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AUTHOR: THOMAS M. NICHOLS, US Naval War College

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This Report contains four brief papers, written by Thomas Nichols, examining the political, legal, electoral, and governmental influences of the Russian system of presidentialism.

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THE LOGIC OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIALISM

THOMAS M. NICHOLS
US Naval War College

Abstract

This report is a four-part examination of the Russian presidency. All four articles seek to investigate the paradox of Russian presidential democracy, namely: why has Russian democracy apparently survived and even strengthened under a presidential system when so many other presidential regimes have decayed into authoritarian rule? The answer lies in the issue of the role of social trust and parliamentary behavior. These articles attempt to show that where society, and consequently politics, are fractious and divided, structural safeguards inherent in presidentialism and built into Russian political institutions actually serve to strengthen democratic behavior.

In the first article, The Fixed Term of Office and its Effect on Politics, we consider the impact of the fixed term of office, often criticized by political scientists for imparting “rigidity” to presidential politics. This article finds that the fixed term in the Russian system:

• prevents sudden regime change (of the type attempted by Russian “anti-system” parties) and calms social fears of a quick return to autocracy; and
• forces Russian legislators and presidential contenders out of a constant and divisive “campaign mode” and allows voters to see how they actually govern.

The second article, Social Conflict and the Difficulty of Lawmaking, examines the problem of lawmaking. Presidential systems are sometimes described as “cumbersome,“ in that legislating is more complex in a system of divided powers (and occasionally, divided government) than in the automatic majority system of the parliamentary alternative. This is often criticized by political scientists as preordaining legislative-executive conflict and subverting good public policy. This article finds that the lawmaking system in Russia, while conflictual and slow:

• traps provocative legislation meant to destabilize the democratic system;
• prevents “tyrannical majorities” from passing laws to institutionalize their own powers;
• prevents short-term social passions from being codified too quickly.

In the third article, Presidential Elections and the Weakness of Parties, consideration is given to the problem of parties and the nature of presidential elections. A common criticism of presidential systems is that elections are zero-sum, “winner take all” affairs that divide society and overshadow the more representative organizations of political parties. This article finds that in the Russian system:
• parties are weak, poorly organized, distrusted, and incapable at this point of forming a government;
• presidential elections have a clarifying effect, forcing politicians to “take sides” and be more direct with their constituents;
• the divisions in society, combined with proportional representation seating in the Duma, make parliamentary elections more divisive than presidential elections

Finally, the fourth article, *Presidents and Accountability*, addresses the problem of accountability. While some critics of the Russian system have argued that the presidency has overwhelmed the legislative branch by political force and constitutional imbalance, this study finds:

• Russian voters are sufficiently disenchanted with legislative behavior that they tend to hold the executive branch accountable for national policy;
• the Duma, despite its protests, does not seek additional responsibility as much as might be thought;
• the executive therefore governs almost by default, a situation that is arguably benign and supportive of further democratic development given the current conditions in the legislature.
THE LOGIC OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIALISM I:
THE FIXED TERM OF OFFICE AND ITS EFFECT ON POLITICS

Introduction

The fixed term of office found in so-called “separated” systems, such as the U.S. and France, and
other presidential-style arrangements, has been derided by political scientists as creating an unhealthy
“rigidity” and “cumbersome ness” that increases the probability of deadlock or even regime collapse. The
Russian system, more so even than its American or French counterparts, could be accused of this
“rigidity,” but in the atmosphere of social mistrust and parliamentary irresponsibility found in present-
day Russia, this is a positive virtue.

The Fixed Term in Law and Practice

The Russian president is directly elected, as is the legislature, both for fixed terms of office (the
President for five years, the parliament, or “Duma,” for four). The president then appoints a prime
minister to act as legislative leader and head of the Cabinet.

The executive, once in place, is difficult to dislodge without elections. The Russian Constitution
places significant (in fact, nearly insuperable) barriers in the way of impeachment. Although it is
theoretically possible to collapse the prime minister’s government while leaving the president in place
with a no-confidence vote, Article 117 of the Constitution structures such a vote as a suicide pill for the
legislature. The Duma must vote no-confidence twice within 90 days, and after the second vote, the
president is then required either to dismiss his own government, or to dissolve the Duma and call new
elections. (The upper house, the Federation Council, is left intact, both because it cannot join the no-
confidence vote, and because its members are chosen at large from each territorial unit of the Federation,
it therefore represents the symbolic autonomy of Russia’s regions.) Obviously, the president hardly
needs an uproar in the Duma in order to sack his own ministers; the clear intent of Article 117 is not to
discipline the executive but to make a vote of no-confidence a dire moment for the legislature. The result
is that terms of office for the President and the Duma in the Russian system are (the structural wrinkle of
a premiership notwithstanding) practically immutable.

1. To impeach, Article 93 of the Constitution first requires a finding against the president of high treason or “grave”
crimes by two-thirds of the Duma. The Supreme Court must concur, and the upper house must then agree to begin
hearings to impeach, again by a 2/3 majority.
2. The Federation Council is elected directly but the choices of candidates are limited and the election processes
somewhat arcane. The Constitution requires only that each region choose two members in ways “determined by federal
law,” one from the regional legislative body, and one from “organs of executive power,” which in practice means that
all regional governors are members of the Council. The point, of course, is to make the Council the regional
counterweight to the central government.
This inability to circumvent the fixed term in all but the most extreme circumstances is valuable because it thwarts the ability of anti-system parties—groups that reject the basic structures of Russian democracy—to collapse the government and thereby force endless rounds of electoral combat, or even to choke the legislative process by constantly invoking the threat of a no-confidence vote. As Russian legal scholar V.A. Chetvernin has pointed out, Russia's is an imperfect democracy in which "anti-democratic forces" (i.e., ultra-nationalists and communists) can "operate legally (or more precisely, despite an abstract constitutional prohibition); these groups reject the liberal foundations of a constitutional structure and intentionally use democratic procedures for their destruction."[emphasis added]\(^3\)

Although such factions represent only a minority, it is a dedicated and dangerous minority, in which the leaders do exactly what their voters want them to do. Russian pollsters have found that citizens who want to see the "firm hand" of authoritarian rule imposed as the result of "the victory of a party in elections supporting a transition to such a regime" were overwhelmingly likely to be supporters of politicians who have repeatedly called for new elections, no-confidence votes, and even a new constitution, such as Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, ultra-rightist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the renegade former Vice President Rutskoi, or law-and-order proponent Gen. Aleksandr Lebed (none of whom except Zyuganov has ever managed more than 10-15% of the presidential vote).\(^4\) Thus in practice, the fixed term and the booby-trapped protections against a no-confidence vote deprive anti-system parliamentary groups of the possibility of gaining, through a manufactured crisis, what they could not attain at the ballot box. For their part, many Russian political figures are quite candid on this point. President Yeltsin's assistant for legal affairs told Izvestiia in late 1995 that:

> ...the current Constitution does not envision the automatic formation of a government based on a parliamentary majority. Taking the results of a parliamentary election into account, to a certain degree, in forming a new Cabinet is another matter. The point is to avoid [the tactic of] continual "voting" [votirovanie]—raising the parliamentary question of confidence in the government, and blocking draft laws submitted by the executive branch.\(^5\)

Many legislators concur. For example, Duma member Konstantin Borovoy (leader of a prominent party of entrepreneurs) said in early 1996 that he considered the presidential system to be the only guarantee of the survival of his party and of democracy—despite his personal opposition to Boris Yeltsin and his policies. Left to their own devices, he said, many Duma members would "pragmatically" go about the business of "destroying democracy."\(^6\) Given the volatility of Russian society, it is understandable that

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4. See I. Kliamkin, V. Lapkin, and V. Panin, Mezhdou avtoritarizmom i demokratiei (Moscow: Fond "Obshchestvennoe mnenie," 1995), pp. 50-60. Rutskoi has since been elected governor in the Kursk region.
reformist groups in both branches (who by their nature have to build constituencies for long-term restructuring by advocating inevitably unpopular short-term measures) would prefer an arrangement in which the anti-system groups could not provoke the collapse of the legislature and call new elections at will.

The question arises, of course, whether this strengthening of the executive’s hand is really necessary. Are the anti-system parties really out to bring down the government, or are they indulging in scare tactics to alter policy? While most legislators dismiss the idea that there is any danger of a sudden revolutionary change in the regime, it is clear that the Communists and radical nationalists see debate over unpopular (if sensible) legislation, and the consequent threat to collapse the government, as a useful tactic. Were it possible, they might well be tempted to increase their majority in one short-term gain after another, especially if they could—as they have often tried to do—change the electoral process in favor of more list seats and fewer single-member districts. Russian journalist Gleb Cherkasov believes that only the fear of losing close contests in the single-member districts restrains these groups from provoking a collapse, since “theoretically, an early dissolution of the Duma is quite beneficial to the opposition, insofar as it allows them, in parliamentary elections, to present themselves as the aggrieved defenders of popular interests.” In any case, the Communists in particular have been explicit in their belief that the existence of the presidency is the single greatest obstacle to their attempts to regain power, and their objection to the establishment of the office led to a break with some of the more conservative opposition figures, who were at one time natural allies in the struggle with the Yeltsin government.

Even the fight for single-mandate seats is not enough to dissuade the most extreme groups, such as Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), or the Russian Worker’s Party (RWP), an extremist group which broke with Zyuganov’s Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), who seem more than willing to take their chances on the fear and anxiety of electoral chaos. As one RWP representative said at a St. Petersburg rally, the only reason to participate in any elections at all is to “destroy the regime from the inside.” Acknowledging that “unfortunately, we are not ready to break heads in the regime. We don’t have the strength yet,” he added: “So we will go to the Duma. We will fight for complete victory over [St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly] Sobchak, Yeltsin and all the other bastards.” Fortunately, most voters rejected this unsubtle call to civil war, but it is sobering to imagine what effect this rhetoric could have had in the midst of a harsh winter and yet another election campaign in the wake of another failed Duma.

The Liberal Democrats and the Worker’s Party are extreme examples, but even the more (relatively)

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8. Deputy Speaker Sergei Baburin claims that this was an important point in his “Narodovlastie” movement’s legislative break with the Communists. Interview with Sergei Baburin, April 1995, Moscow, Russia.

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moderate CPRF is not above such mischief, on occasion introducing legislation in order to provoke a legislative-executive crisis and raise the specter of a no-confidence vote. A striking example of this kind of destabilizing behavior took place in 1996, when the Communists introduced a bill outlawing any illegal “seizure of power” in Russia, a patently redundant bill that makes illegal and declares unconstitutional things that are already illegal and unconstitutional. Observers of the U.S. system would recognize such a bill as, in Capitol Hill parlance, “veto-bait,” but there was more to the bill than a simple attempt at eliciting a veto.

The purpose, according to First Deputy Duma Speaker (and Yeltsin supporter) Aleksandr Shokhin, was to “attract attention and stress that opponents to the Communist majority in the Duma are anxious and eager to overthrow the [government]” to keep them from power. In other words, the point of the legislation was to press the raw nerve of distrust in society; by creating legislation banning “seizures of power,” they hoped to create in the public mind a fear that such a bill was actually necessary. “Now they, the Communists, are good boys,” Shokhin sneered, “they advocate law and order in the country.”

Who will want to go into the substance of the matter? As a result everybody will say that the president has not signed the law because he does not want to cede power. Therefore he will seize and usurp it. Supposing the president returns the law “On the Inadmissibility of the Seizure of Power” to the Duma. What a good propaganda cause to talk about the president’s democratic nature! I even think that a number of bills with such ostentatious titles are prepared especially to provoke the president into returning them, giving extra cause for an uproar. 10

Although the CPRF was behind this particular provocation, Duma Deputy Mikhail Yureev believes that the problem is more widespread: “party affiliation has nothing to do with...opposition to the president” he said in 1996, but rather is part of the process by which the Duma is carving out its “role in the country’s political and social structure as a whole.”11 In other words, depicting the president as a potential dictator and then bravely opposing him is part of the way the Duma justifies its own existence.

Opposition groups have of late taken a new tack, by threatening to introduce legislation to force Yeltsin to step down for health reasons. Communist legislators have led much of this debate, but they have attracted scattered support. However, all parties have been careful to avoid touching the constitutional third rail of a no-confidence vote, and so far the efforts to depose Yeltsin legislatively have been desultory and inconclusive—although in a parliamentary system, it should be noted, Yeltsin and his government would have been forced out months ago and Russia would now be led by a coalition headed by the Communist plurality in the Duma.

10. “Shokhin Sees Duma Adopting Laws To Provoke Yeltsin,” FBIS-SOV-96-098, May 17, 1996. The bill, apparently, has since been bottled up in committee.
“Learning by Doing”

In addition to the negative or preventive goals it serves, the fixed term also performs an important and positive pedagogical function in Russia, in that it teaches citizens and candidates alike that there is more to governing than just winning an election, a kind of “learning by doing” that is enforced by the difficulty of calling elections. The fixed term is a respite from electioneering during which voters are given the chance to see how their candidates will actually engage in the business of governing rather than campaigning. This has been to the benefit of the democrats and reformers, who have shown that the most dire predictions made by their opponents of complete collapse and even civil war were unfounded. Conversely, the radical right and left, forced out of a constant campaign mode, have often succeeded in living down to their reputations, showing only that they are in fact irresponsible when faced with the mundane business of governance.

In the Russian case, there is a lesson to be drawn from the victory of Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democrats in 1993, when they entered the Duma with a plurality of nearly a quarter of the vote. The organization of the Russian presidential system meant that Zhirinovsky could not simply take control of, or try to form, a coalition government, as would have been his right to demand in a parliamentary regime. Instead, he had to endure two years as an ordinary (if that word can ever be applied to him) parliamentarian, during which he showed himself to be a violent buffoon. His extreme rhetoric and televised physical assaults on other politicians, including sucker-punching a middle-aged female deputy on the floor of the Duma and lunging over a table at Governor Boris Nemtsov on a morning talk show, have slashed his popularity and severely damaged the LDPR at the ballot box. While it is true that the structure of the Russian presidential system produced an uneasy cohabitation between the Liberal Democrats and the president from 1993 to 1995, it also enforced a kind of cooling-off period among the electorate (and within the LDPR itself) that, by the time of the 1995 elections, had cut Zhirinovsky’s share of the vote nearly in half as protest voters opted for the Communists and a slew of smaller parties. While still a vocal presence in Russian politics, Zhirinovsky has since been eclipsed by relatively more responsible politicians; perhaps most important, he has been removed from serious contention for the presidency itself. The fixed term and the constitutional bulwark against no-confidence votes served the dual purpose of exposing a good campaigner as a poor politician, and preventing him and like-minded parliamentarians from taking power or even collapsing the regime during the darkest days of Russia’s painful economic transition.

Critics of presidential systems would point out that the barriers to impeachment, or to sacking the government, favor the executive so strongly that the system is therefore “rigid,” and more likely to break, so to speak, than to bend. To be sure, Article 117 is a stick Yeltsin is not afraid to use: during a 1995

12. As Arturo Valenzuela puts it, unlike presidential systems, in parliamentary systems “crises of government do not become crises of regime.” Quoted in Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering* (New York: NYU
confrontation (discussed below) in which the Duma threatened a vote of no-confidence. Yeltsin told Russian journalists that "the Duma can sign its own sentence" and that "if the State Duma does not want to be disbanded, it should not try to disband the government." Advocates of parliamentarism point to this kind of behavior as an example of how the "rigidity" of the fixed term means that presidents and opposition legislators end up "stuck" with one another, with the executives "condemned to serve out their terms" and left with few options but to rule by decree. Short of enduring the traumas of presidential resignation or parliamentary dissolution, neither side can escape the impasse: the presidential term, according to Linz, "breaks the political process into discontinuous, rigidly demarcated periods, leaving no room for the continuous readjustments that events may demand."

What this fails to take into account, however, is the possibility that the legislature will, for its own reasons, intentionally seek to destabilize the government, even where there is no indication that "events" may "demand" it. Linz's view of presidents, to use Kurt von Mettenheim's words, is "unrelievedly negative," and this leads to a consequent lack of concern about the behavior of legislators.

One instance, for example, where the system's putative "rigidity" forced negotiation and compromise rather than collapse and chaos occurred during the crisis associated with the disastrous showing of the Russian military in Chechnya in the spring and summer of 1995. Although the war was deeply unpopular, so was allowing Chechnya to secede, and there was no question that the violence would continue one way or another. The only viable opponents to the president in the upcoming elections, the Communists, were critical of the war, but still pressed for a successful conclusion in which Chechnya remained part of the Federation—indeed, they could hardly do otherwise, considering that their first act in the Duma had been to call for the restoration of the entire Soviet Union. Still, even other Duma members (including those who genuinely wanted the fighting to stop) knew an opportunity to score points against the president when they saw one, and a no-confidence vote duly took place and carried.

A second vote was due in July 1995, and Yeltsin was soon to be faced with a Hobson's choice of either dismissing his government, which he was not about to do, or dissolving the Duma, which in all likelihood would have caused massive unrest in Russia's streets. (Article 117 is biased in favor of the president, but it is hardly risk-free.) For their part, the legislators were now in a corner as well. Many of them—particularly the liberals who were the actual opponents of the war—knew that they would be defeated if new elections were called while emotions in the country were running so high. Only the anti-system parties stood to gain; they could count not only on returning to power, but many in Moscow

suspected that if given the chance they would ignore world opinion and attack the Chechens even more brutally than Yeltsin had in order to finish the conflict and dispose of the matter once and for all.  

At the last moment, a crisis was averted after negotiations that resulted in the president agreeing to sack three prominent hawks in his cabinet. The negotiations themselves are less interesting than the fact that neither side attempted to short-circuit Article 117, either by law or amendment (the Duma's options) or by decree or plebiscite (the president's options). All this prompted one moderate democratic legislator to marvel: "The word 'compromise' is perhaps not the most popular one in Russia. Yet it looks like for the first time a compromise worked to settle a political crisis in Russia. This is perhaps amazing."  

While perhaps not quite amazing, the 1995 compromise suggests that "rigidity" might be just what mistrustful and bickering parliaments need in order to force lawmakers to get on with the business of governing. This seems borne out by the events in the wake of the aborted no-confidence vote: while the Russian government remained in place, the legislature claimed a small victory in deposing three ministers, and in time, the military conflict was ended. As of mid-1997, Chechnya remains in the Federation, Russian Federal forces have left Chechen territory, a pragmatic and more muted politician, Aslan Maskhadov, has won the Chechen presidency (replacing the intransigent Dzhokar Dudaev, killed in a Russian bombing) in elections certified by the OSCE, and negotiations between the new Chechen government and Moscow continue. Without the fail-safe of Article 117, the Duma might have boxed itself into having had to carry out its own threat, and an understandable confrontation between the executive and legislative branches over a civil insurrection would have ended, not in compromise, but in the complete collapse of the regime. As liberal Duma member Anatoli Shabad said at the time, "some parties wanted [to use the no-confidence maneuver] to gain political advantage" before the coming parliamentary elections, and as a result got carried away. "But they didn't want the government to fall. They themselves were afraid of the results of the first vote."  

Conclusion

The survival of the Russian regime and the subsequent electoral victory of Yeltsin and other reformers in 1995 and 1996, despite various crises, suggests that the fixed term allows leaders to run on a longer record rather than being forced, on a moment's notice, to fight to survive one electoral test after

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16. Borovoy related to me that he—like so many of his reformist colleagues—was certain of the fact that a Communist president and Communist Duma would be merciless in bringing Chechnya back into the Federation. LDPR leader Zhirinovsky was, for his part, relentless in his calls to destroy the Chechens.  
another in issue-by-issue, socially divisive trench warfare. In the instances where it is the *parliament* that is the source of instability and intemperance, and not the president, this systemic rigidity is a valuable contribution to stability and strengthens Russia's democratic institutions.
THE LOGIC OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIALISM II:
SOCIAL CONFLICT AND THE DIFFICULTY OF LAWMAKING

Introduction

A common criticism of presidential systems is that they inhibit effective lawmaking. Powers are divided among the branches of government, and again within legislative bodies that themselves may be divided by partisan schisms. The result is that the business of legislating becomes less an exercise in public administration than a run at a kind of political obstacle course. Laws that might otherwise have been for the public good instead become vehicles for divisive political combat whose chances of passage are low. Because parliamentary systems are always based on a functioning majority or coalition, the reasoning goes, the problem of “gridlock” is avoided and lawmaking is more inclusive and stable.

But this criticism assumes that legislators wish to act responsibly and will eschew partisan temptations to use the automatic majority of a parliamentary system against their political rivals. As Terry Moe stated: “A classic, highly competitive parliamentary system...takes the dangers of political uncertainty to their extreme: if the other side comes to power, they can pass whatever laws they want,” even if that includes acts which might “subvert or completely destroy everything the first party has put into place.” Thus the ease with which parliaments change hands, the speed with which the “monopoly on public authority” can move from one party to another, “undermines the making of durable deals.”

Stopping “Crazy” and “Half-Crazy” Legislation

The hazards posed by the parliamentary system in a mistrustful society are mitigated by the presidential alternative. In the Russian system, the cumbersome nature of presidentialism is actually a factor that serves not only to protect the stability of the government itself, but also to snare some of the more irresponsible legislation. Critics might call this “gridlock” but others view this as a safety mechanism. This is no small benefit when dealing with an institution like the Duma that spawns so much ill-considered legislation. The reaction of a political reviewer in the daily Segodnia to an April 1995 session was a fair reading of the activity of the lower house:

Yesterday’s State Duma plenary sitting spawned a fairy-tale mix of decisions. Among other things, there was conscription, Sergei Mavrodi [the head of a failed pyramid scheme who wanted to be elected to the Duma to escape criminal prosecution] and the idea of a medical commission [to monitor the health of high officials]. The rest can be divided into crazy, half-crazy, and non-crazy, that is to say, relatively serious. There are only three, however, in the latter group.

The virtue of separated systems is that they are more likely to trap “crazy” and even “half-crazy” bills before they can get far enough to be divisive and therefore damaging. The legislative maze of the bicameral legislature and the separate executive may at times immobilize lawmaking, but this is not in itself always a bad outcome. One Russian journalist, lamenting the “amorphousness” and disorganization of the moderate and centrist parties, noted that at least they can “delay the adoption of the most odious questions” by denying extremist legislation a veto-proof majority.4

It is rare that provocative or intemperate legislation (bills that have called for the immediate printing of more money or re-nationalizing industry, for example) ever make it to the Russian president’s desk, since most of them are rejected by the upper house and sent back to the Duma, where they then die a quiet death.5 Because the Federation Council is drawn from representatives already serving in regional governments, its main agenda tends to be a practical one of regional autonomy and it is therefore largely unsympathetic to the provocative agenda of the anti-system groups. As Izvestiia noted with some relief in 1994, the Federation Council is able to “bring the Duma legislators to their senses as necessary.”6 (One radical leftist legislator inadvertently confirmed this effect by describing the upper house in disparagingly as a “Soviet of Governors” who exist only to do Yeltsin’s bidding in blocking the Duma.)7 Legislation is often effectively killed at this level, since bills sent back by the Federation Council need a 2/3 vote in the Duma to bypass the upper house and be sent to the president. Even without the moderating influence of the upper house, most of the lower house’s legislation could never muster the 2/3 necessary to override a subsequent presidential veto.

Political Combat and the Tyrannical Majority

Much of this intemperate legislation is designed by one political faction or group to extinguish political opponents, and here again, the presidential system serves as a kind of safety mechanism. Where trust is low, fear of other groups makes politics a form of warfare, if only in self-defense, and parliamentary supremacy consequently becomes an tempting weapon in the struggle to eliminate foes from public life. Attila Agh, in a 1995 survey of legislative behavior in Eastern Europe, describes parliaments across the region as arenas where political combat is conducted without quarter, because “elites have been thinking in terms of a ‘final victory’ and have tried to push out their competitors from politics as ‘enemies.’”8 He describes the new parties in the

5. See, for example, Sergei Chugaev, “Esli kommunisty pobedaiut na vyborakh, novaia natsionalizatsiia neizbezhna,” Izvestiia, November 2, 1995, p. 1.
6. “Yeltsin Address to Federation Council Viewed,” FBIS-SOV-94-009, January 13, 1994, p. 42. It should be noted that liberal Duma member Konstantin Borovoy, for one, believes that this moderating influence is to some extent unintentional, the by-product of the Federal Assembly’s overriding preoccupation of regional autonomy. Interview with Konstantin Borovoy, Moscow, Russia, April 1997.
7. Interview with Viktor Grigoriev, Moscow, Russia, April 1997.
region as trying, in many cases, to establish a "tyrannical majority," in which a "simple parliamentary majority
is, without any effort, taken for granted, and without any consensus being built with the minority in the
parliament."9 It is worth noting that these efforts have often been frustrated, according to Thomas Baylis, by
"presidential intervention" which has "provided a needed corrective to the low level of tolerance and/or
the irresponsible populism displayed by some of the region’s inexperienced governments, thereby
impeding incipient authoritarian tendencies."10

This has not escaped the notice of Russian legislators, particularly those who seek to overturn the
current order. Of all the groups in the Duma, only the Communists and their allies (and to a lesser extent, the
Liberal Democrats) continue to press for a change to a proportionally representative parliamentary system. At
the other end of the spectrum, the liberal parties know full well that the separation of powers has prevented the
anti-system groups from ramming through a series of changes that would have, in one way or another, crippled
the ability to carry on campaigns, free elections, and open parliamentary debate. One example is the
occasional attempt to introduce legislation that would allow virtually no campaign spending, which
would practically guarantee Communist or LDPR increases in list seats even if it meant similar losses
among single-member seats (which are increasingly out of reach for these parties anyway). Without the
veto, this idea might be law today, but as things stand currently, it is merely an annoyance that is occasionally
raised and defeated.

Although this "buffer effect," in which the separation of powers and the veto act to slow or neutralize
combative partisan legislation, is primarily a function of the low level of social and political trust in Russia, it
is important to note that on occasion the Russian presidential system functions exactly as an American
constitutional theorist might recognize. It serves as a stopgap mechanism that forces reconsideration of
legislation that might be the result of ephemeral popular passions. The debate over a religious freedom law in
the spring and summer of 1997 is a case in point. A bill introduced in the Duma restricted the activities of
"non-traditional" religious organizations in Russia; supported by the Patriarch, it attracted a wide backing
among various groups and actually made it to Yeltsin's desk. The bill was a response to the deluge of foreign
missionaries of various denominations, whose aggressive tactics were understandably unsettling to most
Russians and were thus creating public pressure on officials to act against them. The bill was almost certainly
in contravention of Articles 17, 18, 19 and 28 of the Russian Constitution, which together guarantee freedom
of conscience and equal treatment before the law in accordance with internationally recognized norms of
democratic behavior (the U.S. Senate threatened to cut off aid if the bill was adopted). However, the bill was
an accurate reflection of the passions of the Russian public, at least at the moment. It was vetoed by Yeltsin,
who then called for negotiation among various sects and their leaders, an outcome that could be pointed to as

10. Thomas Baylis, "Presidents Versus Prime Ministers: Shaping Executive Authority in Eastern Europe," *World Politics* 48,
April 1996, p. 320.
exactly the kind of restraint on sudden and ill-tempered public outbursts that are needed in a society where consensus on many issues is lacking or fragile.\(^{11}\)

**In Praise of Gridlock**

In American political debate, the term "gridlock" is a pejorative, referring to the obstinacy of one branch in thwarting the desires of the other. The critics of presidential government argue that separating powers merely invites such gridlock and immobilism, consequently providing a basis for recurrent issue-by-issue crises between the branches. Linz claims that presidential systems are in effect systems of "dual democratic legitimacy," in which a "conflict is always latent and sometimes likely to erupt dramatically [as] there is no democratic principle to resolve it..."\(^{12}\) What this criticism does not take into account is that presidential systems are *designed* to be conflictual, specifically to prevent rapid or intemperate change. Here, "gridlock" is the intended outcome rather than an unfortunate side effect. Separated systems may make legislating difficult, but they also benefit by lessening the chance that bills become repeated tests of the regime, successful acts of political violence against opponents, or incendiary social provocations in their own right.

Before leaving this topic, a short thought exercise might be in order. Assume that the parliamentary alternative was in place in Russia after 1993; it is worth trying for a moment to imagine the circumstances under which the 1993-1995 Duma or its successor could have emerged as any kind of coherent governing body, or even created a government and staffed a cabinet. The Communists and their Agrarian allies together held 100 seats of 450, while Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democrats held 63; the reformers, made up of the ever-bickering members of "Russia's Choice," "Yabloko" (led by the aloof and uncompromising Grigoriy Yavlinskii) and a smattering of others, held roughly 120 seats, with the balance controlled by nominally centrist but unstable groupings like the "Party of Russian Unity and Accord" (30 seats) and the "Women of Russia" (23 seats). The current Duma is no better: "Russia's Choice" and the LDPR lost strength, but those votes apparently went largely to the Communists (who now hold a total of 157 seats outright) on one side and to "Yabloko" and "Our Home is Russia" (100 seats, together) on the other. The basic polarization between parties of reform and reaction is unchanged, as is the enmity between them. (Indeed, an argument could be made that the 1993-1995 Duma was better served by, on one side, "Russia's Choice" rather than the inflexible "Yabloko," and by the clownish LDPR rather than the wily CPRF on the other.) It is, in any case, an inconceivable stretch of the imagination to assume that this parliament would somehow perform a miraculous *volte face* and produce a coalition government capable of legislating responsibly on difficult issues. Given the

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11. This passage was written before the Act on Religion was passed and signed by Yeltsin, although in a somewhat modified form. That development does not, however, negate the author's basic point. (NCEEER Note)
composition of the two Dumas since 1993, where reformers first held only a thin and disorganized plurality, and are now faced with a strengthened opposition, it is clear that the inability to pass legislation quickly is a virtue and not a vice of the Russian system.
THE LOGIC OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIALISM III:
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE WEAKNESS OF PARTIES

Introduction

Where society is served by weak, unstable or fractured parties, the presidency, and in particular the electoral process, becomes the vehicle by which people can more confidently vote for a candidate who must spell out a specific platform and ideology. Presidential elections serve to “clarify” Russian politics, by forcing public figures, in effect, to choose sides and to take stands on particular issues and candidates. Normally, choices of party allegiance and other forms of political behavior would serve this purpose, but the weakness of parties and other mediating political organizations forecloses this option in the Russian system. Moreover, debate over the presidency and over presidential candidates is a form of political communication between the public and the regime. While elections serve this purpose in all democracies, it becomes especially important where other forms of communication (like those conducted by parties or public associations) are weak or nonexistent.

Parties, Presidents and Distrust

Presidential candidates act as surrogate party leaders, and consequently as rallying points for legislators, because parties are not only incoherent, but weakly rooted in society. Indeed, it is somewhat misleading to call Russian parties “weak” when “deeply distrusted” or even “hated” might be better terms.¹ Note, however, that these negative feelings about parties are not the residual effect of a general distrust of multiparty democracy. Polls consistently indicate that a broad spectrum of Russians favor a multiparty system, they just have no respect for the current parties in that system.² Russian legislators of all stripes lament that the Duma is too factionalized and particularistic in its legislative activity. In their defense, it might be pointed out that they are merely reflecting the fractiousness of social life in Russia itself. As Valerie Bunce has described them, Russian parties have “narrow and antagonistic political, social, and economic bases, and they [have] often functioned as, in effect, fickle fan clubs for individual leaders.”³ The party system, then, is weak and unstable because society itself is divided and unstable, with alliances and orientations among the populace, like those at the elite level, shifting and often diametrically opposed.

Of course, half of the Duma is selected from party lists, and it would be overstatement to say that parties are completely meaningless. Russian parliamentary elections do serve a useful role, as Robert Cottrell pointed out, as a kind of rough “primary” system, where the voters send very basic messages of support or protest to politicians in general and specifically to the presidential contenders. A late 1994 commentary in Komsomol'skaya Pravda pointed out that parties in themselves mean little, since for years “it was simpler and safer to rob the State Bank than to set up a party even as a joke.” As a result, parties became vehicles for personalities rather than real political associations: “What is needed to set up a new party? An idea? Like minded people? Anywhere else, but not in our country. Here the chief thing is a popular or influential figure (which are by no means one and the same). The number of figures equals the number of parties.” Moreover, because the major parties—the Communists, “Our Home is Russia,” “Yabloko,” and the Liberal Democrats—contested both the parliament and the presidency, they all fielded presidential candidates whose platforms were, in effect, taken to be those of their party. (Nominally “Our Home is Russia” is led by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, but it is in fact a surrogate presidential party that acts on Yeltsin’s behalf and will probably serve as Chernomyrdin’s base for a run at the presidency when Yeltsin is gone.)

Taking Sides: the “Odnomandatniki”

Although supporting a presidential candidate forces a certain amount of discipline on a party and its legislative cohort, what of the legislators who abjure parties altogether? Half the Duma members get elected from single-member districts rather than party-lists (they are known colloquially as odnomandatniki), and many of them simply reject party affiliations. Instead, they act as free agents sent by local voters with only the most nebulous guidance to do something good for the hometown region or district. As Russian political scientists Inga Mikhailovskaia and Evgenii Kuzminskii wrote in 1994:

Almost a third of the [current] deputies...claimed no membership in any political party or movement, and thereby denied allegiance to any platform or plan of action... Because parties and blocs represented in the Duma are numerous and their relative importance is trifling, unstable and ad hoc alliances, unions, compromises, and backstage agreements are inevitable.

At first glance this might be taken to mean that the odnomandatniki are flexible and free to vote their

6. Duma member and odnomandatnik Andrei Greshnevikov made it clear that his support from his district gave him a great deal of latitude to join or leave coalitions as he saw fit. His particular positions, he said, were important, but no less so than the fact that he returned to his district as often as possible and that he had never, in seven years, rented an apartment in Moscow. Interview with Andrei Greshnevikov, Moscow, Russia, April 1997.
conscience, but as Mikhailovskaia and Kuzminskii indicate, it tends instead to mean that they can waffle and waver issue to issue, allying with any group that serves their own personal interests. Presidential elections force these independents to come out for or against basic policies by forcing them to explain to their constituents and to inquisitive journalists why they are for or against particular candidates. (This is closely related to the issue of accountability, discussed in the next section.) Without the clarifying effect of presidential elections, the voter can have little confidence that a vote for a party or a particular legislator is a vote for anything more than a very general political orientation (if that); the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections were marked by the kaleidoscopic emergence of groups and parties who fielded candidates but then managed to collapse or change direction even before election day. 8

The 1996 Election

The presidential system, then, can serve to unify voters and thereby strengthen habits of democratic behavior, since by their nature presidential candidates do not have the luxury of singling out and siphoning off regional or narrowly ideological votes. Not only must presidents seek a national mandate, once in office, they must govern more broadly as well. Terry Moe and Michael Caldwell, drawing on the American experience, believe that presidents differ from legislators in that:

their broad national constituency leads them to think in grander terms about social problems and to resist the specialized appeals of groups. Unlike legislators, moreover, they are held responsible for virtually every aspect of national performance...To be judged successful in the eyes of history, they must be seen as leading and governing effectively. This is the driving force behind presidential behavior. 9

In other words, presidents have to stand for something besides a seat. They can neither concentrate on local issues (and thereby avoid hot-button national problems), nor can they simply disappear into a thicket of candidates and hope for a plurality when the dust settles. 10 By taking stands, they force legislators—even if only every two or three years—to do the same.

The Russian presidential election forced the major candidates to broaden their appeal and unify a larger voter base. Both Yeltsin and Zyuganov moderated their platforms—Zyuganov, for example,

8. An excellent chronological tracking of these political comings and goings from 1989 through 1995 can be found in a compendium assembled by the private “RAU University” research center. See Rossiia: Partii–Vybori–Vlast (Moscow: “Obozrevat,” 1996).
10. Duma member Viktor Grigoriev, for example, was quite candid about his 1995 election strategy: since there were 16 candidates for his seat from a section of the Leningrad oblast, he tried to come a consistent second or third in each polling area, winning a solid plurality as a compromise candidate and thereby defeating each of the legislators who had split the prize of first place. Interview with Viktor Grigoriev, Moscow, Russia, April 1997.

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abandoned some of his worst neo-Stalinist rhetoric, and Yeltsin finally admitted that fighting crime and corruption, even in his own entourage, needed to be a priority. Other presidential candidates found that they had to make pronouncements on the two finalists, instruct their followers, and make deals with them after the first round of voting (a "realignment of the losers" that would be familiar to observers of the French system). The two major presidential candidates were refining their positions, while other politicians were being forced to have positions. The overall effect was a presidential and parliamentary election that, although characterized by an intense and heated debate, engaged the voting public in a discussion both among themselves and with the elite, and thereby strengthened the electoral process itself.

This runs counter to the logic that the advocates of parliamentarism claim is inherent in the “winner take all” nature of presidential elections. In Lijphart’s words, “only one candidate and one party can win; everybody else loses,” a bruising contest that makes politics “exclusive instead of inclusive.” But in Russia the situation (so far, with admittedly few examples) seems to be reversed, in that parliamentary elections are more divisive than the presidential contest. Duma candidates can choose either to win a single seat in a district for themselves, or to hope their party can surpass a 5% national vote threshold to gain seats among those proportionally divided. This has resulted in two divisive phenomena in Russian parliamentary voting. First, it encourages the existence of the free-lance однопредставники, who can eschew the idea of being “national” legislators and instead seek the seat of the particular town or region where they are well-known or have a great deal of personal influence. Second, and more disturbing, is that the anti-system parties in particular have come to realize that a heated rhetorical appeal opens the way to the proportional representation seats by galvanizing a disparate but extreme protest vote.

Meanwhile, it is the presidential candidates who, because they must survive a French-style two stage election, end up broadening their appeal to capture enough votes to pass the first round with a decent showing and then take the second round with a majority. The critics of presidentialism are correct to note that presidential elections are, at least in a structural sense, zero-sum contests. But to argue that presidential elections therefore divide society in some way that parliamentary elections do not is to ignore the reality that presidents must win broad mandates while parliamentarians can settle for narrower ones.

As an aside, the behavior of anti-system parties in seeking list seats raises the issue of whether the real matter at hand, at least where elections are concerned, is not parliaments or presidents but rather single-member districts versus proportional representation. While this issue cannot be discussed in depth here, it is interesting to note that the Russian elections seem to confirm the general principle

12. Although he won in a single-member district, Grigoriev would like to see a much lower threshold for list seats, perhaps 1-2%.
that single-member districts produce more moderate representatives, while proportional representation produces more narrowly focused and extreme ones. In both the 1993 and 1995 elections, the Communists and Liberal Democrats made dramatically more gains in party-list seats than in the individual districts, which were overwhelmingly won by independent candidates—largely on prosaic local issues—and reformers. Anti-system parties were trounced soundly in the upper house elections in both cycles.13

In any case, the adjustment and moderation of the platforms of both Zyuganov and Yeltsin during their second-round struggle, as opposed to the narrow campaigns run by the Duma contenders, suggest that in low-trust societies, it is presidents who unify society during an electoral cycle and parliamentarians who divide it.

Introduction

Because Russian parties are unreliable and unstable, and the behavior of individual Duma members has so often been irresponsible, if not outrageous, expectations of (and trust in) Russian legislators are low. In this situation, the presidency serves as a useful means of providing at least some sense of accountability before the general public. To be sure, the Yeltsin presidency will never be held up to later Russian presidents as the model of an efficient administration, but when contrasted with the Duma—a legislature plagued by buck-passing, intense interpersonal and interfactional warfare, and ill-tempered rhetoric—the executive branch seems relatively coherent and businesslike.¹ Consider, for example, this gem from a 1994 interview with then-Speaker Ivan Rybkin:

*Rossiskaia Gazeta:* How do you feel when Sen. Marychev proposes that Sen. Fedulova undergo [an AIDS test] because, as he says, who knows what she might bring back from abroad?

*Rybkin:* I think what a good thing it is that our deputies are not skilled in the oriental martial arts.²

The Duma itself is aware of its image problem; in early 1997 legislators across the political spectrum voted (264 to 30) to ban cameras from the chamber, blaming journalists for distorted coverage. “There will be no pictures of disorder and arguments,” one LDPR deputy intoned, in words that seemed drawn from an old CPSU Central Committee speech. “In the [bill] we propose, the journalists will give much more attention to the laws.” More startling was the agreement of even normally more liberal Yabloko legislators, such as one who noted, with no apparent sense of irony, that while “it is entertaining to show [brawls on television]...in fact it bears no relation to deputies’ activities.”³ How brawls on the floor of the Duma are considered peripheral matters is left unexplained, but in the end the cameras stayed.

Little wonder that Russians at all levels of society overwhelmingly believe that the executive

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¹. When asked about their day-to-day relations with the executive branch, the most common word used by Duma members and their staff was *delovye,* or “businesslike,” which is more than can often be said of their relations with one another. Duma member Andrei Greshnevikov described interaction with presidential representatives as “*delovye ne druzhestvennye,*” that is, “businesslike but not friendly.” Interview with Andrei Greshnevikov, Moscow, Russia, April 1997.


branch really runs the country and therefore should be held accountable for the conditions in the nation. Moreover, the Russian president, like his counterparts elsewhere, represents at least the semblance of a figure of national unity, an important role in a fractious and mistrustful federal state like Russia.

**Elections as Political Communication: the Strategic Russian Voter**

Russian voters have used the two-round presidential election, and the separate vote for parliament, not only as a kind of primary but as a conduit for political communication, a function that parties cannot yet perform. Presidential and parliamentary elections, then, serve as a means of holding the executive accountable, without being forced either to give him free rein or to fire him. The 1996 elections, for example, seem to have been characterized by a conscious process of vote-splitting, as people voted for protest candidates in the first round of the presidential election, and then supported Yeltsin with an outright majority in the second and final round. There is clear evidence that Russian voters were “strategic” voters; that is, they were self-conscious and purposeful when they gave votes to protest candidates like Zyuganov, Lebed, and Zhirinovsky that they knew could not win; moreover, they also seemed to know that they would not give those votes to Zyuganov in the second round. Only 34% of those who voted for Zyuganov in the first round believed he had any chance of winning at all, and nearly a million Zyuganov voters switched over to Yeltsin later. Even more striking is the fact that of those who voted for Yavlinsky, Lebed, or Zhirinovsky, only 2, 4 and 9 percent, respectively, thought their man could win. Of those who did not vote for either finalist in the first round, all who voted in the second round gave their support over to Yeltsin in overwhelming numbers (70% of Lebed supporters and 80% of Yavlinsky voters turned to Yeltsin) except, predictably enough, the Zhirinovsky voters, who gave 80% of their vote to Zyuganov.

The voters, it seemed, were not interested in trying to change the behavior of the Duma, in whom they had less confidence. Instead, they used the presidential election to make sure that Yeltsin had gotten the message of general anger, and when the incumbent tried to appease them by promising (and in some cases, making) clear personnel and policy changes, the electorate begrudgingly gave Yeltsin a second term after having already saddled him with a strong Communist presence in the Duma.

**Governing by Default**

None of this is to argue that the Russian president is actually as accountable as democratic theorists might wish, but only to point out that the task of, and accountability for, governing falls in

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Russia to the executive branch almost by default. If the low level of social trust means that parties are weak and voters are fickle and vindictive, then what possible incentive exists in a parliamentary regime for any one group to do anything but hope to force destabilizing legislation on other groups (or on the executive) with the idea of taking advantage of shifting coalitions? As Sartori points out, “to say that governments are supported by a parliament is not saying much.”

Parliamentary democracy cannot perform (in any of its varieties) unless it is served by parliamentearily fit parties, that is to say, parties that have been socialized (by failure, duration, and appropriate incentives) into being relatively cohesive or disciplined, into behaving, in opposition, as responsible opposition, and into playing, to some extent, a rule-guided fair game [emphasis original].

This is especially true where day to day legislating is concerned. So far, Russia’s Duma seems content to pass very little legislation and to concentrate instead more on internecine warfare, and this has allowed—or forced, depending on who is asked—the executive branch to rule by decree, and accordingly to be held responsible for those actions.

In Russia, for better or worse, the presidential use of the decree power, and the accrual of popular accountability for doing so, represents an attempt to fill the gap left by “parliamentarily unfit” parties and legislators. This is one area where Yeltsin and his predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev, might commiserate. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin began their presidencies by seeking more legal power, and each was given it, because the lawmakers realized that delegated power meant accountability, if not capability. Gorbachev fell prey to a kind of Soviet decretismo, issuing more and more decrees rather than confronting the legislature and demanding actual laws; in short order he was using presidential authority to issue decrees on lofty matters such as “the Responsibility of Functionaries for the Unsatisfactory State of Supplying the Population with Tobacco Products” while the Soviet legislature decayed into the same kind of paralyzed infighting that characterizes the current Russian Duma. For his part, Yeltsin has since, as Segodniaiia dryly put it, “decreed punishment for those who don’t fulfill his decrees,” and while legislative performance has improved somewhat—Russian legislators seem to understand that they do not enjoy the electoral protections of their Soviet predecessors—the unwillingness of “parliamentarily unfit” parties to shoulder the burdens of government still leaves the president as the sole figure from whom the voters can demand results and explanations.

Sadly, this legislative cowardice (or to use a gentler term that Gordon Silverstein has applied to

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the U.S. Congress, “blame avoidance”) is not just behavior found among the anti-system elements. Russian political scientist Aleksei Kiva has lamented an overall atmosphere of irresponsibility and scapegoating in the democratic movement at large; the liberals, he charges, “have proved incapable of building a democratic society. [They are] hindered by their resolute reluctance to face realities, their disrespect for the authorities and the law, their desire to have it all now.” Deputy Duma chairman Mikhail Gutseriev, himself a moderate liberal, made more specific charges in his 1996 year-end review of legislative work:

In the Duma, a great deal of strength, energy and time went into political confrontation. I saw that there are few deputies in the Duma, half of them at best, who are occupied with lawmakers. Many laws are considered from the point of view of the interests of certain factions, groups or sectors, and not from the point of view of the interests of our country and the broadest strata of its population. There is nothing surprising here, however: the Duma is the direct reflection of our modern society...It’s a shame that the parliament couldn’t consolidate itself...There were a number of basic political and economic documents and laws that we didn’t succeed in issuing this year, which could have had an influence on improving the life of the people.

The situation was worse in matters of national security, where matters ranging from NATO expansion to the Chechen war produced speeches but little else. The Duma continues, for example, to refuse to ratify the four-year-old START Treaty, as opposition figures have chosen instead to use each attempt to bring the treaty to the floor to make incendiary speeches about Western conspiracies and lament Russia’s fall as a great power. And although the most divisive security issue, the Chechen war, is effectively over, Gutseriev noted rather caustically that “the Duma let the war last two years. Now it is criticizing the president because he ended the war.”

In response, it might be argued that legislators are only responding to the realities of the presidential system, in that they realize that the real repository of power is the executive branch and that their own weak institutional position affords them little chance to affect policy. In such a situation, they might as well avoid risky legislative initiatives and concentrate instead on anchoring their own seats. If true, it would strengthen the idea that the institution itself, and not social conditions, are to blame for poor legislative behavior.

13. It has not helped that former Duma Speaker Ivan Rybkin—now a member of Yeltsin’s Security Council—recently lapsed into old habits and averred that Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons against anyone at any moment, a statement immediately repudiated by the government. “Yeltsin Aide, Duma Members on Rybkin’s First Use Remark,” FBIS-SOV-97-029, February 11, 1997.
This would be a more compelling counter-argument if there were any evidence to suggest that Russian legislators are either capable or willing to bear the burden of accountability carried by the executive. Moe and Caldwell have argued that, in general, legislators “are not in the business of creating effective, accountable government. They are in the business of making themselves popular and their jobs secure.”15 This may be a bit harsh (legislators are people too), but it seems especially applicable to the Russian case, where parliamentarians are preoccupied more with issues like their own immunities and privileges than with actual lawmaking.16 While parliamentary advocates might argue that parliamentary systems strengthen parties, Linz himself admits that the parliamentary alternative needs to be supported in the first place by “strong, well-disciplined parties.”17 This begs the question: where do “strong, well-disciplined” parties come from? If, as we have seen, Russian society is, for the time being, incapable of producing such parties, why should we assume that they would somehow suddenly appear under the aegis of a parliamentary regime?

Sartori has presented something of a thought-exercise on whether Brazil would have been better off or more stable under a parliamentary arrangement, and concludes that because Brazilian political culture and traditions nurture “unfit” parties, the idea that a “parliamentary experience would lead Brazil out of chaos into some kind of efficient parliamentary government is...against all odds.”18 He reaches similar conclusions about Chile and Argentina, and I would add Russia to the list as well. There is no reason to believe that instituting a parliamentary system in Russia would do much more than place a prime minister in the same kind of no-win situation in which Yeltsin often finds himself—that is, saddled with the need to implement unpopular measures that have been left untouched by the parliament.

While concern over the formidable powers of presidents is understandable, the fact that the president in the Russian system cannot escape popular accountability is an important factor in the stabilization of Russian politics. The voters may not know exactly who or what they may get from particular parties—the rather cordial relations that developed after the 1995 election, for example, between the “Women of Russia” and the CPRF had to come as a surprise to many “Women of Russia” voters—they can be relatively certain about the stands of men like Yeltsin, Zyuganov, Yavlinsky, and especially Zhirinovsky or Lebed. While we

16. Hockstader reported that Russian analysts believe part of the collapse of the July 1995 no-confidence vote could be traced to legislators who worried that dismissal of the Duma would mean the forfeiture of their personal privileges. It is also the case that the Duma has had to change the laws on their own immunity to prevent white-collar criminals from running for office to escape prosecution. Lee Hockstader, “Anti-Yeltsin Vote Fails in Duma,” The Washington Post, July 2, 1995, p. 1.
might hope for more mature or responsible legislative behavior in the future, the Russian presidential system in the meantime affords the voter at least some sense of predictability and accountability from one branch of the government.