

Kremlin Eases Vote Rules for Opposition

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President Dmitry Medvedev on Thursday signed a law that allows opposition parties to field election candidates in regions and municipalities where they have no offices, the Kremlin web site [reported](#).

Independent election monitors and opposition parties said the law would only slightly boost the representation of the political opposition in the country's legislative bodies.

Previously, the law obliged parties to call conferences of its regional and local members to field candidates in the relevant areas.

The amended law grants a party's national leaders the right to name candidates for regional elections and regional leaders the right to name candidates for municipal polls.

The amendments were drafted by several Communist deputies in the State Duma, who said in the note attached to the bill and posted on the Duma's web site that most parties do not have offices in Russia's 83 regions.

According to the Justice Ministry's web [site](#), three of Russia's seven registered parties — United Russia, A Just Russia and the Liberal Democratic Party — have offices in all 83 regions, while the Communist Party has offices in 81 regions, the Patriots of Russia has offices in 79 regions, and Yabloko and Right Cause each have 75 regional offices.

United Russia, which as the party of power benefits from large administrative resources, often gets the majority of votes at elections, while authorities often deny registration under various pretexts to opposition candidates.

Grigory Melkonyants, deputy executive director of Golos, an independent elections watchdog, said the new law may lead to the election of opposition candidates but suggested that this would not have any impact on local policies. He said the candidates would lack voice and many of them would probably be "acceptable" for United Russia.

Nadezhda Korneyeva, first deputy chairwoman of Patriots of Russia, said turnout would increase if opposition candidates ran, slightly diluting the number of votes for United Russia.

Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin called the new law "advantageous" for opposition parties but unconstitutional.

"Municipal authorities don't make part of the state authorities and therefore the federal authorities can't dictate them how to govern themselves," he said.

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