Government and Opposition, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 216–218, 2009
doi:10.1111/j.1477-7053.2009.01285.x

Kenneth Wilson

Party-System Reform in Democracy's Grey Zone: An Addendum

THERE IS NO NEED TO REVISIT THE ARGUMENTS I SET OUT IN MY MAIN article, for the essential facts remain the same. I would, though, like to comment on Bryon Moraski's reply. Moraski suggests that my main article makes little contribution beyond elaborating, echoing and reiterating his arguments.[1] However, as I made the arguments to which Moraski is referring (i.e. that the Putin-era party-system reforms were aimed at centralizing Russia's political system and consolidating its party system) in an article that was published *before* his contribution appeared in *Government and Opposition* in 2007 there can be no question of my drawing on his arguments.[2] It is, however, extremely surprising that Moraski is apparently unaware of this article, for it is central to the debate and I cite it several times in my response to him. There is also a crucial difference in emphasis. For me, furtherance of the aforementioned processes of centralization and consolidation are central explanations for the party-system reforms. Moraski, by contrast, does not see how 'these goals actually benefit Putin'[3] and sees the need to advance the argument (which I reject) that electoral system reform is 'intended to protect United Russia'.[4] It also is not true that I make little contribution beyond elaborating the points Moraski erroneously claims as his. First, the article is a corrective to Moraski's (in my

[1] Bryon Moraski, 'Revisiting Russia's Electoral System Reform: The Importance of Context and Comparative Perspective', *Government and Opposition*, 44: 2 (2009), pp. 208, 211 and 212.

[2] Kenneth Wilson, 'Party-System Development Under Putin', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 22: 4 (2006), pp. 314–48.

[3] Bryon Moraski, 'Electoral System Reform in Democracy's Grey Zone: Lessons from Putin's Russia', *Government and Opposition*, 42: 4 (2007), p. 550. Similarly Moraski writes of the change to proportional representation, 'It is simply not clear how the law serves the interest of the actor seen as its chief proponent, Russian President Vladimir Putin.' Ibid., pp. 537–8.

[4] Ibid., p. 550.

© The Author 2009. Journal compilation © 2009 Government and Opposition Ltd
Published by Blackwell Publishing, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2009.01285.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

view) flawed analysis; second, I advance the argument that the party-system reforms were also an integral part of the construction of a façade democracy; third, I argue that while these reforms facilitate a more consolidated party system, this (contrary to Moraski) will *only* benefit democracy *if* the practices of electoral manipulation lessen or fail.

Moraski's other criticisms are equally groundless. When I critique his claim that the move to proportional representation should be good for Russian democracy because it facilitates minority representation, I am accused of failing to distinguish between discussion of the general literature and analysis of a specific case.[5] Yet Moraski *explicitly* relates the arguments in the general literature to Russia *without qualification*.[6] The failure to distinguish between a discussion of the general literature and the analysis of a specific case is his, not mine. My argument that United Russia is intolerant of dissent and would remove disloyal deputies from the party ticket rather than moving them down the party list[7] is dismissed as 'irrelevant' on the grounds that the example I give of a disloyal deputy who was expelled from the party (i.e. *not* moved down the list) concerned a list deputy not an SMC deputy.[8] Presumably Moraski thinks, for some reason that is not elaborated, that disloyal SMC deputies would have been treated more leniently. This is convenient for Moraski's argument but utterly implausible.

Moraski also highlights the importance of context, yet his version of this context remains extremely problematic.[9] He claims, for instance, that the future of United Russia was uncertain following the 2003 election because previous parties of power had collapsed and there was speculation in the Russian media concerning a possible split in the party.[10] There was, though, even at that time, simply no comparison between United Russia and previous parties of power, in terms of either electoral success or the Kremlin's fulsome commitment to its construction. Speculation in the media was precisely that,

[5] Moraski, 'Revisiting Russia's Electoral System Reform', p. 212.

[6] Moraski, 'Electoral System Reform in Democracy's Grey Zone', p. 542.

[7] Kenneth Wilson, 'Party-System Reform in Democracy's Grey Zone: A Response to Moraski', *Government and Opposition*, 44: 2 (2009), pp. 191–3.

[8] Moraski, 'Revisiting Russia's Electoral System Reform', p. 208.

[9] My main article makes several points along these lines, including pointing out elementary factual errors.

[10] Moraski, 'Revisiting Russia's Electoral System Reform', p. 209.

© The Author 2009. Journal compilation © 2009 Government and Opposition Ltd

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2009.01285.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

speculation.[11] United Russia was, with a loyal two-thirds majority in the Duma, easily the strongest party in the history of post-Soviet Russia and Moraski overstates its vulnerability.[12] Putin's scheduled departure from office *was* potentially destabilizing but the possible threat came from divisions in the Kremlin elite, not United Russia's SMC deputies.

Moraski also argues that the Kremlin-sponsored Rodina emerged as a 'critic' or 'rival' of the Kremlin.[13] Although there were *some* discordant voices within Rodina, it was never a viable rival precisely because it could not have survived as a party of any significance without the Kremlin's backing. Indeed Rodina no longer exists because in 2006 it joined a new party A Just Russia, which is sponsored by and loyal to the regime (it supported, for instance, Dmitrii Medvedev's presidential candidacy and voted in favour of Vladimir Putin as prime minister). Moraski's conclusion, then, that Rodina is an example of a regime ally becoming a rival is simply perverse.

To conclude, I agree with Moraski that it is important to place the Russian case in comparative context. (I situate my analysis in the literature on electoral authoritarianism, which seems more relevant to me.) The overriding point, however, is that if the analysis is not grounded in an adequate understanding of the *case* (and in my view Moraski's is not) the only contribution it will make to the comparative literature will be a misleading one.

[11] Moreover, Moraski's evidence for this – a single, obscure internet source – is very weak.

[12] This observation is not made only with the benefit of hindsight. In my work published before the 2007 election I anticipated that the regime would, as in 2003, engineer a victory for pro-Kremlin parties in 2007. Wilson, 'Party-System Development Under Putin', pp. 341–2.

[13] Moraski, 'Revisiting Russia's Electoral System Reform', p. 211.

© The Author 2009. Journal compilation © 2009 Government and Opposition Ltd

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2009.01285.x Published online by Cambridge University Press