

# RUSSIAN ELECTION WATCH



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## TOP NEWS

- Parliamentary (Duma) elections Dec. 7, 2003
- Presidential election Mar. 14, 2004
- “Managed Democracy” stifles campaigns
- Media face biggest constraints since 1989
- Putin endorses United Russia but doesn’t join it
- United Russia, Communists far ahead in polls
- 2 pro-Western, free-market parties likely to win seats
- Zhirinovsky’s nationalists surge into third place
- Putin unchallenged in presidential race
- District races, not party-list contests, will be decisive
- Putin may not get majority in parliament

## SEE INSIDE

P.2: *The Duma’s 2 Halves: Rules of the Game*

P.2: *Profiles of major parties, leaders, strategies*

P.2: *That’s Illegal?! Russia’s severe campaign laws*

P.5: *Insider Information: Top Russian analysts from different party camps explain the campaign*

## WHAT’S AT STAKE

The December Duma elections will be the first held under the watch of Russian President Vladimir **Putin** (pictured). At stake is the working majority that has helped him enact a radical reform agenda including a 13% flat tax, ratification of START II and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, a reduction in the power of maverick regional leaders, and restrictions on media freedoms. Yeltsin was long stymied by opposition-dominated parliaments and sometimes resorted to presidential decrees or brute violence to impose reforms. Putin, whose calling card is political stability, is pulling out all stops to keep from falling into the same position.

The key “stop” is what Russians like to call “managed democracy,” ways by which the state manipulates election outcomes. All three major television networks are state-controlled, give sparse coverage to opposition candidates, and report extensively on the good deeds of Putin and his closest associates (for a Communist take, see Peshkov on p.10). Competitors are forbidden to campaign on television until the final month before election day, further boosting incumbents whose “non-campaign” activities are deemed newsworthy (see Nikonov on p.8). Election law is complex and severe, enabling selective disqualification of candidates. Others are given an “offer they can’t refuse,” such as a government post, in return for pulling out of a race. Democracy itself is thus at stake.



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## THE POLLS: If the Vote Were Today...

	Vote	VTsIOM-A	ROMIR
DUMA	Dec. 1999	Sept. 2003	Sept. 2003
United Russia	23%*	28%	31%
Communists	24	23	11
LDPR	6	5	5
Yabloko	6	5	4
SPS	9	5	5
Against All	3	4	8
“Hard to Say”	--	20	13
PRESIDENCY	Mar. 2000		
Putin	53	55	61
Zyuganov	29	11	6
Glaziev	--	3	1
Zhirinovsky	3	3	4
Yavlinsky	6	2	2
Nemtsov	--	2	1
Against All	2	5	3
“Hard to Say”	--	9	5

ROMIR polled 1500 people in 40 regions nationwide on September 18-24 and reports the straight percentage of adult citizens who say they would vote for a particular party or candidate, given a list of names, if the election were held now. VTsIOM-A, surveying 1600 people in 40 regions nationwide on September 19-22, makes an additional adjustment in its Duma ratings, counting only the responses of the 63% who, in answer to a separate question, said they are likely to vote (note: VTsIOM-A does not do this for the presidential vote, where 8% are found not planning to vote). ROMIR found that 16% and 9% will not vote for Duma and president, respectively. We report only parties/candidates with at least 3%, except for Yavlinsky and Nemtsov.

\* Unity’s total. United Russia grew out of Unity and its absorption of Fatherland-All Russia, which had won 13% in the 1999 election.

## MAKING SENSE OF RUSSIAN POLLS

Pollsters can obtain very different results just by changing the wording of a question, the set of choices from which respondents choose, or the baseline of comparison. Honest and highly respected specialists thus often disagree on how best to assess public opinion, as reflected in the different techniques used by VTsIOM-A and ROMIR (see above). Such differences can become politicized: Under fire from some pro-Putin politicians for allegedly inaccurately reporting their “true” ratings, Yury Levada’s VTsIOM became the center of a political scandal over the summer. Formerly a state organization that operated independently, VTsIOM found itself the target of a privatization plan that Levada said would impinge on his agency’s integrity. He then defected with his entire team of specialists and founded VTsIOM-A, a fully private polling firm.

## DATES TO REMEMBER

November 7, 2003: Television campaigning begins

December 7, 2003: Duma elections

March 14, 2004: Presidential election

The election's outcome is far from certain. Powerful regional bosses and financial-industrial "oligarchs" are sometimes dubious Kremlin allies, wary of the short leash on which Putin intends to keep them. Election commissions have also been reluctant to falsify results outright on a large scale, leading to Kremlin losses in some key regional elections in recent years, including industrial powerhouse Nizhny Novgorod. This leaves voters with real power to influence outcomes. If citizens become too disgusted with the process, they also can annul any race if a plurality exercises the right to vote "against all" or if fewer than 25% come to the polls, events that have happened in isolated, but significant, instances.

## THE 2 HALVES OF THE DUMA

The 450-seat Duma (pictured) has two halves. One half is filled when Russians vote for one of the 25 party lists of candidates that have been nominated. The 225 seats



are divided among these parties in proportion to the share of the vote won by each party that nets at least 5%. The other 225 seats are elected much like the United

States House of Representatives, where a voter chooses a candidate to represent his or her territorial district. The candidate with the most votes wins. Districts are designed to be roughly equal in population. Moscow City has the greatest representation with 15 districts (*see Kolmakov on Moscow politics, p.5*), whereas 39 regions have just one district apiece. Each voter thus makes two separate choices, one for a party and one for a district candidate who may or may not belong to that party.

## WHERE THE KEY BATTLE LIES

While most analysts tend to focus on the party list competition, the district elections represent the key "swing factor" influencing whether Putin can control the new Duma. According to polling results reported on p.1,



Putin's favorite party, United Russia, would get about 30% of the party-list vote if the election were held now. But this is only 30% of half of the Duma, the 225 seats allocated by party-list voting. Even if we adopt United Russia's own optimistic expectation that it will garner 40% of the party-list vote, far more than any single party has won since Soviet times, Putin would need to net roughly 60% of the seats in the district contests in order to gain a loyal majority. Barring absolutely massive election fraud in counting party-list votes, which few expect, a Putin majority requires a landslide in the districts. (United Russia activists are pictured above.)

The districts, then, are where the most important battles will be fought. It is also where democracy is most

## THAT'S ILLEGAL?! True or False:

1. The President cannot campaign for candidates he likes.
2. Parties cannot bring voters to the polls on election day.
3. Campaigning is outlawed on voting day and eve.
4. Providing almost any information about a candidate is legally considered "campaigning" by the provider.
5. Media outlets can be shut down after two findings of "campaigning."
6. Parties and candidates cannot campaign for the Duma on television between Sept. 2 and Nov. 7, 2003.
7. The President cannot be a member of a political party.

*The answers? All are true. Purportedly to eliminate the dirty campaign tactics and abuses of state power in favor of particular candidates that have characterized previous elections, a newly revised law on "voter rights" prevents media from expressing views about a candidate's position or campaign, demands that all candidates receive equal coverage by a media outlet, bars many top state officials from campaigning unless they take an official leave of absence, and restricts "preelection campaigning" to a prescribed period. Subjectivity in identifying "reporting" and "campaigning" constrains journalists' ability to provide basic political coverage. Some parliamentarians, led by SPS (*see p.3*), have challenged this law on the grounds that it violates free speech. The Constitutional Court is set to rule this month.*

"manageable," particularly in regions where governors have built strong political machines. Unfair election tactics and voter confusion are also facilitated by the mass media's neglect of the districts. Even apart from governors' complete control of local media in some regions, not one Russian or foreign media outlet has had the will and the means to cover all of these district races systematically. Russian voters have no CNN website where they can go to see how other races are shaping up nationwide in order to learn how their vote will impact the overall balance of legislative power. Closer to the vote, *Russian Election Watch* will draw on a new source of information on the districts designed to help remedy this problem.

## WHO'S RUNNING

**UNITED RUSSIA**, the "party of power," makes loyalty to Putin its chief campaign asset, emphasizing free-market economic reforms and a patriotic pragmatism in foreign policy. While Putin has refused to become a member himself, he endorsed the party loudly in September. United Russia brings together a host of odd political bedfellows, marrying the pro-Putin Unity bloc to its chief rival in the 1999 Duma campaign, the Fatherland-All Russia coalition. Russia's soft-spoken Interior Minister, Boris **Gryzlov** (right), leads the party, pumped up by massive media coverage of seemingly his every move. Occupying the party list's number-two spot is Emergencies Minister Sergei **Shoigu**, who has become one of Russia's most popular politicians for his ministry's heroics in the face of floods, fires, and other widely televised disasters. Symbolizing the party's heavy reliance on the power of regional strongmen, Moscow Mayor Yuri **Luzhkov** and Tatarstan's



President Mintimer **Shaimiev** round out the third and fourth list slots. The party has nominated some of the country's most authoritative and famous public figures in 144 Duma districts and will support close political allies in most of the 81 others.

**THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (KPRF)** claims both democratic ideals and the Soviet legacy, advocating a strong role for the state in managing a gradual transition to a socialist-market economy. Party leader Gennady **Zyuganov** (right) has also long sought a broad coalition of leftists and nationalists, a goal largely realized for the 2003 campaign. Radical leftist splinter parties that had run on their own and received more than 2% of the vote in both 1995 and 1999, notably the **Russian Communist Workers' Party**, are now in the KPRF fold. Also in, occupying the highly visible number-two slot on the party's list, is former Krasnodar governor Nikolai **Kondratenko**, known as one of Russia's most charismatic and outspoken anti-Semites. Interestingly, the party also includes some representatives of big business on its ticket, declaring that it is not only a party of the poor. Several moderate defectors from the KPRF camp have launched their own blocs, notably economist Sergei **Glaziev's Motherland** and current Duma speaker Gennady **Seleznev's "Speakers' Bloc,"** an alliance with Putin ally Sergei **Mironov**, speaker of the Federation Council (Russia's unelected upper house of parliament). None of these Communist spinoffs, however, is polling close to the critical 5% level. As usual, the KPRF is running candidates in a majority of the 225 districts (this time 178) and will back allies in most others.



**THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF RUSSIA (LDPR)** has surged into a solid third place in most polls, with wildly nationalist and charismatic Vladimir **Zhirinovskiy** (below) now claiming to be an even tougher version of Putin. Known for antics such as



throwing orange juice in the face of liberal legislator Boris Nemtsov and physically scuffling with a female Communist lawmaker, he is in rare form this year. In a late September speech before the Duma, for example, he audaciously play-acted the part of a "Western" spy out to subvert Russian "swine," gaining plenty of television coverage in the process. While he reliably captures a sizeable protest vote, his party is also known for backing the Kremlin in major Duma votes, helping explain his media access and raising suspicions that he is himself a KGB product and receives regular support from the Kremlin, though Zhirinovskiy denies this. The LDPR has nominated 186 devotees as candidates in the 225 Duma districts.

**THE UNION OF RIGHT FORCES (SPS)**, torn between its unease with Putin's managed democracy and support of his economic reforms, has decided to emphasize the latter in its 2003 campaign. The most prominent party voice is now that of Anatoly **Chubais** (right), the architect of Russian privatization in the 1990s and the current head of Russia's rich electricity monopoly, Unified Energy Systems. While Chubais remains one of the most widely hated figures in Russia, he is intensely adored by a sizeable minority and is valued by Putin, facts that SPS hopes will be sufficient to guarantee it at least 5% of the party-list vote. While formal party leader and more opposition-minded Boris **Nemtsov** appears only rarely on state-controlled television, Chubais has recently been given broad coverage in both television and print media, where he boldly defends his 1990s reforms as visionary and even says they laid the basis for a future Russian "liberal empire" in the former USSR. Chubais is also known for his sharp attacks on the other pro-Western, liberal-market party, Yabloko, having savaged it with great success for SPS in 1999. Early indications are that distinguishing SPS from Yabloko is an important element of the SPS campaign again in 2003. Pragmatically recognizing its weakness in the districts, it has nominated only 118 district candidates and intends to concentrate on a still smaller subset.



**YABLOKO** appears to have overcome the internal discord that nearly proved disastrous for it in 1999, parting ways with many of the figures involved in these disputes such as 1999's campaign chief, Vyacheslav **Igrunov**. While broadening its ranks at the local level, the party has reserved the top three places on its party list for longtime party loyalists: leader

Grigory **Yavlinsky** (above), ex-Ambassador to the U.S. Vladimir **Lukin**, and former deputy governor of St. Petersburg Igor **Artemiev**. Perhaps most critically, however, the party has managed to stay tightly on message. Leaving no doubt about its support for a peaceful resolution of the Chechnya crisis, Yabloko includes human rights activist and former SPS legislator Sergei **Kovalev** on its party list, to the reported consternation of many Kremlin officials. Yavlinsky has also injected new life into his longstanding call for demonopolization, singling out Chubais in the process by pointing to Unified Energy Systems as a chief culprit. Seeking to shed its image as a party of "constant critics," Yavlinsky now claims that Putin's government has in fact adopted about 2/3 of Yabloko proposals over the last three years, including the flat tax. The party remains largely confined to urban aspirations, however, nominating candidates in just 115 of the 225 districts.

**THE PEOPLE'S PARTY** consists primarily of a set of Duma deputies who were elected in 1999 as independents but who then coalesced into a pro-Putin deputy group. The party has remained at only about 1% in the party-list polls



despite attempts by leader Gennady **Raikov** (below) to build national reputation by advocating capital punishment and opposing homosexuality. But the party is highly likely to reappear in the next Duma since it consists of some four dozen incumbents who have proven themselves in Duma district elections before. Since most of these candidacies are likely to be coordinated with United Russia and other Kremlin allies, their chances are good. It seeks to expand its territorial stronghold by nominating 59 district candidates.



**MANY OTHER PARTIES AND BLOCS** have also advanced candidates, but all remain far below the 5% mark as the public fears “wasting votes” on parties that will not clear the 5% barrier. Moreover, none contains a significant number of incumbent Duma deputies.

**SHADOWY KREMLIN CLANS** are also regarded by some astute observers as being among the most important actors in this race (see Michaleva on p.6). The chief rivalry is said to involve two factions. “**The Family**” grouping consists mainly of holdovers in Putin’s Administration from the Yeltsin regime and includes presidential chief-of-staff Aleksandr **Voloshin** and his deputy Vyacheslav **Surkov**. Another set, variously called “**St. Petersburgers**,” “**Chekists**,” or “**Siloviki**,” mainly includes those whom Putin has brought in, often with former-KGB links or ties to the city of St. Petersburg, such as deputy chiefs-of-staff Igor **Sechin** and Viktor **Ivanov**.

Many observers treat United Russia as primarily a Voloshin-Surkov creature but regard other pro-Putin parties like the People’s Party and the Speakers’ Bloc as attempts by the Chekists to gain their own Duma footing. If this is the case, Putin’s loud endorsement of United Russia and his relative indifference to the others signal a victory for the Family, probably brought about by the failure of the People’s Party and the Speaker’s Bloc to creep close to the 5% barrier in the polls.



Both Kremlin clans (sometimes called multiple “Kremlin towers”) are also suspected of actually promoting a proliferation of parties with the express purpose of sapping votes from key Kremlin antagonists, such as the KPRF. Frequently mentioned in this vein are Glaziev’s Motherland alliance and the Speakers’ Bloc. A recent United Russia attack on the latter, however, perhaps indicates that the Family clan is worried that these blocs could actually work against United Russia as much as against the KPRF. While some see Putin as beholden to these groups, others see him as following Yeltsin’s grand tradition of playing different groups off one another so as to maximize his own decisionmaking autonomy.

--Henry Hale, Indiana University, Carnegie Moscow Center

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# **INSIDER INFORMATION:**

## **CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS**

### **BY LEADING RUSSIAN PRACTITIONERS**

#### **THE MOSCOW DIMENSION OF THE DECEMBER 2003 ELECTIONS**

**Sergei Kolmakov**

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##### **SOME KEY POINTS:**

*\*Moscow voters will choose both mayor and Duma delegation on December 7*

*\*Luzhkov is heavy favorite after deal with Kremlin, but the upcoming term will be his last*

*\*Major battle looms on post-Luzhkov horizon*

*\*Protest vote potential high in Moscow*

In the last elections (March 2000) there were 6,939,686 registered voters in Moscow, accounting for 6.4% of the Russian electorate. For December 2003 Moscow's share of the national electorate remains the same even though the number of voters in Moscow has declined. Voter turnout is typically high (64-70%) in Moscow, where the electorate is primarily right-center and heavily influenced by the city's mayor.

Doubtless, the main issue is what Yury Luzhkov's virtually certain reelection to a final term as mayor will mean for Moscow. Here are some features of the 2003 mayoral campaign:

- An utter lack of public intrigue and, as anticipated, the non-participation of any federal-level candidates (such as Borodin and Kirienko in the 1999 elections);
- A temporary truce between Luzhkov and key federal political clans on the following terms: an end to the destabilization of Moscow's ruling circle, a peaceful reelection, and a "head start" of at least 2-3 years in exchange for the mobilization of Moscow's electorally useful and politically significant resources for the benefit of United Russia's party list. (For example, in 1999,

Luzhkov's Fatherland-All Russia bloc received 40% and its chief rival, Unity, only about 7%). The most important clause of the cease-fire, however, is Luzhkov's pledge not to monopolize the naming of a successor.

All the difficult questions — namely whether a third term would be legal for Yury Luzhkov and the legislative collision over whether the vice-mayor would be an elected official — were already settled several months before the election.

#### **The cease-fire's most important clause is Luzhkov's pledge not to monopolize the naming of a successor.**

Following the Constitutional Court's July 2002 decision to allow Luzhkov to run for a third term, his prospects for reelection became clear. Equally clear was the fact that the 2003-2007 term would be his last. As to the post of vice-mayor, on March 28, 2003 Russia's Supreme Court upheld the Moscow City Duma's decision to make it an elected office, even though this defies federal law. Thus in Moscow's upcoming mayoral elections in December, candidate Yury Luzhkov will run alone, in contrast to the 1999 election, when he and vice-mayoral candidate Valery Shantsev shared a ticket.

After the courts' decisions, rumors of rifts in Luzhkov's team over such things as succession ceased to circulate. The last such report ap-

peared in July 2003, averring that Duma leader and Luzhkov ally Vyacheslav Volodin was planning a December 2003 run for Moscow mayor at the behest of a Kremlin gray cardinal hoping to sow discord between Volodin and Luzhkov. It turned out that this information was fabricated by Volodin's political enemies within United Russia, but it didn't get much play.

It would seem that the weak list of candidates challenging Luzhkov confirms that the mayoral election is predetermined and plebiscitarian in nature. However, the specter of a possible Candidate X, someone to clear the political streets of all the muck, looms as the potential for a protest vote grows in Moscow. By some estimates this potential has risen steadily over the last three years and may now account for up to 25% of the voting public.

The protest vote in Moscow falls into two basic camps. A large part is the "adaptees," representing Moscow's middle class, who are dissatisfied with the Luzhkov "system" of governance, the total domination of business, and the ineffective utilization of the city's real estate and financial potential.

The second group is connected with the problems of growing social polarization in the city:

- Stratification along social and geographic lines, which creates elite, well-heeled neighborhoods on the one hand and ethnic, environmentally neglected areas on the other;
- The hardening of the housing market and erosion of social justice, which is fueled by the flight of so-called "native Muscovites"

to the outer suburbs;

- Overpopulation of the city, which makes it difficult to improve living conditions for a significant segment of the population since the migration of foreigners and people from other cities is insufficiently regulated and since large-scale housing development is beyond the reach of the average Muscovite, designed mainly for those with the greatest means; and
- Unfulfilled plans and promises for the improvement of city infrastructure.

Further, the high level of corruption and ethnic tension in various regions of the city is a widespread source of discontent among this group.

All the factors enumerated above can be used to Candidate X's advantage. Two goals can bolster the candidacy of such a person. One is the potential to become known as the second most popular person in the city after Luzhkov, provided X makes a successful showing in the polls to the tune of 15%. A second is the possibil-

ity that such a candidacy could be useful to political forces — such as the Union of Right Forces, Glaziev's Motherland bloc, and Seleznev's party — that need to make an electoral breakthrough and to overcome campaign inertia.

Of those who are likely to throw their hats into the mayoral ring, the greatest danger is posed by Nikolai Maslov, the deputy chair of Gosstroï (the state construction company of the Russian Federation) and a former official in Luzhkov's administration. He is very familiar with the Moscow system and knows its weak points.

In contrast, the candidacy of the banker Aleksandr Lebedev poses less of a threat to the mayor. In fact, Lebedev's presence can even be seen as a means of halting entry into the race of a more marketable candidate who would tap into Moscow's right-center middle-class electorate (as former Prime Minister Sergei Kirienko did in 1999).

The main question in the mayoral election surrounds the substance and direction of the next Moscow government's agenda as well as the sur-

vival of the "Moscow group" as a monolithic force once its leader departs and the problem of succession is at hand.

Then there are the problems of...

- The concentration of decision-making power in the hands of the premier of the Moscow Government;
- The possible social and political consequences for the megapolis' development prospects if a power vacuum is created;
- The possibility of long-term social upheaval if the Moscow model of privatization is reexamined, if a redistribution of property takes place, and if the models of regulating markets (be they open, gray, or black) are reexamined;
- The destruction of longstanding city ties with developers;
- St. Petersburgers' expansion into Moscow's financial and construction complex...

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## AT THE STARTING LINE: SEPTEMBER AND THE DUMA VOTE

**Galina Michaleva**

*Head of the Yabloko Party's Analytical Center*



### **SOME KEY POINTS:**

- \*The business elite is pushing into the Duma with unprecedented fervor*
- \*Russia's party system has stabilized*
- \*Warring Kremlin clans use parties as instruments of battle*
- \*Party proliferation, inspired by the Kremlin, will favor veteran parties: Yabloko, KPRF, LDPR*

With the presidential decree of September 2 declaring the official start of the campaign season, a motley crew of political actors of varying strength began to form a clearer picture. Administrative "newcomers" joined veterans of the Russian political scene for the formalities of conventions and candidate nomination. After plenty of separations, mergers, and formations of new political blocs, the election's participants finally had been determined by month's end. The

preferences of political elites became clear, which determined the administrative, financial, and human resources of the candidates. Now one can already discern with some certainty who will be the favorites, the longshots, and those with some chance at winning.

While these elections, the fourth to the State Duma, are on the whole based on the same electoral formula as previous ones since 1993, they are nevertheless distinguished by certain features that have implications for the party system and parliamentarianism as well as for the country's political development in general.

1) A change in the institutional and legal framework. The 1993 elections established a mixed electoral system (party-list and district) that has endured until now. However, as a result of a new law on parties and amendments to the law on voter

rights, parties are now legally recognized as basic actors in the electoral process. No less important is that an electoral system analogous to that of the Duma, where half the members are elected from party lists, has been brought to regional legislatures.

2) The party system has stabilized. Three veteran parties — the KPRF, the LDPR, and Yabloko — have made it to the Duma three times and approach their fourth election with the same leaders and the same basic platforms — socialist, nationalist, and liberal-democratic, respectively. Each party has a solid electorate, a more or less developed network of party organizations, established decision-making structures, a financial base, and a system of protection from internal as well as external threats.

3) The federal and regional elite have recognized parties as an impor-

tant instrument for winning and wielding power.

4) Rather than serving as “primaries” for the presidential race, these Duma elections have their own meaning.

Taken together, these factors have created an objective increase in the value of a Duma seat. In past election cycles we saw ex-premiers set their sights on the Duma *en masse* and governors participate in various electoral blocs, whereas the oligarchs, with two exceptions, engaged in this process more indirectly.

Now the situation has changed in a fundamental way. The new election cycle is characterized by the business elite’s push into the legislative branch via several different “columns” at the same time: by district elections and by inclusion in the party lists of virtually all the parties.

Another important feature of these elections is the open conflict between the two groups in the Kremlin, each of which uses the new parties as instruments. In a departure from the administrative parties of previous election cycles, these new groups present themselves not as administrative-bureaucratic machines with semblances of an ideological platform but as PR-projects that are advertised as products of demand without even the pretense of a political platform. Their positions, indistinguishable from each other, amount to basically the same slogan: a declaration of love for and loyalty to the president.

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### **Both sides in the Kremlin hedge their bets against the apparent favorite, United Russia.**

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But the elite’s decision to use these parties as weapons in their internal struggle has created a paradox in that it has spawned a plethora of little known and practically identical parties led by little known politicians. All these parties have converged to compete on a single playing field.

Both sides in the Kremlin — the so-called “Siloviki” (Sechin, Ivanov) and “The Family” (Surkov, Voloshin) alike — have the same goal vis-à-vis the emergence of these new players: to hedge their bets against the appar-

ent favorite, United Russia, whose success became less certain over the course of this past summer. Political analysts and journalists started to talk about a “multi-towered” Kremlin and about party-clones.

A second by-product of the strategy was the creation of potential “party-rats” who could steal votes from the KPRF, whose ratings remain unaffected by the party’s absence from television screens.

Surprisingly, all these party initiatives have proven unsuccessful despite the expenditure of vast financial resources over the summer. By September it became clear that if Putin, who up until then had merely observed as events unfolded, did not openly support United Russia, a majority of votes would go to the Communists.

The “Yukos affair,” seen as yet another attempt to “curb the oligarchs,” elicited a sharply negative reaction in the US and Great Britain. Contrary to expectations, however, it has failed to break the inertia of the electoral process. Yukos shareholders continue to underwrite different political players while Yukos chief Mikhail Khodorkovsky persists in making his vociferous political statements.

In September it became clear that one of this campaign’s idiosyncrasies is that party platforms and goals are nearly identical. It is only the images and leaders, along with the scale of the activities they unleash and their use of dirty campaigning, that distinguish the parties here. The same planks — economic growth, redistribution of natural-resource rents, the war on poverty, raising salaries and pensions, military reform — appear in all the political platforms from the Communists to Union of Right Forces (SPS). With the exception of the KPRF, all support the President either partially or entirely.

But it is precisely such similarities and the abundance of new political players that will give clear electoral advantages to the “old” parliamentary parties. Now, at the start of the campaign, there are 44 parties and 20 associations. The most significant participants in the campaign can be divided into the following groups:

1) *The “old” parliamentary parties, the KPRF, LDPR, and Yabloko.* All these are now both experienced and stable.

Neither the platform nor the electorate of the KPRF has changed despite the internal conflicts and loud expulsions of key leaders in recent years. Since its chief rival in these elections is United Russia, we can expect the most pointed polemics from these two parties.

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### **By September it became clear that if Putin...did not openly support United Russia, a majority of votes would go to the Communists.**

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The LDPR’s image has not changed (it doesn’t make any sense to talk about its platform planks since these don’t have any significance), having virtually one figure, Zhirinovsky, a whirling dervish on the verge of a collapse. As it turns out, this is an effective strategy for winning the protest vote, as is evidenced by the substantial growth in the LDPR’s rating over the summer.

The Russian Democratic Party **Yabloko**, sticking by its democratic and liberal principles, is paying more attention to social problems — housing services reform, the environment, and education. The new issues are geared not only to its small but stable nucleus of voters but also to a broader set of voters within its reach. Yabloko has one of the lowest “negative” ratings — the quantity of voters who absolutely disapprove of the party and of Yavlinsky is small.

An anomaly in this group is the **Union of Right Forces**, which was created relatively recently and has not yet entirely formulated its platform except to defend business, be it large, medium, or small. The “face” of SPS has also changed — Anatoly Chubais, the largely unpopular architect of the economic reform that was so costly for so many, has moved from the rear guard to third place in the party, becoming *de facto* spokesman and symbol of SPS. The party began its fight back in the summer with numerous television ads and posters as well as an aggressive campaign aimed at discrediting Yabloko and winning over its voters.

2) *United Russia*. Two administrative parties from the last election cycle (Unity and Fatherland-All Russia), have now reorganized as **United Russia**, a party of functionaries and the bureaucracy, created by administrative means. It has virtually one point in its program — unconditional support for President Vladimir Putin.

## The abundance of new players will give clear electoral advantages to the “old” parliamentary parties.

There is some ambiguity at the helm of United Russia: Minister of Internal Affairs Boris Gryzlov is not a member of the party yet is called its leader and spokesman. The President's speech at United Russia's congress was an obvious move to go for broke in response to two developments: the falling ratings of this administrative giant and the deteriorat-

ing chances of “reserve administrative party initiatives.”

3) *Reserve administrative parties*. Created as a safeguard in the event of United Russia's collapse, they command relatively little recognition but major financial resources. They attract voters with exotic campaign ads and program points. For example, the Party of Life intends to revive an endangered muskrat-like animal, while the People's Party plans to amend the Constitution with a clause about civic responsibility, to reinstate the death penalty, and to criminally prosecute homosexuals.

4) *Party projects directed at winning a portion of the Communists' vote*. Polls show the KPRF still in the lead. The biggest of the parties directed at whittling away this standing is **Motherland**, led by the until recently promising representative of the Communist leadership Sergei Glaziev along with Dmitry Rogozin, well-known for his conservative and anti-Western views. The bloc also comprises a mixed bag of obscure politicians and small parties. Alongside these has emerged a gamut of previ-

ously unknown parties that are nevertheless conducting active advertising campaigns.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) will without doubt create preferences for potential victors “appointed” by the Kremlin and stumbling blocks for all others. This is made possible by new election legislation that officially limits the abuse of official state posts for electoral purposes, but that, owing to its self-contradictory nature and the outright absurdity of individual articles, significantly broadens the authority of elections commissions and, first and foremost, the CEC.

In closing, the upcoming month will provide answers to these most important questions:

- What will the players talk about with their voters and how?
- Whom will the elite groups support and to what extent?
- From the President's perspective, which of the players is desirable to have in the ranks of the next Duma?

## A STRANGE START Vyacheslav Nikonov President, *POLITY Foundation*



### **SOME KEY POINTS:**

- \*New law suffocates campaign
- \*The Kremlin's goals: *United Russia* outpacing KPRF plus a pro-Putin Duma majority
- \*Putin surprises observers by backing *United Russia* over other pro-Putin parties, gives former a big advantage
- \*Kremlin split is one of few threats to the *United Russia* juggernaut

The official start of the State Duma election campaign on September 7 was followed by some peculiar events. Advertisements for the political parties, together with leading politicians, completely disappeared from the television screen while the newspapers became all but empty of any campaign analysis.

The cause for such an unprecedented situation derives from a new law on voter rights, which, besides some very useful norms, contains these rules:

- One month of political advertising through the mass media is allowed before election day (December 7);
- Every party is to receive an equal amount of coverage;
- Mass media sources are not to take sides in their editorials;
- Commentators cannot express any opinions that could encourage support for one of the parties.

Multiple violations of these rules can lead to the suspension of a program broadcast or newspaper publication.

As a result, just to play it safe, many newspapers have significantly reduced the amount of their election coverage, while the television channels present only pre-recorded political talk shows. Yet commentators daily criticize this new law together with its initiator, the Central Election Commission. Leaders of various parties initiate media events challenging the constitutionality of this piece of legislation in the courts.

The Public Opinion Foundation's (FOM) most recent poll of eligible voters indicates that there are two major parties in the lead: the pro-Putin party United Russia and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) with 20% each. A survey of voters who intend to participate in the election conducted by VTsIOM estimates the Communist electorate at 23% and United Russia's at 28%.

The threshold for gaining seats in the Duma by party-list voting is 5%. FOM gives the LDPR, under the leadership of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, 6% of the total votes. The Yabloko party of Grigory Yavlinsky and the Union of Right Forces of Boris Nemtsov are estimated to receive the minimum 5%. VTsIOM's poll does not differ much from FOM's findings, giving the LDPR, Yabloko, and the Union of Right Forces 5% each. Other parties do not have competitive ratings: none of them gets more than 2%.



The Kremlin aims at the following goals in the upcoming election:

- United Russia prevailing over the Communists;
- Pro-Putin forces making up more than half of the next Duma.

As of now that expectation seems to be well-grounded. Putin is popular, with an approval rating of over 70%, and finds ways to translate at least part of this popularity into more votes for United Russia.

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### **Television channels present only pre-recorded talk shows...**

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Actually, the main intrigue of the party convention season was how Putin would behave. Many observers anticipated that he would stay outside of the party debates and were surprised when he made a visit to the United Russia convention. While receiving a standing ovation, Putin stated that he did not regret casting his vote for this particular party in 1999, extended his thanks for its support of his agenda in the Duma, and wished it victory in the upcoming elections. With this type of support, United Russia clearly received an advantage.

The most powerful media resources, nation-wide television channels 1 and 2, are providing favorable coverage of the party. The coffers are quite full — more than enough, it seems, to win an American or Japanese election.

Theoretically, there are very few things that could prevent United Russia from winning. Splits within the Kremlin (the “multi-towered” political situation) are cause for concern, with each tower pressing its own agenda on the President.

It is still unclear whether Putin is going to promote more than one party. There have been recently formed at least four other parties associated with the President:

- The People’s Party, a moderate, left-wing nationalist group, headed by Gennady Raikov;
- The Party of Life, chaired by the speaker of the Federation Council, Sergei Mironov, which has formed an alliance with the Party of Russia’s Resurrection, led by Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznev;

- Motherland — a vague alliance between Sergei Glaziev, a former member of the Communist Party faction, and Kremlin loyalist Dmitry Rogozin, who chairs the Duma Foreign Relations Committee — aims at making inroads into the Communist electorate.

If the Kremlin supports just its primary party, United Russia, it is clearly going to prevail. However, if it chooses to support more than one, it may improve the KPRF’s chances.

Nevertheless, there are a few variables that are still unclear.

As far as the Communists are concerned, the party is entering its first election in which it is the main opponent of the Kremlin. In the last elections, the Kremlin’s chief rival was the Luzhkov-Primakov coalition, which was eliminated through heavy campaign attacks by the Kremlin.

It is difficult to say what will happen to the ratings of the Communist party should it become the target of the Kremlin; oftentimes the Russian people sympathize with the underdog. And although the Communists have more campaign funds than ever before, generously provided by some of the oligarchs for the purpose of lobbying their interests, it remains unclear whether they can effectively manage this financial support.

It is possible that they will receive somewhat less than 20% of the votes, or they could surprise everyone by winning the race. But even then Putin can maintain a majority by attracting single member district candidates who are non-partisan. From a pragmatic position the district candidates will tend to lean on the Kremlin in order to deliver something for their constituencies or for the governors and financial groups that they represent.

Zhirinovskiy and his quasi-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party will be unquestionably represented in the next Duma. Nationalist feelings are on the rise since the beginning of the war in Iraq. Zhirinovskiy’s relations with the Kremlin are in high standing; his party always gives its full support to Putin. Plus, he is a magnificent campaigner.

The same cannot be said about the Union of Right Forces or about the Yabloko party. Both tend to lose support during election campaigns. The major problem for these parties is that

their combined electorate amounts to 12%. This also happens to be a portion of the electorate that tends to be reluctant to vote.

From a purely statistical point of view it will be very hard for both of these parties to receive more than the necessary 5%. The chances are high that one of these parties will not secure enough votes for their representation and forever disappear from the political scene. It is difficult to say which party will become the victim.

It would seem that a merger between the two parties would be a good idea, but this is impossible for two reasons: 1) the personal ambitions of their leaders and 2) the two parties’ different objectives and affiliations. Yabloko is a social-democratic party of intelligent losers, while the Union of Right Forces is a liberal party of cynical winners.

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### **There are very few things that could keep United Russia from winning, but splits within the Kremlin are cause for concern.**

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The probability of other parties making it into the Duma is rather small. Only one of the minor pro-Kremlin parties has a chance of getting the necessary votes if Putin provides his personal support to it (which doesn’t seem to be happening). But even if he does, the votes this party receives will be drawn from United Russia, which begs the question, “Why should the Kremlin lend too much of its support?”

The party conventions, where the candidates were chosen for party lists and districts, have come to a close. This part of the organizational procedure tended to create hidden tension inside the parties while leaving many disgruntled participants behind. But, as always, the drama of the pre-election season was well concealed by routine, exulted speeches. Out of the 44 parties that are eligible to participate in these elections, less than one half will actually be present on the voting ticket.

As of now the outcome seems clear. But it is known that anything is possible in Russia.

## THE ELECTORAL MARATHON'S STARTING PISTOL FIRES: THE CONTESTANTS ARE RUNNING IN PLACE

**Viktor Peshkov**

*Russian State Duma Deputy, Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee*



### **SOME KEY POINTS:**

*\*Despite massive media bias in favor of United Russia, it has failed to pull ahead of the Communists*

*\*The KPRF has also failed to expand beyond its traditional electorate*

*\*Most Russians think Putin does not need United Russia*

*\*Creativity is needed for either one to break the deadlock*

The beginning of September in Russia saw the start of a campaign season that will include elections for the State Duma as well as for president. But if you look at the whole of the current year, it is clear that, practically speaking, the electoral struggle has long been under way. In fact, the electoral race has not only traveled a long road to the official opening of the campaign but reached an apex, a development only underscored by the presidential decree kicking off the electoral campaign.

Since the winter, television airwaves have been crowded with campaign ads, images of loud and even lavish events like conventions and presentations, and the sounds of popular figures endorsing one party or other even as they formally claim electoral neutrality. But now, after the official start of the race, its main participants seem to be in a decidedly odd position.

Take, for example, the media, whose penchant for the pro-Putin United Russia party, as in the past, cannot be ignored. According to data from the HEB Integrum-Techno elec-

tronic library, United Russia is mentioned in the Russian media twice as often as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), with 1.8% of all references as compared with the KPRF's 0.9%. An even larger distortion characterizes the media's coverage of the activities of Russia's political leaders: Vladimir Putin appears in the media approximately 20 times more than KPRF leader Gennady Zyuganov, who is Putin's main and only realistic competition in the upcoming presidential elections.

All this media bias — the gaps in media attention paid to the KPRF and United Russia as well as to Putin and Zyuganov — is taking place in a situation where the Communists outpaced the "United Russians" in the 1999 parliamentary elections and Putin's vote was less than double Zyuganov's in the 2000 presidential contest. In other words, the situation in the media does not correspond to that at the polls.

But we have yet another electoral paradox: For all United Russia's triumphant superiority over the Communist Party in the media world, the current ratings of the two main participants in the electoral process remain overall equal. An analysis of polling results published by a variety of research services shows that the divergence in ratings between the parties most often falls within the 3-4% average statistical margin of error. The Public Opinion Foundation's September findings show equal chances for United Russia and KPRF (20% of

probable votes). Results compiled by the polling agency VTsIOM-A indicate that United Russia leads by a margin of 5% (28% to 23%). According to data from the Russian Center for Political Culture Research (TsIPKR), the Communist Party continues to lead in the polls by a minimum margin of 1%.

Taking all this as a whole, the present situation is generally thus: Given all the fluctuations of electoral possibilities, the two parties are now neck-and-neck. This indicates that the attempts of these forces to break this stability through loud political actions are to no avail.

### **For all United Russia's superiority over the Communist Party in the media world, the two parties are neck-and-neck.**

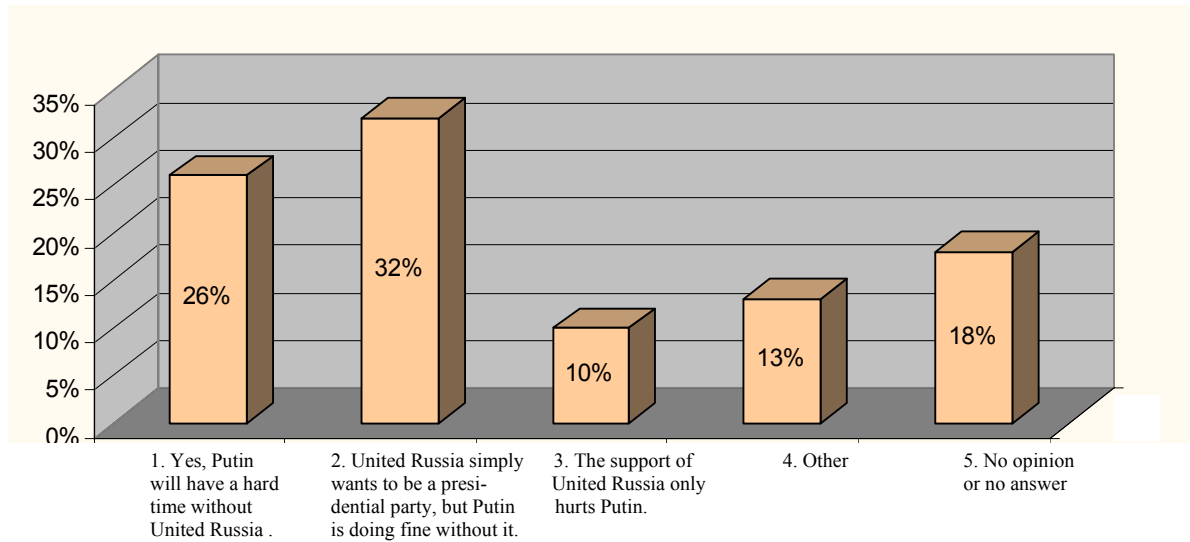
So, the propaganda campaign United Russia launched during its congress last spring, casting itself not just as President Putin's only and main support but also as "the linchpin of the entire system of power," has not yielded the party any significant breakthroughs in the electoral-political arena.

In fact, only 26% of Russians agree with the statement that "without United Russia Putin will have a hard time," while a majority either disagree with the role of United Russia as the

**TABLE 1: Electoral Rating of Russia's Leading Parties (change from previous month)**

	<b>Public Opinion Foundation Sept. 20-21, 2003</b>	<b>VTsIOM-A September 2003</b>	<b>TsIPKR July 28 - Aug. 5, 2003</b>
KPRF	20 (+1)	23 (-5)	25 (+1)
United Russia	20 (0)	28 (+5)	24 (+3)
LDPR	6 (-2)	5 (-4)	7 (+1)
Yabloko	4 (0)	5 (+1)	5 (0)
SPS	5 (+1)	5 (0)	4 (-1)

**FIGURE 1: The leaders of United Russia emphasize the Party’s role as President Putin’s main and single support. What is your opinion.**



“party of Putin” or feel that his connection with the party is a detriment to him.

At the same time, popular support for United Russia matches that for a new Communist Party of the Soviet Union — just 13%. In other words, for all its strength, United Russia remains for now within the bounds of its traditional electorate.

Of course, the KPRF finds itself in a similar situation. A campaign among voters by the Party’s deputies intended as an organizational “carrier”

of large-scale pre-election action has had minimal effects. Nearly 70% of voters did not even know about the push, which had a positive impact on only 1-2% of people, meaning that an overwhelming majority of even staunch KPRF supporters remained outside the sphere of action of the campaign activities.

As a result, there is a persistent “freezing” of the electoral scene at the official start of the campaign despite the passing of more that a half year of

actual campaign activity conducted by a majority of election participants.

The candidates are entering the home stretch of the electoral race in a virtual dead heat. To extricate the electoral competition from its current deadlock will require in the remaining two months no small amount of inventiveness, energy, and intellect from all the parties, especially United Russia and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.