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Analysis

Russia at the Crossroads? The Realignment of the Party System

By Petra Stykow, Munich

Abstract

A structural realignment is taking place in the president's camp in preparation for the fifth State Duma elections on December 2, 2007. The elite groups supporting the "Putin System" are contending in a surprisingly open competition between two "parties of power" whose agendas are practically indistinguishable in terms of substance. So far, the electorate has not responded to this staged competition.

Voter Preferences and the Next Elections

Presidential elections are scheduled in Russia for March 2008. According to his own statements, incumbent Vladimir Putin will not run for re-election. Whether the "Putin System" will remain viable without its central figure is a question that is vividly debated. The elections to the State Duma on December 2, 2007 are expected to deliver important signals as to how the secession will be resolved. These elections are the background for an emerging competition between certain groups within the Russian elite that so far seemed to be fully integrated into the existing system. They now are determined to have a say in its future prospects.

The "traditional" opposition is barely affected by these developments. There have been no structural, personnel, or programmatic changes in this camp in the past months. The electoral support for the Communists and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party has not changed since the last Duma elections in December 2003. Both parties can expect to earn roughly 10–15 percent of the votes. The electoral basis of the (social-) liberal Yabloko Party and the (economically) liberal Union of Right Forces is continuing to erode slowly, and both parties will probably fail to pass the 7 percent threshold to the Duma again. On the other hand, there is vibrant voter approval for the United Russia party, which has acknowledged the president as its "moral leader". Compared to the 2003 elections, it has accrued another 10–15 percent and would win approximately 50 percent of the vote if elections were held today.

The stagnation of the "traditional" opposition should not obscure the possibility that the political playing field may shift in a dynamic manner during the next few months. The rivalry between ambitious groups with disparate power resources opens space for contingent developments that nobody can fully control or predict. The upcoming Duma elections have set off processes bringing forth new structures and profiles in the hitherto diffuse pro-presidential center of the party spectrum.

Impact of New Legislation on Parties and Elections

The restructuring of the party landscape is a reaction to the reforms of party and electoral law since 2001. Their declared aim has been to centralize and consolidate the party system and subsequently to strengthen parliamentarism. Indeed, the amended legislation on political parties has reduced the number of registered parties to only 17, eliminating smaller and unstable formations. Besides, parties now are the only organizations permitted to field candidates for parliamentary elections. As a consequence, the political arena became easier to monitor, compared, for example, to the 2003 elections, when 27 parties and five electoral blocs (the latter consisting of 12 parties and one "social movement") were in competition with one another.

Even more grave than the effects of the party legislation will be the impact of the new electoral law that will take full nationwide effect for the first time in December: It mandates a shift from a mixed electoral system that combined voting in single-mandate constituencies and party-list proportional representation to a strictly proportional electoral system where deputies are elected solely on the basis of party lists. Thus, it is now impossible to win a Duma seat as an "independent" by securing a simple majority of votes. Instead, every candidate for a parliamentary seat has to compete for a promising place on a party list. The result is that party organizations have become more important than ever in Russia's history, and most importantly, that candidates are becoming increasingly dependent on the party apparatuses. Furthermore, the new rules severely jeopardize the political prospects of the leaders of smaller parties that have no chance of clearing the 7 percent hurdle.

Just Russia: The "New Left" project

For these reasons, ambitious politicians have undertaken a number of initiatives since the summer of 2006 to enhance their electoral prospects by merging their respective parties. The various projects'

ability to succeed depends on several factors. One key determinant is the parties' individual political clout and the "chemistry" between the politicians involved. Furthermore, success is shaped by the force of Putin's "strong hand": The restructuring of the party system is highly controversial because the logic of bottom-up self-organization is not the only determinant of the future outcome. This logic suggests that political actors by themselves modify their strategies in reaction to changing conditions in their environment. Instead, party-building in Russia is also managed from the top by the head of the executive branch.

It is well known that Putin's strategy to build a "directed democracy" consists of direct intervention in the institutionalization of political actors. The goal is to create a coherent and controllable intermediary space between the state and its citizens. This strategy, which is best documented in the civil society arena, but also extends to interest groups in the broadest sense, now is being extended to the party system, where only a limited diversity is becoming institutionalized. With the approval and the support of the presidential administration, the system thus develops several "pillars" in the parliamentary-party arena that compete among themselves without representing meaningful policy alternatives. In July 2006, the Rodina and Russian Party of Life parties announced they would "create a strong left-wing patriotic force"; one month later, they were joined by the Russian Pensioners' Party. On October 28, this "New Left" alliance brought forth a new party: Just Russia: Motherland/Pensioners/Life. Just Russia has achieved official registration, is represented in parliament with a faction of its own (29 deputies) and is led by Sergei Mironov, the chairman of the Federation Council. Its leaders have thus significantly enhanced their chances of being re-elected to parliament under the new proportional representation system. Furthermore, all observers agree that this project is supported by influential groups within the presidential administration who are trying to secure the long-term prospects of "directed democracy" by building up two parties that are loyal to the system.

United Russia versus Just Russia

Even though voter support for the "New Left" so far has only been fluctuating around the 7 percent mark, competition between the two "parties of power" is escalating. In late autumn 2006, United Russia seemed temporarily inclined to exert its political dominance in order to force early elections. Ahead of the parliamentary elections in 15 regions scheduled for March 2007, both parties initiated smear campaigns against their respective opponents and appealed to the

Ministry of Justice to investigate alleged abuses. At the same time, in the Duma, United Russia has been trying for months to enforce ever more changes to the electoral law in order to improve the party's chances at the polls in December. The Just Russia faction in parliament, for its part, demands legislation to counter its rival's practice of forcing new members into the party.

The "New Left" can be expected to gain additional weight as soon as it manages to dispel any remaining doubts that it has serious prospects at the elections. There are already signs that the new party has begun to attract politicians who are dissatisfied with the large, amorphous United Russia party, but support Putin's policies. Just Russia is also attractive for relatively well-known politicians because there is so far little competition for promising slots in the new party. Since its existence has ended the necessity for regional elites to join United Russia in order to secure access to the "administrative resources" within the presidential vertical axis of power, their future voting behavior within the regions also becomes less predictable.

Two "Parties of Power" and the Source of "Power"

The rivalry between the two parties is so bitter because the conflict is a domestic one within the Russian power elite. While it is true that in earlier elections, the "party of power" has always been attended by smaller pro-presidential parties, these have primarily siphoned additional votes from the opposition (e.g., "Rodina" in the 2003 elections). The "New Left", too, appeared initially to enjoy the protection of the presidential administration as a counterweight to the Communist Party. It also appeared to be a clever strategy for enhancing the legitimacy of the political system by creating "virtual" electoral alternatives. In the meantime, however, United Russia and Just Russia are mainly competing for personnel and administrative resources within the pro-presidential camp.

This development also sheds additional light on some of the risks that the president's administration is incurring with the "second pillar strategy": On the one hand, it may strengthen the president's autonomy if he can utilize the rivalry between two parties that are beholden to him by playing them off against one another and curbing their political ambitions. On the other hand, however, he may also lose control over the dynamics of such competition, since the respective actors and organizations are by no means mere puppets of the executive as a cohesive actor. They are backed by extremely ambitious politicians who have survival instincts and are embedded in networks of their own. Their connections extend into the presidential execu-

tive branch, where there is a very real competition for power and appropriate strategies in securing the perpetuation of the system after Putin's relinquishing of the presidency in 2008.

It would be naïve to assume that this complex "successor game" – which must be permanently re-interpreted, given the moves of the players and unforeseeable developments – would evolve according to the script of a dominant group within the presidential administration. On the contrary, by reacting to the dynamic developments and testing the limits of pluralism in the party-political sphere, "the Kremlin" also engages in experiments. Once again, it applies the strategy of "directed democracy" that focuses the political realm around a president acting in a paternalistic manner. Thus, he is able to obligate the competing actors to cooperate and reconcile in the name of the "national interest". For example, in December 2006, Putin invited representatives of the "ten most important political parties" to participate in the establishment of a joint "consultation council". This approach is a proven blueprint which during recent years occasionally has been applied with selected representatives of "civil society" and with loyal entrepreneurs. The declared purpose of the meeting was to facilitate joint action against political extremism, i.e., radical nationalist as well as "orange" forces. The selection of participants, which included Communists, Liberal Democrats, and the two liberal opposition parties as well as the two "parties of power," signaled Putin's support for United Russia while at the same time bestowing legitimacy on its rival. The importance of Just Russia, in turn, was downgraded by the fact that other minor parties – which pursued their own project of a party merger directed against the "New Left" – were also invited. This latter project of the "Newest Left" fell apart after months of negotiations between the prospective partners.

What About the Voters?

The current vivid competition between presidential coalitions of power is a new phenomenon

About the author

Petra Stykow is a professor of Political Science at the Geschwister Scholl Institute of the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich.

within the "Putin system". It is directly linked to the increased importance of parties because rivalries between various groups now are becoming more noticeably linked to perceptible structures. However, in the absence of distinctive political profiles, these rivalries can hardly be regarded as anything beyond intralite competition. Therefore, the top-down "assisted" process of party-building and re-building also forces United Russia and Just Russia to engage in program-building. The development of stronger political profiles could signal a re-orientation towards the voters and their preferences. This, in turn, might counteract the self-destructive tendencies of the pro-presidential camp.

Indeed, the ideological and programmatic differences between the two parties are barely distinguishable at the moment, as shown by Putin's comments at a press conference on February 1, 2007: "The difference, as far as I can see, is that United Russia seems to be more of a right-leaning, liberal center, at least in terms of economic policies, although it also features many Social Democratic aspects. But Just Russia, of course, is a party that is reminiscent in all of its aspects of a Socialist, or Social Democratic trend. This may not be completely evident or visible at this point in time, just as the right-leaning liberal tendencies of United Russia are not yet fully visible yet. That takes time."

At the same time, "directed democracy" provides a very narrow framework for establishing such a profile. Voters, at least, have so far failed to respond by developing a stronger interest in politics, as shown repeatedly by opinion surveys. There is no evidence so far that competition between the two "parties of power" is able to galvanize the electorate and thus to broaden the legitimacy of the "directed democracy" and its prefabricated political alternatives.

Translated from German by Christopher Findlay

Tables and Diagrams

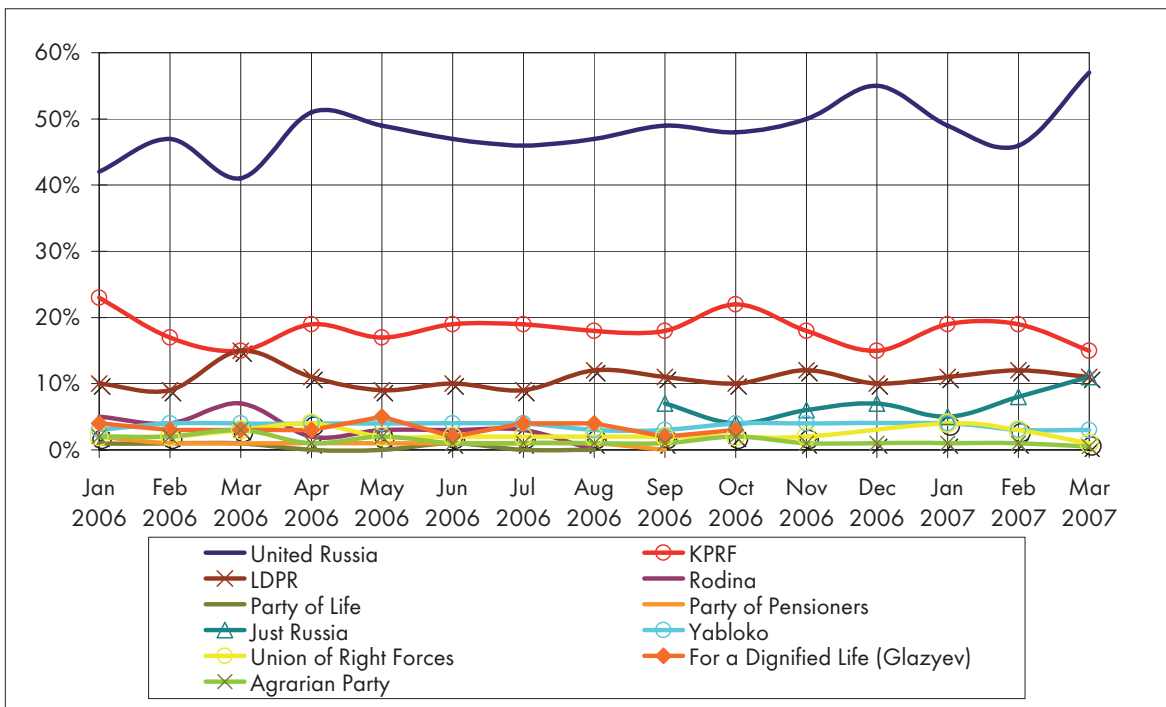
List of Officially Registered Political Parties, 2007

Political Parties that Conform to the Requirements of pt. 1, para. 2 of Federal Law No. 168-FZ “On the Introduction of Changes in the Federal Law ‘On Political Parties’” of 20 December 2004

1	“The People’s Will” Party
2	The Democratic Party of Russia
3	United Russia
4	Russian Political Party of Peace and Harmony
5	The Communist Party of Russia (KPRF)
6	The Union of Right Forces
7	The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)
8	Russian United Democratic Party “Yabloko”
9	“Patriots of Russia” (former “Russian Party of Labor”)
10	Russian ecological political party “The Greens”
11	The Agrarian Party
12	The Party of National Rebirth “People’s Will”
13	The United Socialist Party of Russia
14	Free Russia
15	The Party of Social Justice
16	The Party of Russia’s Rebirth
17	Just Russia (Rodina Party/Party of Pensioners/Party of Life)

Source: <http://www.rosregistr.ru/index.php?menu=3010000000>, 18 February 2007

Party Ratings and Monthly Snapshots of Voter Preferences

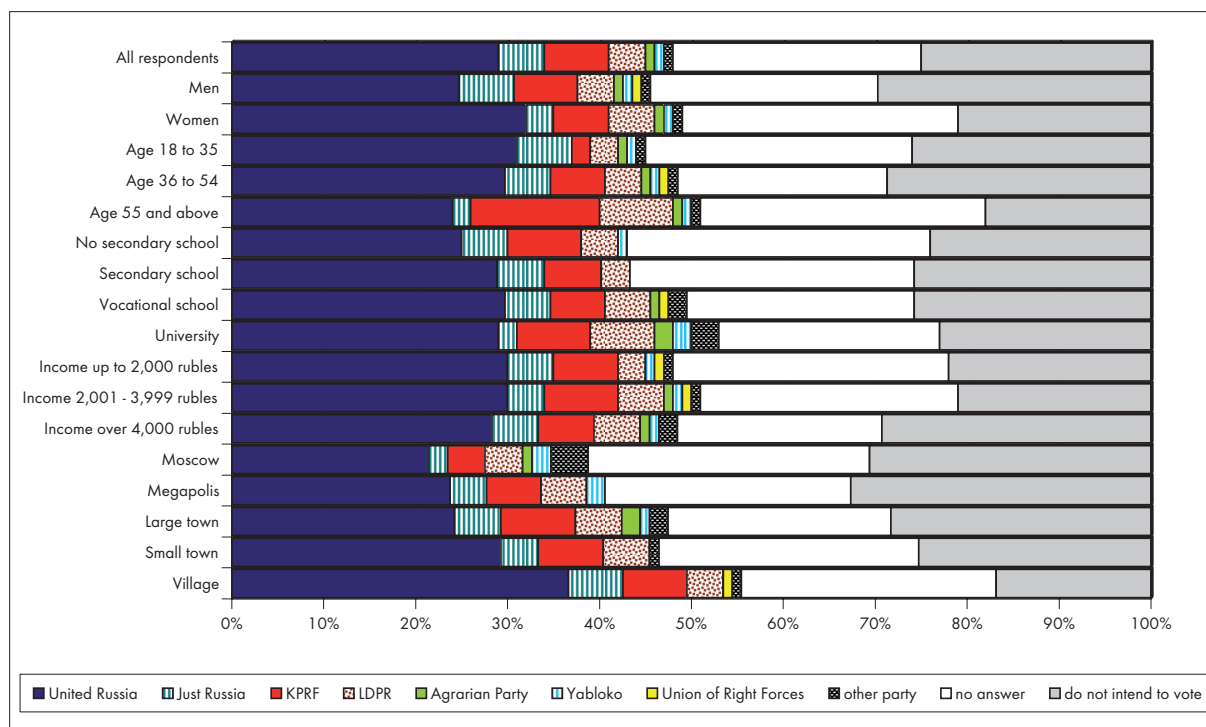


Party Ratings 2006–2007 (percentage of persons intending to vote)

	Jan 2006	Feb 2006	Mar 2006	Apr 2006	May 2006	Jun 2006	Jul 2006	Aug 2006	Sept 2006	Oct 2006	Nov 2006	Dec 2006	Jan 2007	Feb 2007	Mar 2007
United Russia	42%	47%	41%	51%	49%	47%	46%	47%	49%	48%	50%	55%	49%	46%	57%
KPRF	23%	17%	15%	19%	17%	19%	19%	18%	18%	22%	18%	15%	19%	19%	15%
LDPR	10%	9%	15%	11%	9%	10%	9%	12%	11%	10%	12%	10%	11%	12%	11%
Rodina	5%	4%	7%	2%	3%	3%	3%	-							
Party of Life	1%	1%	1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	-							
Party of Pensioners	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	-						
Just Russia									7%	4%	6%	7%	5%	8%	11%
Yabloko	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%		4%	3%	3%
Union of Right Forces	2%	2%	3%	4%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%		4%	3%	1%
For a Dignified Life (Glazyev)	4%	3%	3%	3%	5%	2%	4%	4%	2%	3%					
Agrarian Party	2%	2%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	<1%
Party of Russia's Rebirth	1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	1%	1%		1%	1%	<1%
People's Party of Russia	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Ecological Party "The Greens"	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	<1%	2%	1%	1%	<1%

Source: Opinion polls of the Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru./reitingi2006.print.html> and <http://www.levada.ru./reitingi2007.html>

“For Which of the Following Political Parties Would You Vote If Elections Were to Take Place Next Sunday?” (April 2007)



“For Which of the Following Political Parties Would You Vote If Elections Were to Take Place Next Sunday?” (in percent) (April 2007)

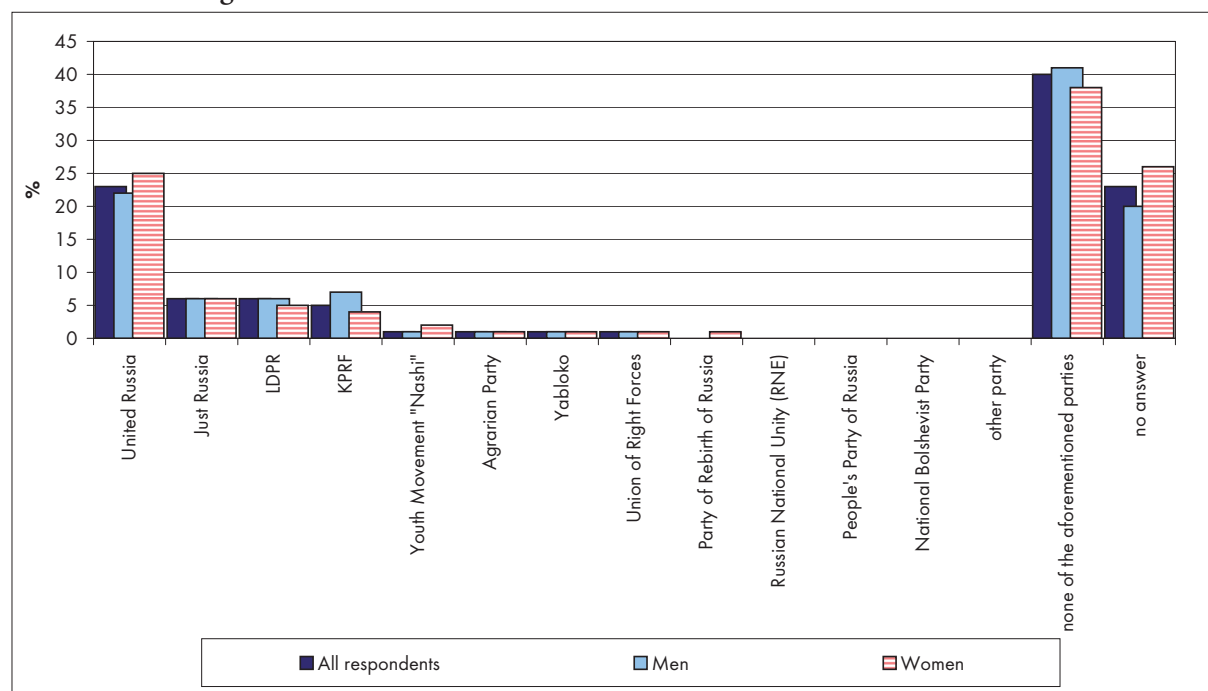
	All respondents	Men	Women	Age 18 to 35	Age 36 to 54	Age 55 and above	No secondary school	Secondary school	Vocational school	University	Income up to 2,000 rubles	Income 2,001 - 3,999 rubles	Income over 4,000 rubles	Moscow	Megapolis	Large town	Small town	Village
Share of group	100	47	53	36	37	27	14	35	33	17	19	33	24	8	12	17	38	25
United Russia	29	25	32	31	30	24	25	28	30	29	30	30	28	21	24	24	29	37
KPRF	7	7	6	2	6	14	8	6	6	8	7	8	6	4	6	8	7	7
Just Russia	5	6	3	6	5	2	5	5	5	2	5	4	5	2	4	5	4	6
LDPR	4	4	5	3	4	8	4	3	5	7	3	5	5	4	5	5	5	4
Agrarian Party	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0
Yabloko	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	0
Union of Right Forces	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
other party	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	3	1	1	2	4	0	2	1	1
do not intend to vote	25	30	21	26	29	18	24	25	26	23	22	21	29	30	33	28	25	17
no answer	27	25	30	29	23	31	33	30	25	24	30	28	22	30	27	24	28	28

Source: Opinion poll by the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM), http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/projects/dominant/dom0725/domt0715_1/d071501 12 April 2007

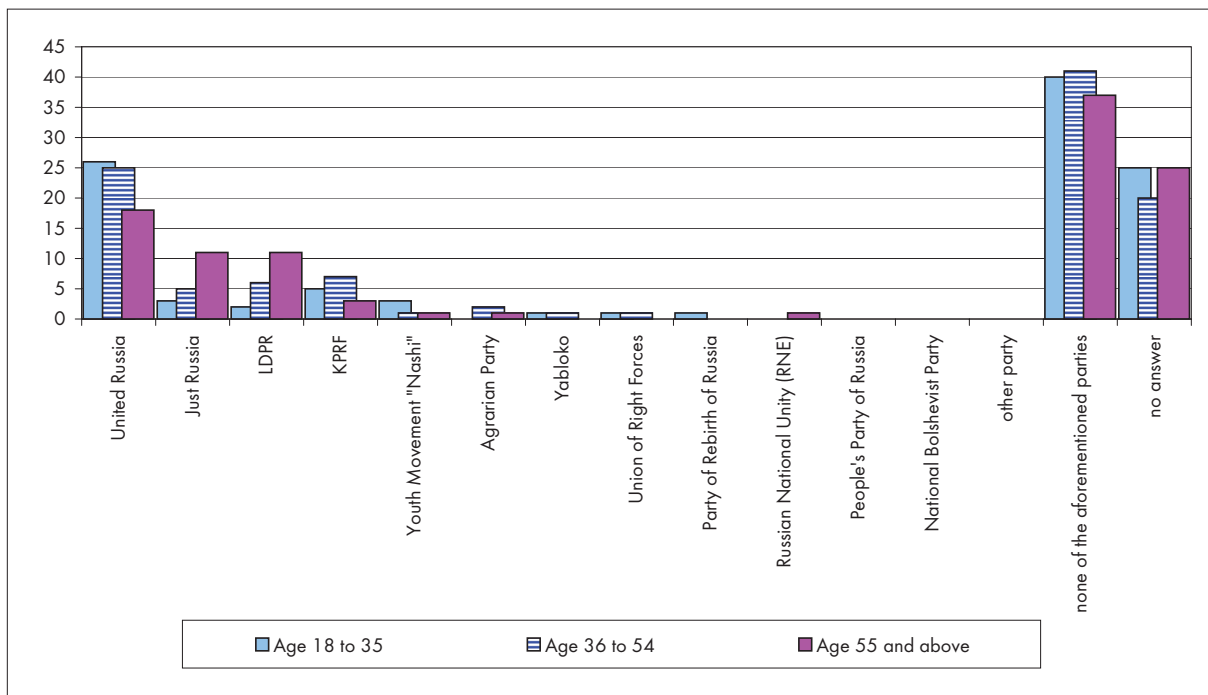
Which Political Group Has Made a Good, Positive Impression on You Recently? (April 2007)

Source: Opinion poll by the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) on 12 April 2007
http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/projects/dominant/dom0725/domt0715_1/d071501

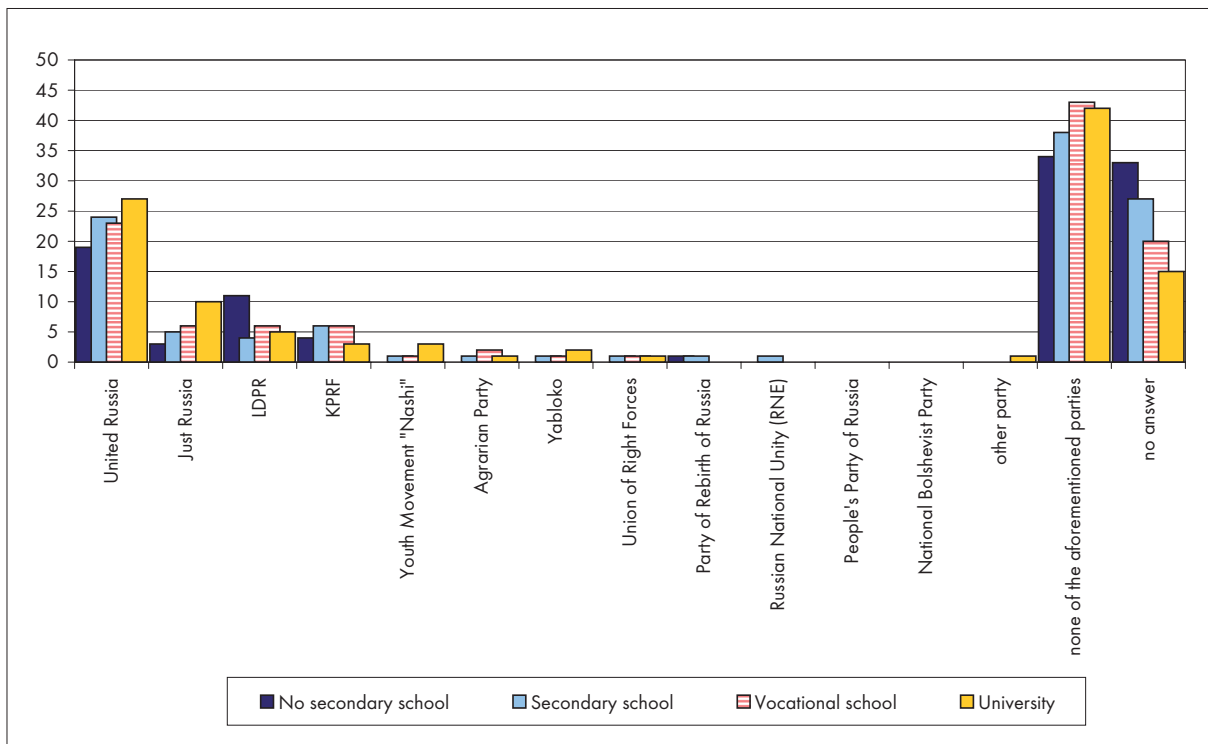
Answers According to Sex



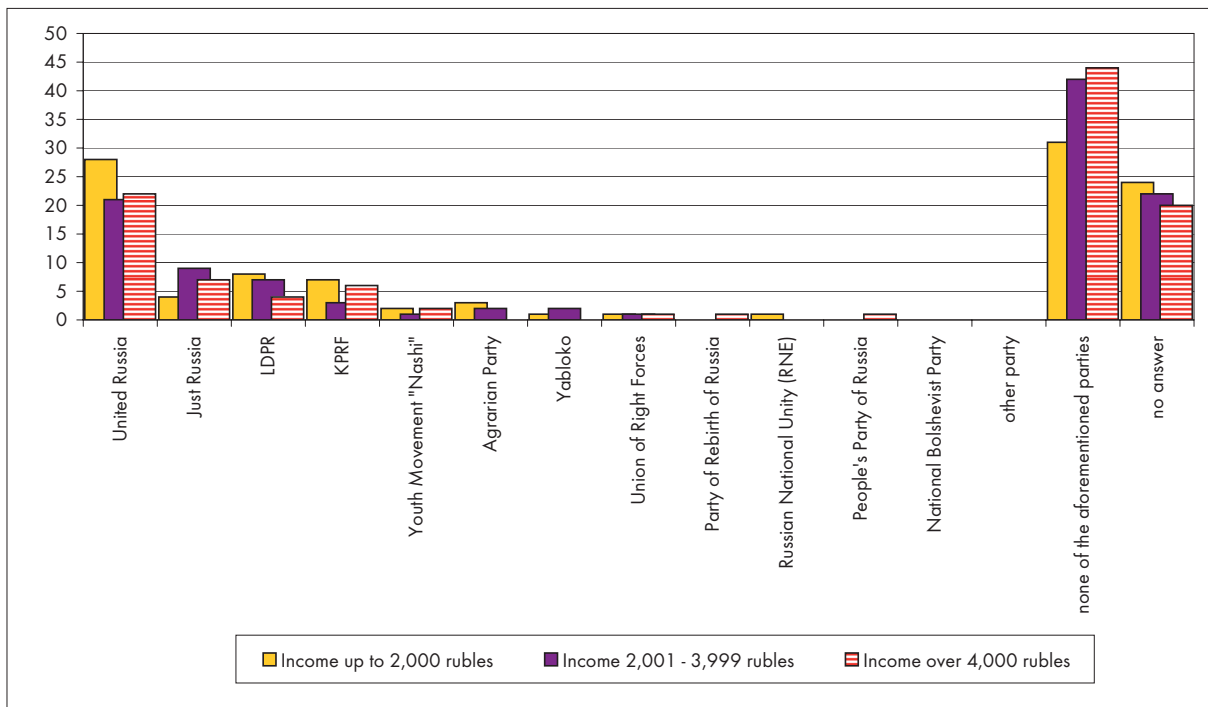
Answers According to Age Cohort



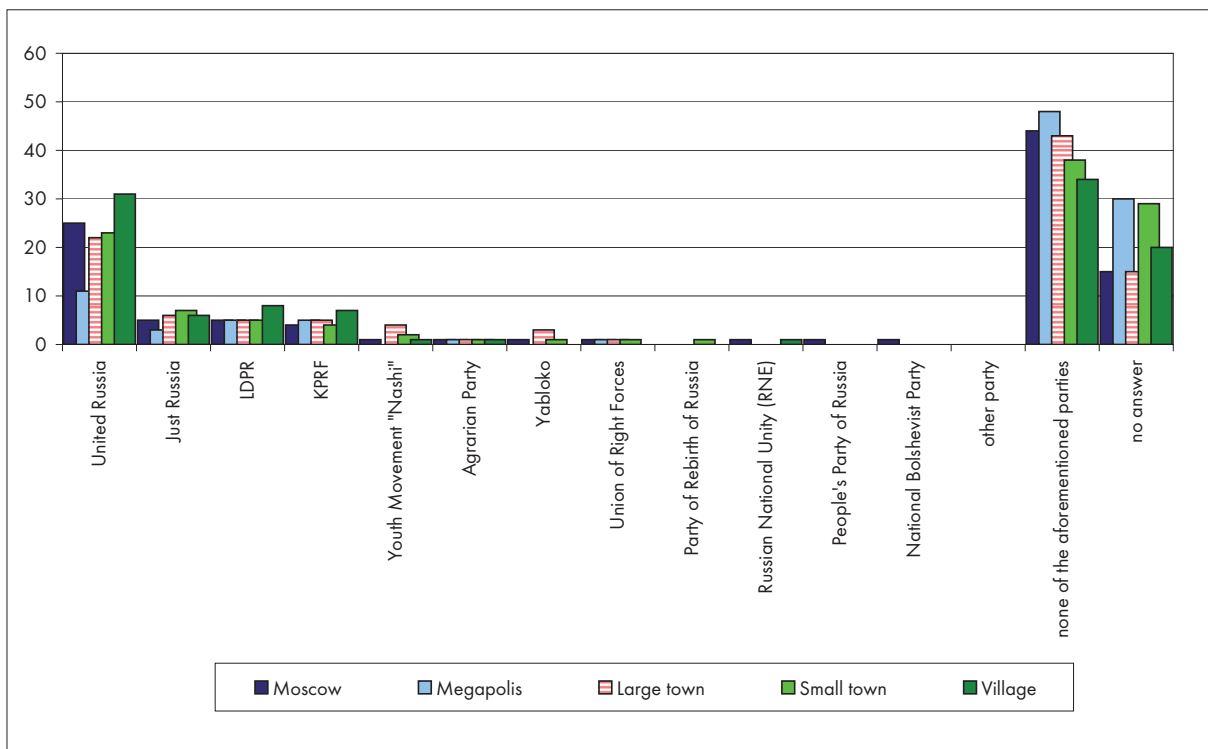
Answers According to Level of Education



Answers According to Level of Income



Answers According to Type of Place of Residence



Share of group	Which Political Party Has Recently Made a Good, Positive Impression on You?														
	United Russia	Just Russia	LDPR	KPRF	Youth Movement "Nashi"	Agrarian Party	Yabloko	Union of Right Forces	Party of Russia's Rebirth	Russian National Unity (RNE)	People's Party of Russia	National Bolshevik Party	other party	none of the aforementioned parties	no answer
Village	25	31	6	8	7	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	34	20
Small town	38	23	7	5	4	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	38	29	
Large town	17	22	6	5	5	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	43	15	
Megapolis	12	11	3	5	5	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	48	30	
Moscow	8	25	5	5	4	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	44	15	
Income over 4,000 rubles	24	22	7	4	6	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	44	20	
Income 2,001 - 3,999 rubles	33	21	9	7	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	42	22	
Income up to 2,000 rubles	19	28	4	8	7	2	3	1	0	1	0	0	31	24	
University	17	27	10	5	3	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	42	15	
Vocational school	33	23	6	6	6	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	43	20	
Secondary school	35	24	5	4	6	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	38	27	
No secondary school	14	19	3	11	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	34	33	
Age 55 and above	27	18	11	11	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	37	25	
Age 36 to 54	37	25	5	6	7	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	41	20	
Age 18 to 35	36	26	3	2	5	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	40	25	
Women	53	25	6	5	4	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	38	26	
Men	47	22	6	6	7	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	41	20	
All respondents	100	23	6	6	5	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	40	23	

Opinion

A Destructive Combination: Why Democratic Institutions Can Destroy Democracy

By Petra Stykow, Munich

The Duma elections at the end of this year will return the results for a campaign in which there is hardly any political or substantial difference between the most promising candidates. Moreover, they certainly do not represent any real opposition to the president. This is a consequence of “Putin’s System”. However, Putin’s unchallenged position is only at a superficial level grounded in one individual, whose image is increasingly demonized in the West. Rather, it is the result of the institutional structure of the system.

It is revealing to compare the variations in Western democracies: In parliamentary systems, the government formally represents the “executive committee” of the parliamentary majority. Under such an arrangement, it is the competition *between the parties* that guarantees that the precarious link between a party (or coalition) and executive power remains temporary. It can be revised through elections. On the contrary, in democratic presidential systems, the key constraint on power stems from checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches. This creates an institutional competition *between the “powers”* themselves. Accordingly, the importance of political parties varies in these two arrangements: While a parliamentary system relies on strong and disciplined organizations with clearly defined profiles, in a presidential system, democracy is not jeopardized by weak parties that are vague in substance; indeed, this may even be a precondition for its functioning.

Russia’s (constitutionally fixed) “semi-presidential” and (de facto) “super-presidential” system combines elements of both of these arrangements. However, since the voting behavior of the Duma deputies can

be effectively controlled by the presidential administration (unlike in the US presidential system), the checks and balances are suspended. Thus, the executive branch has rid itself of the restrictions of the legislature. This effect is reinforced by the fact that – unlike in the European parliamentary democracies – the executive is not an institutionally extended arm of the parliamentary majority and there is no real competition between parties representing meaningful political alternatives.

While some elements of Russia’s institutional system at first glance resemble those of functioning democracies, this impression is dispelled as soon as one looks at the bigger picture: The pieces are rearranged in a way that undermines the overall architecture created by their original contexts. Single elements are derived from various institutional arrangements whose systemic logic depends on the interaction of all its building blocks, but is not inherent in each of the elements themselves. In the Russian Constitution, this interplay has been disrupted by the blending of disconnected components of parliamentary and presidential systems. The mixed institutional design then was implanted in a soil where the legacies of the highly centralized “Soviet democracy” with its informal power structures remained strong. The fragile democracy of the early 1990s did not survive due to the inconsistencies resulting from the “institution shopping” during constitution-making. They brought forth an overwhelmingly dominant presidential executive checked neither by an independent parliament nor by strong political parties.

Translated from German by Christopher Findlay

Analysis

The Transformation of Russia's Party System

By Vladimir Gel'man, St. Petersburg

Abstract

Russia's party system has swung like a pendulum from the one party control of the Soviet era, to the hyper-fragmentation and volatility of the 1990s, to an attempt to restore centralized control in the 2000s. The danger of the new system is that it will cause the death of the political opposition. Now Russia may be developing a "Dresden" style political system, in which one main party controls several satellite parties that have little political power. Such a system could be in place for a long time, though it is unlikely to be permanent.

Swings of the Pendulum

Russia's party system in the 1990s demonstrated several distinctive features in comparison with the post-Communist party systems of Eastern Europe. First, Russia's party system was greatly fragmented, because all segments of Russia's electoral market were over-supplied. Second, the extremely volatile electoral support demonstrated great uncertainty in voter demands, which created opportunities for establishing new parties during every election cycle. Third, non-partisan politicians who possessed resources other than party support (mainly backed by regional and/or sectoral interest groups) also played a major role in national and, especially, sub-national electoral politics. Executive elections at all levels are largely a non-partisan enterprise. But even in the arena of legislative elections, the impact of political parties was limited, while the role of legislatures themselves remains secondary.

In the early 2000s, some observers hoped that the increasing demand of federal elites for the re-centralization of Russian politics would lead to the formation of a stable and competitive party system. Centralization makes it possible to increase the role of political parties and intensifies coalition politics among parties.

The reality turned out to be different from these hopes. Although the party system in Russia actually stabilized after the 2003–2004 parliamentary and presidential elections, the political consequences of its stabilization went too far. Hyper-fragmentation and high volatility on Russia's electoral market were replaced by trends toward a monopoly of the ruling elite. The "party of power," United Russia, acquired a super-majority in the State Duma and in 2004–2007 gained control over most of the regional legislatures in Russia. This dominance is a clear sign of the lack of meaningful competition in the party system: all of the other parties and candidates combined do not have enough potential to form real alternatives to the

pro-governmental parliamentary majority and to the incumbent president. Thus, the developing trends in Russia's party system are similar to swings of a pendulum. After the equilibrium of Soviet one-party rule, the party system changed to hyper-fragmentation and high volatility, and then to consolidation with a monopoly held by the party of power.

The Rise of the Party of Power and the Extinction of the Opposition

The story of the successful establishment of the party of power's monopoly in Russia is rather complicated. Early attempts at party-building during the 1993 and especially the 1995 parliamentary elections failed. Parties of power at this point were not only unable to garner a parliamentary majority, but could not even become key players, and later disintegrated after heavy losses in subsequent parliamentary elections.

During the 1999 parliamentary elections, two claimants for the role of the party of power competed with each other: the coalition Fatherland – All Russia (FAR), established around regional governors, and the Kremlin-backed bloc Unity. The latter was relatively successful (winning 23.3 percent of the votes, against 13.3 percent for FAR); due to political maneuvering in the State Duma, Unity first isolated FAR and later acquired it in the manner of a hostile takeover. Unity and FAR established a majority coalition in Duma, and in late 2001 transformed themselves into a single party, United Russia (UR). This party was the major winner of the 2003 parliamentary elections, primarily due to the strong endorsement from the popular president, Vladimir Putin. Even though UR won only 37.8 percent of the party list vote, it was able to secure a faction with more than two-thirds of the Duma seats (306 out of 450).

All these incarnations of the party of power share major common features: (1) they were established by the executive branch in order to get a majority in the

federal and regional legislatures and are controlled by top executive branch officials; (2) they lack any definite ideology; and (3) they shamelessly use state resources for campaigning.

Beyond parliamentary politics, the role of the party of power remains rather limited. During the 2003–2005 regional legislative elections, UR was successful only in those regions where its local branches were under the strong control of influential governors. The presence of UR in the cabinet was merely symbolic: Although in Mikhail Fradkov's cabinet three members of the government, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Zhukov, Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu, and Agriculture Minister Alexei Gordeev, joined UR, the party's impact on governmental policies was extremely limited. Rather, it serves as a Kremlin "transmission belt" for conversion of major proposals into laws.

While Vladimir Putin's high approval rating is still the major resource for the party of power, signs of UR's further institutionalization became visible over the course of the post-2003 regional legislative elections. In March 2007, it won over 46 percent of the vote and the majority of seats in almost all regional legislatures.

In early 2006, Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head and chief strategist of Putin's administration who has been credited with the construction of UR and the orchestration of political control over the State Duma, instructed UR activists that the party should run the country over the next 10–15 years. This ambitious goal seems to be feasible. In the mid-2000s, Russia's ruling group initiated serious institutional changes that aimed to preserve the party of power's monopoly on Russia's political market. First, entry barriers protecting this market from outsiders were increased. The higher barriers diminished chances for the formation of new strong parties and for coalition politics among existing parties. Registration of new parties became more difficult: minimal requirements increased from 10,000 to 50,000 members, with regional branches in two thirds rather than half of the country's regions. The formation of electoral coalitions (blocs) was prohibited, and the electoral threshold in the State Duma and regional legislative elections rose from 5 percent to 7 percent. Second, the electoral system has been restructured due to the introduction of mixed or proportional electoral systems in regional legislative elections (since 2003) and a purely proportional electoral system in State Duma elections (adopted in 2005 for implementation in 2007). Third, in 2004–2005 Vladimir Putin initiated the abolition of popularly elected regional governors and proposed the appoint-

ment of representatives of parties that won regional legislative elections to these posts. In fact, this idea also enhanced the position of the party of power. Some other innovations, such as the installation of an imperative mandate (deputies who leave their party would also lose their parliamentary seat), the use of electronic vote counting during elections, and the minimization of the role of independent electoral observers in the polls, are also aimed at the same goal.

While the party of power began to dominate Russia's political scene, the previously active and lively opposition – the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and liberal parties, Yabloko and Union of Right Forces (SPS) – bore heavy losses. Parties that continue to protest became marginalized and lost influence, while those that were co-opted into the regime lost their separate identities because they were no longer distinguishable from the authorities. The massive defeat of all opposition parties in the 2003 Duma elections (when Yabloko and SPS failed to cross the 5 percent threshold), as well as the lack of meaningful alternatives to Putin in the 2004 presidential elections serve as the most explicit examples of these trends.

Although some minor opposition groups around the National Bolshevik Party led by Eduard Limonov and United Civil Front led by chess champion Garry Kasparov and former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, recently joined together to sponsor some protest activities, even attracting some other parties such as Yabloko in St. Petersburg, their potential is currently rather modest.

The Kremlin, however, is deeply concerned about the (unlikely) threat of a "color revolution" in the wake of the coming 2007–2008 elections, and is working to prevent it at all costs using two different, though overlapping, methods. First, the elite shamelessly use the police to brutally suppress protest actions. Second, they encourage loyal youth NGOs to establish militant units and prepare them to use violence against the opposition. Third, they attempted to establish a puppet-like "semi-opposition," based on the left and nationalist camps as well as around the loyal liberals, aimed at splitting and thus weakening possible protests.

Toward a "Dresden Party System"?

In August 2006, when the monopoly of UR seemed unchallenged, the Kremlin launched a new venture in Russia's electoral arena: It established Just Russia (JR), led by the chair of the Federation Council, Sergei Mironov (previously a leader of Russia's Party of Life) on the basis of the previously existing pro-Kremlin

parties, Party of Life and Russia's Party of Pensioners, as well as the nationalist party Motherland. The new party's debut during the March 2007 regional legislative elections demonstrated a partial success: JR ran second or third in most regions, with only the KPRF winning a comparable number of seats and votes. Although most observers agreed that JR's potential is strong enough to surpass the 7 percent threshold during the 2007 State Duma elections, it is hard to consider JR a genuine challenger to UR. Rather, it was established as a junior satellite to UR, or a typical fake alternative. As Surkov frankly mentioned once, while "there is no alternative major party, society has no 'second leg' onto which it can shift when the first has gone numb. This makes the system unstable." Although Putin during his news conference in February 2007 classified UR as liberals while described JR as social democrats, in fact this distinction was little more than a smokescreen, because at the same time he argued that both parties should nominate a common candidate for the 2008 presidential elections. No wonder that Vladimir Ryzhkov, State Duma deputy and the Kremlin's opponent, noted that the establishment of a new party of power is a step toward a "Dresden party system", referring to a system in which there were a number of puppet parties under strict Communist control in pre-1989 Eastern Germany (a system quite familiar to Putin because of his KGB service in Dresden in the 1980s).

Among non-democratic political systems, one-party regimes usually live longer than personalist regimes. In this respect, the strategy of monopolist dominance by the party of power in Russia is very rational over the long haul. Although the establishment of a monopoly by the party of power (unlike personalist regimes) requires numerous significant political investments,

it might bring long-term and large-scale benefits to the ruling group. Alternatively, the establishment of personalist regimes in some post-Soviet countries required almost no investments, but the ruling groups have been unable to secure long-term benefits, and sometimes faced bankruptcy, as in the "color revolutions" in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Finally, personalist regimes are very vulnerable in terms of the problem of leadership succession.

The transformation of Russia's party system through its various pendulum swings has complicated Russia's political development. In the 1990s, the fragmentation and instability created major roadblocks to the formation of an efficient party system. Political parties failed to link elites and masses, represent society's interests, perform on the level of decision-making, and provide government accountability. These features of Russia's party system, although widely criticized, did not prevent the development of a more open and competitive party system. But the turn in the opposite direction toward a monopoly for the party of power is more dangerous for the party system. This monopoly will lead to the extinction of the political opposition, an undermining of incentives for mass participation, and the politicization of the state. If the state of Russia's party system in the 1990s can be viewed as the protracted growing pains typical of nascent party systems in new democracies, in the 2000s there are symptoms of a chronic disease. Once established, this monopoly of the party of power could reproduce itself and stay in power for a long period. The experience of Communist Russia tells us that these monopolies can survive for many decades – but not forever. After the 2007–2008 elections, it will be clear whether or not attempts to re-establish one-party rule in Russia have achieved their goals.

About the author:

Vladimir Gel'man is a Professor in the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology at the European University at St.Petersburg (gelman@eu.spb.ru).

Analysis

The Regional Dimension of Russia's 2007–2008 Elections

By J. Paul Goode, Norman, Oklahoma

Abstract

The key to Russia's presidential and parliamentary elections lies in the regions. The March 2007 regional elections show that United Russia will continue to dominate, but that it will face new challenges from the rapidly rising Just Russia. The new party could help stimulate the fracturing of the regional elite. If the governors are willing to take risks, they may have increased influence over the course of the 2007 parliamentary elections. Moreover, the rise of Just Russia could make it difficult for the center to maintain control over the regions.

Understanding the Regional Dimension

While Russia's parliamentary and presidential elections are sometimes lacking in surprises, there is no shortage of intrigue to the campaign battles on the regional level. In the parliamentary race, the domination of the current "party of power" over the last two electoral cycles was forged in Russia's regions. Unity made its surprising gains in 1999 by contesting the provincial seats traditionally taken by the Communist Party (CPRF). In 2003, United Russia's (UR) federal party list contained just 4 names, while the rest of its 117 mandates went to regional party lists. In the upcoming elections, the regional effect has been strengthened by President Vladimir Putin's post-Beslan reforms to transform governors into Kremlin-appointed officials, and to eliminate the State Duma's single member districts. Voting for regional party lists provides an indicator of the relative strengths of Russia's national parties heading into the parliamentary campaign season. The composition of regional assemblies provides an additional indication of the cohesiveness (or fragmentation) of regional elites, which will determine parties' expectations and tactics for December 2007, while Putin's governors play a crucial role in mobilizing support for the "party of power" and managing conflicts among regional elites.

The regional dimension of national elections is equally significant in the presidential race. In the run up to 1996, Boris Yeltsin's realization that the opposition's support was located outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg led him to court the governors with a spate of bilateral power-sharing treaties. Putin's victory in 2000 depended upon Unity's success in meeting the challenge posed by Fatherland-All Russia in the regions – despite the latter's strong cohort of governors – in order to sink Yevgenii Primakov's presidential aspirations. In the 2004 election, the Kremlin relied upon the governors to ensure that Putin's vote matched, if not exceeded, the vote for United Russia in December

2003 and, most importantly, to come up with creative ways to ensure sufficient turnout and avoid a runoff.

Regarding both parliamentary and presidential elections, one must recall that Russia's "political technology" industry does not simply spring in and out of existence every four years. The art of campaigning and manipulating election outcomes is crafted in regional political contests. Those who are successful in running regional campaigns in federal elections often find their way into regional government or are positioned in territorial branches to exercise *kontrol'* (oversight) in regional administrations and assemblies. And, once in power, they are expected to deliver the vote for the "party of power" in the next round of federal elections.

Yet the regional campaigns can also be a source of uncertainty and distress for the Kremlin. Russia's provinces provide a laboratory (sometimes a lightning rod) for various kinds of legal and political experimentation. They can pull the center in unanticipated directions, compel a response when the center would rather not intervene, or otherwise require the Kremlin to rein in over-zealous federal agents in territorial branches of the federal government. In other words, the strengthening of the "ruling vertical" and the "dictatorship of law" in the regions do not protect the center from the law of unintended consequences.

In the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, those consequences are less related to popular choice than to the dynamics of elite competition in the regions. If UR has relied upon its monopoly position to guarantee the cohesive backing of regional elites, the upcoming electoral cycle threatens to diminish that position by pushing hidden conflicts among political and economic elites into the open. The Kremlin clearly expects Russia's governors to prevent this from happening and to lead the campaign for the "party of power" in the regions, just as they have led regional party lists in elections for regional legislatures.

Yet latent ambiguities and contradictions in the governors' relations with the Presidential Administration, as well as ongoing tensions in center-regional relations, may disrupt their position in relation to the regional elite and inject a degree of uncertainty in the process. Consider, for instance, the transformation of Russia's governors from elected to appointed officials. Now that the governors are appointed by the Kremlin, they also represent a significant source of political and material patronage that significantly raises the stakes in presidential elections. Russia's next president will have the power to hire and fire governors across all of Russia's regions, and one would expect that Putin's designated successor will continue the current practice of leaving incumbent governors in place as long as they stay loyal and maintain stability in the provinces. But the power of appointment may help other candidates to punch above their weight by linking up with regional elites seeking a change of governor (particularly where mayors of regional capitals or speakers of regional assemblies oppose incumbent governors). This could create incentives for presidential candidates to compromise with competing elite factions, complicating the ability of Putin's designated successor to achieve a first round victory.

The Lessons of March 2007

Just as elections for the State Duma traditionally serve as primaries for Russia's presidential elections, regional elections are often viewed as dress rehearsals for the parliamentary elections. The results of the regional assembly elections in March 2007 (see Table) suggest that UR will continue its domination, but with a slightly different supporting ensemble. Across 14 regions comprising one-third of the electorate, only UR and the CPRF managed to compete and win party list seats in every region. UR led in all but one region, averaging 44 percent of the party list vote. CPRF averaged 16 percent of the vote, but only managed a second place finish in half of the contests. Just Russia (JR) averaged 15 percent and won seats in 13 regions, while the Liberal Democratic Party brought up the rear with just over 9 percent of the vote and winning seats in 11 regions. One liberal party, Union of Right Forces, managed to compete in nine regions, though it was barred in Dagestan, Vologda Oblast, and Pskov Oblast (it was initially barred in Samara, though the decision was overturned by the Central Electoral Commission). Though the party did surprisingly well in crossing the 7 percent threshold in 5 regions and narrowly missing in a further 2 regions, it poses no clear threat to the main parties. Out of the remaining 9 parties that competed in various regional campaigns,

only 3 managed to win seats in one or two regions: the Agrarian Party in Dagestan and Vologda Oblast, Patriots of Russia in Dagestan, and the Greens in Samara Oblast.

Table: March 2007 Regional Assembly Elections

Party	Average Vote (Party List)	Number of Regions Competing	Number of Regions Winning Seats
United Russia	44.05%	14	14
Communist Party	16.04%	14	14
Just Russia	15.53%	14	13
Liberal Democratic Party	9.62%	14	11
Union of Right Forces	7.14%	9	5

The critical intrigue emerging from the March 2007 elections involves the rapid rise of the newly created Just Russia, which already commands significant resources and the tacit support of the Kremlin. The three parties that merged to form JR (Party of Life, Pensioners' Party, and Motherland) started to show their collective muscle in the October 2006 regional elections, gathering 50 percent more donations than they managed individually in 2005. In March 2007, JR's campaign funds (400 million rubles) were second only to UR (600 million rubles). These are impressive sums when one considers that the total accumulated for *all* parties over the March and October 2006 elections was 624 million rubles. This marks, in part, an influx of new regional elites from the business world seeking to establish a foothold in regional politics. The party's pro-Kremlin orientation yielded additional benefits in terms of insulation from the exploitation of "administrative resources" to deny it a chance to compete: of the four parties that competed in all 14 regions last March, only UR and JR did not suffer any difficulties in securing registration.

The appearance of JR as a pro-Kremlin opposition party potentially threatens UR's hold over regional elites. Though governors led most of UR's party lists in past campaigns, the intervention of the party's central organs in the compilation of regional lists meant that warring factions within regional branches were incorporated into the same party list, effectively papering over internal divisions and driving conflicts among regional elites into UR's regional branches. If support for UR in 2003 was understood as unequivocal support for Putin (and therefore mandatory), the appearance of JR means that regional leaders can safely back an opposition party without opposing the Kremlin. The potential danger for UR was vividly illustrated in Lipetsk Oblast last October, where Sergei Mironov (now head of JR) secured Putin's permission

to use the president's image during the campaign. The situation put the Lipetsk branch of UR in a particularly awkward position since its list included the governor, the speaker of the legislative assembly, and the mayor of the regional capital. As the December 2007 elections draw near, dissatisfaction within UR should directly benefit JR by transforming conflicts within the "party of power" into an inter-party competition. One tangible consequence is that UR and JR are likely to become engaged in a bidding war for the support of the regions, as evidenced by Mironov's recent suggestion that gubernatorial elections could be restored and the various proposals by UR to grant governors the power to directly appoint mayors.

The performance of JR thus provides a measure of (and stimulus for) fragmentation among regional elites. In regions where the elite unite behind UR, the role of JR will be limited to picking off smaller parties. By contrast, regions with fragmented elites are likely to feature direct competition between the two parties. One can already find instances of this effect where the availability of JR provides opportunities for mayors in capital cities to oppose governors in their regions. Stavropol Mayor Sergei Kuzmin formed a weighty JR faction with the aim of eventually forcing the region's unpopular governor out of office, dealing UR an outright defeat in the region's March 2007 election. Other mayors of regional capitals may seek to back the opposition given the possibility that the State Duma may eliminate mayoral elections in exchange for the governors' support of UR. There is no small bit of irony in this, given Putin's record with gubernatorial appointments. In regions where elites are relatively divided, he has appointed political outsiders that are unable to stand independent of the Kremlin's support. Insofar as this has resulted in a number of weak governors in the more developed and significant regions, JR may derive added value from their vulnerability.

These factors combine to put Russia's governors in an interesting position. On the one hand, there are no clear sanctions to supporting JR. The Kremlin has not made extensive use of its power to sack governors, and further sackings are unlikely as the elections approach. It has not articulated clear limits to its tolerance for JR's electoral success, aside from the prediction by the deputy head of the Presidential Administration,

Vladislav Surkov, that UR would remain the leading party in parliament until 2011 with JR in a supporting role. Unlike the 1999 and 2003 campaigns, the performance of either party in December 2007 does not appear to be implicated in Putin's choice of a successor or his electoral prospects. As a result, the governors potentially have the most autonomy to influence the conduct of the national parliamentary campaign since the 1999 campaign.

At the same time, the governors tend to be risk averse. If they detect uncertainty in the Kremlin's mandate, their response is likely to be continued support for UR rather than a crusade on behalf of JR. While this might appear to be a safer approach, it potentially leaves them in an even weaker position in regions where the political and business elite are seeking alternatives. Even if this results in a diminished vote for UR, however, such an outcome might still work to the Kremlin's advantage in facilitating the turnover of the regional elite and the identification of new or potential partners within the regions.

Conclusion

Assessing the regional dimension of the upcoming electoral cycle points to hidden fault lines in Russian politics that could provide short term surprises with longer term consequences. There is little doubt that United Russia will remain the largest party in the State Duma, though the nature and extent of its victory will be determined by the battles in provincial trenches. And while it remains uncontroversial to assume that Putin's designated successor will meet with little resistance in 2008, the end game concerns the new president's ability to mobilize the support and compliance of the regions. The Kremlin's attempt to fashion a loyal opposition in the form of Just Russia offers a means to incorporate new and existing members of the regional elite that are dissatisfied with the current "party of power." This could translate into significant gains for JR over its performance in March 2007 such that it would become the second largest party in the State Duma. In the long run, however, the tactic of exploiting divisions within the regions may undermine the levers of central control over the regions, even threatening the elite consensus supporting the present regime.

About the author:

J. Paul Goode is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma.

Analysis

Parties in the Russian Political Context: What Has Changed?

By Igor Rabinovich, Ufa

Abstract

The authorities are using changes in the electoral laws to eliminate opposition parties. Since regional leaders control most local elections, they are able to exert extensive control over the party branches operating on their territories. The result is that parties must either be co-opted into the system or be marginalized. There are two ways to evaluate the changes in the situation of political parties in Russia: first is the parties' freedom for creation, existence, and activity; second is the guarantee for honest, open, and just political competition, including in elections.

Eliminating Unwanted Parties

Recently, the authorities have imposed unprecedented strict limits on the very existence of political parties. According to amendments to the federal law "On Parties," adopted in December 2004, Russia had to eliminate all parties that had fewer than 50,000 members or fewer than 500 members in 44 regions. Currently of 33 officially registered parties only 17 have the right to compete in elections. The remaining 16 must go out of existence if they do not increase their membership in the course of a year. The authorities eliminated 8 parties in September 2006 and an additional 5 at the beginning of 2007.

Among the parties eliminated were some of the oldest Russian parties from the first democratic wave. At the beginning of April, the most recent example of such a party being eliminated was the Social Democratic Party of Russia, headed by former USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev. In March, the Russian Supreme Court eliminated the Republican Party of Russia, which was headed by State Duma member Vladimir Ryzhkov, for insufficient membership. According to official statistics, it had about 35,000 members in 32 regions and had been in existence since 1990. Party officials tried to present documents showing that the party actually had more than 58,000 members in 44 regions, but the court did not accept this evidence. In Altai Krai, Ryzhkov's home region, protesters took to the streets to voice their anger at the decision.

Nevertheless, the authorities are unlikely to change this policy. Parties in Russia should represent a significant part of the population since they are seeking power, according to Galina Fokina, head of the Federal Registration Service. Therefore discriminating against small parties is completely justified, she claimed. The authorities have no claims against the parties of power, United Russia and Just Russia, and the key parliamentary parties, the Communists and the Liberal Democratic Party. However, according to Fokina, the

other parties list individuals as members of their party even though they are not. She claimed that her investigators had found many people listed who did not know that their names had been included and had no intention of joining a political organization.

For their part, the parties accused the Registration Service of using crude and illegal methods to confirm party membership. Yabloko members asserted that in several regions the inspectors demanded of citizens that they write declarations that they are indeed members of the party. In other cases, the inspectors demanded that party members name the head of the party groups at the local and regional levels and also explain how often they participated in party meetings and when they were held. Additionally, the inspectors demanded that parents confirm that their children were party members. The parties described these tactics as exerting pressure on citizens for political reasons.

Clearly, the authorities are seeking to define a simplified quasi-multiparty system, at the center of which will be the one or two multi-million parties of power. The other parties will not play a significant role and their fate will not be crucial for the existence of the system.

The membership barriers are aimed not at "small" parties, but those that refuse to participate in the party system that the authorities are forming. The remaining parties effectively agree to play by the rules dictated to them. However, even the remaining parties may ultimately be removed if they start to threaten the monopoly of the parties of power. This possibility is suggested by the most recent change in the electoral legislation adopted at the end of 2006 at United Russia's urging. This new legislation bans any criticism of the authorities in the live broadcasts of political debates. Many parties labeled this measure the introduction of political censorship.

Regional Authorities Control Parties

In many regions, to survive and continue operation parties must be loyal to the governor or mayor. Par-

ties in the opposition are oppressed and their activity is effectively blocked by the authorities. Essentially, the local authorities have established de facto political censorship. There are no public debates, the opposition has no access to the media, and there are illegal limits on conducting demonstrations and other forms of mass protest. Frequently, the authorities replace local party heads with leaders who are more loyal and dependent. To achieve these ends, the regional authorities provide extensive resources for party branches, including office space, communications, and help in finding jobs for party activists.

The national leaderships of political parties frequently ignore the manipulations by local authorities in the regional and local party organizations, hoping

to receive in exchange more votes in the elections, which are effectively controlled by the local authorities. In these conditions, only political structures that are inclined to conform, compromise, and make agreements with the authorities continue to survive.

In these conditions, it is not surprising that society has little interest in parties that have not made an agreement with the authorities, but at the same time distanced themselves from the radical opposition. Yabloko is characteristic in this regard. The party is going through some of the most difficult times in its history, losing elections and facing the opposition of the authorities. The same is happening to other parties: they simply must marginalize themselves in order to survive.

About the author:

Igor Rabinovich is deputy director of the Center for Economic and Political Research “Uralbizneskonsalting” in Ufa.

Regional Report

Elections in Komi: A Sign of Future Victory or Defeat?

By Yury Shabaev, Syktyvkar

Abstract

A detailed analysis of the March 11 elections in Komi shows that United Russia and Just Russia did not do as well as they could have and that others parties made gains. Surprisingly, the result may be a more active republican legislature.

Elections Boost All Parties

On March 11, 2007, Komi was one of 14 regions to hold elections to its regional legislature. A detailed analysis of the results in this region suggest that the outcome was not completely predictable and that the mood of the electorate could change by December, when the federal legislative elections will be held.

One way to look at the Komi elections is that everybody won. The biggest winner was the governor and the executive branch, which actively supported United Russia (UR), and saw its victory as a vote of confidence. UR itself won the most votes, gaining 36.4 percent. The opposition parties also won because neither the Communists (14.2%), nor the LDPR (13.6%), nor the Union of Right Forces (8.9%) had been represented in the local parliament previously and the degree of their support within the population was significant. Just Russia also won, gaining 15.8 percent in its political debut.

The population also won, though to a lesser degree, because the republican parliament will likely represent the interests of various social and territorial groups. There is reason to hope that the opposition will force the majority to stop simply rubber stamping the decisions of the executive and actually begin to monitor its actions. Potentially, there will be hearings on difficult social issues and state programs, such as developing villages, and investigations of difficult situations, such as the need to address the poverty of the mining cities of Inta and Vorkuta. The population will likely support such initiatives by the legislature.

Parties of Power Lag

The authorities backing UR could not use their strategic superiority to full effect. They had announced that they would take 50 percent of the vote, but did not reach this self-imposed goal. Polling results show that only hard-core UR supporters voted

for the party. The party could not attract any fence-sitters, all of whom went to the other parties. This outcome demonstrated the weakness of the party's regional organization. UR's weak ability to appeal to the masses and its opponents' ability to neutralize its use of administrative resources could lead to a quick erosion in the party's political influence. The party's success in Komi reflects Putin's popularity more than the success of the local authorities.

Just Russia likewise conducted an ineffective campaign. It did not carry out aggressive work with the socially disadvantaged groups of the population who have strongly negative attitudes toward the authorities. Among them are pensioners, public sector workers, rural residents, and miners. Recent polls show that the population has low regard for all institutes of power. Of 13 mayors running for reelection on March 11, only 5 were able to hang on to their jobs.

Thanks to Just Russia's poor campaign and the absence of the "against all" line on the ballot, the protest vote largely went to the Communists and the Union of Right Forces (SPS). Accordingly, these parties' success cannot be attributed to their campaigns. The Communists have never had much support or distinguished leaders in the republic. Nevertheless, they did well in the elections. SPS has not been particularly active in Komi in recent years. Only the arrival and participation of Nikita Belykh, the party leader, helped boost its image during the campaign.

Voters Seek Alternatives

The voters demonstrated a high level of political consciousness and did not want to vote for the two parties of power simultaneously. They sought to

punish the authorities for their poor policy. In the previous parliament, of the 28 active deputies, 15 were members of United Russia at the end of its term. In the new parliament, United Russia will control 18 seats. Most of the success for United Russia was in the single-mandate districts. Many tricks were used in the district voting. In many cases, the voters were deprived of a real choice. In one Syktyvkar district, six candidates were originally registered, but only two actually made it on to the ballot. One was the United Russia candidate and the other was a person completely unknown to the local population. In Usinsk, the president of LUKoil-Komi ran against an ordinary worker in the oil industry. In the Magistral district, opponents of the UR candidate called on the voters to support her rather than themselves.

What will block United Russia from strengthening its position in the coming months? It must fulfill the promises that it made to the voters before the elections. The main issues are the difficult social and economic problems of the republic's mining cities and its rural areas. It is unlikely that the situation will improve much in the months before the December elections.

Clearly, the political battle in Komi did not come to an end after the elections. In these conditions, it will be difficult for United Russia to maintain its leadership position. Overall, the results from Komi show that many voters want to sidestep the battle between United Russia and Just Russia and are opting for a "third way," whether it is the Communists, SPS, or Liberal Democrats. That means that there will be a more complicated distribution of political forces in the new Russian parliament.

About the author:

Yury Shabaev is a researcher based in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic.

About the Russian Analytical Digest

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The Research Centre possesses a unique collection of alternative culture and independent writings from the former socialist countries in its archive. In addition to extensive individual research on dissidence and society in socialist societies, since January 2007 a group of international research institutes is participating in a collaborative project on the theme "The other Eastern Europe – the 1960s to the 1980s, dissidence in politics and society, alternatives in culture. Contributions to comparative contemporary history", which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

In the area of post-socialist societies, extensive research projects have been conducted in recent years with emphasis on political decision-making processes, economic culture and identity formation. One of the core missions of the institute is the dissemination of academic knowledge to the interested public. This includes regular email service with more than 10,000 subscribers in politics, economics and the media.

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The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) is a Swiss academic center of competence that specializes in research, teaching, and information services in the fields of international and Swiss security studies. The CSS also acts as a consultant to various political bodies and the general public.

The CSS is engaged in research projects with a number of Swiss and international partners. The Center's research focus is on new risks, European and transatlantic security, strategy and doctrine, state failure and state building, and Swiss foreign and security policy.

In its teaching capacity, the CSS contributes to the ETH Zurich-based Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army and the ETH and University of Zurich-based MA program in Comparative and International Studies (MACIS), offers and develops specialized courses and study programs to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students, and has the lead in the Executive Masters degree program in Security Policy and Crisis Management (MAS ETH SPCM), which is offered by ETH Zurich. The program is tailored to the needs of experienced senior executives and managers from the private and public sectors, the policy community, and the armed forces.

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Research Centre for East European Studies • Publications Department • Klagenfurter Str. 3 • 28359 Bremen • Germany

Phone: +49 421-218-7891 • Telefax: +49 421-218-3269 • e-mail: fsopr@uni-bremen.de • Internet: www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad