
How is Multiparty Democracy Functioning in Russia?

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Main arguments

- In practice, no multiparty democracy in Russia
 - However, 'competitive' parliamentary elections and more than one party representation in the State Duma (formal multiparty system and democratic decision making process)
- Decision making power in the hands of the executive power and bureaucracy
- Political parties are weak and/or controlled by those in power
- Why no multiparty democracy?
 - Post-Soviet Russian leaders and political system (presidential system)
 - Political culture

Evidence supporting the argument

- Political parties and party system in Russia
- Public opinion on the State Duma and political parties
- Future of the party system

Party system and democracy

- Russian political parties are parties in the sense that they carry a label and seek votes for their labelled candidates. They structure the vote in the elections. (Sartori, Epstein).
- The role and state of the party system tells a lot about the state of democracy in Russia: party system consolidation is a key development in democratic politics. (Sartori)

Political parties and party system in the 1990s

- In 1990 an amendment of the 6th article of the Soviet Constitution -> monopoly of the Communist party came to an end
- Golden age of political parties in the 1990s during Yeltsin's presidency?
 - Continuous parties in the State Duma (elections in 1993, 1995, 1999): the **Communist party of the Russian Federation**, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Yabloko and Russia's Choice -> the Union of the Right Forces
 - The role of the State Duma was more significant than today
 - Party of power was weak (changed from election to election)
 - Opposition or semi-opposition parties (Gel'man)
 - However,
 - A floating system
 - A volatile electoral system
 - Parties created top down, no support from civil society

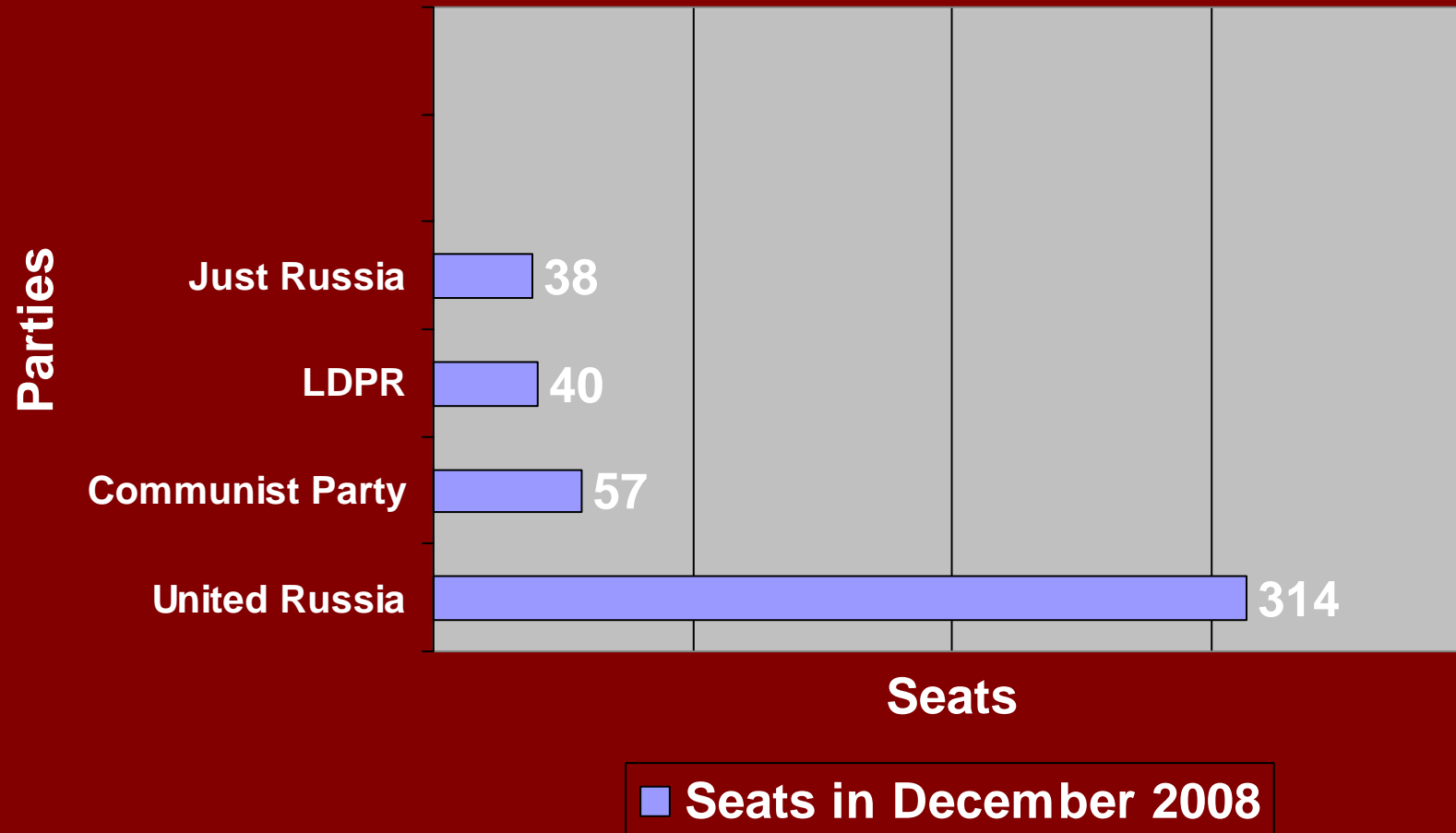
Political parties and party system in the early 21st century

- Putin's presidency: changes to the legislation
 - Law on parties 2001 (e.g. state financing) -> a formal position?
 - But requirements: 10 000 members, branches in no less than half the subjects of the federation...
 - Law on elections 2005 (since 2007) (e.g. proportional representation, party lists, no more independents) -> strengthening the role of parties, party system?
 - But the threshold up from 5 to 7 per cent
 - Formation of blocs not allowed
- Unity -> United Russia – the first party of power to be successful in three elections (1999, 2003, 2007)

Political parties and party system in 2008

- State Duma elections in 2007 (the first during the new electoral law)
- Only 4 parties got seats in the State Duma
- Party of power United Russia headed by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin
- Spoiler party Just Russia
- Liberal parties were excluded
- Use of administrative resource

State Duma



Public opinion

- State Duma's approvement rate 35%. Approx. 25% in April 2004 & October 2005.
- President has 75% approvement rate, Prime Minister 81%, Government 57% among state institutions
- Political parties have 29% approvement rate (fifth highest) among public institutions
- The army has the highest approvement rate (60 %); the media the second highest (53%)

(VTsIOM December 2008)

Opposition (parties)

- No future for opposition parties of 1990s, tied with their history (e.g. Voshanov, Novaya Gazeta, 24.3.2008); transitional parties (Korgunyak 2002, 2006)
- Any hope for political opposition at all? "Protest feelings are lowest ever" (VTsIOM 24 March 2008); but now the impact of the recession?
- Alienation from the authorities (Krystanovskaya)
- Other Russia movement and Dissidents' marches (Marshi nesoglasnykh)

Future of the party system

- One scenario is a two or three party system (all parties supported by the Kremlin)
- A people's democracy type political system (Ryabov) – United Russia – the party in the centre plus junior partners which 'represent' other 'healthy' political interests
- Social dissatisfaction -> a new party in the left? (Ryabov)
- New liberal ('opposition') party created by the Kremlin?
Pravoe delo - Right Cause
- Solidarity (Solidarnost) – a new liberal party in opposition (Nemtsov, Kasparov, Kasyanov?)

Future of the party system

- Democracy: Development of the Russian Model (recommendations for President Medvedev from a group of political experts): political institutions built but the social base for the political pluralism of the “middle class” and civil society insufficiently developed
- Role of the political parties today:
 - a formal role in the State Duma, structuring the vote, party fractions in the State Duma, role in the legislation process (but a rubber stamp for the government and president) -> no real power or representation
 - Opposition parties channelling protest (only a tiny minority)
- change of attitude from the political elite and new political parties needed