Democratization in Regions of Russia: An Empirical Assessment

Mikhail Beliaev

Abstract
This paper estimates the relative levels of democratization in 77 regions of Russia at two time-points: 1995/96 and 1999/2000. The estimates are based on a variety of empirical data on electoral competitiveness, mass-media independence, and development of civil society and party systems in the regions under study. The estimates are justified by several methods.

Key Words
Democratization, measurement, Russia

More than fifteen years have passed since Mikhail Gorbachev initiated political liberalization in the former Soviet Union. Russia has considerably democratized, but it has not consolidated as a liberal democracy. Since the new constitution was adopted in December 1993, the country has gone through four elections to the lower house of the parliament, the State Duma, and three presidential elections. The nation-wide electoral campaigns, except the last presidential election, were highly competitive, but, according to many observers, far from satisfying the standards of ‘fair democratic elections’. There have been many reports on how the government-controlled mass media and the judicial system worked to the advantage of the candidates that had close ties with Kremlin or regional administrations.

The situation with political freedoms conveys the impression that “everyone is free but some are freer than others”, to paraphrase G. Orwell’s famous expression. Certainly, anti-government demonstrations may and, in fact, do take place in the heart of Moscow, as well as in many other cities. Numerous political parties exist and compete with each other for voters’ support. The picture of the Russian democratization becomes, however, less rosy, when the analyst takes into account the difference in the degree to which pro-government and opposition candidates have access to mass-media or considers the ability of the executive to recourse to ‘administrative’ or quasi-judicial means to restrict ‘undesirable’ electoral competition (for detailed reports on this issue see: Brown, 2001; McFaul, 2001; Robinson, 2003;
There have been numerous attempts to assign a one-or two-word label to the kind of political regime that has emerged in Russia. Authors speak of 'delegative democracy', 'guided democracy', 'electoral clanism', 'oligarchy', 'partial democracy' and, most frequently in the recent years, of a political system of 'managed democracy' (Brown, 2001; Fish, 2001; Kubicek, 1994; Lukin, 2001; Robinson, 2003; Smirnov, 2001; Solnick, 1999; White, 2000). It is rather difficult to locate the Russian political system on a scale of approximation to the contemporary Western liberal democratic model. In the second half of the 1990s, its place would be, perhaps, between 'soft authoritarianism' of some East Asian countries and 'streitbare Demokratie'² of the post-war West Germany. The intensiveness of electoral competition distinguished Russia of that time from the political systems of such countries as Malaysia or Singapore. The arbitrary nature of constraints on democratic policy-making made the difference between the initial stages of the Russian democratization and post-war West Germany. Since 2000, a trend toward a more concentrated political regime becomes apparent. The political system of Russia more and more resembles the classic "development dictatorships" of Eastern Asia, at least, in terms of structure and proclaimed goals, however, not always, in regard to efficiency.

How could this, at the first sight, scratchy political system emerge? Which factors may impede a more stable progress in democratic development? Which factors could facilitate further democratization of the Russian political system? In order to address these questions, the scientific community needs a reliable assessment of the relative levels of democratization in regions of Russia during the transformation process.

The present essay analyzes political development in 77 regions of Russia since 1995—96, when elected governors replaced presidential appointees as chief executives in most Russian regions and the regional political systems rapidly diversified in terms of political liberalization and democratic accountability. As a result, the political system acquired the shape, in which the fragmented picture of Russian democracy becomes even more complex when one looks at the developments at the regional level. On the one hand, there are regions that exemplify the ability of the Russian people to develop a strong civil society and competitive political system, e.g. the city of Saint-Petersburg and the Yekaterinburg oblast. On the other hand, elites of some other regions, as Hale (2000, p. 4) puts it, "have been steadily consolidating autocracy, not democracy, and learning all kinds of tricks to exclude opponents from the ballot and defeat those that manage to squeak onto it". For example, the incumbent president of Tatarstan was the only candidate in the 1996 election in that republic, despite the fact that Russian federal legislation does not recognize the validity of unopposed elections. Leaders of Ingushetia and Kabarda-Balkaria were able to gather epic 99% of votes in elections in 1993 and 1997, respectively. In several regions, the judicial authorities used minor formal mistakes to withdraw 'undesirable' candidates from electoral competition. Reportedly, courts acted under the pressure by the regional executive.

The main task of this essay is to estimate the relative level of democratization in regions of the Russian Federation, i.e. to construct a measurement that would be instrumental for this and further research in Russian regional politics and political economy. The relative levels of regional democratization are estimated at two time-points: 1995/1996 and 1999/2000. In both cases, the results nation-wide parliamentary (in December 1995 and 1999) and presidential (in June-July 1996 and March 2000) provide us with additional information on the current state of the regional political systems.
The remainder of the present paper is organized as follows: First, I review theoretical perspectives on operationalization of 'democracy' for the purpose of comparative investigations. Then, I consider possible indicators of democratic development in the regions under study, and combine their information into a scale. Next, I offer some additional justification for the constructed 'Index of Democratic Institutionalization'. Conclusion summarizes the results of our research endeavour.

**Conceptualizations of 'Democracy' in Empirical Studies**

In the last decades, the explosive growth of quantitative investigations on determinants and consequences of political regimes has given an additional impetus to measurement of 'democracy'. Conceptualizations that have been advanced for this purpose are numerous, but they can be roughly classified into three groups: minimalist concepts, which associate democracy with regularly held competitive elections; concepts related to democratic institutionalization; and concepts, which also take into account the social embeddedness of a democratic polity, i.e. democratic consolidation.

**Minimalist concepts**

The minimalist conceptualizations focus on the role of electoral processes in political regimes under study. Political systems are regarded as democratic if they hold competitive elections and these elections ultimately determine the composition of the government. Respectively, researchers are recommended to concentrate on competitiveness of elections, or on electoral outcomes in terms of alternations in power. A representative example of the later approach is the so-called 'two-turnover test'. According to this criterion, a regime qualifies as a democracy, when competitive elections produce, at least, two alternations in power without an authoritarian restoration in-between. Another example of the minimalist approach is Dahl's idea that the presence of an opposition party can be considered as the "most distinctive characteristic of democracy itself" and its absence as "evidence, if not always conclusive proof, for the absence of democracy" (Dahl, 1971, p. 8).

A remarkable (in respect to its simplicity) version of the minimalist approach is Vanhanen's index of democracy (see: Vanhanen, 1990). The author employs the electoral turnout as a proxy for political participation and the electoral competitiveness, which he measures as hundred minus the percentage of votes received by the major party, as a measure of political contestation. The aggregate index takes the value of the geometric average of these two indicators. However, Vanhanen's index, as well as other operationalizations based on the minimalist understanding of democracy, does not always produce reliable estimates. A possible explanation is that the election day is only one day (or few days) of, at least, 365 days a year, in which democracy is expected to operate.

**Concepts related to democratic institutionalization**

More sophisticated conceptualizations of democracy account not only for the issue whether the electoral competition takes place or not, but also for the fairness of this competition and for the actual ability of various social groups to take part in the power contest by democratic means. From this perspective, the crucial question is whether there are established norms and patterns, i.e. institutions, through which the diverse interests of the public are translated into policy-making.

The most frequently considered dimensions of democratic institutionalization are freedoms of information and association. For example, Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1988) define democracy as a political re-
gime that satisfies three main criteria: "... meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civilian and political liberties—freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations—sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation." (p. xvi). In respect to freedoms of information and association, an institutionalist assessment of 'democracy' may ask three types of questions: (a) is the respective freedom legally recognized, e.g. does the constitution proclaim the right of citizens to establish political parties? (b) is the freedom actually enforced, e.g. can citizens form a new political party indeed? (c) is the right actually realized, e.g. have citizens established a number of effectively competing parties?  

Concepts related to consolidation of democracy

In addition to the level of democratization, one may ask the questions related to the sustainability of a democratic regime, public acceptance of democracy, and embeddedness of democratic rules of the game in a given society. These questions have generated a large number of attempts to evaluate the quality of political regimes from the point of view of democratic consolidation. The latter is usually considered as a multidimensional phenomenon. For example, Linz, Stepan and Gunther (1995) argue that, in terms of democratic consolidation, a political regime can be assessed on three scales:

- Structural: ... It posits that no significant reserve domains of power should exist that preclude important public policies from being determined by laws, procedures, and institutions that have been sanctioned by the new democratic process.
- Attitudinal: When a strong majority of public opinion acknowledges that the regime's democratic procedures and institutions are appropriate and legitimate, and where support for antisytem alternatives is quite low or isolated from the prodemocratic forces.
- Behavioral: When no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actor spends significant resources attempting to achieve its objectives by challenging the regime's institutions or rules with appeals for a military coup or revolutionary activities, and when prodemocratic forces abide by its rules and do not engage in semiloyal politics." (p.79).

Of course, there have been many attempts to combine various conceptualization of 'democracy'. As a result, assessments of democratic development increase their sophistication, frequently at the expense of transparency and balance in the estimation.

Choosing an appropriate conceptualization

Which of these diverse concepts is most suitable to organize an assessment of the interregional variance in democratic development in Russia? The below analysis of democratic development in regions of Russia is guided by two considerations. First, any concept of democracy has, explicitly or not, an empirical reference point. For example, critics of the 'two-turnover test' refer to the examples of Italy and Japan in their reasoning that the test is too demanding. They assume that both these countries were democratic long before they passed the test. Another example is the argument against introduction of the social security net as a criterion of democracy. The critics argue that this may create an unbalanced assessment in which Scandinavian countries will appear much more democratic than the United States.

Thus, any conceptualization assumes that there are
some countries that exemplify democracy. In order to make this assumption explicit, I take the countries of Western Europe and the overseas Anglo-Saxon world as the empirical reference point for this study. Of course, none of these countries fully represents the democratic ideal. One may expect some variance in terms of democratization among them. However, the variance among these countries should be considerably smaller than the difference between the average reference-point country and the average 'less democratic country' on each of the selected indicators of democratization. Thus, an indicator can be included in the below assessment only if, in a cross-national comparison, all the reference-point countries would score on this indicator high and many other countries of the world would lag behind them in a considerable distance.

As the second criterion for the selection of indicators, the present study will employ their policy relevance. For example, the dispersion of democratic values among the population may be an important dimension of democratic consolidation; but the development or restriction of free media is, in many circumstances, a policy choice, while deep popular beliefs are less amenable to intentional manipulations. Respectively, the intended assessment will, on the one hand, not rely on measures of democratic support as the only indicators of democratic development and, on the other hand, pay attention to the indicators that are more policy relevant in the sense that they can be changed deliberately.

Because of these two considerations, I will concentrate on three dimensions of regional political regimes in order to assess the variance in democratic development among regions of Russia: (1) electoral competitiveness, (2) mass-media independence, (3) development of civil society and party system. This combination is not a mere atheoretical fix. As the above-presented literature review indicates, electoral competitiveness, democratic institutionalization and democratic support are three principle axes, on which the approximation of political regimes to the democratic ideal has been empirically assessed in previous studies; and this has strong theoretical groundings. However, the public support seems to be less amendable to the policy-induced change, at least, in a non-totalitarian society. Thus, I prefer to concentrate on electoral competitiveness and institutional development.

Another important reason for the choice of electoral competitiveness and the development of democratic institutions as the criteria to assess relative democratization of Russian regions is the place of these issues in the on-going Russian policy debate. Discussing the choice "democratize or not", Russian experts, policy makers and the general public argue, first of all, about the issues related to fairer and more competitive elections, the mass-media independence, the development of civil society. Thus, seeking to assist the debate, I would implement the same conceptualization of democracy that is, explicitly or implicitly, used by the disputants.

Empirical Operationalization

Electoral competitiveness

According to a minimalist vision, democracy is a political regime which enfranchises most of the adult population and periodically holds general elections. However, most of modern dictatorships meet this standard. The crucial difference between democracies and authoritarian regimes is whether elections do ultimately determine the composition of the government, or not. Thus, a 'two-turnover test' was proposed as a means to discriminate between 'consolidated democracies' and non-democratic (or 'defectively democratic') political regimes. According to this criterion, democracy "may be viewed as consolidated if the party or group that takes power in the initial election at the time of the transition, loses a sub-
sequent election, and turns over power to those elec-
tion winners, and if those election winners then
peacefully turn over power to winners of a latter
election" (Huntington 1991, p.266¢67). Two re-

gions of Russia passed the ‘two¢turnover test’ by

The ‘two¢turnover test’ is demanding and has
been criticized on these grounds. For instance, post-
war Japan and Italy have passed this test only in the
1990s. The ‘one¢turnover test’ may be more feas-
able (see : Gasiorowski and Power, 1998). 25 of 77 re-
gions under study met this criterion by 2003, includ-
ing 7 of 20 ethnic autonomies. The distribution is
rather even among the federal districts : the maximal
share is 2 out of 4 regions in the Urals, and the lowest
shares are 3 out of 12 regions in Siberia and 2 out
of 8 regions in the Far East. In the remaining 52 re-
gions, incumbents¡or their designated ‘heirs’ ¡did not
suffer electoral defeats after the initial elections.

Should all the regions that did not pass the ‘one-
turnover test’ be regarded as autocracies? Certainly,
this would be a flawed conclusion. Most of Russian
regions hold their first elections to the office of the
regional chief executive in 1995¡97, and the fact
that the newly elected chief executive won subse-
cquent elections once or twice is not very indicative
for the level of democratization in the region. More
important is the question of whether the elections
were competitive indeed.

Situations where the winning candidate receives
considerably more than 50% of votes in the first
round of elections are not frequent in established
democracies of the West. However, these situations are
not rare in Russia and usually happen when the win-
ing candidate is an incumbent. Naturally, there
might be some cases of exceptional popularity of a
regional leader, but one may have justifiable doubts
whether regimes where the chiefs executive are re-
elected with a majority over 90% (as e.g. in Tatar-
stan in 1996, Kabardino-Balkaria and Kemerovo ob-

last in 1997, or Mordovia in 1998) are truly compe-
titive democracies.

In measurement of electoral competitiveness, I fol-
low Vanhanen (1990) and calculate it by subtracting
the average percentage of votes for the winning can-
didate(s) in gubernatorial elections in 1995¡2000
from 100% (variable GOVERNOR_COMPET)21.
However, one can justifiably expect a strong reciproc-

cal effect of economic performance of a region on
the popularity of particular candidates, in particular,
incumbents. Therefore, I instrumentalize this vari-
ables by two others, which, are also related to the
competitiveness of regional political regimes : (1) 100
minus the percentage of votes gained by the largest
political party in the previous Duma elections
(DUMA_COMPET) and (2) 100 minus the percent-
age of votes received by the strongest candidate in the
first ballot of the previous presidential elections
(PRESIDENT_COMPET)22. The latter two variables
explain 84.2% and 85.7% of variance in competi-
tiveness of gubernatorial elections over 1995¡2000
and 2001¡2004, respectively. The unstandardized B-
coefficients are 0.46 and 0.20 for DUMA_COMPET
and PRESIDENT_COMPET in the first period under
study, and 0.64 and 0.03 for DUMA_COMPET and
PRESIDENT_COMPET in the first period under
study, respectively. The predicted values are labeled
as ELECTORAL_COMPET.

In other words, one can say that the competi-
iveness of regional electoral systems is estimated by the
competitiveness of 1995 Duma and 1996 presidential
elections (DUMA_COMPET and PRESIDENT_COMP-
ET) in a region with weights assigned to the latter
indicators according to their ability to predict the
competitiveness of gubernatorial elections over the
period under study. The highest values on the esti-

ated variable ELECTORAL_COMPET are assigned
to the Yaroslavl(52, 7), Irkutsk(52, 2) and Murmansk
(52, 1) oblasts at the first time-point and to St. Pe-
tersburg(53, 7), Tomsk (53, 1) and Perm (52, 4) for
the second period under study. The Orel oblast (34.4), Dagestan (32.6) and North Ossetia (29.6) republics receive the lowest scores for the first period, while the scores of North Ossetia (38.0), Magadan (37.5) and Tuva (19.7) are the lowest at the second time-point.

**Independent mass media**

In 1999—2000, the Russian NGO 'Public Expertise' has conducted an extensive survey of the mass-media freedom in regions of the Russian Federation. Their final quantitative assessment (FREE_MEDIA_2) was based on several indicators and, in particular, on the shares of independent television, radio broadcasting and press in the value of production on the regional media markets. The Public Expertise reports the data for 1999 and 2000, and the data for 2000 seem to be a completion and correction of the estimates for 1999, rather than an independent assessment. The Moscow City (72.4), St. Petersburg (61.5) and the Kaliningrad oblast (56.4) topped this scale, while the republics of Dagestan (38.8) and Adygea (24.9) and the Orenburg oblast (2.6) obtained the lowest scores. We will employ this assessment as the estimation of the relative level of mass-media independence in the regions under study at the second time point of our assessment (1999/2000).

In order to obtain comparable estimates for the previous period, we need earlier data on the relative mass-media independence in the regions of Russia. As one source of such data, we can use the statistical appendix to the study on *Political and Legal Sources of Investment Risks in Russian Regions* by the Institute of Economics in Transition (Mau, 2002). The authors include a qualitative report on *Independent Press in the Regions of the RF*, which describes development in the previous years. From this report, one can obtain information on four issues: (1) whether independent mass-media with a regional scope were distributed in the region; (2) whether independent mass-media with a regional scope were produced in the region; (3) whether there were reported cases of regional mass-media intimidation in the region. When answers to these four questions are quantified as dummy variables with values of 0 (= "no") or 1 (= "yes"), they effectively add up into a Guttman-type scale with values:

3 — if independent mass-media with a regional scope are produced and distributed in the region and no cases of mass-media intimidation are reported;

2 — if independent mass-media with a regional scope are produced and distributed in the region but some cases of mass-media intimidation are reported;

1 — if independent mass-media with a regional scope are distributed but not produced in the region;

0 — if no independent mass-media with a regional scope are produced in the region.

This scale is labeled MEDIA_FREEDOM_MAUS. Besides that, earlier information on the access of local population to alternative sources of information can be obtained from the Goskomstat data on the number of newspapers distributed in the regions. Marsh (2000, 2002) used 1994 values of this variable as characteristic for one of the aspects of civil society development. I take the 1995 values as an indicator of the local access to the alternative sources of information and label it as NEWSPAPERS_95.

The indicator of media freedom in 2000 (FREE_MEDIA_2) is regressed on the assessment of the media freedom in the second half of the 1990s from Mau's (2000) report (MEDIA_FREEDOM_MAUS), which proxies the ability of regional mass media to act independently of state authorities, and the data on newspaper distribution in 1995 (NEWSPAPERS_95)²³, which proxy the access of the local population to the alternative sources of information. The predictors explain 86.5% of variance on the dependent
variable. The unstandardized B-coefficients equal 11.4 and 0.6 for MEDIA_FREEDOM_MAU and NEWSPAPERS_95, respectively.

The predicted values are saved as variable(FREE_MEDIA_1) and employed as an estimate of the relative mass-media independence in the regions of Russia under study at the beginning of the period under study. Thus, one can say that the situation with mass-media independence in the regions is assessed on the variables MEDIA_FREEDOM_MAU and NEWSPAPERS_95, which relate to the beginning of the period under study, with the weight assigned to these variables according to their ability to predict the share of independent mass media on the regional markets close to the end of the period. The highest values on the estimated variable are assigned to the Moscow City(79.1), St. Petersburg(44.0) and the Samara oblast(41.0). The Adygei republic(12.4), the Jewish Autonomous oblast(12.3) and the republic of Buryatia(11.8) receive the lowest scores.

**Development of civil society and party system**

Marsh(2000, 2002) presents an attempt to estimate the relative development of civil society in regions of Russia in the mid-1990s. The author uses four indicators: the number of registered civic organizations in 1996 (as a "sign of civic involvement"); participation in the 1993 referenda; participation in regional legislative elections 1994–96 (as "signs of civic engagement"); and the number of newspapers distributed in a region in 1994 (a "sign of civic interest"). The results are, at least, debatable. According to Marsh, Orenburg, Tuva and Yakutia score above the average(4), while the Nizhny Novgorod, Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Samara and Sverdlovsk get the average score(3) and civil society in the Leningrad region (around St. Petersburg) is regarded as underdeveloped(score 2). A possible explanation is the employment of the voters' turnout as an indicator of civil society development. Again, one may refer to

the study by Moraski(2002), which demonstrates that the regional authorities in relatively underdeveloped regions and, especially, in ethnic autonomies are frequently able to manipulate the turnout of local voters and that a higher voter turnout is characteristic for regions with a larger share of rural population and more paternalistic public attitudes.

Since we have already employed another indicator employed by Marsh (the number of newspapers distributed in a region), our assessment of regional civil society development concentrates on the proliferation of non-governmental organizations in the region. I use the number of registered NGOs per 100,000 inhabitants divided by 750, which is approximately the average number of NGOs per 100,000 inhabitants in the most developed democratic countries (see: Anheier and Seibel, 1993). The variable is labeled NGO_NUMBER.

Besides that, I employ an empirical assessment of the development of party systems in the regions under study. The existing literature offers several possible indicators of party system development. They can be roughly classified into three groups. First, indicators related to the so-called 'institutionalization' of party systems (cf.: Przeworski, 1975; Pedersen, 1983; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999) essentially measure the stability (as opposed to 'volatility') of party systems. The typical approach is to sum up the percentages of votes that parties keep from one election to the next. Their major disadvantage of this approach is that institutionalization of a stable party system does not necessarily mean institutionalization of a democratic party system: e.g., totalitarian parties usually keep almost 100% from one election to another.

Second, there are estimates related to the 'effective number of parties' (see: Laakko and Taagepera; and Lijphart, 1994 as the classics of this approach; and Dunleavy and Boucek, 2003 for a review of possible modifications) focus on the competitiveness of party
system. The number is most frequently calculated as one divided by one minus the sum of squares of the shares of all parties either in the electoral vote or in the parliamentary seat distribution. However, there are several alternatives. Nevertheless, none of them does not obviate from the main weakness of that approach: highly fragmented and eventually unstable party systems obtain high scores.

Third, some authors employ the concept of the 'number of relevant political parties', meaning the parties that pass a certain threshold. For example, Norris (2004) uses three indicators of this type: the number of the parties that received more than 3% of the national vote, the number of the parties with parliamentary representation (at least, one seat), the number of the parties that received more than 3% of the parliamentary seats. However, if the goal of the researcher is to estimate the level of democratic development of a party system, this approach would suffer from the same disadvantages as the previous one: the scores of the fragmented party systems would be too high.

Therefore, I prefer to take a combinative path. As the indicator of the development of a democratic party system in a region, I employ the number of political parties that pass the electoral threshold of 5% in both, the most recent and the previous parliamentary elections. This indicator may be labeled as the number of institutionalized relevant parties in the region (PARTY_NUMBER). The number is normalized to percentage of the average of the respective variable for our reference group of established democracies, which is assumed to be close to four.

Thus, the variables NGO_NUMBER and PARTY_NUMBER expose the development of civil society and party systems in Russian regions from the point of view of the approximation to the level of civil society development in the countries of our references group, i.e. Western Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world. In order to establish the cumulative assessment of civil society development in the regions under study, I take the average of the two indicators and label the variable DEM_INSTITUTIONS. The Novgorod (61.8), Sverdlovsk (60.6) and Nizhny Novgorod (60.6) oblasts receive the highest scores on the variable for the first period. The republic of Karelia (59.9), and the oblasts of Perm (57.0) and Chelyabinsk (54.2) top the list for 1999/2000. The republics of Kabarda-Balkaria (26.8) and Dagestan (26.6), and Tatarstan (17.0) score the lowest at the first time-point; the republics of Tuva (17.8), Kabarda-Balkaria (16.7) and Dagestan (14.7) obtain the lowest scores for the second period under study. These figures indicate a relatively low level of the civil society development in Russian regions in comparison with the level of developed democratic countries.

**Index of Regional Democratization**

The variables ELECTORAL_COMPET, FREE_MEDIA and DEM_INSTITUTIONS measure three different dimensions of the democratic development. All three are constructed in the manner that allows to consider each of them as an estimate of the approximation to the democratic ideal (in respect to electoral competitiveness and mass-media independence), or to the current situation in the established democratic countries (in respect to the development of civil society and party systems). Assuming that there is no undisputable theoretical reason to prioritize one of the three dimensions over another, I assign each of the three measures equal weight and take their average as the cumulative Index of Regional Democratization. The resultant variable is labeled DEMOCRATIZATION. Chart 1 illustrates the way of its construction. Table 1 reports its values for the top and bottom fifteen regions at the both time-points.

- **Indicators**
  - 100%- of votes for the strongest party in the 1995 Duma election
  - 100%- of votes for the strongest candidate in the first ballot of the 1995 Presidential election
  - Assessment of mass-media freedom by Mass(2000) on a scale from 0 to 3
  - Number of newspapers per 100,000 inhabitants
  - Number of NGOs registered per 100,000 inhabitants
  - Number of effective institutionalized parties

- **Dimensions**
  - Electoral Competitiveness
  - Mass-Media Independence
  - Development of Civil Society and Party Systems

- **Index of Regional Democratization**

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Table 1. Index of Regional Democratization (DEMOCRATIZATION).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moscow City</td>
<td>58.16</td>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
<td>54.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novgorod</td>
<td>49.38</td>
<td>Moscow City</td>
<td>53.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nizhny Novgorod</td>
<td>49.24</td>
<td>Kaliningrad</td>
<td>48.93</td>
</tr>
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<td>Leningrad</td>
<td>49.11</td>
<td>Perm</td>
<td>47.07</td>
</tr>
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<td>Sverdlovsk</td>
<td>48.71</td>
<td>Vladimir</td>
<td>46.72</td>
</tr>
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<td>Karelia</td>
<td>48.21</td>
<td>Chelyabinsk</td>
<td>46.69</td>
</tr>
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<td>St. Petersburg</td>
<td>47.71</td>
<td>Novosibirsk</td>
<td>46.19</td>
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<td>Novosibirsk</td>
<td>46.19</td>
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<td>47.49</td>
<td>Karelia</td>
<td>44.45</td>
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<td>Tomsk</td>
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<td>43.38</td>
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<td>Krasnoyarsk</td>
<td>46.30</td>
<td>Kamchatka</td>
<td>43.13</td>
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<td>Altai Rep.</td>
<td>45.49</td>
<td>Sakhalin</td>
<td>42.94</td>
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<td>Samara</td>
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<td>Leningrad</td>
<td>42.78</td>
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<td>Kaliningrad</td>
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<td>Sverdlovsk</td>
<td>42.42</td>
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Justification

From the point of view of content validity, the proposed Index of Regional Democratization (DEMOCRATIZATION) incorporates the information on those aspects of a political system that may be changed by deliberate policy choices and, in particular, those policy choices that Russian politics faces today. These are the choices between: (1) introducing new constrains on electoral competition vs. creating fair chances for political opposition; (2) restricting the mass media freedom vs. protecting independent mass media from the intimidation by regional authorities; and (3) facilitating the development of a vibrant civil society and party system vs. suppressing or controlling democratic institutions. Therefore, one can maintain that: if we find that, say, democratic support—or another factor that is less amendable to political manipulation in a non-totalitarian society—affects economic performance this will be interesting; if we find that a policy choice (e.g., restrictions on independent mass media) has such an effect, this will be both, interesting and appealing to policy makers and their electorate.

In respect to face validity, I do not find a large discrepancy between the conventional views on the relative levels of regional democratization in Russia and our estimates. The Moscow City, St. Petersburg, the oblasts of Kaliningrad, Leningrad, Nizhny Novgorod, Novgorod, Samara and other regions, which have obtained the highest values on the proposed Index of Regional Democratization, are usually referred to as examples of more democratized regions in Russia. The republics of Adygheia, Dagestan, Kabarda-Balkaria, Kalmykia, Karachai-Cherkessia, North Ossetia and other regions, which have received the lowest scores, are typically assumed to be less advanced in terms of regional democratization.

The scale reliability analysis gives out Cronbach’s
Alpha of 0.66 and 0.64 for the first and second periods under study, respectively. These values are acceptable in the present case since our Index accumulates information on three different dimensions of democratization and there is no uncontestable theoretical justification for the assumption that the changes on all the three dimensions should necessarily come together.

As a criterion of the validity of our estimates, one can employ a rougher proxy for regional democratization, which has been used in previous studies (Berkowitz and De Jong, 2001; Manaeckov, 2000; Yanovsky, 2002). The assumption of these authors is that the higher percentage of votes for liberal democratic parties (i.e. the left-liberal Yabloko and the right-liberal Democratic Choice of Russia (DVR) in December 1995 and Yabloko and the Union of the Rightist Forces, of which DVR became a part, in December 1999) indicates greater advances in terms of democratization or, at least, a stronger public support for democratic institutions.

As another criterion, I take an index of democracy in Russian regions by McMann (2004). The author (in cooperation with N. Petrov) conducted an expert survey of the relative level of democratization in regions of Russia in first half of 1997. In order to develop a quantitative assessment, she subtracted the percentage of respondents ranking each region as 'less democratic' from the percentage of respondents ranking each region as 'more democratic'. Unfortunately, McMann’s study does not include ethnic autonomies. Thus, she presented estimates only for 57 of 77 regions under study.

Our expectation is that our Index of Regional Democratization should be positively correlated with all the alternative measurements, i.e. the shares of liberal democratic parties in the Duma elections of 1995 and 1999 (variables DEMOCRATS_95 and DEMOCRATS_99, respectively), as well as with McMann’s index (DEMOCRATIZATION_MCMANN). The estimation of the linear correlation coefficients conforms to the expectations (see Table 2). All the estimated coefficients have the expect signs and highly significant (at the 0.001 two-tailed probability level).

Table 2. Correlations among the Index of Regional Democratization (DEMOCRATIZATION) and Three Criterion Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMOCRATIZATION</th>
<th>DEMOCRATS_95</th>
<th>DEMOCRATS_99</th>
<th>DEMOCRATIZATION_MCMANN</th>
<th>GRP_PC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.602</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>0.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. of cases</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEMOCRATIZATION_2</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>0.775</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>0.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the above-developed measurement of the regional advances in democratization is valid, one may expect that it would be associated with those factors that exhibited strong associations with democratic development in the studies with a broad international scope. Perhaps, the strongest candidate to test the associative validity of the estimates is the 'affluence level', which is usually proxied by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita or, as it is applicable in our case, by the gross regional product (GRP) per capita. Table 2 also reports the coefficients for the correlations between the Index of Regional Democratization, as estimated for the two time-points, and the GRP per capita before the period study (1994, GRP_PC). Again, we observe the expected positive sign and the correlations turn out to be significant at 0.001 probability level (two-tailed).

Concluding remarks

The present paper develops and justifies an empirical estimation of the interregional differences in the level of democratization (the Index of Regional Democratization, or DEMOCRATIZATION). I assume that this construct will be instrumental for the present and further research on Russian regional politics and political economy. Besides that, the approach that has been used to develop this Index may be helpful to
estimate interregional differences in terms of political regime in other societies with considerable interregional differentiation.

The proposed Index of Regional Democratization (DEMOCRATIZATION) incorporates the information on those political regime aspects that are (1) amendable to deliberate change by policy makers and (2) hotly discussed in Russia today. Therefore, the Index is based on the empirical variables related to the three aspects of regional politics: (1) electoral competition, (2) mass media freedom, and (3) development of civil society and party systems. Theoretical and empirical justifications for the construct have been provided.

In general, this section conveys an optimistic picture. Neither climate, nor the abundance of natural resources seems to inhibit democratic development in Russia. At the same time, resumed economic growth improves the propensity of Russian regions to democratize in the future. The association between the size of the regional population and lesser advances in democratization may attract more attention in the discussion on the reform of territorial division of Russia.

References:


Laakso, M. and R. Taagepera (1979) : ‘Effective’ Number of Parties : A Measure with Application to West Europe, in : Comparative Political Stud-


Manza, Daniil (2000): The Determinants of Foreign Direct Investment in Russia, mimeo, New School of Economics, Moscow.


Note
1) The electoral data are presented by the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation. Most of the data are available on-line: http://www.cikrf.ru.

2) Here and below, if otherwise is not explicitly indicated, the source of the statistical data is the Federal Service of State Statistics (formerly known as Goskomstat). See: Goskomstat (2001, 2002, 2003).

3) The mathematical equation used to estimate the relative levels of democratization in the regions under study can be represented as: DEMOCRATIZATION = ELECTORAL_COMPET/3 + FREE_MEDIA/3 + DEM_INSTITUTIONS/3; where DEMOCRATIZATION is the constructed index, ELECTORAL_COMPET, FREE_MEDIA and DEM_INSTITUTIONS are constructed estimations of the relative levels of electoral competi-
tion, mass-media independence, and development of civil society and party systems, respectively. The details for the construction of the latter three variables and the data sources are given above.

1) Hale (2000) presents an insightful analysis of the means of electoral manipulations in Russia. Although the author concentrates on the 1999–2000 national elections, many of his observations apply to most of other electoral campaigns at the national and regional levels.

2) 'Democracy that can fight for itself' (German). This term has been used in order to characterize the political regime of the post-war West Germany, where the democracy was supposed to grow under the guardianship of political parties, which, in turn, were controlled by the Constitutional Court. The latter twice used its authority to dissolve political parties: in 1953 against the right-wing Sozialistische Reichspartei (SRP), and in 1956 against the Communist. Formally, respective provisions of the German Constitution still remain in force. However, they have been silent in the last decades.

3) Some regions have elected chief executives since the early 1990s, and certain diversification of regional political systems has already existed by 1995. However, the extent of political regime diversification that was characteristic for the late 1990s-early 2000s, especially in the case of non-autonomous regions, was a result of the decentralization processes in 1995–98.

4) For the critique of the theoretical merits and an appraisal of the relative performance of different cross-national indexes of democracy see: Munck and Verkuilen, 2000; and Munck, 1996.

5) Among most popular cross-national assessments of democracy, the following fall in the category of non-minimalist institutional measures: Political Regimes Index (Alvarez et al., 1996); the index of Political Regime Change (Gasiorowski, 1996) and Polity Indices (Jaggers and Gurr, 1996).

6) Besides that, one may question the desirability of such manipulations on ethical grounds and in respect to the risks associated with that kind of 'social engineering'.

7) The second component of the Vanharen’s index (the electoral participation) cannot be employed for the purpose of the present study. The restrictions of the universal franchise are rather liberal in Russia even in comparison with most democratic countries. Every Russian citizen receives the right to elect by 18 years of age and can be deprived of that right only by court in cases of a committed crime or mental disability. There are no restrictions in respect the place or duration of residence, education, etc. Further, there is no
strong evidence that federal or regional authorities inhibit access of enfranchised voters to the polls. On contrary, the authorities frequently try to mobilize those groups which they consider as their potential support base. The study by Moraski (2002) demonstrates that the high electoral turnout in Russian regions is rather an indicator of paternalistic attitudes among local population and, therefore, cannot be indicative of the progress in term of democratization.

8 ) In another study Marsh (in co-authorship with Warhola) himself observes that higher turnover rates in Russian autonomies are rather a factor dependent on the relationship between the local authorities and political forces in the federal center, than an indicator of democratic development in those regions (Marsh and Warhola, 2001).

9 ) In few cases, when the raw number exceed four, its normalized value is taken to be 100, i.e. the maximal one and the same as for the regions with four 'institutionalized relevant parties' .

10 ) McMann's list of the most democratic regions is topped by St. Petersburg (94), the Sverdlovsk (73), Nizhny Novgorod (67) and Samara (62) oblasts, and the Moscow city (56), which all are among also the top eight on our Index. The Bryansk (−32) oblast, the Krasnodar territory (−36), the Kursk (−68) and Ulyanovsk (−74) oblasts, and the Maritime (−79) territory receive the lowest scores by McMann. On our scale, Bryansk and Ulyanovsk also receive the lowest scores among the non-autonomous regions. However, the Krasnodar territory, the Kursk oblast and the Maritime territory score around the average. Below, this mismatch will be analyzed more closely.

11 ) The latter variable enters the calculation in its logarithmic transformation.