

nuances of its full spectrum. Not all the “imperialists” are the same, and the “ethno-centrists” are far from a homogeneous group. But this conceptual distinction does provide a useful analytical tool in highlighting the tangible shift that had taken place in contemporary Russian nationalism from 2000 to 2015. Russia’s imperial and Soviet pasts continue to cast a long shadow, while new challenges lead to forms of ethnic backlashes not entirely unlike what has been going on in the west. The Putin regime’s efforts to occupy a dominant middle ground have achieved mixed success. On the one hand, it has created a narrative that has more coherence and intelligibility than was the case in the first post-communist decade; on the other hand, there remain fundamental tensions within the narrative, which certainly does not enjoy anything close to a national consensus. This volume has brought together a set of complementary, thought-provoking essays that offer a wide range of theoretical and empirical insights into the evolution of, and the fundamental tensions within, contemporary Russian nationalism. As such, this book should be on the reading list of everyone who is interested in Russian nationalism and in the trajectories of Russian and post-communist politics writ large.

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The Origins of Dominant Parties: Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia. By Ora John Reuter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

xiii, 316 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. Maps. \$99.99, hard cover. doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.189

This book seeks to explain why United Russia emerged as a dominant party in the 2000s, while earlier attempts in the 1990s to create such a party failed. The essence of Reuter’s argument is that a dominant party emerges when both the leader and regional elites perceive it to be in their interests to commit to such a party. When regional elites commit, the leader gains greater capacity to run the country because those elites deliver both electoral and administrative resources as well as committing to support the party. In exchange, elites gain greater certainty over access to spoils and career prospects. The development of the dominant party is thereby seen as a result of the actions of both leader and elites, not simply of the unilateral action of the central authorities. Reuter also argues that the emergence of such a party comes about only when there is an approximate balance between the resources held by the leader and those controlled by the elites. If the leader is very strong relative to the elites, he has no incentive to bind himself by committing to a party in order to get cooperation from the regional elites. If the elites are very strong relative to the leader, they have no incentive to bind themselves to the restrictions stemming from party membership. Neither side is confident about the commitment of the other, but the party is seen as the means of guaranteeing the commitments on both sides. Based on a rich comparative and theoretical literature, Reuter tests this argument in both Russia and a range of other authoritarian polities.

This is a well-constructed argument, resting on a sophisticated theoretical apparatus and wide field experience (including interviews) in Russia. Its basic thesis, that the party emerges when both leader and elites see they have something to gain from it, is both logical and demonstrated through the analysis. All subsequent study of United Russia will need to take this book into account. In doing so, however, there are a number of aspects of the argument that require greater explication. One is the way in which the comparative resource base of leader and elites is discussed. Despite

Reuter's attempt in discussing international cases to design a quantitative measure of leaders' and elites' resources, these measures are at best rough approximations and are, as he acknowledges, "noisy." This means that it is very difficult to get an accurate measure of how strong the resources of either leader or elites are in themselves and comparatively, and therefore to show that a balance of resources maximizes the possibility of dominant party commitment by both sides. Reuter seeks to get around this by undertaking a qualitative analysis of the resources available to each, but in distinguishing between the 1990s (when no dominant party emerged) and the 2000s (when one did), he identifies the change in the relationship between leader's and elites' resources purely in terms of the expansion of central power. He is clearly correct in identifying increased central capacity in the early 2000s as strengthening the leader compared with the elites, but it is not clear that this brought a balance.

Furthermore, if the expansion of central power was crucial in persuading elites to commit to United Russia, this may be better seen as a defensive mechanism on their part than a mutually beneficial bargain as Reuter presents it. It is also not clear how his argument about the party guaranteeing the commitment of both sides works in relation to the leader. The problem here is that in Russia the leader was not a member of the party and was therefore not subject to its discipline in the way that its members, including most regional elites, were. If the party did not embrace the leader, how could it provide a guarantee to the elites that the leader would stick to the terms of the bargain? Reuter is left to argue that the party could provide a means for coordinating the collective action of the elites against a leader who infringed the bargain, perhaps denying him the electoral support he needs, but this is at best hypothetical and would in practice not be easy to bring about. Notwithstanding these points, this is an excellent, rich and nuanced study that deserves a wide reading.

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