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RUSSIA

PRESIDENTIAL PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

For the second time in just over three months, the Russian electorate will go to the polls in a national election. On March 26, 2000, Russia will hold its third democratic election for president and complete an election cycle that began with the State Duma election of December 19, 1999. This election is being held earlier than was initially scheduled (June 2000) due to the surprise resignation of then-President Boris Yeltsin on December 31, 1999.

In preparation for the post-Yeltsin era, the Kremlin has undertaken a well-orchestrated campaign to ensure the transfer of power to its own hand-picked candidate. The State Duma election was used by the Kremlin as a means to remove all serious opponents for the presidential election. Prior to the start of the campaign for the State Duma in August 1999, presidential aspirants former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov were polling 22 percent and 9 percent respectively (polls by Public Opinion Foundation.) Considering both potential candidates were leaders of the broad-based Fatherland-All Russia alliance and had no intention of running against each other, either of their candidacies was considered extremely formidable. Now eight months later, neither Primakov nor Luzhkov is running and the Kremlin's candidate of choice – acting President Vladimir Putin – sits atop the polls with an approval rating around 59 percent (VCIOM -- All Russia Center for Public Opinion.) If nothing else has been proven in this campaign cycle, it is that the Kremlin is still the most formidable campaign organization in Russia.

In the run-up to this presidential election, the International Republican Institute (IRI) regularly has produced election updates on its website, www.iri.org. In an attempt to give more in-depth insight into the conduct of this election, IRI has produced this report to examine some of the key aspects of the campaign and to delve into the regions where the Institute works, providing a regional perspective of the election. The key components of this report are:

- A brief background on the candidates;
- A review of the role of the Central Election Commission;
- A discussion of voter apathy and the potential for a low turnout;
- A report on the main issues of the campaign; and
- Regional analyses of St. Petersburg, Murmansk, Perm, Novosibirsk, Kemerovo, Tomsk, Volgograd, Rostov, Voronezh and Volgograd.

The Candidates

Forty-one organizations, known in Russia as “initiative groups,” applied to the Central Election Commission (CEC) after the official beginning of the presidential election campaign on January 6 to be registered to gather signatures in support of a candidate. Of those 41 initiative groups, 8 were denied registration and 33 were registered and began gathering signatures on behalf of their candidate. Of those 33 initiative groups registered by the CEC, 15 presented their collected signatures on behalf of their candidate by the deadline of February 13. Of the 15 candidates’ signature petitions received by the CEC, 11 were accepted. Those 10 men and one woman will be placed on the ballot, in alphabetical order, for the March 26 election for President of the Russian Federation. Below are their names and a brief description of their current activities.

Govorukhin, Stanislav

Mr. Govorukhin is a famous Russian film director and is currently a State Duma deputy in the Fatherland faction.

Dzhabrayilov, Umar

Mr. Dzhabrayilov is currently a co-owner of the Radisson-Slavyanskaya Hotel, a prosperous Moscow hotel, shopping and business center.

Zhirinovskiy, Vladimir

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is the nationalist leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) who also ran for president in 1996 and won 5.8 percent of the vote. He has been at the heart of two CEC registration battles in the last year. First his LDPR was refused registration by the CEC for the State Duma election on the grounds of inaccurate financial disclosures by several of its candidates, a decision that was later overturned by the courts. Despite these obstacles, LDPR won seats in the Duma for the third time since 1993. Second, Zhirinovskiy himself was refused registration as a presidential candidate due to failure to declare an apartment owned by his son, only to be reinstated and allowed on the ballot by the Board of Appeals of the Russian Supreme Court.

Zyuganov, Gennady

Gennady Zyuganov is chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and, as a State Duma deputy, is leader of the CPRF faction in the State Duma. He ran for president in 1996, when he won enough votes in the first round to face Boris Yeltsin in the second round. Most Russian political watchers think he is the most likely candidate to face Putin in a second round of voting if Putin fails to receive 50 percent plus one to win outright.

Pamfilova, Ella

The only woman in the race, Ella Pamfilova is currently the leader of a civic organization called “For Civil Dignity.” Ms. Pamfilova has been active in democratic politics in Russia for many years and in the December 1999 State Duma election led “For Civil Dignity” in an unsuccessful quest for seats in the lower house of the Russian Parliament.

Podberyožkin, Aleksei

Leader of the civic and political movement, “Spiritual Heritage,” Mr. Podberyožkin led his organization to break its alliance with CPRF prior to the 1999 State Duma election. Spiritual Heritage participated on its own in that election but failed to reach the five percent vote threshold needed to gain seats in the Duma.

Putin, Vladimir

A former KGB agent and former head of the FSB – the KGB’s domestic successor – Vladimir Putin was named prime minister to replace Sergei Stepashin in the fall 1999. In a surprise New Year’s Eve announcement, former President Boris Yeltsin resigned, making Putin acting President, his current post. He is the overwhelming favorite in this election.

Savostyanov, Yevgeny

Mr. Savostyanov currently chairs the board of an organization called the Moscow Fund for Presidential Programs and is a former Yeltsin aide.

Skuratov, Yuri

Mr. Skuratov is the suspended Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation. Former President Boris Yeltsin suspended Skuratov and tried to fire him but was unable to get the votes necessary in the Federation Council, the Russian Parliament’s upper chamber. Mr. Skuratov made serious allegations of financial improprieties in the Yeltsin Administration, including the First Family.

Titov, Konstantin

The Samara region, of which Konstantin Titov is the governor, is one of the most prosperous regions in post-Communist Russia. Mr. Titov has been able to attract a large amount of foreign investment and as such, his region is one of the few which makes a net contribution to the budget of the Russian Federation. He is also chairman of the political council of the center-right party, Union of Right Forces, which cleared the five percent minimum vote threshold and, surprisingly, came in third in the 1999 State Duma elections.

Tuleev, Aman

The second governor in the presidential election is CPRF-affiliated Aman Tuleev of the Kemerovo region. Mr. Tuleev was elected governor of Kemerovo in 1997 with almost 95 percent of the vote. It is reported that he is actually supporting Putin for president but is running to undermine Gennady Zyuganov. Reasons for this range from wanting to challenge Zyuganov for the leadership of the CPRF to simply helping the Putin camp to split the communist vote among several candidates.

Yavlinsky, Grigory

The center-right Yabloko movement is headed by Mr. Yavlinsky, both nationally and in the State Duma where he is a deputy and faction leader. Yabloko, with Mr. Yavlinsky in the lead, won seats in the State Duma in 1993, 1995 and 1999. Mr. Yavlinsky also ran for president in 1996, receiving just over seven percent of the vote.

The role of the Central Election Commission

Unlike the role the Central Election Commission (CEC) played in the 1999 State Duma election, the CEC has taken a much lower profile in this presidential election, and has drawn far less criticism. Out of 33 people who announced their intention to run for president and had their support groups registered by the CEC, only 14 managed to collect the 500,000 required signatures. Those who failed to meet the CEC's requirements were mostly obscure personalities. The one exception was Alexander Barkashov, the Russian National Unity leader, who failed to open a special election account in Sberbank by the mandatory deadline of February 9. Another unlucky aspirant is the former flower tycoon turned movie producer, Ismail Suleyman-ogly Taghi-zade, who could only obtain 480,000 signatures, 20,000 short of the required number. Two other candidates, State Duma Assistant German Khrustalyov, and the chairman of the little known People's Party, Anzori Aksentyev-Kikazhvili, were turned down because a large portion of their signatures were invalidated. None of these candidates protested his removal from the race.

The most high-profile incident of the registration process concerned the ultra-nationalist leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. He was initially denied formal registration as a presidential candidate at the February 17 meeting of the Central Electoral Commission. The official reason for the denial was that Zhirinovskiy failed to declare in his income and property statement his son Igor's ownership of a tiny one-bedroom apartment in Moscow. As Zhirinovskiy explained, the apartment constitutes only one percent of the declared living space his family owns. Formally, the CEC is right -- it can justifiably deny registration if a candidate fails to declare "substantial property," such as an apartment or a house, in his or her ownership. But in this particular case the situation looks somewhat overstated. *Kommersant-Daily* noted that the CEC did not prevent Zhirinovskiy's son from being elected to the Duma last December even though he did not declare ownership of that apartment, as the law required. It seems the authorities chose to save that information for another day.

The controversy around Zhirinovskiy's registration is in acting President Vladimir Putin's interest, whatever the outcome, according to *Kommersant-Daily*. It has been widely reported that Putin's main danger at the upcoming election is poor voter attendance and the "protest vote," which is a vote against all the candidates. If there is less than a 50 percent turnout, the election will be declared invalid. A controversy such as Zhirinovskiy's is considered by some to be the best way to mobilize the electorate, as it could energize voters either on his behalf or in protest of the process. Zhirinovskiy appealed the CEC decision, but his appeal was first turned down by the Supreme Court on February 25. Then, on March 6, this decision was overturned by the Supreme Court's board of appeals. CEC Chairman Aleksandr Veshnyakov registered Zhirinovskiy, but said he would appeal that decision. Ballots will now have to be reprinted, which will cost the CEC 20 million rubles.

The Zhirinovskiy controversy represents only one instance in many surrounding candidates' compliance with the law. Tuleev, Zyuganov, Putin, Titov and Yavlinsky have all had run-ins with the CEC over various aspects of their campaign activities. However, the CEC has not always been consistent in its application of the law. If the CEC played a significant role in who ran for office and

who did not in the 1999 State Duma election, its role in the presidential race seems more constrained by the need to have a broad field of credible candidates. Additionally, as reported March 6 by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, candidates seem to be using such controversies as a means to obtain free media coverage and boost their popularity, appealing to Russia's traditional love for the persecuted.

Speaking at an Interfax press conference on February 28, CEC Chairman Veshnyakov stated that a few other candidates could be removed from the race due to a recent investigation into the activities of firms that "assisted in signature gathering." He also warned that the candidates need to abide by the letter of the law in their campaign activities. He added that violation of the election law during the actual campaign may lead to the CEC eliminating other candidates from the race.

Impact of Apathy and Protest Votes

With acting President Vladimir Putin enjoying a commanding position in most polls for the presidential election, voter turnout has become one of the biggest factors in the upcoming race. Russian voters have been subjected to almost six full months of campaigning – first for the Duma and now for president – and they are becoming slightly jaded with the process. Compounding the problem is the belief by most voters that since Putin does not have a serious rival, the election has already been decided: Vladimir Putin will win. Because of this sentiment, many political observers are concerned that vote turnout will be low.

According to Russian law, a presidential election is valid only if 50 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot. The Putin camp is concerned about the possibility of his voters staying home, assuming a win, and the Communist voters turning out, causing Putin not to win in the first round. As a result, there is a fear among political observers that the potential for fraud (such as ballot box stuffing to ensure a 50 percent turnout) in this election is quite high.

In early January, soon after the presidential election was called, the possibility of a run-off seemed unlikely. However, within two weeks the likelihood of a run-off was being widely discussed. Since then, the issue of voter turnout has come to dominate media discussions. As early as January 18, 2000, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* analyzed Putin's chances of winning and indicated that voter turnout may be his biggest problem in this election. As the campaign has progressed, the concern about voter turnout has become more vocal, with newspapers and news agencies warning about this threat to Putin's victory. The list of papers giving these warnings includes *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Segodnya*, Reuters, and numerous other sources speculating on various election scenarios.

Below is a table that reflects the dynamics of potential voter turnout. (Based on polling data from the All Russia Center for Public Opinion (VCIOM); 1,600 respondents, 33 regions of Russia, margin of error 3.3 percent.)

Voter Turnout Dynamics: If the election of the President of Russia took place next Sunday, which one of the following statements most closely reflects your intention to vote in this election?

	Dec31- Jan.4	6-10 Jan.	14-17 Jan.	21-24 Jan.	28-31 Jan.	4-7 Feb.	11-14 Feb.	18-20 Feb.
I am certain that I shall not vote	9	11	8	11	9	10	10	12
I doubt that I shall vote	8	8	6	7	9	8	7	7
I don't know whether I shall vote	14	12	18	17	18	15	17	14
More likely, I shall vote	19	20	20	20	22	18	12	12
I am certain that I shall vote	46	48	46	43	41	49	53	55
Can't answer	4	1	2	2	1	0	1	0

The numbers of those who were certain they will vote dropped to their lowest point at the end of January, then began to rise. One explanation for this shift was the media focus that alerted voters to the possibility of a low turnout invalidating the election. Another explanation for this change in attitude may be statements by Putin that election turnout will be satisfactory. Another reason could be the success of the war in Chechnya.

The results of this poll indicate, however, that it is not the predictability of Putin's victory at the election that may deter voters from showing up. More likely, voters will stay home due to disillusionment with the political scene in general. Below are the reasons people who participated in the above poll gave for why they definitely will not vote, why they doubt that they will vote, or why they don't know whether they will vote.

- ' Don't believe any of the current politicians, don't want to vote for any of them 12%
- ' Difficult to answer 9%
- ' Tired of politics, of fight at the top 6%
- ' Don't understand/not interested in politics 6%
- ' Putin will win anyway - why bother 5%
- ' One person's input doesn't matter 5%
- ' Haven't decided who to vote for 3%

' The election is non-democratic, no alternative candidate 2%

VCIOM's polling data is supported by polling information from the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM), another polling agency. Sixty-six percent of respondents to FOM's February 12-13, 2000 poll stated that they will definitely vote; about 19 percent said that they are likely to vote; 3 percent said that they are not likely to vote; 4 percent said that they will definitely not vote; and 8 percent could not answer the question.

While there is a possibility that voter turnout will be low, Putin's campaign team will do its best to prevent this from happening. For example, they have been using the mass media to give the issue high exposure. Another aspect of Putin's campaign strategy reportedly involves calling on the governors to use their administrative levers to increase turnout. There is also much speculation recently regarding the true origin of the current debate on ending the election of governors and having the Kremlin appoint them. This is seen by some as a veiled threat by the Kremlin to help ensure voter turnout. Pundits speculate that this pressure by the Kremlin raises the possibility of fraudulent practices on election day.

Primary Issues of the Election

One of the biggest issues of the 2000 presidential election has been the nature of the election itself. Originally scheduled for June 2000, the race was suddenly moved forward by the surprise New Year's Eve announcement by then-President Boris Yeltsin that he was stepping down and appointing Prime Minister Vladimir Putin acting president. That announcement was followed by a stampede of support for Putin, making the outcome of the election seem to many as inevitable. Consequently, much of the election-related news has been not about the positions of candidates on issues, but rather on the election process.

A few issues have managed to emerge, however. Chief among them is the war in Chechnya. Many observers of the Russian political process see Russia's actions in Chechnya as the vehicle which has driven Vladimir Putin from obscurity to the pinnacle of political power in Russia. Polling numbers gathered by VCIOM and the Public Opinion Foundation seem to bear that out.

When Vladimir Putin was named prime minister in August 1999, only two percent of voters said they would vote for him if the election were held on the nearest Sunday. However, as the war in Chechnya began and public support for it grew, the public's support for a Putin presidency also grew. Between October and November 1999, the percentage of people who said they would vote for Putin for president if the election were held on the nearest Sunday went from 21 percent to 40 percent – nearly double. At the same time, 51 percent of those polled felt that Russia should “advance” in Chechnya. Over the next few months, despite criticism of the war effort in the West and by Yabloko, approval for Russia's actions in Chechnya continued to grow among Russians. Putin's approval rating continued to grow as well. Both reached a high water mark in late December/early January with 69 percent saying Russia should “advance” in Chechnya and 55 percent saying they would vote for Putin for president if the election were held on the nearest Sunday. Both numbers also experienced a slight

downturn of 3-4 points each in January and early February.

This polling shows that Putin has benefited from being seen as directing a popular military effort. It has also helped him maintain a sharp lead over political rivals for the presidency. Given the popularity of the war in Chechnya, no other major contenders -- except one -- have taken a position that contrasts Putin's position of carrying the war to its "logical conclusion." The only party and person to take a stand against the war is Yabloko and its leader, Grigory Yavlinsky. Partly as a result, Yabloko performed worse than expected in the State Duma elections and Yavlinsky as a presidential candidate is polling lower than usual.

While Chechnya as an issue has helped Putin tremendously, other issues that could potentially hurt Putin have not seemed to have an effect. One such issue is voters' lack of knowledge about him or his stand on issues, other than Chechnya, facing Russia. For example, when asked about Putin's policies in six key areas, in only one category did a higher percentage of voters say they were aware of his policies than unaware. (Based on information collected in January 2000 and published by the Public Opinion Foundation.)

	<u>Aware</u>	<u>Unaware</u>
Putin's direction for Russia	38%	46%
Direction for economic development	32%	49%
How Putin will handle democratic freedoms and human rights	37%	43%
Relationship with the countries of the former USSR	42%	41%
Relationship with the West	36%	47%

With support fuelled by a popular war and a lack of credible challengers, acting President Putin has seen no need to clearly lay out his positions on issues of importance. On the other hand, with an acting president they approve of, as well as a lack of credible alternatives, voters seem willing to vote for Putin despite knowing little or nothing about what he will do as president.

As a result, the other parties hardly seem to be running a campaign on behalf of their candidates. The Communists have actually demobilized some of their regional staff due to "a lack of money and lack of hope among Communists that its leader Gennady Zyuganov can win," reports Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Scant Yabloko campaign activity has been seen in the regions where IRI works, which has not been the case in the past. The Union of Right Forces is split, having declared that a majority of the party supports Putin, while others back Titov, and yet others Yavlinsky, leaving it unable to conduct a coordinated campaign strategy. And the once-powerful Fatherland movement remained neutral until just 10 days before the election, when it endorsed Putin only to avoid total political isolation, according to *Kommersant-Daily*.

REGIONAL PROFILES

This section will provide a picture of how the presidential election is being contested in Russia's regions. The following are eight profiles of regions in which the International Republican Institute has done extensive work and maintains a large compliment of knowledgeable political contacts. Each profile begins with a breakdown of the 1999 State Duma election results received in the region by each of the six parties that cleared the five percent minimum vote threshold nationally to take seats in the new Duma. Most of the information in the profiles is taken from local media sources and local contacts.

St. Petersburg

1999 State Duma election results:

Unity (pro-Kremlin party)	17.7 %
Union of Right Forces (Sergei Kirienko, Yegor Gaidar, Anatoly Chubais, Boris Nemtsov)	17.4%
Fatherland/All Russia (Luzhkov/Primakov)	15.7%
CPRF (Zyuganov)	15.7%
Yabloko (Yavlinsky)	11.18%
Zhirinovsky's Bloc (Zhirinovsky)	4.2%

The most interesting question of the presidential campaign in St. Petersburg is whether its native son, Vladimir Putin, will poll higher in his hometown than he does in the rest of the country, or will St. Petersburg's strong democratic tradition result in higher numbers for a more liberal candidate like Grigoriy Yavlinsky. In internal polls shared with IRI by local contacts, Putin is currently polling at around 60 percent, Zyuganov at 12 percent and Yavlinsky at 10 percent. Putin's numbers are about the same as he is enjoying nationally, but might have been expected to be higher given that Putin was born and raised in St. Petersburg and served as deputy governor to the late Anatoly Sobchak.

History suggests otherwise, however. St. Petersburg's voters tend to support democratic candidates more than voters anywhere else in the country. The support for Yavlinsky is seven percent higher in St. Petersburg than nationally. These numbers may rise as the campaign continues and if Yavlinsky proves capable of consolidating the democratic vote. Such an outcome will still leave Putin with a clear majority, but may cut into his credibility.

Putin's signature gathering campaign was volunteered by various enterprises and the local administration, which give him a huge advantage because it was conducted at no cost to the candidate's budget. He recently established public reception rooms in St. Petersburg that serve as a key outreach effort for his campaign. Putin's recent visit to the city, where he met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, only added to his popularity.

The intrigue surrounding the gubernatorial election is more heated. The incumbent, Vladimir Yakovlev, is making a desperate attempt to secure re-election as St. Petersburg's governor in May

2000. As part of this effort, he is trying to gain the support of acting President Putin, a former colleague in the St. Petersburg mayor's office. Yakovlev's recent attendance at the founding conference of the pro-Putin Unity party, even though he is a senior member of the All-Russia movement that worked closely with Moscow Mayor Luzhkov's Fatherland movement during the 1999 State Duma election, points to how important he considers the Kremlin's support to his victory.

At various times Putin had indicated publicly that he will support Yakovlev, but it is possible that Putin will support another, more loyal, candidate in this race. The fact that the gubernatorial election comes on the heels of the presidential election means that candidate Putin can withhold announcing his support publicly while enjoying the full support of all the potential candidates for governor.

However, the pro-Kremlin Unity party recently announced its support for Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matviyenko for the post of governor, an indication of a possible new Kremlin favorite. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, Matviyenko confidently announced on March 10 that she would challenge Governor Yakovlev in the May gubernatorial elections -- so confidently, in fact, that some observers were suspicious about what level of support she expected to receive from Moscow.

Also, after the recent death of former Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, all the TV stations rebroadcast Sobchak's last interview in which he said that if he died, his death would be on Yakovlev's hands. If Yakovlev were indeed Putin's favorite, such a broadcast would likely not have been permitted.

Yakovlev has made several attempts to better secure his re-election by moving the election date to coincide with national elections. Yakovlev attempted to move the St. Petersburg gubernatorial election to the same day as the 1999 State Duma election, December 19, 1999. He failed, and tried again to move it to coincide with the presidential election in March, but failed to get approval from the Legislative Assembly. The election will take place on May 14, 2000, as was originally scheduled.

Murmansk oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

Unity	31.44%
CPRF	13%
Zhirinovsky's Bloc	11.2%
Yabloko	10%
Union of Right Forces	9.6%
Fatherland/All Russia	7.9%

In the State Duma election, the governor of Murmansk oblast, Yury Yevdokimov, was an outspoken supporter of Fatherland. However, in the later stages of the campaign, he was said to have covertly supported Unity. Unity won over 31 percent to the Communists' 13 percent, a possible result

of such tactics on the outcome of the election. It should also be noted that Murmansk oblast has a high concentration of military installations, which partially accounts for the high Unity showing.

According to watchers of the local political scene in the oblast, since the election, Yevdokimov has become more neutral in his political views. In January, soon after the presidential election was called, he moved the gubernatorial election from December 2000 to March 26 to coincide with the presidential election. The change in the election date accomplishes two things: it upsets the hopes of other aspirants to the gubernatorial post and it strengthens Yevdokimov's hand vis-a-vis the Kremlin. The Kremlin's strategy for the campaign is to call on the governors to ensure their oblasts' support for Putin. Yevdokimov will most likely give that support, but will be able to get the Kremlin's support for his campaign in return.

Another interesting dynamic of the election in Murmansk oblast is that there will be a special election to the State Duma in a single seat district in Monchegorsky on June 18, 2000. The deputy who was elected in December for that district, Luzin Pavlovich, died in a car accident in late January. The announcement of the date change of the gubernatorial election came before the tragic accident. Therefore, most of the strongest politicians had already committed themselves to the gubernatorial race, leaving the seat open for other contestants.

Perm oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

Unity	19.8%
Union of Right Forces	15%
CPRF	14%
Fatherland/All Russia	10%
Yabloko	6.97%
Zhirinovsky's Bloc	7.5%

The results of the 1999 State Duma election confirm Perm oblast's status of one of the relatively pro-reform regions in Russia. Yuri Medvedev, speaker of the Perm oblast Duma, was elected on Fatherland's party list. Perm oblast's single mandate districts were won by: Victor Pokhmelkin, a Russia's Democratic Choice incumbent who was re-elected a second time and had the support of Perm Governor Gennady Igumnov; Sergei Chikulaev, deputy director of LUKOIL-Permneft oil production company who was nominated by Fatherland/All Russia; and two candidates who were unaffiliated with a particular party but did have the backing of the oblast administration.

Although formally uncommitted to any one party, Governor Igumnov seems to be making efforts to reach out to Putin. Prior to the 1999 State Duma election, Igumnov was considered a supporter of Fatherland-All Russia. However, after the strong showing of Unity and SPS, he backpedalled, say local sources. On December 28, the governor attended the national founding congress of the Unity movement.

The main pre-presidential election intrigue in Perm oblast is based on the struggle between Perm Governor Gennady Igumnov and local political clans. Pavel Anokhin, head of DAN financial group, and Victor Nelubin, who is head of the local federation for martial arts, initially laid claims to the leadership of the local Unity organization. However, Governor Igumnov used his political weight to make sure that the local Unity organization is led by Alexander Tulnikov, director general of LUKOIL-Permneft oil production company, who is loyal to him. The head of the local Putin election headquarters is Alexander Malanin, rector of the Perm University. Local political analysts say the campaign will be managed by professional political consultants hired by the oblast administration.

In general, the preparations before the presidential election are closely tied to the upcoming gubernatorial election, expected in late 2000, and all the local political forces seem to have made it a priority to take a stand on the latter. For example, Yabloko's local organization in January elected Evgeni Shvetsov as its head instead of the former leader, Lubov Zotina. Mr. Shvetsov is known for his loyalty to Perm Mayor Yuri Trutnev, who most likely will be the primary opponent to the incumbent at the gubernatorial election. The leader of the local Communist Party, who is known for his loyal position toward Governor Igumnov, retained his position in spite of poor CPRF performance in the oblast and efforts to dismiss him.

Another well-known local politician, Victor Pokhmelkin, has already announced his full support for Governor Igumnov. The support of Pokhmelkin, who is member of the Union of Right Forces (SPS) political council and an influential member of the State Duma Legislation and Legal Reform Committee, is seen by local analysts as particularly important for the governor and is likely some form of a return favor for the governor's not interfering in SPS's activities in Perm oblast during the State Duma elections. Most likely, the presidential administration will also throw its weight and resources behind the incumbent.

Novosibirsk oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

CPRF	28.3%
Unity	20.4 %
Yabloko	9.8%
Union of Right Forces	9.5%
Zhirinovsky's Bloc	6.8%
Fatherland/All Russia	5.8%

The Novosibirsk oblast has recently gained attention for several reasons. First, celebrity wrestler Aleksandr Karelin, a Novosibirsk native, was the number two candidate on Unity's federal party list and also won a single mandate seat in Novosibirsk for the 1999 State Duma election. Second, Vitaly Mukha, the former Novosibirsk governor and well-known communist who was initially a founding member of Fatherland in 1998, did not actively support Fatherland closer to the State Duma elections. It was rumored that he supported the Kremlin-backed Unity party. Mukha's shift to support

Unity in the State Duma election is more interesting when it is considered that he lost re-election to the governor's post in December 1999. It is well known that many of the governors that have openly supported Unity are those who will need Kremlin support to be re-elected.

Mukha's replacement as governor of Novosibirsk oblast is former Novosibirsk city Mayor Viktor Tolokonsky. Tolokonsky's campaign statements called for the improvement of relations between the mayor and the governor, and between the governor and the Kremlin. Throughout most of Tolokonsky's tenure as Mayor of Novosibirsk, he had a strained relationship with then-Governor Mukha.

Viktor Tolokonsky had sought better relations with the Kremlin even before he was elected. His efforts seem to have borne fruit during Putin's recent visit to Irkutsk on February 18, 2000, for a meeting of the interregional association "Siberian Accord." Tolokonsky gained several lucrative concessions from the Kremlin. As the acting head of the delegation, Tolokonsky was able to successfully negotiate four agreements that will allow large transfers of funds from the federal budget to Novosibirsk oblast. First, federal funds to be used to fight locusts will be transferred to the region. Second, Tolokonsky secured a loan for Novosibirsk oblast for spring agricultural programs. A debt repayment plan on a loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the "Development of the Regional Social Infrastructure" was agreed upon, and finally a controlling share of Novosibirsk Airport Tolmachyovo successfully was transferred from the Ministry of Property of the Russian Federation to the Novosibirsk oblast administration.

Even though Governor Tolokonsky did not attend Unity's establishing conference on January 24, 2000, many of his closest assistants did attend, sending a clear signal of Tolokonsky's support of the party. To continue receiving support from the center, Tolokonsky must be seen to be a clear supporter of the party, especially in light of the high profile Novosibirsk gets from Aleksandr Karelin's role in Unity. Karelin served as the chairman of the Unity establishing conference.

Viktor Tolokonsky is also trying to develop a good working relationship with the person he hopes will be the new mayor of Novosibirsk. Upon vacating the mayor's position in January, he threw his support behind his former deputy, Vladimir Gorodetsky. The mayoral election will coincide with the presidential election on March 26, 2000. Gorodetsky's most fierce opponent is said to be Ivan Starikov, Deputy Minister of Economy of the Russian Federation. Starikov lost the gubernatorial election to Tolokonsky by a small margin (44.32 percent vs. 42.17 percent). In the mayoral election, Starikov stands a good chance of securing victory. According to polls published on January 25 by *Vecherny Novosibirsk*, Starikov is leading with 21 percent, while Gorodetsky is trailing in third place with 10 percent. Ivan Gorodetsky may hope to pick up votes on the coattails of Putin's campaign, as he has been put in charge of the acting president's election efforts in the region.

According to IRI local contacts, minimal campaigning has taken place in Novosibirsk oblast so far.

Kemerovo oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

Unity	33.67%
CPRF	28.9%
Union of Right Forces	7.96%
Zhirinovsky's Bloc	5.45%
Yabloko	4.6%
Fatherland/All Russia	4.47%

Kemerovo Oblast is attracting a great deal of interest in the presidential campaign due to the fact that Aman Tuleev, the governor of the oblast, is a presidential candidate. While polls have suggested that he will only receive between 1 to 2 percent nationally, his popularity ratings in this region have been as high as 90 percent.

Aman Tuleev began his working life in the railroad industry, serving as deputy head of the Novokuznetsk Department of the Kemerovo Railroad from 1978 to 1983. At that time, Tuleev was promoted to head of the Novokuznetsk Department of the Kemerovo Railroad, a position he held until 1985. That year Tuleev took charge of the transportation and communications department of the Kemerovo oblast Communist Party committee. From there he became head of the Kemerovo Railroad.

In 1990, politics became the focus of Aman Tuleev's activities. In that year, he became chair of the Kemerovo oblast Council of People's Deputies and a deputy to the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation. Tuleev ran for president for the first time in 1991, coming in fourth with just over six percent. From 1993 to 1996, he served not only as a deputy to the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, but also as chair of the Legislative Assembly of Kemerovo oblast (1994-1996). During the 1995 State Duma elections, he was number three on the CPRF federal list but after the party's victory he chose not to take the seat.

In 1996, Tuleev ran for president for a second time but four days before the election took himself out of the race in favor of Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov. In that same year, he was elected co-chairman of the People's Patriotic Union of Russia and appointed Minister of the Russian Federation on Cooperation with CIS countries. On July 1, 1997, Aman Tuleev was appointed Head of Administration of Kemerovo oblast. Just three months later, on October 19, 1997, Tuleev was elected governor of Kemerovo oblast with 94.5 percent of the vote.

As a precursor of things to come, Tuleev was listed fourth on the party list of the electoral union "CPRF - for Victory," then he endorsed Unity at a later stage of the 1999 State Duma campaign. There has been a great deal of conjecture as to the role Aman Tuleev is playing in the presidential election. He was the first governor to support the idea, raised last year by then-Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, that governors should once again be appointed by the president rather than democratically elected. The statement came on the heels of a decision by Minister of Railroads Nikolai

Aksyonenko to extend for one year the lowered tariffs for cargo transportation from Kuzbass (part of Kemerovo oblast.) Transportation costs account for up to 60 percent of the export price of Kuzbass coal, so the reduced tariff means the coal is more competitive on the world market, providing a great source of financial support for the region. In an article published February 16, 2000, *Kommersant-Daily* asked why the Putin administration would assist one of Putin's opponents in such a way. The answers provided were: first, it creates an impression that there are alternatives to Putin; second, most of Tuleev's votes will come from Zyuganov's supporters; and third, because he is an ideal candidate to introduce the idea of cancelling the election of governors. Tuleev's comments have begun a whispering campaign that is forcing the governors to support Putin.

Political pundits argue that what Tuleev hopes to gain from this campaign is to position himself as a possible alternative to Gennady Zyuganov for the leadership of the Communist Party. If Zyuganov fails to run what is seen as a successful campaign, he may face a challenge to his leadership of the party. According to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, it is very possible that Tuleev will throw his support behind Vladimir Putin in the second round if it takes place.

Interestingly, IRI contacts report that even though Tuleev is nominally running for president himself, he has thrown support to Unity in his region, designating one of his deputies to run Putin's campaign in the oblast.

Tomsk oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

Unity	18.98%
CPRF	16.5%
Yabloko	13.84%
Union of Right Forces	11.57%
Zhirinovsky's Bloc	7.57%
Fatherland/All Russia	6.3%

Like many regions, there were few surprises in Tomsk oblast during the 1999 State Duma elections. Yabloko performed better than expected due to the trouble the party has experienced in the region. Earlier in 1999, the national Yabloko headquarters "decertified" the Tomsk Yabloko organization, a process by which the national organization dissolves a local organization and begins a new one with a Moscow-appointed leadership. This fissure was expected to pit the new Yabloko against the old Yabloko throughout Tomsk oblast. Despite that, the party more than doubled its national vote average in Tomsk.

The governor of Tomsk oblast is Viktor Kress, who is associated with Our Home is Russia. Not only did Our Home back his re-election bid for governor in September 1999 – as did several other parties – but he also was number one on its regional party list for the State Duma election. Despite that association, it was also reported that there was some behind the scenes collaboration between Our

Home and Fatherland/All Russia in Tomsk oblast for the State Duma election. Regardless of these machinations, Governor Kress -- like many governors -- was careful to keep all his options open. Unity was allowed to work in Tomsk oblast, as well, and finished in first place there.

The governor casts a long shadow in Tomsk oblast. Governor Kress unilaterally moved the gubernatorial elections, originally scheduled for December 1999, to September 1999. This action effectively eliminated the possibility that any coordinated effort to defeat him could be conducted and paved the way for his re-election with a near record high percentage for a Russia governor -- more than 70 percent. Opponents of the governor had originally planned to challenge his move in court, but decided to avoid drawing Governor Kress' ire. It is this influence that will work in acting President Putin's favor on March 26.

While Governor Kress has not explicitly said he will vote for Putin nor has he encouraged others to do so publicly, he has stated repeatedly in the media how pleased he is that the acting president is working with governors. In short, he indirectly supports Putin in the mass media.

This is essentially the only presidential campaign activity taking place in Tomsk oblast at this time. Regional contacts report that part of the reason is that a fierce election battle for the mayor's seat in the city of Tomsk is taking place now. A special election to fill two city council seats is also scheduled. All of these elections are occurring on March 26, and as of this moment the local elections are drawing all of the public's attention.

Rostov oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

Unity	30.8%
CPRF	28.5%
Fatherland/All Russia	7.4%
Union of Right Forces	5.96%
Yabloko	7.2%
Zhirinovky's Bloc	4.98%

The characteristics of Rostov oblast are partially explained by the strength of the local executive branch and its ability to influence various aspects of local political and economic life. The party list results of the State Duma election in this oblast became predictable once Governor Vladimir Chub stated that "as a citizen he will vote for Unity." Governor Chub was one of the 38 governors who supported the idea of creating the Unity bloc. According to local sources, this did not contradict his traditional political orientation, which was to support all legitimate political forces while not solidly allying himself with any of them.

As a result of the efforts undertaken by the oblast executive branch, Unity's vote share won Rostov oblast four State Duma deputies elected on the Unity party list. Yabloko performed relatively

well, receiving 5.6 percent of the vote, although it was less than the party had hoped for and did not result in any party list seats. One of the strongest of Yabloko's regional organizations, Rostov Yabloko only performed as well as it did because of the large draw of Yabloko's State Duma Deputy Mikhail Yemelianov, also supported by the oblast administration, who ran as a single mandate candidate. The Union of Right Forces, another traditionally strong party in the oblast, received enough votes to elect Boris Titenko, 1993-1995 State Duma deputy and head of the Don Center for Political Technologies, on its party list. Fatherland succeeded in electing one of its regional party list candidates, Vladimir Litvinov, former deputy governor of the Rostov oblast.

In Rostov's seven single mandate districts, five winning candidates -- one of which was a Yabloko incumbent and another an independent incumbent -- had the support of the oblast administration. The other two single mandate seats were won by Communist Party incumbents.

With regard to the presidential election, according to an article written by well-known local political analyst Marina Poyurova in "*Gorod N*" newspaper at the end of February, a quiet election campaign is expected, as candidates' headquarters are hardly conducting any activities.

Victor Usachev, the presidential representative in Rostov oblast, heads the election headquarters for acting President Putin. However, local sources report that while Mr. Usachev conducts a press conference each week, the campaign has been unable to begin any other appreciable activity due to a lack of funds.

Gennady Zyuganov's campaign will be managed by CPRF State Duma Deputy Leonid Ivanchenko, who also is the leader of the local communists in Rostov. He will be assisted by State Duma Deputy Nikolai Kolomeytsev and coordinator of the CPRF State Duma faction Sergei Reshulski, as well as a number of local CPRF activists. The communists have created their headquarters but their campaigning efforts are also extremely low-key. According to local sources, they will not conduct any large-scale campaign events in Rostov primarily due to a lack of funding.

Grigory Yavlinsky's campaign will be coordinated and financed by the Yabloko's national headquarters. Local Yabloko's initiatives in the past were not welcome in Moscow and that is why, according to local politicians, they will have to approve all activities through the Moscow election headquarters and seek funding for them. Yabloko campaign efforts in Rostov will most likely focus on door-to-door campaigning, Yabloko's favorite campaign technique.

Other candidates have not conducted any activities, and most probably will continue to play a background role both nationally and in Rostov oblast.

Voronezh oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

Unity	32.66%
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CPRF	29.97%
Zhirinovskiy's Bloc	7.35%
Fatherland/All Russia	5.4%
Union of Right Forces	5%
Yabloko	2.96%

The political orientation of the four single mandate deputies elected in Voronezh oblast can be generally characterized as stable red. The winners in those seats were: Dmitri Rogozin, Congress of Russian Communities leader with a clear pro-communist and anti-Semitic orientation; Ruslan Gostev, CPRF oblast committee secretary; Nikolai Olshanski, former minister of the USSR chemical industry and, more recently, director of the Moscow-based "Agrocheminvest," which owns the Rosschanski chemical plant in Voronezh oblast; and Georgi Kostin, CPRF State Duma deputy who ran from the nationalist-oriented Movement in Support of the Army.

Voronezh oblast Governor Ivan Shabanov, elected as a CPRF candidate, is essentially uninvolved in this campaign, report local political contacts. When asked a question at a press conference about his position toward any of the presidential candidates, he stated his view that Putin is a centrist and indicated his wish that he would be able to work constructively with him. Governor Shabanov has not directly called for support of Zyuganov's candidacy, as he did before the December 1999 State Duma elections. However, he did accompany Zyuganov throughout his visit to Voronezh at the end of February.

In Voronezh oblast – as in other regions -- hardly any activities, apart from the signature collection conducted by paid workers, have been undertaken by any of the registered presidential candidates.

Besides CPRF and Yabloko, which have the potential to conduct a campaign, a new structure called "The Public Council in Support of V. V. Putin" was formed in Voronezh. It was formed by: the regional movement "For Revival of the Economy;" the Voronezh Our Home is Russia organization; Regional Policy Foundation, headed by former Governor Alexander Kovalyov; Association of Businessmen, an organization which formerly backed Russia's Democratic Choice; Congress of Russian Communities, led by Dmitri Rogozin; and nearly the entire Communist Party and industrial establishment. The Council is led by the director of Voronezh Sberbank, Alexander Solovyov. According to local political contacts, he exercises a good deal of influence on all branches of the oblast government. Mr. Solovyov has also recently become one of the leading politicians in the region.

Public opinion polls conducted in Voronezh largely coincide with national polling information, with Putin receiving 50-60 percent of the vote, Zyuganov receiving 15-20 percent, and all of the other candidates receiving 5 percent or less.

Volgograd oblast

1999 State Duma election results:

CPRF	29.7%
Unity	28.86%
Union of Right Forces	8.46%
Zhirinovsky's Bloc	6.17%
Fatherland/All Russia	6.04%
Yabloko	4.11%

These State Duma election results show again that Volgograd oblast remains part of Russia's "Red Belt." However it should be noted that the CPRF lost to Unity in two of the oblast's four districts both on the party list and in single-mandate districts. The Union of Right Forces came in third with a surprisingly strong showing in urban areas but a poor showing in rural areas.

Results of the election in single mandate districts also brought surprises, with Communists winning only in one single mandate district -- the Volzhsky district -- out of four. The most surprising of all were the results of the election in the Central district in Volgograd, where former mayoral candidate Yevgeny Ischenko beat powerful incumbent CPRF State Duma deputy and leader of local communists Alevtina Aparina by almost seven percent. Other deputies elected in single mandate districts are: Vasili Galushkin, former first deputy head of the oblast administration, who in 1998 was accused of alleged large-scale theft of budget funds and therefore, according to local sources, was desperate to receive deputy's status and the immunity that comes with it; Vladimir Plotnikov, incumbent member of the Agrarian Party and State Duma deputy since 1993; and Alexander Kulikov, CPRF incumbent in the Volzhsky district.

Volgograd is considered to be the place where acting President Vladimir Putin officially started his campaign. He visited Volgograd on February 22, on the eve of Fatherland's Defender Day. Volgograd oblast Governor Nikolai Maksuta spent almost all day with Putin, attending all the ceremonies and seeing him off at the airport. Recently a coordination council in support of Putin has been founded, with Volgograd Mayor Yuri Chekhov at its head. Prior to the State Duma elections, Chekhov was the head of the Volgograd Fatherland organization -- though he also participated in the founding conference of the local Unity organization.

Putin may have also gone to Volgograd to examine the local political situation and meet prospective gubernatorial candidates for the elections scheduled for the fall 2000. Governor Nikolai Maksuta, who has always been an open communist, both before and after Putin's visit made a number of statements about Putin's role as savior of Russia and about his support for Putin's political, economic and military measures, according to IRI contacts. It is noted locally that the governor's support of Putin will not necessarily guarantee his re-election because his approval ratings are steadily falling and the economic situation in Volgograd, especially in the rural areas, is worsening.

Conclusion

While a technically free and fair election on March 26 is an important part of Russia's transition to a functioning democracy, other challenges remain. It is clear that Russia's political elite continue to play a decisive role in the choice of the nation's leadership. The war in Chechnya and the nearly lock-step support of Putin by regional and local administrations – and even rival candidates -- demonstrate that fact. Parties are so sure that Putin will win that many of them are only running minimal campaigns, if any. Voters may still register their concerns on election day by voting for other candidates, staying home or voting against all candidates. However, at this time the Kremlin clearly remains the most formidable campaign organization in Russia.