

The Russian State Duma, On-Stage and Off: Inquiry, Impeachment, and Opposition

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Legislatures in mixed regimes the world over are often less popular than presidents, dismissed as “talking shops” while executive power lays claim to active and decisive leadership.¹ This tendency is clear in Russia’s relatively new political institutions, with the State Duma rated in December 1999 as the least trusted organ of government.² Both reflecting and helping to consolidate this attitude, the harsh national media routinely belittle the Duma: Deputies are said to “scurry like cockroaches” as they register electronic votes for themselves and their absent colleagues during the allotted fifteen-second period, the television news describes deputies as “babbling” while reporters discuss crises as yet unaddressed, and during election periods television talk shows run polls to ask viewers whether the country needs a national legislature at all. Not surprisingly, those who choose to telephone in this most unrepresentative of surveys defeat scattered support and record thousands of antiparliament “votes.”

Duma-bashing is something of a national sport in Russia, but it was also a useful resource for executive power as exercised by President Yeltsin. Although some commentators predicted a dramatic lessening of tension between Yeltsin’s successor and the Duma after the relatively pro-government parliamentary elections of December 1999,³ the very majority that they had anticipated led to a dramatic walk-out of minority parties in early 2000 when the two largest legislative blocs, the Communists and Unity, found common ground in dividing committee chairperson positions. What was the nature of opposition under Yeltsin, and what will it be like under President Putin?

The very fact that the sixth Russian Duma⁴ can be defined in terms of its struggles against presidential domination would appear to support Max Weber’s contention that the key to building a good parliament is to give it real power, particularly in selection and accountability of rulers.⁵ For Weber, parliament’s first task is the supervision of policymakers, understood as continual scrutiny of and

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reporting on the executive in a mature manner, rather than engaging in “votes of no-confidence, indictments of ministers and similar spectacles of French-Italian *unorganised* parliamentarism.”⁶ Of particular concern are disempowered parliaments that have been pushed from constructive action into an exclusively negative politics, confronting the executive as a hostile power: “as such, [parliament] will be given only the indispensable minimum of information and will be considered a mere drag-chain.”⁷

Many contemporary parliaments, low on dignity and high on confrontation, confirm Weber’s fears. These dynamics are especially notable in newly democratizing states where executives were able to dominate postauthoritarian institution building and the distribution of power. No single explanation accounts for the current organizational structure of the Russian State Duma and its destructive internal political wrangling,⁸ but at least one structural imperative has remained a constant for parliamentary power in Russia. Like its predecessors, the Duma spends tremendous time and energy seeking concessions from the executive. This pattern of behavior is due in part to a greater imbalance in Russia between executive and legislative power than in most other postauthoritarian regimes.⁹

The “Yeltsin” constitution of 1993 left out many opportunities for the chambers of parliament to monitor executive power, leaving the president relatively unsupervised. The Russian State Duma on the face of it should present little challenge to executive power because it is relatively vulnerable to circumvention by executive decree¹⁰ and its members are likely to experience low reelection rates.¹¹ These factors would appear to militate against effective bargaining with the executive, given that incumbents are likely to hold leadership positions and to be relatively outspoken.¹² It may therefore seem surprising that former Russian resident Boris Yeltsin often ranted about parliament and its members, claiming that they caused considerable mental distress and impeded government.¹³ After his dissolution of the Supreme Soviet in 1993, Yeltsin and his circle frequently complained about pressure from the State Duma and responded to it, although sometimes in only a temporary detour from presidential goals.¹⁴ Yeltsin was highly sensitive to legislative outcry and demonstrably wielded his power of the purse to turn down the volume,¹⁵ in addition to making sometimes significant concessions.¹⁶ His personal representative to parliament, Alexander Kotenkov, was a seasoned military man who joked that he felt less fear in the army than when confronting the Duma.¹⁷

In seeking to explain why a dominant executive felt harassed by a weak parliament, I will evaluate two of the roles in the Russian parliamentary repertoire that demonstrated its private and public faces as it sought advantage vis-à-vis executive power in the 1990s. The relatively private and professional path of deputy inquiry is contrasted with the more-visible and less-constructive tactic of impeachment. Whether the new Duma is likely to be more or less openly cooperative with executive power, the sometimes staged quality of opposition between Duma and president after 1993 was widely recognized as masking what could be described as surreptitious cooperation. This sense of pseudo-opposition was much discussed by Russian media and exacerbated the already jaundiced political climate of the 1990s.¹⁸

Yet even a parliament portrayed as greedy and prone to squabbling has the power to ask questions, charge crimes, and otherwise appear to obstruct the president's agenda. In addition to negotiating with the executive over legislation, the Duma sought numerous opportunities to challenge the executive through its powers of inquiry and no-confidence, the latter escalating to impeachment hearings in 1999.

Deputy Inquiry

Deputy inquiry (*deputatskii zapros*) is recognized as a potentially important legislative instrument in monitoring executive action, but at present is a very weak one.¹⁹ The inquiry represents a form left over from the Soviet era that had heightened adversarial power in the transition phase under Gorbachev. When political institutions still functioned with some responsibility, a trickle of information was forthcoming, but there was a strong sense of futility about the process. The dilemma of unanswerable deputy inquiries was reflected in a perestroika-era satirical poem beginning, "Where has all the soap gone? Who was it bothering, anyway?"²⁰

Formally under Soviet power the right of inquiry derived from "the position of the soviets, to which all state organs are under control and accountable."²¹ More realistically, Soviet-era deputies derived their authority from the status of the Soviet as an organization anointed by Communist Party nomenklatura practices—candidate lists were prepared under party supervision—and played on the suggestion of popular support. Deputies and the executive officials to whom inquiries were addressed were, presumably, on the same side. An inquiry prior to the fall of Soviet power was most likely to represent a prosaic service to a member of the public (and not necessarily a constituent), for example, someone who required roof repairs or a larger apartment and had been denied through more obvious channels of recourse.²²

During the brief burst of legislative empowerment under Gorbachev, deputies used their power of inquiry in a newly antagonistic role vis-à-vis executive power but bemoaned a lack of executive responsiveness.²³ Those who drafted the Shatalin "500 Days" plan for economic reform complained bitterly about ministerial recalcitrance in providing the necessary information.²⁴ Throughout the Gorbachev era the only department singled out for praise for responsiveness to deputies' inquiries was the military, probably in part because of Minister of Defense Dmitry Yazov, who mistakenly believed that this would protect him during his own confirmation hearing.²⁵

Given the limited investigative resources at their disposal, however, Duma deputies increasingly turned to their historically rooted right of inquiry as a means of tackling executive power. The years since the founding of the contemporary parliament have seen a steady growth in the number of deputy inquiries submitted each year. Through May 1999, inquiries were addressed to a total of 58 executive organs: about one-third to the Presidential Administration, one-fifth to the General Procuracy, and 3 percent each to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Finance. Some inquiries, especially those from Communist deputies, continued to seek relief for members of the public who

requested help with a range of problems from health care to job loss. Others, often those submitted by committee chairpersons, requested information clearly intended to reveal executive abuse of authority on fiscal matters.

The increase in the number of inquiries sent by deputies during the 1990s was dramatic. While only 37 inquiries on any subject were processed in 1994, in 1995 the number was 172 and in 1996, 597. The total for 1997 was 1,992, and for 1998, 3,025.²⁶ Although the sheer increase in number between 1994 and 1998 was impressive, these totals for a body of 450 legislators are extremely low. For purposes of comparison, the office of a single national congressperson in the United States at any given time is likely to handle thousands of constituent cases and many thousands of requests for information to parts of the executive branch.²⁷ Although the American legislature is uniquely oriented to service and the acquisition of information, even the notoriously understaffed and underfunded British parliament features an ongoing and relatively public exchange of information between government and opposition.²⁸

A majority of deputy inquiries in the Fifth and Sixth Dumas seeking service for individual citizens were submitted by members of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), reflecting the CPRF's dominance as the largest group and perhaps also a greater likelihood for CPRF deputies to continue the Soviet-era tradition of responding to individual requests by letter.²⁹ The inquiries provide a portrait of contemporary Russia's everyday problems: decisions made by courts are not being enforced, privatization of a given factory being challenged, veterans being denied the free transportation to which they are entitled. Most harrowing was an inquiry submitted in 1999 by military hero and deputy Yevgeny Zelenov (Russian Regions Deputy Group) requesting funding so that the approximately 1,000 corpses held frozen in an institute in the Caucasus since the 1994–96 Chechen War could receive proper identification and be turned over to grieving relatives.³⁰

But this litany of Russia's troubles does not include an analogue of cures, given that deputies complain about the empty and unhelpful responses they receive or, less frequently, the lack of an answer within the requisite ten days.³¹ The evidence of serial inquiries containing previous, unsatisfactory responses as part of the package also suggests that the practice of deputy inquiry will remain fairly toothless until deputies themselves wield more influence. Some seeking an interim fix for the Duma—short of constitutional revision and the redistribution of power—believe that for now members of the lower house of parliament can gain prestige only if they are famous persons whose personal authority overcomes the stigma of the institution. Even those who work on handling deputies' inquiries quote the informal norm that the more notable the deputy, the less likely he is to need to use an inquiry at all: "He just picks up the telephone and gets it done."³² Duma elections in December 1999 indeed brought an increased number of famous persons to the deputy ranks, with the new members including oligarchs and former prime ministers. Whether they will contribute more time and energy to their roles as deputies than some of their famous predecessors remains to be seen.

The perception of deputy inquiry as inferior to the tradition of *blat* or using

personal networks,³³ however, is a carry-over from the time when an inquiry was simple enough to be achieved over the telephone. The more sophisticated inquiries from the 1990s were often written by committee chairpersons and sought precise and detailed information, usually financial in nature. An indication that the deputies' right to information is coming to be recognized as an institutional resource rather than an optional personal favor came with a significant change of procedure in July 1999. A relatively few deputies' inquiries now are processed through the Duma's formal institutional mechanism, but require approval by a majority vote. Eighteen inquiries cleared this threshold between July and December 1999, and over a thousand were estimated to have gone out from deputy offices in the same period.³⁴

Impeachment and Votes of No-Confidence

For a restive legislature continually seeking an edge vis-à-vis executive power, another favored device in Russia has proved to be the threat of a vote of no-confidence or impeachment. As with the 1991-93 Supreme Soviet, both the Fifth and Sixth State Dumas exercised the threat of a vote of no-confidence against the government; in 1993, 1995, and 1999 all three bodies discussed impeachment.

In May 1999, the agitation finally came to a head in an impeachment attempt led by the Communist Party against President Yeltsin. After ten months of preparation and much media hoopla,³⁵ the attempt to impeach the president limped through an anti-climactic three days and resulted in the defeat of all five articles of impeachment. Most witnesses called to testify before the Duma as part of the proceedings stayed away,³⁶ including former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, who had vowed to attend. Even the anti-Yeltsin demonstrators across the street from the Duma were dismayed by the turn-out of several hundred rather than the thousands anticipated.³⁷ (By the third day of demonstrations, incidentally, a small "pro-presidential" faction had turned up as well, armed with professionally printed signs and lapel buttons.) This historic face-off between parliament and president featured a melt-down of Duma defiance that flew in the face of predictions and, so it seemed, opportunity.

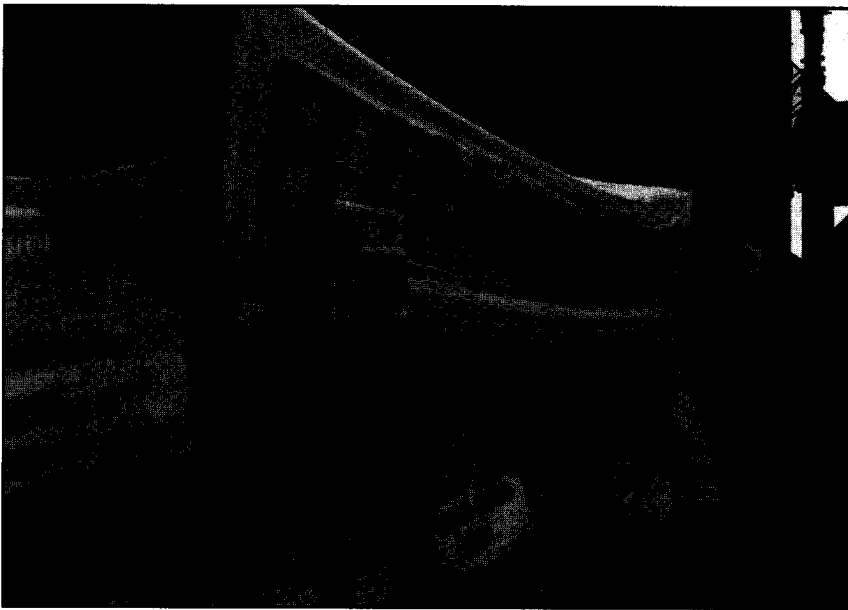
The charges against Yeltsin had been compiled after months of committee hearings. They were, first, that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was illegal and fomented by Yeltsin; second, that the forcible dissolution of the Supreme Soviet in 1993 was illegal; third, that the conduct of the war in Chechnya was a crime; fourth, that Yeltsin was responsible for the destruction of the military; and fifth, that Yeltsin was responsible for "genocide" against the Russian people. The charge thought most likely to pass was the third, regarding the war in Chechnya; many of the protestors outside the Duma carried pictures of corpses or legless servicemen and spoke of the murder of Russian soldiers and civilians.

Political blocs went through several stages of decisionmaking about their impeachment votes. Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the relatively liberal Yabloko alliance, initially indicated that his group would vote for impeaching the president. He later equivocated and finally announced that deputies were free to "vote their conscience" on each count.³⁸ Gennady Zyuganov had similarly pledged uniform

Monetary incentive was not the only reason for lack of support for the Communists during the impeachment process. Some members of Our Home Is Russia (NDR) and Yabloko said that they failed to deliver key votes on the third article because of the hypocrisy of the Communists holding Yeltsin to account, particularly for the first Chechen War (which a majority of the Duma supported through budgetary appropriations).

Who is judging whom? Those who judge Yeltsin for the Chechen War are guilty in the same degree, in that they did not block it. My fraction [Yabloko] introduced a resolution to take decisive measures to stop the war short. The Duma did not listen.⁴⁰

Certainly little support was expressed for the president by those who did not support impeachment. Vladimir Ryzhkov (NDR) gave a powerful speech insist-



Protesters holding signs saying, “He’s guilty!” and “The tragedy of Yugoslavia is a result of Yeltsin’s faulty foreign policy.” Photo by author.

ing that Yeltsin deserved to be impeached, but not for the crimes enumerated by the Communists. Yeltsin was guilty, in Ryzhkov’s view, of three more important failings:

In 1991, when [Yeltsin] had 97% of the population’s support, he did not use that historical chance to construct a democratically worthy government with genuine accountability in parliament. . . . In December 1993, when Yeltsin had before him a clean sheet upon which to write any Constitution, he wrote the world’s most misshapen one. . . . And in June 1996, when he came into the [presidential] elections proposing no program whatsoever to move the country forward.⁴¹

Another factor that was not fully represented in the media was the effect of Yeltsin’s dismissal of Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov on the eve of impeach-

ment proceedings. In addition to genuine fury over Yeltsin's irresponsible behavior, which was widely reported, there was great fear that this move had so destabilized the government as to put Russia in danger. "What if Yeltsin dies tomorrow? Who would succeed him?" was a rhetorical question posed by more than one deputy. Yeltsin's firing of Primakov demonstrated that he would not be bound by reason in triumphing over the Duma. The general consensus seemed to be that Yeltsin was a madman to have taken such a risky move, but in doing so he had gained the upper hand once again by pushing the political game to the brink: if the Duma did not blink, their victory in pressing impeachment could be very short-lived. And, in any event, the impeachment proceedings would be futile in removing Yeltsin from power, given the labyrinthine constitutional process and the single year remaining in Yeltsin's tenure as president.⁴² The real "big stick" militating against impeachment was the omni-present fear that, legal or not, Yeltsin would dissolve the Duma.⁴³

While some political observers expect that the Duma's consideration of impeachment for the president in May 1999 will have longer-term significance,⁴⁴ most deputies and the media portrayed the event as an embarrassing defeat for the Communists. The third clause, on the Chechen War, fell short by seventeen votes. To drive the futility of the matter home, Ryzhkov estimated that the cost of the proceedings was 4.5 million rubles (\$180,000) to hold the three days of parliamentary hearings, plus the salaries of the Commission for the Preparation of Impeachment (fifteen deputies working for ten months), and "incalculable" television expenses.⁴⁵

Respect, Institutional Standing, and Deputies' Salaries

This account of the Duma exercising two of its more neglected monitoring functions—*inquiry and impeachment*—gives little reason to imagine that Weber's criterion for effective parliaments is being met in Russia. Rather than being granted enough power so that deputies learn to cooperate in a publicly visible manner, they have considerable incentive instead to impede governance only until they can squeeze out personal concessions. "Opposition" from the Sixth Duma nevertheless meant that the great majority of legislation passed had been introduced by the Yeltsin administration, and when the chips were down the Duma tended to back off. Yeltsin made only two formal appearances before the Duma during his presidency; Vladimir Putin made repeated appearances before the Duma, both as prime minister in 1999 and as acting president in 2000, perhaps to show the Duma respect in an effort to ease gridlock between parliamentary and executive power.

But we have seen that the "weapons" chronicled here had at best intermittent effectiveness. The Russian president may continue to be keenly aware of and annoyed by parliamentary interference, but Yeltsin's rare willingness to share crucial information and to take action in response to parliamentary initiative involved complex matters of saving face in a still immature political system. In addition to *inquiry and impeachment*, the Duma time and again returns to the issues of *appointment, approval, and removal of government ministers*, including those beyond its official purview,⁴⁶ partly because its severely limited powers in this

realm allow it to highlight executive inadequacy. Indeed, one of the few areas where the Russian press focuses on the unseemly discrepancy between presidential and parliamentary power concerns the formation of the president's cabinet.⁴⁷

The persistence of legislative pressure on presidential sore spots despite considerable efforts by the executive branch to discourage such interference is a classic case of hyperconcentrated attention for a parliament given insufficient powers elsewhere. When responsible government is understood to include practices that serve to make ministers accountable to legislative rather than to executive authority, the assertion of parliamentary power is a key to balance in government; under the Yeltsin administration it was instead a wildly pitching playing field, subject to brutal tactics and surprises. President Putin is likely to seek more stability in his relations with the Duma, ironically by consolidating presidential strength and making the system of rewards and penalties for the Duma *ex ante* rather than *ex post facto*.

Until and unless the Russian president is able to effect such changes, the chief weapon of the Duma remains outside of its official repertoire, namely the general standing of political institutions in post-Soviet Russia. The Duma is able to expose executive vulnerability in a winner-take-all political system. Any appearance of insulting Yeltsin's authority came at potential cost to the president in a system still dominated by personalistic ties. Russia in the 1990s represented an uncertain polity with a vulnerable political system and a chronic shortage of governmental legitimacy. One of the great challenges for democratic institutions in Russia, sharply focused in the case of executive-legislative relations, is playing by the rules of the game because they are deemed legitimate rather than out of fear that governance will further weaken. In the latter circumstance, compliance is likely to be contingent and intermittent. This is one of the circumstances that kept the president and the Duma at loggerheads in the 1990s.

Deputies take comfort where they can, and the Yeltsin administration was quick to publicize the image of an all-consuming Duma. After the Duma had twice rejected Sergey Kirienko as prime minister, for example, Yeltsin said on public television that unless the deputies confirmed his appointment the Kremlin's property manager would be unable to process their requests. The deputies complied. One telling account detailed the official salary of a Duma deputy, 72,000 rubles a year (approximately \$3,000), with perquisites so significant that the real *monthly* income for deputies is closer to \$9,500, or \$114,000 per year. The additional items budgeted per month were food, staff (with no restrictions on "hiring" relatives), maintenance of base in region (124,000 rubles), transportation in Moscow (including a personal car, 44,500 rubles), and living expenses in Moscow (23,000 rubles), all without taxation.⁴⁸

The complaint from deputies was that in fact they were paid significantly less than government ministers, a salary comparison found unfair by some observers who believe that the discrepancy in terms of productivity is profound.⁴⁹ After repeatedly vetoing Duma attempts to increase their salaries (aided by the Council of the Federation, which wanted to be included), Yeltsin finally acquiesced in June 1999 in eliminating the pay differentials for both houses of parliament. This

move was widely interpreted as an exchange for less Duma pressure on charges of presidential corruption and greater political stability.⁵⁰ It also granted Yeltsin yet another opportunity to discredit the Duma as an opportunistic institution on the eve of elections. The monthly salary for Duma deputies increased by 40 percent, with other perquisites added (such as vacation pay and a promise of severance pay if Yeltsin dissolved the Duma). Duma deputies demonstrated their priorities of stability and financial enrichment over the relatively hopeless mission of placating constituents.

In September 1999, deputies rejected a measure that would have addressed another, arguably more important imbalance: a federal law was proposed by the Communists that sought a more consequential redistribution of power. In a series of three options, the Duma would have the right of review and dismissal of the Cabinet, or the right of review and dismissal for some of the Cabinet, or at least add the right of dismissal for the prime minister. Non-Communist deputies were cautious about adding to parliamentary power in case it gave further influence to their opponents. The one measure adopted from the packet of proposals was a resolution that witnesses called before the Duma or a commission should be compelled to appear, or at least to answer the request, surely a legacy of the embarrassing no-shows during the impeachment proceedings.

In short, the Duma's great handicaps are its minimal power to engage in constructive legislative activity, a resulting focus on executive power, and further frustration in its only occasional ability to penetrate presidential armor under the current constitutional regime. The challenge for President Putin will be to keep the Duma cooperative even as its members perceive insult in presidential personnel change and policies. Though it is well recognized in Russia that the constitution is not the only influence on the Duma's power vis-à-vis the president, Putin made it clear that he seeks constitutional change for a seven-year presidential term but not for an increase in formal parliamentary power at executive expense. It will be difficult to characterize the present situation of parliamentary oversight as democratic until the Duma acquires more formal supervisory powers and the president has genuinely to account to parliament, instead of merely paying it off in one way or another.

NOTES

1. This factor, often overlooked by scholars, goes some way toward explaining why practitioners continue to select semi-presidential systems despite a pronounced academic preference for parliamentarism. For an unusually balanced discussion of the choices in regime-building, see Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

2. V. Golovachev, "Diagnoz," *Ekonomika i zhizn'* 50 (1999): 1. The survey was conducted by the Public Opinion Fund during the campaign period for Duma elections in December 1999 and found that 55 percent of respondents distrust the State Duma while only 14 percent expressed trust. As a rule, executive authority was more trusted than legislative authority and local government more than national government.

3. See, for example, Alexander Sadchikov, "Alliances, Russian-Style," *Perspective* 10, no. 3 (January–February 2000), viewed at <http://www/bu/edu/iscip/>.

4. Unlike most other organs of government in the Russian Federation, the lower house of parliament was given a prerevolutionary name. "Duma" evokes a not very successful legislative history, the first three Dumas having been elected and then summarily dissolved by Tsar Nicholas II earlier this century. The Fourth Duma yielded the kernel of the short-lived Provisional Government, until the Bolsheviks seized power later that year. The first contemporary, or historically Fifth Duma was that elected in December 1993 in the wake of President Yeltsin's forcible dissolution of its Soviet-era predecessor; the Sixth Duma was that elected in December 1995 and served out its full term.

5. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Appendix 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 1408.

6. *Ibid.*, 1418–19 (italics in original).

7. *Ibid.*, 1408.

8. Thomas F. Remington and Steven S. Smith ("Theories of Legislative Institutions and the Organization of the Russian Duma," *American Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 [April 1998]: 545–72) find an unclear set of incentives for institutional choices within the Duma, as their application of three dominant theories reveal evidence for each. See also Joel Ostrow, "Procedural Breakdown and Deadlock in the Russian State Duma: The Problems of an Unlinked Dual-channel Institutional Design," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 5 (July 1998): 793–812.

9. Timothy Frye's comparison of constitutionally granted presidential resources in the former Soviet Union and central and eastern Europe show the Russian president to have significantly greater powers than any executive in the nominally democratic regimes. "A Politics of Institutional Choice: Post-Communist Presidencies," *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no. 5 (October 1997): 544–47.

10. Executive decree authority has often been used to bypass or even supersede legislative initiative, and in any case the Russian president aggressively uses his right to introduce legislation into the parliament. On executive rule-by-decree, see Scott Parrish, "Presidential Decree Authority in Russia, 1991–1995" in *Executive Decree Authority*, John M. Carey and Matthew Soberg Shugart, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 62–103.

11. Reelection from the Fifth to the Sixth Duma in 1995 would suggest some 35 percent repeat membership, and 36 percent from the Sixth to the Seventh in December 1999. Both of these relatively low re-election figures include all deputies who served in any preceding legislature, however. See *Gosudarstvennaia Duma Federal'nogo Sborniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii 2-ogo sozyva: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Ves' mir, 1996), 9; and *Kommer sant-Vlast'* 3 (2000).

12. See Laura Belin and Robert W. Orttung, et al., *Russian Parliamentary Elections of 1995: The Battle for the Duma* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 113.

13. Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia* (New York: Times Books, 1994), e.g., 154, 217–83.

14. Even the Duma's important power of prime ministerial review, exercised most successfully when Yeltsin was forced to drop his nomination of the discredited Viktor Chernomyrdin for prime minister and propose instead Yevgeny Primakov, did not deter the president from firing prime ministers at will (three of them in 1998–99).

15. Although executive control of parliamentary perquisites received increased attention toward the end of the 1990s, Eugene Huskey noted the assertion of the executive branch's "dacha politics" immediately after the 1995 Duma elections. "Democracy and Institutional Design in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 4, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 464.

16. For a discussion of Yeltsin's concessions on personnel matters, see my "If Checks Won't Balance: Parliamentary Review of Ministerial Appointments" in *Elites and Leadership in Russian Politics*, Graeme Gill, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1998), 7–23.

17. Interview with Alexander Kotenkov, "Dvoinik El'tsina v Gosdume," *Argumenty i fakty* 20 (1999): 6.

18. For accounts of public strife masking cooperation, see for example Nikolay Doro-

feyev, "Duma: fotografiya nam na pamyat'," *Trud*, 28 December 1999, 1, and Ivan Rodin, "Rossiiskaia politika ukhodit na kanikuly," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 24 June 1999, 1, 3.

19. Deputies Vladimir Lukin and Viktor Sheinis and Vilyam Smirnov, head of the Political Studies Sector of the Institute of State and Law; interviews with the author in Moscow, May–June 1999.

20. Igor Irtenev, "Deputatskii zapros," *Elka v Kremle* (Moscow: Ogonek, 1991), 26.

21. V. A. Kriazhkov, "Deputatskii zapros, vopros i prelozheniia," *Narodnyi deputat* 7 (1991): 100.

22. Interview with Valery Smirnov of the Group for the Organisation of Deputy Inquiries and Protocol Requests, Russian State Duma, May 1999.

23. One observer reported a ten-fold increase in the use of inquiries by some district soviets. V. Pylin, "Deputatskii zapros v zerkale zakonov," *Narodnyi deputat* 9 (1991): 38.

24. A testy appendix was included with the plan to name the specific ministries as well as Central Committee Departments that failed to provide "the required information . . . vital for the analysis of the current condition of the economy." The complete text of unanswered requests was also included. *Perekhod k rynku: kontseptsia i programma* (Moscow: Arkhangel'skoe, 1990).

25. As a deputy in the Supreme Soviet, Anatoly Sobchak noted that in contrast to all other organs the military and the Ministry of Defense responded to his inquiries promptly and with the information required (*Khozhdenie vo vlast'* [Moscow: Novosti, 1991], 154). Yazov's report to the Supreme Soviet on the performance of his duties consisted for the most part of a string of responses to deputy inquiries and was poorly received. See *Pervaia sessiia Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR, stenograficheskii otchet IV*, 30 June–4 July 1989, 71–80).

26. Numbers provided by the Protokol'nyi otdel of the Russian State Duma.

27. Indiana Congressman Tim Roemer's office, for example, in 1999 handled approximately 4,000 cases in response to constituent complaints (aide Michelle Boxell, South Bend, IN, October 1999).

28. Even a highly critical discussion of British parliamentary conventions for acquiring information reveals resources well beyond those of the current Russian parliament. See Jorgen S. Rasmussen, *The British Political Process: Concentrated Power vs. Accountability* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993), 107–20.

29. Interview with Yuri Lebedev, aide to then-Communist deputy Aleksei Podberezkin, State Duma, June 1999. Obligatory responses to letters were indeed a key feature of the Soviet system.

30. Deputy Inquiry no. 51920 (1999), viewed by the author at the Russian Parliamentary Library, Moscow.

31. Author interviews with seven deputies, Moscow, May and June 1999; author interview with Valery Smirnov, Protocol Section, Russian State Duma, May 1999. Smirnov said that his office had taken to following up inquiries to see to it that they were at least answered, however unsatisfactorily.

32. Valery Smirnov, interview with the author in Moscow, May 1999.

33. For a nuanced consideration of the culture of *blat*, see Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchanges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

34. Interview with Valery Smirnov, Russian State Duma, April 2000. More than 1,400 inquiries were submitted through the old method in 1999 (i.e., prior to July). The conduct of the Duma elections that year significantly affected deputy attendance at sessions and, presumably, lessened the time available to consider and submit inquiries.

35. Even the better Western sources of news on Russia fell hard for the intrigue of impeachment and especially misrepresented the effect of the firing of Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov on the proceedings. See, for example, *The Financial Times*, "Duma speaker predicts impeachment," 13 May 1999, 3 and, in the same issue, "Yeltsin's last gasp," 13.

36. Witnesses missing scheduled testimony marred the preparatory phases of the impeachment as well; some would call to say they could not attend, although usually at the last minute, and others simply never turned up. For example, on 21 December 1998, no one came to a hearing on the fifth clause of impeachment (scheduled to attend were former prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, former auditor of the Auditing Chamber Veniamin Sokolov, and chief of the Information-Analytical Agency of the Federal Council Sergei Glazuev). The commission's chair Vadim Filimonov noted that "U.S. colleagues have more rights and other conditions of work" that enabled them to carry out impeachment proceedings (ITAR-TASS, as reported by FBIS-SOV-98-355, 21 December 1998).

37. *Argumenty i fakty* called it "impichment po-malen'komu" [demi-impeachment]. *Argumenty i fakty* 20 (Moscow city special edition) (1999): 1.

38. Interview with deputy Viktor Sheinis, May 1999, Moscow.

39. See, for example, "V. Zhirinovskiy otstoial Kreml' i zamakhnulcia na Belgorod," *Argumenty i fakty* 20 (1999): 4. The television program "Press Klub" on the Sunday after the failed impeachment proceedings featured members of the press vociferously accusing the deputies present of having been "bought off" from pushing forward on impeachment and of living a life of privilege. The deputies present engaged in a spirited defense on the latter point and did not address the former. One exception to the generally held view of Zhirinovskiy's motive for co-operation was held, not surprisingly, by Yeltsin's representative to the Duma, who claimed that Zhirinovskiy's anti-communism was the source of his presidential support. Interview with Aleksandr Kotenkov, *Argumenty i fakty* 20 (1999): 4.

40. Deputy Viktor Sheinis, interview with the author in Moscow, 21 May 1999.

41. Speech of Vladimir Ryzhkov, *Biuletën' no. 261 (403)*, *Stenogramm zasedanii, Gosudarstvennaia Duma*, 15 May 1999, 18.

42. See Oleg Rumyantsev, "Impeachment Russian Style," *Perspective* 9, no. 1 (September–October 1998), web-site [http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vo19/Rumyanstev\(sic\).html](http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vo19/Rumyanstev(sic).html).

43. For the ready rationales in favor of dissolution, see Sergei Shakhrai, "Kak raspustit' Dumu," *Argumenty i fakty* 21 (1999): 2.

44. Interviews with Andrei Melvil' and Vilyam Smirnov, Moscow, June 1999.

45. "Bo chto oboshelsia impichment," *Argumenty i fakty* 21 (1999): 2.

46. For a detailed account of personnel policy under Yelstin, see Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1999); and Merritt, "If Checks Won't Balance," 15–19.

47. *Segodnia*, for example, noted the irony of parliament recessing for the summer just as the new government was being formed after the presidential elections. *Segodnia*, 26 July 1996, 1.

48. "Chei deputat dorozhe?" *Argumenty i fakty* 19 (1999): 7.

49. I. V. Grankin, *Parlament Rossii* (Moscow: Konsaltbankir, 1999), 164.

50. See for example the jaundiced account, "Prezident zaplatit deputatam za stabil'nost'," *Kommersant*, 24 June 1999, 2.