

**RUSSIAN ELECTIONS:
AN OXYMORON OF DEMOCRACY**

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Executive Summary

Considerable controversy swirls around the extent to which Russia's elections have been falsified. We argue here on the basis of an assessment of aberrant distributions of turnout in official election returns for each of Russia's national elections beginning in 1995, that falsifications in the form of stuffed ballot boxes and artificially augmented election counts, whose significance was first apparent in its ethnic republics, has now spread to and metastasized within both rural and urban oblast districts. That spread, moreover, unashamedly accelerated during the Putin administration – notably the 2004 election – and has sustained itself thru the 2007 Duma parliamentary vote.

Introduction

On the basis of official election returns, the late Alexander Sobyenin argued that vote counting in Russia's 1993 constitutional referendum had been falsified to push turnout above the fifty percent threshold required for ratification and that the balancing of the books necessitated by the falsified figures accounted for the surprising success of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR in the parliamentary election held in conjunction with the referendum.¹

Three years later, in the 1996 presidential contest, Boris Yeltsin, rising seemingly from the 'political dead' as judged by his single digit approval ratings, won reelection after being forced into a runoff by his Communist opponent, Gennady Zyuganov – an election that saw some incredulous reversals in official voting statistics between rounds that favored Yeltsin.

In the next presidential contest, in 2000, a then obscure KGB bureaucrat from St. Petersburg, Vladimir Putin, succeeded Yeltsin after being elevated to the post of prime minister and after the Kremlin's party (Unity), with 23.3 percent of the vote, upset a seemingly 'sure thing' in the fortunes of Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov and ex-prime minister Yevgeny Primakov's party (Fatherland-All Russia, with 13.3%) a few months earlier in 1999 parliamentary contest.

In 2004 an admittedly popular Putin won reelection by the largest margin in post-Soviet voting in an election in which, as we argue elsewhere, officials awarded upwards of 10 million or more suspicious votes on his behalf.² Finally, after all explicitly anti-Kremlin opposition had been muffled, barred from the ballot, jailed or covered into submission in 2007, Putin's party, United Russia, won a landslide victory and secured

enough seats to amend the constitution and override the veto of any succeeding president.

Measuring Fraud and its Significance

Only Kremlin apologists and Putin sycophants argue that Russian elections meet the standards of good democratic practice. As ex-Premier Mikhail Gorbachev said, “Something is wrong with our elections.”³ However, the question arises as to whether Russia’s post-Soviet elections are but part of a flawed yet gradually maturing political system in which fraud and electoral skulduggery in various forms are mere irritants in a still-imperfect transition or whether fraud of a more malignant type has increased in extent and severity to where the idea of a democratic election in Russia is now an oxymoron.

In asking this question we emphasize that the fraud that concerns us is not the sort normally cited by observers or journalists, such as ad hoc barriers to the registration of parties and candidates or state sanctioned limits on access to the media. Rather, our concern is with acts of a more criminal nature -- the stuffing of ballot boxes, explicit intimidation of voters, and the manipulation and wholesale fabrication of official vote counts. Here we argue that fraud of this sort has now infected and metastasized within the Russian polity to such an extent that we must also assume that the powers that be in the Kremlin either has no control of their own politicians in their competition to please Putin or it no longer cares whether the West or anyone else judges their elections as free and fair or whether they are in fact a transitional democracy at all.

It may have been that in initially facilitating the formation of a party, Just Russia, to compete against his own, Putin preferred to encourage the image of a competitive

democracy. But trends in official election returns are now consistent with the proposition that Russian policy is dominated by the view, “To hell with the West -- they need our oil and gas too much to object to anything we say or do.” Regardless of whether it is a loss of control or a shift in policy to one that ignores the West and definitions of democracy, this essay examines one indicator of aberrant official election data to argue that the ‘oxymoron hypothesis’ is a sustainable one.

1995 through 2003

Let us begin, not with 1995, but with the presidential election of 1996 since it, unlike any other, generated a unique set of data by requiring a runoff between the top two challengers – Yeltsin and his Communist Party opponent, Zyuganov.⁴ The immediate background to this election was Yeltsin’s apparent vulnerability prior to the first round, which made it difficult for regional officials to know who to back if they wished to curry favor with the eventual winner (and throughout Russian history it has rarely been a good or healthy thing to back someone other than whoever ultimately controls the Kremlin).

Yeltsin’s competition came not only from Zyuganov but also from the then popular general Alexander Lebed and the pro-reform Grigori Yavlinski who, minimally, threatened to siphon off enough votes to raise the possibility that Zyuganov might ultimately prevail. Nevertheless, reflecting in part the power of the oligarchs who supported him and the significant share of the Russian electorate that, then at least, sought to avoid a return to their communist past, Yeltsin led the field with 35.3 percent of the vote, followed by Zyuganov with 32.0%, Lebed with 14.5%, Yavlinsky with 7.3% and the ultra-nationalist Zhirinovskiy with 5.7%.

Despite the closeness of the vote, it was apparent that Yeltsin would most likely prevail in the runoff. With Boris Berezovsky and his media empire leading a cadre of oligarchs strongly opposed to a Zyuganov victory and Lebed no longer on the ballot, not only was Yeltsin likely to win a majority of Lebed's vote and virtually all of Yavlinsky's, but the power of the oligarchs to resurrect Yeltsin's viability was now evident to those regional political bosses who had otherwise sat on the fence or even initially backed his opponents. If there was, then, an incentive to commit to and make special efforts for Yeltsin, it came between rounds with the supposition that Zyuganov was approaching the ever-lower 'glass ceiling' of support thru which no Communist candidate could pass.

"Special efforts", though, come in a variety of forms. They vary from simple endorsements to biased media coverage to outright fraud in the form of stuffed ballot boxes and manipulated official election returns. That fraud in the classic criminal sense was not wholly absent in 1996 is attested to by the example of the rayon (county) in Tatarstan that officially reported 2,064 and 7,461 first round votes for Yeltsin and Zyuganov respectively, but which subsequently awarded 8,512 votes for Yeltsin in the second round and a mere 2,050 for Zyuganov. Even if we assume that everyone who supported some third candidate in the first round returned to the polls in the runoff to vote for Yeltsin, fully 73 percent of Zyuganov's initial vote (5,411 voters) would have had to switch to Yeltsin in order to account for the official numbers. Then we have the rayon, also in Tatarstan, that gave Yeltsin and Zyuganov 7,436 and 10,841 votes respectively in the first round, but reported 21,777 votes for Yeltsin and a mere 1,428 for Zyuganov in the second, thus requiring that no less than 87 percent of the communist's vote (9,413 voters) switch sides between rounds. Such switches, of course, strain credulity and it is

more reasonable to suppose that these official numbers bore little relation to actual ballots.

Such examples occasion two questions when tracing the progression of electoral fraud. First, how pervasive are such reversals? And second, where did they arise? The answers are straightforward, at least for 1996. Although the magnitude of ‘incredulous switches’ is nearly matched in several other rayons of Tatarstan and the republic of Dagestan, of the 2,327 rayons in our 1996 data set, only 194 saw Yeltsin’s vote increase between rounds and Zyuganov’s decrease. And on the flip side, only 30 rayons reported an increase in Zyuganov’s support in conjunction with a decrease in Yeltsin’s. Thus, even if we ignore the fact that many of these reversals are of insignificant magnitude and do not match our earlier examples, only 224 rayons, or less than ten percent of the total, yield a suspicious pattern.

Moreover, the reversals that do raise suspicions are concentrated almost exclusively in Russia’s ethnic republics – regions that are rarely identified with good democratic practice. For example, of the 194 rayons reporting reversals that favored Yeltsin, only twenty three (12%) occur in oblasts as opposed to republics. The remaining 171 reversals occur in ethnic republics, and are most heavily concentrated in the “usual suspects”: Tatarstan, Dagestan and Bashkortostan.⁵ Slightly more than half of Bashkortostan’s rayons report reversals favoring Yeltsin (53%), while fully 85 percent of rayons report such reversals in both Tatarstan and Dagestan. Thus, these three republics account for fully two thirds of all reversals in the ethnic republics.

In all other regions, in contrast, the shift in votes seems unexceptional. In Moscow, for instance, Yeltsin won 2,861,258 votes in the first round and 3,629,464 in the

second – a 27 percent gain over his initial support – while Zyuganov won 694,862 votes in the first round and 842,092 in the second – a 21 percent gain over his initial vote. Surely there is no surprise that Yeltsin did appreciably better than his opponent in Russia’s most urban and reform-minded region in 1996, yet even here Zyuganov captured some votes in the runoff that went to other candidates in the first round.

There is another way to look at this data that is especially useful when comparing elections and which moves us to an assessment of fraud in the form of stuffed ballot boxes, voters coerced into voting, or manipulated and even wholly fabricated official totals. Suppose an electorate consists of two types of election districts -- those that, for one reason or another, are susceptible to fraud in this form and those that are not. Assume that absent fraud, the distribution of turnout for both types looks approximately identical and normal in the statistical sense (i.e., some districts report higher turnout than average, some report lower turnout, but the bulk report turnout near the average and both averages roughly coincide). The overall distribution of turnout nationally, then, will also be approximately normally distributed (i.e., unimodal).

Now suppose that in districts susceptible to fraud, fraud occurs in the way previously cited -- the stuffing of ballot boxes with falsified ballots, compelling voters to vote who otherwise might prefer to stay home via various threats and forms of intimidation,⁶ or by simply adding to a candidate’s total in official summaries without regard to votes actually cast. The distribution of turnout for those districts, then, will be shifted to the right, with the initial effect of creating an ‘elongated right tail’ for the overall distribution. That is, if falsifications of this sort are ‘slight’, the national distribution of turnout will appear skewed left. But as falsifications increase in magnitude

so that the shift in the district subsample increases, that ‘tail’ will become a second mode to the right of the original one so as to render the overall distribution bimodal.

Now consider Figure 1, which graphs the turnout distributions for all of Russia’s national elections between 1995 and 2003, where we restrict the data to rayons from its oblasts.⁷ Clearly there is nothing here of a suspicious nature: All distributions are approximately normal without discernable perturbations. Indeed, the distributions for the three presidential ballots (the first and second rounds of 1996, and 2000) are nearly identical and are about as perfect a match to a normal distribution as we are likely to find in any set of empirical data.

But now consider Figures 2a and 2b, which replicate Figure 1 using data from Russia’s ethnic republics, although now we separate presidential and Duma contests to make trends more evident. Here we see two things: First, the distributions are no longer normal; there is a discernable “bump” in each. And second, with respect to trends, the bump increases in severity in both figures as we move from 1995 to 2003. These data, then, are consistent with two hypotheses: (1) whatever manipulations of turnout occurred in Russia between 1995 and 2003 occurred for the most part in its ethnic republics; and (2) the severity of those manipulations increased incrementally over time.

The graph in Figure 2b for the 2003 Duma vote is interesting for another reason. Notice that in addition to becoming bimodal, the left-most node – corresponding ostensibly to those republic rayons in which there were little or no outright falsifications – diminishes significantly in size. Thus, not only do Figures 2a and 2b suggest that artificially augmented turnout grew more severe in specific suspect republics, but that its scope expanded to include republics that were previously untouched by such

malfeasance.

The 2004 Presidential Contest

A word of caution is warranted here. Deviations from normality in the distribution of turnout can arise, of course, if there is significant non-homogeneity in the data – if one subset of precincts or districts owing to any number of demographic reasons has a ‘normal’ higher rate of turnout than another subset. Differences in turnout among urban and rural regions, for example, then, might occasion non-normal distributions when those districts are mixed. For this reason, then, the trend in the data that Figures 2a and 2b suggest are especially important since we know of no demographic shift within Russia’s ethnic republics that might explain the appearance of a right mode in the distribution of turnout. Nevertheless, the preceding data are subject to two benign interpretations. First, with respect to Russia’s oblasts, although political elites there may have used various ‘administrative resources’ to support one candidate or party or another between 1995 and 2003, whatever advantage they established was not so great or of a form to discredit the process. If there was fraud in the oblasts our method fails to detect, it seems to have remained a constant – neither increasing nor decreasing over time. Second, with respect to Russia’s ethnic republics, a skeptic (or Kremlin apologist) we might argue that the trend we observe is merely the acceleration of differences between, say, republics of one type with as yet undiscovered distinguishing characteristics as that type adapts to democracy and as the other type lags behind in its democratic development. This ‘explanation’ though is undermined first by the evident examples of fraud (e.g, 100% turnout rates and 100% support for a specific candidate or party) in republics we know *a*

priori are permeated by fraud (e.g. Tatarstan and Dagestan) and is undermined as well by the sudden upsurge of turnout in other self-evidently corrupt republics (e.g., Chechnya) which cannot be accounted for by any shift in demographics. Nevertheless, at worst, fraud of a magnitude that might cause us to question the overall legitimacy of an election appears to have remained largely isolated in a subset of republics so that an apologist might reasonably argue that Russia compared favorably with voting in the early 1800's in an evolving American republic where counties in, for instance, New Jersey often reported turnout in excess of 100%.

The presidential election of 2004, though, is quite different. Riding a wave of approval over his handling of Chechnya, feeding off the fears of bomb blasts in Moscow of suspect origin, and enjoying the resources afforded by rising energy prices, Putin's reelection was a forgone conclusion from the start – a fact confirmed by his garnering of 71.3 percent of the vote as compared to his closet rival, the Communist Party's nominee, Nikolay Kharitonov with 13.9 percent. Indeed, the writing on the wall was sufficiently clear that Kharitonov sought to withdraw from the race, but was kept on the ballot by the Central Election Commission, presumably because some opposition was deemed necessary to give the election the semblance of legitimacy.

Naturally, Putin's inevitable victory impacted the strategic imperatives of regional bosses in an unambiguous way: Support the incumbent or suffer the consequences. We can even say that regional bosses were trapped in a Prisoners' Dilemma: With no boss wanting to show less support for Putin than any other (aside from a few quixotic figures), each was compelled to exert the maximum effort to that end, fair or foul and regardless of how absurd official returns might appear. We have, for instance, Nurlatinski rayon in

Tatarstan (again) in which, of 43 precincts, 33 reported turnout of 100 percent, and of those 24 awarded Putin 100% of the vote. More generally, the consequence of the strategic imperative occasioned by a sure winner is illustrated in Figure 3.

As before, this figure graphs the distribution of turnout after we separate republics from oblasts, and the most evident fact here is that despite the overall national decline in turnout (from 69 percent in 2000 to 64 percent), we see a dramatic shift to the right of the distribution for republics. The explanation for that shift lies in the fact that, in addition to habitually suspect Tatarstan, Dagestan and Bashkortostan, we now have the republics of Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia and Chechnya all reporting turnout in excess of 90 percent, with Putin, in Soviet-era style, being officially awarded, respectively, 98, 97, 91 and 92 percent of the vote (one wonders how many mujahideen came down from their mountain hideaways disguised as babushkas, circumvented a Russian military with orders to shoot to kill, and cast ballots for their nemesis so as to raise his Chechnya vote twenty one points above the national average).

The election of 2004, however, is not a critically important juncture in Russian politics simply because of the unambiguous pervasiveness of fraud in the republics. The change in the turnout distribution among oblasts, although nowhere near as dramatic as among republics, is also important. Looking again at Figure 3 we see an overall general shift left in that distribution, corresponding to the national decline in turnout for an election that was a forgone conclusion. However, we also see a 'sticky' or elongated tail that makes the distribution begin to approximate what we observed for republics in 1995 and 1996. In other words, a number of oblast rayons were not a part of the general decline in turnout and a few even reported increases in participation.

We can, in fact, identify the type of rayons most susceptible to fraud. Regional bosses in rural areas hold the greatest sway over voting since it is areas removed from urban centers that afford them a near monopoly on information and, oftentimes, on the employment of local bureaucrats.⁸ With this in mind, consider Figure 4, which graphs turnout for 2004 as before, but separates urban from rural rayons in the republics and oblasts. The picture here is striking: In the oblasts, the ‘sticky tail’ identified in Figure 3 is most noticeable among rural oblasts, and the distortion in the distribution of turnout within republics occurs most dramatically among rural rayons as well.

Figure 4 reveals another pattern: A nearly symmetric bimodal distribution among urban republic rayons, which is consistent with approximately half of those districts resisting fraud in some way while the other half succumb to reporting artificially augmented turnout. As to when this effect was first felt, Figures 5a and 5b provide an answer. Although we can see slight perturbations in the right tail of the distributions in Figure 5a for presidential elections prior to 2004, they are far too small to be significant. Figure 5b, on the other hand, shows that the parliamentary election of 2003 represents a break with the past. Thus, it was in the middle of Putin’s first administration, before the 2004 presidential campaign officially began that fraud’s scope expanded to infect not only the republic’s rural areas, but their urban centers as well.

Figure 5c adds an interesting caveat to this story. There we again graph the distribution of turnout among rural oblast rayons, but now we compare that distribution to 1999, 2000, and 2003, whose distributions follows a logical and unexceptional pattern: Turnout is greatest overall for the 2000 presidential contest and shifts left-wards in 2003 to a level below that of the competitive parliamentary vote of 1999. However, all three

distributions are unexceptional. It is only the distribution for 2004, with its elongated right tail, that looks suspicious. The implication here, then, is that although the parliamentary vote in 2003 presaged 2004 in the republics with respect to manipulations and falsifications, such effects appeared in rural oblasts only in 2004.

We are hardly surprised that a discernable level of outright falsification of ballots and official summaries did not wait until 2004 to expand in scope among the republics. Russian parliamentary elections are little more than primaries for the forthcoming presidential contests,⁹ and in 2003 it was evident that United Russia was Putin's new party of power and the parliamentary vote but a prelude to his recoronation. If regional bosses were to demonstrate their loyalty to the Kremlin, they had little incentive to wait until 2004 and every incentive to jump on the bandwagon as soon as possible. What is surprising is that the evidence of fraud within rural oblasts is weak to nonexistent in 2003 (as judged by our method). Nevertheless, regardless of the explanation for this differential timing, the fact remains that as we move into 2004 we see the sometimes gradual and sometimes accelerated increase in the scope and magnitude of fraud over time in both republics and oblasts.¹⁰

The 2007 Duma vote

Setting aside trends within Russia's republics, we want to emphasize that, as Figures 3 and 4 suggest, our assessment of turnout suggests that fraud in 2004 began to infect parts of Russia – its oblasts -- that previously gave the appearance of a reasonably fair counting of ballots (which isn't to say, of course, that other 'administrative measures' weren't applied to favor one candidate or another). We also should note that there is little

journalistic evidence to prove or even suggest that fraud in 2004 was directed or even explicitly sanctioned by the Kremlin. It may have been that Putin still sought to wear a democratic mask but found himself unable to control the actions of regional bosses and elites who, as we note above, had a clear incentive to ensure a solid victory for him in the areas under their control. Even if they knew the Kremlin would be less than overjoyed to have examples of blatant electoral irregularities brought to the attention of Western governments and media, they also knew that inflating Putin's vote would hardly yield negative legal or political consequences. And with regional governors now being appointed rather than directly elected, it was far more personally dangerous to operate with restraint or to allow any effective opposition to Putin.

Suppose, however, that rather than reign in regional elites and pressure them to avoid the electoral excess of 2004, in 2007 Putin chose a different strategy – one designed to assert Russia's independence from the West, and to demonstrate to others the West's (specifically, the European Union's) impotence and dependence on Russia. What better way to do that than by reverting back to a Soviet-era electoral style wherein regional elites are allowed to operate as before, election observers from OSCE are pointedly denied access, and with bluff and bravado, officials are directed to assert that Russia's elections are as free and fair as anyone else's – and then to simply ignore the sarcasm of journalists and the grumblings of Western politicians and bureaucrats who are more concerned with the flow of natural gas than of fraudulent ballots?

That fraud again occurred in 2007 in the form of stuffed ballot boxes and falsified official summaries is self-evident. We can only conclude on the basis of official returns that the mujahideen of Chechnya again descended from their mountain hideaways to

vote, this time in greater numbers than before, so as to raise turnout to a remarkable 99.2 percent with 99.4 percent going to Putin's United Russia. Thus, of the 580,000 registered voters in Chechnya, only 3,000 are reported not to have participated.

Then there is the republic of Ingushetiya which replicated its remarkable turnout from the previous election of 98 percent. This time, however, the dissident website ingushetiya.ru began a campaign of collecting the signatures and passport numbers of registered voters who certified that they hadn't voted. As of December 23, 2007, fully 57,898 certified signatures had been collected, representing 36 percent of the republic's registered electorate! And while, with the returns from Chechnya in mind, the Western media may have chuckled at the assertion of Vladimir Churov, chairman of Russia's Central Election Commission, that he knew of "no serious violations in the course of polling day", there is also the rayon in the republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia in which *all* 15 voting stations reported 100 percent turnout (17,779 voters) with 100 percent of the vote going to United Russia.

These Soviet-era type numbers, though, do not tell us about overall trends. Thus, Figure 6a graphs turnout for 2007, comparing the distributions for republics and oblasts against what we observe for 2003.¹¹ The differences are striking. Not only is there a virtual explosion of rayons with turnout in excess of 90 percent, and although the change in the distribution among oblasts is nowhere near as extreme, we still see the overall right-ward shift in that distribution with a not insignificant share of oblast rayons reporting turnout in excess of 80 percent.

Indeed, as Figure 6b reveals, patterns of turnout in 2007 -- essentially an 'off year' election for which turnout usually declines relative to presidential contests -- closely

match what we observe for 2004. Specifically, in 2003, 2004 and 2007, the percentage of republic rayons reporting turnout in excess of 90 percent increased from 14 to 33 to 39 percent while the percentages for oblasts went from 0.4 to 3 to 2 percent. Similarly, the percentage reporting turnout in excess of 85 percent went, in republics, from 23 to 44 to 48 percent, and in oblasts from 1 to 6 to 4 percent. Conversely, the percentage of republic rayons reporting turnout less than 65% went from 31 to 11 to 12 percent but in oblasts declined from 64 to 37 to 39 percent.

Overall, then, the message conveyed by these numbers in conjunction with Figures 6a and 6b is that the 2007 parliamentary election bears a closer correspondence to the 2004 presidential contest than it does to the preceding parliamentary vote in 2003. The 2003 vote may have presaged the corruption and fraud that permeated voting and vote counting in 2004 – notably, the continued deterioration of democratic standards in the republics and the increasing turnout of rural oblast rayons that is explicable only with reference to artificially manipulated vote counts. But if there is a clear difference between 2004 and 2007 it is only that an even greater number of republic rayons had their turnout augmented in 2007.

Moscow

The conclusion seems inescapable, then, that whatever fraud infected oblast rayons for the first time in 2004 largely remained in place thereafter. This fact is no more strikingly revealed than when we begin to examine data at the precinct level. We know, of course, that any aggregation of data necessarily loses information – summary national data hide patterns in regional statistics, regional data hide patterns in rayon level

numbers, and rayon level data hide patterns at the precinct level.

Fortunately, we also have data on a select number of precincts and it is informative to look at one Moscow rayon in particular (Presnya) since it reveals how fraud has now infected even Russia's capitol. Figure 7 graphs the distribution of turnout by precinct in that rayon for the 2003, 2004 and 2007 elections. The results are striking. The distribution for 2003 looks utterly normal, without a hint of malfeasance. In 2004, on the other hand, it is as if we are dealing with two separate elections or two separate countries. There is a massive upsurge of turnout, but only among a subset of precincts whereas the remainder looks much like it did in 2003.

The net result is that the overall distribution of turnout looks as if it were made of two wholly disjoint distributions. Finally, in 2007, there seems to be some "backsliding" among a subset of previously corrupted precincts, but not so great as to return them to where they had been in 2003. And in the remaining subset, there is virtually no backsliding at all. Overall, whatever fraud we attribute to 2004 in this urban Moscow rayon persisted to a significant extent in 2007.

These data need to be understood in context. If international observers had access to polls and polling stations, that access was greatest in Moscow. Still, in 2004, nearly half the precincts of this particular rayon saw a remarkable upsurge in turnout, all to the benefit of Putin.¹² And while a Putin apologist might argue that all we are seeing here is a manifestation of his popularity, we also need to keep in mind that Moscow rayons are demographically homogeneous (nor are we aware of any temporal demographic process that would result in such a change in distributions over the course of a few months). So that leaves unexplained why voters at a majority of polling stations did not share in this

enthusiasm. And it leaves unexplained why whatever mechanisms that were implemented in 2004 to pad turnout and the vote for Putin persisted into 2007.

Surely the Kremlin was well aware of what occurred in 2004, but Figure 7 leads us (somewhat cynically) to ask why it so pointedly discouraged outside observers from monitoring its elections in 2007: After all, monitors, at least in the Moscow rayon of Presnya, seemed to have had little impact in 2004 (or is that why not all precincts reported turnout in excess of 80 percent?). It is almost as if the Kremlin was challenging the West to officially deem its election illegitimate, knowing that it would not do so, and thereby demonstrate that Gasprom's vote counts more heavily in international affairs than does that of the Russian electorate.

Conclusion

There are two conjectures to be considered here: Either the Kremlin has deliberately orchestrated the fraud that permeates its electoral process or that process is not under its control but a system of incentives exists whereby regional political elites have, as their primary incentive, that of currying favor with the Kremlin. Reality is almost a mix of the two. On the one hand we see officials within the Kremlin unapologetically defending an electoral process that consistently produces self-evidently absurd outcomes (e.g. Chechnya), no evident attempt at any serious policing of the polling process itself, and officially sanctioned Stalinist style harassment of political opponents.

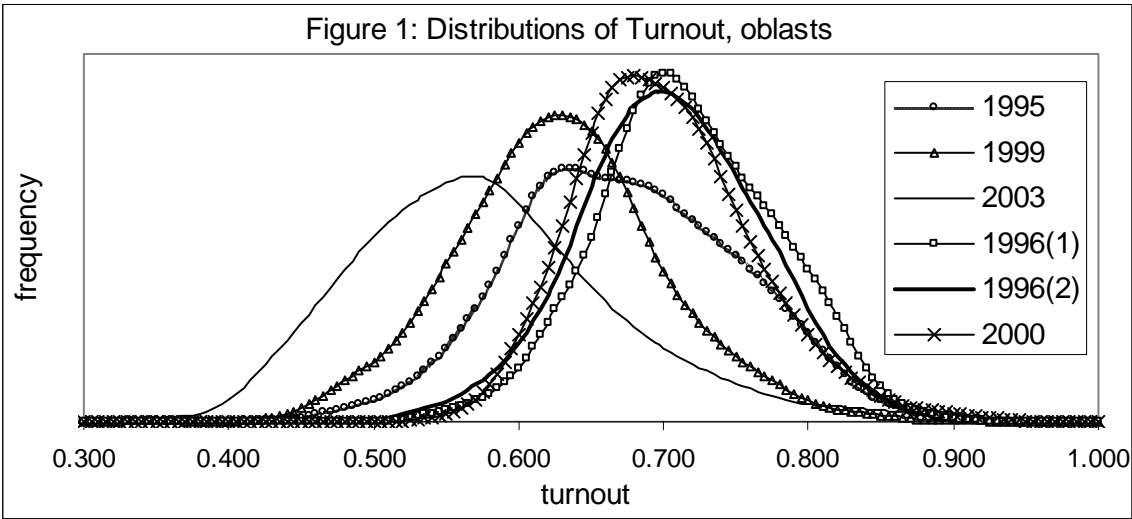
On the other hand, we also understand the incentives established by such "reforms" as the appointment rather than the direct election of governors embedded in a

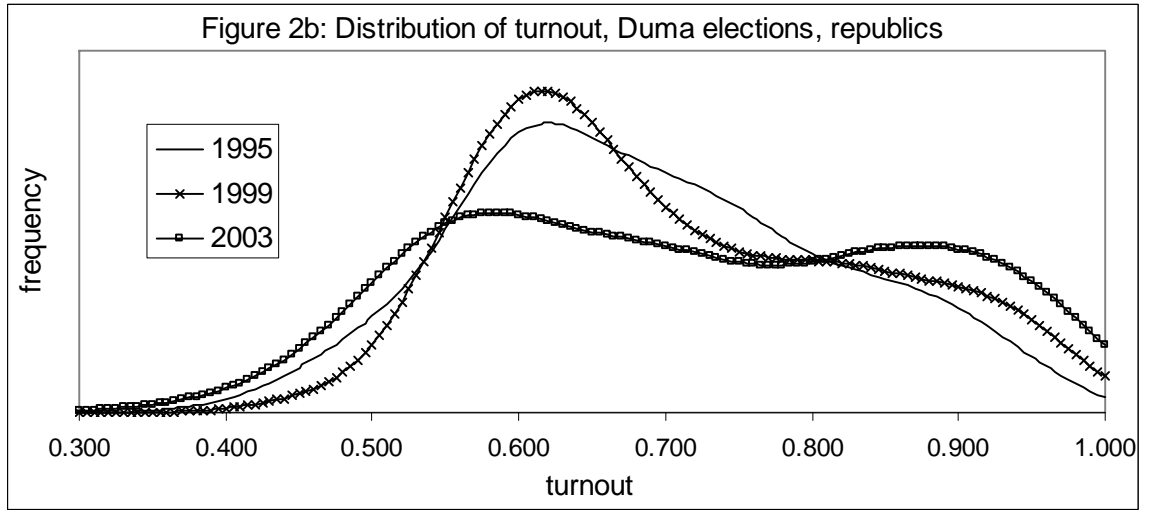
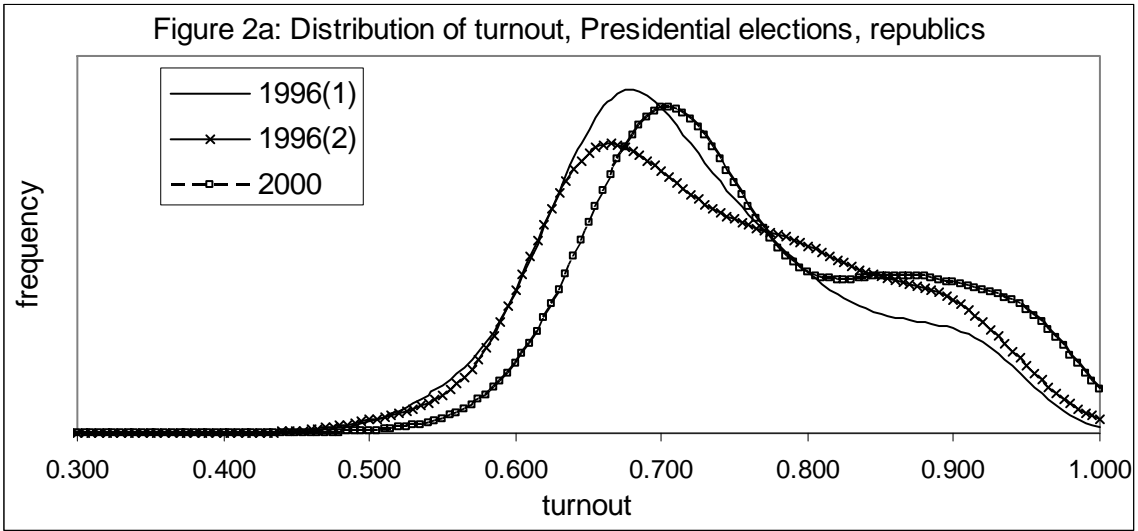
political-economic system where nearly all resources and power are centered in Moscow. Is not unreasonable to conjecture, in fact, that the incentives established by the institutional changes implemented under Putin have created a Frankenstein monster that the Kremlin can no longer control.

Regardless of the ultimate source of electoral corruption, our analysis of turnout distributions suggests that it is now widespread and growing. Although we have thus far refrained from offering an estimate of the number of falsified ballots in 2007, we should keep in mind that in a deeper analysis of the 2004 contest using a variety of methods, we estimated no fewer than 10 million suspect or fraudulent votes. Figures 6a and 6b give us no reason to suppose that fraud was significantly less prevalent in 2007. Almost surely United Russia's greater-than-two-thirds majority in the State Duma derives from an artificial inflation of its vote, and that the 2007 contest, like the 2004 vote (and surely the 2008 presidential vote as well), is a democratic oxymoron.

A final comment now on our methods: First, we appreciate that a study of this sort is much like a criminal investigation, wherein all available evidence needs to be gathered before an indictment is arrived at. Here we look at only one indicator of fraud and there are certainly many others – statistical, journalistic, and from first hand observations of an electoral process. Our objective, however, is merely to illustrate the application of one forensic indicator with, admittedly, significant substantive (i.e., policy) implications. Other indicators should also be applied if only to refine our methods for detecting electoral fraud. Second, we also appreciate that various tests can be applied to assess the 'statistical normality' of data. We have eschewed such tests since we believe that, for the data at hand at least, a simple visual assessment is sufficient (especially when examining,

say, Figures 6a, 6b and 7). Admittedly, we might prefer a deeper assessment of the demographic correlates of variations in turnout here, but data of the type necessary for such a study is in rather short supply or availability in Russia. This, of course, is but an argument for the further development of indicators of electoral malfeasance of the sort introduced here.





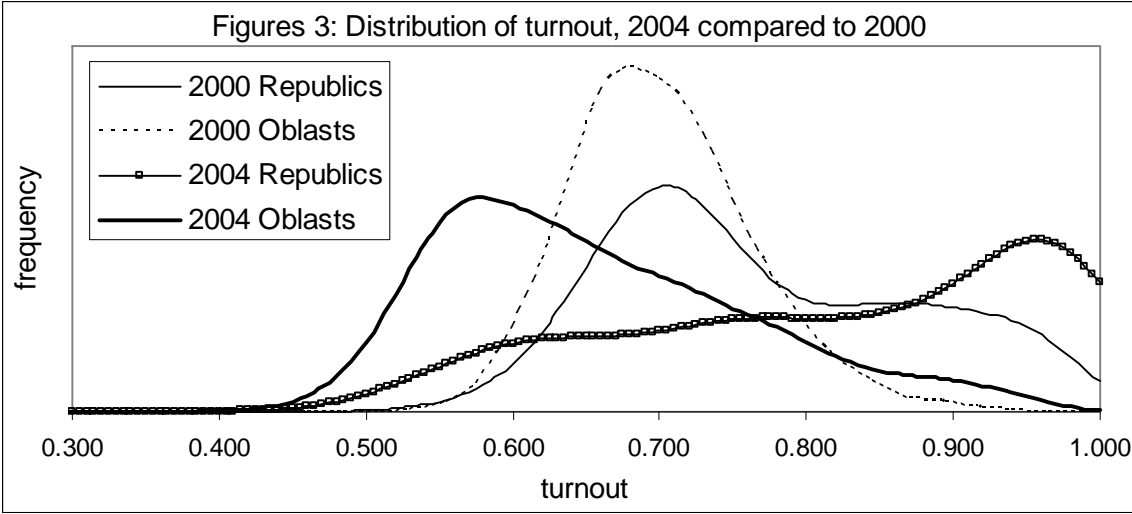
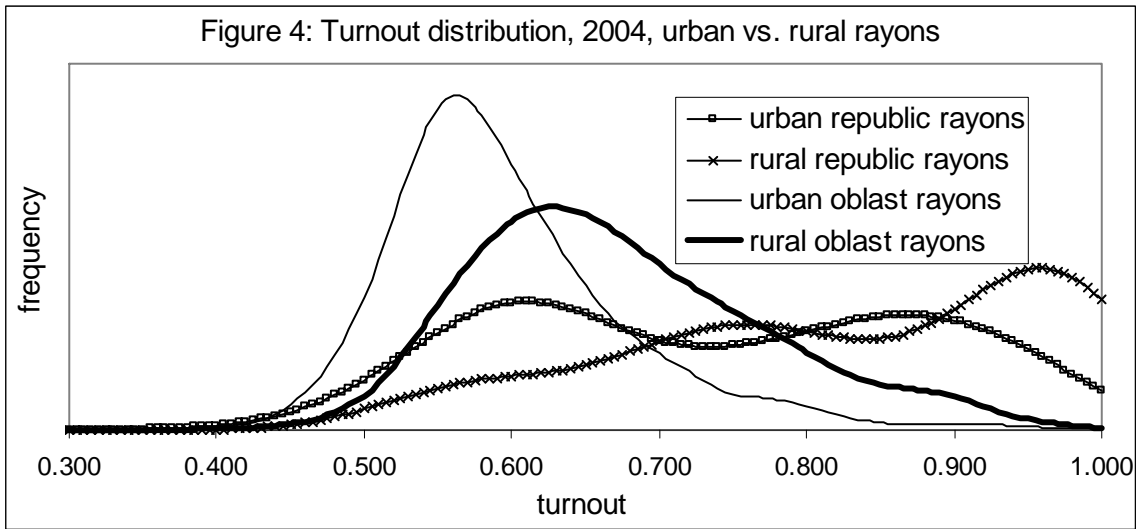
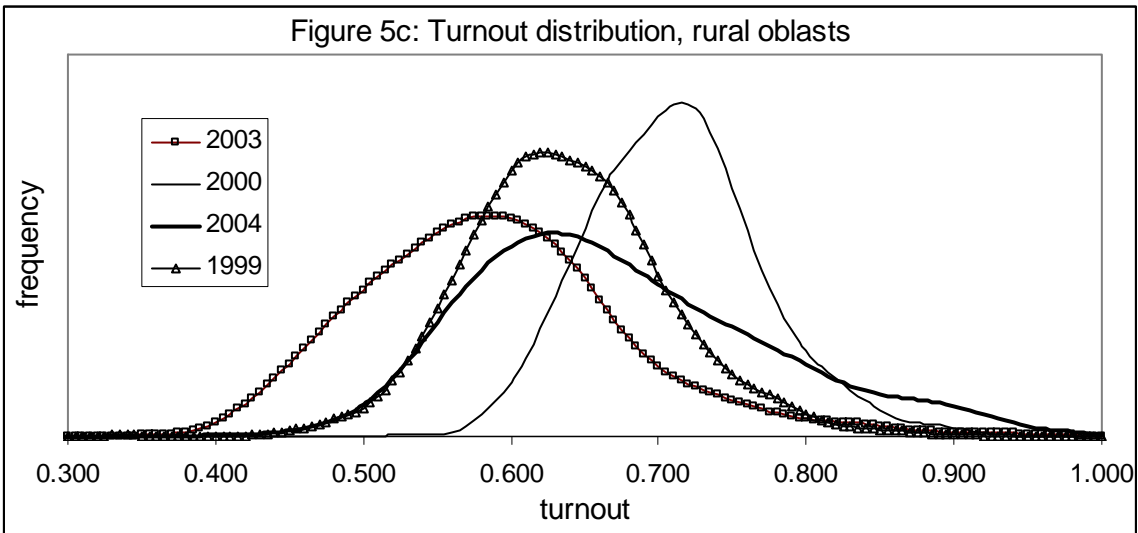
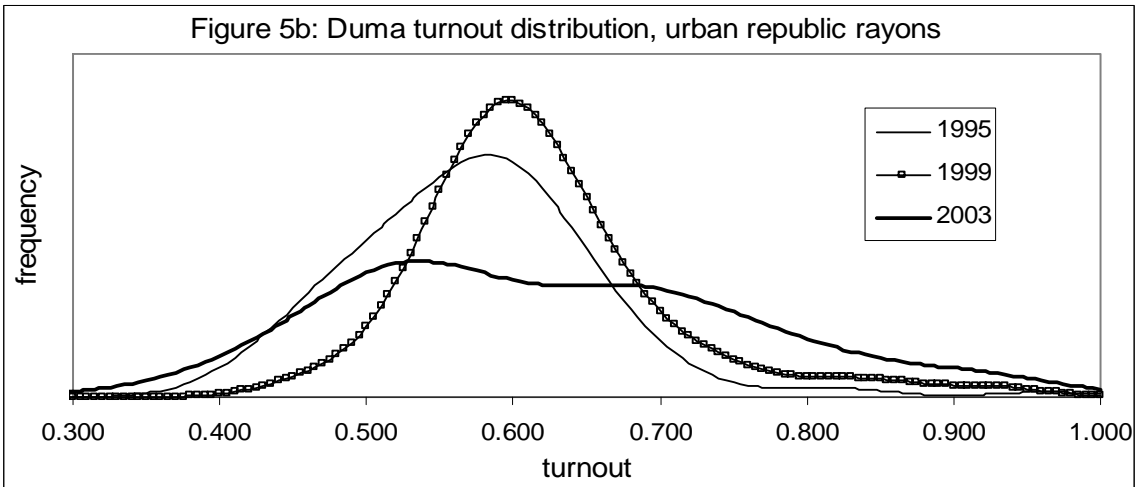
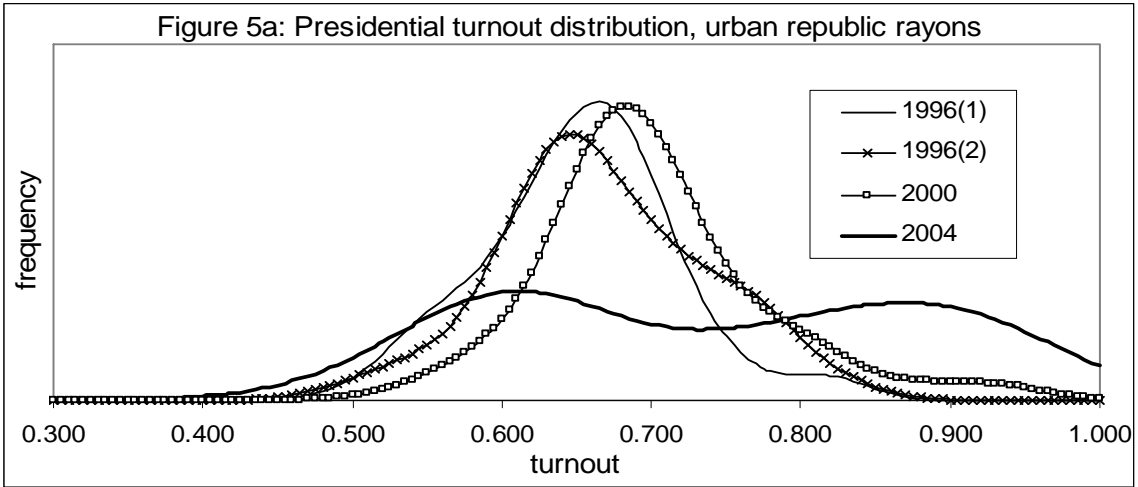
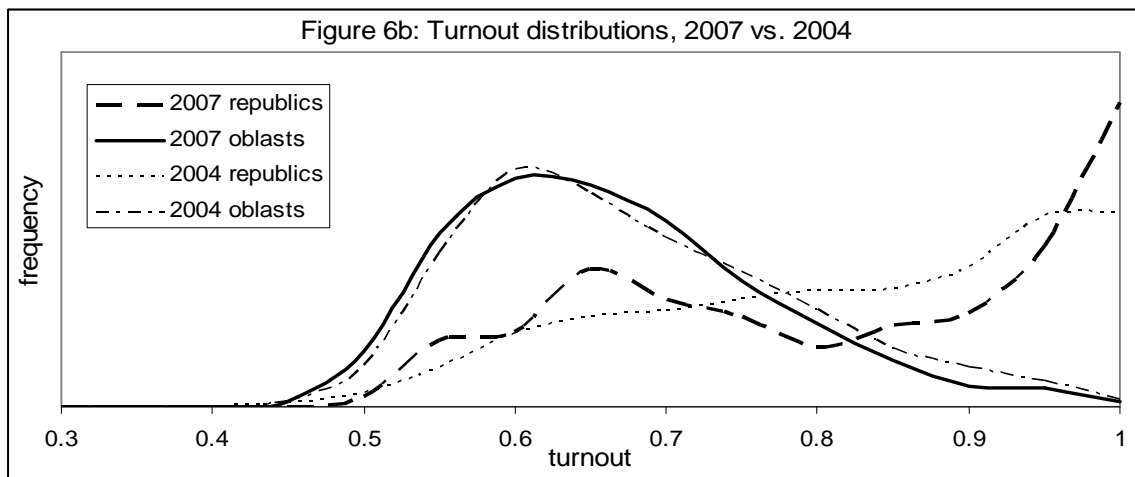
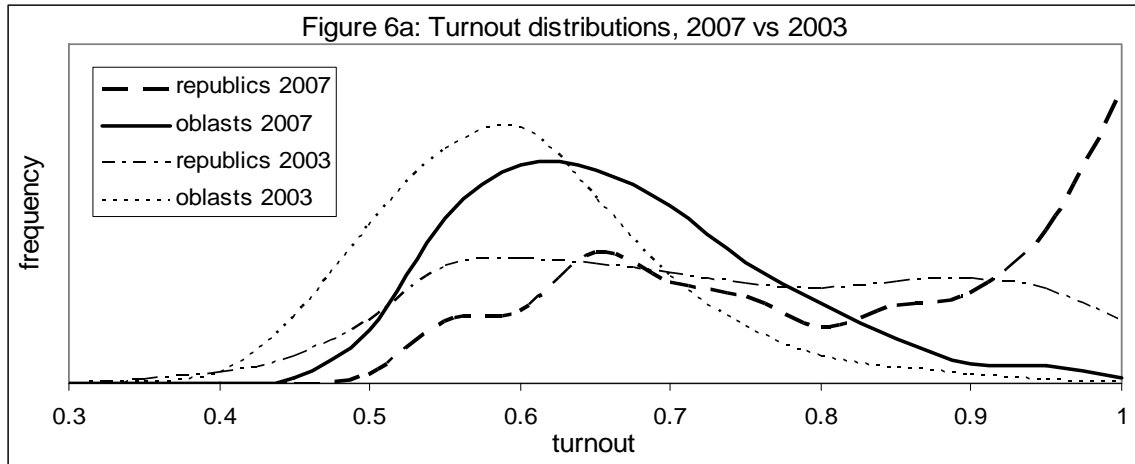
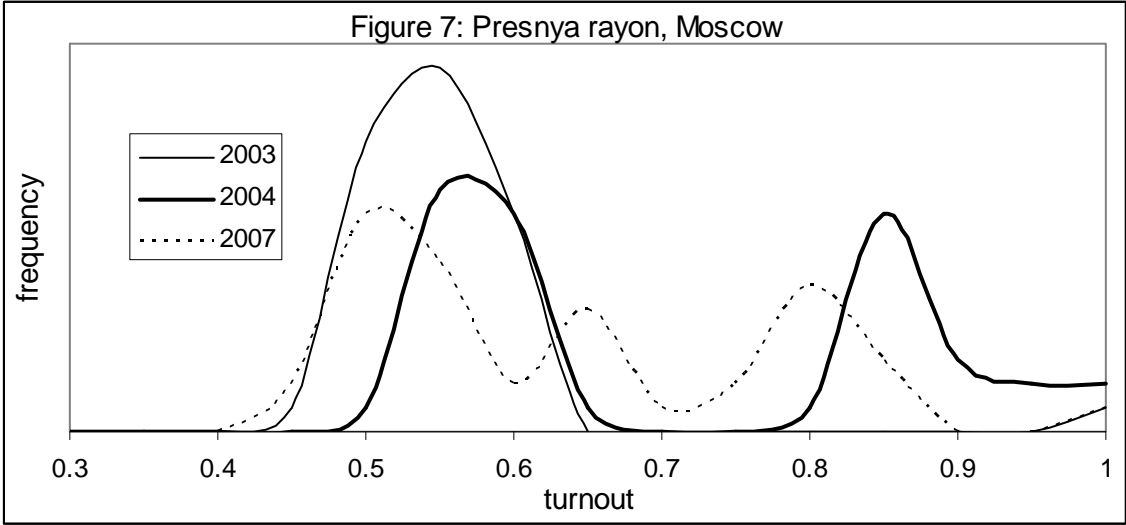


Figure 4: Turnout distribution, 2004, urban vs. rural rayons









Endnotes

¹ Alexander Sobyenin, E. Gel'man and O. Kaiunov, "The Political Climate of Russia's Regions: Voters and Deputies, 1991-1993", *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 21 1 (1994): 63-84 and Sobyenin and V. Suchovolskiy, "Elections and the Referendum December 12, 1993 in Russia: Political Results, Perspectives and Trustworthiness of the Results", report to the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, 1993.

² Mikhail Myagkov, Peter C. Ordeshook, and Dimitry Shakin, "Fraud or Fairytales: Russia and Ukraine's Electoral Experience", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 21 (April-June) 2005: 91-131.

³ *New York Times*, January 29, 2008.

⁴ We do not consider the 1993 vote since our data then, comprised of returns from little more than a quarter of all rayons (counties), is too incomplete for definitive analysis. More generally, our data consists of a linked time series that encompasses approximately 2550 of Russia's 2700 rayons, with the exception of 1996 wherein we have consistent data across both rounds of the voting for 2327 rayons.

⁵ That is, republics governed autocratically; by M. Shamaimiev in Tatarstan, elected president of the republic in uncontested elections in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2005; in Bashkortostan by M. Raximev who has been the republic's president since 1993, and in Dagestan, until 2006, by chairman of the State Council M. Magomedov beginning in 1987.

⁶ Which, in the case of Russia at least, can include the requirement that the voter's ballot be inspected to see if the 'correct' candidate or party has been checked before the ballot is put into the ballot box.

⁷ This figure and Figures 2a-b and 3 are adapted from Myagkov, et al, 2005 cited above.

⁸ See Andrei Berezkin, Mikhail Myagkov, and Peter C. Ordeshook, 2003. "Location and Political Influence," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 44, 3 (2003): 169-83 and Mikhail Myagkov, "The Duma Elections: A Step towards Democracy or the Elites' Game," in Vicki L. Hesli and William M. Reisinger, eds., *The 1999-2000 Elections in Russia*. New York: NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003 for empirical evidence of this fact drawn from official election returns

⁹ Peter C. Ordeshook, "Russia's Party System: Is Russian Federalism Viable," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 12, 3 (1996): 195-217, and Olga Shevtsova, "Resolving the Problem of Pre-Election Coordination: The Parliamentary Election as an Elite Presidential Primary," in Vicki L. Hesli and William M. Reisinger, eds., *The 1999-2000 Elections in Russia*. New York: NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003.

¹⁰ As reported elsewhere (Myagkov et al 2005 cited above), other patterns in official returns indicate that the 2004 contest was the most fraud-ridden of the series, including the relationship of Putin's vote between 2000 and 2004 (there is none for a significant subset of rayons), the estimate that in 2004 Putin won 114% (sic!) of United Russia's 2003 vote while upwards of 24% of habitual non-voters marched to the polls in 2004 to vote for Putin despite the uncompetitiveness of the contest, and the relationship between turnout and Putin's absolute support (e.g., for every 100 voters who went to the polls in Tatarstan, upwards of 167 of them voted for Putin, in Bashkortostan a 100 vote increase in turnout yields 141 additional votes for Putin, and in Chechnya, a comparable turnout increase yields 133 votes for the incumbent, sic!). On net, then, it is not unreasonable to count no less than ten million or so suspect votes for Putin.

¹¹ Unfortunately, our data for 2007 does not differentiate between urban and rural rayons.

¹² In 2003, if we regress turnout against United Russia's vote, we get a coefficient of 0.12 ($R^2 = 0.10$). But in 2004, that coefficient for Putin increases to 1.08 ($R^2 = 0.96$) and in 2007 it increases further to 1.20 ($R^2 = 0.82$). That is, for every additional 10 people who marched to the polls in 2007, United Russia's support increased by 12 votes! Moreover, if we split precincts in 2004 between those reporting greater than 70% turnout and those reporting less, the coefficients for Putin are, respectively, 0.96 and 0.41; and if in 2007 we split precincts into those reporting greater than 55% turnout and those reporting less, the coefficients for United Russia are 1.01 and a statistically insignificant -0.03 respectively. Thus, **every** additional vote in the high turnout precincts went to Putin or United Russia.