

Governor Bill Passes Duma, But Barely

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The  **Moscow Times**

The Russian parliament has passed a Kremlin bill restoring gubernatorial elections, but the vote was unusually close, with opponents saying the new law will still allow the president to screen out undesirable candidates.

The 450-seat State Duma approved the bill Wednesday with 237 votes, just above the simple majority required.

President Dmitry Medvedev submitted the bill in response to massive protests against his mentor Vladimir Putin in the run-up to the March election that gave Putin a third presidential term.

Putin had scrapped direct elections of provincial governors during his presidency as part of a systematic rollback of democratic freedoms.

The new bill envisions presidential consultations with the candidates or the parties nominating them. Opposition parties complain that the rules create barriers making it difficult for opposition candidates to run and for dissatisfied voters to remove unpopular candidates.

The bill now goes to the Federation Council and, if passed, would then go to the president for his signature.

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