

Putin's 'Party of Power' and the Declining Power of Parties in Russia

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This pamphlet is the fourth in the Foreign Policy Centre's 'Future of Russia' project which is built around seminars, lectures, publications, media contributions and larger conferences on the future of liberal and pluralist democracy in Russia. The project takes recent Russian developments and Russian perspectives as its departure point, but ground these in the broad principles of democracy and the commitments of Russia under its adherence both to the Council of Europe and OSCE founding documents. The main purposes of the Future of Russia Project are to expose to wider media scrutiny the reversal of hard won freedoms in Russia and to address the foreign policy dilemma faced by European leaders in relations with Russia as a result. That dilemma is how to protect and promote democratic principles in practice in the face of the visible retrenchment of basic freedoms in Russia, at the same time as advancing more traditional economic, security or geopolitical interests. The work of the Future of Russia Project is directed to making sound policy recommendations for action, followed up with appropriate public dissemination, especially through seminars and media coverage.

The Future of Russia Project features prominent figures from Russian progressive politics, as well as leading specialists and policy advisers from around the world. The project concentrates on the mechanisms by which Western governments, especially the UK, can revitalise the question of Russian democratic governance as one of the central issues of European politics today.

Executive Summary

This paper analyses the dynamics of political preference within the Russian electorate by comparing electoral support for major political parties in legislative and presidential elections from 1995 to 2004. It concludes that the shift in preference towards Putin's United Russia party, the 'party of power', has had a devastating effect on the multiparty system in Russia.

The authors argue that prior to the 2003 elections to the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian Legislative Assembly), political preferences of the voters were relatively stable and could be ascertained based on standard socio-economic factors, such as age, education, geographic location and income. During the 1995 and 1999 legislative elections, the major political parties managed to retain similar shares of the popular vote and fluctuations in voter preferences could be attributed to shifts in external conditions. On the one hand, growing disparities in living conditions contributed to sustained political support for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. On the other hand, democratic expectations of sizable portions of the population were the source of support for other political parties, such as "Yabloko" and the Union of Right Forces.

This situation changed dramatically during the 2003 legislative elections. The party of power – United Russia – managed to gather the largest portion of the popular vote and secured a constitutional majority in the State Duma. The Communists lost up to 60 per cent of their electorate. Democratic parties received dismal support and were not able to clear the five per cent threshold required for election to the Duma.

The authors identify the directions in preference shifts of the Russian electorate and sources of gains/losses among major political parties. Contrary to widespread belief, United Russia – the party supporting President Putin – did not receive the votes during the 2003 campaign that its predecessors (Unity and Fatherland) had received in the 1999 legislative elections. The electoral support of United Russia lacks any clear ideological direction and consists of many

types of voters from all major political parties. The lack of independent ideology and diversity within its base complicates the electoral future of United Russia and casts doubt on its ability to retain a constitutional or simple majority in the Duma during the next electoral cycle. The stability of any party system decreases as ideological preferences in the electorate become more volatile. If parties cannot firmly define their electoral base, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to channel societal preferences into policy.

The opposition parties continued to lose support in the last legislative elections. The decrease in the Communist voting base can be attributed to a massive migration of CPRF voters to United Russia. The democratic opposition stood strong vis-à-vis the party of power, but suffered from electoral ignorance of their core supporters. The percentage of those voters who decided to stay home during the last legislative elections increased to 37 per cent and became the single largest source of voting base decrease for the democrats. The alarming tendency in the new structure of political preferences within the Russian electorate concerns the increase in the support for nationalist and populist parties, such as LDPR and Rodina (Motherland). During the 2003 electoral campaign these parties managed to attract a disproportionately high number of voters not just from the left wing of the political spectrum, but from all other major political parties, including United Russia.

The analysis of voting data from the 1996, 2000 and 2004 campaigns reveals that the overwhelming support of Vladimir Putin in 2000 and 2004 might reflect some irregular results in specific regions of Russia where there was an unusually high voter turnout and where distribution of relative support for major candidates was skewed in favour of the incumbent president.

Since the 2003 election, the political system in Russia can no longer be characterised as a system of stable and predictable voter preferences. We believe that while several factors contributed to the change of the electoral landscape, it is important to note that these factors originate in one place: the Kremlin. It was Putin's own perestroika – or 'vertical of power' – that changed not only the rules

of the game, but players' incentives that had been forming throughout the 1990s. Under such conditions, the prospects for the formation and development of an effective multi-party system appear quite bleak.

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Introduction

After more than a year since the last legislative elections in Russia and Vladimir Putin's reelection as president, few people remember how many voters supported each major political party, including the party of power – United Russia. Even fewer people recall the size of the gap between the incumbent president and the runner up. The heated political debates which engaged broad social circles during the era of President Boris Yeltsin have given way to a different mode of high politics in Russia.

Major policy decisions are no longer taken in the streets or the plenary sessions of the State Duma, but within the headquarters of the presidential administration. The dismal political ratings of the legislature itself indicate that the majority of Russians simply do not care for the activities of the State Duma and place their expectations on the executive branch of power. It is sufficient to note that among the major political parties, the highest approval rating belongs to United Russia, a party which has no independent ideology of its own but relies completely on the personal popularity and legitimacy of President Vladimir Putin. The communists are faring quite poorly and are struggling both with organisational problems and a diminishing constituency. The liberal opposition parties that did not make it into the Duma in 2003, Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS), have single digit approval ratings which fall within the statistical estimation error.

Russian society, once so politically active and ideologically charged, seems to place no bets on the chances for political pluralism in Russia. The citizens seem to have accepted the state monopoly on power which penetrates all levels of the political structure. While the opposition is weak and operates outside of a parliamentary realm, the party of power functions as a voiceless extension of the executive.

What does it mean for the future of the multiparty political system in Russia? Why and how has the once pluralised political system

regressed into a one-party monopoly? These questions address the potential for democratic development in Russia. We will argue in this paper that many answers to these important questions can be found in the analysis of Russian electoral history. Specifically, we believe that election results contain important information about the changes in political preferences of the Russian voters. They provide the material for tracing shifts in the voters' attitudes toward major political parties from one election to another. The losses and gains of each political party reflect the relative success or failure to preserve their own electoral base and attract voters from other political camps.

After the results of the 2003 legislative elections were tallied, many observers were surprised that United Russia was so successful in 2003 in comparison with the more modest results obtained by its predecessors in 1995 and 1999. Did the voters who supported parties of power in 1999 vote for United Russia in 2003? If liberal parties as well as communists lost by a landslide, then which parties benefited from that landslide? Where did the supporters of the pro-Kremlin Motherland party come from? And finally, which parties' would be supporters stayed home in greater proportions?

The above questions refer to the more general issue of the stability of Russian electoral preferences and the predictability and continuity of Russia's political landscape.

The stability of any party system decreases as ideological preferences in the electorate become more volatile. If parties cannot firmly define their electoral base, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to channel societal preferences into policy.

In addition to the uncertainty about the changes in voter preferences, allegations of election irregularities and fraud were put forward by a number of observers after both parliamentary and presidential contests. According to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), turnout figures, as well as Putin's support numbers, looked odd in some of the regions. For example, in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, 98 per cent of all eligible voters turned out to vote, and 96 per cent of them supported Vladimir Putin.

Similar, and sometimes even higher, numbers have been noted in Tatarstan, Dagestan, Mordovia, Adygeya, Chechnya, Bashkiria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and North Ossetia. Yet, none of these allegations of fraud or irregularities led to the results being thrown out or even recounted.

No one questions that the 71 per cent of votes won by Putin in the last election was a decisive victory. He won in all of Russia's regions, beating the runner-up (Nikolai Kharitonov) by more than 57 percent. Yet, can such election results be reconciled with the known preferences of Russian voters? This question can be partially answered by studying the flow of votes between the 2004 presidential election and a number of earlier contests. If such an analysis does reveal some oddities and irregularities then their magnitude can be used to gauge how much 'help' Vladimir Putin received from loyal regional elites across the country.

In this paper we use statistical methods to trace the preferences of Russian voters in the 1995, 1999 and 2003 Duma elections as well as the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections. Our data set consists of approximately 2600 observations – county-level¹ aggregated results for each of the above elections. In the first part we summarise previous results on the issue of Russian electoral change. The main conclusion of this work is that Russian electoral preferences remained stable throughout 1995-2000. In the second part, we estimate transitions of preferences among Russian voters during the 1995-1999 electoral cycle. Results of this analysis are presented and discussed in the third part, along with discussions of the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004.

¹ A rayon, or county, is the level of territorial election commissions and was previously called a rayon election commission.

Stability of the Russian Electorate: 1995-1999

Allegations of electoral fraud, irregularities and dubious tactics of campaigns in Russian elections first appeared in the December 1993 Duma election, which was conducted at the same time as the referendum on Russia's new Constitution. International as well as domestic election observers in Russia have been raising their concerns ever since.

Yet on a larger scale, the voting results in the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1995-1999 reflected the well-known preferences of Russian voters.² Moreover, the estimated flow of votes from one candidate in one election to another candidate in the next election followed predictions made on substantive and anecdotal evidence.³

Consistently, ideological preferences of Russian voters have been predictably distributed⁴ and the influence of various social and economic factors (age, income, level of urbanization, etc.) are consistent with those observed in many democratic countries.⁵

² For this, please see M. McFaul, *Russia's 1996 Presidential Election*, Hoover Press, 1997; M. McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution*, Cornell Univ. Press, 2001; and R. G. Moser, *Unexpected Outcomes*, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2001.

³ For this, please see M. Myagkov, P. C. Ordeshook, and A. Sobyenin, 'The Russian Electorate, 1991-1996', *Post Soviet Affairs*, 13(2):134-166, 1997; M. Myagkov and P. C. Ordeshook, 'The Spatial Character of Russia's New Democracy', *Public Choice*, 97(3), 1998 and M. Myagkov and A. Sobyenin, *Irregularities in the 1993 Russian Election*. Mimeo, HSS, California Institute of Technology, 1995.

⁴ For this, please see M. McFaul and S. M. Fish, 'Russia Between Elections', *Journal of Democracy*, 19:90-118, 1996 and M. Myagkov, P. C. Ordeshook, and A. Sobyenin, 'The Russian Electorate'.

⁵ R. S. Clem and P. R. Craumer, 'Urban-Rural Voting Differences in Russian Elections, 1995-96: A Rayon-Level Analysis', *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, 38(10):379-395, 1997.

Table 1. Election Results 1995-1999 for major political groups

Group	1995	1999
'left'	CPRF + Communists of the USSR 26.8%	CPRF + Communists of the USSR 26.5%
'right'	Yabloko + Russia's Choice + Ahead Russia + Common Cause 13.5%	Yabloko +SPS 14.5%
'nationalist'	LDPR 11.1%	LDPR 6%
Total	52%	47%

Source: Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation

Arguably, the only significant difference between Russian and Western voters was that the Russians regularly demonstrated an unusually high level of tolerance to economic hardships, which are normally associated with poor performance of the incumbent governments. Russians continuously paid much more attention to the ideological stance of a party or a candidate than to the potential outcome of a proposed policy. Even the unexpected success of the ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and his party (LDPR) in the 1993 election was the result of voters' ideology and not their 'cost-benefit' analysis. Notwithstanding the absurdity of Zhirinovskiy's ideology, there existed a potential and a mechanism for future democratic development. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the entire range of issues of why such development ultimately went nowhere, there several things to note.

First, Russian electoral preferences remained remarkably stable and consistent throughout the 1990s despite 'variable' economic and political conditions. Second, newly emerged political parties lacked institutional structure and consequently failed to utilise the stability and mandates that voters gave them. Third, the increasing presidential power diminished the role and status of political parties. It is no secret that both Yeltsin and Putin considered the State Duma

as more of a nuisance than as a partner and/or political opponent.⁶ Fourth, and most importantly, the results of the 1999 State Duma election became the first sign of a failing political party system and the emergence of the Kremlin's domination over the entire Russian political spectrum.

Indeed, the degree of support (as shown in Table 1) for the established parties remained surprisingly stable compared to 1995, thereby supporting the stability continuity theory. The two major Communist parties (Gennady Zhuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation [CPRF] and Viktor Ampilov's Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU]) received 26.5 per cent in 1999 compared to 26.8 per cent in 1995. Liberal reformers (Grigorii Yavlinsky's Yabloko party and the Union of Right Forces [SPS]) received 14.5 per cent in December 1999, maintaining almost the same number as four years earlier: 13.5 per cent (Yabloko, RC, Boris Fedorov's Ahead Russia and Irina Khakamada's Common Cause). Only the nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy saw his support decline from 11 to 6 per cent, which is still enough to keep him (and his faction) among the major players for several years.

In this paper, we are using aggregate election returns and statistical models to learn the percentages of voters who changed parties from one election to another. (see Appendix One for a discussion of the model). For example, we analyse which percentage of the 1995 Communist Party supporters voted for United Russia in 1999, how many votes the liberals lost in 2003 and which political party acquired these votes.

Table 2 compares the vote flows between the 1995 and 1999 legislative elections. These results support the hypothesis of relative stability of voters' electoral preferences. Major political parties did a good job of retaining their core electorate and drawing additional support from unaffiliated voters and those who did not participate in

⁶ S. M. Fish, 'The Impact of the 1999-2000 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections on Political Party Development in Russia'. Paper presented at the Shambaugh Conference, University of Iowa, Iowa City, April 24-25, 2000.

the 1995 election but did in 1999. Communists led this aspect of the campaign, retaining 64 per cent of their 1995 supporters. Newly formed parties of power – Unity and Fatherland – received the majority of votes which went to their predecessor – NDR – in 1995. In addition, Unity managed to capture almost 40 per cent of those who had previously supported Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democrats. This result is somewhat unusual for a party of power, which positioned itself closer to the centre of the political spectrum. However, the migration of voters from LDPR towards Unity was the result of a fierce campaign waged against liberal democrats by the Kremlin and should not be attributed to a conscious ideological shift within the LDPR electorate.

Table 2. Transition of votes among political parties from 1995 to 1999 Duma Elections

		Parties in 1999 elections							
		Yabloko	Edinstvo	LDPR	Otechestvo	KPRF	SPS	NV	Others
Parties in 1995 elections	SPS	0.27	0.10	-0.02	0.34	-0.23	0.45	0.02	0.06
	NDR	-0.04	-0.05	0.05	0.97	-0.11	0.09	-0.12	0.20
	Yabloko	0.38	0.06	0.02	0.07	-0.11	0.21	0.21	0.16
	KPRF	-0.01	0.10	-0.03	0.15	0.64	-0.03	0.17	0.02
	LDPR	0.01	0.39	0.20	-0.17	0.28	0.02	0.17	0.10
	NV	0.01	0.02	0.00	-0.04	0.08	0.05	0.85	0.03
	Others	0.02	0.36	0.11	0.02	0.10	0.01	0.15	0.23

In addition to the fact that these parties kept their voters, their electoral support can also be explained by the same basic independent variables (rural/urban residence, age, education, residence in particular regions of the country) as before, and the old pro/anti-reform issue line remains important. Therefore, if one neglects for a moment the presence of OVR and Unity, then the conclusion can be made that Russian voter preferences remained frozen for the intervening years, thus making future elections rather predictable. The (nearly) forty per cent of the popular vote that Unity and OVR received in 1999 cannot be explained by any of the

standard references to basic social cleavages, such as the rural/urban divide.

Moreover, the supporters of these parties can be found between communists and reformers. The only significant factor that does help to explain individual support for these two parties is whether or not some local and/or federal elites supported the party. This, combined with additional evidence, suggests that the two new parties were in fact parties of elites (i.e. governors, oligarchs and so on). Their electoral success should be viewed as various elites bringing in the vote of their localities to their own parties.

The emergence of new and powerful players raises the issue of whether they could result in a major political realignment of ideology-driven voters in favour of a passive non-ideological electorate controlled by the government. One way to approach this very important question is to trace the party affiliation of various groups of voters throughout a number of recent elections.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: the next section discusses the results of our analysis and Section 4 presents concluding remarks. In the appendix we present two alternative statistical models that we used to approach the above question.

Elections in 2003 – 2004: Emergence of Instability.

2003 Parliamentary (Duma) Election

The figures in Table 3 show the estimated transition of votes between the 1999 and 2003 Duma elections. The rows in Table 3 are 'old' (1999) parties and the columns are 'new' (2003) parties. A quick look at the results suggests that the stability of the Russian electoral landscape found in the analysis of 1995-2000 elections has ended. In 2003 many supporters of the 'old' political parties either switched to other parties or stayed home.

Table 3. Transition of votes among political parties in 1999-2003 Duma elections

		Parties in 2003 legislative elections							
		Un.Russia	KPRF	LDPR	Rodina	Yabloko	SPS	NV	Others
Parties in 1999 elections	Yabloko	0.18	-0.01	0.15	0.15	0.27	-0.01	0.37	-0.08
	Edinstvo	0.65	0.00	0.09	0.07	0.01	0.00	0.08	0.10
	LDPR	0.26	-0.06	0.70	-0.17	0.00	-0.13	0.29	0.10
	Otechestvo	0.63	-0.04	-0.03	0.14	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.17
	KPRF	0.19	0.37	0.05	0.08	-0.01	-0.02	0.23	0.11
	SPS	-0.05	0.09	0.03	0.14	0.15	0.37	0.07	0.20
	NV	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.93	-0.01
	Others	0.16	0.13	0.04	-0.02	-0.02	0.06	-0.02	0.66

Most importantly, as the data in Table 4 suggest, this applies to parties on all sides of the political spectrum: 'left', 'liberal' and the 'party of power'. The support structure of the majority of political parties (except LDPR) has changed significantly since 1999. Even the winners of the 2003 election saw that their support base has been reshuffled since the previous election.

Table 4. Election Results 1999-2003 for major political groups

Group	1999	2003
'Left'	CPRF + Communists of Russia 26.5%	CPRF 12.61%
'Right'	Yabloko + SPS 14.5%	Yabloko + SPS 8.27%
'Nationalist'	LDPR 6%	LDPR+Rodina 29.49%
Total	47%	41,32%

Source: Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation

Of the parties contesting the 2003 election, United Russia enjoyed the most favourable environment, and was viewed by many as

Putin's party. Yet, being in such a privileged position, United Russia received less than two thirds of those voters who supported either Fatherland or Unity in 1999. Even considering the overall relative success of United Russia in 2003, such loss amounts to about eight million votes or approximately 40 per cent of the votes that United Russia received in 2003. These lost votes were almost equally split among LDPR, Motherland (Rodina) and those voters who stayed home in 2003. However United Russia's 2003 result had been augmented by about a quarter of the 1999 Communist vote. In fact United Russia became the biggest beneficiary of the communist electoral collapse.

Communists lost about 60 per cent of their electoral base between 1999 and 2003. In addition to United Russia, CPRF's former voters were found among Rodina's electorate and also among those who stayed home in 2003. Interestingly, Rodina received only about 8 per cent of the CPRF 1999 vote. This runs contrary to the conventional wisdom that Rodina had been created by the Kremlin to split the communist base. The only (unexpected) gain for the communists in 2003 was 10 per cent of the 1999 SPS votes. This demonstrates just how 'virtual' the SPS electorate actually was. Remarkably, this has happened in an environment when CPRF was mostly cut off from national media networks. According to a complaint filed by liberal activists, CPRF received about half the pre-election airtime allocated to United Russia, and approximately 80 per cent of CPRF's TV coverage had negative themes.

The two pro-reform liberal parties (SPS and Yabloko) managed to keep only about one third of their 1999 supporters. At the same time about 15 per cent of the SPS 1999 electorate migrated to Yabloko in 2004, while no opposite flow can be detected. Both SPS and Yabloko lost about 15 per cent of their old supporters to the newly created Rodina. A further loss of approximately 30 per cent was split between United Russia and LDPR. Finally, more than a third of former Yabloko supporters did not vote in 2004.

One of the most intriguing questions about the 2003 election was the source of support for the newly-formed Rodina party. Created by Kremlin political consultants, Rodina was supposed to cut into the

base of CPRF, thus reducing any serious opposition to the level of nuisance. Consistently the main pre-election platform of Rodina had been built on a combination of socially-oriented and nationalistic issues. However, our analysis shows that support for Rodina came from places other than CPRF and LDPR. Rodina had received 7 per cent of Unity, 14 per cent of Fatherland, 15 per cent of Yabloko and SPS and only about 8 per cent 1999 CPRF supporters.

Another 'success story' of the 2003 election was Vladimir Zhirinovsky's LDPR. His usual base received additional support from 1999 Unity supporters (9 per cent), Yabloko (15 per cent) and CPRF (8 per cent). In all likelihood these were voters who switched from voting on the 'pro-against-reform' issue, and turned to the 'nationalist' dimension. Finally, it is important to note that the ranks of 'nonvoters' increased in size mostly due to former supporters of Yabloko and CPRF. The large numbers of voters who support liberal parties did not vote in December 2003. Compared to the elections in 1999, the number of these 'latent democrats' increased from 21 per cent to 37 per cent of the core liberal electorate.

2004 Presidential Election: Success, Which Exceeded Expectations

When a party system is weak and parties themselves lack explicit agendas, parliamentary elections mainly serve as primaries for presidential elections. This is especially the case when parliamentary and presidential elections are not held simultaneously. In 2000, the distribution of support during presidential elections accurately reflected political preferences as they were expressed in 1999 elections of the State Duma. Table 5 reports the percentages of vote flows from the main political parties during the 1999 Duma election to the candidates for the chief executive office (Putin, Zhirinovsky, Yavlinsky, Zhuganov) during the 2000 Presidential contest.

Table 5. Transition of votes between 1999 Duma elections and 2000 presidential elections

	Major presidential candidates in 2000 elections						
	Putin	Zuganov	Zhirinovskiy	Yavlinsky	NV	Other	
Major political parties in 1999 legislative elections							
Edinstvo	1.09	-0.22	0.00	-0.01	0.01	0.12	
LDPR	-0.02	0.59	0.42	-0.05	0.16	-0.10	
Otechestvo	0.95	0.02	-0.03	0.13	0.03	-0.11	
KPRF	-0.01	0.98	0.00	-0.04	0.02	0.05	
SPS+Yabloko	0.07	-0.10	0.01	0.38	0.15	0.49	
NV	0.10	0.10	0.01	0.01	0.74	0.03	
Others	0.80	0.31	0.01	-0.03	-0.02	-0.06	

These results fully support the hypothesis of stability in the preference structure of the Russian electorate at the time. In 2000, Vladimir Putin received the votes which were cast for Edinstvo and Otechestvo in December 1999. Most of the votes in support of Gennady Zhuganov came from the communist electorate. Grigori Yavlinsky became the only exception to this inheritance trend by not only receiving all the votes of the Yabloko party but by also gaining the support of 36 per cent of former SPS voters. Despite the fact that the extent of Vladimir Putin's electoral support from the parties of power exceeded 100 per cent and was greater than what they could offer, the other results were consistent with the stable distribution of political preferences among the electorate.

The presidential elections in 2004 were held under a completely different set of rules political circumstances. By that time, the Russian federal state strengthened its position vis-à-vis the regional elites and the executive gained near total control over the legislature by merging the two pro-government factions Unity and Fatherland into one large United Russia. The economic situation in the country was also dramatically different from the post-crisis 1999 elections, when economic hardship played a significant role in the political orientation of the population. By 2004 Russia had much better economic indicators and more money to balance the budget, to

spend and to save. Under these conditions, the major political opponents of the incumbent chose not to participate in the presidential race and submitted second and third tier substitutes to compete with an overly popular president. Therefore, the outcome of the 2004 presidential campaign could have been predicted at a very early stage and the victory of Vladimir Putin was secured long before the first votes were cast. Nevertheless, the distribution of political preferences during the 2004 presidential elections was very different from the patterns observed during the previous parliamentary elections in December 2003.

The analysis of the vote flows between the parliamentary elections held in December 2003 and the presidential contest in March 2004 reveals both regular and irregular patterns. As was expected, the major opponents of the incumbent managed to keep the support of their respective electorate. Communist Kharitonov obtained 94 per cent of the votes which were cast for the CPRF in the Duma elections of 2003. Sergei Glaziev brought home 36 per cent of the Rodina electorate. Irina Khakamada succeeded in gaining the support of both Yabloko (37 percent) and SPS supporters (43 per cent).

Table 6. Transition of votes between 2003 Duma elections and 2004 presidential elections

		Major presidential candidates, 2004 presidential elections					
		Putin	Kharitonov	Glaz'ev	Khakamada	NV	Other
Major political parties, 2003 legislative elections	United Russia	1.14	0.00	-0.02	0.01	0.15	-0.27
	KPRF	0.07	0.94	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.01
	LDPR	0.00	0.09	0.07	0.03	0.55	0.26
	Rodina	-0.07	-0.01	0.36	0.00	0.73	0.00
	Yabloko	0.65	-0.34	0.03	0.37	-0.07	0.36
	SPS	0.55	-0.32	-0.02	0.43	0.40	-0.04
	NV	0.25	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.66	0.02
	Others	0.67	0.16	-0.03	-0.04	0.19	0.05

The distribution of votes cast in support of President Putin deviates from the pattern observed for other candidates and appears to be rather unusual. Due to the lack of real electoral competition, Vladimir Putin attracted not only the votes which belonged to United Russia in 2003, but also 65 per cent of Yabloko supporters, 55 per cent of SPS voters and even seven per cent of the communist electorate. Interestingly, the amount of Putin's electoral support from United Russia exceeds 100 per cent. Since the model is specified at the level of the territorial election commissions it is very flexible and allows us to track the vote flows quite accurately for each of 2600 rayons in the sample. Hence, the excessive support percentages of Vladimir Putin could hardly be attributed to the measurement error and carry substantive significance. It is further intriguing that the other candidates in those elections did not show a similar pattern of support. Putin's runner-up Nikolai Kharitonov came second in percentages of electoral support extended by his party. The communist electorate has traditionally displayed great discipline supporting CPRF's candidates. However, in 2004 Kharitonov managed to retain only 94 per cent of the votes which went to the CPRF in December 2003. Hence, the 114 per cent of United Russia votes which went for Putin in 2004 require substantial explanation.

While the complete answer to this question is beyond the scope of the current analysis, some explanations are readily available, and are substantiated by facts. The most obvious explanation is the high personal approval rating of the incumbent executive. However, even if all the United Russia voters supported Vladimir Putin, his overall support should not have exceeded 100 per cent. Such high levels of support for the incumbent were not new to the 2004 campaign. Four years earlier, Vladimir Putin retained 109 per cent of Unity and 95 per cent of Fatherland votes in his bid for the Presidency. Then, the level of support for Zhuganov's candidacy extended by CPRF was also high (98 per cent) but did not exceed the 100 per cent mark. These results call for detailed analysis of possible correlations between turn out levels and support for each candidate in all territorial election commissions.

Another irregular result of the presidential elections of 2004 concerns the direction of support by those voters who ignored the 2003 parliamentary elections but did participate in the presidential election in March 2004. The turn-out for presidential elections has consistently been higher than the level of voter participation in elections for the State Duma. Our analysis reveals that all 'additional' votes recorded in March 2004 went for Vladimir Putin and none were distributed among his opponents. Then, Vladimir Putin secured the support of 25 per cent of 'nonvoters' in the previous parliamentary elections. Only three per cent went to Sergei Glaziev and Nikolai Kharitonov. The interpretation of these results means that voters who did not cast their ballots in the State Duma election of 2003 but participated in the presidential elections of 2004, voted as one for the incumbent. While in theory this is indeed possible, the feasibility of such monolithic preference is rather doubtful. By comparison, in the 2000 presidential election the additional electoral activity was evenly distributed among all major candidates. Vladimir Putin and Gennady Zhuganov each obtained about 10 per cent of additional votes in 2000 from those who did not participate in the parliamentary election in 1999.

Conclusion

The changes in voter preferences reported in this paper appear to be stunning. Even if we allow for Russia being at the very early stages of democratic development, it is hardly normal to observe electoral volatility of such magnitude within the scope of just a few years. To summarise the results of this paper in one short expression, we can claim that the Russian electoral landscape had been hit by a 'political earthquake' that destroyed its previous shape and, most importantly, its infrastructure. At the same time the contract to have it rebuilt had been awarded to a 'company' known in the old days as the KGB.

Indeed, regardless of which side of the political spectrum we observe, the old landscape seems to have disappeared. The

reformers who once dominated Yeltsin's political entourage have been reduced to the level of a nuisance and are not even present in the State Duma anymore. Despite this, their electorate remained relatively stable even throughout the years of economic hardships, which had been blamed on many of these 'reformers'. Thus, it is difficult to believe that voters who turned their backs on Nemtsov, Khakamada and Yavlinsky did so because of their track records.

Communists went from being 'the other' power in Russia's politics of the 1990s to find themselves with twelve percent of the vote and no meaningful role in the State Duma. If one looks at this plunge using approaches of western political thought, it is hard not to notice a problem. On the one hand, at least a third of the Russian population lives by the standards of a third-world country without hot water and/or plumbing. On the other hand, Moscow is home for the largest number of billionaires in the world. How can a party which calls for a more egalitarian distribution of resources and has the biggest set of local party organisations be losing support in such proportions?

Finally, the party of power, United Russia, had drawn support from all over the former political spectrum, including both Communists and the 'Right'. Why did so many voters who had been voting along the pro-/anti-reform line in the 90s suddenly become supporters of the faceless and ideology-free United Russia?

While our empirical analysis does not answer the above questions directly, the sudden changes in the flow of vote patterns presented in this paper can be viewed as another piece of circumstantial evidence to suggest that the Kremlin played a significant, if not decisive, role in changing the electoral process. First, and foremost, the last electoral cycle looks much more similar to Soviet-style elections than anything that we observed in the 1990s. It is hard not to recall the faces of Leonid Brezhnev or Josef Stalin when many districts report 99.99 per cent turnout with 99 per cent support for Putin or his party. Indeed, our study of turnout distribution figures shows that its patterns switched from being more or less regular before 2000 to being irregular in the last elections. The natural question that arises out of our research is what exactly the Russian government did to change the electoral landscape of the 1990s?

Was it election fraud? Was it a propaganda campaign by state-owned media channels? Was it a systematic abuse of local administrative powers? Or was it the voters' natural drive for what seemed to be more stability as opposed to Yeltsin's chaos?

We believe that while all of the above factors contributed to the change of the electoral landscape, it is important to note that these factors originate in one place: the Kremlin. It was Putin's own perestroika – or 'vertical of power' – that changed not only the rules of the game, but players' incentives that had been forming throughout the 1990s.

When the system of checks and balances is removed, and the only information available to most voters comes from state-owned television channels, politicians value the approval of bosses in Moscow more than support by voters. As our results show, in such an environment, the balloting becomes non-competitive and the most likely result is the one that the Kremlin wants. We saw this effect more in national republics and less in some of the oblasts. That is also consistent with prevailing views that many republics are closer to an authoritarian style of government than several of the oblasts.

Such a system may seem stable because no vital signs of political life can be seen. However this equilibrium is clearly unstable because it relies on decisions by just one person. Like the old Soviet Union that was not able to adjust to new challenges, such a system has only two courses to run – either it is doomed to collapse or it is destined to consolidate its authoritarian character.

Appendix: A Model for the flow of votes

Because our data is aggregated up to the level of individual rayons, our approach is a generalization of Chambers and Steel's (2000)⁷ procedure for ecological regressions. To summarize that methodology without technical details, let X_i denote i 's ($i = 0, 1, \dots, n$) share of the vote in an election (with $i = 0$ denoting nonvoters), and let Y_j denote j 's vote in some earlier election. Then,

$$X_i = b_0 Y_0 + b_1 Y_1 + b_2 Y_2 + \dots + b_n Y_n$$

where $Y_0 + Y_1 + \dots + Y_n = 100$

The difficulty with this approach, detailed in Myagkov and Ordeshook (2001, 2004) is that the validity of our estimates depends on the assumption that rayons are homogeneous – that the same coefficients apply universally. But we have already seen that rayons vary in character, especially if one differentiates republics from oblasts, and rural from urban rayons. The Chambers-Steel approach is to form clusters of similar rayons according to such criteria as percent urban and classification as a republic or oblast, to estimate vote flows within each cluster and then, in effect, to average these flows. Various goodness of fit measures are then used to choose the most appropriate clusters. Formal details of our methodology are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Consider the following model of the flow of votes between elections. Assume that n parties (or candidates) participated in an election #1 and m parties participated in an election #2. The balloting results are available from r electoral districts (TIKs). The following results are available for each TIK (j – is the TIK's number):

⁷ R. L. Chambers and D. G. Steel, Simple methods for ecological inference in 2 . 2 tables. *J. R. Statist. Soc. A*, 164:175–192, 2001.

1. x_{ji} , $1 \leq i \leq n$ - share of all eligible voters who supported candidate i in an election #1.
2. $x_{jn+1} = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^n x_{ji}$ - share of all eligible voters who did not vote in an election #1.
3. y_{ji} , $1 \leq i \leq m$ - share of all eligible voters who supported candidate i in an election #2.
4. $y_{jm+1} = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^m y_{ji}$ - share of all eligible voters who did not vote in an election #2.
5. p_j - total number of all eligible voters in TIK j
6. z_j - vector of additional variables (proxies) with information about TIK j .

For each TIK j and for each candidate i the following equation is satisfied:

$$y_{ji} = \sum_{k=1}^{n+1} \alpha_{jik} x_{jk} \quad (1)$$

where α_{jik} is equal to the candidate's k share in the election #1 who voted for candidate i in the election #2 (in TIK j)

We need to find the total share of votes that went from candidate k (in the election #1) to the candidate i (in the election #2). It is determined by the following equation:

$$\delta_{ik} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^r \alpha_{jik} p_j x_{jk}}{\sum_{j=1}^r p_j x_{jk}} \quad (2)$$

Below we discuss two different methods of estimating (2).

Goodman Regression (OLS)

In this simple model⁸ ([4],[5]) we assume that the coefficients

α_{jik} in equation (1) are such as:

$$\alpha_{jii} = \alpha_{ik} + \varepsilon_{jik}, \quad E[\varepsilon_{jik} \mid x_{j1}, \dots, x_{jn+1}] = 0 \quad (3)$$

Therefore equation (1) can be rewritten as follows

$$y_{ji} = \sum_{k=1}^{n+1} \alpha_{ik} x_{jk} + \varepsilon_{ji} \quad (4)$$

where

$$\varepsilon_{ji} = \sum_{k=1}^{n+1} \varepsilon_{jik} x_{jk}$$

and it follows that:

$$E[\varepsilon_{ji} \mid x_{j1}, \dots, x_{jn+1}] = 0$$

Therefore, the OLS estimation of equation (4) can be used to estimate α_{ik} for $1 \leq k \leq n+1$. This estimation produces consistent estimates of δ_{ik} through the estimates of α_{ik} since

$$\delta_{ik} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^r \alpha_{jik} p_j x_{jk}}{\sum_{j=1}^r p_j x_{jk}} = \alpha_{ik} + \frac{\sum_{j=1}^r \varepsilon_{jik} p_j x_{jk}}{\sum_{j=1}^r p_j x_{jk}}$$

⁸ For this please see L. Goodman, 'Ecological regression and the behavior of individuals'. *Am. Sociol. Rev.*, 18:663–664, 1953 and L. Goodman. Some alternatives to ecological correlation. *Am. J. Sociol.*, 4:610–625, 1959.

Notice, that instead of using OLS, we can use other more sophisticated versions of linear estimation, such as WLS, for example.

Nonparametric Estimation:

It is often the case that assumption (3) can not be satisfied. The methodology outlined below (and mostly used in this paper) is not based on the assumption that the coefficients hold constant across all electoral districts. This model is a generalization of the model introduced in [1] for the case $m=n=1$.

Assume that:

$$\alpha_{ik} = f_{ik}(z_j) + e_{jik} \quad (5)$$

where f_{ik} - are some (unknown functions). These functions can be estimated as follows:

$$\hat{f}_i(z) = \left(\sum_{j=1}^r K(H^{-1}(z_j - z)) x_j x_j' \right)^{-1} \left(\sum_{j=1}^r K(H^{-1}(z_j - z)) x_j y_{ji} \right)$$

where $x_j = (x_{j1}, \dots, x_{jn+1})'$, $f_i = (f_{i1}, \dots, f_{in+1})'$, K – nucleus (weight function), H – matrix of “window size”⁹. As H we can choose

$$h \hat{\Sigma}^{-1/2},$$

where $\hat{\Sigma}$ - matrix of z_j covariates estimates, and h is a constant. As K we can take density function of any multidimensional probability distribution. Another way to get K is to use a function that is uniformly distributed in the area around z that contains exactly K neighbouring data points from our sample.

⁹ W. Hardle. Applied Nonparametric Regression Analysis. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

The main ideal of our methodology is fairly simple: to estimate f_i in point z we give more weight (the weight is determined by function K and matrix H) to those observations that are closer to z , and then use weighted OLS to get the estimates.

It is easy to see that under some basic assumptions (smoothness of f_i etc.) the estimates $\hat{f}_i(z)$ will be consistent and asymptotically normal when $r \rightarrow \infty$ and $h \rightarrow 0$. In particular:

$$\hat{\delta}_{ik} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^r \hat{f}_{ik}(z_j) p_j x_{jk}}{\sum_{j=1}^r p_j x_{jk}} \xrightarrow{p} \delta_{ik}$$

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