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**THE TRAIL OF VOTES IN RUSSIA'S 1999 DUMA AND  
2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

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## **Abstract**

Russia's array of political parties, based largely on Moscow-centered personalities with presidential aspirations rather than on coherent policy programs, continued its seemingly directionless evolution in 1999, with the appearance of two new "parties" – Otechestvo and Edinstvo. The Russian electorate, by contrast, offered a picture of surprising stability, at least from 1991 through 1996, as the flow of votes across elections from one party or candidate to the next followed a coherent pattern. Aggregate election returns suggest that this pattern persisted through the 1999 Duma balloting to the 2000 presidential election. Here, we offer a close examination of official rayon-level election returns from both 1999 and 2000 and conclude that this picture of stability masks the ability of regional governors to direct the votes of their electorates in a nearly wholesale fashion. This conclusion is significant for reform of Russia's institutions towards encouraging a coherent party system. Specifically, rather than focusing on electoral institutional factors, we argue that the principal culprit in explaining the failure of a coherent party system to materialize is the influence of Russia's super-presidentialism.

## Introduction

It is generally argued that the critical election for a new democracy is not the first, but the second or third, when the government experiences a leadership turnover or when political competition is such that there is a real possibility of turnover. Although the retirement of Boris Yeltsin and the electoral ascendancy of Vladimir Putin might lead us to hope that Russia passed this test, it is more reasonable to argue that the test was not fairly applied. Yeltsin's nameplate may have been removed from his Kremlin office door without tanks rolling through Moscow's streets, but those who see turnover as a test of democratic maturity have a view of this idea that is different than what Russia experienced. That view rests instead on a model in which a ruling party – not an individual – is supplanted by an opposition, so that by dint of electoral defeat, one cadre of elites is sent to early retirement by another, as occurred recently in Mexico and Taiwan. But in Russia there is no ruling party – at least not one that abides by some fixed label we can associate with an ongoing organizational structure. Instead, with the exceptions of the Communist Party and a nearly insignificant entity that persists as the barony of one person's ego and presidential aspirations (Yabloko), parties come and go in Russia with such rapidity that we cannot readily identify an incumbent party or its challengers, and yesterday's "party of power" becomes tomorrow's footnote.

This situation is frustrating, at least for those who see parties as central to democratic process and who, at the same time, notice that the revolving door nature of Russia's parties contrasts sharply with the electorate to which candidates and parties appeal. At least up until 1999, the Russian electorate arguably exhibited a remarkable stability in terms of its ideological predispositions and patterns of electoral support (Myagkov, Ordeshook and Sobyenin 1997, McFaul and Fish 1996). Moreover, whatever correlations researchers could identify between voting and socio-economic parameters, such as age, income, and urban residency (see Clem and Craumer 1996, Solnick 1998), failed to suggest that the Russian electorate in this period was much different from those found in other democracies; the most significant difference was their apparent tolerance for economic pain. The data, then, not only suggested that Vladimir

Zhirinovsky's unanticipated success in 1993 was an aberration and that Russia would not turn to some radical "solution" to its troubles, they also described an electorate that seemed a fertile field for the development of a party system with a coherent underlying ideological structure.

That such a system has not evolved suggests that Russia's current "non-party" system derives more from some institutional deficiencies than from some historical or cultural features of the Russian electorate. That is, if the electorate was stable in the sense that the flow of votes from one party and candidate to the next across elections was coherent and understandable, despite wrenching and painful economic changes, then the failure of parties to mirror this stability could only be the consequence of institutional disincentives for political elites to organize themselves accordingly. And here, scholars point to two institutional characteristics in particular. The first is Russia's extreme form of presidentialism, in which the president is less a leader of public opinion or the champion of some position in a policy space, and more a ruler: a figure who stands above the fray without partisan attachments; who is unencumbered by a constraining judiciary; who is empowered with the authority to issue decrees in areas where the law is silent and to suspend regional acts and laws he deems unconstitutional; and who cannot resist the temptation to use the levers of power at his disposal to engender a compliant Duma and subservient regional governments (Fish 2000). Thus, unlike the presidents or prime ministers of most democracies, a Russian president has little need for an ongoing and coherent political party. Indeed, an organization that is anything more than a personal entourage can only be an inconvenience, since it requires a sharing of power with others who cannot simply be fired (Shvetsova 2000).

It is reasonable to suppose, then, that to encourage a meaningful party system, Russia requires a diminution of presidential power. There is, though, a considerable body of comparative research that suggests another institutional impediment to party formation: Russia's electoral arrangements. Here we refer to the apparent flaw in political institutional design embodied by a politically weak Duma in which half the seats are filled in a national proportional representation election a mere six months prior to the presidential contest. This sequence and ballot form, especially when coupled with Russia's strong

presidentialism, has two consequences. First, it erodes the opportunity for presidential coattails and fails to provide any essential linkage between the presidential electoral campaign and the legislative campaigns of those who might share a presidential candidate's policy objectives. Second, and perhaps more important, it discourages the Duma balloting from being anything more than a presidential primary, in which aspirants to that office use the parliamentary election to assess or demonstrate electoral strengths and to organize for the forthcoming presidential competition (Ordeshook 1995).

The 1999 Duma contest appeared to play this role more than in any previous election. With an aging Yeltsin clearly unfit for a third term, the primary concern of analysts and politicians as the Duma election approached was the relative strength of those who might choose to run for the presidency six months hence. While there was, doubtless, some interest in learning what coalitions were likely in the new Duma, other questions loomed larger. Was Zyuganov, now, little more than a ghost from the past? Who would voters who had previously voted for Yeltsin turn to now? Could Primakov and Luzhkov, separately or together, form electoral coalitions that would make one of them the leading presidential contender? Could Putin carry Yeltsin's mantle?

The official returns of the parliamentary contest did in fact signal the ultimate outcome of the presidential election held – following Yeltsin's surprise (and strategic) resignation – a mere three months later. On the one hand, past stability was reasserted in the nearly unchanging support secured by Communists (in 1995 Zyuganov and Ampilov garnered 26.8% of the vote whereas in 1999 the KPRF (Communist Party of the Russian Federation) got 26.5%) and reformers (Yabloko + Gaidar + Federov + Khakamada received 13.5% in 1995 while Yabloko + SPS (Soyuz Pravykh Sil) won 14.5% in 1999). Only support for Zhirinovskiy's LDPR (Liberal Democratic Part of Russia) changed appreciably – but in this instance by continuing its downward slide (garnering 6% in 1996 versus 11.1% in 1995). These three relatively well-established blocks, then, saw their total vote share remain nearly fixed, with their decline from 52% to 47% of all votes largely attributable to the LDPR's increasing irrelevance. Here at least a fertile field for party development appeared to sustain itself.

In contrast, however, and as a prelude of the forthcoming presidential contest, the Kremlin's Edinstvo (Unity) – a “party” that did not exist a few months prior to the 1999 balloting – surprised many with a strong second-place showing that out-pollled the vote won in 1995 by the old “party of power,” Our Home is Russia (NDR), by better than 2 to 1. Even Luzhkov and Primakov's Otechestvo (OVR), though disappointing and headed for extinction, out-pollled the NDR's old total by nearly forty percent.

These numbers raise a series of questions that should cause us to reassess the appearance of electoral stability. First, where did “Otechestvo” and “Edinstvo” get their votes? Were their electoral coalitions comprised of votes from the remnants of the nearly three dozen unsuccessful parties that competed in 1995, plus NDR? Or did the economy, the war in Chechnya, and the end of Yeltsin's political career result in a wholesale reshuffling of electoral support that is hidden in the aggregate statistics?

Beyond whatever interest we might have in the answers to these questions, the matter of electoral stability needs to be reexamined if we are to assess the extent to which any institutional reform can encourage a coherent party system (Hanson 2000). Suppose, in fact, that we must choose between the two alternative reforms just described – a constitutional curb on presidential powers versus a reconfiguration of Russia's electoral arrangements. Here (ignoring the question of feasibility), our choice depends on which of two hypotheses we deem more reasonable with respect to the processes of party formation and dissolution we have observed thus far.

On the one hand there is the view that failed parties such as NDR, Russia's Choice, and Otechestvo are instances of unstable or unsuccessful coalitions, which failed because of the absence of incentives for political elites to bargain, compromise, and cooperate. Parties arise and their organizations and labels are sustained in a democracy because such elites have a common interest in cultivating parties and using them, to mobilize and guide voters. In this instance, then, the more feasible reform of reconfiguring electoral rules so that the electoral fates of elites are more interdependent might be sufficient to encourage a coherent party system.

On the other hand, Shvetsova (2000) offers an alternative hypothesis about electoral processes: namely, that the various reform and pro-government parties we have seen since 1991 are, along with Otechestvo and Edinstvo, instances of political and economic elites attempting to coordinate with the primary source of political power – the presidency – as a way of defending their positions of authority and bank accounts. If this hypothesis is right, then the existing incentives to form or not form parties can be changed only by the less feasible alternative of removing that focal point of power, by diminishing the constitutional authority of the presidency. In this instance, reform or electoral rules alone will be inconsequential.

This question of alternative interpretations of elite motives cannot be dissected fully in a single essay. However, what we can do here is attempt to examine the official 1999 and 2000 election returns to see what evidence they might lend to either hypothesis. Specifically, using data aggregated only up to the level of Russia's 2,600-plus individual rayons, we extend an analysis we offered earlier that estimates the flow of votes from one election to the next and from one party or political candidate to another in the period 1991 to 1996 (Myagkov, Ordeshook, Sobyenin 1997). Now, however, rather than focus on the ebb and flow of support among reform, communist and nationalist parties and candidates, we are interested in understanding the bases of support of the two new parties that competed in 1999, as a prelude to the 2000 presidential contest, "Otechestvo" and "Edinstvo", and, subsequently, of Putin himself.

The relevance of such an analysis to the issue of institutional reform and political party formation is as follows. First, elsewhere we offered evidence in support of the proposition that, at least in the 1996 presidential contest, regional political bosses played a critical role in Yeltsin's victory (Berezkin, Myagkov and Ordeshook 1999). Although the evidence we offered is largely circumstantial and hardly definitive, the proposition is sufficiently reasonable to warrant consideration and testing. One question we address, then, is whether a regional governor's support for one party or another deflected the "natural" flow of votes in 1999 and 2000. Did votes move differently when a region's political boss supported "Otechestvo" as against those regions whose bosses supported "Edinstvo"? More important, did the flow

of votes from 1999 to 2000 and from 1995-1996 to these two elections “make sense” in terms of the picture of electoral stability that characterized previous elections, so that we might sustain the argument that a “mere” reform of electoral rules would be sufficient to engender a coherent party system? Or, was it the case that votes could be directed by regional governors in such a way to suggest that the game of electoral politics in Russia is primarily a game among regional governors, plus a few parties with little chance of capturing the presidency – in which case, it is unlikely that a change in electoral structure will have the intended effect, unless we also diminish the authority of the president?

### **1. An introductory theoretical model**

To set the stage for answers to the preceding questions, we first take a slight theoretical detour that helps us explain the patterns of gubernatorial support across regions in the 2000 presidential contest. Briefly, the critical component of the political maneuver that occurred in 1999 prior to the Duma election was the formation of Otechestvo and Edinstvo. The first was intended to facilitate the aspirations of Luzhkov and Primakov, and the second to facilitate the elevation to the presidency of Yeltsin’s hand picked successor, ostensibly Vladimir Putin. And although it is apparent that the ultimate goal was the presidency and not merely seats in parliament, it is useful to look at the Duma election in isolation and to assess whether we should anticipate any pattern to the endorsements of regional governors as a function of the political strength of those bosses – as a function of their ability to “deliver the vote” of their constituencies. For this purpose, then, we construct a simple game-theoretic model to “predict” which type of governor (political boss) will support Otechestvo versus Edinstvo.

We begin by assuming that each boss is Weak or Strong, where a weak boss is someone who can only marginally deflect the votes within his region in any particular way, and a strong one is someone who can somehow redirect a significant share of the region’s vote to one party or candidate in both the Duma and the presidential contest. Here we suppose that a boss knows whether he is weak or strong, but that Putin and the Kremlin know only that he is weak with probability  $p$  and strong with probability  $1-p$ . This

may seem a strange assumption – that the Kremlin does not know which governors can deliver the vote and which ones can not. Certainly no one believed that Luzhkov or Shaimiev were weak. However, as we show, our conclusions do not depend on  $p$ 's value.

Because we do not want to confound this model with a discussion of coordination versus cooperative coalition formation, we assume that all bosses of the same type act the same way – that they are already coordinated to choose the same strategies. Our game, then, assumes that each boss confronts two alternatives – to support Otechestvo and to support Edinstvo. These alternatives yield four strategies that allow for a choice of one of these alternatives, conditional on the boss's type:

- OO: support Otechestvo regardless of whether you are weak or strong
- EE: support Edinstvo regardless of whether you are weak or strong
- OE: support Otechestvo if you are weak and Edinstvo if you are strong
- EO: support Edinstvo if you are weak and Otechestvo if you are strong

In terms of payoffs, we assume that any boss supporting Otechestvo immediately incurs a cost  $C$  from doing so, regardless of type, although a boss who is subsequently revealed to be strong gains at least some amount,  $S$ , ostensibly as future political capital, regardless of whom he endorses. Once again, however, bypassing the reasons for preferring to coordinate beforehand to the likely winner of the presidential contest, we assume that a strong boss who supports Otechestvo gains the bribe  $B$  (which we assume exceeds  $S$ ), rather than  $S$  since, having been revealed to be strong by the pattern of votes in his region and not yet having committed to Putin, he must now be pursued and “bought” by the Kremlin immediately following the Duma election (but before the presidential election).

The Kremlin's (Putin's) payoffs are simple: it gains  $V$  (votes in the presidential contest) from any strong boss who supports it subsequently, and nothing from a weak boss. If a boss supports Otechestvo and is, following the Duma vote, revealed to be strong, we assume that the Kremlin gains those same  $V$  votes, but only after paying the bribe  $B$ .<sup>1</sup> Finally, with respect to the Kremlin's choices, we assume that it can either reward a boss that endorses Edinstvo immediately in the amount of  $R$  or withhold any reward

until after the vote is tallied. Thus, we subtract the amount  $R$  from the Kremlin's payoffs if it chooses to reward a boss who supports it before the Duma election. Assuming now that the Kremlin can commit to rewarding or not rewarding supporters prior to the Duma election, its strategies are simply

- $R$ : pay each boss who supports you the amount  $R$
- $\sim R$ : pay nothing to any boss

The strategic-form game this scenario induces is shown in Table 1. (To illustrate the calculation of payoffs, consider the cell  $(EE, R)$ . Here a boss supports Edinstvo regardless of type, and the Kremlin rewards any boss that supports it. With probability  $p$ , then, a boss is weak and "wins"  $R$  while the Kremlin loses  $R$ ; and with probability  $(1-p)$  the boss is strong, wins  $S-R$ , and the Kremlin wins  $V-R$ . Thus, the boss's payoff is  $pR + (1-p)(S+R) = R + (1-p)S$ , while the Kremlin's is  $-pR + (1-p)(V-R) = (1-p)V - R$ . But if the Kremlin commits to offering no reward to anyone except Otechestvo supporters who are subsequently revealed to be strong, in cell  $(EE, \sim R)$  all payoffs are unchanged except that  $R$  disappears from all calculations).

**Table 1: A Simple Game**

	<b>R</b>	<b>~R</b>
<b>OO</b>	$(1-p)B-C, (1-p)(V-B)$	$(1-p)B-C, (1-p)(V-B)$
<b>EE</b>	$(1-p)S+R, (1-p)V-R$	$(1-p)S, (1-p)V$
<b>OE</b>	$(1-p)(S+R)-pC, (1-p)(V-R)$	$(1-p)S-pC, (1-p)V$
<b>EO</b>	$(1-p)(B-C)+pR, (1-p)(V-B)-R$	$(1-p)(B-C), (1-p)V-B$

The essential thing to notice, now, is that this game has a trivial solution whenever  $B-C > S$  – whenever a strong boss can win more by withholding an endorsement of the Kremlin’s candidate or party in order to compel a “buy out” at a later date. If this condition is satisfied, then the strategy **EO** dominates the rest, in which case the Kremlin prefers **~R**. Thus, **(EO,~R)** is an equilibrium that can be arrived at via the elimination of dominated strategies. Moreover, this result does not depend on  $p$  – on the degree of certainty with which the Kremlin associates specific governors with being strong or weak. In addition to the relative magnitude of  $S$ , it depends instead on our implicit assumption that the Kremlin will in fact attempt a buy out and that this attempt will be successful.

This result may appear paradoxical. Why would a weak governor endorse the Kremlin’s party when it knows that it will not be rewarded? Why not at least try to pretend to be strong? Indeed, an examination of Table 1 shows that the cell **(OO,~R)** is also an equilibrium that yields the same payoffs as **(EO,~R)**. The answer to our questions lies in the fact that if there is even the slightest uncertainty as to the Kremlin’s strategy – is there is any chance that an endorsement by a weak governor will be rewarded – then **(OO,~R)** disappears as an equilibrium. Thus, the optimal strategy for the Kremlin is not necessarily to reward its initial supporters with certainty, but to let them believe that there is only some probability of reward. In any event, our general conclusion is that if it is common knowledge that the Kremlin will ultimately offer substantial bribes to those strong regional political bosses who did not support it initially,

then bosses will sort out – weak ones will support the Kremlin throughout the electoral cycle, whereas strong ones will initially support the opposition and wait for a higher payoff.

To this model we could, of course, add the complication of considering the possibility that Putin does not win the presidency and that his likelihood of doing so depends on the pattern of support Otechestvo secures in the Duma vote. In fact, in developing such an extension it is not difficult to develop a scenario that occasions a coordination or coalitional problem for the bosses (for example, assuming that Otechestvo can trump Edinstvo's vote if some super-majority of weak bosses join the strong ones). Here, however, there is no need for such an extension since the imperatives for coordination are well-described elsewhere (Shvetsova 1999) and since it would not add to our understanding of why bosses of one type might prefer to withhold an endorsement of Putin's party. We turn, then, to the methodology employed in our empirical analysis.

## 2. General methodology

Briefly, our empirical analysis and application of the preceding model rely on official election returns aggregated to the rayon level. Thus, our data set – which encompasses the 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2000 elections – consists of 2632 observations and our analysis of it parallels the one we use elsewhere to measure the flow of votes between parties and candidates (Myagkov, Ordeshook, Sobyenin 1997). To simplify notation, let  $X_i$  denote party  $i$ 's (or, equivalently, candidate  $i$ 's) share of the vote in a particular election year, where  $i = 0$  denotes the “party of nonvoters”, and let  $Y_j$  denote party  $j$ 's vote in the preceding election. Then, if there are  $n$  parties in the preceding election, we can write

$$X_i = b_0 Y_0 + b_1 Y_1 + b_2 Y_2 + \dots + b_n Y_n \quad (1)$$

Of course,

$$Y_0 + Y_1 + \dots + Y_n = 100, \quad (2)$$

so expression (1) can be rewritten as

$$X_i = b_0(100 - Y_1 - \dots - Y_n) + b_1 Y_1 + b_2 Y_2 + \dots + b_n Y_n$$

or, equivalently,

$$X_i = 100b_0 + (b_1 - b_0)Y_1 + (b_2 - b_0)Y_2 + \dots + (b_n - b_0)Y_n \quad (3)$$

Expression (3), now, can be used as the basis of a regression equation that attempts to estimate the flow of votes from the parties in one election year to another. Specifically, we can run the regression

$$X_i = a_0 + a_1 Y_1 + a_2 Y_2 + \dots + a_{n-1} Y_{n-1} \quad (4)$$

and use these estimates to calculate  $b_j$  – the share of party  $j$ 's vote in, say, year  $t-1$  that accounts for  $X_i$  –

where

$$b_0 = a_0/100$$

and

$$b_j = a_j + a_0/100. \quad (5)$$

Of course, we realize that no econometric method can ensure unbiased estimates of our parameters, owing to the problem of aggregation error (i.e., ecological inference), as well as to the problem of error structures and the constraint of expression (2) – a constraint that, because the vote shares of all parties must sum to 100%, including all parties in a regression (including the “party” of nonvoters), renders our independent variables linearly dependent. Hopefully, however, the first problem can be minimized by a data set that aggregates only up to the level of individual rayons rather than regions. One check on whether this assumption is being satisfied, moreover, is to see whether the estimated  $b$ 's for a “significant” party are statistically significant and within the range  $[0, 1]$ , since a party or candidate cannot get more than 100% or less than 0% of another candidate's vote. The second problem is minimized, in turn, by letting  $Y_0$  correspond to at least one party or block of parties that secure a “reasonable” share of the vote that varies across rayons so that it is excluded from the regression (thus, expression (4) excludes the  $n^{\text{th}}$  party).

Notice, however, that there is yet another critical and substantively unattractive assumption implicit in the preceding structure – namely, that the  $b$ 's are the same across the entire data set. That is, if we run regression (4) using our full data set of 2600+ rayons, we are implicitly assuming that party  $i$  gets

the same share of party  $j$ 's vote in every rayon (up to some "acceptable" and random margin of error). This assumption, though, is inconsistent with the conclusions we draw from the model offered in the preceding section, at least with respect to the 1999 Duma contest. For example, suppose there is a block of voters who, in the preceding election, supported party  $j$  but who now are largely under control of strong but not weak regional governors. Then, if the preceding model captures any part of the strategic calculations of a governor, that support can go to different parties in the subsequent election, depending on whether a governor is strong or weak. Our model, then, suggests that we proceed with caution when analyzing the 1999 and 2000 elections so that we can check for the possibility that patterns in the flow of votes vary across regions, especially across regions with governors who have distinct political preferences.

### **3. From December 1995 to December 1999**

In December 1995 the Communist Party (KPRF) out-pollled the Kremlin's creation, Our Home is Russia (NDR), 22.7% to 10.3%, but succeeded in increasing its vote in 1999 to only 24.5%. Although this percentage kept it in first place, it barely secured a plurality over Edinstvo, which garnered 23.5%. Edinstvo's support, moreover, was seen as a victory over its chief rival, Otechestvo, which won a disappointing 13.9% of the vote. The question remains, however, as to the source of the combined vote of these two new parties. Naturally, we can speculate that a share came from the now defunct Our Home is Russia, from the LDPR, which saw its support decline from 11.4% in 1995 to 5.5% in 1999, and from Lebed, who won 5.4% in 1995. But even if we assume that all of these votes went to Edinstvo or Otechestvo, we account for less than half the total. To assess, then, the flow of votes, consider Table 2, which reports the results of our regressions in accordance with expressions (4) and (5). (We do not include standard errors since we are reporting here the sum of two coefficients in accordance with expression (5). In general, however, coefficients near zero are not significant at .01, whereas all others are.)

The regressions for Yabloko, SPS and LDPR seem intuitively reasonable. Yabloko wins 47% of the vote of its supporters from 1995 plus 10% of those who voted for the parties that now constitute SPS; SPS wins 37% of Yabloko's 1995 vote plus 22% of its old vote, and the sole significant support for the LDPR is itself (25%) and parties not considered separately (7%). However, the coefficients of three regressions raise red flags with respect to our assumptions. First, the coefficient for Yabloko with respect to the KPRF's source of votes is negative. We note here, however, that if we combine Yabloko and SPS into a single independent variable, this negative coefficient largely disappears without affecting the other conclusions we draw from Table 2 about the KPRF's primary source of votes – 64% of its own supporters from 1995, 29% of the LDPR's 1995 vote, and 11% of those who voted for other candidates (e.g., Ampilov). More troublesome is the regression for Otechestvo, which offers a negative coefficient for the LDPR and an estimate for the NDR that exceeds 1, so as to suggest, improbably, that Otechestvo is getting more votes from Our Home is Russia than it has to give.

**Table 2: From 1995 to 1999, all rayons**

	Non-voters	NDR	Yab	SPS	KPRF	LDPR	Other Parties
Edinstvo	.06	.05	-.44	.29	.13	.41	.34
Otechestvo	-.09	1.16	.32	.09	.13	-.49	.16
Yabloko	.03	-.00	.47	.10	-.01	.00	-.00
KPRF	.03	.03	-.38	.12	.64	.29	.11
SPS	.05	.00	.37	.22	-.02	.00	.01
LDPR	.01	-.04	.03	.00	-.01	.25	.07

As we note earlier, estimates that fall outside the interval  $[0,1]$  suggest that one or more of our assumptions is being violated, and here we can refer to the previous section, which suggests that there are good reasons for supposing that the sources of support for Edinstvo and Otechestvo vary with the political strength and preferences of governors. Specifically, Otechestvo will gain its support primarily from the votes that strong governors control; in other regions, Edinstvo will – because it is the stronger party – be the primary beneficiary of these votes as well as the votes of other parties.

To assess this hypothesis, Table 3 presents the results of our analysis after we divide our sample of rayons into two parts – those rayons in regions that awarded Otechestvo less than 15% of the vote ( $N = 2224$ ) and those that awarded it more than 15% ( $N = 406$ ). This later set of regions consists of Ingushetia (14 rayons), Tatarstan (59 rayons), Bashkiria (65 rayons), Mordovia (27 rayons), Kab. Balkaria (11 rayons), Aginskii Buriatskii (3 rayons), Moscow city (118 rayons), Dagestan (53 rayons) and Moscow oblast (66 rayons). Notice, then, that this list corresponds almost identically to the regions ruled by governors who signed the original letter of endorsement forming Otechestvo – eight of these nine regions (the excluded region is St. Petersburg, which gave Otechestvo 8.32% of the vote).

**Table 3: From 1995 to 1999, separated regions**

	Non-Voters	NDR	Yab	SPS	KPRF	LDPR	Other Parties
<b>Regions strong for Edinstvo (n = 2224)</b>							
Edinstvo	-.03	.60	.23	-.39	.12	.29	.41
Otechsetvo	.02	.18	.07	.29	.07	-.11	.05
<b>Regions strong for Otechestvo (n = 406)</b>							
Otechsetvo	-.07	1.06	-.06	-.01	-.12	.07	.77
Edinstvo	.24	.01	-1.4	.60	.27	-.04	.02

Looking now at the coefficients in Table 3, the first thing to note, of course, is the reoccurring “problem” of negative coefficients associated with Yabloko and SPS when not considering the vote share of either of these parties as our dependent variable. However, in this respect we need to keep in mind that we are talking about a small percentage of the overall vote, that this problem is mitigated somewhat if we combine Yabloko and SPS votes into a single block to form an independent variable, and that the problem largely disappears without impacting our other conclusions if we simply add Yabloko and SPS to the category “other parties”. Those conclusions, moreover, are both interesting and provocative.

First, Edinstvo’s vote comes from a variety of sources in those regions in which it is strong (or at least Otechestvo is weak) – 60% of Our Home Is Russia’s 1995 vote, 41% of the votes garnered by “other parties”, 29% of the LDPR’s support, and 12% of the KPRF’s 1995 vote. In contrast, for those regions in which Otechestvo performs better than average, Edinstvo’s vote comes from only two sources – nonvoters and the KPRF (keeping in mind that sixty percent of SPS is less than 3% of the vote). Thus, the source of Edinstvo’s vote depends critically on region (which, of course, is a violation of the assumption upon which Table 2’s coefficients are based: namely, that the b’s are the same across all regions). Second, for

those regions in which Otechestvo performs poorly, what little support it gets is scattered across all the parties considered except the LDPR. However, in those regions in which it performs well – essentially the regions with gubernatorial backing – it receives overwhelming support from two sources: the old party of power, Our Home Is Russia and “other parties”, thereby mirroring the support Edinstvo gets in all other regions.

This pattern in which the supporters of “other parties” and the NDR overwhelmingly vote for Otechestvo if it is strong but shift their allegiance to Edinstvo if it is weak contrasts sharply with what we would normally expect in an election. If, for instance, voters cast ballots on the basis of ideology or any of the usual socio-economic correlates of voting, and if voters are motivated in the same way across regions so that variations in the vote are determined primarily by variations in the values of these socio-economic parameters, we would not expect to see such a radical discontinuity in vote flow patterns. We might see such a thing in an American presidential primary with two ideologically close competitors, each the favorite son of an adjacent state. But if Edinstvo possessed a policy position that could be compared to Otechestvo, it was not widely broadcast. Indeed, it is as if, for example, nearly all the supporters of Ross Perot shifted to democrats in Iowa but to republicans in Kansas.

The pattern Table 3 reports also conflicts with the picture painted in earlier elections of an electorate in which votes flowed among parties and candidates in a smooth and relatively predictable way, regardless of whether we look at Russia’s “red belt” or elsewhere (Myagkov et al 1997). However, one possible explanation for the estimates reported in Table 3 is offered by imagining a universe in which strong regional bosses control a significant share of the vote in 1995 for the NDR as well as for “other parties”. Suppose also, in accordance with the theoretical model from Section 1, that these strong bosses support Otechestvo while weak ones who, by definition, can control little, support Edinstvo. What is interesting now is that this universe yields the vote flow patterns that Table 3 portrays. First, Otechestvo would derive its electoral support primarily from the votes controlled by a boss who supports it, whereas those votes go elsewhere in other regions. Second, Otechestvo would derive a greater share of this vote

than would Edinstvo – and, indeed, as Table 3 shows, 100% of the NDR’s vote and 77% of the vote for “other parties” goes to Otechestvo in its regions, while in all other regions Edinstvo’s share of this vote accounts for only 60% and 41%, respectively. That is, the governors of regions that support Otechestvo seem better able to deliver the vote than the remaining governors able to “assist” Edinstvo.

We cannot say, of course, that this scenario explains voting patterns in 1999 elections or that Table 3 “proves” that this election was subject to this degree of political boss manipulation. But manipulation in which large blocks of voters were somehow swung between the two contenders for the mantle “heir to Yeltsin” is more consistent with the data than is the old image of a stable electorate with vote shares changeable only at the margin.

## **5. From 1999 to 2000**

Our interpretation of the data thus far presumes that the 1999 Duma election served as a presidential primary that would answer two questions: (1) Was the high water mark of Zyuganov’s communist support reached in 1995 and 1996, and (2) could Putin’s popularity in the polls be translated into votes and could the Kremlin overcome the organizational lead-time given to Luzhkov and Primakov? That election, of course, answered Yes to both questions. Thus, following Yeltsin’s sudden resignation and Primakov’s withdrawal from the competition, we could expect one of two things: a return to the “normal” pattern of vote flows – the pattern exhibited in previous elections – or, again in accordance with the model in Section 1 and our political boss interpretation of parameters, the abrupt flow of Otechestvo’s vote to Putin. It is, in fact, this second pattern that is more consistent with our analysis.

Table 4 considers the vote flows to Putin, Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy, Yavlinski and to the “party of nonvoters” among all 2607 rayons now in our sample (23 rayons are eliminated because of redistricting and an inability to match them with their 1999 counterparts). The estimates Table 4 offers largely fit with our expectations. Putin wins essentially all of Edinstvo’s and Otechestvo 1999 vote, with little or none of this vote going elsewhere. Zyuganov’s vote comes largely from his KPRF supporters, Yavlinski is the

only candidate to win a reasonable share of the SPS vote, and nonvoters come from the ranks of previous nonvoters plus supporters of Yavlinski, the LDPR and other minor parties.

**Table 4: From 1999 to 2000, all rayons (n= 2607)**

	Edinstvo	Otechestvo	KPRF	SPS	Others
Putin	1.08	.94	.10	-.01	.20
Zyuganov	-.06	-.01	.92	-.12	.15
Yavlinski	-.07	.06	-.07	.36	.06
Zhirinovski	.03	-.01	.00	-.05	.03
Nonvoters	-.05	.00	.02	.05	.55

However, a deeper look at the data reveals that the estimates in Table 4 fail to fully portray the nature of Putin's victory. First, consider the aggregate numbers in Table 5, which shows surprisingly that Putin does better in the nine regions in which Otechestvo performed relatively well in 1999 than he does in the regions in which Edinstvo polled strongly (the percentages in this table are in terms of the eligible electorate, not of those voting). It is as if Putin's home base was the regions that opposed Edinstvo and backed Primakov. More perplexing are the vote flow estimates Table 6 offers for these two regional subpopulations. First, notice the discontinuity in the flow of votes with respect to the KPRF. If Otechestvo is weak, Putin gets essentially no Communist votes; but if Otechestvo is strong, Putin and Zyuganov divide the KPRF's vote nearly equally. This is hardly the result we expect from an otherwise stable electorate, but it is consistent with a model in which strong governors who initially supported Otechestvo controlled not only Otechestvo's vote, but a significant share of the KPRF's vote as well. But second, notice the over-sized estimate for the flow of votes from Edinstvo to Putin in Otechestvo's regions (134%!), the over-sized estimate of the flow of votes from Otechestvo to Putin (110%!) in the remaining

parts of the country (which, when combined with its “contribution” to Zyuganov accounts for 123% of Otechestvo’s vote!), and the large negative coefficients for SPS in the last two regressions (and which add to minus 186 percent of its vote!). So again we must consider the possibility that our econometric assumptions about the constancy of coefficients across rayons is untenable.

**Table 5: Vote Percentages as a percent of eligible voters**

	Putin	Zyuganov	Edinstvo	Otechestvo	KPRF
Otechestvo Regions (n=406)	48%	16%	9.5%	30%	16%
Edinstvo Regions (n= )	38%	23%	19%	4%	17%

**Table 6: Estimates for Otechestvo and Other Regions**

	Edinstvo	Otechestvo	KPRF	SPS	Other
<b>Regions strong for Edinstvo</b>					
Putin	1.00	1.10	-.07	.08	.27
Zyuganov	0	.13	1.04	0	.08

Regions strong for Otechestvo					
Putin	1.34	.91	.40	-1.33	.17
Zyuganov	-.14	.10	.49	-.53	.24

There is, however, an additional “natural” division of our data that we should consider. Specifically, we note that Putin experienced an unusually large measure of electoral “success” in a number (154) of rayons – garnering more than 60% of the vote of the eligible electorate, so that if turnout there had merely equaled the national average (approximately 60%), he would have to have won 100% (or more!) of the votes cast. In fact, what kept Putin’s numbers below 100% is the fact that turnout averaged a surprisingly high 85% in those rayons, whereas when turnout fell below 85%, Putin’s average share of the votes cast fell to 37%. More suspicious still is the fact that several of these rayons have, in the past, exhibited voting patterns that can most charitably be described as “interesting”. We find among them, for instance, rayons in Tatarstan that in 1996 gave Yeltsin 30, 47, 26 and 32 percent of the vote in the first ballot and Zyuganov 44, 37, 54 and 49 percent, but which shifted miraculously on the second ballot to 88, 84, 67 and 74 percent for Yeltsin, and 6, 9, 19, and 18 percent, respectively, for Zyuganov. Saratov has a rayon in which Yeltsin’s share of the vote nearly tripled, from 26 to 67 percent, while Zyuganov’s support fell an approximately equivalent amount, from 54 to 19 percent. Dagestan offers the example of a rayon that moved from 46 to 74% for Yeltsin at the expense of Zyuganov, who fell from 40 to 18%, while Bashkiria has a rayon that saw Yeltsin’s vote increase from 36 to 64 percent between rounds while Zyuganov’s vote fell from 47 to 26%. These examples, which suggest the ability of someone – presumably regional governors – to “awaken” the electorate, are not limited to regions in which Putin won more than 80% of the vote, but they are more prevalent in those than in others.

So suppose we eliminate these rayons and, returning to our base analysis, re-estimate the coefficients in Table 4. Looking then at Table 7, we see that the general pattern of support is largely

unchanged. Nevertheless, there are interesting contrasts, the most important being that Otechestvo voters no longer give Putin the wholesale support reported earlier (65% versus 94%). Although still voting overwhelmingly for Putin, a significant percentage now support Yavlinski (18%), while others (13%) simply become non-voters. Subjectively, then, the coefficients in Table 7 seem more reasonable than those in Table 4, even if only marginally so. But the contrast does raise questions about the issue of fraud in at least a part of the 154 excluded rayons (and doubtlessly many of those still included in Table 7's estimates). Why did Putin receive nearly every vote cast for Otechestvo (or more) in those rayons in which he began with what can only be charitably described as an unusually large measure of support, whereas his share of Otechestvo's vote in more "normal" rayons drops to seemingly reasonable proportions? And why does Putin gain little support from the KPRF when the 154 suspect rayons are excluded, but nearly half its support when we look only at regions initially strong for Otechestvo? The answers, of course, may lie in econometric peculiarities; but they also may lie in the fact that Putin's share was no more "natural" than were the ballots cast for Otechestvo and a share of the KPRF's.

**Table 7: From 1999 to 2000, Putin < 60% (n= 2453)**

	Edinstvo	Otechestvo	KPRF	SPS	Others
Putin	1.01	.65	.04	.06	.27
Zyuganov	.00	.06	1.00	-.06	.10
Yavlinski	-.05	.18	-.08	.30	.05
Zhirinovski	.03	-.02	.00	-.04	.03
Nonvoters	-.03	.13	.03	-.01	.53

## 6. From June 1996 to March 2000

Perhaps as a way to emphasize the importance of comparing the flow of votes between Duma and presidential contests as opposed to looking at only one class of elections – parliamentary or presidential –

our final set of estimates concerns the flow between the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections. Again excluding the 154 suspect rayons, Table 8 tells a story that is not much different than what we might expect to see based on journalistic accounts of the most recent presidential contest: Putin's support comes from multiple sources, although it is concentrated in Yeltsin and Zhirinovskiy's old vote. Zyuganov's primary source of support is himself, although there is considerable "leakage" of his old vote to Putin – a leakage that he partially makes up by securing 21% of Lebed's vote and a small share of everyone else's. Finally, nonvoters come from those who no longer have a candidate in the race for whom they had previously voted – Lebed and "others".

Table 8, then, again appears to portray a stable electorate of the sort we observe between 1991 and 1996 – an electorate whose shifting support follows a logic we can understand in terms of policies, perceptions, personalities and policy preferences. Putin's ability to win a significant share of Lebed's and Zhirinovskiy's vote, for instance, is no surprise if we keep events in Chechnya in mind and his relative success at portraying himself as a strong leader and defender of Russian national interests. Nor, perhaps, should we be surprised to see Zyuganov's imperfect hold on his own old supporters, given Putin's image as a Russian nationalist and his KGB background. It is only when we consider the intervening Duma election of 1999 and the flow of votes with respect to Otechestvo and Edinstvo that this pattern of "normalcy" begins to break down.

**Table 8: From 1996 to 2000: Putin < 60% (n = 2452)**

	Yeltsin	Zhirinovski	Zyuganov	Lebed	Other
Putin	.72	.81	.36	.57	.05
Zyuganov	.08	.06	.58	.21	.08
Nonvoters	.05	-.01	.10	.18	.69

### **Conclusions**

Between 1991 and 1996 the Russian electorate appeared to be characterized by a well-defined ideological construction that occasioned a predictable and stable flow of votes among parties and candidates. The constancy of Boris Yeltsin's presence, however, no longer existed in 1999 and 2000, and the question this paper addresses is whether and to what extent that flow maintained its stable pattern. As a backdrop to this question, however, we should also keep in mind the varied allegations of election fraud that had been made after 1991, when political competition seemed to be real and critically important to reform (Myagkov and Sobyenin 1995). Although it may have been difficult to identify the magnitude of that fraud (Filippov and Ordeshook 1996), it seemed evident that fraud existed at least to some extent. Even if that fraud did not occur in the form of an outright stuffing of ballots, it would take the most naive observer imaginable to assume that fraud did not occur in one region or another in the form of regional governors using their influence over their regional media and administration to direct votes to and from various candidates (Berezkin, Myagkov and Ordeshook 1999).

With the stakes raised owing to Yeltsin's inability to succeed himself, it seems only reasonable to suppose that regional political bosses would, if possible, use their electoral resources to even greater effect in 1999 and 2000. And that, in fact, is the hypothesis that our analysis appears supports. In fact, that analysis supports a theoretical model that predicts a specific pattern to the efforts of regional bosses.

Specifically, it supports the hypothesis that strong governors will initially favor a viable party out of power – Otechestvo in this instance – but then switch, if necessary, in wholesale fashion to the eventual winner (Putin) once their candidate is eliminated. The stark magnitude of the vote swings that our analysis uncovers, moreover, suggests something more than the usual effects of endorsements and the application of an effective campaign organization. They suggest that large blocks of votes could be swung in a nearly unitary fashion from one candidate to another almost as if those political bosses themselves filled out the ballot forms.

Again, we hesitate to say that outright fraud dictated the outcome of Russia's 2000 presidential election. But our analysis does not give us confidence that Russia's electoral processes yet approximate those of a "normal" democracy in which the electorate's revealed preferences change only at the margin and in accord with the alternative policy or ideological positions they confront. Instead, our analysis suggests the hypothesis that, at least in 1999 and 2000, the key players were regional political bosses who moved votes from one candidate or party to another as they sought to ally with the person they believed would eventually become president. Our data, then, are more nearly consistent with Shvetsova's (2000) view that presidential electoral politics is best described as a coordination game among political elites, for whom the only uncertainty is who is the most likely alternative to an unelectable Communist candidate. Thus, once Putin rather than Primakov is revealed by the Duma vote to be the focal alternative, those elites who refrained from supporting Edinstvo beforehand shift not only their allegiance but also the votes they control fully behind him.

We can see now the implications of our analysis for reform of Russia's political institutions. First, it is not the case that the Russian party system is merely incoherent and in need of incentives for a more permanent coalescing of the multitude of small and transitory parties that have thus far characterized electoral competition. Russian electoral politics are, in fact, wholly coherent and follow a logic dictated by the primary institutional feature of the constitutional system – super-presidentialism. The fact that we have a few relatively well-established parties (e.g., KPRF, Yabloko) with little chance of winning the

presidency suggests that current institutional arrangements do not wholly preclude parties of the sort we might desire. But we have those regional party bosses who can direct votes in a presidential contest to one candidate or another, who thus far at least appear to have little need for parties in terms of their own political survival, and whose primary concern is allying with the successful presidential candidate. In this context there is little reason, then, for supposing that a reform such as a change in the electoral calendar so as to require the simultaneous election of president and Duma will change much of anything. In fact, if, as Shvetsova (2000) argues, the 1999 Duma election served merely as a mechanism of coordination, it is safer to assume that in the event of absence such elections but with presidential powers still in place, political elites would almost certainly find a new mechanism of coordination. Put differently, the primary institutional variable that exerts its influence is super-presidentialism and the corresponding fact that little else matters in Russian politics aside from controlling the presidency or being somehow allied with it. Of course, our data analysis provides only circumstantial evidence in support of this conclusion, to the extent that they are not inconsistent with it.

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