

Presidential distinctions

By MICHAEL DOSS
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

With incumbent President Vladimir Putin almost assured of a second term, Sunday's election in Russia has been called everything from a one-horse race to the start of the campaign to succeed him in 2008.

It's also been called a farce and a Krem-

lin "special operation" – anything but a vote whose outcome is in doubt.

After winning nearly complete control over Parliament in December and installing a loyal new Cabinet days before the election, the former KGB officer is poised

to seal another four years at Russia's helm.

In a televised address Thursday, Putin told Russians that "each of our votes has huge importance" – but few believe that.

"The result was decided long ago," Siberian pensioner Ilya Ilyin said.

Here is a brief look at how the Russian election system works in comparison to three democracies:

	United States	Russia	England	France
Current leader	 THOMAS A. FERRARA, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS	 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS	 PAUL MCERLANE, REUTERS	 LAURENT REBOURS, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
	George W. Bush was elected in 2000 with only one electoral vote more than needed, and with less than the majority of the popular vote. Outcome was decided in the Supreme Court. Bush is up for re-election this year.	Vladimir Putin won the presidency in 2000, and his United Russia party won a landslide victory in the 2003 parliamentary elections. He is expected to win this weekend's presidential election.	Tony Blair was chosen as prime minister in 1997 as leader of the Labor Party after 18 successive years of Conservative party rule. He has served as party leader since 1994.	Jacques Chirac was first elected to the presidency in 1995 and was reelected in 2002 with 82% of the vote in the second ballot. He ran unsuccessfully for the office in 1981 and 1988.
How the system works	Most major parties choose presidential nominees via conventions. Candidates compete state by state for electoral votes in the general election, with 48 states (Maine and Nebraska excluded) giving the top vote-getter all the electoral votes. The candidate receiving the majority of electoral votes (270) is elected president.	Candidates for president gather 2 million signatures to be placed on the ballot. In the general election, one candidate must receive 50% of the vote or a runoff is held. For the election to be valid, there must be at least a 50% turnout of registered voters and the top candidate must receive more votes than the "none of the above" option on the ballot.	The prime minister is not elected directly; instead, the reigning monarch chooses the leader of the majority party to serve as prime minister from the recently elected Parliament. A new Parliament is elected roughly every five years and the election process begins. Those Parliament members eligible to vote then choose their candidate for their constituency, with a majority determining the winner.	Candidates need to be sponsored by at least 500 elected representatives to appear on the ballot. The president is chosen by direct vote on a two-ballot system similar to the Russian system, where if no candidate gets 50% of the vote on the first ballot, a run-off election is held. Unlike other European countries, the elected president chooses a prime minister and the two typically split leadership duties.
Number of parties	Two major parties (Democratic and Republican), five smaller major parties (Constitution, Green, Libertarian, Natural Law, Reform)	Ten major parties (Agrarian, Communist, Liberal Democratic, Motherland National-Patriotic Union, New Course-Automotive Russia, Party of Life, People's Party, Unified Russia, Union of Rightist Forces, Yabloko), 20 minor parties.	Three major parties (Labor, Conservative and Unionist), six minor parties currently with seats in Parliament (Ulster Unionist, Democratic Unionist, Scottish National, Plaid Cymru, Sinn Fein, Social Democratic & Labor, and The Liberal Democrats).	Three major parties (Front National, Union for a Popular Movement and French Socialist), 13 minor parties.
Number of candidates	Typically two major candidates, with the occasional strong third party or independent candidate running also. Four to six minor-party candidates also make the ballot in some states.	This year's election has seven candidates; 2000's had 12 on the ballot. The number varies as all major parties can field a candidate if they receive the required signatures.	None; the prime minister is the leader of the majority parliamentary party.	2002's election had 16 candidates in the first round; 1995's election had nine in the first round.
Length of process	Candidates begin campaigning early the year before; first national debates take place more than a year before the election, first primaries and caucuses take place in January of election year. Total process: 12-18 months.	The Russian Federation Council officially announces the election in mid-December, with nominations beginning the next day. Nomination papers are required to be filed by late January for the March election. Total process: 4 months.	Political parties officially begin campaigning when Parliament is dissolved and a proclamation summoning the new Parliament is issued. The general election is held about three weeks later.	A list of candidates was published in late February 2002 for the April 2002 election. The campaign officially ends at midnight on the Friday before the first ballot, then restarts if a second ballot is needed. Total process: 7-10 weeks.

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