

President Pledges to Liberalize Politics

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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President Dmitry Medvedev has promised leaders of the State Duma factions to introduce changes to liberalize election laws and the political system.

At a meeting at his Gorki residence on Monday, Medvedev told party leaders that his amendments to election laws "would not be limited" to a bill reducing the threshold for parties at national elections from 7 to 5 percent of the vote, Interfax reported.

The bill introducing the 5 percent threshold, which Medvedev submitted to the lower house of parliament in late June, would take effect after Duma elections in December.

As for the country's political system, Medvedev, among other things, reiterated a promise from last month to decentralize the power vertical erected by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin during his tenure as president.

"Our country is excessively centralized," Medvedev said.

Medvedev asked the party leaders to draft legislation that would give more independence to local authorities in how they spend federal money.

"It is clear that a significant portion of economic and social issues has to be dealt with on the ground, not in Moscow, not in the Kremlin, not in the parliament and not even in the government," he said.

Party leaders had intended to propose their own amendments to election laws to Medvedev, Vedomosti [reported](#) Tuesday, and it was unclear whether they had succeeded.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov had wanted to ask Medvedev for his opinion about a Communist-sponsored bill that would oblige party leaders to take part in public debates ahead of elections, Vedomosti said.

Zyuganov also had sought to convince Medvedev to give a signal to governors not to head United Russia's party list in the December elections. The practice is commonly done by United Russia to garner votes, even though the governors have no intention of serving in the Duma.

A Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov had planned to propose returning popular gubernatorial elections with a catch — candidates would be selected by the president and party leaders and then put to the public for a vote. Currently, governors are nominated by the president and confirmed by regional legislatures.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, was going to propose holding presidential and parliamentary elections on the same day and introducing the proportional system.

A senior official within the Duma apparatus has been detained on suspicion of robbing a man named Medvedev who gave him a lift.

Sergei Tikhonkov, deputy head of the apparatus behind the Duma's Budget and Taxes Committee, was detained by witnesses Monday night after he and an unidentified passenger of a Volkswagen Passat beat up the driver, seized his cell phone and tried to flee the scene on Bolshaya Gruzinskaya Ulitsa in downtown Moscow, Itar-Tass reported, citing police.

Moskovsky Komsomolets identified the driver by his last name, Medvedev, and said he was unemployed. Medvedev was hospitalized with a concussion and bruises, while the second passenger fled.

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