
Editorial: The science and art of generating desired election results

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I do find interesting what the American psychologist Claire W. Graves wrote already in 1974, namely on evolution in our social environment:

“For many people the prospect of the future is dimmed by what they see as a moral breakdown of our society at both the public and private level. My research, over more than 20 years as a psychologist interested in human values, indicates that something is indeed happening to human values, but it is not so much a collapse in the fiber of man as a sign of human health and intelligence. My research indicates that man is learning that values and ways of living which were good for him at one period in his development are no longer good because of the changed condition of his existence. He is recognizing that the old values are no longer appropriate, but he has not yet understood the new.” [Graves, (1970), p.72]

These views later inspired the widely-known evolutionary theory of civilisation ‘spiral dynamics’ (Graves et al., 2005; Beck and Cowan, 2005; Beck et al., 2019) and Wilber’s (1998) integral theory.

There is actually need for new visions when seeing our concrete daily life: a struggle between fundamentally contrary concepts of ‘being human’.

Recent elections in Europe’s largest country extensively sparked comments regarding parallel processes associated with these elections. “The general elections to the Russia State Duma (lower house of Parliament) concluded on September 19, 2021, after three days of in-person and remote internet voting, with a total landslide victory for the Kremlin” (Felgenhauer, 2021b).

Such turnout is especially astonishing in the light of earlier polls. Since long independent monitoring activities exist (Marchesano, 2015; RFE, 2016; Colton and Hale, 2009; Petrov, 2003), e.g., by the respected Russian NGO Golos (in Russian meaning both voice and vote), as shown in Figure 1 for 2012 elections and Figure 2 for 2021 elections:

“There are intriguing differences between polling stations observed by Golos and those not observed by Golos. Most notably, there is significant evidence that polling stations Golos observed recorded lower vote shares for United Russia in the Duma elections compared to other polling stations in the same neighbourhood. We also found that observed polling stations were less likely to record 100 percent turnout than polling stations without Golos observers”. [USAid, (2013), p.1]

The respected international ‘Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’ (OSCE, 2021) this time could not send a mission to monitor the 2021 elections, based on Russian restrictions. The same applies to a mission by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE, 2021), hinting to the COVID pandemic as an advanced ‘explanation’.

Figure 1 Striking differences in 2012 election outcomes for the ruling Russian power party ‘United Russia’ if (a) observed or (b) unobserved by Golos observers (see online version for colours)

Figure 7: Republics Observed

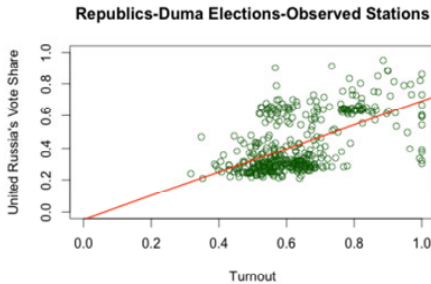


Figure 7: Intercept: -0.045,
Correlation coefficient = 0.738***, p-value = 0.000
Mean United Russia vote share = 0.421
Number of observations = 417
R² = 0.33

(a)

Figure 8: Republics Unobserved

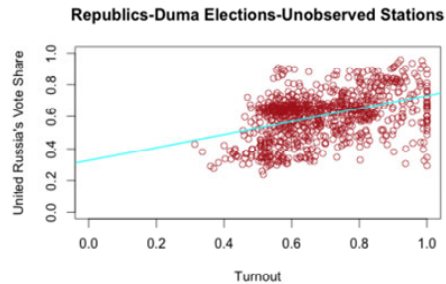


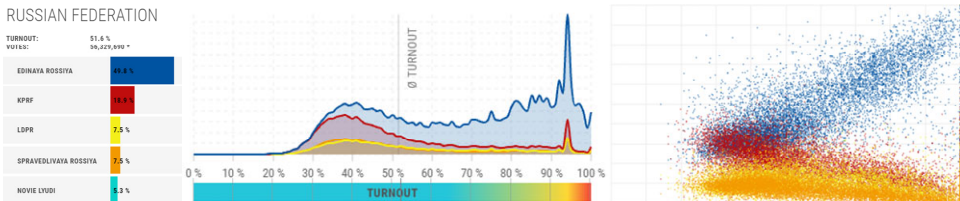
Figure 8: Intercept: 0.326***,
Correlation coefficient = 0.404***, p-value = 0.000
Mean United Russia vote share = 0.603
Number of observations = 869
R² = 0.17

(b)

Note: The existence of observations seems to considerably lower its vote share!

Source: USAid (2013, p.C-7)

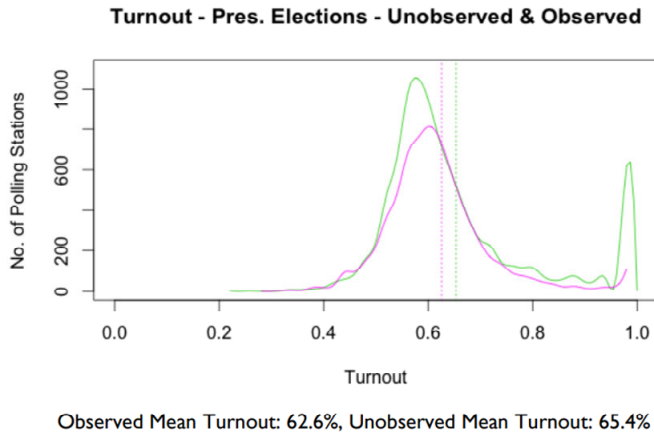
Figure 2 The same is true for the 2021 elections: the higher the turnout, the better the result for the power party ‘Edinaya Rossiya’ (= United Russia) (see online version for colours)



Source: Dekoder (2021)

Similarly, for the 2012 presidential elections, the mean turnout for then-elected president Putin was 3% higher in unobserved polling stations as compared to observed polling stations (in the same neighbourhoods), see Figure 3. The main contribution to this effect is ballot boxes showing 100% turnout (green spike) – a highly unlikely situation in a country with low political ownership and participation, but rather a hint to ballot stuffing.

Figure 3 Distribution of turnout in the presidential election at observed and unobserved polling stations in the same neighbourhood (see online version for colours)



Note: The act of observations seems to considerably lower its vote share!

Source: USAid (2013, p.C-13)

These statistical facts strongly suggest: international monitoring of Russian elections is highly undesired for the ruling party!

In stark contrast to any developed democracy (Graves et al., 2005; Ahamer and Schrei, 2006; Ahamer and Mayer, 2013) acting through dialogue (Beck and Cowan, 2005; Ahamer, 2019), even mentioning the name of Kremlin's most successful antagonist Navalny (Figure 4 and Figure 5) was barred in the Russian information space (Svoboda, 2021b). Politicians demanding his release were banned from elections (Svoboda, 2021a).

Figure 4 Navalny in prison (see online version for colours)



Source: Russian news agency TASS, Svoboda.org on 7.9.2021

Accusations of irregularities and vote-rigging during the election have been widespread but universally rejected by the authorities. The Kremlin won the Duma election in a “landslide using a combination of trickery, deceit and crude political repression” (Interfax, 2021; Felgenhauer, 2021b). Especially online voting opened the door for

last-minute ‘improvements’, and the date shown on Mr. Putin’s Swiss watch during his own reported online voting turned out to be wrong by one week (Gazeta, 2021).

Figure 5 The process of overpainting Navalny in front of a house in Russia has only started (see online version for colours)



Notes: Process of ‘overpainting’ a candidate for Russian presidency. The Russian-language inscription says: ‘Hero of the new times’. Municipal workers painted over a graffiti portrait of Alexei A. Navalny in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Wednesday, April 28, 2021.

Source: (a) Shtepa (2021b) and Euronews, (b) Anatoly Maltsev/EPA, via Shutterstock

These elections took place while Russia defined many institutions and individuals as ‘foreign agents’ (Baev, 2021; Felgenhauer, 2021a).

“A great deal of true grassroots discontent exists in Russia. The true leader of the opposition, Alexei Navalny, is in prison. His anti-corruption foundation and other like-minded organizations have been banned as ‘extremist’, while pro-Navalny activists have been prosecuted or forced to emigrate” (Felgenhauer, 2021b; Shtepa, 2021b). “The Duma simply passes, without much discussion or opposition, Kremlin-sponsored bills. The previous Duma was a rubber stamp parliament, and the new one will be too” (RBC, 2021).

As an example for pre-designed distorting strategies, the ‘New People’ party achieved 5.3% of the votes (Shtepa, 2021a) and is widely seen as ‘systemic opposition’. “The emergence of New People in the Duma was the result of analytical calculations in President Vladimir Putin’s administration, which revealed a social demand for the appearance of new faces in parliament” (Shtepa, 2021b). Investigative journalist Andrei Pertsev established that the New People party was created ‘under the roof’ (political protection) of Putin’s friend, oligarch Yuri Kovalchuk (Meduza, 2021) – a similar strategy as reportedly was used in 2011 already. Distinct geographic regions for such newly founded parties might have been defined (Kommersant, 2020) in order to “split the protest electorate” (Meduza, 2021), and it may be concluded that these should absorb critical votes without endangering the overall national victory of the currently most powerful party ‘in the same scheme’ (Kommersant, 2020).

A popular Russian proverb saying “the severity of Russian laws is excused by the selectiveness of their enforcement” was traditionally attributed to Mikhail Saltykov, a high-level civil servant and administrator in 19th-century imperial Russia and a famous writer/satirist under the pen name Nikolai Shchedrin (Felgenhauer, 2021a).

Russia uses mass-passportisation as a form of annexing populations without necessarily declaring the annexation of the territory to Russia (e.g., in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia; in Crimea and Ukraine's east (Donetsk and Luhansk) (Socor, 2021). As a test run, in the 2020 plebiscite, a mere 14,500 Russian-passportised residents were transported from the 'DPR-LPR' to Russia's adjacent Rostov region to cast ballots there. For the Duma elections, however, a far more elaborate operation was undertaken in this territory. According to interim figures, centralised in Moscow, some 150,000 votes from the 'DPR-LPR' had been cast in Russia's Rostov oblast as of the afternoon of September 19, 2021, according to the Russian news agency TASS on that day. Organised transportation was provided gratis for voters to cast ballots in person at 91 polling stations in Russian territory (Socor, 2021).

The autocephaly of Orthodox churches becomes increasingly attempted (Goble, 2021), especially for Ukraine where the autocephalous Ukrainian Church will displace the Russian one as the largest Orthodox Church in the world (Goble, 2018). "In the Kremlin's view, it represents the end of President Vladimir Putin's dream of a 'Russian World' (Russkiy mir) combining, at a minimum, the three Eastern Slavic nations – Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians – which he continues to view as one people" (Goble, 2018).

Documentation of meddling into elections of other countries are manifold: NIC (2021) identifies detailed Russian influence operations against the 2020 US elections, including through misleading 'fake news'.

Summing up, "in Russia's *system of managed democracy*, the main role of the parliamentary opposition is to preserve an *appearance* of political pluralism, while carefully excluding most regime critics", including methods of vote-rigging (Karta, 2021), system opposition (Krutov, 2021), coercion to vote (Golos, 2021), silencing of media (Dekoder, 2021), strategic inclusion of the orthodox church (FT, 2021), ballot-box stuffing (RFE, 2021; AP, 2021), artificial renaming of candidates, i.e., doppelgänger (BBC Russia, 2021) or 'clone candidates' (Goncharenko, 2021), mass passportisation (Socor, 2021), extremistification of competitors (FP, 2021), 'nullification' of 2 decades in presidency (AlJazeera, 2021) and blunt repression of authentic opposition, including sheer murder (EP, 2021) through 'military-grade Novichok poisoning' of a competitor (CSIS, 2021). *What a relapse into archaic social mindsets!*

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