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## ANALYSIS

## Russia's September 14 Regional Elections: Strengthening the Rules and Reducing Competition Against the Background of the Ukrainian Crisis

By Aleksandr Kynev, Moscow

### Abstract

In the year since Russia held its last round of regional elections on September 8, 2013, the state implemented significant changes in its electoral policy. These changes led to a sharpening of the rules for registering candidates and party lists and a general reduction in the ability of political parties to participate in the political process through institutional means. Following the success of several new candidates and parties in the 2013 elections and the beginnings of an outflow of regional and local elites from the old “systemic parties”—i.e., the parties currently represented in the State Duma—the state adopted at the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014 a series of measures weakening the institutional influence of the new parties. This process was driven by the deepening political crisis developing since March 2014 in connection with the annexation of Crimea and the further developments in eastern Ukraine. The rapid increase in the influence of the siloviki, the expected worsening of the economic situation, and the new political risks have forced businesses to sharply curtail financing for many political projects and conserve resources to the maximum extent possible.

### Changing Legislation

The main consequence of the recent legislative changes in Russia is the de facto removal of parties from the political process and the personalization of elections, particularly in the most protest-oriented regions. The best example is in the case of the Moscow City Duma elections. In contrast to the system which existed until 2011, the new version of the party and electoral system no longer has a significant part of the institutional infrastructure which allowed the parties to achieve success. The main difference is that after a short period of liberalization from 2012 to 2013, there are now a large number of registered parties, which makes it difficult for protest voters to concentrate their votes in one or a small number of parties. Dispersing the vote makes it hard for opposition parties to come to power.

The stricter rules for registering candidates combined with a new regime of reducing the number of parties that can register candidates without having to submit lists of signatures effectively makes it impossible for opposition parties to compete: in order to participate in the elections, it is necessary to have an exemption from the registration rules, but to gain such exceptions, it is necessary to have successfully participated in earlier elections.

Thus, the new system of registering candidates combined with the growing share of deputies elected in single-member districts works against the new political parties and self-nominated candidates. The pro-Kremlin candidates are in the best position since they typically have the most organizational and financial resources. For victory, even in conditions when overall support for the party is falling, all they need is a majority, however, it should be spread evenly over the territory. In all regional elections of recent years, the United Rus-

sia candidates won an absolute majority in the single-member districts, and in several regions, they won all the seats. In the most competitive regions, the authorities can run their candidates as “independents,” registering these candidates even though they are not associated with the ruling party. In the most hostile districts, the authorities only allow candidates from the systemic parties to compete.

### The Legal Basis of the September 14 Elections

Including the elections that took place in the recently annexed regions of Crimea and Sevastopol, 6,024 elections and referendums took place on September 14, 2014. The most significant of these were the 30 gubernatorial elections. In three additional regions—Kabardino-Balkaria, Crimea, and Sevastopol—the newly elected regional legislature was set to elect new regional leaders. There were also 14 elections to elect regional parliaments, three elections for mayors of regional capitals, and 21 regional capital city council elections. Thirteen of these 21 city councils were then to elect one of their ranks as mayor and sign a contract with a city manager.

One distinguishing characteristic of the 2014 elections was the large number of gubernatorial elections. In 20 of the 30 regions, the incumbent governor had resigned before the end of his term. Of these 20, 13 of the previous governors were appointed by Putin as acting governors, while seven were new appointees.

According to the 2012 Russian law that restored the gubernatorial election, the head of a region who resigns or loses the confidence of the president and is forced from office cannot compete in the elections to replace him. The exceptions are if he has been in office for less

than one year or received the support of the president to participate in the elections. Thus, the key factor is the position of the president, though the law does not explain the legal manner in which the president is supposed to express his agreement for the acting governor to run in the elections.

The officially announced goal for holding so many pre-term governors' elections was the desire to strengthen the legitimacy of the regional authorities before the December 2016 State Duma elections. The idea is to hold the governors' elections before the Duma elections in single-member districts assuming that some of the candidates would use the governors' elections as an advertisement for the upcoming Duma elections and thereby reduce the risks of destabilization in regions before the 2016 federal elections.

Another reason is in the concrete social-economic situation: the negative data about the Russian economy and the predictions for further decline, particularly with the on-going international sanctions. Most likely, the governors are trying to prolong their terms before the expected downturn, but are trying to take advantage of the formally high ratings for President Putin and the massive information campaign in regard to the decision to annex Crimea. Also, they are trying to take advantage of the current strict regulations on registering candidates, which effectively allows them to name their own opponents and remove all undesirable candidates from the race.

In the regional parliamentary elections, after the adoption of "Klishas Law," there is a clear trend toward reducing the number of elections held according to party lists. The Moscow City Duma elections were conducted exclusively according to single-member districts. This decision reflected the low ratings of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party in the city and the authorities' fear of conducting elections according to party lists.

### Registering Candidates: A Sharp Reduction in Competition

The process of nominating candidates in 2014 confirmed the earlier prediction that tightening the rules for registration would reduce the number of new party representatives running in the races. In most cases, new parties simply did not nominate candidates or minimized their number, accepting that they would not be registered anyway.

However, the new parties were in great demand in the gubernatorial elections because the systemic parties generally sought to work out a deal with the authorities in advance and did not nominate any serious candidates to oppose the designated official candidate. Moreover, only candidates affiliated with a party are allowed to

run. Thus, these new parties were the only way for candidates who did not have the support of the incumbent authorities to gain a spot on the ballot.

In the September 8, 2013, elections, of the 54 parties having the right to participate in elections, 53 put forward lists for the regional parliaments and city councils and 51 nominated candidates in the single-member districts. In other words, last year only one party (the Party of Business) ignored the elections (though it did participate in one neighborhood election). This year, of 69 parties, only 34 put forward a list for regional parliamentary or city council elections and, of these, three only competed in Crimea. Only 52 parties nominated candidates in single-member districts and in regional centers, including governors and mayors elections. Thirteen parties did not put forward one candidate or list even though 10 of these 13 had participated in last year's elections. The liberal parties—RPR-Parnas, Civic Platform, Yabloko, and the Alliance of Greens and Social Democrats—sharply reduced their participation in the elections.

Much more important than putting forward party lists was nominating candidates in the single-mandate districts. On the day of the elections, of the 1,799 candidates nominated for the regional legislatures, 1,207 remained. Thus 32.9 percent of nominated candidates were not registered in 2014. In 2013, the figure was 17.88 percent and in 2012, it was 11 percent. Among the self-nominated candidates, 62.5 percent were filtered out, whereas in 2013 the figure was 58.5 percent and in 2012 it was 40 percent. Of the 592 self-nominated candidates, only 310 remained. Among candidates for the city councils in regional capitals, of the 2,783 nominated candidates, 2,030 remained on the ballots, with 27.06 percent being filtered out. Of the self-nominated candidates 50.27 percent were removed.

There was almost a complete sweep for the governors' elections. Initially, 207 candidates were nominated for the 30 gubernatorial elections, or 6.9 per region. However, only 138 of these were registered, leaving only 4.6 candidates per region. In 2013, there were five candidates per region after the registration process. On election day, there were only 137 candidates, with P. Dorokhin leaving the ballot. Overall, 33.8 percent of the candidates were filtered out.

The candidates removed from the races were among the most important opponents to the sitting governors and most of the elections were drained of any drama. In most cases they were simply a referendum confirming the power of the incumbent governor. Among those who were not registered were two former governors—Aleksandr Rutskoi in Kursk Oblast and Alexandr Chernogorov in Stravropol Krai. Many of the candidates (46)

were eliminated at their own request or because they did not present their documents for registration. The main reason for the withdrawal was that they were not able to pass through the “municipal filter” without the help of the administration, which was a problem in 2013 as well. In 18 cases, candidates who presented their documents were denied registration. The most notable cases were in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, where the municipal filter was not able to remove the Communist Party of the Russian Federation candidate, Oblast Legislative Assembly Member V. Bulanov, because the Communists had won 28.8 percent of the vote in the 2011 elections, and in St. Petersburg, the Just Russia candidate Olga Dmitrieva was also blocked. Her party had won 23.7 percent of the vote in 2011 and she had twice been elected to the Duma from a single-member district. At the same time, the municipal filter blocked little-known candidates from small parties.

Initially, the body of candidates running in the governors’ elections made it possible to conduct competitive elections in a significant number of regions. However the desire to maintain control at any price proved stronger than any interest in increasing the real social legitimacy of the governors. In almost every gubernatorial election where alternative candidates could win a significant number of votes, they were removed from the race (St. Petersburg, Bashkortostan, Altai Republic, Orenburg, and Orel). Campaign 2014 was distinct not just for the lack of alternatives to the incumbent governors, but also scandals in which the authorities blocked potential candidates from gathering the 5 to 10 percent of the signatures they needed from municipal deputies to participate in the elections.

Another distinguishing feature of the campaign was that competitive candidates were removed from the elections by the parties that nominated them: R. Sarbaev in Bashkortostan, S. Katasonov in Orenburg, I. Mosyakin, V. Rybakov and S. Isakov in Orel, and former Russian Energy Minister V. Kalyuzhnyi in Altai Republic. The quickness of these decisions and the lack of clear explanations for them suggests that these actions reflected political decisions taken when informal pressure was applied on the leadership of the party.

The United Russia party nominated almost all of the incumbent governors. The only exceptions were in Kirov and Orel oblasts where the incumbent governors N. Belykh and V. Potomsky campaigned as an independent and Communist (KPRF), respectively. In other words, United Russia failed to nominate candidates only in regions where the incumbent governor chose a different affiliation. Thus, as a rule, United Russia officially supports any incumbent governor regardless of his party affiliation. This situation clearly highlights the adminis-

trative dependency of United Russia’s institutional situation in that it does not determine who will run as candidates for governor and instead of making decisions, effectively implements policies defined in the presidential administration.

### Characteristics of the Campaign

The 2014 elections continued the tendency visible in 2013 in which most of the campaigning took place during the summer months. This outreach included TV broadcasts, which begin 28 days before the vote. The difficult timing of the elections forces candidates to start work early, often even before the elections are formally announced. An early start is particularly valuable for candidates in competitive districts, where it is important for them to begin advertising early, and candidates who have little name recognition.

An important campaign stop for the incumbent governors is a meeting with President Putin. In some cases, the president or prime minister even traveled to the region to support the candidate. During the campaign, Putin met with 27 of the 30 incumbent governors running in the September 14 elections. The regional media interpreted these meetings as the undoubted support of the president for the governors and these governors, particularly those who were not especially popular, and who hoped that some of Putin’s high standing in the polls would rub off on them. In many regions, besides this indirect campaigning, there was practically no other agitation. However, in some regions, there was a clear effort to copy some of the techniques employed by Navalny in his 2013 Moscow mayoral campaign, such as putting up advertising “cubes” in visible parts of the city.

### Results: Continuing Decline in Turnout and a Crisis among the Systemic Parties

Undoubtedly, the absence of real competition and the mid-September election date helped reduce turnout and lowered the level of real social legitimacy that the elections imparted to the authorities. The expectation of low turnout encouraged the authorities to increase participation through artificial means, such as absentee voting and voting at home for invalids. Scandals associated with these practices occurred in several regions. Also important were the efforts to hinder the work of election watchdog groups like Golos, whose representatives were blocked from all precincts in Chelyabinsk, Samara and Bashkortostan and most precincts in Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow oblasts. At 21 percent, the turnout for the elections to the Moscow City Duma was particularly illustrative. This was the lowest turnout since the body was established in 1993. Turnout the previous year had been 32.1 percent, 35.63 percent in 2009, and 34.8 percent in 2005.

United Russia won every single governor's race. In 15 of 30 contests, the victor won more than 80 percent of the votes, which cannot be considered a normal result for competitive elections (the most successful was Nikolai Merkushev in Samara with 91.4 percent). In an additional 8 districts, the victors won between 70 and 80 percent. Only in 7 regions did the victor win less than 70 percent and of these only two won less than 60 percent (Altai and Sakha republics). In these two regions, if the votes had been counted fairly, most likely the winners would have received less than 50 percent and there would have been runoffs between the two top vote-getters. There was considerable evidence of violations in Altai. Only 18 of the alternative candidates in the 30 races won more than 10 percent of the vote in their region.

## Conclusion

For many experts, these elections in the Russian regions were the most managed and uninteresting for many years. The deep crisis of the old systemic parties currently represented in the State Duma is accompanied by the active desire of the authorities to prevent the appearance and development of new parties and politicians. Moreover, in conditions defined by an obvious militarization of the political regime, a significant part of the elite is frightened and seeking to avoid participating in political activity, fearing accusations of being unpatriotic and repressions. In effect, a significant part of the elite does not understand the situation and is not prepared to take any kind of decisive actions.

The result of limiting the use of proportional representation in the elections and the preservation of the system introduced in 2014 of blocking the registration of undesirable candidates will lead to the effective crash of the party system and a new desire to use the parties currently represented in the Duma exclusively for the goal of being able to register candidates since these parties have the ability to place their candidates on the ballot without collecting signatures. The elections will be cleansed of any ideological candidates. Instead, informal business groups will seek to win spots in the parliament to pursue their commercial interests, essentially by buying the endorsement of the existing parties.

### *About the Author*

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In regions that continue to use proportional representation or mixed electoral systems, as in 2013, there will be an active migration from the old parties to new ones. At the same time the authorities will attempt to limit the number of parties which can register candidates without collecting signatures. Accordingly, the existing parties will become more attractive to a wide variety of candidates who want to win office, but the result will be that the parties will lose any ideological coherence as these various candidates use them as a way to get onto the ballot.

- The current system of simply not registering most alternative candidates for the ballot will lead to the following consequences: Increased efforts by the authorities to establish (or, in many cases, to strengthen) de facto control over the new parties which have won representation in the local legislatures and therefore are able to get their candidates through the "municipal filters." Therefore, Russia will return to the system used in the second part of the 2000s: the state will control the parties which, in turn, control the nomination of candidates. The only difference from the 2000s lies in the greater number of parties and the variation in the number of parties across regions. The authorities will use a system of "manual control" to register candidates from alternative parties under conditions which do not meet existing legal standards and when the law is applied selectively.
- The parties that refuse to cooperate informally with the authorities risk losing their legal status or coming under other pressure.
- Most likely, the number of parties that are able to register candidates will shrink.
- Probably, the state will try to further strengthen the registration rules for governors' elections and eliminate the "loophole" in the law which currently allows any registered party to nominate candidates for governor and limit the number of parties that have such a right. Thus, the authorities will seek to eliminate all undesirable candidates.



## DOCUMENTATION

## Results of the Regional Elections of 14 September 2014

<i>Gubernatorial elections</i>			
Region	Candidates on the first three places (party affiliation)	Result (%)	Voter turnout (%)
<i>Altai Krai</i>	<i>Karlin, Alexander ("United Russia" – UR)</i>	72.97%	34.33%
	Yurchenko, Sergey (CPRF)	11.22%	
	Boronin, Oleg ("Just Russia" – JR)	7.54%	
<i>Astrakhan Oblast</i>	<i>Zhilkin, Alexander (UR)</i>	75.28%	40.52%
	Shein, Oleg (JR)	16.22%	
	Snegov, Oleg (CPRF)	4.11%	
<i>Republic of Bashkortostan</i>	<i>Khamitov, Rustem (UR)</i>	81.71%	74.86%
	Kutluguzhin, Yunir (CPRF)	10.13%	
	Sukharev, Ivan (LDPR)	4.81%	
<i>Volgograd Oblast</i>	<i>Bocharov, Andrey (UR)</i>	88.49%	36.63%
	Mikheyev, Oleg (JR)	4.45%	
	Litvintsev, Dmitriy (LDPR)	2.42%	
<i>Vologda Oblast</i>	<i>Kuvshinnikov, Oleg (UR)</i>	62.98%	29.69%
	Morosov, Alexander (CPRF)	18.04%	
	Karginov, Sergey (LDPR)	10.34%	
<i>Voronezh Oblast</i>	<i>Gordeyev, Alexey (UR)</i>	88.81%	57.19%
	Ashifin, Konstantin (CPRF)	7.65%	
	Filatov, Igor (LDPR)	1.13%	
<i>Ivanovo Oblast</i>	<i>Konkov, Pavel (UR)</i>	80.32%	36.82%
	Simin, Nikolay (CPRF)	7.83%	
	Sirotkin, Sergey (LDPR)	6.41%	
<i>Republic of Kalmykia</i>	<i>Orlov, Alexey (UR)</i>	82.89%	61.71%
	Nurov, Nikolay (CPRF)	8.26%	
	Vyshkvarok, Petr (LDPR)	3.14%	
<i>Kirov Oblast</i>	<i>Belykh, Nikita (self-nominated, with support from UR)</i>	69.98%	36.25%
	Mamayev, Sergey (CPRF)	15.99%	
	Cherkasov, Kirill (LDPR)	9.92%	
<i>Krasnoyarsk Krai</i>	<i>Tolokonskiy, Viktor (UR)</i>	63.30%	31.22%
	Sergiyenko, Valeriy (CPRF)	14.01%	
	Serebryakov, Ivan (Patriots of Russia)	13.88%	
<i>Kurgan Oblast</i>	<i>Kokorin, Alexey (UR)</i>	84.87%	39.74%
	Yevgenov, Ivan (CPRF)	8.07%	
	Alexandrov, Yuriy (LDPR)	4.38%	
<i>Gebiet Kursk</i>	<i>Mikhaylov, Alexander (UR)</i>	66.81%	38.96%
	Firsov, Vladimir (CPRF)	11.73%	
	Fyodorov, Vladimir (LDPR)	10.33%	

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<i>Lipetsk Oblast</i>	<i>Korolev, Oleg (UR)</i>	<b>81.83%</b>	<b>47.49%</b>
	Khalimonchuk, Maksim (LDPR)	7.24%	
	Podgornyy, Vladimir (Party of Pensioners)	3.09%	
<i>Murmansk Oblast</i>	<i>Kovtun, Marina (UR)</i>	<b>64.69%</b>	<b>30.94%</b>
	Antropov, Mikhail (CPRF)	11.29%	
	Makarevich, Alexander (JR)	10.77%	
<i>Nenets Autonomous Okrug</i>	<i>Koshin, Igor (UR)</i>	<b>76.70%</b>	<b>42.82%</b>
	Smychenkov, Andrey (LDPR)	7.67%	
	Ostrodumov, Nikolay (JR)	6.33%	
<i>Nizhni Novgorod Oblast</i>	<i>Shantsev, Valeriy (UR)</i>	<b>86.93%</b>	<b>54.34%</b>
	Bochkarev, Alexander (JR)	5.65%	
	Kurdyumov, Alexander (LDPR)	2.62%	
<i>Novosibirsk Oblast</i>	<i>Gorodetskiy, Vladimir (UR)</i>	<b>64.97%</b>	<b>30.69%</b>
	Savelev, Dmitriy (LDPR)	18.82%	
	Kubanov, Anatoliy (JR)	13.49%	
<i>Orenburg Oblast</i>	<i>Berg, Yuriy (UR)</i>	<b>80.28%</b>	<b>44.12%</b>
	Mitin, Alexander (ChESTNO – Man, Justice, Responsibility)	7.37%	
	Titova, Tatyana (Citizens' Platform)	4.50%	
<i>Oryol Oblast</i>	<i>Potomskiy, Vadim (CPRF)</i>	<b>89.17%</b>	<b>62.59%</b>
	Uteshev, Vitaliy (LDPR)	3.74%	
	Antyukhov, Yuriy ("Molodaya Rossiya")	2.92%	
<i>Primorskiy Krai</i>	<i>Miklushevskiy, Vladimir (UR)</i>	<b>77.43%</b>	<b>40.06%</b>
	Grishukov, Vladimir (CPRF)	12.67%	
	Andreychenko, Andrey (LDPR)	4.77%	
<i>Pskov Oblast</i>	<i>Turchak, Andrey (UR)</i>	<b>78.36%</b>	<b>37.80%</b>
	Rogov, Alexander (CPRF)	11.22%	
	Bryachak, Oleg (JR)	5.28%	
<i>Altai Republic</i>	<i>Berdnikov, Alexander (UR)</i>	<b>50.63%</b>	<b>54.13%</b>
	Petrov, Vladimir ("Grazhdanskaya sila")	36.44%	
	Romashkin, Viktor (CPRF)	7.72%	
<i>Komi Republic</i>	<i>Gayser, Vyacheslav (UR)</i>	<b>78.97%</b>	<b>58.95%</b>
	Bragin, Mikhail (LDPR)	6.85%	
	Andreyev, Andrey (CPRF)	6.85%	
<i>City of Sankt Petersburg</i>	<i>Poltavchenko, Georgiy (UR)</i>	<b>79.30%</b>	<b>37.97%</b>
	Ivanova, Irina (CPRF)	9.37%	
	Sukhenko, Konstantin (LDPR)	3.83%	
<i>Samara Oblast</i>	<i>Merkushkin, Nikolay (UR)</i>	<b>91.35%</b>	<b>61.40%</b>
	Matveyev, Mikhail (CPRF)	3.95%	
	Belousov, Mikhail (LDPR)	1.69%	

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<i>Stavropolskiy Krai</i>	<i>Vladimirov, Vladimir (UR)</i>	<b>84.22%</b>	<b>47.70%</b>
	Goncharov, Viktor (CPRF)	6.10%	
	Drosdova, Olga (LDPR)	5.31%	
<i>Tyumen Oblast</i>	<i>Yakushev, Vladimir (UR)</i>	<b>86.56%</b>	<b>58.26%</b>
	Selyukov, Mikhail (LDPR)	6.21%	
	Piskaykin, Vladimir (JR)	5.36%	
<i>Udmurt Republic</i>	<i>Solovyov, Alexander (UR)</i>	<b>84.84%</b>	<b>43.08%</b>
	Chepkasov, Vladimir (CPRF)	7.65%	
	Markin, Andrey (LDPR)	3.39%	
<i>Chelyabinsk Oblast</i>	<i>Dubrovskiy, Boris (UR)</i>	<b>86.37%</b>	<b>45.51%</b>
	Natsiyevskiy, Konstantin (CPRF)	5.25%	
	Pashin, Vitaliy (LDPR)	4.10%	
<i>Republic Sakha (Yakutia)</i>	<i>Borisov, Yegor (UR)</i>	<b>58.79%</b>	<b>52.70%</b>
	Bereskin, Ernst (Citizens' Platform)	29.49%	
	Gubaryov, Viktor (CPRF)	5.31%	
<b>Elections to regional parliaments</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Parties which received more than 5% of votes</b>	<b>Result (%)</b>	<b>Voter turnout (%)</b>
<i>Bryansk Oblast</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>71.90%</b>	<b>49.90%</b>
	CPRF	9.08%	
	LDPR	5.22%	
<i>Volgograd Oblast</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>60.09%</b>	<b>36.62%</b>
	CPRF	14.34%	
	LDPR	8.16%	
	JR	5.21%	
<i>Kabardino-Balkar Republic</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>65.28%</b>	<b>71.06%</b>
	CPRF	11.55%	
	JR	11.51%	
	Greens	5.11%	
	LDPR	5.10%	
<i>Karachay-Cherkess Republic</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>73.21%</b>	<b>67.56%</b>
	CPRF	9.66%	
	JR	5.99%	
	Patriots of Russia	5.80%	
	LDPR	5.10%	
<i>Republic of Crimea*</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>70.18%</b>	<b>52.80%</b>
	LDPR	8.49%	
<i>Republic Mari El</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>65.40%</b>	<b>41.66%</b>
	CPRF	13.82%	
	LDPR	8.26%	

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<i>City of Moscow (number of candidates who won single mandates)</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>28</b>	<b>21.04%</b>
	Single mandate candidates supported by UR	10	
	CPRF	5	
	LDPR	1	
	Rodina	1	
<i>Nenets Autonomous Okrug</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>45.62%</b>	<b>41.47%</b>
	CPRF	19.26%	
	LDPR	10.75%	
	Rodina	5.51%	
	Citizens' Force	5.12%	
<i>Altai Republic</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>44.70%</b>	<b>54.10%</b>
	CPRF	12.11%	
	JR	7.77%	
	LDPR	7.48%	
	Patriots of Russia	6.21%	
<i>City of Sevastopol*</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>76.67%</b>	<b>47.97%</b>
	LDPR	7.39%	
<i>Republic of Tatarstan</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>84.24%</b>	<b>80.42%</b>
	CPRF	5.55%	
<i>Tula Oblast</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>65.98%</b>	<b>40.52%</b>
	CPRF	11.81%	
	LDPR	8.67%	
<i>Tyva Republic</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>84.03%</b>	<b>70.03%</b>
<i>Khabarovskiy Krai</i>	<i>UR</i>	<b>57.14%</b>	<b>25.45%</b>
	CPRF	14.12%	
	LDPR	13.34%	
<b>Mayoral elections in regional capitals</b>			
<b>City, Region</b>	<b>Candidates on the first three places (party affiliation)</b>	<b>Result (%)</b>	<b>Voter turnout (%)</b>
<i>Anadyr, Chukotka Autonomous Okrug</i>	<i>Davidenko, Ilya (UR)</i>	<b>83.08%</b>	<b>39.06%</b>
	Antonyuk, Bozhena (LDPR)	9.11%	
	Ishkov, Viktor (self-nominated)	6.21%	
<i>Blagoveshchensk, Amur Oblast</i>	<i>Kozlov, Alexander (UR)</i>	<b>38.68%</b>	<b>26.81%</b>
	Rakutina, Tatyana (CPRF)	16.97%	
	Abramov, Ivan (LDPR)	16.51%	
<i>Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Sakhalin Oblast</i>	<i>Nadsadin, Sergey (UR)</i>	<b>79.40%</b>	<b>21.04%</b>
	Moskalev, Alexander (LDPR)	3.88%	
	Burdyugov, Konstantin (JR)	3.11%	

Continued overleaf

Elections of members of parliaments of regional capitals by party lists			
City, Region	Parties which received more than 5% of votes	Result (%)	Voter turnout (%)
<i>Blagoveshchensk, Amur Oblast</i>	UR	40.11%	26.84%
	CPRF	20.73%	
	LDPR	20.01%	
	Russian Party of Pensioners for Justice	7.61%	
<i>Bryansk, Bryansk Oblast</i>	UR	67.44%	41.50%
	CPRF	12.14%	
	LDPR	5.21%	
<i>Vladikavkas, Republic of North Ossetia</i>	UR	62.04%	64.79%
	Patriots of Russia	22.66%	
	CPRF	5.61%	
	JR	5.36%	
<i>Murmansk, Murmansk Oblast</i>	UR	44.38%	29.99%
	LDPR	13.55%	
	JR	11.83%	
	CPRF	10.40%	
	Citizens' Platform	7.05%	
<i>Simferopol, Republic of Crimea*</i>	UR	59.61%	51.89%
	LDPR	17.52%	
	CPRF	6.20%	
<i>Elista, Republic of Kalmykia</i>	UR	47.29%	43.59%
	CPRF	17.48%	
	Citizens' Platform	10.81%	

\* The sovereignty of the Russian Federation over Crimea and the City of Sevastopol is not recognized internationally.

UR: United Russia

JR: Just Russia

CPRF: Communist Party of the Russian Federation

LDPR: Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

Sources: Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation <<http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom>>; Kommersant, no. 166 (5439) of 16 September 2014 <<http://www.kommersant.ru/pda/kommersant.html?id=2568087>>, based on information of the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation.

## ANALYSIS

## Russia's Failed Federalization Marches and the Simulation of Regional Politics

J. Paul Goode, Oklahoma

### Abstract:

Inspired by Russia's insistence on federalization for Ukraine, activists in Novosibirsk attempted to organize a protest march in August 2014 to call for greater regional autonomy in Siberia. Authorities squelched the march almost as soon as the protest threatened to spread. Yet even as organizers were arrested and press reports censored, opposition leaders in Moscow and activists in Ukraine seized upon the news of the planned federalization marches and even invented new ones. The resulting spectacle revealed the Kremlin's ongoing fear of decentralizing power, the weak ties between central and regional opposition, and the boomerang effect of Russia's intervention in Eastern Ukraine.

In August 2014, a new chapter was written in the troubled history of Russian federalism, though in the end it proved to be more farce than tragedy. For all appearances, a perfect storm of nationalist and regionalist sentiment appeared to be taking the form of "federalization" marches in Russia's regions, emboldened by the annexation of Crimea and its admission with the status of a federal republic in Russia's federal system. What transpired was a logical and convincing simulation of a regionalist movement that provided a vivid illustration of the state of regional politics in today's Russia.

For nearly fifteen years, the Kremlin steadily rendered Russian federalism more ritualistic than substantive. Russia's experience with regionalism in the 1990s and the ever-present threat of separatism continue to justify political centralization and the diminishing role of regional politics. For Russia's regions, then, the Kremlin's demands for the federalization in Eastern Ukraine seemed surprising, if not hypocritical. Why should the Donbass benefit from federalism when Russia's regions effectively have been deprived of it for years? For some observers, Russia's tactics in Ukraine were likely to stimulate a revival of regionalism—if not outright secessionism—in Russia. At a minimum, they created an opportunity for the opposition to demand the realization of federalist principles in Russia's constitution.

The very structure of Russia's ethno-federal system had been a source of discontent for opposition nationalists, as well, but for different reasons. While the 1993 constitution recognized 21 "ethnic" republics named for non-Russian peoples, the vast majority of Russia's regions are simply administrative-territorial (read: non-ethnic) provinces. Opposition nationalists point to this difference in federal status as privileging minority ethnic interests and evidencing the "anti-Russian" nature of Russia's ethno-federal system (a claim inherited from Soviet-era nationalists who argued the Soviet system discriminated against Russians). A common nationalist

goal since the early 1990s had been the creation of ethnically Russian republics within Russia's federal system in order to level up the status of Russian regions and to gain recognition of the ethnic Russian people as a core, state-bearing people. Consequently, Crimea's annexation represented the long-awaited creation of Russia's first ethnically Russian republic, setting a precedent for Russia's provinces to challenge Moscow and demand elevated status as republics.

These potentially powerful currents appeared to come together in a movement for the "Federalization of Siberia." On July 24, 2014, a "March for the Federalization of Siberia" in Novosibirsk was announced on the Russian social media website *Vkontakte*, bearing the slogan "Stop feeding Moscow!" (*khvatit kormit' Moskvu!*)—a variation of the common nationalist slogan, "Stop feeding the Caucasus." It also prominently featured a picture of the Siberian Federal District with the slogan, "Let's show Moscow Siberia!" (*Pokazhem Moskvu Sibir!*)<sup>1</sup> The group initially claimed the goal of founding a "Siberian republic" within Russia, though this was later dropped after the city authorities objected. Despite this change, the march's stated goals remained unchanged: (1) to introduce services and income enhancement for those living in harsh environmental conditions; (2) to reserve a share of taxes on resource extraction for regional budgets for a "more just" distribution of local and federal budgets; and (3) to realize constitutional right for relatively autonomous local government and to end the "idiotic situation" in which "all decisions are taken by Moscow without representation of Siberia's interests."

This combustible combination of regionalist and nationalist opposition to the Kremlin quickly gained traction in the online press in Russia. It was not the first time that Siberian regionalism received national

1 "Marsh za federalizatsiiu Sibiri," <<https://vk.com/sibmarsh>>, last accessed September 23, 2014.

attention in recent memory. In 2011, the central press circulated sensationalist reports concerning an activist in Kemerovo, Vladimir Kiselev, who intended to organize a referendum on Siberia's independence. Kiselev claimed that the referendum would be supported by the United States and result in Siberia becoming America's fifty-first state, though he admitted to receiving no help from the Obama administration and confessed that he was, in fact, hoping for a change of administration in Washington.<sup>2</sup>

Copy-cat marches were hastily organized in Krasnodar and Ekaterinburg to coincide with the march in Novosibirsk. Moscow took notice. On July 30, 2014, the independent news site *Slon.ru* published an interview with Artem Loskutov, the organizer of an annual satirical youth march featuring nonsensical, quasi-militaristic slogans in Novosibirsk known as *Monstratsiia* ("Monstration"). Loskutov discussed the rationale for the march, though he explicitly denied being its organizer or even its "ideologue." The next day, Russia's press watchdog, RosKomNadzor, accused *Slon.ru* of distributing material inciting mass public disturbances and forced it to delete the interview.<sup>3</sup> Seventeen other news sites were compelled to delete reports of the story, while the BBC's Russian website edited its report to comply with the state's demand. The march's page on *VKon-takte* was taken down briefly, and the search term for "federalization of Siberia" disappeared from *Google.ru*.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly afterwards, organizers of the march were detained by police on a variety of petty charges and sentenced to two weeks in jail. Four organizers were detained in Novosibirsk, two in Ekaterinburg, and two in Omsk for attempting to organize an apparently related march. The organizer of an attempted march in Krasnodar, Dar'ia Poliudova, was arrested after an unknown male approached her on the street and provoked an argument by accusing her repeatedly of being a nationalist. Following her 14 day sentence, she was not released and instead charged with extremism and threatening Russia's territorial integrity. According to Krasnodar's prosecutor's office, Poliudova is accused of calling for Ukraine's annexation of Krasnodar and the

introduction of Ukrainian troops in the region. If convicted, the charge bears a maximum sentence of five years in a prison colony.<sup>5</sup>

In Moscow, Russia's mainstream opposition politicians, including Boris Nemtsov and Aleksei Naval'nyi, seized upon the news of the planned marches and the Kremlin's censorship to mock the government's hypocritical fear of federalism at home while insisting upon federalization for Ukraine. Their involvement drew international attention and foreign media mistakenly named Loskutov as the march's organizer. In fact, credit for organizing the march was claimed by Aleksei Baranov, coordinator of the "National-Bolshevik Platform"—an opposition group which claims to have split from Eduard Limonov's party over the latter's stance on Ukraine. Baranov characterized the march as a "first attempt to loudly announce our presence" by calling attention to "the Kremlin's hypocritical position on South-Eastern Ukraine." At the same time, he condemned the liberal opposition for spoiling the protest by organizing in support of federalization.<sup>6</sup> When called for initial questioning by the authorities, Baranov denied any separatist intent and instead stated that he sought the redistribution of wealth and nationalization of enterprises. Baranov reportedly received vague threats to life and limb, followed by the discovery of a severed sheep's head left at his doorstep on August 15. Soon after, he was accused of having incited patrons at a bar (located in a village 500 kilometers from Novosibirsk) to participate in the banned march.<sup>7</sup> Another organizer from Baranov's party, Mikhail Pulin, was detained in Altai krai, formally on suspicion of stealing a mobile phone.<sup>8</sup>

Adding fuel to the fire, Ukrainian media and online activists seized upon the news of the planned marches. Rumors spread in the Ukrainian media that the organizers of the march sought independence from Russia, "inspired by the experience of the Donbass." However, many of the Ukrainian sites mistakenly associated the protest movement with an older orthodox-nationalist group, the Siberian Sovereign Union (*Sibirskii derzhavnyi soiuz*), whose leader, Aleksandr Budnikov,

2 "Dissident iz Kuzbassa: 'Prisoedinenie Sibiri k SSHa neobratimo, kak vrashchenie Zemli vokrug Solntsa!'," Tayga.info, June 21, 2011. <<http://tayga.info/details/2011/06/21/-104061>>, last accessed September 20, 2014.

3 "Slon snial material po trebovaniyu Genprokuratury," *Slon.ru*, August 1, 2014. <<http://slon.ru/fast/russia/slon-snyal-material-po-trebovaniyu-genprokuratury-1137502.xhtml>>, last accessed September 20, 2014.

4 "Moscow Freaks Out About Federalization Rally... In Siberia," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 5, 2014. <<http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-separatism-rally-siberia/26515418.html>>, last accessed August 5, 2014.

5 "Pervoe delo po 'separatistkoi' stat'e," *Russkaia planeta*, September 4, 2014. <<http://rusplt.ru/society/pervoe-delo-po-separatist-skoy-state-12559.html>>, last accessed September 21, 2014.

6 "Strasti po marshu 'za federalizatsiiu Sibiri,'" *Natsional-Bol'shevistskaia Platforma*, August 20, 2014. <<http://www.sibinfo.su/news/nsk/1/51195.html>>, last accessed September 21, 2014.

7 "Organizatorami 'marsha za federalizatsiiu Sibiri' zainteresovalas' politsiia," *tvrain.ru*, August 17, 2014. <<http://www.sibinfo.su/news/nsk/1/51195.html>>, last accessed September 23, 2014.

8 "V Sibiri zaderzhivaiut zaiavitelei marsha 'za federalizatsiiu,'" *Radio Svoboda*, August 17, 2014. <<http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/26534757.html>>, last accessed September 23, 2014.

denied any role in the marches. Budnikov argued that the movement was artificial and that Loskutov would likely be co-opted by the Kremlin, while agreeing with the movement's principles and condemning Putin's regime as corrupt.<sup>9</sup> Undaunted, Ukrainian bloggers and activists recirculated Russian and international press reports, created new "federalization march" pages on *Vkontakte*, and conjured the threat of a growing, coordinated regionalist movement within Russia by including the hash tags of a dozen or more large Russian cities. One of Russia's opposition figures, Ksenia Sobchak, may have been duped by this strategy, taking to *Facebook* to announce a gathering in Kaliningrad for a "Kaliningrad People's Republic" on August 17—a call which was widely circulated but does not appear to have had any substance, and which featured a graphic that originated with one of the federalization sites started by Ukrainian activists on *Vkontakte*. Perhaps predictably, countervailing rumors on Russian social media linked the proposed federalization marches (real or imagined) to the infiltration of provocateurs from Maidan who allegedly disguised themselves as Ukrainian refugees and sought to organize mass disturbances.<sup>10</sup>

In all three cities, city authorities denied permission for marches and rejected the slogan "Stop feeding Moscow!" as extremist. Organizers retreated to organizing "gatherings" (*skhod*) that did not require permission from the city, and adopted safer slogans. In Novosibirsk, for instance, the march was re-named to "March for the inviolability of the constitutional structure of RF" with a new slogan "for observance of the principles of federalism!" The gathering in Novosibirsk proved the largest of the three with just two dozen participants. In Ekaterinburg, about 15–20 people showed up for the gathering, including at least one person with a placard displaying the symbol of the Urals Republic that existed briefly in 1993. Police arrested one protestor wearing a t-shirt with the slogan "Stop feeding Moscow!" as well as one apparent provocateur. No meeting occurred in Krasnodar, where patriotic-nationalist groups arrived first on the scene, distributing St. George's ribbons and preparing to drive away any protesters. In the absence of any actual federalization protestors, they instead attacked Viacheslav Martynov, characterized as an "anarchist" in the press, who wore blue and gold ribbons (Ukraine's

national colors) on his wrist. Police intervened and detained Martynov and his attackers, eventually releasing the latter while Martynov was sentenced to 15 days in prison.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, demonstrations held in support of Siberian federalization in Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Kharkiv attracted more participants than the actual gatherings in Russia.

In perhaps the final episode of this strange series of mostly non-existent federalization protests, fliers supporting federalization appeared in Surgut in early September as Khanty-Mansiiskii Autonomous Okrug (KhMAO) prepared for municipal elections. The fliers demanded that KhMAO become a republic, featuring the slogan "Stop feeding Moscow!" as well as "The north will be white! The north will be Russia!" They prominently displayed the logo of the nationalist youth organization *Sovest'* ("Conscience") and called for citizens to boycott the gubernatorial election and to vote for any party in municipal elections other than United Russia. Members of *Sovest'* only recently were charged with hooliganism for their role in city-wide melees with migrants from the Caucasus on June 30, 2014.<sup>12</sup> The organization was further implicated in threats made to a journalist and a variety of other attacks carried out in the course of the election campaign in early September. The organization actively participated in the municipal election and its leadership denied any role in making the fliers on social media, declaring them to be nothing more than "black PR."<sup>13</sup> Local observers suggested the fliers were intended to weaken the regional authorities in advance of municipal elections by raising the sensitive issue of separatism.<sup>14</sup> Regional prosecutors continue to seek to have the fliers declared "extremist" without having identified its author(s).

In the final tally, the federalization marches demonstrated the impoverished state of regional politics in Russia. Organizers initially showed proficiency with the use of social media to raise awareness, but their own parties disavowed them as quickly as they were arrested by the police. National opposition leaders' ideo-

9 "Marsh 'za federalizatsiiu Sibiri.' Kakovy tseli i kto stoit za nim?" *Sibirskii derzhavnyi soiuз*, August 13, 2014. <<http://sibpower.com/publikaci/marsh-za-federalizatsiiu-sibiri-kakovy-celi-i-kto-stoit-za-nim.html>>, last accessed September 21, 2014.

10 "Marsh za federalizatsiiu v Novosibirsk narekli 'maidanom' s priezhim boevikami iz Kiev," *Sibinfo.su*, August 4, 2014. <<http://www.sibinfo.su/news/nsk/1/51195.html>>, last accessed September 21, 2014.

11 "Anarkhist, izbityi v khode 'Marsha za federalizatsiiu Kubani', poluchil 15 sutok aresta," *Yuga.ru*, August 18, 2014. <<http://www.yuga.ru/news/341617/>>, last accessed September 21, 2014.

12 "V Surgute razbiraiutsia v prichinakh massovoi draki. 'Sovest' i diaspora dali svoi kommentarii," *Ugra-news.ru*, June 30, 2014. <<http://ugra-news.ru/article/845>>, last accessed September 23, 2014.

13 "V Surgute khotiat priznat' ekstremistkoi listovku s prizyvom k federalizatsii," *Sova-center.ru*, September 19, 2014. <<http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2014/09/d30246/>>, last accessed September 23, 2014.

14 "V 'Tiumenskoi matreshke' potrebovali federalizatsii," *Znak.com*, September 2, 2014. <<http://znak.com/hmao/articles/02-09-19-18/102862.html>>, last accessed September 21, 2014.

logically inappropriate and factually inaccurate bandwagoning betrayed their opportunism, as well as the weakness of ties between national and regional opposition movements. The entanglement of the federalization marches with the Ukrainian question doubtless mobilized patriotic-nationalist groups who perceive the specter of Maidan in any nonconformist act or organized political opposition—though in this case, their perceptions were reinforced by the active and visible roles played by Ukrainian social media activists and press. The central government demonstrated that it considers even poorly coordinated, under-funded, and under-

attended demonstrations in support of Russia's formal constitutional principles to be threatening and impermissible. The coda in Surgut illustrated that this central intolerance for regionalism may even serve as a resource for combatants in municipal elections, particularly when votes are no longer decisive in local politics. Indeed, in drawing far more attention and generating more intrigue than the election campaigns unfolding simultaneously across a third of the country, the failed federalization marches provide a powerful indictment of the state of public politics in Russia's regions.

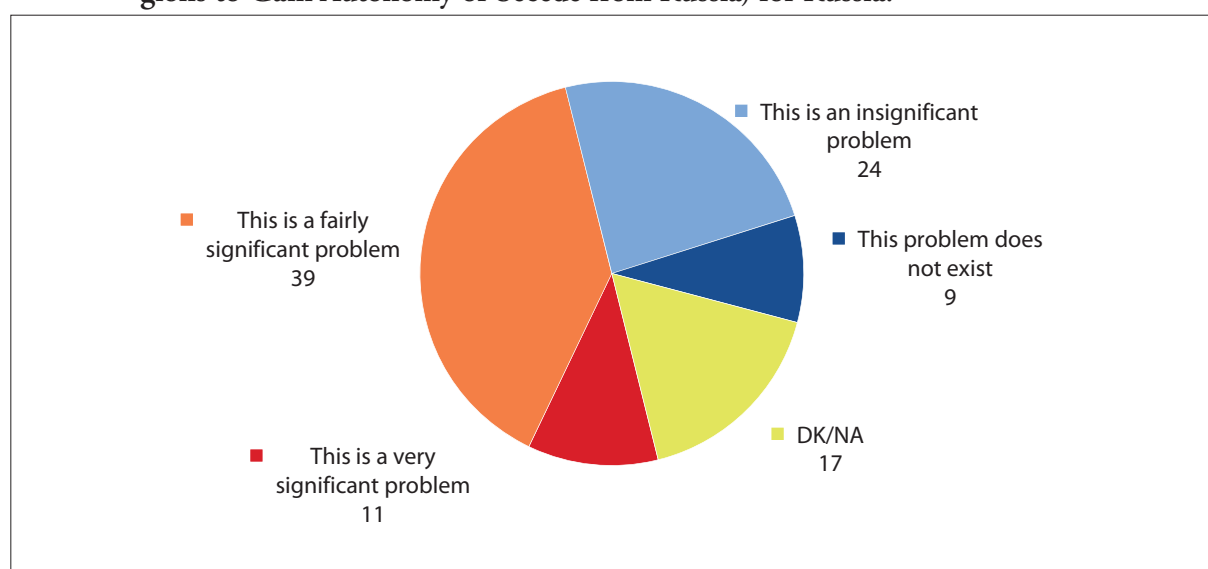
#### *About the Author*

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#### OPINION POLL

### Russian Attitudes Towards Regional Secession (November 2013)

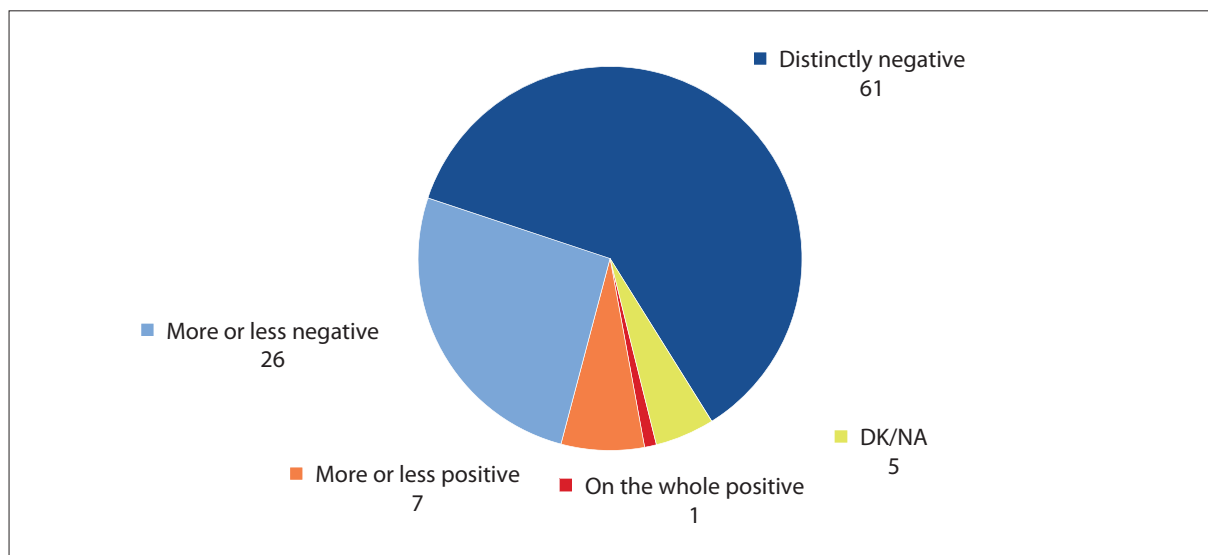
Figure 1: How Significant Is the Problem of National Separatism (the Attempts of Some Regions to Gain Autonomy or Secede from Russia) for Russia?



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 15–18 November 2013, N=1603, <<http://www.levada.ru/28-11-2013/rossiyanе-o-separatizme>>

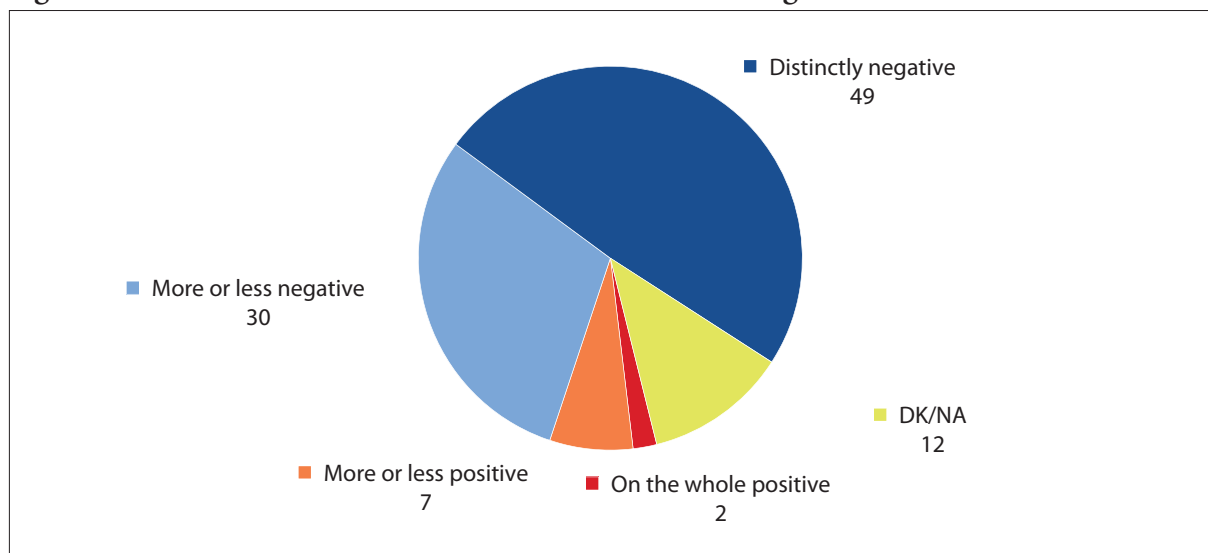


**Figure 2: What Would Your Reaction Be If the Region in Which You Live Were to Secede From Russia?**



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 15–18 November 2013, N=1603, <<http://www.levada.ru/28-11-2013/rossiyanе-o-separatizme>>

**Figure 3: What Would Your Reaction Be If Other Russian Regions Were to Secede From Russia?**



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 15–18 November 2013, N=1603, <<http://www.levada.ru/28-11-2013/rossiyanе-o-separatizme>>

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