

Renovation, Metro, Highways: How Does Authoritarian Modernization Affect Electoral Outcomes? (Evidence from 2019 Moscow Elections)

Large infrastructural projects propelled by incumbents in a wide range of political contexts have been considered as aiming at gaining electoral support and rewarding loyalists through redistribution of positive inducements and provision of public goods of higher quality to specific areas or groups of population (Cox & McCubbins, 1986; Nichter, 2008; De la Calle & Orriols, 2010). This phenomenon evidently persists in nondemocratic settings (Frye et al., 2014), as many of them employ elections as a crucial mechanism for elite rotation, strength signalling, power-sharing, and maintaining public legitimacy (Schedler, 2006; Magaloni, 2006; Simpser, 2013). Do these, very often costly, programs always succeed in bringing about what they were originally intended to deliver when it comes to electoral politics? The case of Moscow, where several government-funded projects having been administered by Moscow city authorities for the last nine years, might seem to provide a negative answer, as the opposition managed to retain large increases in support in 2019 Moscow City Duma elections.

Hence, in this paper, we attempt to identify the effects of such projects on the electoral outcomes of 2019 elections. We focus primarily on the large infrastructural projects that cover substantial portions of Moscow's land area and/or population and can be thought of intended to gain popularity among voters: (1) enlargement of Moscow metro system, (2) construction of so-called 'chords' - urban highways that are to connect peripheral neighborhoods of the city, and (3) enforcement of Moscow renovation program - a plan to demolish outdated mass housing, provide its tenants with accommodation of higher quality, and redevelop adjacent territories.

We argue that these programs are based on different structure of benefits promoted to the populace and have diverging temporal and spatial patterns of responding from the population. This, in turn, implies that exposure to these projects exercises varying effects on the vote share cast in favor of the incumbent and overall turnout. The possible mechanisms accounting for differential outcomes of these projects might, in our theory, include retrospective voting (e.g. rewarding enhancements in transport availability and punishing noise and air pollution for those having started to live side-by-side to highways), 'greed' (e.g. punishing the incumbent for

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selective provision of public goods to the exact neighbors), and strategic caution (e.g. as the last houses subject to Renovation will not be demolished until after ten years from now, the citizens are right to fear their turn will be postponed or, even worse, will never come - this could incentivize populations exposed to redevelopment to mobilize and show at the polling stations to secure the program's operation through re-appointing the incumbents).

To infer the proposed effects, we match a large set of geocoded data about houses included into renovation program with over 3,000 precincts where the votes were cast during, and use different specifications of regression analyses as well as difference-in-difference techniques.

Results suggest that (1) as long as transport programs generally appear to be more efficient in terms of gaining popularity of citizenry, the reaction to them relies heavily on the extent of geographical proximity to the newly constructed objects (Metro stations favored more, or highways, detested by the neighboring communities and generally favored by those living in moderate proximity), and (2) the Renovation, as a project with holdout payoffs, did not provide instant increases in electoral support but resulted in relative turnout gains, as well as identifiable shifts towards opposition within the areas with mass housing similarly outdated yet unaffected by the program ('greed' mechanism).

Literature

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