

Vote-Buying Activities: the Case of the Communist Party in Russia

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in
Political Science

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Vienna, Austria
(2021)

Abstract

In many developing states political parties and candidates practice vote-buying in order to increase their electoral outcomes or to increase turnout. The practice close to vote-buying can be found in Eastern Europe and specifically Russia where opposition parties distribute various “gifts” among people: food, clothes and souvenirs. These exchanges happen during the whole year even without any electoral campaigns. The problem in the case of Russia is the unequal distribution of these activities across regions. This study aims to explain the unequal distribution by establishing the influence of socio-economic and political factors on vote-buying activity. The study focuses on several aspects of vote-buying theory in order to develop them and to study them in the context of Russia. Firstly, the study describes the case of the Communist party of Russia and then proceeds to present the most important takeaways from vote-buying theory. The effect of urbanization on vote-buying and the effect of party supporters on vote-buying. In order to establish the relationship between those factors and vote-buying activity, the study employs quantitative analysis with a negative binomial regression based on the regional-level data. The study finds strong evidence that urbanization has a negative effect on vote-buying activity, while it fails to find statistically significant relationship between party support and vote-buying activity.

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Introduction

In the end of December 2020, the website of the Moscow Oblast's branch of Communist Party of Russian Federation reported that party members in the town of Lobnya distributed “gifts” among the members of families of veterans of WWII (MKKPRF 2020). Both children and adults received undisclosed packages, which are likely to contain some food and sweets. While this report might seem unimportant, it is illustrative of typical activities of Russian opposition parties. News outlets of the Communist party and others regularly report how party officials distributed “gifts” among the regional population (Znak 2019, KPRF 2020). Moreover, based on the data collected for this study there are reasons to believe that these activities are distributed unequally between regions of the country. These activities remain understudied despite being quite frequent and normal in Russia. The goal of this thesis is to understand them better from the standpoint of political science and, specifically, what influences the unequal distribution of these activities in the regions of Russia. Therefore, the research question is what makes the Communist party of Russia to employ vote-buying activities in some regions but not others?

This question is important for political science for several reasons. Firstly, this study is built on the vast theory of vote-buying. While the theory on vote-buying is quite developed, it has certain gaps. For instance, there is a gap concerning the target audience of vote-buying, specifically, swing voters or partisans. Some authors find evidence which supports the idea that political parties try to buy votes of swing voters in order to boost their electoral results in some regions (Schady 2000; Weitz-Shapiro 2006). There are also credible works which state that the complete opposite process takes place and parties target their core supporters with vote-buying in order to mobilize them (Gonzalez-Ocantos, de Jonge & Nickerson 2014; Çarkoglu and Aytaç 2015). While the existence of opposite arguments is acknowledged, any consensus is yet to be achieved. In addition, there is also a gap concerning urbanization. Scholars of vote-buying have

not reached the consensus on what type of area is more attractive for vote-buyers: rural or urban. Some studies argue that the rural areas are the usual place for vote-buying (Bratton 2008; Vicente 2014), while others find evidence that urban areas are more suitable for vote-buying activities (Çarkoglu and Aytaç 2015). This lack of consensus forms another gap. Filling both gaps is the main aim of this study. This study alone cannot resolve these contradictions. However, it can provide new evidence with a new context which will be valuable for studies in the vote-buying field.

Secondly, when it comes to vote-buying political science has a specific focus. Most of vote-buying studies address Latin America, Africa and sometimes Asia. Eastern Europe and especially Russia are much less studied in this field. At the same time post-Communist countries have their own unique party systems which are also vulnerable to vote-buying and clientelist activities (Cook 2014). Thus, the study of vote-buying in Eastern European context is crucial for better understanding of these countries' political systems. The Russian case is also intriguing because the political regime in modern Russia can be characterized as authoritarian one with single ruling party. Despite that the Communist party of Russia which is in the focus of this study is involved in vote-buying activities. Therefore, it is essential for science to find out who can be the target of the vote-buying activities in such an environment. This study approaches two different problems at once: the gaps of vote-buying theory and the underdevelopment of vote-buying studies in the case of Russia.

Finally, this study focuses on very specific types of vote-buying which are more rarely addressed than the classic vote-buying with cash. This study uses data which I collected as a part of research project "Parliamentary Parties as Actors of Mobilization in Modern Russia" in Higher School of Economics. The data comes from the open websites of the Communist party of Russia. The party does not report about vote-buying with cash for obvious reasons, however, it does report about events that can be classified as *non-binding vote-buying* and *non-excludable*

vote-buying (Nichter 2014). Non-binding vote-buying in this case refers to various distributions of “gifts”. These distributions are different from the classic vote-buying since these distributions do not specifically ask from voters to do something in exchange, but they are rather a form of political advertisement. Therefore, they are called *non-binding vote-buying* and it is studied by authors like Chen (2008) and Thames (2001) who research how politicians distribute various resources to specific groups of people in order to gain their votes. There is also *non-excludable vote-buying* which is different from other types since it targets districts instead of people by allocating funding and resources to them (Estevez, Magaloni and Diaz-Cayeros 2002). The Communist party of Russia also engages in this type of vote-buying by building infrastructure in certain districts.

In sum, this study is going to address several issues: the gaps of vote-buying theory, the specifics of vote-buying in Russian context; and it will be done with the focus on rare types of vote-buying. The main research puzzle of the study can be characterized as the absence of consensus on the target audience of vote-buying activities of the Communist party of Russia. The study is going to use regional level data in order to unveil the strategy of the party. This work argues that there are certain political and socio-economic factors which make some regions more attractive for vote-buying than others. Thus, the main question of the study is what factors influence the distribution of CPRF’s vote-buying activities between regions?

The following sections of the study present an answer to this question. In order to do it, this thesis turns to the history and to the context of the Communist party of Russia. It also approaches the problem of vote-buying from the standpoint of vast literature on the subject. Then, the study proceeds to build the theory and to choose suitable methodology. This paper also uses a unique dataset which is thoroughly described below. Finally, the results of quantitative analysis are presented. The paper is structured as follows: first section is introduction which includes history of the Communist party. It is followed by literature review

section which focuses on the general vote-buying theory, its gaps and the East European context for vote-buying. Next, theory section highlights the main points from literature review and uses scientific evidence to present hypotheses of the study. After this, research design section is presented where the data and methodology are described. Finally, there is results section, which presents the outcomes of the analysis. Conclusion then draws on the main implications of the study.

The History of CPRF

Modern Russia is the case of quite untypical party system. For the last decade a specific system was formed with one ruling party winning all elections and three opposition parties always in the parliament. One of them and possibly the most prominent one is the Communist Party of Russian Federation (CPRF) which starting from the 90s is one of the biggest contenders in Russian political scene. The party achieved its biggest results in the 90s when it had the majority in the parliament. However, in the following elections starting in 2003, it drastically lost support and nowadays it always receives more or less the same number of votes, which guarantees the prominent place in federal and regional parliaments, but the party almost never wins any elections. The rise and fall of Communist party are the subject of many scientific works. The initial success of the Communist party is explained as the result of its succession of the party infrastructure which previously was the part of Communist Party of Soviet Union. In the 90s CPRF inherited the system of primary party organizations – local branches of the party consisting of 3 and more people (Malfliet 2011). Thus, unlike other Russian parties CPRF already had the institutions which allowed it to function. Moreover, CPRF had a significant regional support in the so called “red belt” region (McFaul and Petrov 1997; Kurilla 2002). “Red belt” refers to mostly southern agricultural regions of Russia which suffered the most from the economic reforms of the 90s and were at odds with the government. Therefore, CPRF was a party which accumulated protest voting (March 2006). In addition, due to its highly

institutionalized nature of Communist party was also a substitute for civil society in various regions since civil society institutions in Russia were and remain weak (Marsh 2000; Kurilla 2002; Evans 2014).

In the 2000s, however, “United Russia” party was formed, and Communist positions suffered significantly. United Russia successfully positioned itself against the problems of 90s (March 2006) and the “red belt” ceased to exist. The effects of first electoral successes of CPRF started to wear off, it did not help that party remained technologically backwards while other parties have also built their own infrastructures. Spoiler parties which were aimed at CPRF also appeared (Golosov 2015). Moreover, Russian political elite started experimenting with the party system, creating “Just Russia” party (aimed at leftist political spectrum) to be a second actor of proposed two-party system. The party was formed and the significant part of CPRF’s electorate was lost (March 2009). Many scholars state that the Communist party was, in fact, long ago coopted by the government (Panov and Ross 2013; Dollbaum 2017). It receives a comfortable number of votes while being very moderate when it comes to critique of the ruling elites and political protests (Dollbaum 2017).

Current position of CPRF is far from its initial success in the 90s. Party’s activities are tightly limited in the regime with the pronounced ruling party and dysfunctional elections. It is especially noticeable on the federal level and on regional too. Currently there are no regional parliaments with CPRF majority and only two regions with Communist governors. Nevertheless, the party tries to be very active on a political scene, which is surprising, since it seemingly does not lead to any specific electoral results. It is even more surprising since the party’s food and “gifts” distributions are just a form of vote buying, well-known in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Vote-buying activities are supposed to increase the share of votes received by vote buyer. However, the party is not winning any elections and does not even stand a chance to win them in the contemporary Russian regime with overwhelming domination of

the ruling party. This is the foundation of a quite intriguing puzzle: what makes Communist party to spend money on vote buying practices, while recent electoral results are stagnating. To uncover the reasons for this, it is essential to have a more detailed look into the shape of contemporary support for CPRF. In addition, a theory of political marketing and campaigning should be used, since the exchange of “gifts” and vote buying are basically the instruments (although illegal and unconventional but still instruments) campaign. In the following sections I will discuss how parties do campaigns in general, then, I will focus attention on the scientific understanding of campaigning in Russia and in the case of CPRF specifically.

Literature Review

Vote-buying and clientelism are considered illegal in many countries across the world, but they are also a part of the political reality. Moreover, they may be treated as the part of electoral campaigning where instead of classical means of advertisement unethical practices are used. Therefore, the idea of vote-buying and clientelist “gifts” and favors is to attract votes. In the case of the Communist party, it is not clear what is the logic behind these activities and what are the factors which lead to their intensity in certain regions. This problem is to be approached from a standpoint of vast literature on vote-buying. Firstly, this chapter will touch on the political campaigning and its aims and effectiveness in general. Secondly, vote-buying and clientelism would be discussed with the focus on theory and empirical evidence. Thirdly, the gaps in the knowledge of vote-buying would be shown such as the ambiguity of choosing target audience and regions. It is also essential to see these gaps in comparison with the theory of conventional political marketing, since in such a way it is easier to indicate missing information. Furthermore, the question of vote-buying and clientelist aims would be addressed. Finally, the knowledge of vote-buying in post-communist countries would be summarized.

Political Campaigning: Methods and Effectiveness

Political campaigning is one of the most important political processes in every system which implies elections. In view of Strömbäck (2007), political campaigning is very important in modern-day politics as parties in general are more weakened now. This weakness was seen by other scholars as well, for instance, Katz and Mair (1995) highlighted how starting from the 1950s and 1960s parties started to lose their support and followers due to the erosion of strict societal divisions. Parties started to look for a support by trying to attract every possible social group (catch-all parties) or by making close ties with government and relying on government's

support (cartel parties). These two processes do not contradict each other but rather are two parallel developments. The main insight from this evidence is the fact that parties cannot rely solely on some social strata and they need to acquire as much support as possible. The issue here is to inform the voters why they need to vote for a specific party. That is where campaigning comes into play.

In the age of developed mass media political campaigning is conducted by every possible means. Scholars highlight the importance of broadcasts and television in general (Kaid 2004), however, modern context allows for very different ways of getting in touch with voters. Strömbäck (2007) puts emphasis on the importance of periodization of political campaigning eras. The current period is post-modern, and it characterizes by marketing logic of campaigning. This means that multiple channels and media are used; certain messages are targeted to certain groups of people; and e-mails and online advertisement are used all the time. Campaigning became a professionalized and permanent endeavor (Strömbäck 2007).

However, campaigning is not just advertisement of a candidate. As Barton, Castillo and Petrie (2014) state that campaign is not just about having a persuasive message. It is about personal contact with the voters and the connection between candidate and voters. Authors experimentally prove that even the brief appearance of candidate at the voter's doorstep is extremely effective in comparison to simple messaging and advertisement. As authors also state, political messaging itself can affect voter turnout but not their support, while door-to-door campaigning has shown clear increase in voter support of the candidate. This evidence adds new dimension to the modern-day political campaigning: while modern technologies allow for various "post-modern" instruments of advertisement, actual interaction with voters is still effective.

Door-to-door campaigning or, as it is usually called, canvassing is still a largely studied field of politics. For instance, Green, Gerber and Nickerson (2003) study how door-to-door

canvassing in the context of the US local elections. Authors find out that one personal contact of campaign workers with citizen increases the citizen's probability of voting by 7%. In authors' opinion, this is a very significant increase since only 25% of voters go to the local elections. The result of authors' experiment can be summarized by the fact that 12 successful face-to-face contacts transfer to one additional vote. This is the clear sign that door-to-door canvassing brings voters to the electoral polls. Bhatti et al. (2016) conduct a comparative study of 6 European countries and door-to-door campaigning in them. While summarizing the published evidence of door-to-door canvassing's effectiveness authors conclude that in Europe canvassing is less effective than in the United States but it still brings a positive effect to the campaign. This evidence may suggest that the effectiveness of such campaign methods is not universal, however, it must be highlighted that the effect still exists, and it is positive. Nyman (2017) conducts a study of Swedish elections in a form of field experiment. The results clearly show the effectiveness of door-to-door campaigning. Author concludes that if a household was visited by party workers the probability of voting by a household member increase by 3.6%. Even though this number is smaller than the results by Green, Gerber and Nickerson (2003) it is nevertheless substantial. It also should be mentioned that Nyman studies turnout rather than specific party support. Yet it still illustrates that in Europe door-to-door canvassing also works and brings voters to the polls.

In sum, door-to-door canvassing is a very prominent and successful method of campaigning which will not disappear anytime soon. Its use shows that personal interaction with potential voters remain the common instrument to promote candidates and to make people vote. In current post-modern period of political campaigning it is the professionalized routine of political parties which is done by professional agitators and political party workers. In connection to vote buying or clientelist practices this also shows why are they employed by

parties. Distribution of “gifts” and favors is supposed to happen in personal interaction, so it is a not very legal addition to the prominent campaigning activity of personalized visits.

What, in general, makes a successful political campaign? This question is extremely difficult considering how different modern countries in terms of election organization, citizens’ demands, and political preferences are. One important modern factor of campaigning is the use of technologies and professionals as it is stated above. Modern politicians and parties actively use social networks in order to discuss politics personally and to market their political opinions (Enli and Skogerbø 2013). In addition, negative campaigning is another way to lead a successful campaign. For example, Hansen and Pederson (2008) study the case of negative political campaigning in Denmark and while they conclude that in Denmark this type of campaigning is not widely used, they state that it works and pushes voters away from the party under media attack in many other environments. The problem with this method is that it does not necessarily lead voters to support the party which conducts a negative campaign against others.

However, despite the prevalent use of media in modern campaigns, old methods such as door-to-door canvassing never went away. As stated above, they are still used, and they do attract voters. At the same time, personalized interactions with voters can be a perfect occasion for political parties and candidates to try to convince citizens to vote in a not very conventional way. And while during campaigns parties usually distribute leaflets and programmes, during private meetings with potential voters they also can distribute money, “presents” and favors. That is why vote-buying, clientelism and various forms of them may also be considered as a marginal subtype of political campaigning.

In following sections theory of vote-buying and clientelism including the use and effectiveness of these methods will be discussed. The comparison with political campaigning theory is also to be conducted in order to highlight the knowledge gaps. In the end of review, it would be shown how this particular paper is going to help to fill those gaps.

Vote-buying and Clientelism

Before discussing where and why vote-buying is used it must be clearly conceptualized. This paper uses term “social action” which would be thoroughly discussed in the following sections (with explanation for the wording), however, the basic idea is that here “social action” means vote-buying practices, clientelist practices and practices which are very closed to them but do not necessarily include a vocal commitment to the vote. While the term “vote buying” is widely used in political science literature, it is important to define it properly in order to avoid conceptual stretching and misunderstanding. Several authors try to define vote buying. For instance, Schaffer and Schedler (2002) try to look at vote buying from different perspectives of candidates and voters. They state that parties might use payments, gifts, favors and even wages in order to make voters elect them. At the same time voters can see these instruments in various meanings, such as to think that the ability to give away payments is the show of party’s winnability or to think of these offers as a threat. In any meaning, these actions are supposed to make people to go to vote. However, Schaffer and Schedler (2002) are inconclusive and mostly ask questions rather than propose definition. Finan and Schechter (2012), on the other hand, propose quite straightforward definition consisting of two parts. Firstly, vote-buying is not an official policy, but it is an attempt to weaken “electoral discipline”. Secondly, the economic transfers of vote-buying are relatively small and happen in personal meetings.

Lippert-Rasmussen (2011) gives a more specific definition of vote-buying. In author’s view it is a secret activity which includes vote-buyer paying a voter and a voter has no reason to vote as vote-buyer wants other than that voter will gain economically. While a voter can easily check if she is paid, vote-buyer does not have the ability to check the vote in secret ballot environment, therefore, usually there are no sanctions involved. The costs of vote-buying are covered by private individuals and, finally, the benefits are targeted to a small group of vote sellers. The definition proposed by Lippert-Rasmussen is one of the most precise, though author

mostly concentrates on cash as the main instrument of vote-buying while various sources show that it is not the only one (Schaffer and Schedler 2002). Nevertheless, this definition clearly shows the border between political campaigning and vote-buying: vote-buying is not about electoral promises but rather about economic interest.

One of the most prominent vote-buying scholars Simeon Nichter (2014) makes quite convincing attempt to do this in one of his articles. Nichter (2014) analyzes numerous works on vote-buying and concludes that there are at least several concepts of vote-buying in modern political science which include clientelist vote-buying (which is based on contingent exchange between voter and buyer), legislative vote-buying (when the sellers are legislators), non-excludable vote-buying (where candidates or parties target electoral districts with public goods) and non-binding vote-buying (where candidates or parties provide benefits for voters but do not require their commitment to vote). Nichter (2014) states that the definition of vote-buying requires contingent exchange with commitment. On the basis of this, author claims that non-excludable vote-buying and non-binding vote-buying are involved in conceptual stretching of vote-buying and, in fact, are not vote-buying in classical sense. Nichter (2014) proposes that authors which study these types of vote-buying should abstain from the usage of the concept directly and highlight that these practices are diminished subtypes of vote-buying rather than pure clientelist vote-buying. This is one of the reasons why this paper uses the term “social activity” since in most cases which will be studied here there was no vocal commitment of voters to vote for the distributor of goods.

There are several possible points of critique towards Nichter’s (2014) neglect of non-binding and non-excludable vote-buying. Firstly, Schaffer and Schedler (2002) argue that voters may attribute their own meanings to the vote-buying practices. While voters might not vocally make an agreement with buyer, they can interpret the “gifts” and favors they receive as a clear incentive to vote which is the aim of candidate or party. Secondly, the usage of federal

money and resources by Russian opposition parties in order to distribute food, clothes and favors is hardly a part of typical political campaign since providing people with social help is government's work. This is a case of clientelism which will be discussed here too. Interestingly, Nichter (2014) abstains from conceptualizing clientelism while attributing all subtypes of vote-buying to this concept. Finally, Nichter (2014) himself cites authors of published and famous articles which study non-binding and non-excludable vote-buying and call these practices vote-buying. Nevertheless, this paper still would not directly call Russian parties' practices vote-buying in order to avoid confusion or disagreements. Vote-buying activities is a neutral term which here will refer to all various clientelist practices mentioned by Nichter (2014). Clientelism itself is also to be defined properly in further paragraphs.

Although clientelism and vote-buying are very close concepts, clientelism still needs to be conceptualized because it is crucial for understanding the subject of this research. Clientelism is a highly used term and yet its conceptualization is problematic. Stokes (2007) states that there is no consensus on the term. Stokes, as one of the main scholars of clientelism, proposes her own definition of it: "proferring of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?" (Stokes 2007, 649). This definition is very usable since it is very flexible. It does not specifically need vocal commitment to vote for the patron in the future, the vote might happen in the past. This means that clientelist relationships can be sustained with the people who voted for the patron in the past or are likely to vote in the future. Moreover, Stokes adds to this that parties usually target marginal or swing voters with clientelist practices, thus, it can be an electoral strategy to promote party among people who may never voted and may never vote for it.

Another attempt to define clientelism is done by Allen Hicken (2011). Hicken characterizes clientelism by the particularistic targeting and contingency-based exchange and

clientelist relationships in author's understanding are composed of dyadic instrumental relationships, contingency, hierarchy and iteration. In general, Hicken sees clientelism as prominent reoccurring relationships between political entities and citizens which are characteristic for the political systems with low government capacity and imperfect democracy. Both definitions are extensive and will be used in this research. In the following paragraphs contemporary studies and evidence of clientelism and vote-buying will be discussed.

The methods of vote-buying are various. The methods of political campaigning discussed above are used for the full potential only in democratic systems with free speech and the Internet without censorship. In case of electoral autocracies, political systems with low government capacities and in less developed countries in general, it is hard to definitively call their political campaigning activities "postmodern" and instead they have very different electoral malpractices. In many countries electoral campaigns are controlled or exploited while the use of mass media like in the North America or Western Europe would be limited. Across the world there exist prominent clientelist and vote-buying practices which are not a part of proper campaigning. These are inducement and threats which are illegal and yet persistent in various regimes. Mares and Young (2016) explore negative and positive types of electoral strategies both of which are clientelist in nature. This means that politicians, brokers and voters make a contract in which agents are supposed to vote for the principal while the principal follows specific behavior. Negative inducements are threats of violence and threats related to the economic well-being of the individual. On the other hand, positive inducements are clientelist practices that include vote buying with the exchange of money, goods and favors. These inducements' repertoire changes depending on the type of broker (Mares and Young 2016). It can be state employees and they can provide administrative favors and punishments (Weitz-Shapiro 2012). Organizational brokers such as civil society organizations provide social benefits and goods (Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015). Clientelist strategies also can be used by

ethnic leaders who can provide social benefits or use exclusion in order to stimulate people to vote (Lemarchand 1972). Finally, there are partisan brokers who use money, goods and favors as positive inducements (Stokes 2005).

In the following sections this paper will try to shortly summarize the known effects and factors of vote-buying in different regions. The most prominent regions for vote-buying studies are Latin America, Africa and Asia. Carreras and İrepoğlu (2013) write about vote-buying in Latin America and try to specify its effects on electoral process. Authors conclude that vote buying negatively affect turnout due to the decrease of trust in elections. Fundamental study of vote-buying in Latin America by Brusco, Nazareno and Stokes (2004) is dedicated to find how big the problem of vote-buying is and who are the targets of vote-buying. Authors study Argentina and report that 44% respondents of their survey have faced vote-buying attempts. The main point of the article is that vote buyers target poorer groups of people in poorer regions. Nichter (2008) also studies the case of Argentina and tries to find what exactly is the aim of vote-buying. Argentina has a secret ballot; therefore, it is impossible to check if the vote sellers did vote for the buyer. Nichter's (2008) analysis shows that vote-buying is aimed not towards the pure increase in votes for the party, but rather turnout and has the mobilization function.

The studies of vote-buying in Africa show intriguing results. Vicente (2014) analyzes vote-buying in Sao Tome and Principe and concludes that voter education may work effectively against vote-buying. Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) review a large amount of studies about African vote-buying and state that it has a negative effect on the welfare on the continent. Moreover, authors highlight education as one of the most important factors of vote-buying spread and effectiveness. Jensen and Justesen (2014) analyze the broad set of African countries and conclude that the main factor of vote-buying on the continent is poverty. Poverty allows vote-buying to be effective and to persist. In general, numerous studies of various countries from very different regions show similar factors of vote-buying: it is working due to poverty

and low education. For instance, Canare, Mendoza and Lopez (2018) show that the low-income voters from Philippines are usually targeted with vote-buying in different forms: food, presents, cash and favors.

It is evident from works above that socio-economic are the main factors of vote-buying, but it is important to study them in more detail and highlight the more important ones. Poverty and general wealth of population are the most popular ones among many articles. Poverty matters for vote-buying since it would not make much sense to try to buy votes of wealthy people, especially considering that sums and presents involved in vote-buying are not big. However, there are several other factors which need to be separately mentioned. For instance, education seems to be one of the most important predictors of vote-buying. Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) clearly name education as essential to prevent vote-buying. They specifically mention “voter education” and education in general as positive factors which are supposed to battle vote-buying spread. Tawakkal et al. (2017) pay a lot of attention to education and state that on par with income it is one of the main variables for measuring socio-economic status. Lower income and lower education of an individual theoretically are supposed to make vote-buying more likely to occur (Stokes 2005, Nichter 2008). Tawakkal et al. (2017) study Indonesian vote-buying and they find out that education has, in fact, larger effect on vote-buying acceptance than income. Based on this evidence it is possible to assume that education should be treated as an important factor while studying vote-buying since individuals with lower education are the main targets, as well as individuals with lower income.

In sum, main factors of vote-buying are poverty and education, however, there are others which are also mentioned in the literature. One of such factors is the partisanship. Party supporters are more acceptant of vote-buying from the party they support. For instance, Gonzalez-Ocantos, de Jonge and Nickerson (2014) conduct a series of survey experiments to find the optimal conditions for vote-buying. Aside from education and income which once again

prove essential, authors also find that being a party supporter generally increases the acceptance of vote-buying. Similar evidence is reported by Çarkoglu and Aytaç (2015) who study vote-buying in Turkey. Authors prove that partisanship has a significant effect on vote-buying, specifically partisans are the usual targets of vote-buying. In addition, Çarkoglu and Aytaç (2015) also find surprising evidence that urban residents are the most affected by vote-buying. Moreover, their study once again strongly confirms the importance of education, since in their models less education is a significant predictor of vote-buying.

In conclusion, studies of vote-buying and clientelism are numerous and contain a lot of empirical results. It might seem that this field of Political Science is developed and most of important factors are defined. While this is not necessarily untrue, there are several points in the theory and empirical studies which are understudied. Furthermore, it can be argued that some notions of vote-buying studies are at odds with each other. In the following section of this paper, the problems of vote-buying studies would be highlighted and discussed.

The Gaps of Vote-buying Theory

Before turning to the main gap which this thesis tries to fill, it is important to mention other gaps which pose certain limitations on every study on vote-buying. Presumably the first underdevelopment of vote-buying studies which is important to mention is the absence of any coherent evidence on its effectiveness. Various studies mentioned above show what factors lead to the spread of vote-buying. However, there is nothing in these studies which can show if the vote-buying reaches its aim of making people vote. In other words, there is no information on the surplus of votes which comes from vote-buying. At the same time the literature on door-to-door campaigning can clearly show quantitative growth of votes due to the efforts of campaigners. Since vote-buying is a marginal type of political campaigning which also occurs during personal meetings, one would like to see how effective it is in terms of votes. This problem is addressed by several authors; however, it is far from being solved. Nichter (2008),

for instance, is aware of the problem and states that with secret ballot it is impossible to measure the surplus of votes. Parties, therefore, are also unable to check the effectiveness of vote-buying and instead they practice turnout buying, which, in Nichter's (2008) analysis, shows to influence turnout. However, while turnout buying can be measured quantitatively, it is still unknown whether the same can be done to vote-buying.

It is theoretically possible to measure the effects of vote-buying in surveys. However, Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2012) show that there is a strong social desirability bias when it comes to collecting qualitative data on vote-buying. Authors show experimental evidence that when asked directly respondents are highly unlikely to admit that they participate in any vote-buying or clientelist practices including receiving cash, presents or favors. However, list experiments are proved to be effective in collecting such information. Thus, one might expect that sophisticated experimental design is potentially capable to collect information on participation in vote-buying and, hypothetically, even on whether respondents vote for vote buyer.

The gap that this study focuses on is the ambiguity of factors which lead to more prominent vote-buying in certain regions. The problem with vote-buying studies is that they extensively study factors which favor vote-buying practices, while it is still unclear under which circumstances vote buyers choose to act. The issue is that vote-buying studies focus on voters and structural specifics more than on parties' actions. While it is evident that in poorer regions with less educated population vote-buying is likely to appear, it is not evident if the fluctuations in electoral support and in population's wealth and education affect parties' strategies. In some sense, this problem is also tied with the first one about the absence of information on vote-buying outcomes in electoral support. It is not clear why would parties to engage in the illegal and costly campaigning activity if they are not sure if the population will respond to it. Nevertheless, the problem remains, literature cannot give a coherent answer on how the changes

in socio-economic structure and electoral support on the regional level affect the prominence of vote-buying.

Following the problems mentioned above this study will use regional electoral support of the party as one of the explanatory factors of its vote-buying and clientelist activities. Based on the evidence, which specifically states that party supporters are more prone to participate in vote-buying practices, electoral support and its changes might prove very important for the party's strategies towards vote-buying. It is intriguing to see if vote-buying by the Communist party targets more loyal regions with higher support in order to signal supporters that they should continue voting. On the other hand, it might target regions with low regional support in order to try to strengthen the party's position in the region. Thus, this research is less about voters and their characteristics (after all there is no doubt in literature that poorer and less educated voters attract vote buyers) but more about the factors which lead the party to intensify vote-buying activities in specific regions.

The problem of the electoral support's effect on vote-buying is widely acknowledged by political scientists. There are multiple contradictions on this topic inside the existing literature. For instance, the evidence about party supporters being the main targets of vote-buying which is proved in the studies by Gonzalez-Ocantos, de Jonge and Nickerson (2014) and by Çarkoglu and Aytaç (2015) as was stated above. At the same time Stokes (2007) who studies and defines clientelism clearly states that empirical results point that main targets are swing voters. Stokes (2007) is aware of the contradiction and cites several studies which support the argument about swing voters. For instance, Schady (2000) shows that the Peruvian Social Fund created by Alberto Fujimori specifically targeted swing voters with clientelist expenditures. Similar evidence is shown by Weitz-Shapiro (2006) while studying "pork barrel" politics in Argentina. The study provides proofs that the distribution of unemployment compensation in Argentina was biased towards the swing districts. Therefore, both positions

are empirically proven. It may be the case that the targeting may depend on the specific country context or specific type of vote-buying. In any case, this contradiction once again shows the importance of party support for vote-buying. Thus, it is essential to include party support to vote-buying and clientelist models.

Finally, there is another gap in vote-buying studies regarding urbanization. Çarkoglu and Aytaç (2015) find strong evidence in the case of Turkey that urban voters are usually the targets of vote-buying. It is surprising because urbanization can be associated with economic growth and wealth, while rural areas can be perceived as more poor than urban. Consequently, in vote-buying literature, the rural areas are quite often considered the main target based on evidence. For example, Bratton (2008) in his widely cited study of Nigerian vote-buying states that vote-buying occurs more often in rural areas of the country. Vicente (2014) also mentions that vote-buying is more frequent in rural areas in the study of Sao Tome and Principe. On the other hand, Jensen and Justesen (2014) include controls for urban and rural areas in their model and find that it does not matter whether voters are rural or urban: these factors are insignificant for the presence of vote-buying. Thus, there are three different positions on the urbanization relationship with vote-buying and all of them are scientifically confirmed by different scholars. This fact leads to the importance of including urbanization in the studies of vote-buying since it seems to be a controversial factor.

The problems described above come directly from the literature and lead to the understanding in what sense this research can be novel. It is important to try to find the relationship between vote-buying and regional electoral support, because there is not much evidence about it. It is unclear if the vote buyers target their electoral strongholds or swing regions, because evidence differs from article to article. Moreover, it is not known how vote buyers react to the electoral fluctuations. In general, relationship between electoral support and vote-buying activities remains a gap in vote-buying studies. In addition, while this study will

use well-known factors of vote-buying such as wealth and education, it is also essential to include urbanization as another socioeconomic variable. The use of urbanization as an explanatory variable for vote-buying activities can respond to another gap in the literature. This gap is illustrated by the contradiction between authors who find evidence for intense vote-buying in urban areas and authors who state that vote-buying usually target rural areas. Therefore, both gaps (on regional electoral support and urbanization) will be addressed by the empirical parts of this study. Finally, there is another feature which makes this study novel and it is yet to be discussed. This is the fact that it uses the regions of Russia as cases for vote-buying study. The novelty here comes from the fact that Russian Federation and Eastern Europe in general are not the most frequent cases when it comes to vote-buying studies. Moreover, in the subfield of Russian politics vote-buying and clientelism are rarely discussed at all. The following section of the paper will discuss these matters in more detail.

Vote-buying in Post-communist Countries

Studies of vote-buying and clientelism largely focus on Latin America and, to a lesser extent, on Africa and Asia. For instance, the article “Political Clientelism” by Susan Stokes (2007) which is one of the most fundamental works on the subject mostly refers to Latin American cases. On the other hand, Russian and Eastern European are understudied. Thus, the following section of the paper will discuss studies and theories dedicated to vote-buying and clientelism in the context of these cases.

In the post-communist political landscape of Eastern Europe clientelism in various forms is, in fact, quite common. Linda Cook (2014) argues that in electoral-authoritarian regimes elites mainly relied on non-clientelistic strategies and that in consolidated East Central European democracies levels of clientelism are low. However, Cook (2014) also highlights the fact that in poor and industrial post-communist spaces such as parts of Former Soviet Union

and Southeastern Europe electoral clientelism is widespread. There are various arguments which confirm the high presence of clientelism in post-communist countries. For example, Engler (2016) states that Eastern European elections remain highly volatile and in combination with high levels of corruption they create a context suitable for clientelist practices. Brender and Drazen (2009) also argue that new democracies have significant problems with consolidation. In authors' view, new democracies are challenged by pro-authoritarian elites who aim to overthrow them. In order to prove that democracy is beneficial for the population, pro-democratic forces are made to use clientelist practices. New democracies often struggle to perform politically and economically at the same level as established ones, and clientelism is an instrument to prove to the public that democracy is a right choice which leads to economic development and prosperity. Sajo (1998) highlights the fact that Eastern European countries inherited state-centered clientelistic structures from previously existed *nomenklatura*. This, in turn, provides for the development of specific Eastern European state-centered form of clientelism. In sum, Eastern Europe presents an environment in which various forms of clientelism can exist and develop in unique forms.

There are few works dedicated to clientelist practices and vote-buying in Eastern European context. One of the most fundamental among these works is the article by Mares, Muntean and Petrova (2017) which is focused on the factors of clientelistic strategies in Bulgaria and Romania. The results of the research are intriguing. In a survey-based study the authors prove that the choice of clientelistic strategies depends on the regional characteristics, specifically, on the length of incumbency in the region. The evidence shows that in the regions where incumbent holds position for a long time, politicians employ vote intimidation and vote-buying. For example, ruling Socialist party in the town of Karnobat in Bulgaria intimidated voters with reminding them of petty legal crimes which were overlooked due to the party's benevolence. The party officials promised to withdraw this benevolence in case voters do not

support the party at the polls. Various administrative measures were employed, such as transporting masses of people to the polls, monitoring turnout and “assisting” voters with their ballots’ filling. On the other hand, in the town of Karlovo, where administration just changed before the elections, there was no such pressure. Politicians limited themselves to several inducements both positive and negative, but administrative pressure was not involved. Same situation was observed in Romanian regions. It is also important to note that Mares, Muntean and Petrova (2017) find that vote-buying in form of giving gifts, food and clothing was happening independently from the length of incumbency.

The Russian case of clientelist practices and vote-buying is even more understudied than Eastern European. One of the possible reasons for it is that Russian elections are not competitive in comparison to most of the Eastern Europe and Latin America (McFaul 2018), on which most of vote-buying and clientelist studies are concentrated. The absence of actual challenge might make Russian Federation less attractive case for studying. However, the absence of challenge does not mean the absence of vote-buying and clientelism. In order to address the issue of such practices in the Russian case, more context needs to be introduced.

As it was already stated above, Russian party system is quite unique. It does not resemble the systems of Western Europe: while it allows for competition to exist, the system favors the ruling party. The domination of “United Russia” can be explained by its monopoly on regional clientelist “political machines” (Hale 2003). One of the fullest definitions of “political machine” concept is given by Stokes (2005, 315) who defines them as “political organizations that mobilize electoral support by trading particularistic material benefits to citizens in exchange for their votes.” These “machines” are structures of regional political actors who use their resource and influence in order to convince population to vote in a certain way (Hale 2003). In the 1990s, “political machines” were widely used by the Communist party, however, after “United Russia” appeared in 2000s, “political machines” are mostly under the

control of the ruling party (Golosov 2014). Thus, the ruling party has a strong clientelist instrument to ensure its political position.

It is worth mentioning here that “United Russia” is also infamous for its voter intimidation strategies. For instance, Frye, Reuter and Szakonyi (2019) bring up the problem of voter intimidation by public employers who are loyal to the ruling party. These employers can make their workers to go to the polls in order to vote for “United Russia”, and as Frye, Reuter and Szakonyi state, it often happens. The ruling party is also in the position where it can effectively use “pork barrel” politics. This is illustrated in the work by Zavadskaya and Shilov (2021) where authors find evidence that municipalities receive federal funding based on the share of votes for “United Russia”. Municipalities where “United Russia” scores higher tend to receive more financing from the federal center while municipalities with lower scores for the party receive less (Zavadskaya and Shilov 2021). Finally, there is electoral fraud which favors “United Russia” and is organized by the party since it has the administrative resource to do so. This is highlighted and analyzed in various reports by the movement “Golos”. In sum, Russian electoral and party system is fraudulent and various clientelist practices are commonplace.

Based on the evidence above one might believe that “United Russia” is the main user of clientelist practices, however, CPRF is also known for various forms of vote-buying. The party is especially infamous for its regional clientelist networks. The Communist party started to build them in the 1990s: in the absence of NGOs and proper government institutions Communists were constructing substitutes for civil society organizations (Marsh 2000; Kurilla 2002; Evans 2014). These regional networks organize protests, cultural events and engage in distributing goods in the form of “gifts”. This situation resembles those distributions in Bulgaria described by Mares, Muntean and Petrova (2017). In the literature these activities of CPRF are less known and studied in comparison to the ruling party’s clientelist practices. The reason for this is likely the absence of data on vote-buying activities of the Communist party. Therefore,

this study is able to fill another gap formed by the fact that studies on vote-buying activities of CPRF are non-existent. In the following sections of this paper I will discuss the theoretical approach to solve the problems brought up in the literature review section.

Theory

Firstly, I state once again what is known about the regional activities of the Communist party in the literature. Next, I present the most important points of the vote-buying theory, specifically, the gaps which this study tries to fill. Finally, based on these points I develop the main hypotheses of this study.

Russian politics are dependent on so called regional political machines. In the words of Stokes, political machines are “political organizations that mobilize electoral support by trading particularistic material benefits to citizens in exchange for their votes” (Stokes 2005). These machines are closely tied with regional governments and administrative resources. With the decline of CPRF in 2000s and loss of regional dominance in the “red belt”, these regional political machines fell into the hands of the United Russia and its allies (Golosov 2014). Therefore, the practice of distributing goods is in a way an attempt to compensate for the loss of these political machines.

The disappearance of the “red belt” does not mean that the support for CPRF lost any kind of regional structure. Semenov, Lobanova and Zavadskaya (2016) state that the party is politically active in the region when it is not coopted in the local legislature. In this case it means that it has few places in the regional legislature. This means that lower regional electoral results would mean the activization of political activity, including the social activities such as distribution of goods. It makes sense that in the regions with better electoral statistics spending additional resources might be less useful than in other regions with less support. And while in the federal context CPRF cannot gain much from its activities, on the regional level there is significant variation in party’s support which can change from 4-5% to the 30% of votes in regional parliament’s elections. The structure of contemporary support for CPRF is thoroughly studied in the article by White (2019). White (2019) acknowledges the fact that initial bases of Communist support are lost but provides evidence that it is now concentrated in the more

wealthy, educated and urbanized regions. This means that nowadays CPRF competes with other opposition parties for support and votes, including non-systemic opposition, while United Russia remains dominant everywhere, with little fluctuations in support except for large city centers. Semenov (2020) states that electoral support signals to the party that its branch is powerful in the region.

Works above (White 2019; Semenov, Lobanova & Zavadskaya 2016; Semenov 2020) provide evidence, that CPRF support is still dependent on the specific region and its structural characteristic. Party's activities also must be dependent on these structural characteristics since they are tied with the support. Considering social activities, they are almost inseparable from vote buying, since they are basically providing goods to potential voters and supporters. And it is known that such parameters as income and poverty are tied to the scope of vote buying practices (Brusco, Nazareno and Stokes 2004). Poorer people are usually for vote buying and clientelist relationships. This adds evidence that CPRF's social activities are unevenly spread among regions. It would be strange for the agitators to rely on distributing food on the streets of Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, since these cities have strong economies with unending supply of jobs as well as social policies. At the same time, agricultural regions, towns with one main economic enterprise and rural areas are much less economically secure and distribution of free food there might attract people.

In terms of a general vote-buying theory there are several points worth mentioning. Firstly, there are gaps which this study aims to cover. First of them is the relationship between urbanization and vote-buying. Çarkoglu and Aytaç (2015) argue that vote-buying usually happens in cities and urbanized areas. At the same time, Bratton (2008) and Vicente (2014) find evidence that vote-buying usually occurs in rural areas with underdeveloped infrastructure, low incomes and low education. Despite different results, these studies used similar research methods: they used surveys to collect individual-level data and then employed regressions to

find the effect of various factors on the intensity of vote-buying. Possibly, the difference in evidence comes from completely different country contexts: Bratton (2008) and Vicente (2014) study Sub-Saharan Africa, while Çarkoglu and Aytaç (2015) focus on Turkey. The absence of consensus on the effect of urbanization on vote-buying is the foundation of the first hypothesis of this paper.

While conclusions of Çarkoglu and Aytaç (2015) about higher urbanization's positive effect on vote-buying are grounded and valid there is a good reason to expect that in case of Russia and CPRF vote-buying activities might be concentrated in more rural, agricultural regions. The center of CPRF's activity for a very long time was the "red belt" which consisted of agricultural regions with big rural population (Golosov 2014). Even though the "red belt" does not exist anymore the regional activities of CPRF in these regions might still be quite frequent. This would mean that in these regions there are more party activities including vote-buying. Thus, I present the first hypothesis of the study. The idea here is that in more agricultural, rural regions vote-buying is more effective because the "red belt" and such regions in general are poorer and economically struggle more in the new economic system of Russia (Golosov 2014).

H1: In less urbanized regions vote-buying activities of CPRF should increase.

The second gap which this study tries to fill is the absence of consensus about the target audience of vote-buying and clientelist activities. There are arguments that vote-buying is usually aimed at party supporters: for instance, Schady (2000) and Weitz-Shapiro (2006) argue that swing districts are usually targets for clientelist activity. Stokes (2005) also supports this argument. At the same time, there are authors (Gonzalez-Ocantos, de Jonge & Nickerson 2014; Çarkoglu and Aytaç 2015) who state that the main target audience for vote-buying is party supporters. Thus, it vote-buying is the instrument of mobilization of supporters rather than the method of attracting new ones. This gap in the theory is the foundation of the second hypothesis.

This hypothesis is based around the idea that the Communist party of Russia targets mainly its supporters and not swing voters. Basically, it implies that regions where the electoral share of Communists is higher are going to be targeted. The hypothesis predicts the importance of partisan supporters for several empirical reasons. Firstly, White (2019) proves that the Communist party works a lot with the regions with more votes for opposition. Secondly, locations where Communists receive a lot of votes are usually used by them in order to build strong regional networks of supporters. For example, Evans (2014) shows how in the town of Volzhskiy, where CPRF was the most popular party, party's organizations became the main actors in social life, politics and culture. Similar processes were observed in Smolensk in the 1990s by Marsh (2000), who also noted that CPRF constructed a network of organizations which were heavily involved in the social life of the region. Therefore, there is a good reason to believe that CPRF targets regions where it has bigger numbers of supporters in order to cement its position and to mobilize voters in various ways.

Despite the evidence above it is impossible to know if the Communist party targets supporters or swing voters. While CPRF works a lot with the regions where it has large numbers of supporters it is still might not be profitable to spend many resources on those who already vote for the party. Therefore, I present the hypothesis which includes both positions.

H2: If supporters are the target group then in regions with higher regional electoral support for the party social activities of CPRF must increase. If swing voters are the target group then in regions with lower electoral support for the party social activities of CPRF must increase.

Testing these hypotheses can bring a significant contribution to the Political Science. Firstly, the study addresses gaps in the theory of vote-buying. These gaps are yet to be filled and the aim of these paper is to suggest new arguments which would enrich the discussion. Secondly, this study is the first work fully dedicated to the problem of vote-buying by

opposition parties in Russia. The literature on vote-buying and clientelism in Russia dedicated solely to the ruling party, while the opposition parties remain mostly ignored. The results of this study will for the first time show that vote-buying activities of CPRF might depend on the regional factors.

There are several predictors of vote-buying activities based on the literature and theory, which are going to be used in this research as control variables. First one is the general economic development of the region. Such authors as Jensen and Justesen (2014) and Canare, Mendoza and Lopez (2018) find evidence that one of the main factors of vote-buying is poverty. Thus, it is important to control for the economic development of the region. In order to do this, I will include regional GDP per capita and regional unemployment in the analysis. Such authors as Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) and Tawakkal et al. (2017) show that education is another essential predictor of vote-buying. Authors' works indicate that individuals with lower education are usually the targets for vote-buying. Therefore, I will also include the percent of people with higher education in the model in order to control for it.

In sum, at this point this paper has all the necessary theoretical foundations. The remaining task is to test the hypotheses. However, before this I will elaborate on the data and the research design this study is going to use. Firstly, I will describe the data, its sources and structure. Then, I will proceed with methodology. Then, the section with results will follow.

Research Design

Data

In order to conduct an analysis, this study will use a unique dataset. In 2020, research project group called “Parliamentary Parties as Actors of Mobilization in Modern Russia” from Higher School of Economics has collected the data on various activities of the Communist party. I remain the member and co-founder of the project group who actively participated in manual collection of the data in fall 2020. Due to the ongoing process of publishing studies by the research group the dataset is private. Nevertheless, I will try to describe it as much as possible. The dataset is unique because it is the first one dedicated entirely to various activities of Russian opposition parties. Previous works mostly focused on collecting social activity in general, without specifically researching party activities. These activities were collected from the websites of regional branches of the Communist party. The reason for using official regional websites is that they are the only sources which document party activity in the region from as long ago as 2007-2008. In addition, regional party officials are unlikely to underreport their work; thus, group members presumed that these websites are also the fullest sources on party activity.

The dataset includes protests, non-political protests, cultural and social activities. The classification is basically modified classification used by Lankina and Voznaya (2015). Lankina and Voznaya (2015) collect data on Russian protests with thorough approach to typology. They highlight various types of protest. The novelty introduced by the “Parliamentary Parties” project group is that all non-political protests were put under one classification and that the group is collecting social and cultural activities as well. The variable of interest is social activities: under this name various distributions of goods were collected. The idea was to use this category for collecting events where the Communist Party somehow helps different social groups. Most of

these events happened to be some sort of presenting “gifts” and generally “pork-barrel” politics on the party level. In the following sections, the content of dataset will be properly described.

When it comes to vote-buying activities there is a need to provide more examples to illustrate exactly what are they. Perhaps, one of the most typical examples is the distribution of “gifts” to school students in the town of Lipki in Tula region. Members of CPRF went to school and provided undisclosed packages to the members of school’s chess club¹. School students cannot vote, but their parents can, thus, it is indirect vote-buying of students’ parents. There are also examples of CPRF providing favors and infrastructure. For instance, in Kaliningrad region the regional party branch opened a free sports club for adults and children. Top party officials actively participated in the opening process². There is another great case which took place in Nizhny Novgorod region, where CPRF developed and opened a children’s playground in the small town of Shakhunya³. But probably the most typical case was already shown in the very beginning of this work. In Moscow region CPRF’s officials distributed presents to veterans of WWII and, more importantly, to their whole families⁴. The presents remained undisclosed, but they were likely food and party’s merchandise. In sum, all these various gifts and favors compose what is called here “vote-buying activities”.

The dataset includes 72 (out of 83) regions of Russia. Remaining nine did not have working websites of regional branches of CPRF, thus the collection of the relevant information was impossible. The dataset covers four years from 2016 until 2019. Originally the dataset contains values in the form of region-month-number of events, but for this study it was grouped by years. The reason for this is that there are too many months with no vote-buying activities. Another reason is that socio-economic statistics in Russia are not updated monthly but only

¹ <http://kprftula.ru/photo/2017/> (accessed 17 April 2021)

² <http://www.kprf-kaliningrad.ru/2019/10/pri-kaliningradskom-obkome-kprf-otkrylja-sportivnyj-klub.html> (accessed 17 April 2021)

³ <https://www.kompas-rf.ru/2018/10/4723/> (accessed 17 April 2021)

⁴ <https://mkkprf.ru/21047-kommunisty-lyubni-razdayut-podarki-k-novomu-godu.html> (accessed 17 April 2021)

yearly. Thus, using months would lead to multiple values being counted with the same control variables. Therefore, I grouped the data by years. The dataset is an example of panel data: every line resembles the region and the exact year with number of social activities. It contains 288 observations overall.

In order to describe dataset more properly I would like to present some basic descriptive statistics on it. Firstly, it is essential to know how the data is distributed. Thus, the histogram of number of vote-buying activities per region per year is presented below.

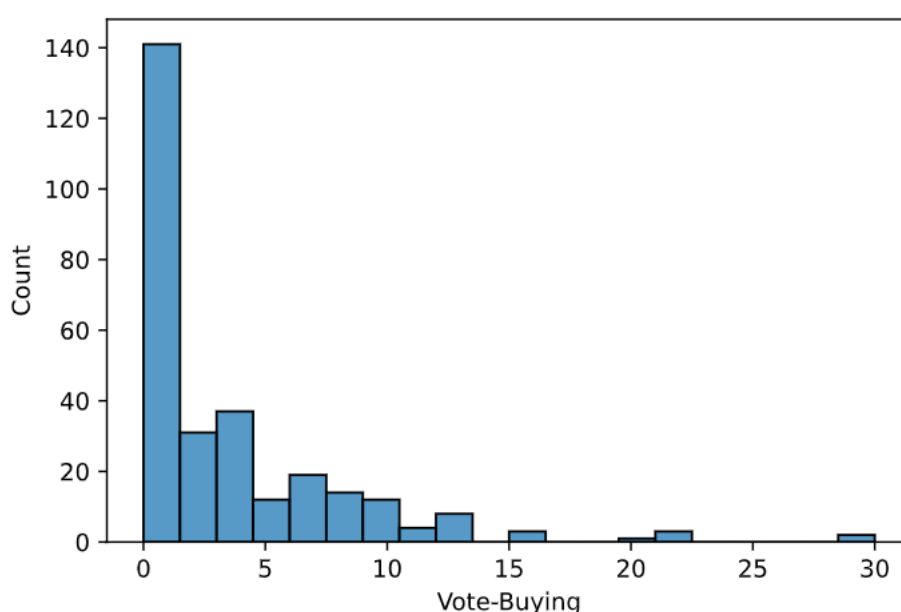


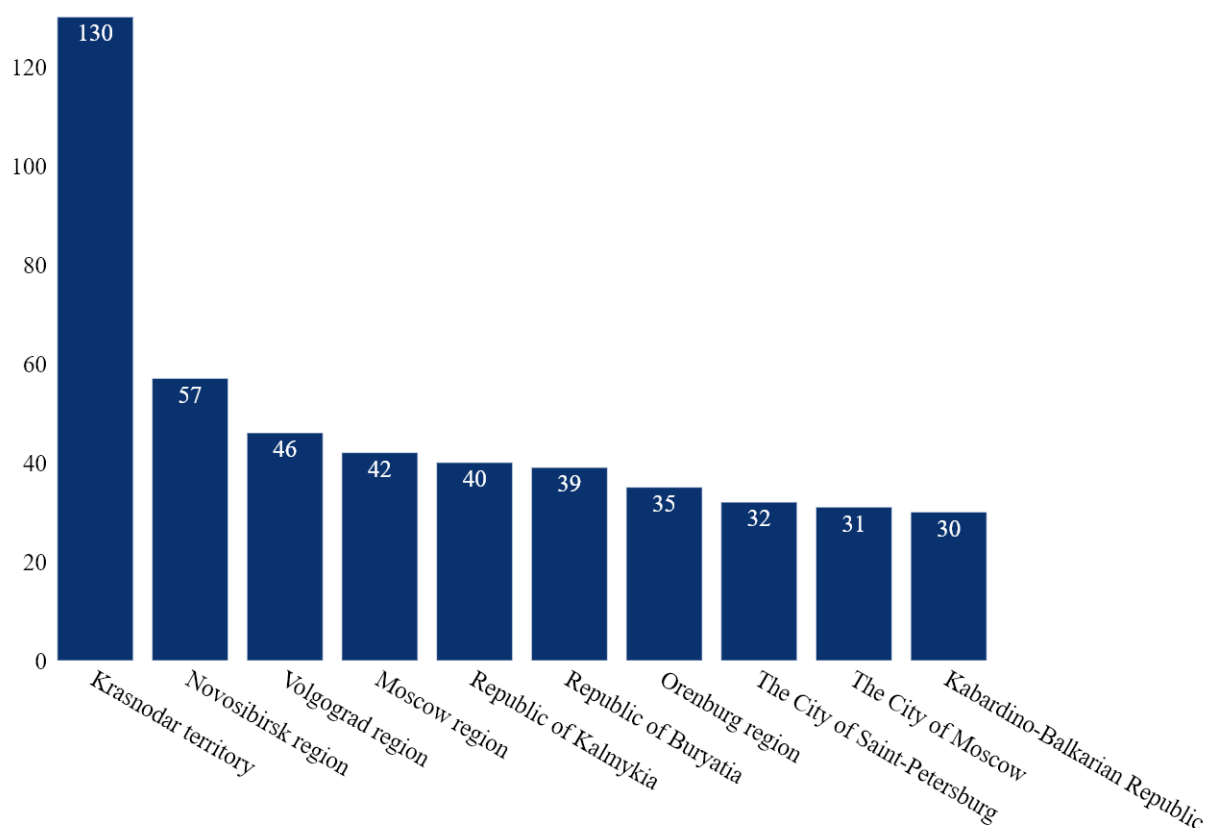
Figure 1. The distribution of vote-buying activities' values.

As it can be seen on the graph the distribution is heavily skewed towards the lower values. The most frequent value seems to be zero. The average value is ~ 3.6 actions per region per year. The median value is 2.0. Despite that, there are observations with much more actions, though they are rare. In general, this serves as an evidence that the distribution of vote-buying activities is an example of negative binomial distribution with a lot of smaller numbers.

After analyzing the distribution, it might seem that there are few vote-buying activities. However, in order to understand the data better it is important to see how many vote-buying activities one region can get. The top ten regions with highest numbers of vote-buying activities

can show intriguing evidence about vote-buying activities distribution, and they are presented below.

Figure 2. Top ten regions with the highest number of vote-buying activities for all years.

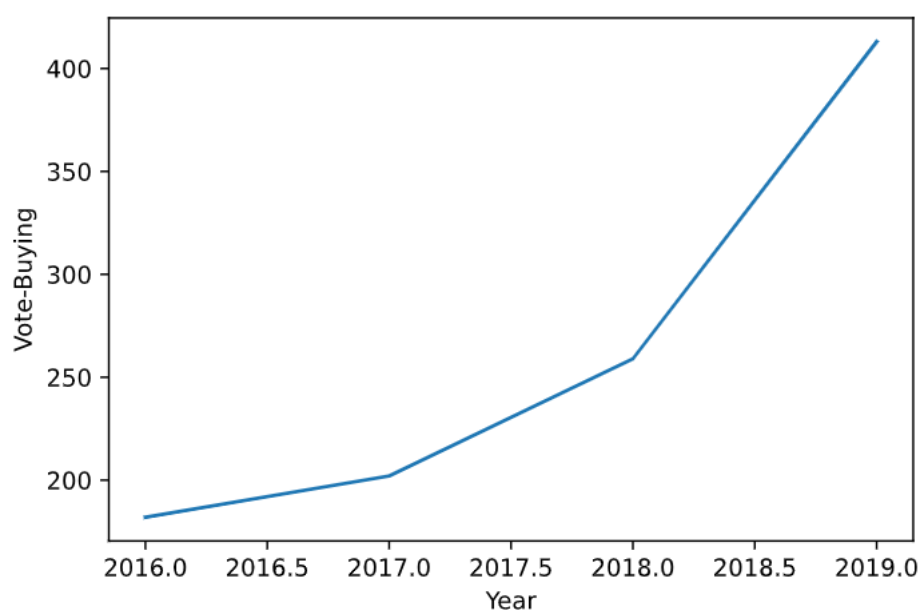


On the graph one can see that over the period of four years many vote-buying activities occurred in specific regions. There is a noticeable gap between the first place (Krasnodar territory) and other regions. In addition, such high numbers in top ten in combination with binomial distribution can indicate that there is extremely large variation in vote-buying activities between the regions. There are also three things to note in top ten regions. Firstly, Krasnodar territory being in the top place can be potentially explained by its being a mostly rural region which also was a part of “red belt” for a long time (Kurilla 2002). Secondly, the presence of Saint-Petersburg and

Moscow in top ten is expected. Capital cities are also the most politically active even if they are supposedly not the most fitting places for “gift” distribution. In order to prevent them from being too significant altering the analysis’ results, the control variable of regional population is going to be used. Thirdly, the surprising fact is that several national republics made it to the top ten. This fact potentially indicates that ethnic republics might be prone to vote-buying. In order to control for this, the control variable of percent of Russian population is going to be used.

It is also intriguing to look at dynamics of social activities over the observed period of time. There might be certain fluctuations which would be important to explain during analysis and which could affect the results. The dynamics are presented below.

Figure 3. Dynamics of vote-buying activities from 2016 to 2019.



The line chart for vote-buying activities throughout the time period shows the steady growth of the number of vote-buying activities. In 2016 there were less than 200 vote-buying activities in the whole country, however, in 2019 the number reached 400 vote-buying activities. This growth can potentially relate to presidential elections of 2018 and electoral campaigns for parliament elections in 2021. In general, the growth is intriguing, since elections are not becoming more competitive. Thus, the fact that “gift” distribution practices are only

intensified through the time period is becoming only more questionable. This highlights the need to study the factors of vote-buying activities in more detail.

The dataset includes information on regional elections results, specifically the Communist Party's support, which is one of the independent variables. The data on regional elections was taken from the official website of Central Electoral Committee of Russia. Regional elections in Russia are not simultaneous, therefore, the data on electoral support in regions changes throughout the time period. The dataset has urbanization rates for every region for every year, which also are an independent variable and were taken from the website of Federal Service of State Statistics of Russia. Finally, the regional higher education rates which are the last independent variable were taken from the same website (Fedstat 2021).

Then, there are the control variables: the gross regional product per capita, unemployment, religiosity and share of natural resources in region's economy. Gross regional product per capita is the control variable which is supposed to indicate the general wealth of people in the region. The unemployment rates are also the indicator of general economic stability in the region. Religiosity is included since Communism and strong religious beliefs can be perceived as contradictory in post-Soviet context. The share of natural resources in the gross regional product is an indicator of how much rent regional government extorts from the regional natural resources. This rent can potentially affect the opposition as well, since regional governments with more resources can suppress opposition more significantly. All of control variables were taken from the website of Federal Service of State Statistics of Russia (Fedstat 2021).

Method

To test the hypothesis about CPRF's social activities a lot of unique data should be collected. While there are datasets on Russian protests there are virtually no data on

distributions of goods and there are no datasets dedicated to the specific party. This situation was changed by the effort of research project group “Parliament’s Parties as Actors of Mobilization in Modern Russia” from Higher School of Economics in Moscow which includes the author of this work. The group was able to collect data on political and non-political protests, social and cultural activities of the Communist party starting from 2016 up until the end of 2019. The dataset presents a unique opportunity to study activities of CPRF since they are all sorted by their respective dates and regions.

The number of social activities is the dependent variable, while urbanization and regional electoral support (vote share from the last regional elections in legislature) are independent variable. Various control variables are also included, such as unemployment rates in the region, regional GDP and others which were all mentioned above. This dataset allows for a quantitative analysis of social activities variable.

In order to find correlation between vote-buying activities, urbanization and regional support, negative binomial regression with interaction term and fixed effects is going to be used. In addition, it is essential to avoid potential biases which can be caused by the specifics of certain regions, such as the gaps in population number between them. Therefore, the model also includes standard errors clustered by regions. Negative binomial regression is chosen since the distribution of social activities is not normal but presents a case of negative binomial distribution. This is because in most of the regions number of vote-buying activities per year is quite moderate and the most common observation is zero.

The expected results are that the hypothesis will be proven. Based on related literature, it seems very plausible, however, it is yet to be known how the interplay between two independent variables will work. Moreover, political science is yet to address the specific case of the phenomenon of Russian parties’ distribution of “gifts”, thus, it is hard to make predictions.

However, this study might bring completely novel evidence to the fields of vote-buying and Russian politics and party politics, especially considering the usage of original data. Independently of how results would turn out for hypotheses, they are bound to bring new discoveries. In the future, other systemic opposition parties also may be introduced to a similar study.

Results

The next step of the study is to fit the model. The choice of regression type was based on the fact that counts for vote-buying activities have negative binomial distribution with large amount of small numbers. For instance, there are 96 observations with zero vote-buying activities, 45 with just one vote-buying activity and 31 with two vote-buying activities out of 288 cases. Despite that there are also many much bigger numbers, the distribution is heavily skewed towards zero. Therefore, negative binomial regression is the adequate choice for testing hypotheses on this data. In addition, to prove that negative binomial regression is suitable for the data and not Poisson regression, I ran likelihood ratio for overdispersion test (odTest), which is used for choosing either negative binomial or Poisson distribution. The results of overdispersion test were as follows:

Critical value of test statistic at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level: 2.7055

Chi-Square Test Statistic = 671.8931 p-value = $< 2.2e-16$

The results clearly show that the distribution of the data is negative binomial. In order for the data to fit Poisson standards, the test statistic cannot exceed the level 2.7055, while in this case test statistic is 671.8931. Thus, this is negative binomial distribution which needs analysis with negative binomial regression.

The model includes all the variables discussed above. The choice of variables was already discussed above. Considering control variables, they are the socio-economic parameters as well as religious ones. It was essential to include variables on religion since the Communist party has a history of oppression against members of various religions. The dependent variable is vote-buying activities (*Vote-Buying*) while independent variables are urbanization (*urbanization*), results of regional elections for CPRF (*reg elect*). There are multiple control variables: unemployment (*unemployment*), percent of Russian population (*percent russians*), results of federal elections for CPRF (*fed elect*), share of natural resources in the regional economy (*nat resources*), regional GDP (*VRP*), total population of the region (*total population*),

share of orthodox Christians in the region (*orthodox religion*), share of Muslims in the region (*islam religion*) and share of people with higher education in the region (*educat*). The model also includes fixed effects for the election years, which means that it controls for the year in which regional elections took place in the region. I also clustered standard errors by region in order to avoid potential problems with clusterization by region.

All the details above present a context for the testing of the model. In the next table the results of the testing are presented.

Table 1. Regression results.

<i>Vote-Buying Activity:</i>

Urbanization	-0.031** (0.015)
Reg elect	0.013 (0.019)
Total population	0.733*** (0.162)
Unemployment	0.077 (0.073)
Percent russians	-0.012* (0.007)
Fed elect	0.001 (0.001)
Nat resources	-0.019 (0.012)
VRP	0.601* (0.333)
Orthodox religion	-0.001 (0.009)
Islam religion	-0.032** (0.013)
Educat	-0.004 (0.004)
year_2016	-0.236 (0.243)
year_2018	-0.342 (0.324)
year_2019	0.847*** (0.326)
Constant	-13.380*** (5.055)

Note: $n = 288$ * $p < 0.1$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$

In order to test the hypotheses a regression was conducted. The negative binomial regression included urbanization, electoral results and natural resources as variables of interest. As it can be seen in the regression results, urbanization is the only independent variable that

showed significance. Based on these results, it can be stated that I found support for the first hypothesis. Higher urbanization has a negative effect on the number of vote-buying activities in regions. The coefficient of -0.031 can be interpreted as follows: the difference in logs of expected counts of vote-buying activities decreases by 0.031. Exponentiated 0.031 is ~1.031, which means that with increase in urbanization by one there is an expected decrease in counts of vote-buying activities by 3 per cent. These empirical results provide evidence that the Communist party prefers to target rural areas with vote-buying activities.

The other independent variable of interest is regional electoral share. Unexpectedly, even though the electoral position of the party in the region proved to be important in previous studies, the case of the Communist party fails to demonstrate the importance of it. The variable lacks any significance, and there is no support for the second hypothesis. At the same time several control variables showed statistically significant effects. For instance, region's population seems to be an important predictor of vote-buying activities with very high regression coefficient. This, however, can be explained by the fact that in some regions there will be more party activities in general, since the population is just bigger. Another interesting result is the importance of religion, specifically Islam. Results show that in the regions with bigger share of Muslims CPRF's vote-buying activities tend to decrease. This can relate to the fact that CPRF is not popular in these regions because of the history of Soviet oppression of Islam. Finally, the fixed effect for the year 2019 is also significant. This result might be explained by the general dynamics of CPRF's vote-buying activities shown in the Picture 3 above. Why this year became the peak of this activities is a question which is out of the scope of this study.

In sum, the results provide partial support for the proposed hypotheses. The first hypothesis is supported, while the second hypothesis is not. Therefore, it must be stated that the Communist party targets rural areas of Russia in order to conduct vote-buying activities, even

though their centers of support are currently in the urban areas (White 2019). At the same time, regional support of the party does not have statistically significant effect on the distribution of vote-buying activities.

Conclusion

This study aimed to close several gaps present in the existing research on vote-buying. Specifically, two of those gaps were addressed: the effect of urbanization and the effect of party supporters. The effect of urbanization was supported to be negative for the number of party's vote-buying activities. This evidence adds up to various studies which argue that rural areas are usually the most preferable locations for vote-buying. At the same time, I do not find support for hypothesis directed at the effect of party supporters. It is intriguing that independent variable of regional electoral share did not show any significant effect at all. Thus, this gap remains unanswered by this study. The implications of results on urbanization, however, add new evidence to the scientific literature. The results show that in the case of Russia the logic of vote-buying is to target rural regions. Despite the disappearance of “red belt”, the rural regions still struggle and are less economically secure. Therefore, targeting the population of these regions with “gifts” is a form of support and political advertising. In the case of Russia, vote-buying is more intense in rural regions like in various other countries. This fact adds to the argument about the negative effect of urbanization on vote-buying.

Another important scientific field that this study tried to touch was the specifics of Russian politics. The subject of vote-buying is understudied when it comes to Eastern Europe and Russia. It is especially true in relation to Russian opposition parties. This study provides novel evidence based on the unique data. Its results allow to see that the biggest opposition party in the country chooses more rural regions for its vote-buying activities. This is supported by various studies of vote-buying in other countries (Bratton 2008; Vicente 2014). It means that the Communist party still looks for support in its “traditional” regions and does not attempt to expend its vote-buying strategies to the urbanized regions. Perhaps, this is because the party does not want to spend resources on “gifts” in big cities and suburbs since such distributions might not be effective in the areas which are economically and socially more complex than rural ones.

The results of the study do not allow to draw conclusions about the second gap. However, it would be just to say that for the Communist party its regional support does not play any significant role when it comes to using vote-buying. Nevertheless, it must be said that rural regions were traditional electoral strongholds of CPRF for a long time (Golosov 2014), and, perhaps, they are still the main aim of the party because of that. However, this study cannot provide any resolution to the contradictory effect of party supporters in the region.

In conclusion, it also must be stated that the results of this study might improve and should be improved. The data covers only a fraction of CPRF's history and does not include the earlier years as well as the most recent years (2020 – 2021) which were much more politically active in the country. Moreover, the data on supporters might be improved significantly. Instead of looking for electoral share of party in the region, it may be more efficient to collect the data on the number of party members or the data on the attendance at party's events. The Russian election system is fraudulent and election results may not show the adequate representation of party support in the region. Finally, without qualitative work in the field it is impossible to fully comprehend the party's strategy on vote-buying. Interviews with party officials on "gifts" distribution would have been an important evidence on how the party chooses targets. Thus, this paper can be the beginning of much bigger research dedicated to vote-buying in Russia while the future research must improve the limitations shown above. It must include qualitative methods and have a bigger data coverage. But perhaps, the best development which can be done by future research is to focus on the most challenging gap of vote-buying theory: the effect of vote-buying on the party's electoral position.

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