repression "involves the mobilization of nonviolent means to silence or eradicate oppositional ideas" (141). Soft repression could be presented in the variety of forms which correspond to a certain level in the society which it is addressed to. Based on the example of the feminist social movements and the way institutions of civil society react to them, Ferree introduces three forms of soft repression – ridicule, stigma and silencing which occur on the micro-, meso- and macrolevel of society respectively (142). The usefulness of the new term was demonstrated by further research which did not only produced detailed case studies but also used the notion of "soft repression" in a broader conceptual context.

If one pays attention to the case of Russia after the wave of revolutions in post-Soviet space, one of the aims of Putin's second presidential term was to avoid the same events in his own country. However, the process of internationalization after the fall of the communism

made it more difficult for the authoritarian leaders to exercise severe repression on their citizens. In his work, Robertson applies the concept of Ferree to the case of Russia and demonstrates how the toolkit of the authoritarian Russian government has switched to a moderate repression through increased police control during the protests, new legislations tampering the activity of NGOs (2009).

The last research I would like to focus on is concerned with the conceptualization of the repression that is currently functioning in Russia. Gelman (2015b) uses the term "politics of fear" to describe the main trends in the repressive techniques of the state. The characteristics of this type of repression include the selectivity of the targets which means that the regime elites try to prevent the expansion of the dissident ideas among the ordinary citizens and eliminate the potential rivals from the contest. NGOs have also become the new recipients of the repression. The politics of fear in Russia is characterized as twofold including targeting individual activists and leaders of the opposition movements and the distribution of repressive populism which mean the legitimation of repressive policies and the intimidation of the citizens with several threats (Rogov 2018). Together with the term introduced by Ferree, it shapes the object of my research which accounts for the frequency of use of Article 282 in Russian regions. To make it more generalizable, the dependent variable is called *intensity of soft repression*.

*Repression: Main Predictors.*

The main question political scientists are trying to provide the answer to is what the factors that cause the emergence of repression are. Many scholars use the structural approach to define the key determinants of the repression.

As the main purpose of political repression is "to prevent or diminish direct and non-institutional challenges to social, cultural, and/or political power" (Earl 2011, 262), the first condition is **the type of political system**. Although it is widely assumed that repression is

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associated with an authoritarian state, some studies highlight that regime type is a less significant predictor of the level of repression than the size of a threat to the regime and the effect of the former should be measured only through the scores of the latter (Regan и Henderson 2002). Moreover, the authors provide support for a previously established claim that repressions are typical in the regimes located in the middle of the authoritarian-democratic spectrum. As it was claimed by Fein (1995), the states that are neither full democracies nor autocracies have the highest record of violations of human rights.

Other studies clarify that the establishment of democratization in a country is not enough to decrease the amount of human rights violations and only some aspects that are associated with the notion of democracy lead to positive effects in the area of human rights (De Mesquita et al. 2005).

Another most persistent opinion existing among the scholars of state repression is that **political conflicts** lead to the state increasing violations of citizens' rights and integrity. A tit-for-tat strategy that could be applied to the relationship between the state and the opposition movements means that both sides of the conflict modify their behaviour pro rata with the actions taken by each other (Carey 2006). Some research goes into more details to find out what characteristics of civil dissent will lead to an increase in state repression. For example, Davenport (1995) points out that such factors as frequency of conflicts, strategic variety and the deviance from cultural norms determine the repressive decision-making. However, even the empirical proof of the existence of the relationship between the strength and complexity of the dissent and the level of repression leaves some loopholes. The expectations the conflicting sides have regarding each other lead to the dissent also being affected by the level of repression, the one that is anticipated (Ritter and Conrad 2016, 87). The authors introduce a new explanatory model and divide repression into the prevention and the response ones. Such a clarification helped them to reach a more precise result which does not demonstrate a

strong influence of the dissent on the level of repression. Thus, future research should focus on the repression as a dynamic phenomenon which can be not only a direct response to an actual dissent but also to the anticipation of it (97).

The last group of scholars tries to understand the effect **international organizations and other external actors** have on the repression used by the state. According to Way and Levitsky, modern forms of repression are less violent due to the interdependence of political actors across the world (2006, 392), meaning that the international control plays a role in decreasing severe repression. Some authors make a clarification that such a positive effect can be found if a leader's position is not threatened. For example, liberalization of the economy as a response to the international demands can increase the level of repression through destabilization of the strength of regime coalitions (Kaire 2019). That is why the influence the international actors have is under question and depends on the presence and manageability of the disagreements within the ruling elites. As for other forms of internal threats, if there is no menace of turnover, an authoritarian leader will neglect the costs that could be caused by the courts after the repression is implemented (Conrad and Ritter 2013). In such cases, the pressure from the international human rights treaties will not be significant for the ruler.

However, other scholars also pay attention to how state-judiciary relations work and found them to be more complicated. In her paper, Shen-Bayh demonstrates that domestic judiciary hardly plays a role of the independent source of justice regarding state-society relationship (2018). She focuses on the ceremonial effect the trials have. In the presence of potential rivals, an autocrat needs to demonstrate that their political system is stronger, so the judiciary participates in the unfair trials while both increasing the degree of repression and legitimizing the authority of the ruler. Trials increase the costs of participating in anti-systemic activities and keeps the regime safe. Such cases make it more complicated for a

scholar to figure out what state institution can represent the interests of the citizens and international norms.

In the context of recent protests in Ukraine in 2013-2014, some researchers also raised the question of how much influence the external actors have on the expansion of repression (Chyzh and Labzina 2018). The findings are relevant for those studying the political systems as the determinants of different levels of repression. Their model shows that a democratic state could also use repression if the third-party provides the support the state is significantly dependent on and apply the model to the case of Ukrainian protests and resignation of Yanukovich.

Scholarship based on the large-N research says that another form of the external effects determining a certain preference of repressive techniques can be found through the study of the regimes with similar political systems. According to Olar (2019), institutional similarities between authoritarian states and the presence of the experience of similar dissent there influence the set of repressive techniques that the states prefer to implement. Thus, due to the similarities in the political systems and shared experience of opposition movements and threats to the regime, "repression diffuses between authoritarian regimes through learning and emulation" (11). Olar's research gives one another approach to combining both institutionalism of the individual political systems and their interdependence for the further study of repression.

The literature mentioned above demonstrates that a leader of a repressive state always faces situations in which they have to make a choice which will lead to fewer costs and provide a stable regime. The game-theoretic approach became very popular among the scholars trying to understand what motivates the state apparatus to apply various repressive strategies depending on the costs of them. In his book "The political economy of dictatorship" Wintrobe (1998) applies rational choice theory to study what provides

authoritarian regimes with strength and success throughout a long period of time. While providing a classification based on the existing authoritarian regimes, the author tries to look at the strategy a hypothetical dictator uses to retain the power and keep the order of the political system with his game-theoretic model.

The concept of particular interest for this research is what Wintrobe calls the "dictator's dilemma". Repression is one of the main instruments that help to maintain an authoritarian rule. However, active use of repression can decrease the satisfaction with the leader's policy actions among citizens due to the fear repressions leave in the society. To balance the effect, the dictator needs to strengthen the support of those who are still on his side, that is why he redistributes the goods among those who are loyal to him. These two instruments are interdependent and the amount of support of the loyalty will influence the intensity of repression. This relationship is studied in more details in some recent studies. In their article on the relationship between state's co-optation and repression, Frantz and Kendall-Taylor claim that the more the state is capable of co-opting the elites, primarily through the main political institutions, the less it would use the means of repression (2014, 333). The active use of co-optation mechanisms helps the leader to trace the ones opposing the current rule and make the political field less contentious. That also results in a lower degree of mass oppression due to the corrupt opposition or repressed leaders of the potential movements.

However, even when the states face similar obstacles to regime survival, they can apply different forms of repression to prevent the current political system. The question of how the repressions vary across time and space, as well as why the states use particular repressive tools lead to another important field of research in the area.

In accordance with the literature on the main determinants of repression, I partly rely on the suggestions from all the three subfields. I use the literature on the influence of the external actors the least, as I look at the subnational dynamics of repression implementation.

However, combined with the literature on repression in different political regimes, it provides me with the conceptualization of the independent variable for the hypothesis on the relationship between the local political regime and the intensity of repression. The rational choice behind the logic of an authoritarian leader is used in the interpretation of the case studies.

## 1.2. Studies of subnational political systems. Subnational authoritarianism.

Although it is claimed by political scientists that Russia started a process of "recentralization" with the first significant package of reforms in the early 2000s (V. Y. Gelman 2006), there is growing number of literature studying Russian politics on a subnational level. The necessity and usefulness of studying Russian regions stem from several reasons.

As well as the study of democratic countries could rely on the subnational level of analysis (e.g. enormous scholarship on the US states), the research about authoritarian regimes with the federative form of government can also go one level lower. The number and diversity of the Russian regions give a perfect field for such a study. By now, there are 85 regions in Russia which could be divided on the basis of different criteria. There are different types of regions and their political systems, dominant ethnic groups, etc. While being parts of the same state and belonging to the same context, Russian regions vary a lot and can become a separate field of research for studying the questions in comparative politics (Reisinger 2013, 2-3). Thus, a researcher will have a variation between the observations from different regions, but they still do not go over the single nation-level.

Moreover, despite the current status of Russian political system, the legacy of political rivalry between the centre and the regions in the 1990s which led to the formation of various

local political regimes is still visible in the way regional political systems function (V. Gelman 2010). This process is conceptualized in more details in the following section.

*Subnational authoritarianism.*

One of the key notions for this research is "subnational authoritarianism". It is usually introduced as a crucial step on the way to development among modern states (Scott 1969). After gaining the autonomy from the central government, subnational units aim at maintaining power for the next round of elections and elimination the potential rivals. Two major strategies they can use include creating "political machines" and keeping "boundary control". "Political machines" can be defined as organizations which use certain incentive to increase the partisanship (Wolfinger 1972, 374–75). By "boundary control" one means the ability to keep the competition for the local power without the interference of the national government (Gibson 2005, 108). Based on the empirical cases, Gibson outlined that the whole process of creating and strengthening a subnational authoritarian regime is not only dependent on the endogenous factors on the regional level, but also on "interactions between provincial politics and the national territorial system in which they are embedded" (103). Thus, for keeping the boundary control one needs to implement three strategies: taking the political control on the subnational level, creating a strong national presence, and monopolizing national-subnational relationship through institutions or affiliations. In this context, external actors on the national level can modify the subnational authoritarianism (further - SNA) in two ways. They can use the national government officials to undermine the strength of SNA, or they can involve the party leaders on the subnational level to increase the competition. Based on these strategies, Gelman introduced a typology with three out of four types supported empirically (2010). Decentralised SNA combines the low level of engagement of national political parties into subnational politics and weak influence of the state apparatus on the local level, while centralised bureaucratic SNA has a strong presence

of the latter; centralised party-based SNA combines strong influence from both state apparatus and national parties (4-5).

Scholars studying Russian politics transposed this term and typology and applied it to the case of the authoritarian states with a variation on a level of subnational units. They found out that post-Soviet Russia had two distinct periods during which its subnational politics belonged to the different categories, decentralised SNA (till the mid-2000s) and centralised party-based SNA (modern Russia) (5).

Russia is a big and diverse federative system with 85 subnational units that have a different history and culture. The variety of the Russian regions was intensified politically by the period of decentralization happened in the early post-Soviet Russia (Gel'Man 2008). The dissolution of the Soviet Union was followed by expansion of the localism existed before the 1990s among regional elites. After the constitutional crisis, Yeltsin, in order to maintain the role of a dominant political actor on a national level, made concessions in exchange for regional elites' loyalty, therefore, giving them a certain degree of autonomy (174). The sub-national authoritarianism was developed and produced different political machines in the regions. However, by the end of his first term, Vladimir Putin launched the politics of recentralisation which led to the changes in the state-regions relationship. How did this happen?

Gelman highlights three major reasons for that (Gelman 2010, 10-11): the financial crisis of 1998, the electoral failure of the "Fatherland - all Russia" party supported by many governors, and the economic rise of the early 2000s. Thus, the Center used both institutional changes and party politics on the local level to gain control over the regions. However, Gibson's framework does not fit well here. His studies were based on the democratic nation-states that were trying to remove the subnational authoritarian rule. The case of Russia is different. By the early 2000s, the authoritarian turn was obvious (Gelman

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2010). So, the main purpose of the control from the Center was to co-opt the regional regimes (11). Although the trend established in the second half of the 2000s seems to set the framework for the future of Russian regions, there is still a necessity of studying the diversity and further changes on the subnational level. This is why there are several studies that suggest how one should study, measure and classify local political regimes. According to Turovsky, there can be done four measurements regarding subnational political regimes: autonomy from the Center, the level of democratization, consolidation of power in the hands of a head of the executive office and the fragmentation of political elites (2010, 20). For this research, the two last points are conceptualized as the indicators of the strength of the political machine in the region.

On the other hand, in her study, Saikkonen (2016) provides a categorization of subnational regimes in Russian regions showing that the variance in the level of competitiveness is explained by the resource abundance and regional economy. The three types compiling Saikkonen's classification include the 'electoral democratic' regime with the presence of free and fair elections, 'competitive authoritarian' with partly free and fair elections, and 'hegemonic authoritarian' which lacks competition and fairness as such (441-442). The results of her classification are presented on the map. They are used to differentiate the regions to study if there is similarity in the intensity of repression between the regions with the same regime.
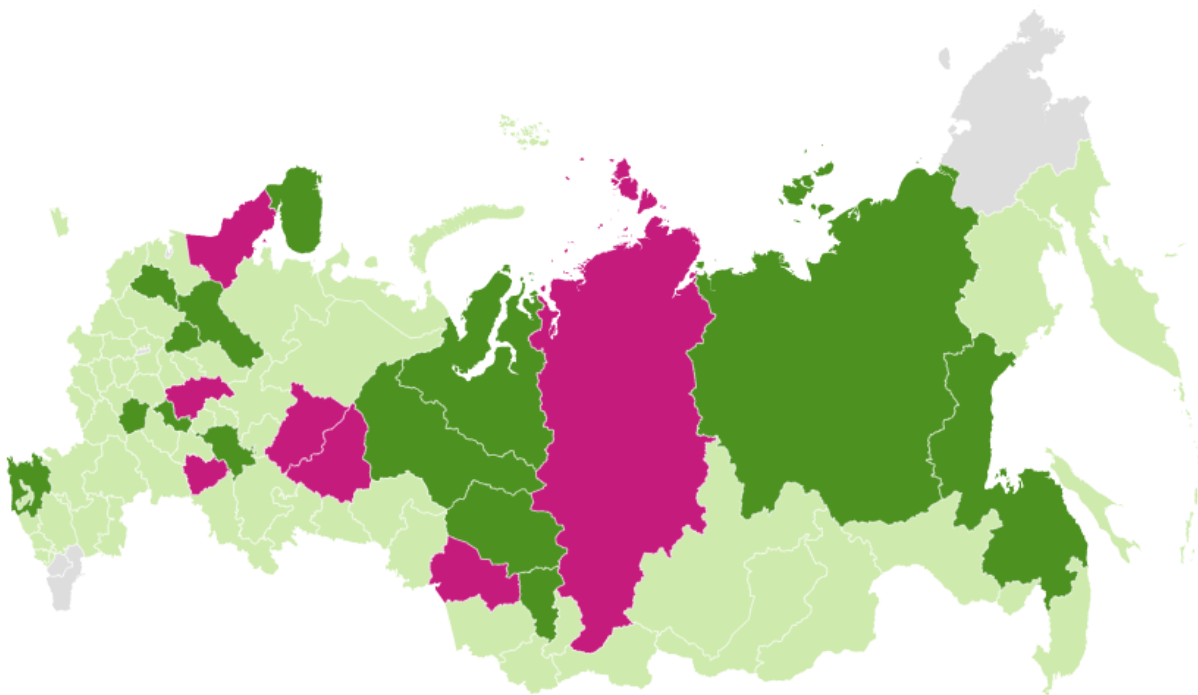
**Figure 1.Types of subnational political regimes in Russia, 2005 (Based on the classification by Saikkonen, 2016). Purple - electoral authoritarian, light green - competitive authoritarian, green - hegemonic authoritarian regimes.**

The research on subnational authoritarianism was mostly based on the cases of subnational units that remained autocratic despite the general trend of the state to democratisation. That is why the scientific contribution of the scholars conducting such research seems to be more significant and the variation across the subnational units can be more visible and easier to measure in the established democracies. Some studies already touched upon the issue of repression on the local level and provided evidence that targeted violence is unequally distributed on the subnational units and needs to be further studied (Bartman 2018). However, they lack causal claims regarding the phenomena and focus on the democratic/democratizing countries. Thus, now I present the three hypotheses based on the reviewed literature on repression and subnational authoritarianism:

1. The stronger the political machine in the region is, the less soft repression is practised there.

2. The more civil dissent the region experience, the more soft repression is implemented.

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3. Region's level of soft repression is positively influenced by the level of repression in the regions with a similar subnational electoral authoritarian regime.

The next chapter demonstrates how these hypotheses will be tested, what the sources of data and possible problems with interpretation are.

# Chapter 2. The research design.

This chapter gives an overview of the research design. I present the data and its sources, variables and measurement, and methods of analysis.

## 2.1. Sample.

Initially, the database contained observations of 81 out of 85 subjects of the Russian Federation. The omitted cases include Moscow, St.Petersburg as these regions have the status of the cities of federal importance and they are governed differently compared to other regions. Although the number of criminal cases in these cities cannot be called anomalous compared to others (Moscow has 129 cases, St.Petersburg - 69), the overall political culture and citizens' involvement differs from the ones in other regions. Such cases will require a separate case study which is not the main purpose of the thesis. Besides them, two more regions were excluded from the sample. These are Crimea and Sevastopol. Although they recognized as the Russian regions in 2014, before that they were not involved in the process of state-regions relationship, and even if there are strong political machines in these subnational units, they were formed outside the context of Russia.

Lastly, there is one region that was removed on the basis of data unavailability. In accordance with the official information from the source of the dependent variable, "Pravosudie" automated system, the information on the cases and judicial acts are provided

for all the Russian regions except for Chukotka Okrug. Thus, it was eliminated from the final list of observations which by the moment of analysis had 80 cases.

## 2.2. Variables and measurement.

The dependent variable is called *intensity of soft repression* and is continuous. It will be represented by the number of criminal cases under Article 282 in the region during the observed time period. The data on the dependent variable was extracted from the "Pravosudie" database. This source is run by the Ministry of Justice and contains the information on adjudications from the courts all over the country.

I rely only on the case of this Article as a representative one for the dependent variable for several reasons. First, its implementation fits the main characteristics of both notions of "soft repression" and "politics of fear". Second, the arrests under the Article involve representatives of different social, religious, ethnic groups across the whole country. Lastly, it targets the users of digital space which becomes one of the main modes of citizens' activity. This is why, I consider Article 282 to represent the modern trends of "soft repression" in Russia.

Independent variable for the first hypothesis is *protest activity* and will be based on the overall amount of protests occurred in the region throughout the period under research. The information is provided by the new dataset provided by the research project of Lankina (2018). The second indicator taken from the second hypothesis is the support for the incumbent in the federal parliamentary and presidential elections. For this hypothesis, the indicator is re-conceptualized and demonstrates the level of dissatisfaction with the incumbent among the citizens.

*The strength of regional political machines* is measured by four indicators. As political machines take time to be established and strengthened, some variables for the second

hypothesis will be based on a longer period of time compared to the observations for the dependent variable. The first variable is the gubernatorial turnover. It is presented by the number of governors changed in the period from 2000 to 2018. Although from 2004 to 2012 the governors were appointed by the president, the number of changes in the regional executive office can show how the governors managed to consolidate power around themselves. Appointments that happen in the second half of 2018 do not count.

This indicator is followed by a dummy variable coded as "1" if there was at least one governor who was not originally from the region they execute their power in, or did not hold any position there ('varyag') in the period from 2012-2018, and "0" if there was not.

The next indicator is measuring how monolithic regional elites are. It is based on the effective number of parliamentary parties calculated by the formula introduced by Golosov (2010):

$$ENP = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{1}{1 + {v_i}/{v_1 - v_i}}$$

where $v_1$ – the share of votes for the winner party, $v_i$ – the share of votes for the other parties participated in the elections (182). The final scores include the mean of the two most recent elections of regional legislatures.

The percentage of votes cast for the ruling party in authoritarian regimes could be interpreted as an indicator of a regions' loyalty. However, here I use these scores as the demonstration of the strength of the political machines in accumulating the votes for a certain candidate. Moreover, the scholarship on electoral authoritarianism proves that elections on the subnational level are not an instrument or an indicator of accountability but a tool that regional elites use in their own interest, for example, to make their power visible to potential rivals (Magaloni 2006). That is why I will also use the mean of the percentage of votes

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received by the "United Russia" political party in the two recent parliamentary elections and by Vladimir Putin in the two recent presidential elections.

The variable for *the diffusion of repression* hypothesis is partially based on data for the explanatory variable from the third hypothesis is taken from the research by Saikkonen (2016) who provides a typology of electoral authoritarian regimes in Russian regions. After dividing the regions into the groups based on the subnational political regime, I will analyze the relationship between the variety of subnational authoritarian regimes and the intensity of repression.

Control variables are also included in the analysis. They represent social, economic and political characteristics like:

1. Region's GRP (based on Rosstat annual data).

2. Region's population (data from Rosstat is used here as well).

3. Distance from Moscow (distance from the regional capital to Moscow).

## 2.3. Method.

For this research, I rely on a mixed methods approach. The advantages of using quantitative, as well as qualitative methods, are highlighted by numerous scholars as a combination of two different approaches could provide one empirical results complementing each other, modifying the measurements and strengthening the results' generalizability (Junk, 2011).

My first and main part of the empirical chapter will include the results of the regression analysis. The use of a quantitative method is explained by the number of cases. 80 observations will not fit the case study research. This number also limits the type of quantitative analyses that I can use; for example, the number of observations is too small for

logistic regression. Moreover, the dependent variable is continuous, that is why I will apply a simple linear regression in my analysis.

As the notion of repression diffusion is directly related to the temporal effects the subnational regimes have, a model for the third hypothesis should be based on time-series analysis. However, due to a very short time period which I rely on for this research, I do not use this type of analysis here. Instead, I present the effect of the local political regime as the legacy received from the early years of post-Soviet Russia and try to measure its effect on the intensity of repression. The empirical part of the thesis provides more details on this issue.

The second half of the empirical part is represented by the within-case study of Kemerovo Oblast and a case study of two other Russian regions – Nizhny Novgorod and Chelyabinsk Obslast. The choice of these particular cases can be explained by descriptive characteristics and the regression results received in the fourth chapter. The case study research is based on secondary sources like local and national media reports, existing research, NGOs' reports, and court materials.

# Chapter 3. Repression in Russia: an overview.

## 3.1. Repression tools in post-Soviet Russia: summary.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian government significantly relies on the repressive tools of the previous regime, while adapting them to the context of a new state. The main similarities between the two regimes are the active use of protestors' harassment and preventive detention (G. B. Robertson 2009, 537). The fear of 'colour revolutions' coming to Russia led not only to active suppression of opposition activities on the streets, but also new forms of control over NGOs (538-539). The coercion is also addressed towards the individual leaders of opposition movements and takes forms of their detention (Alexei Navalny) or even murder (Boris Nemtsov). In addition, another significant characteristic of Russian current political regime is that the state does not only exercise repression against the opposition, but it also punishes members of its own elite, as we can see with the numerous cases of mayors and governors getting fired and ministers imprisoned (Rogov 2018).

Apart from the types of targets listed by Rogov, the emerging one needs to be highlighted in the context of this thesis. With the new laws limiting the freedom of speech on the Internet, criminal cases suggest that ordinary citizens are the new target of the state. As some research on social movements suggests, arrests become a more frequently used tool of repression as they cause the members of social movements more costs (Earl 2005). Applying such a framework to the arrests of an average citizen who gets detained for posting various content online, one can assume that such action has even more effect on other Internet-users. While being more relatable, such cases increase the level of self-censorship online and make people more cautious in their statements in everyday life. Such a mechanism, while harming a few people, will threaten much more and help to keep the strength of the regime.

All in all, repression in Russia is between high and low-intensity coercion with relatively high levels of both cohesion and scope. The targets of the repressions random activists, popular leaders of opposition and organizations with a significant imbalance, thus making the whole process less visible and the regime – less prone to instability.

General trends of repression in Russia can be explained in the following way. During the Soviet years, Russia had strong regional elites which influenced the structure of the relationship between the federal centre and regional elites in late 1990s-early 2000s (Gelman 2008, 173-176). However, in the 2000s the direction of the relationship changed and Putin managed to consolidate the system under his rule (federal reforms in the first half of 2000s are one of the examples). These events might have set the trend to use repression against the regime's own people as well.

The absence of high rates of severe repression can be explained by the alternative techniques the regime uses to maintain its power. The phenomenon of co-optation is involved in Russian politics, especially if we focus on the party systems. As Golosov (2014) points out, the dominant party, United Russia, uses co-optation of different strength to recruit new members, keep the stable composition of well-known parties with low electoral support in exchange for compliance with the rules and create quasi-opposition parties to keep the image of elections democratic. As for the elections, Russian state involves agents who "buy" the votes or the members of election commissions. However, the cases of voter intimidation are more common (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2018).

If one takes a look at how the external actors influence the degree of repression in Russia, they may notice the decreasing influence international community has on the country since Putin's first presidential term. The political discourse presents the West as the main antagonist trying to undermine Russian political systems. This change is especially noticeable after the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 (Hutchings and Szostek 2015). So, the factors determining

the main changes in the way the Russian state represses its own people should be found in its internal factors.

All in all, Russia uses the repressive toolkit relatively similar to the one used in the Soviet Union. However, the general changes in the international relations, as well as the ability to rely on less severe methods of regime strengthening decrease the intensity of repression in the country. Moreover, the new fields of citizens' participation make the state adjust to the changes. The next section elaborates on how the state has done that based on the example of the changes of policies countering extremism.

## 3.2. Article 282 and the history of the war against extremism in Russia.

Article 282 was first introduced in 1996 together with the new Criminal Code of RF under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. It was called "Incitement of National, Racial or Religious Enmity" and included two types of punishment for the acts based on the title. According to the first part of the Article, if the acts were committed publicly or with the use of media, people committing them were punished with a fine, restriction of liberty for up to three years or imprisonment for two to four years. The incitement committed by the use of violence or threats, by using the official position or by the organized group (the second part of the Article) was punished by imprisonment for three to five years. This Article resembled the one from the Criminal Code of RSFSR of 1960 "Violation of equality of citizens on the basis of race, nationality or attitude to religion" (Ugolovnyj kodeks RSFSR 1996).

Paragraph 2 of Article 29 of The Russian Constitution says that "The propaganda or agitation instigating social, racial, national or religious hatred and strife shall not be allowed. The propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or linguistic supremacy shall be banned" (Constitution of the Russian Federation 1993). In accordance with these statements, a new package of legal measures took its turn at the beginning of the 2000s. In 2002, Vladimir Putin

introduced a bill of the Federal Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity to the State Duma. New terminology was introduced by renamed Article 280 and two additional articles 282.1 and 282.2, all of which dealt with the punishment of the extremism. Thus, the law provided the first definition of the term "extremism" which included such features as propaganda of superiority of one social group over the other, violation of the right of people based on their religious, social attitudes (Law of the Russian Federation 2008). The constant presence of strong nationalist movements in some Russian cities demonstrates that the need for the legislation protecting the rights of the most vulnerable groups. However, the set of legal documents under the Federal Law of 2002 left a broad understanding of what the groups whose rights could be violated by the incitement of hatred were. Therefore, the vagueness of the key terms in the context of this legislation led to an arbitrary interpretation of the content of the law.

This is why the controversy of Article 282 has been present for a long time. Even the use of it in the early 2000s raised questions. At that time, the punishment was mostly addressed to the regional and national public figures. For example, antifascist activist Igor Kharchenko was charged under the Article for organizing the extremist community aimed at infringing the rights of a certain social group (Beglova 2013). The targeted group was radical right nationalists while there was no community funded by the defendant. Anton Nozick, a famous Russian journalist, was fined for his online comments about the war in Syria (Turovski 2016). The list of examples of similar cases can be continued.

In 2013, Putin signed many amendments to the Criminal Code, according to which the name and the content of Article 282 changed. The current name of the Article is "Incitement of Hatred or Enmity, as Well as Abasement of Human Dignity". From that moment, not only statements in the media were qualified as a public one. Online posts in social media also became a part of that category. According to the new article, criminal liability for crimes of

an extremist nature using information and telecommunication networks can lead to 4 years of imprisonment. In contrast to the softening the punishment, the definition of the potential groups targeted by the extremists became more inclusive and led to certain outcomes (TASS 2018).

Based on the statistics of the Supreme Court, in 2014 the number of people convicted under Article 282 was 267, in 2015 - 378, in 2016 – 395. In 2017, the number of convicted people reached 600 (Sudebny Departament 2019). More people who were not active and well-known members of civil societies were involved. The punishment became closer to an ordinary Russian citizen. The cases that became objects of active discussion in both pro-Kremlin and opposition media involved people who try to be involved in their local political life. For example, a widely known case of Maria Motuznaya from Barnaul was based on the allegations of posting pictures insulting people of a particular social group, while the same person participated in the opposition activities online. However, there were cases where the convicted were not active participants of regional political life (Verkhovsky 2019, Sova 2019).

Other paragraphs of the Article not studied in this thesis (like the participation in the extremist organization) are controversial as well. Recently, members of Jehovah Witnesses and Scientologists became the main targets and cannot freely conduct their activity (Fakhrutdinov 2017). Thus, elements of the law fighting against radical nationalists turned out to be a weapon against a much more diverse group of organizations and individuals. Religious groups as objects of hatred or enmity became those who impose a threat.

In the second half of 2018, the Kremlin elites started the discussion about the usefulness of the Article and the excesses of its enforcement. The Article was partially decriminalized in December 2018, and there were no new criminal cases already by the middle of the fall after Putin first announced the need to make amendments. After the amendments, the felony

penalties are introduced only after the crime was committed for the second time in 12 months, with all the content of the article staying the same. Imprisonment will also be possible if a person violates the second part of the Article that mentions the use of violence or threats to use it by the person convicted of a crime (ConsultantPlus 2019).

During the period from 2014 to 2018 Article 282 was used in the criminal cases in 72 regions out of 80 studied. As one can see from the map, a tendency to implement the article is more frequent in the European part of Russia, however, some regions in the Urals and Siberia, as well as Sakhalin Oblast in the Far East, constitute the group of regions with the largest amount of criminal cases. It is also noticeable that the area around Moscow is less harmed by the implementation of the Article, while in the South there is a cluster of regions where it was actively used during the last five years.

## Intensity of repression under Article 282
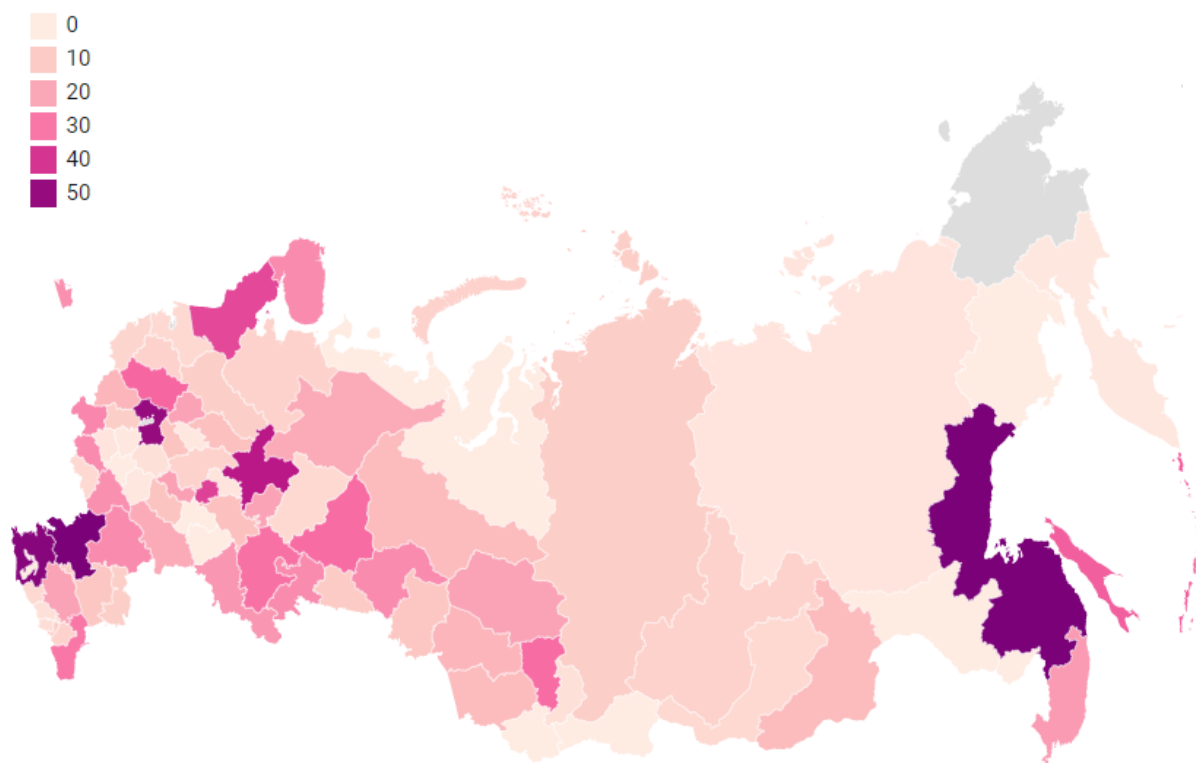


**Figure 2. Intensity of repression under Article 282 in Russian regions, 2014-2018, presented as a number of criminal cases per region (Based on the author's dataset). Chukotka is colored grey due to the absence of data.**

The way the federal centre responded to the problem of this Article in 2018 demonstrates that certain patterns of its implementation were going from the local level and the diversity of the outcomes is driven by the regional political and social characteristics. The attempt to find an empirical explanation of this variety is taken in the following two chapters.

# Chapter 4. Soft repression in Russian regions: an empirical analysis.

This chapter is devoted to empirical analysis. To answer the research question, three hypotheses were introduced. Two of these hypotheses study the relationship between the level of repression and political and social dynamics within the region, while the third one looks at the external influence that the regions have on each other.

Preliminary check of the regression assumptions demonstrated a high correlation between the variables of electoral support for the incumbent political party in the federal parliamentary elections and presidential candidate. That is why the latter indicator was omitted in favor of the former. The reason behind this choice is that, based on the database, one is able to see that the support for Vladimir Putin has more balanced distribution meaning that the regional mobilization during the presidential elections could only partially be explained by the work of the political machines. Under such circumstances, the vote for the incumbent party in the federal parliamentary elections is a better indicator.

## 4.1. Soft repression as prevention of public dissent.

Public politics in Russia became an object of interest after the protests of 2011-2012 which resulted in citizens' mobilization across the country and increased number of arrests and criminal cases. However, by now most of the Russian citizens are apolitical and avoid participation in the protest activities. Moreover, in comparison with the trends of the 1990s, territorial characteristics of the protests are more condensed and located in large cities, and regional capitals (G. Robertson 2013, 12) . Although the number of protests does not increase, there are some new tendencies initiated by the events of 2011-2012.

The wave of these protests brought significant changes to the framing of the agenda for the protests themselves. The main issues the citizens were worried about in the 2000s included mostly socio-economic problems, while since 2011 these issues have been replaced by social changes and authoritarian political trends in Russia as the main concerns (Dmitriev 2015). In addition, contrary to the general expectations, the spread of democratic ideas was found among representatives of different social groups and classes (237). Some scholars use the term "pragmatic politics" to describe what many perceive as apolitical behaviour of Russian citizens (Clément and Zhelnina 2019). According to the authors, such a mode of everyday political life can result in various forms of political expression and lead to activism based on grass-roots initiatives (17-18).

These thoughts find support in the current state of public politics in Russian regions. The expansion of Alexei Navalny's movement, as well as the emergence of local conflicts based on environmental issues (Moscow and Arkhangelsk Oblasts), territorial (Ingushetia), or cultural ones (Sverdlovsk Oblast), keep the rates of public politics among the citizens across the whole country.

Thus, this hypothesis represents the dialogue between the local elites and society with the latter as an initiator of a dialogue. Although several studies highlight the ambiguous nature of the relationship between protests and repression, my causal claim focuses on the protests being the cause and the implementation of repressive techniques – the effect. Moreover, I propose a different adaptation of the hypothesis introduced by multiple works in the area of repression studies. While scholars look at the protest as the potential threat to the overall regime in the country, the facts that I mentioned before demonstrate a more local nature of protests in the regions. Unless a protest occurs in one of the large cities or attracts media attention, it is usually the local elites whose duty is to respond to the conflict. It is their duty not only because they will find less support from their citizens in the next election cycle,

but also it will undermine their reputation on the federal level. Therefore, a high degree of social dissent is the indicator of dissatisfaction with the local elites in the first place, and the increasing number of protests can lead to an authoritarian response on the subnational level.

Moreover, the relationship between social dissent and the implementation of soft repression follows the framework under which Article 282 has been functioning for the last 4 years. For the majority of opposition movements, especially in the big cities, online social platforms help to coordinate the plan between the participants of a protest, attract more people and make the conflict go beyond one region. The context of the Article after the amendments of 2013 made the Internet users the main targets of its implementation. So, the modern context of the citizens' mobilization and the locality of the protests let me test the hypothesis on the regional data.

The results of the statistical analysis reported in Table 1 provide slight evidence for the positive relationship between the level of public dissent and the intensity of repression. As it was stated initially, the increasing number of protests in the region can lead to more active use of the tools of "soft repression". Those regions identified by recent research as ones with the highest rates of protests (REGNUM 2019), like Sakhalin, Voronezh and Volgograd Oblasts at the same time have a more intense repressive response. Although the regions from this cluster have specific agendas mobilizing their inhabitants, they are also distinct by the active political engagement typical for their citizens. The second group of regions with high rates of protests, such as Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, Penza Oblasts and Primorsky Krai, has protests organized mostly on the basis of the local issues triggering the citizens. More representatives from this group demonstrate the examples of the existing relationship between the variables. It means that the protests based on the dissatisfaction with the way local elites manage social, political issues motivate local elites to use repressive tools to decrease public dissent in the region. At the same time, there are also regions where a large

amount of protests is not followed by the use of repressive tools, e.g. Penza or Samara Oblasts. It can mean that such regions either use other tools to oppress those who protest or that by allowing their citizens to express their political attitudes, local elites keep a certain level of democratic participation and legitimize the current political system.

| | Dependent variable: |
|---|---|
| | Intensity of repression |
| Number of protests | 0.171[**] |
| | (0.074) |
| United Russia vote (Federal parliamentary elections) | -0.044 |
| | (0.096) |
| GRP | 0.00001[**] |
| | (0.00000) |
| Constant | 11.419[**] |
| | (5.356) |
| Observations | 80 |
| $R^2$ | 0.199 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.167 |
| Residual Std. Error | 12.782 (df = 76) |
| F Statistic | 6.285[***] (df = 3; 76) |
| Note: | [*]p<0.1; [**]p<0.05; [***]p<0.01 |

**Table 1. Regression model of the relationship between the intensity of "soft repression" and social dissent.**

However, there is no relationship between the level of repression and the electoral support for the incumbent party in the federal elections in this model. One of the possible explanations for this is the absence of real competition on the federal level. Regional parties are not allowed to contest the seats in the State Duma, while the rules for launching a new party on a national level leave almost no option but to join the well-established ones. The experts say that all the current parliamentary parties cannot be considered as a challenging opposition (Gel'man 2015a) , while "Yabloko" political party, which remains oppositional, has not had a seat in the Parliament for 3 terms and targets only a few regions. Thus, one can find electoral preferences as a less convincing indicator of civil dissatisfaction and dissent.

## 4.2. Soft repression as an indicator of weak political machines.

Studies of varying electoral outcomes in Russian regions started using the concept of "political machines" to explain why some regions can provide stronger support for the incumbent than others.

The strength of a political machine can be identified based on the two dimensions: the working output for the Center (the vertical relationships with external forces) and the control of the distribution of power among local elites (the horizontal relationships with the actors inside the subnational unit). Thus, successful political machines on the subnational level can be translated into the effective co-optation of the citizens and the ability to consolidate regional elites and/or buy their loyalty. Regions can follow different scenarios depending on the social structure and the number of political contestants. As the scholars say, the work of a political machine is more effective in the regions where the benefits overweight the costs, like those where the citizens have low income, inactive mobility, work at big factories or are retired (Bader and van Ham 2015; Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014). These groups are easier to be incentivized and provide political machines with stable support and a better relationship with the Center.

In the late 2000s, the responsibility for providing particular election outcomes in the regions went to the governors, therefore they were interested in the proper work of political machines (Golosov 2013, 474–75). The relationship between the elites, as well as the degree of political involvement in the region shape a certain way in which a political machine works. Consequently, if a political machine functions well and helps a governor to maintain the power and buy the electoral support, then there will be less coercive mechanisms used by the regional elites. The reason behind such a choice is that co-opting the voters, as well as elites, benefits more than to oppress them. This logic is tested in the next regression model.

Although no flaws were found at the stage of checking regression assumptions, none of the potential models showed either significant coefficients or explanatory power of the "political machines" hypothesis. As the number of indicators responding to the measurement of the strength of political machines can lead to the overload of the model, I present one model with *varyag* indicator omitted.

| | Dependent variable: | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Intensity of repression | | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| Governor Turnover | -0.235 | -0.673 | -0.627 |
| | (1.467) | (1.539) | (1.552) |
| Varyag | | 3.440 | |
| | | (3.627) | |
| Effective Number of Parties | -0.620 | -0.848 | -1.775 |
| | (2.912) | (2.923) | (3.068) |
| United Russia vote (Federal parliamentary elections) | -0.091 | -0.059 | -0.167 |
| | (0.137) | (0.141) | (0.143) |
| GRP | $0.00001^{***}$ | $0.00001^{***}$ | |
| | (0.00000) | (0.00000) | |
| Distance | -0.0005 | -0.0003 | -0.001 |
| | (0.001) | (0.001) | (0.001) |
| Constant | 18.318 | 17.057 | $31.393^{**}$ |
| | (13.850) | (13.923) | (14.068) |
| Observations | 80 | 80 | 80 |
| $R^2$ | 0.147 | 0.157 | 0.026 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.089 | 0.088 | -0.026 |
| Residual Std. Error | 13.366 (df = 74) | 13.375 (df = 73) | 14.190 (df = 75) |
| F Statistic | $2.549^{**}$ (df = 5; 74) | $2.272^{**}$ (df = 6; 73) | 0.491 (df = 4; 75) |
| *Note:* | | | $^*$p<0.1; $^{**}$p<0.05; $^{***}$p<0.01 |

**Table 2. Regression model of the relationship between the intensity of "soft repression" and the strength of political machines.**

Such choice is motivated by the fact that both *varyag* and *governor turnover* indicators respond to the characteristics of the head of the executive office in the region, thus, only one

of them can be left. Moreover, the latter variable represents a longer period of time in the political history of region, so there are more reasons to eliminate the former.

As one can see from the table, none of the variables demonstrates the influence on the number of criminal cases under Article 282. The third model demonstrates that without one of the control variables included R-squared has a negative score, which only highlights the weakness of the model. One of the explanations here can be the ineffectiveness of the measurement of the political machine. As the work of political machines is mostly based on the informal acts and agreements, it is difficult to grasp all the details of variation between the regions. Moreover, as it was mentioned in the previous section, not all the indicators related to the election preferences and outcomes remain relevant due to the low rate of competition in current party politics in Russia. Other limitations are discussed in the corresponding section in the conclusion.

## 4.3. Subnational diffusion of soft repression.

As it was mentioned previously, the regime type is one of the possible predictors of how much the state uses repression (Regan и Henderson 2002). Moreover, the idea about regime types was developed into cross-temporal studies of the diffusion of repression in countries with similar political systems (Olar 2019). Although the general trend of the Russian political system on both national and subnational levels is characterized as the process of recentralization and autocratization, scholars find a variety of authoritarian tools used differently in Russian regions (Turovsky 2010). Some of them offer a classification of a subnational authoritarian regime, one of which I compile the database for this thesis.

I rely on the typology made by Saikkonen (2016) who works with the data on Russian regions during the period between the dissolution of the Soviet Union and 2005, the beginning of Vladimir Putin's second term. Although the information can seem outdated,

there are several reasons to use it in this research. First, changes in the legislation in 2004 led to the regional governors being appointed for 8 years, thus the measurement of competitive authoritarianism without the head of the executive branch being elected does not provide sufficient outcome for further classification. Second, the main patterns of regional politics were established before the new strategy of strengthening the vertical of power was implemented (Melvin 1998). The gap between the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the authoritarian turn in Russian politics gave the regional elites freedom to build their own political structures, claim autonomy from the Center or make a trade-off in exchange for the support of the patron (Golosov 2011, 624–626). The structures created at this time remained throughout the whole period of modern Russia. This is why I consider the data from the typology of subnational political regimes by Saikkonen as foundational for my third hypothesis, according to which a certain type of electoral authoritarian regime corresponds with a certain degree of "soft repression". I assume that the more hegemonic regimes that restrict competition and use threats and frauds to maintain in power will also use repression as a tool for silencing potential opposition. For this analysis, I use the most recently recorded changes in the political system from the database. The cases of Chechen and Dagestan Republics were not present, so they were removed from the list of observations.

However, as Table 3 shows, there is no influence of the legacy of part regimes on the intensity of "soft repression". The variation of local political regimes based on the criteria of the election procedure does not predict the intensity of repression.

|  | Dependent variable: |
|---|---|
|  | Intensity of repression |
| Type of the regime | 3.407 |
|  | (2.983) |
| GRP | $0.00001^{***}$ |
|  | (0.00000) |
| Distance | -0.0004 |
|  | (0.001) |
| Constant | 4.019 |
|  | (6.677) |
| Observations | 78 |
| $R^2$ | 0.156 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.122 |
| Residual Std. Error | 13.179 (df = 74) |
| F Statistic | $4.564^{***}$ (df = 3; 74) |
| *Note:* | $^*$p<0.1; $^{**}$p<0.05; $^{***}$p<0.01 |

**Table 3. Regression model of the relationship between the intensity of "soft repression" and the legacy of the regional political regime.**

To summarize, the new hypotheses applied to the case of Russian regions did not find any relationship between the suggested explanatory factors and the dependent variable. However, the "localization" of the hypothesis on the influence of social dissent showed some results. The detailed analysis based on the case studies of local political machines and repressions in three regions is demonstrated in the following chapter.

# Chapter 5. Soft repression in Russian regions: case studies.

Based on the results of the data analysis for the first two hypotheses, I decided to focus the last chapter on the analysis of three regions presented by two case studies.

The first case study is based on the results of the testing of the hypothesis on the relationship between social dissent and the intensity of repression. I take the case of Kemerovo Oblast as it is an outlier because it demonstrates a high score of repression while the number of protests is close to zero.

The second one is a comparative case study of two regions – Nizhny Novgorod Oblast and Chelyabinsk Oblast – based on the method of difference. According to this approach, the cases chosen for the analysis have different outcomes and one of the potential explanatory factors is also different, while other causes show similar scores (Rohfling 2012, 110). In the case of these two regions, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast has a very low indicator of the implementation of "soft repression" and the presence of a "varyag" governor during the past 4 years. Chelyabinsk Oblast, on the contrary, has one of the highest rates of criminal cases under Article 282 and the same number of governors with no one being from another region.

In the case studies, I will rely on the literature describing the history of local elites in the region and their relationship with the centre, use the news to define local civil society and then draw the relation between the above-mentioned factors and the intensity of repression.

## 5.1. Kemerovo Oblast – within-case study.

Kemerovo Oblast (Kuzbass) is located in the Siberian federal district and populated by over than 2.5 million people. Since 1997, the region was governed by Aman Tuleev who resigned after the 2018 fire in the Winter Cherry mall. However, even after resignation he remains a powerful actor in the politics of the region and holds the position of the head of the regional legislature. His first electoral win with more than 90% of support from the voters

came in October 1997, 3 months after Tuleev was appointed as a governor by Boris Yeltsin. Tuleev was elected by the popular vote for two more times (2001 and 2015), and in both of them, his support exceeded 90%. Between these years, his candidacy was twice approved by the regional parliament. Moreover, Tuleev participated in the decision-making process of the region in the early 1990s when he was the head of the regional parliament.

The strength of Tuleev's elite was enhanced by the fact that the region has comparatively low activity of non-parliamentary opposition (Myagkov et al. 2018, 491). By 2018, when the most recent legislative election was held, the only competitors remained included three well-known members of federal parliamentary opposition and the Patriots' Party. The support for the United Russia party is high not only on the level of regional elections. Statistics for federal parliamentary and presidential elections also show a high share of votes for the current incumbent. Moreover, since 2005, Tuleev has been a member of the United Russia party and was among the head of the regions, which were represented in the Supreme Council of the party (TASS 2018).

Based on the collected data, one can assume that the level of disagreement is low not only among the elites but also among the citizens. In 2017, there were several protests in Kemerovo Oblast regarding the consequences of open-cast mining of coal mines (Vlasov 2017). Started in the villages, protests spread across the region and reached Novokuznetsk which is the centre of coal mining. Soon after the protests, the governor demonstrated his responsiveness to the needs and concerns of the people and asked the authorized representative of the president in the Siberian Federal District to stop issuing licenses to coal mining in the region (TASS 2017). Thus, he reverses the discourse which demonstrates him as a head of the region who cares about his inhabitants. Recently, there were also some protests in the regional capital as a response to the pension reform, the re-election of Vladimir Putin, and some related to the local socio-economic problems like the closure of a maternity

hospital. However, in the end, the overall score of protest activity is lower than average among all the regions studied.

To summarize, Kuzbass represents a small group of regions with "hegemonic authoritarian regime" (Panov and Ross 2018) that provides consistent support for the incumbent in all federal elections. Among 11 regions with of regimes, Kuzbass and Yamalo-Nenets AO are the only two regions where the Russian population makes up more than half of the overall population of the region, others are ethnic republics. Tuleev himself is one of a few governors who ruled the region for such a significant period of time. All these facts, as well as strong electoral support of Tuleev himself, indicate a well-developed political machine in the region which uses cooptation or the authority of the head of the executive branch to stay in power. In addition, not a large percentage of the region's population involved in the direct participation in politics by taking part in protests. Why then are the records of the implementation of Article 282 high?

The information about the criminal cases under Article 282 in Kemerovo Oblast includes various cases, but the majority of them are based on the actual expression of hatred in online social media via posting pictures or videos of racist and radical nationalist nature (Sova 2019). In this context, it is important to point out that the regions of Southern Siberia had high rates of xenophobia for a long time (Bavin 2007). It could be partly explained by the close neighbourhood of the countries of Central Asia, as the cases were based on hatred towards "non-Slavic social groups". However, there are also several cases where people convicted were penalized for posting the invocatory content to join the protests and fight the policemen (Sova 2015).

The case of Kemerovo Oblast demonstrates a reversion of the initial hypothesis on the relationship between the strength of the political machine and the intensity of repression. Although the reputation of the governor seemed strong enough without the use of repressive

tools, here one can assume that, on the contrary, the absence of possible alternatives gives more freedom in the use of mechanisms demonstrating the strength of the current regime. In such cases, only extreme factors (like the fire in 2018) could undermine the reputation.

Another intervening factor that can be taken under consideration is the strategic importance of the region as a resource abundant one. Kuzbass is one of the leading providers of coal. Several studies examining political systems in the resource-abundant countries highlight the relationship between the significant amount of natural resources in the country and the use of different forms of repression (Ross 2004). Using more general terms related to the main topic of this thesis, most of the literature on authoritarian regimes prove that resource abundance is negatively related to democratic development, although recently several revisions regarding this relationship has been made (Haber and Menaldo 2011). Adjusting these causal claims to the subnational level of the research, one can hypothesize that Kuzbass's richness with natural resources leads to the growth of the authoritarianism in the region and can be followed by higher degrees of "soft repression".

Therefore, the case of Kemerovo Oblast demonstrates several aspects of subnational affairs that can be reconsidered on a higher level of analysis and refine the established hypotheses.

## 5.2. Comparative case study – Nizhny Novgorod Oblast and Chelyabinsk Oblast.

The cases chosen for this part of the empirical research have the different scores of the dependent variable and one of the explanatory factors, *presence of a varyag governor*. Below I give a short description of the regions and conduct a comparative analysis of the causes of differing soft repression intensification.

*Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.*

Nizhny Novgorod Oblast is a region in the Central part of Russia with over 3 million inhabitants and a high degree of urbanization in the regional capital. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there were several strong groups of elites none of which was able to immediate consolidation of power. Supported by one of the groups, the democrats, Boris Nemtsov managed to establish informal arrangements with the competing elites and became the first governor of the region (Gelman 1998). However, the imbalance of initial positions of political actors brought different meanings to this deal. While communists, on the one hand, perceived the agreement as to the best option among the worst, Nemtsov and his coalition obtained power in the regions with the minimum losses provided by cooperation with the former (8). With domination of one political actor and presence of informal institutions as the means of trade-offs, such a political system transforms into the regimes between the autocracy and democracy (15). This statement is partly proved by further research. Examples from the political life of the region in the early 2000s show that although the democratic competition remained in the region, the rules of the game changed and instead of an agreement there was "the war of all against all" (Dakhin 2003).

Since 2005, the region has been governed by *varyags*, or those governors who either were not originally from the region or did not build a political career there, but rather were appointed by the Kremlin. From 2005 to 2017 it was Valery Shantsev who held a position of the vice-governor of Moscow before. After two terms under the system of appointment, he gained the support of almost 87% of voters in 2014 and remained a governor for 3 more years. He was replaced by Gleb Nikitin who, almost a year after being an acting governor in the region, was elected by 67.8% of votes in fall 2018.

The region under Shantsev is characterized by the conflict between elites and the absence of consensus (TASS 2017). It can be explained by both the legacy of the politics of

Shantsev's predecessors and the fact that the governor himself was not strong enough to handle all the interest groups in the region. Consequentially, the inability to consolidate elites and seek support from them leads to higher risks of allowing high rates of repression against ordinary citizens.

To sum up, the relationship between elites in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast in the 1990s was based on the trade-off between different competing groups and carried the possibility of democratic development (Gelman 1998, 9). This model followed the region throughout the 1990-2000s while bringing changes to the nature of competition and cooperation between the elites. The appearance of a new governor who was not associated with either of the established groups did not contribute to elite consolidation. Thus, together with the remains of democracy in the region, this factor left the impact on the rare implementation of Article 282 in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.

### *Chelyabinsk Oblast.*

Located in the Urals, Chelyabinsk Oblast has a population of almost 3.5 million people and shares its southern border with Kazakhstan. Although the level of political competition in Chelyabinsk Oblast is classified by the scholars as high, institutional characteristics, like the effective number of parties in the legislature, does not support this statement (Panov 2009, 167). As it was already mentioned, the effective number of parties cannot always be a good indicator of elite fragmentation due to the monopolization of the Russian party system. Another reason is provided by the positions of actors in a conflict which could not be captured by this score, and the case of Chelyabinsk Oblast is exemplary. Some of the recent conflicts include not only members of parliament; they also involve members of different branches of the regional government, like the one between the executive and judicial branches (Plyusnina 2012).

The region has been governed by 4 heads of the executive office who were all from the region. Different governors brought their own teams with them and those belonged to different key cities of the region – Chelyabinsk, the regional capital, and Magnitogorsk. While regional media cannot reach the agreement if recently resigned Boris Dubrovskii managed to find support among all the elites in the region, one should pay attention not only to the geographic division of the interest groups but also to their professional origin. Experts point to the fact that since the gubernatorial terms of Petr Sumin (from 1996 to 2010) the region's most influential group was siloviki or politicians with a professional background in military or security. Significant changes in the representation of this professional group in the regional politics became vivid under the rule of Boris Dubrovskii (Parnikova 2019).

The federal parliamentary elections of 2016 brought the new personnel who had to implement unpleasant reforms and keep the support for Putin high in the regions. Cooperation of elites combined with stable scores in the socio-economic field allows the leading political machine to apply the tools keep the order among potential opposition (REGNUM 2016). If siloviki compile the core of the ruling elite, less political actors would prefer to directly compete for the positions in the decision-making process. At the same time, many political analysts in the region confirm that the level of trust between the elites is low even if the informal agreements keep working (Znak 2018). Thus, to sustain the competition without making concessions, the stronger elite can use coercion to make the contestation less profitable for other elite groups.

*Comparing the cases.*

As the analysis of the second case showed, attention could be paid to the participants of the elites, their professional biography and current positions, especially those who are represented as the main rivals in the region. The two cases presented have various interest groups who always compete for maintaining power in the region. However, the nature of the

groups is different, and while in Nizhny Novgorod they include politicians and technocrats who are more prone to cooperation, elites in Chelyabinsk do not have well established ties and perceive each other as rivals. Moreover, the military or security background of the elites in Chelyabinsk Oblast can lead to the assumption that the reversed model of Frantz and Kendall-Taylor works in the region. Thus, if there is an established resistance to cooptation under the rule of a particular interest group, then the repression is applied more frequently.

In addition, one can look at the level of socio-economic stability in the region. Although it was said that Chelyabinsk has stable indicators, some sources mention the decline of the level of life in small towns and countryside. In Chelyabinsk Oblast there are multiple enterprises and industries owned by different groups of businessmen. Each of these groups can express contrasting demands and lead to intra-elite conflicts. Such instability can predefine the way repression is used. Meanwhile, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast is not resource abundant to have multiple businesses emerged and is not famous for diverse elites from the economic sector.

All in all, the characteristics of the divisions among the elites that goes beyond the usual indicators which are used for measuring political machines in the regions. It also includes not only the characteristics of political machines, but the whole balance among the regional elites in politics, business and their solidity.

# Conclusion.

In this thesis I try to use a new approach to studying the notion of repression in modern states. I look at the differences in the implementation of Article 282 across Russian regions and hypothesize three groups of explanatory factors. Unfortunately, the herein presented results do not succeed to significantly define the conditions under which different subnational units implement "soft repression" in different amounts. The statistical analysis conducted for the three hypotheses in this paper demonstrates the relationship in only one case. Possible influence was found between the intensity of repression and the degree of social dissent in the region which proves the existing scholarship even on a lower level of political units.

The technical limitations of this research are mentioned below.

**Limitations**.

The limitations of the research and the data I work with could have caused the absence or a low number of significant results. In the beginning, the data analysis had its limitations on the basis of the specificity of the dependent variable. Due to the time constraints, I focus only on one specific Article of the Criminal Code which represents modern trends of "soft repression" in Russia. However, it is not the only or the main indicator, this is why, it grasps some tendencies, but not the overall pattern on the subregional level. As the data was limited to only one sort of criminal case during a short period of time, the scores excluded some of the observations due to the absence the cases, and the scores themselves did not have a range that could have found the dynamics on the subregional level.

Even with such limitation, the analysis of the available data allowed to identify cases for individual analysis and also pointed at the imperfection of some of the measurements. The approach itself represents a novel framework which should be applied to the larger time span and more representative variety of repressions. Thus, such contributions will be able to the

collaboration of two significant scholarships in political science and present a new perspective of studying repressions.

Although the statistical analysis does not show significant inferences, I am still convinced that it is important to study the subnational variation of repression; one should not focus on the official political elites. This idea finds support in the case studies following quantitative analysis of the thesis. The results of comparative analysis of Nizhny Novgorod and Chelyabinsk Oblast demonstrate that the diversity of elites that influence the regions' affairs is far more than just the members of regional parliaments and governors. The structure of these elites, their professional origin, their interests in the region and the existing cleavages between them are all the indicators that should be evaluated by a researcher when they want to understand the nature of subnational political regimes. Such an agenda will require more work in the field and take more time on the completion, but I am sure that the findings can bring more clarity to the mechanisms of repression and their variety on the local level.

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