

**CONTEXT AND PARTY SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT:**

**Voting Behavior in Russian Parliamentary Elections in  
Comparative Perspective**

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## **Executive Summary**

An original survey of Russian public opinion conducted just after the December 2003 parliamentary elections finds that party competition is increasingly structured around two major parties (United Russia and the Communist Party). Voters are choosing parties increasingly based on assessments of economic performance, general evaluations of the incumbent President, and opinions on important issues and decreasingly on the personalities of party leaders. These developments, at first glance suggesting that Russia's party system is developing in a healthy way, are primarily driven by one party, United Russia. Other parties appear to be either in decline or based on more ephemeral attachments and vague senses of parties' competence on major issues. Deliberate Kremlin actions are found to underlie these patterns, as Putin administration supporters have used control over television and law enforcement to weaken the Communist Party and bolster United Russia.

## **Introduction**

To what degree do contextual variables influence the development of party systems in new democracies? Much of the comparative social science literature would leave very little room for the environment to have an effect, focusing instead on fundamental incentives, said to be present in virtually every society, that lead both voters and politicians to join together in parties. Others argue essentially the opposite, positing that certain political conditions have the power to undermine any incentives for party development that might exist. Perhaps nowhere is this debate as stark as in the literature on party development in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. Where some observers see parties progressively developing, others describe a “postcommunist syndrome” that effectively nips them in the bud.

The present paper considers this question by examining voting behavior in the most recent round of Russian parliamentary elections, those in December 2003, through an original survey of public opinion. We do find that patterns of voter choice are increasingly becoming structured in the way that much of the comparative literature would predict. In particular, the competition for voter minds is increasingly structured around two major parties and is increasingly based on assessments of economic performance as well as evaluations of the incumbent president and opinions on important issues. Moreover, partisanship remains the single most important factor influencing Russian voting behavior. Strikingly, as we would also expect in a political system that is gaining in structure, we find that voters are tending to rely less on the personalities of party leaders to guide their choice of party in the ballot box.

At the same time, however, we find that Russia’s party system contains a secondary but important tier that strongly reflects the postcommunist syndrome. This tier’s major parties connect to voters not through issues or performance assessments, but through more ephemeral

attachments and vague senses of competence to pragmatically handle major problems facing Russia.

While the more structured first tier does appear to be ascendant at the level of the masses, the broader Russian political context provides cause to question whether this trend will endure. For one thing, the rise of the first tier derives primarily from the surging pro-government United Russia Party. This, in turn, has hinged on contingent elite actions. President Vladimir Putin, for example, has associated himself with this party more closely than has any Russian president in any previous election, facilitating its identification with his government's policies and performance.

But other contingent elite choices, notably the Kremlin's highly effective multibarreled assault on the Communist Party and other efforts to manipulate the political spectrum, show that the Kremlin is in fact capable of shaking voters loose from even the tightest and most rationally grounded of the transitional attachments they had formed during Russia's first decade of multiparty democracy. Indeed, parties characteristic of the post-communist syndrome show few signs of actually disappearing and Kremlin efforts of the type just described provide them with grist for their political mills. Thus while the underlying logic of the more general comparative theories finds some confirmation despite Russia's very inhospitable context, we find that powerful elites retain a great deal of power to thwart these relatively benign developments and to prolong the postcommunist syndrome.

## **Party System Development in Emerging Democracies**

The social science literature has generated many different views on how party systems emerge. Much of the work that specifically focuses on this question broadly concurs that party systems develop to reflect important societal cleavages but that this process is mediated through electoral institutions, which strongly influence how such cleavages translate into representation in the party system (Aldrich 1995; Cox 1997; Duverger 1954; Kitschelt 1992; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Taagepera and Shugart 1989).<sup>1</sup> This perspective would lead us to expect that voting for parties in new as well as old democracies, while being strategic so as to avoid ballot-wasting given particular electoral institutions, would reflect emerging attachments to important parts of social structure (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002) and associated views or values regarding the most fundamental issues of the day (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991).

Another school of thought tends to attribute votes for parties and even partisanship itself to a much more contingent set of factors, notably the past performance of parties while they or their perceived leaders are in power (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Fiorina 1981; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989). As these assessments accumulate, voters choose parties according to what Fiorina (1981) memorably called a “running tally” of party performance, a tally whose sums can produce highly stable voting patterns that are often labeled “partisanship.”

While some works focus on presidential approval ratings in presidential systems, others concentrate primarily on economic determinants of the party vote. According to models of sociotropic economic voting, when the economy is perceived to be improving generally, people are more likely to vote for the party that they deem most closely associated with those in charge of running the economy. Models of pocketbook voting posit a related logic: A person will tend

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<sup>1</sup> While some literature reviews break this school down into a camp stressing institutions and another camp emphasizing cleavages, a close reading reveals that both “camps” in fact recognize the importance of both institutions and cleavages.

to vote for the incumbent party when that person has personally benefited from economic performance under that party.<sup>2</sup>

Both the *cleavages-institutions school* and the *performance school* describe forces that are largely impervious to contextual influence. That is, the peculiar factors that characterize a given country's politics may influence the pace or the particular forms that party-system development takes, but one would nevertheless expect to see the same general logic at work in the end. This ought to be as applicable to the postcommunist context as to any other.<sup>3</sup> Thus, according to the cleavages-institutions school, postcommunist countries should have different kinds of cleavages and institutions than their Western European counterparts, but the parties that emerge will nevertheless be grounded in these particular cleavages and institutions.

One of the strongest strands of research on postcommunist party development lies in precisely this tradition (Grzymala-Busse 2002; Kitschelt 1992, 1995; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Kitschelt and Smyth 2002; Miller, White, and Heywood 1998; Whitefield 2001; Whitefield and Evans 1999). According to the performance school, one might expect postcommunist voters to have a variety of concerns that differ from those in developed Western economies, but one can nevertheless expect them generally to vote for parties seen to be in power during times of either general or personal economic prosperity and to cast ballots against those in power during times of general or personal economic decline. Several studies have found at least some evidence of this pattern in postcommunist countries (Colton 1996, 2000; Colton and McFaul 2003; Duch

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<sup>2</sup> On these models of economic voting, see Markus 1988. The literature on economic voting is vast. Some leading works include Tufte 1989; Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Kiewiet 1983; Lewis-Beck 1988; Norpoth, Lewis-Beck, and Lafay 1991; and Anderson 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Works establishing the importance and sources of partisanship include Miller and Klobucar 2000 and Miller, Reisinger, and Hesli 2000.

2002; Harper 2000; Mason and Sidorenko-Stephenson 1997; Powers and Cox 1997; Tucker 2001).<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, many scholars remain skeptical that these comparatively derived insights take us very far in describing postcommunist party development. They tend to attribute far greater importance to contextual variables that they say can prevent voters from behaving in the anticipated ways. Nowhere has this argument been made more strongly than with regard to the case of Russia, which is widely depicted as a case of feeble or failed party-system development (Reddaway 1994; Rose 1995, 2001; Rutland 1994; Slider 2001; Stoner-Weiss 1999, 2001). In fact, nascent theory has emerged about something that might be dubbed the *post-communist syndrome*, a set of region-specific factors that stunt party-system development, thwarting the incentives and other forces identified in the comparative literature on parties and voting.

These party-stymieing factors are said to include instability in the elite “supply” of party choices for voters (Rose 2001; Rose and Munro 2002), the discrediting of ideology and of specific notions of “party” owing to the pernicious legacy of Leninism (Hanson 2003; Hough 1998; Sakwa 1995), the absence of social cleavages capable of forming a stable basis for a party system (Hough 1998; Sakwa 1995), dysfunctional political institutions (Fish 2003; Hough 1998; Ishiyama 1999; Sakwa 1995; Shvetsova 2003; Smyth), the presence of elites who actively attempt to subvert parties (Slider 2001; Stoner-Weiss 1999; Hough 1998), or economic concentration under the influence of the state, denying economic safety nets to opposition party-builders who might fail (McMann 2002).

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<sup>4</sup> See Tucker 2002 for a comprehensive and discerning review of the literature on postcommunist voting behavior, including economic voting. A pioneering work on Russian voting behavior is White, Rose, and McAllister 1997.



Some of these works can be linked to a broader strand in the comparative literature, one stressing the “decline of parties” widely across the world. By these lights, new technologies of communication and organization, often associated with certain patterns of economic development, have relegated parties to the sidelines by opening up new ways to serve many of the functions that parties have traditionally served (Dalton 2002; Lawson 1988; Mair 1990). Oates (2003), for example, has argued that new and powerful forms of mass media have created in Russia “broadcast parties,” entities with few organizational roots in society.

Thus, it may not be only the peculiar Russian or postcommunist context that is stunting party growth, but a broader transnational process that simply has a more pronounced impact in Russia because it is catching parties there when they are but tender sprouts. Symptoms of this syndrome are widely said by the aforementioned works to include the primacy of personality or party leadership in voting behavior and a lack of voter-party connection on the basis of either important issues or societally based interest representation.

### **The Approach of the Present Study**

We throw some light on this debate by analyzing results from an original mass survey on political attitudes and voting behavior in the most recent round of Russian parliamentary elections, those in December 2003, and comparing our findings to those from highly similar surveys conducted by one of the coauthors in the two previous Russian parliamentary elections, those in December 1999 and December 1995.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The previous studies are described in Colton 2000 and Colton and McFaul 2003. For additional information on these elections, see the following books that are also dedicated to studying them: Belin and Orttung 1997; Gelman, Golosov, and Meleshkina 2000; Gelman, Golosov, and Meleshkina 2000; Hesli and Reisinger 2003; and Rose and Munro 2002. Marsh 2002 and McFaul 2001 provide helpful overviews of Russia’s electoral history prior to 2003,

This approach has several advantages. First, it enables us to observe patterns as they have evolved over nearly a decade at comparable and important moments in time, the moments immediately following parliamentary elections, when citizens' memory of actual voting activity is fresh. Second, we gain insight from the most recent round of parliamentary elections, the best available gauge of the current state of affairs in Russia. This survey involved interviews of 1,648 adult Russian citizens between December 19, 2003, and February 15, 2004, that is, shortly after the December 7, 2003, Duma election.<sup>6</sup> Third, the 2003 elections in Russia constitute something of a "most difficult case" for the comparative cleavages-institutions and performance schools that are of the most theoretical interest here. For one thing, the bevy of contextual factors listed above would all seem to militate strongly against the "normal" processes of party-system development identified in the mainstream comparative literature.

Additionally, while the 2003 elections are quite recent, works have already appeared in press and a few scholarly outlets that portray the 2003 vote as epitomizing these problems for parties in Russia. Authors have noted the Kremlin's extensive manipulation of mass media and other levers of state influence to manufacture a favorable outcome in this election and have in some cases decried the disappearance of Russian opposition politics and even the demise of democracy itself (Gelman 2004; Pipes 2004).<sup>7</sup> Surely, it would be striking to find evidence for the more general theories in so inhospitable an environment.

To maximize comparability with published work on the 1995 and 1999 parliamentary elections, we adopt the same methodology for analyzing the 2003 data that was employed in

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and McFaul, Petrov, and Ryabov 2004 provide some initial insight on the 2003 contest. On the Duma as an institution, see Remington 2001.

<sup>6</sup> The surveys were carried out by the Demoscope group in Russia's Institute of Sociology at the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account of the 2003 Russian parliamentary elections, see Henry E. Hale (ed.), *Russian Election Watch*, v.3, nos.1-4, 2003-04, accessible online at: <http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/publications/rew.html>.

these earlier studies by Colton (2000).<sup>8</sup> In technical terms, the dependent variable in the statistical analysis is the party list vote for the Duma as reported by the respondent and the independent variables are the responses to a series of other questions described below. The independent variables are coded as indices or dummy variables constructed out of respondents' answers to a series of other questions described below.<sup>9</sup> The fact that the data take this form leads us to employ a technique of regression analysis, multinomial logit, that is well suited to estimating statistical effects on outcomes that are expressed as unordered categories, as with voter choices of a party from a list.

To estimate the magnitude of the detected effects, we use a widely accepted simulation technique. Referring readers to other literature for a full explication, we note here that the method uses stochastic simulation based on the regression results to produce a large number of estimates of the parameters. From this, one can calculate the change in predicted probability of a particular voting choice associated with a specific change in the value of an independent variable.<sup>10</sup> We then estimate the magnitude of the putative effect of one independent variable on party choice in the following way. We hold all other causally prior or causally contemporaneous independent variables constant at their medians and then determine how much more or less likely the otherwise-median voter would be to cast a ballot for the various parties if we change the value of the independent variable from its minimum value to its maximum. The resulting change

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<sup>8</sup> For a fuller description of the methods employed, see Colton 2000 and Colton and McFaul 2003.

<sup>9</sup> To maintain consistency with the previous studies to which comparison is made here, we replicate past practice and substitute mean scores on each independent variable for missing values (those where the response is coded as "finds it hard to say" or the occasional "refuses to answer"). This avoids the problem of listwise deletion of substantial numbers of observations.

<sup>10</sup> The software used to generate these figures and the associated calculations of confidence is CLARIFY, which operates with the statistical package *Stata 7.0*. On CLARIFY, see: King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; and Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003.

in probability, following Miller and Shanks (1996), is called the “total effect” of the independent variable. In the words of their landmark book, total effects reflect “an approximation of the overall extent to which differences between voters on that variable were in fact responsible for producing differences between them in their vote.”<sup>11</sup>

To sort out the total effects of different independent variables, it is necessary to make assumptions about the sequence in which they influence one another and the dependent variable. As an example, take the variable of age. One might posit that older Russians are more likely than younger Russians to vote Communist because Communists promise them higher and more reliable pensions. While this may sound straightforward, suppose we also note that political views affect party choice and that leftist views correlate with votes for the Communists. This complicates things because we might expect old people not only to be more likely to vote Communist, but also to be more likely to have leftist values due to their socialization in the Soviet regime. Moreover, people might adopt leftist views for reasons including but not limited to age. This could have the following implications for statistical analysis. When one includes only age in the regression, we may well find a large effect on voting behavior. When one includes age together with an indicator of ideology, however, the statistical analysis as such has no way of discriminating how much the “leftist values” variable is in fact a result of age and how much it reflects values held for some other reason; as a result, in the multivariate regression the total effect of age is likely to be underestimated.

A solution introduced by Miller and Shanks (1996) and tailored to the Russian setting by Colton (2000) is to employ a “bloc recursive” approach. It begins by grouping variables into thematic blocs and making assumptions as to which blocs are causally prior to other blocs. This

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<sup>11</sup> Miller and Shanks 1996 used linear regression, not multinomial logit, to estimate their effects.

allows us to introduce variables in stages according to their place in the causal hierarchy. Effects of variables are calculated from regressions that include only causally prior or contemporaneous variables; this device captures both direct effects of the variables and the “downstream” effects that are mediated through other variables that come later in the causal chain.

In the case of the simple example of age and leftism given above, we would calculate the total effect of age through the regression that includes only age (and other sociodemographic variables causally contemporaneous with age) since age is causally prior to ideology and may in fact have effects that work through ideology; the estimated total effect of leftist views, though, would be derived from the equation that includes both ideology and the causally prior variable of age (and other sociodemographic indicators).

An important assumption that goes along with this stagewise approach, of course, is that causality is unidirectional. Such an assumption is common to most statistical studies, where the dependent variable is assumed not to impact the independent variable. Its accuracy should always be a matter for testing, but there is already a large body of research suggesting that such an assumption is legitimate. The example given earlier in this paragraph is once such instance: While age might well be said to make a person more or less likely to adhere to leftist views in Russia, few would think that leftism causes people to age any faster or slower than they otherwise would.

Following the extensive study reported in Colton (2000), we consider the following sets of possible influences on voter behavior and make reasonable assumptions about causal hierarchy, with the lowest-numbered level referring to the most primary causal stage.

**Level 1: Social Characteristics.** These variables include elements of social structure that comparative and Russian studies have widely considered potentially important influences on the vote. These include *community size* (a five-point measure by quintile), *education* (a six-point index), *age group* (a six-point index), *affluence* (a six-point index for self-assessment of the person's and household's financial situation), *woman* (a dummy variable coded "1" if the respondent is female), and geographic indicators for *south* (a dummy variable coded "1" if the respondent lives in a region at less than 54 degrees latitude), and *east* (a dummy variable coded "1" if the respondent lives in Siberia or the Far East). With trivial exceptions, these things cannot generally be derivative of people's views, attachments, or beliefs, hence they are located at the bottom of the causal chain.<sup>12</sup>

**Level 2: Current Conditions.** These factors include assessments of both sociotropic and pocketbook economic voting. *Sociotropic economic assessment* places voters on a five-point scale based on whether they said Russia's economy had changed for the better, a little for the better, not at all, a little for the worse, or for the worse over the preceding 12 months. *Pocketbook economic assessment* codes respondents on an analogous scale, also for the preceding 12 months, but asks about their family's "material situation" instead of the state of the Russian economy as a whole. A second pocketbook assessment, *gains since 1992*, takes a longer-term view, asking people: "In general, did you win or lose as a result of the reforms carried out in the country beginning in 1992?" Answers include that the respondent won, mostly won, mostly lost, or lost, with "won some and lost some" coded when respondents volunteered

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<sup>12</sup> In early stages of the analysis, we also tested for effects on voting of three other social characteristics: Russian vs. non-Russian ethnicity, adherence to Russian Orthodoxy, and residency in one of the minority republics. None had the slightest relevance to voting behavior, and so all were dropped from later stages of the work.

it. Given the immediacy and scale of the impact of such current conditions on individuals and what they perceive as their future life chances, evaluations of them should be considered quite fundamental, not likely to be dependent in the Russian context on things that come later in the causal chain such as issue opinions or prospective evaluations of parties and candidates.<sup>13</sup>

***Level 3: Transitional Partisanship and Issue Opinions.*** Respondents were coded as possessing *transitional partisanship* for a given party or quasi-party organization if they named that organization when asked if there was any such entity that they considered “my party” or when asked if there was one partisan entity that “more than the others” reflected their “interests, views, and concerns.”<sup>14</sup> While it is uncontroversial to assume that partisanship does not impact Level 1 factors (social characteristics), we also make the slightly bolder assumption that transitional partisanship also does not impact Level 2 variables, i.e. how voters view current conditions. Instead, we assume that views of current conditions are more likely to impact transitional partisanship. This is a reasonable assumption given the bedrock fact that all Russian parties are new since 1990, even technically the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, unlike the older parties of the developed West that have had generations to cultivate the power to influence all manner of perceptions, including such immediate perceptions as those of the economic situation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This represents one way in which Russia’s transitional context requires a model that differs from that used in more stable Western contexts, such as the one advanced by Miller and Shanks (1996). For further discussion, see Colton 2000, pp.24-5.

<sup>14</sup> See Colton 2000 for the reasoning behind this formulation. For the sake of simplicity, sometimes we drop the term “transitional” in the prose that follows.

<sup>15</sup> This assumption is not only reasonable but also low-risk; if we are wrong, then the total effects we attribute to current-condition assessments are likely to be slightly overestimated and those of transitional partisanship slightly underestimated.

Issue opinions are also assumed to enter into the causal flow at this stage since they are apt to derive in part from both social structure and assessments of current conditions but are not usually expected by outside observers to shape how current conditions are evaluated—and they certainly do not alter a person’s position in the social structure in any meaningful way. In this part of the analysis, we included both “old” issues that were included in studies of earlier elections as well as “new” issues that were prominent in the campaign rhetoric of parties during the fall 2003 campaign. These notably included measures of self-placement on an 11-point *left-right* scale, support for a *democratic regime* (a four-point scale ranging from backing an unreformed Soviet regime to Western-style democracy), support for *presidentialism* (a three-point scale indicating whether a respondent thinks that the balance of power should favor the president, favor parliament, or be evenly distributed). Tests that yielded no significant results were also run for *pro-Westernism* (a four-point scale on whether the West should be treated as a friend, ally, rival, or enemy), preference for a *forceful Chechnya solution* over negotiations (a dummy variable), support for *market reform* over the status quo or socialism (a three-point scale), and inclination to *punish oligarchs* (a four-point scale ranging from leaving them alone to confiscating all the property they gained during privatization and throwing them in jail).

***Level 4: Evaluation of Incumbents.*** We assume here that social structure, current condition assessments, views, and transitional partisanship may shape how people at any given moment think their elected and appointed officials are doing on the job. Evaluation of incumbents based on something other than views, perceptions of the state of the country, social structure, and partisanship are assumed not to be mediated by these latter things in influencing a given voting decision. We thus include at this stage measures of the degree to which people



approve of the performance of both President Vladimir *Putin* and then-Prime Minister Mikhail *Kasianov*. These measures are five-point scales, indicating whether people fully approve, approve, approve some and disapprove some, disapprove, or fully disapprove.

***Level 5: Leadership Qualities.*** We judge that if the personal qualities of party leaders matter, they are unlikely to have downstream effects mediated through the aforementioned sets of factors. It is more plausible to assume that evaluations of party –leaders’ personal qualities will depend on variables that we have placed earlier in the causal chain, notably social characteristics, perceptions of current conditions, issue positions, partisanship, and evaluations of incumbents that might be linked to the party leaders in question. At the fifth causal stage, then, we introduce a four-point *leadership qualities* index for each of the parties clearing the five-percent barrier. It is based on whether people answer no, probably no, probably yes, or yes on questions as to whether each party’s formal leaders is “intelligent and knowledgeable,” “a strong leader,” “an honest and trustworthy person,” and “really cares about people like you,” with rounding to the nearest integer. The leaders in question are Boris Gryzlov for United Russia, Gennady Zyuganov for the Communist Party (KPRF), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy for the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), and Sergei Glaziev for the Motherland bloc.<sup>16</sup>

***Level 6: Issue Competence.*** At the very end of our posited causal chain, we create an additive index of *issue competence* that captures forward-looking voter assessments as to whether any of the four parties clearing the five-percent barrier “would do the best job” of pursuing a given objective or whether there would be “no particular difference between the

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<sup>16</sup> We also tried inserting the junior partner in the Motherland duumvirate, Dmitry Rogozin, in place of Glaziev since Rogozin cut a high profile and later managed to oust Glaziev. This made virtually no difference in the results.

parties.” The five objectives given to voters were “improving the economy,” “safeguarding human rights and democratic freedoms,” “providing social guarantees to people,” “promoting Russia’s international interests,” and “combating crime and corruption.” This index is put at the final stage because it is meant to capture precisely evaluations of general competence that are not derivative of social structure, current condition assessments, partisanship, views on issues, incumbent evaluations, or leaders’ personal qualities.

Returning to the different comparative theories discussed above, each one yields a somewhat different prediction as to which of the above blocs of variables should be most influential on party-list voting in the 2003 Russian Duma elections. The cleavages-institutions school would lead us to expect the party vote to be clearly and increasingly rooted in social characteristics and issue positions reflecting important or emergent cleavages in the electorate, with partisanship eventually consolidating such voting patterns.

The performance school posits a voter more rationally keeping a running tally of how things are going in the country, voting most of all according to evaluations of current conditions and incumbent accomplishments; partisanship is said to emerge as the running tallies involve longer-term assessments that are not likely to be radically altered by a single election cycle’s performance. Both the cleavages-institutions and the performance schools thus also tend to anticipate a strong role for emerging partisanship in voting decisions.

Postcommunist syndrome theory depicts a much more chaotic electorate, one buffeted almost wildly by essentially random variables or, to the extent that it does respond systematically to important factors, one that looks primarily to the personalities of party leaders or ungrounded and perhaps image-sensitive senses of party competence.

While our approach permits us to make sense of extremely complex voting data and to relate them effectively to theory, it requires a substantial amount of information to implement. As it turns out, the only parties for which there is sufficient information in the survey to conduct this analysis are the four parties that cleared the five-percent barrier necessary to win seats in the party-list competition for the Russian Duma: United Russia, the KPRF, the LDPR, and Motherland. The two main self-proclaimed liberal parties that had been in the 1999-2003 Duma not only failed to clear the five-percent barrier necessary to win party-list seats in the new parliament but produced so few self-identified Yabloko and Union of Right Forces voters in our survey that it proved impossible to estimate the above-described statistical effects on the decision to cast ballots for them. Interestingly, this deficiency adds to the “most difficult case” nature of our study as regards general theory. If there is evidence that the comparative theory is valid even absent parties that are widely perceived to represent an important end of Russia’s political spectrum, then the confirmation should be all the more convincing.

## **Results and Discussion**

The main results of this statistical exercise are reported in Table 1, which sets out the total effects for each of the variables discussed above and groups them into their respective blocs. We included in the final analysis only those explanatory factors that proved to have a statistically significant impact on the vote for at least one of the “big four” parties in the 2003 Duma party-list contest. We will spare readers a detailed recount of each finding and focus here on the bigger patterns that emerge. When comparative reference is made below to findings from the 1999 parliamentary election survey, the source is Colton and McFaul (2003, p.237).

One of the most immediate patterns is a major difference in the way voters treat one pair of parties, United Russia and the Communists, and the way they treat the remaining two, the LDPR and Motherland. Voting for the former pair is robustly defined on nearly every bloc of factors and, moreover, these two parties usually occupy opposing positions on these factors. This opposition is the most clear cut on issue opinions and evaluations of current conditions. One particularly significant finding is that whereas Communist supporters unsurprisingly placed themselves markedly to the left of Russia's political spectrum, United Russia voters placed themselves decidedly to the right.

**Table 1: Total Effects on the Party-List Vote, 2003<sup>a</sup>**

| EXPLANATORY VARIABLES            | United Russia | KPRF   | LDPR   | Rodina |
|----------------------------------|---------------|--------|--------|--------|
| <i>SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS</i>    |               |        |        |        |
| Community size                   | -.12*         | -.08** | .03*   | .08*   |
| Education                        | -.18**        | -.01   | -.06** | .09*   |
| Age group                        | -.15**        | .15**  | -.10** | .09**  |
| Affluence                        | .13           | -.08*  | -.01   | -.02   |
| Woman                            | .14**         | -.05*  | -.06** | -.00   |
| South                            | .05           | .04*   | .01    | -.04*  |
| East                             | -.14**        | .02    | -.01   | .03    |
| <i>CURRENT CONDITIONS</i>        |               |        |        |        |
| Gained since 1992                | .18**         | -.11** | -.02   | -.03   |
| Pocketbook economic assessments  | .20*          | -.03   | -.05** | .01    |
| Sociotropic economic assessments | .28**         | -.09** | -.01   | -.05   |
| <i>PARTISANSHIP</i>              | .33**         | .50**  | .73**  | .82**  |
| <i>ISSUE OPINIONS</i>            |               |        |        |        |
| Left-right                       | .40**         | -.18** | -.09   | -.05   |

|   |       |        |       |       |
|---|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| Democratic regime                       | .11   | -.12** | .02   | .09   |
| Presidentialism                         | .15*  | -.03   | -.01  | .04   |
| <b><i>EVALUATIONS OF INCUMBENTS</i></b> |       |        |       |       |
| Putin                                   | .43** | -.12*  | -.06  | -.06  |
| Kasianov                                | .17   | -.05   | .08   | -.07  |
| <b><i>LEADERSHIP QUALITIES</i></b>      | .27*  | .24**  | .24** | .25** |
| <b><i>ISSUE COMPETENCE</i></b>          | .44** | .55**  | .51** | .94** |

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

a. Differences in predicted probabilities. Computed from multistage statistical model, holding causally prior and simultaneous variables constant at their medians. Sample N = 1,111.

This may come as a surprise, in that United Russia and its predecessor Unity have often been seen as “centrist” groups devoid of ideology. The view that United Russia is centrist ignores its close association with (indeed, wholehearted backing of) important Putin-era reforms of a resolutely pro-market nature, including the flat tax that the Russian president introduced during his first term in office. Our survey found that the modal response among voters who could place United Russia on a left-right scale was at the *far right* side of the political spectrum.

Table 1 also indicates that other issues did not tend to be very significant in driving voting behavior, with the Communists mobilizing anti-democratic sentiment but little else and United Russia capitalizing on pro-presidentialist views but little else. While some might characterize this as reflecting only a weak role of issues in party voting, it may also mean that voters are boiling issues down into a single dimension that voters relate to in terms of a difference between leftist and rightist values.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the effect of changing the views of the

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<sup>17</sup> In part, of course, the issues on which voters decide can be expected to depend on the menu of choices that are provided to voters. One might, for example, have expected a cleavage centered around support or opposition to democracy or the autocratic tendencies observed by some in Putin’s behavior. Of the big four parties, only the

otherwise median voter from extreme leftism (the modal placement by respondents of the Communist Party) to extreme rightism makes a person 40 percentage points more likely to vote United Russia, according to our estimate—a large effect and a significant increase relative to the 1999 figure for the Unity bloc, United Russia’s organizational ancestor.

Whereas in 1999 the Union of Right Forces (SPS) and its collection of Yeltsin-era reformers capitalized significantly on rightist views, in 2003 United Russia appears to have stolen this thunder, which may be one reason why SPS fared so poorly in the election. The Communists’ tendency to mobilize leftist values, while still sizable, fell to about half its 1999 value. This almost surely has to do with the Kremlin’s massive media campaign that on television news programming pointed to the party’s acceptance of money from financial barons as a means of portraying it as corrupt and not true to communist ideals.

Not only has United Russia become associated in voter minds with rightist ideas, but there is strong evidence that it is getting the credit (and the blame) for what Russians see as the state of their economy. United Russia benefits, and in a very significant way, when voters think that the national economy is on the upswing and the Communists, conversely, are rewarded when voters see economic doom and gloom. For United Russia, these findings represent a dramatic improvement compared to Unity’s 1999 performance. While the otherwise median voter was found to be 18 percentage points more likely to vote for Unity if his or her view of the economy went from the most negative to the most positive, it did not benefit from either short-term (12 months) or long-term (since the 1990s reforms were launched) pocketbook assessments.

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Communists made a major issue of this (except the LDPR which went so far as to call for a “police state” at one point), but this particular position is most credibly seen as growing out of the Communists general opposition to Putin, which stems largely from the ideological left-right divide and the other factors considered here. For a discussion of how the self-proclaimed liberal parties factor into this, see Hale 2004 and Hale 2005.

Moreover, in 1999 it was the Yeltsinite SPS that benefited with a total effect of .14 when people reported that they had benefited since the 1990s reforms. In 2003, not only does the total effect of sociotropic assessments on voting for United Russia leap in magnitude from .18 to .28, but both long-term pocketbook assessments (total effect of .18) and short-term pocketbook voting (total effect of .20) are now found to significantly correlate with votes for United Russia. This suggests that United Russia is about much more than affection for Vladimir Putin, which barely changed between 1999 and 2003. The Communists continued to be the party that benefited when people believed the economy had gotten worse; the total effect of the long-term pocketbook assessment on KPRF voting actually increased by a hair compared to 1999, although the short-term sociotropic assessment declined in the magnitude of its total effect on the KPRF from -.16 to -.09. The Communists, interestingly, did not do better when people experienced a short-term crunch on their family pocketbooks either in 1999 or in 2003; in 2003 the LDPR was the only party to stand out in its ability to gain such ballots, but with a total effect of just -.05.

This is not to suggest that the Putin factor was irrelevant. United Russia and the Communists squared off quite strongly on assessments of the incumbent. An otherwise median voter who fully supported Putin was 43 percentage points more likely to vote United Russia than was a voter identical except for fully opposing him. This represented a slightly greater total effect than the .39 points that Putin was found to have bestowed on Unity in 1999. Putin himself has never joined United Russia formally, and yet there is clear evidence that voters link the party to the President. And for good reason: Putin made several high-profile televised proclamations of his exclusive support for United Russia during the 2003 campaign, and he did so in the campaign's earliest stages. Our survey confirms that voters received this message loud and clear. An overwhelming 78 percent of all surveyed Russian citizens, when asked whether Putin

supported various parties, responded that Putin “fully supported” United Russia.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, 84 percent of all our respondents said that United Russia fully supported Putin.

The Communists, in turn, stood out as the anti-Putin party, although the total effect involved dropped in magnitude from -.25 in 1999 to -.12 in 2003. Most likely, this decline also reflects the success of Kremlin efforts to damage the reputation of its main rival; anti-Putin voters proved just as likely to go to the LDPR or Motherland as to the KPRF. While evaluations of Putin’s performance still on the whole defined an important divide between Russia’s two major parties, the country’s ostensibly second-most powerful man, Prime Minister Mikhail Kasianov, appeared largely irrelevant to the party-list voting.<sup>19</sup>

Given how strongly social characteristics, current condition assessments, and incumbent evaluations impacted the likelihood of voting Communist or United Russia and posed a clear choice between them, it is striking that the other two parties to clear the five-percent hurdle stood out not a whit on any of these blocs of factors. The one exception, hardly qualifying as a whit, is the modest total effect (-.05) of pocketbook voting for the LDPR. Instead, the LDPR and Motherland were distinguished among voters primarily on the basis of other blocs of factors, that is, social characteristics, partisanship, leadership qualities, and issue competence. The LDPR and Motherland mobilized primarily people who had somehow become “transitional partisans” of one of these parties, who believed in the competence of one of these parties to handle important issues, and who attributed positive personal traits to one of these parties’ leaders.

This pair also managed to set down some roots in social characteristics. Both the LDPR and Motherland won support, unlike United Russia and the Communists, in people who lived in

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<sup>18</sup> A smattering of respondents maintained that Putin supported other parties. The most frequently mentioned was the Motherland bloc, at a mere five percent.

<sup>19</sup> Kasianov was dismissed from his position shortly before the March presidential election and disappeared from the national scene without a trace.



larger communities. The LDPR resembled United Russia in appealing to the less educated and young; Motherland proved attractive to those who had spent more time in school and those who were older. The LDPR also had a strong particular appeal to men while Motherland displayed a modest concentration of support among people who did not live in Russia's South.

The Communist-United Russia divide, of course, was also implicated in these other blocs of factors. This was true not only of partisanship, leadership qualities, and issue competence, which proved significant for all parties, but also for social characteristics. If United Russia was the party of the young with a strong appeal to women, the Communist Party attracted disproportionately old and male voters. Both parties, however, were more likely than the others to gain from people who lived in small communities. There were also a few social categories that one party successfully mobilized but that the other did not. Thus while the voracious United Russia did better among people with low levels of education and those not living in Siberia or the Far East, the Communists stood out among poor voters and those living in Russia's South.

In sum, we appear to be seeing the emergence of what might be called a "bifurcated" or perhaps "two-tiered" party system. All four of the parties that cleared the five-percent hurdle in 2003's party-list competition mobilized voters on the basis of transitional partisanship, leadership qualities, competence, and at least some social characteristics. This alone reconfirms that voting in Russia, far from being random behavior, remains what Colton (2000, p.211) has described as "highly patterned behavior." For our purposes, it is even more important to observe that two of these parties have distanced themselves somewhat from the fray as of 2003. A rivalry between Russia's two largest parties, United Russia and the Communist Party, is robustly

and, it would seem, increasingly defined by assessments of current conditions, issue opinions, and evaluations of the incumbent president.

This broad finding can be extended by making a set of further calculations based on the statistical analysis described above. Table 2 reports estimates of the magnitude of effects of entire blocs, with the various component variables of each bloc essentially collapsed into a single variable.<sup>20</sup> This is calculated by running the same kind of simulation exercise explained above except that instead of changing the value of just one variable from its minimum to its maximum, we alter values across a whole bloc of variables.<sup>21</sup> This summary makes clear that the rivalry between United Russia and the Communist Party is defined quite distinctly by current conditions, issue opinions, and evaluations of incumbents as well as by leadership qualities, issue competence, and transitional partisanship. It also highlights the important finding that the LDPR and Motherland stand out in their ability to attract votes only on the latter three blocs, with the exception of the very small effect of pocketbook voting, a current condition evaluation, on the likelihood of casting a ballot for the LDPR.

The duality of the party system is more remarkable still when we observe that the blocs of factors on which the two leading parties outpace the rest are the very blocs of factors that the general theories discussed above emphasize. The performance perspective appears borne out in the finding that both economic voting and voting on the basis of incumbent evaluations are on

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<sup>20</sup> Social characteristics are not included in this alteration exercise because in the real world they cannot change much in the short run. They are retained as control variables.

<sup>21</sup> To shift all of a bloc's variables from their minimums to their maximums would generate artificially extreme expected effects. Following Colton (2000), we instead calculate the effects of "moderately large" changes in a bloc's variables. What is appropriate as a "moderately large" change is necessarily somewhat arbitrary and requires the judgment of the researcher based on knowledge of the situations involved. While a fuller explication is given by Colton and McFaul (2003, pp.238-40), two examples of "moderately large" changes are from "lost" to "mostly lost" in *gained since 1992* and from "disapprove" to "approve" (as opposed to "fully" disapproving or approving) in *evaluations of incumbents*.

the rise and that these things have become a strong part of the bipolar battle between the KPRF and United Russia. As for the cleavages-institutions approach, it is true that the main social characteristics that divide the KPRF and United Russia (age and gender) are not the stuff of the kind of broad social cleavages usually posited by this school. Nevertheless, the finding that Russia's main party struggle has centered around a left-right issue spectrum lends credence to this approach since not every cleavage need be grounded hard and fast in social structure.

**Table 2: Modified Total Effects of Blocs of Explanatory Variables on the Party-List Vote, 2003<sup>a</sup>**

| Bloc of variables         | United Russia | KPRF    | LDPR    | Rodina | Weighted average of absolute values |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------|---------|--------|-------------------------------------|
| Current conditions        | .311**        | -.130** | -.039** | -.026  | .218 <sup>b</sup>                   |
| Partisanship              | .333**        | .503**  | .733**  | .821** | .458                                |
| Issue opinions            | -.313**       | .197**  | .024    | -.029  | .225 (up) <sup>b</sup>              |
| Evaluations of incumbents | .307**        | -.088** | .017    | -.058  | .205 (down) <sup>b</sup>            |
| Leadership qualities      | .188**        | .123**  | .082**  | .052*  | .151                                |
| Issue competence          | .388**        | .143**  | .104**  | .610** | .344                                |

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

a. Differences in Predicted Probabilities for Simultaneous, Moderately Large Changes in all Variables in Bloc. Estimates control for effects of all causally prior and simultaneous variables. Sample N = 1,111.

b. Counting effects where  $p > .05$  as 0.

But while the two dominant parties are found to be increasingly competing along the lines anticipated by the general theories, the minor parties continue to mobilize voters in ways that postcommunist syndrome theory tends to describe. These parties' appeals to voters are largely divorced from major policy ideas or the state of the nation. Each of these parties did

make verbal pitches on such matters during the campaign, of course. In fact, they often made them in a strident manner, taking stands more radical than most voters would have been apt to find believable.

Thus Motherland, for example, called for a sweeping redistribution of Russia's oil wealth in order to raise pensions and stipends and to compensate Russians for seemingly everything they had lost during the painful reforms of the 1990s. The LDPR, not to be outdone, declared that criminal businessmen should be tried and shot and that Russia needed an iron-fisted government to enforce order and help the common man. Our survey results and detailed examination of these parties' campaign performance prompt us to the view that these promises, sincere or not, were most effective not in articulating concrete and comprehensible policy stands but for communicating more fleeting, contingent, and personality-based senses of style, image, and abstract competence on the toughest issues of the day, issues that governing coalitions had arguably failed to resolve due to a lack not of ideas but of toughness or will. This helps account for the very large dependence of the Motherland vote on notions of issue competence at the same time that its actual positions on the issues that it stressed during the campaign are found to have had no effect whatsoever on its election performance.

Perhaps the biggest analytical questions arise with regard to the transitional partisanship variable. Table 2 catches the eye immediately not only for the all-around importance of this factor but also for massiveness of the total effects for precisely the LDPR and Motherland, the parties that seem emblematic of the post-communist syndrome. This anomaly raises questions that are far beyond the scope of this paper and thus helps define the agenda for future investigation.

Among the questions that occur is whether the notion of transitional partisanship might in fact be capturing different sorts of attachments for different parties. Thus while one might posit that loyalties to the KPRF and increasingly United Russia closely resemble that which one finds for major parties in Western countries, attachments to the LDPR and Motherland possibly incorporate more ephemeral sentiments based largely on the aforementioned notions of style and image. This finds some preliminary confirmation in a study by Hale (In Press, Chapter 3), who explores the correlates of transitional partisanship as of 2003-04 and finds that it has strong grounding in issue positions for both United Russia and the Communist Party but that transitional loyalties to the LDPR and Motherland have no apparent relationship to views on key questions of the day.

Table 3 provides some crude leverage on trends over time. It dispenses with the specific numbers but presents, for each of the last three Russian parliamentary elections, the rank order of each bloc of factors in terms of the magnitude of the estimated effects of each bloc on the whole of the party vote, weighted according to party performance. That is, we gain a rough sense here of the relative importance of different factors on party voting as a whole in Russia over the years. This table reveals several trends that support the notion that Russian voting is becoming more structured along the lines predicted by general comparative theories of party system development, but that the post-communist syndrome continues to be relevant.

The most obvious finding, which at least rules out extreme versions of post-communist syndrome theory, is that transitional partisanship has consistently been the most important influence on voting in Russia at least since 1995, when Russia's second multiparty parliamentary nationwide elections were held. At the same time, perceptions of issue competence, independent of particular stands on these issues, have consistently remained the second-most influential factor

in Russian voting for parliamentary party lists. This hints that there is still a powerful role for the kind of voting behavior most closely associated with the post-communist syndrome.

**Table 3: Rank Ordering of Weighted Averages of Absolute Values of Modified Total Effects, in Party-List Voting in 1995, 1999, 2003**

| Rank | 1995                      | 1999                      | 2003                      |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1    | Partisanship              | Partisanship              | Partisanship              |
| 2    | Leadership qualities      | Issue competence          | Issue competence          |
| 3    | Issue opinions            | Leadership qualities      | Issue opinions            |
| 4    | Issue competence          | Issue opinions            | Current conditions        |
| 5    | Current conditions        | Evaluations of incumbents | Evaluations of incumbents |
| 6    | Evaluations of incumbents | Current conditions        | Leadership qualities      |

Very significantly, however, we find a couple of trends that indicate Russian voters have come over the past decade to behave vis-à-vis parties in a way much closer to that anticipated in the general comparative theories. For one thing, the relative importance of issue opinions and current conditions, as anticipated respectively by the cleavages-institutions and performance schools, has been on the rise. Moreover, this has occurred despite the fact that some of the parties identified by Western scholars as leading idea-based parties (notably Yabloko and SPS) have fallen off the big stage of national politics in Russia.

The analysis above strongly suggests that the trend has been driven by the rise of the pro-Putin United Russia. It is no small matter that the party on which the ascendant Putinite state has chosen to place its bets as of 2003-04 has become strongly tied to issue views and indicators of presidential performance that are distinct from assessments of Putin's character. In fact, United Russia has managed to occupy some of the most important niches that the disappearing reformist SPS had previously held, including perceived responsibility for Russia's long-term and short-

term economic well-being as well as what Russian citizens tend to characterize as the “rightist” end of the ideological spectrum. A second significant trend supporting the general theories is that the importance of leadership qualities has declined over the years, going from being the second-most influential bloc on Russian party-list voting in 1995 to becoming the very least influential bloc as of 2003. Interestingly, Table 2 indicates that party leadership pure and simple is not very important relative to issue competence and transitional partisanship even for the LDPR and Motherland and that leadership, while on the decline, still matters slightly more for United Russia and the Communists than for the former pair.

These findings weigh strongly against the idea that a postcommunist syndrome dooms Russians to random or purely personality-based politics. They are also consistent with the notion that Russia’s party electorate is becoming increasingly structured around the kinds of things that in other countries have generated relatively healthy and long-lasting party competition, with its two major parties coming to define the new choices. But the analysis also reveals that the postcommunist syndrome appears to have entrenched itself in an important part of the polity, with parties like the LDPR able to sustain and even gain voter appeal and entities like Motherland capable of surging from nonexistence to prominence in a matter of months.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this study has found evidence that the post-communist syndrome in Russia has lost ground *at the level of the masses* to an increasingly structured rivalry between two different parties, a rivalry centering around the kind of factors envisioned in the most prominent general theories of party system development. This is a fascinating development given the extreme nature of many of the forces that scholars hold to be working against party development in

Russia. Despite the odds, voters have increasingly been selecting their most important parties in parliamentary elections in some of the same ways that comparative research shows have tended to generate stable and responsive party government in other countries.

Taking a step back to consider this mass-level finding in light of broader political developments in Russia, however, we find reason to suspect that the relatively benign trends are not firmly grounded and are at least somewhat dependent on contingent events. One of the most important contingencies involves the power of the executive branch's current occupants to influence the degree to which (and even whether) these sorts of developments continue. Indeed, 2003 was the first year that a "party of power" ran under the same general label in two successive elections. Where Yeltsin's team abandoned the 1993 model Russia's Choice for Our Home is Russia in 1995 and cut the latter to the wind in 1999 for the sake of Unity, Putin unwaveringly backed Unity in 1999 as Prime Minister and then reaffirmed his support for Unity's successor, United Russia, in 2003. Surely this supply-side stability facilitated the strong rise in the degree to which the pro-government party was linked in voter minds to the President and was attributed with some responsibility for the country's state of affairs.

Just as surely, the Kremlin knew what it was doing and had good reason to preserve this stability. Whereas an unpopular president presiding over a declining economy shed his old parties of power for fresher faces in 1995 and 1999, Putin's administration knew that more people than not thought the economy was improving as of 2003 and thus saw an opportunity to capitalize by sticking with United Russia. While there is much more than this narrow calculation to the Kremlin's decision to stick with United Russia (Hale In Press), the party's prospects



undoubtedly figured into the calculation. By implication, then, Russia's establishment could weaken or stifle some of the same trends by acting to scuttle United Russia and its powerful brand in a future election.

We must also be concerned that the narrowing of issue-based competition to a primarily economic left-right scale may not be a healthy development for Russia at the present time. One conclusion from the comparison of 2003 with 1999 is that the "pro-democracy" cleavage has ceased to drive the party vote in Russia, at least among the parties capable of getting five percent of the vote in a parliamentary election. Yabloko voters stood out for stands against strongman rule and SPS did so in favor of Western-style democracy in 1999. But the only parties found to mobilize this sort of issue at all in 2003 were United Russia, whose voters were distinguished by their support for presidentialism, and the KPRF, whose supporters opposed Western-style democracy.

It is possible that attitudes to democracy have become absorbed into the single left-right dimension discussed above, with rightist views in Russia being seen as pro-democracy. There is some evidence for this, in that about two-thirds of United Russia's voters stated in our survey that democracy was a good way to govern Russia and United Russia won the majority of all Russian voters who so agreed. United Russia also won a majority of votes from people who believed that party competition makes Russia stronger. On the negative side of the ledger, hardly any United Russia voters considered "democracy of a Western type" to be the most appropriate political system for Russia and they also broke down 49% - 33% in believing that Russia would benefit from a strong leader who "did not have to bother with parliament or elections."

Nonetheless, as Rose and Munro (2002) argue, how voters vote also depends crucially upon the choices with which they are presented during a given election. In Russia, the problem has arguably been less that voters have not wanted to vote for democracy, as some like Pipes (2004) have argued, than that Russia's parties have not always given them good opportunities to vote this way. The main parties that had mobilized pro-democracy sentiment to a modest degree in the past diluted their message in 2003 and discredited themselves in other ways that drove away votes.

For example, SPS, in its effort to ride a small swatch of Putin's coattails back to the Duma in 2003, opted to deemphasize its pro-democracy stands during the campaign and to play up support for the President; this strategy proved disastrous when pro-Putin voters decided to vote for the more definitively Putinite party, United Russia. Even Yabloko, which did stress democracy in its 2003 campaign, blurred the message through ham-handed efforts to sidle up to Putin during the last lap of the campaign in hopes of winning over some of his supporters. This took much of the steam out of the party's criticism of Putin's encroachments on democratic institutions.

One might chalk this up to poor party strategy, but Putin, through prosecution of major party sponsors and other actions, also created an environment in which parties and their leaders were wary of facing the full force of Kremlin wrath and being effectively cast out of the political arena. More vital, Putin was out-and-out so popular in 2003 that *majorities* of those who said they cast ballots for each party except the Communists also said in our survey that they preferred Putin to their own party's leader in the presidential race that was forthcoming in March 2004. Rather than boldly oppose a President popular within their own ranks, then, both Yabloko and SPS diluted their messages. Worse, they engaged in a venomous internecine struggle for

preeminence on the right side of the political spectrum. Their efforts wound up tarnishing both parties and helping United Russia to seize the right flank and push them out of the way. And Putin's control of all major television media in Russia also influenced his popularity, which accordingly weakened the potential pro-democratic opposition.

This media control thus reflects yet another lever that the entrenched leadership of the executive branch of the Russian state has effectively wielded to shape the political landscape. Its effects were noted above, in hurting the KPRF's ability to mobilize supporters on views contrary to those of the Kremlin's (that is, leftism). Even bedrock loyalists of the KPRF, a group that had consistently been about 10 percent of the population through 1999, had been reduced nearly in half by the end of the 2003 Duma campaign and the biased news coverage of it on Kremlin-controlled television channels.<sup>22</sup> The Kremlin thus appears able to mobilize even voters who had previously been considered set in their ways and it remains to be seen whether they will gravitate to a new issue- or performance-based party or to a party of the postcommunist syndrome.

In conclusion, our study indicates that context and even contingency play important roles in influencing the degree to which cleavages and performance evaluations can come to form the basis of a sturdy and responsive party system. Indeed, one of the most important findings of this research is that Russia's party system at the mass level has been developing in some of the ways anticipated by studies of other countries despite contextual factors that seem likely to obstruct it. Russia has seen the emergence of a rivalry between a pair of parties that connect to voters not only by force of personality or other factors associated with the postcommunist syndrome, but by communicating stands on important issues and claiming responsibility for (or presenting an alternative to) important national developments, most notably in the economy. This

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<sup>22</sup> This finding is from the first wave of the 2003-04 panel survey.

development in fact lays some of the groundwork necessary for parliamentary elections to involve true leadership accountability to the public.

At the same time, however, we find that this development may hinge rather precariously on executive branch actions (or deliberate inaction) that facilitate it. Moreover, while the most extreme theories of the postcommunist syndrome have been discredited, a more moderate version appears alive and well with the strong performance of the Motherland bloc and the LDPR in Russia in 2003 and the success of the Kremlin's attacks on the Communists. The general theories thus appear borne out, but future scholarship will do well to focus both on why the executive branch might choose to inhibit or facilitate such developments and on factors influencing how resistant transitional partisanship is to such elite machinations.

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**Table 1: Total Effects on the Party-List Vote, 2003<sup>a</sup>**

| <b>EXPLANATORY VARIABLES</b>            | <b>United Russia</b> | <b>KPRF</b>  | <b>LDPR</b>  | <b>Rodina</b> |
|---|----------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b><i>SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS</i></b>    |                      |              |              |               |
| Community size                          | -.12*                | -.08**       | .03*         | .08*          |
| Education                               | -.18**               | -.01         | -.06**       | .09*          |
| Age group                               | -.15**               | .15**        | -.10**       | .09**         |
| Affluence                               | .13                  | -.08*        | -.01         | -.02          |
| Woman                                   | .14**                | -.05*        | -.06**       | -.00          |
| South                                   | .05                  | .04*         | .01          | -.04*         |
| East                                    | -.14**               | .02          | -.01         | .03           |
| <b><i>CURRENT CONDITIONS</i></b>        |                      |              |              |               |
| Gained since 1992                       | .18**                | -.11**       | -.02         | -.03          |
| Pocketbook economic assessments         | .20*                 | -.03         | -.05**       | .01           |
| Sociotropic economic assessments        | .28**                | -.09**       | -.01         | -.05          |
| <b><i>PARTISANSHIP</i></b>              | <b>.33**</b>         | <b>.50**</b> | <b>.73**</b> | <b>.82**</b>  |
| <b><i>ISSUE OPINIONS</i></b>            |                      |              |              |               |
| Left-right                              | .40**                | -.18**       | -.09         | -.05          |
| Democratic regime                       | .11                  | -.12**       | .02          | .09           |
| Presidentialism                         | .15*                 | -.03         | -.01         | .04           |
| <b><i>EVALUATIONS OF INCUMBENTS</i></b> |                      |              |              |               |
| Putin                                   | .43**                | -.12*        | -.06         | -.06          |
| Kasianov                                | .17                  | -.05         | .08          | -.07          |
| <b><i>LEADERSHIP QUALITIES</i></b>      | <b>.27*</b>          | <b>.24**</b> | <b>.24**</b> | <b>.25**</b>  |
| <b><i>ISSUE COMPETENCE</i></b>          | <b>.44**</b>         | <b>.55**</b> | <b>.51**</b> | <b>.94**</b>  |

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

a. Differences in predicted probabilities. Computed from multistage statistical model, holding causally prior and simultaneous variables constant at their medians. Sample N = 1,111.

**Table 2: Modified Total Effects of Blocs of Explanatory Variables on the Party-List Vote, 2003<sup>a</sup>**

| Bloc of variables         | United Russia | KPRF    | LDPR    | Rodina | Weighted average of absolute values |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------|---------|--------|-------------------------------------|
| Current conditions        | .311**        | -.130** | -.039** | -.026  | .218 <sup>b</sup>                   |
| Partisanship              | .333**        | .503**  | .733**  | .821** | .458                                |
| Issue opinions            | -.313**       | .197**  | .024    | -.029  | .225 (up) <sup>b</sup>              |
| Evaluations of incumbents | .307**        | -.088** | .017    | -.058  | .205 (down) <sup>b</sup>            |
| Leadership qualities      | .188**        | .123**  | .082**  | .052*  | .151                                |
| Issue competence          | .388**        | .143**  | .104**  | .610** | .344                                |

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

a. Differences in Predicted Probabilities for Simultaneous, Moderately Large Changes in all Variables in Bloc. Estimates control for effects of all causally prior and simultaneous variables. Sample N = 1,111.

b. Counting effects where  $p > .05$  as 0.

**Table 3: Rank Ordering of Weighted Averages of Absolute Values of Modified Total Effects, in Party-List Voting in 1995, 1999, 2003**

| Rank | 1995                      | 1999                      | 2003                      |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1    | Partisanship              | Partisanship              | Partisanship              |
| 2    | Leadership qualities      | Issue competence          | Issue competence          |
| 3    | Issue opinions            | Leadership qualities      | Issue opinions            |
| 4    | Issue competence          | Issue opinions            | Current conditions        |
| 5    | Current conditions        | Evaluations of incumbents | Evaluations of incumbents |
| 6    | Evaluations of incumbents | Current conditions        | Leadership qualities      |