

Hutcheson, Derek S. Parliamentary Elections in Russia: A quarter-century of multiparty politics. British Academy Monograph Series. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018. xx + 326 pp. Preface and acknowledgements. Acknowledgement of funding. Abbreviations. Appendix: Details of focus groups and surveys. References. Table of laws and decrees. Index. £65.00.

HOW have Russian State Duma elections varied between 1993 and 2016? In this book, Derek S. Hutcheson – a leading scholar on Russian elections – provides a meticulous analysis of the shifting electoral landscape in post-Soviet Russia.

The book contains nine chapters. Following an introductory chapter and an overview chapter (that surveys the broad changes in electoral politics from the late Soviet period to the seventh State Duma election, including discussions of key actors in the party system and the shifting role of the State Duma), the third chapter discusses the Russian electoral system, including the frequent reforms to it. The fourth chapter then looks at the party system, charting the transition from the 'floating' party system of the 1990s to the 'cartel' party system emergent from the early- to mid-2000s. Chapter Five examines how political marketing has evolved, as well as how media coverage of party campaigns has varied both by party and over time. The sixth chapter turns to voter mobilisation, including discussions of the use of 'administrative resources', turnout patterns, and motivations for (non-)voting. The seventh chapter looks in more detail at voting behaviour, including analysing voting variation across Russian regions and discussing party identification, as well as the reasons for electoral discontent. The final substantive chapter discusses the question of electoral legitimacy, evaluating both evidence of electoral subversion and perceptions of legitimacy in the eyes of both Russian voters and international observers.

The key attractions of the book are its sustained diachronic analysis of the full set of State Duma elections; its discussion of discrete stages of elections, from electoral laws to behaviour at the ballot box; and the impressive level of detail provided. By giving a long-term view of federal-level legislative elections, Hutcheson underscores the point that the State Duma's current status as 'a compliant part of the political 'machine'' (p. 5) is 'not by chance' (p. 3) – rather, a 'considerable degree of institutional engineering [...] has gone into creating' this state of affairs (p. 5). In other words, 'the constitutional structure of Russia does not necessarily lead to domination of the legislature by the president' (p. 75).

The text is peppered with fascinating details, including the reason why United Russia's symbol is a bear (p. 30) and an account of farcically frequent party switching by one State Duma deputy (pp. 94-96). There are even some surprising moments of humour, such as the description of the time when former Central Electoral Commission chairman Vladimir Churov landed in a pond in 2012 (p. 68), and the footnote on Ivan Rybkin's mysterious disappearance during the 2004 presidential election campaign (p. 29).

The use of the word 'election' in modern-day Russia is often modified by adjectives such as 'fake', 'rigged', 'manipulated', and 'falsified'. One distinctive feature of Hutcheson's analysis is that 'it does not take as its starting point the automatic assumption that the Russian Federation is an unequivocally 'electoral authoritarian' regime' (p. 3). One advantage of taking this approach is that Hutcheson can do justice to the variation in the level of Kremlin control over elections in the post-Soviet period; there is not one simple characterisation that can capture the federal executive's stance towards, and fortunes in, State Duma elections. Another advantage is that, by adopting this starting point – that 'real

elections take place within the rules of the game' (p. 56) – Hutcheson remains sensitive to the ways (beyond unfair manipulation of electoral procedures and illegal falsification) by which the authorities have been able to secure victories since 2003, such as through adopting modern political marketing techniques to appeal to as many voters as possible. The recipe for success in electoral authoritarian regimes can include elements used in liberal democracies.

On the question of electoral manipulation and falsification, Hutcheson is clearly concerned to give a balanced assessment – and not to hold Russia 'to a higher standard than is expected elsewhere' (p. 219). Overall, the author accepts 'the fact that much of the fight of Russian politics is determined in advance by the rules of the game' (p. 264), which have been subject to frequent reform by the authorities with a view to consolidating 'a pro-Kremlin majority' (p. 86) – but that, on balance, electoral 'malfeasance' might be 'actually rather rare', and that, if it has occurred, it is more likely that such violations have been 'coordinated at a mid-level rather than from the top down' (p. 240).

Some readers might think Hutcheson is too willing to entertain scenarios that paint the authorities' activities in a more innocent light – or that he does not mention more sinister factors that helped produce victories for the Kremlin, such as the 'loans for shares' scheme when discussing Yeltsin's re-election (p. 124), the holding of early elections during the summer holidays to reduce turnout in 2016 (p. 129), and the crackdown, and de-liberalisation programme, launched by the Kremlin following the 2011-12 protests when discussing the 2016 election (p. 250). Readers' reactions will likely be conditioned by whether they are more sympathetic to the 'electoral authoritarian' approach or the 'comparative political science approach' to the study of elections noted by Hutcheson in the final paragraph of the book. At points, Hutcheson's attempt to blend these two approaches is tricky. For example, he writes that 'it can be contended that the primary reason that Putin and the presidential administration spent significant energy upon obtaining a pro-presidential majority in the State Duma, and modifying the selection processes for the Federation Council, has not been that of constructing an authoritarian regime, but rather to bring stability to the process of legislation and to their security of power' (p. 46). But many will consider efforts to 'bring stability' to the incumbents' 'security of power' to be precisely a key feature of an authoritarian regime.

This book will be of interest to scholars of Russian politics, electoral politics, legislative politics, and authoritarianism. By virtue of its breadth and depth, it will be a key resource in understanding an important dimension of the construction of the modern-day Russian political system by a scholar with unmatched knowledge of the intricacies of the Russian electoral system.