



**Parliamentary elections
18 September 2016
Russian Federation**

**ANALYTICAL REPORT ON THE 2016 ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN THE
MEDIA: "TO BE IN THE SPOTLIGHT BUT NOT TOO MUCH"**

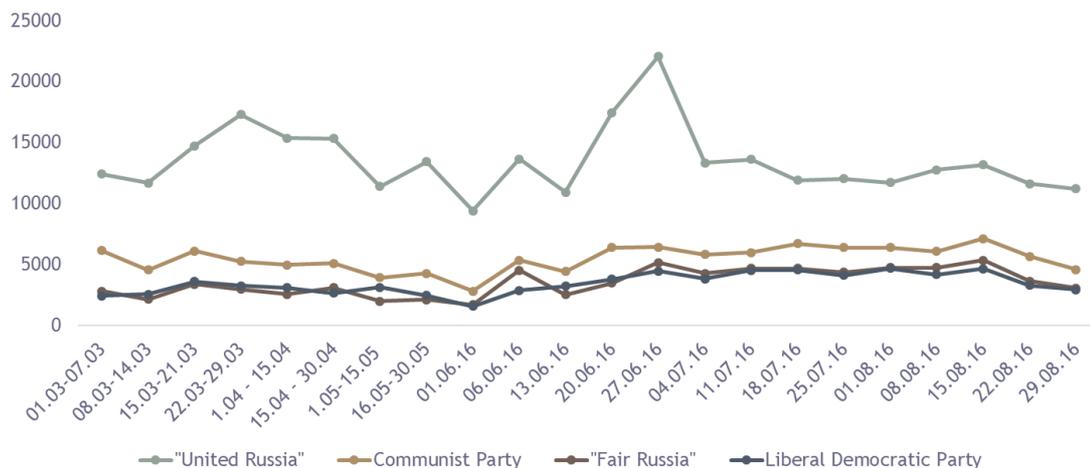
On September 18, 2016, the Russian Federation holds the elections of deputies to the State Duma of the VII convocation. At the beginning of September, during an interview for the NTV channel, the head of the Central Election Commission Ella Pamfilova stressed that “[Compared with previous elections] now, the political parties have greater media capabilities and can tell citizens about their programs on television and the radio.”¹ In theory, the recent legislation liberalization that Pamfilova was referring to should lead to an increase in media “weight” of non-parliamentary parties (parties not represented in the current Parliament) or small parties. The question is to what degree the change in the law and the political situation actually affected the coverage of parties in the media. In other words, what has actually changed?

The following data is based on the results of monitoring the “Medialogia” database in the period starting March 13, 2016. The database includes 22,598 media outlets, including 237 TV stations; 39 radio stations; 2,471 newspapers and journals; 412 news agencies; and numerous Internet publications and blogs. In total, over 700,000 media messages (“references”) were analyzed from media outlets of different levels and types.

“United Russia”: from 2011 to 2016

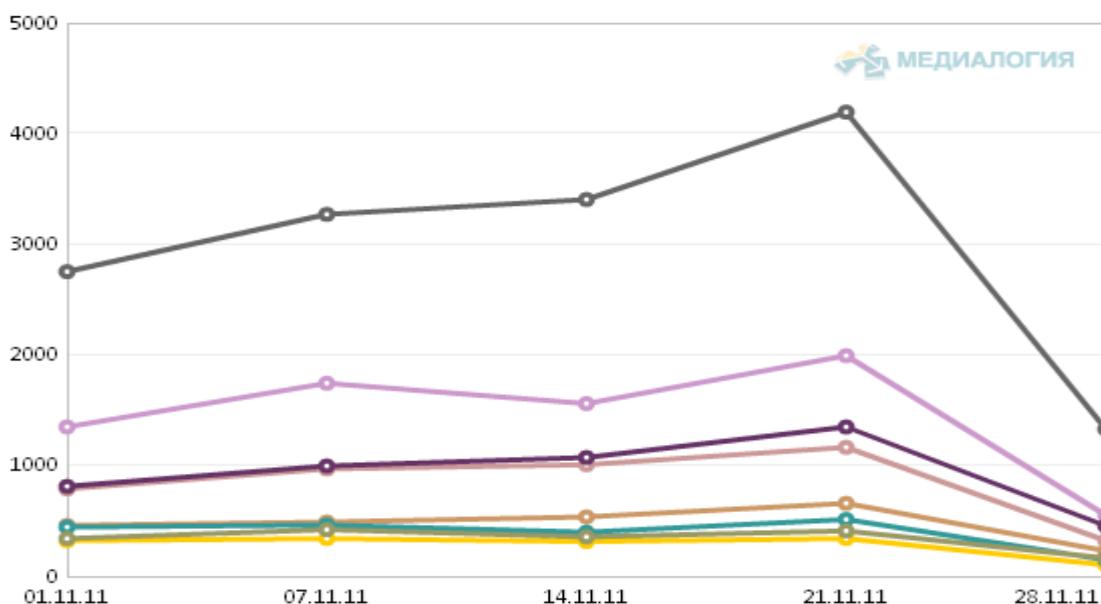
How is the media coverage of the 2016 parliamentary campaign different from the previous one in 2011? The bulk of the coverage took place during the summer holidays, which significantly affected the intensity of media support—it was the most sluggish and inactive campaign of the decade.

2016 dynamics of references



The peak of media interest in the ruling party occurred on June 27, when Vladimir Putin visited the congress of “United Russia” in the Moscow Manege. A large number of negative references to the party came out on the same day. Regardless of these negative assessments, “United Russia” continues to dominate over other political parties in federal and regional media. A similar pattern was reported in 2011.

2011 dynamics of references



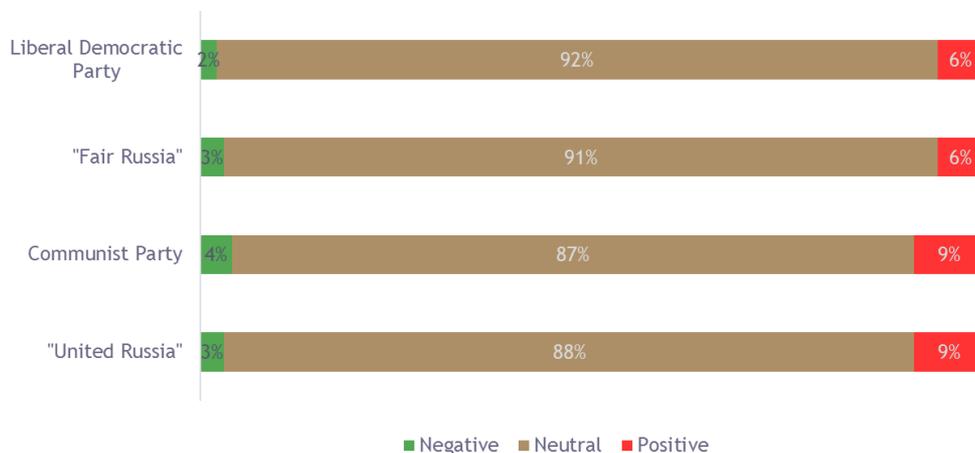
■	"United Russia"
■	The Communist Party of the Russian Federation
■	"Fair Russia"
■	The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
■	Russian United Democratic Party "Yabloko"
■	"Just Cause"

	All-Russian People's Front
	"Patriots of Russia"

The ruling party had strong media presence in the spring (especially in March). The “primaries” in May and the Congress in June caused a noticeable increase in the number of media references to the party. After this, however, media interest in the party fell almost by half. “United Russia” campaigned on the “to be in the spotlight but not too much” principle: the majority of references to the party occurred in news programs featuring party members and candidates (often outside the context of the elections). The most notable media references relate either to the organizational aspects of the upcoming elections (as in “The Central Election Commission had a draw to allocate candidates’ positions on the ballot and approved the text of the election ballot for the election to the State Duma,” and “They made it into the Top Ten [of the party list]”), to the operating activities of “United Russia” and the President (“Several remarkable dismissals: Vladimir Putin replaced the Minister of Science and Education”), or were veiled campaign messages disguised as analytical articles and expert opinions (“The State Duma will take a social turn”ⁱⁱ).

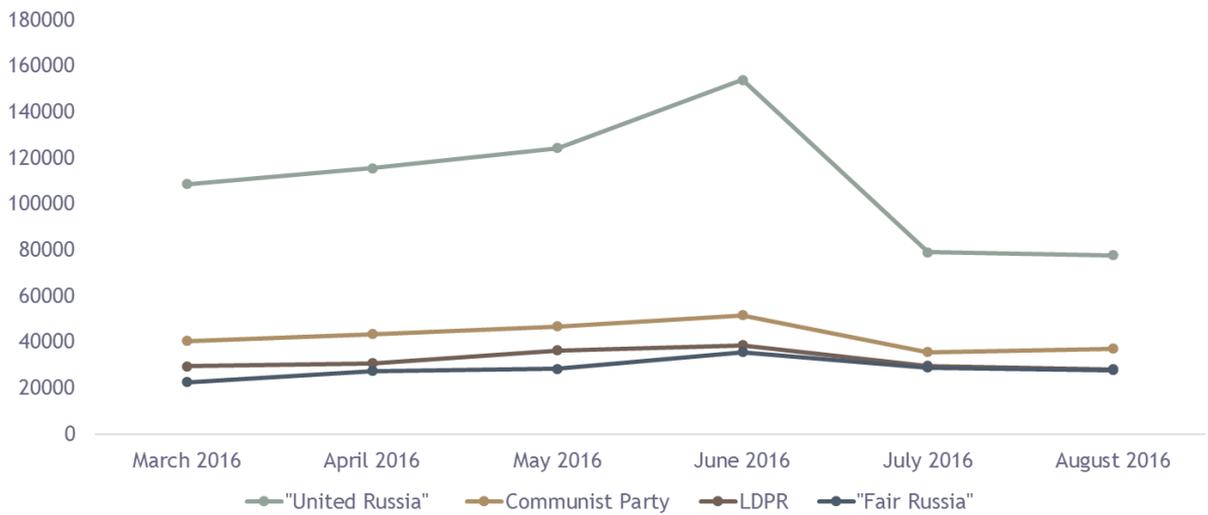
In 2011, “United Russia” was not only the key player in the media but also its main target: more than 20% of all references to the party in power were negative (only 14% were positive). In 2016, “United Russia” did not attract as much interest and remained largely in the “neutral zone.” Tellingly, the majority of negative references to the party were not connected to media campaigns against it (unlike five years ago, when “Against the party of crooks and thieves” was a popular campaign slogan), but rather were linked to criticism of the party by President Putin.

2016 evaluation of references



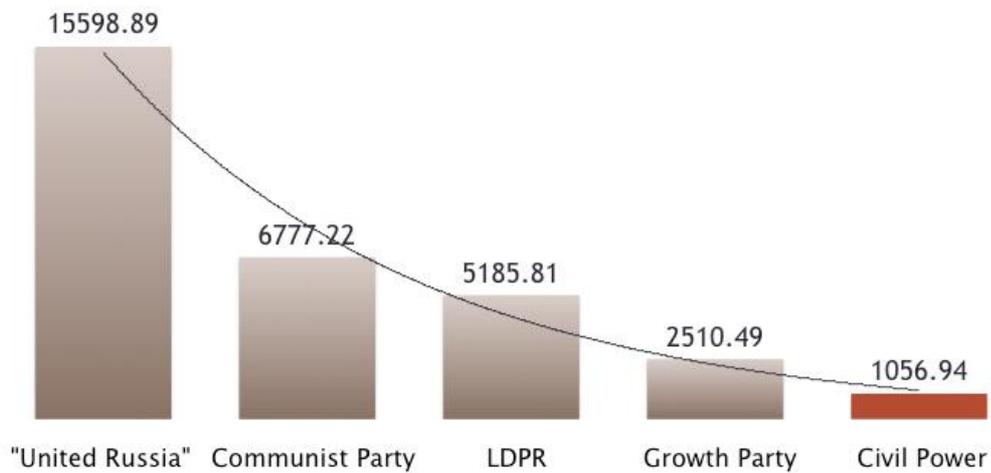
Yet despite the drop in the “information favor index” (a.k.a. Media index— a measure of how positively something is reported on) after the June Congress, the media depicted the activities of the party in power more positively than 5 years ago. The Media index gap between “United Russia” and other parties is large even in regard to the parties currently in the Parliament: at the beginning of the election campaign, the media favored “United Russia” three times more than the Communist Party, and four times more than “Fair Russia” and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).

Media index: 2016 favored by the media



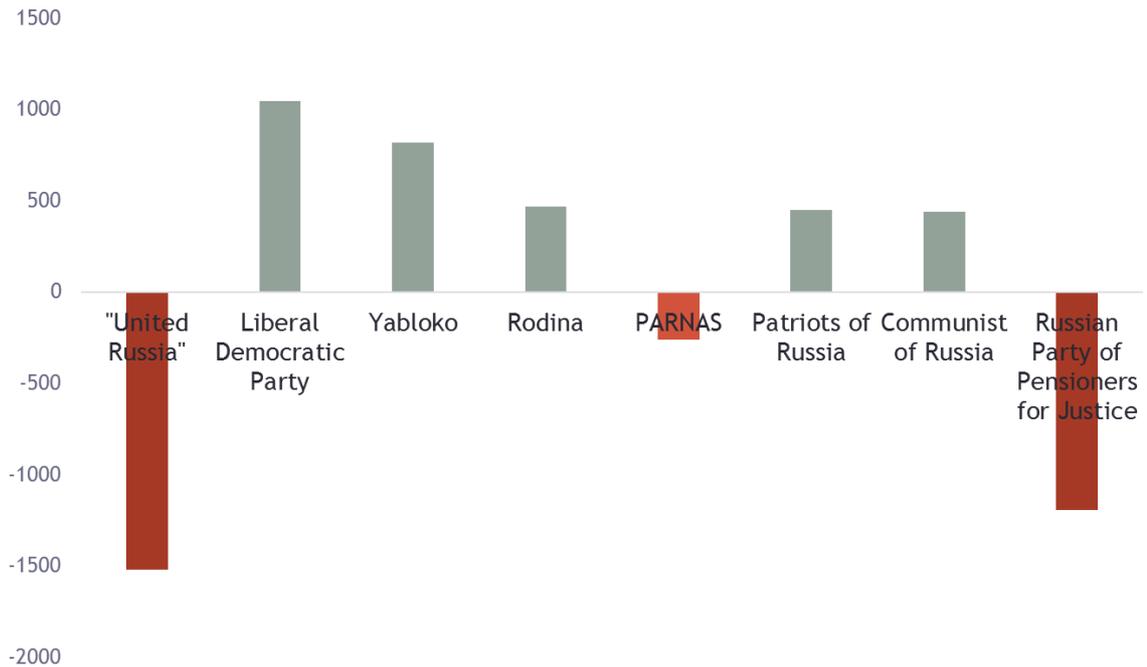
The Media index gap between “United Russia” and non-parliamentary parties is enormous: at the beginning of the election campaign (on June 20, 2016), the media favored the party in power 50 times more than PARNAS and 20 times more than “Yabloko”. Just like earlier, there is a disparity in the Media index for the most quoted media outlets. Major news agencies favor “United Russia” on average twice as much as other news sources.

Favorable reporting: TASS



The exception here is the “Vedomosti” newspaper, which expressed the same degree of negative criticism of both parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties, which is probably due to the publication’s editorial policy (active coverage of scandals involving the candidates).

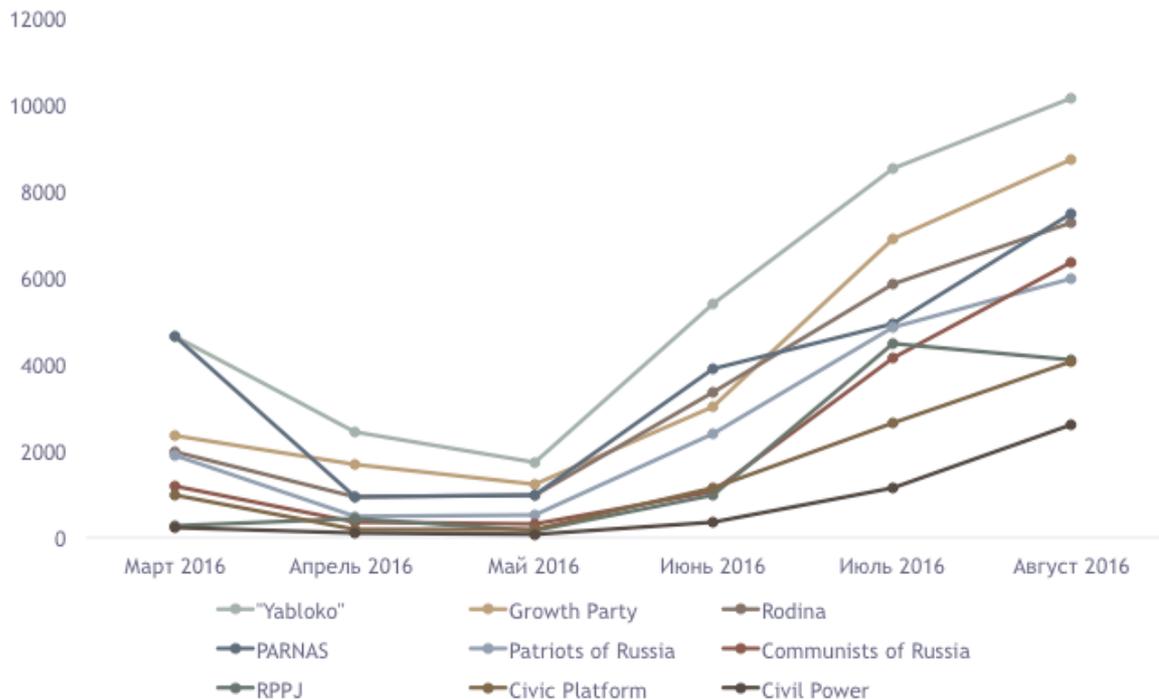
Favorable reporting: "Vedomosti"



Parties not currently in the Parliament

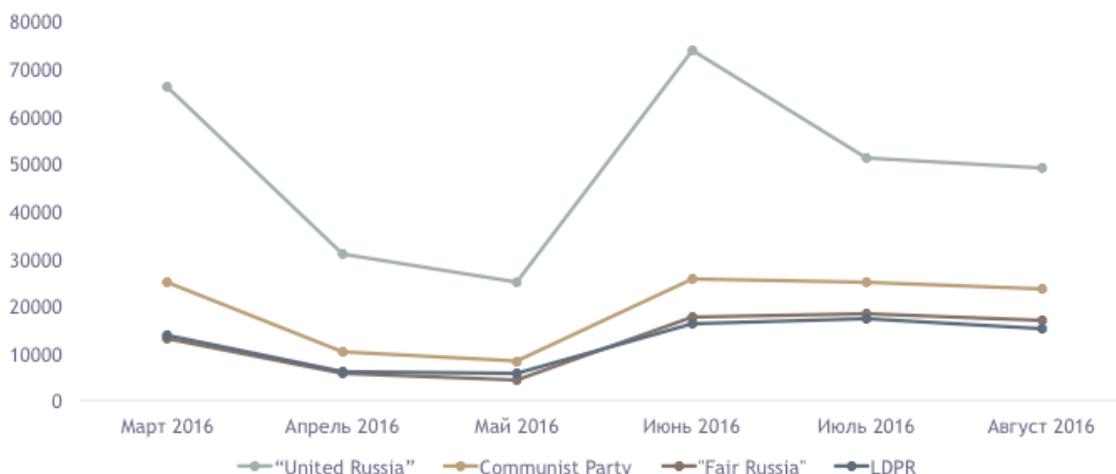
In contrast to the ruling party, which chose the strategy of remaining neutral and “fading to grey”, the non-parliamentary parties tried to strengthen their media presence: the number of references increases as we approach the elections for almost all players. In the case of small parties, there is a strong imbalance of representation in the media almost throughout the entire campaign: such parties are referenced 2-3 times less often than parties holding seats in the Parliament.

Dynamics of the number of references (non-parliamentary parties)

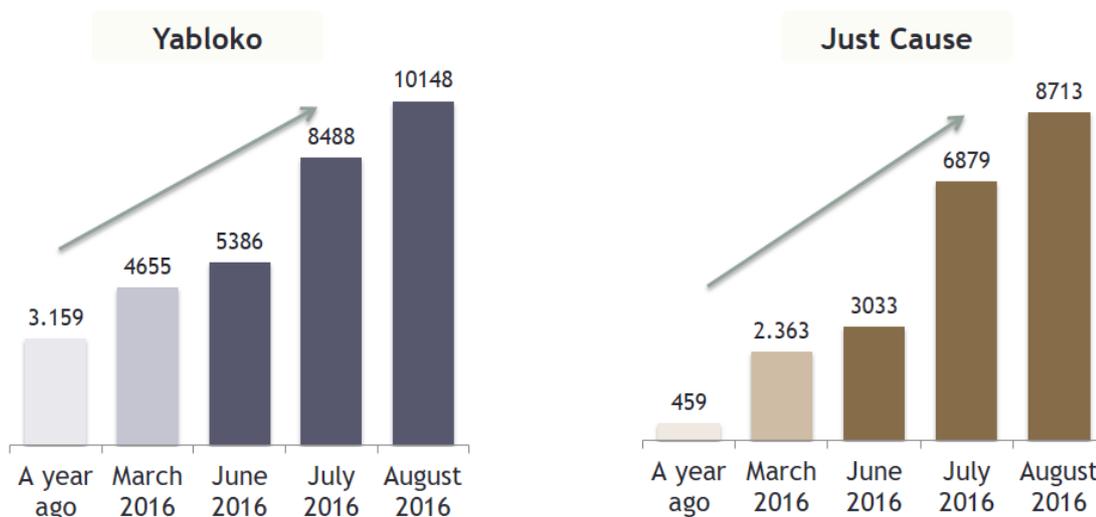


While at first glance, the chart above seems impressive –there is growth of media activity, there is competition, there are ups and downs – one ought to pay attention to the scale. Even the most media-active non-parliamentary party (“Yabloko”) does not approach the coverage level of the most passive parliamentary party (“Liberal Democratic Party”).

Dynamics of the number of references (parliamentary parties)

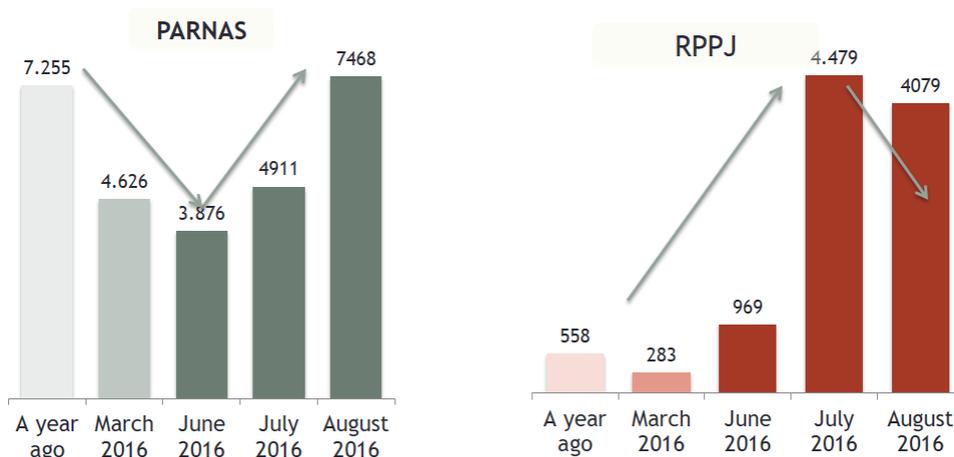


A group of non-parliamentary parties did manage to secure relative visibility in the media through consistent campaign strategies, namely “Yabloko”, “Party of Growth” and “Rodina.”

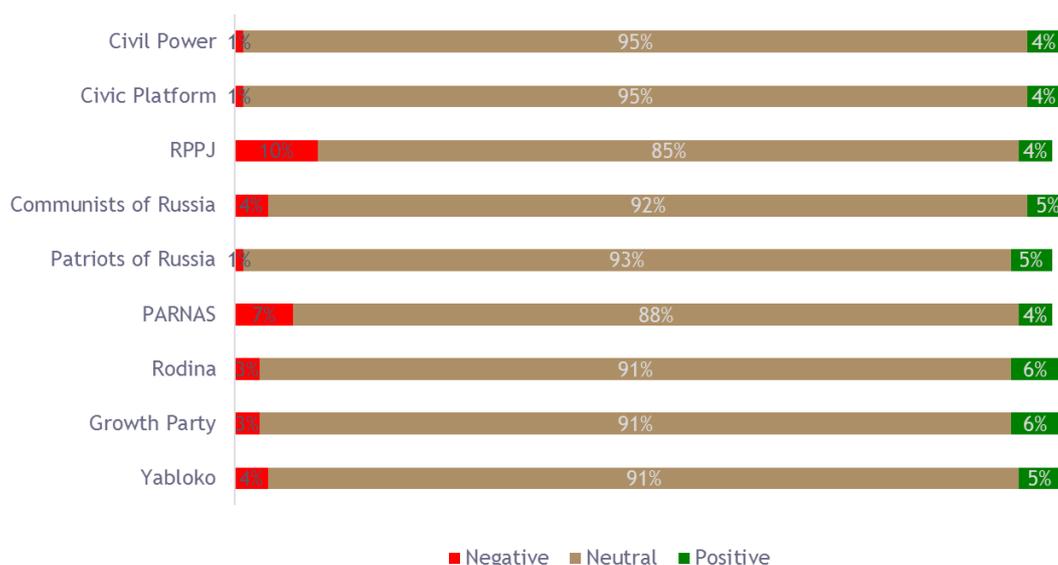


Looking at the simplest figure – the number of references in the media – we see that these parties consistently increase their presence in the media as the elections draw closer. Parties such as PARNAS and the Party of Pensioners are forced to operate differently. They adopt the strategy of “ejection”. Their chief reason for media coverage is involvement in conflicts, which are widely covered by media outlets.

“Uneven” campaigns



Thus, their presence in the media becomes “discontinuous” and such parties receive the highest percentage of negative references: “Russian Party of Pensioners for Justice,” for example, (RPPJ) received 10% of all negative references in the media. The party with the second-highest percentage of negative references is PARNAS, with 7%. The rest of the election campaign has a neutral tone – media references to all other non-parliamentary parties were neutral in 90% of the cases, while the percentage of negative references does not exceed 4%.



The policy of regionalization

The participation of Russian regions in the election campaign is uneven, due to the weakness of the media in some regions and the weakness of regional election campaigns. Despite this, due to the changes in the legislation, all parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties were forced to give their attention to the regions.

"United Russia" is the most represented party in the regional media (which is not surprising given the specificity of campaigns in single-member districts): two-thirds of “United Russia” references happened in the regional media.

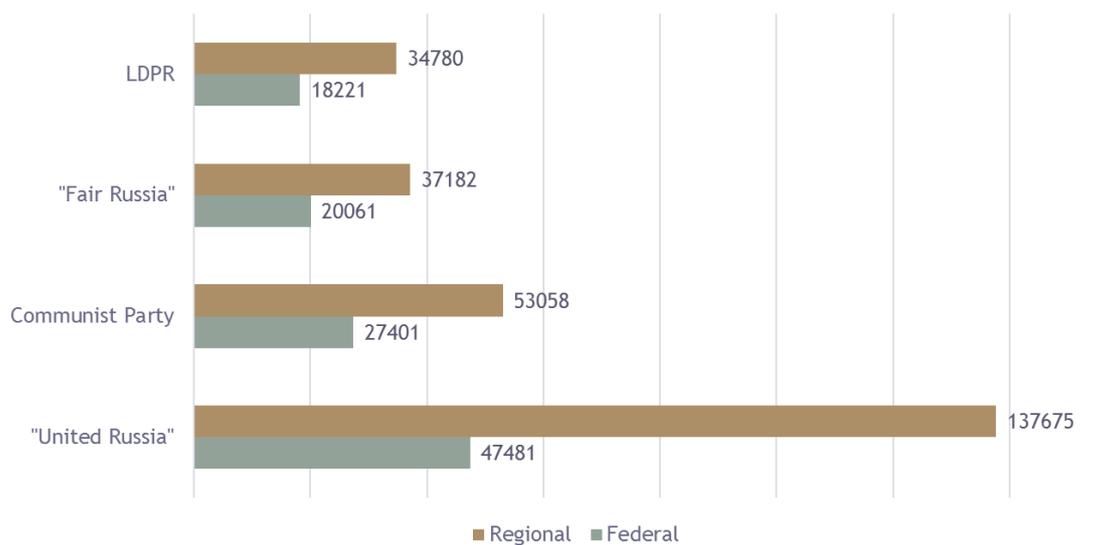
The presence of the party in power in the regional media



Yellow on the map highlights areas in which the presence of the “United Russia” party was above the national average. Blue indicates areas where this coverage was below average.

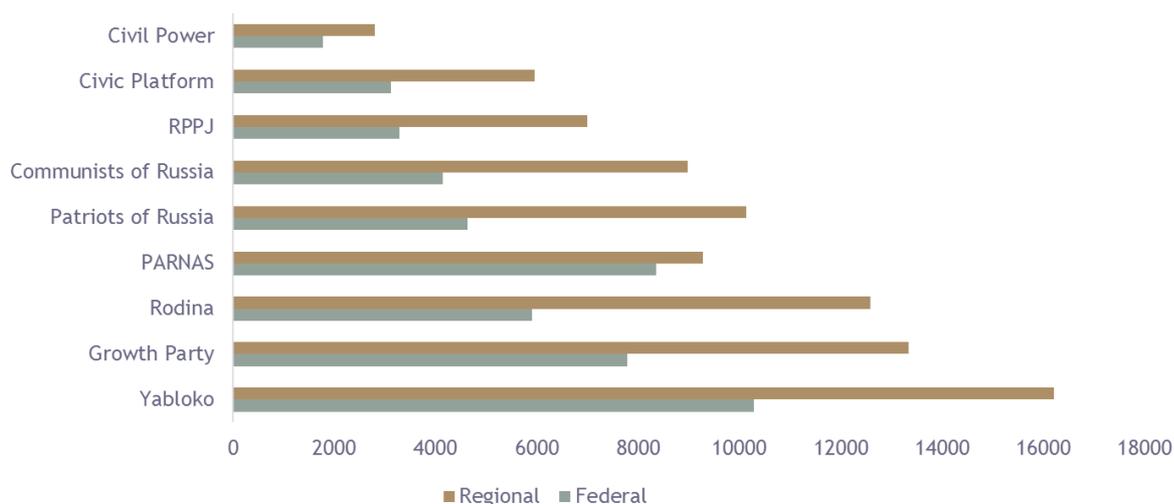
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The ratio of regional and federal mass media (parliamentary parties)



A similar picture about their regional reach is available for the non-parliamentary parties.

The ratio of regional and federal mass media (non-parliamentary parties)



PARNAS is the only party that is represented almost equally in regional and national media. In addition, a curious feature of the 2016 campaign, absent in 2011, is the focus on online media. If we exclude from the sample all the “information noise” from Internet agencies, we find that one out of five references to the PARNAS party appeared in blogs. Parliamentary parties continue to “bet” on the traditional media: television and the press.

Electoral apathy

In contrast to the intense and lively campaign of 2011, the apathetic campaign of 2016 left no significant information trace. Although legislative changes were supposed to stimulate the media activities of non-parliamentary and small parties, this did not happen – “United Russia” totally dominated over other parties in both federal and regional media. The largest contributors to this outcome were the summer holidays and political passivity of many election “stakeholders.”

The chief new trends of the 2016 election year were thus: regionalization, the de-facto refusal of the ruling party to campaign on the federal level, and the “crowding out” of the non-parliamentary opposition to blogs and social networks.

i <http://pronedra.ru/globalpolitics/2016/09/11/pamfilova-partii-vybory/>

ii “The main difference between the new composition of the State Duma and the current will be a significant reduction in the number of representatives from the business. But the main trend of the seventh convocation is the personal responsibility of politicians. ”

Further: <http://izvestia.ru/news/623158#ixzz4Jzc98sw8>