

## Russia's Political System and Democracy

Russia's political system undermines democracy due to the influence of wealthy groups, prompting the need to develop democratic political parties. The country's political environment applies the strong-state model, where the political leaders control all the country's affairs. The system restrains competition and advocates for an authoritative personal regime that silences citizens' voices.<sup>1</sup> To ensure the continuity of the authoritarian system, political leaders emanate from wealthy and powerful affiliations that influence the state's economy instead of political parties that would uphold democracy. As such, the existence of influential non-political groups has undermined the principles of democracy, leading to a flawed political system. Therefore, exploring the level of influence of non-partisan groups and milestones in the development of political parties will help shape the country's democratic ideals.

Russia's political parties' system is weak due to the strong influence of powerful non-political groups such as regional governorships, industrial groups, and business groups. Primarily, Russia does not require political players to be in parties, making non-parties candidates have significant influence in the country.<sup>2</sup> They present considerable authority over their regions due to their power and are elected directly by the voters.<sup>3</sup> They can also influence the political electoral process, as seen from the monopolies in business and production emanating from the old Soviet.<sup>4</sup> The powerful groups are mainly the governing and economic forces, controlling the state's means of production and distribution.<sup>5</sup> That way, Russian candidates

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<sup>1</sup> Bryon Moraski, "Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone: lessons from Putin's Russia," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 4 (2007): 536.

<sup>2</sup> Moraski, Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone, 537.

<sup>3</sup> Moraski, Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone, 537.

<sup>4</sup> Henry E. Hale, "Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions: economy, ethnicity, and legacy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 3 (2003): 231.

<sup>5</sup> Hale, Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions, 231.

obtain a national audience through powerful business monopolies and wealth, making the economic sector determine the election's winner.<sup>6</sup> Again, the Russian political system acts like a market model involving supply and demand, where the voting demands from non-political and political parties appear to supply governance and positive transformations.<sup>7</sup> As such, non-political groups present solid support for political candidates, thus, earning more members and weakening political parties. Therefore, although Russian political parties are weak, the non-party independent candidates play a significant role in the political process as voters perceive them as the right people for public offices.

But again, the influence of powerful non-political groups restrain democracy despite it being a landmark of modern civilization. Moraski<sup>8</sup> and Hale<sup>9</sup> observe that democracy is crucial because politicians and political parties influence nations' future leadership, but in Russia, the electoral system is complex and corrupt due to a limited democracy system.<sup>10</sup> Democracy in Russia is choked because the state's governors and political parties act like machines manipulated by wealth and favors.<sup>11</sup> Besides, politicians create harsh environments for their political rivals, making their politics a cut-throat operation.<sup>12</sup> Mainly, politicians change the electoral systems to suppress opponents and promote self-preservation, undermining the pillars of democracy that require a fair rule for every people-chosen leader.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Putin amended some principles of Duma, making it difficult for some rivals to advance in the political

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<sup>6</sup> Hale, Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions, 229.

<sup>7</sup> Hale, Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions, 229.

<sup>8</sup> Moraski, Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone, 542.

<sup>9</sup> Henry E. Hale, "Why not parties? Electoral markets, party substitutes, and stalled democratization in Russia," *Comparative Politics* (2005): 150.

<sup>10</sup> Hale, Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions, 231.

<sup>11</sup> Hale, Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions, 246.

<sup>12</sup> Hale, Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions, 229.

<sup>13</sup> Hale, Explaining machine politics in Russia's regions, 229.

ladder.<sup>14</sup> As such, Russia's political system is under the manipulation of governors, who come to power through wealth manipulation and support of business-based political parties. Therefore, Russia's governing body should limit the influence of individuals in politics and promote political parties that support democratic ideals.

Political parties play a significant role in promoting democracy, which has prompted the development of political parties in Russia. Russia has been non-partisan for a long time; thus, it is a complex process for the state to transition to a political parties system.<sup>15</sup> Political parties act as markets where candidates are the main customers seeking help to get elected<sup>16</sup>. As such, political parties are the producers and suppliers of the resources that candidates require to win an election.<sup>17</sup> The resources that political parties provide candidates include campaign funding, organizational assistance, electoral information, and reputation.<sup>18</sup> However, in Russia, political parties are not the sole suppliers of electoral resources to candidates since other non-political financing groups and regional political machines exist.<sup>19</sup> The non-political groups surpass the usual campaign financing and corporate lobbying in democratic states, making it attractive to candidates.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Putin's leadership promotes the political party system, which has prompted the abolition of single-mandate districts in Duma (Senate) to strengthen political parties such as the current Pro-Kremlin United Russia party.<sup>21</sup> As such, political parties may outgrow Russia's non-partisan system if the governing body continues to support the rise of

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<sup>14</sup> Moraski, Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone, 543.

<sup>15</sup> Moraski, Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone, 537.

<sup>16</sup> Hale, Why not parties? 149.

<sup>17</sup> Hale, Why not parties? 149.

<sup>18</sup> Hale, Why not Parties? 153.

<sup>19</sup> Hale, Why not parties? 152.

<sup>20</sup> Hale, Why not Parties? 153.

<sup>21</sup> Moraski, Electoral system reform in democracy's grey zone, 541.

political parties. Thus, the growth of political parties in Russia will fundamentally impact the state's democratic system, which has been choked over the years.

Russia is on the verge of adopting a partisan political system to eliminate the regime under the influence of powerful non-political groups that undermine the principles of democracy. The country's political parties have been weak because the electoral system does not require candidates to have the affiliation, prompting the rise of wealthy influential groups and individuals who control the state's affairs. The powerful non-partisan groups undermine democracy by influencing the economy and manipulating voters with their wealth. Besides, the groups use their power to suppress their political rivals and create a self-preserving system. However, Putin's leadership is gradually considering the development of political parties in the state, as evident with the current Pro-Kremlin United Russia party. As such, the nation will establish progressively political parties that will promote strong democratic principles.

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