

Non-Party Political Influences in Russian Elections

Henry E. Hale discusses the Russian political situation as an example of a market model, that is one of supply and demand. The voting public demands that political candidates, usually via political parties, must be seen as able to supply desired change and governance more effectively than other candidates/parties to be elected to office. A political party is a group of publicly recognized people having a common goal to elect a candidate for control of the government.¹ However, not all players in politics are parties. Although strictly no longer a Communist country, Russia has not yet achieved democracy but does conduct elections wherein numerous parties present candidates. Unfortunately, these parties are traditionally weak. This is because the Russian people distrust the idea of parties and those already holding power desire to keep party development weak. Therefore, non-traditional or non-parties have significant influence in the country. To test the thesis that non-traditional parties or substitutes might skew popular party politics in Russia, Hale discusses the strength of regional governorships and powerful business and industrial groups that act as parties without the name in election to the national Duma.² The Russian Duma (senate) consists of 225 seats allocated according to party representation and another 225 seats that are decided by district elections.³

Regional leaders or governors in Russia survived the collapse of traditional Communism, gained a great deal of power in Russia's 89 federal districts, and are elected directly by the voters.⁴ While not nationally organized nor a political party per se, they exert significant power

¹H. E. Hale, "Why Not Parties? Electoral Markets, Party Substitutes, and Stalled Democratization in Russia." *Comparative Politics*, 37, no. 2 (2005): 149.

² Ibid, 152.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 153.

in their own regions. They can pressure the political process because they are recognized locally and are able to send representatives to polling places where they can impact the election process directly without the benefit of the 'party' title.⁵ Herein, the regional powers have an impact on 'party politics' without the name. It was shown that successful national candidates rely heavily on the backing of regional governors.

Likewise, the monopolies for business and production that grew out of the old Soviet Union can influence elections by funding candidates much as do American lobbyists. On the other hand, like the governors, these powerful and wealthy groups also have considerable independent political clout over elections. They control the economy and the means of production and distribution. They are primarily economic and not governing forces, but their importance in backing of various political candidates is like that of the governors. Thus, although there is some overlap of candidates also being business/production czars, for the most part, the economic sector does not seek public office but nevertheless influences who runs and who wins.⁶ But many candidates could not effectively reach a national audience without the money and backing of the powerful business monopolies.

Hales determines that although Russian parties may be weak, with the backing of strong governors and business/production organizations they can present individuals that are seen by the voting public as candidates for public office. The non-party independent factions are a sometimes invisible but often significant factor in who achieves political success. Therefore, without a 'party' title, the reality in Russian politics is that there are numerous different political factions working as 'non-parties' in a reasonably democratic process.

⁵ Ibid, 154.

⁶ Ibid. 156.

Bibliography

Hale, H. E. "Why Not Parties? Electoral Markets, Party Substitutes, and Stalled Democratization in Russia." *Comparative Politics*, 37, no. 2 (2005): 147-166.