

## Risk Management Model in Public Governance in Russia: Regional Aspects

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This article is devoted to the problem of risk in the activities of political parties. The importance of risk management is growing in conditions of social tension, which are a characteristic of Russia. The study identified the main risk factors for the ruling United Russia party in the Transbaikal Territory. These include: 1) social tension and poor quality of life; 2) internal migration and urbanization; 3) natural disasters; 4) political instability; 5) protest activity of the population; 6) competition from other political parties. The author's model is proposed as a conceptual basis for managing political risks in the activities of political parties. The main components of the presented model are: subjects and objects, goals, objectives and principles, resources, functions and mechanisms, specific technologies and management tools. Each of the components of the model is concretized in the context of managing political risks in the activities of the regional branch of the United Russia party, taking into account the specifics of the Transbaikal Territory. At the end of the article, it is concluded that this model can be considered as universal (for other regions and parties).

**Keywords:** political party; risk; risks in public administration; social tension; protest activity; electoral behavior; political risk management; management model.

Today, issues of managing political risk in the activities of political parties are becoming increasingly relevant. This is due to the fact that in modern conditions, a wide range of constantly increasing risks affect political parties, which are the main subject of mediation between citizens and the state.

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Political parties must protect the interests of individual social groups. It is obvious that the values of different social groups may not coincide. Violation of the values of one social group may fully correspond to the values of another social group. This situation creates significant difficulties in implementing risk management policies (Renn, 1998). The only viable solution to these conflicts in democratic societies is to initiate a discussion between the main parties involved in the decision-making process or those affected by the outcome of the decisions (Renn, Webler, Rakel, Dienel, & Johnson, 1993).

The basis for the functioning of political parties is the struggle for power and its retention in order to stabilize the sociopolitical situation in society. And this, in turn, involves a continuous process of studying current problems, identifying their causes, predicting further development options, searching for system solutions, resources for their implementation, assessing risk factors and determining ways to minimize negative consequences. It is necessary to take into account that mistakes made as a result of a superficial analysis of probable political risks will not only negatively affect the ruling party itself, but can also lead to the formation and intensification of social tension, up to mass protests and riots. In modern society, risk assessment and the corresponding decisions of elites are increasingly disputed by a dissatisfied majority of the population, which may well lead to a crisis of legitimacy of the ruling party (Walsh, 1987). It is public trust that is now becoming the most important criterion for political stability in democratic countries (Short, 1984).

At the same time, it is important to understand that any risks in the activities of political parties in essence do not always represent an unfavorable outcome but also, with a competent, carefully thought-out approach, create the potential for positive results and further development. Therefore, in the context under consideration, we should speak specifically about managing political risks, and not about constant rejection and avoidance of them.

The problem of managing political risk in conditions of already formed social tension, when political parties have to function under the influence of many factors that impede the effective fulfillment of their immediate duties – protecting the interests of citizens – becomes especially complex and acute. Among these factors, first of all, it should be noted the aggravated sociopolitical situation is characterized by: a wide range of equally relevant problems; insufficient resources necessary to

resolve them; and a deliberately negative attitude of the population to all representatives of power.

Thus, the greatest concern of Russians is caused by problems related to welfare and income: price increases; poverty and impoverishment of the population; rising unemployment; sharp stratification of rich and poor; and unfair distribution of income. Other problems also cause dissatisfaction with the inhabitants of the country, including: corruption and bribery; the inaccessibility of many types of medical care; crisis in the economy; decline in production in industry and agriculture; environmental degradation; crisis of morality and culture; increased pay; and inaccessibility of education. Against the background of all the identified problems, the citizens of the country are particularly keen on reforming the pension and tax systems (raising the retirement age, raising the VAT rate), and also creating an atmosphere of distrust by the majority of steps taken by representatives of the legislative and executive authorities, at both the federal and regional and local levels.

### **Current Status of Risk Research (For Political Parties)**

Risk has always been a part of human existence, and risk studies have their origins dating back to the moment when people realized that they could avoid dangerous situations by taking deliberate actions. However, a systematic scientific understanding of risk only has occurred more recently. Some researchers claim that the study of risk began with a fundamental article by Chauncey Starr (Starr, 1969; Covello & Mum-power, 1985), while others date the beginning of research a decade earlier, when the development of probabilistic space exploration programs began (Kolluru, 1995). Thus, risk research is about 70 years old and attention to such developments is only growing, which shows an increasing flow of publications, as well as the creation of specialized scientific publications such as *Risk Analysis* and *Journal of Risk Research*. In this section, we will give a presentation of the main theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of risk and show how our research compares/integrates into modern developments.

An authoritative researcher, former president of the European Society for Risk Analysis O. Renn, in his works systematically analyzes existing concepts of risk. The author identifies the following basic concepts (Renn, 1998):

1. Technical concept/technical assessment of risks (technical concept, technical assessment);

2. Economic concept;
3. Psychological approach (risk perception);
4. Sociological and cultural concepts.

Technical analysis focuses on real health effects or environmental damage. The main difference between the economic concept is that here the concept of physical harm is replaced by economic utility (utilities) (Adler & Posner, 1999). It is in the context of the economic approach that the term political risks is most often used, which corresponds to the risk of non-return on investments due to political instability in the country (Kobrin, 1979; Busse & Heeler, 2007; Jensen, 2008).

The psychological approach broadens the scope of subjective perceptions of risk. Firstly, people are not prepared for risk if the potential losses are high and predisposed to risk, or if the potential benefits are great (Hahnemann & Testy, 1979), and, secondly, risk perception has different semantic meanings (Renn, 1990).

Sociological risk analysis is based on the study of individual and social interests and values, while cultural models structure the thinking of individuals in such a way as to accept some values and reject others (Renn, 1998).

In our work, we analyze risk factors for the ruling United Russia party, and also present our own model for risk management.

Party members have recently become a popular research subject in many European countries (see, for example, Header & Pedersen, 2006; Kölln & Polk, 2017; van Haute & Gauja, 2015). However, it should be noted that systematic studies that analyze the risk assessment for parties remain rather scarce (the exception is the thorough work of Finnish colleagues – Koivula, Keipi, Saarinen, & Räsänen, 2018).

The study and construction of risk management models has long been the focus of attention of many researchers and there are many developments in this area. Our risk management methodology is based on the concept of rational action based on the search for “expected benefits” (Etzioni, 1967; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). According to the logic of this direction, the current subject makes the choice of alternatives based on the determination of the probabilities and scope of consequences. In our case, the key subjects are members of the United Russia party.

The core of the “expected benefit model” is the provision that the risk has its quantitative and quantifiable nature (Etzioni, 1967; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), and, therefore, consists of the numbers of votes re-

ceived/not received in elections, or, which is typical for Russia, the low turnout of voters. The action of the subject in the framework of this model is always regarded as dependent on some form of “maximization” or “optimization” of “utility.” The purpose of the members of the United Russia party in this context is to maintain power and stabilize the political order. Despite criticism of the rational concept by some researchers, for example, J. Adams, who insists on the impossibility of a single scale by which subjects evaluate both positive and negative consequences (Adams, 1995), this approach seems to us the most productive as opposed to impulsive incrementalism, which only in certain cases can fill certain gaps in risk management (Etzioni, 1967).

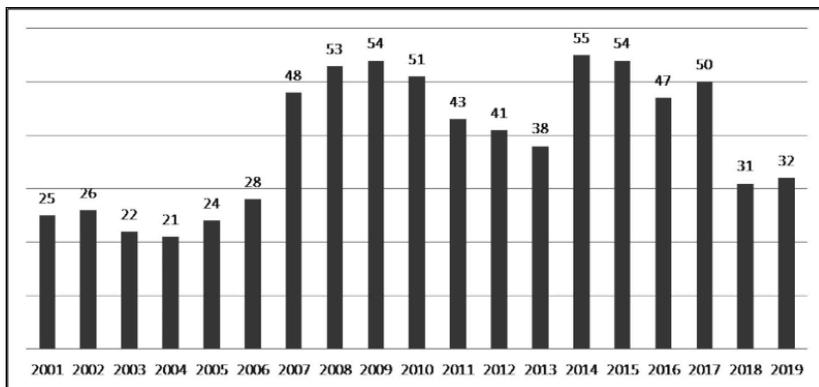
### Statement of the Problem

Socioeconomic instability, a deplorable situation with the standard of living in Russia, naturally affects political parties. To a large extent, this applies to the political party “United Russia,” because, firstly, having the status of being all-Russian, it should solve the bulk of the problems of the majority of the population. Secondly, its rating is the most vulnerable, since the party is among citizens inseparably identified with the President and Government of the Russian Federation. This, in turn, is due to the official ideological position of the party, which consists of supporting the current government and the president, the membership of the majority of representatives of the Government of the Russian Federation in United Russia, as well as the fact that the leader of the party is the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation. Thus, the United Russia party seems to be a reflection of power, and therefore they are automatically held responsible for the destabilization of the general situation in the country.

According to the results of studies conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation, the rating of the United Russia party dropped significantly in 2018. Moreover, this trend appears to have begun in 2015–2016, with insignificant positive dynamics in 2017. Today, 32% of people trust parties, while in 2017 the degree of trust was 50%, and in 2014 it was the highest point of the rating at 55% (Figure 1) (Public Opinion Fund, 2018). Experts attribute this lowering of the rating to the fact that Russian society has been in a state of protracted and increasingly aggravating economic and political crisis for about five years, concerning both internal processes and events taking place in the international arena. In essence, the current situation is the effect of the accumulation of

social negativity (first of all, it is an increase in prices with a fall in real incomes of the population). It was against this background that, in 2018, the issues of raising the retirement age and transformation in the tax sphere began to be studied in detail (RosBiznesConsulting, 2018).

**Figure 1. Rating dynamics of the Political Party “United Russia,” %**



Nevertheless, despite the negative trends in the rating, on a single voting day in 2018 the result of “United Russia” on average in all constituent entities of the Russian Federation amounted to more than 60% of the vote, which indicates that the situation in the whole country is not critical. However, it requires effective measures aimed at restoring lost positions. The situation in those regions where the lowest results were recorded is close to critical: Vladimir (29.6%) and Irkutsk (27.8%) regions, Transbaikal Territory (28.3%) (RIA News, 2018). In our work, we will dwell on the analysis of the situation in the Transbaikal Territory. The main objectives of this study are the analysis of risk factors in the studied region in a comparative perspective, as well as the construction of a relevant risk management model.

### **The Situation in the Transbaikal Region**

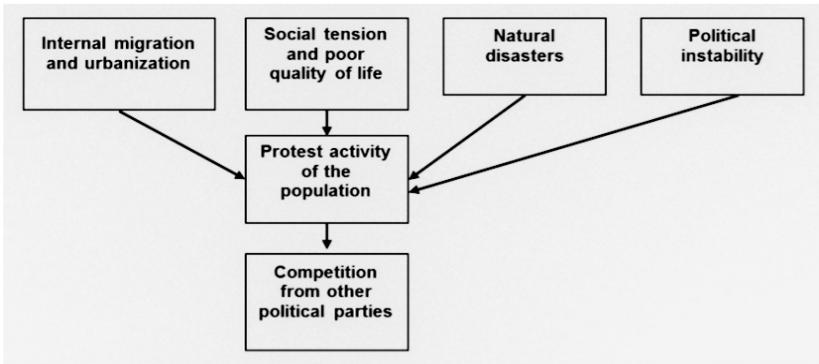
Taking into account all types of risks, they can be divided into civilizational and national, regional and local. But they tend to transform at such a speed that this leads to the emergence of new species and combinations covering different levels of threat distribution (Kurochkin & Maltseva, 2018). Our focus is on risk analysis for public administration in the Transbaikal Territory; thus, we can say that we are interested in the regional aspect of risk management. However, in the era of digitalization, regional instability can instantly go to the federal level, the

opposition to which the media and Internet bloggers are always ready to contribute.

A typical example from the recent past is the situation with roads in the city of Omsk, when video clips of the terrible state of roads were released, showing cars literally sinking through them, instantly causing a wide negative outcry. Risk management at different levels is always connected, and each link in the chain is certainly important, especially since regional authorities are always closer and more understandable to other regional authorities than to managers from the center.

Researcher T. Assmuth, considering the influence of risks on political structures and processes in Europe, gives the following classification of risk factors: 1) socioeconomic; 2) sociopolitical; 3) environmental; 4) a threat to public safety; 4) a threat to public health; and 5) technological (Assmuth, Hildén, & Benighaus, 2010). Refining and optimizing the adopted approaches, we identified the main risk factors relevant for the Transbaikal Territory for the state administration of the region (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Classification of the main risk factors in public administration in Transbaikal Territory**



**Social tension and quality of life.** If we talk about the sociopolitical and socioeconomic situation in the Transbaikal Territory, which directly affects the attitude of the population to the activities of the United Russia party, then it is necessary to talk about a high level of social tension, which has a protracted and increasingly aggravating character. It should be noted that the Transbaikal Territory has not only been on the list of the most problematic regions of the Russian Federation for many years, characterized by low GDP, budget deficit, huge and increasing public debt, low living standards, underdeveloped social infrastructure,

including poor state of systems health care, education and social protection, neglected state of housing and communal services, and an uncompetitive labor market, especially in rural areas. A serious problem is that the prevailing adverse situation continues to deteriorate. So, if in 2016 the Territory occupied the 80th place in terms of quality of life among other regions of the Russian Federation (out of 85), then in 2017 the rating for this indicator dropped to 81st, and in 2018 to 83rd place (RIA News, 2019b).

**Internal migration and urbanization.** The situation in the region leads to high migration activity of the population — on average more than seven thousand people leave the Transbaikal Territory annually. In addition, internal migration is also noted — from small settlements — to regional centers and the city of Chita, as a result of which further deprivation of the countryside occurs (Naryshkina, 2017). The main reason for this state of affairs in the region is the chronic underfunding of all spheres of life, since the region's own low incomes, combined with a small share of revenues from the federal center, do not allow budgeting without a deficit.

**Natural disasters.** Another factor causing social tension in the Transbaikal Territory is the annual serious damage from virtually uncontrolled forest and steppe fires. Since the damage to settlements suffering from such fires has been recorded, the specified damage not only affects the economy of the region but also directly impacts individual citizens. It also significantly worsens the ecological situation in the region, which is already characterized by a high level of degradation — Chita, since 2015, tops the rating of Russian cities with the most polluted air (RIA News, 2019a). A huge impact on the social mood of the inhabitants of the Transbaikal Territory was caused by the massive flood of 2018, for which the region was completely unprepared, and as a result more than 730 residential buildings, as well as adjoining territories of multistory buildings, over 1700 household plots and more than 2700 summer cottages in 29 populated areas were affected, roads were damaged and bridges destroyed (NEWSru.com, 2018). However, strong indignation from the population was caused not so much by the fact of the flood itself as by the lengthy process of making payments to citizens affected by the flood.

**Political instability.** It is not possible to effectively solve the problems of the region and frequent personnel changes in the government of the Transbaikal Territory, which primarily includes the high turnover

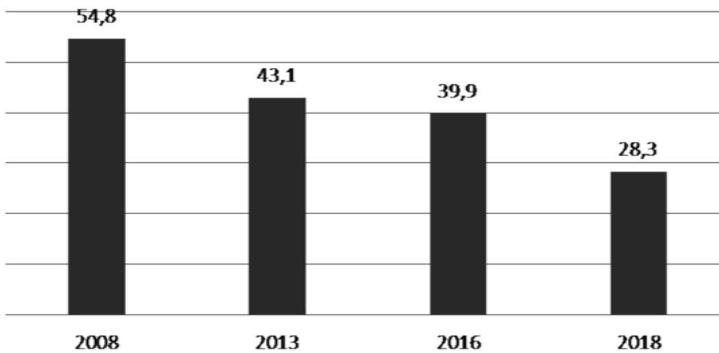
of governors — four governors were replaced in the region in five years. This leads to both general instability of the sociopolitical situation and the lack of a systematic, consistent approach to making effective political decisions.

**Protest activity of the population.** The above problems become the cause of growing protest moods of the population. For example, according to the results of studies of social tension and protest activity in Russia, the Transbaikal Territory was part of the group of constituent entities of the Russian Federation where, during 2013–2014, the highest degree of orientation toward protest actions was noted, associated with the dissatisfaction of citizens both with the general situation in the region, and with the inefficiency of the authorities (Rodimushkina, Chernikova, & Yakovlev, 2015). In 2016, the Transbaikal Territory, in accordance with criteria such as the “leading” crime rate, high unemployment, rising prices, low incomes and high debt levels of the population, took first place in terms of social tension among the regions of Siberia (Arguments of the week, 2016). In 2017, in accordance with the rating of social tension formed by the Center for Economic and Political Reforms, based on the number of labor protests, the Transbaikal Territory was assigned 9–10th place (RosBiznesConsulting, 2017). Also aggravating the situation is the lack of funding from the center. In particular, the draft regional budget for 2019 suggests that public sector salaries are provided for only 10.5 months. This represents a significant risk factor for increased protest sentiment. In 2016, there was already a significant increase in the number of protests by public sector employees who had not received wages for several months. The annual problem for the Transbaikal Territory is also the non-payment of salaries to miners working in mines, which also leads to worker strikes and hunger strikes. In 2017, the protest activity decreased slightly, and in 2018 increased again. The main reasons for the protests were the increase in the retirement age and dissatisfaction with the work of the current head of the regional center.

**Competition from other political parties.** A natural consequence of this situation is a further increase in discontent of the population, the formation of feelings of bitterness, hopelessness and pessimism, and a general decrease in the degree of confidence in the authorities. This has not converted into serious political protest, but contributes to the formation of negative trends in the change in the electoral behavior of residents of the Territory, first of all in terms of discouraging citizens

from participating in elections, which was especially demonstrated on a single voting day 2018. The results of the single voting day of 2018 indicate only a slight advantage of United Russia over its main political competitors — the Communist Party (24.59%) and the Liberal Democratic Party (24.6%). In addition, the Transbaikal Territory is one of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation with the lowest voter turnout within the framework of 22.04%, which also indicates that real party support may be even lower (Orlovskaya, Golovanova, Kozyr', Berezyuk, & Vorozheva, 2018). The results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of the Transbaikal Territory indicate a steady weakening of the party. In comparison with 2008 (which was the official formation of the Transbaikal Territory after the unification of the Chita Oblast and the Aginsky Buryat Autonomous Okrug), the result worsened almost twofold — from 54.8% to 28.3%. Compared to the previous period — the 2016 elections — the rating decreased by 11.6% (Figure 3) (Election commission of Zabaykalsky Krai, 2018).

**Figure 3. Rating of the Transbaikal regional branch of the All-Russian political party “United Russia”, %**



The above negative trends, in turn, allow us to draw quite reasonable conclusions about the further unfavorable forecast of the political stability of the United Russia party at the regional level, if the current situation is not fundamentally changed. In fact, today there is an urgent need to develop and implement an effective, deeply developed program based on a comprehensive study of the specifics of the region's problems, an analysis of all the key factors of political risks and the development of a strategy for managing them, and a review of existing approaches to

activities, which will allow systematically solve the most pressing problems, respond precisely to the most acute contradictions, both with the aim of reducing social tension in the region, and in order to strengthen the position of United Russia and raise its rating.

**Political Risk Management Model in the Activities of Political Parties**

In general, there are currently many risk management models/standards. However, there are six main, universally recognized models: 1) the risk management standard of Australia and New Zealand (AS/NZS); 2) the model of the Management Committee of the sponsoring organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO); 3) the Institute for Risk Management (IRM) standard; 4) the Canadian Standard (CSA); 5) the US Department of Energy (DOE) model; and 6) a model of the International Organization for the Assessment and Management of Environmental Risks (NERAM). The main components of these models are shown in Table 1. Most of the standards are based on the concept of enterprise risk management, which does not prevent the best practices from being applied to public administration, which is clearly demonstrated in Leung (Leung & Isaacs, 2008).

**Table 1. Comparison of risk management models**

AS/NZS	COSO	IRM	CSA	DOE	NERAM
Context detection Risk identification Risk assessment Risk analysis Quantification of risk Risk management	Formulation of the problem Event modification Risk assessment Activity control Information activity, communications Monitoring	Organization strategic goals Risk assessment Risk analysis Risk quantification Risk reporting Making decisions Risk management Reporting Monitoring	Initiation Primary analysis Risk assessment Quantification Control Monitoring Plan implementation	Risk planning Risk assessment Identification Analysis Treatment Monitoring	Context detection Primary analysis Rating Quantification Priority risk identification Rating Quantification Elimination Making decisions

We offer our model of political risk management in the activities of political parties in conditions of social tension. The main components of this model are: subjects and objects of influence, its goals, tasks and principles, resources, functions and mechanisms, as well as specific technologies and management tools.

The key subject of political risk management in this context is the regional branch of the United Russia party and, in particular, its staff. Therefore, priority attention in this context should be given to individual actors — party representatives, whose characteristics include two basic

components: competency-building and image-building. Competency includes a combination of professional and personal-business qualities of a particular person, including those that allow him to analyze the social situation in the region, assess real and potential risks, develop adequate solutions to the most pressing problems and predict their consequences.

In this regard, it seems relevant and appropriate to develop a system of competencies that allows assessing the personnel potential of the regional branch of the United Russia party, both in terms of general business qualities and specific skills in managing political risks in conditions of social tension. The results of this assessment will provide an opportunity to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each individual subject, to develop development priorities, and in some cases to assess the appropriateness of the positions taken and to carry out personnel changes. It is important that United Russia is currently actively developing various areas of party education, which opens up wide opportunities for development. In particular, the Higher Party School provides training on the programs “Political Leader,” “Party Organizer,” and “Political Manager,” as well as the continuing implementation of the Polit Startup HR project for training novice politicians (United Russia, 2019).

Reputation is no less important, since it forms in the eyes of the population a certain image not only of the representative of the party, but also of the party as a whole. In this regard, it is necessary to draw up a party ethical code that takes into account the specifics of the region. The main goal of work in this direction is to prevent cases of incorrect behavior and unacceptable statements by representatives of United Russia, and their awareness of increased responsibility for their words and actions.

In addition to the above, regional authorities, other political parties, various state, public, commercial organizations, and individual socially active citizens should be considered as subjects. Among such entities in the Transbaikal Territory, in addition, there are educational institutions of the Territory, mainly in the higher and secondary professional education sector (a total of nine universities and 23 secondary vocational schools), as well as such large employers as the Transbaikal Railway, the Norilsk Nickel plant, and so on. In general, the list of potential actors cannot actually be exhausted. In this regard, the multi-subjectness of the proposed model should be emphasized. In our opinion, the most effective approach in managing political risks will be the orientation specifically

towards joint, intersectoral interaction, creating an atmosphere of cooperation, dialogue and teamwork that helps to harmonize the interests and positions of various sociopolitical groups and allows for an integrated approach to solving the problems of the regional community.

The objects of the presented model include specific events, situations and conditions that can have a negative impact on the rating and image of the party, interfere with the implementation of party programs and projects, and generally adversely affect its functioning. In addition, it should also include the actual actions of the party (or vice versa, inaction) that can lead to the destabilization of the sociopolitical situation in the region. That is, in fact, the objects of this model are the risks themselves, as well as the factors contributing to their occurrence. In relation to the Transbaikal regional branch of United Russia, such objects will be a combination of the above conditions that form social tension, strengthen protest moods in the region and lower the party rating. A systematic analysis of these conditions will help determine ways out of this situation.

However, in addition to external risk factors, internal objects must also be classified as objects, among which the party's information activity is of prime importance. In the context of political risk management, depending on the literacy of use, the information activities of parties can act both as a means of preventing and reducing risks, and as a risk factor. This is due to the fact that various characteristics of the information broadcast to the population through various channels have a direct impact on the formation of public opinion about the activities of political parties, and, consequently, on electoral behavior. Moreover, it is important not only to transmit information, but also feedback, taking into account public opinion, and creating a favorable social response. Today, special attention is also paid to rumor management.

The study of the organization of information activities of the Transbaikal regional branch of the political party United Russia allowed us to draw a number of conclusions and identify the strengths and weaknesses of work in this direction. In this case, special attention should be paid to the development of corrective measures to work with weaknesses, among which are low information transparency, lack of interactive feedback tools, and poor representation in social networks. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare and publish understandable, informative, and sufficiently positive content in various media, activate it on social networks, and develop tools for feedback from citizens (Naryshkina, Shemelin, & Romanova, 2017).

The purpose of the subject's influence on the object within the framework of the model under consideration involves ensuring the effective operation of the party's regional branch, taking into account the interests of citizens, in the context of real and potential social, political and economic threats.

The objectives include the result of the decomposition of the goal into concrete steps to achieve it. In general terms, they can be represented as follows: identification, analysis and assessment of political risks, and the selection and implementation of their management strategies (elimination, adoption and adjustment, minimization of consequences, etc.) depending on specific risk events.

The principles of impact determine the set of basic requirements for the process and the outcome of managing political risks and, in fact, represent the axiological basis of the proposed model, since, in the first place, they are a reflection of the value system of a political party. Among the basic principles of the activity of political parties it is necessary to name: legality, equality, transparency, voluntariness, and self-government (The Federal Law 95-FZ of the Russian Federation, 2001). The specific principles of political risk management should be identified, such as: making informed decisions, expediency and focus on results, complexity, systematic and integration.

The resources necessary to ensure the process of managing political risks within the framework of this model can be material (including financial), human (both internal personnel and external — partners for the implementation of joint projects) and information (the whole set of information flows and opportunities rationally use it).

The functions of the proposed model also consist of two blocks — general and private functions of political risk management. Common functions include: goal setting, planning, organization, motivation, coordination, and control, which are a standard control cycle of any system or process. Private functions are aimed at working with risk factors — analysis and assessment, forecasting, protection and prevention, insurance, reimbursement, etc.

The implementation of these functions is possible through the implementation of political risk management technologies linked into a single sequential mechanism, consisting of the following procedural steps:

1. goal-setting and development of a risk management strategy;
2. the formation of communicative relationships;
3. collection and processing of information;
4. risk identification, analysis and risk assessment;
5. development of a decision on risk response;
6. planning and organizing a response to risk;
7. selection, preparation and motivation of performers of the response to risk;
8. monitoring and control of results.

Each of the presented steps involves the use of a wide range of tools: regulatory documents, various methods and techniques of risk management, conferences, meetings with voters, the media, and so on. In other words, within the framework of this model, instruments represent the means to implement the functions of managing political risks in the activities of political parties.

Based on the main characteristics of the proposed model, it must be emphasized that the key factors for the effectiveness of its implementation are: multi-entity and consolidated political risk management based on the principles of constructive interaction; phased and comprehensive impact; and the availability of appropriate material, personnel, regulatory, organizational, informational and socio-communicative support for this process.

## Conclusion

Summarizing the above, attention should be paid to the importance and relevance of managing political risks in the activities of political parties because of the instability of the current socioeconomic and sociopolitical situation in Russia. This process acquires special significance in the context of the formation of social tension, which significantly affects the electoral behavior and rating of political parties in particular. In order to stabilize and maintain political positions, as well as effectively implement the tasks set, parties need to be actively involved in the risk management process. As a strategic guideline, the proposed political risk management model can be used, which is generally quite universal and suitable for use both theoretically and practically in various regional branches of political parties.

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