

The Early Phase of Political Party Formation in Post-Soviet Russia

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In the process of establishing a democratic order in post-Soviet Russia, a key feature has been the amorphous nature of the emerging multiparty system. Although the initial post-Soviet reforms did see the creation of a new set of representative governmental institutions, the development of an effective multiparty system operating within those institutions has taken a lot longer.

For the first two post-Soviet years most of the political activity focused on the struggle for power between the institutions themselves rather than between the fledgling parties in the Duma. This was a struggle between President and parliament and it culminated in the violent showdown at the parliament building in October 1993 and the subsequent elections for a new parliament and referendum on a new constitution in December of the same year.

Even now, some six years later, the development of an effective multiparty system is still in its early stages. In the words of one analyst, Russia has “moved from being a one party state to a non-party state.”¹

In this paper I intend to look at the early development of post-Soviet Russia's political party system from the appearance of quasi-political parties under Mikhail Gorbachev, through the post-coup break up of the Soviet Union, to the October crisis and December parliamentary elections and constitutional referendum of 1993. I will account for the fractional nature of the new parties and the tendency towards bloc politics, and identify the main factors that influenced and impeded the quick development of a strong multiparty system operating within the institutions of government.

1 Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, Routledge, London, 1993, p132.

In so far as political parties constitute one of the key agencies for meaningful public participation in political life, they are an important pre-condition for the creation of a durable, modern civil society.² Modern civil society as it is emerging in Russia encompasses a myriad of competing interest groups and I would contend that the emergence a multiparty political system in which strong parties start to compete against each other on the basis of distinct and reasonably consistent political platforms is one of the necessary conditions that will help to secure the resilience of the democratic nature of the reform process.

From Glasnost to the Emergence of Parties.

As Soviet society developed into a modern, complex, urban and industrial social organism by the 1960s, so there emerged a growing plurality of interests pressuring to be accommodated into the political process. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), hampered both by its own ideological baggage and by the increasingly self-serving nature of its bureaucratic oligarchy, failed to respond to these interests. This failure led, by the 1980s, to such a profound social malaise of public cynicism and apathy that the very fabric of the society and economy appeared to be under threat.

The CPSU's response was *glasnost*, openness, which effectively took the lid off repressed interests which then, very quickly, formed the basis for thousands of new social and political movements.³

These movements, confounding the predictions of many Western experts, greeted with enthusiasm President Gorbachev's challenge to take the initiative and responsibility for the regeneration of civil society. In the press they were described as "informal groups", and they marked a radical departure from the officially sanctioned social activity organisations. They eagerly criticised the state bureaucracy and government programs and, as they encountered bureaucratic inertia, they became increasingly politicised. Here, in these groups, which ranged from cultural preservation societies to ecological action

2 See Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1968, p89.

3 It has been estimated that by the end of 1988, some 60,000 discussion groups and clubs were in existence across the country.

groups, were the manifestations of pressure for change from the grass roots of the body politic.

By 1988, these informal groups, realising their common desires to combat the bureaucracy, began to coalesce into conglomerate organisations, which could act more effectively in promoting reform against the entrenched apparat.

In the non-Russian republics these coalitions took the form of popular fronts, which found common cause in their opposition to Moscow. The fronts initially promoted ideas of national sovereignty and emphasised the importance of preserving the local culture and language. Later, they began to push for independence. In the crumbling but still Communist Party dominated Soviet Union of the late 1980s, these nationalist fronts in the non-Russian republics acted as substitutes for real political parties and, for as long as they existed, they inhibited the development of a genuine multiparty system.

In Russia the national issue was a far more contentious rallying point than in the other republics. Democratic groups in Russia shied away from joining anti-Soviet, pro-Russian revival fronts since, historically, Russian nationalism was identified with chauvinism and imperialism. As a result, the Russian based fronts were weak and democracy took the place of nationality politics as the chief mobilising force. *Democratic Russia (DemRossi)*, which came closest to resembling a popular front, began in January 1990 as an umbrella organisation to contest the local and republican elections to be held in the spring. However, without the overriding unifying factor of the desire for independence, the ideological differences within the organisation meant that the alliance remained very fragile.

By the beginning of 1990, the existence of neo-political pressure groups in many of the republics meant that something resembling a multiparty system had emerged in the Soviet Union. In view of this, the CPSU agreed to abolish Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution, which had guaranteed the CPSU's monopoly on power.⁴ Then in October 1990, the new Soviet Law on Public Associations

4 At the February 1990 plenum, the CPSU central committee made it clear that it was prepared to accept the end of the party's monopoly on power. This was then enacted into law by the Congress of People's Deputies in March 1990.

legalised all of the already existing organisations and facilitated the creation of many new groups that then started to define themselves as political parties.

The Decline of the CPSU and the Emergence of Other Political Parties.

The CPSU itself was not immune from *glasnost*. For decades it had been the only effective channel for legitimate political expression and, as such, it was an essential element in the resume of all those who wished to play an active part in Soviet society. Consequently, its membership stretched across a broad spectrum of individuals and groups in society and, once the organisational principle of democratic centralism had been relaxed under *glasnost*, a diversity of interests, freed from ideological cant, began to manifest itself. In advance of the 28th Congress of the CPSU in the summer of 1990, three “platforms” emerged from within the party, each publishing a competing agenda for the future route it should take.⁵ Indeed, the party’s internal divisions were becoming so deep that some were beginning to describe the CPSU, itself, as a virtual multiparty system.

At the 28th Congress, Boris Yeltsin and other leading reformers resigned from the party. The previously internal rifts were now external and, with the communist parties in the other republics having already declared their independence, the shape of the CPSU and its program, blurred by ideological and organisational fragmentation, began to lose all focus. In the following year even President Gorbachev was to speak of “...two, three or four parties struggling within the CPSU framework.”⁶

While the CPSU struggled internally, the new Soviet Law on Public Associations encouraged the emergence of new political formations and by early 1991, Russia had over 100 self-declared political parties, most of them indistinguishable from the informal organisations they had succeeded. In the Soviet Union as a whole, the number of new political parties was closer to 500. This was evidence indeed for the CPSU that it had relinquished its monopoly

5 For details see Alexei Leonov, *A Fresh Start for Democracy*, Novosti, Moscow, 1990, p. 84.

6 *Moscow News*, May 12–19, 1991, p. 5.

hold on power.⁷ Of course, it still remained overwhelmingly the most powerful political institution in the nation and, in seeking to retain its pre-eminence, it began to look for potential allies amongst the new parties.

One distinctive feature of all of the groups that the CPSU's leadership invited for consultations regarding the possibility of coalition government was that, at grass roots level where the pressure for change was being generated, they were politically insignificant movements. Groups with significant grass roots support such as the *DemRossi* movement and the *Democratic Party of Russia*, were ignored by the central authorities and at the same time were often criticised on central television and in the Communist Party press, and were subjected to intimidation by the state security apparatus.

The CPSU's motives were clear. It hoped to patronise groups that, through their lack of popular support, posed no challenge to the CPSU's paramount position. By making overtures to allow for the possibility of coalition government with one or more of its benign "rivals", whilst simultaneously making life more difficult for the more popular groups, the central authorities were adopting tactics aimed at establishing what amounted to a fake multiparty system, a system that tolerated the emergence of political groups but blocked the creation of a viable union of opposition forces that might pose a threat to the CPSU's monopoly hold on power.⁸

From the Coup towards a Party System.

Following the attempted coup of August 1991, the CPSU was outlawed and, very quickly, the Soviet Union began to fall apart. As a result, the evolutionary process within Russia's neophyte "multiparty system" underwent fundamental changes.

In following de Tocqueville's maxim, "[in] politics, shared hatreds are almost

7 For statistical details on the decline of the CPSU as an organizational force, falling membership figures, financial difficulties and disillusionment amongst its rank and file, See Sakwa, *ibid* p. 132–134.

8 Vera Tolz, "Towards a Multiparty System?", in Uri Ra'anani, Keith Armes and Kate Martin, editors, *Russian Pluralism - Now Irreversible?*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1992, p. 19–20.

always the basis of friendships”⁹, once the object of hatred disappears, so the reasons for friendship go with it. Such was the case in Russia, where the motives for cooperation between organisations in opposition to the CPSU and the center, disappeared after the coup. Until then many disparate groups, although pursuing different goals, had shared an anti-Moscow perspective that enabled them to coalesce and cooperate on mutually advantageous issues. The break up of the Soviet Union and disbanding of the CPSU resulted in a concomitant devaluation of commonly held notions for many of these organisations, and this led to an intensive regrouping of political forces.

Issues such as state building, the pace of economic reform and the disintegration of the USSR rose to the forefront of the political agenda. But the new parties were weak and evolved and divided around these issues at a rapid rate, with no party emerging that looked capable of forming a government. Instead, coalitions and blocs formed to articulate common sets of principles and it was these blocs that established a modicum of stability in a very fractured political scene.

Broadly speaking, four blocs of parties could be identified after the 1991 attempted coup. The first bloc was the conservative bloc, which sought to turn back the clock and recreate a monolithic totalitarian type of party monopoly. The members of this bloc considered themselves the defenders of socialist principles, and they viewed Gorbachev and the new reformers as traitors to the socialist cause. Amongst their number they included Nina Andreeva’s Stalinist group the *All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks* (VKPB), and the *Russian Communist Workers Party* (RKRP), which in an earlier guise had supported General Al’bert Makashov in the June 1991, Russian presidential election. Given the economic decline that many blamed on the reform process, the message of these conservative forces found some resonance in society.

The second bloc could be described as a moderate formation but, actually, it was too heterogeneous to be accommodated for by a single taxonomic umbrella term. It was a grouping that ranged from social democrats to industrial corporatists to anarcho-syndicalists. Their common cause was the plight of the

9 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1835.

workers in the difficult period of transition from a command to a market economy. They did not oppose reform in itself and mostly favoured pluralist democracy, but it was the harsh nature of the reformers' policies that they criticised and, in doing so, appeared to reflect the mood of many Russians.

The third bloc, which after the coup seemed to have the ear of the Russian president, looked Westward for its inspiration. Into this camp collected the out and out reformers, accused by their opponents of "wild privatisation" and the seemingly oxymoronic transgression of "market Stalinism". They were broadly liberal in orientation and they favoured the market, parliamentary democracy, ideological pluralism and minimal state intervention in the affairs of society.

A fourth discernible bloc rallied around the ideas of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and could be described as neo-Slavophile, but also included monarchists. This bloc saw the source of a resurgent Russia in a return to traditional values, the reassertion of the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church and a rekindled sense of national identity.

A Multiplicity of Parties Without a Multiparty System.

Two years later the situation was even more confused and, with the state of the party system so unstable, any attempt at classifying the individual parties during this period is inevitably unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, I shall borrow Ronald Hill's classificatory table (table 1), which sets out an ordering of the major political groupings under their now five bloc headings as he perceived them prior to the October events of 1993.¹⁰ The table should merely be regarded as a freeze frame of the shifting kaleidoscope of political groups, parties and coalitions at the time, but it does at least provide a picture of the fractious state of things.

The proliferation of organisations calling themselves political parties was not the same thing as a multiparty system operating within the institutions of power. The weakness of parties and the shifting pattern of coalition politics meant that no efficient mechanism existed to channel popular feelings into

¹⁰ Ronald Hill, "Parties and the Party System", in Stephen White, Alex Pravda & Zvi Gitelman, *Developments in Russian & Post-Soviet Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1994, p. 102.

Table 1. The Russian political spectrum, 1993

'Oppositional' parties and movements		Pro- Yeltsin parties and movements		
'Patriots'	'Communists'	'Centrists'	'Democratic Movements'	'Democratic Parties'
National-Republican Party of Russia (less than 1000)	United Opposition (bloc)	Civic Union (bloc)	'Democratic Russia' (bloc: 200– 300,000 'supporters')	Social Democratic Party (5600)
Russian National <i>Sobor</i> (bloc)	All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks	People's Party 'Free Russia' (120,000)	Democratic Reform Movement (bloc)	Republican Party (7000)
Russian All-National Union (bloc)	Labour Russia (bloc: up to 100,000 'supporters')	All-Russian Union 'Renewal' (2000)		Free Democratic Party (2000)
National Salvation Front (bloc; 40,000 supporters)	Russian Party of Communists (10,000)	Democratic Party of Russia (40,000)		Constitutional Democratic Party (2000 supporters)
Liberal-Democratic Party (100,000, independent est. 1500)	Russian Communist Workers' Party (60,000)	Constitutional Democratic Party - Party of Popular Freedom (300)		Party of Economic Freedom (600)
	Union of Communists (10,000)	Agrarian Party		People's Patriotic Party (103,000)
	Socialist Workers' Party (50– 80,000)			Peasant Party (14,000)
	Party of Labour			People's (<i>Gdlyan</i>) Party (10,000)
	Communist Party of the Russian Federation (500,000)			Christian-Democratic Union (5000)
				Russian Christian Democratic Movement (7000)

Source: Based upon *Spravochnik* (1993). Membership estimates in brackets are generally self-declared; some minor blocs or parliamentary factions have been excluded; the Liberal-Democratic Party has been reclassified as 'patriotic'.

parliamentary politics. In a functional party system the parties would act to link the civil society and the state governing apparatus, but this wasn't happening. The internecine struggles between parties, within parties and between state institutions, also prevented the other functions of a party system from developing. For example, while every party produced manifestos in abundance, it was the government, standing, as it were, above politics, that formulated its own policies independent of any party. Political parties neither nominated the president nor formed the government and, consequently, the parliament and the parties in it were marginalized.

Marginalization, the failure of parties to integrate into the operations of the political system and their lack of influence in the policy making process, threatened the stability of the new democratic institutions. From December 1991 to October 1993, this threat took the shape of a power struggle between the entrenched parliamentary bodies (the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet) and the presidency, occupied by Boris Yeltsin. Disagreements over policy and clashes of personality escalated into an institutional battle over where power lay and where it ought to lie in the new Russian state framework. Until this issue was resolved, it was unclear what role political parties would play or what kind of party system would evolve.

Factors Influencing the Evolution of Parties and the Party System.

Underlying all of the other influential factors affecting the evolution of political parties and the party system was the legacy of the old regime, in which the CPSU had claimed absolute ideological authority and monopolised political power.

One important aspect of this legacy was the stunting of the normal development of horizontal links between separate groups in society, and this led to a highly fragmented kind of social organism. In post-communist Russia this fragmented pattern of social interests, groups and professions, all with only vertical links to a now crumbling center, remained disaggregated and no hegemonic bloc emerged to articulate the interests of, say, labour or soldiers or religious groups. In other words, the fractured nature of post-communist society in Russia meant that parties found it difficult to root themselves in a

broad social base that was both ideologically consistent and distinct from the social bases of rival parties. The implication of this in the early period of party formation was that most new parties offered unstable, vague and eclectic programs, appealing to no distinct or specific constituencies. Political parties hoisted their colours declaring such idealised concepts as “world civilisation”, “the market”, “economic freedom” and “democracy”, but little effort was made to get into understanding the details of conceptual meaning or the nitty-gritty of policy implementation that might lead to the realisation of these lofty declarations.¹¹

It could be argued that the similarities in the programs of many of this first post-communist generation of parties pointed towards a broad social consensus. However, the abstract nature of the concepts that the parties appealed to meant that the consensus was a fatuous one, favouring little more than health, wealth and a good and long life for all.

Meanwhile, Boris Yeltsin was leading a liberal, reform oriented government, but the reform process was not going smoothly. The attempted transformation of the lumbering Soviet economy was producing far more losers than winners and, as the crisis of the liberal reforms intensified, opposition to the reform process gathered. In this environment, the details of policies instead of abstract concepts had to be addressed. True political cleavages began to emerge over such issues as the nature of economic reform, the relative powers of the presidency and other state institutions, and the relations with the “near abroad” of newly independent former Soviet republics. These new cleavages began to undermine the simplistic consensus that had previously been prevailing.

Another aspect of the CPSU’s legacy was that it affected the nature of internal party organisation in the new parties. Fear of being compared to the communists and the rejection of Bolshevik-type sectarianism, meant that many parties eschewed rules for their membership. As a consequence, individuals who belonged to one organisation might also belong to other political groups or might even hold ideas diametrically opposed to the party’s platform. This could

11 One telling statistic comes from a survey in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 20, 1992, p. 1, which revealed that only 8% of those polled thought that any of the political parties reflected their views.

result in members of the same coalition, same party and same faction within a party holding opposing views on major political issues. Such internal confusion combined with the frequent reticence of members to take strong positions made it very difficult for any party to present a united and cohesive front.

To give an example of the ramifications of the lack of cohesiveness within party groupings, I will look at the *DemRossii* movement. As I've mentioned, it was formed in January 1990 as an umbrella organisation to fight the upcoming local and republican elections. Initially its leaders collaborated to achieve common goals, but it wasn't long before it was wracked internally by both political and personal divisions. In November 1991, the movement faced its first test of the post-coup era. At issue was the position to be taken by the movement in view of President Yeltsin's statement that Russia's borders with Kazakhstan should be redrawn to incorporate Russian communities in northern Kazakhstan. The points of contention were; whether or not Russia could legitimately make claims on territory beyond the Russian Federation, whether force should be used to defend the rights of Russian minorities in the newly independent republics, and whether such aims were consistent with the movement's founding principles. Disagreements opened up between the moderates and the more staunch nationalists and, consequently, three party groupings, the *Democratic Party of Russia* (DPR), the *Christian Democratic Movement* (RCDM), and the *Constitutional Democrats* (CDP), withdrew from the movement and formed their own alliance, which they called the *People's Accord* bloc. This action then led to internal breaches within each "rebel" organisation, as some local chapters, angered by the unilateral decisions of their leaders, chose to continue supporting *DemRossii* in defiance of their national organisations. Even more confusingly, some local chapters were happy to support both *DemRossii* and the *People's Accord* bloc. Such fissile activity did not stop there, as the *People's Accord* alliance quickly split, with the DPR becoming a founding member of another coalition, the *Civic Union*, and the CDP establishing the *Russian Rebirth* bloc.¹²

12 For more details on this, see Eric Rudenshiold and N. Catherine Barnes, "Political Party Development in Russia: Integration and Disintegration", in Douglas W. Blum, editor, *Russia's Future - Consolidation or Disintegration?*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1994.

Contributing to this fractious state of affairs was the dominance of personality politics, where a party was often little more than a vehicle to project the personality of its leader. This was in keeping with the Russian tradition of *krugovschina* - the tendency of political movements to fracture around dominant personalities. The DPR, led by Nikolai Travkin, was a case in point, but there were many others including Vladimir Zhirinovskii's *Liberal Democratic Party* and the *Yabloko*, supporting Grigorii Yavlinskii. In general, it's clear that the lack of emphasis on party platforms, rules and broader political goals often led to parties being geared more towards the short term interests of leaders than towards long-term institutional viability.

Another consequence of the CPSU experience that impacted upon the nature of the party system was what has been called a Russian "allergy" to the concept of "party". Alexander Solzhenitsyn has argued against party politics and in this he has reflected a general mood against the whole divisive dynamic of contesting party politics. In part, this has been the result of a lack of understanding of the role of an "opposition", since opposition in the Soviet era was tantamount to heresy (in fact, it was the only kind of heresy). Consequently, the notion that there could occur a peaceful struggle of ideas between parties within the framework of law and parliament was difficult to grasp.

The resistance to the congealing of issues into political parties also showed itself in the relatively small numbers of people who joined parties. Taking another look at table 1, it can be seen that, with the exceptions of the fragments of the defunct CPSU, that is, the parties falling under the category "*Communists*", and Alexander Rutskoi's *People's Party "Free Russia"*, - all of whose comparatively large membership figures, if they were to be believed, could be explained as remnants of the once 20 million strong membership of the CPSU - the memberships of even the largest of the other parties (not blocs) were quite small. The DPR, for example, claimed a membership of only 40,000 at the beginning of 1993, and DPR associations were active in just a third of Russia's regions. In fact, survey data indicates that no party was able to develop strong links with large numbers of Russian voters. In response to the question which political party or group from a long list was closest to their own

views, 41% of a mid-1992 survey group said “none” and that figure rose to 47% by the start of 1993.¹³

The post-communist model of political parties was as electoral organisations focused on parliamentary life and the constituencies. The system made the parties territorial, forcing an increasingly regional character upon Russian politics and few parties achieved a nation-wide organisation.

The sheer size and diversity of the country contributed significantly to the failure of new parties to develop mass national political movements. Given the poor state of communications and low opinion of Moscow held in the regions, it was doubtful whether any kind of centrally commanded party discipline could be maintained. On top of this, economic hardship that accompanied the Moscow directed reform process also meant that many local level political entities lacked the basic resources to co-ordinate party work. Furthermore, given the perception that Moscow was responsible for the rotten state of the Russian economy, local party formations, loath to associate themselves with the capital, were prepared to forsake the possibility of membership expansion that would come from a more national orientation.

Coming to terms with the break-up of the Soviet Union further weakened the coherence of political parties since it involved that most volatile of concepts, the idea of nation.

The loss of territory and sudden rupture of traditional Russian communities, which had such a traumatic effect upon the Russian people, was a source of contention which all of the parties in the political spectrum were able to tap into to criticise each other. The national-patriotic parties, who promoted some form of restoration of the Soviet Union, were perceived by the reformers as threatening the stability of the post-communist order since stability was predicated on the development of the statehood of a smaller Russia. On the other hand, the parties espousing a new Russian based polity were open to charges of betraying the motherland and abandoning ethnic Russians “abroad”. This issue crosscut other defining party cleavages and consequently inhibited the consolidation of parties and further undermined the possibility of a

13 Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 130.

democratic community being built upon a social consensus.

Another strong inhibition to the emergence of a party system was Yeltsin's presidential style of government. "Man of the people" Boris had haughtily declared himself above politics and refused to create a presidential party, stating that "My support is the Russian people."¹⁴ Accordingly, he had selected a government chosen on a non-party basis. Such a presidential system clearly diminished the role that political parties were able to perform and was quite different to the parliamentary systems prevalent in Western Europe, where mandated parties, either singly or in coalition, would form governments to frame legislation in keeping with their manifestos.

Under Yeltsin's presidential system, party political programs became something of an irrelevance. Yeltsin looked to all parties and even outside of the party system to form his governing "team". A result of this marginalization was that the parties were deprived of the skills of many of "the best and the brightest", who were far more inclined to devote their energies to working with the real power actors in the state administrative structures than waste their time promoting vague political principles off in the wings away from the political main stage.

It was only after Yeltsin's power weakened, as he grappled with an adversarial parliament through the autumn of 1992, that he conceded the need to build support for his embattled reform program among the parliamentary factions. To this end, he endorsed a new bloc, *Democratic Choice*, which incorporated the old *DemRossii* movement and was intended to act as a counterweight to his opponents in the parliament. However, Yeltsin devoted little time to this bloc and little effort was spent building up its organisational resources.

Post-October '93 - the December Elections and Afterwards.

For all of the reasons laid out above, it seems reasonable to conclude that up until the crisis of October 1993, while parties and party leaders existed in abundance, there was no party system.

14 Quoted at a press conference given on August 21, 1992.

The October violence at the Russian parliament building proved to be a watershed in the development of the party system. For a start, it forcibly broke the impasse between president and parliament, which had been the dominant feature in the political landscape since early in 1992, when Yeltsin's government, accepting the theoretical framework of certain American economists, had launched a series of radical economic reforms known collectively as "shock therapy". In response, the parliament had rallied to oppose these same reforms and had attempted to usurp the powers of the president. This struggle for power between the institutions of government had largely blocked the emergence of party based political struggles over policy.

The October events also paved the way for parliamentary elections, which, by their very nature, would take politics from the corridors and smoke filled rooms of the state buildings back out into the open. A competitive, party based election campaign could establish exactly which parties and which policies enjoyed genuine support in the country. At the same time, the referendum for a newly devised constitution in which the relative powers of the different branches of government would be clearly defined offered the prospect of creating a more stable foundation for the structure of government institutions. This, it was hoped, would lessen the likelihood of a recurrence of the autumn power struggle, which was, in part, born of the existing ambiguous and oft revised Brezhnev era constitution.

Tempered in the crucible of popular elections and with the prospect of institutional stability, the chances of a more coherent party system emerging seemed good.

As expected, with the elections approaching, party leaders were forced to define their positions with greater precision in order to present distinct identities. The election campaign also witnessed attempts to establish credible policy-based coalitions that could, potentially, lead to party mergers.

At the start of the campaign, there were 21 parties or electoral blocs. However, in order to avoid the risks to stability that a highly fragmented political contest would entail. President Yeltsin decreed restrictions upon organisations that could not demonstrate broad appeal (by mustering at least 100,000 signatures spread across several provinces). This encouraged

consolidation and ensured that, in the end, only 13 distinct political organisations were registered for the elections.

The new, post-coup, parliamentary institutions and electoral system also aimed to achieve some degree of consolidation. The December 1993 Constitution aimed to establish a new national parliament, the Federal Assembly, within which the parties would be operating. The parliament was designed to have two chambers, with the stronger, lower chamber, the State Duma, having half of its 450 seats filled by proportional representation from parties electoral lists (the other half to be decided by traditional, single member district contests). Such a list system gave party organisations a whip hand under which the threat of exclusion from the list exerted a certain degree of discipline upon the party candidates to conform to their respective parties' manifestos. A 5% threshold level for parliamentary representation on the basis of party lists was another consolidation measure, designed to limit the number of small parties that would exist in the new parliament.

However, despite these measures aimed at encouraging consolidation, the new constitution, by formalising the type of strongly centralised presidential rule that Boris Yeltsin was already practising, could not be considered a constitution devised to promote a strong party system. In fact, it could more readily be considered a deliberate attempt to weaken the party arena, parliament, so that political power could not be wielded by an institution whose post-Soviet track record was of instability and fragmentation.

The elections saw the President's administration represented by *Russia's Choice*, an evolution of *Democratic Choice*, headed by Yegor Gaidar. Its candidates included most members of the government, including Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, Privatisation Minister Anatolii Chubais and Finance Minister Boris Fedorov. Yeltsin, himself, however, remained aloof and refused to endorse any party directly.

Despite the tendency towards consolidation, party cleavages still did not necessarily conform to policy positions and, in addition to *Russia's Choice*, several other pro-reform groups fielded candidates. St. Petersburg mayor, Anatoli Sobchak headed the *Democratic Reform* movement, and *Yabloko*, was focused around the economist Grigorii Yavlinskii. *Russian Unity and Concord*

Table 2. Parties, Groups and Blocs in the Federal Assembly, as a result of the December 1993 elections

<i>State Duma (Lower House)</i>	Seats
Russia's Choice (radical reformist)	76
New Regional Policy (centrist)	65
Liberal Democratic Party (extreme nationalist)	63
Agrarian Party of Russia (procommunist)	55
Communist Party of the Russian Federation	45
Party of Russian Unity and Concord (moderate reformist with strong regional policy)	30
Russian Way (Russian nationalist)	25
Yavlinsky-Boldyrev-Lukin Bloc (moderate reformist)	25
Women of Russia (centrist)	23
Democratic Party of Russia (centrist)	15
Union of December 12 th (radical reformist)	12
<i>Council of the Federation (Upper House)</i>	
Pro-reform democrats	48
– Russia's Choice	40
– Yavlinsky-Boldyrev-Lukin Bloc	3
– Party of Russian Unity and Concord	4
– Russian Movement for Democratic Reforms	1
Moderate reformers	23
Centrist opposition to the government	36
The communist and socialist opposition	20
– Communist Party of the Russian Federation	15
– Agrarian Party of Russia	3
– Socialist Workers' Party	1
– Labour Party	1
Extreme nationalists	2
– Cossacks' movement in Kuban	1
– Russian National Council	1

Source: Adapted from Thomas F. Remington, "Representative Power and the Russian State", in Stephen White, Alex Pravda & Zvi Gitelman, *Developments in Russian & Post-Soviet Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1994, p. 83.

was another pro-reform party that aimed to represent the “real interests” of Russia’s regions and was favoured by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

The other groupings were, essentially, the opposition. The ultra nationalist *Liberal Democratic Party*, under Vladimir Zhirinovskii, was neither liberal nor democratic. *Women of Russia* was an anti-market feminist bloc. The *Democratic Party of Russia*, which had re-established its autonomy, remained a vehicle for Nikolai Travkin’s ego. The *Agrarian Party* reflected the interests of state and collective agriculture rather than private agriculture. Finally, there was the *Communist Party of the Russian Federation*, which was the only post-CPSU grouping allowed to compete since other post-CPSU groups had been banned in the wake of the October events, forcing their members to stand as independents.

The election’s results gave Zhirinovskii’s party a surprising first, with 23% of the vote, followed by *Russia’s Choice* with 15%, the Communists with 12%, and the Agrarians, Women of Russia and Yabloko all with about 8% each. (See table 2)

Overall, parties more left-wing and nationalist than the government gained 57% of the vote, while the dominant party of government, *Russia’s Choice*, even when pooled with the other reform parties, could only muster about 30% of the vote. Assuming that many of the independents were also opponents of reform, the new parliament seemed hardly any more predisposed towards Yeltsin’s policies than the old one. So, despite the fact that the new constitution had passed with 52% of the popular vote, the stage appeared set for a continued struggle between the President and the state legislature and the likelihood was that parliamentary party politics would once more be consigned to the wings.

Post-election stabilization.

After the December 1993 elections, political parties still had no real role in the exercise of power. They still had trouble exerting party discipline over their members in parliament and they had little or no control over their members in government. In fact, although the December ’93 elections forced parties to organise, define and consolidate themselves, the post-election period saw a return of the pre-October blight of ego driven micro-factionalism. This should

not come as a surprise since most of the earlier conditions inhibiting party development remained in effect. Yet, despite the still fragmented state of party politics, in fact, in the first year after the elections, the Russian political scene stabilised and this could be attributed to the influence of the new constitution. Even though the new presidential republic had a new parliament dominated by Yeltsin's opponents and pessimists predicted a paralysed body politic, in practice, a rough but workable system of checks and balances seemed to emerge.

Power clearly favoured the president while parliament was the weakest of the power centres. The finance minister, Boris Fedorov, likened the Lower House deputies to "cockroaches running around in a glass jar, achieving nothing."¹⁵ That notwithstanding, the new Duma at least appeared to be functioning better than the old one, it bickered less and legislated more. However, the price of stability appeared to be the triumph of the executive over the legislature, and this cast doubt on how far Russia had gone in overcoming its authoritarian traditions and building a law based democratic state.

15 Quoted in *The Economist*, June 25, 1994, p. 47.