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Within the period of 1993-2014 Russia experienced four major electoral reforms: in 1993, 2002, 2005 and 2014. One more attempt to change the Russian electoral system initiated by the president in 1994-1995 failed. This article considers the cases of major electoral reforms in Russia through the veto player theory. It demonstrates that the reforms were successfully implemented in cases when the executive branch, striving for maximum control over the legislative process, was interested in such implementation and there were no other veto players, who were able to block passage of the law.

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Introduction

On February 22, 2014 Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, signed the new law concerning the election to the Russia's lower house of parliament, which is the State Duma, reintroducing the mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) electoral system. This system has been already used at the Duma elections of 1993, 1995, 1999 and 2003. At the federal parliamentary elections of 2007 and 2011 the solely party-list proportional representation (PR) system, brought into the Russian election practice in 2005, was applied.

The reintroduction of a mixed-member system in 2014 after the short period of experiments with the proportional representation became the fourth of the major³ electoral reforms, conducted in the post-communist Russia within the two recent decades. It followed the establishment of the electoral competition rules in 1993, making thorough serious amendments to them in 2002 and their fundamental change in 2005 (see Table 1). Let's compare it with France, which is often considered as the country, having been gone through the extremely high number of large-scale electoral changes (Rahat 2011: 525). For instance, during the whole period of the Fifth Republic only three major electoral reforms were conducted (Elgie 2005: 120).

Yet in early 2000s neither the political experts, nor the officials considered such sharp changes in the Russian electoral competition rules as possible. For instance, Vladimir Gel'man in his article, devoted to the process of formation and passage of the Russian electoral legislation in 1993-1995, wrote: *"If not considering the case of revolutions in Russia in the nearest future, Russian electoral policy and the Russian electoral system reform in the whole would be characterized by making some specific changes to the particular provisions of law"* (Gel'man 2000: 70). Alexandr Veshnyakov, the head of the Central Electoral Commission, spoke in similar vein about the newly adopted electoral legislation and the law on political parties on July 2002 and claimed: *"It was the last serious change; there will be no need in such changes any more"* (Veshnyakov 2002: 26).

Major electoral reforms are rarely conducted in democracies (Andrews, Jackman 2005: 66; Rahat 2011: 524). However, even if we consider the political regime in Russia upon the mid 2000s as electoral authoritarianism (Golosov 2011; White 2012; Gel'man 2015), it shall be clearly comprehended, why the State Duma electoral law has been experiencing so many changes within the last two decades? Therefore, the aim of this article is to present an explanatory framework for revealing the logic of the major electoral reforms in the post-communist Russia.

³ Coming over to Arend Lijphart, under a "major" electoral reform this article considers a significant change on one or more of the four main dimensions of electoral systems: any change in the electoral formula and 20 percent or greater change in district magnitude, the national legal threshold or assembly size (Lijphart 1994: 13).

Table 1. Major Electoral Reforms in Russia

Year	Event	Outcome
1993	Introduction of a mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system at the first election to the State Duma. The half of the parliamentary seats (225) was to be distributed in accordance with a single-member plurality (SMP) system and the other half (225) were to be distributed in accordance with a proportional representation (PR) system. The 5 per cent threshold was applied to the PR system.	Passed
1995	The proposal of the president to change the balance between the SMP and the PR mandates within the MMM system, applying the proportion of 300-150 instead of 225-225.	Failed
2002	Increase of the PR electoral threshold from 5 to 7 percent.	Passed for the Duma elections after 2003
2005	Replacement of the MMM system by the closed list PR one. Increase of the electoral threshold from 5 to 7 percent since the 2007 Duma election, as it was provided for in 2002.	Passed
2014	Reintroduction of the MMM system, applied until 2003, with equal balance between the SMP and the PR mandates. Lowering of the threshold, applied to the PR system, from 7 to 5 percent.	Passed

We suggest that the success, as well as the failures of the electoral reforms in Russia can be explained by the same reasons as in the other countries regardless of their political regime. In our view, the electoral reforms within any political system are rooted in the specific constellation of the veto players within the system and their political preferences (Tsebelis 1995, 2002).

Our research in the dynamics of the major electoral reforms in Russia through the lens of the veto player theory is based on the large volume of secondary literature devoted to the political grounds of these reforms and the analysis of the main institutions of Russian super-presidential political system. In this article we are going to sum up the previous attempts to clarify the causes of the electoral system reforms in Russia.

The article consists of three parts. The first section contains the review of the literature on the electoral reforms in the Russian Federation and the theoretical model on which the analysis is based. The second part of the work is devoted to the four major electoral reforms, conducted

within the period from 1993 to 2014 through the lens of the veto player theory. The final part contains the main conclusions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

The political researchers have been attempting to analyze the nature of the major electoral reforms in modern Russia since the second half of 1990s. A large number of the researches concerning this topic is devoted to explanation of the logic of the 1993 electoral reform and the causes of failure of Boris Yeltsin's attempt to increase the number of the SMP mandates within the MMM system from 225 to 300 at the end of 1994 (Remington, Smith 1996; McFaul 1999; White, McAllister 1999; Gel'man 2000; Moser, Thames 2001; Birch et al. 2002). Some scholars paid their attention at analyzing the reasons for the electoral reform of 2005, when the MMM system was replaced by the closed list PR one (Moraski 2007, 2009; Smyth, Lowry, Wilkening 2007; Wilson 2009; White, Kryshantovskaya 2011). In 2014 the proportional representation electoral system was replaced by the mixed-member majoritarian system, which had been already applied until 2003 at the Duma elections. It became the last significant reform of the Russian electoral competition rules and has not been very well studied up to the present moment, while the researchers have already made some attempts to explain this fact (see Sheinis 2014: 64; Gel'man 2015: 133).

However, the scientific literature has not so far presented the general approach of the electoral reform policy in the Russian Federation. Why only one electoral reform, which established the electoral competition rules for the initial elections of 1993, was conducted within the period from 1993 to 2001, while since 2002 there have been three major electoral changes? Why were the reforms of 1993, 2002, 2005 and 2014 a success and why has the reform of 1994-1995 failed? The main purpose of this article is to answer all these questions.

We suppose that the veto player approach, introduced by George Tsebelis in 1995 as a method of the decision making process analysis, which was subsequently refined by the scholar in 2002 (Tsebelis 1995, 2002), is quite suitable for explanation of the major electoral reform trends in Russia. In accordance with the above mentioned scientific literature this approach is "*intuitive, testable, and transparent*" (Hallerberg 2011: 39) and has already proved itself to be valuable at conducting the empirical studies, devoted to explanation of political stability and instability causes (Hallerberg 2011; Ganghof 2015). The veto player approach has been applied at studying the electoral reform policy in Ukraine (Herron 2004), in the United Kingdom (Blau 2008), in Slovenia, in the Czech Republic, in Romania (Nikolenyi 2011) and in Belgium (Hooghe, Deschouwer 2011). This model was also used for the analysis of the party reform in

Russia in 2001 (Herron 2004) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs reform under the President Dmitriy Medvedev within the period from 2009 to 2011 (Taylor 2014). The main advantage of the veto player approach is that it has a universal scope of applicability at studying the causes of political stability or instability. Moreover, this approach can be applied to the countries with different types of political and party systems and different political regimes (Tsebelis 2002: 17-18; Hallerberg 2011: 39).

The veto players theory has several variations (Ganghof 2015). This article is based on the Tsebelis' pure approach, described in his monograph in detail (Tsebelis 2002). This theory rests on some key points. Any policy change requires the unanimous consent of all the veto players, which, in their turn, are "*individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo*" (Ibid.: 19). There are two kinds of veto players. If a veto player's status is formalized, generally, in the constitution, such veto player is called institutional. Partisan veto players, which "*are generated by the political game*" (Ibid.), can exist in parallel with the institutional ones. Each political system has a certain veto player configuration, which is determined by the number of the veto players, their position regarding the political issues and their internal cohesion (for the collective veto players). The veto player constellation can be changed with the course of time or may depend on the substance of the considered issue.

Political stability decreases along with the decrease in number of the veto players, shortening the gap between them (Ibid.: 37) and leading to degradation of their internal cohesion (Ibid.: 61). Implementation of these conditions makes political changes possible, but not inevitable. According to Tsebelis, "*when policy change is possible, whether it occurs or not will be a matter of the specific choices of actors themselves*" (Ibid.: 17). Discussing the veto player theory for the purposes of our analysis, it is also important to highlight that, in Tsebelis' view, in such cases, when all the veto players within a political system are controlled by one actor, they can be absorbed, and, consequently, it is appropriate to consider such political systems as the systems with only one veto player (Ibid.: 78).

In this article we are going to apply the veto player approach to the analysis of the electoral reform policy in the post-communist Russia. For this purpose we consider the examples of the successful and the failed major electoral reforms in Russia in the chronological order. We are going to restore the structure and the preferences of the veto players, involved in the decision making process, for each particular case.

For simplicity we consider the State Duma and the Federation Council – the two institutional veto players in the Russian political system – as if they were permanently having a consolidated majority sharing the same political views (which became the empirical fact rather than an analytical assumption in regard to the Federation Council in 2002 and the State Duma in 2004).

We consider it as appropriate, because in all the cases of the major electoral reforms both: the upper and the lower houses of the Russian legislative branch showed the high rate of the internal cohesion, even if none of the political groups (or the political parties, in the case of the Duma) dominated the Parliament, as it was in the 1990s.

We are not going to consider the Russian Constitutional Court as a veto player, because its profound confrontation with the presidential government within 1992-1993 had negative consequences and triggered it to avoid political issues (Grigoriev 2013).

Analysis of Major Electoral Reforms in Russia

Electoral Reforms in 1990s

The electoral reform of 1993 was conducted in the institution-free settings, where the President Yeltsin was the only veto player (Remington, Smith 1996: 1258; Gel'man 2000: 44; Moser, Thames 2001: 259; Birch et al. 2002: 134). This exceptional political environment occurred as the result of the constitutional crisis of September-October of 1993, when the President Yeltsin made a decision to dissolve the Congress of People's Deputies and called for conduction of the first post-soviet parliamentary elections and the constitutional referendum on December 1993.

The electoral system for the first State Duma elections was introduced by the presidential Decree No. 1557 issued on October 1, 1993 (McFaul 1999: 39; Moser, Thames 2001: 261; Birch et al. 2002: 133). One of the main purposes of this reform was to maximize the representation of the pro-presidential political forces among the Duma deputies. However, the situation, in which the electoral competition rules were established, was characterized by the high degree of uncertainty concerning the impact of various electoral formulae on the partisan structure of the new Russian parliament. In these circumstances the mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) electoral system with the equal balance between the number of the seats to be distributed in accordance with the single-member plurality (SMP) system and the proportional representation (PR) system (225-225) was introduced for the initial elections to the State Duma (Remington, Smith 1996: 1260-1261; Moser, Thames 2001: 264-265; Birch et al. 2002: 135). The point is that the isolated introduction of one of these systems would be risky for the decision-makers, because the effect of these electoral formulae on the political structure of the first post-soviet Russian parliament was uncertain. It was not clear, whether the communists or the reformists would benefit from the application of one particular system of these two (Remington, Smith 1996: 1259-1260; Moser, Thames 2001: 265).

However, the results of the Duma elections of December 1993 were disappointing for the Russian president and his team. Russia's Choice party, which was closely associated with Yeltsin, gained slightly over fifteen percent of the total number of seats (McFaul 1999: 41-42; Birch et al. 2002: 136-137). These results provoked Yeltsin to initiate a new electoral reform, which was intended to drastically curtail the number of the PR deputies in relation to the SMP ones. The cause is that, as the election results showed, it was the opposition parties, namely, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), who benefited from the application of the PR system. At the same time, the pro-government party Russia's Choice performed quite well in the single-member constituencies. Moreover, the average deputy, elected under the SMP system, shared the centrist position, profitable for the president. Thus, from the point of view of the president's advisers, reduction of the PR deputies' number would have allowed to strengthen the political influence of the head of the state among the next Duma (Golosov 1997; White, McAllister 1999: 28-29; Gel'man 2000: 63; Moser, Thames 2001: 267; Birch et al. 2002: 137).

Nevertheless, the Russian president had to work under the principally new conditions if compared with the end of 1993. Simultaneously with the first State Duma elections the referendum on ratification of the new constitution of the Russian Federation and the first and the single elections to the Federation Council (the upper chamber of Russia's parliament), were held. Consequently, the institutions, restricting the power of the president, appeared in Russia (Gel'man 2000: 59).

Despite the fact that the president enjoyed significant legislative power, including the suspensive veto power (McFaul 1999: 38; Remington 2007: 121-122; Chaisty 2008: 432-433), a bill could be adopted only with the approval of the Russian parliament houses⁴, while Yeltsin's presidency was characterized by a permanent conflict between the president and the parliament (Remington 2007: 121-123; Chaisty 2008: 425), because neither the Duma, nor the Federation Council had pro-presidential majority (Gel'man 2015: 77; Chaisty 2008: 433-434). Thus, within 1994-1995 the new electoral reform draft was considered in the presence of not one but three veto players: the president, the State Duma, and the Federation Council⁵ (Gel'man 2000: 62; Moser, Thames 2001: 269).

On November 1, 1994 Yeltsin submitted the draft electoral law, which among other issues provided for decrease of the PR deputies number from 225 to 150 and, accordingly, increase of the number of the deputies, elected in the single-member districts from 225 to 300⁶, to the

⁴ The Federation Council has only the suspensive veto power concerning the bills, proposed by the State Duma, but the latter can override the veto by two thirds majority of deputies.

⁵ We do not consider the government as a veto player, because it is controlled by the president (Remington 2007: 122).

⁶ In case this electoral reform passed, the average district magnitude would have decreased by nearly 25 percent. The following formula was applied for calculation of an average district magnitude: $M_{aver}=S/E$, where S is the number of seats and E is the

Duma for its review in the first reading (e.g. Remington, Smith 1996: 1271; McFaul 1999: 42-43; White, McAllister 1999: 30; Gel'man 2000: 63; Moser, Thames 2001: 268; Birch et al. 2002: 137-138). In the third reading, which took place on March 24, 1995, the Duma adopted the electoral law, substantially diverging from the president's proposal. In particular, the Duma deputies kept equal balance (225-225) between the deputies from the single-member districts and the national party lists. The law, however, to be appeared to the president must be voted by the Federation Council, which, in turn, refused to approve it of April 12. Prior to its final passage to the President Yeltsin the electoral law was passed by the Duma's majority vote with minimum amendments on April 21 and then once again vetoed by the Federation Council on May 4. The law was adopted once more by the qualified two third majority of the Duma deputies' votes on May 11. Finally, the president also vetoed the Duma's bill on May 23. The Duma had to collect not less than two thirds of votes to override the president's veto. However the Duma failed, and, consequently, a conciliation commission, consisting of the members of lower and upper houses of the Russian parliament, and the presidential administration, was established (Moser, Thames 2001: 268). The compromise law, drafted by the commission, was passed by the Duma on June 9, adopted by the Federation Council on June 15, finally signed by the President Yeltsin on June 21 and soon came into effect (White, McAllister 1999: 31; Gel'man 2000: 65-70).

The electoral competition rules for the Duma elections of 1995, established by the revised electoral law, were slightly differing from the rules, applied at the elections of 1993; however, they kept equal balance between the deputies from the single-member districts and the national party lists (225-225) (White, McAllister 1999: 31-32; Moser, Thames 2001: 268). The Duma had to adopt the non-electoral method of the upper house formation, preferred by the vast majority of the senators, to achieve the compromise with the Federation Council. As for the compromise with the president, the Duma passed Yeltsin's law on presidential elections with little amendments prior to consideration of the bill on parliamentary elections (McFaul 1999: 43).

Why has Yeltsin's attempt to reform the Russian electoral system in 1994-1995 failed? At that time the Duma was the genuine veto player, and its majority preferred to leave the mixed-member majoritarian electoral system unchanged. Only few deputies of the Duma tended to approve the electoral law version, proposed by the president. Almost all the deputies, who were elected under the PR system, were totally against the decrease of the PR component (McFaul 1999: 43; Moser, Thames 2001: 273). Moreover, several dozens of the SMP deputies did not support the amendments as well, because they were the members of the parties, which got substantial number of votes under the proportional representation system (McFaul 1999: 43).

number of districts. At the same time, as the result of the reform, the effective electoral threshold would have increased by approximately 20 percent. The following formula was applied for calculation of the effective electoral threshold: $T_{\text{eff}} = 50\% / (M+1) + 50\% / 2M$, where M is the average district magnitude (in this case $M = M_{\text{aver}}$) (Lijphart 1994: 27).

Most of the parties, including the liberals (Yabloko), the nationalists (LDPR) and the communists (KPRF), voted for the status quo electoral system (McFaul 1999: 43; Gel'man 2000: 60). Even the members of the pro-presidential parties in the Duma, such as Russia's Choice and the Party of Russian Unity and Accord, were not unanimous in voting for the Yeltsin's electoral reform (Remington, Smith 1996: 1271-1275; Moser, Thames 2001: 272; Birch et al. 2002: 138). Thus, the presence of the veto player (the State Duma), which had an opposite position to the president and the Federation Council⁷ concerning the electoral reform, in the Russian political system resulted in the impossibility of the major electoral changes and the continuity of the previous electoral formula.

Electoral Reforms in 2000s and 2010s

Until 2002 none major electoral reform was brought up for the discussion in the parliament. In our opinion, the issue of the electoral system change did not appear in political agenda until the early 2000s due to the presence of several veto players, which were far apart in regard to the electoral reform matter. Therefore, these veto players contributed into the endurance of the status quo (Tsebelis 2002).

However, upon 2000 the conditions, which have encouraged changes in the previous veto player structure of the Russian political system, appeared. On March 2000 Vladimir Putin won the presidential elections. Due to the high level of electoral legitimacy, the economic growth, which was caused by the windfall oil revenues, and the manipulations with the formal and informal rules of the game, Putin managed to get the main segments of the Russian political and business elites under his control in the short run (Reuter, Remington 2009: 517-518; Gel'man 2015: 75-76).

On May 2000 Putin launched the reform of the Federation Council. He planned to remove the heads of the regional executive and legislative bodies, who have been holding their positions since 1996 ex officio and were often governed by their own interests in the decision making process, from the upper house, (Remington 2003: 670). The new structure of the Federation Council was formed by the early 2002. Then the upper house consisted of the officials, representing the executive and the legislative branches⁸, instead of the regional leaders, two representatives per each region. Upon the very beginning of the reform, the majority of the Federation Council turned to be pro-Kremlin. Thus, by the end of 2001 the bills, proposed by the president,

⁷ The members of the Federation Council supported the president in regard to the electoral reform, as they considered the PR component of the Russian MMM electoral system as an advantage for the Moscow-based political parties and, consequently, as an obstacle for promotion of regional interests in the lower house of parliament (Remington, Smith 1996: 1270; White, McAllister 1999: 31; Moser, Thames 2001: 270).

⁸ In fact, the presidential administration played one of the key roles in formation of the Federation Council's personal composition (Remington 2003: 674; Chaisty 2008: 434).

regardless of their content, have very seldom faced with the opposition in the upper house of parliament (Remington 2003). Upon 2002 the Federation Council was completely absorbed (Tsebelis 2002) by the presidential preferences.

By the middle of 2001 the State Duma had the pro-presidential majority for the first time upon it was established. This majority consisted of the deputies of the four factions: Unity, Fatherland-All Russia, Russia's Regions and People's Deputy. However this coalition, including the deputies, elected under both: the PR and the SMP systems, was far from being unanimous in regard to many issues (Remington 2001: 307, 2007: 122, 131). Often the Kremlin needed some additional votes of the deputies, beyond the above mentioned coalition, in order to pass a law (Chaisty 2008: 439-441). Thus, the Duma still kept some features of a veto player until the parliamentary elections of 2003.

Nevertheless, another major electoral reform took place in 2002, being the second reform of such kind upon 1993. On December 20 a new electoral law concerning the Duma elections was successfully passed. Despite the mixed-member majoritarian system with the equal balance between the PR and the SMP components remaining unchanged, the electoral threshold for the parties, which were going to participate in the further parliamentary elections, was raised from 5 to 7 percent (White 2005: 317; Lyubarev 2009: 13). This increase of the electoral threshold by almost one third reflected the Kremlin's intention to bring the Russian party system under its control (White 2005: 317; Golosov 2012: 24).

However, why the 7 percent threshold was not applied at the parliamentary elections of 2003? In our view, the point is that despite the Duma and the president shared similar positions in regard to some political issues, especially after the formation of the pro-Kremlin majority in the middle of 2001, the lower house of parliament remained the veto player, yet not absorbed by the head of the state. Meanwhile, the increase of the threshold at the elections of 2003 was quite risky for the Duma's parties. Consequently, the president had to agree to a compromise with the Duma, regarding the terms of the higher threshold introduction (Kynev, Lyubarev 2011: 536).

As the result of the parliamentary elections in December 2003 the United Russia party⁹ got the constitutional majority of the seats in the Duma. The party managed to convert 37.6 percent of the votes into 68.3 percent of the seats. Due to this success of the party of power, as United Russia is often called for its close relations with the President Putin (see Reuter, Remington 2009), at the elections, the lower house of Russian parliament was embedded into the vertical power structure, headed by the president (Moraski 2007: 544). The United Russia's hegemony in the legislative arena was achieved by means of the advantageous conversion of the votes, got

⁹ United Russia is the successor of Unity, formed by the merge of Unity and Fatherland-All Russia on July 2001 with the permission of the Kremlin (Reuter, Remington 2009: 516).

under the both: PR and SMP systems, into the seats and by conclusion of the pre-election agreements with some formally independent SMP nominees (Golosov 2005). Upon the State Duma elections of 2003, the Duma has been absorbed by the president (Tsebelis 2002), as well as had been the Federation Council. United Russia has become a political instrument for promotion of Putin’s political interests in the parliament (Roberts 2012; Gel’man 2015: 88-89).

Upon the opening of the Fourth Duma initiation of a new electoral reform became dependent on the preferences of the only veto player, remaining in the Russian political system, which was the president (Moraski 2007: 544; Gel’man 2015: 75). It is worth mentioning that upon the moment when the number of the veto players diminished to one, the cardinal changes aimed at elimination of real political competition began (Kynev, Lyubarev 2011: 515). As the result, the number of amendments made to the Russian electoral legislation upon 2004 has significantly grown if compared with the past decade (see Fig. 1)¹⁰.

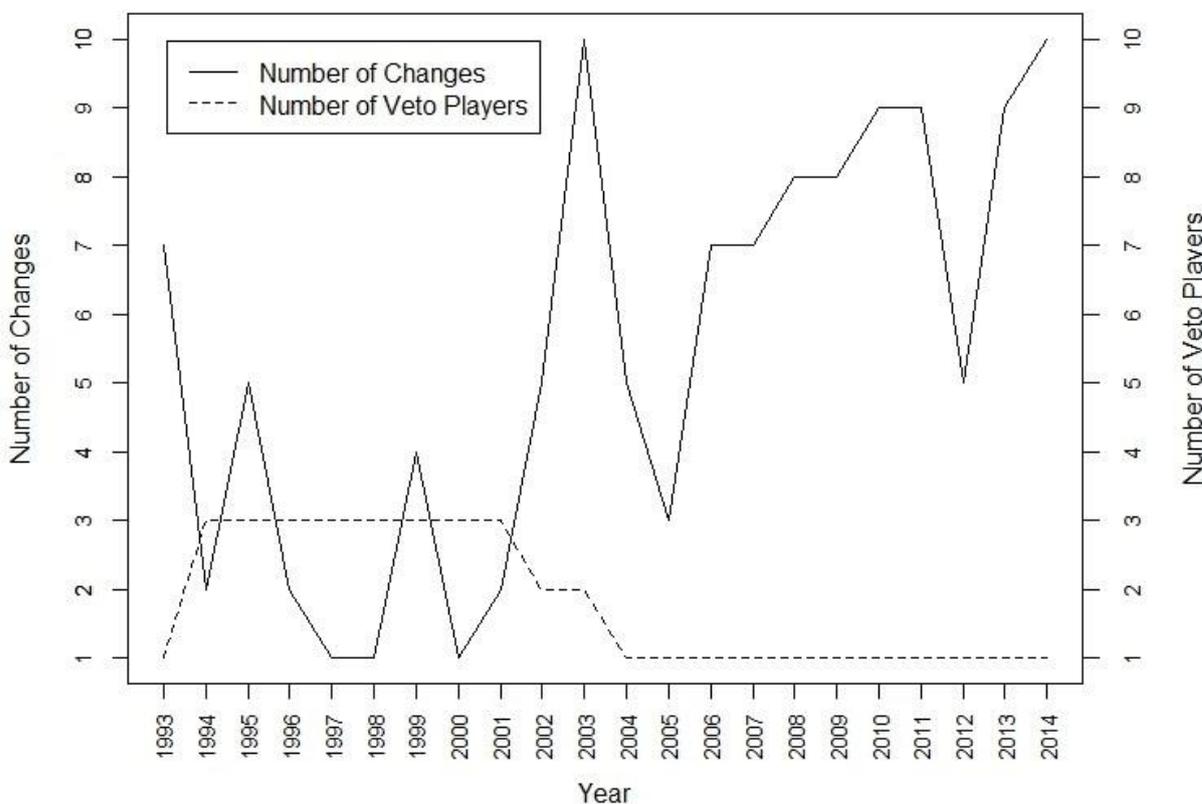


Fig. 1. Changes in Russian Electoral Legislation, 1993-2014

Source: <http://www.golosinfo.org/timeline>, <http://www.duma.gov.ru/>, Lyubarev (2009), and our calculations.

¹⁰ In this article we first and foremost consider major electoral reforms in Russia. At the same time, along with relatively few major reforms there were numerous minor and technical ones (Jacobs, Leyenaar 2011). Their frequency is also clearly dependent on the number of veto players. To determine the number of electoral reforms per years, we used the calculations of changes in Russian legislation, which were originally undertaken by Arkady Lyubarev in 2009 and subsequently updated by him in 2014. Since his calculations ended in the early June 2014, we added data using the official site of the State Duma.

The new major electoral reform took place in 2005. In accordance with the new electoral law the mixed-member majoritarian electoral system, applied for the Duma elections in 1993, 1995, 1999 and 2003, was replaced with the solely PR system, defining the unified nationwide district magnitude of 450. It was the presidential administration, which played the main role in the development of the new electoral competition rules (White, Kryshtanovskaya 2011: 576; Kynev, Lyubarev 2011: 547). There were no other veto players, which could prevent the process of implementation of the reform (Moraski 2007: 544).

The electoral reform of 2005 was a link in the chain of “counter-reforms” (Kynev, Lyubarev 2011; Sheinis 2014), aimed at centralization of Russian political life and the total control of the executive branch over the legislative process¹¹. In particular, introduction of the pure proportional representation system led to the disposal of independent (i.e. non-party) candidates, as well as the nominees, closely connected with the regional leaders (Smyth, Lowry, Wilkening 2007: 130; Wilson 2009: 200-201; White, Kryshtanovskaya 2011: 562-563; Kynev, Lyubarev 2011: 547). Another purpose of the electoral reform of 2005 was the long-term consolidation of the Putin’s party United Russia and strengthening of its internal cohesion (Moraski 2007: 554, 2009: 209; Smyth, Lowry, Wilkening 2007: 130). Loyalty of the United Russia’s deputies was provided by the Kremlin’s total control over the party list formation (Moraski 2007: 554-555).

Though the proportional representation system is considered to be unfavorable for the large parties (Colomer 2004), United Russia was guaranteed to be a success, at list, at the Duma election of 2007. Firstly, the success was expected due to the replacement of the regional leaders direct elections with the procedure of their nomination by the president, which took place in early 2005, so that the regional governors were co-opted into the party of power along with their political machines (Reuter, Remington 2009; Golosov 2014; Gel’man 2015: 84-85). Secondly, by 2007 the Kremlin has successfully put the Russia’s party system under its control through establishment of the restrictive rules concerning creation and operation of the political parties (Kynev, Lyubarev 2011). Thirdly, the President Putin, who was extremely popular among the voters, took the lead of the United Russia’s list at the election of 2007 (Roberts 2012: 236).

Due to the overwhelming victory of United Russia at the election of 2007, where the party managed to gain 64.3 percent of votes and 315 seats in the Duma, thus, achieving the constitutional majority, Putin and his allies had not stimuli to initiate a new electoral reform.

During the Dmitriy Medvedev’s presidency the number of the veto players in Russian political system remained the same. The Federation Council and the State Duma were still ab-

¹¹ Among the most important changes of such kind one can mention the requirement to raise the minimal number of party members up to 50000, the prohibition of electoral blocs and electoral alliances at all the elections, introduction of the official polling day, hardening of the rules of nominees and party lists registration, based on the signatures of the registered electors, and the abolition of electoral deposit (see Wilson 2009; Kynev, Lyubarev 2011; Sheinis 2014).

sorbed. The specific feature of that period was the Medvedev-Putin tandem, in which Medvedev hold the position of the president and Putin acted as the head of the government. However, Medvedev was completely loyal to Putin and they shared similar position concerning the general trends of the Russian policy (Gel'man 2015: 106-108).

However, at the Duma elections of 2011 the application of the PR system resulted in poor outcome for United Russia and, consequently, for the Kremlin. Three opposition parties (KPRF, A Just Russia and LDPR) managed to overcome the 7 percent threshold and collectively gained little fewer votes than United Russia. Meanwhile, the scrutiny of the official results of those elections by means of the statistical analysis (Shpil'kin 2011) and the experimental method (Enikolopov et al. 2013) clearly shows that a lot of votes were artificially assigned to the party of power. Thus, the application of the PR system, which was initially oriented at consolidation of United Russia, led to the consequences, which have been already forecasted in the scientific literature even in 2007, particularly, to appearance of a better-organized opposition and, consequently, the conditions, encouraging further democratization (Moraski 2007: 551).

The unexpected failure of United Russia at the election of 2011, when it managed to achieve the majority with a close shave (getting only 238 seats of 450), forced the Kremlin to update the rules of electoral competition for the next parliamentary elections. Such update (or, to be precise, major electoral reform) was conducted in 2014.

The Duma remained absorbed upon the elections of 2011, being dominated by United Russia. At the same time, as the result of the presidential election of 2012, Putin became the president once again. Consequently, the constellation of the veto players within the Russian political system did not change. That is why the reintroduction of the mixed-member majoritarian electoral system in the early 2014 did not face any obstacles (Sheinis 2014: 64).

The Putin's decision to reintroduce the MMM system, which had been already applied for the Duma elections can be explained by his intention to compensate for the possible poor results of United Russia under the PR system. In accordance with the results of the elections of 2003, the SMP component has provided high conversion rating for the party of power (Golosov 2005) and has given it a lot of opportunities, connected with availability of coalition and co-optation strategies in the single-member districts (Sheinis 2014: 64; Gel'man 2015: 133).

Conclusion

The electoral reform of 1993 was conducted in the environment with no formal restrictions of the presidential power. Another special feature of that period was the high level of uncertainty (McFaul 1999). As the result, the mixed-member majoritarian system, introduced by

the presidential Decree in order to facilitate the reformist parties in achieving wide parliamentary representation in the First Duma, has failed. The President Yeltsin's reaction was initiation of the new electoral reform at the end of 1994, which has subsequently failed. The point is that upon December 1993, when the constitution came into force and two houses of the Russian parliament were elected, any political reform, including the electoral one, ceased to be dependent on the single veto player. An attempt to change the electoral system, taken by Yeltsin, faced with the strong resistance of the Duma's majority, which did not share the president's and the Federation Council's view on the electoral reform. While such veto player configuration was remaining, there was a powerful barrier, preventing the major electoral system reform (Rahat, Hazan 2011).

The next major electoral system reform, following the one of 1993, took place in 2002, when the Federation Council became already absorbed by the president due to the reform of this chamber, conducted by the President Putin about two years prior, and the formation of the pro-presidential coalition in the State Duma in the middle of 2001. However, the Duma remained a veto player. That is why the electoral reform came into effect only upon the next parliamentary elections. The electoral reforms of 2005 and 2014 became possible due to the fact that after the elections of 2003 only one veto player remained in the Russian political system upon the absorption of the State Duma by the president, who was interested in promotion of the major electoral changes prior to the Duma elections of 2007 and upon the Duma elections of 2011.

We suggest that the major electoral reforms in the post-communist Russia became possible as the result of the principal changes in the veto player configuration. Upon the absorption of the Federation Council and, subsequently, the State Duma by the president in the first half of the 2000s, initiation of the electoral reforms became dependent only on the interests of the president and such reforms were initiated each time the electoral status quo did not correspond with them.

Application of the veto player approach, proposed by Tsebelis, contributes into the better understanding of the electoral policy in Russia. This approach allows us to embed the existing explanations of the electoral system changes in the Russian Federation into the unified explanatory framework. Moreover, the Tsebelis' theory can be used for the purposes of forecasting. On the basis of this theory we can suppose that, taking into account the current veto player's configuration, the nearest major electoral reform can be implemented upon the parliamentary election of 2016, in case its results would not meet the president's aims.

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