

ANNOUNCEMENT

Elizabeth Meehan ‘Best Article’ Prize

On behalf of the editorial board, the editors of *Government and Opposition* are pleased to announce the winner of the annual ‘best article’ prize, named in honour of long-time editorial board member Elizabeth Meehan (1947–2018). The prize is offered to the non-commissioned, peer-reviewed, original research article published during the previous calendar year that the editorial board members believe best represents the scholarly excellence of the journal and the tradition of commitment to public discourse on important topics in comparative politics that *Government and Opposition* has maintained for more than 60 years.

The 2024 prize-winning article is by Hannah S. Chapman (University of Oklahoma), ‘Shocks to the System: Electoral Manipulation, Protests and the Evolution of Political Trust in Russia.’ *Government and Opposition: An International Journal of Comparative Politics* 60(2), 496–516. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2024.18>.

Chapman’s article presents a chilling picture of the normalization of electoral manipulation in authoritarian regimes. Using polling data collected around the controversial elections to the Russian Duma that took place in 2011 soon after Russian President Dimitri Medvedev stepped aside to allow Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to run for president, Chapman shows how the scandal surrounding the manipulation of the vote for the Duma diminished trust in Putin, who was widely regarded as having gone beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ manipulation of the democratic process. Nevertheless, Putin’s restrained reaction to popular protests around the Duma results managed to restore public confidence. In both cases – the loss of trust, and its restoration – the polling respondents most affected by events were also those less engaged in electoral politics and less attached to the main political parties.

Chapman’s work sheds important light on the connection between ‘trust’ and ‘expectations’ in an authoritarian context. While popular attitudes towards Putin evolved over the course of events, attitudes towards Russian institutions remained unchanged. Her work also sets an important research agenda for scholars working on democratic backsliding and disaffection with democracy. As voters disconnect from politics, Chapman’s work suggests they continue to respond to any dramatic worsening of the political situation, but they also tend to appreciate behaviour that does not fall below their already low expectations. Whether that finding within an autocratic regime would also apply to a regime that is ‘autocratizing’ is an open question, very much worth exploring.

Chapman's article is a strong example of how research on a single country using existing polling data can generate important insights on developments that are unfolding in government and opposition almost everywhere.