

Russia's Political Party System as an Impediment to Democratization

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Political parties play a fundamental role in the representative political systems of northern industrialized democracies. They “connect civil and political society, advance the perceived interests of individuals, groups, and social strata while aiming consciously to develop these constituencies, and provide a link between society and the state, espousing the claims of the one and enforcing the rules of the other” (Sakwa 1995, 169). Political parties provide representation and accountability, electoral pressure for partisan constituencies, and the basis for structuring political choice in the competition of interests in the political arena. In short, they serve as an integral aspect of representative democracies, and thus are perceived as the bedrock for the process of democratization.

It is the argument of this article, however, that Russia's transition to democracy actually has been inhibited by the development of a dysfunctional and extremely unstable party system. An important starting point for understanding the woe-ful state of Russia's contemporary party system is examining the motivations surrounding the choices made by self-interested political elites. The desire of those who already possess power to maintain it and the desire to obtain the “goods” of political office—most notably power and personal enrichment—by those who seek them, have adversely impacted party system formation. These motivations also have had an impact on the structure of the institutions of government with which the parties interact, creating a political environment that reduces the importance of the role played by parties. In this regard, Russia's transition to democracy played a key role, because it served to enhance the freedom of action of the political elites, allowing them to better mold the political system according to their desires.

This analysis emphasizes the profound impact of two factors on the develop-

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ment of Russia's party system: the course of the initial transition and the role of elites during and after the transition process. The sudden collapse of the Soviet system disrupted the development of the nascent party system, severing its connections to society and leaving it to be reconstituted from above by elites in circumstances that limited its connections with the society and the political system. In these circumstances, the parties became led by the elite. The later changes made to the overall political system during the 1993–95 and 1999–2000 election cycles have reinforced the party system's susceptibility to the behavior of the elite but at the expense of developing links between political and civil society. Those changes also shaped the incentives for elite action in ways that have led away from the development of a well-structured party system. Until the party system re-establishes its links with society and the incentives of party elite behavior are shaped by the need to promote societal interests rather than their own, Russia's party system will continue to be dysfunctional in the ongoing process of democratization.

The remainder of this article is divided into five sections. Section one discusses how the collapse of the Soviet Union granted elites the leeway to fashion a party system and political institutions according to their own desires. Sections two and three describe the major developments in party system formation during the 1993–1995 and 1999–2000 election cycles, respectively. Section four draws on the historical evidence described in the preceding three sections to outline the principal factors that have contributed to the dysfunctional nature of Russia's political party system and its impact on the consolidation of Russian democracy. Section five offers general conclusions and prescriptions for the future.

Impact of the Soviet Union's Collapse on the Emergence of a Nascent Multiparty System

Competitive elections "provoke" party development, and this is one reason that "founding elections" are considered to be so important in transitions to democracy (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 57). In Russia's case, however, the first competitive elections to the USSR's Congress of People's Deputies held in March 1989, were instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev as part of his "reform from above" of the Soviet system prior to its collapse.

Political parties, except for the Communist Party, were prohibited from participating in the 1989 election. Although the primary electoral resource available to pro-reform candidates was their own reputations as reformers, many also received considerable support in the form of endorsements of their candidacy made by one of the various reform movements. The strongest of these was the Democratic Russia movement, which had developed in response to the political liberalization initiated by Gorbachev. The overriding issue of the 1989 campaign was reform, but this did little to stimulate the formation of a party system structure since many of the reform candidates, along with the hard-liners, were still members of the Communist Party. In addition, Democratic Russia itself not only eschewed party status but also supported the deparisanization of Russian politics, formally adopting this stance in its platform (Ponomarev 1993). Parties formed after the election, and there were several efforts to create parties based on

reform movements, but they did not have sufficient time to organize prior to the 1990 elections for the Russian Republic's Congress of People's Deputies. As a result, the Russian parliament was not constituted along party lines (McFaul and Markov 1993, 21; Belin and Orttung 1997, 13). In 1991, during the first Russian presidential election, despite the fact that Democratic Russia constituted his entire campaign organization, candidate Yeltsin betrayed the movement through deeds that ran counter to its goals (for example, signing the "nine-plus-one" agreement and choosing Alexandr Rutskoi as his running mate, and adopted an aloof campaign stance that deprived Democratic Russia of the leadership it needed to prevent it from fragmenting along internal fault lines (Urban 1993). The movement was weakened by Yeltsin's "strategy of enhancing his personal authority to the neglect of institution building" (Urban 1993, 193), an issue other political organizations would face in the future.

The nascent party system that had begun to form was disrupted by the collapse of the Soviet system. Having functioned as an opposition force, political parties were simply not prepared to offer an action program once the system they opposed had disappeared. The democratic camp in particular lacked cohesion, being defined largely by their opposition to the former Soviet system. It soon began to fracture. Lessons learned elsewhere suggest that a founding election likely would have provided for the redivision of political space around which a new party system could be formed. This did not occur until after the extant political organization within society unraveled, however (Dallin 1995, 248–50).¹

After more than seventy years of Communist rule, Soviet society had been rendered remarkably uniform, in the sense that the main political cleavage was between the party *nomenklatura* (the party elite) and everyone else. With the lack of socioeconomic cleavages, there were few well-defined interests prompting party formation in society. In addition, there was a general retreat from political involvement as people began to experience the hardship created by economic reform policies. During the period prior to the calling of elections in 1993, political party roots in society became shallower rather than deeper.

Although a founding election might have reversed this trend, there simply was no incentive for the political leadership of the now independent Russian Federation to oversee such a political contest; the Soviet Union's collapse left them holding the reins of power, and they could claim legitimacy on the basis that they had been popularly elected, albeit under the old system. The one major institutional change that occurred was the superimposing of a presidential system onto the existing government. Since neither Yeltsin nor the parliamentary members owed their positions to party connections, the role of parties in politics was marginalized. Politics became the province of technocratic elites applying democratic formulas from above (Sakwa 1995, 174).

There also were no party linkages between president and parliament. The creation of the Russian presidency in March 1991 was a move by Yeltsin and his allies to protect his hold on power by providing him with a direct electoral mandate, thereby insulating him from an increasingly conservative Congress of People's Deputies. The collapse of the Soviet Union fueled a growing conflict between

Yeltsin and parliament over which formulas to apply to the new political system, the issue being which institution should dominate. The ill-defined constitution essentially grafted a constitutionally weak presidential executive onto what had been a parliamentary system, giving neither institution power over the other, but granting some executive functions to both (Huskey 1999), thereby leading the parliament to believe that it, too, held executive power. The result was that Russia's first true political contest occurred in October 1993, not through elections but through violence, and Yeltsin's victory over the Supreme Soviet provided him with the opportunity to greatly strengthen his presidency with a new constitution that was ratified in December 1993.²

One Russian political institution that remained essentially unchanged had, and continues to have, an adverse impact on Russia's party system—the KGB. Since before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the KGB's internal security forces have plied their trade to undermine the pro-democracy parties. By infiltrating these parties with operatives and informants, and by creating other parties, the KGB has muddled the political field and sowed confusion. It created the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia to make the Communist Party of the Soviet Union appear to be the responsible center besieged by democratic extremists. This was an act that would later contribute to the polarization of the Russian Federation's party system, to the detriment of the genuine democratic parties (Waller 1994).

The loss of the Soviet-era parties' *raison d'être*, the lack of clear incentives for party formation within society, and their marginalization from politics produced a devolution from protoparties (parties in an early stage of development) to pseudoparties (mere imitations of parties) in the period from the collapse of the Soviet Union to Yeltsin's dissolving of the old parliament in September 1993 (Sakwa 1995, 175). It was during this period that parties were formed primarily from above by elites and elite "wannabes," becoming less important as links between society and its political leaders and more important as a mechanism for serving the political goals of these elites. The party system at this time was essentially formless because the main strategy of party formation was the creation of blocs of kindred groups that allowed their leaders to form larger organizations without having to sacrifice the autonomy of their original groups. This strategy would be repeated during the 1995 election (Sakwa 1995, 175).

The 1993 and 1995 Parliamentary Elections: Reinforcing a Weak Multiparty System

The 1993 parliamentary elections for the newly created state Duma (the lower house of the new federal assembly) marked a change, not only because they put these parties to the test, but because they were held under new rules developed by Yeltsin to form a stable party system. Half of the Duma's 450 seats were elected by party list through a proportional representation system (in which votes are cast for parties, and seats are apportioned to the parties based on the percentage of the vote attained), while the remaining half were elected through a single-member district plurality system (in which votes are cast for individual candidates in electoral districts, and the one with the greatest number of votes wins). Rules were

added specifically to get rid of insignificant parties and concentrate votes. To get on the party list ballot, a party had to gather the signatures of one hundred thousand supporters, with no more than 15 percent coming from any one of Russia's eighty-nine republics and regions. Parties also had to surmount a 5 percent barrier in the party list voting to gain seats through that half of the election (Belin and Orttung 1997, 19).

The results of the 1993 election were a disappointment for those who hoped for the emergence of a stronger party system. The number of parties participating was kept lower than it might have been otherwise. Thirteen parties competed, out of which eight gained seats through the two voting methods, an additional four gained a few seats in the single-member district voting (a total of 8 out of 225), and one gained no seats (White, Rose, and McAllister 1997, 123). No party obtained a plurality of the total seats, however. (The party winning the largest number of seats gained 70.) Ideologically, the democratic "center" came out ahead, but the seats were divided among nine parties, as opposed to 1 for the illiberal right, and 2 for the communist left. The largest single block of seats (141) went to independent candidates who used the single-member district voting to win without the benefit of party affiliation.

The coalition-building activities of parties in many democratic states show that there are still ways that a fragmented parliament can develop a party structure conducive to policy formulation, which, in turn, can facilitate a stronger, more responsive party system. In the Duma, the practice of forming parliamentary factions offered the potential for creating such coalitions. However, the incentive for members to gain access to power resources worked against this end. Factions provide access to important power resources; they appoint the speakers who engage in floor debates as well as the members of reconciliation commissions that are convened to overcome legislative deadlock. They also play a key role in nominating legislative leaders, from the top down to committee chairs, through a process that gives an advantage to larger factions. Factions may be formed by parties surpassing the 5 percent barrier in the party list vote, but the minimum membership requirement of forty members effectively reduced the number of factions that could be formed. In theory, this should have led to parties combining factions or even developing their constituencies prior to the election in order to "win big." What occurred in practice was the proliferation of committees with duplicate responsibilities to share the "spoils" more evenly (Hough 1996, 103). As a result, party responsibilities have become obfuscated, and policy successes have become more difficult to achieve.

The rules for forming factions permitted members to change their party affil-

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iations at any time during their tenure in office, and more than a few did so. A considerable portion of these were members who had run as independents in single-member districts, either showing their true partisan “colors” or seeking benefits of faction membership, such as committee assignments (Rose 2000). Within a month of the 1993 election, the number of independents in the Duma dropped from 141 to 47. Several members who had run as party list candidates also changed affiliations. The two parties that experienced the greatest change in affiliation by October 1995 were Russia’s Choice (the party most closely tied to Yeltsin), which lost 21 members, and the Agrarian Party, which gained 18. Several prominent politicians left the parties that had sponsored their candidacies, including Nikolai Travkin, who left the Democratic Party that he had founded (White, Rose, and McAllister 1997, 184–85). Additionally, deputy groups were formed as “parties of convenience” (Rose 2000), which, although fielding no candidates during the election, obtained the same agenda-setting role and many of the privileges of parties within the Duma.

Immediately after the election, the New Regional Policy deputy group was formed, and in 1994 it was the second largest faction in the Duma. By October 1995, three such groups existed with a combined membership of 110, or more than 24 percent of the total Duma membership. The motivation to change party affiliation, a trend that would become more pronounced following subsequent Duma elections, was often one of self-interest. For example, a candidate might abandon a party that had fared poorly at the polls or appeared to be losing popularity, or leave a party that had served the purpose of getting a candidate elected for a faction that more genuinely reflected the candidate’s ideology, but it also served those who wished to have a greater impact on policy formulation. Regardless of motivation, changing party affiliation *after* an election weakens the ability of voters to make informed choices that make their government representative of the people and that hold parties accountable (Rose 2000).

There were three changes in the party system dynamic following the 1993 election. The first was that, despite having held the first post-Soviet era election, the party system was actually weakened. This is not to deny the fact that in the crucible of the 1993 election, many of the insignificant parties failed to survive or that there were only six “effective” parliamentary parties (the number of parties with sufficient representation that are capable of affecting policy making) (Moser 1997, 294). For a consolidated democracy, this is a high, but not unreasonable, number. At the same time, party activity became more centered around elite-to-elite rather than elite-to-society interaction. In the words of one Russian observer at the time: “Russian politics is increasingly becoming restricted to private, top-level intrigues. One can talk of retrogression: Before, a proto- (or quasi) multiparty system ensured a semblance of feedback between the authorities and society and guaranteed a certain transparency of political life, but today the rudimentary multiparty structure is drying up” (quoted in Sakwa 1995, 181). A case in point is the agreement fashioned by faction leaders to transform the committee system to serve their own purposes rather than the purposes of governing the country.

A second change in the dynamic of the Russian party system involved a new

round of negotiations between parties of similar inclinations in an attempt to construct more unified entities to participate in the next Duma election scheduled to take place only two years later, in 1995. The most salient feature of these efforts is that all of them failed. On the right, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy rebuffed the desire of several small nationalist parties to seek an alliance with his Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). On the left, it was the more substantial Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), the descendant of the old Communist Party, that approached the Agrarian Party (APR) about forming an alliance. Since the APR had also done well in the 1993 election (acquiring 48 to the KPRF's 64 seats), such an alliance had considerable potential. The APR served a more well-defined constituency tied to farming interests and believed the KPRF to be too ideologically compromising, however, and rebuffed the offer.

It was in the more fragmented democratic center that the need for alliances was greatest, but nothing came of such efforts. What is important to note here is Yeltsin's attempt to institute a two-party system from above. In 1995, at his instigation, two party blocs were formed—the right-of-center Our Home Is Russia (NDR) party bloc, formed by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, and the left-of-center The Bloc of Ivan Rybkin party bloc, formed by Rybkin—which were intended to represent the pro-Yeltsin forces and the loyal opposition respectively. The expectation was that the more moderate parties from both directions would gravitate toward these two blocs, strengthening the political center and weakening the extremist parties, such as the LDPR, that had done very well in 1993 (gaining the second most number of seats). Even though the NDR could offer some incentive to join, in the form of campaign resources from Chernomyrdin's connections (Rybkin's bloc could not), no existing parties joined either bloc. The net result was the further fragmentation of the center by adding two more contenders (Belin and Orttung 1997, 32–3).

The third change in the dynamic of the Russian party system was the proliferation of new parties contending for Duma seats in the 1995 election. Some, such as Boris Fedorov's Forward, Russia party, represented splits among the existing party leadership. Fedorov had left Yegor Gaidar's Russia's Choice party immediately following the 1993 election. Others represented new entities attempting to find a niche somewhere in the ideological spectrum. For example, the nationalist Congress of Russian Communities (KRO) formed as a party in 1994 and became one of the most visible political players in 1995 (Belin and Orttung 1997, 51). However, most of the new entrants were small parties and, as the results of the 1995 election showed, this proliferation mainly served to further fragment the political center.

The results of the 1995 election belied any expectation that learning necessarily progresses from experience. Compared to the thirteen parties and blocs that participated in the 1993 election, forty-three parties and blocs qualified to participate in 1995. Of these, twenty-one failed to win any seats at all. The voter list portion of the election, especially its 5 percent barrier, actually worked as intended, limiting the number of winning parties to four. On the left, the KPRF won 99 seats in the proportional representation contest and 58 seats in the single-

member district contests (157 seats total). On the right, the LDPR won 50 seats in the proportional representation contest and 1 seat in the single-member district contests (51 seats total). In the democratic center, NDR won 45 seats in the proportional representation contest and ten seats in the single-member district contests (55 seats total) and the Yabloko Party won 31 seats in the proportional representation contest and 10 seats in the single-member district contests (41 seats total). However, the single-member district voting added 19 more parties, most of which gained only a few seats, and the independents won 78 seats.

While it appears from the results that pro-democracy support dwindled and the communist vote soared, this picture is deceiving. The pro-democracy vote actually increased over that of 1993, but it was split among seven parties, most of which fared poorly (Belin and Orttung 1997, 111–12). Much of this voter support is counted among the 49 percent wasted on parties not surmounting the 5 percent barrier and the 71 percent of the vote cast for losers in the district races in which an average of twelve candidates participated (Urban and Gel'man 1997, 209). As KPRF leader Gennadi Zyuganov wryly noted, “The Democrats are eating each other. We wish them ‘bon appétit’” (quoted in Belin and Orttung 1997, 123).

The 1999–2000 Election Cycle: Continued Impediments to the Formation of an Effective Multiparty System

A superficial examination of the 1999 Duma election gives the appearance of movement toward a more stable party system in Russia. While “taxi” parties (as in the entire membership can fit into a taxi) continued to make their appearance (there were more than three hundred registered parties one year prior to the election), only twenty-six qualified to participate in the election, a reduction of seventeen from the forty-three parties vying in 1995. Of these twenty-six parties, only fourteen actually gained seats in the Duma, a reduction from the twenty-three parties seated in 1995.

A closer examination offers a different picture, however (see table 1). Several trends are noteworthy. First, the two parties created specifically to compete in the 1999 election—the Unity and Fatherland–All Russia parties—gained seats at the expense of most of the older parties. Second, a closer comparison of the proportional representation and single-member district contests shows that political parties played a significantly more substantial role in the former than in the latter, since no political party fared as well in the single-member district races as they did in the proportional representation contests. Only the Communist Party and the Fatherland–All Russia Party came close to attaining a balanced representation from both contests. This indicates that most of the political parties are less reliant on partisan constituencies than on the rules of proportional representation for their electoral successes.

Even more illuminating is the single-member district victories of non-partisan candidates. In the 1995 election, the number of seats won by independents dropped to 78 (from 141 in the 1993 election), suggesting that the appeal of independent candidates was waning. In 1999, however, the 46 percent increase in seats won by independents belied any such downward trend. During the 1999 Duma

election campaign, independents outnumbered party candidates 1,134 to 1,077, constituting on average 5 out of the total average of 10 candidates per district (whereas parties fielded 1 candidate each per district). Additionally, independents contested in every district, whereas parties contested in much fewer, ranging from the Communist Party contesting in 57 percent of the districts to the Movement in Support of the Army party contesting in 8 percent, with the average party contesting in only 32 percent.

Comparing the 1999 and 1995 elections, there were approximately 500 fewer candidates competing in the single-member district contests than had run in 1995. This reduction was at the expense of party participation since the number of independent candidates rose slightly in 1999. Much of this represented a reduction in participation by minor parties, which is potentially a positive result for party system formation. But the major parties that won in the proportional representation contest in both 1995 and 1999 also reduced their participation in the 1999 single-member district contests. The Communist Party had contested in 80 percent of the 1995 district races but only in 58 percent in 1999. The LDPR-Zhirinovskiy Bloc had contested in 83 percent in 1995 but only in 42 percent in 1999. These parties suffered a reduction in the number of seats won in single-member district contests in 1999 compared with the 1995 results, but this does not appear to be due to their reduced participation in single-member contests. The Communist Party competed in about fifty fewer district races but lost only 9 seats. Zhirinovskiy's Bloc dropped from 1 seat to none. Only the Yabloko party maintained a high involvement in single-member district contests, but even it dropped from 14 to 4 seats. However, the Communist and Yabloko parties made gains in their proportional representation races, although Zhirinovskiy's Bloc did not. In short, it appears that the parties learned that their resources were better concentrated on the party-based proportional representation contests, and candidates learned that party backing is not the key to victory in single-member district races.

There are three related factors that substantially mitigate against any change in this situation. First is that the rules governing nomination as a candidate de-emphasize the role of parties. Parties do not nominate candidates. Rather, individuals must either obtain signatures from 1 percent of the district's electorate or put up a deposit one thousand times the minimum wage (Russia Votes 2001, 1). Individuals *may* rely upon the local chapter of a nationwide party to accomplish this, but other resources include "a group around the elected governor of the region [most of whom have no party affiliation]; local resources, such as a major enterprise; or personal networks or wealth" (1). Undoubtedly, many viable candidates are local notables who find it easier to utilize these local resources, while at least some of those who turn to parties for help do so because they lack other options. It is also important to note that the signature method of getting on the ballot provides a potential incentive for parties to strengthen their local organizations and establish support among the electorate, thereby increasing their ability to attract strong candidates who would be beholden to the party. But this incentive is undercut by the deposit method, resorted to by 860 single-member district candidates comprising more than a third of the total, which fosters ties to the

wealthy and powerful—either by encouraging prospective candidates to court their support or by encouraging the elites to handpick their own candidates—rather than to either parties or the community.

Ties to the wealthy and powerful constitute a second important factor in the 1999 single-member district elections. Non-partisan actors, particularly regional elites, played a much more prominent role in influencing the outcome of these elections than they had in previous election years (McFaul 2000b, 14–15; Sadchikov 2000, 4).³ Although space constraints preclude an extended discussion of the development of local and regional political structures, suffice it to note that politics at this level is organized around informal “parties of power”—networks

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of local elites, such as key administrators, enterprise heads, and especially wealthy entrepreneurs and the media—“with no ideological affiliation and with strong ties to local executive heads” (McFaul 2000b, 17; see also Sadchikov 2000; Rose 2000; Colton and McFaul 2000). These parties of power control state, media, and economic resources (jobs),

often enabling these parties of power to exert considerable leverage over sufficient numbers of voters to obtain victory for their candidate.

A third factor is that the electoral rules for single-member district races, which give victory to the candidate “first past the post,” promote the proliferation of candidates. In Russia, where candidates in single-member district races essentially nominate themselves without party involvement, those with some significant bloc of votes might find that reducing the proportion of the vote needed to win by encouraging other candidates to run is an easier strategy for improving their chances for victory than broadening their constituency. Moreover, a large number of candidates provide an incentive for even more individuals to become candidates, since the margin for victory decreases as the vote is spread across an increasing number of contestants (White, Rose, and McAllister 1997, 203). In the 1999 election, the median vote percentage for a winning candidate was 31 percent, and dividing results in five percentile ranges reveals that the range with the highest number of seats (45) won between 20 and 25 percent of the vote.

Contrary to the single-member district contests, election to the Duma under proportional representation rules constitutes the most significant institutional influence fostering, rather than impeding, the formation of a stable party system. The reason is straightforward and obvious: proportional representation elections require voters to cast votes for parties, not individuals. It is less obvious how consequential this electoral system has been to party system formation in Russia.

There are scholars who believe that a stable party system is manifesting itself in Russia. Several of them base their arguments on survey data accumulated prior

to 1999 that indicates that voters are increasingly able to make informed choices regarding parties and that partisan attachments are beginning to form. Miller and Klobucar (2000) argue that, contrary to the view that parties in Russia are undifferentiated and merely reflections of their leaders, Russian voters are able to both aggregate their own interests and differentiate between the interest and ideological representations of the vast array of parties, and they are demonstrating the ability to identify and form attachments to the parties closest to their own positions. Miller et al. (2000) argue that the standard for studying partisanship in an established democracy is a long process of socialization based on socioeconomic cleavages and is not suited to studying partisanship in Russia. They present evidence to support an information-processing model: Russians are able to identify parties that most closely represent their own interests and ideological stances through information available primarily from the mass media, and partisan attachment to such parties forms among those most able and motivated to process this information. These include the educated and those who believe that political participation can make a difference. Finally, Brader and Tucker (2001) argue that partisanship does develop over time but that nascent partisan attachments can be discerned from basic attitudinal and behavioral indicators. They conclude that a sizeable plurality of Russian voters is exhibiting signs of three criteria for the development of partisanship. First, attachment is growing with an accumulation of political experience. Second, as attachment grows, other views are acquiring more partisan consistency. Finally, partisan attachment is based on a rational assessment of which party best represents their own interests and ideology.

Proponents of the view that a stable party system is manifesting in Russia point out that four parties from the 1999 elections represent the core of a stabilizing party system (McFaul 2000b, 2000c, 2000d). Three of these parties—the KPRF, the Yabloko Party, and Zhirinovskiy's Bloc (the LDPR)—competed in all three Duma elections, and one party (the Union of Right Forces Party) represents the merger of four pro-liberal democracy parties that had competed in 1995 (Democratic Choice of Russia, Forward Russia!, Pamfilova-Gurov-Lysenko, and Common Cause). McFaul argues that these parties exhibit characteristics found in other parliamentary political systems. They have shown durability by competing in several elections, indicating that they have "financial resources, brand names, and organizational capacities," as well as having shown well-defined orientations, loyal partisans, and notable leaders. They also have demonstrated an overall stability of aggregate support, with only the Zhirinovskiy Bloc not gaining roughly the same percentage of votes in both 1995 and 1999 (it lost substantial ground), and success at resisting the encroachment of newer ideological parties on their political niches. Additionally, they have taken their parliamentary roles seriously, forming disciplined party factions in the Duma that have helped organize the work of the Duma along party lines (McFaul 2000b, 9–12).

One can draw a significantly different (and, according to the thesis of this article, more accurate) conclusion by focusing on those parties that did not participate in past elections: the Fatherland–All Russia Party and especially the Unity Party. As table 1 shows, these two new parties fared very well in the proportional repre-

TABLE 1. Results of the 1999 Election Compared with the 1995 Election

Party	Proportional Rep.			Single-Member District			Total Seats		
	1999	1995	% Change 95 to 99	1999	1995	% Change 95 to 99	1999	1995	% Change 95 to 99
Communist Party	67	99	-32	46	58	-21	113	157	-28
Unity	64	N/A		9	N/A		73	N/A	
Fatherland-All Russia	37	N/A		31	N/A		68	N/A	
Union of Right Forces*	24	0	100	5	15	-67	29	15	93
Yabloko	16	31	-48	4	14	-71	20	45	-55
Zhirinovskiy Bloc	17	50	-66	0	1	-100	17	51	-66
Our Home Is Russia	0	45	-100	7	10	-30	7	55	-87
Agrarian	N/A	0		N/A	20		0	20	
Other Parties	0	0	0	9	29	-69	9	29	-69
Independent	0	0	0	114	78	46	114	78	46
Total	225	225		225	225		450	450	

*The union of the Russia's Democratic Choice, Forward Russia! Pamfilova-Gurov-Lysenko, and Common Cause parties, which ran separately in 1995. For purposes of comparison, the 1995 figures aggregate results for these four parties.
 Source: Russia Votes, http://www.russiavotes.org/Duma_system.htm; White, Stephen, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister. *How Russia Votes*. (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1997).

sentation race. The Unity Party came in second, just behind the Communist Party. The Fatherland–All Russia party placed third, considerably ahead of the Union of Right Forces Party, Zhirinovskiy's Bloc, and the Yabloko Party (which placed fourth, fifth, and sixth respectively). These parties gained overall representation in the Duma in the same order, although the Communist Party's relatively greater success in the single-member district elections advanced it beyond the virtual dead heat between it and the Unity Party, which resulted from the proportional representation contests. On the other hand, single-member district results also advanced the Fatherland–All Russia Party considerably beyond the Union of Right Forces Party. Moreover, of the three parties at the bottom of the list, all of which belong to McFaul's core group, Yavlinsky's Yabloko Party is moving toward minor party status, having lost 25 percent of its support since the 1993 election. Zhirinovskiy's Bloc, which led the field in 1993, is in danger of disappearing altogether as its popularity declines, having barely surmounted the 5 percent barrier in 1999. In marked contrast, the Unity Party rose from nearly zero support at its inception to become the second most successful party in the election in a mere ten weeks. Obviously, there is a great gulf between the Communist Party (which best exemplifies McFaul's depiction) and the other three long-standing parties, into which new parties can successfully insinuate themselves.⁴

Even more may be learned through a closer examination of the Unity and the Fatherland–All Russia parties. There are several significant features. First, these parties represent "presidential coalitions" (McFaul 2000b, 13) or "parties of convenience" (Rose 2000) that were formed specifically to win the 2000 presidential election. The Fatherland–All Russia Party was formed as a coalition of the Fatherland Party, created in 1998 by Moscow Major Yuri Luzhkov, and the All Russia movement. Luzhkov had once been considered a leading contender to replace Yeltsin as president, but in August 1999 he entered into the coalition, sharing leadership with former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov. He did this to support Primakov's bid for the presidency since, by then, Primakov appeared to be the strongest contender. The Unity Party was the initiative of Kremlin insiders who disliked Primakov, created to oppose Primakov's bid for the presidency by beating his party in the parliamentary elections (Colton and McFaul 2000, 205). As in 1995, these parties used the Duma elections as a primary contest for advancing their contenders' chances at the presidency, a strategy that was successful for the Unity Party since Primakov withdrew from the presidential race after the 1999 election.

Neither Unity nor Fatherland–All Russia established well-defined identities within the electorate, as evidenced by the fact that a scant seven days before the election, focus groups indicated that voters had little idea of what these parties stood for or represented (McFaul 2000b, 14). This should not be surprising since both parties represented an amalgamation of various political figures. The Unity Party was such a diverse group that it even included Alexandr Rutskoi, who led the parliamentary revolt against Yeltsin in 1993 (Graham 1999, 2). Although Fatherland–All Russia suffered from contradictory positions expressed by its leading adherents, Unity purposely kept its program vague as part of a strategy aimed at attracting non-partisan voters (Colton and McFaul 2000, 209) by appear-

ing to be a non-ideological group and, thus, a refreshing departure from the usual party. The Unity Party in particular sought to tap popular sentiment by appealing to national pride and the people's pent-up desire to restore Russia's greatness after a decade of decline under Yeltsin. Its clearest and most successful message was personalistic—support for then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who had come to exemplify this sentiment. Putin had experienced a dramatic rise out of obscurity to become the most popular political figure in the final few months before the election, not based on ideological or policy positions but, instead, based on the purely impressionistic notion that he was exactly what Yeltsin was not—young, decisive, and ready to restore Russia's greatness. This impression was derived from one event: his decisive conducting of the second Chechen War. For the Unity Party in particular, part of its success was due to *not* enabling voters to clearly identify that party's place in Russia's ideological space.

The Unity Party's success also represented a realization of the potential of the "party of power" in electoral politics. The term "party of power" came into usage to describe the group of political and business elites who had become the Kremlin political establishment that Yeltsin informally presided over (Colton and McFaul 2000, 202). The phrase implies that these Kremlin insiders are both the executive branch's power base and its constituency. "Party of power" has both a less restrictive and more restrictive meaning: it can refer to the informal body of Kremlin insiders, as well as actual political parties formed by Kremlin insiders to act as the pro-government party. In past elections, Chubais' Russia's Choice Party in 1993 and Chernomirdin's Our Home Is Russia Party in 1995, both founded by seated prime ministers, have been referred to as "parties of power." They had both faced the similar dilemma of Democratic Russia, however: they supported Yeltsin, but he did not support them, denying them the impetus for growth and continued existence that his affiliation could have brought (regarding Our Home Is Russia, see Kolesnikov 1996). But by this time, the Unity Party was firmly linked to a popular leader, and the Kremlin supplied it with abundant resources to convert this into electoral victory. It received financial and other assistance from campaign managers, key ministries, and many of Russia's most powerful businesspersons. The most critical resource that the Unity party received was extensive positive media coverage from the major television networks, which were owned by the state and by pro-Kremlin businesspersons such as Boris Berezovsky, the man responsible for setting in motion the creation of the Unity party. The near monopoly of the "party of power" on television also permitted dedicating vast quantities of airtime to attacking the Unity Party's opponents, particularly Primakov and Luzhkov, with half-truths and fabrications, including accusations of murder and corruption (Graham 1999; 2000; Colton and McFaul 2000). This use of the media kept the Duma campaign focused on the Unity Party's simple message of patriotism and support for Putin to the virtual exclusion of all other issues.

Finally, there was the involvement of the regional governors. To a greater degree than ever before, the regional governors utilized their powerful personal resources to support parties in the proportional representation election. Not only did many of them control the local media, but since many people still rely on state

enterprises for their livelihood, governors could, and did, virtually dictate how significant portions of the local electorates would vote. After the election, Russian observers noted that nearly everywhere, the victorious parties were those who were supported by the governors. Although all of the parties received the support of some regional governors, the Unity Party received considerable support from this quarter, since many of the governors saw the advantage of currying favor with the man most likely to be the next president (Sadchikov 2000, 4).⁵

The 2000 presidential race, in which Putin won a first-round victory with 52 percent of the vote, held fewer surprises than the Duma elections, since Putin's victory seemed a foregone conclusion. Still, there are several features worth noting. First, Putin was the "party of power's" candidate. He had the same resources, media advantages, and regional support as the Unity Party, he conveyed much the same vague nonspecific message as Unity, and he benefited considerably from the Unity Party's victory over Primakov. Like Yeltsin, however, Putin did not run as a party candidate but remained above party competition. While the Unity Party had firmly hitched itself to Putin's star, the reverse was not true, since he had actually endorsed both the Unity Party and the Union of Right Forces Party in the Duma race. Third, Yeltsin's resignation in January was a smart strategic move because it moved the campaign back from June to March. Putin's campaign strategy was to rely on his popularity, and since a rapidly escalating popularity is vulnerable to de-escalation (Rose 2000), a shorter campaign period meant the chances were reduced that Putin's popularity would drop significantly before the election. Indeed, evidence indicates that Putin's popularity was dropping fast enough that he would have faced a runoff election if the first round had been held in June (McFaul 2000a, 25). Thus, the presidency was won by a candidate who was not tied to a party and whose victory was due to voter sentiment rather than reasoned choice and the unbridled use of state power.

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Regarding the post-election state of the "party-in-government," there are two aspects representing continuity with the past and one notably significant change, none of which bode well for the strengthening of Russia's party system. As in the past, there was considerable reshuffling of party allegiances in the Duma immediately following the election. As of January 2000, in the four largest parties winning in the proportional representation election, the KPRF had lost 24 members, the Unity Party gained 9, the Fatherland–All Russia Party lost 21, and the Union of Right Forces Party gained 3, not to mention the fact that 89 out of 105 independents scrambled to join parties. Additionally, three Duma parties were formed only after the election and together controlled 137 seats, or 30 percent of the

Duma. Committee assignments again were somewhat chaotic. Initially the Unity Party and the KPRF formed an agreement to share all committee chairs between them, but after much resistance by the other parties, chairmanships were parceled out among them all—except the Yabloko Party—without consideration of the proportional strength of the parties (Rose 2000).

The one change concerns presidential-legislative relations. During Yeltsin's presidency, pro-government supporters never dominated the Duma. Most members desired to promote their own policies rather than those of the president. However, because of its relative weakness, usually the best the Duma could do was to resist Yeltsin's plans and to achieve some modification of his policies. This changed after Putin became president. He has received considerable support from the Duma on major issues because of the more pro-government balance of power that exists with the Unity Party at its core. Although this new cooperative relationship between the executive and a coalition in the legislature may appear to have the potential to promote party system formation, this is not the case. Part of the strength of the pro-government forces is due to Putin courting individual leaders in the KPRF to weaken the party's ability to oppose him. The current speaker of the Duma, KPRF leader Gennady Seleznev, is more loyal to Putin than to Zyuganov since Putin endorsed Seleznev's failed candidacy to become governor of the Moscow region. Seleznev has even initiated the formation of his own organization. The core of Putin's support is less a party than it is a construct of the Kremlin's making, with "no history, no platform, and no membership," which achieved a startling victory with Kremlin backing. The new distribution of power in the Duma, although chosen at the ballot box, is largely due to Putin's ability to draw on state power to reward his friends and punish his enemies (McFaul 2000c, 310–311).

Assessing the Evidence

Part of the explanation for the state of Russia's party system lies in the fact that Russia's parties are elite-oriented organizations. Rose (2000) provides a depiction of politics that aptly illuminates this point: in liberal democratic theory, politics is driven by voters' demands, and politicians compete to supply these demands. In Russia, voters are "free" to choose from among the parties supplied to them. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet regime, party development, limited though it was, reflected demand-side politics. Since these new parties were allowed no official standing, they developed as grassroots organizations, offering electoral support to candidates who supported their reform agendas, an offer that was eagerly accepted by many candidates. After the collapse of the Soviet system brought about the demise of this party system, two years passed before another election provided the impetus for another party system to emerge. During this period, the people withdrew from political engagement, and a supply-side party system was born as the elites created parties to support their own candidacies and those of their supporters.

There is no doubt that private motivations were a factor in this development. As Huskey points out, there is a lack of viable career alternatives for party lead-

ers (1999, 167). Moreover, the perks of office are very enticing. They include free cars, healthcare and vacations, paid household expenses, and, until just recently, Moscow apartments purchased at taxpayer expense (Sadchikov 1999, 2). Legislative office also has attracted those seeking private gain through corrupt practices. Opportunism goes a long way toward explaining the phenomenon of the many “taxi” parties, and some of the more visible parties that are born and die out every election cycle as well, plus the abundance of independent candidates who dispense with party labels. Opportunism played a part in the fragmentation of the party system. This was most evident during the 1995 election cycle when few reformists were willing to sacrifice their leadership to gain greater electoral success through coalition building.

Purely self-centered motives are not the only explanation, however. Another reason is that many of these elites, particularly the better-known party leaders, can be characterized as technocrats. The abrupt demise of the Soviet system left the new Russian state with the daunting task of transforming both its political and economic systems. It is no surprise that many political figures believed that they possessed the expertise to accomplish this task and founded parties to advance their particular ideas. The result is a party system in which parties are less concerned with the voters’ desires than they are with convincing the voters of the righteousness of their vision. These parties are not simply personalized reflections of their leaders; they present an ideological view that voters can identify and by which voters can differentiate them from other parties. Also, while some parties have suffered disintegration from disagreements among the leadership regarding differences in their vision, a few have managed to achieve longevity and the appearance of stability. The Yabloko Party and, to a lesser extent, Zhirinovsky’s Bloc are representative of this trend. But they are also emblematic of the weakness of supply-side parties as a basis for a stable party system. Both parties have managed to match their message to a portion of the electorate, but now that their messages have less appeal, they appear willing to court obscurity rather than align their ideas with popular demands.

Yet another factor influencing the character of the party system is the race for the presidency. Every election cycle, parties have formed around presidential contenders treating the legislative race more as a primary to build momentum for their candidates’ bids for the “big prize” six months later. The 1999 Duma contest between two parties—the Fatherland–All Russia Party and the Unity Party—reveals the potential for the success of this strategy, since Primakov withdrew his candidacy after the Unity Party’s strong showing. The Kremlin’s “party of power” has also fielded its own party to support either the incumbent or a replacement to its liking: the Russia’s Choice Party in 1993,⁶ the Our Home Is Russia Party in 1995, and the Unity Party in 1999. All parties of this type share common characteristics. Their rationale is to “supply” the voters with a particular candidate in a particular race and, because of this, they do not endure beyond the election that is the focus of their attention.

A consequence of supply-side politics is that Russia’s elite-dominated party system possesses little potential to grow substantial partisan roots in the society.

Critics of this view (Miller and Klobucar 2000; Miller et al 2000; Brader and Tucker 2001) argue that voters are able to differentiate parties by ideology and identify the party closest to their own position. But how significant can this be when so many parties are short-lived? As Rose points out: "people cannot vote for a party that is not there. Nor can people vote against a party that has dissolved itself rather than give an account of its actions at the end of its term in office" (2000). In addition, even parties with longevity are inattentive to the demands of the wider public, harkening more to their own visions or to lining their own pockets. As a caveat to their generally positive conclusions regarding party system formation in Russia, Miller and Klobucar observe that even those voters they identify as partisan loyalists do not see parties as responsive political bodies (2000, 684). Couple this with Colton and McFaul's conclusion that the Unity Party, which has no history and no substantive message, drew most of its votes from converts from other parties, and partisanship in Russia loses its substance (2000, 215). Instead, what appears is a party system disconnected from society because its component parties provide little accountability or true representation, a situation in which the electorate is susceptible to manipulation by populist sentimentalism.

In other words, one of the important functions of a political party is to harness the self-interest for the public good by making a politician's job dependent on the approval of the electorate. But in Russia, parties seek to harness the electorate to the will of the party leaders, with varying degrees of success. It is unlikely in any political system without a democratic heritage that political elites will internalize a sense of putting the public good above private interest on their own initiative, and this would be a vain hope in Russia. According to Fairbanks, one of the features of the transition away from the Soviet system "was the change from a system preoccupied with an unpopular version of the public interest to one dominated by private interests. The loss of public spirit pervades Russian life from top to bottom" (2000, 35).

In this environment, one of the most effective means for promoting the development of a representative and accountable party system is by creating political institutions in which political actors have incentives to operate through parties and in which parties hold a measure of responsibility for the actions of the government. This is more likely to occur in a transition to democracy that involves a cleaner break with the past than was the case in Russia. Such a transition involves creating new institutions designed with democracy in mind and establishing the legitimacy of the new government by means of elections. Such a transition is more likely to create incentives promoting party system development. Instead, in the case of Russia, the existing rulers simply inherited control of a new sovereign state, creating a strong disincentive to tinker with outmoded political institutions.

In fact, political reform did not occur until the struggle between the executive and legislative branches for control of the government, in which parties did not play a part, made it necessary for Yeltsin to strengthen his hold on power, albeit within a democratic framework. It is not likely that promoting a party system would be compatible with this agenda. Accountability restricts freedom of action.

Party government means that individuals must cede some control over the political process to parties, and parties can make formidable opponents. Little wonder then, that the political system instituted by the Russian constitution passed in 1993, through a combination of indifference to party system development and concern that parties could impede executive power, has offered few inducements to strengthening Russia's party system and too many opportunities to perpetuate its weakness through elite behavior motivated by expediency and private interest.

The constitution established presidential rule by granting the president substantial powers to overcome, and even ignore, the federal assembly (of which the Duma is the lower house), including rule by decree. Since neither Yeltsin nor Putin became members of a party, presidential politics is not party politics. There exists no party basis for holding the office wielding the lion's share of state power accountable. On the other hand, the Duma, which is constituted along party lines, has little ability to proactively develop and implement policy. The federal assembly is not totally without power. One of the key sources of the federal assembly's power is the requirement that the president's budget must pass the assembly. However, independent legislative action is largely restricted to reaction to the president to "wrest concessions in exchange for passage" (Huskey 1999, 168), which was characteristic of legislative politics during Yeltsin's presidency. In return, Yeltsin often undermined party cohesion by exerting influence on individual leaders through such means as control over the allocation of the perks of legislative office. Putin currently enjoys much greater party support in the Duma, but he is still not accountable to them for his actions. Indeed, party compliance with presidential acts should not be construed as independence of action. Moreover, Putin has also used his influence to weaken the opposition in the Duma by courting individual party leaders.

Many of the advantages of representation in the Duma are the benefits provided to individual office holders—visibility, legitimacy, staff, and other prerequisites (Huskey 1999, 168). In 1993 and 1995, this provided a powerful disincentive for kindred parties to unite into fewer, larger organizations. The main incentive for building a larger party is to obtain sufficient representation to advance an agenda. But why should Russia's party leaders sacrifice the autonomy of their organizations to build strong programmatic parties when they cannot implement programs and when their smaller parties are at least potentially sufficient to propel them into office? This is exactly the sentiment expressed by a member of the Women of Russia Party when, after learning that the party just passed the voter list barrier with 6 percent of the vote, stated, "We won" (168). Although in the 1999 election there was some consolidation of the democratic center forces in the formation of the Union of Right Forces Party, other parties popped into existence to advance their leaders' ambitions. Even larger party organizations are susceptible to individualistic motivations. There is little impetus to change the supply-side nature of Russia's party system when parties are better able to provide their leaders with offices than to respond to voters' demands.

Additionally, because of the structure of the Duma itself, in particular the faction system, party cohesion suffers from private interest. Access to committee and

other leadership assignments is granted to factions formed after elections, rather than to the electoral parties themselves, with no requirement that factions must be representative of electoral results in some fashion. It is only after the election that winning candidates show their true colors; independents reveal their political alignments, party candidates allied with one party simply for electoral advantage bolt to join a different faction; and others are seduced away by opportunities to satisfy their personal ambitions. After each election, the composition of the Duma's "party" system has been strikingly different from what the voters chose and continues to change throughout the period between elections. In effect, this erects a barrier that prevents the electorate from judging who is accountable for the work of the legislature and thus insulates the legislators from the demands of the electorate.

Another factor that explains the state of Russia's party system is the electoral system which, for the most part, contributes little toward party system formation. Again, the circumstances of the founding of the Russian Federation played an important role. In this case, the absence of a founding election represented a lost opportunity. It is possible that, had he chosen to do so, Yeltsin could have mobilized the pro-reform supporters among elites and the electorate to form a party under his leadership. He could have done this particularly in the early period when his popularity was still high and avoided the fragmentation of the democratic center in the 1995 Duma election, creating a base of party support for his policies in the legislature. In the 1993 election, as many as 85 percent of the voters who supported the Russia's Choice Party, which gained the most seats of any party in that election, did so because they believed that Yeltsin was affiliated with that party (Belin and Ortung 1997, 40). In addition, Putin's popularity propelled the upstart Unity Party from nothing to the second strongest party in the Duma in just ten weeks.

In 2001, the situation is the reverse. It is the Duma elections that have stimulated the emergence of a multiparty system in which no single party has ever gained more than a quarter of the vote. In the presidential race, however, a candidate must garner an absolute majority to win office, by holding a second round if necessary. Party candidates can hope to advance to a second round, as Zyuganov did in 1996, but a winning strategy requires that party candidates must reach out beyond their own parties' base of support to receive the endorsement of *other* parties and support from the electoral base of those other parties to win. Given the level of interparty rivalries that exist in Russia, such coalition-building is difficult to achieve. Instead of partisan presidential candidates fostering party system stability, the party system creates an advantage for candidates who wish to maintain their distance from parties to make non-partisan appeals to the broader electorate.

The reason so many party leaders compete in the Duma election is to position themselves for the presidency. This is due to a combination of two factors. First is that the Duma election occurs six months prior to the presidential race. Second, the proportional representation race, which restricts participation to parties, is nationwide. This combination provides the perfect opportunity for party leaders to put themselves before the public and acquire name recognition in time to

enter the contest for the real prize: the presidency. It also provides the financial resources to accomplish this, for those parties that qualified to run. This situation also contributes to the fragmentation of the party system which, in turn, makes it difficult for partisan leaders to win the presidency. As Urban and Gel'man point out: "Parliamentary elections thus appeared for many would-be nominees for the presidency as 'primaries' in which their names would be promoted and their organizations tested in political battle. Concomitantly, the impetus to combine forces in order to win a larger share of seats in a rather powerless parliament was rather weak" (1997, 201).

Regarding the parliamentary elections themselves, the use of proportional representation rules for electing half of the Duma members is a positive influence on the party system, but it also hides aspects of party system weakness that are revealed when examining races involving single-member districts. The essential differences between these two electoral systems are that proportional representation, by its nature, requires competition by parties, whereas a single-member district does not, and that the proportional representation race is nationwide, whereas the single-member district races are local. Proportional representation rules promote the development of larger party organizations that focus on broader national issues. What the single-member district races reveal is that, to a considerable degree, the result of proportional representation rules is artificial. As Robert Moser notes in his study of the 1993 and 1995 elections, with the exception of support for the APR, electoral results in the district contests did not reflect patterns of regional interests, but instead indicated that these contests were intensely local in nature (1998, 62). He concludes that the lack of a well-developed party system with partisan roots in society has led to the emergence of the personal politics of candidate-centered elections in Russia, in which local well-known notables have a distinct advantage. This is why in 1995, contrary to Duverger's Law, the district plurality contests produced more party representation in the Duma than did proportional representation with its 5 percent barrier. Small local parties abounded because they were sufficient to elect local elites. In the 1999 single-member district races, local parties won far fewer seats but not because they formed larger coalitions. Rather, 1999 saw a return of the independent candidate winning seats at a level approaching that of the 1993 election. In addition, the parties competing in the proportional representation race significantly reduced their efforts to win single-member district seats in 1999, concentrating instead on districts where their base of support was strong. Overall, it appears that parties have a limited impact on single-member district races, and many candidates have discovered that they are not necessary.

This last point is representative of a trend, most clearly revealed in the latest round of elections (1999–2000), that is the most disturbing factor contributing to the weakness of Russia's party system: the rising intrusion of "parties of power" in the electoral process. In the context of the democratic method of alternating control of the government through competitive elections, the term "party of power" is a misnomer. Such "parties" do not forge links between state and society. They do not compete for power by offering visions of how best to represent

society's interests. Instead, they are alliances of governmental and economic elites who are determined to hold on to power to advance their own common interests. Of course, even in established democracies, parties have been accused of functioning in this manner. But the crucial distinction is that parties in established democracies maintain their organizational independence from the state. They provide an independent source of the resources necessary to field candidates in elections, whereas Russia's "parties of power" directly apply the considerable resources of the state and its allies to the electoral contest, including, most insidiously, their direct control over the livelihood of large numbers of people. This situation forges links between candidates and these non-"parties of power" at the expense of the electorate.

Regarding the single-member district contests, Moser's observation (1998, 62) is still valid (1998, 62). The advantage of local notables no longer manifests itself as a proliferation of small parties, however, but rather as the decline of parties in favor of independent candidacies. Why bother to adopt a party label when it cannot get a candidate on the ballot and when the best chance of winning comes from the circle of power surrounding the local executives? Nor does the requirement that parties be the center of focus in the proportional representation race insulate this contest from the influence of "parties of power." In the words of one Russian observer, "Unlike the 1993 and 1995 contests where ideological and social factors played a role, the explanation for the composition of the present Duma should be sought in the provinces, in the gubernatorial ability to summon 'administrative resources' to benefit political parties" (Sadchikov 2000, 4). In light of this, the reduction of the fragmentation of the democratic center through the creation of the Union of Right Forces Party is not the positive influence on the party system that would have been expected following the 1995 elections. The current trend is toward formally organized parties exchanging links with society for links with the informal "parties of power." Though this picture emphasizes the decentralization of the foci of power, this should not be construed as minimizing the importance of the Kremlin's own "party of power," which mobilized vast resources to support the Unity Party and other pro-government candidates. Indeed, the 1999 and 2000 elections represent the ability of the federal "party of power" to network with many regional "parties of power" to support the Kremlin by means of more centralized economic leverage over the regions (4) coupled with the incentive to stand behind a very strong candidate. Should these developments continue, they threaten to reduce Russia's party system to a façade to cover the machinations of the brokers of state power.

Toward the Future: General Conclusions and Prescriptions

In the study of democratization, especially regarding a country such as Russia that has virtually no past experience with a democratic political system, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that key institutions such as a vibrant, effective party system do not automatically emerge with the transition to democracy. Were lack of experience the only problem, over time the political actors would learn through competition in the electoral marketplace about the advantages of

building party roots in society through agendas representative of salient social interests and of building a strong, autonomous organization that is not merely the instrument of personal ambitions. Indeed, the increasing ability of Russian voters to differentiate between the ideological stances of various parties and to identify the party that best represents their own orientation, as well as the presence of four parties that have competed in all three election cycles, suggests change has taken place in the party system as the parties have gained experience.

Any change is overwhelmed by the enduring weakness of the party system, however, due to the interaction between the institutional structure of Russia's political system and the actions of Russia's political elites. Elite action is both a cause and an effect of institutional structure. The inheritors of executive power after the collapse of the Soviet Union designed a political system intended to preserve that power and, as a result, created institutional incentives for political elites to manipulate, ignore, or otherwise subvert the party system for political gain. Perhaps the most important consequence of the structure of Russia's political system is that political parties are substantially limited in their ability to fulfill their main objective: to win elections to gain control of the government and thereby advance the interests of their constituents through government policy.

In Russia, the power to make policy resides primarily in a nonpartisan presidency, not the party-constituted legislature. Yeltsin's personal choice to eschew party affiliation has become an advantage to the holder of a unitary office in a multiparty system. To win office and to build support for (or, quite frequently, to minimize resistance to) presidential policies in the Duma, presidents need a broader constituency than party affiliation can provide and nonpartisan prime ministers to do their bidding. All parties in the Duma are relegated to playing the role of a minority party. They can either follow the president's lead or seek to put their imprint on presidential policies. In either case, their ability to advance their own policies is considerably circumscribed.

Additionally, continuous changes in the rules governing legislative leadership assignments and the realignment of the party system in the Duma after elections have enabled members to operate without regard for party cohesion. The incentive for candidates to win office is less the advancement of the party's objective and more personal gain, such as the personal rewards of office-holding or personal ambitions to attain the presidency. In other words, in the absence of incentives to serve the public interest, candidates field parties rather than the reverse. Electoral victory becomes the end, rather than a means to an end, as parties serve as electoral vehicles for elite self-interests. Finally, parties operate most genuinely only within the limited scope of the electoral contest itself.

Even within the electoral arena, it is quite likely that interparty competition would be much less significant were it not for the fact that half of the Duma is elected under the rules of proportional representation that require votes be cast for parties rather than individuals. In the current Duma, nearly half of the 250 members elected in single-member districts met the requirements to be placed on the ballot and won election without benefit of a party organization. Local elections favor local political notables who are capable of mustering sufficient

resources and influence on their own. For these individuals, parties are likely to represent little more than a constraint on their personal exercise of power. Not only are the powerful gaining access to the political system by bypassing parties, but the “parties of power” that have formed around federal and regional executives have begun to exert their power to manipulate election results. One author argues that Putin is creating “managed democracy” Mexican-style through a ruling party able to manage a coalition of pro-presidential political and business interests united by the desire to prevent the “opposition” from ever achieving real power, combined with presidential “coordination” of key social and cultural institutions in civil society (with selected acts of repression designed to elucidate the limits of pluralism) (Gvosdev 2002, 488). This is a most disturbing trend, since it threatens to make parties representative of, and accountable to, the very elites who are themselves supposed to be held accountable. This would sever the connections between Russia’s society and its political system, which is essential to a democratic political system, as well as to the party system’s main purpose in service to democracy.

Russia is not a unique case. With the exception of the Baltic states and Moldova, which view themselves as European states and consciously sought to emulate a western European style of democratic political system, Russia has much in common with the remaining ten former republics of the Soviet Union. A characteristic feature is the high concentration of power in the executive. Many of the leaders of these newly sovereign states were less willing than Yeltsin to institute democratic constraints on their power. The majority of these states have presidencies even more powerful than Russia’s, and their political parties have even less independence of action. Five (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) have become presidential autocracies in which elections and political parties, where they still exist, serve as democratic façades to authoritarianism, and in at least two others (Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan), elections are subject to considerable manipulation by political elites loyal to their presidents. In contrast, the new leaders of the ten countries of East-Central Europe formerly under Soviet control (including the three Baltic states and Moldova) instituted a greater balance of power between the executive and legislative branches in their constitutions (for example, the presidents of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, and Moldova are elected by the parliaments), and their political parties enjoy considerable independence of action.

A useful method for comparing some additional institutional features is to use the democracy ratings compiled on an annual basis by Freedom House, a conservative think tank (see www.freedomhouse.org). The six East-Central European and three Baltic states are all rated “Free,” whereas the remaining twelve states of the former Soviet Union are all rated either “Partly Free” or “Not Free” (including Moldova, although it is the closest of these states to being rated “Free”). Of the latter group of states, all except Moldova use single-member district elections to elect some or all of their legislatures. Furthermore, the less free a state is rated, the more likely it is to elect most or all of its legislators by means of single-member districts. Additionally, non-partisans constitute a significant

proportion of the legislative members in these states. Among the former group of nine states, on the other hand, all except Hungary and Lithuania use a proportional representation system exclusively. This precludes nonpartisan candidates, but even in Hungary and Lithuania, virtually no nonpartisans are elected.⁷

The enduring weakness of Russia's political party system is not irreversible. By instituting necessary changes to the political system, elite action can be as important to strengthening the party system as it has been in keeping it weak. An obvious change would be to eliminate single-member district elections and to elect the members of Russia's legislative bodies at the federal, regional, and, ideally, local levels, by means of proportional representation. This would eliminate independent candidates, replace the particularistic politics of local notables with nationwide contests involving national leaders emphasizing national issues, and encourage parties to strengthen their organizations to reach out to a nationwide electorate. Holding the presidential and parliamentary elections concurrently would also prevent the relegation of the Duma elections to a form of presidential primary contest.

A second change, aimed at generating a degree of additional power for the Duma, would be to have the prime minister appointed by the Duma, rather than the president. This is admittedly a controversial move, since, as Linz (1994) argues, this risks creating contending centers of power with no constitutional means of resolving conflict. However, the balance of power would still favor Russia's president, making a challenge of the president a risky proposition, and, as was learned in Poland, there are constitutional means of increasing the costs of conflict to both parties (Howard and Brzezinski 1998). Each of these four institutional reforms targets a significant impediment to Russia's party system formation. As a whole, they enhance the strength and independence of parties, both in the electoral arena and the functioning of government, which is necessary for the party system's formation as a link between government and society.

And yet, consistent with the thesis presented in this article, Russia's political elites show little inclination to place the health of their democracy ahead of their self-interest. Elite action has been gradually, but steadily, undermining institutional features necessary to party system development and to the progress of democratization in Russia, as evidenced by the April 2001 takeover of Russia's last independent television network, NTV, and other media outlets owned by mogul Vladimir Gusinsky, by the semiprivate gas monopoly Gazprom. It is becoming increasingly doubtful that within the Russian political system there are sufficient incentives to reverse this trend.

The most likely source of such incentives is assistance from the international community of northern industrialized democracies. In the immediate post-cold war era, the United States assumed the lead in aiding the development of democracy in Russia, but this has become an increasingly less viable option. The disastrous outcome of the "shock therapy" reforms of Russia's economic system supported by the United States has generated a general distrust of the intentions behind U.S. aid. Moreover, the declining independence of Russia's media, a reversal of the promotion of media independence that had been seen by the Russians as the

greatest success of U.S. democracy-building assistance, has created suspicion regarding the level of commitment and the effectiveness of America's aid. The same cannot be said of the European Union, however, which enjoys a much closer working relationship with Russia. More significantly, Russia's government has been seeking higher levels of assistance from the European Union (Belkin 2001). This creates an opportunity for the European Union to influence Russia's political development directly, through democracy-building programs, and indirectly, through well-crafted conditions placed on overall assistance. Should the European Union choose to pursue this course of action, it could provide the incentives for Russia's political elites to make the reforms necessary for strengthening political party system development, thereby revitalizing democratization in Russia.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that the soon-to-be established Communist Party of the Russian Federation is the sole exception to this and generally all of the observations made here regarding the state of Russia's parties. Having inherited many resources from the defunct Communist Party of the Soviet Union, including thousands of grassroots organizations and many newspapers, the new party is far stronger, both organizationally and in terms of its links with society, than any other political party in Russia.

2. For a more detailed description of the development of the Russian presidency, see McFaul 2000c, 27–29.

3. This was a key factor in the 1999 Duma elections as a whole, including both single-member district and proportional representation races.

4. In all fairness, it should be noted that McFaul does acknowledge that the success of these two parties indicates the possibility that “party dominance over parliamentary elections and parliamentary representation may be declining, not increasing” (2001c, 13). The disagreement here is with the notion that the four long-lived parties, while representing a positive trend, actually do not provide any significant stability to Russia's party system.

5. This does raise the question of whether the governors were leading or following local preferences. While this cannot be definitively answered here, evidence strongly favors the former interpretation (see Sadchikov 2000).

6. The situation was different in 1993, since there was no presidential election following the Duma race. The purpose for creating the Russia's Choice Party was to elect a more pro-government Duma. However, the rationale was essentially the same—to generate support for the president.

7. An overview of electoral systems for countries around the world is available from *Elections Around the World*, <http://www.agera.stm.it/elections>.

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Download Citation | Russia's Political Party System as a (Continued) Impediment to Democratization: The 2003 Duma and 2004 Presidential Elections in Perspective | This article offers a brief assessment of the 2003 Duma and 2004 presidential elections in light of the arguments that we presented earlier in | Unfortunately, proponents of strengthening democratic consolidation in Russia cannot take heart from the 2003 Duma and 2004 presidential elections, which have become more rather than less elite driven, contributing to the "Mexicanization" of the Russian political party system (i.e., the creation of a one-party dominant political system). Political parties in democratic systems therefore seem to contain populism, albeit to Russia's party system is generally characterised as susceptible to "the behaviour of the elite but at the expense of developing links between political and civil society" (Riggs and Schraeder, 2004). It is a feature of this situation that many parties exist to help local notables to occupy prominent positions of power. ... Above all, the regime identified itself with a single major party, United Russia, although the relationship between the regime and the party was problematical. Russia practises a heavily presidential model of executive dominance, but the polity is characterised by a dominant power system. This system was careful to preserve its autonomy, and thus guarded against the emergence of a dominant party system. Political parties play a fundamental role in the representative political systems of northern industrialized democracies. They "connect civil and political society, advance the perceived interests of individuals, groups, and social strata while aiming consciously to develop these constituencies, and provide a link between society and the state, espousing the claims of the one and enforcing the rules of the other" (Sakwa 1995, 169). This analysis emphasizes the profound impact of two factors on the development of Russia's party system: the course of the initial transition and the role of elites during and after the transition process.