

Changing Russia's Electoral System: Assessing Alternative Forms of Representation and Elections

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Considerable controversy surrounds Russia's current arrangements for electing deputies to its lower parliamentary chamber, the State Duma. The method, which provides for electing one half of 450 seats by party list proportional representation (PR) and the other half in single-mandate constituencies, is similar to that by which Germany elects its *Bundestag*. However, the two systems are different in several important respects. First, parties in Germany necessarily campaign on regional (*Länder*) lists, whereas those in Russia need only submit a single national list. Thus, unlike Germany's decentralized party system, Russian parties are largely creatures of Moscow's political establishment, with tenuous ties to regional and local party organizations. Second, whereas Germany links single-mandate and PR elections by making provision for an overall proportionality of representation, the allocation of PR seats in Russia is divorced from the results of the single-mandate contests. A party wins seats under PR in Russia only if its vote exceeds 5 percent, regardless of the outcomes in the single-mandate contests, thereby increasing the separation between these two halves of the Duma. Third, parliamentary elections in Russia occur in the context of a presidency whose constitutional powers overshadow parliament's. Moreover, because Russia's parliamentary elections occur a mere six months prior to its presidential contest, those elections assume much of the flavor of a primary in which presidential aspirants seek to establish themselves at the head of some party list while positioning themselves for the forthcoming contest.

These features of Russia's electoral system and its deviations from the German model doubtlessly contributed to the confusing array of parties (forty-three) that confronted voters in 1995, and to the fact that the total vote share of the four parties that passed the 5 percent threshold to secure PR seats barely reached 50 per-

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cent (and did not reach 50 percent if one counts invalid and blank ballots). However, even though we can debate the motives of those who designed Russia's electoral system, we can be fairly certain that such structural issues are not the primary concern either of the advocates of different electoral arrangements today¹ or of those who would oppose any change. More important is that the present system seems to have benefited the ultranationalist Zhirinovskiy in 1993 and Yeltsin's opponents, most notably the Communist Party, in 1995.

Of course, even if existing procedures survive to the next scheduled round of elections in December 1999, someone, sometime later, will have an incentive to seek change. Manipulating electoral systems under the guise of reform to the advantage of those in power is a time-honored democratic tradition. The questions we address here, then, are, What are the most feasible alternatives to current arrangements, and what are the likely consequences of any specific change? What increased or decreased share of seats are communists, nationalists, and liberals likely to experience if Russia were, for example, to elect all of its Duma deputies using single-mandate constituencies, national PR, or some variant of regional PR?

As to the alternatives, the world offers a vast menu of possibilities. We examine only the simplest—several variants of plurality rule and alternative forms of proportional representation.² Although imagining alternatives is easy, identifying a methodology for assessing their impact is more difficult. First, we must decide if we are interested in long- or short-term consequences. Long-term consequences, of course, are important because they include the coherence of Russia's party system, which in turn critically influences the functioning of its federal system,³ not to mention the general performance and stability of its democratic institutions.⁴ To concern ourselves with those consequences seems premature, however. Although we might like to suggest electoral systems better suited to Russia's long-term needs, in Russia, decisions in politics, like decisions in economics, are likely to be made on the basis of two- or three-month planning horizons.⁵ More to the point, until and unless we understand fully the short-term consequences of any proposed change we cannot predict long-term consequences, if only because Russian democracy remains in a sufficiently precarious state that the short-term events can render the long-term irrelevant.

Unfortunately, even if we limit our analysis to the immediate fortunes of proponents of reform and avoid broader systemic issues, there is no well-established method for addressing the questions we might ask. Changing the electoral system is likely to change the structure of parties and their electoral tactics and strategies that, in turn, may change patterns of voting. We know that the incentives to coordinate and consolidate parties depend importantly on how votes are counted, where majoritarian or plurality systems ostensibly encourage more consolidation than does proportional representation.⁶ Complicating matters further is the fact that if the system is changed to one that allows for only single- or double-member constituency contests, politics will almost certainly become more local and less dependent on Moscow's political establishment (and money). Indeed, it is only reasonable to suppose that a greater number of candidates will prefer, as in the 1996–97 gubernatorial contests, to compete without party labels or with

ambiguous partisan attachments, to disassociate themselves from parties that are seen as the instruments of a Moscow political elite, and to base their campaigns primarily on their local or regional reputations. In addition, voters themselves may employ different strategies, depending on how their votes are counted and aggregated. The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) won 11.4 percent of the vote in 1995 with Zhirinovskiy's name on every ballot, whereas under a system of single or two-member constituencies, at most only one constituency would display his name and the rest would offer ballots with the label "LDPR" alongside a candidate whose identity might or might not be familiar to voters. Whether 225 candidates running in 225 districts under the label LDPR can win as many votes as can one national party list headed by a single visible figure is anything but certain. Thus, past electoral returns may be an imperfect if not misleading guide to the consequences of change.

Despite these cautions, our approach is to take election district and oblast-level data from the 1995 parliamentary elections (section 1) and the 1996 presidential contest (section 2), and assess what would have happened had a different method of aggregating those votes been employed.⁷ The most evident justification for this approach is that it is the one most likely to be used by decision makers in Moscow when assessing alternatives. If, as is sometimes said of generals, military plans "refight the last war," then it is also true that politicians, when assessing the consequences of "reform," compete anew in the last election.

We can, however, get a sense of the problems with this approach by checking how well we can predict outcomes in the 1995 single-mandate elections using the 1995 PR results and the 1996 presidential balloting. For example, if in 1995 the Communist Party won a plurality in an election district, then if voters do not change their voting strategies significantly when considering the single-mandate contests, we would predict that a communist candidate is most likely to have been elected in that contest.⁸ To assess this hypothesis, suppose we first divide the parties into two categories, "left" (Communist, Power to the People, Agrarian, Anpilov's Working Russia, and Ruskoi's Derzhava) and "others," and apply a logit analysis to the 1995 PR elections to see how well we can predict the outcomes of the single-mandate elections. In this instance, we find that in 82 percent of the cases we can correctly predict the election of a "left" candidate from a single-mandate constituency, while in 72 percent of the cases we can correctly predict an "other" candidate. Similarly for 1996, if we divide districts into those in which Yeltsin won and those in which he lost in the second round of balloting, then in 79 percent of the cases we can correctly predict that the district will elect a candidate from the "left," and in 85 percent of the cases we can correctly predict a candidate from the "other" category.⁹ The level of predictability here is not perfect, but it does show the strong relationship between how election districts voted in the PR contest or presidential election and how they voted in the single-mandate constituencies, giving us some confidence in supposing that either the 1995 or 1996 election returns are a reasonable basis for estimating how parties might fare under, say, a 450 seat single-mandate system.

Of course, one problem these numbers do not address is that despite the

remarkable stability the Russian electorate exhibited between 1991 and 1996, we cannot presume that Russia's current political-economic turmoil will not result in a significantly different list of parties and party leaders, new constellations of voting blocs, and significant shifts in voter sentiment.¹⁰ Thus, in section 3 we consider the possibility of one contending side or the other—communists, nationalists, centrists, or reformers—increasing its vote share or recombining with others in various ways. Our last section offers some general conclusions and reiterates that caution that must be taken with our approach.

Data from the 1995 Duma Elections

There are two broad classes of electoral systems that might be implemented in Russia: single or n -member districts with plurality rule, and proportional representation within oblasts or within more broadly defined regions. Briefly, we consider here the following specific variations of these two procedures with respect to the 225 seats currently allocated by PR:

A. The current system.

B. A single member plurality system in which a seat is awarded to the party winning the most votes in the corresponding election district, where for election district boundaries we use the 225 districts that currently exist when assessing this and other similar alternatives.

C. A two-member plurality system within each existing election district, in which candidates run under party labels and seats are allocated according to a quota, $100/(s + 1) = 33.3$ percent. Thus, if a party wins 67 percent or more of the vote, it wins both seats. But if it wins 55 percent of the vote, it is awarded the first seat and the quota is subtracted from its support—in this case, $55 - 33.3 = 21.7$ percent. If no other party wins more than 21.7 percent of the vote in that district, the first party is awarded the second seat, whereas if another party gets more than 21.7 percent, then it gets the second seat.

D. The preceding system contrasts with that of SNTV—the single nontransferable vote—in which only party-endorsed candidates appear on the ballot and parties are assumed to have sufficient organizational skill to allocate their support optimally among their endorsed candidates (for example, Japan). Thus, if one party wins 55 percent of the vote, and its strongest competitor wins, say, 24 percent, then unlike C, the first party is assumed to be able to divide its support between its two candidates so that each wins 27.5 percent and both are elected.

E. The same as D, except that each oblast (republic, autonomous region, etc.) is an election district that elects two members to the State Duma.

F. Each oblast (republic, autonomous region, etc.) fills as many seats as are currently assigned to it using a party-based quota like the one described in C.

G through I. The same as F, except that a fixed number of seats are filled within each oblast ($s = 1, 2, \text{ or } 3$), regardless of population.

There are a great many other variants that we might study, including SNTV at the oblast level, alternative treatments of fractional shares, and different preferential voting schemes (for example, Hare voting).¹¹ This list, though, allows us

to address some of the most important questions. For example, in addition to offering a stark contrast between national PR and single-member district elections, we can also look at who might benefit from a double-member district system that would allow a party with 25 percent of the vote to win as many seats as a party with 55 percent, versus a system that might award both seats to the strongest party in each district.

In our analysis of these electoral systems, we can employ two data sets—the 1995 parliamentary elections and the 1996 presidential contest¹²—in trying to answer the question “what would have happened if . . . ?” Of course, for reasons we discussed earlier, we know that the data can at best provide only an initial guess about the answer to our question. In addition, 1995 might by now seem like ancient history: A presidential election has passed; economic reform has been pursued and has to some extent failed; Yeltsin’s authority has declined precipitously along with the reputations of many of the “reformers” associated with him; and gubernatorial elections have strengthened the regional basis of voting habits. Russia’s politics, moreover, continues to revolve around personalities, and by December 1999 voters may confront a radically different menu of names—new reformers, new generals proclaiming Russia’s greatness, and new leftists dressed as democratic socialists. Even the 1996 presidential contest might seem irrelevant by 1999 if Yeltsin is not a critical player and if elections become even more the battlefield of the monied interests that today seem to control Russia’s “democratic” processes.

Turning to the 1995 parliamentary contests, table 1 reports the seats that would have been won by each of the primary competitive parties or their candidates under the nine electoral systems described above. This presumes that voters vote without regard for the electoral system and the framing of the alternatives before them, that opportunities for fraud and the manipulation of ballot counts remain constant, and that the parties themselves and their candidates act in precisely the same way as they did in 1995 (since the different systems entail filling a different sized parliament, we report the percentage of seats won by each of the ten parties considered).¹³

The easiest way to make sense of table 1 is to consider first only those election schemes that use the current configuration of Duma election districts—B, C, and D. From these three, it is evident that the parties explicitly supporting reform or Yeltsin—Our Home Is Russia and Yabloko—should prefer the status quo, column A, while Communists and their fellow travelers—Anpilov and the Agrarians—should prefer either single-member plurality rule contests (column B) or, providing they possess the ability to target their support to specific candidates, the

“Our Home Is Russia, Yabloko, and Women of Russia . . . are best served by having election districts as large as possible.”

TABLE 1. All Parties Considered Using the 1995 Duma Election Data

| | Duma districts as constituencies | | | | Federal subjects as constituencies | | | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) | (E) | (F) | (G) | (H) | (I) |
| | Current system | Single memb. plurality | Two-seat plurality w. quota | Two-seat cand. based plurality | Two-seat cand. plural. in oblasts | n-seat party list plurality w. quota | 1 seat per oblast | 2 seats per oblast | 3 seats per oblast |
| WoR | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3.9 | 0 | 0 | 3.0 |
| OHR | 18.8 | 8.7 | 13.0 | 8.7 | 9.2 | 15.5 | 9.1 | 10.2 | 18.6 |
| Yabloko | 12.1 | 4.3 | 4.8 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 7.2 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 4.9 |
| RC | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0 | 0 | 1.0 | 0 | 0 | 0.8 |
| Shakrai | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Communist | 45.4 | 69.1 | 45.9 | 70.0 | 71.5 | 34.3 | 70.5 | 44.9 | 31.4 |
| Lebed | 0 | 0 | 1.9 | 0 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 1.5 |
| LDPR | 23.7 | 13.0 | 29.0 | 15.0 | 15.9 | 24.6 | 14.8 | 36.9 | 27.7 |
| Anpilov | 0 | 0.5 | 0 | 0.5 | 0 | 3.4 | 0 | 0.6 | 2.3 |
| Agrarian | 0 | 1.4 | 0.5 | 1.9 | 1.0 | 1.4 | 1.0 | 2.3 | 4.2 |
| Others | 0 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 4.6 | 0.5 | 2.8 | 5.7 |
| Seats filled | 207 | 207 | 414 | 414 | 176 | 207 | 88 | 176 | 264 |

two-seat version of SNTV (column D). Choosing between B and D, then, would seem to require an assessment of the Communist Party's relative ability to organize its support—relative to its strongest. Barring maintenance of the status quo, reformers and the LDPR would prefer a quota-based, two-seat plurality system, which doubtless derives from the fact that although the Communists came in first in many more election districts than did the LDPR or OHR, they did not win enough votes (66+ percent) in those districts to win both seats outright using a quota. However, Communists fare best if it is assumed that they can accurately target their support at candidates (column D). Thus, while reformers might have sought to mute their disadvantage in a plurality system by favoring a two-seat district arrangement, Communists could have countered this “reform” by advocating a ballot structure in which candidates rather than parties competed, and where the two strongest candidates were elected from each district. So in summary, a single-member plurality system would have benefited the Communists in 1995, as would a system of two-member districts that allowed parties to target support to specific candidates. On the other hand, if PR is abandoned, both the LDPR and OHR should prefer a double-member, party-based plurality system (as opposed to a single-mandate system) since the Communist Party's strength was not always sufficient to elect two candidates per district outright under a quota arrangement.

An alternative to using anything like the preexisting district system is to elect deputies oblast-wide, and columns E through I assess a number of possibilities. As with elections using the preexisting system of election districts, the Communist Party should prefer electing a single deputy from each region using simple plurality rule (column G) or the application of SNTV with two seats per oblasts (column E). Our Home Is Russia, Yabloko, and Women of Russia, in contrast, are best served by having election districts as large as possible—if not national PR, then a plurality system with a quota that elects as many deputies for oblasts as possible (I) or a similar system that elects as many deputies from each oblast as currently represent it (F). Finally, and as before, Zhirinovskiy's LDPR does best under a quota based, two-seat-per-oblast or per Duma district (columns C and H). Summarizing this analysis with two conclusions:

(1) If elections are decentralized to the oblast level, the fortunes of the major parties in 1995—OHR, Communists, and LDPR—are essentially unchanged from the seat allocations that result from elections held within existing Duma election districts. That is, Communists prefer single-mandate constituencies, while OHR prefers districts to be as large as possible.

(2) The advantages and disadvantages to parties of eliminating PR and electing two deputies from each Duma district using plurality rule depend on precisely how that rule is applied. Under a quota system (column C), the parties do approximately the same as they do under PR, whereas if parties can target their support to their candidates (column D), the Communists are greatly advantaged.

The patterns of preference portrayed in table 1 are readily understood from the patterns of support for the parties. Consider table 2, which reports the number of times one party or another ranked first, second, third, and so on, in a Duma district or region, as well as the number of districts and regions in which a party's

TABLE 2. Rankings of Parties in 1995

| | 1st place | 2nd place | 3rd place | 4th place | 5th place | 6th place | # times vote 2 × strongest opponent |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---|
| <i>In Duma Election Districts</i> | | | | | | | |
| WoR | 0 | 0 | 15 | 28 | 30 | 50 | 0 |
| OHR | 18 | 35 | 60 | 35 | 24 | 21 | 4 |
| Yabloko | 9 | 10 | 35 | 26 | 27 | 17 | 0 |
| RC | 0 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 11 | 0 |
| Shakrai | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Communist | 143 | 41 | 9 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 48 |
| Lebed | 0 | 7 | 4 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 0 |
| LDPR | 27 | 98 | 28 | 16 | 12 | 11 | 1 |
| Anpilov | 1 | 0 | 16 | 31 | 33 | 28 | 0 |
| Agrarians | 3 | 7 | 17 | 15 | 15 | 12 | 0 |
| <i>In Oblasts, Republics, etc.</i> | | | | | | | |
| WoR | 0 | 0 | 7 | 20 | 17 | 13 | 0 |
| OHR | 8 | 10 | 31 | 17 | 8 | 8 | 2 |
| Yabloko | 2 | 2 | 9 | 10 | 13 | 13 | 0 |
| RC | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Shakrai | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Communist | 62 | 17 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 20 |
| Lebed | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 15 | 0 |
| LDPR | 13 | 52 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| Anpilov | 0 | 1 | 5 | 14 | 19 | 10 | 0 |
| Agrarians | 1 | 3 | 7 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 0 |

vote total was greater than twice that of its closest rival. Notice first that of the 207 election districts in our data set, the Communist Party alone ranked first or second in 184 (88.9 percent), whereas the combined total for Our Home Is Russia, Yabloko, and Russia's Choice is a mere 75 (36.6 percent). It is hardly surprising, then, that any single-member district system would greatly benefit the Communist Party, at least as of 1995. And a two-seat SNTV system would benefit them most of all because of the 143 election districts in which they ranked first, their support exceeded twice that of their closest competitor in 48 (23.2 percent of the total); the comparable figure for Our Home Is Russia is a mere 4 election districts (1.9 percent). The story is much the same for the 88 regions in our data set. Our Home Is Russia and Yabloko together rank first or second in only 22 regions (25 percent), whereas the Communists ranked first in 62 regions (70.5 percent) and first or second in 79 regions (89.8 percent). While OHR's vote is twice that of the Communist Party in 2 regions, the Communist Party is twice that of its nearest competitor in 20 regions. This last fact, and the comparable one with respect to election districts, readily explain why Communists would have done

best under a two-seat-per-district (column D in table 1) or two-seat-per-oblast (column E in table 1) SNTV system. In contrast to these two extremes, Zhirinovsky's LDPR found its waning support leading to 98 (47.3 percent) second-place finishes in election districts and 52 (59 percent) in the regions. Thus, the LDPR would naturally have favored a system that awarded two seats per district or region, but which did not allow a party to strategically target its vote, as is the optimal strategy under SNTV; hence, its preference for a two-seat party list plurality system (column C in table 1).¹⁴

These results can, of course, be misleading for many reasons—an important one being the likelihood that parties will reconstitute themselves if a different electoral system is ultimately chosen. In particular, abandoning PR and moving to a plurality system is likely to yield some consolidation of parties and the disappearance of small, uncompetitive ones—and indeed, with forty-two lists in 1995, we might say that that number can only go down.¹⁵ To assess how such a consolidation might influence our conclusions, the simplest approach is to take the preceding data and ignore all parties except those we list. That is, we can suppose that no other parties compete and that the ten listed ones account for 100 percent of the vote, which is equivalent to assuming that in any consolidation, those ten parties (or their equivalents) will uniformly increase their vote shares in proportion to the shares they enjoyed in 1995. Further, since consolidation is likely to eliminate some of these parties, we combine these ten into four blocs: Reformists (Yabloko, Russia's Choice, and Shakrai); Centrists (Our Home Is Russia, Women of Russia), Communist (Communists, Anpilov, and Agrarians), and Nationalists (LDPR and Lebed). In some respect, of course, this combination does violence to the actual flow of votes, since not all of Lebed's supporters, for instance, came from or would gravitate to a nationalist candidate and not all supporters of Women of Russia would vote for a party identified as the party of power.¹⁶ Later, we consider these factors, but this recombination gives us a first approximation of the likely consequences of consolidation. Table 3 reproduces table 1 for these four blocs.

The primary conclusion we can draw from this table is evident, namely: If the ten parties in table 1 are the only ones that survive an electoral change, if their vote shares remain in the same proportions as before, and if they subsequently consolidate into four groups, then reformers and centrists are best advantaged by plurality quota systems that award as many seats as are currently awarded in each oblast (F) or one that awards three seats per oblast (I). Plurality quota systems advantage Communists only if one seat is awarded per election district (B or G), or by two-member districts that allow parties to target their support to their candidates (D or E). Indeed, if three seats are awarded in each oblast regardless of population, then centrists draw virtually even with Communists.

In addition to the election systems considered in tables 1 and 3, there is one additional possibility that we should consider—namely, the possibility that Russia will choose to move closer to the German model by requiring regional party lists use predefined regions that are more broadly defined than those of federal subjects. Luzhkov, Moscow's mayor, for instance, has proposed that federal subjects them-

TABLE 3. Ten Parties Consolidated Using the 1995 Duma Election Data

| | Duma districts as constituencies | | | | Federal subjects as constituencies | | | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) | (E) | (F) | (G) | (H) | (I) |
| | Current system | Single memb. plurality | Two-seat plurality w. quota | Two-seat cand. based plurality | Two-seat cand. plurality | n-seat party list plurality w. quota | 1 seat per oblast | 2 seats per oblast | 3 seats per oblast |
| Reformers | 12.0 | 8.2 | 5.3 | 8.2 | 2.4 | 15.0 | 2.3 | 6.8 | 14.3 |
| Centrists | 18.8 | 6.2 | 15.0 | 6.3 | 10.1 | 28.5 | 13.6 | 39.8 | 33.0 |
| Communist | 45.4 | 77.8 | 52.7 | 77.7 | 79.7 | 42.0 | 84.1 | 47.7 | 33.3 |
| Nationalists | 23.7 | 7.7 | 26.6 | 7.7 | 7.7 | 14.5 | 0.0 | 5.7 | 19.3 |
| Seats filled | 207 | 207 | 414 | 414 | 196 | 207 | 88 | 176 | 264 |

selves be redefined and consolidated so that there are no more than a dozen or so such subjects.¹⁷ There are myriad possibilities here, but from among them we choose the simplest—electoral regions that correspond to Russia's eleven traditionally defined economic zones.¹⁸ Table 4 summarizes our results using those zones after we add the additional electoral alternative of PR within each zone, with a 5 percent threshold for representation, and after we modify our earlier electoral systems so that they are appropriate for these eleven larger districts.

The data in table 4 suggest that with any regional PR system, the primary parties in 1995 all suffer losses at the expense of the otherwise smaller, less-competitive ones, even with a 5 percent threshold required in each region to win seats. Indeed, parties other than the ten we consider here could secure upward of one quarter of all Duma seats if the entire Duma were filled by a regional PR system. Most of that gain, moreover, comes at the expense of the Communist Party, although not necessarily to the advantage of reformers and pro-Yeltsin parties. Comparing column A to, for example, column G, notice that the seat share of Women of Russia, OHR, Yabloko, and Russia's Choice declines from 30.9 percent to 25.3 percent—a loss of little more than 5 percent of the seats in the Duma, whereas the Communist Party's decline exceeds 10 percent. However, Anpilov plus the Agrarians increase their representation from none to 7.1 percent, so that the gap between communists and reformers actually widens a bit. This gap can be narrowed considerably, however, if plurality with a quota is implemented within each region (see column H): reformers get 24.4 percent of the seats, but the three communist parties have their representation reduced to 32.5 percent. So in conclusion, because otherwise uncompetitive parties can secure 5 percent or more of the vote regionally but not nationally, regional PR is likely to encourage party proliferation to a greater extent than even the current system. Regional quota-based plurality systems have a similar effect: WoR, RC, Anpilov, Lebed, and the Agrarians all benefit at the expense of OHR, Communists, and the LDPR, relative to national PR. But as in our earlier analysis, if a regional electoral system is implemented, reformers do better with a plurality quota system than with a PR arrangement.

Data from the 1996 Presidential Contest

The 1996 presidential contest stands in sharp contrast to the 1995 Duma elections if only because of the far smaller number of alternatives that confronted voters on the first ballot. And of that number, only five were assumed beforehand to be serious candidates who might win enough votes to challenge Yeltsin or Zyuganov for second place in the event of a run-off. The 1996 contest differed from the Duma election also in terms of the resources devoted to securing Yeltsin's eventual reelection and the evident choice that confronted voters—a choice of a communist past (Zyuganov), a relatively popular and sane nationalist who supported reform but whose ability to govern was unknown (Lebed), and the chief architect of a reform who was perceived as having left a sizable proportion of the population impoverished but who at the same time was seen by some as having led Russia to democracy. The choices in 1996, in other words, seemed more clearly

TABLE 4. All Parties Considered Using the 1995 Duma Election Data

| | Only 10 parties competing | | | | | | All parties competing | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|--|--|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) | (E) | (F) | (G) | (H) | (I) | (J) | (K) |
| | Current system | PR in each region, 5 % thresh. | Quota with each region current # of seats | Quota with each region having 20 seats | Quota with each region having 30 seats | Quota with each region having 40 seats | PR in each region, 5% thresh. | Quota with regions having current # of seats | Quota with each region having 20 seats | Quota with each region having 30 seats | Quota with each region having 40 seats |
| WoR | 0 | 5.8% | 6.2 | 6.8 | 7.6 | 7.3 | 4.4 | 5.3 | 5.9 | 5.5 | 5.5 |
| OHR | 18.8 | 12.9 | 11.6 | 13.1 | 12.7 | 12.7 | 13.8 | 9.3 | 9.5 | 9.4 | 9.5 |
| Yabloko | 12.1 | 5.8 | 7.1 | 9.1 | 9.4 | 9.1 | 7.1 | 6.2 | 7.7 | 6.7 | 6.8 |
| RC | 0 | 1.3 | 4.4 | 4.1 | 4.2 | 4.3 | 0 | 3.6 | 5.0 | 3.9 | 3.4 |
| Shakrai | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Communist | 45.4 | 32.0 | 29.8 | 32.3 | 31.8 | 31.1 | 34.7 | 22.7 | 24.5 | 23.9 | 23.4 |
| Lebed | 0 | 4.4 | 5.8 | 5.5 | 3.0 | 5.5 | 2.7 | 5.3 | 5.0 | 4.2 | 4.8 |
| LDPR | 23.7 | 16.9 | 15.6 | 18.2 | 17.6 | 17.5 | 18.2 | 20.1 | 12.3 | 13.0 | 13.2 |
| Anpilov | 0 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 7.0 | 4.4 | 5.8 | 5.0 | 5.5 | 4.8 |
| Agrarian | 0 | 3.6 | 4.9 | 5.5 | 3.0 | 5.5 | 2.7 | 4.0 | 5.0 | 4.2 | 4.1 |
| Others | 0 | - | - | - | - | - | 11.1 | 16.8 | 20.0 | 23.6 | 24.5 |
| Seats filled | 207 | 225 | 225 | 220 | 330 | 440 | 225 | 225 | 220 | 330 | 440 |

drawn than in 1995 and, we suspect, corresponded better to the party system likely to prevail if Russia's current menu of parties consolidates. Table 5 reproduces table 1 as if each of the five primary contenders were a party seeking seats in the State Duma.

Our conclusions stand in sharp contrast to those drawn from the 1995 Duma election data: Whereas supporters of Yeltsin would have preferred the status quo PR system in 1995, in 1996 their preferences are reversed, so that they should then prefer a single-member constituency system based on existing Duma districts. No arrangement gives Yeltsin's party fewer seats than the current system and no arrangement gives Zyuganov's more. Moreover, Zhirinovskiy's representation can be wholly eliminated and Lebed's reduced considerably with an appropriate electoral choice. On the other hand, centrists and reformers gain little clear advantage from eliminating PR in favor of a plurality system decentralized only to the oblast level.

The implications of table 5 are sustained through equivalent manipulations (which we do not report here). The source of this radical contrast between 1995 and 1996 is not difficult to find. Table 6 reproduces table 3 for the three leading presidential contenders and shows that, unlike OHR in 1995 (or even the combination of OHR, Yabloko, Women of Russia, and Russia's Choice), Yeltsin not only came in first in a plurality of Duma election districts, but also won enough votes in those districts to often elect two candidates if an appropriate two-member district system were implemented.¹⁹ We should not be surprised, then, that Yeltsin's advisors today appear to favor changing Russia's parliamentary electoral system so as to wholly eliminate PR. The only decision they seem to confront on this score is whether they should try to gain maximum advantage by implementing a double-member rather than single-member district system of some type. On the other hand, Yeltsin's opponents—most notably the Communists and supporters of Zhirinovskiy—barring an unlikely move to full PR, should simply prefer the status quo. As table 5 shows, however, these conclusions apply only when the basis of our calculation is the current system of Duma districts. If instead elections are disaggregated to only the oblast level, then much of Yeltsin's advantage disappears, and in fact, if three seats are filled per oblast using a quota system, Yeltsin, Zyuganov, and Lebed draw essentially even in terms of number of seats won. Table 6 holds the key to this reversal. Specifically, although Yeltsin won in a clear majority of Duma districts, Zyuganov holds a clear edge in terms of the number of federal subjects in which he secured a positive plurality as well as the number of subjects in which his vote is at least twice that of Yeltsin's. Thus, unlike 1995, Zyuganov should prefer the elimination of PR, but only if a form of plurality rule is implemented at the oblast level.

Sensitivity

As we noted earlier, although the single-mandate results in 1995 correlate highly with party list and presidential voting patterns, the turmoil we see in Russia today is likely to lead to significant shifts in party support as well as recombinations of parties and electoral alliances. At this time, of course, we do not know if such shifts

**TABLE 5. All Candidates Considered Using the 1996 First Round Presidential Data
(Only candidates winning a seat under one scheme or another are included)**

| | Duma districts as constituencies | | | | Federal subjects as constituencies | | | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) | (E) | (F) | (G) | (H) | (I) |
| | Current system | Single memb. plurality | Two-seat party list plurality | Two-seat cand. based plurality | Two-seat cand. plural. in oblasts | n-seat party list plurality w. quota | 1 seat per oblast | 2 seats per oblast | 3 seats per oblast |
| Yelstin | 37.3 | 53.3 | 56.0 | 53.3 | 51.7 | 29.3 | 38.2 | 48.3 | 33.3 |
| Zhirinovskiy | 6.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 7.0 |
| Zyuganov | 33.3 | 46.2 | 40.0 | 46.2 | 48.3 | 32.4 | 61.8 | 46.6 | 33.2 |
| Lebed | 15.1 | 0.4 | 4.0 | 0.4 | 0 | 13.3 | 0 | 5.1 | 29.2 |
| Yavlinsky | 8.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8.4 | 0 | 0 | 3.4 |
| Others | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Seats filled | 225 | 225 | 450 | 450 | 178 | 225 | 89 | 178 | 267 |

TABLE 6. Rank of Presidential Candidates, First Round 1996

| | Duma districts | | | | | | | Oblasts | | | | |
|----------|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------------------------------|---------|-----|-----|-----|--------------------------------------|
| | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | # times 2 × strongest opponent | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | # times 2 × strongest opponent |
| Yeltsin | 116 | 102 | 3 | 4 | — | — | 60 | 34 | 52 | 3 | — | 15 |
| Zyuganov | 104 | 90 | 27 | 4 | — | — | 33 | 55 | 28 | 6 | — | 21 |
| Lebed | 1 | 26 | 166 | 26 | 6 | — | — | — | 9 | 72 | 8 | — |

will occur, or if they do, what their magnitude will be. Nevertheless, it is essential that we try to assess the consequence of any change in the fortunes of parties on the conclusions we offer earlier. To this end, we consider four scenarios with respect to how votes in 1999 might change relative to those from 1995:

- Scenario 1: Reformists and centrists combine their support, while the support of nationalists is absorbed wholly by the communists.
- Scenario 2: Reformists and centrists combine, but owing to economic circumstances, 10 percent of their vote shifts to communists and nationalists in equal numbers.
- Scenario 3: Ten percent of the reformist and centrist vote shifts to communists and nationalists, but reformist and centrist parties, as in the past, fail to coalesce.
- Scenario 4: Reformists and centrists coalesce, while the nationalist vote is split between this bloc and communists.

Rather than examine the consequences of each scenario for all of the electoral systems that we considered earlier, we focus here on the simplest versions of plurality rule—single- and double-member districts—since, as our earlier tables show, the qualitative conclusions we reach here can be readily extrapolated to other (for example, regionally based) systems. Table 7 summarizes our results when we apply the data from the 1995 Duma elections to our scenarios. Recall that, based on the 1995 election returns, reformist and centrist parties fare poorly under any plurality system relative to the seats they won under national party

TABLE 7. Sensitivity Analysis Using the 1995 Party List Duma Election Returns

| | Parties | Current system | 1-member districts | 2-member districts quota system |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Actual data | reform | 13.0% | 4.3 | 5.3 |
| | centrist | 20.8 | 8.7 | 13.0 |
| | communist | 43.0 | 73.9 | 49.3 |
| | nationalist | 23.2 | 13.0 | 29.0 |
| Scenario 1 | ref + cent | 33.8 | 18.8 | 27.0 |
| | com + nat | 66.2 | 81.8 | 73.0 |
| Scenario 2 | .9(ref + cent) | 30.4 | 35.2 | 30.2 |
| | communist + nationalist + .9reform | 44.9 | 60.9 | 49.5 |
| Scenario 3 | communist + nationalist + .9centrist | 24.6 | 3.9 | 20.3 |
| | communist + nationalist + .9centrist | 11.7 | 3.9 | 3.6 |
| Scenario 4 | ref + cent + .5nat | 18.7 | 7.2 | 10.6 |
| | comm + .5nat | 44.9 | 77.3 | 53.6 |
| Scenario 4 | ref + cent + .5nat | 24.6 | 11.6 | 32.1 |
| | comm + .5nat | 45.4 | 49.4 | 45.1 |
| | | 54.6 | 50.6 | 54.9 |

list PR, and this conclusion holds true under the various scenarios we consider. The only circumstances under which reformists and centrists fare even modestly better under plurality rule is when they combine into a single political force while nationalists and Communists remain separate (scenario 2), or after combining, nationalist support is distributed evenly between this coalition and communists (scenario 4)—and even in these cases, the gains of reformers plus centrists are at best modest. Indeed, in scenario 2, any gains reformers and centrists might enjoy come at the expense of nationalists, whereas the communists secure an outright majority of seats. Finally, recall from table 3 that reformers and nationalists do somewhat better at the expense of communists if Duma districts elect two deputies rather than one. Scenarios 2 and 3 sustain this pattern. In general, then, even if reformers and centrists can set aside their differences and coalesce into a single party, the gains they are likely to enjoy from the implementation of a plurality electoral system are either modest or negative. That is, based on the 1995 election returns at least, our earlier conclusion that centrists and reformers should prefer the status quo remains unchanged.

Turning now to the 1996 presidential returns, we consider four slightly different scenarios in which the number of voting blocks is reduced to three or two:

- Scenario 1: Yeltsin's and Yavlinsky's votes combine into a single centrist-reform bloc, and the nationalist votes of Lebed and Zhirinovskiy combine.
- Scenario 2: Yeltsin's and Yavlinsky's voters combine with one-half of Lebed's; Zyuganov's and Zhirinovskiy's voters combine with Lebed's remaining voters.
- Scenario 3: Yeltsin's and Yavlinsky's voters combine with half of Lebed's, but 10 percent of the total goes to a coalition of Zyuganov's, Zhirinovskiy's, and half of Lebed's.
- Scenario 4: Yeltsin's and Yavlinsky's voters combine, but 10 percent of that vote is shared equally by Zyuganov and a coalition of Zhirinovskiy's and Lebed's voters.

Looking now at table 8, which considers only the votes won by the five primary presidential contenders, notice that in all four scenarios, reformers and centrists do at least as well and sometimes better under plurality rule than with the current party list arrangement. Although the difference between party list and plurality is attenuated in two of the scenarios (2 and 3), the reversal of preferences that we observed when contrasting 1995 and 1996 continues to hold.

Conclusions

Our analysis is, of course, preliminary. Any firm conclusions about the likely consequences of a change in the formula for representation in the State Duma should consider other scenarios. Such conclusions, moreover, should also consider other ways of manipulating the consequences of any particular electoral formula—gerrymandering in the case of a plurality-based system and alternative definitions of regions in any regionally based system of party list PR. As we noted earlier, there continues to be some sentiment for redefining Russia's federal subjects to reduce

TABLE 8. Sensitivity Analysis for Four Scenarios Using the 1996 Presidential Returns

| | Parties | Current system | 1-member districts | 2-member districts quota system |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Actual returns | Yeltsin | 37.3% | 53.3% | 56.0% |
| | Yavlinsky | 8.0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Zhirinovskiy | 15.1 | 0.4 | 4.0 |
| | Zyuganov | 33.3 | 46.2 | 40.0 |
| | Yeltsin + Yav | 45.3 | 62.0 | 58.7 |
| Scenario 1 | Leb + Zhir | 21.3 | 1.3 | 8.9 |
| | Zyuganov | 33.3 | 36.0 | 32.4 |
| | Yel + Yav + .5Leb | 52.8 | 54.7 | 56.9 |
| Scenario 2 | Zyug + Zhir + .5Leb | 47.2 | 45.3 | 43.1 |
| | .9(Yel + Yav + .5Leb) | 47.5 | 47.1 | 48.7 |
| Scenario 3 | Zyug + Zhir + .5Leb + .9(Yel + Yav) | 52.5 | 52.9 | 51.3 |
| | | 40.8 | 53.3 | 50.9 |
| Scenario 4 | Lebed + Zhir + Zyuganov + | 23.6 | 3.6 | 14.0 |
| | | 35.6 | 43.1 | 35.1 |

the number from eighty-nine to, say, fifteen, and any such redefinition opens the door to a plethora of possibilities and manipulations. Nor should we ignore the possibility that the Russian electorate will find new combinations of support for Right versus Left as new candidates and parties appear on the scene. Nevertheless, our analysis does serve to emphasize one fact—despite the relative stability of the Russian electorate between 1991 and 1996, the changes that did occur in voting patterns between 1995 and 1996 (most notably, Yeltsin's relative success at consolidating much of the centrist and pro-reform vote that eluded OHR and other pro-government parties), in combination with a significantly reduced number of alternatives, have profound consequences for the allocation of seats in the State Duma and the preferences in electoral arrangements of the primary ideological competitors in Russia's electoral politics. Indeed, one's preference in electoral arrangements—if one is an advocate of reform as that position is commonly identified, or if one is a supporter of the Communist Party and its fellow travelers—depends critically on whether the 1995 or 1996 election returns are taken as representative of future voting patterns.

Any move to eliminate PR at the national level and replace that system with either single- or double-member districts, as well as any attempt to redefine Russia's federal subjects and implement an electoral scheme based on that redefinition, opens the door to a new manipulative possibility—gerrymandering. We cannot say whether the advantage that plurality systems might have conferred on Yeltsin's opponents in 1995 or on Yeltsin's supporters in 1996 can be negated by the appropriate redefinition of districts or subjects. Gerrymandering is a powerful tool of electoral manipulation, and given the reversal of preferences that

appears to have resulted from the changing patterns of voter choice between 1995 and 1996, we suspect that this is no less true in Russia than anywhere else. Thus, those who might choose to interpret our results as absolute guidelines of preference need to explore, as a second stage of inquiry, the extent of the manipulations that gerrymandering might allow.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Herbert Kitschelt and Regina Smyth, "Issues, Identities and Programmatic Parties: The Emerging Party System in Comparative Perspective," paper presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC; Michael McFaul, "Uncertainty, Institutional Design and Path Dependency during Transitions: Cases from Russia," *Constitutional Political Economy*, forthcoming; Thomas F. Remington and Steven S. Smith, "Political Goals, Institutional Context, and the Choice of an Electoral System: The Russian Parliamentary Election Law," *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1996): 1253–79.

2. A third alternative is majority rule with a run-off. Assessing this alternative, however, requires knowledge of the second, and perhaps even the third, fourth, etc., choices of voters. Although we can imagine methods for estimating these choices, they are based on a great many tenuous and sometimes arbitrary assumptions, which, when combined with the tenuous nature of extrapolating election returns to alternative electoral systems that we describe later, yields an assessment that is far less reliable than the ones we offer here of plurality and PR systems.

3. See Peter C. Ordeshook and Olga V. Shvetsova, "If Hamilton and Madison Were Merely Lucky, What Hope Is There for Russian Federalism?" *Constitutional Political Economy* 6 (1995): 107–26.

4. See E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967).

5. See Peter C. Ordeshook, "Russia's Party System: Is Russian Federalism Viable?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 12 (1996): 195–217.

6. See Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1954); Rein Taagepera and Matthew Shugart, *Seats and Votes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

7. Throughout this article we refer to all oblasts, autonomous regions, and so forth simply as "oblasts."

8. Many of the successful candidates in the 1995 single-mandate contests campaigned as independents and without explicit party affiliations listed on the ballot. Subsequently, though, most of them joined factions within the Duma explicitly aligned with one major party or the other. In this way, then, we can infer party attachments.

9. As a point of comparison, we note that if we use the 1993 parliamentary election data, we can correctly predict only 67 percent of the "left" winners, and 61 percent of the "others" (a score of 50 percent, of course, means that nothing can be predicted at all). However, these numbers are generated from only 81 of 225 districts owing to missing data and redistricting.

10. See Mikhail Myagkov, Peter C. Ordeshook, and Alexander Sobyanin, "The Russian Electorate, 1991–1996," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 13 (1997): 134–66.

11. Notice also that we do not consider the important issue of gerrymandering—manipulating a district system by the strategic drawing of district boundaries. We suspect, in fact, that if pure PR as currently practiced is replaced by some other scheme, including PR at the regional level, the drawing of district or regional boundaries will become an important issue and the focus of much controversy and debate. Nevertheless, we suspect that such issues will arise only after the more qualitative choice of electoral system is made.

12. The 1993 parliamentary election seems too far removed, given the pace of political events, while at the same time no official rayon-level data exists for this election. Notice, in addition, that we allocate only 207 seats under PR and consider only 88 federal subjects because our 1995 data set excludes Moscow. This omission derives from the unavailability of data at the rayon (precinct) level that would allow an assessment of alternative election systems based on a different configuration of election districts.

13. Although Shakrai's party hardly qualifies as a "major" contender, we include it here as a point of contrast and as a means of ascertaining whether any of the wholly unsuccessful "reform" parties might have benefited from a change in the electoral law.

14. To clarify the difference in preferences between Communists and the LDPR for the precise form of two-member districts each would prefer, suppose the LDPR ranks second in a district, let X = the LDPR's share of the vote, and let Y = the vote share of the leading party in a district. Then even if $Y/2 > X$ (in which case the leading party elect two deputies if it could target its vote precisely, as we assume in the calculations under column D), it need not be the case that $Y - 33.3 \text{ percent} > X$, in which case the LDPR would be awarded the second seat under column C.

15. See Duverger, *Political Parties*.

16. See Myagkov, Ordeshook, and Sobyenin, "The Russian Electorate, 1991–1996."

17. "Proposal for Russia's Redivision," *Izvestiya*, 2 September 1998.

18. For the precise definition of these regions see "Russia's Regions after the 1996 Presidential Election," 1997, Office of the Presidential Administration, Moscow (in Russian).

19. We note, moreover, that in thirty-one of the thirty-three election districts in which Zyuganov won an overwhelming victory, Yeltsin was the district's second choice in all but two cases, whereas Zyuganov is second to Yeltsin in Yeltsin's strongest districts only 70 percent of the time, with Lebed accounting for all but three of the remainder—thereby suggesting that Lebed's voters, if forced to choose, would choose Yeltsin more often than Zyuganov, which is, of course, a supposition borne out by the second ballot returns.