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PROJECT TITLE: Fragmentation of Liberal Parties in Russia

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

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Comments (Optional):

This paper is well-written and technically near-perfect. It would have been better if it more sources, especially Russian sources, and if it explicitly engaged and synthesized particular opinions of other commentators. More consistent consultation with the faculty mentors would have helped prevent these shortcomings.

Fragmentation of Liberal Parties in Russia

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Fragmentation of Liberal Parties in Russia

Party development in post-communist Russia has been highly disorganized. The chaotic formation, dissolution, and reformation of parties that has been so characteristic of the past decade has its roots in several aspects of Russian politics. First and most basically, the structure of Russia's national government and its electoral process are not conducive to a coherent party system. The way in which political parties form and develop are extensively shaped by the government in which they operate, and Russia's system of government has had a negative effect on the strength of its parties. Party development has also faced challenges from taking place after the fall of a long-standing oppressive regime, in terms of both the mentality of voters and politicians and the political climate in which parties began to form. One lingering problem in the party system that is beginning to take shape is that of coordination among like-minded parties. Parties with similar ideologies have consistently competed against one another in elections, often leading to outcomes based on which ideologies are represented by the fewest parties, rather than which ones are supported by the most voters.

The current structure of Russian government was created by the Constitution of 1993. This constitution gave extensive powers to the president. The president was to be commander-in-chief of the armed forces, would preside over the security council, and have the power to declare marshal law. The prime minister was to be appointed by the president and confirmed by the parliament; however, the president was given the authority to dissolve the parliament if it failed to confirm his appointee on three consecutive occasions. There was also no requirement that the prime minister be a member of parliament or belong to one of the parties represented in the parliament, and the prime minister could be dismissed by the president at any time without parliamentary approval. The president was also responsible for appointing and dismissing deputy prime ministers, and required only the consent of the prime minister to appoint and dismiss other members of the government. The president could veto legislation that was passed by the parliament, but a presidential veto could be overridden by a two-thirds majority in each house of the legislature. The constitution did give the parliament the power to impeach the president; however, the procedures for

impeachment were complex and difficult, and could only be initiated in the most extreme circumstances.[1]

The constitution allowed the president to serve for a maximum of two consecutive four-year terms. The president was to be directly elected in an election separate from the legislative elections. The president also had to be elected by a majority of those who voted in the election; if no candidate received greater than fifty percent of the vote in the first round of voting, there would be a run-off election between the two candidates receiving the greatest number of votes.[2]

The legislative branch created by the 1993 Constitution was called the Federal Assembly. It consisted of an upper house, the Federation Council, and a lower house, called the Duma. The powers of the Federation Council included approval of boundary changes, appointment of judges to the Supreme Court upon nomination by the president, and authorization of the use of armed forces outside the boundaries of the state. It also considered legislation proposed by the Duma on matters of taxes and currency, the budget, international treaties, and war and peace. It met irregularly, for one week out of every

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[1] Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routeledge, 2002), 104.
[2] Christopher Marsh, *Rusia at the Polls*. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 2002), 59.

three, with an additional period before these sessions for committee meetings.[3]

The Federation Council consists of 178 members, or two from each of the eighty-nine subjects of the Russian Federation. Members of the council were elected by a majoritarian method in two-member districts, with each voter casting two votes and the top two candidates in each district receiving seats. This method was only used for the 1993 elections, however, and the Federation Council has been indirectly elected by regional governors and legislatures in all subsequent elections.[4]

The lower house of the Federal Assembly is the State Duma. Its powers include the approval of the president's nomination for prime minister, although failure to approve the nominee three consecutive times makes the president constitutionally required to appoint his own candidate for prime minister, dissolve the Duma, and call new elections. The Duma also has the authority to declare its lack of confidence in the government as a whole; however, doing so twice within three months would also result in the dissolution of the Duma.[5] The Duma is also responsible for confirmation to and dismissal from certain positions, such

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[3] Sakwa, 133.
[4] Sakwa, 134.
[5] Stephen White, *Russia's New Politics: The Management of a Postcommunist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 64.

as Chairman of the State Bank, Chairman of the Accounting Chamber, and Commissioner on Human Rights.[6] It adopts federal legislation, which must be approved by the Federation Council, but it can override a rejection with a two-thirds majority on a second vote. After this process, legislation is still subject to presidential approval.[7]

The Duma is composed of 450 members, half of which are elected in single-member districts, and the other half of which are elected through a proportional representation party list system. Members are elected to four-year terms, in elections held the year before presidential elections. Candidates in single-member districts need only a plurality of the votes to be elected. In the party list races, parties must win at least five percent of the vote in order to receive seats in the Duma; the seats are then assigned to individual members based on their ranking on the party list, i.e., the higher a candidate is on the list, the more likely he or she is to receive a seat. Votes cast for parties that receive less than five percent of the vote are redistributed to the winning parties based on the percentage of the votes each received.[8]

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[6] White, 65.
[7] Sakwa, 128.
[8] Marsh, 60.

One of the first problems the constitution adopted in 1993 presented to party development in Russia was the fact that it wasn't adopted until 1993. A major stimulus for the development of parties and a party system is the electoral process itself.[9] After the fall of the Soviet Union in August 1991, it was over two years before Russia held a general election. Until the adoption of the new constitution in 1993, parties didn't even have an electoral system to work with, much less an election to begin campaigning for.

Development of political parties also depends on the parties' base in the legislature.[10] With no new elections held between August 1991 and December 1993, the parties that were forming had no such base to work with. The legislature was still composed of the old USSR Congress of Peoples' Deputies, who had no links to the new parties and were in no way accountable to them.[11]

The Constitution of 1993 also hindered party development because of the circumstances under which it was adopted. When elections to the state Duma were finally held in December 1993, conditions were less than favorable

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[9] Robert A. Dahl, *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 349.
[10] Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, trans. by Barbara and Robert North (London: Methuen, 1959), 183.
[11] Sakwa, 176.

for running a campaign due to the military action taken against parliament three months earlier. The constitution was finally passed after a long stand-off between President Boris Yeltsin and the parliament that existed at the time under the old Soviet constitution. Both the president and the parliament had proposed drafts for a new constitution, with the presidential draft creating a strong presidential system and the parliament's draft providing for significant legislative checks on the president's power.[12] Neither side was willing to compromise, and in order to end the stalemate President Yeltsin dissolved the parliament in contradiction to the existing constitution. In response, members of parliament barricaded themselves inside the legislative building and the head of parliament, Aleksandr Rutskoi, declared himself acting president. After a deadlock lasting nearly two weeks, Yeltsin ordered military action against the parliament, Rutskoi and his supporters were arrested, and Yeltsin was free to introduce a constitution creating a strong presidential system.[13] This chain of events created circumstances for the parliamentary elections three months later that were hostile to party activity and a healthy campaign.

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[12] Marsh, 55-56.
[13] White, 35.

The party system in Russia also struggles because of the power of the president in Russian government. Neither Boris Yeltsin nor Vladimir Putin ever officially joined a political party, and Yeltsin actively promoted an image of being "above" partisan politics.[14] With the resources available to a sitting president, the incumbent in a presidential race doesn't need the support of a party to win reelection.[15] Since a presidential election has not yet been contested in Russia without an incumbent, partisan candidates have always been at a disadvantage in these races. With the disparity in power between the president and the legislature, Duma elections may seem relatively unimportant. This fact combined with a presidency that has eschewed association with political parties reduces the effect voters think they can have on government by supporting a political party.

Another major cause of the weakness of Russian political parties comes from their formation in a declining communist regime. The development of a legal multi-party system in Russia began with the amendment of the Soviet constitution in 1990 to allow the existence of parties other than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

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[14] Timothy J. Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 105.
[15] White, 97.

Article 6 of the constitution, which had officially recognized the CPSU as the "leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organizations and public organizations" was amended to read "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and other political parties, as well as trade union, youth, and other public organizations and mass movements, participate in shaping the policies of the Soviet state and in running state and public affairs through their representatives elected to the soviets of people's deputies and in other ways."[16] The constitution was also revised to include Article 51, which expressly stated that citizens had the right to "unite in political parties and public organizations and to participate in mass movements contributing to their greater political activity and to the satisfaction of their diverse interests."[17]

With a legal framework for their existence in place, a large number of parties began to emerge. By the end of 1990, there were over 450 political organizations in Russia,[18] and by August 1991, almost one hundred of these had developed into recognizable political parties, although

[16] White, 36.
[17] White, 36.
[18] Sakwa, 174.

many had only a few hundred members and few had members in the Soviet republics outside Russia.[19]

Many of the parties that emerged at this time were able to achieve success as parties of opposition to the CPSU. By campaigning on negative platforms based solely on opposition to the communist regime, parties were able to exploit the CPSU's unpopularity to win victories with a minimum of organizational or intellectual resources.[20] The parties had no need to develop a positive program or define a clear ideological position of their own. The consequence of this type of development was that the resulting parties were organizationally and ideologically weak. The parties that developed in these circumstances were characterized by:

"numerical weakness, weak and amorphous organizational structures (particularly at the local level), regionalism, ideological vagueness and a negativism bordering on populism, and low-caliber leaders who, for the sake of self-affirmation, actively set themselves up against other parties, even ones that were ideologically close to them."[21]

Once the CPSU was no longer a power, parties could not exist solely as opposition to it, and had to develop

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[19] Sakwa, 174.
[20] Sakwa, 175.
[21] Vyacheslav Nikonov, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 7 August 1992, p 5, quoted in Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 175.

platforms beyond just a vague support for democracy. The already numerous parties began dividing over conflicting viewpoints on political, economic, and nationality policy. The absence of the CPSU removed the incentive for parties opposed to it to unite, and the parties became polarized not only because of divergent programs, but also because of the "irreconcilable" style of politics, in which any difference in issue stances became a barrier to cooperation between parties, that became the standard for most parties.[22]

Another legacy of the Soviet Union's one-party system was the stigma surrounding the word "party" in Russia, where the only concept that most people had of a political party was the old CPSU. For this reason many parties in Russia prefer to be called "electoral blocs" or "public associations," and many voters still remain wary of joining a party.[23]

Russia's party system also faced unusual fragmentation because of its sudden development. In an established party system, when small parties develop and gather support, they are usually absorbed by one of the larger, established parties who add the smaller party's issues to their

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[22] Sakwa, 176.
[23] White, 36.

platform.[24] New concerns and constituencies thus become represented by the major parties in government. In Russia, a party for every possible interest and segment of society developed at the same time and on equal footing, which led to a chaotic plethora of parties rather than the gradual additions to major parties that smaller parties usually become. Without the larger established parties, the small parties continue to exist on their own, competing with other small parties that may be ideologically similar to them.

Another weakness of Russian political parties is that they are frequently built around the personality of their leaders, rather than around clear issue stances or ideological viewpoints. Without firmly established reputations, party leaders are usually the clearest association voters can make with a given party. In fact, parties are colloquially referred to by the names of their leaders, such as "the party of Zhirinovsky" for LDPR, or "the party of Yavlinsky" for Yabloko.[25] Personality basis presents several problems for a party. Obviously, when a party is based entirely on one person's leadership, the party's very existence is tenuous because the leader could

[24] Duverger, 290.
[25] Colton, 174-175.

die, retire, or leave the party for some other reason. Also, focusing attention on personality detracts from the development of a clear and stable ideology and issue platform that would provide a lasting foundation for the party.

The political parties that have developed in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union can be grouped into four broad ideological families: communist, right-wing nationalist, pro-government center, and liberal reformist.[26]

The communist parties consist mainly of former members of the CPSU. When the CPSU was officially banned in 1992, several successor parties had already begun to form. Most of these parties, including the Socialist Party of Working People (SPWP) and the Union of Communists, combined to form the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), which claims to be the official successor party to the CPSU. Some extremist communist parties refused to join the CPRF, such as the Russian Communist Workers' Party (RCWP) and the All-Union Communist Workers' Party (UKPB), which refused to recognize the 1993 constitution and therefore took no part in elections.[27] Even without the support of these extremist parties, the CPRF became the largest party in Russia, with

[26] White, 42.
[27] Sakwa, 179.

a membership of over 500,000.[28] One other major communist party, the Agrarian Party, remained independent, but functioned primarily as a rural branch of the CPRF.[29]

Parties in the right-wing nationalist group varied somewhat in terms of both ideology and level of extremism. One of the most radical was the National Salvation Front (NSF), which was declared unconstitutional by Boris Yeltsin in October of 1992, but was reinstated by the Constitutional Court in February 1993. The NSF then became one of the leaders of the military resistance to the dissolution of parliament in September and October of 1993, and was one of several parties to be banned from the 1993 Duma elections. The only nationalist party that did not participate in the conflict, and therefore the only nationalist party remaining at the time of the December elections, was the obviously misnamed Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).[30]

The LDPR is one of the best examples of a political party based on the personality of its leader. The founder of the Liberal Democrats, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, was a charismatic campaigner who drew attention to himself and his party with outlandishly nationalistic proposals, such

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[28] Sakwa, 179.
[29] Marsh, 65.
[30] Sakwa, 177-178.

as the restoration of the Russian empire to encompass not only the former Soviet Union, but also the entirety of the former Tsarist empire, including Poland, Finland, and Alaska.[31] In 1994, the Liberal Democrats added "the party of Zhirinovsky" to their official name, and named Zhirinovksy as chairman for life with the right to form the party leadership any way he chose.[32]

Although the ban on the nationalist parties that participated in the confrontation between the president and parliament in 1993 left LDPR the only nationalist party eligible to contest that year's election, others were soon to emerge. Most notably, Derzhava(Great Power) led by former vice-president Aleksandr Rutskoi, and the Congress of Russian Communities, led by Yuri Skokov and Alekasandr Lebed, competed with LDPR for the nationalist vote in 1995 and 1999,[33] but the Liberal Democrats remain by far the largest and most successful of the nationalist parties.

The third grouping consists of pro-government centrist parties. While the Russian president has never officially joined a political party, parties have formed during each Duma election with the purpose of supporting the policies of the president and the presidentially appointed prime

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[31] Sakwa, 178.
[32] White, 48.
[33] Marsh, 79.

minister. In 1993, the leading party of presidential support was Russia's Choice, led by Yegor Gaidar.[34] Before the 1995 election, Viktor Chernomyrdin founded Our Home is Russia (*Nash Dom -- Rossiya*, or NDR), to be the new party of government support. Many members of Russia's Choice left the party to join NDR, and Yegor Gaidar rebuilt the party as Russia's Democratic Choice and moved toward a liberal reformist platform. NDR espoused a vague program supporting the further development of democracy, a market economy, and stability, and lost its status as the "party of power" when Chernomyrdin was dismissed as prime minister in 1998.[35] For the 1999 elections, the new pro-government party was the Interregional Movement Unity, commonly known as "Unity" or by its Russian acronym "Medved." This party received explicit support from Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, but was headed by leaders with limited political exposure.[36] In addition to the officially acknowledged "party of power," other parties developed with a platform of supporting the presidential government. Women of Russia, which has competed in all three Duma elections, set itself up as a kind of "women's branch" of the leading pro-

[34] Marsh, 77.
[35] White, 45.
[36] Marsh, 88.

government party,[37] supporting the president's policies with the additional objective of electing women to the Duma. In 1999, Fatherland - All Russia (*Otechestvo - Vsya Rossiya*, or OVR), developed as an alternative pro-government party, which had support among members of regional governments. While OVR was not endorsed by Yeltsin or Putin, it did support the policies they proposed.[38]

The final group is composed of liberal reformist parties. The largest of these parties, and the only one that has contested all three Duma elections, is Yabloko. The name "Yabloko," which means "Apple" in Russian, is an abbreviation of the names of the party's three founders, Grigory Yavlinsky, Yuri Boldyrev, and Vladimir Lukin. Yabloko was extremely critical of the Yeltsin government, and it has cultivated an image as "the only democratic alternative to the current regime."[39] The remainder of Russia's liberal reformists have presented a constantly changing stream of somewhat chaotic parties, ranging from a handful of parties in the 1993 election to the outrageous number that competed in the 1995 election. By the 1999 election most of these parties had joined to form the Union

[37] White, 45.
[38] Sakwa, 157.
[39] White, 43.

of Rightist Forces (*Soyuz Pravikh Sil*, or SPS), and were able to run a more efficient campaign.[40]

The first electoral test of these parties came in the Duma elections of December 1993. Due to the executive-legislative standoff that had ended with military action that October, conditions were less than ideal for contesting an election. The leading critics of Yeltsin's government, Ruslan Khasbulatov and Aleksandr Rustskoi, remained in prison for their resistance to the dissolution of parliament. Sixteen political parties had been banned on the grounds that they had been involved in the confrontation, including the National Salvation Front (NSF) and the Russian Communist Workers' Party (RCWP).[41] The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) was eventually legalized and allowed to take part in the December elections, but the ban remained on most of the others. Eighteen newspapers were banned or suspended, including *Pravda* and *Sovetskaya Gazeta*, which were required to replace their editors before their suspensions could be lifted, and the parliament's newspaper, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, which was overtaken altogether by the Russian government.[42] Until October 18, a curfew was enforced and a ban remained

[40] Marsh, 91.
[41] White, 38.
[42] White, 38.

in place on public rallies and demonstrations,[43] which made campaigning almost impossible.

The ban on public rallies also presented parties with difficulties in simply qualifying for the ballot. The Duma elections had been announced on September 21, but whether or not they would actually take place remained uncertain until the executive-legislative stalemate ended on October 4. In order to be placed on the ballot, each party was required to collect 100,000 signatures from across several regions and register with the Central Election Commission by November 6.[44] The task of collecting the signatures in such little time was difficult for parties that had yet to form strong organizational structures, and was made even more difficult by the fact that during almost half of that time it was illegal to hold a rally for the party's supporters.

Out of over one hundred parties and electoral blocs that had formed or were forming in the months before the 1993 elections, thirty-five attempted to qualify for the ballot. Twenty-one presented the CEC with the required number of signatures, but eight of these failed to qualify due to irregularities in the signature lists and

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[43] Marsh, 62.
[44] Marsh, 63.

accompanying documentation. In all, thirteen parties were placed on the ballot for the party list election.[45]

Eight parties passed the five percent threshold required to win Duma seats in the party list race. The nationalist LDPR won the most votes of any single party, with 22.9 percent of the vote and fifty-nine party list seats. Three pro-government parties cleared the five percent threshold: Russia's Choice with 15.5 percent of the vote and forty party list seats, Women of Russia with 8.1 percent of the vote and twenty-one party list seats, and the Democratic Party of Russia with 5.5 percent of the vote and fourteen party list seats. The two communist parties on the ballot both received more than five percent of the vote, with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) winning 12.4 percent and thirty-two party list seats, and the Agrarian party winning 7.9 percent and twenty-one party list seats. Of the liberal reformist parties, the Party of Russian Unity and Accord (PRES) won 6.8 percent of the vote and eighteen party list seats, and Yabloko won 7.9 percent of the vote and twenty party list seats. A total of 13 percent of the vote was cast either

[45] Marsh, 63.

for parties that failed to pass the five percent threshold or for the option of "against all parties."[46]

The majority of the district races were won by independent candidates (136 out of 229). The most successful party in the district races was Russia's Choice, winning twenty-five seats, and most other parties won at least one single-member district seat. Of the thirteen parties on the ballot for the proportional representation race, the only one that failed to win a single seat in the Duma was the Constructive Ecological Movement of Russia (CEDR).[47]

Procedures for registering for the ballot were changed somewhat between the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections by the Electoral Law of 1995. The biggest change was in the number of signatures required to be placed on the ballot. The required number was raised from 100,000 to 200,000, and no more than seven percent of the signatures could come from any one region.[48] Despite the more stringent requirements, the party list race in 1995 included more than three times as many parties as in 1993. According to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), there were 273 groups that qualified as "political parties" or "electoral

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[46] Marsh, 67.
[47] Marsh, 69.
[48] Marsh, 73.

organizations" and therefore had the right to attempt to be placed on the party list ballot.[49] By May 1995, seventy-nine parties had been registered by the Ministry of Justice to participate in the elections, and after the process of collecting and authenticating signatures was complete, the ballot listed a total of forty-three parties.[50]

Out of the forty-three parties on the ballot in 1995, only four passed the five percent threshold to receive seats in the Duma. The CPRF was the top finisher, with 22.3 percent of the vote and ninety-nine party list seats, followed by the LDPR with 11.2 percent of the vote and fifty party list seats, Our Home is Russia with 10.1 percent and forty-five seats, and Yabloko with 6.9 percent of the vote and thirty-one party list seats. Together, these four parties received just over fifty percent of the vote, which means that almost half of the votes cast in the party list race went to parties that won no proportional representation seats. Many people perceived these votes to be "wasted," and some even challenged the legitimacy of the elections. Particularly unhappy with the outcome were the parties that came within a few tenths of a percentage point of clearing the threshold, such as Women of Russia with 4.6

[49] White, 39.
[50] Sakwa,181.

percent of the vote, and the Congress of Russian Communities with 4.3 percent.[51]

The Communist Party was also the most successful party in the district races. With fifty-eight seats, the CPRF won almost three times as many of these elections as did its closest competitor - its fellow communist Agrarian Party, which won twenty seats. With wins in seventy-seven of the single-member district races, the independent candidates were again more successful than any single party; unlike 1993, however they didn't win a majority of these races, as 148 seats went to candidates nominated by a party. Other parties that did well in the district races included Yabloko, with fourteen seats, Our Home is Russia with ten, and Russia's Democratic Choice and Power to the People with nine seats each.[52]

Although most won only one single member district seat, a total of twenty-three parties received some representation in the Duma.[53] That smaller parties would have a better chance at winning single-member district races than proportional representation seats in an election with so many parties seems contrary to conventional wisdom. In most cases, these parties won only one seat, which was

[51] Marsh, 82-83.
[52] White, 52.
[53] Marsh, 83.

from the district where the party's leader was competing.[54] This is a result of the tendency of parties to form around a charismatic leader with personal political ambitions and strong local support, rather than around a platform or ideology that could develop a nation-wide following.

The success of the Communist Party in the 1995 Duma elections was commonly attributed to the voters' dissatisfaction with existing conditions,[55] but the difference in electoral results between communist and liberal parties can be better explained by differences in organization and coordination. While many voters did express their dissatisfaction by voting for the CPRF, just as many if not more voted for liberal reform parties. Including "wasted" votes, the total number of votes received by liberal reformist parties amounted to almost thirty percent, roughly equal to the combined total of the communist parties.[56]

Lack of coordination also played a role in the Communist victories in the district races. Although there were tentative agreements among some of the major parties within each ideological grouping not to oppose one another in some districts, in most districts party nominees found

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[54] White, 52.
[55] Marsh, 86.
[56] Marsh, 83.

themselves competing against candidates from like-minded parties. This was particularly true for the liberals, who faced competition from numerous small parties as well as the major parties that made attempts at coordination. In districts where support for liberal parties was strongest, such as those in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as many as six or seven liberal candidates competed against each other for the single-member district seat.[57]

In addition to the victories by the CPRF in 1995 that were largely attributable to their superior organization, the LDPR could also credit its success in 1993 to the consolidation of like-minded voters. After the other nationalist parties were banned for their participation in the parliament's resistance to dissolution, the LDPR was left as the only party for which supporters of a nationalist ideology could vote.[58] Taken as a whole, each of the other groupings - communist, pro-government, and liberal -- won roughly the same percentage of the vote.[59] The results in 1993 were not as shockingly disproportionate to the actual votes received, because with a significantly lower number of parties to split like-minded voters, a greater number of parties representing a greater percentage

[57] Sakwa, 182.
[58] White, 38.
[59] Marsh, 67.

of the vote were able to clear the five percent threshold. The results of both the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections clearly demonstrated the need for Russia's numerous political parties to consolidate.

Recognizing the benefits of consolidation, several parties have made attempts at working together. One of the earliest was a government-sponsored plan to create a two-party system before the 1995 elections. The idea was to unite right-center parties into one bloc, which would be led by Viktor Chernomyrdin, and to combine the left-center parties into another bloc, to be led by Ivan Rybkin. Both groups faced problems with parties that were unwilling to join and defections after the blocs had formed. The left-center bloc never really got off the ground, and the right-center bloc splintered and its remains became the pro-government party Our Home is Russia(NDR).[60]

Attempts have also been made to coordinate the supporters of ideologically similar presidential candidates. When the 1996 presidential election appeared to be a race between the incumbent Boris Yeltsin and the leader of the Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov, several liberal and centrist candidates dropped out of the race and endorsed Yeltsin in order to avoid a split of the vote like

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[60] Sakwa, 181.

the one that led to the CPRF's victory in 1995.[61] The leading liberal candidate who refused to support Yeltsin was Grigory Yavlinsky, one of the founders of Yabloko, and one of the liberal politicians who had been most critical of Yeltsin and his policies. Despite Yeltsin openly courting an alliance in the hope of gaining the seven to ten percent of the voters that opinion polls showed as supporting Yavlinsky,[62] Yavlinsky remained in the race, ultimately receiving 7.3 percent of the vote and not significantly interfering with the eventual reelection of Yelstin.[63]

A more successful attempt at party cooperation was the creation of the Union of Rightist Forces (SPS), a collaboration of liberal parties for the 1999 election. By consolidating the support of most of the smaller liberal parties that had contested the 1995 election, the SPS was able to win 8.5 percent of the party list vote, thus clearing the five percent threshold and earning twenty-four seats in the Duma.[64] Again, the holdout among the liberals was Yabloko, which was left as the only serious liberal competitor for SPS. Yabloko finished behind SPS in the

[61] "Russia's Power Puzzle," *The Economist* vol. 339 (1996): 49.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Marsh, 106.
[64] Marsh, 92.

1999 election, barely clearing the threshold with 5.93 percent of the vote and sixteen seats.[65]

The 1999 elections as a whole showed a significant improvement in party consolidation. A total of twenty-six parties competed in the party list race,[66] which was a considerable reduction from the forty-three parties that competed in 1995. More changes were made between 1995 and 1999 in the procedure for being registered for the party list ballot. Parties could still qualify by submitting 200,000 signatures with no more than seven percent coming from any one region, as they had done in 1995. To register for the 1999 ballot, however, there was the added option of paying an electoral deposit of 25,000 times the minimum wage, which amounted to approximately 80,000 US dollars. Seventeen of the twenty-six parties were placed on the ballot in this manner.[67]

Other changes included measures taken by the Central Electoral Commission to prevent such a large number of parties from entering the race. New provisions in the electoral law provided that parties who registered by paying an electoral deposit and failed to receive at least three percent of the vote would not get their deposits

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[65] Marsh, 92.
[66] Marsh, 87.
[67] Marsh, 87.

back. Also, parties that received less than two percent of the vote would have to repay the CEC funds that were allocated to them during the campaign and repay the media for the free airtime they were given.[68] These measures provided a deterrent to smaller parties that were unlikely to be able to meet the minimums, and provided an incentive for parties to consolidate to increase their chances of meeting the minimums, or at least to share the financial burdens in the event of failure.

The results of the 1999 elections were considerably more reflective of the votes cast than in 1995. Six parties surpassed the five percent threshold, and their combined totals amounted to more than eighty-one percent of the vote. The CPRF was again the top finisher, with 24.29 percent of the vote. This was an increase of almost two percentage points from 1995, but because there were so many fewer "wasted" votes to be redistributed to the top finishers, the number of party list seats the CPRF received fell from ninety-nine to sixty-seven. The second place finisher was the new pro-government party, Unity, with 23.32 percent of the vote and sixty-four seats. The other four parties to enter the Duma from the party lists were Yabloko and SPS, as mentioned above; Zhironovsky's Bloc

[68] Marsh, 97.

(the new name of the LDPR) with 5.98 percent of the vote and 17 party list seats; and the regionally based pro-government party Fatherland - All Russia (OVR) with 13.32 percent of the vote for thirty-seven party list seats.[69] All seventeen parties that paid an electoral deposit to be placed on the ballot failed to win the three percent of the vote required in order to have the deposit returned to them. A total of eighteen parties received fewer than two percent and had to repay the CEC and broadcast media for their support during the campaign.[70]

The success of the SPS in the 1999 election and the decline in support for Yabloko from 1995 led to attempts by the two parties to coordinate their efforts in future elections. The dramatic difference in the electoral failure of the highly fragmented liberal parties in the 1995 election and the success of mostly the same parties consolidated under the umbrella of the SPS in 1999 would seem to illustrate the benefits of cooperation. The incentive to work together should be even greater because of a general trend in the support for liberal parties shifting to the pro-government center since the 1999 election, which puts both parties in danger of not clearing

[69] White, 92.
[70] Marsh, 97.

the five percent barrier in 2003.[71] In spite of this, attempts at an alliance have thus far been unsuccessful.

There are several possible reasons for Yabloko's pervasive resistance to joining or collaborating with other parties. Many of these reasons are the same ones that have hindered the coordinated development of Russia's party system as a whole. The most obvious reason stems from the strongly presidential system of government. Yabloko's leader, Grigory Yavlinsky, was a serious candidate in both the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, and it seems unlikely that he would be willing to give up his candidacy in future elections by joining with another party that might want to nominate its own candidate. Because of the disproportionate power of the president compared to the legislature, Yavlinsky may view the potential sacrifice of success in the Duma election to be worth the guarantee of a nomination in the presidential race.

The effects of years of one-party rule may also play a factor in Yabloko's refusal to combine with another party. Over the past decade, Yabloko has consistently taken a position of staunch opposition to the government and has been known for its refusal to compromise its positions in

[71] Andrei Ryabov, "Yabloko and the Vacuum," http://www.eng.yabloko.ru/Publ/2002/papers/vek-120702.html

order to cooperate with other parties. This ideological absolutism may be the result of decades where no political compromise was possible, and opposition to the government was something that was longed for but impossible. In the first years of Russian electoral politics, Yabloko enjoyed its image as "the one democratic alternative to the current regime," and it may be unwilling to let go of its reputation as a government antagonist by alligning itself with the more government-friendly SPS.

Party politics in post-Soviet Russia have been characterized by a lack of cohesion and a failure by most parties to organize and campaign effectively. Several factors, which have their underlying causes in the effects of Soviet rule and the government system that was adopted in its wake, have presented challenges to developing parties from their very beginning. While the highly fragmented Russian parties seem to be making gradual progress towards a more cohesive and functional party system, some of the same factors responsible for the initial chaos are still causing problems for attempts at further consolidation.

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