

Kremlin Slams Embarrassing Report Saying United Russia Lost Elections

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The  **Moscow Times**

The Kremlin said on March 13 that the author of a report that claims the ruling United Russia party actually lost the 2011 elections to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation thanks to fraud needs "psychiatric help."

The report is surprising and extremely embarrassing, as its conclusions are not in dispute: it is widely accepted that the Duma elections were fixed, which engendered the widely publicized protests in December that year.

And it is surprising because the institute, the Governance and Problem Analysis Center (GPAC), is a state-run body that is chaired by state-owned Russian Railways (RZhD) and by its CEO Vladimir Yakunin.

While it is highly unlikely that this is a political play by Yakunin to embarrass his masters in the Kremlin — Yakunin is a consummate politician and former ambassador to the EU — it

is interesting that a prestigious state controlled institution has had the *shariki* to come out with this sort of claim in public.

The deputy head of United Russia's executive committee, Konstantin Mazurevsky, said in a statement on his party's website that Sulakshin's report was based on data "snatched out of thin air." And a senior Russian Railways representative told Interfax that Yakunin, a Putin loyalist, had nothing to do with the report and said his boss could give up his role at the think tank in light of its conclusions.

The GPAC director Stepan Sulakshin told journalists that United Russia actually received 22% of the vote against the Communists that garnered roughly 30%, while elections officials gave their vote totals as 49% and 19%, respectively.

As bne reported following the elections, the voting numbers show clearly that something very fishy happened during the vote counting. Without wanting to get too technical, votes should distribute themselves along a Gaussian or "normal" curve that describes most random events in nature.

The trouble is that United Russia's vote count has a very "fat tail" and is not a normal distribution, whereas that of the Communists is too "skinny" and also not a normal distribution. This looks extremely odd compared to the vote for parties like those for Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic party of Russia (LDPR) which are distributed along a normal curve.

Secondly there are "spikes" at the multiple of 5s in the counting; something else that also can't be explained by statistics. In other words, it looks like election officers responsible for counting followed the very human impulse to round up the votes in United Russia's favor when counting up the totals to give United Russia an advantage without resorting to gross vote rigging.

These statistical clues are not definitive proof, but they do most of the way to showing the vote was rigged, but they also show that the vote was largely open, but tweaked to produce the desired results.

The corollary to this fixing — and an aspect that will not be mentioned by those bothering to report this story — is that the evidence also shows that Russia had by far the most open and democratic elections in the CIS, with the possible exception of Georgia and Ukraine in 2010, albeit still a deeply flawed vote.

The fact that United Russia squeaked in with a mere 49% of the vote stands in stark contrast to the results in places like Minks, Astana and Ashgabat, where parliaments were all returned with at least 80% of the vote and authorities didn't bother to count votes at all, but just make up the results that suit them. In other words, Russia has a semi-democratic system: the Kremlin wants the legitimacy of winning most of the popular vote by genuinely convincing the population to vote for its representatives, but will still fix the vote to make sure its parties actually take office if they fall short — as they did.

This balancing act between representation and repression is what has stopped Russia's protest movement from becoming violent but of course also fuels resentment. The [upshot](#) will

be one of the most civilized revolutions of any country in transition.

Interesting, Sulakshin went on to say that his institute found no significant problems with the presidential election in May 2012, which Russian President Vladimir Putin would have won regardless; although he did add that the authorities added "only" 12% to the result. Again, bne reported the same conclusions at the time of the vote.

Why was this report allowed to come out, which was actually read last autumn but only released to the press on Wednesday? In a way it is symptomatic of the nature of very vote rigging it reports on: Russia has a pseudo-democratic system where votes count but power counts a bit more; where public debate is allowed, but within limits; where you can complain and the press will report it, but expect to be vilified if you do.

If you accept that political transition is a process and this administration is not going to be overthrown anytime soon, then this report is part of that process. However, Putin's reaction to the opposition has been repression and increasing his control over the freedoms of the people. The fact of the report is encouraging as it shows the process is ongoing and people are still willing to speak their mind, but it will be interesting to see what the follow up for the government is.

In general I remain optimistic as the mounting momentum of the anti-corruption investigations shows the Kremlin is interested in more accountability and in this light the report is specifically targeting the legitimacy of the United Russia party, which the anti-corruption investigations are also doing. Clearly the party is dying and will need to be replaced at the next elections if the Kremlin are going to follow the same model. But at the same time the fact that this destruction of its own baby will undermine any party the Kremlin puts up to the people. The bottom line is that the Kremlin increasingly needs to win these votes by simply winning them and not massaging the numbers to get the result it wants.

A high resolution copy of the map can be found [here](#).

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