The role of public transport in the legitimation of power: regional aspect

Aleksandr Skiperskikh

Bunin Yelets State University, 399770, Yelets, Russian Federation

Abstract. The article shows how the transport problems of modern Russian regions can have a direct impact on the legitimacy of the government. Using the structuralist and neoinstitutional method, the author identifies the factors of legitimation/delegitimation of municipal and regional authorities. All the highlighted factors are relevant to the discourse of public transport and are given in special tables. The author focuses on specific examples of the connection of public transport problems with the policy of regional authorities. The dynamics of public trust in the government directly depends on the timeliness of solving these problems. Russian cities are in unequal economic conditions. In this sense, the dependence of the specifics of a single Russian city on the prospects for articulating the protest transport agenda is given. The author believes that such a political situation will continue to be relevant both for the authorities and for society.

1 Introduction

The legitimacy of the government depends on a number of factors. The government understands how popular it is and how it is consistent with the reforms it is carrying out. In democratic regimes, political elites often replace each other. The political cycle of power does not seem to be long. It is limited by criticism of competitors and risks of unpopular decisions of its own policy. In modern Russia today there is a situation when the power structure headed by the President of the Russian Federation seems to be quite stable and irremovable. The issue of changing priorities in politics is practically not discussed. As some researchers note, "even the degradation of power should not devalue the state itself" [1].

The lower levels of the political structure are more often subject to change. We can see serial resignations of governors and regional officials. Even more often, power can circulate at the municipal level. Frequent resignations, compared with the upper level of government, can be explained by the responsibility of the authorities for the problems of specific territories. Disruptions of construction work deadlines, problems with landscaping and providing the territory with the necessary benefits, infrastructure problems, corruption scandals - all this has a risky potential.

Studies showed that transport problems are also an important factor in delegitimation of local authorities. Transport acts as a connecting form of real communication on the ground, ensuring the vital activity of municipalities and subjects of the Russian Federation.
growth of mobility in society, the increasing speed of social life determine almost the key role of transport in the functioning of the urban organism. Transport logistics is politicized, becoming part of the political system. This element gives an idea of what the system itself represents [2].

2 Materials and methods

In our research, we will use the structural method by Roland Barthes. It is impossible to separate public transport from the political sphere. R. Barthes spoke of power "nesting in any discourse," even in one that seems to be connected with the sphere of anarchy [3].

The involvement of the authorities in the functioning of public transport is also illustrated by the limitations of COVID-19. This method works at the moment when passengers are met by a masked driver. Protocols on an administrative offense - "sanitary" cases are drawn up for passengers. It is also possible to create around public transport and the image of a place where epidemiological norms are not observed. This may cause it to be boycotted by the population, which will be fraught with the loss of "the ability of public transport systems to perform their social function" [4].

The neoinstitutional method makes it possible to determine the quality of political and social processes in a particular municipality or subject of the Russian Federation. He explains the formed "rules of the game". Following Douglass North, "institutions are the framework within which people interact with each other" [5].

The operation of public transport depends on the government regulating its functioning, controlling it and licensing it. In addition, transport lobbyists and influential carriers are present in many regional and municipal legislatures today, exerting strong pressure on decision-making by the authorities related to transport infrastructure.

Neoinstitutional optics can be quite productive. Attention is focused on "everyday practices and social conflicts through which socio-spatial inequalities are formed and intensified" [6].

3 Results

Public transport is actively present on the political agenda both directly and indirectly. Since the first campaigns in the State Duma of the Russian Federation, the LDPR campaign train has become famous. The authorities remind of their presence when political agitation "moves" along with passengers. Urban transport parks are municipal enterprises, so the candidates from the government look almost without alternative.

The elite top and the people's bottom are very different from each other. There are equally strong gaps in the discourse of public transport. In Russia, there may be a stereotype about taxis as transport for the rich. Public transport serves as a metaphor for the production of social and political differences.

Texts of Russian culture often confirm these divisions. In the "Railway" by A. Blok, the color of the train cars speaks about the classiness of the cars themselves, emphasizing the images of their passengers. The story of the Nobel laureate I. Bunin "First Class" shows the discomfort of a railway worker who accidentally got into a first class carriage. In "The Gentleman from San Francisco" I. Bunin shows a deck steamer. In the context of the steamer resembles a society where the lower classes are subordinated to the upper. D. Likhachev, recalling his childhood trips along the Volga, noted strong differences between passengers of different classes who occupied different decks of the steamer. Then his mother "couldn't stand it when a pregnant woman danced" [7].
Little has changed in Russia over time. With the growth of the public masses, the expansion of urban development, the construction of new neighborhoods in the USSR, the problems of transport infrastructure required an immediate response from the authorities. The processes of democratization have actualized a completely new image of a public politician – a demagogue.

Boris Yeltsin's popularity in the early years was largely connected with the topic of public transport and the launch of trolleybus lines in Moscow. It is no coincidence that in the Yeltsin Center in Yekaterinburg you can see a real blue trolleybus, referring visitors to the USSR of the late 1980s. Boris Yeltsin is also credited with his active participation in the construction of the metro in Yekaterinburg. In some subway cars, you can see joint photos of the former President of the Russian Federation and the Governor of the Sverdlovsk region, E. Rossel.

The topic of public transport and its ability to accelerate communication within society is the most important factor in the legitimation of political power. It is no coincidence that Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin is so often associated with the launch of new stations and the appearance of new interchanges. Of course, the media demonstrate such events to the audience as "unique - unprecedented and inimitable" [8].

In the Russian regions, you can find examples when protests related to public transport reduced the legitimacy of the government. These are protest actions in Perm (2018-2019), Samara in 2019. The cancellation of the city train in Perm could indirectly affect the resignation of the governor M. Reshetnikov. Some protests may not be related to local problems of the transport network, but they accumulate questions to the city authorities (Sochi in January 2018). In the resolution to the Sochi rally, there was dissatisfaction with the reduction in the number of buses by 25%, the increase in the interval of movement, the cancellation of a number of routes, the replacement of the buses themselves with less spacious ones, the lack of a cashless fare system, etc. [9]. In some cases, the protest is initiated by representatives of the systemic opposition (KPRF). In some places, the agenda is picked up by the non-systemic opposition and city activists.

Some authors talk about politics in single-industry towns. The city-forming enterprise becomes the manager of the life of citizens, including public transport. T. Vitkovskaya and O. Ryabova speak about this, relying on the cases of single-industry towns in the Middle Urals [10]. Here articulate discontent seems unlikely. The boundaries of municipal authority coincide with the boundaries of the employer's authority.

On the contrary, the larger the city, the wider the circle of civil actors independent of the authorities. Protests may be more likely, which is confirmed by some authors [11]. As E. Limonov rightly noted, "specific domestic disasters turned submissive citizens into violent activists" [12].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legitimation factors</th>
<th>Municipal government and the head of the city</th>
<th>Regional government and Governor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed payment for trips is maintained for as long as possible</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An understanding has been reached in relations with carriers</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum preservation of regional lines (buses, commuter trains)</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The factors of delegitimation of municipal and regional authorities.
Maximum preservation of municipal lines (buses, trolleybuses, trams, commuter trains, ferries) is high.

Preservation of suburban municipal lines is medium.

No shortage of personnel and high "turnover" from the organizations of carriers is medium.

Proper condition of transport and constant updating of the fleet is medium.

Attention to the sanitary condition of the transport fleet (clean transport, glass, cleanliness in the cabin, air conditioning, etc.) is medium.

Proper maintenance of bus stations and adjacent infrastructure is low.

Neat condition of public transport stops, cleanliness, friendly design, harmonious with the surrounding space is medium.

Convenience of logistics, convenient transfers is medium.

Punctuality of the schedule, short waiting time for transport is medium.

Free payment by bank cards, easy access to terminals is low.

The negative effects of public transport policy affect the decline in confidence in the authorities, as shown in the table below (table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delegitimation factors</th>
<th>Municipal government and the head of the city</th>
<th>Regional government and Governor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase in payment for trips</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems of relations with carriers</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancellation of regional lines (buses, commuter trains)</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancellation of municipal lines (buses, trolleybuses, trams, commuter trains, ferries)</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect personnel (drivers, conductors)</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The condition of the transport fleet and its technical characteristics</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitary condition of the transport fleet (cleanliness in the cabin, availability of air conditioning, etc.)</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of bus stations and adjacent infrastructure</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of public transport stops</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient logistics, lack of convenient transfer hubs</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality of the schedule, waiting time for transport</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with transport cards (blocking, lack of terminals, etc.)</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public transport demonstrates religious and ethnic divisions is high.
4 Discussion

As we can see from the tables, the dependence of the state of the transport infrastructure has a direct impact on the legitimization/delegitimization of political power.

The situation with public transport is an indicator of the political culture that dominates within a particular locality. In turn, political culture depends on the "demand" for the quality of economic practice in society" [13, 311].

Clean transport, punctuality, well-groomed bus shelters largely create the image of the city government, proving its efficiency. Society is getting used to the normal functioning of the urban transport network. Russian society is quite conservative. Any failure in the usual navigation is accompanied by significant disturbances and risks to the perception of the government itself. An even worse scenario for the authorities is protest actions, which are always undesirable for any administration. Any protest action is evidence of discontent and indignation with something. In addition, any excitement is immediately taken into account in the Kremlin, in the current Russian reality, in fact, by the acting employer of any Russian governor. The absence of reasons for public unrest in the region is perceived as a clear plus of the governor's activities.

We will give just a few examples of how individual factors can influence urban policy. In Perm, the presence of an influential lobby of carriers in the city Duma could influence the resignation of Mayor Yu. Utkin. The resignation occurred on the eve of the elections to the city Duma in September 2021. In the Lipetsk region, the blocking of transport cards in the fall of 2021 could not but affect the rating of Governor Igor Artamonov. The regional government was in the focus of strong criticism from the public, because among the victims were just broad social strata with low income. As for the sanitary condition of the transport fleet, the results of the ONF survey together with the All-Russian Association of Passengers in Voronezh (N = 1728) may look indicative. The survey showed that 73.7% of respondents are not satisfied with the work of transport in Voronezh. At the same time, "47.5% complained that it was virtually impossible to enter the salon at certain hours. And besides, it's very stuffy inside during the warm season" [14].

An important point is the shortage of personnel. The level of wages does not keep pace with inflation and there is a constant decline in the quality of life. From here, you can observe a high turnover rate, increasing with each new increase in requirements for drivers (COVID-19 sanitary restrictions, fines, etc.). As a result, some carriers are forced to keep employees as much as possible. In particular, as a result of a sociological study conducted in Voronezh, it was noted that "the carrier cannot dismiss even drivers who violate traffic regulations - otherwise who will get on the line?" [14].

Interreligious and ethnic divisions also cannot but be projected on the state of affairs in public transport. In some Russian cities, you can see how religious rituals can be performed directly by drivers, which causes bewilderment of passengers who redirect their dissatisfaction with the city and regional authorities. This fact was noted in Voronezh at the end of January 2022 [15]. In Khabarovsk, bus drivers even had to drop off passengers for a while for this [16].

Let's take as an example such a factor as the state of public transport stops. In Russia today, the quality of snow removal in cities is causing more and more complaints. The state of the stops, which allows public transport to move easily through the city, generally affects the perception of the transport infrastructure itself. But the capabilities of even large cities can vary greatly. In particular, as N. Zubarevich notes, "the budget of St. Petersburg spends 15 times less on landscaping than the budget of Moscow. This is also connected with the dissatisfaction of residents of the northern capital with the quality of street cleaning from snow and other problems [17].
Of course, territorial specifics are also of great importance. The capabilities of Russian cities vary significantly. If in one case you can see the brilliant scenery against which the political process is being carried out, then, in another case, everything looks sad. The author has already tried to talk about this dependence in one of his scientific texts [18].

5 Conclusions

The role of public transport is noticeably increasing along with the increase in passenger traffic. This is relevant for megapolis, where there is an increase in attention to the environment, and where the use of a personal car is becoming an increasing problem. The growth of passenger traffic cannot occur outside the control of the government, which is constantly involved in the struggle for its voters, and is well aware of the possibilities of such a colossal resource. The bigger the city, the more power it has. Returning to the situation with COVID-19, we note that if things could be quite spontaneous in provincial transport, then in large cities it is completely different. Residents of Moscow should have worn a protective mask and gloves. Without such sanitary rituals, it was impossible to use the subway and other public transport.

But Russia does not consist exclusively of large cities - centers of comfort that attract the social resources of the rest of Russia. This may be fully relevant for the province, where all the processes mentioned above occur (only in the direction of regression).

As we can see, the problem of public transport can cost the authorities dearly. Periodically, you can see how the transport agenda is the basis of social protests. That is why the authorities keep transport under close control. The dependence of the smooth operation of public transport on the legitimacy of the government looks obvious.

References


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