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Electoral Markets and Russia's Political Smorgasbord

When Mikhail Gorbachev first introduced the USSR to competitive nationwide elections in 1989, comparative social scientists looking into a crystal ball would have seen the future they were expecting if their gaze had happened to fall on parliamentary elections in St. Petersburg's Vostochnii District a decade later. There, four major candidates were each appealing to voters on the basis of party platforms covering the most important issues of the day. Irina Khakamada, a telegenic star within the Union of Right Forces, championed radical economic reform. Stepan Shabarov extolled the patriotic socialism of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The Yabloko Party's Yury Nesterov advocated a gentler market and emphasized human rights. And Aleksandr Morozov appealed quite specifically to the interests of the older generation as a nominee of the Pensioners' Party. Indeed, while political scientists have disagreed markedly on almost everything else, one thing upon which almost all have concurred is that political parties are inevitable in democracies. Seminal works call democracy without political parties "unimaginable" (Max Weber), "unthinkable" (E.E. Schattschneider), "unworkable" (John Aldrich).[1] The conceptual consensus underlying such statements is that electoral institutions and important social divides combine to force sets of likeminded politicians to work together or to give up their dreams of influence.[2]

If our crystal ball were capable of ranging beyond Russia's "window to the West," past the Urals, and on to the distant Omsk Region's Bol'sherechenskii District, however, these same political scientists would have been quite surprised by another image of the same 1999 parliamentary elections. While the presence of two opposing party nominees would have looked familiar (a Communist Party man, Vladimir Dorokhin, and a Yabloko candidate,

[1] Aldrich 1995; Schattschneider 1970; Weber 1990.
[2] Aldrich 1995; Cox 1997; Duverger 1954; Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Toka 1999; Kitschelt 1992; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Taagepera and Shugart 1989.

Gennady Girich), a third pretender to office (Aleksandr Podgursky) was clearly different. This candidate, general director of the regional firm *Bekon*, represented no political party. What he did represent was the powerful provincial political machine headed by the sitting governor.[3] In fact, the Omsk machine did not back a party nominee in any of the three parliamentary districts falling within its jurisdiction, preferring to remain independent. Nevertheless, it was clearly the region's dominant political force, winning two out of the three parliamentary races in the province, including Podgursky's.

Were the prescient orb to have detected signals from the even more distant Siberian region of Krasnoiarsk, our would-be visionaries of 1989 might have encountered an even more baffling image, this one from the gubernatorial contest of 2002. In this race, hardly a peep was heard from political parties. While the Communist Party fielded one of its best-known backers, Sergei Glaziev, neutral observers never counted him among the real contenders. Neither was there a powerful gubernatorial machine to dominate the campaign. In resource-rich Krasnoiarsk, what mattered most were the province's largest two financial-industrial groups, each of which had advanced its own candidate for the governorship. In one corner stood Aleksandr Uss, the chair of the regional legislature who stood for the huge metallurgical concern Russian Aluminum (RusAl), which controlled a large part of the province's southern economy. The challenge was issued by Aleksandr Khloponin, a former top executive in the gigantic firm Norilsk Nickel, based in the northern Taimyr autonomous district within Krasnoiarsk and owned by the Interros group. Stoutly independent, these candidates did not pay parties so much as lip service. Instead, virtually all observers saw the election as a struggle between "oligarchic" financial-political clans representing very narrow business interests. When Khloponin won, this was interpreted as a victory for nickel and a crushing blow to local aluminum.

Our crystal ball also might have picked up any one of the presidential contests of 1996, 2000, or 2004. While these races consistently featured party candidates, our orb-gazers surely would have found it striking that the incumbent president ran as an independent in each of these contests despite the urgings of many advisors and aspiring party-builders.

Foreign tourists peering at these future images in 1989 might have been tempted to see an analogy with the smorgasbord that structured their gastronomical experiences in the largest Soviet hotels of that era. Political parties were not the only items they would have seen on this organizational *shveskii stol*; in fact, what has made transitional Russia remarkable in comparative perspective is that parties were generally not even the main dish. At times

[3] For simplicity's sake, in this volume the term "governor" is generally used to refer to the heads of the executive branch in Russia's provinces even where they may have other formal titles.

they mounted strong support for their designated candidates and monopolized the choice set presented to voters, as in St. Petersburg, yet in places like Omsk and Krasnoiarsk they also faced stiff competition from candidates backed by governors' political machines, financial-industrial groups, and other nonparty forms of organization.

This represents the great puzzle that Russia's short experience with political parties poses to both interested observers and social science: Why have Russian political parties failed to fully penetrate the polity over 15 years since Gorbachev first instituted competitive nationwide elections? Answering this question is the central task of this volume.

THE PUZZLE OF STALLED PARTY DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA

Perhaps because the degree to which parties dominate politics has ranged so widely across transitional Russia's regions and institutions, there has been great variation among scholars as to whether this country's parties are best characterized as "strong" or "weak," "growing" or "stagnant." On one hand, a vast body of research argues or even takes for granted that Russian parties have been nothing if not weak.[4] There is a great deal of evidence for these claims. Most obviously, both of Russia's presidents have eschewed party labels in all four elections to this post, most recently in 2004. Regional governors ran for reelection as major-party nominees only 3 percent of the time from 1995 to 2000. As Kathryn Stoner-Weiss has observed, less than 14 percent of all deputies elected to regional legislatures in 1993–4 carried a party affiliation. For the period 1995–7, she reports, this figure had risen to just 16.8 percent.[5] Political organizations have flashed into the political pan for one election cycle, only to evanesce into the ether the next. Such disappearing acts were performed quite convincingly by the Democratic Party of Russia, the Party of Russian Unity and Accord, and Our Home is Russia.[6] Countless others never managed to generate so much as a spark of public interest in the first place. In 1995 alone, some 43 organizations won places on the party-list ballot for their parliamentary candidates. Only the Communist Party has received more than 6 percent of the vote in all four national party-list parliamentary elections (1993, 1995, 1999, 2003). As if this were not enough to make the point, other researchers have reported sure signs that many of these parties have persistently lacked clear, distinguishing programmatic platforms.[7] Moreover, the high hopes of many Americans and Europeans that Yabloko or the Union of Right Forces would create a

[4] McFaul 1999a; Reddaway 1994; Rose 1995, 2000; Rutland 1994; Slider 2001; Stoner-Weiss 2001.
[5] Stoner-Weiss 2000.
[6] Rose and Munro 2002.
[7] Kitschelt and Smyth 2002; McFaul 1999b.

powerful, pro-Western liberal bloc in the parliament were brutally dashed when both parties in 2003 failed even to reach the 5 percent threshold for winning an officially registered parliamentary delegation (called a "fraction") in party-list voting. Equally, however, many Western social democrats and moderate socialists have been disappointed that the Communist Party remained the primary organizational representative of the Russian left as late as 2005.

Experts have advanced numerous explanations for parties' purported weakness, some of which are listed here:

- Voters have been suspicious of the mere idea of "party" after having had a very bad experience with the Communist one under the USSR;[8]
- The Soviet regime destroyed the social cleavages and related social infrastructure that are said, following Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, to give birth to parties. The transition, this argument goes, has failed to create new stable cleavages;[9]
- Russian political institutions have not provided proper incentives for party formation;[10]
- Russian political tradition involves strong executives and weak legislatures, thereby reducing the chances that parties will form in legislatures;[11]
- Few organizational resources have been available in society for leaders to use to build party structure;[12]
- A rise in "post-materialist" values such as environmentalism, the atomizing effects of television, and other factors related to "modern European society" have made parties weaker and more volatile in Russia much as they have in European politics;[13]
- Russia's governors have intentionally kept parties weak in order to bolster their own power and pursue their own economic interests;[14]
- Potential activists have had too little economic opportunity available to them and thus fear losing their jobs if they become politically active and irritate powerful incumbents;[15]
- Leaders' concrete decisions regarding party development, notably Russian President Boris Yeltsin's personal decision to neglect and even subvert party formation, have nipped Russian parties in the bud;[16]

[8] Hough 1998a, pp. 685–8; McFaul 2001b, p. 315; Sakwa 1995, p. 184.
[9] Hough 1998a, pp. 688, 696; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; McFaul 2001b, p. 316; Sakwa 1995, pp. 191–2.
[10] Hough 1998a, p. 691; Ishiyama 1999, p. 200; Ordeshook 1995; Sakwa 1995, p. 169; Smyth 1998.
[11] Hough 1998a, p. 691.
[12] Ishiyama 1999, p. 200.
[13] Sakwa 1995, p. 190.
[14] Stoner-Weiss 2001.
[15] McMann 2002.
[16] Hough 1998a, pp. 699–700; McFaul 2001b, pp. 315–17.

- Russia's particular form of postcommunist transition has produced an "oligarchic capitalism" in which those with resources don't need parties and those without resources are too fragmented and disoriented to organize them effectively.[17]

Despite the seeming weight of all these "pessimistic" accounts, a different set of scholars has come to strikingly rosier conclusions, implying that the St. Petersburg image of Russian politics is more reflective of the whole polity than these other works have supposed.[18] These researchers have begun with the conventional social science expectation that electoral competition provides strong incentives for politicians to band together and that it is only a matter of time before a sturdy party system emerges in Russia. Despite all of the problems parties have faced in Russia's postcommunist environment, they have contended, the bottom line is that party reputation is an efficient way for politicians to communicate policy stands to citizens and to cultivate voter loyalties. Most researchers in this loosely defined camp suggest that a learning process has been taking place whereby parties develop reputation, cultivate nascent loyalties, and build organization. Since many in this school have focused on the usefulness of parties in guiding citizen voting decisions, they have frequently used surveys to ask citizens directly about the importance of political parties in influencing their choices of candidates. They have reached a series of compelling findings.

First, these studies have quite convincingly established that Russia's parties do distinguish themselves clearly in the minds of voters on the basis of issues and that they do so in ways that one would expect given the parties' stated views.[19] Second, these studies have reported not only that voters have tended to correctly identify party stands on key issues, but also that, to a significant degree, voters have been basing their voting decisions on these policy positions.[20] Arthur Miller and his colleagues found that although Russians have selected parties partially because of the personal appeal of party leaders, issue stands have nevertheless been a large part of these decisions.[21] Third, these partisan voting patterns have been rooted in postcommunist social cleavages, as the classic comparative framework[22] would lead us to expect. Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, for example, found that Russian partisan voting patterns have been rooted in socioeconomic class cleavages.[23] Thomas Klobucar and Miller likewise detected strong correlations between

[17] McFaul 2001b, pp. 317–19.
[18] Brader and Tucker 2001; Colton 2000; Colton and McFaul 2003; Miller, Erb, Reisinger, and Hesli 2000; Miller and Klobucar 2000; Moser 1999.
[19] Klobucar and Miller 2002; White, Rose, and McAllister 1997.
[20] Miller et al. 2000; Miller and White 1998; White, Rose, and McAllister 1997.
[21] Miller et al. 2000.
[22] Lipset and Rokkan 1967.
[23] Whitefield 2001; Whitefield and Evans 1999.

citizen self-identification with traditional class cleavages (peasant, worker, intellectual, and so on) and party loyalties.[24] Fourth, party loyalties have been emerging among the Russian population.[25] Different scholars, working with different surveys or measures between 1995 and 2000, have concluded that as many as half of Russian voters can reasonably be called something akin to "transitional partisans."[26] Fifth, this "transitional partisanship" has been found to be one of the most important determinants of voting in Russia. In fact, one of the most thorough studies of overall voting behavior in Russia to date finds that as early as 1995 transitional partisanship was more important than attitudes toward individual leaders, evaluations of incumbents, or issue opinions taken alone.[27] Sixth, strong evidence has been presented that party activists have shown signs of being ideological "true believers" rather than mere political opportunists.[28] And finally, parties have been shown to act in a distinctly coherent manner in the lower house of parliament (the Duma), influencing the activities of legislators in important ways. Thomas Remington's research on Russian legislative behavior has found that party discipline in the Duma has been relatively high and that parties have regularly influenced member voting patterns independently of legislators' personal, regional, or institutional interests.[29]

We are left, then, with an intriguing puzzle. Why does the evidence seem to be so strong that parties have been important both in the electorate and in the Duma at the same time that parties have strikingly failed to penetrate the vast bulk of elective state institutions and have not been able to dominate elections?

Several answers suggest themselves. For one, some of the "pessimistic" studies were conducted with the snap 1993 elections (Russia's first multiparty parliamentary elections) in closest view, while many of the "optimistic" works have focused on later elections for which parties had much more time to prepare and learn the rules in advance. This is certainly not the case with all pessimistic studies, however; Michael McFaul and Richard Rose and Neil Munro, for example, base their conclusions on developments throughout the 1990s and into the presidency of Vladimir Putin.[30] A more promising answer is that most of the optimistic analyses have been based on mass surveys of potential Russian voters, whereas most of the pessimists have focused on macropolitical outcomes (such as low party penetration of provincial

[24] Klobucar and Miller 2002.
[25] Brader and Tucker 2001; Colton 2000, pp. 112–15; Miller et al. 2000; Miller and Klobucar 2000.
[26] Brader and Tucker 2001; Colton 2000, pp. 104, 112–15; Colton and McFaul 2003; Miller et al. 2000.
[27] Colton 2000.
[28] Klobucar and Miller 2002.
[29] Remington 1998; Smith and Remington 2001.
[30] McFaul 2001b; Rose and Munro 2002.

organs or the frequent appearance and disappearance of parties).[31] This suggests the possibility of another answer, which is that these scholars may be implying different definitions of party "strength" and "weakness." Survey research can tap into mass attitudes about parties but cannot directly assess the relative capacity and longevity of party organizations themselves. Studies of macro-outcomes without micro-level data usually cannot rule out that low party penetration of state organs and high party volatility might result from factors *other* than thin party organization, undeveloped reputation, or even a lack of popular support.

The pattern of evidence cited by the two camps, therefore, suggests that it may be possible that *both* the "pessimistic" and "optimistic" interpretations of Russian party development are at least partially right. Parties may enjoy significant resonance among the population and be coherent organizationally at the same time that factors other than intrinsic "weakness" hinder them from actually dominating the political system. Existing frameworks for considering party development in Russia, therefore, may have led some researchers to imply unwarranted extrapolations about the whole "electoral elephant" based on impressions about the particular part of that elephant that they have happened to be studying. Russia's parties have been a *specific mix* of both strength and weakness.

The possibility that both sides are right actually poses the biggest puzzle. How can we explain this odd pattern of established partisanship among large numbers of voters accompanied by differential party penetration of important state institutions?

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PARTY SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

Lest one think that the phenomenon of partial party development is unique to Russia, it is important to note that other societies have passed through analogous periods early in their democratic histories. After the Federalist Party largely disappeared and the Jeffersonian Republican Party crumbled following President James Monroe's retirement, U.S. politics was characterized by state-level political machines that were for the most part independent.[32] Some parts of the country at different times were essentially company towns where electoral politics were under the thumbs of powerful industrial interests.[33] India endured a similar period before Congress transformed itself into a full-fledged party of national scope.[34]

[31] An important exception is Rose and Munro 2002, which integrates a careful study of voting behavior with a focus on macro-level "supply side" dynamics that determine the choice set voters face.
[32] Aldrich 1995; Hofstadter 1969; McCormick 1966; Remini 1959.
[33] Shefter 1977, pp. 403–52, 451. See also Shefter 1994.
[34] Weiner 1967.

Even those political scientists who have looked comparatively at such phenomena, however, have tended to assume that parties are an exclusive and natural product of political institutions and societal cleavages given electoral competition. This has led them primarily to investigate differences among systems where parties already predominate. How many parties?[35] What kind of parties?[36] What patterns of interaction among parties?[37] How stable or representative the system of parties?[38] The fundamental question of how a political system becomes a *party* system in the first place remains remarkably underresearched and undertheorized.

The dominant approach to this question proceeds from the belief, noted earlier, that democracy is unworkable without parties.[39] As Aldrich has elegantly argued, parties solve key problems of collective action and social choice for office seekers and holders.[40] It follows that they will emerge naturally. Thus, many outstanding works on the formation of party systems tend to treat the "preparty period" as a shapeless transitional phase.[41] The image is one of parties, like gases, expanding to fill an institutional void due to the benefits they bring politicians and voters. Some have noted the importance of nonparty forms of political organization, not unlike the Russian financial-industrial groups and independent political machines described previously, during the initial stages of democratization. The assumption of party inevitability, however, has led these writers to characterize party formation as a relatively smooth process of "absorbing" or outcompeting alternative forms.[42]

A few have made advances in understanding the dynamics of the absorption process. Myron Weiner showed that the Indian Congress Party used its control over the state to "nationalize" other groups.[43] This finding is in line with Alan Ware's contention that U.S. parties have regularly exploited their control over the state to preserve their own power against antiparty groups and Gary Cox's finding that the electorate became primarily party-oriented

[35] Cox 1997; Downs 1957; Duverger 1954.
[36] Ansell and Fish 1999; Boix 1998; Chhibber 2001; Chhibber and Kollman 2004; Epstein 1967; Katz and Mair 1995; Kirchheimer 1966; Kitschelt 1989; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Michels 1962; Ostrogorski 1964; Panebianco 1988; Rohrschneider 1994; Sartori 1976; Shefter 1977.
[37] Dahl 1966; Sartori 1976.
[38] Bielasiak 2002; Geddes 1995; Lijphart 1994; Mainwaring 1998.
[39] This volume generally follows Huntington's (1991) definition of democracy, a system by which "the most powerful collective decisionmakers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote."
[40] Aldrich 1995.
[41] Aldrich 1995; Beer 1982; Cox 1997; Duverger 1954; Shefter 1977, 1994; Snyder and Ting 2002; and Weber 1990.
[42] Duverger 1954; Hofstadter 1969; LaPalombara and Weiner 1966; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Ostrogorski 1964; Panebianco 1988; Sartori 1976; Schattschneider 1970.
[43] Weiner 1967.

in Great Britain after back-benchers were stripped of policy initiative in the House of Commons.[44] James Coleman and Carl Rosberg have argued that colonial-era norms and procedures institutionalized African parties prior to independence.[45] Martin Shefter implies that parties originating in state institutions can outmuscle autonomous organizations at will; variation depends on whether they are forced to choose mass mobilization due to an electoral threat from a powerful rival.[46] In a series of meticulous studies of Norway, Rokkan stresses the role of competitive pressures in driving parties to co-opt or supplant nonparty organizations by aggressively recruiting local nabobs regardless of ideological stripe; he attributes intracountry disparities in the pace of the process to geographical and historical factors.[47] Aldrich presents the most theoretically developed account, demonstrating how Martin Van Buren united key U.S. state-level machines to form America's first modern party (the Democratic Party) for the 1828 elections by providing them with a noncontroversial states' rights platform, a victory-bound presidential candidate (Andrew Jackson), the promise of a share in the "spoils of office," and the prospect of repeating the process over multiple election cycles.[48] Virtually all of these works contain what appears to be an assumption that parties were the inevitable outcome.

In some instances, it may be justifiable to take parties as givens. One such set of cases involves polities that legislate a monopoly for parties in proportional-representation election systems. But such legislation must itself be explained and most major countries do not legislate party monopolies, the United States and India being only two of the best-known examples. The question of how parties come to dominate political systems is thus a very appropriate one to pose. Russian experience drives this point home forcefully. Here we have a case where parties had manifestly failed to monopolize the polity more than 15 years after Gorbachev's initial electoral reforms. Because earlier scholarship has left largely unanswered the question of why this might be, including the literature on Russia itself, we currently have little insight into such phenomena.

ELECTORAL MARKETS: THE POLITICS OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND

The approach developed here begins by understanding political party development as an outcome of a market for electoral goods and services. In this electoral market, would-be candidates are the consumers and parties are suppliers of products, such as reputation, organization, and financing, that

[44] Cox 1986; Ware 2000.
[45] Coleman and Rosberg 1964, p. 664.
[46] Shefter 1977, 1994.
[47] Rokkan 1970.
[48] Aldrich 1995.

candidates hope will help them get elected. From this perspective, party systems form when candidates decide to "buy" party products, agreeing to run for office on party labels.

The Market Basics of Party Formation

It is reasonable to make several general assumptions about voter and candidate behavior for the purposes of theory-building. Voters cast ballots for candidates who they think will represent their interests (broadly conceived). Candidates, in turn, want to be elected. To win office, therefore, candidates compete to show voters that they can best represent voter interests, whatever they might be.[49] It can also be safely assumed that a relatively plentiful supply of people will decide to run for office for any number of reasons. As one of the foremost theorists of elections notes, this is often the case in new democracies where candidates have little history by which to judge their own and others' electoral prospects.[50] Given an abundance of candidates wanting to win votes, it is natural to assume that these desires will create demand among these politicians for goods and services that will assist them in their electoral endeavors.

Political parties are a particularly important supplier of these goods and services demanded by candidates. Building on the conceptualizations of Giovanni Sartori and E. E. Schattschneider, a party is here defined as an enduring association of people who identify themselves by a public label and who are joined together under this label for the primary purpose of winning control of the government by means of presenting their own candidates in elections for public office on the basis of a common platform.[51] Comparative theory focuses on four major electoral benefits that parties are said to provide candidates.[52] First, parties supply organizational support, something that is almost universally agreed to benefit campaigns. Second, by associating themselves with the stands of a well-known party, candidates can gain an "instant reputation" that better connects them to targeted voters, be it through issues, personalities, or well-known patronage networks. Third, parties can provide material benefits that can be used either to invest in a campaign or to provide a basis for patronage politics, both of which can facilitate electoral success. Fourth, parties can confer "focal" status on a candidate, lending an aura of credibility to the candidacy through the commitment of party supporters to form a core of electoral support.

These dynamics, taken together, constitute a kind of market. The *demand side* of the production equation in the market for electoral goods and services

[49] Downs 1957.
[50] Cox 1997, pp. 151–2.
[51] Sartori 1976, pp. 58–64; Schattschneider 1970, pp. 35–7.
[52] Aldrich 1995; Cox 1997; and Kitschelt et al. 1999.