Will Elections Erode Russia's Democracy?

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One can only marvel at the progress Russia has made in democratization over the course of the last decade. The 1990s ended with Russia's third free multi-party parliamentary elections in December, and, more dramatically, Russian voters are poised to choose a new president in the first spring of the new millennium. Less reported, however, are a series of critical regional elections that are also taking place as Russia begins its next century and that may even prove more important to the daily political life of most Russians. Here, in Russia's motley mix of provinces, disturbing developments threaten to eat these achievements away from below, a process that in the worst-case scenario could gut the world's largest electoral system of real democratic content.

While Western theorists have often assumed that Russia will become more democratic as its citizens and officials learn the habits and mentalities of electoral politics, some provincial leaders have been learning something else. They have discovered that elections are vulnerable to many forms of manipulation, especially when federal power is weak and when democratic expectations have not been fully institutionalized. Ironically, federal electoral pressures themselves make this "autocratization" of the provinces likely to continue. Federal authorities depend on regional bosses to deliver the vote; the regional bosses accordingly become more influential on the federal stage the more efficiently they can promise to do this delivering.

The continuation of this trend does not necessarily mean the end of political competition in Russia, but it does mean that we should expect to see Russian politics develop in a different way than is often supposed. While many observers expect political competition to center around parties that are primarily

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issue- or personality-based, the strongest Russian political parties may in fact emerge primarily as coalitions of key regional leaders propped up by their powerful electoral "machines" competing to influence federal policy. This will not happen overnight, and in the short run, we are most likely to see a complex mixture of intermarriage and competition between more traditional issue- and personality-oriented political organizations and those based on alliances of provincial strongmen. These different types of parties (a term used loosely in this article) are likely to have different priorities and may therefore create important new political cleavages. How Russian parties and issue cleavages develop in the longer run will depend on many contingencies, and the West may be able to shape this process at the margins if it stays engaged with Russia in strategically identified ways.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF ETHNOCRACY?

Since communist rule collapsed in 1991, Russia has directly elected its president twice and its own parliament thrice in competitive, multi-party elections. The outlook for democracy at the local level in Russia is more mixed.

The Russian Federation consists of 89 constituent members of the Federation, also called provinces or regions. Unlike the states in the U.S. federal system, these provinces were not created equal. The most important distinction is between the 32 that are formally recognized to be the "homelands" of ethnic minorities, also known as republics, and the 57 that do not have this distinction (referred to as *oblasts*). When Lenin and his associates created the USSR in the 1920s, they actually sent ethnographers out into the periphery to identify all ethnic groups that were large or otherwise significant enough to be given their own homelands. Along with the oblasts, therefore, the Soviet state also created ethnic regions even where nothing of the kind had existed before, and the ones that remain include the 32 "ethnic republics" of Russia. The "ethnic" members are almost always named after their ethnic group(s).[2]

One major difference between oblasts and republics is that throughout the first half of the 1990s, the Russian president had the right to appoint the chief executives in the oblasts (usually called governors), but not the chief executives in the republics (who were often called presidents). With a few exceptions, then, governors tended to be appointed while presidents were elected.

Democratization appears at first glance to be spreading fast in the oblasts. In 1995, Yeltsin decreed that all governors must stand for election, although he delayed the bulk of the votes until after his own presidential reelection in the summer of 1996. This injection of political competition brought 26 new governors to their posts in the 50 elections between 1995-97, as would be the hallmark of a strong democratic system.[3]

The ethnic minority homelands, on the other hand, appear to be moving in a very different direction, and the republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Kalmykia are leading the charge. Tatarstan, for example, has never held a competitive election for its own presidency, as President Mintimer Shaimiev has carefully ensured that he faced no competition whatsoever in two separate elections in 1991 and 1996. He even managed to thwart *federal* elections in December 1993.[4] Kalmykia has mimicked this behavior, as its young president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov ran for reelection unopposed in 1995 (this is illegal under Russian law). In October 1998 he engineered the election of a completely loyal republic legislature; not a single member of an opposition party won a seat.[5] Russia's Deputy General Prosecutor condemned these elections as invalid, but the legislature continues to serve.[6]

Bashkortostan's strongman president, Murtaza Rakhimov, has been a bit more careful to obey the letter of the law, but has achieved similar results. In what one liberal party leader dubbed a "grandiose profanation," Rakhimov's bureaucracy excluded three prominent rivals from the presidential ballot in June 1998, including a former republic prime minister and a deputy in the federal parliament.[7] So as to reduce the chances of federal intervention, however, a lone opponent was registered, the little-known Forestry Minister, who openly supported Rakhimov in television interviews before the election. Needless to say, Rakhimov won in a landslide, although a striking 17 percent cast ballots "against all candidates" (a figure that reached nearly 35 percent in the capital city of Ufa).[8] Less than a year later, in March 1999, the local "party of power" won overwhelmingly in legislative elections, as all but one district-level executive appointed by the president captured seats. While Bashkortostan allowed opposition candidates to win up to half of its six seats in the federal parliament in 1993 and 1995 elections, in the December 1999 elections indications are that Rakhimov managed to replace all opposition incumbents with his own men.[9]

What is being consolidated in these republics, then, appears not to be democracy but a system of "machine politics," whereby the president uses powerful state institutions to manipulate voters or even to falsify votes to achieve electoral ends. This sort of politics leaves little opportunity for local opposition to form. It leaves even less opportunity to vote the opposition into office even when it does manage to get onto the ballot. One could easily add Kabardino-Balkaria and Mordovia to the list of leading offenders, and muckrakers in many other republics are not likely to come up empty.[10] Some political opponents have taken these accusations a step further, decrying the formation of what they call local "ethnocracy" since members of the eponymous nationalities of the republics sometimes possess a greater share of seats in key state power structures than in the population as a whole.

One must be careful not to paint all the republics in the same political colors, however, as some have featured robust political competition and appear to be remarkably democratic. For example, incumbents lost reelection bids in Khakassia and Mari El in 1996 as well as in Karelia and North Ossetia in 1998. Even where incumbents won with large majorities, this is not necessarily evidence of electoral engineering; the optimist hopes that these are simply popular votes of confidence in executives that have in fact done a great job.

Nevertheless, the advantages of incumbency seem significantly greater among the republics than the "non-ethnic" oblasts, at least during the first round of regional executive elections that took place between 1995 and 1997. Less than 50 percent of incumbent governors won election between 1995-97, while the rate for republic presidents was 67 percent during that same time period, even including Chechnya where longtime leader Djokhar Dudaev had been recently killed.[11] This incumbent advantage in and of itself is not what is disturbing, however; what is disturbing is why it has come about and what the implications could be for the future of Russian democracy.

WHY ARE ETHNIC REPUBLICS AMONG THE LEADING AUTOCRATIZERS?

There are several possible reasons for the pattern observed above, wherein ethnic republics seem to be more prone than oblasts to slip out of the democratic fold. First, there is the logic of ethnic machine politics. Soviet-era affirmative action programs typically left politicians from the eponymous or titular groups in power in these republics even where these groups made up a small minority of the population. This was the case in Bashkortostan where Bashkirs constituted just 22 percent of the population according to the 1989 census. Ethnic groups have extra reason to cling tightly to the reins of local power so as to minimize their chances of being exploited by other groups (notably Russians) in the future. In addition, many ethnic Russians have come to accept Soviet-sanctioned dictums that the titular ethnic groups have special status in their homelands, an acceptance that reduces the willingness of Russians and other groups to resist ethnocratizing regimes.[12] Yet while Bashkortostan, Kalmykia and Tatarstan all fit this pattern, other republics such as Komi, Karelia, and Khakassia have not elected titulars as presidents but the latter have been noticeably more democratic.

Second, republics have traditionally enjoyed more autonomy than their non-ethnic counterparts, another legacy of Soviet rule aimed at preventing ethnic unrest.[13] The largest and most economically important republics, notably Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Sakha (Yakutia), have received significantly greater formal federal tax exemptions, for example, than other members of the federation. Their special legal status also gives them cause to believe they can get away with more than leaders of the oblasts.

Third, and most troubling, republics might be more vulnerable to semi-autocratic backsliding precisely because they have *more experience* with Russia's Yeltsin-era electoral institutions. While the vast majority of Russia's oblast governors were not popularly elected until 1996, almost all of the republics had directly elected presidents by 1995. Thus many republics have by now had two presidential elections. Prominent examples show that some key republic leaders have used the time to refine their skills as machine politicians, learning how best to manipulate the political process so that no opposition figure has a realistic chance to win office.

In fact, all of the so-called worst offenders listed above except Tatarstan began their post-Soviet electoral existence with political competition—the retreats came primarily with these republics' *second* set of presidential elections. Kalmykia provides a good example, where the dynamic businessman Kirsan Ilyumzhinov upset a prominent local bureaucrat to become the youngest head of a republic in Russia in April 1993. Instead of facing competition in a reelection bid, however, he ran unopposed in 1995, and has since ensured that no opposition candidates enter his legislature.

In Bashkortostan's first presidential election in December 1993, Rakhimov—then the head of the local parliament, the top republic post before the presidency was introduced—erected a series of formidable barriers to any opponent seeking to enter the race. He then watched in surprise as one determined banker, Rafis Kadyrov, managed to jump through all of the difficult hoops. Kadyrov had the willpower and the resources (including his bank's own newspaper) to make this a real race, although Rakhimov managed to rally his core constituency against him, in part by skillfully controlling the rest of the local media. What is most striking, however, is that from this experience, Rakhimov learned not that he could fight and win a competitive race, but that he should have been more careful in making sure that no serious candidate could oppose him in the first place. Thus, by the time of the next presidential race in 1998, Kadyrov had been turned into a political corpse, his bank liquidated and his newspaper gone. In the race itself, Rakhimov's bureaucracy actually found it quite easy to keep Kadyrov off the ballot.

This third possible reason for the republics' greater tendency to authoritarianism is worrisome because it suggests that the key lies not in the "ethnic" or institutional nature of the republics, but simply in a learning process that could take place (and may even be likely to take place) in any region, be it a republic or an oblast. Leaders learn not only from their own experience, but from that of neighbor presidents and governors with whom they talk or about whom they hear and read. These leaders have not been learning how to contest elections more effectively, but how to thwart them. Thus societies have not been learning how to be more "civil," but have tended to remain passive.

The leadership skills that are learned do not involve the outright abolition of democracy, but instead its denuding of meaningful content. This does not necessarily involve blatant fraud or even the clear violation of law, but rather more subtle ways of influencing how people vote. Presidents in the more remote areas can find excuses to shut down critical local media and even to minimize access to federal newspapers. They can use the powers of executive office to pressure local corporations and potential political donors (most of whom have good financial reason to avoid quarrels with the local authorities), thus shifting the flow of campaign donations to candidates they like and away from those they dislike. They can apply special pressure on rural election districts, where access to information is more easily controlled and where village votes can be easily identified and the villagers punished for "unwise" choices by withholding critical services or products that are otherwise hard to get. They can manipulate local electoral rules and commissions (whose membership governors and presidents usually strongly influence) so as to exclude a threatening candidate on the basis of a technicality. For example, they can set entry requirements so high that only someone with state backing could possibly clear all the hurdles. The better the incumbent is at manipulating the media and discouraging local opposition, the fewer of these techniques he or she will need to employ. All of this is the stuff of machine politics.

Several oblast leaders have apparently learned these skills quickly, as their incumbent governors have won elections with votes of over 90 percent, as in Yegor Stroyev's Orel, and have gained virtually complete control of local legislatures for their supporters, as in Aman Tuleev's Kemerovo region. In fact, the strong trend in 1999 was for incumbents to win resoundingly in *both* oblasts and republics. In September 1999, for example, all five incumbents up for reelection won (in Sverdlovsk, Leningrad Oblast, Novgorod, Omsk and Tomsk). In December 1999 and January 2000, while four incumbent governors lost in nine races, four of the five incumbent winners won with at least 65 percent of the vote. Of course, some of these votes reflect real popularity, as is the case with Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who won over 70 percent in his December race. But others, including the victory of incumbent Nazdratenko in Primorsky Krai, appeared to take place only on the basis of gross electoral abuses, including the removal of key opposition candidates from the ballot.

WHY REGIONAL AUTOCRATIZATION IS LIKELY TO ACCELERATE

If the trend in Bashkortostan and Primorsky Krai has been toward ever greater authoritarianism, there are some other regions that appear to be moving in the opposite direction, towards greater levels of democracy. The case of Karelia is a major exception among the republics, where its incumbent executive ran unopposed in 1994 but actually lost in 1998 to an upstart mayor. A political sci-

entist at the European University of St. Petersburg, Vladimir Gelman, has developed an interesting typology of democratic outcomes in the Russia's regions. In some cases, like those described in Bashkortostan and Kalmykia, a situation of "winner take all" has come to prevail. In some cases, however, a near-Hobbesian state of "war of all against all" has developed, where local titans pull out all the stops to subvert their rivals but where none have managed to secure complete dominance. In still other cases, Gelman argues, elites have managed to come to a compromise pact that eliminates serious competition, while in a few cases the rule of democratic law has actually come to govern the political struggle. [14]

Where each region winds up in Gelman's typology depends on whether the province's history produces a dominant actor and on the choices made by key political players. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons why different governors might choose different strategies. Gelman is certainly right that individual governors matter. If they refuse to strong-arm their opposition, they can successfully promote local democratization. It is also interesting to speculate on deeper structural factors that might tip the trend predictably in one direction or other. Local culture might be part of the answer, as some regions like Nizhny Novgorod and the city of St. Petersburg already appear to have developed rather democratic traditions among their populations, and some leaders have proven unable to cow their constituents into submission. For example, one reason why Primorsky Krai's Nazdratenko has had to resort to such egregious electoral abuses is that the local population of the capital city has proven willing to stand up against the governor's attempts to squelch his opponents. For example, Nazdratenko tried to strike a popular rival from the Vladivostok mayoral ballot in 1998, only to find that over half of the voters responded by choosing "none of the above," thereby invalidating the election results. This would suggest that at least some Russian regions will not descend into authoritarianism, especially where the governor is not so iron-willed or as skilled in the art of machine politics, or where people vehemently believe that they deserve the right to choose their own rulers. One is tempted to go a step further and argue that the most likely regional trend will be toward greater democratization, since the same political forces that have caused democracy to advance in Russia in the first place will continue to push for democratization at the local level.

But if the Russian population as a whole is likely to prefer democracy to other forms of rule, several factors spur regional rulers themselves to tighten their political grip on local politics.

THE DESIRE FOR POWER. Few have accused Russia's governors and presidents of being committed libertarians, and most of the current crop of chief regional executives cut their political and managerial teeth in Soviet times when the regional boss held almost all levers of local power. To be sure, leaders everywhere

fantasize about how much they could achieve without the meddling or even destructive activity of political opponents. This can be true even for leaders who are genuinely committed to improving their regions' economies and the material well-being of their constituents, and is even more true for those who just want to exploit the immense opportunities for corrupt money-making available in post-Soviet society.

DEMONSTRATION EFFECTS. Republics like Bashkortostan, Kalmykia and Tatarstan, as well as non-ethnic regions like Orel, have shown that subverting local democracy is possible and have developed techniques that other regional leaders can learn to improve their own chances of success.

WEAK CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. Not only have the leaders of Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Kalmykia shown others that electoral engineering is possible, but they have also demonstrated that federal authorities won't interfere. Kalmykia violated federal law by holding an uncontested presidential election, yet authorities let the election stand. Russia has similarly taken no action on the 1998 Bashkortostan presidential election, most recently with the Supreme Court ruling last spring that the republic's elections should stand despite the problems evident there. Indeed, showing that he knows where real power lies in Russia, President Boris Yeltsin congratulated Rakhimov on his victory right after it took place. In general, this federal inaction is likely to encourage other governors who might have worried about violating Russian law. So long as Russia's central government lacks the capacity to enforce its own laws, therefore, the autocratization of the regions is likely to expand.

PASSIVE POPULATIONS. With few exceptions, the Russian people have shown little propensity to take to the streets to protest the denial of democracy, a passivity that can be reinforced by skillful machine politicians. While polls now indicate that Russians prefer democracy, they do not always expect it and usually don't think they can do much to restore it once it has been eroded.[15]

ELECTORAL COMPETITION AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL. Ironically, in the context of the other factors just noted, the very fact of electoral competition at the federal level actually encourages "autocratization" at the local level. Regional governors not only derive local political benefits by consolidating their own positions, but they also make themselves much more important players on the federal scene since they can sell themselves as the most efficient deliverers of votes in races for national office. If a presidential candidate has limited resources to apply to gaining votes, it makes sense to invest them in those regions where the returns to ruble invested are highest. In turn, the potential rewards from being part of the winning

presidential coalition are likely to spur regional leaders to compete with one another for the reputation of being the best able to deliver the presidential vote. This is often easier to do by Machiavellian methods than by good policy decisions in a country that has been on the brink of economic ruin for some ten years. Furthermore, federal authorities forced to compete for votes have great incentive not to crack down on local strongmen and, in fact, to indulge them in hopes of gaining their support or at least neutrality in the federal elections that most concern them.[16] It hardly seems coincidental, therefore, that Yeltsin found it easy to overlook the electoral engineering of an economically conservative and relatively separatist Bashkortostan in 1998. In the first round of his 1996 reelection bid, Yeltsin dramatically leapt from an eight-point deficit in the first round in the republic to an eight-point victory over Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov in the second round. This happened despite the fact that Bashkortostan had reliably voted against Yeltsin's wishes on virtually every major ballot before that point.[17]

THE IMPACT ON LOCAL AND FEDERAL ELECTIONS

Even the most authoritarian regional leaders are extremely unlikely to abolish democratic institutions outright, since they derive some benefit from presenting a democratic veneer and since they don't want to risk inciting the federal government to somehow intervene. Some local leaders may have reason to fear a local popular backlash if they abandoned all subtlety in a blatant grab for power. In addition, since their power at the federal level depends in part on their ability to produce favorable votes in presidential and possibly Duma elections, provincial leaders have incentive to keep their electoral machines in good working order by running them regularly and, in the process, improving their effectiveness. For reasons outlined below, we can expect provincial political machines to play their strongest roles in the federal presidential and regional chief executive elections in the year 2000 and perhaps beyond.

The logic of Russian political power outlined above suggests that local strongmen are likely to apply their greatest efforts toward influencing gubernatorial-level elections, since these are the elections on which their personal power most directly depends. We should thus expect to see more incumbents successfully reelected in Russia's second round of regional executive elections than was the case in the first round that took place in most provinces between 1995-97. In 1999, this expectation was dramatically borne out: 24 of 35 chief executive incumbents won reelection in the regions.[18] To the extent local legislatures can thwart executive initiatives, regional autocrats are also likely to strengthen their grip on these organs, although allowing a token (and largely media-mute) opposition may serve the purpose of enhancing the window-dressing of democracy at little political cost.

Federal races will prove harder for the machine politicians to manipulate since much of the competition will take place in national media, which is harder to regulate locally. Nevertheless, regions like Tatarstan and Bashkortostan proved quite able to deliver the presidential vote to Boris Yeltsin in 1996, and they have every incentive to increase their own effectiveness in the March 2000 race since success will only make them more important players on the federal stage. Control will not be complete, of course, since the federal media will be able to circumvent much local influence. Also, important opponents are likely to find in most regions at least some supporters, some of whom may wield significant power if they represent big banks or giant critical monopolies (like Gazprom). Nevertheless, the strongest regional leaders will be able to counteract many of these efforts, especially in the rural regions where voters are most vulnerable to pressure and information manipulation. If such regional leaders are allied with an incumbent federal leadership that successfully controls major media outlets, there may in fact be little to counteract.

Throughout 1999, Russia's governors and presidents were actively forming political alliances designed to contest the December 1999 parliamentary elections. Their impact was major, but not in the ways most often assumed. Most observers have focused on only one half of the parliamentary elections, the half in which people vote for whole lists of candidates put forward by parties and electoral associations (rather than for individual candidates in territorial districts). This part of the race gets the most attention because it is the easiest to understand: party support and success can be judged directly by the percentage of the vote each party receives.

Regional leaders, however, are likely to have the hardest time controlling results of the "party list" half of the parliamentary voting precisely because vote percentages for parties are calculated nationally and most of the competition takes place in the national media. Some of the strongest local machine politicians certainly proved able to raise the vote totals for friendly electoral blocs by pressuring rural regions and orchestrating a major local media splash. In Ingushetia, for example, the Fatherland-All Russia Party won 88 percent of the vote despite getting only 13 percent in the rest of Russia. But it is usually very difficult, short of outright fraud, to produce overwhelming results since so much of the campaigning is outside of their control and since the choices are so diverse (over 40 electoral associations competed in the 1995 Duma elections and 26 were on the ballot in 1999). For this reason, Bashkortostan's Rakhimov is now considering restrictions on the local broadcast of unfriendly national network programs.

The other half of the Duma is elected as in the United States: people vote for individual candidates in territorial districts and the candidate with the most votes wins. Here regional leaders have proven best able to influence the results. This is because election requires not clearing a five-percent threshold, but instead

garnering a plurality of the vote, meaning that the victory bar is much higher for each competitor. In addition, the territorial district races are usually almost entirely local, with federal media playing a small role in providing information about the specific pretenders to office. Control is also strongest in the rural constituencies, where manipulation is most possible for reasons described above. Thus in Bashkortostan in 1993, Rakhimov-approved candidates won in all electoral districts except the one with the greatest percentage of urban voters, that is, in five of six races. The remaining district, in the capital Ufa, elected Aleksandr Arinin, the leader of the local anti-autonomy and ethnic Russian movement (and one of the candidates illegally excluded from the 1998 presidential race). Whereas in 1993 Rakhimov's team was resigned to letting Arinin win and actually cut a deal with him, it campaigned hard against him when he ran for reelection in 1995.[19] Despite these efforts, however, Arinin managed to win reelection in this urban constituency where he had had time to build up a localized power base. Rakhimov finally managed to eliminate competition from Arinin in 1999.

The greatest danger of regional autocratization is that the local political machines will all jump onto the bandwagon of a single national-level presidential candidate or party, effectively ending meaningful electoral competition in Russia. This is certainly possible, as regional leaders have reason to want to wind up on the winning side of Russia's high-stakes struggle for the presidency. But rivalries between ambitious personalities, divergences in the economic interests of regions and the ongoing weakness of central authority in Russia all mean that there will still likely be political competition at a national level even if all local leaders succeed in becoming little autocrats. Many observers expected the presidents of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan simply to jump on the bandwagon of the likely winner of the presidential race. Instead, they ran in fierce opposition to the party backed by the current overwhelming presidential favorite, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, in the Duma elections of 1999. (Given that Putin now has no credible rival, however, it would not be surprising for them now to switch to his side.)

Strong political parties, then, may coalesce as coalitions of primarily regional leaders with common ties to certain influential national candidates or government officials. Parties may yet come to Russia from the top down as well as from the bottom up. Regional interests along with economic interests and ideological appeal may become the foundation of the emerging Russian political party system. It is also entirely possible that governors will eventually align themselves along ideological cleavages, as governors and presidents join together with likeminded peers to realize policy ideas that they all support. It will therefore be very interesting to see which parliamentary groups the representatives of governors and presidents join in the new Duma in the first part of 2000.

If these trends continue to develop, an interesting mix of competition and partnership between at least two kinds of parties is likely to emerge. Top-down parties

linked to local executive power (and their political machines) might link with bottom-up parties based primarily on ideological or leadership appeal. The bottom-up Russian parties certainly have great incentive to get as many governors or presidents on their side as possible, but it is not altogether clear whether the governors and presidents will want to align themselves with a party unless they clearly play the dominant role. In addition, some of the bottom-up parties have spoken out against the growing autonomy of Russia's regions, meaning that the issue of decentralization could become a major new cleavage in Russian party politics even if voters do not consider this their primary concern. We have already seen evidence of this tension, as the Russian nationalist Congress of Russian Communities broke off its alliance with Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov's Fatherland Party for trying too hard to cozy up to the "separatist" presidents (including Rakhimov and Shaimiev) of the "All Russia" electoral bloc in June 1999.

The danger, therefore, will not be the lack of alternatives but the difficulty ordinary people will have in choosing these alternatives for themselves in free and fair elections.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WESTERN POLICY

The West has always had only the most marginal influence on Russia's democracy. However, it can influence the development of regional autocratization at margins that may become important, perhaps helping halt the slide away from democracy before it picks up much momentum.

First, it can work to strengthen the judicial system and rule of law in Russia. This is easy to say and impossible for the West alone to do, but such programs may push in the right direction. The West can also help by paying close attention to electoral developments in the regions and bringing the pressure of international public opinion to bear on the Russian courts that must decide these cases, urging fair and objective rulings. For example, while the Russian Supreme Court turned down the appeal of the two disqualified candidates for Bashkortostan's presidency, circumstances exist under which this case can be heard again. Some international publicity, especially if timed after the Russian presidential elections so as to catch a new chief executive when he or she least has to worry about a regional reaction, might help their (and democracy's) cause. This publicity is most likely to be effective the less it is perceived as coming from the United States or Europe, suggesting a role for nongovernmental institutions with a broad international representation or truly international institutions like the United Nations.

Western governments and philanthropists can also follow the lead of George Soros and actively promote independent media in the regions. The West can step up and support initiatives promoting objective local television, radio and newspapers. Most effective would be a set of Radio Liberties with regionally

specific coverage broadcasting from outside the region. Indeed, Bashkortostan opposition leaders have singled out Radio Liberty's Russian language coverage of their plight as being a beacon of hope for local democracy. Similar television and newspaper initiatives would help greatly, but would be more difficult to realize. Again, however, Westerners must be cautious as suspicion of Western motives now runs high in Russia.

In addition, now that Western governments have made aiding Russia's regions an important part of their policies towards Russia, they might do well to introduce "degree of democratization" as a criterion for targeting Western region-oriented aid. Governments have 89 regions to choose from when deciding where to direct aid, and some competition along these lines might sway leaders that are wavering between their democratic instincts and other political pressures. Aside from rewarding "democratic" regions with economic aid, support for civil society and other hallmarks of democracy should be targeted at those regions where democracy is in the greatest danger.

The West should also support the efforts of Russian political parties to build strong regional organizations. If Russian parties can build strong structures in virtually all regions faster than governors and republic presidents can consolidate control over them, the roots of local political competition will have already taken hold and will be harder for regional autocrats to remove. Western advisors should work to discourage Russian party leaders from the all-too-common tendency to neglect building local party organizations. The Communist Party has long had a strong organization; Grigory Yavlinsky's Yabloko Party has been quite successful in developing one since 1995. Luzhkov's Fatherland has shown great promise in this field (despite kowtowing to the governors themselves, as it has done in many regions) by aligning with local trade unions, university or industrial structures or with mayors who may not be in the pockets of their governors. These examples provide hope that those governors who have not already "authoritarianized" may have missed their chance.

Finally, the international community can also encourage more rigorous election observing. Observers should spend time getting to know the region they are covering or (ideally) should be experts on the region, in addition to being trained on the procedures of election observation. This may help at the margins by giving local autocrats bad press and by providing at least some public criteria for assessing levels of regional democratization, criteria which would then be used to determine where to direct investment support and pro-democracy initiatives.

CONCLUSION

While Russia's presidential and parliamentary elections point to a promising democratic future, budding trends in the provinces threaten to gut this future

of meaningful content. The autocratization of the regions should be resisted since it will be to the detriment of the people. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that in the very long run, this process could preserve political competition at the federal level, effectively "regionalizing" autocracy for the Russian people. In this case, the foundations for the future flourishing of democracy may remain sturdy. Since regional leaders are unlikely to agree on all policy questions, coalitions of like-minded regions are likely to form parties that will eventually gain enough strength to try to expand into other parties' core regions, which will mean renewed competition at the local level. The recent shift of the U.S. Democratic Party's formerly "Solid South" to the Republican Party and the erosion of machine politics in Chicago show that this is possible even after a long period of consolidated regional power bases. Democracy, therefore, may just come to Russia in an unexpected way, through the competition between sets of "authoritarian" regions. But Russian citizens should not have to wait for this eventuality. ■

NOTES

[1] Henry Hale works for the Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project at Harvard University.

[2] There are at least six different kinds of regions in Russia in terms of formal status, but since the distinction between the "ethnic" ones and the primarily Russian ones is the most important for this article's purposes, I do not introduce this element of complexity here.

[3] Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation. *Vybory glav ispolnitel'noj vlasti sub'ektov rossijskoj federatsii 1995-1997* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ves' Mir, 1997) p.51.

[4] Michael McFaul and Nikolai Petrov (eds). *Political Almanac of Russia 1989-1997*, v.1, book 1 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998) pp.229-52; and Pauline Jones Luong, "Tatarstan: Elite Bargaining and Ethnic Separatism," in Timothy J. Colton and Jerry F. Hough (eds.) *Growing Pains: Russian Democracy and the Election of 1993*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998) pp.637-668.

[5] RFE/RL Newsline, v.2, no.207, Part II, October 26, 1998.

[6] Izvestia, October 30, 1998, Internet Securities.

[7] RFE/RL Newsline, v.2, no.119, Part I, June 23, 1998.

[8] Faust, Florin. "Rakhimov's Re-election In Bashkortostan No Surprise," RFE/RL Newsline, June 16, 1998, carried in Turkistan Newsletter, v.98-2:120-07-July-1998.

[9] Hale, Henry E. "Bashkortostan: The Logic of Ethnic Machine Politics and the Consolidation of Democracy," in Colton and Hough 1998, pp.588-636.

[10] See McFaul and Petrov 1998; and Natan Shklyar, "Economic Crisis Strengthens Governors," *EastWest Institute Russian Regional Report*, v.4, no.1, January 14, 1999.

[11] Central Election Commission 1997, pp.54-56.

[12] Hale 1998.

[13] On the importance of institutional resources in separatist politics, see Dmitry Gorenburg, "Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic Mobilisation or Power Grab?" *Europe-Asia Studies*, v.51, no.2, 1999, pp.245-74.

[14] Gelman, Vladimir. "Regime Transition, Uncertainty and Prospects for Democratisation: The Politics of Russia's Regions in a Comparative Perspective," *Europe-Asia Studies*, v.51, no.6, 1999, pp.939-56.

[15] Javeline, Debra. Work in progress based on survey data in Russia.

[16] Daniel Treisman has also found that the Russian government tends to reward "troublemaking" regions. See, for example, his "Russia's 'Ethnic Revival:' The Separatist Activism of Regional Leaders in a Post-Communist Order," *World Politics*, v.49, no.2, January 1997, pp.212-49.

[17] McFaul and Petrov 1998, pp.90-92; Hale 1998.

[18] By the author's count, based largely on McFaul and Petrov 1998 and Shklyar 1999.

[19] Hale 1998; McFaul and Petrov 1998, pp. 92-93.