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Competition Levels in Russia

William M. Reisinger*

Bryon J. Moraski†

*University of Iowa, william-reisinger@uiowa.edu

†University of Florida, bmoraski@ufl.edu

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The Relationship between Turnout and Competition Levels in Russia

William M. Reisinger
Department of Political Science
University of Iowa
william-reisinger@uiowa.edu

Bryon J. Moraski
Department of Political Science
University of Florida
bmoraski@ufl.edu

Abstract:

We examine voter turnout in the 89 administrative units comprising the Russian Federation for elections to the presidency and the State Duma (the lower house of parliament) from 1991 to 2007. Politics within these regions has come to vary substantially, and they therefore are apt cases for examining factors that drive turnout levels. The collapse of the Soviet Union introduced relatively free elections at the national level, which were gradually expanded to the subnational level with the popular election of regional executives. However, Vladimir Putin's ascension to the presidency is now widely recognized as ushering in a new era, one of managed competition. From 2000 on, Putin gradually reasserted the influence of the central government--particularly the executive branch--over regional elections and ultimately eliminated the popular election of regional executives. Thus, although the factors explaining how regional turnout varies include economic and social conditions, voting levels should not always be equated with democratic participation since in extreme cases—such as the Russian Federation—the two may be negatively correlated. Our analyses illuminate the differences across Russian regions as well as between the Yeltsin and Putin years. We find substantial evidence of elite-driven turnout, accomplished in large part thanks to the persistence of patron-client ties.

Key words: Russia, electoral turnout, Putin, patron-client ties

The Relationship between Turnout and Competition Levels in Russia¹

The ready availability of turnout data makes it tempting to treat turnout rates as indicators of public political engagement, or even democratization. Since some countries are said to have more participatory cultures than others (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963), one could take high voter turnout as evidence of such participatory norms (Putnam et al. 1983). Empirical analyses, however, demonstrate problems with this approach. For one thing, turnout can differ widely among established democracies (see, e.g., Dalton 2002, 35-39), yet it is unclear whether lower turnout in these contexts reflects political apathy and alienation or public satisfaction with politics (Jackman 1987, 406). For another, turnout that approaches 100% in the absence of a compulsory voting law could easily be measuring regime coercion or falsification of figures.

Where scholars can shed light on important political trends, though, is by conducting comparative and temporal analyses of turnout. Like Ladner and Milner (1999), we compare sub-national units, which provides enough cases to conduct statistical analysis while simultaneously limiting the historical and cultural variation that country-level analyses face. Specifically, we examine voter turnout in the 89 administrative units comprising the Russian Federation for elections to the presidency and the State Duma (the lower house of parliament) from 1991 to 2007. Politics within these regions has come to vary substantially, and some of the factors that confound multi-country analyses of turnout are controlled for. Perhaps more importantly for a study of scholars interested in untangling disengagement and disenchantment, until the 2007 Duma election the Russian Federation provided voters the option of disengaging by abstaining from an election or of expressing their discontent by voting ‘against all candidates’ (see Hutcheson 2004a, 2004b). Russia’s regions therefore are apt cases for examining factors that drive turnout levels. While such factors may include economic and social conditions, we also focus on conditions that make turnout susceptible to elite pressure. In other words, we seek to demonstrate not only that

¹We thank Katherine Otto for valuable research assistance and Michael Martinez for comments and suggestions.

voting levels should not be equated with democratic participation, but that in extreme cases—such as the Russian Federation—the two may be negatively correlated.

The level of competitive politics across post-Soviet Russia has changed dramatically, and in multiple directions, over the last fifteen-plus years. The collapse of the Soviet Union introduced relatively free elections at the national level, which were gradually expanded to the subnational level with the popular election of regional executives. However, Vladimir Putin's ascension to the presidency is now widely recognized as ushering in a new era, one of managed competition. From 2000 on, Putin gradually reasserted the influence of the central government--particularly the executive branch--over regional elections and ultimately eliminated the popular election of regional executives. Moreover, Russia's 2007 parliamentary elections showed Putin's mastery of the electoral system (Coalson 2008). Accordingly, we ask 1) under what conditions has higher voter turnout reflected political conditions commonly associated with competitive electoral politics, and 2) under what conditions has higher turnout represented the ability of elites to drive election outcomes? To answer these questions, we use data from Russia's constituent regions from 1991 through 2007, allowing us to test for spatial and temporal effects.

Explaining Voter Turnout Levels: Regional Contexts and Election Characteristics

Most works examining voter turnout fall into one of two overarching approaches: social-psychological and institutional. Social-psychological explanations suggest that a variety of socioeconomic and demographic factors determine voter behavior. Specifically, age, education, gender, occupation, and wealth influence individual attitudes toward politics (Dalton 2002, 49-51), which in turn influence political behavior. Attitudes of particular relevance include self-efficacy, interest in politics, partisanship, and interpersonal trust. The largest portion of such research examines rates of turnout within a single country over time, especially in the United States (see for example, Teixeira 1987, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Franklin 1996, Gray and Caul 2000). In the comparative context, several seminal works have

described how social-psychological factors vary across nation-states and reflect cultural variations in participation rates (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963, Inglehart 1990, and Putnam 1993). According to these works, political participation—even the decision to vote or abstain—reflects subjective orientations that evolve from differences in socialization and are difficult to undo.

Recently, however, the social-psychological approach has received notable criticism. As Franklin (2004, 16) points out, turnout is an aggregate-level phenomenon: “It is a feature of an electorate not a voter.” In other words, understanding turnout levels is not the same thing as understanding why an individual votes. In fact, the latter question has perplexed formal theorists for decades (see among others, Downs 1956, Fiorina 1990, Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Yet, according to Franklin, much of the problem with previous analyses of turnout rates is the failure to consider the dynamics of aggregation, as opposed to viewing turnout as simply the sum of individual decisions. This individualistic fallacy leads scholars to overlook important theoretical issues. Specifically, Franklin argues that in advanced industrial democracies a missing link is the role that social networks play: In isolation, it seems irrational for individuals to vote regardless of whether they are well-educated or older. However, education and age matter because of their effects on political mobilization. Education inculcates civic responsibility and provides the skills to make electoral participation easier. Age, meanwhile, not only determines one’s educational opportunities but also increases the degree to which people become embedded in social structures. Accordingly, we should care about individual-level characteristics not simply because they reveal certain capacities but because they determine the degree to which individuals participate in group action or acquire a group mentality. And, for Franklin, factoring such aggregate dynamics into a voter’s decision calculus makes turning out to vote appear much more likely.

The second main approach to the study of voter turnout focuses on institutional differences. Institutionalists emphasize how different political institutions can boost or retard electoral participation, *ceteris paribus* (e.g., Blais and Carty 1990; Bowler, Brockington and Donovan 2001; Banducci, Donovan and

Karp 1999; Pérez-Liñán 2001). Although institutional concerns have important implications for understanding cross-national variations in voter turnout (see Jackman 1987 and Ladner and Milner 1999), institutional variation is, as a rule, small when studying turnout for national elections.² Therefore, institutional explanations fail to explain significant variations in turnout in the same country over time (Franklin 2004, 15). For example, higher turnout is often associated with more proportional electoral systems or compulsory voting. Yet countries that switch to more proportional electoral rules or change compulsory voting requirements fail to experience the concomitant changes in turnout levels. So while these system-level differences are often found to possess significant effects in cross-sectional investigations, they fall flat in longitudinal studies.

These shortcomings in the existing literature lead Franklin (2004) to advance a third approach: One contending that changes in turnout levels stem, not from individual-level characteristics or system-level institutions, but rather from the nature of the elections themselves. Specifically, one should expect higher turnout levels when elections are more competitive, when turnout rates are more likely to influence election results, and when the election results themselves are more likely to have tangible effects on policy outcomes. While often overlooked, the empirical roots of this argument are well established. Cox and Munger (1989), for example, observed that close races produce higher turnout than elections for which the outcome is well known ahead of election day. Similarly, the presence or absence of concurrent elections has been demonstrated as influencing turnout levels. In the United States, for example, changing the dates of gubernatorial elections to coincide with midterm elections rather than presidential elections has not only shortened presidential coattails but also lowered voter turnout levels (Boyd 1986, Jewell and Olson 1988, 209).³

²The lower house of Russia's parliament, the Duma, uses a mixed electoral system in which 225 seats are allocated through single-member-district plurality and 225 seats are allocated through party-list PR. Regional voter registration coincides with national residency registration – the *propiska* system (Colton 2000, 36 and 276). This Soviet-era practice requires Russian citizens to register their place of residence with the police. Russian citizens abroad can vote at the Russian consulate (see also Avak'yan et al. 1999, 302-3).

³In Russia, in particular, Marsh (2002, 129) suggests that liberal politicians try to schedule regional elections to coincide with national elections as a way to increase their electoral support since younger, more liberal members of the

Like Franklin (2004), we acknowledge that understanding why individuals vote (or not) is a worthwhile enterprise. However, since higher or lower levels of turnout are conventionally viewed as critical factors that may determine the winner of elections, we also believe studying voter turnout as an aggregate-level phenomenon is important. Yet, our comparison of regional levels of voter turnout in the national elections of a postcommunist country over time differs from Franklin's work in important ways, which we believe make it novel.

First, Franklin has explicit reservations about applying his "meaningfulness of elections" approach of voter turnout—which is largely a story about the expansion of suffrage and generational change in consolidated democracies—to transitional settings. In these environments, the novelty of the democratic process, the uncertainty of election outcomes, and the absence of institutionalized party systems all emerge as intervening factors that require new theorizing if we are to understand the origins of habitual voters (and habitual nonvoters). We agree. And we suggest that one avenue for explaining turnout levels in postcommunist settings is the ability of political elites to drive turnout. This focus also requires one to consider the dynamics of social networks, most likely patronage networks, and to conceptualize turnout as an aggregate-level phenomenon. We return to this issue in more detail below.

Second, by focusing on differences in voter turnout across regions in one country, our work diverges from Franklin's book, as well as other cross-national studies, by eliminating cross-national differences in the electoral contexts. While this point may seem obvious, it is far from trivial. These differences not only include critical institutional differences (e.g., the type of electoral system or the presence of compulsory voting), but they also include many of those variables that Franklin considers most instrumental (like whether the election results are likely to determine policy outcomes). Put succinctly, comparing regions within one country at one specific point in time also helps control for the meaningfulness of elections. For example, if voters are expected to turn out at higher rates during presi-

electorate participate at a lower rate outside elections for the president or national parliament.

dential elections because these elections have greater import on policy decisions than do parliamentary elections, variations in *regional* turnout levels cannot be attributed to this difference.⁴ Something else must be going on. We believe the “something else” may be teased out by exploring the characteristics of different regions.

A third difference between our analysis and Franklin’s is the pride of place that we once again give to measures generally associated with tapping individual capacity at the aggregate-level (i.e., those variables that Franklin sets aside). Specifically, we believe that, in countries where democracy is far from consolidated, aggregate-level measures of education, age and ethnicity, matter.⁵ Based on research into individual-level behavior from studies around the globe, we have specific expectations about the kinds of individuals who are most likely to vote in free and fair elections—that is, we expect habitual voters to be older, better educated, and urban. Ethnic differences, meanwhile, can also be a powerful political force. The comparative context suggests that ethnicity may be a crucial factor structuring patron-client relationships as well as mobilizing voters. For example, Horowitz (1985, 326) emphasizes that the 1964 elections in Guyana and the 1961 elections in Trinidad reached unusually large turnouts by world standards because party identification became synonymous with ethnic identity.⁶ Such expectations underlie the aggregate-level hypotheses that permeate much of the cross-national turnout literature. Thus, aggregate-

⁴Tucker (2006, 81) makes a similar point when outlining the benefits of a comparative cross-regional analysis of economic voting.

⁵While several works have examined voter turnout in Russia at the individual level (e.g., McAllister and White 1994; Reisinger et al. 1995; Colton 1996; White and McAllister 2004), few studies consider turnout at the aggregate level. Clem and Craumer’s (1998) work, which considers the relationship between the socioeconomic characteristics of the regions and their turnout rates, is an important exception. In general, they find that regions with older populations and more workers in the agricultural sector have higher rates of turnout. Meanwhile, regions with more educated and more urban populations have lower turnout. Likewise, although one should expect poorer economic conditions to foster higher turnout levels (Radcliffe 1992, 1996), Clem and Craumer (1998) fail to find a significant relationship between macroeconomic conditions and voter turnout. However, Colton (1996) does find evidence to indicate that pocketbook issues have shaped voting patterns in Russia.

⁶One could reasonably expect elections to assume greater importance where non-Russian nationalities comprise larger proportions of the regional population and when key ethnic issues dominate national politics. This is particularly relevant to a developing federal system, like the Russian Federation, which experienced extensive debates and continual negotiations over the distribution of governmental authority between the federal center and certain regions (called ‘republics’) with significant proportions of non-Russian nationalities in their borders (see especially, Kahn 2002).

level measures of individual characteristics are relevant because these measures are standard indicators of the kinds of people who are most disposed to vote. In other words, one should expect relatively higher levels of voter turnout in regions where more of these kinds of individuals reside, given free and fair elections. A critical issue from our perspective, however, is that elections are not always free and fair.

Similarly, the economic and social conditions of polities may shape turnout. A fundamental tenet of the democratization literature is that high voter turnout correlates with better economic performance. The implicit theoretical explanation of this relationship is that stronger economies are more likely to produce a middle class with the leisure time and interest to participate in politics (Lipset 1959, Moore 1966). In addition, in economically successful regions greater segments of the population are likely to enjoy feelings of efficacy, which is commonly associated with higher rates of participation. However, high rates of voter turnout also could emerge in regions that are struggling economically. Such a relationship would signal dissatisfaction with the system and, possibly, an absence of democratic norms.

The political environment within a particular region and the resulting quality of elections must be understood as a theoretically important aggregate-level variable that alters the relationship between individual capacity variables and voter turnout in relatively predictable ways. Specifically, voter turnout in more traditional or hierarchical societies during low quality elections reflects the social characteristics that enable patron-client relationships. Thus, when aggregated measures are viewed as simply tapping the sum of individual capacities, they may yield counter-intuitive results where the quality of elections is in doubt. For example, one may see higher turnout rates in regions with less educated voters. However, when these aggregated variables are conceptualized as indicators of how patron-client networks operate in flawed elections, then otherwise counter-intuitive findings prove less surprising: Less educated individuals are not only less likely to be politically active, but they are also more likely to be clients of powerful patrons. Therefore, in flawed elections, the presence of a large proportion of less educated individuals in a polity can result in higher than expected levels of political mobilization since flawed elections grant elites

the opportunity to utilize clientelist networks. Karklins' (1986) study of voter abstention in the Soviet Union illustrates how flawed elections can yield relationships between voting and individual-level characteristics that contradict those found in advanced democracies.

Karklins utilizes a survey of Soviet emigrants between the ages of 21 and 70, who arrived in the United States between January 1, 1979 and April 30, 1982, to analyze the characteristics of non-voters in a noncompetitive setting. As Karklins points out, elections in the Soviet Union were taken very seriously. Election day was always on Sunday, came complete with a flood of campaign activity, and took place amongst "a festive atmosphere, with bands playing and banners flying as streams of voters arrive[d] in polling places" (1986, 450). More importantly, the results of 99% or higher turnout in support of the Communist Party's single candidate were always depicted as demonstrations of the regime's legitimacy. Yet, despite detailed rules and regulations intended to guarantee voting equality, secrecy, and fairness, the gap between theory and practice epitomized the absurdity of the electoral process in the Soviet Union. For example, while only one name was ever listed on a ballot, voters were instructed to leave the name of the candidate they supported and to cross out the remaining ones. Likewise, affirmative votes were far from secret since a voter merely had to place an unmarked ballot into the ballot box. At the same time, since the only reason to enter a voting booth was to cross out the single candidate's name, would-be dissidents were stripped of the right to vote in secret (1986, 450-52).

Soviet elections, then, provide a nice point of departure for understanding voter abstention and, by extension, turnout in non-competitive elections. First, Karklins (1986, 450) reveals that non-voting can represent a dissident political act. In the Soviet Union, "intense psychological and social pressures [were] applied to get out the vote" (ibid, 453). Specifically, the Communist Party relied on a network of "agitators," who were enlisted by electoral commissions to contact 20 to 30 voters prior to an election, educate them about politics, and make sure they voted. These agitators were also held responsible for their voters' behavior to such an extent that an agitator might visit his or her voters at home on election day and, if

necessary, cast a ballot for those who refusing to vote. In such an environment, then, abstention takes on significant meaning. More importantly, for our purposes though, Karklins work reveals that *abstaining* in this non-competitive setting was correlated with attitudinal factors similar to those associated with *voting* in consolidated democracies. In her study, émigrés most interested in politics were more likely to abstain. In addition, non-voters were younger (46 years of age or under), more frequently male, more highly educated, and more urban (from the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, especially Moscow and Leningrad). Moreover, non-voters in the Soviet Union tended to be more interested in politics, more critical of the Soviet system, and more likely to have engaged in unsanctioned civil and political behavior.

Karklins's findings are important to our study for at least three reasons. First, they suggest that the attitudinal correlates of political acts in Russia (even during the Soviet Union) are not inherently different from those correlates emphasized in the existing literature for Western voters. Rather, it is the context in which the individuals were operating that matters: Given the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union, the meaningful political act was abstaining rather than voting; yet the individual characteristics influencing the probability of meaningful political behavior were largely the same in the East as they were in the West. Second, and related, her findings reveal that a crucial contextual factor shaping voter turnout is the quality of elections. Therefore, on one hand, the onset of more open and more competitive elections should lead individuals, who would have abstained previously, to vote. At the same time, the removal of a system-wide network of agitators should give individuals least engaged in politics, yet most vulnerable to psychological and social pressures, the freedom *not to vote*. Third, Karklins' (1986, 456) results indicate that the willingness to vote or abstain may reflect regional differences within the same country—that is they reflect “the properties of various communities rather than the individual characteristics of respondents.” Among the aggregate properties that Karklins offers to account for regional differences in abstention during the Soviet period are the global awareness of politics that existed in the country's political center and the nonconformist atmosphere present in Moscow and Leningrad. Given our interest in turnout

(rather than abstention), we interpret these explanations as suggesting that, in non-competitive settings, turnout should be higher in regions where politics is more insular and more compliant. Moreover, we argue that regional politics where patron-client networks predominate can be conceptualized as both insular and compliant.

Patronage has a long history in Russia. During the Soviet era, it dominated the *nomenklatura* system of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Factors such as common service with an important official in a particular geographic region, one's succession of job assignments, and ascriptive traits, like ethnic identity and gender, became important determinants of recruitment and mobility (Barghoorn and Remington 1986). The Soviet Union's collapse did not dismantle these existing patron-client ties. Instead, patronage networks have continued their importance thanks to the pervasiveness of the Soviet bureaucracy in the post-Soviet period (see Willerton 1992, Glinski and Reddaway 1999). Patronage norms have even survived the removal of *nomenklatura* members from positions of political power: When members of the former *nomenklatura* have been replaced by new political elites, sharp leadership rivalries have emerged with personal connections—rather than a defined and accepted set of rules—continuing to shape post-Soviet politics (Badovskii and Shutov 1997, 34-35).

To one or another degree, legacies of patronage characterize regional governance in Russia and are likely to have important consequences for electoral behavior there. Several scholars argue that a weak center has allowed regional leaders to substantively influence the reported voting patterns of their constituencies (Lukin 1999, McFaul 1997, Wedel 1996), while others have investigated the motives of regional and local officials to participate in election fraud (Filippov and Ordeshook 1997). More recently, Myagkov (2003, 157) argues that election fraud has played a larger role in Russian elections than most international observers believe. Since many regions are economic and social disasters, local residents are hostages of the local elites. They believe that they must obey the regional boss or conditions could get

worse. In other words, some regions possess social and economic attributes that make insular and compliant political behavior more likely among their populations.

One regional characteristic that may facilitate patronage and its effects on turnout is place of residence (i.e., urban or rural). The urban-rural divide is usually associated with a social-psychological approach, in which the regions or other polities are seen as collections of individuals, each of whom makes a vote/abstain decision for various personal reasons. Rural districts will differ from urban districts if they have different proportions of individuals with education or feelings of political efficacy. Such logic led an early analysis of voter turnout to contend that urban areas enjoy higher rates of political participation than rural areas (Milbrath 1965). Empirically, however, other works show that the relationship between urbanity and participation at the subnational level is far from clear-cut (Nie, Powell, and Prewitt 1969; Verba and Nie 1972). In particular, Johnson (1971), Monroe (1977, 76), and Schulz (1979, 12) indicate that, in certain contexts, rural regions can experience higher turnout than urban areas. What seems to explain this inconsistency between the social-psychological expectations associated with the characteristics of a polity's populace and the actual level of participation in the polity is the political *context*. In other words, it is not the factors that distinguish the residents of the polity from each other as individuals, but what unites them and distinguishes them (in the aggregate) from residents of other polities. And, at the subnational level, there is evidence to suggest that the influence of local politicians in rural areas can make the difference.

In some environments, local politicians play a disproportionate role in determining the provision of service in rural areas. These local politicians not only deliver benefits to their constituents, they represent crucial allies for national politicians since they can marshal votes, intervene in the policy implementation process, and interpret national objectives to local constituencies (Schulz 1979). Monroe (1977, 77), in particular, contends that the ability of local politicians to distribute government jobs in the rural counties of Illinois explain why these counties enjoyed higher levels of voter turnout. Thus, local politicians

who play prominent roles in the provision of services and jobs should be more able to determine rates of voter turnout. One might reasonably expect this rural dynamic to play an even greater role in post-Soviet Russia. According to Fish (1995), the link between dependency in the workplace and city size proved particularly prominent in the success of conservative politicians during the 1989 and 1990 elections to the Soviet and Russian Congress of People's Deputies, respectively. He argues that "Just as fear and dependence in the workplace placed harsher constraints on the abilities of residents of smaller communities to engage in radical activity, so they also imposed more severe limitations on their freedom of expression at the ballot box" (ibid, 194-5). In sum, then, we focus on the relationship between urbanity and turnout at the aggregate level across the regions comprising the Russian Federation to determine whether the enduring prevalence of patronage has allowed local politicians to continue to enjoy the power to manipulate election outcomes.

Another environmental factor that may prove important to determining turnout levels in transitioning states, in particular, is party development. In established democracies, the party system is a central aspect of a society's political organization since political parties organize and shape electoral competition. Parties can work to promote or suppress voter turnout as part of their electoral strategies (see, for example, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992). In an analysis of turnout during democratic transitions in 17 Latin American countries, Pérez-Liñán's (2001) finds that political parties, as well as state actors, were critical vote mobilizers, even though ineffective registration procedures ultimately inhibited turnout.

Much of the literature on political parties in post-Soviet Russia has highlighted their shallow roots in society and weak organization (with the possible exception of the Communist Party). Hough (1998, 688) portrays the initial incarnation of post-Soviet parties as "highly personalistic and ephemeral." Meanwhile, Rose (2000) depicts a tendency for Russian parties to 'float' above society often supplying candidates and policy rather than responding to voter demands. Other research, however, contends that party politics remains a crucial aspect of Russia's transition (Fish 1995, Miller et al. 2000, Moser 2001).

As Fish (2003, 186-87) notes, “The notion that Russia is a virtually party-free polity, or that parties are utterly insignificant in Russian politics, was not sound before the most recent [1999-2000] round of elections, nor is it valid after them.”

In Russia’s regions, the degree to which political parties have been vehicles for candidates has varied (Golosov 1999 and 2004). Clem and Craumer (1998), in particular, found that if a party with strong organizational structures at the grassroots (like the Communist Party) was popular in a region, that region had higher voter turnout. But these conclusions stem from bivariate analysis, which raises questions about whether the impact of party development holds when say, socioeconomic conditions, are controlled for. Still, since political parties have developed slowly in the regions, variation in party development represents an important consideration when comparing turnout rates.

Voter Turnout in Post-Soviet Russia’s Regions

We expect, then, the factors influencing regional turnout levels in Russian elections to be of four types: 1) regional population characteristics, 2) regional socioeconomic characteristics, 3) regional political characteristics, and 4) characteristics of a given election. In this section, we proceed from background information on Russian elections to univariate and then bivariate depictions of turnout levels. These analyses will shed preliminary light on how factors from each of these categories influence turnout. They also reveal intriguing over-time shifts.

Russia’s two post-Soviet presidencies—Boris Yeltsin from 1991-1999 and Vladimir Putin from 2000 to 2008—represent distinct electoral eras. (We do not analyze data from the highly controlled Soviet era, discussed above, but that era implicitly forms a comparison period in examining turnout and other electoral behavior from 1991 on.) We consider the Yeltsin era to have begun with the presidential election in 1991 even though the USSR was not dissolved until later that year. Unlike the 1990 legislative elections, the presidential race in 1991 was decoupled from Soviet election processes. Yeltsin’s admini-

stration also oversaw federal legislative elections in 1993 and 1995, two rounds of a presidential election in 1996, and the onset of regional and gubernatorial elections.⁷ The 1993 legislative elections took place two months after a bloody showdown between Yeltsin and his opponents in the legislature.⁸ Neither political parties nor the electorate had much time to prepare for the political contest to select the members of the newly configured parliament, and the public was disillusioned, depressing turnout nationwide. Also, voters in the Republic of Tatarstan boycotted this election in large numbers as a means of protesting membership in the Russian Federation. On the other hand, these elections included a referendum on Yeltsin's constitution, which required 50% turnout to be valid. Sobianin and Liubarskii (as quoted in Dunlop 2001, 58) suggest that local officials agreed to guarantee the 50% turnout necessary to validate the constitutional referendum in return for a free hand in rigging the parliamentary election results in their favor. Subsequent elections during Yeltsin's tenure revolved around the rivalry between Yeltsin's supporters and his opponents, primarily the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.⁹

After becoming Prime Minister in August, 1999, Putin created a political party in support of his policies, called Unity, and it outperformed expectations in that December's legislative elections. At the end of the same month, Yeltsin stepped down, elevating Putin to the presidency. Putin won election in 2000 to keep the post, then re-election in 2004. When the legislators elected in 1999 convened in early 2000, Putin maneuvered his party into the most influential position. Following the 2003 legislative elections, Putin's party, now called United Russia, gained an outright majority. In contrast to the 1990s, then, the Putin period was characterized by much less legislative-executive tension than Yeltsin's tenure.

⁷Yeltsin had run for office successfully prior to the dissolution of the USSR: winning a seat in 1989 to the Soviet Union's Congress of People's Deputies, then becoming head of the Russian Federation's legislature in 1990 and president of Russia in the 1991 presidential elections that we include in our analyses.

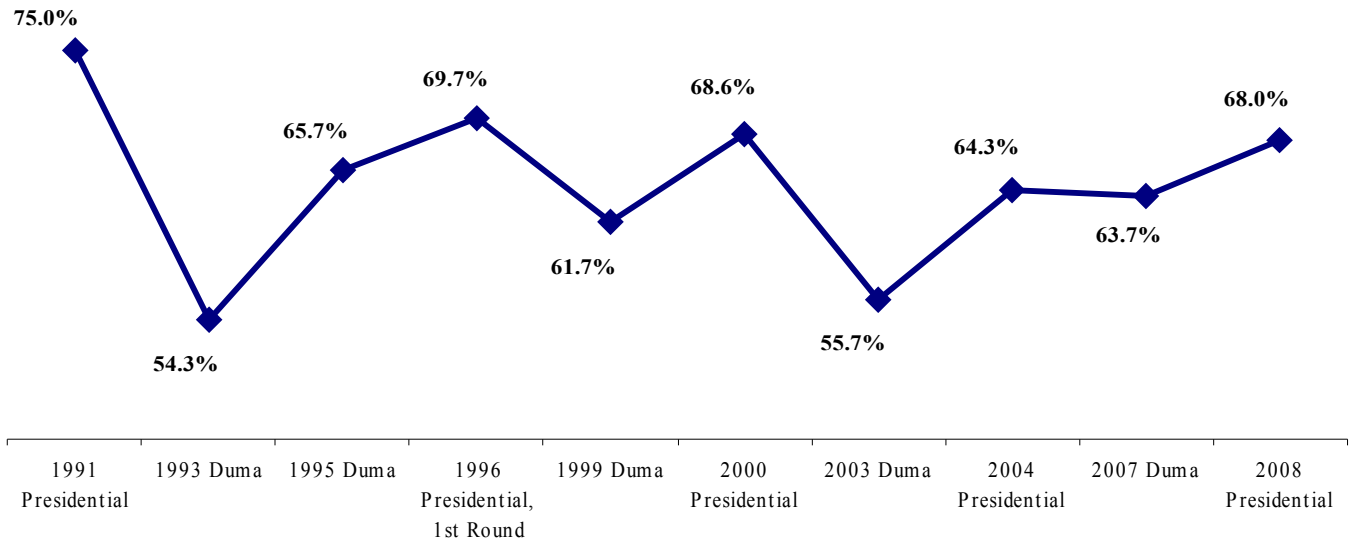
⁸The 1993 crisis between President Yeltsin and the parliament emerged as the two sides disagreed on the direction of economic reform, the division of powers between the federal executive and legislature as well as different drafts of a new Russian constitution. The confrontation reached its climax in September when Yeltsin disbanded the Russian parliament, stripped all of its deputies of their legal mandates, and set new federal parliamentary elections for December. The resulting standoff ended in early October when violence broke out in Moscow and Yeltsin convinced the military to storm the parliament building and arrest those inside.

⁹For more information on elections during the Yeltsin period, see and)

Among the political fault lines during Putin's presidency, a central one was the relative power of regional leaderships versus that of Russia's central government. Yeltsin-era policies had allowed regional governors to accrue differing degrees of control over regional politics and economic resources. Putin emphasized reversing that trend. His efforts included lawsuits to repeal regional laws that violate the Russian constitution; tax code changes; altering the federal law that specifies the composition of the upper house of the federal parliament to remove governors' ex officio membership; and two moves in 2004: consolidation of small regions into their larger surrounding regions, and elimination of elections for governors in favor of the president appointing them. We therefore expect turnout levels and their correlates to differ between the Yeltsin era and the Putin era--which we treat as beginning with the 1999 Duma elections when Putin was in charge of the government though not yet president--primarily because the regional political conditions change.

National levels of voter turnout in post-Soviet Russia from 1991 through 2007 range between 54% and 75%. Figure 1 illustrates the movement in national turnout levels between 1991 and 2008. The highest turnout figure occurs during the 1991 presidential election, while the low figure comes two and a half years later, in the 1993 legislative elections/constitutional plebiscite. In 1991, Yeltsin is seeking election to the newly created presidency, and his election is part of a struggle for Russian sovereignty with President Gorbachev. The comparatively high level of turnout reflects this election's salience. The 1993 Duma election, by contrast, comes in the aftermath of the divisive struggle between Yeltsin and legislative leaders that leads to violence in the streets and the shelling of the legislative building (the White House).

Figure 1: Voter Turnout in Russia’s National Elections (1991-2008)

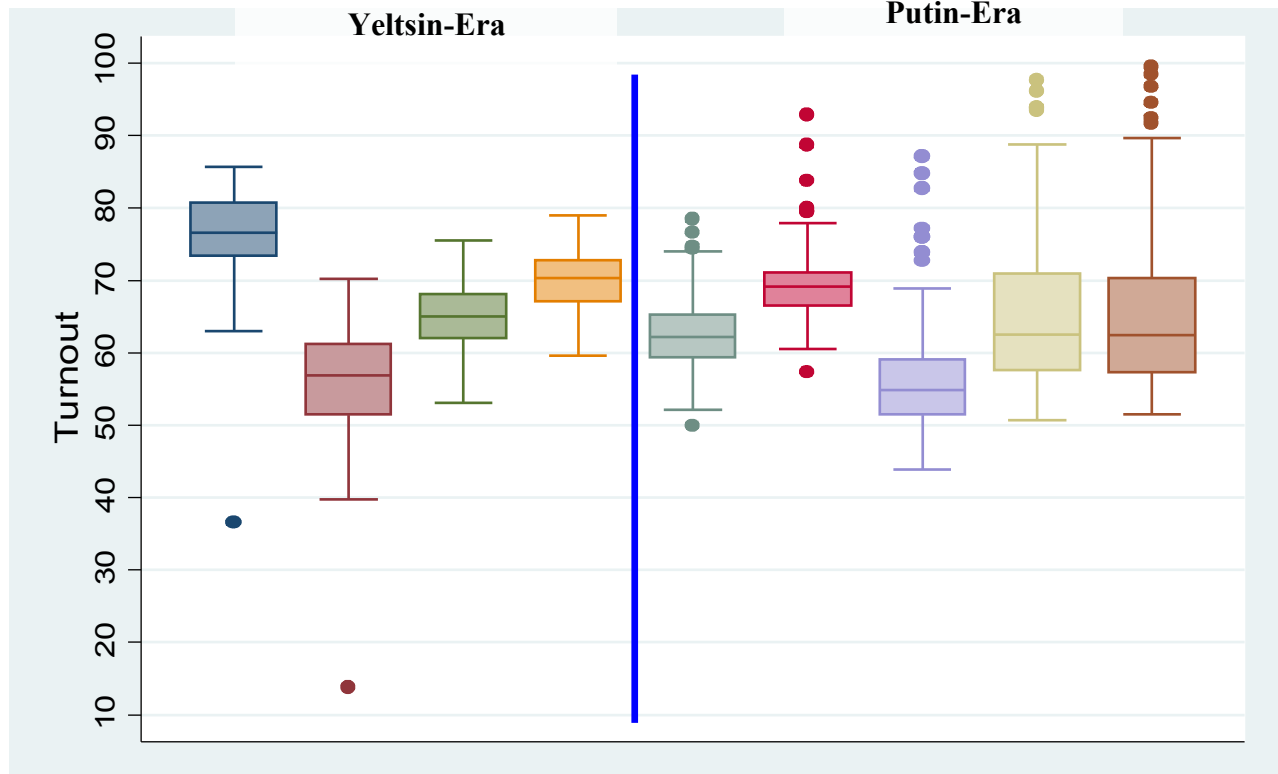


Source: See Appendix.

Note that the turnout rates for different types of elections have a pattern: presidential elections exceed the rates for the legislative contests they follow. Since the Russian presidency concentrates an unusual amount of political power in the hands of one individual (including veto and decree powers as well as control over the formation of the government), a higher rate of participation is not surprising. The trend in the rates over time is insignificant (coefficient = $-.0024$, or declining by two-tenths of a percent per election), and the average in the Yeltsin era is only trivially higher than in the Putin era (65.3% vs. 64.1%).

Figure 2 displays the distributions of regional turnout levels for all national elections between 1991 and 2007. For each, the turnout levels for regions at the 25th and 75th percentiles define the box,

Figure 2: Regional Variation in Voter Turnout in Russia’s National Elections (1991-2007)



'91 Pres. (avg.=76.2) (s.d.=6.5)	'95 Duma (65.0) (4.7)	'99 Duma (62.7) (5.5)	'03 Duma (56.9) (8.7)	'07 Duma (66.2) (11.8)
	'93 Duma (56.1) (7.8)	'96 Pres., 1 (69.8) (3.9)	'00 Pres. (69.7) (5.3)	'04 Pres. (65.7) (11.1)

Regional Turnout in 4 Yeltsin-Era Elections

Mean of averages:66.8
 Mean of standard deviations:5.7

Regional Turnout in 5 Putin-Era Elections

Mean of averages:64.2
 Mean of standard deviations:8.5

Sources: See Appendix.

with the line through the middle indicating the median level. The means and standard deviations for each election are noted below the figures.¹⁰

¹⁰These averages of regional turnout levels will differ from the national turnout level because of differences in the number of registered voters in each region.

As with the national totals, the average of regional turnout levels has only a slight trend downward across the elections--mostly as a result of the high level in 1991. Yet Figure 2 shows a notable increase over time in the variation across the regions. The gap between the lowest regional rate and the highest is 22% in the 1995 Duma election; 19% in the first round of the 1996 presidential election; 29% in the 1999 Duma election; 36% in the 2000 presidential election; 43% in the 2003 Duma election; 47% in the 2004 presidential election and 48% in the 2007 Duma election. Excluding the extreme outlier of Tatarstan in 1991 and 1993, the gaps are 22.7% and 30.5%. The standard deviation statistics presented in Figure 2 provide another look at the same issue. The 2007 figure of 11.8 is three times as high as in 1996 and over double the Yeltsin-era average. The average standard deviation for the Putin-era elections is 50% higher than the equivalent figure for the Yeltsin-era elections. This disparity would be even more marked if low outlying Tatarstan were to be excluded in 1991 and 1993.¹¹ For comparison, the standard deviation in turnout across U.S. states in the 2004 presidential elections was only 7.0 versus almost 11.8 in Russia in 2007.

Also of note is that, during the Putin era, the outlier regions are all on the high-turnout end of the distributions. In the 2004 presidential election, for example, the median turnout level was 63% and the minimum just above 50%. Yet five regions reported turnout exceeding 90%: Chechnya, Dagestan, Mordova, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. All except Mordova are located in the Caucasus. In the 2007 Duma elections, 90% is surpassed by the same five regions plus Karachaevo-Sirkassia, which is also located in the Caucasus. In 2004, Kabardino-Balkaria led the rest of the country with a daunting turnout level of 97.5%. In 2007, both Ingushetia and Chechnya surpassed that mark, with announced turnout levels of 98.4% and 99.5%, respectively.

As Figure 2 makes clear, the standard deviation statistics grow not because the regions spread apart evenly but because a few regions have much higher turnout than average. Those regions are

¹¹In 1991, excluding Tatarstan causes the standard deviation to fall from 6.5 to 5.0. In 1993, from 7.8 to 6.4. Using those numbers for 1991 and 1993, the mean of standard deviations for the four Yeltsin-era elections drops from 5.7 to 5.0--making the Putin-era mean of 8.5 now 70% higher than the Yeltsin-era mean.

concentrated in the Caucasus. Table 1 shows the results of excluding the seven Caucasus republics (Adygeia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Sirkassia, Severo-Ossetinsk, Ingushetia and Chechnya) from the distributions shown in Figure 2. For the Yeltsin-era elections, excluding these cases has minimal impact. In the Putin era, excluding these cases causes a significant decline in the average turnout levels as well as in the variation of regional turnout levels.

Table 1: Differences in Turnout Distributions When Excluding Caucasus Republics

	Mean of Regions	S.D. of Regions	T-test
1991 Presidential	-0.3%	0.1	-1.6 (.103)
1993 Duma	-0.4%	0.1	-1.6 (.104)
1995 Duma	0.1%	0	0.5 (.579)
1996 Presidential, 1st Round	-0.1%	0.1	-.5 (.602)
1999 Duma	-0.3%	-0.5	-2.0 (.045)
2000 Presidential	-0.8%	-1.4	-5.4 (.000)
2003 Duma	-0.9%	-1.3	-3.6 (.001)
2004 Presidential	-2.0%	-2.4	-7.6 (.000)
2007 Duma	-1.8%	-2.4	-5.3 (.000)

One salient feature of the Caucasus republics is that their populations have relatively few ethnic Russians. Of course, in the Russian federal system, republics are so titled because they have a sizeable non-Russian ethnic group, but most Caucasus republics have *remarkably* small numbers of ethnic Russians in 2002: 1.2% in Ingushetia, 3.7% in Chechnya, and 4.7% in Dagestan. Outside the Caucasus, the republic with the closest percentage is Tuva, with 20% Russians. This suggests that we should examine the impact of Russian ethnicity rather than of the physical location of the regions that have been marked by the highest levels of turnout in the Putin era.

Table 2 shows the correlations for each election between regional turnout and the regional proportion of ethnic Russians. The significant negative correlations from 1999 on indicate that regions with

fewer Russian residents report higher turnout.¹² Whereas this correlation is insignificant in the elections from 1991-1996, it is strong and significant from 1999 on.

Table 2: Correlations between Regional Turnout and Ethnic Russians as a Proportion of the Regional Population

	Correlation with Russian
1991 Presidential	.04 (.742)
1993 Duma	-.01 (.912)
1995 Duma	.12 (.272)
1996 Presidential, 1st Round	.02 (.863)
1999 Duma	-.39 (.000)
2000 Presidential	-.53 (.000)
2003 Duma	-.59 (.000)
2004 Presidential	-.72 (.000)
2007 Duma	-.72 (.000)

To show in a different way the impact of high versus low proportions of ethnic Russians in a region's population, Table 3 presents the change in each election's distribution when the republics are

Table 3: Differences in Turnout Distributions When Excluding All Republics

	Mean of Regions	S.D. of Regions	T-test
1991 Presidential	0.2%	-1.4	.5 (.625)
1993 Duma	-0.1%	-1.5	-.2 (.872)
1995 Duma	0.3%	-0.3	.9 (.383)
1996 Presidential, 1st Round	-0.1%	0	-.1 (.885)
1999 Duma	-0.8%	-0.9	-3.0 (.004)
2000 Presidential	-1.2%	-1.8	-4.2 (.000)
2003 Duma	-2.1%	-2.8	-4.5 (.000)
2004 Presidential	-3.4%	-3.9	-6.2 (.000)
2007 Duma	-3.4%	-4	-5.2 (.000)

¹²This relationship remains strong when the Caucasus republics are dropped: -.58 (.000).

removed. The impact is even stronger than when separating out the Caucasus regions: Withdrawing the republics as a group moves the averages up even more sharply than is seen in Table 1, and it makes the variance even bigger.

Multivariate Analysis

To examine how regional population characteristics, regional socioeconomic characteristics, regional political characteristics, and characteristics of a given election shape turnout levels in Russia's national elections, we use cross-sectional, ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression analysis. While we considered pooling the data and conducting a longitudinal analysis,¹³ this approach does not allow one to inspect changes in the core theoretical variables over time or to determine, explicitly, whether they vary with turnout in presidential elections differently than they do with turnout in parliamentary elections. The following analysis, then, presents equations for the State Duma elections and Russian presidential elections from 1995 through 2007. We exclude the 1993 elections for several reasons. First, the conflict between President Boris Yeltsin and the acting parliament, which produced the December elections, did not end until the shelling of the parliamentary building during the first weekend in October.¹⁴ Thus, neither political parties nor the electorate had much time to prepare for the political contest that would select the new parliament. Also, the legislative elections were held simultaneously with a referendum on Yeltsin's constitution, which required 50% turnout to be valid. Yet, as noted above, dissatisfaction with the distribution of federal and regional powers outlined in the new constitution encouraged voters in some regions, like Tatarstan, to boycott the election. Moreover, unlike subsequent elections in Russia, the 1993 elections could not be seen as acting as "primary" for an upcoming presidential election. Also, for the

¹³We created dummy variables to control for differences in turnout between election cycles and type of national elections, as well as dummy variables based on the federal districts created by Putin during his first term to capture spatial effects.

¹⁴The 1993 crisis between President Yeltsin and the parliament emerged as the two sides disagreed on the direction of economic reform, the division of powers between the federal executive and legislature as well as different drafts of a new Russian constitution. The confrontation reached its climax in September when Yeltsin disbanded the Russian parliament, stripped all of its deputies of their legal mandates, and set new federal parliamentary elections for December 1993. The President's breach of his constitutional power produced a standoff that ended in an armed confrontation.

sake of comparison, the analysis focuses on the first-round of the 1996 presidential elections since subsequent elections only entailed one round.

For three of the four election cycles under investigation, we measure each independent variable, where possible, in the first of the two years—that is, in 1995, 1999, and 2003. For the 2007 Duma election, however, we rely on 2006 data for our independent variables because these are the data most recently available from Goskomstat (see *Regiony Rossii* 2007). Each of the variables corresponds to the core explanations of voter turnout previously discussed.

First, the multivariate regression model includes four measures of regional population characteristics. The percentage of pensioners in a region's population is available on an annual basis and, as mentioned, is measured for 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2006. However, the percentage of the population with higher education is only available for census years. Therefore, we use the 1989 census numbers to indicate regional differences in education levels for the 1995 and 1996 elections and 2002 census numbers for the remaining elections. We also include a measure of the percentage of urban residents in each region. The percentage of urban residents in a region is again available on an annual basis and, like pensioners, it is measured for the years 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2006. The fourth demographic variable we include is ethnic heterogeneity measured as the percentage of ethnic Russians in each region. Like the education variable, the percentage of ethnic Russians in each region is measured only during census years. Accordingly, the 1989 census figures are used to indicate regional differences in ethnicity for the 1995-96 elections and 2002 census figures are used for the remaining elections.

Next, two indicators are used to measure differences in the economic and social conditions of the regions. A fundamental tenet of the democratization literature is that higher voter turnout correlates with better economic performance. Alongside real income and inflation rates, unemployment has been a primary indicator of economic conditions in the economic voting literature (see Lewis-Beck 1986, 1988). And, as Pacek (1994, 728) points out, unemployment is a particularly salient issue for post-communist

states. Accordingly, we include the percentage of registered unemployed persons in each region as an indicator of the regions' economic performance. To assess the social conditions in the regions, we employ the number of crimes per 100 people age 14 and over in each region. Again, while higher crime rates could drive more people to the polls due to dissatisfaction with current conditions, the literature suggests that voter turnout correlates positively with feelings of trust, and we argue that feelings of trust are less likely in crime-ridden regions.

Third, we include two variables to assess whether different political contexts in Russia's regions have impacted voter turnout. Since we argue that voter turnout could reflect the ability of regional politicians to influence voters to participate when they may not have otherwise, we seek to measure the level of political competition for each region's top post—the regional chief executive—prior to each national election. Accordingly, we calculated the effective number of candidates competing in the gubernatorial election preceding each election.¹⁵ Regions with fewer effective candidates are less competitive regions. If anything, the literature on consolidated democracies suggests that voter turnout would be higher where electoral competition is fierce. However, it is also plausible that voter turnout in Russia's regions is negatively correlated with competition levels: Instances where one politician dominates an election can also indicate instances where patron-client relations prevail. Note, however, that independently elected chief executives did not head all of Russia's regions over the last ten years. During the 1995-96 election cycle, several regions still possessed Yeltsin appointed governors while a few republics—which were exempt from having presidential appointees head their executives during this period—relied on parliamentary-style government.¹⁶ We created dummy variables to capture these nuances, and they are included in the equations where appropriate. The level of competition during gubernatorial elections

¹⁵ We begin by weighting the vote percentage of each gubernatorial candidate against itself and summing all of the weighted components: $\sum v_i^2$, where v_i is the fractional share of the i^{th} candidate. This calculation is called the Herfindahl-Hirschmann index. The effective number of gubernatorial candidates is simply the inverse of the Herfindahl-Hirschmann index (Taagepera and Shugart 1989, 79): $N_{\text{eff}} = 1 / \sum v_i^2$. The gubernatorial election results come from the Central Election Commission's website (www.fci.ru) and the website of the Independent Institute of Elections (www.vibory.ru).

¹⁶ In fact, the republic of Udmurtia relied on a parliamentary-style executive throughout the 1990s and the republic of Dagestan has never held popular elections for its executive branch.

obviously becomes a moot point after 2004, following their elimination; so the measure is not included in the equation estimating regional turnout in the 2007 Duma election.

The next variable distinguishing among the regions' political context is the level of party development. To measure party development in Russia's regions, we use the percentage of SMD seats per region that party-nominated candidates, as opposed to candidates nominated by independent blocs of voters, actually won in each of the three Duma elections (1995, 1999, and 2003). In other words, we rely on an indicator that determines the degree to which explicit ties to a national-level political party proved relevant to the election of regional politicians in instances where party affiliation was optional. This variable provides an indication of the degree to which regional elites have moved beyond traditional patronage relations with parties fulfilling their expected role as vehicles linking elites and voters (Weiner and La Palombara 1966, 400; Fish 2003, 187). Unfortunately, this measure of party development loses its applicability in 2007 since Duma seats were no longer allocated via SMD.

Finally, the analysis controls for the effects of simultaneous elections. One dichotomous variable captures those cases where the national presidential elections were held concurrently with a region's gubernatorial election. A second dichotomous variable indicates those cases where the national parliamentary elections were held concurrently with a region's gubernatorial election. Cases where national elections were not held on the same date as the region's gubernatorial election score zeros for both of these dummy variables. Of course, like our measure of regional competitiveness, the question of simultaneous gubernatorial elections proves inapplicable after 2004.

Table 4 presents the results of the equations estimating regional turnout for the State Duma and Russian presidential elections from 1995 to 2007. For each election, there are two columns. The first presents the unstandardized coefficients with standard errors below them in parentheses. The second lists the standardized coefficients, or beta weights. Bold betas indicate that the variable attains significance in the equation at the 0.05 level or higher for a two-tailed test.

The equations in Table 4 reveal several noteworthy trends. First, among the variables measuring regional population characteristics, only two of the four regularly attain standard levels of significance: the percentage of urban residents for the 1995, 1996 and 1999 elections and the percentage of Russians for the 2000, 2003, 2004, and 2007 elections. Note as well that both of these variables are *negatively* correlated with turnout levels. In other words, from the 1995 Duma elections through the 1999 Duma elections, regional turnout rates were significantly higher in more rural regions. Meanwhile, the beta weights for the percentage of urban residents suggest a downward trend in the explanatory power of this variable until it loses significance in the 2000 presidential election. Meanwhile, the percentage of ethnic Russians in a region in the 1995 Duma elections, the first round of the 1996 presidential election, and the 1999 Duma elections fails to reach standard levels of significance; it actually starts with a positive sign in 1995. Yet, in the same election that the percentage of urban residence loses its significance, the percentage of Russian residents in a region emerges as strongly and negatively correlated with turnout and the size of its beta weight, for the most part, increases over time maxing out at -0.44 in 2004 while reaching a comparable level in 2007.

While the remaining two demographic variables fall short of statistical significance across all four equations in Table 4, they do present some interesting dynamics. First, regions with higher percentages of residents with higher education—like those with more ethnic Russians—witnessed higher turnout rates during the 1995 Duma elections and the 1996 presidential elections. The sign for the percentage of residents with higher education then flips in 1999 to indicate a negative relationship, which continues on through the 2007 Duma election. Meanwhile, as expected, the percentage of pensioners in a region emerges as positively correlated with turnout in the 1995 Duma elections, actually reaching significance during the 1996 presidential election. In other words, during the first round of the 1996 presidential election, regions with older populations witnessed significantly higher turnout rates. Yet, not only does this relationship fail to attain statistical significance beyond this election, the sign of the coefficient

Table 4: Factors Shaping Regional Voter Turnout in Russia's National Elections (1995-2007)

	Dependent variables = Turnout by Year													
	<u>1995</u>	β	<u>1996</u>	β	<u>1999</u>	β	<u>2000</u>	β	<u>2003</u>	β	<u>2004</u>	β	<u>2007</u>	β
Constant	71.68 (4.75)		75.83 (4.45)		74.30 (5.84)		83.09 (5.40)		83.81 (9.11)		106.90 (9.81)		111.62 (10.59)	
% with Higher Education	0.08 (0.17)	0.06	0.02 (0.16)	0.13	-0.08 (0.14)	-0.07	-0.13 (0.13)	-0.11	-0.27 (0.22)	-0.15	-0.00 (0.23)	-0.00	-0.23 (0.26)	-0.08
% Urban	-0.18 (0.05)	-0.48	-0.15 (0.04)	-0.42	-0.10 (0.04)	-0.32	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.02	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.18	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.09	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.05
% Russian	0.03 (0.03)	0.13	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.11	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.16	-0.08 (0.03)	-0.36	-0.14 (0.05)	-0.41	-0.20 (0.05)	-0.44	-0.20 (0.06)	-0.43
% Pensioner	0.23 (0.15)	0.21	0.36 (0.14)	0.36	0.20 (0.16)	0.16	0.19 (0.16)	0.15	0.01 (0.25)	0.01	-0.26 (0.27)	-0.10	-0.61 (0.32)	-0.20
Registered Unemployment	0.20 (0.17)	0.12	-0.01 (0.16)	-0.00	0.36 (0.36)	0.11	-0.11 (0.33)	-0.04	-0.28 (0.33)	-0.10	0.16 (0.38)	-0.09	0.07 (0.13)	0.05
Crimes per 100 people	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.27	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.26	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.21	-0.03 (0.01)	-0.41	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.15	-0.06 (0.02)	-0.31	-0.03 (0.01)	-0.22
% of SMD deputies With Party Labels	0.61 (1.15)	0.06	-0.31 (1.09)	-0.03	-0.59 (1.30)	-0.05	-1.32 (1.16)	-0.11	0.17 (1.85)	0.01	0.24 (2.01)	0.01		
Effective number Of Gubernatorial Candidates	-0.68 (0.47)	-0.19	-0.33 (0.28)	-0.12	-1.03 (0.39)	-0.26	-0.67 (0.37)	-0.17	-1.06 (0.46)	-0.22	-1.74 (0.51)	-0.26		

	<u>1995</u>	β	<u>1996</u>	β	<u>1999</u>	β	<u>2000</u>	β	<u>2003</u>	β	<u>2004</u>	β	<u>2007</u>	β
Appointed Governor	0.13 (1.42)	0.02	1.28 (1.11)	0.15										
Simultaneous Gubernatorial Election	0.99 (1.08)	0.09			3.82 (1.72)	0.22	2.51 (1.80)	0.14	4.48 (2.20)	0.20	-3.84 (2.76)	-0.11		
Adj. R ²	0.43		0.42		0.30		0.37		0.31		0.55		0.52	
SEE	3.18		3.04		4.46		4.07		6.34		6.93		8.14	
N	71		71		84		85		86		86		85	

Note: Bold beta coefficients indicate significance at the 0.05 level or higher for a two-tailed test.

changes direction for the 2004 presidential election and 2007 Duma elections. In fact, in 2007, regional turnout rates were substantively lower (i.e., significant at the 0.10 level for a two-tailed test) in regions with more pensioners.

Of the two variables measuring socioeconomic conditions in the regions, only the level of crime in a region emerges as a significant correlate of regional turnout rates, and this relationship appears inconsistent. That is, in two of the elections—during the 1999 and 2003 Duma elections—the crime rate fails to significantly influence regional turnout levels. Still, on the whole, it appears that more crime-ridden regions in Russia experienced lower levels of turnout. In contrast, regional unemployment rate fails to significantly determine regional turnout rates in any of the equations.¹⁷

Among the political characteristics of the regions, the effective number of gubernatorial candidates measure, on the other hand, significantly impacts regional turnout levels during the 1999 and 2003 Duma elections, as well as the 2004 presidential election. Meanwhile, the dichotomous variable indicating the simultaneity of national and gubernatorial elections emerges as significant, but only for the 1999 and 2003 Duma. Since regional executive elections do not become commonplace until after the 1995 Duma election, the insignificance of these variables for that election should not be surprising. The finding that holding gubernatorial elections on the same day as national parliamentary elections increased regional turnout rates resembles the results of existing research on turnout in consolidated democracies, which argues that higher levels of turnout reflect the meaningfulness of elections. For the same reasons, the power of the Russian presidency and its dominant role in Russian politics helps explain the null result for the simultaneity variable in presidential elections—that is, the finding that regional turnout rates in presidential elections are largely immune to the holding of gubernatorial elections makes sense.

While the findings related to the simultaneity of elections conforms to contentions in the existent literature, the revelation that regional turnout in Russia has been greater in regions where political compe-

¹⁷ Real average income in a region also failed to attain significance (unreported, but available from the authors).

tition at the regional level has been weaker runs counter to conventional expectations. In the context of free and fair elections, a less competitive political environment should suppress turnout. Thus, the negative relationship between regional competitiveness and turnout rates represents is probably the best indicator that regional turnout levels in Russia do not primarily reflect different regional publics' interest level in national politics. At the same time, since our indicator of national party development in the regions fails to significantly influence regional turnout in any of the elections for which it is available, one cannot attribute higher regional turnout rates to party mobilization efforts (see Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992). The most likely explanation, then, is elite-driven turnout, which is accomplished in large part thanks to the persistence of patron-client ties.

Discussion

Our analysis of voter turnout in Russia focuses on regions as the unit of analysis. This approach allows us to use statistical analysis to examine the correlates of voter turnout as an aggregate-level phenomenon while simultaneously limiting historical, cultural, and institutional variations that country-level analyses regularly encounter. At the same time, studying voter turnout in national elections at the regional level allows us to limit the number of variables determining the “meaningfulness of elections” (Franklin 2004). Meanwhile, we argue that an investigation of voter turnout in a competitive authoritarian regime (see Levitsky and Way 2002) requires one to reconsider conventional expectations. Specifically, factors that may facilitate higher voter turnout in free and fair elections could operate differently in elections that are not necessarily free or fair.

Using data on voter turnout across Russia's regions, we illustrate substantial cross-sectional and longitudinal variation. At the same time, our examination of outlying cases pinpoints one potentially important explanatory variable: the percentage of ethnic Russians in the regions. Specifically, we demonstrate that most outlier regions 1) emerged during the Putin era, 2) tend to be located on the high end of

turnout, and 3) have sizable non-Russian populations. And, among other things, our multivariate analysis reveals that this bivariate relationship holds when additional theoretically relevant variables are included.

Indeed, the multivariate regression analysis reinforces Table 1's finding that a substantive change in regional turnout rates occurs with the onset of the Putin era. The multivariate analysis identifies Russia's March 2000 presidential election as the statistically significant breakpoint: From 1995 through 1999—that is, during the Yeltsin era—significantly high turnout levels among rural regions characterized national elections. Not only does this relationship disappear during the Putin era, but it is replaced with the dynamic that begins in 1999 of higher turnout occurring among regions with higher percentages of non-Russians. Since the pace of the change makes it unlikely that the different relationships simply reflect temporal demographic changes in the regions, how do we account for this radical shift?

Taking a demand-side view of how elections operate, one might argue that, by the 2000 presidential election, regional turnout in Russia was no longer correlated with urban-rural divisions but instead became correlated with the ethnic compositions of the regions because the saliency of the issues defining national politics themselves had changed. Most obvious would be the contention that national elections in the 1990s were contests between pro-Western parties and candidates on one side and conservative, reactionary interests on the other. Thus, given this division, the saliency of national elections was simply higher among rural interests who had more at stake—thanks to their privileges under the old regime—and therefore had more to lose. At the same time, the significance of this division dissipates in the 2000 presidential election because the election was centered around a highly popular, at this point incumbent, president, who intentionally eschewed clear policy positions in order to appeal to everyone while offending no one. While this explanation does not repudiate the possibility that these rural interests were mobilized to the voter booth from above, it can be seen as a complementary, if not rival, account.

Yet a demand-driven version of events also suggests that 1) urban-rural issues would be more salient than ethnic issues during the 1990s and 2) ethnic concerns would become dramatically more

salient in 2000 than they had been previously. This argument, however, is dubious. Certainly, the reining in of the country's unruly regions was a primary objective of President Putin's tenure in office (see among others, Moraski and Reisinger 2006, and Moraski 2006, 2007). However, this agenda did not become evident until *after* Putin was formally elected in March 2000. The notable exception, of course, is the initiation of Russia's second war in Chechnya, which began in August 1999 while Putin was prime minister under Yeltsin. Yet relying on the second war in Chechnya to explain why regions with substantially more non-Russian residents began to turn out to vote at higher rates than other regions in 2000—and not in 1999, by the way—again rests on questionable foundations. First, as many works have pointed out (see, for example, McFaul 2000 and Russell 2002), the second war in Chechnya proved much more popular across the Russian Federation than the first. Still, it is not clear why one should expect an ethnic Russian/non-ethnic Russian divide to have defined regional perceptions of national politics in 2000 and not in 1995 and 1996. Indeed, Russia's "ethnic revival" was much more evident in the 1990s and it was during the *first* war that some leaders of the Federation's ethnic republics refused to contribute troops (Treisman 1997).

Given the shortcomings of the demand-side view of the demographic correlates driving regional turnout rates in Russia, we offer a supply-side account that highlights the specific context surrounding the 2000 presidential election. An important aspect of this explanation has already been offered: a highly popular incumbent president not only held office, but by all accounts was expected win election in March 2000. The only question mark was whether Putin would be able to win the outright majority necessary to avoid a runoff. Thus, given the inevitability of a Putin victory, local officials sought to curry his favor by ensuring that a second round would be unnecessary. And this tactic was either more prevalent or more successful in regions with non-Russian residents—that is, those regions that Stepan (2000) identifies as having the strongest legacies of clientelism.

Our elite-driven understanding of voter turnout in Russian elections gains additional support when one examines the impact of the regions' political characteristics. First, the development of national parties in the regions fails to significantly determine regional turnout rates, leaving the door open for other types of mobilization. Second, based on our measure of regional competitiveness, turnout often proved higher in regions characterized by less political competition.¹⁸ This finding clearly resembles the kind of relationship that Karklins's (1986) describes as characterizing elections in the uncompetitive environment of the Soviet Union, while failing to make sense when viewed through a "meaningfulness of elections" lens.

Still, our analysis does provide some support for Franklin's (2004) "meaningfulness of elections" argument. First, the simultaneity of gubernatorial and national elections operates in predictable ways in Russia. Holding concurrent regional executive elections significantly raised regional turnout levels in national parliamentary elections, but not the presidential contests. Since presidential elections are zero-sum in nature and since the Russian Constitution places so much power in the hands of the Russian president, the null finding for those elections makes sense: They are meaningful enough on their own. The finding that the simultaneity of elections can boost turnout rates in a country where democracy is far from consolidated is important because it suggests that Franklin's theory may travel to what many may perceive as inhospitable terrain.¹⁹

¹⁸While this latter variable falls short of standard significance levels during the 2000 presidential election, this result may reflect the tendency for incumbent governors in traditional more competitive regions to expend their resources mobilizing turnout as a way to earn political capital with the new president.

¹⁹For a cross-national application of this approach, see Pacek et al. (undated).

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APPENDIX: DATA SOURCES

National Turnout Levels:

Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, Russia Votes Website.
(<http://www.russiavotes.org/>).

Regional Turnout Levels:

1991 Presidential election, by region

McFaul & Petrov, Political Almanac of Russia, 1989-1997 (Washington DC: Carnegie, 1998), 3 vols.,
vol 1., pp. 379-81

Ibid., pp. 393-96

December 1995 elections to the federal State Duma, by region

Ibid., pp. 408-411.

December 1996 presidential election turnout, by region, first round

Ibid., pp. 425-428.

December 1999 federal State Duma elections, by region

Russian Federal Electoral Commission via the Izbirkom web page:

<http://www.izbircom.ru/1911/xod/index.shtml>

March 2000 presidential elections, by region

Russian Federal Electoral Commission: <http://www.izbircom.ru/2217/xod/index.shtml>

December 2003 federal State Duma elections, by region

Russian Federal Electoral Commission: <http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom>

March 2004 Presidential elections, by region

Russian Federal Electoral Commission: <http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom>

December 2007 federal State Duma elections, by region

Statistics for all regions except Kamchatka and Perm are from G. V. Golosov, "База данных "Российская электоральная статистика," ["Russian Electoral Statistics" Database] *Inter-regional Electoral Network of Assistance (IRENA)*, <http://db.irena.org.ru/> (7 February 2008). Final data for the 2007 Duma election in Kamchatka were not available. Data for Kamchatka come from preliminary results collected at 7 p.m. before the polls officially closed at 8 p.m, from Regnum News Agency, "Voting Ends in Kamchatka," 2 December 2007, <http://www.regnum.ru/english/925008.html> (14 February 2008). Electoral data for Perm Krai were obtained from the Perm Regional Server, "Current Events," 3 December 2007, <http://www.perm.ru/eng/events/event/?id=344> (14 February 2008).

Other Measures:

Percentages of a region's total population that is urban in 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2006

State Committee of the Russian Federation for Statistics, *Regiony Rossii: Statisticheskii Sbornik*, various volumes (Moscow: Goskomstat).

Percentage of pensioners in a region's population 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2006

State Committee of the Russian Federation for Statistics, *Regiony Rossii: Statisticheskii Sbornik*, various volumes (Moscow: Goskomstat).

Percentage of the region's population with at least some higher education as reported in the 1989 census

Robert W. Orttung, ed., The Republics and Regions of the Russian Federation: A Guide to Politics, Policies and Leaders (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), *passim*.

Percentage of the region's 15-and-over population with at least some higher education in the 2002 census

<http://www.perepis2002.ru/>

Percentage of the region's population that is ethnically Russian

Michael McFaul, et al., eds., Primer on Russia's 1999 Duma Elections (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), Table 2.

Level of registered unemployment as a percentage of the economically active population for the years 1993-2000

State Committee of the Russian Federation for Statistics. 2001. Регионы России: официальный изданий. Moscow: Goskomstat; vol. 2, pp. 101-102.

Number of crimes per 100 people age 14 and older, by region, in 1995 and 2000-2006

State Committee of the Russian Federation for Statistics, Regiony Rossii: Statisticheskii Sbornik, various volumes (Moscow: Goskomstat).

The percentage of deputies in regional assemblies who are affiliated with a political party from 1995-1998

Golosov, Grigorii V. 1999. "From Adygeya to Yaroslavl: Factors of Party Development in the Regions of Russia, 1995-1997." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51(8):1333-1365.