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**PARTY–SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND DEMOCRACY:  
THE CASE OF RUSSIA**

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## **Party-System Institutionalization and Democracy: The Case of Russia.**

Kenneth Wilson<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Party-system institutionalization and its implications for democratic consolidation is an important sub-field in the study of political parties. The conventional view is that an institutionalized party system is better for democracy than an under-institutionalized one. This article considers the case of party-system institutionalization and democracy in Russia, and its implications for our understanding of the relationship between party-system institutionalization and democracy. The analysis finds, contrary to the expectations of the literature, that this relationship has been inverse in Russia i.e. as the party system has institutionalized democracy has declined. The Russian case shows that the link between party-system institutionalization and democracy does not necessarily hold and suggests that the conditions in which party-system institutionalization has democratizing effects need to be specified more precisely.

Key words: party systems; institutionalization; democratization; Russia.

It is a fact of democratic experience, and an axiom of the political science literature, that large-scale representative democracy cannot function without political parties. Correspondingly, the study of political parties and party systems has long been central to political science. A prominent question regarding newer democracies or those in ‘transition’ concerns party-system institutionalization and the implications of this for democratization.<sup>2</sup> The work that has been carried out in this field overwhelmingly (although not unanimously) posits a positive relationship between party-system institutionalization and democracy: an institutionalized party system, in short, is seen to be better for democracy than an inchoate one, for reasons that will be elaborated below.

This article will show, however, that the relationship between party-system institutionalization and democracy in Russia has been inverse i.e. as the party system has institutionalized the polity has become less democratic. The article will argue that Russia has exhibited this inverse relationship because, firstly, party-system

institutionalization was achieved, to a very considerable extent, via undemocratic means and, secondly, the party system that has been institutionalized is not dominated by political parties that are actively committed to democratic norms. This analysis, then, shows that the link made in the comparative literature between party-system institutionalization and democracy does not necessarily hold and suggests, consequently, that the conditions in which party-system institutionalization has democratizing effects need to be specified more precisely.

The article begins by examining the relationship between party-system institutionalization and democratization, as postulated in the literature. It then shows that this relationship has not held in Russia and explains why. The article concludes with some remarks on the implications of these findings for the orthodox understanding of the relationship between party-system institutionalization and democracy.

### **Party-System Institutionalization and Democracy**

While political parties appear to be both an essential component and a natural concomitant of democracy, the nature of the link between party-system institutionalization and democracy is much harder to ascertain. It is, in other words, one thing to say that democracy requires parties and quite another to say that democracy requires an institutionalized party system. Mainwaring and Scully (1995: 1-2), whose pioneering study of Latin America inspired most of the subsequent work on party-system institutionalization, come very close to making such a claim when they say that, 'It is difficult to sustain modern mass democracy without an institutionalized party system.'<sup>3</sup> There is important evidence, however, that democracy *can* consolidate without an institutionalized party system. Using a variety of measures derived from the literature, Toka (1997a) examines the degree of party-

system development in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic in the first half of the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> He finds that while the party systems in these countries remained unstable by any standards, at least three of the four countries had to be counted as consolidated democracies. The party system of the non-consolidated democracy (Slovakia), moreover, was, in decisive aspects, the most or second most institutionalized of the four. (1997a: 7-8) His main finding therefore is that the presence of reasonably institutionalized political parties is not a must for democratic consolidation (1997a: 3).

While an institutionalized party system, then, is not a prerequisite for democratic consolidation, many scholars are of the view that an institutionalized party-system is better for democracy and that, therefore, institutionalization has important consequences for the quality or nature of democracy.<sup>5</sup> To an extent this view appears to be based on intuitive reasoning i.e. given the centrality of parties and party systems to the democratic process, their institutionalization or otherwise must have consequences for democratic development. There is also, importantly, evidence of a correlation between institutionalized party systems and consolidated democracies. Mainwaring and Torcal (2006: 207-8), for instance, study 39 democracies and semi-democracies and find that in general (although there are significant exceptions) electoral volatility, a key measure of party-system institutionalization, is lower in the more democratic countries (as defined by Freedom House scores).<sup>6</sup>

The question that this raises is how does an institutionalized party system enhance democracy? Or, to put it another way, why is an inchoate (or under-institutionalized) party system worse for democracy than an institutionalized one? A large number of propositions have been advanced in this regard, primarily by Mainwaring and his co-authors. It is argued, *inter alia*, that: in weakly

institutionalized party systems it is more difficult to establish accountability and legitimacy; that public policy will be less stable and legislators less experienced; that the chances of democratic survivability may be lower; that antiparty politicians, populism and demagoguery are more common; that institutional impasses may be more likely; that governing is more complicated; that patrimonial practices often prevail, legislatures tend to be weakly developed and corruption higher (Mainwaring and Scully: 1995, 21-28; Mainwaring: 1999, 323-36). Such a list is certainly thought provoking. Persuasive arguments have been advanced for some of these claims (and the Russian case, as we shall soon see, corroborates some). However, little or no evidence has been advanced in support of many (if not most) of the claims. It seems, indeed, that correlation has become confused with causation: many of these features may be evident in countries with weakly institutionalized party systems (particularly those in Latin America on which the literature is largely based) but that does not mean that the under-institutionalization of the party system has caused them (or even contributed to them substantially).<sup>7</sup> In fact, to attribute all of these ills to weakly-institutionalized party systems (to any significant extent) without convincing evidence is untenable. This seems to have been recognized by Mainwaring (the main author here) who has dropped many of these claims in his later work (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006).<sup>8</sup>

All in all, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that both the exact nature of the relationship between party-system institutionalization and democracy (the aforementioned correlation notwithstanding) and the precise mechanics of how this purported relationship actually works are, in general, poorly understood. There is, however, important evidence that Russia's under-institutionalized party system had negative implications for democracy in the 1990s. Specifically, as we shall now see,

weak institutionalization hampered the ability of Russia's party system to facilitate accountability and representation in the 1990s.

### **Party-System Institutionalization and Democracy in Russia**

The under institutionalization of Russia's party system in the 1990s on a number of dimensions was well documented in a number of important studies (Rose, 2000; McFaul, 2001; Rose et al, 2001; White et al, 1997).<sup>9</sup> The party system was fragmented and volatile, and non-party (or independent) candidates were uncommonly successful. Under the electoral system in force at that time half of the Duma's 450 deputies were elected in first-past-the-post constituency contests and the other half by proportional representation from national party lists, with a 5% threshold. The number of parties contesting the party-list elections was consistently high (13 in 1993, 43 in 1995 and 26 in 1999). There was also a conspicuous lack of continuity in terms of the parties contesting elections and gaining representation in the Duma as parties, major and minor, appeared and disappeared between elections. For instance, of the 43 parties that contested the party-list vote in 1995, only 8 had also done so in 1993; moreover, 35 of these 43 parties did not nominate lists at the next election in 1999 (Rose et al, 2001: 423). Indeed, only 3 parties – Yabloko, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)<sup>10</sup> – won proportional representation seats in each of Russia's first three Duma elections. In the single-mandate constituencies independent candidates were extremely successful, winning more seats than any individual party at each of Russia's first three Duma elections. (Systematic quantitative evidence of these measures of party-system institutionalization is introduced and discussed below.)

This 'floating' party system, as one prominent observer aptly characterised it (Rose, 2000; Rose et al, 2001), had negative implications for democracy in at least

two important ways. The extreme volatility of Russia's 'floating' party system, for instance, undermined accountability. One of the key functions of political parties is to facilitate accountability, but voters can only hold their representatives to account if parties persist from one election to the next.<sup>11</sup> As Rose et al (2001: 419) point out:

If a party disappears during the life of a parliament, then those who voted for it at one election cannot pass a judgement on it at the next. If parties on the ballot are new, voters cannot judge them on the basis of their performance during the parliament that has just ended.

Russia's floating party system also had negative consequences for representation, which is one of the cardinal functions of political parties. One way in which parties are held to further representation is by acting as points of reference or political guideposts, which help voters to understand the choices on offer and thereby make reasoned choices (Mainwaring, 2006: 221). The fragmentation and volatility of under-institutionalized party systems impedes voter orientation of this kind (Mainwaring, 1999: 324). It must, for instance, have been a very considerable challenge for Russian voters to orient themselves politically in the 1990s given that the number of parties and candidates on offer was not only large but also substantially new at each election.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps a more important concern with regard to representation is that the results of Russia's elections in the 1990s tended to be highly disproportional, largely due to the high number of parties (mostly minor) and independents taking part. The most egregious instance occurred in 1995. Only four of the 43 parties on the ballot paper managed to gather the 5% of the vote required to enter parliament, meaning that 49.5% of those who cast a vote in the PR section of the election received no representation in the Duma (White et al, 1997: 227). Results in the SMCs were even less representative: in 1995 there were eleven candidates in the median constituency

and the median winner received just 26.2% of the vote (Munro and Rose, 2007: 12). In 1995 many Russians must have cast their two votes and still ended up with no representation in the Duma.

These representation and accountability problems, moreover, were exacerbated by the heavy traffic between parties within the Duma. This phenomenon of floor-crossing – which was particularly pronounced in immediate post-election periods – saw deputies elected as independents joining factions in the Duma or banding together to form new groups (sometimes with the help of deputies loaned from other factions), as well as deputies switching from one party to another.<sup>13</sup> In this process many of the small parties that won SMC seats disappeared once in the Duma, while other groups emerged that had not even contested the election (Rose, 2000: 55-6; Rose and Munro, 2002: 106-8). In general, such intra-Duma party-system flux further blurred the lines of representation and accountability. Following the 1999 elections, for example, it simply was not clear who (if anybody) groups such as People's Deputy, Russia's Regions and the Agro-Industrial Deputy Group were supposed to represent: they had not appeared on the ballot paper and, therefore, had not, as such, received a single vote, but ended up with about one-third of the seats in the Duma. It was also difficult to hold these groups to account as (with the partial exception of People's Deputy) they did not transform directly into political parties which contested the 2003 election.<sup>14</sup>

The experience of Russia in the 1990s, then, provides some evidence in support of the contention that under-institutionalized party systems have negative implications for democracy. However, it has not followed, as we shall now see, that a more institutionalized party system has enhanced democracy in Russia.



Since 1999 significant party-system institutionalization has occurred. The number of effective electoral parties (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979), a standard measure of party-system fragmentation, has declined markedly (table 1) and is now lower than in many established Western democracies.<sup>15</sup>

Table 1: Effective Number of Electoral Parties in Russia, 1993-2007

Year	1993	1995	1999	2003	2007
Electoral Parties	8.26	11.08	6.79	5.41	2.27

Notes: Calculated on the basis of the share of the party-list vote cast for each party. The category ‘against all’, which appeared on the ballot paper through 2003, is excluded. For figures including ‘against all’ see White (2007: 24).

Sources: CEC (1994, 2007a) and Vybory (1996, 2000, 2004).

The level of party-system volatility has also dropped. The Pedersen Index, which measures change in support for parties that participate in successive elections, is a commonly-used indicator of volatility (Pedersen, 1979). As this Index only measures vote changes among parties that compete in successive elections it is of limited use in the Russia context, because, as we have already seen, many parties appeared and disappeared between elections.<sup>16</sup> The Pedersen Index, therefore, is supplemented by the Party-Replacement Indicator (Thames, 2007: 461-2), which measures the percentage of the vote won by parties that did not participate in the previous election. The Party-Replacement Indicator, as table 2 shows, dropped dramatically by 2007. According to the Pedersen Index volatility actually increased in the period 2003-07; this rise, though, was largely due to the dramatic increase in support for United Russia, whose share of the list vote increased from 37.57% in 2003 to 64.3% in 2007. In the Russian context, however, the winning of a higher

percentage of the vote by a pre-existing party surely constituted greater institutionalization rather than less.

Table 2: Party-List Volatility in Russia, 1993-2007.

Period	Pedersen Index	Party Replacement
1993-95	24.52	40.96
1995-99	12.86	52.41
1999-03	12.30	58.05
2003-07	19.12	9.90

Sources: CEC (1994, 2007a) and Vybory (1996, 2000, 2004).

The number of independents securing election, another key measure of party system institutionalization (Mainwaring, 1998: 74; Mainwaring, 1999: 33), has also declined. In 2003, as table 3 shows, fewer independents were elected than ever before; this was also the first election at which an individual party (United Russia) won more constituency seats than independents. In 2007 there were no independent candidates at all, as the whole Duma was elected on the basis of party lists due to a change in the electoral legislation.

Table 3: Single-Mandate Constituencies in Russia, 1993-2007.

Seats won by:	1993	1995	1999	2003	2007
Independents	141	77	105	67	NA
Most Successful Party	30	58	46	103	NA

Sources: CEC (1994) and Vybory (1996, 2000, 2004). The figure for the number of independents in 1993, which was not reported by the CEC, is taken from White (2007: 24).

In some ways, in fact, these indicators do not fully capture the party-system institutionalization that took place during Vladimir Putin's presidency. United Russia's success in winning 223 seats in 2003 marked the first time that a party had

come anywhere near securing a majority in the Duma. United Russia subsequently marshalled a two-thirds majority in the Duma (by absorbing independents and representatives of small parties) which was unprecedented in the history of post-Soviet Russia. After the 2007 election the party system is even more institutionalized: all of the seats in the Duma are held by individual political parties for the first time in post-Soviet history (as independents and blocs are prohibited); a single party – United Russia – won a two-thirds majority outright (its 64.3% of the vote gave it 315 seats); and just three other parties (the CPRF, the LDPR and A Just Russia) control the remainder of the seats between them.

It is clear, then, that significant party-system institutionalization took place during Putin’s presidency. In the same period, however, Russia did not become more democratic. Indeed, contrary to the expectations of the literature, the quality of democracy (as measured by the Freedom House scores for political rights and civil liberties, which are presented in table 4) *declined* as the party system institutionalized.<sup>17</sup> In order to explain this, we shall now consider *how* institutionalization occurred and the political implications of the *outcome* that has been achieved.

Table 4: Freedom House Scores for Russia, 1993-2007.

	1993	1995	1999	2003	2007
Political Rights	3	3	4	5	6
Civil Liberties	4	4	5	5	5
Status	PF	PF	PF	PF	NF

Note: PF = Partly Free; NF = Not Free.

Source: [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

### **Party-System Institutionalization Under Putin**

During Vladimir Putin's presidency a number of important changes were made to the laws governing political parties and elections. This legislation has had an important role in the institutionalization of Russia's party system.<sup>18</sup> In Putin's first term the centrepiece of these reforms was the 2001 law 'On political parties' ('O politicheskikh partiiakh', 2001), which established political parties as the only form of organization with the right to compete independently in elections. Other organizations, known as civic associations, were still permitted to participate in elections at that time but only – according to an amendment to the law 'On the election of Duma deputies' ('O vyborakh', 2002) – in electoral blocs that consisted of a maximum of three entities, one of which had to be a political party. The law on parties, moreover, set out a number of criteria that must be met in order for an organization to register with the authorities and attain the legal status of a political party. The main demand in Putin's first term (it changed later, as we shall see) was that parties were required to have a minimum of 10,000 members, with no fewer than 100 members in regional branches in more than half of the subjects (component parts) of the Russian Federation. Parties are also obliged to participate in elections and to have rules and a programme, which lay out, amongst other things, their aims and objectives. However, the number of parties that succeeded in registering was, at 44, high which meant that the law on parties had no direct impact on the 2003 Duma election or, consequently, party system institutionalization (Wilson, 2006).

The legislation that came into force in Putin's second term was more radical. The minimum-membership requirement was increased fivefold to 50,000 (with at least 500 in more than half of the country's subjects), a demand that only 15 parties satisfied in advance of the 2007 Duma election (CEC, 2007b). The election rules, moreover, changed very significantly: in 2007 the entire election was conducted on

the basis of party lists, which meant that the single-mandate constituencies disappeared; only individual parties could compete, as no blocs were permitted; and the electoral threshold was seven per cent (not five as previously). These innovations effectively ensured party-system institutionalization: the list-only PR system meant that there could be no independents, and the 7 per cent threshold all but guaranteed that only a very limited number of parties would make it into the Duma. Furthermore, a new imperative mandate rule came into force, which establishes that any deputies who voluntarily leave their factions now lose their seats in the Duma. By definition this stamps out floor crossing, thereby further consolidating the party system within the Duma.

These legislative changes, while important, are only part of the story. The party-system institutionalization that occurred under Putin was also the product, to a very significant degree, of electoral processes that were severely flawed in a variety of ways. It was clear, for instance, that several of the parties contesting the elections in 2003 and 2007 were backed or even formed by the Kremlin. The principal example of this is the current 'party of power' United Russia, which was aided, as we shall see, by the Presidential Administration in a variety of ways. Several other parties have also been Kremlin projects, most notably Motherland in 2003 and A Just Russia in 2007. These parties have had two main purposes: to act as back-up parties of power for United Russia and to take votes away from the main opposition party, the CPRF. Elections under Putin were also characterized by the widespread abuse of administrative resources and grossly biased media coverage. The OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) election report on the 2003 election, for instance, found that the use of administrative resources by the state apparatus on behalf of United Russia candidates, 'blurred the distinction between the

party and the executive administration' (OSCE, 2004: 12) while state-owned TV channels 'openly promoted' United Russia (OSCE, 2004: 16). The same points applied in 2007 and both elections were adjudged to have been free but not fair.

There was also evidence of electoral fraud on both occasions. In 2003 an alternative count conducted by the CPRF, in cooperation with Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (URF), found results that differed from those recorded by the Central Election Commission (CEC). The alternative count suggested that both Yabloko and URF had, contrary to the official results, received enough votes to cross the 5 per cent threshold, and that United Russia's share of the vote had been inflated by about 4 per cent (from 33.61% to 37.57%). (Dzhemal', 2004; Wilson 2006) In 2007 a number of territorial election commissions recorded implausibly high levels of support for United Russia. Five of these commissions, for instance, reported that over 90% of the vote had been cast in favour of United Russia (the highest was 99.36% in Chechnia, of all places); another 15 commissions indicated that over 75% of those voting backed the party of power (CEC, 2007a). Such levels of support constitute prima facie evidence of blatant fraud. Numerous other reports of malpractice suggest that falsification of the results was widespread, although the exact extent of this is unclear (Belonuchkin, 2007).

The Duma election campaigns in 2003 and 2007, in sum, were systematically unfair in ways that benefited pro-Kremlin parties – principally United Russia – at the expense of opposition parties (or, more precisely, those not favoured by the Kremlin). While the use of these techniques to manipulate elections is not new, the extent of their application under Putin was exceptional even by the standards of post-Soviet Russia.<sup>19</sup> It is also important to note that the elections' results were the outcome of a complex of many factors, not least the benefits United Russia gained from its close

association with the highly popular Vladimir Putin: administrative manipulation alone is not sufficient to explain the outcome. It would, however, be implausible to suggest that these machinations did not have a telling impact. Indeed it is simply inconceivable that United Russia would have won 64.3% of the vote in 2007 had the election been free and fair. The unprecedented degree of electoral manipulation in 2003 and 2007 ipso facto damaged democracy in Russia. Party-system institutionalization, therefore, did not improve the quality of democracy; indeed, it was achieved – to a very significant degree – at the expense of democracy.

This decline in electoral fairness (and the deterioration of associated rights and freedoms) accounts, in large part, for the general democratic decline that has occurred in Russia under Vladimir Putin. The unfair elections also have implications for the specific themes of accountability and representation. The choice facing Russian voters in 2007, for instance, was the most coherent so far (only 11 parties contested the election – the lowest yet – and there were no constituency candidates), which should have simplified voter orientation. Moreover, as a consequence of the party-system institutionalization outlined above, elections under Putin became more representative: in the literal arithmetical sense the 2007 election was the most representative yet (table 5). Voters, however, can only truly have their interests represented and hold politicians to account when elections are free and fair. It must have been difficult for Russia's electorate to orient themselves and to make objective decisions concerning voting (and, by extension, accountability and representation) in the absence of reasonably impartial information. Moreover, the strong prima facie evidence of falsification suggests that election results under Putin were far from fully representative of the will of the people.

Table 5: Representation in Russia, 1993-2007.

	1993	1995	1999	2003	2007
% of list vote represented in Duma	87.06	50.50	81.37	70.65	91.75
% vote of median SMC winner	25.5	26.2	30.9	39.6	NA

Sources: List vote calculated from CEC (1994, 2007a) and Vybory (1996, 2000, 2004); median SMC winner from Munro and Rose (2007: 12).

The outcome of this process, i.e. the party system that has been institutionalized, is also inimical to democratization. The most democratically-oriented parties, Yabloko and URF, are now out of the parliament. More importantly, there is no numerically significant opposition in the Duma. United Russia, by far the largest party at present with 315 of the parliament's 450 seats, is unswervingly loyal to the Presidential Administration and will pass virtually any bill introduced by the executive.<sup>20</sup> A Just Russia, which won 38 seats, is also a pro-Kremlin party: it is openly supportive of Putin and even co-nominated the presidential candidacy of his chosen successor Dmitrii Medvedev. The LDPR has 40 seats but, in spite of the fiery rhetoric of its leader Vladimir Zhirinovskii, is also consistently loyal to the executive (Remington, 2006). Only the CPRF, which holds just 57 seats, will provide constant opposition to the executive. Three of the four parties in the party system that has been institutionalized, then, support an undemocratic executive that manipulates elections; the dominant party (United Russia), moreover, is a willing participant in these undemocratic machinations. The institutionalization of this party system serves not to consolidate democracy but to entrench authoritarian governance.

This analysis shows that party-system institutionalization is not always good for democracy; it is also evident from this analysis that party-system institutionalization is far from the most important influence on democracy (or its



absence) in Russia. The most proximate cause of the lack of electoral democracy in Russia is that the Kremlin manipulates the political process, particularly elections. The composition of the party system is also, at present, a reflection – to a very considerable degree – of the anti-democratic policies of Putin’s administration. In this sense, it is the quality of democracy (or more accurately its absence) in Russia that is shaping the party system, rather than the other way around. In sum, at present the prospects for democracy in Russia have far less to do with the condition of the party system than with the attitude of the Presidential Administration.<sup>21</sup>

### **Party-System Institutionalization and Democracy: Lessons from Russia**

What, then, are the lessons of what has happened in Russia? The Russian case has shown, firstly, that party-system institutionalization does not always enhance democracy. This implies that the conditions under which party-system institutionalization has democratizing effects need to be specified more precisely. Most obviously, events in Russia suggest that elections, which are the crucible of party-system institutionalization, must be free and fair (or at least freer and fairer than those that preceded them). This point is likely to hold more generally, for while it is possible to have a democracy with a weakly institutionalized party system (and Russia came very close to this in the early 1990s) it is by definition impossible to be a democracy without free and fair elections.

The Russian example also suggests that party-system institutionalization will only improve the quality of democracy if the party system that is institutionalized consists, predominantly, of parties that are committed to democracy. This is also likely to be true generally, for it is hard to see how anti-democratic parties can further democracy. Parties do not principally facilitate democracy simply by being part of an

institutionalized party system; rather they facilitate democracy by adhering to democratic norms and fighting for them when they are absent or at risk. The list of such norms is potentially lengthy but a commitment to the maintenance of free and fair elections is a crucial minimum requirement. The implication of this, then, is that the emergence of parties that are committed to democracy is more important than the institutionalization of a party system.<sup>22</sup> (This point, in turn, reinforces the importance of free and fair elections: elections that are not free and fair are likely to benefit those who manipulate them, thereby strengthening non-democratic parties.)<sup>23</sup>

This is not to say that party-system institutionalization offers no benefits. If these two conditions (free and fair elections, and pro-democracy parties) are met then an institutionalized party system is likely, ceteris paribus, to be better for democracy than an under-institutionalized one. We saw earlier that Russia's weakly institutionalized party system undermined accountability and representation in the 1990s. It is logical then that institutionalization can provide benefits in the form of enhanced accountability and representation but these are of relatively minor benefit in comparison to the establishment of free and fair elections and pro-democracy parties.

These findings clearly challenge the conventional understanding of the relationship between party-system institutionalization and democracy. The Russian case shows, first of all, that there is nothing intrinsically democratic about party-system institutionalization. Developments in Russia also question the significance of party-system institutionalization per se as a factor in democratization by suggesting that how institutionalization occurs and which parties make up the party system are more important. The extent to which these claims hold comparatively remains to be seen; however the Russian case suggests that unless the elections through which party-system institutionalization occurs are free and fair, and the party system is

comprised of parties that are committed to democracy, the likely result of party-system institutionalization is not democratic consolidation but the sort of authoritarian tightening we witnessed under Vladimir Putin.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> There is no generally agreed definition of an institutionalized party system (or consolidated party system, the two terms are used synonymously). However, what is clearly meant is the kind of party system we see in established western democracies i.e. one which consists of a limited number of stable, major parties. Party-system institutionalization is the process by which such a party system develops. For representative examples see Huntington (1968: 12), Toka (1997: 8) and, Mainwaring and Torcal (2006: 206).

<sup>3</sup> It is sometimes claimed (e.g. Stockton, 2001: 95) that Mainwaring and Scully treat party-system institutionalization as a necessary but insufficient condition for democratic consolidation. They do not, specifically stating (1995: 34), 'We are not claiming that any one kind of party system is a necessary or even sufficient condition for democracy...'

<sup>4</sup> The same research was presented in Toka (1997b).

<sup>5</sup> Examples include: Dix (1992); Hadenius (2002: 4); Mainwaring and Scully (1995: 1-34); Mainwaring (1998: 67-81); Mainwaring (1999: 21-39); Mainwaring and Torcal (2006: 204-27); Thames (2007: 456-9); and Toka (1997: 62).

<sup>6</sup> Stockton (2001) also posits a positive, albeit non-linear, relationship between party-system institutionalization and democratic consolidation.

<sup>7</sup> It is not even certain that all of these phenomena are bad for democracy, although most of them are clearly undesirable.

<sup>8</sup> Here Mainwaring and Torcal (2006: 221) claim only that weak institutionalization has negative consequences for uncertainty and accountability.

<sup>9</sup> The focus here is on the party system at the level of the State Duma, the lower house of Russia's bicameral legislature. Parties' position in the wider political system in the 1990s was even weaker than in the Duma: no party representative occupied the post of president (and, largely as a consequence of this given Russia's presidential system, parties played little role in government or even in government formation); national political parties played very little role in the Council of the Federation (the upper house of Russia's bicameral legislature) or in regional politics at either the executive or legislative levels.

<sup>10</sup> The LDPR ran as Vladimir Zhirinovskii's Bloc in 1999.

<sup>11</sup> The same general point is made by Mainwaring (1999: 326). Russia's highly presidential constitution seriously constrains the ability of the legislature to hold the executive to account (White, 1997); the focus here, therefore, is on representatives' accountability to the electorate.

<sup>12</sup> An institutionalized party system is not sufficient for parties to act as meaningful guideposts. Information levels are important, as is the coherence of parties' platforms; however, it is still easier, *ceteris paribus* for voters to orient themselves when faced with a constrained, stable choice as opposed to a volatile and fragmented one.

<sup>13</sup> Any party that won 5% of the PR vote was accorded the status of 'faction'; at that time 'groups' were formed by 35 deputies, usually independents or representatives of small parties that lacked factions. Parties and groups enjoyed equal rights in the Duma. 'Groups' no longer exist due to changes to the electoral legislation.

<sup>14</sup> People's Deputy served as the basis of the People's Party, which contested the 2003 election, but there was considerable turnover of personnel. Moreover, most of the People's Party deputies who were elected to the Duma in 2003 quickly joined the United Russia faction.

<sup>15</sup> Comprehensive comparative data can be found in Gallagher and Mitchell (2008).

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<sup>16</sup> Moreover, such measures, as White (2007: 30) points out, can readily be applied only to the party-list contests, as no party share of the vote is officially reported for the SMCs. Nor, as White continues, would such a figure be meaningful given that few of the parties contested even half of the single-member seats.

<sup>17</sup> Freedom House ratings, which are the standard measure of democracy in this literature, are sometimes disputed (not least by the Russian authorities). There is, though, general agreement that democratic standards in Russia declined under Putin and the Freedom House ratings are a useful proxy measure of this.

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of this legislation see Wilson (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Three prominent American specialists (Hale et al, 2004: 285), for instance, characterized the 2003 election as, 'the most constrained and least competitive since the Soviet period'.

<sup>20</sup> Seats won by each party are taken from CEC (2007c).

<sup>21</sup> Strong pro-democracy parties could, of course, potentially perform a crucial role in checking the power of the Presidential Administration; it is, though, hard to see how such parties can develop while the Kremlin remains able, to a large extent, to determine the winners and losers of Duma elections.

<sup>22</sup> This finding, in fact, suggests that the focus on the implications of party-system institutionalization for democracy is misplaced i.e. the primary focus should be the parties, and their commitment to democracy, rather than the institutionalization of the party system.

<sup>23</sup> Exceptions are of course possible (e.g. where an election is not free and fair but is won by pro-democracy forces) but are likely to be comparatively rare.

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