

The
Carl Beck
Papers
in Russian &
East European Studies

Number 1301

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The Logic of Russian
Presidentialism:
Institutions and Democracy
in Postcommunism

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No. 1301, May, 1998

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ISSN 0889-275X

The Carl Beck Papers

Editors: William Chase, Bob Donnorummo, Ronald H. Linden

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Cover design: Mike Savitski

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This study began as an investigation into the proverbial “dog that didn’t bark,” that failure of intuition which often opens the most interesting avenues of inquiry. In this case, the silent dog was an authoritarian Russian Federation: from 1991 onward, there was widespread expectation that it would be only a matter of time before Russia fell back into old habits, and that the experiment with democracy would be little more than an odd footnote in an otherwise unbroken record of autocracy. I am forced to admit that I was part of this chorus of pessimism, and in late 1993—despite the fact that I felt Yeltsin was right to crush the attempted coup of Ruslan Khasbulatov and Aleksandr Rutskoi—I expected little more than that Russia would then descend into some kind of muddled and mild authoritarianism.

But soon after the October 1993 attack on the legislature, it seemed to me that democratic reforms were moving forward rather than backward. More interesting, this seemed to be taking place in direct contravention of an overwhelming academic consensus which held, in effect, that further democratic consolidation was nearly impossible given the institutions put in place by the December 1993 constitutional referendum. With each successful election, with every day that passed in which Russian politics became more “ordinary,” the failure of previous predictions became more obvious and a more coherent explanation of Russian political development became more pressing. This study is an attempt at such an explanation.

Of course, no one can be sure that Russia’s political institutions will not soon be swept away by a political earthquake of the magnitude of those in 1989, 1991, or 1993. Nor is it clear that the current system is the final stage of Russian political development. But even if the system were to fall tomorrow in some strange or violent scenario, I would maintain that the experiences of only the past seven years are themselves unexpected enough to merit further study and to force

us to reconsider our images both of postcommunist politics and of the part political institutions play in them.

This study is part of a continuing project on the Russian presidency, and was begun in 1995 with support from the William H. Spoor Dialogues on Leadership, a program established for the study of presidential leadership within the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for the Social Sciences at Dartmouth College. I wish to thank the director of the Center at that time, George Demko, for his early and continuing support for the project.

I wish to acknowledge with special gratitude the crucial support I received from the National Council on Soviet and East European Research (NCSEER), whose Special 1996 Research Competition grant allowed not only for time to write but also for travel and interviews in Moscow in early 1997.

Several colleagues have provided valuable comments on various drafts of this and ongoing related work over the past two years. I would like to thank William Fuller, Jim Shoch, Gordon Silverstein, Dean Spiliotes, Linda Titlar and Dirk Vandewalle for their patient reading and useful comments. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Strategy Department's faculty seminar program at the Naval War College for their comments on the revised draft of the manuscript.

With regard to the final drafts, I would especially like to thank the anonymous reviewers who served as referees for the *Carl Beck Papers* for their insightful and thoughtful comments; these helped me not only to make clear improvements on the original manuscript, but also to think more carefully about the thrust of the argument, and I am grateful for the obvious care and conscientiousness with which they read the draft and suggested their revisions.

I owe a special debt to my friend and colleague at Yaroslavl University, Sergei Baburkin, for his assistance in Moscow and his many comments and conversations on the subject. Without him, my 1997 work in the Duma would have been virtually impossible.

I would also, of course, like to thank the many Russian legislators and staff members who were willing to speak with me at the Duma. (I wish to offer special

thanks for the many courtesies extended to me by Anatolii Greshnevikov, and to Deputy Speaker Sergei Baburin for taking time out of his busy schedule to speak with me on short notice, as well as to Konstantin Borovoy and Vladimir Grigoriev for their generous time.) While I know that they and their colleagues may not agree with the conclusions of this study, I hope that they understand the well-intentioned spirit in which it was written.

Introduction

“Choices of political institutions matter,” Scott Mainwaring has written, although as Terry Moe and Michael Caldwell point out, “exactly how they matter, and thus how one might choose among them, remains something of a mystery.”¹ Where the new democracies of the former Soviet region are concerned, the choice for most scholars is no choice at all: reflecting the consensus (represented most prominently in the work of Juan Linz, among others) that presidents corrode democracy and parliaments protect it, these fledgling democracies should maximize their chances of survival by choosing to institute parliamentary regimes.² These concerns have taken on new salience as it has become clear that many regimes in this region have stubbornly rejected the advice of the academic community and chosen to institute separation-of-powers arrangements rather than variations on the parliamentary model.

Recently, however, there have been challenges to this academic wisdom. As Valerie Bunce wrote in 1997:

The preference for directly-elected presidents with some (and sometimes a great deal of) power is not—Juan Linz to the contrary—a cause for concern insofar as the consolidation of a liberal order in Eastern Europe is concerned. There are, in fact—in this context—real advantages to a system that tilts in the direction of presidentialism. Moreover, there are some disadvantages to a pure parliamentary system in the postcommunist context.³

What are those advantages, and why do they take on special relevance in the postcommunist context? I argue that in the social conditions found in post-Soviet Russia, there is a “logic” to presidentialism that is not apparent if the experiences of Latin America or other developing nations are merely extrapolated into Eastern Europe. Kurt von Mettenheim is right to note that “recent critics of presidentialism

focus on vices, but not virtues, emphasizing risks, but not opportunities,” and here I intend to use the Russian case to illustrate those virtues rather than to debate the vices.⁴

Specifically, I proceed from an understanding of the Russian Federation and the other post-Soviet states as low-trust societies—that is, lacking the bonds of social trust between persons and groups normally taken for granted in stable democracies—and contend that in low-trust societies the logic of presidentialism is compelling both to the public and to the political elite. Parliamentary democracies rely on a great deal of informal trust: not only do they require the generalized atmosphere of trust among individuals that allows people to associate in groups and finally in parties, but they also are predicated on specific norms of trust and reciprocity among elites that mitigate the fear of abuses of the concept of parliamentary sovereignty. Where these repositories of trust are lacking and neither elite participants nor ordinary citizens can be certain of the motives of their fellows, presidential arrangements can go far to alleviate many of the anxieties and uncertainties that surround the establishment of a new democracy.

Four aspects of presidentialism are especially noteworthy in this regard: the fixed term, which prevents sudden regime change; the difficulty of lawmaking, which slows provocative legislation; the clarity of presidential elections, which compensates for the weakness of parties; and the accountability of the president, which remedies the intemperance of the legislature.

Each of these will be discussed below in more detail, but all are meant to illustrate that in a society suffering from a lack of trust, it is parliamentarism that presents unacceptable risks to the citizen and therefore dampens the willingness to participate in civic life, and it is presidentialism that offers stability and a modicum of safety that allows for the emergence of more participation and the growth of more civic attitudes. Indeed, in a low-trust society, the supposed virtues of parliamentarism and the vices of presidentialism are in fact *reversed*, an outcome that is not evident if the issue is considered only from the point of view of institutional structure. Reconsidering the case in favor of presidentialism should

help to explain not only why such arrangements were chosen but should also shed light on why Russia, despite numerous predictions to the contrary, has failed to decay into an authoritarian regime.

Two prior questions, however, arise when thinking about democracy and presidentialism in Russia. First, is the essential premise—that Russia is a democracy—flawed? It could, after all, be argued that if Russia is not recognizable as a democracy, then the central paradox of Russian presidential democracy is no paradox at all. And second, can the presidential system in the Russian Federation be categorized as of the same type against which so many political scientists have warned so strenuously? If it is not, why bother with the Russian case at all? Neither of these issues can be explored fully here—indeed, the question of the nature of Russian democracy could form the basis of an entire study in itself—but they are worth considering.

Is Russia a Democracy?

Few questions in post-Soviet politics remain as politicized or as polarizing as the question of “Russian democracy,” in part because the answers have enormous implications for the conduct of American foreign policy. Approaches to the question of Russian “democracy,” however, are often flat statements that accept or, more often, reject the idea. Gerald Easter, for example, wrote in early 1997 that “the Russian transition has given rise to a hybrid regime, in which a strong authoritarian president coexists with a weak democratic parliament,” and while “many institutional features of democracy [currently] exist in Russia . . . democratic consolidation appears well out of reach.”⁵ This kind of dismissal of Russian democracy is not uncommon and reflects the presumption among many scholars and policymakers that the Russian Federation is undemocratic until decisively proven otherwise. “It’s getting to the point,” an exasperated Western

diplomat in Moscow told *The Wall Street Journal* in late 1996, “where you wonder what [Russia] has to do to prove it’s a democracy.”⁶

Given the Soviet past, a certain amount of caution is understandable, and this presumption was more warranted in the first two years of the Russian transition, while battle was still underway between extremist forces (including admitted Soviet restorationists) and reformers. Even now, it must be admitted that the ultimate test of a stable democracy—the peaceful transfer of power from one ruling group to another—has not been passed, although the willingness of the regime to accept the legislative victory of the Communists in 1995 was an encouraging sign. Still, critics of Russian democracy are right to be wary of a system that is as plagued with mistrust and outright misconduct as the current Second Republic.

But the accumulated experiences of the nearly seven years since the Soviet collapse, first and foremost the failure to fulfill the worst predictions of authoritarian regression, has in my view shifted the burden of proof to those who contend that the Russian Federation is *not* a democracy. Predictions of electoral violence, perhaps even suspension of the electoral process, were not fulfilled, even in the wake of the 1993 attack on the parliament. The Russians, despite the traumatic events of 1993, have now completed two national referenda, two parliamentary elections, and a two-stage presidential election through which they could have effected severe changes. There was electoral misconduct, particularly in the funding of Boris Yeltsin’s campaign, but international observers certified the elections as free and fair. More important, perhaps, is that the results of these elections have been accepted as legitimate *even by the losers*, no small achievement in a new democracy.⁷ And if measured by standards of a free press, generally secure civil liberties, and other criteria normally associated with postindustrial democracies, then Russia’s democratic consolidation continues and seems to be strengthening.

Even opposition politicians are in something of a dilemma when trying to portray the system as undemocratic; one legislator—one of the last of a handful

elected to the RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies in 1990, a member of the White House resistance in 1993, and still serving in the Duma at this writing—told me in 1997 that Russia had only the “beginnings” of a democracy. He then admitted that his own base of voter support was quite strong and that he had been fairly and popularly reelected three times despite his clear opposition to the Yeltsin government.⁸ Even a more implacable foe of the government, Deputy Duma Speaker Sergei Baburin, has acknowledged that while he sees the Russian system as imperfect, if given the chance he would seek only changes in “nuance” rather a drastic reconstruction of Russian institutions. This is a far cry from his more radical days in the opposition and reflects both his probable desire to run for the presidency (and therefore to keep it strong and intact) and the routinization of political conflict in Moscow.⁹

Two things are apparent about the criticisms leveled against Russian democracy. One is that while many analysts might question the idea that Russia is democratic, few are willing to go on to take the next step, which is to argue that it is therefore authoritarian. (Few Russian opposition legislators seem willing to use this term now as well.) This is because defining “democracy” is a messy business, with criteria strewn across concepts ranging from accountability to constitutional structure, while the criteria associated with authoritarianism (i.e., coercively limited pluralism) are relatively clearer. Thus, while it is not difficult to find ways in which Russia fails to meet at least some of the tests of democracy, it is much harder to find ways in which it convincingly meets a reasonable definition of authoritarianism. The second line of argument rejecting the notion of Russian democracy reflects an exceptionalist approach that applies to the Russian case criteria that many other “democratic” nations might well fail to meet if subjected to similar scrutiny. Irregularities in campaign finance, gruesome incidents in the conduct of military operations, abuse of power, and corruption among high officials and other scandals are not unknown in the United States or its European allies, but such events are not commonly used as a *prima facie* case that the Western nations are not democracies.

None of this is to condone the daily conduct of Russian politics but rather only to point out that messy politics are not necessarily undemocratic politics. The manner in which both Yeltsin and his rivals in the Duma have governed has hardly been elegant, but it is too much to argue that therefore the Russian Federation is an authoritarian state. To say that the Russian civil administration is often corrupt, that Russian streets are plagued by crime, and that Russian political institutions are ruled by powerful politicians and special interests is to say only that Russia, for better or worse, is plagued with some of the worst problems that normally afflict most democracies. Democracy in Russia is not efficient, it is not particularly well organized, and it is certainly not attractive. Neither is democracy in France, Peru, Greece, South Korea, and a host of other nations that today need not endure prolonged debate over their general orientation or stability, whatever their spotty pasts. Russian democracy, as unlovely as it is, is recognizable as such, and this fact in itself creates part of the puzzle that this study seeks to explain.

Is Russia a Presidential System?

Another question to consider is whether Russia is actually a “presidential” system, and whether analysis of the Russian case will actually produce any generalizable propositions. The Russian and other post-Soviet presidencies are not patterned directly after the American model, but tend instead to resemble the French system, a “semipresidential” arrangement in which there is a prime minister who, in the Western model, would act as legislative leader but in Russia occupies a more complicated role. This is an important distinction for those who would argue either that semipresidentialism’s bicephalous executive is a remedy for the shortcomings of “pure” presidentialism, or that the semipresidential arrangement is so different from “pure” presidentialism as to render the two incomparable. Leaving aside the larger debate over hypothetical versions of semipresidentialism,

it is clear that in the Russian case the system is semipresidential in structure but presidential in practice.

The essential characteristic of a presidential system is that the executive and legislative branches of government are generated from separate electoral mandates. Kurt von Mettenheim opts for a “minimal” definition of presidentialism as “the separate election of the executive and the legislature for fixed terms,” while Charles O. Jones argues that terms like “presidential” and “parliamentary” are so imprecise that a better nomenclature would include calling systems like the United States *separated* systems.¹⁰ The Russian system is obviously “separated,” in that both the president and the legislature are elected directly but separately for fixed terms, and insofar as the daily tasks of governing are concerned, each branch shares powers and responsibilities in a way that students of the American system would recognize.

Nonetheless, there is a prime minister, and the Russian system meets the minimal structural definition of “semipresidential.” While he does not have the same range of powers or grounding in an established party that would make him a more formidable competitor to the president, the Russian prime minister can take advantage of his nebulous legal status (and has) to act in his own interest and to oppose the president or press his own political agenda.¹¹ But whatever the flexibility of that office, the presidency itself remains supreme, for political as well as legal reasons. For one, the ideological distance between the parliament and the executive branch—the former dominated by Communists, the latter composed primarily of an uneasy alliance of reformers and status-quo industrialists—has meant that the president and the prime minister have (if more out of self-interest than comity) acted in unison more often than in competition. Moreover, former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin often acted as a kind of powerful chief of staff not only because the struggle with parliament usually dwarfed his disagreements with the president, but also because the Russian Constitution grants Yeltsin decree powers that, in effect, would allow the president to rule without the

prime minister (or the Duma) if forced to do so.¹² (It is not his preferred course, as will be discussed below, but it is still an option.)

The Russian system is in fact so strongly presidential that it can be discussed in the same general terms as the American or other “strong” presidential arrangements. Not only is the president able to rule independently of the prime minister, but—like the “pure” presidential model—the entire executive branch is much more insulated from the legislature than in other semipresidential systems. The Russian president and prime minister are, in Eugene Huskey’s words, placed by the Constitution “beyond the reach of all but the most united parliaments.”¹³ To all intents and purposes the Russian presidential system, although structured to accommodate a bicephalous executive, in fact operates very nearly like a pure presidential arrangement, and it is therefore a plausible case from which to draw lessons for other presidential regimes in the region.

Trust and Presidentialism

The link between trust and presidentialism lies in the fact that in relative terms presidential arrangements require little trust, while parliamentary arrangements require a lot. As Terry Moe has put it: “A classic, highly competitive parliamentary system . . . takes the dangers of political uncertainty to their extreme: if the other side comes to power, they can pass whatever laws they want,” even if that includes acts which might “subvert or completely destroy everything the first party has put into place.” Thus the ease with which parliaments change hands, the speed with which the “monopoly on public authority” can move from one party to another, “undermines the making of durable deals.” In a separation-of-powers system, however, “lots of players have authority, but it is extremely *difficult* to make law—and this very difficulty promotes extensive *reliance* on formal structure. In a parliamentary system, authority is concentrated in the

majority party, and it is *so easy* to make law that the law itself *cannot be relied upon* for protection.” (emphasis original)¹⁴

In other words, for parliamentary systems to be stable and productive, they must be able to draw on tangible expressions of trust, such as a high regard for norms and values like reciprocity and reputation. Presidential systems, by contrast, alleviate the burden of trust by replacing the reliance on informal norms with an obstacle course of formal legal mechanisms. Parliaments work when people trust each other not to use parliamentary supremacy for malefic ends. Presidential systems survive because they are nearly impossible to commandeer or even capture in toto; as Richard Rose has written, such a system “need not result in inaction in the face of great difficulties—but it does require endless discussion, negotiation, bargaining and compromise to arrive at an agreed policy.”¹⁵ Separating powers may make lawmaking slow and cumbersome, but it also prevents the quick or easy institutionalization of political victories, and this says much about why such a system would be preferable in post-Soviet Russia.

Trust and Presidentialism in Russia

Russia, as I have argued elsewhere, is a society whose recent history is characterized by the widespread destruction of transitive relationships of social trust.¹⁶ These relationships were attacked by Soviet policies designed to atomize society and to eliminate any possible basis for politics outside of parameters acceptable to the regime. In itself, this is an unremarkable proposition; Barbara Mizstal has summarized a large body of sociological research by noting that communist methods of rule produced throughout Eastern Europe “a social vacuum between the private world and public life, a lack of trust toward others and an unusual importance attached to the intimate circles of family and friends.”¹⁷ Data

specifically from Russia suggest that the lack of trust is even sharper and deeper there than in Eastern Europe overall.¹⁸

The legacy of these Soviet practices, however, goes deeper than a general suspicion about public life: they did immense damage to the atmosphere of civic associationalism that is crucial to developing a willingness to delegate personal sovereignty to democratic structures. As Ronald Inglehart has written, as far back as 1963 and the publication of *The Civic Culture* it was understood that “a sense of trust is required for the functioning of the democratic rules of the game: one must view the opposition as a *loyal* opposition, who will not imprison or execute you if you surrender political power but can be relied upon to govern within the laws and to surrender political power reciprocally if your side wins the next election.”¹⁹ If we think of trust as, in Niklas Luhmann’s words, a “solution for specific problems of risk,” in which people gamble on the goodwill of their fellows and choose actions that might be detrimental to themselves “in spite of the possibility of being disappointed by the action of others,” it is understandable that after a certain point fear can defeat the willingness to risk such disappointments.²⁰ The reticence of the postcommunist citizen to bear such risks lies in the reality that choosing poorly and investing trust in the wrong friend, associate, coworker or political figure during the Soviet era could lead not only to disappointment but to imprisonment or death.

As a general proposition, then, the destruction of associationalism and the consequent deficit of social trust in Russia means that arrangements requiring a great deal of trust, such as parliamentarism, are regarded by the public and by most political competitors as unstable and risky, while the divided powers and cumbersome processes associated with presidentialism are preferred, in that they allay fears of a quick return to autocracy. In fact, there is ample data to confirm broad support for the Russian presidential system itself, and interviews with legislators of various stripes confirm a corresponding support for presidentialism even among the regime’s harshest critics. Furthermore, it is clear that this public support is not merely a legitimation of Boris Yeltsin personally, nor does it

represent a close identification of the office with the occupant.²¹ Russians broadly understand that the “presidency” and “Boris Yeltsin” are two different things, that the office can change hands, and that real choices among candidates exist.²² Professional legislators, obviously, are even more explicit that their support is for presidentialism, and not the current president.

This general support for the presidential system—affirmed in the constitutional referendum of 1993 and in several polls since then—should not be construed as meaning that Russians consider the system itself in any sense to be optimal. Different sectors of the public and different groupings among the elite all have their own reasons for supporting a presidential system in Russia, but they all share a distinct lack of enthusiasm about presidentialism per se. Even the strongest supporters of the regime agree readily that it is flawed; as two pro-Yeltsin Russian legal analysts wrote in early 1995:

The parliament, the voters and society as whole must grow into a parliamentary republic. [But] in general, the presidential form of rule (or the “semi-presidential,” as exists in France and in our country) is perhaps the most strongly “indicated” for Russia. It is said that the President makes mistakes, some of them gross ones [*podchas grubye*]. We also see them . . .²³

It may well turn out that the Russian presidential system is not the final stage of Russian political development. However, the general lack of social trust in Russia means that it is, for the foreseeable future, the one arrangement that all social groups will accept, however grudgingly, as most likely to protect all of them from each other.

The Logic of Russian Presidentialism

Continuing public and elite support for the Russian presidential system rests on four pillars, each of which could itself be considered part of a more general case in favor of presidentialism in low-trust societies. First, the election of each branch to fixed terms protects citizens and politicians alike from sudden or unexpected reconstitution of the government and thus allows for a measure of predictability in daily life. Second, the cumbersome nature of lawmaking in a system of separated powers means that dramatic legislative change is rare and cannot in any event occur without negotiation or advance warning. These first two characteristics are especially important in aiding democratic consolidation in a low-trust environment. Where there is suspicion among social groups and strongly opposed (or even physically warring) political factions, people have good reason to fear that any kind of political participation, from political rallies to voting to holding office, could turn out to be deadly if opposing forces can suddenly seize the coercive capacity of the state, or ram through legislation aimed at such a capture. Mitigating these fears is an important step in stabilizing a new democracy.

Third, the presidential system compensates for the lack of parties in public life by offering presidential candidates as surrogate party leaders who stand for coalitions that in turn represent broad directions in policy. Finally, where parties are weak and legislative behavior irresponsible, the presidential system offers up a small number of key figures who may be held accountable for their actions. Because the ephemeral nature of parties and the fixed electoral cycle means that chief executives can neither hide behind the excuse of party discipline nor protect themselves by calling for elections when they might find it advantageous to do so, the system forces a few individuals to the forefront as speakers (to be held publicly responsible for a predictable period) for or against basic policies. This gives the citizen something more tangible on election day and offers at least some reassurance that voting is not entirely a matter of firing blindly into the morass of half-formed or unstable parties.

We turn now to each of these aspects of Russian presidentialism in more detail.

The Stability of the Fixed Term

The Russian Constitution places significant (in fact, nearly insuperable) barriers in the way of impeachment, and although it is theoretically possible to collapse the prime minister's government with a no-confidence vote while leaving the president in place, Article 117 structures such a vote as a suicide pill for the legislature.²⁴ The Duma must vote no-confidence twice within ninety days; after the second vote, the president is required either to dismiss his own government or to dissolve the Duma and call new elections. (The upper house, the Federation Council, is left intact, both because it cannot join the no-confidence vote, and because its members are chosen at large from each territorial unit of the federation and it therefore represents the symbolic autonomy of Russia's regions.)²⁵ Obviously, the president hardly needs an uproar in the Duma in order to sack his own ministers, and the clear intent of Article 117 is not to discipline the executive but to make a vote of no-confidence a dire moment for the legislature. The result is that terms of office for the president and the Duma in the Russian system are (the structural wrinkle of a premiership notwithstanding) practically immutable.

This virtual inability to circumvent the fixed term in all but the most extreme circumstances is valuable because it thwarts the ability of antisystem parties—groups that reject the basic structures of Russian democracy—to collapse the government and thereby force endless rounds of electoral combat, or even merely to choke the legislative process by constantly invoking the threat of a no-confidence vote.²⁶ As Russian legal scholar V. A. Chetvernin has pointed out, Russia's is an imperfect democracy in which "antidemocratic forces" (i.e., ultranationalists and radical communists) can "operate legally (or more precisely,

despite an abstract constitutional prohibition); *these groups reject the liberal foundations of a constitutional structure and intentionally use democratic procedures for their destruction*” (emphasis added).²⁷ Although such factions represent only a minority, it is a dedicated and dangerous minority, and their leaders are doing exactly what their voters want them to do.²⁸ Russian pollsters have found that citizens who want to see the “firm hand” of authoritarian rule imposed as the result of “the victory of a party in elections supporting a transition to such a regime” were overwhelmingly likely to be supporters of politicians who have repeatedly called for new elections, no-confidence votes, and even a new constitution, such as Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, ultrarightist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the renegade former Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi, or law-and-order proponent Gen. Aleksandr Lebed (none of whom except Zyuganov has ever managed more than 10–15 percent of the presidential vote.)²⁹ Thus in practice the fixed term and the booby-trapped protections against a no-confidence vote deprive antisystem parliamentary groups of the possibility of gaining through a manufactured crisis what they could not attain at the ballot box.

Many legislators concur. For example, Duma member Konstantin Borovoy (leader of a prominent party of entrepreneurs) said in early 1996 that he considered the presidential system to be the only guarantee of the survival of his party and of democracy—despite his vehement personal opposition to Boris Yeltsin and his policies. Left to their own devices, he said, many Duma members would “pragmatically” go about the business of “destroying democracy.”³⁰ Given the volatility of Russian society, it is understandable that reformist groups in both branches (who by their nature have to build constituencies for long-term restructuring by advocating inevitably unpopular short-term measures) would prefer an arrangement in which the antisystem groups could not provoke the collapse of the legislature and call new elections at will.

The question arises, of course, whether this strengthening of the executive’s hand is really necessary. Are the antisystem parties really out to bring down the government, or are they indulging in scare tactics to alter policy? While most

legislators dismiss the idea that there is any danger of a sudden revolutionary change in the regime, it is clear that the Communists and radical nationalists see debate over unpopular (if sensible) legislation, and the consequent threat to collapse the government, as a useful tactic. Were it possible, they might well be tempted to increase their majority in one short-term gain after another, especially if they could—as they have often tried to do—change the electoral process in favor of more party-list seats and fewer single-member districts. Russian journalist Gleb Cherkasov believes that only the fear of losing close contests in the single-member districts restrains these groups from provoking a collapse, since “theoretically, an early dissolution of the Duma is quite beneficial to the opposition, insofar as it allows them in parliamentary elections to present themselves as the aggrieved defenders of popular interests.”³¹ In any case, the Communists in particular have been explicit in their belief that the existence of the presidency is the single greatest obstacle to their attempts to regain power, and their objection to the establishment of the office led to a break with some of the more conservative opposition figures who were at one time natural allies in the struggle with the Yeltsin government.³²

Even the fight for single-mandate seats is not enough to dissuade the most extreme groups, such as Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) or the Russian Worker’s Party (RWP), an extremist group which broke with Zyuganov’s Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), who seem more than willing to take their chances on the fear and anxiety of electoral chaos. As one RWP representative said at a St. Petersburg rally, the only reason to participate in any elections at all is to “destroy the regime from the inside.” Acknowledging that “unfortunately, we are not ready to break heads in the regime. We don’t have the strength yet,” he added: “So we will go to the Duma. We will fight for complete victory over [St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly] Sobchak, Yeltsin and all the other bastards.”³³ Fortunately, most voters rejected this unsubtle call to civil war, but it is sobering to imagine what effect this rhetoric could have had in the midst of a harsh winter and yet another election campaign in the wake of yet another failed Duma.

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

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

Who will want to go into the substance of the matter? As a result everybody will say that the president has not signed the law because he does not want to cede power. Therefore he will seize and usurp it. Supposing the president returns the law "On the Inadmissibility of the Seizure of Power" to the Duma. What a good propaganda cause to talk about the president's democratic nature! I even think that a number of bills with such ostentatious titles are prepared especially to provoke the president into returning them, giving extra cause for an uproar.³⁴

Although the CPRF was behind this particular provocation, Duma deputy Mikhail Yureev believes that the problem is more widespread: "party affiliation has nothing to do with . . . opposition to the president" he said in 1996, but rather is part of

the process by which the Duma is carving out its “role in the country’s political and social structure as a whole.”³⁵ In other words, depicting the president as a potential dictator and then bravely opposing him is part of the way that some factions of the Duma justify their own existence.

Opposition groups for a time took a new tack, threatening to introduce legislation to force Yeltsin to step down for health reasons. In any event, threats of a no-confidence vote are a recurring part of the Russian political scene, but all parties have been careful to avoid touching the constitutional third rail of an actual vote. So far the efforts to depose Yeltsin legislatively have been desultory and inconclusive—although in a parliamentary system, it should be noted, Yeltsin and his government would have been forced out months ago and Russia would now be led by a coalition headed in all probability by the Communists (who, as the largest single party in the Duma, would get first crack at forming a government).

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

In the Russian case, there is a lesson to be drawn from the victory of Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democrats in 1993, when they entered the Duma with a plurality (nearly a quarter of the votes cast for the 225 party seats). The organization of the Russian presidential system meant that Zhirinovskiy could not simply take control of, or try to form, a coalition government, as would have been his right to demand in a parliamentary regime. Instead, he had to endure two years

as an ordinary (if that word can ever be applied to him) parliamentarian, during which he showed himself to be a violent buffoon. His extreme rhetoric and televised physical assaults on other politicians, including sucker-punching a middle-aged female deputy on the floor of the Duma and lunging over a table at Governor Boris Nemtsov (now a member of Yeltsin's leadership team) on a morning talk show, have slashed his popularity and severely damaged the LDPR at the ballot box. While it is true that the structure of the Russian presidential system produced an uneasy cohabitation between the Liberal Democrats and the president from 1993 to 1995, it also enforced a kind of cooling-off period among the electorate (and within the LDPR itself) that, by the time of the 1995 elections, had cut Zhirinovskiy's share of the vote nearly in half as protest voters opted for the Communists and a slew of smaller parties. While still a vocal presence in Russian politics, Zhirinovskiy has since been eclipsed by relatively more responsible politicians; perhaps most important, he has been removed from serious contention for the presidency itself. The fixed term and the constitutional bulwark against no-confidence votes served the dual purpose of exposing a good campaigner as a poor politician, and preventing him and like-minded parliamentarians from taking power or even collapsing the regime during the darkest days of Russia's painful economic transition.

Critics of presidential systems would point out that the barriers to impeachment or to sacking the government favor the executive so strongly that the system is therefore "rigid" and more likely to break, so to speak, than to bend.³⁶ To be sure, Article 117 is a stick Yeltsin is not afraid to use: during a 1995 confrontation (discussed below) in which the Duma threatened a vote of no-confidence, Yeltsin told Russian journalists that "the Duma can sign its own sentence" and that "if the State Duma does not want to be disbanded, it should not try to disband the government."³⁷ Advocates of parliamentarism point to this kind of behavior as an example of how the "rigidity" of the fixed term means that presidents and opposition legislators end up "stuck" with one another, with the executives "condemned to serve out their terms" and left with few options but to

rule by decree.³⁸ Short of enduring the traumas of presidential resignation or parliamentary dissolution, neither side can escape the impasse: the presidential term, according to Linz, “breaks the political process into discontinuous, rigidly demarcated periods, leaving no room for the continuous readjustments that events may demand.”³⁹

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

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

A second vote was due in July 1995, and Yeltsin was soon to be faced with the dilemma of either dismissing his government, which he was not about to do, or dissolving the Duma, which in all likelihood would have caused massive unrest in Russia’s streets. (Article 117 is biased in favor of the president, but it is hardly risk free.) For their part, the legislators were now in a corner as well. Many of them—particularly the liberals who were the *actual* opponents of the war—knew

that they would be defeated if new elections were called while emotions in the country were running so high. Only the antisystem parties stood to gain; they could count not only on returning to power, but many in Moscow suspected that if given the chance they would ignore world opinion and attack the Chechens even more brutally than Yeltsin had in order to finish the conflict and dispose of the matter once and for all.⁴⁰

At the last moment, a crisis was averted after negotiations that resulted in the president agreeing to sack three prominent hawks in his cabinet. The negotiations themselves are less interesting than the fact that neither side attempted to short-circuit Article 117, either by law or amendment (the Duma's options), or by decree or plebiscite (the president's options), and that the standoff ended with an agreement by both branches to make changes. All this prompted one moderate democratic legislator to marvel: "The word 'compromise' is perhaps not the most popular one in Russia. Yet it looks like for the first time a compromise worked to settle a political crisis in Russia. This is perhaps amazing."⁴¹

While perhaps not quite amazing, the 1995 compromise suggests that "rigidity" might be just what mistrustful and bickering parliaments need in order to force lawmakers to get on with the business of governing. This seems borne out by the events in the wake of the aborted no-confidence vote: while the Russian government remained in place, the legislature claimed a small victory in deposing three ministers, and in time, the military conflict was ended. As of early 1998, Chechnya remains in the federation; Russian Federal forces have left Chechen territory; a pragmatic and more muted politician, Aslan Maskhadov, has won the Chechen presidency (replacing the intransigent Dzhokar Dudaev, killed in a Russian bombing) in elections certified by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; and negotiations between the new Chechen government and Moscow continue. Without the fail-safe of Article 117, the Duma might have boxed itself into having to carry out its own threat, and an understandable confrontation between the executive and legislative branches over a civil insurrection would have ended not in compromise but in the complete collapse of the regime. As one liberal

Duma member, Anatolii Shabad, said at the time, “some parties wanted [to use the no-confidence maneuver] to gain political advantage” before the coming parliamentary elections, and as a result got carried away. “But they didn’t want the government to fall. They themselves were afraid of the results of the first vote.”⁴²

The subsequent electoral victory of Yeltsin and other reformers in 1995 and 1996, despite the Chechen crisis, also suggests that the fixed term allows leaders to run on a longer record rather than being forced, on a moment’s notice, to fight to survive one electoral test after another in issue-by-issue, socially divisive trench warfare. Where it is the *parliament* that is the source of instability and intemperance, and not the president, this is a valuable contribution to stability and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

The Difficulty of Law-Making

Not only does the Russian presidential system protect the stability of the government itself, it also serves to snare some of the more irresponsible legislation in what critics might call “gridlock” but others might call safety mechanisms. This is no small benefit when dealing with an institution like the Duma that spawns so much ill-considered legislation (the “seizure of power” ban discussed above is a good example). The reaction of a political reviewer in the daily *Segodniia* to an April 1995 session was a fair reading of the activity of the lower house:

Yesterday’s State Duma plenary sitting spawned a fairy-tale mix of decisions. Among other things, there was conscription, Sergei Mavrodi [the head of a failed pyramid scheme who wanted to be elected to the Duma to escape criminal prosecution] and the idea of a medical commission [to monitor the health of high officials]. The rest can be divided into crazy, half-crazy, and non-crazy, that is to say, relatively serious. There are only three, however, in the latter group.⁴³

The virtue of separated systems is that they are more likely to trap “crazy” and even “half-crazy” bills before they can get far enough to be divisive and therefore damaging. The legislative maze of the bicameral legislature and the separate executive may immobilize lawmaking, but this is not in itself always a bad outcome. One Russian journalist—writing in the presidential organ *Rossiiskie Vesti*, a newspaper usually more sympathetic to the reformers—lamented the “amorphousness” and disorganization of the center-right (including “Our Home Is Russia” and Yabloko), but noted that at least these parties can, with minimal cooperation, “delay the adoption of the most odious questions” by denying extremist legislation a veto-proof majority.⁴⁴

It is therefore rare that provocative or intemperate legislation (bills that have called for the immediate printing of more money or renationalizing industry, for example) ever make it to the Russian president’s desk, since most of them are rejected by the upper house and sent back to the Duma, where they then die a quiet death.⁴⁵ Legislation is often effectively killed at this level, since bills sent back by the Federation Council need a two-thirds vote in the Duma to bypass the upper house and be sent to the president. Even without the moderating influence of the upper house, most of the lower house’s legislation could never muster the two-thirds necessary to override a subsequent presidential veto. And because the Federation Council is drawn from representatives already serving in regional governments, its main agenda tends to be a practical one of regional autonomy. It is therefore largely unsympathetic to the provocative agenda of the antisystem groups. As *Izvestiia* noted with some relief in 1994, the Federation Council is able to “bring the Duma legislators to their senses as necessary.”⁴⁶ (One hard-left Communist legislator inadvertently confirmed this effect by describing the upper house to me disparagingly as a “Soviet of Governors” who exist only to do Yeltsin’s bidding in blocking the Duma.)⁴⁷

Much of this intemperate legislation is designed by one political faction or group to extinguish political opponents, and here again, the presidential system serves as a kind of safety mechanism. Where trust is low, fear of other groups

makes politics a form of warfare if only in self-defense, and parliamentary supremacy consequently becomes a tempting weapon in the struggle to eliminate foes from public life. Attila Agh, in a 1995 survey of legislative behavior in Eastern Europe, describes parliaments across the region as arenas where political combat is conducted without quarter, because “elites have been thinking in terms of a ‘final victory’ and have tried to push out their competitors from politics as ‘enemies.’” He describes the new parties in the region as trying, in many cases, to establish a “tyrannical majority,” in which a “simple parliamentary majority is, without any effort, taken for granted, and without any consensus being built with the minority in the parliament.”⁴⁸ It is worth noting that these efforts have often been frustrated, according to Thomas Baylis, by “presidential intervention” which has “provided a needed corrective to the low level of tolerance and/or the irresponsible populism displayed by some of the region’s inexperienced governments, thereby impeding incipient authoritarian tendencies.”⁴⁹

This has not escaped the notice of Russian legislators, particularly those who seek to overturn the current order. Of all the groups in the Duma, only the Communists and their allies (and to a lesser extent, the Liberal Democrats) continue to press for a change to a proportionally representative parliamentary system. At the other end of the spectrum, the liberal parties know full well that the separation of powers has prevented the antisystem groups from ramming through a series of changes that would have in one way or another crippled the ability to carry on campaigns, free elections, and open parliamentary debate.⁵⁰

In American political debate, the term “gridlock” is a pejorative, referring to the obstinacy of one branch in thwarting the desires of the other. The critics of presidential government argue that separating powers merely invites gridlock and immobilism and consequently provides a basis for recurrent issue-by-issue crises between the branches. Linz claims that presidential systems are in effect systems of “dual democratic legitimacy,” in which a “conflict is always latent and sometimes likely to erupt dramatically [as] there is no democratic principle to resolve it.”⁵¹ But what this criticism does not take into account is that presidential

systems are *designed* to be conflictual, specifically to prevent rapid or intemperate change. Here, “gridlock” is the intended outcome rather than an unfortunate side effect. Indeed, one of the central conclusions Richard Rose drew from the 1996 New Russian Barometer V (NRB V) study was that Russians, suspicious of the motives of both elected branches of government, consciously *approve* of “gridlock” and engage in electoral behavior to create it.⁵²

Separated systems may make legislating difficult, but they also benefit by preventing bills from becoming either repeated tests of the regime or incendiary social provocations in their own right. Given the composition of the two Dumas since 1993, where reformers have managed only to cobble together thin and disorganized pluralities from issue to issue, it is clear that the inability to pass legislation quickly is a virtue and not a vice of the Russian system.

Presidential Elections and the Weakness of Parties

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

Presidential candidates act as surrogate party leaders, and consequently as rallying points for legislators, because parties are not only incoherent but weakly rooted in society. Indeed, it is somewhat misleading to call Russian parties “weak” when “deeply distrusted” or even “hated” might be better terms.⁵³ Note, however, that these negative feelings about parties are not the residual effect of a general distrust of multiparty democracy, nor do they date from the introduction of the presidential system. Polls consistently indicate that while a broad spectrum of Russians favor a multiparty system, they have no respect for the current parties *in* that system.⁵⁴ Russian legislators of all stripes lament that the Duma is too factionalized and particularistic in its legislative activity. But in their defense, it might be pointed out that they are merely reflecting the fractiousness of social life in Russia itself. As Valerie Bunce has described them, Russian parties have “narrow and antagonistic political, social, and economic bases, and they [have] often functioned as, in effect, fickle fan clubs for individual leaders.”⁵⁵ The party system, then, is weak and unstable because society itself is divided and unstable, with alliances and orientations among the populace, like those at the elite level, shifting and often diametrically opposed.

Of course, half of the Duma is selected from party lists, and it would be overstatement to say that parties are completely meaningless. Russian parliamentary elections do serve a useful role, as Robert Cottrell pointed out, as a kind of rough “primary” system, where the voters send very basic messages of support or protest to politicians in general and specifically to the presidential contenders.⁵⁶ A late 1994 commentary in *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* pointed out that parties in themselves mean little, since for years “it was simpler and safer to rob the State Bank than to set up a party even as a joke.” As a result, parties became vehicles for personalities rather than real political associations: “What is needed to set up a new party? An idea? Like-minded people? Anywhere else, but not in our country. Here the chief thing is a popular or influential figure (which are by no means one and the same). The number of figures equals the number of parties.”⁵⁷ Moreover, because the major parties—the Communists, Our Home Is Russia, Yabloko, and

the Liberal Democrats—contested both the parliament and the presidency, they all fielded presidential candidates whose platforms were, in effect, taken to be those of their party.⁵⁸ (Nominally, Our Home Is Russia is independent, but it is in fact a surrogate presidential party that acts on Yeltsin’s behalf and will probably serve as Chernomyrdin’s base for a run at the presidency when Yeltsin is gone.)

One response to this criticism of Russian parties is that voters may feel free to send bizarre candidates to a chamber that in the end has little power compared to the presidency. If the Duma, in a very real sense, doesn’t matter, then why not send a message to Moscow by voting for Zhirinovsky’s LDPR or some other extreme organization in parliamentary elections?

First and foremost, to accept this explanation is to accept that the Duma is in fact as powerless as it so often claims to be. But the fact is that while the president can in theory rule without the parliament, in day-to-day affairs—including important matters like the budget, land reform, and military issues—he needs the Duma to pass effective legislation. While the president could ram through almost any kind of executive action on these matters, to do so would be neither popular nor efficient (since every decree would be tied up by legislative counteraction), and so far Yeltsin has chosen more often than not to work through, rather than around, the Duma on prosaic issues of government.

More important is that such an explanation neglects the actual orientation of the electorate. Surprisingly, Rose’s 1996 NRB V study found that “[a]lthough the 1993 Russian Constitution is ‘presidentialist,’ Russian public opinion is anti-presidentialist.” Rose elaborates:

69 percent [of Russians polled] think the Duma should have the right to stop the president from making decisions that it considers wrong. Yet 48 percent think there are also circumstances in which the president might be permitted to suspend the Duma and rule by decree if this is considered necessary. The apparent inconsistency shows the tension between the desire for a representative Parliament strong enough to check the

president, and a chief executive capable of taking actions that he thinks necessary and effective.⁵⁹

This is not a finding that supports a view of the Russian electorate as one that treats the parliament as a joke, but rather one with a fairly sophisticated understanding of checks and balances. To be sure, the presence of a strong presidency allows the parties to duck a certain amount of responsibility (about which more below), and this in turn hinders their ability to learn and develop. Nonetheless, it should be clear that the parliament is taken seriously by Russian voters, even if they feel that the parties in it are not capable of faithfully representing them.

Although supporting a presidential candidate forces a certain amount of discipline on a party and its legislative cohort, what of the legislators who abjure parties altogether? After all, it might be argued that the legislators elected directly (and whose actions are thereby deprived of the fig leaves of the orders of party leadership or adherence to platforms) would have to be more responsive to their districts and more coherent in their positions. But instead, these Duma members elected from single-member districts rather than party lists (they are known colloquially as *odnomandatniki*) act as free agents sent by local voters with only the most nebulous guidance to do something good for the hometown region or district.⁶⁰ As Russian political scientists Inga Mikhailovskaia and Evgenii Kuzminskii wrote in 1994: “Almost a third of the [current] deputies . . . claimed no membership in any political party or movement, and thereby denied allegiance to any platform or plan of action . . . Because parties and blocs represented in the Duma are numerous and their relative importance is trifling, unstable and ad hoc alliances, unions, compromises, and backstage agreements are inevitable.”⁶¹

At first glance this might be taken to mean that the *odnomandatniki* are flexible and free to vote their conscience, but as Mikhailovskaia and Kuzminskii indicate, it tends instead to mean that they can waffle and waver issue to issue, allying with any group that serves their own personal interests. Presidential elections thus force these independents to come out for or against basic policies by

forcing them to explain to their constituents and to inquisitive journalists why they are for or against particular candidates. (This is closely related to the issue of accountability, discussed in the next section.) Without the clarifying effect of presidential elections, the voter can have little confidence that a vote for a party or a particular legislator is a vote for anything more than a very general political orientation (if that); the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections were marked by the kaleidoscopic emergence of groups and parties who fielded candidates but then managed to collapse or change direction even before election day.⁶²

The presidential system, then, can unify voters and thereby strengthen habits of democratic behavior, since by their nature presidential candidates do not have the luxury of singling out and siphoning off regional or narrowly ideological votes. Not only must presidents seek a national mandate, but once in office, they must govern more broadly as well. Terry Moe and Michael Caldwell, drawing on the American experience, believe that presidents differ from legislators in that “their broad national constituency leads them to think in grander terms about social problems and to resist the specialized appeals of groups. Unlike legislators, moreover, they are held responsible for virtually every aspect of national performance . . . To be judged successful in the eyes of history, they must be seen as leading and governing effectively. This is the driving force behind presidential behavior.”⁶³

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

The Russian presidential election also forced the major candidates to broaden their appeal and unify a larger voter base. Both Yeltsin and Zyuganov moderated their platforms—Zyuganov, for example, abandoned some of his worst neo-Stalinist rhetoric, and Yeltsin not only admitted that fighting crime and corruption, even in his own entourage, needed to be a priority, but also that he

needed to end his own war in Chechnya. Other presidential candidates found that they had to make pronouncements on the two finalists, instruct their followers, and make deals with them after the first round of voting (a “realignment of the losers” that would be familiar to observers of the French system). The two major presidential candidates were *refining* their positions, while other politicians were being forced to *have* positions. The overall effect was a presidential and parliamentary election that, although characterized by an intense and heated debate, engaged voters in a discussion both among themselves and with the elite, and thereby strengthened the electoral process itself.

This runs counter to the logic that the advocates of parliamentarism claim is inherent in the “winner take all” nature of presidential elections. In Lijphart’s words, “only one candidate and one party can win; everybody else loses” in a bruising contest that makes politics “exclusive instead of inclusive.”⁶⁴ But in Russia the situation (so far, with admittedly few examples) seems to be reversed, in that parliamentary elections are more divisive than the presidential contest. Duma candidates can choose either to win a single seat in a district for themselves, or to hope their party can surpass a 5 percent national vote threshold to gain seats among those proportionally divided. This has resulted in two divisive phenomena in Russian parliamentary voting. First, it encourages the existence of the free-lance *odnomandatniki*, who can eschew the idea of being “national” legislators and instead seek the seat of the particular town or region where they are well known or have a great deal of personal influence. Second, and more disturbing, is that the antisystem parties in particular have come to realize that a heated rhetorical appeal opens the way to the proportional representation seats by galvanizing a disparate but extreme protest vote.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, it is the *presidential* candidates who, because they must survive a French-style, two-stage election, end up broadening their appeal to capture enough votes to pass the first round with a decent showing and then take the second round with a majority. The critics of presidentialism are correct to note that presidential elections are, at least in a structural sense, zero-sum contests. But to

argue that presidential elections therefore divide society in some way that parliamentary elections do not is to ignore the reality that presidents must win broad mandates while parliamentarians can settle for narrower ones.

As an aside, the behavior of antisystem parties in seeking list seats raises the issue of whether the real matter at hand, at least where elections are concerned, is not parliaments or presidents but rather single-member districts versus proportional representation. While this cannot be discussed in depth here, it is interesting to note that the Russian elections seem to confirm the general principle that single-member districts produce more moderate representatives, while proportional representation produces narrower and more extreme ones. In both 1993 and 1995, the Communists and Liberal Democrats made dramatically more gains in party-list seats than in the individual districts, which were overwhelmingly won by independent candidates—largely on prosaic local issues—and reformers. Antisystem parties were trounced soundly in the upper house elections in both cycles.⁶⁶

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

Presidents and Accountability

Because Russian parties are unreliable and unstable, and the behavior of individual Duma members has so often been irresponsible if not outrageous, expectations of (and trust in) Russian legislators are low. In this situation, the presidency serves as a useful means of providing at least *some* sense of accountability before the general public. While the Yeltsin presidency will never

be held up to later Russian presidents as the model of an efficient administration, when contrasted with the Duma—a legislature plagued by intense interpersonal and interfactional warfare, and some genuinely ill-tempered rhetoric—the executive branch seems relatively coherent and businesslike.⁶⁷ Russians at all levels of society overwhelmingly believe that the executive branch really runs the country and therefore should be held accountable for conditions in the nation.⁶⁸ Moreover, the Russian president, like his counterparts elsewhere, represents at least the semblance of a figure of national unity, an important role in a fractious and mistrustful federal state like Russia.

As discussed above, Russian voters have used the two-round presidential election, and the separate vote for parliament, not only as a kind of primary but as a conduit for political communication, a function that parties cannot yet perform. Presidential and parliamentary elections, then, serve as a means of holding the executive accountable without being forced either to give him free rein or to fire him.

The 1996 elections were characterized by a conscious process of vote-splitting, as people voted for protest candidates in the first round of the presidential election and then supported Yeltsin with an outright majority in the second and final round. There is clear evidence that Russian voters were self-conscious and purposeful when they gave votes to protest candidates like Zyuganov, Lebed, and Zhirinovskiy who they *knew* could not win; moreover, they also seemed to know that they would not give those votes to Zyuganov in the second round. Only 34 percent of those who voted for Zyuganov in the first round believed he had any chance of winning at all, and nearly a million Zyuganov voters switched over to Yeltsin later.⁶⁹ Even more striking is the fact that of those who voted for Grigorii Yavlinskii, Lebed, or Zhirinovskiy, only 2, 4, and 9 percent, respectively, thought their man could win.⁷⁰ Of those who did not vote for either finalist in the first round, nearly all gave their support to Yeltsin in overwhelming numbers in the second round (70 percent of Lebed supporters and 80 percent of Yavlinskii voters turned to Yeltsin) except, predictably enough, the Zhirinovskiy voters, 80 percent

of whom voted for Zyuganov.⁷¹ The voters, it seemed, only wanted to make sure that Yeltsin had gotten the message of general anger; when the incumbent tried to appease them by promising (and in some cases, making) personnel and policy changes, the electorate grudgingly gave Yeltsin a second term after having already saddled him with a strong Communist presence in the Duma.

None of this is to argue that the Russian president is actually as accountable as democratic theorists might wish, but only to point out that the task of, and accountability for, governing falls in Russia to the executive branch almost by default. If the low level of social trust means that parties are weak and voters are fickle and vindictive, then what possible incentive would exist in a parliamentary regime for any one group to do anything but hope to force destabilizing legislation on other groups (or on the executive) in the hopes of taking advantage of shifting coalitions? As Sartori points out, “to say that governments are supported by a parliament is not saying much: [p]arliamentary democracy cannot perform (in any of its varieties) unless it is served by *parliamentarily fit* parties, that is to say, parties that have been socialized (by failure, duration, and appropriate incentives) into being relatively cohesive or disciplined, into behaving, in opposition, as responsible opposition, and into playing, to some extent, a rule-guided fair game.” (emphasis original)⁷²

This is especially true where day-to-day legislating is concerned. So far, Russia’s Duma has divided its attentions between legislating and conducting internecine warfare, and this has allowed—or forced, depending on who is asked—the executive branch to rule by decree and, accordingly, to be held responsible for those actions. In Russia, for better or worse, the presidential use of the decree power, and the accrual of popular accountability for doing so, represents an attempt to fill the gap left by “parliamentarily unfit” parties and legislators.

This is one area where Yeltsin and his predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev, might commiserate. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin began their presidencies by seeking more legal power, and each was given it because the lawmakers realized

that delegated power meant accountability, if not capability. Gorbachev fell prey to a kind of Soviet *decretismo*, issuing more and more decrees rather than confronting the legislature and demanding actual laws; in short order he was using presidential authority to issue decrees on lofty matters such as “the Responsibility of Functionaries for the Unsatisfactory State of Supplying the Population with Tobacco Products” while the Soviet legislature decayed into the same kind of infighting that characterized the Russian Duma early on. For his part, Yeltsin has since, as *Segodnia* dryly put it, “decreed punishment for those who don’t fulfill his decrees,” and while legislative performance has improved somewhat—Russian legislators seem to understand that they do not enjoy the electoral protections their Soviet predecessors had—the unwillingness of “parliamentarily unfit” parties to shoulder the burdens of government still leaves the president as the sole figure from whom the voters can demand results and explanations.⁷³

Sadly, this legislative “blame avoidance” (to use a term that Gordon Silverstein has applied to the U.S. Congress) is not just behavior found among the antisystem elements.⁷⁴ Russian political scientist Aleksei Kiva has lamented an overall atmosphere of irresponsibility and scapegoating in the democratic movement at large; the liberals, he charges, “have proved incapable of building a democratic society. [They are] hindered by their resolute reluctance to face realities, their disrespect for the authorities and the law, their desire to have it all now.”⁷⁵ Duma member Mikhail Gutseriev, himself a moderate liberal, made more specific charges in his 1996 year-end review of legislative work:

In the Duma, a great deal of strength, energy and time went into political confrontation. I saw that there are few deputies in the Duma, half of them at best, who are occupied with lawmaking. Many laws are considered from the point of view of the interests of certain factions, groups, or sectors, and not from the point of view of the interests of our country and the broadest strata of its population. There is nothing surprising here, however: the Duma is the direct reflection of our modern society . . . It’s a shame that the parliament couldn’t consolidate itself . . . There were a

number of basic political and economic documents and laws that we didn't succeed in issuing this year, which could have had an influence on improving the life of the people.⁷⁶

The situation was worse in matters of national security, where matters ranging from NATO expansion to the Chechen war produced speeches but little else. The Duma has as yet, for example, refused for over four years to ratify the START II Treaty; opposition figures have chosen instead to use each attempt to bring the treaty to the floor to make incendiary speeches about Western conspiracies and lament Russia's fall as a great power. And although the most divisive security issue, the Chechen war, is effectively over, Gutseriev noted rather caustically that "the Duma let the war last two years. Now it is criticizing the president because he ended this war."⁷⁷

One response to this criticism might be to argue that legislators are only responding to the realities of the presidential system: they understand that the real repository of power is the executive branch and that their own weak institutional position affords them little chance to affect policy. This is a variation on a criticism discussed earlier, the idea that the meaninglessness of parliament frees the voters to elect extremists; here the impotence of the Duma frees legislators to act irresponsibly. In such a situation, after all, they might as well avoid risky legislative initiatives and concentrate instead on anchoring their own seats. If true, it would strengthen the idea that the institution itself, and not social conditions, is to blame for poor legislative behavior.

This would be a more compelling counterargument if there were any evidence to suggest that Russian legislators are either capable of or willing to bear the burden of accountability carried by the executive. Moe and Caldwell have argued that in general, legislators "are not in the business of creating effective, accountable government. They are in the business of making themselves popular and their jobs secure."⁷⁸ This may be a bit harsh (legislators are people too), but it seems especially applicable to the Russian case, where parliamentarians are often

preoccupied more with issues like their own immunities and privileges than with actual lawmaking.⁷⁹

In any case, it is imperative to ask whether Russian voters would, if faced with a parliamentary system, suddenly overcome the severe social divisions between them and vote for more responsible parties. More to the point, would it be possible to elect more responsible candidates, given the ability of the antisystem parties to exploit these divisions to their benefit? For example, Duma member Vladimir Grigoriev (an avowed Soviet restorationist who described himself as still a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) was quite candid about his 1995 election strategy, a sophisticated approach that relied on disorder among reform candidates.⁸⁰ Since there were sixteen candidates for his seat (representing a section of the Leningrad *oblast*) he tried to come a consistent second or third in each polling area, winning a solid plurality as a compromise candidate and thereby defeating each of the contenders who aimed for, but split, the prize of first place. In other words, other candidates tried to win by winning big in a particular region or on a particular issue, while Grigoriev gathered up the protest vote and avoided a high-profile run at coming in first; he emerged with enough of a plurality to win, but not to be considered representative of the district. Such an outcome can hardly be ascribed to the existence of the presidential system: Grigoriev's strategy was a smart one that would almost certainly have worked in any circumstance in which there is a divisive and fractious field of candidates, regardless of the structure of the executive branch.

This is especially important because parliamentary advocates might argue that an arrangement like Russia's actually undermines the creation of stable parties and that a parliamentary system conversely would strengthen processes of party formation. But Linz himself admits that the parliamentary alternative needs to be supported *in the first place* by "strong, well-disciplined parties."⁸¹ This, however, begs the question: where do "strong, well-disciplined" parties come from? If, as we have seen, Russian society is for the time being incapable of producing such

parties, why should we assume that they would somehow suddenly appear under the aegis of a parliamentary regime?

Sartori has presented something of a thought-exercise on whether Brazil, for example, would have been better off or more stable under a parliamentary arrangement, and concludes that because Brazilian political culture and traditions nurture “unfit” parties, the idea that a “parliamentary experience would lead Brazil out of chaos into some kind of efficient parliamentary government is . . . against all odds.”⁸² He reaches similar conclusions about Chile and Argentina, and I would add Russia to the list as well. There is no reason to believe that instituting a parliamentary system in Russia would do much more than place a prime minister in the same kind of no-win situation in which Yeltsin often finds himself—that is, saddled with the need to implement unpopular measures that have been left untouched by the parliament.

It is difficult to imagine the circumstances, for example, under which the 1993–1995 Duma could have emerged as any kind of coherent governing body, or even have created a government and staffed a cabinet. The Communists and their Agrarian allies together held 100 seats of 450, while the Liberal Democrats held 63; the reformers, made up of the ever-bickering members of Russia’s Choice, Yabloko, and a smattering of others, held roughly 120 seats, with the balance controlled by nominally centrist but unstable groupings like the Party of Russian Unity and Accord (30 seats) and the “Women of Russia” (23 seats). The current Duma is no better: Russia’s Choice and the LDPR lost strength, but those votes apparently went largely to the Communists (who now hold a total of 157 seats outright) on one side and to Yabloko and Our Home Is Russia (100 seats, together) on the other. The basic polarization between parties of reform and reaction is unchanged, as is the implacable enmity between them. It is an inconceivable stretch of the imagination to assume that this parliament would somehow perform a miraculous *volte face* and produce a coalition government capable of legislating on difficult issues.

While concern over the formidable powers of presidents is understandable, the fact that the president in the Russian system cannot escape popular accountability is an important factor in stabilizing Russian politics. The voters may not know exactly who or what they may get from particular parties—the rather cordial relations that developed after the 1995 election, for example, between the Women of Russia and the CPRF had to come as a surprise to many Women of Russia voters—but they can be relatively certain about the stands of men like Yeltsin, Zyuganov, Yavlinsky, and especially Zhirinovskiy or Lebed. While we might hope for more mature or responsible legislative behavior in the future, the Russian presidential system in the meantime affords the voter at least some sense of predictability and accountability from one branch of the government.

Conclusions

The experience of the Russian Second Republic since 1993 not only presents a difficult case for parliamentary advocates to explain, but also suggests important ways in which presidential arrangements work under certain social conditions.⁸³ Although parliamentary regimes perform superbly in established high-trust environments like Great Britain, presidentialism serves several purposes that parliamentarism cannot where trust is low, society is divided, and democracy is novel. First, it may be the only form of protection from each other or from “tyrannical” majoritarianism that all significant groups are willing to accept, because it removes the possibility of legislating one’s opponents into oblivion or irrelevance by making legislating very difficult and then by vesting the execution of law outside the legislature. It also enforces periods of stability during which political competitors must rely more upon enacted law and the legislative process, and less upon electoral warfare and the hope of sudden electoral victory, to realize their ends. And where actual legislation—the actual business of governing—is

concerned, it vests at least one branch of the government with power (and, with the fixed term, the accountability) to carry out basic tasks even if the nominal legislature has fallen into paralyzing and dissolute squabbling. The “rigidity” of a system of separated powers, far from being a drawback, actually explains much not only about why the Russian voters support presidentialism despite their misgivings about it, but why presidentialism seems to have strengthened democratic processes rather than undermined them.

The difference is one of context. The critics of presidentialism depict institutions as an independent variable: once chosen, they are set in motion and in turn produce certain kinds of social outcomes. But as Bunce rightly notes, in the Eastern European context, “institutions are best understood as dependent, not independent, variables,” chosen under difficult and highly conflictual circumstances, where information was lacking and time was of the essence.⁸⁴ The option of re-creating old institutions, or capturing previously existing institutions, was no option at all in the post-Soviet region. A stronger case can be made that the causal relationship between society and institutions in the postcommunist context should be reversed, and that the independent variable, critical in conditioning the performance of institutions, is the status of society itself, and especially the level of social trust.

In any event, the issue of trust is central in casting doubt on the possibility that any of the myriad problems of modern Russian political life could be remedied by adopting the parliamentary alternative. Lacking any tradition of trust or associationalism, it would have been impossible to create stable parliamentary institutions out of Russia’s post-Soviet chaos. The temptation in such a parliamentary regime (and here the sad case of the First Republic Supreme Soviet led by Ruslan Khasbulatov from 1991 until Yeltsin’s attack in 1993 comes to mind) would have been for the most aggressive social and political forces to use the principle of parliamentary supremacy to strike hard against all others in hopes of the kind of “final victory” Agh described earlier. Whatever its flaws—and they are many—the Russian system has prevented each group from extinguishing the others,

and this alone no doubt accounts for its survival and its public reaffirmation in referenda and elections.

In looking back at the American experience, Harvey Mansfield describes a paradox that seems to capture the essence of the modern Russian situation as well:

Executive power, expanding when needed, kept the rule of law from being, in effect, the rule of ambitious legislators and contrary judges. The beauty of executive power, then, is to be both subordinate and not subordinate, both weak and strong. It can reach where law cannot, and thus supply the defect of law, yet remain subordinate to law. This ambivalence in the modern executive permits its strength to be useful to republics, without endangering them.⁸⁵

Critics of presidential systems would be less charitable, calling this expansion “ruling at the edge of the constitution.” Perhaps it is. But given the choice between a powerful if mercurial chief executive and a legislature at war with itself, the Russian people seem to have defied the odds (and the best guesses of many in the West) by choosing an arrangement that has served to stabilize what in 1992 seemed to be an almost unrecoverably chaotic situation. The Americans, the French, and now the Russians seem to have found something of value in presidentialism; perhaps Western political scientists should consider if they might be able to do the same.

Notes

1. See Scott Mainwaring, "Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination," *Comparative Political Studies* 26, no. 2 (July 1993): 198–99, and Terry Moe and Michael Caldwell, "The Institutional Foundations of Democratic Government: A Comparison of Presidential and Parliamentary Systems," *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 150, no. 1 (March 1994): 171.
2. Mathew Shugart and John Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992): 2.
3. Valerie Bunce, "Presidents and the Transition in Eastern Europe," in *Presidential Institutions and Democratic Politics*, ed. Kurt von Mettenheim (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 162.
4. Kurt von Mettenheim, "Introduction," *ibid.* p.2.
5. Gerald Easter, "Preference for Presidentialism: Regime Change in Russia and the NIS," *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (January 1997): 209.
6. Steve Leisman, "A Mistrustful West Finds It Hard to Grasp Real Change in Russia," *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 1996, p. A1.
7. Even Communist presidential candidate Gennady Zyuganov admitted that his predictions of fraud were not borne out, and electoral post-mortems by sympathetic newspapers such as *Sovetskaia Rossiia* placed blame squarely on the shoulders of the opposition candidates for failing to run effective campaigns. Shortly before the second round, liberal candidate Grigorii Yavlinsky vented his frustration with his poor showing in typically mercurial fashion by charging that the elections were "unfair and unfree" and then curiously pronouncing himself pleased with the campaign and predicting he would win. See A. Frolov, "Pochemu El'tsinu udalos' vyigrat'?" *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, July 9, 1996, p. 2, and Natal'ia Gorodetskaia, "Grigorii Yavlinskii schitaet vybory 'neravnopravnyimi i nesvobodnymi'," *Segodniia*, June 7, 1996, p. 2.
8. Interview with Anatolii Greshnevikov, April 16, 1997, Moscow. Greshnevikov did not see this as much of a paradox: he simply believed his voters were more independent than others that might have knuckled under to Moscow's wishes (or been duped by Moscow's machinations).

9. Interview with Sergei Baburin, April 1997, Moscow.
10. See von Mettenheim, "Introduction" p. 2, and Charles O. Jones, "The American Presidency," in von Mettenheim, *Presidential Institutions*, p. 22; see also Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach, "Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarianism versus Presidentialism," *World Politics* 46, no. 4 (October 1993): 2-3.
11. The odd position of the Russian Prime Minister results in part from the absence of a vice president in the Russian system, a constitutional reform made after then-Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi turned against Yelstin in the October 1993 debacle. In many ways, the prime minister has taken the place of a vice president, including the right of immediate (if only temporary) succession.
12. Article 90 of the Russian Constitution grants the president a sweeping ability to issue decrees and edicts (*ukazy* and *rasporiazheniia*) that "must be implemented throughout the territory of the Russian Federation" and therefore seem to have the force of law, as long as they do not contradict existing federal law or the Constitution itself.
13. See Eugene Huskey, "Democracy and Institutional Design in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 4, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 460-61.
14. Terry Moe, "Political Institutions: The Neglected Side of the Story," *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 6, special issue (1990): 240, 243, 248.
15. Richard Rose, "Boris Yeltsin Faces the Electorate: Findings from Opinion Polling Data," *Demokratizatsiya* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 387.
16. See Thomas Nichols, "Russian Democracy and Social Capital," *Social Science Information sur les sciences sociales* 35, no. 4, (December 1996): 630-42.
17. Barbara Mizstal, *Trust in Modern Societies: The Search for the Bases of Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996): 229.
18. Rose notes that when "people in postcommunist societies are asked their views about a variety of institutions of governance and civil society, the median response normally shows skepticism. By contrast, in Russia the median response normally registers *distrust*." (emphasis original) See Richard Rose, "Russia as an Hour-Glass Society: A Constitution Without Citizens," *East European Constitutional Review* 4, no. 3, (Summer

1995): 38.

19. Ronald Inglehart, "The Renaissance of Political Culture," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 4 (December 1988): 1204.

20. Niklas Luhmann, "Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives," in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed. Diego Gambetta (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988): 95–97.

21. The Russian Academy of Sciences and several independent firms have tracked answers to questions about interpersonal trust, trust in political institutions, and preferences in institutions fairly regularly since 1990. (Remarkably, the preference for presidentialism holds steady even through the late 1993 period of confrontation between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet.) A good overview of this information may be found in *Reformirovanie Rossii: Mify i real'nost'* (Moscow: Academia, 1995): 119–293.

22. When polled, Russians give fairly sophisticated answers about the qualities they desire in a president (many of which they feel Yeltsin lacks) and which ones they see among contenders for the office and other politicians. See, for example "Nevazhno, kto. Lish' by chelovek byl khoroshii," *Obshchaia Gazeta*, February 15–21, 1996, p. 6.

23. V. Guliev and A. Kozlov, "Perekraivat' Konstitutsiiu nedopustimo," *Rossiiskie Vesti*, February 5, 1995, p. 2. Ellipses in original.

24. To impeach, Article 93 of the Constitution first requires a finding against the president of high treason or "grave" crimes by two-thirds of the Duma. The Supreme Court must concur, and the upper house must then agree to begin hearings to impeach, again by a two-thirds majority. (In passing, it should be noted that this practical legislative inability to divide the president from the prime minister's government is one of the stronger arguments for treating the Russian system as essentially a "pure" presidential arrangement.)

25. The electoral process in the Federation Council is somewhat arcane. The Constitution requires only that each region choose two members in ways "determined by federal law": one from the regional legislative body and one from "organs of executive power." In practice this means that all regional governors are members of the council. The point, of course, is to make the council the regional counterweight to the central government.

26. For example, President Yeltsin's assistant for legal affairs told *Izvestiia* in late 1995 that "the current Constitution does not envision the automatic formation of a government based on a parliamentary majority. Taking the results of a parliamentary election into account, to a certain degree, in forming a new Cabinet is another matter. The point is to avoid [the tactic of] continual 'voting' [*votirovanie*]*—*raising the parliamentary question of confidence in the government, and blocking draft laws submitted by the executive branch." See V. Kononenko, "Nezavisimo ot rezultatov 17 dekabria kabinet Chernomyrdina ustoit," *Izvestiia*, December 16, 1995, p. 1.

27. V. A. Chetvernin, "Vvedenie," in *Stanovlenie konstitutsionnogo gosudarstva v posttotalitarnoi Rossii*, ed. V. A. Chetvernin (Moscow: Institute of State and Law, 1996): 7.

28. Rose's 1996 study found that two-thirds of Russians "reject the view that a tough dictatorship is the only way out of the current situation. Moreover, the intensity of rejection is strong: 37 percent completely reject the call for a dictatorship, compared to 12 percent endorsing dictatorship strongly. And neither the public nor Russia's political class could agree who the dictator ought to be." Rose, "Boris Yeltsin Faces the Electorate," pp. 386-87

29. See I. Kliamkin, V. Lapkin, and V. Panin, *Mezhdru avtoritarizmom i demokratiei* (Moscow: Fond "Obshchestvennoe mnenie," 1995): 50-60. Ruskoi has since been elected governor in the Kursk region.

30. Interviews with Konstantin Borovoy, Hanover, N.H., March 1996, and Moscow, April 1997.

31. Gleb Cherkasov, "Segoniia Duma budet utverzhdat' kandidaturu prem'er-ministra," *Segodniia*, August 10, 1996, p. 2.

32. Baburin claims that this was an important point in his "Narodovlastie" movement's legislative break with the Communists. Interview.

33. Sergei Shargorodsky, "Russia-Revolution Day," AP North American Wire, November 7, 1995. The speaker, Viktor Tiulkin, added the blunt admission that working people "cannot come to power by parliamentary means."

34. *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, May 17, 1996, p. 1, translated in "Shokhin Sees Duma Adopting Laws to Provoke Yeltsin," FBIS-SOV-96-098, May 17, 1996. The bill,

apparently, has since been bottled up in committee.

35. Anna Kozyreva, "U Dumy dostatochno vlasti. Prosto eto vlast' drugaia," *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, August 14, 1996, p. 3.

36. As Arturo Valenzuela puts it, unlike presidential systems, in parliamentary systems "crises of government do not become crises of regime." Quoted in Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering* (New York: NYU Press, 1994): 94.

37. The comment was made to journalists on Russian television and reported in "Yeltsin Says Duma Controls Own Fate," FBIS-SOV-95-121, June 23, 1995, p. 22.

38. Stepan and Skach, "Constitutional Frameworks," p. 18.

39. Juan J. Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," in *Parliamentary Versus Presidential Government*, ed. Arend Lijphat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 120.

40. Borovoy related to me that he—like so many of his reformist colleagues—was certain of the fact that a Communist president and Communist Duma would be merciless in bringing Chechnya back into the federation. LDPR leader Zhirinovskiy was, for his part, relentless in his calls to destroy the Chechens. Interview.

41. The comments were by Duma member Viacheslav Nikonov. See Lee Hockstader, "Anti-Yeltsin Vote Fails in Duma," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1995, p. 1.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Aleksei Kirpichnikov, "Vesna i votum nedoveriia obostriaiut chuvstvo nereal'nosti," *Segodniia*, April 8, 1995, p. 2.

44. Olga Burkaleva, "Parlament—ne ryhag dlia partiinykh tselei," *Rossiiskie Vesti*, August 1, 1995, p. 2.

45. See, for example, Sergei Chugaev, "Esli kommunisty pobedaiut na vyborakh, novaia natsionalizatsiia neizbezhna," *Izvestiia*, November 2, 1995, p. 1.

46. Valerii Vyzhutovich, "Bez sensatsii," *Izvestiia*, January 12, 1994, p. 1. It should be noted that Borovoy, for one, believes that this moderating influence is to some extent unintentional, the by-product of the Federal Assembly's overriding preoccupation of

regional autonomy. Interview.

47. Interview with Vladimir Grigoriev, Moscow, April 1997.

48. Attila Agh, "The Experiences of the First Democratic Parliaments in East Central Europe," *Communist and Post Communist Studies* 28, no. 2 (1995): 205, 207.

49. Thomas Baylis, "President Versus Prime Ministers: Shaping Executive Authority in Eastern Europe," *World Politics* 48 (April 1996): 320.

50. One example is legislation that would allow virtually no campaign spending, which would practically guarantee Communist or LDPR increases in list seats even if it meant similar losses among single-member seats (which are increasingly out of reach for either party anyway).

51. Juan J. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?" in *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, ed. Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 7.

52. "Russians," Rose writes, "are inclined toward government being weaker rather than stronger. When the views of individuals about the rule by decree and parliamentary veto are combined, there is a majority for gridlock." Richard Rose, "Boris Yeltsin Faces the Electorate," p. 387.

53. Rose's 1995 study found that 78 percent of respondents "actively distrusted" the Duma, with a whopping 83 percent giving the same answer about parties. A 1994 study by the Russian Institute for Comparative Social Research produced similar results: when asked "Which party or movement most closely reflects your views?" nearly two-thirds of Russian respondents answered "none." See Rose, "Russia as an Hour-Glass Society," p. 38, and "Oppozitsiia—mnogoglavnyi Sobor," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, June 15, 1995, p. 2.

54. See Kliamkin, et al., *Mezhdú avtoritarizmom*, p. 16.

55. Bunce, "Presidents and the Transition," pp.168-69.

56. Robert Cottrell, "Russia's Parliamentary and Presidential Elections," *Government and Opposition* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 161.

57. Pavel Voshchanov, "'Nu vot ia i v Kreml'e! A dal'she?'" *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, December 8, 1994, p. 2.
58. As Voshchanov notes, identification of platforms with individuals was so strong in 1994 that one was more likely to call a party by the name of its founder rather than a proper name: "Travkin's Party," "Shakhrai's Party," etc. *ibid*.
59. Richard Rose, "Boris Yeltsin Faces the Electorate," p. 387.
60. Duma member and *odnomandatnik* Greshnevikov made it clear that his support from his district gave him a great deal of latitude to join or leave coalitions as he saw fit. His particular positions, he said, were important, but no less so than the fact that he returned to his district as often as possible and that he had never, in seven years, rented an apartment in Moscow. Interview.
61. Inga Mikhailovskaia and Evgenii Kuzminskii, "Making Sense of the Russian Elections," *East European Constitutional Review*, 3 (Spring 1994): 60-61.
62. An excellent chronological tracking of these political comings and goings from 1989 through 1995 can be found in a compendium assembled by the private RAU University research center. See *Rossia: Partii—vybory—vlast'* (Moscow: Obozrevatel', 1996).
63. Moe and Caldwell, "Institutional Foundations," p. 175.
64. Arend Lijphart, "Introduction," in Lijphart, ed. *Parliamentary Versus Presidential*, pp. 18-19. See also Linz, "Perils of Presidentialism," p. 123.
65. Although he won in a single-member district, Grigoriev would like to see a much lower threshold for list seats, perhaps 1-2 percent. Interview.
66. See Cottrell, "Russia's Parliamentary and Presidential Elections," p. 167, and Chetvernin, *Stanovlenie*, Appendix 1, p. 123.
67. When then-Speaker Ivan Rybkin was asked in 1994 about the comment of one legislator that a certain female colleague should be tested for AIDS because there was no telling "what she might bring back from abroad," Rybkin answered: "I think what a good thing it is that our deputies are not skilled in the oriental martial arts." Interview with Ivan Rybkin, *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, November 15, 1994, translated in "Duma's Rybkin on Yeltsin, Current Issues," FBIS-SOV-940-211, November 16, 1994, p. 21.

68. See David Lane, "The Transformation of Russia: The Role of the Political Elite," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 4 (1996): 535–49.
69. "Rossiiane o vyborakh i ikh itogakh," *Segodniia*, July 26, 1996, p. 4.
70. See Lev Gudkov, "Politicheskie nastroiieniia i ozhidaniia pered vyborami," *Segodniia*, June 13, 1996, p. 3.
71. See "Odin prezident— dve strany," *Segodniia*, July 10, 1996, p. 5, and "Optimizm storonnikov Borisa El'tsina vse usilivaetsiia," *Segodniia*, June 1, 1996, p. 4.
72. Giovanni Sartori, "Neither Presidentialism nor Parliamentarism," in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *Failure of Presidential Democracy*, p. 112.
73. Tat'iana Malkina, "Boris El'tsin ukazal nakazyvat' tekh, kto ne vypolniaet ego ukazy," *Segodniia*, June 7, 1996, p. 1.
74. Gordon Silverstein, *Imbalance of Powers: Constitutional Interpretation and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 201.
75. Aleksei Kiva, "Proigraiat li storonniki demokratii parlamentskie vybory?" *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, August 12, 1995, p. 3.
76. "Liubaia voina konchaetsia mirom'," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, December 11, 1996, p. 10.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Moe and Caldwell, "Institutional Foundations," p. 175.
79. Hockstader reported that Russian analysts believe part of the collapse of the July 1995 no-confidence vote could be traced to legislators who worried that dismissal of the Duma would mean the forfeiture of their personal privileges. Hockstader, "Anti-Yeltsin Vote," p. 1. In a similar vein, in their interviews with me in April 1997, legislators as varied in their orientations as Grigoriev and Borovoy felt it was obvious that the CPRF and the LDPR had both been bought off and nearly neutralized as serious opponents with material largesse from the presidential apparatus and its allies.
80. Interview with Vladimir Grigoriev, April 1997, Moscow.

81. Linz, "Perils of Presidentialism," p. 123.
82. Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, p. 96.
83. In passing, I would suggest that a good case for future study, one that is strangely neglected by parliamentary advocates and that would make a good companion to the Russian case, would be the pure parliamentary system in Israel, which seems to have produced all the very worst traits normally ascribed to presidentialism.
84. Bunce, "Presidents and the Transition," p. 163.
85. Harvey Mansfield, *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1989): xvi.