

Case Study: Russia back to Authoritarianism?

“We will develop political processes in the sense of the word that is traditional- and I wish to stress this – traditional for Western democracy. But this does not mean that anarchy and total permissiveness must flourish in Russia”
 (Vladimir Putin, 2001).

Inroduction – brief history of the Russian Presidential Democracy

- The Presidency and the First Russian Republic

1991 - a referendum on the future of the USSR as a renewed federation, voters also asked if they would support the institution of a directly elected presidency

1993 – the crisis and the new constitution

- The Presidency and the Second Russian Republic

1996 – electing the Russian President

1999/2000 – from Yeltsin to Putin

I System of Government:

- Framework for politics: Federal Presidential Republic

President	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directly elected president, 4 years, two term limit ▪ shares executive responsibilities with a prime minister ▪ The Russian Presidential Administration as an institution supporting the activity of the president and vice-president ▪ Some of the Powers and Responsibilities of the President: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ defines the basic domestic and foreign policy ➤ the power to veto legislation ➤ represents the Russian Federation inside the country and in international relations ➤ is the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. ➤ can dissolve the State Duma
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Executive body ▪ Consist of the Chairman of the Government (prime minister), Deputy Chairmen of the Government and federal ministers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ prime minister appointed by the president and confirmed by the State Duma ▪ the president has the right to independently take the decision to dismiss the Government; The Constitution does not indicate grounds for this
Parliament of the Russian Federation: Federal Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ consists of two chambers - the Federation Council (the upper house) and the State Duma (the lower house) ▪ Composition of the FC: Two deputies from each subject of the Federation, one from the representative and one from the executive bodies of state authority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Beslan school hostage crisis in September 2004 and the change in the election of governors; direct elections of regional governors replaced by appointments from the president ▪ Composition of the Duma: 450 deputies; elected for four years ▪ Cooperation mode between the two chambers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Federal laws concerning budgets, customs regulations, credit monitoring, and the ratification of international treaties are to be considered by the Council after they have been adopted from the State Duma, where most legislation is introduced.
Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ judges appointed by the Federation Council on the recommendation of the president; other judges for all federal courts appointed by the president

II Party System

Parties currently in the Duma (after the 2003 election)

Party	Official Ideology/ Political Position
United Russia (Yedinaya Rossiya)	Centrism, Conservatism, Patriotism
Communist Party of the Russian Federation (<i>Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossiskoy Federatsii</i>)	Communism, Elements of Nationalism
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia	Ultranationalism, Populism
Motherland- People's Patriotic Union	Socialism, Nationalism
Motherland-People's Will - Socialist United Party of Russia	Socialism, Nationalism (A splinter of Motherland)

Further major parties:

- Agrarian Party of Russia (Agrarnaya Partiya Rossii)
- Fair Russia (Spravedlivaya Rossiya: Rodina/Pensionery/Zhizn)
- Party of National Revival (Narodnaya Volya)
- Party of Russia's Rebirth (Partiya Vozrozhdeniya Rossii)
- People's Party of the Russian Federation (Narodnaya partiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii)
- Russian Social Justice Party (Rossiyskaya Partiya Spravedlivosti)
- Union of Right Forces (Soyuz Pravykh Sil)
- United Socialist Party of Russia
- Yabloko (Rossiyskaya Demokraticheskaya Partiya "Yabloko")

Degree of Consolidation:

- Fragmentation – a multi-party system; many parties and party-like organizations exist; the weakness of parties is one of the main features; many small parties divide into smaller ones and sometimes hostile groupings; only few parties have the capacity to enter parliament and shape policy-making
- Polarization – various ideological positions are represented; Nationalism can be seen as an element reducing the ideological distance
- Volatility – parties are the most distrusted of all the political institutions, extraordinary levels of electoral volatility, very fluid electorate

Exigencies of representation, concentration and participation:

- Representation – various political ideologies are included, but the problem is the party system lacks a stable foundation in society
- Concentration – yes, due to the 2003 and the 2005 reform will also increase
- Participation – theoretically yes, practically the opposition will be excluded (The Yukos affair)

III Electoral System

The 2005 reform of the Duma electoral system:

- The 225 single-member districts are abolished
- All seats will be awarded by proportional representation using the Hare method
- The threshold for eligibility to win seats has been raised from 5.0 to 7.0 percent
- Duma seats are allocated to individuals on the lists of successful parties in accordance with their ranking there. Any members who resign from their party automatically forfeit their seats.
- Minimum turnout for a valid election: 25%

The Federation Council:

- Following the Beslan school hostage crisis in Sept 2004, President Putin initiated a radical shake up proposing that the direct elections of regional governors be replaced by appointments from the president himself. These appointments could later be confirmed or rejected by the provincial legislatures.

IV The Political Culture in Russia

- 40% of respondents refer to the political situation as tense, 9% consider it explosive
 - 45 % see the developments in Russia as going into a good direction, 39 % the opposite
 - Russians feel freer than under the old regime
 - 65% of respondents judge the present system of governing positively, which at the same time is the highest percentage from 1992
 - Most Russians disagree that freedom of speech is under attack
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- President Putin has repeatedly stated that he will not be a candidate in the March, the presidential election in 2008. However, there has been speculation about changing the Constitution in order to allow him to run for a third term.
 - Survey results indicate that most Russians prefer that President Putin does not amend the Constitution and leaves office when his current term expires in March, 2008. No politician has a significant amount of popular support as his successor.

V Conclusion and Discussion

- It is tempting to conclude that for the Russian president it is likely to rule without effective opposition. The president stands above all three branches. All further arrangements make the nature of the Russian system not a presidential but a superpresidential one
- The study of the Russian political system is a study of mistrust

Hypothesis

1. Russian presidentialism has played a crucial part in the transition process precisely because presidentialism is more likely than other arrangements to preserve processes of democratic consolidation in societies that are characterised by a lack of social trust. The powers of presidential systems make changing the legal status quo difficult, thus raising the confidence of citizens into politics as an ongoing process.
2. Russia is not an authoritarian system, but rather an unconsolidated democracy
3. The most disturbing element of the system is the lack of a minimal political etiquette

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Internet Resources:

- www.russiaelections.org
- www.electionword.org