In Russia, a Constitutional Court was formed in 1991. Its decisions were binding, and in several cases even the president had to bow to its authority. After several controversial decisions, Yeltsin suspended the operations of the court in late 1993. However, the Russian constitution now provides for a Constitutional Court again, with the power to adjudicate disputes on the constitutionality of federal and regional laws, as well as jurisdictional disputes between various political institutions. Judges are nominated by the president and approved by the Federation Council, a procedure that produced a stalemate after the new constitution was adopted, so that the new court became functional only in 1995. Since 1995, the court has established itself as a vehicle for resolving conflicts involving the protection of individual rights and conformity of regional laws with constitutional requirements. The court has, however, been cautious in confronting the executive branch.

Alongside the Constitutional Court is an extensive system of lower and appellate courts, with the Supreme Court at the pinnacle. These courts hear ordinary civil and criminal cases. In 1995, a system of commercial courts was also formed to hear cases dealing with issues related to privatization, taxes, and other commercial activities. The Federation Council must approve nominees for Supreme Court judgeships, and the constitution also grants the president power to appoint judges at other levels. Measures to shield judges from political pressures include criminal prosecution for attempting to influence a judge, protections from arbitrary dismissal, and improved salaries for judges. One innovation in the legal system has been the introduction of jury trials for some types of criminal offenses.

Subnational Governments

The collapse of the Soviet Union was precipitated by the demands of some union republics for more autonomy and, then, independence. After the Russian Federation became an independent state, the problem resurfaced of constructing a viable federal structure within Russia itself. Some of the federal units were very assertive in putting forth claims for autonomy or even sovereignty. The most extreme example is Chechnya, whose demand for independence led to a protracted civil war. The ethnic dimension complicates political relations with some other republics as well, particularly Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, which occupy relatively large territories in the center of the country and are of Islamic cultural background.

power vertical

A term introduced by Vladimir Putin when he was president to describe a unified and hierarchical structure of executive power ranging from the national to the local level.

Putin's most controversial initiatives relating to Russia's regions were part of his attempt to strengthen what he termed the "**power vertical**." This concept refers to an integrated structure of executive power from the presidential level down through to the local level. Critics have questioned whether this idea is consistent with federal principles, and others see it as undermining Russia's fledgling democratic system. A first step in creating the power vertical was the creation of seven federal districts on top of the existing federal units. Although not designed to replace regional governments, the districts were intended to oversee the work of federal offices operating in these regions and to ensure compliance with federal laws and the constitution.

A second set of changes to create the power vertical involved a weakening of the independence of governors and republic presidents. Beginning in 1996, the governors, along with the heads of each regional legislative body, sat as members of the upper house of the Russian parliament, the Federation Council. This arrangement gave the regional executives a direct voice in national legislative discussions and a presence in Moscow. In 2001, Putin gained approval for a revision to the composition of the Federation Council, removing regional executives. Now one regional representative

U.S. CONNECTION

Federalism Compared

Russia is a **federal system**, according to its constitution. This means that, at least in theory, powers are divided between the central government and Russia's eighty-three constituent units. In comparison to the American federal system, the Russian structure seems complicated. Some of Russia's federal units are called republics (21), while others are *oblasts* (regions) (49), *krais* (territories) (6), one autonomous republic (1), autonomous *okrugs* (4), and cities of federal status (2, Moscow and St. Petersburg). Russia's size and multiethnic population underlie this complexity. Because many ethnic groups are regionally concentrated in Russia, unlike in the United States, these groups form the basis for some federal units, notably the republics and okrugs, which are named after the ethnic groups that reside there.

In the 1990s, Russia's federal government had difficulty controlling what happened in the regions. Regional laws sometimes deviated from federal law. Bilateral treaties with the federal government granted some regional governments special privileges, producing what some called "**asymmetrical federalism**." During his term as president, Vladimir Putin put measures in place to ensure a greater degree of legal and political uniformity throughout the country. One such measure, adopted in 2004, involved replacing direct election of governors by a quasi-appointment procedure, making the governor dependent on the president

Russia's federal units are represented in the upper house of the national legislature, the Federation Council. Just as the U.S. Senate includes two representatives from each state, in Russia each region also has two delegates in this body; however, their method of selection has varied over time. In 1993 they were elected directly by the electorate, as in the United States. From the mid-1990s, the regional chief executive (hereafter referred to as the governor) and the head of each regional legislature themselves sat on the Federation Council. Now the members of the Federation Council are appointed, one by the region's governor and the other by the region's legislature. As the president has considerable influence over appointment of the governor, this system weakens accountability of the Federation Council to the public.

All of these measures have led some observers to question whether Russia is really a federal system at all. Although Russia does have a constitutional court to resolve disputes over the jurisdictions of the federal government and the regions, unlike in the United States the constitution does not provide a strong basis for regional power, since it places many powers in the hands of the central government while most others are considered "shared" jurisdictions.

is appointed by the regional executive and the other by the regional legislature. Some governors resisted this change, seeing it as an assault on their power. Putin made concessions to make the change more palatable, for example, giving governors the right to recall their representatives. The State Council was formed to try to assure the regional executives that they would retain some role in the federal policy-making arena.

Following the Beslan terrorist attack in 2004, Putin identified corruption and ineffective leadership at the regional level as culprits in allowing terrorists to carry out the devastating school hostage taking. Accordingly, Putin proposed an additional reform that created the decisive element of central control over regional politics. This change eliminated the popular election of governors. They are now nominated by the president and approved by the regional legislature. However, if the regional legislature refuses the nomination three times, the president may disband the body and call for new legislative elections. The president's nominees have been approved by the regional legislature in every case, usually with an overwhelming majority or even unanimously. In his first two years in office, Medvedev replaced eighteen incumbent governors in this way, apparently seeking individuals who would both be politically loyal and managerially competent.[25] With governors and republic presidents dependent on the goodwill of the president for appointment and reappointment, a self-perpetuating power structure has taken on a formal character.

The distribution of tax revenues among the various levels of government has been another contentious issue. The Soviet state pursued a considerable degree of regional equalization, but regional differences have increased in the Russian Federation. Putin

federal system

A political structure in which subnational units have significant independent powers; the powers of each level are usually specified in the federal constitution.

asymmetrical federalism

A form of federalism in which some subnational units in the federal system have greater or lesser powers than others.

created a more regularized system for determining the distribution of revenues, taking account of both the regional tax base and differences in the needs of various regions (for instance, northern regions have higher expenses to maintain basic services). However, in fact, an increasing proportion of tax revenues are now controlled by Moscow, and regional governments are constantly faced with shortfalls in carrying out their major responsibilities, for example, in social policy. Disparities between rich and poor regions have reached dramatic proportions, with Moscow and areas rich in natural resources being the best off.

The Policy-Making Process

Policy-making occurs both formally and informally. The federal government, the president and his administration, regional legislatures, individual deputies, and some judicial bodies may, according to the constitution, propose legislation. In the Yeltsin era, conflict between the president and State Duma made policy-making contentious and fractious; under Putin and Medvedev, the State Duma has generally gone along with proposals made by the president and the government, and the proportion of legislation initiated by the executive branch has increased significantly.

In order for a bill to become law, it must be approved by both houses of the parliament in three readings and signed by the president. If the president vetoes the bill, it must be passed again in the same wording by a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament in order to override the veto. Many policy proclamations have been made through presidential or governmental decrees, without formal consultation with the legislative branch. This decision-making process is much less visible and may involve closed-door bargaining rather than an open process of debate and consultation.

Informal groupings also have an important indirect impact on policy-making. During the Yeltsin period, business magnates were able to exert behind-the-scenes influence to gain benefits in the privatization of lucrative firms in sectors such as oil, media, and transport. Putin attempted to reduce the direct political influence of these powerful economic figures, but at the cost of also reducing political competition.

A continuing problem is weak policy implementation. Under communist rule, the party's control over political appointments enforced at least some degree of conformity to central mandates. Under Yeltsin, fragmented and decentralized political power gave the executive branch few resources to ensure compliance. Pervasive corruption, including bribery and selective enforcement, hindered enforcement of policy decisions. Although Putin and Medvedev both have stated their commitment to restrict these types of irregularities, they no doubt continue. However, the commitment to reestablishing order and a rule of law has been an important justification for the centralization of power.

Summary

When the Russian Federation was formed in 1991, new political structures needed to be constructed. A constitution was adopted in 1993, which involved a directly elected president who had strong political powers. In addition, a federal system was established with the result that the central government had difficulty controlling actions of regional governments in the 1990s. Since 1999, however, the political system has seen increased centralization, including a harmonization of central and regional laws, quasi-appointment of regional governors, and a more unified executive structure in the country. Under Putin the role of the security forces increased; the military lost its previous stature; and the judiciary took on increased, although not complete,

independence. Policy-making is largely under the guidance of the executive organs of the state with little real influence from society or political parties. Whereas in the 1990s the relationship between the executive and legislative branches (Federal Assembly) was characterized by conflict that often produced political deadlock, since 2000 the legislative branch has been relatively compliant, reinforcing the president's dominant role.

REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

SECTION 4

Gorbachev's policies in the 1980s brought a dramatic change in the relationship between state and society, as *glasnost* sparked new public and private initiatives. Most restrictions on the formation of social organizations were lifted, and a large number of independent groups appeared. Hopes rose that these trends might indicate the emergence of **civil society**. Just a few years later, only a small stratum of Russian society was actually actively engaged; the demands of everyday life, cynicism about politics, and increasing controls on political opposition led many people to withdraw into private life. However, with hardships imposed by the economic crisis of 2008–2009, there is evidence of increasing political activism among a small but important sector of society.

Focus Questions

How has the United Russia party been able to gain a dominant position in such a short period of time?

To what extent are elections an effective vehicle for the Russian public to make their leaders accountable?

What kinds of social movements have become prominent since the fall of the Soviet Union, and to what degree can these social movements influence political decisions?

The Legislature

The Federal Assembly came into being after the parliamentary elections of December 12, 1993, when the referendum ratifying the new Russian constitution was also approved. The upper house, the Federation Council, represents Russia's constituent federal units. The lower house, the State Duma (hereafter the Duma), has 450 members and involves direct popular election based on a national **proportional representation** electoral system.

Within the Duma, factions unite deputies from the same party. In May 2008 there were four party factions representing the parties elected in the December 2007 vote; in January 2011, 315 (or 70 percent) of the 450 deputies in the State Duma were part of the faction of the dominant party, United Russia.[26] The Duma has a council (ten members) and thirty-two committees. The Duma elects its own speaker (or chair); since July 2003 this has been Boris Gryzlov of the United Russia party.

Compared to the communist period, deputies reflect less fully the demographic characteristics of the population at large. For example, in 1984, 33 percent of the members of the Supreme Soviet were women; in 2005 they constituted less than 10 percent, rising to a bit over 13 percent in 2010.[27] The underrepresentation of women and workers in the present Duma indicates the extent to which Russian politics is primarily the domain of male elites.

The upper house of the Federal Assembly, the Federation Council, has two members from each of Russia's federal regions and republics. Many prominent businessmen are among the appointees, and in some cases the posts may be granted in exchange for political loyalty. Party factions do not play a significant role in the Federation Council. Deputies to the Federation Council, as well as to the Duma, are granted immunity from criminal prosecution.

civil society

A term that refers to the space occupied by voluntary associations outside the state, for example, professional associations, trade unions, and student groups.

proportional representation (PR)

A system of electoral representation in which seats in the legislative body are allocated to parties within multi-member constituencies, roughly in proportion to the votes each party receives in a popular election.

The constitution grants parliament powers in the legislative and budgetary areas, but if there is conflict with the president or government, these powers can be exercised effectively only if parliament operates with a high degree of unity. In practice, the president can often override the parliament through mechanisms such as the veto of legislation. Each house of parliament has the authority to confirm certain presidential appointees. The Federation Council must also approve presidential decrees relating to martial law and state emergencies, as well as to deploying troops abroad.

Following electoral rebuffs in the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, Yeltsin confronted a parliament that obstructed many of his proposed policies, but the parliament did not have the power or unity to offer a constructive alternative. Since the 2003 election, however, parliament has cooperated with the president, since about two-thirds or more of the deputies have been tied to the United Russia faction, closest to the president. In general, however, the process of gaining Duma acceptance of government proposals has depended more on the authority of the president and on the particular configuration of power at the moment rather than on the existence of disciplined party accountability such as exists in some European countries.

Society's ability to affect particular policy decisions through the legislative process is minimal. Parties in the parliament are isolated from the public at large, suffer low levels of popular respect, and the internal decision-making structures of parties are generally elite-dominated.

Political Parties and the Party System

One of the most important political changes following the collapse of communism was the shift from a single-party to a multiparty system. In the USSR, the Communist Party (CPSU) not only dominated state organs but also oversaw all social institutions, such as the mass media, trade unions, youth groups, educational institutions, and professional associations. It defined the official ideology for the country, set the parameters for state censorship, and ensured that loyal supporters occupied all important offices. Approximately 10 percent of adults in the Soviet Union were party members, but there were no effective mechanisms to ensure accountability of the party leadership to its members.

National competitive elections were held for the first time in the USSR in 1989, but new political parties were not formal participants in Russia until 1993. Since then, a confusing array of political organizations has run candidates in elections. In early 2007, thirteen registered parties met conditions required for official registration, with eleven appearing on the Duma ballot and four winning at least some seats; in January 2011 only seven parties met conditions of legal registration.[28]

In the 1990s, many parties formed around prominent individuals, making politics very personalistic. Furthermore, other than the Communist Party, Russian parties are young, so deeply rooted political identifications have not had time to develop. Finally, many citizens do not have a clear conception of their own interests or of how parties might represent them. In this context, image making is as important as programmatic positions, so parties appeal to transient voter sentiments.

While individual leaders play an important role in political life in Russia, some key issues have divided opinions in the post-1991 period. One such issue is economic policy. Nearly all political parties have mouthed support for creation of a market economy. However communist/socialist groupings have been more muted in their enthusiasm and have argued for a continued state role in providing social protection and benefits for vulnerable parts of the population. The liberal/reform groupings, on

Table 8.2 Top Parties in the Russian State Duma, 2003, 2007

Party or bloc	Percent of 1999 party list vote	Percent of 2003 party list vote	Percent of Duma seats 2003	Percent of 2007 party list vote	Percent of Duma seats 2007	Comment	Current or last party leader
Centrist/establishment							
United Russia	23.3 (Unity Party)	37.6	49.3	64.3	70.0	Formed as Unity Party in 1999, then merged with Fatherland, All-Russia to form United Russia	Vladimir Putin (since 2007)
Rodina (2003)/A Just Russia (2007)	_	9.0	8.2	7.7	8.4	Rodina formed a constituent element of A Just Russia, formed Oct. 2006	Sergei Mironov (A Just Russia)
Fatherland, All-Russia	13.3					Merged into United Russia, 2001	Yuri Lyzhkov, Evegenii Primakov (1999)
Communist/Socialist							
Communist Party of the Russian Federation		12.6	11.6	11.6	12.7	Most popular party in the 1990s	Gennady Zyuganov
Nationalist/Patriotic							
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia	6.0	11.5	8.0	8.1	8.9	Ran as Bloc Zhironovsky in 1999	Vladimir Zhironovsky
Liberal/Westernizing							
Union of Rightist Forces/now Pravoe delo (Just Cause)	8.5	4.0	0.7	1.0	0	Joined with other parties in Nov. 2008 to form Pravoe delo	Georgii Bovt, Leonid Gozman
Yabloko	5.9	4.3	0.9	1.6	0	Under the leadership of Grigory Yavlinksy until 2008	Sergey Mitrokhin

the other hand, have advocated more rapid market reform, including privatization, free prices, and limited government spending. United Russia charts a middle ground, appealing to voters from a wide ideological spectrum.

Another dividing line relates to national identity. Nationalist/patriotic parties emphasize the defense of Russian interests over Westernization. They strongly criticize the westward expansion of NATO into regions neighboring Russia. They favor a strong military establishment and protection from foreign economic influence. Liberal/reform parties, on the other hand, advocate integration of Russia into the global market and the adoption of Western economic and political principles. Again, the United Russia party has articulated an intriguing combination of these viewpoints, identifying Europe as the primary identity point for Russia, but at the same time insisting on Russia's role as a regional power, pursuing its own unique path of political and economic development.

Ethnic and regional parties have not had a significant impact on the national scene. Similarly, religion, although an important source of personal meaning and a strong social presence, has not emerged as a significant basis of political cleavage for ethnic Russians, who are primarily Russian Orthodox Christians.

Russian political parties do not fit neatly on a left-right spectrum. Nationalist sentiments crosscut economic ideologies, producing the following party tendencies:

- The traditional left, critical of market reform and often mildly nationalistic
- Liberal/reform forces, supporting assertive Western-type market reform and political norms
- Centrist "parties of power," representing the political elite
- Nationalist/patriotic forces, primarily concerned with identity issues and national self-assertion

The most important parties in all four groupings have not challenged the structure of the political system but have chosen to work within it. Since 2000, liberal/reform parties have been marginalized and are no longer represented in political institutions. Of the four parties represented in the State Duma, two are centrist (United Russia and A Just Russia). The second-strongest party after United Russia, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, is a traditional left party. The fourth party, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky) is nationalist/patriotic.

The Dominant Party: United Russia

dominant party

A political party that manages to maintain consistent control of a political system through formal and informal mechanisms of power, with or without strong support from the population.

Since 2003, one political party, United Russia, has taken on clear dominance. Its predecessor, the Unity Party, rose to prominence, together with Vladimir Putin, in the elections of 1999 and 2000. While the Unity Party gained 23.3 percent of the vote in Duma elections in 1999, United Russia received 37.6 percent in 2003, and 64 percent in 2007. In April 2008, at a party congress, United Russia's delegates unanimously approved creation of a custom-made post for Vladimir Putin as party chairman. United Russia has served as a major source of political support for Putin, and in January 2011 Medvedev gave the party the right to use his photo as well in United Russia campaign materials, although he does not hold a formal position in the party.[29]

What explains United Russia's success? An important factor is the association with Putin, but the party has also built a political machine that could generate persuasive incentives for regional elites. The party is truly a party of power, focused on winning to its side prominent people, including heads of Russia's regions, who then use their influence to further bolster the party's votes. Combined with increasingly centralized control within the party, the result is a political machine reinforced by the president's

power over gubernatorial appointments. The party has a rather poorly defined program, which emphasizes the uniqueness of the Russian approach (as distinct from Western models), an appeal to values of order and law, and a continued commitment to moderate reform.

The question now facing the party is whether it has adequate institutional strength to impose accountability on its leaders and whether it can develop an organizational footing in society. When Dmitry Medvedev removed the long-time mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, from office in 2010 (citing corruption), this raised questions about United Russia's future strategy. Luzhkov's removal left the Moscow branch of United Russia, which Luzhkov had dominated, in a difficult position, given its dependence on the national power structure. Luzhkov's replacement, Sergei Sobrianin, who has ties to both Putin and Medvedev, received the unanimous support of the 32 United Russia deputies in the Moscow city council (called the city Duma).

Other Parties Represented in the State *Duma* (2007–2011)

Many consider the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) to be the only party that could be considered a real opposition force. The CPRF was by far the strongest parliamentary party after the 1995 elections, winning over one-third of the seats in the Duma. Since then its strength has steadily declined. With the second-strongest showing, after United Russia, in the 2007 Duma elections, the party's vote was nonetheless weak, winning only 11.7 percent of the vote. The party defines its goals as being democracy, justice, equality, patriotism and internationalism, a combination of civic rights and duties, and socialist renewal. Primary among the party's concerns are the social costs of the market reform process.

Support for the party is especially strong among older Russians, the economically disadvantaged, and rural residents. The CPRF appears to represent those who have adapted less successfully to the radical and uncertain changes of recent years, as well as some individuals who remain committed to socialist ideals. Its principal failures have been an inability to adapt its public position to attract significant numbers of new adherents, particularly among the young, as well as the absence of a charismatic and attractive political leader. Although one might expect Russia to offer fertile ground for social democratic sentiments like those that have been successful in the Scandinavian countries of Western Europe, the CPRF has not capitalized on these sentiments, nor has it made room for a new social democratic party that could be more successful.

Two other parties were represented in the State Duma after the 2007 elections. The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) placed a close third behind the Communist Party. Neither liberal nor particularly democratic in its platform, the party can be characterized as nationalist and populist. Its leadership openly appeals to the antiwestern sentiments that grew in the wake of Russia's decline from superpower status. Concern with the breakdown of law and order seems to rank high among its priorities. The party's leader, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, has garnered especially strong support among working-class men and military personnel. However, most often this party has not challenged the political establishment on important issues.

The same is true of A Just Russia, founded in 2006, based on an amalgam of three smaller parties. Many observers consider that A Just Russia was formed, from above, to demonstrate the competitive nature of Russia's electoral system, while undermining opposition parties that might pose a real threat to United Russia. The leadership espouses support for socialist principles, placing it to the left of United Russia on the political spectrum and offering a political magnet for dissatisfied supporters

of the Communist Party. In highly exceptional cases A Just Russia has been able to win mayoral elections in smaller cities;[30] however, the party does not pose a real challenge to the position of United Russia and has generally supported the president and government.

While these three parties, singly or combined, cannot challenge the power of United Russia, they have on occasion issued protests over what they consider to be unfair electoral procedures. For example, in October 2009 deputies from all three factions abandoned a session of the State Duma as a sign of protest against the results of regional elections, accusing United Russia of infringement of proper electoral procedures and demanding that the results be nullified. After consultations with the president, the demands were withdrawn.

The Liberal Democratic Parties: Marginalized

The liberal/reform parties (those that most strongly support Western economic and political values) have become marginalized since 2003, when they won only a handful of seats in the Duma. These groups have organized under a variety of party names since 1993, including Russia's Choice, Russia's Democratic Choice, and, most recently, the Union of Rightist Forces, as well as the Yabloko party. These parties have espoused a commitment to traditional liberal values, such as a limited economic role for the state, support for free-market principles, and the protection of individual rights and liberties. Prominent figures such as Boris Nemstov and Grigory Yabloko were visible and sometimes influential in the 1990s as representatives of reform policies, but they have since found it hard to build a stable and unified electoral base. Many Russians hold policies associated with these figures, such as rapid privatization and price increases, responsible for Russia's economic decline. Often referred to as "democrats," their unpopularity also creates confusion as to what democracy really implies. An additional source of weakness has been their difficulty in running under a uniform and consistent party name. Support for liberal/reform parties generally has been stronger among the young, the more highly educated, urban dwellers, and the well-off. Thus, ironically, those with the best prospects for succeeding in the new market economy have been the least successful in fashioning an effective political party to represent themselves.

Elections

Turnout in federal elections remains respectable, generally between 60 and 70 percent; it stood at 63 percent in the 2007 Duma election and close to 70 percent in the 2008 presidential vote. National elections receive extensive media coverage, and campaign activities begin as long as a year in advance. The political leadership has also actively encouraged voter turnout, to give elections an appearance of legitimacy. Up until 2003, national elections were generally considered to be reasonably fair and free, but international observers have expressed serious concerns about the fairness of both the 2003–2004 and 2007–2008 election cycles, related, for example, to slanted media coverage.[31]

Until 2007, the electoral system for selecting the Duma resembled the German system in some regards, combining proportional representation (with a 5 percent threshold) with winner-take-all districts. In addition, voters were given the explicit option of voting against all candidates or parties (4.7 percent chose this in 2003). Until 1999, despite the electoral rebuffs in 1993 and 1995, the public gave strongest

support to the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party; in contrast, in 1999 and 2003, parliamentary elections offered qualified support for the government.

The 2007 election was governed by a new electoral system involving one national proportional representation district, with a minimum threshold for representation of each party raised to 7 percent. Parties are required to include regional representatives on their lists from across the country. For those parties above the 7 percent threshold, choice of deputies from the party list must reflect strength of the vote in the various regions. In addition, according to the 2001 law on political parties, in order to participate in the election, a party must have affiliates in more than half of the regions of Russia, with a certain number of registered members in these regions. Therefore, parties with a strong political base in one or several regions would only be represented in the national parliament if they had organizations of the requisite size in half of the regions in the country and if they had gained 7 percent of the national vote. In 2006, national legislation removed the "against all" option from the ballot.

With the rapid ascent of United Russia since 1999, opposition parties have experienced a sharp decline in electoral success. One reason is genuine popular support for Putin (and later Medvedev), as well as the failure of the opposition parties to develop appealing programs or field attractive candidates. Media coverage has also strongly favored United Russia and the president. Administrative control measures and selective enforcement have delimited the scope of acceptable political opposition, sometimes providing pretexts to disqualify opposition forces. In addition, the carrot-and-stick method has wooed regional elites, producing a bandwagon effect that has been reinforced by the abolition of elections of regional executives.

Russia has yet to experience a real transfer of power from one political grouping to another, which some scholars consider a first step in consolidating democratic governance. Under the Russian constitution, presidential elections have been held every four years, but beginning with the 2012 election the term will be extended to six years; the Duma mandate will be extended from four to five years.

Political Culture, Citizenship, and Identity

Political culture can be a source of great continuity in the face of radical upheavals in the social and political spheres. Attitudes toward government that prevailed in the tsarist period seem to have endured with remarkable tenacity. These include a tradition of personalistic authority, highly centralized leadership, and a desire for an authoritative source of truth. The Soviet regime embodied these and other traditional Russian values, such as egalitarianism and collectivism. At the same time, the Soviet development model glorified science, technology, industrialization, and urbanization; these values were superimposed on the traditional way of life of the largely rural population. When communism collapsed, Soviet ideology was discredited, and in the 1990s the government embraced Western political and economic values. Many citizens and intellectuals are skeptical of this "imported" culture, partly because it conflicts with other traditional civic values such as egalitarianism, collectivism, and a broad scope for state activity. Public opinion surveys over time do, however, suggest at least general support for liberal democratic values such as an independent judiciary, a free press, basic civil liberties, and competitive elections, but at the same time a desire for strong political leadership. During Putin's presidency the leadership espoused a particular Russian concept of **sovereign democracy**, emphasizing the importance of adapting democratic principles to the Russian context.

sovereign democracy

A concept of democracy articulated by President Putin's political advisor, Vladimir Surkov, to communicate the idea that democracy in Russia should be adapted to Russian traditions and conditions rather than based on Western models.