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THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE STATE DUMA

From betting on electoral
support to intra-elite intrigues

FREE
RUSSIA



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In 2016, the author conducted a comparative analysis of the demographics of two sessions of the Russian State Duma (2011 and 2016).¹ The goal of the analysis was to capture changes resulting from the shift in the electoral system from being fully proportional to being mixed or majoritarian-proportional (i.e., 50% of the State Duma members are appointed based on the party lists, and 50% of the State Duma members are appointed based on the proportional system; there are 225 and 225 members, respectively). Building on the previous research, this report summarizes the findings of a recent analysis on the composition of the current State Duma of the Russian Federation elected on September 19, 2021.

The socio-professional composition of the State Duma changed significantly between 2011 and 2016. There was a sharp increase in the number of the State Duma members representing public sectors and government-funded organizations or who were former heads of municipalities. However, the composition of the 2021 State Duma was more similar to that of 2011 under the fully proportional system. Noticeably, the party in power started to focus less on searching for truly electable candidates and more on selecting those who could fit certain projects or concepts, in addition to those who participated through self-nomination.

The legislative powers of the State Duma are limited, as is its ability to influence the formation of executive authorities. The constitutional amendments passed in 2020 give the appearance of increasing the influence of the parliament on forming some part of the government.²

But in reality, this power is checked by the president's new authority to dismiss appointed officials and judges, which similarly weakens the judiciary system. The 2020 amendments also gave the president the right of absolute veto, which is veiled through the ability of any adopted law to be appealed by the Constitutional Court.³

The full extent of the president's powers became apparent at the launch of the "special operation," or invasion, of Ukraine. Before the invasion on February 22, 2022, the State Duma almost unanimously and without any factional differences voted in favor of ratifying the treaties on friendship and cooperation with the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. The vote came a day after President Vladimir Putin formally recognized the territories. At first, it was reported that 398 deputies voted in favor of the recognition. Then, the reported number increased to about 400. Thus, nobody voted against it, and no one abstained from voting. The remaining Duma members simply did not participate in the vote. This shows that currently no member of parliament is capable of confronting the executive branch or the president, regardless of parliamentary group or territorial factor.

In situations not considered to be "tests of loyalties," the State Duma does not appear to be so homogeneous. The State Duma consists of representatives of various social and elite groups, whose difference in the positions are more profound than the differences in their parties. Examples of such differences include the negotiations regarding the law on domestic violence, the history of

1 A portion of study's results was published in the journal *Politika*: Kynev A.V. V. The State Duma of the Russian Federation of the seventh convocation: between the "sleeping potential" and party discipline // *Politiya*. No. 4(87), 2017. P.65-81

2 The State Duma now approves, on the proposal of the Chairman, the candidacies of Deputy Prime Ministers and federal ministers, with the exception of the federal ministers specified in paragraph "e.1" of Article 83 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (ministers in charge of defense, state security, internal affairs, justice, foreign affairs, prevention emergency situations and elimination of consequences of natural disasters, and public safety are appointed directly by the President of the Russian Federation after consultations with the Federation Council)

3 According to the new version of Article 107 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, if the President of the Russian Federation, within fourteen days from the date of receipt of the federal law from the Parliament, applies to the Constitutional Court with a request to verify the constitutionality of the federal law, the period for signing such a law is suspended while the request is being considered. If the Constitutional Court confirms the constitutionality of the federal law, the President of the Russian Federation signs it within three days from the moment the Constitutional Court makes the appropriate decision. If the Constitutional Court does not confirm the constitutionality of the federal law, the President of the Russian Federation returns it to the State Duma without signing.

renovation, and the struggle to maintain a flat tax scale. While the varying positions on individual issues do not interfere with the mainstream evolution of the political regime, they offer insight into contemporary Russian society and the Russian elite and may provide an example of how Russian society could have progressed under freer and more competitive political conditions.

This study included an expert assessment of the final composition of the affiliations of the State Duma members during the sixth through eighth convocations (2011, 2016 and 2021). The corresponding tables are presented below.

Since the composition of the State Duma members during the convocation inevitably changes, the same point in time for all the convocations was used in order to conduct adequate comparisons. As a rule, State Duma compositions were compared across the first sessions of the convocations.

For the eighth convocation, the final composition also took into account the second and third sessions, since some of the State Duma members resigned immediately after the first meeting. Their resignation allowed the party leadership to manipulate the distribution of mandates. Initially, the mandates are distributed strictly according to the procedures outlined by law, but the resignations allowed the party leadership to reassign the vacant seats. In light of the resignations, it is important to mention four State Duma members:

1. Yevgenii Prilepin (Zakhar Prilepin) immediately resigned, so that the party leadership could transfer the mandate to Dmitriy Kuznetsov (Fair Russia/Patriots/For Truth);
2. Alexander Avdeev (affiliated with United Russia) was appointed governor of Vladimir oblast, instead of Vladimir Sipyagin who had been elected by the Liberal Democratic Party;

3. Olga Batalina (affiliated with United Russia) was appointed First Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation;

4. Sergey Chudayev (affiliated with New People) resigned immediately after the Duma's confirmation

When sorting State Duma members into certain socio-professional groups, there were multiple cases in which some State Duma members could have been associated with several groups at once. This issue was particularly pertinent to those individuals whose positions were relevant to multiple groups at once. For example, a State Duma member could simultaneously represent public sectors, as well as the governor's team. Therefore, the total number of all members affiliated with all associated groups adds up to more than 450. In cases where individual groups could be combined with one another, State Duma's members affiliated with multiple individual groups were not counted multiple times. For example, all former heads of municipalities, former governors, and former speakers of regional parliaments can be also included in the career politicians group, which includes long-term professional State Duma members, public figures, party representatives, and individuals holding key administrative positions at the federal level. Those individuals would not be counted twice despite belonging to multiple specific groups and broader categories of groups.

If a State Duma member's demographics were adjacent to multiple groups (that do not align perfectly but may overlap partially), the individual will be included in all relevant groups. Therefore, the total number of all members of the hypothetical groups is slightly greater than 450. In case of combining specific individual groups into broader categories, the individuals would not be counted multiple times (based on the belonging to such specific groups).

Changes in the composition of the State Duma: from 2011 to 2016

During the seventh convocation (2016), it was expected that changes in the composition of the State Duma would be associated with the impact of the mixed electoral system on the criteria to select State Duma members. Before, the candidate lists had been compiled by the federal leadership of the parties (meaning they were actually written in Moscow), and individuals became State Duma members as a result of their agreements with the federal party and near-party bureaucracy. However, during the seventh Duma convocation, it was not the candidates who had to persuade and prompt the parties to put them on the list. Instead, parties were forced to search for elected candidates in a particular constituency. Previously, parties' leaderships took into account regional elites' interests, as well as the extent to which those interests aligned with their own (personal) interests. Those who were able to find a balance between these different interests were more successful than others. In case of the seventh convocation, it became necessary to consider regional elites' interests.

Due to the reinstatement of the majority of the Duma, a much more complex relationship between elected State Duma members and different individuals in power was formed. In this new system, besides maintaining influence on the composition of the legislative body, the State Duma members who maintain authority at the regional levels, regional elites in general, and voters gained influence. At the same time, the percent of members elected through the proportional system was reduced thereby leading to

intensified competitions for appointments and an increase in the number of voters needed to obtain a mandate. This also meant an increase of the cost of the entry ticket.

As a result, the proportion of the State Duma members affiliated with the United Russia party has grown naturally. In light of the current political conditions in Russia under the majoritarian system, government-approved candidates have become the undoubted favorites, given that there is always a single administrative candidate. Meanwhile, the opposition electorate is always divided (typically, there are some candidates from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), and Just Russia). The opposition electorate possesses some organizational and financial resources, which are nothing compared to those of United Russia. For example, during the regional parliament elections on September 13, 2015, United Russia won 213 districts out of 230 (92.6%) in the majoritarian part of these elections. Further, during the city councils of regional centers elections, United Russia won 491 districts out of 543 (or 90.92%). It is, therefore, not surprising that during the State Duma elections on September 18, 2016, the United Russia candidates won 203 constituencies out of 225 (90.2%). United Russia also won an additional 140 seats based on the party lists (54.2% of the vote, according to official figures).

The State Duma body has also changed significantly in terms of its representation of various social, political, and economic groups.

The initial socio-political composition of the State Duma, elected on December 4, 2011 *

	UNITED RUSSIA	CPRF	LDPR	JUST RUSSIA	Total
Former heads of municipalities	6	-	-	-	6
Former speakers of regional parliaments	2	2	-	-	4
Former governors	2	1	-	1	4
State employees, public sector, trade unions	24	4	-	-	28
Artists	3	1	-	1	5
Media business, journalists	3	1	1	1	6
Teams of governors, key administrative figures at the regional levels	26	2	-	-	28
Large state-owned business	23	2	1	1	27
Government corporations	5	3	-	-	8
Individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement and military	17	6	2	-	25
Cosmonauts	1	1	-	-	2
Regional and interregional business (including representatives of the agricultural business and the agricultural lobby)	51	18	19	28	116
Athletes, sports officials	13	-	1	-	14
Career politicians (public figures, key administrative party figures, key administrative figures at the federal level)	64	54	32	32	182
Other	12	-	-	-	12

**(includes counts during the first session, excluding subsequent filling of vacant mandates)*

The initial socio-political composition of the State Duma, elected on September 18, 2016 *

	UNITED RUSSIA	CPRF	LDPR	JUST RUSSIA	No Faction	Total
Former heads of municipalities	34	-	-	-	-	34
Former speakers of regional parliaments	10	1	-	-	-	11
Former governors	-	-	-	-	-	0
State employees, public sector, trade unions	57	7	-	-	-	64
Artists	4	1	-	1	-	6
Media business, journalists	9	1	1	-	-	11
Teams of governors, key administrative figures at the regional levels	43	1	1	-	-	45
Large state-owned business	19	1	1	1	-	22
Government corporations	5	3	-	-	-	8
Individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement and military	17	2	2	-	-	21
Cosmonauts	4	1	-	-	-	5
Regional and interregional business (including representatives of the agricultural business and the agricultural lobby)	74	6	9	8	-	97
Athletes, sports officials	18	-	-	1	-	19
Career politicians (public figures, key administrative party figures, key administrative figures at the federal level)	69	21	25	12	2	129
Other	4	-	-	-	-	4

**(including counts during the first session, excluding subsequent filling of vacant mandates)*

According to the tables above, it is obvious that the State Duma body has undergone significant changes. Particularly, the number of career politicians (key administrative party figures, key administrative figures at the federal level, etc.) and business representatives (at both federal and regional levels), has decreased, although these two groups remain the largest.

There was also a sharp, three-fold reduction in the number of those who fall under the category, "Other." To some extent, this group includes individuals in the State Duma body who ended up on the list for various formal and symbolic reasons. For example, the notorious representatives of the All-Russian People's Front (ONF) in 2011 included previously publicly unknown pensioner on the list for so-called social diversity. In reality, such a representative did not actually represent any organized social group. In the face of tougher competition in

2016, there was almost no room for such experiments. Candidates who could indeed receive voters' support and represent an organized group, or had charisma and popularity, were more important.

There was also an increase in the number of representatives of public sectors (state employees in education, health care, science, welfare, etc.) and trade unions. In addition, there was an increase in the number of former heads of municipalities (especially among State Duma members elected at the majoritarian districts.). Among the State Duma members, the number of former speakers of regional parliaments more than doubled. The number of individuals part of the group, "Teams of governors" (key administrative figures at the regional level) also increased. The role of regional authorities in electing the politically necessary candidates in majoritarian districts is obvious. The number of representatives of the

media business, journalists, and astronauts also doubled, and even the number of previously well-represented athletes and sports officials grew.

These demographic shifts were not only a matter of changing the format of the electoral system, under which only an increase in the proportion of representatives of regional elites and a decrease in the proportion of party and other federal officials would be expected. However, changes in the number of representatives of other groups (e.g., municipalities, business, representatives of the media and sports) indicate that there exist other political and legal reasons for the changing composition of the State Duma body.

The number of business executives and entrepreneurs dropped, unexpectedly, since their political ambitions are quite overt in many regions and bureaucrats putting together party lists are often supportive. It is possible that the decrease happened due to the election regulation restrictions introduced in 2012.

In May 2012, additional restrictions on the right of citizens of the Russian Federation were introduced. Particularly, the restrictions indicated that Russia's citizens who had been sentenced for felonies (including first degree felonies) would not have the right to be elected, regardless of their statute of limitations. Retroactively, an additional life sentence was introduced for citizens who had already served for their crimes, including those who had suspended and expunged convictions. Mostly, we are referring to controversial decisions on financial articles, which, in Russian law, were often used as a tool to handle the redistribution of property. The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation by its Decree of October 10, 2013, canceled this provision. After that, a new Federal Law on February 21, 2014, No. 19-FZ was adopted, which established that individuals sentenced for felonies must be deprived of their right to nomination for 10 years, which would start at the date when their conviction was served or cancelled. Individuals sentenced to imprisonment for committing first degree felonies must be deprived of their right to nomination for 15 years, which would start at the date when their criminal record expired or was removed.

In 2013, additional property restrictions were also introduced that disqualify many prospective candidates. The Federal Law of May 7, 2013, On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Connection with the Adoption of the Federal Law (No. 102-FZ) prohibits *'...certain categories of persons to*

open and have accounts (deposits), keep cash and valuables in foreign banks located outside the territory of the Russian Federation, own and (or) use foreign financial instruments." In other words, in order to register for elections at the federal government levels, constituent entities of the Russian Federation levels, as well as municipal districts urban districts levels, candidates must close their saving and checking accounts in foreign banks located outside the territory of the Russian Federation and/or dispose of any foreign financial instruments. In accordance with this law, the candidate is obliged to submit a written testimony that they do not have any accounts in foreign banks and do not own or use foreign financial instruments.

Experts have repeatedly stated that these restrictions do not apply for elected officials already in office, though they apply to candidates. According to this law, all foreign property must be disposed before the elections, even if there is no guarantee in place that a candidate will be elected. Although it is difficult to imagine how one can run a big business and not have any accounts abroad, state propaganda refers to these restrictions as the "nationalization" of the elite. In reality, it is an attempt to put up a barrier to elections for independent people who have their own financial resources and who could have been elected without relying on administrative resources and the consent of prominent officials.

The increase in the number of the State Duma members representing public sectors (state budget employees), sports, and media seems to be a result of certain campaign strategies and long-term restrictions on political competition.

It should be noted that this group includes not only State Duma members who previously worked in education or healthcare, but also those who continue to act as recognized representatives in their fields. For example, it is not uncommon for a former school principal or head physician to first work in the regional parliament or in the regional or city administration, and then end up in the State Duma.

A significant increase in the number of representatives of public sector aligns with two phenomena. Firstly, the authorities (including those at the regional levels) are interested in forming the State Duma body that is dependent on them and, therefore, can be easily controlled. In addition, relying on "budget-dependent" (i.e., state employees) candidates is a long-standing and well-known strategy. For example, this strategy

was implemented during the elections of the State Duma members in Moscow 2014. Earlier, in the 1990s, a Duma formed largely of doctors and teachers was a reality in many regional parliaments and local councils. A number of governors still strive to form their regional parliaments in this way today. Secondly, low voter turnout is expected, especially because of the postponement of elections to September.

Elections with low voter participation tend to see mainly the turnout of an administratively dependent and conformist electorate. Such elections focus primarily on the authorities' use of social networks, which have been historically formed through healthcare, education, and welfare. The focus on targeted voters implies that candidates who are best at mobilizing such groups are elected. Therefore, it is reasonable to see on the lists of elected candidates university deans, school principals, respected doctors, or heads of pension funds. According to the results of the preliminary intra-party vote (PVG) of United Russia held on May 22, 2016, the "party of state employees" could have been even larger. In light of some criticism, some of the "state employees" (winners of the PVG) were not included on the lists, and some refused to receive mandates after the elections.

The reason behind an increase in the number of representatives of the media, sports, and even cosmonauts among the State Duma members is slightly different. This

is due to the overall shortage of publicly promoted and elected candidates. This trend has been intensified due to the desire of the authorities to reduce the influence of independent businesses on politics. This has in turn resulted in a preference by voters for candidates who are recognizable by their occupations, such as TV hosts, correspondents, cosmonauts, and athletes.

The emergence of a significant municipal faction is partly due to the problem of a shortage of outspoken public politicians who could win majoritarian districts. The heads of municipalities are some of the few regional politicians who are known and who continue to rely on certain support structures. There are known cases when a governor might not have wanted to see an ex-mayor turn into a State Duma member but did not see any other options to get through the State Duma. However, there are other important reasons as well. In a significant number of cases, the election of a former mayor to the State Duma in 2016 acted as part of an intra-elite exchange involving a transition from being elected as a mayor (by the population) to being elected as a State Duma member (who, as a rule, would have a say in candidacies for future mayors). Thus, the result of the shortage of popular candidates and simultaneous intra-elite exchanges may have led to the election of speakers of regional parliaments to the State Duma.

Internal diversity in the State Duma of the seventh convocation as the price of dominance

The analysis of the composition of the State Duma body during the seventh convocation clearly shows that there is a greater diversity of interests within the organized faction of United Russia than between the party and the factions of other parties. This is largely due to the general decrease in the number of appointments for seats on the lists, which has been reduced to a simple formula: party nomenklatura + representatives of big regional businesses,

At the same time, the multifaceted nature of the United Russia faction can be perceived as the actual price for their dominance and their desire to find and elect those who can get support from significant groups of voters and local elites. In a number of regions, during the selection of candidates for elections, United Russia even recruited some local oppositionists, because they had some significant public resources and electoral opportunities. In this case, we are particularly referring to politically competitive regions, not the areas with already appointed State Duma members. Here, we considered the overall findings and not their future implications.

The contradicting ideologies within the United Russia faction were pronounced during the seventh convocation. There were several internal splits within the faction. The first and most pronounced divide was between those who were interested in supporting entrepreneurial activities through tax cuts, reducing the powers of various regulatory and licensing authorities, reducing forceful interference by the authorities, protecting property rights, and providing a fair judiciary; and those who were more interested in the opposite (representatives of public sectors, state employees, trade unions). The latter advocated for state paternalism and the redistribution policy that would increase the tax burden at the expense of the earners. They believe businesses need affordable loans, not sanctions, confrontation with the outside world, and bans. The second internal rift in United Russia was between “governor teams” and “municipals.” For those, who have been dealing with the problems of local governance for many years, the shortcomings of the 2014-2015 so-called reform (but, in reality, the counter-reform) of local governance are obvious. There is also a problem of overrepresentation of the electoral anomaly

regions, primarily the ethno-national regions of the North Caucasus and the Volga region. An incredibly low turnout in larger cities, regions of Siberia, the Urals, and the Russian North led to a low representation of these regions within the parliament.

However, such a diverse and conflicting body did not allow the State Duma of the seventh convocation to convene a platform for real competition of programs and approaches due to external political boundaries. This diversity manifested itself in solving a number of important, but sometimes not the most media-worthy issues, and, therefore, had little effect on the State Duma’s overall image. In a sense, it was a Duma with dormant potential, which never woke up. The 2018 pension reform showed that the authorities have the least number of problems with the representatives of public sector. It is paradoxical given cuts in social spending and unpopular reforms in education and healthcare. On one hand, there is no doubt that this group is ready to support any redistributive initiatives. On the other hand, prior experience shows that public sector representatives in the State Duma barely have any corporate social responsibility. State Duma members who are state employees often do not advocate for other state employees. Each head physician or school principal focuses primarily on their own school or hospital, ignoring the broader issues within public sector. The authorities have a clear understanding of that and tend to take into account the interests of specific organizations that are represented by certain State Duma members.

During the seventh convocation, the State Duma members tried to alter the working style of the parliament through changes in the regulations in order to shift away from the image of “mad printer” (a term the general population uses to describe the process of adopting and imposing long lists of restrictive and prohibitive laws and rules on the population). This resulted in a new operating process that was less publicly visible and scandalous than the previous one. The leadership of the State Duma and parliamentary factions tried to streamline and centralize the legislative process as much as possible. Their goal was to reduce the influence of individual State Duma members on the legislative process and reduce their individual

political media affairs. In some sense, we can also see that they tried to compensate for changes by providing regional elites and voters with opportunities to have more control over the composition of the State Duma body and introducing additional mechanisms to monitor and control State Duma members. Back in the spring of 2016, the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted a bill on granting parties the right to deprive State Duma members of mandates "in instances of systematic failure to fulfill their official duties" (stipulated in Articles 8 and 12 of the law on parliamentary status within 30 calendar days). Examples of such failures include State Duma members' failure to participate in plenary sessions or loss of contact with voters.

Many members of the State Duma are concerned with their own political reputation and they want to reduce the number of people who run for office just get on the news. According to this principle, during the sixth convocation, a number of the State Duma members introduced various semi-anecdotal prohibitive initiatives (such as proposals to ban sneakers and ballet flats, as well as stilettos).⁴ State Duma members attempted to avoid being on the news by not showing up for votes. But a half-empty hall looks worse on TV than a hall packed with State Duma members. As a result, Article 44 of the Regulations of the State Duma was introduced and stated that if a State Duma member is absent without a valid excuse, their salary would be reduced by one sixth for each missed meeting. The Committee on the Rules and Organization of the Duma is in charge of imposing the above-stated penalty on State Duma members. Valid excuses to miss a gathering include temporary disability (e.g., illness), travel outside the country as part of an official parliamentary delegation, a business trip ordered

by the Chairman of the State Duma, and any absence due to State Duma member's fulfilment of duties on behalf of the Council of the State Duma. The work schedule of parliamentarians in the regions has also been changed. Previously, State Duma members used to do associated work at plenary sessions for two weeks, at committees for one week, and for regional projects for another week. However, currently, the State Duma members have only one week to work on the regional projects. The remaining three weeks have to be allocated to plenary sessions in combination with the committee work.

In reality, State Duma members' freedom to make voting decisions is more important than how many of them are present at a gathering. State Duma member's vote does not have any significance, if their party requires them to express solidarity in voting. Having a formal presence with no actual right to vote transforms State Duma members into highly paid background actors. These contradictions began to affect the quality of the parliament work immediately, and a number of high-status State Duma members started resigning. First to resign was Alexander Skorobatko, one of the wealthiest State Duma members. He was on the Board of Directors of JSC Sheremetyevo International Airport in 1998-2001 and was a co-owner of the Novorossiysk Commercial Sea Port. Then, Alexander Metkin resigned. He was previously in charge on the ZAO Tamaneftgaz, a subsidiary of OTEKO holding, which facilitated the construction and operation of the Taman transshipment complex for transshipment of liquefied hydrocarbon gases, oil, and oil products. Then, Vladimir Zhutenkov, an agrarian entrepreneur from the Bryansk region (head of Okhotno holding), resigned. After that, resigned the famous tennis player Marat Safin and others.

4 Editors of Lenta.ru, *The State Duma proposed to ban sneakers and high heels*, Lenta.ru, June 19, 2014. <https://lenta.ru/news/2014/06/19/shoes/>

Changes in the composition of the State Duma from 2016 to 2021

Although, during the elections of September 19, 2021, the mixed electoral system was still in place, the socio-professional composition of the State Duma of the eighth convocation changed significantly. Compared to 2016, the number of former municipals among State Duma members decreased significantly. The decrease might be linked to the general decrease in their political influence during the 2016-2021 period, as well as a decrease in the number of cities with direct mayoral elections. Individuals, who were elected due to the advantage provided by administrative support, State Duma members, and the heads of municipalities are not legitimate and have weaker institutional ties than the mayors elected by the general population. It is also important to note that currently the head of a municipality is one of the most frequently rotated positions. Heads of municipalities come and go, which prevents the accumulation of influence and authority. It is rare to see that someone remains in the position for more than two years.

The number of public sector representatives decreased by almost 50% since 2016. Such a drop can be attributed to changes in personnel policies introduced by Vyacheslav Volodin and Sergey Kiriyenko. However, this still does not align with the downward voter turnout trends. At the same time, the number of education representatives decreased, and the number of healthcare representatives increased (unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic).

The number of former chairmen of regional parliaments, key administrative figures at the regional level, media representatives, state corporation representatives, regional and interregional representatives remained relatively stable. Although it should be noted that some governors' protégés were replaced by other governors' protégés in a number of regions. Between 2016-2021 (before the September elections), 75 governors were replaced across 63 regions, meaning that 74% of the regions had appointed new governors by the election time. The number of representatives of large private state-owned businesses decreased. In addition, the number of direct representatives of the power lobby (those who have

law enforcement and military background), athletes, and sports officials decreased slightly (which was somewhat unexpected).

At the same time, the number of career politicians increased, as did the number of former governors (Apparently, authorities could not offer them anything else. In 2017-2021, there were drastic rotations of governors thereby leading to a high number of former governors.). The Other category (i.e., unpopular politicians with no connections or financial resources) also expanded— in 2016, there were almost no State Duma members representing the Other category. This shift occurred due to two factors: (1) the emergence of the New People party, consisting of many individuals with limited political backgrounds in the parliament, and (2) United Russia's active inclusion of individuals involved in various Kremlin-approved competitions (e.g., Leaders of Russia, PolitStartup, etc.) on the lists, as well as the quasi-public structures encouraged by the Presidential Administration all these years (e.g., volunteer movements, promotion of family values, etc.) Almost all Kremlin-approved competitions (reminiscent of the late Komsomol business games) that the elites used to entertain themselves included participants affiliated with the United Russia party across almost all regions. Some individuals were eventually elected and became part of the State Duma. Even though some of them have had some public visibility, most of them are too early in the career (based on the limited biographies). For example, Maria Vasilkova, an unknown candidate, became a State Duma representative of the Irkutsk region after she had been rejected by the regional group. All that is known about her is that she was the winner of the Leaders of Russia 2020 contest and was mentored by Denis Manturov, the Minister of Industry and Trade.

Despite the mixed electoral system, the composition of the State Duma of 2021 was more similar to the composition of the State Duma of 2011. Most likely, during the 2021 campaign, the authorities paid much less attention to the viability and electability of candidates.

Instead, when compiling the lists, the authorities trended toward relying on voluntary appointment of State Duma members and ignored regional elites' interests.

Particular electoral changes during 2016-2021 strengthened the electoral process. The number and nature of restrictions associated with the rules of nomination increased. In addition, individuals with criminal records were also subjected to additional bans and restrictions.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and newly introduced restrictions, the law of May 23, 2020, No. 153-FZ was implemented. This law banned the individual's right to be elected if such individual has been being sentenced for misdemeanors (covered by 50 articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). The rule is effective for five years starting at the date of removal or expiration of a criminal record. The new rule affected individuals who are under conditional conviction or convicted under political articles, including public dissemination of fake information of significance to the public, repeated violations associated with organizing a rally, public calls for extremism, calls for separatism, extremism, use of violence against representatives of authority, as well as fraud, appropriation or embezzlement, drug possession, and others.

After Alexei Navalny's arrest on January 17, 2021, and the following mass protests, almost all regional FBK's offices (Anti-Corruption Foundation) were raided by the police. Even though it violated specific deadlines established by the State Duma laws and regulations, the law of June 4, 2021, No. 157-FZ was adopted in a short period of time. The new law stated that if a Russian citizen was previously involved in activities associated with extremist or terrorist organizations, the individual cannot run for elections. Founders, management teams, and organizers who had been affiliated with such organizations over the period of three years before their ban, cannot run for elections for five years. Ordinary members and employees of such organizations are also banned from running for elections for three years, if they had been involved with such organizations within a year before the ban. The law states that one's affiliation with such organizations can also be established by means of one's expressing public support (e.g., statements on the Internet or donations) for such organizations. This law, contrary to the rule of law, provides a retroactive effect: it punishes actions that were not considered illegal at the time they were committed. The vague wording of the law (e.g.,

statements of support on the internet, provision of various assistance) creates great opportunities for arbitrariness in implementing the law in relation to opposition-minded citizens.

Meanwhile, there were an increase in the nationalization of the country's economy, a decrease in the influence of private businesses, and an increase in repressive measures against media and NGOs. Particularly, it has become common to label opposition organizations and even individuals as "foreign agents."

There were also changes in the electoral processes. First, a multi-day voting period was introduced. For the first time, this multi-day voting period system was tested during the general vote on changes to the Constitution of Russia in 2020. The federal law of May 23, 2020, allowed for the multi-day voting period—even though it formally referred to early voting only, it was applied during the September 2020 voting. Next, there was the Federal Law of July 31, 2020, No. 267-FZ, which indicated that voting can be held "for several days in a row, but not more than three days." The CEC (Central Election Commission) of Russia has the power to determine the dates of the State Duma elections. As a result, on June 18, 2021, the CEC decided to hold voting over the course of three days, from September 17-19, 2021. The multi-day voting system reduced the amount of control over elections, as the longer voting period requires more resources and creates more opportunities for falsifying the voting results.

The authorities started introducing the distance electronic voting (i.e., DEV) systems that is almost impossible to regulate. In addition, the CEC assigned seven regions (Moscow, Sevastopol, Kursk, Murmansk, Nizhny Novgorod, Rostov, and Yaroslavl) to participate in the DEV experiment. To use DEV, participants had to submit an electronic application sometime from August 2 - September 13. According to the opposition leaders, DEV makes it impossible to establish who voted, how they voted, and whether the reported results correspond to the real votes. Between 2016 and 2021, the voter turnout in the Russian Federation increased from 47.9% to 51.72% in relative terms. In absolute terms, there was an increase from 52,700,992 to 56,484,685 (a net increase of 3,783,693) votes cast. 2,530,839 voters used DEV in Russia, which corresponded to a 67% increase in voter turnout. Moscow clearly demonstrated the significance of the contribution of the DEV system. DEV voter turnout in Moscow accounted 76.8% of all those who voted using

DEV in the Russian Federation. In Moscow, as a result, the voter turnout rose from 35.3% to 50.12% between 2016 and 2021.

Before the DEV system was introduced in GAS (Government Automated System) “Vybory,” the opposition candidates were leading in nine regions. After the DEV system was established, 15 candidates, supported by Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, became winners. It is important to note that the DEV results in Moscow were

published 12 hours after the end of the elections. These 12 hours provided the authorities with sufficient time to calculate the needed volume of “missing” votes, so that candidates associated with the party in power would win. The DEV results provoked harsh criticism of its system, which was virtually devoid of public oversight and could be used to falsify the voting results, according to opposition representatives and many members of the public.

The initial socio-political composition of the State Duma, elected September 19, 2021 *

	UNITED RUSSIA	CPRF	LDPR	JUST RUSSIA	NEW PEOPLE + Individuals	Total
Former heads of municipalities	21	-	-	-	1	22
Former speakers of regional parliaments	11	-	-	-	-	11
Former governors	4	1	1	1	-	6
State employees, public sector/state employees, trade unions	33	1	-	-	-	34
Artists	3		-	3	1	7
Media business, journalists	11			-	1	12
Teams of governors, key administrative figures at the regional levels	49			-	-	49
Large state-owned business	16			1	1	18
Government corporations	9	1	-	-	-	10
Individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement and military	13	2	1	-	-	16
Cosmonauts	3	1	-	-	-	4
Regional and interregional business (including representatives of the agricultural business and the agricultural lobby)	70	9	9	9	1	98
Athletes, sports officials	16	-	-	-	-	16
Career politicians (public figures, key administrative party figures, key administrative figures at the federal level)	67	43	12	14	7	143
Other	12	-	-	-	4	16

**(Includes counts during the first session, taking into account refusals during the first sessions in October)*

Comparison of general changes by convocations in 2011, 2016 and 2021

	2011	2016	2021
Former heads of municipalities	6	34	22
Former speakers of regional parliaments	4	11	11
Former governors	3	-	6
State employees, public sector/state employees, trade unions	28	64	34
Artists	5	6	7
Media business, journalists	6	11	12
Teams of governors, key administrative figures at the regional levels	28	45	49
Large state-owned business	27	22	18
Government corporations	8	8	10
Individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement and military	25	21	16
Cosmonauts	2	5	4
Regional and interregional business (including representatives of the agricultural business and the agricultural lobby)	116	97	98
Athletes, sports officials	14	19	16
Career politicians (public figures, key administrative party figures, key administrative figures at the federal level))	182	129	144
Other	12	4	16

Conclusion

As we can see, the socio-professional and elite composition of the State Duma is only loosely correlated with its party and factional composition. In fact, diversity of interests affects only one faction, United Russia, which is an artificial conglomerate of different groups. The existence of such a conglomerate, as one of the main elements in the overall system for managing political life in the country, significantly affects the level and quality of political competition in the country. Restrictive and prohibitive laws preventing individuals from running for elections also affect the State Duma composition and its representation of various social and ideological groups. At the same time, the State Duma composition also illustrates how United Russia's electoral results are formed, particularly, that social status and corporate factors determine the electoral results. Other parties, on the other hand, mostly rely on the ideological support provided by career politicians, instead of relying on corporate support.

In essence, this analysis demonstrates that it is precisely the United Russia party, and not the formally-left Communist Party, paradoxically, is the only "corporate" party in Russia. Its corporate mobilization, and, evidently, centrally-coordinated corporate representation emerges as the main driver of election mobilization from specific social groups.

In a truly competitive party system, the picture would be very different. There would be a more diverse representation of different social groups across different parties and a more equal role for career politicians and public figures.

About the Author

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He previously served as the Dean of the Department of Political Sciences of the School of Social Sciences of the High School of Economics (2012-2019). Between 2012-2018, he headed the Civil Initiatives Election Monitoring Expert Group. From 2007-2012 he was the Director of the Analysis Department of the GOLOS Association dedicated to the defense of voters' rights, where he authored most of the association's election monitoring reports and publications. Between 2004-2012, he worked as the Regional Programs Director of the Foundation for the Development of Information Policy.

Mr. Kynev has authored hundreds of articles and co-authored a number of books, including "Parliamentary Elections in Russia's Regions 2003-2009: from Party Politics to Personalization" (2014), "Parties and Elections in Contemporary Russia: Evolution and Regression" (2011), "How Russia Voted in 2016: Election Monitoring Insights" (2017), "Russia's Governors: From Elections to Appointments" (2020), "Regional Parliamentary Elections in Russia 2014-2020: New de-partisation and managed party politics 2.0".