

# ASCENT AND DECLINE OF RUSSIAN ELECTORAL LEGISLATION

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From 1988 to 2022, the Russian electoral legislative landscape underwent notable transformations. The foundational shifts occurred with the issuance of Presidential Decrees in 1993 and the enactment of the Law on Guarantees of Electoral Rights in 1994, marking crucial milestones in post-perestroika Russian legal evolution.



The laws implemented between 1997 and 2002 brought Russian electoral legislation into alignment with international standards. Despite these advancements, the trends in the development of the state and political systems exhibited incongruities with the concurrent amelioration of the legal framework.



Commencing in 2004, the progression of electoral legislation entered a retrogressive phase. The incremental, though uneven, deterioration of the legislative framework culminated in its degradation and inherent contradictions, manifesting non-conformity with both international electoral standards and Russia's constitutional mandates.

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## INTRODUCTION

Russia's political system and its electoral legislation as its integral part have made a dramatic detour over the last 30 years and reverted to an almost Soviet state. Russian elections have again ceased to fulfill their primary democratic function of representing and harmonizing voters' interests. Elections have once again become an accessory of a totalitarian state.

In this paper, we will trace the path of the Russian electoral legislation from the perestroika reforms of 1988 to the changes in 2022. The legislation evolved along with the political system, usually lagging behind it. This path was not unilinear, with both regressive and progressive developments. Yet, in the 2000s, the overall changes proved to be regressive.

Besides, law enforcement practices did not always correspond to the law, and one could be tempted to think that the role of legislation was negligible compared to law enforcement activity, as is often the case in Russia. Such a view is, however, easily disproved by the great deal of attention the authorities paid to legislative changes.

Although elections are an integral part of the political system, we will focus strictly on the electoral legislation reforms, making only a cursory mention of the overall changes in the political system and state structure. The author does not believe that "it is the electoral system and electoral legislation that is the magic key that opens or closes the doors to democracy."<sup>1</sup>

The innovations in electoral legislation can be roughly divided into three categories according to their impact. The first category includes political innovations that directly impact the configuration of political forces. The second category consists of innova-

tions that change election rules and indirectly affect election results. Superficial, technical and publicity-driven changes, which have almost no impact on the election result, fall into the third category. This paper will only discuss the most important innovations in the first and second categories.

## CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING CHANGES IN ELECTORAL LEGISLATION

When assessing a particular change in electoral legislation, we will determine whether the change has made it more difficult to conduct a fair election and whether the innovation meets the generally recognized criteria for free elections.

### The declared standards, principles and criteria for free elections

The Russian Constitution defines the purpose of elections in a rather general way: "Referenda and free elections are the highest direct expression of the power of the people."<sup>2</sup> The concept of "free elections" is not defined in the Constitution. Regrettably, for this norm to be applied, further legal definitions are needed.

*THE CONSTITUTION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ALSO CONTAINS A MORE EXPLICIT NORM STATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS TO ELECT AND BE ELECTED: "CITIZENS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION HAVE THE RIGHT TO ELECT AND BE ELECTED TO BODIES OF STATE POWER AND BODIES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, AS WELL AS TO PARTICIPATE IN REFERENDA."<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Lukyanova E.A., Poroshin E.N., Arutyunov A.A., Shpilkin S.A., Zvorykina E.V. Elections of the strict regime: How Russian elections became non-elections and what to do about it? Politico-legal research with elements of mathematics. Moscow: Mysl, 2022, pp. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation, adopted on December 12, 1993, Ch. 3, Art. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation, adopted on December 12, 1993, Ch. 2, Art. 32.

According to the Constitution, these rights can only be revoked if a citizen is recognized as legally incompetent by the court or is sentenced to a prison term. As we will see further on, today the Russian electoral legislation infringes even these constitutional provisions.<sup>4</sup>

The basic tenets<sup>5</sup> of Russian elections are outlined in Article 3 of the current Federal Law, herein referred to as the “Law on Guarantees”<sup>6</sup> for brevity. One of these principles is universal, equal, direct suffrage by secret ballot.

The article on voluntary participation in elections was added in 1994, and in 1997 requirement of openness and transparency in the work of election commissions was set by law. The principles of Russian elections, legislatively established in the early 1990s, also include the principle of equality of candidates, specified in the section on the status of candidates.

The principle of fair counting of votes, which is obviously implied in any election, should also be mentioned. It is implicitly established by regulating vote-counting procedures, which in Russian legislation (unlike the legislation of many other countries) is defined in sufficient detail.

*THE EVOLUTION OF ELECTORAL LEGISLATION OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS ALLOWS ELECTION ORGANIZERS AND LAW ENFORCERS TO DEVIATE FROM THESE PRINCIPLES AT PRESENT.*

4 Definitions of free elections and standards for free elections are defined in international legal documents. The main international documents that directly or indirectly establish criteria for free elections are:

- Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (Copenhagen, 1990);
- Declaration on the Criteria for Free and Fair Elections (Paris, 1994);
- Convention on Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Chisinau, 2002);

Russia participated in adopting all these documents, and the last of them was sponsored by Russia. The principles of free elections include the absence of pressure on the will of the electorate, the fair counting of votes, the openness and transparency of the work of election commissions, and the possibility of public observation. The propagandists of Russian elections never tire of reminding about these principles, and the corresponding requirements are contained in Russian legislation. These principles and the proper Russian legislation are violated in Russian elections. However, Russian election organizers mention the other most important international electoral standards much less frequently, and non-compliance with these very standards is an important flaw of Russian elections, even more important than direct falsifications during counting. These grossly disregarded standards include freedom to form parties, political neutrality of public institutions, equality of candidates (candidates and electoral associations) in elections, freedom of campaigning and access to mass media.

- 5 These principles appeared in the 1936 USSR Constitution, then were reproduced in the 1977 Constitution, and were removed from the Constitution of 1993, while passing into the Federal Law of 1994 and its subsequent revisions.
- 6 Federal Law of 12.06.2002 No. 67-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

Another criterion for assessing the innovations of electoral legislation is assessing their impact on the result of elections and on the state’s political evolution. Sometimes the impact is direct, for example, when governors’ elections are canceled or the electoral system is changed in the narrow sense<sup>7</sup>; sometimes this impact is indirect, for example, when the electoral deposit is waived.

## STRUCTURE OF RUSSIAN ELECTORAL LEGISLATION

Russian electoral legislation is a hierarchical structure of laws and regulations, with the Constitution of the Russian Federation at the top, followed by the federal Law on Guarantees,<sup>8</sup> then other federal laws (on federal elections<sup>9</sup> and on the State Automated System of the Russian Federation “Elections” (GAS “Vybory”<sup>10</sup>)) and regional (including electoral codes), and then resolutions of election commissions at various levels (electoral legislation often also includes laws on referenda, which we will not discuss here).

Changes in the electoral legislation are, first of all, changes in the Law on Guarantees, to which all other electoral laws are rather quickly adjusted.

*HOWEVER, MAJOR CHANGES IN RUSSIA’S ELECTORAL SYSTEM WERE INTRODUCED BY AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION IN 2008, WHICH INCREASED THE PRESIDENT’S AND STATE DUMA’S TERMS OF OFFICE, AS WELL AS BY THE 2020 AMENDMENTS, WHICH “NULLIFIED” PUTIN’S PRIOR PRESIDENTIAL TERMS.*

The institution of elections is also defined by the laws on the state structure and on the structure of local self-government. These laws determine which of the state and local self-government bodies are elected by universal suffrage.

7 The phrase “electoral system” is used in the Russian language both to designate the organization of elections in general, including the rules of elections and electoral bodies, and the electoral system in its narrow sense, as referring to the rules of forming the content of the ballot paper and the rules of displaying the votes cast in the distribution of mandates (majoritarian, proportional and other systems).

8 Federal Law of 12.06.2002 No. 67-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

9 Federal Law of 22.02.2014 No. 20-FZ “On elections of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation”; Federal Law of 10.01.2003 No. 19-FZ “On the election of the President of the Russian Federation”

10 Federal Law of 10.01.2003 No. 20-FZ “On the State Automated System of the Russian Federation “Vybory”

*GOVERNOR'S ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN ABOLISHED AND REINTRODUCED IN RUSSIA WITHOUT ANY ALTERATION IN THE ELECTORAL LEGISLATION, ONLY BY CHANGING THESE "STRUCTURAL LAWS," AND, ELECTIONS OF THE HEADS OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION HAVE BEEN VIRTUALLY ABOLISHED BY THE SAME MEANS.*

## DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN ELECTORAL LEGISLATION IN 1988-1994

The Law of the USSR of December 1, 1988 No. 9855-XI "On the Election of People's Deputies of the USSR" radically changed the electoral system that existed in the USSR. Undoubtedly, the most important change was that the ballots of 1101 electoral districts (out of 1500) contained more than one candidate. Also, citizens and candidates gained the right to campaign for the first time. It is worth noting, however, that these achievements were caused primarily by the changing political situation rather than by changes in the legislation.

Importantly, the 1988 and 1989 laws explicitly stated for the first time explicitly stated that election commissions work openly and transparently, which was used to some extent by the politically active civil society.

In 1991, general elections of the executive power were introduced, which was unimaginable for the Soviet Union.

The Russian Constitution adopted in 1993 created new bodies of legislative and representative power instead of the Soviets (in fact, it established a different

structure of the state with the separation of powers, which, however, was never realized in practice).<sup>11</sup>

In 1994, the Federal Law systematized these provisions, extended them to all elections in the Russian Federation, and introduced additional guarantees of electoral rights<sup>12</sup> (see Annex 1).

## 1995-2002: RUSSIAN ELECTORAL LEGISLATION REINFORCED

In April 1995, amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Codes introduced liability for violations of electoral legislation.

The law on the election of deputies to the State Duma<sup>13</sup> adopted the same year was the most liberal of all subsequent laws on State Duma elections. It allowed for the nomination of candidates by electoral associations (which at that time were defined as any public association that claimed in its charter to participate in elections, including parties), blocs of electoral associations, groups of voters, as well as self-nomination. Only 1% of the voters were required to support the nomination of a candidate for a single-mandate constituency.

In 1996, a law on local elections in the constituent entities of the Federation where the relevant regional laws had not yet been passed was adopted. This law played a positive role in the establishment of local self-government in the regions. In particular, it proclaimed the mandatory formation of election commissions of municipalities, which supported the autonomy of local self-government

11 The 1993 presidential decrees introduced important electoral innovations:

- 1) compulsory alternative elections;
- 2) the possibility of campaigning in the state mass media;
- 3) formation of election commissions on a parity basis by executive and representative bodies, independence of commissions;
- 4) the institution of members of election commissions with the right of deliberative vote;
- 5) The rights of members of election commissions were been defined, including the right to familiarize themselves with any documents of the commission;
- 6) The „against all“ box was introduced on the ballot paper;
- 7) judicial appeal against any decisions of the election commission;
- 8) turnout threshold of 25%;
- 9) nomination of candidates in single-mandate districts by electoral associations and groups of voters;
- 10) electoral associations may consist of several parties and other public associations (blocking);
- 11) election participants may independently finance their election campaign and collect donations;
- 12) electoral associations and candidates were given the right to send observers to district election commissions.

12 Federal Law of 6.12.1994 No. 56-FZ "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights of Citizens of the Russian Federation"

13 Federal Law of 21.06.1995 No. 90-FZ "On elections of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation"

enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The period of the 1990s and early 2000s was marked by the rapid introduction of electoral technologies. At this time, newly formed bureaucratic elites began to adapt to the new legislation. In Moscow, the executive branch ostensibly resorted to the “use of administrative resources,”<sup>14</sup> and where by the end of the 1990s it had taken over the legislative and judicial branches, the election commissions, the city’s media, and the city’s economy. In the 2000s, Putin’s administration replicated this practice nationwide.

Nevertheless, Russian electoral legislation continued its progress in the 1990s. In 1997, a new Law on Guarantees<sup>15</sup> was adopted (see Annex 2). This law contained the main provisions of the 1994 law,<sup>16</sup> but was substantially more detailed. The new law recognized the emerging practice of administrative meddling in elections, as well as the practice of “dirty” electoral technologies, and attempted to discourage these tendencies. In addition, the new law described many electoral procedures in more detail to counteract fraudulent practices and promote fair and transparent counting of votes.

*BY THE END OF THE 1990S, RUSSIAN ELECTORAL LEGISLATION WAS BROUGHT IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL ELECTORAL STANDARDS. THIS LEGISLATION TRIED TO COUNTERACT THE MAJOR FLAW IN RUSSIAN ELECTORAL PRACTICE, WHICH, DESPITE THE LEGISLATION, PROLIFERATED AND EVENTUALLY UNDERMINED RUSSIAN ELECTIONS. THIS WEAKNESS LAY IN THE FACT THAT THE DOMINANT (ALBEIT INFORMAL) PARTICIPANT IN ELECTIONS WAS AT THE SAME TIME THEIR ORGANIZER. THIS SINGLE POLITICAL GROUP, THE OLIGARCHS CONCENTRATED POWER AND PROPERTY IN THEIR HANDS AND WERE ORGANIZED AS THE “EXECUTIVE CHAIN OF COMMAND”.*

However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s this flaw was not yet so apparent and took different forms in different regions. The diversity of political and social

currents had not yet been suppressed, and the courts still had some autonomy.

In 1998-2001, several changes were introduced into the electoral legislation aimed at curbing the entry of criminals into elected bodies (obligation to report income and criminal records), improving the representativeness of the State Duma (lowering the barrier if more than one party failed to overcome it or if all the parties that did overcome it received less than 50% of the votes), and introducing sanctions for refusing a mandate without compelling circumstances. During the same period, administrative liability for violation of electoral legislation was significantly expanded (from 13 to 24 articles).

In 2002, a new Law on Guarantees<sup>17</sup> was adopted, incorporating the main provisions of the 1997 law and supplementing it with some both progressive and regressive norms.<sup>18</sup> Many of the novelties of its provisions were aimed at overcoming the negative experience of the previous elections (for example, against dubious deregistration and against the use of “black” technologies), but, unfortunately, they proved ineffective given the political course opted for by the state.

This law was drafted mainly by the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation and attempted to strengthen the system of election commissions and make it more independent. Looking ahead, we note that this attempt failed, and the strengthening of the system of election commissions ultimately led only to its even greater control by the administration.

*HIGHER COMMISSIONS BEGAN TO FORM DISTRICT, TERRITORIAL AND PRECINCT COMMISSIONS, AS WELL AS APPOINT THEIR CHAIRPERSONS.*

<sup>17</sup> Federal Law of 12.06.2002 No. 67-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

<sup>18</sup> The 2002 Law contained the following progressive changes:

- 1) a mandatory mixed system of elections to regional parliaments was introduced;
- 2) the share of representatives of “parliamentary” parties (i.e. parties that were allowed to distribute mandates in previous proportional elections) in commissions was increased from one third to one half;
- 3) an obligation for registered candidates holding public positions in executive or judicial bodies or elective municipal positions to go on vacation was introduced;
- 4) the list of grounds for de-registration and denial of registration was made closed and the inaccuracy of income information was excluded from it;
- 5) election commissions were deprived of the right to cancel registration;
- 6) this right remained only with the court, which could make such a decision no later than five days before election day;
- 7) the concept of political campaigning was clarified. An important article (Article 48) defining attributes of campaigning was introduced.

<sup>14</sup> The use of administrative resources in elections is the use of the resources of the current government - informational, organizational, material, financial and others - in order to achieve a certain result at the elections that is beneficial to the administration.

<sup>15</sup> Federal Law of 19.09.1997 No. 124-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

<sup>16</sup> Federal Law of 6.12.1994 No. 56-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights of Citizens of the Russian Federation”



## A REVERSAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ELECTORAL LEGISLATION AND ITS GRADUAL EROSION

### An outline of electoral lawmaking in 2003-2019

The 2002 law<sup>19</sup> became a turning point in the development of Russian electoral legislation (see Annex 3). In 2003, the dominant political group, the so-called “executive chain of command”, was finally consolidated. This group took control of all branches of power, using the “United Russia” brand for party registration, legally compliant participation in elections, and representation in legislative assemblies. United Russia resulted from the merger of Unity and Fatherland, the two major rival coalitions of bureaucrats and oligarchs in the late 1990s.

*IN 2003, UNITED RUSSIA WON AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE STATE DUMA, WHICH ALLOWED THE DOMINANT POLITICAL BLOCK NOT ONLY TO CONTINUE ITS LAW ENFORCEMENT FIGHT AGAINST PROGRESSIVE ELECTORAL LEGISLATION, BUT ALSO TO REVERSE ITS DEVELOPMENT.*

Since 2002, when the still effective Law on Guarantees was adopted, 111 federal laws and 9 rulings of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation have been passed to amend the main law on elections. The frequency of legislative amendments by year is reflected in Figure 1. Currently, the existing version of the law differs from its original version more than the original version differed from the 1997 law.

<sup>19</sup> Federal Law of 12.06.2002 No. 67-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

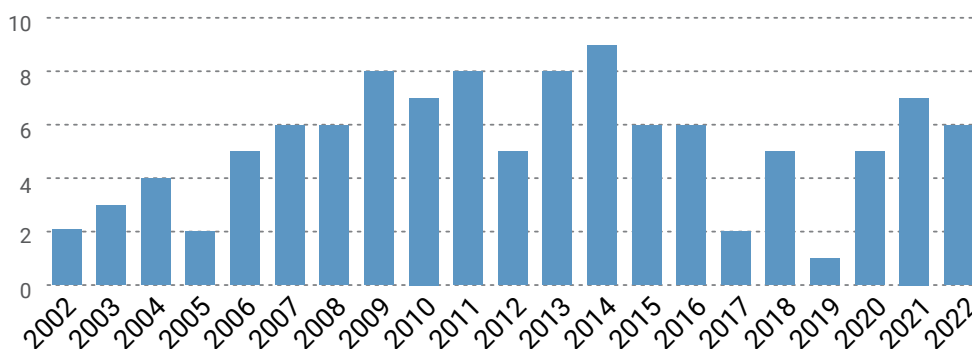
Many legislative changes were of purely decorative or technical nature. They merely reflected the MP’s law-making zeal and desire to show that they were truly hardworking. Sometimes legislative activity was used for advertising and propaganda purposes. In the late 2010s, the Russian Central Election Commission actively engaged in propaganda initiatives that had nothing to do with improving the quality of elections, but were intended to showcase elections’ openness and transparency. The law on the admission of Public Chamber’s members to election observation can be cited as an example of these propaganda-type laws.<sup>20</sup>

The number of laws adopted in a given year does not reflect the extent of their impact on the quality of elections. For example, two laws of 2005 initiated a wave of regressive changes in the electoral legislation, which was continued after the 2006-2007 elections to implement the political and state structure reforms on the way to a “sovereign democracy”.

*THE CONSTANT CHANGE OF THE ELECTORAL LEGISLATION ITSELF HAD A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON ELECTIONS. THE INSTABILITY OF THE ELECTORAL LEGISLATION PROVIDED ADVANTAGES TO PROFESSIONAL SPIN DOCTORS AND ELECTORAL LAW EXPERTS, TURNING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN INTO A COMPETITION OF ELECTORAL TECHNOLOGIES, REDUCING THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES AND ELECTIONS’ COMPETITIVENESS.*

<sup>20</sup> Federal Law of 05.12.2017 No. 374-FZ “On Amendments to the Federal Law “On the election of the President of the Russian Federation”; Federal Law of 04.06.2018 No. 150-FZ “On Amendments to the Federal Law “On elections of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation”; Federal Law of 03.07.2018 No. 184-FZ “On Amendments to the Federal Law “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

Figure 1.  
**Number of laws amending the 2002 Federal Law on Guarantees**  
(As of December 28, 2022, 111 amendments were introduced)



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of the Federal Law of 12.06.2002 No. 67-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

Changes in the electoral legislation coincided with changes in other socio-political laws. In 2004, the requirements for the activity of political parties were considerably toughened (the minimum number of parties was increased to 50 thousand members), the number of political parties sharply decreased. The ideological bloc of the Presidential Administration assumed the role of federal and regional election supervisor and entrusted the supervision of elections to the relevant subdivisions of regional administrations. Control over civil society organizations was tightened. A competitive economy began to be curtailed, property was merged with power (oligarchization), and media diversity was destroyed. "Sovereign democracy" became the forerunner of an oligarchic authoritarian state, which naturally degenerated into a militarized totalitarian state. The change in electoral legislation and the transformation of elections into a decorative element was a consequence rather than a cause of such transformations, but it reflected the degeneration of the Russian state to a certain extent.

It is worth noting that the "opposition" parties (CPRF, LDPR, and later Just Russia) in this period, unlike in the period after 2020, were highly active in lawmaking and often proposed progressive bills. According to the author's calculations,<sup>21</sup> as of April 20, 2020, these parties have submitted 158 electoral bills to the State Duma since 2003, of which only 4 were adopted. In contrast, bills introduced by the President and the Government have been enthusiastically embraced by the Duma: of the 24 bills introduced by them, all but two were passed, being withdrawn after Putin got reelected. At the same time, the United Russia party itself has not been active in lawmaking; formally, its members initiated only 18 bills, of which 12 were adopted. At the same time, the United Russia party itself has not been active in lawmaking; formally, its members initiated only 18 bills, of which 12 were passed.

## 2005-2007: Drastic Reforms

*IN DECEMBER 2003, THE STATE DUMA ELECTIONS BROUGHT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY TO UNITED RUSSIA. THIS VICTORY OPENED THE WAY FOR MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO THE ELECTORAL LEGISLATION FOR THE NEEDS OF THE RULING ELITE, RESULTING IN COMPLETE EROSION OF THIS LEGISLATION.*

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.votas.ru/men\\_zak.html](http://www.votas.ru/men_zak.html). The information presented in this source does not consider bills currently under review, leading to slight variations between the data in the article and that of the specified source.

However, some regressive innovations were introduced even before that: in early 2003, the rules for nominating candidates for presidential elections were tightened: the number of initiative group members increased from 100 to 500, the number of required signatures in support of nomination was raised from one million to two; and in July, public associations were banned from being part of electoral blocs.<sup>22</sup>

The first thing the new State Duma did was to pass an undemocratic referendum bill. It was introduced by the newly elected President Putin. It made it virtually impossible to initiate a referendum "from below," i.e., at the initiative of citizens.

In December 2004, governor elections were canceled, which naturally undermined federalism.

The Federal Law No. 51-FZ of May 18, 2005, "On the Election of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," became a decisive step in the further deterioration of electoral legislation (and of the political system in general). Interestingly, some provisions of this law contradicted the Law on Guarantees, which was radically transformed a month later.<sup>23</sup>

In 2006-2007, numerous laws further adjusting the electoral legislation to the needs of the administration were passed.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Federal Law of 10.01.2003 No. 19-FZ "On the election of the President of the Russian Federation"

<sup>23</sup> The following regressive changes were introduced:

- 1) the permissible share of state and municipal employees in election commissions was raised to a half;
- 2) a fully proportional system was introduced for State Duma elections (which allowed for greater centralization of election administration at that time);
- 3) the threshold for State Duma elections was raised to 7%, and regional legislators were allowed to raise the threshold to 10% (which was immediately used by Moscow, Kalmykia and Dagestan);
- 4) the number of regional groups in the State Duma elections was increased to 100;
- 5) electoral blocs were abolished;
- 6) sanctions for refusing a mandate were abolished (which gave rise to the practice of "steam locomotives");
- 7) candidates were permitted to abstain from pre-election debates;
- 8) candidates holding public office and local government elected positions were no longer obliged to go on vacation;
- 9) the right of public associations to send observers to federal elections was abolished, and the regions were granted the right to abolish the right of public associations to send observers to regional and municipal elections;
- 10) The rules related to candidate registration have been tightened, in particular, the permissible percentage of "defects" in signature sheets has been reduced;
- 11) simultaneous submission of signatures and deposit of a deposit is prohibited;
- 12) candidate's registration could be canceled on the basis of violation of intellectual property rights;
- 13) "Against All" box on the ballot paper was removed.

<sup>24</sup> 1) members of other parties could no longer be nominated as candidates;  
2) "Against All" box was permanently removed;  
3) Russian citizens who have citizenship of a foreign state or a residence permit can no longer run as candidates;  
4) criticism of electoral competitors on television was prohibited.



A number of laws designed to meet the needs of the Presidential Administration and the approaching State Duma elections were urgently adopted in 2007. Chairpersons of top-level commissions and members of the CEC were allowed to have no legal training (V.E. Churov, Chairman of the CEC from 2007 to 2016, whom V.V. Putin later appointed as Chairman of the CEC, had no such background). The minimum number of regional groups for the State Duma elections was reduced to 80 (the election campaign staff that started working in the Presidential Administration realized that it did not have one hundred obedient governors).

After the fraudulent elections<sup>25</sup> in 2007-2008, when the ruling elite secured fully controlled State Duma and president, electoral legislation underwent some technical changes. Many laws adopted in 2008-2011 slightly clarified electoral procedures and could have improved the electoral process if they had been implemented.<sup>26</sup> Some laws, such as the law on additional guarantees of the rights of persons with disabilities,<sup>27</sup> served populist purposes.

Putin's team used Medvedev's administration to carry out several important operations in both the political and legislative spheres. Under Medvedev, Russia backed the emergence of the unrecognized republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The dangerous rival Yuri Luzhkov was removed from politics, and the possibility of manipulating election dates was expanded, increasing the parliamentary terms of office to five years and the presidential term to six.

*MEDVEDEV'S ADMINISTRATION ACTED IN LINE WITH PUTIN'S POLICIES FOR MOST OF MEDVEDEV'S TERM, BUT MADE SOME MINOR TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENTS TO THE ELECTORAL PROCEDURES AND ADOPTED SEVERAL PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL MEASURES AS LATE AS 2012.*

The abolition of the electoral deposit in 2009 was a serious blow to the competitiveness of elections.<sup>28</sup>

In the same year, public associations finally lost the right to nominate candidates in all elections, and the role of municipalities in the formation of municipal election commissions was reduced.

However, in 2009-2011, several laws that could contribute to progress in the electoral process were passed (the number of signatures required to register a list of candidates for the State Duma was reduced, additional requirements for the safety of absentee certificates were introduced, and others).<sup>29</sup>

In early 2012, during the last months of Medvedev's presidency, several progressive innovations were introduced into the legislation, which would be disavowed as early as 2014. Quite typically, Medvedev's administration drafted a new law on the election of State Duma deputies. On February 16, 2012, the bill was submitted to the State Duma and passed the first reading, but at that moment, a new president was elected. The bill remained in the State Duma for about a year and was subsequently withdrawn by President Putin.

In May 2012, the elections of governors were reintroduced.<sup>30</sup> The so-called "municipal filter" required for the registration of a nominee made it almost impossible for any candidate not from United Russia to run for this post. The informal mechanism for the selection of municipal council and administration members formed in the previous ten years, made the overwhelming majority of municipal deputies dependent on the local administration, composed of United Russia members.

*IN MOST REGIONS, THERE WERE SO FEW "NON-ADMINISTRATIVE" PARTY MEMBERS IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS THAT A CANDIDATE NOT SUPPORTED BY THE ADMINISTRATION HAD VIRTUALLY NO CHANCE OF OVERCOMING THE "MUNICIPAL FILTER." IN ORDER TO CREATE A SEMBLANCE OF COMPETITION, ADMINISTRATIONS HAD TO GIVE*

25 Buzin A.Y., Lyubarev A.E. Crime without Punishment: Administrative Electoral Technologies of Federal Elections 2007-2008, Moscow, 2008: "NIKKOLO M".

26 Specifying the rules for out-of-premises voting and absentee voting is a case in point.

27 Federal Law of 14.06.2011 No. 143-FZ "On Amendments to Some Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation for the Purpose of Improving the Mechanisms Whereby Citizens' Electoral Rights Are Ensured"; Federal Law of 01.12.2014 No. 419-FZ "On Amendments to Certain Laws of the Russian Federation on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities Following the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities"

28 Federal Law of 09.02.2009 No. 3-FZ "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Connection with the Abolition of the Electoral Deposit for Elections"

29 Federal Law of 12.05.2009 No. 94-FZ "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Connection with the Increase in Representation of Voters in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation", Federal Law of 27.07.2010 No. 222-FZ "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Connection with the Establishment of Additional Guarantees to Ensure Equal Conditions for Providing Premises for Meetings with Voters and Referendum Participants", Federal Law of 08.03.2011 No. 34-FZ "On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation" and etc.

30 Federal Law of 02.05.2012 No. 40-FZ "On the General Principles of the Organization of Legislative (Representative) and Executive Bodies of State Power of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation" and the Federal Law "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation"

**MUNICIPAL DEPUTIES ORDERS TO SUBMIT THEIR SIGNATURES IN SUPPORT OF CERTAIN CANDIDATES.**

The Federal Law of May 2, 2012 is of great interest.<sup>31</sup> It contained apparently progressive innovations: candidates nominated by any political parties were no longer required to collect signatures; the number of signatures required to register a self-nominated candidate as a presidential candidate was significantly reduced from 2 million to 300,000, and for a candidate nominated by a non-parliamentary party this number was reduced to 100,000. Ironically, the law was the “swan song” of Medvedev’s rule.

In 2012, with the renewal of the Presidential Administration, a new strategy for managing the country and elections was also introduced. The civil unrest in the wake of the rigged elections of 2011 played provided an incentive. The authorities realized that they had to be more careful in falsifying elections and focused on more subtle electoral technologies. The major overhaul of electoral legislation began with reversing the progressive reforms of the early 2012.

The first of the electoral laws adopted at that time provided a landmark. It demonstrated how the law-making process can be manipulated. Back in October 2010, deputies S. V. Ivanov and I. V. Lebedev introduced a bill proposing to postpone the single day of voting to the end of March. After the bill had been on the floor for two years, it was “creatively” revised. The law adopted in October 2012 set the single day of voting for the second Sunday of September, which was extremely inconvenient for all participants in the elections, except for the administration.<sup>32</sup> But it was also inconvenient for the administration, as it became more difficult to form precinct election commissions. Therefore, one of the amendments to the draft law was to form precinct commissions with a five-year term of office.

**THE LAW WAS ADOPTED THANKS TO THE USE OF SOPHISTICATED MANIPULATION TECHNIQUES AND HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE DRAFT.**

31 Federal Law of 02.05.2012 No. 41-FZ “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Connection with Exempting Political Parties from Collecting Voter Signatures for Elections to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, to State Authorities of the Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation and Local Self-Government Bodies”

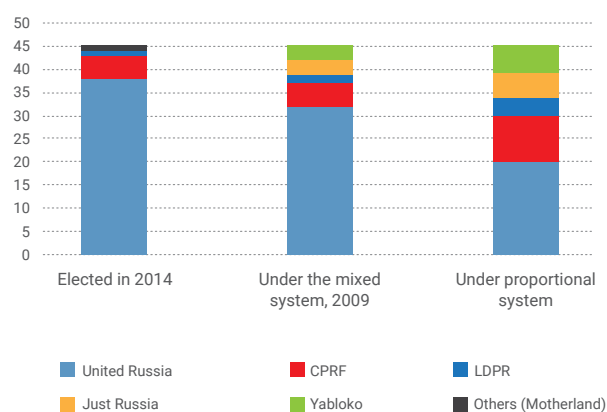
32 Federal Law of 02.10.2012 No. 157-FZ “On Amendments to the Federal Law “On Political Parties” and the Federal Law “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation”

In April 2013, regional lawmakers were allowed to cancel general elections of governors and choose them from the three candidates proposed by the President<sup>33</sup>. The same year the proportional electoral system began to be phased out. The so-called “Klishas law” reduced the number of proportional seats in regional parliaments from 50 percent to 25 percent. At the same time, Moscow and St. Petersburg were allowed to abandon the proportional system altogether, something the Moscow authorities promptly exploited.

**BY LEGISLATIVELY CHANGING THE RATIO OF PROPORTIONALLY AND MAJORITY ELECTED CANDIDATES, THE AUTHORITIES ACHIEVED THE DESIRED RESULTS BOTH AT THE FEDERAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS.**

The complete abolition of proportional representation in Moscow (about 7% of Russian voters), where party life was the most vibrant, is indicative. In 2014, the Moscow City Duma elections were held under a fully majoritarian system, and if the mixed election system of 2009 had been retained, the composition of the Moscow City Duma would have been quite different (see Figure 2). It would have been even more different if the Moscow City Duma elections had been held under a fully proportional system.

Figure 2.  
**Composition of the Moscow City Duma under Different Electoral Systems**



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of the results of the 2009 and 2014 Moscow State Duma elections

In February 2014, a new law on elections to the State Duma is again adopted.<sup>34</sup> It does not contain any radical innovations, but reintroduces a mixed elec-

33 Federal Law of 02.04.2013 No.30-FZ “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation”

34 Federal Law of 22.02.2014 No. 20-FZ “On elections of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation”

toral system. Manipulations with the change of the electoral system affected the composition of the State Duma. According to the author's calculations, the switch from a fully proportional system used in 2011 to a mixed system in 2016 took away 28 mandates from the CPRF, 23 mandates from the LDPR, 19 mandates from Just Russia, and 67 mandates from United Russia.

In April 2014, one's chances to challenge voting procedure violations and vote rigging in court were significantly reduced.<sup>35</sup>

*VOTERS WERE PROHIBITED FROM CHALLENGING THE WORK OF COMMISSIONS IF THEY DID NOT VOTE THERE. THE VOTING RESULTS COULD BE CONTESTED ONLY WITHIN 10 DAYS, WHILE THE TIME FOR CHALLENGING ELECTION RESULTS WAS REDUCED FROM A YEAR TO THREE MONTHS.*

The new law on the State Duma elections made clear that regressive innovations could be extended to all other elections. First, the liberal "Medvedev's" rule that exempted all parties from collecting signatures in support of candidate nomination was abolished. Second, a requirement to collect an absurdly large number of signatures in support of a candidate's nomination in federal and regional elections – 3% of the district's electorate – was introduced. This meant a significant electoral inequality of candidates and contradicted not only the Constitution, but also the Law on Guarantees.

Gerrymandering or manipulating the boundaries of electoral districts to achieve a certain electoral result has been spreading in Russia since 2016. Constituencies are drawn by the election commission organizing the elections and approved by the relevant legislative or representative body.

The Law of July 14, 2015 moved the next State Duma elections two months earlier than the constitutionally mandated deadline and aligned them with the single day of voting.<sup>36</sup> Thus, now all elections, except for the presidential (and early) ones, have been held at an inconvenient time for the opposition forces: campaigning and signature collection had to happen in the summer. At the same time, the dates for snap, repeat and by-elections were changed so that they

could coincide with the elections to the State Duma.

The February 2016 law stipulated that lists of observers had to be submitted to territorial commissions in advance, while an observer could be appointed to only one election commission. This law also contained a progressive provision: an observer could be removed from the voting room only by a court decision.<sup>37</sup>

In March 2016, the criteria for the media representatives in election commissions were tightened.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, several laws limiting the right to campaign were adopted. These laws censored any statements criticizing the authorities, undermined competition in the elections, and were clearly opportunistic. Their main purpose was to target Navalny and his supporters, who had become the opposition's symbol. The March 2016 law made it impossible to order campaign materials from individuals who are not individual entrepreneurs. Even stronger and absurd for free elections restrictions were introduced in April: candidates were prohibited to use images of individuals other than their own, and electoral associations were prohibited to use images of individuals other than their candidates. In 2017, the requirement to participate in pre-election debates,<sup>39</sup> which had been included in the law the year before, was removed from the legislation.

In 2018 and 2019, there was a period of legislative calm, with nothing but technical, superfluous or populist innovations being passed. It was in 2019 when remote electronic voting (REV) was first introduced to be tested in the elections to the Moscow City Duma. The law lacked meaningful guarantees of public control over the new way of voting. The results of the 2019 experiment raised reasonable doubts about the REV's fairness.

## Amending the Russian Constitution. Voting "to approve"

The introduction of amendments to the Constitution of the country served as a trigger to accelerate the

35 Federal Law of 02.04.2014 No. 51-FZ "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation"

36 Federal Law of 14.07.2015 No. 272-FZ "On Amendments to Articles 5 and 102 of the Federal Law "On elections of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation"

37 Federal Law of 15.02.2016 No. 29-FZ "On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation" to Article 33 of the Federal Law "On elections of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation "with regard to the activities of observers"

38 Federal Law of 09.03.2016 No. 66-FZ "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation on Elections and Referenda, and Other Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation"

39 Federal Law of 01.06.2017 No. 104-FZ "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation"

decline of the electoral legislation. Firstly, the very procedure of introducing these amendments contradicted the procedure for making amendments to the Constitution established by the Constitution and laws of the Russian Federation.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, the manifest disregard for the law on the part of the authorities untied the hands of lawmakers from the Presidential Administration to adopt new regressive electoral laws. The Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation was entrusted to develop the rules of the “national vote to approve amendments”, and it developed something substantially different from the referendum rules. These innovations were later integrated into the electoral legislation.

Amendments to the Constitution enabled the President to run for reelection despite having served two subsequent terms. The similar strategy is a hallmark of authoritarian regimes.

The Covid-19 pandemic provided additional opportunities to carry out “emergency” reforms of the electoral legislation. In 2020-21, the new laws made it possible to postpone elections “in the event of a state of high alert or emergency”.<sup>41</sup> These same laws expanded the use of remote electoral voting (REV).<sup>42</sup> The current legal framework does not provide any possibilities for public oversight of REV. The current use of REV in Russia poses a serious threat, as there are no competitive elections and trust in election organizers is very low.

In 2020, voting rights, both the right to vote and the right to participate as an election observer, were rapidly reduced. Thus, the May 2020 law identified an additional 50 articles of the criminal code which made it impossible for a candidate to be nominated. A year later, in June 2021, this list was further expanded to include citizens “involved in the activities of an extremist or terrorist organization”.<sup>43</sup>

Legislative activity intensified as the Duma elections approached. The May 2020 law contained several multifaceted innovations concerning signatures in support of candidate nomination. This law also authorized early voting outside the voting premises.

Then, a new provision made it possible to recall a voting member of an election commission. It is prohibited for citizens who do not reside in the respective region or municipality to be observers in regional and municipal elections. “In places where voting equipment could be put in place”, voting could take place within two or three days.

Back in 2014, non-profit organizations deemed foreign agents were banned from participating in any form of election. In 2021, the fight against “foreign agents” continues with the adoption of laws establishing a complete ban on the participation in elections of public associations, legal entities and mass media that are “foreign agents” and a requirement to indicate information about the “foreign agency” or “affiliation with a foreign agent” in campaign materials and on the ballot.<sup>44</sup>

## Electoral lawmaking in the context of the “special military operation”

In March 2022, several regressive innovations were passed:

- 1) the status of members of election commissions with the right of deliberative vote was abolished (except for regional commissions and the CEC of the Russian Federation);
- 2) municipal commissions were abolished;
- 3) the requirement that the proportional part of the electoral system be mandatory for regional elections was abolished;
- 4) the period of deprivation of passive suffrage for citizens convicted of extremist activity was extended;
- 5) The requirement to submit materials intended for publication in the media to the election commission in advance was introduced;
- 6) the decision to postpone voting was facilitated (the right to make a decision was transferred from organizing commissions to higher commissions);
- 7) it was allowed to produce a voter list with voters’ passport data included in advance.

In July 2022, Russia adopted a law that officially declared war on the government’s political opponents.<sup>45</sup> This law clarified the notions of “foreign agent” and “person affiliated with a foreign agent”, and its wording allowed any citizen who was undesirable to the

40 <https://golosinfo.org/articles/144025>

41 <https://golosinfo.org/articles/144062>

42 Federal Law of 23.05.2020 No. 152-FZ “On conducting an experiment on the organisation and implementation of remote electronic voting in the Federal city of Moscow”

43 Federal Law of 04.06.2021, No. 157-FZ “On Amendments to Article 4 of the Federal Law “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of Citizens of the Russian Federation” and to Article 4 of the Federal Law “On elections of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation”

44 Federal Law of 20.04.2021 No. 91-FZ “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation”

45 Federal Law of 14.07.2022 No. 255-FZ “On control over the activities of persons under foreign influence”

authorities to be recognized as a foreign agent. This law opened a new stage in the political development of the Russian state, making free elections in Russia impossible.

*THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE STATE'S FURTHER REGRESSION WILL ALSO AFFECT THE ELECTORAL LEGISLATION. HOWEVER, IN THE ABSENCE OF REAL ELECTIONS, THIS WILL HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON REAL POLITICS.*

## ANNEX 1.

**Federal Law of 6.12.1994 №56-FZ “On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights of Citizens of the Russian Federation”**

**This law established its priority over all other electoral regulations in the Russian Federation and reiterated the following important guarantees of electoral rights:**

- members of the election commission, including those with the right of deliberative vote, have the right of access to all materials and documents of the corresponding election commission, must be notified of all meetings of the election commission, and have the right to speak at its meetings;
- meetings of election commissions are held openly and publicly, candidates, their proxies, representatives of electoral associations and mass media have the right to attend the meetings, and observers, including foreign observers, have the right to be present in precinct commissions on the day of voting;
- candidates are equal, during the election campaign they are provided protection from dismissal and some protection from criminal and administrative prosecution;
- the state provides citizens and public associations with freedom of campaigning; campaigning can be conducted both for and against candidates.
- candidates and electoral associations are provided with free airtime on television, premises for campaigning and are guaranteed equal conditions of access to the media (as practice has shown, the latter requirement turned out to be unenforceable in the economic conditions of 2000s Russia, while in the 1990s it was ensured not by the state, but by the presence of competing political groups);
- vote counting starts immediately after the end of the voting time and is conducted without interruption until the establishment of the voting results, of which all members of the precinct election commission, as well as observers, must be notified. At the request of any member of the precinct election commission or observer, the commission must provide them with a certified copy of the protocol on the results of voting;
- the data of the protocols on the voting results of all election commissions must be published.



## ANNEX 2.

**Federal Law of 19.09.1997 № 124-FZ “On basic guarantees of electoral rights and the right to participate in the referendum of citizens of the Russian Federation”****The 1997 law introduced the following progressive electoral innovations:**

- 1) an election commission may not include more than one third of state or municipal employees, and at least one third must be representatives of parties with factions in the State Duma or regional legislature;
- 2) the rights of members of election commissions are described in more detail, in particular, the conditions of their criminal and administrative liability, the possibility to familiarize themselves with the documents of the commission and receive copies of them;
- 3) guarantees of publicity of the work of election commissions are emphasized in a separate article, in particular, the rights and duties of observers who can now be appointed to commissions at all levels are defined. The rights of media representatives, who are allowed to attend the work of commissions at all levels upon presentation of a certificate, have been defined;
- 4) the procedure for the work of election commissions has been clarified. The heads of the commission - chairman, deputy chairman, secretary - are elected by the commission itself;
- 5) a list of grounds for refusing registration and canceling registration has been established;
- 6) it has been established that candidates holding state and municipal positions may not use the advantages of their official or official position, and the signs of using such a position have been defined;
- 7) candidates may be registered on the basis of an electoral deposit (established by an amendment adopted in 1999);
- 8) registered candidates serving in the public or municipal service are exempted from official duties for the period of their participation in the elections;
- 9) campaigning is prohibited for persons holding public and municipal offices, public and municipal servants, and military personnel in the performance of their official or official duties or using the advantages of their official or official position;
- 10) state and municipal mass media must provide candidates and electoral associations with free airtime and print space as established by law;
- 11) pre-election debates on television should be mandatory;
- 12) public and municipal premises should be provided to candidates on an equal basis;
- 13) bribing voters was defined and prohibited for the purposes of campaigning (as well as charitable activities);
- 14) detailed procedures for voting and counting of ballots, including mandatory sorting of ballots with the announcement of their marks, is given.

ANNEX 3.

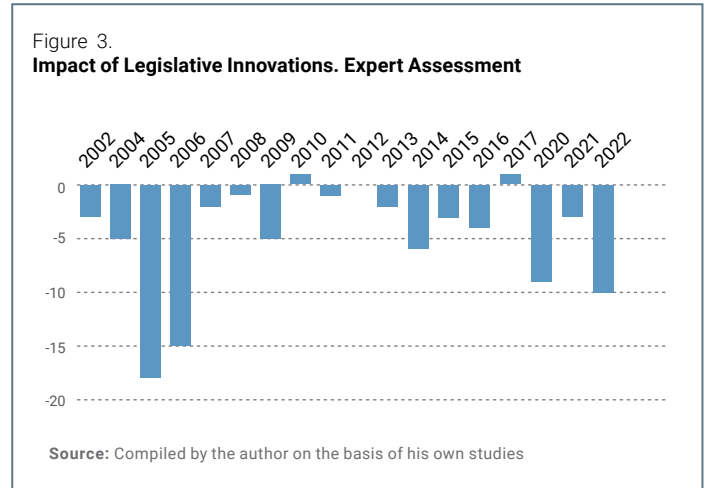
**QUANTITATIVE EXPERT ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL LEGISLATION CHANGES IN 2003-2022**

Above we have mentioned only a part of the changes introduced in the Russian electoral legislation since the adoption of the latest version of the Law on Guarantees in 2002. Although these changes have been diverse, the main trend has resulted in a gradual erosion of the electoral legislation as described at the beginning of this paper. If the innovations of the electoral legislation are quantified, the evolution of its quality can be shown in a diagramme.

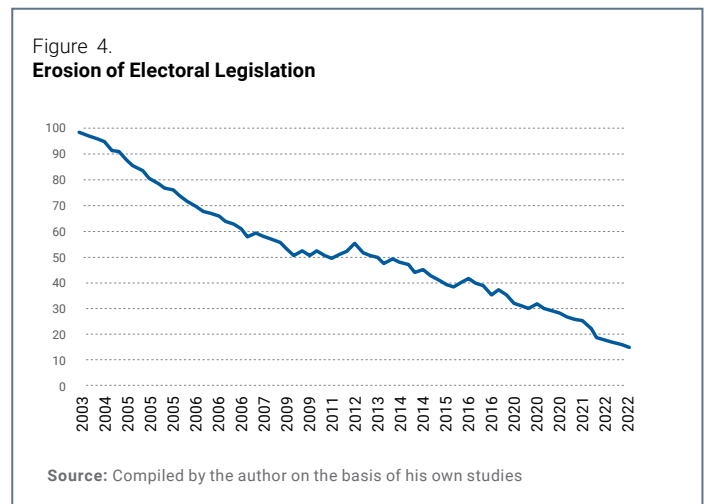
This work was done for all 73 innovations since 2003, to which we assigned positive or negative ratings (i.e., we did not take into account the innovations that did not influence or contradictorily influenced the elections from our point of view). We rated each of them on a six-point scale from -3 to +3, giving the innovation a score of -3 if it radically affected the election for the worse; a score of -2 if it significantly worsened the quality of the election; and a score of -1 if the innovation slightly worsened the quality of the election. Similarly, a score of +3 was given to innovations that radically improved (or could have improved) the quality of elections; a score of +2 to innovations that significantly improved (or could have improved) the quality of elections; and a score of +1 to innovations that slightly improved (or could have improved) the quality of elections.

It should be taken into account that the assessment attributed to innovation is quite subjective. It is based on the experience of the author of this paper. The subjectivity of assessments naturally affects the general quantitative estimates of the evolution of Russian legislation presented below.

Figure 3 presents estimates of the cumulative change in legislation for each year of the 2003-2022 period. It is easy to see that the erosion of Russian electoral legislation has been uneven. The two main periods of deterioration are “building a sovereign democracy” and “reuniting the Russian lands”. During the period of Medvedev’s vice-presidency, a minor “thaw” was observed. The period of 2017-2019 can be called the period of “the calm before the storm”. It was the time when the newly appointed CEC Chairperson E.A. Pamfilova tried to listen to the public (in particular, the author of this paper was appointed head of the Expert Advisory Group under the CEC Chairperson and worked in this position until mid-2018; the group actively proposed improvements to the electoral legislation).



The evolution of the electoral legislation by steps, i.e. from innovation to innovation, is illustrated in Figure 4. The initial quality of the Russian electoral legislation in 2002 is taken as 100. Each subsequent legislative innovation either decreased or increased this level by a number equal to its expert assessment.



The graph clearly illustrates the general erosion of the Russian electoral legislation, as well as the details of this process.

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## ABSTRACTS



The electoral legislation of post-perestroika Russia, akin to the institution of Russian elections, follows a nuanced historical trajectory characterized succinctly as a 'rise and fall.' Initiated with Gorbachev's reforms and extending through President Yeltsin's decrees, Russian electoral legislation, by the advent of the new millennium, approximated international electoral standards.

During this period, it not only asserted the autonomy of election organizers but also secured avenues for public scrutiny. Of paramount significance were the provisions facilitating unrestricted candidate nominations, ensuring unimpeded campaign advocacy, and fostering transparency in electoral procedures. Despite occasional deviations from statutory norms in practice, a generalized assertion can be made regarding the prevalence of competitive elections in 1990s Russia.



During the late 1990s and early 2000s in Russia, a new political dominion took shape, anchored in the established executive power that encompassed security structures and novel avenues for property acquisition. Until the close of the century, this dominion lacked cohesion, a characteristic discernible in electoral processes. Concurrently, the executive authority endeavored to adapt to progressive electoral legislation, refining administrative electoral methodologies, and mastering the art of self-preservation under the guise of ostensibly free elections.

In the early 2000s, a convergence of aspirants for power and property occurred under the auspices of a singular President, who wielded a formidable instrument in the form of clandestine policing. This seamlessly facilitated the subjugation of legislative authority to the Presidency. The amendment of legislation in the desired direction underwent substantial streamlining.



Beginning around 2004, a consistent trend of degradation becomes discernible in Russian electoral legislation, characterized by its accommodation to the exigencies of a self-perpetuating authority. Over this period, there has been a notable constriction of rights related to candidacy, participation in election oversight, and the conduct of political campaigns. The configuration of electoral commissions and the temporal parameters of elections have been purposefully aligned with the requirements of the incumbent regime. Notably, the trajectory of electoral legislation over the past two decades has resulted in a misalignment with both international electoral standards and the constitutional framework of Russia. This article delineates the principal innovations of the 1990s, juxtaposed with their legislative nullification in the 2000s. The article further endeavors to illustrate instances of legislative manipulations and their discernible impact on election outcomes. Additionally, a quantitative assessment is attempted to elucidate the extent of the degradation of Russian electoral legislation.