

The Duma's electoral system

Lessons in endogeneity

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Neo-institutional scholars share the belief that different institutions can produce different incentives for the same political actors. Institutional incentives are believed to shape how politicians work with one another, which policies they address, and how they seek to resolve political conflict. When well formulated, institutions may balance personal ambition to elicit good government. When poorly formulated, however, institutions may hinder good government by allowing ambition to work against the greater interests of society as a whole. Since the initial selection of institutions sets the framework in which the game of politics will be played, how institutions are designed takes on a great deal of significance. According to Lijphart (2004, 99), "The most important choice facing constitution writers is that of a legislative electoral system". Legislative electoral systems translate votes into seats and help determine the strength of political parties in parliament, which in turn has ramifications for the representation of societal interests, government formation, and policy-making.

The scholarly literature on electoral system effects is long and rich, often focusing on the relationship between electoral systems choice and the number of parties in a country's party system (e.g. Cox 1997; Lijphart 1994; Rae 1967; Taagepera and Shugart 1989). Riker (1982), in particular, identifies research on Duverger's Law as evidence that political science is a discipline with a research tradition that has produced an accumulation of generalisable knowledge. As Riker notes, a substantial body of work has examined empirically Duverger's classic assertion that "*the simple-majority single-ballot system¹ favours the two-party system*" (italics in the original, Duverger 1954, 217) as well as his hypothesis that "*both the simple-majority system with the second ballot and proportional representation favour multi-partism*" (italics in the original, Duverger 1954, 239). Most of these studies also emphasise Duverger's less famous observation that the influence of simple-majority single-ballot systems is limited to the constituency level (Duverger 1954, 223).

While Duverger's work has made a profound impact on the study of electoral systems and party systems, scholars have questioned the extent to which electoral laws affect party systems. For example, Grumm (1958) notes that where multiparty systems already existed, proportional representation (PR) was adopted because political elites wished to avoid the political gamble associated with moving toward a single-member-district (SMD)-plurality system (what Duverger calls simple-majority, single-ballot). Likewise, Lipset and Rokkan (1967, 30) argue that, given the role party strategists play in electoral legislation, it makes little sense "to treat electoral systems as independent variables and party systems as dependent".

A direct challenge to Duverger's Law comes from Colomer (2005), who seeks to turn Duverger's Law on its head. In a study of 219 elections across 87 countries since the nineteenth century, Colomer presents evidence to suggest that existing political actors determine electoral system choice. He argues that electoral systems, on their own, do not generate new party systems; rather they merely "crystallize, consolidate or reinforce previously existing political party configurations" (Colomer 2005, 1).

Research into the origins, effects, and evolution of the electoral system governing the lower house of Russia's legislature, the Duma, has made many welcome additions to our understanding of the interplay between political interests and electoral system design. With Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and now the Russian Federation serving as such a prominent case in the study of comparative politics, insights from this part of the globe are nearly impossible to discount. As such, it is worth taking stock of the lessons from the Russian case.

The origins and effects of Russia's initial electoral system

In a study of electoral system effects across six countries in post-communist Europe, Moraski and Loewenberg (1999) illustrate how institutional choice reflects the expectations of their designers and subsequent reactions to electoral outcomes. The authors depict the evolution of national electoral systems in East-Central Europe as passing through three stages. In the first stage, electoral laws were adopted to govern what would become transitional elections. In the second stage, laws for fully competitive elections were adopted with particular emphasis on the prospective results of the elections. In the third stage, electoral laws were modified, often in an attempt to address unexpected outcomes from the second stage. The framework provides a reasonable starting point for a description of how Russia's post-Soviet electoral system has evolved.

The design of the electoral system for Russia's first fully competitive legislative elections occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Equally important, it was adopted after more than a year of executive-legislative gridlock between President Yeltsin and parliamentary opponents of his plans for economic and political reform (see Colton 1998; Sakwa 1996; Willerton 1994). In September 1993, the conflict peaked. President Yeltsin declared that the parliament was making reform impossible and, on 21 September, despite lacking the constitutional power, he issued a series of decrees offering a solution to the political gridlock. Yeltsin disbanded the parliament, stripped all deputies of their legal mandates, and set new federal parliamentary elections for December 1993. In response to the president's actions, Yeltsin's opponents refused to vacate the parliamentary building and voted to impeach him for violating the constitution in place at the time. The stand-off ended in violence on the weekend of 3-4 October as the forces backing the president clashed with paramilitary units opposing him.

As Moser (2001, 25) emphasises, the political context in Russia during the fall of 1993 had important implications for how the electoral system was designed. Following the forceful disbanding of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, President Yeltsin enjoyed a free hand when it came to institutional design. The exclusive nature of the process granted Yeltsin and his supporters the opportunity to design an electoral system, as well as a constitution, that could serve their electoral and political interests. Second, the intense conflict between Yeltsin and his opponents – including a communist-nationalist opposition – leading up to the crisis produced even greater incentives for those in power to adopt rules that would favour reformist parties.

Yet, given the freedom that the president and his advisors enjoyed, the choice of a mixed electoral system for the Duma – one with both PR and SMD-plurality components – may seem surprising. Conventionally speaking, one would expect such an option to result from

political compromise, with the former component appeasing smaller parties and latter working to the advantage of larger ones. In a way, Russia's initial electoral system did emerge from compromise, but one that occurred internally rather than among rival parties.

Empirical work on the question agrees that, while Yeltsin and his inner circle wished to maximise the number of pro-Yeltsin and pro-reform deputies in the new Duma, there was great uncertainty about which type of electoral system would yield this desired result. Participants in the process, interviewed by Smith and Remington (2001, 98), actually expressed great uncertainty about what the new parliament would look like under *any* electoral system. Thus, debates on the issue often turned on the comparative advantages and disadvantages of different systems. Proponents of SMD-plurality asserted that this system would over-represent the most popular group in the country. So, based on their understanding of Duverger's Law, some advisors advocated SMD-plurality because they believed pro-reform parties would win support from voters who would not want to waste their vote on minor parties. Indeed, there was a sense that the voting dynamics under SMD-plurality would encourage pro-reform parties to coalesce, as would the anti-reform parties, possibly resulting in a two-party system with the pro-reform bloc dominating in the foreseeable future.

On the other side of the debate, however, critics of SMD-plurality pointed out that the grass-roots organisation and local positions of Communists would work against pro-Yeltsin parties, particularly outside the reformist strongholds in Russia's urban areas. Proponents of PR also questioned whether reformist parties could unify into a single party or bloc, especially in the limited time available, to actually benefit from the over-representation that SMD-plurality grants to large parties (Smith and Remington 2001, 99). Without sufficient electoral coordination, the competition of multiple reform candidates within one district would run the risk of dividing the pro-reform vote and electing anti-reform deputies. In contrast, then, these advisors viewed a PR system as providing reformers with the best chance of capitalising on continued anti-Communist sentiment (Moser 2001, 26).

While uncertainty obscured the electoral prospects for pro-reform parties under SMD-plurality and PR, certain advisors, like Viktor Sheinis, offered normative reasons for a mixed system. Sheinis contended that an SMD component would permit voters the chance to select local representatives, and that there was significant value in having individual deputies represent specific geographic constituencies. At the same time, Sheinis and others believed a large PR segment would encourage political parties to form and compete with one another on the national stage. Elites would work together to create electoral associations to get on the national PR ballot while voters would be compelled to choose on the basis of partisan labels (Moser 2001, 26). Taken together, then, President Yeltsin and his advisors not only faced an electoral context that encouraged them to hedge their bets and adopt a mixed system, but also had normative reasons to move in that direction.

Remington and Smith (1996, 1256-7) provide a nice summary of the key features of the parliamentary electoral law governing the December 1993 Duma elections. The new Duma could consist of 450 deputies, with half (225) elected from party lists on the basis of the vote share that each party managed to attain in a single, nationwide electoral district. However, the proportionality of this half of the election was limited: the new electoral law included a 5 per cent legal threshold, meaning that parties had to receive at least 5 per cent of the national vote total through the list vote to be allocated one or more of the 225 PR seats. The other 225 Duma deputies, meanwhile, were elected in SMD-plurality contests – that is, 225 deputies were elected from 225 geographic districts, with the candidate receiving the most votes winning the district seat. The threshold for victory in 1993, then, was much lower than in the March 1990 elections to the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, when run-offs were held for contests in which no

candidate received an absolute majority of votes. In addition, the turnout threshold for a district race to be valid was lowered between 1990 and 1993, from 50 per cent to 25 per cent. The new electoral system also included a new ballot paper. During the Soviet era, voters had to cross out all unwanted choices. On the new ballot paper, voters merely needed to mark the box next to their preferred candidate or party. Voters still could express their discontent with all candidates and parties on the ballot, however, thanks to the presence of an "against all" option.

The upper house of the Russian legislature, the Federation Council, was elected using a different method. In 1993 only, Yeltsin decreed that members of the Federation Council would be chosen through direct election through two-member plurality contests (i.e. the two candidates from each subject of the federation receiving the most votes became the region's representatives). As Remington and Smith (1996, 1257) point out, though, this provision contradicted the constitution that was being voted on by referendum at the time. According to the 1993 Russian Constitution, the Federation Council was to include two representatives from each region with one representative from the regional executive branch and the other from the regional legislative branch. Subsequent methods of selection to the Federation Council have more closely followed this constitutional imperative.²

The 1993 election

By all accounts, the results of the 1993 Duma election were viewed as a defeat by Yeltsin and his supporters. As expected, the PR component did allow a large number of parties representation. Of the 13 that competed, eight electoral blocs passed the 5 per cent threshold. Five of the eight garnered less than 10 per cent of the nationwide PR vote (see also Moser 1995). The surprise, however, was the success of an extreme nationalist party operating under the misnomer, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). With a charismatic leader in Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and skilful use of television coverage, this electoral underdog won the largest share of the PR vote and the largest share of the PR seats. As Huskey (1996, 466) puts it, "the strong showing of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in December 1993 and 1995 reminds us that, in an era of crisis and video politics, extremist politicians may rise to power on a wave of popular frustration".

Russia's Choice, the party most closely associated with President Yeltsin, came a distant second with 14.5 per cent of the vote and only 40 PR seats (see Table 9.1). In third place was the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) with 32 PR seats thanks to about 12 per cent of the PR vote. While Russia's Choice managed to win the largest share of SMD seats among all electoral blocs competing, its total of 30 fell far below the number of independents elected in district elections in 1993. In fact, with 146 SMD contests going to independent candidates, independents won more of these seats than all the electoral blocs combined. On the normative side of the equation, there are reasons to question the role that political parties played in Russia's 1993 election. According to Moser (1995, 379), even in the PR half, party influence was superficial as "party organizations remained personalistic, organizationally amorphous, and ideologically ambiguous".

According to Breslauer (1999), the stunning defeat of reformists in 1993 was a serious blow to Yeltsin, not only politically but personally. Following the 1993 elections, President Yeltsin's leadership style changed with a more patriarchal tendency predominating. Like others in power across the post-communist space, Yeltsin and his entourage moved to correct the electoral system's unintended consequences and promoted changes that were expected to produce outcomes that would better serve the President's interests. Specifically, Yeltsin proposed an increase in the number of SMD seats (to 300) at the expense of the PR tier (Remington and Smith 1996, 1271). According to Moser, this move did not reflect an expectation that the electoral fortunes of

Table 9.1 Electoral allocation of Duma seats for notable parties and independent candidates, 1993–2007

	1993		1995		1999		2003		2007
	PR	SMD	PR	SMD	PR	SMD	PR	SMD	PR
Communist Party	32	16	99	58	67	46	40	12	57
LDPR/Zhirinovskiy Bloc	59	5	50	1	17	0	36	0	40
Yabloko	20	3	31	14	16	4	0	4	0
Russia's Choice	40	30	0	9	–	–	–	–	–
Our Home is Russia	–	–	45	10	0	7	–	–	–
Union of Rightist Forces	–	–	–	–	24	5	0	3	0
Unity	–	–	–	–	64	9	–	–	–
Fatherland/All Russia	–	–	–	–	37	31	–	–	–
United Russia	–	–	–	–	–	–	120	103	315
Rodina (Motherland)	–	–	–	–	–	–	29	8	–
Just Russia	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	38
Independents	–	146	–	77	–	114	–	68	–

Notes: The data presented are number of seats. They come from www.russiavotes.org (downloaded 13 May 2010) with the exception of the 2003 SMD total for United Russia (see note 6). To calculate seat percentages, divide the figures by 225 for the elections prior to 2007 and by 450 for the 2007 results. – indicates that the party did not compete or that, for independents in 2007, they could not compete.

reformist parties were greater in SMD-plurality contests; rather, it was based on the realisation that independent deputies were more susceptible than partisan deputies to “presidential pressure and pragmatic exchanges of legislative support for pork barrel projects” (Moser 2001, 26). The President's proposed electoral reform failed, however. Incumbent deputies, including many from Russia's Choice and other reformist parties, proved vested in the existing system and its equal distribution of seats across the two halves (Remington and Smith 1996, 1277).

The 1995 election

The Russian Federation held its second round of fully competitive legislative elections in December 1995. Given the sudden nature of the 1993 elections, members of the first Duma were elected only for a two-year term. Subsequent Duma deputies would be elected for four-year terms.³ Perhaps the biggest change between the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections with ramifications for Russia's party system was the longer time that parties and candidates had to prepare. In 1995, the number of parties competing in the PR half of the election jumped dramatically to 43 parties. The increase occurred despite the decision to raise the signature requirement for registration from 100,000 to 200,000 (Moser 1997, 291).

The significance of the rise in the number of parties is well documented (see Moser 2001; Remington and Smith 1996; Rose 2000). For Moraski and Loewenberg (1999), the Russian case illustrates how much of an effect legal thresholds can have on election results. In 1995, almost half of the PR vote went to parties that failed to pass the 5 per cent legal threshold. In fact, only four parties overcame this hurdle: the Communists, the Liberal Democratic Party, the reformist party, Yabloko, and the pro-Yeltsin party and new “party of power”, Our Home is Russia. Given the proliferation of parties between 1993 and 1995, as well as the willingness of many voters to cast ballots for these parties (thanks in part to the surprising success of the LDPR in the previous election), the mechanical effect of Russia's legal threshold in 1995 was to vastly over-represent

Russia's most popular parties. The Communist Party, in particular, benefited, winning 44 per cent of the PR seats with only 22 per cent of the votes. Still, the LDPR, Yabloko, and Our Home is Russia were advantaged as well. The disproportionality of the 1995 Duma election is an important case underpinning Moraski and Loewenberg's (1999, 168–69) conclusion that one unanticipated effect of the use of legal thresholds for PR systems across Central and Eastern Europe has been their heightened sensitivity to swings in electoral opinion, leading them to behave more like plurality systems in established democracies.

For Moser (2001, 40), however, the more dramatic consequences of Russia's mixed electoral system are associated with the SMD-plurality elections. He notes that not only did the 5 per cent barrier fail to deter the proliferation of small parties, but also that the level of fractionalisation in the district elections was strikingly high. In both 1993 and 1995, the average effective number of candidates was substantially higher than Duverger's Law would predict for SMD-plurality contests: 5.48 for the former and 6.61 for the latter (Moser 2001, 37). At the same time, the plurality half of the election did not produce the high level of disproportionality that Duverger's Law would lead one to expect. Thus, Moser (2001, 42–43) finds that the cumulative effect of Russia's mixed system in 1993 and 1995 diverged from conventional expectations. Mixed electoral systems are expected to yield a moderate number of parties, with the PR tier compensating for the higher disproportionality levels coming from SMDs. In Russia, however, the two halves combined to produce even greater fractionalisation than would have occurred had either system been used in isolation.

According to Moser (2001), the effects of Russia's mixed system stem from its unlinked nature and the lack of party institutionalisation in the country. Not only was each party permitted to keep every seat that it won in either half of the election, but, in 1995, no party other than the Communists performed well in both halves. Those that were successful in the PR contest tended to struggle in the SMD-plurality races, while other parties, such as the Agrarians, that failed to overcome the 5 per cent threshold in the PR segment managed to secure SMD victories. After extending his analysis to other post-communist states, new democracies outside the region, and consolidated democracies using mixed electoral systems, Moser highlights how the institutional effects of electoral systems depend on social context: “In Russia, the absence of an institutionalized party system dramatically changed the reductive effects of PR and plurality systems themselves” (Moser 2001, 55).

The results of the 1995 Duma election once again should have provided incentives for change. While Russia's Choice competed in the 1995 contest, the Kremlin supplied the electorate with a new party of power, “Our Home is Russia”, which was headed by then-prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Our Home is Russia outpolled Russia's Choice in the PR vote, 10.1 per cent to 3.9 per cent, but, even combined, the two parties still failed to win as much support as Russia's Choice did in 1993.⁴ Worse yet, Our Home is Russia came a distant third in the PR vote, closely behind the LDPR but well behind the Communists. Adding in Our Home's 10 SMD seats to the party's total was enough to push the new party of power ahead of the LDPR for second place overall (thanks to the LDPR's dismal showing of one seat in the SMD tier). However, the KPRF's 58 SMD seats gave it a commanding plurality of 157 total seats in the new Duma (see Table 9.1).

In sum, if the results of the 1993 Duma election were a defeat for the Kremlin, then the 1995 elections could be viewed as a disaster. Still, the Kremlin and the reformist camp, in general, learned a valuable lesson from the 1995 Duma election and it was one that the opponents of the SMD-plurality option foreshadowed: the failure of liberal parties to coordinate not only fractured the party system but it also led to the over-representation of their communist and nationalist opponents.

The 1999 election

Yet, as Remington and Smith's (1996) work anticipates, changes to Russia's electoral system for the 1999 Duma election were again minimal, reflecting the institutional inertia that comes when the prospects for change depend upon those believed to benefit from the status quo. Still, Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) was charged with refining the electoral law for 1999 so as to prevent a recurrence of the severe disproportionality that accompanied the 1995 election. Among the changes made, the CEC verified 20 per cent of the 200,000 signatures required for inclusion on the ballot. In addition, the CEC disqualified parties with 15 per cent or more invalid signatures and disqualified candidates who failed to submit accurate income and property statements, had a criminal record, or were foreign citizens. The disqualification of any of the top three candidates on a party list or 25 per cent of a party list would disqualify the entire party from competition (Brudny 2001, 156).

The 1999 election law also included other innovations. First, a deposit roughly equivalent to US \$77,000 was introduced, which could be used in lieu of signature gathering. If a party failed to garner at least 3 per cent of the PR vote, this deposit would not be returned. At the same time, while all parties were granted free access to television and radio, the CEC required those parties failing to win 2 per cent of the PR vote to reimburse the state for the costs of advertising. Lastly, the 1999 election law stipulated that candidates running on both a party list and in a single-member district could not use the free television and radio time designated for promoting the party list to promote themselves. Together, these changes appear to have been effective, reducing the number of parties from 43 in 1995 to 26 in 1999 (Brudny 2001, 157).

Though the changes to the electoral system were relatively minor for the 1999 Duma election, the party system witnessed more significant developments. Specifically, learning lessons from 1995, Russia's more liberal politicians strove to present a united front in the aptly named party, Union of Rightist Forces (SPS). A main exception to the consolidation on the right was the continued independence of Grigory Yavlinsky's Yabloko, one of only four parties to compete in all three Duma elections through 1999. While SPS performed fairly well nationally, with 8.5 per cent of the PR vote, Yabloko's vote total continued to decline: from 7.9 per cent in 1993 to 6.9 per cent in 1995 to 5.9 per cent in 1999 (Rose 2000, 55). On the left, the KPRF established itself as the dominant party, building upon its 1995 successes and receiving over 24 per cent of the PR vote. The LDPR also competed again in 1999, but this time as "the Zhirinovskiy bloc".⁵ By 1999, the LDPR's political trajectory was clearly in decline, down to 6 per cent of the vote in 1999 after dropping from 22 per cent in 1993 to 11 per cent in 1995 (Rose 2000, 55).

The main headline from the 1999 elections was the rise of two rival centrist parties, both with claims to the title "party of power". On one side, Fatherland-All Russia emerged as a coalition of former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov, and several regional leaders including Tatarstan president Mintimir Shaimiyev. In response to this centre-left "party of power", the Kremlin assembled its own centrist – though, presumably, centre-right – party of power, Unity, in October 1999 (McFaul 2000, 29). While Unity enjoyed the support of billionaire, Boris Berezovsky, and the state-run media, media oligarch, Vladimir Gusinsky, as well as several regional TV stations, including Moscow's TV-Tsentr, backed Fatherland-All Russia (McFaul and Petrov 2004, 24).

Although the 1999 election campaign was fierce, Rose (2000, 54) emphasises the degree to which it departed from the functions commonly associated with democratic elections. Not only were Unity and Fatherland-All Russia "fuzzy-focus parties", but they exemplified the degree to which Russian elites could supply different parties from election to election, presumably in an effort to subvert accountability. The SMD portion of Russia's electoral system proved equally

problematic. As in 1993 and 1995, independent candidates won the plurality (114) of SMD seats in 1999 (see Table 9.1). Yet, since effective participation in the Duma entails joining a party or organising a party faction, the behaviour of independents once in office significantly altered the composition of the Duma, and in ways that had little to do with the popular vote. Most dramatically, three "convenience" parties (i.e. legislative parties that did not compete as electoral parties) formed after the 1999 election: People's Deputy, Russian Regions, and the Agro-Industrial bloc. Together they constituted almost a third of the seats in parliament (Rose 2000, 55). While both sides of Russia's mixed electoral system yielded fewer effective parties or candidates in 1999 than in previous elections, Moser (2001, 153) still finds similar electoral system effects: "Both PR and plurality elections allowed for rather significant party proliferation, and once again, the cumulative effect of the two tiers created even greater party fractionalization in the State Duma."

With the March 2000 election of President Vladimir Putin, Russian observers anticipated significant changes in Russia's political system, including how elections would be held. McFaul (2000), in particular, ventured to provide some expert projections. Most relevant is McFaul's insight into rumours about election reform that were circulating among President Putin's advisors at the time, specifically, the possible elimination of the PR tier of the Duma's electoral system. In general, the suspicion was that this and other institutional changes "could resurrect a system dominated by a single 'party of power'" (McFaul 2000, 30). President Putin did not disappoint, although he probably did surprise. Among Putin's first-term reforms were changes to the Federation Council's membership, the creation of seven federal districts to oversee the operation of politics in Russia's often unruly regions (Hyde 2001; Remington 2003; Ross 2003), the decision to mandate more uniform electoral systems for regional legislatures (see Golosov 2004), and the passage of a new party law requiring parties to re-register while demonstrating some degree of national organisation (Bacon 2004; Moraski 2006; Wilson 2006). Still, Russia's electoral system remained largely unchanged for the 2003 Duma election, although the results certainly fuelled speculation that a dominant-party-state had begun to emerge.

The 2003 election

With the union of Fatherland-All Russia and Unity, Russia's party of power had changed once again, this time emerging as United Russia. The 2003 Duma election provided some evidence that the electoral system was working in the party of power's favour. United Russia not only won 120 party-list PR seats (or 53 per cent) with 37.6 per cent of the national vote, but 103 seats in the SMD-plurality contests.⁶ United Russia's total of 223 seats plus those it gained through bandwagoning (see below) gave it an outright majority in parliament. Its closest competitor was the Communist Party (KPRF), which came in a distant second with a total of 52 seats (40 PR and 12 SMD). Meanwhile, Russia's two main liberal parties – Yabloko and the Union of Rightist Forces – failed to pass the 5 per cent legal threshold. They ended up with four and three seats, respectively, all of which came via SMD elections. Although the liberals' defeat should be viewed in the context of the wild popularity of President Putin (Ryzhkov 2004), the Kremlin's control of all major national television stations and selective persecution of those oligarchs who financially supported Russia's opposition parties also facilitated United Russia's victory.

The only parties besides United Russia and the KPRF to pass the 5 per cent legal threshold in the PR half of the 2003 election were two nationalist organisations – the Liberal Democratic Party and Rodina (or the Motherland bloc). The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia's share of the PR vote of over 11 per cent boosted the party back up from its dismal 1999 showing and probably

reflected its willingness to serve as a relatively reliable Kremlin ally. Rodina, meanwhile, was commonly seen as another Kremlin project, supplied from above a few months before the 2003 elections with the intent of siphoning votes away from the KPRF. And, indeed, the KPRF's 2003 seat total was reduced almost to its 1993 level. Meanwhile, many deputies elected as independents or as candidates of smaller parties joined the ranks of United Russia once in parliament. This bandwagon effect made Rose's (2000) concerns about supply-side politics dominating Russian politics seem prescient as United Russia enjoyed control over two-thirds of the Duma seats, enough to pass constitutional amendments.

Despite the election outcome, some scholars remained optimistic that the move toward more authoritarian practices in Russia might prove to be a democratic "eclipse" rather than a "sunset".⁷ McFaul and Petrov (2004, 20), for example, found comfort in the fact that Russian elections had become "thoroughly institutionalized" with little changes to the basic electoral laws. At the time, the only major change was the 2002 decision to raise the legal threshold from 5 per cent to 7 per cent, but for the 2007 election not the 2003 one (Moraski 2007, 537). In other words, while the third stage of electoral-system reform that Moraski and Loewenberg (1999) identified in other post-communist cases may have been taking place, the change was slight and the implementation gradual. Yet more sweeping changes were on the horizon.

After Putin's March 2004 re-election as President and a spate of terrorist attacks in the autumn, the Kremlin introduced another series of reforms to change the electoral system even more dramatically for the 2007 Duma election. Rather than eliminate the PR option for the election of half of the Duma's deputies, the decision removed the SMD-plurality contests altogether. While the level of surprise associated with the change may be debated (Moraski 2009, Wilson 2009), scholars agree that the decision to define Duma elections solely in party terms was a natural extension of the Putin administration's larger reform agenda "to limit the influence of regional politicians in Russia and establish a lasting party of power" (Moraski 2006, 216).

With the move to a PR-only system, Russia's "against all" option was expected to have little impact in subsequent Duma elections, and speculation began that it would be removed entirely. In 2006, it was (see McAllister and White 2008). Then, in 2007, Russia's minimum turnout requirement of 25 per cent was removed. The anticipated effect of these changes was to ensure that supporters of the Kremlin with "a smaller element of (largely token) opposition" would dominate the next parliament (White 2009, 171).

Proportional representation and dominant-power politics

Carothers (2002) argues that democracy's "grey zone" is populated by many countries that, in fact, may not be in transition (or not in transition to democracy anyway). Rather, elites in power may be satisfied with preserving systems that fall well short of democratic consolidation. Carothers offers two broad, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, syndromes within democracy's grey zone: feckless pluralism and dominant-power politics. He also places Putin's Russia, at the time at least, in the latter category. Despite debates about the level of political freedom and competitiveness of elections there, the country was (and is) ruled by political forces with a long-term hold on power that make it difficult to imagine how existing opposition parties could come to power in the foreseeable future (Carothers 2002, 13; see also Gel'man 2006).

While Carothers sees both feckless pluralism and dominant-power politics as having some degree of stability, under the right circumstances countries can move from one to the other or out from their current status to liberal democracy or full-blown dictatorship. By 2007, Russia's dominant-power politics appeared destined to become the latter. As White (2009, 171) notes, from the start of the 2007 campaign, there was little doubt that United Russia would win the

largest share of seats in the Duma. The only question was whether turnout would be high enough to grant the election sufficient legitimacy so that President Putin's anointed successor, Dmitry Medvedev, could begin his campaign for the March 2008 presidential election as the clear favourite. Turnout in the 2007 Duma election proved to be fairly high, at over 63 per cent, and United Russia emerged as the unquestioned ruling party with over 64 per cent of the vote and another constitutional majority of 315 seats. The only parties considered "serious competitors" in the election were the KPRF and the LDPR, which is perhaps most questionable for the latter. Neither party, however, challenged United Russia's grip on power. The KPRF won 57 seats with 11.6 per cent of the vote while the LDPR won 40 seats with 8.1 per cent. The only other party to gain representation in the Duma was Just Russia, a new union of Rodina and two minor parties – the Pensioners' Party and the Party of Life. The liberal parties – Yabloko and Union of Rightist Forces – failed to clear the 7 per cent threshold. In fact, neither would have passed the 5 per cent threshold. By all accounts, all electoral uncertainty had been removed from Russia's 2007 election.

Moraski (2007, 550) speculates that the electoral system reform itself was intended to assist in removing any uncertainty in 2007 so that United Russia's power would be sufficiently consolidated to allow President Putin to observe Russia's constitutionally mandated limit of two consecutive presidential terms. With a lasting party of power in place, Putin could cede power to a competent and trustworthy successor and leave open the possibility of seeking the presidency again in 2012. Following United Russia's 2007 victory, the party along with three minor parties announced that they would nominate Medvedev for the presidency with Putin's explicit endorsement. On 18 December, Medvedev indicated his intention to appoint Putin to the post of prime minister should he win in March 2008 (White 2009, 173). Since Russia's prime minister succeeds the president should the president step down from office, this act would position Putin for a return to the presidency – even prior to 2012, if necessary – while formally still not serving more than two consecutive terms.

According to Myagkov et al. (2009, 118), "only Kremlin apologists and Putin sycophants had the audacity to argue that the [2007 Duma] election met standards of good democratic practice". Yet it is possible that Russia's electoral system reform leading into the 2007 election will be meaningful from a historical perspective. Classic work in comparative politics emphasises the centrality of parties to political development (Apter 1965). Huntington (1968, 405), in particular, contends "arguments against parties betray the circumstances of their historical origins" in that they are "less arguments against parties than they are arguments against *weak* parties" (italics in original). Since weak parties dominated Russian politics throughout the 1990s (see, especially, Hale 2005, 2006), these lessons and insights should carry significant weight for observers of Russian politics.

Viewed from Huntington's perspective, the political disorder that marked post-Soviet Russian politics can be seen as a natural product of the massive societal changes that accompanied the collapse of communism and weak political – and party – institutionalisation in Russia. Likewise, if one takes Huntington's arguments as a basis for prescribing a path toward meaningful political development, then it makes sense that electoral reforms promoting stronger, nationally organised parties – such as adopting a PR electoral system or mandating parties to establish a national presence to qualify for competition – are necessary. Of course, such reforms will not necessarily lead to liberalisation or even liberal democracy, but may consolidate a non-democratic regime comparable to the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico (Gel'man 2006). Still, one should not expect the "sun" of liberal democracy to rise in Russia without a strong party system. And, as this chapter highlights, institutional incentives for such a system often come from above.

Notes

- 1 The simple-majority single-ballot system is also often called a "single-member-district (SMD)-plurality" or "first-past-the-post" system.
- 2 In 1995, the law on the formation of the Federation Council made regional chief executives and chairmen of the regional legislatures from each of Russia's 89 subjects the regions' representatives in the Federation Council. In 2000, newly elected President Vladimir Putin pushed through a new law that replaced the regional executives and heads of the legislatures with full-time representatives in the Federation Council appointed from these two regional branches of government (Hyde 2001, Remington 2003).
- 3 The length of term assumes that the chamber does not act in a way that would lead to its dismissal and the holding of new elections. The 1993 Russian Constitution includes a number of provisions that would enable the president to disband the Duma, such as if the Duma were to block the president's choice for prime minister three consecutive times.
- 4 See *Russia Votes* (at www.russiavotes.org).
- 5 The name change reflected the LDPR's need to re-register when the CEC disqualified it after the candidates holding the second and third positions on its party list were found to have submitted incorrect personal information (Brudny 2001, 156).
- 6 In three of the 225 SMD election districts (162, 181, and 207), the "against all" option won, producing by-elections three months later (CEC 2004, p. 228). The winners in all cases were registered, officially, as independents (see the Central Election Commission website, www.cikrf.ru, downloaded 16 March 2010). However, since the March 2004 by-elections were held following United Russia's clear victory in December, these three independents were particularly susceptible to this bandwagon effect, which probably explains why Clark (2005, 514) lists United Russia with 106 total SMD seats, as does Moraski (2007). While McFaul and Petrov (2004), Smyth et al. (2007), and *RussiaVotes.org* list the total number of United Russia SMD seats as 102, data from the Central Election Commission (2004, 249) confirm the number as 103, as does Wilson (2009).
- 7 See, especially, the series of articles in the July 2004 issue of *Journal of Democracy*, listed under the heading "Russian Democracy in Eclipse".

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Political parties

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In the two decades since independence, the Russian Federation produced two distinct party systems: an inchoate multi-party system that had its last gasp in the parliamentary elections of 2003 and a hegemonic party system that consolidated in 2007 and remains intact – although vulnerable – in 2011. This dramatic shift in competitive context obscures a persistent and troubling weakness in the institutional structures within individual party organisations. Until the consolidation of the parliamentary faction of United Russia (UR) following the 1999–2000 electoral cycle, Russian parties remained largely irrelevant for both electoral competition and governance, raising important questions that look beyond theories of political party formation to understand organisational durability and effectiveness and, ultimately, the link between party development and the quality of democracy.

There is no dearth of parties in Russia, even under the exclusionary rules adopted by the Putin administration. Yet, very few parties have emerged as mechanisms to channel voters' demands into the policy process. The growing literature on Russia's political parties underscores that most party organisations have been irrelevant to government decision-making as well as electoral choice. Even parties that managed to solve the collective action and social choice problems endemic to party building, for example, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and Yabloko, struggled to influence policy and maintain voter support.

Any theory of party relevance must be able to account both for the limited influence of parties until 2003, as well as the consolidation of the hegemonic party, UR. This chapter builds on the literature to demonstrate Russian parties' limited capacity to weigh in on the policy process, cataloguing the institutional, historical, and strategic factors that rendered even capable parties impotent. Finally, I show how institutional and contextual changes after 2000 gave rise to a new Kremlin strategy to invest in building UR in order to coordinate policy activity across branches of government, federal levels, and within legislative institutions.

Russia's parties prior to 1993

In the two years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the controlled institutions of the Soviet-era regime continued to structure Russia's quasi-party politics. Late Soviet officialdom had conducted controlled elections to both regional legislatures and the national Congress of People's Deputies (CPD) with significant control, limiting participation to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) (Helf and Hahn 1992). Yet despite its origins and non-partisan decision-making structure, the CPD's standing body, the Supreme Soviet, was marked by contentious factional politics that has important implications for party development throughout the next decade.