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**STATE CAPACITY AND ECONOMIC VOTING IN RUSSIA**

This report discusses how the level of subnational administrative state capacity, expressed through the success of the implementation of certain categories of the “May Decrees” of the President of the Russian Federation in 2012 in the regions, affects the electoral support of the regime. The study focuses on indicators reflecting the income of “public sector employees” - that is, categories of citizens working in organizations directly or indirectly financed by the state budget.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly asked the question of how state capacity can affect the stability of authoritarian regimes. The theoretical scientific consensus states that a high level of state capacity has a beneficial effect on maintaining regime stability [Soifer, vom Hau 2008; Anderson 2014]. However, the number of empirical studies proving the connection between a high level of administrative state capacity (providing performance-based legitimacy) and maintaining the stability of an authoritarian regime is still not numerous. D.Andersen et al. concluded that administrative state capacity is more conducive to the stability of democratic regimes, and in authoritarian regimes the main factor is the level of coercive state capacity [Andersen et al. 2014]. At the same time, M.Seeberg revealed the importance of incumbent control over the economy, which can be used, among other things, to distribute material wealth in order to maintain regime stability [Seeberg 2018], and M.Mietzner noted that authoritarian regimes can combine and use different strategies (and different measure of state capacity) with varying degrees of intensity: using the Suharto regime in Indonesia as an example, he shows that over the years the regime has moved from using predominantly coercive capacity to using predominantly administrative capacity to maintain stability [Mietzner 2018]. However, in general, while the theoretical consensus is that a high level of administrative state capacity has a positive effect on the stability of authoritarian regimes, the amount of empirical evidence for this is limited, and my work seeks to contribute to the study of this problem field.

Examining how the strategy of legitimation through positive economic dynamics and distribution of wealth can influence the support of authoritarian regimes leads us to turn to numerous studies of economic voting. It should be noted that studies studying the impact of socio-economic indicators on the voting of citizens still have conflicting results. Turning to Russian studies, we can distinguish three stages in the study of economic voting - the 1990s, characterized by a shaky economic situation and relative decentralization of the regions, the 2000s, characterized by the strengthening of the vertical of power, the stabilization of the economic situation and the abolition of popular elections of governors, and the modern period with 2012, characterized by attempts by the authorities to strengthen regional governance within the framework of new institutions for electing governors, as well as an unstable economic situation. In the modern period, interest in the problem has increased again (after its decline in the 2000s), however, existing studies [Turovsky, Gaivoronsky 2017; Shcherbak 2017] show conflicting results and require a broader study of this issue. Thus, my research also aims to contribute to the study of economic voting in Russia.

In this study, I measure the level of state capacity through the success of the execution of the “May Decrees” (this approach has already been applied in an earlier study [Ross, Turovsky, Sukhova 2022]). As part of the work, I analyze 8 socio-economic guidelines included in the “May Decrees” and aimed at increasing the salaries of “public sector employees”. Given the significant differences in these socio-economic indicators between regions, as well as in the level of administrative state capacity that they reflect, I suggest that these indicators may have an impact on electoral support for the regime. To test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was performed (using linear least squares models). The dependent variable reflecting the loyalty of the electorate is the percentage of votes in the region for “United Russia” in the elections to the State Duma in 2016 and 2021 and for V. Putin in the presidential elections in 2018. The independent variables include individual “May Decrees” indicators in the region at the time of 2016, 2017 and 2020 (according to the election campaign). Control variables include the logarithm of GRP per capita in the region for 2016, 2017 and 2020; share of the Russian population according to the All-Russian census of 2010; the level of urbanization and the population of the region as of January 1, 2021.

The results of the regression analysis show that in regions with a higher ratio of salaries of “public sector employees” to the average monthly income, the electoral support for the regime is higher. Thus, a high level of subnational administrative state capacity has a positive effect on the loyalty of citizens and, as a result, on the electoral support of the regime. These findings contribute to the current scholarly debate about how authoritarian regimes can use state capacity to maintain regime stability. In particular, the results confirm the effectiveness of using a performance-based legitimacy strategy based on the distribution of material wealth among the electorate to increase electoral support and, therefore, maintain the stability of an authoritarian regime. In addition, the results allow us to conclude that certain socio-economic indicators - in particular, those related to the income of the categories of the population employed in the public sphere - have a positive effect on the level of electoral support for the incumbent, which is consistent with the traditional theory of economic voting, however, is not a scientific consensus in modern Russian political science. Finally, the paper confirms the importance of the social group of “public sector employees” as one of the support groups of the electorate for the ruling regime.