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# *Media Effects and Russian Elections, 1999–2000*

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The Russian parliamentary and presidential elections of December 1999 and March 2000 appeared to have been won in large part through the partisan use of (particularly state) television. According to the evidence of a spring 2001 national survey, television was the main source of political information for the supporters of all parties and candidates. However, state television (which had been most supportive of the Kremlin) was much more likely to be favoured by the supporters of the pro-regime Unity party; while commercial television (which had provided a more even-handed coverage of the elections) was more popular and respected among the supporters of anti-Kremlin parties and candidates and less popular among supporters of Vladimir Putin. Regression analysis that takes account of reciprocal causation between media source and vote choice indicates that these were not spurious associations. The findings suggest that the state itself may exercise a disproportionate influence upon the electoral process in newly established systems in which social structures and political allegiances remain fluid.

By the late summer of 1999, Boris Yeltsin and his immediate entourage were in considerable difficulty. Living standards had fallen sharply following the devaluation of the rouble in August 1998, itself a humiliating capitulation. But elections to the State Duma had to be held before the end of the year; and a presidential election was due the following summer, at which the Russian president would have to stand down with no sign of a successor who could be relied upon to sustain his legacy, or protect the Kremlin 'Family' from the possibility of an inquiry into the gains they appeared to have made from their tenure of public office. Asked to name five or six politicians in whom they had confidence in the summer of 1999, just 1 per cent mentioned the Russian president, and more than two-thirds were prepared to support demonstrations calling for his removal.[1] Indeed, if a presidential election had actually been held it was Yeltsin's sacked prime minister, Evgenii Primakov, who was most widely expected to be the popular choice; 'no other Russian politician', according to the surveys, 'had so much popular support at the end of the summer'.[2] The movement headed by Primakov and Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, Fatherland–All Russia, was in turn the best-placed of all the parties that were expected to compete for places in the new Duma in December 1999, which would set the context for the all-important presidential election that was to take place six months later.[3]

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[1] *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya*, no. 5, 1999, p. 54, and no. 6, 1999, p. 64.

[2] B. Z. Doktorov, A. A. Oslon and E. S. Petrenko, *Epokha El'tsina: mnenie rossiyan: Sotsiologicheskie ocherki* (Moscow: Institut Fonda 'Obshchestvennoe mnenie', 2002), p. 321.

[3] Doktorov, Oslon and Petrenko, *Epokha El'tsina*, p. 322; similarly *Monitoring*, no. 5, 1999, p. 77, and no. 6, 1999, p. 64.

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In the event, there was a remarkable turnaround. A new party, Unity, was hastily confected at the end of September 1999; it finished a close second in the party-list election to the new Duma, and then the newly appointed prime minister, Vladimir Putin, swept to victory in the first round of a presidential contest that had been brought forward to March 2000 by Yeltsin's unexpected resignation. Unity, explained its leader Sergei Shoigu, was not a party at all but an 'association of sensible people, fed up with seeing others decide their fate',[4] and there was little to distinguish its position apart from support of the Kremlin (its ideology, Shoigu explained, was actually the 'absence of an ideology').[5] Putin himself had been almost unknown at the time of his nomination as prime minister in the summer of 1999; early the following year, after he had become acting president, foreign journalists were still asking 'Who is Mr Putin?'[6] The decisive factor in this dramatic reversal of fortunes appeared to be the media, particularly state television, which operated under the direct control of the Kremlin and a wealthy oligarch who was at this time closely associated with the ruling circle, Boris Berezovsky. Most Russian commentators had no hesitation in describing the Duma election as a 'victory' for Unity and a 'political defeat' for Fatherland–All Russia;[7] it led directly to Primakov's withdrawal from the presidential contest, leaving Putin without a serious competitor when he faced electors three months later.

The view that it was 'Russian Public Television wot won it'[8] was certainly supported by the monitoring that was undertaken by international observers, which found that Unity and then Putin himself had received a disproportionate share of coverage on state television and particularly on the first channel, which is the most widely available across the country and the most important source of political news. But to date, there has been little empirical examination of the complex ways in which the media helped to shape the decisions of Russian voters, or of the extent to which these were elections that could indeed be said to have been won by the partisan use of state television.[9] The discussion that follows, based upon a representative national survey conducted in the spring of 2001, begins with an account of our research design, and of the evidence of more general patterns of media consumption that emerges from our responses. We go on to consider the ways in which these patterns related to the preferences of voters as they selected their parties and candidates in December 1999 and March 2000, and then we seek to isolate the contribution that was made to those choices by the media and particularly by national state television. We conclude with a consideration of some of the implications of our findings for the exercise of media power in a 'new democracy' in which allegiances are fluid and countervailing institutions are weakly articulated.

[4] *Izvestiya*, 29 October 1999, p. 4.

[5] *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 1 October 1999, p. 4.

[6] Roi Medvedev, *Vremya Putina? Rossiya na rubezhe vekov* (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 2001), pp. 208–9.

[7] *Moskovskie novosti*, no. 49, 1999, p. 4; *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 December 1999, p. 1.

[8] An allusion to the role of the British tabloid which proclaimed 'It was *The Sun* Wot Won It' after the general election of 1992: see Ivor Crewe and Brian Gosschalk, eds, *Political Communications: The General Election Campaign of 1992* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 121–36.

[9] The most substantial recent study of Russian voting behaviour, for instance, examines the impact of 'television' without distinguishing between state and commercial channels – a crucial distinction in 1999/2000 (Timothy J. Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000)).

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## MEDIA EFFECTS AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

An early literature, much impressed by the success of the Nazis and their 'big lie', had suggested that the role of the media was normally decisive in the shaping of political attitudes and values.[10] The development of mass communications appeared to have placed a new and immensely powerful instrument in the hands of governments and anyone who could afford to advertise; audiences, it seemed, were an undifferentiated mass, easily manipulated by the messages they received from press, radio and particularly television. But as empirical research developed, it soon became apparent that the effects of mass communications had been greatly exaggerated, or at least oversimplified. The work of Berelson in the United States, for instance, found that ordinary people chose forms of communication that were 'congenial to their predispositions', and took decisions that were 'in line with their latent attitudes'.[11] Readers and viewers, it became clear, were more than passive recipients: they interpreted what they saw in relation to their own experience, and the result was normally to reinforce their predispositions, rather than to change them. Klapper, in an influential review, pointed to the measure of agreement that had been reached on the importance of the 'nexus of mediating factors' that stood between the media and their audiences;[12] some, indeed, went so far as to suggest that it was the 'public that manipulated the media', not the reverse.[13]

More recent approaches have avoided either extreme, but as television moved into a dominant position on national and international communication markets there has been something of a 'return to the concept of powerful mass media'.[14] This newer literature drew attention, not just to short-term changes in opinion, but to the shaping of a 'climate of political action' in which particular issues were given national prominence, which then 'set the agenda' for policy makers as well as the public at large.[15] The agenda-setting literature tended more often to support the view that it was the media agenda that had 'cause[d] the public agenda', rather than the reverse.[16] This newer literature made use of a wider range of methodologies, including experimental and time-series analysis, which appeared to offer still more conclusive evidence that television was likely to influence electoral choices, particularly by defining the issues on which voters placed the greatest priority.[17] It was certainly unusual to 'convert' the mass public to an entirely different set of values, but agenda-setting in various forms was 'pervasive', and television news appeared to be particularly important in establishing the hierarchy of issues against which parties and candidates for public office were judged by their respective electorates.[18]

[10] See Barrie Gunter, *Media Research Methods* (London: Sage, 2000), and Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 4th edn (London: Sage, 2000), chap. 17.

[11] Bernard Berelson, 'The State of Communication Research', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 23 (1959), 1–6, p. 3.

[12] Joseph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1960), p. 8.

[13] Gunter, *Media Research Methods*, p. 13 (slightly adapted).

[14] See Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, 'Return to the Concept of Powerful Mass Media', *Studies of Broadcasting*, 9 (1973), 66–112.

[15] See respectively Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1993); and Joel Krieger, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 536–9.

[16] Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*, 6th edn (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2000), p. 394.

[17] See particularly Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[18] Iyengar and Kinder, *News That Matters*, p. 117.

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Indeed there were individual cases in which the news media appeared to have been decisive, and not simply influential. The role of television had evidently been crucial, for instance, in Brazil's 1989 presidential contest, when privately owned TV Globo – the fourth largest television network in the world – gave a disproportionate amount of favourable coverage to the conservative candidate Fernando Collor de Mello, who won a narrow majority.[19] According to others, it was the tabloid paper *The Sun* that had won the 1992 British general election for the Conservatives, on the evidence of a disproportionately large shift in electoral support among its predominantly blue-collar readership.[20] There was also evidence that television coverage had been a 'crucial factor shaping voter attitudes and behavior' in the Mexican presidential election of 2000, in which the nominee of the ruling party had been defeated by an outside challenger.[21] But in spite of such studies, there has been little agreement on the nature and extent of media effects, a failure that appears to owe something to the 'complexity of the processes and the inadequacy of research designs and methods'.[22] Street, in a recent review, notes the 'uncertainty and contradiction' that is characteristic of the literature;[23] Bartels, writing somewhat earlier, goes so far as to describe the current state of research on media effects as 'one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science'.[24]

Systems of the Soviet type appeared to present fewer problems, as both Western scholars and the ruling parties agreed that control of the mass media was crucial to the maintenance of their position (and that the *glasnost* of the late 1980s appeared to have some connection with their loss of power).[25] The place of media influence in postcommunist Russia, however, has received rather less attention,[26] although international monitors left little doubt that it had been a factor of considerable importance in shaping the decisions of a mass electorate that is now in a position to choose among rival parties and candidates. In December 1993, when Russia's first postcommunist election took place, there were already signs of the 'monopolistic tendencies of the old Soviet era' in the 'heavily lopsided' coverage of the competing parties on the main state channel.[27] By December 1995, when the next parliamentary election was held, a commercial television station had been established and its more independent coverage, particularly of the Chechen war, appeared to have played a considerable part in the poor performance of the main pro-government party.[28] But by the summer of 1996, when Boris Yeltsin stood for re-election, there was

[19] See Thomas A. Skidmore, ed., *Television, Politics and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[20] See Crewe and Gosschalk, *Political Communications*.

[21] Chappell Lawson and James A. McCann, 'Television Coverage, Media Effects, and Mexico's 2000 Elections' (paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, 2002).

[22] McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, pp. 416, 419.

[23] John Street, *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* (London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 89.

[24] Larry Bartels, 'Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), 267–85, p. 267.

[25] The standard study is Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[26] See, however, Sarah Oates and Laura Roselle, 'Russian Elections and TV News: Comparison of Campaign News on State-Controlled and Commercial Television Channels', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 5 (2000), 30–51.

[27] *Monitoring the Media Coverage of the 1996 Russian Presidential Elections: Final Report* (Düsseldorf: European Institute for the Media, 1996), p. 8; Michael E. Urban, 'December 1993 as a Replication of Late-Soviet Election Practices', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 10 (1994), 127–58, p. 139.

[28] *Monitoring the Media Coverage*, p. 8.

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much greater consensus across the channels, and the media played a central role in boosting his candidature and at the same time defining the choice as a stark polarity 'between democracy and dictatorship'.[29]

In this article we focus on the two elections that followed, to the Duma in December 1999 and the presidency in March 2000, in which the role of the media – for many commentators – had been decisive. We base ourselves upon a survey fielded on our behalf in April 2001 under the direction of Russian Research. Some 2,000 adult citizens were interviewed face to face in their homes; the sample was representative of the urban and rural over-18 population of the Russian Federation, with control quotas for sex, age and education.[30] In addition, both to supplement and to inform our survey questions, we conducted twenty-four focus groups in Moscow, the Volga city of Ul'yanovsk and a village outside Voronezh; we gathered video evidence of political commercials and television news; and we interviewed party and media professionals in the course of both campaigns. An important feature of our research design was that, like the population at large, it contained a substantial minority – about 23 per cent – who were unable to receive the main commercial channel and who were accordingly much more dependent upon the state networks for their news coverage. We follow McQuail in positing that media effects are a universal and that their impact is particularly important during periods of crisis, but that the 'direction, degree, durability and predictability of effect are each uncertain and have to be established case by case'.[31]

## THE MEDIA AND RUSSIAN ELECTIONS

According to our survey evidence, television is the medium of choice in contemporary Russia – as it is in other industrial nations. As many as 92 per cent of our respondents in the spring of 2001 watched television at least several times a week, usually for two or three hours at a time, and even more on their days off (see Table 1). The two main state channels, Russian Public Television (ORT) on Channel 1 and Russian Radio and Television (RTR) on Channel 2, are the most widely watched, attracting a daily audience of 84 and 71 per cent respectively of all respondents – figures that are very much in line with those of other surveys of the media marketplace at the end of the 1990s.[32] The main evening news on ORT is the most popular programme of its kind, as it was in Soviet times; just over 70 per cent of our respondents claimed to watch it more regularly than other news broadcasts. The main commercial channel NTV is in third place with a regular viewership of 53 per cent, disproportionately in urban areas (its reach in the countryside is still rather less than that of the national state channels). By contrast, newspaper circulations have fallen sharply, for largely economic reasons; local papers, on the evidence of our survey, have retained a more loyal readership, but more than six times as many watch television as read a national daily.

Russians, it emerges, are rather trustful of their mass media, particularly when they are operated by the state itself. On the basis of our survey evidence, the media enjoy more confidence than any other social institution in contemporary Russia – more than the armed forces, the church, political parties or the government. State television, moreover, is trusted more than any other section of the media. As many as 57 per cent of our survey respondents

[29] *Monitoring the Media Coverage 1996*, p. 34.
[30] A technical report is available from the UK Data Archive (reference SN 4464).
[31] McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, pp. 422, 447.
[32] See for instance *Monitoring*, no. 4, 2000, p. 66.

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TABLE 1 *Russian Media Consumption, 2001*

| | Daily | Frequently | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | (*n*) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| National newspapers (%) | 12 | 24 | 23 | 16 | 25 | (1,991) |
| Local newspapers (%) | 17 | 41 | 19 | 10 | 13 | (1,992) |
| National television (%) | 77 | 15 | 4 | 2 | 2 | (1,997) |
| Local television (%) | 51 | 23 | 9 | 5 | 12 | (1,913) |

*Source*: Authors' survey conducted by Russian Research, fieldwork 10–26 April 2001.
*Notes*: $n = 2{,}000$. 'Frequently' is defined as several times a week; 'occasionally' as several times a month; and 'rarely' as several times a year.

had full or substantial confidence in state television compared with 53 per cent in the case of radio, 47 per cent in respect of the printed press, and only 38 per cent in respect of commercial television. Similarly, a large majority thought state television was the 'most unbiased and reliable source of information' at their disposal: 65 per cent took this view, compared with just 13 per cent who thought it was commercial television and 18 per cent who suggested the national press. State television is also more popular than commercial channels, with 37 per cent expressing a preference for ORT and just 26 per cent for NTV. Older viewers, who are more likely than others to exercise their vote, are particularly likely to favour ORT, and to watch its regular news bulletins. Control of the national networks, under such circumstances, is likely to be an electoral weapon of considerable power.

Russian law has established a reasonably clear framework within which elections must be conducted. Apart from basic provisions about freedom of speech and information, which are contained in the constitution as well as in federal legislation, there are particular responsibilities upon the media during election campaigns. These are set out in a 1997 statute, modified in 1999, on 'basic guarantees' of electoral rights, and in the laws on elections to the Duma and to the presidency, adopted in June and December 1999 respectively. According to these provisions, all registered candidates, electoral associations and blocs must have equal opportunities for the conduct of their campaign, and an allocation of free broadcast time and newspaper space. They must have equal conditions for campaigning in all media that draw at least 15 per cent of their income from state sources, and must have access to commercial outlets on the same terms and conditions, including a common price-list. And during a campaign, the relevant media outlets are not allowed to publish information that might 'damage the honour, integrity or professional reputation' of any of the candidates.[33]

The monitoring of output that was organized by the European Institute for the Media found there was in fact considerable variation in the attention that was devoted to each of the parties and candidates (see Table 2). ORT alone devoted more than a quarter of its coverage of the Duma election to Unity (28 per cent); this was almost twice as much as it gave to Fatherland–All Russia (15 per cent), who in turn had even less coverage than the Zhirinovsky Bloc, whose representatives in the outgoing Duma had been consistently pro-Kremlin (16 per cent). There was a similar bias on the second state channel, RTR; the

[33] *Sobranie zakonodatel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, no. 38, 1997, art. 4339, revised in *Sobranie*, no. 14, 1999, art. 1653; the Duma election law is in *Sobranie*, no. 26, 1999, art. 3178, and the presidential election law in *Sobranie*, no. 1, 2000, art. 11.

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TABLE 2 *News Coverage by Channel: Duma and Presidential Elections*

*(a) Duma election, December 1999*

| | CPRF | FAR | Unity | URF | Yabloko | Zhirinovsky |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ORT | 8 | 15 | 28 | 8 | 3 | 16 |
| RTR | 10 | 13 | 24 | 4 | 16 | 14 |
| NTV | 18 | 33 | 5 | 3 | 14 | 10 |

*(b) Presidential election, March 2000*

| | Putin | Yavlinsky | Zhirinovsky | Zyuganov |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ORT | 45 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| RTR | 44 | 10 | 9 | 13 |
| NTV | 41 | 12 | 12 | 11 |

*Source*: Derived from European Institute for the Media data files (used with permission). Figures relate to total output of news and current affairs programmes between 28 November and 18 December 1999 and 3 and 24 March 2000, respectively. ORT news bulletins were longer than those of RTR and reported biases are correspondingly more significant. Party names are abbreviated as follows: CPRF = Communist Party of the Russian Federation; FAR = Fatherland–All Russia; URF = Union of Right Forces; Zhirinovsky = Zhirinovsky Bloc (in effect the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia).

tone of the coverage of Unity, moreover, was 'positive' in both cases, while the treatment of Fatherland–All Russia was 'overwhelmingly negative'. Given Unity's recent origins and lack of local organization, it depended very heavily on media attention of this kind; one commentator went so far as to describe it as an '*efirnaya*' or 'airwave party'.[34] The main commercial channel, NTV, was rather more supportive of Fatherland–All Russia; but its coverage was no compensation for the heavy bias on the two state channels, and in fact it gave most attention across its entire output to a different party entirely, the Union of Right Forces.[35]

Coverage of the presidential election, in turn, was 'overwhelmingly dominated' by Vladimir Putin, although he made no use of his allocated free time and refused to engage in debate with the other candidates.[36] The acting president received about a third of the coverage that was given to all the candidates across all channels, and in news and current affairs programmes he accounted for almost half the total. The European Institute for the Media concluded once again that the state channels had been heavily biased in favour of the incumbent, not simply in the amount of coverage he had received but also in its deferential tone. The acting president had been presented as a 'strong and decisive Commander-in-Chief', defending Russian state interests against Chechen 'terrorists' and even co-piloting a fighter-bomber; in other reports he was shown travelling around the country, promising higher salaries and more generous support for regional projects. By

[34] Interview with Moscow journalist Yelena Rykovtseva, December 1999.

[35] *Monitoring the Media Coverage of the December 1999 Parliamentary Elections in Russia: Final Report* (Düsseldorf: European Institute for the Media, 2000), pp. 2, 32, 38.

[36] *Monitoring the Media Coverage of the March 2000 Presidential Elections in Russia: Final Report* (Düsseldorf: European Institute for the Media, 2000), p. 2.

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contrast, the Yabloko leader Grigorii Yavlinsky came in for heavy criticism, including suggestions that he had been spending in excess of the permitted limits, and that he was beholden to Jewish and Israeli interests. In addition, he was described on state television as a 'cryptocommunist' on the grounds that he was taking votes from Putin and thereby assisting Putin's leading opponent.[37]

Of the two state channels, RTR was wholly state-owned, but almost half (49 per cent) of ORT was in private hands, and it took its political direction to a very large extent from the most important of its minority shareholders, financier Boris Berezovsky, who was a figure closely associated with the Kremlin inner circle – 'the Family', as it had become known. Accordingly, he had every reason to undermine the efforts of the Kremlin's main opponents; and he had reasons of his own, as Primakov, while prime minister, had supported an investigation into the origins of his rapid enrichment. NTV's owner, Vladimir Gusinsky, stood outside the Family and defended a rather different set of interests; this provided some compensation for the heavy pro-regime bias on the media outlets controlled by Berezovsky, although Gusinsky's concerns were more diverse and in part commercial, as both of them were competing for control of the media market and seeking to add to their portfolios. Berezovsky, for instance, already owned or controlled the dailies *Kommersant*, *Novye izvestiya* and *Nezavisimaya gazeta* as well as another pro-Kremlin channel, TV-6; Gusinsky controlled the daily paper *Segodnya*, the Ekho Moskvy radio station and the weekly newsmagazine *Itogi*.[38]

The Duma campaign was associated, not simply with unbalanced coverage, but with a series of 'dirty tricks' (in Russian, *kompromat*). There were insinuations on ORT in particular that Primakov was too old and sick to govern (he celebrated his seventieth birthday during the campaign and had undergone a hip operation); that corruption was rampant in Moscow and particularly in the mayor's office; that Luzhkov's wife was involved in dubious commercial practices; that the mayor himself had properties abroad; that both Primakov and Luzhkov had been involved in assassination plots; and that Fatherland–All Russia had been conspiring with foreign powers to unseat prime minister Putin.[39] Much of this material was presented on Sergei Dorenko's popular Sunday evening show on ORT (he was reportedly paid more than a million dollars by Berezovsky for his services).[40] In addition, there were attempts to apply other forms of pressure, including heavy-handed investigations into the financial position of NTV and of the Media Most group of which it formed a part. For some, the entire contest was less between the parties themselves than between Fatherland–All Russia and the Kremlin-sponsored media; Primakov himself, writing later, thought the whole exercise could only be compared with the activities of Goebbels in Nazi Germany.[41]

Media bias was also apparent in March 2000. Putin, as prime minister and acting president, was 'rarely off the screen' even though he did not campaign directly and refused to engage in television discussion with other candidates.[42] By contrast, Grigorii Yavlinsky

[37] *Monitoring the Media Coverage 2000*, pp. 2, 37, 39.

[38] A convenient overview appeared in *Segodnya*, 12 August 1999, p. 2.

[39] *Monitoring the Media Coverage 1999*, p. 37; Laura Belin, 'State Television Wages Unprecedented "Information War" ', *RFE/RL Russian Election Report*, no. 7 (17 December 1999), consulted at www.rferl.org.

[40] David Remnick, 'The black box', *New Yorker*, 27 March 2000, p. 41.

[41] *Izvestiya*, 2 November 1999, p. 3; Evgenii Primakov, *Vosem' mesyatsev plyus …* (Moscow: Mysl', 2001), p. 216.

[42] Christian Nadeau, ed., *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Russia 1999–2000: Technical Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: IFES, 2000), p. 51.

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came in for more negative coverage than any of the other candidates, particularly during the last week of the campaign when it appeared possible he might deny Putin a first-round victory. It was at this time that an 'unflattering photomontage … of a group of homosexuals' was shown declaring their support for the Yabloko leader, and that he was accused of having undergone cosmetic surgery to refresh his youthful image.[43] NTV was again more balanced, but it had been placed under 'continuous financial pressure' by increases in the cost of its broadcasting frequencies, and its parent company was unexpectedly called upon to repay a loan to state banks. Pressure on local media outlets was more overt, with repeated fire warnings, cuts in electricity and tax inspections if there was any suspicion of disloyalty.[44] The state-controlled media, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concluded, had 'failed to uphold the public trust by engaging in slanderous reporting, geared to preserve the advantage of the existing power structure and promoting a specific outcome'.[45] 'We can do anything we want,' a Kremlin official told Yavlinsky. 'We only need a few oligarchs, some TV channels and we'll do what we like. We can make anyone president.'[46] Could they?

## VIEWING AND VOTING IN THE 1999–2000 ELECTIONS

Virtually every Russian family has a television set (or more than one), and at least three-quarters of our entire sample were regular viewers who tuned in on a daily basis. It was unlikely, given this degree of saturation, that voters for a particular party or candidate would differentiate themselves very markedly from other viewers in terms of overall viewing; nor did they do so. Unity and Putin voters were somewhat more likely than others to be regular television viewers (83 and 80 per cent respectively, compared with 77 per cent for the sample as a whole); Zhirinovsky voters in the parliamentary and presidential election were the most avid viewers of all (85 and 86 per cent respectively), and Zyuganov voters (75 per cent) fell just below the average. But in general there was little variation among supporters of each of the parties and candidates in their overall television consumption (by contrast, Union of Right Forces, Fatherland–All Russia and Yavlinsky supporters were the heaviest users of the national press, and Communist and Zyuganov supporters were the most likely to consult local newspapers).

Clearer differences began to emerge when we compared the political allegiances of those who were most likely to watch the main state channel ORT with those who were most likely to watch its commercial rival NTV. Unity voters were somewhat more likely than others to watch ORT on a daily basis, and rather less likely to watch NTV. Fatherland–All Russia voters were the opposite, and the most likely of all to watch NTV on a daily basis (three quarters of them did so, as compared with just over half of the sample as a whole). Yavlinsky supporters in the presidential contest were also much more likely than others to make daily use of NTV. And there were very similar patterns in the channels our respondents said they personally preferred (see Table 3). Unity voters liked ORT the most and NTV the least (Communist supporters took a broadly similar view), but supporters of the Kremlin's liberal opponents, Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces, took exactly the opposite position. In the presidential contest, similarly, it was Putin and Zyuganov

[43] *Monitoring the Media Coverage 2000*, pp. 54–5, 39.
[44] Nadeau, ed., *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections*, p. 52.
[45] *Russian Federation: Presidential Election 26 March 2000. Final Report* (Warsaw: OSCE, 2000), p. 27.
[46] *The Guardian* (London), 21 December 1999, p. 11.

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TABLE 3 *Channel Preferences by Party or Candidate Support*

*(a) Duma election, December 1999*

| | CPRF (%) | Fatherland (%) | Unity (%) | URF (%) | Yabloko (%) | Zhirinovsky (%) | Other (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ORT | 49 | 36 | 50 | 33 | 27 | 37 | 37 |
| NTV | 28 | 39 | 25 | 47 | 49 | 42 | 33 |
| Other | 23 | 25 | 25 | 20 | 24 | 21 | 30 |
| (*N*) | (255) | (58) | (355) | (56) | (108) | (64) | (157) |

($\chi^2 = 42.94$, df = 12, sig = $< 0.000$)

*(b) Presidential election, March 2000*

| | Putin | Yavlinsky | Zhirinovsky | Zyuganov | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ORT | 45 | 22 | 26 | 46 | 34 |
| NTV | 26 | 63 | 44 | 32 | 33 |
| Other | 28 | 15 | 29 | 22 | 33 |
| (*N*) | (983) | (59) | (31) | (163) | (55) |

($\chi^2 = 42.94$, df = 12, sig = $< 0.000$)

*Note*: The question wording was 'Which channel do you prefer to the others?' Estimates exclude 'Don't knows'.
*Source*: As Table 1.

supporters who were the most positive about ORT, and Yavlinsky supporters who – by a considerable margin – were the most favourable to NTV.

These differences in preference by party and presidential support were very much in line with the biases that had been found to characterize the output of the corresponding channels. But we were also interested in the nature of the attachment of our various respondents to the television channels they consulted most frequently and with most approval. Which of the channels, for instance, did they think provided the most trustworthy account of what was taking place in the country at large? And how much could they have confidence in state and commercial television as compared with other sources of information? The patterns, in fact, were very similar. Once again, it was Unity voters who were more likely than almost all others to trust ORT's reporting of national affairs, and the least likely to trust what they saw on NTV. Fatherland–All Russia supporters took more or less the opposite view, and supporters of Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces were even more likely to place their confidence in NTV. In the presidential contest, it was Yavlinsky voters who were – once again – the most supportive of the commercial channel.

There was fairly general agreement that state television was the most 'objective and reliable' of all the sources of information that were available to our respondents – much more so than newspapers, radio and the internet, and more so than commercial television. Unity voters, however, were the *most* likely to think state television was a reliable source of information, and so were Zhirinovsky and Putin supporters in the presidential contest. Supporters of Fatherland–All Russia, Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces and Grigorii Yavlinsky, by contrast, were less enthusiastic about state television, and *twice as likely* as the entire sample to consider commercial television a reliable source of information. There

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was also a close association between trust in state or commercial television, as compared with other civic institutions, and support for the various parties and candidates. Unity and Putin voters, once again, were the most likely to have confidence in state television of all the groups we considered. Conversely, it was Fatherland–All Russia, Yabloko, Union of Right Forces and Yavlinsky voters who were the most likely to have confidence in its commercial rival.

Moving to the voting decision, we went on to ask our respondents 'what sources of information [had been] most important' when they came to make their electoral choices. The results are set out in Table 4. For all our voters in both the parliamentary and the presidential contest, state television was by far the most important of such sources. But Unity voters were by some margin the *most* likely of all our groups of supporters to identify state television as the source on which they had mainly relied in making their voting decision, and the *least* likely to identify a commercial channel. Fatherland–All Russia and Yabloko voters, by contrast, were the least likely to mention state television, and the most likely to identify a commercial channel. Putin voters in the presidential contest were similarly the *most* likely to identify state television as the source that had been most important in making their decision, while Yavlinsky voters were the *least* likely to identify state television in this connection and the most likely to identify a commercial channel (in practice NTV). It was news and feature programmes, clearly, that had exercised the greatest influence: very few believed they had been influenced 'a lot' by paid or free-time advertising during the Duma election (4 and 7 per cent respectively), and in the presidential election the following spring – as we have noted – Putin made no use of the free airtime to which he was entitled.

Overall, and with striking consistency, Unity and Putin voters were the most positive towards state television in general and ORT in particular: they watched it more often, liked it the most, were the most likely to regard it as objective, and the most likely to say it had influenced them in their voting decisions. Conversely, Fatherland–All Russia, Yabloko and Union of Right Forces supporters, and supporters of the Yabloko presidential candidate Grigorii Yavlinsky, were generally the least positive about state television and the most favourable towards commercial television in general and NTV in particular; they were equally the most likely to suggest it (rather than the state channels) had influenced their electoral choices. Communist and Zyuganov supporters were much closer to the sample as a whole; Zhirinovsky supporters were more erratic, but in any case rather fewer in number. The central conclusion remains: that there was a very close association between the channels that were most supportive of Unity and Putin, and those that voted for them; and conversely, between the channels that gave more coverage to other parties and candidates, and those that chose to support them (we obviously accept that there will have been causal flows in both directions and that any adequate model must allow for a substantial degree of interaction).

## TELEVISION AND VOTE CHOICES

The final section of our analysis takes these issues further, seeking to establish the influence, net of other factors, that appears to have been exercised by state or commercial television on vote choices as compared with a range of other possible determinants. Unity and Putin supporters may indeed have been more likely to watch ORT, and to say they were guided by it in making their electoral decisions; but did ORT influence their choices, or were they naturally attracted to the channel that gave the most sympathetic coverage

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TABLE 4 *Sources of Election News and Voting*

| | *(a) Duma election, December 1999* | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CPRF (%) | Fatherland (%) | Unity (%) | URF (%) | Yabloko (%) | Zhirinovsky (%) | Other (%) |
| State TV | 52 | 43 | 66 | 53 | 43 | 55 | 49 |
| Commercial TV | 4 | 11 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 8 |
| Newspapers | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 5 |
| Radio | 3 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| Other | 35 | 34 | 26 | 30 | 42 | 30 | 34 |
| (*N*) | (267) | (72) | (378) | (65) | (119) | (69) | (171) |

($\chi^2 = 59.25$, df = 24, sig = $< 0.000$).

| | *(b) Presidential election, March 2000* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Putin (%) | Yavlinsky (%) | Zhirinovsky (%) | Zyuganov (%) | Other (%) |
| State TV | 67 | 42 | 65 | 58 | 45 |
| Commercial TV | 4 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 11 |
| Newspapers | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| Radio | 1 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 25 | 43 | 25 | 33 | 37 |
| (N) | (963) | (58) | (29) | (156) | (54) |

($\chi^2 = 40.51$, df = 16, sig = $< 0.001$)

*Note*: The question wording was 'Which, for you, was the most important source of information when you decided whether or not to vote, and for whom to vote in the elections to the Duma in 1999/in the presidential elections of 2000?'
Source: As Table 1.

to the party and candidate they favoured in the first place? And did watching ORT still make a difference after the other characteristics of Unity and Putin voters had been taken into account? Equally, did watching NTV influence the electoral decisions of those who had opted for Fatherland–All Russia, Yabloko and Yavlinsky, or did it simply reflect the choices they would in any case have made? Again, more specifically, did it make an observable difference when the social characteristics and political attitudes of respective groups of voters had been included in our analysis?

Obviously, there are limits to the extent to which we can resolve these issues within a survey design, particularly a cross-sectional one. In the first place, a wide variety of influences affect voting choice, and must be taken into account before we can reliably estimate the net impact of the mass media. A regression analysis, in this instance, allows us to show the relative importance of the various factors that appear to have contributed to voting choices, including state and commercial television. To this end, we control for a wide variety of potential influences on choice, ranging from socio-economic characteristics such as age and family income, to economic attitudes that tap voters' opinions about the transition from a command to a market economy.

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The second issue is more difficult to resolve. Our model assumes that media exposure influences voting behaviour. But we must also allow for the possibility that voters will tend to select a media source that best fits their political outlooks; in other words, there may be a selectivity bias in the link between self-reported media source and vote choice. This is an issue that can only be resolved by panel data, which are not available to us.[47] We can, however, reduce the potential bias inherent in the model by calculating a two-stage model, using instrumental variables that are correlated with the endogenous variables (media sources) in the first stage equation, but not with the dependent variable in the second stage model (vote choice). In effect, this procedure purges the possibility of any reciprocal causation between media source and vote choice. Since both the instrumental variables and vote are dichotomous, two sets of logistic regression equations are estimated.[48]

Tables 5 and 6 present the results of the second set of logistic regression equations, which control for the instrumental variables derived from the first equation, as well as for socio-economic status and a range of economic attitudes, in order to predict the choice of parties and presidential candidates. The use of instrumental variables related to media exposure but not to vote choice means that as far as possible, the results provide us with unbiased estimates of the effects of media consumption on the vote.[49] Russia's large and fragmented multiparty system means that, in some cases, the numbers of survey respondents reporting that they voted for a particular party or presidential candidate are small, and we have accordingly excluded from our analysis those cases where the number of respondents supporting a party or candidate fell below an *N* of 50.

Overall, conventional factors certainly made a difference in the Duma election. Socio-economic status, with the exception of age, had comparatively little consistent influence on the vote; older voters were more likely to support the Communists and Fatherland–All Russia, everything else being equal, while younger voters supported Unity and the Zhirinovsky Bloc. Economic attitudes also played a role, particularly in the case of the Communists who, as we might have expected, were opposed to the ownership of land by ordinary citizens and to free enterprise more generally. But compared to the rather modest effects of socio-economic status and economic attitudes, the effects of state or commercial television viewing are much more striking. Those who watched state television regularly, in particular, were very much more likely to support the pro-Kremlin Unity party. Conversely, those who had relied most heavily on commercial television were more likely, net of other factors, to have supported the Fatherland–All Russia and Yabloko.

[47] In the context of our model partisanship would have been an ideal control variable, but it was not available in our dataset.

[48] The instrumental variables were based on questions asking respondents if they were able to receive state and commercial television. These variables were strongly related to media exposure (mean correlation 0.70) but not to either Duma or presidential vote (mean correlation 0.04), and are therefore exogenous to the error in the second stage model. Ordinary least squares (OLS) methods are, of course, biased when the dependent variable is dichotomous. For that reason, two sets of logistic regression equations were calculated. The first set of equations used the range of socio-economic status and economic attitudes variables included in Tables 5 and 6 to predict the instrumental variables. In the second set of equations, the predicted values of these two instrumental variables were included with the other independent variables to predict vote, the results for which are shown in Tables 5 and 6, again using logistic regression. For an overview of these procedures, see W. Newey, 'Simultaneous Estimation of Limited Dependent Variable Models with Endogenous Explanatory Variables', *Journal of Econometrics*, 36 (1987), 231–50.

[49] M. E. Sobel, 'Causal Inference in the Social and Behavioural Sciences', in G. Arminger, C. C. Clogg and M. E. Sobel, eds, *Handbook of Statistical Modeling for the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (New York: Plenum, 1996), pp. 1–38; G. S. Maddala, *Introduction to Econometrics* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 145ff.

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TABLE 5 *The Effect of Media Exposure on Party Vote Choice, December 1999*

| | CP | FAR | Unity | URF | Yabloko | Zhirinovsky |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Socioeconomic status* | | | | | | |
| Age | 0.04** | 0.03** | − 0.02** | − 0.02 | − 0.01 | − 0.03** |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Male | 0.25 | − 0.27 | − 0.02 | − 0.27 | − 0.11 | 0.72** |
| | (0.15) | (0.25) | (0.13) | (0.27) | (0.20) | (0.26) |
| Tertiary education | − 0.49 | − 0.11 | 0.52* | 0.14 | 0.54 | − 0.29 |
| | (0.31) | (0.41) | (0.27) | (0.44) | (0.32) | (0.49) |
| Employed | − 0.70** | 0.34 | 0.36 | − 0.86* | 0.27 | 1.04** |
| | (0.28) | (0.41) | (0.24) | (0.40) | (0.31) | (0.42) |
| Family income | 0.01 | − 0.02 | − 0.23** | − 0.04 | 0.01 | 0.08* |
| | (0.03) | (0.04) | (0.07) | (0.13) | (0.03) | (0.04) |
| *Economic attitudes* | | | | | | |
| State provide goods | − 0.13 | − 0.08 | 0.41** | 0.06 | 0.08 | − 0.47* |
| | (0.14) | (0.22) | (0.14) | (0.24) | (0.18) | (0.22) |
| Citizens not own | 0.18** | − 0.18* | 0.02 | − 0.18 | − 0.03 | − 0.14 |
| land | (0.07) | (0.12) | (0.06) | (0.13) | (0.09) | (0.12) |
| Citizens not own | 0.08 | 0.06 | − 0.13* | − 0.25 | − 0.14 | 0.16 |
| small businesses | (0.06) | (0.10) | (0.06) | (0.14) | (0.09) | (0.11) |
| Supports free | − 0.87** | − 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.00 | 0.24 | 0.19 |
| enterprise | (0.30) | (0.22) | (0.23) | (0.44) | (0.32) | (0.39) |
| *Media exposure* | | | | | | |
| State television | 0.03 | − 0.17 | 0.19* | − 0.32** | − 0.22* | − 0.06 |
| | (0.10) | (0.13) | (0.08) | (0.13) | (0.11) | (0.14) |
| Commercial | 0.07 | 0.28** | − 0.21** | 0.20 | 0.29** | − 0.01 |
| television | (0.06) | (0.11) | (0.05) | (0.11) | (0.09) | (0.09) |
| Constant | 7.43 | − 2.63 | − 0.63 | − 2.78 | − 0.45 | 25.13 |
| Cox and Snell $R^2$ | 0.18 | 0.03 | 0.06 | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.04 |
| (*N*) | (1,147) | (1,147) | (1,147) | (1,147) | (1,147) | (1,147) |

**Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, both two-tailed.

*Notes*: Logistic regression estimates showing parameter estimates and (in parentheses) standard errors, using instrumental variables. The dependent variables are scored 1 = party vote, 0 = other party vote; non-voters are excluded. The instrumental variables for media consumption are discussed in the text and fn. 49. Age is scored in single years, family income in 1,000s of roubles, economic attitudes from zero to 10, and male and tertiary education are dummy variables. Media consumption is scored 3 = watches daily, 2 = watches at least weekly, 1 = watches at least monthly, 0 = never watches. The two instrumental variables were the ability to receive good quality reception on ORT and NTV (both coded 1 = yes, 0 = no). The means for the two variables were 0.95 and 0.76 respectively.

Source: as Table 1.

TABLE 6 *The Effects of Media Exposure on Presidential Voting, March 2000*

| | Putin | Yavlinsky | Zhirinovsky | Zyuganov |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Socio-economic status* | | | | |
| Age | 0.00 | − 0.01 | − 0.06* | 0.03** |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.03) | (0.01) |
| Male | − 0.29 | 0.04 | 1.34** | 0.16 |
| | (0.15) | (0.31) | (0.45) | (0.17) |
| Tertiary education | 0.30 | 0.87* | − 0.38 | − 0.56 |
| | (0.24) | (0.45) | (0.34) | (0.37) |
| Employed | 0.09 | − 0.06 | 1.47 | − 0.34 |
| | (0.20) | (0.40) | (0.64) | (0.28) |
| Family income | − 0.05 | 0.00 | 0.11* | 0.01 |
| | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.06) | (0.03) |
| *Economic attitudes* | | | | |
| State provide goods | 0.01 | 0.29 | − 0.45 | − 0.02 |
| | (0.12) | (0.25) | (0.34) | (0.16) |
| Citizens not own land | − 0.15* | − 0.03 | − 0.39* | 0.22** |
| | (0.06) | (0.14) | (0.20) | (0.09) |
| Citizens not own small business | − 0.02 | − 0.16 | 0.30 | 0.02 |
| | (0.06) | (0.13) | (0.16) | (0.07) |
| Supports free enterprise | − 0.06 | 0.53 | 0.18 | − 0.61** |
| | (0.19) | (0.37) | (0.44) | (0.27) |
| *Media exposure* | | | | |
| State television | 0.20** | − 0.32* | 0.00 | − 0.10 |
| | (0.07) | (0.13) | (0.22) | (0.09) |
| Commercial television | − 0.19** | 0.44** | 0.19 | 0.09 |
| | (0.05) | (0.13) | (0.15) | (0.06) |
| Constant | 3.62 | − 3.04 | 45.80 | − 0.34 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.09 |
| (*N*) | (1,490) | (1,490) | (1,490) | (1,490) |

**Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$, both two-tailed.
*Notes*: Logistic regression estimates showing parameter estimates and (in parentheses) standard errors, using instrumental variables. The dependent variables are scored 1 = vote for candidate, 0 = vote for other candidate; non-voters are excluded. The instrumental and independent variables are described in the note to Table 5.
*Source*: As Table 1.

In the presidential election the following March, socio-economic status and economic attitudes were again only modestly important in shaping the vote, with some notable exceptions (see Table 6). Zyuganov, as the Communist-supported candidate, was more likely to attract the support of the older voters who form the traditional constituency of his party, while Zhirinovsky was – as usual – more popular among men than women. Respondents with a higher education were more likely, other things being equal, to favour Yavlinsky as a presidential candidate, as were the supporters of a free market system; opponents of a free market system and of land ownership, not surprisingly, were more likely to favour Zyuganov. But television was again important as a predictor of electoral support. Those who reported regular viewing of state television were more likely to vote for Vladimir Putin, all other things being equal, while those who said they watched commercial television regularly were less likely to vote for Putin and more likely to vote for his liberal opponent, Grigorii Yavlinsky.

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In line with our expectations, then, television had major but quite selective effects on the vote in both the Duma and presidential elections. These effects remained important even after we had controlled for a range of socio-economic and attitudinal factors, and after we had purged the effects of reciprocal causation between media exposure and vote choice. Overall, the impact of media factors was on a par with socio-economic and attitudinal factors in shaping electoral choices, as we might expect in a postcommunist country in which social structures have been rapidly changing and party loyalties have had little time to establish themselves.[50] The effects we observed, moreover, reflected the bias that had been apparent in the media themselves: in the case of state television, strongly pro-Unity and pro-Putin; in the case of commercial television, much more supportive of the parties and presidential candidates that were hostile to the Kremlin, and whose electoral prospects the Kremlin itself was seeking to damage.

## MEDIA, ELECTIONS AND NEW DEMOCRACIES

Overall, the analysis we have presented is strongly supportive of the conclusion that it was ORT that had 'won it' in the Duma contest, paving the way for an easy victory for Vladimir Putin three months later. It was ORT, and state television more generally, that had helped to create a party at very short notice. Its coverage, on the monitoring evidence, was strongly supportive of the party it had created. It waged a smear campaign against its most dangerous opponents and their leaders of a kind that monitors agreed was 'unprecedented in post-Soviet general elections' – an 'unremitting stream of scurrilous and undocumented information through presenters Sergey Dorenko, Mikhail Leontyev, and Pavel Sheremet, all on current affairs programs and in the news'.[51] On our evidence, Unity voters were no more likely than other voters to watch television – everyone did, whatever party they supported. But they were more likely than almost all others to think state television was objective and trustworthy, and more likely to cite it as the decisive factor in their voting choices. On the evidence of our regression analysis, which shows the disproportionate influence of television on choices of this kind, the regime itself had an extremely powerful weapon in securing the electoral outcome it wanted.

There were fewer signs, in March 2000, that state television had systematically been used to support the Putin candidature and to discredit his opponents. But, as international monitors pointed out, this was because Putin's victory had never been in doubt; during the last week of the campaign, when a first-round victory appeared in question, state television had 'once again resorted to "black PR" ' in a manner that was fundamentally incompatible with the broadcasting conventions to which the Russian state had been a signatory.[52] And once again there were close associations between state or commercial television and the various candidates. Putin supporters were the most likely to choose ORT as their favourite channel, they had most confidence in state television as an institution, and it was their most important source of information when it came to making a voting choice. On the evidence of our regression analysis, state television was in fact the most important single predictor of a Putin vote, and a factor of considerable importance (in our two-stage least squares analysis) in depressing the vote for his opponents.

[50] See Richard Rose, Neil Munro and Stephen White, 'Voting in a Floating Party System', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53 (2001), 419–43.

[51] Nadeau, ed., *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections*, pp. 49–50.

[52] *Monitoring the Media Coverage 2000*, p. 2.

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This was a result that raised still larger issues. One of them, certainly, was the further improvement of the regulatory framework. International monitors agreed that there should be better mechanisms to allow politicians to respond to attacks or unfair coverage. There might be special advisory boards for the state-controlled channels in order to protect them from the directives of their political masters. Political advertising should be clearly identified, and the concept itself should be more precisely defined. Local governors should not be allowed to shut down programmes if they disagreed with their contents. The penalties for slander and libel should be considerably increased. The Central Electoral Commission should have its own enforcement mechanism, instead of relying on the ministry of the mass media and communications; and it should give those journalists who retained a sense of pride in their independence the 'chance to do their jobs properly without the threat of sanctions'.[53]

Recommendations of this kind, however, had been made after earlier elections, and one of the most disturbing signs that emerged from the Duma and presidential elections of 1999–2000 was that neither journalists nor the mass public showed much understanding of the norms of fair and impartial broadcasting to which they were all nominally committed. Journalists, monitors reported, had 'abandoned even the pretence of free and fair coverage of elections', and embraced the use of *kompromat* with considerable enthusiasm.[54] The press had continued to provide a wider range of information and opinion, but the 'widespread practice of hidden advertising, demanded by political candidates and facilitated by willing editors, once again cast serious doubts on the ethics of the print media profession'.[55] Nor had there been a single reference to the Broadcasters' Charter, which supposedly committed the major stations to a common set of ethical norms, in spite of 'massive violations of taste and decency'. The Charter, in the end, had omitted an article on the impropriety of accepting bribes; but even in this emasculated form it ruled out any attempt to discredit individuals of the kind that had clearly taken place during both elections.[56]

The evidence of our focus groups, moreover, was that ordinary Russians had no better understanding of the kind of norms that underpin the media in liberal democracies, and to which their own legislation formally committed them. Many, in our focus groups, said they had been dismayed by the relatively novel sight of political mudslinging on Russian television. And yet our survey results suggest that many more had been influenced by a series of programmes that were designed to undermine the reputation of politicians and their parties, and which were clearly little influenced by the fact that the election law clearly prohibited such tactics. Some 14 per cent of our respondents, in fact, thought *kompromat* was 'a good way to know more about famous people', and more than a third agreed 'there must be some truth in it or it would not be on television'. Other inquiries have found that there is majority support for state ownership of the media and for 'information control' or even censorship, with few differences across the generations.[57]

[53] See respectively *Monitoring the Media Coverage 1999*, pp. 73–5; *Russian Federation: Elections to the State Duma 19 December 1999: Final Report* (Warsaw: OSCE, 2000), p. 33; Nadeau, ed., *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections*, p. 134.

[54] *Monitoring the Media Coverage 1999*, p. 75.

[55] *Monitoring the Media Coverage 2000*, pp. 2–3.

[56] Nadeau, ed., *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections*, p. 135; G. V. Kuznetsov *et al.*, eds., *Televizionnaya zhurnalistika*, 3rd edn (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MGU/Vysshaya shkola, 2002), p. 260 (the Charter is reprinted in the same publication, pp. 257–60).

[57] 'Russians not alarmed by threats to free speech', Office of Research, Department of State, *Opinion Analysis*, M-2-02, 8 January 2002.

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The Duma and presidential elections of 1999 and 2000 marked a further step forward in the consolidation of Russia's electoral procedures. They marked a less positive development in the demonstration they provided of the extent to which a determined regime could use its control over the media environment to resist any challenge to its authority. More generally, they underline the importance of examining media effects (as McQuail had urged) on a case by case basis. In established democracies, with well-understood legal conventions and a robust civil society that limits the exercise of government power, media effects may often be modest. In postauthoritarian countries, with more fluid identities and powerful executives who control national television and do not scruple to use it for their purposes, media effects can evidently be very powerful indeed.

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