

Democracy Assistance and Political Transition in Russia

Between Success and Failure

Sarah E. Mendelson

In one of the more stunning developments of the post–Cold War era, Russia has been host since the early 1990s to a virtual army of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from the United States, Britain, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe. These NGOs, many of which receive funding from Western governments, have worked for years with local political and social activists on various aspects of democratic institutional development, such as helping to establish competitive political parties and elections, independent media, civic advocacy groups, free trade unions, and independent judiciaries.¹ Little is known (although much good and bad is believed) about the impact of this “democracy assistance.” For example, how have Western efforts helped, hurt, or been irrelevant to Russians? What have been their positive and negative unintended consequences?

Sarah E. Mendelson is Assistant Professor of International Politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

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1. American NGOs include the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Eurasia Foundation, the Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, World Learning, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), and Internews. The European Union and the German and British governments have also supported democracy work. Private foundations such as George Soros's Open Society Institute, the Ford Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation have additionally spent millions of dollars in the region. For a more complete list, see Holt M. Ruffin, Alyssa Deutschler, Catriona Logan, and Richard Upjohn, *The Post-Soviet Handbook: A Guide to Grassroots Organizations and Internet Resources*, rev. ed. (Seattle: Center for Civil Society International in association with the University of Washington Press, 1999).

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Should this work continue? How could it be improved? How does it relate to the larger U.S. foreign policy goal of promoting democracy?

The evaluation of Western efforts to support Russia's political transition is an important national security issue. The political trajectory of Russia will play a large role in determining Europe's stability in the next several decades. It will influence every major security problem, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, crime and corruption, and the spread of disease. The U.S. government has declared that it too has a strong interest in seeing Russia become a democracy.² Technical assistance to groups in Russia working on the development of democratic institutions has been a central—albeit not the only—component of democracy promotion.³

Despite the security ramifications of Russia's transition, few champions or critics of democracy assistance have systematically grounded their discussion in detailed empirical analysis.⁴ Instead the debate has grown increasingly, and

2. The Mission Performance Plan for the U.S. embassy in Russia for 2000–02 claimed that “the consolidation of democratic institutions and values in Russia over the long term is a vital U.S. national security interest.” Quoted in Management Systems International, “An Assessment of USAID Political Party Building and Related Activities in Russia,” report prepared for USAID/Moscow, Office of Democracy Initiatives and Human Resources, June 30, 2000, p. 38 (hereinafter MSI report).

3. Drawing on the democratic peace theory, which stipulates that democracies are less likely to fight one another, democracy promotion as a foreign policy goal was a major rhetorical plank of the Clinton administration. In addition to technical assistance programs designed to help in the building of democratic institutions, democracy promotion included the integration of Russia into international institutions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), military-to-military contact programs between members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia, and increased trade. The scholarly literature on the democratic peace theory is voluminous. For an original articulation, see Michael Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 1986), pp. 1151–1169. For an overview, see Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace: An International Security Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996). For recent works, see Joanne Gowa, *Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Spencer R. Weart, *Never at War: Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998). For examples of official support for this policy, see William Clinton, address to the Russian Duma, June 5, 2000, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/4348.html>; U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, “Sustaining Democracy in the Twenty-first Century,” School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., January 18, 2000, <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/2000/000118.htm>; and Strobe Talbott, “Democracy and the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 6 (November/December 1996), pp. 47–63.

4. There are few scholarly examinations of democracy assistance. This article emerges from a project, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, designed to address this gap in the literature. For results, see Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: Transnational Democracy Networks and Post-Communist Transitions* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming). Among the works available, see Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); Marina Ottoway and Thomas Carothers, eds., *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000); and Nancy Lubin, “U.S. Assistance to the NIS,” in Karen Dawisha, ed., *The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transi-*

intensely, partisan and parochial, often driven by organizational, rather than national security, interests. Officials from the Clinton administration, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and NGOs working in Russia tended to overestimate the role that democracy assistance could play. As a result, they helped to create expectations that could never be met and that clashed awkwardly with the pace of what in fact were multiple transitions, involving the Russian state and society, as well as economic, political, and security institutions. Clinton administration officials, staffers at USAID, and the NGOs themselves tended to talk mainly about Russia's "success stories": the 65,000 NGOs that developed, the multiparty system, the regular elections, and the millions of citizens who in the last several years regularly turned out to vote. They feared losing funding from a hostile Congress if they discussed openly the difficulties associated with transitions from communism and the more complicated, even gloomy, reality of the poorly functioning institutions that exist in Russia today.⁵

The critics have countered that Western assistance to Russia has been a waste of money and could even be dangerous. In an article that influenced the larger policy debate on assistance, Fareed Zakaria, then managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, implied that aid helped to promote what he labeled "illiberal democracy," where elections occur but rulers ignore constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.⁶ Russia watchers' criticisms of assistance became increasingly emphatic following, among other manifestations of arbitrariness, Boris Yeltsin's firing of several prime ministers, a second war in Chechnya, and

tions in Russia and the New States of Eurasia (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 350–378. On democracy promotion more generally, see Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Gideon Rose, "Democracy Promotion and American Foreign Policy: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 186–203.

5. USAID budgets did decline from \$14.1 billion worldwide in 1993 to \$12.6 billion in 2000, making the United States the largest industrialized nation with the smallest foreign assistance budget. For a discussion, see Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*. Examples of "success stories" such as Russia's "65,000 NGOs" that appear in U.S. officials' speeches come from documents such as "USAID/Russia Activity Description as of October 31, 1999"; "USAID/Russia Activity Description as of March 31, 2000"; and "Russia's Economic and Political Transformation: Some Results of USAID Support to Date," Spring 1995. These documents are available on request from USAID/Washington. For examples of senior officials then using success stories to bolster U.S. policy toward Russia, see William Clinton, "Remembering Yeltsin," *Time*, January 1, 2000; and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, "Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations," April 4, 2000, both carried on David Johnson's Russia List at <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson>.

6. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 6 (November/December 1997), pp. 22–43.

money-laundering scandals that appeared to involve both Western assistance and the Kremlin.⁷ Eventually, commentary on democracy assistance became fodder for U.S. election campaigns: The “Who lost Russia?” debate was one of the few foreign policy topics mentioned in the 2000 presidential race; the Republicans in Congress excoriated the Clinton administration for just about everything bad that occurred in Russia.⁸ In the last days of the administration, insiders hit back in defense of the “Clinton legacy” in foreign policy.⁹

This article seeks to advance what has been a divisive debate by examining an important component of Western democracy assistance to Russia: support for political parties and elections. The evidence presented here suggests that the impact of democracy assistance has, partly by design and partly by nature, been limited.¹⁰ The story, rather than being either exclusively positive or negative, is deeply mixed. On the one hand, with relatively small amounts of money, Western donors and NGOs have helped specific groups of local activists to build institutions associated with democracy. On the other hand, these institutions continue to be fragile and function poorly.

Western assistance has contributed to the ways in which political parties campaign and citizens monitor elections in Russia. Even the growth and acceptance of parties as organizational units, initially widely shunned after years of one-party rule, are traceable in part to the efforts of Western groups. In interviews, Russian activists have generally claimed that Western NGOs have had an impact in presenting practical menus of problem-solving skills that have helped to shape the development of competitive parties and elections. They have also noted, however, that these parties have responded poorly to constituents and have done little beyond run for election. In terms of domestic election monitoring, there is also unfinished business. Monitoring has yet to deter

7. Stephen F. Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); and Janine Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe, 1989–1998* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

8. Speaker's Advisory Group on Russia, “Russia's Road to Corruption: How the Clinton Administration Exported Government Instead of Free Enterprise and Failed the Russian People,” September 2000, <http://policy.house.gov/russia>.

9. See Samuel R. Berger, “A Foreign Policy for the Global Age,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 6 (November/December 2000), pp. 22–39; and Steve Sestanovich, “Where Does Russia Belong?” *National Interest*, No. 62 (Winter 2000/2001), pp. 5–16.

10. Evidence and arguments on the power and limits of democracy assistance in Russia draw on several years of work with and assessments of such programs since the early 1990s. I worked in Moscow as an NDI program officer from August 1994 to July 1995. I returned to Russia several times to interview dozens of activists and observe four sets of national elections between December 1995 and September 2000. I benefited also from the collaborative project based at Columbia University evaluating Western efforts at democracy assistance in twelve postcommunist societies. See Mendelson and Glenn, *The Power and Limits of NGOs*.

electoral fraud, and whatever fraud has been detected has gone largely ignored by the Russian government and public.

Democracy assistance has inherent limitations, however, beyond the design or implementation of any specific program. It tends to have a minimal influence on the national leadership. As most people involved in this work know, assistance has the potential to create change at the micro level, within activist communities. But rare indeed are the communities that effect macro-level change, that use their newly acquired skills to alter the internal balance of power, as seemed to have occurred in Serbia, for example, in September and October 2000. Preliminary reports of events there suggest that Western democracy assistance played a crucial role in providing nonviolent organizing skills, including a specific type of domestic election monitoring system, that ultimately helped to bring down the regime of Slobodan Milošević.¹¹ More often, however, as in the case of Russia, decisionmakers are beyond the realm of assistance.

The impact of democracy assistance in Russia has been further limited by a surprising source: Western governments and international organizations (IOs) such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). A negative, unintended consequence of unnuanced laudatory statements by Western officials—for example, those that categorize elections as “free and fair” when they have many irregularities, or that tout parties as signs of democratic progress when in fact they shun contact with civic groups—is that democratic activists on the ground in Russia are increasingly isolated.¹² Equally serious, the Russian leadership may have learned an unfortunate lesson: The generally positive Western response to recently established Russian institu-

11. In-depth studies have yet to be written, and the groups engaged in the assistance are just beginning to assess the lessons. Author telephone conversation with Paul McCarthy, program officer, Southeastern Europe, National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, D.C., December 15, 2000. Assistance had little visible impact from 1996 to 1998. See, for example, V.P. Gagnon, “International NGOs and Democracy Assistance in Serbia,” December 1998, <http://www.ceip.org/files/pdf/GagnonSerbia.pdf>. As late as August 17, 2000, some analysts argued that it was “unlikely that any meaningful resistance could be organized before autumn.” See International Crisis Group, ICG Balkans Report No. 99, August 17, 2000, p. ii. Among the key questions will be establishing why the Serbian student movement supported by Western assistance was successful, especially in the xenophobic atmosphere after the NATO bombing. In the meantime, see Roger Cohen, “Who Really Brought Down Milosevic?” *New York Times Magazine*, November 26, 2000, p. 43; and Michael Dobbs, “U.S. Advice Guided Milosevic Opposition,” *Washington Post*, December 11, 2000, p. A1.

12. On irregularities, see, for example, IFES, *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Russia, 1999–2000: Technical Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: International Foundation for Election Systems, 2000) (hereinafter IFES report); on parties shunning contact, see MSI report, p. 29; and on isolation, see Sarah E. Mendelson, “The Putin Path: Civil Liberties and Human Rights in Retreat,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 47, No. 5 (September/October 2000), pp. 3–12.

tions that sometimes only vaguely resemble democratic ones suggests that the form of these institutions may be more important to Western policymakers than if or how they function.¹³

This article proceeds as follows. I describe briefly the main players working on democracy assistance in Russia, specifically those groups that support parties and elections. In the second section, drawing on findings from two sets of parliamentary and presidential elections between 1995 and 2000, I detail the impact of Western democracy assistance on how political parties in Russia campaigned and on how activists attempted to enhance transparency. The point here is not a comprehensive account of these elections or of the impact of assistance as measured by electoral outcomes.¹⁴ Rather it is a discussion of the power and constraints of democracy assistance, particularly of choices made by Western NGOs and Russian activists themselves. In the third section, I look at the larger forces limiting the impact of democracy assistance that exist outside the work of NGOs. These include Russia's own leaders and the ways in which they have weakened rather than strengthened their country's democratic institutions. They also include the dominant tendency of both U.S. government and OSCE officials to focus on Russia's superficial compliance with democratic norms, while downplaying or ignoring evidence of complications in the country's political transition. The last section summarizes the findings and suggests ways to alter U.S. policies and the focus of activists' work to have a more profound and long-term impact on political transition in Russia.

13. A memo written by the in-house expert on international election observation at NDI describes how rulers have adapted to this preoccupation with the superficial: "Autocrats have become more sophisticated in their attempts at electoral manipulation" (p. 3). "Autocrats know (that observers tend to focus on election day) and increasingly attempt to manipulate other elements of the electoral process so that election day seems more-or-less normal." Observers then release statements 48 to 72 hours after the polls close (p. 5). Patrick Merloe, "Lessons Learned and Challenges Facing International Monitoring," NDI memo, March 1999.

14. I have provided information on outcomes in tables to give readers a schematic sense of the political landscape in Russia. In parliamentary elections, voters choose from both party lists (Table 1) and single-mandate lists (Table 2 shows the total number of seats for both). The seats in the Duma are split 225:225. To win outright in a presidential race, a candidate must capture more than 50 percent of the vote. If no candidate achieves 50 percent of the total, then the race moves to a second round with the two candidates who received the most votes from the first round. Table 3 shows the results from the two rounds of voting in 1996. Table 4 shows the 2000 election, in which Vladimir Putin received 52.9 percent in the first round. For detailed discussions of the elections, see Timothy J. Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997); Michael McFaul, *Russia's 1996 Presidential Election: The End of Polarized Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1997); and Michael McFaul, *Russia's Troubled Transition from Communism to Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

Assisting Russian Democracy: A Cast of Thousands

Democracy assistance in Russia as elsewhere is funded by states and private donors, but the work is done primarily by Western NGOs and local activists, focusing on various aspects of institutional development. The underpinning logic of this assistance is that socialization occurs through the process of habit—such as the habit of voting or running for election.¹⁵ The promotion of elections and the development of parties are only a part of democracy assistance. It also includes helping to professionalize the media outlets that were once exclusively state run, improving the legal and organizational infrastructure of the media, working with local NGOs on women's issues, providing information technology to networks of environmental groups or human rights monitors, and supporting the creation of independent trade unions. Within the development of parties and elections, several strategies have been used in Russia, including two that I discuss in some detail: training activists in campaign techniques (such as focus groups, direct mail, polling, and advertising) and training domestic election monitors.

Like the advocacy networks that political scientists Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink examine, Western NGOs advocate on behalf of others or promote and “defend a cause or proposition,” in this case, democracy.¹⁶ These NGOs, like those in *Activists beyond Borders*, are motivated mainly by ideals, not profits. They are usually composed of young people willing to work hard for little pay in flat organizational structures on projects that are transparent to the public. Many Western NGOs receive government funding, but their strategies for pursuing their goals, with a few exceptions, are derived and implemented with minimal interference or supervision from government bureaucracies (or market interests), making them a “third force” of international activity.¹⁷

The power of Western groups working on democracy assistance, like advocacy networks elsewhere, lies not in their access to brute force, finance, or political office but in their ability to spread information. In the post-Soviet context, the Western actors in these networks have worked to level the playing

15. For a discussion, see Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, pp. 86–90.

16. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 8.

17. Ann M. Florini, ed., *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society* (Tokyo and Washington, D.C.: Japan Center for International Exchange and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000).

field by equipping activist groups with hardware (computers, fax machines, etc.), helping to set up printing presses, translating texts, mailing newsletters, and conducting thousands of hours of training sessions on topics connected with the specific issue around which they have mobilized.¹⁸ "Information politics," this redistribution of knowledge, has been particularly important in Russia because previously the state had monopolized information and kept like-minded groups of people from banding together.¹⁹ It has helped empower a people whose voice had been muffled by communist authorities for as long as seventy-five years.

Inside Russia, advocacy networks have developed around issues such as women's rights, environmental degradation, political party formation, free trade unions, and independent media. Environmental groups have waged campaigns against the dumping of nuclear waste in the Barents Sea. The original human rights networks formed through the Helsinki process in the 1970s still track reports of torture, arbitrary arrest, detention, and disappearances. Other human rights networks have mobilized around issues dealing with conscription and hazing in the military, and the treatment of civilians and medical personnel in Chechnya.

THE PARTIES AND ELECTIONS NETWORK

Here I focus on a few central nodes in the network that have developed around parties and elections in Russia, including Western NGOs that have worked closely with Russian political activists and the Russian parties themselves. On the Western side, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) have been two of the most important organizations based in Russia doing large-scale political party training.²⁰ They have offices in Moscow but have worked in many regions of

18. For example, the numerous meetings that I attended in 1994 and 1995 on elections and political parties included information on transparency in elections (such as organizing a domestic election monitoring effort) and on all aspects of competitive campaigns (such as getting out the message and using polling data).

19. On information politics more generally, see Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, pp. 18–20.

20. Other groups working with political parties include the British Conservative International Office (Conservatives), supported by the British Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and the German party institutes such as the Konrad Adenauer, the Friedrich Ebert, and the Friedrich Naumann Stiftungen. The Canadian government runs parliamentary and small grants programs, as does the British embassy in Moscow through the Know How Fund. The Moscow Carnegie Center plays an important role in bringing together various political parties to discuss pertinent issues. Harvard University's Strengthening Democratic Institutions project has worked with political parties in Russia. Other American groups receiving funding from USAID to help to increase citizen participation in politics include IFES, which has worked with Russian election officials, and the

Russia. NDI and IRI have reached thousands of activists with support from USAID of more than \$15 million since the early 1990s.²¹

Those who work in Western NGOs explicitly strategize about how best to promote ideas and practices associated with democratic institutions. With respect to parties and elections, NDI and IRI have had as their main goal the development of and assistance to reformist-minded political parties, usually meaning self-described democrats and supporters of a market-driven economy. It has been commonly assumed that the best way to achieve this goal is through the practice of campaigns and elections. Therefore NDI, IRI, and another NGO—the British Conservative International Office—have focused on training Russian political activists in campaign techniques. These Western NGOs have engaged mainly in importing ideas and methods used throughout the world with a bottom-up, client-based approach, grounded in consultations with national and regional political activists. Additionally, NDI and IRI have worked with Russian activists to increase transparency in elections through the development of domestic election monitoring.

The Russian activists who have worked with Western groups come primarily from two pro-Western parties, each with a distinctive culture. Emerging in the early 1990s, Russia's Choice (later a part of the Union of Right Forces or SPS) is an amalgam of several political factions, including a human rights wing as well as a politically conservative, pro-business one. At different times, Russia's Choice has aligned itself with the Kremlin (1993 and 1999) and against it (1994–95 because of the first war in Chechnya). The party is run by Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais. Yabloko, established in 1993, comes closest to a social democratic party, advocating a social safety net and some government intervention in the economy, although it strongly supports free enterprise. Led by Grigory Yavlinsky, it is the only reformist party consistently opposed to the Kremlin. Both parties draw on urban, elite, intellectual, pro-Western voters. Combined, this electorate represents perhaps 20 percent of Russia's voting population. Both parties supported Boris Yeltsin for president in 1996 in the

Moscow School of Political Studies, which has sought to develop democratic culture among young, regional leaders.

21. NDI estimates that it has trained 7,750 political party and social activists. IRI estimates it has worked with 4,045 such individuals. USAID/Russia Activity Descriptions as of October 31, 1999, pp. 68–69. NDI and IRI are funded by cooperative agreements with USAID. The amount of \$15 million comes from USAID/Russia, "USAID/Russia Democratic Institution Strengthening Project, Global Election and Political Processes—Russia Component, Program Description," draft, November 27, 2000 (hereinafter USAID/Russia draft program description), p. 2. I thank USAID/Russia for sharing this draft.

second round of elections. In 2000 the Union of Right Forces supported Vladimir Putin, while Yabloko backed Yavlinsky.²²

Additional players on the Russian political landscape that figure in the discussion here include the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), Our Home Is Russia (NDR), and Unity. The KPRF is the inheritor of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It has had a stable voter population of about 24 percent. As Russia's largest, truly nationally based, grassroots party, KPRF has evolved somewhat away from traditional communist values.²³ Both NDR and Unity are blocs created by the Kremlin that draw on regional administrative, corporate elites. In the 1995 parliamentary election, NDR received about 10 percent of the popular vote; in 1999 Unity received slightly more than 23 percent of the popular vote.

All Western groups in Russia must decide with whom to work. European party organizations located abroad use ideology to guide their choices, that is, an assessment of the degree to which a political party is like-minded. For example, the British Conservatives worked with Russia's Choice and then with its later incarnation, the Union of Right Forces. They would not, however, work with Yabloko. Throughout the 1990s, NDI had good relations with Russia's Choice. By 2000 NDI also had increasingly close contacts with the Yabloko Party leadership, having run several programs with Yabloko's regional activists in the 1990s. For most of the 1990s, IRI did not develop close relations with specific parties and tended to stay away from ideology, focusing instead on what it referred to as the "structure [of parties] and technique [of elections]."²⁴ Greater collaboration between American and European groups and Russian party activists, as well as joint seminars, became necessary by 2000 as budgets for assistance in the United States and Britain shrank.²⁵

22. Alexey Zudin, "Union of Right Forces," and Alexey Kuzmin and Boris Ovchinnikov, "Yabloko," in Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov, and Andrei Ryabov, with Elizabeth Reisch, eds., *Primer on Russia's 1999 Duma Elections* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1999), pp. 103–112 and 85–94, respectively.

23. Sergey Chernyakhovsky, "The Communist Party of the Russian Federation," in *ibid.*, pp. 77–85.

24. Author interviews with Richard Normington, head of the international office, and Abbey Rosemont, coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe, both of the British Conservative Party, London, December 1997, December 1999; Jacques Monash, NDI director, Moscow, September 2000; and David Merkel, former IRI program officer in Russia, Washington, D.C., September 1998. NDI and IRI also had contact, although much less, with NDR.

25. "Seminar for Heads of the Union of Right Forces Regional Executive Councils, Campaign Managers, and Press Secretaries," Union of Right Forces–British Conservatives–IRI–NDI, September 22–24, 2000, Kolontayevo, Russia. The reasons for the steadily shrinking budgets for democracy assistance are complex and would make an interesting subject for further research.

NDI and IRI have been criticized for not selecting “a few [organizations] that showed the greatest promise and capability for special assistance in order to encourage and nurture their development.”²⁶ Officially, organizations that receive funding from the U.S. government must be nonpartisan. In practice, however, this has not always been true in Russia. Because of limited time and budgets, these organizations did de facto “pick winners” in elections between 1995 and 2000. Indeed they received implicit encouragement from USAID/Washington to do so.²⁷ But it was the Russians, not USAID or the Western groups, who ultimately determined with whom they worked. Efforts have been demand driven in Russian cities, not supply driven by directives from Washington or London.²⁸

THE ROLE OF WESTERN GOVERNMENTS

At the government level, states and IOs fund democracy assistance. They can do so minimally, adequately, or generously. Throughout the 1990s, despite the significance of Russia’s political trajectory, the United States provided comparatively minimal funds for such work. U.S. policymakers and Congress consistently talked about the importance of developing democratic institutions in Russia, but the budgets painted a different picture. From 1992 to 1996, USAID spent more than 50 percent of its budget in Russia supporting American consulting firms working on market reform. USAID on average allocated only 6 percent of its funds for Russia to U.S. NGOs working on democracy assistance. In fiscal years (FYs) 1997 and 1998, the percentage rose, but with decreased overall spending on assistance to Russia, the actual dollar amount for democracy assistance fell. By FY 2000, the democracy assistance budget for Russia was \$16 million, nearly a 30 percent drop from 1999.²⁹ Perhaps given

26. Constantine C. Menges, “An Initial Assessment of U.S. Aid to Russia, 1992–1995, and a Strategy for More Effective Assistance,” *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Fall 1996), p. 545.

27. Author conversations with senior USAID/Washington officials in the spring of 1995, regarding, in the words of one official, the importance of distinguishing the “black hats” (meaning undesirable groups) from the “white hats” (pro-Western groups) in the Duma elections.

28. This finding contrasts with assistance to civic advocacy groups. Evidence from programs that involved direct grants to local NGOs often resulted in NGOs forming around issues that donors rather than locals thought important. See Mendelson and Glenn, *The Power and Limits of NGOs*.

29. The amounts listed above are based on information from USAID/Moscow and the Office of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department. Figures from other sources tend to be higher. For example, according to the Government Accounting Office (GAO), the international community has spent roughly \$36 billion on assistance to Russia since 1992. It claims that the U.S. government targeted \$631 million on democracy assistance. See GAO report to the chairman and to the ranking minority member, Committee on Banking and Financial Services, House of Representatives, “Foreign Assistance: International Efforts to Aid Russia’s Transition Have Had Mixed Results,” November 2000, pp. 6, 58.

the declining budgets, it is not surprising that the impact of U.S. assistance has been uneven and limited.

U.S. and European rhetoric can help to support or undermine democracy assistance. In the 1990s, Western leaders, especially those in the Clinton administration, were publicly reluctant to acknowledge that Russian political and social institutions functioned poorly. Instead they recounted Russia's success stories, usually in quantitative terms, as a substitute for discussion about the difficulties of states and societies in political, social, and economic transitions. (U.S. NGOs receiving funding from USAID had financial motivations to support the gathering of success stories for show on Capitol Hill.) As for parties and elections, the consensus not just in Washington but also in Europe was to speak of free and fair elections.

The Mixed Impact of Democracy Assistance to Russia

In assessing the influences of democracy assistance in Russia between 1995 and 2000, it is important to remember that few Russians as recently as the late 1980s had personally participated in competitive, multiparty elections.³⁰ Prior to elections in the late-Soviet period, parties other than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) were illegal. Party-building techniques in the Soviet Union were generally limited to compulsory meetings at work, and Communist Party operatives built cadres by going door-to-door. Slogans such as "Glory to the CPSU" dotted Soviet urban and rural landscapes. When NDI, IRI, and European democracy assistance groups first began to work in Russia, which for most was in the early 1990s, few Russians outside Moscow or Leningrad had seen or used Western campaign techniques.³¹

By 2000, Western NGO efforts to develop modern campaign techniques had had a mixed impact on Russian political parties. They helped some parties to become more competitive in elections, but they did not help to make them responsive to their constituents. With every national election, campaign practices

30. Through fiction, historical accounts, and movies, Russians have some sense of the role that competitive elections played in their country from 1905 through 1917. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

31. Author discussions at training seminars with activists from across Russia, March and April 1995; author interview with Sergei Mitrokhin, Duma deputy and Yabloko activist, Moscow, December 1997. Vladimir Boxer, a Russia's Choice activist and fellow at Harvard University's Strengthening Democratic Institutions project, believes that this claim is overstated. Boxer argues that in 1989–91 (before most Western NGOs were working in Russia), activists were using, for example, direct mail. He claims that the "new" technologies brought by Westerners were focus groups and other ways of using research to shape political message. Davis Center seminar, Harvard University, May 11, 2000.

continued to spread across the political spectrum, changing the environment in which parties competed and voters made choices.³² According to the Russian population, these changes were not always for the better. Survey data indicate that throughout the 1990s, “most Russians [did] not find the political parties collectively to be trustworthy or empathetic.”³³ Additionally, Russian attempts to monitor elections have increasingly come to resemble Western methods of parallel vote counts. For a variety of reasons, however, these efforts have been haphazard.

Below I detail a pattern showing that Russian parties campaign and monitor elections increasingly informed by Western techniques. Larger democratic norms underpinning the institutions of competitive politics and elections—such as the nature of open competition and transparency—are generally absent, however.

PARTIES AND CAMPAIGNS

The specific aspects of campaigning that NDI and IRI discussed with thousands of Russian activists between 1995 and 2000 were the result of direct requests for training from the parties. Typically, the Western groups would present a menu of campaign skills and explain how these tools could address problems encountered in competitive elections. Over several years and throughout Russia, these groups held seminars discussing campaign planning and scheduling, polling and focus groups, how to develop a campaign message, and designing television advertisements and direct-mail letters. Central to the idea of campaigns based on voter contact was effective use of media. The Western NGOs trained activists in setting up press conferences for candidates and compiling press packets, complete with contact numbers, logos, pins, and pens. Increasingly from 1995 through 2000, the largest liberal parties provided road maps for their campaigns based on standard research methods

32. Even the KPRF increasingly relied on these marketing techniques. Author interviews with Duma Deputy Viktor Peshkov, director of the KPRF campaign and election monitoring effort, and with Duma staffer Vladimir Akimov, KPRF activist, Moscow, December 1997, December 1999, and March 2000. According to Stephen Biegun, former IRI trainer, who worked in Russia in 1993, seminars were open to all parties and activists but the KPRF chose not to come. Author interview, Washington, D.C., August 1998.

33. Timothy J. Colton, “Parties, Citizens, and Democratic Consolidation in Russia,” paper for a workshop entitled “Ten Years since the Collapse of the Soviet Union,” Princeton University, October 13–14, 2000, p. 7 (table on p. 41), <http://www.wws.princeton.edu/~cis/COLTON.PDF>. From a sample of 1,846 post-election interviews in 1999 and 2000, 45 percent of respondents “mistrust” parties, and 8 percent “completely mistrust” parties. The sample finds that 27 percent “trust” and 1 percent “fully trust” parties, and 48 percent believed that “political parties don’t care what ordinary people think.”

such as polling and focus groups, although this did not always translate into votes.

The process of adapting campaign techniques, however, even among the parties relatively enthusiastic about these tools, was incremental. According to staffers from NDI, IRI, and the British Conservative Party, leading Russian politicians as well as activists from the regions had difficulty mastering, for example, the critical issue of “message discipline”—that is, not only stating clearly and succinctly the party’s message to the voters, but using every opportunity to articulate that message. One American staffer lamented, “In the last election [1993], no party worker could say in thirty seconds what the party’s message was.”³⁴ The implications of murky messages were real, especially for like-minded, liberal, pro-Western candidates who in many Russian districts were running against one another, thus dividing the vote. In 1995, for example, Russia’s Choice did not make it to the Duma (see Tables 1 and 2).

The incremental response also derived in part from the way in which new ideas and practices introduced by Western groups competed with various Russian organizational cultures. For example, although no Western groups worked directly with the KPRF on campaigning, actions by the KPRF and interviews with KPRF activists suggest that their party culture in 1995 and 1996 competed directly with the reliance on Western campaign/marketing techniques. The loss by Gennady Zyuganov, the KPRF presidential candidate, in the 1996 race was particularly striking because he went into the campaign as the heavy favorite in virtually every poll. Zyuganov had a strong grassroots organization behind him. Through April 1996, he was widely believed to be the favored candidate and expected to have an easy campaign ahead of him. In the end, though, the KPRF’s door-to-door campaign was obliterated by the heavily researched, well-financed, media-saturating, modern campaign waged by the Yeltsin team.³⁵ Viktor Peshkov, the KPRF Duma deputy in charge of Zyuganov’s campaign, conceded that “the quality of the campaign was not enough to get the results.” But, he reasoned, “we had as an organizational principle to distinguish ourselves from the kind of campaign proposed by Niccolo M” (a Russian public relations firm named after Niccolò Machiavelli, run by Russian political consultants trained in NDI and IRI seminars). The “kind” he was referring to was one based on Western marketing techniques,

34. Author interview with Gregory Minjack, a former NDI trainer, Moscow, February 1995. For similar statements, author interviews with former IRI trainer Biegun and with British Conservatives Normington and Rosemont.

35. Author election observation; Sergei Markov, briefing at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 5, 1996; and McFaul, *Russia’s 1996 Presidential Election*, pp. 36–48.

Table 1. Results of Party-List Voting in Parliamentary Elections of December 17, 1995, and December 19, 1999 (percentage of national proportional representation vote).

Political Party/Bloc	1995	1999
Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF)	22.7	24.29
Russia's Choice/Union of Right Forces (SPS)	3.9*	8.52
Yabloko	7.0	5.93
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)	11.4	5.98
Unity	N/A	23.32
Fatherland–All Russia (OVR)	N/A	13.33
Our Home Is Russia	10.3	1.20
None of the above and parties not receiving 5 percent	49.6	18.63

SOURCES: Michael McFaul, "Russia's Parliamentary Elections: Party Consolidation and Fragmentation," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2000), p. 13; and Sarah Oates, "The 1999 Russian Duma Election," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (May/June 2000), p. 7.

*All right-wing parties together comprised 8.1 percent. This includes a number of small parties, such as Democratic Choice of Russia (3.86 percent); Forward Russia! (1.94 percent); Pamfilova-Gurov-Lysenko (1.6 percent); and Common Cause (0.7 percent).

including the use of negative advertising. By 1997 KPRF members were thinking of a different strategy: They had begun to translate manuals from Western groups on how to win elections.³⁶

By 1999 Western campaign techniques were widely accepted in Russia and, in some cases, firmly embraced. All major political parties (including the KPRF) used opinion polls, focus groups, political message development, and even direct mail to learn what voters wanted to hear and then communicated back to them.³⁷ SPS in the December 1999 parliamentary election launched an ambitious plan to establish seven points of contact with 30 million voters—including door-to-door campaigns, direct mail, and phone banks—that ulti-

36. Author interviews with KPRF Duma Deputy Peshkov, December 1997. On Niccolo M, author interview with political consultant Ekatarina Egorova, Washington, D.C., February 1997. See also Sergei Grigoriev and Matthew Lantz, "Lessons of the 1995 State Duma Elections," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 1996), pp. 159–172.

37. Author interviews with KPRF Duma Deputy Peshkov and KPRF Duma staffer Akimov, December 1999.

Table 2. Results of Parliamentary Elections, 1995 and 1999 (number of deputies elected from party list and from single-mandate races).

Political Party/Bloc	Party List Vote	Single Mandate	Total for 1995	Party List Vote	Single Mandate	Total for 1999*
Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF)	99	58	157	67	47	114
Russia's Choice/ Union of Right Forces (SPS)	0	9	9	24	5	29
Yabloko	31	14	45	16	4	20
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)	50	1	51	17	0	17
Unity	N/A	N/A	N/A	64	9	73
Fatherland–All Russia (OVR)	N/A	N/A	N/A	37	30	67
Our Home Is Russia	45	10	55	0	7	7
Agrarian	0	20	20	N/A	N/A	N/A
Independent	N/A	103	103	N/A	114	114
Registered voters			107,496,558			108,073,956

SOURCES: Michael McFaul, "Russia's Parliamentary Elections: Party Consolidation and Fragmentation," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2000), p. 9; and Sarah Oates, "The 1999 Russian Duma Election," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (May/June 2000), p. 7.

*Nine seats are empty: Elections were declared invalid in nine districts, including Chechnya, because of low turnout or because the number of votes "against all" was larger than the number of votes for the leading candidate. Oates, "The 1999 Russian Duma Election," p. 7.

mately proved successful.³⁸ Yabloko, however, performed miserably in the election, according to party officials. Party discipline was weak, and Yavlinsky made decisions based on what was best for him rather than for the party. His parliamentary campaign director, Vyecheslav Igrunov, claimed in December

38. NDI/Moscow, "Russian Party Work Assessment," Moscow, April 2000, p. 3. There is some disagreement within SPS on the effectiveness of the door-to-door campaign. Author interview with Russia's Choice activist Boxer, Boston, Massachusetts, February 2000. Party leader Yegor Gaidar and Boxer also emphasized that their party had benefited from the nightly debates held on NTV because the format had favored their candidates over Yavlinsky, who came off as arrogant, unfriendly, and unfocused in his message to the voters. Author interviews with Gaidar and Boxer, Boston, February 2000; and author election observation, December 1999.

1999 that if Yabloko received less than 8 percent of the vote, Yavlinsky would not run for the presidency in 2000. Yabloko pulled in slightly more than 6 percent, but Yavlinsky insisted on running anyway.³⁹

The impact of Western NGO assistance on the functioning of Russia's political parties continued to be mixed. An April 2000 review of NDI's work acknowledges, "The state of democratic political parties in Russia is uncertain," and notes their heavy reliance on decisions by their leaders.⁴⁰ In addition, as a result of the growth of the Russian political consultant industry, which NDI, IRI, and the British Conservatives helped to develop, Russians could increasingly rely on their own experts; thus the type of training that the Westerners could offer was no longer rare or needed.

ELECTION MONITORING

Although most aspects of democracy assistance have little direct impact on the leadership of a country, one stands out as having the potential for enormous influence: domestic election monitoring. NDI and IRI have been key players in helping to train domestic election observers and set up parallel vote counts around the world. These counts take much organization, but the principle is straightforward: Nonpartisan observers are deployed at a randomly selected yet statistically meaningful (usually between 2 and 5 percent) set of polling stations and follow the voting results from the local to the federal electoral authorities. These efforts have been instrumental in changing governments. In Chile under Augusto Pinochet, the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos, and most recently Serbia under Milošević, the power of parallel vote tabulations (PVTs) has proven ultimately stronger than the whim of autocrats to ignore unfavorable election results.⁴¹ In the case of Serbia, "without a massive monitoring operation, and an equally massive parallel vote count . . . [the fall 2000]

39. Vyacheslav Igrunov meeting with NDI observation mission, Moscow, December 1999.

40. NDI/Moscow, "Russian Party Work Assessment," pp. 3–4. A draft law on political parties submitted by the Kremlin to the Duma and under consideration in 2001 could make the fate of these parties even more uncertain; "it could be used selectively to winnow the political field by administrative means, rather than letting the voters decide which parties have a future." Laura Belin, "Draft Law on Parties Contains Many Pitfalls," *RFE/RL Russian Political Weekly*, January 26, 2001, <http://www.rferl.org>.

41. See Larry Garber and Glenn Cowen, "The Virtues of Parallel Vote Tabulations," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 1994), pp. 95–107. For an overview, see Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, pp. 126–128. For the Serbian experience, see Cohen, "Who Really Brought Down Milosevic?"; and Dobbs, "U.S. Advice Guided Milosevic Opposition." See also National Democratic Institute, *How Domestic Organizations Monitor Elections: An A to Z Guide* (Washington, D.C.: NDI, 1995).

effort to unseat Milosevic would almost certainly have failed.”⁴² In other words, the parallel vote count may have been far more effective than NATO’s air campaign in toppling the Serbian strongman. To date, domestic election monitoring efforts in Russia, as part of a larger effort to increase transparency in elections, have been poorly organized, undersubsidized, and marginally effective.⁴³

By 1995 Russian parties of all stripes were particularly concerned about the multiple ways in which electoral fraud could occur. At the local level, electoral commissions sometimes fielded candidates as well as ran the elections. The main fears of Russian parties, however, concerned the activities of the Yeltsin administration. Exactly a year before the 1995 parliamentary election, Russia’s Choice and Yabloko broke with the administration over the war in Chechnya. This principled position had material costs for Russia’s Choice; it lost the backing of its main financier, Oleg Boyko, when the Yeltsin administration made him choose between continued lucrative government contracts and his support of Russia’s Choice.⁴⁴ Yabloko always distrusted the Yeltsin administration. In response to feared electoral fraud, liberals formed the Russian Observers’ Association.⁴⁵

Among Western NGOs, NDI took the lead in organizing discussions about possible election monitoring options in Russia. The only nationally based organizations that had the capacity and legal standing, according to the election law in 1995, to carry out electoral monitoring efforts were political parties, although foreign groups could observe elections. To have legitimacy, domestic monitoring had to be multiparty, so NDI explored the possibilities of pursuing this approach in the Russian context. Meanwhile, IRI was testing how the vote-count system worked in providing transparency. IRI organized party activists and international observers to follow the tally of votes (“protocols”) from a sample of precincts up through the electoral administrative chain, which in Russia goes from the polling station to the “territorial level,” to the “district (*oblast*)” level,” and then to the Central Election Commission (CEC) in Moscow.

42. Dobbs, “U.S. Advice Guided Milosevic Opposition.”

43. Another aspect of electoral transparency was IFES’s work with the Russian Central Election Commission. See IFES report for details on its findings.

44. Author attendance at Russia’s Choice executive committee meeting, Golitsino, Russia, February 1995.

45. This group included organizations such as Memorial, the Academy of Sciences, and the Strategy Center in St. Petersburg, as well as party officials and the highly respected human rights activists Sergei Kovalev and Anatoly Shabad. Kovalev argued that the “danger of fraud is so enormous that something *must* be done.” Author meeting with NDI, Moscow Carnegie Center, May 18, 1995.

They then made recommendations to the parties and to the CEC (many of which were followed) based on their observation missions in 1993, 1995, and 1996.

Monitoring efforts among Russian liberals between 1995 and 2000 were plagued by organizational problems. Instead of pursuing a random statistical sample, Russian activists wanted to cover all 93,000 polling stations in Russia. At the same time, almost in the same breath, liberal leaders—who were also human rights activists—dismissed the possibility of staging a multiparty effort “for historical reasons”; they simply could not cooperate with the Communists given their legacy of repression, which some—including Sergei Kovalev—experienced firsthand as political prisoners during the Soviet period. NDI’s response in 1995 was to provide information on monitoring: It decided to invite one of the creators of the PVT, Glenn Cowan, to Russia to meet with Russian activists from all parties, and it translated and disseminated his co-authored article on the impact of PVTs worldwide.⁴⁶

Before NDI could even issue an invitation to Cowan, however, USAID/Russia and another U.S.-based NGO—the International Foundation for Election Systems—objected. IFES, which was also funded in Russia by a cooperative agreement with USAID, worked mainly as an adviser to the CEC. Following the lead of the Yeltsin administration, the CEC strongly objected to Russian nongovernmental election monitoring efforts and put pressure on IFES’s Moscow director to stifle NDI’s discussions with party activists. Additionally, the U.S. embassy warned the USAID staff in Moscow to keep their distance from monitoring efforts. Unofficially, they were told of worries that fraud benefiting Yeltsin might be uncovered.

But NDI had enough autonomy from USAID/Russia to pursue the all-party meeting with Cowan. Six months before the 1995 parliamentary election, the meeting convened.⁴⁷ The consensus among the parties was to focus on detecting fraud—that is, to monitor the counting of ballots. In 1995 the parties wanted to create a separate protocol to pressure the electoral commission to count honestly. Not much came of these efforts, however. Despite the fears of fraud, the liberals never agreed to cooperate with the Communists in 1995 or

46. NDI translated Garber and Cowen, “The Virtues of Parallel Vote Tabulations.”

47. Author attendance at meeting, June 20, 1995. IFES’s director refused to set up a meeting for Cowan with the CEC to explain the purpose of the monitoring, which in principle the CEC had no reason to fear unless systematic fraud was planned. Unrelated to this incident, the IFES director was fired in December 1995 and went to work as a public relations consultant for the head of the CEC.

1996 and were themselves internally divided.⁴⁸ The response by NDI was to work with party activists in the regions on election monitoring. NDI helped to put on a local monitoring effort in a few cities for the December 1995 election. By June 1996, it had developed a handbook on monitoring and distributed 21,000 copies throughout the country.

In contrast with the pro-Western parties, the KPRF did not oppose a multi-party monitoring effort. Its members claimed that they would organize with anyone as long as it was done on a national basis, but they also made clear that they could mount an effort of their own. In 1995 and 1996, the KPRF claimed to have placed monitors in most of Russia's 93,000 polling stations to deter fraud at the precinct (PEC) level. It did this using the language and logic of the PVT. These efforts, however, were also plagued by organizational problems: More than half of the observers had no training or access to computers. Nevertheless, Communist Party activists claimed that they had mounted a poll-watching exercise in nearly every Russian precinct. As long as the KPRF did this alone, however, the findings were seen as partisan.⁴⁹

With KPRF support in the Duma, the election laws had been amended by the spring of 1999 to include monitoring not just by political parties but also by NGOs. By the summer of 1999, the same laws required NDI and IRI to stop all work with parties on campaigns.⁵⁰ NDI and IRI worked instead with parties and NGOs on monitoring. They trained party activists from Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces on observing the voting process, while NDI and other activists wrote and distributed a manual on domestic observation for SPS. NDI trained 650 activists on poll watching in 1999.

NDI's longer-term effort centered on helping to organize the GOLOS (Voice) coalition that included active Russian NGOs such as the Moscow Helsinki

48. By the fall of 1995, the Russian Association of Election Observers sent an \$8 million proposal to USAID/Moscow. The amount nearly exceeded the entire budget of NDI and IRI in Russia for 1992–95. USAID/Moscow turned this one down, as well as a separate request from Arkady Murashev and Alexander Sobyenin to fund a ballot security project for between \$2 and \$3 million. Whatever the political reasoning, USAID could then reasonably turn down these requests based on organizational criteria alone.

49. On the KPRF monitoring efforts in 1995 and 1996, author interviews with KPRF Duma Deputy Peshkov and KPRF Duma staffer Akimov, December 1997; see also Catherine Barnes, "Federal Elections in Russia: The Necessity of Systemic Reforms," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 1996), p. 402. According to Barnes, "The Communist Party has been the only partisan structure capable of consistently mobilizing observers." She argues that at that time pro-democracy groups did not have sufficient manpower.

50. Article 31–33 of the Basic Guarantees Law; Article 77–81 of the Duma Election Law; and Article 17–22 of the Presidential Elections Law, as cited in IFES report, p. 32.

Group/Human Rights Network, the Women's Forum, the Socioecological Union, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, and the human rights group Memorial. Human rights activists in December 1999 argued that they were interested in "really serious monitoring for the 2000 election," using the regional network of human rights groups for this purpose.⁵¹ This network, like the one in 1995–96, was not well organized in 1999, and was further handicapped when the 2000 election date was moved from June to March.⁵²

A striking but underreported event during the 1999 parliamentary election was the deployment of a huge number of domestic monitors from several political parties to polling stations around Russia. OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) reported that observers found monitors at 98 percent of the 2,300 polling stations they visited.⁵³ Reporting from Nizhni Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Astrakhan, Chelyabinsk, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, and the roughly 180 polling stations its monitors visited, the NDI-sponsored observer group found that in the vast majority of these polling stations, domestic monitors from the various parties were already on the scene. In the majority of polling stations with SPS delegates, they carried copies of a booklet prepared by SPS and NDI on how to observe elections. These findings, although hardly a large sample, contrast starkly with the elections in 1995 and 1996, when the only party to deploy large numbers of domestic observers was the KPRF.⁵⁴

If the good news is that domestic observers were present at the opening and closing of the 1999 parliamentary election, as well as throughout the day, the bad news is that it is unclear how much observing they really did. IFES has questioned the degree to which these domestic observers at the PEC level were

51. Human rights activist Lydmilla Alexseeva, comments to NDI briefing, Moscow, December 1999.

52. In addition to organizational problems, certain prominent activists, in the words of some, attempted to "hijack" the coalition. The activists later turned out to have close ties to Gleb Pavlovsky, the public relations expert behind Unity and Putin's campaign. Others involved in the monitoring included the Russian think tank INDEM, which used funding from the Open Society Institute and the Eurasia Foundation to post findings on elections on the internet.

53. ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Russian Federation, "Guide Book for Short-Term Observers," prepared for presidential elections of the Russian Federation, March 26, 2000, p. 3. The KPRF had observers at 79.22 percent of stations observed, and SPS had observers at 56.54 percent, according to OSCE/ODIHR, *Russian Federation Elections to the State Duma, 19 December 1999, Final Report*, Warsaw, February 13, 2000, pp. 21–22, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elecprep-rus.html>.

54. On December 19, 1999, in all eighteen polling stations that I visited in Nizhni Novgorod, in the small town of Gorodets up the Volga from Nizhni, as well as in small village polling stations, several representatives from the political parties were observing elections. Only one polling station had just three observers, while most had six to eight. The observers were present at the poll's opening and closing.

actually monitoring the voting: “Observers appear passive, reading a book, napping, taking a cigarette break, and sitting without being alert. When asked why they were not more alert, they explained that they thought the elections were being conducted properly. . . . Their ability to detect voter fraud is questionable.”⁵⁵ Moreover, although many observers were present at the PEC level, the OSCE claimed that higher up the chain, there were “virtually no domestic observers.”⁵⁶ Additionally, hundreds of polling stations were off-limits to international and domestic observers. IFES drew attention to the prohibition of international monitors on military installations, where soldiers were particularly vulnerable to pressures from commanding officers. In the 1999 parliamentary race, there were many accounts of soldiers being urged or told to vote for Unity.⁵⁷ In the 2000 presidential race, where Putin won in the first round by 2.2 million votes, the military vote of significantly more than 1 million may have been an important factor in his victory.

The Larger Forces Limiting the Impact of Democracy Assistance

In the preceding section, I described some evidence suggesting the mixed impact of democracy assistance on parties and elections. In this section I detail the much larger inherent limitations to democracy assistance. Most serious: Beyond a few rare examples of election monitoring leading to a change in government, this assistance usually has little to no effect on the senior political leadership of a country. That Yeltsin, Putin, and others within the Kremlin have been outside the scope of this enterprise is no small detail.⁵⁸ They are the ones who play or have played an enormous role in determining how new political and social institutions actually function (or not) in Russia. These are the men who have presided over an increasingly dangerous political environment for democratic activists.

Since the late 1990s, the harassment of political and social activists has expanded in Russia, threatening its fragile democratic institutions. Russian federal authorities have increasingly pushed back advances in civil liberties and

55. IFES report, p. 35.

56. OSCE/ODIHR, *Russian Federation Elections to the State Duma*, p. 24 See also IFES report, p. 109, which notes the “entry of data done in rooms where observers were prohibited” and, in some cases, data from the PECs were “merely stored, and not processed.”

57. IFES report, p. 34.

58. As the political environment has grown more hostile for Russian activists, those engaged in democracy assistance are paying increased attention to this problem. USAID/Russia draft program description lays out a proposed strategy for working with Russian parties and NGOs for 2001–04 given the difficult climate.

human rights. The state has targeted independent media outlets in particular, but there have been numerous cases of environmentalists, human rights activists, and even students and academics—Russians but also Americans and Europeans—being intimidated, interrogated, trailed, jailed, robbed, accused of treason, beaten, and run out of the country, all by the federal authorities.⁵⁹ The bloodiest part of the regression is the grisly way that the Russian federal forces have prosecuted the second war in Chechnya; much evidence points to troops repeatedly violating both the Geneva Convention and the International Declaration of Human Rights.⁶⁰

To the extent that forces outside Russia influence the highest levels of government inside Russia, it has been through meetings with foreign heads of state, with “friend Bill,” as Boris Yeltsin used to call former President Bill Clinton, or with British Prime Minister Tony Blair. It comes from the stamp of approval that IOs regularly issue Russia through invitations to join, or engage in relations with, Western “clubs” (such as the Group of Seven, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) or through pronouncements concerning free and fair elections, sometimes even before they have taken place.⁶¹ In fact, declarations by the OSCE and by U.S. officials

59. See “On the Violations Committed in the Course of Registration and Re-Registration of Public Associations in the Russian Federation in 1999,” report prepared by the Information Center of the Human Rights Movement and the Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Moscow, February 15, 2000; Boris Pustintsev, Citizens’ Watch, St. Petersburg, “Russian Authorities Declared War on Human Rights NGOs”; author’s e-mail correspondence with Alyson Ewald of the Sacred Earth Network, May 2000; author interviews with Yuri Dzhibladze, president, Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Moscow, March 24, 2000; and Masha Lipman, deputy chief editor, *Itogi*, telephone interview, May 18, 2000. For examples of non-Russians being harassed, see Joshua Handler, “Under Suspicion,” *IEEE Spectrum*, March 2000, where he recounts his October 1999 experience with the Federal Security Service (the former KGB, the FSB according to the Russian acronym) when his research materials were confiscated, and he was driven out of Russia. Handler had been an environmental activist with Greenpeace before enrolling in a doctoral program at Princeton University. Other examples include a rise in the number of foreign missionaries expelled from Russia and a program officer from NDI fleeing the country in 1999 after repeated harassment and threats from the FSB. The British organization Halo Trust, which seeks to remove land mines, has been accused of treason for its work in Chechnya. Author’s telephone interview with Halo Trust program officer, May 31, 2000.

60. Many groups—including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, the Russian groups Memorial and Soldiers’ Mothers in St. Petersburg, the French groups Doctors of the World and the Nobel Peace Prize recipient Doctors without Borders—have gathered testimony on the abuses by federal forces. See, for example, Human Rights Watch, *Welcome to Hell: Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Extortion in Chechnya* (New York: Human Rights Watch, October 2000); Doctors without Borders, “MSF Denounces Politics of Terror on Civilian Populations of Chechnya,” press release, Brussels, November 22, 2000, <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/pr/pr107.htm>; and Physicians for Human Rights, *Endless Brutality: Ongoing Human Rights Violations in Chechnya*, January 22, 2001, full text available at <http://www.phrusa.org>.

61. Author observation of OSCE meeting, Moscow, December 15, 1999, where OSCE officials claimed that the election, still days away, would be free and fair.

sanctioning the process and outcome of elections in Russia were important bellwethers in assessing that state's political development in the 1990s.⁶² As in many elections worldwide, however, the label "free and fair" belied the reality that although not clearly fraudulent, Russian elections were far from fair.⁶³

Although the Russian leadership engaged in elections and even created political parties, norms related to retaining power—not furthering the cause of democracy—were most salient. Whatever positive impact democracy assistance had at the grassroots level, it was obscured, even threatened, by the actions of the leadership. The response by Western leaders and organizations was to minimize, forgive, or even overlook the Russian leadership's significant noncompliance with democratic norms.⁶⁴ The unintended negative consequence of this response, however, has been to weaken the very norms and ideas that Western states and organizations appear to be supporting through democracy assistance.

POWER IN THE KREMLIN

Far from the seminars where activists practiced their campaign skills, laboring under difficult party leaders and working haphazardly toward transparent elections, stood the intersection of powerful interests inside the Kremlin. The work at the activist level described above was not entirely divorced from the balance of power at the top, but it played no role in constraining these powerful players.⁶⁵ Money, control over the media, and the use of force were conveniently arranged under one roof and had a growing impact on elections from 1995 to 2000. This is not to say that everyone in the Kremlin was engaged in

62. Guillermo O'Donnell argues that "fair elections are the main, if not the only, characteristic that certifies countries as democratic before other governments and international opinion." O'Donnell, "Illusions about Consolidation," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (April 1996), pp. 34–51, at p. 45.

63. Jorgen Elklit and Palle Svensson, "What Makes Elections Free and Fair?" *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (July 1997), pp. 32–46.

64. This pattern is hardly unique to Russia. Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

65. There were exceptions: Aleksandr Lebed's 1996 presidential campaign was run by hired campaign operatives, borrowed from and paid for by the Yeltsin team, who had participated in NDI and IRI seminars. They crafted Lebed's "truth and order" message and vetted all of his television advertisements to focus groups before they were aired. Author interview, Yulia Russova, Lebed campaign director, Moscow, July 1996. In addition, the Yeltsin team's direct mail campaign was based mainly on materials that Mikhail Simonov, general director of the lucrative direct marketing agency "POSTERpublicity" had acquired from the British Conservatives in training sessions held in England, in addition to information supplied to him by NDI and IRI in April 1996. Simonov contracted with the Kremlin to carry out what he described as "the first national direct mail campaign in Russia." Author interview, Moscow, July 1, 1996.

corrupt practices or interested in undermining democracy. But a pattern of activity surrounding elections during this period betrays, at best, a less than whole-hearted embrace of democratic norms.

Although the Kremlin was not particularly active in the 1995 parliamentary election, Viktor Chernomyrdin, the prime minister and former head of Gazprom, did sponsor the formation of a political party, Our Home Is Russia (nicknamed Our Home, Gazprom). To some, this was a hopeful sign that the Kremlin, despite the first war in Chechnya, was going to use parties and elections—not force—to govern. The corporate-state interests, however, combined with little transparency meant that NDR (to use the acronym for Our Home Is Russia) looked hollow as a political party.

If the formation of NDR was mixed news for democratization in Russia, so was the 1996 presidential election. Thanks to the work of the “eemudzh makers” (Russian for image makers) in the Kremlin, Yeltsin fighting off the communist challenger, Zyuganov, made for powerful, at times even moving, political drama. Photographs of people’s suffering, of starvation, of prison camps, of families divided by political terror, all taken from the Soviet archives, were shown in campaign advertisements.⁶⁶ Who wanted Russia to turn back the clock? As Thomas Dine testified before the U.S. Congress days before the first round of elections, “Will Russia continue on the road to reform, or will it turn off and move back toward the path it had been on in its recent past?”⁶⁷ This was precisely the political message that the Kremlin had targeted at voters.

What some may have thought was the road to reform was, on closer inspection, circuitous and bumpy. Russian oligarchs, such as Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky, gathered in January 1996 in Switzerland at the World Economic Forum at Davos to construct their plan to keep Yeltsin in power. Yeltsin’s single-digit ratings less than six months before the election were, according to those running his campaign, an obstacle to be overcome, a problem to be fixed, and did not reflect the views of the people. The media, fearing the

66. On the power of the image, see McFaul, *Russia’s 1996 Presidential Election*; and Colton, *Transitional Citizens*.

67. Statement of Thomas Dine, assistant administrator for Europe and the Newly Independent States, USAID, hearing before the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, June 13, 1996, p. 8. In this testimony, Dine claimed that “Russia in the middle of its second set of free national elections” was a “democratic condition” that “U.S. technical assistance has played a significant role in creating.” See also Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, remarks to the U.S.-Russian Business Council, Washington, D.C., July 11, 1996, U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch*, July 15, 1996, on “whether to turn back the clock.”

return of the Communists, played a willing partner in altering public perceptions of Yeltsin.⁶⁸

All the while, Yeltsin's image as the fighter of communism obscured the truth that he was extremely ill, having suffered a heart attack that he kept hidden from voters between election rounds. The image also hid the fact that, by his own admission, he was ambivalent about democracy. In his memoirs, Yeltsin discusses his inclination to cancel the 1996 election for fear that he would lose. At the same time, Yeltsin's campaign strategists helped to sponsor the candidacy of Aleksandr Lebed in a deliberate effort to siphon off votes from possible opposition in the first round of the election. The plan, which worked, was that with Lebed's endorsement in the second round of elections, his voters would go to Yeltsin.⁶⁹ Additionally, "the decision of the Russian people to proceed with democratization," as U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher characterized the election in July 1996, may have gotten a boost from the military.⁷⁰ Evidence points to pressure from officers on conscripts to ensure a Yeltsin victory.⁷¹

While Western NGOs were working with local party activists on the use of television in campaigns, which mainly consisted of using handheld video cameras at training sessions in cheaply rented, run-down, Soviet-era spas, a multi-million-dollar media campaign was under way for Yeltsin, produced by the Russian advertising firm Video International. Campaign strategists in the Kremlin, including Yeltsin's daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko, expertly used Western campaign techniques to their advantage. A former IRI staffer lamented of the 1996 elections, "What worries me is that [the Kremlin] used a perverted form of campaign techniques. They monopolized the media. They used exclusive access and denied access to their opposition." There was the

68. David Remnick, "The War for the Kremlin," *New Yorker*, July 22, 1996, pp. 40–57; Chrystia Freeland, John Thornhill, and Andrew Gowers, "Moscow's Group of Seven," *Financial Times*, November 1, 1996, p. 15; and Chrystia Freeland, *Sale of the Century: Russia's Wild Ride from Communism to Capitalism* (New York: Crown Business, 2000). Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000).

69. Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*.

70. Statement of Secretary of State Warren Christopher, hearing before the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, July 31, 1996, p. 25.

71. Two weeks before the first round of presidential elections in June 1996, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev announced, "I was told today that the crews of our ships and submarines that are now sailing far from Russia had unanimously voted for Boris Yeltsin." See Jonas Bernstein, "Grachev's Boast: Sailors for Yeltsin," *Moscow Times*, June 5, 1996. For additional evidence, see Stephen Blank and Jacob Kipp, "Yeltsin's Newest Coup," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Fall 1996), p. 480.

“patina of a legitimate campaign,” but it was “perverted in a way to exclusively serve the interests of Yeltsin.”⁷² Specifically, after culling through U.S. presidential and congressional ads, as well as British, Australian, and French political ads, and drawing on their marketing experience learned at the American advertising firm Olgilvy and Mather’s offices in Moscow, the Video International executives produced forty-five ads aired on 99.9 percent of Russia’s television stations.⁷³

Many believe that the Kremlin strategists’ use of television and the media’s acquiescence played the central role in Yeltsin’s 1996 victory. (See Tables 3a and 3b for the 1996 presidential election results.) The European Institute for the Media (EIM) monitored the Kremlin’s use of television and found that from May 6 to July 3, 1996, Yeltsin got 53 percent of prime-time coverage on Russia’s major channels, ORT, RTR, and NTV, the overwhelming majority of which was positive. Zyuganov got 18 percent of mainly negative coverage, and all of the other candidates combined received 11 percent.⁷⁴ The primary ownership of ORT was the state, with 51 percent, with Berezovsky, the oligarch and Kremlin insider, controlling another 11 percent. RTR was 100 percent state owned, and the head of NTV, Igor Malashenko, was Yeltsin’s media adviser. In this election, more than 80 percent of Russians were exposed to the campaigns through these channels.⁷⁵ Against the Kremlin and Video International, it is hard to imagine even American elections gurus such as James Carville and Lee Atwater successfully competing without access to the media, let alone with the “1920s style campaign” that the KPRF ran.⁷⁶

72. Author interview with former IRI trainer Biegun.

73. In the first round of elections, the Yeltsin team ran fifteen- and sixty-second advertisements two to three times a night. The first round of ads was devoted to “universal” values of “faith, love, and hope”—the central theme of Yeltsin’s campaign. For the second round, Video International “went negative” on the communists, with fifteen new ads (fifteen- and thirty-second spots) using the Soviet archival material depicting the brutality of Josef Stalin’s Russia. Video International researched Yeltsin’s image problem and fashioned ads that cut right into the bifurcated politics: communists versus democrats, the past versus the future. Its goal was to help Yeltsin “take the great communist past” from the KPRF. Author interview, Video International executives, Moscow, July 1996. Four years later, Mikhail Lesin, a former Video International executive, is Russia’s press minister. For NGOs that follow freedom-of-press issues, Lesin’s presiding over the harassment of media outlets critical of the state has made him number one on the “enemies of the press list.” See Robert Coalson, “Media Watch: Lesin Is Press Enemy No. 1,” *Moscow Times*, July 7, 2000, as carried on Johnson’s Russia List.

74. European Institute for the Media, *Media and the Russian Presidential Elections: Preliminary Report* (Dusseldorf: European Institute for the Media, 1996), as cited in White, Rose, and McAllister, *How Russia Votes*, p. 251; and McFaul, *The 1996 Russian Presidential Election*, p. 34.

75. Colton, *Transitional Citizens*, pp. 58–61.

76. Author interview with Valery Khomiakov, a Yeltsin campaign activist, Moscow, July 1996. Producers from Video International rather self-servingly explained, “It became clear that Zyuganov

Table 3a. Russian Presidential Election, First Round, June 16, 1996 (no. of registered voters: 108,495,023).

Candidate	Percentage of Russian Voters	Number
Boris Yeltsin	35.3	26,665,495
Gennady Zyuganov	32.0	24,211,686
Alexander Lebed	14.5	10,974,736
Grigory Yavlinsky	7.3	5,550,752
Vladimir Zhironovsky	5.7	4,311,479
Total turnout	69.7	75,587,139

SOURCE: Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997), p. 260. This table shows candidates who received more than 5 percent of the vote.

Table 3b. Russian Presidential Election, Second Round, July 3, 1996 (no. of registered voters: 108,600,730).

Candidate	Percentage of Russian Voters	Number
Boris Yeltsin	53.8	40,208,384
Gennady Zyuganov	40.3	30,113,306
Total turnout	68.8	74,706,645

SOURCE: Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997), p. 267.

Three years, several presidential heart attacks, and one ruble devaluation later, those surrounding the increasingly feeble Boris Yeltsin, including his daughter and Berezovsky, continued the hands-on approach to elections they had displayed in 1996. Just thirteen weeks before the 1999 parliamentary election, the electoral bloc Unity was created. This bloc embodied more of the negative unintended consequences of Western campaign techniques. According to political analyst Igor Bunin, Kremlin advisers to Yeltsin put Unity together based on market research—polling data and focus groups—showing the Russian voters wanted a “strong leader.”⁷⁷ The faces associated with the new bloc

did not understand political marketing and that was their [the communists’] main problem.” Author interview with Video International executives.

77. Quoted in John Thornhill, “Russia: Hard-Pressed Family Finds a Way Out,” *Financial Times*, January 3, 2000, as carried on Johnson’s Russia List; more generally on the role of the Kremlin

included Vladimir Putin, the former KGB colonel waging, as prime minister, a ruthless war in Chechnya; Sergei Shoigu, the minister of “emergency situations”; Alexander Karelin, world champion of Greco-Roman wrestling; and “crime fighter” General-Major Alexander Gurov, former head of the organized crime department of the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs. Putin was sober and decisive, Shoigu was the savior, Karelin was strength, and Gurov was honesty.

At the very least, Unity was “an impressive piece of political marketing.”⁷⁸ This virtual bloc with plentiful resources used slick advertising plus favorable news coverage and mass support for Russia’s second war in Chechnya—ostensibly begun in response to fears created from apparently random terrorist bombings of apartments in Russia, in which more than 300 people were killed—to further its voter appeal.⁷⁹ Shoigu reassured a terrified Russian population that “all those guys who blew up residential buildings in Russian cities must be brought in a sack.”⁸⁰

The war in Chechnya was a central feature of the 1999 parliamentary campaign. Kremlin insiders understood the need to dominate the media, especially regarding Chechnya; graphic stories about hardship and abuses by and against the Russian forces had eroded popular support for the first war. The Kremlin was forced to seek a retreat from Chechnya in 1996 using Lebed as the broker.⁸¹ In the second war, however, Kremlin strategists got around the “problem” of critical media attention by creating the *Rosinformatsentr* (Russian information center) to spin the news, and by controlling access of Western and Russian journalists to the region.⁸² In the fall of 1999, a sanitized version of the events in Chechnya dominated the news every night on TV. Putin’s ratings soared from 4 percent in September to 21 percent in October, to 45 percent in November. The October increase reflected support for his decision to authorize the

in Unity’s formation, see Sarah Oates, “The 1999 Russian Duma Elections,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (May/June 2000), pp. 3–14.

78. Oates, “The 1999 Russian Duma Elections,” p. 6. Yulia Russova, who had run Lebed’s campaign and had been trained by NDI, was working for Putin, while her husband, Aleksei Golovkov, was working for Unity.

79. Author meeting with Sergei Popov, deputy head of the Unity campaign, December 16, 1999. Some speculate (because there is no proof) that the FSB (not Chechens) planted the bombs in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia in the fall of 1999.

80. Quoted in *Jamestown Foundation Monitor*, December 2, 1999, as carried on Johnson’s Russia List.

81. Gail W. Lapidus, “Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer 1998), pp. 5–49.

82. *Rosinformatsentr* was organized by former employees of Video International who had created the ads for Yeltsin’s 1996 campaign. Some journalists did manage to make it into the region. See Anne Nivat, *Chienne de Guerre: A Woman Reporter behind the Lines of the War in Chechnya* (New York: PublicAffairs, forthcoming).

bombing campaign against Chechnya. By the last week in November, according to one polling firm, the Public Opinion Fund, Unity had nearly doubled its electorate from 8 percent to 14 percent. ORT and Interfax explained the jump as a result of Putin's stated support for Unity the week before. By official accounts in the fall of 1999, support climbed as high as 23 percent.⁸³

The other central feature of the 1999 parliamentary election was the use of TV by Unity to smear candidates in another new coalition, Fatherland–All Russia (OVR). As Unity's numbers rose, OVR's numbers plummeted from a high of 28 percent in July to 13.3 percent in November.⁸⁴ One observer notes that "all it took (to deal with the Kremlin's opposition) was the steady drip, drip of hatred from state-owned media, and veiled threats of financial investigation." OVR party leaders, former Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, simply folded.⁸⁵ Activists from OVR complained loudly in the press about media manipulation and Unity's "dirty tricks." They and other sources pointed to evidence that the Kremlin also used the military to enhance votes for Unity. The European Union's Project for Capacity Development in Election Monitoring claims that only Unity was mentioned in handouts to military education institutions, which declared that the "Army Chief Deputy of the Main Administration of Educational Affairs publicly called upon subordinates to promote Unity among the ranks."⁸⁶

Unity's showing in the 1999 parliamentary election of 23 percent of the popular vote convinced Yeltsin that his candidate, Putin, associated with Unity, would win in the upcoming presidential race. Yeltsin resigned on December 31, 1999, thus forcing the early calling of the election for the end of March 2000. The only serious candidate to contest the election other than Putin was KPRF head Zyuganov. Most candidates and their parties were emotionally and financially depleted by the December parliamentary election. Even Zyuganov "visited only about a quarter of the regions during the campaign."⁸⁷

Putin's approach to the election was deceptive: He appeared not to run for election, all the while campaigning. At a March 14, 2000, press conference days

83. The Putin figures appear in *Russian Election Watch*, February 4, 2000, p. 1; the Unity percentages are from Interfax, December 1, 1999, as carried on Johnson's Russia List.

84. Michael McFaul, "Russia's 1999 Parliamentary Elections: Party Consolidation and Fragmentation," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2000), pp. 8–10.

85. Anne Applebaum, "Democracy in Russia? Don't Make Me Laugh," *Sunday Telegraph*, March 26, 2000, as carried on Johnson's Russia List.

86. OSCE/ODIHR, *Russian Federation Elections to the State Duma*, p. 13; and IFES report, p. 93. NDI observers in Yaroslavl reported hearing that military units there had been ordered to vote for Unity.

87. IFES report, p. 94.

before the election at the Moscow Carnegie Center, Dmitri Medvedev, head of the Putin electoral committee, claimed that "at this time, Mr. Putin does not feel it appropriate to present the components of his program."⁸⁸ Putin made clear his disdain for campaigning with the statement: "These videos, their advertising. I will not be trying to find out in the course of my election campaign which is more important, Tampax or Snickers," a clear allusion to campaigning as a Western marketing technique.⁸⁹ Instead, on the Monday before the election (March 20), the news on all the major channels led with dramatic shots of Putin flying in an Su-27 fighter jet to Chechnya. Back in Moscow at press conferences asking for people's votes and discussing their platforms, the other candidates could not help but look less presidential.⁹⁰ In reality, members of Putin's "virtual campaign" were out polling and conducting focus groups. Meanwhile Putin's moves were well choreographed for the cameras.⁹¹ When needed, the campaign "went negative." ORT targeted Yavlinsky on the Wednesday and Thursday before the election, arguing that only homosexuals, Jews, and foreigners supported him, which in the Russian context was extremely negative.⁹² (See Table 4 for the 2000 presidential election results.)

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES TO ELECTIONS

Throughout the 1990s, the U.S. government referred to Russian elections as "free and fair" milestones in Russia's transition to democracy.⁹³ The general response from the international community to the 1996 election had been a collective sigh of relief that Zyuganov had not been elected. The OSCE

88. Carnegie Moscow Center, press release, available at <http://www.carnegie.ru/english/Pr/2000/pr00-1503.htm>. For a discussion, see Laura Belin, "Campaign Manager Explains Putin's Refusal to Publish Program," *RFE/RL Russian Election Report*, March 17, 2000. See also Vladimir Boxer and Henry Hale, "Putin's Anti-Campaign Campaign: Presidential Election Tactics in Today's Russia," *AAASS NewsNet*, newsletter of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Vol. 4, No. 3 (May 2000).

89. *New York Times*, March 8, 2000, as cited in *Russian Election Watch*, March 15, 2000.

90. Author observation of ORT; and author interview with Ekatarina Egorova, Moscow, March 23, 2000. Egorova, a political consultant with the Putin campaign, claimed that the flight was the idea of Putin campaign strategist Gleb Pavlovsky.

91. Author interview with Egorova. Niccolo M, for example, was working in five regions for Putin. Like all candidates, Putin had a web site: <http://www.putin2000.ru>.

92. IFES report, p. 51; Laura Belin, "ORT Launches Wide-Ranging Assault on Yavlinsky," *RFE/RL Election Report*, March 24, 2000. The Kremlin accused Yavlinsky of exceeding legal limits of campaign spending, receiving money from abroad, and campaigning at military units.

93. For examples, see Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, testimony to U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, September 23, 1999, as carried on Johnson's Russia List; Secretary of State Warren Christopher, remarks to press briefing at G-7 summit, Lyon, France, June 28, 1996; and statement by President Bill Clinton, U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch*, June 24, 1996, both available at <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/dispatch/1996.html>.

Table 4. Russian Presidential Election, First and Only Round, March 26, 2000 (no. of registered voters: 109,372,046).

Candidate	Percentage of Russian Voters	Number
Vladimir Putin	52.9	39,740,434
Gennady Zyuganov	29.2	21,928,471
Grigory Yavlinsky	5.8	4,351,452
Total turnout	68.74	75,181,073

SOURCE: *Russian Election Watch*, No. 9 (April 2000), p. 1; and *Radio Free Europe Election Report*, <http://www.rferl.org/elections/russia00report/archives.html>.

“congratulate[d] the voters of the Russian Federation for participating in a further consolidation of the democratic process in the Russian Federation.”⁹⁴

Despite indications that the blueprints for democracy, which included support for parties and elections, had not led to the desired results, official pronouncements rarely mentioned problems.⁹⁵ A White House memo designed to counter criticism that the Clinton administration had been overly tolerant of corruption in Russia had as one of its talking points: “Russia is now an electoral democracy—politicians vie for power by appealing to the electorate. All relevant political groups understand and accept the democratic ‘rules of the game.’ The 1995 parliamentary election and 1996 presidential election demonstrated Russia’s new democratic system at work. The outcome of these elections was determined at the ballot box; the losers accepted defeat and went to work preparing for the next electoral contest.”⁹⁶ Official statements on the elections did not mention or downplayed the role of the war in Chechnya in the

94. For the complete text, see <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elecprep-rus.html>.

95. On the problems with the 1996 elections cited above, as well as on the 1999 and 2000 elections, see European Institute for the Media, “Monitoring of Media Coverage during the Parliamentary Elections in Russia in December 1999,” press release, December 20, 1999. EIM claimed that “in many ways the character of this election campaign in the media was considerably worse than the previous parliamentary elections in 1995.” EIM found that in the 2000 campaign Putin got 48 percent of all TV news coverage, and the other candidates received 10 percent each. These numbers do not include coverage of Chechnya, the “silent” campaign message. Gillian McCormack, EIM project director, at OSCE briefing attended by the author, Moscow, March 22, 2000. The IFES report, p. 36, claims that the KPRF “accumulated extensive information and documentation [of fraud] from their observers who were active in all parts of the country.” See also articles in *Moscow Times*, September 9, September 29, and October 29, 2000, http://www.TheMoscowTimes.com/election_fraud.html, which cite evidence of ballot-box stuffing, ballot burning, inflated numbers of voters in the 2000 election, and many cases of systemic fraud in several regions (including Bashkortastan, Dagestan, Saratov, and Tatarstan).

96. Unclassified fax from Carlos Pascual, senior director for Russian, Ukrainian, and Eurasian affairs, National Security Council, “U.S. Policy toward Russia: Foundations, Achievements, and the

1999 and 2000 campaigns.⁹⁷ Speaking two months before the 1999 election, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott claimed that “there now seems to be a fundamental commitment of major politicians—you could even call it a social contract—to sorting out their differences through electoral democracy.” Talbott’s remarks, however, left no room for the violence that was fast engulfing Russian electoral politics. Talbott was correct when he observed that “Russian citizens are now voters; they can register their grievances and express their desires through the ballot box.”⁹⁸ This is graphically demonstrated by the millions of Russian who turned out to vote. What Talbott’s statement and the numbers do not show, but which is equally important in any discussion of Russian politics, is how little the Kremlin responded to voters’ grievances and how much it was able to manipulate their desires.

The OSCE, the organization explicitly designed to oversee democracy and human rights in Europe, also engaged in questionable rhetoric about institutional development in Russia. At press conferences, OSCE officials consistently declared Russian elections free and fair either before they took place, as delegation heads did in December 1999, or immediately after, as they did in March 2000.⁹⁹ These pronouncements regularly violated the OSCE/ODIHR Observer Code of Conduct, which explicitly prohibits such behavior.¹⁰⁰

In March 2000, the OSCE offered symbolic endorsement to Putin, again in violation of its organizational rules. After an election campaign that drew almost exclusively on Putin’s handling of the war in Chechnya, which included

Continuing Agenda,” September 20, 1999, p. 9, listed under “Achievements of U.S. Policy toward Russia.”

97. Clinton, “Remembering Yeltsin,” writes instead of Russian forces liberating Grozny. For a defense of the Clinton administration’s response to the war in Chechnya, see Sestanovich, “Where Does Russia Belong?” pp. 14–15. For examples of the serious and systematic crimes not mentioned in the official statements, see “Civilian Killings in Staropromyslovski District of Grozny,” *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (February 2000); “No Happiness Remains: Civilian Killings, Pillage, and Rape in Alkhan-Yurt, Chechnya,” *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (April 2000); and “February 5: A Day of Slaughter in Novye Aldi,” *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 12, No. 9 (June 2000).

98. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, address on Russia at Harvard University, October 1, 1999, as carried on Johnson’s Russia List.

99. In addition to author observation, see Robert Coalson, “OSCE Verdict on Elections Outstrips State Propaganda,” *Moscow Times*, March 31, 2000, as carried on Johnson’s Russia List. Writing about earlier elections, White, Rose, and McAllister, *How Russia Votes*, p. 223, also observed that the OSCE and the European Parliament call elections free and fair “the morning after the election.”

100. This observer code states that the OSCE “will maintain strict impartiality . . . and shall at no time express any bias or preference in relation to national authorities, parties, candidates. . . . Observers will refrain from making any personal or premature comments about their observations to the media.” OSCE/ODIHR, *The ODIHR Election Observation Handbook*, 4th ed. (Warsaw: OSCE, April 1999), p. 6. On pronouncements, ODIHR/OSCE briefings attended by author in Moscow, December 1999 and March 2000.

heavily documented instances of war crimes, the leader of the OSCE Election Observation Mission, Helle Degn, accompanied Putin to the polling station in a show of solidarity, smiling behind him within camera range as he voted.¹⁰¹

Sunny day-after-election reports contrast with detailed reports issued months later that reveal many glaring inconsistencies in the voting process. The OSCE, for example, has gathered significant amounts of information on electoral irregularities—information absent from the much-cited day-after reports. In a March 27 OSCE statement, optimism is clearly evident: “The 2000 presidential election in the Russian Federation took place under a constitutional and legislative framework that is consistent with internationally recognized democratic principles. As during the 1999 State Duma election, the framework provides a sound basis for the conduct of orderly, free, fair, transparent, pluralist, and accountable elections.” These elections, it claimed, represented a “benchmark” of democratic consolidation.¹⁰² The OSCE final report on the December 1999 election, however, offers a much less glowing and more nuanced depiction of events: “The most powerful players remain those that come together, not as real political parties founded on common ideologies but as strategic alliances often looking no farther ahead than the specific election in which they want to compete . . . the conflict in Chechnya as the ‘silent’ campaign message . . . the apparent support from administrative structures in the strategic campaign of the pro-Kremlin Unity Movement. . . . Any direct criticism of the government . . . became taboo. . . . The administration may have overstepped its boundaries.”¹⁰³

How significant have electoral irregularities been in post-Soviet Russia? They vary depending on the region and the election. The abuse of the media in 1996 was instrumental to Yeltsin’s victory. As for the 2000 elections, there is no question that Putin was popular. But again, a variety of sources raise concerns about the nature of the elections themselves. Freedom House, an American-based NGO that monitors and rates democratic and human rights compliance worldwide, cited “voting irregularities and unequal access to media” in the presidential election as one of the reasons for assigning lower ratings to Russia in its annual report for 2000.¹⁰⁴ In September 2000, after months of investiga-

101. On Degn, author observation of ORT.

102. The complete statements are available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elecprep-rus.html>.

103. OSCE/ODIHR, *Russian Federation Elections to the State Duma*, pp. 11–13.

104. The other reason cited is “the brutal ongoing war in Chechnya,” which as a territory is listed in the “worst of the worst” category along with Tibet and such states as Burma, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea. See *Nations in Transit, 1999–2000*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

tion, the *Moscow Times* reported (although it could not prove) that “fraud was pervasive and decisive, and the West’s response has been to pretend otherwise.” Among the most serious allegations of fraud was the claim that 1.3 million names were added to voter rolls between December 1999 and March 2000.¹⁰⁵ The complaints about the Western response were targeted specifically at the OSCE. An OSCE spokesman responded, in part accurately, that “the OSCE/ODIHR has never written off the more concrete and compelling violations uncovered by your report, some of which was cited in our final report. . . . The issue deserves a thorough investigation and a credible accounting.”¹⁰⁶ The OSCE response, however, never confronts the problem that Western governments and media do not read the reports issued months later, preferring instead to cite the day-after report as evidence that an election was free and fair.

Without a systematic parallel vote count, it is not possible to prove that Unity in 1999 got anything but 23 percent of the vote, or that Putin in 2000 was not the winner of the first round of the presidential election. Based on the OSCE’s own information and reports from IFES, EIM, and the *Moscow Times*, several Russian elections, at best, look less than free and fair.¹⁰⁷ This information from multiple international and Russian sources directly contradicts the upbeat, reassuring statements from Western leaders and organizations on the state of Russian democracy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence presented here suggests an altogether more complicated story of political transition in Russia than either the critics of or crusaders for democracy assistance have suggested. Democracy assistance can make a difference, however limited, within activist communities in a country. Many ideas and practices related to parties, elections, and other democratic institutions have

105. On the new voters, the *Moscow Times*, http://www.TheMoscowTimes.com/election_fraud.html, reports that the CEC explained the change in numbers as a result of “480,000 new Chechen voters” and “an assertion that 550,000 people turned 18 between December 1999 and March 2000.” Murray Feshbach, the most respected demographer of Russia in the United States, argues that the 1.3 million voter increase does not conform to either migration or birth patterns. Exchange with author, November 10, 2000.

106. Hrair Balian, head of the Election Section, OSCE/ODIHR letter to the editor, *Moscow Times*, October 28, 2000, http://www.TheMoscowTimes.com/election_fraud.html.

107. Even Aleksandr Veshnyakov, the CEC Chairman, admitted in December 1999, “I cannot claim that the electioneering, including media campaigning, was fair.” *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 20, 1999, as cited in *Russian Election Watch*, January 8, 2000, p. 6.

developed in Russia partly as a result of Western groups working with local activists.

The limits of assistance are increasingly clear, however. In the cases discussed here, campaign skills did not necessarily lead to robust parties. How surprising is this? The very campaign techniques that Western NGOs disseminated to Russian parties, such as polling and conducting focus groups, are often considered one of the factors undermining American democracy.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the degree to which political parties in powerful Western democracies appear unhealthy or unresponsive to their own constituents, greatly (and rightly) worries those who work on this type of democracy assistance.¹⁰⁹ Despite misgivings, NGOs such as NDI and IRI argue that campaign skills can make parties more responsive to a population through outreach, polling, and research. Their impact beyond elections has yet to be established, however. Instead evidence from Russia suggests that these skills make parties and decisionmakers alike responsive to perceived desires of constituents, but only during elections. Different approaches suggested below are needed to help parties, and ultimately the leadership, respond to the voters' will at other times.

Another more specific limitation in assistance to parties and elections in the 1990s were the rather half-hearted efforts at supporting parallel vote counts. While Russian activists had their own organizational problems, the Western efforts were inadequate and poorly timed (i.e., just months before elections). This strategy of support deserves money and attention. Examples of such vote counts (including in other postcommunist states), in which both NDI and IRI have been instrumental, have decisively contributed to citizens' voices being heard. The act of forming a national organization has benefits for the democratic process well beyond deterring or detecting electoral fraud.¹¹⁰

Although elections have emerged as an important international measurement for change, evidence increasingly suggests that, even in the United States as the 2000 presidential election showed, standards for transparency and counting ballots are often poorly established or enforced. Well-organized, com-

108. On this, see Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, p. 153.

109. This view was expressed by the directors of NDI and IRI at a meeting I attended that was held to review democracy assistance to Eastern Europe and Eurasia, at USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, Office of Democracy and Governance, Washington, D.C., July 19, 2000.

110. The USAID/Russia draft program description suggests that USAID recognizes the multiple benefits of counts. The National Endowment for Democracy plans also to pursue possible support of counts in other regions. Belarus is likely to be a target. Author telephone conversation with Program Officer McCarthy.

prehensive, nongovernmental parallel vote counts are a reliable way of establishing and enforcing transparency. Without parallel counts, the phrase “free and fair” means little.¹¹¹

Aside from the inherent limits of assistance, in this case, exacerbated by a Russian leadership ambivalent about democracy, the rhetoric of powerful Western states and IOs painting democratic institutions as caricatures does additional damage. When states or IOs look the other way on issues that directly impede development, such as evidence of possible electoral manipulation or voter fraud, they do unintended damage to the work that Western and Russian NGOs are attempting to carry out.¹¹² This leads me to make several recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

Despite past mistakes and the very real limits of democracy assistance, George W. Bush and his administration should stay engaged in Russia, applying lessons from the previous decade.¹¹³ Chief among these: The administration must have modest expectations for the impact of external support, but at the same time, be clear about how important this support is to local activist communities. The West must not abandon the thousands of activists living and working in an increasingly hostile political climate in Russia. If the climate worsens, these ties will become more important than ever for Russian activists. If the climate improves, then the ties may become more robust. In either case, the fate of Russia’s transition continues to be a U.S. national security interest. From a security perspective, continued engagement with those Russians who have worked for years to make their country compliant with democratic and human rights norms, and their democratic institutions function, is necessary.

A first step is to adequately fund work with Russian grassroots organizations. The Bush administration should work with Congress to reverse the trend

111. One senior NDI staffer argued that this term means little in, for example, Baltimore County, Maryland, or Cook County, Illinois. Many involved in democracy assistance shun this term. Author observation, NDI annual meeting, January 1995. See also, Merloe, “Lessons Learned.” One Russian polling firm, ROMIR, found that 52.4 percent of Russians do not think that elections in Russia are free and fair. Yelena Bashkistrova, “Russians Long for a Strong Hand,” *Vremya Novostei*, October 23, 2000, as carried on Johnson’s Russia List. ROMIR is the only Russian member of Gallup International.

112. Dysfunctional policies are not unusual in IOs. Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, “The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations,” *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Autumn 1999), pp. 699–732.

113. For a more general catalogue of lessons learned, see Michael McFaul and Sarah E. Mendelson, “Russian Democracy—A U.S. National Security Interest,” *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 2000), pp. 330–353, especially pp. 342–349.

of shrinking assistance budgets by doubling, if not tripling, the \$16 million earmarked for democracy initiatives in FY 2000. In FYs 1999 and 2000, the U.S. government spent more than \$40 million on democracy assistance programs in Serbia, which has a population of 10 million. In Russia, with a population of 146 million, additional money for democracy assistance should be used to help make Russian nongovernmental groups responsive to their constituents and more connected to the networks of like-minded Russians who want responsible government. If democracy assistance was a security strategy in Serbia, it is more so in Russia. It is in fact defense by other means. In the late 1990s, it became instead assistance on the cheap.

In addition to its financial role, the Bush administration has a rhetorical role to play. It should speak truthfully about the increasingly difficult conditions confronting activists in Russia. The administration must understand the costs of bracketing off issues such as the second war in Chechnya or explaining away human rights abuses; these actions undermine democracy assistance and undercut the work of the activists.¹¹⁴ Rather than constantly referring to the number of NGOs that exist in Russia as a sign of the health of its civil society, U.S. policymakers should talk about the harassment that human rights and environmental groups now encounter. Instead of declaring elections free and fair, decisionmakers should support the work of Russian activists to build a nationwide monitoring effort, so that a parallel vote count might be possible in the next round of federal elections scheduled for 2003 and 2004. This has the potential to increase transparency and strengthen institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS AND ACTIVISTS

Western NGOs should adjust their strategies and programs in several ways to the Russian reality. Russian activists need to play a greater role in designing strategies. Because ideas spread depending on how they interact with local organizational cultures, Western NGOs need to have staffs who are sensitive to these dynamics. The more decisionmaking authority that local experts have inside NGOs, the more likely they are to develop strategies responsive to their own organizational cultures.

114. For a more comprehensive list of policy recommendations regarding Chechnya, see Human Rights Watch, *Welcome to Hell*, pp. 89–97. For an alternative perspective, see *An Agenda for Renewal: U.S.-Russian Relations*, a report by the Russian and Eurasian Program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), p. 34, which argues: “Concerning U.S. protests over Russian human rights abuses, the new administration should essentially follow the existing course,” warning that “a distance should be kept from the more extreme criticisms of Russia in the Western media.”

Democracy assistance in this second decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union must be focused on helping to make Russian institutions function better. Specifically, assistance should increasingly focus on helping to build ties among societal groups. Parties need to connect with NGOs and unions. These linkages will ultimately help to make parties more responsive to constituents. The training programs described in this article did not do this and are no longer needed. Instead, as an exercise in building advocacy networks, Western groups should stay engaged in efforts that help to support cross-societal coalitions.¹¹⁵

Election monitoring offers promise. If by the 2003 parliamentary election and the 2004 presidential election, Russians have a national nongovernmental election monitoring movement, it could have a lasting impact on democracy in their country. In Serbia it seems to have been one of the keys to dislodging Milošević.¹¹⁶ With the assistance of Western NGOs, Russian activists can learn from the experience of their Serbian counterparts. But the time to do so is in 2001 and 2002. If NGOs (and their donors) wait until 2003, their efforts will yield few if any results.

115. The First All-Russian Emergency Congress in Defense of Human Rights, held in Moscow in January 2001, with more than 1,000 participants from across Russia, is an example of such a coalition. Discussion with Lev Ponomarev, human rights activist and one of the main organizers of the congress, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, January 31, 2001.

116. Cohen, "Who Really Brought Down Milosevic?"; and Dobbs, "U.S. Advice Guided Milosevic Opposition."