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# Institutionalization versus personalization: electoral effects of the mixed-member electoral system in Russia

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## ABSTRACT

The study of mixed electoral systems has gained in popularity due to frequent experiments with electoral systems in post-communist countries. Russia represents an interesting laboratory for this research, as it is a country that had switched to a proportional system in the 2007 parliamentary elections, and then moved back to mixed-member system in 2016 and over this period its dominance of the party system was strengthened. A comparative analysis of elections on the basis of votes received by party lists and voting in single-mandate districts suggests there is a high level of interrelation between two simultaneous voting processes, confirming the well-known thesis of ‘contamination’ in the mixed system. At the same time, a comparison of the diverse parties allows us to suggest that the level of that interrelation, and the vote ratio, are dependent on the characteristics of the party concerned. The research showed that, in a dominant party system, electoral competition in districts delivers higher results than in voting by party lists, and the voters demonstrate a strategic approach to supporting parties rather than voting for particular candidates in particular districts. This leads to a lower level of electoral support for candidates from large parties in comparison to the vote received by the parties themselves.

## KEYWORDS

Party systems; electoral systems; dominant party; mixed-member electoral system; institutionalization of the party system; nationalization of the party system; strategic voting; split voting

## Introduction

Mixed-member electoral systems have been of increasing interest to researchers since the 1990s, creating an extensive array of scientific literature on the subject (Blais & Massicotte, 2002; Farrell, 1997).<sup>1</sup> This focus on the mixed system was stipulated firstly by its attempt to connect the best practices from established systems – proportional and majority. Then comes the well-known description of mixed systems as ‘the best of both worlds’, compared with the previous perception of them as something strange and unusual (Massicotte & Blais, 1999; Shugart & Wattenberg, 2001). Secondly, in the course of the democratization seen in a number of different regions worldwide and in post-communist countries in particular, experiments in introducing mixed-member electoral systems have become increasingly widespread. Research on mixed-member systems was aimed at revealing connections between electoral systems and party systems, parliament structure, electoral and

legislator behaviour (Hainmueller & Kern, 2008, p. 213). But since the 2000s, trends have started to change again. The few countries that had introduced the mixed-member system soon rejected it with disappointment. Criticism of the mixed system was widespread among researchers who argued that, instead of connecting the best from 'the two worlds', it in fact amplified the disadvantages of both systems.

Moreover, the widespread criticism of elections in majority electoral systems, especially when applied in the more traditional 'first-past-the-post' manner, also affected research into mixed-member electoral systems. One of the problems to emerge was 'wasted votes' – more typical in single-mandate electoral districts, where the majority of electorate votes for the losing candidates. Another, similar, problem is disproportionate parliamentary representation: the structure of which does not correspond to the structure of electoral preferences expressed at the elections. Among the fundamental problematic characteristics of the majority system, and similarly of mixed-member systems is the problem of symmetry (the ratio of the number of votes for the party and the mandates received), responsiveness (the variation of the number of mandates in accordance with the number votes received), efficiency (the connection between the vote and how electoral districts are shaped) (McGhee, 2014). Authors have often concentrated on revealing the problems and disadvantages of these electoral systems, which has broadly created a critical aspect to the available literature.

District elections assume particular attention to research into the candidates' biography, but these studies are poorly developed due to lack of information and difficulties encountered in conducting this research in the comparative setting of multiple states. Nevertheless, personalization is an influential factor in elections and has been, for instance, widespread in Japan. However, the analysis of the influence of candidates' personal characteristics on the voting still requires further development and is often limited to the most obvious characteristics (such as party membership and incumbency).

An upsurge of interest in mixed-member systems has, in many respects, coincided with the processes of post-communist transformation. In the early 1990s, a large number of post-communist countries adopted a mixed-member system (which eventually proved most stable in Lithuania and Hungary), but later rejected it in favour of the purely proportional system (Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, in 2017 – Armenia, and in the future possibly – Georgia). Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan both introduced and then rejected a mixed system. Ukraine has implemented a mixed system several times, later switching to the proportional system, and finally returning to the mixed system. New works dedicated to a comparative analysis of the mixed system implementation in the post-communist elections have been published (Bochsler, 2009). Notably, experiments with the mixed system are still being conducted in the post-Soviet states. For example, from 2018 Moldova is planning to switch to a mixed system from a purely proportional system. While on the contrary – Armenia made a move in the opposite direction in 2017, and similar suggestions have been voiced in Georgia. All this is evidence of the difficult institutional choice typical for the post-Soviet states, where the change in electoral systems is frequently connected with particular ruling groups' interests in preserving power, or, on the contrary, results from claims made by a strong opposition.

Russia is known also to have experimented with the mixed system, which was selected as the basis of its electoral system from the moment of its creation, i.e. since the first post-communist parliamentary elections in 1993. However, after the apparent establishment of

this system and four parliamentary elections, a decision was made to move to a purely proportional system. Then, after two parliamentary campaigns, in 2016 the elections were once again held via a mixed system. At the same time, it is important to remember the particular ‘path dependency’, defined by a high interest in a majority system and single-mandate elections in Russian districts. Soviet elections were held under the majority system, but were not competitive, and the first democratic elections held in the USSR in 1989, and thereafter in the Soviet republics, including Russia in 1990, were also held under that system.

This tradition has determined high interest in a candidate’s personality, especially while the multi-party system is underdeveloped. The first democratic elections held during the end of the Soviet era anticipated a struggle within the CPSU (as many members of the same party ran against each other for one post) and the participation of numerous independent candidates with a wide range of ideological beliefs. Therefore, elections in single-mandate districts where there was an emphasis on candidate’s personality and in which the significance of the party was low or even absent – became the first factual basis of Russia’s emerging electoral system.

Research into the mixed system in Russia has in most cases been dedicated to issues related to a correlation between the formation of the electoral and party systems. Researchers also paid close attention to party list voting and the electoral behaviour, as expressed in elections under the proportional system. Voting in districts was rarely deemed a priority, due to the special methods required. Western researchers focused on the influence of the economic performance on election outcomes in districts and on the positions of the incumbents amid these changing conditions. For example, they mentioned that

when economic conditions in electoral districts deteriorate compared with the previous electoral period, it hurts the electoral prospects of legislative incumbents who belong to the governing party. Incumbents belonging to an opposition party, on the contrary, enjoy higher re-election chances when local economic conditions are bad. (Duvanova & Zielinski, 2005, p. 1145)

The least studied aspect remains the correlation between elections based on proportional and majority systems in the framework of a single campaign.

Generally, research into the mixed system in the post-communist states offers ambiguous results, highlighting potential damage to the stabilization and institutionalization of the party systems in new democracies, amplifying disproportionality and volatility (Bochsler, 2009).

Finally, considering the importance of the regional tier of politics for the vast expanse of Russia, the connection between electoral systems and regionalization deserves particular attention. Notably, research into Bolivia, where a transition from a proportional system to a mixed system was carried out, highlighted that one of the consequences of this process was increasing regionalization, expressed in Bolivia in the form of a deep split between two parts of the country – its mountainous western and economically more developed eastern parts (Centellas, 2005). Research into the mixed-member majority system in South Korea reveals the importance of the regional structure in voting (Yong, 2015).

The ‘come-back’ of the elections in the majority districts was one of the key changes to electoral legislation in the Russia’s State Duma elections of 2016, which inevitably

impacted the elections' results. However, a mixed system has always operated in the country: elections in single-mandate districts continued to be held, but only on the regional tier, where after 2003 a mandatory mixed system was introduced. The results had continuously outlined the importance of the mixed electoral system for the dominant party – United Russia, which proved able to win an absolute majority of mandates in the legislature owing its success to the single-mandate districts (in some regions the party has won in all single-mandate districts).

All in all, the results of the 2016 State Duma elections have confirmed the correctness of the adjustments made to the electoral legislation, as initiated by the Kremlin – from the perspective of both the Kremlin's and United Russia's interests. The election delivered a complete victory of the United Russia party in single-mandate districts (203 districts out of 225, or more precisely out of 206 in which the party fielded a candidate), as well as a series of victories for candidates from other parties (and of an independent candidate) in the districts, which were intentionally conceded by United Russia. 'Unexpected' results occurred only in four districts, where candidates from CPRF have won either in direct competition with United Russia (three cases) or after the United Russia candidate dropped out (one case). Thus, on the whole, district elections were held with a prescribed scenario, creating just a very limited number of possibilities for unpredictable competition.

At the same time, the results of the 2016 State Duma elections, as a whole and viewed as single-mandate districts are, we believe, a result of the long-running process of post-Soviet political transformation, related to the formation of the party system and the changing intensity of competition levels in elections. From this point of view, institutional changes have restored the status quo that had been a distinctive feature of the electoral system before the abolition of SMD elections (which were not held during the State Duma elections in 2007 and 2011) and at the same time have reflected the structural changes that took place when the purely proportional system was being adopted with United Russia becoming an absolute leader. Research shows that replicating the party competition formed in that period had a decisive influence on elections held under the majority system. At the same time, the majority system has not raised competitiveness in votes held under the proportional system, which again has decreased (as seen in the growth of the United Russia's results in party list voting and the decline in the effective number of parties in the elections, but which has also created individual competitive scenarios in the districts, that are not always completely identical to the party vote, which leads to some differences in the final results of two simultaneous votes held.

### **Competition under a mixed system: where is it higher?**

The main area of interest in electoral system research traditionally lies in assessing the influence on the party system, its structure, and competitiveness. This kind of research takes as a starting point the famous works and conclusions by Maurice Duverger. Simplified, his idea is that the majority system, as a rule, leads to the formation of a two-party political system, whereas the proportional system creates more complex multi-party systems (Duverger, 1954; Mudambi & Navarra, 2004). Along with Maurice Duverger, Anthony Downs comes to the same conclusions, proving that 'applying the median voter theorem renders a three-party polity unstable in the context of competition in single-member constituencies' (Mudambi & Navarra, 2004, p. 248–249).

Certainly, the question of the extent to which these assertions are relevant has long been raised and continues to be a subject of intense debate, since many scientists have opposed Duverger and proved that, under different conditions, his law fails. In particular, that is supported by comparative research carried out in a number of well-known democracies that implement the majority system. They show a completely different type of multi-party competitiveness in India, as well as a three-party competition in the single-mandate districts in Canada. In fact, only the USA follows more or less clearly the logic of the Duverger law (Grofman, Blais, & Bowler, 2009). A large-scale assessment of the Duverger law in contemporary conditions has also been undertaken by other authors (see Singer, 2012 on examples of 53 countries). In general, it would not be correct to say that this research comes to conclusions completely contrary to that theory. They rather allow us to come to some important clarifications and exceptions: 'Yet third-place parties do not completely disappear and ethnic divisions shape party fragmentation levels, even under plurality rule. Finally, institutional rules that generate multiparty systems elsewhere in the country increase electoral fragmentation in single-member plurality districts' (Singer, 2012, p. 201).

It could be expected that the mixed system would generate party competition at a certain average level between proportional and majority systems. This has been proved in works that connected the electoral system with the distribution of parliamentary seats (on the basis of effective number of parliamentary parties): 'the effective number of parties will be greatest in PR (with d'Hondt producing slightly fewer parties than other PR formulas) followed by mixed systems with linked tiers, mixed systems with unlinked tiers, and SMD plurality' (Nishikawa & Herron, 2004, p. 760). Similar conclusions have been drawn in studies of the post-communist countries where it is said that 'mixed systems affect the shape of the emerging East European party systems in a way which stimulates moderate fragmentation' (Kostadinova, 2002, p. 31).

A considerable impact on the structuring processes of the party system under the mixed system is exerted by coalition formation, which logically develops from the need for concentration of efforts in districts. Research into the use of the mixed system in a country with long-term traditions of proportional electoral and fragmented party systems shows that the implementation of the mixed-member system, as introduced in Italy in the 1990s, contributed to the formation of two oppositional coalitions, which in a certain sense upheld Duverger's law: 'Thus, mixed systems are multi-party systems in which the formation of coalitions leads to two-sided politics' (Mudambi & Navarra, 2004, p. 248–249). In general, the issue of electoral strategies and the re-enforcement of the strongest players' positions are vital for mixed-member electoral systems (Bochsler, 2015). In addition to the party, individual strategies also attract attention, the realization of which could lead, for example, to the defection of a candidate from one party to another. As for party strategies, they could be connected with the choices of candidate distribution between the districts, the choice to nominate a candidate in a particular district or to include it in the party list (the example of Mexico, see Calvo & Medina, 2002).

Research into mixed-member systems, of course, focused heavily on Russia's case, which is usually considered in the context of the democratization process in the late twentieth century. As a rule, Russia is viewed in the framework of a large selection of countries that use the mixed-member system, which actually made it easier to conduct an undifferentiated comparison, in which conclusions on Russia usually stand out from the rest. For example, researchers looking at the first election campaigns noted with satisfaction that

the mixed-member system in Russia had not lead to any disproportion typically seen in that kind of system.

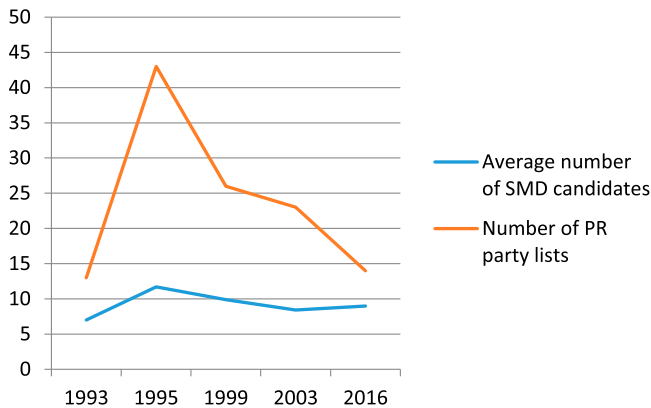
Failures of strategic coordination in plurality systems typically produce high levels of disproportionality, which penalize smaller parties and reward large parties. This mechanical effect tends to produce parliamentary majorities even when the vote distribution does not warrant it. This was not the case in Russia's transitional elections. (Shugart & Wattenberg, 2001, p. 529)

One of the main reasons for that was seen in the absence of sufficiently credible information necessary for strategic decision-making by both candidates and voters:

The most compelling reason for a lack of strategic behaviour in Russia is the lack of information. The lack of party identification means that candidates could not accurately estimate the level of support for themselves or their competitors, making strategic entry and exit difficult ... . If candidates and voters expect the vote to be distributed among a half dozen or more significant candidates, then the vote share necessary for victory in any one district is very low. Consequently, any candidate who appeals to a significant minority in the district or has high name recognition has an incentive to enter the race. Voters also have less reason to defect from little-known candidates if the vote is fragmented enough to allow a candidate to win a seat with one-third of the vote or less. (Shugart & Wattenberg, 2001, p. 530)

However, the sharp change in structure of the Russian party system and the escape from its former fragmentation could not avoid provoking an equally dramatic change in the elections' political outcomes, which the last parliamentary elections of 2016 held under the mixed system clearly demonstrated.

Our research into competition dynamics in elections held in Russia five times under mixed system – in 1993, 1995, 1999, 2003 and, after a break, in 2016, showed that the dynamics of the 'raw' competition (as calculated by the simple number of candidates) at the elections in 2016 in their majority section amounted to a continuation of the process that had begun in the 1990s, but which acquired new features in the 2000s with the creation of a dominant party. On one hand, the 2016 elections showed a formal growth in the number of candidates per district in comparison with the 2003 elections (9 candidates in 2016 and 8.4 in 2003, see [Graph 1](#)<sup>2</sup>). But in the 1990s the nominal



**Graph 1.** The quantity of party lists and the average quantity of candidates in a single-mandate district in the parliamentary elections in Russia.



level of competition in the district was higher – 9.9 candidates in 1999 and 11.7 – in 1995. At the same time, it is important to note that the lowest level of competition for one mandate was registered in the very beginning of the post-Soviet electoral process – in 1993 (7 candidates in one district). But that was influenced by situational conditions: the campaign was held very soon after the enforced dismissal of the Supreme Council.

Hence, the structuralization of the party system in Russia with evolving leading players exerted the main influence on the dynamics of formal competition in districts, as well as the general upsurge (and later decline) of public interest in politics, initially attracting many diverse groups and individuals to engage in the electoral process. The structuralization of the political spectrum and the appearance of a dominant player have led to a reduction in the number of electoral participants. In other words, strategic behaviour was demonstrated in the Russian elections as the politicians started to back larger and more stable players (as can be seen by the example of the single-mandate candidates, who renounced their independent status, and representatives of minor parties), and the voters have started to behave similarly. However, we cannot say that the Russian voter was so disoriented that they did not display any strategic behaviour even at the beginning of the democratic transition. In the 1995 elections, in allocating party lists, out of 43 lists, preference was given to only four parties, which as a result passed the election threshold. In districts, high competition can be explained by traditional interest in the candidate's personality rather than in his party (taking into account also the large number of independent candidates): under these conditions it was impossible to make a purely strategic choice.

However, the absence of decline in the level of nominal competition shows that under the rules of the game established in 2016, associated with comparatively loose principles for party registration and the so-called 'parliamentary quota' of 14 parties, privileged to register in districts without collecting voters' signatures, opened up the opportunity to involve a large number of obviously weak candidates in the campaign, which did not raise the real level of competition. At the same time, parties strived to use district nominations to strengthen the parallel campaign (although just a few parties succeeded), to improve their results in the party lists.

Generally, it is somewhat curious that the average number of candidates per district in the post-Soviet Russian elections does not differ considerably, and that the maximum (11.7 candidates in 1995) is not far from the minimum (7 candidates in 1993). Whereas both maximum and minimum had been seen in the elections of the 1990s, when the structure of the party system was still in its infancy. A higher number of candidates in the elections of the mid-1990s was a consequence of the participation of independent candidates representing elite groups or civic/political activists, who either did not belong to any party or consciously masked their affiliation to unpopular parties. The shrinkage and later disappearance of that layer caused nomination activity to decline. In the conditions of 2016, the standard structure of the district electoral pool comprised four parliamentary parties (United Russia, CPRF, LDPR, Just Russia) and was accompanied by a number of non-parliamentary parties ('Yabloko', 'Rodina', 'Patriots of Russia', 'Communists of Russia' and others). A change in the rules of the game contributed to the formal growth in the number of candidates in 2016, contradicting to the general tendency of decrease of political competition in Russia, namely – the easing of registration rules for candidates from parties that meet the 'parliamentary quota'.



In our opinion, the absence of a drastic change is due to the presence of a small group of more or less strong parties and political blocs forming the basis of the Russian party system, capable of nominating candidates in a majority of districts (with a changing set of that group). In Russia, the most important factor that has been limiting district-level competition has been the resource restrictions: the formation of a network of regional organizations across such a huge country and the significant regional diversity, recruiting activists and nomination became a serious problem even for the largest party. But in any case, elections on party lists and the voters' orientation regarding nationwide ideologies, as well as the country's choice of a certain development path have facilitated the emergence of nationwide parties and limited the growth and the progress of the regional parties. In the end, regional parties have de-facto become prohibited by law, since it requires parties to have regional offices in over half the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and sets out a minimal number of party members in an entity. Thus, the geographic (spatial) factor, the political focus of the population on national, rather than regional goals and legislative limitations have in concert led to the fact that nationwide parties developed. But they too faced the problem of creating a dense network of regional organizations, and in elections they face a particular problem of recruiting candidates generally, and strong ones in particular.

A comparison of elections under majority and proportional systems show that the number of nominees per single district in Russia has been always less than the number of party lists, meaning the formal completion with party lists has been higher than in districts (see [Graph 1](#)). Though the number of party lists has had a much wider fluctuation from year to year, comparatively smoother changes, against this background, were recorded in the number of the candidates in districts.

The biggest gap was seen in 1995 when the number of lists also reached its peak value (43 participants in the elections). However, in all other parliamentary elections, this difference was less obvious. The gap in formal competition (the difference between the number of party lists and an average number of the candidates per district) was at its highest back in 1995 and then gradually decreased until the 2016 elections. Like that, the 2016 elections demonstrated the rapprochement of the levels of formal competition of majority and proportional systems, taking into consideration that the main participants in those elections were, as a rule, the same actors.

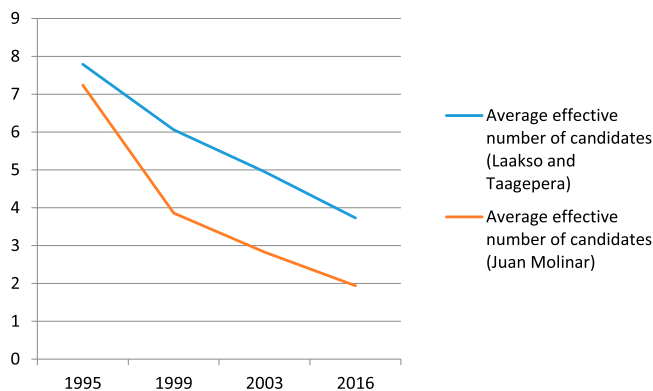
However, the very first elections in 1993 were also distinguished by their small difference gap, rooted in the comparatively small number of party lists and candidates in those elections. Moreover, only in 1993 in Russia, there were cases of the number of candidates in particular districts (that is nine) exceeding the number of party lists. Never again in any elections and any districts has the number of nominees exceeded the number of party lists. This nuance of how the mixed-member electoral system operated in Russia proves once again that the nomination of candidates in the districts is an important and a complex test as to whether or not a party has a real working network of regional organizations and activists in these local areas.

At the same time, the conditions for the registration of party lists, and after the party reforms of 2012 – even for registration of parties per se, provided a more accessible environment in Russia than the conditions for participating in district elections. But we have to emphasize, that this was caused less by legislation restrictions than by the parties' lack of the human, financial and organizational resources. It is also important to

keep in mind, that, despite the great amount of the nominees from party lists, the real success in Russia was achieved only by a few, which led to an almost Darwinian selection process. By 2016, the number of parties that formally existed in the country reached a very high level (74 parties had the right to participate in the elections), while the real number of parties participating in the elections on party lists was just 14 (those that had the 'parliamentary quota'), and only 13 in the districts (one of the party lists of SMD candidates had been removed somewhat controversially). The cause here was not an intentional cut-off in the number of participants: most Russian parties had not even tried to join the State Duma campaign.

A more credible measurement of competition in elections is the effective number of the electoral parties (candidates) that proves the real state of competition, as expressed in voting patterns during elections (see [Graph 2](#)). And here the dynamic trends in single-mandate districts are clearly determined. Our calculated average effective number of candidates in the districts (ENC is based on the formula of Juan Molinar) showed a steady decrease since 1995<sup>3</sup>. From that point of view, the 2016 elections just continued this already established trend. However, even if that trend appears to be mainstream, substantial changes are taking place. The 1995 elections (ENC = 7.2) and 1999 (ENC = 4) could be recognized as highly competitive, with a lot of significant candidates, while with the establishment of United Russia, the ENC decreased in 2003 to 2.9, and in 2016 fell to 1.95. The intentional elimination of split-offs between the elites during the elections and the weakening of the opposition impacted competition. The same trends are proven by calculating the ENC with the more frequently used Laakso and Taagepera formula, which always gives a higher figure (from 7.8 in 1995 to 3.7 in 2016).

From the point of view of electoral competition in districts, the elections in 2016 remind us of the previous elections to use a mixed system – the 2003 campaign. In other words, the intervening time delivered a reinforcement and development of the established tendencies. Elections in 2003 marked the transformation in the structure of competition with the first appearance in the history of post-Soviet Russia of a really dominant pro-Kremlin player. The decline of competition in the elections of 2016 is logically connected with the further expansion of United Russia's positions. Along with the process of the formation of a system containing a dominant party, the predetermination of results, lack of belief in a

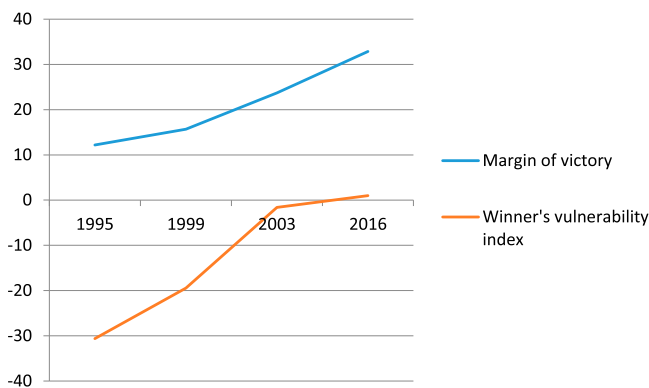


**Graph 2.** The dynamics of the effective number of candidates in single-mandate district elections.

possible success and at the same time – the growth of significance of administrative, financial and organizational resources, especially crucial for single-mandate districts, had played an increasingly demotivating role for potential participants in district elections.

A comparative analysis of post-Soviet campaigns in single-mandate districts allows us to speak of a unidirectional process of electoral transformation – from competitive to those closer to a plebiscite scenario (see [Graph 3](#)). For example, an estimated average margin between the winning candidate and the one that came second grows constantly – from 12.2 points in 1995 to 32.9 p. in 2016 (in 1999 it amounted to 15.7 p., in 2003–23.7 p.). But more interesting is the fact that the average index of the winner’s vulnerability (the difference between the figure scored by the winner and the sum of figures of the rest of candidates) in 2016 crossed the threshold and became positive (1 p.) for the first time. This means that the winner has, for the first time, got more votes than all other candidates combined, thus becoming ‘invulnerable’. Before that, for example, the elections in 1995 had shown a very high vulnerability of the winner (–30.6 p.), but that figure had already started to change in 1999 (–19.5 p.), and the 2003 elections have confirmed that trend (–1.6 p.). In other words, the widespread practice of intense competition, in which the winners advanced with a small percentage of votes, has remained in distant history and the last time it was seen was in the 1995 elections. At the individual district tier, the 2016 campaign gave a very small number of a minimal margin of the winner (less than 1 p. in just two districts) and a high level of winner vulnerability (less than –30 p. in 12 districts).

Nevertheless, the extent of prevalence of the United Russia candidate in the districts is limited: it is signalled by the preservation of the ENC (by Molinar) at a level close to that of the two actors (for comparison: ENC in the presidential elections in Russia since 2004 has been considerably lower and close to 1). That means that a United Russia candidate faces a comparable opposition, which is, however, fragmented, and shares the rest of the electorate. That is the reason why we should not look for a hint of Duverger’s law in Russia on that level of electoral competition. This could have only made sense in a scenario involving an opposition coalition, which could have become a player capable of matching United Russia. But this formation has not shown any signs of coming into being due to the ideological differences and leading parties’ own relations with the government, which can



**Graph 3.** The evolution of the winner’s margin and winner vulnerability in elections in single-mandate districts, in %.

easily split the opposition if necessary. However, this level of electoral competition, in particular cases, does not exclude rare defeats of the ‘party of power’ and a small difference in votes for candidates that end up taking second place. Cases of United Russia’s defeat have recorded in three districts in the 2016 elections, where the second popular party – CPRF – had become the winner.

A comparison of the level of electoral competition in majority and proportional systems in Russia does not make it possible to come to straightforward conclusions where that level was higher. Previous studies on the topic have shown, that

the effective number of SMD parties at the national level tends to be greater than the effective number of candidates at district level. By promoting the viability of smaller parties with geographically concentrated followings, the PR tier tends to undermine the projection of district-tier effects of the SMD tier to the national level. (Moser & Scheiner, 2004, p. 595)

Our analysis of Russian elections does not confirm the conclusion that elections on party lists deliver a higher level of competition. Here things are more complex than they were with the formal competition (which is truly higher in the case of party lists). Moreover, different methods of calculating the effective number give notably different results (Table 1). In our research we used two methods of calculating the effective number of parties (candidates) based on the widespread Laakso and Taagepera formula, and by its derivative such as the Juan Molinar formula, which takes into account the influence of the leader (particularly well suited to elections in which there is a dominant player, which is especially relevant in Russia). We compare the average effective number of candidates in districts (ENC) with the effective number of parties (ENP) in elections on party lists, and also in two versions – general ENP (based on the federal results of all parties) and average ENP (calculated for party list voting separately for each single-mandate district and then averaged).

The analysis of the 1995 elections, in particular, gives different results depending on the formula. According to the Laakso and Taagepera formula, the competitiveness of elections on party lists has been higher than in single-mandate districts. The Juan Molinar formula gives the opposite results. It is likely that, in 1995, when there was no dominant player, it would be more accurate to rely on the Laakso and Taagepera formula, and in that case, to conclude that there was a higher level of real competition in elections on party lists. However, no clear conclusions can be drawn from this since Laakso and Taagepera’s

**Table 1.** The comparison of electoral competition in proportional and single-mandate elections.

	1995	1999	2003	2016
The difference between the effective number of parties (federal results) and the average effective number of candidates in districts. Laakso and Taagepera formula.	+3.21	+0.73	+0.49	−0.74
The difference between the effective number of parties (average results for the districts) and the average effective number of candidates in districts. Laakso and Taagepera formula.	+2.08	−0.16	+0.56	−0.26
The difference between the effective number of parties (federal results) and the average effective number of the candidates in the districts. Juan Molinar’s formula.	−1.25	+1.21	−0.53	−0.57
The difference between the effective number of parties (average results by the districts) and the average effective number of candidates in districts. Juan Molinar’s formula.	−0.14	+1.07	0.0	−0.1

formula is very sensitive to the number of small parties, which in the 1995 elections was at a record high.

The 1999 elections, perhaps, confirm the conclusion a little better, as in the 1990s the competition between the party lists was higher than that seen in districts (which tallies with the difference in level of formal competition). Juan Molinar's formula bears evidence about it. As for the Laakso and Taagepera formula, it again shows, as with 1995, that competition on party lists was higher for general ENP, but for average ENP in districts the difference appears to be in favour of competition in the districts.

In 2003 it is again difficult to judge where competition was higher. If we follow the Laakso and Taagepera formula, competition on party lists remained higher, but at the same time with a lower difference rate. However, the 2003 elections saw the appearance of a dominant player – United Russia, which means that it is worth using the Juan Molinar formula for the calculations. And these calculations demonstrate that competition in the districts was higher (in comparison with the general ENP), whereas for the average ENP the figures for competition were the same.

Difficulties determining where the effective competition was higher come to an end with the elections of 2016. These elections mark the general downward tendency in effective electoral competition in the country. And at the same time, all calculations lead to the definitive conclusion that competition in SMD was higher. In other words, the dominance of United Russia in the elections on the party lists was more explicit, whereas by voting for candidates in districts the competition was more intense, and, for instance, the candidates of United Russia received fewer votes than its party list (see below).

To subject these conclusions to further analysis we also compared elections on party lists and in districts using simpler indexes – winner margin and vulnerability (see Table 2). This analysis shows that in 1995 the margin achieved by the winner on party lists and in districts was comparable, but in 1999 it was higher in districts (due to the fact that in that election closely spaced results were achieved by CPRF and the Unity bloc, established by the Kremlin just before the elections). In 2003 the figures for the winner's margin were again close, and in 2016 the margin of the leading party list recorded a significant advantage.

A comparison of winner vulnerability delivers particularly most interesting results. Until 2003 the figures had a negative value, indicating the intense nature of the competition. At the same time, the vulnerability of the winner was always higher on party lists, which is evidence of the absence of a dominant player (the 2003 elections saw reduced winner vulnerability with the appearance of United Russia, but it still was quite significant), at the

**Table 2.** Dynamics of winner margin and vulnerability indexes in elections on party lists and in single-mandate districts.

	1995	1999	2003	2016
Winner margin (party lists): nationwide/average for districts	12.17/10.97	0.97/–0.08	24.75/24.54	40.87/36.63
Winner margin (single-mandate districts)	12.19	15.67	23.71	32.86
Winner vulnerability (party lists): nationwide/average for districts	–52.91/–54.8	–46.17/–47.38	–18.92/–19.67	10.27/3.2
Winner vulnerability (single-mandate districts)	–30.62	–19.46	–1.62	0.99

same time there have been quite strong leaders in districts, for example, incumbents that achieved an outright victory. This situation changes considerably in 2016, when for the first time the winner vulnerability in districts was higher than the vulnerability of United Russia as the winner in party list contest. That was caused by the already mentioned higher level of competitiveness of the campaign in districts and also a number of districts, in which United Russia has refused to nominate its candidates, conceding them to other parties.

The difference in the competitiveness levels of elections under proportional and majority systems is explained by the gap between party and personal voting patterns (assuming votes are cast for the personality of a certain candidate). For example, from the 1993 elections it has been known that more or less successful LDPR campaigns are not accompanied by the success of its candidates in single-mandate districts. Considerable deviations in votes in districts are influenced by the participation in particular regions of some strong candidates from minor parties (such as political activists or businessmen using party labels). The same situation was seen in the 2016 elections: competition in districts was higher than for party lists, despite the presence of a similar cast of participants and even despite the smaller number of those (in comparison with the number of parties), that have registered their lists. This means that if the structure of the party preferences in Russia has been established and provided it can be considered stable (four parliamentary parties, determined in 2007, and passed again to the parliament in 2011 and 2016), the competition structure by votes cast for the candidate's personality, as previously, indicates a noticeable fluctuation. While generally votes cast for candidates from parties corresponded to the votes cast for their party lists, discrepancies between the two types of voting were nevertheless apparent, and the return of district voting has brought a revival of this competition. On this basis we can conclude that, as the Russian case shows, where a dominant party has formed in the mixed electoral system, district voting has started to distinguish itself with a higher level of effective competition than voting on party lists.

## **SMD elections in the process of institutionalization of the party system**

Researchers who study new democracies have mentioned that

the lack of well-established parties undermines the ability of voters and elites to behave strategically, as well as a project to the national level constraining effects that occur at the district level. Where parties are new and weak, party ID among voters may be absent, so the main voting cues voters are left with involve the personal characteristics of candidates and patronage. (Moser & Scheiner, 2004, p. 577)

In countries lacking party institutionalization, the SMD tier should not have its intended effect of constraining the number of competitors in a district. Instead, a proliferation of independent candidates or micro-parties formed around single personalities may produce very fragmented district tier contests between many candidates. (Moser & Scheiner, 2004, p. 583)

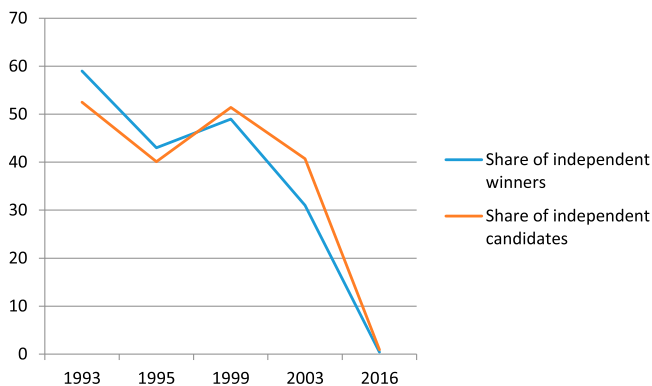
Thus, a low level of institutionalization of parties in countries that underwent democratic transition is capable of bringing a high level of fragmentation to single-mandate districts, not permitting the emergence of classical scenarios of double-party confrontation.

In this regard, it is important to understand when and to what extent Russian parties have been involved in district elections. The ratio between the number of candidates

nominated by parties, and those who participate in the elections as independent candidates (in the Russian case this means self-nomination and nomination from an initiative group of voters) – is the criteria of maturity of a party system in general. And from this point of view, the distinctions between the 2016 elections and all four campaigns that were held before, under mixed system (in 1993, 1995, 1999 and 2003), are the most dramatic. Previously, the proportion of independent candidates among all nominated candidates had fluctuated between 40 per cent and 50 per cent. Formally it reached an historical maximum at the very first elections in 1993, when the new party system was just starting to form. By 1995 it had fallen to 40.1 per cent, due to the creation and relative success of the opposition represented by CPRF and its allies. Nevertheless, the tendency for the creation and possible formation of a two party-political system, right-wing and left-wing, which generally corresponded to the features of the majority system, as seen in the theory and in the experience of many democratic countries, was widely anticipated by numerous experts and politicians in Russia but has turned out to be temporary. As early as 1999, there was a new wave of increase in the proportion of independent nominees, which resulted from the fragmentation of both poles, due to both cleavage in the elites and to the absence of consolidation in the opposition and the impossibility of creating a unified opposition on the basis of CPRF. The next decrease in independent nominees took place in 2003, due to a new and growing process of consolidation – the creation of United Russia (see [Graph 4](#)).

However, the overall proportion of independently-nominated candidates in the 1993–2003 period had been consistently very high. This happened due to the weak development of party institutions and due to candidates' intentions to distance themselves from the existing parties, which, according to the popular point of view, were confining the electoral potential of the candidates. Rational considerations of many candidates, even those who were members of parties, were that party ratings had been too low and it might be more reasonable to not associate with a party focusing on personality instead.

The same dynamics became the attribute of the independent winners in districts. Their portion in the 1993 elections exceeded half, at 59 per cent, but then there was a dramatic fall to 34 per cent in 1995, primarily due to the success of the then-popular CPRF



**Graph 4.** The proportion of independent and party candidates at district elections, in %.



candidates. And by the same logic, as described above regarding the proportion of independent candidates, this indicator grew to 49 per cent in 1999 and fell to 31 per cent in 2003 due to the creation of United Russia and also because of the relatively successful performance of certain other parties. Incidentally, an interesting example of attempts to institutionalize independent lawmakers in the 2000s was the creation of the People's Party of Russia just on the basis of a group of single-mandate deputies who usually stood as independent candidates, and those who united into a grouping in parliament (subsequently this party united with Just Russia). In the 2003 elections, this SMD-based party won in 17 districts. However, taking into consideration those fluctuations, the importance of independent candidates has always been significant, as it was related to the functioning features of the majority system per se, and to restrictions and delays in the formation of the consolidated party system in Russia.

Really drastic changes in favour of parties and not in favour of independent candidates took place only in 2016 – after two electoral periods during which a purely proportional system was applied, and after party configuration took shape. As a result, the proportion of independent candidates dropped to 1 per cent: there were only 19 such candidates across the country, and they were in just 17 districts out of 225. And in only one district the independent candidate won, but even in this case the candidate cannot be considered an example of someone completely distant from a party: Vladislav Reznik had been a member of a faction of United Russia in the previous convocation and re-joined it once again after his victory.

An important criterion for the nationalization of a party system is the index of coverage of the country territory calculated as the proportion of the districts in which parties nominate candidates compared to their total number. Parties with the greatest coverage index are the closest to being considered national parties. An analysis of the coverage index confirms that the elections of 2016 had fundamental differences from former campaigns (Table 3). Comparing campaigns in different years demonstrates that only a few parties were capable of or considered worth nominating candidates in more than half the districts. In 1993 no party did this at all, and only the liberal 'Choice of Russia', which had the support of presidential administration, came close to this target. In 1995 there were only two such parties – CPRF and LDPR (they took the first two places according to party lists). In 1999 the same situation arose, the difference being that over 50 per cent territorial coverage nationwide was achieved by CPRF and 'Yabloko'. In 2003, in addition to United Russia, CPRF and LDPR, a newly created (with Kremlin assistance) party – 'Rus' – joined the list but limited its role to technical participation in the campaign not anticipating success. And there were even lower coverage rates in Russian election history. In 1995, LDPR nominated candidates in 85 per cent of the districts whereas this was 80 per cent in 2003: for all other parties the figures were considerably lower.

However, in 2016 the situation has drastically changed. For the first time in history there emerged parties that nominated candidates in more than 90 per cent of districts, even up to a 100 per cent coverage by LDPR: all four parliamentary parties and also the 'Communists of Russia', usually considered as a spoiler for CPRF. More than half the districts were covered by 'Yabloko', 'Rodina', 'Party of Growth', The Greens and the 'Patriots of Russia'; PARNAS also came very close to this point. Only two parties out of 13 – 'Civic Platform' and 'Civilian Power' – showed smaller figures in comparison to the others. Moreover, this coverage could have been even higher had there not been a series of

**Table 3.** Index of coverage (share of districts in which a party nominated candidates<sup>a</sup>).

	1993	1995	1999	2003	2016
'Parties of power'	–	Our Home - Russia – 46.2%	Unity – 13.8%, Fatherland – All Russia – 40.6%, Our Home - Russia – 40.2%	United Russia – 61.3%	United Russia – 92%
CPRF	25%	57.8%	39.7%	76%	99.1%
LDPR	24%	84%	67.4% (as Zhirinovskiy Bloc)	80%	100%
Just Russia	–	–	–	–	97.7%
Liberal parties	Choice of Russia – 49%, Yabloko – 39%, Russian Democratic Reform Movement – 26%	Democratic Choice of Russia – 34.5%, Yabloko – 30%	Yabloko – 50.9%, Union of Right Forces – 29.5%	Union of Right Forces – 41.3%, Yabloko – 40%	Yabloko – 72.8%, Party of Growth – 64.8%, PARNAS – 48%
Nationalist parties	–	Congress of Russian Communities – 40.35%	Spiritual Heritage – 47.8%	Rus' – 55.1%, Rodina – 22.2%	Rodina – 72%, Patriots of Russia – 55.1%
Other parties	Civic Union – 34%, Agrarian Party of Russia – 30%, Party of Russian Unity and Accord – 31%, Democratic Party of Russia – 26%, Women of Russia – 3%	Agrarian Party of Russia – 38.6%, Communists – Labour Russia – For the Soviet Union – 28.25%, Power to the People! – 17%, Party of Self-government of Workers – 11.65%, Women of Russia – 9%		Party of Russia's Revival – Russian Party of Life – 44.4%, Agrarian Party of Russia – 27.1%, People's Party of Russia – 20.8%	Communists of Russia – 95.5%, The Greens – 57.7%

<sup>a</sup>Table mentions those parties that passed the party list election threshold, or those that reached at least 3% of the vote, as well as other parties if they won at least in five districts or their territorial coverage index exceeded 40%.

concessions by United Russia in favour of other parties and also refusals from participation in elections of several candidates after their registration. Therefore the 2016 elections for the first time provided a high level of connection between party list nomination and candidates from parties in districts, which also impacted the results of the vote (see below).

Considering the spreading dynamics of the nomination process by various parties, a steady growth in this figure for CPRF with each new campaign could be seen – from 25 per cent in 1993 up to 99.1 per cent in 2016. The dynamics of other political parties and groups was, however, not so unidirectional. The retreat of LDPR in 1999 was evidently connected with the fact that this party's list was not registered, and instead 'the Zhirinovskiy Bloc' was created quickly. As a rule, LDPR sought to ensure maximum territorial coverage, which it managed to do in 1995 and 2003, up to absolutely full coverage in 2016. Another permanent participant of the Russian elections – 'Yabloko' – shows fluctuating dynamics with a big lapse in 1995 as a result of the first split in the party, but with the restoration of quite a good level of formal representation at district level after 1999.

As for the ‘parties of power’ created by the ruling elite, against the backdrop of an insufficiently consolidated elite of the 1990s, they lacked potential for the universal promotion of their candidates, who were territorially narrow coalitions of regional governors. Therefore neither ‘Our Home – Russia’ (NDR), nor ‘Fatherland – All Russia’ (OVR) could nominate candidates in more than half the districts, and the Unity bloc, created by the Kremlin rapidly for the 1999 elections, did not even aspire it. This situation changed only with the rise of United Russia, but even this party covered little more than 60 per cent of districts in its first elections.

Thus, in the 1993–2003 period, Russian parties showed a moderate presence in single-mandate districts, demonstrating their organizational problems in the regions, as well as the unwillingness of many candidates (including party members) to be nominated from parties directly. And only the changed game rules that appeared in the 2000s, and involved the modification of the party legislation, the spread of elections on party lists on regional and even partially municipal tier and the creation of a dominant party, offered all participants an incentive to enter parties and be nominated by them.

### Split voting and its effects

The mixed system is particularly interesting in terms of its effect of ‘split voting’ (also known as split ticket, split ballot). The voter receives two ballots and can vote identically in the districts and on the lists, but also have the option of giving the preference to one candidate in the list, and a candidate from another party (or independent) in the district. In particular, it is the subject of intense interest to reveal those parties whose candidates get more votes than their party lists and the other way around. It is interesting to consider if the promotion of the strong party list is contributing to the growth in popularity of the nominated candidates, or if the opposite is the case, if candidates through their local efforts help the party gain more votes in the same territory, and in the country overall. Based on the Russian experience it has been always challenging to clearly identify what – the party label or the local candidate – has more influence on the electorate’s behaviour.

According to the literature, mixed-member systems have been often viewed from the point of view of the mutual interaction of party lists and candidates in voting patterns in the districts. Most attention is paid to an analysis of the root causes of the behaviour of those voters that make two different choices at the same elections (Mudambi & Navarra, 2004). Split voting has become the subject of research in Germany more than elsewhere, where a mixed-member system is applied (Jesse, 1988). One group of Western researchers has also considered Russia’s elections, drawing conclusions connected with the problem of the institutionalization of Russia’s party system: ‘the individual motivations of voters are the major cause of split-ticket voting in Russia principally as a consequence of weak partisanship’ (Mudambi & Navarra, 2004, p. 231 citing McAllister and White (2000)).

The mutual influence of both electoral systems in the framework of the mixed-member system is addressed in the literature as ‘contamination’. This term is defined as follows:

Contamination is present, at the micro-level, when the behaviour of a voter, a party, a candidate, or a legislator in one tier of the election is demonstrably affected by the institutional rules employed in the other tier. At certain level, contamination is observed when a particular

outcome produced in one tier (like the number of parties) is affected by the institutional features of the other tier. (Ferrara, Herron, & Nishikawa, 2005, pp. 8–9)

Among the most noticeable effects of this ‘contamination,’ one mentions the growth in the number of candidates in districts, resulting from attempts by the weakest parties to nominate candidates to increase the rating of their party list, which could otherwise end up with an even worse result. In other words, this phenomenon is called ‘spillover effect’ and has the following explanation:

Spillover effects can operate in two directions. First, the presence of single-member districts could affect the electoral competition in the PR tier [...]. Second, the direction of causality also could be the reverse, from the proportional tier to single-member districts. (Hainmueller & Kern, 2008, p. 214)

Research into the spillover effect in literature is often linked to research into the characteristics of the candidates nominated by the parties in the districts. In particular, Hainmueller and Kern (2008) prove that the cause of this effect lies in nominating incumbents who manage to attract more votes for party lists, which consequently leads to an increase in the number of party mandates.

The roots of this contamination are connected with the effect of strategic voting, which impacts the nature of voting behaviour when voters have to choose a candidate in a single-mandate district and a party on a party list. Voting behaviour that is connected with a particular political choice is also called strategic and may not correspond with the voter’s political and ideological preferences: this has been seen as an effect of simultaneous elections.

In a mixed electoral system, voters – particularly those who identify with medium- or small-sized parties – face three main courses of action. Under the assumption that the choice set is unrestricted in both tiers, voters could:

- Vote strategically in SMD and sincerely in PR;
- Vote sincerely in PR and select their favourite party’s affiliated candidate in SMD, even if that candidate is not viable; or
- Vote strategically in SMD and select the corresponding party in PR (Ferrara et al., 2005, p. 35).

Apparently, the theory includes multiple variations of relations between strategic and sincere voting. In some cases, the voter prefers a candidate and then chooses his party, in others – he prefers a candidate from a party that he generally supports. Reasoning further based on this rationale, in real terms, it is more beneficial for parties to nominate even weak candidates, aiming to cover the maximum number of districts and thus stimulate party-list voting. In Russia, this practice has become gradually widespread and was particularly noticeable in the 2016 elections, in which most parties strived to provide the maximum coverage with their candidates in the territories. Moreover, the nomination of some strong candidates from small parties contributed to the rise in votes cast, though not very influential, for the party lists. In addition, due to the particularities of strategic voting in mixed systems, Duverger’s law might not apply in districts, because the parties would strive to nominate more candidates despite their weakness and low chances of election.

As we can see, strategic voting is not a consistent scenario in electoral behaviour and decisions made by parties are based on an interpretation of that behaviour. As highlighted above, the priority for strategic voting could be made in some cases in voting in districts, in others – for the party list. The psychological perception of the election campaign and awareness has a significant influence on the voter.

Plurality SMD elections may not reduce the vote for minor parties if any of the following holds: voters who are not short-term instrumentally rational; a lack of public information about voter preferences and vote intentions (and, hence, insufficient sense about which candidates are ‘out of the running’); widespread certainty regarding likely winners; and the presence of many voters who strongly prefer their first choice and, thus, are nearly indifferent to other choices. (Cox, 1997, p. 79; cited in Moser & Scheiner, 2004, p. 577)

For instance, assumptions of which candidate would win could promote a consolidation of the voters around this candidate as the recognized leader, as has been proved multiple times during the Russia’s presidential elections. ‘If voters are short-term responsive to the electoral situation, strong candidates, in a close race, will be able to attract votes from supporters of weaker candidates’ (Herrmann & Pappi, 2008, p. 228). In general, the problem of election forecasting by the voters is particularly important, because of its significant impact on voting strategy (Grofman et al., 2009). But there is not necessarily any imperative to regard strategic voting as being the decisive factor in electoral behaviour, as the most carefully examined mixed-member system case – Germany – shows (Herrmann & Pappi, 2008).

Research into emerging democracies, however, detects problems related to the institutionalization of the party system, which results in the contamination being weak.

Our findings suggest that, despite claims of a “contamination effect” between the two tiers, in countries with developed party systems, PR and SMD electoral arrangements tend to approximate their expected effects even when used in combination in mixed systems. We also find that particular institutional characteristics within mixed systems have a substantial constraining effect on the number of significant political parties. However, the nature of the party system itself, in particular, the extent to which its parties are institutionalized, also plays a very important role in shaping the degree to which constraining effects are truly felt. (Moser & Scheiner, 2004, p. 575)

At the same time, research into Russia in the 1990s, and into Japan, where the personalization of votes for candidates in the districts plays a significant role, confirmed the fact that the mixed-member system promotes the nomination of candidates from the small parties (Hainmueller & Kern, 2008, p. 214 citing Herron and Nishikawa (2001)).

Strategic voting and the connection between votes cast for candidates in districts and on party lists in general is an area that is not sufficiently studied in Russia. In our opinion, in the Russian case, the convergence process (and in general – the changing ratio) of votes cast for party lists and party candidates, the influence of a candidate’s party identity on their support and, in other cases, the consolidation of voters from various parties around one politically strong person and the corresponding reduction in votes cast for weak candidates – are of particular interest.

In 2016, institutional restrictions became one of the factors facilitating the conversion of weakly competitive party voting scenarios into a similar kind of voting in single-mandate districts. The existing legislative framework placed severe restrictions on the participation

of independent candidates, and reduced competition in districts to an interparty competition scenario typical for voting for candidates from party lists. As a result, a considerable coincidence between the party lists and the list of the nominated candidates caused the widespread conversion of party support into support for candidates from the same parties. Where there is a dominant player present, this leads to superiority for United Russia candidates in virtually all districts. This, in turn, meant that elections in single-candidate districts and direct elections for the post of regional governor held since 2012 were held under conditions in which it was virtually impossible for independent candidates to participate and there was a low level of support for candidates from the parliamentary opposition. Thus, the actual approbation of elections in single-mandate districts took place earlier, not only in elections for regional legislatures but also by the election of regional governors, which became the crucial electoral process in the inter-election period since fall 2012.

In our research, firstly, we will try to understand in the context of individual parties the extent to which voting for candidates from party lists and for candidates of the corresponding parties are connected, using a correlation analysis. In our work, we calculated the linear correlation coefficient (using the Pearson formula) between voting for parties and for candidates from the same parties in the context of single-mandate districts (for each party – for the selection of districts in which the party had a nomination). The main conclusion is that this connection in 2016 became much more significant than it had been before and grew to a historical maximum for all parties (Table 4). This result is evidently connected with the standardization of electoral competition and the actual disappearance of independent candidates, as well as with the extreme lack of strong candidates from minor parties. Against the background of United Russia, CPRF and LDPR, however, a weaker correlation for Just Russia is discernible, demonstrating that this party (which twice participated in federal elections under the proportional system, but for the first time – under the mixed-member system) and its candidates have the least devoted and steadfast electorate.

**Table 4.** Correlation of votes cast by party lists and for candidates in districts for the most significant parties (Pearson's coefficient<sup>a</sup>).

	1995	1999	2003	2016
'Parties of power'	Our Home - Russia – 0.52	Fatherland – All Russia – 0.6, Unity – 0.57	United Russia – 0.6	United Russia – 0.89
CPRF	0.6	0.66	0.52	0.76
LDPR	0.75	0.24 (as Zhirinovskiy bloc)	0.38	0.71
Just Russia	–	–	–	0.54
Liberal Parties	Yabloko – 0.63, Democratic Choice of Russia – 0.57	Union of Right Forces – 0.62, Yabloko – 0.49	–	–
Nationalist Parties	Congress of the Russian Communities – 0.53	–	Rodina – 0.72	–
Other Parties	Agrarian Party of Russia – 0.73, Party of Workers' Self-government – 0.66, Communists – Workers' Russia – For the Soviet Union – 0.63, Women of Russia – 0.53	–	–	–

<sup>a</sup>We consider parties that received more than 3% of votes on party lists.

The correlation between votes cast for United Russia and its candidates was amplified in 2016 in comparison with the 2003 elections (and in both campaigns the correlation rate for this party was the highest against the others, confirming a gradual emergence of a disciplined loyal electorate). However, in 1999 OVR (Fatherland – All Russia) and Unity showed approximately the same level of correlation as United Russia in 2003. Whereas in 1995 for the first ‘party of power’ represented by NDR (Our Home – Russia) the correlation between voting for this bloc and its candidates was lower.

From those parties that consistently participated in the post-Soviet elections, the most noticeable positive evolution is associated with LDPR. It is logical therefore, to posit that the greatest imbalance between the votes cast for a party and for its candidates arose in 1999 when, after being prevented from registering its list, LDPR had to re-register. And in 2003 the correlation was also extremely weak, demonstrating that the voters, when choosing this party, often did not even notice its candidates. In 1995 when LDPR was still polling a relatively high level of support (though its electoral rating had started to fall in comparison with 1993), there was a considerable correlation, followed by a rather big reduction of the party’s activity in the districts, in contrast with the formally large number of nominations. A restoration of this balance only took place in 2016 when at the same time the gap between the votes cast for LDPR and its candidates fell.

CPRF also sees the most explicit correlation between votes cast for the list and for party’s candidates in 2016, whereas earlier this connection was at the average level as was also the case for other parties. Some strengthening of the correlation was observed in 1999, when the electoral activity of alternative and radical left-wing parties, which had peaked in 1995, decreased. But in 2003 the situation worsened again, which can be explained by a sharp decrease in the electoral rating of this party and the increase in spatial differences in votes cast both for the party and its candidates in districts.

Overall, the linkage between votes cast for a party and for its candidates is at a satisfactory level in Russia, but this does not exclude substantial gaps caused, as a rule, by the influence of the local context, delivering a very diverse ratio between the popularity levels of the party and its local candidate. LDPR has most often shown the weakest correlation, and now the youngest parliamentary party – Just Russia is standing out as the worst.

Further, we will consider the question of the gap between votes cast for a party and for its candidate. Analysing split voting, we have calculated the deviations between votes for parties and their candidates for all elections since 1995 (Table 5). Calculations were carried out on the basis of averages taken from the results received by party lists and candidates in the districts. We also calculated the number of districts in which a party received more or fewer votes than its candidate.

This analysis indicates remarkable differences between parties, demanding special explanation. One difference relates to party size. For example, the analysis of the 1995 elections shows that candidates of the parties that took the first two places on the lists, CPRF and LDPR, received fewer votes than the other parties. The strongest gap was for LDPR. Other, less popular parties’ results showed the opposite trend. This could be explained by the consolidation process of the opposition electorate of the 1990s during elections around the lists from the two leading parties, while in single-mandate districts



**Table 5.** The difference between voting for party lists and for candidates from corresponding parties.

	1995	1999	2003	2016
'Parties of power'	Our Home – Russia: 12.3/9.8/+2.5 <sup>a</sup>	Unity: 16.8/25.9/–9.1 Fatherland – All Russia: 18.6/15.2/+3.3	United Russia: 37/37.7/ –0.7	United Russia: 49.4/50.8/ –1.44
CPRF	21.4/23.2/–1.8	22.2/25.4/–3.1	14.3/12.9/ +1.41	13.5/13.9/–0.34
LDPR	6.7/11.4/–4.8	Zhirinovskiy Bloc: 3.9/6.2/–2.3	4/12.1/–8.1	10.6/14.3/–3.7
Just Russia	–	–	–	9.9/6.5/+3.5
Liberal Parties	Yabloko: 11/10.1/+0.9 Democratic Choice of Russia: 9.2/5.6/+3.6	Union of Right Forces: 10.1/10.1/0.0 Yabloko: 7/9.8/–2.8	–	–
Nationalist Parties	Congress of the Russian Communities: 7.4/5.5/+1.9	–	Rodina: 13.5/10.3/ +3.2	–
Other Parties	Agrarian Party of Russia: 14.5/5.1/+9.4 Women of Russia: 10.5/5.5/+5.0 Communists – Workers' Russia – For the Soviet Union: 6.5/5/+1.4 Party of Workers' Self-government: 6.2/5.6/+0.6	–	–	–

<sup>a</sup>In the box there is a consistent outline of the following measures: voting for the candidate / voting for the party list / the difference between candidate and party.

these parties' supporters could vote for other candidates. For example, candidates representing local elites, or very famous individuals could boast an advantage, when nominated by minor parties. As the deviation index shows, the greatest scope for differences between votes cast for the party and for candidates was noted for the Agrarian Party of Russia (nominated a number of very strong candidates in districts, but their majority, on the contrary, did not gain significant support, as well as the party itself), it was also especially noticeable for the 'Women of Russia' and LDPR. The main impact on these distortions was exerted by the nomination of a large number of strong independent candidates and famous local politicians, joining minor parties.

The 1999 elections confirmed approximately the same tendencies. The lag displayed by the 'Zhirinovskiy Bloc' candidates was very big, but CPRF also increased its gap. The last trend can be connected with the fact that in 1999 a consolidation of the left-wing electorate took place around CPRF, which achieved its maximum results in its history, but this was not supported with the promotion of strong SMD candidates. This difference became negative for the 'Yabloko' candidates, also emphasizing the relative weakness of its candidates (while by comparison their competitors on the liberal wing – the 'Union of Right Forces', conducted what proved its strongest ever campaign, ensuring a coincidence in the results recorded for its list and its candidates). Even more noticeable were the distinctions for the pro-Kremlin Unity bloc, which did not manage to collect a sufficient pool of candidates and instead backed the promotion of the party's brand.

By comparison, among the major players, the 'Fatherland – All Russia' bloc (OVR) displayed the strength of its candidates, which included members of the ruling local elites.

These candidates were able to attract supporters of diverse parties, while at the same time its list received a small number of votes nationwide. In general, OVR displayed a considerable deviation in votes cast for the party and for its candidates, but this was even greater for Unity.

The 2003 elections led to new interesting changes in the split voting effect. Thus, United Russia candidates, participating in elections for the first time, lagged behind their party list a little. United Russia, if compared with its predecessors, was more reminiscent of Unity than of OVR. This tendency for candidates to lag behind party results increased dramatically in scale with LDPR. By contrast, CPRF candidates for the first and the last time surpassed their party list results, which can be explained by a dramatic decrease in support for the party list – while preserving the residual, relatively substantial potential of its candidates. That said, in the majority of districts the party nevertheless received more votes than its candidate.

Finally, the 2016 elections, with the rapprochement of voting results for parties and their candidates, showed that in districts, the largest parties still have more support for their lists than for their candidates. The largest gap of this kind was displayed by LDPR (though it has sharply decreased), but United Russia and CPRF also showed a small lag. The weakest parliamentary party – Just Russia whose candidates conducted a significantly more successful campaign than its list, displayed the opposite trend. It is possible to state that some supporters of United Russia, having voted for the list of this party, preferred to support candidates fielded by left-centrist Just Russia, which is positioned politically close to the ‘party of power’. Losses were also experienced by candidates of CPRF and LDPR, probably in favour of candidates of minor left-wing and nationalist parties.

## Conclusion

Thus, research into competition and split voting in the Russian mixed-member electoral system yields results that partially coincide with those seen in comparative research, and partially contradict them. From the point of view of party system evolution, it is possible to speak about the unidirectional process of the decrease in competition in single-mandate districts. Whereas a number of trends displayed in the 2016 elections, connected with the competition level date back to the campaign not even of 2003, but of 1999, when the formation of a group of strong candidates – unconditional favourites of many district campaigns was already noticeable (though not united in a single party yet). The reason seems to be found in the gradual formation of the party system, which had led to drop in the number of independent candidates, and also the gradual formation of a list of strong favourites, usually – incumbents, skilled local politicians who made up the ‘law-makers elite’ of Russia. The consolidation of the elites and the creation of United Russia as the dominant player led to the formation of a hierarchy in the party system, which started to be reproduced in the districts. In essence, this can be considered from the point of view of the strategic processes that brings about the gradual institutionalization of the party system.

The interconnected processes of nationalization and institutionalization of the Russia’s party system led to a considerable change in the situation as regards independent candidates. The change in the electoral system that came with the adoption of a

purely proportional system in 2007 and 2011 had a huge impact on the transformation of voting patterns. In this period the final formation of the party system with a dominant party and three parliamentary opposition parties took place. Under these conditions, the return of mixed system in 2016 confirmed the increased correlation between voting for parties and their candidates in districts. However, the standardization of the electoral competition scenarios (with the growth in territorial coverage and decrease in the spatial variability of competition levels) was also observed earlier, right up to the elections of 2003.

All these quite logical processes are combined with a number of paradoxes and contradictions. On one hand, the analysis of the Russian elections shows that the mixed system is politically favourable for the large parties, chiefly due to their success in single-mandate districts. This tendency peaked in 2016 when the dominant party achieved victory almost in all districts. There is a clear rationale for the general superiority of a party to convert into more frequent victories in single-mandate districts. In 2016, United Russia for the first time (in comparison with 2003) displayed a high level of disproportionality – when the proportion of mandates received in single-mandate districts was larger than that of the mandates received on party lists.

On the other hand, the correlation between the size of party and its success in elections under the mixed system is not unambiguous, since it is dependent on the institutionalization of the party system and certain characteristics of the party concerned.

In the period of weak institutionalization of the Russian party system, even large parties provided very limited territorial coverage, and candidates from minor parties who were at the same time prominent local leaders or federal politicians, members of cultural elite and so forth reaped local advantages. These could be corporate groups (for example, an agrarian elite, associations of a regional elite), parties and blocs created by famous politicians etc. (their founders, as a rule, also won in districts), or liberal blocs (popular in large cities). Therefore, small parties created a representation in parliament thanks to single-mandate districts and some of them – only this way. There was a time when the number of parties that were successful in districts exceeded the number of parties that entered parliament based on the lists. In 1993, only 8 parties passed the electoral threshold, whereas seats in the districts were won by 12 parties out of the 13 participating in the campaign. In 1995 only four parties won on party lists, while 23 achieved success in districts. In 1999 the electoral threshold was passed by six parties, and 13 won in the districts. Finally, in 2003, while four parties entered parliament on lists, 11 enjoyed a victory in districts.

After the creation of the party system with a dominant party, however, the success of even relatively large parliamentary opposition parties began to be a matter of agreement with United Russia, which in 2016 purposefully conceded them some districts, to reduce disproportionality in the parliament. Moreover, the attitude of United Russia and the Kremlin towards a particular party was outlined by hierarchy in such concessions: Just Russia received an opportunity to win in seven districts, LDPR – in five, CPRF – in three (but it won four more districts in competition), and two non-parliamentary parties – in one district each ('Rodina' and 'Civic Platform'). Other non-parliamentary parties did not receive such privilege. Almost all victories of candidates from other parties in single-mandate districts resulted from agreements reached with United Russia, which adheres to what is known in Russia as a policy of 'parliamentary consensus' – aimed at the

formation of a 'systemic opposition'. But from the formal point of view, the situation recurred, and the number of parties that won at least in one district (six), exceeded the number of parties successful through party lists (four)<sup>4</sup>.

The question of competition ratio in elections on lists and in districts has also no definitive answer in Russia. We have noticed that there are fewer nominations in districts than the number of party lists, which can be explained by restrictions that exist in the institutionalization of the party system and by spatial factors turning into organizational constraints. Even in the 2016 elections not all parties that had an opportunity to freely register candidates in all districts, seized this opportunity. The abundance of weak parties remains a characteristic phenomenon of nowadays Russia, while in districts the competition concentrates around a very small number of parties.

At the same time, a correlation in electoral competition could have been slightly more in favour of elections on party lists during a period of weak institutionalization of the party system, which corresponds to a higher number of lists compared to the number of candidates fielded in the districts. But the 2016 elections that took place after the institutionalization of the party system with a dominant party produced a different outcome: competition in districts has become clearly higher, than that on the lists. A situation emerged, where amidst the general decline of political competition in Russia, this competition has moved from party level to district level and is therefore more about the level of personal competition. Elections under the mixed system in 2016 slightly restored the interest in elections as a personality contest rather than a competition between parties, a typical feature of Russian elections of the democratization period, which started in the late 1980s.

At this point, a serious question arises: how does strategic voting actually work in Russia? We have seen that the structure of electoral competition in the districts can visibly differ from that on party lists. Russian experience shows that leading parties more frequently receive more votes than their candidates, and smaller parties – fewer. In other words, candidates from small parties in the districts are capable of winning votes from those who simultaneously choose the bigger parties via party lists. A leading party candidate's rating in the districts becomes dependant on the party rating and in some cases can fall below its level, and even greatly below – as seen in the case of LDPR. As for United Russia, it is not only the rating of the party that determines the votes cast for its candidates, but rather the personality of president Vladimir Putin, with whom the party is associated. In 2016 the connection with Vladimir Putin was intentionally emphasized to improve the party's rating. But at the same time, this also means that even the leading parties have problems with candidates in places – their weakness, poor personal popularity, the lack of well-known regional politicians and of ties with the electorate in the area.

In general, the most noticeable gap in favour of votes cast for the party list characterizes leader-type parties with a weak regional network (in Russia – an example would be LDPR), a smaller, but also pronounced gap – the parties, that promote their ideological principles (for example, CPRF) and those, associated with the personality of the head of state (United Russia). In all these cases a SMD candidate's rating is rather related to the rating of the party and their national leaders and usually lags behind. Parties with a weaker federal or ideological presence (that rely on regional politicians, their coalitions, or interest groups) are in the opposite situation. But

these parties also boast the most variable support for candidates in the districts, which can be enormous for some key candidates and de-facto be absent for the others. This is why the average increase in candidate's results as compared with the party's result can hide greater diversity of the results. From that point of view, outcomes for the large parties in territorial terms are more homogeneous both for the lists and for the candidates in the districts.

Following this rationale, we can conclude that strategic voting as described in the literature is not very typical in Russia, although as we mentioned above, there is neither a common nor widely described theoretical scenario for it (often it is thought that the electorate consolidates around a candidate fielded by the stronger parties). The Russian voter shows interest in strategic voting on party lists, often staking their bet on the perceived or actual leader. However, voting in districts is more sincere, a phenomenon that may be related to the tradition of voter interest in candidate's personality. Certainly, the great majority of voters simply repeat their choice and vote for the candidate of their preferred party, but not all voters do this: and in the case of some parties, as noted above – this gap is particularly visible. We cannot say that this gap was caused by a lack of information or bad calculation: as a rule, the acknowledgment of the future winner is obvious, as was the case in the 2016 elections given the dominance of United Russia. That is why in the districts some Russian voters allow themselves a conscious 'wasted vote', rejecting candidates from the larger parties that they do not like. The highest and most sustainable gap in the case of LDPR can be explained by the fact that only the party's charismatic leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy gets voters' support. Interestingly, United Russia finds itself in a similar position, since its candidates cannot hope for comparable support to that for Vladimir Putin.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the use of the majority electoral system in Russia has opposite effects at the presidential and parliamentary elections. It is exactly at the national presidential elections that people vote strategically, consolidating around the leading candidates, and in fact – around the clear winner. Only in the 1996 competitive presidential elections, when the incumbent president Boris Yeltsin was not popular, the consolidation occurred around two struggling flanks (Yeltsin and CPRF's Zyuganov). Even that was not a complete polarization, as a proportion of the votes went to the third candidate – the moderate nationalist Alexander Lebed', who declared himself the 'third power'. In all other presidential elections, the consolidation effect helped the main candidate attract supporters from other parties, including competing parties. It has become particularly visible at the elections with Vladimir Putin in 2004 and 2012: a significant difference arose between the levels of support of Vladimir Putin and United Russia. The same effects were clearly discernible in the regional gubernatorial elections, when they reverted to direct elections in 2012: incumbent governors could receive 70–80 per cent of the votes, significantly playing out United Russia, while their rivals often did not even receive enough of their own party's votes. But at the parliamentary elections in the districts, the opposite is the case: voters have no great interest in consolidating around a United Russia candidate or other leading parties' candidates, which leads to higher competitiveness of the SMD elections and some votes cast for obviously weak candidates who stand little to no chance of winning the election.

## Notes

1. The results of the project 'Influence of institutional factors on the regional structure of Russia's party system', carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2017, are presented in this work.
2. Here and further all the calculations were made by the author on the basis of the Central Election Commission (CEC) official statistics, provided on the website [www.cikrf.ru](http://www.cikrf.ru), as for the 1993, 1995 and 1999 elections – in the printed editions of the CEC (*CEC Bulletin*, *CEC Review*) and from the official governmental press (*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*).
3. Due to insufficient accessible information for the 1993 elections, we were unable to calculate the numbers, requiring the missing data on the results of the voting for all candidates in the districts.
4. However, the rules of the game in the 2016 elections made it impossible for a party to participate in district elections without participating in elections on party lists. Before that, some parties could register at least one candidate, without participating in elections under the proportional system. In 1995 there were 18 such parties and blocs, in 1999 – two and in 2003 – seven. Twice – in 1995 and 2003 – the number of parties participating in district elections exceeded the number of parties registered for the elections under the proportional system in Russia.

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