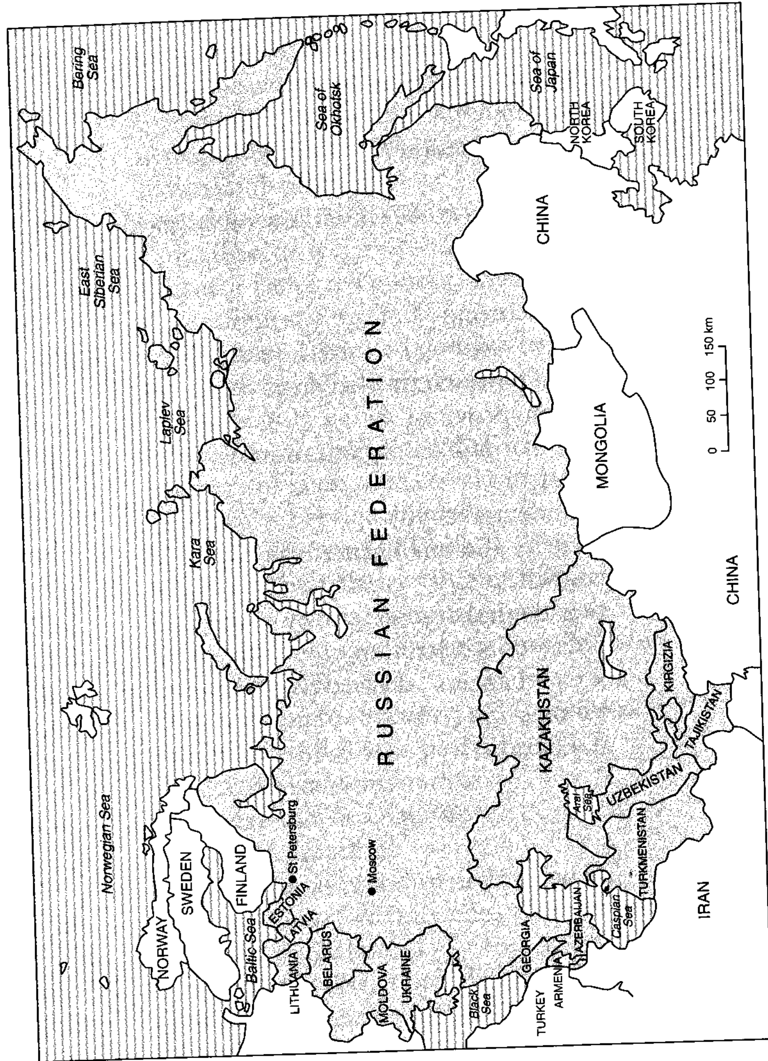


Map 0.1 *Russia and the former Soviet Republics*

Chapter 1

Politics in Russia

RICHARD SAKWA

Two decades after the fall of communism and the establishment of an independent Russia in 1991 the nature of the new political system remains controversial. No one thought it would be easy to create the institutions of representative democracy and the rule of law, together with the mechanisms of market capitalism and national integration, but few could have anticipated quite how difficult these processes would be. The formal establishment of democratic institutions, symbolised above all by the adoption of the constitution in December 1993, was the relatively easy part. Making them work and imbuing them with the spirit of legality, accountability and pluralism is something else. Russia's post-communist development has been marked by some spectacular failures, including armed conflict between the executive and the legislature in 1993 and two wars in Chechnya, yet overall the picture is not quite so bleak as some would suggest. This chapter will present an overview of political developments in the recent past, and suggest some ways of evaluating the contemporary situation.

The Soviet system and its demise

For seventy-four years between 1917 and 1991 the Soviet Union sought to create an alternative social order based on its own interpretation of Marxist thinking combined with a Leninist understanding of the need for a dominant party. The Soviet system endured far longer than most of its early critics thought possible, but ultimately in 1991 came crashing down. The legacy of the failed experiment lives on in Russia today. The *dissolution* of the communist system was accompanied by the *disintegration* of the country. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established in December 1922 as a union of allegedly sovereign republics to give political form to the diversity of the new republic's peoples and nations, and this was then given juridical form in the adoption of the Soviet Union's first constitution in January 1924. The system worked as

long as long as there was a force standing outside the ethno-federal framework; and this force was the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (VKP(b)), renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) at the Nineteenth Party Congress in 1952. With the launching of *perestroika* (restructuring) by the new General Secretary of the CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1985, the Party gradually lost its integrative capacity as its own internal coherence dissolved, precipitating by late 1991 the disintegration of the state that it had overseen.

Communism and the Soviet Union

The abdication of Nicholas II in February 1917 brought to an end the Romanov dynasty after more than 300 years in power. During the next eight months Russia tried to fight a war while making a revolution, and although it was notably unsuccessful in the first endeavour it shocked the world with the second. The dominant rule of the Communist Party was established by Vladimir Il'ich Lenin soon after the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, and for Lenin (once victory in the Civil War of 1918–20 was assured) development became the priority of Soviet power rather than more general emancipatory goals (the entire sequence of leadership from Nicholas II to the present is set out in Table 1.1).

For Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, who after a struggle following Lenin's death in 1924 achieved dictatorial power, accelerated industrialisation became the overriding aim, accompanied by the intensification of coercion that peaked in the terror of the 1930s. Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 over Nazi Germany and its allies appeared to vindicate all the sacrifices of the early Soviet period, yet the prevalence of terror remained. A first step towards destalinisation was taken following Stalin's death in 1953 by his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, in his 'Secret

Table 1.1 *Soviet and Russian Leaders*

Date	*Name of Leader*
1894–1917	Nicholas II
1917–24	Vladimir Il'ich Lenin
1924–53	Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin
1953–64	Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev
1964–82	Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev
1982–84	Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov
1984–85	Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko
1985–91	Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev
1991–99	Boris Nikolaevich Yeltsin
2000–08	Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin
2008–	Dmitri Anatol'evich Medvedev

Speech' of 25 February 1956 at the Twentieth Party Congress. Khrushchev provided a devastating critique of the man – Stalin – but failed to give a systemic critique of how this man had been able to commit so many crimes for so long. During the long reign of Leonid Brezhnev (1964–82) the question of the political renewal of the Soviet system was placed firmly on the back burner. The attempt to renew the communist system by establishing a more humane and democratic form of socialism in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was crushed by Soviet tanks in August of that year. Instead, the last years of Brezhnev's rule gave way to what later was called the period of stagnation (*zastoi*) as the high hopes of the period of *détente* with the West gave way to an intensified and extremely dangerous renewed phase of the Cold War.

Already in 1983 Yuri Andropov, who had headed the KGB since 1967 and then briefly took over as General Secretary of the CPSU between Brezhnev's death in November 1982 and his own death in February 1984, posed the fundamental issue: 'We do not know the country we live in'. Andropov's response was a programme of 'authoritarian modernisation', including the intensification of labour discipline, the struggle against corruption and the restoration of a more ascetic form of communist morality. On Andropov's death the Brezhnevite Konstantin Chernenko managed to claw his way to power for a brief period despite his many illnesses. Chernenko's death in March 1985 finally allowed a new generation to assume the reins of leadership.

Perestroika: from rationalisation to disintegration

The appointment of a reforming General Secretary of the CPSU in March 1985 set in motion changes whose outcome is still not clear. Even though Gorbachev came to power as Andropov's protégé, his programme of reform quickly transcended even a residual notion of 'authoritarian modernisation'. In domestic politics full-scale reforms were adopted, while at the same time he sought to put an end to the Cold War conflict with the West, a struggle that he increasingly considered both futile and damaging for all concerned. Gorbachev came to power with a clear vision that the old way of governing the Soviet Union could no longer continue, but his plans for change swiftly came up against some hard realities. He achieved some significant success in democratising the Soviet system, but by 1991 the communist order was dissolving and the country disintegrating.

On a visit to Canada in May 1983, Gorbachev and the Soviet ambassador, Alexander Yakovlev (who later was to play a large part in shaping the reforms) agreed that 'We cannot continue to live in this way' (Remnick 1993: 294–5). Gorbachev came to power committed to

modernising the Soviet system. In the space of six years *perestroika* moved through five main stages: initial attempts to *rationalise* the system moved to a phase of *liberalisation*, and then to *democratisation* (*demokratizatsiya*) that began to transform the society and polity but which provoked the *dissolution* of the foundations of the communist order and culminated in a final stage of *disintegration* of the country itself. Once changes began they could not be limited by regime-led reform, and by 1991 pressure for a radical change of system became overwhelming. The attempt in August 1991 by a group of conservatives to hold back the tide of change precipitated the result that they had sought to avert: the dissolution of the communist system of government and, by the end of the year, the disintegration of the USSR.

Gorbachev did not come to power with a clear set of policies; but he did have an attitude towards change to which he remained loyal to the bitter end. He intended to achieve a modernisation of the communist system through *perestroika*, and within that framework launched what he called a 'revolution within the revolution' to save the system and not to destroy it. Gorbachev understood that the system was suffering from major problems, including declining economic growth rates, social decay, excessive secrecy in scientific and political life, and the degeneration of the ruling elite into an ever more venal and incompetent class. Gorbachev never repudiated the basic idea that the communist system remained a viable and in some respects a superior one to capitalist democracy. His aim was to provide Soviet communism with dynamism similar to that enjoyed by capitalism, but without its defects. He certainly never intended to undermine what was called the 'leading role' of the Communist Party or to destroy the planned economy. *Perestroika*, he insisted, was 'prompted by awareness that the potential of socialism ha[d] been underutilised' (Gorbachev 1987: 10).

In the economic sphere he got off on the wrong foot right away: the policy of acceleration (*uskorenie*) sought to achieve economic transformation and increased output at the same time, and in the event was unable to gain the long-term achievement of either. This was accompanied by an anti-alcohol campaign that deprived the country of nearly one-third of its tax revenues. Soon after came *glasnost'* (openness), intended at first not to be freedom of speech but to be used as a way of exposing the failings of a corrupt bureaucracy, and thus to strengthen the Soviet system. However, *glasnost'* soon became a devastating search for the truth about Leninist and Stalinist repression and took on a life of its own, escaping from the instrumental constraints that Gorbachev had at first intended.

Gorbachev's own views about the past were filtered through a romantic Leninism, believing in an allegedly more democratic and evolutionary late Leninist model of the New Economic Policy of the 1920s. By the end

of 1987 *demokratizatsiya* came to the fore, with the gradual introduction of multi-candidate elections accompanied by a relaxation of the Leninist rule against the formation of groups in the Communist Party. Gorbachev's own views at this time were eloquently developed in his book *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (1987), in which he talked of *perestroika* as a revolution both from above and below. The 'from below' element was by now taking hold in the form of thousands of 'informal' associations, representing the rebirth of an independent civil society. The changes begun by Gorbachev began to outrun his ability to control them. The proliferation of *neformaly* (informals) and an independent press reflected a distinctive type of negative popular mobilisation against the old regime that proved very difficult to channel into positive civic endeavour. The establishment of the Democratic Union on 9 May 1988 marked the beginning of the renewed era of multiparty politics in Russia, but its radical anti-communism signalled that Gorbachev's attempts to constrain and control political pluralism within the framework of 'reform communism' would fail and the communist order would dissolve. In some non-Russian republics the informal movement took the form of popular fronts, with Sajudis in Lithuania one of the largest representing aspirations for national autonomy and, later, independence. Once the genie of political pluralism had been let out of the bottle, it would take on a life of its own.

The high point of Gorbachev's hopes that a humane and democratic socialism could replace the moribund system that he inherited was the Nineteenth Party Conference in June–July 1988, where he outlined a programme of democratic political change and a new role for the USSR in the world. Soon after, institutional changes weakened the role of the party *apparatus*, and constitutional changes in November 1988 created a new two-tier parliament, with a large Congress of People's Deputies meeting twice a year selecting a working Supreme Soviet. The first elections to this body took place in March 1989, and revealed the depths of the unpopularity of party rule. The early debates of the parliament riveted the nation, as problems were openly discussed for the first time in decades. The Congress stripped the Communist Party of its constitutionally entrenched 'leading role' in March 1990, and at the same time Gorbachev was elected to the new post of president of the USSR. His failure to stand in a national ballot is often considered one of his major mistakes. Lacking a popular mandate, he was sidelined by those who did – above all Boris Yeltsin, who became head of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies in May 1990 and then went on to win a popular ballot in June 1991 to become Russia's first president.

What was called the 'nationalities question' now began to threaten the integrity of the country. Although Gorbachev was responsive to calls for

greater autonomy by the 15 union republics making up the USSR, he had no time for any talk of independence. Through an increasingly desperate attempt to negotiate a new Union Treaty Gorbachev hoped to transform what was in effect a unitary state into a genuinely confederal community of nations. These hopes were dashed by Lithuania's declaration of independence in 1990, followed by that of Georgia and other republics in 1991. In foreign affairs Gorbachev advanced the idea of 'new political thinking', based on the notion of interdependence and a new co-operative relationship with the West. On a visit to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in September 1988 he talked of the establishment of a 'common European home', but it was not clear what form this would take. By 1989 the Eastern European countries in the Soviet bloc took Gorbachev at his word when he called for change, and from the later months of that year one after another the communist regimes fell. Gorbachev facilitated the unification of Germany, although he is much criticised for failing to guarantee in treaty form the demilitarised status of the eastern part of the new country and of eastern Europe in general.

At home resistance to his aims and his policies grew to the point that a group prepared to seize power in a coup. The specific issue was the planned signing of the new Union Treaty on 20 August 1991, but the plotters were also concerned about economic disintegration and the loss of political control. For three days in August (19–21) Gorbachev was isolated in his holiday home at Foros in the Crimea, while his nemesis, Yeltsin, emerged much strengthened. In the days following the coup Yeltsin put an end to communist rule by banning the party in Russia. Attempts to save the Soviet Union in the last months of 1991 failed. The pressure for increased sovereignty for republics grew into demands for independence, and following the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 7–8 December comprising Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the USSR was clearly on its last legs. The CIS was broadened on 21 December to include most (with the exception of the Baltic republics and Georgia) former Soviet republics. Gorbachev formally resigned as president on 25 December 1991, and on 31 December the USSR formally ceased to exist.

Gorbachev's reform of the Soviet system provoked its demise. The debate over whether the Soviet Union could have been reformed while remaining recognisably communist continues to this day (see for instance Cohen 2004). Gorbachev's *perestroika* clearly showed the system's evolutionary potential, but this was an evolution that effectively meant the peaceful transcendence of the system it was meant to save. The fundamental question remains whether Gorbachev's reforms were a success or a failure. The issue depends on the definition of both. In one sense, they were a success. By 1991 the country had become relatively

democratic, it was moving towards becoming a market economy, the union was changing into a community of sovereign states, and the Cold War had been overcome largely by Gorbachev's efforts. However, the terminal crisis of the system in 1991 revealed deep structural flaws in Gorbachev's conception of reform and in the system's capacity for change while remaining recognisably communist in orientation. Gorbachev remained remarkably consistent in his commitment to a humane democratic socialism with a limited market in a renewed federation of Soviet states. However, his attempts to constrain the process of change within the framework of his preconceived notions soon crashed against some harsh realities: the aspirations for independence in a number of republics, notably of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, forcibly incorporated into the USSR by Stalin; the inherent instability of a semi-marketised system – it either had to be one thing or another, a planned or a market economy; and ultimately the lack of popular support for any socialism, irrespective of how humane or democratic it may have been. The attempt to reform the Soviet system brought into the open its many contradictions, and these ultimately brought the whole system crashing down.

Post-communist Russia

Russia entered the twenty-first century and the new millennium a very different country from the one that had entered the twentieth. The tsarist empire had disintegrated, the autocracy had been overthrown, the Soviet communist system had been and gone, and the USSR had also disintegrated leaving fifteen separate republics. Independent Russia was for the first time developing as a nation state rather than as an empire; its economy was severely distorted by the Soviet attempt to establish a planned economy and by the subsequent privatisation of the 1990s with its oligarchs; and the country was engaged in an extraordinary act of political reconstitution intended to establish a liberal democratic system. Democratic politics, defined as the procedural contest for political power and governmental accountability to a freely elected legislature and subordinate to the rule of law, accompanied by a public sphere of debate, criticism and information exchange, had finally arrived in Russia. Whether the so-called transition actually achieved democracy is another question, and one to which we shall return.

Yeltsin: the politics of reform

Russia emerged as an independent and sovereign state in 1991 and since then has been undergoing a complex process of accelerated political

change. The Yeltsin administration was committed to Russia becoming a democratic market state allied with the advanced Western nations and integrated into the world economy. There was far less agreement, however, on how these three goals – democratisation, marketisation and international integration – were to be achieved. Bitter debates raged throughout the 1990s over all three, and aspects of these controversies will be discussed in later chapters of this book. On one thing, however, there was broad agreement: the borders of the Russia that emerged as an independent state in 1991 should not be changed, however unfair and arbitrary many considered them to be. Some 25 million ethnic Russians found themselves scattered across the 14 other newly independents states, yet Yeltsin's refusal to exploit the real and imagined grievances of the Russian diaspora to gain cheap political capital must forever stand as one of his major achievements (for a comprehensive review, see Colton 2008). Politics in the post-communist era would be in *Russia*, and not in some mythical re-established Soviet Union in whatever guise.

The nature of these *politics* is less clear. For the first two years following independence Russian politics was wracked by the struggle to adopt a new constitution (Andrews 2002; Sakwa 2008a: Chapter 3). The two-tier parliament that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union was clearly an unworkable arrangement, and ultimately provoked an armed confrontation between the Congress of People's Deputies and the President in October 1993. The constitution was finally adopted in December 1993, and gave Russia a degree of political stability. Although the constitution is a fundamentally liberal document, proclaiming a range of freedoms that would be expected of a liberal democratic state, the balance drawn in the separation of powers between the parliament and president remains controversial. For Fish, Russia's 'low-caliber democracy' is a result of a particular institutional design, namely an excessively strong executive that he and others call 'super-presidential' (Fish 2001b, 2005).

The presidency emerged as the guarantor not only of the constitutional order (as stated in the constitution itself), but also of a reform process that under Yeltsin was driven forward with a single-mindedness that at times threatened to undermine democracy itself (Reddaway and Glinski 2001). This is most vividly in evidence when it came to elections. Fearing that neo-communists and other opponents of moves towards the market and international integration would come to power in the 1996 presidential elections, some in Yeltsin's entourage urged him to cancel them altogether. In the event, although in ill-health, he won a second term and dominated politics to the end of the decade (McFaul 2001).

Although Yeltsin formally remained committed to Russia's democratic development, there were features of his rule that undermined the achievement of his ambition. The first was the unhealthy penetration of

economic interests into the decision-making process. Rapid and chaotic privatisation from the early 1990s gave birth to a new class of powerful economic magnates, colloquially known as oligarchs. Their support for Yeltsin's re-election in 1996 brought them into the centre of the political process, and gave rise to the creation of what was known as the 'Family', a mix of Yeltsin family members, politicians and oligarchs. Most notorious of them was Boris Berezovsky, who effectively used political influence as a major economic resource. Many others at this time could exploit insider knowledge to gain economic assets for a fraction of their real worth. It was in these years that the empires of Mikhail Khodorkovsky (pre-eminently the Yukos oil company), Roman Abramovich (with Berezovsky at the head of the Sibneft oil company), Vladimir Potanin at the head of Norilsk Nickel, Vladimir Gusinsky at the head of the Media-Most empire, and many others were built (Fortescue 2006). Their heyday were the years between the presidential election of 1996 and the partial default of August 1998, and thereafter oligarchical power as such waned although as individuals they remained important players.

The second feature was the exaggerated power of the presidency as an institution. Granted extensive authority by the 1993 constitution as part of a deliberate institutional design to ensure adequate powers for the executive to drive through reform, the presidency lacked adequate constraints. Too many decisions were taken by small groups of unaccountable individuals around the president, notably in the case of the decision to launch the first Chechen war in December 1994. We will return to this question below, but associated with that is the third problem, the weakness of mechanisms of popular accountability. Although far from powerless, the State Duma (see Chapter 3) was not able effectively to hold the executive to account. This is related to the weakness of the development of the party system (see Chapter 5). The fourth issue is the question of the succession. While all incumbent leaders try to perpetuate their power or to ensure a transfer to favourable successors, in Yeltsin's case the stakes were particularly high: he feared that a new president could mean a change of system in its entirety, with the possibility of personal sanctions being taken against him and his family. For this reason the Kremlin engaged in a long search for a successor who would be able to ensure continuity and the personal inviolability of Russia's first president (as he liked to style himself) and his associates. They found this guarantee in the person of Vladimir Putin, nominated prime minister on 9 August 1999, acting president on Yeltsin's resignation on 31 December, formally elected for a first term on 14 March 2000 and a second term on 14 March 2004, who then assumed the prime minister's office on 8 May 2008 under the presidency of his chosen successor, Dmitri Medvedev, whose inauguration had taken place the previous day.

Putin: the politics of stability

Putin's accession to the presidency in 2000 did not at first represent a rupture in the constitutional system inherited from Yeltsin, but changes in leadership style, policy orientations and ideological innovations effectively marked the beginning of a distinct era. It is still too early to provide a full analysis of this period or to discern the underlying significance of the events. It is abundantly clear, however, that Putin's programme of 'normal' politics, accompanied by attempts to build a state established on the basis of a modified understanding of the principles of order, represented a new stage in the restless dialectic of continuity and change in Russia's endlessly unforgiving attempts to come to terms with modernity (Sakwa 2008).

Putin's approach was characterised by the pursuit of a politics of stability. The sharp polarisation that attended Yeltsin's rule gave way to an explicitly consensual and 'centrist' approach. The nature of this centrism was not simply an avoidance of the extremes of left and right but was based on a transformative centrism that allowed the regime to reassert its own predominance while allowing the socio-economic transformation of the country to continue. The regime took a relatively pragmatic and technocratic approach that allowed society to get on with its business as long as it did not challenge the leadership's claim that it knew what was best for the country. A relatively coherent and apparently durable new political order began to emerge.

While Putin was undoubtedly a reformer, his approach to change was no longer one of systemic transformation but of system management. His speeches and interventions are peppered with the concept of 'normality'. The concept of normality suggests a certain naturalness of political debate and choice of policy options, relatively unconstrained by the formal imposition of ideological norms. Putin's strategic goal of modernisation of the economy was accompanied by an attempt to consolidate society. Although these goals were not always compatible, a common principle underlay both: the attempt to avoid extremes in policy and to neutralise extremist political actors. Putin's rule was technocratic and based on the exercise of administrative power.

Putin's politics of stability was characterised by the refusal to accept changes to the constitution, the acceptance of the privatisations of the Yeltsin years, and the explicit repudiation of revolution as an effective form of achieving positive political change. This echoed Putin's sentiments voiced in his address on 'Russia at the Turn of the Millennium' at the end of December 1999, where he noted that the communist revolutionary model of development not only had not delivered the goods, but could not have done so (Putin 2000: 212). Although regretting the

break-up of the Soviet Union (but not the dissolution of the communist system), Putin never considered the restoration of anything resembling the USSR as remotely possible, let alone desirable. At the heart of Putin's politics of stability was the attempt to reconcile the various phases of Russian history, especially over the last century: the Tsarist, the Soviet and the democratic eras. In the foreign policy sphere Putin insisted that Russia should be treated as a 'normal' great power. He insisted that Russia's foreign policy should serve the country's economic interests, a policy that was evident in debates over the union of Russia and Belarus.

At the heart of Putin's leadership was the reassertion of the constitutional prerogatives of the state (what he called the 'dictatorship of law'), accompanied by the struggle to ensure that that the regime did not fall under the influence of societal actors. In particular, the 'oligarchs' under Yeltsin had exercised what was perceived to be undue influence; this was now repudiated. However, the regime increasingly became insulated from all political actors, including independent political parties and parliament. Accountability mechanisms were weakened, and what was gained in the ability of the government to act as an independent force was lost in its lack of autonomous interaction with society.

An important aspect of Putin's politics was the tension between stability and order. This was a feature of Brezhnev's rule that in the end gave way to stagnation. Stability is the short-term attempt to achieve political and social stabilisation without having resolved the underlying problems and contradictions besetting society. Thus Brezhnev refused to take the hard choices that could have threatened the regime's precarious political stability. Order in this context is something that arises when society, economy and political system are in some sort of balance. To a large extent an ordered society operates according to spontaneous processes, whereas in a system based on the politics of stability administrative measures tend to predominate. As Samuel Huntington (1968) had already noted, political order in changing societies sometimes requires the hard hand of the military or some other force that is not itself subordinate to democratic politics. Putin on a number of occasions explicitly sought to distance himself from this sort of tutelary politics, yet overall the *leitmotif* of his leadership was the technocratic assertion that the regime knows best. To achieve this, a system of 'managed democracy' applied administrative resources to manage the political process, undermining the spontaneous interaction of pluralistic political and social forces. This was in evidence as Putin managed the succession in 2007–08 to allow Medvedev to assume the presidency. The aim was continuity, and this was confirmed by Putin taking up the office of prime minister.

Problems and perspectives

The scope of transformation in post-communist Russia has been unprecedented. A monolithic society was converted into a pluralistic one, a planned economy was reoriented towards the market, a new nation was born, and the state rejoined the international community. None of these processes is complete, and probably by definition never can be. The reform process itself generated new phenomena that raise questions about the received wisdom of the political sciences and economics. There has been rapid divergence in the fate of the post-communist countries, with the majority of Central and East European countries joining the European Union in May 2004 with a second wave in January 2007, while the twelve former Soviet states grouped in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) look ever more different from each other, with some having established more or less functioning democracies while others are firmly locked into authoritarian systems. Russia finds itself somewhere in the middle.

The transition and regime type

The 'third wave' transitions, to use Huntington's (1991) term to describe the mass extinction of authoritarian regimes since the fall of the dictatorship in Portugal in 1974, prompted a renewed interest in problems of democratisation. The fall of communism encouraged political scientists to look again at the theoretical literature on democratisation and to compare the current transitions in the post-communist bloc with earlier transitions in Latin America and Southern Europe. The insights gathered from the study of the democratisation process elsewhere provide a theoretical framework to study the problem of the reconstitution of central political authority on principles of democratic accountability. The degree to which this literature has anything to offer when political regime change is accompanied by economic transformation, state and nation building and societal reconstruction remains a moot point (Bunce 1995).

The view that democracy is the inevitable outcome of post-communist transition is clearly mistaken. There is far too much that is contingent in processes of systemic change to allow any firm teleological view to be convincing. While about a hundred countries have set out on the path of democracy during the 'third wave', at most three dozen have achieved functioning democracies. The contrary view – that the legacy of communist and even pre-communist authoritarian political cultures, economies and social structures doom the attempt to build democracies where there had at best been weak traditions of pluralism, toleration and political participation – is equally wrong. Deterministic views of democratisation

leave out of account national political cultures, level of economic development, strategic concerns, leadership choices and elite configurations, economic dependencies and proximity to zones of advanced capitalist democratic development (above all the European Union). Rather than a *teleological* view about the inevitability of democracy, we prefer a *genealogical* approach that takes into account concrete questions of political order, constitutionalism, state-building, social structure and social justice, interacting with the practice of democratic norms and good governance. Despite the best efforts of political scientists, there is no agreement on one single factor that determines the success or failure of a democratisation process.

The relationship between liberalism, democracy and constitutional order remains contested in the post-communist context. Putin's supporters advanced the argument that security should come before democracy. Russia, they suggested, should not be expected quickly to achieve a high-quality democracy, given its authoritarian past, its political culture and the weakness of civil society. Following the Beslan school massacre of 1–3 September 2004, Putin's speech of 13 September announcing a range of reforms to the state system, including the appointment of governors and wholly proportional parliamentary elections, was seen as reflecting this strategy of authoritarian modernisation. The best that Russia can do at this point is to be satisfied with some form of 'managed democracy' – at least, so the supporters of this approach argued. This is not an argument that is satisfactory in the long run. One reason is the lack of contemporary legitimacy for developmental discourses or for those suggesting that 'order' must take priority over democracy. Russians and others who have lived in the shadow of authoritarian regimes are well aware how often the notion of 'order' (in Russian *poryadok*) can be used to subvert political freedom. Unless elites and political leaders strive for genuinely liberal, democratic and constitutional rule, then there is no knowing where the back-sliding will end. This was recognised by Medvedev at the time of his election as Russia's third president in March 2008, when he condemned 'legal nihilism'.

The question of the quality of democracy is particularly acute in Russia, where the very 'givenness' of a structured society is in question. Too often discussions of democratisation assume that once the authoritarian burden is lifted that society will automatically spring back into some sort of democratic shape; although it is usually recognised that in the transition from totalitarianism, society is destroyed to such a degree that it has to become an object of the transition process itself. This tends to justify the displacement of sovereignty from the people to some agency that can carry out the necessary transitional measures. In the Russian case this was the elite group around Yeltsin, and under Putin the institutions of the administrative system.

It is in this context that the notion of 'sovereign democracy' was advanced by Vladislav Surkov, a deputy head of the presidential administration, and others. The debate over sovereignty and democracy and Russia's place in the international system took shape in the months following the Beslan hostage crisis; although certainly not absent earlier, the crisis brought to the fore concerns about territorial integrity and political manageability. This period coincided with solid evidence that the economic situation had improved, with the country registering an average of seven per cent annual growth throughout Putin's presidency, but tailing off rapidly as a result of the economic crisis from 2008. Thus from the first the debate has manifested contradictory aspects: a growing confidence based on domestic economic and political stabilisation and windfall energy revenues, accompanied by a deep-rooted insecurity about Russia's international position and domestic integrity. The term then came to the fore following the 'orange' revolution in Ukraine in late 2004, when a broad popular movement forced a third round run-off presidential contest between Viktor Yushchenko, favoured by the West, and Viktor Yanukovych, the candidate promoted by Russia.

Without going into too much detail, three key aspects can be identified in the 'sovereign democracy' debate. The first focuses on *real sovereignty* for the state. In one of the most considered expositions of the implications of sovereign democracy, Andrei Kokoshin argued that 'real sovereignty' was 'the capacity of a state in reality (and not merely in declaratory fashion) to conduct independently its internal, external and defence policies, to conclude and tear up agreements, enter into strategic partnerships or not'. He held up India and China as exemplars of countries able to uphold real sovereignty in the face of the desovereignisation accompanying globalisation, although he was at pains to stress that he was not defending autarchy or isolation (Kokoshin 2006). The key point was to achieve state sovereignty in the international system, accompanied by what Surkov and others have called the democratisation of international relations (Surkov 2007: 31–32).

The second aspect focuses on domestic concerns and the *sovereignty of experience*. In the aftermath of the Beslan crisis Surkov launched a debate about national priorities, and perhaps even more than that, a new ideology of state development, if not a new state ideology. The latter element was reflected in the debate over the adoption of new school history textbooks, which was imbued with the spirit of 'sovereign democracy', asserting what was considered to be a more balanced approach to Russia's Soviet past. The aim was to build a political system for Russia that claimed to be responsive to its specific needs and national characteristics. Surkov defined sovereign democracy as 'a form of political life of society, ... their organs and actions are selected, formed

and directed exclusively by the Russian nation in all its variety and completeness so that all citizens, social groups and peoples comprising it achieve material well-being, freedom and justice' (Surkov 2006: 28).

The corollary of this leads to the third aspect, *autochthonous democracy*. This stresses the autonomous character of Russian democratic development. At the heart of the concept is the view that democracy is an evolutionary process, and the revolutionary view of a leap to democracy that was typical of the first post-communist decade is rejected, in keeping with the evolutionary approach espoused by Putin himself. In his address to the Federal Assembly on 25 April 2005, in the wake of the 'orange' revolution, Putin insisted that the strengthening of democracy was the top priority for Russia: 'The main political–ideological task is the development of Russia as a free, democratic country.' Political freedom, he insisted, 'is not just necessary but economically beneficial'. He took issue with the political culture approach, which suggested that the Russian people were somehow not suited to democratic government, the rule of law, and the basic values of civil society: 'I would like to bring those who think like that back to political reality ... Without liberty and democracy there can be no order, no stability and no sustainable economic policies.'

Responding to Western criticism, however, Putin stressed that the 'special feature' of Russia's democracy was that it would be pursued in its own way and not at the price of law and order or social stability: 'Russia ... will decide for itself the pace, terms and conditions of moving towards democracy.' All this would be done in a legal way, warning that 'Any unlawful methods of struggle ... for ethnic, religious and other interests contradict the principles of democracy. The state will react (to such attempts) with legal, but tough, means' (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 25 April 2005). Addressing a conference of United Russia activists on 7 February 2006, Surkov drove home the message that sovereign democracy was more than an abstract concept but a basis for action for the long term (Surkov 2006: 43–79).

This was in effect the manifesto of 'sovereign democracy', in the sense that democracy would be developed in Russia at its own pace and in a manner of the country's choosing. While an entirely legitimate approach, there remains the issue of who would be doing the deciding about the pace and type of democratic development, and thus there was the danger once again of the regime substituting for the people. There is a second theme implicit in the message: the autonomy of the regime from society. In that respect, sovereign democracy perpetuates the thinking behind the 'managed democracy' that was characteristic of Putin's first presidential term. Thus for many sovereign democracy was little more than a synonym for managed democracy. It was on these grounds that Medvedev rejected the term, insisting that democracy did not need any qualifying adjectives.

Regime and administered democracy

Democratic political institutions have been created in Russia and function with a degree of autonomy, yet the people remain distant from decision making and the authorities are only weakly accountable to society. Dahl's (1971) polyarchy (contestation and participation) has not yet been established, although Joseph Schumpeter's procedural democracy, defined as the structured competition for votes in exchange for policies, does exist (Schumpeter 1976). A type of co-optive rule has emerged characterised by the interaction of a powerful executive while parliamentary and other elites represent not mass movements but their own interests. This system was given political form by the emergence of a powerful hegemonic party in the form of United Russia, which dominated parliament following the elections of 2003 and 2007. How can we explain the gulf between formal democracy and displaced sovereignty in Russia's 'managed democracy'? To help characterise the present system we will first look at two substantive approaches before providing our own analysis of the system.

Fareed Zakaria (1997: 23) distinguishes between *liberal* democracy, defined as 'a political system marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property', what he calls constitutional liberalism, and *illiberal* democracy. In the latter 'Democratically elected regimes, often ones that have been re-elected or reaffirmed through referenda, are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms' (p. 23). For Zakaria, the regular staging of relatively fair, competitive, multiparty elections might make a country democratic, but it does not ensure good governance. In practice, even relatively free elections 'have resulted in strong executives, weak legislatures and judiciaries, and few civil and economic liberties' (p. 28). In a later work Zakaria (2003) developed his argument that while constitutional liberalism can lead to democracy, democracy does not necessarily lead to constitutional liberalism. The Central European post-communist states are negotiating the passage to democracy more successfully than the former Soviet states, it is argued, because they went through a long phase of liberalisation without democracy in the nineteenth century that grounded the rule of law and property rights into social practices.

In a similar vein, Guillermo O'Donnell (1994: 59) argued that in weakly established democracies a leader can become so strong that he or she can ignore those whom they are meant to represent. O'Donnell characterises these countries as having 'delegative' rather than representative democracy, with the electorate allegedly having delegated to the executive the [...] fit, 'constrained only by the hard facts of existing

power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office'. Thus a government emerges that is 'inherently hostile to the patterns of representation normal in established democracies' by 'depoliticising the population except for brief moments in which it demands its plebiscitary support' (O'Donnell 1993: 1367). This sort of democracy is, according to O'Donnell (1994: 59), under-institutionalised, 'characterised by the restricted scope, the weakness, and the low density of whatever political institutions exist. The place of well-functioning institutions is taken by other non-formalised but strongly operative practices – clientelism, patrimonialism, and corruption.' The notion of delegative democracy has a clear application to Russia, and has been used fruitfully in analysing regional politics. However, the concept has limitations when applied to the post-Soviet world. Although the powers of the executive everywhere have been enhanced, these are not classical presidentialist regimes of the Latin American type although they do share some of the characteristics of Latin American *democraduras* ('hard democracies'). Politics in Russia is too unstructured, institutions too fluid, and the personages too constrained by the emerging class system, ethnic contradictions and regional forces to allow the full delegation of authority.

In terms of regime type Russia is a semi-presidential democracy, but this does not tell us much about how the constitution works in practice. The entwining of institutional and personal factors in a weak constitutional order and under-developed civil society gave rise to the dominance of a power system centred on the presidency that relies on administrative ways of managing conflict and of reducing the uncertainty engendered by the electoral process. Decisions and leadership do not emerge out of the untrammelled operation of politics but out of an administrative elite positioned between state and society. This is what we call regime politics.

Russia's fledgling democracy is characterised by the gulf between a system with a constitution to one governed by genuine constitutionalism. According to Max Weber (1995), Russia's 1906 constitution represented sham constitutionalism in that it was not able effectively to establish accountable government. Even less effective in this respect were the various Soviet constitutions (1918, 1924, 1936 and 1977), since they signally failed to define and thus to limit the powers of the leadership. They were pseudo-constitutions since they did not even attempt to fulfil the classic functions of a constitution, let alone foster the practices of constitutionalism (that is, the impartial exercise of the rule of law, limited government and a division of powers). Russia's 1993 constitution finally does what a constitution is supposed to do: establish the basic principles of the polity, define the roles of the institutions of government,

and entrench the practice of the rule of law. At the heart of the idea of modern constitutionalism is the separation of powers, and this is indeed embedded in the 1993 document, although this separation is unbalanced in various aspects.

The contrast between the informal relations of power established within the framework of regime politics, on the one hand, and the institutionalised competitive and accountable politics characteristic of a genuinely constitutional democratic state, on the other, is typical of many countries in the post-communist era. In Russia, as elsewhere, particularistic informal practices have been in tension with the proclaimed principles of the universal and impartial prerogatives of the constitutional state. Under Yeltsin personalised leadership came to the fore, with the power system and its oligarchical allies operating largely independently from the formal rules of the political system, whose main structural features were outlined in the constitution. Behind the formal façade of democratic politics conducted at the level of the state, the regime considered itself largely free from genuine democratic accountability and popular oversight. These features, as Hahn (2002) stresses, were accentuated by the high degree of institutional and personal continuity between the Soviet and 'democratic' political systems. This is a finding confirmed by Kryshtanovskaya's and White's study (2003). While a party state ruled up to 1991, the emergence of a presidential state in the 1990s fostered the creation of a system that perpetuated in new forms some of the arbitrariness of the old order. Both the power system and the constitutional state succumbed to clientelist pressures exerted by powerful interests in society, some of whom (above all the so-called oligarchs) had been spawned by the regime itself.

Instead of government being accountable to the representative institutions of the people and constrained by the constitutional state and its legal instruments, the government assumes an independent political existence. It is at this point that a politically responsible and accountable government becomes a regime; formal institutions are unable to constrain political actors and informal practices predominate (North 1990). The outward forms of the constitutional state are preserved, but legality and accountability are subverted. A set of para-constitutional behavioural norms predominate that while perhaps not formally violating the letter of the constitution undermine the spirit of constitutionalism. Para-constitutional behaviour gets things done, but ultimately prove counter-productive because they rely on the personal intervention of leadership politics rather than the self-sustaining practices of a genuinely constitutional system. The regime is constrained by the constitutional state but the system lacks effective mechanism of

Conclusion

A democratic transition is usually considered to be over when democracy becomes the only game in town and where there is 'definiteness of rules and indefiniteness of outcomes'. According to Kulik (2001) Russia's transition is indeed over, but instead of democratic consolidation Russia's 'managed democracy' has reversed the formula to ensure 'definiteness of outcomes and indefiniteness of rules'. This is true to a degree, but the scope for democratic development in Russia remains open. The government does seek to deliver a set of public goods, and it does not appeal to an extra-democratic logic to achieve them. The regime is legitimate precisely because it claims to be democratic. Putin's government is undoubtedly considered legitimate by the great majority of the Russian people, as evidenced by the outcomes of the 2003–04 and 2007–08 electoral cycles, accompanied by Putin's consistently high personal ratings throughout his two terms. Whether the system is becoming an illiberal or delegative democracy is more contentious. Too much is settled not in the framework of competitive politics but within the confines of the power system, leaving government only weakly accountable to society and its representatives. Nevertheless, the sinews of constitutionality are developing, and politics is not yet entirely subsumed into the administrative order. Just as the price of freedom is eternal vigilance so, too, the struggle for democracy is never a single act but must be advanced daily. This struggle is far from over in Russia.

Chapter 2

Semi-presidentialism and the Evolving Executive

JOHN P. WILLERTON

The spring 2008 presidential election and inauguration of Dmitri Medvedev represented an unprecedented moment in the over thousand-year history of the Russian state, as a politically strong and healthy 55-year-old chief executive willingly turned over formal powers to a similarly vigorous new leader. These events, constituting post-Soviet Russia's second leadership succession, revealed all of the complexities and uncertainties that surrounded Russian politics nearly fifteen years after the adoption of the 1993 democratic constitution. Vladimir Putin, the twice-elected president who was at the height of his power and who was riding public approval ratings in the high 70 per cent range as his term ended, chose to avoid efforts to amend the constitution to permit him a third term, voiced support for a loyal protégé to succeed him, and subsequently agreed to assume the more junior, but highly demanding, position of prime minister. The political significance of these unique developments was subject to varying interpretations, but most observers, Russian and Western, were agreed that Russia was moving onto an uncharted political–institutional course that entailed a new and untried leadership arrangement: a dual-headed executive, with a to-be-constructed and nuanced balancing of decision-making powers and prerogatives between not only the country's two top executive positions, but two capable and ambitious individuals.

The 1993 Russian constitution had formally set up a semi-presidential system entailing a dual-headed executive, with a separation of executive powers between a popularly elected head of state or president and an appointed head of government or prime minister, the latter responsible both to that president and to the national legislature, the State Duma. Yet, looking both at the constitutional particulars and to expectations and experience, post-Soviet Russia had been governed by an all-powerful presidency, a 'hegemonic president', assisted by a weaker and highly [illegible] government. Indeed, the Russian

Federation's (RF) first two presidents, Boris Yeltsin (1991–9) and Vladimir Putin (2000–8), had proven to be forceful leaders who had very much moulded the politics and socio-economic realities of their times. In contrast, the nine men who had served as prime minister during the January 1992–May 2008 period had constituted a varied group in background, orientation, political standing, and bureaucratic savvy, but they had all proven to be subordinate to the president, their tenures, decision-making roles, and policy programmes fully defined by the country's head of state. None of these prime ministers had come into office with strong public support; some had been little known. Only Vladimir Putin had left the prime minister's office with a respectable public approval level (approximately 50 per cent), albeit this was as he assumed the position of acting president on Boris Yeltsin's unexpected retirement on 31 December 1999.

Thus, the 2008 succession raised many questions about the logic of the Russian political system, where power lay, how institutions would operate, and what would be the political–institutional settings from which policy would now arise. As we will see, newly elected President Dmitri Medvedev was not without considerable abilities and experience, even as he assumed office appearing junior to his powerful mentor and new prime minister, Vladimir Putin. Medvedev's own initial high public approval ratings, also in the 70–80 per cent range, and building upon his first round presidential electoral triumph with more than 70 per cent of the popular vote, seemingly placed him on a comparable plane to Putin. The newly Medvedev–Putin tandem communicated a solidarity in both policy preferences and style that suggested a unified presidential–governmental team. It suggested that the Kremlin cohort that had long governed Russia, going back to the Yeltsin presidency and continuing through the eight-year Putin term, would continue. Yet throughout the later 1990s and early 2000s, the ruling Kremlin cohort had evolved, as had the Russian political system and the policy programme. If a putatively democratic system had arisen, and a domestic and foreign policy thrust was in place, they were products of a relatively short period of less than two decades.

The intriguing institutional and personnel changes arising out of Russia's second leadership succession raised uncertainties regarding both the decision-making process and the policy line of the preceding eight years. The ongoing centrality of the federal executive, the president, and the presidential team to Russia's political and economic life is a core feature of contemporary Russian reality. The Yeltsin–Putin team's preference for a strong state, with a powerful federal government led by a strong and multi-faceted executive branch and powerful chief executive, has been fully adopted by the country's elite and populace. The Putin period theory of 'sovereign democracy', grounded in the integrity of the state, a

reasserted Russian Eurasian (and global) leadership position, is joined with the concepts of a 'managed democracy' and 'directed economy' that assume a strong state. If a powerful legacy of the Putin presidency was to reassert and advance these systemic and policy ends, then the Medvedev presidency portended their continuing consolidation. Russia's third post-Soviet president promised a fuller realisation of the 'dictatorship of the law' set out in his predecessor's term, pointing to a new strengthening of the courts and the judicial system and a renewed but more serious assault on corruption. He also put renewed emphasis on high-profile domestic socio-economic programmes, the National Priority Projects, which he himself had guided during his predecessor's second term.

After more than sixteen years of an increasingly centralised decision-making system, the evolution of the Russian semi-presidential system into the Medvedev–Putin administration suggested a spreading of decision-making powers across more executive actors. What appeared in the Medvedev presidency to be a modestly reconfigured Kremlin team still entailed a large set of executive institutions and officials, overlapping from the presidential administration into the central government, through the team's platform party, United Russia, into the legislature, and downward into the regions. Questions remained as to the long-term integrity and viability of this extensive conglomeration of political–bureaucratic interests, whether it could move the ambitious agenda set out by President Medvedev and amplified upon by Prime Minister Putin, and what the implications of its successful operation would be for Russia's 'emerging democracy'.

In assessing these questions, we focus here on the federal executive, the president, prime minister and government, examining key institutions, their roles in the Russian polity, and the influential politicians who direct policy making and implementation. We consider the evolving relationship between these federal executive bodies and other actors, federal and subfederal, in the process illuminating the hegemonic decision-making position the executive has carved out for itself. However, to better understand the realities of the contemporary Russian political scene and to appreciate the complexities inherent in continued system building and governance, we must underscore several important considerations that are key to both the operation of the political process and the prospects for democratic consolidation. First, we must distinguish between formal offices such as the presidency and prime ministership and the officials who hold these positions. The constitution invests offices with powers and prerogatives, but these are separate from the abilities, intentions, and potential authority of the individuals who hold such offices. Thus, Dmitri Medvedev, like his predecessor Vladimir Putin, entered the presidency ...ding first round electoral

victory, but he would need time and policy successes to build his authority. Similarly, Putin, bringing significant authority to the presumably junior position of prime minister, could bolster the powers and policy-making possibilities of that more technocratic position, but he could also be drawn into the demands and minutiae of this macro-managerial position that might weaken such authority.

Apart from this, we must distinguish between the formal roles of political positions and the informal arrangements that affect their operation and permit politicians to influence the political landscape. Over the past fifteen years a Kremlin team has dominated the Russian political scene; that team is composed of evolving but identifiable groups, with potentially different interests and perspectives, groups that are constantly manoeuvring around the chief executive and other critical political actors. This dynamic constellation of groups acts as the human conduit through which institutionalised interests and programmatic goals are realised. Finally, we must consider the logic of the Russian institutional design, grounded in a tradition of executive assertiveness and dominance. Perspectives on this design, a semi-presidential system with a hegemonic executive, vary greatly as we distinguish arguments that see the powerful executive (atop a powerful state) either facilitating or obstructing both the construction of viable democratic institutions and the emergence of a more vibrant society. The contemporary shifting and rebalancing of prerogatives and powers between the president and prime minister, presidential administration and government, only contribute additional complexity to this setting.

Putin, Medvedev, and the tradition of a strong executive

Putin took power in the complicated and troubling context of the post-Soviet 1990s, and arguably the most important contribution he made to the ongoing evolution of the Russian polity was to restore the power of the presidency, the executive branch, and the federal state. In personality, style, and policy preferences, he proved able not only in meeting – and exceeding – public expectations, his 50 per cent approval rating at the time of his elevation to the presidency rapidly moving into the 60–70 per cent range. Indeed, he would retain public approval ratings in the mid-to-high 70 per cent range throughout his second term; he left office at a remarkable 84.7 per cent approval level (ITAR-TASS 30 April 2008). Many observers noted Putin's good fortune in the timing of his tenure, with record energy prices significantly boosting an economy that had only emerged from a lengthy depression in Yeltsin's final years. Yet at the heart

of Putin's strong leadership was the reality that the institutionalised hegemonic presidency was joined with a decisive, energetic, and highly respected occupant: renewed state power was joined with leadership authority.

Putin's modest background and forceful yet unassuming leadership style fitted with Russian preferences in the emerging democratic era. Born to a working-class family and a product of the post-Stalinist era, Putin had made a career in the Soviet security services that entailed a more elite education, travel and work abroad, and a broader awareness of both the Russian society and the outside world. His life experiences of the late Soviet and immediate post-Soviet periods left him subject to divergent and conflicting influences that were evident both in his rise to power and in his own presidency. As a security agent, Putin was well conditioned to a chain-of-command culture that emphasised loyalty and strict subordination, public order, and commitment to a strong state. Working as a key associate of the reformist St Petersburg mayor Anatolii Sobchak, however, he personally experienced the need for root and branch system change, and became sensitive to bottom-up societal pressures, notions of elite and governmental accountability, electoral procedures, and the messiness of democracy building. Taken in its totality, Putin's life and career experience provided him with a mounting awareness of the complexities of system change and of governmental administration, and not only of commercial life but of civil society.

Perspectives on Vladimir Putin and his eight-year tenure were varied, with especially divergent judgements separating Russian elite and public perspectives from those of many Western observers. At the heart of Russian assessments were widespread elite and public perceptions of significant domestic and foreign policy successes. Other chapters will detail the various socio-economic and other developments of the Putin years, but suffice it to highlight here the considerable national economic growth, the resultant, very evident rise in citizens' standard of living, and Russia's return as a major global player. Putin government initiatives reversed most of the conditions and developments associated with Russia's 'failing state'; the 'failing state' signifying a state that is losing its vibrancy and legitimacy as it fails to carry out the tasks or provide the services to which it is committed (Willerton, Beznosov and Carrier 2005). A combination of factors was responsible for this turnaround, but forceful political leadership must be included among them. Putin's modest style and 'samurai warrior' personal ethic, his decisiveness from the onset of his presidency to tackle complex problems (such as taking on the influential oligarchs, beginning the process of reining in regional power barons, and crafting an intelligible tax programme), his soon-evident ability to [illegible] strengthening the state and

providing tangible returns to the population, all secured him consistently high marks from an overwhelming majority of Russians. Indeed, the extent of Putin's authority – that is the legitimacy of his governance – was revealed in the second term: his government advanced a number of unpopular reforms that trimmed the welfare state, but Putin's popularity went unaffected. In the judgement of most Russians, on the evidence of the regular surveys conducted by the Levada Centre and other agencies, Putin and his government had delivered on nearly all of the promises set out in the early days of his term (the evidence may be consulted directly at www.levada.ru).

If forceful leadership tied with a strengthened state rested favourably with most Russians, this combination of factors left many Western observers sceptical, their assessments during and after Putin's tenure generally reserved and occasionally highly negative. To many Western observers, the enhanced power concentration and related decision-making 'streamlining' were seen as undercutting democratic impulses. A new corporatism enabling the state to dominate key industries was joined with the state's consolidation of control over the media and its enhanced ability to shape public opinion. Meanwhile, if the oligarchs of the Yeltsin period were reined in and no longer in a commanding position to dominate politics, corruption continued to be widespread and appeared to include elements of the ruling Kremlin team itself. Finally, fledgling impulses for creating a Russian civil society were undercut by the sum impact of the above-noted developments. For many in the West, the bottom line was a new authoritarianism, one that came with a more forceful foreign policy and that was grounded in Russia's re-emergence as a formidable energy-producing power (Goldman 2008).

The disparity in mainstream Russian and Western assessments was enormous, and while we cannot analyse it in detail, it is important to note that Russians and Westerners operated with different world views and reference points for judgement, different preferences and different emphases regarding policies and outcomes, and different understandings of the factors necessary for the successful transformation of Russia and construction of a democratic, free market polity. Perspectives on the 2008 presidential election were a good example of this Russian–Western disparity in assessments. There was little doubt that the popularity of the governing Kremlin team's programme and legacy would highly favour Putin's and the team's candidate, Dmitri Medvedev. The array of opponents was weak, with all observers concluding that Medvedev would easily win the first round and avoid a runoff. Yet the disqualification of two candidates with high international profiles (the one-time prime minister Mikhail Kas'yanov and former world chess champion Garry Kasparov) troubled Westerners, as did various irregularities during the

campaign season and in the conduct of the elections. For Westerners, the Kremlin's seeming dedication to retain power reinforced Medvedev's prospects while undercutting the legitimacy of the electoral process. Russians paid less attention to these developments, for instance dismissing Kas'yanov as a shady figure with questionable ties to the Yeltsin past and Kasparov as an eccentric, politically naïve publicity hound. Russians well understood the numerous advantages provided to Medvedev, but they voted for him anyway, and at the high turnout level (of about 70 per cent) seen in earlier elections. They opted for a close confidant and key member of the Kremlin team, a man central to the functioning of the Putin administration, a new leader tapped to maintain that team's governing position while continuing its programmatic thrust.

Putin's successor, Dmitri Medvedev, is a politician who should not be underestimated. While he was young (42) upon assuming high office, he brought a surprisingly impressive résumé to the presidency. Growing up in a family of academics, he had focused on civil law while a student at the prestigious Leningrad State University, ultimately earning a PhD in private law in 1990. A lawyer–academic who worked in the St Petersburg government under the reformist mayor Anatoli Sobchak, Medvedev early in his career developed a close working relationship with Vladimir Putin, initially serving as a legal adviser when Putin was heading a city committee negotiating with foreign businesses. Troubled by the collapse of the USSR and the dilemmas of post-Soviet Russia's 'failing state', both Medvedev and Putin saw a strong state and economic reform – via the market – as keys to Russia's revival. From 1991, when his and Putin's careers first crossed, to his election as RF President seventeen years later, Medvedev served in an impressive array of posts that left him with tremendous organisational experience and policy knowledge. He moved into the federal executive in 1999, shortly after Putin was elevated to the premiership, quickly becoming deputy head of the presidential administration and heading Putin's 2000 presidential campaign. As head of the presidential administration (2003–5), he became well attuned to the intricacies of Kremlin politics. As a first deputy prime minister (2005–8), he oversaw priority projects (agriculture, education, health care and housing) that were at the heart of Russian policy reforms. Meanwhile, chosen to guide (2000–8) and reassert the state's control over Gazprom, the world's most powerful energy conglomerate, he dealt with the important resource questions that have been key to Russia's impressive growth and emergence as an important global economic player. It was during Medvedev's tenure that Gazprom's debts were restructured, its declining production reversed, and its market capitalisation grew from US$9 to $300 billion (as of early 2008). On the international scene, it was [illegible] Russia's energy disputes with Ukraine

and Belarus, while in the midst of the 2008 presidential campaign it was Medvedev who flew to Belgrade to offer support to Serbia in the dispute over Kosovo's independence. Medvedev's modest manner and low-key style should not distract the observer from appreciating that he has been ambitious and assertive in promoting his, and Russia's, interests.

Medvedev came into the presidency with a strong electoral victory, but he clearly lacked the standing and authority of his mentor, Vladimir Putin. After Putin identified Medvedev as his successor in December 2007, little was done to alter the institutional arrangements underlying the hegemonic presidency. Moreover, Russians, while expressing strong support for Putin as he left office, overwhelmingly opposed any effort to weaken the federal presidency or transform Russia's semi-presidential system into a parliamentary system with a strong prime minister (Levada Centre survey reported in *Kommersant*, 31 March 2008). With Putin selected to once again hold the prime ministership, decision-making authority now appeared divided between a powerful presidency and a popular prime minister. The challenge before Medvedev was to present himself and move his agenda so as to translate superficial popular support into decision-making authority. Appreciation of these efforts and related issues requires an understanding of the Russian semi-presidential system and illumination of its key institutions and norms of operation.

Semi-presidentialism and institutions of the federal executive

Russia's semi-presidential system is formally grounded in the 1993 Constitution, but its *de facto* logic stems in part from the Soviet experience, where the executive was divided between policy-making bodies housed in the Communist Party apparatus and policy-implementing bodies housed in the Soviet government. In a democratic setting, the semi-presidential system divides political responsibilities between a president (and related institutions), who is head of state and who sets out the broad contours and directions of policy, and a prime minister and government, which are responsible for developing, implementing, and managing policies. In a democratic setting, the prime minister and other ministers who form the government are responsible to both the president and the national legislature. In most modern semi-presidential systems, it is the head of state, the president, who nominates the prime minister, who must enjoy majority support within the legislature. That support is ensured by the president nominating the leader of the majority party or a majority coalition, with the prime minister then forming a government comprised of ministers who must be approved by the legislature. While

most modern democracies are either parliamentary (where the prime minister and government arise out of a popularly elected legislature) or presidential (where the top executive, the president, and legislature are separate and elected separately), there is a handful of semi-presidential systems, France and Finland being among the most notable. The logic and organisation of the emerging Russian democratic system are in some ways reflective of the French–Finnish type of semi-presidential system.

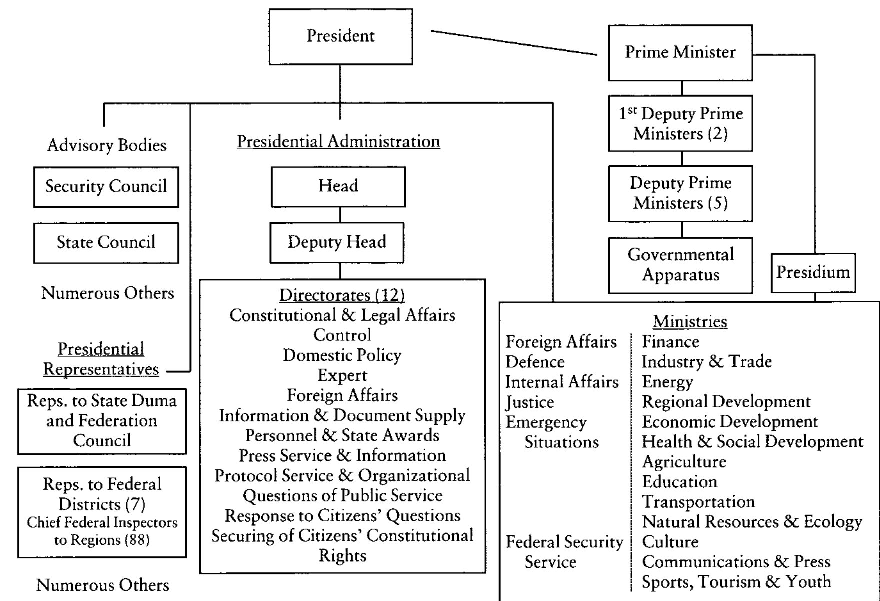
The president

A vast array of institutions and officials comprise the federal executive, with the hegemonic presidency at the helm. Informal arrangements, involving various whirlpools of interest, bureaucratic elements, and groupings of personnel also structure the president's decision-making primacy. The federal presidency has been hegemonic not only because its position is legally superior to that of other institutions, but because it has possessed independence and freedom of manoeuvre. Since 1992, the president, through presidential decrees, legislative proposals, and vetoes, has been able to direct the decision-making process. Moreover, he has been able to appoint and guide the work of the prime minister and government, with key cabinet members (such as the foreign, defence, internal affairs, and justice ministers) appointed by and directly accountable to the head of state. He has been supported by a large set of agencies and officials that link him to all federal and major subfederal institutions (see Figure 2.1).

While the Putin government did oversee some institutional changes that further bolstered the president's position (such as in nominating regional governors, rather than allowing them to be directly elected), these changes only modestly expanded the highly advantageous position of the head of state. The 1993 Yeltsin constitution specified that the president 'defines the basic directions of the domestic and foreign policy of the state', while the president also represents the country domestically and internationally (see Articles 80–93). As the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the president has the right to declare a state of emergency and martial law, call for referendums, and even suspend the decisions of other state bodies if their actions violate the constitution or federal laws. Changes during the Putin leadership only strengthened the president's ability to direct Russia's centre–periphery relations, this in a country that is as vast as it is varied in its regional and ethnic composition.

Much decision-making initiative comes out of the president's office and the presidential administration, but the president directs the federal government through the appointment and supervision of the prime minister and other ministers. The president, acting through the vast structure of … reporting annually to a joint

Figure 2.1 *Major institutions of the Putin–Medvedev executive*



parliamentary session on his government's domestic and foreign policy. Putin used such sessions, as well as annual lengthy press conferences, to good end in promoting his agenda and further consolidating his authority, with every expectation that Medvedev would approach such opportunities similarly. Meanwhile, there are conditions under which the president can dissolve the lower house of the parliament, the State Duma, but these entail unusual circumstances that to date have not materialised. Likewise, the rival legislative branch has the formal ability to remove the president for malfeasance, but the procedures for impeachment are cumbersome and involve numerous federal bodies including the Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, and upper house of the parliament, the Federation Council. Since a two-thirds majority of the full membership of both houses is required to remove a president, the probability of ouster is low by any count; the dominant position of the Kremlin's platform party, **United Russia**, only further ensures the near-invulnerability of the head of state. The more compelling constraint on a president's tenure in office comes with the constitutionally mandated consecutive two-term limit, with Putin's 2008 decision to step down after two terms, following upon Yeltsin's 1999 decision to retire after nearly two terms, setting a precedent that is unlikely to change. However, the Medvedev-initiated legislation at the end of 2008 to extend the presidential term to six years (it had been

four), as from the end of Medvedev's first term, makes this two-term limit a much weakened constraint.

An important, constitutionally permitted, means by which the chief executive can manoeuvre unilaterally is through the issuing of presidential decrees (*ukazy*), which have the force of law. The Constitution (Art. 90) provides the president extensive leeway in issuing decrees to make institutional and policy changes, and while such decrees are inferior to laws, they are binding so long as they do not contradict the Constitution or federal laws. In the face of a massive state bureaucracy, with its numerous and often-conflicting ministries, there is a need for powerful top-down mechanisms such as presidential decrees to direct its activities. While policy-making decrees may be overridden by parliament, a two-thirds vote of both chambers is needed, and this is highly unlikely to occur given the parliament's highly fragmented structure, the weakness of the party system, and the continuing strength of the Kremlin's platform party, United Russia. In the past, most notably during the Yeltsin period, decrees had a significant impact on Russian politics, and Putin relied on them during his first term to advance important initiatives (such as the establishment of the country's seven macro-districts and restoration of the system of presidential envoys, efforts to 'normalise' Chechnya, and energy and economic reforms). Yet as the Putin team further strengthened its position, including within the federal legislature, decrees became less critical and Kremlin initiatives were advanced through legislation. Some late Putin and early Medvedev period decrees involved institutional matters (for instance, further federal governmental supervision of regional officials) that could prove important to the functioning of the Medvedev–Putin team, but the continued dominance of the Kremlin team after the 2008 succession suggested most of its agenda would be advanced via the legislative process.

Presidential administration and advisory bodies

As Figure 2.1 reveals, a vast presidential administration supports the activities of the country's chief executive and supervises the implementation of presidential decisions. Originally built on the organisational resources of the defunct Soviet Communist Party central apparatus, this extensive set of institutions is composed of dozens of agencies and includes approximately 3,000 full-time staff members: a number suggesting it is larger than the comparable support structure of the US president. The 12 directorates that are at the heart of the presidential administration, reorganised during the Putin presidency and continuing under Medvedev, reflect the decision-making and supervisory interests of the … with the complex and often hidden manoeuvrings of

the varied organisations and informal groups of officials constituting a sort of 'checks and balances' system within the federal executive. Since the Russian Constitution is silent on the organisation and functioning of this administration, it is up to each president to structure and manage it according to his own power and policy needs. Elite and public expectations of a chief executive being able to supervise and direct this administration – along with the federal government and the political process overall – are critical to positive evaluations of strong leadership. Putin proved very able in this regard, and while Medvedev appears to have the organisational experience and understanding of the subtleties of Kremlin politics to do likewise, he will need to project the gravitas and build the authority to be successful.

Management of the presidential administration requires a team of reliable subordinates and Medvedev appears to have this, even if his team is composed of associates also closely linked with Vladimir Putin. Critical is the head of the presidential administration, the president's chief of staff as of 2009, Sergei Naryshkin, who oversees both administrative and personnel matters and operates as a sort of *éminence grise* of the federal executive. Medvedev held this post during the middle of the Putin tenure, so he is well tuned to the realities of the presidential administration. Medvedev's own chief of staff, Sergei Naryshkin, is a long-time confidant of both Medvedev and Putin and served for some time on both the presidential administration and prime minister's administrative staff. His experience and connections make him a key figure, not only in linking the President to the extensive set of institutions below, but in connecting the President to the government, Prime Minister Putin, and senior government officials. Other top presidential administration personnel, notably the deputy heads, Vladislav Surkov (first deputy head), Mikhail Gromov, and Aleksandr Beglov, similarly bring significant past presidential administrative experience while having worked directly under both Medvedev and Putin. Finally, dozens of top functionaries who head directorates and agencies beneath these senior officials bring considerable experience and ongoing work relationships with the President and Prime Minister.

Figure 2.1 also indicates that the federal executive includes numerous presidential representatives to most federal and sub-federal organisations, with these representatives serving as liaisons to co-ordinate those bodies' actions with presidential preferences. It also includes numerous advisory bodies that deal with selected policy areas while formally linking the president and his executive team to other institutional actors. These bodies also do not have a constitutional status, they operate at the president's pleasure, and similar to the presidential administration can be reorganised or abolished as the chief executive sees fit. Several of these bodies have now accrued some institutional history, encompass senior officials,

and facilitate the president's handling of high-level policy matters. This is true of the Security Council (created 1994), which deals with foreign and security issues and includes the prime minister, relevant ministers, and the heads of the seven federal districts. Its secretary, Nikolai Patrushev, a former intelligence-security official, confidant of Putin, and one time head of the FSB, is an intriguing liaison between Putin and Medvedev as the latter tries to use the Security Council to legitimate his decisions and to influence government actions (especially *vis-à-vis* the Presidium of the Cabinet of Ministers headed by Prime Minister Putin). Meanwhile, the State Council (created in 2000) includes the heads of Russia's 80 or so regions and is the main institutional setting where regional leaders can deal directly with the president. Created to compensate regional leaders for the loss of their seats – and power – in the upper house of the parliament (Federation Council), the State Council addresses centre-periphery and subfederal policy issues through meetings held every three months, a smaller presidium – or governing council – of seven rotating regional leaders, one from each of the federal districts, meeting monthly.

Prime minister and government

The president's power and authority has also been traditionally grounded in his direct influence over the prime minister and cabinet, which form the government and define the 'basic guidelines of the government's activity'. The constitution does not specify which ministries shall be formed, leaving it to the president and prime minister to make the desired choices, but it does identify the policy areas with which the government will deal. The government crafts the federal budget and implements fiscal and monetary policies. It is responsible for the conduct of the economy and has oversight of social issues. The government implements the country's foreign and defence policies, administers state property, protects private property and public order, and ensures the rule of law and civil rights.

At the government's helm stands the prime minister, who is nominated by the president and must be approved by the Duma. While the Duma can remove the prime minister through the passage of two 'no confidence' votes within three months, there are political constraints on the parliament doing so; while the Duma for its part must be dissolved by the president if it does not approve his prime minister designate three times in a row. Traditionally, the prime minister's power is grounded in presidential approval rather than parliamentary support. The position and power of current Prime Minister Putin, however, while formally nominated by President Medvedev and approved by an overwhelming vote of the State Duma (392–56, with only Communist deputies voting against), is

grounded in the tremendous authority he brought to the office after eight years in the presidency, not to mention the presence of a vast array of protégés and allies in top governmental and presidential posts.

The prime minister chairs the Cabinet of Ministers, which oversees the state bureaucracy and has both political and law-making functions. Individual ministers set objectives for their ministries, craft their own subordinate bodies' budgets, and oversee policy implementation, but they do not have independent power bases. While most ministers report to the prime minister, five 'power' ministries (Foreign Affairs, Defence, Internal Affairs, Justice, and Emergency Situations) are directly accountable to the president. Putin has further consolidated his power over the ministries through a recently reconstituted Cabinet Presidium, led by the Prime Minister and including the seven first and deputy prime ministers and seven other senior ministers. The Presidium co-ordinates and manages the government's work and, with it including three of the power ministers (foreign, defence, and internal affairs) who report directly to Medvedev, it places Putin in a central executive supervisory role. Presidents Putin and Medvedev exhibited similar preferences in the setting out of ministerial portfolios, with only modest organisational changes coming in May 2008. Putin and now Medvedev have set out a vertical, top-down administration arrangement which Putin claims has as a consequence 'universal elements of management' to streamline the policy process (*Moscow Times*, 16 May 2008). Meanwhile, the 2008 Putin government included two first deputy prime ministers, five deputy prime ministers, and 18 ministers (Table 2.1), an arrangement similar to that of immediate past governments but including a rotation of personnel that has bolstered the real power position of the prime minister. Putin assembled a diverse set of ministers, many drawn from his presidential administration, who were not only competent and reliable managers, but experienced political watchdogs.

The composition of the Putin government included many top officials drawn from Putin's presidential administration and last government. Former Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov, a no-nonsense bureaucrat who had been involved in financial monitoring and tax inspection and who had a reputation as a task-master when he held the top governmental position during Putin's last year as president, was tapped as one of Putin's main assistants as First Deputy Prime Minister. The other First Deputy Prime Minister, Igor Shuvalov, was a Putin confidant who was drawn from the presidential administration and who previously served under Medvedev in supervising the National Priority Projects that were developed from 2005 onwards as a means of focusing government attention on education, health, agriculture and housing. Putin was further assisted by five deputy prime ministers, all of them protégés of the Prime Minister,

Table 2.1 *Leading officials in Putin and Medvedev executive teams*

President	*Vladimir Putin (2nd term)*	*Dmitri Medvedev*
Head, Presidential Administration	Sergei Sobyanin	Sergei Naryshkin
Deputy Head	Igor Sechin Vladislav Surkov	Vladislav Surkov (1st Dep.) Aleksei Gromov Aleksandr Beglov
Prime Minister	Viktor Zubkov	Vladimir Putin
1st Deputy Prime Minister	Sergei Ivanov Dmitri Medvedev	Viktor Zubkov Igor Shuvalov
Deputy Prime Minister	Aleksei Kudrin Sergei Naryshkin Aleksandr Zhukov	Sergei Ivanov Aleksandr Zhukov Aleksei Kudrin Igor Sechin Sergei Sobyanin
Leading Ministries & Services		
Foreign Affairs	Sergei Lavrov	Sergei Lavrov
Defence	Anatolii Serdyukov	Anatolii Serdyukov
Internal affairs	Rashid Nurgaliev	Rashid Nurgaliev
Justice	Vladimir Ustinov	Aleksandr Konovalov
Emergency Situations	Sergei Shoigu	Sergei Shoigu
Finance	Aleksei Kudrin	Aleksei Kudrin
Federal Security Service	Nikolai Patrushev	Aleksandr Bortnikov
Industry & Trade	Viktor Khristenko (Industry)	Viktor Khristenko
Energy	Viktor Khristenko	Sergi Shmatko
Regional Development	Dmitri Kozak	Dmitri Kozak
Economic Development	Elvira Nabiullina	Elvira Nabiullina
Health & Social Development	Tatyana Golikova	Tatyana Golikova
Agriculture	Aleksei Gordeev	Aleksei Gordeev
Education	Andrei Fursenko	Andrei Fursenko
Transportation	Igor Levitin	Igor Levitin
Natural Resources & Ecology	Yuri Trutnev	Yuri Trutnev
Culture	Aleksandr Sokolov	Aleksandr Avdeev
Communications & Press	Leonid Reiman	Igor Shchegolev
Sports, Tourism & Youth	–	Vitalii Matko

but with different specialties and political orientations. While we will discuss the informal groups that comprise the Medvedev–Putin team in the next section, suffice it to note here that these first and deputy prime ministers reflected a balance of more 'conservative' (Sergei Ivanov and Igor Sechin, together with Zubkov) and more 'liberal' (Aleksei Kudrin and Aleksandr Zhukov, together with Shuvalov) forces, with the ideologically neutral deputy prime minister Sergei Sobyanin supervising the division of powers among federal, regional, and municipal bodies and overseeing legislative initiatives; a set of responsibilities similar to those Sobyanin assumed when he was Putin's last head of the presidential

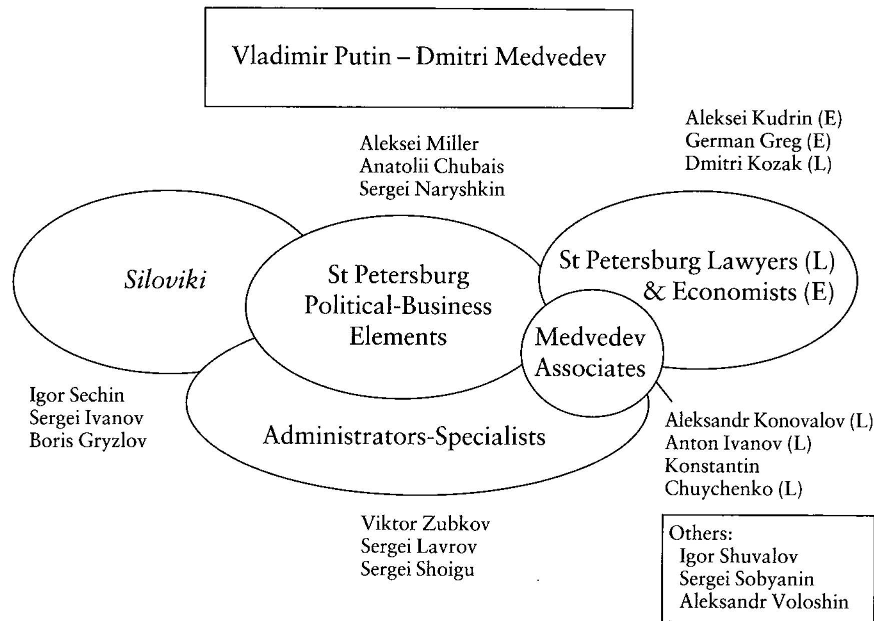
administration. Meanwhile, a perusal of Table 2.1 reveals that upwards of two-thirds of the ministers within the Medvedev–Putin Cabinet were holdovers from the Putin–Zubkov regime, with five of the six most senior ministers retaining their posts, the sixth entailing the elevation of a Medvedev protégé, Aleksandr Konovalov, to the Ministry of Justice. While acknowledging there are many nuances in fully appreciating this configuration of ministries and inclusion of ministers, we can generalise that experience combined with reliability of membership in the Kremlin team were the key factors explaining the composition of the Putin government.

The Medvedev–Putin (or Putin–Medvedev?) team

Informal politics – the politics of personalities, career networks, regional and sectoral interests, and competing institutions – have been central to the conduct of Russian politics, as they were in Soviet times. The fact that the post-Soviet system is less than a generation old only reinforces this reality. Analysis of informal politics is difficult: definitive evidence is often lacking, with the necessary interpretation always subject to sceptical judgement. We proceed cautiously in assessing contemporary Russia's informal politics, our focus on the elements and logic of an evolving Kremlin team that has governed Russia for more than a decade.

As RF President, Dmitri Medvedev is in a strong institutional position to elevate trusted associates while directing alliances and bridging linkages to other federal and subfederal actors. His past experience in the presidential administration and federal government yielded nuanced knowledge of high-level elite politics and countless personal connections, while his overall training and career reveal regional, institutional, and policy preferences that structure his personnel and decision-making choices. With an educational and early career focus on legal issues, his network of associates includes academics, lawyers, and officials dealing with various aspects of jurisprudence. Not surprisingly, many of the officials linked with Medvedev come from the President's hometown, St Petersburg, and are a component in a group termed the 'St Petersburg lawyers' (Figure 2.2). Justice Minister Aleksandr Konovalov, Supreme Arbitration Court Chair Anton Ivanov, Head of the Federal Bailiffs Services Nikolai Vinnichenko, together with senior Gazprom official Konstantin Chuichenko, are among the President's protégés who have previously studied or worked with him, have ascended to high office with him, and in background and expressed perspectives look to be highly valuable as he promotes his policy and programmatic preferences: fighting crime and corruption, strengthening the law and the court system, while retaining influence over the country's primary income generator,

Figure 2.2 *Major informal groups of the Putin–Medvedev team*



the energy sector. Beyond this group of St Petersburg protégés, other associates who have worked with Medvedev since he came to Moscow in 1999 appear to be allied with him and his causes, among the most influential meriting mention: Presidential Administration Head Sergei Naryshkin, First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin.

Medvedev and his relatively small cohort (to date) of associates, however, must be nested in the larger and more expansive set of informal groups that are primarily organised around the career and presidency of Vladimir Putin who, in assuming the prime ministership, retained a leading position in the configuration of the federal political elite. As we have noted, Medvedev himself is a protégé of Putin, he rose to federal prominence under Putin, and it was Putin who, with his nomination of Medvedev for the country's highest office, did more than anyone to make Medvedev president. As Figure 2.2 indicates, a complex array of forces have comprised what we see is a Putin-constructed cohort, but what we call the Putin–Medvedev team. Major elements include the *siloviki* (security and intelligence officials), St Petersburg political–business elements, St Petersburg lawyers and economists, and administrators and specialists: they reflect both the career trajectory and presidential history of Vladimir Putin. While Figure 2.2 singles out the modestly sized 'Medvedev associates' cohort, a cohort that is narrowly situated, in fact arguably all of the names listed as examples of the various groupings of the Putin–Medvedev team are Putin protégés, associates, or allies. Indeed, a comparison of Table 2.1 and Figure 2.2 reinforces the fact that the Medvedev team is essentially composed of Putin second-term officials, with some rotation of offices as many who served in the Putin presidential executive moved over with Putin to federal government posts. Even when considering the group identified as 'administrator-specialists', long-term government functionaries or career specialists, we find officials sponsored by the former president who continued in high office under Medvedev (such as former Prime Minister and current First Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov). Meanwhile, this Putin–Medvedev team that has dominated the Russian political scene since Putin's first term must be nested within the onetime governing team of President Boris Yeltsin, a cohort that came to be known as 'the Family' (since it literally included a few relatives of Yeltsin as well as a large set of trusted protégés) and that included members who continue to influence Medvedev period politics, albeit in the background (such as one-time Yeltsin presidential administration heads Anatolii Chubais and Aleksandr Voloshin, now prominent political-business officials).

Considerations of space preclude a full-blown analysis of all the officials noted in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.2, but the major informal groups listed in Figure 2.2 reflect the diversity of elements comprising the governing team. The so-called 'St Petersburg lawyers and economists' are a highly educated group of academics and specialists, trained and starting their careers in the northern capital, who have been central to the crafting and implementation of Russia's economic and political transformation. Generally educated in the late or immediate post-Soviet period, they ascended to federal importance under Putin, though older figures tied with them were important in the Yeltsin years (such as Anatolii Chubais). Here are officials often focused on the technical complexities of the country's economic and political overhaul, they are generally committed to a market economy, privatisation, careful structuring of the state's role in the country's socio-economic life and full engagement of Russia with the global system, but nested in a democratic political system. This chapter has distinguished another grouping, 'St Petersburg political-business elements', as these officials, also from Putin's hometown, have backgrounds more grounded in practical business experience and politics, but their policy preferences generally have been aligned with those of the St Petersburg lawyers and economists. Overall, while organising officials into these groups, there are differences in background and articulated priorities: we can differentiate the Gazprom executive Aleksei Miller from Anatolii Chubais, Chairman (until 2008) of Russia's national power company, Unified Energy Systems, with the most important part of

politician–businessman Sergei Naryshkin's career coming in the presidential administration. Likewise, the policy trouble-shooter, Dmitri Kozak, who has tackled numerous high-profile issues (including problems in the Caucasus and Chechnya) and has served of late as the Regional Development Minister, brings tremendous 'hands on' political experience while Aleksandr Konovalov and Anton Ivanov have more focused institutional–legal interests. In contrast, Aleksei Kudrin and German Gref have been key intellectual forces in the crafting of the Putin (and now Medvedev) domestic economic policies. While there are reported personal–career rivalries among these elements, it is difficult to assess their dynamics, while all of them appear committed to the governing Medvedev–Putin team's power and policy agenda.

The other major group in the governing Kremlin team of the past near decade is the *siloviki* (derived from the Russian word for power), officials from the intelligence–security services who constituted a dominant force during the Putin presidency, and who continue to be well represented at the high level. It is challenging to draw a broad description that accurately captures a common interest or shared set of perspectives for all *siloviki*, but many would conclude they have a natural preference for a strong state and less sensitivity to the nuances of the democratic system. *Siloviki* have presented themselves as disciplined professionals, they are generally highly educated, and some have brought past commercial experience to their government positions. Finally, a view of many in Russia, if not in the West, is that the *siloviki* are generally non-ideological, have a pragmatic law and order focus, and emphasise Russian national–state interests. Setting aside Prime Minister Putin, who has strong connections with all Kremlin informal groups, the *siloviki* do not have a single leader, do not form a cohesive group, and do not promote a common agenda, but they seem to bring the work ethic and skills that have been especially appreciated by one-time President and current Prime Minister Putin. In the Medvedev–Putin regime, long-serving Putin lieutenants, Deputy Prime Ministers Igor Sechin and Sergei Ivanov and State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov are among the most prominent *siloviki*, and while their and their allies' collective presence was reduced with the 2008 succession, they constitute a continuing formidable bloc involved in some of the country's highest priority areas (such as energy and the military–industrial complex). Factoring into our discussion such senior ministers as Rashid Nurgaliev (Internal Affairs), Aleksandr Bortnikov (Federal Security Service), and Nikolai Patrushev (Security Council) only drives home this point.

Finally, as Figure 2.2 indicates, all of these groups should be juxtaposed not only to one another, but to the numerous experienced administrators and specialists who hold senior positions within the presidency and

government. Many ministers in the Medvedev government are holdovers from the previous regime, and among them are seasoned officials not easily associated with a given career group (such as Zubkov, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu). Their credentials and past experience have provided them the personal connections and reputations that make them formidable figures in the governing team. Some bring an organisational prowess that makes them highly valuable to the decisionmaking process (for instance, Sergei Sobyanin). Overall, reviewing Figure 2.2 and Table 2.1, we can see that the constellation of figures responsible for executive branch and federal level policy making is large, multifaceted, and spans both co-operating and competing elements. It reveals the complex interconnection of organisation and personnel considerations. Putative 'conservative' groupings (such as *siloviki* Sechin, Sergei Ivanov, and Patrushev) manoeuvre around 'liberal' groupings (like Shuvalov, Konovalov, and Kudrin), while other influential officials retain their distinguishable positions (among them Zubkov and Sobyanin). If not prone to simple explanation, this constellation of varied actors reinforces the conclusion that a priority concern for all Russian chief executives must be the management of both institutions and personnel. If Vladimir Putin proved highly successful to this end, only time will tell whether Dmitri Medvedev will be likewise.

The executive and governance

As the Medvedev regime moved through its first term, uncertainties surrounded the distribution of power within the federal executive, with President Medvedev consolidating his position and projecting authority as the Putin government demonstrated its capabilities in developing and administering policy. Medvedev assumed a high public profile, whether in well-publicised trips to China and Germany, in his presence at the G8 Summit, or in forcefully setting out Russia's position in the August 2008 Russian-Georgian-South Ossetian war. He was also highly visible in promoting his **anti-corruption campaign**, pressing for judicial reform, and championing small and medium-sized businesses. It did not take long for a 'Medvedev leadership style' to emerge, characterised in one newspaper as entailing 'predictability, rationality, and composure' (*Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 14–21 August 2008). Meanwhile, Prime Minister Putin was immersed in managing domestic policy administration, from the ongoing transformation of agriculture to tax policies and state regulation of large corporations. The reality of a fluid power relationship between the presidency and government, while new to Russia, was not new to the semi-presidential system, the more mature French and

Finnish systems having experienced changes in the roles of its top executive bodies. Over the past twenty years, France experienced several political cohabitations that entailed complex power relations between competing presidents and prime ministers, while Finland altered its constitutional arrangements to bolster the decision-making position of the prime minister *vis-à-vis* a dominating president. Clearly, the Medvedev first term entailed a new phase in the development of the Russian political system, with the Putin stewardship of the federal government resulting in some shifting of powers, at least some deconcentration of power from the presidency, and a sharing of policy-making functions among a wider array of institutional actors.

Observers could draw very different judgements regarding developments surrounding the 2008 succession and formation of the third post-Soviet administration. Some saw an eight-year incumbent Vladimir Putin retaining power through a shrewd, but legal, sleight of hand by assuming an upgraded prime ministership, that upgrading coming not by constitutional change but by Putin's considerable authority. Others saw Putin helping the designated protégé–successor Dmitri Medvedev to consolidate power so as to continue the Putin–Medvedev team's programmatic agenda. Was the powerful Putin altering the operation of the Russian semi-presidential system to retain effective decision-making primacy, or was Putin laying the institutional–personnel foundation to maintain system–policy stability while withdrawing from the public stage and at best operating as an *éminence grise* in the background? Was the ascending Medvedev motivated to assert his own leadership authority and policy interests, distinguished from those of his mentor-predecessor, or was he motivated to assume more of a caretaker role in pursuing an agenda that would be little more than a derivative of his predecessor's?

Early Medvedev regime posturing and actions suggested the Kremlin team would pursue an agenda similar to that of its predecessor, with attention given to continuing to build the economy and to bolster with investments the areas of the four National Priority Projects that Medvedev himself had previously overseen. Some differing points of accent offered by the Medvedev regime involved the law, court system, and addressing the country's widespread corruption, all areas that Putin had acknowledged had not been adequately addressed by his government. Interestingly, the stabilisation fund (worth US$158 billion) that had emerged during the Putin second term was reorganised in early 2008 and appeared to offer some of the vast resources needed to address these issues as well as under-funded pensions and state wages. Indeed, these resources would prove especially valuable as the Russian (and global) economy suffered a significant downturn beginning in the second half of 2008. An especially suggestive institutional–personnel–policy trend of the Putin

period that was continued under Medvedev involved corporatist approaches to strategic sectors of the economy (including energy, other natural resources, defence, and transportation industries), as the state assumed guiding control over these corporations and inserted leading members of the Kremlin team as chief executives (a so-called 'private–state corporate partnership'). Referring back to our figures and table, note these high-profile Kremlin team figures and the important corporations they headed in the early days of the Medvedev regime: Viktor Zubkov, gas giant Gazprom; Igor Sechin, oil giant Rosneft; Igor Shuvalov, sea shipping company Sovkomflot; Sergei Ivanov, Unified Aircraft Building Corporation, OAK; Sergei Naryshkin, the Channel One television network; and (until 2008) Anatolii Chubais, electricity giant UES, to name a few of the most prominent. Managerial and legal means were replacing the use of force in the Russian struggle for power and property. One sensed that the creeping power of the Kremlin and the state in the country's socio-economic life, a hallmark of the Putin years, was continuing.

Each presidential term has entailed unforeseen developments and policy choices, but we can conclude that post-Soviet Russia's third administration exhibited institutional and personnel arrangements and an articulated policy line that were fairly predictable and intelligible. What is important for the viewer of the evolving Russian system to keep in mind is that all choices and decisions are subject to change, that no institutional structures or configuration of personnel is 'set in stone'. Moreover as Lilia Shevtsova has observed, Russia to date has developed according to the 'law of unintended consequences', so one must be careful not to over-analyse or over-emphasise any single development or action (*The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 2008). Some observers were already engaging in such over-analysis in the first year of the Medvedev-Putin administration, as supposed differences in public pronouncements by the President and Prime Minister were said to reflect 'disputes' or the tendency of one to be more 'liberal' or the other to be more 'conservative'. Closer to reality was the fact that both Medvedev and Putin were members of the same team, with both the presidential administration and government committed to power and policy coherence. It is clear that Russia today, as in the past, desires what we could term a 'stability of power', and as Russia's richest citizen, billionaire Oleg Deripaska remarked, 'In Russia, in our culture, we need a leader' (AP, 8 May 2008). Russians had such a leader for eight years, and we will need a full four-year presidential term to determine whether Dmitri Medvedev alone, or with his Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, fills that role. Indeed, we will need that four-year term to assess whether, in fact, that 2008 succession was little more than a shifting of formal positions, with a system patron continuing to hold the real reins of

power for the foreseeable future. By 2012 we will also learn, with the extended six-year presidential term, whether Dmitri Medvedev opts for a second term and a ten-year tenure, or whether Vladimir Putin returns to the top executive post for a second presidency that could last up to another twelve years. However these personnel matters are sorted out, the federal executive continues to be the pre-eminent force in the Russian polity, and by all indications Russian elites and citizens support this and will ensure its long-term continuation.

Chapter 3

Parliamentary Politics in Russia

THOMAS F. REMINGTON

Changes in the status and role of Russia's parliament reflect the turbulent evolution of the post-communist political system. Mikhail Gorbachev's democratising reforms in the late 1980s transformed the Soviet parliament from a ceremonial adornment of communist rule into an arena of stormy debate and tense political confrontation in the 1990s when Boris Yeltsin was president. In the 2000s, however, under Vladimir Putin's presidency, parliament for the most part reverted to its Soviet-era role as a docile rubber stamp for the leadership's proposals. In this process of transformation are reflected the hopes, contradictions, and failures of democratic reform. Still, while parliament is not the source of political legitimacy and authority for the state in Russia that it is in liberal democracies, neither is it quite the decorative window-dressing that it was in the Soviet era. As at the time of writing, with Dmitri Medvedev having succeeded Putin as president and Putin himself becoming prime minister, parliament remains a site of bargaining and deal making among organised intererests over the distribution of benefits and liabilities while providing the president and prime minister secure support for their legislative agenda. Of particular importance is the dominant position of the United Russia party in parliament: United Russia serves as the mechanism for converting the political needs and ambitions of members of parliament into a solid bloc of voting support for the Kremlin. The transformation of parliament's place over the years since the communist regime ended tells us a great deal about the dynamics of power in Russia.

To understand the contemporary Federal Assembly, it helps to begin with a brief review of the status of elective representative bodies in the Soviet Union. Although they exercised little actual power, they symbolised the idea that the people were sovereign in the state. Legally, the Soviet political system rested on the fiction that state power resided in the hierarchy of *soviets* (soviet means council). Soviets were popularly elected bodies in which, according to Soviet doctrine, legislative and executive power were fused. Each village and town, region and republic, had its nominally elected soviet (elected in the characteristic, uncontested elections for which

the regime was famous), while at the apex of the system, the USSR's Supreme Soviet was the equivalent of a parliament for the Soviet Union as a whole. At the same time, it was understood that actual political power lay with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which exercised power through the soviets and the executive bodies that were nominally accountable to the soviets. Therefore the few votes that soviets were called upon to take were exercises in the unanimous affirmation of decisions that had been made by the Communist Party. Both Soviet political thought and practice rejected any notion of a separation of powers, and thus reinforced the older Russian tradition of an absolutist state.

This system changed markedly when Mikhail Gorbachev launched his political reforms in the late 1980s. Gorbachev used new expanded parliamentary structures and open elections as instruments for awakening popular political energies. His goal was to channel the country's newly active political life into a new set of legislative structures where he would be able to guide decision making. Gorbachev created a cumbersome four-tiered parliament for the USSR, consisting of a huge, 2250-member Congress of People's Deputies, which elected a smaller, full-time parliament called the Supreme Soviet. In turn, the Supreme Soviet was guided by its Presidium, which was overseen by a Chairman. The first election of deputies to this new parliamentary structure was held in 1989; in 1990, elections were held for the equivalent bodies at the level of the union republics and in regions and towns throughout the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev's strategy was to give *glasnost'*, his policy of open political communication, an institutional base. He sought to incorporate many diverse groups into the new parliamentary arena while ensuring that he would have the ultimate power of decision over policy. But liberalisation of politics under Gorbachev had unanticipated consequences. Not only did it mobilise radical democrats against defenders of the old order, it also encouraged coalitions of democrats and nationalists in the republics, including Russia, to rally around demands for national independence. As a result, the new USSR parliament and its counterparts at lower levels *represented* reasonably well the political divisions existing in the country between defenders and challengers of the old order. But they were woefully unsuited to *deciding* the grave policy questions that the country faced. They lacked even the most rudimentary institutional means to generate and debate coherent alternative policy options. They depended heavily on the executive to set their agendas and guide their decision making. Sessions of the new USSR parliament, and the parliaments in the union republics and lower-level territories, were frequently the sites of passionate but inconclusive debate, dramatic walkouts by embattled minorities, and deep frustration as the deputies found themselves unable to reach majority decisions on difficult issues. Little wonder that they were never able to resolve the most serious crises that the Soviet Union faced.

Gorbachev's awkwardly remodelled parliament did achieve some notable results, passing some major new legislation and stimulating the formation of proto-parties. But faced with the fundamental conflict between radical reformers and hardliners over market-oriented reform, the parliament simply ducked: it created a state presidency for the USSR, a curiosity that was logically incompatible with the principle of CPSU rule. Then it delegated extraordinary powers to President Gorbachev, who fell into a trap of his own making by constantly expanding the nominal powers of the president. What he failed to recognise at the time was that by doing so, he only encouraged the presidents of the union republics to follow suit at their own level of jurisdiction, thus deepening the disintegration of the Soviet state. The more power Gorbachev claimed for himself as president of the USSR, the less power he had in actuality, and the more he undercut the possibility that *any* central level institution – president, parliament or Communist Party – could have held the union together.

Boris Yeltsin and the crisis of 1993

The 1990–3 period was marked by the rise of Boris Yeltsin, who made Russia's parliament his initial base of power. Yeltsin led a coalition of radical democrats and Russian nationalists in a struggle for greater autonomy for Russia within the union. Yeltsin's own position was strengthened, rather than weakened, by Gorbachev's clumsy attempts to undermine him. In 1990, Yeltsin was elected by a narrow margin to the position of Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, enabling him to use the parliament as his institutional base for challenging Gorbachev. In spring 1991, Yeltsin rallied a majority of deputies who endorsed his proposal for a powerful, directly elected Russian president. In June 1991, he was elected president of Russia in a nationwide election.

Establishing the presidency, however, led to a contest between the legislative and executive branches. The leadership of the parliament began to challenge Yeltsin for supremacy, claiming that the legislative branch was the supreme seat of state power. Yeltsin claimed that as popularly elected president, he embodied the Russian people's will. The August 1991 coup attempt further solidified Yeltsin's political position. The popular resistance to the coup in Moscow, Leningrad, and other Russian cities, and his own uncompromising opposition, gave Yeltsin a substantial political bonus. Many of his communist opponents in the Russian parliament lost their political bases through a series of presidential

decrees which suspended, and later outlawed, the activity of the CPSU and confiscated its considerable property. In October 1991, at the Fifth Congress, Yeltsin sought and received special powers to enact economic reform measures by decree; he won the congress's consent to put off elections of local heads of government until 1 December 1992, and its approval of constitutional amendments giving him the right to suspend the acts of lower authorities in Russia if he found they violated the constitution and to suspend legal acts of the union if they violated Russian sovereignty; and the congress approved his programme for radical economic transformation. A few days later Yeltsin assumed the position of prime minister himself, named a new cabinet dominated by young economists committed to rapid liberalisation, and issued a package of decrees launching the radical 'shock therapy' that is discussed in Chapter 11.

Making full use of his expanded powers, Yeltsin pursued his programme of reform throughout 1992. Although the impetus of 'shock therapy' fizzled out as the year proceeded, opposition to Yeltsin grew, and the majority in the parliament shifted further and further away from him. Yeltsin was also unable to win legislative approval of a new constitution that would formalise his powers *vis-à-vis* the government and the legislative branch. Under the old constitution, however, only the Congress had the power to amend the constitution or adopt a new one. Confrontation between Yeltsin and the Congress-Supreme Soviet intensified. In March 1993 the Congress attempted to remove Yeltsin from power through impeachment but fell slightly short of the required two-thirds majority of its entire membership. Yeltsin responded by holding a popular referendum on support for his policies in April, which gave him a surprisingly strong vote of confidence. However, the constitutional crisis continued to deepen.

Finally, on September 21, Yeltsin issued decrees that lacked constitutional foundation although they offered a political solution to the impasse. He shut down parliament, declared the deputies' powers null and void, and called elections for a new parliament to be held on December 12. He also decreed that there was to be a national vote on the same date on the draft constitution that had been developed under his direction. In the December referendum, Yeltsin's constitution was approved. It has remained in force ever since.

Yeltsin's constitution created a two-chamber Federal Assembly. The upper chamber, the Federation Council, allocated two seats to each of Russia's 89 constituent territories (called 'subjects of the federation'). Under the initial election law that Yeltsin put into effect, half of the 450 seats in the lower house – the State Duma – were to be filled by candidates elected from parties' electoral lists according to the share of votes that party received, so long as it won at least 5 per cent of the party list votes. The other half of the seats were filled by plurality voting in 225 single-member districts. In the first election held under this plan, in 1993, voters were also given the opportunity to elect their two representatives to the Federation Council.

Not surprisingly, Yeltsin's draft constitution provided for a very strong presidency. The president could issue decrees with the force of law, as well as veto laws passed by parliament. Yet the constitution also provided for the 'separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers' (Article 10). Contradictions between the powerful presidentialist elements in the constitution and the principle of separation of powers have been resolved very differently at different times since the adoption of the constitution. Under Yeltsin, the president shared some power with the parliament; since Putin took office, however, parliament has been pushed to the sidelines of the political system. The changes in the balance of power between president and parliament reflect both changes in the organisational arrangements within parliament itself as well as shifts in the larger institutional environment in which parliament and president operate.

The first and second Dumas

One of the most important determinants of the balance of power between president and parliament is the outcome of elections. The first elections held under the new electoral system in 1993 gave no one political party or coalition a majority of seats in the Duma. Winning voting coalitions in the 1994–5 Duma often were formed from the votes of the Communists, Agrarians, and their allies. As a result, parliament fought Yeltsin over much of the legislation he proposed, with the result that Yeltsin sometimes simply bypassed parliament by issuing presidential decrees. Yet both Yeltsin and the parliamentary leadership generally sought to avoid the sort of mutually destructive confrontations that had brought the country to the brink of civil war in 1991 and 1993. Regular bargaining and consultation between the executive and legislative branches succeeded in working out compromises on numerous pieces of legislation.

This pattern continued in the second Duma, which sat from 1996 through 1999. Yeltsin had decreed that the Duma elected in 1993 would serve for only two years and that elections would be held again in December 1995 for a new Duma that would serve a normal four-year term. The December 1995 election was characterised by a huge number of political groups running: 43 parties registered and ran lists – far more than could hope to win seats given the 5 per cent threshold rule for receiving seats. Four parties succeeded in winning seats on the party list ballot,

and they divided the 225 proportional representation seats among themselves: the Communists, Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, the 'Our Home is Russia' bloc formed around Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the Yabloko bloc led by economist Grigorii Yavlinsky. Of these, the Communists were by far the most successful. Russia's Democratic Choice, which had been the major reform faction in the previous Duma, failed to receive even 4 per cent, and altogether, half of the votes were cast for parties that failed to win any seats on the party list ballot. The Communists were also successful in winning district seats, taking more than 50. Combined with the seats they won through the party list vote, they wound up with one-third of the seats in parliament, the highest share that they or any party had held in the previous Duma.

The Communists and the factions allied with them came close to commanding a majority of seats in the new Duma. The Communists therefore became an indispensable member of many majority coalitions. However, their position was not secure. To win majorities, they generally needed to offer concessions to other factions or to moderate their policy stance. The Communists refrained from seeking full control over the chamber and largely abided by the previous working arrangements in such matters as the distribution of committee chairmanships among factions, and the practice of forming task forces and legislative commissions by recruiting members from all factions. Most important, they retained the rule under which the Duma's steering committee, the Council of the Duma, comprised the leader of every faction, one leader per faction.

Likewise, President Yeltsin devoted considerable effort to bargaining with the Duma over legislation. Both the president and the government maintained permanent representative offices in the Duma, working closely with deputies to ensure the passage of key legislation. Altogether, around one hundred executive branch officials were detailed to liaison duty with the Duma. Much of the bargaining within the Duma and between Duma and the executive took place out of public view; public attention instead tended to focus on the histrionic displays of temper on the floor and high-stakes brinkmanship between president and Duma. One of the most memorable confrontations between the branches came as the Duma tried to remove the president through impeachment. The deputies were well aware that removal of the president by means of impeachment was a long and complicated process of which a two-thirds parliamentary vote was only the first step, and that even if they succeeded in passing a motion to impeach, the odds of actually removing Yeltsin were remote indeed. The action thus served largely symbolic purposes for the parliamentary opposition.

The Communists in the Duma had long tried to put impeachment on

the agenda. They finally succeeded in June 1998, when the chamber agreed to form a commission to examine five accusations against Yeltsin: that he had committed treason by signing the agreement in December 1991 to dissolve the Soviet Union; that he had illegally initiated the war in Chechnya in 1994; that he had illegally dissolved the Russian Congress and Supreme Soviet in 1993; that he had destroyed Russia's defence capacity; and that he had committed genocide against the Russian people through the effects of the economic policies of his government since 1992. In March 1999 the commission approved all five charges and submitted them to the full chamber for its consideration. On May 15 the deputies voted on the five charges. None gained the required 300 votes, although the charge that Yeltsin had illegally initiated and conducted military operations in Chechnya came close. Yeltsin used the full range of carrots and sticks at his disposal to avert impeachment, promising material rewards to some deputies in return for their support, and reminding the Duma that he still had other trump cards in his hand.

Yet spectacular as this pyrotechnic display of president–parliament conflict was, it was already a sideshow by 1999. The polarisation between democratic and communist forces, real enough in the early 1990s, had faded in importance by the end of the decade in guiding actual alignments in parliament. Although episodes such as the impeachment vote continued to attract public attention, actual parliamentary politics increasingly came to centre on distributive issues – how government spending should be allocated; on whom the burdens of taxes should be imposed; who should control the privatisation of state enterprises; to whom access rights to the exploitation of lucrative mineral resources should be granted. The Duma became a central arena for wheeling and dealing among powerful organised interests, including firms, business associations, regional governments, federal ministries, and shadowy bureaucratic 'clans' linked to senior figures in the presidency and government. The fine details of legislation were the object of acute interest; vast sums of money were at stake, not a little of which wound up in the pockets of those drafting and voting on the legislation itself (see Barnes 2001).

The high point of parliamentary power occurred after the August 1998 financial crash. Yeltsin tried to bring back Chernomyrdin as prime minister, but the Duma adamantly refused to confirm him. After two tense confirmation votes failed, Yeltsin backed down and appointed Yevgenii Primakov, a centrist acceptable to the Communists. The Duma confirmed him and Primakov formed a government reflective of the balance of power in parliament. With Yeltsin weakened both physically and politically Primakov began making the major decisions on economic policy. This was as close as Russia has yet come to parliamentary government, where the cabinet is made up of the majority coalition in parliament. This

phase was short-lived, however. Yeltsin dismissed Primakov in May 1999, on the eve of the impeachment vote in the Duma.

The stormy era of confrontation between president and parliament ended in December 1999. Elections to the third Duma were held on December 19; five days later the second Duma held its final session. On December 31, Yeltsin resigned as president. He was succeeded by his prime minister, Vladimir Putin, whose powerful political appeal had been demonstrated by the remarkable electoral success of the party with which he was loosely affiliated, Unity, in the parliamentary election. Putin's accession to the presidency, combined with the outcome of the parliamentary election of December 1999, produced a fundamentally new dynamic in legislative–executive relations. After January 2000 the Duma was no longer an arena for confrontations between the president and the opposition, but instead became an instrument for legislative endorsement of nearly any initiative offered by the president. This trend grew still more marked following the 2003 presidential election, when the president's allies gained an overwhelming majority in the Duma, and the president had succeeded in taming or suppressing nearly every source of independent political initiative in the country. At the same time, the Duma remained an arena for the resolution of distributive conflicts.

The third, fourth and fifth Dumas

The 1999 election gave the party most closely allied with Putin – Unity – a strong plurality in the Duma. Unity had to work to build majority coalitions that could pass legislation proposed by the president and government. Its success in forming a fairly reliable cross-factional majority coalition reflects the skill with which the presidential administration manipulated parliamentary politics. Table 3.1 shows the strength of parliamentary parties in the third, fourth, and fifth Dumas.

Working in close co-operation with the president's parliamentary managers, Unity assembled a coalition of four parliamentary factions that co-ordinated voting on major legislation proposed by the president and government. Faction leaders could not always enforce party discipline (two of these factions were made up of deputies elected in single-member districts, who had to pay close attention to powerful local interests back home), but by drawing votes as needed from other factions, they ensured that the president's legislative agenda almost never suffered a defeat and the president almost never had to veto legislation passed by parliament. As Table 3.2 indicates, only 76 per cent of the legislation that passed the Duma in third (final) reading was eventually signed by the president in the 1994–5 Duma (sometimes the president only signed after multiple rounds

Table 3.1 *Party factions in 3rd, 4th and 5th Duma convocations*

	3rd Duma (2000–2003)		*4th Duma (2003–2007)*		*5th Duma (2007–2011)*	
	Party list vote %	*seats in Duma (%)*	*Party list vote %*	*seats in Duma (%)*	*Party list vote %*	*seats in Duma (%)*
Unity/ United Russia*	23.32	18.4	37.4	68	64.3	70
OVR	13.33	10.2				
CPRF	24.29	20.2	12.65	11.56	11.57	13
LDPR	5.98	3.9	11.49	8	8.14	9
SPS	8.52	7.3	3.97	0	0.96	0
Yabloko	5.93	4.8	4.32	0	1.59	0
Motherland/ A Just Russia**	9.04	8.67	7.74	8		

*Unity merged with OVR in 2001 to form United Russia.
**A Just Russia formed in 2006 from the merger of Motherland, the Pensioners' Party, and the Party of Life.

Abbreviations:
OVR = Fatherland-All Russia
CPRF = Communist Party of the Russian Federation
LDPR = Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
SPS = Union of Rightist Forces

Table 3.2 *Passage rates for legislation, Russian State Duma, 1994–2007*

	First convocation: 1994–1995		*Second convocation: 1996–1999*		*Third convocation: 2000–2003*		*Fourth convocation: 2004–2007*	
	No.	As %	No.	As %	No.	As %	No.	As %
Total no. of bills considered in any reading	(na)		2133		2125		2713	
Laws passed (in 3rd reading)	464	100	1045	100	781	100	1087	100
Vetoed by president only	263	29.3	185	18	31	4	7	.64
Vetoed by president + FC			113	11	10	1	3	.28
Signed by president (of those passed in this period)	354	76	724	69	730	93	735	91.9

Source: Based on Analytic Reports of Russian State Duma, various years.

of veto and revision), and only 69 per cent of the legislation passed in the 1996–9 period was signed. But over 90 per cent of the laws passed in the third and fourth Dumas were signed by the president. It is notable that whereas Yeltsin had often resorted to his decree powers to enact major decisions, Putin almost never did: thanks to his commanding base of support in the parliament, he was able to pass a far more sweeping legislative agenda than Yeltsin had proposed. Putin's legislative achievements included significant reductions in taxes, legalisation of a market for transactions in land, foundations for a system of mortgage lending, sweeping changes in the pension system, overhaul of the labour market, major changes to federal relations, substantial liberalisation of the judicial system, and breakups of major national monopolies. Painful as many of these changes were for the deputies to swallow, they ultimately passed them, albeit sometimes in modified form.

The 2003 elections produced a decisive victory for the president's forces and a humiliating defeat for the opposition both on the right and the left. The liberal democratic forces failed entirely to win party list seats and the Communists' share of the party list fell by nearly half, while the party backed by the Kremlin, United Russia (the successor of Unity, which had performed so well in 1999) took more than 37 per cent of the party list vote. Together with deputies elected in single-member districts, United Russia wound up with two-thirds of the seats in the new Duma. Since the advent of democratisation in the late 1980s, no party had ever held so dominant a position in parliament. United Russia used its commanding majority to make sweeping changes to the way parliament was run. They replaced the old power-sharing, proportional arrangements of the previous three Dumas with a new majoritarian system in which their members held nearly all the committee chairmanships and seats on the governing Council of the Duma, and their leader was elected the Duma's chairman. They quickly moved to impose a gag rule on their members, demanding that no member speak to the press without party approval.

But for all their ability to control the Duma, theirs was a pyrrhic victory, because the power to make policy decisions lay in the Kremlin. As total as United Russia's influence was in the Duma, the Kremlin's monopoly on policy making was just as absolute. As a result, United Russia placed itself in a position of complete subservience to the Kremlin for its power and privileges. Its base of support in society is thin, and it has identified itself completely with the interests of office holders rather than offering a clear policy programme. This is a mixed blessing for the Kremlin. The party's effectiveness in delivering reliable majorities in parliament depends on its ability to win elections. Therefore, if the Kremlin were to withdraw its support from the party

and its fortunes collapsed, the president and government might not be able to ensure such solid voting support in parliament. President Putin has repeatedly said that Russia needs a capable (*deesposbnyi*) parliament and has tied that to the ability of United Russia to forge consistent, coherent majorities. That is the reason, he explained in October 2007, that he had agreed to head the United Russia list in the forthcoming election (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 2 October 2007).

The legislative agenda shifted somewhat between the third and fourth Dumas, reflecting the president's changed priorities. Modernising economic reform took a back seat, while anti-terrorism legislation, generous increases in social spending, and the establishment of a number of new state corporations taking over ownership and control of many of Russia's most significant public and private industries occupied much more of the parliament's time. These pieces of legislation gave deputies, particularly those from United Russia, many opportunities to showcase their effectiveness in bringing benefits back to their home districts and to the powerful business lobbies that backed them. So although they ceded even more power to the executive branch (for example, supporting the law replacing direct elections of governors with a system of presidential nomination and greatly expanding the power of the security police to deal with terrorists), they also reinforced the popularity of United Russia with the electorate.

Preparations for the December 2007 Duma election proceeded amidst great uncertainty about the presidential succession. President Putin resolved many fears and doubts when he announced that he intended to run at the top of United Russia's election list and to stay on in power – but not as president. The presidential administration pulled out all the stops to ensure a smooth and controlled succession. The first step was to guarantee a large victory for United Russia in the Duma election by methods that included manipulation of media coverage, massive funding for United Russia's campaign, disqualification of popular opposition politicians, and outright falsification of voting returns in many districts (Myagkov and Ordeshook 2008). The official results gave United Russia 64.3 per cent of the vote. Because this election was entirely based on proportional representation from party lists (there are no longer any single-member district mandates), and because the threshold to receiving seats was raised from 5 to 7 per cent, only four parties won representation (see Chapter 5). As in the fourth Duma, United Russia took three-quarters of the seats and full control of the Duma: it holds 26 of the 32 committee chairmanships and 8 of the 11 seats on the Duma's steering committee, the Council of the Duma. The party's leader, Boris Gryzlov, was once again elected speaker.

The Federation Council

The president and government enjoy a similar position of dominance in the Russian upper house, the Federation Council. Here, however, executive control is not directly transmitted through the United Russia party.

Like the United States Senate, the Federation Council is designed as an instrument of federalism in that every constituent unit of the federation sends two representatives to it. Thus the populations of small ethnic-national territories are greatly overrepresented compared with more populous regions. Members of the Federation Council were elected by direct popular vote in December 1993 but since the constitution was silent on how they were to be chosen in the future, requiring only that one representative from the executive branch and one from the legislative branch from each region be members of the chamber, new legislation was required to detail how members of the Federation Council should be chosen. Under a law passed in 1995, the heads of the executive and legislative branches of each constituent unit of the federation were automatically given seats in the Federation Council, and this was the system in force between 1996 and 1999. Under President Putin, however, new legislation was passed in 2000 which provided that the governors and legislatures of the regions were to choose full-time representatives to occupy their regions' seats in the Federation Council.

Because the Federation Council has rejected the use of political factions to organise political bargaining, United Russia has only an informal status in the chamber. Nevertheless, the president and government guide its deliberations closely. Under the constitution, some legislation is not required to be considered by the Federation Council, although it can choose to take up any bill it wishes to consider. Actual voting in the Federation Council routinely produces lop-sided majorities favouring the president's position; the chamber spends very little time on floor debate, since the decisions have been agreed upon beforehand in consultations among committee chairs and the president's representatives. Often members of the Federation Council involve themselves in shaping legislation while it is still being considered by the Duma, so that by the time it has passed the Duma it already reflects their interests. Federation Council members also spend a good deal of time in lobbying with federal government agencies on behalf of their home regions or business interests (Remington 2003).

Constitutionally, the Federation Council has important powers. It approves presidential nominees for high courts such as the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court. It approves presidential decrees declaring martial law or a state of emergency, and any actions altering the

boundaries of territorial units in Russia. It must consider any legislation dealing with taxes, budget, financial policy, treaties, customs and declarations of war. In the Yeltsin period, the Federation Council defied the president's will on a number of issues. After President Putin entered office, however, the Federation Council lost the independence it once had enjoyed. Its members, although often caught between the conflicting imperatives of their home regions and the president's domination of the political system, have rarely had much difficulty deciding to take the president's side. The highly centralised nature of the current system means that it is far more costly to members to oppose the president than to side with the president against their home regions.

The legislative process in the Federal Assembly

Basic legislative procedure

The State Duma originates all legislation except in certain areas of policy that are under the jurisdiction of the upper house, the Federation Council. Upon final passage in the State Duma, a bill goes to the Federation Council. If the upper house rejects it, the bill goes back to the Duma, where a commission comprising members of both houses may seek to iron out differences. If the Duma rejects the upper house's changes, it may override the Federation Council by a two-thirds majority. Otherwise it votes on the version of the bill proposed by the commission (see Figures 3.1–3.3). When the bill has cleared both chambers of the Federal Assembly, it goes to the president for signature. If the president refuses to sign the bill, it returns to the Duma. The Duma may pass it with the president's proposed amendments by a simple absolute majority, or override the president's veto, for which a two-thirds vote of the entire membership is required. The Federation Council must then also approve the bill, by a simple majority if the president's amendments are accepted, or a two-thirds vote if it chooses to override him.

State Duma

The steering committee of the Duma is the Council of the Duma. The Council of the Duma makes the principal decisions in the Duma concerning the agenda, and acts on occasion to overcome deadlocks among the political groups represented in the Duma. Until the sweeping changes of 2004, it was made up of the leader of each party faction or registered deputy group regardless of size, and thus served to diffuse political power in the chamber. Since 2004, however, it has been dominated by the United

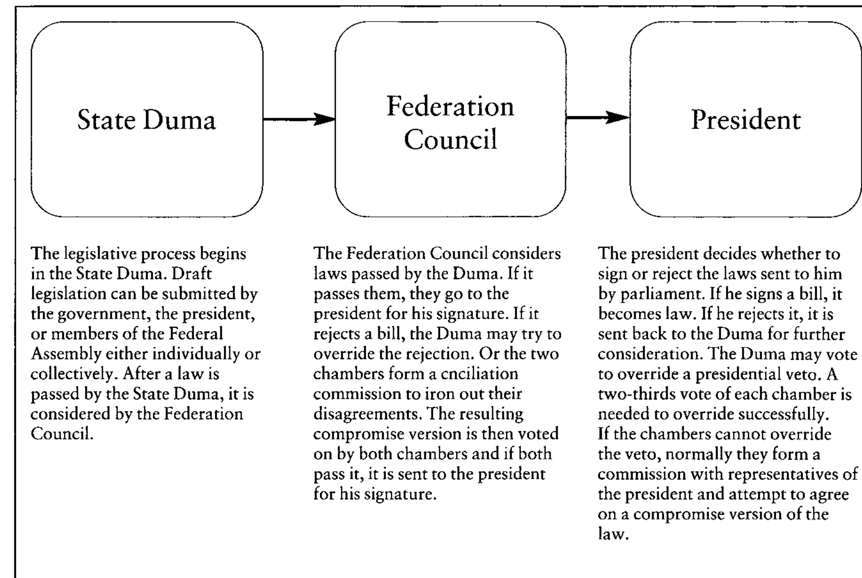


Figure 3.1 *The legislative process: overview*

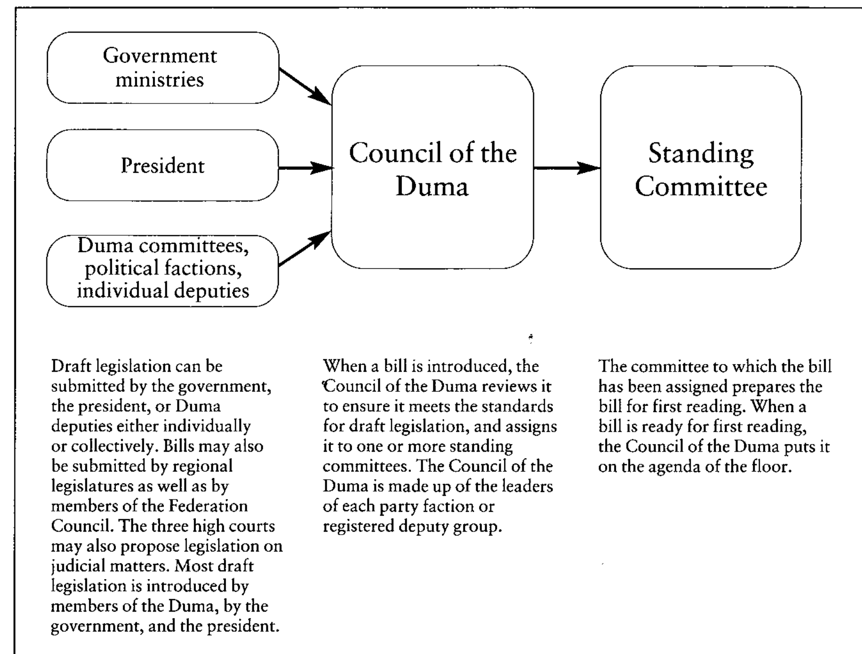


Figure 3.2 *The legislative process: bill introduction*

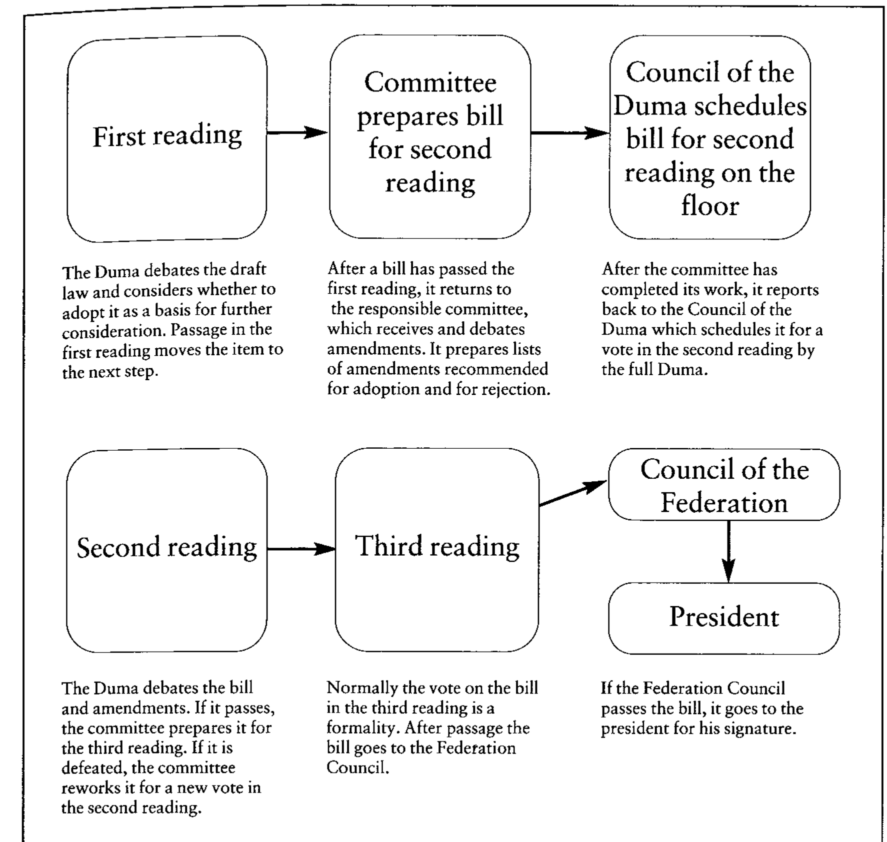


Figure 3.3 *The legislative process: three readings*

Russia faction, whose members hold eight out of the eleven seats on the Council.

All deputies in the Duma belong to the political faction tied to the party on whose list they were elected. Under new Standing Rules, they may not change factions (on pain of losing their seat). Each party that has won at least 7 per cent of the party-list vote is entitled to form a faction in the Duma made up of its elected deputies. The factions use the Duma as a means for showcasing their pet legislative projects, giving their leaders a national forum, obtaining crucial organisational support for their party work, and providing service to their constituents. However, only the United Russia faction has any real power to shape legislation. It is so large and diverse that it has subdivided into four internal groupings, organised around common policy interests (such as the interests of the oil and gas industries), or particular leaders. United Russia also uses three political

clubs, one with a vaguely pro-market orientation, one broadly social-democratic and the third focused on patriotic and moral concerns, as forums to debate policy.

The Duma also has a system of standing legislative committees to handle legislation in particular issue jurisdictions. Each deputy is a member of one committee. The work of drafting and developing legislation goes on in the committees, and committees report out legislation along with recommendations on amendments that have been proposed. Members join committees according to the issues areas in which they wish to specialise.

Formally, bills are considered in three readings (see Figure 3.3). In the first reading, the Duma simply decides whether or not to approve the bill's basic conception. If it passes, the bill goes back to the committee, which then sifts through the amendments that are offered. When the committee has agreed on its recommended version of the bill, it reports it out again to the floor for a second reading, and the whole chamber decides on which amendments to approve and which to reject. At that point the floor votes on the bill in its entirety, and sends it back to the committee for a final editing and polishing. The third reading gives the Duma's final approval to the bill, after which it goes to the Federation Council.

In recent years, a practice has evolved whereby much of the bargaining over legislation occurs at the so-called 'zero reading' stage. This refers to the consultation between the government and its supporters in the Duma before a bill is ever formally submitted to the Duma. For example, before the government formally introduces the annual budget bill to the Duma, it meets with the United Russia faction leaders, who press for increases in spending in areas that will be politically and electorally useful for it. For example, before the government submitted the 2009 budget, it heard requests from United Russia to add another 20 billion rubles in spending on highway construction, 2 billion on supercomputers, 660 million rubles on preparations to celebrate the 1150th anniversary of the city of Novgorod, and so on. Through the 'zero reading,' deputies in the United Russia faction are able to reward their friends and supporters by such budget revisions – something much easier to do when oil revenues are swelling the budget.

The relationship between the executive and the United Russia party illustrates the dynamics of a dominant party regime. In such a regime, the rulers use the dominant party to control the political process. As in other authoritarian regimes where such a model has been used (as during the era of dominance of the Party of the Institutionalised Revolution in Mexico or that of the United Malays National Organization in Malaysia), the party gives ambitious politicians an opportunity to build political careers. Thanks to their privileged access to the government, elected party politicians can reward the wealthy and powerful interests that back them, steering lucrative contracts or jobs their way. The party operates as a giant national patronage machine. The rulers benefit by ensuring that politicians will be loyal to the authorities rather than competing against it. The party mobilises support for the regime at the elections, and the authorities use all their powers of control over the media, money, election commissions, courts, police and the like, to make sure that opposition parties cannot make serious inroads into the ruling party's dominant status. In parliament, the dominant party organises large, lopsided voting majorities to pass the executive's proposed legislation. In effect, the politicians in the dominant party give up their political voice in return for access to the benefits of office. This allows them to pay back the business interests that have funded their election campaigns.

As a result of the new relationship between parliament and president established under Vladimir Putin and continuing under President Medvedev, almost no legislation that passes the Duma and Federation Council is vetoed. Vigorous debates over legislation continue, but rarely on the floor of either chamber. Bills can be slowed down by disagreements within the executive branch itself (as different ministries lobby for different versions of the legislation) or when the United Russia is given new marching orders by the Kremlin. (For example, in the spring of 2008, a bill making it easy for public officials to sue media organisations for defamation, which passed by a wide margin in first reading, met a crushing defeat in its second reading after President Medvedev told United Russia that he thought the bill excessive and unnecessary; the party's attitude to the bill turned around 180 degrees.)

The 1993 Constitution did not give the Federal Assembly a formal power of 'oversight' over the executive, such as the United States Congress has. Parliament has, however, other formal powers which it can use to monitor and check executive power if it is so inclined and if the executive allows it to do so. One of its instruments is the Audit Chamber, which reviews the accounts of state bodies including federal ministries, regional governments, and even private companies. Another is the practice of inviting government officials to parliament to respond to deputies' questions during 'government hour'. Committees frequently organise hearings to gather public testimony on matters of public policy and assist in developing legislation. Parliament can also conduct investigations of allegations of executive branch misconduct. All of these powers, however, can only be exercised to the extent that parliament chooses to wield them and the executive branch consents to their being used. In the current period, when political power in the state is highly concentrated in the presidential administration, parliament's oversight power has been reduced to virtually nil.

The Federal Assembly in perspective

The ability of a legislature to exercise its constitutional prerogatives depends both on its own internal rules and structures and on features of its institutional environment. One critical aspect of that environment in Russia is the degree to which the president dominates political processes. The 1990s and 2000s present two very different models in this regard. Yeltsin's political and physical weakness, and, undoubtedly, his own fitful but sincere political instincts, allowed parliament to play a stronger role than has been the case under Putin and Medvedev. Although under Yeltsin the balance between the branches was asymmetric, with the presidency still possessing the upper hand over parliament, parliament still managed to check the president's power and influence public policy in a number of significant issue areas. This was because parliament found its own institutional means to overcome fragmentation and to produce majorities on legislative issues, and because the presidential administration and government were often divided, encouraging bureaucratic interest groups to compete for support in parliament.

Putin reversed both patterns. He centralised and disciplined policy making within the executive branch, and reengineered the internal procedures of both chambers of parliament in such a way as to ensure him consistent and reliable majorities. In the Duma this has come about through the domination of parliament by United Russia. In the Federation Council Putin's reforms of 2000 deprived the Federation Council of any political independence, allowing him to shape the chamber's majorities as he chose. Thus neither chamber has the means or inclination to challenge the president. This state of affairs is not necessarily permanent, but a shift to a more balanced relationship between the branches will require significant changes on both sides. The president would need give up much of the informal power he presently possesses, and parliament would need to win an independent political mandate from the electorate.

Putin's move to the prime ministership in 2008 has opened yet a new set of possibilities for the evolution of the regime. It makes it more difficult for the United Russia party to play the familiar role of expressing total loyalty to the president while blaming the government for shortcomings in policy implementation. On the other hand, it requires United Russia to link Putin as prime minister to the parliament, to big business, to regional governors, and to other sources of power. Putin and Medvedev need United Russia and its dominance of parliament just as United Russia depends on the life-support system from the Kremlin. Regardless of how the system of power sharing between president and prime minister works out in the future, the political legacy of Putin is likely to be institutionalised in a party that outlives him.

Over the past fifteen years, parliament's role in the political system has changed fundamentally. In the early 1990s, parliament reflected the sharp polarisation in the country, together with the grave debility of all the central political institutions. No one party held a majority in parliament, and the weakness of parliament and the president forced them to bargain with one another as best they could. After the August 1998 financial crash, another model began to take shape. For a period of several months in late 1998 and early 1999, Russia's political system even gravitated toward a parliamentary system, in that the head of government (at that point Yevgenii Primakov) derived his power from the support of a parliamentary majority rather than from the president. Under Putin, the authorities took pains to construct a lasting dominant party system built around United Russia.

Radical shifts of this kind in the balance of power across the institutions suggest that Russia's political system is likely to evolve still further. If the current dominance of United Russia eventually gives way to a more truly competitive party system, so that political parties in Russia offer alternative visions of policy direction, then parliament will again become a more important arena for deliberation. Likewise, if the mass media, national interest groups, and judicial bodies gain greater independence, they will encourage members of parliament to stake out policy positions independent of the president and to position themselves as counterweights to the executive branch. Finally, if the president himself comes to recognise that a system in which the government is in fact accountable to parliament makes it a more reliable, disciplined, and effective instrument for exercising power, Russia's political system may eventually see a more even balance in the distribution of power between the executive and legislative branches.

Chapter 4

Elections and Voters

MICHAEL McFAUL and KATHRYN STONER-WEISS

Competitive elections were the most dramatic institutional change that distinguished the old Soviet dictatorship from the Russian political system that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. During the Soviet period, elections occurred on a regular basis, but since the ballot offered no choice between candidates or parties, and Soviet citizens faced sanctions if they did not vote, these elections lacked real political consequences. Beginning in 1989, however, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced reforms that allowed for semi-competitive elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies. This reform, in combination with others, brought about a fundamental transformation of the Soviet political system, which eventually led to the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the Russian Federation as an independent state at the end of 1991.

The function of Russian elections has evolved and changed over time. Since 1993, the formal institutions, rules, and regulations governing the practice of elections in Russia have changed slightly. However, the political implications of elections have changed considerably. If elections in the early 1990s constituted the main political drama of post-Soviet politics, then they most certainly no longer pl[ay] that role today. In particular, under President Putin (2000–8), t[he] outcomes of elections became more certain, less competitive, a[nd] therefore less meaningful in Russian politics. This change occurred [in] part because Putin was so popular and faced few serious challeng[ers] during his time in office. Additionally, Putin's own political 'reform[s]' – that is, changes in the political system that made Russian politics [less] pluralist during and following Putin's tenure as President – a[lso] contributed to the lessening importance of elections. Since t[he] competitive elections no longer determine who governs Russia in ei[ther] the legislative or executive branches, Russia can no longer be con[sid]ered a democracy (Diamond 2002, 2008 and Freedom House 2008 ... consider such issues further in Chapter 15).

[Electi]ons as certain procedures with uncertain [outc]omes

[Betwe]en June 1991 and December 1993, Russia did not hold elections [for nat]ional office. In the tumultuous period between August 1991 and [the dis]solution of the Soviet Union later that year, organising new elec[tions w]as the last item on Yeltsin's agenda. First and foremost, he concen[trated o]n breaking up the Soviet Union in a peaceful manner, a mammoth [task] that involved dismantling the Communist Party of the Soviet [Union a]nd splitting into pieces the Soviet army and intelligence services [while k]eeping his own Federation from experiencing a similar fate. His [next gr]eat priority was jumpstarting Russian economic reform. Yeltsin [reasone]d that he already had secured an electoral mandate from the [people a]s recently as June 1991. His allies in the Russian Congress were [elected i]n the spring of 1990, just a year earlier. New elections in post-[Soviet R]ussia, therefore, seemed distracting, dangerous, and unneces[sary. Ye]ltsin even postponed local elections scheduled for December [1991.]

[Yelts]in's failure to secure a new electoral mandate, however, had desta[bilising] consequences for the new state. The combination of major [economi]c dislocation, in part fuelled by Yeltsin's reforms, and poorly [defined p]olitical institutions created ambiguity, stalemate and conflict [bet]ween the federal and sub-national units of the state, and then, [sub]sequentially, between the president and the Congress of People's [Deputies. A]fter price liberalisation and the beginning of radical economic [reform in] January 1992, the Congress, once loyal to Yeltsin, began a [campaign t]o reassert its superiority over the president. The disagreement [over eco]nomic reform in turn spawned a constitutional crisis between [parliam]ent and the president. With no formal or even informal insti[tutions to] structure relations between the president and the Congress, [a po]larisation not unlike the standoff between Gorbachev and [Yeltsin in 1]990–1 re-emerged.

[In this ne]wly polarised context, both sides claimed to represent the will [of the peop]le. In the heat of the stalemate Yeltsin and the Congress agreed [to ask vo]ters directly which political institution and what reforms they [supported. I]n the April 1993 referendum, voters went to the polls to give [answers to t]he following questions:

[Do you t]rust Russian President Yeltsin?
[Do you a]pprove of the socio-economic policy conducted by the [P]resident and by the Russian government since 1992?
[Should a n]ew presidential election be conducted ahead of schedule?
[Should a n]ew parliamentary election be conducted ahead of schedule?

On the first question, despite the serious economic hardship that most people endured at the time, 58.7 per cent of voters affirmed their trust in Yeltsin, compared with 39.3 per cent who did not. Even more amazingly, 53 per cent expressed their approval of Yeltsin's socio-economic policy, while 44.5 per cent disapproved. Regarding questions three and four a plurality (49.5 per cent) supported early presidential elections, while a solid majority (67.2 per cent) called for new parliamentary elections.

These results reflected the highly divided and polarised nature of Russian politics at the time. In essence, voters were being asked their opinion about the revolution midstream in the revolution: half supported it, half did not. This electoral result, therefore, did little to defuse the constitutional crisis in Russia. On 21 September 1993, Yeltsin issued Presidential Decree Number 1400, which dissolved the Russian Congress of People's Deputies and called for a referendum to adopt a new constitution. The Congress rejected Yeltsin's decree as unconstitutional and instead impeached him and appointed his vice-president, Aleksandr Rutskoi, as the new president. In a replay of August 1991, the crisis only ended when one side – Yeltsin's side – prevailed in a military conflict.

The development of more certain rules

After Yeltsin's successful use of force against the Congress, which ended on 4 October 1993, the president sent mixed signals about his commitment to elections and the democratic process. Obviously, the dissolution of the Congress was a blatant violation of both the constitution and the spirit of democracy. The deputies, after all, had been elected by the Russian people. Yeltsin showed the same disregard for the electoral process by dissolving the regional soviets (elected parliaments in Russia's 89 provinces). He also removed three out of eight regional heads of administration who had been elected several months earlier. At the same time, Yeltsin seemed eager to establish new political rules in which elections would play a central role. He published a draft constitution and called for a referendum to approve it in December. After 4 October, Yeltsin also announced that elections for a new bicameral parliament would take place in December.

Without parliament in place, Yeltsin used decrees to establish new electoral laws. As we saw in Chapter 3, he dictated that the new lower house of parliament, the State Duma, would be elected according to a mixed system: half of the 450 seats would be determined by a first-part-the-post system in newly drawn up electoral districts, while the other half would be allocated according to a system of proportional representation. Parties had to win at least 5 per cent of the popular vote to win seats on the

proportional representation ballot. (In 2007 this threshold was raised to 7 per cent, as explained later in this chapter.) For the Federation Council, the upper house, Yeltsin decreed that voters in each of Russia's 89 regions would cast two votes for their senatorial candidates on one list. The top two finishers in each region would win. (This too would change to a system of *de facto* appointment under Putin's presidency.)

The December 1993 elections served as the founding elections for Russia's new political system. A majority of Russian voters ratified Yeltsin's draft constitution, giving popular legitimacy to a set of political rules for governing Russia. The new constitution outlined difficult procedures for amendment, meaning that adoption of this constitution was likely to produce a lasting set of political institutions for post-communist Russia. Since 1993, the constitution has not been substantially amended, although there was some discussion about doing so in order to enable Putin to run for a third time as president. The December 1993 vote was also the first election in Russia's brief democratic history in which political parties had the opportunity to participate fully, with proportional representation being an additional incentive for stimulating party participation and development.

The basic rules of the game for elections to the Duma established during this tumultuous period in late 1993 endured for the first four of the (so far) five parliamentary elections. Eventually the newly elected Duma codified Yeltsin's mixed electoral system in to law, meaning that four parliamentary elections (1993, 1995, 1999, and 2003) took place using the same electoral system, while the fifth, in December 2007, was held under a new electoral law that severely circumscribed the number of parties that could gain representation in the Duma. The minimum threshold for parties to gain representation in the Duma was increased to 7 from 5 per cent. This step effectively eliminated small liberal parties, including Yabloko, and the Union of Right Forces (SPS), which had hovered at around the 5 per cent level in the Duma elections of 2003, and who gained more seats through the single mandate races than through proportional representation. In 2007 the single mandate system was eliminated completely such that all Duma deputies are now by law elected only according to party list. As noted later in this chapter, in our discussion of the 2007 parliamentary election results, this served to cement United Russia's dominance of the Duma. Registration requirements for candidates have fluctuated, and become increasingly *ad hoc* such that at the regional and national levels there have been clear efforts to block the participation of candidates deemed undesirable by the Kremlin and local business leaders. Although since 1993, all parliamentary elections occurred as scheduled as prescribed by law and some electoral districts have been redrawn, although not in a radical way, elections have become

much less competitive under the system of 'managed' democracy that Putin installed after 2000 in Russia.

The 2000 presidential vote took place three months earlier than planned because Boris Yeltsin suddenly resigned from his office on the last day of the millennium. As prescribed by the law on presidential elections, a new election had to be held three months after Yeltsin's resignation, meaning that the vote was held in March instead of June 2000. All other major rules and practices governing presidential elections, however, have remained stable up to the time of writing. If examining the formal rules and procedures, elections in Russia have become normal, certain events. The predictability of elections and the stability of those institutions run by elected officials in Russia during the last decade stand in sharp contrast to the earlier electoral history from 1989–93, when not a single elected legislative body served out its full term. Formally, the Russian president has the power to disband the Duma under certain circumstances spelled out in the constitution. Since the end of 1993, however, the Russian parliament has never been dissolved.

The Federation Council is the one government body that has experienced volatility in how it is constituted. Originally, as just discussed, deputies to this upper house of parliament were elected in double-mandate districts; in each region in Russia the top two finishers won seats in the Federation Council. After the 1993 vote, however, the rules governing the formation of the Federation Council twice changed dramatically. Before the parliamentary election in 1995, regional executives (presidents in republics and governors in regions and territories) and heads of regional parliaments pushed hard for and succeeded in winning the right for direct elections to their regional offices, followed by automatic appointment to this Federation Council rather than direct elections. Such a formulation gave governors increased local legitimacy and greater autonomy from Yeltsin and Moscow, because elected governors were harder to dismiss than appointed ones. This new formulation also gave governors a direct voice in national legislative affairs, blurring the divisions both between executive and legislative powers and between national and sub-national units of the federal system. This formulation lasted until Vladimir Putin was elected president in the spring of 2000. In one of his first acts as president, Putin pressed for and eventually succeeded in changing the composition of the Federation Council. Instead of elected governors and head of regional parliaments, Putin called on regional executive and legislative heads to appoint representatives to the Federation Council from their regions. In effect, this new procedure for selecting 'senators' made the upper house less powerful, since those serving did not have an electoral mandate. Many members of the upper house had rarely, if ever, visited the regions that

they purportedly represented and behaved more like paid lobbyists for their respective provinces, rather than elected representatives.

From uncertain electoral outcomes to one party dominance

From 1993–2007, Russia's electoral rules were relatively certain. Throughout the 1990s, the outcome of these elections, however, remained uncertain. For those interested in the development of Russia's electoral democracy, this was good news, as the presence of stable electoral rules and unpredictable electoral outcomes is the essence of genuine democracy (Przeworski 1991). However, following the Duma elections of 2003, and the increased dominance of Putin's preferred 'party of power', United Russia/Unity, this situation changed notably and dramatically.

The constitutional referendum in December 1993 produced predictable if somewhat contentious results. Not surprisingly, a majority of Russians approved the new constitution. But the vote for the Duma did produce a shocking, unexpected outcome (these and later results are set out in Table 4.1). The pro-reform party affiliated with Yeltsin, Russia's Choice, won only 15 per cent of the popular vote, only a third of what pollsters and analysts had predicted just two months earlier. Even more amazing was the strong showing of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), a xenophobic, nationalist organisation that was neither liberal nor democratic. In essence, Russian voters remained divided in rather equal proportions between those who supported Yeltsin's 'reforms' and those that did not. Zhirinovsky's supporters were simply a new, non-communist expression of dissatisfaction with Yeltsin's course. Zhirinovsky's sudden splash created the impression that Russian voters yearned for a fascist resolution to the tumultuous times in which they lived.

The results of the 1995 parliamentary vote were also surprising (the parliament elected in 1993 was an interim body whose term expired after two years, instead of the normal four as prescribed in the constitution). In the two-year interval between the first and second Duma elections, Zhirinovsky's star had waned. Taking advantage of Zhirinovsky's demise was the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), which reemerged as the leading force of the anti-Yeltsin coalition. The CPRF made impressive gains, winning almost a quarter of the popular vote and reclaiming its role as the leader of the opposition. Buoyed by party identification on the ballot, CPRF candidates also dominated the single-mandate races. Zhirinovsky won less than half his 1993 total, but still came second, and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's Our Home is

Table 4.1 *Elections to the Russian State Duma, 1993–2003*

	1993				1995				1999				2003			
	List %	List seats	SMC seats	Total seats	List %	List seats	SMC seats	Total seats	List %	List seats	SMC seats	Total seats	List %	List seats	SMC seats	Total seats
LDPR	22.9	59	5	64	11.2	50	1	51	6.0	17	0	17	11.5	36	0	36
RC	15.5	40	27	67	3.9	0	9	9	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CPRF	12.4	32	16	48	22.3	99	58	157	24.3	67	46	113	12.6	40	12	52
WR	8.1	21	2	23	4.6	0	3	3	2.0	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
AP	8.0	21	11	33	3.8	0	20	20	–	–	–	–	3.6	0	2	2
Yabloko	7.9	20	6	26	6.9	31	14	45	5.9	16	4	20	4.3	0	4	4
PRUC	6.7	18	1	19	0.4	0	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
DPR	5.5	14	1	15	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.2	0	0	0
OHR	–	–	–	–	10.1	45	10	55	1.2	0	7	7	–	–	–	–
Unity	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	23.3	64	9	73	–	–	–	–
FAR	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	13.3	37	31	68	–	–	–	–
URF	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	8.5	24	5	29	4.0	0	3	3
UR	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	37.6	120	105	225
Rodina	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	9.0	29	8	37
Others	8.7	0	8	8	34.0	0	32	32	12.2	0	9	9	17.2	0	33	33
Indepts	–	–	141	141	–	–	77	77	–	–	105	105	–	–	69	69
Agst all	4.2	–	–	–	2.8	–	–	–	3.3	–	–	–	4.7	–	–	–

Source: Based on Central Electoral Commission.

Party abbreviations are: LDPR: Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (competing, in 1999, as the Zhirinovsky Bloc); RC: Russia's Choice (in 1995, Russia's Democratic Choice); CPRF: Communist Party of the Russian Federation; WR: Women of Russia; AP: Agrarian Party; PRUC: Party of Russian Unity and Concord; DPR: Democratic Party of Russia; OHR: Our Home is Russia; FAR: Fatherland-All Russia; UR: United Russia; URF: Union of Right Forces.

Russia (OHIR) was the only reformist party to break through to double digits. Grigorii Yavlinsky's Yabloko, the self-proclaimed leader of Russia's democratic opposition, dropped almost a full percentage point, and former acting prime minister Yegor Gaidar and his Democratic Choice of Russia (a modified reincarnation of Russia's Choice from 1993) suffered the greatest setback, winning less than a third of its 1993 total. The Kremlin did not orchestrate this election result. On the contrary, Yeltsin aides created, generously funded, and provided massive media coverage to the Our Home is Russia, yet the pro-Kremlin bloc placed a distant third, while outright opponents of those in power scored major gains.

Coming just six months after the Communist comeback in the December 1995 parliamentary elections, the 1996 presidential election also exhibited great uncertainty, especially in the early months of the campaign. President Yeltsin began the New Year with a single-digit approval rating. Support for his policies, such as the Chechnya war, hovered in the low double digits. Russia seemed poised to follow the electoral trajectories in other post-communist countries in which first generation reformers lost their second election to left-of-centre parties.

Yeltsin, however, still enjoyed several advantages over his opponents that eventually helped him win a second term. Perhaps most importantly, Yeltsin was offered the opportunity to campaign yet again against an old-style Communist, CPRF leader Gennadii Zyuganov. The reemergence of the Communist Party as the main opposition force allowed those in power to frame the 1996 election as a referendum between communism and the past versus anti-communism and the future. With the contest framed in this way, Yeltsin could assert that he was the only reform candidate capable of defeating the communist challenge (McFaul 1997).

Yeltsin enjoyed the additional advantage of controlling Russia's two major television stations, ORT and RTR. Both channels broadcast relentlessly pro-Yeltsin and anti-Zyuganov ads, news, talk shows, and 'documentaries'. Russia's third national channel at the time, NTV, was a private company, but its owner, Vladimir Gusinsky, backed Yeltsin, as did all the other business tycoons – the so-called oligarchs – who had made their fortunes during the Yeltsin era. Yeltsin also employed the more traditional tactics of distributing government pork to obtain support from regional heads of administration (Triesman 1998). During the campaign, Yeltsin raised pensions and increased the salaries of government employees. For the first time since 1989, the administrative resources of the state were playing an instrumental role in deciding the outcome of a national election.

In a field of a dozen candidates, Yeltsin barely managed to win more votes than his communist opponent: in the first round he took 35 per cent

of the vote, while Zyuganov captured 32 per cent. However, when the vote became a binary choice between the 'communist' and the 'reformer', the vast majority of Russians still favoured moving forward, not backward. In the second round, Yeltsin's entire campaign message painted him as the lesser of two evils. Yeltsin won easily in the second round, winning 54 per cent of the popular vote compared with Zyuganov's 40 per cent. In contrast with electoral trends in many parts of post-communist Europe, Russian voters opted to retain their first democratically elected leader for a second term.

The 1999 Duma elections continued to exhibit the same mix of certainty about the procedures, but uncertainty about the results. In fact, the December 1999 parliamentary election may have been Russia's most competitive in the 1990s, since the ruling elite was openly divided. In the prelude to the 1999 campaign, the combination of the August 1998 financial crash, the subsequent instability in the government, and Yeltsin's declining health created the appearance of weakness and disarray in the Kremlin. Those in power looked vulnerable. Just a year before the presidential election, they had not produced a candidate to replace Yeltsin. The Kremlin's lack of a game plan for staying in power eventually triggered the defection of many considered to be part of the ruling party of power. Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov planned to participate in the next electoral cycle as an opposition candidate. Former Prime Minister Yevgenii Primakov joined Luzhkov's coalition, Fatherland-All Russia (OVR), as a step toward winning the 2000 presidential election. At the beginning of the 1999 campaign, Primakov was ahead of all other presidential contenders by a large margin. For the first time in its post-communist history, Russia appeared poised to hand over presidential power from one political group to another through the ballot box.

Those close to Yeltsin in the Kremlin were not going to vacate their fortress without a fight. Because Primakov decided to compete in the 1999 parliamentary vote as a way to build momentum for 2000, his enemies in and close to the Kremlin decided to join the battle against the former prime minister in the parliamentary election as well. As a result, the 1999 election was the first time the federal government became actively involved in a parliamentary contest.

As in the 1996 presidential contest, the state played a tremendous role in shaping the outcome. Working closely with figures in the presidential administration, Russian tycoon Boris Berezovsky helped to invent a new pro-presidential electoral bloc, Unity. State resources contributed to this new electoral bloc, often referred to in the Russian press at the time as a 'virtual' party. Berezovsky hired the best electoral consultants money could buy and then deployed the full force of his ORT television station to promote Unity and destroy OVR. To a lesser degree, RTR assumed a

similar mission. ORT newscasters and commentators unleashed the most vicious personal attacks of any Russian campaign against OVR leaders (White, Oates and McAllister 2005).

Indirectly, another arm of the state – the armed forces – contributed to the rise of Unity and the eventual presidential winner, Putin. Russian armed forces responded to an attack by Chechen rebel forces against Dagestan and alleged terrorist attacks against Russian civilians in Moscow and elsewhere by sending forces into Chechnya in September 1999. At the time, Prime Minister Putin had a negligible approval rating; however, the war effort – especially as portrayed on ORT and RTR – was popular, and soon catapulted Putin's popularity into double digits and above all other presidential contenders. Putin in turn endorsed Unity. The blessing of the popular prime minister helped the virtual electoral bloc win nearly a quarter of the popular vote.

The results of the 1999 parliamentary vote radically altered the balance of power within the Duma and determined the winner of the 2000 presidential race. As in 1995, the CPRF won the largest percentage of any party, 24 per cent, an outcome that ensured Zyuganov a second-place finish yet again in the presidential contest the next year. Unity came second with 23 per cent, followed by OVR in a distant third place with a vote that was so disappointing that Primakov decided not to run in the 2000 presidential election. The newly revamped liberal coalition, the Union of Right Forces (SPS), surprised many by winning more than 8 per cent of the popular vote, almost double the total of its chief liberal rival, Yabloko. Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia continued to fade, winning only 6 per cent of the party list vote and just barely crossing the 5 per cent threshold.

When the distribution of seats from single-mandate races was added into the equation, the balance of power within the parliament had moved in a decisively pro-Putin direction. The Communist Party still controlled a solid minority of seats, but it could not construct opposition majorities to Kremlin initiatives. The combination of a loyal Unity, a divided and weakened Communist Party, a sometimes supportive SPS, and strong backing from independents and other smaller factions produced a parliament supportive of Putin on major issues – an outcome that few would have predicted just a year earlier.

The Putin era: the rise of one man and one party dominance

The results of the 1999 parliamentary election made clear that Putin was going to win the 2000 presidential election. Upon naming Putin prime

minister in August 1999, Yeltsin had hinted that he hoped Putin would replace him as president the following year. Yeltsin gave his heir one last boost by resigning as president on 31 December 1999, an act that moved the date of the presidential election from June to March. As Putin's popularity peaked in January and slowly declined until election day in March, Yeltsin's decision to resign was critical in helping Putin win the 2000 presidential election in the first round.

During the abbreviated campaign period in 2000, Putin continued to enjoy the unequivocal support of ORT and RTR. Though Putin did not run an official campaign, which he considered demeaning for a sitting president, these television stations continued to document his every move in glowing terms. His opponents, by contrast, received no attention at all from these Kremlin-friendly media outlets. Most oligarchs and regional heads of administration also stumbled over each other in trying to show their support for Putin, since everyone knew he was going to win. And they were right to jump on board since Putin won in a landslide, winning more than half of the popular vote in the first ballot, compared to 24 per cent for the runner up, Communist candidate Zyuganov.

Unity's surge in 1999 and then Putin's victory in 2000 marked the beginning of the Kremlin's dominance over national electoral politics in Russia. Throughout the 1990s, electoral support for Yeltsin and his allies always seemed precarious. Yeltsin orchestrated a dramatic comeback to win reelection in 1996, but parliamentary votes both before and after 1996 demonstrated that support for Yeltsin's policies was soft. The volatility in voter preferences in 1999, expressed in opinion polls during the campaign, suggested that the traditional cleavage among voters between 'democrats' and 'communists' had faded as the central driver of Russian electoral politics. Beginning in the 1999–2000 electoral cycle, Putin offered a different reason to support his party and his candidacy – stability. After a decade of chaotic revolutionary change, Russian citizens yearned for it. With the exception of the ongoing war in Chechnya, Putin delivered it. The Russian economy grew more in each year of Putin's first term in office than in all of the previous decade. Voters did not care whether this growth was due to Putin's economic reforms, which were substantial, or to the combination of high oil prices and low international interest rates. Putin got the credit regardless. More generally, Putin's positive rating as a leader hovered well above 70 per cent for his entire first term. In contrast to Yeltsin, Putin appeared to be a young and able leader who showed up for work every day and made Russians proud again of their president and their country.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Putin and his allies won again in the 2003 parliamentary elections and the 2004 presidential elections. In December 2003, his party – United Russia (the latest incarnation of Unity

from 1999) – won a major victory, capturing more than a third of the popular vote on the party list and winning more than a hundred of the single-mandate contests. Two other parties close to the Kremlin also performed well beyond expectations: Zhirinovsky's LDPR doubled its total from the 1999 parliamentary election, winning 11.5 per cent of the popular vote. The other Kremlin-friendly party to cross the threshold on the party list, with 9.2 per cent of the popular vote, was *Rodina* (Motherland), a loose coalition of nationalist and left-of-centre politicians that the Kremlin helped to organise and then advertise over the course of the campaign. After the vote and after independents lined up behind different factions in the Duma, United Russia and its allies controlled the two-thirds majority needed to pass amendments to the constitution.

While the pro-Kremlin parties surged in 2003, the main opposition parties on both the left and right faltered. On the left, the CPRF lost half of its party-list vote from 1999, and managed only eleven victories in single-member districts. As a result, the CPRF faction in the Duma shrank by 61 seats, falling from 113 in 1999 to 52 in 2003. Liberal opponents of the Kremlin fared even worse than their comrades on the left. Both Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS) failed to cross the 5 per cent threshold. In the single-mandate contests, Yabloko won only four seats, while candidates affiliated with SPS won three seats. For the first time since competitive elections began in 1990, the liberals had no faction in the parliament. To varying degrees, all three parliamentary parties that increased their share of the popular vote since the 1999 election supported Putin and enjoyed support from the state. All three parties that criticised Putin (and hence did not enjoy state support) fared worse in 2003 than they had in 1999. By 2007, Yabloko and SPS would be effectively eliminated from the Duma.

The overwhelming victory of United Russia in the Duma elections made it clear that Putin would win the presidential ballot without any difficulty. Indeed, Putin's reelection was so certain that none of the party leaders who competed in the December parliamentary vote ran as presidential candidates in March. Zhirinovsky, Communist Gennadii Zyuganov, Yabloko leader Grigorii Yavlinsky, and SPS leader Boris Nemtsov all stepped aside, and let other lesser-known figures in their parties run in vain against Putin. In March, Putin won on the first ballot, capturing more than 71 per cent of the popular vote. The Communist Party candidate Nikolai Kharitonov came a distant second with 13.7 per cent. Former Motherland leader Sergei Glaz'ev came in third with 4.1 per cent; Irina Khakamada of the SPS garnered only 3.8 per cent; the LDPR candidate, Zhirinovsky bodyguard Oleg Malyshkin, managed just 2.0 per cent; and Putin backer and Russian Party of Life candidate Sergei

Mironov trailed the field with 0.7 per cent, well behind 'against all', the choice of 3.4 per cent of those who went to the polls.

By December 2007, and the most recent elections to the Duma, Russian voters had clearly lost the meaningful right to choose their leaders. In 2007, the Russian Duma was elected according to party list votes alone with an increased threshold, now 7 per cent. This effectively eliminated smaller, liberal parties like Yabloko and SPS, which had done better in single mandate than list voting, where they had barely cleared the previously required 5 per cent barrier for representation, from parliament. Further, the changes to campaign laws in late 2006 included restrictions of political parties on using airtime on television to campaign against other candidates and parties. The law also eliminated the minimum voter turnout requirement for elections at both national, local, and regional levels, such that even elections with a turnout of, for example 10 per cent or less, will be counted as valid.

The effect of these changes and some tougher party, candidate and voter registration requirements was another stunning victory for United Russia, which garnered more than 64 per cent of the popular vote, translating into 315 seats of the 450 seat Duma (see Table 4.2). For the first time, Vladimir Putin's name appeared on the United Party list – indeed, it was the only name on the list, and given his high personal popularity rating as president, this undoubtedly help fuel United Russia's big win. The CPRF received a respectable, although relatively meagre 11.6 per cent of the popular vote, which translated into 57 seats. LDPR followed

Table 4.2 *The Russian Duma election of 2 December 2007*

Name	*Vote*	*Share of vote (%)*	*Seats*
United Russia	44,714,241	64.30	315
Communist Party of the Russian Federation	8,046,886	11.57	57
Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia	5,660,823	8.14	40
Fair Russia: Rodina/Pensioners/Life	5,383,639	7.74	38
[7 per cent threshold]			
Agrarian Party of Russia	1,600,234	2.30	
Yabloko	1,108,985	1.59	
Civic Force	733,604	1.05	
Union of Right Forces	669,444	0.96	
Patriots of Russia	615,417	0.89	
Party of Social Justice	154,083	0.22	
Democratic Party of Russia	89,780	0.13	
Invalid votes	759,929	1.09	

Source: Based on Central Electoral Commission communiqué in *Vestnik Tsentral'noi izbiratel'noi komissii*, No. 19(222), 2007, pp. 5–22. The registered electorate was 109,145,517, or whom 69,537,065 cast a valid or invalid ballot (63.71 per cent).

with 8.1 per cent of the vote, giving Zhirinovsky's party 40 seats in the Duma, while Just (or Fair) Russia, a new party created shortly before the elections and strongly backed by the Kremlin as the second half of what was then envisioned as two party system (with United Russia), received 7.7 per cent of the vote or 38 seats. These were the only four parties to gain representation in the Duma, since single mandate seats had been eliminated and also the phenomenon of independents gaining representation in the Duma (in the previous election approximately 100 Duma seats had been occupied by independents). Moreover the unsurpassed dominance of United Russia, along with the election in March 2008 of his protégé Dmitri Medvedev, truly cemented Putin's control of both the legislative and executive branches of government.

A political transition that did not bring about any change

Dmitri Medvedev was elected in March 2008 in the most highly managed political event in Russia's post-communist history. He was nominated to the position in December 2007, days after Unity's overwhelming victory in the Duma elections. Sure enough, upon accepting the nomination, Medvedev immediately announced his intention to run for the presidency only if Putin, his long time political mentor, would serve as his prime minister should he win. Putin consented to do so, and this afforded him the opportunity of staying in control of government without having to amend the Russian constitution to allow him to have a third term as President.

Even with Putin's personal seal of approval, no measure was spared in ensuring Medvedev's resounding victory in the presidential elections on 2 March 2008 (see Table 4.3). He faced no real opposition, his image flooded Russian television, and news of his and Putin's travels around the country dominated the largely now state-controlled Russian print media. Huge billboards picturing Putin and Medvedev walking shoulder to shoulder into Russia's evidently glorious future loomed over city squares – the largest of all on Manezh Square, just outside the Kremlin in Moscow. In case voters didn't get the message: Medvedev would continue the good times and good policies of his mentor, Vladimir Putin. Russian citizens were exhorted to vote at every turn – receiving reminders by text message and even on the back of Moscow metro tickets – since poor voter turnout might delegitimise what was correctly expected to be an overwhelming mandate for Medvedev – remarkable for someone running for elective office for the first time in his life – and Putin, by extension. Medvedev won convincingly with more than 70 per cent of the vote (just one per cent less

Table 4.3 *The Russian presidential election of 2 March 2008*

Name	*Nominated by*	*Vote*	*%*
Dmitri Medvedev	United Russia	52,530,712	70.28
Gennadii Zyuganov	Communist Party of the Russian Federation	13,243,550	17.72
Vladimir Zhirinovsky	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia	6,988,510	9.35
Andrei Bogdanov	Independent	968,344	1.30
Invalid votes		1,105,533	1.36

Source: Based on Central Electoral Commission communiqué in *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 8 March 2008, p. 1. The registered electorate was 107,222,016, of whom 74,746,649 (69.71 per cent) cast a valid or invalid ballot.

than Putin had won in 2004). The resurrected Communist leader, Gennadii Zyuganov, was second, followed by perennial presidential candidate and leader of the LDPR, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and Andrei Bogdanov, a lightweight character thought to have been financed and parachuted into the election by the Kremlin to make the race look more competitive.

State limits on the electoral playing field

Given the president's popularity, it is hard to imagine how Putin and his surrogates could have lost free and fair elections from 2003 onward. We can only speculate about the results of free and fair elections, however, because the actual elections have taken place in a context that did not offer a level playing field. Instead, Putin's regime limited opportunities for political challengers while at the same it provided Putin, and then Medvedev, and their preferred party, United Russia, with virtually unlimited 'administrative resources' to wield during the campaign. To be sure, Putin did not inherit a consolidated democracy from Boris Yeltsin. At the end of Yeltsin's rule, Russia's democratic institutions were still weak (McFaul 2001). Nonetheless, Putin did little to strengthen democratic institutions and much to weaken them (McFaul, Petrov and Ryabov 2004; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008).

First, Putin and his government initiated a series of successful campaigns against independent media outlets. When Putin came to power, only three television networks had the national reach to really count in politics – ORT, RTR, and NTV. By running billionaire Boris Berezovsky out of the country with a politically motivated criminal prosecution, Putin

effectively acquired control of ORT, the channel with the biggest national audience. RTR was always fully state-owned, and so it was even easier to tame. Controlling the third channel, NTV, proved more difficult since its owner, Vladimir Gusinsky, decided to fight. But in the end, he too lost not only NTV but also the daily newspaper *Segodnya* and the weekly *Itogi* when prosecutors pressed charges. When the parliamentary campaign started, the Kremlin *de facto* controlled all television networks with a national reach. This continued through the 2007 and 2008 electoral cycles.

At the same time, the independence of electronic media eroded on the regional level. Heads of local state-owned television stations continue to follow political signals from regional executives, and most regional heads of administration stood firmly behind Putin in the last electoral cycle. Private and cable stations steer clear of political analysis altogether. Dozens of newspapers and web portals have remained independent and offer a platform for political figures of all persuasions, but none of these platforms enjoys mass audiences. Moreover, Putin changed the atmosphere for doing journalistic work. When journalists criticised his policies, such as the war in Chechnya or his handling the sinking of the submarine *Kursk* in 2000, he called them traitors. Similarly, during the August war with Georgia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, critics of the Russian side were hard to find in the Russian press. As we note in Chapter 7, media independence eroded so significantly during Putin's first term that Freedom House downgraded Russia's media from Partly Free to Not Free, and it has maintained that rating every year since 2005. Reporters without Borders, which published their first worldwide press-freedom index in 2002, ranked Russia 121st out of 139 countries assessed (just one ranking above Iran), making it one of the worst performers in the post-communist world. The Committee to Protect Journalists accorded Russia the dubious distinction of being one of the ten worst places in the world to be a journalist.

Given these changes, the media has come to play a very different role in elections than they had in the 1990s. During the campaign for the 1999 parliamentary elections, Russian elites supported different electoral blocs: OVR or Unity. Russia's national media outlets lined up on both sides of this divide. ORT and RTR backed Unity, while Gusinsky's NTV as well as Luzhkov's Moscow television station TV–Tsentr and several other regional stations backed OVR. The playing field was not equal, but opposing points of view were represented in the national electronic media. In the 2003 and 2007 parliamentary votes and 2004 and 2008 presidential elections, by contrast, the Kremlin controlled all the major national television stations, and because most regional elites were now united behind Putin and then Putin and Medvedev, the vast majority of

regional stations (including Moscow's TV–Centre) also sided with pro-Kremlin candidates.

A second important political change carried out on Putin's watch was 'regional reforms' and these have remained in place since he moved from the presidency to the prime minister's office. Almost immediately after becoming president in 2000, Putin made reining in Russia's regional barons a top priority. As we discuss more fully in Chapters 9 and 10, he began his campaign to reassert Moscow's authority by establishing seven supra-regional districts headed primarily by former generals and KGB officers. These new super-governors were assigned the task of taking control of all federal agencies in their jurisdictions, many of which had developed affinities if not loyalties to regional governments during the Yeltsin era. These seven representatives of federal executive authority also investigated governors and presidents of republics as a way of undermining their autonomy and threatening them into subjugation. As already discussed, Putin also emasculated the Federation Council, and regional leaders who resisted his authority found elections rigged against them.

These reforms regarding the distribution of power between Moscow and the regions had important consequences for national elections in 2003 and 2004 and 2007 and 2008 beyond that. Wielding carrots and sticks, the Kremlin eliminated the serious divisions among regional elites that had created the main drama of the 1999 parliamentary elections. By late 2003, almost all regional leaders were supporting Putin and United Russia. These regional executives also deployed their local resources to support United Russia candidates in the single-mandate district races. By 2007, there was no effective opposition to United Russia in the provinces, and governors were encouraged to deliver votes for the party and then for Medvedev in the presidential elections of 2008.

A third context-changing initiative by the Putin regime was a crack-down on the oligarchs. Very early in his first term, Putin made clear that the oligarchs could no longer treat the state as simply another tool to be used for their personal enrichment. Instead, Putin implied that the oligarchs had to get out of politics altogether. Eventually, he arrested or chased into exile three major oligarchs – Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Russia's richest man, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, head of the oil conglomerate Yukos. All three had previously played significant roles in funding and supporting political parties and individuals not deemed loyal to the Kremlin. The marginalisation of these three sent a chilling message to other tycoons. In the 2003 parliamentary campaign, oligarchs continued to contribute significant resources to political campaigns, but only as sanctioned by the Kremlin. Compared to the previous electoral cycle, big business in 2003 was relatively united in backing United Russia and other pro-Kremlin candidates. In 2004, everyone backed Putin and in

2008, the best way to demonstrate continued support for Putin was to back Medvedev.

The absence of independence or internal divisions within media, regional elite, and oligarchic ranks reduced the freedom to manoeuvre for opposition political parties and candidates in elections since 2003. At the same time, the state's larger role in this electoral cycle gave incumbents enormous advantages, be it positive, continuous, and free national television coverage, massive logistical and administrative support from regional executives, or enormous financial resources from companies like Gazprom and Lukoil. Before the legislative balloting, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) issued its first-ever critical preliminary report on a Russian election, ruling that the State Duma elections had failed to meet many OSCE and Council of Europe commitments for democratic elections. In 2007, the OSCE refused to send a delegation to observe the Russian elections for parliament because representatives of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) maintained that they were issued an invitation to observe so close to the elections that they could not field a meaningful mission of electoral observers. The OSCE also did not field a monitoring team for the 2008 presidential elections, asserting that the Russian government was insisting on too many restrictions on the monitoring team that observers would not be able to do an effective job. Although none of Russia's previous elections was wholly free and fair, the most recent ones have been the least free and fair of all.

Conclusion: do elections still matter?

In the last years of the Soviet Union and the first years of independent Russia, elections helped to weaken or remove communist incumbents and open political opportunities for non-communist challengers. In the context of social, political, and economic upheaval, elections in the USSR and then Russia often were convoked to serve an immediate political purpose. They were not simply ways to choose leaders, but were used and manipulated in the heat of battle over such major issues as the fate of the Soviet Union or the course of economic reform.

Since 1993, national elections were more regular and anticipated events conducted in the context of a widely accepted constitutional system. However, stability in the electoral calendar and electoral procedures have been paralleled by increasing stability in the outcomes of elections. The most powerful office in the country – the presidency – has not seen a true turnover of power: Medvedev has clearly governed in the shadow of his prime minister, mentor, and sometime boss, former

President Putin. The landslide victory of the party of power in the 2003 and 2007 parliamentary elections and the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections marked a new milestone in demonstrating how elections could be easily manipulated to maintain and strengthen the group of elites already in power.

In democracies all over the world, incumbents enjoy tremendous electoral advantages. For instance, in the 2002 elections for the US House of Representatives, incumbents seeking reelection won 98 per cent of the time. Before the election, fewer than 30 of the 435 races were even considered competitive. Parties of power have remained in power for decades in countries widely regarded as liberal democracies.

Nonetheless, the way in which Russian elites have begun to deploy state resources to stay in power represents a greater challenge to the democratic process than some of these other examples of incumbent entrenchment in liberal democracies. The imbalance in resources of the state compared to resources controlled by society give those already in power a tremendous and unfair advantage. The state's growing role in determining who gets on the ballot and who does not is an especially disturbing trend. The trajectory over the last fifteen or so years in Russia has been clear – a growing role for the state in determining electoral outcomes.

At the same time, the elimination of elections is unlikely, since too many actors are interested in preserving the process. The political elite need elections in their present form to legitimise their rule. International norms also place pressure on the Russian elite to continue the formal practice of elections. Moreover, polls indicate that very solid majorities of Russian citizens believe that their leaders should be elected (Colton and McFaul 2003).

Consequently, elections are likely to perform a quasi-democratic function in Russia for the foreseeable future. Elections in which several parties and multiple candidates participate (but don't exactly compete) will continue to occur, though the party of power – currently called United Russia – is likely to win these contests thanks to monopoly control over national television, and solid backing from most regional elites. In close elections they also are likely to benefit from the control of those state institutions that have demonstrated a capacity to falsify elections.

Elections of limited consequence, however, are perhaps still better than no elections at all. And as dictators in Kenya and Serbia recently learned, elections can unexpectedly change from a charade into a much more meaningful procedure during periods of crises. In Russia today, elections have less meaning than they did several years ago. In a time of crisis, they might acquire meaning again.

Chapter 5

Russia's Political Parties and their Substitutes

HENRY E. HALE

Many observers expected Russia to develop a competitive party system rapidly after the USSR broke apart in late 1991. Russia was democratising, the argument went, and the experience of Western countries had given experts little reason to question Max Weber's classic aphorism that democracy was 'unimaginable' without parties (Weber 1990). Russian developments quickly challenged this view, however. A plethora of parties did spring up during the 1990s, with as many as 43 appearing on the parliamentary ballot in 1995 alone, but by the end of that decade their growth had stalled. Independent politicians continued to dominate the country's most important posts. For example, only 3 per cent of Russia's regional leaders, when running for re-election, chose to do so as party nominees between 1995 and 2000. Likewise, President Boris Yeltsin himself consistently declined to join any party after leaving the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1990.

In the 2000s, Russia's party system did finally begin to take shape, but with a major twist. Putin instituted a series of reforms that weakened the most important pre-existing parties and corralled a majority of the most influential independent politicians into a new pro-Putin organisation called United Russia. Almost all governors are currently affiliated with United Russia, and by 2008 that party commanded majorities in the national parliament and nearly all regional legislatures. Despite this, United Russia's growth has never quite reached the point of complete dominance, even in the government. Thus while Dmitri Medvedev became the first party nominee ever to win the Russian presidency, he refused actually to become a member of the party. Former President and current Prime Minister Vladimir Putin similarly agreed to become 'chairman' of United Russia in 2008, but declared that even this did not mean he would actually be a party 'member'. Some have asked, how strong can a party be if its own top patrons will not fully commit themselves to it? Moreover, there is evidence that the Kremlin (that is, Russia's president

and his close associates) continues to keep a stable of other parties 'in reserve' that can be used either to attack true opposition parties or perhaps one day replace United Russia if something goes wrong.

How did this situation come about, and what does the answer tell us about how politics works in Russia? This is the subject of the pages that follow.

The building blocks of Russian parties

Why would any politician ever bother joining a party in the first place? One short answer is: a politician will join a party when that party gives the candidate a greater chance of getting elected than he or she would have as an independent. Parties in Russia, and arguably everywhere, generally offer candidates at least two kinds of advantages. First, they can provide a candidate with money, organisation, connections, and other *resources* that can be used to campaign or otherwise win office. Second, they can connect a candidate with a set of ideas that the party has a *reputation* for pursuing, helping a candidate reach out to people who may support the party's ideas but who may not know anything about the candidate. Politicians who are rich in either resources or reputation, therefore, tend to be particularly successful party builders because they have something that other ambitious politicians want. These things, resources and reputation, are thus the building blocks of parties.

What building blocks were available to would-be party builders in Russia upon the USSR's demise? The only pre-existing party with any claim to have stood the test of time was the CPSU, but in the wake of the August 1991 coup attempt it was banned along with its Russian branch. Even in its heyday, it was mostly an instrument of control rather than a party geared for actually competing in free elections. Moreover, by 1991, its central Marxist ideas were widely discredited and it had been losing members since CPSU leader Mikhail Gorbachev started seriously reforming the Soviet system. Nevertheless, the party did leave behind some significant networks of true believers and people who had forged important personal connections that could eventually be reactivated for organising a party.

Once Gorbachev began reforming the Soviet political system in earnest, and even before parties other than the CPSU were formally legalised in early 1990, a huge number of 'informal' organisations sprang up to promote various political causes. Flush with the opportunity to publicly pursue almost any political agenda openly, these associations were extremely diverse and generally small, often focusing on the pet issues of all and sundry politicians. Some of these grassroots groupings

did begin to coalesce into larger associations, with the most prominent being Democratic Russia. During the late *perestroika* period, Democratic Russia looked like it could successfully rival the Russian branch of the declining CPSU and was able to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people in some of Moscow's largest street rallies ever. But this was an extraordinarily motley movement, united almost solely by a common desire to end communist rule. Once the USSR broke apart, it splintered and left little in the way of reputation and resources for future party builders to utilise.

By far the most important source of building blocks for Russia's first party system was the Soviet state itself. In fact, almost every non-communist politician who has built a truly successful Russian party gained his or her primary fame or other party-building resource through some connection with the state structures of the USSR or the Russian Federation. Upon reflection, this is not surprising: the Soviet state penetrated nearly all aspects of life in some way and explicitly sought to own or at least control all the means by which someone could accumulate political influence, including mass media, social organisations, and, as Marxist ideology dictated, economic resources (including all enterprises and banking institutions). Even after political liberalisation removed most controls over political activity, the state remained overwhelmingly the greatest source of money, organisation, and media attention, which are among the most valuable building blocks for parties. Even after Yeltsin's governments privatised the bulk of Russia's economy in the 1990s, business (including the media it controlled) still remained highly dependent on aspects of the state for its profitability. All this meant that people within or connected to the state had major advantages in building the first non-communist parties. It also meant that people within the state continued to have tremendous resources that could be used against party-building projects that they did not like or to support parties that served their purposes.

The next two sections show how this particular array of building blocks translated into the party system that characterises Russia today.

The veteran parties: those first emerging in the early 1990s

Researchers have found that the outcome of a country's first multiparty elections, often called 'founding elections', can have a disproportionate long-run impact on how its party system develops (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 61–2). This is because the parties that win gain the visibility, opportunities to impact policy, and access to resources that political office brings. These gains, in turn, can be ploughed back into the party-building project, giving the initial winners a great advantage in

future rounds. Winners also gain an advantage just for being seen as winners: voters and potential donors generally do not want to risk wasting votes or money on parties that will not be able to 'pay a return' on the investment by holding office (Cox 1997).

The specialists who initially authored Russia's current Constitution in 1993, empowered after Yeltsin unilaterally abrogated the old Constitution and called early elections late that year, were well aware of research on the importance of founding elections. They were also aware of other research indicating that the results of such elections would depend heavily on the election rules that they themselves chose. They thus chose the rules strategically in order to pursue certain concrete goals. One of these goals was to buttress the power of Yeltsin and his allies while another was explicitly to promote the development of a multiparty system. A complex set of compromises ultimately produced a system that was expected to have mixed effects on the party system (Colton and Hough 1998; McFaul 2001). It was to be dominated by a strong president, and here no special advantage was given to candidates who wished to run as party nominees.

The constitutional drafters did, however, plan for the parliament to spur party-system development. While an upper chamber (the Federation Council) was to represent regions on a largely non-party basis, half of the lower chamber (the State Duma) was to be elected through a competition between nationwide party lists with a 5 per cent threshold. This effectively reserved at least half of the Duma's seats for parties capable of winning this proportion of the nationwide vote. The other half of the Duma was to be chosen in 225 districts, with one deputy elected per seat. While parties could compete for these seats too, in fact independents frequently won them. Regional authorities were left the freedom to determine their own rules for local elections. This basic setup remained in place until the 2007 elections.

Since the first presidential election to take place under the new Constitution did not occur until 1996, observers at the time saw the 1993 Duma elections as potentially being a founding election for Russia's post-Soviet party system. The passage of time reveals that these elections did have something of a 'founding' effect, but only in a specific sense: parties that failed to clear the 5 per cent threshold in the Duma race proved unable ever afterward to make it into parliament. The only parties capable of breaking into the Duma for the first time after 1993 have been those with the unusually strong backing of incumbent state authorities. There were only two of these 'upstarts' in the parliament by 2009: United Russia and A Just Russia. At the same time, success in 1993 proved no guarantee of long-term success. In effect, subsequent Duma elections served as what might be called 'weeding elections', successively winnowing down the field until by 2009 only two veteran parties remained in the parliament: the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). The following paragraphs tell the story of the veteran parties, those first gaining traction in the founding elections of 1993. After that, we turn to the upstart parties. Readers are directed to Table 5.1 for summary information on Russia's most important parties from 1993 to 2009.

One-hit wonders

Among the eight parties to win official delegations ('factions') in the party-list Duma elections of 1993, four were never able to repeat the feat on their own: the Agrarian Party of Russia (APR), the Women of Russia bloc, the Democratic Party of Russia (DPR, an early breakaway from Democratic Russia), and the pro-Yeltsin Party of Russian Unity and Accord (PRES). All of them have since disappeared from Russia's political scene, though Kremlin supporters temporarily resurrected the APR and DPR 'brands' for various purposes. These purposes are said by some to include providing at least the superficial appearance of a 'democratic' candidate in the 2008 presidential election (where little-known DPR leader Andrei Bogdanov garnered about 1 per cent of the ballot) or dividing the leftist vote to weaken the Communists (as some say was the Agrarians' role in the 2007 Duma election). By late 2008 the APR had dissolved itself into United Russia and the DPR had merged with two other parties to found the pro-Kremlin 'Right Cause' party (more on this below).

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation

It is a common mistake to regard the CPRF as the direct continuation of the CPSU in Russia. In fact, Yeltsin banned the Russian branch of the CPSU in 1991 and confiscated its property. Even when the Constitutional Court effectively reinstated it at the end of November 1992, there was no longer any organisation in place to reclaim its mantle. Instead, there was a wide variety of small Communist organisations that were led by little-known former officials that had formed after the ban, all now competing for at least a share of the inheritance. Moreover, it was a decidedly non-communist idea (at least, according to Karl Marx) that enabled a little-known former CPSU official, Gennadii Zyuganov, to wind up as the heir. This idea was nationalism. During 1991 and 1992, he crafted a distinct ideology of nationalist socialism that helped cement a broad alliance of former communists and hardline non-communist Russian nationalists that proved able to mobilise tens of thousands in street protests. Such

Table 5.1 *Post-Soviet Russia's main parties*

Party	*Main leaders*	*Years in Duma*[1]	*Main policy stands*	*Attitude to Kremlin*	*% loyalists in population 2008*[2]	*Party status 2009*
United Russia[3]	Vladimir Putin, Boris Gryzlov	1999–	Anticommunism, presidentialism, moderate pro-Westernism	Pro-Kremlin	30	Duma supermajority, Prime Ministership
CPRF	Gennadii Zyuganov	1993 –	Socialism, nationalism	Anti-Kremlin	8	Duma minority
LDPR	Vladimir Zhirinovsky	1993 –	Nationalism, law and order	Loyal opposition	4	Duma minority
A Just Russia	Sergei Mironov	2003 –	Moderate leftism	Loyal opposition	2	Duma minority
Yabloko	Sergei Mitrokhin, Grigorii Yavlinsky	1993–2003	Democracy, social market, pro-Westernism	Anti-Kremlin	<2	Delegations in some regional legislatures
Right Cause[4]	Leonid Gozman, Georgii Bovt, Boris Titov, Anatolii Chubais	1993–5, 1999–2003	Liberal economy, pro-Westernism, democracy	Pro-Kremlin 1993–2007, anti-Kremlin 2007–8, pro-Kremlin 2008–9	<2	Delegations in some regional legislatures
OHR	Viktor Chernomyrdin	1995–9	Anti-communism, moderate pro-Westernism	Pro-Kremlin	–	Merged into UR
FAR	Yuri Luzhkov, Yevgenii Primakov	1999–2003[5]	Moderate leftism, moderate nationalism	Anti-Kremlin	–	Merged into UR

1 Official delegation earned in party-list competition. First year includes year of election.
2 According to Colton-Hale-McFaul survey conducted after the March 2008 presidential elections, using Colton's (2000) measure of 'transitional partisanship'.
3 Or its predecessor, Unity Bloc.
4 Or its predecessors Russia's Choice, Russia's Democratic Choice, and SPS.
5 Even after FAR merged with UR in 2002, the official FAR fraction remained registered until the next Duma was seated.

impressive displays of support, combined with fears that communism alone might not be potent enough to win many votes after the USSR's break-up, led key former CPSU leaders to hitch their wagons to Zyuganov's locomotive. This, then, was the origin of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which officially emerged in early 1993 after the Constitutional Court had ruled it would be legal. Once the CPRF gained a surprisingly high 12 per cent in the snap 1993 Duma election, the only leftist party to clear the 5 per cent barrier, it consolidated its position as the primary heir to the CPSU legacy and quickly reintegrated many of the CPSU networks that had fallen apart in 1991.

The party reached the pinnacle of its influence in 1996, when Zyuganov took Yeltsin to a second round in the presidential contest of that year and failed only after Yeltsin's allies resorted to media manipulation and other methods of machine politics to achieve their victory. The party also captured a large share of governorships and controlled many regional legislatures, especially in the 'red belt' of Russia's southwest. Then as now, the party was no longer calling for a return to full-blown communism, accepting a significant role for private enterprise and making democracy a central element of its platform. Rather ironically, the CPRF had actually become the primary source of political competition in Russia by the 2007–8 election cycle. Despite having its support nearly halved by a negative media campaign in 2003, it remained the only party with a large and independent following that had a hope of standing up to United Russia. While in the 1990s it drew significant financing from big business, which hoped to minimise its losses should the CPRF happen to win, by 2007–8 it had come to rely mostly on some modest state funding now allocated by law to large parties and on donations of time and money from its still-large pool of dedicated (if aging) members.

The divided liberals: Right Cause and Yabloko

Yeltsin's supporters repeatedly urged him to personally lead a party that could withstand the revival of the communists, but Yeltsin consistently refused, fearing that leading a party would alienate other voters and limit his room for political manoeuvre. That did not stop him from backing efforts by his key loyalists to build parties to support him, his market-oriented reforms, and his relatively pro-Western foreign policy orientation. In 1993 the new Russia's Choice party became the first 'party of power', led by Yeltsin's economic reform architect Yegor Gaidar and backed by the administrative resources of the Russian presidency. Initially expected to win a large majority in the glow of Yeltsin's 1993 victory over 'hardliners' in the shelled Congress, its party list netted a shockingly low 16 per cent due to dissatisfaction with the ongoing economic collapse and

Yeltsin's violent suppression of the parliament. Yeltsin effectively cut the party loose and it splintered, dropping out of the Duma altogether in 1995. It returned in 1999 by combining with a few fresher faces under the label Union of Right Forces (SPS) and by openly supporting the highly popular Putin for the presidency. The SPS ultimately flew too close to Putin's sun, however. Once Putin had adopted many of the market reforms the party had been pushing and the economy started actually to grow, it was the most clearly Putinite party, United Russia, that claimed and won the credit in voters' eyes. In 2007, the SPS sought to distinguish itself from United Russia by blasting Putin's authoritarian turn, but this rang hollow to many in light of its recent support for Putin and its backing of the not-very-democratic Yeltsin. After Kremlin-controlled media trained a blistering negative campaign on the SPS in late 2007, the party became widely seen as on the verge of collapse. Corporate conglomerates, which were often creations of Yeltsin-era privatisation and a key source of party financing, virtually halted donations for fear of drawing Kremlin ire upon their businesses. Hardly anyone by 2008 considered themselves an SPS loyalist. Thus few complained when the Kremlin made SPS an 'offer it could not refuse'. SPS accepted, shedding its most outspoken opposition-oriented leaders and merging with two other parties (Civic Force and the DPR) to form the pro-Kremlin Right Cause party in late 2008.

The Yabloko party followed a similar trajectory between 1993 and 2009, though clung to its independence. The party was founded by economist Grigorii Yavlinsky, who gained fame as a market reformer in the Yeltsin government just before the USSR's break-up. After Yeltsin abandoned Yavlinsky's reform plan for Gaidar's, Yavlinsky united pro-market, pro-Western, and pro-democracy politicians who thought that Yeltsin had actually undermined these ideals by his methods, with the 1990s economic collapse being important evidence. These stands and Yavlinsky's personal appeal to highly educated voters helped earn Yabloko (an acronym for the party's founders that literally means 'apple') representation in every Duma between 1993 and 2003, winning 5–8 per cent on each occasion. Its undoing was its complicated relationship with the oligarchs, the Kremlin, and the SPS. Opposing the Kremlin, it softened its critique to avoid banishment. Opposing the oligarchs, it had to take money from some of them (including Yukos chairman Mikhail Khodorkovsky) to finance a viable campaign. Opposing Yeltsin's reforms and hence the SPS, the SPS responded by simultaneously attacking it and calling Yabloko the main obstacle to integration of the 'democratic' camp in Russia. Khodorkovsky's dramatic arrest on the eve of the 2003 election not only exposed Yabloko's relationship to this controversial figure, but also eliminated its main source of funding. The party has not recovered and can claim only a handful of loyalists as of 2009.

The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) of Vladimir Zhirinovsky

Vladimir Zhirinovsky first burst onto the national political scene in June 1991, during presidential elections for the Russian Republic of the not-yet-disintegrated USSR. The fact that someone could win 8 per cent of the vote and come in third place with his radical nationalist rants, calls for territorial expansion, and authoritarian tirades shocked observers both inside and outside Russia. These observers found themselves even more shocked when Zhirinovsky's party, the famously misnamed Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, actually won the party-list Duma elections of 1993, scoring 23 per cent of the vote and humiliating the second-place Russia's Choice.

While the LDPR might seem to be an example of a party rising up independently of state resources due to a charismatic leader, some research suggests that the party (the first non-communist formation to officially register in the USSR) was actually the product of a KGB attempt to use Zhirinovsky to discredit the whole idea of democracy and electoral politics (Wilson 2005: 23–6). Remarkably, in the Duma itself, the LDPR frequently votes with the Russian government despite its seemingly radical opposition rhetoric, leading to widespread speculation that it gets financial help from the Kremlin along with the dues and corporate donations it publicly acknowledges. This has not prevented the party from winning roughly 10 per cent of the party-list vote in every Duma election after its 1993 victory except 1999, when it still got 6 per cent. Its organisation and brand are almost entirely centred on the personality of Zhirinovsky himself, whose over-the-top antics (from tossing a glassful of orange juice onto his reformist opponent during a televised debate to tugging on a female deputy's hair in parliament) are designed to entertain and grab attention more than to persuade. Disavowing both communism and liberalism in the process, he has proven consistently able to mobilise the support of both nationalists and people (especially poor males in small towns) who just want a way to register their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in Russia.

Party substitutes

The building blocks available to party-builders were also available to people who had no intention of actually building parties, but still wanted to influence political outcomes in Russia. Thus alongside the 1993-vintage parties there quickly appeared what might be called 'party substitutes' (Hale 2006). These were types of political organisations whose

bosses generally wanted to avoid the strings that would come attached to party membership (such as the need to adhere to an ideology or party rules that could limit one's room for manoeuvre), but who still wanted to get 'their people' elected to key state posts.

One key type of party substitute was the regional political machines run by powerful governors. Russia's reform process gave regional authorities a great deal of latitude to design their own provincial state institutions and to influence the way local firms were privatised, if they were privatised at all. Many of the original 'governors', as they are widely called, used this opportunity to make sure that their bureaucracies or their cronies gained ownership of former Soviet enterprises during the 1990s reforms. These governors also set up extensive licensing and inspection procedures for firms not owned by their close associates, and very often also established effective control over local police, courts, election commissions, and other state bodies. The result was a series of regional political machines that had great power to get candidates that it favoured elected, by hook or by crook. While such governors during the 1990s would frequently pay lip service to political parties supported by the Yeltsin administration in order to secure subsidies, the vast majority of them acted very independently, almost always running for office themselves as non-party candidates. To win an election in Russia in the latter half of the 1990s, in fact, a candidate was usually better off gaining the support of a regional political machine than a party, though parties did win many battles.

Another important sort of party substitute was a set of mega-rich and politically connected corporate conglomerates, led by figures popularly known as 'oligarchs' due to their influence on affairs of state. Corporations in virtually all countries engage in politics, usually by lobbying government or contributing to candidate campaigns. What made these politicised financial–industrial groups (PFIGs) special was that they often went straight to the electorate, recruiting their own candidates for office and supplying these candidates with their primary campaign organisation and resources. This was profitable for PFIGs because the candidate once elected could be counted upon to vote for the corporate interest when needed, and this was most reliable when the candidate was not beholden to any party that might impose other claims on his or her loyalty. Thus major Russian firms like Gazprom and the Alfa Group, not to mention corporate groups with less than national scope, also provided ways for ambitious politicians to win office without having to bother joining a party.

One might even interpret the Kremlin itself as being 'the ultimate party substitute' in Russia. Much like regional political machines could powerfully influence local politics, so could the Russian President and his administration have a major impact on national politics. In part, it could do so by putting pressure on regional political machines and PFIGs to support candidates backed by the president. For example, many PFIGs depended for their wealth on comfortable deals with the government, and the President also had a great deal of control over budgetary and non-budgetary financial flows that could be directed toward or away from particular regional political machines. Moreover, the Russian state continued to own or otherwise control the two most-watched television networks during the latter 1990s, which meant it could influence how campaigns were covered. This effect was greatest during presidential elections, when no individual PFIG or regional machine was big enough alone to guarantee a candidate's victory and when the Kremlin was likely to be most aggressive in mobilising its resources. Yeltsin's presidential victory as an independent over the CPRF's Zyuganov in 1996 was a pivotal moment in the development of the Kremlin as a party substitute. The Kremlin could also directly intervene in regional-level elections to significant effect, though it was often unsuccessful when working against the vital interests of the local political machine. What this has meant is that incumbent presidents generally do not need parties to win re-election and thus prefer to maintain maximum flexibility by remaining independent. No Russian president has ever sought to be an actual party member while in office.

One upshot of all of this is that Russia's parties failed to dominate the political system in the 1990s not so much because they were objectively 'weak', but because they in fact faced very strong competition from extremely powerful independents backed by regional political machines, PFIGs, and the Kremlin itself.

Parties originating in the Putin era: United Russia and A Just Russia

The most important party to appear in the Putin era, United Russia, might be thought of as a conglomeration of these party substitutes, increasingly tightly harnessed during the 2000s to Putin and the broad programme he has advocated. This 'administrative' path to party development is not as abnormal as one might think, even in democracies. American Senator Martin Van Buren founded the Democratic Party in the United States, for example, largely by cobbling together a coalition of state political machines and recruiting Andrew Jackson to lead it and win the presidency in 1828 (Aldrich 1995).

In Russia, events took a different twist. Its Van Buren was Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who recruited the highly popular former Prime

Minister Yevgenii Primakov and successfully organised many of Russia's strongest regional political machines and corporate representatives under the label Fatherland-All Russia (FAR) in August 1999. But Luzhkov, unlike the original Van Buren, lost his struggle to capture the presidency for his team and himself personally. The battle in 1999–2000 was all the same so hard fought and so close that it had the effect of terrifying Kremlin insiders who feared losing power.

One lesson Kremlin insiders learned is that they ultimately needed a party of their own in order to defeat challenges from coalitions of party substitutes like FAR. In 1999–2000, the party they needed was the Unity bloc, the precursor to United Russia that was formed less than three months before the December 1999 Duma election in a last-ditch effort to prevent what initially looked like a sure FAR victory. Contrary to a common perception, Unity was not initially created to be a true party of power. The first party of power, Russia's Choice, was seen as a failure, as was the second, the Our Home is Russia (OHR) party formed by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin after Yeltsin abandoned Russia's Choice. OHR won only 10 per cent of the vote in 1995 and lost almost all of its support after Chernomyrdin was sacked as prime minister in 1998. Kremlin insiders thus did not at the time expect a new party of power to have much chance of success, especially since Yeltsin was as unpopular as ever and the newly appointed Prime Minister Putin's ratings were still in single digits as of the late summer of 1999.

Instead, as the Kremlin official most directly responsible for overseeing the Unity project later admitted openly, Unity had only one purpose at its creation, an extraordinarily narrow purpose that was limited to a single election: to counter the campaign of FAR (Shabdurasulov 2008). It was mainly to be a diversion, a 'decoy party' designed to muddy the electoral waters, to make governors and oligarchs think twice before joining forces with FAR, and to provide an alternative framework in which governors left out of FAR (or leaving it) could publicly express this in return for Kremlin favours. While positioning itself as slightly to the right-of-centre ideologically, it mimicked FAR's emphasis on competence and pragmatism and included the well-respected Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu atop its party list. Its platform was strikingly similar to that of FAR, one of whose representatives called it the 'purest plagiarism' (*Segodnya*, 4 October 1999). The governors who nominally supported Unity tended to come from regions that were the least successful and most dependent on the central government, and even they generally delegated only mid-level associates to appear on its party list (Hale 2004a).

Imagine Unity's creators' surprise when the party not only cleared the 5 per cent hurdle, but also got far more votes than FAR and came within one percentage point of the first-place CPRF! The party's informal

Kremlin curator, Igor Shabdurasulov, could not contain his glee, calling Unity's performance a 'colossal breakthrough' and even a 'revolution' (*The Moscow Times*, 21 December 1999). Between its last-minute creation in early October and the December balloting, Putin's popularity had soared after decisively sending troops into the rebellious Chechnya republic in retaliation for a series of terrorist bombings in Moscow and other cities, and state-controlled television had outcompeted pro-FAR television and done severe damage to the reputations of Luzhkov and Primakov, tarred as corrupt and old. Both Luzhkov and Primakov then dropped out of the presidential race as it became obvious that Putin would win handily even in a completely fair contest.

Almost immediately after the December 1999 elections, state officials began encouraging the transformation of Unity from a one-off campaign tactic into a full-fledged party of power. A first step was to develop the party's formal organisation and reputation. This began with the formation of Unity's official Duma delegation, which soon joined forces with a large number of independent deputies (and even some from other parties) who had been elected in the Duma's districts contests. Interestingly, FAR's representatives, elected primarily as pragmatists who had planned on benefiting from a close association with those in power, were quick to do an about-face and join the new Unity-led coalition in the Duma. Indeed, Putin and his top Kremlin aides (especially deputy presidential administration chief Vladislav Surkov, emerging as the party's main strategist) were happy to extend this offer even to Luzhkov personally (who accepted) since FAR governors controlled some of the most powerful political machines in Russia. In early 2002, the merger between FAR and Unity was formally consummated under the new name of the United Russia Party, with Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov the new party leader.

As part of the same process, the Kremlin went about corralling Russia's party substitutes into the new party of power structure and reducing their ability and incentive to ever again organise a collective challenge to the incumbent authorities. Putin first stripped governors of most of their political autonomy through a variety of reforms (see Chapter 9), ultimately replacing gubernatorial elections with a system whereby the Russian president nominates a candidate who then must be confirmed by the local legislature, usually dominated by United Russia. Putin also moved decisively against oligarchs to end their days as more or less autonomous political actors. His prosecutors initially targeted two of the most prominent ones, Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky, effectively forcing them to leave the country and give up their influence over key television networks to corporate owners more tightly under Kremlin control. Even more important was the demonstrative arrest in October 2003 of Khodorkovsky, owner of the Yukos oil company and Russia's

richest man, who reportedly had designs on the presidency himself and had been launching a large hidden slate of Yukos candidates to run as independents in the 2003 Duma election. That arrest capped a major campaign to co-ordinate the political activities of both big businesses and regional political machines, directing their efforts to support United Russia candidates rather than to act as party substitutes.

Putin and his supporters also made a series of changes in law that have given United Russia a tremendous advantage over its rivals. Only organisations that are officially categorised and registered as national 'political parties' are allowed to nominate candidates in Duma and party-list regional legislative elections. A special registration agency inspects whether parties meet myriad requirements, from having (as of early 2009) at least 50,000 members spread out fairly evenly across Russia's regions to having approved a party charter according to very specific organisational procedures. The membership requirement is particularly onerous, since unlike in many Western countries, joining a party requires people to fill out an application and be formally accepted by party organs. The authorities can then verify whether people are 'really' members according to the formal requirements of the law. Campaigning also takes place according to a highly specific set of guidelines. All this, if one considers Russia's problems with the rule of law, makes opposition parties vulnerable to selective prosecution. United Russia, of course, has had no trouble with this, and by May 2008 it had already registered over 2 million members (*Polit.ru*, 27 May 2008).

Other rules are explicitly intended to weed out smaller parties. Parties can no longer run together in coalitions for the Duma, and instead must appear separately on the ballot or not at all, and parties receive state funding in proportion to their election performance. The length of time that televised election campaigning is permissible is quite limited, less than a month for parliamentary elections, which tends to benefit parties that are already in government because their activities are covered by media as 'news'. This also aids parties whose backers control the mass media, which tend to give highly positive coverage to United Russia and its supporters.

Putin has also adopted several institutional changes that have helped United Russia, including replacing the mixed system of Duma elections with a party-list-only system (which increased the power of central party authorities relative to regional ones and eliminated the opportunity for party substitutes to compete directly in elections) and raising the threshold for winning seats in that competition from 5 per cent to 7 per cent as from the 2007 election. The Kremlin also pushed through a measure that reserved a significant portion of regional legislative seats for national parties, which now compete for these mandates in party-list

competitions. The latter reform has led to United Russia's dominance in most regional legislatures.

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss United Russia as being solely an administrative product that represents no ideas and has no genuine popular support. Independent surveys show that as many as 26 per cent of the population could be considered loyal to the party in 2004 and that this figure had grown to 30 per cent in 2008. Thus while there is strong evidence of at least some ballot box fraud – for example, an improbably high number of precincts reporting turnout figures corresponding to round numbers in 2007 – this is not the main story of its rise (RFE/RL *Newsline*, 29 February 2008). Its popularity derives first and foremost from its close association with Vladimir Putin. The Unity and then United Russia fractions in the Duma have always characterised themselves as wholly supportive of Putin's agenda, and this was clearly a winning strategy since Putin retained 60 to 80 per cent approval ratings throughout his eight years in the presidency. Survey results also provide strong evidence that Russian citizens tend to credit United Russia (as well as Putin) for improvements in the economy. But the party does also stand out in voter minds for certain kinds of positions on important issues. It has been associated with a market economic orientation, opposition to communism, a moderately pro-Western foreign policy, and a tough stance on rebellious minority regions like Chechnya. Voters who support such positions, the survey evidence suggests (Hale 2008), have been significantly more likely to vote for United Russia than for other parties. It remains to be determined exactly how much of United Russia's success has been due to the coercive power of Russian authorities and how much has been due to the same kinds of things that make parties popular everywhere, including association with a successful leader, a growing economy, and widely supported policy positions. While Russia's shift to a more authoritarian system in the 2000s has clearly worked to United Russia's advantage, one could also argue that people would not have tolerated this authoritarian shift had there not been genuine popular support for Putin and his favourite party.

The Kremlin has also helped ensure United Russia's rise by manipulating the set of available alternatives. Partly, this has been through pressuring or spreading damaging information about the party's true opposition. One example is the negative state-controlled news reporting that portrayed the CPRF as hypocritical for accepting money from several 'dollar millionaires' during the 2003 Duma campaign. The authorities have also used less conventional means, including the support of what Andrew Wilson (2005) has called 'virtual parties', which the Kremlin intends to play the role of a 'loyal opposition' that will take votes from real opposition parties while not actually acting against the interests of

the incumbent administration. Some virtual parties formally bear the brands of older real parties, such as the aforementioned Democratic Party of Russia. Others were actually created as virtual parties under Yeltsin, such as (reputedly) the Pensioners' Party, which first ran for the Duma in 1999 and is thought to have targeted the CPRF's base of elderly loyalists. As hinted above, the LDPR may in fact be Russia's oldest virtual party.

The most prominent virtual party appearing in the Putin era is A Just Russia, currently one of the four parties in the Duma. It has its roots in the Motherland bloc that was formed in 2003 through an alliance between the Kremlin and disgruntled CPRF allies who hoped to use the authorities' support for their own political gain at the Communists' expense. At the same time state media was depicting the CPRF as losing touch with true socialist values by accepting corporate money, as described above, these same media broadcast relatively positive portrayals of Motherland as a truer heir to communist ideals. Thus not only were CPRF voters given reason to doubt their old party, they were given an alternative that did contain some credible leaders, including the popular leftist economist Sergei Glaz'ev and the nationalist Duma deputy Dmitri Rogozin. The results were dramatic: during the final week of the campaign, the CPRF's ratings plummeted and Motherland's soared, surprising even its Kremlin supporters by reaching 9 per cent of the Duma vote. Once in the Duma, both Rogozin and Glaz'ev proved less than loyal to the Kremlin and were pushed out of Motherland's leadership. The new leaders then merged the party with the Pensioners' Party and a minor party founded by a close Putin associate, Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov. Mironov, not known for either leftist or nationalist views, then assumed the leadership of the new 'A Just Russia' party and tallied 8 per cent of the officially counted votes in the 2007 Duma election. Some speculate that it is part of a Kremlin plan to eventually engineer a two-party system in Russia, with A Just Russia potentially waiting in the wings to capture leftist votes should United Russia's popularity decline.

Of course, the true opposition's difficulties should not all be blamed on Kremlin manipulation. Some of their woes are surely due to the fact that, throughout Putin's presidency, the economy was improving and the incumbent president popular. Such trends normally weaken opposition parties even without repression (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). Russia's opposition parties have also made some serious strategic mistakes, as when Yabloko and the SPS seemed to spend more effort attacking each other than Putin in the 2003 Duma campaign in bids to become Russia's dominant liberal party (Hale 2004b). This made it much easier for United Russia to win away some of their liberal voters on the strength of market reforms under Putin.

All this made possible another United Russia step toward dominance in 2007–8: for the first time it began to play an official role in presidential politics. Initially, outgoing President Putin agreed to head the party's list in the 2007 Duma campaign, an unprecedented move in Russian politics, ensuring that it won a huge majority of over two-thirds of the seats. Putin declined his Duma seat after the election. Second, Putin's anointed successor, First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev, then ran for president as a party nominee, something neither Putin nor Yeltsin had ever done. Third, immediately after Medvedev succeeded Putin in office, Putin acceded to the post of United Russia chairman as well as Prime Minister. But despite all these moves, neither Putin nor Medvedev has yet proven willing to fully affiliate themselves with and thus fully lend their authority to United Russia by becoming members. They may yet do so, but their hesitancy indicates both that United Russia is not yet close to having the status of the old CPSU and that Kremlin insiders themselves see risks to their own power in taking this final step. They want, it appears, to make sure that the party remains an instrument of their personal leadership rather than an institution with its own interests and authority that could one day part ways with theirs.

Conclusion

Russia has come a long way in forming a party system since the USSR disintegrated in 1991, but its development was not what observers initially expected. While a set of parties did emerge and grow during the 1990s based largely on political resources and reputation gained through connections to the state, their growth was stunted as Yeltsin-style privatisation and overly strong executive authority led to the rise of party substitutes that often managed to outcompete parties for both candidates and votes. After Kremlin authorities nearly lost power to the Fatherland-All Russia coalition of party substitutes in 1999–2000, the newly elected President Putin began to transform Russia's party system by both reducing the power of party substitutes and organising them around one increasingly dominant party, United Russia. As these efforts were all linked with a growing economy and a popular president, and as state-controlled television could ensure that voters made this link, United Russia reached a point of near-dominance in the political system.

At the same time, Putin and his successor as president, Dmitri Medvedev, have remained reluctant to tie their personal authority too closely to any party (even United Russia) since their mighty Kremlin power base has given them great room for political manoeuvre that they have worried a strong party might limit. Thus Russia's political system is

not yet fully a party system, even a fully 'dominant party system'. There is even speculation that the authorities are trying to engineer a two-party system, pairing United Russia with a 'very loyal opposition' like A Just Russia. Russia's party system thus remains in flux and could take on quite different directions in the years ahead.

Chapter 6

Russian Society and the State

ALFRED B. EVANS, JR

There is general agreement that in the history of Russia, from Tsarist times through the Soviet period to the present, the state usually has been the dominant partner in its relationship with society. Nevertheless, the Russian people have never failed to exhibit an impressive capacity for resourcefulness and adaptation. Thus Western scholars often have wondered whether the growth of a civil society might be detected in Russia. In the West the dominant conception of civil society refers to the sphere of organisations that are formed primarily by the independent initiative of citizens who devote their efforts to co-operative endeavours aimed at achieving common goals. Civil society is seen as distinct from the state, which exercises authority, and businesses, which seek to make profits. Civil society also may be seen as an intermediate level of social organisation that operates between families and the state. Most Western scholars believe that a vigorous civil society exercises a positive influence in a number of ways, by providing means for citizens to solve pressing problems, representing the interests of social groups in the political arena, and potentially restraining the state from the abuse of citizens' rights and interests.

It is the consensus of both Russian and Western historians that during the last several decades of existence of the Tsarist regime the number of voluntary associations in Russia was growing steadily and that those organisations provided a wide range of services. Mary Schaeffer Conroy (2006: 24) argues: 'Though the tsarist state was far from democratic, it allowed space for many independent initiatives by citizens, and in many cases even encouraged nonstate organisations as a means of gaining assistance in serving national interests.' She concludes that by the early decades of the twentieth century civil society was burgeoning in Russia. If that trend had continued it might eventually have led to a revision of the image of dual Russia. The Bolshevik revolution brought a fundamental change that ruled out that possibility, however. Though in the aftermath of that revolution there was a burst of social energy resulting in the creation of many new clubs and societies, it is apparent that the main

tendency within the Communist leadership sought the replacement of existing social associations with a network of new organisations that would be controlled by the ruling Communist Party (Il'ina 2000; Evans 2006). By the middle of the 1930s that vision had been translated into reality. In the Soviet system all legally sanctioned *obshchestvennye* ('social' or 'public') organisations primarily carried out the function of assisting the political regime in attempting to achieve its goals, though each of those organisations also delivered some services to its members. The widespread awareness that the meetings and elections of an organisation were managed in detail by Communist Party officials presumably reinforced the sense of powerlessness in relation to political authority that was inherent in the image of dual Russia.

Civil society in post-communist Russia

Though there was a slight loosening of control of most social organisations in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin years and the authorities tacitly tolerated the growth of some unofficial groups of citizens, the essential character of the relationship between the political regime and social associations did not change until Mikhail Gorbachev became the head of the Communist Party in 1985. Soon it became apparent that his programme for the radical restructuring (*perestroika*) of the Soviet system permitted 'informal' groups to form openly without being incorporated into the network of organisations controlled by the Communist Party. A wide variety of such groups sprang up rapidly in the period of *perestroika*, so that as many as 60,000 were said to exist by 1989. The proliferation of the 'informal' groups was associated with a radical increase in the frankness of discussion of political issues that could not have been mentioned in public a few years earlier. Those changes implied a shift in the relationship between the state and society of such fundamental significance that the most optimistic Western scholars predicted that a full-blown civil society would soon flourish in the Soviet Union.

In reality, however, the boom of social organisations in the Russian republic of the USSR in the late 1980s was followed by a period of many difficulties for such groups in the Russian Federation in the 1990s (Evans 2002). It was true that many organisations still survived at the end of that decade, and they benefited from the end of Communist Party rule and the increase in pluralism in the mass media. Nevertheless, associations formed by citizens were in a marginal position in Russian society by the end of the 1990s in terms of their base of support, their political influence, and their capacity to address social problems and fulfil citizens' needs. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Russia suffered from a series of handicaps. First, the cultural legacy of the Soviet system included a low level of confidence in social organisations, and more broadly a pervasive distrust of the public sphere as a realm where self-seeking, amoral behaviour is to be expected. The collapse of the hopes for political reforms that had been aroused by Gorbachev intensified alienation from public activism. Second, the deep decline in the Russian economy in the 1990s forced most citizens to concentrate on a struggle for survival, making participation in civic or charitable groups seem to be a luxury that few could afford. Also, with most Russians in poverty or on the edge of it, the prospects for gathering substantial sums of money in the form of contributions were very poor for most NGOs. Third, the high degree of concentration of power in the hands of the main executive leader on each level in the political system created an incentive for cultivating relationships with key officials rather than building a broad base of membership support. As Fish (2001b: 22) puts it, such a concentration and personalisation of power 'tends to encourage the formation of small, closed, compact societal organisations that are adept at applying pressure on and currying favor with individuals in ministries and other executive-branch officials'. During the 1990s social organisations could form with relative freedom, but encountered conditions that discouraged them from seeking to expand their membership, raise funds from many potential contributors, recruit large numbers of volunteers to work in their projects, or draw widespread public attention to their goals and activities.

Vladimir Putin and civil society in Russia

Thus when Vladimir Putin took office as president of Russia in 2000 he was aware that civil society in Russia was relatively weak, as his statements confirmed. He has repeatedly emphasised the importance of civil society for the development of Russia into one of the great powers of the world, and this author agrees with the assessment by James Richter (2009) that Putin's statements in support of civil society 'are not mere posturing'. Richter notes that Putin's viewpoint does 'recognise a fairly large private sphere', where citizens should have space 'to pursue individual profits and interests without state interference, particularly in comparison with the extremely small private sphere recognised by the Soviet regime'. But for Putin civil society is in the public sphere, assumed to be narrower than the public realm as conceived by the Soviet Communists, but a space in which all who enter should subordinate their 'private interests to the collective interest of the nation as a whole, as embodied in the interests of the state'. In relation to the public realm Putin is extremely suspicious of disagreements over ideology or interests that

would fragment the unity of the nation, so he has expressed a strong desire for a consensus on goals in Russian society. Though Putin counsels that a healthy civil society is needed to protect the state from stagnation, he believes that a strong state is a prerequisite for a healthy civil society (Evans 2008a: 19). He sees the relationship between the state and civil society not as one that is primarily adversarial (as many in the West would assume) but as a partnership in which social organisations work with the state in addressing social problems and providing needed services. In the view of Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev the institutions of civil society should also furnish channels of feedback to the state, giving information about the effectiveness of policies and offering criticism when the performance of bureaucratic officials is unsatisfactory.

Though Putin's general intentions for Russian society were probably clear by the time that he came to power, only after the beginning of his second term as president in 2004 did the regime turn its energies toward the proper structuring of civil society. Putin and his associates (including Vladislav Surkov, who then was a deputy head of the presidential administration) assumed that civil society in their country was weak and the state would have to take the initiative in strengthening it. Their plans for imparting more energy to the organisations within civil society also entailed efforts to integrate non-governmental organisations into the system of comprehensive support of the executive leadership of the state. On the one hand, the political regime directed the creation of a number of groups that were informally labelled 'government-organised non-governmental organisations', or GONGOs, and began to distribute grants to social organisations on a rapidly increasing scale. On the other hand, the regime tightened the legal requirements pertaining to social organisations. A bill bringing changes in the laws regulating NGOs was introduced in the Duma in November 2005 and was signed into law by Putin in January 2006 after it had been approved by both houses of the Federal Assembly.

Observers have disagreed sharply about the implications of that legislation, and its full consequences are not yet clear. There is no doubt that it requires NGOs that wish to be registered officially to spend much more time filling out forms (including annual reports), and even members of United Russia in the Duma have admitted that the legislation's requirements for registration and reporting should be eased significantly. One section of the current law also makes it possible for officials to ban any organisation that threatens 'Russia's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, national unity and originality, cultural heritage, and national interests', which potentially leaves wide discretion to the federal registration officials to decide on the life or death of any formally organised group. Apparently very few NGOs have actually been put out of business under that provision. The authorities contend that the organisations that have found it impossible to satisfy the requirements for renewing their registration (or have not attempted to do so, which appears to have been more common) largely consisted of those that had been inactive for some time and existed only on paper. Rather than using administrative means of closing a large number of contentious organisations, the main thrust of the political regime has been to marginalise such groups by making it more difficult for them to obtain funding or gain access to the mass media and decision makers. The leadership seems to assume that organisations that have few resources and little influence can for the most part be safely ignored, and will probably wither away in the long run. So the state's intervention is intended to stimulate greater vigour in the organisations in civil society in Russia and at the same time to ensure that organisations operate within the boundaries of a consensus of values.

The Public Chamber

In recent years Russia's political leadership also has created new institutions that are closely connected with the state but are officially considered as part of civil society. The most prominent of those is the Public or Social Chamber (*Obshchestvennaya Palata*) of the Russian Federation. In September 2004 Vladimir Putin proposed the creation of that body 'as a platform for extensive dialogue, where citizens' initiatives could be presented and discussed in detail' (Evans 2006: 151). The bill on the Public Chamber was approved by both houses of the parliament and was signed by the president in April 2005. Putin appointed the first third of the members of the chamber, who then selected an equal number; together those two groups chose the remaining third, with each member serving a term of two years. None of the members can be government officials or officers in political parties. The members of the Public Chamber, for which the selection process has now worked its way twice (in 2005 and 2007), are a strikingly varied collection of individuals, drawn from many different fields of endeavour, including business, science, art and culture, sports, and social services. Some of the members were widely known before they were selected for the chamber.

Putin's original conception of the Public Chamber emphasised the value of the expertise that its members would possess and envisioned it as evaluating proposed legislation and providing feedback to administrative agencies. Before the institution began to function some critics derided it as 'an attempt to create a dummy of civil society' or predicted that it would be 'the Kremlin's puppet theatre', sure to be completely lacking in independence from the top power holders. It must still be said that the Public Chamber is a work in progress and its character has not been fully

formed. Yet even before it began to function it displayed a willingness to take on some state officials while serving as an advocate for the rights of various individuals and groups. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, proposed changes in legislation concerning the regulation of NGOs had been introduced into the Duma in November 2005. By early December all of those who by that time had been selected for the Public Chamber joined in appealing to the parliament to postpone voting on that bill until the chamber had begun to function and could give its evaluation of the proposed legislation. That request was ignored, and the bill was signed into law on January. When the Public Chamber met for its first session, in Georgievsky Hall in the Kremlin with Putin present, one of its members openly complained that the adoption of the legislation on NGOs without consultation of the chamber had been 'a gross political error' on the part of the Duma.

Almost immediately after that session the Public Chamber was plunged into the highly publicised controversy over the case of Private Andrei Sychev, a draftee in the army who had been subjected to extreme brutality by senior enlisted men in the Chelyabinsk Tank School at the end of December 2005, resulting in gangrene that forced doctors to amputate his legs and genitalia. The Public Chamber dispatched three of its members, headed by Anatolii Kucherena, a lawyer who headed a commission of the chamber, to investigate that tragic incident. Subsequently Kucherena's commission created a working group on the problem of extreme hazing of recruits in the military, which included representatives of the Public Chamber, the Duma, the Ministry of Defence, the president's council on human rights, and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. In June Kucherena and another member of the Public Chamber (Nikolai Svanidze, a well-known television broadcaster) played a conspicuous role in advocating protection for the rights of residents of South Butovo, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Moscow, who were to be moved forcibly from their homes to clear the way for the construction of a large apartment complex. In the first few months after it was formed, the Public Chamber proved to be bolder than some people had expected in criticising problems created by government officials. The members of the chamber have not confronted the Kremlin leadership, however, which is not surprising, since the body derives its status from the authority of the Russian President.

In Putin's vision the Public Chamber would serve as the capstone institution of civil society in Russia, and also would present a model for the organisation and functioning of the whole society (Richter 2009). Thus the actions of the chamber not only show what criticism of government officials is acceptable, but also implicitly signal the limits of permitted conflict. The Public Chamber has assisted in the creation of public

chambers in the regions of Russia and has seen the introduction of public councils (*obshchestvennye sovety*) that are supposed to advise the ministries in the national government. So far little is known about the operation of those organs. It is likely, however, that they will emulate the national Public Chamber, whose head, the renowned physicist Yevgenii Velikhov, has stressed the importance of co-operation with the state: 'The motto of the chamber's work should be, not confrontation of the authorities but active work with them, in order to make Russian citizens more interested in the country's destiny' (Evans 2008b: 347–48). The national chamber now offers advice in virtually every area of policy making, but some of its members have complained that the committees of the Federal Assembly do not pay much attention to that advice. The Public Chamber has no legislative or executive authority, and its impact on the shaping of major policies appears to have been marginal so far, but the members of the chamber do enjoy a degree of access to decision makers and the mass media that they would not have if they were not part of that chamber. The role of the Public Chamber is fundamentally similar to that of the office of the state's ombudsman for human rights (Vladimir Lukin) and the President's Commission on Human Rights and the Development of Civil Society (until recently headed by Ella Pamfilova), in the sense that the ombudsman and the members of that commission were chosen by officers of the state, but are supposed to represent society in its dealings with the state. On occasion Lukin and Pamfilova have been aligned with the Public Chamber and some independent-minded NGOs in directing criticism toward aspects of legislation or actions of state officials.

Types of non-governmental organisations in contemporary Russia

As we have noted, by the end of the 1990s most organisations in civil society in Russia were marginal in terms of their base of support, their influence on those in authority, and their impact on society. The NGOs that were most independent of the state and most attuned to the Western notion of civil society consisted, as Richter (2009) has put it, of 'a relatively small network of small, often professional advocacy organisations that usually received some support from outside assistance agencies'. Funding from Western governments and foundations was directed primarily to those Russian organisations that engaged in activities that seemed appropriate to those who provided the funding. Groups emphasising human rights issues, women's rights, and environmental protection were among those receiving the most outside funding. While contacts with like-minded Western activists and money from Western sources did

raise the level of professionalism of the leaders of a few Russian NGOs, it has been well documented that organisations that relied primarily on financial support from the West tended not to build a domestic base of support by focusing on issues that could be presented within a framework compatible with the values of the majority of the local population (Sperling 1999; Henderson 2003). The leaders of such organisations typically became well integrated into international support networks but were isolated from the potential support groups in their own society.

A far larger segment of society in post-communist Russia, in terms of the scale of membership, consists of social organisations that have survived from the Soviet period. We should recall that in the Soviet system, while such organisations did perform some services for their members, they also were subject to control by the Communist Party and the state, and existed primarily to help realise the goals of the political regime. Some of those organisations disappeared with the end of Communist patronage, while others survived after the downfall of the old regime, in some cases adopting new names. Scholarly researchers have devoted little attention to such organisations, with some notable exceptions (particularly the labour unions, which have been the subject of a number of scholarly writings). Since the Russian people were well aware of the lack of independence of those organisations during earlier decades, we have reason to suppose that most of them are not highly respected.

Yet if the officers of an organisation work diligently to carry out tasks that are helpful to its members in everyday life (as anecdotal information about some groups suggests), the organisation might be regarded as important to those who depend on its services. The funding for such organisations was reduced dramatically after the abandonment of the Soviet system, but assistance from one level of government (national, regional, or local) was necessary for their continued existence. Since the early 1990s most of those organisations have received meagre funding from government, but many of them have been allowed to use government-owned office space and equipment, giving them a crucial advantage over other organisations that do not receive such support. It is widely reported that the organisations that depend on the state for support that is essential for their existence accept the necessity of a fundamentally co-operative relationship with government officials, particularly seeking the favour of the chief executive at their own level. In recent years the national government has discouraged NGOs in Russia from seeking financial assistance from abroad if any political goals might be involved, while the state has awarded grants to Russian social organisations on an increasing scale.

Business organisations

The relationship between business and the state that developed in Russia during the 1990s was quite different from that between government and the holdover social organisations. The circumstances of the massive privatisation of formerly state-owned enterprises under the Yeltsin leadership made it possible for some people who were very skilful in using good connections and seizing opportunities to accumulate large amounts of wealth with startling rapidity. By the middle of the decade observers referred to the richest men as the 'oligarchs', and some scholars spoke of the 'capture' of the Russian state by the titans of business. Those tycoons became a key source of support for Boris Yeltsin, and they were rewarded with great influence over economic policy. It has been alleged by some who served in high offices in the Yeltsin administration that some oligarchs even controlled appointments to positions at the level of ministers and deputy ministers (Stack 2008). Because of the weakness of the state and political parties, 'power shifted from formal political institutions to informal networks of influence among individuals who had political connections or economic resources at their disposal' (Rutland 2006: 76). Personal ties and insider dealing by powerful individuals overshadowed the feeble efforts of organised interests representing large groups of people. Though the oligarchs were riding high in the 1990s, they left themselves potentially vulnerable by failing to unify in a strong organisation dedicated to the collective goals of the large businesses. 'They devoted most of their energies to competing with one another for favours from the state and rarely worked together to protect or advance their common interests, or even to discuss what those common interests might be' (Rutland 2006: 79). After he came to power Vladimir Putin moved deftly to take advantage of that vulnerability, and the treatment of Gusinsky, Berezovsky, and Khodorkovsky showed that, by 2004, the relationship between the state and the oligarchs had changed.

Under Putin the national political leadership encouraged the growth of more formal, institutionalised means of representing the interests of business owners. Andrei Yakovlev (2006: 1043) has reported that after 2000 the federal authorities decreased the emphasis on 'direct informal contacts with business tycoons' and 'started to build a system of "collective representation" of all strata of business'. In a study of business associations (BAs) in Russia, Stanislav Markus (2007: 287) concludes, 'the evidence thus indicates successful interest aggregation within formal BAs as well as the ongoing formalization of the state–business dialogue in which BAs (as compared with individuals or single firms) come to play an increasingly important role'. There is a large number of business associations in Russia, and according to one well-informed Russian source interviewed by

William Pyle (2006: 498), as many as 5,000 may be officially registered. Membership in those associations has increased substantially since 2000 (ibid.: 503). Perhaps the most prestigious of those groups is the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP), with about 130 members (Obshchestvennaya Palata 2007: 51), consisting of the largest companies in the country. After Putin established limits on the political power of the oligarchs, those who remained in business joined the RSPP and shared in its efforts to influence issues of economic policy. Delovaya Rossiya (Business Russia) is the main organisation of large companies outside the sphere of oligarchic capital, claiming around 1,200 members, with 72 regional divisions and 38 branches in various sectors of the economy. OPORA of Russia has enlisted small and medium-sized businesses in its ranks, and says that it has over 330,000 members in 78 regions of Russia. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TPP) has 155 regional and municipal centres and 14 foreign offices, which represent 20,000 companies and associations. Markus (2007: 287) reports that 'the Chamber assumed a much greater lobbying role after Yeltsin's departure', assisted by the leadership of Yevgenii Primakov (a former foreign minister and prime minister) since December 2001. We should emphasise that policymakers at the highest level *invited* business owners to strengthen their organised representation and to engage in regular consultation with the top leadership in order to decrease the autonomy of the state bureaucracy and overcome resistance to the implementation of reforms (Markus 2007: 292–4).

The increase in the importance of business associations, enhancing formal, collective means of representation of business interests, must be considered one of the most important trends in Russian society of the last several years. Of course, the rise of more formal, institutionalised means of lobbying has not prevented individual business owners from continuing to rely on informal means of lobbying government officials to seek benefits for their companies. It is likely that business actors choose various combinations of strategies to try to get what they want from government, and that many use both personal connections and collective representation to serve their interests. Also, there are multiple levels of political authority in Russia, and with tighter constraints on the manipulation of officials in the national government under Putin, many companies have concentrated on exercising influence over regional and local governments that have a direct impact on their operations (Yakovlev 2006: 1052–3). It is often more feasible for a company to gain useful access at a lower level of government, and a large company may build a close alliance with a regional leader. At the national level, however, the Yukos case gave a clear signal that the type of influence the oligarchs had possessed in the 1990s had been ruled out. Since the 1990s, in the words of William Pyle (2006: 520) 'business associations have become economic actors of consequence in post-communist Russia', and according to Pyle those associations usually lobby for policies that are designed to facilitate the more effective working of market mechanisms.

Labour unions

Labour unions in Russia have not shown the same upsurge in energy that has infused business associations in the current decade, which is troubling in light of the fact that the union movement played a major part in the growth of civil society and democracy in Western countries. In the Soviet Union almost all employed persons belonged to unions, and all union organisations belonged to a single federation that was called the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's component of the VTsSPS was renamed as the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), with most of the officers of the old federation remaining in their leadership positions. The FNPR inherited impressive resources from the old order, which in fact have provided the main basis of its survival. After the dismantling of the Soviet system the FNPR owned property worth billions of dollars, which supplied most of its income (Davis 2006: 202). That property gave the union federation an incentive to avoid being confrontational toward the state, especially in the conditions of insecurity created by the privatisation of industry. The wealth inherited by the union federation and the perquisites for its officers that carried over from the old system also made it unnecessary for its leaders to be greatly concerned with winning support from workers. Initially after the end of the old order, membership in a union was virtually automatic for all workers in most enterprises. As a result, in 1992 the FNPR claimed to have 66 million members, or 92 per cent of the work force (Davis 2006: 203), though those numbers have declined since that time. Surveys have consistently indicated that labour unions are among the least trusted institutions in Russia and that most workers have little confidence in the capacity of their union to represent them if their interests are threatened.

A number of independent unions were formed during the late Soviet period and soon after, and some of them are more likely to push management for concessions, but only about 1 per cent of the labour force belongs to those unions. On the whole unions have had little influence on determining wages in industrial firms, or even on the suspension of wages that was common in many sectors of the economy during the 1990s (Crowley 2002: 241). The incidence of strikes has been low in Russia in the post-communist period in comparison with levels in West European countries. When a local union does carry out a strike or a protest, it

usually does so on behalf of demands that are endorsed by both managers and employees, consistent with the FNPR's strategy of focusing its branches' efforts 'not on battling employers for improved work conditions, but on appealing in tandem with employers to the state for greater concessions and side payments to their industry and enterprise' (Crowley 2002: 235). The strikes and protests that erupted spontaneously during the late 1980s and the 1990s, such as those carried out by coal miners, were opposed by the traditional unions, and should be remembered mainly as setting an example that has been followed by other protestors in recent years.

On the whole labour unions are among the weakest social organisations in contemporary Russia. The FNPR in particular has paid a price for placing primary emphasis on ensuring the survival of its organisational structures and material assets, and continuing to act 'as if it were an administrative and managerial entity instead of a representative of the workers' (Davis 2006: 203). Recently, however, some journalists have reported an increase in strikes in Russia, apparently signalling bolder demands from the workers in some enterprises. It remains to be seen whether that trend is a reaction to economic expansion, in which some firms have become more prosperous, easing the fear that they might close down and leave all their employees without jobs. Foreign-owned firms seem to have been the target of more aggressive demands and a disproportionate number of strikes (Bush 2007: 35). It is possible that Russian unions may not prove impervious to change in the future, but it is too early to speculate on the possible character of their adaptation in the years to come.

Women's organisations

Women's organisations in Russia have not experienced such a rapid expansion in membership and growth in influence in the post-communist years; most of them have not been able to move beyond the margin of the society, even though their potential constituents are a majority in that society. The background to the attitudes that create obstacles for efforts to defend the rights of women in Russia must be found in the history of the Soviet system. The Bolsheviks promised that women would achieve equality if they subordinated their distinctive goals to the struggle for the victory of socialism. When the Soviet state brought socialism into being the Communist Party told the people of the USSR that women had achieved equality with men. Despite undeniable gains for women in terms of education and mobilisation in the paid labour force, 'equality' as defined by the Communists was not completely satisfactory for women (partly because it preserved aspects of inequality), so an appeal to that

term has negative connotations for most women in Russia today. The cataclysmic changes in the economy of Russia in the 1990s added to the stress on most women, because they were more likely than men to be unemployed and women disproportionately felt the impact of cutbacks in social services by the state and privatised enterprises. In the new circumstances in the economy there was widespread discrimination against women in hiring and blatant sexual harassment in places of work. Job advertisements by employers frequently listed the sex, age, and even physical description of preferred candidates, and women who themselves advertised that they were seeking work sometimes found it necessary to specify that they wanted jobs 'without intimate relations' (McIntosh Sundstrom 2006a: 86).

A few highly educated women in Russia had become familiar with Western feminist writings during the 1960s and 1970s, and by the late 1980s independent women's organisations were forming and developing contacts with Western women's rights activists. During the 1990s Western governments and foundations provided grant funding to some Russian women's organisations. While that financial support enhanced the professional skills of the leaders of the organisations that received such funding and integrated them into transnational networks of activists, it did not lead them to expand their base of support among Russian women. The organisations that received grants from Western sources characteristically couched their rhetoric in terms that appealed to those who approved the grants but failed to evoke a positive response from the women they claimed to represent. In other words, the gulf between a few women's organisations and the majority of Russian women widened. A basic problem that such organisations face is that, because of the prevailing disillusionment with the promise of equality that had been made by the Soviet regime, 'Russian women tend to view feminist organisations as espousing an alien Western ideology unsuited to their conditions' (McIntosh Sundstrom 2006a: 90). Efforts to define employment discrimination and sexual harassment as violations of the principle of equality for all people, regardless of their sex, have not met with a positive response from most women in post-communist Russia. Rather than looking to women's organisations to improve the conditions of their work and life, in recent years most women in Russia have pursued individual strategies to try to achieve personal advancement or at least economic survival.

Scholarly research has found that two types of organisations formed by women have been successful in gaining substantial support from the public. The committees of soldiers' mothers have grown from one group that met in Moscow in 1989 to a network of hundreds of committees that have taken shape in almost all regions of Russia. Public opinion polls have

shown that most Russians know about the soldiers' rights organisations and have a positive view of their activities (McIntosh Sundstrom 2006a: 70). Activists of those organisations have appeared frequently on television and generally have received favourable coverage. Those NGOs have achieved some victories in their attempts to influence government policies, though they have not been successful in persuading the state to eliminate conscription and institute an all-volunteer army. Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom has argued persuasively (2006a: 73) that the soldiers' mothers have gained broad popular support because they appeal to the norm against physical harm to individuals, which has particular resonance in Russia with respect to those inducted in the military, since it is widely known that the hazing of junior recruits (*dedovshchina*) sometimes assumes extreme forms and is thought to have caused the deaths of thousands of soldiers. The activity of the committees of soldiers' mothers also evokes the image of mothers as protectors of their sons (McIntosh Sundstrom 2006a: 186), presenting a role for women that is consistent with deeply rooted national traditions and therefore widely accepted. The committees of soldiers' mothers have taken an approach emphasising co-operation with agencies of the state, though a certain tension between those committees and the military is inherent in their relationship.

The movement to address Russia's serious problem of domestic violence, primarily focusing on the physical abuse of women, also has a record of considerable success, although so far it has not been able to gain changes in the national criminal code that would facilitate the prevention and prosecution of domestic abuse. The main achievement of that movement has been the establishment of women's crisis centres that offer services such as telephone hotlines, counselling, and legal and medical assistance. The first of those centres opened in Moscow and St Petersburg in 1993, and by 2002 about 40 of those centres were operating in Russia, with about 120 organisations responding to the problem of violence against women (Johnson 2006: 268). Financial assistance from foreign governments and foundations helped to make that expansion possible. As McIntosh Sundstrom has noted (2006a: 96–7), while most of the international funding organisations (and a few Russian leaders of the movement) see domestic violence in a feminist perspective as part of a larger problem of inequality between men and women, most of the leaders of the crisis centres frame the issue as one of protecting individuals from bodily harm, which is more acceptable to the majority of Russians. The expansion of the network of crisis centres has led some regional political leaders to try to co-opt the movement by establishing their own crisis centres as appendages of their governments, sometimes separating them from the influence of those who have worked to spread awareness of the problem of domestic violence.

Environmental organisations

The environmental movement in Russia began to grow quietly in the early 1960s in the biology and geography departments of Soviet universities, giving rise to the Student Nature Protection Corps. In the early 1980s the movement widened, as new groups seeking the protection of nature emerged from the Student Nature Protection Corps and the media began to pay attention to environmental issues. Between 1987 and 1991 the movement expanded still more and became more radical as the number of groups increased rapidly and mass campaigns protested against government plans for projects such as the construction of new nuclear power plants and the diversion of rivers. After 1991, however, the environmental movement declined, and many of those groups disappeared, as the attention of the public 'shifted away from environmental problems to more pressing concerns of personal survival' (Henry 2006b: 105). Many of those who had led the environmental protection movement a few years earlier moved into more secure positions in government or returned to their former professional careers. Under Yeltsin and Putin the state placed an overriding priority on the transition to a market economy and the revival of production, and was not interested in enacting new environmental legislation or even enforcing laws on that subject that had already been adopted. The political leadership's unfavourable attitude toward environmental activists had not changed significantly by the time that Medvedev became president.

Nevertheless, one expert has said that 'thousands of green groups' were in operation in Russia by the middle of the current decade (Henry 2006a: 211). The organisations that continue the tradition of the Soviet nature protection movement are led by members of the scientific intelligentsia (most often biologists), most of whom have advanced degrees. Those groups have often received grants from foreign donors and their leaders are embedded in the international network of environmentalists. Such organisations are more likely than other environmentalist groups to have an adversarial relationship with their own government, as they often oppose current policies and criticise a lack of enforcement of existing legislation. Such groups typically prefer to keep their distance from the general public, preserving their character as an elite movement of specialists with a high level of professional expertise. On the other hand, some organisations oriented toward the protection of nature in Russia mainly conduct environmental education programmes for children and carry out other projects such as cleaning up litter in local areas. Such groups are usually led by educators, the largest number of whom are teachers in elementary schools. They are largely apolitical and almost entirely non-confrontational in relation to government officials. Such organisations

are more likely than the elite groups to recruit community members to take part in their activities, drawing on networks of family members, friends, colleagues, or parents of the children who are enrolled in their schools. All groups seeking more effective protection for the natural environment are aware that if they do not seek support from foreign donors, the only other potential source of substantial funding is government on one level or another within Russia. They also understand that organisations which accept assistance from government must accept limits on their advocacy and commit themselves to assisting the state rather than challenging it.

Still a dual Russia?

As the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin often emphasised the importance of a vigorous civil society for the development of his country, and Dmitri Medvedev has spoken in a similar vein. It should be apparent, however, that civil society as defined by Russia's current political leaders will not be autonomous from the state, nor will it be an adversary of political authority. In their view the Russian version of civil society should support the state and co-operate with it. Civil society should provide channels of feedback to the political regime and assist the agencies of the state in providing services to citizens. It is necessary that the institutions of civil society communicate suggestions to policy makers and criticise shortcomings in the operation of administrative agencies, but the expression of ideas and interests by social organisations will be legitimate only if it takes place within the boundaries of consensus, and implicitly recognises that common, national values must be of primary importance, while diverse, particular interests will be regarded as secondary. Recently the Russian state has created new structures that are intended both to assist in the institutionalisation of civil society and to establish the limits that organisations in the public space should respect.

The need for effective channels of feedback from society to the political leadership has been underlined in recent years by the phenomenon of public protests, which implicitly has drawn on the example of the strikes and other direct action tactics of coal miners and other workers in the late 1980s and 1990s. Large-scale protests by citizens in a number of cities, with elderly people as the majority of participants, erupted in early 2005 in response to problems in the shift to cash payments to replace certain types of services that had been free for people in some categories. Those protests caused obvious embarrassment for the government, resulted in backtracking by the parliament, and set a precedent that citizens would not forget. Since 2005 there have been protests of various sizes that have

focused on a variety of issues, but all of which have expressed the indignation of ordinary citizens concerning behaviour by those in political authority that is seen as abusive and creates discomfort that people feel in their daily lives. From the point of view of the highest political leadership there might be a potential for instability if ambitious opposition figures took advantage of such mass dissatisfaction. Thus the leadership has taken the initiative in introducing institutions such as the office of the human rights ombudsman, the president's commission on human rights and civil society, the national Public Chamber, regional public chambers, and the public councils attached to government ministries. As we have seen, sometimes those who have been appointed to an institution created by the state can form an alliance with NGOs on a particular issue, in some instances even associating themselves with the position that relatively independent groups, which often take an adversarial stance toward the government, have adopted on a specific issue. At the same time some other groups are subjected to low-level harassment by state officials and a few are simply closed down, demonstrating the penalty for what the leadership sees as disloyalty to the interests of the nation and the state.

We may put the developments of recent years in a broader perspective by noting a conception with deep roots in Russian history that could be traced in the writings of Russian intellectuals such as Vasilii Klyuchevsky and Pavel Milyukov, which was identified by Robert C. Tucker (1971: 122) as 'the image of dual Russia'. Tucker described the traditional conception of the Russian state and society as distinct and separate entities, one represented by '*vlast*' or *gosudarstvo*, the centralised autocratic state power', the other consisting of 'the population at large, the society, nation, or people (*obshchestvo*, *narod*)'. The assumption implicit in that image is that the autocratic state has been perceived by the people as an alien force, which exerts power with a degree of arbitrariness and is always beyond the control of the society. In that view the state 'is the active party, the organising and energising force in the drama of dual Russia, whereas the population at large is the passive and subordinate party, the tool and victim of the state's designs'. Like Klyuchevsky, Tucker saw that image as fundamentally derived from the manner of the expansion of the Muscovite state into the vast Russian empire, but Tucker argued that the dualism was intensified by the transformations launched by Peter the Great, who set the precedent for reforms that transformed Russian society from the top down. It would be difficult to disagree with Tucker's argument that the use of an authoritarian state by the Communists to carry out even more radical transformation after 1917 firmly reinforced the image of a dominant political regime and a submissive society.

Has the image of dual Russia, with the state viewed as an alien force imposing its dominance over a society whose members must either submit to political authority or evade its reach, persisted into the present time? Surveys of the attitudes of contemporary Russians indicate that most of them share a sense of 'the pervasiveness of imposed power with a strong division between organs of power and society' (Clément 2008: 69), corresponding closely to the traditional image of dual Russia. Most Russians see the state, or 'power' (*vlast'*), as something that cannot be controlled or contested openly, so the prudent strategy is to show the appearance of subordination and loyalty, while either trying to obtain advantages by building connections with some people in positions of power or retreating from the public sphere into the security of 'your private micro-group' (ibid.: 70). The disjunction between the micro-networks that provide reciprocal help to their members and organisations that strive for collective representation of group interests reflects the separation between the public realm and private life. A very recent development that is important in the light of that condition of separation has been the rise of new grassroots movements that have taken shape in protests during the last few years (ibid.: 73). The informal groups that have emerged from the protests of pensioners, home owners, the drivers of automobiles, and others have been motivated by the desire to defend concrete interests that are felt on a practical level. The participants in such protests share a common sense of having been treated unfairly that drives them to unify against some people in authority, but they do not seek to overthrow the political regime. They focus on demands for specific changes in policies and the actions of administrative officials.

We may ask how initiatives from the bottom up that create self-organising groups demanding fairness will interact with the efforts of political leaders to organise civil society from the top down in order to improve the functioning of the state and prevent instability. The possible responses of those in political authority range from repression through co-optation (and manipulation) to recognition of the movements with genuine popular support and limited objectives. Overt repression of such movements seems unlikely in view of the fact that the current leadership of Russia has tried to avoid that option even when it had to make policy concessions to placate protesters. The recognition of such movements would imply acceptance of a degree of autonomy for them and the use of institutions that have been created by the state to grant representation to each group with a broad base and promise partial satisfaction of the interests of such groups. That strategy would be an extension of the efforts of Russia's top leadership in recent years to introduce new structures at the highest level of civil society, but it would be a step into the unknown that might seem too risky to leaders as cautious as Putin and Medvedev. It is possible to

give good reasons both for and against expecting such a development. Whether grassroots movements can produce stable organisations, and whether initiatives from below can eventually mesh with structures created by the political leadership, are questions of crucial importance for the relationship between society and the state in Russia, and those questions remain unresolved.