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Explaining Machine Politics in Russia's Regions: Economy, Ethnicity, and Legacy

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Russia's Flawed Political System

Democracy is a landmark achievement of modern civilization. The rule of the people, by the people, and for the people implies that citizens possess absolute power in choosing their leaders and shaping the political system. Nevertheless, political science experts find that democracy is choked in many modern societies like Russia. According to Hale and Moraski, political parties and politicians have more influence over the future leadership of nations than citizens. The experts unveil the complex, sometimes corrupt, system of electing leaders in Russia. In the paper "Why Not Parties," Hale posits that parties penetrate the electoral process to increase their delegates' chances of winning an election.¹ Similarly, Moraski claims that parties and governors negate the conventions of elections to uplift their "chosen ones" into power.² Furthermore, Hale conjoins these arguments by referring to Russia's governors and political parties as machines [*machine governors*] because they are easily manipulated through inducements like wealth and favors.³

Moraski describes Russian politics as a cut-throat affair, where rogue politicians create unfavorable environments for their political rivals.⁴ Politicians aim for self-preservation by changing electoral systems to suppress the competition. Such practices undermine the primary foundations of democracy that promote fair rule by the people's chosen leader. For example, Putin made constitutional changes to Russia's Duma, making it difficult for some rivals to climb

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

² Bryon Moraski, "Electoral System Reform in Democracy's Grey Zone: Lessons from Putin's Russia." *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 4 (2007): 541.

³ H. E. Hale, "Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions: Economy, ethnicity, and legacy." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 3 (2003): 228-263.

⁴ Moraski, 561.

the administration ladder.⁵ Therefore, the author argues that the political system is under the manipulation of governors. Similarly, Hale posits that political parties act as intermediaries linking aspiring politicians and power.⁶ Parties act as businesses supplying nominees with the products required to win an election. When parties act like businesses, the rule of supply and demand suggests that the highest bidder wins the prize. Therefore, political parties become tools for manipulation.

Furthermore, Hale combines his “political parties as a business” argument with Moraski’s assertion that governors choke democratic elections. In his second article, Hale describes politicians and political parties as machines that are controlled using rewards.⁷ Since the Soviet era, regional authorities have manipulated the populations to vote for their desired candidates. Therefore, although the world celebrates democracy, many states are far from achieving political liberation.

⁵ Moraski, 537.

⁶ Hale (2005), 148.

⁷ Hale (2003), 229.

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