

# **NATIONAL TELEVISION IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA**

THE MEDIA'S CHANGING ROLE IN SOCIETY AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF  
COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM

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MARGARITA SOKOLOVSKAJA  
308174844

HONOURS IV 2011  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND GOVERNMENT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

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# ABSTRACT

Over the course of Putin's two terms as president, national television, the most important form of media for the Russian population, fell increasingly under the control of the state and many independent channels were dismantled. Employing the 2000 and 2008 presidential elections as case studies, this thesis looks at the decline of media independence in Russia since the 1990s and considers the changing role of the mass media in Russian society and politics. In the late 1990s national television served as a means for competing oligarchs to propagate their views and political aspirations to the public. However, by 2008, pro-Kremlin coverage had become the dominant voice on national television. This is a reflection of wider trends of the time. Putin transformed the weak government that lacked sufficient coercive and organisational capacity to respond to elite challenges into a competitive authoritarian regime, where elections remain competitive, but the media and other crucial resources are biased in favour of the incumbent candidate.

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# INTRODUCTION

## POSING THE QUESTION

The mass media has always been perceived as a vital institution within modern societies, although its precise purpose and relationship with other societal institutions has been a subject of much contention. In Eighteenth Century Britain, the media was perceived as the fourth state, independent from the monarchy, the parliament and the judicial system, and therefore capable to exposing abuses of the democratic process (Curran, 1991, p. 92; Wheeler, 1997, p 6). In contrast, for Antonio Gramsci, the media was one of the cultural institutions that the ruling elite employ to communicate society's dominant ideology and perpetuate its reproduction (Patrick and Thrall, 2007, pp. 97-98). Over the course of the Twentieth Century, scholarship on the mass media underwent significant changes. The rise of the Nazi party in Germany and the growth of mass media in the United States led to the mass society or the hypodermic needle theory becoming the dominant paradigm in the first half of the Twentieth Century (Williams, 2003, pp. 26-28). With the advent of empirical research into the impact of the mass media on its audience, the mass society theory was largely discarded in Western academic scholarship to be replaced with conceptual models, which portrayed the media as having only limited influence over the audience. However, in the following decades, these empirical studies were further challenged by scholarship embracing feminist, neo-Marxist or post-modernist theories (Williams, 2003, pp. 44-52)

The rich debate about the role of the media had produced a wide range of literature, among which was literature on political communication. Political communication research concerns primarily with the interactions between the media, public action and politics. Thus, Brian McNair identified the five basic functions of the media: to inform the citizens, to educate as to the meaning and significance of the facts, to provide a platform for political

discourse facilitating the formation of public opinion, to provide publicity to governmental and political institutions and to serve as a medium for the articulation of party policies. However, he is swift to stress that this interpretation applies only to ideal-type democracies and in many instances, the media is unable to perform such functions due to poor education, overly-stringent controls and the absence of true political pluralism (McNair, 2003, pp. 21-24).

When the Communist leadership in the Soviet Union decided to expand newspapers, radio and television coverage they did so because their view of the mass media was largely consistent with the early Twentieth Century mass society theory. Yet in reality, the spread of the mass media actually aided the destruction of the Communist regime and in the years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the monolithic state-owned media was largely dismantled (Hutchings and Rulyova, 2009, pp. 4-5).

On the other hand, the role of the media in post-Soviet Russia does not approach the five functions that Brian McNair had outlined either. In the years immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the various forms of mass media enjoyed a great degree of freedom and the journalists aspired to function as the fourth estate in society. However, as the Russian state consolidated, media freedom declined. In 1997, Freedom House ranked media independence at 3.75<sup>1</sup>, but by 2003 media independence declined to 5.0 (Freedom House, 2003). The following year, the ranking declined further to 5.75 and in 2005, Freedom House changed the status of the media in Russia from 'partly free' to 'not free' (Freedom House, 2005).

This thesis thus aims to consider how we can explain the disintegration of media independence in Russia over the course of Vladimir Putin's presidency. Moreover, if the role

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House rankings for the state of civil and political rights within a country are measured on a 7 point scale, 1 is considered the most free and 7 the least free

of the Russian mass media, as many states, does not conform to the functions political communication scholarship ascribes to the media, is it possible to create a working paradigm that explains the relationship between the mass media and the state in Russia at the end of Vladimir Putin's presidency?

## THESIS ARGUMENT

It is possible to situate an explanation about the links between the Russian mass media and the state within a wider literature that focuses on the analysis and categorisation of newly established regimes in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. The underlying assumption beneath much of the earlier literature on states that underwent regime changes since the beginning of the third wave of democratisation was that they would eventually transition towards a democratic system of government. However, in the thirty years since Samuel Huntington first identified the beginning of a third wave of democratisation in 1974 (Geddes, 1999, p. 115), it has become clear that not all regime changes have produced democratic governments and there is no guarantee that such a transition will eventually occur (Carothers, 2002, p. 6).

Scholars within the field of transitional studies have therefore attempted to create a framework for the categorisation of these newly established regimes, recognising that these countries fall outside the parameters of previously established regime classifications and are essentially hybrid regimes existing somewhere on the spectrum between democracy and authoritarianism. The product of this scholarship has been a vast array of new terms for these hybrid regimes that rely on qualifying forms of democracy or authoritarianism, such as 'delegative democracy', 'illiberal democracy' or 'sultanic semi-authoritarianism' (Bogaards, 2009, p. 399-400). Levitsky and Way's concept of competitive authoritarianism falls within this latter strand of literature.



Levitsky and Way argue that the post-Cold War world produced several examples of competitive authoritarian regimes, where governments routinely violate at least one of the defining attributes of democracy (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 7). The authors rely primarily on a definition of democracy that follows Dahl's 'procedural minimum' requirements of democracy: free, fair and competitive elections; full adult suffrage; broad protection of civil liberties and the absence of non-elected authorities that limit the elected officials' ability to govern. However, Levitsky and Way also include a fifth criterion to their definition of democracy: the existence of a level playing field between the incumbent and the opposition (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 5-6). Elections in competitive authoritarian regimes are typically unfree and unfair due to fraud and intimidation of opposition activists, but the opposition is not prevented from running a full-fledged national campaign as would occur in a full-fledged authoritarian regime. Civil liberties are guaranteed and mostly respected, but the independent media may be threatened or suppression of opposition leaders suppressed by legal means may occur (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 8-9). ). The opposition and the incumbent in a competitive authoritarian regime also have an unequal access to resources, access to the media or access to the law, with the opposition always at a disadvantage (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 10-11).

A stable competitive authoritarian regime can arise and succeed in the long term through a favourable combination of three factors: the degree of country's linkage to the West, a country's vulnerability to Western pressure and the strength of incumbent government's organisational and coercive capacity (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 23-24). Over his two terms as president, Vladimir Putin found that improved economic performance and his policies strengthened the core of the Russian state, which created conditions favourable for the emergence of a stable competitive authoritarian state in Russia. This is evident in the shifts in the conduct of presidential elections and the coverage of presidential candidates between the 2000 and the 2008 presidential elections.

There were thus two key developments at play, a decline in Western leverage and an increase in coercive and organisations capacity for the incumbent. Levitsky and Way note that Western leverage can take the form of multilateral conditionality, direct democracy promotion or transnational advocacy networks. Yet the vulnerability of a nation-state to this pressure is very variable depending on the size and strength of the state and the economy, the existence of countervailing strategic interests and the existence of counter-hegemonic forces in the region (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 38-41). Even after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia remained a nuclear state with a large territory and population, which ensured that Western leverage remained relatively low, but improved economic performance further weakened the capacity of Western governments to exert pressure on the Russian state (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 187-190).

The true weakness of the Yeltsin government in the 1990s was its poor domestic leadership. The success of a competitive authoritarian regime rests on the capabilities of its domestic leadership, such as the state's coercive capacity, party strength and degree of opposition strength (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 54- 68). The incumbent leadership is able to contain elite conflict and to outmanoeuvre the opposition by pre-empting opposition challenges in states where organisational power is high. In states where this does not occur, the incumbent is vulnerable to elite defection and unable to resist challenges from his opponents (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 71). This is evident in 'the information wars' that played out across the major television channels in the late 1990s and culminated at the 2000 Russian presidential elections. The pro-government faction included Yeltsin's immediate supporters, prominent regional governors and the oligarch Boris Berezovski, who controlled ORT and TV-6 and a large portion of the national periodical press. On the other side was the Fatherland-All Russia bloc, the rest of the governors, the Luzkhov media holding company and Vladimir Gusinski's Media-Most, which owned NTV (Zassoursky, 2004, p. 119). The sharp difference in the coverage of the election between the pro-state and

the independent television channels is evidence of elite conflict in Russian society, where the national television channels were used to promote the agendas of particular political factions and which the weak Yeltsin presidency could not resolve due to its poor coercive capacity.

In contrast, by 2008 much of the independent media was dismantled. Of the independent national television channels, Gusinski's company Media-Most was taken over by the pro-government Gazprom, which ended the ability of NTV to act as a voice of opposition to the government. Boris Berezovski gave up his share in ORT and had to accept exile in the United Kingdom. The smaller independent channels, TNT and TV6 were shut down due to unprofitability or legal issues. The television coverage of presidential candidates in the lead up to the 2008 election makes it clear that that the playing field in Russian elections had become more uneven; the pro-government forces were able to exercise a significantly greater influence over the media and Ren-TV, the sole dissenting voice, is unable to mirror the challenge that NTV's audience share had represented in 2000. It can be concluded, therefore, that the Russian television networks functioned as a medium through which the state could consolidate its power and pre-empt an opposition challenge by ensuring an uneven access to crucial resources and ultimately facilitating the transformation of the Russian state into a competitive authoritarian regime.

## CASE STUDY SELECTION

The use of an election as a case study in academic literature can be very worthwhile, because an analysis of the way elections are conducted within a state can reveal great amount of information about a state and its political system. Traditionally, periodic elections have been one of the defining features of a liberal democracy, as at the end of each term in office, the electorate has the opportunity to decide whether to reward an incumbent with a

re-election or to elect an alternative candidate. An election is a way for the voting population to hold its elected officials accountable for their policy choices and to confirm the legitimacy of the government (List and Sturm, 2006, p. 1249). However, democratic states are not the only ones to conduct elections. In the Soviet Union, elections were also held regularly and voting encouraged, but there was little opportunity to offer a dissenting vote in the Soviet single candidate system (White, 2000, p. 302). Moreover, as Levitsky and Way have argued, one of the distinguishing factors of a competitive authoritarian regime is the way elections are competitive and as perceived as a valid arena to contest for power, but are unfairly biased towards the incumbent.

In view of the vast disparity in the conduct of elections across various regime types, regular elections alone cannot define a regime as a democratic one. In reflection of this, there has been an increasing insistence in academic scholarship to consider factors other than the procedural casting of votes in a ballot box as evidence of the democratic process (White, 2000, p. 303). The behaviour of the mass media during and in the lead up to elections is one of these factors. Mass media is critical to the conduct of modern elections as the media has the vital role of informing the public about the candidates and provides a platform for the candidates to present their perspectives and policies to the voters.

The focus on the 2000 and the 2008 presidential elections in this thesis reflects the emphasis of the analysis on the changes that occurred in the Russian state and society over the two terms of the Putin presidency. Therefore, the 2000 election acts as a starting point for the discussion, because that is the moment of culmination of the Yeltsin presidency and the beginning of Putin's. The 2008 election can be seen as a parallel of the 2000 election, since both feature an almost dynastic succession from the president to his chosen replacement. More importantly, however, the 2008 presidential election is the culmination

of the Putin presidency and the changes that had occurred over the course of the previous eight years.

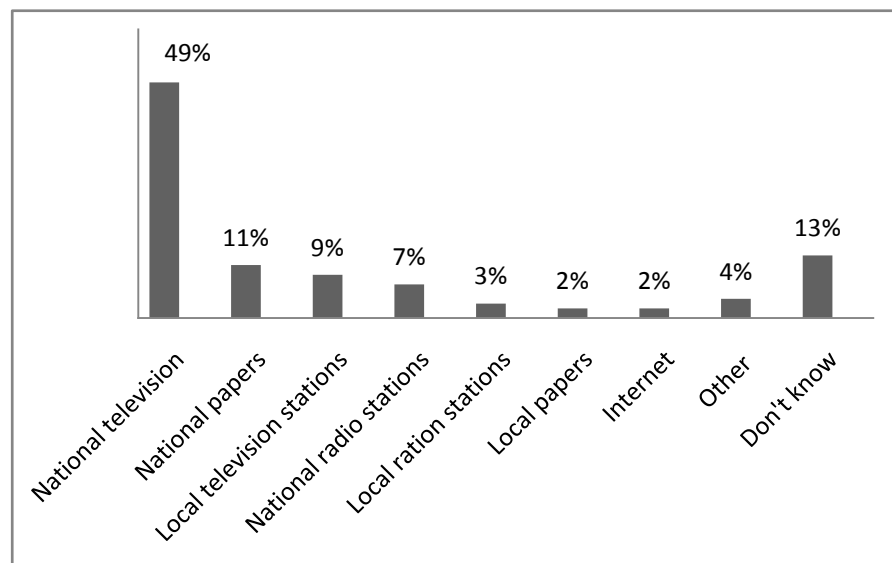
In the analysis of the media during the 2000 and the 2008 presidential elections, the focus is firmly on national television channels. This is due to the fact that national television channels, such as ORT, RTR and NTV, are by far the most important form of media in post-Soviet Russia; they dominate all other forms of media. In the Soviet Union, both the television and the print media were considered vital propaganda tools. The Soviet authorities had actively encouraged the development of a national television system and by the 1980s, more than 90 per cent of the country received at least one television channel compared to only five per cent of the population in 1960. Similarly, the Soviet Union had newspapers with some of the largest circulations in the world (White and Oates, 2003, p. 32). However, the printed press had fared poorly after 1991; there was a proliferation of new newspapers and journals, but print runs slumped. In 1990, there were 43 publications with an average print run of 2.5 million (Beumers, Hutchings and Rulyova, 2009, pp. 20-21) and total daily print run of Russian newspapers was 708 for every 1000 inhabitants. By 1996, the daily print run fell to 105, which did not correspond to figures for other European countries, such as 218 in France and 311 in Germany (White, McAllister and Oates, 2002, p. 22). In a 2001 survey of media consumption in Russia, 91 per cent of respondents watched television daily; while less than a quarter read newspapers daily (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: HOW OFTEN DO YOU...

	Daily (in percentages)	Never (in percentages)
Watch television	91	1
Listen to the radio	68	23
Read the newspaper	24	18
Read literature	20	44
Watch videos	7	60
Use a computer	6	88
Read magazines	4	53

'Television through the eyes of the TV viewer - 2001' quoted in Aksartova et al, 2003, p. 3

FIGURE 2: PREFERRED SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE RUSSIAN PUBLIC



Source: Izvestia Media, March 26, 2001, quoted in Rantanen, 2002, p. 96

Izvestia Media's 2001 survey also highlights this preference towards television (see Figure 2). Only 11 per cent of respondents nominated national newspapers as a source of information and two per cent stated that they used local newspapers for information. In comparison, 49 per cent of respondents used national television channels as a source of information. Moreover, the media, especially state television channels, enjoyed a greater level of confidence than other social institutions in contemporary Russia, including the church, the government and the armed forces (White, Oates and McAllister, 2005, p. 195). Of those surveyed, 57 per cent of respondent had full or substantial confidence in state television, compared to 47 per cent in the printed press and 38 per cent in commercial television (White, Oates and McAllister, 2005, p. 195-196).

## THESIS STRUCTURE

The purpose of this thesis is to explain the evolution of the relationship between Russian national television and the federal government during the Putin presidency. Chapter 1 therefore considers the major strands of existing research on the media theory

and on the media in Russia since 1991. It suggests that Levitsky and Way's concept of competitive authoritarianism is a useful perspective for an analysis of post-Soviet Russia, because it describes profoundly undemocratic societies and does not display a bias towards liberal-democracy as an ideal type, which is evident in many other strands of academic literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Levitsky and Way's conceptualisation of competitive authoritarianism and trajectories for its emergence.

The following two chapters contain the two case studies, which are analysed through the lens of competitive authoritarianism. Chapter 2 discusses the 2000 presidential election and the coverage of the leading presidential candidates on major television channels. The disparity between electoral coverage on the pro-state and independent channels makes clear that at the beginning of 2000, the competing political factions in Russia used national television as a vehicle for the presentation and accomplishment of personal political goals. This was due to the weak Russian state's inability to eliminate challenges from dissenting elites due to its poor coercive and organisational capacity.

Chapter 3 traces Putin's efforts to increase the capacities of the state through consolidation of power from the federation's peripheral regions to the Kremlin and the near destruction of independent media in Russia. It argues that during the eight years of the Putin presidency, advantage in elections was swung further in the favour of the incumbent as Putin consolidated Russia into a stable competitive authoritarian state. The final chapter draws on the arguments presented in the two case studies to present a conclusion to the questions explored and suggests avenues for further study.

# **CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTUALISING THE MEDIA AND THE STATE**

## **THEORIES OF THE MEDIA**

Any discussion about the media in Russia will exist within the parameters of the wider debates about the role of the various forms of the mass media in modern society. These debates originate with the emergence of the mass media itself, as despite a general consensus that the mass media is an important institution within a society, there has been considerable disagreement about its purpose and capabilities.

In Eighteenth Century Britain, for instance, the media was perceived as the fourth state. It was therefore independent from the monarchy, the parliament and the judicial system, and consequently capable to exposing abuses of the democratic process. This interpretation of the role of the mass media argued that the free market facilitates a free press, because it encourages competition. If usual mechanisms of the free market fail due to monopolization and advertising pressures, professional journalistic integrity would preserve media freedom (Curran, 1991, p. 92; Wheeler, 1997, p 6).

The Marxist based scholarship, on the other hand, has been more critical about the place of the mass media in modern society. Marxist interpretations of the media perceived the mass media as operated in the interests of the bourgeois class and working to promote a false consciousness in the working class. Herbert Marcuse, for instance, saw the media, along with other mass production systems, as engaged in imposing a particular social system that is at the same time both desirable and repressive. The primary contribution of the media is therefore to stimulate and then satisfy 'false needs' leading groups to assimilate into a common 'one-dimensional society' despite their lack of real material interest in doing so



(McQuail, 1994, p. 77). Antonio Gramsci's thesis followed the same narrative strands. His argument concerned the underlying consensus in society about private property, social relations and the behaviour of political elites and concludes that the ruling elite preserve its influence through non-coercive dominance. The ruling elite communicate the dominant ideology through the use of symbols and cultural institutions, such as formal forms of education and the mass media, and perpetuate its reproduction through these institutions despite the dominant ideology's clear clash with working class interests (Patrick and Thrall, 2007, pp. 97-98).

The dominant interpretation of the media in the first half of the Twentieth Century was the mass society theory, sometimes alternatively referred to as the magic bullet or the hypodermic needle theory (Williams, 2003, p. 28). This interpretation of the mass media became prominent due to political changes of the period, when mass communications were developing rapidly in the United States and academics sought to explain the success of the Nazi party (Williams, 2003, p. 26). This theory was not associated with any specific author, but can be found in the academic writings of Harold Lasswell, Charles E. Merriam and Herbert Blumer. It rested on an underlying assumption that all subjects will receive the same critical feature of the message that would change the audience in the same way. In essence, the hypodermic needle theory worked on the assumption that stimuli transmitted through the media would trigger the same emotive response or force the same change of thinking in the individuals receiving them and therefore the media had an immediate and uniform impact on opinions and behaviour of individuals who made up the mass audience (Ward, 1995, p. 24). The popularity of the mass society theory faded in the late 1950 and early 1960s, when the fear of totalitarianism receded and inherent flaws in the theory became clear, although such views linger in public debates about the impact of television and video violence on the audience (Williams, 2003, p. 29).

The decline of mass society theory after the Second World War was the result of a different approach being undertaken in academic scholarship to the study of the media. From 1940 through to the 1970s, American researchers embraced empiricism, applying statistical methodology and adapting attitudinal survey techniques to the study of mass communication and effects of propaganda. This empirical research produced limited effects and middle-range theories rather than grand theories such as the mass society theory (Ward, 1995, p.32; Williams, 2003, p. 44). These approaches were underpinned by two interconnected theories of society: functionalism and pluralism. Functionalism suggested that for a society to operate successfully, it requires certain needs to be met and scholars in the decade immediately following the Second World War sought to identify and assess the functions of the media. Harold Lasswell argued that the media had three social functions: surveillance, correlation and transmission (Williams, 2003, pp. 47-49) McQuail in contrast assigned five functions to the media: provision of information, correlation, continuity, entertainment and mobilization (McQuail, 2005, pp. 97-98). Pluralism, on the other hand, concerned power relations in society, considering power to be dispersed widely among competing groups and interests. The role of the media in this argument was to facilitate the expression of rival policy proposals and the media is essential to the workings of liberal democracy (Williams, 2003, pp. 50-51).

While these approaches received little criticism in the 1950s and early 1960s, the political unrest throughout the Western world by the late 1960s appeared at odds with interpretations that saw the media as a tool for the promotion of stability. In the 1970s, neo-Marxist conceptualisations came to the fore and there was a rejection of empiricism in favour of ideologically based interpretations (Williams, 2003, pp. 51-52). In the following decades, challenges from the fields of feminism, post-modernism and critical analysis further broadened the scholarship on the mass media (Williams, 2003, p. 70).

Among the many current sub-fields of research in media studies, the body on literature on political communication can be most closely tied with the discussion of the relationship between the Russian media and the state. In 1981, Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders identified the emergence of political communication as a field of study, as despite its origins some thousand years in the past, the concerted cross-disciplinary effort to study political communication began only in the 1950s (Denton Jr. and Kuypers, 2008, p. 12). Scholarship in the field of political communication is concerned with public discourse and communication that accompanies political activity. Hence, Nimmo and Swanson defined political communication as 'the strategic uses of communication to influence public knowledge, beliefs and action on political matters', while Bob Franklin defined it as the 'interactions between media and political systems locally, nationally and internationally' (Denton Jr. and Kuypers, 2008, pp. 13-14). In reflection of this emphasis on the links between political activity and communication, Brian McNair outlined the five basic functions of the media. He defined these as to inform the citizens, to educate as to the meaning and significance of the facts, to provide a platform for political discourse, facilitating the formation of public opinion, to provide publicity to governmental and political institutions and to serve as a medium for the articulation of party policies. However, he was swift to stress that this interpretation applies only to ideal-type democracies and in many instances, the media is able to perform such functions due to poor education, overly-stringent controls and the absence of true political pluralism (McNair, 2003, pp. 21-24). Yet this is a reflection of a wider issue with the field of political communication, even if the author does not rely on a normative interpretation of the media or democracy, political communication scholars remain concerned primary with democratic forms of governance. This is problematic to the study of fundamentally undemocratic regimes.

## THE MASS MEDIA IN POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIA

In the past twenty years there has been few attempts to create a thesis focusing on the place of the mass media in Russia's post-Communist society. There has been plenty of literature published on the Russian media, but the vast majority of the writing is substantive rather than analytical in nature. This can be explained by the relative youth of this issue as a field of study and the swiftly changing political conditions in Russia. Of the literature that does exist, there are two main strands: the first traces the history of the media in Russia since 1991 and the second considers influence that television has on shaping Russian popular opinion.

In scholarship that traces the development of the mass media in Russia, the discussion concerns primarily the decline of media independence and the increased influence of the state. Amidst substantive scholarship on post-Soviet media in Russia, Ivan Zassoursky's 'Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia' is considered the definitive work on the development of the media from the late Soviet period to the Putin era (Hutchings and Rulyova, 2009, p. 14). He is distinctive not only in the detail provided, but in the breadth of media forms that he analyses, including newspapers, radio and the internet. Zassoursky is also distinct from other writers in the field, due to his personal background as a journalist with *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Obshchaya Gazeta*. Ultimately, Zassoursky has argued that in the 1980s journalists began to conceive of themselves as the fourth estate, independent and self-sufficient, thus capable of becoming part of the check-and-balancing mechanism in society (Zassoursky, 2004, p. 11). Over the course of the Yeltsin presidency, Russian journalists lost the near absolute freedom they enjoyed in the early 1990s and television became the vehicle for electoral success and control of state-owned industries. The lack of established institutions and poor regulations were main causes of this transformation

(Zassoursky, 2004, p. 18; 2009, p.29). However, he fails to explain clearly, why the lack of institutional frameworks resulted in the decline of media freedoms.

Others have proposed alternative explanations. Lipset and Oates drew two different, but equally disheartening conclusions. Lipset placed the blame on the lack of interest among the public in supporting media independence and the appeal of paternalism that Putin offered after the failure of reforms in the 1990s. Oates' primary research did add weight to this idea, as her findings showed a preference for more positive reports, despite the audience's awareness of bias in such programs (Oates, 2005, p. 127). However, in Oates' own view, the media in Russia was never independent, although journalists enjoyed more liberty during glasnost, and when political control strengthened, the old Soviet model became more visible (Oates, 2005, p. 115).

The most robust argument however, draws a link between the decline of media freedom and electoral politics. Dunn took a comparative approach to the subject-matter, characterising the Russian media in the late 1990s as similar to the Italian *lottizzazione* system, where channels are distributed among the various political factions (Dunn, 2009, p. 46). The Putin administration was firmly opposed to this arrangement and sought to depoliticize television by dismantling the *lottizzazione* system (Dunn, 2009, pp. 44-48). Burrett adopted a similar proposition, but created a stronger argument by drawing on elite theory. In her view, the conflict between the media and the Kremlin in the first term of Putin's presidency is thus the result of disagreements between elites over the role of the media in society (Burrett, 2009, p. 71). For Putin, 'media criticism of the president was seen as endangering national security and stability', while the oligarchs had become accustomed to using positive coverage as a carrot to secure favours from the Yeltsin government' (Burrett, 2009, pp. 74-79). Burrett emphasised that Putin was able to forge an alliance with

the oligarchs, but that it will hold only as long as Putin is able to provide economic and political stability (2009, pp. 84-85).

The argument for a link between the decline of media independence and the fight for electoral success is reinforced through Sarah Oates' discussion of the 'broadcast party' in Russian politics. She argued that such parties emerged out of the peculiarities of Russian conditions after 1991. Politicians began to conduct elections according to the traditional democratic model, but in an environment where there are a high number of unfixed voting preferences due to the lack of historical political parties and where track-records are unimportant. The result was a party that can be created swiftly, without ideological platforms and succeeded primarily through television coverage that it was able to garner (Oates, 2003, pp. 38-42).

The second strand of academic literature on the Russian media is a response to the belief of Russian politicians that television is 'a totalitarian's dream', a unique institution due its capability to influence public opinion, a belief that Russian politicians have inherited from the Communist leadership (Dunn, 2009, p. 48; Beumers, Hutchings and Rulyova, 2009, p. 6). It has aimed to discover whether television coverage is in fact a genuine catalyst for political success. There have been two notable attempts to verify the authenticity of this belief through primary research into how the Russian public perceives what is broadcast on major Russian channels and these have produced mixed conclusions.

The lack of analysis into regional variation and the perspective of individuals living outside major cities is a major fault of Mickiewicz's study. Nevertheless, despite this omission, Mickiewicz's focus groups revealed that the Russian public are not passive receptors of information projected onto the screen, but are in fact very cynical about television coverage. A comment from one of the focus participants was: 'there has never been in my life, ever, an objective story about electoral campaigns, and there will never be

one' (Mickiewicz, 2008, p. 72). Russians spent a great deal of time comparing broadcasts to find discrepancies and when this is not possible, they rely on their prior knowledge or experience to interpret and understand what has been left out of the story. This is referred to as 'reading between the lines' in Soviet scholarship (Mickiewicz, 2008, p. 203-205). Building on this argument, Hutchings and Rulyova found that the tendency towards collective viewing in Russia encouraged critical discussion about content and style, contrary to the Soviet assumption that 'simultaneous viewing' is associated with passive, uncritical viewers (2009, p. 217).

The second major study was a 2001 nationwide survey, which sought a correlation between television habits and voting preference in the 2000 election. Those who favoured the government controlled ORT (62%) were more likely to vote for Putin than those who preferred the then independent NTV (53%) (Oates, 2003, p. 36). Oates noted that there were significant socio-economic differences between those who preferred ORT and those who favoured NTV, which was probably had an influence on voting patterns, however, the results made clear that the strongest predictor of a vote for Putin was a dislike of NTV (White and Oates, 2003, p. 35). Oates and Mickiewicz's groups also come to different conclusions about the reaction of the public to bias in television. Oates' participants showed a preference towards biased accounts because these are more positive (Oates, 2005, p. 127). In contrast, Mickiewicz concluded that the upbeat stories of state dominated stations are re-interpreted or merely ignored by the audience (2008, p. 206). Two possible explanations exist. Firstly, the make-up of the focus groups was the deciding factor or alternatively, between Oates' study in 2001 and Mickiewicz's in 2002, television content had shifted enough to evoke a different reaction from viewers.

### THIRD WAVE OF DEMOCRATISATION AND HYBRID REGIMES

Although existing scholarship makes few attempts to analyse the relationship between the Russian mass media and the state on a conceptual level, but it does provide an adequate substantive foundation to do so. As stated above, the democratic pluralist interpretations of the media are at times problematic bases of discussion about fundamentally undemocratic states due to their reliance on an ideal-type democratic system with a free press, civil rights and low corruption. It is more constructive, therefore, to employ a model that does not assume the existence of an ideal type democracy, such as Levitsky and Way's concept of competitive authoritarianism.

Levitsky and Way's conceptualisation of competitive authoritarianism as a distinct type of regime is a product of several decades of academic scholarship on transitional regimes and democratisation. This field of literature concerns primarily countries that became part of the third wave of democratisation, which Samuel Huntington identified as having begun in 1974. In the following decades regime changes occurred in many regions around the world and by the end of the 1990s, 85 authoritarian regimes had collapsed (Geddes, 1999, p. 115). The disintegration of authoritarian regimes produced 21 new states and three re-unifications of previously divided nations, however, the optimistic forecasts about the victory of democracy over autocracy and dictatorship have not eventuated. Only 35 states that experienced a regime change in recent decades have become stable democracies, 42 remained authoritarian, 10 fell into civil war or engaged in war with its neighbours and numerous states remain in an intermediate area between authoritarianism and democracy. Such states may have had changes of government through democratic means, but remain unstable or exclude important groups from the competition (Geddes, 1999, p. 115-116).



It became one of the chief pursuits of scholars writing about these states and generally on regime change to attempt to understand and classify such regimes. This was a response to the realisation that many states that have typically been termed transitional did not demonstrate any clear movement towards democracy (Carothers, 2002, p. 6). These states were neither democratic nor authoritarian, but constituted an unclear, gray zone between the two (Howard and Roessler, 2006, p. 365).

A common method of responding to this was to characterise these hybrid regimes as diminished sub-types. Larry Diamond, for instance, identified six regime types: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, ambiguous regimes, competitive authoritarian, hegemonic electoral authoritarian and politically closed authoritarian (Diamond, 2002, p. 26). Yet even within these categories, Diamond acknowledges the difficulty of finding distinct borders between his regime types, hence the need to create a special category for ambiguous regimes types in the nexus of the diminished democracies and the diminished authoritarian regimes, into which Diamond places 17 regimes (Diamond, 2002, pp. 26-27).

An alternative method of analysis was presented by Hans-Joachim Lauth, who proposed a more systematic method of classification. Lauth identified 15 fields of democratic prerequisites, such as equality, legal guarantees and limitation of political power, which can form a matrix and then can be measured on a five point scale, ranging from full presence of a feature to insufficient presence. In consequence, democracy has to be sufficiently democratic on all 15 criteria or it must be classified as a defective democracy (Bogaards, 2009, p. 401-402). Building on Lauth's work, Merkel et al have developed a topology that includes 34 indicators, which can classify a regime into five types of democracy, one functioning and four defective (Bogaards, 2009, p. 403). These defective types of democracies are exclusive, illiberal, delegative and democracy with reserved

domains, with classification dependant on the particular democratic components a regime may lack (Bogaards, 2009, p. 404).

This area of academic scholarship suffered from a similar drawback as the pluralistic interpretations of the media, since it used liberal-democratic values as a basis for analysis. The result was various types of 'democracy with adjectives' and clear concept stretching (Schedler, 2006, p. 4).

A countervailing strand of scholarship had emerged in the Twenty-first Century. It attempted to create an alternative classification scheme employing authoritarianism as a starting point for analysis rather than democracy. This has led to a similar proliferation of neologisms to describe diminished forms of authoritarianism, such as Ottaway's discussion of 'semi-authoritarianism' or Guliyev's 'sultanic semi-authoritarianism' (Guliyev, 2005, pp. 394-395).

More recently, Matthijs Bogaards has also attempted to synthesise the two strands academic literature and create a double root concept that employs both Merkel et al's typology of defective democracies and the concept of electoral authoritarianism. He argued that the customary single-root approach to the study of hybrid regimes is limited because this approach covered only one side of the spectrum and confusion arises when they meet in the middle (Bogaards, 2009, p. 400). That is certainly a valid criticism; one can see this at play in Diamond's use of 'ambiguous regime' to describe the conceptual vacuum between a diminished democracy and a diminished authoritarian government. However, there is little to support Bogaards' statement that a double-root strategy can clarify this confusion as even a double-root strategy will produce cases that will be categorized as hybrid regimes (2009, p. 415).

Overall, despite the variety of proposed classification systems for hybrid regimes, including those employing democracy or authoritarianism as the foundation point for classification as well as Boggards' attempt to combine the two approaches to no unified system has been adopted and the entire debate has in fact been of limited value to efforts to understand hybrid regimes.

## COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM

Levitsky and Way's competitive authoritarianism is a concept that derives from the scholarship dealing with classification of newly emergent regimes in the third wave of democratisation. However, in recognition of the ultimate futility of these academic debates about regime classification, the focus of Levitsky and Way's analysis is not on regime classification, but on understanding the underlying causes for the emergence of such regimes and prospects for their long term survival.

Levitsky and Way consider competitive authoritarian regimes as a distinct regime type rather than states in the midst of an incomplete transition or unconsolidated democracies. Thus, competitive authoritarian regimes exist as stable hybrid regimes that possess features of both authoritarianism and democracy. (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 5). Among these features of democratic governance, the most critical is the presence of competitive elections. Levitsky and Way (2002, p. 60) argue that competitive authoritarianism is a distinct type of governing model that proliferated after the end of the Cold War. Competitive elections were simply not a feature of typical authoritarian regimes in the past, even Juan Linz' encyclopaedic 'Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes' contained barely a mention of multi-party electoral competition within authoritarian regimes when it was first published in 1975 (Diamond, 2002, p. 24). Levitsky and Way argue that this evolution occurred when the end of Cold War subsidies created economic crises

that eventually destabilised autocratic regimes throughout the world and the West became more proactive in promoting democracy in the international arena through external assistance and pressure (2010, p. 17).

The conceptualisation of competitive authoritarianism that is presented by Levitsky and Way is similar to Andreas Schedler's concept of electoral authoritarianism. For Schedler, electoral authoritarian regimes are states that hold regular elections for their chief executive or legislative assembly. Elections are broadly inclusive; opposition parties are allowed to run, win seats in parliament and are not subject to massive repression. However, liberal democratic principles, such as freedom and fairness, are systematically violated to a degree that renders elections as 'instruments of authoritarian rule rather than "instruments of democracy"' (Schedler, 2006, p. 3). Authoritarian rulers may achieve this through discriminatory electoral laws, infringement on the rights and civil liberties of the opposition candidates or merely employ electoral fraud to win seats (Schedler, 2006, p. 3).

Electoral and competitive authoritarianism differ significantly from closed or full authoritarianism, which produces states where the opposition has no viable channels through which to legally contest for executive office and the opposition leadership is often imprisoned (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 6-7). In these societies control is maintained through repression and there are few opportunities for the development of the free press or civil society (Howard and Roessler, 2006, p. 367). However, a distinction is also required between electoral and competitive authoritarianism. The primary difference between the two concepts is Levitsky and Way's emphasis on competitiveness in elections, while to fit into Schedler's paradigm, regimes require merely to hold regular multi-party elections for the legislature or the executive (Gilbert and Mohseni, 2011, p. 274). As a result, what Howard and Roessler term as hegemonic authoritarian regimes, where elections are held, but are not competitive, because only the ruling party is allowed to compete effectively and

government repression provides political control, creating a de-facto one party state are designated in the same category as competitive authoritarian regimes (Howard and Roessler, 2006, p. 367). In effect, competitive authoritarianism is a more specific conceptualisation of a regime type than Schedler's notion of electoral authoritarianism.

While Schedler relies on Freedom House ratings as a basis for his regime classification (Bogaards, 2009, p. 407), Levitsky and Way consider the ways regimes deviate from democratic and authoritarian regimes. They rely primarily on a definition of democracy that follows Robert Dahl's 'procedural minimum' requirements of democracy, which has four primary attributes. These are free, fair and competitive elections; full adult suffrage; broad protection of civil liberties and the absence of nonelected authorities that limit the elected officials' ability to govern (Levitsky and Way, 2002, p. 53). However, Levitsky and Way add a fifth criterion in their definition of democracy: the existence of a level playing field between the incumbent and the opposition. That is not to say, that liberal democracies are not vulnerable to the effects of incumbent advantage, this can occur in the form of employment through patronage, privileged access to media and finance or biased social policies. Yet these practices do not seriously hinder the capacity of the opposition to compete against the incumbent and if they do, this is incompatible with fully-fledged democratic governance (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 5-6).

In competitive authoritarian regimes, elections are held regularly and in such manner that the opposition groups are able to treat them seriously as arenas through which they can contest for power and the opposition usually participates rather than boycotting the election (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 6-7; Howard and Roessler, 2006, p. 367). Yet competitive regimes also violate at least one of the defining attributes of democracy. Elections in competitive authoritarian regimes are often unfree and unfair due to fraud, intimidation of opposition activists, but they do not prevent the opposition from running a

full-fledged national campaign. Civil liberties are guaranteed and mostly respected, however, the independent media may be threatened or opposition leaders suppressed through the use of the legal system (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 7-9). Lastly, the opposition in a competitive authoritarian regime does not have a level playing field in access to resources, access to the media or access to the law (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 10-11). Democratic regimes may at times experience similar violations of democratic norms, these violations are not systematic enough to impede the workings of the democratic system, while in a competitive authoritarian regime such violations are broad and systematic enough to create an uneven playing field between the government and the opposition (Levitsky and Way, 2002, p. 53).

Competitive authoritarianism can be viewed as a residual category. It is neither liberal or electoral democracy nor closed or hegemonic authoritarianism, which led scholars to conclude that it is an inherently unstable form of government and can 'tip' in one direction or another (Howard and Roessler, 2006, p. 368). In Levitsky and Way's view, the creation of democratic institutions generates tension in competitive authoritarian regimes. The governing forces must retain a balance between the authoritarian and democratic features of the regime, because leaders in such regimes may suffer serious consequences after an outright assault on democratic institutions, but may lose their political influence if they permit democratic institutions to function unchecked (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 20-21). Between 1990 and 2008 competitive authoritarian regimes have had three trajectories: democratisation, unstable authoritarianism where there is a change of leadership without democratisation or stable authoritarianism where the incumbent or his hand-picked successor remain in power for at least three terms in office (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 21-22).

It was one of Levitsky and Way's objectives to move away from the discussion about regime classification and to create instead an argument to explain the trajectory of various competitive authoritarian regimes. They conclude that there are three determining factors in the long-term outcomes for a competitive authoritarian regime: degree of linkage with the West, vulnerability to pressure from Western powers and the strength of incumbent organisational and coercive capacity (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 23-24).

Linkage to the West in the form of density of ties and cross-border flows whether economic, political, diplomatic, social or organisations are transmitters of international influence. The greater the level of cross-border linkage, the greater the possibility of a foreign government taking action in the event of a reported abuse, because the Western states perceive themselves to have higher stakes in any conflict. One can point to the NATO intervention in Kosovo, due to its geographic proximity and historical ties to Western Europe, in comparison to its lack of action to human rights abuses in Sudan, Congo or Angola (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 43-46).

Western leverage can take the form of direct democracy promotion, multilateral conditionality or transnational advocacy networks, but the vulnerability of a nation-state to this pressure is very variable, depending on the size and strength of the state and economy, the existence of countervailing strategic interests among Western states and the existence of counter-hegemonic forces (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 38-41). High level of Western leverage can destabilise a regime as the government is constrained from employing coercive action against the opposition, regimes in states where the West can exert little external leverage are expected to be more stable (Slater, 2010, p. 386).

The success of a competitive authoritarian regime rests also on the capabilities of its domestic leadership, such as the state's coercive capacity, party strength and degree of opposition strength (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 54- 68). In states where organisational

power is high, the incumbent leadership is able to contain elite conflict and to outmanoeuvre the opposition by pre-empting opposition challenges. Where this does not occur, the incumbent is vulnerable to elite defection and incapable of responding to challenges from his opponents (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 71).

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the nature of the relationship between the mass media, society and the state has been a subject of much contention in academic scholarship. When the mass media first emerged in the Eighteenth Century, it was perceived as an institution independent from other institutions in society, but many strands of later research, originating in fields such as feminism, Marxism and post-modernism, have created far more critical interpretations of the media. The literature on the media in post-Soviet Russia, on the other hand, has been primarily substantive in character due to the swiftly changing conditions in Russia since 1991. However, it is possible build on the existing substantive scholarship to theorise about the media in post-Soviet Russia through the lens of Levitsky and Way's concept of competitive authoritarianism. This concept emerged from literature on the third wave of democratisation and attempts to classify the newly emergent regimes. Levitsky and Way argue that competitive authoritarian regimes exhibit features of both democracy and authoritarianism, but elections remain the primary arena for the contestation of power despite the clearly uneven field of play between the incumbent and the opposition. The development of a competitive authoritarian regime is dependent on three factors: degree of Western linkage, degree of Western leverage and the state's domestic organisational and coercive capacities. Hence, strong coercive capacity and low degree of Western coverage and leverage may result in the establishment of stable competitive authoritarianism within a state.



## CHAPTER TWO: 2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

### RUSSIA IN THE 1990s

Levitsky and Way argue that three factors are crucial to the development of a stable competitive authoritarian state: Western linkage, Western leverage and the strength of domestic governance (2010, pp. 23-24). In early 2000, when the Russian presidential election took place, the Russian state was not a competitive authoritarian regime, although certain features of the Russian state were consistent with Levitsky and Way's description of competitive authoritarianism. Russia has historically had a low degree of Western linkage. This is due to decades of political isolation under the Soviet Union, when economic and cultural flows had been limited and they increased only moderately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 184-185).

It can be argued that the ailing Russian economy left the Russian state more vulnerable to Western pressure. By the end of the 1990s, the Russian state was in severe crisis. On the economic front, the national income had been falling progressively since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Goods shortages in 1991 were followed by 2,500 per cent hyperinflation in 1992. The rate of inflation eventually fell to 25 per cent in 1996, but the GDP had dropped for seven years in a row to produce a cumulative decline of forty per cent from the 1990 level (Rutland, 2005, p. 187). The country's economic problems culminated in a full-scale crisis in August 1998, when Russia defaulted on its international obligations and the value of the rouble fell sharply (White, McAllister and Oates, 2002, p. 17). Already by the middle of the decade, the country's poverty rate was commonly estimated at over fifty per cent of the population with working-age adults, the economically active population, forming

the majority of the poor. In 1999, the incomes of more than forty per cent of the population, approximately sixty million people, were below the official subsistence level and half of all families with one child lived below subsistence level (Lynch, 2005, p. 104). Russia's economic problems had a serious impact on Russian society. Male life expectancy declined from 63.8 years in 1990 to 58 years in 1995, mortality rate increased until deaths vastly exceeded births and Russian medical authorities diagnosed a sixth of Russia's children with chronic illnesses (Lynch, 2005, pp. 99-105). Among the population, there were serious concerns about high prices, unemployment and unpaid wages (White, McAllister and Oates, 2002, p. 17).

Yet these severe economic problems had a limited impact on Russia's vulnerability to Western leverage, as despite the poor economic results and increase in poverty throughout the country, the Russian Federation retained many of the traits that made the Soviet Union resistant to Western leverage. This included a large population, a vast geographic area and nuclear weaponry. These factors allowed the Russian government a greater degree of autonomy than smaller, non-nuclear states would have enjoyed, so Western leverage over the Russian state remained limited. Together with Russia's historically weak linkage to the West, due to its geographical location and prolonged isolation from the Western powers during the Communist era, the Russian state in the 1990s had two of the three prerequisites that Levitsky and Way had identified as necessary for the creation of a competitive authoritarian regime.

The primary cause of the instability in the Russian regime after 1991 was therefore the state's poor organisational and coercive capacity, which left the incumbent unable to affectively respond to challenges from the opposition as would have occurred in a competitive authoritarian regime. The population had no confidence in the ability of the government to provide workable solutions for the state's poor economy or social problems,

as the elected government was fundamentally weak, unpopular and unstable. President Boris Yeltsin's personal approval ratings were at 1.8 on a 10-point approval scale by the summer of 1999, and more than two-thirds were prepared to support public demonstrations calling for his resignation (White, McAllister and Oates, 2002, p. 17). The frequent changes on the ministerial level at the close of the decade were also met with little enthusiasm. Boris Yeltsin sacked the long-serving Viktor Chernomyrdin as prime minister in March 1998 and replaced Chernomyrdin with Sergei Kirienko, who was soon dismissed due to the August financial crisis. Between March 1998 and August 1999, the Russian Federation saw five different prime ministers (White, McAllister and Oates, 2002, p. 17).

#### THE RISE OF VLADIMIR PUTIN

When Vladimir Putin was appointed as prime minister in August 1999 in the aftermath of the 1998 economic crisis and profound political instability in the country, few Russians believed that he would retain the position longer than his predecessors (Jack, 2004, p. 44). Even Yeltsin's declaration claiming Putin as his preferred successor was unconvincing, as he had also declared General Alexander Lebed as his chosen successor in 1996 and then sacked Lebed from his position as Secretary of the Security Council a mere three months later (Truscott, 2004, pp. 95-96). In August 1999 only two per cent of voters said that they would vote for Putin if an election were held on the coming Sunday (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 7). However, by November, the percentage of respondents prepared to vote for Putin rose to forty per cent. Putin's popularity rose in tandem with the beginning of the Second Chechen War and the swelling public support of the war (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 7). He acquired the image of a strong, tough and dynamic leader who contrasted sharply with the often ill or inebriated Boris Yeltsin. Merely three months later, Putin had acquired popularity sufficient to push the

newly created Unity party to an extraordinarily strong result in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Understanding the advantage of the moment, Boris Yeltsin announced his early resignation in a televised speech on New Year's Eve forcing an early election (Jack, 2004, p. 45).

In 2000, Russian electoral law required parliamentary and presidential election to be held every four years, with the presidential elections always following the parliamentary elections. In consequence, the 1999 parliamentary elections were used as a 'primary election' to the later presidential election (OSCE, 2000, p. 8). There were two major contenders evident in the 1999 election. The first was the Fatherland-All Russia bloc, a credible challenger to the ailing incumbent government and to the Communists. It represented a merger between the centrist movement of Yuri Luzkhov, the Mayor of Moscow, and the political platform of former Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov. Early in the campaign, Fatherland-All Russia was estimated to receive more than 20 per cent of the federal list votes, which would have challenged the Communist Party for the lead (OSCE, 2000, p. 9). This success in the Duma would have then become a launching pad for a presidential bid (White, McAllister and Oates, 2002, p. 18).

However, in September 1999, merely two months before the election, Unity, which would become the second major contender in the election, was established. Unity became known as a pro-government movement projecting an image of youthful professionalism far removed from the traditional debates and intrigues of the Kremlin (OSCE, 2000, pp. 9-10). OSCE long-term monitoring mission concluded that the core of Unity's strategy was to undermine Fatherland-All Russia and the newly created party launched a well-funded campaign against Fatherland-All Russia (2000, p. 12). A key part of this was the media coverage the party received as Sergei Shoigu, the head of Unity, performed his official duties as the emergencies minister and the open support of Vladimir Putin (White, McAllister and

Oates, 2002, p. 19). This strategy was successful, Unity received 23.3 per cent of the vote coming just behind the Communists, who received 24.3 per cent and had the largest number of parliament seats. In contrast, Fatherland-All Russia did more poorly than anticipated, receiving 13.3 per cent and 66 seats in total (European Institute for the Media, 2000b, p. 13).

Fatherland-All Russia's poor showing in the parliamentary elections was key to the eventual Putin victory in the presidential election as through the success of Unity, the Kremlin effectively eliminated Putin's most formidable rivals. At the start of the campaign for the 1999 parliamentary election, the leaders of the Fatherland-All Russia alliance, Yevgeni Primakov and Yuri Luzhkov were considered formidable presidential candidates, yet by March 2000 Putin polled first on approval ratings and neither Primakov nor Luzhkov were nominated candidates for the presidency (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 1).

The presidential election itself was brought forward from June to March 26, 2000 due to President Boris Yeltsin's surprise resignation on December 31, 1999. Of the thirty-three initiative groups registered by the Central Electoral Commission, fifteen presented their collected signatures on behalf of the candidate and eleven were accepted. This number of candidates suggests a wide field of potential opposition to the pro-government bloc.

Among the nominated, only five candidates ultimately earned more than two per cent of the total vote. Gennadi Zyuganov was the runner-up, receiving 29.21 per cent of the national vote. Zyuganov was the chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and leader of the CPRF faction in the Duma. He had also ran for president in 1996 and won enough votes to force a second round of voting, although Boris Yeltsin was ultimately elected president (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 2).

Grigori Yavlinski also ran for president in 1996, receiving just over seven per cent of the vote. He headed the centre-right Yabloko movement both nationally and in the Duma. In 2000, he received 5.8 per cent of the total vote (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 3). Yavlinski and his party were the only party to oppose the Second Chechen War and as a result performed worse than previously expected in the 1999 Duma and the 2000 presidential elections (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 8). Aman Tuleev was the governor of Kemerovo Oblast and affiliated with the CPRF. The International Republican Institute alleged that Tuleev actually supported Putin for president but was in the running to undermine Gennadi Zyuganov. Reasons for this range from wanting to challenge Zyuganov for the leadership of the CPRF to simply helping Putin camp to split the communist vote among several candidates (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 3).

Aman Tuleyev received 2.95 per cent of the vote, while Vladimir Zhirinovski earned 2.7 per cent. Zhirinovski had also been a candidate of president previously, receiving 5.8 per cent of the vote in 1996. He was the national leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (International Republican Institute, 2000, p. 2).

Such disparity between Vladimir Putin's electoral success and that of other candidates might appear irrational considering Putin had refused to formally campaign.

FIGURE 3 - RESULTS OF THE 2000 RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

<b>Candidate:</b>	<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Percentage of Votes</b>
Vladimir Putin	39,740,434	52.94
Gennadi Zyuganov	21,928,471	29.21
Grigori Yavlinski	4,351,452	5.8
Aman Tuleyev	2,217,361	2.95
Vladimir Zhirinovski	2,026,513	2.7
Konstantin Titov	1,107,269	1.47
Ella Pamfilova	758,966	1.01
Stanislav Govorukhin	328,723	0.44
Yuri Skuratov	319,263	0.43
Alexei Podberezkin	98,175	0.13
Umar Dzhabrailov	78,498	0.1
Against all candidates	1,414,648	1.88

Source: Central Electoral Commission, 26 March 2000

However, Putin was not elected on the strength of his policies; voters were largely unaware of Putin's position on key issues. His popularity was fuelled by the swelling support for the war in Chechnya and the lack of credible opponents once the Fatherland-All Russia bloc was essentially eliminated as potential rivals. Moreover, the International Republican Institute reported that other parties were not even actively campaigning for their candidates. The Communist party dismantled some of its offices prior to the election because they were doubtful about the possibility of a Zyuganov victory and the Union of Right Forces had split between supporters of Putin, Titov and Yavlinski, so the party is unable to conduct a coordinated campaign (2000, p. 8).

#### ELECTION COVERAGE

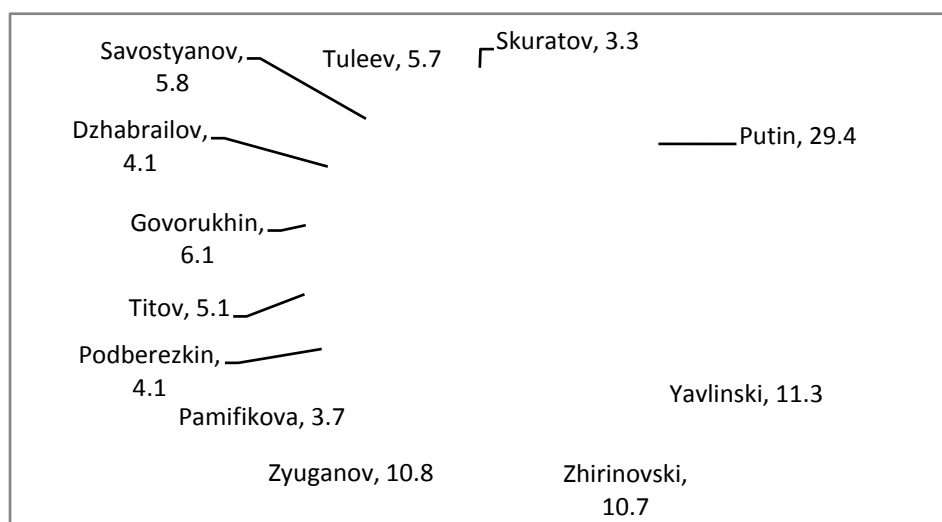
The coverage of the 2000 presidential election on national television highlights the shortage of organisational or coercive capacity in the Russian government at the close of the Twentieth Century, which accounts for the inability of Yeltsin's government to transform the Russian state into a competitive authoritarian regime as Vladimir Putin did during his two terms as president. Yet that does not suggest that the election coverage was strictly impartial; incumbent advantage exists even in liberal democracies.

During the 2000 presidential election, the European Institute for the Media (EIM) conducted a long-term monitoring mission investigating the coverage of the election. This was the fifth media-monitoring mission the EIM had undertaken in Russia since the non-governmental research institution was established in 1992. As in previous elections, the EIM found that media reporting practices did not live up to existing Russian legal frameworks regulating the media, although this election was more subdued than the 1996 and 1999 electoral campaigns (EIM, 2000, pp. 1-2). Using quantitative analysis of electoral coverage of

major national television channels, the EIM report concluded that Vladimir Putin dominated television coverage throughout the campaign and many segments of the public, as well as the media, appeared to accept the notion that a Putin victory was inevitable (EIM, 2000, p. 2).

Across all the channels analysed, Vladimir Putin received 29.4 per cent of the coverage. Yavlinski, Zhirinovksi and Zyuganov, who were the next most covered candidates during the election received 11.3 per cent, 10.7 per cent and 10.8 per cent respectively. None of the other candidates received much more than five per cent of the coverage each (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: COVERAGE OF CANDIDATES ON NATIONAL TELEVISION: ALL CHANNELS, MARCH 03-24 2000. PERCENTAGE OF SHARE TIME



Source: EIM Final Report, 2000, p. 42

However, when analysing only news coverage, which is particularly important during elections, Putin's share of total coverage rose to 43.3 per cent, while Zyuganov, Zhirinovski and Yavlinski received between 10.3 and 10.6 per cent each. Putin of course did not formally campaign, but he was able to receive this level of broad coverage while performing his official functions as prime minister and acting president. However, as EIM noted, Putin's extensive travel throughout the country 'took on the character of an intensive



campaign' as he pledged increased wages, federal funding for regional projects and reinforced his image as the capable and decisive commander in chief (EIM, 2000, p. 37).

There were, however, clear differences between electoral coverage on various channels, which reflected the allegiances of the Russian oligarchs at the end of the 1990s. At the end of the 1990s, Russia had a mixed private-public system that was in many ways comparable to systems found in other European nations (Dunn, 2009, p. 44). The three most popular channels were ORT, RTR and NTV. ORT and RTR attracted a daily audience of 84 and 71 per cent respectively, while NTV had a regular viewership of 53 per cent, which came disproportionately from urban areas, because NTV's reach in the rural parts of the country did not match that of public channels (White, Oates and McAllister, 2005, p. 195).

In November 1994, ORT was transformed by presidential decree into a joint-stock company. The state continued to hold a 51 per cent share of the company, while private companies divided the other 49 per cent of the company shares. Following the August financial crisis, ORT became an open-stock company, but controlling votes in the company remained in the hands of the oligarch, Boris Berezovski (Aksartova et al, 2003, p. 33). The other state channel, RTR was established in 1990 as the main media company supporting Boris Yeltsin and subsequently remained entirely controlled by the state, broadcasting to 98.5 per cent of the population and reaching another fifty million people in the CIS and the Baltic states (Aksartova et al, 2003, p. 35).

NTV was the only private channel to obtain a nearly nationwide audience, with 72 per cent of Russians able to watch NTV and in many parts of Russia, NTV broke the state monopoly on television broadcasting (Belin, 2002, pp. 19-20). When NTV was initially created in 1993, it shared broadcast frequency with VGTRK's "Russian Universities" channel. After the re-election of Boris Yeltsin, a presidential decree helped NTV gain full time broadcast rights over airtime on Channel 4. This was seen by most as a reward for

supporting Yeltsin in the elections. (Aksartova et al, 2003, p. 36-37). Of the three other channels that have extensive national coverage, Kultura was owned by the state, TV-Centre was owned by the Moscow city authorities and TV-6 was under Boris Berezovski's ownership (Dunn, 2009 p. 44).

## INFORMATION WARS

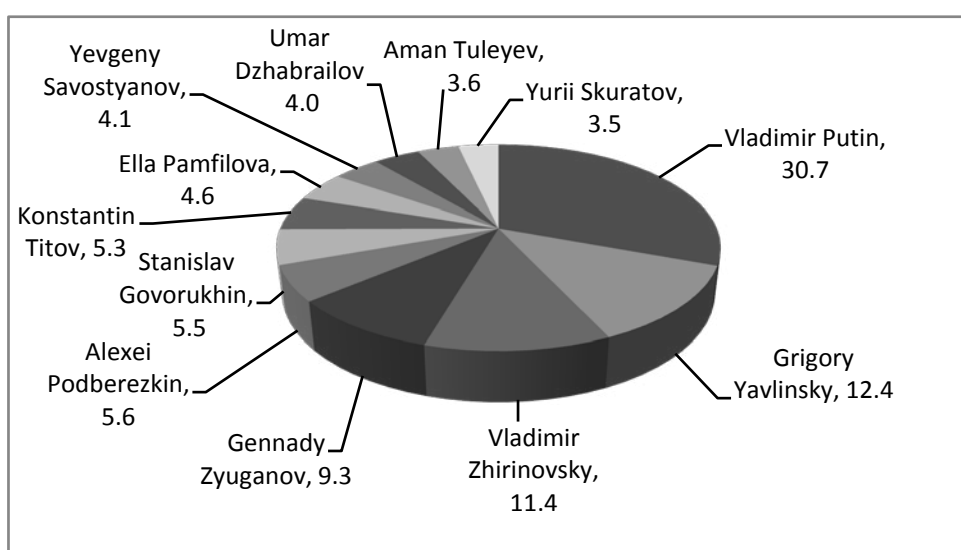
The late 1990s saw the so-called 'information wars' between oligarchs being fought out on national television. During the 1996 presidential election, all major television channels supported Yeltsin's re-election, however, by the 1999 election this had altered dramatically and two clear factions had emerged. The first was the Fatherland-All Russia bloc, which included Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, the entire Luzhkov media holding company and the publications it controlled and numerous influential governors. Vladimir Gusinski, the head of Media-MOST, which owned NTV, participated in this block due to the need for financial assistance from his partners, although he maintained loyalty to Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (Zassoursky, 2004, p. 119).

On the other side of the 'information wars' was Boris Berezovski, who had rebuilt his reputation and expanded his media empire in 1999 after setbacks during the Primakov era. He had increased his stake in TV6 to 75 per cent to gain control of the company and strengthened his position in ORT. Berezovski was open about his close ties with the Kremlin. He was on good terms with Yeltsin's daughter and the president's chief of staff Aleksandr Voloshin, although the relationship with Yeltsin himself was at a low point (World Mediawatch, 1999). Berezovski, however was only one figure out of the pro-government block, which had at its side all the advantages of an incumbent government, the state television, a large portion of the national periodical press and governors who were not part of the Fatherland-All Russia bloc (Zassoursky, 2004, p. 119).

This clear contest between the incumbent and the opposition is a sign of weakness in the government's organisational and coercive capacity in the 1990s as in a stable competitive authoritarian regime the incumbent is able to pre-empt challenges from the opposition and faces elections with the field stacked firmly in its favour (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 8-11). The television coverage of the 2000 election, in contrast, highlights the sharp divide between the two primary factions vying for power and the media they controlled as the national television channels were frequently employed as a vehicle for promotion of factional interests.

This use of national television as a soapbox for the promotion of personal political goals and opinion is evident in the reportage of the two state owned channels, ORT and RTR, who appeared to be supporting Putin's run for presidency. ORT devoted 30.7 per cent of its coverage on the presidential candidates to Vladimir Putin, while the next most mentioned candidate, Yavlinski, received 12.4 per cent of the coverage (see Figure 5). RTR gave Putin slightly less attention than ORT, as Putin received 26.4 per cent and Zyuganov recorded 15.4

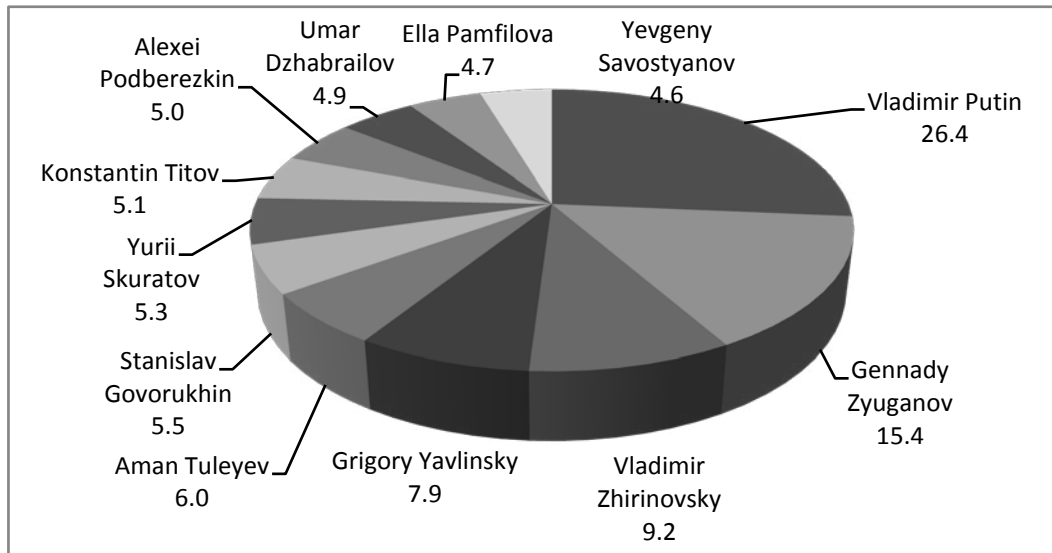
FIGURE 5: CANDIDATES' SHARE (IN PERCENTAGES) OF ELECTORAL COVERAGE ON ORT. 3-24 MARCH 2000



Source EIM Final Report, 2000, p. 59

per cent of the total coverage (see Figure 6). However, it is important to also recognise the type of coverage each candidate received and the circumstances behind it.

FIGURE 6: CANDIDATES' SHARE (IN PERCENTAGES) OF COVERAGE ON RTR. 3-24 MARCH 2000



Source EIM Final Report, 2000, p. 60

Generally, Yavlinski, Zyuganov and Savostyanov received clearly negative coverage, while Putin, Savostyanov and Tuleev were the only candidates to receive positive mentions on ORT (EIM, 2000, p. 61). When it came to news coverage, most of the negative coverage was received by Yavlinski, who received 39 per cent (EIM, 2000, p. 66). Yavlinski's share of ORT's coverage rose sharply during the last week of the campaign, however, this is due to the use of black PR against Yavlinski. ORT's primary evening program 'Vremya' reported at considerable length about Yavlinski's alleged links to George Soros and German political foundations, accusing Yavlinski of illegal campaign financing and foreign influence on the candidate. At other times, ORT described links between Yavlinski's foreign financing, Gusinski and Jewish international circles implying once more that Yavlinski was a candidate clearly influenced by foreign interests (EIM, 2000, pp. 38-39).

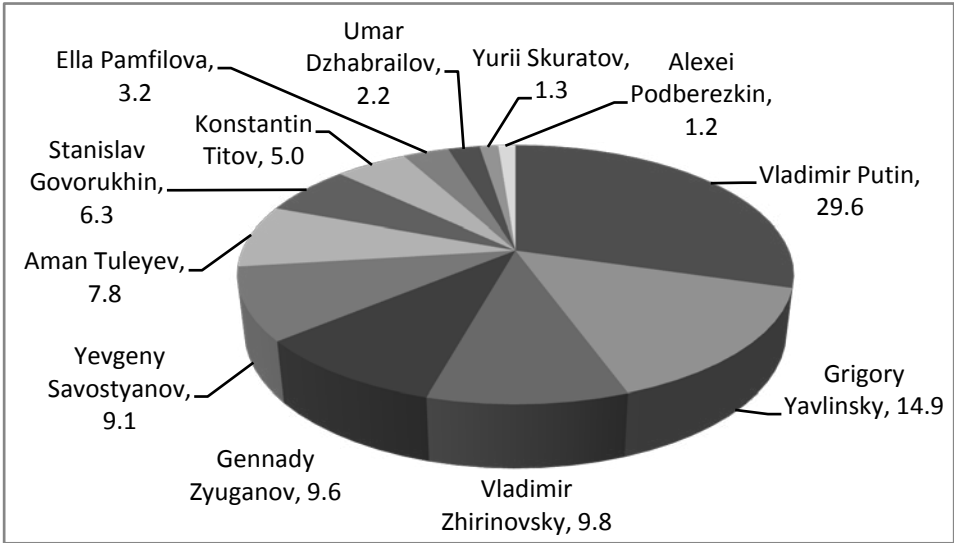
The majority of RTR's coverage was neutral in tone. Only two per cent of the total coverage was negative in tone and this was during reports concerning Putin, Tuleev, Zyuganov, Yavlinski and Zhirinovski. Yavlinski and Zhirinovski received the largest shares of negative reports, 5.9 and 5.5 percent respectively, while Putin's share of negative coverage was only 1.6 per cent (EIM, 2000, pp. 62-64). RTR experienced a leadership change prior to the beginning of the campaign and the new general director, Oleg Dobrodeyev, was among RTR's management aspiring for a more balanced coverage. Early on, RTR ran some reports that portrayed Yavlinski positively, but over the course of the election campaign, the channel became increasingly open about its support for Putin and joined in the slander campaign against Yavlinski in the last week of the campaign (EIM, 2000, p. 39).

The coverage of the privately owned channels was quite different in tone and focus, with a more balanced approach to the portrayal of the presidential candidates. The EIM media-monitoring mission analysed three private channels, NTV, TV6 and TV-Centre. The report concluded that TV6, which was under Berezovski's control, was generally supportive of Putin, but not ostentatiously so despite the channel's heavy reliance on ORT for its news coverage (EIM, 2000, p. 39). Putin received 34.1 per cent of the total coverage of candidates on TV6, Zhirinovski followed with 14.1 per cent and then Yavlinski 11.1 per cent (EIM, 2000, p. 70).

The Moscow City owned TV Centre was sometimes critical of the acting president despite Luzhkov's now open support for the Putin candidacy (EIM, 2000, p. 39). However, although Putin received 29.4 of the total coverage on TV Centre and dominated the electoral campaigning, when it came to positive coverage, TV Centre favoured Tuleev and Savostyanov. They received a third of the total positive coverage each, while Putin received only 8.3 per cent (EIM, 2000, p. 72-77).

The most contrasting reporting to that of the state channels, however, came from NTV. The channel still devoted approximately a third of its total coverage to Putin's official duties as prime minister and acting president. Putin received 29.6 per cent of the total coverage, Yavlinski 14.9 per cent, Zhirinovski 9.8 per cent and Zyuganov 9.8 per cent. Yet, the less competitive candidates, such as Tuleev, Savostyanov and Govorukhin also received a higher share of coverage on NTV than on other channels, 7.8, 9.1 and 6.3 per cent respectively (see Figure 7). It is however likely that Savostyanov's share of coverage was the result of his last minute decision to withdraw his candidacy as reports about Savostyanov increased significantly during the week when he made the decision to pull out of the race (EIM, 2000, p.69).

FIGURE 7: CANDIDATES' SHARE (IN PERCENTAGES) OF ELECTORAL COVERAGE ON NTV. 3-24 MARCH 2000



Source: EIM Final Report, 2000, p.68

In general, NTV had more objective coverage of Putin's presidential activities than ORT and RTR and during the weekly analytical programs, such as 'Itogi' and 'Glas Naroda' a more critical view of Putin was presented. These analytical programs displayed a favourable attitude towards Yavlinski, it was part of the channel's effort to unite the democratic, liberal

opposition around a single candidate (EIM, 2000, p. 38). NTV's satirical show Kukli also caused a sensation when the show portrayed the Duma as a brothel where most of the politicians are for sale and eager to cater to the new leader's tastes and the show culminated with the competing political 'prostitutes' performing a mass strip tease before disappearing into thin air (EIM, 2000, p. 39).

The existence and success of NTV as a channel broadcasting for a national audience despite its clear critical presentation of the incumbent and his chosen successor is a reflection of the strength of the opposition for the pro-government bloc on the eve of Vladimir Putin's election. This is further reinforced by the fact that TV Centre and the rest of the Luzkhov media holding company did not participate in the heavily pro-Putin style of coverage that emerged from RTR and ORT despite Luzkhov's own decision to support Putin after the disappointment of Fatherland-All Russia results in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Such preference among the oligarchs controlling the media companies towards using national television to personal political views and interests illuminates the fundamental weakness in the government's ability to respond to challenges from the dissenting elites due to its institutional weakness and lack of coercive capacity.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the Russian state had the capacity to become a competitive authoritarian regime after 1991, because after decades of Communist rule it inherited weak linkages with the West and was still only moderately vulnerable to Western leverage. However, the Russian government remained weak and unstable rather than consolidating into a competitive authoritarian regime because the incumbent forces lacked the coercive and organisational capacity to respond effectively to challenges from the opposition. The coverage of the 2000 presidential election on national television highlights this because it

exposes a sharp divide in the loyalties of different channels that is reflective of the political contest between the pro-Kremlin faction and the Fatherland-All Russia bloc. While the government enjoyed the support of the state owned RTR and Boris Berezovski's ORT, NTV clearly pursued its own agenda. The channel focused on alternative candidates to Putin and conducted critical analysis of the acting president, as well as presented satirical interpretations of the contemporary political events on the show Kukli. It is an indication of the availability of opposing voices in Russia, particularly since NTV enjoyed a large audience share and was available to most of the country's population. Moreover, the fact that TV-Centre was critical of Putin and its coverage focused Tuleev and Savostyanov, when Luzkhov himself openly supported Vladimir Putin is further evidence of the fundamental lack of cohesion in the country and regime. Hence, while the election coverage was biased in Vladimir Putin's favour, there were avenues for the opposition to present its own political platforms and the field of play was not as uneven in these elections as one would anticipate in a competitive authoritarian regime. It suggests that rather than creating an uneven field for the presidential candidates by limiting opponent's access to the media as often occurs in competitive authoritarian states, the role of the media in Russia at the beginning of Vladimir Putin's term as president was to serve as the promotional vehicle to the interests of the media owners.



## CHAPTER THREE: 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

### PUTIN'S RUSSIA

By the end of Putin's eight years as president, the Russian state had been transformed into a stable competitive authoritarian regime. This was primarily a result of two factors, improvements in the Russian economy that led to the decline of the limited degree of leverage the Western states had gained in the 1990s due to Russia's economic problems and a multi-faceted government policy of strengthening the organisational and coercive capacity of the state.

Although the Putin administration had worked to strengthen the Russian economy, many of the causes for Russia's recovery cannot be attributed to government policy directly. For instance, the August financial crisis actually created certain opportunities for the Russian economy. Import-competing domestic producers took advantage of the cheap rouble to regain their market share and exports of metals and other raw materials surged. Real GDP increased by a cumulative total of 25.8 per cent between 1999 and 2002 and inflation fell to single digits. In 2000, households also began to recover as real wages rose by almost 64 per cent between 2000 and 2002 (Tompson, 2004, p. 117). Economic recovery was further boosted by sharp rise in global oil prices. At the time of the August 1998 crash, the price of oil had sunk to \$10 per barrel, but by the middle of 2004 the price had risen to \$45 per barrel (Lynch, 2005, pp. 159-160). The improvement in the national economy further weakened the ability of the Western powers to exert leverage over the Russian government and gave Putin a greater degree of autonomy.

Vladimir Putin was, however, involved in the consolidation of power in the Russian state in favour of the Kremlin, which ultimately increased the organisational capacity of the

state and allowed him to transform Russia into a competitive authoritarian regime. The Russian federal system had been secured through the 1993 Constitution, but in December 1993, 42 of the 89 regions failed to ratify the constitution and many of the ethnic republics declared that their own constitutions were to take precedence over the Russian constitution. Furthermore, Chechnya demanded secession, Tatarstan declared itself as a mere 'associate member' and other republics were able to secure confederal relations with Moscow (Ross, 2002, p. 173). The republics were able to exploit the turmoil and uncertainty that was the result of a political impasse in Moscow and as Yeltsin needed the support of the regions in his struggle with the Russian parliament, the republics were able to secure ever-greater degree of national autonomy for themselves (Ross, 2002, p. 173). In many regions, local laws violated federal norms, for example in December 2001, 72 per cent of Bashkortostan's laws violated federal law (Ross, 2002, p. 174). Presidential leaders in the ethnic republics had used their considerable autonomy to develop authoritarian style regimes where regional assemblies had become mere appendages of executive power (Ross, 2002, p. 175).

Almost upon election as Russian president, Vladimir Putin began to consolidate and streamline the operations of the Russian government to create a system centred even more around the presidency than Yeltsin's super-presidential governing style (Lynch, 2005, p. 159). Putin achieved this by strengthening the vertical chain of command emanating from the Kremlin to all regions of Russia. He reorganised the Russia's 89 regions into seven super regions corresponding to existing military districts. He induced the Duma to allow the president to dismiss elected regional leaders if a court decreed that a leader has violated federal law more than once. Moreover, he reorganised the Upper House of the Federal Assembly, removing regional governors from the body and making tenure subject to presidential appointment (Lynch, 2005, p. 160).

## TELEVISION

The media was another avenue through which Putin sought to consolidate the influence of the state. Television in Russia was brought under stricter government influence in line with the general trend towards the improvement of the state's coercive and organisational capacities. Putin's view of the media appeared to be similar to Gorbachev's, who frequently spoke about the importance of media independence, but at the same time believed that the press should support him and his reforms (Becker, 2004, p. 148). This trend for the dismantling of private owned media companies was interpreted very negatively among foreign observers. In 2005, Freedom House lowered its rating of Russia from 'partly free' to 'not free' and the Committee to Protect Journalists placed Putin on its 'Ten Worst Enemies of the Press' list (Freedom House, 2005; Becker, 2004, pp. 139-140).

The true crucial turning point in Putin's relationship with the media appeared to have been the Kursk disaster just three months after Putin was elected. This was the first challenge of his presidency and the first time when the media was critical of his actions, particularly his decision to continue his holiday in the Black Sea resort of Sochi and to wait five days before making a statement about the disappearance of the submarine (Jack, 2004, p. 149-150).

However, NTV's problems had already begun previously. With the 1998 financial crisis, advertising budgets had fallen by 70 to 80 per cent and companies had to seek alternative sources of money to survive (Zolotov Jr., 2001, p. 87). Gusinski had secured a number of loans for his company, Media-Most, but in 1999 Vneshekonombank declined to extend the terms of the \$42 million loan to Media-Most (Belin, 2004, p. 139). After a lengthy court battle, Media-Most was forced to repay the loan and subsequently, struggled to cover repayments on other loans. In March 2000, Gazprom demanded a \$211 million reimbursement for the loan the company had repaid on behalf of Media-Most and two

months later, masked officers from the Procurator-General's Office and the Federal Security Service raided Media-Most's headquarters. This was the first of more than two dozen searches to be conducted at Media-Most and its affiliated companies over the following year (Belin, 2002, p. 34).

Gusinski himself was arrested in June and was charged with embezzlement during the acquisition of a St. Petersburg television company, however, the charges were dropped swiftly after Gusinski agreed to allow Gazprom, a state controlled corporation, to buy a controlling share in Media-Most (Belin, 2002, p. 35). When Gazprom forced a change of management at the shareholders' meeting on April 3, 2001, the journalists working for NTV declared the meeting illegal and staged on air-protests for ten days. At the end, Gazprom representatives, accompanied by armed guards, took over the network's headquarters on the night of April 13, 2001 (Belin, 2002, p. 37). This prompted many prominent journalists to resign from NTV and a large share eventually joined Media-Most's cable network, TNT (Belin, 2002, pp. 37-38).

Gusinski now divides his time between Israel and the United States, but the other oligarch at the centre of the 'information wars' of the late 1990s fared little better, despite his open support for Putin and his policies. Boris Berezovski was liquidating the last of his Russian assets by the beginning of Putin's second term as president (Treisman, 2007, pp. 141-142). After the wide spread criticism of the president after the Kursk disaster, pressure mounted on Berezovski to give up his stake in ORT (Belin, 2004, p. 141). In the face of mounting pressure from Russian prosecutors, Berezovski conceded and offered to sell his 49 per cent share in ORT. This did not deter the prosecutors who moved to extradite Berezovski from the United Kingdom to face charges in Russia, but the case was dismissed and Berezovski was granted political asylum in Britain in September 2003 (Truscott, 2004, p. 180). The use of legal instruments is actually further evidence of the growth of

competitive authoritarianism in Russia, as Levitsky and Way argue that in such regimes, assaults on civil liberties do not necessarily include the murder of opposition supporters or violent repression of protest, but more subtle forms, such as tax, fraud or defamation charges (2010, pp. 8-9).

After the Gazprom takeover of NTV, a large number of journalists and officials from NTV made the move to TNT, but merely two days after Gazprom took control of NTV's offices, the Russian tax police began pursuing criminal charges against senior TNT staff. Like other entities under the Media-Most banner, TNT also eventually fell under Gazprom's control (Belin, 2002, p. 39). Other former NTV journalists and executives went to work for TV-6, for instance NTV's general director, Yevgeni Kiselev, became the general director of TV-6 (Belin, 2002, p. 39). This was a minor channel controlled by Berezovski, but the oil company, Lukoil, owned 15 per cent of the company's shares (Belin, 2004, p. 141). In January 2002, Lukoil shut down TV-6 on the basis of the channel's profit losses between 1998 and 2000. (Truscott, 2004, p. 180). Finally, on June 22, 2003, the Russian authorities switched off TV-6, the last refuge of former-NTV and TV-6 journalists. It had had financial troubles and was swiftly replaced with a sports channel (Truscott, 2004, p. 181). Thus, within three years independent television in Russia was almost completely dismantled.

## PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

As at the end of Boris Yeltsin's second term as president, there were questions about the future of the presidency, since the Russian Constitution permits an individual to remain president for only two consecutive terms. Now, numerous voices called for Putin to amend or override the constitution in order to remain in power for the third term (Goldman, 2008, p.1). However, on December 10, 2007 Putin announced his preferred successor, Dmitri Medvedev. He was a forty-two year old lawyer from St. Petersburg, one of many on Putin's

staff who had followed the president from Putin's home town of St. Petersburg to Moscow. Medvedev had headed the Presidential Administration before Putin appointed him as First Deputy Prime Minister in 2005. He was generally perceived as one of the most liberal voices within the Putin administration (Goldman, 2008, p. 3). Like Putin in previous elections, Medvedev refused to engage in debates with other candidates and pledged to continue with Putin's previous policies, even accepting Putin's request to become prime minister under a Medvedev presidency (Nichol, 2008, pp. 1-2).

The 2008 presidential election highlights the changes that had taken place in Russia over the course of Putin's presidency. The number of candidates aspiring for the presidency had fallen compared to the 2000 election, as the barrier to registration and nomination had been increased. This is consistent with Levitsky and Way's argument that one of the primary features of a competitive authoritarian regime is the uneven, but nevertheless competitive, field for nominees in elections with the incumbent enjoying a significant advantage in access to the resources, the media or the law (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 8-11). The Russian election law forbade parties that are not represented in the Duma to put forward candidates for the presidential election and their candidates were required to nominate as independent candidates. However, due to a revision in the law, independent candidates were now required to collect two million signatures of supporters within only a few weeks in order to be listed on the ballot (Goldman, 2008, p. 4).

Only two parties put forward candidates, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia nominated Vladimir Zhirinovski and the Communists nominated Gennadi Zyuganov as in previous elections. Andrei Bogdanov was the only other candidate to appear on the ballot. Once a United Russia official, he had become the leader of the Democratic Party, a minor party that had received fewer than 90,000 votes nation-wide in the 2007 parliamentary elections (Goldman, 2008, pp. 4-5). He was regarded as a candidate designed to provide the

appearance of the liberal alternative in the electoral race (Hale and Colton, 2009, p. 23). Bogdanov ultimately received 1.3 per cent of the total votes, less than half of the votes he might have expected should those who had signed his petition have voted for him (Nichol, 2008, p. 3).

Medvedev also had a potentially credible rival in Mikhail Kasyanov, who had been Putin's Prime Minister between 2000 and 2005 and announced in 2006 that he would form a political party and run for president. However, when he attempted to register his Russian Popular Democratic Union Party, the Federal Registration Service declared that the submitted documents did not meet technical requirements and Kasyanov's party was banned from participation in the 2007 parliamentary election. Similarly, when Kasyanov submitted his required two million signatures to the Central Electoral Commission, it found an unacceptably high number of signatures were invalid (Goldman, 2008, p. 4). The Central Electoral Commission concluded that over 13 per cent of the signatures were invalid, while by law, a candidate is disqualified when more than five per cent of the collected signatures are declared invalid (The Moscow Times, 2008).

The outcome of the election was not surprising, considering Levada-Centre's polls, which asked who the surveyed would vote for if the election were to be held on the coming Sunday, showed that 79 per cent were prepared to vote for Medvedev in December 2007 and 82 per cent favoured Medvedev in January 2008 (Levada-Centre, 2008a). In the election itself, Medvedev received 70.28 per cent of the votes, Zyuganov 17.72 per cent, Zhirinovski received 9.35 per cent and Bogdanov received 1.3 per cent (see Figure 8) Voter turnout was at 69.7 per cent (Clark, 2008, p. 344).

FIGURE 8 - RESULTS OF 2008 RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

<b>Candidate:</b>	<b>Number of votes:</b>	<b>Percentage of votes:</b>
Dmitri Medvedev	52,530,712	70.28
Gennadi Zyuganov	13,243,550	17.72
Vladimir Zhirinovski	6,988,510	9.35
Andrei Bogdanov	968,344	1.3

Central Electoral Commission, 2 March 2008

#### ELECTION COVERAGE ON NATIONAL TELEVISION

The shift in the way the presidential election was portrayed in 2008 in comparison to the 2000 election is evidence of the difference in the way national television was used by its owners or controlling factions. During the 2000 presidential campaign, there was a clear differentiation between the pro-state faction and the opposition. They employed national television as the means through which they could propagate their opinions and goals. This was not mirrored in the 2008 election coverage, which had become more clearly biased in favour of the pro-Kremlin forces. As discussed before, by the start of Vladimir Putin's second term in office the independent media in Russia was mostly dismantled, which followed the general policy of the Putin government towards concentrating power in the hands of the executive and led to the stabilisation of a competitive authoritarian regime in Russia. In the 2008 election, the largest and most influential national television channels were the mouthpieces of the pro-Kremlin forces, supporting the Medvedev candidacy and therefore acted to secure the government a greater influence, while depriving the opposition of equal access to the media. This is consistent with Levitsky and Way's thesis that in a competitive authoritarian state the opposition cannot have a level playing field when it comes to access to resources, such as access to the media (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp. 10-11).



In a further reflection of the greater strength of the Russian government and the decline of Western leverage over the Russian state at the end of the Putin presidency, there was no EIM long-term monitoring mission during the 2008 presidential election nor did the OSCE monitor the election. The conditions the Russian government wanted to impose on the election observers prompted the OSCE to decline the invitation to monitor the election. However, two Russian non-governmental organisations, the Centre for Extreme Journalism and Golos, carried out their own monitoring during the election.

Golos' conclusions were overwhelmingly negative. According to Golos, the media was dedicated to a single candidate and news programs are commonly 'dedicated to publicising his "professional activity", which can be viewed as indirect agitation' (Golos, 2008a, p. 4). On average between January 1 and January 25 the federal TV Channels broadcast 17 messages a day about the four presidential candidates. These break down to 86 per cent featuring Medvedev, 6 per cent concerning Zhirinovski, and Zyuganov and Bogdanov each received 4 per cent share of the coverage (Golos, 2008a, p. 4). The changes in the election coverage during the second half of the campaign were not significant. Between 1 February and 16 February 2008 television coverage concerning the four presidential candidates was distributed at 76 per cent to Medvedev, 11 per cent to Zhirinovski, 9 per cent to Zyuganov and 4 per cent to Bogdanov (Golos, 2008b, p. 2). However, apart from the four presidential candidates, a report prepared by Medialogia, an independent information and analytical company, found that Kasyanov ended up second among most covered candidate during the first half of the election. However, the majority of the coverage was negative, while Bogdanov was positively covered second only to Medvedev (Golos, 2008a, p. 5).

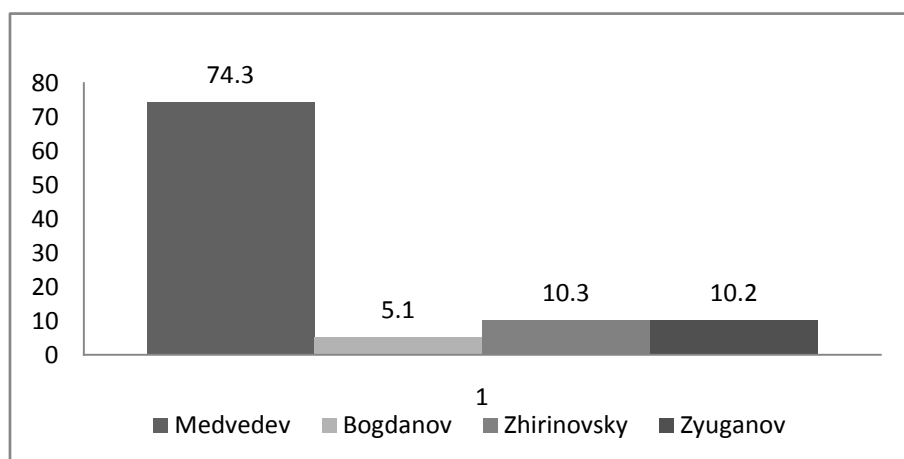
When debates between presidential candidates were broadcast they were not shown at the optimal time. The First Channel, formally ORT, broadcast debates each Tuesday from 7:05 to 8:00 am when many potential voters would have been on their way to work, while

on TV-Centre, ten rounds of debates lasting for twenty-five minutes were broadcast from 5:50 to 6:15 pm when most viewers had not yet returned from work. Channel Russia, formerly RTR, showed the debates only three times, broadcast on a very late time slot, from 10:55pm to 00:05am, which does not garner a large percentage of the total audience (Golos, 2008b, p.3-4).

The Centre for Extreme Journalism (CEJ) also concluded that television coverage was heavily biased towards Medvedev. The organisation carried out systematic monitoring of electoral coverage on the major national television channels, aiming to establish the extent to which the mass media presented to the viewers an objective and balanced coverage of the candidate and to what extent it was possible for Russian citizens to make an informed decision during the electoral process (CEJ, 2008a). In order to do so, the CEJ analysed election coverage on the two state channels, the First Channel and Russia, as well as three private channels, NTV, TV-Centre and Ren-TV.

The analysis provided by the CEJ included Vladimir Putin in the analysis and in the second half of the election campaigning period Putin received a greater share of television coverage than any of the candidates running for president in 2008. However, when only the four

FIGURE 9 - TOTAL PERCENTAGE OF COVERAGE RECEIVED PER CANDIDATE



presidential candidates are included in the analysis it is clear that Medvedev dominated the television screen, receiving nearly three-quarters of the total time spent on the coverage of the presidential candidates (see Figure 9).

Nevertheless, the numbers Bogdanov, Zhirinovski and Zyuganov did receive were boosted from the attention they received on Ren-TV. Medvedev received 73 per cent of Channel Russia's coverage of the elections and 84 per cent of the coverage on the First Channel. Medvedev did even better on NTV and TV-Centre, receiving a 92 per cent and 89.2 per cent share. In terms of the tone of coverage, the broadcasts on NTV and TV-Centre did not differ significantly from the state channels, although TV-Centre was somewhat more neutral in the tone of its reporting (CEJ, 2008b). In the first month of the campaign 81 per cent of Medvedev's coverage on channel Russia was positive and 19 per cent neutral. On NTV, 86 per cent of broadcasts about Dmitri Medvedev were neutral and 14 percent were positive (CEJ, 2008b). Out of those analysed, the one channel that displayed any significant amount of variation when compared to the rest of the channels surveyed was Ren-TV (see Figure 10).

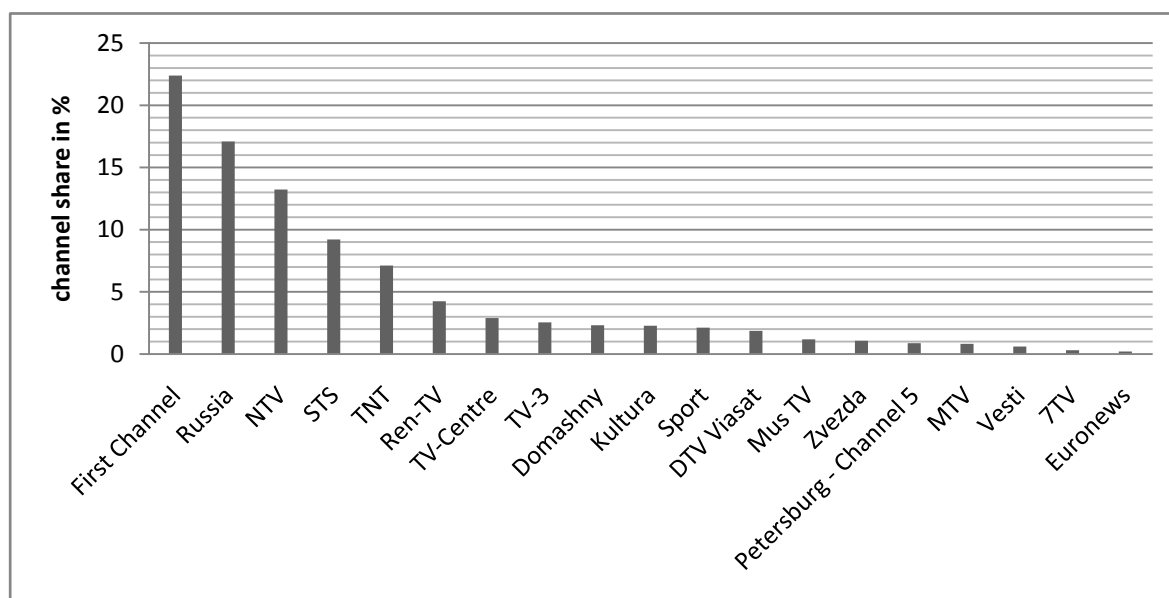
FIGURE 10 - PERCENTAGE OF COVERAGE RECEIVED PER CANDIDATE - REN-TV



In the first month of the electoral campaign, Ren-TV contributed 27.8 per cent of its electoral coverage to Mikhail Kasyanov, while Medvedev received only 20.2 per cent (Golos, 2008a). However, over the course of the election campaign, Ren-TV provided a fairly balanced presentation of the four presidential candidates allotting Medvedev 33.5 per cent, Zhirinovski 27.3 per cent, 23.6 per cent to Zyuganov and Bogdanov 15.7 per cent.

However, Ren-TV cannot provide the strong platform for oppositional forces that NTV had offered the anti-Kremlin faction in 2000. NTV was the third most popular channel in Russia and was accessible to 72 per cent of the population (White, Oates and McAllister, 2005, p. 195; Belin, 2002, pp. 19-20). Ren-TV was unable to obtain the same audience share. Throughout the 2008 presidential election campaign, Ren-TV received on average a little over four per cent of the total audience share (see Figure 11). Nor did Ren-TV feature programs in the same style as NTV's *Kukli*, which openly satirised the election and the government.

FIGURE 11 - AUDIENCE SHARE PER CHANNEL, JANUARY 14 -MARCH 2, 2008



Data provided by TNS-Global

## ROLE OF THE INTERNET

The continued existence of Ren-TV and its ability to provide an alternative style of content during an election suggests that there is still a place for the opposition to express its perspectives although support for Medvedev was disproportional and is evidence that Putin's Russia had not been transformed into a neo-Soviet closed authoritarian state. Moreover, some have argued also that the internet has become an alternative medium of political contestation in lieu of opportunities on traditional forms of media.

Indeed, one of the major changes to occur between the 2000 and 2008 elections was the growth of the internet use and computer ownership in Russia. According to a Levada-Centre 2001 survey on internet use in Russia, only four per cent of the surveyed had a home computer in their family, but by early 2008, 28 per cent reported to have one (Levada-Centre, 2008b). When asked in 2001 'do you personally use the internet at home, work or other places other than to check email and how often do you do so?' only two per cent of respondents reported that they use the internet every day or several days a week, while 95 per cent never used the internet at all. By 2008, 12 per cent used the internet daily or several times a week and six per cent on average once a week (Levada-Centre, 2008b).

Some writers assert that the internet has become an arena of free political debate that is often stifled in traditional forms of media (Rutten, 2009, pp. 25-26). The internet is also relatively unregulated, the first legislation on internet regulation was introduced only in 2005 (Schmidt and Teubener, 2006, p. 60) and remains moderate by international standards. In 2007, a blogger was sentenced to 18 months of conditional imprisonment for using violent language against police officers in his blog, but as Rutten noted, this case was similar to cases outside of Russia, such as the prosecution in Germany of a blogger for invoking hatred in a blog entry (Rutten, 2009, p. 26).

Yet internet could not function as an alternative medium of political promotion and protest in 2008, because the increase in internet usage, computer ownership and changes in the mediums individuals choose to access information had not changed significantly enough. Although significantly down from 95 percent in 2001, three quarters of those surveyed by the Levada-Centre in 2008 still reported that they do not use the internet at all (Levada-Centre, 2008b). Closer examination showed that computer ownership in Russia varies greatly depending on demographics and education level. In the families of students, 48 per cent had a computer and computer ownership was at 46 per cent among respondents with tertiary level education. In contrast, only five per cent of pensioners and seven per cent of disabled had a home computer in the family. Regional factors were also clear, 52 per cent of the surveyed from Moscow or St. Petersburg in comparison to 19 per cent from small towns and rural communities had a domestic computer (Levada-Centre, 2008b). Furthermore, the Levada-Centre also found that only 15 per cent used the internet to learn about events in Russia and internationally, while 92 per cent relied on the television <sup>2</sup> (Levada-Centre, 2008b).

Apart from the statistical data, Ellen Rutten's research casts into doubt the popular notion that the internet is an arena where politics are freely discussed and suggests a hesitancy to engage with electoral politics. She took as her case-studies a cross-section of popular literary bloggers, making the case that there is a long standing Russian tradition of using literature as a vehicle for political debate and therefore, she could expect these bloggers to engage in discussion about elections (Rutten, 2009, p. 28). Rutten selected bloggers who have exceptionally high readers and comment number, and then surveyed what material they chose to publish on the day of the 2008 presidential election. Rutten found that out of the seven bloggers she analysed, not one mentioned the election, focusing

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<sup>2</sup> Survey employed closed answers and no more than two answers permitted to the question

instead on food, poetry or the theatre. These are not bloggers who purposefully abstain from engaging in political debates. At the outbreak of war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, for instance, one blogger posted a long entry on the conflict and another analysed media reports on the war. Such posts clearly did not lead to lower reading number or decrease in popularity, instead the number of comments the blog entries on the Russia-Georgian war received was more than double the average number of comments for the blog (Rutten, 2009, pp. 26-27). Ultimately, Rutten concludes that the bloggers' silence on the subject of elections is the product of a desire to write without engaging in politics and mirrors the preference of the average Russian to retreat from political engagement and political spheres (Rutten, 2009, pp, 27-28).

## CONCLUSION

Over the course of Vladimir Putin's two terms as president much of the independent media in Russia was dismantled, as the oligarchs previously in control were forced to relinquish control of their companies to avoid facing legal charges or television channels were forced to shut down due to unprofitability. This was part of a wider strategy of the Putin administration that allotted the Kremlin a greater level of organisational and coercive capacity than the Yeltsin administration enjoyed. The stronger Russian state and the significant improvements in the Russian economy made it possible for Russia to become a stable competitive authoritarian state. Consequently, the playing field between the incumbent and the opposition had become systematically more uneven. The coverage of the 2008 presidential elections reflects this transformation. While the media was obviously biased in the 2000 election, media coverage on the major national television channels favoured Putin's successor, Dmitri Medvedev, to a greater degree, since the previously dissenting channels NTV and TV-Centre now offered similar coverage to the two state channels. Ren-TV did present an alternative style of coverage, but it is

a less significant factor in the elections than NTV had been in 2000, because Ren-TV did not have a comparable audience share. Nor was the internet a viable arena of open discussion as some have suggested, computer ownership in Russia remained low and those who did use the internet did not necessarily seek to engage in discussion about electoral politics. Hence, with the creation of a competitive authoritarian regime in Russia, the role of the national television channels was no longer to function as a vehicle for competition between various factions, but had largely become a means for the incumbent and his supporters to maintain their power.



## CONCLUSION

Between the 2000 presidential election and the end of President Vladimir Putin's first term in office, the Russian media lost much of the independence it had gained at the break-up of the Soviet Union. Private television channels critical of the government were dismantled, journalists threatened and media moguls were brought before the courts to face charges of fraud or embezzlement in an effort to pressure them to give up controlling shares in the companies they owned. This thesis aimed to explore this decline of media independence in Russian over the course of the Putin presidency and to explain the changing role of the major television channels in the contest for electoral success between the pro-state and the opposition factions.

The thesis concludes that the decline of media independence is part of a larger process that Russia underwent during Vladimir Putin's presidency and which, eventually transformed the state from an unstable regime where dissenting elites had many pathways through which they could challenge the president or his supporters to a stable competitive authoritarian regime. In consequence, the balance of power had swung heavily in favour of Putin and his chosen successor, Dmitri Medvedev, and while elections in Russian remain a legitimate arena for the contest of power, the playing field is clearly uneven with members of the opposition having a only a limited access to campaign resources or legal protection.

When one considers the coverage of the 2000 presidential campaign and the candidates in comparison to the 2008 election it is evident that the role of the media within Russia has altered. By the late 1990s, the unity of the oligarchs at the 1996 presidential elections had broken down and the so-called 'information wars' between the various factions played out on national television. This dispute among the Russian elites consolidated into factions vying for power at the 2000 election. On one side was the pro-

government faction consisting of the President Yeltsin's immediate advisors, many of the regional governors, the mayor of Moscow and the oligarch, Boris Berezovski. They had the support of the state-owned television network RTR, Berezovski's ORT and a large portion of the national periodical press. In contrast, on the other side of the conflict was the former prime minister Yevgeni Primakov, the Fatherland-All Russia bloc, the Luzkhov media holding company and Media-Most, particularly its popular national channel NTV, which had broad national reach and was the third most watched channel in Russia.

During the election, ORT, RTR and Berezovski owned TV6 were supporting of Yeltsin's appointed candidate, Vladimir Putin, and deliberately attempted to use black-PR to undermine Yavlinski's campaign. ORT led the attack on Yavlinski, alleging that he was campaigning illegally and due to his links with foreign investors, would be influenced by foreign interests. RTR later joined in the campaign against Yavlinski. In contrast, TV-Centre and NTV presented a more balanced approach to the election campaign and were at times critical of the acting president. NTV particularly broadcast critical views of Vladimir Putin during its weekly analytical programs and on its program, Kukli, satirised the eagerness of the politicians within the Duma to side with Putin by presenting the Duma as a brothel. This contrast in the coverage of the campaign suggests that at the 2000 election, national television served as a vehicle of the competing factions to promote their views and interests to the population.

By the 2008 election, the political and social realities had altered significantly and Putin had consolidated the state enough to create a competitive authoritarian regime. According to Levitsky and Way, there were three main factors at play in the creation of such as system: the country's linkage with the West, Western leverage over the government and the strength of the domestic organisational capacity. The Russian state never did have especially close links with Western powers due to decades of economic and cultural

isolation during the Soviet era. Western powers were able to have a greater leverage on the Russian state because of the poor economy during the 1990s, but as the fighting between factions on national television during the 2000 election suggests, the most significant factors at play was the Yeltsin government's lack of the organisational and coercive capacity to curtail the opposition.

However, the economy began to recover after the 1998 financial crisis and oil prices rose over the following decade, which meant that the Western powers lost much of its leverage over the Russian government. Furthermore, it was the policy of the Putin government to strengthen the position of the executive, which included centralisation of power by dismantling the autonomy regional governors had won for themselves in the political chaos in the 1990s and also, the dismantling of the independent media.

NTV was the first major television channel to be overtaken by the pro-government Gazprom, although Gazprom ultimately gained full control of Gusinski's media company Media-Most. Boris Berezovski was persuaded to give up his controlling share in ORT and TV6 was later closed down by one of its shareholders, Lukoil, because the channel had been unprofitable in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Berezovski himself became an exile in the United Kingdom. The channels that many of the former NTV staff moved to, TNT and TVS were similarly closed down until virtually all independent television channels ceased to exist.

This is in line with Levitsky and Way's argument that in a competitive authoritarian regime the incumbent benefits from an uneven playing field to a degree not seen in democratic states. Certainly, Medvedev's dominance of the 2008 election coverage on ORT, RTR, NTV and TV-Centre highlights the great advantage he enjoyed as the chosen successor to President Putin. However, Russian television is not a monolith Soviet-style propaganda monolith, the other candidates in the campaign received more balanced coverage on Ren-

TV, although the channel does not have the same place in Russian culture and society as NTV did in 2000, a reflection of the greater inequality in access to crucial resources between the incumbent and the opposition. It can therefore be concluded that as Putin transformed Russia into a competitive authoritarian regime, national television channels lost their role as an arena of elite struggle and became another avenue to consolidation of the competitive authoritarian regime, ensuring that the opposition does not have a balanced access to resources.

It would be a viable area of further research to consider whether this role for national television is a permanent one or whether further changes have occurred since the 2008 elections or will occur in the future. One of the features of competitive authoritarianism is its innate instability, as the government must retain a balance between democracy and authoritarianism to avoid moving permanently in the direction of liberal democratic governance or full authoritarianism. It is not assured therefore that the competitive authoritarian regime that emerged during the Putin presidency will survive into the future and if there is further regime change in Russia, the role of the media in the country may also alter.

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