

# Kremlin Rebuffs Report Questioning Duma Vote

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Vladimir Churov, above, told journalists that those with doubts about the legitimacy of the Duma vote should check themselves into a psychiatric clinic.

Senior government officials on Wednesday rejected as pure fantasy a leaked report that cast doubt on the ruling United Russia party's victory in the 2011 State Duma elections, saying its author should seek psychiatric help.

The report, written by Stepan Sulakshin, director of the Governance and Problem Analysis Center, a think tank co-chaired by Russian Railways president Vladimir Yakunin, said that United Russia only won elections to the lower house through electoral falsifications and that the Communists gained the most votes in the disputed December race, which kick-started the opposition protest movement.

But Sulakshin's study, which was written in the fall but only leaked to RBC Daily and Kommersant in time for publication Wednesday, did not question Putin's victory in the

March 2012 presidential vote, saying the head of state had garnered far more votes than his nearest competitor.

Analysts were divided on their assessment of Sulakshin's report, titled "The Electoral System and Success of the Government," with some seeing it as an attempt to influence Russia's political course by pointing up voters' support for conservative policies and others calling its conclusions implausible.

Early Wednesday, an undisclosed Kremlin source said about the report that "if someone wants to review the election results, he should file a lawsuit with concrete facts instead of writing reports," RIA-Novosti reported.

Vladimir Churov, the country's top elections official, reacted just as skeptically to the study, telling journalists that those with doubts about the legitimacy of the Duma vote should check themselves into a psychiatric clinic.

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

Acting on the criticism, the Governance and Problem Analysis Center appeared to stall on the report's publication, and a spokeswoman said by phone that Sulakshin's work would be published "in the near future" and refused further comment.

Sulakshin, a prominent liberal in the final years of the Soviet Union and a former State Duma deputy during Boris Yeltsin's presidency, is known as a conservative force within the academic community. Aside from his research roles, he advises Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko and Yakunin at Russian Railways.

In his study, Sulakshin used statistical analysis to demonstrate that United Russia's results were inflated by falsifications on voting day, Kommersant and RBC reported. He said that United Russia actually received 22 percent of the vote and that the Communists garnered roughly 30 percent, while elections officials gave their vote totals as 49 percent and 19 percent, respectively.

But Sulakshin said Putin's re-election for a third term as president was fair since overzealous officials "only" added 12 percent to his real vote total, with Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov coming a distant second.

"From December to March, the falsification coefficient decreased. This is linked with the fact that Putin showed political will. He needed an honest result, and for this reason he gave the order to hold fair elections," Sulakshin wrote, according to the newspapers.

Vyacheslav Nikonov, a political scientist and lawmaker affiliated with the All-Russia People's Front, an umbrella organization of civic groups created by Putin, dismissed Sulakshin's conclusions, saying that they "bore no relation with reality."

But Alexei Makarkin, deputy director of the Center for Political Technologies, saw the report

as an attempt to call for a new political course by further discrediting State Duma deputies, whose reputation has suffered in recent weeks with revelations concerning costly undeclared real estate.

Although he could not explain why the report was leaked only months after it was written, Makarkin linked its appearance with the fact that conservative supporters of the president were seeking to gain the upper hand in dictating policy.

"By saying that the Communists should have won, the report suggests that Russian voters are more reactionary than the State Duma and that the ruling elite should place a bet on ideological conservatives, rather than Duma deputies who will vote for any legislation that is put in front of them," he said.

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