



## Election Falsification and Its Limits: A Regional Comparison on the Eve of the Presidential Elections

By Alexander Kynev, Moscow

### Summary

The results of the presidential elections essentially depends not on the true poll ratings of the candidates, but on how many extra votes are given to the main candidate and how many are taken away from the others. By using the election results from 4<sup>th</sup> December, Russia can be divided into three regions with varying potential for manipulation and protest. The result of the presidential election on 4<sup>th</sup> March partly depends on the turnout in the group of the “protest regions” with 52.2 million voters, where, according to the official results of the December 2011 parliamentary elections, United Russia received less than 42% of the vote: these regions are mainly in Northern Russia, Siberia, the Urals and the Far East. Additionally, the relationship between the durability of administrative resources and electoral control in the “mid-table regions” (the regions of Moscow, Rostov, Voronezh and Stavropol) with over 30 million voters will also play an important role.

### “Inflating” the Voter Lists

The turnout for the Duma elections on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011 was 60.21%. This represents 65.8 million voters among 109.2 million people who were registered to vote on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011 (almost 337,000 of these live outside the country). In July 2011, a decision taken by the Central Election Commission stated that as of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011, only 108.1 million people were registered to vote within the territory of the Russian Federation.

Where did these 800,000 people come from in just five months? The reality is that the number of additional voters is even higher if one considers the votes cast using an absentee voter certificate (AVC): In the precincts, a total of 1.797 million AVCs were issued, whilst just 1.258 million people used such a certificate to cast their vote. There are therefore over half a million people who were struck from the voter list in their precinct because they received an AVC and were not subsequently registered in any other voter lists.

This means that, in total, the voter lists were inflated by around 1.376 million people who can possibly have cast a vote more than once. If one also takes those people into account who voted early because of an AVC or who voted via the mobile ballot boxes<sup>1</sup>, then the number reads 7.15 million (11%) votes which are usually referred to as “questionable.” This does not even include ballot stuffing, the sale and purchase of votes or the manipulation of protocols.

### The Shpilkin Method

In Russia, various methods are applied to determine the extent of election falsification. For example, comparisons are drawn between neighbouring precincts with a

similar electorate. Mathematical models are also used to determine anomalous distributions of the vote. No less popular are polls after the elections. Besides these methods, it is possible to use the official figures provided by the Central Election Commission to determine how many votes are cast via the “questionable” ways of voting, that is those that are most affected by manipulation.

One of the methods for determining the extent of manipulation, and the one which has received the most attention in recent years, is based on a mathematical model. There are a number of different models, with the most well-known being that named after Sergei Shpilkin, an expert on election statistics. The basis of this method is formed by graphs which show the distribution of votes by precinct. A normal distribution should provide curves for all parties which have an approximately similar arc. This can be seen at most “normal” elections. In Russia, however, an abnormality is found: the graph of one of the parties (United Russia) shows an “anomaly”. If the curves for all parties are compared with United Russia’s, then, with the help of a coefficient, an estimate for the number of “anomalous” votes cast in a particular precinct for this party can be calculated.

According to Shpilkin’s calculations, the real election turnout at the Duma elections on 4<sup>th</sup> December stood at around 46.1%; 50.4 million voters cast their vote. In reality, United Russia received, according to these calculations, 33.9% of the vote and not 49.32%; the CPRF 25%, A Just Russia 17.3%, the LDPR 15.2% and Yabloko 4.5%.<sup>2</sup>

The sociologists from the Levada-Center arrive at similar figures from their poll held one week after elec-

1 On 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011, 4.3 million voters cast their vote using a mobile ballot box.

2 The Central Election Commission counted 19.2% for the CPRF, 13.2% for A Just Russia, 11.7 % for Zhirinovskiy’s LDPR and 3.43% for Yabloko.

tion day which asked Muscovites the following question: “Did you vote at the Duma elections and, if yes, for whom?”

According to this poll, United Russia received 15 percent less in the capital city than it was awarded in the official result. According to the Shpilkin Method, the Moscow result for the party in power would have been 17.5 percentage points lower.

Therefore, the estimates of the extent of nationwide vote manipulation range between 7.13 million (the proportion of “questionable” votes provided by the official figures) and 15.3 million using the Shpilkin Method.

### Regional Variation in Levels of Manipulation

The tradition of election falsification is different in each region. In some areas, such as the North Caucasus Republics, any result is simply recorded in the final protocols based on what is required at the time. Other regions prefer ballot stuffing, election “tourism” or the manipulative transcription of protocol data.

A number of regions “traditionally” use mobile ballot boxes to ensure an anomalous distribution of the vote.

In recent years, voting with an AVC has become more and more popular: This has led to serious scandals in St. Petersburg, Sverdlovsk Oblast and the Chelyabinsk, Voronezh and Ryazan oblasts.

Acts of electoral falsification during the voting process itself are also difficult to expose. It is not possible for an election observer to look over the shoulder of every member of an election commission in order to look and check whether every voter has signed for him/herself. It is also impossible to compare the additional voter lists in the precincts in order to determine whether more than one vote has been cast by one and the same person.

With the efficient organisation of election monitoring, acts of manipulation during the vote-counting process can, however, be effectively prevented. In this case, the level of manipulation which has taken place during the voting process itself is inversely proportional to the number of votes from “living souls.” To put it more simply, when more genuine voters cast their vote at a polling station, fewer extra ballot papers can be stuffed into the ballot boxes for those people who did not go to the polls.

For this reason, it is no wonder that, during elections in recent years, deliberately inspired campaigns aimed at artificially preventing protest voters from going to the polls and therefore at improving the result of the “candidates in power” could be observed. It is not uncommon for these campaigns to target those areas where the proportion of protest voters is particularly high and the election controls are tight; these tend to be the large cities. The methods which are used to reduce the election

turnout include scandals, slander campaigns and the nomination of candidates with high negative poll ratings.

### From December to March: Varying Potential for Protest in the Regions

Using the elections of 4th December as a basis, the Russian regions can be divided into three groups. Thus, the regions with traditional “electoral anomalies” (both in the turnout and in the percentages for the “desired” candidate) continue to include the national republics in the North Caucasus and the Volga region. For years, the Tyva Republic and Chukotka Autonomous Okrug have also belonged to this group, as have Kuzbass (Kemerovo Oblast) and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug; and since the early 2000s also Tyumen Oblast. Often, the “anomaly” of the vote in these regions is based on the “election machinery” built up by the region’s governor, which is first made possible by the regional leader’s high popularity ratings.

During the elections on 4th December, United Russia received more than 60% of the vote in 20 regions and in three regions this result was almost achieved, between 56 and 60%. Alongside the traditionally “anomalous” regions mentioned, two central Russian oblasts have emerged (Tambov and Tula, although in the latter case this result is clearly to the “credit” of the new governor Vladimir Gruzdev), one region from the Northwest (the Komi Republic, where extremely scandalous events took place) and also the Saratov, Astrakhan, and Penza oblasts and the Krasnodar Krai. In total, there are 25.1 million registered voters in these 23 regions. It can be safely assumed that these regions will also provide the “correct” result on 4th March.

In 32 other regions, less than 40% voted for United Russia (even with election falsification). This group can also be said to include seven further regions with 40-42% for United Russia, primarily regions in Northern Russia, in Siberia, in the Urals and in the Far East. 52.2 million registered voters live in these “protest regions.” However, these regions show a relatively low election turnout when compared with the nationwide average. The regional and local administrations do not seem to have the resources needed to radically change the special electoral situation there.

Twenty-one regions can be considered “mid-table”. These include Moscow and Rostov Oblast, which has removed itself a little from the “anomalous zone”, as well as Voronezh Oblast and Stavropol Krai. These regions cover around 30.8 million registered voters. It is in these regions that the development of the elections raises the largest questions. It is quite possible that it will be the election situation in precisely these regions which determines whether or not the presidential elections will be

decided in one or two voting rounds. If the elections in Moscow again take place in “December style”, then this could raise the danger of political destabilisation in the country. For this reason, serious election falsification is not to be expected in these regions.

Therefore, the final result of the presidential elections is largely dependent on the results in the “protest regions”. The results also depend on the relationship between the durability of the administrative resources and the struggle for electoral control of the regions in “mid-table”.

It tends to be more difficult to exercise control over the presidential elections than the parliamentary elections. Firstly, during the latter there are more victors, actors, people who have a personal interest in maximising the result and so work towards it. That said, the Shpilkin Method showed in 2007 and 2008 that the manipulation during the presidential elections was higher than during the parliamentary elections. Sec-

only, in December 2011, not only the Duma but also 27 regional parliaments were elected, so that candidates for the regional legislative assemblies were also interested in securing control. In March 2012, additional elections will only take place alongside the presidential elections in a few regions, and these will only be at local level. It is therefore no surprise that in many polling stations the only individuals providing control will not be official election observers of particular candidates, but volunteers bearing the status of media correspondent.

Due to the tidal wave of people registering to become election observers, and due to the general increase in protest activity, this tendency could be broken. We will only find out how effective the “angry citizens” stationed in the polling stations will be when we get the results after 4<sup>th</sup> March.

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**Figure 1: Post-election poll conducted by the Levada-Center from 8<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Proportion of the votes cast (in %).**

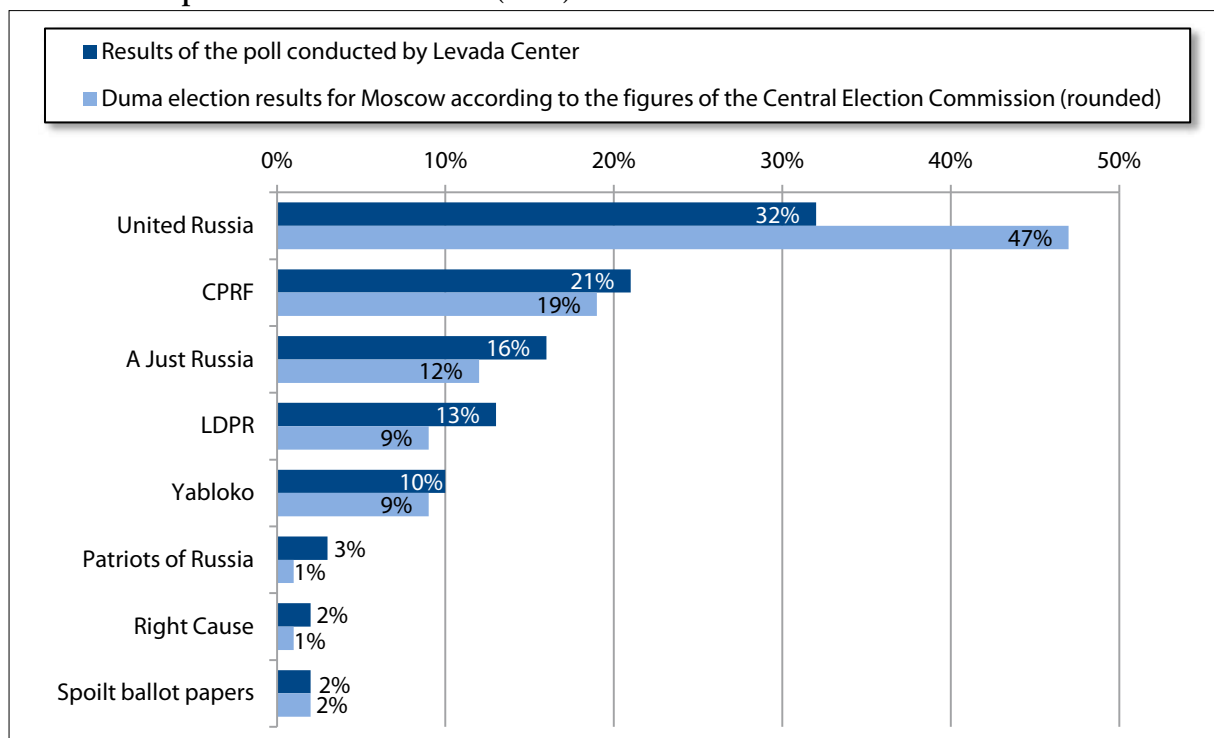
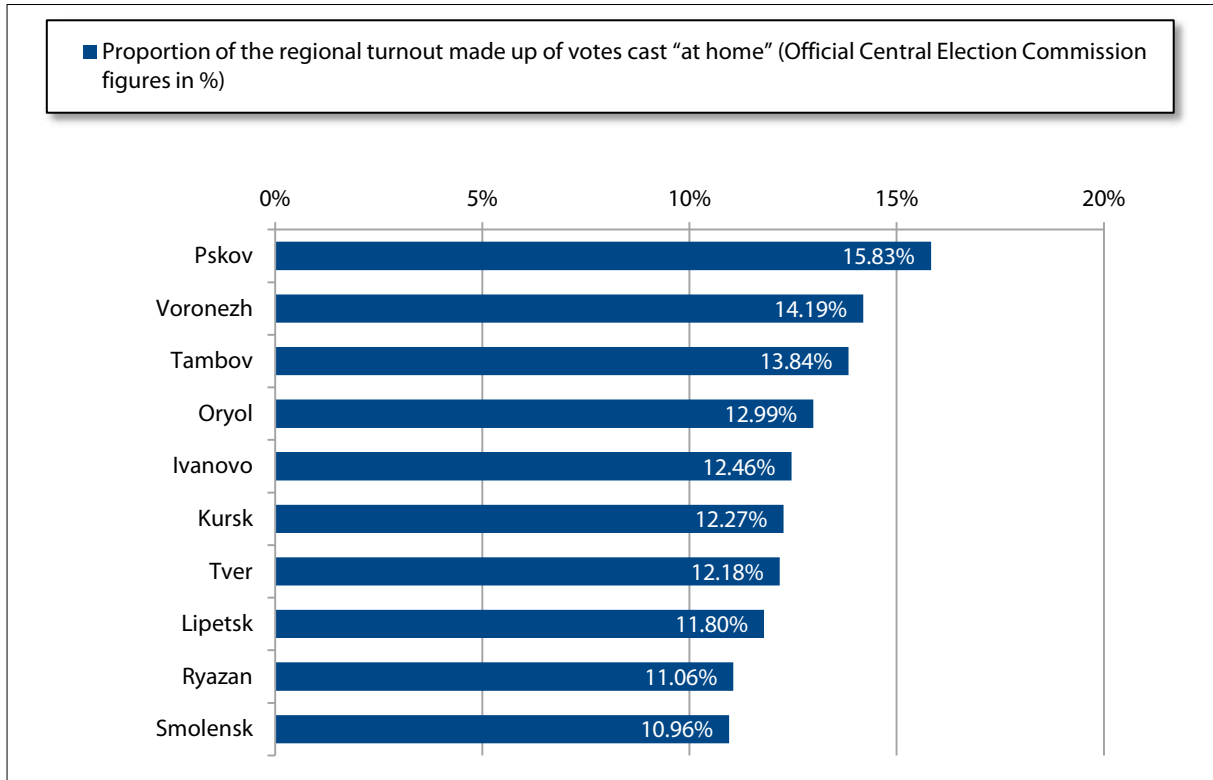


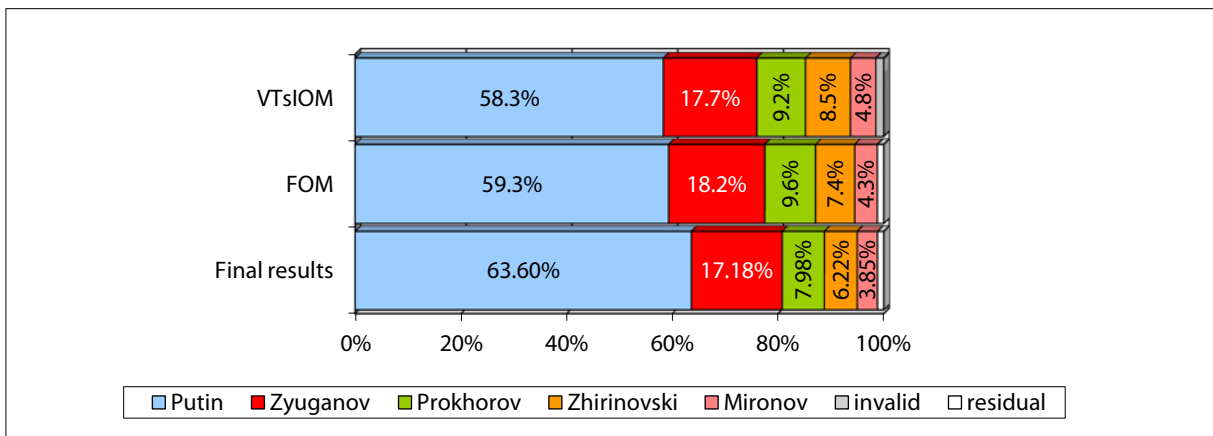
Figure 2: Regions with the highest levels of voting using mobile ballot boxes during the Duma elections on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011.



DOCUMENTATION

Final Results of the Presidential Elections

Figure 1: Presidential Elections of 4<sup>th</sup> March 2012: Final Result Compared to Exit Polls



Sources: <http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/2012/03/07/prot.rtf>, <http://fom.ru/politika/10346>, <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=112577>.