

A Survey of Democracy in Russia's Regions

Kelly M. McMann and Nikolai V. Petrov¹

Abstract: An American political scientist and a Russian geographer, specialists in postcommunist political reform and Russian regional politics, respectively, adopt a subnational approach to democratization, measuring democracy in a standard fashion across 57 regions of Russia. They rate levels of democracy in Russia's oblasts, krais, and federal cities based on the results of a survey they administered to experts on Russian provincial politics. The article presents the ranking of the regions, evaluates the survey as a means of measuring provincial democracy, and examines five possible explanations for subnational variation in democracy. *Journal of Economic Literature*, Classification Numbers: H11, H77, P16, P26. 3 figures, 4 tables, 79 references, 2 appendices.

Since Russia's rebirth as a sovereign state, scholars have followed the devolution of power from center to periphery and have increasingly studied politics outside of Moscow. Findings from this research suggest that political reform has occurred unevenly across the country: some regions have become more democratic than others. Yet scholars of Russian and comparative politics have ignored evidence of subnational variation in democracy and instead have treated democratization as a national-level phenomenon. By essentially defining democratization as a process centered in national capitals, social scientists overlook its impact on the lives of most of the population. Furthermore, researchers tend to search for the catalysts of political change only at the national level. In a country as large as Russia, the idea of democratization as a national-level phenomenon is particularly misleading. The margin of error is likely to be enormous if a scholar attempts to understand democratization in Russia only from events in Moscow. By incorporating regional politics into our study of democratization, we can better understand the causes and effects of democratic development. And we can suggest to policymakers how they can promote democracy in regions of their countries where it has not taken root.

Although studies of Russian regions have proliferated, it has proven difficult to compare levels of provincial democracy and to search for possible explanations of the variation. Investigations of provincial democracy to date have focused on only one to nine regions of Russia. Using these case studies to compare regions is hazardous, because scholars have utilized different measures of political reform. Without standard measures, the case studies cannot serve as a base of data for testing generalized explanations.

¹Respectively, Kathryn W. and Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Russian Studies, Harvard University, 1737 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138 and Moscow Carnegie Center, Ul. Tverskaya 16/2, Moscow 103009, Russia. The Institute for the Study of World Politics funded Kelly M. McMann's work on this project. We are grateful to Aleksei Titkov of the Carnegie Moscow Center for his assistance with the survey and to Sharon Werning Rivera and the members of Harvard University's Postcommunist Politics Workshop for their suggestions. The survey is the first component of two larger projects: Kelly M. McMann's investigation of subnational variation in democracy and Nikolai Petrov's study of stereotypes of Russia's regions. See McMann (2000) and McFaul and Petrov (1998), pp. 139-146).

To facilitate the study of subnational variation in political reform, we developed a measure of provincial democracy based on a survey of experts on regional politics and used this measure to compare levels of democracy in 57 regions of Russia. The purpose of this paper is to present our findings, familiarize others with this bank of data, and initiate a discussion on how to measure provincial democracy. We also hope to introduce the study of provincial democracy to the democratization literature by exploring some possible explanations for regional differences.

In the sections below, we first consider the complex pattern of subnational variation in democracy from the comparative and Russian perspectives. Then, following a description of our survey, we examine the ranking our experts provided and evaluate the survey as a tool for measuring provincial democracy. Finally, we use the ranking to test five possible explanations for subnational variation in democracy.

SUBNATIONAL VARIATION IN DEMOCRACY

From anecdotal evidence, media accounts, and case studies, it is clear that political institutions and practices often differ dramatically within a country, particularly during periods of political transition. Yet scholars who seek to explain the emergence of democratic systems have focused on the national level nonetheless, attempting to explain variation across, not within, countries.² Similarly, studies of subnational politics in the United States and other countries have focused not on the uneven development of democracy, but on issues of effective governance, control of local politics, center-periphery relations, elite values, and citizen participation.³

Likewise, within the post-Soviet politics literature, many works address tangential questions, such as urban politics, local government law, and center-periphery relations, without investigating uneven development of democracy.⁴ Numerous single case studies have examined problems of political development in Russian provinces and cities,⁵ but, without a comparative design, these studies provide limited insight into political differences among regions.

A small number of works investigates subnational political differences more systematically, thus reaching broader conclusions; however, none of them examines the specific

²Some of the key works that aim to explain the development of democratic regimes are Dahl (1971), Di Palma (1990), Gunther et al. (1995), Huntington (1991), Linz and Stepan (1996), Lipset (1959, 1994), O'Donnell et al. (1986), Przeworski (1991), and Rustow (1970). The review of these literatures also appears in McManm (2000) in an expanded form.

³As examples of studies of subnational politics in the comparative subfield, see Elazer (1987), Jacob et al. (1993), Kohli (1990), Putnam (1993), Teune (1995), and *Values* (1971). As sample critiques of the study of comparative local government, see Eldersveld (1996) and Kesselman and Rosenthal (1974). The literature on American subnational politics is vast, but some of the key works include Dahl (1961), Frug, (1988), Key (1984), Peterson (1981), and Stone (1989).

⁴Examples from this literature include Briachikhin (1995), Fadeyev (1994), Lysenko (1993), Ordeshook (1996), Postnikov (1996), and Shereinet (1993).

⁵Single case studies of Russian regions and cities are too numerous to list here, but most have appeared in the journals *Europe-Asia Studies* and *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* and in edited volumes, such as Friedgut and Hahn (1994) and Colton and Hough (1998). Kirkow (1998) explored differences between Russian provinces but focused on economic reform. One of the case studies most relevant to the question of uneven development of democracy is Ortung's (1995) examination of democratization in St. Petersburg. He provides a detailed empirical account of events in St. Petersburg and overlays his description with a theoretical framework from the democratization literature; however, he does not consider why democratization has varied within Russia or how democratization at the local level may differ.

question of why democracy develops unevenly. Stoner-Weiss (1997) studied provincial governing institutions in four Russian oblasts, focusing on their effectiveness, and Fish (1995) examined four Russian regions in order to understand variation in the genesis and nature of local democratic movements, not differences in the local political systems themselves. Election analyses examine variation in voter preferences instead of differences between regional political systems.⁶ Finally, Treisman is interested not in the extent of democratization, but in variation in demands for autonomy (1997) and support for the center (1999) among ethnic regions.

In separate works, McAuley (1992), Gelman (1999), and Moses (1992) do consider variation in subnational democracy. In her study of three Soviet cities, McAuley, however, is more interested in the consequences than the causes of variation.⁷ Gelman does not examine actual levels of democracy but instead categorizes both democratic and authoritarian outcomes of transition from communist regimes. Moses addresses the question of variation in subnational political systems by dividing 25 Russian and Ukrainian regions into "anti-establishment," "transitional," and "establishment" regions, for the period from 1989 to 1991, but, although the typology was relevant for the early period of political change, it is now possible to consider democracy directly.

Not only is the topic of subnational democracy understudied, but data concerning variation in levels of democracy in Russia are unavailable. Freedom House (1978–1995) provides democracy ratings for countries, but not subnational regions. The National Democracy Institute organizes projects related to democracy in different regions of Russia. However, the Institute's staff measures only the effectiveness of its specific programs, such as projects to promote non-governmental organizations: it does not evaluate the level of democracy in the regions.⁸ The United States Agency for International Development, the United States Peace Corps, and the European Union's Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program include a political assessment of regions in their decisions about where to work in Russia, but these assessments are derived from personal experience, advice from the Russian government, and word of mouth rather than standardized measures.⁹ Banks and business groups also have begun to rate regions of Russia, but these organizations are more interested in political stability than in democracy.¹⁰

OVERVIEW OF SURVEY

Ideally, democracy in Russia's regions would be measured by conducting in-depth research in each province. Unfortunately, the cost and time requirements of such an endeavor are prohibitive, because of the large number (89) of regions in Russia. Common proxies for

⁶See Clem and Craumer (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1996, 1997), Hough (1998), McFaul and Petrov (1997), O'Loughlin et al. (1996), and Solnick (1998).

⁷Her conclusions concern the consequences of local government being more or less democratic during the final years of the Soviet regime.

⁸Telephone interview by Kelly M. McManm with Tom Melia, National Democracy Institute (Washington office), winter 1997.

⁹Interview by Kelly M. McManm with Boris Iarochevich, First Secretary, Delegation of the European Commission in Russia, European Union, Moscow, March 11, 1998 and with Andrei Melnikov, Director of Programs, Western Russia, Peace Corps, Moscow, March 10, 1998.

¹⁰For example, a study sponsored by the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs examined politics in terms of the power and influence of the regional governing elite and the political orientation of the population (*Prezhnimiratel'skay*, 1997).

democracy, including turnover at elections and competition per seat, do not reflect a theoretical understanding of democracy, because it is not clear how particular levels of electoral turnover or competition lead to responsive government. Another proxy for democracy, votes for reformers, captures only citizens' attitudes, not the possibilities for actually exercising democratic rights.

As a first cut at this problem of measuring democracy within Russia, we conducted a survey of experts on regional politics in mid-1997. More specifically, we asked 40 experts on provincial politics to select, from a group of 57 Russian regions, the 10 most democratic and 10 least democratic regions. The pool of 57 regions consisted of Russia's 49 oblasts, 6 krais, and 2 federal cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg). We excluded republics, autonomous okrugs, and the one autonomous oblast because as ethnoterritorial regions they differ from the 57 administrative regions in a number of ways.¹¹ The former were designed as administrative-territorial units for non-Russian peoples and as such tend to have a smaller proportion of ethnic Russians.¹² On average these ethnoterritorial units also have fewer people and larger areas, are less industrialized and more economically dependent on Moscow, and are clustered in the North Caucasus and East Siberia.¹³

The two sets of regions differ so dramatically that we felt that comparing levels of democracy across both groups would provide little information. A few of our experts who did not follow directions and selected from all 89 of Russia's regions confirmed our suspicions. Based on the results from their questionnaires, republics tended to cluster at the less democratic end of the spectrum. Whereas the political differences between the two sets of regions present an interesting research question, our focus in this paper is on the 57 administrative-territorial regions, reflecting our desire to control for broad socioeconomic factors in order to explore why otherwise more or less similar regions exhibit such different levels of democracy.

The experts who completed our survey included members of universities and research centers in Moscow, representatives from the Russian presidential administration and Federation Council, and foreign scholars. We selected our experts using a snowball sample, because there is no defined group of experts on Russian politics and as a group experts are more difficult to reach than other populations, such as "the Russian public." Facing these constraints, we first compiled our own initial list of academics, researchers, and political consultants whose work focuses on the politics of Russia's regions. To create this list we relied on the second author's knowledge of the regional expert community, based on his own expertise in and work on regional issues in Russia and his leadership of a research group on the topic. As part of the survey, these experts, in turn, suggested additional potential respondents. Surveys

¹¹In the Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, the ethnoterritorial regions legally had greater privileges than the non-ethnic regions, but since the election of heads of oblasts, beginning with 13 oblasts in 1995, the political position of subnational units seems to depend more on their economic potential and their informal relations with Moscow.

¹²The average proportion of Russians in the ethnoterritorial regions is 53 percent, whereas in the oblasts, krais, and federal cities, the average is 91 percent. The data for these calculations are from 1989 in *Predprinimatel'skiy* (1997).

¹³On average the populations of republics, autonomous okrugs, and the autonomous oblast are less than half the size of the populations of oblasts, krais, and the federal cities, whereas the territories of the ethnic regions tend to be nearly one and one-half times larger. (Relationships between population and area do not change significantly when we exclude the small, densely populated federal cities from the second set.) Nearly half of the ethnic regions are clustered in two regions of Russia—the North Caucasus and East Siberia—and tend to be less industrialized than the administrative-territorial regions.

were then distributed to the recommended individuals; 26 of the 40 experts who received surveys returned them.¹⁴ Those who did not complete the surveys claimed that they were not familiar with a large enough number of regions or the particulars of their political life. The small sample size reflects the small number of experts on regional politics in present-day Russia.

We asked the experts to select regions based on Robert Dahl's definition of democracy. Dahl (1971, pp. 2-3) defined democracy as "a political system, one of the characteristics of which is the quality of being completely or almost completely responsive to all its citizens," meaning that citizens must be able "to formulate" and "signify" their preferences and have them "weighed equally in the conduct of the government." For these opportunities to exist, eight guarantees must be present: freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression, eligibility for public office, right of political leaders to compete for support, right to vote, free and fair elections, alternative sources of information, and institutions for making government policies depend on voters' preferences.

Dahl's definition is useful because it is both theoretical and easily operationalizable. Other definitions tend to exhibit only one of these characteristics. For example, classical definitions of democracy such as the "realization of the common good" or "governance by the people" describe the purpose or mechanism of democracy but provide few hints for application in actual research. On the other end of the spectrum, Freedom House (1998) clearly defines its measurements, using checklists of eight political rights and 13 civil liberties, but there is no theory that explains how these particular rights and liberties cohere and how they produce "freedom in the world."

Underlying Dahl's definition is a theory of how to create responsive government, which is the goal of democracy, according to Dahl. He explains the process for achieving this goal as one involving the formulating, signifying, and equal weighing of citizens' preferences, and lists eight institutions (guarantees) necessary to this process. The eight guarantees are concrete institutions and practices, which our respondents could use as guidelines to rate democracy in Russia's regions.

In the first part of the survey, respondents were asked to select democratic regions based on their own understandings of democracy, without Dahl's or any other definition being provided. In the first part, respondents also explained their top three most democratic selections and top three least democratic selections in their own words. In the second part of our written questionnaire, we asked respondents to perform the same task based on Dahl's definition of democracy, a synopsis of which was provided.¹⁵ By comparing responses in the two parts of the survey we were able to evaluate whether our experts had used Dahl's definition. We also included measures of reliability and knowledge in the first part of the survey, upon which we elaborate in our evaluation of the survey below.

RANKING OF RUSSIA'S REGIONS

Based on Dahl's definition of democracy, the experts ranked the regions as indicated in Table 1. To derive the ranking, we calculated the percentage of respondents listing each region as one of the 10 most democratic in Russia and then subtracted the percentage of

¹⁴Of the 26 respondents, 2 were foreign scholars residing in Russia at the time, and the remainder were Russian citizens.

¹⁵We requested that respondents not look at the second part of the survey until after they had completed the first.

Table 1. Experts' Ranking of Russian Regions by Level of Democracy^a

Ranking	Region	Percentage of respondents ^b	Ranking	Region	Percentage of respondents ^b
1	Saint Petersburg	94	28	Vladimir	0
2	Sverdlovsk	73	28	Volgograd	0
3	Nizhegorod	67	28	Vologda	0
4	Samara	62	33	Altay	-5
5	Moscow (city)	56	33	Astrakhan'	-5
6	Irkutsk	39	33	Belgorod	-5
8	Perm'	33	33	Chita	-5
9	Yaroslavl'	28	33	Kirov	-5
9	Krasnoyarsk	28	33	Pskov	-5
9	Murmansk	28	33	Rostov	-5
9	Novgorod	28	33	Smolensk	-5
9	Sakhalin	28	33	Stavropol'	-5
14	Novosibirsk	23	42	Amur	-11
15	Chelyabinsk	17	42	Ryazan'	-11
15	Kamchatka	17	44	Tula	-15
15	Leningrad	17	45	Voronezh	-16
15	Orenburg	17	46	Kemerovo	-20
15	Tyumen'	17	46	Orel	-20
15	Tomsk	17	46	Tambov	-20
21	Arkhangel'sk	12	49	Kurgan	-26
22	Kaluga	11	49	Lipetsk	-26
23	Kostroma	6	52	Saratov	-26
23	Magadan	6	52	Bryansk	-32
23	Tver'	6	52	Penza	-32
26	Moscow (oblast)	2	54	Krasnodar	-36
27	Omsk	1	55	Kursk	-68
28	Ivanovo	0	56	Ul'yanovsk	-74
28	Khabarovsk	0	57	Primor'ye	-79

^aAccording to Dahl's definition of democracy.

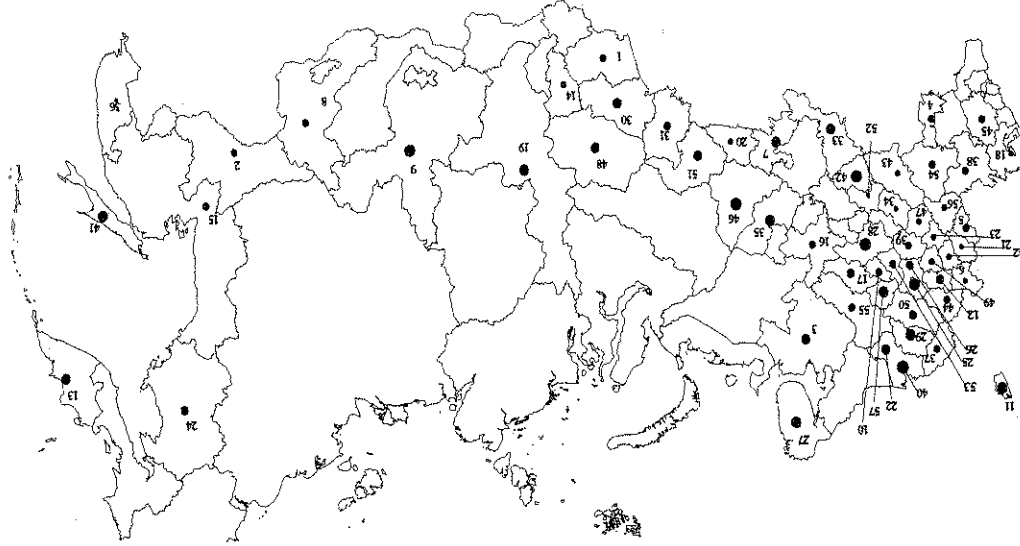
^bPercentage of respondents selecting each region as one of the 10 most democratic regions, minus the percentage of respondents selecting each region as one of the 10 least democratic.

experts who selected that region as one of the 10 least democratic.¹⁶ The ranking also is depicted on the map in Figure 1.

The results of our survey indicate that there is variation in levels of democracy among Russia's provinces, but from the map it is clear that there is no pronounced concentration, in certain parts of Russia, of either the most nor least democratic regions. Our experts' ranking

¹⁶The original most democratic and least democratic rankings appear in Appendix I.

Fig. 1. Levels of democracy in Russia's oblasts, krais, and federal cities. The size of the circular symbols plotted on the map are proportional to the level of democracy, with larger circles indicating higher levels of democracy. The northern tip of the Chukotka autonomous district is not shown on the map. Key to numbers on map: 1 = Altay Krai; 2 = Amur Oblast; 3 = Arkhangel'sk Oblast; 4 = Astrakhan' Oblast; 5 = Belgorod Oblast; 6 = Bryansk Oblast; 7 = Chelyabinsk Oblast; 8 = Chita Oblast; 9 = Irkutsk Oblast; 10 = Ivanovo Oblast; 11 = Kaliningrad Oblast; 12 = Kaluga Oblast; 13 = Kamchatka Oblast; 14 = Kemerovo Oblast; 15 = Khabarovsk Krai; 16 = Kirov Oblast; 17 = Kostroma Oblast; 18 = Krasnodar Krai; 19 = Krasnoyarsk Krai; 20 = Kurgan Oblast; 21 = Kursk Oblast; 22 = Leningrad Oblast; 23 = Lipetsk Oblast; 24 = Magadan Oblast; 25 = Moscow (city); 26 = Moscow (oblast); 27 = Murmansk Oblast; 28 = Nizhegorod Oblast; 29 = Novgorod Oblast; 30 = Novosibirsk Oblast; 31 = Omsk Oblast; 32 = Orel Oblast; 33 = Orenburg Oblast; 34 = Penza Oblast; 35 = Perm' Oblast; 36 = Primorsky Krai; 37 = Pskov Oblast; 38 = Rostov Oblast; 39 = Ryazan' Oblast; 40 = St. Petersburg; 41 = Sakhalin Oblast; 42 = Samara Oblast; 43 = Saratov Oblast; 44 = Smolensk Oblast; 45 = Stavropol' Krai; 46 = Sverdlovsk Oblast; 47 = Tambov Oblast; 48 = Tomsk Oblast; 49 = Tula Oblast; 50 = Tver' Oblast; 51 = Tyumen' Oblast; 52 = Ul'yanovsk Oblast; 53 = Vladimir Oblast; 54 = Volgograd Oblast; 55 = Vologda Oblast; 56 = Voronezh Oblast; 57 = Yaroslavl' Oblast.



should not be interpreted to mean, however, that some regions are fully democratic and other regions are non-democratic. Democracy is an ideal that no region of Russia nor country of the world, for that matter, meets completely. Furthermore, all the regions exhibit some signs of democracy, having elected some public officials and having reduced restrictions on civic activity, such as freedom of expression. The question is rather which regions have moved farther away from their nondemocratic pasts.

St. Petersburg occupies first place in the experts' ranking. Ninety-four percent of the respondents selected it as one of the 10 most democratic regions. In their explanations of their selections, the experts wrote that St. Petersburg exhibited "observance of political rights and tolerance," "free activity of different political organizations," and "the demonstrated rotation of power after elections."¹⁷

Between 56 and 73 percent of our experts also selected four other regions as democratic leaders. Sverdlovsk, Nizhegorod, and Samara oblasts and the city of Moscow occupy second through fifth place, respectively. The experts noted the "freedom of elections" and "diversified political life" in Sverdlovsk, and, for Nizhegorod, respondents mentioned the "autonomy of different groups" and the leeway afforded the political opposition. Experts selected Samara as more democratic in part because of the "freedom for opposition parties and [freedom] of the press." Our respondents wrote that "maximum political pluralism and tolerance [and] maximum observance of political rights" existed in the city of Moscow.

From this set of most democratic regions, the percentage of respondents selecting regions as more democratic drops fairly consistently. There tend to be clusters of a few regions having the same percentage, separated from those with higher or lower ranking by gaps of four to six percentage points. However, the last three regions in the ranking break this pattern. Between 68 and 79 percent of respondents selected Kursk Oblast, Ul'yanovsk Oblast, and the Primor'ye (Primor'skiy Kray) as among the 10 least democratic regions of Russia. The region just above them in the ranking, Krasnodar, was chosen as less democratic by only 36 percent of the experts. Kursk Oblast, Ul'yanovsk Oblast, and Primorskiy Kray therefore are outliers even among the less democratic regions.

Our experts considered Kursk as less democratic by virtue of the "cancellation of local elections" and the "absence of organized political life." For Ul'yanovsk they mentioned the "absence of an opposition" and noted that oblast parliamentary elections were postponed for political reasons. They cited the "suppression of opposition and the free press" in Primorskiy Kray.

As a group, our experts identified most of the regions as clearly more democratic or less democratic, but the level of democracy was highly disputed for 10 of the regions (indicated in boldfaced type in Appendix 1). Seven regions—Moscow (Oblast), Khabarovsk, Volgograd, Vologda, Pskov, Rostov, and Omsk oblasts—were selected as more democratic and less democratic by nearly an equal number of experts. The levels of democracy in the other three regions were disputed by only a few experts.

More than half of the experts listed the city of Moscow and Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast as the most democratic, but a few respondents also listed these regions as the least democratic. Similarly, more than one-third of the experts selected Saratov as less democratic, but a few respondents chose it as more democratic.

¹⁷The experts' written answers about their selections referred to the ranking of the regions based on their own understandings of democracy. As a later section of this article indicates, the rankings from parts one and two were almost identical, so the experts' comments are illustrative for both parts.

No single explanation can account for why the level of democracy in these 10 regions is highly disputed. The respondents who challenged the predominant judgments varied from region to region. No group of experts, such as the set of "communist" respondents, consistently accounted for the disputes.¹⁸ Familiarity with these regions also cannot explain why the level of democracy in these regions is more disputed. Nearly all experts have first-hand experience in the city of Moscow and Moscow Oblast, and respondents who knew a region well did not necessarily rate it differently than experts who were less familiar with it.

Discrepancies are most likely a result of genuine disputes about the level of democracy in these 10 regions. Although most respondents selected the city of Moscow as more democratic because of its political pluralism and observance of political rights, some respondents noted that the mayor rules with a strong hand, not accepting criticism of his own actions, for instance. Similarly, those choosing Nizhegorod as more democratic noted that the opposition can operate freely, whereas others labeled the oblast as less democratic because of the former governor's manipulation of mayoral election outcomes.¹⁹ Likewise, some experts found the legislative acts of the Saratov Oblast government to be democratic in nature, but a few questioned how democratic the legislative process and elections had been.

Interestingly, levels of democracy are not disputed for regions at the less democratic end of the spectrum. In other words, the least democratic regions in Russia are clearly less democratic, whereas the most democratic regions exhibit some nondemocratic features too. The agreement over the least democratic regions may suggest that it is easier to identify what is not democratic than what is democratic.

EVALUATION OF SURVEY

How useful is an expert survey of democracy in Russia's regions? Specifically, are our experts' judgments reliable and valid? By comparing experts' selections of regions with their rating of eight designated regions, we concluded that our ranking was relatively free from random error and used in a consistent manner (Appendix 1). To gauge the validity of the experts' assessments we included in our survey two measures of respondents' knowledge of the regions and two tests of our experts' conceptualizations of democracy.²⁰

To evaluate whether our respondents were familiar with the current politics of each region, we asked them to list the name of the leader of each region they chose. For the regions they selected, the experts wrote the name of the correct leaders for 85 percent of them, and approximately three-quarters of the incorrect answers were for Nizhegorod, where elections for a new governor were occurring during the survey period.²¹ Considering that Russia has 89 regions, 57 of which we included in our survey, an 85 percent correct response rate indicates that these respondents were knowledgeable about regional politics. The responses in this section also suggest that most respondents kept current on changes in the

¹⁸Our "communist" respondents were individuals who worked in the Communist Party of the Russian Federation—for example, people who worked for the Communist Party faction in the State Duma.

¹⁹As governor of Nizhegorod, Boris Nemtsov allegedly convinced his favored mayoral candidate to drop out of the elections so that they would be canceled. Polls suggested that the incumbent, the governor's political opponent, was likely to win. The incumbent mayor then lost his position by presidential decree, and the deputy governor served until elections were held a year and one-half later.

²⁰Our measures of knowledge were in the first part of the survey where respondents used their own conceptualizations of democracy to select regions. Since the responses for this part and the part based on Dahl's definition were highly similar, the knowledge measures are applicable to both the first and second parts of the survey.

Table 2. Respondents' Knowledge of Regions

Source of knowledge	Percentage of choices
Personal experience with the region ^a	34
Personal contact with representatives ^b	17
Familiarity with regional materials ^c	32
Knowledge through the central media ^d	16

^aAt least.^bBut no experience.^cBut no experience or contact with representatives.^dBut no experience, contact with representatives, or familiarity with regional materials.

regions. Respondents were aware, for example, that a new individual had recently replaced the former governor of Kemerovo Oblast.

As a second measure of the respondents' expertise, we asked them to indicate whether their knowledge of each region they selected was based on: (a) personal experience in the region; (b) personal contact with representatives of the region; (c) familiarity with materials from the region; and/or (d) knowledge of the situation in the region through the federal mass media. The results from this section confirmed that our respondents are experts. In contrast to non-experts, our respondents had personal experience with many regions and familiarity with numerous regional materials, such as newspapers: they did not simply rely on the central media in order to gain an understanding of regional politics (Table 2).

We did find that respondents' levels of knowledge were related to their judgments about democracy. Specifically, our experts are more knowledgeable about the regions they chose as more democratic than the regions they selected as less democratic. For their more democratic selections, 77 percent of their choices were derived from personal experience, whereas only 44 percent of less democratic choices were based on personal experience. Similarly, 43 percent of the most democratic selections and 18 percent of the least democratic choices were based on contact with regional representatives (Table 3).

This relationship between personal experience and democracy could result from the fact that experts assume regions with which they have not had contact are less democratic. On the other hand, respondents may not know less democratic regions as well, because these areas may offer fewer professional opportunities and their residents may have less contact with the liberal capital. Less democratic regions may be less likely to sponsor academic exchanges, host professional conferences, and send their elites to Moscow. Because reliance on regional materials and the central media was similar across the categories, we conclude that this latter explanation holds and that experts had sufficient knowledge of regions they selected as less democratic.

Our familiarity measures and entire survey suffer from an unavoidable weakness. Most likely each of our experts knows relatively little about some set of regions, and our familiarity tests cannot measure this because they evaluate an expert's knowledge of only those

²¹Three percent of the remaining 15 percent were incorrect answers and the others were left blank. Two respondents did not list leaders for either the most democratic or least democratic section, and one respondent did not list leaders for both sections. Since they left entire sections blank, we assume they either did not see the request or did not have time to fulfill it. For the incorrect answers for Nizhgorod, respondents listed the previous governor and wrote "farmer."

Table 3. Respondents' Knowledge of Most and Least Democratic Regions

Source of knowledge	Percentage of choices	
	Most democratic	Least democratic
Personal experience with the region ^a	77	44
Personal contact with representatives ^b	43	18
Familiarity with regional materials ^c	61	52
Knowledge through the central media ^d	26	31

^aAt least.^bBut no personal experience.^cBut no personal experience or contact with representatives.^dBut no personal experience, contact with representatives, or familiarity with regional materials.

regions he or she selected. Although we asked respondents to select from among 57 regions, each individual's knowledge may have limited their selection to a smaller pool of regions.

Poor knowledge of some regions may affect the ranking. Regions that no one selected fell in the middle of the ranking, and regions that few experts chose fell near the middle. Nonetheless, two factors allay some of our concerns about the influence of unfamiliarity on our ranking. First, only two of the 57 regions (Ivanovo and Vladimir) were not selected by any expert, suggesting that as a group our respondents were familiar with many of the regions. Second, we found that our respondents' current residence in Moscow did not indicate a geographic bias. A regression of average familiarity ratings for each region on the regions' distances from Moscow indicated that our experts were neither more nor less familiar with regions far from the capital. Unfortunately, neither of these analyses reveals how familiar each individual is with all 57 regions.

Media coverage also may influence experts' familiarity with regions and their selections. Regions that many respondents selected may simply receive greater media attention and thus be easiest for our experts to recall. To examine the possible influence of the media, we compared our ranking to a rating of central media coverage of the regions.²² A correlation of .545 suggests that there is a moderate relationship between media attention and our experts' selections. Looking at the middle of our ranking, we found that the regions that few respondents chose have the low media scores. For example, no one selected Vladimir and Ivanovo, and these regions received a score of 2 on the media scale. Most of the regions that only 5 to 11 percent of our experts selected also scored a 2, and two of these regions, Kostroma and Kaluga, received only a 1 on the media scale. Interestingly, the three least democratic regions, Primorskiy Krai, Kursk Oblast, and Ulyanovsk Oblast, did not all receive high media ratings despite the large numbers of respondents who selected them. Their scores were 4, 3, and 2, respectively.

²²A region's media rating is based on 14 factors of media visibility: a famous politician, exciting elections, power conflicts, struggles over ownership, large economic projects, international connections, territorial problems and border disputes, criminal activity and corruption, terrorism, political events and visits of nationwide significance, large cultural or sporting events, strikes, environmental and biological catastrophes, and a Constitutional Court decision regarding the region. The scale ranges from 1 to 4, 4 being the highest level of media coverage. We ran a correlation of the media scores and the absolute value of our ranking, the net percentage of respondents who selected each region as either more or less democratic. For a more detailed explanation of the media scale, see McFaul and Petrov (1998, pp. 135-138).

Overall, our comparison of the media and democracy rankings suggests that media coverage has more influence on our experts' selections. Regions that received little media attention were more likely to fall in the middle of the democracy ranking. However, these regions may actually be neither the most nor the least democratic regions in Russia. The most democratic regions may be in the news because true electoral competition, abundant civic activity, and political debates deserve media coverage. At the same time, the least democratic regions may be in the media spotlight because violations of democratic procedures and civil rights are so striking in these provinces. The regions between these two extremes may well receive minimal media coverage because little political activity takes place. Without the buzz of pluralism or the noise of egregious political behavior, these regions may simply not make the news.²³

Although the middle of our ranking may be weaker than the extremes, we are confident that our respondents were highly knowledgeable about regional politics and capable of ranking regions based on levels of democracy. But did our experts abide by our request to use Dahl's conceptualization of democracy (in the second part of the survey), or did they base their evaluations on other definitions of democracy that differ substantially from Dahl's conceptualization? We explored these possibilities by conducting two analyses.

In our first test we compared the ranking of regions based on the experts' own understandings of democracy with the ranking based on Dahl's definition. A correlation of .970 indicates that the relationship between the two rankings is extremely strong. While this result could mean that respondents ignored our request to use Dahl's definition in the later section of the survey, their explanations of their selections indicate that their own understandings of democracy are simply highly similar to Dahl's definition.

Without yet having read our description of Dahl's definition, 81 percent of the respondents wrote at least one of his eight institutional guarantees to explain their selections in the first part of the survey, and, on average, our experts cited two of his guarantees. Our respondents mentioned the presence of the guarantees as reasons for their selection of a region as more democratic and the absence of the guarantees as rationales for labeling a region less democratic.

The most frequently listed guarantees were freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, freedom to form and join organizations, and free and fair elections. For example, many respondents wrote "freedom of speech." Because independent media constitute one alternative source of information, we considered phrases like "freedom of the press" to capture this idea. Examples of the freedom to form and join organizations included "free activity of different political organizations" and "existence of a developed political party system." For free and fair elections, our experts wrote phrases such as "the democratic nature of elections."

The respondents also used the lack of Dahl's institutions as a sign that a region belonged in the least democratic category. For instance, our experts wrote "suppression . . . of a free press" and "restraining of journalists" to indicate that the right to alternative sources of information was weak. They used the same technique for elections, mentioning the "cancellation

²³A number of measures could be taken in subsequent surveys to better evaluate the influence of familiarity on the ranking. Our experts could rate all the regions of Russia. This approach would be time consuming and possibly less reliable and valid. Even an expert would have difficulty rating 57 or, ideally, 89 regions. It is likely that they would not be able to reproduce these ratings across time, and the enormity of the task could reduce their adherence to Dahl's definition. A more practical approach to the problem of knowledge is to have familiarity measures for all the regions, even those that respondents do not select. This would be more time consuming, but it would not prove too daunting. Furthermore, it would meet the objective of clarifying the impact of familiarity on our ranking.

of local elections" or single-candidate elections. One expert wrote about the elections in Kurgan, saying "the gubernatorial elections were [like] a bad movie."

Respondents did not mention four of Dahl's guarantees—eligibility for public office, right of political leaders to compete for support, the right to vote, or institutions for making government policies depend on voters' preferences. The often-cited idea of free and fair elections captures the first three, and in fact, scholars who have operationalized Dahl's definition tend to group these three guarantees under the institution of free and fair elections.²⁴ Similarly, Dahl's first seven guarantees and the entire definition reflect the final component, institutions for making government policies depend on voters' preferences. Because the final guarantee is captured by the other components, scholars tend to exclude it when operationalizing Dahl's definition (e.g., see Coppedge and Reinicke, 1990, p. 60). Therefore, although our experts did not cite all the components of Dahl's definition, they did employ the main tenets of his conceptualization of democracy, indicating that the ranking is based on a standard definition of democracy.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

Our rating underscores the uneven development of democracy within Russia, but what can explain this variation? As a first attempt to address this understudied question, we derived hypotheses from the literatures on democratization and Russian regions and tested them against our ranking. These hypotheses are presented in boldfaced type below.

The higher the level of urbanization in the region, the higher the level of democracy. The relationship between urbanization and democracy is well-grounded in theory and in empirical studies of other regions of the world. Cities tend to offer advanced education and provide easy access to mass communications and the outside world, conditions that encourage people to demand greater political participation and engage in political activity, according to modernization theory.²⁵ In the Russian context, advanced education and access to the outside world hinders the ability of local elites to control a population. To examine the relationship between urbanization and democracy in Russia, we compare the experts' ranking with the percentage of urban dwellers in each region.²⁶

The wealthier the region, the higher the level of democracy. Socioeconomic theories of democratization also propose a positive relationship between wealth and democracy.

²⁴See, for example, Coppedge and Reinicke (1990) and Gasiorowski (1990).

²⁵One school of democratization theory attributes democratic development to a country's structural characteristics such as socioeconomic development. Examples from this school of thought include Deutsch (1961), Inkeles (1966), and Lipset (1959, 1994). The other school of democratization attributes democratic development to particular patterns of interaction among national elites. Although scholars continue to debate the applicability of both sets of theories to postcommunist countries, many have reached a consensus that elite interaction theories best illuminate democratic transition and socioeconomic theories are most useful to understanding democratic consolidation. See, for example, Gunther et al. (1995), O'Donnell et al. (1986), and Przeworski (1991). We test a socioeconomic hypothesis here because "levels of democracy" refers to the success of democracy in the medium term, not the initial extraction from a nondemocratic regime. By electing their parliaments and leaders and reducing restrictions on civic activity, such as freedom of expression, all the regions we examine have extracted themselves from the nondemocratic regime. Our focus is on the fact that some have distanced themselves to a greater extent than others. Some works in the debate about the applicability of democratization theories to postcommunist countries include Bova (1991), Bunce (1995a, 1995b, 1998), Ekiert (1992), Karl and Schmitter (1994, 1995), Linz (1995), McFaul (1993), Offe (1991), and Terry (1993).

²⁶Unless indicated otherwise, the data used to test the correspondence between the experts' ranking and the various hypotheses were obtained from *Predprimarnel'skiy* (1997).

These theories suggest that a wealthy society is a better breeding ground for democracy than an impoverished one. By reducing everyday hardships, increasing leisure time, encouraging longer time perspectives, and diversifying interests, wealth promotes democracy, the theories contend. We evaluate the possible influence of wealth on democracy in the Russian context by comparing our ranking and the percentage of average income to the subsistence wage in each region. The subsistence wage, or *prozhivochnyy minimum*, is the amount of money needed to survive in a given area.²⁷

The greater the economic reform in the region, the higher the level of democracy. With marketization and democratization occurring simultaneously in many states of the former Eastern bloc and Latin America, scholars initially predicted that economic reforms would undermine democratic development because short-term costs would encourage citizens to vote or throw reformers out of office (Nelson, 1994, pp. 21-22). Alternatively, by insulating the state from voters' demands or through deception concerning economic policies, reformist incumbents would abandon democratic reform in order to maintain their positions (Przeworski, 1991, p. 138; Evans, 1992, pp. 139-181; Haggard and Kaufman, 1992, pp. 18-20; Nelson, 1994, p. 22).

However, as time passed, experience indicated that many of the underlying economic and political assumptions did not hold, and marketization and democratization may, in fact, be compatible or even symbiotic. Radical economic reforms do not necessarily lead to sharp economic declines, the costs of economic liberalization have been lower than predicted, the diffuse effects of economic reform have hindered collective action by opponents, and economic liberalization has weakened the bargaining power of potential opponents (Geddes, 1995, pp. 64, 66-67; Hellman, 1998, pp. 209, 223). Furthermore, electoral reversals or pressure have not led to the abandonment of reform, and inclusive politics can undertake radical economic reform (Hellman, 1998, pp. 215, 230). Marketization may even benefit democracy by increasing legitimacy through economic improvements, by creating a class of people invested in reform, and by reducing the perception that the state is the source of all capital and economic benefits (Mizsei, 1994, pp. 114, 14; Nelson, 1994, pp. 20, 25, 26).

We hypothesize that economic reform does promote democracy and test our claim in the Russian context. We capture the idea of economic reform by relying on an index that includes the percentage of industrial subsidies in the regional budget; the amount of budget subsidies for 100 rubles of agricultural production; the percentage of privatization in the trade, dining, and services sectors; the percentage of goods and services with regulated prices; and the level of regulation of food prices.

The more democratic the leader of the region, the higher the level of democracy. Observers of Russian politics often attribute a region's political character to its governor because of Russia's tradition of a single strong leader and the lack of independent legislative and judicial systems. Thus, some argue that democratic regions are regions with democratic leaders. This idea of leaders' overwhelming influence resonates with the elitist school of thought, which suggests that democracy can be implemented from the top down.

To evaluate the relationship between leaders and democracy, we asked the respondents to rate leaders' levels of democracy on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being more democratic. To test for a relationship, we compare our experts' ranking of regions with their rating of the leaders.

²⁷See, for example, Lipset (1959, 1994). For the official definition of *prozhivochnyy minimum*, see Goskomstat Rossi (1996, p. 76).

The higher the vote for Yel'tsin in the region, the higher the level of democracy. Some regions of a country may be less democratic because citizens in those territories are not as supportive of democracy. The pluralist school of democratic theory implies that the nature and policies of a polity reflect the wishes of the citizens in that territory. Although levels of democracy vary across Russia's regions, all provincial governments likely reflect their residents' desires to some extent. Elections may not be completely free and fair, and some restrictions on freedom of expression may remain. Nonetheless, leaders are likely aware of citizens' wishes, and they try to maintain civil peace by fulfilling at least some of them.

We examine the relationship between citizens' attitudes and regional democracy by comparing our ranking with the percentage of the vote that incumbent President Boris Yel'tsin and Yabloko candidate Grigoriy Yavlinskiy won in the first round of the 1996 Russian presidential elections. The vote for Yel'tsin and Yavlinskiy is a good proxy for citizen support for democracy because in the 1996 election these candidates represented the democratic, reformist end of the spectrum, whereas the other contenders represented the nondemocratic (in the sense of Dahl), communist or nationalist end of the spectrum.

To evaluate these five possible explanations for variation in regional democracy, we first graphed each variable (x-axis) against our democracy ranking (y-axis) (Fig. 2). The graphs depict positive relationships between our ranking and three of the variables—urbanization, leaders, and voting outcomes. For each of these three variables, all but three regions—Primorsky Krai, Kursk Oblast, and Ul'yansovsk Oblast—fall along an upward sloping line. The democracy scores for these three regions are considerably lower than the ratings of other less democratic regions. Nonetheless, our tests indicate that these three outliers do not have a significant effect on the relationship.²⁸

Compared to the other three variables, wealth and economic reform do not seem to be as useful to understanding variation in regional democracy. Wealth is not a good predictor of democracy because it is similar for nearly all the regions but Saint Petersburg, Tyumen' Oblast, and Moscow, which are considerably wealthier.²⁹ However, even without these outliers the graph does not reveal a relationship (Fig. 3). A relationship also is not discernible between economic reform and the experts' ranking of regional democracy. At most of the points on the economic reform index, there are similar clusters of cases.

To explore the relationships between democracy and each of the variables further, we regressed our ranking on the five variables. In Model A we included all the variables, and in Model B we use only urbanization, leader, and vote, the three variables that exhibit linear relationships on the graphs. In a final set of regressions we excluded one of the five variables each time. We present the data for one of these regressions as Model C in Table 4.

²⁸To evaluate the influence of these three outlying regions, we regressed the democracy ranking on the urbanization, leader, and vote variables twice—once with the three outliers and once without. The coefficients for the three variables are fairly stable with and without the outliers: for urbanization .76 (.29) and .95 (.25), for leader 1.11 (1.63) and 8.40 (1.44), and for vote .32 (.27) and .24 (.22). (Coefficients are unstandardized and standard errors are in parentheses. When the outliers are included $n = 55$. Vladimir and Kostroma were excluded from the regression because respondents did not rank their leaders.) As a second test of the influence of the outliers, we calculated their predicted values from the regression equation that did not include them. The three outliers remain among the less democratic regions, but the predicted values differ somewhat from the original ranking: for Primorsky Krai -.16 and -.79, for Kursk -.27 and -.68, and for Ul'yansovsk -.12 and -.74 ($n = 52$). Based on the stability of the coefficients and adequate predicted scores, we decided to keep the three outliers in the data set.

²⁹These three regions are positioned (from left to right) at the far right of the graph of Wealth versus Democracy in Figure 2.

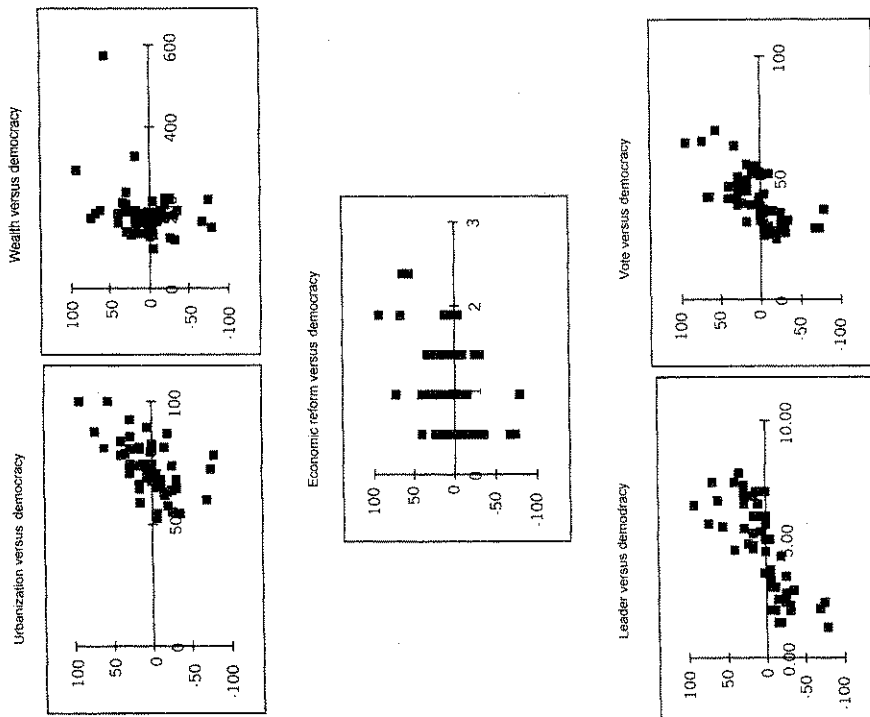


Fig. 2. Five possible explanations for variations in democracy across the 57 regions.

The positive coefficients for all these regressions indicate that the five independent variables have a positive effect on the level of democracy. This illuminates the economic reform debate, suggesting that economic reform may promote instead of hinder democracy; however, because the coefficient for the economic reform variable is not stable across the regressions we have less confidence in this estimate. The coefficients for the other variables are fairly stable.

By removing one variable at a time, we found that the leader variable was most important to the regression equation. The standard error of the regression drops significantly only when this variable is absent (see Model C in Table 4). This means that the forecast for the level of democracy in a region is less accurate only when the leader variable is excluded from the analysis. Therefore, to judge the level of democracy in a region, we should definitely consider the political orientation of the region's leader.

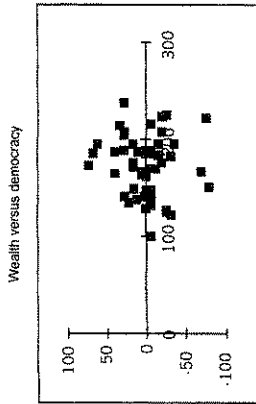


Fig. 3. Wealth as a predictor of democracy, with outliers removed.

Table 4. Tests of Explanations for Democracy^a

Variable	Model A	Model B	Model C
Urbanization	.65*** (.30)	.76*** (.29)	1.20** (.38)
Wealth	.04 (.05)	—	.04 (.06)
Economic reform	7.44 (5.81)	—	18.05*** (7.28)
Leader	10.40* (1.70)	11.11* (1.63)	—
Vote	.21 (.29)	.32 (.27)	.24 (.39)
Standard error of regression.	20.33	20.43	26.70
Adjusted R ²	.62	.62	.35

^aMultiple regression of democratic ranking on five variables. * = $p < .01$; ** = $p < .05$; *** = $p < .10$. Coefficients are unstandardized, and standard errors are indicated in parentheses. Vladimir and Kostroma oblasts were excluded from the regression because the respondents did not rate their leaders; thus $n = 55$.

In evaluating which variables have the greatest effect on the level of democracy, we must keep in mind that the variables are measured on different scales. We can control for the different scales by considering the percentage change in the scale. For example, the effect of economic reform on democracy seems large. A one point change in economic reform places a region 7 to 18 points higher in the democracy ranking (depending on the model used). However, the economic reform scale ranges only from 0 to 3. So this change in democracy requires a 33 percent jump in economic reform. This interpretation suggests that economic reform is not as strong an influence on the level of democracy as the raw coefficient indicates.

The leader variable appears to have a greater impact on level of democracy. This measure is scaled from 1 to 10, so a coefficient of 10 means that a 10 percent change in the leader's political orientation results in approximately a 10-percentage-point increase in the democracy ranking. The effects of the other variables are small, even when we factor in the range of their scales. The urbanization and vote variables are on a scale from 0 to 100. The values for the wealth variable range from 101 to 575 percent.

The data above indicate that the urbanization and leader coefficients consistently reach statistical significance at the .10 and .01 levels, respectively. However, we must interpret the p values cautiously. In general p values indicate the probability that a relationship between variables is a byproduct of sampling instead of a true, empirical relationship. If we are examining the relationship between democracy and these variables only in the 57 oblasts,

krajs, and federal cities and only at the time of our survey, then the p values provide little additional information, because we are testing our hypotheses not in a sample of Russian regions, but in the universe of Russian regions in which we are interested.

Before drawing conclusions from graphs and statistical tests, we examined whether highly disputed cases or inadequate measures affected our results. The ten highly disputed regions (Appendix 1) could have hidden relationships between the variables and democracy. However, we found that excluding these cases did not reveal stronger relationships. The standard error of the regression did not improve significantly, and the coefficients were not substantially affected.

We thought that wealth and economic reform may appear to have little influence on democracy because we were measuring them inadequately. People do not always accurately report their income, so we used the number of personal automobiles per 1000 individuals as an alternative measure of wealth. However, this did not improve our results. Our economic reform measure may be poor because Russian economic statistics often are unreliable, and indices tend to be inexact measures of single concepts. Unfortunately we were unable to find a better measure of economic reform. As the study of Russian regions develops further, we will have more information about how to best measure concepts such as wealth and economic reform at the provincial level.

Overall our analysis suggests that positive relationships exist between leaders' orientations, urbanization, popular support for democracy, and the level of democracy in regions. And leaders' orientations have the largest effect on levels of regional democracy. Based on this evidence, we should not, however, leap to the conclusion that the main cause of regional democracy is democratic leadership, followed by urbanization and public support for democracy.

As we mentioned above, some of the variables may not exhibit relationships because of poor measurement. On the other hand, the influence of the leader's orientation may be stronger because of the way we measured it. The same individuals rated both the regions and the leaders, and an individual's perception of the political character of a leader probably influences the individual's perception of politics in the region and vice versa. This increases the likelihood of a strong relationship appearing in our data.

Drawing conclusions from this preliminary analysis is also challenging because our ranking is based on expert opinion. There is the risk that a relationship between a variable and our democracy ranking may indicate not a true relationship in the world but our experts' understanding of democracy. From their explanations of why they selected particular regions, we know that our experts relied on Dahl's definition more than any other. However, respondents could give multiple reasons for their evaluations, and an analysis of their answers also suggests that other conceptualizations of democracy did influence their judgments.

Our experts mentioned all five of our variables in their explanations. The importance of leadership was most often cited, with 52 percent of the 21 experts who provided explanations mentioning leadership. For example, one respondent included Perm' Oblast in the most democratic category, explaining that "[Governor] Igumnov is a normal man and intelligent." Another expert cited poor leadership as a reason for weak democracy, writing about Primorskiy Kray, "the leader is a 'half-bandit' whom is so far allowed to do as he wishes." The expert also noted that the governor of Orel Oblast had a "paternalistic approach" and thought "oblast = family, and I am the head."

Among our five variables, voting outcome was the next most popular explanation. Thirty-three percent of our experts mentioned voting behavior as one of the reasons for their

selections. For example, one respondent noted the "anti-communist orientation of the residents" of St. Petersburg, whereas another expert mentioned the "consistent communist mood of the voters" of Bryansk. Urbanization and economic reform each were cited by 19 percent of our experts. For example, one respondent defended the choice of St. Petersburg as democratic by writing "democratic nature of a big city." Another expert noted that Sverdlovsk Oblast is an "urbanized and industrialized area." The respondents represented both sides of the economic reform debate: some cited economic reform as an aid to democratic development, whereas others considered it a hindrance. A respondent chose Sverdlovsk Oblast as most democratic because of "reform in the economy of the region," yet another selected Primorskiy Kray as least democratic because of the "parasitic-nomenclatural character of privatization."

Only 10 percent of our experts cited wealth as a reason for their selection. Take, for example, the respondent who wrote, "of the subjects of the federation [the city of Moscow is] the richest." Another expert used lack of wealth as a rationale for placing Kursk Oblast in the least democratic category, noting the "severe economic crisis" in the oblast.

Our experts also cited two other factors that they believe are related to democracy. Forty-three percent of the respondents mentioned separate, independent governmental institutions as being important for democracy. For example, one respondent noted the "real division of power . . . [and] independence of courts" in Sakhalin Oblast. Another expert mentioned the importance of "multi-centered . . . balance of powers" and strong oblast parliaments in St. Petersburg and Perm'. The same expert explained that the independence of the oblast parliament from the governor of Arkhangel'sk Oblast made this region more democratic. For Sverdlovsk Oblast, a respondent wrote that the "conflict between the governor and the mayor [of the provincial capital Yekaterinburg] results in greater political choices."³⁰

Other respondents wrote about how a lack of separate, independent institutions can hinder democratic development. One expert listed Moscow city as one of the least democratic regions and noted that the metropolis had "pocket prosecutor and internal police organs." Another respondent selected Kemerovo as one of the least democratic regions, citing the "sabotage" of the oblast parliament by the administration.

Twenty-four percent of our experts mentioned crime as important to democracy. One respondent noted that a strong mafia hindered democracy in Penza Oblast and a weak mafia was less detrimental for democracy in Perm'. Another expert cited "the growing together of criminals, local power, and the old directorate" as a reason for rating Primorskiy Kray as one of the least democratic regions.

Dahl's definition was more popular than these other understandings of democracy, with 81 percent of respondents having cited its main tenets, but we must not underestimate the implications of multiple understandings of democracy. In particular, these multiple understandings of democracy may account for why there was more disagreement about the most democratic cases than about the least democratic cases. Perhaps it is easy to identify regions that lack the standard components of democracy, such as free and fair elections and a free press, and to label them less democratic. However, multiple conceptualizations of democracy may indicate that our experts believe that the more democratic regions should have additional features, including independent institutions and ethical leaders.

The experts' explanations also provide some insight into the relevance of Western conceptualizations of democracy to Russia. Our respondents were able to apply the standard

³⁰Interestingly, another expert claimed that the "war" between the governor of Primorskiy Kray and the mayor of the provincial capital Vladivostok weakened democracy in the kray.

Western conceptualization of democracy, as embodied by Dahl's definition, to Russia. However, most of our experts also mentioned two other factors as being important to democracy: leadership and independent institutions. The elitist school of Western democratic theory emphasizes the importance of leadership, but institutional theory has overshadowed elite theory in recent years. Leadership may be critical, however, in the Russian or, more broadly, postcommunist contexts where institutions are weak and elites have fewer constraints on their actions.

By emphasizing the importance of independent institutions to democracy, our experts were highlighting the weakness of their current institutions. One means to empower governmental institutions is to provide them with unique rights and responsibilities that other groups cannot override. The idea of independent institutions or separation of powers has been an important component of American political doctrine, although, interestingly, Dahl's definition of democracy does not capture this idea. Dahl's conceptualization is based on the idea of pluralism, and his focus is on pluralism in society. He does not emphasize the fact that the governmental institutions should themselves be pluralistic, in the sense of separate and independent. By Dahl's definition governmental bodies that are connected and dependent can be responsive—as long as his eight guarantees are present.

These multiple understandings of democracy also have implications for our conclusions about why levels of democracy vary within Russia. Our data suggest that leadership may strongly influence the level of democracy in a region, but these relationships may appear in our data because respondents selected regions based on this factor. Or these relationships may exist both in the minds of our experts and in reality. This tension between perceived and true relationships is an unavoidable consequence of using expert opinion to measure democracy.

In drawing conclusions about provincial democracy in Russia, it is also important to remember that we excluded republics, autonomous okrugs, and the autonomous oblast from our survey. We suspect that most of the republics would be rated as the least democratic. Thus, in an investigation of provincial democracy in all 89 regions of Russia, socioeconomic conditions would likely play a greater role than they do in the oblasts, krais, and federal cities alone. Perhaps lower levels of industrialization, sparser populations, and greater ethnic heterogeneity in republics and autonomous okrugs hinder democratic development, whereas, as a group, oblasts, federal cities, and krais do not face these hurdles. The latter units seem to have reached a socioeconomic threshold that enables democracy to develop. Perhaps only poor leadership hampers democratization in these regions. A meaningful rating of democracy in all 89 of Russia's regions would enable us to better explore these ideas.

Conclusions about the causes of democracy also are difficult to reach because correlation does not establish causation. Our preliminary analysis cannot rule out the possibility that some intervening or confounding factor may promote democracy. Our graphs and regression results also cannot reveal the direction of causality. For example, democracy in a region may produce a democratic leader and democratic publics. Furthermore, even if leadership, urbanization, and public support are the "causes" of democracy, our statistical analyses do not explain how these three factors promote democracy. "A democratic leader equals democracy," "an urban setting equals democracy," and "a democratic public equals democracy" are not completely satisfying explanations.

Additional research would enable us to draw stronger conclusions about the causes of subnational variation in democracy. The literature on the Russian economy may suggest more appropriate measures for wealth and economic reform. Only by devising and applying

more refined measures for wealth and economic reform would we be confident that a relationship does not exist between these factors and democracy.

Perhaps additional case studies also would help us reveal causes of subnational variation in democratization. Case studies can provide confirming or disconfirming evidence for such questions as whether leaders create democratic regions or whether this is just a common belief among experts. Case studies also may suggest the strength and direction of causality. Such an approach would help refine the finding that leadership, urbanization, and voting outcomes are statistically related to levels of democracy, given the caveats above.

DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA'S REGIONS SINCE 1997

Since we administered our survey in mid-1997, has the extent of democracy in Russia's regions changed? Is progress toward democracy relatively permanent, or have the most democratic regions fallen in the ranking? Can obstacles to democracy be overcome within two years, pushing the least democratic regions up in the ranking? To explore these questions we examined political events since 1997 and repeated the survey in an abbreviated manner, with approximately half of the original respondents, in the fall of 1999.

Provincial political life in 1998 and 1999 was marked by the increased prominence of regional elites in the national political arena. Cabinet replacements brought Nizhegorod notable Sergey Kiriyenko and two Petersburg elites, Sergey Stepashin and Vladimir Putin, to the Kremlin, thus increasing the role and significance of Nizhegorod and Petersburg at the federal level. During Boris Yel'tsin's second term as president, regional leaders played an active role in some of the elite clans that struggled fiercely for power. Foremost among these regional leaders were Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, who founded the movement Otechestvo (Fatherland); Samara governor Konstantin Titov, who headed the first of the "governors' blocks" (Golos Rossii); and Petersburg governor Vladimir Yakovlev, who led the Vsyá Rossiya (All-Russia) Bloc.³¹ The governors of Saratov, Kemerovo, and Sverdlovsk oblasts as well as Krasnoyarsk Krai also became more active in the federal political arena.

Although certain regional leaders distinguished themselves at the national level, in general, political life within the provinces from the middle of 1997 until the beginning of the Duma elections in 1999 did not change dramatically. During these two and one-half years, a series of regional elections were held. Particularly noteworthy were the gubernatorial race in Krasnoyarsk Krai in the spring of 1998; legislative elections by the "executives' lists" in Saratov Oblast and the city of Moscow; pro forma gubernatorial elections in Kemerovo, Orel, and Nizhegorod; and the Petersburg Zakonodatel'noye Sobraniye election at the end of 1998—one of the dirtiest electoral contests in the country. During this period a wave of corruption scandals broke across a series of regions, involving both former leaders (in Vologda, Tula, and Vladimir oblasts as well as Krasnoyarsk Krai) and incumbents (in Kursk, Voronezh, Tula, Magadan, Tver', and Kaliningrad oblasts).

Our experts' new ranking differed little from their previous one, reflecting the fact that political life in the regions had changed minimally. Sverdlovsk and Samara oblasts and the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow again appeared as the most democratic regions, but Nizhegorod fell from their ranks, whereas Perm' Oblast joined them. With the departure of Governor Boris Nemtsov, Nizhegorod lost its role as the showcase of reform, emphasizing the importance of leadership in the country. Perm's rise is not surprising, considering that it

³¹The Otechestvo and Vsyá Rossiya blocs ultimately merged to run as "Fatherland-All Russia" (or ONR) in the 1999 Duma elections.

appeared as the eighth most democratic region in the previous ranking and our survey is an inexact instrument. Interestingly, St. Petersburg did not fall from the top of the list despite its scandalous elections and the continued perception of Yakovlev as a less democratic leader. This suggests that other components of democracy weathered the dirty race and that perhaps the scandals reflect an open and competitive political environment.

Kursk Oblast and Primorskiy Krai were among the less democratic regions, as were Krasnodar Krai, Saratov Oblast, and Orel Oblast, which also had fallen near the bottom of the first ranking. Ul'yanovsk Oblast no longer appeared second to last in the ranking, perhaps having lost its title of the "red horror" to Krasnodar Krai. Ul'yanovsk's relative improvement may capture a change in media exposure as well as increased anti-democratic politics in other regions. Since the reelection of Yuriy Goryachev in Ul'yanovsk, the central mass media lost interest in the oblast as a model of orthodox communism.

The elections to the State Duma in December 1999 marked a reversal of center-periphery trends. The strongest regional political movement Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya (Fatherland-All Russia) finished worse than expected, in third place behind the Communist Party and the newly created party of power Yedinstvo (Unity).³² The national government further undercut the trend toward regionalism by excluding Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya from the parliamentary alliance between Yedinstvo and the Communists. As regional figures lost influence, Vladimir Putin ascended, ultimately winning the presidential race and calling for a recentralization of power.

Fewer surprises occurred at the regional level, where the management of Duma elections in the provinces resembled the administration of previous races. In the less democratic regions, such as Primorskiy Krai and Ul'yanovsk Oblast, governors strongly influenced the outcome of the elections by using their privileged positions. In Primorskiy Krai, Governor Yevgeniy Nazdratenko's support for Yedinstvo resulted in strong media criticism of Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya, undermining earlier popular enthusiasm for the regional movement. In Ul'yanovsk Oblast, Goryachev violated electoral laws and campaigned for his candidates for the Duma on the day before the elections, resulting in victory for each of them, according to the opposition's accounts (East-West Institute, 1999).

In the more democratic regions, the Duma elections illustrated that the governors did not have a monopoly on power. Forces in opposition to the governors were able to campaign and successfully place their candidates in the Duma. In St. Petersburg, Yakovlev's favored party, Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya, finished in third place, and in Nizhegorod the regional movement made a poor showing behind the Communists, Yedinstvo, and the reform party Soyuz Pravyykh Sil (Union of Right Forces), despite Governor Ivan Sklyarov's strong support for it (East-West Institute, 1999). Overall, Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya's weak showing in the democratic regions, other than those governed by OVR leaders, suggests that these provincial executives do not control political outcomes and pluralism truly exists in these regions.

While the role of the regions in national government changed dramatically between the middle of 1997 and the end of 1999, political life in most regions remained relatively stable. According to our experts and events in the regions, the most democratic provinces continued to exhibit characteristics of democracy, and the least democratic regions remained less democratic.

³²For an analysis of the returns from the 1999 Duma elections, see Clem and Craumer (2000)—Ed. PSGE.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our ranking of democracy in Russia's regions is far from ideal; however, it can provide a starting point for the study of subnational variation in democracy. The survey itself can be improved to increase confidence in the reliability and validity of the results. For example, the inclusion of additional measures of familiarity would enable us to examine more carefully the impact of expert knowledge on the ranking.

More important than improvements to the survey per se is the search for how to measure democracy across Russia's regions. We hope that this paper will encourage such a search. Case studies are critical to the study of political reform in Russia, and we suggest using them to better understand causality in the relationships our data revealed. However, case studies have not measured democracy in a standard fashion across Russia's regions.

Despite its weaknesses, our ranking is a decent first attempt to measure democracy in Russia's regions. Most importantly, it reveals that in less than 10 years considerable political variation has developed among Russia's regions. The ranking also suggests some new research questions. Why are some regions outliers? Why is the level of democracy less clear for some regions? Students of politics also can use the data to monitor changes in political reform over time. They can investigate the permanence of the new democratic practices and institutions and can explore why democratic reform may be more ephemeral in some regions than in others. Finally, scholars can test their explanations for subnational variation in democracy. By measuring provincial democracy in the same manner across all 57 regions, our survey should contribute to a better understanding of political reform in Russia and help identify generalized explanations for variation in provincial democracy.

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Appendix 1. Most and Least Democratic Rankings^a

Ranking	Region	Percentage of respondents selecting region as 1 of 10:	
		Most democratic	Least democratic
1	Saint Petersburg	94	0
2	Sverdlovsk	78	5
3	Nizhgorod	78	11
4	Moscow (city)	72	16
5	Samara	67	5
6	Irkutsk	44	5
6	Kaliningrad	44	5
8	Perm'	33	0
9	Krasnoyarsk	33	5
10	Yaroslavl'	28	0
10	Murmansk	28	0
10	Novgorod	28	0
10	Sakhalin	28	0
14	Novosibirsk	28	5
15	Moscow (oblast)	28	26
16	Leningrad	22	5
16	Tyumen'	22	5
18	Chelyabinsk	17	0
18	Kamchatka	17	0
18	Orenburg	17	0
18	Tomsk	17	0
22	Arkhangel'sk	17	5
23	Kaluga	11	0
24	Tver'	11	5
25	Khabarovsk	11	11
25	Volograd	11	11
25	Vologda	11	11
28	Pskov	11	16
28	Rostov	11	16
30	Saratov	11	37
31	Kostroma	6	0
31	Magadan	6	0
33	Omsk	6	5
34	Astrakhan'	6	11
34	Belgorod	6	11
34	Chita	6	11
34	Stavropol'	6	11
38	Tula	6	21
39	Kemerovo	6	26
39	Orel	6	26

(continues)

Appendix 1. Continued

Ranking	Region	Percentage of respondents selecting region as 1 of 10:	
		Most democratic	Least democratic
39	Tambov	6	26
42	Krasnodar	6	42
43	Ivanovo	0	0
43	Vladimir	0	0
45	Altay	0	5
45	Kirov	0	5
45	Smolensk	0	5
48	Amur	0	11
48	Ryazan'	0	11
50	Voronezh	0	16
51	Kurgan	0	26
51	Lipetsk	0	26
53	Bryansk	0	32
53	Penza	0	32
55	Kursk	0	68
56	Ul'yanovsk	0	74
57	Primor'ye	0	79

^aOrdered by most and then least democratic ranking. Disputed regions are indicated in bold type.

Appendix 2. Procedure for Assessment of Consistency of Experts' Rankings

After the experts selected regions based on their own definitions of democracy, we asked them to rate eight regions (Volgograd, Saratov, Orel, Kursk, Rostov, and Irkutsk oblasts and Krasnodar and Krasnoyarsk krais) on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most democratic. By comparing results from these different sections (the rating of the eight regions and the experts' ranking of most/least democratic regions), we evaluated whether the experts consistently rated the regions in the same fashion. For example, we examined whether a respondent placed Rostov below Volgograd but above Krasnodar in both his/her own selection of democratic regions and in the rating of the eight regions we requested. We selected regions that we expected to fail neither at the more nor less democratic end of the spectrum, but in the middle. Consistent ratings of these more confusing cases would increase our confidence in the reliability of our measures. At the same time, we selected pairs of neighboring regions, from different parts of Russia, that exhibited political differences. For example, political orientations of the regional leaders and voters vary within the set and in some cases within a single neighboring pair. These similarities and differences helped us evaluate whether our experts used the rating scale in a similar fashion.

We found that our experts' responses were reliable. Of the 23 experts who rated the eight regions, three confused the direction of the scale and another five gave one or two regions ratings that differed by one point between the two sections. The fact that the experts' evaluations were more or less consistent across sections suggests that respondents' mistakes were not too detrimental to our results.

From the ratings of these eight regions we could also determine that our experts used the scale in a similar fashion. Nearly all of the respondents gave all the regions scores in the middle of the scale, as we would expect. None of the experts placed all of the regions on either end of the spectrum. And, only a few experts gave this set of regions a wide range of ratings, such as from 2 to 9, on the scale of 1 to 10. Overall, there was consistency in how the respondents used the rating scheme.