Amending budget bills in the Russian State Duma

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Do budget bills change during review in the Russian State Duma? If so, by how much and why? Portrayals of the contemporary Federal Assembly as a 'rubber stamp' parliament would suggest that budget initiatives undergo no amendment during the formal period of legislative review. There is, however, evidence of bill change. The article's primary goal is to present this surprising evidence, focusing on changes to spending figures, 2002-2016. The article also discusses *why* such changes are made, assessing hypotheses concerning legislator influence, technical updating, and intra-executive conflict.

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Do budget bills change during review in the Russian State Duma? If so, by how much and why? Portrayals of the contemporary Federal Assembly as a 'rubber stamp' parliament would suggest that budget initiatives undergo no change during the formal period of legislative review. As Taylor (2014, p.245) argues, 'although the Duma formally has the power to discuss and amend laws, its real function is simply to pass laws – it is not an opportunity for influence.' Indeed, commenting on current budgeting practices, Just Russia deputy Aleksandr Burkov has stated that 'parliament votes on budget expenditures, but no real discussion takes place' (cited in Dyatlovskaya, 28 October 2015, *Novye izvestiya*).

There is, however, evidence of budget bill change. The article's primary goal is to present this surprising evidence, focusing on changes to spending figures, as well as other measures of amendment, 2002-2016.[2] The article also discusses *why* such changes are made, assessing hypotheses concerning legislator influence, technical updating, and intra-executive conflict.

The article consists of four sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the State Duma's place in the budget process. The second section then puts current practices in historical perspective, presenting data on budget scrutiny, 2002-2016. The third section – the core of the article – sets out and analyses data on budget bill amendments, discussing alternative explanations for these changes. Following a summary of the findings, the final section notes international parallels of Russian budget practices, as well as areas for future research.

The State Duma and the budget process

The passage of budget bills through the Federal Assembly is the final stage in the budget process before presidential signature into law. Although this stage is clearly associated with legislators, two points must be borne in mind: firstly, it is not the only stage during which parliamentarians are involved in budget discussions, as they are included – to varying degrees – in earlier discussions with executive actors; and, secondly, as will be made clear below,

[2] These years relate to the *fiscal* year, rather than the year of budget drafting, Duma consideration, and legal promulgation. Thus, in what follows, 'the 2012 budget', for example, refers to the annual budget relating to the 2012 fiscal year, but considered by the Duma in 2011. In addition, even with the shift to the three-year budget cycle in Russia (discussed below), references in the text will refer to the first year and not the planning year – for example, 'the 2012 budget' refers to the bill or law 'On the Federal Budget for 2012 and the planning period 2013 and 2014'. Occasional references are made to budget bills outside of this timeframe.

non-legislative actors – Government actors, most importantly – are active during the nominally legislative stage of the budgeting process. In light of these two points, we cannot infer actor *influence* simply from the *venue*, or stage, of budget policy-making.[3]

Consideration of the budget bill in the State Duma – the lower chamber of the federal parliament – is the most important phase of the parliamentary review process. Although Federation Council approval is required in order for an initiative to move on to the president, any consequential activity by senators takes place during the bill's review in the Duma. During Duma consideration, the bill is scrutinised by committees – according to policy area specialisation[4] – with the Budget Committee leading and coordinating this activity.[5] In order to progress through the lower chamber, budget initiatives need to pass Duma floor readings, the number and purpose of which have changed over time; but, overall, readings relate to particular features of bills, such as overall tax and spending figures, and, as a result, the size of the deficit, as well as particular figures for functional spending categories and sub-categories.

Russian budget bills over time – from chaos to control

Existing work on the parliamentary passage dynamics of Russian federal budgets relates primarily to the 1990s and early 2000s.[6] Contemporary practices, however, differ significantly. In contrast to the 'drawn-out, conflict-ridden budget cycle' (Chaisty 2006, p.161) in 1993, the 'procedural breakdown and deadlock' (Ostrow 2000, p.118) apparent in 1994 and 1995, and the production in 1997 of 'a budget that could not be implemented and which was not fulfilled until half-way through the year it was intended to cover' (Troxel 2003, p.159), the parliamentary passage of Russian budgets has become much less eventful.

[3] As a result, this article does not attempt to answer a related, but broader, question: What influence does the State Duma, and deputies, have on the overall budget decision-making process?
[4] See, for example, this list specifying which Duma committees were responsible for reviewing spending figures in different functional categories of the 2017 budget: http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(ViewDoc)?OpenAgent&work/dz.nsf/ByID&D917B4455A2C2F944325805A006294D7 (last accessed 20 November 2016).
[5] Expertise is also provided by the Audit Chamber, which produces a report (*zaklyuchenie*) on budget bills.
[6] See, for example, Sinel'nikov, Batkibekov and Zolotareva (1999) and Iwasaki (2002). Remington (2008) is an exception, providing a chapter-length commentary on Russian budget politics, although this includes data from a mixed time period. For example, data on the signing date and length of budgets is presented for 1992-2002, although the chapter also includes references to dynamics in the fourth Duma convocation (2004-2007). Chaisty (2012, p.97) also provides a brief overview of budgeting changes during the 2000s.

For example, whereas Russian budgets during the 1990s were often signed into law *after* the beginning of the planned fiscal year, this has not occurred since the 1999 budget. And, whereas Duma bill reading votes during the 1990s were often unpredictable – sometimes even resulting in failure – voting coalitions have become predictable, largely stable across readings, and successful.[7]

[Figure 1 around here]

This diachronic change in budget-passage dynamics is reflected in Figure 1, which presents data on the 2002 to 2016 budgets. The top graph presents budget bill velocities – that is, the number of days taken between Duma introduction and presidential signature. After relative stability from 2002 to 2006, the time spent by budget bills in the legislative process decreased roughly twofold by 2010. This suggests that the Duma spent less time scrutinising the Government's initiative. However, bill velocity might not capture legislature-specific scrutiny. Various actors could be involved in the activities taking place during the legislative stage, and the time spent during this stage might not relate specifically to scrutiny. In response to this ambiguity, the middle graph presents a measure that should more closely track Duma scrutiny. Specifically, this measure is a proxy for the length of time budget bills are discussed in Duma plenary sessions.[8] The trend presented is congruent with the decline in bill velocity over time, although the change in floor activity is more than a twofold reduction, and the decline begins earlier.

The bottom graph in Figure 1 suggests, moreover, a relationship between this reduced Duma activity and the extent of change experienced by budget bills during legislative review. This graph presents a measure of text similarity between introduced bill and final law dyads for the 2002 to 2016 budgets.[9] The extent of budget bill amendment has reduced over time, with

[7] By contrast, Ostrow (2000, p.138) – writing of budgeting in the 1990s – remarks, '[w]hen budget votes are held in the Duma, no one has any idea what the outcome will be'.

[8] The figures reported are the number of HTML lines of source code used to compose online transcripts of budget bill discussions on the Duma floor. Thus, the longer a bill is discussed on the floor, the more lines of text compose the official transcript, and the more HTML lines are needed to construct the webpage. As such, the measure is bounded on the left at 0 and unbounded on the right.

[9] Specifically, the figures relate to percentage text change, focusing on unique word frequency differences – figures calculated according to the system proposed by Pedrazzani and Zucchini (2013) and using the JFreq programme (http://conjugateprior.org/software/jfreq/).

the sharpest drop experienced between the 2008 and 2009 budgets. The over-time trends displayed in these graphs are consistent with observations of increased Russian executive dominance over the legislature – also framed in terms of authoritarian backsliding – noted in existing scholarship (see, for example: Chaisty 2012, 2013, 2014; Remington 2013; Shul'man 2013).

This executive dominance has also manifested itself in formal rule changes.[10] The time allowed for passage of the budget through the Duma has been reduced over time. The deadline for parliamentary introduction of the budget draft has shifted from 15 August (the original edition of the Budget Code),[11] to 26 August (116-FZ, 2000),[12] and to 1 October (216-FZ, 2010).[13] Moreover, for the 2015 and 2016 budgets, the deadline was shifted to 25 October (273-FZ, 2015)[14] and 1 November (158-FZ, 2016),[15] respectively, in response to the economic crisis.[16] Moreover, amendments to the Budget Code introduced in 2007 (63-FZ) reduced the number of Duma readings of budget bills from four to three.[17] At the same time, the budget moved from a one-year to a three-year cycle. Thus, whereas all budgets up to and including the 2007 budget covered only the following fiscal year, budgets from 2008 have set out tax and spending plans for the following fiscal year, as well as two further 'planning' years.[18] Chaisty (2012, p.97) attributes this shift to a three-year cycle to a desire 'to contain

[10] The rules governing legislative passage of the budget are located in various documents: the Constitution of the Russian Federation; the respective standing orders (*reglamenty*) of the State Duma, the Federation Council, and the Government; and the Budget Code. These rules have changed over time. For example, the Budget Code has been amended more than 100 times since 2000. See the list of amendments at http://www.consultant.ru/popular/budget/ (accessed 20 October 2016).
[11] The Budget Code is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_19702/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[12] The text of Federal Law 116 (2000) is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_28104/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[13] The text of Federal Law 216 (2010) is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_103029/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[14] The text of Federal Law 273 (2015) is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_186694/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[15] The text of Federal Law 158 (2016) is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_198846/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[16] Whereas previous editions of the Budget Code specified a particular number of days allowed for each stage (readings) of draft passage, a change in 2013 (104-FZ) means that the Duma has a total of 60 days to review the draft, with no constraint on how this time is apportioned. The text of Federal Law 104 (2013) is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_145985/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[17] The text of Federal Law 63 (2007) is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_58942/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[18] There have been exceptions, however. In response to the world financial crisis, the detailed portions of the 2010 budget covered only the following financial year, omitting detailed spending decisions for 2011 and 2012. In addition, the 2016 budget moved back to a one-year cycle, ostensibly as a result of the difficulties of planning during a period of economic volatility (see, for example, Filipenok, 1 September 2015, *RBK Daily*). However, the Government announced in March 2016 that future budgets would return to the three-year cycle (see Butrin and Skorobogat'ko, 16 March 2016, *Kommersant''*).

lobbying by United Russia deputies', characterising the formal changes as 'a major blow to the parliament's authority.'

Amendments and spending figures

The longitudinal picture of bill change presented in the lower graph of Figure 1 uses a measure of text change. Although this provides a preliminary picture of bill change over time, we should be more interested in the *substance* of change. In particular, do spending figures change during Duma review? Looking only at *overall*[19] budget expenditure figures in drafts and laws suggests there is little of interest to explain: from 2002 to 2016, these figures have changed only once during parliamentary consideration – for the 2002 budget. Whereas the version of the 2002 bill submitted by the Government to the Duma proposed a total expenditure of 1,871,871,050,000 roubles, the final law provided for 1,947,386,255,400.[20]

A different picture emerges, however, if we compare spending figures in bills and laws for *functional spending categories*, such as defence, healthcare, and education. Although overall expenditure figures have not varied between bills and laws beginning with the 2003 budget, the *distribution* of spending across functional spending categories has changed every year during legislative review. In an analysis of budget amendments in the Japanese Diet, Meyer and Naka (1998: 274) calculate 'gross expenditure difference' as the sum of absolute 'budget-item-spending changes'. In effect, this measure sums the changes made to spending category figures, providing an overall statistic of amendment, but removing information on the *direction* of change. Figure 2 presents data on gross spending changes made during Duma review, 2002-2016.

[Figure 2 around here]

[19] That is, the headline spending figures, which include both unclassified and classified spending figures.
[20] This, therefore, contradicts a report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Kraan, Bergvall, Hawkesworth, Kostyleva and Witt 2008: 30), which states that '[t]he totals of expenditures and revenues and the balance *have never* been changed in the final version of the budget law approved by the parliament as compared with the draft submitted to the State Duma' (emphasis added).

Two features stand out in Figure 2. Firstly, the 2002 budget is a clear outlier, showing a relatively high level of change. Indeed, as noted above, this was the last budget year to see a net difference between spending totals in the draft and the final law. The exceptional nature of the 2002 budget is consistent with changes in executive-legislative consultation practices. Beginning with the preparation of the 2003 budget in 2002, the Government held 'zero readings' – consultations between the Government and legislators *before* the budget draft's submission to the Duma and readings on the floor, with a view to incorporating policy preferences and constructing voting majorities (Shul'man, 2014, pp.102-103; Svobodnaya analiticheskaya shkola, 2003). As a result, adjustments resulting from executive-legislative bargaining would more likely be made *before* legislative introduction from the 2003 budget onwards.[21] Secondly, although gross expenditure changes fell precipitously after 2002, change still occurred in later years. Why? The following will explore three possibilities, the first of which is that changes reflect legislator influence.

Legislator influence

Amendments made to budget initiatives during parliamentary passage are often attributed to legislator influence. According to Meyer and Naka (1998, p.273, footnote 19), 'deviations in budgetary outcomes from proposals reflect the political power of the legislative and executive branch. The formulation of the budget can then be modelled as a bargaining process'. This strategic model is common in studies of the legislative stage of budgeting. Araya (2015, p.220), for example, argues that, '[w]hile the government has no motivations to amend its budget bill, the assembly is interested in adapting the budget to its preferences'. Similarly, in a study on US state budgeting, Clarke (1998, p.12) uses as 'a measure of conflict between the governor and legislature, the percentage change made by the legislature to the governor's recommendation for each [executive] agency'. And Wehner (2010, p.56) uses budgetary 'amendment activity' as a 'measure of [legislative] policy influence'.

One way to evaluate the hypothesis that parliamentarians are responsible for spending figure changes is to look at the *direction* of change. Are spending redistributions consistent with

[21] This point also serves to highlight that this article is focused on amendments made during the legislative passage of Russian budget bills, rather than the broader question of parliamentary influence on the wider budget process. An analysis of the latter question would require, for example, analysis of Duma involvement in pre-parliamentary, executive discussions, as well as oversight of budget implementation.

legislator – and, in turn, citizen – priorities? White (1982, pp.84-87) uses this approach in his study of budget amendments introduced in the USSR Supreme Soviet. Finding 'evidence of a consistent attempt to increase the allocation of resources on categories of expenditure of obvious public appeal, such as socio-cultural purposes and the republics, rather than on others which may be of less immediate interest to local areas and constituents, such as administration, arms and the economy', White tentatively suggests that this might reflect 'an embryonic form of 'linkage politics', connecting the mass public, deputies, the Supreme Soviet and the national budget' (1982, p.87).[22] Working from this insight, Figure 3 presents changes to functional category spending figures during Duma review, expressed as a percentage of overall spending in the original version of budget bills, 2011-2016. These years are selected, given the stability of functional spending categories in this period.[23] Given the year-on-year variation, Figure 4 presents mean values for the six years.

[Figure 3 around here]

[Figure 4 around here]

Overall, the picture presented by Figures 3 and 4 bears a striking resemblance to White's (1982) findings: during legislative passage, spending is – on average – redistributed away from administration, defence, security, and the economy to areas such as housing, education, and social policy. Could it be that Duma deputies have been successful in amending budget bills, tailoring them more to their – and citizens' – preferences?

There are reasons to be cautious in interpreting these amendment data as clear-cut evidence of independent legislator influence. Firstly, the small number of observations available, as well as the variation displayed over these years, mean that we cannot speak of robust trends. Secondly, we have insufficient information regarding the divergent preferences of the

[22] This is congruent with assumptions found in other, more recent works. For example, Miller (2015, p.703) argues that 'increases in education and social welfare spending constitute general policy concessions, whereas increases in military spending indicate greater attention to satisfying elites'.
[23] There were 14 separate spending categories for the 2011-2016 budgets. By contrast, there were 11 discrete categories, 2005-2010, and 27 categories for the 2002 and 2003 budgets.

Russian executive and Duma deputies in order to work back from observed category spending figure changes to actor influence. And, thirdly, even if these changes were consistent with clear estimations of actor preferences, this would not tell us *why* such changes were made to the budget bill. For example, rather than concessions granted to oppositional legislators, figure changes could be cosmetic amendments, granted to cultivate an image of executive magnanimity – or to help regime-loyal deputies to claim credit for spending beneficial to their nominal constituents.

[Figure 5 around here]

Information on particular moved amendments should, however, help uncover the springs of change. Figure 5 presents a longitudinal picture of the raw number of amendments proposed and accepted for Russian budget bills, 2007-2016.[24] Overall, the trend is consistent with the diachronic data on bill text amendment presented in figure 1: a reduction over time. But who is responsible for these particular amendments? Figure 6 presents data on the formal sponsorship of successful amendments, expressed as the percentage formally sponsored by the Government.

[Figure 6 around here]

Figure 6 should make us even more cautious in attributing spending changes to legislator influence. Between the 2007 and 2009 budgets, although the raw number of amendments proposed reduced significantly, the proportion of successful amendments sponsored by the Government saw a more-than-twofold increase. Indeed, beginning with the 2008 budget, the majority of successful amendments have been sponsored by the Government: the mean proportion of successful budget amendments formally sponsored by the Government from 2008 to 2016 is around 82 percent. Furthermore, Government-sponsored amendments rarely

[24] Unfortunately, complete amendment data are only available on the Duma's online archive beginning with the 2007 budget.

fail: the mean success rate for the 2007-2016 budgets is 99 percent.[25] If we take this formal sponsorship information at face value, then amendatory activity in relation to Russian budget bills has become dominated by the executive.

At the same time, parliamentarians have been the formal sponsors of successful amendments, albeit in the minority. Moreover, these amendments make sense, insofar as there appears to be a clear link between the change made and actor interests. For example, a successful amendment to the 2013 budget sponsored by United Russia deputy Stanislav Govorukhin – a renowned Russian actor and director – introduced a change relating to Lenfil'm, one of the foremost film studios in Russia.[26] And a change to the 2014 budget sponsored by senators Evgenii Bushmin, Sergei Riabukhin, and Aleksandr Torshin provided funding for the Federation Council's television channel.[27] There is also evidence of success for *opposition*-sponsored amendments – for example, an amendment to the 2014 budget sponsored by KPRF deputies Gennadii Zyuganov, Nikolai Kolomeitsev, and Oleg Kulikov increased healthcare spending.[28]

But this still leaves the majority of amendments to be explained: Why would the Government want, or need, to modify its submitted budget bill? One possibility is consistent with the legislator influence hypothesis. In a study of budgeting in Sweden, Wehner (2013: 555) finds that some executive-sponsored budgetary changes 'responded to parliamentary demands'. Similarly, Baldez and Carey (2001: 123) report the 'selective ability of the executive to sponsor spending increases desired by legislators'; and Araya (2015: 217) argues somewhat more strongly that, '[a]s the government has no incentive to amend its budget bill, the executive amendments can be considered as concessions to Congress'. Alternatively, Huber (1996: 157-158) demonstrates – in an analysis of budgeting in the French National Assembly,

[25] Government amendments to the 2013 budget saw the lowest success rate, with 97.8 percent (the reasons for amendment failure are unknown); and amendments proposed by the Government to six other budget bills saw a 100 percent success rate.
[26] See the amendment details in the committee amendment table here: http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(ViewDoc)?OpenAgent&work/dz.nsf/ByID&C9F279539EDBCC0143257AB6007EE8FF (accessed 12 November 2015).
[27] See the amendment details in the committee amendment table here: http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(ViewDoc)?OpenAgent&work/dz.nsf/ByID&58B022C1862D4DE943257C2800033140 (accessed 12 November 2015).
[28] See the amendment details in the committee amendment table here: http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(ViewDoc)?OpenAgent&work/dz.nsf/ByID&1723B39E90B8551143257C280002FC32 (accessed 12 November 2015).

1988-1989 – how executive actors can take credit for ideas originally expressed in legislator-sponsored amendments by repackaging them as government amendments.[29]

For the Russian case, however, there are reasons to question whether Government-sponsored amendments are, in fact, the result of legislator influence. Firstly, the inclusion of certain parliamentarians in pre-parliamentary discussions – including during budget draft 'zero readings' – should allow for the accommodation of legislator spending preferences earlier in the budgeting process.[30] Secondly, cooperation between parliamentarians and the Government is more manifestly exhibited by *co-sponsored* amendments by both actors, with, on average, around four such amendments moved for each of the 2007-2016 budget bills.[31] And thirdly, existing research suggests that mismatches between formal amendment sponsorship and actual authorship in Russia largely reflect the opposite situation: that Government-drafted changes are introduced by legislator proxies (see, for example, Chaisty 2006: 130; and Noble 2016a, 2016b). What, then, explains Government-sponsored changes to Government-drafted budget bills? We will now turn to two further explanations for bill amendments.

Technical updating

The budget bill might require technical updating, given revised economic data following bill introduction into the legislature. There is evidence of this beyond Russia. In Chile, for example, Baldez and Carey (2001: 122-123) note that 'the executive proposal is originally submitted on October 1. During the next sixty days, as fourth-quarter tax receipts and economic projections take shape, the executive itself inevitably wants to make changes to fine tune its budget projections'. Similarly, Wehner (2013: 555) writes that executive amendments are sometimes the result of 'updated economic forecasts' in Sweden.

[29] One broader implication of these findings, of course, is that *formal* sponsorship information cannot provide a reliable guide to the *actual* agents of change or the ideational sources of amendments.

[30] That being said, we have very little information concerning the actors included in these discussions, as well as the extent to which the negotiations are efficient in reconciling executive and legislative preferences on spending commitments. For budgeting in the third Duma convocation, Iwasaki (2002: 309-310) reports that issues remained unresolved following 'zero readings', meaning that the Federal Assembly's discussion occupie[][d] a very important position in the budget compilation'. However, this relates to a period of markedly different executive-legislative relations. It is plausible to assume that, when pre-parliamentary executive-legislative discussions now take place, issues raised are resolved more effectively.

[31] Specifically, for these ten budget bills, co-sponsored amendments numbered 9, 2, 0, 21, 1, 2, 4, 0, 0, and 0, respectively. These numbers are drawn from the committee amendment tables on the bills' webpages.

This need to tailor budget figures in response to changing socio-economic conditions and prognoses is reflected in supplementary budget bills in Russia, which are used to update the budget law during the fiscal year. For example, Federal Law 93 from 2015 reduced the 2015 budget's overall spending figure by around 300 billion roubles.[32] It is plausible that such changes might also need to be made following the introduction of the main budget bills, resulting in the redistribution of spending commitments. And there is evidence that such updating does, in fact, take place. For example, in the context of a worsening economic environment, President Putin signed a decree on 28 October 2014, requiring changes to salaries for officials of the Audit Chamber. As this decree was promulgated *after* the Government's introduction of its budget bill into the State Duma on 30 September, this salary change was inserted as a second-reading amendment to the budget initiative (Netreba, Milyukova, Bocharova, Dorokhov and Sobolev, 10 November 2014, *RBK Daily*).

Although such changes might be truly technical – not being the object of contestation between actors, that is – another plausible executive-centred account of budget bill amendments highlights the likelihood of *intra-executive* dispute. In brief, this explanation contends that budget changes reflect the resolution of intra-executive conflict over spending commitments, which spill over from pre-parliamentary, cabinet-level discussions.

Intra-executive spending disputes

Federal budget bills signed off by the Russian Government are not finalised documents. In theory, cabinet sign-off should signify that executive actors have reached their final positions on the details of budget bills. This comes at the end of a long and arduous decision-making process: draft macro-economic prognoses, and draft tax and spending policy documents, are circulated for discussion in spring, before discussion of budget parameters over the summer, and the draft budget is discussed by Government in the autumn.[33] However, there is evidence that intra-executive decision-making on the budget continues *after* cabinet sign-off. The following will present and discuss three types of evidence demonstrating that executive

[32] The text of Federal Law 93 (2015) is available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_178391/ (last accessed 12 December 2016).
[33] See the article by Stephen Fortescue in this special issue for details of the pre-parliamentary, executive stage of the budgeting process.

actors anticipate the continuation of decision-making at the point of bill sign-off; that decision-making does, in fact, continue; and that this has measurable effects on budget drafts following cabinet sign-off.[34]

In the formal decisions published following budget bill sign-off meetings, Government actors have been instructed to develop the respective bills. These instructions have been given for every budget bill for which data is available, excluding the 2010 budget.[35] This quite clearly puts paid to the notion that bill sign-off marks the end of intra-executive discussion. Take, for example, the 2014 budget. In the sign-off decision, the Minister of Finance Anton Siluanov and the Minister of Economic Development Aleksei Ulyukaev were instructed – along with 'interested federal organs of the executive' – to revise the draft bill. Executive actors were instructed to present this revised version to the Government on 23 September – albeit, crucially, *without* a further sign-off meeting with other executive actors – for subsequent introduction to the State Duma.[36]

The instruction for further development is, moreover, not merely a formality. Comments by executive actors themselves, as well as media reports, testify to the reality of post-sign-off discussions. For example, Butrin (21 October 2016, *Kommersant''*) notes the continuation of inter-agency spending disputes, despite Government sign-off on the 2017 budget bill. And, for the same budget initiative, President Vladimir Putin noted that this post-sign-off conflict centred, in part, on differences between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Development regarding prognoses of Russia's socio-economic development (Latukhina, 25 October 2016, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*).[37] What is more, these discussions result in meaningful changes to budget bill drafts. Between Government sign-off and Duma introduction, overall spending increased in the 2015 bill by around 30 billion roubles; by around 337 billion roubles for the 2016 budget bill; and by around 60 billion roubles for the 2017 bill.[38]

[34] This evidence involves partial transcripts of Government meetings, made available on the Government's official website. There are, clearly, reasons to be cautious when using this information. As an incomplete and public record, it is unclear which portions of discussion are not made available; and actors are, no doubt, fully aware of the strategic considerations necessary when discussing policy matters in public. As a result, this information cannot be taken as a faithful record of intra-executive relations.
[35] These formal decisions are available on the Government's website: http://government.ru/meetings/.
[36] The formal decision is available here: http://government.ru/meetings/5830/decisions/ (last accessed 20 November 2016).
[37] See also Prokopenko and Bazanova (13 October 2015, *Vedomosti*).
[38] Budget drafts signed off on by Government are hosted on the website http://regulation.gov.ru/.

It is unlikely, moreover, that these spending figure changes made after Government sign-off, but before Duma introduction, constitute the end of the story. Comments made by Prime Minister Medvedev at the end of the 19 September 2013 Government sign-off meeting for the 2014 budget suggested anticipation of further development during *Duma* passage: 'After adopting these decisions, I once again draw attention to the need for consolidated work on the corresponding [budget] bill in the State Duma'.[39] Similarly, when commenting on the 2015 budget bill, Medvedev requested that Government actors 'present a unified position of the Government on the budget' during the bill's passage through the Duma.[40] The words 'consolidated' and 'unified' are instructive: both speak to the difficulties involved in reaching final, resolute decisions, as well as highlighting the difficulties of realising core executive control over executive actors during bill passage through the Duma. Ministries and agencies face the temptation of pursuing their own, individual spending preferences.

Dividing up finite resources between actors with conflicting spending priorities will always be tricky. There are particular reasons, however, why the Russian Government faces difficulties in reaching resolute budget spending decisions.[41] Like all executive decision-making, cabinet actors faces limitations of time, resources, and policy expertise when conducting policy decision-making (Martin and Vanberg 2011). These limitations are exacerbated by the apparent reluctance of the Ministry of Finance to include external actors in pre-parliamentary budget decision-making (Prokopenko, 19 October 2016, *Vedomosti*), which shifts inter-ministerial conflict resolution to later in the budgeting process.[42] Even when other actors take part in discussions – as, for example, when the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Finance have been tasked with revising the budget bill after cabinet sign-off – the absence of a formalised opportunity for *excluded* actors to sign off on these decisions means that parliamentary passage becomes an obvious opportunity for

[39] A transcript of Medvedev's public comments during the Government meeting are available here: http://government.ru/meetings/5830/stenograms/ (last accessed 20 November 2016).
[40] A transcript of Medvedev's public comments during the Government meeting are available here: http://government.ru/meetings/14808/stenograms/ (last accessed 20 November 2016).
[41] Indeed, these difficulties associated with intra-executive decision-making are, no doubt, compounded during periods of economic crisis, during which socio-economic conditions are volatile, economic prognoses are uncertain, and there are manifest pressures on resource distribution.
[42] In addition, the possibility of presidential intervention in decision-making – as noted above – likely weakens the incentives for inter-ministerial cooperation, as well as the likelihood of core executive control (see Fortescue 2012).

executive actors to challenge and attempt to modify the budget proposal.[43] Moreover, the presence of a disciplined majority of pro-executive Duma deputies removes, in a sense, the hard constraint of Government bill sign-off. Safe in the knowledge that a majority of deputies will ratify changes to Government-sponsored initiatives, intra-executive discussions can spill over into the nominally legislative stage of policy-making (see Noble 2016a, 2016b).[44] As a result, although the legislative stage of the budget process is meant, in theory, to provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to review, critique, and possibly amend budget proposals, this stage can also involve the resolution of intra-executive spending disputes.

4. Conclusion

Contrary to 'rubber stamp' expectations that the content of bills does not change during legislative review in contemporary Russia, this article demonstrates that budget bills do, in fact, undergo amendment during passage through the State Duma. Various measures of amendment were used above to demonstrate these changes, providing an unprecedented diachronic picture of budgeting in the Federal Assembly. The article also provides a preliminary assessment of the springs of this change, presenting evidence consistent with three hypotheses: legislator influence; technical updating; and intra-executive conflict. There are, it seems, various reasons for budget bill amendment – change is *equifinal.*[45]

One of the novel contributions of the article is its exploration of the hitherto largely unexplored *executive* springs of change. Intra-executive spending decision-making is not neatly contained in the pre-parliamentary stages of policy-making; the legislative passage of budget initiatives provides a final opportunity for executive actors to battle over the distribution of expenditures. This executive-centred account of budget bill amendments is not restricted to contemporary Russia. Writing of non-democratic Venezuela, Curristine and Bas (2007: 8) write that 'the majority of the amendments are actually proposed by the executive,

[43] On the sign-off (*soglasovanie*) process more generally, see Fortescue (2010).
[44] It might be argued that reputational concerns regarding the airing of the executive's dirty laundry in the relative publicity of parliament would prevent the spill-over of intra-executive conflict into the Duma. And yet, although intra-executive conflict resolution might occur during the *stage* of parliamentary review, it will unlikely take place in the relative publicity of parliament itself.
[45] For discussions of equifinality, see George and Bennett (2005: 161, 215) and Haggard and Kaufman (2012: 498).

reflecting its need to revise its original budget submission.' And, writing of the USSR, Hough and Fainsod (1979: 378) note that 'it is very probable that the preparatory committees [of the Supreme Soviet] are the place where final inter-agency agreement on the details of the plan and the budget are hammered out.'

Future work should both explore other possible sources of bill change, as well as attempt to specify the *proportion* of amendments resulting from different actors. What proportion of changes result from legislator – or, more broadly, non-executive – influence? How often are executive-inspired changes the object of contestation, rather than being merely technical adjustments to shifting socio-economic conditions? More broadly, answers to these questions will help track the State Duma's shifting place and role in Russian politics.

APPENDIX – Data sources

1. Budget bills

a. Texts

Budget bill texts are available on the Duma's legislative information website, ASOZD,[46] beginning with the 2003 budget.[47] Unfortunately, digital versions of bill texts are not available before this budget year.

b. Overall category spending totals

For 2002-2004, draft overall category spending figures have been collated from reports compiled by the Russian Audit Chamber on budget drafts.[48] The relevant appendix is available on budget bill web pages for the 2005, 2006, and 2007 budgets. Beginning with the 2008 budget, the Government ceased making the relevant appendix public.[49] Fortunately, however, approximate overall category spending figures are included in the Ministry of

[46] This is the website address: http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/.
[47] Budget bill webpages, 2002-2016: 2002 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=125501-3) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2003 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=235269-3) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2004 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=362797-3) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2005 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=86859-4) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2006 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=211446-4) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2007 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=335233-4) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2008 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=425229-4) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2009 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=94777-5) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2010 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=258591-5) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2011 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=433091-5) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2012 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=607158-5) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2013 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=143344-6) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2014 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=348499-6) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2015 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=611445-6) (last accessed 20 November 2016); 2016 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=911755-6) (last accessed 20 November 2016).
[48] These documents are hosted here: http://www.budgetrf.ru/Publications/Schpalata/Zakluchenia/schpalzakluch_index.htm (last accessed 12 November 2015).
[49] Cooper (2007: 2) argues that, '[b]y dropping the usual appendix providing a functional breakdown of total budget expenditure, an unprecedented degree of classification of the budget has been achieved, in addition to the traditional practice of declaring some appendix secret'.

Finance's explanatory notes on the introduced budget bills and available on bill web pages.

2. Budget laws

a. Texts

Original versions of budget law texts – that is, versions not amended by the passage of later laws – are available on the legal information portal *Zakonodatel'stvo Rossii*[50] – an official resource curated by the Federal Protection Service, *Federal'naia sluzhba okhrany*.

b. Overall category spending figures

From the 2002 budget to the 2007 budget, appendices outlining final overall spending category figures are available as appendices to the main budget text. These appendices are available on bill web pages. However, as with the same information for budget bills, these figures have not been made public beginning with the 2008 budget. We need, therefore, another source for these overall figures. Both Cooper (2013: 31) and Zatsepin (2014: 91) cite budget implementation reports (monthly, quarterly, and yearly) produced by the Federal Exchequer (*Federal'noe kaznacheistvo*) as a source of information on final expenditure levels. These reports provide the needed information for the 2012-2016 budgets.[51] Figures cited for the 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 budgets, however, relate only to unclassified spending and / or provide figures that incorporate subsequent amendments. Fortunately, the Audit Chamber produces a report – *Zakliuchenie Schetnoi palaty Rossiiskoi Federatsii na proekt federal'nogo zakona* – on supplementary budget bills, as well as a report on the implementation of the budget – *Zakliuchenie Schetnoi palaty Rossiiskoi Federatsii na otchet ob ispolnenii federal'nogo biudzheta*. These reports contain information on expenditure category totals from the original, unamended budget laws for the 2008, 2009, and 2011 budgets.[52] For 2010, the Federation Council's Budget Committee fortunately included final

[50] This is the website address: http://pravo.gov.ru/ips.html.
[51] The reports are available here: http://www.roskazna.ru/ispolnenie-byudzhetov/ (accessed 12 November 2015).
[52] The former reports are available on the following webpages, relating to the main supplementary budget bills for particular budget years: 2008 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=67230-5) (last accessed 12 November 2015); 2009 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=181653-5) (last accessed 12 November 2015);

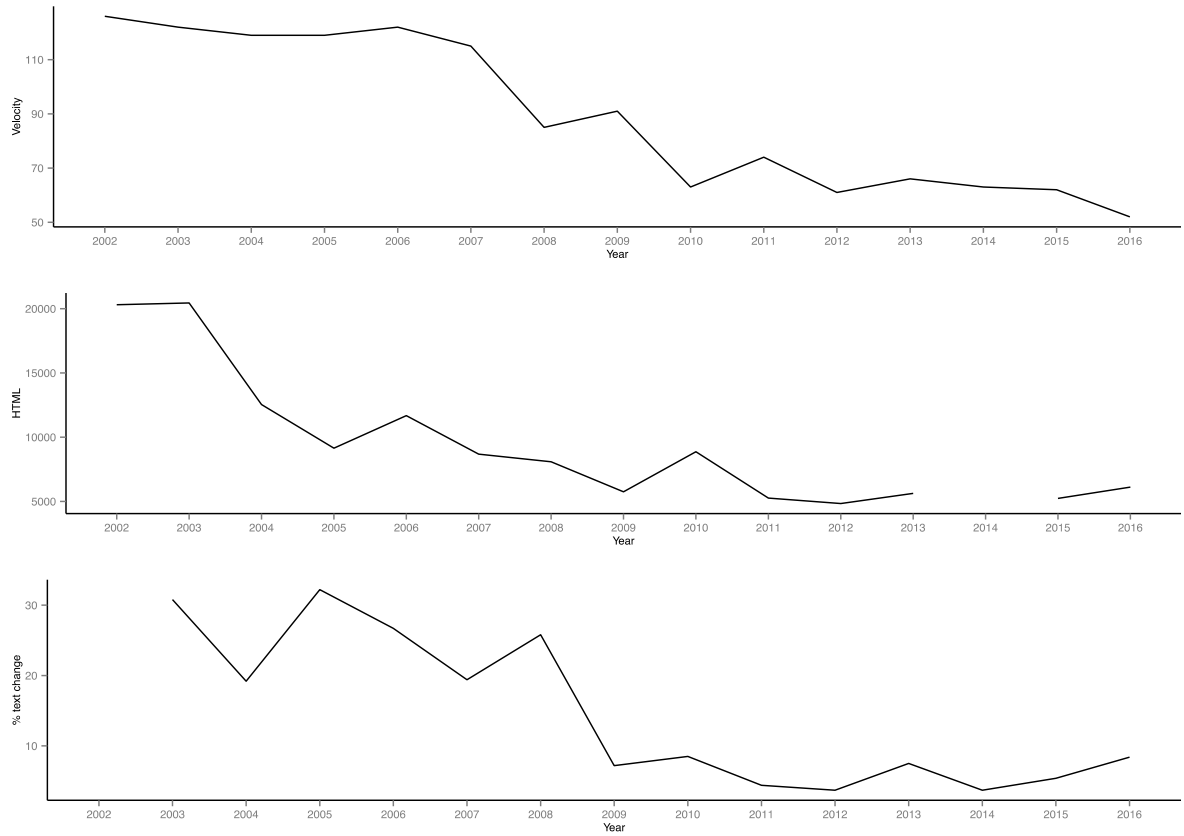
overall category spending figures in its report (*zakliuchenie*).[53] It is not clear why either the Audit Chamber or the Federation Council are able to make these figures public when it appears that the Government has gone to some lengths to prevent the publication of these spending data.

2011 (http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=542807-5) (last accessed 12 November 2015). The latter reports are available here: http://audit.gov.ru/activities/audit-of-the-federal-budget/ (last accessed 12 November 2015).

[53] The report is available here: http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(ViewDoc)?OpenAgent&arhiv/a_dz_5.nsf/ByID&4ABCC02BC3655D37C325767B002FD086 (last accessed 12 November 2015).

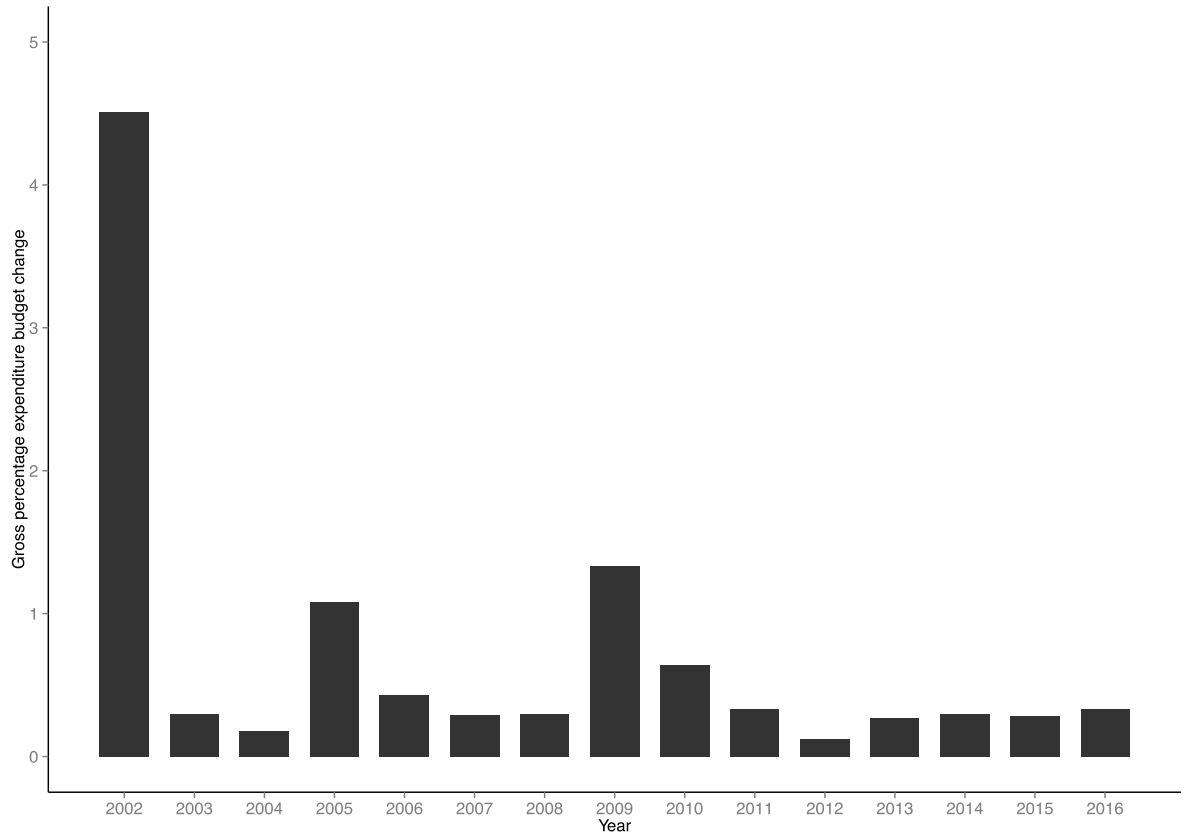
FIGURES

Figure 1:



Notes: These data are taken from various sources: velocity information is taken from bill webpages (see the appendix); HTML lines are taken from Duma floor transcripts hosted at http://transcript.duma.gov.ru; bill texts are taken from bill webpages; and law texts are taken from the *Zakonodatel'stvo Rossii* database (see the appendix). The y-axes do not start at 0. The 2002 budget bill text is not available. Transcript data for the 2014 budget are incomplete.

Figure 2:



Notes: Gross change percentages are calculated as follows: absolute values for category spending changes are summed; net overall expenditure change is then subtracted (only relevant for 2002); the resulting figure is then divided by two (given that expenditure changes balance to zero)[54] in order to avoid double counting; this figure is then added to net overall expenditure change (again, only making a difference in 2002); finally, this figure is expressed as a percentage of the overall expenditure presented in the budget draft.[55]

[54] Once overall tax and spending figures are adopted, subsequent changes to spending figures are matched – thus, an increase in one area of spending much be balanced by a decrease in another area. See article 201 of the Budget Code, available here: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_19702/ (last accessed 20 November 2016).

[55] For example, in 2004, the sum of absolute values for category spending changes comes to 9,368,283,800 roubles; there was no net overall expenditure change between the budget draft and law, so 0 is subtracted; the initial figure is divided by two; 0 is added; and the final figure, 4,684,141,900, is expressed as a percentage of draft overall expenditure, 2,659,447,000,000, which comes to 0.176 percent.

Figure 3:

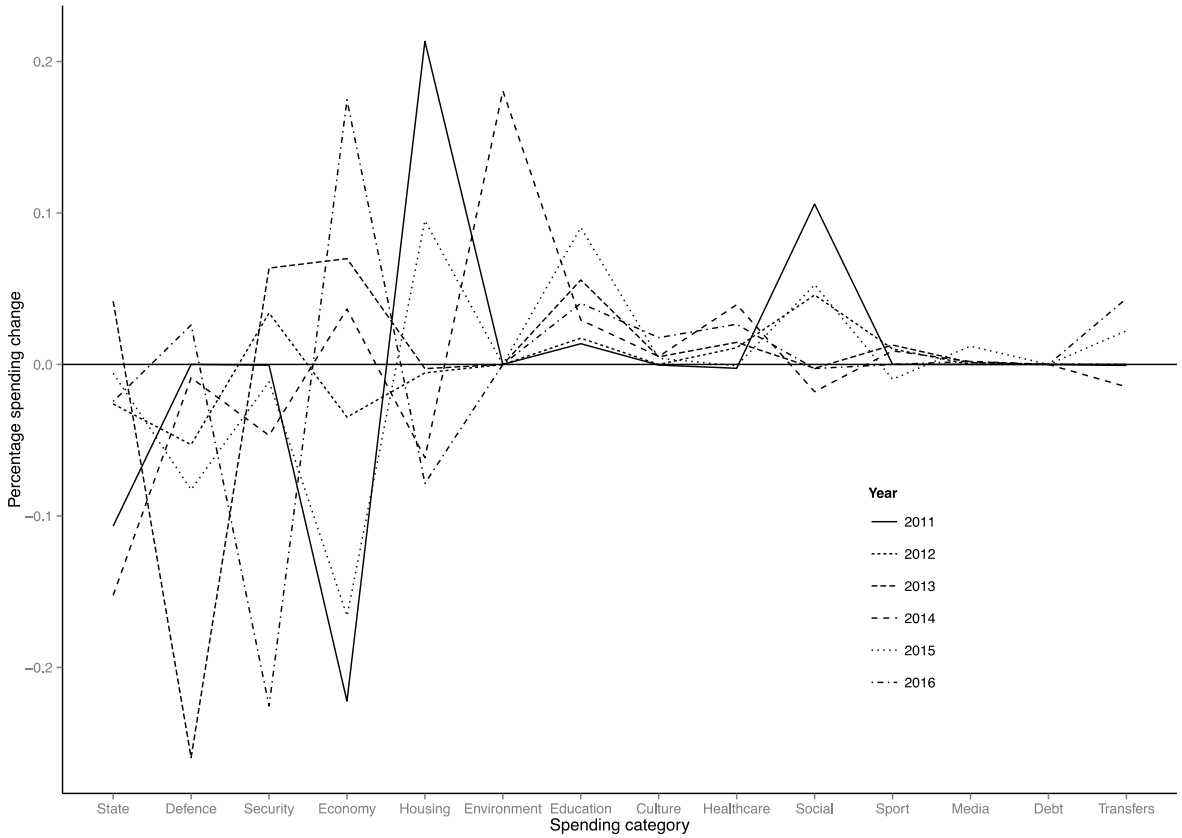


Figure 4:

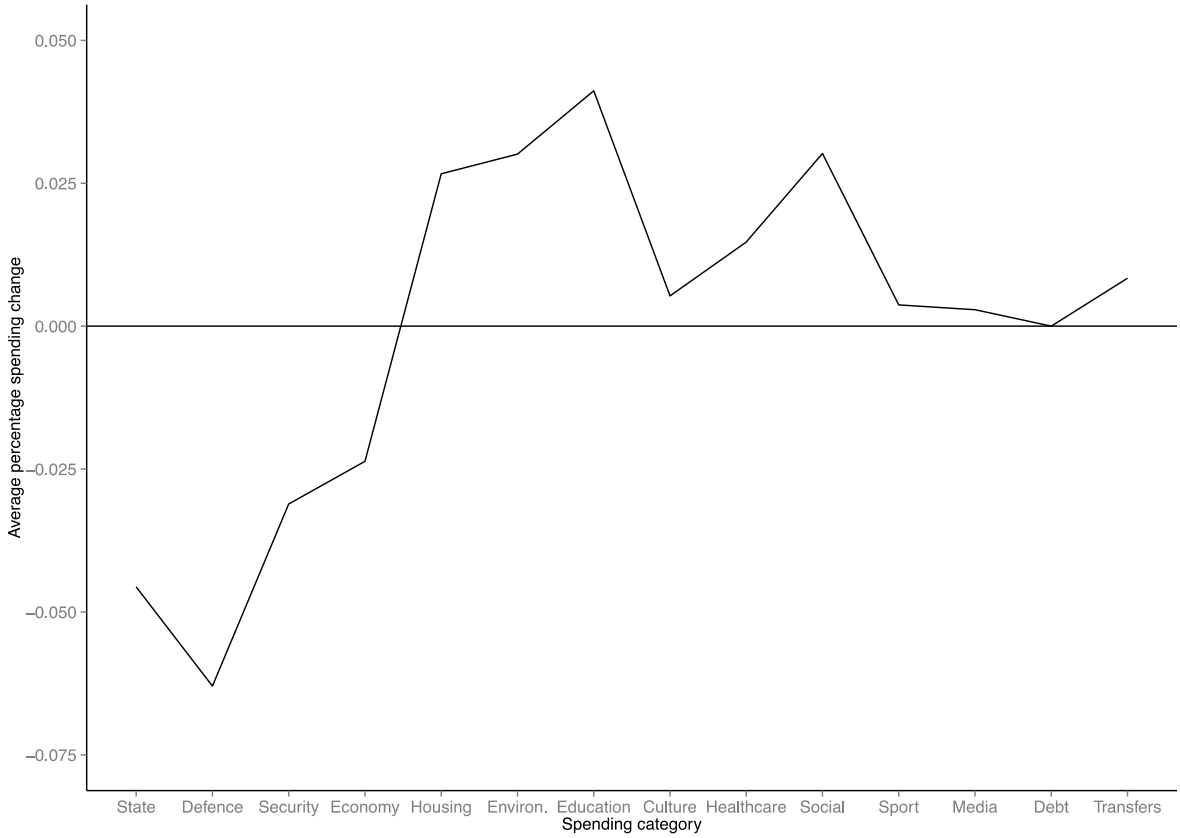
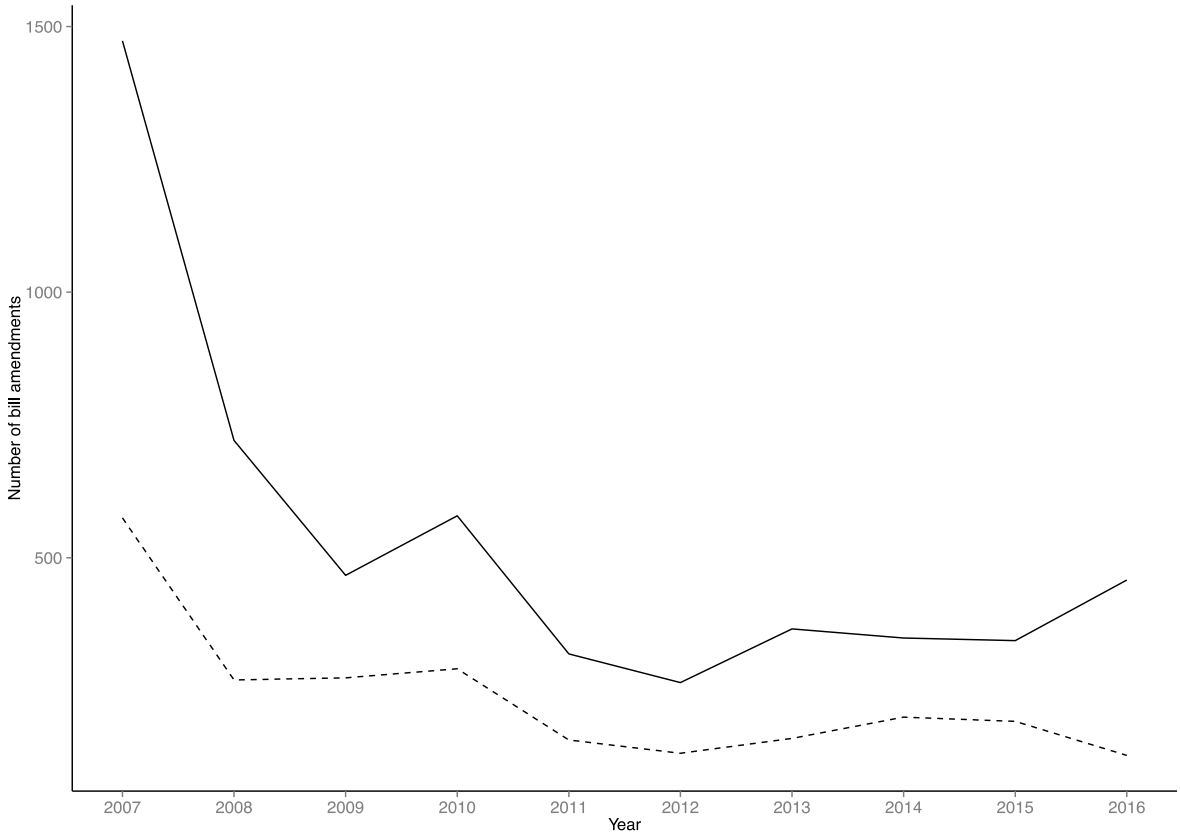
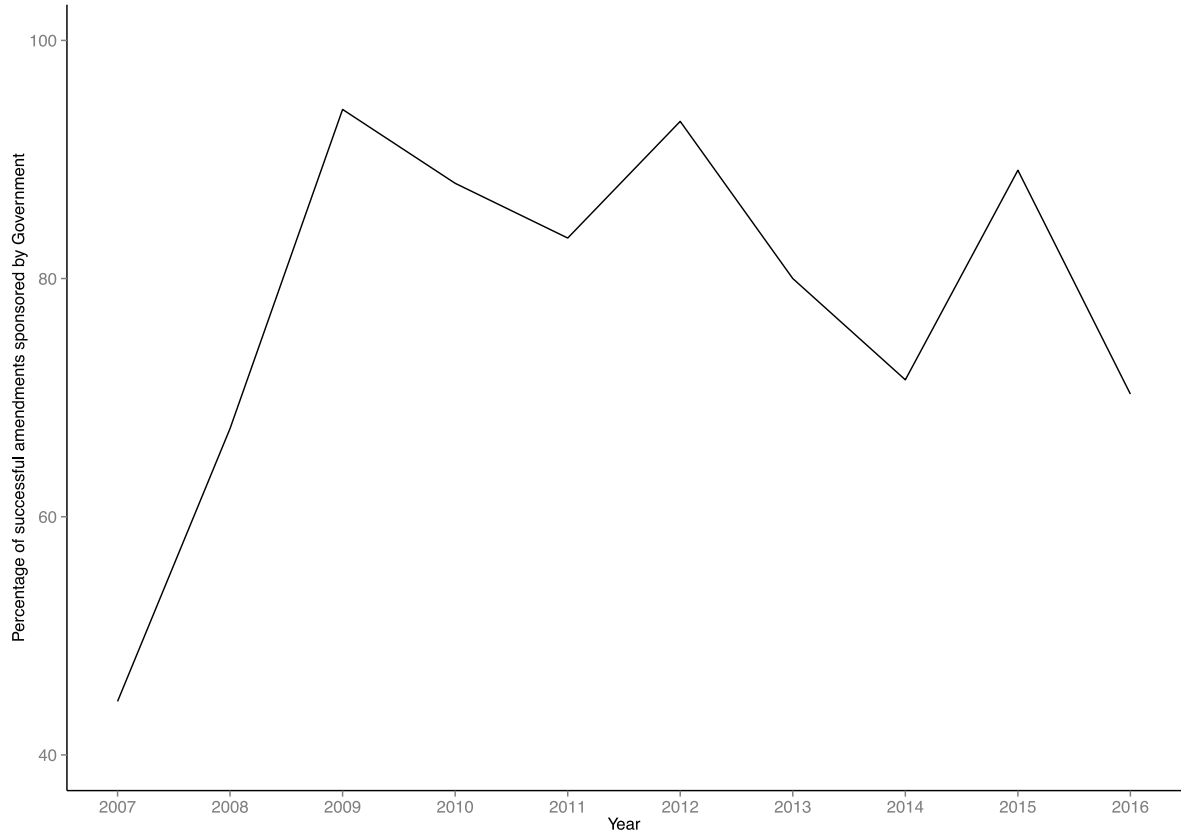

0.050
0.025
0.000
−0.025
−0.050
−0.075
Average percentage spending change
State
Defence
Security
Economy
Housing
Environ.
Education
Culture
Healthcare
Social
Sport
Media
Debt
Transfers
Spending category

Figure 5:


1500
1000
500
Number of bill amendments
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
Year

Notes: The y-axis does not start at 0. The solid line relates to all proposed amendments; the dashed line to the total number of successful amendments. These data are taken from amendment tables (*tablitsy popravok*) produced by the Duma's Budget Committee in preparation for the budget bills' floor readings; they are available on the budget bills' webpages. Figures for successful amendments relate to committee decisions, rather than floor results. These numbers include all entries in particular amendment tables, ignoring finer distinctions between 'adopted' and 'partially adopted' or 'considered' amendments.

Figure 6:



Notes: The y-axis does not start at 0.

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