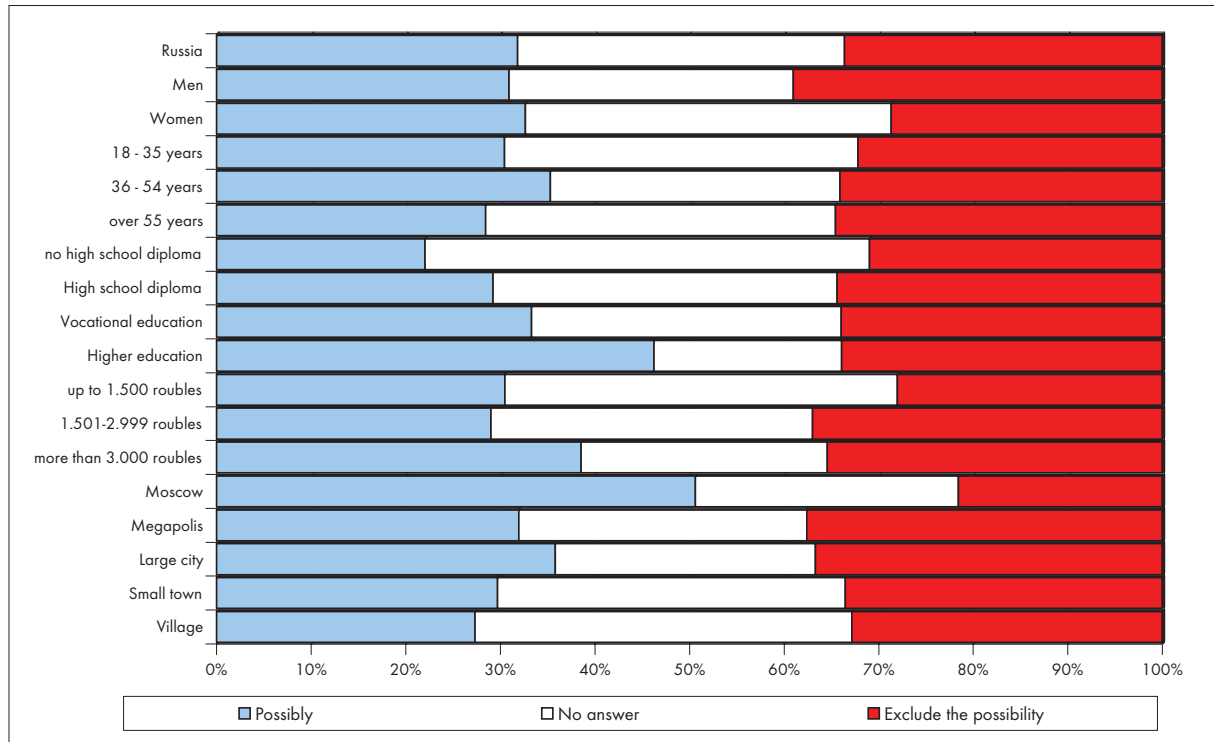


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Regional Report

United Russia Sweeps Regional Legislatures, but Faces Difficulties in 2007 Duma Elections

By Dmitry Vinogradov, Moscow

On 12 March, Russia held its first unified election day, allowing voters in 68 regions to elect various levels of government simultaneously. Attention focused on the eight regions that elected their parliaments that day, some of them using party lists for the first time. Experts described this voting as an early indicator of the elections for the State Duma that will take place in December 2007. While the pro-Kremlin United Russia party was the top vote-getter in each region, the results suggest that it will have difficulty forming a controlling majority in the federal parliament. The eight regions were: Khanty-Mansy, Gorno-Altai, Kirov, Nizhny Novgorod, Kaliningrad, Kursk, Orenburg, and Adygeya.

According to new federal legislation, the elections in all eight regional legislatures took place according to a mixed system: half of the deputies were elected from single-member districts, half by party list. United Russia, the Communists (KPRF), the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), and the Party of Pensioners participated in all 8 regions, the Russian Party of Life in 6, Yabloko in 4, and the Union of Right-Forces (SPS) in 3. The barrier for entry into the parliaments of Adygeya, Kaliningrad, and Kursk was 7 percent; Kirov, 6 percent; and in the other regions, 5 percent. In total, 359 deputy mandates were at stake.

United Russia officially had the most money to

spend (88.35 million rubles), followed by Patriots of Russia (30.2 million rubles), LDPR (18.27 million rubles), and the Communists (3.57 million rubles), according to Central Electoral Commission Chairman Aleksandr Veshnyakov.

The elections were the same in each of the regions: United Russia was the leader in all regions, drawing support from the local elite, and generally facing off against one competitor, the Communists, Party of Life, Party of Pensioners, or LDPR, depending on the region. In all regions, Yabloko and SPS prepared a common list under the brand name of one of the two parties. Another common theme across regions was

the removal of the Rodina party for various violations. The only region where Rodina succeeded in remaining on the ballot was the Gorno-Altai Republic, apparently because the head of the party list there was a locally influential politician, Deputy Speaker Viktor Bezruchenkov.

The elections produced no surprises since United Russia won everywhere with varying degrees of success. Of the 359 seats contested, it won 197, scoring from 27 percent in Gorno-Altai to 55 percent in Khanty-Mansy. In five regions, the Communists won second place, with their overall vote total ranging from a low of 8.96 percent in Gorno-Altai to 17.81 percent in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. In Gorno-Altai, Rodina took second place, while “against all” won the silver medal in Kaliningrad, with 16.48 percent. The LDPR was second in Khanty-Mansy, with 10.42 percent. The LDPR did well overall, securing representation in six regions, winning from 5.83 percent of the vote in Nizhny Novgorod to 14.58 percent in Kirov. The Agrarian Party of Russia will be in four regional legislatures, the Party of Pensioners in 3, the Party of Life and Patriots of Russia in 2, Rodina and the Industrial Party in 1.

The liberals’ performance was a failure even though they united under one of two party labels: they did not win representation in a single legislature. Yabloko participated in four campaigns, winning from 0.65 percent of the vote in Gorno-Altai to 4.03 percent in Kaliningrad. The SPS balloted in three races, winning from 2.42 percent in Khanty-Mansy to 6.54 percent in Kursk, where the minimum required to enter the regional legislature was 7 percent. Gorno-Altai’s legislature will have the most parties, with six; Adygeya and Kursk will have the fewest, with three each.

Voter participation in the regional legislative elections dropped 2.6 percent in comparison with the previous elections in these areas, according to Veshnyakov. The greatest drop, 14 percent, took place in Kaliningrad, where two parties were removed from the ballot. The large number of protest voters and the low turnout in Kaliningrad is likely connected to the authorities’ heavy handed actions during the campaign, according to Veshnyakov.

Based on these elections, Veshnyakov predicted that 10 parties would take part in the 2007 State Duma elections, with 3–5 winning representation in the national parliament.

These elections also demonstrated the contours of the future State Duma elections more generally, according to Dmitry Badovsky, the head of the Department of Special Programs at Moscow’s Institute of Social

Systems. Four parties were “allowed” to compete in all regions: United Russia, the Communists, the LDPR, and the Party of Pensioners. The focus of the campaign was the various parties’ efforts to win the favor of judges and electoral commissions, rather than a competition of party programs or even efforts to gain voter support. “The fate of all the elections to a very significant degree was decided by ‘whom they registered, and whom they did not register.’”

“The techniques for removing parties is becoming increasingly refined,” according to Boris Makarenko, deputy director for the Center of Political Technologies. “They are using increasingly bold and far-fetched pretexts.” Moreover, they are using them against obvious enemies of the authorities, such as Rodina, as well as those who simply do not enjoy the authorities’ favor. Sometimes being in favor varies from region to region: the People’s Will party was registered everywhere, except Kursk. In Nizhny Novgorod, where the governor is a leftist and the Communists are strong, the authorities removed all the other leftist parties, such as the Agrarians and the Patriots of Russia. The Party of Pensioners replaced its regional leader there and its problems disappeared. One measure of the collapse of the liberal wing of the party spectrum is that the authorities have so little fear of the Yabloko-SPS tandem that no one bothered to block them from the ballot.

Despite United Russia’s extensive successes in this regional voting, it cannot count on winning 50 percent in the 2007 State Duma elections, according to Novosibirsk Political Scientist Aleksei Mazur. The 2007 elections will be contested entirely by party lists since recent legislation dropped the previous practice of filling half of the seats by single-member districts. Therefore United Russia will need allies among the other parties (regardless of their ideologies), and party-kamikazes, whose sole purpose will be to attract votes away from more viable opponents. Currently, United Russia has only one faithful ally, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s LDPR. Rodina, which won representation in the parliament thanks to Kremlin support in 2003, fell out of official favor after criticizing the authorities for the botched social reforms introduced at the beginning of 2005 and has since been pushed to the sidelines. The improved results of the Party of Pensioners, Party of Life, and Patriots of Russia will raise them on the Kremlin list of possible allies for United Russia or kamikazes, particularly since the Pensioners and Patriots draw support from the leftist electorate and could drain away backing from the Communists.

About the author:

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