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# Electoral Authoritarianism in Putin's Russia

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# **Electoral Authoritarianism in Putin's Russia**

By  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the honors  
Requirements for the Department of Political Science

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction.....                              | 3  |
| The Concept of Electoral Authoritarianism..... | 4  |
| The Case of Russia.....                        | 13 |
| Costs and Benefits.....                        | 38 |
| Conclusion.....                                | 57 |
| Appendix.....                                  | 60 |
| Bibliography.....                              | 63 |

## **Introduction**

The presence of elections in a regime that is not outright authoritarian has long been thought to be a black and white indication of a democratic regime. However, in the last fifteen years, the language used to classify political regimes has been expanded, and the line between democratic and authoritarian has blurred. The hybrid regimes types that fill the grey space in between combine traits from both sides. In one such regime type, electoral authoritarianism, regular elections are held, but are instrumentally manipulated by an authoritarian government. Many of the states filling this space have come from the post-Cold War wave of democratization. Elections, assumably adopted with the best of intentions, have been retained by regimes that have nonetheless slid gradually towards authoritarianism. The continued occurrence of elections in these circumstances, where the process is more important than the results, begs the question of why they are happening at all. In what ways do electoral authoritarian regimes use elections as tools to maintain their control, and what are the costs and benefits to the legitimacy of the regime associated with these methods?

In the examining the case of Russia under President Vladimir Putin, one such electoral authoritarian regime, I will seek to answer these questions. Since taking office in 1999, Putin, Russia's second post-Soviet leader, has presided over the drastic centralization of the Russian state, and it is his ascendance to power that marks the beginning of Russian electoral authoritarianism. Putin has claimed that Russia is governed only by a "dictatorship of law", while Russians have called the regime a managed democracy, but the primary characteristic is that elections have become predictable.<sup>1</sup> This electoral authoritarian regime has continued through the term of his temporary successor, Dmitry Medvedev, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> "Russia's Dictatorship of Law." The New York Times. (November 21, 2010)

Putin's return to the presidency for a third term. This has helped the regime gain legal legitimacy, which together with Vladimir Putin's popular legitimacy, has allowed for the maintenance of control. However, the weakening of either one could lead to political instability.

In this paper I will first summarize the scholarly literature on the classification of hybrid regimes with an emphasis on the idea of electoral authoritarianism, and I will discuss the theoretical risks and benefits of electoral authoritarianism for a regime. I will then apply this method of categorization to the case of Russia, and look at how reforming party registration, legislative representation, and the role of regional executives to limit competition, as well as subjugating the media to limit access to information, has allowed the Putin administration to build an electoral authoritarian regime. Following that discussion, I will look at what the Putin regime has gained from electoral authoritarianism, and how legal legitimacy has reinforced Putin's own popular legitimacy, created a culture of loyalty, and built broad centralized control over the Russian political structure. In this section I will also consider the risks associated with these benefits, and make concluding predictions based on events surrounding recent Russian elections about possible future threats to Putin's electoral authoritarian regime.

### **The Concept of Electoral Authoritarianism**

As the large-scale, twenty-five year period of democratization came to a close at the end of the twentieth century, the ultimate results became the subject of interest to many scholars. Initially, what Samuel Huntington described as the "Third Wave of Democratization" provided much opportunity for optimism among supporters of democracy. The number of authoritarian and autocratic governments plummeted, and the global total of

countries in the world with democratic governments more than doubled.<sup>2</sup> However, this rate of progress did not last, and, like the two previous waves (the first in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the second following WWII), this most recent wave eventually crested. However, unlike in the earlier waves, some of these new regimes got stuck at various points in the transition process. Though the point came when their transition phases were largely determined to be over, they had never managed to consolidate into full-fledged liberal democracies, nor did they revert into fully closed authoritarian states. Along the way, some managed to adopt and maintain certain traits from both, forming a hybrid regime.

### Categorization

One of the problems states governed by hybrid regimes present is how to categorize them in a comparatively useful way. Many different adjectives have been used to describe states that do not fit into the binary of democratic or authoritarian, but they have been non-specific and non-standard. Countries that were democratic on paper but in practice had authoritarian traits were described as pseudo-democratic, semi-democratic, or borderline authoritarian, or some other variation of either diminished democracy or augmented authoritarianism. Recent research in the study of comparative democratization has sought to develop better language to distinguish between regime types that did not fit into the previous dichotomy. Using this framework, ratings from the Freedom House organization, which are often interpreted to measure to what degree a country is democratic, could instead be used to determine where on the spectrum a country is located.<sup>3</sup> Using a spectrum allows

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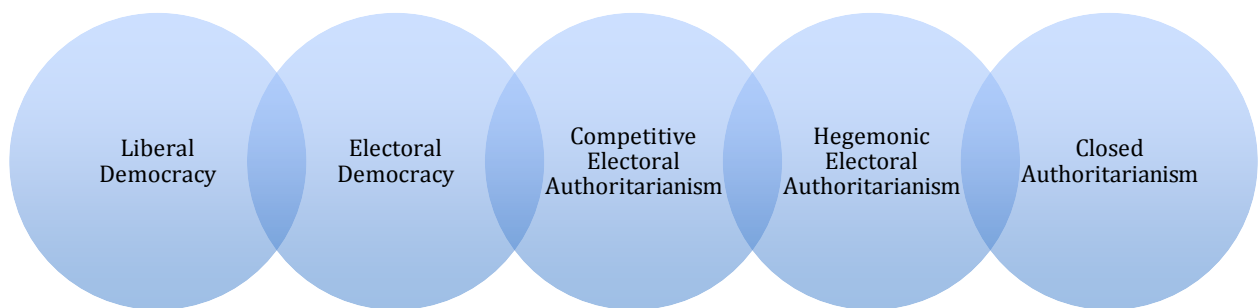
<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave", *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 4 (1997) 3-12.

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House ratings are in fact the metric used by Larry Diamond in his article "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes" referenced below. He considers anything with a score of less than two a liberal democracy, but the rest of the regime types have some variation.

categorization to be more specific, describing what a regime actually is rather than the degree to which it is not another type of regime.

The role that the electoral process plays in a political system has become one of the primary areas of confusion when classifying a regime. Elections are generally considered to be one of the principle traits of democratic government, and often they are seen to be methods of democratization in their own right. Since the end of the Cold War, regular elections have been seen alongside clearly undemocratic practices in countries thought to be in the transition process to democracy. However, despite the form of democracy, those elections were lacking the substance. Recently such cases have begun to be treated as regime types in themselves.<sup>4</sup> Rather than just conceptualizing regimes in the two categories of democracy and authoritarianism, the space in between has come to be seen as a spectrum, rather than discontinuous. The regimes on the spectrum range from liberal democracy, the most free, to closed authoritarianism, the most repressive.

Figure 1: The Spectrum of Political Regimes



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Freedom House has their own scale, Free (1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (3.0 to 5.0), or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0).

<sup>4</sup>Andreas Schedler, “The Menu of Manipulation”. *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2, (April 2002); Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism”, *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2, (April 2002); Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes”. *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2, (April 2002).



Democratic regime types are classified based on whether they meet or exceed the minimum procedural definition of democracy. This definition is based on the ideas of Joseph Schumpeter and Robert Dahl, where political leaders are chosen through free, fair, and inclusive elections, with all basic civil rights, particularly in the form of open speech, universal adult suffrage, and absence of nonelected political authority.<sup>5</sup> A liberal democracy, shown in figure one on the left extreme of the spectrum, is a regime that goes beyond the minimum requirements for democracy by having extensive political pluralism and transparency, vertical and horizontal accountability of leaders, rule of law, and comprehensive civil rights such as most of Western Europe and the United States.<sup>6</sup> At the other end is closed authoritarianism, which in basic terms is the lack of all or most of those things. In an authoritarian regime all power is centralized in the leaders of the state, there is no political competition or even avenues of public expression, and civil liberties are limited, such as North Korea. In between these two poles, the major points along the line are the regime types of electoral democracy, competitive authoritarianism, and hegemonic electoral authoritarianism, ordered by their combination of democratic and authoritarian traits.<sup>7</sup>

Just to the right of liberal democracy on figure one is electoral democracy, in which a regime meets the minimum requirements for democracy but where civil and political freedoms are only at level necessary for “competition and participation to be meaningful”,

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<sup>5</sup> Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes”; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, (2010).

<sup>6</sup> Larry Diamond, “Is the Third Wave Over?,” *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 3 (1996): 20-37

<sup>7</sup> Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” 48. In this article, Diamond also includes an ambiguous category between electoral democracy and competitive authoritarianism, but by treating categorization as a spectrum, this label is unnecessary. Schedler addresses this problem by erring on the side of caution, and not calling a country democratic if there is any ambiguity.

such as India and Brazil.<sup>8</sup> In an opposite place on the spectrum, just to the left of authoritarianism, is hegemonic electoral authoritarianism. Andreas Schedler first extensively defined the idea of electoral authoritarianism in an article in the *Journal of Democracy*. Schedler builds on Larry Diamond's idea of electoral democracy, pairing it with the opposite idea of electoral authoritarianism, where elections take place, but are used as a tool of the regime, rather than an instrument of choice.<sup>9</sup> Rather, he notes that "by organizing periodic elections they try to obtain at least a semblance of democratic legitimacy, hoping to satisfy external as well as internal actors. At the same time, by placing those elections under tight authoritarian controls they try to cement their continued hold on power."<sup>10</sup> Electoral authoritarian regimes survive on the hope that these un-free elections will be enough for them to sustain legitimacy and maintain control. In hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes, such as Uzbekistan and Singapore, elections are little more than a theatrical setting for the self-representation and self-reproduction of power.

In order to distinguish an electoral authoritarian regime from an electoral democracy, Schedler devises "the Chain of Democratic Choice" comprised of seven democratic norms, which he considers the minimum criteria necessary for elections to be truly democratic. These norms are empowerment of elected officials, free supply of choices, free demand for information, universal adult suffrage, insulation from coercion and corruption, integrity of elections, and irreversibility of elections. A break in the chain caused by government

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Diamond, "Is the Third Wave Over?"

<sup>10</sup> Schedler, "Menu of Manipulation," 1.

manipulation in any of these categories means that “elections become not less democratic but undemocratic”, and the regimes themselves no longer qualify as democracies.<sup>11</sup>

Further differentiating regime types, in between electoral democracy and hegemonic electoral authoritarianism at the center of the spectrum is what Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way call competitive authoritarianism. Levitsky and Way draw a definitive line between competitive and uncompetitive or hegemonic hybrid regimes, placing what they call competitive authoritarianism into its own category.<sup>12</sup> They consider non-competitive (hegemonic) electoral authoritarianism to be full-blown authoritarianism, despite the occurrence of elections.<sup>13</sup> Though Levitsky and Way present the idea of competitive authoritarianism as an alternative to electoral authoritarianism, it is in fact a variation. Like hegemonic electoral authoritarianism, competitive authoritarian regimes use the tools of “electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources, and varying degrees of harassment and violence skewed the playing field in favor of incumbents”.<sup>14</sup> But it is a distinction of degrees that separates “regimes in which democratic institutions offer an important channel through which the opposition may seek power from those regimes in which democratic rules simply serve as to legitimate an existing autocratic leadership”.<sup>15</sup> Incumbents in power in competitive electoral authoritarian regimes regularly manipulate elections for their own benefit, but unlike in hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes,

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<sup>11</sup> Schedler, “Menu of Manipulation,” 41.

<sup>12</sup> Schedler also recognizes that further distinction exists, and that “in ‘competitive EA regimes’ authoritarian rulers are insecure; in ‘hegemonic EA regimes’ they are invincible.”, but he does not provide criteria to differentiate between the two, and when placing countries into categories, both types fall under the broad label of Electoral Authoritarianism. Schedler, “Menu of Manipulation,” 47.

<sup>13</sup> Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” 54.

<sup>14</sup> Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” 54.

democratic institutions provide periodic opportunities for the political opposition to meaningfully challenge the authority of the regime, despite the uneven playing field, such as in Ukraine, or Mexico in the nineties. The four institutions or arenas for competition that Levitsky and Way specifically point to are elections, the legislature, the judiciary, and the media. Elections in competitive electoral authoritarian regimes are often extremely close and the legislature is weak, but opposition parties are active, the judiciary occasionally challenges executive power, and, despite intimidation, the media is independent and influential.<sup>16</sup>

### Balancing Risk

There is innate risk that comes with maintaining the balance of an electoral authoritarian regime of any kind. By nature, “the coexistence of democratic rules and autocratic methods aimed at keeping incumbents in power creates an inherent source of instability.”<sup>17</sup> Using the manipulation of elections as the primary tool to maintain this balance is especially precarious, as elections have the possibility to be both “regime-sustaining” and “regime-subverting”.<sup>18</sup> The scale could be tipped in either direction, as the perception of illegitimacy can give grounds to greater embolden the opposition, or push a regime to become more openly authoritarian. The immediate questions that arise from this problem are what is gained from the act of holding elections in such a precarious regime, and what is at stake. The benefits of electoral authoritarianism must be great enough to justify facing the risks of maintaining the system. Determining the relationship between these two factors will allow insight into whether electoral authoritarian regimes could be sustainable in the long run, as long as the benefits to a regime outweigh the risks they take, or if they are

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<sup>16</sup> Levitsky and Way, “Linkage versus Leverage,” 8.

<sup>17</sup> Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” 59.

<sup>18</sup> Schedler, “Menu of Manipulation,” 49.

unsustainable by nature.

Undoubtedly, the most significant benefit of an electoral authoritarianism regime type is sustaining political power. In a regime at its peak, this can be virtually uncontested and comprehensive, and in this way, electoral authoritarian regimes enjoy many of the benefits of fully authoritarian regimes. However, elections provide additional political legitimacy that cannot exist in regimes that hold power against the will of the people. As defined by Max Weber, a regime is politically legitimate when its power is founded in the belief of its citizens. Political legitimacy is justified on three types of authority, those of belief in tradition, belief in a charismatic leader, and belief in legality.<sup>19</sup> The authority of legality, or “the readiness to conform with rules which are formally correct and have been imposed by accepted procedure”, is what regimes gain from elections, and is the most typical form of legitimacy.<sup>20</sup> Weber implies that “the most stable type of political system, i.e. least prone to collapse, rests on rational-legal foundations”.<sup>21</sup> By holding elections, but manipulating them in their favor, electoral authoritarian regimes can benefit from the legitimacy gained from legal authority without actually facing the possible uncertainty of free and fair elections.

This legitimacy can be both internal, preventing opposition pressure, and external, preventing international criticism. Generally, “as long as incumbents avoid egregious (and well-publicized) rights abuses and do not cancel or openly steal elections, the contradictions inherent in competitive authoritarianism may be manageable. Using bribery, co-optation, and various forms of “legal” persecution, governments may limit opposition challenges without

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<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, <http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/dss/Weber/polvoc.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 131.

<sup>21</sup> Monica Ciobanu, “Communist Regimes, Legitimacy and the Transition to Democracy in Eastern Europe,” *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 1 (January 2010) 3–21.

provoking massive protest or international repudiation.”<sup>22</sup> Control through elections allows the regime to centralize power at all levels of government where elections occur by ensuring that supporters are placed in office while maintaining a semblance of self-government. From the external perspective, even when elections do not go well, the fact that they are occurring is often seen as an encouraging sign to the rest of the world.<sup>23</sup>

The primary risk facing electoral authoritarian regimes is going too far, causing the illusion of legality to break, legitimacy to be lost, and subsequently the regime to change. The worst-case scenario is this happening all at once, but legitimacy can also be lost gradually. In general, it is dangerous for a regime to draw attention to its manipulation. The safest methods are those that do not greatly impact the daily lives of citizens. There can be problems if a regime begins to enact policy that noticeably affects civil society in a negative way.

Stolen elections in particular, where the regime in power is believed to have lost despite manipulating the results, can be a turning point “which fundamentally reshapes political contestation and thus deserves to be distinguished from other forms of electoral fraud”. The Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine are both recent examples of where disputed stolen elections played a significant role in initiating regime change in countries that could be considered to have had electoral authoritarian regimes.

Not having broad enough control can also be cause for weakness. Having complete

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<sup>22</sup> Philipp Kuntz and Mark R. Thompson “More than Just the Final Straw: Stolen Elections as Revolutionary Triggers”, *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 3 (April 2009), 254.

<sup>23</sup> This may be in part due to a western democratic bias, which might cause some onlookers praise consistency over quality in hopes that one day the regime will reach democratic consolidation, but nonetheless, it reduces criticism.

democratic institutions on paper means a broad system that can grow in places that are hard to notice until it is too late. If the vertical of power from the center falters, opportunities could emerge in areas such as local government for elections to be truly competitive. A crack at this level could provide an opportunity for the opposition to work its way up and gain more power. Flawed or fraudulent elections can have potential consequences on a country's image and power among the international community. In particular, a tarnished reputation can lead to the loss of leverage, or increased vulnerability to external international pressure. More specifically leverage is defined as "regimes bargaining power vis-à-vis the West, or their ability to avoid Western action aimed at punishing abuse or encouraging political liberalization".<sup>24</sup> The risk can be lowered depending on the relative strength of the country in question or other policy priorities of the states that could apply pressure, but this factor has particularly played a role in altering the course of smaller regimes.<sup>25</sup>

In order for an electoral authoritarian regime to keep control, and maintain its legitimacy, elections have to be important in form, but meaningless in substance. They have to happen regularly, with results that have evident, but calculated and predictable, effects. Elections must be structured around the limitation of choice.<sup>26</sup> Regimes can do so through formal and informal mechanisms, the combination of which can help to balance the risks against the benefits.

The formal mechanisms of control are those based in a states election law. A regime would want to encourage participation, therefore legal restrictions to suffrage would be low.

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<sup>24</sup> Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Such as the different "Normative Premises of Democratic Choice" outlined by Schedler in chart 1, of "The Menu of Manipulation". However, violating some of these norms is more useful to a regime than others.

Opposition groups would be allowed, but would either have to meet unrealistic requirements to officially register as parties, or be fractured by registration laws so lenient that organization would be impossible. In either case, high thresholds would be placed on receiving representation in legislative bodies, which would often prevent opposition parties from receiving public funding. The scope and jurisdiction of elected offices would be decreased, so that officials could be elected without any delegation of decision-making authority. The laws that govern formal mechanisms are often not permanent, and change based the regime's needs in the next election.

Informally, the centralization of power might encourage inherent mechanisms of control that are not necessarily systematically ordered by the regime, but their existence is nonetheless beneficial. As a way for subordinates to prove loyalty to the regime, they might perpetrate election fraud, such as ballot stuffing, vote buying, and voter intimidation, particularly on the regional or local level. Such scenarios could also cause practical disenfranchisement, preventing eligible voters from casting a ballot, as well as suppression of political or civil liberties. State run media, or media owned by people loyal to the regime, particularly television, can skew coverage of elections in favor of the regime in power, or outright exclude opposition parties or candidates from receiving time, limiting the information available to voters to make a decision.

### **The Case of Russia**

Though it is democratic by constitution, critics routinely criticize Russian president Vladimir Putin as the leader of an authoritarian regime.<sup>27</sup> In reality, Russia today is somewhere in between these two points. Many Russians themselves recognize this, and

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<sup>27</sup> Wall Street Journal, Gorbachev Blasts Authoritarian Rule, November 23, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203710704577054174278824562.html>



“upravlyaemaya demokratiya” or managed democracy has come to be the standard term used by Russians to describe the Russian system of government, by both its admirers and its detractors.<sup>28</sup> Russians are skeptical of how much elections actually matter, and they consider the electoral playing field skewed in favor of the regime. Russia’s managed democracy is, in fact, an example of an electoral authoritarian regime, which Putin has carefully engineered since taking office.

Vladimir Putin has undertaken this strategy in order to benefit from the legitimacy that elections provide without facing the unpredictability of the electoral process. To accomplish this, Putin has during his time in office initiated electoral reforms to ensure predictability of both the process and the outcome on the national and regional levels, as well as subverting the independence of the Russian media.<sup>29</sup>

### Before Putin

An electoral authoritarian regime is unique to the Putin Era, but, while other periods in recent Russian history certainly could not be considered liberal democracies, elections are not a new phenomenon in Russia. Even during the time of the Soviet Union elections occurred, but despite this fact, the Soviet Union falls squarely into the category of an openly authoritarian regime. Elections were held regularly in order to choose representatives for the Supreme Soviet, the main legislative body the government with 1,500 members who met just a few times a year, but this institution served a mostly ceremonial purpose. Though the Supreme Soviet did elect a president, the position on its own had no real power, and the indisputable head of the Soviet Union was the General Secretary of the Communist Party.

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<sup>28</sup> Archie Brown, “Problems of Conceptualizing Russia’s Political System” (Presentation APSA Annual Conference, Washington, D.C., Sept. 1-4, 2005): 9.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen White and Ol’ga Kryshstanovskaya, “Changing the Russian Electoral System: Inside the Black Box,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (June 2011): 561.

Starting with Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary began to be ceremonially chosen as president, so he received the title. The government was used as an instrument of the Communist Party, and a party apparatus shadowed the entire government structure and actually made the decisions.<sup>30</sup>

The elections themselves failed to meet what is required by the procedural definition of democracy. Soviet elections were merely a formality carried out by an authoritarian regime, and there was not even an attempt to pretend there was competition. On election day, citizens were instructed to go to their polling place and fill out a ballot, but there was only one name that they could vote for under each position, approved by the Communist Party. The only options that provided a semblance of choice was to turn in an empty ballot, or cross out the entire list of names and write “against all.” While generally this tactic served only as a symbolic protest, there were rare cases where the candidate was replaced if significantly more votes than not were cast against them. Voting was not a civil right, but rather a government mandated requirement. Not voting was forbidden, as there was a great deal of pressure from the authorities on citizens to turn out, and to achieve as close to 100% participation as possible. During the Brezhnev Era from the mid sixties to the early eighties, not voting would be marked in someone’s police file, but “in Stalin's time, not voting literally led to a midnight knock on the door and a one-way ticket to Siberia”.<sup>31</sup> Soviet citizens did not put much weight in the results of elections, and the government did not gain much legitimacy, whether internal or abroad, by holding them. When Freedom House began their Freedom in the World ratings in 1973, the USSR received an average score of six out of a

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<sup>30</sup> White and Kryshstanovskaya, “Changing the Russian Electoral System,” 568.

<sup>31</sup> Erik Amfitheatrof, "One Party, One Vote," *Time* 123, no. 11 (March 12, 1984): 52.

possible seven, placing it in the “Not Free” category, and fluctuated between six and seven until 1987, as would be expected from an authoritarian regime.<sup>32</sup>

The reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR, during the late eighties and early nineties began the gradual transition from authoritarianism to electoral democracy. This was done in two steps, the first of which introduced a limited form of competition, as well as allowed for greater freedom of speech and the press. As part of Gorbachev’s policy of democratization, the legislative branch of the Soviet government was reorganized, and the Congress of Peoples Deputies was formed to replace the Supreme Soviet as the country’s main legislative body in 1988. The new Congress was a part time body of 2,250 members, which elected from among themselves a new Supreme Soviet of 542 professional legislators. Two thirds of the Congress’s members were to be directly elected, and multiple candidates would be nominated for the same position by local branches of the Communist Party, providing for a limited form of competition.<sup>33</sup> The process of voting was also reformed, requiring voters to mark their ballot in private booths so that voters would feel free to make their own choice.<sup>34</sup> However, not all of the members of the Congress of Peoples Deputies were directly elected; 750, or one third were chosen by social organizations, which allowed the Communist Party to maintain some of its control. This new congress would also fill the newly created office of the executive presidency, which would be the official Soviet head of state, rather than the General Secretary of the Communist Party. This position would eventually have been chosen by direct popular vote, but an exception was made the first time

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<sup>32</sup> Steven Groves, *Advancing Freedom in Russia*, Executive Summary Backgrounder no. 2088, Heritage Foundation, Nov. 29, 2007, 3. The Freedom rating scale is as follows: Free (1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (3.0 to 5.0), or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0).

<sup>33</sup> Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes*, (Washington, D.C: CQ Press, 1997) 23.

<sup>34</sup> White, et. Al., *How Russia Votes*, 24.

in order to choose someone quickly.<sup>35</sup> The policy of glasnost, or openness, allowed for open discussion and criticism of the government by the Soviet people and the press. While there was not yet freedom of the press, as all media was still state owned, real information was suddenly available to Soviet citizens, which was starting to resemble moderate civil liberties. Since 1985 when Gorbachev took office, the average freedom rating from Freedom House has gradually fallen and in 1988 and 1989, the USSR received for the first time ratings right on the edge of “not free” and “partly free” with a rating of 5.5.<sup>36</sup>

The second step of democratization took place March 1990, and marks the shift to electoral democracy lifting the restrictions on electoral competition. Article six of the Soviet constitution, which effectively banned political parties other than the Communist Party, was repealed, allowing for the first time for a multi-party system. The first multi-party elections to be held were for the newly created Parliament of the Russian Republic, held alongside elections for parliaments in the other Soviet Republics, and only 86 percent of the new Russian deputies elected were members of the Communist party. In 1991, the Russian Parliament proposed the creation of a separate Russian presidency; an election was held in June and won by Boris Yeltsin, with 60 percent of the vote against five other candidates.<sup>37</sup> The results of this first democratic election would stand after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The reforms of these two years allowed the USSR to ultimately break into the “partly free” category in 1990 with a score of 4.5. 1991, the final year of the USSR, marks the peak

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<sup>35</sup> White, et. Al., *How Russia Votes*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Groves, “Advancing Freedom in Russia”, 3.

<sup>37</sup> White, et. Al., *How Russia Votes*, 39.

freedom rating for both the USSR and post-Soviet Russia, with a rating of three, just missing the “free” category.<sup>38</sup> Ratings at this level are associated with electoral democratic regimes.

In the nineties under Boris Yeltsin, Russia maintained and built upon the electoral democracy set up at the end of the Soviet Union. Particularly after the new Constitution in 1993, international observers were optimistic that the system in place would eventually develop into a liberal democracy. Elections during this period were fairly competitive, and while they were marked by significant problems, such as interference by economic and regional elites, manipulation was not systematically organized. Scholars frequently point to the State Duma national elections in 1995 and 1999 as examples of the last truly fair contests to occur.<sup>39</sup> In 1999 there was “unconstrained electoral entry, a relative oligopoly, and clearly defined alternatives” which the regime in power did not try to limit.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, under Yeltsin mass media continued to have the freedoms it had gained during Glasnost, and independent media began to become established. Both state owned and independent media provided discussion of multiple viewpoints of important issues. Reporters were ruthless, writing stories about crucial problems faced by the Yeltsin administration and the opposition, many of which were harshly critical.<sup>41</sup>

However, limitations to democracy did exist, but those that did were societal rather than built into the political structure by the regime. In fact, the political structure that existed at the time seemingly prevented the regime from exerting central control, and governing in

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<sup>38</sup> Groves, “Advancing Freedom in Russia”, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, “Problems of Conceptualizing Russia’s Political System,” 3.

<sup>40</sup> Grigorii Golosov, “The Regional Roots of Electoral Authoritarianism”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (June 2011): 626.

<sup>41</sup> Birgitte Hopstad, *The Russian Media under Putin and Medvedev*, Master thesis in Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (2011):13.

this era has been described as complete chaos.<sup>42</sup> Despite democratic intentions, the type of regime that developed in the Yeltsin era turned out to be quite powerless, characterized by a weak president, influential regional leaders, and dominant economic elites.<sup>43</sup> If anyone was manipulating elections for their own benefit, it was the economic elites, or “oligarchs”, but they were not using the structure of political system to do so. In the nineties, money was the primary factor of influence, not political office. While this was certainly not the ideal trajectory that pro-democracy observers hoped Russia would take, it still was not authoritarianism. From 1992 to 1997, Russia’s freedom rating stayed flat at 3.5. It started to rise in 1998 due to the collapse of the ruble, and in 1999, just before Vladimir Putin took office, Russia was rated at 4.5. This was still in the “partly free” category, and Russia was still an electoral democracy, but appeared to be on the verge of becoming less democratic.

### Putin’s Russia

The beginning of the Putin Era marks the turning point when electoral authoritarianism was established in Russia. Upon succeeding Boris Yeltsin as president following his resignation on New Years Eve 1999, Vladimir Putin quickly began to centralize power in the executive, and by the end of the next decade, “images of open, free, and fair elections and a legislature in which parties were able to challenge presidential edicts were anachronistic.”<sup>44</sup> Under the Putin regime, Russia has fallen from the “partly free” category back into the “not free category”. From 2000-2004, Russia teetered on the edge with a rating of five, but in 2005 received a rating of 5.5, which has been maintained through

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<sup>42</sup> Regina Smyth, Anna Lowry and Brandon Wilkening “Engineering Victory: Institutional Reform, and Formal Institutions and the Formation of a Hegemonic Party Regime in the Russian Federation,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23, No. 2 (April-June 2007): 2.

<sup>43</sup> Smyth, et. Al., “Engineering Victory,” 7.

<sup>44</sup> David White, “Re-conceptualising Russian party politics,” *East European Politics* 28, no. 3 (2012): 211.

2012.<sup>45</sup> Though this rating is in the “not free” category, it is just barely so, which would be expected from an electoral authoritarian regime that is trying to present a more democratic appearance.

To a certain extent, Putin’s initial actions upon coming to power could in part be seen as a response to what he saw as Yeltsin’s weakness, and some suggest that Putin may have entered office “with a mandate to reassert central control from Moscow.”<sup>46</sup> Putin’s popularity, demonstrated by his victory in the presidential elections of March 2000, certainly helped him be able to begin the process of centralization. With 68 percent voter turnout, Putin won with 53 percent of the vote. The next leading vote getters were Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party (KPRF), with 29 percent, and Grigory Yavlinsky of Yabloko with 6 percent.<sup>47</sup> In 2004 he won re-election with 71 percent of the vote with 64 percent turnout. The Communist Party, expecting low support, barely tried and ran a lesser figure, receiving only 14 percent. Combined with the powers of his office, this high level of public approval has enabled Putin to more easily “strengthen the center’s hold over both the formal and informal levers of political control”, mainly through the instrumental treatment of federal and regional elections and subordination of the media.<sup>48</sup>

In describing elections that have occurred in post-Soviet Russia, Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR who initiated the first efforts towards democratization, calls them “democratic in form but not in substance”.<sup>49</sup> This has been by design. In the Putin Era,

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<sup>45</sup> Groves, “Advancing Freedom in Russia”, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Cameron Ross, “Federalism and Electoral Authoritarianism under Putin”, *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 354.

<sup>47</sup> Russia Votes, *Results of Previous Presidential Elections*, [http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency\\_previous.php](http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency_previous.php)

<sup>48</sup> Smyth, et. Al., “Engineering Victory,” 2.

<sup>49</sup> Mikhael Gorbachev, “Perestroika Lost”, *The New York Times*, March 14, 2010.

national elections for the State Duma and the presidency have been consistently inconsistent. Though happening on a regular schedule, the Putin regime has changed the rules of the game between each election cycle, so that what is seemingly the same process has different results each time.<sup>50</sup> This is a trait particular to the Putin Era. Prior to his first reforms, the structure of elections had not changed since the adoption of the Russian Constitution in 1993.<sup>51</sup> Putin's strategy has worked well and worked quickly, and by 2004 "the leaders of the increasingly enfeebled political parties had come to the conclusion that it wasn't even worth participating personally in the electoral game on such a grossly uneven playing field."<sup>52</sup>

Necessary to the success of legal reforms has been the United Russia Party, a primary tool of the Putin Administration. United Russia was formed in 2001 by the merger of two pro-Kremlin minority parties in the Duma, Unity and Fatherland–All Russia, and it has held the majority since the 2003 elections. As an organization separate from the Kremlin, United Russia is indistinctive, but it does not have to be, as it exists only "because the administration itself could not put forward candidates."<sup>53</sup> The party platform is centrist and non-specific, "framed as vaguely possible in order to prevent open ideological schism within its elite ranks," as United Russia candidates are not chosen based on ideology, rather based on loyalty or utility to the Kremlin. This broadness also allows United Russia to appeal to voters without having to defend any specific positions.

The Putin regime fails to meet the procedural definition of democracy as a result of the limitations placed on political competition, and freedom of the press, therefore it fails to

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<sup>50</sup> A timeline of electoral reforms since 2000 can be found in the appendix.

<sup>51</sup> Bryon Moraski, "Electoral System Reform in Democracy's Grey Zone: Lessons from Putin's Russia," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 4 (2007): 541.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, "Problems of Conceptualizing the Russian Political System," 9.

<sup>53</sup> White and Krystanovskaya, "Changing the Russian Electoral System," 568



qualify as an electoral democracy. Competition has been limited by changing party registration requirements, severely limiting sources of campaign funding for opposition parties, changing legislative apportionment to benefit the party of power, and functionally eliminating the election of regional governors. Freedom of the press has been limited by dominant state control of the media, suppressing a basic civil liberty necessary for electoral democracy. Russia instead fits the description of an electoral authoritarian regime due to the existence of these restrictions and their goal, aimed at preventing the inherent uncertainty of the democratic process but retaining the form.

### Political Parties

In order to limit electoral competition, the Putin regime has used party registration requirements to eliminate true opposition parties and shift influence towards United Russia, the party of power led by the Kremlin. When Putin came to power, political parties had not yet stabilized, and changing the rules at that time allowed the Kremlin, through United Russia, to dominate elections, effectively leading to a one party system. This has resulted in the Kremlin dominating the political debate as well, which is a complete reversal of how the party system worked in the 1990s, when parties served as vehicles to signal various interests to the Kremlin. Under Putin, all interests of conflicting political parties have been more or less controlled.

The first action taken to change party registration procedures was in June 2001, when the State Duma passed the Federal Law on Political Parties, which would take effect in 2007 and affect the parliamentary elections that year. The law initially raised the membership requirement for parties to have regional branches with a minimum of 100 members in at least

half of the 83 federal regions, and a total membership of no less than 10,000.<sup>54</sup> In December 2004 the total membership requirement was raised to 50,000, with branches with 500 members in at least half of all regions. If they met these requirements, parties were allowed to register by proving their membership with signatures, but a party was disqualified if more than five percent of the signatures were judged by the electoral commission official to be falsified. This judgment was often an arbitrary decision. Before the 2003 State Duma elections, when the new law had not yet taken effect, there were 46 registered national parties. Before the 2007 State Duma elections only 15 parties were registered, and by 2009 there were just seven parties.<sup>55</sup> “The new registration requirements provided a mechanism for the Kremlin to weed out potential threats in favor of weak or loyal opposition”, leaving behind an opposition in principle, but whose lack of support and political influence prevents them from actually posing a challenge to United Russia.<sup>56</sup>

These changes also applied to the parties who were allowed to run candidates in regional elections. The December 2003 and March 2004 regional elections were the first to occur after the law took effect requiring regional legislatures to have a mixed system of seat allocation, with at least half being distributed proportionally from party lists. Only nationally registered parties were allowed to run lists in regional elections, excluding regional organizations which had until this point been fairly dominant.<sup>57</sup> As a result, participants in subsequent regional elections were limited to the parties that had been allowed to achieve

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<sup>54</sup> Russia has several different levels of regional autonomy, regions is used as the generic. The term oblast correlates most directly to the American state.

<sup>55</sup> Минюст России (MinJust of Russia), Список зарегистрированных политических партий (List of Registered Political Parties) <http://minjust.ru/nko/gosreg/partii/spisok>

<sup>56</sup> Smyth et. Al., “Engineering Victory,” 15.

<sup>57</sup> Grogorii Golosov, “The Structure of Party Alternatives and Voter Choice”, *Party Politics* 12, no. 6 (2006): 708.

national success and only United Russia and the Communist Party (KPRF) had the resources to successfully run party lists in all regions that had elections the following year.<sup>58</sup> These reforms have prevented regional opposition parties from gaining broader support and allowed United Russia to quickly become established as the party of power regionally as well as nationally.<sup>59</sup>

More recently, another approach that the Putin regime has taken is going in the complete opposite direction, making registration requirements so lenient that it prevents legitimate opposition from organizing. This has been a preventative response to the opposition movement that grew out of the dissatisfaction with the 2011 parliamentary elections, to prevent a single unified party from forming. The movement was made up of many smaller factions that had come together against the results of the elections, and by changing the laws the Kremlin hoped to disorganize the larger group as a whole. As part of the reforms that were led by President Dmitry Medvedev just before he left office, the membership requirements were dropped from 50,000 to just 500, with no geographic distribution or signatures needed.<sup>60</sup> The law went into effect immediately after passage and as of the beginning of 2013, 50 new parties have registered and the Republican Party, banned in 2011, has once again been allowed to participate in elections.<sup>61</sup> Some of these new parties have indeed been started by figures seen as leaders of the recent opposition movement. Mikhail Prokhorov, the billionaire who ran in the 2012 presidential elections as an

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<sup>58</sup> Golosov, "The Structure of Party Alternatives", 711.

<sup>59</sup> Cameron Ross, "Regional Elections and Electoral Authoritarianism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (2011): 343.

<sup>60</sup> Alexei Korolyov, "Medvedev Signs Party Registration Bill," RIA Novosti, Apr. 3, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20120403/172576418.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Минюст России (MinJust of Russia), Список зарегистрированных политических партий (List of Registered Political Parties) <http://minjust.ru/nko/gosreg/partii/spisok>

independent, coming in a distant third with 8 percent after Putin and Communist leader Zyuganov, registered the Civil Platform Party in July 2012. This drastic change in strategy demonstrates how the regime is willing to respond to threats of competition.

Getting seats will no doubt be easier. Dmitry Medvedev lowered the electoral threshold for proportional representation in 2011 from 7 percent to 5 percent starting with the 2016 elections. In addition President Putin introduced a bill in March of 2013 proposing that the Duma once again elect half of its body through single member districts, which would be easier for candidates from smaller parties to win. While on the surface lifting restrictions to registration and representation appears to be a good thing, this change was not made with democratic intentions in mind, and a crucial factor was deliberately left in place to prevent opposition parties from gaining influence if they were to win seats in the Duma. At this point the ban on multi-party electoral blocs in the Duma, instituted in 2002, still stands, which means that if small parties were to gain a only a few representatives in the Duma, they would be dominated by the majority party, which still happens to be United Russia.

This approach may be similar to the one taken during the 2003 Duma elections, when United Russia first took hold of the majority. United Russia was formed by a Kremlin-orchestrated merger between two pro-Kremlin parties, Unity and Fatherland–All Russia, who after 1999 were the second and third largest parties in the Duma with 16 and 15 percent, respectively. At the same time participation of many small center-left parties and electoral blocs was “strongly encouraged by Russia’s national executive in order to split the KPRF vote.” These two factors accelerated the decline of the KPRF, getting them out of the way for United Russia. In the 1999 elections, the Communist Party was held the most seats in the Duma with 113, or 25 percent. In 2003, their seat total was more than halved to 52, or 11.6

percent. This drop is particularly seen in single member districts. In 1999, 46 Communist seats were directly elected, in 2003, just 12 were. In contrast, between them in 1999 Unity and Fatherland All-Russia had only 40 SMD seats together, and in 2003, United Russia had won 102 SMD seats.<sup>62</sup> The Kremlin was able to further injure its main competition, allowing United Russia to emerge as the dominant party.

In order to further limit competition, the Kremlin reformed the laws on campaign finance to restrict the funding available to opposition parties. In the 2001 Law on Elections, public funding of political campaigns was for the first time provided to registered political parties. However the restrictions placed on party registration equally impacted the ability of parties to qualify. Only parties that received seats in the Duma would be eligible. This shifted the advantage to the larger parties, namely United Russia, in many ways allowing for even more use of government resources to sponsor regime-supported candidates in elections.

The new law also sent a signal to potential donors, such as members of the economic oligarchy, that it is a better investment to support to an incumbent party, which in turn sends a message to voters about the perceived viability of opposition parties.<sup>63</sup> Outside support to political parties was also limited under the guise of preventing foreign intervention in elections, banning political parties from receiving donations from companies who were more than thirty percent owned by foreign investors. Limits were also placed on how much Russian companies and individuals that were allowed to donate. However, the primary source of funding from Russian individuals had already been curtailed by the Kremlin's hunt of the oligarchs. "The elimination of the oligarchs and consolidation of control over much of

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<sup>62</sup> [http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma\\_elections\\_93-03.php](http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_elections_93-03.php)

<sup>63</sup> Regina Smyth, "Engineering Consolidation: Explaining Electoral System Innovation in Post-Communist States," (Presentation APSA Annual Conference, Washington, D.C., Sept. 1-4, 2005):12

the countries' major natural resources and industrial production also eliminates the potential for outside funding to support the national campaign necessary to contest parliamentary elections."<sup>64</sup> By making it harder for opposition parties to register and establish themselves, the Putin regime has limited competition to benefit United Russia.

### Legislative Representation

Democratic competition has also been limited by how seats are apportioned in the state Duma and the regional legislatures. Reforms have allowed United Russia to be awarded a higher percentage of seats for the votes they receive, which has allowed the Kremlin to subordinate the Duma. As part of the law passed in December 2004 to strengthen national security in response to the Beslan Hostage Crisis, the Duma's 225 single member districts, which made up half of the seats, were abolished, and the 2007 election would decide seat allocation through a completely proportional, closed party list system. In addition, the same law increased the required threshold that a party must meet to receive a seat from five to seven percent of the vote. Both reforms were an attempt to establish United Russia as the permanent party of power, and then prevent it from losing that position. Dominated by United Russia, the parliamentary process in the Duma has turned into an automated system of approving presidential policy, only adding to the process with any significance by serving as a place where the most obvious mistakes can be removed from legislation before it is implemented.<sup>65</sup>

The loss of Single Member Districts prevented anyone from running as an independent or as a member of a small or regional party from gaining single seats through direct election. Instead, all power would be held by the established national parties who

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<sup>64</sup> Smyth et al, "Engineering Victory," 18.

<sup>65</sup> White and Kryshstanovskaya, "Changing the Russian Electoral System," 572.

could, through the building of party lists, enforce loyalty among their members. The desire for higher placement on the list for the next election “would make these deputies less likely than SMD deputies to violate party discipline.”<sup>66</sup> This change came with short-term costs, but the long-term benefit of a stronger position of power for United Russia. Based on the results of the 2003 election, the last with SMD seats, the continued existence of single member districts would have resulted in a higher number of seats for United Russia and showing that the system already worked in their favor.<sup>67</sup> United Russia’s early success proved its usefulness to the Kremlin, and “the administration probably viewed the electoral system as a tool that could be used to ensure the loyalty of these new members of parliament” which Putin would find instrumental to the rest of his agenda.<sup>68</sup>

The switch to proportional representation was also made at the regional level. In July 2002, even before changes were made at the national level, regional legislatures were required to switch to a mixed system and elect at least half of their representatives through proportional representation from party lists. Some regions went even farther than the Kremlin asked and switched to a system of seat allocation that was 100 percent based on party lists. Prior to this, regional legislatures had not elected their members in a uniform way. Combined with the law allowing only nationally registered parties to run in regional elections, this switch was an effort to extend the influence of national parties into regional governments where local parties often dominated legislatures.<sup>69</sup> This particularly benefited United Russia, which, likely due to the advantage of name recognition from association to the Kremlin,

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<sup>66</sup> Bryon Moraski, “Electoral System Reform,” 553.

<sup>67</sup> Bryon Moraski, “Electoral System Reform,” 538.

<sup>68</sup> Bryon Moraski, “Electoral System Reform,” 549.

<sup>69</sup> Bryon Moraski, “Electoral System Reform,” 548.

quickly grew to be the majority party in most legislatures. As of 2013, United Russia is the majority party in all but three regions, and even in those three, it holds a plurality of seats.<sup>70</sup>

At the same time that the change in apportionment was made in the State Duma, the minimum threshold for a party to receive a seat was raised from 5 to 7 percent. This change was not really necessary, as the five percent bar was already working to restrict some of the more vocal opposition parties. At its height in 1995, Yabloko, a center left party, held 10 percent of the Seats in the Duma, receiving 6.9 percent of the proportional vote. In 2003 the 5 percent threshold prevented them from receiving proportionally allocated seats after they received only 4.3 percent of the total vote, leaving their delegation with just four SMD seats. The 2003 election also saw the Union of Right Forces drop below the threshold. This threshold benefits the parties that qualify by allowing them to be allocated more seats than the percentage of the vote they received, as the votes for parties that do not reach the minimum were essentially worthless. Unsurprisingly, United Russia has benefited the most. In 2007, approximately 7 percent of the vote went to parties that did not qualify for seats. United Russia officially received 64 percent of the vote, but was allocated 70 percent of the seats, pushing them over two-thirds mark and granting them supermajority status.<sup>71</sup> In 2011 this extra bump was even more crucial. Five percent of the vote was for parties that did not qualify. United Russia officially received just under 50 percent (49.4) of the vote, but because it was allocated 53 percent of the seats, it managed to maintain its status as the majority party in the Duma, although it lost the supermajority it had held previously.<sup>72</sup> In

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<sup>70</sup> Central Election Commission, <http://www.izbirkom.ru/izbirkom.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Russia Votes. *Results of Previous Elections to the Russian State Duma*, [http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma\\_elections\\_93-03.php](http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_elections_93-03.php).

<sup>72</sup> Russia Votes, *Final Result of the Duma Election, 4 December 2011*, [www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma\\_today.php](http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_today.php)



both 2007 and 2011 the five percent threshold would have also prevented new parties from gaining seats, but by raising the threshold to seven percent, the regime can assure that no one new will reach it. The three other parties in the Duma, the Communists, A Just Russia, and the Liberal Democrats, have benefited from this bump as well, but nowhere near to the degree that United Russia has. They have each typically gained about a percentage or less, which has not greatly changed their position in the hierarchy.

Raising the minimum was partially adding insult to injury, but it didn't just have to do with preventing smaller parties from getting seats. It also disqualified smaller parties from receiving public funding, and preventing them from recruiting support from wealthy donors, due to skepticism about prospects. This meant that fewer parties would be able to win seats, and those parties that did win would get even more, United Russia in particular. In addition, a higher threshold "could become self fulfilling, in that parties that were projected to fall below the minimum that was required to win seats would find that businessmen became less interested in financing them, and that politicians who appeared to have a promising future would avoid them".<sup>73</sup> Most of all, fewer voters would support them, and the votes of those who did would essentially mean less.

### Regional Executives

Perhaps the most significant accomplishment of the post-Beslan legislation from December 2004 was the abolishment of gubernatorial elections. Based on the reason of national security, the regime succeeded in preventing the democratic process from determining an entire class of high-level political officials. From this point, the Kremlin would appoint all executives of Russia's 83 regions. Though the official reason was to

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<sup>73</sup>White and Krystanovskaya, "Changing the Russian Electoral System," 564.

promote better national security, this was certainly used as an opportunity to reign in the regional governments that had been the cause for so much dysfunction during the 1990s. Those appointed by the Kremlin were chosen based on their loyalty or resources, sometimes with no political experience in the region. Tenure was granted based on the turnout that a governor could get for United Russia. In cases such as that of billionaire Oligarch Roman Abramovich, a major holder in the energy company Sibneft, the Kremlin used appointments to force influential elites to pledge their obedience. Abramovich had been elected governor of the Chukotka region, which shares a border with Alaska, in 2000 after serving in the Duma as a SMD member from the region. His recruitment to run against the incumbent had in part been due Alaskan activists, in an effort to solve the poverty and corruption that spilled over the border.<sup>74</sup> He personally invested more than a billion dollars of his own fortune into human and economic development in Chukotka, and when his term ended in 2005, he looked to step down, citing the expense.<sup>75</sup> Instead he was reappointed to serve another term ending in 2008, likely with expectations attached requiring his continued investment. It was also this same year time that the Russian state owned energy company, Gazprom, purchased Abramovich's majority stake in Sibneft, for thirteen billion dollars.<sup>76</sup>

As one of Dmitry Medvedev's last acts before leaving office in 2012, he introduced a law reinstating gubernatorial elections, seemingly going against Putin's major victory and granting a key request of the pro-democratic opposition. However, the brief period when

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<sup>74</sup> Nicholas Wheeler, *Alaska, Chukotka, and the Oligarch Governor*, Kennon Institute, May 6, 2002, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/alaska-chukotka-and-the-oligarch-governor>.

<sup>75</sup> Will Smale, "What Abramovich may do with his money," *BBC*, September 29, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4293684.stm>.

<sup>76</sup> BBC, "Gazprom to buy Sibneft for \$13bn," Sept. 28, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4290282.stm>

gubernatorial elections were abolished allowed the Putin regime to place significant limitations on the institution that was brought back. Though they looked similar on the surface to what had existed in the nineties and early 2000s, the results of the new elections will decide very little about who will become governor. The first contests were to take place in October 2012 in ten regions, though it is clear that they will be on very different terms than the last gubernatorial elections held in 2004. Upon taking office for his third term, Vladimir Putin unilaterally canceled the elections in certain regions where United Russia was seen as vulnerable. Amur, Belgorod, Bryansk, Ryazan, and Novgorod would continue with elections as planned, but in Samara, Kostroma, Yaroslavl, Smolensk, and Leningrad, the regional executive would remain an appointed position for the time being. The sitting governors in the latter group at the time were all dismissed, replaced by appointees that would be better at turning out voters for United Russia on the chance that elections are held in the future.<sup>77</sup>

In the regions where elections did take place, the incumbent governors previously appointed by the Kremlin were all re-elected, and the official percentage of the vote received by the least popular candidate was still 64 percent. In preparation for the gubernatorial elections that will take place in October of 2013, the Kremlin has been preemptively replacing unpopular governors with more favored candidates, in order to maintain their advantage in those races.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, an amendment was made to the law passed under

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Liles, "Putin's Management of Russia's Governors Reveals Regional Fractures, Fear of Losing Power", *New Atlanticist*, May 30, 2012, [http://www.acus.org/new\\_atlanticist/putins-management-russias-governors-reveals-regional-fractures-fear-losing-power](http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/putins-management-russias-governors-reveals-regional-fractures-fear-losing-power).

<sup>78</sup> Nikolai Petrov, Switching Governors in Midstream, *The Moscow Times*, Mar. 4 2013, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/switching-governors-in-midstream/476433.html>

President Medvedev, revising it to allow regional legislatures to choose whether to participate in gubernatorial elections. If so decided, each parliamentary party would instead submit to the president three names, from which the president would select three finalists, whom he would send back to the regional legislature for the ultimate choice. The official reason presented for this alternative was to mitigate the problems elections might cause in less stable regions, such as the multi-ethnic Caucasus, where elections could possibly lead to the resumption of ethnically motivated conflict.<sup>79</sup> Putin has very carefully managed the Caucasus region due to the conflict in Chechnya, and because voter turnout for United Russia is typically at very high levels, he will likely be able to continue appointing regional executives there.

Prior to abolition of gubernatorial elections, Putin instituted reforms that had already begun to limit the authority of the office. Since 1995, holding a position as governor or as head of a regional legislature for any region also came with the entitlement to a seat on the Federation council, the upper body of the national legislature. In July 2000, the State Duma passed a bill that required these two officials to instead appoint full-time representatives to serve in their place by the end of 2001.<sup>80</sup> This change has allowed the regime to limit regional influence in parliament.<sup>81</sup> The new rules for membership have undermined its institutional legitimacy and essentially turned it into a rubber stamp.<sup>82</sup> From what once was an engine of regional interests, Putin has created a dependent, compliant council, where “all

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<sup>79</sup> Yulia Ponomareva, “United Russia proposes bill allowing regions to forgo direct gubernatorial elections,” *Russia Behind the Headlines*, Jan. 31, 2013, [http://rbth.ru/politics/2013/01/31/united\\_russia\\_proposes\\_bill\\_allowing\\_regions\\_to\\_forgo\\_direct\\_guberna\\_22385.html](http://rbth.ru/politics/2013/01/31/united_russia_proposes_bill_allowing_regions_to_forgo_direct_guberna_22385.html)

<sup>80</sup> Smyth et. Al., “Engineering Victory”, 10.

<sup>81</sup> Bryon Moraski, “Electoral System Reform,” 547.

<sup>82</sup> White and Krystanovskaya, “Changing the Russian Electoral System,” 573.

bills, even bills that directly infringe upon regional interests, are quickly considered and approved.”<sup>83</sup>

In May 2000, President Putin announced the establishment of seven federal districts, each made up of about a dozen regions, to which he appointed a presidential envoy to manage regional affairs for the Kremlin. Those appointed were very close to the president, often with a similar background in the security services, and were granted a very high rank within the administration, with the privilege to attend presidential cabinet meetings and regular meetings with the President Putin himself.<sup>84</sup> The creation of these districts was solely by executive decree, with the specific goal of reigning in the governors and centralizing authority in Moscow.

### Media

Under Vladimir Putin, the Russian mass media has gradually been subordinated to the will of the regime. This has been used as control to portray a calculated image of political power, while at the same time prevent opposing views from receiving wide coverage. This has limited the basic right to speech necessary to meet the procedural definition of democracy, and is an important reason why Russia under Vladimir Putin qualifies as an electoral authoritarian regime. In Russia, mass media, particularly television, plays an important role in national elections, especially given the size of the country, and is “all the government needs to manipulate public opinion.”<sup>85</sup> Since 2000 Putin regime has gained outright and passive control over the most influential media outlets, so that at this point, the primary source of news for 80 percent of Russians is state controlled television, with a state

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<sup>83</sup> Cameron Ross, “Federalism and Electoral Authoritarianism Under Putin,” *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 3 (2005): 357.

<sup>84</sup> Ross, “Federalism and Electoral Authoritarianism,” 356.

<sup>85</sup> Feifer, “Russian Media Landscape Varied”.

controlled message.<sup>86</sup> Domination of television media by the regime has prevented opposition parties and candidates from being able to campaign on an equal level nationally.<sup>87</sup>

Not all of the widest reaching television networks are owned by the state directly, but rather through different means of ownership in order to imply that there is a sense of plurality. Only two networks, Channel One and Russia 1, are directly state-owned. Others are owned by state run companies like Gazprom, such as NTV and TNT, or owned by companies that have close ties to the Kremlin like the National Media Group, which owns REN TV outright, and holds stakes in CTC and Channel Five.<sup>88</sup> Top officials from these television stations meet regularly with the Kremlin about what news they are allowed to report, and when.<sup>89</sup> Similar takeovers by the state and state interests of print media outlets have also occurred, and they have been subject to the same types of instructions from the Kremlin.<sup>90</sup>

Several of these media outlets had been initially been independently owned, and had frequently criticized the Kremlin in the nineties, but once Putin came to power, he made it clear that this would no longer be tolerated. Media tycoon Vladimir Gusinsky, the founder of NTV, the first independent post-Soviet television station, “was temporarily jailed and his station forcibly taken over by a minority shareholder, state-owned Gazprom”, serving as an example for what would happen to other critical media outlets.<sup>91</sup> Channel One was once

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<sup>86</sup> Gregory Feifer, “Russian Media Landscape Varied Despite Heavy State Control,” RFE/RL, Oct. 7, 2011  
[http://www.rferl.org/content/russian\\_media\\_landscape\\_varied\\_despite\\_heavy\\_state\\_control/24352432.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/russian_media_landscape_varied_despite_heavy_state_control/24352432.html)

<sup>87</sup> Stephen White, Elections Russia-Style. *Europe-Asia studies* 63:4, 2011 535

<sup>88</sup> Birgitte Hopstad, The Russian media under Putin and Medvedev: Controlled media in an authoritarian system. Master thesis in Political Science, NTNU, February 2011, 30

<sup>89</sup> Scott Gehlbach, “Reflections on Putin and the Media,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26, no. 1(2010)

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<sup>90</sup> Smyth et. Al. 18.

<sup>91</sup> Gehlbach, “Reflections on Putin”, 80.

partly owned by Billionaire Boris Berezovsky, but he sold his share after falling out of favor with the Kremlin and immigrating to Great Britain.

Due to state control of the media, the amount of coverage has skewed in favor of United Russia and Kremlin supported candidates. Leading up to the 2007 parliamentary elections, United Russia was found to have 10 times more coverage than its main competitor, the Communist Party (KPRF). Before the 2008 presidential elections, United Russia candidate Dmitry Medvedev was found to have received 43% of the news coverage on the primary national channels, and in an average news program, for more minutes than the three other candidates combined.<sup>92</sup> In 2012, presidential challenger Mikhail Prokhorov criticized deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov while addressing a gathering of his party, Right Cause, the video of which rapidly spread on the Internet. Prokhorov, a powerful oligarch, was criticizing the chief domestic advisor to Putin, but the event was not mentioned on the nightly news and Prokhorov himself was barely mentioned.<sup>93</sup>

The tone of news coverage has also been considerably whitewashed to portray the Kremlin favorably and without going into depth on policy. Coverage of the president largely consists of simply recounting his activities, “and stories often show the president meeting with officials in his office to convey the sense that he is in charge, with very little depth analysis of the policies that are being discussed.”<sup>94</sup> This type of coverage has helped to cultivate President Putin’s macho image, over his political accomplishments. The news widely covers his practice of judo and his discovery of ancient Greek urns, using it to convey

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<sup>92</sup> Gehlbach, “Reflections on Putin,” 82.

<sup>93</sup> Feifer, “Russian Media Landscape Varied”.

<sup>94</sup> Smyth et. Al. 18.

a message of fitness and strength. The political information most accessible to most Russians is highly controlled, and exclusive of sensitive topics or minority opinions.

Under the control of Vladimir Putin, Russia has turned into an electoral authoritarian state, distinguished from the previous regimes in the USSR and earlier in post-Soviet Russia. Competition has been limited by the restriction of registration and funding of political opposition parties, the limitation of legislative representation of opposition parties, and the decrease of power of regional executives. The media, particularly television, has been subverted to the regime, allowing it to control the main source of political information. Elections are held, with the goal of appearing to be an electoral democracy, but due to the intentional limitation of competition and freedom in the media, Russia does not meet the procedural definition of democracy and is in fact an authoritarian regime.

### **Costs and Benefits of Electoral Authoritarianism in Putin's Russia**

The inherent instability of electoral authoritarianism is just as present in the case of Russia as it is in theory. However, up to this point, Vladimir Putin seems to have gained more from his authoritarian electoral structure than he has risked, and he has so far managed to achieve the balance necessary to continue to maintain an electoral authoritarian regime. Despite the fact that elections in Russia have come to be less and less democratic, there is still an implied sense of competition from the fact they are still happening, and the winners of elections, even on uneven terms, still gain legal legitimacy from their victory. Without close scrutiny, which the regime was counting on, Russia still appeared to be trying to meet the procedural definition of democracy, and appearances are important, as it is from this that the regime benefits. But for every benefit, there are risks that the Putin regime must balance.



Since the 2011 Duma elections and the 2012 Presidential election, holes have been starting to form in the façade of Russian democracy, revealing the structural manipulation of electoral authoritarianism underneath. These holes are examples of where the risks of the regime's strategy have become clearly evident. The legal legitimacy gained from holding elections has been reinforced by Vladimir Putin's popular legitimacy, inextricably tying the two together. The centralization of party politics around United Russia has led to the development of party loyalty at all levels, but the incentivization of loyalty has led to more blatant election fraud. The Kremlin's structure of electoral control has been able to extend through all levels of government, but grassroots movements, such as that of the newly formed opposition movement, and candidates for local government have found certain ways to work around it, which threatens the effectiveness of the structure as a whole. All of these risks threaten to destabilize the structure of Russia's electoral authoritarian system by forcing the regime to respond by either allowing greater competition or imposing greater repression, which could cause a shift towards either electoral democracy or outright authoritarianism.

### Popular Legitimacy

Vladimir Putin, despite criticisms of his style of governance, is nonetheless extremely popular, and this is in part a result of the electoral authoritarian regime he has built, allowing him to benefit from two of the kinds of legitimacy defined by Weber. The legal legitimacy gained by holding elections is the primary benefit of an electoral authoritarian system, the most stable type of legitimacy, but in the case of Russia, legal legitimacy alone cannot fully explain Vladimir Putin's success. The Putin regime relies on the legal legitimacy elections provide as the official foundation of the regime, but this is supported by Putin's own popular legitimacy from being seen as a strong, charismatic leader. The combination of both traits has

been crucial to the success of electoral authoritarianism in Russia, as one reinforces the other. Vladimir Putin's popularity has allowed him to get away with the manipulation of legal legitimacy, and the appearance of legal legitimacy led to higher approval as president. However, the reverse is true as well, and the effectiveness of one depends on the effectiveness of the other, which ultimately makes the risk of relying on both even greater.

For most of his time in office, Putin's popularity and job approval ratings have been overwhelmingly high, so this has not been an issue. According to the Levada Center, an independent Russian public opinion center, Putin entered office in January 2000 with an 84 percent approval rating, and just ten percent disapproval. He left office in March 2008 with 85 percent approval rating and 13 percent disapproving.<sup>95</sup> In his first two terms, the lowest approval that Putin ever received was in the summer of 2005 when he introduced some unpopular economic reforms during a particularly bad part of the second Chechen War.<sup>96</sup> At that point his approval ratings were down in the sixties, and disapproval ratings reached as high as thirty percent, but this only lasted a few months. Throughout his first two terms the average approval was seventy or eighty percent.<sup>97</sup> This period coincided with considerable economic growth in Russia due to the rising price of oil and natural resources, which greatly contributed to Putin's popularity.<sup>98</sup> Even if the 2004 elections had been perfectly democratic, Putin still would have easily been re-elected. As a result of Putin's popularity and perhaps

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<sup>95</sup> Levada Center, Approval Index of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, <http://www.levada.ru/indeksy>. (In Russian)

<sup>96</sup> RIA Novosti, "Putin's Approval Rating at Post-Election Low – Survey," Aug. 17, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20120817/175269092.html>

<sup>97</sup> Levada Center, "Approval Index."

<sup>98</sup> Alissa de Carbonnel, "Russian pollster says approval for Putin at 12-year low," *Reuters*, Jan 24, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/24/us-russia-putin-approval-idUSBRE90N0IX20130124>.

leading to his wide margin of victory, the leaders of several opposition parties including the Communist Party, decided to let others run in their place.

After Putin stepped down due to term limits these high levels of support were transferred onto his chosen successor, Dmitry Medvedev, who before had been a relatively unknown but important deputy prime minister. This transition was perhaps the biggest test to the electoral authoritarian structure, but the regime's popularity contributed to its success. Medvedev handily won his election and undoubtedly would have done so under fair circumstances, though by closer margins.<sup>99</sup> The success of the strategy was also reflected by the fact that 77 percent of those surveyed in a post-election national poll claimed to have cast a vote, even though the official turnout was 64 percent, showing high value placed on the act of voting.<sup>100</sup> Though Medvedev did not start out his presidency as well as Putin did in 2000, upon taking office in May 2008, Medvedev's approval rating was in a similar range with 70 percent and 20 percent disapproving. There was also high approval for the tandem approach that the two leaders were taking, though Putin was still seen as the dominant leader. During Medvedev's presidency, Putin maintained his strong approval ratings as Prime Minister, consistently staying 5 to ten points above President Medvedev. This divide can be particularly seen in late summer 2008 after the Russian War with Georgia, when Putin reached 88 percent approval, his record high, despite the fact that he was not officially head of state. May 2011 was the only point when Medvedev surpassed Putin, but even then it was just by one point, 70 percent to 69 percent, and they quickly grew apart again.<sup>101</sup> Popular

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<sup>99</sup> Stephen White, "Elections Russia-Style," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (June 2011): 531-556.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen White and Valentina Feklyunina, "Russia's Authoritarian Elections: the view from below," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (June 2011): 579

<sup>101</sup> Levada Center, "Approval Index."

approval was certainly an important factor in why the orchestrated transfer of power from Putin to Medvedev was well received.

Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency has been a more difficult test. His announcement in September 2011 that he would indeed be running for re-election in the 2012 presidential elections was met with a less than enthusiastic response from the Russian public. This was likely a contributing factor to the dissatisfaction with the results of the 2011 Duma elections, which in turn has led to lower approval ratings, creating a possibly damaging cycle. Putin's approval ratings have been on average around 65 percent, reaching a record low point of 62 percent in January 2013. His disapproval ratings, perhaps the more dangerous number, have since the announcement, stayed consistently above thirty percent and have kept climbing, reaching a record high of 37 percent in January 2013 as well. Compared to other world leaders, these numbers do not seem problematic, but, for an electoral authoritarian regime such as Putin's with tenuous legal legitimacy, any lower could be dangerous.

For the time being, the Putin regime's national control is protected by actions taken in 2008, perhaps in anticipation of this moment. President Medvedev introduced amendments to the Russian constitution extending the length of both terms in the Duma, starting in 2011, and Presidential terms, starting in 2012. The Duma would now serve for five years, and the president for six; both positions had served for four years previously.<sup>102</sup> The Kremlin will not need to re-assert electoral dominance in the Duma until 2016 and Putin will not have to run for re-election until 2018. In the scope of post-Soviet Russia, that is quite a long time, and time could be all that is needed to re-build popularity. In the meantime, the regime is taking

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<sup>102</sup> CNN, "Russian presidential term extended to 6 years," December 22, 2008, [http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/12/30/russia.presidential.term.extension/index.html?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/12/30/russia.presidential.term.extension/index.html?_s=PM:WORLD).

action to separate itself from the aspects of recent elections that have triggered recent protests in order to prevent the backlash impacted in local and regional elections this fall. These measures could possibly go as far as making a high profile scapegoat. Dmitry Medvedev assumed the position of Prime Minister and head of United Russia after Putin resumed the presidency, but in the past several months he appears to have fallen out of favor with the Kremlin, serving as the subject of attacks over poor economic growth.<sup>103</sup> The campaign seems to be internally led, and Putin has done nothing to stop it, possibly indicating the lead up to a strategic replacement of his former right hand man.<sup>104</sup> Medvedev's approval ratings have fallen to about 55 percent, with disapproval over 40 percent, certainly providing rationale for the choice. Putin and Russian electoral authoritarianism is too reliant on popular legitimacy to take a chance on keeping him around.

#### Loyalty and Election Fraud

The Kremlin has centralized loyalty to its United Russia party among public officials at all levels of administration, in both political offices and in government agencies. Continued loyalty has been reinforced through a reward system, with incentives such as higher office or more resources. The primary demonstration of loyalty is by delivering high election turnout for United Russia and Kremlin supported candidates, which indirectly encourages less than honest tactics on the part of officials to achieve the necessary results. This works in the Kremlin's favor, as it prevents the Kremlin from having to get its figurative

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<sup>103</sup> Tim Wall, "New Central Bank chief likely to focus on growth," March 15, 2013, [http://rbth.ru/business/2013/03/15/new\\_central\\_bank\\_chief\\_likely\\_to\\_focus\\_on\\_growth\\_23911.html](http://rbth.ru/business/2013/03/15/new_central_bank_chief_likely_to_focus_on_growth_23911.html)

<sup>104</sup> Will Englund, "In Russia, Dmitry Medvedev is targeted by campaign of insults," *Washington Post*, February 23, 2013, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-23/world/37249551\\_1\\_prime-minister-dmitry-medvedev-lilia-shevtsova-moscow-carnegie-center](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-23/world/37249551_1_prime-minister-dmitry-medvedev-lilia-shevtsova-moscow-carnegie-center)

hands dirty by participating in election fraud itself. However, because of this indirectness, the Kremlin risks elections results becoming more blatantly fraudulent due to the independent actions of officials, which could ultimately cause elections to be too flawed to provide legal legitimacy.

As United Russia has gained more dominance in the political system, political leaders have increasingly needed to prove their loyalty to the Kremlin to gain entry or advance to higher positions. Particularly on the regional or local level this has shown through high voter turnout supporting United Russia, augmented by ballot box stuffing, vote buying, and voter intimidation. This effect was particularly evident during the period when the Kremlin directly appointed the regional governors. It was made clear that their political survival depended on the results they were able to procure for United Russia.<sup>105</sup> United Russia set levels that it would accept from each governor, but that was as far as their direct involvement went. Governors usually were left to secure this goal however they could, which allowed the Kremlin to separate itself from the actions themselves.<sup>106</sup> In this situation, Governors often went farther than they were asked, out of either self preservation or fear of the Kremlin, and leading to results that seem clearly questionable.<sup>107</sup> In the 2007 Duma elections, the national turnout was 63 percent, and United Russia received 64 percent of the vote, but 12 regions it was over 80 percent (several regions it reached upwards of 90 percent), and in most of this group of regions, the support for United Russia was similar to the levels of overall turnout.<sup>108</sup> Pressure is also felt by state institutions to secure high turnout for Kremlin supported

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<sup>105</sup> Golosov, "Regional Roots", 636.

<sup>106</sup> Golosov, "Regional Roots", 636.

<sup>107</sup> White and Feklyunina, "Russia's Authoritarian Elections," 586.

<sup>108</sup> RIA Novosti, "Preliminary results of State Duma elections in Russian regions," Dec. 8, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/infographics/20111208/169491066.html>.

candidates, due to the belief that their funding and resources will be increased as a reward. “There had been particularly detailed supervision of staff in all forms of public employment as well as soldiers and students in many regions of the federation.”<sup>109</sup> For example, students in particular are expected to obtain absentee certificates and vote at the polling place at their universities, often facing threats about their academic futures, with members of the faculty on duty as monitors.<sup>110</sup>

Most recently, the results of the 2011 parliamentary elections have been called into question by accusations that United Russia overwhelmingly benefited from fraud. It has been documented that, like in other elections, Russian authorities used various methods of fraud and coercion to assure that United Russia received a majority in the polls, using their professional positions to campaign for the party and pressure others, and organizing the stuffing of ballot boxes.<sup>111</sup> Though such behavior has happened regularly, this election was particularly significant due to the degree of fraud, and the tenuous reception to the results. The Golos Association, a Russian non-governmental monitoring organization, estimated that officials gave United Russia 15 million votes, almost half of its total votes, through padding of the voting rolls alone. Their final assessment concluded that in actuality, United Russia received just 25 percent of the vote, rather than the 49 percent officially recorded.<sup>112</sup> Due to the mechanisms that allocate seats in the Duma, United Russia was just barely able to retain

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<sup>109</sup> White, “Elections Russia-Style,” 545.

<sup>110</sup> White, “Elections Russia-Style,” 544. Russians are allowed to vote at whatever polling place is convenient if they will not be near their home, as long as they receive an absentee certificate ahead of election day.

<sup>111</sup> Jim Nichol, “Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests,” *Congressional Research Service*, December 21, 2012, 7.

<sup>112</sup> Nichol, “Russian Political, Economic and Security Issues,” 8.

its majority party status. The invalidity of these elections was one of the primary reasons for recent opposition protests, which have called for new elections.

The Kremlin has responded to allegations of fraud by blaming the election monitoring organizations for having an anti-Russian bias, and making it harder for election monitors to observe Russian elections. Russia is a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has been serving as the lead international election observers in Russia since the Presidential elections of 1996. Just before the 2007 Duma elections, OCSE monitors were prevented from observing elections by last minute visa delays, in retaliation for not agreeing to strict conditions the Kremlin was trying to impose.<sup>113</sup> These same restrictions were placed on OCSE for the 2008 presidential elections, once again resulting in no international observers.<sup>114</sup> Observers were allowed for the 2011 and 2012 elections, both of which they found skewed in favor of the regime due to electoral structure, as well as procedural violations and manipulation, though the presidential elections did see an improvement over the earlier Duma elections.<sup>115</sup> Closer to home, the Putin regime has pursued harsh penalties for the GOLOS Association, the only domestic non-governmental election monitoring organization. In the run up to the election GOLOS recorded and publicized procedural violations that happened during the campaign for the 2011 Duma elections, and because of this faced ever increasing pressure from the Kremlin in the attempt to prevent them from

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<sup>113</sup> Nichol, "Russian Political, Economic and Security Issues," 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*, "OSCE/ODIHR regrets that restrictions force cancellation of election observation mission to Russian Federation", Feb. 7, 2008, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/49438>.

<sup>115</sup> *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*, "OSCE/ODIHR final report on Russian Duma elections says contest 'slanted in favour of the ruling party,'" Jan. 12, 2012, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/86981>.



monitoring the elections. Vladimir Putin himself implied that GOLOS's western funding revealed it to be a foreign tool to influence Russian elections.<sup>116</sup> The Central Election Commission brought legal charges upon GOLOS for interfering with elections, and the continued work of organization observers since 2011 has been blocked by local authorities. This seems to suggest that the Putin regime realizes that illegal election tactics by its supporters could be dangerous, but is prevent the problem from growing further by blocking information, rather than increasing transparency.

As an attempt to appear responsive to the criticisms of the 2011 Duma election, the Kremlin installed webcams at 91,000 polling places in the 2012 presidential election to discourage and record violations of electoral integrity by election officials. The cameras would be constantly streaming video on the day of the election to a website that could be accessed by the public. Election monitors doubt that this did much for transparency, despite the fact that installation of the cameras was estimated to have cost \$300 million. Many cameras were not positioned correctly or were simply turned off.<sup>117</sup> Video of a polling station in the Republic of Dagestan, in the Northern Caucasus, caught several men apparently stuffing ballot boxes, but according to the head of the Federal Electoral Commission they were "merely depositing ballots that were filled out by sick or elderly people voting at

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<sup>116</sup>Kathy Lally, "Russia targets election monitor linked to U.S., Europe," Washington Post, Dec. 1, 2011, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-30/world/35282430\\_1\\_golos-independent-election-election-campaign](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-30/world/35282430_1_golos-independent-election-election-campaign).

<sup>117</sup> Ellen Barry and Sophia Kishkovsky, "Russian Turnout Includes Thousands of Eager Election Observers," New York Times, March 4, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/world/europe/russian-vote-draws-thousands-of-election-observers.html?pagewanted=all>

home”, which is normal procedure in Russia.<sup>118</sup> Altogether, the cameras recorded over 500 years of video, the vast majority of which was mundane and insignificant. Some cameras witnessed slightly bizarre events, such as a disco that was held at a polling place several hours before it opened, a man doing the moonwalk, and children singing and dancing in a ring around a ballot box.<sup>119</sup> The primary achievement of the cameras was not preventing fraud, but rather allowing the Kremlin to appear proactive about solving the problem. Further actions to either cover their tracks or increase transparency will be necessary to address the problem of election fraud if the Kremlin wants elections to continue to be accepted as meaningful and prevent damage to its legal legitimacy, which could ultimately lead to the failure of the electoral authoritarian strategy.

### Grassroots Challenges

The Putin regime has built an electoral structure that is extremely centralized from the top down. This has allowed the Kremlin to closely manage elections and elected officials, ensuring obedience and cohesiveness. However, despite how effective the regime’s structure of control has been, there is no getting around the fact that it is inflexible. Vladimir Putin and United Russia gain the most legitimacy from elections if the Kremlin’s control encompasses every aspect of the Russian electoral process, from the presidency to a city council in Siberia, so that mistakes do not happen. Therefore the most dangerous challenges to the regime are not those that could come from the center of the system, such as a national election, but on the grassroots level on the periphery of the structure, or outside of it altogether. Over time

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<sup>118</sup> *LA Times*, “Russian election webcam appears to catch ballot stuffing,” Mar. 5, 2012, [http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world\\_now/2012/03/russian-election-ballot-stuffing-fraud.html](http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/03/russian-election-ballot-stuffing-fraud.html)

<sup>119</sup> *Russia Today*, “Webcam vote sensation: Poll dance, moonwalk & fitness,” March 05, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/russia-elections-cameras-video-903/>

anti-Putin protests or opposition candidates winning local office could destabilize the central structure of control to the point that it no longer provides enough legitimacy to the regime to be useful.

The Kremlin, through United Russia, has been able to establish itself as the party of power not only nationally, but also regionally and locally. Since gaining power in the State Duma in 2003, United Russia has also dominated regional legislatures, as well as elections for mayor and other local officials in most cities, especially larger ones. On occasion, candidates from the other parties in the State Duma, particularly the Communist Party and A Just Russia, manage to win in the local positions. Such was the case in the March 2010 mayoral race in Irkutsk, a large city in Siberia, where the communist candidate won with 62 percent of the vote over the United Russia candidate's 27 percent. Though this loss was seen as a blow in press coverage, its significance was considerably minimized by the fact that during the same election cycle average gains of more than 50 percent were made by United Russia in the eight regional legislatures that held elections on top of they majorities that it had already held, as well as countless other wins in local races.<sup>120</sup> Regional and local elections happen every October and March, and this pattern only continued. United Russia even gained significantly in the six regional legislatures that held elections in December 2012, maintaining majorities in all of them, despite a general decline on popularity since Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency. Turnout for regional elections is generally significantly lower than for Presidential and State Duma elections, around 40 percent nationally in March 2010.<sup>121</sup> In October 2012 in the far eastern Primorsky Region, turnout for

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<sup>120</sup> *RIA Novosti*, "Regional polls give dose of reality to pro-Kremlin United Russia," Mar. 15, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100315/158199001.html>

<sup>121</sup> *RIA Novosti*, "Regional polls."

local races was just 8 percent.<sup>122</sup> Lower turnout allows United Russia party leaders to have a greater effect with their efforts of mobilizing supporters. By basic estimates, United Russia holds a considerably higher percentage of regional positions than it does in the State Duma.

The Kremlin is starting to see more losses on the edges of its control. In local elections in 2012, independent candidates in regions all over Russia seriously contested United Russia backed candidates and incumbents. Out of the fifteen mayoral races that were held that day, ten were won by independent candidates.<sup>123</sup> While a few of these were supported by various factions of the growing opposition organizing the protests, most were locally grown, and found their success in refocusing the races on local issues, rather than serving as a referendum on Kremlin policies. Two cases in particular were major upsets to United Russia's stronghold. In the city of Togliatti, Sergei Andreev, a member of the Right Cause party, forced incumbent mayor Aleksandr Shakhov into a second round. Andreev was slightly behind Shakhov in the first round, but he won the second with 57 percent of the vote to Shakhov's 40 percent.<sup>124</sup> In the city of Yaroslavl, city Duma representative and ex-United Russia member Yevgeny Urlashov defeated Yakov Yakushev, a businessman supported by the Yaroslavl region governor, 40 percent to 27 percent. He went on to win the second round with 70 percent. This victory caused a ripple effect from the Kremlin. The governor of the Yaroslavl Region at the time supported Yakushev, and, because of this, former Vice-Mayor Sergei Yastrebov, who had been serving as acting mayor since the retirement of the

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<sup>122</sup> Ilya Arkhipov, "Putin Loyalists Assert Control in Russian Regional Elections," Oct. 15, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-10-14/russia-votes-in-putin-s-first-election-test-since-kremlin-return.html>

<sup>123</sup> Michael Schwirtz, Mayoral Elections Give Russian Opposition a Boost, *New York Times*, Apr. 2, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/world/europe/russian-ruling-party-loses-mayoral-seat-in-yaroslavl.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/world/europe/russian-ruling-party-loses-mayoral-seat-in-yaroslavl.html?_r=0)

<sup>124</sup> Maria Guturova and Vladislav Trifonov, "Fight in Tolyatti," *Kommersant*, Mar. 26, 2012, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1897163> (In Russian)

previous mayor, lost the United Russia primary and did not participate in the general election, despite being the expected successor. Punishing the governor for this mistake, the Kremlin appointed Yastrebov in his place following Urlashov's victory.<sup>125</sup> Both the Yaroslavl region and Samara Region, in which the cities of Yaroslavl and Togliatti are respectively located, were scheduled to hold gubernatorial elections in the fall of 2012 after Dmitry Medvedev reinstated the direct election of governors. Vladimir Putin later postponed these elections indefinitely after he returned to office, likely out of concern that Andreev or Urlashov would run.

In the city of Astrakhan, Oleg Shein, a candidate from the A Just Russia party, lost the mayoral race to the United Russia candidate with the official vote total of 30 percent to 60 percent. However, in precincts where the ballots were counted with machines, as opposed to where the electoral commission counted them by hand, he had won 45 percent to 42 percent, leading him to call for the results to be overturned and new elections to be held. The electoral commission refused to hear his complaint, and as a result Shein and his supporters began a hunger strike that would ultimately last forty days. Leaders of the protest movement, who had until this point been working largely in Moscow, flew to Astrakhan to support Shein. A hearing was eventually held in court and the election results were ruled valid. Despite not succeeding, the events in Astrakhan are significant because they brought a grassroots local candidate together with the national opposition movement that had been holding protests since the previous December. This election marked the beginning of a greater trend on the part of the opposition towards strategically focusing on local politics.

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<sup>125</sup> *RIA Novosti*, "Medvedev called the situation with the Mayor of Yaroslavl intolerable," Apr. 27, 2012, <http://ria.ru/politics/20120427/636518053.html>. (In Russian)

The Putin regime could also have a problem if too much starts happening outside of the formal political structure, over which it is able to exert the most control. The 2011 Duma elections initiated a series of protests, creating a movement that continues to grow almost a year and a half later. As the 2011 Duma election results were announced the night of Election Day, protesters immediately took to the streets of Moscow and Saint Petersburg to decry the apparent fraud that had resulted in United Russia just barely maintaining its majority. Over the course of the next week, thousands of people attended sanctioned and unsanctioned protests in the both cities and hundreds were detained by the police. On December 10, 2011, six days after the election, a protest “For Honest Elections” was held in Moscow’s Bolotnaya Ploshad, with coordinated protests to take place in 80 other cities throughout Russia. Police estimates of attendance was 25,000, other estimates were as high as 70,000, but either way it was the largest protest to take place in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union twenty years earlier. Organizers of the protest include Boris Nemtsov, leader of the People’s Freedom Party that had been prevented from registering due to signature problems, lawyer and anti-corruption activist Aleksei Navalny, who was still in jail from arrests earlier in the week. There was significant participation from prominent figures on the far left and far right, such as Sergei Udaltsov and Eduard Limonov, respectively, as well as Russian cultural figures such as journalist Oleg Kashin, poet Dmitry Bykov, and best-selling mystery writer Boris Akunin. A list of five official demands was released calling for freedom for political prisoners; annulment of the election results; the resignation of Vladimir Churov, head of the election commission, and an official investigation of vote fraud; registration of the opposition parties and new democratic legislation on parties and elections; and new democratic and

open elections. The protests ended peacefully, but there were over one thousand arrests over the course of the day.<sup>126</sup>

Subsequent protests “For Honest Elections” were in the lead up to the March 2012 presidential elections. Approximately 80,000 participants turned out on December 24<sup>th</sup>, though the organizers estimated possible turnout of up to 120,000.<sup>127</sup> The largest of all occurred on February 4<sup>th</sup>, with organizers estimating that up to 160,000 people turned out.<sup>128</sup> Smaller actions, though still with turn out of several thousand on average, have been held on an almost monthly basis since then, most significantly on May 6<sup>th</sup>, the day before Vladimir Putin’s inauguration, when for the first time a violent clash broke out with the police.<sup>129</sup> Since then, the message of the protests has evolved to demand not only honest elections, but also a Russia without Putin. The most well-known slogan of the protest movement is that United Russia is the “party of crooks and thieves”, connecting the regime not only to unfair elections, but with the problem of corruption in Russia as a whole. The Russian protest movement calls to mind a reference to the Rose Revolution that took place in Georgia after parliamentary elections in 2003 and the Orange Revolution that took place in Ukraine after the 2004 presidential elections, both in reaction to election fraud and both successfully resulting in the resignation of the sitting president. However, both of those revolutions succeeded relatively quickly after the elections they contested, whereas the Russian protests

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<sup>126</sup> *The Guardian*, “Russian Election Protests,” Dec. 10, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/2011/dec/10/russia-elections-putin-protest>

<sup>127</sup> Miriam Elder and Tom Parfitt, Russian anti-Putin protests draw thousands to Moscow again, *The Guardian*, Dec. 24, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/24/russia-europe-news>.

<sup>128</sup> Nichol, “Russian Political, Economic and Security Issues,” 9.

<sup>129</sup> Alissa de Carbonnel and Maria Tsvetkova, “Russian police battle anti-Putin protesters,” *Reuters*, May 6, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/06/us-russia-protests-idUSBRE8440CK20120506>

are evolving into a more long-term movement against the Putin regime, and the current Russian political structure.

Out of the protests has grown an organized opposition movement, but this group has remained largely informal, at least in the sense that its leaders have chosen to not participate in the official electoral system. Aleksei Navalny, the informal head of the opposition movement, has faced pressure from officials to form a party rather than to continue to lead the public protests. Navalny has observed that officials do not know what to do about people like him, stating, “Some, they know how to co-opt. Others, they don’t. They don’t want these other people in politics.”<sup>130</sup> Individual opposition leaders belong to various political parties, but an intentional decision was made not to create a unified party from the movement as a way to reject the structure of the regime. This was helped by the fact that no one ideology was driving the movement. Instead they chose to do it their own way. A group of opposition leaders active in the protests formed the Central Election Committee, which would oversee the election of a self-governing body called the Coordinating Council of the Russian Opposition, which would create a platform of demands and organize future protests. The Council would not function like a political party, but rather as almost a shadow government, with the goal of providing an “an alternative system of representation for those who feel alienated by the Putin government.”<sup>131</sup>

The members of the Coordination Council were chosen through a democratic election in October, 2012, through a voting system designed by Central Election Committee to be

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<sup>130</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, “With Trial Suddenly Looming, Russian Activist Expects the Worst” *New York Times*, Mar. 27, 2013 [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/world/europe/with-case-reopened-the-russian-activist-aleksei-navalny-expects-the-worst.html?ref=world&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/world/europe/with-case-reopened-the-russian-activist-aleksei-navalny-expects-the-worst.html?ref=world&_r=1&)

<sup>131</sup> Masha Gessen, “For Fair Elections,” October 22, 2012, <http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/22/russian-opposition-stages-alternative-election/>



“entirely transparent and falsification proof”, in contrast to the elections they were protesting.<sup>132</sup> Almost 200,000 people registered to vote in the elections through an online process. Any Russian Citizen could participate by registering online with a picture, a scanned passport, and a phone number, and then were then sent an ID number that they would use to vote. The voting took place online and at several polling stations in Moscow on Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup> and Sunday the 21st of October, with over 82,000 people casting ballots. The committee would be forty-five members total, with thirty sitting on a general list as well as five each from leftist, liberal, and nationalist factions. The primary figures of the protests, including de-facto leader Alexei Navalny, writer Dmitry Bykov, chess master Gary Kasparov, and television personality Ksenia Sobchak were all top vote getters in the election.<sup>133</sup> Since its formation, the Coordination Council has heard resolutions on making elections more fair, and holding the regime accountable, as well as organizing continued protests in Moscow.<sup>134</sup> The specific actions of the Council have yet to substantially challenge the regime, but at this point they do not have to. What is more significant at this point is that it even exists in the first place.

The Putin regime is trying hard to prevent the Coordination Council from becoming a viable challenge to its power, but has had to resort to more blatantly undemocratic tactics to do so. Criminal charges were brought against council leader Aleksei Navalny, accusing him of stealing \$500,000 worth of lumber from a company for which he had been an un-paid legal consultant four years ago. The case against him was first opened in December 2011 and

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<sup>132</sup> Gessen, “For Fair Elections.”

<sup>133</sup> *Central Election Collittee of the Russian Opposition*, “Voting Results,” Oct. 22, 2012, [http://cvk2012.org/news/rezultaty\\_golosovaniya/](http://cvk2012.org/news/rezultaty_golosovaniya/) (In Russian)

<sup>134</sup> *Coordination Council of the Russian Opposition*, “Coordination Council Blog,” <http://democratia2.ru/group/opp?bydate=True> (In Russian)

soon after closed for lack of evidence, but later it was re-opened when after Navalny and Aleksandr Bastrykin, head of the Federal Investigation Committee, clashed publicly.<sup>135</sup> The trial is to begin in April 2013, and the charges could bring up to ten years in prison, but another possibility is that he would be convicted and serve a suspended sentence, which would be enough to prevent him from being allowed to ever run for office.<sup>136</sup> Leftist leader Sergei Udaltsov, who also sits on the Coordination Council, was charged with plotting to overthrow President Putin due to his actions at the pre-inauguration protest in May, and was placed under house arrest in February until at least August while he awaits a trial.<sup>137</sup> Though the Putin regime has used criminal charges in the past to force potentially threatening figures, such as oligarchs, to submit to its control, they have normally been economic elites, not political figures. By bringing criminal charges against leaders of the Coordination Council, even if they are not officially part of a registered party, the regime could be seen as blatantly suppressing the political opposition, slipping towards outright authoritarianism.

The Putin regime has no doubt benefited from legal legitimacy gained from the structure of electoral control that is central to its strategy of electoral authoritarianism. This legal legitimacy has supported and strengthened Vladimir Putin's personal popular legitimacy, which has led to a culture of loyalty and a deep vertical of control. However, tying legal legitimacy to popular legitimacy could shake the entire system if Putin's approval sinks. Loyal supporters could go too far, and electoral fraud could become too obvious. Grassroots candidates in local politics could erode the regime's control on the edges, and

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<sup>135</sup> *RFE/RL*, "The Race to Frame Navalny", Apr. 3, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/framing-navalny/24947139.html>

<sup>136</sup> Kramer, "With Trial Suddenly Looming".

<sup>137</sup> *RIA Novosti*, "Court Extends Home Arrest for Protest Leader Udaltsov," Apr. 1, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20130401/180375681/Court-Extends-Home-Arrest-for-Protest-Leader-Udaltsov.html>

growth of the opposition outside of the system altogether, could force the regime to react in more openly repressive ways. All of these possibilities could ultimately make elections dangerous enough for the regime that the legitimacy gained from holding them would no longer be worth it.

## **Conclusion**

Vladimir Putin's governance of Russia serves as an example of electoral authoritarianism in practice, and demonstrates the benefits of this type of regime, as well as the possible risks. Despite the intent of appearing to be an electoral democracy, Russia does not meet the procedural definition of democracy on two counts: it lacks meaningful political competition and it lacks freedom of the media. Competition has been limited through restricting the registration and legislative representation of opposition parties, as well as curtailing regional executives. Media, particularly television, has been subverted to the will of the regime, so that most people only have access to state controlled information. Russian electoral authoritarianism is built on providing the appearance of a democracy with none of the unpredictability of open elections.

The case of Russia presents clearly the balancing game in which electoral authoritarian regimes must engage in order to maintain their political control. Elections in Russia take the form of democracy, which allows the Putin regime to gain legal legitimacy from the outcome, but lack the substance of democracy, which removes uncertainty from the process. Elections have become a tool, rather than a contest, allowing the Kremlin to use them to centralize power from the top down. For the benefits that the Putin regime gains, there are equal risks to which it must respond. Electoral authoritarianism has provided the regime with legal legitimacy, which reinforces Putin's own popular legitimacy, supports a

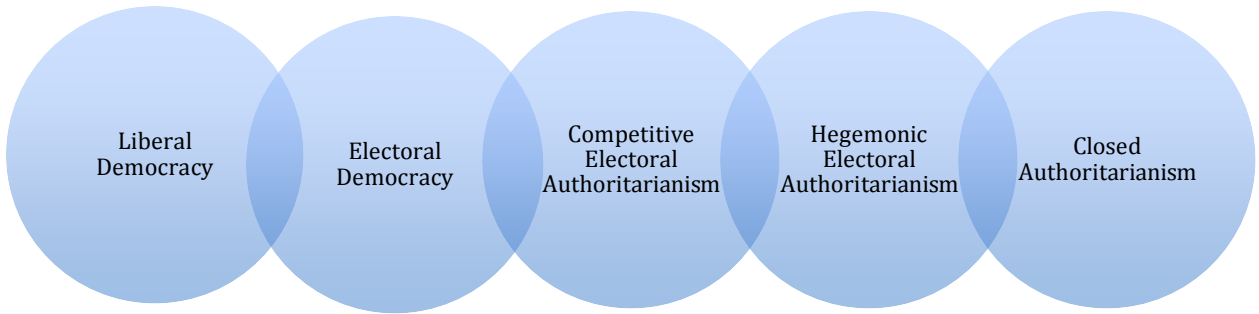
system of loyalty through the United Russia party, and broadly extends central political control. However, legal legitimacy could be damaged by falling popular legitimacy, blatant fraud committed by loyal supporters, and grassroots candidates and opposition movements on the fringes of the regime's control.

Many of these risks are demonstrated in Russia's most recent elections for State Duma in 2011 and President in 2012, coinciding with Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency. Putin's approval ratings have fallen since announcing his intent to run again for president, the 2011 Duma elections faced widespread allegations of falsification, and independent local candidates and a growing civil opposition movement gained success at the grassroots level across the country. The Putin regime seems to be facing the toughest challenge yet to the balance of its control, and its response must be measured to maintain the system as it is, and not allow for more democratic competition or more outright authoritarian repression.

Further questions that the case of Russia presents about electoral authoritarian regimes deal with the transition of power and the long-term viability of the regime as a whole. Though little seemed to change structurally under the tandem government between Putin and Medvedev, the response to Putin's return to the presidency showed that he could be reaching the point where he has overstayed his welcome. If he were to step down for good, such as in 2018 when his term expires, it would be interesting to see if electoral authoritarianism would or could continue under his successor. A more immediate problem forcing the regime to take action is the protest movement that has grown over the past year and a half. Granting them more rights than the political opposition has had in the past could cause other groups to expect the same, but treating opposition leaders like Aleksei Navalny

as if they were criminals is unlikely to help keep up appearances of democracy. Ultimately, Russia could show whether electoral authoritarian regimes are inherently transitional, or if they are capable of being permanently viable systems of government. Vladimir Putin's next term may provide an answer to this question.

Appendix A: The Spectrum of Political Regimes



Appendix B: A Timeline of Electoral Reform in Putin's Russia

| Date      | Type of Change        | What It Did   |
|-----------|-----------------------|---|
| Mar. 2000 | Federal Districts     | Seven federal districts created, to which the president appoints representatives  |
| May 2000  | Federation Council    | Heads of regional legislative and executive branches replaced with appointed representatives.   |
| Jun. 2001 | Party Registration    | Registration requirements increased to 10,000 members, with chapters of at least 100 members in half of the 83 regions. Effective 2007. |
| Jul. 2002 | Regional Legislatures | Reg. leg. required to adopt mixed member systems, least a half proportional.  |
| Dec. 2004 | Governors             | Gubernatorial elections abolished.  |
| Dec. 2004 | Party Registration    | Membership requirements further increased to 50,000, with chapters of at least 500.   |
| Apr. 2005 | Duma Apportionment    | Single member half of the Duma eliminated, becomes 100% Proportional representation. Electoral blocs banned.                            |
| Jul. 2005 | Electoral Threshold   | Duma Electoral threshold increased from 5% to 7%  |
| Dec. 2008 | Term Length           | Constitution amended increasing presidential term to 6 years and Duma term to 5 years, both previously 4.                               |
| Jan. 2012 | Party Registration    | Party membership requirements decreased to 500  |
| Jan. 2012 | Governors             | Direct elections reinstated, starting Fall 2012.  |
| Jan. 2013 | Duma Apportionment    | Single member districts reinstated starting 2016.   |
| Jan. 2013 | Governors             | Direct election of governors made optional.   |

Appendix C: Elections During the Putin Era

Abbreviations

UR – United Russia

KPRF – Communist Party of the Russian Federation

LDPR – Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

| Date/Type                     | Results   | Turnout |
|-------------------------------|---|---------|
| Dec. 31, 1999                 | Vladimir Putin appointed president after Boris Yeltsin resigns.   | n/a     |
| Mar. 26, 2000<br>President    | Putin (Unity) 53.44%<br>Zyuganov (KPRF) 29.49%<br>Grigory Yavlinsky (Yabloko) 5.9%  | 68.6%   |
| Dec. 7, 2003<br>Duma          | United Russia: 37.57%, 223 seats.<br>KPRF: 12.61%, 52 seats.<br>LDPR: 11.45% 36 seats.<br>Rodina: 9.02% 37 seats.<br>In total, 11 parties held seats, 67 members were independents. | 55.7%   |
| Mar. 14, 2004<br>Presidential | Putin (independent) 71.9<br>Nikolay Kharitonov (KPRF) 13.8%   | 64.3%   |
| Dec. 2, 2007<br>Duma          | United Russia: 64.30%, 315 seats.<br>KPRF: 11.57%, 57 seats.<br>LDPR: 8.14%, 40 seats.<br>A Just Russia: 7.74%, 38 seats.   | 63.71%  |
| Mar. 2, 2008<br>Presidential  | Dmitry Medvedev (UR) 71.2%<br>Evgeny Zyuganov (KPRF) with 18%<br>Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (LDPR) with 9.5%   | 69.7%   |
| Dec. 4, 2011<br>Duma          | United Russia: 49.32%, 238 seats<br>KPRF: 19.19%, 92 Seats<br>A Just Russia: 13.24%, 64 seats<br>LDPR: 11.67%, 56 seats   | 60.1%   |
| Mar. 4, 2012<br>Presidential  | Vladimir Putin (UR) 63.6%<br>Evgeny Zyuganov (KPRF) with 17.18%<br>Mikhael Prokhorov(Ind.) with 7.98%   | 65.25%  |



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