

Role of ideology, program and strategy in the evolution of United Russia Party

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Abstract

In a multi-party democracy, different political parties coexist with each other and compete among themselves to become an incumbent power. To ensure her victory, a political party subscribes a particular set of ideology. It utilises scores of strategies and programmes based on her ideologies to capture and perpetuate her political power in the long run. The present article endeavours to map a trajectory of ideological affiliation along with strategies and programmes used by United Russia party to emerge a dominant party of power in post-Soviet Russian party system.

Keywords: ideology, program, United Russia Party

Introduction

Historical Background

United Russia Party was founded in April 2001 after the merger of Fatherland- All Russia party led by Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov and the pro-government Unity Party of Russia led by a Serey Shoigu (Russian political parties and organisations Directory 2011).The party officially is known as “Unity and Fatherland–United Russia” (party charter). It is called *Yedinaya Rossiya* in Russian language. United Russia party was registered on December 18, 2011 with 19,579 members. It came into being through merger of the Unity, Fatherland and All-Russia movements. The party has branches in all 89 constituent federation members (English Pravda 2003). The Unity was founded by the Kremlin to the counter the influence of Fatherland-All Russia led by then Moscow Mayor (Wilson and Decker 2010).Originally it was founded to support Vladimir Putin who succeeded Boris Yeltsin as the president of Russia on Jan 1, 2000. The party becomes more powerful with the solidification of Putin’s elections. It gained 38% of votes and then won nearly 68% of total poll in 2007 Dumas elections. More interestingly, this victory came in the backdrop of having less membership than her nearest rivals CPRF and LDPR. Officially United Russia had 2, 57,000 members only in comparison to the membership strength of CPRF (500000) and LDPR (600000) (Wilson and Decker 2010).United Russia has set up its branches in all regions of Russia. Besides, it has established around 2,595 local branches of the party office (party website). Russian political parties and organisations Directory (2011) dwells upon different perception of United Russia among different sections. It argues that some analysts term United Russia as populist and nationalist while many consider it as a ‘party of power’. Some analysts also term the party as a ‘presidential party’ having only one goal of securing the power. It is also called public official party or administration party since majority of its members are the public officials across Russia. A certain section of foreign media-house considers it as ‘presidential party’ as they believe that the party has single-minded goal to first

capture presidential power than to occupy the parliamentary majority (Russian political parties and their organisations Directory 2011).In April 2008, though he was never the primary member of United Russia, he became party’s Chairman (Wilson and Decker 2010). Former interior minister Boris Gryzlov was elected party leader in November 2002 and retained the post for long period. Putin accepted the nomination for party chairmanship in April 2008.

Party charter outlines the main aims and objective of the party. Firstly, it would ensure that the public policy decision taken at all the three levels of government i.e. federal, regional and local level are in the interest of the majority of citizen of Russia. Secondly, it would make incessant attempts to educate and make people aware of Russia on issues of public importance. Besides, it would bring the matters of poor attention and neglect by the authorities to the latter’s cognizance. Thirdly, both the abovementioned tasks must be accomplished through conducting mass propaganda, agitation, dissemination of information and political socialization in accordance with the strategies and programme of the party (Section 2 party charter).

Ideology of the Party

The official party platform of United Russia party argues that the party will follow a centrist, pragmatic and conservative ideology in contrast to radicalism. It considers itself as conservative and regards itself as one of the legitimate heirs of Russian tradition of statehood, both Tsarist and the Communist (Russian political parties and organisations Directory 2011). Party declares its ideology as “ Russian Conservatism” which it claims to be stable and social- rejuvenatory in spirit without being stagnant and revolutionary (United Russia Party Website). It calls for liberating Russian society from all chronic social troubles. It resolves to construct a new, healthy and free Russia which cheers the values like love for motherland, a strong family, a healthy lifestyle, professionalism and civic solidarity (United Russia Party website).

Party also asserted that on Russia becoming a “Sovereign democracy. Sovereign democracy as a concept is different from managed democracy where later is a political regime controlled from outside the nation that it governs. Some analysts have the view that there was a need of Russia’s own version of democracy. Chadev (2006) ^[1] claims that the idea of a “global democratic revolution” had become pretext for the ‘liquidation of sovereignty’. The draft of the party program of United Russia published in early October 2006 focused on the term “Sovereign democracy” (United Russia Party Program 2006) ^[3]. Also, Putin’s idea of ‘Sovereign democracy’ suggested that Russia does commit for the democracy but only on his own terms. Putin repeatedly emphasized over the urgent necessity of strengthening the Russian state. He maintains that it is not possible to meet the pressing challenges before the country. This is because, Putin believes that basic cause of all Russia’s great problem is the “weakness of state institutions” (Evans Jr. 2008).

One of the principal goals of the Putin is bring Russia back to world’s great power states (Putin’s Plan 2007). In February 2006, Vladislav Surkov, Putin’s deputy chief of staff and chief political strategist, for the first time, outlined the underlying ideology, goals and aspirations of the Russian federations largest political party (Cohen 2006).

Party Programme and Election Programme

A political party articulate its ideological preferences through formation of various party programmes. The basic party programme signifies its identity of the party by providing a general introduction to the election to the guiding principle and ideology of the party. The party programme extensively illustrates the political ambition, basic values, demand and suggestion of political party (Hofmeister and Grabow 2011) ^[2].

The party Congress of United Russia adopted the election program of the Party -"Putin's Plan - a worthy future of a great country" in 2007 ^[4] (election programme 2007) ^[4]. Putin's Plan outlines some of the objectives for United Russia in upcoming four years (United Russia Party website).. First, It would strive towards further development of Russia as a unique civilization by working tirelessly to protect the common cultural space, language and historical tradition of Russia. Second, It will work for enhancement of economic competitiveness of the Russian economy through access to innovative development, support of science, infrastructure development, increasing investment primarily in high technology whereby the industrial sector will be the major engine of growth the engines of economic growth. Third, it will work relentlessly to provide a new quality of life with the continued implementation of priority national projects. Party will seek further substantial increase in wages, pensions and scholarships to help citizens in solving the housing problem so that people would enjoy a descent life. Fourth, party will seek tremendous support of civil society thereby promoting social mobility and activity by promoting community initiatives. Fifth, it would work to strengthen the sovereignty of Russia by cementing country's defence

power to ultimately get an established place in multi polar world (Putin’s Plan 2007).

For implementing some major goal until the unveiling the “Strategy 2020” and the modernization of “United Russia”, a new version of Party programme was launched in 2008. The document outlines priorities in terms of technological development, modernization of the political system, strengthen judiciary and to fight against corruption. It also identifies five strategic vectors of economic modernization, leading countries in production, energy and transportation. It also believes that nuclear technology is very essential for the country while improved information technology will have major impact on supercomputers, ground and space infrastructure transmitting all kinds of information (party program 2008; see also Medvedev 2009).

Strategy of the Party

Alexandrova (2012) sheds light over party’s strategy stating that the party's strategy is based on the modernization of the economy, on uprooting corruption and strengthening the judicial system, on the maintenance of international and inter-religious peace, and on the further development of the country's political system. It is also going to take care of both internal and external security of the country and would work on an "independent, sensible foreign policy" in near future. Apart from this, party has also devised many other strategies to connect with the large population of Russia through ‘party projects’ in 2006. This was an attempt to reach the population of Russia through certain constructive works (party website). Party projects develop effective technological solutions to the most pressing problems and needs of society (United Russia Party website). Party’s website claims that United Russia set itself the ambitious goal of competitiveness, not only within the country but also abroad. Creating a modern party, in their work the best international practices, requires constant expansion and deepening of international cooperation. Presently, United Russia is a member of: the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP).

United Russia party also decided to intensify inner debate at intra-party level on the basis of the three clubs of United Russia – “Centre for Social-Conservative Policy,” “liberal-conservative political action club”, and “state-patriotic club” in order to create more opportunities for creative self-realization of each member of the Party (party website). Thus, in 2008, three clubs namely social-conservative club, liberal-conservative club and state-patriotic club was established within the United Russia party structure. Originally, they were intended to help government officials in developing strategies to implement the government’s ambitious program “Strategy 2020”. However, after the close examination of their working mechanism, Kunkler (2010) suggests that they also may function as an ideology incubator for the larger party and as a safety valve for internal party dissent.

Conclusion

It is rightly being argued that the political parties across

the global democracies are mainly interested in attracting voters to ensure their electoral victories. And to meet this end, they use battery of strategies and programmes to connect the voters and to grab their precious votes. This is highly influenced by the political party's ideology and the preferences of voters as well. United Russia Party is not an exception to the above mentioned fact. Hence, a political party articulate their agenda through their party programmes and election manifesto based on the voter's choice and party's ideology as well. United Russia party believes in the sovereign democracy, Russia's modernization, Putin's Plan, Strategy-2020 etc among others.

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