

Department of Political Science

Bachelor's Thesis



Civil society and election monitoring as factors of the new  
political process in Russia

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## Abstract:

This thesis studies the monitoring of the 2012 Russian presidential election and explores theoretical and empirical questions about the influence of domestic and international actors on the election process. The study of election observation is one of the topics of the very large field of study on democratization and, more specifically, democracy-promotion and assistance (Regalia 2010). Therefore in my research I will try to answer the following questions: What is the role of domestic and international actors in election processes? In my research I am particularly interested in whether domestic actors, in the form of election observers, can increase the accuracy of information about elections and therefore increase the incentives for governments to hold clean elections (Hyde & Marinov 2012).

## Key words and concepts:

democratization, civil society, social movements, democracy assistance, election monitoring, election observers, presidential elections

Table of content:

Abstract.....	2
Key word and concepts .....	2
1. Introduction .....	5
2. Background and significance .....	7
3. Aim and Research Problem.....	9
4. Literature Review.....	10
5. Hypothesis.....	14
6. Methodology.....	15
7. Data.....	18
7.1. Quantitative data analysis.....	18
7.2. Survey and interviews.....	21
8. Discussion.....	27
9. Conclusion.....	29
10. Reference list.....	30

## **1. Introduction**

With the end of the Cold War and the recent increase in democratic transitions in many parts of the world the idea that elections are a political right rather than merely a political option has gained considerable ground. By sending out more and more delegations to monitor elections in politically transitioning countries, “the established Western democracies have reinforced the basic idea that holding elections is something that civilized and democratic countries do. Like all internationally established political and civil rights, the right to elections is still often breached, but it is increasingly acknowledged as an important principle” (Carothers 1997:21). As national elections have been adopted by nearly all countries in the world, election fraud and other forms of election manipulation have become more ubiquitous. “Hybrid regime types, such as electoral authoritarianism and electoral democracy, have garnered a good deal of attention from both academics and policy makers”. Some of this attention comes from international election observation missions, which are now sponsored by dozens of international organizations, NGOs, and states in order to promote democracy (Hyde & Marinov 2012:1). Domestic and international observers are now present at most elections that appear significant for a country’s democratic development. Election observation is “the best-established, most visible, and often best-funded type of democracy-related assistance” (Carothers 1997: 4).

As has been stated in the Election support project by United Nations Development Program, the sustained monitoring of all phases of the electoral process by domestic and international organizations is necessary for “an informed assessment of the conduct of the elections and a necessary element for democratic development. Independent elections observation is a critical component of a credible election process” (UNDP 2010). The main function of election observation is to detect and prevent deception and electoral fraud.

Thomas Carothers in his research on election monitoring and observation (1996-1997) concludes that election observers, indeed, “helped to draw attention to fraud in many countries” (Carothers 1997:19). In the 1980s a few notable cases

occurred, namely in the Philippines and Panama, when American observers were witnesses of great electoral fraud, when President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines tried to steal the 1986 presidential elections, and when General Manuel Antonio Noriega did the same for his candidacy in Panama in 1989. Similar cases have been observed in the Dominican Republic parliamentary election in 1994 and in Haiti in 1995 during parliamentary elections. A lot of cases can be found in Latin America during the transition period, as well as in post-Soviet countries, such as the - Armenian presidential elections in 1996 (Carothers 1997). Yet, “despite significant domestic and international efforts to improve electoral integrity, there are numerous hurdles to reducing election fraud, simply detecting election fraud is highly problematic” (Hyde & Marinov 2012:1).

In many cases it is still difficult to render an overall judgment about whether a particular election is free and fair. (Carothers 1997) Many elections in politically transitional countries fall somewhere in between. There is no obvious answer to the question of how many specific shortcomings must be, before an election can be called “free and fair.”

As Jorgen Elklit and Palle Svensson conclude, that the phrase ‘free and fair’ cannot indicate compliance with a fixed, universal standard of electoral competition: “No such standard exists, and the complexity of the electoral process makes the notion of any simple formula unrealistic” (Carothers: 23-24).

For instance, the Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights define “free and fair” as “secret, universal and direct”, while others have defined the term as the expression of the “will of the people” or “a step forward in terms of the country’s progress toward democratic governance” (IDEA 1995:14). Thereby Paul Kaiser (2011) gives a suggestion not to use competing definition “free and fair” until it can be clearly identified and concluded by the world community (Kaiser 2011: 31). This question was considered once on the global agenda, at a workshop in Stockholm in 1995, when seventeen observer organizations analyzed previous observer experiences and attempted to establish a consensus on the scope and meaning of future observation missions. Participants decided to use the terms

“legitimization or delegitimization” instead, but even for defining these terms in term of electoral processes, observers could not leave “tricky words” out of it. In the official workshop paper have been stated legitimization should be accomplished by “assessing the relative freedom and fairness of an election and contribution to public confidence in an electoral process” (Kaiser 2011: 34).

Based on the aforementioned facts and the incapacity to identify certain criteria of clean and fair elections I will attempt to find out if the participation of domestic and international actors during the presidential election in 2012 strengthened the “fairness” of the election process and led to transparent elections without violations of political rights.

The aim of the research is to analyze how international and domestic civil actors influenced the election processes during the 2012 Russian presidential election.

Based on the assumption that election monitoring is able to facilitate democratization processes in Russia, however it is not principally improving elections; I present the idea of Sharon Lean that “election monitoring is an effect of democratic opening rather than a cause” (Lean 2004:4). The aim is to demonstrate that election monitoring in Russia involves significant roles for both state and non-state actors and prove that the transnational practice of election monitoring has contributed to the emergence and expansion of a democracy regime in Russia. In addition, it is indicated that the consolidation of civil society and social movements can be effective in creating, facilitating and supporting democratic civil actors.

The structure of the presented research helps the reader to understand the influencing factors towards ability to answer the research question. *Chapter 1 and 2* present the nature of election monitoring, *Chapter 3 and 4* demonstrate the significance of the research problem and draw conclusion of the previous research on the topic, in *Chapter 5* I draw hypothesis based on the read literature and in the main *Chapter 7* I present quantitative data analyses and results of the survey and interviews carried out before and after the 2012 presidential elections. In the last

*Chapters 8 and 9* I draw a conclusion of my research and ability to answer a research question.

## **2. Background and significance**

Elections are not a new phenomenon in post-Soviet countries such as Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when most countries gained independence, elections were common and suffrage was relatively widespread over all post-Soviet countries. But in most of the cases, elections in new independent states did not lead to the beginning of democracy. For instance, for most of the 1990s, the regime in Russia appeared trapped somewhere between a dictatorship and a democracy.

On the one hand, the autocratic institutions of the old Soviet regime had collapsed and were replaced by the basic elements of an electoral democracy. Throughout the 1990s, “major political leaders came to power through the ballot box in semi-competitive elections”. On the other hand, these “democratic” regimes were far from perfect and in many respects not democratic. As McFaul (2001) stated: “Political system lacked most of the elements of a liberal democracy, such as a powerful legislative check on executive power, an independent courts system, or a vibrant party system and civil society”.

Recent advances in Russia’s democratization process “have created the need for a new approach to elections. Thus, the search for a modern approach to the running and organizing of elections has been launched.” The country’s unique conditions, such as its huge territory, large number of time- zones, uneven distribution of populations, and various regions with differing levels of infrastructure and transport development have all influenced the search for a solution. There are at present 105 million voters in Russia. More than 95,000 voting centers are organized during elections, and over one million people take part in the organization and conducting of elections. “It is obvious that under such circumstances, preparation and transparent conduct of democratic elections face

many difficult organizational and technological problems, as well as large financial costs” (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network).

Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999 the country’s situation has been generally stable. Despite Russia’s low level of democracy compared to other countries, president Putin has always been supported by a majority of citizens (on presidential elections in 1999, 2004) and even in 2008 his candidate for the presidency – Dmitriy Medvedev was supported by 67% of voters.

Nonetheless, after the parliamentary elections in 2011, the socio-political situation in Russia changed dramatically. Russian civil society has transformed and the internet community was overloaded with videos and incidents of frauds which occurred during the parliamentary elections. In the past few months Russian civil society has been stimulated like never observed since the break-up of the USSR and now it is trying to find its rightful place under extremely difficult conditions (Freedom House Report 2012). In a 6 month period (November 2011- April 2012) more than 16 official protests and meetings have been observed; millions of people took part in them. The main request was a re-counting the 2011 December parliamentary voting and to hold “fair” presidential elections. To a certain extent, Russian civil society has awakened from the “disillusionment with the limited effectiveness of state actions” (Santiso 2011:8).

Main TV channels have changed their attitudes toward the opposition in light of the protests that followed December’s disputed parliamentary elections. State TV first tried to ignore the protests, but once it was clear that protesters had much support, they started to give them coverage and depth without overt hostility. During this period, the advantage of new technologies and internet social media played a crucial role.

There are over 45 million internet users now registered in Russia, out of a total population of 145 million. The internet has transformed politics in Russia and has played a key role in organizing recent protests and support for fair elections. The main appeals were to: organize protests against the current government; pay as much attention as possible to December frauds on parliament elections; support

fair March elections; and finally to recruit people as election observers on polling day to control the “free and fair” elections (Ennis 2012).

As a result, authorities could no longer ignore outrage over the outcome of the December parliamentary elections. Thus in January 2012 prime-minister Vladimir Putin instructed that NGOs, journalists and other media representatives were to be supported in accessing the central election commission’s work. In order to increase transparency of the upcoming presidential elections it had been decided to install web cameras at every polling station, what made it possible to observe the elections via internet. Almost \$ 2 billion was spent to set up cameras at 95,000 polling stations around the country.

More than 6 non-governmental organizations and associations were given authorization to prepare election observers for the presidential election. These organizations included: Citizen-Observer (Гражданин Наблюдатель), Association of Russian jurists, The Voice (Голос), Democratic Choice, RosVibori – 2012 and the Corps For fair elections (За чистые выборы) among others.

### **3. Aim and Research Problem**

Numerous scholars and practitioners assert that the mere presence of electoral observers helps reduce election-day fraud and strengthening the whole election process (Carothers 1997, Lean 2004, Regalia 2010). Can this assertion be tested and verified? It can be hardly argued about the election-day fraud, due to the lack of information and confirmation of electoral fraud from official sources, but it is possible to follow improvements of the election process and election monitoring over time and increase of interest of international community. Therefore, in my research I am investigating the following questions: “What is the effect of international and domestic election observation on the election process?” Does domestic observers play crucial roles in strengthening the election process towards transparent elections and how?

I want to study a subset of democracy-promotion initiatives: more specifically, the “observers’ effect” on the behaviours of actors involved in the

election. There is a variety of election irregularities put in place by candidates or parties in order to win an election that otherwise would have an uncertain result, for example ballot stuffing or its equivalent, as well as distorting voting results (Regalia 2010:2). It is my intention to verify if the presence of observers has any effect on election results.

The experimental nature of this research proposal rests on examining the work of international observers and domestic observers.

The presented research differs from most previous research in this field in several respects. First, the study is based on democratization, civil society and social movement theories, thus allowing broader comparison and generalization, without neglecting the specific post-Soviet context. Second, in my study I use a mixed methods approach combining quantitative data and qualitative interviews which will be presented in the study investigation.

The question explored in this paper is: What are the effects of international and domestic election observation on election process?

#### **4. Literature Review.**

The scholarly literature on subject of international observation is quite narrow. The issues that have been dealt with are, apart from case studies – observers in South Africa on presidential election during the beginning of the 90s (Anglin 1995), election observation in Zambia (Bjornlund et al 1992) and Latin America. (Lean 2007), election fraud (Hall & Hyde 2008), how to define and operationalize the concept of “free and fair elections” (Elklit & Reynolds 2005, Elklit & Svensson 1997) and international norms regarding elections and election observation (Goodwin-Gill 2006, European Commission and NEEDS 2007). Despite the focus of authors on different elements of the election periods and processes everyone accepts the idea that "election monitoring is a primary and widespread element of democracy promotion regime over the last 20 years” (Carothers 1996:6).

Based on my research, the only attempt to empirically assess election observation effectiveness in election monitoring and protection of political rights is the works of Thomas Carothers.

Carothers, in his consecutive researches on election monitoring and observation (1996-1997) concludes that although “international election observation has developed considerably over the past decade and has helped improve elections in many countries, it is not a cure-all” (Carothers 1996: p.21). Fraudulent elections continue to occur frequently in many countries, despite the presence of international observers. The massive participation of foreign observers, does not guarantee the transparency and fairness of the election process.

On the issue of international and domestic observers, Thomas Carothers in his range of research on elections monitoring, emphasizes that domestic election observers have important advantages over foreign observers. They can more easily turn into a large group and have better cooperation with media and government institutions. They know the political culture, language and territory in question and, therefore, are able to see much more than short-term international observers. “As citizens, they embody the crucial idea that the society in question should take primary responsibility for improving its own political processes” (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network). Even after the election period domestic election observers continue to use their newly honed skills for civic education and other democratic initiatives, in contrast to the “here today, gone tomorrow” nature of international election observers. Well prepared observers have a chance to catch the subtle forms of political violations, such as the manipulation of voter registration lists, fraud, and significant distortions in counting of votes. But many observers, inexperienced teams, who are only around for a short time, are unlikely to see beyond the obvious (Carothers 1997:26). Therefore, in my research I will try to find how well domestic observers are prepared against election fraud, and if they were active before and after the elections.

Another important factor found in the previous literature is monitoring of vote counts and parallel voting counting, or, as Garmer & Cowan (1993) prefers

the term, “parallel vote tabulation” (PVT). “Observers no longer limit themselves to assessing election-day mechanics, but evaluate elections in their totality, considering the nature of the campaign period, the integrity of the polling and counting procedures, and the willingness of the population to accept the results”. The lion’s share of the monitor’s attention however, goes to balloting and votes tabulation - the stages where chicanery is most likely to occur. “Mere suspicions of fraud, if sufficiently widespread, can discredit an election and undermine the legitimacy of its result. Thus both representatives of domestic monitoring organizations and international observers have striven to develop effective means for evaluating how ballots are counted and results tabulated” (Garmer & Cowan 1993: 95).

Parallel voting tabulation has proven its value as a means of independently verifying the results reported by election authorities, examples can be found almost all over the world, such as in the Philippines (1986), Panama (1989) and Haiti (1990). In all cases PVT proved the victory of the opposition despite government attempts to manipulate the results. In this process, monitors record results obtained from selected polling sites, and compare them with the official results: “The monitoring of vote counts as part of an overall election-observation effort can boost the confidence of voters suspicious of possible fraud, permit results to be projected more quickly than the official results, and allow for the identification of actual winners and the consequent exposure of any attempted manipulations” (Garber & Cowan 1993). I could not find any empirical researches investigating problem of parallel voting tabulation in Russia. Due to the proven fact of the importance of PVT and its influence on the quality of elections, I would like to find if Russian domestic observers do parallel voting tabulation to hold fair elections.

#### *Media overview of the 2012 presidential election in Russia*

Concerning the 2012 presidential election in Russia, the media review is pretty poor. Comparing to Russian domestic observers, comments from

international representatives about election processes and electoral fraud were rather much scanty. At the a press conference at the International Centre in Moscow, Natasha Radulovic, an observer from Serbia told – “We did not see any violations of rights during the election, example of Russian Federation can be used for other countries”. (Rosbalt 2012) Another participant in the press conference, the chairman of the Communist Party of Serbia and an independent observer Josip Broz, said that this was “the world's first democratic elections” he has ever seen. Additionally Joseph Vegrostek from Austria admitted that “everything went according to Western standards.”

Another observer – deputy of the European Parliament (MEP) Bela Kovacs - said that in his report to the European Parliament he will encourage the of use web cameras to monitor election processes in the future. During the overview of international organizations who took part in the election monitoring, most of them made special mention of the use of webcam as a huge breakthrough in achieving transparent elections and democracy. “This is a unique solution for such countries as Russia to prove fairness and transparency of their elections”- said the representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Tadeusz Ivinsky (RIA News).

As it was mentioned above, the video surveillance system was first implemented in the presidential election in 2012. Around 15 billion rubles (2 billion US dollars) were spent on video surveillance. Despite that huge investment, webcams were undoubtedly beneficial. According to experts, due to the continuous video surveillance, it was possible to prevent and prove 99% of possible violations of the election. For example, at polling station 1402 in Dagestan (Southern Russia) was possible to prevent ballot stuffing. Results of voting at this station were canceled.

## 5. Hypothesis

While reviewing the literature I have formulated the following hypothesis:

- The influence of international election observers on election processes is not significant and too little in Russian presidential elections.

To confirm or disprove this statement I will analyze quantitative data to find out how significant was the number of international election observers compared with other countries.

Further hypotheses are based on statements of Thomas Carothers that well prepared domestic observers play a significant role in preventing election fraud and monitoring. Thereby I suppose:

- Russian domestic observers are not able to prevent fraud because of lack of knowledge.

Additionally, I surmise that:

- People decided to become election observers to keep somebody company or just for fun.

To substantiate such a strongly-worded argument I need to find out the average age and education level of my observers and if the decision to participate in the political events were their own or influenced by others.

Another hypothesis is the result of work by Garber & Cowan (1993) on parallel voting counting. I would like to find out if during the presidential election in 2012, Polling Voting Tabulation has been done.

- Russian domestic has been doing PVT to prevent falsification of election results.

I also concerned if observers took part in all “phases” of election day, from the opening of polling stations, direct observation on election day from 08.00 - 20.00 and took part in the vote count. (It should be clarified that not all observers had the right to engage in vote counting with the Commission of Elections, only approximately one-third of observers with “electoral vote”. But other observers had the right to monitor the vote counting and take photos and videos; they have rights to protest and demand re-consideration (review) of

some ballots if they were not satisfied with the decision made by the Election Commission), therefore, I make a hypothesis that:

- Election observers stay on polling stations till the end of work of Election Commission to control fairness and authenticity of the result presented in the final protocol.

## **6. Methodology**

Researchers have argued for and encouraged a mixed method approach adding that it promotes quality in research, through capitalizing on the strengths of each approach and compensating for the weakness of the other approach (Punch 2005:241). Therefore in my research I am using mixed methods: quantitative survey data combined with qualitative methods.

In considering these two methods, the main focus will be on the qualitative method. One reason that the qualitative method will be emphasized is that according to Adrian Holliday, scholars are increasingly becoming aware of statistical quantitative statements from opinion polls, government, opposition and ‘independent’ scientific reports, and what ‘research has shown’, can tell quite different stories and also be at the mercy of political ‘spin’ (Holliday 2007:7). For this reason carefully conducted interviews and correct interpretation of answers will be the most important part of my work.

Between the 27th of February to 2nd of March 2012 I conducted the first survey, and 5th of March to 9th of March the second. The survey concerned different aspects on political life in Russia, mainly with the focus on election processes. It was conducted in two stages – before and after the election with participants of the organization “RusElection 2012” in Moscow (Росвыборы 2012). The timing was very suitable for my research as elections indicate the increased intensity of political activity. These events made it a time of more intense political activity. It is also at time when civil society activists participate in election campaigns. The general political temperature was extremely high for the upcoming presidential election. As a consequence, I expected respondents to be

somewhat more interested in political issues than under more normal circumstances.

The survey was conducted to identify their motivation and expectations from the elections, the attitude towards the elections and government, as well as previous experience in social activism. On the whole I was rather successful in collecting feedback due to the fact that the presidential election is a popular topic among Russians and especially future election observers.

The survey was conducted electronically in two phases - before and after the elections. The first survey involved 137 observers and the second - 64. That is why in the presented data I include only people who fully answered the questions in the first and the second survey – 60 people.

The questionnaire consisted of nine questions which were sent out by e-mail. The last question of the first questionnaire was the issue of consent to participate in the second survey. If the answer was “YES”, the observer’s email was saved for the further research. Of course it is a pity that after the elections, the number of responses fell by half. In terms of electronically surveys Alan Bruman (2008) make a statement that comparing with its purely email-based counterpart, the web-based survey is more efficient and attractive, yet internet survey response rates tend to be lower than return rates of traditional postal surveys.

In the first survey, I inquired about attitudes toward the presidential elections and the current government; their participation in the activities of political parties (whether they supported the current government or were in opposition); and the level of their social activity and participation in civil organizations. I also inquired about their experience for the event.

After the election I conducted a second step of my survey to know the impression after the election, if observers sought to help or assist, problems they faced, the monitoring process, and participation in protests after the election, and desire to be an observer in the future. Due to the fact that my research question was developed and narrowed over time, some of the gathered answers are not important for me longer, and the presented research do not include than in data analysis.

Since the research will consist of both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the criteria of reliability, replicability and validity will remain important (Bryman 2008:31). Of course, it is important to bare in mind the issue of external validity and that this particular study is not representative for the whole country (Bryman 2008: 55). However, the case of election monitoring and consolidation of civil society groups in Moscow might hopefully add something new to a general debate on the political situation in Russia.

### *Sampling*

In choosing the sampling method I bear in mind suggestions and outlined problems by Marcella Hart in her work “Birthing a research project”, that the sample is not representative of the whole population (sampling bias). It is not possible to identify “universe” of civil society groups or perfect observer group in order to select a representative sample (Uhlin 2004), thus I carried out a survey and semi-structured interviews with people participating in domestic election monitoring NGO - RusElection 2012 (Росвыборы 2012) in Moscow.

My sampling would most probably will be perceived as random; due to population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. Through Tedly and Yu (2007) will most probably clarify it as “cluster sampling”, due to I examine a group that occurs naturally in the population such as neighborhoods, in my case – election observers groups, that occurred naturally within the society. (Bryman 2008)

### *Survey*

The aim of my survey is to produce a stable foundation for further qualitative insight into the general research question. The main advantage of this format is large selection of opinions in a short time, which represents the general opinion among the people; in the same time the weakness of my survey that it does not represent the whole population, due to the reason that only election observers took

part in it. The survey has been done in a self-completion questionnaire format comprised of closed questions.

### *Interviews*

When I first started my research I planned to conduct structured interviews as they are “easier to evaluate”. However, as time went by I came to the conclusion that semi-structured interviews are more useful as they give various angles of the problem and give more useful information. Semi-structured interviews allow new questions and discussions to be brought up during the interview. Thus, I used the same questions from my survey to gather broader answers, feedback and comments which I might have missed from my survey questions. Interviews were conducted with 6 observers (Bryman 2008: 191).

## **7. Data analysis**

For the quantitative analysis this study uses information and data obtained from newspaper articles and NGO reports from December 2011 till May 2012 to examine the role of organizational interests and norms in monitors’ assessments of elections. The quantitative data analysis is aimed to understand the role of international observers in the context of the 2012 Russian presidential elections, while the survey and interviews is aimed on understanding the nature of domestic observers and the recent rise in numbers.

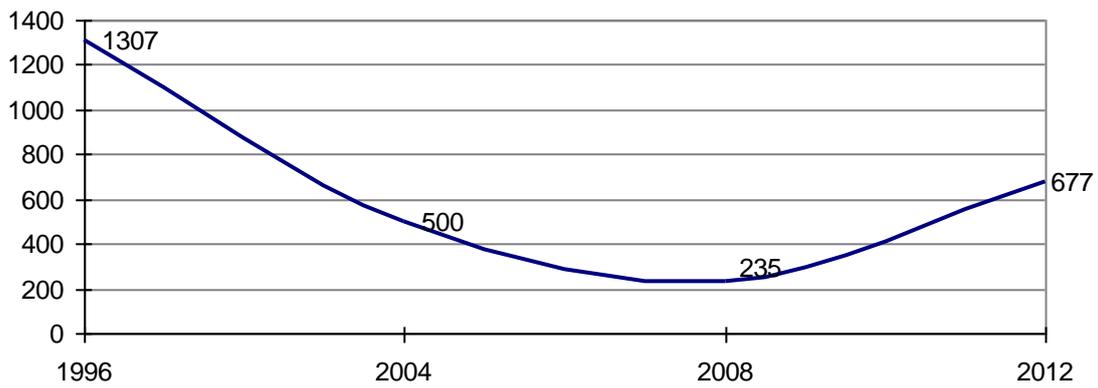
The main data was gathered during the survey carried out between the 27th of February to – March 9th 2012, and 6 additional interviews in order to collect comments and reflections.

### **7.1. Quantitative data analysis**

Examining the history of international election observation in Russia over the past 20 years, a significant year was the year 1996, when it was registered a maximum number of international observers – 1307 on the presidential election (Civil control 2012). Eight years later, during the 2004 presidential election the

number fell to only 500 (BBC 2007) and in 2008 it reached the minimum rate of international election monitoring in Russia and have been equal to 235 observers (Civil control 2012). That year observers from OSCE ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly refused to come to Russia, due to claims of “unacceptable conditions” imposed by the Russian Election Commission. The main stumbling block was that Russian authorities refused to allow a core group of 50 observers of ODIHR to arrive and start election monitoring earlier than 2 weeks before the election day (BBC 2012).

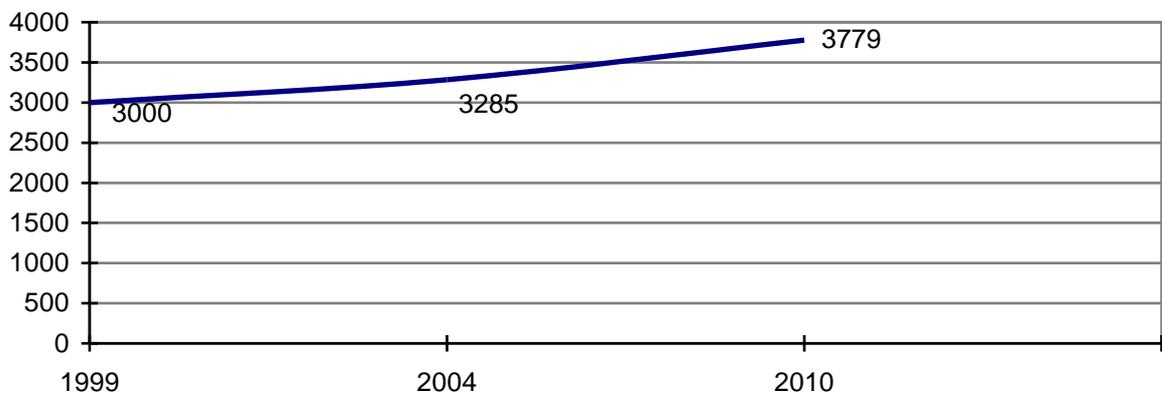
The Russian authorities have traditionally had a lukewarm attitude toward the work of observers from European institutions. Criticism of the organization and conduct of elections and counting votes by international observers often cause a rather indifferent reaction from the Russian governance. But in the upcoming 2012 presidential elections, experts point out that CEC has accepted all conditions imposed by Western organizations. As a result, according to data gathered from the Central Election Commission, 667 international observers have been accredited from international non-governmental organization and intergovernmental organizations to participate in election monitoring during the 2012 presidential elections. Of these, 219 observers were presenting the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 231 were from the mission of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), International Assembly of the Council of the CIS has appointed 44 people, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have been represented by 37 and 8 international observers came from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The Figure 1 clearly illustrates that the number has dramatically increased compared to the number of accredited international observers in 2004 and 2008 (Churov 2012).



*Fig. 1* (Sources: BFM, Central Election Commission of Russian Federation)

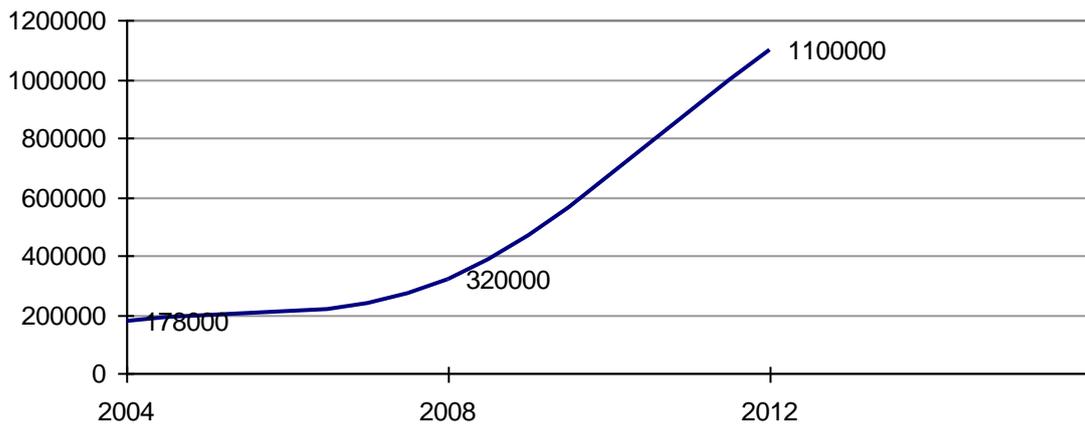
In spite of the recent rise in numbers of international observers, it is still insignificant compared to the number of international observers in other countries with similar political conditions.

For instance, similar analysis of the presence of international observers in Ukraine showed (Fig. 2) that the number of international observers has always been above 3,000 in the last three presidential elections.



*Fig. 2* (Sources: Trust Ukraine, RBK UA, Woronowycz 1999)

The trend in number of international observers is also poor when compared to the rapid rise of domestic actors (Fig.3), where the number of domestic observers rose almost 10 times since the 2004 presidential elections.



*Fig. 3* (Sources: BFM, organization RusElection 2012, Centre for Studies of Civil Society and Nonprofit Sector (HSE, Moscow)

This increase can be explained by several reasons – rise of domestic civil organizations, organizing the education of election observers, support of such organizations by authorities after the 2011 parliamentary election, big attention of mass media to the upcoming 2012 presidential elections and as it has been mentioned by one of my interviewees – “succumbing to fashion”. As I researched further, I attempted to find out what were the reasons for such an increase in domestic election observers and can domestic observers be called “backbone of Russian civil society” (Hamraeva 2012) – people as they, who take the most active role in the life of the country?

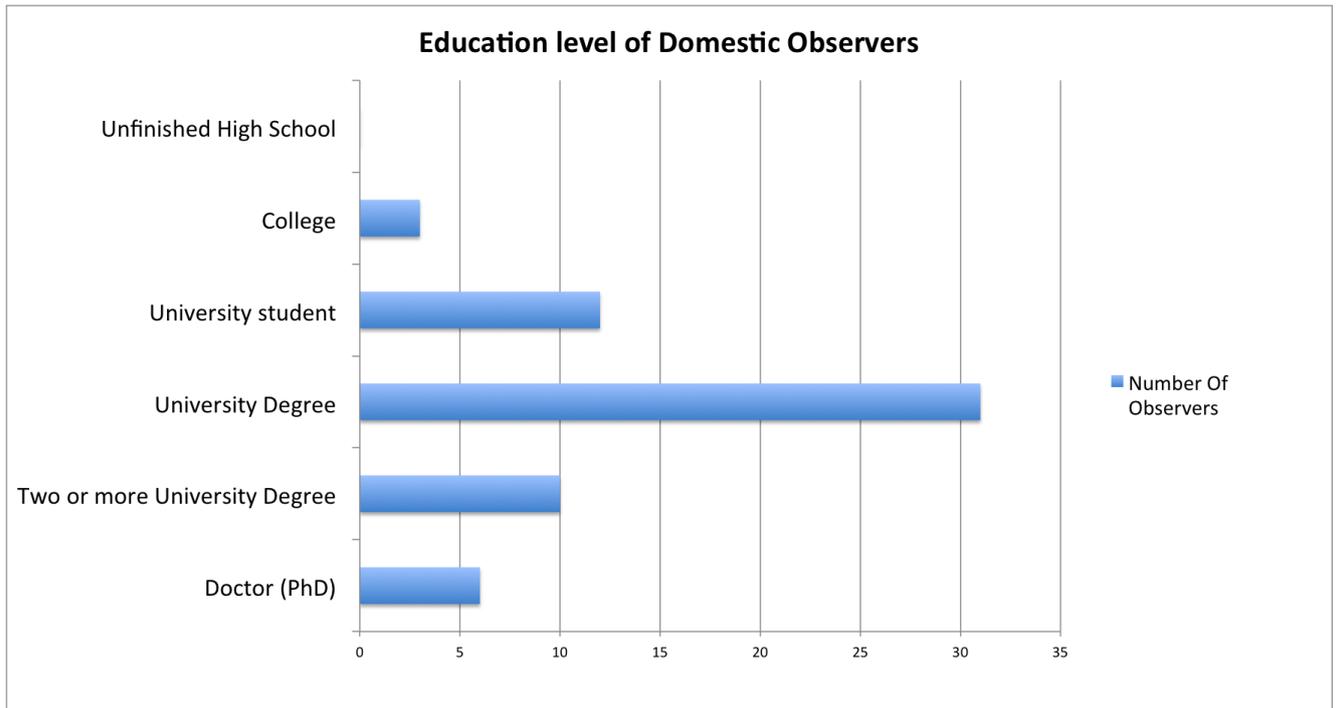
## **7.2. Survey and interviews**

This section presents comparative data from a survey of domestic observers and representative surveys of the adult population as a whole - 60 people.

Among the observers there were more men (60%) than women (40%). The majority (55%) fell within to the age group 18-30 years, about one-third (31%) were between the ages 31-45 years and people over the age of 45 was just 14%.

Over half (71%) of the observers had higher education, one-fifth (20%) had undergraduate degrees or still were students, and only 5% of the observers did not

have higher education. Gathered numbers give us a right to say that Russian domestic observers represent young and well-educated part of the society.



*Fig. 4*

In examining political questions all observers (45 people, 75%) had negative attitude toward the current government, the rest of the respondents were “apolitical” - neither supporters nor members of any political party.

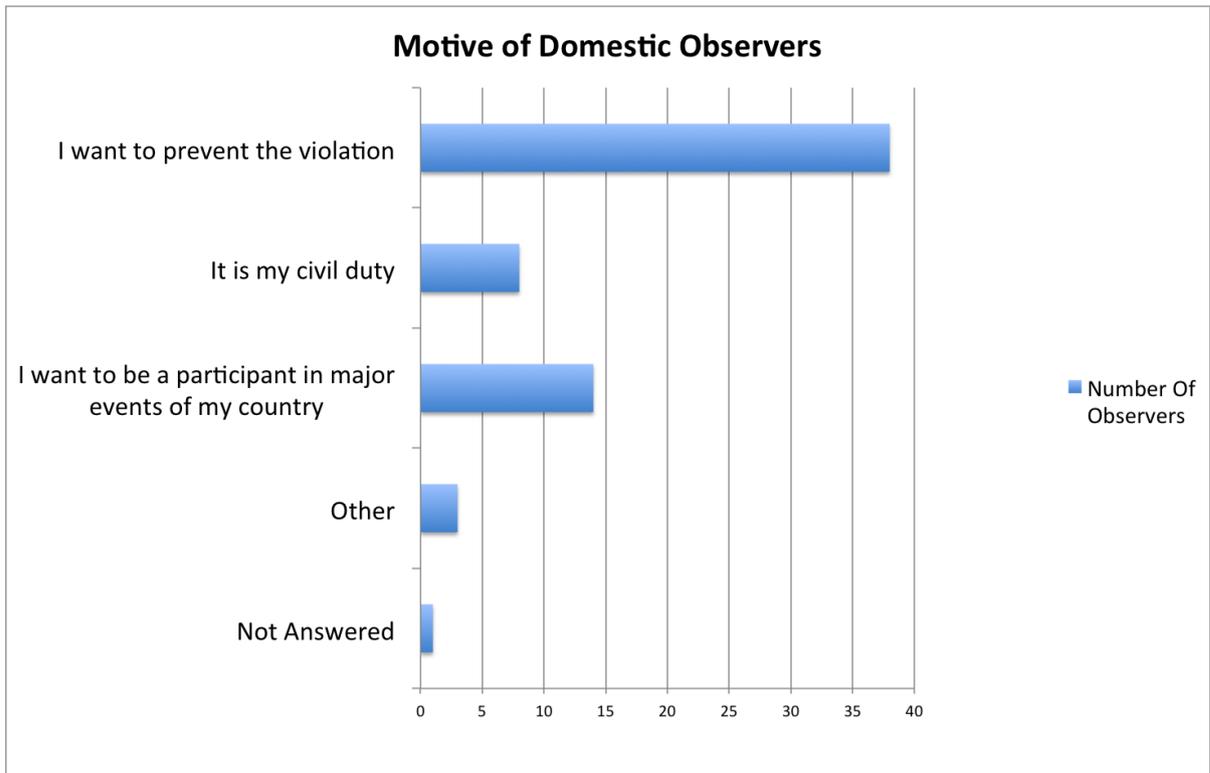
In response to the question “Are you a member or supporter of any political party?” 43 of the observers (78%) responded “NO”, 12 are supporters of (some) political party, and only 1 was a member. This data gives us a right to argue that despite my respondents have negative attitude towards the current government, in general, people are politically inactive and did not expressed their political preferences before.

Confirmation of the rapid rise of election observers can also be gathered from the survey question: “Have you ever been an election observer before?”

54 of 60 observers participated in election monitoring for the first time.

The respondents have decided to become observers for various reasons, but mainly because of the wish to prevent the violation of the law. This answer was selected

by 63%, 14 people (23%) responded that in their opinion the upcoming presidential elections is major event for the country and they would like personally contribute to it.



*Fig. 5*

During the interviews with 6 respondents, 5 people honestly said that their decision to become an electoral observer was influenced by videos of fraud and falsifications during the 2011 parliamentary election, and they are sure that electoral fraud would take place during the presidential elections. Another respondent, a jurist, admitted that he did not have any expectations from the election; he just wanted to make sure that the election would take place without violations of the law.

To prove my hypothesis that most of the observers did not had necessarily education and preparation I decided to include the following question in the survey: “Are you planning to attend any education seminars for election observers (by political parties or election monitoring NGOs)?” 25% of respondents replied “Yes”, 75% – “NO”. Some of the respondents relied on the methodological literature, which was provided by election NGOs to prepare the observers. This

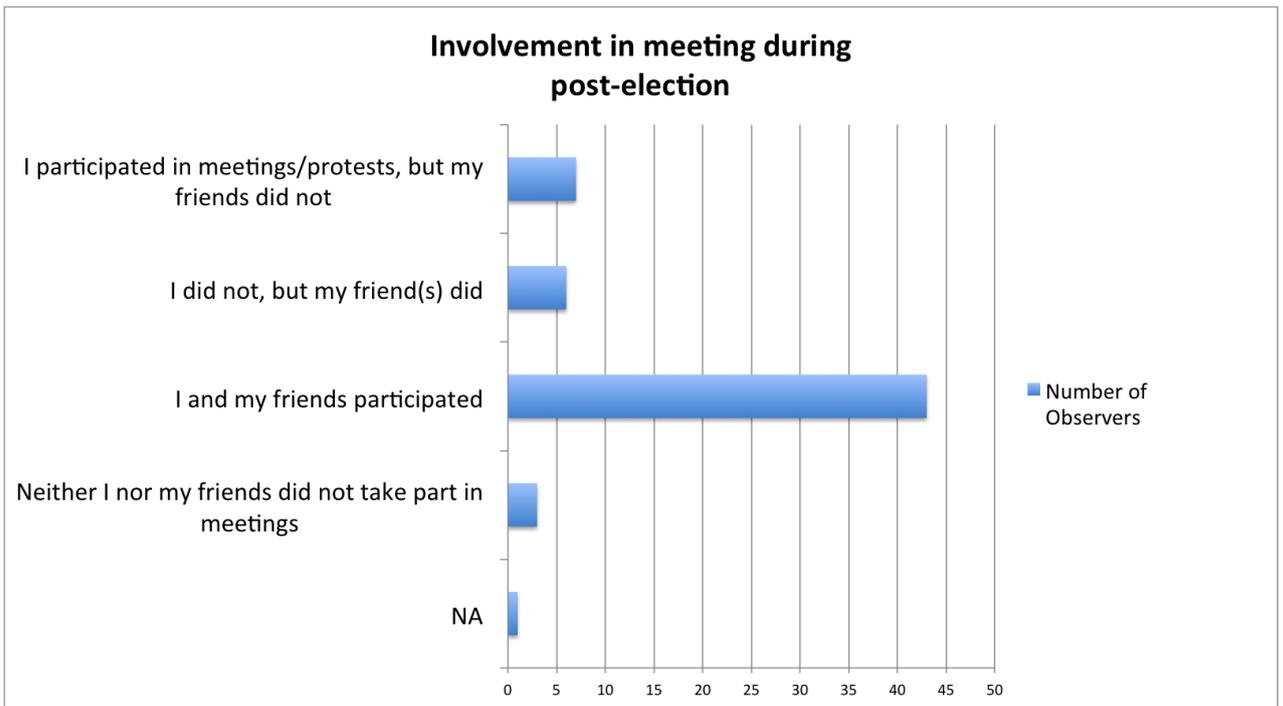
confirms my hypothesis that generally people are not well-prepared for the role of election observer. They are passionate to participate and prevent electoral fraud, but most of them did not have specific knowledge to do it in practice.

One of the project leaders of the project (NGO) “Citizen Observer”, Inna Kurtyukova, who I luckily met on the education seminar for observers, said that: “The quality of monitoring in March will be lower than in December, as many people decided to participate “succumbing to fashion”, most of them will not manage the stress and responsibility, the rest just do not have enough knowledge in the repression of violations”. Miss Kurtyukova also mentioned that some people decided to become observers because of their friends and relatives.

To confirm or disprove my hypothesis that people who decided to participate in election monitoring are probably the “backbone”, I would like to know if the people participate in other socio-political events such as meetings, protests and other kind of citizen impressive actions. Therefore, I included the question “Have you or any of your family members participated in meetings or protest after the parliament election?”

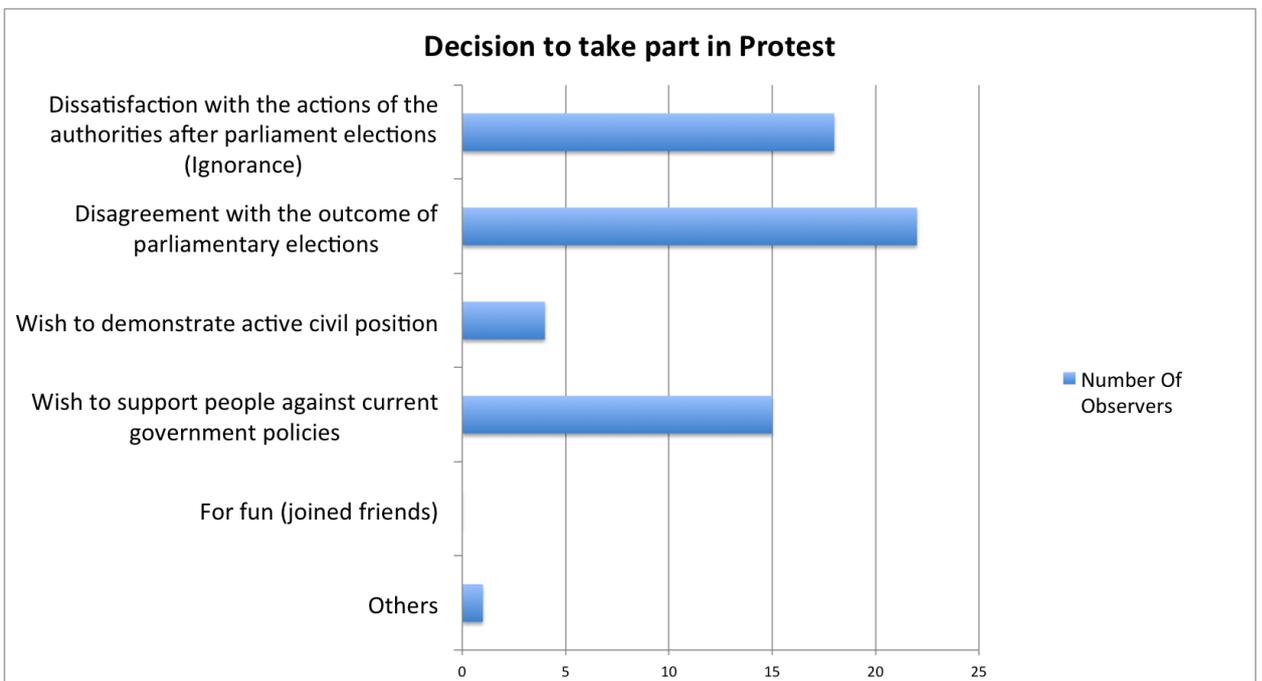
As it shown on the Figure 6, virtually all observers (96%) reported their involvement and / or participation in meetings with their friends after the parliamentary elections.

This question was important for the research, due to such sort of activities as participation in meetings and protests considered to be stimulation for “public sphere” of political dialogue and exchange. Many researchers consider current decade as a new era of expression of public opinion which has “shrunk considerably in the twentieth century—in capitalist states as a result of technological developments and spatial arrangements which have contributed to the isolation of individuals, as well as in the former Communist world as a result of state policies which tended to colonize private and small-group activity” (Erik Gordy 2003:1). Results represented in the Figure 6 shows that significant percentage of observers does impress and exchange their political opinion.



*Fig. 6*

On my question: “What are the reasons influenced your decision to take part in protests? I got the following answers.



*Fig. 7*

The observers’ reason for taking part in meetings was, first of all, disagreement with the outcome of the parliamentary elections, according to the 34% of

respondents. Dissatisfaction with the current actions of the authorities led to the participation of 30% of the observers. These results disprove my hypothesis that people joined protests for fun or because of the friends. Observers represent their own civil and political position, as well 25% answered that they wished to support people against current governmental policies what might give us a right to argue that it was a beginning of consolidation of Russian civil society.

After the election, my second survey included the question where I wanted to know if observers were doing PVT. In the first survey I found that 42% (25 observers) were planning to do a parallel counting, 14 people – not, 20% of observers (12 people of 60) responded the do not know how to conduct PVT.

Comparing to 25 observers in the first survey, the second showed that on practice only 7 of them (11%) were doing parallel tabulation, the reason for that was “impossibility to do continuous (uninterrupted) counting” as it has been mentioned by one of my interviews.

Among other problems which observers faced in practice were (Fig. 8) “lack of legal knowledge and procedural issues” - 24 respondents note, for one-fourth (25%) it were absence of interaction with members of the election commission. In addition, 10 % of observers pointed to the excessive physical and psychological stress.

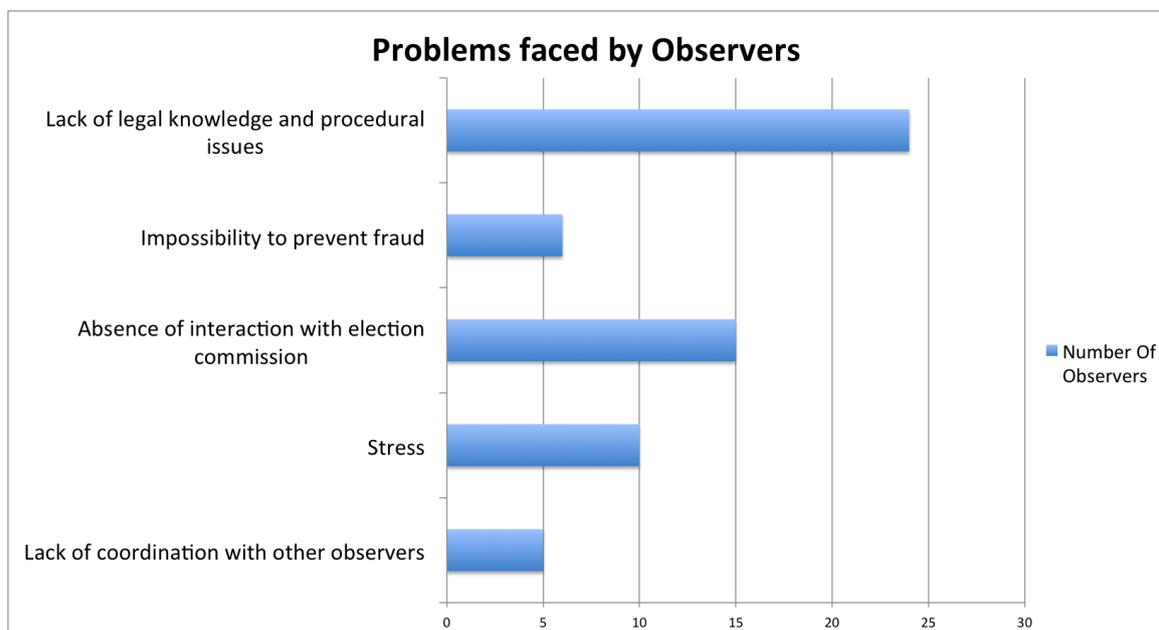


Fig. 8

Concerning my last hypothesis I found that virtually all observers (92%) expected to be present at the counting of votes in the first survey. After the election answers show that expectation to attend the counting practices were even more positive- in fact 96% has stayed till the end of the counting process.

The second survey also showed that generally monitoring situation was much optimistic that were expected, before the election most observers expected to be pressured by election commission for ballot rigging, the post-election survey showed the opposite - most of the observers indicated that pressure has not exerted on them, 82% vs. 31%.

## **8. Discussion**

The results of my investigation coincide well with my hypothesis outlined in the beginning and reflect the literature I have read. Analysis of quantitative data in the form of three graphs in *Chapter 7* represent a little influence of international observers. It has been found that their amount has not been over 700 hundred representors in the last 15 years, for such huge country with the 145 million populations and almost hundred polling stations; the number of international observers is not significant. Comparative analysis shows that it was even less compared with much smaller, post-Soviet country. The study of role of the international observers could not be performed effectively in my research. This could mainly happened because they refrain from the official comments on presidential election observations in Russia on their official websites / information's and also because reports have not been released yet upon during my study. The better investigation of this problem could be made only through the interviews of the international observers and election organization who took part in monitoring, which was not possible in my study due to time limitation and capacity of my study.

The target focus of the research was the domestic actors; to investigate their role in election monitoring process due to easy accessibility for interview and questionnaire surveys. In my research it was found that Russian domestic

observers represent young and well-educated part of the society, they are apolitical and became observers for the first time. The main reason why observers chose to monitor the elections was to prevent the violation and frauds, which occurred during the 2011 parliament elections, and personally they were driven to conduct and take part in fair and transparent presidential election. Even though it could be seen that the youth are enticed to prevent the frauds but my study confirms that the majority of them did not participated in educational seminars held for the election observers. Thus, they lacked the basic knowledge to effective monitoring. It was merely based on their initial conception about themselves that they had enough understanding of election monitoring which was later disproved during my second survey in post-election period. They admitted that they lacked enough knowledge required to prevent frauds in the election. In this case, it is possible to argue that lack of clear responsibility is one of the major keys to the cause fraudulent election.

In the research I also looked on such phenomenon as “succumbing fashion” mentioned in the section 7.2 by Inna Kurtyukova. It has been partly confirmed and illustrated in the Figure 6 that people decided to become observers with (or because) of their friends/ or relatives which could be seen from the trend and fashion of their involvement in monitoring. From another point, it might mean that participation of the closest friends and relatives also has the influence of decision of domestic election observers to participate in election monitoring.

Continuing the discussion of personal expression of political and civil position in other forms rather than election observation I had investigated involvement of these actors in meetings and protests after the parliament elections. With the gathered data it could be proved that observers are the active part of Russian civil society, which participates in meetings and protests. Figure 7 demonstrates their personal opinion such as dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the parliament election, and position against current government policies, while involvement in these actions because of friends or because of having fun have not been confirmed by any of respondents.

General results of the presented research can tell a lot about the nature of Russian “domestic observers”, it clearly underlines the reasons why people became observers and explain such rapid rise of domestic election observers in 2012 in Russia (Fig. 3); it shows that the rise of civil activity after the 2011 parliament elections has helped to strength the election process and led to installation of web cameras on the polling station, which effectiveness were approved by the international community. It resulted in access of election observation organization to the work with the central election commission, but unfortunately, it does not give us a right to argue about prevention of violation of human rights or the effectiveness of their work as quantification of frauds in post-election. In my research the conclusion based on the quantification of fraud during election could not be drawn due to unavailability of fraud data and facts of the violation. The lack of data on the fraud or specifically how many frauds were prevented by the observers, and how serious were they would help to draw the conclusion on the effectiveness and effect of the domestic election observation. This data could later be obtained in the domestic election organizations with the observer’s reports and work papers from the polling station, which unfortunately was not available during my research. In the further research on effectiveness of domestic observers in terms of preventing electoral fraud more investigation of work of domestic monitoring organization should be done. This will aid to prepare and control the workflow of election observers to prevent electoral fraud.

## **9. Conclusion**

The presented thesis studied the monitoring of the 2012 Russian presidential election and explored empirical questions about how the domestic and international actors influenced the election process. The study of election observation confirms the assumption that election monitoring is able to facilitate such democratization processes as transparent elections and strengthen relations between the government and civil society. However it has been proved that changes happen not principally by prevention of election day fraud, but mainly

through increasing attention to the organization of the elections. To draw a conclusion on the effect of international and domestic election observers, more research is needed to investigate both work of international observers and the domestic election monitoring organizations.

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