

THE PECULIARITY OF RUSSIAN POLITICS: AUTHORITARIANISM, CIVIC CULTURE,
AND THE ISSUE OF ELECTORAL FALSIFICATION

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In recent years much has been said both about Russia's status as a democracy, as well as the issue of falsification in Russian elections. While there is little reason to challenge the assertion that Russia's transition from dictatorship to democracy has been far from satisfactory, much more can be said about the nature of its elections. While the nature of Russian politics are such that virtually no national election is fair, I argue that it is not clear that elections in Russia do not represent, on the whole, the will of the Russian people.

This thesis draws primarily on two approaches: the use of opinion poll results and the comparison of returns from national and local elections. Utilizing these two resources I argue that it is rational to conclude that the majority of Russians support and vote for Putin, Medvedev, and generally candidates of the party United Russia. Given this conclusion, I examine several hypotheses which attempt to explain why Russians support their leaders, paying particular attention to the popularity of Putin and the cultural aspect of authoritarianism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- *"It will not happen soon, if it ever happens at all, that Russia will become the second edition of, say, the U.S. or Britain in which liberal values have deep historic traditions." - Vladimir Putin*

1.1 DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS IN RUSSIA

That Russia's status as a democracy is in dispute should come as no surprise .¹ What originally looked like a triumph for democracy following the fall of the Soviet Union has instead led to a quasi-authoritarian state wherein the office of the president has not changed hands from one party to another in the Russian Federation's seventeen years of existence. Moreover, political victories for Vladimir Putin, his hand-picked successor Dmitri Medvedev, as well as his party of power United Russia seem only to have become more predictable since the former's rise to power in 2000. Indeed, in the past two presidential elections both Putin (2004) and Medvedev (2008) officially won more than 70% of the popular vote, far more than Putin's 53% in 2000. The official support for United Russia, the overwhelmingly dominant party in parliament which has unequivocally supported Putin since its inception (although both Putin and Medvedev are technically independents), has grown astronomically over the past few election cycles, as well.

Such impressive increases in support for Putin, Medvedev, and United Russia, both at the national level and the local level, have met with accusations of cries of unfairness and falsification. Such accusations, which typically denounce Kremlin-orchestrated attempts to

1 See Freedom House, "Map of Freedom in the World," <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009> (accessed November 28, 2009); The Economist, "The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index," http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/DEMOCRACY_TABLE_2007_v3.pdf; Luke March, "Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastal Opposition."

suppress opposition parties and tamper with election results are in fact nothing new to Russia.² The electoral environment in Russia is certainly neither fair nor conducive to fostering healthy democratization, and many Russians, as we shall see, understand that the country is not fairly run. However, the implication that apparent support for Putin, Medvedev and United Russia is an illusion, artificially created by electoral fraud is not at all clear. In spite of undemocratic control wielded by the current government, I hope to show that the majority of Russians do indeed support their elected officials, despite any isolated falsification.

The focus of what follows is three-fold: I intend to explore whether there are good reasons to conclude that substantial voter fraud has regularly taken place in Russia to the degree that certain candidates would not otherwise be easily elected. In fact, I hope to show that there is good reason to conclude that, despite Putin's machinations, both he and representatives from United Russia in the Duma (Russia's lower house of parliament) are fairly elected in what may be called the minimalist sense that they simply receive the majority of votes. Secondly, given the falsification that does take place, I examine what best explains the Russian populace's general support for Putin and his party, given the clear authoritarian and anti-democratic nature of Putin's government. The final section explores what support for Putin-Medvedev government might say about Russia's political culture.

In what follows I begin by outlining the political situation currently in place in Russia, explaining the history and platform of major political parties and voting trends over roughly the past ten years. I address accusations of falsification by drawing on and comparing election returns from several local elections in 2009 and 2010 in order to first to detect any clear signs of

² See Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov, and Andrei Ryabov, *Between Dictatorship and Democracy*, 42, 49, 51; The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Report," http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2004/06/3033_ed.pdf.

voter fraud for United Russia at the local level. These results are compared with the results of the national Duma election of 2007 to judge how realistic official support for United Russia appears to be at the national level. I then turn to the results of several different polling organizations to lend credibility to the argument that the majority of Russians favor (and thus in all likelihood vote for) United Russia. Chapter three elaborates upon the nature of the current government in place, explaining how it has shaped society and how, regardless of any electoral legitimacy, it has suppressed civil society, strengthened the central government, and fostered a system that marginalizes opposition parties, thus making it very unlikely for opposition candidates to win offices of national importance.

The remainder of this paper addresses not why Russia has the government it has, but rather, given the present government Russia does have, why Russians approve of it. Of particular importance here is the examination of whether Russia has a significantly different political culture from Western countries. Particular attention to whether Russians are for or against a democratic form of government and whether concepts such as authoritarianism and nationalism are essential to understanding Russian approval ratings.

1.2 THE POLITICAL ARENA IN RUSSIA

After roughly seventy years of single-party rule, Gorbachev's implementation of *glasnost'* ("openness"), *perestroika* ("rebuilding"), and *novoe myshlenie* ("new thinking") in the late 1980's introduced a relaxation to government interference and suppression in the lives of Soviet citizens. At the same time Gorbachev's new policies gradually allowed for the creation of opposition political parties. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union their number rapidly

multiplied. Since the early 1990's, however, only a handful have maintained any real relevance. By the mid 1990's, for example, only a small fraction of regional parliamentary deputies and governors belonged to any party.³ Perhaps more importantly, survey data showed that party affiliation was a poor predictor of policy implementation.⁴

Table 1, found at the end of this chapter, attempts to illustrate the differences amongst Russia's major political parties. It is impossible to sort these parties out perfectly along a single left-right axis, given the inherent murkiness of Russian politics in general. Nonetheless, the table provides an estimation of where the parties stand on very general issues.

Without a doubt, the most powerful and influential party remains United Russia, the latest successor in a line of parties of power that stand for little more than support for the Kremlin. Formed by the combination of Unity (the party of power which supported Yeltsin without fail) and the party bloc Fatherland and All Russia, United Russia was assembled after the election of Putin to president in 2000, and has since produced little more than steadfast support for Putin's (and now Medvedev's) policies. United Russia has been depicted as being neither a true political party nor a mass movement,⁵ as well as nothing more than a party "of bureaucrats and policy makers"⁶ with a "bland and ideologically ambiguous platform" which relies heavily on its control of mass media.⁷ Like other parties of power its strength comes from the use "of broader regime-type relationships...used instrumentally by those already there to remain in power."⁸ In advertising United Russia's platform, former party leader Boris Gryzlov has only offered such

3 Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, "Central Governing Incapacity and the Weakness of Political Parties," 136-137.

4 Ibid.

5 Richard Sakwa, "Elections and National Integration in Russia," 125.

6 Andrew Konitzer, *Electing Russia's Governors*, 223.

7 Nicklaus Laverty, "Limited Choices: Russian Opposition Parties and the 2007 Duma Elections," 365.

8 Luke March, "Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime," 505.

banalities as the "ideology of success" and "common sense."⁹ Indeed, United Russia's political ambiguity leads it to such contradictory stances as a call for both free markets and state regulation.¹⁰ Because of such contradictions, on top of the party's ambiguous stance on almost every issue, I classify it as centrist.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (hereafter CPRF) arguably represents the strongest opposition party to United Russia, though its popularity has waned dramatically over the last ten years. Originally outlawed after the fall of the Soviet Union, the revived CPRF emphasizes Russian nationalism,¹¹ while deemphasizing its Marxist-Leninist heritage by blaming those who deviated from the proper socialist philosophy under the Soviet Union.¹² Its platform does claim, however, that Lenin's maxim concerning imperialism as the final stage of capitalism has been confirmed.¹³ The CPRF has pushed for "voluntary" reinstatement of USSR, but advocates power through constitutional means.¹⁴ Like the Communist Part of the Soviet Union, the CPRF is highly critical of capitalism, calling it a "path to social repression, which leads to national catastrophe and the end of Russia's civilization."¹⁵ However, unlike the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, its platform is acceptant of private property, as well as private control of production, although it does advocate state regulation in the areas of agriculture and finance.¹⁶ It is perhaps the most grassroots party still active in Russia, being the only one, for example, to distribute information to potential voters in traditional forms of posters, hand-outs, etc.¹⁷ It is

9 Stephen White, "The Political Parties," 85.

10 Ibid.

11 Derek Hutcheson, *Political Parties in the Russian Regions*, 20.

12 J.T. Ishiyama and S. Shafqat, "Party Identity Change in Post-Communist Politics," 445-446.

13 *Kommunisticheskaia Partia Rossijskoj Federatsii*, <http://kprf.ru/party/program>.

14 Laverty, 370.

15 <http://kprf.ru/party/program>

16 Ishiyama and Shadqat, 445-446.

17 Sakwa, 125.

also the only opposition party with a national structure and a party press.¹⁸ Led by Gennady Zyuganev, the CPRF has traditionally performed the strongest in the south-west (politically known as the "red belt") amongst typically older, less-educated, and below-average income groups.¹⁹

Also on the left side of the political spectrum is the rather new Fair Russia. Formed through the alliance of previous parties Rodina, the Pensioner's Party, and the Party of Life, Fair Russia emphatically pushes for a socialist government. Distancing itself somewhat from the communistic government of the USSR, the official party program of Fair Russia decries the "Soviet Socialism" as implying (among other things) a command economy, "the hypertrophy of government [owned] property...a single party system, and terror before great leaders."²⁰ However, the party's platform praises the socialist system of the Soviet Union for its industrial production, provision of infrastructure, and the building of "the best educational system in the world."²¹ Led by Speaker of the Federation Council Sergei Mironov (Russia's upper chamber of parliament), Fair Russia absorbed The United Socialist Party of Russia, as well as the Russian Ecological Party. The CPRF, however, balked at an offer to join forces. Despite its declared intention to provide a left alternative to the supposed center-right status of United Russia, some have charged Fair Russia for being a puppet of the Kremlin meant to imitate the economically socialist stance of the CPRF and thereby sap away the latter's support.²²

Yabloko, whose name means "apple" in Russian through a partial acronym of the last names of founding members Gregori Yavlinsky, Yuri Boldyrev, and Vladimir Lukin, arguably

18 White, 84.

19 Hutcheson, 23-24.

20 *Spravedliia Rossiia*, http://www.spravedlivo.ru/information/section_11/section_99/p_5.

21 Ibid.

22 Nabi Abdullaev, "New 'Just Russia' Party Says Putin Knows Best," *The St. Petersburg Times*, October 31, 2006, http://www.times.spb.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=19303, (accessed March 16, 2010).

comes closest to representing European liberalism. It typically supports a more dovish foreign policy and has called for membership in the European Union, having asserted that Russia is culturally a European country.²³ Like most liberally-oriented parties its platform calls for the inviolability of personal property, competition in both economics and politics, the strengthening of democratic institutions, the supremacy of the law. It has traditionally been stronger in larger cities and amongst the better educated.²⁴ Its liberal platform on individual rights and a separation of governmental power was mirrored to a certain degree by the now defunct party Union of Right Forces, though the latter was less enthusiastic about wealth redistribution.²⁵ Currently under the leadership of Sergei Mitrokhin, Yabloko is threatened with political extinction, having lost all representation in the Duma following the 2007 elections.

The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (hereafter LDPR) represents the last of the traditionally important opposition parties. The name is something of a misnomer, since the party is anything if not liberally orientated and has been depicted as supporting a far-right, quasi-fascist platform,²⁶ while others have depicted the LDPR as advocating what might be called an "empire-restorer" type of nationalism.²⁷ The party is led by the pugnacious and bombastic Vladimir Zhirinovski, a unique figure in the world of politics who is not above throwing water on or even threatening to have his bodyguards threaten personal opponents. In addition to calling for the restoration of Russia's "natural borders" (to include Ukraine, Belarus, parts of Central Asia, and even Alaska), Zhirinovski has recommended the support of Islam as a means of weakening the U.S. and Western Christianity.²⁸ Accordingly, Zhirinovski has, unlike Yabloko,

23 White, 86-87.

24 Hutcheson, 23-24.

25 White, 87.

26 Ibid.

27 Sven Gunnar, Nationalism and the Russian Political Spectrum," 273.

28 White, 88.

asserted that Russia is not part of Europe, but rather an "independent civilization." Its official platform goes further, insisting that anything borrowed from the West cannot naturally be assimilated in Russia due to the idiosyncratic nature of its civilization and history, adding that part of its purpose is to rescue Russia from its "democratic hangover."²⁹ The LDPR has been traditionally stronger in the north and east, largely amongst uneducated males in rural regions.³⁰ Despite strong results in Duma elections following the fall of the Soviet Union, LDPR's popularity has significantly declined since 1993.

1.3 TABLES

Table 1.1 Russia's Major Political Parties³¹

Party	Government Control of the Economy	Welfare State	Cooperation with West/U.S.	Personal Freedom
United Russia	Center	Center	Center	Center
CPRF	Far Left	Far Left	Right	Center
LDPR	Left	Left	Far Right	Right
Yablako	Right	Right	Left	Left
Fair Russia	Left	Left	Center	Center

²⁹ LDPR, <http://www.ldpr.ru/partiia>.

³⁰ Hutcheson, 22.

³¹ In this chart I take "left" to mean that position on the political spectrum which is generally for more government control in the economy and less government interference in personal liberties. "Right" should be understood to be the very opposite.

CHAPTER 2

VOTING IN RUSSIA

2.1 THE ISSUE OF FALSIFICATION

As already mentioned, opposition leaders, area analysts, and other politicians in Russia have accused the Kremlin of having a hand in falsifying election results. Writing for *Foreign Policy* in 2009, Lilia Shevtsova of The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace asserts, for example, that Nicolas Sarkozys comments about the Kremlin imply a tacit approval for "manipulated elections."³² Dmitri Simes and Paul Saunders agree, claiming that the democratic parties in Russia are partially burdened by "electoral manipulation."³³

Of particular notoriety has been the local Duma and mayoral elections of October 2009, an event in Russian politics so controversial that three of Russia's opposition parties, which typically end up falling in line with Kremlin policies, walked out of parliament in protest. Nikoai Petrov, for example, asserts that "the real picture" of the election is "without a doubt" not reflected in the official returns.³⁴ The Kremlin's alleged tactic, according to his analysis, consists in honestly reporting the first 25% or so of election returns, while the remaining are indiscriminately attributed to United Russia.³⁵ Writing in *The St. Petersburg Times*, Konstantin Sonin similarly decries the Kremlin for flagrant falsification in the 2009 Moscow Duma election. Major discrepancies found between two districts in Moscow show, so he argues, the unmistakable sign of falsification: whereas district 160, for example, reported a paltry turnout of 18.3 percent with United Russia receiving a modest 32.6% of the returns, in district 161

32 Lilia Shevtsova, "The Kremlin Kowtow."

33 Dimitri K. Simes and Paul J. Sanders, "The Kremlin Begs to Differ."

34 Nikolai Petkov, "Digging Their Own Graves at Polls."

35 Ibid.

turnout was reported to be 94.6%, with a 77.8% win for United Russia: the evidence for fraud according to him thus lies partially in the the suspiciously high turnout.³⁶ Chairman of Fair Russia Sergei Mironov has also slammed United Russia for forging votes in several regional elections of October 2009.³⁷

In support of the those who argue for significant falsification, it should be pointed out that a rather large number of ordinary Russians are also skeptical of the legitimacy of elections. Upwards of 75% of supports of LDPR and KPRF felt that seats in the Moscow Duma elections of October 2009 had been predetermined and that members of the electoral commission simply closed their eyes to falsification.³⁸ Somewhat more ambiguous is the fact that even 44% of those who supported United Russia indicated that there was no real competition to the elections³⁹ Since these were *supporters* of United Russia, this seems to either imply the belief in major falsification or the observation that United Russia is so strong no other party can reasonably compete with it.

A much more nuanced picture, however, can be ascertained through various opinion polls. As far as the 2009 election for Moscow's Duma is concerned, for example, only 17% of those polled felt that serious falsifications had taken place, with a relative majority of 48% denying any sort of falsification and 35% unable to answer.⁴⁰ Similarly, only 11% of respondents claimed to have experienced any sort of pressure to vote one way or the other by local

36 Konstantin Sonin, "Falsification Par Excellence," The St. Petersburg Times, http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=30128, (accessed March 12, 2010).

37 "Litsom k Litsu," Radio Svoboda, March 7, 2010, http://www.svobodanews.ru/archive/ru_bz_ftf/latest/896/110.html (accessed March 10, 2010).

38 Levada Centre, "Monitoring Elektoral'nyx Predpochtenij na Vyborax 2009 goda v Moskovskuyu Gorodskovckuyu Dumu," <http://www.levada.ru/press/2009122501.html>.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

institutions, supervisors, or any others.⁴¹ In fact, voter satisfaction with the results of the Moscow Duma elections grew considerably from December 2005 to October 2009: those who felt satisfied with the results increased from 29% to 42%, while those who were unsatisfied dropped from 32% to 26% (those who were unable to answer dropped slightly from 39% to 35%).⁴²

It should be emphasized at this point that there is little reason to doubt that limited falsification takes place in some locations in Russia. There are indeed several examples since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1996 presidential election the CPRF candidate Gennady Ziuganov won 38.3% of the vote in Tartarstan, only to see his real percentage paradoxically drop in the second round to 32.3%.⁴³ In the 2000 presidential election, Vladimir Shevchuk, head of the Tartarstan Elections Press Center admitted that in fact some votes were bought for Putin.⁴⁴

Moreover, data collected during the 2008 Presidential Elections indicate suspiciously different numbers of eligible voters within a very short amount of time--the point being that in districts where the second count of eligible voters indicated a decrease in that number, votes that were eventually cast for non-Medvedev candidates were purged; on the other hand, the extra votes were allegedly attributed to Medvedev in districts in which it was reported that the number of eligible voters had increased.⁴⁵ According to the Inter-Regional Union of Voters, in twenty-three regions of Moscow voter turnout rates were reported to be as suspiciously high as (+ 95%) in the presidential election. Moreover, ninety-five percent of all votes in supplementary turnouts went to Medvedev, instead of being split among the major candidates as one would expect statistically. The independent electoral observational association Golos contends that multiple

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed*, 33.

44 Ibid., 42-43.

45 Mezhhregional'niia Obshchestvennaia Organizatsiia Sodejstviia Realizatsii Izberatel'nykh Prav, <http://www.votas.ru>.

accounts of voter fraud were captured on camera in Moscow, as well as Rostov Oblast.⁴⁶ They assert, for example, that some officials were actually awarded if falsification was detected in the regions.⁴⁷

These claims are backed up by computer scientist Sergei Shipilkin's statistical analysis of the 2008 Presidential Election. The results of his analysis, similar to what the Inter-Regional Union of Voters' examination pointed to, indicate unexplainable results for Medvedev in districts where turnout was unusually high.⁴⁸ At the highest turnout levels support for Medvedev spiked at levels oddly ending in either 0 or .5. The conclusion is that it is statistically improbable that these sort of results would occur without interference.

We are left then at something of an impasse. There is no shortage of those who agree that elections have been tarnished by voter fraud in favor of United Russia or any candidate that the party endorses. On top of this, there is indeed evidence of at least some falsification in the past, in particular in the Caucasus and Tartarstan. Several questionnaires also indicate that a significant number of Russians doubt the veracity and competitiveness of elections. I argue, however, that what evidence there is of fraud does not show that the majority of Russians do not support Putin, Medvedev, and United Russia, nor does it show that any of these three would not be elected by a solid majority in major national elections without any fraud. Shipilkin's statistical analysis of the 2008 Presidential Election, for example, concluded that even if the alleged fraudulent votes were removed, Medvedev would still have captured 63% of the vote (instead of 70%)--enough to preclude a runoff. The various opinions of voters at this point in our analysis is

46 Golos, "Vybory v Rossii 11 Oktiabri 2009 Goda," http://www.golos.org/IMG/pdf/Doklad_GOLOS_11-10-2009.pdf (accessed March 12, 2010): 111.

47 Ibid., 98.

48 Tony Halpin, "Dmitri Medvedev Votes Were Rigged, Says Computer Boffin," Times Online, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article3768223.ece>, (accessed March 18, 2010).

not satisfactorily uniform to argue conclusively one way or the other. Moreover, since these two phenomena (falsification and voter satisfaction) seem mutually inconsistent, more evidence must be brought to bare on the problem at hand.

In order to better analyze claims of falsification, I turn to data from elections in order to cast more light on the plausibility of the hypothesis that falsification occurs in significant amounts. I first illustrate the results of national Duma elections in order to show the suspicious rise in popularity of United Russia. I then turn to the highly controversial local elections of October 2009. The goal in this section is to compare the results of cities where elections were accused of being fixed (e.g. Moscow) with those where there was little or no controversy. Finally, I compare these results with the results of local and regional elections which took place in March of 2010, since these were generally viewed to be more honest. The obvious assumption is that similar support for United Russia candidates in local and regional elections validates (within reasonable assumptions) results for United Russia in major national elections and thus militates against claims of falsification (at least of a wide-spread, significant nature).

I admit at least two caveats to the analysis: the data is not presented in any statistical context, but rather is meant to provide a general impression of the degree to which Russians support United Russia from city to city; furthermore, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that the returns in one electoral district should mirror those of another (just as there is no reason, for example, to assume that the results of Houston will match those of Boston in U.S. elections). With that in mind, I compare voting across many districts in order to provide a general picture.

Table 2.1 shows that United Russia gained drastically in popularity by late 2007 and serves as an illustration of the sort of increased support that many find suspicious. The data also

point to voter abandonment of the CPRF in droves and the near extinction of Yabloko. The roughly 25% increase in proportional returns was suspicious enough to motivate the European Commission to urge the Kremlin to examine claims of voter fraud.⁴⁹ Indeed, even 50% of those polled by the Levada Centre in March of 2007 felt that the counting of votes for the Duma would be done dishonestly.⁵⁰

While it is true that the Kremlin has exercised near hegemonic control in the realm of Russian politics, through its tightening control over much of the mass media, intimidation, and the manipulation of electoral laws, which has thus giving the party an unfair advantage in almost any election, the point in question is whether there is substantive evidence of wide scale voter falsification significant enough to have altered election results, and alone this increase is *prima facie* insufficient.

In defense of the legitimacy of these first numbers for the national Duma, for example, it might somewhat naively be pointed out that United Russia's share of the vote in 2003 (37.6 %) is almost the same as the combined results of Unity and FAR in 2000 (36.6%). This is interesting since United Russia was formed through the combination of both Unity and FAR. And as far as the precipitous fall in popularity of the KPRF, is concerned, it has been argued that CPRF's disappointing performance, beginning in 2003, is to be blamed mostly on economic performance in the country, and not interference by the Kremlin.⁵¹ However, while this might lend some credibility to the legitimacy of the 2004 Duma elections, it does little to explain the apparent huge jump in popularity for United Russia in 2007.

Before examining the data, it is worth mentioning that a more damaging case against the

49 "EU Calls on Russia to Answer Election Criticism," Forbes.com, December 4, 2007, <http://www.forbes.com/feeds/afx/2007/12/04/afx4401951.html> (accessed March 20, 2010).

50 Levada Centre, <http://www.levada.ru/vybory2007.html>.

51 Lavery, 372.

assertion of substantial falsification can be made by comparing the returns for United Russia with approval for the party during the time of the elections. Interestingly, United Russia's November results for the 2007 Duma election (which occurred in December of that year) of 64.3% corresponds closely to its approval rating of 66% in November (polling results for November are given provided since results for the month of December were not collected until after the election).⁵² In fact, approval for United Russia had steadily climbed through 2007 from a low of 49% in January to a slightly higher 67% in October.⁵³ The other correlation for the other parties is not far off either. The CPRF's return of 11.6% is very close to its November approval rating of 12%, the LDPR's share of 8.1% is almost identical to its 8.0% rating, Fair Russia's 7.74% is close to its 6%, and Yabloko's return of 1.0% is not far from its 2.0% approval rating.⁵⁴

The crucial test at this point is to compare voting result-approval rating correspondences with the 2003 Duma election. I submit that a similar trend, wherein party approval rating accurately predicts voting returns, argues against the claim of major falsification and places a greater burden of proof on those arguing such to produce more substantive evidence. In fact, the correspondence with the 2003 Duma election is less accurate than the correspondence between the 2007 Duma election and polls at the time, though it does predict a similar picture: United Russia claimed 37.6% of the vote in December of 2003, but had an approval rating of roughly 30% in November of 2003. The Union of Right Forces return of 4.0% is close to its approval rating of 6.0%, while the LDPR's 11.45% of the vote is not too distant from its then approval rating of 8%.⁵⁵ The real outlier is the KPRF, which had an approval rating of 23% at the time, but

52 Levada Centre, "Rejtingi Partij za 2007 god," <http://www.levada.ru/reitingi2007.html>.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Levada Centre, "Rejtingi Partij po Mesyatsam," <http://www.levada.ru/reitingi.html>.

inexplicably took only 12.61% of the vote.⁵⁶ The correspondence between approval rating and voting results is therefore not quite as precise for 2003 as it is for 2007, but the relationship is on the whole the same.

Since this sort of evidence alone may be insufficiently compelling, I now turn to results for the controversial October 11, 2009 city Duma elections. The purpose of this section is both to examine any general inconsistencies that would suggest falsification at the local level, as well as expose considerable discrepancies between support for United Russia in national and local elections. The hypothesis here is that considerably and consistently less support for United Russia at the local level suggests, *ceteris paribus*, that very high support for United Russia candidates at the national level should be called into question.

Table 2.2 lists the district results of the first three major regions of the of the Moscow Duma election. These results reveal that returns like those mentioned earlier, where support for United Russia eclipsed 70%, are the exception to the rule. To be sure, support for United Russia varies roughly between 45% and 65%. One one must exercise caution, however, in drawing specific conclusions, since, as the table illustrates, in some races United Russia candidates ran against several competing candidates (which naturally reduces the total support for United Russia) while in other races only two or three candidates competed. Furthermore, there is no reason to assume that the results of one region should necessarily closely correspond to the next. We must admit to agnosticism therefore, as to whether there is anything of concern in the 20-30 gap in support for United Russia between regions within a single city. We may, nonetheless, tentatively conclude that regions two and three of Table 2.2 contain rather suspicious results, since United Russia captured over 70% of the returns and five candidates ran in each race. The

⁵⁶ Ibid.

vast majority of this sample, however, provides no obvious evidence of falsification.

To further test the legitimacy of these results I now turn to the city Duma elections for the cities of Irkutsk and Kurgansk, found in Table 2.3 and 2.4. These data on the whole do not appear to differ markedly from the Moscow Duma results. Once again, United Russia candidates won almost every single race. These races do contain a few districts with suspiciously high results for United Russia, such as districts seven, nine, and fourteen in the Irkutsk election and districts 21 and 25 in the Kurgansk election, but by and large the data parallel those of Moscow, save the fact that here an independent, Fair Russia, or CPRF candidate did in fact win the occasional seat. Crucially, there does not seem to be noticeably less evidence of falsification, which in turn would (given our background assumptions) argue against claims that the Moscow Duma election was riddled with fraud. As in the Moscow elections, the number of competitors varied between local contests, which partially explains the range in support for United Russia candidates.

As a final comparison I compare data from the March 14, 2010 city Duma elections found in Table 2.5 and 2.6. This is arguably the best test yet, since analysts such as Nikolai Petkov of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace called these elections "relatively honest" in contrast to the October 2009 elections.⁵⁷ The results of these elections do show a few differences with those of October 2009. For example, in no district in the Ivanovo election did a United Russia candidate win 60% or more of the vote. Nonetheless, the general picture is roughly the same, especially in view of United Russia's virtual sweep of both elections. If we are generous to the falsification hypothesis and assume that the results of the 2010 elections are a more accurate picture of support for United Russia in the country we could say that in the worst

⁵⁷ Nikolai Petkov, "March Elections: United Voting Day in Russia," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://www.carnegie.ru/en/news/84231.htm>.

case a modest amount of fraudulent votes were added to the 2009 elections. But perhaps even this gives the falsification too much. Note, for example, that there are few obvious differences between the Kurgansk city дума election of 2009 and the regional election for the Kurgansk regional election of 2010. The essential difference may lie in the city of Ivanovo itself.

Having compared these results in an admittedly non-rigorous way, it nonetheless seems safe to say that a strong majority of voters cast their vote in favor of United Russia. I argue that there is insufficient evidence that the Moscow Duma election of 2009 was not a general reflection of the will of those who cast their votes. Extrapolating from these local elections, I submit that it is reasonable to conclude that United Russia in fact legitimately won the 2007 national Duma election; the 63.40% it supposedly captured does not seem to be unrealistic, and if judged against the results of 2010 Ivanovo election, was at worst probably only slightly inflated. Furthermore, I argue that it is unlikely that the Kremlin would have the time or have gone to the trouble to falsify hundreds of district races, and if it had, it is unlikely it would have randomly allowed for wins for CPRF or Fair Russia, for example.

I have, admittedly, provided no knock-down argument against falsification at the local or national level. The data presented above do not present a perfectly clear picture, since no statistical analysis of the results is performed. This is compounded somewhat by the ambiguity of support for United Russia in some races, since the number of competing candidates at times varies sharply from district to another. Moreover, comparing the results of different cities ignores other potential factors, such as varying support for the CPRF across regions, which would ideally need to be controlled for. However, since most of the local elections that took place in October of 2009 were not repeated in March of 2010, there are few options aside from comparing different

cities against one another, or comparing different types of elections in the same city. Nonetheless, this general snapshot of Russian voting trends illustrates that little if anything immediately jumps out which might suggest significant falsification.

2.2 POLL RESULTS

The argument that the majority of Russians support United Russia candidates in national elections, including the 2008 Presidential Election, can be strengthened by the detailed examination of opinion polls. In examining the average Russian approval of Putin/Medvedev and United Russia I draw upon polling data conducted by, the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), the Foundation for Public Opinion, and the Levada Centre, the founder of which often appears as a guest on *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (arguably the radio station most critical of the Kremlin). Results from both the Levada Centre and the Russian Public Opinion Research Center, moreover, are widely relied upon by the Center for the Study of Public Policy at the University of Aberdeen.

The results of nearly every relevant poll point to extremely high approval rates of both Putin and Medvedev--almost 80%--as well as general trust in the intentions and capabilities of the government.⁵⁸ One recently taken poll, moreover, suggests that Putin would easily be re-elected were he to run again for president.⁵⁹ Medvedev, similarly, would be re-elected if pitted against any other non-Putin candidates in a presidential election.⁶⁰ When asked to what degree they trust their politicians, 58% claim to trust Medvedev, with 26% saying they partially trust

58 Levada Centre, "Odobrenie i Doverie," <http://www.levada.ru/prezident.html>.

59 Center for the Study of Public Policy University of Aberdeen, "Voting Behaviour-Presidency," http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency_vote_preferences.php.

60 Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), "Electoral'nyj Rejting Politikov (s Iyunya 2008)," <http://wciom.com/news/ratings/electoral-rating-of-political-leaders.html>.

him, and only 13% professing distrust; 64% say they trust Putin, with 21% saying only partially, and only 12% not trusting him.⁶¹ Furthermore, Putin and Medvedev are also the most improved politicians in terms of popularity. When asked for which politicians their opinion had improved in the last month, 17% and 16% listed Putin and Medvedev (respectively)--roughly 10% higher than number three Zhirinovski.⁶²

United Russia more or less maintains its high popularity demonstrated in the previous section. It is, for example, the overwhelmingly the popular choice for theoretical Duma elections at 54% were they to be held today according to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center⁶³ and 51% according to the Obshchestvennyj Fond, roughly 40 points higher than the second most popular party KPRF.⁶⁴ Interestingly, one poll shows that the KPRF, which 7% responded they would support ranks far behind those who said they would vote for no one (19%) and those who were unsure how to answer (11%).⁶⁵ This decline in the popularity of the KPRF, sans the noticeable increase in support for any other opposition party, implies strong if not increased support for United Russia.

Furthermore, the results go on to suggest that Russian approval of Putin and his party is logically consistent with other beliefs and cannot be attributed to, say, misleading questions or voter indifference. That is to say, approval for Putin and Medvedev correctly predicts a corresponding lack of approval for other parties and their candidates. Indeed, those polled not only express approval for United Russia but also strong *disapproval* for other parties and their

61 Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie, "Politicheskie Indikatory: Prezident," <http://bd.fom.ru/pdf/d09ind10.pdf>.

62 Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie, "Otnoshenie k Politikam," <http://bd.fom.ru/pdf/d09polit10.pdf>.

63 Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), "Electoral Rating of Parties," <http://wciom.com/news/ratings/electoral-rating-of-political-parties.html>.

64 Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie, "Politicheskie Indikatory: Prezident," <http://bd.fom.ru/pdf/d09ind10.pdf>.

65 Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), "Electoral Rating of Parties," <http://wciom.com/news/ratings/electoral-rating-of-political-parties.html>.

candidates. When polled by the Levada Centre as to which party they would never consider supporting, the largest number of respondents confessed to never being able to consider voting for LDPR, followed by the CPRF and Yablako.⁶⁶ In fact, United Russia was second only to Fair Russia (out of six) in the list of most detested parties.⁶⁷ Similarly, in February of 2008 the Levada Centre showed that Medvedev was the least hated candidate, while the relative majority (44%) of respondents professed to under no circumstances being able to consider voting for A. Bagdanov (incidentally, the most liberally-minded candidate), followed by 43% who felt the same for Zhirinovskiy.⁶⁸

Moreover, opinion polls reveal that approval for Putin not can not be explained as support for Putin *qua* the office of the president or prime minister. While the president has maintained large approval ratings, it is of particular interest to note that the office of prime minister trailed the office of the president tremendously in approval by roughly 40-50 points from the beginning of 2005 to early 2008--that is, during the time that Putin was president. However, shortly after Medvedev was elected president in 2008 and Putin was almost immediately appointed prime minister, approval ratings for the latter office soared; approval, in fact, rose high enough to slightly eclipse that of the president.⁶⁹ Yet another poll concerning confidence in political leaders shows that Putin again edges out Medvedev.⁷⁰

Given the above results, I submit that it is even less likely that claims of major falsification hold water. Conservatively we can at least say the following: if these polls are even

66 Levada Centre, <http://www.levada.ru/vybory20074.html>.

67 Ibid.

68 Levada Centre, <http://www.levada.ru/vybory20080.html>

69 Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), "Ratings of State Institutions," <http://wciom.com/news/ratings/ratings-of-state-institutions.html>

70 Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), "Confidence in Political Leaders," <http://wciom.com/news/ratings/confidence-in-political-leaders.html>.

close to being accurate then there is at least no reason for the Kremlin to engage in wide scale voter fraud; why such risk-taking would be necessary when Putin, Medvedev, and their party United Russia have enjoyed long-term consistent support by the people is another puzzle that cannot be given more attention here. The data analyzed in Section 2.1, which pointed to relative consistency between local and national elections, only strengthens this point. There is certainly evidence credible enough for one to conclude that some falsification does take place, but it seems now even more unlikely to be sufficient to truly alter the results of major elections. If, in fact, it turns out that very large numbers of votes are consistently falsified then (assuming the general reliability of the polling data mentioned here), the most sober conclusion may in fact be that elections in Russia are over-determined; that is, total votes for United Russia candidates are illegally inflated, although in most cases those candidates would be elected by a majority anyway.

2.3 TABLES

Table 2.1. Russia's Duma Elections

National Duma Election	United Russia	CPRF	LDPR	Yablako	Fair Russia	Unity	Fatherland- All Russia
1999	N/A	24.29%	6.00%	5.90%	N/A	23.32%	13.30%
2003	37.60%	12.61%	11.45%	4.30%	N/A	N/A	N/A
2007	64.30%	11.60%	8.10%	1.60%	7.74%	N/A	N/A

Table 2.2. Moscow City Duma Elections (Oct. 2009)⁷¹

Region	Winner	Percentage of Votes Won	Number of Parties Competing
1	United Russia	60.95	5
2	United Russia	73.34	5
3	United Russia	72.47	5
4	United Russia	61.07	5
5	United Russia	63.55	5
6	United Russia	68.74	5
7	United Russia	60.34	5
8	United Russia	58.98	5
9	United Russia	68.72	5
10	United Russia	58.5	5
11	United Russia	52.86	6
12	United Russia	44.52	6
13	United Russia	58.61	6
14	United Russia	62.85	6
15	United Russia	52.35	6
16	United Russia	64.42	6
17	United Russia	51.52	6
18	United Russia	68.18	6
19	United Russia	60.93	6
20	United Russia	51.83	6
21	United Russia	52.68	5
22	United Russia	51.19	5
23	United Russia	63.39	5
24	United Russia	45.12	5
25	United Russia	54.45	5
26	United Russia	55	5
27	United Russia	64.18	5

⁷¹ Data from this table and all tables that follow are taken from Tsentral'naya Izberatel'naya Komissiya Rossijskoj Federatsii, <http://www.cikrf.ru>.

TABLE 2.3. Irkutsk City Duma Elections (Oct. 2009)

District	Winner	Percentage of Votes Won	Number of Parties Competing
1	United Russia	76.92	4
2	Fair Russia	50.11	6
3	United Russia	68.63	5
4	United Russia	64.86	4
5	United Russia	58.54	5
6	United Russia	34.51	4
7	United Russia	75.79	3
8	United Russia	53.02	3
9	United Russia	70.05	3
10	United Russia	33.65	5
11	United Russia	57.76	3
12	United Russia	49.14	4
13	United Russia	76.8	3
14	United Russia	75.61	2
15	United Russia	55.54	4
16	United Russia	59.42	4
17	Independent	37.51	5
18	United Russia	34.51	6
19	United Russia	51.41	3
20	United Russia	52.91	5

TABLE 2.4. Kurgansk City Duma Elections (Oct. 2009)

District	Winner	Percentage of Votes Won	Number of Parties Competing
1	Independent	27.01	5
2	United Russia	63.87	4
3	United Russia	30.19	6
4	Independent	43.86	4
5	United Russia	50.22	5
6	United Russia	56.13	3
7	United Russia	49.57	5
8	United Russia	46.19	5
9	United Russia	44.24	4
10	United Russia	39.35	5
11	United Russia	38.7	4
12	United Russia	48.3	4
13	Independent	35.64	5
14	United Russia	51.17	3
15	United Russia	42.32	4
16	United Russia	53.2	4
17	United Russia	39.65	7
18	United Russia	61.3	3
19	United Russia	47.03	5
20	United Russia	38.54	4
21	United Russia	78.73	2
22	United Russia	44.27	4
23	United Russia	45.13	4
24	CPRF	37.73	4
25	United Russia	76.41	3

TABLE 2.5. Ivanovo City Duma Elections (March, 2010)

District	Winner	Percentage of Votes Won	Number of Parties Competing
1	United Russia	44.52	5
2	United Russia	58.16	3
3	United Russia	50.7	4
4	United Russia	45.73	4
5	United Russia	45.48	4
6	United Russia	52.46	4
7	United Russia	44.97	4
8	United Russia	40.33	4
9	United Russia	50.33	4
10	United Russia	40.59	5
11	United Russia	47.79	5
12	United Russia	43.8	4
13	United Russia	48	4
14	United Russia	38.52	4
15	United Russia	52.59	4

Table 2.6. Kurgansk Regional Duma Elections (March 2010)

1	United Russia	40.45	4
2	United Russia	29.65	5
3	CPRF	30.7	4
4	Fair Russia	40.99	3
5	N/A	33.67	4
6	United Russia	35.81	4
7	Fair Russia	30.5	4
8	United Russia	48.5	5
9	United Russia	52.7	5
10	United Russia	56.09	5
11	United Russia	72.6	3
12	United Russia	70.41	5
13	United Russia	60.82	3
14	United Russia	48.18	4
15	United Russia	54.37	5
16	United Russia	51.13	5
17	United Russia	51.63	5
18	United Russia	56.84	5

CHAPTER 3

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

3.1 RUSSIA UNDER PUTIN

The argument laid out at this point should obviously not be construed as implying that elections in Russia are fair or that interference from the Kremlin is an illusion. Nor should they be taken as an argument for Russia's status as a democracy. Far from it. The purpose thus far has been to show that it is fairly likely that the results of national elections in 2007 and 2008, as well as local elections of 2009, mean that the majority of voters actually pulled the lever, so to speak, for United Russia. Beyond this, the political game in Russia is certainly not fair, and has grown even less fair since the election of Putin to president in 2000.

Since coming to power, Putin has pushed through a myriad of policies that have stymied what fledgling democracy there ever was in Russia. One of his first moves was to strengthen the central government at the expense of growth in regional power under Yeltsin. Specifically, Putin divided Russia into seven federal okrugs with each to be placed under the supervision of a presidential envoy. He followed this with removal of the election of local governors, in addition to granting the federal government the power to disband local legislatures. Following the Beslan Hostage crisis of 2004, Putin used the pretext of the "war on terror" to impose a new law calling for the selection of regional executives by the president.⁷² Writing before the elections of 2007-2008, Dmitri Trenin laid out the single supremacy of Putin in Russia:

[T]here is no question that [Russia] has a czarist political system, in which all major decisions are taken by one institution, the presidency, also known as the Kremlin.

⁷² Darrell Slider, "Politics in the Regions," 179.

The separation of powers, provided for under the 1993 constitution, is a fiction. All institutions of the federal government, from the cabinet to the bicameral legislature, are in reality mere agents of the presidency. The legal system is anything but independent, especially when dealing with opponents of the Kremlin...⁷³

In addition to exercising unchecked control, Putin has altered important electoral laws since coming to power such that it is now even more difficult for opposition parties to form coalitions and win representation: the minimum returns necessary for winning representation in the Duma was raised from 5% to 7%, while the election of Duma deputies by single mandate races was completely eliminated. This last aspect is particularly cumbersome given the weakness of political parties and ideology in Russia: hopeful parties are required to either gain 200,000 signatures or deposit the equivalent of roughly \$1.3 million to qualify for ballot access. Often those parties and groups that do obtain the required number of signatures are disqualified under suspicious circumstances. For example, the Central Election Committee rejected a number of the 2.5 million signatures collected by local chapters of Greenpeace to block the importation of spent nuclear fuel.⁷⁴ The Election Committee also overlooks the lack of any sort of monitoring system for at-home voting practices--a clear violation of Russian laws on the secrecy of the ballot.⁷⁵

On top of this is a politically weak civil society, where (as of 2005) less than one percent of the population belongs to a political party.⁷⁶ Intimidation only worsens the situation and remains on the unofficial list of suppressive techniques: beginning in 2003 and 2004 Putin's government began, for example, the selective use of financial laws to imprison local governors.⁷⁷

Political deception is also an element of control. The Kremlin has been widely accused of

73 Dmitri V. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, 9.

74 Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed*, 44.

75 *Ibid.*, 59-60.

76 Leon Aaron, *Russia's Revolution*, 238.

77 Slider, 179.

creating faux left parties in order to create the specter of some sort of substantive opposition parties and sap away the strength of genuine ones. As the most significant competitor to the party of power in the 1990's, the CPRF's base of support was targeted by the Kremlin through the latter's creation of the ideologically similar "dummy" party--the Pensioner's Party--as well as the utilization of the party Rodina to siphon away support from nationalistic supporters.⁷⁸ In fact, this should come as little surprise, especially since earlier incarnations of United Russia--i.e. parties of power--were created by the Kremlin: Our Home is Russia, for example, was created by Kremlin elites in 1993 in order to create the semblance of a two-party system.⁷⁹ On the other hand, those who are fortunate enough to win the favor of the party of power apparently gain a powerful ally: of 21 regional executives in 2003, candidates simply backed by United Russia won in 19 districts; between January 2003 and January 2005 the success rate of United Russia-backed candidates had increased to 35 out of 43 wins in some local elections.⁸⁰

Of monumental importance is Putin's control of many media outlets, some of which he wrestled from independent owners, and which now give the Kremlin a virtual government monopoly in the realm of televised news. Vladimir Gusinsky, owner of the NTV station, in particular drew the ire of the Kremlin for his station's critical portrayal of the war in Chechnya.⁸¹ As a result the government threatened him with criminal charges (ostensibly for tax reasons), eventually forcing a change in ownership and the closing of Gusinsky's magazine *Itogi* and newspaper *Segodnya*.⁸² Incidentally, Putin's suppression of independent media prompted Freedom House to downgrade Russia from "partially free" to "not free."⁸³ Putin also canceled a

78 Lavery, 371-372.

79 Hutcheson, 15.

80 Konitzer, 225.

81 McFaul et. Al, 189.

82 Ibid.

83 White, 76.

1991 decree which guaranteed the legal rights of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* to broadcast in Russia.⁸⁴ To be fair, a fairly robust print media remains intact in Russia, with a wide selection of ideologically different newspapers available to Russians--including those that offer frank criticisms of Putin; however, almost all Russians get their news from the state-owned t.v. channels.⁸⁵

Putin has also allegedly not been shy about targeting those outside the media who are unfriendly to his agenda. The most famous case is surely the arrest of Mikhail Khodorovsky in 2003, one of Russia's most famous tycoons. The CEO of the oil company YUKOS and a well-known supporter of Yabloko, Khodorovsky was officially charged with tax violations. In addition to being illegally denied bail in the course of his arrest, Khodorovsky's attorney's offices were searched, while judges who attempted to objectively rule in the case were either dismissed or replaced.⁸⁶

This sort of harassment is, however, only the beginning. Post-Soviet Russia has unfortunately become a dangerous place for journalists and other fighters for civil rights. Reporters Without Borders, for example, has named Russia, along with Algeria, "as the most dangerous countries for journalists."⁸⁷ Among other things, journalists have been beaten in Primorskii Krai, Kaliningrad, Kirov, as have political challengers in Moscow.⁸⁸ And contributing to such an illiberal society, the Kremlin continues the Soviet practice of monitoring opposition groups and political opponents.⁸⁹

Putin's machinations notwithstanding, it must be pointed out that part of the explanation

84 Fish, 73.

85 Ibid.

86 Aaron, 243.

87 As cited in Fish, 70.

88 Fish, 68-69.

89 Ibid., 76.

for Russia's poor transition to democracy lies in the unsatisfactory development of robust and ideologically recognizable political parties. The data in table 3.1, for example, demonstrate the underdeveloped nature of political parties at the regional level:

While the results in this table might appear at first to indicate a strong showing for independents, they are in fact a better indication of the relative weakness of the major national parties at certain levels. In none of these races, for example, did a candidate from a non-United Russia party win a seat. More disappointing is the fact that in few cases did an opposition party even field a candidate. The data do show the power and popularity of United Russia: in very few of these elections did an independent defeat a United Russian candidate (although Komi is something of an exemption).

One particular problem, which has contributed to the lack of party development but which perhaps Putin can personally be excused for, is the post-Soviet transfer of power to local governors, who controlled an unfair amount of material resources crucial to the people.⁹⁰ Since much of previous Soviet power transferred to the hands of governors, at times they alone were able to provide the relevant "electoral goods and services that theorists usually assume parties provide."⁹¹ The privatization of powerful companies into the hands of small, concentrated groups also began to significantly influence Russian politics by the late 1990s.⁹² The upshot, of course, was additional stifling of the growth of independent parties.

The fragile system of political parties and underdeveloped civil society likely finds an additional explanation in Russia's cultural history, particularly the heavy burden communist rule entails for democratization. In particular, elections in Russia have by and large never been

90 Henry E. Hale, "Why Not Parties?" 153.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., 154.

democratically oriented, since the very first ones following the implementation of glasnost' were aimed at gaining power as a means of tearing down the USSR; the result was that office seekers were left with little incentive to build democratic institutions.⁹³ The implosion of the Soviet Union took with it "the social cleavages and related social infrastructure that...give birth to parties."⁹⁴ The present Russian institutions, on the other hand, which provide inadequate incentives for building parties, along with insufficient resources available to potential party leaders is another burden.⁹⁵ Most parties that did end up taking form ended up being based around the charisma of their leader, while many elites hand had no motivation to form parties at all.⁹⁶ All these points coalesce around the fact that that elections in the late Soviet Union were implemented before substantive political parties and a strong civil society could be created. The result was that the "electoral process" was never really "an actual goal of the political struggle."⁹⁷ It is little wonder then that Russia's democratic transition has been so incomplete.

The result of these various forces and historical legacy has been not only the continual domination of a single party of power (all too reminiscent of the Communist party of the Soviet Union) with no transfer of power between ideologically competitive parties, but also a system in which almost all parties define themselves vaguely and at times enact policies unpredictably once elected. Data analyzed by Regina Smith, for example, shows that when several of the major parties in Russia are assigned values based on the average of party member issue assessments and then compared against one another, only the KPRF is truly distinguishable from all other parties.⁹⁸ For example, concerning economic issues, LDPR's leftist position is indistinguishable

93 McFaul et. al, 33.

94 Hale, 153.

95 Ibid.

96 Stoner-Weiss, 141.

97 McFaul et. al, 33.

98 Regina Smyth, "Strong Partisans, Weak Parties?" 216-218.

from any of its competitors on the right; somewhat similarly, while SPS's economic ideology distinguishes it from rivals on the left, its differences with fellow center-right parties are unrecognizable.⁹⁹ Most interesting is the fact that Unity's political philosophy is not recognizably different from any other party.¹⁰⁰ The logical implication, as Smyth argues, is that "issue positions are not likely to be good predictors of what the party will do in office."¹⁰¹

What may be worse is that the parties, in addition to being rarely distinguishable from one another under the political microscope, are perhaps incoherent themselves. While the KPRF and SPS are coherent on economic issues, with Yablako and Unity being somewhat coherent, when all salient issues are combined all parties reach a coherency score that is dangerously close to random--that is, incoherence.¹⁰² This analysis reveals that unfortunately the "placement of a party's position on one issue does not accurately predict their placement on other related issues."¹⁰³

Although Putin has received most of the criticism so far, trends of run-away executive power did not begin *ex nihilo* with the ascension of Putin to the presidency in 2000. The general process at least to a certain degree finds its roots in the reforms of Yeltsin in the early 1990's. It was Yeltsin, to be sure, who, after illegally dissolving congress in September of 1993 (an act which led to an attempt by congress to impeach him, not to mention a civil war), altered the nature of elections and the composition of parliament by decree. In a referendum on the new constitution of 1993, which created what has been labeled a "super-presidential" system, Yeltsin too was accused of falsifying the results.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, Yeltsin's party of power at the time

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., 218-219.

102 Ibid., 219-220.

103 Ibid.

104 As cited in McFaul et. al, 61.

"Russia's Choice" was soundly defeated by Zhirinovski's LDPR in the 1993 Duma elections. Incidentally, if Yeltsin had no qualms about increasing executive power--by questionable means, no less--yet allowed his party of support to lose in the Duma elections, it is possible that Putin, who has from one point of view simply continued the investment of power in the executive, may not have had electoral results altered either. The implication here is once again that Putin does in fact enjoy the support of Russia. Indeed, in the 1999 Duma elections the party of power at the time Unity did exceedingly well. And here no falsification need be entertained, since the party clearly rode to success on the coattails of Putin's incredible popularity at the time in all sectors of the electorate.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Putin's popularity has not only been high recently, but was stable enough in the early 2000s that there was almost no way, according to one analysis, that he could lose a fair election in 2003 and 2004.¹⁰⁶

105 Hutcheson, 25-26.

106 McFaul et. al, 61, 75.

3.2 Tables

TABLE 3.1 Regional Head Elections (March 2007)

Republic/Region/Oblast	Seats Won By United Russia	Seats Won By Independents
Belgorod	-	1
Vologda	-	2
Lipetsk	1	1
Moscow	-	1
Murmansk	-	1
Novogorod	1	1
Orel	-	1
Pskov	1	-
Samara	-	1
Sverdlovsk	-	1
Tver	1	-
Tomsk	-	1
Yaroslavl	1	-
Koryak	-	1
Khanty-Mansisk	-	1
Yamalo-Nenetsk	2	-
Perm	-	2
Republic of Adygeia	-	4
Republic of Buriatia	-	2
Republic of Dagestan	1	4
Republic of Komi	4	9
Republic of Yakutia	-	4
Republic of Khakasia	3	3
Altajsk Kraj	-	3
Krasnodar Kraj	-	2
Primorskij Kraj	-	2
Stavropol'skij Kraj	-	2

CHAPTER 4

CIVIC CULTURE

4.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

Curiously, despite the authoritarian nature of his rule Putin's popularity has oddly not been affected., nor does it seem to encourage Russians to view Russia as any less of a democracy. Listening to *Radio Free Liberty*, it is not all uncommon to hear people in response to the question "Which of the major parties do you consider to be the most democratic?" gleefully reply "United Russia!"

An explanation for the popularity behind Putin and United Russia is made more confusing by data which imply that most Russians do not feel the government is on their side, nor do they seem to have a strong attachment to the electoral process in Russia. For example, from 2000 to 2004 confidence in the president went from 45% to 62%-- incidentally, more than confidence in the church, army, media, etc.¹⁰⁷ During the same time-frame Russians were polled about Putin's removal of the popular election of governors and republican presidents. While the initial reaction was arguably negative, it turned out that Russians were largely indifferent: of those polled 29% felt it was a positive move, 37% negative, and 35% were unsure--only months later those who regarded the move as positive had jumped to 36%, with 35% undecided, and 29% negative.¹⁰⁸ Another figure put the overall approval for Putin's decision at 44% vs 42% disapproval.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, when asked whether the minimum percentage needed for a party to gain

107 Ibid., 90.

108 As cited in Konitzer, 6-7.

109 Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Why Was Democracy Lost in Russia's Regions?," 364.

representation in the national Duma should be lowered (from 7% to the previous 5%) 33% of those polled answered "no," while a surprisingly large 37% responded that they were unsure. While the first number could be partially attributable to fervent United Russian supporters hoping to maintain control of the Duma through their party as much as possible, it is puzzling that roughly a third of the country would not have an opinion on the matter.

On the other hand, civil rights and freedoms are largely greater than they were during the Soviet Union. In fact, there is much more freedom in present Russia at the level of individual liberties than one might glean from the previous section. While the previous section focused on the authoritarian nature under Putin's rule, the authoritarian thrust of his Kremlin, from another point of view, extends primarily to the area of political opponents, media outlets, and members of the *nouveau riche* deemed unfriendly to the Kremlin. Since *pre-perestroika* Soviet Union, Russians have gained significant individual rights outside the arena of politics. To be sure, unlike his counterpart of the early 1980's and before, the contemporary citizen of Russia has the right to travel beyond the country's borders, listen to whatever music he pleases, dress however he likes, work wherever he likes, open a business, etc. Moreover, these freedoms have remained basically the same ever since the fall of the Soviet Union. As of 2005, 77% of Russians polled reported that they feel freer now than under the Soviet system.¹¹⁰ In fact, between 1992 and 2005, the perception of newly gained freedoms have increased support for the Putin Regime by 14-17 points.¹¹¹

From another point of view, one cannot overlook the potential role that general apathy towards politics plays, which would further explain why the expanding nature of the Kremlin

110 Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Neil Munro, *Russia Transformed*, 169.

111 *Ibid.*, 181.

under Putin has perhaps had little effect on the Russian approval rates. Over seventy years of autocratic rule under communism, so the argument goes, has arguably left the majority of Russians indifferent towards politics in general:

Russia is still an autocracy, presided over by a czarist president. His subjects show little interest in politics and will ratify the leader's choice of a successor, whoever the candidate is...Most Russians want to be left alone by the state. They do not bother and do not want to be bothered. They leave politics, i.e. clan struggle, to their nominal leaders, as they go about their own business.¹¹²

This sort of attitude at least seems to be reflected in the roughly quarter or third of polled respondents who are unsure how to respond to what one might presume to be political questions whose answer should be at least easy if not obvious. This phenomenon is arguably reflected in attitudes towards Russia's political parties. For example, that political parties are weak in Russia does not seem to be a major concern for the majority of Russians. Only 39% partially are entirely in agreement that the role of parties should be increased. Forty percent somewhat disagreed or entirely disagreed, with 22% not knowing how to respond.¹¹³

Having addressed the issue individual liberties, the relevant question now becomes this: assuming the legitimacy of all relevant indicators, does support for Putin, Medvedev, etc. entail indifference towards democracy, given the explicitly undemocratic deeds of Putin's Kremlin; or, on the other hand, do Russians simply value issues such as an improved economy, for example, above the strengthening of democratic institutions so much so that the former masks real support on the ground for democracy?

Unfortunately, some poll results paint a potentially confusing picture. We saw, for

112 Trenin, 104.

113 Levada Centre, "Obshestvennoe Mnenie 2009," <http://www.levada.ru/sborniki.html>.

example, that opinion polls did a fairly good job of predicting the contested Duma elections of 2007. At the same time, polls conducted through the same organization showed that roughly half of the country felt the 2007 Duma election would not be conducted fairly.¹¹⁴ Fifty-eight percent said the same concerning the 2008 presidential elections.¹¹⁵ Does this indicate indifference towards the government forging votes? Is dissatisfaction with falsification *per se* simply masked, since the forging of votes just so happens to be in favor of the party the majority supports? Or is it the case that those who would otherwise disapprove of alleged falsification reward Putin, Medvedev, etc. for what the latter have provided since 2000? In short, does Russia care about honest elections and the democratic process?

When asked directly about democracy, the majority of Russians are not necessarily opposed to it, although support for it is not as strong as one might hope. Fifty-six percent of those polled by the Levada Centre responded that Russia does indeed need democracy.¹¹⁶ Similarly, a relative majority of 49% responded in favor for the right to freedom of self-expression, while 32% responded that only the courts should be able to decide what sort of opinions can be voiced and under what conditions they can be punished.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, despite huge levels of support for Medvedev prior to the elections, an almost equal number (73%) of those polled felt that Medvedev should indeed have participated alongside other candidates in the presidential debates.¹¹⁸

Perhaps, then, it is more revealing to ask whether democracy entails something different to the average Russian worldview. Interestingly, support for a democratic government drops

114 Levada Centre, <http://www.levada.ru/vybory2007.html>.

115 Levada Centre, <http://www.levada.ru/vybory20080.html>.

116 Levada Centre, "Obshestvennoe Mnenie 2009," <http://www.levada.ru/sborniki.html>.

117 Ibid.

118 Levada Centre, <http://www.levada.ru/vybory20080.html>.

precipitously depending on how it is framed. Since February of 2005, for example a Western-style democracy has ranked as the lowest of three theoretical types of government in Russia.¹¹⁹ In February of 2009, 38% reported that a Soviet-style government would be best of all, while 25% opted for the present system; a mere 18% felt that Russia needed a political system in line with the Western democracies.¹²⁰ Incidentally, this association with the West may partially explain why one poll showed that 24% of Russians were opposed to democracy.¹²¹ When asked directly "What is Democracy to you" the answer "Economic prosperity" (39%) slightly edged out "Freedom of speech, press, and religion" (38%).¹²²

William Mishler and John P. Willerton cite evidence that democratic values have indeed taken shape, at least insofar as one reads this as implying that Russians believe they have the right to hold their leaders accountable for what they do or do not accomplish.¹²³ This, though, is not exactly what is at stake. The question that intrigues us is whether Russians uniquely evaluate their government due to some idiosyncratic aspect of Russian culture or whether they value the democratic ideals usually tacitly assumed to go hand-and-hand with a liberal democratic government. In addressing this question Mishler and Willerton find that, while Russians seem to possess a different set of values (even perhaps evaluating their leaders along different lines than Western countries), by and large Russian support for elected leaders is strongly tied to the economy and consumer prices, as in the West, and Russians, furthermore, reward their leaders for peace and prosperity.¹²⁴

119 Levada Centre, "Obshestvennoe Mnenie 2009," <http://www.levada.ru/sborniki.html>.

120 Ibid.

121 Richard Gaplin, "Stalin's New Status in Russia," BBC News, December 27, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7798497.stm> (accessed December 15, 2009).

122 Levada Centre, "Obshestvennoe Mnenie 2009," <http://www.levada.ru/sborniki.html>.

123 William Mishler and John P. Willerton, "The Dynamics of Presidential Popularity in Post-Communist Russia," 117.

124 Ibid., 131, 134.

4.2. THE ELEMENT OF AUTHORITARIANISM

If support for the regime does not entail a disregard for democracy, what, then, does determine it? The alleged cultural preoccupation with power, nationalism, and order in Russian society deserves particular attention, since it is often argued that Russian culture possesses a particular predilection towards authoritarianism and nationalism. Historian Geoffrey Hosking, for example, argues that the wide frontiers of Russia and the natural difficulty in guarding them has always made national security a top issue for the Russian state, and the people have always been ready to sacrifice everything in exchange for it.¹²⁵ This cultural affiliation towards autocracy was strengthened by Russia's early self-identification as a state:

The Tartar occupation of the thirteenth century generated...intense Russian national feeling, which centered on the Orthodox Church, as the one national institution which had survived the disaster. And because the church conducted its liturgy not in Latin but in a Slavonic tongue close to the vernacular, this national feeling had deep roots among the ordinary people. All this imparted to Russian national consciousness from early times a demotic quality, a defensiveness, and an earth-boundedness which still have strong echoes today...Moscow Grand Dukes proclaimed themselves Tzars (Caesars), claiming the heritage of Byzantium, which had fallen to the infidels in 1453.¹²⁶

Richard Sakwa touches upon a similar theme when he claims that a large part of "the mythic representation of Putin's leadership...is generated spontaneously, drawing in particular upon mythologized versions of Peter I (the Great) as the great tsar-transformer."¹²⁷ Russia, he goes on to note, is "a country where popular attitudes to political authority have traditionally taken on a sacred aspect."¹²⁸

Data from polls in the early 2000s, in fact, suggested a willingness of Russians to return to authoritarianism, so long as doing so guaranteed law and order.¹²⁹ And from a certain point of

¹²⁵ Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, 16.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁷ Richard Sakwa, "Myth and Democratic Identity in Russia," 206.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ As cited in Sven Gunnar Simonsen, "Nationalism and the Russian Political Spectrum," 270.

view, this trend has not substantially changed. Recently 60% of Russians polled said that it would be advantageous for the president to control both the courts and the parliament, while a disturbing 40% of Russians as of 2009 felt that power should always be in the hands of an "iron-fist" ruler, with 31% saying there were times when it is appropriate.¹³⁰

Despite this, Mishler and Willerton find no substantial evidence that Russians reward Putin out of a nationalist ideology in 2003, not do they find political actions which would imply a reverence for authoritarianism to be a significant explanatory factor.¹³¹ Perhaps most surprising is their debunking of the common wisdom that the second Chechen War had a positive increase on Putin's popularity.¹³²

Steven Fish also finds admiration of authoritarianism (as well as Russia's civic culture in general) to be largely lacking in explanatory power in accounting for Russia's authoritarian government. While a larger than average number of Russians do in fact approve of an authoritarian government (49%), this establishes only a very "modest...relationship between the size of the pro authoritarian population and actual regime type."¹³³ Russian attitudes towards trust and general intolerance are found to be even less significant.¹³⁴

Interviews with Russian citizens conducted by Ellen Carnagham citizens in the late 90s and early 2000s bear out these sorts of conclusions. Unlike those cultural theorists and historians who posit an idiosyncratic nature of Russian culture which precludes the development of democracy based on civil rights, Carnagham finds that Russians dislike their own democratic institutions for their poor performance--and not democratic institutions in general.¹³⁵ And when

130 Levada Centre, "Obshestvennoe Mnenie 2009," <http://www.levada.ru/sborniki.html>.

131 Mishler and Willerton, 129-130.

132 Ibid., 131.

133 Fish, 111.

134 Ibid., 110-111.

135 Ellen Carnagham, "Thinking about Democracy: Interviews with Russian Citizens."

asked about Yeltsin, most respondents in her analysis were unhappy with his "autocratic behavior"; on the contrary, they credited him with the individual freedoms that had become institutionalized under his watch.¹³⁶ If hers (and other analysis mentioned above) are correct, it is likely that those polled Russians who do respond favorably to an "iron handed ruler" reflect frustration with governance, corruption, the rule of law, etc. in Russia, and perhaps not a particular disdain for liberalism.

As a final point concerning the nationalism/authoritarianism issue, it is interesting to note that if Russia has become more authoritarian over the past decade, then according to one poll the majority of the population does not recognize it. Only 11% call what is occurring in Russia "authoritarianism"; almost as many (9%) call it the installation of democracy. Forty-two percent call it the laying down of order, while 19% feel that it is in fact chaos; 20% did not know how to reply. In fact, a relative majority believes that Russia is in fact moving towards a democracy (40%).

Like in most Western countries, more practical concerns such as economic factors do a better job of explaining the approval of Russian leaders. During Putin's two terms as president real incomes increased two-fold, while poverty was cut in half. Similarly, GDP grew by 70%, while wages outpaced inflation. Moreover, dips in Putin/Medvedev approval in late 2009, where approval ratings dropped around six points, appear to be somewhat linked to economic fluctuations during the crisis. And when asked what Medvedev's greatest accomplishment in his two years of being president is, 14% cite an increase in wages, pensions, and stipends, 8% referred to his solving of social problems, while 7% what he accomplished in foreign relations (the war with Georgia, etc). Only one percent cited the increased international prestige and

¹³⁶ Ibid., 354-355.

power of Russia, once again arguing (at least partially) against the nationalism-authoritarianism explanation. In fact, the one percent who did cite accomplishments implying nationalism was less than the three percent, who *on the contrary* cited Medvedev's cooperation with other countries, including even better relations with the U.S.¹³⁷

Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Neil Munro together argue that support for the regime simply implies a fear of any other alternatives, or at least the feeling that ideal alternatives are out of reach, rather than enthusiastic approval for current policies.¹³⁸

Expectations are particularly important in an autocratic regime. Instead of trying to win the normative commitment of subjects, as would be the case in the consolidating support for a democratic regime, autocratic leaders need only make subjects believe that there is no alternative to the current regime. When subjects see little or no chance of changing regimes, then they can avoid frustration by giving acceptance to the powers that be.¹³⁹

As of 2005, according to their analysis, the mere passage of time (from the collapse of the Soviet Union to 2006) accounted for roughly 42% of regime support--a three-point increase annually.¹⁴⁰ This explanation proposes that Russians judge the modern regime largely by comparing it to the far more suppressive Soviet regime.¹⁴¹ The implication is also that the average Russian has rather low standards in evaluating the performance of the government. While improvement in political performance has a marginal effect, Russians are very likely to give their approval as long as the regime is less repressive and more prosperous than the Soviet Regime.¹⁴² It should be noted, however, that their analysis measures support for the regime as a whole and does not take into account individual measurements for the president or prime minister.

137 Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie, "D. Medvedev: Dva Goda na Postu Prezidenta," <http://bd.fom.ru/pdf/d10medvedev10.pdf>.

138 Rose et. al, 167-168.

139 Ibid., 176-177.

140 Ibid., 178.

141 Ibid., 143.

142 Ibid.

While a cultural preoccupation with authoritarianism or nationalism is not an accurate predictor of regime approval or presidential approval, there are still factors beyond immediate pragmatics that play a significant role in determining support of the government. Indeed, a significant portion of United Russia's approval seems to be connected to the personality and popularity of Putin.¹⁴³ In addition to his association with the Russia *siloviki*--typically macho men of military or intelligence service fame--Putin's divisiveness and steadfastness in standing up to the West has earned him the reputation as strong and capable leader.¹⁴⁴ Colton and Hal calculate that mere personal appeal accounts for 64% of Putin votes.¹⁴⁵ For example, although their study shows that an improved economy was a significant predictor of United Russia success in the 2007 Duma elections, the majority of support is linked to Putin's charisma, particularly since the majority of United Russia votes came from those who reported no real economic gains under Putin.¹⁴⁶ Rose et. al seem to agree: the drastic differences in personality between Putin and Yeltsin accounts for a significant difference in approval, with fluctuations in Putin's approval due to "intermittent changes in political and economic performance."¹⁴⁷ Once again, Carnagham's interviews support these conclusions. At least in February of 2000, most respondents "stressed... [Putin's] energy, vitality, youth, education, experience, and decisiveness," and not any qualities tied to authoritarianism.¹⁴⁸

We may conclude by stating that Russians are not against democracy. On the contrary, in general they are for it, though what they imagine the concept to mean is not perfectly clear. It is certainly not popular when it is depicted as being of a "Western" type, and it is endorsed less as

143 Timothy J. Colton and Henry E. Hale, "The Putin Vote: Presidential Electorates in a Hybrid Regime," 473, 479.

144 Dmitri K. Simes and Paul J. Saunders, "The Kremlin Begs to Differ."

145 Colton and Hale, 501.

146 Ibid., 481, 488, 491.

147 Rose et. al, 169-170.

148 Carnagham, 355.

an ideal type of government in Russia than in the eight formerly communist countries of eastern Europe that (as of 2005) are members of the European Union.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, what might seem to be indifference towards democracy and tacit approval of a rather repressive and authoritarian government is often a hidden priority for a better economy or acceptance of a regime that is at least not as repressive as the Soviet Union.

By the numbers alone, Russians approve of authoritarianism more than the average country, but statistically this factor is found to account for rather little. Nonetheless, if the polls cited here are accurate at all it is safe to say that Russia is still culturally different from the West. Respect for authoritarianism may be overemphasized, but it is still significantly higher than in many other countries. Moreover, while it may be inadequate for explaining the type of regime Russia has, it may play a role in explaining why Russians satisfaction with the current government is as high as it is, all things taken into consideration.

And a culture of individual rights, based on libertarian values, is certainly not the same in Russia, any other factor notwithstanding. To be sure, 54% believe order is more important than civil rights, while 38% believe the opposite.¹⁵⁰ Even civil rights themselves seem to be evaluated much more differently than in, say, the U.S. When asked to rank the most important human rights, Russians place the right to health care and employment far above the right to freedom of speech, property, religion, and right to vote for representatives.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, one cannot go too far with this; for, as we have seen, civil rights do matter to Russians (even if economic security might be marginally more important) and is a significant predictor of support for the regime vis-a-vis the Soviet system or autocratic theoretical alternatives, such as a dictatorship,

149 Rose et. al, 128.

150 Levada Centre, "Obshestvennoe Mnenie 2009," <http://www.levada.ru/sborniki.html>.

151 Ibid.

military rule, etc.

Does, then, Russia have an idiosyncratic civic culture? It should come as no surprise, for example, that Russians emphasize "economic welfare values" differently than do Americans and therefore identify them as part of democracy to a much greater degree.¹⁵² Nor should one be too surprised to find that Russians put somewhat less importance on individual liberties to the benefit of order, especially given both Russia's history of autocratic rule and periods of immense disorder and suffering, as well as the fact that Russians have already cashed in on a considerably large number of personal liberties since the mid-1980's. Beyond that, however, it does not seem to be the case that Russians are so different that they put nationalism above democracy or enshrine authoritarianism to the degree that it is sometimes entertained. Rather, they are more likely to resign themselves to the latter, for example, as long as things are at least marginally better than they were in the past. This, in addition to evidence which shows Russians evaluate their leaders somewhat differently than other countries, is sufficient to conclude that political or civic culture in Russia is somewhat different, though not substantially.

¹⁵² Rose et. al, 127.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

That Russia's categorization as a democracy has been called into doubt should surprise no one. Both civic institutions and political culture are weak and underdeveloped. And though the hegemony of official one party rule under the Soviet Union is no more, the present situation is similar in many ways. Namely, the political process is almost entirely controlled through the Kremlin, and by extension, its loyal party of power, which itself was created by elites from the top. In place of any substantive program or political ideology, this party's only real purpose is to secure control for the Kremlin. And though the party of power has passed from one incarnation to the next since 1992, there has been no real transfer of power from one party to the other.

We have seen that electoral fraud is indeed a problem for Russia's transition to democracy. The cries of falsification, however, naturally create the impression that elections in Russia are fixed and that the winners illegitimately obtain office. My purpose has been not to excuse any falsification, but rather to show that in spite of it there are good reasons for concluding that the majority of Russians nonetheless support and vote for Putin, Medvedev, as well as United Russia candidates. It follows that those who are elected are elected quasi-legitimately. Although the organization of parties is weaker at the local level, United Russia garners a large amount of the populace's support, from which I argue it stands to infer that these same voters would likely vote for United Russia at the national level, as well. Elections in Russia therefore appear to be causally overdetermined. Since 2000 the president and United Russia

candidates in the national Duma have been strongly supported by the people, though in some cases (especially regional republics) ballot boxes are probably stuffed and voter turnout is drastically inflated. However, examining the relative consistency between support for United Russia in local elections across regions, as well as correspondence between local elections and national ones, falsified returns appear to be the exception to the rule. This argument is strengthened by the unequivocal support for Putin, Medvedev, and United Russia in several polls. The falsification that does occur, then, it is highly unlikely to truly alter any outcome.

We have seen that there are several explanations for Putin's popularity (and by extension the popularity of Medvedev and United Russia). Though Putin has tightened control over the political arena since his rise to power, the economy has at the same time strongly rebounded from its dismal state of the 1990s. We saw, moreover, that a significant portion of support for Putin is due to his personal charisma. At the same time, support for Putin does not imply that claims that Russians are particularly inclined towards authoritarian governments are viable. It follows that the improvements of the Russian state, the personality of Putin, combined with the indifference of many Russians towards politics, which is reflected in the sometimes contradictory attitude toward democracy, along with the phenomenon that tolerance for the regime naturally grows over time goes the furthest in explaining why the majority of Russians support Putin, Medvedev, and United Russia.

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