MEDIA AND POLITICAL LEADERS IN RUSSIA: AGENDA-SETTING TIME SERIES ANALYSIS (2001 – 2004)

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science

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June 2005

This thesis entitled

MEDIA AND POLITICAL LEADERS IN RUSSIA:
AGENDA-SETTING TIME SERIES ANALYSIS (2001 – 2004)

by

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has been approved for
the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
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MATUKHNO, NATALIA S. M. S. June 2005. Journalism

Media and Political Leaders in Russia: Agenda-Setting Time Series Analysis (2001 – 2004) (73 pp.)

Chair of thesis: Joseph Bernt

The purpose of this analysis is to establish the directions of influences between newspaper coverage and public opinion in Russia. The newly political developments made researchers question the existence of pluralism of opinions and freedom of press in the Russian Federation, taking into account an unconventional approach to political reforms of the president Vladimir Putin. The analysis compares both the public opinion and the newspaper coverage of the four prominent Russian political figures, Vladimir Putin, Gennady Zuganov, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and Grigory Yavlinsky. The method employed in this paper is time series analysis, namely vector autoregression with Granger causality tests. It allows incorporating both dependent and independent variables with their several lags to test for direction of causality. The study explores causal relationships between two media variables (coverage in a government-oriented newspaper, *Izvestia*, and a more liberal, business-oriented paper, *Kommersant*) and two public opinion ones (approval and informational ratings). There is no clear indication of the governmental newspaper's pressure over the business-oriented paper or the public opinion; there are only few indications of Putin's variables directly influencing the coverage or the public opinion of the other opposition leaders.

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Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Joseph Bernt, my mentor, for unconventional wisdom and guidance throughout my last year; Dr. Thomas Hodson for the financial assistance throughout this project and support; Dr. Genie Baker, for her eye-opening course on research methods; Mark Leff for his support and understanding and valuable discussions on current mass media and political events; Dr. Guido Stempel for wise remarks and assistance with this thesis project; Dr. Anne Cooper-Chen for being an understanding advisor and graduate chair throughout my two years at the Scripps School of Journalism; Dr. Hugh Culbertson for his caring attitude; Dr. James Mosher for technical guidance and support with my research; and, of course, my husband and my mother for their support and encouragement.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Russian democratic media have been rapidly developing for the last 15 years. They have been an influential agent in construction of the new open society that complies with the norms of a free democratic state. Recent events in the mass media community, however, have made researchers rethink their approach toward democratic Russia. This study analyzed the relationships among public opinion, media attitude and the coverage of the political leaders in Russia. Since Vladimir Putin's election as President, there has been much discussion about whether Russia remains a democratic state or has moved gradually toward authoritarianism. One of the most valuable indicators of the freedom of society is the behavior of the media: how independent they are and whether they are controlled by the state or the public. The most accurate reflection of that is internal relations between the media content and various indicators of public opinion. Causal relationships are of special interest for this analysis. Interdependency among variables would indicate either pluralism of opinions or state pressure over both media and public.

The most common definition of a democratic mass media system can be described as the following: "In such a system, the population must have access to the media; there must be a significant degree of pluralism in all media, either internal or external; the press should reflect different views and ideologies; and the press must not be under control of the state or under the control of such a limited number of private owners that pluralism is limited" (Becker, 2004). Rose described an ideal democratic society in his analysis of the

current state of Russian democracy as that a modern democratic society had to be transparent to the public especially in regard to its governmental actions, and there should be constant flow of feedback from the governed to the governors (Rose, 2001).

The First Amendment has been a hallmark of media freedom in the United States. Russian media law is among the most liberal in Europe; however, it is questionable whether actual practices truly reflect the fact that journalists in Russia are free to express their opinions. Does pluralism exist? How applicable are the principles of the First Amendment to the practice of political journalism in Russia? How important is the protection of freedom of the press to the government? Does it even exist if concrete journalistic practices are examined?

A broad overview of the basic political developments in Russia during the last decade is essential to understand the Russian media environment, which was analyzed in this research. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, allowing all of the republics to establish their own independence and move toward founding their own democratic states. Russia can be characterized as a presidential republic, in which the executive branch unquestionably has significant influence over other power structures. The parliament consists of two branches: the Senate and the Duma. The Senate is comprised of the local governments' representatives, while the Duma deputies are elected every four years by the population. Half of the deputies are elected based on party proportional representation; and the other half are elected through single-member districts. The most controversial election in the last decade was obviously the 1996 presidential election, in which voters were facing the dilemma of choosing between the unpopular president and the communist challenger. The election had been portrayed as a vote for or against the

'red scare,' and despite minimal single-digit support of the population, Boris Yeltsin, the incumbent, was reelected for a second presidential term. The 1995 parliamentary elections resulted in a diversified parliament, in which the whole spectrum of political forces was represented, from ultra-liberal groups to communists.

The turn of the century brought some unexpected changes. After appointing and firing four prime ministers during a single calendar year, in August 1999 President Yeltsin chose Vladimir Putin (virtually unknown to the public) for this high-ranking post. The 1999 parliamentary elections had been characterized by a vicious battle between the two so-called parties of power, Otechestvo and Edinstvo. Edinstvo won a sizable part of the Duma seats. Since 1999, the Communist Party had been losing power as gradually shown in the results of both the 1999 and 2003 elections. After the parliamentary election, on New Year's Eve of 1999, Yeltsin resigned and appointed Vladimir Putin as acting president. Putin emerged as a charismatic figure – the strong leader for whom Russian society had hoped. He easily won the election of 2000 (Gennady Zuganov and Grigory Yavlinsky were among his opponents); and, with even larger support of the population, won the election of 2004. However, major political opponents had been complaining for four years that Putin had been exercising an authoritative style of governing, not allowing pluralism of opinions, and constructing a closed political system in pursuit of a strong Russia.

For the past two years the U.S. media have been critical of emerging authoritarian patterns in the relationship between the Russian government and media. The accusations were that the mass media served only the government and that opposition forces had no access to national media outlets. U.S. researchers noted that several major television

outlets with national reach had been closed or had been placed under stricter government control. The coverage of the war in Chechnya became more favorable to the government than to the insurgents. Both Russian and American scholars emphasized Putin's division of the media into state and anti-state and his placement of state interests above the interests of the media. Apparently, Putin has been judging the media according to their level of loyalty to the government (Herspring, 2004).

The time period for this research was 2001 through 2004, and this study consisted of the analysis of monthly data from open-access sources of public opinion as well as major newspaper outlets. Monthly data allowed for controlling for causal dynamics between variables of interest. Using time series analysis based on monthly data made it possible to trace the dynamics of the mass media coverage of the government versus coverage of the opposition. Was there a trend of silencing the opponents of the regime and not letting them have access to voters? How much freedom did media demonstrate? How dependent were they on government pressure rather than public opinion? Did public opinion cause an increase or decrease in coverage? Did time series analysis indicate the direction of influence to be from the major media outlets to the public opinion or vice versa?

Data on the media were obtained from the two leading Russian newspapers, *Izvestia* and *Kommersant*, which mirror two leading U.S. newspapers (*The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*) in their orientation toward target readerships. Formally independent, *Izvestia* is nevertheless viewed as more of an official state newspaper in its orientation; while *Kommersant* is slightly less conservative and serves a broader business readership (Vedrashko, Zaplenyuk, 2004). In addition to newspaper

coverage, a prominent survey organization, Foundation of Public Opinion (FOM), has provided various surveys for the past ten years. Within the available surveys on its website are valuable data on the popularity of politicians, numbers of mentions of politicians, informational ratings, numbers of appearances on TV, electoral ratings, and other useful aggregate figures. In addition to gathering information through FOM surveys, this study also mined FOM surveys for data on Putin as President; Gennady Zuganov, the head of the Russian Communist Party; Vladimir Zhirinovsky, head of the Liberal Democratic Party; and Grigory Yavlinsky, head of the Yabloko party, as the most prominent opposition leaders. Data on those figures were incorporated into a dataset as a separate time series.

The purpose of this study was to establish causal relationships between the coverage of prominent leaders in the two major newspapers, their informational ratings, and their approval ratings. The direction of causality helped imply some conclusions about the degree to which media can express their own opinion, whether they have to follow public opinion or government pressure. The intermixing of influences can serve as a better indicator of a pluralistic system, while a distinct cointegration and following the same direction can provide objective characteristics of an authoritarian pressure of the government on both media outlets and public opinion. Little attention has been devoted to the scientific approach to the recent Russian developments. Scholars have addressed these questions through qualitative research rather than quantitative studies. This study attempted to demonstrate the role of the media system in Russia, through a quantitative analysis based on an agenda-setting approach that has not been applied to the Russian political and media systems.

In a democratic system, the public should be well informed and should participate at least to some degree in policy formation. This study attempted to determine whether the public was well informed about both the government leaders and their opponents, using the most contemporary examples of Vladimir Putin and his major political rivals. It attempted to also show whether all of the prominent political figures had access to the media, to what extent they were allowed to communicate their ideas to the public, and whether the public was receptive to them.

Beginning with the year 2001, Russia has experienced several crucial events on the political stage. The Kursk nuclear submarine sank in August 2001, evoking a panicking response from the world community. In April 2001 the independent television channel had been reorganized and most of the journalists who were not loyal to the government left the channel. Also in April the two prominent parties, Unity and Fatherland – All Russia, merged. The other significant development in the Russian political scene was obviously the attack against the U.S. in September 2001 and the subsequent increased collaboration on the war on terror between the United States and Russia. In 2002, the largest Russian independent television station, TV-6, was closed. Later, in June 2002, the authorities allowed its reopening with a new name, TVS. In October 2002 terrorists with connections to Chechen rebels took more than 800 people as hostages in a Moscow theater, which led to more than a hundred dead. In December 2002 suicide bombers attacked the administrative buildings in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. More than 50 people were killed in the attack. In June 2003, the TVS station was closed. The managers claimed that the station was closed due to financial reasons, though the move had been criticized as another attack on media freedom. In July and

August 2003, two other suicide bomber attacks took place, killing more than 60 people. In October, oil oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky was arrested. In December 2003, more than 40 people were killed in a bomb attack on a passenger train. Also in December the Duma elections took place, with the Kremlin-backed party gaining control over the parliament. This was followed by the presidential elections in March 2004. In February 2004, a suicide bomb attack in the Moscow metro killed 40 people, followed by a bomb assassination of the Chechen president, Kadyrov, in May 2004. In August 2004, two passenger planes crashed because of suicide bombers on board. In September 2004, hundreds of children were killed in a school siege in Beslan. In September 2004, Putin strengthened national security measures and announced appointments of regional governors with approval by local parliaments (BBC News Service, 2005).

Explanation for the choice of sources

Izvestia is presumably the largest newspaper in Russia that represents an official point of view. It also serves as an agenda setter, and it has authority among Russian decision makers. Formally, it is an independent media outlet that is owned by its employees and several businesses. *Izvestia's* circulation is 243,500 copies daily, and *Kommersant's* circulation is 77,348 copies.

Voltmer studied *Izvestia* in terms of analyzing current Russian journalistic practices, and found that over the past decade journalists adopted many new norms. "There are clear signs of growing professionalization with the news becoming more factual, more timely and broader in the selection of topics. At the same time, we still find a high degree of subjective evaluations indicating the persistence of the historical legacy

of Russian journalism" (Voltmer, 2000). Voltmer mentioned that *Izvestia* had evolved from an official party organ to a respected quality daily. Her research showed that foreign policy was not a primary topic of news in *Izvestia*. Nevertheless, she noticed some negative trends in 2000. "During the presidential campaign the ills of Russian journalism – political interference in editorial policy, lack of balance and objectivity – became all too evident once more. Election coverage was generally heavily biased in favor of Putin" (Voltmer, 2000).

Adam Jones conducted a case study on *Izvestia*. He inferred that, even though the paper formally abandoned Soviet ties to the government, unofficially it remained under the strict control first of the State Duma, and then of oligarchs. Since the article was written in 2002 and Berezovsky no longer owns *Izvestia*, it could be added that now the paper is mostly controlled by the government. As a practicing public relations person until recently, working with the major Russian media outlets on an everyday basis, the author can add that *Izvestia* had the strongest reputation as a tribune of government as compared to other newspapers. Jones noted that *Izvestia*'s core constituency is upper-middle and upper-class intellectuals and professionals, including decision makers. He also argued that after Putin came to power, *Izvestia* was highly influenced by the Kremlin (Jones, 2002).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Agenda-setting studies

Agenda setting describes the process of gaining the attention of the public and elites to specific problems or topics. In terms of definitions, an agenda is a collection of problems and solutions that come to the attention of officials and the public (Birkland, 2001).

Most agenda-setting studies have been conducted in the United States. The classic study by McCombs and Shaw in North Carolina demonstrated the existence of the agenda-setting function of the media (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The correlation they found between the emphasis given an issue by the news media and the voters' perception of the same issue was .967. Since the McCombs and Shaw study was published, many scholars have studied the influences on agenda setting (Anderson, 1978, Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, Cobb and Elder, 1972, Downs, 1972, Flemming, Wood, and Bohte, 1997, Jones, 1994, Kingdon, 1995 Light, 1991, Peters and Hogwood, 1985, Walker, 1977).

McCombs and Shaw studied the role of media in the U.S. presidential campaign of 1968. They selected undecided voters and interviewed them prior to November elections. Researchers asked voters what the main issues on their agenda were, what were the main things they thought the government should concentrate on, and what they were concerned about. They aggregated responses into five main campaign issues (foreign

policy, law and order, fiscal policy, public welfare, and civil rights) most frequently mentioned by the respondents. The media agenda was measured by counting the numbers of articles and broadcast stories in the nine media outlets. The authors found a significant and relatively strong correlation between the rank order of the five issues on the media and public agenda. For example, foreign policy was ranked as most important both by the public and in the media. The significance of this method was that McCombs and Shaw used both content analysis and surveys of public opinion that were combined for the first time in mass communication research (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

Funkhouser concentrated more on the actual prominence of the issues in reality, ranking them according to the quantity of articles versus the public's importance ranking (Funkhouser, 1973). Later, McCombs and Shaw expanded their own study and explored the direction and strength of the media influences on the public agenda. The results were not always clear-cut; however, they indicated that the newspapers were causing the changes in public perceptions, not vice versa (McCombs and Shaw, 1977). Lang and Lang asserted that media were not as effective in telling people what to think as they were in pointing out what to think about (Lang and Lang, 1983). Weaver addressed the salience of topics; as the prominence of a topic increased on the media agenda, it increased on the public agenda as well (Weaver, 1975). Dearing and Rogers noted that people took cues from the media as to which issues were on the top of the agenda (Dearing and Rogers, 1996).

In U.S. agenda-setting studies, most scholars agree that the national media market is relatively consistent in bringing similar issues to the agenda. For example, Berkman and Kitch noticed any topic was first brought up by the most influential news

organizations and then picked up by the majority of media outlets nationwide (Berkman and Kitch, 1986).

Many researchers have focused on the relationships among the policy agenda, the media agenda, and the public agenda (Miller and Wanta, 1996, Takeshita, 1997). The frequency of media stories is broadly used as an indicator of whether a topic is prominent on the media agenda.

Media scholars are divided on the issue of whether newspapers and broadcasters are independent of government control (Siebert et al, 1956; Cater, 1964; Dunn, 1969) or whether they are acting as instruments in the hands of power elements of the society (Tuchman, 1978; Gitlin, 1980; Altschull, 1984; Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Trumbo created longitudinal models of public issues using global warming as an example. The first part of his work provided a valuable theoretical overview of agenda-setting research. He divided previous studies into four dimensions: 1) the domain of the agenda-setting effect, 2) the methodology for studying the effect, 3) the conditions under which the effect operates, and 4) directionality. McCombs suggested that the strongest evidence for agenda setting could be obtained by using aggregate data and ranking sets of issues. Originally, researchers simply compared the media's and the public's rank order of issues; then they moved to cross-lagged correlations. Trumbo used Granger-verified cross-lag correlation. Agenda-setting effects are more likely to occur with national and international rather than local issues. Trumbo discovered that print attention leads television attention. Public concern and television attention were in an indirect feedback relationship with newspaper attention and opinion polling (Trumbo, 1995).

The time series analysis of agenda setting studies can bring an interesting

perspective to the field. The most noted studies involved with panel studies, in which each variable consisted of many cases (such as respondents in surveys). Time series deal with aggregate data, gathered over an extensive period of time (usually at least 40 to 50 observations). The first attempts employed correlations of variables; and the next wave of studies incorporated regression analysis. The first study using cross-lagged correlations was done by Watt and van den Berg on media coverage and complaints to the Federal Aviation Administration telephone service (Watt & van den Berg, 1978). Another important study examined public opinion and media coverage in regard to civil rights from 1954 to 1976. The monthly lags used for correlations were from one to five, thus checking for correlations from one to five previous periods (Winter & Eyal, 1981).

One important study conducted in 1985 used regression analysis (controlling for autocorrelation) of television coverage and public opinion on such issues as energy, unemployment, and inflation. They used Durbin-Watson statistics to check for autocorrelation for the first order autoregressive process (Behr and Iyengar, 1985). A study by Smith employed regression analysis of public concerns, media agenda, and public evaluations of local governments using eight annual surveys. This time-series cross-sectional approach also included Granger causality that helped to prove causal temporal relationships among variables (Smith, 1987).

ARIMA modeling was the first major development in time series studies, mostly adopted by economists. ARIMA modeling is a simple univariate model that integrates autoregression and moving-average components. In agenda-setting studies ARIMA modeling was used by Rogers, Dearing, and Chang on polling agenda, the science agenda, real-life agenda, media agenda, and the policy agenda. Each of the series was

modeled using ARIMA and then each of the ten pairs was tested for causality using Granger tests (Rogers et al, 1991).

Dearing and Rogers had made a list of the most common generalizations in the agenda-setting studies. After the historic 1972 study, it had been assumed that over a certain period of time different media gave similar salience to an issue. Media tend to agree on how much time and space they dedicate to a problem. Another common generalization that was first investigated by Funkhouser in 1973 is that the media agenda is not particularly correlated with real-world events. Overall, the White House, the *New York Times* and trigger events (those that initiate a concern) seem to have the largest influence over the U.S. media agenda (Dearing and Rogers, 1996).

Returning to Funkhouser's conclusion that real world indicators did not have a significant influence on agenda setting, another study should be mentioned. Behr and Iyengar (1985) studied surveys and broadcast stories (prominence of issues both in public opinion and journalists' newscasts) and found that real-world indicators (changing national indicators) lead to an increase of issue prominence on the news and public agenda.

Contemporary Russian media history studies

Since Russia's media system has always been a relatively narrow yet stable area of research among Western and non-Western scholars, some of the most recent examples are examined in this literature review. A number of newspaper and magazine articles have criticized the current media environment in Russia. The most significant indicator of a growing authoritarianism is the newly established Security Doctrine, which states that

the most reliable information in terms of national security should come from the government and the state media should rely solely on governmental sources. In 2003 the nation's largest political scandal developed because of the arrest of a prominent businessman, YUKOS chief Mikhail Khodorkovsky. He is one of the most powerful oligarchs in Russia, with extensive connections in media and politics. He allegedly attempted to express his aspirations for the presidency; he was accused of corporate tax evasion and arrested. In the West this case largely was portrayed as a retreat from democracy as well as from freedom of political expression. This and some other cases led to a hostile reaction from the major international media and civil rights organizations, which expressed their concern about the recent changes in the Russian media (Herspring, 2004).

In 2003 Freedom House lowered Russia's rating to 'not free.' The causes for the change presented in its report were the closure of the last independent national television broadcaster, negative government influence over public and private media, and continuing attacks against journalists. President Putin had declared 'guided democracy' despite proclaiming constitutional freedom of expression. Even if the majority of newspapers are privately owned, most of them are controlled by oligarchs to represent their interests (Freedom of the Press, 2003). A number of American scholars also have assessed the Russian political media environment. Becker focused specifically on the evolution of the freedom of the Russian press and overall understanding of the political mass media system. He asked whether the state is still a major threat to media freedom. The year 2003 proved a crucial one for establishing guidelines for Russian democracy. The International Press Institute's Watch listed Russia as one of five countries that are

'endangered with becoming repressive.' Putin was named as one of the ten worst enemies of the press for 2001 by the Committee to Protect Journalists. The Worldwide Press Freedom Index ranked Russia 121st out of 139 countries. However, Becker argued that the circumstances are not as dire as during the pre-Gorbachev period (Becker, 2004).

The researchers seemed to be inconsistent in describing the state of Russian media market. In the most recent literature, Yeltsin's negligence in terms of human rights and freedom of speech had been portrayed mostly as favorable for the media, but in reality, he was dependent on oligarchs to keep power and did not use his authority to limit their ambitions in the media market. The most infamous oligarchs were Boris Berezovsky (who controlled the biggest TV channel - ORT, plus numerous print outlets) and Vladimir Gusinsky (whose media empire consisted of a prominent opposition TV channel - NTV, radio stations, and print media). After Putin came to power, they were both deprived of their influence and some of their assets; currently they are both abroad claiming that return to Russia would be life threatening. Gusinsky, Berezovsky, and Khodorkovsky do not play the major roles that they did three to four years ago. The underlying trends behind why the Russian population and the Russian media react to Putin's policies the way they do have not been studied sufficiently. Despite new developments, the Russian media and the population are mostly supportive of Putin.

O'Loughlin provided his perspective on why Putin still enjoys such popularity among Russians. O'Loughlin and colleagues conducted a survey to determine which different population groups supported either President Putin's geopolitical view or those of his extra-liberal or extra-nationalist opponents. They discovered that Putin's storyline was accepted by Edinstvo (the government party) supporters, males, Westernizers,

singles and young adults; they found the opposition party line was accepted by Communist Party members, the elderly, Muslims, women, the poor, and residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg (O'Loughlin et al., 2004).

Yuri Levada, the head of Moscow polling firm Levada Center, has noted that Putin's 2004 victory was not surprising and the electoral blow to democratic aspirations was consistent with sociopolitical trends (Levada, 2004). However, Levada had lost his position as a head of the VTsIOM polling company the year before, supposedly with Kremlin pressure, so his view might be distorted. Levada pointed out that most Russian respondents equated democracy with economic prosperity. They favored economic prosperity over multiparty elections and political pluralism (Levada, 2004).

Nevertheless, a comparison of the different approaches researchers took in analyzing the Russian press at the end of 1990s and after 2000 presents a dilemma. Researchers' assessments of the media at the end of 1990s are mostly critical, and there are no significant alterations of these conclusions several years later. Previous years of Russian press history had been modified to appear in a more favorable light than has been the case during Putin's era.

Brown suggested that media self-censorship had been developing rapidly among journalists. He did not notice any major government moves to restrict press freedom; however, he attributed media self-regulation to an old Soviet habit of self-control because of fear of punishment from the Soviet government (Brown, 2001). Laura Belin suggested that there was significantly less freedom of the press at the end of the 1990s than at the beginning of the decade. For example, Yeltsin recognized his need for media support in 1996, so he appointed a loyal journalist as chief of the state-run broadcast company RTR.

Most private networks provided negative coverage of most of the government's policies prior to the presidential elections; however, given the Communists' alternative, they all preferred to support Yeltsin in order not to lose all of their recently obtained freedom. Thus, most of the media broadly supported Yeltsin in the presidential campaign. Later, private media returned to a critical view of government actions. Most journalists hoped, however, to regain their independence after the 1996 election, but they were mistaken. The oligarchs, media owners, used this opportunity to establish closer ties with the Kremlin and influence the government for their own interests (Belin, 2001).

Belin was also surprised by the unusually large number of dailies (more than a dozen) in Moscow, an almost unthinkable number for any other major Western city. She explained that the media became a tool in the hands of oligarchs and were not entities that generated profits, according to Belin, but propaganda instruments. As an example, she cited a conflict between *Izvestia* and one of its major stakeholders, LUKOIL. Eventually, the editorial staff split and established its own daily; some employees preferred to stay with the old newspaper to more thoroughly reflect stakeholders' interests. Belin also argued that there was no proof that Putin or his campaign staff had influenced any major broadcasters in order to receive more favorable coverage, as had been the case with Yeltsin's campaign (Belin, 2001). In a later article, Belin insisted that Putin's policy of less pluralism and more self-censorship became more pronounced with time. For example, during the 1999 parliamentary campaign, many regional leaders, assuming the Kremlin's approval, used the media under their control to promote opposition to the Fatherland - All Russia Party. Soon after, Putin granted the federal authorities the right to appoint executives of the state-owned radio and television companies. During the 2000

presidential campaign, some of Putin's opponents, such as Grigory Yavlinsky, found it difficult to gain exposure on television or in large-circulation newspapers. However, Belin recognized that there was little resistance against Putin's policies among journalists. She drew the conclusion that the Kremlin was skillful at exploiting the existing divisions in the media community (Belin, 2004).

Goldman analyzed the current state of affairs in regard to the Putin versus Khodorkovsky case. He acknowledged that the heavy lobbying by the Yukos chief for his interests in various governmental agencies and the parliament collided with Putin's policies, which is a common practice in other developed democracies; it did not coincide with Putin's conception of a strong state. The oligarchs, with their past misdemeanors, were an easy target. Putin's approval ratings soared to 80 percent following Khodorkovsky's arrest, and a nationalist party not connected to Putin – Rodina – won a significant number of seats in the December Duma elections in addition to a government party (Edinstvo) majority in the Duma (Goldman, 2004). Rodina represented the right wing of the Russian political spectrum and it was critical of Putin; however, it criticized the president from a different opposing perspective than Khodorkovsky.

Ryabov added to the concept of the contemporary mass media environment as less democratic; he classified some important changes that happened when Putin came to power, which allowed researchers to see the media perspectives more positively. He pointed out that one of the goals of Putin's government was to restrict voices critical of the executive branch. He emphasized, however, that the elites had definitely lost control the media; there was less oligarchic supervision and the state was less directly involved in media matters. He also insisted that the media role had diminished from participantion in

the decision-making process into ordinary information tools for leading political actors. The skeptical public attitude towards the media had been mostly derived from Putin's overwhelming popularity; therefore, most of the critical stories about the president had evoked a hostile reaction against the media. Both the elites and the public sought order and stability. The messianic role that the media adopted from the late 1980s to early 1990s had transformed into a cautious rational role. Ryabov also said that pluralism had been preserved under Putin as it had been launched under Yeltsin (Ryabov, 2004).

Vartanova, in her overview of the Russian media market, mentioned that Yeltsin had shaped the media environment; he was interested in the oligarchs' control over media, because they kept the president in power. She also argued that growing media commercialization was a negative trend in current media development. "Under present conditions some state interventions such as support for satellite and digital television, safeguarding media diversity, encouraging domestic film production, providing universal public access to the Internet are demanded by the society. However, any interference in the activity of media companies, manipulation of news flows or media content is viewed as an infringement of basic human rights " [sic] (Vartanova, 2004).

Simon's opinion also supports the choice of the media outlets for this research. He acknowledges the fact that *Izvestia* is one of the two major dailies in the Soviet Union. He then expanded on the overall history of the development of the Russian media. During Yeltsin's regime, oligarchs accumulated substantial power, including the ownership of major media outlets. Yeltsin was dependent on oligarchs, since he did not enjoy majority public support and had to use other means to stay in power. Two of the major media conglomerates were under the control of Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky.

Simon also offered his own classification of media ownership under Yeltsin's rule: oligarchical, state, Western, and criminal (Simon, 2004). This classification adds to the argument that the transition from Yeltsin to Putin was not necessarily move from democracy to autocracy.

Further, Simon provided his own interpretation of parliamentary elections. While the 1995 elections were mostly about a struggle between pro-reform and anti-reform parties, the 1999 elections were about two 'parties of power,' and which one would look more legitimate and accumulate more public support. The role of the media was more crucial in the 1999 elections, since the government's party, Unity, was virtually unknown to the general public. In 1995 most of the election was shaped by political campaigns and political advertising. In 1999, ORT and RTR, the two main state broadcast channels, dedicated most of their coverage to Unity. For example, ORT devoted 28% of its election coverage to Unity and only 14%, mostly negative, to Fatherland-All Russia (FAR). The Zhirinovsky block, another opposition party, got more coverage than FAR. However, it has to be noted that two slightly smaller channels, TV-Tsentr and NTV, supported FAR. In general, Simon draws a line at the 1996 elections, claiming that thereafter the media never regained their independence. They became tools to pursue their owners' interests. Putin as a new president had definitely been portrayed in a more positive light than Yeltsin. His image was based heavily on his personality, and his presidential campaign mostly relied on his being an incumbent. "According to the European Institute for the Media, the media coverage was overwhelmingly dominated by Putin. Although less confrontational than in the parliamentary campaign or the previous presidential elections, it still fell short of international standards" (Simon, 2004). Putin's key aspiration became

to restore the integrity of the Russian state. As a part of this restoration, a Doctrine of Information Security was introduced, a doctrine that tightened state relationships with the media (Simon, 2004).

Nath acknowledged that after the collapse of the Soviet Union the press became more objective; however, negative 'muckraking' stories prevailed in the press. He recognized that during elections, candidates were given relatively equal attention by the media. Chechnya and corruption in the government also were given enough coverage in the media. He did not notice any troubling trends in terms of erosion of press freedom; however, new circumstances tempted the media to move in a more profitable direction, such as publishing more sensational, yellow journalism (Nath, 2001).

McNair recognized that Russian media had adjusted to the shift from the political pressure of the authoritarian Soviet government to the market pressures of the oligarchs. He also argued that Russia is an important case for social scientists, since changes that took a century in the U.S. and Europe unfolded in Russia in less than a decade. He then argued that the media were still free, despite the criticisms. For example, in the 1996 and 2000 elections, voters were exposed to information on corruption of politicians, and public figures were exposed to critical scrutiny by the media (McNair, 2000).

Shleifer and Treisman offered their own version of the current developments in the Russian political system. First they provided an abstract of existing criticisms of Russian democracy: the government was accused of manipulating elections through control and censorship of the press; voters were uneducated and easily deceived; big businesses supported their own political candidates in order to gain more influence. They suggested that the Western accusations had been grossly overblown. Since Shleifer is an

economist, he asserts that Russia is one of the most successful among middle-income countries. For example, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe had characterized Russian elections as free and fair. Compared to American voters, apathetic Russian voters were still participating in much larger numbers. As for incumbents, who were supposed to have the most power and to win the elections, all of the contemporary Russian elections refute this hypothesis. Many election results came as a surprise. Shleifer and Treisman pointed out a very important detail about the criticism of Russian media. They noticed inconsistencies: for example, that in the 1990s the press had been mostly criticized for being controlled by oligarchs; and now, starting in 2000, the same type of criticisms were leveled against growing state control. Western critics charged the oligarchs with press harassment; now they charge the state with the same thing. The researchers are biased and forget that in almost every country the major broadcast and press outlets belong to a few individuals or to governments. Media are free overall when compared to their peers in any other middle income capitalist democracy (Shleifer and Treisman, 2004).

Methodology of media and election studies and usage of surveys

Overall, there have not been a large number of studies on the Russian elections. About two dozen works offered major contributions to the literature of Russian election studies. Since in this thesis the research questions ask whether Putin dominated the informational sphere without allowing his opponents the right to talk and whether approval ratings are directly dependent on the agenda setting functions of the media, it seemed appropriate to provide an overview of approaches undertaken in regard to

Russian election studies. In this analysis, the FOM aggregate survey results would be used to conduct a time series analysis. FOM is a Russian polling company, one of the oldest and most reputable in the country. FOM was founded in 1991. The main consumer of the Foundation polling services is the Presidential Administration. Starting with the 1996 elections, the Foundation has been providing the Administration with latest survey results on public opinion. In addition to that, FOM had conducted surveys for the USIA, ROPER STARCH, BBC, Stanford University, Eurasia Foundation, and various embassies in Russia. The Russian political and media landscape has been mostly studied using survey research and an interpretive approach. Content analysis and game theory are rare but useful additions to the area of studies.

White, Rose, and McAllister made a useful comparison of various types of surveys that have been conducted in the Russian Federation. The first and the most widespread one is a current events survey. There is a certain number of well established survey companies on the market (FOM, VTsIOM, Levada Center, Demoscope, and ROMIR). The above mentioned researcherss believe current events surveys are useful but only in terms of time series analysis, when the same types of replies can serve as a measure of social trends. The next type of survey is a sponsor model, when a survey is financed by a commercial entity in order to conduct marketing research. The third is a Western type, a destination model. American researchers assume that Russians want to become ‘just like us’ and thus measure the Western standards of democracy and evaluate Russian attitudes according to those standards. However, most data show that Russians have become more and more reluctant to adopt totally the Western model of development and prefer to pursue their own, special way. The fourth type is an origins model that

allows researchers to test for attitudes that were framed during the Communist regime, which obviously had significantly influenced the Russian people. Most of the adult population in contemporary Russia grew up under Communism (White, Rose, and McAllister, 1997).

A contrasting example to the major Western scholars' works is an article written by a Russian researcher, a senior analyst for one of the survey companies. Sedov's article is a good representative example of the Russian scholars' approach. It was translated and reprinted from the Russian journal, *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*. The author works as a senior analyst for the leading Russian public opinion polling company, VTsIOM. He provides an overview of the Russian electorate and its evolving attitudes towards their political and social systems. At first the article surprises the reader by a seeming lack of cohesion and standard structure common in the publications of leading U.S. political science journals. The article exploits a wide variety of surveys conducted by VTsIOM over a ten-year period. Sedov provided empirical support for his analysis of why Russians favor reforms one way or another (Sedov, 2003).

Sedov used an extensive historical context. He traced major transitions of the electorate from one party to another. For example, he described how the Communist Party was able to recreate its image from that an international socialist to a nationalistic imperial one, thus recapturing some of the Liberal Democratic Party electorate. Sedov followed trends in the Russian electorate's opinions regarding the preferred political or economic system. Although, in this example he did not do so, given his unlimited access to all VTsIOM surveys for the last decade he could have created a time series dataset and analyzed it using statistical methods to illustrate his conclusions. Sedov offered his

forecast of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections; however, it is unclear from the article which methods were used to obtain the forecasts. VTsIOM included such questions as for whom respondents would vote if elections were to be held the next day, but Sedov did not describe his actual methodology in getting the final forecasts. As a region-based specialist, Sedov had an advantage of 'nailing down' brief characterizations of each party that are hard to grasp from abroad. For instance, he described the CPRF as a party of traditional voting and people's belief in it as the defender of particular interests, the LDPR as purely leader-based, Unity as the president's party, Yabloko as a party with a leader and with a defined program, and the SPS as a party with prospects in the future (Sedov, 2004).

Thames also used a statistical approach; however his data did not come from survey research but from available aggregate figures that reflected the economic and political state of the country (socioeconomic and government expenditure data). He wanted to show the relationship between the political business cycle and Yeltsin's victory in 1996. What had determined it? Did Yeltsin appeal to voters using his economic resources as the head of state? What did voters consider when they were making their decisions? He first addressed the visual analysis of the data, a useful tool sometimes unfairly abandoned by scholars. Thames came up with four multiple regression models, using the following dependent variables: total real federal expenditures, real federal social expenditures, the real average monthly pension, and real wage arrears. He also included lagged versions of some variables to test for temporal relationships. He did not find evidence of 'buying of the voters,' and data did not support the political business cycle theory. One of the advantages of this study is the extensive period of time covered, which comprised almost all of the 1990s (Thames, 2001).

Oates and Roselle employed content analysis to study two prominent news programs on Russian television - *Vremya* and *Segodnya* in 1995 and 1996. They coded for electoral issues, various candidates, parties, voters' participation, polls, and other related topics. Since more than 98 percent of Russians have a television and more than 80 percent get their news from television news programs, it offers one valid measure of the characteristics of the current political situation. This particular piece of research is also rare among the articles on the Russian election (Oates and Roselle, 2000).

Qualitative methods are less popular than quantitative methods among Russian scholars. One example of an important qualitative study is James Alexander's article, in which he uses a cultural studies approach. He specifically criticized the use of survey methods for the 'formlessness' of their findings. He disagrees that implicit assumptions about human nature can be made easily, as well as that the formulation of questions themselves are already value laden, especially the ones that are closed-ended. Alexander criticized mass survey approaches because of their attempts to homogenize the Russian population and ignore local peculiarities. In addition to that, Western approaches, predominant in most surveys, can bring bias and measurement error in both response collection and interpretation. Quantitative researchers, Alexander argues, compromise internal validity, and ignore complicated internal processes on-going in Russian society. Alexander also sees implementation of surveys as a significant factor in influencing the outcome. Finally, he believes that answers are usually interpreted in a way that is convenient for a particular researcher. He sees that 'Western' values are more likely to be seen in Russians by the proponents of the rational choice theory. Political culture

theorists are more likely to see historical roots in the attitudes of Russians and see fewer 'Western' values. He does not agree that, if surveys functioned relatively well over the last few decades in the West, they can provide an accurate reflection of Russian attitudes. Alexander used in-depth interviews to create a 'thick explanation' that goes beyond 'thick description.' He preferred anthropological techniques of ethnography to study cultural behavior; thus he did field research in the peripheral towns of Russia (Alexander, 2000). Alexander's conclusions only partially match the conclusions of survey researchers. He demonstrated the complexity and fragmentation of Russian political beliefs. Alexander claims that survey data could not tell more than what the statistical findings supported, but that with qualitative interviews a researcher could generalize the results to a broader population using the context and his/her personal experience. Through qualitative research he discovered stronger authoritarian tendencies than can be identified through quantitative studies (Alexander, 2000).

Myagkov and Ordeshook employed game theory to deconstruct the outcome of the Russian elections. They studied a hypothesis that the stability of the Russian electorate was in part guaranteed by local governors' pressure and shaping of the environment favoring one candidate/party or another. Myagkov and Ordeshook built a simple game theoretical model to predict which type of governor would support Otechestvo versus Edinstvo in the 1999 elections. They divided all of the regional leaders into weak and strong categories. Then, according to the game model, they created four alternatives:

- OO, support Otechestvo regardless of whether you are weak or strong;
- EE, support Edinstvo regardless of whether you are weak or strong;

- OE, support Otechestvo if you are weak and Edinstvo if you are strong;

- EO, support Edinstvo if you are weak and Otechestvo if you are strong.

Then they employed Kremlin rewards (for supporters/all governors) versus no rewards at all. In addition to the game theory model Myagkov and Ordeshook compiled a dataset of results of all elections from 1995 to 2000. They used regression analysis to track the flow of voters from one party to another. They concluded that even if the voters' flow was stable in regard to the 1991 through 1996 elections, the 1999 election broke this pattern of 'normalcy.' Local governors are able to use their 'administrative resource' to influence the election. When Otechestvo seemed to be appearing as a promising party of power, they supported it; but, when in 2000 a clear leader emerged, they switched to supporting Putin. The key players were the regional political bosses, not the electorate itself. The constructed model does not fit into a standard model of democracy, when electoral preferences change only at the margins and they fluctuate with the policies they confront. They also noted the phenomenon that there are only two well-established parties in Russia, Yabloko and the Communists, which prevents the system from achieving an equilibrium (Myagkov and Ordeshook, 2001).

Further, Myagkov expanded his research in his 2003 article *The 1999 Duma election in Russia: a step toward democracy or the elites' game?* He started his analysis of the 1999 elections because of the seeming irrationality of the Russian voters. Earlier researchers had concluded that the Russian electorate is relatively stable on the axis of 'pro-reform' and 'anti-reform' combined with nationalism, but Myagkov saw that the 1999 elections did not fit into this paradigm. Myagkov pursued a relatively unusual direction in Russian studies, concentrating more on the underlying driving forces than on the Russian electorate as it is, isolated from external influences (Myagkov, 2003).

Olga Shvetsova also applied a game theory approach to the Russian elections. Shvetsova studied the phenomenon of two major contenders in the 1999 parliamentary elections - Otechestvo and Edinstvo. She connected the parliamentary elections to the following presidential ones. As did Myagkov, she employed a simple game theoretical model of the payoffs for backing Primakov versus Putin. In the main body of her article, Shvetsova employed VTsIOM's surveys. The first model estimated runoff votes for leading potential presidential candidates with the help of a poll conducted in June 1999. Then she cited results obtained by VTsIOM's survey of popularity of both political parties and presidential candidates from the mid 1999 until the beginning of 2000 (Shvetsova, 2003).

De-westernizing approach

The post-Communist press has been judged mostly by Western researchers according to its lack of the freedom of expression and the presence of state control. The best known classification employed is Siebert's *Four Theories of the Press*. Siebert's fundamental 1956 work is still an influential study that determines Western scholars' approach to different mass media systems. The four theories include authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Communist. They are mostly defined by state versus private control and ownership (Siebert et al., 1956).

Colin Sparks, a British researcher, offered his own interpretation of the media theories in regard to the differences between media systems. He compared the U.S., the Western European, and the former Communist system. Both the European and the former

Communist states had no press monopoly, no press impartiality, had press stratification and both public and major state broadcasters. On the contrary, the U.S. media system had press monopoly and press impartiality, no press stratification, and no state broadcaster (Sparks, 1998). Thus, it is incorrect to generalize based on most common media theories that do not recognize major differences between the Western European and the U.S. systems. Sparks criticized the *Four Theories of the Press* for its inflexibility: it did not even recognize the peculiarities of the European systems, not to mention examining the past and the future of the Communist systems. The four theories cannot be altered according to the changing environments. He favored a transitional approach. The Anglo-Saxon model, which is mostly used as a reference for researchers, as it is, does not exist. He brought up an example of the *New York Times* and the BBC - how different they were in their approaches. The U.S. press is commercial, but it exists in a monopolistic situation. The European press exists in a highly competitive environment (Sparks, 1998).

Becker also pointed out the de-westernization arguments. He joins those scholars who do not accept Siebert's four theories of the press classification as a dogmatic and irrefutable one. Such authors as Sparks, Reading, Downing, and Nordenstreng looked at Russia as a good example to illustrate the process of 'internationalization' or 'de-westernization' of the media. They argued that the power of the state and the power of private capital had an equally negative effect on the freedom of the press. Becker specifically pointed out the growing concerns with the Western press, such as more 'soft news' and infotainment, subjectivity in delivery, and excessive reliance on official sources (Becker, 2004).

Nordenstreng continued a critical analysis of de-westernizing the press. He

attempted to rewrite the *Four Theories of the Press*. He said that "politics and economy determine media structure and performance, while media autonomy and ethics do not work; that human rights are not sufficient for democracy unless materialistic conditions are in place, interventionist state leads to a balanced system. Russia is a good case study to show that the media under any circumstances are fundamentally political." [sic] He insisted that the media have always been run by political and economic elites and an exceptional period of extreme freedom in Russia in 1990 - 1991 just confirmed his thesis. In both Western and post-communist societies, the media float between the centers of political and economic power (Nordenstreng, 2001).

Most of the described studies illustrate how fractured this area of research is; it does not provide a cohesive explanation of Russian political and media environment. Media scholars in general are more interested in the U.S. agenda-setting models, with random applications of the U.S. theories to some other countries. Comparative political scientists are mostly focused on their specific methodological approaches; otherwise, competition in the political science as a field would prevent them from publishing and presenting their research. There is no such science as socio-political study of Russia; thus, most scholars have to compromise and combine their own research interests with applications to Russia. In addition to that, the Russian democratic and media environment had formed only a decade ago, so there had not been a sufficient amount of time for researchers to fully integrate existing methods and approaches into studying Russian society. This paper adds one more building block to Russian studies, exploring causal relationships in agenda-setting process between the print media and public opinion.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This research employs a dataset constructed of monthly time series of four variable sets: approval ratings of each politician, their informational ratings, and their coverage in *Kommersant* and *Izvestia*.

A unit of analysis is the number of mentions of each politician in the two newspapers, *Izvestia* and *Kommersant*. For the polling company data, a unit of analysis is the percentage of either approval ratings or informational ratings for each politician. Four prominent figures were selected: Vladimir Putin, the President, Gennady Zuganov, the head of the Russian Communist Party, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, head of the Liberal Democratic Party, and Grigory Yavlinsky, head of the Yabloko party. All of them play a significant role on the Russian political scene. Zuganov is an ultra-right politician, Zhirinovsky is a nationalist right politician and Yavlinsky is an ultra-liberal one.

The analysis is based on four groups of frequencies. The first group is comprised of four time series of approval ratings. Each politician (Putin, Zuganov, Zhirinovsky, and Yavlinsky) comprises a separate time series of levels of approval ratings for the last 4 years. The data were taken from the aggregate tables based on the monthly FOM surveys of public opinion, which are stored on FOM website. The second group consists of informational ratings of the same four politicians over the last 4 years. The third and the fourth groups represent *Kommersant* and *Izvestia* monthly coverage (numbers of articles on each politician) respectively.

Methodology – time series

Time series analysis (namely vector autoregression) will allow creating models with various dependent and independent variables together with the lagged versions of each of them. Causality can be also inferred using Granger causality tests. Vector autoregression with Granger-causality test is the best way to establish the directions of causality between variables. Granger-causality is in principle a simple assumption that if an event occurs first (such as a publication or an increase in ratings), and another event follows, then it can be inferred that the first event is Granger-causing the second one, based on a temporal causality between them.

Here is an overview of the pertinent methods. The basic method employed in the research is time series analysis. Multivariate vector autoregression (VAR) combined with Granger causality tests will allow tracing causal relationships between variables. The initial equation that can be produced by vector autoregression is:

$$Y_t = a + \sum_{i=1}^{n} b_i Y_{t-i} + \sum_{j=1}^{n} c_j X_{t-j} + e,$$

where Y is a dependent variable, Y_{t-1} is the first lag of a dependent variable, Y_{t-i} is the j lag of a dependent variable, X is an independent variable, X_{t-1} is the first lag of an independent variable, X_{t-j} is the j lag of an independent variable, b and c are consecutive coefficients, a is a constant and e is an error term. Vector autoregression equation expresses a linear function of past values of a dependent variable, all other variables with their past values, and a serially uncorrelated error term.

Some researchers had employed Prais Winston and Cochrane Orcutt regressions to test for autocorrelation of errors. With sufficient loss, VAR should correct for

autocorrelation (specifically residuals autocorrelation), because at least two lags of each variable are included. In this particular paper, coefficients from the results of vector autoregression models will not be included, since they do not provide much theoretical significance and they do not have a substantial practical purpose. Instead, only F statistics and their significance levels are reported. This paper explores directions of causality, not magnitudes of causality. The biggest advantage of time series vector autoregressive models is this method's ability to establish causal relationships. Vector autoregression allows for more complex dynamics; it can offer a more accurate explanation of processes. Since the dynamics traced through vector autoregression are more complex, it can accumulate complex dynamics but can be less efficient. Vector autoregression results are in essence Granger-causality tests in both directions at the same time.

Historically, the time series method most used by mass media scholars studying agenda setting are cross-lagged correlations. Occasionally they employ Granger tests. However, the biggest disadvantage of correlations is their weaker ability to explain.

Vector autoregression is a model where variables are specified as a function of their own lags as well as the lags of other included variables. Vector autoregression shows researchers if one variable is useful in predicting another variable. A variable X is said to be Granger causal to Y if, taking into account the past values of Y, past values of X are useful in predicting Y (Stata Time Series, 2004). Granger tests can be applied after vector autoregression, a matrix type of regression analysis, where a dependent variable is explained by its own lagged versions as well as by independent variables with their own lagged versions. The complex model creates a temporal relationship among variables. The Granger test checks for significance of temporal influences: which variable leads a

change, and which one follows. Time series tests will check for autocorrelation of errors, normality of errors, and VAR stability conditions. Each Granger-causality table includes an F-statistic and a p-value associated with it. An F-statistic tests whether each set of coefficients on the lags of independent variables is zero. A null hypothesis is that each set is zero, so a probability value of less than 5% gives enough confidence to say that the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Dependent variables interact with lagged versions of independent variables: certain statistical techniques will allow choosing the appropriate lag lengths. Some technical tests, such as the ones for autocorrelation, stability, and the normality of errors, were applied to ensure the accuracy and applicability of models.

There are several statistical tests that need to be applied in order to specify each model. First of all, the number of lags for each model should be selected. Depending on the most appropriate level of several information criteria (for example, Akaike information criterion or Bayesian information criterion), an appropriate lag length is chosen. STATA was used as statistical software to execute all of the commands and procedures. Vector autoregression by default is checked for the first order autoregressive process, however, for the clarity of analysis, an additional Lagrange Multiplier test for autocorrelation in residuals will be used. In addition to that, the model should be stable, i.e. all of the coefficients should not be approaching 1, otherwise the model would not satisfy stability conditions. Another potential flaw of time series models is non-normally distributed errors. It is a less serious problem than autocorrelation; however, it can be significant.

Research questions

The research problem for this paper is to explore the political freedom of the Russian mass media in light of the coverage of the major political figures – Russian president Vladimir Putin and his major opponents. 1) Does the governmental paper, *Izvestia*, lead *Kommersant* coverage on the President as well as the major opposition figures? 2) Does the coverage of Putin cause the coverage of opposition leaders or vice versa? 3) Do Putin's approval ratings cause approval ratings of others or vice versa? 4) Do Putin's informational ratings cause approval ratings of others or vice versa?

Chapter 4

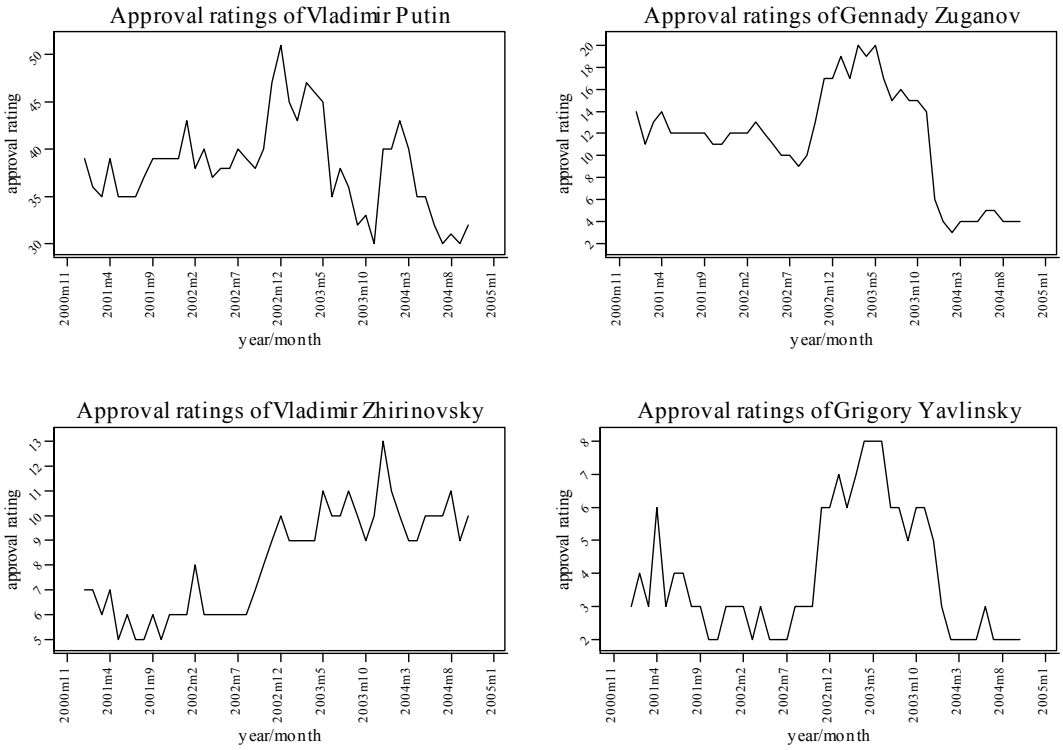
Results

Findings

The results section is divided into two parts: descriptive graphs and causality tables. The first four figures illustrate the descriptive time series graphs of all four subdivisions of analysis, including approval ratings, informational ratings, *Kommersant* coverage, and *Izvestia* coverage. The graphs do not provide enough information to conduct statistical analysis; however, they illustrate the data that had been used as a base. The second part of this section presents the results of vector autoregressive models and Granger-causality tests, which allows deriving conclusions about the interactions between variables.

The first table of graphs is combination of four graphs of each politician approval ratings for the last 4 years. The graphs provide descriptive information on the data; however, they are not enough to infer any causal relationships. In order to analyze information visually, an appendix to this thesis contains larger versions of overlaid graphs.

Figure 1. Approval ratings of Putin, Zuganov, Zhirinovsky, and Yavlinsky (January 2001 – October 2004)

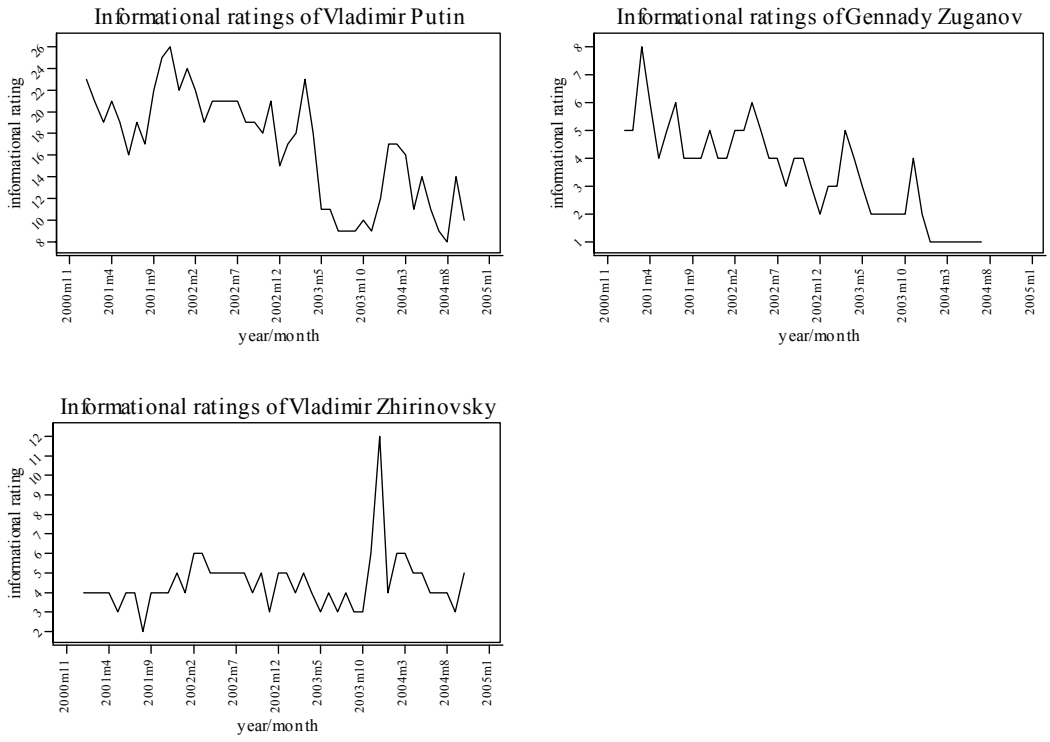


Descriptive graphs of approval ratings indicate that all of the politicians' approval ratings peaked during the December 2003 elections.

The three presidential rivals definitely gained more influence during the parliamentary elections than during the presidential ones in March 2004. First, all of them declined to contest Putin, despite their own relatively stable positions in the political market. Second, Putin's approval ratings are fluctuating; there is no definite upward trend. The public assesses Putin's actions and judges the president accordingly. For example, Putin's rating soared before the parliamentary elections, though, again went up right after. Vladimir Zhirinovsky's ratings, on the contrary, are steadily increasing. Both

Gennady Zuganov's and Grigory Yavlinsky's ratings went up at the end of 2003 and then went down after the relative loss in elections. Vladimir Zhirinovsky appeared to be the most stable and successful player with his increasing approval ratings.

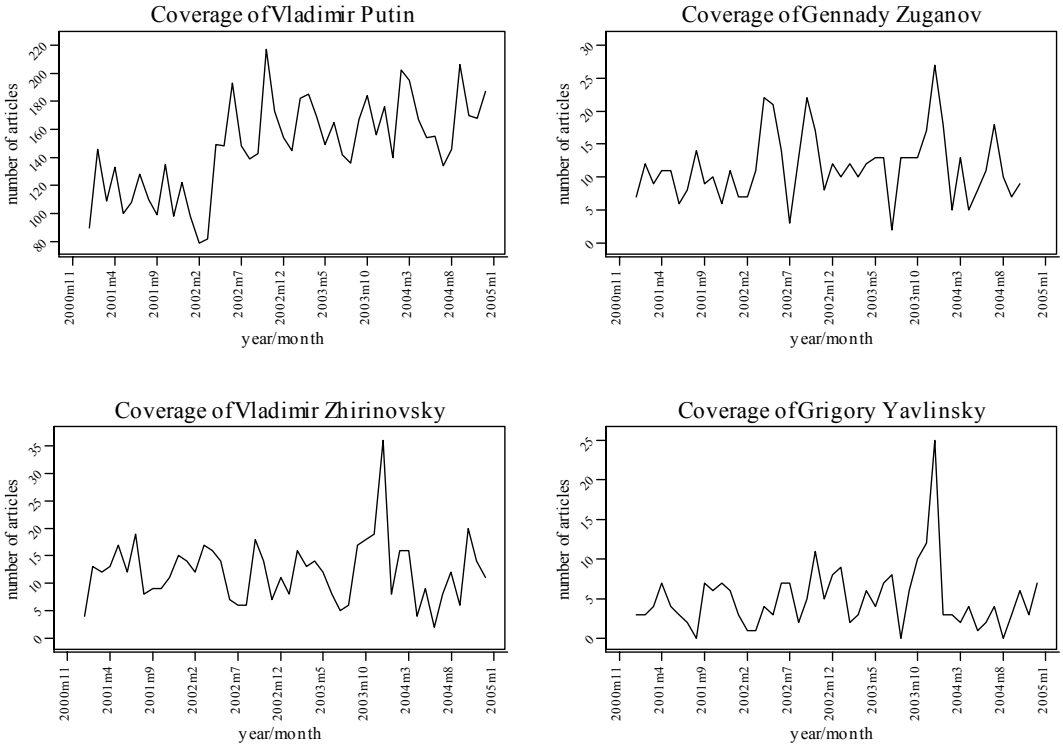
Figure 2. Information ratings of Putin, Zuganov, and Zhirinovsky (January 2001 – October 2004)



Unfortunately, informational ratings for Grigory Yavlinsky are not available for all four years, and time series require an uninterrupted sequence of numbers for a proper analysis. That is why they were not included in this set of graphs and in the further sets for assessing Granger-causality.

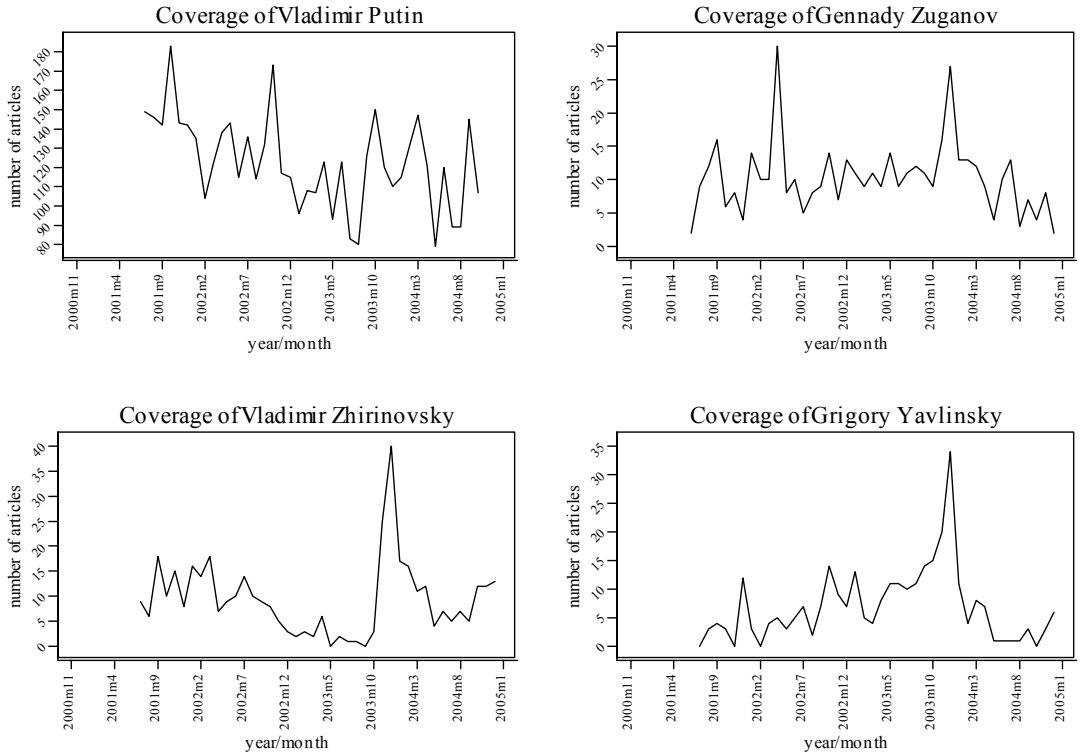
Informational ratings for both Putin and Zuganov have been steadily going down. Putin's ratings peaked during the March 2004 presidential election, but that is an expected rise taking into account the fact that he was the most likely candidate to win. There is no indication, however, that the news market overrepresented the president on the news. Informational ratings were compiled based on the news that could be recollected by the respondent over a month. There is a trend that the president becomes a relatively stable and predictable player to whom people pay less and less attention. His ratings are average for a country leader, but not excessively high as would be expected for an autocratic dictator. Vladimir Zhirinovsky gained popularity during and after the December 2003 parliamentary elections. His party was among the most successful political parties. Gennady Zuganov's Communist party had been experiencing a decline since their most successful 1995 parliamentary elections and his largest number of votes in the 1996 presidential elections. The generational change caused a lack of interest in Communist ideology among voters.

Figure 3. *Kommersant* coverage of four political leaders (January 2001 – October 2004)



Kommersant's coverage of all four leaders increased significantly during and after the 2003 parliamentary elections. According to those graphs, there is no obvious evidence of opponents being silenced. Each leader experienced an increase in the number of articles focusing on him. There was no obvious bias toward one candidate versus another in *Kommersant*.

Figure 4. *Izvestia* coverage of four political leaders (July 2001 – November 2004)



The same pattern emerged on the *Izvestia* coverage graphs. Vladimir Putin's coverage actually went down compared to the peaks in September 2001 and October 2002, which were determined by crucial events – attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and the Moscow theater. Putin's *Izvestia* coverage contradicts with *Kommersant* coverage. Even as a government newspaper, *Izvestia* does not show overwhelming support; moreover, Putin's coverage goes down with time.

Again, coverage of other leaders went up significantly before and during the parliamentary elections. That answers the question about pluralism, that, even in a government newspaper, the opposition was still covered. By looking at the frequencies of

articles (Y axis), there is a clear indication that each political leader receives an equal proportion of coverage in both *Kommersant* and *Izvestia*.

The second section of the results chapter presents Granger-causality tables illustrating interactions between different sets of variables. As mentioned in the methodology section, significant F tests in Granger-causality tables indicate that past values of an independent variable influence present values of a dependent variable. The first set of 4 Granger-causality tables test for directions of influences among different variables for each politician separately. For example, the first one presents Putin's variables' interactions.

Table 1. Granger causality tests for Vladimir Putin's variables

Dependent variables	Independent variables	
Kommersant coverage		
	Izvestia coverage	28.55 (.00)*
	Informational rating	6.28 (.39)
	Approval rating	20.55 (.00)*
Izvestia coverage		
	Kommersant coverage	24.01 (.00)*
	Informational rating	2.93 (.33)
	Approval rating	3.90 (.69)
Informational rating		
	Kommersant coverage	64.97(.00)*
	Izvestia coverage	33.03 (.00)*
	Approval rating	53.42 (.00)*
Approval rating		
	Kommersant coverage	229.54(.00)*
	Izvestia coverage	286.23 (.00)*
	Informational rating	309.02 (.00)*

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain six lags; there are 34 monthly observations in the series.

Selection order criteria suggested using a model with six lags, based on the lowest LR, AIC, and BIC criteria. The LM statistics for autocorrelation indicates that there is no autocorrelation at two lags. Disturbances are normally distributed. The first test is a Wald test that the coefficients of the six lags of the *Izvestia* coverage are jointly zero, the null hypothesis that the *Izvestia* coverage does not Granger-cause the *Kommersant* coverage can be rejected. The informational rating variable does not Granger-cause the *Kommersant* coverage, but the approval rating variable, on the contrary, Granger-causes the *Kommersant* coverage.

The *Kommersant* coverage is Granger-causing the *Izvestia* coverage. All of the included variables (*Kommersant*, *Izvestia*, and approval ratings) Granger-cause informational ratings, as well as all of the available variables Granger-cause approval ratings.

What these Granger-causality tests indicate is that if past values of one variable are significant in influencing present values of another variable, it can be inferred that the first variable is Granger-causing the second one; i.e. if approval ratings Granger-cause the *Kommersant* coverage, it means that previous levels of approval ratings predetermine present levels of the *Kommersant* coverage.

The above mentioned complete vector autoregression models (table 1) show results holding all of the other variables constant.

Table 2. Grander-causality tests for Gennady Zuganov's variables

Dependent variables	Independent variables	
Kommersant coverage		
	Izvestia coverage	6.36 (.38)
	Informational rating	10.27 (.11)
	Approval rating	1.06 (.98)
Izvestia coverage		
	Kommersant coverage	15.15 (.02)*
	Informational rating	9.47 (.15)
	Approval rating	11.79 (.07)
Informational rating		
	Kommersant coverage	12.88 (.04)*
	Izvestia coverage	9.57 (.14)
	Approval rating	2.68 (.85)
Approval rating		
	Kommersant coverage	13.10 (.04)*
	Izvestia coverage	14.33 (.03)*
	Informational rating	7.20 (.30)

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain six lags; there are 34 monthly observations in the series.

All of the appropriate tests (autocorrelation of errors, normalcy of disturbances, VAR stability condition) indicate that the model can be specified. Unless further noted, all of the auxiliary test results in the further pair-wise models are not included, for the information would be too technical and too detailed for each specific pair of relationships.

Gennady Zuganov's *Kommersant* coverage is not Granger-caused by any of the included variables. *Kommersant* is not a primary source of information for the Communist party supporters; thus, its coverage is less related to Zuganov's activities. *Izvestia* coverage is Granger-caused by the *Kommersant* coverage. Again, Zuganov's informational ratings and approval ratings have no effect on the two newspapers because

of the different audiences and their different political orientations in general. Zuganov's supporters simply get information from other sources. Zuganov's informational rating is Granger-causing *Kommersant* coverage. Approval rating, however, is Granger-caused by both the *Kommersant* and *Izvestia* coverage.

Table 3. Grander-causality tests for Vladimir Zhirinovsky's variables

Dependent variables	Independent variables	
Kommersant coverage		
	Izvestia coverage	41.01 (.00)*
	Informational rating	31.63 (.00)*
	Approval rating	36.35 (.00)*
Izvestia coverage		
	Kommersant coverage	43.26 (.00)*
	Informational rating	45.35 (.00)*
	Approval rating	10.97 (.09)
Informational rating		
	Kommersant coverage	71.49 (.00)*
	Izvestia coverage	135.85 (.00)*
	Approval rating	36.74 (.00)*
Approval rating		
	Kommersant coverage	10.67 (.10)
	Izvestia coverage	9.97 (.13)
	Informational rating	17.62 (.01)*

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain six lags, there are 34 monthly observations in the series.

Granger causality tests for the *Kommersant* coverage and informational rating indicate that they are determined by all past values of the independent variables. *Izvestia* coverage seems to be unaffected by approval ratings, but affected by the two other independent variables. The approval rating is dependent only on the informational rating.

The fact that both the *Kommersant* and *Izvestia* coverage are Granger-caused by the approval and informational ratings but the approval rating is not Granger-caused by any of the variables indicates that public opinion on Zhirinovsky is shaped independently from the two newspapers' coverage. Even a high informational rating among respondents does not lead to a higher approval rating. The Zhirinovsky electorate is in general more of a heterogeneous opposition group that is mostly influenced by his charisma rather then by media coverage.

Table 4. Grander-causality tests for Grigory Yavlinsky's variables

Dependent variables	Independent variables	
Kommersant coverage		
	Izvestia coverage	1.31 (.52)
	Approval rating	1.80 (.41)
	Kommersant coverage	4.50 (.34)
Izvestia coverage		
	Kommersant coverage	.74 (.69)
	Approval rating	4.66 (.10)
	Izvestia coverage	6.22 (.18)
Approval rating		
	Kommersant coverage	.12 (.94)
	Izvestia coverage	.77 (.68)
	Approval rating	2.41 (.66)

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain six lags, there are 34 monthly observations in the series.

Grigory Yavlinsky variables do not demonstrate any Granger-causal relationships between each other.

Since the purpose of this analysis is to explore causal relationships among

variables, combinations of each set of variables in regard to their common themes are assessed.

Table 5. Granger tests for approval ratings.

Dependent variable	Independent variables	
Putin's approval		
	Zuganov's approval	.56 (.76)
	Zhirinovsky's approval	.03 (.99)
	Yavlinsky's approval	.32 (.85)
Zuganov's approval		
	Putin's approval	5.84 (.05)*
	Zhirinovsky's approval	.04 (.98)
	Yavlinsky's approval	2.00 (.37)
Zhirinovsky's approval		
	Putin's approval	1.23 (.54)
	Zuganov's approval	3.74 (.15)
	Yavlinsky's approval	2.27 (.32)
Yavlinsky's approval		
	Putin's approval	1.64 (.44)
	Zuganov's approval	31.67 (.00)*
	Zhirinovsky's approval	2.99 (.22)

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain two lags, there are 44 monthly observations in the series.

Putin's approval ratings are not caused by any other politician's approval ratings. Zuganov's approval ratings are Granger-caused by Putin's approval ratings. If fewer people support Putin, then more people support Zuganov. Yavlinsky's approval is Granger-caused by Zuganov's approval. The protesting electorate reacts both ways, though more liberal groups are delayed in their actions. If Zuganov's ratings go up, in the next period Yavlinsky's ratings go up too.

Table 6. Granger tests for informational ratings

Dependent variable	Independent variables	
Putin's informational rating		
	Zuganov's info rating	2.45 (.29)
	Zhirinovsky's info rating	2.71 (.26)
Zuganov's info rating		
	Putin's info rating	5.33 (.07)
	Zhirinovsky's info rating	2.84 (.24)
Zhirinovsky's info rating		
	Putin's info rating	.35 (.84)
	Zuganov's info rating	5.59 (.06)

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain two lags, there are 44 monthly observations in the series.

Only two relationships are close to being significant: Putin's rating Granger-causing Zuganov's rating, and Zuganov's rating, in return, Granger-causing Zhirinovsky's rating. Nevertheless, they are not statistically significant. It means that even if one politician makes fewer or more appearances in the media, it does not affect other politicians' informational ratings.

Table 7. Granger tests for *Izvestia* coverage

Dependent variable	Independent variables	
Putin coverage		
	Zuganov	.33 (.85)
	Zhirinovsky	2.92 (.23)
	Yavlinsky	3.15 (.20)
Zuganov		
	Putin	.59 (.75)
	Zhirinovsky	3.03 (.22)
	Yavlinsky	2.07 (.36)

Table 7: continued.

Zhirinovsky		
	Putin	5.95 (.05)*
	Zuganov	.58 (.75)
	Yavlinsky	1.49 (.48)
Yavlinsky		
	Putin	1.82 (.40)
	Zuganov	.33 (.85)
	Zhirinovsky	12.34 (.00)*

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain two lags, there are 38 monthly observations in the series.

Putin's *Izvestia* coverage is Granger-causing Zhirinovsky's coverage. In return, Zhirinovsky's coverage is Granger-causing Yavlinsky's coverage. By looking at figure 4, it is visible that when Zhirinovsky's coverage goes up, Yavlinsky's coverage goes down and vice versa. The two leaders represent the opposite sides of political spectrum; therefore, they are moving in two different directions in terms of their newspaper coverage.

Table 8. Granger tests for *Kommersant* coverage

Dependent variable	Independent variables	
Putin		
	Zuganov	27.16 (.00)*
	Zhirinovsky	10.24 (.01)*
	Yavlinsky	17.40 (.00)*
Zuganov		
	Putin	1.69 (.43)
	Zhirinovsky	1.38 (.50)
	Yavlinsky	.57 (.75)

Table 8: continued.

Zhirinovsky		
	Putin	1.04 (.59)
	Zuganov	1.97 (.37)
	Yavlinsky	1.35 (.51)
Yavlinsky		
	Putin	2.80 (.25)
	Zuganov	3.82 (.15)
	Zhirinovsky	.12 (.94)

The numbers in the table are F statistics; the numbers in parenthesis are probability values. VAR results contain two lags, there are 44 monthly observations in the series.

Putin's coverage is Granger-caused by all three independent variables. Compared to *Izvestia*, *Kommersant* provides just the opposite picture. Putin's coverage in *Kommersant* is dependent on the previous coverage of other politicians. In an autocratic system it would be presumed that a dictator sets his own rules. This is not the case using this example of a Russian business newspaper. Other prominent political figures are more influential in causing the number of articles on the president.

Discussion

The results indicate that there is no obvious autocratic trend based on the analysis of the two major newspapers and two forms of public opinion (informational ratings and approval ratings). Even descriptive graphs do not show a significant drop of coverage of Vladimir Putin's opponents starting from 2000, the year when he became president. *Izvestia* and *Kommersant* are also different in their coverage of the four leaders. Even if *Izvestia* is more of an official state newspaper, its coverage of Putin goes down with time; *Izvestia* published more articles on the president in 2001 – 2002 than in the last year.

Kommersant, on the contrary, being a business-oriented newspaper with a critical slant towards the president, has increased its coverage of Putin over time. Results also indicate that *Kommersant* reacts faster than *Izvestia* to the political environment's changes.

Putin's informational rating is not caused by any of the variables. It does not matter how many times people see or read about the president, it has no effect on the public's decision whether to support Putin. There are no causal relationships among various politicians' informational ratings. If one of them makes more appearances in the media, it does not lead to fewer appearances of others. Variables are independent of each other. Pitin's approval ratings Granger-cause only Zuganov's ratings. On the contrary with the media, *Kommersant* coverage of Putin is dependent on the previous coverage of other politicians.

The political media environment does not show distinct authoritarian patterns. No indicators exist that Vladimir Putin had been pressuring either journalists or the public. Obviously, opposition politicians are less popular and receive less coverage than a president who is supported by the population. But it is the same in any country where presidents are elected by a majority. Comparison of the two newspapers (one of which being a government mouthpiece and the other being an independent business newspaper) provides no proof of visible biases. *Izvestia* even tends to publish fewer articles on Putin with time. In addition to that, *Kommersant*'s coverage of the president depends on how much coverage it had dedicated to the other politicians in the previous periods.

The first research question, whether the governmental paper, *Izvestia*, led *Kommersant* coverage on the President as well as the major opposition figures, is answered negatively. There is no distinct indication of one-way causality in regard to

Putin's coverage, both *Izvestia* and *Kommersant* coverage Granger-cause each other. Zuganov's coverage, on the contrary, indicates an opposite relationship. Zuganov's *Kommersant* coverage is Granger-causing *Izvestia* coverage. Zhirinovsky's coverage exhibits a pattern similar to the President's one: both *Kommersant* and *Izvestia* coverage Granger-cause each other. Neither Yavlinsky's *Kommersant* nor *Izvestia* coverage cause each other. The results illustrate the plurality of opinions and interactions between the two newspapers. There is no evidence that the governmental newspaper leads the business newspaper coverage in regard to the President or controversial opposition leaders. On the contrary, for the Communist Party leader, *Kommersant* is causing *Izvestia* coverage.

The second question about the President's coverage has a partial positive answer. The coverage of Putin in *Izvestia* only Granger-causes Zhirinovsky's coverage, but that is the only significant pair of causal relationships in regard to the second research question, whether the coverage of Putin cause the coverage of opposition leaders. Again, on the contrary, Putin's coverage in *Kommersant* is Granger-caused by the previous coverage of all three opposition leaders, not vice versa. Putin is not dominating the media market and opposition leaders obtain newspaper coverage independently of the coverage of the President.

The third question had a partial positive answer. Yes, Putin's approval rating predetermines Zuganov's approval rating and not vice versa. Zuganov's approval rating, in turn, is Granger-causing Yavlinsky's approval rating.

The fourth question is answered negatively. None of the informational ratings influences each other in temporal dynamics.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study employed a relatively new approach to study of the agenda-setting process between the media and the public using contemporary Russian society as an example. The method employed in this study is relatively popular in economics, though not so frequently used by media scholars. Time series analysis allows researchers to test relationships in their temporal dynamics. The concrete method used is vector autoregression that was expanded to Granger causality tests. This type of causality tests for relationships between previous values of independent variables with current values of dependent variables; thus, tests infer causal interdependency based on a temporal sequence of linear relationships.

The study explores causal relationships between two media variables: coverage of 4 prominent political leaders in a government-oriented newspaper, *Izvestia*, and a more liberal, business-oriented one, *Kommersant*. Public opinion had been measured by the aggregate answers to the two survey questions, approval and informational ratings of the same 4 political leaders over the last 4 years.

The results illustrate an absence of authoritarian traits in the media and public agenda setting. Putin's *Izvestia* coverage and Putin's *Kommersant* coverage are both Granger-causing each other, there is no clear indication that the governmental newspaper dictates *Kommersant's* way of representing the president. More than that, for the Communist Party leader, Zuganov, *Kommersant* coverage is Granger-causing *Izvestia*

coverage. *Izvestia* is in a submissive position to *Kommersant*. Other results indicate multidirectionality of interactions, again, no distinct authoritarian traits. In cases where *Izvestia* is causing *Kommersant* coverage, the relationship is significant both ways, *Kommersant* is also influencing *Izvestia*.

In terms of the coverage of the president influencing the coverage of other political leaders, a significant causal relationship is found only between Zuganov and Putin. Putin's past coverage is Granger-causing Zuganov's present coverage. However, this relationship disappears in regard to the two other opposition leaders. News on both Zhirinovsky and Yavlinsky is not dependent on the previous news about Putin.

Adding to the Putin and Zuganov coverage, a similar pattern exists between Putin's and Zuganov's approval ratings. Putin's approval rating predetermines Zuganov's approval rating. However, Zuganov's approval rating in turn Granger-causes Yavlinsky's approval ratings.

Even if there are few random indicators of the President having more influence over the media market and the public opinion than other political leaders, this influence is not widespread. Putin does not dominate the informational environment.

In general, the informational ratings of four political leaders are independent of each other, the amount of coverage each of the leaders obtains does not influence the quantity of coverage that the others obtain. The market fluctuates according to the news flow, not according to the prevalence of one political figure over another.

Obviously, the study is not precisely reflexive of all of the Russian media reality without including news broadcasts; however, informational ratings include what people saw or read about a particular person. These findings are not sufficient in order to study

fully the nature of the content of the newspapers' coverage. While the conclusions suggest an absence of authoritarian control, in order to fully assess the content, a content analysis is needed, which can be done through pulling a sample of coverage and analyzing the nature of that coverage. This paper lays the ground for further elaborate research; in that sense, it can be classified as an exploratory study. Further research can include various content analyses of major media outlets.

The study can also be expanded by analyzing other media outlets, as well as adding more years, for example, going back to 1991 – 1992. Another possible direction of continuation of this research is applying new statistical approaches. In addition to that, an analysis of several countries that represent different sides of the spectrum (from dictatorships to democracies), can be conducted to check for differences between media systems in an authoritarian environment versus a free democratic one.

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Appendix A. Combined graphs of the two newspapers' coverage, approval ratings, and informational ratings

Figure A1. *Izvestia* coverage of the four politicians

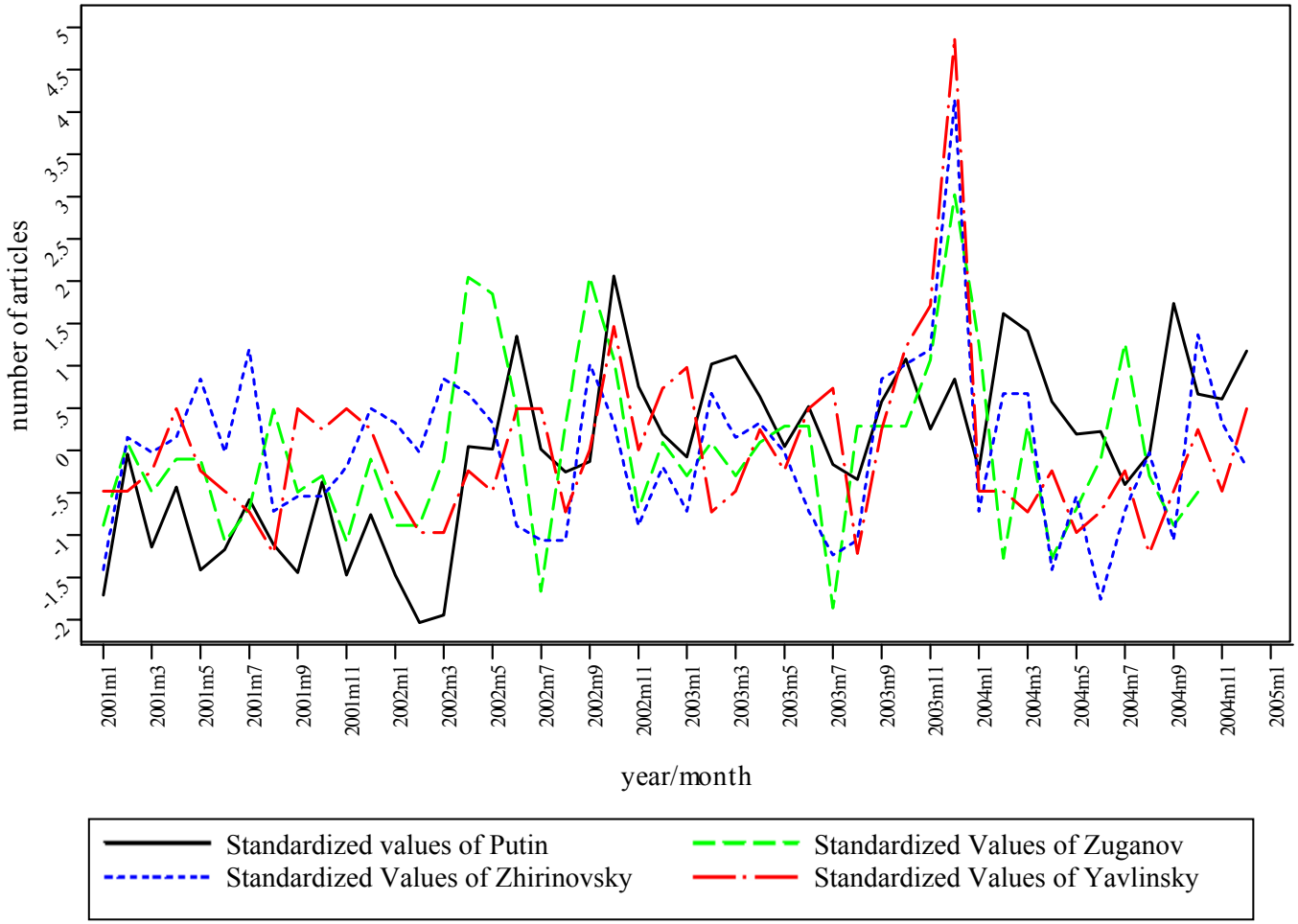

Figure A2. *Kommersant* coverage of the four politicians

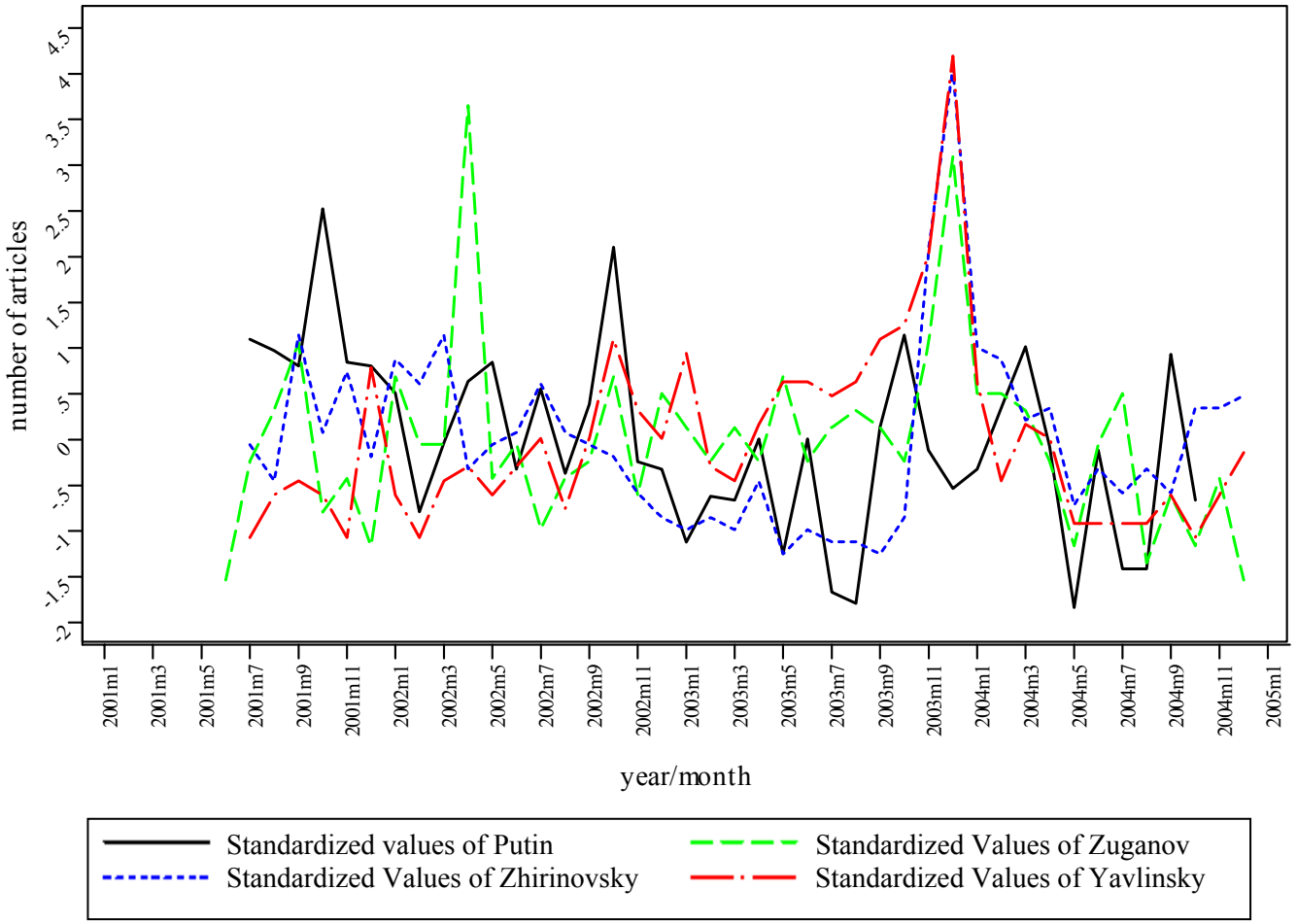

Figure A3. Approval ratings of the four politicians

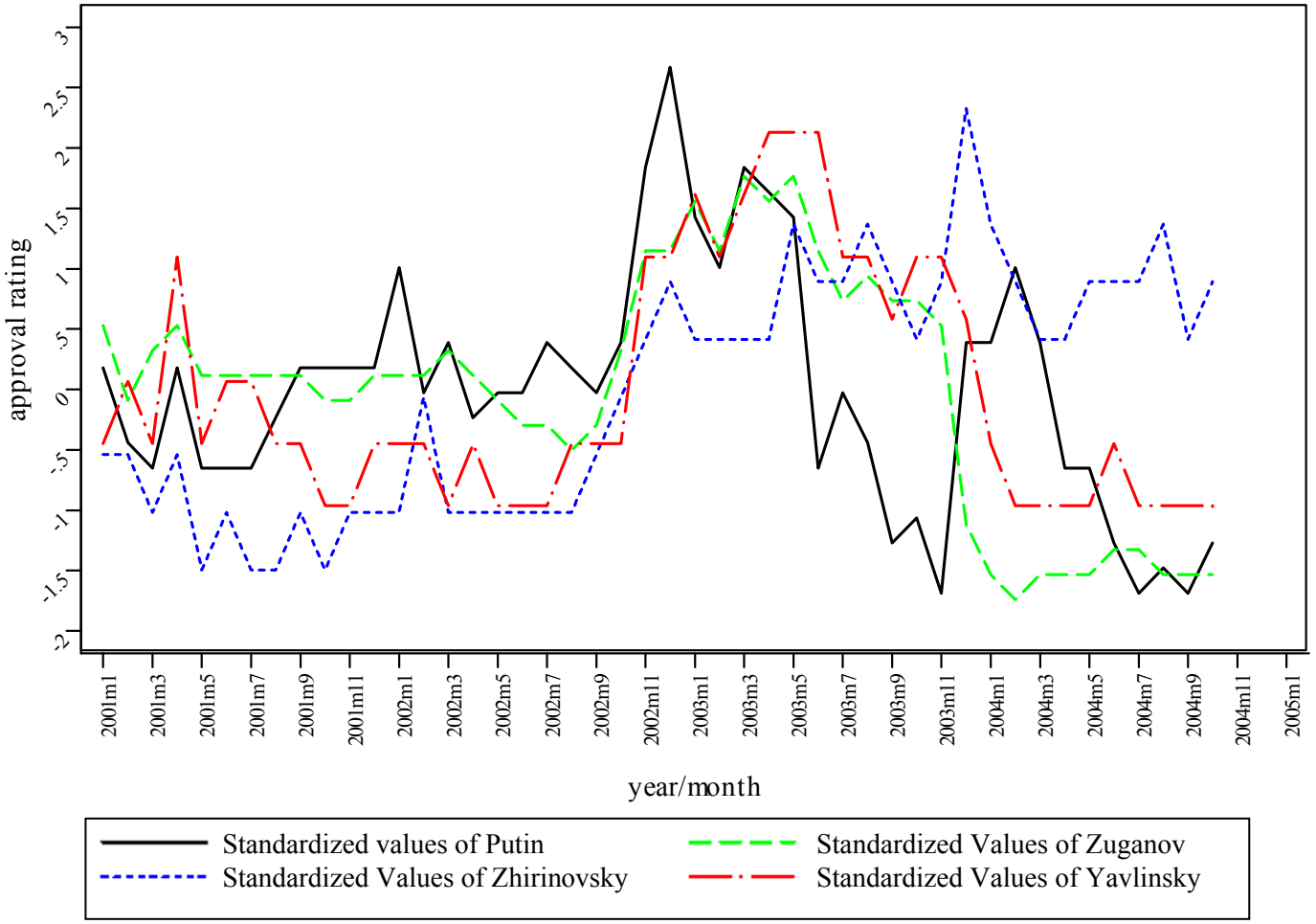

Figure A4. Informational ratings of the four politicians