

Supporting Multiparty Democracy in Russia: Have International Actors Made a Difference?

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International support for Multiparty Democracy in Russia: Defining the Context

Three independent variables:

- (1) Russia's political parties and party system
- (3) public opinion on political parties
- (3) international party assistance

Parties and Party Systems: Definition

Sartori: ‘a party system is precisely the *systems of interaction* resulting from inter-party competition’

(Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*. Cambridge: C.U.P. 1976, 44)

Ware: ‘patterns of competition and cooperation between (...) parties’

(Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 7).

Parties and Party System(s) in Russia

not so much about competition or cooperation between PP, as it is about the interaction between PP and the *state* (the power elite) →

a power-oriented party systems

Development of parties and party systems

1991-2000 (2003):

- > proliferation of PP (Duma elections 1999: 300 registr. parties, 26 qualified, 14 gained seats)
- > Duma: no majority parties, no pro-g' ment majorities, fluid coalitions
- > limited political role & relevance

The early years:

*The early years: elite-driven, supply-side and artificial party politics:
the 'standard lament'*

- * self-interested organizations by ambitious individuals
 - * ideologies are largely symbolic, platforms vague
 - * fighting with each other over petty issues, rather than trying to solve their country's problems
 - * only become active at election time
 - * ill-prepared for and do a bad job of governing the country
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- *Source:* Thomas Carothers, *Confronting the Weakest Link. Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. New York, CEIP, 2006.

Fragmentation and volatility

Discontinuity of parties / continuity of political preferences:

Criteria:

- > participation in three elections
- > representation in three legislative terms
- > membership stability and voter discipline in Duma

Parties / political orientations:

- > Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF)
- > Liberal 'opposition' (Yabloko; SPS)
- > Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)
- > early 'Parties of Power'

Phase two: semi-democracy → competitive authoritarianism → hegemonic authoritarianism

From 2003: *political and legal manipulation of pp and party system:*

- > selective coercion and intimidation of opposition parties (administrative pressure, biased media coverage, election falsification), including international assistance ('anti-NGO' legislation)
- > *limitation, strengthening, centralization* (control) and *instrumentalization* of (most) remaining parties → increasingly important role for *Parties of Power*

Parties of Power

The quintessential element of the Russian political party system (from 2003):

- * Russia's Choice (1993)
- * Our Home is Russia (1995)
- * Unity (1999)
- * One Russia (2001)
- * Just Russia (2007)
- * The Right Cause (November 2008): a new Kremlin project?

Parties of Power

Characteristics:

- > stands in long tradition of party politics in semi-authoritarian regimes
- > neither 'parties' nor 'in power' (ruling)
- > created by the regime, for the regime
 - * (democratic) legitimacy → winning elections
 - * exercising political control and inclusion → distributing patronage, imposing constraints
 - * dominating the legislature
- > the ambivalence / ambiguity of ideas and ideologies

Political parties as *regime institutions* not as *institutions of democracy* in the FSU

Public opinion, political parties and democracy

About democracy:

- > theoretical (foreign) concept versus personal practice
- > social justice rather than individual freedom
- > the ideal of democracy and the practice of authoritarianism
- > about democracy promotion: do people want to be helped?

* *Independent Democratic Party of Russia*, September 2008, Mikhail Gorbachev

* *Solidarnost*, December 2008, no political party, no *democratic* political party

Public Opinion, PP, and Democracy

About political parties:

- > links between parties and citizens are weak (exception: KPRF);
- > popular opinion: no interest, no sympathy, no trust

Political party assistance: Definition

assistance to political parties / political CSO to enable them to better perform the functions parties are supposed to perform in democracies – through financial assistance, trainings, exchange programs, election campaigning and monitoring, etc.

200 million USD annually:

party building & organization

electoral competitiveness

legislative and governing capabilities

Political Party Assistance: Rationale

political parties are widely considered as both a precondition for and the weakest link of processes of political democratisation.

Political party Assistance: Methods

- *Fraternal party assistance:*
 - with ideologically like-minded partners, more partisan and intrusive; more stable, more trust (*and* the danger of becoming too close, too uncritical)
- *Multiparty assistance:*
 - more parties, ‘less’ partisan, intrusive; more opportunities for impacting the party *system* (and the danger of ‘depoliticization’)

International Party Assistance: The Russia experience (1)

- *Of limited relevance:*

- > relatively small part of decreasing democracy assistance to Russia → from the heyday years of democracy assistance during the 1990s to the ‘poor’ 2000s

- > few international actors: NDI, IRI, German *Stiftungen*, other European institutions

Party assistance in Russia (2)

‘ Biased’ : politically and organizationally

- * focused (almost exclusively) on opposition parties
 - > political choice (party assistance is *not* a neutral activity)
 - > leveling the playing field
 - > attitude of major non-democratic / popular parties and /or parties of power

- * Starts from ‘ Western’ experience and expectations
 - > mass parties
 - > ideological profiles
 - > the question of convergence

Party assistance in Russia (3)

Ineffective for reasons of structure and strategy:

- * the predominant relevance of a ‘ hostile’ political structure and context
- * lack of a wider international political context (cf. Central Europe and EU enlargement)
- * lack of incentives: no self-interest democratization of PP and party system reform → no incentive for party assistance
- * lack of imagination and flexibility on the part of donors

The future of party aid in Russia

Political, moral, and practical arguments for or against political party assistance in Russia:

- ‘...it is at least worth asking whether it really makes sense for Western aid agencies to invest in party institutionalisation *when 83 percent of the people polled say they have no interest in parties.*’ (italics added)
- Nicolai Petro, *Crafting Democracy. How Novgorod Has Coped With Rapid Social Change*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004, 61)

The future of party assistance

two variables:

Major:

- > *the ambiguity of Russia's 'hybrid' political regimes* → the very different nature, role, function, interest and *relevance* of parties in post-communist Russia → the fundamental gap between donors and recipients

Minor:

- > *strategy and tactics of donor organizations* → 'standardised method of party assistance' (Carothers): preconceived and ideal-typical ideas, notions, and strategies

Democracy Promotion and Political Party Assistance in Russia

widen our scope; limit our expectations; focus on:

- > more than the (democratic) opposition → the challenge of (non)democratic parties and Parties of Power, the potential of building relationships (socialization)?
- > more than the central party organization → regional and young activists?
- > more than political parties → on political NGO's (Golos, Memorial); election monitoring, etc.?
- > more than democratization → on the *Rechtsstaat*: governance, judiciary, anti-corruption?