

Chapter 5

PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS IN RUSSIA

Ben Noble

In the early 1990s, parliamentary politics was at the heart of Russian politics. It was the deadlocked battle for supremacy between the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, and the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, that ended with the shelling of the White House – the-then seat of Russia’s permanent parliament. This violent confrontation ultimately claimed the lives of many in Moscow, with upper estimates reaching 1,000 people (see the chapter on contentious politics). Now, the Federal Assembly is dismissed as a mere ‘rubber stamp’ – a body that unthinkingly nods through decisions made by the Presidential Administration and the government. What changed? How did we get from violence to passivity, from parliament being at the centre of political life, to it (apparently) playing a largely peripheral, symbolic role?

This chapter will tell the story of federal-level parliamentary politics in post-Soviet Russia. Although it might be tempting to narrate a simple account, moving from violence and confrontation to conformity and control, the chapter will also underscore events that complicate this narrative. The chapter will also touch on a more fundamental question: Does it even make sense to approach studying the Russian Federal Assembly as a ‘real’ parliament – as a branch of government that plays a meaningful, independent role in the political life of the country? Just because we call a body a legislature, does it follow that we should assume it performs the ‘roles’ and ‘functions’ traditionally associated with such institutions in democracies? In engaging with this issue, the chapter will discuss the recent literature on political institutions in non-democratic regimes, which is part of wider scholarship on neo-institutionalism. Before getting there, however, the chapter will begin with some necessary historical context: the place of parliaments in the Soviet Union.

History

Parliamentary politics in the Soviet Union

A deep chasm separated the rhetoric and reality of Soviet parliamentary politics. Article 2 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution stated that ‘All power in the USSR belongs to the people. The people exercise state power through Councils of People’s Deputies, which constitute the political foundation of the USSR. All other bodies are under the control of, and are accountable to, the Councils of People’s Deputies.’ In other words, Soviet ideology located power in parliaments (or councils – *soveti*, in Russian). This was, however, a legal fiction. In reality, power was exercised by the Communist Party. Votes in the ‘soviets’ were unanimous – symbolic affirmations of the Party line; there was no real opportunity for substantive debate of, and resistance to, decisions already made.

Things began to change with General Secretary Gorbachev’s reforms in the second half of the 1980s: *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and *demokratizatsiya*. In March 1989, elections for the Congress of People’s Deputies were held, giving people in the Soviet Union a relatively meaningful choice of candidates for the first time. Many candidates endorsed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union failed to gain seats in the Congress, losing to vocal, reform-minded individuals, including Yeltsin. The first sessions of the Congress in May 1989

proved sensational, with Soviet citizens able to watch on television real, passionate, and heated debate, with open criticism of the Soviet system.

Although the USSR Congress of People's Deputies dissolved itself following the attempted August 1991 coup, the Congress of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) continued to operate *after* the collapse of the Soviet Union (albeit changing its name slightly). (For a helpful chronology of legislative institutions in the transition across the fall of the USSR, see Remington 2001: 2.) However, the blurred lines of authority associated with the operation of the hangover 1978 Russian Constitution in the early, chaotic post-Soviet period led to ratcheting tension between the legislature and the executive. Who had the final say? Who *truly* represented the interests of the people?

The 1993 constitutional crisis

Things came to a head in 1993. Following decision-making gridlock, Yeltsin took the nuclear option on 21 September, issuing decree number 1400 to dissolve the Congress and Supreme Soviet. On 22 September 1993, members of the Committee for Protecting the People's Power and the Constitution issued an appeal to 'the people', denouncing Yeltsin's decree. This plea to the people, issued from within the White House, echoed another document in Russian parliamentary history. On 9 July 1906, members of the first Imperial State Duma issued an appeal to 'the people', protesting against the dissolution of the Duma by decree on 8 July. History appeared to be repeating itself.

Continuing a flurry of astonishing events – including the declared impeachment of Yeltsin, a ruling by the Constitutional Court finding decree 1400 null and void, the barricading of the White House, and a battle over the Ostankino television tower – Russian army tanks shelled the White House on 4 October. This proved to be the decisive blow against the resistant pro-parliamentary actors. Yeltsin was now able to forge ahead with plans for a new post-Soviet constitutional order.

The 1993 Constitution was, therefore, formed in the shadow of the fire-ravaged White House. Yeltsin had beaten the legislature into submission, allowing him to shape constitutional details from a position of strength. A referendum on whether to adopt the new constitutional text took place on the same day as elections to the Federal Assembly on 12 December 1993. (Note how odd this was: people were asked to vote for parliamentarians, who would fill a body which did not yet exist – and might never exist in case the people did not support adoption of the constitutional text.) The 1993 Constitution was adopted, and quickly dubbed 'super-presidential' (Holmes 1993/1994; see also the chapter on executive politics). This was hardly surprising given the conditions of the document's genesis. And yet, Yeltsin did not dominate the Federal Assembly after it began operating in January 1994. To understand how this was possible, we need to cover the basics of institutional rules and the shifting composition of the new parliament.

Federal Assembly

The new post-Soviet constitution created a bicameral (two-chamber) national-level legislature – the Federal Assembly – consisting of the State Duma and the Federation Council. Article 100.1 of the 1993 Constitution states that these two chambers 'shall hold separate sittings', although the two bodies sit together for the president's address to the collected Assembly – a Russian equivalent to the 'state of the nation' address by the president of the United States. The geography of these two chambers' buildings is indicative of their relative current importance. Whereas the State Duma is in the very centre of Moscow, within eyesight of the

Kremlin, the Federation Council is slightly further out – still within the capital’s central boulevard, but in a far less prominent position.

State Duma

Unlike the English words ‘parliament’ and ‘legislature’ – which are derived from the French for ‘to speak’ and the Latin for ‘law’, respectively – the Russian verb ‘*dumat*’, from which the word ‘Duma’ is derived, means ‘to think’. Although we should be careful not to read too much into the significance of this etymological difference, it is interesting, at least, to bear in mind as we look at the lower chamber’s structure and activities.

The State Duma contains 450 seats. Each seat is filled by a ‘deputy’ (synonymous with ‘legislator’ or ‘parliamentarian’). The rules governing the election of State Duma deputies have varied over the post-Soviet period. Between the 1993 and 2003 federal parliamentary elections, half (225) deputies were elected on the basis of achieving a plurality of votes in single-mandate districts (constituencies). The other 225 deputies were elected according to a party-list proportional representation (PR) system. The 2007 and 2011 elections, by contrast, moved to a pure PR system. But – in a prominent example of institutional instability in modern-day Russia – the 2016 elections saw a return to the mixed electoral formula. The rules of the game have, clearly, changed. On one reading, such instability should be expected in a society still getting used to the operation of elections; tweaks are needed in order to ensure that rules match social conditions. On another reading, however, these changes to electoral legislation stem from the Kremlin’s desire to manipulate institutions to suit its own ends, rather than to foster conditions favourable to healthy democratic competition.

There have been seven legislative terms – known as ‘convocations’ (*sozvyvy*) in Russia – since the creation of the Federal Assembly by the 1993 Constitution. The length of these convocations has varied. The first convocation lasted two years, from the beginning of 1994 to the end of 1995; the second through to the fifth convocations lasted four years each; the sixth convocation was slated to last five years (in line with a 2008 constitutional amendment), but finished slightly earlier than planned for reasons discussed below; and the seventh convocation started at the end of 2016, with a view to sitting for five years. Each parliamentary year is further broken down into two sessions, spring and autumn.

The State Duma has a leadership hierarchy, including a chairperson (colloquially known as a ‘speaker’), first deputy chairs, and deputy chairs. There have been five chairmen of the State Duma so far: Ivan Petrovich Rybkin (1st convocation – Agrarian Party deputy); Genadii Nikolaevich Seleznev (2nd and 3rd convocations – Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), then Party of Russia’s Rebirth deputy); Boris Vyacheslavovich Gryzlov (4th and 5th convocations – United Russia deputy); Sergei Evgen’evich Naryshkin (6th convocation – United Russia deputy); and Vyacheslav Viktorovich Volodin (7th convocation – United Russia deputy).

Each deputy serves as a member of one parliamentary committee – bodies which focus on a particular policy area, and which deal, *inter alia*, with bills falling in that particular area. As of 2017, there were 26 committees, ranging from the committees on defence, culture, and education, to the committees on energy, budget and taxes, and health protection. Each committee has its own leadership structure, with a chairperson, as well as deputy chairs. There are also a number of Duma commissions, including the commission on questions of deputy ethics.

Deputies are assisted in their jobs by a body of technical civil servants. This body – or ‘*apparat*’, in Russian – of professionals consists, for example, of the Legal Department (*Pravovoe upravlenie*), which provides legal expertise on draft legislation. Reports from the Legal Department sometimes contain scathing criticism of submitted bills, although the

visibility of this criticism depends largely on the willingness of committee chairmen to draw attention to the Department's reports. It is unlikely, therefore, that a United Russia chairman will draw attention to criticism relating to a bill submitted by the president or the government. On money matters, the Federal Assembly is also assisted by the Audit Chamber (*Schetnaya palata*), which provides expertise on, for example, federal budget bills, as well as presenting reports on the implementation of budget laws.

The partisan composition of the State Duma has varied considerably over time. Figure 1 presents information on all seven Duma convocations, 1994-2017. Each segment within each bar relates to a different formal legislative grouping. Rather than focus on the details of party and deputy groups names, the pattern is of particular importance.

[Figure 1 around here]

In the first three convocations of the State Duma, the 450 seats were divided between a relatively large number of parties and deputy groups, with no one political bloc forming a majority. This clearly changed, however, with the fourth convocation, when United Russia achieved more than the two-thirds majority required to amend the constitution. Figure 1 also makes clear United Russia's loss of this 'constitutional majority' in the sixth convocation. (Although United Russia won a majority of seats (238) in this convocation, it secured this majority on the basis of less than a majority of votes cast – 49 per cent.)

It is difficult to overstate the importance to the Kremlin of securing a pro-executive majority in the State Duma in order to achieve its policy goals. (See the chapter on party politics.) When the Kremlin lacked a stable, disciplined majority of deputies in the Duma who could be relied upon to support the executive's policy initiatives, the government and the president had to rely on shifting, *ad hoc* coalitions of deputies. Engineering these majorities was costly, since votes had to be 'bought' through, for example, promises of career advancement or access to rents.

The emergence of a pro-executive majority had clear effects on the vibrancy of debate. On 29 December 2003, the-then chairman of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov, stated that the State Duma 'is not a venue in which it is necessary to hold political battles, to assert political slogans and ideologies' – something that became popularised in the catchier form, the Duma is 'not the place for political discussions' (Chaisty 2012: 97). This claim angered and puzzled observers in equal measure. If the Duma was not the place for political debate, then what was it meant to do? Wasn't the lower chamber of the national legislatures *precisely* the place for such discussions – in a vibrant, pluralistic political system, at least?

Russians do not hold the State Duma in high regard. Figure 2 presents data collected by the Levada Centre on Russian citizens' views of the Federal Assembly's lower chamber. Specifically, a representative sample of Russian citizens was asked the following question: 'Do you, on the whole, approve or disapprove of the activities of the State Duma of Russia?' The light grey line relates to the response 'Disapprove', and the dark grey relates to the response 'Approve'.

[Figure 2 around here]

Over this period, the majority of time is associated with a majority of respondents reporting a *negative* view of the lower chamber. And, according to data collected in a 2012 survey by the Public Opinion Foundation (*Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie*, FOM) – a Russian polling organisation that is widely regarded to be Kremlin-friendly – 73 percent of respondents were simply not interested in the State Duma's work (FOM 2012).

Federation Council

As originally conceived, the Federal Assembly's upper chamber was meant as a venue for the expression of *regional* voices in the national-level decision-making process. Each region is constitutionally guaranteed two representatives in the Council, with the basic law further stipulating that one of these representatives should be from the executive branch and the other from the legislative branch of a region's political system. However, the *overall* number of Federation Council members – known colloquially as 'senators' – has varied along with changes to the number of federal subjects in Russia. (See the chapter on federalism.) There were, therefore, initially 178 senators, but the number of regional representatives now stands at 170 (166 if we exclude the representatives from Crimea and Sevastopol). And, according to a July 2014 amendment to the 1993 Constitution, the president is able to appoint a certain number of senators directly.

The method for filling Federation Council seats has also changed over time. In 1993, there were concurrent elections for senators and Duma deputies. But this was the only time Russian citizens have been able to vote directly for Federation Council members. Following legal changes in 1995, the regional heads of the executive and legislative branches were granted *ex officio* membership of the Council. This authority gave regional elites a place at the centre of federal decision-making – a power that they used frequently in the second half of the 1990s (see Reuter 2017, chapter 3). However, in an effort to reduce the influence of regional interests, the rules were changed again in 2000, which meant that regional executive and legislative branch leaders lost this automatic seat, instead choosing representatives. And, in 2012, the formula was amended yet again, allowing the Kremlin a tighter grip on the choice of senators.

Although party factions are not allowed to form in the Council, the majority of senators are United Russia members. Exceptions in 2017 include Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Markhaev – a KPRF senator representing the executive branch of Irkutsk *oblast'* – and Arsen Suleimanovich Fadzaev – a "Patriots of Russia" member and representative of the legislative branch of North Ossetia–Alania.

Such has been the shift in the balance of power between the federal centre and the regions that experts have concluded the following: the Council 'effectively represents the federal government in the regions rather than providing the regions representation in federal policy-making' (Ross and Turovsky 2013: 59). And, when it comes to the law-making process (on which more below), these same scholars have dubbed the Federation Council a 'rubber stamp' (*ibid.*).

The law-making process and outputs

How a bill becomes a law – theory

In order to become a federal law, all bills must be introduced into the State Duma. According to article 104.1 of the 1993 Constitution, 'The power to initiate legislation shall belong to the President of the Russian Federation, the Federation Council, members of the Federation Council, State Duma deputies, the Government of the Russian Federation, and the legislative (representative) bodies of the subjects of the Russian Federation'. The higher courts – now, the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court – also have the right to introduce bills in their areas of competence. Particular, fine-grained rules governing the consideration and passage of legislative initiatives are contained in the standing orders (*reglamenty*) of both chambers of the Federal Assembly.

[Figure 3]

All bills pass through three key venue-stages: the State Duma; the Federation Council; and the president's office (see Figure 3). Of these three stages, the review requirements are most elaborate in the Duma, with most bills required to go through three readings in plenary sessions of the lower chamber. Beyond these hurdles, initiatives must also pass a number of 'gatekeepers'. Following registration in the lower chamber, all initiatives are sent to the Duma speaker, following which they are sent to a committee related to the initiative's subject matter. This committee is known as a 'profile' committee. If an initiative satisfies the committee's preliminary review, the committee can propose to the whole Duma – or Duma 'in plenary' – that the initiative be taken up for consideration. Otherwise, the bill is returned to its author. Initiatives taken up for consideration are then sent to the Duma Council, which appoints a 'lead' committee that is responsible for coordinating work on the initiative as it passes through the State Duma. Additional co-committees can also be appointed if a bill covers a range of policy areas. The Council also calls for initial reactions from a variety of actors on the initiative. The lead committee then makes a decision as to whether to recommend the bill be adopted by the Duma in first reading, and the Duma Council schedules the first reading on the Duma floor. The bill can be rejected at this stage, but, if it is adopted in first reading, amendment proposals are called for, to be presented within a specified timeframe. Before the second reading of a bill, the lead committee collects these amendment proposals, sorting them into those it thinks should be adopted and rejected. The Duma Council once again schedules the bill for consideration on the Duma floor, and deputies discuss, and vote on, whether to allow the bill to progress. If the bill is not rejected, it moves on to the third reading stage, which is largely used to tidy up linguistic and legal details.

Once a bill is approved by the State Duma in third reading, it is officially referred to as a federal law (*federal'nyi zakon*), and moves on to the Federation Council. The Council is not required to review all laws. Indeed, if the upper chamber does not act on a piece of legislation within 14 days, the law moves on to the president. The Council can, however, reject an initiative, returning it to the Duma, following which a special commission comprised of both deputies and senators works on resolving points of contention. Alternatively, the Duma can overturn the Council's rejection with a two-thirds vote. Once laws reach the president, the head of state can either sign or not sign the text. In the case of the latter, the law returns to the lower chamber. If the Duma wants to override the president's veto, this requires two-thirds of all deputies to vote in favour of an override, following which two-thirds of the Federation Council must also vote for an override in order for the initiative to be promulgated into law.

How a bill becomes a law – practice

Figure 4 presents data on the number of bills introduced and adopted by the State Duma between the second and sixth convocations, as well as the number of laws rejected by the Federation Council or president, and the number of laws signed by the president.

[Figure 4 around here]

As shown by the lower left graph in Figure 4, the frequency with which bills are vetoed (or returned) to the State Duma by the president or the Federation Council has decreased markedly. (For a discussion of the reasons for bill vetoing, see Noble and Schulmann 2018: 62.) This means that, once a bill is adopted by the State Duma, the overwhelming likelihood is that it will be signed into law by the president. This contrasts with earlier post-Soviet experience, especially during the second Duma convocation, in which initiatives sometimes 'ping ponged' between the three venue-stages, as policy disagreements dragged on.

According to Tkachenko (2017: 523), 6,717 federal laws were adopted in Russia between 1 January 1994 and 31 July 2016. Although this figure includes laws amending existing pieces of legislation, this is still an exceedingly large number of laws, with clear (negative) implications for realising the rule of law. Put yourself, for example, in the shoes of a criminal defence lawyer, who will have to keep on top of the constantly shifting content of the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, never mind focusing on the specifics of a case and defending their clients.

We should be cautious, however, in blaming parliamentarians for this legal instability. Malaev and Shkurenko (2017) report that, in the fifth and sixth convocations of the Duma, the government and the president were responsible for 55 and 61 percent (respectively) of all bills that became laws. Moreover, the vast majority of executive-sponsored bills are signed into law, with infrequent cases of bill failure more often explained by differences between executive actors, rather than resulting from successful opposition from deputies (see Noble and Schulmann 2018). As such, although the Russian constitution can be seen as providing for a ‘separation of powers’ system, a United Russia (super-)majority in the State Duma, as well as a loyal corpus of senators, allows the Kremlin to reap the rewards of a ‘unity of purpose’ system (see Haggard and McCubbins 2001).

The data presented in Figure 4 do not include information on the level of debate over bills or voting results. Existing analysis of a sub-set of legislative initiatives – budget bills – gives some impression of trends over time, however. When it comes to the discussion of federal budget bills, a proxy for the level of debate on the Duma floor suggests a notable decline over time (see Noble 2017b: 507). This apparent reduction in scrutiny is, moreover, associated with lower levels of amendment to the text section of budget bills. To be sure, we cannot discount the possibility that the proxy measure of scrutiny fails to capture meaningful legislator activity. In addition, it is tricky to present conclusive proof causally linking apparent reduced scrutiny with fewer amendments. However, the existing analysis suggests that the contemporary State Duma does not act as a significant player in the budget process. To the degree that review of the yearly budget is a key task of parliament – a moment during which any autonomy from, and criticism of, executive plans should be on display, even if it is absent in other policy areas – then we have reasons to suspect that the vigour of debate in the Russian parliament on key policy questions has waned over time. (For further information on the parliamentary passage dynamics of Russian budget bills, see Noble (2017b).)

Tkachenko (2017: 522) provides a critical summary of the current law-making situation in Russia: ‘inadequately prepared bills are introduced to the Duma and become law very quickly: often they are adopted in the first reading in one day, and from one to seven days are allocated for amendment. The stage for discussion, where the shortcomings of the bills could be identified and addressed, is in fact skipped.’ According to a Communist Party (KPRF) State Duma deputy, Victor Ilyukhin, ‘[l]egislation is not made in the Duma, but by the Kremlin and the government [...] All decisions about whether or not to pass bills are made there’ (quoted in Feifer 2010). In line with this account, a video was circulated in May 2010, purportedly showing people racing around the Duma’s main hall, frantically voting for absent deputies (*ibid.*).

At the same time, although deputies themselves might be excluded from many consequential lawmaking discussions, policy disputes can rage between executive actors and powerful economic interests during the legislative stage of lawmaking. Although these debates take place in non-legislative venues, their outcomes are inserted as second-reading amendments, sometimes drastically altering the content and scope of bills (see Noble and Schulmann, 2018).

Although there are now fewer opportunities for deputies and senators to influence decision-making on key pieces of legislation as they pass through the Federal Assembly, there is still evidence of lobbying in the federal parliament (Chaisty 2013). Beyond opportunities to help shape the content of federal policy, however, there are other powerful incentives for achieving a seat in the Assembly. These include immunity from prosecution and access to high-ranking officials.

In light of the above, the Federal Assembly has been referred to with a number of disparaging terms, including ‘rubber stamp’ and ‘mad printer’. The suspicion that the federal legislature is not a ‘real’ parliament is either stated bluntly or hinted at (see, for example, Feifer 2010). In fact, the question of whether ‘nominally democratic institutions’ (including parties, elections, and parliaments) in hybrid or non-democratic regimes play the same ‘roles’ and ‘functions’ as their namesake institutions in democracies has received a good deal of attention recently from political scientists (see, for example, Gandhi 2008, and Svobik 2012). A common starting point is that these institutions are not simply ‘window dressing’ – efforts to create a Potemkin democracy for international observers and domestic opposition – but, rather, serve meaningful roles, including co-opting members of the political opposition, transmitting information about citizen grievances to the regime elite, and co-ordinating intra-elite relations.

What is the solution to this apparently poor state of affairs from the point of view of democracy? According to Tkachenko, it is nothing less than the introduction of meaningful competition between parliamentary actors: ‘Without competition there is no incentive for thorough discussion of bills’ (2017: 523). And Ekaterina Schulmann – a Russian political scientist and leading political commentator – has argued that ‘[t]here is only one way to fix this: hold free, fair elections’ (quoted in Antonova 2014).

Recent parliamentary developments

Following his installation as speaker of the State Duma in October 2016, Vyacheslav Volodin – former first deputy chief of staff of the Presidential Administration – set about instituting a range of reforms. These measures focused on four areas: improving discipline in the corpus of deputies; raising the prestige of Duma deputies; carving out an independent place for the legislature in national-level decision-making; and increasing the law-making efficiency of the lower chamber. Examples of these include a clampdown on deputy absenteeism from Duma plenary sessions; returning to deputies the right to use VIP lounges in airports; taking a critical stance against certain government-sponsored bills (or, at least, holding up their consideration in the lower chamber); and removing the backlog of bills under consideration for decades.

The evidence so far suggests the limited effectiveness of these changes. There are reports, for example, that deputies continue to vote by proxy during plenary sessions (albeit possibly not on the scale previously seen). Moreover, evidence presented in Figure 2 suggests that Russian citizens’ perceptions of the State Duma have *worsened* since Volodin has introduced his reforms. As for taking old bills off the books, although this might help portray an image of efficiency and order, it is not clear that it will significantly free up time for Duma actors to focus on more pressing concerns. (For an early assessment of Volodin’s reforms, see Noble (2017a).)

Deputies have grumbled about Volodin’s new regime. In November 2017, for example, LDPR State Duma deputy, Sergei Ivanov, protested against the ‘complete unanimity’ observed when deputies voted during plenary sessions, saying that such unanimity was only possible in a ‘cemetery’ (Samokhina 2017). Ivanov protested about the difficulty experienced by deputies in voting according to their own consciences and preferences, stating that legislators were required to write explanatory letters every time they voted against the party line. (It is worth mentioning that this same Duma deputy proposed a bill on 1 April 2013 that called for

protections for civilians from the effects of garlic consumption, including people's bad breath in public places. Ivanov argued that the introduction of the bill (on April Fool's Day) was meant as a bit of light relief, following the adoption of too many serious, 'draconian' laws (RIA Novosti 2013).)

Displays of open criticism of the national parliament during a plenary session are exceedingly rare nowadays, however. And it is not surprising why. In response to Ivanov's comments on voting unanimity in the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin made a thinly veiled reference to the possibility that Ivanov might lose his mandate. Indeed, *Kommersant*'s journalist Sofya Samokhina called Ivanov's speech 'brave' (Samokhina 2017). Should we expect legislators to have to be brave when commenting on parliamentary practices?

Conclusion

Parliament's place in post-Soviet Russian politics has varied significantly. From the deadlock and dissolution of the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet, to the unnerving uniformity of deputy behaviour in the State Duma's seventh convocation, it is not possible to come up with a cover-all description of legislative politics in post-Soviet Russia. The story of post-Soviet Russian parliamentary politics clearly reflects, and constitutes, broader dynamics, including the institutional uncertainty, decentralisation, and fractiousness of the 1990s and the efforts at recentralisation in the 2000s. Much, however, like claims of the recentralisation of the state under Vladimir Putin have been overstated (see, for example, Monaghan 2012 on the power '*vertikal*'), so too would it be too simplistic to claim that the conflict apparent in legislative affairs in the Yeltsin years have been replaced by perfect order. Conflict is still very much present in the legislative stage of law-making, although legislators are not the primary actors; and members of the Federal Assembly are not all unthinking, loyal voting automatons.

Scholars of legislative politics sometimes disaggregate various 'roles' or 'functions' of parliaments. Kreppel (2014: 85), for example, notes the 'traditional' classification of legislative activities into 'four primary functions: linkage; representation; control/oversight; and policy-making'. This chapter has focused on the policy-making process, but it is worth mentioning the other roles as they apply to the Russian Federal Assembly. Regarding linkage and representation, deputies' schedules certainly block off time for 'work with voters' – a time that should provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to hear, and respond to, citizens' issues. However, legal changes in 2017 mean that deputies need to seek approval to hold meetings with voters under certain conditions. Regarding oversight, executive actors are periodically called to answer questions in both the State Duma and the Federation Council during "Government hour". These events, however, rarely result in stinging, meaningful critique. Following the posting of Aleksei Navalny's YouTube video, accusing Dmitrii Medvedev of large-scale corruption, there was some discussion among Duma deputies about whether to raise the issue during the prime minister's query session in the lower chamber. This potentially awkward situation did not arise, however.

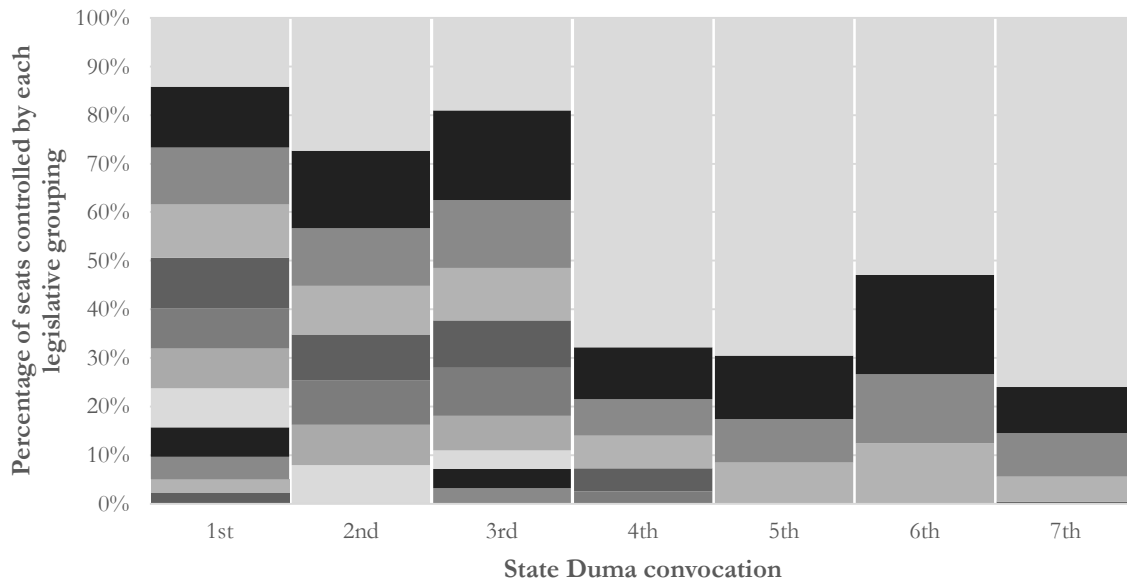
What are the prospects of meaningful change in parliamentary politics? At a 2017 meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly in St Petersburg, President Vladimir Putin stated, 'We will strive consistently to raise the authority and importance of parliament' (quoted in Churakova 2017). The reality does not, however, match the rhetoric. As long as a majority of deputies and senators regard pleasing Kremlin principals as the optimal strategy for career advancement (and survival), then things will likely not change much. In spite of speaker Volodin's claims that the Duma is once again a 'place for discussion', this fact is disputed by

the State Duma's very own deputies, as well as being reflected in the low regard Russians have for the federal parliament.

The next federal parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2021. As with so much else in Russian politics, the fate of parliamentary politics before (and after) then will, no doubt, depend to a large degree on the choices of President Putin, who secured a fourth presidential term (2018-2024) on 18 March 2018. However, as questions of leadership succession become even more central, the attractions of diffusing power – either by making government more manifestly accountable to the Federal Assembly or by transferring powers from the executive to the legislature – could help move parliament closer to the centre of political life. That being said, the safest option for the current elite might be to keep parliament as a safely subservient body – although this option, in turn, runs the risk that maintaining an ersatz body will only kindle hopes for the return of a legislative branch of power with its own will.

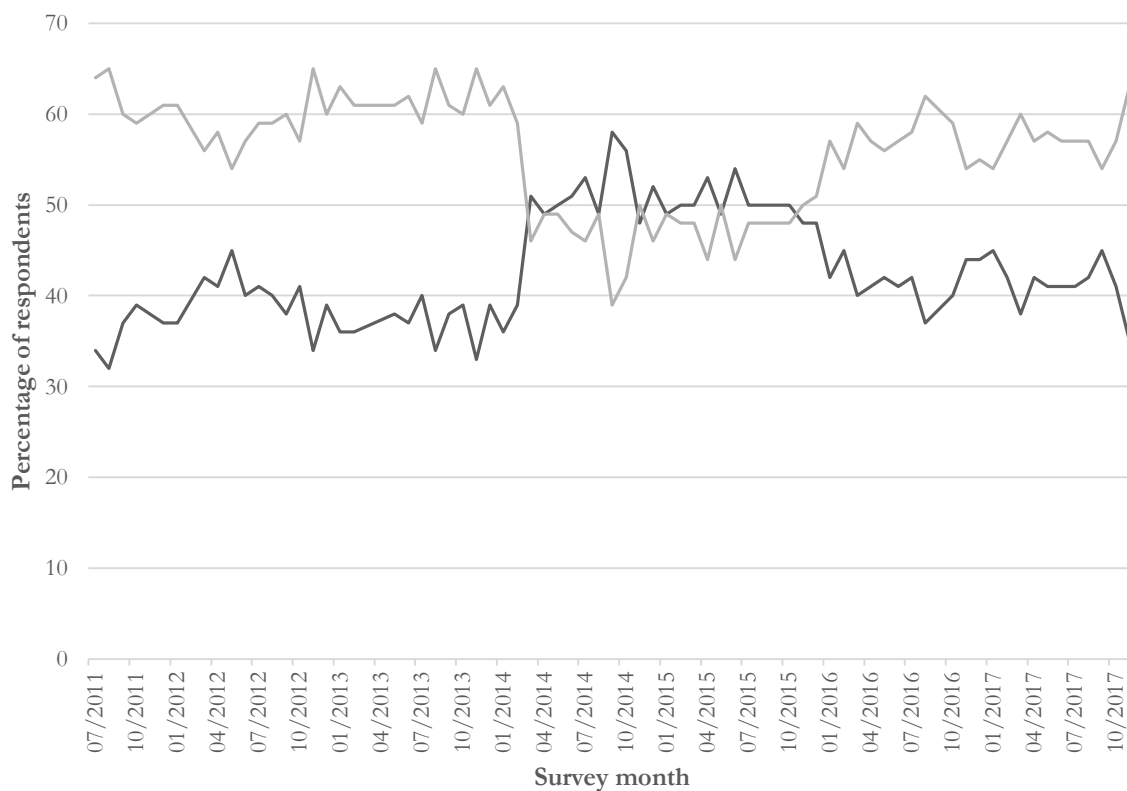
FIGURES

Figure 1: *The partisan distribution of the State Duma, 1994-2017.*



Notes: Each segment within each bar relates to a different formal legislative grouping. Segment shades do not indicate the same formal legislative groups across bars. The data presented in this figure are taken from voting records on the State Duma's online voting record archive: <http://vote.duma.gov.ru>. Given that the party affiliations of certain Duma deputies can, and have, changed during convocations, data on the 1st through to the 6th convocations are taken from the *final* vote during that convocation's *final* plenary session. For the 7th convocation, data is taken from 24 November 2017.

Figure 2: Survey data on views of the State Duma, 2011-2017.



Source: These data are taken from Levada.ru (<https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/odobrenie-organov-vlasti/>). The light grey line relates to the response ‘Disapprove’, and the dark grey relates to the response ‘Approve’ in response to the question, ‘Do you, on the whole, approve or disapprove of the activities of the State Duma of Russia?’.

Figure 3: *Key venue-stages of the lawmaking process.*

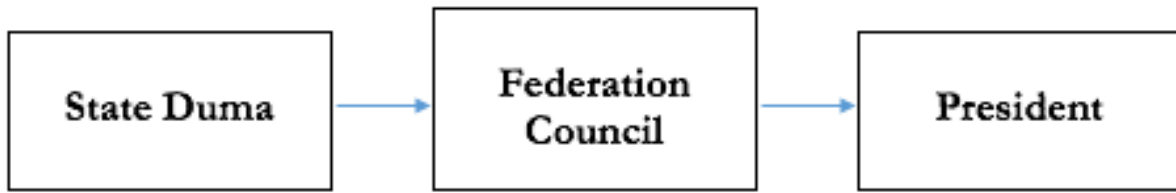
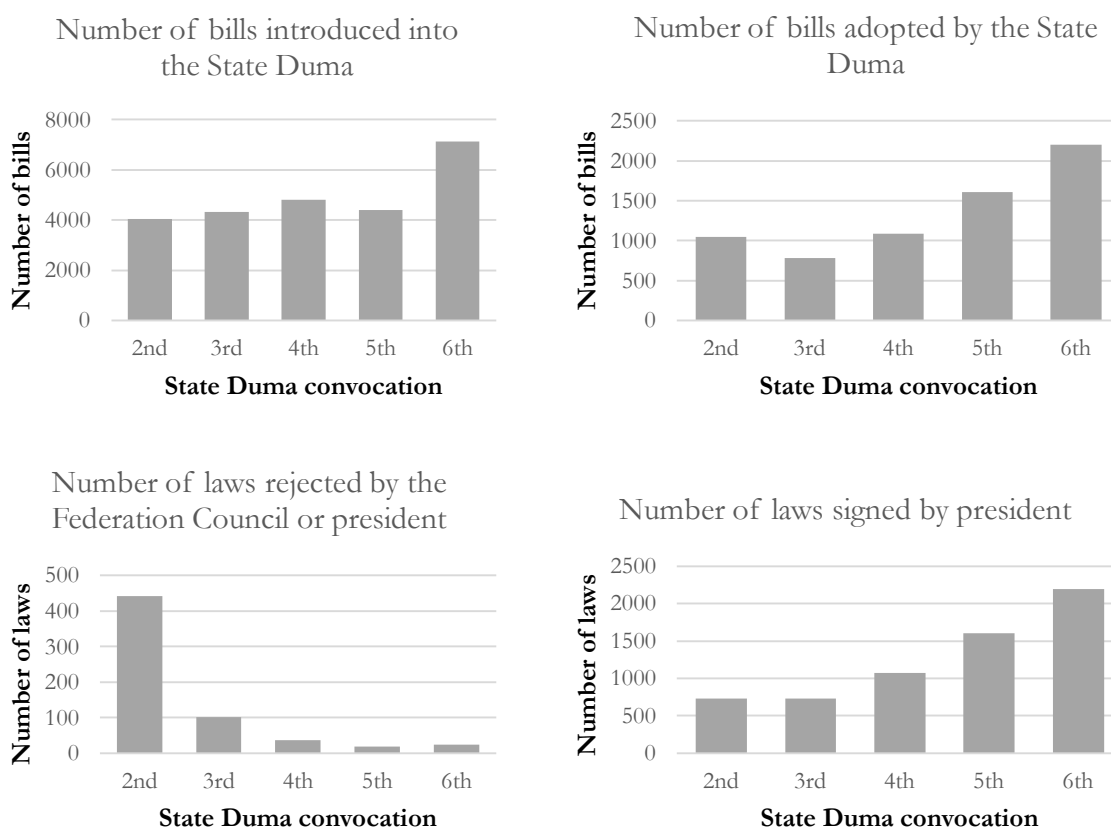


Figure 4: *Bill passage statistics, 2nd through to 6th State Duma convocations.*



Notes: The data presented in these graphs are taken from the State Duma’s website, <http://www.gosduma.net/legislative/statistics/>.

References

- Antonova, Natalia (2014), 'Russian State Duma: "Possessed printer" or executor of the people's will?', *The Moscow News*, 29 January, <http://russialist.org/russian-state-duma-possessed-printer-or-executor-of-the-peoples-will/>.
- Chaisty, Paul (2005), 'Majority control and executive dominance: Parliament-president relations in Putin's Russia', in Alex Pravda (ed.), *Leading Russia: Putin in Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chaisty, Paul (2006), *Legislative Politics and Economic Power in Russia*. Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chaisty, Paul (2008), 'The legislative effects of presidential partisan powers in postcommunist Russia', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 424-453.
- Chaisty, Paul (2012), 'The Federal Assembly and the power vertical', in Graeme Gill and James Young (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society*. Abingdon; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Chaisty, Paul (2013), 'The preponderance and effects of sectoral ties in the State Duma', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 65, no. 4, pp. 717-736.
- Churakova, Ol'ga (2017), 'Rossiya pouchit deputatov dialogu [Russia will teach deputies dialogue]', *Vedomosti*, 15 October, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2017/10/15/737916-rossiya-deputatov>.
- Feifer, Gregory (2010), 'Opposition Legislators Say Russia's Parliament Is No Parliament', *RFE/RL*, 18 October, https://www.rferl.org/a/Opposition_Legislators_Say_Russias_Parliament_Is_No_Parliament/2193979.html.
- FOM (2012), 'Gosudarstvennaya дума: Otsenka raboty Gosdumy i itnoshenie k deyatel'nosti deputatov [The State Duma: An assessment of the work of the State Duma and the relationship to activities of deputies]', 25 October, <http://fom.ru/politika/10669>.
- Gandhi, Jennifer (2008), *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haggard, Stephan, and Matthew D. McCubbins (2001), 'Introduction: Political institutions and the determinants of public policy', in Stephan Haggard and Matthew D. McCubbins (eds), *Presidents, Parliaments, and Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes, Stephen (1993/1994), 'Superpresidentialism and its problems', *East European Constitutional Review*, vol. 2, no. 4, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 123-126.
- Kreppel, Amie (2014), 'Typologies and classifications', in Shane Martin, Thomas Saalfeld, and Kaare Strøm (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malaev, Mikhail, and Ol'ga Shkurenko (2017), 'Sravnitel'nyi parlamentarizm [Comparative parliamentarism]', *Kommersant*, 22 December, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3502058>.
- Noble, Ben (2017a), 'The State Duma, the "Crimean Consensus," and Volodin's reforms', in Olga Irisova, Anton Barbashin, Fabian Burkhardt, and Ernest Wyciszkievicz (eds), *A Successful Failure: Russia after Crime(a)*. Warsaw: The Centre Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding.
- Noble, Ben (2017b), 'Amending budget bills in the Russian State Duma', *Post-Communist Economies*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 505-522.
- Noble, Ben, and Ekaterina Schulmann (2018), 'Not Just a Rubber Stamp: Parliament and Lawmaking', in Daniel Treisman (ed.), *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin's Russia*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

- Ostrow, Joel (2000), *Comparing Post-Soviet Legislatures: A Theory of Institutional Design and Political Conflict*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- Panov, Petr, and Cameron Ross (2013), 'Sub-national elections in Russia: Variations in United Russia's domination of regional assemblies', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 65, no. 4, pp. 737-752.
- Panov, Petr, and Cameron Ross (2016), 'Levels of centralisation and autonomy in Russia's "party of power": Cross-regional variations', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, no. 2, pp. 232-252.
- Remington, Thomas (2001), *The Russian Parliament: Institutional Evolution in a Transitional Regime, 1989-1999*. New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press.
- Remington, Thomas (2007), 'The Russian Federal Assembly, 1994-2004', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 121-141.
- Remington, Thomas (2008), 'Patronage and the party of power: President-parliament relations under Vladimir Putin', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 6, pp. 959-987.
- Reuter, Ora John (2017), *The Origins of Dominant Parties: Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- RIA Novosti (2013), 'Deputat LDPR rasskazal, pochemu vnes zakonoproekt o zaprete chesnoka [LDPR deputy comments on why he introduced a bill on banning garlic]', 1 April, <https://ria.ru/politics/20130401/930378590.html>.
- Ross, Cameron, and Rostislav Turovsky (2013), 'The representation of political and economic elites in the Russian Federation Council' *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 59-88.
- Samokhina, Sof'ya (2017), "'Tut vezde govoryat: napishi ob''yasnitel'nyuyu, pochemu ty knopochku ne nazhal": V Gosdume posporili o printsipakh raboty parlamenta' ["They are always saying: Write a letter of explanation regarding why you didn't press the voting button": Arguments in the State Duma about the principles of parliamentary work]', *Kommersant*, 24 November, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3475952>.
- Svolik, Milan (2012), *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tkachenko, Natalia (2017), 'Statistical analysis of federal legislation in Russia', *Statutes & Decisions*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 518-564.
- Troxel, Tiffany (2003), *Parliamentary Power in Russia, 1994-2001: President vs. Parliament*. Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.