Russian political scientist Alexandr Domrin studied the 2003 Russian elections and analyzed why the American media described them as “free, but not fair.” He argued that their characterization of the outcome was incorrect and he hypothesized that Western audiences thought the elections were unfair because Russia’s pro-Western candidates did not do well in the election. He said that during the 1995 and 1999 elections, the Western media declared the voting to be very “free” and “democratic;” Domrin argued that this was because U.S.-friendly candidates did well in these elections.

In 2001, he said that two parties, Yabloko and Union of Rightist Forces, benefited greatly from $17.4 million of American economic support. These were the only two parties that were able to cross the 5% threshold of popular support for a party to claim a seat in the Russian parliament. Domrin said that the United States was frustrated by the parties’ failure to have more influence in the government in light of strong economic support from Washington.

The only party that has the right cry unfairness is the Russian Communist party, said Domrin. Of the four primary television stations in the country, only one attempted to be objective in their reporting on the views of Communist candidates. Of the three who did not even feign objectivity, all but one of the forty-eight references to the party were negative.

Domrin spoke strongly against the Russian Democracy Act in U.S. law, which he described as absurd. He criticized the decision to devote funds and time to support a candidate determined by Washington to be a “true” Democrat. Domrin likened this to the Russian government deciding that filmmaker Michael Moore was a “true” Democrat and funding his (and his party’s) political campaign, training him and his staff, hiring campaigners, and inviting him to Russia to give talks…and paying him $70,000 to do it.

Domrin admitted that foreign influence and the influx of foreign capital has a strong effect on Russian elections, but that it is clear that many foreign governments do not fully understand the dynamics of the Russian voting public and are surprised when their well-trained and well-financed candidates do poorly. He said that when these foreign governments are disappointed with the outcome of the election, they become critical of the entire Russian democracy. Domrin joked that Colin Powell had accused Russia of not maintaining a balance of power between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches; Domrin explained that unlike the American constitution, the Russian constitution does not call for such a balance of power.

Rather, the system situates power in a super-president who has a lot of constitutional power. Domrin explained that this system was adopted during the reign of Boris Yeltsin, who was strongly supported by the United States. Now that the nation is led by a man with weaker ties to Washington, the U.S. government is critical of the system, he said.

Domrin said that western governments need to rationally and fairly analyze the Russian system before condemning it; he said that the Russian economy is stronger under Vladimir Putin that it was under Yeltsin. He said that the world needs to understand and respect the views of the Russian people, who said may disagree with U.S. views, but are genuinely supportive of democracy in their homeland.