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THE POLITICAL ROLE OF RUSSIA'S REGIONS

■ ANALYSIS		
	Building a New Political Machine	2
	By Grigorii Golosov, St. Petersburg	
■ ANALYSIS		
	Rostov Oblast: Transformations during the Economic Crisis	6
	By Maksim Vaskov, Rostov-na-Donu	
■ ANALYSIS		
	Political and Economic Changes Come Slowly to Marii El	9
	Sergei Poduzov, Ioshkar-Ola	
■ GRAPHS		
	Rostov and Marii El Regions – Key Data Compared	11
■ MAP		
	Federal Subjects of Russia	13
■ DOCUMENTATION		
	Russia's Regions. A Statistical Overview	14

Analysis

Building a New Political Machine

By Grigorii Golosov, St. Petersburg

Abstract

The United Russia “party of power” dominated the March 1 regional elections. Whereas in the past, it gained support by providing the voters with a constantly rising standard of living, now it must rely on a new mechanism. The components of this political system include limited competition among a small number of political parties, falsification of results when necessary, placing the regional electoral commissions under the regional leaders, and depriving elections of all political content. At the regional level, governors have built up political machines to ensure sufficient turnout to demonstrate the population’s loyalty to the authorities. These machines operate through the regional media, material enticements, and election day entertainment at the polls.

United Russia Dominates March Regional Elections

Russia had its latest twice-yearly round of regional elections on March 1. Nine regions elected their legislatures and several municipalities held local elections. On the eve of the elections, several analysts argued that they would mark a turning point in Russian politics: the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, having dominated all similar elections since December 2007, would gradually start to lose its position as a monopolist. The basis for such predictions was the economic crisis, which by the beginning of March was having a significant effect on the standard of living in the Russian regions.

In fact, however, nothing of the kind occurred. Several of the municipal elections disappointed the “party of power.” But in all regional legislatures, United Russia won a majority of seats: 52 of 72 in Kabardino-Balkaria; 48 of 73 in Karachaevo-Cherkessia; 87 of 100 in Tatarstan; 53 of 75 in Khakasia; 38 of 62 in Arkhangelsk Oblast; 47 of 60 in Bryansk; 27 of 38 in both Vladimir and Volgograd oblasts, and 6 of 11 in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug.

United Russia achieved these outstanding results partly through the majoritarian side of the ballot, which allows parties with only moderate electoral support to score an absolute majority of seats. But the party also did well on the proportional representation half of the ballot. In all regions except for Volgograd Oblast and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, it received more than 50 percent of the vote, and in the latter two, more than 40 percent. Accordingly, it is fair to describe United Russia’s performance in the elections as successful.

The March elections demonstrated that United Russia’s electoral results are not greatly influenced by the social conditions in the regions. If earlier it was possible to tie the success of this party with some sort of “so-

cial contract” between the authorities and the population, presumably one in which the people swap loyalty for improving economic conditions, now the mechanism for the party of power’s electoral success is different. This article will lay out the main elements of this mechanism.

Securing the Authorities’ Success

The most important elements of United Russia’s success derive from the institutional changes that took place in Russia during Vladimir Putin’s second presidential term, particularly in the years 2004–2007. Most important is the artificial limit on political competition, which gives only a limited number of parties the right to participate in electoral competitions. At the end of 2003, there were more than 40 registered parties in Russia but their number has dropped steadily since the beginning of 2004. Currently, the only parties active in Russia include the four parties currently represented in the parliament and the Patriots of Russia party headed by Gennady Semigin. These were the parties that participated in the March 1 elections. Yabloko is burdened by the debts it incurred during the 2007 State Duma campaign and exists under the constant threat of liquidation, while the new “Pravoe delo” [Right cause] party had not secured official registration by the time the campaign began.

Obviously, it is not simply a matter of how many parties there are. Even a limited number of opposition parties could offer serious competition to United Russia, but only under two conditions: if they offer serious programmatic alternatives able to mobilize the voters and if they can attract influential regional politicians to their ranks.

None of the current parties met those conditions. Two of the four parties competing with United Russia in the regional elections – the Communist Party

of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) – have a narrow appeal. The source of their core support is, respectively, archaic Communist rhetoric and the personality of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. These parties cannot abandon these defining features without endangering their current position. The cost, however, is that they are unlikely to attract new voters. The third party, Just Russia, does not have a clearly defined ideological profile or a recognizable national leader. At the height of its popularity in March 2007, this party sought to attract influential local elites to its ranks. However, judging by its subsequent actions, the presidential administration forbid party leader Sergei Mironov from using this tactic further and Mironov strictly follows all orders from above. Cutting Just Russia's ties to the regional elite doomed the party to playing a marginal role in the regional electoral campaigns. The fourth party, Patriots of Russia, has no resources to expand its electoral potential.

Thus, United Russia's competition is limited to a small number of parties, each of which is focused on a narrow niche and does not seek a wide range of voters. Beyond the hard-core supporters of the Communists and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, most Russian voters have reason to believe that there simply are no alternatives to United Russia. This situation deprives the elections of any political content, turning demonstrations of loyalty into the only possible rational approach to the electoral campaign.

Key Role of Governors

The second institutional change defining elections in Russia today is the 2004 cancellation of gubernatorial elections. Since then, the presidential administration several times made clear to the governors that their political survival as a regional leader depended directly on their ability to secure good results for United Russia in the elections. Governors who could not handle this basic task failed to win appointment to a new term or were fired before their term was up. Faced with such threats, the governors made serious attempts to fulfill the tasks set by the federal government. The presidential administration was the main body that defined these tasks. Before each campaign, it informed the governors what kind of results the Kremlin would consider acceptable. Information about these targets occasionally reaches the media. This evidence suggests that the governors usually carried out these instructions with a high degree of precision.

How do the governors carry out these orders? Of course the type of instruments available to regional leaders varies from place to place. In some cases, the results

of regional elections have no relationship to the actual preferences of the voters – in other words, they are completely fabricated. A classic example of this type of voting is the elections to Ingushetia's Popular Assembly in March 2008. The announced results so obviously differed from the experience of the republic's residents that they led to mass demonstrations. Among the most recent elections, the results from Kabardino-Balkaria apparently fit into this mold. The Central Electoral Commission published the preliminary results of these elections in approximately half of the voting precincts on its website only two hours after the end of the voting. These preliminary results varied little from the ultimate final results. As a rule, such speed in the electoral count indicates that the electoral commission prepared the protocols earlier, even before the elections took place.

On the basis of numerous, but episodic, facts, one can assume that falsifying electoral results to one or another degree takes place in the vast majority of regions. This level of cheating is not surprising considering that in recent years the regional administrations have gained complete control over the system of regional electoral commissions. Similarly just as the governor bears personal responsibility for the result of the election before the presidential administration, within the regional administrations there are employees whose career perspectives depend directly on the results of the elections. The chairmen of the electoral commissions, in turn, are responsible to these bureaucrats. Additionally most of the rank-and-file workers in the electoral commissions depend on the income they derive from the elections. Thus, this well functioning vertical in many cases explains the election results.

De-Politicizing the Elections

However, direct falsification is not the main factor in most regions. Often, there is no need for it. Also, it is not the optimal method from the point of view of the Russian authorities, although they don't consider it unacceptable. The most important thing is that United Russia wins in the elections. And, in conditions in which the elections are deprived of political meaning and the main alternatives only appeal to a narrow slice of potential voters, one must do only two things to win the elections: maintain their de-politicized character during the entire electoral campaign and create significant stimuli for the voters to go to the polls to demonstrate their loyalty to the authorities.

The authorities ensure that the campaigns remain depoliticized by guaranteeing that none of the parties participating in them raise difficult political issues, es-

pecially of a local character. All parties without exception must obey this rule. Earlier, to carry out this instruction, Russian officials used such instruments as disqualifying already registered party lists and candidates. Sometimes, they relied on accusations of extremism or promoting national or social tension. Usually, however, the reasons given for disqualification were formal, such as violating the rules for campaigning or the departure of a large number of candidates from the party list (often under pressure).

Now, when the circle of parties is already so limited, these methods remain effective in regard to independent candidates in regions where there is a mixed electoral system and local politicians can run without being a member of a party. In relation to the parties, the most effective threat to keep them in line is to count the electoral results so that they cannot overcome the barrier (usually 7 percent) to gain seats in the proportional representation system. In relation to all parties (except the Communists in some regions), this threat is fully convincing. To change a result from 8–9 percent to 6.5 percent requires only an insignificant amount of falsification. Many remember how the Union of Right Forces received only 6.5 – 6.99 percent of the vote in a series of regions in March 2007. Under such pressure, parties prefer to avoid actively conducting campaigns on issues which would be of interest to significant groups of voters, concentrating instead on general ideological rhetoric (KPRF) or the personal calls of the national leader (LDPR).

Mustering Turnout

Having achieved the depoliticization of the elections, the regional authorities must address the second problem: guaranteeing sufficient turnout in the election to demonstrate loyalty. To achieve this task, most regions have created “electoral machines.” The chief element of these mechanisms is the administrative mobilization of socially-dependent categories of the population. One key category of this type is pensioners. It is well-known that in the 1990s, senior citizens were the electoral base of the KPRF. During the last 5–6 years, there was a massive restoration of the state social support system which provides pensioners with a source of small, but stable and gradually growing, monetary payments. To receive these payments (as well as holiday gifts and other material benefits), the pensioners need to interact constantly with social security agencies. And since participating in the elections is a traditional form of social activity, it is not surprising that mobilizing them for the elections is relatively easy.

A second category of the socially-dependent population includes several groups of public sector employees, including the numerous doctors and teachers. Since they have extremely low pay and are heavily dependent on the directors of the schools and clinics where they work, these categories of the population are easy to mobilize. However, their importance for the electoral machines is not only in their own votes, but in their ability to convince large groups of others to participate in the elections (and vote for United Russia). In schools, this campaigning takes place at parent meetings, through personal contacts with the parents, and especially by telephone. The practice of having class leaders systematically and repeatedly call parents on election day, summoning them to vote, has become wide-spread. It is well known that in hospitals, there is almost 100 percent participation in elections and 100 percent support for United Russia. Additionally, in recent years, college students have become a target for active electoral mobilization.

A third important category of the socially-dependent population is government workers themselves. They make up a significant part of the population and find voting for United Russia part of their job. This category also includes military personnel, who have a significant influence over election results in the areas where they are based.

An increasingly common form of administrative mobilization targets hired personnel employed in private enterprises. There are numerous well-known cases when representatives of employers demand that employees vote and the next day present evidence that they turned out and made the “right” choice in the form of a ballot photographed with a mobile phone. In other cases, such monitoring methods are not necessary since the turnout is organized by having the workers all go to the polls at the same time. There are often campaign meetings during working hours and in places of employment. While these methods are relatively new to the big cities, they have long been practiced in rural areas and small towns in many regions.

Mobilizing the Harder Cases

The administrative mobilization of the socially-dependent population by itself is able to mobilize a significant turnout for the elections. One big advantage of mobilizing this group of individuals is that it provides nearly 100 percent support for United Russia. A clear deficiency, however, is that it provides a relatively limited turnout. In the rural areas, its potential is great, but in the large cities, by a rough estimate, it guarantees only 20–30 percent participation in the elections.

Additional measures are necessary to attract voters who are not subject to administrative pressure or only weakly influenced by it.

These additional measures include several components. One is the massive influence on voters through the regional media, which is typically under the direct or indirect control of the regional administration. The media and, in particular television, constantly remind the voters about the up-coming elections. The accent in the reporting is not on the choice as such (there is none), but the idea that the act of voting represents a civic duty, prestigious type of civil behavior, and manifestation of “adulthood”. A large part of this propaganda is aimed at young voters. Additionally, the media reminds voters that on election day they will find free goods and entertainment at the polls.

In my observations, such attractions have become a central form of turning out the vote. The material benefits take the form of souvenirs, free or significantly-discounted food, and, in some cases, other consumer goods. A variety of lotteries are also held on election day. Although there are laws against this practice, the distributors get around this problem by handing out the

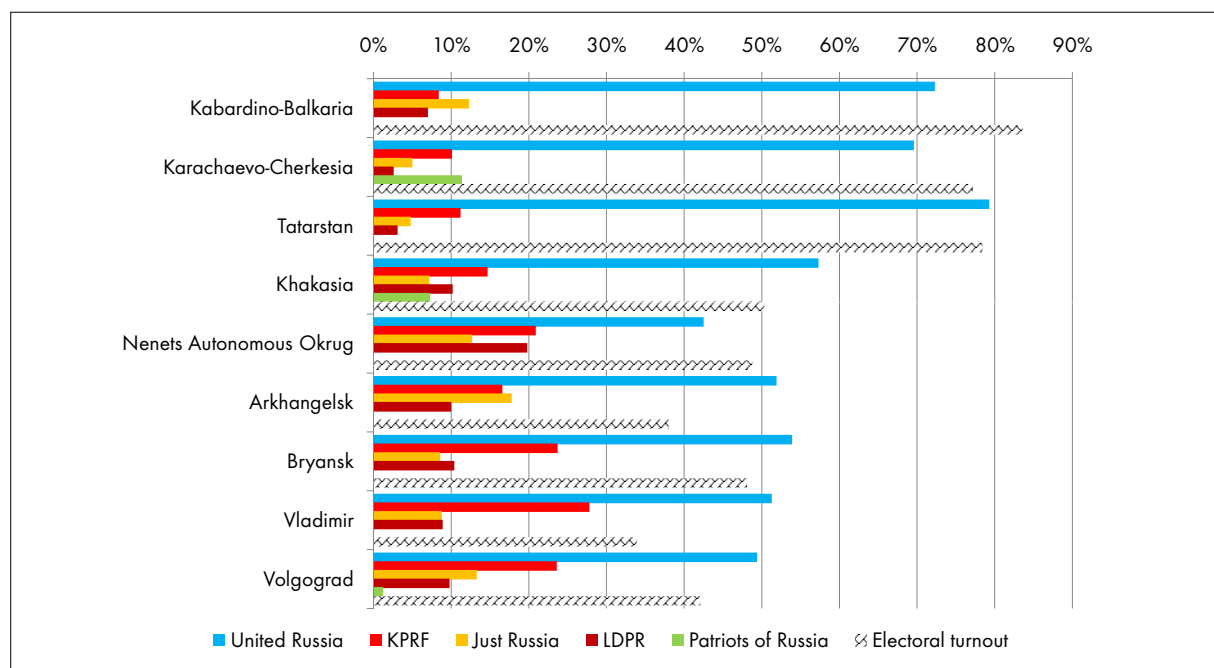
lottery cards as people vote, but not announcing the winners until later. There are free concerts and events aimed at bringing voters onto the streets and then convincing them to fulfill their civic duty. Thus, the authorities are consciously transforming the elections from a substantive political event into an entertaining holiday with a large number of participants.

The electoral machines exert an influence on Russia’s political development. Undoubtedly, as the global economic crisis continues, critical attitudes among the population will grow. But that does not mean that these critical attitudes will affect regional elections. As now, the electoral machines will block such sentiments from having political consequences. Most of these machines are relatively new (with a few exceptions in the republics): they were first widely tested in the 2007 Duma elections and brought to full force only in the 2008 presidential elections. Accordingly, simply increasing the capacity of these machines could support the current situation for a long period of time regardless of the political mood in society. Cardinal changes will only occur in the case of a significant change in the overall Russian political context.

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Overview over Regional Election Results



Source: <http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/izbirkom.html> (see overleaf for figures)

Overview over Regional Election Results

	United Russia	KPRF	Just Russia	LDPR	Patriots of Russia	Electoral turnout
Kabardino-Balkaria	72.3%	8.4%	12.3%	7.0%	-	83.6%
Karachaevo-Cherkesia	69.6%	10.1%	5.0%	2.6%	11.4%	77.2%
Tatarstan	79.3%	11.2%	4.8%	3.1%	-	78.4%
Khakasia	57.3%	14.7%	7.2%	10.2%	7.3%	50.3%
Nenets Autonomous Okrug	42.5%	20.9%	12.7%	19.8%	-	48.8%
Arkhangelsk	51.9%	16.6%	17.8%	10.0%	-	38.0%
Bryansk	53.9%	23.7%	8.6%	10.4%	-	48.1%
Vladimir	51.3%	27.8%	8.8%	8.9%	-	33.9%
Volgograd	49.4%	23.6%	13.3%	9.8%	1.2%	42.1%

Source: <http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/izbirkom.html>

Analysis

Rostov Oblast: Transformations during the Economic Crisis

By Maksim Vaskov, Rostov-na-Donu

Abstract

Rostov Oblast had been relatively successful over the previous decade, but now is facing economic challenges as a result of the global economic crisis. Unfortunately, the Rostov regional and local leadership lacks adequately trained personnel to address the problem; policies adopted so far focus on saving large enterprises rather than developing the region over the long term. The economic crisis is unlikely to provoke political instability since there is little organized opposition and the various groups affected by the crisis – such as members of the middle class who lost their jobs and marginalized Communist Party backers – are unlikely to join ranks against the incumbent leaders.

Economic Difficulties Create Challenges

Rostov Oblast is the administrative center of the Southern Federal District, making it the strategic center of the entire North Caucasus region and the focal point of the federal transportation system in this part of Russia. It is among the Russian regions with a strong agricultural sector and several types of industry. Rostov is second only to Krasnodar Krai in the region in terms of integration into the national and international financial-economic system.

Unfortunately, during the current global economic crisis, the region's high level of development means that it is facing severe difficulties. Regions that in the past attracted foreign companies are now suffering from the crisis, leading to layoffs and, consequently, increasing social and political tension. The regions that had

fewer links to the world economy, where local output consists mainly of small- and medium-sized businesses that generally serve only the domestic market, have suffered least of all.

Likewise, the fate of various regions depends on whether they have access to recession-proof industries. Within the Southern Federal District, Krasnodar Krai is lucky to have a large part of its economy focused on preparations for the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The region will benefit from the guaranteed profits provided by the state orders for new infrastructure and payments into the krai budget. The North Caucasus republics receive extensive federal budget subsidies and these will continue, but the crisis has definitely hurt these struggling economies. The federal government hopes to prevent a situation in which economic difficulties cause an

increase in ideologies favoring religious extremism and separatism among the region's Muslim populations.

Rostov Oblast cannot depend on such support. Even efforts to help the giant Rostselmash factory have more to do with politics than an effort to address real economic issues. According to the Rostov Oblast administration, only 37 local enterprises can count on state aid. These are typically large enterprises working in transportation, energy, metallurgy, the military-industrial complex, retail sales, food-processing, and housing construction. Other businesses will not receive support from the regional authorities. Even lower taxes will not be enough to help many of these firms survive in the long-run since the relatively small amount of money saved will not be enough to develop new business.

There is no shortage of economic difficulties. The Rostov Oblast budget now faces a deficit greater than 4 billion rubles (\$113 million) and, in some cases, there are simply not sufficient funds to meet pressing needs. More importantly, overall investment growth in 2008 fell short of what had been anticipated. This shortfall hit the region hard because in 2007 Rostov had already fallen behind investment growth figures for Russia as a whole. Whereas overall Russian investment growth was 19 percent, the figure for Rostov was 11 percent. In 2008 most investment went into Rostov's large enterprises. Little investment went into the crucial agricultural sector, with regions like Krasnodar and Voronezh doing a better job of attracting companies working in this sector.

Rostov is also dealing with rising inflation. From November 2007 to March 2008, Rostov was among the regions suffering from the greatest price increases in Russia. Subsequently, the situation stabilized, but now it is starting to turn sour again. While all prices are rising, it is the increase in food prices that is most important. In 2008, real incomes in the region grew 7.3 percent, whereas they had grown 15.2 percent in 2007.

Rostov's economic troubles are increasing political and social tensions. Already there have been numerous layoffs. Ironically, however, the number of vacancies is greater than the number of dismissals, but this does not solve the problem. The majority of people who lost their jobs were in prestigious professions. These jobs were well paid and held by people who are well educated, ambitious, and used to a high standard of living. Many of the openings now are for unqualified workers and it would be extremely difficult for the people who lost their previous jobs to settle for such lowly positions.

Local Response

The policy choices of the local authorities play a key role in defining how well a region is able to adapt to the evolving situation. Here there are a host of problems connected to regional cadre policy. Officials have already noted that leaders at all levels of regional Russian politics suffer from insufficient training. They lack the ability to work in crisis situations since there is little effective planning and guidance on how to proceed. In Rostov Oblast, the bureaucracy is an absolutely closed corporate society. The staff of Deputy Governor S. G. Kuznetsov evaluates applications for civil service positions, apparently based on his personal sympathies and on recommendations of current bureaucrats or their relatives. Objective criteria, such as professionalism, level of knowledge, or work experience, play less of a role. Competitions for civil service positions typically are fictitious since their winners are usually determined in advance. This practice closes off opportunities for high level professionals from business or academia to secure spots in regional management structures and creates an extensive complex of negative social consequences. The staff of the presidential representative to the Southern Federal District is discussing these issues, but has not been able to implement effective measures to address them.

Monitoring the implementation of anti-crisis measures shows that the greatest problems occur where the regional leadership should actively intervene, identify the key problems, and take responsible decisions. Here, in full measure, we can see the results of strengthening central control from Moscow and the disproportionately large role of bureaucrats in regulating the economic, social, and political spheres of society, and, as a result of this, the absence of social mechanisms for self-regulation.

The policy of creating the "vertical of power" during Vladimir Putin's presidency sought to increase the presidential administration's control over the regions and combat separatist tendencies. As Moscow enhanced its control, the governors started to create their own "verticals of power," suppressing the opposition in regional legislatures and local governments. They used administrative resources to help elect candidates loyal to them in the regional legislature and as mayors. In Rostov Oblast, as a result of this policy, of the 50 deputies in the Legislative Assembly, 45 represent United Russia and five the Communist Party. Communists head only two rural areas of the 12 urban districts and 43 rural raions. The other opposition parties have no official offices.

The result is that Rostov Oblast's managers at the regional and local levels are industrious, but poorly trained. The bureaucrats are ready to carry out any order from above to preserve their jobs regardless of the consequences. Therefore, the policy of the Rostov Oblast leadership is characterized by inertia.

Although there is a plan to deal with the consequence of the crisis, its gist boils down to simply cutting expenses without a serious examination of the long-term perspectives for the economic and social development. In particular, there is no plan to cut financing for loss-making sectors of the economy to a minimum, while concentrating capital in promising areas and creating a foundation for further development.

Consequences of Poor Management

The lack of qualified personnel has hurt the authorities' ability to deal effectively with foreign investors. The regional authorities are definitely interested in attracting foreign investors. They have had considerable success in providing security for Russian and foreign businessmen, helping with tax benefits, and developing infrastructure to provide attractive working conditions. However, having solved the problems that plagued investors in the 1990s, a new crop of challenges arose. Now the chief problem for foreign investors is not corruption (this affects mostly Russian businessmen who have to deal with local governments), but the incompetence of executive branch employees.

The example of General Motors provides a good example of these problems. Attracting investors to the region, which still relies on subsidies, is an important part of the authorities' efforts to secure tax revenue for the budget, particularly after the beginning of the economic crisis and the suspension of the project to develop a tourist recreation zone. The Rostov bureaucrats' active participation in international economic forums and their invitations to business, unfortunately, are often accompanied by poorly designed legal and economic proposals. To encourage General Motors to build a factory in the region, the authorities offered the company tax breaks as well as a construction site with links to the necessary infrastructure. However, during the process of drawing up a contract, it became clear that the Rostov authorities

had exceeded their authority in giving such promises. Russia's complicated legislation divides responsibilities between the regional and local authorities. Addressing a number of problems, such as allotting the land for construction, connecting the sewers, and dealing with environmental issues are the competency of the local government. Even at the local level, there is often conflict over who does what since the municipal council, rather than the executive branch, frequently holds jurisdiction. Disagreements among the authorities and the threat of legal disputes ultimately halted the negotiations.

Moving Forward

Ultimately, the internal economic and social trends in the Rostov economy will not by themselves lead to some sort of systemic or radical changes. The continued stability or destabilization of the political situation does not depend on the activities of the regional authorities but on external factors. While there will be a gradual reduction in living standards for the population, there will not be any significant social or political conflicts.

The situation could change radically if the crisis intensifies and massive layoffs ensue. None of the existing opposition parties, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Just Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia or the regional representatives of the radical political groups in the Other Russia coalition are able to take advantage of the growing protest feelings. Rostov is currently conducting by-elections to the City Duma and none of the opposition candidates has been able to use the crisis to his benefit. The people who are suffering from the crisis are not likely to unite into a political movement because they all have different values and characteristics. Unemployed members of the middle class will not join ranks with the marginal supporters of the KPRF.

The social consequences of the crisis could become more apparent in 2010, when the governor's term will expire and the question of his successor will be high on the agenda. Additionally, then there will be elections for the mayor of Rostov-na-Donu, all seats in the City Duma, and more than two-thirds of the local government heads.

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Analysis

Political and Economic Changes Come Slowly to Marii El

Sergei Poduzov, Ioshkar-Ola

Abstract

The Marii El presidential administration works consistently to limit the powers of local government in the republic and deprive citizen activists of the ability to criticize the authorities. Accordingly, a protest movement could only arise on the basis of collective efforts to defend political rights.

A Referendum to Limit Local Government

On March 1, 2009, Marii El successfully conducted a referendum in 44 local jurisdictions on consolidating local government. With its passage, the referendum created one urban and 19 village jurisdictions. The authorities explained the changes as necessary to optimize local government management as part of an on-going national process of reform launched in 2003. However, the true reason for conducting the referendum was completely different: Four years ago the Marii El republic presidential administration decided to subordinate local government directly to the republican government.

To be sure there are many problems with local government in the republic and the general public has low regard for it. The republican authorities created a situation in which incompetent people dependent on the higher authorities and local business were elected as mayors. Often these mayors violated the law, creating an impression among the public that rural settlements could not independently carry out their duties and therefore it was necessary to restructure them. The Marii El procurator filed 12 criminal cases against local officials in 2008, according to its web site.

In 2007, the Man and Law organization conducted a public opinion poll in the republic's raions which showed that the population ranked mayors in second place as violators of human rights. In a poll of 812 individuals, 22 percent categorized the heads of local governments this way. Policemen were the most frequently cited human rights violators.

However, local government is the only level of government today that can serve as an arena for developing democracy under existing Russian legislation. Most importantly, these laws allow the election of unaffiliated candidates, as well as party members, to local office.

By conducting the referendum, the republican authorities secured a system of local government that will be easier for them to manage. The population, by participating in the referendum and voting ostensibly for strengthening the governments of village settlements

did not realize that they were actually depriving themselves of the ability to influence the management of their settlements.

A History of Conflict between Republican and Local Governments

It is important to note that the Marii El presidential administration decided to implement its plans for restructuring local government only after it eliminated its political opponents. There have been several episodes of conflict between the regional and local authorities.

The first conflict between Marii El President Leonid Markelov and local government leaders began at the end of 2001 when Markelov changed the republican law, forcing the local governments to give a large portion of their budgets to the republic's treasury. Four mayors criticized the president's action: the mayors of Volzhsk and Zvenigov raions and Volzhsk and Ioshkar-Ola cities. All four subsequently had to leave office.

As a result of the conflict, the authorities filed charges against the mayor of Zvenigov Raion Mikhail Zherebtsov for allegedly misusing public funds. During the preliminary investigation, Zherebtsov was removed from office and a new mayor was elected who was loyal to the Marii El president. Accordingly, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation closed the case against Zherebtsov, but he could not return to his office. The conflict between Zherebtsov and Markelov did not end there. On June 17, 2005, Zherebtsov criticized Markelov in public at a meeting with diplomats from Estonia, Hungary, and Finland. Subsequently, the authorities charged Zherebtsov with slander and on October 26, 2005, a Ioshkar-Ola justice of the peace found him guilty and gave him a six-month suspended prison sentence.

Volzhsk Mayor Nikolai Svistunov was the second mayor to suffer for opposing Markelov. His situation at the republican level is similar to that of Mikhail Khodorkovsky at the federal level. The real reason for the conflict between the mayor of Volzhsk and the president of Marii El is a battle for the resources located in Volzhsk.

The president wanted the mayor to transfer some of this property to other people. Svistunov refused, claiming that to do so would break the law. The president chose to fight back by filing criminal charges against him. In 2003 the authorities accused Svistunov of embezzling property. In 2004, the Volzhsk city court found him guilty and he was sentenced to prison for three years and three months. While Svistunov was in jail he continued to fight for his rights, attempting to show that he was illegally convicted, drawing more and more attention to his case within Russia. In 2005, Svistunov was eligible for parole, but Markelov feared that if he were released from prison, his political rating would be higher than the Marii El president's. He also feared that Svistunov could consolidate the local political elite which then did not have a clear leader. To address this problem, the authorities filed new criminal charges against Svistunov. In order to break his will, the authorities held him in inhuman conditions as they investigated the new charges. Svistunov was placed in a cell where there was no light, hot water, or heat and his jailers would not allow his relatives to provide him with a blanket. To draw attention to his case, Svistunov announced a hunger strike. At that point, members of the Man and Law organization began to represent Svistunov's interests before the authorities, protesting the violation of his rights. They demonstrated in court that the authorities' poor treatment of the prisoner destroyed his human dignity and amounted to torture. The Ioshkar-Ola court ruled in favor of Svistunov, finding that the authorities had violated article 3 of the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This small victory offered hope that Svistunov would be found not guilty of the new charges against him. However, on June 30, 2006, the Marii El Supreme Court found him guilty of accepting a bribe and raised his overall sentence to eight years and six months. Svistunov considers that it will be difficult to win justice in the Russian Federation and has appealed to the European Court for Human Rights. At the same time, he has decided not to register additional complaints until the end of his term. In April 2009, Svistunov will again be eligible for parole. However, on March 2, the head of the procurator's investigative committee announced that it was investigating new charges against him - abuse of power during the time when he served as mayor.

In contrast to the other two, the mayors of Ioshkar-Ola and Volzhsk Raion voluntarily left office. The only conflict between the mayor of Ioshkar-Ola and the president did not last long and a new mayor was appointed in 2005.

President vs. Citizen Activists

The second major conflict which took place in Marii El was between citizen activists and the republican president. This conflict began in 2005 and continues to the present.

Georgii Pirogov was the first citizen to criticize Markelov publically, doing so at a 2005 demonstration organized by the group Marii Ushem, which seeks to protect the rights of the indigenous people in the region. The authorities charged Pirogov with slander and after two-and-a-half years of investigation, a justice of the peace in Ioshkar-Ola found him guilty and gave him a suspended sentence of six months in 2007.

Nina Maksimova and Vladimir Kozlov of the Marii Ushem group also came into conflict with Markelov. The authorities used a variety of means to pressure this group, including the filing of criminal charges. The Moscow Helsinki Group has a long description of this incident on its web site (<http://www.mhg.ru/publications/A1AD2FD>). This conflict does not have an impact on the current political situation in the region. However, either side could revive it at any moment.

The third incident of conflict between the regional authorities and its citizens involved the Marii priest Vitalii Tanakov. He prepared a brochure entitled "A priest speaks" which contained three sections: the origins of the Marii religion, a comparison of the Marii religion and nationality with other religions and nationalities, and the future of Marii El. In the third section, Tanakov criticized the political elite led by the republican presidential administration. The authorities filed charges against Tanakov for instigating inter-ethnic conflict. A Ioshkar-Ola court found him guilty and sentenced him to 120 hours of community work. Then the Ioshkar-Ola procurator asked the court to declare the brochure "extremist." April 2009 will mark the second anniversary of the beginning of that case. Specialists from six institutions have concluded that the brochure included information that sparked ethnic conflict. As the case drags on, Tanakov has appealed to the European Court for Human Rights claiming that his freedom of religion and speech were violated.

The fourth case is a conflict between supporters of former prime minister and presidential candidate Mikhail Kasyanov and the Marii El president. The leader of Kasyanov's election campaign in the republic is Rustam Abdullin. The authorities paid special attention to Kasyanov's supporters during the campaign. Before the campaign, Abdullin had criticized Markelov in his capacity as deputy chairman of the regional branch of Union of Right Forces political party and as the coor-

dinator of United Civil Front protest movement in the region. Kasyanov's supporters collected signatures for him in the republic and then passed them to Abdullin so that he could take them to Moscow. The authorities detained Abdullin on the Ioshkar-Ola-Moscow train. They filed charges against him and his colleagues for allegedly forging signatures. The case is currently before the court and Abdullin's supporters fear that his rights will not be protected.

All of these cases demonstrate how all conflicts among the elites of Marii El end in victory for the republican president. Currently, the battle is escalating,

bringing ever more people into the struggle for power. To date, the authorities have managed to contain the conflict in the legal field, using the punitive powers of the law enforcement agencies. It is clear that the authorities are limiting political freedoms and violating human rights in an ever more serious ways. It is important to point out that if the political elite never lose, and we see how only one side in this conflict is ever convicted of wrongdoing, then the protest movement will only become stronger as people seek to defend their political freedoms.

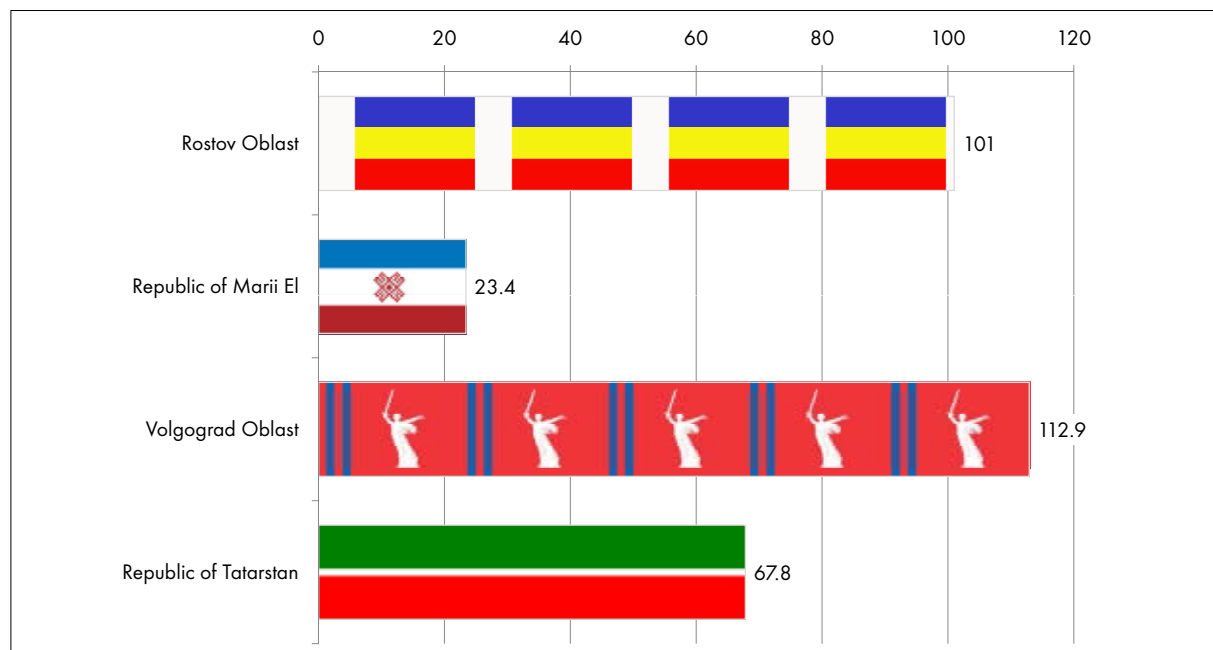
About the author

Sergei Poduzov is the co-chairman of the Man and Law organization in Marii El.

Graphs

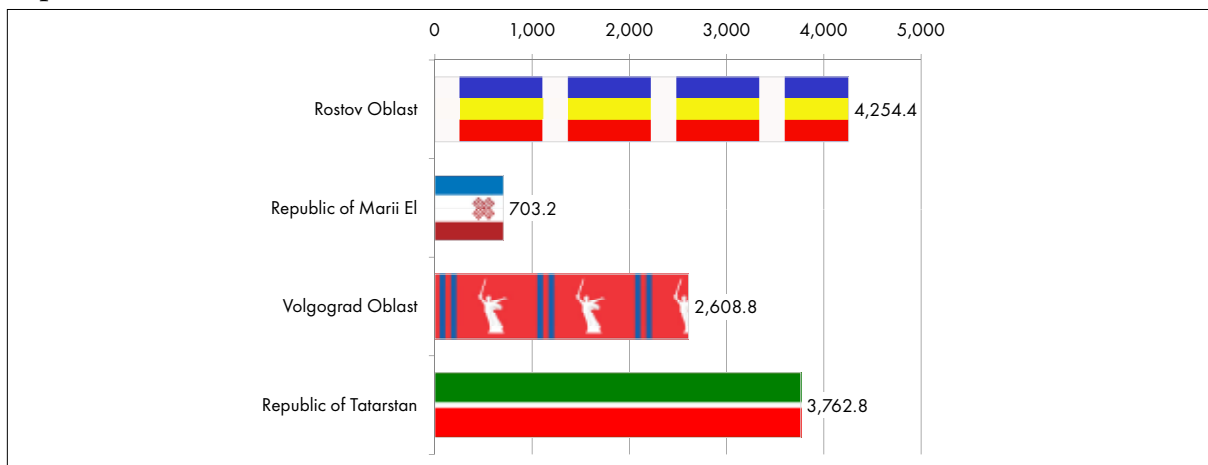
Rostov and Marii El Regions – Key Data Compared

Territory (in thsd. km²)

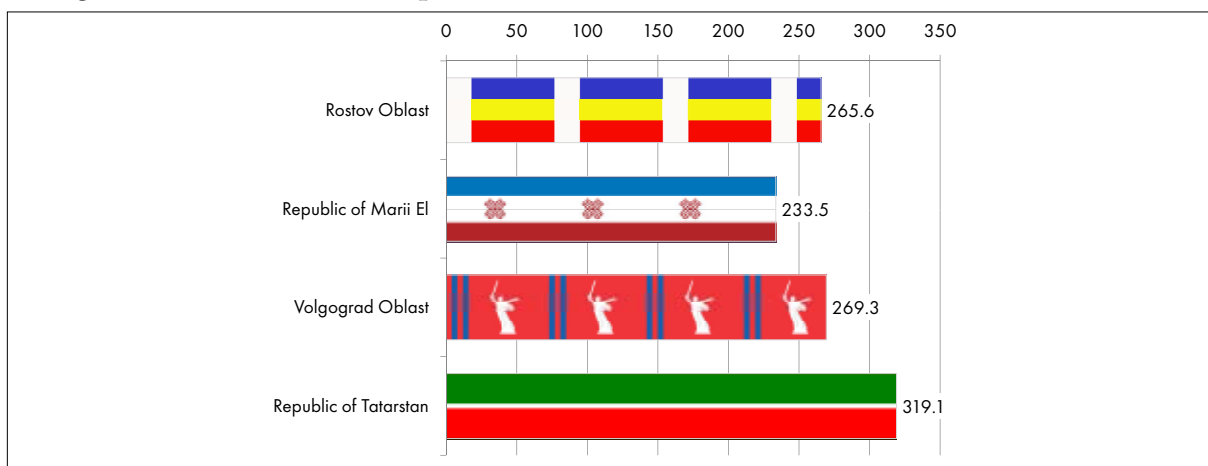


Source: see table on pp. 14–17.

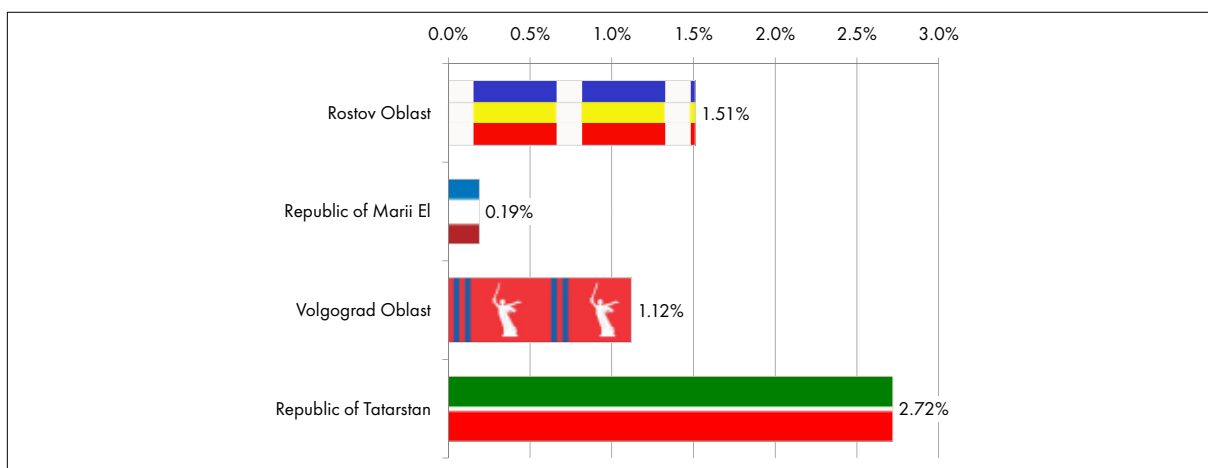
Population (in thsds.)



Average Monthly Income Per Capita (in Euro)



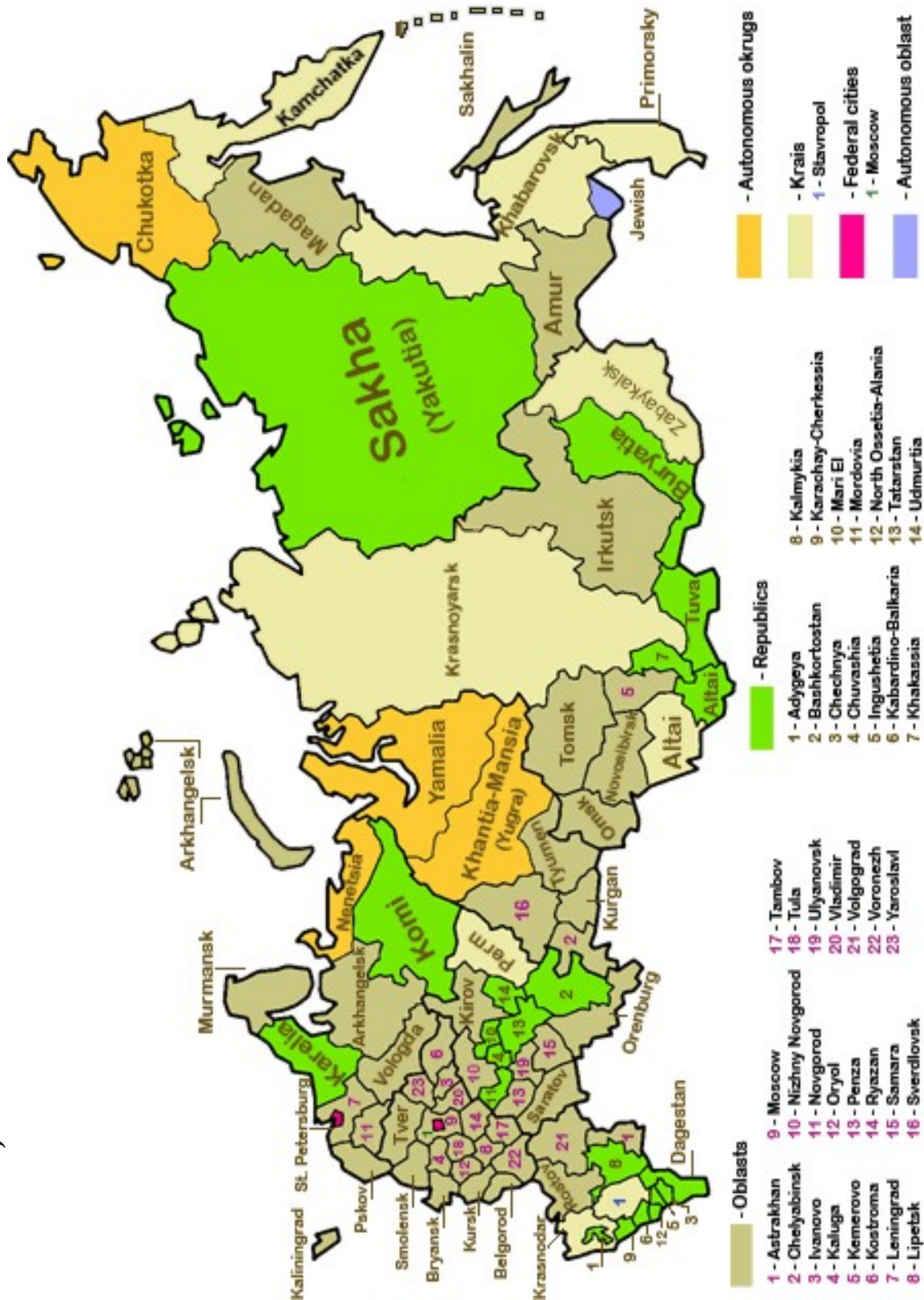
Share in Russian GDP (2006)



Source: see table on pp. 14–17.

Map

Federal Subjects of Russia



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_subjects_of_Russia

Documentation

Russia's Regions. A Statistical Overview

(data as of 01 January 2008)

Region	Capital	Territory (in thsd. km ²)	Population (in thdsds.)	Average monthly income per capita (in Euro)	Share in Russian GDP (2006)
<i>For comparison: Russia</i>	<i>Moscow</i>	<i>17098.2</i>	<i>142008.8</i>	<i>376.5</i>	<i>100%</i>
Northwestern Federal Okrug					
Republic of Karelia	Petrozavodsk	180.5	690.7	370.2	0.39%
Republic of Komi	Sykt'yvkar	416.8	968.2	476.4	0.95%
Arkhangelsk Oblast	Arkhangelsk	589.9	1271.9	404.6	0.93%
Vologda Oblast	Vologda	144.5	1222.9	362.8	0.93%
Kaliningrad Oblast	Kaliningrad	15.1	937.4	349.3	0.45%
Leningrad Oblast	St. Petersburg	83.9	1633.3	362.3	1.19%
Murmansk Oblast	Murmansk	144.9	850.9	514.2	0.70%
Novgorod Oblast	Novgorod	54.5	652.4	299.2	0.33%
Pskov Oblast	Pskov	55.4	705.3	245.7	0.22%
St. Petersburg	St. Petersburg	1.4	4568.1	467.3	3.64%
Nenets Autonomous Okrug	Naryan Mar	176.8	42	957.5	0.27%
Central Federal Okrug					
Belgorod Oblast	Belgorod	27.1	1519.1	291.3	0.81%
Bryansk Oblast	Bryansk	34.9	1308.5	228.9	0.37%
Vladimir Oblast	Vladimir	29.1	1449.5	260.1	0.50%
Voronezh Oblast	Voronezh	52.2	2280.4	249.4	0.73%
Ivanovo Oblast	Ivanovo	21.4	1079.6	233.1	0.24%
Kaluga Oblast	Kaluga	29.8	1005.7	301.3	0.38%
Kostroma Oblast	Kostroma	60.2	697	254.1	0.24%
Kursk Oblast	Kursk	30	1162.5	248.0	0.45%
Lipetsk Oblast	Lipetsk	24	1168.8	302.6	0.84%
Moscow Oblast	Moscow	45.8	6672.8	448.3	4.21%

Region	Capital	Territory (in thsd. km ²)	Population (in thdsd.)	Average monthly income per capita (in Euro)	Share in Russian GDP (2006)
Oryol Oblast	Oryol	24.7	821.9	240.0	0.28%
Ryazan Oblast	Ryazan	39.6	1164.5	272.7	0.46%
Smolensk Oblast	Smolensk	49.8	983.2	267.2	0.36%
Tambov Oblast	Tambov	34.5	1106	219.8	0.35%
Tver Oblast	Tver	84.2	1379.6	279.6	0.56%
Tula Oblast	Tula	25.7	1566.3	278.1	0.64%
Yaroslavl Oblast	Yaroslavl	36.2	1315	312.9	0.70%
Moscow city	Moscow city	1.1	10470.3	644.9	23.08%
Southern Federal Okrug					
Republic of Adygeya	Maykop	7.8	441.2	223.7	0.09%
Republic of Dagestan	Makhachkala	50.3	2687.8	157.6	0.53%
Republic of Ingushetia	Nazran	3.6	499.5	218.3	0.04%
Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria	Nalchik	12.5	891.3	203.3	0.19%
Republic of Kalmykia	Elista	74.7	285.6	196.8	0.06%
Republic of Karachayev-Cher- kessia	Cherkessk	14.3	427.4	210.5	0.10%
Republic of North Ossetia	Vladikavkaz	8	702.4	212.8	0.19%
Republic of Chechnya	Grozny	15.6	1209	281.6	0.13%
Krasnodar Krai	Krasnodar	75.5	5121.8	287.8	2.09%
Stavropol Krai	Stavropol	66.2	2705.1	243.0	0.80%
Astrakhan Oblast	Astrakhan	49	1000.9	277.4	0.38%
Volgograd Oblast	Volgograd	112.9	2608.8	269.3	1.12%
Rostov Oblast	Rostov on Don	101	4254.4	265.6	1.51%
Volga Federal Okrug					
Republic of Bashkortostan	Ufa	142.9	4052.8	306.7	2.27%
Republic of Mari-El	Yoshkar-Ola	23.4	703.2	233.5	0.19%
Republic of Mordovia	Saransk	26.1	840.4	225.4	0.25%

Region	Capital	Territory (in thsd. km ²)	Population (in thds.)	Average monthly income per capita (in Euro)	Share in Russian GDP (2006)
Republic of Tatarstan	Kazan	67.8	3762.8	319.1	2.72%
Republic of Udmurtia	Izhevsk	42.1	1532.7	272.8	0.73%
Republic of Chuvashia	Cheboksary	18.3	1282.6	242.9	0.41%
Kirov Oblast	Vyatka	120.4	1413.2	247.9	0.43%
Nizhny Novgorod Oblast	Nizhny Novgorod	76.6	3359.8	285.6	1.71%
Orenburg Oblast	Orenburg	123.7	2119	268.3	1.34%
Penza Oblast	Penza	43.4	1388	239.0	0.41%
Perm Krai	Perm	160.2	2718.2	335.9	1.76%
Samara Oblast	Samara	53.6	3172.8	333.0	2.20%
Saratov Oblast	Saratov	101.2	2583.8	254.8	0.90%
Ulyanovsk Oblast	Ulyanovsk	37.2	1312.2	235.3	0.45%
Urals Federal Okrug					
Kurgan Oblast	Kurgan	71.5	960.4	249.3	0.30%
Sverdlovsk Oblast	Yekaterinburg	194.3	4395.6	385.1	2.94%
Tyumen Oblast	Tyumen	1464.2	3373.4	795.2	11.70%
Chelyabinsk Oblast	Chelyabinsk	88.5	3511	329.1	1.98%
Khanty-Mansiisk Autonomous Okrug	Khanty-Mansiisk	534.8	1505.2	898.6	7.33%
Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug	Salekhard	769.3	542.8	1040.0	2.44%
Siberian Federal Okrug					
Republic of Altai	Gorno-Altaysk	92.9	207.1	259.2	0.05%
Republic of Buryatia	Ulan-Ude	351.3	959.9	317.7	0.41%
Republic of Tyva	Kyzyl	168.6	311.6	292.9	0.07%
Republic of Khakasia	Abakan	61.6	537.3	315.8	0.23%
Altai Krai	Barnaul	168	2508.5	214.6	0.75%
Krasnoyarsk Krai	Krasnoyarsk	2366.8	2890.4	430.4	2.63%

Region	Capital	Territory (in thsd. km ²)	Population (in thds.)	Average monthly income per capita (in Euro)	Share in Russian GDP (2006)
Irkutsk Oblast	Irkutsk	774.8	2507.7	382.7	1.45%
Kemerovo Oblast	Kemerovo	95.7	2823.5	348.1	1.51%
Novosibirsk Oblast	Novosibirsk	177.8	2635.6	337.5	1.29%
Omsk Oblast	Omsk	141.1	2018	312.3	1.11%
Tomsk Oblast	Tomsk	314.4	1035	395.8	0.84%
Chita Oblast	Chita	431.9	1118.9	337.0	0.39%
Aginsk Buryat Autonomous Okrug	Aginskoe	19.6	76.4	244.1	0.03%
Far Eastern Federal Okrug					
Republic of Sakha-Yakutia	Yakutsk	3083.5	951.4	541.6	0.92%
Primorsky Krai	Vladivostok	464.3	345.7	367.1	0.24%
Khabarovsk Krai	Khabarovsk	164.7	1995.8	438.0	0.94%
Amur Oblast	Blagoveshchensk	787.6	1403.7	371.3	0.88%
Kamchatka Oblast	Petro-Kamchatsky	361.9	869.6	608.3	0.41%
Magadan Oblast	Magadan	462.5	165.8	649.6	0.13%
Sakhalin Oblast	Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk	87.1	518.5	645.4	0.73%
Jewish Autonomous Oblast	Birobidzhan	36.3	185.6	336.7	0.08%
Chukotka Autonomous Okrug	Anadyr	721.5	50.3	875.9	0.07%

Source: Russian Federal Service for Statistics, http://www.gks.ru/doc_2008/rusfig/rus08.zip.

About the Russian Analytical Digest

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The Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly internet publication jointly produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich). It is supported by the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Digest draws on contributions to the German-language *Russlandanalysen* (www.laender-analysen.de/russland), the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia (www.res.ethz.ch), and the Russian Regional Report. The Russian Analytical Digest covers political, economic, and social developments in Russia and its regions, and looks at Russia's role in international relations.

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The Research Centre possesses a unique collection of alternative culture and independent writings from the former socialist countries in its archive. In addition to extensive individual research on dissidence and society in socialist countries, since January 2007 a group of international research institutes is participating in a collaborative project on the theme "The other Eastern Europe – the 1960s to the 1980s, dissidence in politics and society, alternatives in culture. Contributions to comparative contemporary history", which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

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The CSS is engaged in research projects with a number of Swiss and international partners. The Center's research focus is on new risks, European and transatlantic security, strategy and doctrine, state failure and state building, and Swiss foreign and security policy.

In its teaching capacity, the CSS contributes to the ETH Zurich-based Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army and the ETH and University of Zurich-based MA program in Comparative and International Studies (MACIS), offers and develops specialized courses and study programs to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students, and has the lead in the Executive Masters degree program in Security Policy and Crisis Management (MAS ETH SPCM), which is offered by ETH Zurich. The program is tailored to the needs of experienced senior executives and managers from the private and public sectors, the policy community, and the armed forces.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Comprehensive Risk Analysis and Management Network (CRN), the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Russian and Eurasian Security (RES) Network.

Any opinions expressed in Russian Analytical Digest are exclusively those of the authors.

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