

Exploring the Role of Duma in the Power Structure of Contemporary Russia

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Abstract: The state of Russian politics has always attracted the attention of many scholars, especially the unique authoritarian system of Russia, which maintains a democratic framework, and the role of the Duma in this is a natural focus of scholarly research. The Duma, the legislative body of the Russian Empire since 1905, reappeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union and assumed the role of the post-Soviet transition, as well as the Putin era. This study researches the question that what the role of the Duma plays in the power structure of the contemporary Russian regime. In terms of the significance of the study, it is important to understand the dynamics of the institution's role in Russia's political system, as it is vital to contribute to academic research and to improve and assist political practice. Regarding the research methodology, a systematic review of the relevant academic literature was conducted using the "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses" (PRISMA) guideline and a review of the latest decade of academic literature was sought to refine this study. Finally, this study concludes that the role of the Duma is dual and functional, due to its role in promoting authoritarianism as well as in maintaining democratic power structures, and its constructive role in foreign policy.

Keywords: duma, Russia, power structure

1. Introduction

As a major global power, Russia's political condition has always piqued the interest of many academics, which make scholars have thoroughly examined Russia's political situation such as pro-Western diplomacy following the end of the Soviet Union, Putin's governance of Russia and anti-Western initiatives, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It is safe to assume that the political situation in Russia has been the topic of extensive scholarly research, and the role of the State Duma in the Russian power structure is also an interesting case study of the Russian political situation for research.

Although modern Russia's power structure appears complex, it is essentially driven by the dynamic interaction of the major political institutions. One such institution that has considerable influence on the country's political environment is the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian Federation's parliament, whose historical significance dates back to its establishment in 1906, but whose role has changed considerably since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The State Duma currently plays an important role in the Russian constitutional system. Specifically, the State Duma governs not only legislative matters but also the nation's political discourse and power

structures, and its functions and authority have evolved alongside Russia's altering political landscape over the last two decades, from a strongly opposed chamber to one that is generally supportive of the executive branch [1]. Under President Vladimir Putin, the Duma's function and influence within the larger political structure appear to have grown. Scholars and politicians have been closely following the changing role of the State Duma, particularly its interaction with the executive power and its impact on the larger political climate in Russia. Recent research has emphasised the Duma's growing importance in the post-Soviet era, underlining its impact on decision-making and legal processes and its strategic relationship with the executive branch [1]. Despite extensive research, the question of how the State Duma functions in the Russian power structure remains controversial.

Given this context, this study's key research issue is: What is the function of the State Duma in Russia's contemporary power structure, and how does it contribute significantly to it? For the Research significance, understanding the dynamics of this institution inside Russia's political machinery is critical for academic research as well as practice. On the one hand, it contributes to the scholarly literature on comparative politics by broadening our unique academic grasp of the Russian political context. In practice, however, researching this topic can provide policymakers, diplomats, and international organisations with practical information that will allow them to better predict and respond to Russian policy decisions and plans.

In order to answer this research question, this study conducted a systematic review of the literature in accordance with the PRISMA guideline, searching Google Scholar for publications published during the previous 13 years (from 2010 to the present) using the phrases "State Duma," "Russia," and "power structures." A total of 15 scholarly publications were included in the study for this work after being chosen in accordance with the requirement guideline.

To demonstrate the whole research, this study's structure is methodologically organised according to a logical succession of themes. It first analyses the historical context and evolution of the State Duma in the introduction part, followed by a study of the State Duma's modern roles and influence in the Russian power structure, based on insights acquired through a synthesis of scholarly literature. This is followed by a discussion section in which the study is extended and explained in more detail, explaining and elaborating on one of the specific perceptions of the role of Duma and how this study differs from previous studies, and providing specific policy implications. Finally, the conclusion section summarises the academic and practical implications of the study's findings.

2. The Roles of the Duma

2.1. Support for the Authoritarian Structure of Russia

The establishment of the Duma, the Russian legislature, was essentially an important tool for consolidating the rule of the authoritarian power structure. This is because for Russia, in contrast to other authoritarian countries that have a single-party system, the Russian State Duma has institutionalised a multi-party system [2]. Authoritarian governments, in particular, stay in power for considerably longer when they offer advantages to their loyalists in an institutionalised manner [2]. Furthermore, by standardising decision-making and appointment procedures, legislative institutions can help to eliminate the lack of openness and conspiracy in authoritarian regimes [2]. More importantly, the legislature can give the dictator credibility, ensure trustworthy commitments, expose public preferences, and aid in co-optation [3]. In this case, Duma has indeed given significant stability to the authoritarian power structure of the Russian regime. In addition, the State Duma also gives lawmakers in the power structure a higher degree of loyalty to the President. Specifically, the Kremlin wants to keep productive, loyal MPs in the Duma, who will be prioritised

on their parties' lists to assure re-election, politicians on party lists whom the Kremlin disapproves of are placed last or simply not included [3]. In this context, opposition parties such as the Communist Party of Russia have become part of Russia's "systematic" opposition, which is not attempting to truly challenge the presidency [2]. Thus, the Russian Duma has helped stabilise Russia's authoritarian power structure. Furthermore, the local Duma has played a solid role in consolidating local authoritarian power structures. For instance, in Kungur, the mayor has traditionally chosen the majority of the Duma's members, giving him or her a "controlling stake", and through the Duma, the mayor can pass laws through them, increasing legitimacy and reducing controversy over his rule [4]. This means that the Duma also plays a consolidating role in their power structures in local communities. However, some experts criticise that the Duma's role is limited and can hardly play any role in the Russian power structure, let alone consolidate it. Indeed, with the consolidation of authoritarianism in Russia around the turn of the century, the executive branch took over decision-making from the legislature and became the primary source of key legislation [2]. Nevertheless, this study argues that it is the fact that the Duma is to a large extent controlled by the executive, but this does not mean that the Duma does not play a role in the power structure of Russia, on the contrary, it is more evidence of the Duma's consolidating role. Specifically, some analysts regard, Russia under Vladimir Putin as a 'textbook case' of contemporary dictatorship since it is a stable electoral dictatorship with regular multi-party elections and a high level of legitimacy [3]. In this case, the State Duma became an instrument for Putin to stimulate loyalty, promote limited pluralism in the governmental decision-making sphere and formalise arrangements for translating individual needs into collective decisions [5]. Thus, State Duma is an important part of the power structure of the contemporary Putin regime and its role in consolidating it cannot be ignored. Therefore, it should be safe to say that Duma has played a role in consolidating the authoritarian system in the power structure of Russia.

2.2. Role of the Duma in Maintaining Constitutional Politics

Although the Duma played a clear role in consolidating authoritarian government in the Russian power structure, it still played a role in maintaining and protecting constitutionalism within the power structure to some extent. This is because Putin's power is still ostensibly derived from the constitutionally mandated electoral process and the State Duma, Russia's highest parliamentary entity [6]. More importantly, in Russian politics, where the democratic process is largely 'managed' and retains the impression of multi-party democracy, Putin formed his party, United Russia, in 2001 and its long-standing majority in the Duma, yet the party barely secured 51% of the vote in 2011 and the Kremlin did not massively interfere with the Duma's election results [7]. This behaviour may suggest that the Duma has at least served to maintain a democratic framework in Russia's power structure. Furthermore, the State Duma is critical in proposing and voting on constitutional modifications. For example, individual legislators in the Russian dictatorship remain actively involved in the consideration and amendment of government legislation, despite being placed in a hierarchical system of power [2]. In addition, Putin must consider increasing the powers of the Parliament in the 2020 Russian Constitution reform. Specifically, under the new Constitution, the State Duma approves the Prime Minister's candidature, and if the State Duma approves the nominations, the President is obligated to appoint them, but he does not have the right to reject the candidates approved by the Parliament for the official in question [8]. However, the role of the State Duma in maintaining the constitutional framework remains controversial and, as mentioned in the previous section, some scholars may criticise that the Duma is not sufficiently independent of the executive and the president. For example, in the 2020 reform of the Russian constitution, the Duma fully implemented Putin's will by completely abolishing the term limits for the Russian presidency, ensuring that Putin could run and win the election [8]. Nevertheless, this study claims that while the

Duma has played a large role in consolidating the authoritarian system in the power structure, its role in maintaining the ostensible constitutionalism of Russian politics should not be underestimated. The State Duma's high level of loyalty to the executive branch is conditional, not unconditional in its obedience to executive orders. Specifically, the changes in the Russian electoral system in 2016 (the shift to a mixed electoral system) have already led to significant changes in the nature of the deputies themselves, achieving greater internal diversity and inevitably increasing the effective political independence of the deputies as the majority component is restored [9]. This is because they must now allow themselves to be open to the views of the party and the state bureaucracy, their constituents, and the regional and local elites who support them. In this case, the Russian State Duma is not the puppet of the executive power that it is supposed to be but rather has more power. Therefore, the Duma can be said to play a role in maintaining constitutionalism within the power structure.

2.3. An Important Supporter of Russian Foreign Policy

Additionally, the State Duma influences how Russia engages in international affairs and formulates its foreign policy. It is required to ratify international agreements, and discussions and debates on these global issues may give the Duma influence over issues relating to Russia's relations with other nations. The proposals of the State Duma influenced Russia's new foreign policy in 2013 and, notably following the Crimean crisis, the Russian government's diplomatic strategy shifted. The State Duma's ideas influenced Russia's new foreign policy in 2013 and the transformation of the Russian government's foreign policy. The introduction of a national ideology based on Orthodoxy, for example, has been discussed at the initiative of the State Duma and is an important impact of the Russian government's new foreign policy of rejecting foreign ideologies such as communism and democracy and restoring the national ideology by promoting the politicisation of Orthodoxy [10]. In particular, the Russian National Unity Party's Elena Mizulina, a Duma deputy, proposed adding the phrase that Orthodoxy is the cornerstone of Russian culture and national identity to the constitution in November 2013; a week later, the party's Edinaia Rosia Yevgeny Fedorov, also a Duma deputy, proposed removing Chapter 13's Article 2, which forbids the introduction of state ideology [10]. Hence, this reflects the important role played by the Duma in shaping the turn in Russian foreign policy within the power structure. However, some experts argue that the State Duma has no independence in formulating the country's foreign policy, which is based solely on the needs of the Putin government. For instance, several organisations and organisations including State Duma and the Federation Council officially responsible for establishing Russian foreign policy lost autonomy and influence throughout the 2000s and 2010s [11]. Nevertheless, it can be argued that in the Russian power structure, it is a fact that the executive power of the autocracy influences and manipulates, but it is also important to be aware of the role of the Duma in influencing Russian foreign policy. In many cases, even though it essentially holds the majority of seats in the State Duma through the United Russia party, the Putin government still uses the Duma to shape foreign policy. For example, the Duma lawmakers promoted the Putin government's "military assistance without delay" to the former Yugoslav and now Serbian governments [12]. In addition, the presence of several right-wing Russian nationalist parties and groups in the State Duma, such as Rodina, led the Duma to develop a more radical nationalist diplomatic strategy, such as a united Greater Russia, which would encompass Belarus, Ukraine and northern Kazakhstan [10, 13]. It can be seen that the Duma was instrumental in the implementation of the Russian diplomatic strategy of invading Ukraine in 2022. Therefore, the Duma can be said to play a role in helping Russia's foreign policy within the Russian power structure.

3. Discussion

This study argued that the Duma is essentially an important tool for consolidating the rule of the authoritarian power structure in the 2.1 section, it has been examined that the role of the State Duma is to give more legitimacy and support to its authoritarian power structure through institutional parliamentary arrangements. And in this part, this study wants to explain and research further my first argument of the role of the Duma in Russia's power structure. For example, the Duma helped to bring about an institutional shift in power distribution among the Russian regime's elite. Specifically, through the dominance of United Russia, the State Duma facilitates the distribution of power and interests among different interest groups within the authoritarian power structure of Russia, a process and outcome that can be realised in the dynamic changes within the Duma [14]. This is because the State Duma does not require candidate representatives to represent their party, and once elected, candidates are free to join other political parties, change their political views, or even declare themselves to be "independent" non-partisan representatives [15]. In this case, the seats in the Duma were largely determined not only by the attitudes of United Russia but also by the outcome of the power struggles of the elite. Hence, the struggles of different interest groups can be managed within the Duma without causing further chaos to the regime. This makes the composition of the Duma very flexible and changeable and thus has facilitated the Putin government's control of the long-term political struggle within the elite, which has consolidated the power structure. Therefore, after further interpretation and extension of the study, the role of the Duma in the consolidation of the Russian dictatorship can be seen not only because it can provide the dictatorship with a "veneer of democracy and legitimacy" as mentioned in the 2.1 section, but also because it provides a controlled platform for the power struggle of the dictatorship's elites.

Compared to other studies, this study not only discussed how the Duma has contributed to the consolidation of Russia's authoritarian power structure but also dialectically examines how the Duma has maintained some of the characteristics of constitutionalism and democracy in Russia's power structure, as well as its role in promoting and shaping Russia's foreign policy within the Russian power structure. In this case, this study is more comprehensive, dialectical and comparative than previous studies. Although this study does not provide as much data as other studies, it is still a scholarly study of the role of Duma by examining the work of many scholars. In addition, this study is more specific and narrower in scope than other studies of Russian politics, and focuses on the role of the Duma, the Russian legislature, in the power structure of Russia.

Furthermore, another important point is that continued research on this topic can provide policy implications for policymakers. An understanding of the role of the Duma can have an impact on the way foreign governments, international organisations, NGOs and even internal Russian actors make decisions. The research shows that State Duma plays a consolidating role in the authoritarian power structure. And it is shown that State Duma can play an important role in retaining constitutional politics in the Russian power structure. And it can be illustrated that State Duma is an important and relatively independent supporter of Russian foreign policy. It can be generated a policy that the State Duma has some autonomy and legislative power, and its consolidation of authoritarian regimes may encourage other nations with comparable political systems to establish closer relationships with it. This could be done through parliamentary exchanges, official visits, or the creation of more extensive channels for communication and collaboration. Furthermore, international groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) striving to promote democracy may modify their strategy depending on the level of authority and independence the State Duma enjoys. Given that the executive dominates the Duma to a considerable extent, the purpose of the activities of these organisations may be to strengthen the Duma's independence and decentralisation. However, the study's findings may also indicate that the Duma is currently regarded to have some

more independence, a circumstance in which these organisations may focus on improving the Duma's function and encouraging its continued independence and democratisation. Moreover, given the State Duma's significance in the ratification of international treaties, this might encourage international organisations or other nations to approach negotiations with greater complexity, considering the Duma's interests and potential for resistance. These are some of the policy implications based on this study that may reflect the application of this study in practice.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the Duma has played a significant role in the power structure of Russia. During the research on the State Duma, this study has found many key findings that can be academically significant. First of all, this study has found that State Duma plays a critical role in consolidating the authoritarian power structure. This is a classic finding in many studies that the Duma is an instrument of authoritarian rule, so in this study, the present study draws on a wider range of literature and expands on past research to arrive at the unique finding that the Duma contributes to the authoritarian power structure. Then, this study found that State Duma can retain a constitutional political framework for the power structure of Russia. This finding has often been overlooked by studies, and few studies have really felt that the Duma has been instrumental in maintaining constitutionalism in Russia, but this study, through a dialectical approach, has come up with this key finding. At last, this study found that the State Duma acts as an important supporter and establisher of Russia's foreign policy. This last finding has also been mentioned in other studies but has been less analysed and generally considered to be influenced by the executive power, however, this key finding of the present study illustrates a certain degree of independence and importance of the Duma in the formulation of foreign policy from an international perspective. Taken together, several important findings of this study reflect the dual and functional nature of Duma's role. In future, there will be more research on the role of the Duma in the power structure of Russia. The study of Duma should be more objective and dialectical, specifically, to avoid the influence of political positions on the study and think in the direction of the two sides of the matter. It is expected that future research will expand on this study to examine the Duma's role in promoting authoritarianism in Russia's power structure, to examine the evolution of its ongoing role in upholding constitutionalism using a dialectical approach, and to expand the study of its functional roles, such as in diplomacy.

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