

# The Role of Political Parties in Putin's Hybrid-Regime

Written by Joshua Gray

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## The Role of Political Parties in Putin's Hybrid-Regime

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### Introduction

There is increasing consensus among scholars that Russia's deviation from democracy is moving towards and beyond 'democracy with adjectives'. Much of the literature and the mainstream of studies on Russian politics pertain largely to failed transition, or forms of imperfect democracy. Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul (2003) posit that Russia is a "managed democracy", and Fareed Zakaria (2002) argues Russia is an "illiberal democracy". Others suggest worse still, the title of Ostrow's et al. (2007) book is simply, *The consolidation of dictatorship in Russia: an inside view of the demise of democracy*. There is another school of thought, however, which posits that Russia's failed transition towards democracy led to the emergence of a 'hybrid-regime'. The hybrid-regime is a method of conceptual classification for political systems which fall within the parameters of neither a democracy nor autocracy, but which seemingly exhibit a combination of institutions and norms from both. Scholars of hybrid-regimes, *inter alia*, Henry Hale (2011), Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010), contend that hybrid systems are not transitional phases in a regimes' development. But rather, constitute an end-state of regime in its own right with long-term trajectories. This paper posits that the hybrid-regime is the most suitable conceptual approach to contemporary Russian politics. However, one issue often overlooked in the literature is the subsequent meaning of political institutions within

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systems that are classified under the rubric of hybrid-regime. In particular, this paper is concerned with the role of political parties within Russia's hybrid-regime, "should political parties found in these regimes be understood as convenient window dressing for perpetual authoritarianism?".

To use Lee Morgenbesser's (2014) terminology, "conceptual stretching" of democratic institutions within hybrid systems becomes problematic, instead parties acquire new functions and roles within hybrid-regimes. It is the thesis of this paper that political parties are *sine qua non* to the consolidation and stability of Russia's hybrid-regime this is, for the most part, their role within the hybrid system. This paper therefore proposes the following hypothesis: "Russian political parties are more than convenient window dressing for perpetuating authoritarianism; rather their role (for the most part) is to consolidate the hybrid-regime". This paper will demonstrate the role of parties in hybrid-regime consolidation. Furthermore, parties in Russia's hybrid-regime have each developed distinct, if not unique roles. There is a variety of party typology in Russia's hybrid system; the role of some is to ensure the Kremlin (Russia's executive branch of government) has reliable legislative majorities. Whilst others actively siphon votes from opposition parties and espouse an oppositional rhetoric, whilst remaining loyal to the Kremlin, providing a sheen of electoral legitimacy. These functions of parties ultimately support the stability and consolidation of the hybrid-regime. However, within the hybrid-regime there are also parties which seek to challenge the political order, but the role of these parties has been undermined by a number of factors. In ascertaining the role of parties within Russia's hybrid-regime, this paper has conducted primary research focusing on, *inter alia*, political programmes and election manifestos, as well as an analysis of the rhetorical positions of key party figures. In addition, the paper has drawn upon the literature on Russian party politics and used a variety of secondary sources.

The central objective of this paper is to ascertain the role of political parties in Russia's hybrid-regime. In rationalising the thesis of this paper, it is worth noting that there has been a paucity of scholarly attention to the role of parties in hybrid-regimes. Although there have been efforts to address this (Ekman, 2009), drawing on primary research as well as the existing literature on Russian parties, this paper will attempt to determine the role of parties and how they operate within the parameters of the hybrid-regime.

The chapter structure will be as follows. Chapter one will set the theoretical parameters of the paper; the aim of this chapter is to highlight the development of the hybrid-regime, and apply its theoretical framework to the case of Putin's Russia. Having posited that the hybrid-regime is the most suitable conceptual approach to Russian politics, the aim of chapter two is to determine the role of Russia's so-called 'parties of power' in the hybrid-regime, focusing on the United Russia (UR) and Just Russia (JR) parties. This chapter will also address the relevant terminology, approaches to and nature of, Russia's party system. Chapter three aims to analyse the role of the 'semi-opposition' parties, namely the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). This chapter will also explicate the role of opposition parties in the hybrid-regime, focusing on the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and the liberal faction. The fourth chapter aims to bring together the analysis in chapters two and three in a case-study of the 2008 financial crisis. The response of parties in the crisis largely confirms their respective conceptual classifications, but also draws out the broader role of parties in the hybrid-regime, of sustaining the hybrid system during crises. Due to the limited scope and space of this paper, this section will focus on the role of JR, the LDPR and the KPRF, as these parties represent an example of each party typology found within the hybrid system. The conclusion will summarize the major findings of the paper and draw out the broader contentions elicited by the analysis.

## 1. Classifying Russian Politics: *The Hybrid-Regime*

First, it is necessary to set the theoretical parameters of the paper. This chapter seeks to classify the nature of Russian politics, positing that Russia should be categorized under the rubric of "hybrid-regime". Russia is not a state in transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Rather, the hybrid-regime constitutes a *sui generis* paradigm in its own right, which is relatively durable and more than a "stuck transition" (Balzer, 2003, p.189). This regime typology has a unique set of characteristics which separate it from both democracies' and authoritarian regimes. As this chapter will explicate, the "hybrid-regime" is the most suitable conceptual approach to Russian politics. The chapter will outline the development of the "hybrid-regime", and then apply the theoretical framework to the case of Putin's

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Russia.

## *Democracy and Democratic Transition*

Scholars struggle to define democracy and struggle further to classify ambiguous regimes. Joseph Schumpeter posited a minimal approach to democracy, arguing that the democratic method consists of “institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples vote” (Schumpeter, 1966, p.269). Samuel Huntington argues that a political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through “fair, honest, and periodic elections [where candidates] freely compete for votes [and] virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote” (1996, p.7). He contends that democracies elicit norms, such as civil and political freedom to speak, publish, assemble and conduct electoral campaigns (Huntington, 1996, p.7). Robert Dahl's (1971) seminal study of modern democracy provides a robust and adequate definition for the purpose of this paper, contending that a democracy requires the following institutional guarantees:

- The ability to formulate preferences (e.g. freedom to form/join organisations, freedom of expression, right of political leaders to compete for support).
- Freedom to signify preferences (e.g. free and fair elections, alternative sources of information).
- Preference must be equally weighted in the conduct of government (e.g. institutions for making government policies depend on the general consensus of the *demos*, legislative body or votes) (Dahl, 1971, p.3).

Huntington (1991) posited a “third wave” of democratization in the 1980s-1990s elicited by the decline of authoritarianism in Latin America, Africa, and the demise of the Soviet-Union. He defines a “wave of democratization” simply as “a group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period” (Huntington, 1991, p.15). Similarly, Larry Diamond (1996) draws attention to the proliferation of states moving away from authoritarianism during the “third wave”. Diamond (1996) argued that “freedom took its biggest jump in the latter half of the 1980s and the early 1990s”, as the number of authoritarian regimes “declined to a historic low of 23 percent in 1991, falling further to just over 20 percent in 1996” (p.26).

The third wave of democratization gave rise to the academic field of “transitology”, derived from the seminal work of Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986). The transition thesis is based on a number of generalisations from Southern European and Latin American transitions. Thomas Carothers (2002) in the *Journal of Democracy* identifies its core assumptions. First, ‘transitologists’ contend that any country moving away from dictatorial rule can be considered in transition to democracy. Second, democratization takes place in a set of sequenced stages, with an ‘opening’ or political liberalization which creates elite splits (hard/soft liners), followed by a breakthrough, adoption of democratic institutions and the habituation of society to the new democratic “rules of the game” (O'Donnell, Schmitter, 1986). Third, elections are believed to institutionalise democracy by facilitating the habituation of democratic norms and values within society. Fourth, the role of agency, not structural factors is the main determinant of the success in the transition process (Carothers, 2002, p.7). However, Carothers (2002) notes that many third wave transitions did not result in democracy.

The trajectory of third wave democracies was often ambiguous and frequently deviated from Dahl's democratic ideal. Diamond identifies a “period of stasis” in which many of the nascent third wave ‘democracies’ experienced democratic impasses, “erosion and stagnation offsetting liberalization and consolidation [and steadily] the quality of democracy [...] has eroded in many of the most important and influential new third-wave democracies—including Russia” (Diamond, 1996, pp.27-31). Huntington (1996) also posited that “with third wave democracies, the problem is not overthrow but erosion, [the] intermittent or gradual weakening of democracy by those elected to lead it” (p.8). Henry Hale (2011) concurs with the view that many third wave democracies experienced authoritarian regressions, but also attributes the third wave to the expansion of a conceptual “grey zone”. Hale (2011) refers to the increase of ambiguous regimes which fall within the parameters of neither a democracy nor autocracy. Following the collapse of communism, Russia was largely perceived as a state in transition from authoritarianism. However, this transition did not result in democratization. There is a need, therefore, to assess Russian democracy, and account for its

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conceptual classification in the “grey zone”.

## *Assessing Russian ‘Democracy’*

Contemporary Russia is not a democracy. One of the most systematic quantitative measures of democracy is conducted by Freedom House, whose particular concern pertains largely to the Dahl's criteria. Its criteria is based on, *inter alia*, political rights and civil liberties, the former being the “extent that the people have a choice in determining the nature of the system and its leaders”, and the latter being “freedoms to develop views, institutions and personal autonomy apart from the state” (Freedom House, 2014). Diamond (1996) stated that “the Freedom House survey is the best available empirical indicator of ‘liberal democracy’,” (p.24). Freedom House (2014) classified Russia as “Not Free”; its “Press Freedom Score” was 81 (0 being best, and 100-worst); its “Legal Environment” was rated 25 (0-best, 30-worst); and Russia's “Political Environment” was rated 32 (0-best, 40-worst), ‘Civil-Liberties’ and ‘Political Rights were rated’ were rated 5 and 6 respectively (1-best and 7-worst).

Other inquiries into the nature of Russian democracy denote a similar trend. Human Rights Watch (2014), an organisation monitoring political and civil freedoms, stated during Putin's second term, the Kremlin had created an adverse environment for civil society due to the continuing “crackdown against independent groups and activists”. Similarly, Amnesty International, a non-governmental body whose particular concern is the treatment of peaceful protest and human rights, found that Russian authorities were “increasingly intolerant of dissent or criticism [there has been a] crackdown on civil and political rights” (Amnesty, 2014). When correlated with the criteria posited by Dahl, particularly the freedom to formulate and signify preferences (Dahl, 1971, p.3), the contentions above provide cursory evidence that Russia does not satisfy the requirements to be categorized as a democracy.

When accounting for Russia's democratic impasse outlined above, the legacy argument and political culture offer some explanation. As Michael McFaul (2002) notes, “different historical contexts may create unique factors for and against democratization” (p.244). Valerie Bunce (2002) argues that the transition in Eastern Europe, particularly in Russia, was fundamentally different from that of Latin America or Southern Europe, as it was “more than a political transition; it is a revolution—in identity, economics, social structure, and the state” (p.26). Bunce (2002) indicates that although institutional transition may have taken place in post-communist Europe, attitudinal transition (e.g. attitudes of the political elite) posits much greater time horizons due to the nature of soviet totalitarianism and its “monopoly on political expression” (p.26). Similarly, Lilia Shevtsova (2002) contends that the “soviet legacy” undermined the Russian transition, as there was a paucity of liberal political elites “ready to step in” during democratic transition (p.241).

Furthermore, McFaul (2002) argues that in the transition from authoritarianism, “geography [...] history, culture, prior regime type and ideological orientation”, were *sine qua non* in the production of “democracy and dictatorship in the post-communist world” (p.238). Russia has a tradition of absolutist and centralised rule, from Tsarism to Soviet totalitarianism, its cultural predisposition is gravitated towards a strong state and Russian society has been traditionally weak in independent sources of political expression (White et al., 2010, p.277). This limited experience of democracy, and democratic pluralism in part explains the challenges of democratic transition. In addition, the experience of the 1990s influenced Russian approaches to democracy as the initial attempt to transit to democracy resulted in chaos and poverty under President Boris Yeltsin. Remington (2012) indicates that post-soviet political culture, compounded by the instability of Yeltsin's tenure, has undermined transition towards democracy as most “Russians are willing to trade-off democratic rights for political order and stability”(p.125). For Russians, their view of democracy and its ends is one that delivers stability and security, more than individual freedom.

McFaul (2002) posited that “deeper structural variables might explain regime variance” (p.238). In this vein, the confluence of Russian political culture and the soviet legacy with democratization offers some explanation to Russia's failed attempt to transit to democracy. As a result of these structural factors, McFaul (2002) argued that post-communist regime types were “so varied [that] the experience might better be captured by a different theory and a separate label—the fourth wave” (p.242). As indicated above, Russia does not satisfy the institutional guarantees posited by Dahl (1971), but it has also shifted from soviet-authoritarianism. Rather, Russia is characterised by institutional hybridity, as the succeeding section will contend, Russia falls under an alternative rubric of regimes.

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## *Hybrid-Regimes*

Observers have noted the “unprecedented growth in the number of regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian [post-third wave]” (Diamond, 2002, p.25). Many scholars posit that the third wave of democratization led to the proliferation of “hybrid-regimes”. Fruman (2008) contends that these systems come into being when the “conditions in a given society are not ripe for democracy, and yet there is no ideological alternative to it” (p.39). As the name infers, hybrid-regimes represent an institutional hybridity characterised by the coalescing of democratic and authoritarian methods within a given polity (Diamond, 2002, p.24). These regimes are comprised of formal democratic institutions, *inter alia* multiparty elections; however, they are unsupported by democratic norms and attitudes.

There is significant scholarly congruence on the characteristics of the hybrid-regime. Hale (2011) argues that hybrid-regimes are not a vague confluence of authoritarian and democratic elements, but a combination of “significantly contested elections with state political coercion and corruption” (p.35). Hale (2011) outlines the central features of hybrid-regimes, namely, media manipulation, coercing or buying votes, political violence, manipulation of political parties, and selective prosecution (pp.37-39). In a similar vein, Levitsky and Way (2010) define hybrid-regimes as polities “in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power”, but in which the incumbents “abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage *vis-à-vis* their opponents” (p.5). Levitsky and Way posit a number of generalisations derived from their study of twentieth and twenty-first century hybrid-regimes. First, they contend that although formally democratic, “competition [in hybrid-regimes] is real but unfair”, caused by, “electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources, and varying degrees of harassment and violence”, all of which, “skewed the electoral playing-field in favour of incumbents” (Levitsky, Way, 2010, p.3). Scholars also concur on the importance of elections in generating legitimacy. Andreas Schedler (2002) contends that “the dream [of hybrid-regimes] is to reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty” (p. 37). Diamond (2002) argues that “democratic political institutions, such as multiparty competition masks [to legitimate] the reality of authoritarian domination” (p.24).

Current approaches to the study of hybrid polities, however, are limited by their focus on a single root concept. For example, hybrid-regimes have been conceptualised as “defective democracies” (Merkel, 2004) and “illiberal democracies” (Zakaria, 1997), on the one hand, and “electoral authoritarianism” (Schedler, 2002) and “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky, Way, 2010) on the other, implicitly understood as diminished subtypes of democratic or authoritarian regimes (Collier, Levitsky, 1997). Attaching adjectives to the existing regime typology implies the possibility of transition, or that the hybrid-regime is not a viable separate regime type. Rather, this paper concurs with Matthijs Bogaards (2009) et al. who argue that hybrid-regimes are a distinct typology of regime, many of which have proven durable suggesting they “are not transitional phases” (p.415). Similarly, Hale (2011) contends that hybrid-regimes are often “long lived and stable political systems”, and the trajectories of more than half of which have exceeded 10 years (p.27). The paper will now turn to Russia's hybrid-regime.

## *Putin's Hybrid-Regime*

This paper contends that Putin's Russia falls within the conceptual parameters of the hybrid-regime. Hale (2011), Levitsky and Way (2010) posit that electoral manipulation and falsification, unfair media access, political violence, selective prosecution and laws which favour the incumbents' are *sine qua non* to the hybrid-regime. From this perspective, these essential elements can be used as an analytical tool to determine if a polity is a hybrid-regime, in this case it will be used to explicate the nature of Russian politics. The characteristics outlined by Hale (2011), Levitsky and Way (2010) are evident in Putin's Russia, for example:

- Electoral manipulation and falsification. Hale (2011) identifies the “manipulation of voters choice set” in which “fake opposition movements, sets of politicians or parties [are] supported by the incumbent regime as a way of channelling opposition votes” (p.36). Although fake parties are not *sui generis* to Putin's incumbency, there has been a notable proliferation of fake parties, their role within the hybrid-regime will be analysed in the succeeding chapters. Hale (2011) argues that “coercing and buying votes” is another feature of hybrid-regimes. This is evident in Putin's Russia, from Kremlin officials paying the electorate to

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- vote Putin or UR, posters of Putin in polling stations, to public sector workers facing the choice of voting Putin or face unemployment (White, 2011, pp.544-545). In terms of falsification, the Kremlin's methods include *inter alia*, "ballot stuffing" and giving Kremlin supporters multiple ballots (White, 2011, p.538).
- Media manipulation. Hale (2011) argues that "where the state owns mass media, it can directly bias content in favour of pro-incumbent candidates and policies" (p.36). Media manipulation is evident in Putin's Russia as pro-Kremlin Dimitri Medvedev received 43% of coverage in the 2008 presidential elections, while no other candidate received more than 10% (White, 2011, p.535). This was enabled through the proxy of state owned Gazprom, which has acquired a commanding stake in media following the co-option/elimination of media oligarchs.
  - Political violence. Politically motivated violence is evident in Putin's Russia. For example, there are frequent threats to the psychical integrity of journalists who are critical of the Kremlin, epitomised in a number of high profile murders, such as Anna Politkovskaya, and 32 other journalists since 2000 (Guardian, 2009).
  - Selective prosecution. Hale (2011) notes that the "authorities gain the power to prosecute or disqualify almost anyone they want, at the same time ensuring that friendly parties, candidates, or individuals can get away with illegal activities that give them electoral advantage" (p.37). Selective prosecution is evident in Putin's Russia in a number of high-profile cases, such as the "Khodorkovsky affair", whereby dubious charges of tax evasion and fraud resulted in the incarceration of the oligarch, but derived from political motives due to his support for the oppositional KPRF (Goldman, 2004, p.37).
  - Laws favouring the electoral prospects of the incumbents'. This feature of the hybrid-regime is evident in Putin's Russia. The 2001/4 Law on Political Parties, the 'Law on the Election of Deputies' and the 'Law on Opposing Extremism' all systematically make the party system less favourable for regime opposition (Remington, 2012, p.172).

It is evident, *prima facie*, that Putin's Russia is a hybrid-regime and should be categorized and defined as such. In Russia, although formal democratic institutions exist *de jure*, such as periodic elections and political parties, *de facto* they are marred by disparities in electoral resources, coercion, and Putin's power to legislate to disadvantage opponents. These facets of the hybrid-regime subvert democratic institutions, and diminish their meaning, in Putin's Russia they create an 'uneven playing field' in which the Kremlin is advantaged *vis-à-vis* the opposition.

That is not to say, however, that Putin's regime is not legitimate due to its lack of adherence to democratic norms. A poll by Forbes (2013) in June 2013 found that 63 percent of the Russian *demos* who responded supported Putin and his policies, providing the regime with a source of societal legitimacy. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Putin's hybrid-regime is relatively consolidated. Schedler (2001, p.73) posits that the ability to withstand adverse conditions and shocks indicates the level of consolidation of a regime. Similarly, Burnell and Calvert (1999) contend that the idealized endpoint of a regime's consolidation lies in "a totally assured confidence in the ability [of the political regime] to withstand crises and shocks" (p.19). Applying this dictum to Putin's hybrid-regime suggests that it is consolidated. Putin's regime has survived numerous terrorist attacks, including a spate of attacks in Volgograd, Stavropol and Dagestan in 2013-2014 (RT, 2013.a); the regime survived mass anti-government protests in 2012 (BBC, 2012); and macroeconomic shocks, such as the 2008 financial crisis.

Overall, Russia's transition from authoritarianism during the third wave did not result in the emergence of "Russian democracy". Russia shifted into a conceptual "grey zone" of regimes, failing to satisfy the institutional guarantees posited by Dahl (1971). Rather, as the previous section indicates, there is *prima facie* evidence that the hybrid-regime is the most applicable conceptual approach to Russian politics. However, rather than being transitory phases, hybrid-regimes constitute a unique regime in its own right. Having established that Putin's Russia falls within the parameters of the hybrid-regime, this paper will now analyse how political parties operate within the hybrid system.

## 2. Russian Political Parties; *Parties of Power*

In his seminal study of hybrid-regimes, Hale (2011) posits that "authorities have become masters at creating fake opposition [...] in an attempt to manipulate the choices voters face" (p.36). However, other than identifying "fake

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opposition", the scope of Hale's analysis pertaining to political parties is limited. Fake parties are central to hybrid-regimes. However, parties in Russia's hybrid-regime have developed a plethora of roles. Similarly, other scholars (*inter alia*, Levitsky, Way, 2010) have failed to sufficiently explicate the role of parties in hybrid systems. This chapter seeks to ascertain the role of Russia's parties of power, focusing on UR and JR. This paper finds that the role of these parties is essential to the stability and consolidation of the hybrid-regime. First however, the chapter will define the relevant terminology, identify the conceptual approaches to parties/party systems applicable to Russian politics and outline Russia's party system.

## *Terminology and Approaches*

This paper proposes a tripartite typology for Russian parties in the hybrid-regime, comprised of parties of power, semi-opposition parties and opposition parties. The first category, parties of power, refers to those parties created by the Kremlin, and which subsequently exhibit unconditional support for the president or prime-minister. As a result of their parastatal nature, parties of power gain access to state support and administrative resources, resulting in electoral advantage *vis-à-vis* the opposition. Vladimir Gel'man (2008) argues that parties of power are "established by and closely tied to the rulers [...] freely employ[ing] state power and resources to maintain dominance; and using extra-constitutional means to control the outcomes of politics during elections" (p.915). The second category, semi-opposition parties, refers to what Luke March (2009) calls "Duma opposition", in so much that these parties oppose the main party of power in the legislature and their leaders tend to use opposition rhetoric. However, these parties "toe the Kremlin line", and generally back the Kremlin's agenda (White, 2012, p.217). These parties *raison d'être* can also be to siphon votes from, and subsequently weaken, opposition parties. The third category, opposition parties, is comprised of "political actors seeking power precisely because they want to change the way the political system operates", these parties and movements "openly seek to challenge the regime" (White, 2012, p.219).

Many scholars posit that Russia has developed a "hegemonic party system", due in part to the dominance of the parties of power (Roberts, 2012; Gel'man, 2008). Giovanni Sartori (1976) provides a seminal insight into the nature of "hegemonic party systems". Sartori (1976) argues that in these systems, party competition is stifled as "the hegemonic party neither allows for a formal nor a *de facto* competition for power" (p.230). Although other parties are permitted to exist, they are "second class, licensed parties", not permitted to compete with the hegemonic party on an equal basis. Despite the existence of other parties, hegemonic systems are not multiparty systems. They are, at best, a "two-level system", characterised by "satellite parties", which act in support of the hegemonic party (Sartori, 1976, p.231). When studying the role of Russia's parties in the hybrid-regime, particularly the parties of power and semi-opposition parties, this approach provides some insight.

## *Party System Development under Putin*

Before the analysis of parties can begin, the parameters of Russia's party system should be established. Russia's party system systematically favours Kremlin parties, in particular, the parties of power, indicating that Russia is a hegemonic party system. First, this is achieved through the development of institutional barriers, which ensure the dominance of parties of power *vis-à-vis* opposition parties. For example, the 2001/4 'Law on Political Parties', stipulates that parties must have 50,000 members in half of Russia's 87 regions and in order to gain legislative seats, and parties have to cross a 7 percent threshold (Remington, 2012, p.172). In addition, the 2005 'Law on the Election of Deputies' eliminated single-member district seats in the Duma; by 2007 all seats were filled by party lists. This has created a legal impasse to smaller parties, whilst making the system more favourable to larger, usually pro-Kremlin parties. The electoral playing field has also been sloped to favour Kremlin parties through the widespread use of electoral fraud. The Kremlin's *modus operandi* is multifaceted, from allowing Putin supporters access to multiple ballots, to ballot stuffing, and intimidating voters. All of which in 2011, led the Parliamentary-Assembly of the Council-of-Europe to state that the Duma elections were "slanted in favour of United Russia [...] marked by a convergence of the state and the governing party, limited political competition and a lack of fairness" (RIA Novosti, 2012.a). It is evident that in Russia's party system, Kremlin parties are advantaged *vis-à-vis* opposition. The remainder of this chapter aims to ascertain the role of these parties in the hybrid-regime, beginning with UR.

## *United Russia*

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Parties of power are not *sui generis* to Putin's Russia, from 'Our Home is Russia' (OHR) (1995-1999) to the 'Unity' party (1999); there have been numerous attempts by the Kremlin to create a national party of power. In contemporary Russia, UR is the pro-government party of power. The role of UR is multifaceted; however, there are three primary functions identifiable. UR supports the Kremlin through ensuring reliable legislative majorities, control of the legislative process and ensuring support for the president.

UR's origins shed light on its classification as a party of power. UR was formed in 2001, but its roots lay in the 'Unity' party, formed with Kremlin support shortly before the 1999 state Duma election, and campaigning as the "party of Putin" (Hale, 2010, p.92). UR's close ties to the Kremlin were evident in its 2007 election manifesto, simply called "Putin's Plan: A Worthy Future for a Great Country", which refers to Putin as the "national leader" (United-Russia, 2007). Russia, the manifesto states, would once again become one of the "world centres of political and economic influence, cultural and moral attraction [this is] Putin's plan" (United-Russia, 2007). UR's support of the President is evident in the rhetorical position of key party figures, such as party chairman Boris Gryzlov who stated in 2007 as Putin's second presidential term was ending, "we must preserve Vladimir Putin's status as the national leader via the elections [his role] as leader will be fully guaranteed by the party and its parliamentary majority" (Reuters, 2007). Similarly, Putin stated in 2003 that UR was the "the political force [he had] relied on throughout these four years [which had] consistently supported [him as president]" (Izvestiya, 2003). This section will now identify a number of functions that UR performs to support the Kremlin.

First, in explicating the role of UR in the hybrid-regime, there is an apparent institutional rationale for the Kremlin to create party support in the Duma. The nature of the Russian constitution creates a number of potentially conflicting power centres, as Russia has a "dual executive", with a president in the federal executive branch, and a prime-minister as head of the legislature (Roberts, 2012, p.234). However, through the proxy of UR, the Kremlin can placate the threat posed by an independent legislature. For example, UR is loyal to the Kremlin, and holds a majority of seats in the Duma (50 percent as of 2014), facilitating minimal conflict between the two branches of government. Quantitatively, as the UR faction grew in the Duma from 1999, the efficiency of law making also increased. For example, by 2013, the number of laws proposed by the Kremlin numbered 595, of which 582 were passed by the Duma (Duma.gov.ru, 2014). Putin argued in 2012, that all branches of government must become more "efficient", and "there must be an extensive introduction of new forms and methods of control" (Putin, 2012), through UR Putin has a means of controlling the legislative. This contrasts markedly with Yeltsin's presidency, during which the polity was characterised by institutional paralysis. Yeltsin lacked a strong pro-government party in parliament, consequently facing opposition from the Duma (Roberts, 2012, p.234). UR therefore performs an important role of rationalising executive-legislative relations.

Through UR the Kremlin gains a strong degree of control over the legislative process and significant autonomy over law making, what Gel'man (2008) refers to as "external governance". For example, the Duma has passed controversial legislation which disadvantages the opposition *vis-à-vis* Kremlin parties such as the 2004 'Law on Political Parties', and the 'Law on Opposing Extremism', which has allowed the Kremlin to crackdown on opposition groups and human-rights organisations. In addition, other legislation such as the 2012 'Foreign Agents Law', which fines foreign assisted NGOs which take part in "political activity", removing checks on executive power, were passed by the Duma enabled by UR majorities of 49.3 percent in 2003, 64 percent in 2007 and 50 percent in 2011 (The Economist, 2011). UR's role in the hybrid-regime is, therefore, to represent Kremlin interests in the legislature and ensure the passing of Kremlin backed legislation.

UR also shores up societal support for the president. In an address to party members in 2013, Putin stated that an important role of the party was "integrating people who are not formally party members, but who share our basic views, into your ranks [and] extend[ing] the social base the party relies on for support" (Putin, 2013). Stephan White (2011) outlines UR's unconditional support for the president, arguing that "it was less clear what the new party stood for, other than support for the President and whatever policies he put forward" (p.45). Therefore, increasing membership and "integrating people" into UR ranks, by extension, increases support for Putin. There have been notable successes. For example, according to the UR website, the party had in 2008 1.98 million members, increasing from 2001 by 300,000 per-year (United-Russia, 2014). In addition, UR also deflects negative public opinion away from the Kremlin. For example, the 2005 law 'On the Monetisation of Privileges', which substantially



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cut social welfare, was passed by UR under pressure from the Kremlin. The law sparked weeks of street protests, with protestors accusing UR of "betrayal", but not implicating the Kremlin (Roberts, 2012, p.236).

Furthermore, UR ensures the investment of the political elite in Kremlin power structures. Through access to patronage, political elites can benefit from support of UR and the Kremlin. For example, UR officials frequently receive top posts in Russian industry and institutions, such as chair of UR's executive committee Alexander Bespalov who, following his resignation, received a post on Gazprom's board in 2003 (Gel'man, 2008, p.920). Remington and Reuter (2009, p.507) posit that this process of patronage, through UR's close affiliation with the president, co-opts political elites into support of UR and by extension the Kremlin. This produces stability by minimizing elite conflict, facilitating the stability of the hybrid-regime.

However, UR's role of sustaining public support for the Kremlin from the *demos* and political elite is limited. Despite positioning as non-ideological, UR exhibits a commitment to *laissez faire* economics over a more interventionist model. For example, UR's 2012 election-programme is replete with reference to free market economics and austerity measures, stating "we cannot afford to accumulate public debt [and only] increase social spending without endangering getting into debt", UR will enable "conditions to stimulate private initiative [...] especially protection from any attack on private property" (United-Russia, 2012). UR's ideological position is problematic when the Kremlin needs to move on the left electorate, eliciting an acute need to develop a pro-government leftist party. This is embodied in the creation of the 'Just Russia' party.

## *Just Russia*

The 'part' cannot effectively encompass the 'whole' without losing its internal ideological cohesiveness. In this vein, UR cannot encompass all national interest groups, particularly those of the left. Luke March (2009) posits that the Kremlin needed a "manageable opposition", which could oppose UR, but not threaten the status quo. JR's *raison d'être* is to ensure support for the Kremlin from the left electorate. Its role is also to siphon votes from the Kremlin's principle opposition, the Communists, by positioning ideologically close in terms of its rhetoric and policy. However, there are also scholars who argue that JR has moved beyond what Andrew Wilson (2005) terms "clones"; parties backed by the authorities that profess similar views to genuine opposition factions to try to split their vote. But rather, posit that JR is a second party of power (March, 2009). First, this section will outline JR's relationship with the Kremlin, followed by an analysis of its role in the hybrid-regime.

JR's origins indicate that, like UR, it is a parastatal party created by the Kremlin. JR was formally established in 2006 following the merger of three left leaning parties, the Party of Life, the Pensioners' party, and Rodina. Rodina had been formed with Kremlin support in 2003, as a means of weakening the KPRF's support base and JR's leader, Sergei Mironov, is a close Putin associate (Remington, 2012, p.178). JR's support of the Kremlin is evident from Mironov's rhetorical position, stating in response to anti-government protests in 2011 that "party members should distance themselves from [anti-government] opposition protesters" (The Moscow Times, 2012). Mironov's support for the Kremlin was evident from as early as 2004, stating that "we all want Vladimir Putin to be the next president", despite being a presidential candidate himself (Aljazeera, 2012). JR's 2011 election manifesto refers to the party as "constructive opposition", and as a "pro-government party", indicating that it supports the Kremlin (Just Russia, 2011). The paper will now turn to the analysis of JR's role in the hybrid-regime.

First, JR's role within the hybrid-regime is to weaken left wing opposition parties, principally the KPRF. In voting terms, the threat posed by the KPRF is considerable. For example, the Communists have consistently come second to UR, polling 11.57 percent in 2007 and in 2011 19.19 percent equating to 92 of the 450 seats in the state Duma (Russia Votes, 2014). As will be expounded in the succeeding chapters, the KPRF is broadly unsupportive of the Kremlin, opposing its agenda. Furthermore, a Levada Centre (2007) poll found that 46 percent of respondents were supportive of socialism and 30 percent of the electorate identify themselves as centre left. From the perspective above, there was a need within the Kremlin to establish what March (2009) terms a "left-leg" in the Duma to weaken the KPRF.

JR is positioned as a social democratic alternative to the Communists. Party documentation and publications are

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replete with leftist slogans and terminology such as “solidarity”, “social justice” and the “exploitation of workers” (Just Russia, 2014.a). Its main policy positions include improved pay for workers, increased social welfare, higher pensions, nationalisation of resources and state funded housing, healthcare and education (Just Russia, 2014.b). JR's policy position corresponds markedly with that of the KPRF, which stands for “fair social policy [and the] interests of working people [and a] guarantee of work and decent salary [...] free and affordable health care [...] education for all [...] industrialisation and nationalisation of industry” (KPRF, 2014). However, JR's 2011 election manifesto distinguishes the two parties by portraying itself as a “progressive socialist party”, whereas, “the [KPRF] is stuck in the distant, Soviet past” (Just Russia, 2014.b). JR's role in the hybrid-regime as a means of weakening the KPRF has been largely successful. For example, by 2008 JR had over 500,000 members, approximately 320,000 more than the KPRF (March, 2009, p.517). Conversely, KPRF membership is in attenuation, decreasing from 547,000 in 2000 to 184,181 in 2007, the role of JR in part explains this (White, 2011, p.44).

Furthermore, JR also performs the residual role of maintaining elite investment in the hybrid-regime. JR provides an alternative party to affiliate with or invest in other than UR, but one which remains loyal to the Kremlin. March (2009) argues that JR grew due in part to “[UR] defectees”, which in 2007 numbered 33 (p.517). Through this process of co-opting elites into regime sanctioned activity, JR redirects political elites from aligning with opposition factions such as, *inter alia*, the KPRF. Putin argued that the lack of a pro-government left-wing party made “the [political] system unstable”, from this perspective, the role of JR can be viewed as a means of minimizing elite conflict, and ensuring the stability of the hybrid-regime (March, 2009, p.511).

In addition, the creation of JR augments the pro-government faction in the Duma. In 2007 JR gained 38 seats and 64 seats in 2011 (Russia Votes, 2014). When the collective electoral success of JR and UR are weighted together, the pro-government domination of the legislature is significant. For example, through JR and UR the Kremlin controls, by proxy, 62.56 percent of the Duma, or 302 of 450 legislative seats (Russia Votes, 2014). This gives the Kremlin autonomy over the legislative process, as the pro-Kremlin faction is 12.56 percent larger than the required 50 percent necessary to pass legislation. The dominance of the pro-Kremlin faction has led some (March, 2009; Remington, 2012) to posit that Russia is developing a “managed two party system”. This is not unlike Western liberal democracies, such as the UK or U.S., in which the legislature is dominated by two parties. However, Russia's hybrid system differs as neither party “openly seek to challenge the regime” (White, 2012, p.219). March (2009) contends that within Russia's developing two party system, JR is the “second party of power”, providing a “sparring partner” for UR, which ensures a façade of party competition, but does not threaten the Kremlin (Remington, 2012, p.178). Furthermore, should support for UR wane, then the Kremlin can use JR as an alternative party of power, ensuring the regime is not dependent upon one party for its support base and ensuring the perpetuation of the status quo.

The contribution of the parties of power to the hybrid-regime is *sine qua non* to the stability of the system. UR and JR perform a variety of roles which support the hybrid-regime, they ensure support for the Kremlin; they legislate to weaken opposition parties; they ensure the representation of Kremlin interests in the state Duma; as with JR they can siphon votes from genuine opposition parties and they ensure the investment of the political elite in Kremlin sanctioned power structures, minimizing elite conflict. The role of UR and JR is therefore essential to sustaining the hybrid-regime. It is also worth noting, however, that categorizing JR is problematic, as it performs roles attributable to both parties of power and semi-opposition parties. The paper will now turn to the role of semi-opposition and opposition parties in the hybrid-regime.

### 3. Semi-Opposition and Opposition Parties in the Hybrid-regime

The preceding chapter outlined the role of parties of power in facilitating the stability and consolidation of the hybrid-regime. There is, however, a variety of party typologies in the hybrid system. There are, *inter alia*, semi-opposition parties which like parties of power, support the hybrid-regime by backing Kremlin proposals in the Duma and siphon votes from *de facto* opposition parties. Furthermore, it is also necessary to analyse how opposition parties operate in Putin's regime. Despite the existence of opposition parties, their role of “openly seek[ing] to challenge the regime” (White, 2012, p.219), has been undermined by a number of factors. First this chapter will explicate the role of the

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LDPR in the hybrid-regime, followed by an analysis of opposition parties.

## *LDPR*

This paper posits that the LDPR falls under the rubric of “semi-opposition” party. This conceptual classification derives from the party’s relationship with the Kremlin. Formed under the charismatic leadership of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in 1991 with funding from the KGB, the LDPR espouses a nationalist opposition rhetoric, but is *de facto* largely supportive of the Kremlin’s agenda (Hale, 2010, p.87). The 2014 party programme appears to be highly critical of Kremlin policy and conduct. For example, it calls for the “eradication” of corruption in government, stating that “corrupt officials [have] permeated every pore of our society” (LDPR, 2014). It is critical of electoral fraud, stating that “election fraud should be severely punished” and it opposes government economic policy, advocating to “radically change fiscal policy [...] the economy is inefficient [with disparities] between rich and poor” and arguing that there is “no real competition in the economy or politics” (LDPR, 2014). However, despite this oppositional rhetoric, it is broadly pro-government in its voting behaviour and, like JR, siphons votes from opposition parties. That said, the LDPR differs from JR in its use of oppositional rhetoric and it receives less support in terms of funding and access to administrative resources from the authorities and cannot, therefore, be categorized as a party of power (Remington, 2012).

First, the role of the LDPR in the hybrid-regime is to support the Kremlin in the legislative process. There are many cases of the LDPR voting in favour of Kremlin policies. A notable example, however, is the ‘2013 Amnesty Bill’, comprised of an amnesty for protestors in which “around 1,300 [...] released from prison [...] 17,500 relieved of non-custodial sentences [and] criminal proceedings against 6,000 terminated”, Vladimir Vasilyev, deputy speaker of parliament said (RT, 2013.b). The LDPR voted in favour of the Bill despite the party and Zhirinovskiy personally taking tough stance on civil disobedience. This indicates that the LDPR performs policy *volte-face* when support is needed to enable the passing of Kremlin backed legislation.

Despite its origins as a right-wing KGB funded party, there are scholars (White, 2012) who posit the LDPR’s role within the hybrid-regime is also to siphon votes from the KPRF. David White (2012) contends that the “LDPR’s traditional role [is] attracting the support of potential Communist voters” (pp.217-218). The Communists have traditionally positioned as a left, nationalist party. The LDPR is a nationalist party, its party programme aims at the “revival of Russia as a great power”, and the party supports the, “great Russian people, the Orthodox faith, the restoration of the country’s territory [and] the defence of fellow nationals abroad” (LDPR, 2014). White (2012) posits that “through its national-patriotic appeal, the LDPR eats into the Communists’ electorate” (p.218). This in part explains the declining membership of the KPRF, as the populist approach of Zhirinovskiy and the LDPR appealed to the younger, disenfranchised urban electorate who traditionally voted KPRF (Hale, 2010). The role of the LDPR in the hybrid-regime is, therefore, to weaken opposition parties, principally the KPRF. The paper will now turn to the role of the KPRF in the hybrid-regime.

## *The KPRF*

Andrew Wilson (2005) posited that Russian politics has become “virtualised”, as the presence of parties of power and semi-opposition parties may afford the pretence, but not the substance of competitive party politics. Party competition in Russia’s hybrid-regime is largely a façade, as although JR and UR may oppose each other as “sparring partners”, and the LDPR exhibits an oppositional stance, they are broadly supportive of the Kremlin. However, parties such as the KPRF, *inter alia*, do seek to “change the way the political system operates” (White, 2012, p.219), and opposes to the Kremlin. The KPRF is the successor party to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and was re-established in 1993 under the leadership of Gennadii Zyuganov after the ban on its activity in 1991 had been pronounced unconstitutional (Remington, 2012, p.174). The KPRF is an opposition party; however, its ability to effectively oppose the Kremlin has been undermined by a number of factors.

The KPRF is the only parliamentary party to *de facto* oppose the Kremlin. Its oppositional positioning is evident in its party programme which adopts an anti-systemic character, contending that the government is returning Russia to a “barbaric primitive capitalism” which is leading to “social regression” and “national catastrophe”, but led by the

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KPRF, “forces of social and nation liberation [are merging into a] single mass movement of resistance [of] people’s power” (KPRF, 2014). The 2014 party programme also states that the KPRF is the “sole political organisation, consistently upholding the rights of the people, [the] strategic goal of the party [is] the construction of renewed socialism in Russia [...] guided by Marxist-Leninist theory” (KPRF, 2014). Furthermore, the KPRF’s oppositional stance is evident in the rhetorical position of key party figures. Zyuganov stated in an address to the Duma in 2013 that “we must warn society that should the current social economic course be continued, Russia would face collapse”, contending further that, “the Communist Party says outright: the country needs a new course, a new team, a new strategy [...] we need a new government—a government of national interests, a government of popular trust” (RIA Novosti, 2013).

Opposing the Kremlin in its policy and rhetorical positions is not unlike the LDPR. However, there is substance behind the KPRF’s positioning as an opposition party; its response to the 2011 protests over electoral fraud being a notable example. Following the 2011 state Duma elections, electoral falsification sparked weeks of street protests centred in Moscow, in response the KPRF announced it would “lead a nationwide protest movement”, and urged “proletarians and patriots to unite” (RT, 2012). Zyuganov stated, “for the last 20 years we’ve been talking about electoral fraud. We are glad that people have finally realized this and taken to the streets” (RIA Novosti, 2012). In voting terms, the KPRF has frequently opposed government-led proposals in the Duma. For example, the ‘2013 Bill on Mixed Election Procedure’, banning coalitions of parties and making the system less favourable for smaller parties, was opposed by the KPRF in both readings, arguing that the bill was an “outdated throwback” (RT, 2013.d). The KPRF has also exhibited opposition to both Putin and Medvedev, leading an initiative to dissolve the Medvedev government in 2013, with KPRF central committee chair, Valeriy Rashkin, stating that “we are ready to give the most harsh appraisal of the government work”, and the KPRF was the only party not to vote in favour of Putin becoming prime-minister in 2008 (RT, 2013.c; March, 2012, p.248). However, the KPRF’s role as a *de facto* opposition party in the hybrid-regime has been undermined by a number of factors.

The KPRF inherited a well-structured national organisation, and a mass-membership from the CPSU. However, the popularity of the KPRF is waning and membership of the party has reduced by approximately 416,000 from the late 1990’s (March, 2002, p.142). White (2011, p.47) posits that there is a correlation between changing Russian demographics and the reduction of KPRF support (White, 2011, p.47). As Zyuganov noted in 2008 that “the majority of party members are past or approaching retirement age; older people make up about 85% of the organisation’s membership, while people under 30 make up 5%” (Zyuganov 2008, in; White, 2012, p.385). Studies on Russian demographics indicate that the population is contracting, with only 13 percent now aged 60 years-or-over (index mundi, 2014), problematic as the KPRF’s core demographic is generally the older generations. This is compounded by JR which, as noted previously, is positioned as a “progressive socialist party”, deliberately to appeal to younger voters (Just Russia, 2014).

Furthermore, the KPRF’s role of opposing the Kremlin is undermined by its inability to ideologically reposition. If the KPRF repositions to the centre then it loses its ideological distinctiveness, providing no clear alternative to JR and risks alienating its remaining support base of veteran CPSU supporters. However, should the party reposition further left, then it risks marginalisation and will be unable to attract new voters (Remington, 2012, p.174). Furthermore, although the Communists do not directly repudiate Putin, they do have an ambiguous attitude towards the incumbent. This is detrimental to attempts to increase the party’s support base, as Putin is a popular president. Conversely, JR is able to attract more support by positioning left, similar to the KPRF, but also by exhibiting support for Putin. The confluence of these factors suggests that in the long-term, support for the KPRF may dwindle, and its future as the second largest party in the Duma appears ambiguous. In this case, there will be no *de facto* opposition to the Kremlin. This has a consolidating effect on the hybrid-regime as the government is unlikely to face significant opposition.

## *The Liberals*

As well as the KPRF, the liberal faction is an opposition grouping in Russian politics, although, contrary to the Communists, it considers itself the ‘democratic opposition’ to government. It is comprised of Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS), and has adopted an oppositional stance towards the Kremlin. However, the capacity of the

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liberals to effectively challenge Putin is undermined by exogenous and endogenous factors. First, the nature of the Russian party system systematically disadvantages smaller parties. For example, since the 1999 electoral cycle, SPS and Yabloko have failed to cross the 7 percent threshold, and have subsequently been marginalised from parliamentary politics (Russia Votes, 2014). However, the weakness of the liberals is not solely attributable to institutional barriers. The liberal faction is characterised by “in-fighting” between its two main political stakeholders, Yabloko and SPS. For example, Yabloko has persistently refused to merge with SPS or other liberal groups; the liberal faction is subsequently weak and fragmented (Remington, 2012, p.174). This denotes that the manipulation of the party system is effective at facilitating stability in the hybrid-regime, as opposition parties are denied accession to the Duma, and therefore have no legislative influence. It also indicates that due to internal division, a political faction that is independent from Kremlin manipulation is unable to challenge the regime, having a ‘consolidating effect’ on the hybrid system.

The above analysis highlights the variety of parties within the hybrid-regime. The role of semi-opposition parties is to support the Kremlin, by weakening *de facto* opponents of the regime and backing Kremlin proposals in the Duma, whilst positioning as an opposition party, evident from Zhirinovskiy's LDPR, creates a façade of opposition. In addition, the analysis denotes that the manipulation of the party system, the role of parties of power and semi-opposition parties is *sine qua non* to the stability of the hybrid-regime. This contention derives from the fact that although opposition parties are present in the hybrid-regime, their ability to challenge the status quo is limited, due to a lack of legislative influence and the role of Kremlin parties in reducing their support base. However, to ascertain the role of Russian parties in the hybrid-regime, their contribution to the system needs to be analysed in a specific context, this is the focus of the succeeding chapter.

## 4. Parties and the 2008 Financial Crisis: ‘All Bark and No Bite’

To understand the role of political parties in Russia's hybrid-regime, it is necessary to situate their behaviour in a specific context, in this case the 2008 financial crisis. The Russian economy suffered among the severest fiscal collapses of any Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country, with a 7.9 percent GDP drop in 2009 (RIA Novosti, 2010). However, parties did not mobilize opposition movements (excluding the KPRF), or challenge the Kremlin. This was in stark contrast to say the USA, much of the European Union, and neighbouring Ukraine and Moldova in particular where, as March (2012) notes, “[the] economic crisis and its aftermath [...] were significant factors in popular discontent, party volatility and the ousting of incumbents” (pp.242-243). However, this scenario was not repeated in Russia, due largely to the role of parties. This chapter is primarily concerned with the response from JR, LDPR and the KPRF as examples of each party typology in the hybrid-regime and will determine their responses to the crisis through explicating party programmes and the rhetorical position of key party figures.

### *Just Russia*

The response of JR to the 2008 financial crisis largely confirms its role within the hybrid-regime as a “parastatal party” (March, 2009). JR refrained from repudiating the Kremlin, and was broadly supportive of Medvedev's modernization agenda as a means out of the crisis (March, 2012, p.247). This position is evident in a speech made by Mironov to the state Duma in 2008, in which he conceded “this is a serious crisis, and there is every reason to believe that it will be a rather long-lasting one” (Pravda.ru, 2008). However, referring to Medvedev's economic reforms, he argued that “there are opportunities for an economic breakthrough [and] to use the crisis for [positively] changing the structure of [Russia's] economy” (Pravda.ru, 2008). JR did not implicate the Kremlin in the crisis. Rather, Mironov saw the main impasse to modernisation and recovery as the “absence of competition and the culture of political dialogue, open opposition of views and opinions” (Just Russia, 2010). In particular, JR's criticism was reserved for UR's monopoly of legislative power and corruption within the ruling party. For example, in one region, namely Altai, JR's electoral campaign was explicitly focused on the “danger of single-party monopoly” (March, 2012, p.247). Subsequently, JR's anti-crisis programme included support for Medvedev, but was also aimed at reducing UR's legislative hegemony. For example, JR proposed that the threshold for Duma accession be lowered from 7 percent to 5 or even 3 percent, and for party registration requirements to be simplified to allow for more political

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competition (March, 2012, p.248). JR's position of hostility *vis-à-vis* UR and its support for the Kremlin was a natural result of its role as 'secondary party of power'.

## *The LDPR*

Similar to JR, the LDPR's response to the 2008 financial crisis substantiates its conceptual classification as a semi-opposition party. First, the rhetorical position of party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy reflects the party's parastatal relationship with the Kremlin and its role as a semi-opposition party. In a speech in 2010 Zhirinovskiy conceded that Russia "fell to the worst economic crisis that is still ongoing", however this did not elicit a challenge to the status quo (Zhirinovskiy, 2010.a). For example, Zhirinovskiy referred to Putin in 2010 as "the most experienced official" in Russia, in the same statement even praising the Kremlin's foreign policy as opposed to criticising its monetary and fiscal policy (Zhirinovskiy, 2010.a). This suggests that Zhirinovskiy, although critical of the crisis, did not call for a change in leadership, rather, stating that Putin was the "right man for the job" (Zhirinovskiy, 2010.a). Like JR therefore, the LDPR did not challenge the authorities during the crisis.

However, the LDPR was highly critical of UR, espousing the most militant response to the crisis. The LDPR labelled UR in October 2009 the party of "swindlers, thieves, villains and scam-artists", and called for the resignation of UR party leader Boris Gryzlov (March, 2012, pp.245-246). In a similar vein to JR, the LDPR criticised UR's dominance in the legislature. For example, Zhirinovskiy stated in May 2010 that "the monopoly of one party leads to a challenging economic environment [there is a] need to seek political diversity", using the recently formed British Conservative-Liberal-Democrat coalition as an example of how two parties can end one-party domination (Zhirinovskiy, 2010.b). Zhirinovskiy argued that a preferable parliamentary environment would consist of "two parties in coalition, two in opposition" (Zhirinovskiy, 2010.b). It is clear that the LDPR is a 'parastatal party'. Although it challenges UR, in particular, the lack of 'political diversity', it does not implicate the Kremlin in the crisis, attributable to the LDPR's nature and role as a semi-opposition party

## *The KPRF*

The role of the KPRF as a *de facto* opposition party was evident in the crisis, as its criticism of the Kremlin was the most trenchant. The KPRF's response to the 2008 crisis differs from that of JR and the LDPR, in that it directly implicated the Kremlin as responsible. This is evident from the rhetorical position of Zyuganov, who criticised the Russian economic model as being too dependent on oil and gas revenues which had produced a façade of fiscal stability. He stated that "the share of raw materials in Russia's exports has neared 90 percent", which Zyuganov attributes to, "Putin's cabinet [having] done next to nothing to diversify Russia's economy away from oil and gas" which was in part responsible for the crisis in Russia (RIA Novosti, 2013). At the core of the KPRF's criticism was a strong contention for political reform. In particular, the Communists attributed corruption and the dominance of UR as attributable for the crisis and recommended institutional changes to safeguard the integrity of elections, and to ensure opposition parties are not disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* UR. For example, the party advocated the development of a government commission comprising representatives of all parties to investigate violations of electoral laws (March, 2012, p.248).

From investigating party documentation on the KPRF website, it is evident that the Communists developed an ideologically distinct programme of reforms for the post-crisis period. One such document is replete with left-wing reforms, stating that the Communists will "first; nationalize extractive industry and other basic industries [...] create a centralized body of economic management for effective use of resources needed to rebuild the country [...] introduce progressive taxation of wages [...] profits of banks and corporations, which received state support, should be directed to repayment of loans taken from the government" (KPRF, 2010). However, as was noted in the analysis of the Communists, the KPRF differs from other parties in its mobilization of opposition movements. This was evident in the KPRF's response to the crisis, for example, in 2008 it organised country-wide anti-government protests numbering over 150,000, captured by a speech made by Zyuganov, in which he stated that "Capitalists! I recommend you start reading Marx's 'Das Kapital,'" (The Moscow Times, 2008). It is evident, *prima facie*, that the KPRF is a *de facto* opponent. Its response to the 2008 fiscal crisis challenged the status quo by proposing an anti-crisis programme based on radical change, and through the mobilization of anti-government forces.

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Furthermore, there are those scholars (March, 2012) who posit that the KPRF, in response to the crisis, attempted to exploit Kremlin factionalism for its own political gain. In his seminal study of Kremlin politics, Richard Sakwa (2010) argues that within the Kremlin's power structures, there are a number of often conflictual factions. There is, *inter alia*, a 'liberal faction', headed by then President Dimitri Medvedev, and a 'security faction', the siloviki, headed by Putin and other former security personnel. March (2012, p.248) contends that the Communists gravitated towards Medvedev during the crisis, although this appears contradictory as Medvedev's modernisation agenda was far from left wing. However, Medvedev's modernisation agenda suggested a marked shift away from the authoritarian turn under Putin. For example, in an article published by Gazeta.ru (2009) he contended that "society [will become] more open and transparent, even if this displeases the ruling class". It can be speculated that the Communists may have perceived their chances of electoral success enhanced by Medvedev, more so than under Putin and therefore sought to back the 'liberal' faction, at the expense of the siloviki. However, this strategy proved ineffective due to popular support for Putin, and the two incumbents close relationship.

## *Parties and Hybrid-Regime Perpetuation*

The contentions in this chapter indicate that parties in the hybrid system are essential to sustaining the regime and enabling it to withstand crises. When judging the ability of the hybrid system to withstand the 2008 crisis, it is necessary to analyse its depth. The crisis adversely affected ordinary Russians, for example, prices for groceries rose, the number of poor increased by approximately 2.7 million, and unemployment increased to 13 percent in 2009 (Bogetic, 2009). However, although the Communists organised protests, there were no mass anti-regime movements in the crisis and post-crisis period, and Putin's popularity remained around 70 percent throughout 2008 to 2010 (Forbes, 2013). In accounting for the ability of the hybrid-regime to withstand the crisis, the role of parties in deflecting negative attention from the Kremlin, and rather implicating UR in part accounts for this. In addition, political parties (excluding the Communists) though at times rhetorically opposed, did not mobilize opposition movements. Political parties in the hybrid system therefore have a 'regime consolidating effect'.

It is worth noting, however, that the crisis did translate itself into electoral preferences, notably, left-wing parliamentary parties gained from the crisis. For example, the Communists polled 19.19 percent in 2011, up from 7.9 in 2007; JR also polled 13.24 percent, up from 7.74 (Russia Votes, 2014). In addition, opposition parties, namely Yabloko, also witnessed an increase in votes, up from 1.59 percent in 2007 to 3.43 percent in 2011 and conversely, UR's share of the vote fell by 15 percent in 2011 (Russia Votes, 2014). This draws out JR's contribution to the system, as it was partly able to accommodate a shift left following the crisis. However, in voting terms, opposition parties also gained from the crisis, particularly the KPRF, suggesting that in periods of crises parties may become the focus of real opposition and the role of the opposition more significant.

It is evident that the role of parties in the crisis was *sine qua non* to sustaining the hybrid-regime. JR and the LDRP both exhibited support for the Kremlin, whilst repudiating UR and deflecting negative attention from the government. Both parties also failed to mobilize opposition movements in response to the crisis, ensuring the perpetuation of the system. It is evident from the analysis that there was a broad convergence on a desire for political reform. However, this proved to be 'all bark and no bite' as although challenges were made, no effective opposition to the Kremlin emerged. The KPRF advanced a recovery programme which implied radical change but due to the Kremlin's dominance of the legislative process, reform did not take place. The fact that KPRF opposition did not lead to any significant reform or regime change indicates the success of the system in marginalising opposition and ensuring hybrid-regime continuity.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond providing the regime with a sheen of legitimacy through competing in elections, each of Russia's main political parties plays a key role in sustaining the hybrid-regime. From the analysis of Russian parties, this paper has substantiated the hypothesis posited at the beginning. To refer back to the question posed at the beginning of this paper, it would be simplistic to classify the role of political parties in the hybrid-regime as 'window dressing' for

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authoritarianism. Rather, as is evident from the above analysis, the role of parties in Putin's hybrid-regime is much more intricate, each with a *sui generis* function. The role of the parties of power enables the Kremlin to dominate the legislative process; they ensure elite investment in Kremlin power structures and support the Kremlin by maintaining popularity for Putin. Furthermore, as March (2012) posits, the development of JR as a "second party of power", indicates that Russia is developing a "managed two party system", suggesting that Russia's hybrid-regime may become further consolidated as the pro-government faction continues to dominate the state Duma. In addition, even each party of power has a distinctive, if not unique role within the hybrid-regime. There are notable differences in the individual roles UR and JR perform, an example being JR's function to position left similar to the KPRF to siphon votes from, and subsequently weaken the Communists.

The role of semi-opposition parties, namely Zhirinovskiy's LDPR, also facilitates the stability of the hybrid-regime, through siphoning votes from the Communists and supporting Kremlin initiatives in the Duma. The role of the parties of power and semi-opposition parties is, therefore, *sine qua non* to the consolidation of the hybrid-regime. When judging the degree of consolidation, the ability of the system to withstand crisis provides some measure (Schedler, 2001). From this perspective, the survival of the system through the 2008 financial crisis suggests, *prima facie*, that the hybrid-regime is consolidated. From analysing the rhetorical and policy positions of parties during the crisis, and their responses to it, the role of parties was essential to regime perpetuation through 2008. That said, this consolidating role is not entirely unique to parties in the hybrid-regime, but is also true of political parties in other systems, including stable democracies.

Furthermore, there is real competition between parties in the hybrid-regime. UR and JR are competing bodies, or "sparring partners", divided by an ideological dichotomy, as JR is a "progressive socialist party" (Just Russia, 2014), whilst from analysing party documentation, it is evident that UR leans closer to markets (United Russia, 2014). The LDPR has also engaged with other Kremlin parties on antagonistic terms, particularly in response to the 2008 financial crisis. This draws out a broader role of the party system, to create a façade of competition whilst not "seek[ing] to change the way the system operates" (White, 2012, p.219). That is not to say, however, that there are no *de facto* challengers to the Kremlin. However, the analysis has shown that the role of opposition parties within the hybrid-regime is limited. The Kremlin's methods of institutional manipulation mean the liberal faction, comprised of Yabloko and SPS, cannot gain accession to the Duma, and have been effectively marginalised. Furthermore, from this paper's primary research of the KPRF and its response to the 2008 financial crisis, it is axiomatic that the Communists are an opposition party. However, the capacity of the KPRF to oppose the Kremlin and its parties of power is undermined by the role of JR and the LDPR, which actively reduce its support base, but also by exogenous factors, such as an ageing membership. This denotes that the trajectories of the KPRF as the second largest parliamentary party appear ambiguous.

However, it is also worth noting that there was a marked shift left in voting terms following the 2008 financial crisis. The Communists were the principle beneficiaries of the crisis, seeing their share of the vote increase from 7.9 percent to 19.19 percent (Russia Votes, 2014). It can be speculated based on this evidence that should Russia suffer from further economic shocks, similar to that of 2008, then it is likely that left wing parties will gain politically and parties may become the focus of real opposition. In this hypothetical scenario, the KPRF and other opposition parties may gain a more substantive role in Russian party politics and challenge the hegemony of Kremlin parties in the Duma. This calls into question the long-term stability of the hybrid-regime; however, more research is needed in this area.

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