

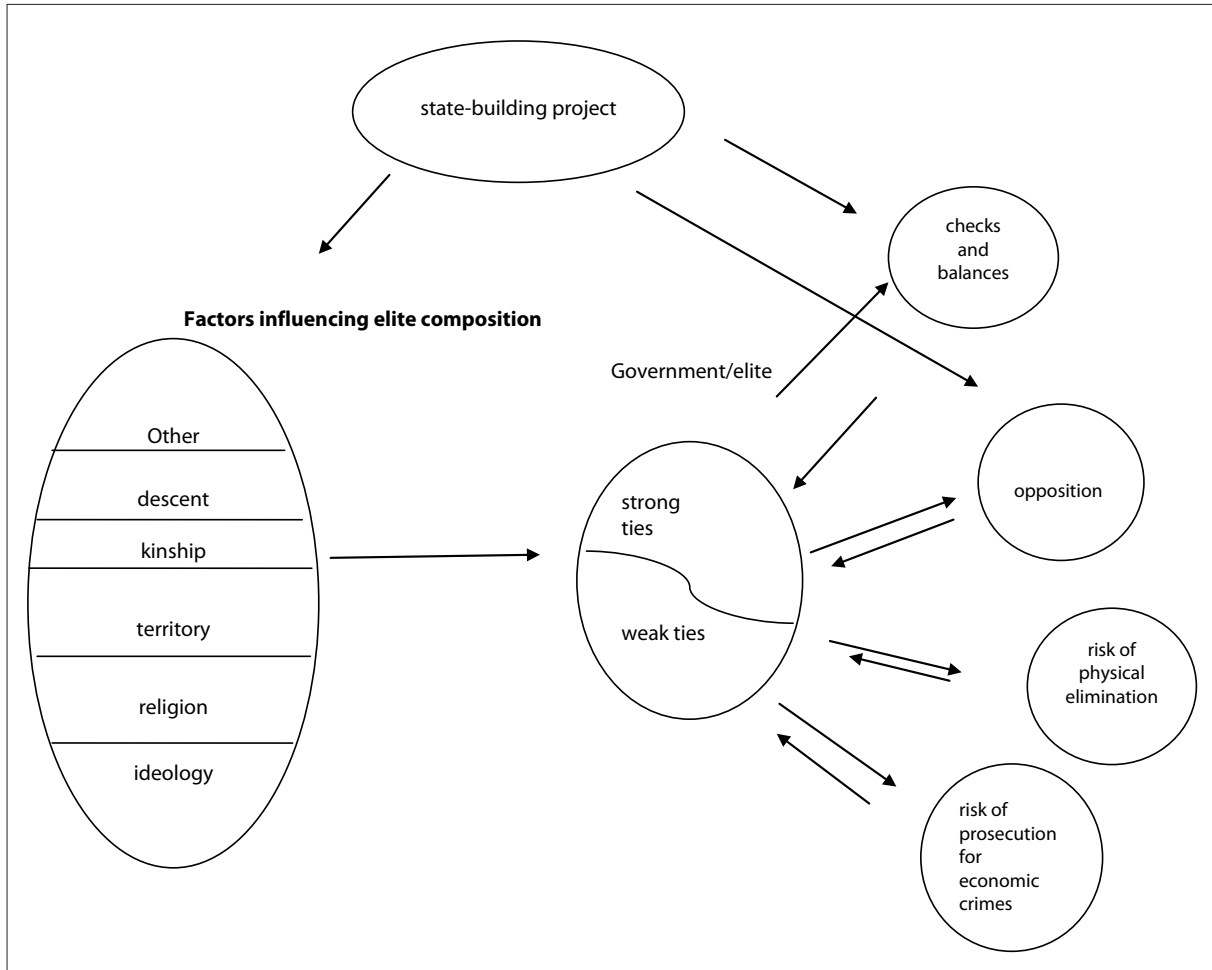
Figure 1: Elite Composition and the Nature of Ties Within the Government

Diagram by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia

ANALYSIS

Political Parties in Dagestan and the October 2010 Local Elections

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Abstract

Overall, United Russia dominated the local elections in Dagestan on 10 October 2010. However, since its leaders are typically the most important public officials at the local level, the party has also become a target for voter dissatisfaction.

Party-System Standout

The republics of the North Caucasus have much in common with regard to their political party systems and parliamentary representations. However, Dagestan differs from the other North Caucasus republics in the unprec-

edented number of parties that took part in the 10 October 2010 local elections. On that day a record 14,991 candidates participated in the elections for 7,055 executive and legislative branch positions at the raion, city, and village levels. The 10 October voting included 9 may-

oral elections, 36 elections to city and raion legislatures, 463 elections for village mayors and 583 elections for village councils. On a day when six other regions across Russia elected members to their regional legislatures, Dagestan boasted the most candidates even though it was not electing its republican legislature. Dagestan also had the most people participating in its electoral commissions, which run the voting process, according to Vladimir Churov, chairman of Russia's Central Electoral Commission.

Dagestan's party system has the most parties represented in its parliament, where five political parties hold seats. In the 2007 elections, Putin's party United Russia won 63.67% of the vote. Just Russia won 10.68%, the Agrarian Party of Russia 9.12%, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation 13%, and the Patriots of Russia, 7.07%. Thus, of the 72 seats in Dagestan's legislature, United Russia holds 47, Just Russia 8, the Agrarian Party 7, and 5 seats each for the Communists and Patriots.

Weak Parties

In Dagestan a key feature of the party system is that there are only weak links between the regional branches of the Russian political parties and the candidates representing them. In a meeting with representatives of the political parties on 2 September 2010, republican electoral commission chairman Magomed Dibirov expressed concern about the situation and called on the parties to take greater responsibility for the actions of their candidates.

A second feature of the party system is that in the 10 October elections, members of United Russia preferred to participate as independent candidates. Initially, according to the republic's official newspapers, United Russia nominated 5,215 candidates (34.7%), Right Cause 1,112 (7.4%), Communists 819 (5.4%), Patriots 638 (4.2%), Just Russia 602 (4%), LDPR 471 (2.7%), and Yabloko 52 (0.3%). In addition, there were 6,132 (40.9%) independent candidates. Several days later, RIA Novosti reported a different set of statistics, this time claiming that United Russia made up 71.9% of the candidates, Right Cause 15.7%, Communists 11.6%, Just Russia 8.5%, Patriots 8.3%, LDPR 5.9%, and Yabloko 0.7%. This game with the statistics suggests that United Russia is losing authority in the republic, according to journalists at the independent newspaper *Novoe delo*.

One member of the regional legislature said, on condition of anonymity, "I know that many of the independent candidates are actually members of United Russia. They prefer to run as independents because many leaders of United Russia are mayors in their cities and villages and they run their offices like separate king-

doms. Neither the people nor other party members trust them." Likewise one of the independent candidates noted, also on condition of anonymity, that "In our raion, the United Russia party is not popular because its leader has been our mayor for a year – he is completely incompetent and is only able to embezzle from the local budget. Before the election, he single-handedly prepared the list of candidates, including only people who were personally loyal to him. However, there are numerous problems in our area that no one is trying to address and I decided to run as an independent. Several of my friends did the same. The head of the raion was very unhappy, but so far he has not said anything to us" (*Novoe delo*, Makhachkala, 2 September).

The campaign was unprecedented not only in its scale, but the extent of the security measures that the authorities took to prevent any disorder. In addition to installing video cameras in several raions, they placed metal detectors at the entrance to the voting halls. In Babayurtov Raion, they even placed tanks outside the polls. There were numerous public protests during the campaign and even three murders, including the mayor of the large village of Khadzhal'makhi in Levashin Raion, the head of the electoral commission in Novolak Raion, and a relative of a candidate running for a council seat in Babayurtov Raion.

As usually happens during electoral campaigns, all seven of Dagestan's political parties signed a declaration calling for honest elections on 6 August. But this declaration had little impact on the campaign. In fact, in order to deal with the difficult situation surrounding the voting, the republican government set up a special working group headed by First Deputy Prime Minister Rizvan Kurbanov and the presidential administration set up a separate group whose members included representatives of the procurator's office.

Predictable Results

The United Russia party won the October elections, considerably improving its representation in the republic's elected bodies and convincingly confirming its reputation as the leading political force. The party scored its best results in the big cities of Makhachkala and Derbent where its members Said Amirov and Imam Yarialiev, both incumbents, won.

On election day, Makhachkala's markets and streets were unusually quiet. Amirov gained 96% of the votes, a result that surprised no one, given his personal influence and extensive control over the city's administrative resources. The only thing that threatened him was voter apathy. In fact, only 105,000 out of 300,000 potential voters, approximately one third, bothered to turn out. And that is according to official data (*Chernovik*,

Makhachkala, 15 October). In Derbent about 96%, the same as in Makhachkala, voted for Yaraliev. Both Amirov and Yaraliev belong to the constellation of heavy weights in Dagestan who can win elections regardless of the party competition on the basis of their personal charisma alone. In addition to United Russia, following the elections four other parties will be represented in the Makhachkala and Derbent city councils: Just Russia, the Communists, Patriots of Russia, and Right Cause.

Electoral Surprises: Party Duels and United Russia Failures

United Russia faced its greatest troubles in southern Dagestan. There was a particularly intense battle between parties in Kaitag Raion, where the Patriots of Russia, headed by Alim Temurbulatov, edged United Russia 22.5% to 21.47%, even though United Russia had the open support of the republican presidential administration. In the up-coming battle for the mayor's post, the Patriots will have the support of the Communists, who trailed close behind United Russia for third place with 18.56% of the vote.

There was also an intense party battle in the city of Dagestanskii Ognii. There United Russia, led by Galim Galimov, lost the fight for leadership of the city council to Just Russia, whose list was led by Mayor Magomed Gafarov. Just Russia took 38.57% of the vote, while United Russia won 33.58%, giving Just Russia 7 seats and United Russia 6. The Patriots of Russia and Right Cause also won seats. Five days before the voting, United Russia's Galimov said that the republican president supported him. The results were so surprising for the republican authorities that on 12 October the deputy speaker of the republican parliament Nikolai Alchiev arrived with the goal of convincing the new members of the city council to support Galimov. However, the local Patriots had already thrown their two votes behind Just Russia's Gafarov.

Another dark, but typical, side of Dagestani politics is the use of violence. The most notable incident occurred just before election day in Levashin Raion. As noted above, it ended in the death of Khadzhalmakhi mayor Abdulmuslim Nurmagomedov. On the eve of the elections, some of the ballots went missing. On 10 October, during the delivery of new ballots, an argument took place between Nurmagomedov and opposition-supporters among the village's residents, leading to a massive riot with more than 500 participants. In the course of the fighting someone shot and mortally wounded Nurmagomedov. Two others were seriously wounded. To this list can be added the murder on 22 August of a relative of the Communist candidate in the Babayurtov Raion, after which the Communists refused to participate in the elections. Also on 27 August Suleiman Gadzhimuradov, the head of the Novolak Raion electoral commission was murdered.

Communists Reject Results

The Communist Party's republican committee refused to recognize the results of the 10 October elections, describing them as a "farce." According to the Communist Party, the elections were characterized by the criminal methods that had been common during the 1990s. They declared that the lawlessness in the republic deprived people of the possibility of influencing the situation through legal methods. This announcement was made in response to the conflict in the Babayurtov Raion, where the Communists did not have a chance to participate in the elections.

Overall, the republican authorities were satisfied with the results of the 10 October elections. But their worries are far from over. Dagestan will elect the members of its legislature in March 2011.

About the Author

Arbakhan Magomedov is the chairman of the Department of Public Relations at Ulyanovsk State University and a frequent visitor to Dagestan.