Harvard University (Belfer Center for Science & International Affairs, Davis Center for Russian & Eurasian Studies) and Indiana University-Bloomington

RUSSIAN ELECTION WATCH

Editor: Henry E. Hale *Associate Editor: Danielle Lussier* *Vol.3, No.7, April 2004*

TOP NEWS

- Putin wins with 71%, claims reform mandate
- Experts debate future of democracy, liberalism
- Kharitonov beats expectations with 14%
- Khakamada leaves SPS, forms "Free Russia" party after "satisfactory" 4% in presidential race
- OSCE cites violations of democratic principles
- Yabloko claims surge in membership, calls reports of its demise premature

INSIDE, p.3: ***Top Russian analysts*** *debate vote's implications for democracy, "liberal" parties*

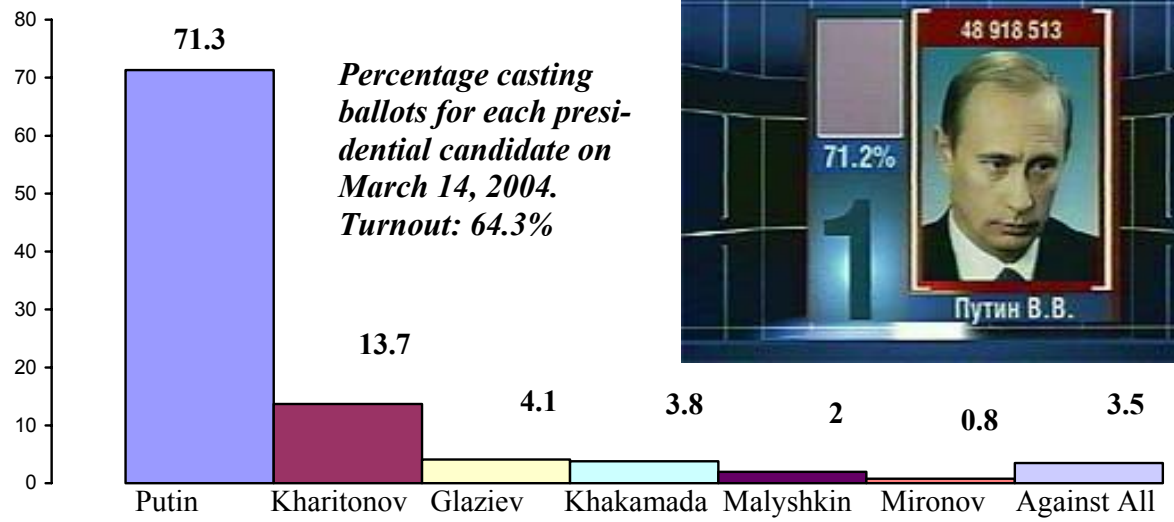
DATES TO REMEMBER:

December 2007: *Next Duma election*
March 2008: *Next presidential election*

FOR MORE IN ENGLISH:

Carnegie Moscow Center: www.carnegie.ru
RFE/RL: www.rferl.org/specials/russianelection

RESULTS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE:



Final official results as reported by the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation.

RUSSIA'S ELECTIONS: THE POLITICAL FALLOUT

While the 2003-04 campaign trail took a number of unexpected turns, it ultimately brought Russians right back to where they had been and expected to be all along: firmly under the leadership of President Vladimir V. **Putin**, who won 71% of the vote. Since they had no hope of beating Putin, his rivals focused on beating expectations. As the final weeks of the campaign brought few surprises, pundits spent most of election night debating how many Kharitonovs, Glazievs, and Khakamadas could fit on the head of Russia's political pin. A bigger question, though, remains: What do the elections mean for the fate of democracy in Russia?

The "uncampaign" strategy that helped bring Putin to office in 2000 worked again in 2004 although this time around there was even more "un" than before. As in 2000, Putin eschewed candidate debates, forewent television campaign advertisements, and relied heavily on free positive coverage on state-owned mass media.

Unlike 2000, however, this time Putin did not even put an emphasis on legions of official campaign representatives rallying voters intensively at factories and public meeting places. Instead, the pressure was on Russia's regional governors, many of whose budgets are heavily dependent on transfers from the federal government, to guarantee that turnout surpass the 50% necessary for the elections to count and to ensure that most of those who turned out (like the man at left) cast ballots for Putin. While challengers Irina **Khakamada** and Sergei **Glaziev** charged that many irregularities took place, few doubt that Putin is supported by a clear majority of the population. Indeed, a few observers remarked that his 71% was actually below the support levels he had been registering in the most reliable opinion polls. Naturally, Putin then claimed a major mandate to continue radical market reforms, to restructure state administration, and to continue the restoration of order across Russia's vast territory.

Meanwhile, many of the election's losers spent a lot of time arguing that they were in fact winners. Khakamada claimed that her 3.8% was a democratic protest vote that justified her creation of a new party, which she named Free Russia in order to emphasize its opposition to what she said were autocratic trends in Russia under Putin. Breaking with her former party, SPS, she effected a major split in that party along pro- and anti-Putin lines. The rump of SPS is now largely controlled by the pro-Putin Anatoly **Chubais**, head of the electricity monopoly Unified Energy Systems. Khakamada and her supporters talked of cooperation with Yabloko, an initiative that the latter's leader Grigory **Yavlinsky** supported. While a few top Yabloko figures accepted state posts after the Duma election, including Vladimir **Lukin** as Russia's human rights ombudsman, Yavlinsky called Yabloko the only large party in the pro-democracy, pro-market side of the political spectrum, stoutly opposing authoritarian trends. Yavlinsky even claimed that Yabloko's membership had surged since its December 2003 defeat in the Duma race. *(What should "liberals" do to revive their fortunes? See Kara-Murza's view on p.3.)*

On the political left, most analysts regarded Nikolai **Kharitonov's** 14% showing as a relative success, confirming that the Communists could net a large share of the vote even with a very weak candidate, thereby reaffirming the KPRF as Russia's number-two political force. Communist Party leader Gennady **Zyuganov** was thus quick to proclaim victory for his wing of the party over his leftist rivals, notably the ambitious Communist millionaire Gennady **Semigin** as well as former KPRF Duma fraction member and presidential candidate Sergei Glaziev. According to Zyuganov, Kharitonov showed that the party and its "popular patriotic" message is in fine shape; had the playing field been fair, he opined, Kharitonov would have gotten even more of the vote. This was clearly a dig at Semigin, who soon convened a "Congress of Russian Patriots" that included representatives of Gennady **Seleznev's** Party of Russian Revival, the Pensioners Party, the People's Party, Dmitry **Rogozin's** Motherland Party, and even Viktor **Anpilov's** ultra-leftist Working Russia. Semigin intoned that the KPRF's summer party congress is likely to oust Zyuganov and that the new leadership would bring the party into the "patriotic" coalition reflected by Semigin's Congress of Russian Patriots. As for Glaziev, almost all observers regarded his 4.1% of the vote as a decisive defeat. Having alienated the Communists by forming the Motherland bloc for the 2003 Duma elections, and then having lost the helm of Motherland after undertaking an independent bid for Russia's presidency, Glaziev found himself politically isolated. He announced that while he would retain his Duma seat, he would devote much of his time to academia, where he began his professional life. As for Russia's most famous nationalist, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia leader Vladimir **Zhirinovsky** claimed a victory of sorts for his chief bodyguard, Oleg **Malyshkin**, who in March 2004 managed to garner about the same percentage of the presidential vote as did his charismatic boss in the 2000 presidential race (about 2%). Putin "double" and Federation Council Speaker Sergei **Mironov** attracted less than 1% of the vote and was barely visible at all after the election.

As the results rolled in, observers both inside and outside Russia began to debate the implications for the fate of democracy *(for an optimistic Russian view, see Nikonov on p.5; for a more critical interpretation, read Kolmakov on p.4)*. Most official representatives of the international community expressed concern. In a March 15 press release, the OSCE echoed its assessment of the December 2003 Duma election, calling the presidential race "generally well administered but lacking elements of a genuine democratic contest." Topping the list of problems cited in the OSCE's preliminary report was a stark television news bias in favor of Putin on the major networks, all of which are state-controlled. But the Commonwealth of Independent States delegation, representing Russia's neighbors in its "near abroad," were more upbeat, declaring the vote "free, democratic, and fair," reported *RFE/RL Newsline*.

— Henry E. Hale, Indiana University

Russian Election Watch can be found online at **http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/publications/rew.html**

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INSIDER INFORMATION:
CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS
BY LEADING RUSSIAN PRACTITIONERS

WE WILL REALIZE THE LIBERAL PROJECT IF…

Alexei Kara-Murza
Member of the Political Council of the Union of Right Forces

SOME KEY POINTS:
** Khakamada campaign was important stand against Kremlin's political monopoly*
** Her good results buoy democrats*
** Liberals must not bide time until next elections but get to work now*
** Legal reform, monitoring of media, and nurturing provinces at top of liberal agenda*

Vladimir Putin won the presidential elections before they happened. In light of that, it doesn't make sense to dwell on the strategies and administrative resources used in the campaign itself. The problem is much broader — in Russia there is a monopoly on power and the interpretation of policy that operates during campaign seasons as well as between them.

In this political model, elections do not define political periods but are instead a continuation of the same political monopoly, just by slightly different means.

For precisely this reason the liberals and democrats should not concentrate exclusively on electoral campaigns. For us it is important to change the atmosphere and the very political situation in the country. After all, administrative resources are at work even in between elections and have already started to look ahead to the next four years.

The power monopoly is obvious. The question is what to do about it. It seems to me that the idea of an election boycott and the attempt to undermine voter turnout were completely inappropriate.

One can learn democracy only when one participates directly in democratic processes. At a moment when the monopolistic grip on political life is getting tighter, inaction or a gesture at action by liberals and democrats only aggravates this.

Therefore Irina Khakamada's position, her personal project, put into action in the presidential elections, was more appropriate to the situation.

I think that this is something many of those who tried in other ways to take a stand against the monopoly of the current government will start to understand although they will probably not admit it openly. Moreover, I believe that some of the democrats' old leaders are annoyed by Khakamada's rather good results.

Irina Khakamada performed quite well in the presidential elections, receiving 2,600,000 votes. This is a half-million more votes than the Union of Right Forces (SPS) got in the parliamentary elections. While Khakamada's percentage was the same (she got 3.9% of votes), voter turnout in the presidential elections was higher.

She achieved these results even though neither SPS nor Yabloko officially supported her. SPS started to push for a boycott, and Yavlinsky generally took an odd tack, calling on his supporters to come to the polls and take their ballots home. Some actually did that. But the point of this approach is totally unclear: after all, these people didn't lower turnout, which is based on the number of ballots distributed to registered voters. In this way, Yabloko overtly took votes away from Khakamada.

However, the electorate turned out to be smarter than its leaders. People came and voted even though a portion of voters was disoriented, of course.

Khakamada's showing was achieved as a result of a very brief but concerted effort. We gained indisputable evidence that the liberal project in Russia is possible. In the current situation it was extremely important to ascertain this. I am sure that the particulars of the voting in various regions will reveal the areas that are the most promising in terms of a liberal electorate and will draw a new political map of Russia.

When I tallied the results of the elections together with Irina Khakamada's campaign staff, at first it seemed that she might get over 4% of the votes. Although that did not end up happening, the final result made a very favorable impression on all those present.

It showed that in Russia there are people who think strategically, politically sophisticated experts, who have joined up with this project, which has received the moral and intellectual support of political, artistic, and literary figures.

I have the sense that our holiday was the happiest. Strange as it may seem, the result, formally the same as that of SPS in the parliamentary elections, has a completely opposite psychological feel. If the SPS result was depressing, Irina Khakamada's result inspires cautious optimism.

In the end, to interpret these elections is itself to continue the work of the administrative resource, which is the only thing we really have in Russia.

Indeed, bureaucracy does not shift gears during an election. It is like a bulldozer that tramples the political field on a daily basis. Therefore the goal of liberals and democrats is obvious — they must change the lay of the political land. To do this it is essential to move in several directions.

We must work to continue legal reform. Since there is no independent

judiciary in Russia, all legal suits involving parliamentary and presidential elections simply drown in bureaucratic delays and usually yield no result.

We must change the state of information in Russia. It is a question of placing the electronic media under public control. On this score, there is a lot of talk but little action. In the meantime, it is extremely important to create some sort of organ of public control over electronic media along the same lines as the BBC in Great Britain.

We must consistently work to cultivate the political landscape in the provinces. Elections in Russia are continually taking place.

Currently there are some politicians who want to take a break and come back in three or four years. This is completely misguided because political life in Russia doesn't happen just in the center; it is continuously regenerated in the regions. The way many governors are handily reelected, including some to a third term, is an ongoing problem though it is happening less and less.

The areas to work on are obvious. We have to understand clearly that we will be able to count on relative success three or four years from now only if we work today to establish a foundation for participation in future elections. ∎

POST-ELECTION REFLECTIONS

Sergei Kolmakov

Vice-President of the Foundation for the Development of Parliamentarism in Russia

SOME KEY POINTS:
** Low turnout tempers Putin victory, points to discontent among liberals and conservatives*
** Opposition voters pushed turnout above necessary 50%*
** Kremlin strategy to bulldoze political parties leads to extremism, low voter turnout in future*
** Kremlin's task of rebuilding party system now very difficult*

By any standards, the very predictable results of the presidential elections confirm the legitimacy of President Putin's reelection. The President received two-thirds (71.3%) of votes cast with 64% voter turnout.

However, looking at the numbers and putting aside the spin, Putin's triumphal picture does not look so rosy and perfect. Without any real challengers, the 2004 presidential elections largely resembled a plebiscite, in which the main indicator is not the percentage of votes for the current president (this number was entirely predictable) but voter turnout.

In absolute numbers, of the 108 million voters registered for these elections, only 49 million cast ballots for Putin. Thirty-eight million did not participate in the elections (that is, they voted "with their feet" against the process itself), and just over 20 million voted for other candidates or "against all."

Thus, turnout reached the 50% necessary for the election to count thanks only to the approximately 20% of the opposition electorate who showed up at the polls.

Similarly, the Russian media's geographic numbers paint a very troubling picture. Of the ten regions of Russia with the highest voter turnout, nine are national-minority-designated republics with a strong tradition of so-called "managed electorates." Only one is an ethnically Russian province, Orel, where the popularity of the current governor, Yegor Stroev, always drives the vote. Every time he has run for governor, he has gotten between 80% and 95% of the ballots.

At the same time, in Russia's largest cities — Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Yekaterinburg, and Nizhny Novgorod — voter turnout was relatively low and support for President Putin was below the national average.

The electoral "experiment" conducted by the leadership of Krasnoyarsk Krai in using virtually none of the so-called administrative resources is quite interesting. Reflecting Russian elections on the whole, Krasnoyarsk has long been viewed as a Russian New Hampshire. For the 2004 presidential elections, voter turnout in Krasnoyarsk barely topped 50% (the worst turnout in the country). President Putin won 60% of votes, and his main challenger in this region was Sergei Glaziev, who got over 17% of votes (while in Russia at large he took only 4.1%).

What do all these numbers mean? They indicate a lack of *total* trust and an unwillingness to accept just *any* initiatives from the popular president. Data from the big cities attest to serious dissatisfaction among the liberal electorate, disturbed by the escalation of authoritarian tendencies in the country and the havoc the Kremlin has wreaked in the right of the electoral spectrum.

Conservatives are unhappy with the policies Putin has pursued, considering them too liberal and pro-Western. The Kremlin's cynical use of the Motherland bloc to achieve its electoral goals in the December Duma elections, followed by the bloc's organizational collapse and the persecution of one of its leaders, Glaziev, testifies to power holders' own fear of the demand for radical authoritarianism, which they themselves aroused in the public.

The policy of destroying the political organizations that have developed on both the right and the left is fraught with the risk of a rise in voter absenteeism in future elections and in radicalization of the political extremes. It is telling that Communist Party (KPRF) candidate Nikolai Kharitonov's comparatively good showing (14%) was accompanied by a drop in the Communist electorate's willingness to come out in subsequent elections. According to some polls, the number of these voters who said they would support future Communist candidates has dipped to 8-9%.

The use of its amassed administrative resources notwithstanding, the

President and his election team did not really rely on United Russia's organization for the whole campaign period.

The results of the 2003-2004 electoral cycle provide grounds to confirm a major weakening of the KPRF, Yabloko, and SPS as well as a slowing of Motherland's plan to become a full-fledged opposition party.

Consequently, United Russia has effectively wound up outside the system of political-party checks and balances; now there are no limitations on it at all. Under such circumstances, United Russia itself ceases to fulfill the most important function of a party — to channel the public's demands and get them considered in policy.

The task of rebuilding the political-party system, a task that will doubtlessly loom before the new presidential administration, is becoming extraordinarily complicated. ∎

THE ELECTIONS AND THE "DEATH OF RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY"

Vyacheslav Nikonov
President of the POLITY Foundation

SOME KEY POINTS:
** Russian democracy is alive and well*
** Yeltsin's Russia was less democratic than Putin's*
** Democratic progress is not only occurring but relatively quickly*
** Public likes Putin for good reasons*
** The elections were fair: people like Putin so they reelected him*

It seems that the results of the presidential elections on March 14 are of interest to no one. Cynics are telling a joke: Putin liked the inauguration so much he bought himself an automatic inaugurator. In the West and liberal circles in Russia, scores lament the untimely end of Russian democracy. Are things really that bad? Is democracy really dead? I'm not so sure. I think it is a case of the glass being either half-full or half-empty.

First, you can't bury that which has not yet truly been born. Only the extremely naïve can consider the political regime of Yeltsin's Russia to be democratic. Yes, it saw the first institutions of democracy sprout in Russia — there were competitive elections, a parliament convened. But anarchy and lack of any sort of leadership were the dominant traits of the regime. This was combined with the oligarchy — through corruption, businessmen close to Yeltsin acquired multi-billion-dollar properties and opened any door in the Kremlin with their left foot. Add to this an eastern despotism, since it is only in sultanates or emirates that the family of the head of state really governs.

Today the same institutions — elections, parliament — are in place. The oligarchs are kept at a distance from the levers of power, and Putin's relatives do not lead the country. We have moved not from Yeltsin-style democracy to a kind of new autocracy but rather from total anarchy to moderate anarchy. Some entrepreneurs and citizens have even started to pay taxes.

Second, this trajectory does not disturb me so much as it inspires my optimism. As a rule, the government takeover of Boris Berezovsky's TV station, Gazprom's acquisition of Vladimir Gusinsky's TV station, and the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky are cited as proof of "the end of democracy." Acknowledging that these events are not exactly immaculate, people's views of them depend on their feelings for individual oligarchs, which is fair. Only a person who knows nothing about these men could consider Berezovsky a democrat or Khodorkovsky a model taxpayer.

In light of all this, it hardly makes sense to ignore the many signs of progress towards greater democracy. It is impossible to imagine another scene of tanks shooting at a democratically elected parliament as we saw in 1993. It is impossible to imagine the Communists' return to power as in 1996 when such a scenario was more than realistic.

There is even progress in the electoral process. As an insider to all the Russian elections of the post-Soviet period, I can say with complete confidence that the 2003-2004 campaigns were cleaner and more transparent than, say, those of 1996 or 1999.

Third, elections can be considered fair if they adequately reflect the current preferences of the public. It is laughable to see Putin's victory as the result of some sort of campaign manipulation. The current level of support for the President was established three years ago, and since then not one poll has shown a decline.

Putin's problem in the March elections was not getting as many votes as possible but getting too many with the inevitable risk of accusations of dictatorship (although in the recent Georgian elections, which the West recognized as the height of democracy, the winner received 97% of votes).

Putin is popular not because of any democratic deficit. In the last four years the Russian economy grew at an average rate of 6.8% per year, and the population's earnings increased even faster.

Next to his predecessor, Putin wins by contrast in the eyes of voters: he is young, sober, energetic, and Russians don't have to be ashamed of him.

Moreover, Putin had no serious challengers. Those who could have given him any competition — Zhirinovsky, Zyuganov, Yavlinsky, Nemtsov — cravenly withdrew to the shadows, from which the majority of them have yet to emerge. They, not Putin, chose their fate.

Fourth, democracy in its clean and ideal forms doesn't just appear. The development of democracy takes time. In the United States' first hundred years of democracy, slavery existed; in the first 150 years, women couldn't vote; and in the first 190 years, blacks couldn't either.

In Russia, democratic institutions are developing 12 years after a millennium of totalitarianism or, at best, of strict authoritarianism. By average world standards, democracy in Russia is developing at breakneck pace.

The latest issue of *Foreign Affairs* opens with the article "A Normal Country." Its authors, Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, argue that, for a

state at its level of development, Russia is normal to the point of being boring. Its democratic institutions are not that advanced compared with countries where democracy goes back a few centuries. But in comparison with the majority of democratic states in the world from Latin America to East Asia, Russia doesn't look bad.

In the jargon of transitional politics, Russia's current regime is not authoritarian at all but an undeveloped or unconsolidated democracy. Such a regime does not necessarily become a mature democracy. But it is far from hopeless. It simply needs time. And its *demos* are conscientious citizens who are striving to remake their lives on their own.∎