THE PUTIN VOTE: THE DEMAND SIDE OF HYBRID REGIME POLITICS

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Under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia became a markedly less democratic and, by most standards, more authoritarian country than it had been in the 1990s. Existing scholarship has correctly recognized that much of this process owes to a whole series of autocratic reforms and practices that Putin and his supporters either introduced or intensified during his two terms in office. Prominent among these are the engineering of a dominant-party system through restrictive legislation and selective application of the law;[1] the reining in of nonparty actors, such as governors and businesspeople, who might be in a position to support opposition candidates;[2] the additional artificial and forcible narrowing of the choice set presented to voters;[3] control over the most influential mass media outlets;[4] vote falsification;[5] and legal and preemptive measures designed to control civil society and keep

[1] For recent treatments, see Grigorii Golosov, "Sfabrikovanoe bol'shinstvo: konversiia golosov v mesta na dumskikh vyborakh 2003 goda," in Vladimir Gel'man, ed., *Tretii elektoral'nyi tsikl v Rossii, 2003-2004 gody* (St. Petersburg: European University of St. Petersburg Press, 2007); Ora John Reuter and Thomas F. Remington, "Dominant Party Regimes and the Commitment Problem: The Case of United Russia," *Comparative Political Studies*, 2008; Regina Smyth, Brandon Wilkening, and Anna Urasova, "Engineering Victory: Institutional Reform, Informal Institutions, and the Formation of a Hegemonic Party Regime in the Russian Federation," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, v.23, no.2, 2007.

[2] Harley Balzer, "Managed Pluralism: Vladimir Putin's Emerging Regime," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, v.19, July-September 2003, pp.189-227; Kelly M. McMann, *Economic Autonomy and Democracy: Hybrid Regimes in Russia and Kyrgyzstan* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[3] Vladimir Gel'man, "Political Opposition in Russia: A Dying Species?" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, v.21, September 2005, pp.226-46; Richard Rose, Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[4] Sarah Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections in Russia* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2006).

[5] M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mikhail Myagkov, Peter C. Ordeshook, and Dmitri Shakin, "Fraud or Fairytales: Russia and Ukraine's Electoral Experience," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, v.21, April-June 2005, pp.91-131.

discontent from spilling onto the streets.[6] These also tend to be the sorts of factors that gain the greatest attention in comparative works on the creation and functioning of "hybrid regimes," political systems that combine some democratic features (such as contested elections) with important autocratic tendencies that heavily favor incumbent authorities in these ballots.[7] Such accounts often seem to imply that ordinary voters play no role in determining political outcomes like Russia's authoritarian turn. Those who do find roles for voters in their accounts tend to cast these citizens either as being authoritarian themselves (due to culture or tradition) or as being captivated by the personal charisma of the leader who is doing the autocratizing.[8]

We present evidence from two original surveys from 2000 and 2004, the only years Putin himself ran for president, to show that it would be a mistake to write off Putin's electoral performance as little more than the product of fraud, voter coercion, mass brainwashing, a culturally determined support for any authority figure, or even support for Putin personally. We do not deny that at least some of these factors have their place in Russian politics. But we cannot let this obscure the fact that Putin has also, from the beginning, built a highly structured relationship with the electorate. Most of all, voters were attracted to Putin for performance-related reasons during his first term, with the role of such reasons gaining strongly in importance as time passed at the same time that the role of personality markedly declined. Moreover, the notion that this performance-based support is all about oil prices or even the economy in general appears to be both exaggerated and oversimplified. In fact, we find strong evidence that Putin is connecting strongly with voters

[6] Graeme Robertson, *Managing Protest and Politics: Regime and Contention in Post-Communist Russia*, unpublished book manuscript, 2007.
[7] For example, see Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy*, v.13, April 2002; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, v.13, April 2002; Ellen Lust-Okar, "Divided They Rule: The Management and Manipulation of Political Opposition," *Comparative Politics*, v.36, January 2004; Andreas Schedler, ed., *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Lynne Rienner, 2006); Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, v.76, November/December 1997.
[8] E.g., Richard Pipes, "Flight From Freedom," *Foreign Affairs*, v.83, no.3, May/June 2004, pp.9-15.

on the basis of concrete policy issues, and that the particular issues involved have shifted during his first term away from the standard left-right dimension to questions like constitutional structure and even foreign policy. Even partisanship appears to matter somewhat. He also became quite successful by the end of his first term in connecting with specific social constituencies, especially the young, the female, and the Orthodox.

In short, the relationship between the electorate and Putin is not what one would expect if fraud, coercion, leader orientation, or "zombification" were all that mattered. This supplies grounds for concluding that public opinion dynamics in hybrid regimes like Russia's may be different than commonly assumed and thus deserve more rigorous scholarly attention than they have been getting.

Why We Should Care About Public Opinion in Putin's Russia

While most explanations of Russia's recent movement toward autocracy have focused on the development of the administrative means and techniques that carry it out, it is something of a scholarly consensus that Putin has accomplished this development with the clear support of a popular majority.[9] Perhaps this is merely a coincidence and the support is either unrelated to or a meaningless by-product of the regime change over which Putin has presided. There is reason to suspect, however, that popular support for Putin is an important factor enabling the authoritarian moves that have occurred on his watch. For one thing, the popularity preceded the autocratization: Putin's ascendancy dates back to the last months of the Yeltsin period, when the Kremlin's desire and capacity to manipulate and control the process were far more limited than they were in 2008. Additionally, even when authoritarian control reached record post-Soviet levels in late 2007 and early 2008, Putin and his associates continued to pay an enormous amount of attention to cultivating and sustaining popular

[9] Debates are mainly on the depth of this support. See, for example, Richard Rose, Neil Munro, and William Mishler, "Resigned Acceptance of an Incomplete Democracy: Russia's Political Equilibrium," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, v.20, no.3, 2004, pp.195-218.

support. Observing this Kremlin obsession with opinion poll ratings, one analyst even dubbed Russia's political system a "ratingocracy."[10] Such attention to the views of the masses is hard to explain if one posits that Kremlin leaders did not believe public opinion was somehow important to their continued control over the polity. Added credence for this view can be found in the observation that the only post-Soviet hybrid-regime presidents whose teams lost power after 2000 were those who were the least popular in their respective countries (Akaev in Kyrgyzstan, Kuchma in Ukraine, and Shevardnadze in Georgia).[11]

We also find it telling that Putin, having already set firmly in place all of the aforementioned accoutrements of authoritarianism by mid-2007, nevertheless took the unprecedented step of personally leading the United Russia Party candidate list in the December 2007 elections to the State Duma despite having no intent to actually accept a seat there. Moreover, even after this party netted a dominating two-thirds majority of the parliamentary mandates, Putin still considered it worthwhile to tie his own person explicitly to the candidacy of his favored successor, Dmitry Medvedev, by publicly agreeing in advance to be Prime Minister should his anointed one win the presidential election of March 2008. Of course, Putin's pre-election acceptance of the prime minister's post was likely also aimed at keeping regime officials in line by convincing them that Putin himself was no lame duck. But if avoiding becoming a lame duck was all that was at stake, it would seem to have been unnecessary for him to do much more than declare his intent to stay in power as prime minister. This leaves his decision to personally head United Russia's party list unexplained since it should have been enough for him (no lame duck) simply to have ordered his subordinates to produce the desired result for the party. Overall, these moves strongly suggest that Putin himself and his closest advisors did not consider the means and methods of

[10] Aleksandr Shmelev, in a roundtable discussion "Perspektivy avtoritarizma v Rossii," *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, tom 39, pp.41-61, p.55.
[11] Henry E. Hale, "Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Politics*, v.58, October 2005, pp.133-65; Michael McFaul, "Transitions From Communism," *Journal of Democracy*, v.16, July 2005.

authoritarianism they had established over the previous eight years to be enough to achieve the results they wanted in 2007 and 2008. Instead, it strongly appears that Putin's personal popularity has been an important factor in at least facilitating Russia's authoritarian turn during 2000-2008, a factor that remains understudied both in Russia-specific and comparative research.

The Putin Ascendancy and Russia's Electorate

Putin first entered the world of presidential politics in August 1999, when Boris Yeltsin tapped the little-known Federal Security Service chief to become his prime minister and, he declared to surprised observers, his political heir-apparent. Genuinely a popular tabula rasa, Putin could muster only two percent in the most reliable presidential ratings at that time, creeping up only to around four percent during his first month atop Russia's government. Those ratings were then dominated by the veteran Communist (KPRF) leader, Gennady Zyuganov, and what appeared to be a rising political juggernaut, the Fatherland-All Russia coalition forged in August by two of Russia's most popular politicians, the left-leaning former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and the pragmatic, populist mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov. Putin also trailed the radical nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky and the liberal Grigory Yavlinsky, while the nationalist governor of Krasnoiarsk, General Aleksandr Lebed, had also long harbored presidential ambitions and seemed better positioned than Putin. Indeed, given Yeltsin's near-zero approval ratings, his endorsement seemed like a poison chalice that would prevent Putin from ever making a serious play for the presidency.

A series of wild events quickly and unexpectedly turned the tide strongly in Putin's favor. Just before Putin's appointment, rogue Chechen fighters had occupied part of neighboring Dagestan, proclaiming jihad against the Russian military and creation of an Islamic state in the extended region. Shortly after Putin assumed his post, state-owned

television launched a news analysis program, anchored by Sergei Dorenko, that prominently featured negative information on the Fatherland-All Russia team and did significant damage to their presidential ratings. On September 8 and 13, terrorist explosions destroyed two apartment buildings in Moscow, killing hundreds of sleeping citizens and setting off a nationwide panic that was accompanied by similar tragedies in two other cities. Putin responded by blaming the elected government of Chechnya and sending in Russian troops to install a new republic government and quell all resistance. His popularity soared, with over half of likely voters by December voicing their intent to cast their ballots for him in the upcoming presidential election.

When he endorsed the newly founded pro-government Unity bloc for the December 1999 Duma contest less than a month before election day, its standing in the polls also leapt up dramatically and it finished a close second to the KPRF. Moreover, the coalition of former Yeltsinites known as the Union of Right Forces also beat expectations by clearing the five-percent threshold through a strategy of supporting Putin. While a few other parties also cleared this hurdle (Yabloko, the Zhirinovsky Bloc, and the beleaguered Fatherland-All Russia), they performed worse than had earlier been expected.

Recognizing Putin's electoral strength, Yeltsin shocked analysts by resigning as president on New Year's Eve, a move that made Putin acting president due to Russian rules of succession and that required moving the presidential election up from June to March 2000. Seeing the writing on the wall, Putin's most dangerous erstwhile rivals one by one dropped their own presidential ambitions, including Lebed, Luzhkov, and Primakov. Putin thus won with 53 percent of the vote, handily besting Zyuganov's 29 percent, Yavlinsky's 6 percent,

Kemerovo Governor Aman Tuleev's and Zhirinovsky's 3 percent, and the even lower figures netted by six other candidates (See Table 1).[12]

Table 1. Presidential Election Results 2000, 2004 (percentage vote won)

Presidential Election Results 2000		***Presidential Election Results 2004***	
Putin	**53**	**Putin**	**71**
Zyuganov (KPRF)	29	Kharitonov (KPRF)	14
Yavlinsky (Yabloko)	6	Glaziev	4
Tuleev	3	Khakamada	4
Zhirinovsky (LDPR)	3	Malyshkin (LDPR)	2
Titov	1	Mironov	1
Pamfilova	1		
Govorukhin	0.4		
Skuratov	0.4		
Podberezkin	0.1		
Dzhabrailov	0.1		
Against All	*2*	*Against All*	*4*

Putin sustained 60-80 percent approval ratings throughout his first term in office at the same time that he began insulating his regime from potential political challenges. Some reforms increased the Kremlin's control over the federal election process, notably reducing the political autonomy of regional "governors," the most influential television networks, and corporate conglomerates. The most dramatic step came in October 2003, when police demonstratively arrested Russia's richest man, Yukos corporation owner Mikhail Khodorkovsky, less than two months before the Duma election, in the run-up to which he and his corporate associates had been supporting a large number of opposition candidates and parties. With these other parties subject to media criticism for accepting this "corrupt" money and finding their other sources of funding drying up, United Russia (Unity's successor) enjoyed the strong support of most governors and corporate conglomerates, with Putin's envoys atop the newly created federal districts coordinating this support. After Putin unambiguously endorsed it, United Russia then won 38 percent of the party-list vote, far

[12] On these elections, see: Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Vicki L. Hesli and William M. Reisinger, eds., *The 1999-2000 Elections in Russia: Their Impact and Legacy* (NY: Cambridge); and Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections without Order* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

outstripping the second-place KPRF (13 percent) and third-place LDPR (12 percent), with the "alternative" Kremlin-supported party (Motherland) surging into the parliament with 9 percent of the vote. When one factored in deputies elected in single-member districts and some post-election party shifting by some deputies, United Russia wound up with over two-thirds of the Duma seats. Both Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces found themselves without a registered fraction in the Duma. With Putin the prohibitive favorite in the presidential race, all other major parties withheld their strongest candidates from the contest as the KPRF tapped the uncharismatic agrarian Nikolai Kharitonov and the LDPR nominated Zhirinovsky's burly bodyguard Oleg Malyshkin as little more than placeholders on the ballot. In the ensuing March 2004 presidential election, Putin achieved his electoral peak as president, winning 71 percent of the ballots against the 14 percent mobilized by the second-place Kharitonov (See Table 1).

Approach and Interpretation

What underpins Putin's electoral success? As noted above, his totals were undoubtedly due at least partly to manipulations of the electoral process documented in many other works. Without denying the importance of such factors, our goal here is to investigate the extent and quality of any actual connection Putin made with Russian voters. We do so by analyzing patterns in the two elections in which Putin ran personally for Russia's top executive post. Studying the presidential contests of 2000 and 2004 affords several analytical advantages. By bearing down on contests for one and the same post, and Russia's most influential post at that, we gain leverage on how his electorate changed during his reign. Moreover, there is reason to believe that this relationship to the electorate was largely forged during the period that spans the 2000 and 2004 election cycles. By 2004, Putin had already achieved the approximate level of electoral support (71 percent) that the two main pro-Putin

parties (United Russia and A Just Russia) would together garner in the Duma election of 2007 (72%) and that his chosen successor (Dmitry Medvedev) would enjoy in 2008 with Putin promising to be his prime minister (70 percent).[13]

To understand how all of the above-board and below-board methods actually translated into concrete voting decisions made by individuals, we make use of revealing data from two original and representative surveys of the Russian population designed by the authors and conducted just after both the 2000 and 2004 elections.[14] In the discussion that follows, we report patterns in how people's answers to different survey questions (the independent variables) correlate with which candidate they told us they voted for in the year of the survey (the dependent variable).[15] The most appropriate statistical technique for analyzing such data is multinomial logit regression analysis, and we give the quantities it produces real-world meaning by using another widely accepted technique.[16] To determine how large the effect of a particular factor (e.g., age) had on the Putin vote, we employ the results of the multinomial logit analysis to estimate (through a stochastic simulation exercise)

[13] As is normal for post-election surveys in most countries, including the United States, ours reports an inflated estimate of the percentage voting for the winner in both 2000 and 2004. In 2000, 59.6 percent report voting for Putin, and for the 2004 election, this figure is 80.4 percent.

[14] Both surveys were conducted by the Demoscope group at the Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences. [Author-specific information deleted.] Both surveys were also the final waves in panel surveys (where the same individuals are interviewed more than once) designed to understand public opinion dynamics related to the electoral cycles of those years. The earlier survey began with interviews of 1,919 potential voters carried out between November 13 and December 13, 1999, just before the December 1999 parliamentary elections. All of these that could be tracked down again (1,842) were reinterviewed after these parliamentary elections, between December 15, 1999, and January 25, 2000. The final wave of this survey, the wave on which we focus in this paper, was conducted between April 9 and June 10, 2000, after the presidential elections, and reinterviewed all but 22 of the people who had been reached in the second wave. The more recent survey round did not include a pre-parliamentary-election wave, instead beginning after the December 2003 Duma elections with interviews of 1,648 adult Russian citizens between December 19, 2003 and February 15, 2004. The second and final (post-presidential) wave, the one considered most closely here, questioned 1,496 of the original respondents between April 4 and May 11, 2004. Figures presented in this paper are calculated with a weighting system developed by Leslie Kish to correct for the normal oversampling of individuals who are more likely to be home when surveyers arrive (for example, elderly widows) or live in small households (for example, single young people).

[15] The independent variables are quantities reflecting indices or binary variables summarizing certain (sets of) answers. For answers of "hard to say" or "refuses to answer," we substitute the mean score on that variable for a given respondent as a way of using the information from the respondent's other answers without distorting the overall findings.

[16] For these calculations, wee use the software CLARIFY. See Gary King, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg, "Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation." *American Journal of Political Science*, v.44, 2000, pp.347-61; and Michael Tomz, Jason Wittenberg, and Gary King., *CLARIFY: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results*, Version 2.1, Stanford University, University of Wisconsin, and Harvard University, January 2003. Available at http://gking.harvard.edu.

how much more likely a median voter would be to vote for Putin if we change that factor from its minimum to its maximum value (e.g., from 18 years of age to 95), holding constant all causally prior or contemporaneous independent variables. This answer to the "how much" question is called a *total effect* of a given factor and is what we primarily analyze below.[17]

We immediately confront a problem when trying to sort out the relative importance of different factors, however, because many of these factors clearly influence one another. For example, an older person may vote for a Communist candidate because the Communist's campaign appeals directly to older people (for example, by promising higher pensions) or because older people are more likely to have leftist views due to longtime Soviet-era socialization. At the same time, people have leftist views for reasons other than age. If we include leftism and age in the same analysis, then, the statistical machinery will apportion the causal impact of the area of overlap, that part of leftism that is a product of age, attributing some of it solely to age and the rest solely to leftism. We use a "recursive" method designed to avoid this problem in the following way. The total effects estimates we report for a given factor are calculated *before* we introduce variables that we expect to come (for the most part) later in the causal chain. Thus, we would estimate the effect of age before we insert "later-stage" variables like leftism into the equation; the estimate of age's total effects, then, would capture those of its effects that work through leftist views as well as those that work through promises of higher pensions or any other factor that age influences. Since we do not expect that having leftist views makes people older, leaving leftism out of the earlier-stage calculation will not bias our estimate of age's importance. When estimating the total effect of later-stage variables like leftism, though, we of course retain causally prior variables like age in the equation as controls, so that we can sort out the independent effect of leftism (whether

[17] Following the general procedure set out in Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

or not created by age) from that which is solely due to the more fundamental variable of age (which serves as a control variable in calculating the impact of leftism).[18]

Accurately assessing the importance of influences on the Putin vote, therefore, requires making some assumptions as to causal sequences such as those given in the example of age and leftism. To facilitate comparability with prior published work using similar techniques, we follow scholarly precedent by starting with the sequencing strategy established and used by Colton to study Russian elections in 1995-96.[19] This approach groups factors into seven categories (blocs) and assigns each a place in the causal chain (thus the technique is called a "bloc recursive" method). The statistical results will thus depend on the accuracy of the assumptions: To the extent that we are mistaken in ordering this causal chain, our results for variables placed too late in the sequence may be underestimates while those for factors placed too early may be overestimates. This need not be a significant problem: Where this is in question, we can experiment with different orderings so as to establish upper and lower bounds for our estimates of a given factor's importance.

The sequencing developed by Colton for the Russian context considers *social characteristics* (like age, place of residence, gender, affluence) to come first in the causal chain since they generally cannot be derivative of people's views, beliefs, or attachments. Second in the causal chain, due to their immediacy and broad impact on views, come individuals' *perceptions of current conditions* (mostly economic) pertaining both to their own situation and that of Russia in general. Stage three variables include *attachments to parties* and *opinions on important issues* of the day.[20] At the next and fourth stage, we place *evaluation of the incumbent's performance* in office; any such evaluation based on something

[18] This method was developed by Miller and Shanks, *The New American Voter*, as was the idea of grouping factors into "blocs" in the way described in the next paragraph.
[19] Timothy J. Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[20] In the West partisanship is generally considered a source of assessments of current conditions, but in the Russian context, where partisanship is only first developing, we expect the causal flow to be overwhelmingly in the other direction.

other than partisanship, social structure, issue positions, or current condition assessments is not likely to be influencing these other things. Fifth stage factors include assessments of the *personal leadership qualities* (as separate from performance) of different candidates, and sixth stage variables are those of *issue competence*, or voter estimates as to which candidates, in the abstract, "would do the best job" of dealing with particular problems faced by Russia--considerations that we place at the end of the causal sequence precisely because we want to capture forward-looking effects that do not derive primarily from factors coming earlier in the chain. The regression results reported below in Table 2 for the Putin vote reflects the method just described for our 2000 and 2004 surveys, respectively.[21] The sections that follow discuss these findings.

Social Characteristics

Initially, Table 2 reveals that Putin's electorate had become much more clearly defined in terms of social structure between 2000 and 2004. In 2000, out of all the social characteristics we investigated, he stood out only among women (who were 6 percent more likely to vote for him than were men) and people who did not live in Russia's East, whose voters were 8 percent less likely to give him their ballots. By 2004, he was systematically reaping support from those in small communities, people with lower education levels, the Orthodox, youth, residents of ethnic minority republics, and residents of Russia's South as well as from his previous social base among women and non-Easterners. None of the total effects for these variables is particularly large taken individually (though the figure for age at .11 is rather impressive), but together they indicate that Putin was able to connect to particular segments of the population in ways that were not random by the time of his reelection.

[21] The actual regression analyses also estimated influences on voting for other significant candidates in these same races, but these findings are not of direct interest here and so are not reported. The full results are available upon request from the authors.

Table 2. Total Effects on the Presidential Vote 2000 (Differences in Predicted Probabilities)[a b]

Explanatory factors	***Putin 2000***	***Putin 2004***
Social characteristics (Stage 1)		
Woman	.06**	.05**
East	-.08*	-.02*
Community size	.03	-.05*
Education	.03	-.05**
Age group	-.08	-.11**
Republic		.05**
Orthodox		.07*
South	-.00	.04**
Affluence		.03
Ethnic non-Russian	.06	
Former member CPSU	-.08	
Consumption	-.08	
Moscow	-.05	
Current conditions (Stage 2)		
Sociotropic economic assessments	.24**	.27**
Pocketbook economic assessments	.09	.09**
Gained in 1990s	.06	.08**
Assessments of democratization	.36**	
Partisanship (Stage 3)	.16**	.08**
Issue opinions (Stage 3)		
Left-right	.35**	.03
Market reform	.12*	
West as Friend or Partner		.14**
Independent Chechnya	-.06	
Democratic regime	.23**	.06
Presidentialism	.26**	.24**
Centralization	-.01	
Strongman leader	.12**	
Evaluations of incumbents (Stage 4)		
Yeltsin	.25**	
Putin	.73**	.79**
Leadership qualities (Stage 5)	.75**	.19**
Issue competence (Stage 6)	.38**	.05**

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

a. Computed from multistage statistical model, holding causally prior and simultaneous variables constant at their medians. Sample N = 1,481.

b. Gaps in the table reflect one of three circumstances: (i) the variable was deemed relevant or effectively meaningless in only one of the two years; (ii) the variable could not be operationalized in exactly the same way due to differences in the questionnaire, such as new questions added in 2004, and similar variables were not found to be significant; or (iii) the variable was insignificant for the year in which it is omitted. In general, we are confident that filling in any of these empty spots will not alter the findings that are the focus of this paper.

Current Conditions: Russia's Economic Turnaround

Observers sometimes explain Putin's popularity with reference to economic performance, positing that Putin's rise has been all about the economy or, even more specifically, high oil prices that have produced economic growth. The common wisdom is not completely off base. To be sure, our data confirm some major changes in public perceptions of economic trends between 2000 and 2004, as indicated in Table 3. Most dramatically, the percentage of respondents believing that the Russian economy as a whole had declined in the past year (a sociotropic perception) was a whopping 69 percent in 2000 but only 9 percent in 2004, while the number believing it had improved leapt from 2 to 34 percent. More people in 2004 than in 2000 also reported that they personally had turned out to be mostly winners from the 1990s economic reforms, though even the 2004 figure remained quite low (13 percent).

Accordingly, there were statistically significant total effects in 2004 indicating that Putin systematically won more votes from people who: believed that the economy as a whole had improved over the previous year (a 27 percent total effect); reported that they had gained as a result of the economic reforms begun in 1992 (8 percent); and said that their family's economic ("pocketbook") situation had gotten better during the last 12 months (9 percent). And while the 27 percent total effect for sociotropic economic evaluations was only 3 percent more than it had been in 2000, the far greater number of people with positive views on the economy means that the overall impact of sociotropic economic considerations was a more important part of the overall story than before. All this does reflect a greater role for economic voting than in 2000, when only sociotropic considerations had mattered.

A closer look at our data, however, shows that caution is warranted in attributing too much causal power to the pure, actual improvement in the economy noticeable in official government statistics. To begin, we note that in 2004 the majority sociotropic perception (at

51 percent) is that nothing had changed in the economy over the previous year. Thus, those who believed the economy as a whole had improved during that time made up only about 41 percent of Putin's voters, while people reporting that their own situation was improving were only about half that share of his electorate. Only about a fifth of Putin's voters gave positive assessments on both the pocketbook and sociotropic measures.

Table 3. Citizen Perceptions of Current Economic Conditions, 2000 and 2004 (percentages)

Economic variable	***2000***	***2004***
How has <u>your family's material situation</u> changed over this past twelve months?		
Worsened a lot	12	7
Worsened a little	16	13
Remained unchanged	50	59
Improved a little	21	18
Improved a lot	1	1
Don't know	1	1
In general, did you <u>win or lose as a result of the reforms</u> carried out in the country beginning in 1992?		
Lost	44	35
Mostly lost	26	17
Lost some, won some (volunteered)	17	24
Mostly won	4	9
Won	2	4
Don't know	7	11
What do you think, over the past twelve months has the <u>economy of Russia</u>...?		
Gotten much worse	24	4
Gotten somewhat worse	45	5
Stayed the same	27	51
Gotten somewhat better	2	33
Gotten much better	0	1
Don't know	2	6

Even more interestingly, we notice that the share of people reporting that their own family's economic situation had improved during the past year was actually slightly *greater in 2000 than in 2004* (22 percent compared to 19 percent). Eight percent more people in 2000 reported that their family's situation had gotten worse or much worse compared to 2004, but the change benefited the "unchanged" rather than "improved" category in 2004.

These findings suggest that for voting, the change that mattered most between 2000 and 2004 was a general optimism regarding the economy and the government's ability to do something about it rather than the immediate experience or observation of positive change. This general optimism is likely related to three developments occurring between 2000 and 2004. First, in 2004, the incumbent president was in a much better position to claim credit for any personal economic improvement that people would have experienced in the previous year; Putin had been in a position to influence the economy as prime minister and then acting president for only about six months in 1999 and 2000. Second, the economy by 2004 had been growing for almost five years whereas the growth had only just started by 2000; people were likelier to have believed that their gains were more than fleeting in 2004 than 2000 and were thus likelier to consider the gains worthy of rewarding an incumbent for.[22] Third, a significant change in media reporting on the economy took place between the 1999-2000 and 2003-04 election cycles: a shift from the strongly negative media portrayals of presidential influence on economic trends in the late 1990s to highly positive portrayals, including the prominent association of newly positive economic growth figures with presidential policies, that became the norm as Putin's allies tightened their control of television coverage of important events. Thus by 2004, people whose personal economic situations had improved over the previous year were willing to reward incumbent authorities while they had not been so willing in 2000.

In sum, while economic voting has clearly played an important role in the Putin phenomenon, its proper interpretation is not as straightforward as sometimes assumed. What is also important is the overall political environment that shapes how people interpret broader national trends, assign credit, and allocate blame. Moreover, our other findings indicate that the economy was far from the whole story behind support for Putin.

[22] Joshua Tucker, in a personal communication with the authors, also noted that a question in 2004 asking about not just the previous 12 months, but the four years of Putin's presidency, might have revealed larger degrees of pocketbook improvement.

Partisanship and the Presidency

To what extent has partisanship proven to generate votes for Putin? The scholarly consensus is: "none at all." United Russia, the party that Putin has most consistently and directly supported, is widely regarded as little more than an administrative mechanism for elite advancement, coordination, and/or control with few real roots in the electorate.[23] Certainly the party's origins do little to discourage this view. Created less than three months before the 1999 Duma election, its late-campaign surge owed primarily to Putin's endorsement and it is probably fair to say that no expert has even thought to explain Putin's electoral performance as deriving primarily from Unity loyalists.

This reflects the general state of party attachments during Putin's first term (see Table 4 for a summary of key findings from our surveys). Borrowing Colton's measure of "transitional partisanship," which we used in our surveys, only 49 percent of Russia's potential electorate (and only 53 percent of actual presidential voters) in spring 2000 named any real party as "my party" or, declining that, identified any party as "more than others" reflecting their "interests, views, and concerns."[24] Of the whole set of transitional partisans, the largest group by far was KPRF partisans (22 percent), with Unity making up only 11 percent. Thus even if every single Unity partisan had cast a ballot for Putin, he would still have had to win tens of millions of supporters from other sources.

By 2004, Unity had merged with Fatherland-All Russia and several smaller entities to become United Russia, and Putin's team had invested far more resources into its promotion and development at all levels of politics than it had done for Unity in 2000. This paid off in

[23] Most of the best works on the development of the party over the Putin era, therefore, find little reason to discuss any connection it might have to the electorate independent of Putin. For example, Reuter and Remington 2008 and Smyth, Wilkening, and Urasova 2007.

[24] Colton 2000. The concept reflects the expectation that in a country emerging from long-term one-party or nonparty rule, true partisanship in the Western sense is unlikely to emerge for some time, necessitating the development of a softer measure that can capture those attachments that may be developing during the transition to multiparty politics.

the form of a surge of United Russia transitional partisanship, which reached 26 percent among the electorate and eclipsed the KPRF's dwindling base of loyalists, now measured by our survey at just 8 percent. But even though 100 percent of United Russia partisans said they cast a ballot for Putin in the 2004 presidential race, this base was still only 36 percent of all Putin voters. Putin thus had to appeal to many other voters to get a majority, and did so in part by declining invitations to join and lead United Russia, running for reelection as an independent. Cowing the most popular leaders of other major parties out of the race also played into this strategy. His effort was clearly a success: Our survey even shows that 15 percent of his voters in 2004 were transitional partisans of parties other than United Russia. The plurality of Putin's support, as in 2000, came from independents. It is interesting to note, however, that both the share of independents and partisans for other parties among his voters declined between 2000 and 2004, while the share of United Russia partisans nearly doubled.

Turning now to how partisanship stacks up against other potential influences on the two Putin votes, we find something of a puzzle: Even though the share of United Russia transitional partisans in the electorate almost doubled between 2000 and 2004, the estimated total effect of Unity/United Russia partisanship on the likelihood of voting for Putin is virtually halved. Yet 100 percent of United Russia voters voted for Putin, so how can this be? The answer takes us back to the discussion of causal chains. Someone who professed to be a Unity loyalist was more likely to have been displaying a loyalty to authorities that did not much reflect causally prior variables (notably views of economic conditions, which were poor or not seen to be stable, or social characteristics that Unity did not target to any particular degree). People who had become United Russia supporters by 2004, on the other hand, had quite likely formed their attachments to the organization partly on the basis of evaluation of current conditions as well as on the basis of belonging to certain social groups that United Russia had campaigned particularly actively to represent during Putin's first term

(for example, youth or less-educated workers).[25] Moreover, even those who were Unity loyalists in 2000 had much more information that could form the basis for supporting Putin directly in 2004, including four years during which his relationships to social groups could be better evaluated. In short, the same social appeals and current conditions that were leading people to vote for Putin were also behind the rise in loyalty to United Russia, meaning that the latter had less of an independent effect than it had in 2000 even though it now claimed more loyalists and even though more of these loyalists voted for Putin.

Table 4. Summary Information: Partisans and the Putin Vote, 2000 and 2004 (Percentages)

Characteristic	***2000***	***2004***
Partisans		
In the electorate	49	47
Among participating voters	53	52
Unity/United Russia partisans		
In the electorate	11	26
Among participating voters	12	29
KPRF partisans		
In the electorate	22	8
Among participating voters	24	9
Proportion of Unity/United Russia partisans who vote for Putin	96	100
Proportion of Putin supporters who are Unity/United Russia partisans	19	36
Proportion of Putin supporters who are partisans of other parties	25	15
Proportion of Putin supporters who are nonpartisans	57	49

Overall, our results do indicate partisanship still played a significant role in Putin's vote in 2004: An otherwise median voter who was a United Russia loyalist was found to be 8 percent more likely to vote for Putin than was an otherwise identical voter who was not a transitional partisan for the party, even after we control for causally prior factors. But the role of partisanship as an independent factor in presidential politics had clearly declined. And we must also keep in mind that even this 8 percent total effect could be an overestimate if our causal sequencing in the bloc recursive model is at least partly off. If we decide that United

[25] On United Russia's connection to social groups, see Henry E. Hale, "Parties to Manipulation: Russia as a Case Study in Hybrid Regime Partisanship," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, New Orleans, November 15-18, 2007.

Russia partisanship must be completely derivative of all other blocs of factors, it is found to have a total effect of 2 percent, or 3 percent if we place it not at the end of the causal chain but right after performance evaluation of Putin. Thus we find with a great deal of confidence that partisanship is one influence on Putin's vote, which is interesting, but it is far from the most important one.

Issue Opinions

There is some evidence of a decline in the overall importance of voters' personal stands on prominent issues of the day when it came to the Putin votes of 2000 and 2004, but this factor nevertheless remained quite significant on the strength of a shift in the kinds of issues that mattered. Most dramatic was disappearing role of whether voters saw themselves as belonging to the political left or right on an 11-point scale. In 2000, voters' presidential choices varied tightly with their self-placement on this scale, with Putin reaping total effects to the tune of 35 percent from people who considered themselves rightists rather than leftists. This same factor is found to have been completely insignificant in 2004, however, as Putin won votes from people on both sides of this political spectrum.

One might suspect that this is because people came to see Putin primarily as a centrist in 2004 and that this explains his appeal to left and right alike. But in fact, on the 0-10 scale, where 0 is the far left and 10 the far right, more people placed Putin at the far-right 10 than at any other point, with the central position, 5, coming only in second. His mean score was 7.3, decidedly to the right of the spectrum generally and well to the right even of the population as a whole, whose mean self-placement we found to be 5.9 in 2004, with 5 being the most common mass response. Nor was there any noticeable shift toward the center in how people saw Putin between 2000 and 2004. In 2000, almost exactly as in 2004, his modal score was

10 and his mean 7.5.[26] Putin did not so much shift to the center, it appears, as win more votes on based on issues or factors that did not boil down to left and right.

Two such issues, we find, involved choices on foreign policy and constitutional state structure. Perhaps the most interesting is the systematically strong support for Putin, to the tune of a 14-percent total effect, among people who believed Russia should treat the West more as an ally or friend than as a rival or enemy.[27] Indeed, contrary to widespread perceptions in the West, Putin is not seen by Russians as anti-Western. Asked in 2004 which treatment of the West Putin stood for, over two-thirds (68 percent) placed him as supporting treatment of the West as an "ally" and the second most frequent response was as a "friend." Only 5 percent thought Putin believed in treating the West as a "rival" and almost no one said he wanted to relate to it as an "enemy." Kharitonov (as well as Glaziev, Malyshkin, and even Mironov) were all placed closer to the anti-Western side of the scale than Putin was, though fewer respondents felt confident in identifying these other politicians' stands. Issues of foreign policy nationalism were not found to be important predictors of Putin voting in 2000.

The other issue position playing a significant role in 2004 was largely unchanged from 2000: a preference for strong presidential as opposed to parliamentary power.[28] Given Putin's style of rule, it is not surprising that voters associated him with presidentialist policies. It is probably partly the case that their approval of him personally led 53 percent of our respondents to prefer presidentialism as a way of giving more power to the leader they trusted most given that he just happened to already occupy that post in 2004. In line with this supposition, we also find that when Putin was Prime Minister back in fall 1999 and the

[26] In 2000, the population's mean was 5.1 and mode was 5. Thus the masses seem to have shifted slightly to the right in their self-placement during Putin's first term.

[27] The variable is a four-point scale based on the question: "There are various opinions about what relations should be like between Russia and the West. What do you think of how Russia should relate to the West?" The options are: "as to an enemy," "as to a rival," "as to an ally," or "as to a friend."

[28] The variable is a five-point scale based on the following question: "Some people believe that, regardless of who is President of Russia, he should have more power than the Parliament. Others want the Parliament to have much more power than the President. What is your point of view?" The answers are: "the president should have more power" (value 1), an unlabeled value 2, "the president and parliament should be equal in power" (value 3), an unlabeled value 4, and "parliament should have more power" (value 5).

incumbent president Yeltsin was dismally unpopular, only 24 percent of our respondents thought the president should have more influence than parliament.[29] Nevertheless, even if we treat support for presidentialism as coming after support for Putin's performance in our causal chain,[30] the total effect of the presidentialism issue does not disappear but still comes in at a respectable .09. Thus there is good reason to believe that many people supported Putin in both 2000 and 2004 in part due to an independent preference for a strong leader, a role to which they consistently found him well suited. That said, clearly others appear to have formed their preferences as to constitutional order on the more contingent basis of liking Putin.

Evaluation of Putin's Performance in Office

Immensely important in 2004 as it had been in 2000 is the degree to which voters approved of Putin's overall performance in office.[31] A shift from complete disapproval to complete approval, controlling for causally contemporaneous and prior factors, tended to make an otherwise median 2000-vintage voter 73 percent more likely to cast a ballot for Putin and the 2004-model voter 79 percent more likely to do so, as the tables of total effects indicate. This would seem unsurprising because approval of Putin's performance, which we expect partly to reflect economic performance assessments and perceptions of his actions on key issues, is getting very close in the causal chain to the actual decision to vote for Putin.

To be more sure of the latter claim, though, it is useful to look more closely at how voters view some of the most significant individual initiatives that Putin undertook during his first term in office. Readers are directed back to Table 3 for a summary of key perceptions on

[29] The 1999 figure is from wave 1 of the 1999-2000 survey.
[30] That is, in estimating for the effect of support for presidentialism, we are controlling for approval of Putin's performance in office.
[31] We use standard wording here: "Some people like Vladimir Putin's activity, and others do not. What about you, do you approve of Putin's activity in the post of President of Russia?" The given answers are fully approve, approve, approve some and disapprove some, disapprove, and completely disapprove.

economic performance, and we will recall it was reported there that only 33 percent believed the economy as a whole was improving as of 2004 and that even fewer reported that their families were actually experiencing such improvement relative to the previous year. As for other Putin first-term initiatives, we present Table 5. There we also find levels of support and perceptions of success that are far lower than the 76 percent approval rating we detected in our survey during spring 2004. While we may have happened to miss the particular initiatives that are actually generating the approval ratings, we would note that we included indicators of key successes or reforms stressed most prominently by Putin and his allies during the lead-in to the 2004 presidential election.[32]

Table 5. Popular Views of Some Putin First-Term Initiatives as of Spring 2004

40%	Believed the level of **order** in the country had increased under Putin
9%	Believed the level of **corruption** had decreased
8%	Believed the level of **crime** had decreased
31%	Approved of the new land law providing for **private land ownership**
58%	Approved of the introduction of **jury trials**
31%	Approved of the creation of seven **federal districts** led by presidential envoys
14%	Approved of the 13-percent **flat tax**
43%	Believed the situation in **Chechnya** had improved
6%	Feared **terrorism** less than before
76%	**Approved of Putin's performance overall**

We also asked our respondents an open-ended question in both 2000 and 2004: "Which of the decisions taken by Putin over the past four years were, in your opinion, the very best for the country?" The set of issues mentioned in responses to this question did not differ significantly from those captured in our questions and none of the volunteered questions dominated. Indeed, in 2000, a full 48 percent could not name one decision they thought was best under Putin or reported that he had made no good decisions, and this figure was only slightly smaller (44 percent) in 2004. All this adds to our confidence that the gap

[32] A few other developments (such as the Khodorkovsky arrest and changes in the strength of the state, US-Russian relations, and income inequality) do not produce a significantly different picture than what is presented in Table 5.

between the general and the specific performance assessments was not due to our overlooking any particular key achievements or issues when designing our survey questions.

The open-ended questions (which also included a query as to what Putin's worst decision was) also shed some light on what particular aspects of Putin's performance resonated most strongly with voters. As Table 6 illustrates, the economy appears not to be the main story. Among respondents who were able to name a decision in response to our questioning, only 15 percent mentioned an economic decision as Putin's best in 2000, and this figure had increased only to 20 percent by 2004. Moreover, during the same time interval, the share citing an economic decision as Putin's *worst* move grew from 9 percent to 20 percent. As for identifying the decisions that did generate the most support for Putin, there are two ways to proceed. One is simply to look at the issue areas in which the most people named Putin's best move. From this vantage point, respondents' favorite Putin decisions in 2000 tended to be in the realm of law and order (cited by 56 percent of those naming a decision, mostly mentioning Chechnya) and, secondarily, social policy (42 percent). By 2004, Putin's social policies were seen in the most favorable light, while the number citing law-and-order decisions had nearly halved. Both law-and-order and social policy decisions, though, were mentioned significantly more often than economic ones in both 2000 and 2004, with foreign policy, political, and stylistic decisions remaining far behind.

Another approach would identify those general policy areas that tended to generate more citations as "best decisions" than as "worst decisions." Interestingly, in 2000, even more people named a law-and-order policy as Putin's worst move than named one as his best, and only in the realm of social policy did the positives overwhelmingly outweigh the negatives (with only 1 percent of those citing any decision naming social policy as his worst). In 2004, there was no single policy area that generated a strong positive balance for Putin.

His decisions on law and order and social policy tended to be cited by respondents only 7-8 percent more often as his best than as his worst, with foreign policy netting positively to about the same degree (a change from 2000, when it was a small but net negative). Indeed, one of the interesting results from the open-ended questions is that the share of our respondents naming any decision as Putin's worst increased much more dramatically (from 20 percent to 36%) between 2000 and 2004 than did the share of those naming one as his best (from 51 percent to 56 percent).

Table 6. Most Frequently Mentioned "Best" and "Worst" Decisions Taken by Putin (Pct.)

Issue area	***2000***[a]	***2004***[b]
Best		
Law and order	56	29
Social	42	44
Economic	15	20
Political	1	12
Foreign policy	1	12
Stylistic	5	1
Worst		
Law and order	60	21
Social	1	37
Economic	9	20
Political	24	16
Foreign policy	4	5
Stylistic	4	1

a. 1999–2000 panel, wave 3 (N = 359 weighted cases).
b. 2003–04 panel, wave 2 (N = 545 weighted cases).

All of these findings suggest that we are encountering voter approval of a very general direction in which voters saw Putin moving the country, including efforts that may not always be seen bearing immediate fruit (or that voters may even have seen as hopeless) but that they gave him credit for trying or tackling in a particular way. Indeed, an index created on the basis of the factors in Table 5 is strongly correlated with support for Putin.[33] Of course, we may also be seeing some of the effect identified by Rose, Mishler, and Munro, who find evidence that Russian citizens have been increasingly voicing support for Putin

[33] Results available from the authors upon request.

largely because his rule (and the political regime that he represents) has more and more become seen as inevitable, with the alternatives increasingly unthinkable.[34] We must keep in mind additionally that voters may also be making implicit comparisons with past leaders they have experienced, including Yeltsin and Gorbachev, against which backdrop anyone who seems generally competent and proactive might be expected to generate positive performance assessments.[35]

Leadership Qualities

Part of the Putin story does seem to be qualities that voters attribute to him as a leader. To test this, we created a four-point leadership qualities index based on whether people answered "yes," "probably yes," "probably no," or "no" when asked if they thought Putin was accurately described in the following ways: "intelligent and reliable," "a strong leader," "an honest and trustworthy person," and "really cares about people like you" (similar indices were computed for the other main presidential candidates). As indicated in Table 2, the total effect of this factor was a respectable .19 in 2004, but that same table reveals that this represents a dramatic decline from 2000, when an otherwise median voter would have become 75 percent more likely to vote for Putin if he or she had moved from the most negative to the most positive assessment of Putin's leadership quality.

This may reflect a couple developments. For one thing, it is compatible with the Rose, Mishler, and Munro thesis that electoral support for Putin is increasingly reflecting a perception that he is inevitable rather than skilled or successful in any particular way as a leader. Yet as Table 7 reports, people continue to give him high ratings on most of these leadership qualities, and in general his scores have gone up. Moreover, the tables we present above indicate that support for Putin remains quite structured on many other factors. Indeed,

[34] Rose, Mishler, and Munro 2004, 2006.
[35] On Yeltsin, see Timothy J. Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life* (NY: Basic Books, 2008); on Gorbachev, Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997).

it seems most likely to us that the decline in significance of the leadership qualities index indicates that voters as of 2004 had much more information upon which to make their voting decisions, including a clearer understanding of Putin's issue positions and performance quality based on four years of his leadership.[36] Thus leadership qualities still mattered in 2004, but they were increasingly overshadowed by factors coming earlier in the causal chain, especially general evaluations of actual performance.

Table 7. Citizen Assessments of Putin's Personal Qualities, 2000 and 2004 (Percentage Positive Assessments Minus Negative Assessments)

Quality	***2000***	***2004***
Intelligence	90	92
Strength	77	83
Integrity	63	78
Empathy	50	60

Forward-Looking Issue Competence

Our surveys also asked potential voters which of the main presidential candidates they thought would "would do the best job" of tackling a particular problem or whether they thought there was "no particular difference between the parties." We asked about five problems: "improving the economy;" "safeguarding human rights and democratic freedoms;" "providing social guarantees to people;" "promoting Russia's international interests;" and "combating crime and corruption." While Putin was named "best" many times more frequently than were his rivals combined in 2004, and while this did reflect an increase in voter estimation of his issue competence, we find that the impact of such considerations on individual voters' decisions drops significantly between 2000 and 2004. The total effect estimate declines from .38 in 2000 to a mere .05 in 2004, as Table 2 shows. Most likely this also reflects the broader shift we have begun to document above from voting decisions based on more fleeting or future-oriented assessments about personality or leadership to evaluations

[36] As Rose, Mishler, and Munro (2006) also note is an important effect of the passage of time.

based on perceptions of four years of performance and specific issues on which Putin had a whole term to recommend himself.

Conclusions

Overall, a three-level story appears to emerge from our analysis. At the most general level, we find that to write off the Putin vote as reflecting nothing but fraud, coercion, or the mindless support for authority would be to grossly misrepresent how voters relate to their regime.[37] Moving a step down the ladder of generality, we also find evidence to characterize the evolution of the Putin vote in the following way: While personality and stylistic considerations initially played significant roles, such factors have declined sharply in importance at the same time that substantive, performance-related factors have come to dominate as Russia's hybrid regime system has matured. At an even more specific level, we find some very interesting particulars fleshing out this story, particularly when it comes to the role of economic performance and issue preferences.

For one thing, those who do note the importance of performance usually point to Russia's oil-driven economic revival as the main source of Putin's support, but we find these claims to be exaggerated and oversimplified. To be sure, we do not question that economic voting matters in Russia--indeed, this is one of our most important findings.[38] More clearly than in 2000, people in 2004 were systematically more likely to cast a ballot for Putin when they were able to report either that their own family's or the country's economic situation was on the upswing or that they had benefited from the reforms of the 1990s. Consistently

[37] Reinforcing this conclusion, we also found that adding an additional bloc of variables at the end of the causal chain to capture perceived administrative pressure as an influence on the self-reported vote did not generate any significant results. That is, when other factors were controlled for, people who reported that either their workplace administration or their governor were backing Putin were no more likely to vote for (or against) him than were others.

[38] Here we reinforce the comparative findings on the postcommunist world by Joshua Tucker in *Regional Economic Voting: Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, 1990-1999* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

most important were the sociotropic considerations. But we also find that this economic voting was not entirely determined by actually experienced or perceived changes in the economy, and that a majority of Putin's voters were still supporting him in 2004 despite perceiving either a worsening or unchanging economy that year. In fact, slightly fewer people in 2004 reported experiencing personal economic improvement than they did in 2000, but in 2004 they were far more willing to give the incumbent authorities electoral credit. We thus call attention to a series of factors that are likely to mediate between pocketbook or sociotropic perceptions of the economy and the willingness of people to reward or punish a given incumbent. Such factors include: mass media, which can be manipulated by hybrid regime incumbents to link themselves in voter minds to improvements (or delink themselves from problems); time in office, which increases the credibility of government claims to be responsible for success (or of opposition claims that the government is responsible for failure); and the duration of success, which helped convince people that the success was more than fleeting and thus worth rewarding an incumbent for. The finding with the biggest implications for understanding the distinct nature of hybrid regimes is likely to be the power Russian incumbents have over mass media. One might even forumalate a hypothesis for future testing in other countries along the following lines: In hybrid regimes where the state controls the most influential mass media, economic voting is likely to be more pronounced where the economy is improving (since media will be used to link incumbents to the positive performance) than where the economy is deteriorating (when media will be used to separate the authorities from blame).

Even this more nuanced notion of economic voting is far from all that underpinned the Putin vote, however. For one thing, when people were asked to identify Putin's best and worst decisions without being given a preconceived list, only 20 percent named economic moves as his best ones in 2004. Moreover, just as many named economic decisions as being

his worst in the same year. The number citing economic decisions as his best in 2000 was even smaller. And when we asked Russian voters what they thought of signal Putin economic policies, such as the flat tax or the expansion of private land ownership, a generous interpretation is that the response was lukewarm. Instead, people more frequently liked best Putin's moves in the realms of law-and-order and social policy, though even here no one issue stands out enough to justify the conclusion that it alone drove Putin's high popularity. Putin thus appears to be drawing performance-based support from a wide range of his perceived activities and responsibilities, with the sum of this performance being perceived as greater than its parts.

Our findings additionally suggest that at least two other particulars in our story deserve more prominence in accounts of Putin's electoral prowess than they are currently given. First, we show that Putin had quite successfully connected with particular social groups by 2004, establishing an especially strong relationship with youth, the Orthodox, and certain downtrodden parts of the electorate. Second, and perhaps most surprisingly, our data indicate that Putin's popularity is in fact at least partly based on topical issue positions (and to a small degree, even emerging party loyalties), items that are usually written off almost entirely in accounts of Putin's success. Some elements of Putin's issue connections to the electorate did fall away during his first term. Left-right orientations, important in 2000, were a non-factor in 2004. Putin was still seen as a clear rightist, but won support from both ends of the political spectrum despite this reputation. Issue-oriented voters thus supported him in 2004 on the basis of issues that did not collapse into left and right. Particularly interesting is the newly prominent role of foreign policy orientation as of 2004.

These findings have some important implications for how we might best think of the role of public opinion in hybrid regimes. First, they suggest that elections in such systems are not purely the product of fraud, voter coercion, brainwashing, or a culturally or historically

driven support for authority figures. Instead, hybrid regime leaders can forge highly structured relationships with the electorate that can at least partly underpin these leaders' electoral success. Second, contrary to most treatments of public opinion in hybrid regimes, we find that the role of personality-driven leadership has been decreasing rather than increasing in Russian voting patterns and that the role of performance evaluations has actually been increasing. Indeed, good actual performance in office can be a significant source of power for hybrid regime leaders independently of the various mechanisms of manipulation that they wield. Moreover, we have found surprising evidence for the continued importance of issue positions in the Putin vote. And while the particular issues have shifted, they have not moved in the way that most thinking about hybrid regimes leadership would suppose: Putin has not moved to the center of the left-right scale, but has remained firmly on the political right. While he no longer derived support for this rightism in 2004 as he did in 2000, he instead drew backers based on other issues. Among these other issues, the least surprising is support for a strong presidential political system. More likely to raise eyebrows among comparative scholars is that Putin's first-term success was built not on promoting animosity with the West so as to promote a siege mentality, as is widely presumed, but the opposite--being seen as a greater advocate of friendlier relations with West than his main election rivals. Our findings also suggest that transitional partisanship cannot be written off entirely as a factor in Putin's ascendancy, which indicates that dominant-party-building may be able to bear electoral fruit for party creators earlier than has often been thought.[39]

Of course, we in no way deny the very important impact of the systematic electoral manipulations commonly practiced by hybrid regime leaders. Putin has forged these connections to the electorate, including his aura of successful performance, in part *through*

[39] On the importance of political parties as supplying political stability in autocratic and hybrid regimes, see Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, v.2, June 1999; and Lucan Way, "Authoritarian State-Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine," *World Politics*, v.57, January 2005.

his regime's artificial shaping of the supply of ballot options, tendentious media coverage (including the ability to both influence views and set the agenda), and his own personal image. Our claim is merely that it is a mistake to stop there, to treat voters in hybrid regimes like zombies who have no autonomous role in relating to their authorities. This mild corrective to conventional wisdoms may not bring a great deal of hope for future democratic change, but it does suggest we would be unwise to rule it out.