

It has been argued that democracy cannot exist without political parties in a governance system. This perception has played a significant role in the development of political parties in Russia. However, scholars tend to agree that the country is expected to have strong political parties, which is not the case. The reality about the development of political parties in Russia is more complex. Although Russian leaders and legislators have always tried to be non-partisan, the voters know and understand primary political parties and that they play a vital role in their voting decisions.<sup>1</sup> Due to the essential role of political parties in promoting democracy, it becomes vital to dissect in-depth how they have fared in Russia by reviewing Hale's and Moraski's articles.

This phenomenon can be explained by considering political parties as markets where candidates are the primary customers of the parties that help them get elected. Therefore, political parties are the producers and suppliers of the items that tend to meet their consumers' needs of getting elected.<sup>2</sup> The goods and services that political parties supply to their candidates include funding for campaigns, electoral knowledge, reputation, and organizational help. Although these goods and services are not the same as the ones provided by American or European political parties, they play a crucial role in helping candidates get elected.

However, political parties are not the only suppliers of the products mentioned above and services to candidates. There are other organizations, such as political financing groups and regional political machines, offering the same services that help candidates win elections.<sup>3</sup> There are non-political groups that support their type of candidates in elections.

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1. Henry E. Hale, "Why Not Parties? Electoral Markets, Party Substitutes, and Stalled Democratization in Russia," *Comparative Politics*, 37, no. 2 (2005): 150.

2. Hale, "Why Not Parties? Electoral Markets, Party Substitutes, and Stalled Democratization in Russia," 149.

3. Hale, 152.

This form of political engagement and involvement exceeds the common campaign funding and corporate lobbying found in democratic nations. In Russia, substitutes to political parties are attractive to candidates because becoming a member of a political party involves costs. Mostly the charges are of monetary value since party members are often required to finance the operations of their parties. Conversely, candidates joining a political party are required to toe the party line and compete with others to contest for a certain seat. It is surprising that with this kind of competition, political parties have not closed the electoral market.

Leaders are supposed to support non-partisanship, but this is not the case for Russia, where it has declined since Putin came into power. He has done what other Russian presidents never did, join a political party and promote its system. Together with his advisers, Putin was of the opinion that if all non-party systems were not united to support the Kremlin, they were likely to be united in the opposition eventually. Since Putin assumed power, he has implemented various changes to Russia's electoral system. For instance, he abolished the single-mandate districts in Duma.<sup>4</sup> This move has strengthened the role of political parties, especially United Russia, which is the current Pro-Kremlin party.

In systems where presidents hold massive power, such as Russia, the role of political parties becomes distorted. Either the presidents no longer see the need for political parties, leaving them to weaken or support a specific party system but change the applicable principles to favor their parties. In Russia, the weakening of strong party systems has a negative impact on democracy in the country. However, it does not imply that democracy is diminished. Removal of presidents who weaken strong political party systems from office rekindles the political competition in a state. Once the competition is restored, it can have positive impacts by opening new platforms for the public to express itself.

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4. Bryon Moraski, "Electoral System Reform in Democracy's Grey Zone: Lessons from Putin's Russia." *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 4 (2007): 541.

## Bibliography

- Hale, Henry E. "Why Not Parties? Electoral Markets, Party Substitutes, and Stalled Democratization in Russia." *Comparative Politics*, 37, no. 2 (2005): 147-166.
- Moraski, Bryon. "Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone: Lessons from Putin's Russia." *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 4 (2007): 536-563.