

Russia's 2026 State Duma Elections: What to Expect



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Introduction

From September 18 to 20, 2026, the Russian Federation will hold elections to the State Duma, the first parliamentary elections since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.¹ The vote will take place at a time when the prolonged war is placing growing pressure on the social contract that has underpinned Vladimir Putin's political legitimacy, built around the promise of stability and security. Against the backdrop of the war's mounting economic costs and the continued tightening of political freedoms, the Kremlin is seeking to reaffirm United Russia's dominance and legitimize regime continuity by projecting an image of broad and uncontested popular support.

The predictability of the outcome does not, however, diminish the significance of the election, which remains an important indicator of the internal dynamics of Russia's power structure. The vote will test the ability of regional administrations to translate the Kremlin's objectives into electoral results, while also providing a framework for recalibrating influence within the political elite. The allocation of seats, the relative weight of the systemic opposition parties, and the promotion of veterans of the war in Ukraine will reflect the leadership's priorities in the controlled renewal of political representation.

Recent experience also points to a Kremlin practice of strategically postponing unpopular decisions until after elections. In this context, both Western and Russian sources have raised the possibility of a new wave of mobilization after the vote, particularly given

¹ "Encountering Turbulence: How War Is Shaping the Russian State Duma Elections," *Network for Eastern European Studies and Topics (NEST)*, accessed September 11, 2026, <https://nestcentre.org/encountering-turbulence-how-war-is-shaping-the-russian-state-duma-elections/>.

that the decree on "partial mobilization" issued in September 2022 remains in force.² In June, State Duma deputy Andrei Gurulyov stated that a new mobilization was being actively discussed within Moscow's ruling circles and that, in principle, a decision had already been made for this fall.³

The composition of the next State Duma takes on added significance given the timeframe of its mandate. By the 2030 presidential election, Vladimir Putin will be 78 years old, and this factor, combined with the uncertain trajectory of the war in Ukraine, heightens the importance of the succession question in a deeply personalized political system. The Duma elected in September 2026 will therefore serve through a critical period in which internal competition for power may begin to take clearer shape.

Electoral System and the Structural Advantages of the Ruling Party

The State Duma of the Russian Federation consists of 450 deputies elected to five-year terms under a mixed electoral system. Half of the seats, 225, are allocated proportionally through party lists, subject to a 5% electoral threshold, while the remaining 225 are contested in single-member districts under a first-past-the-post system.⁴

² Catherine Belton, "As Russia Fails to Achieve War Aims in Ukraine, Putin Needs a Way Out," *The Washington Post*, June 2, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/06/02/pressure-rises-putin-analysts-say-russia-war-aims-are-unattainable/>.

³ Andrey Gurulev (@agurulev), Telegram post, June 2, 2026, <https://t.me/agurulev/7958>.

⁴ Jędrzej Jander, "The Outlook for This Year's Elections to the State Duma in Russia," IES Commentaries, no. 1517 (22/2026), *Institute of Central Europe*, January 30, 2026, <https://ies.lublin.pl/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ies-commentaries-1517-22-2026.pdf>.

This mixed electoral system gives the ruling United Russia party a significant structural advantage. In single-member districts, support from local administrations, the ability to mobilize voters dependent on the public sector, and restrictions on independent candidates consistently favor the ruling party. As a result, election after election, United Russia secures a share of seats that is disproportionate to its performance on the national party-list vote. The 2021 elections clearly illustrate this dynamic: although United Russia received 49.82% of the party-list vote, it won 198 of the 225 single-member districts.⁵

The boundaries of the single-member districts used in the previous two parliamentary elections were established in 2015 for a ten-year period. For the September 2026 elections, the Central Election Commission approved a new electoral map on April 25, 2025, this time for a five-year period. Unlike the previous map, the revised scheme includes seven districts created in the Ukrainian territories illegally annexed by Russia in 2022: three in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, two in the so-called Luhansk People's Republic, and one each in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions.⁶

⁵ "It's Official: Meduza dissects Russia's election results, the success of the Communists and 'New People,' and how Navalny's 'Smart Vote' fared," *Meduza*, September 22, 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/09/22/it-s-official>.

⁶ "A New Scheme of Single-Mandate Constituencies Will Be Used in the State Duma Elections," *State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, May 20, 2025, <http://duma.gov.ru/news/61430/>.



The scheme of single-mandate constituencies for the 2026 Russian legislative election.⁷

In 2026, voting will again take place over three consecutive days, a practice first introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Extending the voting period facilitates the coordinated mobilization of employees in the public sector and major state-owned companies, particularly on Fridays. During the September 17–19, 2021 parliamentary elections, the Central Election Commission (CEC) reported an official turnout of 16.85% on the first day alone,⁸ while independent media documented cases in which the management of industrial enterprises, medical facilities, educational institutions, and other public-sector organizations arranged for employees to be taken to polling stations.⁹

At the same time, remote electronic voting, available this year in more than 32 regions of the Russian Federation, remains one of the most controversial elements of the electoral

⁷ TagMorgan, "2026 Russian State Duma single-mandate constituencies map (color)," Wikimedia Commons, May 1, 2026, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2026_Russian_State_Duma_single-mandate_constituencies_map_\(color\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2026_Russian_State_Duma_single-mandate_constituencies_map_(color).svg) (modified by author).

⁸ "Turnout in the State Duma Elections Across Russia Reached 16.85% as of 20:00 Moscow Time," TASS, September 20, 2021, <https://tass.ru/politika/12438003>.

⁹ Timofei Rozhansky and Andrei Golubev, "'They Forced Me': Moscow Voters Explain Why They Voted En Masse," *Current Time*, September 21, 2021, <https://en.currenttime.tv/a/they-forced-me-moscow-voters-explain-why-they-voted-en-masse/31471626.html>.

process.¹⁰ The absence of independent verification mechanisms limits the transparency of the system and fuels concerns about the potential manipulation of results, particularly in major urban centers. Russia operates two separate technological infrastructures: the Moscow platform, used exclusively by voters in the capital, and the federal platform, deployed in the other regions authorized by the Central Election Commission.

Moscow was at the center of controversy surrounding electronic voting in the 2021 elections. After ballots cast at polling stations had been counted, opposition candidates were leading in eight of the capital's 15 single-member districts.¹¹ Unlike in other regions, where electronic voting results were released promptly, Moscow's results were published more than 17 hours later, without a plausible explanation. Once more than 1.9 million electronic votes were incorporated into the count, the leads held by all eight opposition candidates were reversed, and all 15 Moscow districts were ultimately won by candidates backed by United Russia.¹²

Political Forces and the Limits of Electoral Competition

Ten political parties are contesting the 2026 State Duma elections. Although the ballot preserves the appearance of pluralism,

competition is taking place within a framework tightly controlled by the Kremlin. The election is dominated by the five parties already represented in the Duma, which qualify automatically without having to collect signatures: United Russia, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), A Just Russia, and New People.

United Russia, formally led by Dmitry Medvedev, serves as the legislative pillar of presidential power. Its electoral advantage rests on its direct association with Vladimir Putin, broad access to administrative resources, and the mobilization capacity of regional political structures. According to Presidential Administration sources cited by *Vedomosti*, the Kremlin has set regional authorities a "50/50" mobilization target: turnout of at least 50% and a 50% party-list vote for the ruling party. The strategic objective is to preserve a constitutional



Vladimir Putin addressing the United Russia congress, June 28, 2026.¹⁴

¹⁰ "Testing of Online Voting Has Begun in 32 Regions of the Russian Federation," *Interfax*, September 9, 2026, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/1114012>.

¹¹ Andrew Roth, "Pro-Putin Party Wins Majority in Russian Elections Despite Declining Support," *The Guardian*, September 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/20/pro-putin-party-wins-majority-in-russian-elections-despite-declining-support>.

¹² "Flipping Moscow: Opposition Candidates Lose in the Russian Capital as Electronic Voting Results Roll In at the Last Minute," *Meduza*, September 20, 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/09/20/flipping-moscow>.

¹³ Elena Mukhametshina, "Authorities Are Adjusting Target Performance Indicators for the State Duma Elections," *Vedomosti*, June 23, 2026, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2026/06/23/1207955-vlasti-korrektiruyut-tselevie-pokazateli-na-viborah-v-gosdumu>.

¹⁴ Grigory Sysoev, "XXIII Congress of the All-Russian Political Party 'United Russia'," photograph, June 28, 2026, Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:United_Russia_Congress,28_June_2026\(06\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:United_Russia_Congress,28_June_2026(06).jpg).

The other four parties represented in parliament make up the so-called “systemic opposition”: parties that unconditionally support the invasion of Ukraine and function primarily as mechanisms for absorbing and channeling discontent among different segments of society. The KPRF, led by Gennady Zyuganov since 1993, received 18.93% of the vote and won 57 seats in the 2021 elections.¹⁵ It remains the leading political force after the ruling party, with a strongly anti-Western profile and full alignment with the Kremlin’s war effort. Its criticism focuses primarily on economic and social policy, without challenging the core direction of Russia’s foreign and security policy.

Although it is still grappling with an identity crisis following the death of its populist founder, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, in 2022, the LDPR has retained a segment of the ultranationalist electorate under Leonid Slutsky’s leadership. At the same time, it faces strong competition from the ruling party’s increasingly militaristic rhetoric. A Just Russia, a center-left party led by Sergei Mironov, has likewise adopted a strongly pro-war stance, undermining its social democratic profile through its explicit association with mercenary formations and private military companies.¹⁶

Founded in 2020 and propelled into parliament in the 2021 elections, New People has recorded the most visible gains over the past year. By positioning itself against online censorship, high tax burdens, and excessive state control over citizens, the party has appealed to a more liberal urban electorate. Its limits, however, remain clear: on every major security-related decision, New People has

aligned its votes with the line set by the ruling party.

The most significant development of the 2026 electoral cycle, however, concerns not the parties allowed to compete, but Yabloko, which was excluded from the race by Russia’s Supreme Court on August 10.¹⁷ Yabloko was the only registered party to campaign under an explicitly anti-war slogan: “For Peace and Freedom! For a Life Without Fear!” Backed by prominent opposition figures in exile, including Yulia Navalnaya, Ilya Yashin, Vladimir Kara-Murza, and Lyubov Sobol, the party had been gaining support rapidly, reaching 9.38% by the end of July, according to data reviewed by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.¹⁸

Faced with this surge, the Supreme Court upheld a challenge brought by the ultranationalist Rodina party and invalidated Yabloko’s candidate list on technical grounds, including alleged copyright violations, the use of AI-generated images, and financial irregularities. In practice, the ruling removed the only explicitly anti-war option from the ballot. In response, Yabloko’s leadership adopted an alternative protest strategy, urging voters to boycott remote electronic voting and instead go to polling stations in person on September 20 to deliberately spoil their ballots.¹⁹

¹⁷ “Supreme Court Cancelled the Registration of ‘Yabloko’ for the State Duma Elections,” *RBC*, August 10, 2026, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/08/2026/6a789d9c9a7947364db9bc69>.

¹⁸ Daria Garmonenko, “‘Yabloko’ Faces a Political Choice,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 9, 2026, https://www.ng.ru/politics/2026-08-09/1_9555_apple.html.

¹⁹ “‘Yabloko’ Proposed ‘Plan B’ After Removal from State Duma Elections—Spoil the Ballot for Party Lists,” *Meduza*, September 9, 2026, <https://meduza.io/news/2026/09/10/yabloko-predlozhilo-plan-b-posle-snyatiya-s-vyborov-v-gosdumu-portit-byulle-ten-dlya-golosovaniya-po-partiynym-spiskam>.

¹⁵ “KPRF,” *Kommersant*, accessed September 11, 2026, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8119924>.

¹⁶ “Mironov Proposed Legalizing PMC Wagner for the Capture of Soledar,” *Kommersant*, January 17, 2023, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5773419>.



Yabloko submits election documents to the CEC, carrying boxes with their campaign slogan: "For Peace and Freedom! For a Life Without Fear!".²⁰

VCIOM and FOM, polling organizations closely linked to the Presidential Administration, confirm United Russia's dominant position but offer differing assessments of the systemic opposition. In early September, VCIOM put the ruling party at 37.4%, the KPRF at 13.1%, New People at 10.4%, the LDPR at 9.9%, and A Just Russia at 4.5%.²¹ FOM, by contrast, placed United Russia at 33%, the LDPR at 10%, the KPRF at 10%, New People at 5%, and A Just Russia at 4%. At the same time, 15% of FOM respondents said they did not intend to vote, while 18% remained undecided.²²

Although polling by the two state-aligned institutes does not necessarily reflect actual voting intentions, their longer-term trends point in the same direction: a gradual erosion of support for the ruling party over the past year. FOM data show United Russia falling from 43–44% in the fall of 2025, while VCIOM

²⁰ "'Yabloko' Submitted Documents to the CEC of Russia to Participate in the Elections," *Yabloko Press Service*, July 4, 2026, <https://www.yabloko.ru/cat-news/2026/07/04>.

²¹ "Rating of Political Parties," *Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM)*, accessed September 11, 2026, <https://wciom.ru/ratings/reiting-politicheskikh-partii/>.

²² "Dominants: Field of Opinion, Issue 36," *Public Opinion Foundation (FOM)*, September 11, 2026, <https://fom.ru/Dominanty/15379>.

recorded a drop to 27.3% in April 2026, the party's lowest level since December 2021. Its ratings subsequently began to recover in the run-up to the election, at a pace that contrasts with the steady decline observed in the preceding months.

Political and Socioeconomic Context

The War and Regime Consolidation

The war against Ukraine has become the principal reference point for the reorganization of Russia's domestic politics, functioning both as a test of loyalty and as an instrument of regime consolidation. The subordination of institutions and political competition to war-related priorities has accelerated the closure of the political system, while the 2026 election is taking place in a more restrictive electoral environment, marked by the screening of candidates, the marginalization of independents, and the narrowing of the political agenda.²³ Although the outcome of the parliamentary elections is largely predictable, the vote remains important for the Kremlin as a means of validating political control, mobilization capacity, and support for the regime.

Vladimir Putin has presented the elections as confirmation of the state's stability, sovereignty, and resilience in the face of external pressure.²⁴ The exclusion of Yabloko and the promotion of veterans²⁵ into elected

²³ Alexander Kynev, "Managed Competition, or On Elections in Russia's Regions", *The Moscow Times*, August 19, 2026, <https://ru.themoscowtimes.com/2026/08/19/soglasovannaya-konkurentsiya-ili-o-viborah-v-rossiiskih-regionah-a203843>.

²⁴ Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Second Stage of the 23rd Congress of the United Russia Party", *President of Russia*, August 22, 2026, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/80570>.

²⁵ Ksenia Naumchik and Yulia Maleva, "Pamfilova: 1,586 Participants in the 'Special Military Operation' Registered as Election Candidates", *Vedomosti*, August 26, 2026,

office reflect the progressive institutionalization of the war within the political system. The decision also reflects the growing influence of the security establishment (*siloviki*) over the political process, suggesting that the regime is unwilling to tolerate any deviation that could undermine the cohesion and stability of the system.



Propaganda poster for the 2026 State Duma elections, merging pro-family and militaristic themes.²⁶

From Economic Resilience to the Accumulation of Imbalances

The adaptability demonstrated by the Russian economy after 2022 has been sustained by a broad mobilization of state resources. Economic growth depends disproportionately on public spending and the military-industrial complex, while civilian sectors are bearing the effects of high interest rates, mounting fiscal pressure, and restricted access to capital and technology.²⁷ In the first half of 2026, military

<https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2026/08/26/1223798-pamfilova-na-vibori>.

²⁶ "Unified Voting Day 2026," National Guard of the Russian Federation (Rosgvardiya), accessed September 14, 2026, <https://rosguard.gov.ru/page/index/edinyj-den-golosovaniya-2026>.

²⁷ Cristina Melnic, *The Road to Collapse: Structural Vulnerabilities and the Inevitability of Crisis in the Russian Economy*, September 14, 2026, <https://newstrategycenter.ro/project/the-road-to-collapse-structural-vulnerabilities-and-the-inevitability-of-crisis-in-the-russian-economy/>

expenditure increased by 30% compared with the same period in 2025, reaching RUB 10.7 trillion, equivalent to 4.7% of estimated full-year GDP.²⁸ At the same time, fixed capital investment declined by 9.9%, while the Bank of Russia forecasts economic growth of only 0–1% for 2026²⁹. Official inflation is projected at 6–7%,³⁰ while inflation perceived by the population stands at around 15%.³¹ The budget deficit, the depletion of liquid reserves, and the fuel crisis are further constraining the Kremlin's room for manoeuvre, as it is forced to finance the war, the security apparatus, and social obligations simultaneously.

Social Transformations Generated by the War

The effects of the war are becoming increasingly visible in everyday life and in Russia's social structure. Mobilization, recruitment, emigration, and demographic decline have deepened the structural labor shortage, with the available labor reserve falling by approximately 40% compared with 2021,³² while the overall workforce deficit is estimated at around 1.5 million workers.³³

²⁸ Janis Kluge, "Russian Military Spending Soars, Upending the Kremlin's Budget Plans," *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*, September 4, 2026, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/russian-military-spending-soars-upending-the-kremlins-budget-plans>.

²⁹ Verstka Editorial Team, "Russia's Central Bank Cut Its 2026 Economic Growth Forecast to 0%," *Verstka*, July 27, 2026, <https://verstka.media/czentrobank-snizil-prognoz-rosta-economiki-rossii-v-2026-godu-do-0>.

³⁰ Polina Duganova, "The Central Bank Raised Its Annual Inflation Forecast to 6–7%," *RBC*, July 24, 2026, <https://www.rbc.ru/finances/24/07/2026/6a6346209a7947135f49ceff>.

³¹ Anastasia Bashkatova, "Inflation Perceived by the Population Exceeded 15%," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 20, 2026, https://www.ng.ru/economics/2026-05-20/4_9499_inflaton.html.

³² Milana Gadzhieva, "Russia's Workforce Reserve Nearly Halved over Five Years," *Izvestia*, April 27, 2026, <https://iz.ru/2085422/milana-gadzhieva/kadrovyy-rezerv-v-rossii-za-pyat-let-sokratilsya-pochti-vdvoe>.

³³ Yulia Ovchinnikova, "Russia's Shortage of Skilled Workers Reached 1.5 Million People," *RBC*, December

Payments and compensation granted to servicemembers, veterans, and their families have supported incomes in some regions, but have also created forms of socioeconomic dependence on war-related spending. At the same time, drone attacks on infrastructure and cities inside Russia, together with persistent insecurity in border regions, have weakened the perception of domestic invulnerability. In August, six out of ten respondents surveyed by Levada said that the war had affected them directly or indirectly,³⁴ reinforcing passive adaptation, social anxiety, and polarization between those benefiting from militarization and groups affected by the deterioration in living standards.

Discontent Without an Alternative: Impact on the Election

The accumulation of economic and social pressures does not automatically translate into organized political opposition. Levada data from August indicate that a majority continues to favor negotiations (59%), compared with a significantly smaller share supporting the continuation of the war (31%),³⁵ a trend that coincides with the erosion of some indicators of support for United Russia in surveys conducted by state polling institutions.³⁶ Yabloko's temporary rise highlighted the existence of an electorate receptive to a political offer explicitly associated with ending the war and gave greater visibility to the

anti-war position. The party's exclusion from the federal race, however, restricted the main legal channel through which this preference could be expressed and limited the possibility of an anti-war agenda gaining legitimacy and becoming normalized in the public political sphere.

At the same time, the low intensity and limited visibility of the campaign favor apathy: at the end of May, 66% of respondents in a Levada poll were not even aware that elections were due to take place in 2026.³⁷ In the absence of an autonomous political alternative, discontent is therefore more likely to manifest itself through abstention and fragmented protest voting, a tendency that Russia's exiled opposition is seeking to channel through calls for participation and votes against the ruling party.³⁸



Yabloko supporters queuing outside the Russian Supreme Court in Moscow, August 10, 2026.³⁹

11, 2024,
<https://www.rbc.ru/economics/11/12/2024/67596ef49a79474844647e79>.

³⁴ Levada Center, "The Conflict with Ukraine in August 2026: Attention, Support, Attitudes Toward Negotiations, Perceptions of the Duration of the 'Special Military Operation,' and Its Impact on Respondents' Lives", *Levada Center*, September 1, 2026, <https://www.levada.ru/2026/09/01/konflikt-s-ukrainoi-v-avguste-2026-goda/>.

³⁵ *Ibidem*

³⁶ Stepan Melchakov, "FOM and VTsIOM Recorded a Decline in United Russia's Rating to 33%", *Kommersant*, July 24, 2026, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8843878>.

³⁷ Levada Center, "2026 State Duma Elections: Awareness, Willingness to Vote, Reasons for Participation and Non-Participation, Party Ratings, and Motives for Supporting Parties", *Levada Center*, June 2, 2026, <https://www.levada.ru/2026/06/02/vybory-v-gosudarstvennyu-dumu-2026/>.

³⁸ Verstka Editorial Team, "'In the End, We're Not Hunting for Votes, We're Guarding the Taiga': Elections Are Coming Soon in Russia — Is There Any Point in Voting?", *Verstka*, September 3, 2026, <https://verstka.media/skoro-v-rossii-projdu-vybory-est-li-smysl-na-nih-golosovat>.

³⁹ Grigory Yavlinsky, "'It Is Not About the Fate of Yabloko—It Is About the Fate of Russia,'" Yabloko Party,

Post-Election Scenarios and Consequences

1. *Controlled Continuity*

This scenario assumes that United Russia secures another comfortable victory, supported by the structural advantages of the electoral system, the mobilization of administrative resources, and tight control over political competition. Even amid an erosion of electoral support, the mixed electoral system and the dominance of pro-government candidates in single-member constituencies could translate a more modest party-list result into a constitutional parliamentary majority. The extended voting format and the use of electronic voting would further strengthen control over the process. The Kremlin would present the outcome as confirmation of regime stability, political continuity, and continued support for the current course, including the continuation of the war.

2. *Erosion*

United Russia retains control of the State Duma but records weaker results in certain urban centers and regions, amid a more pronounced protest vote and stronger mobilization among dissatisfied voters. Although the Kremlin maintains control over the political system, compensating for a shortfall in support could require more intensive use of administrative resources, management of turnout, pressure on voters and candidates, as well as the exploitation of advantages provided by electronic voting and control over electoral commissions. A visible discrepancy between the actual dynamics of the vote and the official results would further

erode the informal legitimacy of the electoral process and expose the limits of the regime's control mechanisms, while also intensifying tensions between the technocratic component of the administration and the security structures.

3. *Loss of the Constitutional Majority*

Broader mobilization against United Russia, fuelled by war fatigue and socioeconomic pressures, could significantly reduce the party's share of the party-list vote. Losing the constitutional majority would signal a decline in the Kremlin's mobilization capacity, without, however, threatening its simple majority. The regime would become more dependent on support from the systemic opposition for decisions requiring qualified majorities, or on more aggressive electoral interventions to offset its losses.

The likelihood of this scenario nevertheless remains low, as the electoral architecture and administrative control over the process provide the Kremlin with sufficient instruments to correct, if necessary, results deemed politically unacceptable. Even under these circumstances, a transfer of power would remain unlikely. A weaker-than-expected result would, however, expose an increasingly pronounced gap between the level of support projected by the regime and the actual attitudes of part of society, narrowing the Kremlin's political room for maneuver in adopting unpopular measures in the post-election period.

4. *Post-Election Measures*

The election functions as a temporary political shield, and the closing of the polls may open a window for the adoption of unpopular measures that had been postponed for electoral reasons. After 20 September, the authorities could intensify military mobilization,

either through informal mechanisms and expanded recruitment or through more overt measures, in order to offset battlefield losses. At the same time, further tightening of control over the digital space is possible, including restrictions on VPNs and messaging platforms not controlled by the state.

On the economic front, the budgetary pressures generated by the war may be shifted onto the population through fiscal adjustments and tariff increases. These measures could be accompanied by an intensification of political repression and further restrictions on the space for domestic criticism. The overall direction of such measures is unlikely to depend fundamentally on the election result; what may vary is the pace, scale, and mode of implementation, depending on the level of electoral apathy, the size of the protest vote, and the Kremlin's assessment of societal resilience.

Conclusions

The 2026 State Duma elections are largely predictable and are unlikely to produce a change in political direction, alter the balance of power, or decisively influence the continuation of the war. The narrowing of political competition, the exclusion of inconvenient actors, and United Russia's structural advantages make any transfer of power highly unlikely and favor the continued dominance of the Kremlin over parliament.

The significance of the election is therefore more political than institutional. A weaker result for United Russia or a more pronounced protest vote would not immediately alter the regime's course, but it could signal a decline in mobilization capacity and increase the political cost of subsequent decisions concerning military mobilization, taxation, digital control, or other unpopular measures.

At the same time, Russia's political system is becoming increasingly rigid and more exposed to the accumulation of internal vulnerabilities. Socioeconomic pressures, war fatigue, and discontent originating even within ultranationalist circles are gradually eroding the regime's informal basis of legitimacy. By restricting legal channels for expressing dissatisfaction and shifting an increasing share of the costs of the war onto the population, the Kremlin may preserve institutional control, but at the price of growing dependence on administrative and coercive mechanisms. Stability maintained in this way becomes increasingly costly and more vulnerable to potential economic, social, or military shocks.

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