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FEDERAL BARGAINING IN RUSSIA: REGIONAL POLITICS IN THE URALS

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Comparative Politics from
the School of Politics and International Relations,
University of Kent

Canterbury, United Kingdom
May 2022

[Word Count: 101,578]

Abstract

This thesis examines how informal institutions operate in federal relations and how they affect the dynamics of federal bargaining in contemporary Russia. In addressing these issues, the research considers how elite groups and networks operating in centre-region relations were bonded together by a complex network of vertical and horizontal ties and interactions. On the one hand informal rules of the game played a complementary role and have been instrumental to the construction and consolidation of a centralized and vertical system of governance, integrating the sub-national level into a bureaucratic hierarchy. On the other hand, however, the overreliance on informal rules and personalistic interaction between central and local elite networks and within the regional polity, played a substitutive role, deeply affecting the capacity of the centre to effectively exercise control over the regions.

The research is rooted in the re-conceptualization of the notion of the *federal process* and relies on two case studies and the analysis of a specific, network-based, elite management model that emerged over the last twenty years and affected formal and informal resources available to regional leaders (governors). The paradox of the Russian centralized federal system identified in this work is associated with the inherent weaknesses of regional governors that makes them unable to function as an effective transmission belt between regional and federal interests. This leaves space for the operation of a plethora of different interest groups and networks within the regional polity, tempering vertical integration and control. The thesis argues that beneath the seemingly consolidated centralized system of subordination, the role of horizontal forces and the specific constellation of actors and interests creates a complex framework of asymmetric interaction that shapes the contours of regional politics and centre-region bargaining. Control is mainly exercised through manual interventionism and short-term risk aversion tactics that renders the system of federal relations more susceptible to the pressure of endogenous and exogenous shocks.

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List of abbreviations

AO	Autonomous Okrug (Autonomous District)
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics
BSSR	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
CC	Central Committee of the CPSU
CEC	Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFI	Chief Federal Inspector
CPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EC	Executive Committee
FSB	Federal Security Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMP	Gazprom Mezhregiongaz Perm
Gorkom	City Committee (Gorodskoi Komitet)
GRP	Gross Regional Product
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate (Glavnoe upravlenie General'nogo shtaba Vooruzhonnykh sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii)
GTC	Gazprom Transgaz Chaikovskii
JR	Just Russia (party)
LDPR	Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
MP	Member of Parliament
MVD	Ministry of Interior
NMG	National Media Group
NTMK	Nizhnii Tagil Iron and Steel Works (Nizhnetagilskii Metallurgicheskii Kombinat) – EVRAZ-NTMK is the official name.
Obkom	Regional Party Committee (Oblastnoi Komitet)
Oblispolkom	Executive Committee of the Region (Oblastnoi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet)
OMZ	United Heavy Machinery (Ob"edinennye Mashinostroitel'nye Zavody)
OPS	Organised Crime Society
Otechestvo	Fatherland (electoral block)
OVR	Fatherland-All Russia (Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya) (electoral bloc)
PA	Presidential Administration
PFPG	Permskaya Finansovo-Promyshlennaya Gruppa
PG	Prosecutor General
PM	Prime Minister

polpred	Plenipotentiary representative of the president of the Russian Federation in the Federal District
Raikom	City District Committees (Raionnyi Komitet)
RF	Russian Federation
RMK	Russian Copper Company (Russkaya Mednaya Kompaniya)
Rosatom	State Nuclear Energy Corporation
Roscosmos	State Space Corporation
Rosstat	Federal State Statistics Service
Rostec	State Corporation for Assistance to Development, Production and Export of Advanced Technology Industrial Product
Rostelekom	State Telecommunication Corporation
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic
RZhD	Russia Railways (State transportation monopoly)
SGM	Stroigazmontazh
SK	Investigative Committee (Sledstvennyi Komitet)
SMD	Single Member Districts
Sovnarkhoz	People's Economy Councils (Sovet Narodnogo Khozyaistva)
TMK	Pipe Metallurgical Company (Trubnaya Metallurgicheskaya Kompaniya)
TSFSR	Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic
UGMK	Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company (Ural'skaya Gorno-Metallurgicheskaya Kompaniya)
UkrSSR	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
UR	United Russia (pro-presidential party)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the contribution of so many people who shared the entire or part of the period I have been working on this thesis. I am incredibly grateful to all of them, although by opting to keep my acknowledgments brief there is no space to provide a comprehensive list.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Richard Sakwa, for being always available and helpful. From the very beginning, Richard provided his guidance and encouragement (sometimes the most needed thing of all), helping to make the final version of this thesis possible and sustain my own motivation during all sort of challenging moments. Over the years Richard was a great intellectual and human guide and I will be always grateful for that.

Thank you to many friends and colleagues that accompanied me in this journey. In particular, my source of expertise in federalism, Bizuneh Getachew Yemenu (Bizu), the first person I met in Canterbury on a windy day of September. Umut Can Adisönmez, also known as Professor Canush, who, among other things, traded his physical (and mental?) wellbeing to help me with the relocation. Morvan Lallouet, for all the cigarettes and chats about Russian politics and beyond (IIIII). The rest of the now famous ‘Demotivation Brigade’ at the School of Politics and IR, Robert (although he would prefer Rob) Wilson, Tadek Markiewicz, Giulia Grillo and many others. Thank you all for your friendship, support, sense of humour, fatalistic jokes, your ‘optimistic pessimism’ and uncountable pints (and sparkling water!). Cheers!

My special thank you goes to my other halves, Marta and little Oli. Marta, I owe so much of my (limited) success to you that I don’t even know where to start. You have been an incredible source of support, calm and love. You always believed in me and found a way to encourage me, which, I realize, was a remarkable effort. Olivia, thanks for being the most incredible baby. Although I genuinely hope you’ll never read this thesis, your smiles, hugs, jokes, cries and a few sleepless nights were all an incredible source of calm and joy. I’ve learned more from you in the last one and a half year than throughout my entire life. I would never be where I am without you both. A simple thank you will never be enough.

And last, but certainly not least, I am grateful to my (extended) family and my mother. For accepting me as I am and for letting me always take my own decisions. I could never have gone this far without you.

Chapter 1 - Introduction and research aim

Introduction

With a population of about 147 million citizens, an area of 17 million square kilometres and some 170 different ethnic groups and nationalities, Russia represents today one of the most heterogeneous and complex examples in the pantheon of world's federations. Over the last 30 years its institutional structures experienced different phases of transition. While the Soviet system combined a federal façade hand in hand with an extremely centralized state, the construction and consolidation of new federal institutions enshrined in the 1993 Constitution faced several structural and contingent problems epitomized by the fierce resistance of the regional elite. The re-centralization effort started in early 2000s with the slogans of *power vertical* (*vertikal' vlasti*) and 'dictatorship of law' inaugurated a new phase of Russian federalism. This period was characterised by the control and subordination of subnational level to the will of the centre. This process built a new façade that solved only temporarily the malaise of federal relations. Not surprisingly, taking into consideration the peculiar type of political regime that emerged since early 2000s, the federal character of the Russian state remains today contested if not denied. More broadly, however, the transformation that the Russian political system experienced after the collapse of the Soviet Union exposed a significant gap between the formal institutional design and concrete political practices, one that shapes the contours of the regime and centre-region relations.

This research dissects this cleavage between formal structures and informal practices with the specific focus on relations between the centre and the regions. Although the research looks specifically at the contemporary trajectories of development of federal relations during different phases of re-centralization started in early 2000s, the study attempts to place this process in a broader historical context. Indeed, as will be discussed later, the systemic interaction of formal structures and informal practices is not peculiar to Putin's Russia. On the contrary, when approaching the topic through the perspective suggested in this work, elements of continuity linking together different periods of centre-periphery relations appear more prominent than usually assumed.

By examining the features of interaction between different levels of governance, the study analyses the role of formal institutions hand in hand with the incentives and constellation of different actors involved in the process. One of the arguments of the thesis is that informal politics expressed through the opaque interaction within and between elite groups and networks continued to shape the contours of centre-region interaction despite

the consolidation of the centre's formal coercive capacity and enhanced ability to control the subnational level of governance that emerged during Putin's presidency. Formal tools of control and subordination adopted since the very beginning of the process of federal re-centralization in early 2000s contributed to the consolidation of a dense network of informal mechanisms of interaction affecting the process of elite management and, paradoxically, contributing to the inherent dynamism of the system.

The Russian federal structure remains, indeed, highly asymmetrical, segmented and characterized by systemic conflict over power and resources. At the regional level, despite the partial subordination to the federal centre, local political and economic elites continue to interact mainly relying on informal and personalistic ties forming a variety of clandestine networks and groups. The study, indeed, seeks to enhance the knowledge and understanding of these complexities and how they affect the operation of formal institutions and the process of federal relations that cannot be explained by the top-down paradigm usually adopted by most scholars of Russian politics, elite and federal relations. While these approaches provide a vital analysis of the vertical forces operating in centre-region relations since early 2000s, they nonetheless fall short of explaining the role of the subnational elite groups and networks in this process. Even when the role of the regional elite is taken into account, it is usually analysed as a deviant case or as an attempt to isolate the region from central control, as in the case of some ethnic republics among which Chechnya is a prominent example.

The starting point of this research, however, is different. The role of regional elites is considered an integral part of the *federal process* that contributes to its inherent dynamism, instability, unpredictability and bargaining. In other words, the study attempts to shed light on the role of horizontal forces that, hand in hand with incentives of vertical integration and control, shape the federal process. Thus, drawing on numerous earlier studies of centre-region relations and federalism in Russia, this research aims to integrate this literature by investigating the distinction between formal and informal institutions and the role of the interaction between federal and regional elites in defining the contours and nature of federal relations in Russia.

Rather than asking *why* during the period of re-centralization subnational elites surrendered their power and privileges accumulated during the process of the foundation of Russian federalism in the 1990s, with the empirical analysis of the political process within two regions (Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai) the study attempts to analyse *how* regional elites have been integrated into the new system based on vertical subordination (the infamous power

vertikal') and what are the consequences on the nature of the federal system and centre-region bargaining.

I approach the concept of the power *vertikal'* as a top-down system that relies on the subordination of Russian governors and their integration into the bureaucratic hierarchy, but nonetheless leaving ample space for the operation of a wide spectrum of informal groups and irreconcilable conflicts. Indeed, both structural and behavioural incentives remain in constant interaction under the carapace of the power *vertikal'*. In other words, as noted by Gibson (2004, p. 9), even when they are weak and inconsistent, federal institutions provide 'de jure limits to the scope of governmental action; increase the number of veto players in the political system; create multiple arenas for political organisation and mobilization; distribute power between regions and regionally based political actors and affect the flow of material resources'. Although Russian federalism remains a façade that masks an extremely centralized system, it nonetheless provides room for complexity of interactions and actors and space for bargaining and conflict.

Following this logic, the main argument of the research is that the preservation of informal practices and consolidation of personalistic ties within the regions, at the federal level and between the two levels of governance, contribute to the formation of elite factions, networks and coalitions that, even in a highly centralized and authoritarian system of decision-making and elite management, may affect the centre's capacity to fully control the federal process. In this way the study seeks to contribute to the literature on Russia's federal relations by examining the impact of these horizontal forces that indirectly preserve some elements of federal bargaining, despite the undeniable erosion of formal aspects of genuine federalism.

Finally, although beyond the scope of this research, understanding the logic and operation of federal relations appears relevant to the broader topic of Russian politics and peculiarities of its contemporary regime. The interaction between the centre and the regions has been one of the central elements throughout the recent history of Russia. Even without taking into consideration the role of federal institutions and republican elites in the process of final dissolution of the Soviet Union (briefly discussed in chapter 3), it is acknowledged that the resources and power of the central government depend on complex interactions with regional elites. While in the 1990s the economic and political transition was, among other things, hampered by the erection of regional boundaries and sovereignty declarations, the co-optation of regional elites has been one of the key elements in the consolidation of Putin's rule. More generally, the focus on the sub-national level may shed some light on the

dynamics characterizing the federal level of governance. The post-political and technocratic turn that the Russian regime openly embraced in recent years with the appointment of Mikhail Mishustin as Prime Minister (PM) in early 2020, has been previously 'tested', although with varying degree of success, at the regional level of governance. Thus, without understanding the role of the regional regimes and the complex interaction between federal and sub-national elites it appears difficult to explain the logic of the decision-making process and the nature and contradictions of the regime itself. As aptly noted by Snyder (2001, p. 100), 'regionally differentiated perspective that highlights variation across subnational units in a country can be essential for understanding how national political regimes work...' "center-centered" approach that treats the national level as an autonomous, separate sphere and obscures the connections between actors in the periphery and the center may mischaracterize the strategic context in which national politicians labor'.

Federalism and centre-periphery bargaining in Russia: a literature review

The nature of Russia's federalism and centre-periphery relations has been a matter of enduring debate, internationally and in Russia itself. The formation of the new federation in the 1990s and the period of dual transition after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been discussed and investigated by analysts and academics. As Mikhail Gorbachev finally admitted in 1989, 'up to now our state has existed as a centralised and unitary state and none of us has yet the experience of living in a federation'.¹ Thus, the post-communist Russian Constitution, ratified in December 1993, established a federal design with a strong commitment to a 'democratic federative rule of law' (Article 1).

In practice, however, major challenges that emerged before the ratification remained unresolved and continue to shape the evolution of the Russian state and federation. While federal asymmetry is one of the common features of multi-ethnic federations in the contemporary world (Stepan, 2005), centre-periphery relations in Russia are based on a complex mix of political, social, economic and constitutional asymmetry that represent one of the major challenges in the study of federalism and regionalism, affecting the very definition of the state itself (Sakwa, 2010a). Thus, while Russia can be commonly identified as a *de jure* federation, its *de facto* federal arrangement remained and remain contested. Not surprisingly in his study of the evolution of federalism in contemporary Russia, Cameron

¹ Gorbachev's report at the CPSU Central Committee Plenum on December 25, 1989. Quoted in: S. Kux (1990). 'Soviet Federalism'. *Problems of communism*, (March-April): p.2

Ross (2002, p. 7) bluntly described the post-Soviet country as ‘a federation without federalism’. For all these reasons, the nature and dynamics characterizing the interaction between the federal and the subnational levels appear crucial to understand the general trends and dynamics of Russian governance, hence, more broadly, the Russian contemporary regime.

What follows is a brief overview of the heterogeneous scholarship analysing the evolution of centre-region relations since the dissolution of the Soviet Union up to the emergence of a seemingly consolidated centralized system under the presidency of Vladimir Putin. Even though the process of federalization of the Russian state seems now firmly in the past, many of the structural elements inherited in early 1990s affected successive trajectories of the institutionalization of centre-region relations, the role of informal institutions and consolidated elite dynamics that characterize the Russian Federation (RF) today.

The legacy of the past

As aptly noted by Nancy Bermeo (2002, p. 98) ‘institutions, like objects, are best assessed from multiple vantage points, a fair analysis requires both comparative and historical perspectives’. Many scholars of Russian politics, indeed, adopted this approach in investigating the path of transition of the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Looking at Russia through the lens of path-dependence and critical junctures, one of the sources of the body of literature emerging in early 1990s has been indeed the analysis of the legacies of the past. Looking at the complex dynamics in centre-region relations in retrospect, the *national question* of the Soviet period assumed a more prominent role. As noted by a leading analyst of the soviet institutional design, in his study of the role of socio-political terminology in nationality policies in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the practice of the Soviet ethno-federalism and the distinct role played by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) among the fifteen Union republics, was aimed at the actual ‘absorption – of other nationalities - by the Russians’ (Bruchis, 1988, p. 126). The formal preservation of the ethno-federal arrangement, comprising the right of secession enshrined in all Soviet constitutions, was just a formal way to appease non-Russian nationalities and reducing possible resistance to central policies from Union republics. In other words, it was an attempt to denationalize the non-Russian population of the country.

Starting from late 1980s, a large number of scholars looked at centre-periphery relations in the USSR through the lens of path-dependency. According to Philip G. Roeder

for instance, while the Soviet political institutions at the base of its ethno-federalism ‘delayed the political reckoning with the ‘age of nationalism’ - a typical feature of the period of industrialization and modernization - it ‘nonetheless contained the roots of its own longer-term dysfunction’ in terms of ethnic assertiveness that disrupted the system in late 1980s (Roeder, 1991, p. 196). Following this approach, the formal recognition of nationalities enshrined in Soviet ethno-federalism coupled with the policy of *indigenization* (*korenizatsiya*) in the ethnic republics on the one hand, and the actual domination of the Russians at the central level on the other (Jones and Grupp, 1984), restricted the assimilation of nationalities and left the door open for potential secessionist mobilization by exploiting the political opportunity structure and available resources for local elites (Lapidus, 1984; Remington, 1989; Smith, 1995; Bunce, 1998a; Beissinger, 2002, pp. 50–55). Valerie Bunce (1998a, 1999) noted that federal institutions provided the platform for state dismemberment in the process of regime collapse. Ethno-federalism, in other words, contained the seeds of dissolution and some necessary preconditions for the final disintegration of the state. Furthermore, by creating ‘proto-states’ (Bunce, 1999, p. 139) federal institutions provided a strong platform of organisation for ethnically distinct local political elites and granted the necessary ‘institutional resources’ for political mobilization and assertiveness along ethnic lines (Roeder, 1991; Brubaker, 1994; Smith, 1995, pp. 157–179; Bunce, 1998a).

While some scholars emphasize the impact of the structural factors of the ethno-federalism in the USSR (Lapidus, 1991; Bunce, 1998b), others look deeper at ethno-demographic practices and policies and the role of republican and regional elites in shaping the functioning process of centre-periphery relations. Looking at the causal interaction between structure and agency in the process of Soviet demise, Mark Beissinger argues that the ‘tidal influence of one nationalism on another’ played a significant role in transforming the impact of political institutions on society, leading to the final demise of the state (Beissinger, 2002, p. 36). Rather than being an outcome of structurally predetermined conditions, the Soviet collapse was the result of the interaction between institutions and events that acquired progressively greater power over the last four years of Soviet history. Thus, Beissinger demonstrates that the dissolution of the state under the pressure of nationalism has been a long process containing in itself the contradictions of the ethno-federal structure and the power of tidal forces released in a particular historical period (*glasnost*).

The coercive capacity of Soviet institutions was undermined by ‘multiple waves of nationalist revolt and inter-ethnic violence’ that enveloped the country, overwhelming the

‘capacity of the Soviet state to defend itself forcefully against destruction. And as tidal forces mounted, they became available for appropriation by established political elites’ (Beissinger, 2002, p. 37). That once loyal Soviet *nomenklatura* – the Heydar Alievs, Leonid Kravchuks, Mintimer Shaimievs, and Saparmurad Niiazovs of the Soviet world – could become ‘fathers’ of their respective nations was not a plausible outcome before the onset of the *glasnost*’ tide of nationalism.

Not surprisingly, the Soviet Union is usually seen as a stranger in the field of comparative studies of federalism. When comparing the Soviet system with Western federations, scholars and researchers are usually careful in conferring the definition of a proper federal state (Wheare, 1946, p. 27; Armstrong, 1977; Churchward, 1979, p. 167), pointing out the lack of historical and political legitimacy of the system (Lynn and Novikov, 1997), the ‘ideological dichotomy’ between theory and practice (Aspaturian, 1950, p. 33), the centralizing role of the Communist Party (Kux, 1990) or at its non-democratic nature (Elazar, 1991). Elazar once described the USSR system as a ‘nominal federalism which, despite the paper guarantees of its constitution, does not function in a federalistic way in practice’ (Elazar, 1991, p. 2).

Other scholars, while recognising some genuine elements in the Soviet federal compromise, nonetheless continued to consider the USSR a particular, deviant case, difficult to compare with established democratic federations. Ronald Watts for instance, looking at the Soviet Union (a few months before its final collapse) in a broader comparative perspective described it as the most centralized federation which had ever existed, identifying three structural problems (disparity in the size of the units, federation containing a federation, asymmetry in the degree of autonomy) common to other failed federations (Watts, 1991). By the same token, Filippov *et al.* (2004) albeit including the USSR case in their study of a stable federal design, were cautious in conferring the label of a proper federation. Even though the ‘mechanisms by which the union was sustained were not (at least following Stalin’s death) wholly coercive and the federal aspects of its political processes were not entirely orthogonal to those of its democratic counterparts’ (Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004, p. 89), the USSR remained a borderline case, a failed federation that was probably not a proper federation at all or, simply a *federal façade*.

The ambivalence and unintended consequences of this pseudo-federal arrangement have been the starting point for researchers investigating the role of republican and regional elites within the system (Hough, 1969). Several analyses of the subnational level of governance, indeed, mostly agree that despite the centralizing role of the Communist Party

of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and de facto a hierarchical system of subordination and control, several factors allowed regional chief executives to accumulate some degree of autonomy in running their regions and nurtured personal networks (Hough and Fainsod, 1979; Landry, 2008). This became known as the Soviet *nomenklatura* at different levels of governance, tied together by loyalty to the CPSU but able to develop a power base and personal relations outside party structures as well (Harasymiw, 1969, 1984). These dynamics and subnational elites played an important role in the process of the final collapse of the USSR (Roeder, 1991; Smith, 1996), partially determining the vectors of the transition to a new federal paradigm in Russia (Treisman, 1997; Gel'man, Ryzhenkov and Brie, 2003).

The federalization of Russia under Yeltsin

After almost thirty years, the academic debate about the Soviet Union's sudden collapse is still a matter of discussion. Contemporary scholarship has offered several, sometimes contradictory, explanations of the reasons that led the Soviet Union to the final dissolution along national boundaries. Indeed, as Michael Burgess (2009, p. 30) notes, 'the chaos out of which the new federal state emerged in the years between 1990 and 1993 – the context of the transition – had important practical implications both for the Russian state *qua* state and for the *kind* of federation it became'.

Many scholars agree that the new Russian federal system has not only been constructed on the fragile foundation of the previous Soviet experience, but also as a response to the chaotic period of power struggle between the new president of the independent Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin and the leader of the moribund Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev (Solnick, 1996b, p. 15; Tolz and Busygina, 1997, pp. 403–405; Kahn, 2000, pp. 76–78; Goode, 2011, pp. 4–5). However, which of these factors played a central role is a matter of discussion. Thus, two main strands emerged. One looking at the legacy of the past in the development of new federal institutions, the other investigating the role of political actors in the chaotic period of transition.

The existing institutional design, of course, played a significant role in shaping the process of federalization (or re-federalization) under the premises of dual political and economic transition. The un-institutionalized and under-institutionalized character of the period in which the federalization of the Russian political and economic space took place deeply affected the final outcome and the rise of the Russian Federation (Stepan, 2000; Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004). For Nicholas Lynn and Aleksei Novikov the asymmetry between ethnic republics and ethnically Russia regions, emerging from the Soviet

institutional design, was the main source of the contested nature of the initial federal bargaining during Yeltsin's presidency (Lynn and Novikov, 1997). Despite different perspectives on the weight of the legacy, indeed, many scholars share the position that the inherited system of centre-periphery interaction had a crucial impact on the structure of the nascent Russian federal state (Salmin, 1993; Bunce, 1998b; Kahn, 2002; Ross, 2002).

On the other hand, the consolidation of complex centre-region relations has been explained from an agent-centric perspective. In the context of regional demands for more and more autonomy and sovereignty, many scholars focused on the nature of these demands and the political issues at stake. Thus, Richard Sakwa has noted that regional loyalty in exchange for Moscow's policy of non-interference, a result of contextual needs of the weak centre, was the primary instrument overcoming the deficiencies of the federal institutions and consolidating the strategies of political players at both levels of governance (Sakwa, 2021b, pp. 353–395). In other words actors' strategies and political and economic interests has been the focus of the analysis of the development of Russian centre-region relations in the 1990s (Treisman, 1996, 1997; Stoner-Weiss, 1997b, 1999; Hale, 2000). This approach, indeed, has the merit to shed light on the importance of the interaction and bargaining between the national and the subnational levels in the process of creation and consolidation of federal institutions exploring the horizontal and internal dynamics characterizing regional politics during the period of Yeltsin's rule.

A broad body of literature focused on the nature and development of regional political regimes under the guise of difficult consolidation of federal institutions in the 1990s. This literature constituted a separate field of federal studies in Russia exploring the nature of the personalistic leadership and networks that emerged and consolidated during the period of transition and their role in erecting barriers against the central control of the subnational level of governance (Mau and Stupin, 1997; Stoner-Weiss, 1997b; Mendras, 1999; Bahry, 2005).

Matsuzato (2001), drawing on a historical parallel with Latin American practice of 'caciquismo' developed by Spanish conquistadores, provides an in-depth analysis of Mintimir Shaimiev's strategies and tactics in Tatarstan that allowed the leader to consolidate his personal power relying on vertical and horizontal networks of loyalists. Kathryn Stoner-Weiss (1997b) on the other hand looked at the role of regional elites in measuring provincial governing effectiveness in early 1990s. Exploring regional dynamics in four case studies (Nizhnii-Novgorod, 'Tiumen', Saratov and Yaroslavl), Stoner-Weiss finds that a higher concentration of power and the emergence of monocentric regimes in the short-term

perspective appeared conducive to higher regional government performance. In the same vein, expanding on her previous work, Stoner-Weiss (2006) focused on the consolidation of the business-regional administration link to explain the construction of insulated regional regimes and the variation of the degree of regional non-compliance with federal law. These findings appear somewhat in line with the comparative approach developed by Gel'man, Ryzhenkov and Brie (2003) looking at the specific combination of structural and contextual elements in which regional leaders operated in the 1990s and their influence on the consolidation of specific political systems within Russian regions.

The transformation and rotation of national and regional elites in the 1990s has been well investigated, contributing to the development of this field of scholarship. Many prominent scholars provided invaluable accounts of changes and continuities in the Russian ruling class during this complicated period of transition at both level of governance.² While elite 'circulation' has been more prominent at the federal level, within Russian regions the transition period was crucial for the 'reproduction' of former elite and networks, consolidated during the late Soviet period (Lane and Ross, 1999, pp. 142–144; Kryshтанovskaya, 2005).

As many accounts convincingly demonstrate, for instance, the period of gubernatorial appointment in the early 1990s and the weakness of the Yeltsin's administration were instrumental to elite continuity in the regions, as many regional First Secretaries and Heads of the regional Executive Committees (EC) were charged by the president with leading their regions as new governors (Kryshтанovskaya and White, 1996; Hughes, 1997; Tolz and Busygina, 1997), relying on their existing regional networks and patronage system. By the same token, the process of democratization launched earlier by Gorbachev (Kryshтанovskaya and White, 1996) and the consolidation of the advantage of the incumbents in early 1990s contributed to the process of colonisation of the regional assemblies by members of Soviet elite (Slider, 1996; Golosov, 1997; Matsuzato, 1999) further consolidating the pre-existing patronage system relying on ties developed during the Soviet period (Hosking, 2000).

In further exploring the patronage system characterizing regional regimes, Alla Chirikova and Natalya Lapina (2001, p. 369) discuss the emergence of a specific form of 'selective patronage' blurring the distinction between administrative and private relations and

² See for instance the research of Olga Kryshтанovskaya (2005), Olga Kryshтанovskaya and Stephen White (1996), James Hughes and Peter John (2001), David Lane and Cameron Ross (1997, 1999), and Alla Chirikova and Natalya Lapina (2001).

allowing regional leaders to extend their power and influence almost over all the aspects of the public sphere by cementing a specific relations with the new regional and local economic interests.

Overall, due to the weakness of the centre and a chaotic process of establishment of new rules of the game, federal relations in Russia have been mostly investigated following an agent centric and bottom-up approach in which the regions, despite all the diversities and asymmetries, played a central role in the political process, ultimately leading to the consolidation of bilateralism signalled by the signature of bilateral treaties between Moscow and the provinces.

Centralization and consolidation of the power vertikal'

The field of research investigating the complexities of regional politics slowly lost its appeal hand in hand with the process of power centralization initiated by Putin in early 2000s. The shift in the balance of power between the centre and the regions in favour of the former and the implementation of a series of federal reforms attracted growing attention (Ross, 2003; Mitin, 2008; Sharafutdinova, 2013). This attention, however, focused increasingly on the formal and informal rules of the game established by the Kremlin (Gel'man, 2003), often neglecting the regional dimension of the political process. While the political, economic and geographic asymmetry that characterized regional regimes and centre-region relations in the 1990s inspired the scholarship focusing on regional specificities and their particular regime dynamics, the seemingly solidified centralized system that slowly emerged since the very beginning of the 2000s stimulated a top-down approach in studying the transformation of federal relations. Putin's Russia started to be perceived as an example of electoral or competitive authoritarianism (Schedler, 2006; Gel'man, 2015) and federal relations were often analysed through this lens as well (Ross, 2005).

The consolidation of what many scholars call the power vertikal' (Monaghan, 2012) has been the starting point for many fruitful analyses of the transformation of federal relations, investigating the tools and goals deployed by the centre to integrate Russian regions into the hierarchy of authority established by the Kremlin (Gel'man, 2009) and the consequences for the regional polity (Ross and Gel'man, 2010). The role of governors in the new system indeed attracted the attention of many Russian and international scholars.

Many studies relying on different empirical and theoretical approaches show how the process of reform and institutional engineering hand in hand with the abolition of gubernatorial elections became a tool that allowed the Kremlin to consolidate control over

the subnational level, incorporating governors and their administration into the bureaucratic hierarchy. Grigorii Golosov (Golosov, 2011, p. 636) argues indeed that the transformation of Russia into an electoral authoritarian system was facilitated by the co-optation of regional chief executives, linking their survival to the delivery of electoral results to the Kremlin. The Kremlin's control over the regional governors was not eroded by the Medvedev partial modernization programme (Blakkisrud, 2011) and as demonstrated by several studies even the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections punctuated by informal rules of the game proved itself to be a strategy of long-term risk aversion rather than the liberalization of the system (Golosov and Tkacheva, 2017; Smyth and Turovsky, 2018).

Gulnaz Sharafutdinova (2016, p. 372) argues that the transformation of the Kremlin's priorities since the beginning of the Putin's third term made governors even more dependent on the centre with 'increased control over the electoral process and the regional cadre exercised by the Kremlin'. Other analysis, while agreeing with this general framework, emphasized possible risks in this system. While arguing that governors have been successfully integrated into the 'vertical chain of command', Petrov notes that their weakening in terms of political and institutional power made the system of centre-region interactions less stable and predictable (Petrov, 2010a, p. 276). In the same vein, Paul Goode (2011, pp. 109–132) emphasizes that while accepting their subordination governors were able to centralize power at the regional level, mimicking the federal process at the subnational level, thus preserving some potential for revival of regionalism that characterized federal relations in the 1990s.

The process of subordination of regional governors since the beginning of 2000s has been also investigated through the lens of the 'party of power'.³ The emergence of United Russia (UR) as the main tool of control of the Russian regions has been widely discussed in the literature (Reuter and Remington, 2009; Ross, 2011). On the one hand a series of changes in the legislation drastically increased the barrier to enter the political competition. In 2004 a new set of registration requirements, such as the minimum number of members (from 10000 to 50000) and the number of necessary regional party branches (2/3 of the regions) reduced the number of registered political parties making virtually impossible the existence of regional parties. The further prohibition of political blocs and the new threshold for Duma elections

³ A 'party of power' is a specific concept applied to the post-Soviet space which describes a party 'crafted by top officials in order to maximise their control over political arenas' (Gel'man, 2008, p. 920). Thus, it is not the party *in* power in democracies neither the ruling party in a single-party regime. Rather it is effectively controlled by the executive, centred around a powerful president generally endorsing and supporting the policies of the executive.

(from 5% to 7%) was followed by the decline of the effective number of electoral parties competing in federal and regional election (Gel'man, 2006).

Institutional engineering went hand in hand with a process of co-optation of subnational elite, thus ensuring the consolidation of the electoral dominance of UR at the regional level (Golosov, 2014). Not surprisingly as demonstrated by Reuter (2013, 2017), the absolute majority of Russian governors joined UR, transferring their previously constructed 'political machines' into the 'party of power'. Other studies showed how the combination of formal rules and party regulation ensured a long-lasting dominance of the federal centre over the subnational level of governance (Golosov, 2018) and helped to preserve subnational elite loyalty to the regime (Reuter and Turovsky, 2014).

Other approaches making a positive contribution to the field investigated more specifically the consequences of the process of centralization on regional and local levels. Cameron Ross's analysis (2009) of the early reform of local self-government remains the most detailed study of the consequences of the process of centralization on regional and local institutions and democracy, providing a plethora of case studies. Other scholars devoted particular attention to the process and consequences of the 'municipal reform' and its relations with the general trend of power centralization (Ross, 2007a; Golosov, Gushchina and Kononenko, 2016) also providing a comparative perspective (Matsuzato and Tahara, 2014).

The relationship between economic and political power in the regions has been also analysed through a series of case studies and theoretical approaches (Orttung, 2004; Turovsky, 2009; Chebankova, 2010). Thus, Natalya Zubarevich (2010) showed how the new realities of federal relations affected the role played by the economic power at the subnational level further exacerbating regional asymmetries and consolidating the intermediary role of big corporations between the powerful centre and increasingly weak regions. In-depth analysis of trends and transformation of regional legislative and executive institutions has been provided in a series of studies by Aleksandr Kynev (2020a), while Chirikova (2010) investigated the process of adaptation of regional and local elites to the centralization of power relying on in-depth interviews with local and regional officials and experts. Although these and other works focusing on the regional dimension provided invaluable insights for the current study, this important field remains nonetheless underrepresented in the contemporary literature.

Not surprisingly, if compared with the 1990s, the study of the role of elites in Russia also assumed an increasingly Moscow-centric approach. Detailed and perceptive academic

research is now conducted by several scholars with a plethora of different methodologies. Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Oksana Gaman-Golutvina are among the most prominent Russian scholars in the field that provided a historical overview of the transformation of the ruling elites from the late Soviet period to the Putin's era (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 1996; Gaman-Golutvina, 2004, 2008; Kryshtanovskaya, 2008).

The focus on the role of elites, indeed, has been prominent especially during various inflection points in recent Russian history, such as the period of power succession. Sakwa, for instance, provided an excellent account of the backdoor elite power struggle during the end of the second Putin's term (Sakwa, 2011). More broadly, the role of *siloviki* (members of the ruling class affiliated with law enforcement agencies) in Russian politics became almost a separate field (Taylor, 2011; Petrov and Rochlitz, 2019). While some scholars argued that the siloviki almost colonized Putin's inner circle and represented 'a steadily increasing proportion of its leading members' (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 2009, p. 294) thus transforming Russia into a 'militocracy' (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 2003), others challenged these findings (Renz, 2006; Rivera and Rivera, 2006). Relying on extended original data, for instance, Rivera and Rivera (2014, pp. 43–44) asserted that 'the quantity of empirical evidence undergirding the claim that the Russian state under Putin has become a "militocracy" is small' and 'the estimates produced by these two research programs suffer from several threats to validity and/or meaningfulness' thus emphasizing that the real proportion of siloviki among the ruling elite in Russia is far smaller.

Concerning federal relations, Petrov (2010b, p. 1) argued that the process of progressive 'de-nativization and intensive personnel rotation' allowed the Kremlin to increase 'the control and manageability of regional politics' installing representatives of law enforcement agencies loyal to the centre within regions. Yakovlev and Aisin (2019) on the other hand have investigated the role of the interaction between regional governors and heads of regional departments of the Federal Security Service (FSB) finding that economic growth correlates positively with stable relations between regional chief executives and siloviki. Beyond these few studies, however, the systemic role of siloviki in the process of interaction between Moscow and the regions remains today not much investigated.

Overall, the analysis of the role of the ruling class went hand in hand with the idealization of the construction and consolidation of Putin's power vertical', emphasizing the hierarchical control of the president and his administration over national and subnational elites. This approach is encapsulated in Henry Hale's single pyramid model, according to which the multitude of networks and groups operating at different level of governance in the

1990s were co-opted to merge into a single big network coordinated by the president (Hale, 2015). Although this approach does not deny the existence of chaos in the decision making process (Zygar, 2016) and divisions within the power system (Mendras, 2012), vertical factors of integration overshadowed the analysis of horizontal dynamics and the persistent role of regional formal and informal institutions, groups and networks in shaping the dynamics of relations between Moscow and the regions, forming a specific type of multi-level governance. The few studies investigating the role of regional elites as active players in the federal process and bargaining focus mainly on ethnic republics, above all Tatarstan and Bashkortostan (Sharafutdinova, 2015; Garifullina, Kazantcev and Yakovlev, 2020; Shkel, 2021).

Research question(s) and argument

Hence, conceptually, although making a positive contribution to the field, many accounts of Russia's governance more broadly and relations between the centre and the regions in particular miss out the horizontal dimension of power relations and the role of informal institutions and practices binding together actors across different levels of governance and shaping the dynamics and incentives in the process of centre-region interaction. As emphasized in the brief overview of the main trends in contemporary literature, the dominant focus on national-level politics in elite and informality studies provided an important stream of research, but devoted less attention to the subnational dimension of governance and its interaction with the federal level. The model of interaction between vertical and horizontal forces and incentives, suggested in this work, is an attempt to fill this gap, looking at the combination of hierarchical and horizontal dynamics that play an important role in defining the contours of the federal process in Russia.

Through this approach, the study seeks to address the main question: How does the consolidation of informal institutional practices at different levels of governance affect the federal bargaining in Russia? To answer this question the study asks following subsidiary questions; how do elite networks operate in a highly centralized federal system? How does this affect the role of regional governors and the process of elite-management at both levels of governance? How do regional interest groups and networks integrate into a vertical system of control and subordination?

This study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it provides a richer understanding of the complexities of the federal process and Moscow's dominance over the regions, integrating the subnational dimension and the role of informal institutions and personalistic elite ties into the analysis of peculiarities and problems characterizing the

extremely centralized federal façade. Second, while supporting the existing literature on the institutional and structural development of federal relations in Russia, the study places a greater focus on the evolution and adaptation of regional economic and political elites and investigates the general impact of informal channels of interaction within the regions and between the regions and the federal centre. Finally, the research provides an in-depth empirical analysis and data concerning two non-ethnic regions and their internal dynamics, hand in hand with the updated empirical evidence investigating changes, continuities and peculiarities in the background, characteristics, political status and factional ties of the entire body of Russian governors.

The research argues that vertical integration and control appear tempered, although not reversed, by horizontal forces, creating a complex framework of asymmetric interaction between central and regional actors and sub-networks that can be hardly captured by the image of the so-called 'power vertical' of Russian politics. Indeed, I argue that the consolidation of the political system enlarged the gulf between formal and informal rules of the game. This gap has been progressively filled by un-institutionalized competition and bargaining at different levels of governance, contributing to the segmentation and instability of the system. This inherent duality raises important questions concerning the consequences for federal relations and governance in Russia. By investigating the complexities and problems of informal bargaining and interaction the study argues that, although from a short-term perspective this duality allowed the creation of a system based on co-optation of regional economic and political elites, reversing the centrifugal tendencies of the 1990s, in the long run and especially in periods of internal and external shocks the system of central control on the subnational level remains prone to instability and bottom-up pressure in which regional and local elite may play a major role.

Research design

This study starts from the idea once emphasized by Jeffrey Kahn (2002, p. 21) that 'federal institutions both shape and reflect the political playing field on which they are constructed'. Indeed, the main purpose of this research is to identify and reconstruct 'relational mechanisms' that 'exert strong effects on political processes', thus affecting federal relations and bargaining in contemporary Russia (Tilly, 2001, p. 25). Methodologically this requires a focus on the interaction between micro and macro level factors, the so-called macro-micro linkage, thus in practice a middle-ground between structural and agent centric explanations (Coleman, 1990). Starting from the analysis of structural constraints (macro level), the thesis

attempts to identify the parallel process of change and continuity in informal institutional practices and orientations of actors involved in the process (meso and micro level). The constant interaction between these dimensions ultimately shapes the nature and dynamics of bargaining and relations between federal and regional centres of power and actors. As will become clear in what follows, this constitutes the dense network of vertical and horizontal forces affecting federal relations in Russia.

Hence, the research approach is an exploratory, puzzle solving one. As such, it starts with an operational hunch, an interpretative hypothesis, proceeding with the examination of various types of data and cases to finally generate a more structured and coherent hypothesis (Schmitter, 2008) encompassing the nature and dynamics of federal bargaining and relations in contemporary Russia. In this sense, even though the strict distinction between induction and deduction appears far more theoretical than real and that research is a process of continuous interaction between theory and observation (retroduction), the current research can be defined as inductive in its nature (Halperin and Heath, 2017, pp. 30–34). The main benefit of this approach is the ability to provide a detailed and in-depth exploration and understanding of different and contrasting elements and forces shaping the political (federal) process at different levels of governance by focusing on their continuous interaction. Indeed, the case study approach adopted in this research is a common design to address an exploratory research puzzle (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 156).

The research is based on a mixed method of data generation and analysis and adopts an approach often described as process-tracing, looking at the incentives, motivations and decision-making calculus in the political process. This approach is also useful in terms of triangulation of the data collected from different sources and contributes to enhancing the validity of the results (George and Bennett, 2005).

Methodology and case selection

This study analyses the development trajectory and dynamics of federal relations and bargaining in Russia. For many reasons, indeed, Russia represents an important case of a federal state with a distinct historical path and type of governance, both consolidating a particular set of incentives, formal and informal rules of the game. Nonetheless, Russia can be and was compared with other contemporary federations. Indeed, even taking into consideration the now clearly unsuccessful transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, which would make the Russian case hardly comparable with consolidated and well-established democratic federations such as Germany, Canada, Belgium and Australia

(different cases different outcomes), Russia shares some similarities with federations such as Nigeria, Malaysia, India and Ethiopia. All these cases appear similar along specific dimensions, such as the decentralization-centralization continuum, multi-ethnic nature and de facto and de jure degree of asymmetry. However, unlike India, Malaysia and Nigeria, Russia's federalism is not a product and heritage of devolution of previous imperial domination (British empire). And unlike Ethiopia, Russia's federal arrangement does not rely only on the principle of ethnic federalism, mapping constituent units on specific ethnic groups.

Russia, in other words, represents a specific case of a federation born from the dissolution of another (at least formally) federation, the Soviet Union. This powerful legacy, hand in hand with internal and external pressures in the period of transition not only affected the nature and the context of the federal bargaining in the early 1990s when new federal institutions were created, but also the perception of political actors and elites involved in the process. As aptly emphasized by Smith, for instance, in many cases 'the notion of federation retains a pejorative meaning' echoing the legacy of a highly centralized Soviet system of governance (Smith, 1995, p. 167). Moreover, Russia remains the only post-Soviet independent state formally opting for a federal arrangement after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Thus, although some of the dynamics and problems concerning the role of informal political practices, weak institutional consolidation and the role of elite groups and networks (in some cases clans) are widespread in centre-region relations in other former Soviet republics such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan, the institutional constraints that 'shape and reflect the political playing field' experienced different trajectories of development. Indeed, as noted by Burgess (2009, p. 26), the peculiarity of the Russian experience of federalism means that the 'comparison that is most relevant is not so much with other federations as with Russia's own past'.

Considering the methodological approach and the exploratory nature of this research, Russia appears a peculiar case (George and Bennett, 2005, pp. 114–116) presenting an interesting research puzzle: how do elite groups, informal institutions and horizontal - pluralist - forces operate in a context of centralized federal system and authoritarian governance? What effect do they have on the federal bargaining in Russia? How and to what extent this does affect the vertical integration of the system and the role of governors within the so-called power *vertikal*? Indeed, this study attempts to achieve an in-depth understanding of the development of federal relations in Russia and the peculiar role of informal institutions and practices and their impact on formal structures and federal centre's

ability to maintain a centralized and hierarchical control on the subnational governance in the context of a non-democratic regime. As emphasized by Gerring, the focus on a single case facilitates the objective of ‘establishing a more variegated set of tools to capture the complexity of social behaviour’, allowing to investigate relational mechanisms and the variation over time (Gerring, 2007, p. 4), providing an intensive, rather than extensive, examination of the role of horizontal forces in the federal process.

Although approached as a case study, the case of Russia, despite its peculiarities, might provide some important insights on informal institutions, incentives and the role of the subnational political and economic elite, relevant to other federations, especially those characterized by a rather centralized political system and authoritarian federal regime. Besides, the thesis adopts a subnational small-N comparative-historical design, with the analysis of two cases of Russian regions, which facilitates the process of discovering specific mechanisms of interaction between levels of governance, actors and institutions delineated in the theoretical framework.

The benefit of a case study with a small-N subnational comparison is that of providing a detailed in-depth account of the political process, informal practices and relational mechanism. Another benefit of this design is its ability to incorporate and take into account broader historical and contextual factors affecting this process. Combined, these elements reinforce the internal validity of the research enhancing the ability to deal with two common problems, ‘history’ and ‘maturation’ (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 154). As emphasized by Snyder (2001, pp. 94–95), ‘disaggregating countries along territorial lines makes it possible to explore the dynamic linkages among the distinct regions and levels of a political system. Analysing these linkages is an indispensable step for understanding and explaining fundamental processes’ and can provide a ‘stronger understanding both of national politics and of major processes of political and economic transformation’ (Snyder, 2001, p. 100).

Considering the theoretical advantages of the selected research design and the lack of available compiled data focusing on networks, groups and informal practices at the regional level, the research focuses on the historical and analytical comparison of two subnational units (Sverdlovsk Oblast’ and Perm Krai), investigating their internal dynamics and vectors of interaction with the federal centre. The case selection was guided by specific theoretical considerations and some practical limitations. The aim was to select constituent units that would enable the investigation of the political process, focusing specifically on non-ethnic subnational units. As the Russian Federation maintains an extremely asymmetric

structure and is composed by six different types of federal subjects, namely Oblast', Republics, Krai, Autonomous Okrugs, Federal Cities and Autonomous Oblast', the main distinction adopted in the research is between units with distinctive ethnic characteristics and autonomy (namely republics) and non-ethnic regions.

Table 1: Types of subnational units in Russia

<i>Name</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Total</i>
Respublika	Republic	Ethnically defined	21 ⁴
Krai	Administrative territory	Comparable to regions – historically frontier regions	9
Oblast'	Administrative region	Predominantly ethnically Russian	46
Avtonomnaya Oblast'	Autonomous region	Official Jewish jurisdictions	1
Avtonomnyi okrug	Autonomous district	Substantial ethnic minority – under the administrative control of another region	4
Gorod federal'nogo znacheniya	Autonomous city	City that functions administratively as separate region	2 ⁵

First, the role of informal practices and regional elite networks (or clans) in ethnic republics attracted the attention of scholars and analysts over the last twenty years (Graney, 2009). These dynamics, however, remained under-investigated in the case of non-ethnic Oblast's and Krai that do not have, in theory, specific privileges and bargaining advantages vis-à-vis the federal centre. One of the main goals of the thesis is indeed that of investigating the role of horizontal forces and elements of bargaining in subnational units that are not affected by the ethnic dimension in their internal and external relations.

Second, although internal dynamics in republics may be in many aspects similar to those in non-ethnic regions, and this research in its general part do refer to examples drawn from ethnic republics, it is well acknowledged that particular historical trajectories hand in hand with the encompassing force of ethnicity constitute an important element differentiating the logic of informal political practices and intra-elite dynamics within republics vis-à-vis non-ethnic regions (Reisinger and Moraski, 2017). Ethnicity, in other words, represents a powerful bond for local and regional elites, generally contributing to the consolidation of monocentric political regimes.

⁴ Although de facto integrated in the federal structures of the RF, the Republic of Crimea, annexed in 2014, is not included here.

⁵ The city of Sevastopol is not included.

A prominent example is the Chechen Republic, representing an extreme case in terms of its internal and external dynamics after the second Chechen war and the consolidation of Kadyrov's regime (Russell, 2008, 2012). The focus of this research, however, is on the multiplicity of actors and interests and their interaction that affect regional and federal political dynamics forming a particular type of political process based on the interaction of vertical and horizontal axes, beyond the ethnic dimension.

The selection of the cases of Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai thus follows the logic of the most similar research design (Anckar, 2008; Geddes, 2010). To allow an in-depth analysis of the political processes in the two regions and to incorporate the important historical background that affects the playing field in which political and economic elite operates, the cases are examined separately in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 and the general analysis of the findings is provided in chapter 10. The two regions share many characteristics and are similar according to many factors that are theoretically relevant, including territorial size, socio-economic status, population size and ethnicity. Both regions are characterized by a pluralist economic system with several industrial poles. Both are relatively prosperous and included in the category of so-called 'donor' regions.⁶ Both regions historically shared a similar type of political regime, characterized by a rather pluralist political system. Moreover, the two cases historically displayed similar electoral results for the 'party of power' (United Russia), considered as one of the core elements in centre-region relations and one of the main factors in ensuring the stability and longevity of governors (Golosov, 2011). Finally, the governors of both Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai in the period under examination are reputed to fall into the sphere of influence of the same patron in Moscow.

As will be argued in the comparative part of this work, beyond these overall similarities, however, a crucial difference in the period under examination is represented by two interrelated elements. First, the capacity of the governor to consolidate the regional political elite and integrating it into their own network; and second, the specific power constellation of regional elites and their direct ties to federal political and economic actors. These differences, it is argued, might have produced a different outcome in the trajectories of the governors of the two regions. Such a comparison provides an illustration of the role of informal practices and constellation of horizontal forces in shaping the federal process

⁶ The situation in which the revenues collected by regional authorities are larger than the fiscal transfers from the centre to the region. According to different calculations, out of 85 regions only a number comprised between 9 and 13 are considered being 'donor'.

taming the impulse of vertical integration and subordination of the regional level of governance.

The selection of Sverdlovsk and Perm as specific case studies has been affected by practical considerations and limitations. First, considering their structural characteristics, the two cases can be regarded as representative of other ethnically Russian regions with a diversified structure of economic (companies and corporations) and political interest (groups and networks). According to different accounts, this type of regions represents the majority of ethnically Russian subnational units (Ortung, 2004; Petrov and Titkov, 2013). Furthermore, considering the research approach adopted in this study, data conducive to a qualitative in-depth study off all the available cases was impossible to generate.

Table 2: Case selection overview

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Sverdlovsk</i>	<i>Perm Krai</i>	
Territorial size	Medium	Medium	
Socio-ec. status	Developed-pluralist	Developed-pluralist	
Population size	Medium	Medium	
Ethnicity	Majority Russian	Majority Russian	Overall similarities
Dominant party	UR	UR	
Results for UR	Below average	Below average	
‘Sponsor’ in Moscow	Sobyanin	Sobyanin	
Elite co-opted	Yes	No	Crucial differences
Elite coalition	No	Yes	
	Governor reappointed	Governor replaced	

Data and methods

The research relies mainly on qualitative data, especially when analysing the role of local institutions and political and economic actors in the regional system. However, quantitative data with the analysis of descriptive statistics based on the dataset collected by the author, is used to validate the findings and to place the in-depth analysis in a broader cross-regional dimension. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative data is used in order to check and reinforce each other. The dataset contains information on all the gubernatorial elections carried out in Russia since their re-introduction in 2012, including their timing (regular or early elections), type (re-appointment or new interim) electoral results and turnout, registered parties, characteristics of the main contenders and characteristics of the winner (local, outsider etc.). The dataset also includes detailed information concerning the main characteristics of the current 85 Russian governors such as their party affiliation, type (silovik,

politician, technocrat etc), previous experience and personal ties to a specific faction/network in Moscow (the so-called ‘sponsor’).

Primary data and interviews

The foundation of the research relies on a combination of primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected during the fieldwork conducted in Moscow, Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai between 2019 and 2020. The initial trip to Moscow and the two regions in June and July 2019 was followed by an extensive period of research in Perm Krai and Sverdlovsk between October and January 2020. Follow-up trips to Russia were planned for the summer 2020 but were made impossible by the travel restrictions due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. The main method of data-collection relied on face-to-face semi-structured interviews with federal and regional experts, political consultants, academics, officials and former officials of the regional administration and deputies of the regional legislative assemblies, many of which preferred to remain anonymous. To familiarise myself with regional politics, I first met with local journalists, academics and activists that helped to understand peculiarities in local power dynamics and provided contacts of regional officials and politicians.

Semi-structured interviews appear as the most effective way of collecting information considering the sensitivity of the topic and the research objectives. This type of interview was preferred to allow me to cover the main issues I wanted to investigate ensuring consistency in the interviewees’ responses. However, in some cases unstructured interviews were also adopted allowing to ask longer and more complex questions and granting more flexibility in exploring specific aspects of the topic and insight into the personal experience of some officials. Interviews with experts, political consultants and local journalists were conducted to generate information regarding the nature and nuances of the regional political processes, the informal influence of big corporations and the general composition of elite networks. Interviews with regional officials, on the other hand, were useful to provide more details from ‘within the system’ about the above-mentioned dynamics and, especially, to shed some light on the adaptation of the regional elite to the zig and zags of the process of centralization and their formal and informal policy-making practices. Considering the sensitivity of the issues discussed, many officials and experts refused to be recorded and preferred to remain anonymous.

All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in different locations decided by the interviewees according to a previously agreed schedule. Considering the sensitivity of the issues explored and the general secrecy of the bureaucrats and officials, none of the

interviews were conducted in the offices of the regional administration and the respondents did not allow to record the conversation. Consequently, I captured the information and answers by taking notes informing the interviewees that our conversation would be anonymised. Further, some of the interviews were conducted after public events attended by the interviewee and myself.

Secondary data

Primary data collected through interviews and observations during the fieldwork has been complemented by the analysis of regional press and newspapers and data available through federal and regional state agencies such as Rosstat - Federal State Statistics Service - and the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Russian Federation. Other sources of secondary data have been the academic research in English and Russian (monographs and journal articles) that, hand in hand with the author's dataset described above, allowed to fill some of the gaps in the research and to place the empirical analysis in the broader cross-regional perspective (chapters 4, 5 and 10). Considering the peculiarities of the Russian media and informational environment, media sources complementing the primary data for the chapters exploring the two case studies has been selected taking into consideration their alleged political affiliation.

Concerning regional political dynamics in Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai, I've relied mainly on three newspapers available online. *Kommersant*, a nationally distributed daily newspaper with well-developed regional offices. Despite being owned by the oligarch Alisher Usmanov, and a recent re-configuration of the editorial board, up to 2019 the newspaper was considered one of the few outlets preserving high-quality reporting and editorial independence. The other two newspapers are Znak.com, considered an independent source of information and analysis focusing on the broader Ural region, and Ura.ru (Rossiiskoie informatsionnoe agentstvo), an online outlet dealing with regional politics in the Ural macro-region and reputed to be close to regional authorities.⁷ This approach allowed to triangulate the information collected from interviews with regional officials and experts, cross-referencing primary and secondary sources of data (Lilleker, 2003).

⁷ Znak.com decided to suspend its operations in March 2022 due to the increasing pressure from the authorities and the introduction of the restrictive legislation in the aftermath of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Some of the materials can be still accessed through Web Archive (<https://web.archive.org>)

Regional and federal informal coalitions and networks, their organisation and power remain extremely opaque in Russia like elsewhere. Information allowing me to trace these dynamics has been collected relying on different sources. First, the interviews with experts in Moscow and the two regions specifically asking to identify the connection between elite groups and between governors and their ‘sponsors’ at the federal level, provided a primary data on the constellation of different actors included in these networks. When experts were unable to provide information and, with the beginning of the global pandemic, a series of planned in-person interviews were cancelled, I have relied on the analysis of secondary data available in regional and federal newspapers and previously conducted research by Russian and international scholars.

Existing academic material have been complemented with some of the existing models tracing changes and continuity in Russian elite and the influence of individuals – e.g., the ‘Politburo 2.0’ developed by Minchenko Consulting (2012; 2017) and the ‘tower’ model suggested by Vladimir Pribylovskii (2016). Furthermore, the assessment of the composition and power of the elite networks at the federal level is also based on the analysis of the monthly expert survey conducted by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.⁸ These preliminary findings have been matched with the analysis of official publicly available biographies of the governors and members of the federal elite. Indeed, it’s widely acknowledged that in Russia a shared professional and educational background represents a powerful bond in intra-elite dynamics (Ledeneva, 2013; Baturu and Elkind, 2016). Further, beyond tracing this shared background, the analysis of available biographies complemented by experts evaluation and analysis of journalistic sources, provided further information on personal ties and possible conflicts between distinctive regional and federal networks. This approach mitigated some problems related to the validity and reliability of data concerning informal and opaque dynamics such as the formation and consolidation of elite networks and coalitions at both levels of governance (Halperin and Heath, 2017, pp. 171–174).

Problems and limitations

The research faced several limitations. First, due to the increasingly closed and secretive nature of the Russian (federal and regional) political establishment and the sensitive nature of the topic, the research process encountered several obstacles. The fieldwork, for instance, was carried out just after the introduction of a restrictive piece of legislation ‘advising’

⁸ Monthly updates are available at <https://www.ng.ru/ideas/>

Russian academics to limit their communications with foreign counterparts and to receive the approval of the university administration before hosting such meetings.⁹ Moreover, my foreign (specifically Ukrainian) nationality proved to be an obstacle during the fieldwork. Some journalists, colleagues and academics expressed their concern of possible negative consequences (especially in Ekaterinburg) preferring, as their explained in private communications, to avoid direct contacts due the fact that a 'Ukrainian citizen' was conducting research for a UK-based University on such a 'sensitive topic'.

Individual schedules, different degrees of openness of the regional officials and varied interest in participating in the research increased the degree of bureaucratic avoidance despite my reliance on local contacts and academics in the process of arranging interviews. Some of the regional officials that had unofficially agreed to speak with me retracted when discovering my nationality. Despite several attempts they did not provide an agreement to conduct the interview via online or phone. These problems limited the access to the higher echelon of regional officials including the gubernatorial administration and regional government.

Bearing in mind the political sensitivity of the questions, in conducting the interviews I tried to minimise the possibility that respondents adapt their answers avoiding controversial topics or provide misleading information, thus affecting the validity of the collected information. All the interviews were conducted one-on-one in a place decided by the respondent. Interviewees were provided only a brief overview of the research and informed at the start of the interview that their answers will be anonymised. Further, they were informed that the output of the research was for academic purposes only and that the thesis was in English and not designated for the Russian general public. According to some scholars this approach helps to minimise the 'social desirability bias' when conducting interviews on particularly sensitive topics (Steenkamp, De Jong and Baumgartner, 2010).

Moreover, I avoided leading questions by adopting a flexible strategy when conducting interviews. When my perception was that the interviewees were trying to avoid specific issues, for instance, I asked if they can confirm what some of the experts and secondary sources such as newspapers say about the specific topic, encouraging them to recall anecdotes and explore their personal experience. Beyond all these measures, when necessary, I also encouraged the interviewees to refer to specific institutions and offices in general (e.g., gubernatorial administration) rather than to a specific person (e.g., governor).

⁹ Information about the legislation can be found here: <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/183863> (accessed: 21 July 2021)

Finally, to build trust between the interviewer and the interviewee I relied on regional experts and academics as ‘intermediaries’ able not only to provide contacts and access, but also to introduce me directly to the interviewee.

The second type of limitations of this research concerns the external validity. Although a case study with a subnational comparative small-N design is considered an effective tool to trace ‘relational mechanisms’ through an in-depth and detailed investigation of the political processes - thus addressing an exploratory research question - it inevitably has disadvantages. The first controversial issue concerns the ‘problem of representativeness’, in other words the external validity and the ability to generalize (Gerring, 2007, p. 43). Indeed, although a good degree of internal validity can be achieved through this approach, this type of research is usually deemed weaker in terms of external validity. The general trade-off between internal and external validity has been taken into consideration and analysed in accordance with broader research goals (in-depth investigation of informal practices and the role of federal and regional elite in the federal process) and the methodological approach (mostly qualitative). Although a greater degree of external validity can be theoretically achieved by enlarging the number of sub-national case studies, this option has been limited by a series of practical considerations and problems of original data collection.

The first problem regards the time and resources available to conduct the study. The closed nature of the Russian regional elite, hand in hand with problems encountered in contacting academics and experts through remote means of communications (emails, skype etc.) proved to be an additional burden. Including other regional cases, indeed, would require the construction of a network of ‘intermediaries’ from regional academic and expert milieu able to provide contacts and ‘access points’ to regional officials and experts. However, the capacity of building such an intermediary network before conducting the fieldwork in other regions beyond the two examined in this study has been limited by time constraints and limited resources.

Second, even though including other regions in the set of sub-national case studies has been an option considered and discussed, it has been made unviable by the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic and consequent travel restrictions. Although theoretically possible, several attempts to contact and arrange interviews with federal and regional experts and officials via online tools did not produce any result due to an extremely low response rate to my invitations and decreasing degree of openness to foreign interviewers exacerbated by the online mode of communication.

Chapter structure

To investigate the effect of informal institutional practices on the federal bargaining in Russia and the role of the horizontal dimension of federal politics in shaping the interaction between federal and sub-national economic and political elites, the thesis first presents the general approach adopted in this study. In doing so, chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework of the thesis, departing from the crucial distinction between *federal structure* and *federal process*. Moving away from the strictly sociological interpretation of the federal process as the representation of the ‘federal spirit’ of the society, the framework suggested in this thesis integrate this concept with the notion of multi-level governance defined as a set of rules operating *within* the federal state. This allows to explain the role of informal institutions and economic and political actors in shaping the contours of centre-region interaction, complementing the focus on hierarchical elements with equally important horizontal dynamics operating in the federal process.

Although the study focuses mainly on the development of federal bargaining in the period of ‘new centralism’, investigating changes and continuities since the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections in 2012, chapter 3 provides an historical context for the transformation of the system initiated in early 2000s. Despite the re-configuration of the system, many of the elements of the informal bargaining laid down during the process of federalization of the Russian state in the 1990s appeared hard to reverse even in the context of growing strength of the central state and the transformation of formal institutional structures started in the early 2000s. Following this logic, chapter 4 looks at the duality between formal institutions and informal practices during the consolidation of the new paradigm regulating centre-region relations in the process of ‘centralization’, analysing the set of rules and procedures that enhanced the central control over the subnational level of governance. The study notes that despite the consolidation of the power *vertikal*’ and the erosion of genuine elements of federalism, this newly constructed hierarchical structure remained beset by problems and contradictions.

Chapter 5 further explores these contradictions with the specific focus on the role of political and economic actors, factions and networks. The chapter argues that these horizontal elements of interaction filled the structural weaknesses of the power *vertikal*’ affecting federal relations and bargaining from both, top-down and bottom up. On the one hand the informal interaction constitutes the playing field for factions and networks able to affect the decision-making process concerning elite management, specifically the process of appointment of governors. On the other hand, regional dynamics remain beset by elite

competition and conflict for resources and power, providing a diverse set of incentives to regional actors and institutions such as regional parliaments and branches of the *party of power*, United Russia. The intersection between vertical and horizontal axes creates multiple arenas increasing the number of actors and access points.

The subsequent four chapters (from chapter 6 to 9 included) investigate the interaction between vertical and horizontal forces in the specific case of two economically developed Russian regions like Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai. Chapters 6 and 8 explore differences and similarities in the complex interaction between the regional executive and main economic players in these regions. While chapters 7 and 9 provide a qualitative in-depth analysis of the role of regional networks and coalitions after the appointment of two new governors Evgenii Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk and Viktor Basargin in Perm Krai. Overall, the empirical part provides an overview of the complex network of channels of interaction between the federal centre, regional governors and powerful local economic and political players shaped by concurrent formal and informal incentives.

Chapter 10 finally explores crucial differences between the two cases that may account for contrasting political outcomes. Looking at the role of consolidated regional political and economic networks, their interaction with the centre and skills and tools of control exercised by the two governors, the analysis explains why Kuivashev was able to consolidate personal power in Sverdlovsk winning his reappointment as acting governor, while Basargin was marginalized and forced to resign. Expanding the analysis, the second part of the chapter explores changes and continuities in the personal characteristics and composition of the broader category of governors in Russia. Relying on several examples the chapter concludes by exploring some of the consequences of the unpredictable and chaotic policy of elite-management exercised by the federal centre on the federal process, further expanded in the conclusions (chapter 11).

Chapter 2 - Federal process and bargaining: a theoretical framework

Introduction

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework adopted in this work to analyse centre-region relations and regional politics in Russia. The notion of federalism and its contradictions appears as a useful starting point of this analysis. Although assuming a distinctive character of federalism in Russia, indeed, centre-region relations and bargaining is rooted in the general framework of federal studies. Departing from these considerations, the theoretical framework suggested in what follows focuses on the important distinction between the *federal structure* and the *federal process*. As emphasized by the rich literature in federal studies, both elements are central in approaching the study of federalism and federal relations. While the federal structure mostly refers to the formal institutional character of a polity, the process rests on the actual political realities of the state, the role and influence of culture, society and informal political practices in shaping the outcome of formal institutional elements.

The focus on the federal process, indeed, is the main analytical standing point adopted in this work. This induces a further theoretical elaboration of the concept of federal process with the introduction and discussion of the idea of multi-level governance, informal institutions and the specific role of actors and networks in this particular setting. Drawing on the extensive literature dealing with neo-patrimonialism and ‘patronalism’ the theoretical section attempts to incorporate different strands, the role of actors, networks and informal institutions, into the concept of federal process thus departing the mostly cultural interpretation common in the literature. The federal process conceptualized as the result of formal and informal interaction between different actors, groups and networks in a multi-level governance setting thus allows the analysis of the complexities of centre-region relations in Russia taking into consideration the dialectical role of vertical and horizontal forces that shape the outcome of interaction between Moscow and the regions.

Federalism: looking for a common ground

A lot of time has passed since the publication of the K. C. Wheare’s (1946) seminal work on the Federal government. The book represented one of the first attempts of a broader and systematic conceptualization of federalism as concept in the post-war period. Since the first edition of the work was published in 1946, federalism received growing attention from the

academic community. Advantages, as well as disadvantages, of federal form of government have been widely analysed. In contemporary literature we can trace several justifications of federalism and federation as 'desirable governmental form' (Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004, p. 1). Some scholars look at the economic benefits as the main justification of the federal arrangement.

The constitutionally decentralized form of government, for instance, is considered to be more efficient in producing and providing public services, facilitating a better allocation of public goods across the territory and greater responsiveness to citizens preferences assuring more accountability and competition (Qian and Weingast, 1997; Breton, 2000; Kincaid, 2001). Others look at a more nuanced domain of political consequences. The most obvious among political reasons are certainly the preservation of the territorial unity of the state (or its re-unification such as in the case of Germany after the end of the Cold War) allowing and maintaining a degree of subnational autonomy and the accommodation of minorities, especially when the polity is ethnically heterogeneous (Friedrich, 1968, pp. 30–40; Elazar, 1987, pp. 1–32; Bermeo, 2004). Other scholars went even further. Elazar, for instance, in tracing the historical development of federalism after World War II concluded the essay stating that 'the new federal paradigm is equally a recipe for peace, if it works' (Elazar, 1995, p. 18).

Despite significant attention on the advantages of federalism, many scholars came to realise that the federal solution cannot be uncritically considered as a panacea for any political and economic problem of contemporary states (King, 1982, p. 74). In reflecting on the evolution and the relevance of the federalism in contemporary world, Ronald Watts aptly noted that 'experiences indicated that even with the best of motives, there were limits to the appropriateness of federal solutions' (Watts 2007, 10). This conclusion was undoubtedly influenced by the troubling situation and the failure of several post World War II federal experiments. The civil war in Nigeria, the separatist movement in Bangladesh and its final separation from Pakistan, the dissolution of several French colonial federations, continuing tensions in India and Malaysia, the ambivalent path of biggest Latin American federations (such as Mexico and Brazil) and the collapse of Communist ethno-territorial federations certainly cooled down the enthusiasm for the universal application and benefits of the federal solution.

Several 'sources of stress' within the federal arrangement has been studied and investigated. Watts, for instance, has identified at least four endogenous factors contributing to the general instability and problems in federations: (1) sharp internal cleavage in terms of

religion, language, cultural tradition, ethnicity and social structure; (2) characteristics of the particular type of institutional structures adopted to manage the possible conflict among constituent units; (3) specific strategies (more centralization or more decentralization) adopted when polarizing forces are already in place; resulting at the final stage in a growingly (4) polarizing political process transforming the federal compromise in a zero-sum game (Watts, 2008, pp. 179–188).

Beside the preconditions of federal fragility, probably not surprisingly, growing attention on specific problems and constraints of federal arrangements characterized the comparative field of federal studies. Watts in his work devoted particular attention to the pathologies of federalism and its flexibility and evolution (Watts 1999, 2008), while other scholars, such as Thomas Franck, intensively studied the reasons of failure of contemporary federations (Franck, 1968; Hicks, 1978; Bunce, 1998a; Burgess, 2006). The contentious impact of federal structures, especially in terms of economic performance in developing countries (Wibbels 2000) and ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic societies (Erk and Anderson, 2009; Roeder, 2009), as well as the debatable ability to accommodate ‘social concerns and identities’ have gained growing interest in contemporary literature (Hueglin and Fenna, 2015, pp. 25–28 and 341–349).¹⁰

Beyond its benefits and disadvantages, what does the scholarship tell us about the nature and characteristics of federalism and federal systems? In this regard, despite a vast amount of effort and literature, the definition of the federal concept remains fluid. The growing number of countries adopting a federal formula and the significant degree of variation among federal countries in terms of different historic, cultural and political experiences - despite the attempt of some early scholars of federalism (Wheare, 1946; Riker, 1964) - has usually acted as an obstacle in the burdensome attempt to devise an all-embracing definition and a general theory of the concept.

The variety of forms and the dynamic nature of the political arrangement that we use to call federal system,¹¹ prevented theorist and scholars from the construction of a single

¹⁰ For an analysis of preconditions and prerequisites necessary for the successful application of the federal arrangement especially in democratizing and post-conflict societies see: R. Simeon (2011), ‘Preconditions and Prerequisites: Can Anyone Make Federalism Work?’ In *The Federal Idea: Essays in Honour of Ronald L. Watts*, (eds.) T. Courchene *et al.* Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, p. 207–23. A special issue of *Regional & Federal Studies Journal* has been devoted to the general discussion about advantages and disadvantages of a federal arrangement in contemporary political and economic situation. For more information see: *Regional & Federal Studies*, Volume 19, Issue 2, 2009 (available online at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/frfs20/19/2?nav=tocList>).

¹¹ Elazar uses the terms ‘federal political system’ and ‘federation’ in a descriptive way to identify systems which institutionalize a degree of power distribution among the central and regional layers

model or theory applicable to the whole range of federations (Watts, 1999, pp. 1–20). Not surprisingly, taking in consideration this heterogeneity some scholars even question the relevance of such a general theory (Friedrich, 1968, pp. 7–9). Federalism appeared from the very beginning as a dynamic term able to encompass the diversity of forms and designs. One of the leading scholars of federalism, for instance, emphasized the federal paradox stating that ‘the great strength of federalism...lies in its flexibility (or adaptability), but that very strength makes federalism difficult to discuss satisfactory on a theoretical level’ (Elazar, 1987, p. 38).

Federalism and federation

Despite theoretical and empirical constraints, an important breakthrough in the field can be ascribed to Preston King. Starting from the idea that in social science normative, empirical and analytical thoughts are intertwined, in his ‘*Federalism and Federation*’ King claims that the study of federalism, and especially the comparative field that entails some form of measurement, should necessarily start from the definition of some kind of convention about the nature of the federation itself. King emphasized that ‘no empirical understanding of society can proceed without conventions: conventions is the price we pay for such understanding’ (King, 1982, p. 11).

In his attempt to provide ‘some common logic’ able to distinguish a federation from other forms of government the scholar was among the first to make a systematic methodological distinction between *federalism* and *federation* (King, 1982, pp. 71–87). Building upon Proudhon’s writings on the federal idea, King identified federalism as a comprehensive doctrine, an ideology and a conceptual value or, in his words, ‘a coherent and inclusive view of the world’ (King, 1982, p. 74). On the other hand, federation refers to practical institutions, the institutional arrangement as a device in particular forms of political organisation (Watts, 1999, p. 6). The crucial point in King’s approach, emphasized by other scholars such as Burgess (Burgess 2006, 76–101, 2011), is not the distinction between two terms and notions, but the emphasis on their continuous interaction. As King aptly stated:

of government. This spectrum comprises nine non-unitary systems, according to the variation in power allocation between the centre and periphery: Unions; constitutionally decentralized unions; federations; confederations; federacies; associated states; condominiums; leagues; joint functional authorities. For a more detailed account see: D. J. Elazar (1987). *Exploring Federalism*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. pp. 38-64; see also: R. L. Watts (1999) *Comparing Federal Systems*. 2nd ed. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press. pp.6-14

Every federation, taken as an institution, has some recommendatory component or character. And if we equate recommendation with philosophy or ideology, then every federation has a philosophical or ideological character. Although a philosophy or ideology will not necessarily take on an institutional form, any coherent set of institutions may be regarded as giving expression to some set of philosophical or ideological postulates (King, 1982, p. 76).

The conceptual distinction between federalism and federation, thus, is the point of departure in the analysis of other two important issues in contemporary literature on federalism. The interaction between federalism and democracy and the distinction between federal structure and federal process. King's ideological and philosophical idea of federalism appeals, indeed, to political pluralism and autonomy. Consequently, the symbiotic relationship between *federalism* and *federation* entails the application of political pluralism in the structure of the government.

The dialectical interaction between *federalism* and *federation* and the intrinsic political pluralism that encompass both notions is the main feature of a federal system. Thus, by their very nature federations cannot be absolutist, 'which means that they are in some degree democratic' (King, 1982, p. 88). Wheare associated federalism and democracy looking at the importance of free elections and the party system in a federation (Wheare, 1946, pp. 44–49), while Friedrich looked at the connection between federalism and democracy through the lens of constitutionalism as the pillar of any federal arrangement (Friedrich, 1968, pp. 30–40).

In labelling federalism as 'the territorial expression of the core creed of democracy' Duchacek was primarily concerned by the importance of political pluralism within and among the constituent units and by the role played by the party system in federal relations (Duchacek, 1986, p. 96). Indeed, for the most part - and especially in recent years - a general consensus on the intimate connection and convergence between the concepts of federalism and democracy has characterized the academic discussion on the topic (Elazar, 1987; Burgess, 2006; Burgess and Gagnon, 2010b; Kincaid, 2010; Watts, 2010)¹². Not surprisingly, Paolo Dardanelli - echoing King's famous formula about the distinction between *federalism*

¹² For a broad theoretical, historical and empirical discussion on the topic see the edited volume, M. Burgess and A.G. Gagnon, (eds) (2010a), *Federal democracies*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

and *federation* - concludes that, ‘if democracy can exist without federalism, the latter cannot really flourish without the former’ (Dardanelli, 2010, p. 142).¹³

Federal constitutionalism

Notwithstanding their heterogeneity federal systems share some basic common constitutional and organisational features, and the constitutional nature of the federation is commonly accepted as the main unifying idea (Wheare, 1946; King, 1982; Elazar, 1987, pp. 154–168; Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004; Hueglin and Fenna, 2015, pp. 16–46). The constitution (written) and its provisions thus appear as the essential part of what Elazar calls the ‘contractual non-centralization’ as the main characteristic of any federal system (Elazar, 1987, p. 36). This entails two main pillars of a federal system, the constitution and the formal division of powers between different levels of government. The division of powers indeed both derives from and is guaranteed by the constitution as the final point of arrival of the original federal bargain and negotiation in which a variety of interests find a compromise (Davis, 1967). The constitution, thus, is not only the guarantor of the division of powers, but especially the safeguard of the federal principle of mutuality and combination of unity and diversity. As King has claimed:

...any federation be regarded as an institutional arrangement, taking the form of sovereign state, and distinguished from other such states solely by the fact that its central government incorporates regional units into its decision procedure on some constitutionally entrenched basis (King, 1982, p. 77).

Starting from the idea that a federation is a particular species of the broad realm of federal political systems scholars identify six common structural characteristics of federations: (1) two orders of government, national and subnational; (2) a constitutionally granted distribution of authority between legislative and executive branches and between two orders of government granting a degree of autonomy for each order; (3) representation of regional interests in federal institutions provided by a federal second chamber; (4) a rigid constitution not amendable unilaterally; (5) rule enforcement provisions and an umpire; and (6) institutions able to facilitate intergovernmental relations in those areas where responsibility can overlap or being shared (Watts, 2008, p. 9).

¹³ In his discussion about the concept of *federalism* and *federation* and their intertwined nature, King stated that “although there may be federalism without federation, there can be no federation without some matching variety of federalism” (King, 1982, p. 76)

Despite the central role of the constitutional provisions, however, the actual degree of distribution of powers is one of the main elements reflecting the delicate balance between uniformity and diversity in federal systems (Friedrich, 1968, pp. 70–81). King (1982, p. 75) identifies three types of federation that are consistent with three type of federalism. A federation, indeed, can secure greater centralization, decentralization or achieve a form of balance between the two opposite tendencies. It is commonly accepted that the distribution of power between federal and regional governments are not fixed and several factors, such as historical, cultural, economic and political context can establish or move the plank towards the former or the later (Friedrich, 1968, pp. 70–81; Elazar, 1987, pp. 198–222; Watts, 2008, p. 84). Other institutional factors, such as the period in which federal structures have been created and, most importantly, the party system and the type of the federal government (presidential or parliamentary, for instance) can also influence the actual degree and variation of power distribution and the level of federal non-centralization (Watts, 2013).

The crucial distinction between structure and process

The symbiotic interplay between federalism and democracy and federalism and constitutionalism does not help, however, to understand the operation of centre-region relations and the nature of Russian federal bargaining. As suggested by Ross (2005, p. 367), ‘electoral authoritarianism is now entrenched in a large number of regions in Russia, and federalism is a sham’. What appears more cogent in the Russian case, indeed, is the discrepancy between the constitution and the actual political practices that, as will be discussed in later chapters, characterized centre-region relations since the introduction of the Russian federal constitution.¹⁴

It is not only the ‘lack of democracy’ that makes Russia today a ‘federation without federalism’ (Ross, 2002, p. 7), but rather the specific nature and qualities of the state and the role of informal institutions and practices that operate hand in hand with the formal constitutional arrangement. The model of centre-region relations developed in this work,

¹⁴ It goes without saying that this is not only the case of Russia. For instance, Wheare was among the first scholars of federalism to look at the divergence between structure and process in Canada emphasizing that that while in constitutional terms Canada was a quasi-federal state, it was nonetheless predominantly federal in practice (Wheare 1946, pp. 20–21). By the same token, Wildavsky claims that the key difference between the Australian and the American cases is represented by the ethnic, economic and religious diversities that form the so-called ‘social federalism’ in the United States. While the ‘structural federalism’, characterizes both countries, the social one is present only in the US, and its impact on the party system should be analysed along with structural factors (Wildavsky, 1967).

indeed, draws on the central distinction between federal structure and federal process, with the specific emphasize on their dialectic interaction.

This distinction is far from new in federal studies. Livingston developed his sociological interpretation (Birch, 1966) concluding that federalism, as an attempt to develop a proper political organisation, arise and interact with different economic, social, cultural and political incentives. Institutions, in other words, are nothing else than an apparent manifestation of ‘deeper federal quality of the society’ as a whole (Livingston, 1952, p. 84), or as other scholars would put it, a ‘federal spirit’ or ‘federal behaviour’ (Friedrich, 1968, pp. 30–39). Indeed, the driving force of the discussion concerning the distinction between the federal structure and the federal process was not represented only by theoretical necessities, but also – and to some extent especially – by empirical urgencies.

Taking in consideration the dynamic nature of federalism and the influence of historical and political factors on the creation and operation of institutions, the necessity is now recognized to look at both, the structure and the process, in order to study and compare federal systems. Only by combining the institutional arrangement with what Elazar calls the ‘political-cultural dimension’ of the polity we can really investigate the nature of a federal system (Elazar, 1987, p. 67). Indeed, despite a similar structural feature, federal systems can practically operate in a different way from each other because of the influence of political forces in the society and practices of governments, in some cases undermining constitutional provisions and the real distribution of powers (Davis, 1967).

The relationship between structure and process is not conceived as static, but rather as a dynamic and mutual interaction where the process can influence the structure and vice versa (Burgess, 2006; Watts, 2008, 2015). The operation of institutions, values and attitudes and the interplay among them as well as among different level of the system (national and subnational) constitute indeed a federal political system (Stein, 1968, p. 731). The difference and differentiation in the patterns of evolution of federal systems is, indeed, the demonstration of this mutual interaction between structure and process. As argued by Burgess (Burgess, 2011, p. 205), ‘the coexistence of self-rule and shared rule means that conflict, competition and cooperation are institutionalized in a particular way that perpetuates problems of great complexity’.

Looking at the difference in size, population, economy and political powers among component units Duchacek highlighted the extra-constitutional dimension of federal asymmetry. Even where the constitutional provision grants equal powers to the units, these factors are able to shape and determine different interests in relation to the actual operation

of the system. Thus, in practice, no federal system can be considered properly symmetric (Duchacek, 1987, pp. 277–297). Indeed, the distinction between *de jure* (constitutional) and *de facto* (political) asymmetry appears crucial. While *de jure* asymmetry refers to the constitutional processes that define institutional differences between the units, *de facto* asymmetry arise from the actual political practices (Agranoff, 1999; Watts, 2008, pp. 125–130). As noted by Alfred Stepan (2005, pp. 264–266), *de jure* asymmetrical solution has become more popular with the growing number of multi-ethnic federations after the World War II. Today, with the exception of Switzerland, all multi-ethnic democratic federations adopt some sort of constitutionally asymmetric arrangement.

Finally, understanding how and why federations are created appears important in order to investigate and evaluate the operational and political reality in different political systems, namely the actual political process. As it has been argued by some scholars, the nature of the process of federal formation has a longstanding impact on the stability of the federal institutions and its consequent evolution (Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004). In this regard, Burgess (2006, p. 279) aptly notes that ‘both the historical context and the point of departure of each federation matter in the search for understanding’, while Bermeo (2004, p. 472) looking at failure of the federal experiments in Eastern Europe, concludes that this ‘pattern is not the fruit of coincidence, but, rather, a strong signal that origin matters’.

Federal process as multi-level governance

Departing from this discussion, this work looks at the federal structure as the formal form of federal institutions. The federal process on the other hand is shaped by the actual operation and outcome of those institutions. However, the focus on the federal process in Russia, the main reference point of this work, has several theoretical implications. First, it broadly defines the conceptualization of the Russian state with the specific focus on governance rather than government. While states defined as government holds the traditional Weberian vision of the state as an ideal type authority enforcing order within specific borders and regulating the interaction between political actors (Weber, 2004), governance can be conceptualized as a set of rules and political practices operating *within* the state. These rules and political practices do not operate only within the framework of formal procedures and structures (institutions). In other words, although the reference point of the federal process are the structural elements of the state, it is equally populated by different actors and interests able to shape the actual reality of centre-region relations, their stability, variation over time and shape, leading some scholars to define it as ‘informal governance’ (Gel’man, 2012) or,

with a clear normative perspective, 'bad governance' (Gel'man, 2017).

Governance is understood as the 'process of governing' (Rhodes, 1996, p. 653) transcending the state and based on a coordination between different actors, 'labour unions, trade associations, firm, NGOs, local authority representatives, social entrepreneurs and community groups' (Hirst, 2000, pp. 18–19), or, more broadly between state authorities, non-state actors and business. Governance thus is an interactive process in which different actors operate establishing specific practices and rules, shaping a 'governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred' (Stoker, 1998, p. 15). In other words, it is a process of coordination and conflict between a multiplicity of actors that through an official position or an informal influence can affect the way in which the governing mechanisms operate. Not a single actor, thus, possesses full information and knowledge about the behaviour of other actors, even when possessing resources in a power dependence setting.

This does not automatically mean that governance as such undermines state control and democratic attributes. On the contrary, many observers claim that the interaction between state and non-state actors is a necessary attribute of the complex contemporary democracies (Rhodes, 2007) where specialization, administrative fragmentation and decreasing state responsibility ('hollowing out' of the state) creates new forms of state and non-state interaction able to improve democratic qualities of a regime (Mayntz, 1993). On the other hand, however, others, with the specific focus on actors involved in the governance process, emphasize the issue of inclusion and exclusion in the process. In other words, the interaction between state and non-state players can be used to preserve the status quo and the power of traditional elites preventing possible competitors from entering the process or co-opting them, with the consequent blurring of responsibilities (Davies, 2011), hollowing out not only the state, but also democratic institutions and accountability.

Furthermore, in the case of a federal states like Russia, the concept of governance assumes a multilevel dimension. A coherent consolidation of a specific 'governing style' is thus undermined by a varied constellation of state and non-state actors and interests at the national and subnational levels and by the differentiation between types of subnational regimes. The constellation of actors involved in the process and the kind of governance emerging as a consequence may depend on the peculiarities of specific federal subjects. The Russian Federation, indeed, is not only characterized by territorial and economic asymmetry, but also by a large variation in terms of type and characteristic of regional political regimes (Petrov and Titkov, 2013). Governance is in other words embedded into the framework of

the federal system that provides a multiplicity of ‘access points’ for state and non-state actors to affect political dynamics at both levels and the relations between the centre and the regions. This makes the interaction between actors and territorial levels more complex and multifaceted leaving, despite the consolidation of a centralized system and the growing power asymmetry, space for negotiation and bargaining between actors involved at different levels in the process of governance. As emphasized by Mikkel Berg-Nordlie *et al*, ‘multilevel governance rarely appears as a uniform setting’ (Kropp, Berg-Nordlie and Holm-Hansen, 2018).

Federal process and formal-informal duality

If the concept of governance is then our point of departure to unpack the complexities of the federal process, and if the process of governance is characterized by a multiplicity of actors transcending formal hierarchies and structures of the Weberian state, what then regulates the actors’ behaviour and interaction in a multi-level setting? To address this question, a necessary theoretical tool appears to be the distinction between formal and informal institutions populating the framework of centre-region interaction and shaping actors’ expectations and behaviour.

According to Douglass C. North (1990, p. 3), institutions are ‘rules of the game’ or ‘humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction’. The main purpose of institutions is that of guiding and structuring everyday life and, consequently, reducing the uncertainty about the behaviour of others. In creating a set of rules, institutions thus introduce a form of constraint on human behaviour creating ‘conventions and codes’, providing a framework for interaction and a structure of expectations (North, 1990, p. 4). Although these constraints can be also internal (internalization of norms), the general agreement is that the main mechanism of constraint is external. In other words, an external, third-party authority - usually the state - introduces and enforces sanctions against any violation of shared ‘rules of the game’ (Lauth, 2004).

Despite the main focus on formal institutions, the institutionalist literature acknowledges the existence and importance of another type of ‘rules of the game’. Indeed, for North ‘[Institutions] are made up of formal constraints (e.g., rules, laws, constitutions), informal constraints (e.g., norms of behavior, conventions, self-imposed codes of conduct), and their enforcement characteristics’ (North, 1990, p. 360). While Lauth emphasizes how formal institutions ‘show only one side of the coin’ while other, informal types of constraints shape and structure ‘social and political life in a broader sense’ (Lauth, 2004, p. 67).

Narrowing down, informal institutions are distinguished from formal counterparts as they represent ‘socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels’ (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). What makes informal ways of getting things done part of the institutionalist discussion is the fact that there is a credible set of sanctions for those breaking these un-written rules. The type of sanctions, however, may vary according to the type of informal institutions. Indeed, sanctions may represent a loss of status, prestige or employment, as in the case of informal norms shaping the voting behaviour of state employees in electoral authoritarian regimes, or the use of compromising material (*kompromat*) discrediting a public figure.

An important caveat is that informal norms shaping political practices may be enforced by ‘actors and institutions within the state itself’ (Helmke and Levitsky, 2006, p. 5). When applied to the process of governance in Russia this means that political actors can ‘borrow the coercive power of the state’ in enforcing the informal sphere of the institutional structure (Sakwa, 2011, p. 108). Indeed, as will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the executive apparatus itself may rely on a complex toolkit of formal and informal incentives able to shape the behaviour of actors involved in the process of multi-level governance.

It has been also argued that the coexistence of formal and informal can be ‘functional’ or ‘dysfunctional’ (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004, p. 728). Indeed, functional informal institutions are those practices that can improve the efficiency of formal rules, solving problems and providing a channel for enhancing social coordination. Dysfunctional institutions, on the other hand, are those able to divert the expected outcome of formal rules of the game, undermining their performance and hijacking them (O’Donnell, 1996). Some scholars, for instance, refer to this type of informal constraint as ‘parasitic’ (Lauth, 2004, p. 74) or ‘subversive’ (Gel’man, 2012). Building on this general distinction, Helmke and Levitsky provided a useful bi-dimensional typology of informal institutions dividing them in four different types. According to two dimensions based on the degree of convergence between rules and practices (divergent and convergent) and on their effectiveness (effective or ineffective), informal institutions can be classified as complementary, substitutive, accommodating or competing (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004, pp. 728–30).

Thus, formal and informal institutions do not represent two isolated domains. Rather, the dynamic approach, looking at how informal politics, that might be uncoded, affects the creation and the evolution of formal rules of the game (and vice-versa), seems to better gauge the complex relationship between rules and practices and, above all, the resulting political outcomes (Grzymala-Busse, 2010; Hale, 2011). In the particular case of multi-level

governance in Russia, indeed, changes in the formal rules and institutions have affected the transformation of informal practices and constraints in a process characterized by constant interaction and adaptation. Formal and informal remain two mutually dependent, dialectic, elements of the federal process.

An important caveat should be emphasized here, namely the distinction between informal and weak institutions. Indeed, if in some cases the institutional weakness or weak institutionalization (O'Donnell, 1994) can explain the ineffectiveness of formal rules and the dominance of informal practices, this does not imply by default the existence of informal institutions. Following the same logic, indeed, as the first part of the dissertation will demonstrate, the institutionalization or the restoration of state capacity does not lead toward the dissolution of informal rules and practices. If the sharp decline in state capacity and the weakness of formal institutions in the 1990s contributed to the fragmentation of the state based on an informal devolution of power from the centre, the subsequent restoration of functioning state structures in early 2000s did not defeat informal institutions by default. Despite changes and new incentives, there is enough evidence that informal institutions play an important role in the Russian federation at both levels of governance (Ryzhenkov, 2010; Sakwa, 2011; Ledeneva, 2013).

Another important theoretical caveat is that the focus on the interaction between formal institutions and informal practices encapsulates the continuous tension between chaos and control at different levels of federal politics in Russia (Sakwa, 2021a). If on the one hand rules and institutions shape individuals' behaviour and how 'political actors respond to a mix of formal and informal incentives' (Helmke and Levitsky, 2006, p. 2), thus representing a structural constraint on political agency, on the other hand these formal and informal rules are 'used' and shaped by political actors at both levels of governance (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov and Brie, 2003; Ledeneva, 2013).

The formal-informal interaction represents a central element in the *modus operandi* of political actors within a context of fragmented interests within and between the centre and the regions. The transformation of formal rules in federal relations can hide informal purposes and incentives enforcing the centre's control over the subnational level. However, being this control institutionalized mainly informally, these institutions and practices leave ample room for forces able to undermine this control and the creation of informal coalitions at both, the central and the regional levels with their particularistic objective and interests (analysed in chapters 4 and 5). In other words, as the empirical part of this work will discuss in detail, the constant interaction between formal and informal institutions in a multi-level

governance setting is a two-edged sword making centre-region relations far more complex than a stylized picture of a hierarchical and centralistic structure would suggest. For instance, the process of centralization analysed in chapter 4, far from solving the conflict between the regions and the centre created different channels for ‘conflict-resolution’ which effectiveness appears temporary.

The process of multi-level governance thus reveals the role of formal-informal interaction. As emphasized by Sakwa (2021a, p. 230), for instance, ‘institutionalized governance and informal network regime relations not only coexist but are dependent on each other’. This symbiosis between formal institutions and informal practices, encapsulated in constant interaction between the constitutional state and the administrative regime, hence the ‘dual state’ (Sakwa, 2010b), is punctuated by ad hoc and arbitrary interventionism in regime relations that makes the system ‘inherently dynamic’ (Hale, Lipman and Petrov, 2019) and, one might argue, less stable.

Actors and networks: the vertical and horizontal axes of the federal process

Informal institutions remain a broad domain as political practices deviating from formal institutions may assume different forms and encapsulate different dimensions of analysis. The main focus of this work is, however, on the set of institutionalized informal practices operating in the context of elite interaction at both levels of governance. Elite is broadly defined as ‘persons who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organisations and movements of whatever kind, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially’ (Higley and Burton, 1989).

In the analysis carried out in this work, indeed, actors operating at different levels of governance are not treated as ‘unitary’. The Kremlin, the Presidential Administration (PA) and the regional administration are understood and analysed as a conglomeration of multiple actors with different and sometimes contrasting interests, the so-called networks (Easter, 2000). As will be argued in chapter 5, for instance, within the state administration at the federal level different agencies, actors and interests coexist shaping the process of gubernatorial appointments. On the other hand, the diversity of constellation of actors at the regional level determines the likelihood and ability of the governors to build and consolidate informal coalition with and among regional and local elites and non-state actors, thus complicating the integration of the sub-national level into the state hierarchy.

As a consequence, this multiplicity of actors and interests plays an important role in determining political dynamics operating in the federal process. Thus, not only institutional

but also personal connections and conflict between actors and members of political and economic elite structure relations and conflicts between the centre and the regions. Both formal and informal institutions are indeed in a sense populated by informal elite groups. These groups operate within and outside the formal skeleton of the state infusing it with alternative rules of the game and undermining its autonomy.

Although these dynamics appear relevant even in countries with a strong and long-lasting institutional design (Azari and Smith, 2012), they assume a particularly pervasive role in contexts such as Russia, where formal institutions, combined with informal practices, play a central role in the preservation of the regime and the status quo (Lust-Okar, 2006). Following Stoker (Stoker, 1998, p. 20), a regime is defined as a conglomerate of ‘actors and institutions’ that ‘gain a capacity to act by blending their resources, skills and purposes into a long-term coalition’. Thus, a particular regime represents an ‘informal basis for coordination’ between different actors and networks, rather than an autonomous structure of command. As will be discussed later in this work, the interaction between actors constitutes the core of the horizontal dimension of the federal process tempering and shaping the vertical integration and control of the subnational level by the federal centre.

From a theoretical perspective, the focus on elite groups and their informal role in shaping the political process has been widely analysed through the lens of clientelism and neo-patrimonialism (Clapham, 1982; Snyder, 1992). Drawing on the Weberian concept of patrimonialism, a rule based on patron-client relations as opposed to legal patterns of authority, neo-patrimonialism describes an equilibrium that combines personal institutions (leaders’ role and elite relations), impersonal institutions (state bureaucratic machinery) and ‘particularistic economic exchange’ (Robinson, 2017). In this system the political process is affected by personal relations among elites which are, however, not in opposition but rather in constant interaction with the impersonal administrative system (Erdmann and Engel, 2007).

The neo-patrimonial equilibrium is usually associated with informal structures or networks revolved around actors sharing personal (kinship, acquaintance, friendship) and institutional (working together) ties in private and public domains (Wellman and Berkowitz, 1991). These networks allow to consolidate and institutionalize patronage dynamics operating in a particular system of governance making political capital available to its members. Hand in hand with the coexistence of formal and informal institutions, networks provide an additional mechanism of coordination and resources distribution supplementing some of the functions of formal institutions and providing benefits to its members which

otherwise would not be available (Roniger, 2004). Although networks can be organised in different ways, they usually assume a vertically integrated structure, with a limited number of actors (patrons) exerting control over others (clients) tied by patronage bonds (Knoke, 1990). Being a restricted informal venue of interaction, the power of the members and patrons derives not only from the available resources but also from the ability to regulate the membership and prevent internal and external competitors from becoming too powerful (Buck, 2010). Thus, networks are fluid structures encompassing different interest groups and sub-units in a constant process of re-balancing.

The role played by elite networks appears thus an important part in investigating the process of Russian politics in general and centre-region relations in particular. Not surprisingly several studies have been devoted to the analysis of this phenomenon. While using different approaches, a multiplicity of research looking at the working mechanisms at the federal level emphasize the importance of such informal structures in the preservation (or conservation) of the status quo in Putin's Russia, while negatively affecting the modernisation of the state (Ledeneva, 2013). Thus, Vadim Kononenko and Arkadii Moshes (2011) introduced the concept of 'network state' in which formal institutions have merged with informal networks penetrating the totality of the state.

The composition and structure of networks have been investigated, among others, by Kryshatanovskaya (2005) who identify several sub-groups, cliques and clans encompassing formal and informal aspects and institutions. Baturu and Elkind (2016), on the other hand, look at the evolution of different networks over time, hence different centres of power, and the consolidation of the network built around Putin. At the regional level, research on the role of networks experienced the golden age during the 1990s when governors were able to acquire an unprecedented amount of autonomy building personal patronage systems and clienteles, especially but not only in ethnic republics (Stoner-Weiss, 1997b; Mendras, 1999; Matsuzato, 2001).

More recently, Hale has developed the idea of 'patronalism' applying it to the analysis of the post-Soviet Eurasia. Patronalism describes a 'social equilibrium in which individuals organise their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments' (Hale, 2015, p. 20). Although drawing on and integrating several elements of other theoretical approaches such as clientelism, informal politics and neo-patrimonialism, Hale emphasizes that patronalism is a more general notion characterizing a 'pattern of social relations' rather than a 'form of rule' which is the focus of the other existing approaches (Hale, 2015, p. 25). In other words, a patronal network is a

structure organised around the figure of the ‘patron’, usually the president, including several clients and equals reflecting a complex combination of relationship between different actors.

Although describing elements of instability of these networks, specifically the role of the collective action of ‘clients’ shaped by their expectations, the main focus of the analysis is again the hierarchical structure of the network and the ability of ‘patrons’ to control and shape the expectations of ‘clients’. Not surprisingly, when it comes to Russia, the image is that of a single-pyramid network able to co-opt and incorporate several private and regional patronal networks closing all the alternatives and restricting other centres of power.

Integrating federal process, governance and networks

The relationship within the macro-network described by Hale, however, appears much more complicated and complex. While the patron certainly relies on the integration of other members of the elite in their network to gain power and control over the regime, the so-called clients remain equally active political actors that can use their position within the regime and the access to the patron to pursue their own personalistic interests vis-à-vis other actors. The combination of different goals and interests of different actors may not always align with official directives and objectives of the regime. Hence, despite a clear subordination, the relationship between patrons and clients remains bidirectional.

While drawing on some of the core elements of neo-patrimonial and patronal literature, the current work attempts to integrate this top-down approach with horizontal elements of analysis, looking at informal and personalistic dynamics shaping the federal process in the context of multi-level governance. With the specific focus on the interaction between central and regional level and vertical and horizontal forces, indeed, the analysis investigates the internal dynamics and complexities operating within the big ‘patronal network’ described by Hale and supported by the neo-patrimonial approach.

Although networks are usually associated with personalist regimes and ‘patron-clients’ dynamics (Baturu and Elkind, 2016), indeed, Alena Ledeneva (2013, p. 4) notes that they perform other important functions, such as control of resources and, above all, mobilisation of cadres, constituting what the scholar calls *sistema*, an informal ‘pattern of governance’. The focus on the vertical integration and organisation of the network, indeed, obscures horizontal forces operating within this macro-network in a context of multi-level governance. Below the macro level of analysis, horizontal forces formed by sub-networks, interest groups, institutions, corporations and personalities (analysed in chapter 5) shape a fluid ecosystem of corporate and interpersonal interaction with different sources of power,

thus tempering and sometimes destabilizing the vertically integrated line of command and control. These sub-networks, corporations and personalities operating at different levels of governance may well interact within the single-pyramid model coordinated around Putin described by Hale, but this interaction remains dynamic, based on different amount and sources of power (e.g., close relations with members of the Presidential Administration, but also economic resources) thus blurring the sharp distinction between vertical and horizontal integration. As noted by Ledeneva (2013, p. 22), one of the characteristics of the networks (or sub-networks) is indeed their diffuse and complex nature. 'They can operate in a 'horizontal, de-centred mode and rely on very weak ties' serving not only as cross-institutions but also as cross-clan bridges.

On the federal level the big network is shaped by the instable dynamics between different sub-networks and actors, described by Sakwa (2011, pp. 85–130) as factions, drawing on the pattern of politics in eighteenth century Britain. At the lower level, on the other hand, despite the transformation of formal and informal rules of the game regulating centre-region relations, regional politics and elements of bargaining with the federal centre remain affected by the power constellation in each region, the relationship among main political and economic actors with formal and informal powers, and directly between regional and central actors.

The vertical integration and control of a network is not only affected by the distribution of rewards and punishments, but by the monitoring capacity as well (Stokes, 2005). Although formally vertically integrated and structured around a patron, the informal nature of the network complicates the ability to monitor, reward and punish subaltern actors (clients). The monitoring problem assumes even a more important dimension in the case of a multi-level governance, with its fragmented institutional structures and several access points, thus further undermining the centre's capacity to control and encroach upon the subnational level. The integration of lower-level elites in the network, indeed, is not based on direct control, but rather on incentives provided by selective reward and punishment.

The balance, however, appears more precarious in a federal state when the monitoring capacity is further limited. This monitoring problem is emphasized by the issue of 'dual commitment' (discussed in chapters 4 and 5) which can arise for some of the political actors in centre-region relations (such as governors) (Sharafutdinova, 2010). Even when incorporated into the bureaucratic hierarchy, the legitimacy and the position of these actors may be dependent on multiple sources located at both levels of governance and anchored to different sub-networks and actors. Despite the centralization and co-optation, in the process

of multi-level governance affected by the monitoring problem, regional actors may exploit at their own advantage the integration into the main network and the structural contradictions of the hierarchical control.

Conclusion

In Russia elements of ‘boundary control’ (Gibson, 2005) exercised by regional actors and networks in the 1990s have been dismantled and federalism has been eroded through powerful formal and informal tools of centralization. However, vertical integration did not eliminate the horizontal forces integrated into the federal process. As such, the focus on governance and actors forming informal groups, factions and networks represent the theoretical foundation of the analysis of centre-region interaction in contemporary Russia allows the examination of the federal process from a different angle. Multi-level governance, indeed, encompasses a complex combination of interdependent vertical and horizontal forces of interaction and organisation between state and non-state elites.

As will become clear in what follows, despite the pre-eminence of vertical forces in centre-region bargaining, the horizontal dimension, usually neglected by the literature, plays nonetheless an important role in shaping the process and mechanisms of interaction between Moscow and regions. Indeed, through this lens, the idea of a line of command stemming from the centre and going down to the regional and local level, in Russian parlance the *vertikal’ vlasti*, appears as a simplification of a far more complex process of interaction involving a multiplicity of actors and institutions.

Examining the interaction between vertical and horizontal forces and their effect on regional and federal politics through the lens of the federal process, governance and networks will be the subject of chapters 4 and 5, with empirical evidence provided by the case studies of Sverdlovsk and Perm in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 and a general cross-regional analysis in chapter 10. However, before moving to the analysis of these recent developments, we must investigate the complexities of the evolution of the specific federal system in Russia. The following chapter will place the process of centre-region relations in its historical context, analysing the evolution of the federal process and the growing gap between formal institutions and consolidated informal practices in the period of state transition.

Chapter 3 - The (re)federalization of Russia: formal and informal bargaining

Introduction

The primary purpose of this historical chapter is to provide an overview of the evolution of federalism and centre-region relations in Russia that preceded the period of centralization initiated by Putin. By briefly focusing on the historical legacies of the Soviet federal experience and the complex evolution of the centre-region bargaining under Yeltsin, the chapter examines the peculiarities of Russian federalism and the increasing divide between the structure and process in centre-region interaction encapsulated in the creation and insulation of regional regimes from the central control in the 1990s. In the pantheon of world federations, the Russian case is distinctive for several reasons, not least because of the fact that the new federation was born out of the collapse of a previous federation (at least formally), the USSR (Smith, 1995, p. 157). The period of transition involved major political and economic reforms and undeniably influenced the federal relations of the multi-ethnic polity. As Donna Bahry (2005, p. 127) noted, ‘federations that survive the transition intact often face additional problems, including significant pockets of traditional rule, corruption, and provincial resistance to centrally imposed market reform’.

Before moving to the analysis of the process of centralization, the chapter lays the foundation for the analysis of the role of vertical and horizontal forces in Putin’s Russia. The main argument here is that in a period of complex transition, the evolution of the federal process has been characterized by an uneven interaction between formal and informal institutions in which the latter filled the gaps in the formal institutional design and compensated for the weakness of the federal centre, contributing to the consolidation of specific regional political regimes. The interaction between formal and informal incentives and rules of the game, however, not only allowed the consolidation of tight regional regimes and networks, but also their interaction and dialectic of relations with the centre, along the vertical axis. Although the post-Soviet period has been characterized by a substantial transformation in the way federal relations have functioned, some of the peculiar elements and dynamics of centre-region interaction consolidated during this period were hard to reverse despite the growing federal centre’s capacities and the subsequent weakening of the regional elite and networks since the beginning of the 2000s.

The Soviet federal façade

The Russian Federation, as it was fifteen or twenty years ago, represents a distinctive political subject spreading across a huge land mass encompassing dozens of different ethnic groups. Even though full discussion of Russian distinctiveness is far beyond the goal of this study, it is worth noting that, beyond its unique geographical and territorial characteristics, any approach to the nature of centre-region relations and regional politics in contemporary Russia would be probably pointless without taking into consideration the historical context and the burden of the particular and troubled political evolution of the system. In other words, establishing a line of continuity in studying the evolution of Russian federalism and centre-periphery relations after the dissolution of the Soviet Union appears a meaningful starting point for an in-depth analysis of contemporary dynamics.

There is no doubt that, in a historical perspective, the distinctive character of Soviet government and power distribution between the centre and periphery across the USSR has had a significant effect not only on the rise and evolution of newly independent republics, but also on Russian regions once the Soviet state broke apart. Russia, indeed, not only came into existence as one of these independent republics, but also as the political successor of the Soviet Union, inheriting both the responsibilities and privileges arising from the status of an international superpower enjoyed by the USSR. Furthermore, in contrast to the other fourteen members of the former Union, Russia was the only one that managed to establish a formally federal structure as the cornerstone of the new state organisation. Path-dependence (Hedlund, 2005) and a mixture of cultural and political factors played certainly their part (Chebankova, 2009, p. 2).

Born as a product of the Treaty of Union signed by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR), Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) and the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) in 1922, the Soviet Union emerged as composite multinational state encompassing more than one hundred ethnic groups and nationalities (Lapidus, 1984). According to the last soviet census, in 1989 about twenty of these groups numbered more than one million people each (Sakwa, 1989, pp. 296–318). As a consequence of this ethno-territorial complexity, the first Soviet Constitution promulgated in January 1924 was based on a federal compromise.¹⁵ The new federation, merging the principles of ethnicity and territoriality and

¹⁵ For an in-depth investigation of the evolving ethno-demographic dimension of the Soviet Union see Ann Sheehy's chapter in A. McAuley (1991) *Soviet federalism, nationalism and economic decentralisation*. Leicester, Leicester University Press.

organised on a hierarchical basis, granted to major ethnic groups their own territorial administrations. The Soviet Union, indeed, was organised in fifteen Union republics and another four distinct lower administrative units, namely the Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Oblasts, Autonomous Okrugs and regions. This administrative arrangement was not only a complex political construction, but also the first experiment of an ethno-territorial version of federalism in history (Matsuzato, 2017, p. 1049) or - as other scholars put it - a distinctive and objectified 'codification and institutionalization of nationhood and nationality exclusively on a sub-state rather than a state-wide level' (Brubaker, 1994, p. 50). Thus, ethno-territorial principles appears deeply rooted in the conceptualization of the Soviet federalism at the expense of other forms of territorial administration (Aspaturian, 1950; Roeder, 1991, p. 204).

Federalism versus centralism

Fusing the doctrine of self-determination on the one hand and federalism on the other, the concept of *democratic centralism* emerged as the cornerstone of the Soviet political system. Democratic centralism entails a hierarchical organisation of power where lower levels of administration are subordinated to the levels above and under the final scrutiny of the centralizing Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Ross, 2002, p. 17). In fact, the real political and economic distribution of powers between the centre and the union republics, despite the cosmetic devolution, was highly asymmetric and concentrated. Crucial was central control over the economy and budgetary system exercised through the development of economic plans for the entire federation (Churchward, 1979; Fortescue, 1988; von Beyme, 1989).

Economic centralism was combined with the lack of political pluralism and the central role of the CPSU in many aspects of socio-political and economic life (Armstrong, 1977; Unger, 1981, pp. 45–76; Remington, 1989). Thus, it is not surprising that the combination between this institutional arrangement and the ideological feature of the communist state finally guaranteed a vast amount of power to the central government (Churchward, 1979, pp. 157–171; Ramans, 1991). In other words, the cleavage between the federal structure and the actual political process guiding centre-periphery relations emerged out of the very creation of the Soviet federation.

Indeed, the federal design of the USSR was characterized by a strategic and instrumental purpose aimed at preventing further separation and disintegration of the country along the national (or proto-national) lines. For instance, Sakwa (2010a, pp. 203–

204) emphasizes that among the Soviet leadership no one really favoured federalism as a principle. As a People's Commissar for Nationalities, Stalin for instance advocated the *autonomisation scheme* according to which non-Russian nationalities should have been integrated into a unitary state with an official recognition in terms of their distinctive identity, but without any constitutionally recognized sovereignty (Aspaturian, 1950). Even Lenin, at least until 1913, was keen in condemning federalism as a surrender to nationalism. Only exceptional revolutionary circumstances and strategic political considerations made federalism at the final stage an attractive compromise device. As Raymond Pearson puts it, after the revolution and the bloody period of civil war, 'recognizing the force of nationalism, Soviet federalism was designed to license the undesirable the better to contain it.' (Pearson, 1991, p. 28).¹⁶

Despite the unitary role of the party and the centralized system of governance, however, federal units were granted a distinct territory, 'symbolic institutions and administrative framework of autonomy' (Lynn and Novikov, 1997; Beissinger, 2002, pp. 47–102). For Elena Chebankova, these contradictions in the federal design accompanied by the cleavage between formal structure and the informal decision-making process allowed the Soviet government to pursue 'a policy of cyclical centralization-devolution development' (Chebankova, 2009, p. 32). A strong argument can be made that it was precisely the inherent dualism of Soviet territorial ethno-federalism and the dialectical relationship and tension between formal and informal part of the process to provide a powerful instrument in the hands of indigenous political elites despite the creeping *russification* of the Soviet state (Suny, 1992; Beissinger, 2002, pp. 49–57). As noted by Rogers Brubaker (1994, p. 51), while Russians were indeed the dominant nationality and controlled key institutions and the party, this 'did not make the state [Soviet Union] a Russian nation-state' because of the contradictions and dualism enshrined in Soviet territorial ethno-federalism.¹⁷

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of why the principle of self-determination was preserved in all the successive Soviet Constitutions, see: W. Connor (1984). *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press., pp.43-66

¹⁷ It is important to note here that, despite the generalization in describing the balance of power between Russians and non-Russians in the Soviet system, the degree of indigenous elite's power of self-administration varied over time and diverse areas of the Union. For instance, one of the examples regards the high degree of self-administration enjoyed by the Caucasian republics and Ukraine. Specifically, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was also the most integrated in the central system. Contrary to many other republics, a significant number of Ukrainians had the opportunity to advance their career from the republican to the all-Union level bureaucracy. For an accurate analysis of the complex interaction between the dominant political position of Russians at the central level and the indigenous elite at the local see: S. Bialer (1980). *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability, and Change in the Soviet Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (particularly chapter 10); for an in-depth study of the variation of socioeconomic and political differences between ethnic groups in the Soviet Union

Furthermore, despite uneven results, the asymmetric distribution of resources from the centre (and other more developed republics such as Ukraine and Baltics) to the less developed units remained one of the cornerstones of federal policies. This had an impact on centre-periphery dynamics and relationship between Russian and indigenous elite, creating a particular type of a patronage system that characterized Russian regions as well (Smith, 1995, pp. 157–162).

Finally, according to some scholars, this gap between the federal structure and the actual process and the constant tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces of federalism was one of the preconditions for the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union itself. While denying any real and practical political and economic autonomy and insisting on the merging of nationalities from an ideological perspective, Soviet ethno-federalism nonetheless provided ethnic republics and regions with functioning institutions, an administrative framework and strong territorial boundaries creating, paradoxically, a framework for the cultivation of national cultures, political cadres and informal patronage relations (Brubaker, 1994; Smith, 1995). Furthermore, a degree of cultural autonomy and the consequent consolidation, although uneven, of national identities provided the ethnic republics and their elites with a powerful tool in developing their own symbols of nationhood (Bialer, 1980, pp. 207–225; Sakwa, 1989, pp. 296–318; Lapidus, Zaslavsky and Goldman, 1992; Slezkine, 1994) or, as Valerie Bunce puts it, created ‘proto-nations’ and ‘proto-states’ (Bunce, 1998a, p. 330).

Soviet elite and centre-periphery relations

The soviet federal process, encapsulated in a complex political construction characterized by the constant interaction between de jure and de facto, formal and informal power functions deeply affected governance at the republican and regional levels. The centralization of the system was indeed balanced by informal autonomy of leaders of several republics on their territories organised around extended personalistic networks. Not surprisingly, different waves of cadres renewal provoked resistance from republics and periods of instability of the system. One of most prominent examples was the decentralization policy promoted by Khrushchev after 1957 with the introduction of People’s Economy Councils (sovnarkhoz) in order to improve economic efficiency (and fight corruption). The consequent turnover of

see: E. Jones and F.W. Grupp (1984). ‘Modernisation and Ethnic Equalisation in the USSR’. *Soviet Studies* 36(2): pp. 159–84.

elites and the increasing appointment of outsiders as an attempt to consolidate his own political base (Moses, 2019, p. 217) caused resistance and decreased the political support for the leader of the party (Landry, 2008, p. 19). Not surprisingly, Brezhnev reversed the incentives for the republican and regional leaders, building a particular form of stability of the system based on 'stability of cadres' (Gill and Pitty, 1997). The period of slow horizontal and vertical circulation of elites and the subsequent consolidation of republican and regional networks and political machines contributed, however, to the consolidation of informal autonomy and declining control of the centre over the periphery of the Soviet Union.

If at the republican level this process generated 'incentives, opportunities and resources for the multiplication of sovereignty' (Bunce, 1998a, p. 331) it affected also the particular type of governance that emerged in regions within Russia itself, where control on the subnational level of elites and their reproduction was the main functions of the party. De jure the power system in the regions was built around the legislative branch, the regional Soviet (regional assembly). Oblast' Soviets were elected in a single candidate ballot in order to reproduce the social structure of the region. However, Soviets were not a permanent body and remained by and large subordinated to the executive Committee of the region, the Oblispolkom. This smaller executive Committees acted as the representative body of regional Soviets and even though, in theory, subordinated to the legislative branch, acted independently and in direct cooperation with the representatives of the Regional Party Committee (Obkom). Thus, de facto, regional governance was organised around the executive Committee that presided over the sessions of the legislative branch and controlled the decision-making process, restricting the role of the Soviets to the approval of decisions taken by the executive. This system was overseen by the Obkom that retained informal control on the decision making process that remained thus subordinated to the party (Little, 1980).

The highest representatives of the party, the First Secretary of the Regional Party Committee were selected directly by the Central Committee (CC) of the CPSU and enjoyed a large degree of autonomy in ruling their regions. In his seminal work on the organisation of the Soviet bureaucracy Jerry Hough dubbed these regional first secretaries 'Soviet prefects' (Hough, 1969). Relying on developed informal practices, indeed, local branches of the CPSU played the crucial role of distribution of welfare at the subnational level and, above all, in the consolidation of interest groups promoting specific regional interests within the party hierarchy (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov and Bric, 2003, pp. 44–50). This process created de facto a dual system in which the First Secretaries of the regional organisations of the party were on

the one hand representatives of the centre into their regions, while on the other acted as representatives of the regions in the centre.

Beyond ideological loyalty to the CPSU a system of personal loyalty within the structures of the party played a crucial role in preserving the stability of the system. Vertical patronal networks encompassing national leaders and their protégés at the republican and regional level remained an important element of the Soviet governance system. As emphasized by Willerton (1992), for instance, the patronage system linking members of the Politburo and their regional bases (especially at the level of autonomous republics) was an important element determining the success and power of specific factions within the highest bodies of the Union hierarchy. Although integrated into a hierarchical system of subordination, at the regional level First Secretaries remained largely autonomous and able to develop horizontal ties with other members of the regional elite, above all the directors of the large state enterprises, creating their own patronage system.

Over time, ‘Soviet prefects’ were able to consolidate their own power base through the process of appointments within the regional party Committees tasked with managing many aspects of the regional political and economic life and overseeing the regional executive and legislative branches (Hough and Fainsod, 1979, pp. 490–503). The system was largely reproduced at the municipal level, with City Committees (Gorkom) and City District Committees (Raikom), integrated into a hierarchical chain of subordination under the patronage of Obkom. This vertical subordination indeed was balanced by informal and horizontal forms of exchange and patronage within the regions (and between regions) as the main available tool for the party Secretaries to offset ‘some of the distortions that are inevitable in a large bureaucracy’ and to ensure the overall economic performance of the system (Hale, 2003, p. 233).

Directors of state enterprises in turn were also subject to a dual subordination, hierarchically dependent on the Union level Ministries but rather autonomous at the regional level due to their monopoly on important resources. Despite their formal subordination to the first secretaries, informally in regions with powerful agricultural, industrial and military complexes, directors of state enterprises could rely on a significant degree of influence and bargaining power. In order to maintain social balance within the region, First Secretaries thus needed to co-operate and develop horizontal ties and bargain with these powerful economic players able to provide public goods for the population (Gel’man, Ryzhenkov and Brie, 2003, pp. 47–51). Thus, within regions different networks were loosely integrated under the supervision, rather than control, of the CPSU and its representatives, the First Secretaries.

This dual system of vertical and horizontal patronage created indeed a specific political class, the so-called *nomenklatura*, bound by hierarchical integration into the structures of the CPSU and by horizontal patronal links within the party, connecting actors and creating a particular type of loyalty. The *nomenklatura* system operated indeed at various levels of state hierarchy and became the main channel of career advancement within the Soviet system at different levels of governance. Especially in regions characterized by the presence of industrial and agricultural big enterprises, local elites were thus able to consolidate their control on local governance building strong horizontal networks based on personalistic ties with powerful actors, manoeuvring between different centres of power at the Union level and within the regions (Stoner-Weiss, 1997b, pp. 39–42; Hale, 2003).

The (re)federalization process

Political reforms initiated in the mid-eighties aimed at alleviating the longstanding period of stagnation culminated with the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which offered, indeed, an extraordinary opportunity in unleashing local demands for greater autonomy (Lapidus, 1992; Beissinger, 2002). The weakening and fragmentation of the CPSU after the introduction of direct elections for the post of First Secretaries of the fifteen republics only accelerated the process of political mobilization and growing autonomy at the republican and local level (Ross, 2002, p. 19). This tendency was emphasized by other reforms of the Soviet system in the context of the power struggle between Gorbachev and the emerging leader of the RSFSR, Boris Yeltsin. For instance, the creation of the post of ‘president’ of the USSR in 1990, formally independent of the party, and the establishment of the Federation Council (composed of fifteen union republics presidents) (Kahn, 2002, p. 93).

Thus, competitive elections for the Congress of People's Deputies of fifteen republics that in March 1990 brought to power openly anti-communist leaders in several republics¹⁸ coupled with the symbolic effect of the Lithuanian party's withdrawal from the CPSU in December 1989, represented, according to many scholars, just the final blow to the party's role in the USSR (Merridale, 1991; Gleason, 1992). As noted by Filippov *et al* (2004, p. 96), ‘once the party's control was undermined, Soviet federalism could not survive in the old form’.

With the shift of the political initiative from the CPSU to republican legislative organs, the struggle between the centre and republics acquired a new dimension. While the

¹⁸ For instance, Baltics republics, Moldova and, above all, Russia.

so called ‘war of laws’ launched by newly-elected republican’s parliaments weakened the exclusive jurisdiction of the centre, the process of unilateral sovereignty declarations, started in late 1988 in the Baltic republics (Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia) and Caucasus (Georgia and Azerbaijan) and continued by Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Central Asian republics, made the preservation of any type of federal structure almost impossible (Gleason, 1992; Tishkov, 1997, pp. 52–53).

Table 3: The parade of republican sovereignty in the USSR, 1988-1990

<i>Republic</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Republic</i>	<i>Date</i>
Estonia	16 November 1988	Ukraine	16 July 1990
Lithuania	18 May 1989	Belarus	27 July 1990
Latvia	28 July 1989	Turkmenistan	22 August 1990
Azerbaijan	23 September 1989	Armenia	23 August 1990
Georgia	18 November 1989	Tajikistan	25 August 1990
Russia	12 June 1990	Kazakhstan	26 October 1990
Uzbekistan	20 June 1990	Kyrgyzstan	15 December 1990
Moldova	23 June 1990		

Source: Gleason, G. (1992). The Federal Formula and the Collapse of the USSR. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 22, 3, pp. 141-163.

In this context, the long process of negotiation over the new Union Treaty, the final Gorbachev attempt to hold the Soviet Union together exposed the weakness of the centre. The Baltic states, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia not only refused to hold the referendum, but also to take part in the subsequent negotiation process.¹⁹ The so-called ‘9+1 Novo Ogarevo’ process and the final draft of the Treaty was, at the end, the final victory of a ‘confederal thinking’ that dominated the federal discussion in the last period of the USSR (Kahn, 2002, pp. 98–99). The agreement not only recognized the validity of declarations of

¹⁹ According to the official results the referendum, held in nine republics, registered a turnout of 80% (148.5 million), with 76.4% (113.5 million) of voters supporting the preservation of the Union. It should be noted, however, the nature of a vaguely worded question (“Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights of freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?”), and, beyond the boycott by several republics, the difference between large cities and the rest of the country. For instance, large urban centres such as Kiev and Sverdlovsk (today’s Ekaterinburg) voted against the preservation of the Union, while the result in Moscow and Leningrad (Saint Petersburg) was basically split. The highest support for the preservation of the Union came from the Central Asian republics. The lowest from Ukraine and Russia. Furthermore, in several republics an additional question was added. While in Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan people were asked for the endorsement of the sovereignty of their republics as members of the Union, in Russia the additional question asked the support for the creation of a directly elected republican presidency. For a comprehensive analysis of the process of Union Treaty negotiation, its different drafts and the role of the referendum held on 17 March 1991, see the accounts by Gleason (1992) and Kahn (2002).

sovereignty of Union republics, but, most importantly, granted republics the possibility to suspend a Union law on their territories and reasserted the right of self-determination (Smith, 1995). The 'August putsch' was the final blow to Gorbachev's 'federal stratagem' to preserve the Union (Merridale, 1991, p. 215). The Union itself ceased to exist in December. As Sakwa aptly notes, along with the politics of *perestroika* and *glasnost* launched by Gorbachev, in the context of political mobilization in Socialist Soviet Republics and the institutional transformation of the state, 'sovereignty had effectively become a synonym for independence' (Sakwa, 2013).

From national to subnational

The legacy of the process of contemporary multi-level transition, at the all-Union level that led to the dissolution of the USSR and the formation of fifteen newly independent states is still a central factor in understanding the evolution of the federal relations in Russia. While republican leaders in the USSR were publicly denouncing and renegotiating the nature of the Soviet federal system, the same process and rhetoric was borrowed by ethnic leaders in Republics and regions in Russia itself (Filippov and Shvetsova, 1999). In other words, declarations of sovereignty at the all-Union level stimulated mobilization at the subnational level.

Russia itself was a quasi-federation encompassing thirty-one distinct ethno-territorial subdivisions hierarchically organised in Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSR), regions (Oblast') and districts (Okrug). Consequently, Yeltsin's declaration of Russia's sovereignty represented not only an unprecedented challenge for the Soviet system, but for the Russia's federal future as well (Lapidus and Walker, 1995; Kahn, 2002, p. 114). As noted by Gregory Gleason, the issue of the side-effect of the 'Parade of Sovereignty' suddenly became one of the main concerns for Yeltsin's leadership. 'Separatism in the large and ethnically varied Russian Republic posed the question most starkly: once the disintegration of the Soviet state started, where should it stop?' (Gleason, 1992, p. 156). The Russian 'Declaration of State Sovereignty' on 12 June 1990, indeed, represented also an important precedent in catalysing draft declarations of ASSRs within Russia itself, with twenty ethno-territorial units unilaterally claiming their sovereignty in the next few months.

The 'Declaration' represented a unilateral legal act containing provisions that could easily appeal to the sentiments of the republican elite, such as the inclusion of the right of self-determination (article 4), secession (article 7) and, above all, the acceptance of a necessary revision of the status and rights of subnational units (Autonomous republics and regions)

within Russia (Mitrokhin, 2001). This was indeed the context in which Yeltsin, in his three week-long journey across the Russian regions, once in Kazan in August 1990 famously exhorted Autonomous republics to ‘take all the sovereignty you can swallow’, or in December of the same year during his visit to Yakutiya promised that ‘Yakutiya itself must decide the fate of its natural riches’. The process of the ‘Parade of Sovereignty’ within Russia was already ongoing (Dunlop, 1993, pp. 62–65; Ross, 2002, pp. 18–27).

Table 4: The parade of republican sovereignty in Russia, 1990-1991

<i>Republic</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Republic</i>	<i>Date</i>
<i>Russia (RSFSR)</i>	<i>June 12, 1990</i>		
North Ossetia-Alania	20 July 1990	Marii El	22 October 1990
Kareliya	9 August 1990	Chuvashiya	24 October 1990
Khakassia	15 August 1990	Gorno-Altai	25 October 1990
Komi	29 August 1990	Tuva	1 November 1990
Tatarstan	30 August 1990	Karachai-Cherkessiya	17 November 1990
Udmurtiya	20 September 1990	Checheno-Ingushetiya	27 November 1990
Sakha (Yakutiya)	27 September 1990	Mordoviya	8 December 1990
Buryatiya	8 October 1990	Kabardino-Balkariya	31 January 1991
Bashkortostan	11 October 1990	Dagestan	15 May 1991
Kalmykiya	18 October 1990	Adygeya	2 July 1991

Source: Kahn, J. (2002). *Federalism, democratization, and the rule of law in Russia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.104

The context of the federal Constitution

In the context of bitter political confrontation between the centre and periphery, at least three models of organisation for federal relations were under scrutiny at that time. While the idea of ‘local self-management’, stemming from the reinterpretation of the historical concept of *zemstvo* as a core democratic institution in Russia and looking not at the regional but at the central role of the self-government of local communities, did not receive strong support in government circles. The debate between ‘territorial’ and ‘ethno-territorial’ models of federal organisation characterized the drafting process of the new Constitution especially in the brief period between the Russian Sovereignty Declaration and the signature of the Federation Treaty in 1992 (Teague, 1994; Lynn and Novikov, 1997).

The ‘territorial’ model, embraced by many new ‘reformers’ such as Oleg Rumyantsev (the Secretary of the Parliamentary Constitutional Commission), Andrei Sakharov (former Soviet dissident) and Sergei Shakhrai (then Nationalities Minister), envisaged the abrogation of ethnic criteria and, looking at the German and US federal systems, proposed the creation

of newly defined and equal territorial units. For Shakhrai, for instance, federalism was not only a practical solution, but above all one of the cornerstones of the new Russian state, hand in hand with other key notions such as democracy, marketization and privatization (Shakhrai, 2001). This approach was later labelled as 'radical federalism' or 'self-enforcing federalism' (Mitrokhin, 2001, pp. 49–51).

Far from being a unitary camp, the idea of a territorial organisation of the state attracted even some Russian nationalists, pleased to see a hierarchical organisation of the state and the disappearance of ethnicity as a guiding principle that was perceived as disadvantageous for the Russian majority. While supporters of this idea were members of the reformist camp in Moscow, at the other extreme the idea of an 'ethno-territorial' model in continuity with the Soviet experience, implying asymmetry and special rights for titular nationalities, was advocated primarily by regional leaders and presidents of ethnic republics, above all Mintimer Shaimiev in Tatarstan and Murtaza Rakhimov in Bashkortostan (Solnick, 1996b).²⁰

Yeltsin's position remained rather ambiguous, but his support for Russian sovereignty, and the interpretation of the concept of sovereignty in itself, appeared influenced by the evolving democratic thinking and based on the conceptualization of 'from the ground up' sovereignty (Lapidus and Walker, 1995), as a 'pyramid flow of authority from the smallest villages to the Supreme Soviet' (Kahn, 2002, p. 115). This ambivalent position, was certainly a part of Yeltsin's strategy in order to win the support of regional leaders in the confrontation with his opponents, but in terms of establishing a new approach in centre-periphery relations it did, indeed, foment further segmentation along the horizontal axis of federal relations. Thus, Ross in his review of the formation of the new Russian state could aptly conclude that 'whilst Gorbachev's policies had led to the rise of nationalism in the USSR, Yeltsin's policies were in danger of leading to a similar rise of national sentiment in the RSFSR' (Ross, 2002, p. 20).

The Federation Treaty

Initiated in early March 1991 and finally signed a year later on 31 March 1992, the Federation Treaty symbolically emphasized all the problems of federal transition in Russia. Indeed, while the drafting process started under the umbrella of the USSR, when the Soviet centre

²⁰ An analysis of the debate about federalism in Russia and the distinction between three schools of thought is offered, among others, by Lynn and Novikov (1997), Teague (1994) and especially by Tishkov (1997).

collapsed and the Union disappeared, the periphery suddenly became the new centre. Many Russian and Western observers looked at the development of the political struggle between the centre and periphery and at Yeltsin's notion of sovereignty 'from the ground up' with concern. The fear that the same process that led to the dissolution of the USSR could fragment Russia threatening its own territorial integrity was advanced not only by analysts and experts, but also by a part of the political establishment in Moscow (Lysenko, 1992; Tishkov, 1997, pp. 44–67; Fedorov, 2000).

The emergence of regional coalitions in the North Caucasus, Volga and Ural regions and the outbreak of ethnic tensions and violence in North Caucasus (for instance between Ingush and Ossetians along with tensions in Dagestan), were all factors that affected the context of the re-negotiation of the new federal arrangement.²¹ As noted by Valerii Tishkov (1997, pp. 54–60), a prominent political anthropologist and ethnologist who was directly involved in the negotiation process with regions and republics as a Chairman of the State Committee on Nationalities, the rise of 'peripheral nationalism' was, indeed, encouraged by both the political language in the context of power struggle at the centre and by the ethno-territorial federal structure inherited from the Soviet Union.

Fears of disintegration were probably exaggerated, but the role of republican and regional elites in the process of negotiation of federal rules had nonetheless a significant impact on the interaction between vertical and horizontal forces shaping the federal process in the 1990s. Demographic, economic and political reasons, and differences with the Soviet experience, are usually advanced in order to minimize the real danger of the disintegration of the state. Ethnic republics, tremendously varied among themselves in terms of size and population, made up around 15.7% of the total population of Russia. Most importantly, even the population of the ethnic republics was far from homogeneous. The titular nationality represented the majority in only five of twenty-one ethnic republics (Checheno-Ingushetiya, Chuvashiya, Kabardino-Balkariya, North Ossetia-Alania and Tuva), while Russians made up an absolute majority in nine of them, representing the plurality in another three. Economically, regions and Autonomous republics remained heavily dependent on Moscow, a factor that could be considered a mitigating element in their growing claims for autonomy and independence (Smith, 1996; Ross, 2007b).

²¹ During the process of federal bargaining in early 1990s the opposition of regions and republics emerged also through the creation of regional coalition such as the Confederation of Mountain People (in North Caucasus), Volga-Urals movement (aiming at uniting Tatarstan and Bashkortostan), Central-Urals movement (among several Oblasts), the Siberian agreement and other political and economic associations. For a general account of these coalitions see Lapidus and Walker (1995, pp. 87–96) and Ross (2002, pp. 63–65).

However, Daniel Treisman (1996, 1997) has convincingly demonstrated how in the context of limited resources and extremely weak central power, separatist demands represented one of the main bargaining chips in the hands of regional leaders. In other words, ethno-nationalism in Russia became a political resource for regional elites in their attempt to extract more economic and political privileges from the centre in the process of the founding federal bargaining. This process was indeed instrumental to the re-creation and consolidation of subnational personalistic patronage networks driven by regional and republican leaders (Hale, 2000; Stoner-Weiss, 2004).

Table 5: Composition of ethnic federal subjects according to 1989 census

<i>Republic</i>	<i>Titular population (%)</i>	<i>Russian population (%)</i>
Dagestan	90.8	9.2
Checheno-Ingushetiya	70.7	23.1
Chuvashiya	68.7	26.7
Tuva	64.3	32.0
Kabardino-Balkariya	57.6	32.0
North Ossetia-Alania	53.0	29.9
Tatarstan	48.5	43.3
Kalmykiya	45.0	37.7
Marii El	43.3	47.5
Karachai-Cherkessiya	40.9	42.4
Sakha (Yakutiya)	33.4	50.3
Mordoviya	32.5	60.8
Gorno-Altai	31.2	60.4
Udmurtiya	30.9	58.9
Buryatiya	24.0	70.0
Komi	23.3	57.7
Adygeya	22.1	68.0
Bashkortostan	21.9	39.3
Khakassia	11.1	79.5
Kareliya	10.0	73.6
<i>Autonomous Oblast'</i>	<i>Titular population (%)</i>	<i>Russian population (%)</i>
Jewish	4.2	83.2
<i>Autonomous Okrugs</i>	<i>Titular population (%)</i>	<i>Russian population (%)</i>
Komi-Permyak	60.2	36.1
Agin-Buryat	54.9	40.8
Ust'-Ordyn Buryat	36.3	56.5
Koryakiya	16.5	62.0
Evenk	14.0	65.5
Taimyr	13.7	67.1
Nenets	11.9	65.8
Chukotka	7.3	66.1
Yamala-Nenets	4.2	59.2
Khanty-Mansi	0.9	66.3

Sources: V. Tishkov. (1997). *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 87-98; I. Bremmer and R. Taras, eds. (1993). *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 550-560

In this context the Federation Treaty was perceived in Moscow as a short-term transitional device (Kahn, 2002, pp. 102–141). For republics and regions the objective, however, was different. The treaty represented, indeed, a legal act that would certify republican claims for greater autonomy, institutionalizing their power vis-à-vis the centre (Mitrokhin, 2001, pp. 47–51). Furthermore, the process also implicitly emphasized the second-tier status of the Russian regions, alienating the majority of federal subjects that were practically excluded from the negotiation (Kahn, 2002, pp. 102–141; Ross, 2002, pp. 17–28).

The final signature of the document on 31 March 1992 did not really ameliorate the tension between the federal and subnational level.²² Tatarstan and Chechnya, indeed, refused to sign the final draft of the document while Bashkortostan and Sakha (Yakutiya) requested - and received - additional protocols and agreements granting further powers (Fedorov, 2000, p. 97). Crippled from the very beginning - with Tatarstan shortly afterwards ratifying its own constitution and Chechnya going even further unilaterally proclaiming its independence - the Federation Treaty provided, in reality, a series of major concessions to the republics. The agreement, for instance, officially recognized republics as sovereign entities with the right of self-determination, delineated the inadmissibility of federal intrusion into republican affairs, reiterated the role of republican constitutions in regulating the relationship with the centre and granted the status of 'autonomous participant in international and foreign economic relations'. Further concessions were also granted by the additional protocol to Bashkortostan in terms of taxation and autonomous legislative and judiciary system (Fedorov, 2000, pp. 95–97). Finally, the Treaty remained ambiguous regarding the division of powers. While delineating exclusive federal and shared powers, no detailed list of exclusive republican powers was added (Kahn, 2002, pp. 126–128).

In general terms, the Federation Treaty not only provided special powers to the republics that were at odds with the common theoretical understanding of a federal system – with the implicit right to secede enshrined in the references to self-determination and territorial integrity of the republics – but also explicitly accepted the asymmetric, triple-tiered and hierarchical division of the state based on both ethno-territorial and territorial principles. In its final form and in the context of centre-periphery confrontation, the Treaty laid the

²² The Treaty in practice was composed of three separate treaties, each for the type of federal unit. One Treaty was for 'national-state' units, namely the ethnic Republics, the second was for 'administrative-territorial' units (Oblasts, Krai and Cities of federal significance) and the third was for 'national-territorial' units (Autonomous Oblasts and Autonomous Okrugs).

foundation for a 'negotiated federation' and 'treaty-constitutional' future of centre-periphery relations (Fedorov, 2000, p. 101).

Ethnically Russian regions, dissatisfied with the official recognition of their second-tier status, started to challenge the central power. While some of the republics started to assert their increasing autonomy drafting new constitutions claiming the supremacy over the Federation Treaty and the full property of natural resources (Sakha, Tuva, Ingushetiya, Kalmykiya) and refusing to pay taxes to the centre (Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Sakha, Komi, Udmurtiya) (Fedorov, 2000, pp. 88–101; Kahn, 2002, pp. 102–141). Some economically powerful regions started their own 'Parade of Sovereignty', withholding tax revenues, asserting unilateral ownership rights on land and natural resources and creating economic and trade barriers on the free movement of goods within Russia (Lapidus and Walker, 1995, p. 98).

Furthermore, regions started to elevate unilaterally their own status within the federation, and some of them claimed a republican status (Ross, 2002, pp. 23–26). One of the most prominent cases was Sverdlovsk that, after an informal referendum in April 1993,²³ proclaimed the creation of the Urals Republic in July of the same year (Easter, 1997; Startsev, 1999). Other regions followed suit creating the so-called 'republicanisation' movement, either declaring sovereignty or republican status. This was the case, for instance, of Astrakhan, Amur, Chelyabinsk, Chita, Kaliningrad, Perm, Orenburg, Kurgan and others (Lapidus and Walker, 1995, p. 98).²⁴

Structure and process: constitutional and bilateral relations

As a result of the rapid evolution of the political situation under the chaotic pressure of the period of transition, the new Russian constitution encapsulated the nature of the open political struggle at different levels.²⁵ Coming into force almost two years after the signature

²³ The question about the elevation of the regional status of Sverdlovsk (*'Do you agree that Sverdlovsk oblast' should have full powers and rights like the republics in the Russian Federation?'*) was added to the four-question referendum on the confidence in Yeltsin and the government held on 25 April 1993.

²⁴ In some cases, new territorial entities were proposed through merging and unification of districts. E.g., Pomor republic (based in Arkhangelsk), Central Russian republic (Oryol), Siberian republic (Novosibirsk), Leningrad republic (Saint Petersburg), Maritime republic (Vladivostok). Some of the regions promoted also inter-regional politico-economic coalitions, such as the Siberian Agreement.

²⁵ The violent events in October 1993 that led to the final dissolution of the parliament, represented a turning point for the future development of federalism in Russia. Without the opposition of the parliament and regional legislative branches, dissolved along with the Congress of People's Deputies of the RF, Yeltsin no longer needed the regional support for his Constitution while republican leaders lost much of their leverage on the president. Thus, the draft, delivered by the presidential Commission

of the Federal Treaty, it reflected the changing political reality in Russia. The drafting process of the new Russian Constitution was particularly affected by the entrenched confrontation along both, the vertical and the horizontal axes. While at the central level parliament rejected any idea of a presidential constitution and the extreme decentralization entrenched in the Federation Treaty, at the subnational level republics, boosted by their victory in the negotiation of the Federation Treaty, refused any constitutional draft. Ethnically Russian regions, on the other hand, were advocating the elevation of their status and the equalization of federal relations between republics and regions that would have meant in practice the abrogation of the ethno-territorial principle at the base of the Federation Treaty (Fedorov, 2000, pp. 101–105).

After Yeltsin's show of force emblematically portrayed by the shelling of the White House on 4 October 1993, the final text of the Constitution, approved by a nationwide referendum on 12 December 1993, reflected his final victory over Parliament.²⁶ Beyond establishing a presidential political system, though, the constitution was an important document for the future of federal relations as well. Indeed, the text of the new Constitution appeared far more centralized than any other preceding draft (Kahn, 2002, p. 136). While preserving reference to 'self-determination of people' (Art.5), Article 4 codified the 'integrity and inviolability of its territory', the sovereignty of the RF on the 'whole of its territory' and the 'supremacy of the federal law', thus rejecting in practice any residual right to secede. Moreover, any reference to the sovereign status of republics, encapsulated in the previous Federation Treaty, was deleted from the constitution. All constituent units were declared 'equal subjects of the Russian Federation', and the Chapter (Art.95) regulating the Federation Council equally distributed the seats among federal units (two representatives for each subject, one from the legislative and one from the executive branch). Finally, the Federal Treaty was formally excluded from the constitution (Fedorov, 2000).

in November and approved by referendum in December, reversed many of the previous concessions made in favour of ethnic Republics.

²⁶ Held together with first post-Communist legislative elections, the Constitution was approved by 58.4% of the voters with a total turnout of 54.8%. The referendum was boycotted in Chechnya and rejected in some other republics. In six republics and eleven regions, the turnout was below the required 50 per cent of the electorate, thus failing to ratify the constitution (Tatarstan 14%, Ingushetiya 46%, Komi 47.2%, Marii El 46.8%, Khakassia 45.6% and Udmurtiya 44.2%). The document was rejected in seven republics: Adygea (38.9%), Bashkortostan (42.1%), Chuvashia (41.58%), Dagestan (20.86%), Karachai-Cherkessiya (28.0%), Mordovia (37.14%), Tuva (31.21%); and ten regions: Belgorod, Bryansk, Kursk, Lipetsk, Oryol, Smolensk, Tambov, Penza, Volgograd and Voronezh. For official data on the December 1993 constitutional referendum see: http://cikrf.ru/banners/vib_arhiv/referendum/1993_ref_itogi.html. A detailed account on December 1993 elections and referendum and on the pattern of vote is offered by Sakwa (1995).

The centralizing tendency of the founding document is particularly evident in the section delimitating federal and joint powers. Indeed, while defining the exclusive federal jurisdiction (Art.71) and the joint jurisdiction (Art.72), the Constitution did not delegate exclusive powers to the subjects of the federation. Instead, Article 73 grants to federal subjects just residual powers while Article 78 grants to the centre the right to 'transfer' to the subjects of the federation the 'fulfilment of a part of their powers'. Furthermore, the Constitution established a 'single system of executive power' (Art.77) and allowed the centre to 'create their own territorial organs and appoint corresponding officials' in order to exercise federal authority. Finally, according to the document, all legislative acts of the subjects of the RF 'may not contradict the federal laws' (Art.76).

From constitutional to political bargaining

Despite its centralising nature, however, Yeltsin's Constitution entailed a series of contradictions that affected the practice of federal relations. While on the one hand it did not include the Federation Treaty and, above all, formally equalized the status of all the subjects of the federation (Art.5) (Fedorov, 2000, p. 105), on the other it mirrored the Treaty's provisions which formalised the hierarchical organisation of the state by classifying three types of federal units. Moreover among the subjects, only republics were granted the status of 'states' within the state, with the right to issue their own constitutions, maintaining their languages, flags and symbols of statehood (Ross, 2002, p. 35). Thus, despite the formal reference to the subjects of the federation as 'equal', the constitution appears as a clearly asymmetric document, based on both ethno-territorial and administrative (territorial) principles.

Furthermore, the document appears implicitly vague over the regulation of disputes between the federal centre and the subjects of the federation. Thus, in particular Article 11 (stating that the delimitation of powers between the centre and the subjects is regulated not only by the Constitution but also by the Federation Treaty and by other agreements) and Article 78 (granting to the federal centre the right to transfer some of powers to the federal subjects) emphasized the long-lasting 'institutional bias toward bilateralism' (Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004, p. 308). Indeed, 'rather than act as barriers to federal bargaining, such provision can actually encourage renegotiation when the different sides to a dispute find it in their self-interest' (Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004, p. 308).

Thus, the Constitution provided ground for a contractual form of devolution of power from the centre. Indeed, the institutional federal asymmetry enshrined in the

Constitution, reinforced the political asymmetry created by the Federation Treaty, where the determination of winners and losers was based on extra-constitutional factors, political bargaining and informal distribution of privileges. The new 'war of laws' and the period of bilateralism that emerged immediately after the proclamation of the new Constitution, clearly illustrated all these contradiction.

Not surprisingly, the process that dominated federal relations in Russia over the 1990s was labelled by Sakwa as 'segmented regionalism' (Sakwa, 2010a). Territorial and political segmentation along both the vertical (top-down centre-region relations) and horizontal (competition within and between regions) axes came to characterize the Russian Federation in the period of post-soviet transition, thus consolidating the informal practices dominating relations between the centre and the regions. On 15 February 1994 the first special agreement between the centre and the regions entered into force. The bilateral agreement with Tatarstan (indeed a series of 12 agreements) was aimed at regulating relations between Moscow and Kazan' in a wide range of spheres, comprising economy and finance, legal legislations, customs and foreign economic relations. Another two republics signed a special agreement with the centre in 1994 and four in 1995. Finally, approaching the electoral period in 1996 regions also joined the process of distribution of special rights. By late 1998 a total number of forty-seven bilateral treaties between Moscow and the provinces were signed (Ross, 2002, pp. 42–43).

As emphasized by Stepan, this process of bilateral negotiation between the centre and the regions was in itself informal and 'anti-constitutional'. Negotiation and ratification of bilateral treaties, indeed, was a matter of the executive branch of power, both at the central and regional level, while the parliament was *de jure* and *de facto* excluded from the discussion (Stepan, 2000). The opaque and informal character of the process that relied on secret agreements, had a crucial impact on the development of federal institutions and on the future dynamics of centre-region relations (Solnick, 1995; Kahn, 2002, p. 145).²⁷ As investigated by Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, indeed, between 1994 and 1999 subnational Constitutions and Charters regularly violated the federal Constitution in general and the sphere of exclusive and joint jurisdiction enshrined in Article 71 and 72 in particular (Stoner-Weiss, 2006, pp. 44–76).

²⁷ As noted by Solnick (1996a), for instance, the first regions to sign bilateral agreements were constituencies for the main figures of the political elite in Moscow such as Viktor Chernomyrdin (Orenburg) and the president Yeltsin himself (Sverdlovsk).

Most importantly, the entire process deeply affected the development of regional politics and the consolidation of regional regimes. The growing constitutional and anti-constitutional asymmetry in the early 1990s, indeed, caused an unprecedented degree of segmentation of the vertical axis of control and the consolidation of particular patronage system between federal and regional elites and within the regions, causing a significant differentiation among the subjects of the federation and their relations with Moscow. The uneven devolution of power from the centre contributed to the creation of several personalized and executive-driven subnational political and economic regimes, as well as granted to republics and regions an unprecedented capacity to constrain the policy of the federal centre in political, economic and social areas (Kahn, 2002; Stoner-Weiss, 2006).

Regional political regimes: between vertical and horizontal dynamics

At the subnational level the contemporary process of political and institutional transformation of the state along with the bilateral and informal nature of federal bargaining, allowed a partial preservation of the dual system of vertical and horizontal patronage consolidated during the Soviet period. The old soviet *nomenklatura*, in other words, was initially able to preserve its power and privileges. Whereas the rotation of cadres and elite circulation affected the Russian state at the national level (Lapina, 2004), ‘nomenklatura continuity’ has been the norm rather than the exception at the subnational level (Ross, 2002, pp. 17–28; Moses, 2008). Indeed, democratic elections in 1990 strengthened and legitimized the position of the majority of party first secretaries and directors of state enterprises, while introducing the concept of accountability, making them theoretically responsible in front of the electorate.

Furthermore, these elections provided resources and opportunities for regional leaders in their demands for more power vis-à-vis the centre. However, regional elite survival was not the only issue at stake. The parallel process of marketization and privatization offered an extra incentive for demands of more political and economic autonomy (and sovereignty) from the centre. Preservation of the old style patronage system and the creation of new politico-economic alliances at the subnational level was, in fact, another element that deeply affected the bargaining over the new federal relations and the increasing struggle over the notions of sovereignty and federalism itself (Stoner-Weiss, 1997a).

Within this milieu, the creation of the governorship as the head of regional administration, a step wanted directly by Yeltsin, not only initiated the process of bilateral bargaining between the centre and the regions encapsulated in the process of bilateral treaties,

but also affected the consolidation of regional elites and networks.²⁸ Not surprisingly, the first wave of appointments of regional governors directed by Yeltsin had seen the majority of former Soviet regional party leaders and chairs of Oblispolkom becoming new chief executives (Tolz and Busygina, 1997). Overall, between 1991 and 1992, 68 governors were appointed directly by Yeltsin (Kynev, 2019). Apart from few exceptions, these were members of the local elite entrenched in regional dynamics with well-developed personal clienteles. Further, as documented by Slider (1996), for instance, in early 1990s regional and local executives and directors of former Soviet enterprises were able to capitalize on their privileged starting position and to dominate many of the regional assembly elections, thus practically undermining the independence of these institutions.

In the period of transition and without concrete opportunities for career advancement at the federal level, indeed, new governors were able to consolidate their control on both economic and political resources within their regions. If on the one hand the regional chief executives oversaw the process of privatization launched by Yeltsin in early 1990s, enjoying considerable informal control on key regional resources (Bahry, 2005), on the other hand they were also able to guide the development of new institutions and the consolidation of major centres of power at the regional level. In many cases, regional law enforcement agencies, tax police and the prosecutor's offices fell under the patronage of governors, able to control or influence cadre rotation and providing resources that Moscow was unable to provide (Taylor, 2011, pp. 112–155). New regional leaders were also able to influence electoral legislation and institutions, such as control over the personnel of regional Electoral Commissions, thus manipulating the playing field and restricting competition from actors outside their personalistic networks (Golosov, 1997).

More importantly, the reforms of the early 1990s granted the regions a high degree of control over the process of privatization and allowed regional authorities to keep important shares of state properties and former state enterprises. The consolidation of a system of clienteles and patronage relations, hand in hand with the opacity of the process of privatization, in practice granted considerable power to regional authorities in deciding who would obtain the shares of state properties and under what conditions.²⁹ Thus, although

²⁸ In regions other than republics, after the creation of governorship that was to be elected, for political considerations Yeltsin banned elections until 1993 and appointed the first heads of regional administration. However, after the first wave of elections in 1993, when favourites of the president lost in 7 out of 8 races, Yeltsin re-introduced the ban on gubernatorial elections. Some of the regions disregarded this ban, conducting elections. 13 elections were held in 1995 and finally elections were re-introduced in all the regions in 1996.

²⁹ For a detailed overview see for instance Åslund (1995).

officially subordinated primarily to the centre, regional branches of law enforcement agencies, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and Federal Security Services (FSB), operated in practice in a context of dual subordination. On the one hand, they remained officially representative of the federal centre, but on the other hand they were also loyal to regional leaders, which had informal control on their resources and personnel.

Overall, given the informal enforcement of ill-defined rules of federalism in a period of political and economic weakness of the centre and internal confrontation between different financial groups within the Kremlin, regional leaders and regional elite were able to strengthen their control over economic and political resources, (re)creating regional networks that characterized the Soviet period based on informal and exclusionary patronal relations. When the centre finally instated gubernatorial elections on the whole territory of the country in 1996, these new regional networks entered the final stage of their consolidation, gaining formal popular legitimacy.

In the context of pronounced horizontal asymmetry between Russian regions, however, the process of consolidation of regional networks and autonomy was far from uniform. Indeed, the characteristic of regional regimes and their internal dynamics varied widely, depending on the specific skills, structural characteristic and constellation of actors. The legacy of the institutionalization of ethnicity during the Soviet period, not only played a prominent role in the bargaining process with the centre (as discussed above), but was also instrumental in the consolidation of quasi-monocentric regimes in ethnic republics. Some of the emerging republican leaders were former CPSU secretaries such as Rakhimov in Bashkortostan and Shaimiev in Tatarstan, both able to consolidate dominant leadership roles creating their personal networks and political machines (Matsuzato, 2001; Sharafutdinova, 2015). Others, such as Kirsan Ilyumzhinov in Kalmykia, had not held any executive role during the Soviet period, but were still able to monopolize power at the subnational level for almost 20 years.

This process, however, did not affect only republics. Leaders of ethnically Russian regions were in many cases able to isolate their own networks from external pressure. Although this appeared an easier task in regions with some structural preconditions, such as concentrated economies based on a single sector (above all agriculture) (Hale, 2003), other governors were able to create powerful regional networks tightening the control over regional politics even in more competitive and economically pluralist regions. Among many possible examples, the case of Sverdlovsk's governor, Eduard Rossel', and Moscow's mayor, Yurii Luzhkov, are illustrative of this tendency (Startsev, 1999). Paradoxically, as

demonstrated by Grigorii Golosov (2011), the 1995 and 1996 gubernatorial elections played an important role in the consolidation of regional networks, exclusionary tendency and the self-reproducing nature of the regional elite characterized by the entrenchment of the dominant coalition against newcomers. While almost half of Yeltsin's appointees lost power during the first wave of elections, the newcomers were able to capitalize on stronger organisational means of electoral mobilization, popularity acquired during elections and, in many cases, control over the regional legislature (Solnick, 1998). Not surprisingly, from the second half of the 1990s the incumbency advantage increased steadily at the subnational level (Golosov, 2008).

Despite this general trend, the situation within regions (and regional networks) was largely based on a delicate balance between different actors and groups of political and economic elites. Notwithstanding the advantage in terms of formal and informal powers, new governors had to cooperate and build sometimes precarious horizontal alliances with other influential actors and directors of major regional enterprises. In some cases, these alliances provided a long-term informal framework allowing emerging regional networks to consolidate power and prevent the emergence of possible competitors, as documented by Stoner-Weiss (1997b).

In other cases, however, the specific nature of the 'elite settlement' remained precarious, leaving ample room for frequent conflicts and confrontation between heterogeneous elite groups (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov and Brie, 2003). Conflicts for resources and power were far from over. Such conflicts, indeed, occurred along different lines. A prominent example is the conflict between governors and mayors of the regional capitals, such as in the case of the above-mentioned Sverdlovsk, where the powerful governor Rossel' had to develop a complex system of rule to deal with the regional elite consolidated around the mayor of Ekaterinburg, Arkadii Chernetskii (Denezhkina and Campbell, 2009).

Furthermore, governors, local officials and economic actors continued to cultivate personalistic and institutional vertical ties with Ministries and politicians at the federal level, relying on their informal support in the regional disputes. Despite the capacity of regional authorities to insulate themselves from the encroachment of the federal centre, consolidating what Gibson (2005) calls the 'boundary control', Moscow remained, nonetheless, the main actor in several important sectors. For instance, as documented by Chirikova and Lapina (2001), the centre preserved control over the financial sector (Central Bank and Ministry of Finance) and ownership over energy and transportation systems throughout giant enterprises such as Gazprom and RZhD (Russian railroads). This allowed the Kremlin to maintain some

control over the subnational level and exert influence on important aspects of the regional economic activity. Hence, access to influential figures in Moscow remained an important asset for regional networks. As aptly noted by Marie Mendras (1999, p. 307), the outcome of the interaction between vertical and horizontal forces operating in federal relations was ‘not the creation of “microstates” of a neo-Soviet type but rather a complex, interdependent web of relations’ involving powerful horizontal networks and forces tamed by elements of vertical interaction. Regional networks not only interacted horizontally, but also vertically, relying on personalistic relations and ties between two level of governance.

The image of a strictly hierarchical subordination as well as that of chaos and supremacy of horizontal forces do not appear as the correct representation neither of relations between the centre and the regions, nor of the consolidation of a complex set of mechanisms operating within the regions. The creation of a particular patronage system at the subnational level was rather based on a precarious combination of structural factors (weak centre, institutional uncertainty, regional political and economic structure) and agency (skills and capacity of the regional leaders) in a process of constant interaction between horizontal and vertical dynamics. It was this combination of factors, indeed, that allowed at the end of the 1990s some of these local based networks to become power brokers at the national level.

The famous case of the loose coalition of different regional networks under the banner of Fatherland-All Russia bloc (*Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya*) became a clear example of the tendency of some subnational leaders to maximize their influence on federal politics. On the wake of power transition in the Kremlin, in 1998 one of the most powerful subnational leaders, the mayor of Moscow Luzhkov, created the Fatherland movement. A few months later, in April 1999, an alternative ‘pro-regions’ party, All Russia, was created by the president of Tatarstan, Shaimiev, and the governor of Saint Petersburg, Vladimir Yakovlev.³⁰ When in August 1999 these leaders decided to create a united electoral bloc, Fatherland-All Russia (OVR), endorsing one of the most popular politicians of that time, Evgenii Primakov, it had a strong regional base including ‘presidents’ of ethnic republics such as Mintimer Shaimiev (Tatarstan), Murtaza Rakhimov (Bashkortostan), Ruslan Aushev (Ingushetia) and Aslan Dzhariyev (Republic of Adygeya) and governors such as Vladimir Yakovlev (Saint

³⁰ In the second half of the 1990s there were several other parties and organisation led by regional leaders. For instance, ‘My Fatherland’ led by Dmitrii Aiatkov (governor of Saratov), the ‘Voice of Russia’ led by Konstantin Titov (governor of Samara), ‘Revival and Unity’ of Aman Tuleev, governor of Kemerovo and ‘Russian People’s Republican Party’ led by Aleksandr Lebed, governor of Krasnoyarsk.

Petersburg), Vladimir Chub (Rostov Oblast'), Petr Sumin (Chelyabinsk Oblast'), Boris Govorin (Irkutsk Oblast') and many others. Notably, the future governor of Tyumen and mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyenin, was a member of the executive committee of the political bloc. It is speculated that the bloc was financed by Lukoil, a private oil giant with interests and assets in many regions.

Conclusion

The process initiated by the first bilateral treaty with Tatarstan and continued with the signature of other forty-six different bilateral treaties between the centre and the subjects of the federation, thus emphasized the informal nature of the federal bargaining with long-lasting consequences for the structure of federalism in Russia.³¹ Not surprisingly, the dynamics of the federal transition progressively appeared to lead the state toward a confederal, rather than a federal arrangement, with an unbalanced amount of power reserved to republics and regions. As we have seen in this chapter, several interrelated and parallel processes affected the Russian transition from a *de facto* unitary state to a formally federal but *quasi-confederal* one. The transition was affected by weak institutions and informal political practices that, if on the one hand allowed to overcome the uncertainty and the weakness of the centre, on the other affected the future development of centre-region in Russia, entrenching subnational regimes and informal institutions in the federal process.

In this institutional environment, however, federal relations and regional politics were dominated by a constant interaction between vertical and horizontal forces. The consolidation of regional regimes and the monopolization of the regional administrations of political and economic processes at the subnational level, indeed, were tamed and contrasted by vertical interactions and by the preservation of central control in some areas of the system. The emergence of winning coalitions in the regions were also based on a balance between different groups affected by competition and conflicts. Although Russia had a new Constitution, the federal process remained mainly located in the informal dimension of politics. At the end of the 1990s this constant dialogue between vertical and horizontal forces was epitomized by the emerging coalition of regional governors and their growing ambition to play an increasingly important role at the federal level. This process however, was not only a by-product of the growing power aspiration of regional bosses, but, paradoxically, a

³¹ Overall, 11 Republics, 26 regions, 8 Krai and 2 federal cities signed a bilateral treaty with Moscow. The first non-republics that signed a treaty with the centre were Sverdlovsk, Orenburg, Omsk and Kaliningrad.

consequence of the system in which the cultivation and preservation of vertical ties remained a crucial instrument to maintain and consolidate their control over the regions.

Through this lens, the next chapter analyses the transformation of centre-region relations and regional politics since the early 2000s when a series of reforms drastically changed the balance of power between the national and subnational levels of governance. However, as will become clear in what follows, while Putin's centralization of power drastically reduced the autonomy of the regions and reversed the line of initiative (from regions to the centre), many of the structural elements continued to characterize centre-region interaction throughout the 2000s. The federal process indeed inherited continuous interaction between formal and informal institutions and practices, relying on ad hoc bilateralism and manual control. These contradictions remained the main source of instability in the process of vertical interaction between the centre and the regions, emphasizing some of the paradoxes of the hierarchical control analysed in the following chapters.

Chapter 4 - Federal institutions and actors in the context of centralization: the vertical dimension of centre-region bargaining

Introduction

Emerging from the 1990s, the transformation and the role of the regional elites in determining the nature of regional regimes and their relations with the centre has been widely discussed and investigated (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov and Brie, 2003). However, since the beginning of the first Putin term as a president of the RF, the attention of many scholars slowly moved towards the centre's strategies of control and subordination (Golosov, 2012; Reuter, 2013). The introduction of a series of reforms, briefly discussed in this chapter, and the process of centralization and consolidation of the so-called power *vertikal'* overshadowed the role of the regional elites, groups, networks and factions operating within the regional polity that remained not fully integrated in the centralized federal structure dominated by the Kremlin. Thus, despite the consolidation of a centralized federal system the role of regional politics and regional elites and their interaction with the centre through a different set of channels, often bypassing formal institutions, remain an important element in the examination of the federal process in contemporary Russia. Indeed, despite the transformation of federal relations, a strong argument can be made that the Russian Federation remains far from being a unified space and a functioning federal system. If, on the one hand, the consolidation of the power *vertikal'* over the last twenty years certainly reduced political opportunities and incentives for the regional elites, on the other it left the informal part of the political process firmly in place, thus granting alternative and sometimes indirect channels of interaction and opportunities.

This chapter analyses the top-down transformation of centre-region dynamics and the long-term impact of the federal reforms initiated at the beginning of the 2000s and continued throughout the 20 years of the Putin presidency. Through the lens of informal political practices (some of which are now institutionalized) and their consequences on the political process, the chapter attempts to unpack the complexities of the vertical axis in centre-region interactions and the problems that the consolidation of the Kremlin's control over governors have created for the coherence and stability of the federal system and the power *vertikal'* itself. Although governors are no longer equal members of the regional elite, but rather representatives of the centre in the region, in many cases the control of the regional processes remains partial, incomplete and, above all, situational. Thus, far from creating a

unified federal space, the interaction between the formal and the informal part of the political process preserves, necessarily, some sort of bilateralism and bargaining that also characterised the nature of federal relations in the 1990s.

After the examination of the main reforms introduced during the period of centralization, the chapter will overview the set of formal and informal tools of control preserved by the Kremlin after the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections in 2012 and the effect on the process of elite management. The chapter will then conclude by examining the unintended consequences of this new system of incentives looking at how increasing central control on the vertical axis hides tensions, conflicts and instability on the horizontal one.

This chapter lays the foundations for the subsequent part, which will develop the idea of a 'horizontal' dimension as an analytical tool complementing the vertical discussed here. The main argument of the chapter, indeed, is that the dynamics of centre-region interaction cannot be fully captured by a top-down approach alone. Rather, the vertical axis with its strengths and weaknesses analysed here, need to be complemented with the 'horizontal' dimension in which factional relations, diverging interest groups, networks and political elites are incorporated in the analysis of changes and continuities in the multi-level governance framework of centre-region interaction. A fully-fledged analysis of this 'horizontal' axis, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter and, apart from sporadic references in what follows, will be expanded in the next chapter.

The evolution of the vertical axis in the guise of centralization

One of the first initiatives launched by Vladimir Putin after his inauguration was focused precisely on the general reconfiguration of federal relations. Over the first few months of his presidency the presidential administration reshaped the federal system through a series of decrees and bills aimed at transforming the selection process of the members of the upper chamber (Federation Council),³² restructuring the politico-territorial dimension of the state (federal districts)³³ and limiting the powers of regional governors. Also, Putin gained legal

³² If before regions were represented in the Council by the acting governor and the speaker of the regional parliament, after the August 2000 reform members became delegates, one selected by the governor, the other nominated by the regional assembly.

³³ In May 2000 the presidential decree divided the federation into seven enlarged federal districts. Each of these districts is supervised by a special presidential representative (or envoy), usually referred to as *polpred*. Polpreds are directly subordinated to (and officially members of) the Presidential Administration and have their own staff and the power to appoint the Chief Federal Inspectors (CFI) based in each region of the district. CFIs provide a link between the polpred, the regional government and local elites. In other words, CFIs are polpred's eyes and teeth in the regions, while polpred's deputies are tasked with the coordination and interaction with Moscow. On paper, the federal districts

tools to fire regional leaders and to dissolve regional assemblies in case of violation of federal legal provisions (Ross, 2003; Mitin, 2008).

Although governors were stripped of their electoral legitimacy only in 2004, when after the dramatic Beslan school siege Putin decided to suppress gubernatorial elections, the balance of power tilted toward the centre from the very beginning of the process.³⁴ The centralization of federal relations was based on a mix of formal rules and informal tools and purposes, above all the Kremlin's intention to rebalance the power asymmetry and solve the problem of regional commitment, discussed in the previous chapter.

Finally, the reform of local governance was aimed at incorporating the municipal level into the system of centralized control (Ross, 2007a). The municipal reform, started since the introduction of the federal law on local self-government in 2003 and further expanded after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, represented the last step of power centralization, putting the most recalcitrant mayors of big Russian cities under the direct control of regional governors (Moses, 2015; Golosov, Gushchina and Kononenko, 2016). Although their task has been facilitated by formal institutional amendments, the actual implementation of the municipal reform was far more difficult due to the opposition of the local and regional elites and their control of a series of regional political machines (Moses, 2013). Furthermore, as emphasized by some political analysts and scholars, to defuse conflicts and negative consequences of tension and confrontation between different elite networks at the regional level, the Kremlin allowed chief executives ample flexibility and room for manoeuvring, sometimes referred to as 'Kremlin conditionality' (Moses, 2017). The resulting institutional structure, however, remained vague and ambiguous with a series of loopholes filled by informal channels of control and interaction.

represent a partial answer to the segmentation of the federal space experienced in the 1990s with the aim of improving coordination between levels of governance enhancing the monitoring capacity of the centre.

³⁴ As will be discussed later in the chapter, direct gubernatorial elections were reintroduced in 2012, but the centre preserved several formal (e.g. 'municipal filter') and informal (e.g. United Russia's dominance in regional assemblies) tools able to prevent undesirable results.

Table 6: Federal districts of the RF

Central Federal District			
Belgorod Oblast'	Lipetsk Oblast'	Tver Oblast'	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Moscow City
Bryansk Oblast'	Moscow Oblast'	Tula Oblast'	
Ivanovo Oblast'	Oryol Oblast'	Vladimir Oblast'	
Kaluga Oblast'	Ryazan Oblast'	Voronezh Oblast'	
Kostroma Oblast'	Smolensk Oblast'	Yaroslavl Oblast'	
Kursk Oblast'	Tambov Oblast'		
North-western Federal District			
Arkhangelsk Oblast'	Leningrad Oblast'	Pskov Oblast'	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Saint Petersburg
Kaliningrad Oblast'	Murmansk Oblast'	Vologda Oblast'	
Republic of Karelia	Nenets AO		
Komi Republic	Novgorod Oblast'		
Southern Federal District			
Republic of Adygeya	Krasnodar Krai	Republic of Crimea*	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Rostov-on-Don
Astrakhan Oblast'	Rostov Oblast'	Sevastopol*	
Republic of Kalmykia	Volgograd Oblast'		
North Caucasian Federal District			
Republic of Dagestan	Kabardino-Balkariya	Stavropol Krai	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Pyatigorsk
Chechen Republic	Karachai-Cherkessiya		
Republic of Ingushetia	North Ossetia-Alania		
Volga Federal District			
Republic of Bashkortostan	Nizhny Novgorod Oblast	Saratov Oblast'	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Nizhny Novgorod
Chuvash Republic	Orenburg Oblast'	Tatarstan Republic	
Kirov Oblast'	Penza Oblast'	Udmurt Republic	
Mari El Republic	Perm Krai	Ulyanovsk Oblast'	
Republic of Mordovia	Samara Oblast'		
Urals Federal District			
Chelyabinsk Oblast'	Kurgan Oblast'	Tyumen Oblast'	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Ekaterinburg
Khanty-Mansi AO	Sverdlovsk Oblast'	Yamalo-Nenets AO	
Siberian Federal District			
Altai Republic	Republic of Khakassia	Tomsk Oblast'	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Novosibirsk
Altai Krai	Krasnoyarsk Krai	Tuva Republic	
Irkutsk Oblast'	Novosibirsk Oblast'		
Kemerovo Oblast'	Omsk Oblast'		
Far Eastern Federal District			
Amur Oblast'	Kamchatka Krai	Sakhalin Oblast'	<u>Administrative Centre:</u> Vladivostok
Republic of Buryatia	Magadan Oblast'	Khabarovsk Krai	
Chukotka AO	Primorskii Krai	Zabaykalskii Krai	
Jewish AO	Sakha Republic		

* Annexed by Russia in 2014; recognized yet as a part of Ukraine by most of the international community.

Source: <http://club-rf.ru/okrug>

These series of reforms deeply affected the role of Russian governors within the federal system and their interaction with both the federal and the regional levels of governance. Hand in hand with the increasing subordination of regional chief executives to the centre, the rotation of cadres over the 8-year period when governors were appointed by the Kremlin appeared functional to the co-optation of regional elites and their incorporation into the paradigm of the power vertical'. The appointment of an increasing number of outsiders (the so-called *varyags* in Russian parlance) and the dependence of governors on the centre, rather than on the regional population, was widely perceived as an attempt to disrupt and anaesthetise consolidated regional based networks and informal alliances able to affect the allegiance and commitment of regional leaders (Sharafutdinova, 2010; Gel'man and Ryzhenkov, 2011a). Indeed, as the events of the 1990s and early 2000s demonstrated, the degree of informal autonomy and isolation of some regions has been enforced by the control that some governors were able to exercise over regional political machines and tools of electoral mobilization, thus forming integrated regional based networks (Hale, 2003).

From appointment to elections, again

There is ample evidence on how the abolition of direct gubernatorial elections has been instrumental in the process of co-optation of governors and their incorporation into the structures of the Russian administrative regime (Hale, 2010; Golosov, 2011). The new system of appointment, officially based on the evaluation of the president of a candidate selected by the plenipotentiary representative of the president in the newly created Federal Districts (*polpred*) and finally approved by the regional assembly, gave the Kremlin ample scope for manoeuvre. Not only the plenipotentiary representatives were appointed by and directly responsible to the president, but by 2004 also the vast majority of regional assemblies were dominated by the party of power, United Russia (Panov and Ross, 2013). At the time of writing, indeed, United Russia preserves the absolute majority of seats in 76 out of 83 regional parliaments (78 out of 85 if Crimea and Sevastopol are included) corresponding to the 72.2% of the total number of regional deputies in all the subjects of the RF.³⁵ Probably not surprisingly, during the appointment period there was not a single case of the regional assembly rejecting the presidential candidate. Minor exceptions were represented, indeed, by some cases when the vote for the nominees was not unanimous. For example, in Amur region in 2005 the governor Korotkov faced some opposition when a quarter of the regional

³⁵ As a reference, 12.6% are members of the CPRF, 6.3% belong to the LDPR and 6% to JR.

parliament voted against his nomination. A similar situation happened in Tyva and Krasnoyarsk Krai, where appointed governors, Sholban Kara-ool and Alexander Khloponin, faced opposition from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) within the regional assembly.

However, the system did not crystalize and the formal procedure was officially amended in 2009 when the selection of governors became a matter of the regional party with the majority of seats in the regional assembly, rather than of the *polpreds* (Podvintsev, 2009). The amendment appeared instrumental in enhancing the role of United Russia as the tool of conflict resolution at the regional level while preserving the Kremlin's control over the process on the other. However, as will be discussed in chapter 5, these mechanisms did not automatically improve the Kremlin's monitoring capacity, but rather contributed to create several problems at the regional level as United Russia, despite its officially centralized and vertically integrated structure, appeared in many cases fragmented at the bottom of the vertical chain of command (Panov and Ross, 2016b).

The appointment system, thus, not only reduced the autonomy of the regional leaders, but was also instrumental in incorporating governors into the bureaucratic hierarchy resorting to co-optation rather than to repression (Golosov, 2011). This allowed many so-called heavyweight governors, which were politically recalcitrant and somehow inconvenient for the centre, to preserve their post in exchange for a formal, although in many cases only superficial, commitment to join the 'party of power', helping the Kremlin to achieve the required results in federal elections. At least at the beginning of the process, many important political figures remained in charge, preserving their control over the regional polity and political machines in exchange for their loyalty to the Kremlin (Chebankova, 2009). Indeed, this informal compact allowed longstanding governors such as Rossel' in Sverdlovsk and Kress in Tomsk, hand in hand with powerful presidents of ethnic republics such as Rakhimov and Shaimiev, respectively in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, to survive the first period of gubernatorial appointments. An exceptional case is represented by Savchenko, the longstanding governor of Belgorod who occupied the post for 27 years, between 1993 and 2020, before being replaced by Gladkov in 2020.³⁶

As the selection and appointment system remained susceptible to backdoor bargaining and negotiation based on an informal rather than formal power structures, the

³⁶ Since 2020 Savchenko is a member of the Federation Council, the upper house of the Federal Assembly of Russia. Despite the support of his former boss, Butsaev has been replaced after spending only two months as the interim governor. Vyacheslav Gladkov, with well-established connections within the PA was appointed as the new interim governor of the region in November 2020.

system failed to create new formal, commonly accepted rules and procedures. Furthermore, the lack of electoral experience made it more difficult for governors to acquire 'organisational skills' necessary to mobilize the electorate in favour of the 'party of power' during nationwide electoral cycles. Some scholars pointed at the deficient results of United Russia in 2011 federal elections as a by-product of the whole appointment system (Golosov, 2012).

Not surprisingly the return of Putin to the post of the president of the Russian Federation in 2012 re-shaped again the contract between the centre and the regions, marking a new phase in federal dynamics and the nature of centre-region bargaining. On the wave of 2011-2012 mass protests in Moscow and other major centres of the federation, the Kremlin decided to re-introduce gubernatorial elections. According to a poll conducted by Levada centre between 2008 and 2010, almost 60% of Russians were in favour of the re-introduction of popular gubernatorial elections, while only 20% were against them in one way or another (Levada Centre, 2010).

Formal and informal tools of central control.

Although the return of elected regional head has been initially seen as a step toward a more transparent system in centre-region relations (Teague, 2014), its main result was a reconfiguration of formal and informal incentives in centre-region relations rather than a radical transformation of the system. Indeed, the centre preserved several institutional and non-institutional tools to maintain an important advantage and minimize undesirable results in gubernatorial races, thus practically maintaining governors integrated into the bureaucratic hierarchy built during the appointment system (Blakkisrud, 2015). In other words, the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections did not substantially change the nature and the role of governors within the structures of the power vertikal'.

First of all, the new arrangement introduced a series of 'filters' altering the playing field for possible competitors. The law on gubernatorial elections of May 2012, indeed, introduced the so-called 'municipal filter', which requires all potential candidates to gain the support of deputies of the regional or municipal assemblies. Although each region can decide the exact number of deputies supporting the candidate necessary for his or her participation in elections, the legislation provides nonetheless a well-defined framework. A candidate indeed must secure the support of a substantial number of deputies of regional or municipal representative organs, between 5 and 10 percent.

Furthermore, hand in hand with this threshold, the deputies supporting a single candidate must be from three quarters of municipal districts of the region. Although

theoretically this procedure should function as a filter for various spoiler candidates, improving the quality of the gubernatorial race, in practice the strict regulation of the nomination appeared since the very beginning as the major obstacle for opposition candidates' ability to challenge the incumbent (DeBardeleben and Zhrebtssov, 2014; Golosov, 2018). The fact that United Russia remained a dominant party in the majority of the regional and municipal assemblies and that the executive has several tools of control over the municipal level of governance, commonly prevents possible challengers to receive the necessary number of signatures from regional deputies, altering in practice the rules of the game (Panov, 2016).

After an eight-year break indeed, in 2012 during the first electoral competition in five different regions, all the incumbents affiliated with United Russia and supported by the Kremlin were able to maintain their post with an average of 72% of popular support. As demonstrated by the data collected by the author, since their re-introduction in 2012 up to September 2021 (included) there have been 153 gubernatorial elections. In this period the vast majority of Russian regions had two elections (60 regions) and a smaller group went through 3 electoral cycles (9 regions). Only 6 regions had only one gubernatorial election since 2012.³⁷ On average, in 153 gubernatorial election 36% of candidates were denied registration by the municipal filter.

The legislation was further amended in 2013, despite the opposition of the Communist Party and Just Russia (JR). In a partial reversal of the process started in 2012, regions were now granted the possibility to choose either to have their governors popularly elected or to revert again to an appointment system. Although granting more options to the regional legislature if compared with the previous period of appointments, the latter option would mean in practice a reversal of the law on gubernatorial elections and a return to a slightly 'liberalized' appointment system.

Indeed, according to the amendments, the procedure is as follows: the parties represented in the regional legislature (and in the State Duma) would present a list of up to three candidates to the president; among all these candidates, the president would select three names and the regional assembly would finally vote; the candidate receiving the support of the regional legislature would be appointed as a governor.³⁸ This option was officially

³⁷ These are: Buryatia, Karelia Republic, Sverdlovsk, Saratov, Tomsk and Yaroslavl.

³⁸ A further amendment was introduced in February 2015. Accordingly, the appointment of the governors of Autonomous Okrugs now follows a complex procedure under the patronage of the governor of the region within which the Okrug is located. The parties represented in the regional assembly and State Duma prepare a list of candidates for the post, then the governor of the 'host' region select the maximum of 5 candidates from that list submitting the names to the president which

proposed with the reference to the precarious situation in some of the ethnic republics, with the alleged goal to avoid ethnic tension among major groups. Up to September 2021, ten out of 85 federal subjects (83 if we exclude Crimea and Sevastopol) resorted to the presidential appointment as the process of selection of governors.³⁹

Second, although with the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections the Kremlin's action is more constrained in its ability to replace governors at any time, other more informal tools in the Kremlin's risk aversion strategy have been also important in defining the contours of centre-region relations. The 'voluntary' resignation of a governor before the official end of their term and his or her reappointment, hand in hand with the strategy of appointing an interim governor chosen by the Kremlin, has become an institutionalized informal procedure enhancing the incumbent's advantage over possible competitors within the region (Golosov and Tkacheva, 2017). For instance, between 2012 and 2021 out of the total of 153 gubernatorial elections, the timing of 67 (44%) was manipulated through the procedure of early voluntary resignation of the incumbent. This, indeed, was not only the case for those regions experiencing gubernatorial turnover, in which the resignation was instrumental in the appointment of a new interim leader. Although 52% of new governors elected in this period benefited from the instrument of early elections, indeed, out of 68 gubernatorial races where the incumbent was re-elected, 34% (23) of cases were early elections. Overall, voluntary resignation remains the most common procedure in the process of gubernatorial appointment even when not affecting directly the timing of elections. In 53% of all gubernatorial contests (including where governors are voted by the regional parliaments) the incumbents resigned either to allow the appointment of a new incumbent or to receive the official support of the Kremlin for their re-appointment and election. For comparison, only in 33% of the cases did governors wait for the natural end of their term without relying on the procedure of voluntary resignation.

in turn selects 3 final candidates. The governor is finally voted by the regional legislative assembly among the 3 candidates. Today three subjects of the RF are Autonomous Okrugs: Khanty-Mansi AO and Yamalo-Nenets AO (Tyumen Oblast'); Nenets AO (Arkhangel'sk Oblast'). A particular case is represented by Chukotka AO which despite being an Autonomous Okrug is not part of any 'host' region. Chukotka was granted this status in 1992. Before, Chukotka was part of the Magadan Oblast'.
³⁹ Republic of Adygeya; Republic of Dagestan; Republic of Ingushetia; Republic of North Ossetia – Alaniya; Kabardino-Balkarian Republic; Karachai-Cherkess Republic; Khanty-Mansi AO; Yamalo-Nenets AO; Nenets AO and the Republic of Crimea.

Table 7: Voluntary resignation in gubernatorial elections⁴⁰

<i>Reason</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>Total</i>
Voluntary Resignation											
Cases	2	1	18	11	4	13	15	14	7	6	91
Percentage	40.00%	10.00%	60.00%	45.83%	44.44%	76.47%	57.69%	73.68%	35.00%	50.00%	52.91%
Presidential decision											
Cases			1	1					1		3
Percentage			3.33%	4.17%					5.00%		1.74%
Promotion (to federal level)											
Cases		2	2	2		2	4	1	2		15
Percentage		20.00%	6.67%	8.33%		11.76%	15.38%	5.26%	10.00%		8.72%
Acting governor arrested											
Cases				1	1	2				2	6
Percentage				4.17%	11.11%	11.76%				16.67%	3.49%
Natural end of the term											
Cases	3	7	9	9	3		7	4	10	4	56
Percentage	60.00%	70.00%	30.00%	37.50%	33.33%		26.92%	21.05%	50.00%	33.33%	32.56%
Death of acting governor											
Cases					1						1
Percentage					11.11%						0.58%
Total Cases	5	10	30	24	9	17	26	19	20	12	172
											100.00%

Source: Author's dataset

⁴⁰ The table does not include the case of re-elections in Primorskii Krai in 2018 and the appointment of the governors of Crimea and Sevastopol in 2014.

Indeed, despite the fact that with the new legislation the president retained the power to fire the governor in case of a failure to perform her or his duties, if the governor is guilty of corruption or if he or she ‘loses the confidence of the president’ (Article 19.1), a more nuanced tool of resignation and reappointment appeared more useful in dealing with the degree of uncertainty introduced by gubernatorial elections.⁴¹ This set of informal control mechanisms is instrumental in achieving two important goals. On the one hand it allows the Kremlin to manipulate the electoral timing, moving up elections in situations in which the declining popularity of the governor or tension in the regional elite networks could endanger the electoral performance of the incumbent. On the other hand, it became also an instrument of informal elite rotation and management, allowing the centre to minimize potential risks of electoral competition, an important element of the horizontal axis analysed in chapter 5.

Furthermore, despite the wave of protests in 2011-2012, and some ups and downs, over the last ten years Putin’s personal popularity remained a central element in the electoral process in Russia (Frye *et al.*, 2017). Regional and gubernatorial elections are not an exception. Especially after the annexation of Crimea and the surge of support for Russian authorities channelled - among other things - through patriotism and nationalism (Hutcheson and Petersson, 2016), the Kremlin’s (and Putin’s personal) support for an incumbent has been an important device of electoral mobilization at all levels of governance and an important signal to the regional branches of United Russia.

This system of resignation and reappointment, however, remained highly informal and based on a hidden bargaining at different levels. Indeed, the practice of backroom negotiations within the PA and with several players sometimes competing with each other in the process of reappointment or nomination of a successor continued to characterize centre-region relations despite the introduction of formal elections. The top-down approach of the system was also balanced by some horizontal input. As a general informal rule, for instance, governors that during their career demonstrated loyalty to the Kremlin and the ability to control the regional elite, were often allowed to sit at the negotiation table for the appointment of their successor (Kynev, 2019). In other cases, the process of nomination of the successor involved also some representatives of powerful groups of regional elites (discussed in detail in chapter 5).

⁴¹ According to the data collected by the author on all the gubernatorial elections, the presidential power of dismissing the governor directly has been used only nine times since 2012. Six out of these cases are related to the arrest of acting governors.

Another informal control mechanism, developed since 2016, able to guarantee some case-by-case flexibility during the electoral race is the flexible use of the ‘party of power’ label. In some cases, according to the specific situation at the regional level, the strength of other political parties (such as LDPR and CPRF) and the composition of the regional elite, candidates supported by the Kremlin (and by United Russia) were allowed to run as independents, without the official support of the ‘party of power’. This appeared to be the case especially in more recent gubernatorial races, hand in hand with the stagnating popularity of UR.

By the same token, in few cases gubernatorial appointments are used as a tactic of spoils distribution and co-optation of the systemic opposition. In Oryol, where the CPRF has had historically a strong electoral showing demonstrated by the strongest performance in 2011 Duma elections with 32% of votes for the Communists (only 7% below UR), in 2014 the Kremlin appointed Vadim Potomskii, an outsider and member of the CPRF.⁴² A similar situation occurred more recently in Khabarovsk Krai where after the arrest of Sergei Furgal, the popular governor from the LDPR elected in 2018, the centre decided to appoint another member of LDPR, the outsider from Moscow Mikhail Degtyarev as the new interim governor. Overall, after September 2021 elections, only 7 governors (8.3%) are members of the parliamentary opposition, with CPRF retaining three gubernatorial seats, LDPR and JR two each. The faction of governors not affiliated with United Russia is larger, with 19 regional leaders (22.3%) remaining officially independent, although informally supported by UR. The remaining 59 governors (69%) are members of the party of power.

If before 2018 governors widely used the party’s brand and resources in their electoral campaigns,⁴³ with the declining popularity of United Russia, especially after the introduction of the unpopular ‘pension reform’ in 2018, the trend of escaping the toxic label of the party became more widespread. In 2018 the mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyenin was re-elected running as an independent and Aleksandr Burkov, the interim governor (member of JR) of Omsk, refused to use United Russia as a platform for his campaign. The 2018 campaign was characterized indeed by a few setbacks for the Kremlin. Three candidates were able to defeat United Russia incumbents, Furgal (LDPR) in Khabarovsk, Vladimir Supyagin (LDPR) in Vladimir Oblast’ and Valentin Konovalov (CPRF) in the Republic of Khakassia.

⁴² Potomskii has been later replaced (2017) by another ‘red’ governor from Moscow, Andrei Klychkov.

⁴³ For instance, in 2016 only one of the candidates supported by the Kremlin, the *silovik* Aleksei Dyumin appointed as an interim governor of Tula in early February 2016, ran as independent, despite the external support of United Russia. In 2017 all the candidates were members of United Russia.

Moreover, elections in Primorskii Krai, when the candidate of United Russia was able to defeat the CPRF opponent only in the second round, were finally invalidated by the Electoral Commission because of massive irregularities. The newly appointed interim, the political veteran Oleg Kozhemyako,⁴⁴ won the recall elections in December running as independent. Kozhemyako openly declared that the choice was made in order to consolidate the regional elite and the electorate avoiding the toxicity of the United Russia brand, particularly unpopular in the region (Chernyshev, 2018).

Thus, to avoid being affected by growing popular dissatisfaction, translated in the decline of trust for the government and the party of power, in the 2019 gubernatorial campaign six out of sixteen candidates supported by the Kremlin were allowed to run as independents. The trend continued in 2020, despite the attempt of the United Russia leadership to compel governors to use the party platform during elections. In addressing the party congress in November 2019, Dmitrii Medvedev, former Prime Minister and the leader of United Russia, expressed his concern about the growing numbers of governors refusing to join the party during the electoral campaign, suggesting that all governors supported by United Russia should also be leaders of the regional branch of the party (Mukhametshina, 2019).

Despite this formal request however, in September 2020 five out of ten interim governors appointed by the president in the months preceding the campaign were nonetheless allowed to run as independents.⁴⁵ In 2021, with only nine regions holding gubernatorial elections and two of the nine candidates supported by the Kremlin being members of the parliamentary opposition (Russkikh from CPRF in Ulyanovsk and Degtyarev from LDPR in Khabarovsk Krai), there was only one governor running as independent, Dyumin in Tula. Increasing flexibility in the use of the UR brand appears indeed as another informal tool through which the Kremlin minimizes the risks associated with the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections.

Governor-outsiders, technocrats and the problem of 'dual commitment'

One of the consequences of the almost complete reshuffling of governors between 2004-

⁴⁴ Before becoming governor of Primorskii Krai, Kozhemyako had been already governor in three other regions of the Far East: Koryak Okrug (2005-2007), Amur (2008-2015) and Sakhalin (2015-2018).

⁴⁵ The five independent candidates were: Igor Kobzev in Irkutsk, Oleg Nikolaev in Chuvashia, Vladimir Solodov in Kamchatka Krai, Vladimir Uyba in Komi Republic and Dmitrii Makhonin in Perm Krai. The total number of regions in which there were gubernatorial elections in 2020 is 18.

2012, was the qualitative transformation of their role within the bureaucratic hierarchy.⁴⁶ This transformation led to two overlapping issues. One was the transformation of the governor from a political figure into a ‘manager’. The other regards the loss of their political capital and autonomy. This qualitative change was also paradoxically revealed by the practice of appointing an increasing number of outsiders as heads of the regional executive. A varyag is typically a bureaucrat parachuted to the region without previous connection to the region and, more broadly, to the previous administration. As another informal tool of co-optation and control exercised by the centre over the regions, the phenomenon of appointment of varyags contributed to the general de-politization of the role of the governor (Chirikova, 2010). As aptly noted by some analysts, outsiders played generally an administrative, rather than political role, becoming mainly executors at the regional level of federal policies directed from Moscow (Kynev, 2019). Furthermore, and most importantly, being parachuted into a region either from another region or directly from Moscow, their involvement in intra-regional affairs was limited and their connection to influential regional elite groups reduced.

Hand in hand with the surge in appointment of outsiders, the portrait of Russian governors started to change also from a qualitative point of view. With the appointment of the former Prime Minister (1998) and presidential envoy to the Volga Federal district (2000 – 2005) Sergei Kirienko as the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, a new trend emerged. The increasing cadre rotation was indeed accompanied by a general ‘managerialization’ of the figure of Russian governors. The appointment of young (between 30 and 50 years old) governors with a background and experience in a managerial position in state corporations or at the ministerial level, rather than any political role, became more common.

The figure of the so-called ‘governor-technocrat’ usually overlapped with the varyag, as their career pattern is associated more with the federal centre than with the regions. One of the first examples of such a new cadre policy was Anton Alikhanov, appointed as interim governor of Kaliningrad in 2016 and then elected in 2017. The youngest governor of the RF (only 30 when appointed), Alikhanov was parachuted into the region only a year before the appointment after making his first steps in Moscow, as an advisor to the Ministry of Justice first and head of one of the sub-departments within the Ministry of Industry and Trade later. Since 2016, and especially on the eve of 2018 presidential election the trend of appointing governor outsiders and, preferably, young professionals with a managerial background, only

⁴⁶ Only 16 acting governors before the introduction of the appointment system remained in charge when elections were re-introduced in 2012

accelerated. Out of 20 acting governors that according to their biography may be included in the category of ‘technocrats’ only one, Vladimir Vladimirov in Stavropol, was appointed and elected before 2016. Further, only one governor of this group, Dmitrii Artyukhov in Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, can be considered as ‘local’, with a significant background and experience in the region before the appointment. Another two governors, Vladimirov in Stavropol and Starovoit in Kursk, were only born in the region but spent their entire careers either in another region or at the federal level.

If on the one hand having a chief executive owing his or her legitimacy directly to the centre without connection to the regional elite groups was an important tool to break the isolation of some regions from central control, thus theoretically improving the Kremlin’s monitoring capacity, on the other it also created several problems. The appointment of a varyag was usually accompanied by increasing resentment by regional political and economic elites (Moses, 2013). Moreover, although some of the newly appointed outsiders were indeed able to break up regional patronal networks, they were not always able to replace the existing informal structures with newly created framework of intra-regional affairs. As will be further discussed in the empirical chapters, the ability of chief executives in consolidating their personal position within a region became even more affected by personal skills, the specificity of the regional context and the affiliation with powerful factions at the federal level. Although initially (during the appointment system) the opposition of the regional elite remained weak and under the surface (Turovsky, 2010a), with the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections the conflict between varyags (and governors more broadly) and the regional elite only intensified. The general de-politicization and increasing ‘varyagization’ of the institution of governorship created indeed several problems to chief executives in delivering electoral results (Reuter, 2013).

Especially in regions with a complex mixture of political and economic elite interplay,⁴⁷ control over the regional political machines and tools of mobilization remained fragmented and, in many cases, under the supervision of region-based networks rather than outsiders (Reisinger and Moraski, 2017, pp. 117–145). If even without gubernatorial elections regional elites proved to be a sufficiently stable group difficult to fragment for the Kremlin’s appointees, leading some scholars to underline how despite the administrative submission to the Kremlin ‘structural issues inherited from the 1990s’ remained almost intact (Makarychev,

⁴⁷ These are usually regions with a pluralist economic structure with different economic and political interest groups competing with each other.

2018, p. 959), the situation appears even more complicated after the return of elected governors coupled with the shrinking popularity of the ‘party of power’.

A strong argument can be made that the governors’ stability and success in controlling the regional administrative resources, forming their administrative strength, depends on variety of factors independent from the centre, including the ability to consolidate their authority within the region and to build broader coalitions with both the regional and federal elite groups. The new centralized system, indeed, although favouring control over and loyalty of the governors, did not solve the problem of ‘dual commitment’.⁴⁸ Governors, especially varyags, remained trapped between the line of command stemming from the top, and different and sometimes contrasting incentives from the bottom, thus leaving even more space for informal practices and the dominant role of elite backdoor manoeuvring at both levels of governance. In other words, while incorporated into the bureaucratic hierarchy and officially dependent on the centre, governors remained at the same time dependent on the specific power constellation and elite networks within the regions representing different strands of political and economic actors and interests. Remaining in control of regional resources and tools of political mobilization, the latter can potentially undermine the governors’ position within the region despite the support of the Kremlin. Therefore, the process of centralization did not solve the problem of ‘dual commitment’, but rather created incentives for the intensification of political rivalry and conflicts at the subnational level.

Indeed, as discussed in the historical chapter, some studies persuasively show how the ‘dual commitment’ problem characterized the evolution of the federal process in the 1990s (Sharafutdinova, 2010). Governors, indeed, could selectively rely on the support of the federal centre on the one hand, and on the system of regional patronage and economic and political networks on the other (Hale, 2005; Konitzer and Wegren, 2006), consolidating personal networks and gaining a degree of flexibility translated in informal autonomy. With the transformation of the role of governors in the federal system, however, a new version of the ‘dual commitment’ problem remained an important feature of the federal process. Rather than an advantage for the governors in the zero-sum game with the centre, like in the 1990s, the ‘dual commitment’ today represents nonetheless an important limitation for the Kremlin’s control and monitoring capacity in a highly centralized federal system. If power

⁴⁸ The idea of ‘dual commitment’ is a revision of the concept of ‘common agency’, namely the situation in which the agent has several principals at the same time. For an overview of the ‘common agency’ problem see Dixit, Grossman, and Helpman (1997)

and resources of the governors derive primarily from the support of the centre, the ability to deploy those resources is contrasted by the configuration of the situation within the regions. With the dissolution of personal networks led by the governors, the 'dual commitment' problem makes them dependent first of all on the federal centre but also, importantly, on the regional elite and the ability of local networks to preserve their control over tools of political mobilization. Thus, although this does not translate in more autonomy for the regions, it nonetheless creates instability, an unclear set of incentives for both the governors and the regional elite and, consequently, several layers of tension and conflict between the centre, governors and the regional elites.

A by-product of the Kremlin's enhanced control over the governors appears more likely to cause the opposition of, or bargaining with, the old regional elite, consequently weakening and fragmenting the vertical line of control over the lower echelon of power. Evidence of this problem affecting centre-periphery relations may be found in the increasing turnover of the regional leadership and the surge of appointment of outsiders after 2016, when the dividends of the Crimean annexation started to decline and the prolonged stagnation of the Russian economy, especially in the periphery, reduced the available share of the pie for the co-optation of the regional elite. Indeed, another consequence of the appointment system 2.0 is the institutionalization of a short term and flexible strategy of the Kremlin towards the regions that, by its own nature, undermined stability and the emergence of shared rules of the game in the elite management process, further discussed in chapter 10.

The paradoxes of the vertical axis: between control and instability?

The enhanced control over the regions through the top-down process of power centralization, and hence the weakening of federal institutions, was undoubtedly instrumental in the consolidation of the so-called power *vertikal*. For all the reasons discussed in previous chapters, one can probably argue that despite the emergence of federal institutions enshrined in the 1993 Constitution, after 30 years Russia has never been a federal state. With the reshuffling of federal relations since the beginning of the 2000s, by the same token, it could be also argued that one system in which formal institutions were usually overshadowed by informal dynamics and practices, has been replaced by another. What has changed is the locus of power, from the regions in the 1990s to the centre since early 2000s, not the nature of the relationship. The rift between the federal structure and the federal process, in other words, remained the main feature of the centre-region interaction.

In this general framework, as aptly demonstrated by some studies, if the reason for the abolition of the gubernatorial elections was to strengthen the power *vertikal'*, the result was only partially achieved. Despite the incorporation of the governors into the bureaucratic hierarchy, 'the Kremlin faced a complicated challenge of elite management throughout the country', preserving patterns of power dynamics and multilevel bargaining between the centre and each region (Reisinger and Moraski, 2017, p. 116). Pockets of resistance were weakened and the dysfunctional elements of the system silenced, but did not disappear. Already during the 2011 electoral cycle the governors' institutional and administrative weakness appeared to undermine and fragment the power *vertikal'*. Among several possible explanations for the weak results for United Russia in the 2011 parliamentary elections, indeed, one plausible answer could be the weakness of the regional heads and the inability of many of them to control political machines effectively.⁴⁹

A similar logic can be applied to the period following the re-introduction of direct gubernatorial elections. Despite the retention of several tools of control and ad hoc mechanisms - discussed above - the vertical dimension of centre-region relations rests on informal practices and multilevel ad hoc bargaining between the centre and the regions. This lack of formal institutionalization, however, although granting a degree of flexibility, makes the pattern of federal relations unstable, situational and based on short-term perspective, as aptly demonstrated by several waves of cadre rotation and the increasing use of coercive measures in dealing with the regional elites and governors (the Furgal case in Khabarovsk is only one possible example). Thus, paradoxically, control over the regions and regional elites appears more fragile than the presented picture of the power *vertikal'* usually tells us. Moreover, the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections changed again the incentives for, and the role of, the actors involved in the process, namely the centre, the governors and regional elite groups. Although the Kremlin, retaining tools of control and manipulation, was able to use gubernatorial elections as a system of 'appointment 2.0', the institution of governorship remained nonetheless the weak link between the centre and the regions.

Indeed, if in the 1990s and early 2000s governors were able to play the role of 'transmission belt' to mediate between the interests of regional elite networks and the centre (Petrov, 2011), their weakened institutional position and the qualitative transformation of their role created new set of problems in terms of interaction between the two levels of

⁴⁹ For instance, Reisinger and Moraski (2017, pp. 146–175) demonstrate how the 'core' of United Russia's vote comes from a relatively small number of 'deferential' regions. These regions are small in size of the population and nation-wide economic output but able to provide a disproportional support for the pro-Kremlin party.

governance. First of all, by eliminating the ‘transmission belt’ and incorporating governors into the bureaucratic vertical, the attempt to control the regions limited the role of governors as brokers, de-institutionalizing previously operating mechanism of bargaining and mediation of interests. By granting them enhanced administrative resources and a free hand within regions at the expense of their political autonomy (Demchenko and Golosov, 2016), the Kremlin, however, was not able to solve the problems of effective monitoring and ‘dual commitment’, thus creating a set of new problems and incentives.

Depriving governors of their political autonomy and capital placed regional leaders in a difficult position. On the one hand the primary goal is to fulfil the expectations of the centre, on the other this objective can be hardly achieved without the support of regional elite networks, especially but not exclusively, for outsiders. Although this does not automatically translate into an open conflict and the defeat of Kremlin’s appointees, the problem of ‘dual commitment’ nonetheless creates instability which may undermine the centralized control and the effective operation of the regional political machines (and other tools of electoral mobilization) that remain under the control of the old autochthonous deeply-rooted elites (Shkel, 2021).

Thus, despite the upper hand in the system of cadre rotation and appointment, to ensure the loyalty of regional elites the Kremlin-endorsed governors need nonetheless to rely on complex and multilevel bargaining and a situational approach to their regions, distributing rents and providing incentives, hand in hand with the deployment of administrative resources. Indeed, the process of centralization of elite management did not fully extend to the level below the chief executive in the region. Although governors are, in one way or another, appointed by the centre, they remained responsible for elite management in their own regions. In other words, centre-region relations remained characterised by two overlapping tendencies, centralized elite management on the one hand and ‘federalized’ regional elite management on the other. The latter rests on a complex interaction between the governors and their regions and on the complex set of incentives that the governor is able to deploy to co-opt regional elites.

Second, the transformation of the role of the governors creates a set of new problems and incentives during periods in which the stability of the vertical axis may be undermined, namely federal and regional elections.⁵⁰ Thus, elections not only represent a test of loyalty

⁵⁰ This point follows Hale’s assumption that even if ‘managed’ and not ‘free and fair’, elections in ‘patronal’ systems are nonetheless an important occurrence able to provide an opportunity for popular protests on the one hand, and elite re-configuration on the other, thus changing the set of

for governors and the regional elites, but also an indication of their *capacity* and *intent*, hence an opportunity for informal and multilevel bargaining. The degree of uncertainty about the outcome of gubernatorial and federal elections, even if minimal, can potentially affect the set of incentives for regional-based elite groups and increase the chances for intra-elite confrontation (DeBardleben and Zhrebtssov, 2014).

As will be discussed in the empirical chapters, in order to deliver expected results for United Russia during electoral cycles, beyond their personal popularity governors need to rely on their ability to build intra-regional coalitions, giving more bargaining power to different regional elite groups. The increased personnel rotation, an element of discontinuity in regional network relations, hand in hand with the qualitative transformation of the institution of governorship, make this task more difficult. As some studies show, beyond the deployment of the administrative resource during elections, indeed, the system of patronage and public good redistribution necessary to secure desired results needs to be continuously stimulated and preserved even outside electoral cycles (Magaloni, 2006).

Thus, the second paradox and tension created by the enhanced control of the Kremlin over the governors. On the one hand, governors need to build their own political capital integrating into the political processes at the regional level. On the other hand, their incorporation into the bureaucratic hierarchy reduces their ability to create strong and long-lasting intra-regional coalitions and prevent intra-elite conflict, thus forcing the centre to reconsider or replace those governors that are unable to stabilize the situation in their regions and unite different elite networks. In doing so, however, the situation may lead to further destabilization, protracted confrontation and crystallization of the opposition of regional elites to the Kremlin's appointee (Kynev, 2019). As will be further discussed in chapter 10, a strong argument could be made that, despite the absence of an open revolt at the regional level, the increased cadre rotation since 2016 is a symbol of decreasing stability of the federal system, rather than increased control of the centre over the subnational level.

In extreme cases, such as in Irkutsk and Khabarovsk, for instance, increasing instability may also lead to the defeat of the incumbent (or Kremlin-endorsed candidates) and the victory of the opposition. Both the Communist Levchenko in Irkutsk (2015) and the Liberal Democrat Furgal in Khabarovsk (2018) were strongly endorsed by the regional and local elites and economic interest groups, provoking the fragmentation of the regional branch of the 'party of power' (Moses, 2017). Similar dynamics are widespread and will be further

expectations of different elite networks and factions at both the regional and the federal levels (Hale, 2015, pp. 61–94).

discussed in the empirical chapters with the analysis of general trend presented in chapter 10. Even though the cases of defeat of the candidate endorsed by the Kremlin remain sporadic, the complex configuration of interests in the regions hand in hand with the structural weakness of governor's intra-region responsibilities, represent a challenge to the vaunted power vertical'.

Finally, because of the series of formal and informal reforms outlined above, from being the most powerful members of regional elite governors became second-tier bureaucrats at the federal level. In other words, adopting Hale's (2015) sketch of the pyramidal relationship between elite groups, from being the apex of the regional pyramid system, governors became the bottom of the big federal pyramid. This has not only the effect of shaping the expectations of the regional elites, but also the willingness of powerful groups (especially those connected to big business and corporations) to bargain directly with the federal level, bypassing the regional chief executive.⁵¹ As a consequence, cadre rotation and the array of informal tools deployed by the centre intensified the feeling of uncertainty and, in some case, resentment of the regional elites (as the case of Perm Krai aptly demonstrates), thus affecting their expectations.

Furthermore, the consolidation of the short-term perspective in managing centre-region relations contributed to the destabilization of pre-existing networks and channels of interaction within the regions and between the regions and the centre. Thus, a strong argument could be made that, although the external dimension of the power vertical' has been consolidated granting the centre increasing tools of control, its strength nonetheless hid growing tensions and weaknesses within the system, showing signs of fragmentation along the vertical axis. In other words, the Kremlin certainly gained more freedom of manoeuvring when trying to put in power in the regions its own people, but as a consequence it also exposed tensions and conflict within the same structure of the vertical axis.

Conclusion

Despite its evident centralizing nature, the reconfiguration of centre-region relations along the top-down vertical axis exposes a series of problems and weaknesses analysed in this

⁵¹ The idea is further developed in chapter 5 with empirical evidence presented in chapter 6, 7, 8 and 9 (case studies). However, it's important to note here that the weakened role of governors as a 'transmission belt' created strong incentives for different regional elite groups to maintain and preserve channels of direct communication with the centre, thus bypassing the governors. This applies specifically to the economic and political interests of the big regional business and to the relationship with law enforcement agencies that are directly under the control of the polpreds.

chapter. The attempt to consolidate the administrative hierarchy has several negative effects on the governability of regions and on the Kremlin's ability to effectively control the lower level of governance. What the process of centralization was not able to transform is the mutually interdependent nature of the actors included in the process, the centre, the governors and the regional elite.

Moreover, one of the consequences of the process of centralization, is the emergence of what one could call a dual system within the power vertical'. In other words, outside the formal framework, the interaction between the centre and the regions is based on a set of selective and informal incentives stemming from the top of the vertical, which however are translated in different ways in political action at the bottom. Hand in hand with the structural weakness of the gubernatorial institution, these dynamics made the pattern of federal relations unstable, situational and based on short-term perspective. For governors, despite the increasing concentration of administrative resources, the actual tools of command, power and room for manoeuvring within the regional political field appear in reality shrinking. As the appointment is less the product of a formal policy rather than a result of a backroom lobbying and bargaining, their time horizon has been reduced and based on a specific and situational nature of elite management. This affects their role as power brokers and distributors of rents and may facilitate regional elite defection (Reuter and Szakonyi, 2019).

As discussed in this chapter, the essence of the central policy towards the regions in the process of centralization is also partially affected by the dynamics of popularity of the central government, one of important elements in both, preserving the balance between different actors and preventing open conflict and insubordination at the regional level. However, in the period of decline of political legitimacy of the centre and economic crisis, when the resources and rents necessary for the co-optation of the regional elite appear less significant in magnitude, the unsolved problems of 'dual commitment' and un-institutionalized centre-periphery relations are clearly re-emerging. With the decline of the distributive vector, not only the coercive dimension may assume a prominent role (as demonstrated by the case of Furgal in Khabarovsk), but also the inconsistencies of the power vertical' exposed and multiplied.

These structural weaknesses and loopholes in the vertical axis are indeed filled by 'horizontal' forces, forming a quadrant in which a dense network of informal mechanisms shapes the dynamics of centre-region relations at both levels of governance. Thus, despite the formal power asymmetry between the centre and regional actors, the success of the consolidation of the power vertical' has been far from even and uncontested. Beyond the

perception of stability, predictability and control, increasing signs of conflict and tension characterize the relationship between and within different levels of governance. The paradoxes endemic to the vertical axis discussed in this chapter must be now analysed in relationship to the dynamics characterizing the 'horizontal' dimension of federal politics, which is the scope of the next chapter.

Chapter 5 - Beyond centralization: the horizontal dimension of centre-region bargaining

Introduction

Despite the consolidation of a centralized system of power - de facto undermining elements of federalism - the pattern of centre-region relations appears in reality less universalistic and stable across territory and over time. The dynamics of relations between Moscow and the regions forming the Russian Federation can greatly differ, reflecting the specific power constellation at both levels of governance and their constant interaction. As discussed in chapter 2, the federal process is indeed shaped by the uneven relationship between formal institutions and informal practices dominating the political field. The reliance on informal elements of interaction, indeed, is beset by internal contradictions. On the one hand informality provides mechanisms of control and subordination sometimes bypassing formal institutions. On the other hand, it leaves ample space for bargaining, paradoxically undermining hierarchical elements of the system. Accordingly, the idea of a single vector of command and the strictly hierarchical pattern of interaction stemming from the Kremlin and going down to the local level, known as the power *vertikal'*, appears as a simplification of a far more complex process of centre-region relations. Beyond intrinsic contradictions and problems of the vertical axis - analysed in the previous chapter - the Russian federal process can be conceptualized as a dynamic combination of horizontal and vertical forces shaping power and dynamics of interaction between the federal and the regional level of governance.

In a dialectical relation with the previous section, this chapter analyses the horizontal dimension in centre-region relations and its constant interaction with vertical forces. The final objective is to provide an analytical model to approach centre-region relations in contemporary Russia. The chapter precedes the empirical part of the work, where the conceptual framework is applied to the analysis of two case studies, Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai.

First, drawing on different existing models the chapter provides a conceptual understanding of the horizontal axis. It then proceeds with the analysis of the impact of these horizontal forces on the power *vertikal'* at both levels of governance, namely the federal centre and the regional layer. Specifically, the chapter first demonstrates the importance of the horizontal dimension in shaping Moscow's policy toward the regions through the emergence of a factional system of gubernatorial appointment. Then it looks at the nature

and influence of horizontal factors within the regional polity and their impact on the transformation of formal and informal institutions (e.g., regional assemblies and branches of the party of power). Overall, the chapter shows how the seemingly solidified system of hierarchical subordination is in reality tempered by a complex interaction between the vertical and the horizontal axes forming different channels of informal bargaining and communication, hence the emergence of ‘multiple verticals’ in the federal process.

The horizontal axis of centre-region relations

The concept of the horizontal axis rests on the theoretical distinction between structure and process, between government and governance and, ultimately, between formal and informal institutions. Indeed, while the power vertikal’ has been consolidated relying on both formal and informal incentives, it represents only one dimension of centre-region relations in Russia. While the vertical axis draws on a set of shared ‘rules of the game’, specific practices and processes shape the way in which these rules are created, how they are institutionalized and how they affect federal relations. In other words, outside the formal framework, the interaction between the centre and the regions is based on a set of selective and informal incentives that are translated into political action in different ways. Thus, in its intersection with the horizontal, the vertical axis of control and subordination appears fragmented, creating a network of multiple-verticals shaped by different forms of interaction.

The main assumption in developing the concept of the horizontal dimension of Russian politics is that neither the federal nor the regional level can be considered as unitary actors. At both levels of governance, indeed, a plethora of different informal groups and interests operates in coordination, contrast and sometimes conflict with each other. This applies not only to the problems of vertical control of the centre on regional actors and the need of constant interaction between monitoring and sanctioning (Stokes *et al.*, 2013), but also – paradoxically - to the processes of coordination in the development of regional policy between different actors at the central level as well.

An important role in the horizontal dimension is played by elite groups, factions and networks able not only to ‘infiltrate’ formal institutions, but to become quasi-institutions themselves, emphasizing the dual nature of the Russian regime (Sakwa, 2011). This symbiotic relation between elites and institutions is the core of the horizontal axis at both levels of governance. The two dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal, are indeed mutually dependent. While there would be no power vertikal’ without informally enforced tools of

control, the horizontal interaction between actors and institutions would be unconceivable as it is without the vertical distribution of rents and incentives.

Heterogeneous elites populate this horizontal axis. These top position-holders are not connected only through personal acquaintance (relatives, classmates, former colleagues etc.), but also through ties of informally shared interests and allegiances (Kononenko and Moshes, 2011, p. 6). As such, these groups permeate different areas of policy-making and extend their influence to politico-administrative structures. Forming personal networks and factions, they operate within the intra-bureaucratic relations blurring the boundaries between administrative, political and economic resources (Sakwa, 2011, pp. 85–130).

Networks, factions and elite groups

An important element of the horizontal axis is indeed loyalty and expectations. Both of these elements appear important in holding the groups together but at the same time representing the main elements of their instability. If, as nicely summed up by Sakwa, ‘factions act as an informal mechanism to prevent elite defection, binding individuals to a power system by ties of informal loyalty and reward’, still the concept of ‘loyalty’ remains amorphous (Sakwa, 2011, p. 104). What practices and actions are considered ‘loyal’ and what are deemed as ‘disloyal’? How does ‘disloyalty’ get punished? How are ‘rewards’ re-distributed when available resources fluctuate over time? By the same token, in his macro level analysis of patronal networks in Eurasia Hale argues that the ‘logic of expectations can account for the coherence of patronalistic networks on all levels’ (Hale, 2015, p. 35). In other words, expectations of the members of the network, shaped by both endogenous (resources and organisation) and exogenous (constitution and elections) factors, are crucial to understand the coherence of the network and to explain conflict and defection. However, it remains less clear how expectations operate at the micro level, especially when defections and conflicts of interest do not operate under the logic of collective action. These questions remain unanswered if we interpret elite groups, networks and factions as fixed and rigid structures. Quite the opposite, these are fluid and situational organisations without clear boundaries, operating informally and tying together political actors and bureaucratic elites with different interests.

An important caveat should be emphasized. Although sometimes used interchangeably, networks and factions assume different meanings in the literature. On the one hand, factions, defined as ‘personal networks that exploit organisational structures and institutional procedures’ (Sakwa, 2011, p. 103), characterize what Sakwa calls the macro-level

of the ‘rhizomatic heterarchy’ of the Putinite power system (Sakwa, 2021a). Beyond their informal character and functional role, these factions share ideological orientations on the shape and form of the Russian state and society as a whole. That is where the scholarship identifies different ‘ideational-factional blocs’ (Sakwa, 2021a, p. 228) within the Russian polity. From the so called *siloviki* (those generally affiliated with law enforcement agencies and the military) to the liberal macro-faction. From conservatives (or neo-traditionalists) to Eurasianists. The influence and importance of these macro-factions in the Putinite system fluctuated over the years, under the pressure of different exogenous and endogenous factors (Zygar, 2016).

On the other hand, although acknowledging the complexities of the network organisation and forms of horizontal relations, clientelistic (or ‘patronalistic’) networks assume a vertically integrated association between patrons and clients based on a basic trade-off: support to the patron in exchange for personal status within the system (Easter, 2000). This is the starting point of the analysis based on the single pyramid model that looks at the process of incorporation of different patronalistic networks at the central and regional level into a new big network hierarchically organised around a single patron, the Russian president Vladimir Putin (Hale, 2015). When applied to centre-region relations the single pyramid image and the hierarchically integrated network corroborates the idea of the power *vertikal’* and control of the centre over the regions, the vertical axis analysed in the previous chapter.

However, horizontal links and dynamics within this vertically integrated network play an important role in shaping the configuration of the pyramid itself. As emphasized by Vladimir Gel’man and Sergei Ryzhenkov in their study of local regimes, ‘the competition among cliques within the power *vertikal’* (both on the same level of government and between these levels) for extraction of rents became an inherent feature of Russia’s local regimes’ (Gel’man and Ryzhenkov, 2011a, p. 456). These are precisely the informal interest groups that affect the relations between the centre and the regions analysed in this work. Indeed, the intersection between the vertical and the horizontal axes of governance is where the federal process lays, characterized by a multilevel informal bargaining between different actors at the centre and in the regions.

There are several implications of the conceptual use of the horizontal axis in analysing centre-region interaction. First, far from denying the existence of the hierarchical organisation of federal relations, the focus on the intersection between vertical and horizontal appears useful to investigate the power system around which these relations are organised, looking at how the vertical forces of control are affected by horizontal dynamics

of coordination and conflict. On the one hand, the Kremlin's policy toward the regions is shaped by many factors, among which the interest and competition for resources among the informal groups around the Presidential Administration plays an important role. On the other hand, however, the interaction is also affected by the specific constellation of various political and corporate forces at the regional level and their relationship among themselves and with federal actors.

The other implication is the formation and consolidation of different horizontal and vertical vectors of interaction within a single pyramid model. Thus, multiple sectoral verticals linking regional actors to certain corporations and personalities at the level of the federal centre shape the regional relations with the centre. By the same token, this power configuration affects regional regimes as well. Within regional power structures several informal institutions, groups and actors form a complex constellation of interests shaping tools of coordination available to regional governors.

The 'Kremlin' and the horizontal axis at the top

The organisation and interests of the groups around the Kremlin remain opaque and in constant fluctuation and the assessment of their influence and power is usually a subjective exercise. At a cross-cutting level, they represent indeed a plethora of overlapping elite groups and a network of state-owned companies and financial interests which may well have different and particularistic goals and objectives in the regions. Nonetheless, some broad groups with specific interests can be identified.⁵²

One conglomerate of personalities and corporations gravitate around the state-owned fuel and energy complex, including Gazprom and Rosneft. This group intersects with the state-owned military-industrial complex encompassing holding conglomerates such as Rostec and Roskosmos and the industrialist and manufacturing group(s) including companies such as Russian Post, Rostelekom and Russian Railways (RZhD). This large conglomeration of enterprises and businesses play an important role not only in ensuring the stability of regional governance (Luzin, 2019), but also in shaping the interaction between the centre and specific regions. What unites these corporations, indeed, is their competition and influence on policy towards the regions and, among other things, the system of gubernatorial appointments.

⁵² The analysis of informal groups and personalities in this chapter draws on several sources described in the methodological section.

One could add a group of private enterprises operating in the metallurgic and energy sectors that are informally dependent on the state (above all Lukoil, but also Norilsk Nickel, Sibur, Metalloinvest and Urals Mining Metallurgical Company [UGMK]). As will be discussed in the empirical chapters, although these private corporations have less power in affecting Kremlin's policy toward the regions, their interests remain an important factor in centre-region interaction as in many regions they are important providers of public goods providing work and, in many instances, directly financing regional development projects. Relying on good relations with actors in Moscow hand in hand with their economic power, big private businesses are able to affect regional politics by 'infiltrating' executive (regional government) and legislative (regional parliament) branches of power with their representatives (Zubarevich, 2010). Their lobby power is usually non-confrontational towards the governor, but their direct financial support (or the lack of) may represent an important variable in regional political dynamics, as will be discussed in the cases of Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai.

Important financial interests are now represented by a group composed by different personalities gravitating within and around the Presidential Administration. Although not forming a coherent faction, this group is represented both within and outside formal state institutions. Some of the 'technocrats' within the PA and the government may be collocated in this group that, according to some accounts, gained more leeway since 2016 with the appointment of Kirienko as the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the PA (Vardanyan, 2018). Notably, Kirienko's responsibilities within the PA are concentrated specifically on domestic policy, among which managing the regions. Not surprisingly, the wave of appointments of the so-called 'young technocrats' coincided with his new position.⁵³

Other representatives of this financial group are businesspeople and oligarchs that do not hold any formal position. Their informal influence relies directly on the personal closeness to Putin or to other important actors within the PA. For instance, the former head

⁵³ According to some accounts, Kirienko is linked to the financial group and specifically to Kovalchuk brothers. Before becoming the deputy head of the PA, Kirienko was the head of the State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom) (2005-2016). His influence is also based on direct closeness to Vladimir Putin. Kirienko served as polpred to the Volga federal district during the first Putin term (2000-2005). Further, despite his departure, he maintained influence on Rosatom. Interestingly, Kirienko is considered responsible for the recent 'technocratic turn' in Russian politics. He is one of the authors of several new professional training schemes for the Russian elites. One of these is the 'Leaders of Russia' programme, an 'open competition for the managers of the new generation' launched in 2017 (<https://лидерыроссии.рф/#about>). The winner of the 2019 competition, Evgenii Grigor'ev, is today the elected mayor of Yakutsk (after the voluntary resignation of Sardana Avkcent'eva in early 2021), along with Yuri Shalabaev, the current mayor of Nizhnii Novgorod.

and major stakeholders of Rossiya Bank Yurii Kovalchuk and his brother Mikhail⁵⁴ and the founders of SMP Bank Arkadii and Boris Rotenberg whose influence extends to several other sectors such as the construction and railway industry, are among the most influential businesspeople in Russia.⁵⁵ In this group may be also included Herman Gref, the current CEO of Sberbank who worked with Putin in the Saint Petersburg administration in the 1990s. Although not operating as a coherent faction, personalities from this group retain a degree of influence on regional politics. The influence of Rotenbergs and Kovalchuks remains particularly strong in Saint Petersburg where both families started their business in the early 1990s, under Anatolii Sobchak. It is widely reported that the appointment of the former governor of Saint Petersburg in 2011, Gennadii Poltavchenko, was lobbied by the Rotenbergs and part of the commercial activities of the Poltavchenko family is linked to the businessmen. On the other hand, the new governor appointed in 2018, Aleksandr Beglov, is considered to be close to Yurii Kovalchuk (Zorin, 2019).

Another important group, with a significant influence on regional politics, especially in the Urals federal district, is cemented around the figure of Moscow's mayor Sobyenin. This group is tied together not only by shared connections to the former Tyumen elite, but also by a broader technocratic image and personal connection to the mayor of Moscow, former deputy Prime Minister (2008-2010) and Chief of the PA (2005-2008), Sobyenin. This group holds several important official positions within the new government and the federal structures of the federation. Within the Mishustin government Maxim Reshetnikov,⁵⁶ former

⁵⁴ Beyond the financial sector, Yurii Kovalchuk owns several important federal media (such as REN-TV, Channel One, Channel Five and the newspaper *Izvestiya*) incorporated in the media holding National Media Group (NMG). Kovalchuk's ties to Putin date back to the Saint Petersburg period (when Putin was the deputy mayor of Saint Petersburg) and the establishment of the notorious 'Ozero' cooperative.

⁵⁵ Until 2019 Arkadii Rotenberg was also head of SGM Group – Stroigazmontazh. The company was created in 2008 by the amalgamation of five companies that were under the control of Gazprom. According to RBK (<https://www.rbc.ru/business/21/11/2019/5dd69fb29a79479473dd3024>), by 2014 the company became the main contractor of Gazprom, along with Stroitransneftegaz owned by Timchenko another influential figure of the group. Beyond interests in many Russian regions (such as the construction of a pipeline in Krasnodar Krai) Stroigazmontazh was also involved in the construction of the bridge and railway on the Kerch Strait, connecting the Crimean Peninsula with the Russian mainland. Allegedly, Rotenberg brothers are also very close to Oleg Belozеров, since 2015 President of the RZhD and Igor Levitin, former Minister of Transport (2004-2012) and currently Aid to the President. The son of Arkadii, Igor, was Deputy Head and Chief of the Property Department of RZhD (<https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2015/08/21/605676-rotenbergi-posposobstvovali-naznacheniyu-belozerova-rzhd>; <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/05/13/a-few-family-friends>).

⁵⁶ Although originally from Perm Krai, where he also served as governor between 2017 and 2020, Reshetnikov worked with Sobyenin since 2009, first the Director of the Department of Public Administration, Regional Development and Local Self-Government of the Apparatus of the

governor of Perm Krai and currently the Minister of Economic Development, and Valerii Falkov, Minister of Science and Higher Education, own their current status to their closeness to the former governor of Tyumen. Vladimir Yakushev, former vice governor of Tyumen and then the successor of Sobyenin as the governor of the region (2005-2018), between 2018 and 2020 served as Minister of Construction, Housing and Utilities (under both Medvedev and Mishustin governments) before being appointed as polpred to the Ural federal district. It has been speculated that Yakushev's departure from the government has been balanced by the appointment of Marat Khusnullin as the new deputy prime minister. Indeed, Khusnullin served as the deputy of Sobyenin in Moscow for 10 years (2010-2020).

Finally, broader dynamics of Russian politics are undoubtedly shaped by the heterogeneous group of siloviki, currently or previously affiliated to law enforcement and security agencies. Far from being an homogenous group (Sakwa, 2011; Taylor, 2017), siloviki do not have only influence on the general directions in foreign and domestic politics, but also able to balance the role of 'technocrats' and financial interests in centre-region dynamics. The centralization of the federal system, the institutionalization of the polpred's control on the law enforcement and security agencies at the district and regional level hand in hand with the increased cadre rotation, drastically reduced the governor's ascendancy on the territorial divisions of the MVD and FSB. However, as increasing evidence shows, this process not only allowed further room for manoeuvre for siloviki in the process of gubernatorial appointment, but also increased factional and inter-agency conflicts and competition for control of important assets at the regional level. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of the siloviki group is further emphasized by figures like Chemezov and Sechin, with strong links to and influence across different factions,⁵⁷ thus bridging interests between the state-owned corporations like Rosneft and Rostec and law enforcement agencies.

These elite groups represent the central part of the interaction between the federal and the regional level of governance transcending formal administrative divisions and a strictly hieratical organisation. This logic affects indeed several institutions and practices of centre-periphery relations. While organised within the presidential network with Putin as the main patron, thus included in the vertical dimension, in several policy areas - such as federal

Government (headed by Sobyenin) and then joining the government of Moscow when Sobyenin became mayor of the capital.

⁵⁷ For instance, although he is increasingly regarded as an independent player owing the influence to the closeness to the president, Anton Vaino, the Head of the PA, has also family connections to Chemezov.

politics - hierarchical boundaries between different elite groups are more blurred, leaving ample space for interaction, distribution of interests and competition.

Furthermore, the horizontal axis at the top, despite its general stability, is nonetheless in constant evolution thus undermining the strict vertical control and the consolidation of the decision-making process. Beyond elite-management logics of hierarchical control described in the previous chapter, as aptly noted by one of the leading analysts of regional politics, the system is characterized by a situation ‘where virtually every governor was linked to the interests of one federal elite group or another, and accordingly, the issue of their dismissal became an issue of relationship between groups within the federal elite’ (Kynev, 2020b, p. 170). These horizontal dynamics, indeed, contributed to the consolidation of different and competing ‘sectoral verticals’ within an only seemingly solidified hierarchical system.

Intra-elite dynamics and the puzzle of gubernatorial appointments

Elite dynamics at the central level operate within the framework of centre-region relations and intersect with the vertical axis described in the previous chapter. Thus, the enhanced control of the centre over the regions, above all through the qualitative transformation of the role of Russian governors and their incorporation in the bureaucratic hierarchy, is shaped by horizontal forces operating at the top of the vertical axis, the centre. The interaction between vertical and horizontal forces is played on the informal playing field through backdoor bargaining rather than commonly accepted formal rules of the game. As emphasized by a research based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with members of the regional elite conducted by a Russian sociologist, in 2010 85% of respondents underlined the increasing reliance of the system on informal practices in the process of centre-region relations (Chirikova, 2010, p. 144).⁵⁸

The general ‘de-politicization’ of Russian governors (despite the attempt of ‘re-politicization’ with the re-introduction of direct election discussed previously) has important consequences not only on their ability to control tools of mobilization - described in the previous chapter - but also on the sources of their political power. Indeed, the reliance on informal power relations not only did not disappear, but became even stronger (Petrov,

⁵⁸ The point has been confirmed during in-depth interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 in Perm and Sverdlovsk by the author. The respondents emphasized indeed the increasing importance and institutionalization of informal mechanism in the appointment of governors and further interaction between regions and the federal centre.

2012). Particular decisions regarding the appointment and dismissal of governors relies to a great extent on what is usually called in Russian '*ruchnoe upravlenie*' (manual control), a system characterized by arbitrary and informal interventions rather than well-organised rules and procedures that dominated centre-region relations since the early 1990s. Although there is evidence that decisions of dismissal and appointment of governors are generally based on political (electoral results and stability) rather than economic considerations (Sharafutdinova, 2010; Reisinger and Moraski, 2017), specific cases and decisions appear to be nonetheless the product of intensive intra-elite backdoor bargaining.⁵⁹ Consequently, the time horizon for governors appears shrinking and based on a specific and situational nature of elite management. This affects their role as power brokers and distributors of rents at the regional level. Thus paradoxically, the reliance on personal ties and relations undermines the stability of the system and tools of vertical control.

The intra-elite bargaining is complemented by an opaque system of delegations. While Sergei Kirienko is responsible for the management of regional policy and the appointment system of governors has been certainly affected by departure of his predecessor, Vyacheslav Volodin, his decision-making power is nonetheless tempered by other influential players within and around the PA.

As emphasized by several analysts, almost every influential elite group has its own members acting as high officials at the regional level (Minchenko Consulting, 2017). In other words, the competition among groups and personalities represents an important variable in the selection of a candidate. Large corporations may affect the process of appointment in regions where they have a consolidated presence and significant interests. Although Gazprom, Rosneft and other conglomerates are too powerful and almost all the governors need to take into account their interests, they nonetheless have some representatives among regional heads. In Tomsk the current governor Sergei Zhvachkin had a long career within the structures of Gazprom, being for several years the managing director of 'Kuban'gazprom' and 'Gazprom Transgaz-Kuban' before his appointment in 2012. A similar trajectory characterized the governor of the neighbouring Omsk region, Viktor Nazarov (2012-2018) who spent a considerable part of his career within Gazprom before becoming governor.⁶⁰ In other regions governors from the Gazprom network were replaced by figures able to

⁵⁹ More recently, the set of political criteria for the evaluation of Russian governors, among which level of support of the 'party of power' and the president, has been institutionalized (Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2019).

⁶⁰ After his replacement Nazarov returned to Gazprom becoming the Managing Director of Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz Sever.

accommodate competing interest of major state-owned (and private) corporations. After a period of hegemony in Yamal-Nenets AO (with the former governor Iurii Neelov) where Gazprom extracts most of its natural gas, Dmitrii Kobylkin represented a compromise between several players, above all Gazprom, Rosneft and Novatek (Bocharova and Mukhametshina, 2018).⁶¹

Several other governors can be included in the Rostec – Chemezov defence sector network. Beyond the economic clout of the conglomerate with its ample network of subsidiaries all over the Russian territory, Chemezov is considered one of the most influential figures in Russian politics at both the federal and the regional level. Here corporate interests intersect with power dynamics within and around the PA. Chemezov's regional network is reputed to include several governors, such as Gleb Nikitin in Nizhnii Novgorod, Anton Alikhanov in Kaliningrad, Dmitrii Ovsyannikov⁶² in Sevastopol and Dmitrii Azarov in Samara (Bocharova, 2017). Nikitin and Ovsyannikov before being appointed governors were both deputies of Denis Manturov the longstanding Minister of Industry and Trade (since 2012) and considered as one of the main Chemezov protégés within the government. To this list one could add other governors with a more nuanced allegiance. For example, according to several sources the successor of the heavyweight Evgenii Savchenko (1993-2020) in Belgorod, Vyacheslav Gladkov, has ties to both Chemezov and Kirienko (Polovinko and Romanova, 2020). Indeed, in regions where several corporations and personalities have significant stakes and interests, in many cases the appointment is a product of a bargaining rather than a zero-sum competition at the central level. The ability to accommodate different interests navigating inter-factionalist dynamics became an important asset for governors.

Similar dynamics concern the other major state-owned corporation, Rosneft, and its head Igor Sechin. While Rosneft's economic clout is a fact that almost all the governors need to deal with, in some cases the appointment is affected by the competition between Sechin's and other groups. An interesting example is the appointment of Natal'ya Komarova (2010) as a head of oil-rich Khanty-Mansi AO that, incidentally, falls under the administrative control of the host region, Tyumen. According to Aleksandr Kynev (Kynev, 2020a, p. 566), the appointment process has seen the confrontation between two major groups, one headed by Sechin and the other by Sobyanin. The final decision rewarded the former, as Komarova is reputed to be very close directly to Sechin. Beyond being the head of Rosneft, however,

⁶¹ Thanks to support of several groups in 2018 Kobylkin was appointed Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. In November 2020, during the reshuffle of the Mishustin cabinet he was replaced by Aleksandr Kozlov, former governor of Amur.

⁶² In 2019 Ovsyannikov resigned. The new appointee is Mikhail Razvozhayev.

Sechin is an influential figure on its own, able to bridge different groups as his clout within the siloviki has been historically prominent. For instance, intra-factional conflicts within and around the PA may also be replayed at the regional level. Sechin's group, which among others include the director of FSB, Aleksandr Bortnikov and the Chairman of the Investigative Committee (SK), Aleksandr Bastrykin, is reputed to be behind criminal investigations conducted between 2015 and 2016 that led to the arrest of several governors such as the former head of Sakhalin, Aleksandr Khoroshavin, Vyacheslav Gaizer in Komi and Nikita Belykh in Kirov.⁶³

Beyond large corporations, other groups compete for influence in Kremlin's regional policy. Some influential players at the federal level are able to maintain a patronage system in regions of their origin or where they started their political career. The former First Deputy Chiefs of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office, Volodin, remains one of the key players in Saratov where he was able to maintain his clientelist network well after his departure to Moscow. The current governor, Valerii Radaev (2012) is considered one of his close associates in the region (Kynev, 2020a, p. 570). Further, it is rumoured that Volodin's patronage also extends to neighbouring regions, such as Volgograd and Penza. Despite the arrest on graft charges of Ivan Belozertsev, the first high-profile case in 2021 after the detention of Sergei Furgal in Khabarovsk, Volodin allegedly was able to lobby another protégé as the new governor, Oleg Melnichenko, in Penza.⁶⁴ Incidentally, during the 2016 Duma elections Volodin was the only member of the PA being elected through the single-member constituency system, running in the 15th constituency which includes Volgograd, Penza, Tambov and Saratov regions.

Tuva is the homeland of Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and his network in the region remains very strong despite the replacement of Sholban Kara-ool (2007-2020), with Vladislav Khovalyg a member of the local elite affiliated with the team of the former governor (Ivanov and Mukhametshina, 2021b). The Minister has influence allegedly in other regions as well. For instance, Andrei Vorob'ev who succeeded Shoigu as governor of Moscow Oblast' after the latter's brief gubernatorial experience in 2012, was his assistant when Shoigu was the Deputy Prime Minister in 2000. Furthermore, the father of Vorob'ev, Yurii, is a close friend of the current Defence Minister. Interestingly, Aleksei Russkikh, the new Communist interim governor of Ulyanovsk appointed in 2021 after the resignation of

⁶³ Other experts interviewed by the author include in the group also Aleksandr Solov'ev, former head of Udmurtiya and Leonid Markelov governor of Mari El. Both have been arrested in 2017.

⁶⁴ Beyond Volodin, Melnichenko relies also on ties to the former polpred to the Volga federal district, Mikhail Babich, being his deputy in the federal district.

Sergei Morozov, was a member of the Moscow region government. He is allegedly tied to Shoigu through Andrei Vorob'ev (and his father). The appointed acting governor of North Ossetia in 2021, Sergei Menyailo is also reputed to be a member of Shoigu's personal network (Ivanov and Mukhametshina, 2021a).⁶⁵

Sobyanin's influence is multidimensional and rests on several sources of authority. His closeness to Putin is certainly an important factor, but it is enhanced by his official position as mayor of Moscow and the image of a technocratic manager of the economic, financial and political centre of the Russian Federation. Although officially only a regional leader, his position within the elite hierarchies is boosted not only by the general importance of the Russian capital and his image as 'the leader of regional leaders' further emphasized by management of the Covid-19 pandemic, but also by his political experience (in contrast to other technocrats that do not have much political experience such as the Prime Minister Mishustin).⁶⁶ The independence and influence of Sobyanin further increased with the departure of Volodin from the post of First Deputy Chief of Staff of the PA (with the specific focus on domestic politics) in 2016 and with the 'technocratization' of the governors under Kirienko.⁶⁷

Beyond his leeway in regional policy of the centre, Sobyanin's influence also rests on his ability to bridge different constituencies. Although not without frictions and tensions (as in the case of the appointment of Komarova mentioned above), the mayor of Moscow is considered to have good working relations with other close associates of the president, such as Medvedev and Shoigu, with the new 'technocrats' among which Kirienko and with the financial interests of Kovalchuk and Rotenberg brothers. Further, Sobyanin is reputed to have good relations with managers of state-owned and private corporations such as Gazprom's Aleksei Miller and Gennadii Timchenko active in the financial and energy sector with major stakes in Gunvor, Novatek (the second larger natural gas producer in Russia) and SIBUR (Orlov, Neizhmakov and Stepanov, 2017). According to different accounts

⁶⁵ Menyailo, a former deputy commander of the Black Sea Fleet, played an important role in the process of annexation of Crimea in 2014 and was the governor of Sevastopol between 2014 and 2016. In 2016 he resigned, leaving the post to a member of the Chemezov team, Ovsyannikov. Before becoming the governor of North Ossetia, he was the acting polpred to the Siberian federal district.

⁶⁶ In March 2020 Putin appointed Sobyanin as the head of the 'Covid-19 crisis management committee' within the State Council. The day before, the PM Mishustin created a government commission with the same objective. The presidential decision created frictions between the PM and Sobyanin. Who was actually leading the government's reaction to the pandemic remained unclear.

⁶⁷ Some analysts, among which Tat'yana Stanovaya (2020), note that Volodin's policy caused several frictions with the mayor of Moscow. For instance, it's rumoured that the participation of Aleksei Navalny in 2013 Moscow elections was allowed thanks to a direct intervention of Volodin, a decision that deeply upset Sobyanin. See also Zygar (2016, p.250-2).

Sobyanin's network at the regional level now extends beyond his stronghold, Tyumen, encompassing other regions such as Sverdlovsk with Evgenii Kuivashev, Kurgan with the former deputy governor of Tyumen, Vadim Shumkov, and Perm with Basargin and Reshetnikov.⁶⁸

It should be also noted that Tyumen is indeed the so-called 'host' region of the Khanty-Mansi and Yamalo-Nenets AO, which remain subordinated to Tyumen. The biggest oil and gas fields in Russia are located in these two Autonomous Okrugs. Thus, although balanced by the interests and influence of other powerful actors, such as Sechin and Timchenko the influence of Sobyanin extends also to the Khanty-Mansi and Yamalo-Nenets AO.

There is also a group of governors directly linked to law enforcement agencies and important players from the siloviki camp. Representatives of the siloviki have been recently appointed in regions with different internal and external dynamics. For instance, while the appointment of Dmitrii Mironov in 2016 as the governor of Yaroslavl, traditionally a problematic region in terms of regional elite conflicts and weak electoral support for UR, was lobbied by the structures close to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the current governor of Tula, Aleksei Dyumin may rely not only on closeness to Putin and Shoigu, but also on good relationship with some other personalities such as Igor Sechin and Sergei Chemezov (Proekt Media, 2019). Others, like the newly appointed head of the Republic of Dagestan Sergei Melikov (2020) after the departure of another silovik, Vladimir Vasil'ev, have close connections to Viktor Zolotov, the head of the National Guard of Russia (Rosgvardiya), member of the Putin's inner circle since the Saint Petersburg period in the 1990s (Vinokurov and Rozhkova, 2020). Incidentally, according to several accounts, Zolotov and Sechin along with the longstanding head of the FSB Aleksandr Bortnikov and the secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, are members of two separate factions within the siloviki group whose competition assumed a public character during the succession crisis in 2008 (Sakwa, 2011).

Finally, some governors might be sponsored the presidential envoys to federal districts. This practice was widespread during the first period of gubernatorial appointments under Putin (2004-2008) but later declined (Kynev, 2019). Today, only few presidential envoys have a voice on this process, and it depends more on a personal influence within the PA rather than the official post. The most prominent example is probably Yuri Trutnev who

⁶⁸ With the promotion of Reshetnikov at the federal level Sobyanin's clout in Perm diminished as the new governor of the region appointed in 2020, Makhonin, is considered a compromise figure.

since 2013 combines the post of Deputy Prime Minister and polpred to the Far Eastern federal district. For instance, the governor of Kamchatka Krai, Vladimir Solodov (2020), is associated with Trutnev. He was also allegedly sponsored, unsuccessfully, for the post of governor of Amur region back in 2018 (Vasil'eva and Samokhina, 2018).⁶⁹

Incidentally, the post of polpred seems to have become another tool of intra-elite management and accommodation between different factions and a retirement post for some influential players. After his resignation as a Prosecutor General (PG) in 2006, a well-documented chapter of the siloviki factionalist war (Zygar, 2016) and a two-year experience as Minister of Justice, Vladimir Ustinov was appointed polpred to the Southern federal district where he remains ever since. More recently, the same pattern was followed by Yurii Chaika, the successor of Ustinov as PG and a member of a contrasting faction within the siloviki. Since January 2020 he is the presidential envoy to the North Caucasus federal district.⁷⁰

Finally, other informal practices shape the system of gubernatorial appointments. For instance, when the incumbent governor leaves a post for a new position at the federal level, he or she is usually allowed to maintain an informal control over the region through the appointment of a member of his or her team as the new governor. This was the case of Sobyenin in Tyumen, able to maintain the supervision of the region by sponsoring his associate as the successor, Vladimir Yakushev.⁷¹ Also Trutnev in Perm Krai when appointed as the new Minister of Natural Resources and Environment was able to maintain an informal influence over the region by sponsoring the appointment of Oleg Chirkunov, his associate and business partner, although Chirkunov later demonstrated a high degree of independence and was able to create his own regional network (a process analysed in the empirical part of

⁶⁹ In 2018 Vasilii Orlov was appointed as the acting governor of Amur. Orlov was previously the representative of the managing director of SIBUR holding (Timchenko) in the region. Notably, in 2017 SIBUR and Gazprom started the development of a new project in the region, comprising the construction of several facilities such as the Amur Gaz-processing plant and Amur chemical-processing plant.

⁷⁰ Interestingly enough, the successor of Chaika as PG is Igor Krasnov, the former Deputy of the Chairman of the SK, Aleksandr Bastrykin. The creation of the SK (2007), an autonomous department within the General Prosecutor's Office, was a part of the broader process of balancing the influence of different factions within the siloviki and the longstanding conflict between Sechin and Zolotov. While Chaika is reputed to be a close associate of Zolotov, his predecessor Ustinov and the head of the SK, Bastrykin, are associated to Sechin. Krasnov, the new PG is also a member of the Sechin-Bastrykin group, which now seem to control both, the General Prosecutor's Office and the SK.

⁷¹ When Yakushev, was appointed Minister of Construction, Housing and Utilities of the RF in 2018, he was allegedly allowed to appoint a close associate and loyalist, Aleksandr Moor, as his successor. Moor, indeed, has a long career under the wing of Sobyenin and Yakushev in Tyumen'. He was a deputy governor between 2005 and 2011 and mayor of the regional capital from 2011 to 2018.

this work). More recently, the governor of Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug appointed in 2018, Dmitrii Artyukhov, is a protégé of Dmitrii Kobylkin appointed as the head of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

Regional regimes and the horizontal axis at the bottom

Beyond intra-elite processes shaping the gubernatorial appointment system thus fragmenting the power vertical', centre-region interaction is affected by horizontal forces at the regional level as well. Indeed, horizontal intra-elite dynamics at the top of the vertical axis described so far intersect with the complexity of regional politics and specific characteristics of sub-national regimes.

Attempts by the centre to control the process at the regional level through institutional and informal means analysed in the previous chapter, indeed, have been partially undermined by horizontal forces. If on the one hand the process of 'varyagization' of regional governors undermined the formal capacity of regional elites to influence Moscow's policy, on the other it did not reduce the importance and influence of regional networks in shaping the contours of subnational regimes. In other words, the interaction between horizontal forces at the top and at the bottom add further complexity to the system of the federal relations creating a dense network of 'multiple verticals' linking federal, regional and local actors and diluting unified channels of control.

Far from being a unitary subordinated actor, indeed, regional elites remain fragmented and characterized by diverse political and economic interests whose strength and cohesion varies in accordance with consolidated regional dynamics. Regional business and political elites continue to play a central role in providing public goods and consequently maintain an important degree of control over the tools of political mobilization at the local level. As demonstrated by Reisinger and Moraski (2017), for instance, not only the ability of the regional elite, but also its 'willingness' played an important role in voter mobilization and regional turnout during federal electoral cycles since 2003. Other studies show how the degree of consolidation of the regional elite in some ethnic republics plays an important role in the ability of governors to negotiate the appointment of their successors with the centre (Garifullina, Kazantsev and Yakovlev, 2020), or how the ability of the governor to take into consideration the specific interests of local elites can help to maintain the control over the regional political machines (Shkel, 2021). Beyond the specific issues, however, what these examples demonstrate is that despite the twists and turns of formal and informal institutions,

regional elite remains a central player within regional regimes and, indirectly, an important element of the federal process and interaction between the centre and the regions.

If elite groups within and around the Kremlin compete for influence and resources, in the same fashion regional politics are characterized by different actors competing for formal and informal positions operating within the regional polity, concealing a plethora of conflicts within a seemingly solidified system of governance. As will be demonstrated in the empirical part of this work, intra-elite interaction and conflict at the regional level may indeed assume different contours. In Sverdlovsk the historically rooted conflict between the regional capital administration (the mayor) and the regional executive (the governor) provided the framework for the consolidation of different elite groups compelling the governor to rely on a mix of informal bargaining and co-optation in dealing with regional elites. On the other hand, in Perm Krai, where the regional elite was even more fragmented after the sudden departure of the incumbent, the newly appointed governor faced the consolidation of a short-term informal coalition that was able to undermine his control and authority over the regional political process. Thus, although regional elite groups lost much of their ability to influence directly the centre's policy - in particular the process of gubernatorial appointment and distribution of financial resources - due to their local knowledge and closeness to the population (Gibson, 2005) they nonetheless preserved informal bargaining power vis-à-vis the governors.

Formal-informal institutions and regional elite

Several structural elements that increased the competition for influence and resources at the regional level can be identified. First, the process of centralization drastically reduced formal channels of vertical mobility. As emphasized in a series of studies conducted by Chirikova (Chirikova, 2010, 2015), in the absence of formal tools of competition for power and promotion, the main consequence was the institutionalization of the overwhelming reliance on personal informal links between political, regional business and federal actors. If the system remained seemingly stable in periods of economic growth, its contradictions started to emerge more vividly during periods of exogenous economic shocks (2014-2015 and 2018) and endogenous political inflection points (e.g., the issue of succession at both national and regional level). Not surprisingly, competition and conflict at the regional level intensified hand in hand with the decrease of distributive capacity of the centre and in proximity of federal or regional elections, as demonstrated in the empirical part of this study.

The second feature of intra-elite bargaining operating in the policy of gubernatorial appointments is the drastic rise of the horizontal mobility of cadres at the subnational level. Although, as argued in the previous chapter, this might have been a rational calculation to enhance the centre's control over the regional regimes, horizontal dynamics continued nonetheless to play a destabilizing role. As governors, affected by the problem of 'dual commitment' are less able to consolidate effectively regional elites due to the reduced connection to the region and a short-term position, regional interest groups gained more informal leeway. Further, the increased turnover and the informal character of the appointment process that rarely takes into consideration the interest of the regions, increased the possibility of conflict between ex-ruling elite and new governors since the former group may have a resources advantage accumulated during the time in office and rely on a well-entrenched system of informal and personal connections at the regional level (Greene, 2007), as demonstrated by the cases of Sverdlovsk and Perm.

The horizontal rotation of personnel concerns not only regional chief executives. Hand in hand with the increasing rotation of governors indeed, the process involved the systematic replacement of the heads of regional law enforcement agencies such as the FSB, MVD and Prosecutor office (Yakovlev and Aisin, 2019). While large-scale *siloviki* horizontal rotation was instrumental in decreasing their connection to governors and regional elite, thus increasing their loyalty to the centre (Petrov, 2011), the system enhanced the potential for informal bargaining and conflict between different sectoral law enforcement verticals, governors and various regional interest groups, as the increasing number of high-profile arrests and scandals demonstrates.⁷²

This general trend has some important consequences on the distribution of power within Russian regions and the operation of formal institutions. Although regional parliaments remained largely subordinated to the executive power, they became important informal venues for the regulation of regional elite interaction and bargaining. Where the governor, especially in the case of outsiders, was unable to act as a hub for the consolidation of the regional elite, regional assemblies offered an institutionalized platform for interaction between powerful regional political and economic players. The actual power of the regional elite within the regional assemblies vis-à-vis the executive is largely determined by available

⁷² This does not concern only the growing number of governors being arrested, mentioned above, but also other regional officials. Further, as noted by Kynev, the 'varyagisation' of law enforcement agencies at the regional level often causes conflicts within the agency hierarchies as well, especially between the outsiders and local officials. For further details on this issue see Kynev (2020a, p. 647-663)

resources and the dense network of connections rather than official positions. In regions with a fragmented and multifaced regional elite and with a powerful legacy of the former governor, the legislative assembly was sometimes able to balance the power of the executive by the emergence of informal coalitions cemented around powerful local figures. Resources available to this sort of informal coalitions, however, are far from being formal, but rather determined by situational alliances, links to members of the regional executive, to the higher echelon of the 'party of power' or directly to some influential players at the federal level. The case of Perm Krai during the governorship of Basargin is a paradigmatic example of such a process.

Furthermore, regional assemblies and regional governments became a consolidated platform for the representation of the interests of influential regional and federal business actors (Turovsky, 2010b), the so-called 'politicized financial-industrial groups' (Hale, 2006, pp. 163–166) that may play a role within and outside official party structures. Indeed, hand in hand with personalistic interaction with the regional executive, the lobby capacity of regional and federal corporations intersects with the growing number of local deputies with direct or indirect ties to the business. If on the one hand this process added a semi-formal layer to the interaction between the regional executives and economic players, on the other it complicated the dynamics within regional assemblies, among other things blurring party allegiances. Indeed, informal coalitions between economic and political interests largely assumed a cross-party character affecting the type and amount of resources available to some factions and members of the regional assemblies (Chirikova, 2010, pp. 68–69).

For instance, depending on the specific nature of regional regimes, regional business elites may be involved in pro- or anti- governor campaigns, thus affecting the balance of power within the region (Orlov, 2014). Examples of the dense network of important connections of big regional business drawing its power from economic resources, territorial entrenchment and dynamic relations with regional and central actors discussed in the empirical chapters is partially illustrative of the complexity of this interaction. If on the one hand this reduced the overall autonomy and power of regional networks that were used to cement around the governors (Petrov, 2011), on the other hand the system did not solidify in a coherent macro-network, but rather in a segmented informal relations between regional players forming multiple channels of interaction.

Indeed, as governors weakened institutionally, informal connections represented one of the most important power resources. If the support of the centre (or more precisely elite coalitions around the PA) remains crucial for the appointment, the administrative strength

of chief executive depends on the balancing ability of diverse regional horizontal forces. Not surprisingly, the composition of gubernatorial teams became more complex with the frequent inclusion of representatives of different corporations, siloviki and elite groups in the regional governments.⁷³ Overall, this osmosis between informal interests and formal institutions not only complicated the system of top-down and bottom-up communication, but even more importantly did not offer institutionalized tools to overcome the consolidation of the short-term and situational character of centre-region interaction, punctuated by the over reliance on ‘manual control’ and the continuous personal rotation among Russian governors.

The ‘party of power’ in the regions: between factionalism and control

It has been well documented how since early 2000s United Russia emerged as the first successful ‘party of power’ in Russia (Gel’man, 2008; Lavery, 2015; Reuter, 2017).⁷⁴ The centralization of the party system and the general consolidation of United Russia through the process of co-optation played an important role in the new balance of power between the centre and the regions (Konitzer and Wegren, 2006; Reuter and Remington, 2009). In the new system of federal relations UR provided resources and an effective electoral vehicle for regional elites incorporating them in a seemingly vertically integrated ‘party of power’. As emphasized by some regional experts, the consolidation of United Russia was an attempt to ‘unify’ and ‘control’ the federal process through co-optation rather than coercion (Chirikova, 2010, p. 124). Over the last 15 years, indeed, United Russia has incorporated into the party the regional political machines and networks able to act as vote-mobilizing tools (Reuter, 2013).

However, as pointed out above, these vertical forces are nonetheless tempered by horizontal dynamics and informal practices that characterize Russian federal and party politics. As the empirical chapters will delineate with more detail, at the regional level the

⁷³ In some cases, important posts within the regional government, such as the heads of financial organs and vice-governors that usually supervise relations between the administration and law enforcement agencies (siloviki), are also appointed in agreement with the centre and may be representative of different interest groups.

⁷⁴ The ‘party of power’ offers long-term benefits in terms of mobilization and consolidation of patronage links between the regime and the population at different levels of governance. The distinctive element of such parties is indeed the subordination to the executive and the consequent ability to gain control over the legislative branch of power, relying on the power of the incumbency and the deployment of several formal and informal tools un-leveiling the playing field

‘party of power’ appears less cohesive and centralized and there is less evidence of a solidified party hierarchy.

A strong argument can be made that the origin and the creation of the ‘party of power’ in Russia had a significant impact on its subsequent development throughout the federal space. Despite the fact that UR is one of the few parties having a regional branch in all the territories of the federation,⁷⁵ the degree of coherence within the party structures, according to Panebianco, depends largely on the way the party is created. Panebianco distinguishes between two major patterns of party origin, ‘territorial diffusion’ and ‘territorial penetration’ (Panebianco, 1982, pp. 106–107). The former refers to a bottom-up process whilst different regional party associations coming together to form a nation-wide party. ‘Territorial penetration’ instead is a top-down process, where the consolidation of the party takes place at the central level and then ‘penetrates’ the periphery through a process directed and coordinated by the centre. Although, as Panebianco argues, the first stage of party consolidation is far more complicated and turbulent in the case of ‘diffusion’, the Russian example shows that over time the process of ‘territorial penetration’ is not exempt from its own contradictions.

The dominance of United Russia at the regional and local level relies, indeed, on the co-optation of different elite groups. Although, as many studies demonstrate, this process appeared successful in granting UR the official control of regional executives and legislatures (Gel’man, 2006; Reuter and Robertson, 2012; Golosov, 2014), it nonetheless prevented the establishment of a consolidated ‘party vertical’. Although UR is a tool of distribution of ‘selective benefits’ such as political, economic and lobby resources to regional elite and business (Roberts, 2012, pp. 165–170), as aptly noted by Ross and Turovsky (2015, p. 222) the party is still ‘unable to reward all of its key members with political posts and spoils’. Thus, the ‘party affiliation appears to be a mechanism for officials to hold on to their posts rather than a tool of patronage and recruitment’ (Slider, 2010, p. 264). In other words, pre-existing regional groups and networks have been integrated into the party but remained largely autonomous at the regional level, undermining the ability of the party to provide a coherent top-down integrative structure able to substitute the authority of pre-existing elite networks in the regions. For instance, as demonstrated by Panov and Ross (2016b, p. 251) in their study of party-list candidate selection for the 2011 Duma election, although ‘formerly the party rules provide for a top-down centralised model of intra-party rule, informally the grass

⁷⁵ According to data of the Ministry of Justice, only three other parties have a branch in all the Russian regions (CPRF, JR and LDPR).

roots leadership has been able to exercise considerable degrees of decision-making autonomy'. The relationship is indeed bilateral, as the 'party of power' depends on the regional groups and networks for electoral results as much as the latter depends on the party for resources and power.

The process of consolidation of the 'party of power' and its territorial 'penetration' did not solve the issue of internal division and informal competition for limited resources at the regional level. If on the one hand the series of reforms of the party and electoral system allowed UR to become the dominant force in party politics,⁷⁶ on the other hand the limited inter-party competition had the effect of increasing the intra-party competition. For instance, the abolition of regional and interregional parties and blocs in the early stage of federal reform created several paradoxes at the regional level. While the new legislation became a central incentive for regional elites to join the 'party of power', it contributed to the fragmentation along ideological and political lines of the regional branches of UR. In many cases, especially in more competitive and economically diverse regions (polycentric regimes), the attempt to include as many regional interest groups as possible into the structures of the party - instrumental in the co-optation of regional tools of mobilization - led to greater division, conflict and competition among non-institutionalized factions (Kynev, 2010). Paradoxically, as will be further discussed in the case of Perm Krai, this fragmentation at the bottom taking place behind closed doors not only has the effect of destabilizing the regional unity of the 'party of power' but also undermining the monitoring capacity of the centre. Information about actual developments in some of the regions may be filtered by the conflict between regional elite groups with their own access to the centre through the party structures.

Moreover, the process of abolition of mayoral elections and incorporation of the local level of governance in the bureaucratic hierarchy described in the previous chapter, further increased room for confrontation within UR. As the case of Sverdlovsk shows, despite the successful co-optation of the local level elite by the regional executive, the historical conflict on the regional capital-regional executive axis reappeared within the 'party of power' with powerful interest groups fighting to maintain their influence - now de-

⁷⁶ There is a wide range of literature exploring the issue of 'institutional and electoral engineering' in Russia and the effect on the inter-party competition. See for instance: Golosov (2018); Smyth et al. (2007); Turchenko (2020). Among several reforms the most important in helping UR establishing and maintaining a dominant position in the regions was the abolition of regional (and interregional) parties and blocs (hand in hand with new requirements of territorial penetration and minimum membership) along with frequent change in electoral system to which regional legislatures, while having some leeway, needed to conform (e.g., the requirement to adopt mixed electoral system for regional assemblies' elections). For an overview of the institutional transformation of the system see: Ross (2014).

institutionalized - on the political processes at the local level. This process not only increased the confrontation within the seemingly solidified structures of United Russia thus undermining power resources of the governors, but also increased the likelihood of electoral punishment of the 'party of power', as voters appear more likely to blame directly the regional executive for problems at the local level (Beazer and Reuter, 2019).

Finally, although United Russia remains a powerful vehicle for governors in terms of vote mobilization and coordination with lower-level elite, in many cases the situation is more complex, especially but not only for varyags. With the increasing turnout of regional chief executive since 2016, United Russia in some cases may act as a stronghold for consolidated regional elites tied to the former governor - like in the case of Perm Krai during the governorship of Basargin - or to other prominent figures of the regional political and business elite - like in Sverdlovsk.⁷⁷ Intra-party competition may also explain - although partially - some of the recent cases in which UR candidates were surprisingly defeated in gubernatorial elections, such as in Irkutsk, Vladimir, Khakassia and Khabarovsk.

Overall, the consolidation of the 'party of power', although instrumental in the process of centralization of federal relations, did not institutionalize the direct control of UR over regional clientelist networks and informal interest groups. These groups are sometimes able to create quasi-factions within the regional branches of the 'party of power', being officially integrated into the party but able to maintain a certain degree of autonomy. These horizontal forces shaping the vertical axis are largely the product of structural characteristic of regional regimes and their internal dynamics: from the degree of consolidation of the informal influence of the incumbent, to the particular set of relations on the executive-legislative and regional-local axes, to the specific role of state-business relations at the regional level. In this sense, despite the seemingly integrated hierarchical and centralized structure, after 20 years United Russia remains a partially federalized 'party of power' resting on previously consolidated regional elite groups.

Conclusion

Analysing the transformation of the federal system in Russia, this chapter argues that structural weaknesses in the power vertical are filled by 'horizontal' forces, forming a quadrant in which a dense network of informal mechanisms shape the dynamics of centre-

⁷⁷ In other cases, the appointment of a governor from another party may also create a split within UR between groups supporting the new governor and those opposing him/her, like in the case of Potomskii (2014-2017) and Klychkov (2017-) in Oryol oblast.

region relations at both levels. Despite the perception of stability, predictability and control, increasing signs of tension characterize the relationship between and within different levels of governance. Thus, the power vertical' is in reality a complex mix of formal and informal incentives that are better understood complementing the vertical axis of analysis with the horizontal dimension. This creates 'multiple verticals' that emerged hand in hand with the reshuffle of centre-periphery relations started in early 2000s. The consolidation of the new system of federal relations went with a parallel process of informal institutionalization of horizontal forces described here.

These horizontal forces affect both levels of governance. At the federal level they assume the feature of factions and elite groups operating within the consolidated network formed around the Kremlin, described in the first part of the chapter. At the regional level, the power constellation and structural characteristics of the economic and political elite are not only shaped by, but also actively shape the nature and role of regional institutions and their informal channels of interaction with central actors. In other words, as a perverse act of continuity, the impact of the consolidation of power vertical' affects each region differently as it is tempered by horizontal forces, thus contributing to the preservation of an informal segmentation that characterized the federal system over the 1990s. Paradoxically, elite dynamics and configuration at both levels of governance create multiple arenas for political interaction, increasing the number of actors in the federal system and distributing power between players.

The next chapters will provide an in-depth investigation of these dynamics in two neighbouring regions (Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai), while the discussion of general consequences of the interaction between the vertical and horizontal axes on the federal process in Russia will be the focus of the conclusive section of this work.

Chapter 6 - State-business relations in a pluralist region: the case of Sverdlovsk

Introduction

The oblast' of Sverdlovsk is the most dynamic in the Urals Federal District. Being one of the most populous regions and one of the most urbanized, with a population of 4.3 million (about 3% of the entire population in Russia 3.6 million of which live in urban areas (83%), Sverdlovsk and its administrative centre, Ekaterinburg, represent an economic, cultural and political hub at the crossroad between Europe and Asia. Following the pattern of the industrial development Ekaterinburg is today the fourth biggest city in Russia with a population of 1.4 million, a centre of a rapidly developing financial sector and, until recently, progressive politics. The majority of the population is ethnic Russian, making up about 90% of the total. Other ethnic groups include Tatars (3.5%), Ukrainian and Bashkirs (about 1% respectively). For those familiar with the region, it probably comes without surprise that the first president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, built his political career here, being the First Party secretary for Sverdlovsk between 1976 and 1985.

The per capita Gross Regional Product (GRP) is 456,860 rubles (about 8,950 USD) not far from the federal average of 578,740 rubles. Sverdlovsk remains one of the 'donor' regions of the federation - contributing to the federal budget more than it receive from the centre. Once a key area for the Russian military-industrial complex, the regional economy today is more diversified. Sverdlovsk, indeed, has one of the most developed regional industrial sectors of the country, dominated by metallurgy and mechanical engineering which account for about 35% of the regional GDP. Given the nature of the business and the type of economic structure, the metallurgical and mechanical sectors are dominated by big corporations that play a central economic and social role in the region.⁷⁸

This part of the thesis focuses on the first of the case studies, exploring changes and continuities in regional political dynamics in Sverdlovsk and examining the process of institutionalization of new set of informal relations between the governor, Kuivashev, and regional political and business elites. The first chapter devoted to Sverdlovsk looks at the evolution of the relationship between state and business, in an economically developed and 'pluralist' (Ortting, 2004) region such as Sverdlovsk. It shows how, despite the introduction

⁷⁸ Data collected from the Rosstat official web site, under the section: 'Regioni Rossii. Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie pokazateli', available at: <https://www.gks.ru/folder/210/document/13204>

of several formal instruments in state-business interaction and the reorganisation of state-business relations more broadly, the connection between the governor and major economic actors remains highly informal and based on rent-seeking dynamics. Also, the chapter examines the degree of interdependence between the regional executive and big business. When the governor is an outsider - or not a representative of any consolidated regional interest group - the support of the business appears as a very important variable in period of elections and in case of major conflicts with the local political elite. On the other hand, regional business needs to establish cooperative relations with the chief executive in order to enforce the protection of property rights, preserve their 'control of localities' and get access to the distribution of preferences and rents at the regional level.

The functional relations between business and regional authorities

Relations between big corporations and the regional political authorities have always been an important element affecting regional political dynamics. Especially before the abolition of gubernatorial elections in 2004, the support of business was a crucial element for the regional political elite, particularly during the period of electoral competition (Orttung, 2004; Zubarevich, 2005). The ability of the former governor (1995-2009), Eduard Rossel', to play the role of the mediator between different and sometimes competing interests of big corporation, incorporating them into his personal network, represented one of his crucial skills allowing him to build a long-lasting political career.

In the 1990s Rossel' witnessed and supported the growth of regional corporations which were able not only to acquire importance and assets in Sverdlovsk, but also to establish federal and nationwide holdings. While the governor was able to enforce, informally, weak property rights (Yakovlev, 2006) and safeguard the regional business by erecting protectionist policies in the region (Guriev, Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya, 2010), big corporation actively participated in regional social, economic and political life, backing and supporting Rossel' and his personal network (Startsev, 1999).⁷⁹

Among other things, for instance, Rossel' established the 'Fund of governor's programmes of the Sverdlovsk region', which was successfully used to finance social programmes at the regional level. The fund was financed mainly by big regional corporations.

⁷⁹ The business support for Rossel' and the role that the former governor played in building personal relations with all the major business groups in Sverdlovsk is a common theme that emerged in the majority of interviews conducted by the author with experts, political consultants and members of the regional elite.

Indeed, the symbiotic relation between the state and business in Sverdlovsk was one of the factors allowing Rossel' to be re-elected in 2003, despite tense relations with Moscow and growing concern within the Kremlin about his activism at the regional and inter-regional level (Herrera, 2004; Denezhkina and Campbell, 2009). Hand in hand with the consolidation of his personal network within Sverdlovsk, since the early 1990s Rossel' attempted to extend his influence beyond the region. The cultivation of inter-regional relations relied on his reputation as an effective economic manager and his ability to consolidate and promote regional business in Sverdlovsk. One of the platforms through which Rossel' operated was the Association of Joint Economic Activity for the Republics and Regions of the Urals (Bol'shoi Ural), encompassing several regions within the wider Urals territory, of which the governor of Sverdlovsk became president.⁸⁰

Through their strong relations with the governor on the one hand and with the federal centre on the other, big business was able to convert its growing economic power and resources into a real political influence in the region. As a matter of fact, in Sverdlovsk as in many other regions in Russia, the process of power centralization also affected relations between the political elite and big economic actors. By weakening politically strong governors and their personal networks that previously allowed some regions, such as Sverdlovsk, to isolate themselves from both the political and economic encroachment of Moscow, the power of governors decreased not only vis-à-vis the centre, but regional influential economic actors as well (Zubarevich, 2005, p. 109).

At the beginning of the process of federal reforms, indeed, the situation became more complex and the network of regional relations more fluid. Informal access to the centre became an important asset for regional corporations on the one hand, while the support of regional economic players became even more pivotal for the incumbent's political survival and their success in dealing with the regional elite on the other (Turovsky, 2005). At the beginning of the 2000s, hand in hand with the process of reshuffling and the creation of state-owned agglomerates (Newton and Thompson, 2010; Pappe, 2012), the business elite was able to use its wealth and influence in order to play an assertive role in politics. Federal and regional businesspeople, in other words, became de-facto the only credible alternative to governors coming from the 'party of power'. In 2005, for instance, 16 governors were

⁸⁰ Bol'shoi Ural and inter-regional relations more broadly were undermined during the process of political centralization, in particular with the introduction of Federal districts and by the activity of the polpred. Latyshev, the first plenipotentiary representative in the Urals district created an alternative association to foster cooperation between business and corporations in different regions of the district, Industrial Urals-Polar Urals (Ural Promyshlennyyi-Ural Poliarnyy).

representatives and owners of big corporations (Lapina, 2005), a trend started by Roman Abramovich in Chukotka (2000). The case of Perm Krai discussed in chapter 9 vis-à-vis that of the neighbour Sverdlovsk is a good example of these dynamics at the beginning of the 2000s, also showing how regional characteristics and peculiarities are an important element in differentiating political outcomes.

However, a new turn with the abolition of direct elections in 2004, which incorporated governors into the new system of governance and centre-periphery relations, was in this regard a serious blow for the political ambitions of the big business. By slowly excluding the federal business and oligarchs from direct involvement in politics, this new reality complicated and fostered the emergence of a new informal and personalized system of business-state interaction at the regional level.⁸¹ Rather than a zero-sum model of the 1990s and early 2000s, such as the ‘state capture’ and ‘business capture’ (Stoner-Weiss, 1997b; Gel’man, Ryzhenkov and Brie, 2003), indeed, since the second half of the 2000s relations are characterized by ‘functional’ interaction (Turovsky, 2005; Zubarevich, 2010). While neither the governor nor the big regional business can rely on a dominant position, they both need to cooperate with each other using diversified tools in pursuing their personal interests. Thus, at the regional level, direct participation of big business in politics depends on several factors, such as the contextual political situation, the institutional context and the network of vertical connections with Moscow (Turovsky, 2009, p. 186).

Local oligarchs in a pluralist region

Sverdlovsk is a good example of the adaptation of the regional elite to new realities and the functional relations between the regional business and the state. After the departure of Rossel’ in 2009, the short governorship of Aleksandr Misharin (2009-2012) and the nomination of Evgenii Kuivashev as a governor in 2012, large corporations remained important actors at the regional level, institutionalizing the informal interaction and network structures with the head of the regional executive.

The appointment of a governor-outsider (varyag), with weak ties to the region and its political and economic elite, was certainly a new variable in the regional dynamics and bargaining with the federal centre. Unable to rely on pre-existing informal networks and arrangements, a varyag, indeed, needs certainly more time to learn how to deal with different

⁸¹ Hand in hand with the general process of power centralizations, for instance, the federal centre reduced the economic redistributive competence of governors, limiting, for instance, their ability of issuing regional mining licences with the law ‘On natural resources’ in early 2005.

interests and contrasting expectation of different economic and political groups, thus affecting the predictability and the stability of regional dynamics (Podvintsev, 2009).

One, quasi-institutionalized way in which the big business participates and exerts influence on regional political processes is through the regional legislative assembly. Having lobbyists and broad pro-business coalitions in the regional assembly is an important tool not only to bargain for practical issues concerning their activities, such as tax privileges and re-distribution of preferences, but also to have a say on the political process in the region. This creates a complex interdependent system between the political and economic sphere at the regional level (Moses, 2002).

The second vector of interaction is the ability, and sometimes an informal obligation, of some big corporations to provide social services and financial resources for general social development programs and important projects initiated by the governor. The so-called 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) remains one of several tools of the new model of cooperation between the state and the business (Gel'man and Ryzhenkov, 2011b).⁸²

For Kuivashev, after becoming governor, the support and good relationship with regional oligarchs, thus, has been one of fundamental instruments in dealing with regional politics and pre-existent elite networks. Thus, the ability of dealing with several and sometimes contrasting interests of business elite, especially in a difficult macroeconomic situation and a pluralistic economic structure of the region (Zubarevich, 2010, p. 213) is an important element of his political career in Sverdlovsk.⁸³

Although it is difficult to distinguish between regional and federal corporations, as the diversification of assets, enlargement to other regions and mergers with other corporations have been a common strategy for big regional business, several active economic groups can be identified in Sverdlovsk. Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company (UGMK) is one of the biggest corporations located in the region with assets spread across the Urals federal district and beyond. Based in Verkhnyaya Pyshma, a small village about 20km north from Ekaterinburg, the company is the second largest producer of copper in Russia (Vorob'ev, 2016). Established at the end of the 1990s by the billionaire Iskander

⁸² 'Vladimir Putin prinyal uchastie v zasedanii pravleniya Torgovo-promyshlennoi palati, posvyashchennom sotsial'noi otvetstvennosti biznesa', December 23, 2003, Moscow, available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/30013> (accessed 14 June 2020). On the issue of 'corporate social responsibility' in Russia, its differences from similar concepts emerged in the US in the early 20th century and its peculiarities in the context of centralized power, see Chebankova (2010).

⁸³ As some recent studies demonstrate, after the introduction of economic sanctions in 2014 the amount of federal transfers to regions has been declining, even if compared with the period of 2008 financial crisis. For more details see Alexeev and Chernyavskiy (2018).

Makhmudov, the chairman of the company is Andrei Kozitsyn. Since 2005 the company enjoyed constant growth, diversifying its assets into different sectors, such as metallurgy, construction, finance, telecommunication and others. Also, UGMK performs today important social functions at the regional level, financing and supporting regional cultural projects, education, sports and healthcare. Despite the growing diversification across sectors and territory, the majority of company's assets, including the holding's headquarter, remain in Sverdlovsk. The company thus is one of the main contributors to the regional budget through taxation and a fundamental employer.⁸⁴

Another big regional economic actor is the billionaire Dmitrii Pumpyanskii. Owner of the TMK (Pipe Metallurgical Company), one of the biggest manufacturer and steel pipes supplier for gas and oil sector, and stakeholder of Sinara Group operating across different sectors from mechanical engineering to property development, Pumpyanskii is considered one of the most influential Sverdlovsk based oligarchs, with important ties to the federal centre.

The third regional oligarch is Igor Altushkin, owner of the Russian Copper Company (RMK). Established in Ekaterinburg in 2004, today the RMK holding is one of the largest copper producers in Russia, with branches and factories in five regions and about ten thousand employees.⁸⁵ Like other two local oligarchs, Altushkin is very active in the regional cultural and political sphere. For instance, anticipating the anniversary of the foundation of Ekaterinburg (1723), along with Kozitsyn he established the 'St. Catherine Foundation' (Fond Svyatoi Ekateriny), with the main mission to 'support important public initiatives and projects in the cultural, spiritual and educational life of the Urals'.⁸⁶ The Foundation was actively involved in the project of the construction of the St. Catherine Church in Ekaterinburg, which caused a wave public protests and the direct involvement of the president Putin in the political life of the region in early 2019. Altushkin can rely on strong links with the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ekaterinburg eparchy.

The main difference between UGMK, TMK-Sinara, RMK and other huge federal holdings active in Sverdlovsk (such as Renova, VSMPO-Avisma, Uralvagonzavod, United Heavy Machinery - OMZ), though, is that the former are not only big corporations with their

⁸⁴ Additional information about the company can be found at their official website: https://www.ugmk.com/about/main_factors/.

⁸⁵ Information available at the official website of the Company: <http://rmk-group.ru/ru/company/about/>

⁸⁶ Information available at the official website of the Foundation: <http://святаяекатерина.рф/%d0%b4%d0%b5%d1%8f%d1%82%d0%b5%d0%bb%d1%8c%d0%bd%d0%be%d1%81%d1%82%d1%8c/>

headquarters in Sverdlovsk and important interests at stake in the region, but their owners are all resident in Ekaterinburg.⁸⁷ This fact makes them more active not only in the economic sphere, but also in socio-cultural and political life of the region. This is also one of the main differences between the case of Sverdlovsk and that of Perm Krai, where beyond the Trutnev-Chirkunov business group, other main economic actors are huge federal corporations (such as Lukoil, Uralkali, Renovo and Gazprom) with less attachment to the region.

Establishing cooperative relations with these important players has been one of the main objectives for Kuivashev since the very beginning of his political career in Sverdlovsk. Indeed, despite the penetration of federal corporations and the budget centralization, the influence of business in the region remains a central factor in political dynamics. Business support for the governor remains as central as the governor's relation with the political and municipal elite. Regional oligarchs, on the other hand, need a productive and friendly relations with the executive in order to get priority access to the regulatory policies and consolidate an uneven playing field for competitors.

⁸⁷ Renovo Group is a holding with assets in different spheres and activities. The owner is one of the biggest oligarchs in Russia, Viktor Vekselberg. VSMPO-Avisma Corporation is one of the major world's titanium producers integrated into the state corporation Rostec. The head of the company's board is Sergei Chemezov. Also Uralvagonzavod, based in Nizhnii Tagil and specialized in the defence and machine industry, is part of Rostec. Finally, GazpromBank controls the majority of stocks of United Heavy Machinery – OMZ, which detains stakes in UralMash and several other companies.

Table 8: Main economic actors in Sverdlovsk

<i>Name</i>	<i>Headquarter</i>	<i>Holding</i>	<i>Key figure(s)</i>
Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company (UGMK)	Verkhnyaya Pyshma (Sverdlovsk)	UGMK Holding	Andrei Kozitsyn, Iskander Makhmudov
Russian Copper Company (RMK)	Ekaterinburg	RMK Holding	Igor Altushkin
Pipe Metallurgical Company (TMK)	Moscow	TMK Steel Holding Limited	Dmitrii Pumpyanskii
Sinara	Ekaterinburg	Sinara Group	Dmitrii Pumpyanskii
Renova	Moscow	Renova Group	Viktor Vekselberg
VSMPO-AVISMA	Verkhnyaya Salda (Sverdlovsk)	Rostec	Dmitrii Osipov, Sergei Chemezov
Uralvagonzavod	Nizhnii Tagil (Sverdlovsk)	Rostec	Vladimir Artyakov, Alexander Potapov
United Heavy Machinery (OMZ)	Moscow	GazpromBank	Dmitrii Vorobiev, Aleksei Belous
Evraz-NTMK	Nizhnii Tagil (Sverdlovsk)	Evraz Group	Aleksandr Frolov, Aleksei Kushnarev

Source: Author's interviews with regional experts and political consultants; Various issues of 'Ekspert Ural' from 2018, 2019, 2020 (<https://expert.ru/ural/>); Forbes rating of the '200 Richest people in Russia' (<https://www.forbes.ru/rating/360355-200-bogateyshih-biznesmenov-rossii-2018>)

'Control of localities' and corporate social responsibility in Sverdlovsk

Regional oligarchs and big corporations have several instruments in their toolkit in dealing with the varyag appointed by the Kremlin. The first is based on quasi-monopolistic 'control of localities' where big factories are the main employer and social welfare providers. This is the case, for instance, of Verkhnyaya Pyshma district where UGMK's director, Kozitsyn, is widely considered the 'informal mayor' of the town and one of the most influential people in the entire region.⁸⁸ In 2017, on the eve of the first gubernatorial elections since their re-introduction in 2012, for instance, the main regional polling and sociological research organisation, SOCIUM, found out that the figure of Kozitsyn was among the most nominated as an example of an ideal-type leader for the region (Plyusnina, 2017b).

⁸⁸ The name of Andrei Kozitsyn was always referred to as the most influential person in the region during author's interviews with regional experts, political consultants and members of the regional legislative assembly. Verkhnyaya Pyshma is not the only town where the factories of the UGMK-Holding are located. Other localities in Sverdlovsk where the corporation plays an important economic and political role are Revda, Serov, Kirovgrad, Krasnoural'sk.

In a pluralist region such as Sverdlovsk, however, other big corporations are able to compete with UGMK for power and influence at the local level. Pipe Metallurgical Company (TMK-Sinara) owned by Pumpyanskii is the biggest actor in Kamensk-Uralskii an industrial town south-east from Ekaterinburg of about 180 thousand inhabitants, while Evraz-NTMK and Uralvagonzavod compete for the control over the City Council of Nizhnii Tagil, the second biggest city and the industrial centre of the region.

The 'control of localities' by industrial corporations has, of course, an indirect electoral effect which translates into the growing informal involvement of representatives of the business in formal institutions such as the regional legislative assembly and branches of federal parties (Moses, 2002; Zubarevich, 2010). The direct and indirect participation of representatives of the business in the regional political life is not new in post-communist Russia. Some Russian experts and analyst have estimated that in 2005 about 75% of MPs in the regional assemblies were directly or indirectly representatives of the big and medium business (Chirikova, 2005).

These informal quasi-territorial power centres are today important players in regional political life contributing to the segmentation of the administrative resource in the hands of the governor. In order to consolidate his position in the region and, especially during regional and nationwide electoral periods, to rely on functioning 'political machines' able to mobilize voters, the governor needs to establish good working relations with big business, co-opting their local political machines (Golosov, 2013; Frye, Reuter and Szakonyi, 2014).

In many cases this translates into entrepreneurial party membership as a sign of loyalty and conformity on the one hand, and direct and indirect influence on processes within the party, on the other (Turovsky, 2009). In Sverdlovsk many representatives of regional business are (or were), indeed, affiliated to the party of power, United Russia. An example is Aleksei Kushnarev, director of the Evraz-NTMK group based in Nizhnii Tagil, and a powerful member of the regional legislature since 2011, elected in Tagil's single-member constituency. Kozitsyn, despite his reluctance to participate directly in the electoral competition, is also a longstanding member of United Russia and may rely on several representatives in the regional assembly directly or indirectly affiliated with his corporation, UGMK (Mukhametov, 2017). Even Dmitrii Pumpyanskii, who has tried to distance himself from politics, has been a member of the Coordination Council of the Sverdlovsk regional organisation of supporters of UR.

United Russia, however, is not the only vector of political influence of big business in Sverdlovsk. Representatives of the corporations in the regional assembly can be found

among other parties. Armen Karapetyan a member of Just Russia, before losing his position as an MP because of alleged tax evasion, is an example of this diversification of influence through a cross party participation in the regional assembly. He was considered, indeed, to be close to UGMK director, Kozitsyn, and defending the interests of the company in Verkhnyaya Pyshma (Plyusnina, 2016; Mukhametov, 2017).⁸⁹

Beyond direct and indirect participation in regional politics, another important instrument of informal political influence is the increasing involvement of the regional business in the social sphere through the so-called ‘corporate social responsibility’. Being a widely un-institutionalised sphere, business participation and contribution, not only in terms of employees working conditions but also in other spheres such as healthcare, culture and sport, remains widely based on bargaining and informal relationship with the executive. Big regional corporations may come under pressure of the executive requesting them to guarantee or increase the average salary, or to take a more active position in the socio-economic development of the territory, like Kuivashev did several times during his term (Reutova, 2019).

On the other hand, the stick is not always in the hands of the governor. In a period of scarcity of resources and increasing pressure from the centre, especially after the introduction of the famous May decrees (*maiskie ukazy*), governors are now forced to rely heavily on regional resources.⁹⁰ The contribution of big regional business in the social sphere and infrastructural development becomes crucial. For instance, over the last ten years the sphere of social activity of some corporations such as UGMK dramatically increased. The company not only invested in healthcare and education, creating private medical centres and the first private University in Russia (Technical University - UGMK), but also signed a series of agreements with the regional administration and run a series of joint projects for the ‘development of the territory’ in social and cultural sphere (Burov, 2014).⁹¹ In a region which is already spending almost 70% of the budget in the social sphere and welfare, the

⁸⁹ Karapetyan’s affinity to the UGMK has been also confirmed by several members of the regional elite and political analysts interviewed by the author.

⁹⁰ A series of decrees signed by Putin after his inauguration in May 2012 and in 2018 and commonly known in Russia as ‘May decrees’ are executive orders aimed to overhaul Russia’s economy and set a series of targets for public sector salaries, Russia’s economy attractiveness for business and several other so called ‘national projects’. These targets are supposed to be achieved before the end of his term as a president (2012-2018 and 2018-2024) and represent a programmatic plan of development, involving all the subjects of the RF. A detailed account of the May decrees is available at the Russian Government website: <http://government.ru/news/35675/> (accessed: 12 May 2021).

⁹¹ For a general overview of the CSR activities of the corporation see the official website: https://www.ugmk.com/social_responsibility/sotsialno-ekonomicheskoe-sotrudnichestvo/ (accessed: 16 June 2020).

cooperation and the resources of the big business becomes even more important (Lutkova, 2016).

In exchange, Kuivashev's executive has been willing to negotiate bilateral and ad-hoc measures regarding regulatory policies and their fiscal contributions to the regional budget or actively lobbying their requests in Moscow (Sharoglazova, 2015). Despite the development of some formal and institutionalized venues for this kind of interaction such as the 'Sverdlovsk Regional Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs' or the 'Coordination Council of Strategic Planning in the Sverdlovsk Region', state-business bargaining continues to rely more on informal and bilateral interaction between the regional authorities and representatives of the business (Tompson, 2005).

Avoiding conflict and distributing rents

All the political and economic resources, hand in hand with the bilateral interaction with the regional authorities, provided three main broad vectors of influence to the regional business. In between elections regional business can deploy its influence indirectly threatening the stability of the governor through shadow support of temporary coalitions and ad-hoc protest movements formed by the ex-ruling elite, the municipal elite or both. Relying on economic and financial resources, regional business is able to exercise its political pressure by supporting alternative elite coalitions and protests, or even simply remaining neutral in case of a conflict between different groups (Moses, 2002; Turovsky, 2009; Chebankova, 2010). As will be discussed in the next chapter, indeed, regional oligarchs played an important role in Kuivashev's conflict with Ekaterinburg's administration. This was a particularly important issue in Sverdlovsk, a region that traditionally experienced a high level of confrontation on the region-city axis.

On the other hand, during elections, regional tycoons may be directly involved in either the anti-governor or the pro-governor political campaign. Although openly confronting the incumbent may entail a political risk for business, the informal character of the possible involvement provides the option of plausible deniability. Furthermore, with the growing importance for the federal centre of such parameters as the absence of social contestation and high electoral results for United Russia in evaluating the job done by the governor, the bargaining power of regional oligarchs during electoral cycles remain an important tool affecting the regional political process (Orlov, 2014).

Finally, regional corporations may rely on the direct access to their network and factions at the centre. Although, as discussed in chapter 5, the direct participation and lobby

for the nomination of favourite candidates in the Kremlin during the decision and appointment process is a tool available only to a handful of state-owned corporations such as Rostec, RZhD and oil and gas giants (Rosneft, Gazprom), informal coalitions and networks can indirectly affect the stability and the process of re-appointment of the governor.

UGMK is again a good example in Sverdlovsk. If the general manager of the corporation, Kozitsyn is a regional figure with less influence in Moscow, the founder and majority stakeholder is Makhmudov, an Uzbek-born billionaire. Over his career, started in the early 1990s, Makhmudov was able to build his network at the federal level, developing working relations and friendship with Timchenko and Yakunin (Igumenov and Popov, 2013; Temkin, Asankin and Podobedova, 2015). The first is a close Putin associate and co-founder of the Swiss-based oil trading company (Gunvor) which handles an important share of oil exports on behalf of major Russian companies. Yakunin is another close Putin friend and a longstanding member of his administration. Head of the RZhD for a decade (2005-2015), Yakunin played an important role during the Putin period, acting as a 'bridge' between different factions within the PA (Sakwa, 2011, pp. 167–172).

Although Kuivashev's appointment was initially received with scepticism by the regional elite, the cautious approach of the new governor allowed him to consolidate his position and establish working relations with regional business. Despite the fear that the appointment of a varyag governor who made his career with Sobyanin in Tyumen could have been instrumental to the penetration of new economic and political actors from the neighbour region, Kuivashev started to build his relations with Sverdlovsk business since the very beginning of his first mandate. Already as a plenipotentiary representative of the president of the Russian Federation (polpred) for the Urals federal district, between September 2011 and May 2012, Kuivashev was able to use his official position to establish channels of communication with the regional elite. Even though the initial fear of a concrete economic 'tyumenization' of Sverdlovsk never disappeared from the political imaginary of the region, it slowly dissipated thanks to often cooperative relations between the executive and the business (Kiselev, 2012).

As confirmed by several interviews conducted by the author, one of the pivotal skills of Kuivashev that respondents were able to identify was, indeed, the ability to maintain good working relations with major economic players within the region. Mediating and acting as an arbiter between different interests groups was his main strategy in order to prevent one of these groups to claim disproportional power for themselves. The new governor, indeed, at

the beginning avoided claiming special privileges for his associates from Tyumen or to support one side of the economic spectrum at the expense of the interests of other actors. As one of the experts and political advisors noted:

‘They [regional oligarchs] do not like him personally, but they still prefer working with him rather than with other possible candidates. They understand that he has the support of the Kremlin on the one hand, and on the other he is able to maintain some sort of balance at the regional level between the interests of different economic players’.⁹²

Since the very beginning of his first term, indeed, Kuivashev looked to establish friendly relations with Kozitsyn (UGMK), Altushkin (RMK) and Pumpyanskii (TMK). One of his first steps as a governor was the approval of a 7 billion plan for the infrastructural development of Verkhnyaya Pyshma, a project lobbied for a long time by Kozitsyn. During the governor’s first term the general director of UGMK has been the businessman that Kuivashev met the most in his official meetings as the representative of the regional executive. In 2014 he was also nominated an ‘honorary citizen’ of Sverdlovsk region, the first among the local tycoons (Sverdlovsk Governor’s Office, 2014) and his corporation received several tax exemptions and was able to acquire rights over several assets from regional and city property (Pozdnyakova and Peretykin, 2017).

More broadly, however, all important economic players were included in the board working on the strategic development plan 2030, a pilot project looking at the formulation of the infrastructural and social development of the region (Plyusnina, 2015). The strategic development plan 2030, beyond its marginal impact on the regional infrastructural and social development, provided nonetheless a quasi-formal framework to foster cooperation between local business and the regional administration, balancing different interests. Beyond this framework, indeed, Kuivashev was able to get the support of the major corporations during the main electoral and political challenges. In 2016 the growing confrontation between the governor’s team and the Ekaterinburg elite was solved before September Duma and local elections thanks to the active intervention of Kozitsyn and the formal support of Pumpyanskii (Sverdlovsk Governor’s Office, 2016).⁹³ A year later, on the other hand, despite much speculation about the support of regional business for another candidate (Dzhultaev,

⁹² Author’s interview with a political adviser based in Ekaterinburg, who preferred to remain anonymous.

⁹³ The information about the elite conflict on the eve of 2016 elections and the final agreement brokered by the direct intervention of the centre and the mediation of regional oligarchs has been confirmed by different interviewees in Sverdlovsk.

2017), the incumbent governor in an informal meeting with representatives of the main regional corporations was able to win their overall backing for his re-election campaign relying on the involvement of his sponsors in Moscow.

Not surprisingly, Kozitsyn and Pumpyanskii ended up as major winners after 2016-2017 electoral cycle. Kozitsyn acquired more political leverage and access to the decision-making process within the regional executive, becoming an advisor to the governor and successfully lobbying a number of his close associates to the regional government (Ol'shannikov, 2016b). The new ministers of health, agriculture and infrastructure and construction were all widely considered to be members of the UGMK's informal group within the government.

Pumpyanskii on the other hand, was not only able to gain more influence within the Ekaterinburg city administration, with his representatives becoming members of the mayoral team, but also to capitalize on his position in several important projects at the regional level. Sinara Group, for instance, was awarded the 12 billion ruble reconstruction of the stadium (Ekaterinburg Arena) in preparation for the Football World Cup 2018 and other projects of federal importance such as the preparation and construction of the Olympic village for 2023 Summer Universiade in Ekaterinburg. His regional position was certainly supported also from the centre. According to different sources, Pumpyanskii could rely on his influential friends in the Russian government, such as the former Minister of Sport and Deputy Prime Minister of the Russia Federation, Vitalii Mutko (Balyuk, 2019).

Conclusion

The appointment and subsequent re-election of Kuivashev as a governor of Sverdlovsk signalled an important development not only in the nature of the regional political regime and its relations with the federal centre, but also in terms of relations between regional authorities and main economic players in Sverdlovsk. Although big regional corporations and local oligarchs were not directly involved in the political competition, their important role as public good providers and monopoly of power at the local level (control of localities) provides them the necessary toolkit of political influence.

The political trajectory of Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk shows the importance of a broader constellation of regional actors and the ability of the governor to deal with contrasting and competing political and economic pre-existent interests. The un-institutionalized interaction and the informal support of local big business revealed itself as fundamental, especially in moments which may be considered as critical junctures for the

political survival of the governor, such as elections and the political confrontation with the municipal elite. The cooperation with local oligarchs did not reveal itself through domination, but rather through political bargaining, rent distribution and a preservation of a delicate balance of interests.

The political influence of local oligarchs translates into their bargaining capacity with the regional executive over preferential access to regional and municipal resources and limitations for direct competitors. More broadly, though, state-business interaction goes even beyond rent-seeking. Especially in a period of scarcity of resources, the informal support of business and regional oligarchs remained a central element for the varyag's position within the complex regional political environment based on a fluid interaction between diversified groups and networks. Far from breaking the state-business connection, which allowed Rossel' to maintain an autonomous position from the centre, in the new system of federal centralization, Kuivashev needed to rely on broad un-institutionalized interaction with the main pre-existing economic factions in the region. However, he was not able to integrate main regional players into his own personal network. Rather, the relationship remained situational, based on the constant interaction between regional political dynamics and vertical links between local actors and the federal centre. As briefly mentioned in the chapter, this interaction played an important role in the overall political conflict historically affecting regional politics in Sverdlovsk, the confrontation between the gubernatorial administration and elite networks consolidated at the municipal level. The process of co-optation of the Ekaterinburg elite coalitions and its consequences for Kuivashev will be the focus of the next chapter.

Figure 1: Sverdlovsk Oblast' (Map of Russia)



Source: Wikipedia, (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Russia_-_Sverdlovsk_Oblast.svg)

Figure 2: Map of Sverdlovsk Oblast'



Source: Wikipedia (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relief-Sverdlovskaya.png#/media/Файл:Relief-Sverdlovskaya.png>)

Chapter 7 – Political bargaining and conflict in Sverdlovsk: between change and continuity

Introduction

As we have seen in previous chapters, the series of federal reforms initiated at the beginning of Putin's first term not only affected intergovernmental relations, but also triggered a reconfiguration of political dynamics, resources and incentives for the main political and economic actors within the regions. Although the reform was aimed at the institutionalization of centre-region relations, making them formal and universal (e.g. the harmonization of regional constitutions and legislation), at the regional level the interaction between different networks and interests remained highly fragmented. Central control over regional regimes and how governors dealt with the local elite remained discretionary and un-institutionalized, thus relying on behind the scene and informal bargaining. Importantly, despite their increasing formal power due to their incorporation into the power vertical' (Golosov and Konstantinova, 2016), governors needed still to win the loyalty and support of the regional elite in order to deliver results during electoral cycles and consolidate their own position within the region. Control over the regional political machines remained, indeed, under the scrutiny of powerful regional forces and the process of their co-optation has been far from smooth and universal. Although the set of incentives and powers has been reversed, governors remained trapped in the 'dual commitment' problem, with a complicated task of dealing with increasing demands from the federal centre on the one hand, and regional elite on the other.

This chapter examines political dynamics in Sverdlovsk, looking at the complex relations between the governor, local actors and elite networks. Through the example of the conflict around the introduction of the municipal reform, which at the end deprived the regional capital of an elected mayor, the chapter shows how, despite the increasing political and formal powers of the regional executive, conflict and confrontation remain the common trait of political bargaining affecting the stability of the governor and his ability to achieve expected results.

Here again emerges a dialectical relationship. If on the one hand the governor, despite his direct access to the federal centre and the Presidential Administration, needs to deal with contrasting and competing pre-existent interests of different factions, networks and interest groups in order to gain their support, especially during such critical junctures as

elections, on the other hand the regional elite does not have adequate resources to trigger collective action to challenge effectively the governor through the formal mean of elections. Thus, confrontation is played out beyond the institutional terrain and is based rather on backdoor agreements able to solve only temporarily the political dilemma and preserve some semblance of a competitive political environment. Thus, the governor remains trapped in a dense network of relations both at the regional and federal level which, singularly and in their entirety, remain crucial for the definition of the contours of his actual political power and career.

Regional elite: between consolidation and confrontation

The case of Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk shows that success in co-opting the regional elite remains illusory and required considerable political capital. As such, the integration of the regional elite into the bureaucratic hierarchy should be regarded as only a short-term and sometimes precarious achievement, based more on the personality and ability of the governor than on commonly accepted rules of the game.

The beginning of the process of centralization was indeed characterized by an un-institutional push back from some of the Russian regions. In power since mid-1990s, Rossel' may be described as one of several heavy-weight governors able to build their political career and power base in a period of political, social and ideological transformation of the Russian polity, experienced hand in hand with the weakness of the federal centre. During the complex process of federalization and development of new federal institutions in the 1990s, indeed, Sverdlovsk was among the leading regions able to elevate their status comparable to that of autonomous republics thanks to the conclusion of a bilateral treaty with Moscow, granting special fiscal and political privileges (Chebankova, 2009, pp. 29–31). Despite the unsuccessful attempt to elevate the status and autonomy of the region through the creation of the Urals Republic in 1993, Rossel' was able to consolidate his power base in the region relying on the support of the regional elite and big business (Solnick, 1998).

Thanks to his strong network-based leadership, the ability to ensure a strong level of electoral support for the Kremlin and a pragmatic commitment to maintain cooperative relations with the federal centre (for instance joining the presidential party and rejecting any formal and direct reference to regional autonomy and/or independence), indeed, Rossel' was allowed to participate in elections for his third term in 2003 and re-appointed as the acting governor (formally his fourth term) in 2005, during the first wave of governor reshuffle (Blakkisrud, 2011).

Even though control over cadre rotation at the regional level fell under the direction of the plenipotentiary representative of the president in the Ural federal district, Rossel' was able to preserve the final say on appointments in important regional institutions, despite his conflictual relations with the polpred, Latyshev (Kondrat'ev, 2004).

However, despite Rossel's grip on regional elite factions and political machines, the nature of the regional regime in Sverdlovsk since early 1990s has been characterized by a long-standing city-region conflict. Although the core of this conflict has always been economic in nature, namely a dispute over the allocation and distribution of the budget between the region and the capital (Ekaterinburg), the outcome was obviously political, with different factions and regional elite competing for the control of these financial resources and power (Startsev, 1999). Thus, beyond his horizontal power and network Rossel' relied also on vertical forces, competing with the mayor of Ekaterinburg (Arkadii Chernetskii) for the federal-level approval and support. His control on the regional political machines and friendly relations with major corporations proved a useful tool in winning the support of Moscow ahead of the 2003 gubernatorial elections. Moreover, the incumbent was also successful in recruiting members of the Ekaterinburg elite, a process that would be decisive for Kuivashev as well. For instance, in 2001 one of the Chernetskii's first deputies, Yurii Osintsev, was suddenly appointed as a Minister in the regional government, thus weakening the network consolidated around the mayor of the regional capital.

After the departure of Rossel' in 2009, Sverdlovsk became one of the problematic regions for the Kremlin. The long-lasting region-city conflict not only emphasized the important role of the strong and rather autonomous regional and municipal elite, but also functioned as a tool of political competition and pluralism at the regional level, in spite of the centralization of centre-periphery relations initiated in early 2000s (Gel'man and Golosov, 1998).⁹⁴ After the brief governorship of Misharin, who was seriously injured in a car accident in December 2011, the appointment of the new governor, Kuivashev, was the by-product of two important tendencies in the federal policy towards Russian regions.

First, as discussed in chapter 5, the appointment of regional chief executives became an informal system of balance of power between different factions and interest groups at the federal level. Indeed, Kuivashev is widely considered a close associate of the Moscow mayor

⁹⁴ The autonomous regional elite and the favourable effect of the city-region dichotomy on political pluralism and competition allowed Nikolai Petrov and Aleksei Titkov to evaluate Sverdlovsk as one of the most 'democratic' regions in the Russian federation for the period 2000-2010. The full report prepared for the Carnegie Moscow Center is available online at: <https://carnegie.ru/2013/12/25/ru-pub-55853> (accessed: 10 September 2021).

Sobyanin. He started his political career in Tyumen, under the Sobyanin's wing, at that time the governor of the region. When Sobyanin was the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office within the PA (2005-2008), Kuivashev became first the mayor of Tobolsk (2005-2007) and later the mayor of the regional capital, Tyumen (2007-2011). After a brief period as presidential representative to the Urals federal district (2011-2012), he was appointed governor of Sverdlovsk (2012). According to different accounts Sobyanin directly and indirectly lobbied Kuivashev's appointment to such an important region as Sverdlovsk (Minchenko and Petrov, 2012). Indeed, the mayor of the Russian capital and his associates are considered today one of the most influential factions in Russian politics, and can rely on a series of loyal governors, especially in the Urals.⁹⁵

Second, the nomination of an outsider with his own background and previous career associated not to Sverdlovsk but rather to another region, Tyumen, was aimed at disrupting links between the new chief executive and the regional network-based elite factions and clientelistic interaction, thus integrating the region into the structure of the power *vertikal'*. Rossel', indeed, was able to build his power on network-based interaction with the regional elite, relying only sporadically on the vertical connection with the centre, thus isolating Sverdlovsk from a Moscow's direct control.

Theoretically speaking, the scope of resources and formal powers of the governors, hand in hand with the informal support of a powerful faction at the centre should have allowed the chief executive to easily co-opt the regional elite, integrating it into the Kremlin driven centralized system (Golosov and Konstantinova, 2016). In reality however, the task for Kuivashev has been far more difficult. He was forced to rely selectively on the support of some groups and factions in order to win the loyalty of a recalcitrant regional elite and appease the long-standing conflict on the city-region axis.

The power resources of the new governor, indeed, remained fragmented. In the context of 'dual commitment', the support and good relations with the federal centre, were not enough to consolidate his position within the region, without previously buying off loyalty of the regional elite by distributing rents and privileges. His first term in Sverdlovsk was characterized, indeed, by a prudent approach towards local actors, their interests and the city-region conflict, coupled with a slow co-optation process of the regional political and economic elite. Despite being new to the region, his first term was characterized by a slow

⁹⁵ According to many accounts, along with the appointment of Kuivashev, another close associate of Sobyanin became the governor of Perm Krai, Basargin. In 2017 Basargin, unsuccessful as governor of Perm Krai, was replaced by Reshetnikov, another member of the Sobyanin's faction. In January 2020 Reshetnikov has been appointed Minister of Economic Development of the RF.

cadre rotation in the highest echelon of the regional executive. Whereas his predecessor, Misharin, started a serious reshuffle of the regional government, Kuivashev adopted a more cautious approach, replacing only 3 previous ministers (the regional PM, the Finance Minister and the Minister of State Property Management). His cadre policy remained conservative during his entire first term, with only few other appointments at the minister level positions (Mukhametov, 2018).

This prudence was clearly instrumental, designed to avoid regional elite discontent, minimizing the opposition that could have been caused by the appointment of the first governor outsider in Sverdlovsk. Indeed, at the beginning of his term only two political bureaucrats previously working with him in Tyumen joined his team. Aleksei Orlov, his close associate since the period when Kuivashev was the mayor of Tobolsk, became the new Deputy Head of the regional government and Galina Kulachenko, from Tyumen city administration was appointed as the new Finance Minister in Sverdlovsk. During the first term, the 'Tyumen team' was joined by two other Kuivashev associates, Pavel Krekov and Aleksei Kuznetsov, but the majority of key positions in the government and gubernatorial administration remained occupied by the autochthonous elite.

The municipal reform and city-region conflict under Kuivashev

The implementation of the municipal reform, one of the main tasks for governors since 2014, is a good example of Kuivashev's policy in Sverdlovsk. As emphasized by many scholars, the municipal reform, started since the introduction of the federal law on local self-government in 2003⁹⁶ and further expanded after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014,⁹⁷ was the last step of power centralization, putting the most recalcitrant mayors of big Russian cities under the direct control of the regional governments (Ross, 2007a, 2009).

⁹⁶ The first step in the direction of the reform of the local self-government was the introduction of the 2003 federal law which gave city councils the nominal power of amending their Charters in order to institutionalize the so-called dual city chief executive system, with an elected mayor with reduced powers and a 'city manager' with administrative resources, chosen by the city council. For more details about the 2003 federal law, see: 'Federal'nyi zakon No. 131-FZ, 'Ob obshchikh printsipakh organizatsii mestnogo samoupravleniya v Rossiiskoi Federatsii', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 8 October 2003 (<https://rg.ru/2003/10/08/zakonsamouprav.html>) (accessed 13 March 2020).

⁹⁷ The 2014 reform, although formally allowing local authorities to choose among four different alternatives of organisation of self-government (comprised the popular elections of the mayor), in practice authorised the regional executive to adopt uniform Charters for the regional municipalities. The final goal was eliminating the remaining elected mayors, switching to the 'city-manager' system. At the end of 2019, more than five years after the introduction of the reform, only 7 mayors out of 83 (85) regional capitals were elected. For more details about the 2014 federal law, see: 'Federal'nyi zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 27 maya 2014' *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 27 May 2014 (<https://rg.ru/2014/05/30/samoupravlenie-dok.html>) (accessed 13 March 2020).

Although their task has been facilitated by formal institutional amendments, the actual implementation of the reform was far more difficult due to the opposition of the local and regional elite and their control of political machines (Moses, 2013). Furthermore, to defuse conflicts and any negative consequence of a possible regional elite-split, the Kremlin allowed governors ample flexibility and room for manoeuvring, sometimes labelled ‘Kremlin conditionality’ (Moses, 2017).

Kuivashev inherited from his predecessor a bicephalous power system at the municipal level. According to amendments of the Ekaterinburg city statute introduced on September 2010, in line with the 2003 federal law on local self-government, the regional capital adopted a dual-executive form of government separating powers between the mayor (*mer*) - a chair of the city council elected through direct elections - and the so-called city-manager, also labelled as the ‘economic-mayor’ (Moses, 2013) and officially referred to as head of the city administration (*glava*) (Polous, 2013).⁹⁸ The latter, nominated by the Ekaterinburg city council, was responsible, beyond other things, for the oversight of the capital budget and the functioning of municipal agencies and departments. The creation of the institution of a dual chief-executive power (maintained until 2018), certainly marginalized the role and the authority of the elected mayor, but did not defuse the conflict on the city-region axis, despite the departure of Chernetskii, the long-standing Ekaterinburg mayor (1992-2010) and the main political opponent of the former governor, Rossel’ (Denezhkina and Campbell, 2009).

2013 elections and the opposition of regional networks

In spite of bifurcated municipal power, the beginning of the Kuivashev governorship was characterized by a new phase in the city-region conflict. As soon as 18 months after his appointment, in September 2013, Ekaterinburg, the fourth Russian city and the economic and financial heart of the Ural district, elected a new mayor. Surprisingly for many observers and, to some extent, for the new governor and part of the regional elite, the new head of the city was a representative of the opposition, Evgenii Roizman. Founder of ‘City without Drugs’ foundation, State Duma deputy between 2003 and 2007, Roizman was a charismatic and populist leader with a controversial past supported by Mikhail Prokhorov and his Civic Platform party, was able to beat the United Russia candidate in the mayoral election. The

⁹⁸ For the full text of the city council decision see: ‘O vnesenii izmenenii v Ustav munitsipal’nogo obrazovaniya «gorod Ekaterinburg», Reshenie N.62/29 ot 12 oktyabrya 2010 goda’ (<http://www.ekburg.ru/getFile.php?id=29619>).

activity of ‘City without Drugs’ foundation in the 1990s and early 2000s when Roizman was one of the key figures remains controversial. Beyond questions about the legality of its methods concerning illegal detention and abduction of drug addicts, it is rumoured that Roizman and other members of the foundation had close ties to one of the largest criminal gangs in the Urals, ‘Uralmash’, that allegedly financed and protected their activity.⁹⁹

When Roizman won the election, it was widely speculated that Kuivashev was taken by surprise by such a development. Indeed, after a year and a half in Sverdlovsk, the 2013 local elections were his first political test. The governor, not only directly supported another candidate, an expert politician, member of United Russia and deputy governor since November 2012, Yakob Silin, but also expended a significant amount of his political capital in order to push forward his candidate despite the recalcitrant local elite.¹⁰⁰

The election of a figure from the opposition camp as a mayor of the regional capital was an important signal of the problematic relationship between the new governor and part of the regional and municipal elite. According to many accounts, indeed, after several months of conflict with the municipal *vlast*’ an informal agreement was reached between the chief executive and the powerful network of Ekaterinburg elites under the control of the long-standing Chernetskii deputy-mayor and ally, Vladimir Tungusov (Kolezev, 2013; Azar, 2017). Brokered by the presidential envoy to the Urals federal district, Igor Kholmanskikh, the agreement between Kuivashev and Tungusov stipulated a compromise for the period of municipal elections. Tungusov would support the governor-backed candidate for mayor, Silin. The regional executive, on the other hand, would restrain from intervening in the competition for the City Council, leaving Tungusov freedom to select his own UR list formed by his loyalists. Tungusov, in other words, would have been allowed to maintain his control over local mobilization tools during the electoral competition.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ In the 1990s the Organised Crime Society Uralmash (OPS) was a prototype of the ‘violent entrepreneurs’ described by Vadim Volkov (2002). After winning the gang warfare, OPS Uralmash controlled hundreds of companies, including banks, in the whole Sverdlovsk region. Part of the profits were indeed reinvested in the regional economy and social initiatives. In the early 2000s the OPS entered regional politics with the first representative of the gang elected to the Ekaterinburg City Council in 2001. Interestingly, it was an open secret that in the city-region conflict during the governorship of Rossel’, members of Uralmash aligned with the regional executive and their informal coalition within the City Council was one of the elements undermining the decision-making process at the municipal level.

¹⁰⁰ Silin was a close associate of Kuivashev, serving as a CFI when Kuivashev was the presidential envoy to the Urals federal district (September 2011 – May 2012). He later served as Head of the Governor Administration and deputy governor. After the defeat in mayoral elections in Ekaterinburg in 2013, he was appointed as the Chairman of the Government of the Sverdlovsk Region until 2015.

¹⁰¹ According to several accounts close to the governor and the regional administration collected during personal interviews, the Kremlin intervened into the dispute through the presidential envoy,

Thus, the results of the 8 September election was hardly expected for Kuivashev. Despite all the expectations, Roizman was elected as the mayor of Ekaterinburg with 33.31% of votes, while Tungusov managed to maintain the control over the city assembly. The United Russia candidate scored a low 29.71%. It was widely speculated that the unexpected defeat of the candidate supported by the governor, beyond the popularity of the charismatic leader such as Roizman, was the result of an intense intra-elite confrontation. Several interviewees pointed at the attempt of Tungusov to undermine the power base and political credibility of the governor. An indirect confirmation came from the reaction of the regional executive and the Urals federal district presidential envoy. A few days after the election, the regional police department started a series of investigations involving Tungusov and his close associates (Tronina and Plyusnina, 2013).

The Roizman factor: loose coalition vs the governor

Despite weak formal powers of the mayor in the system of dual-executive (mayor and city-manager), the election of Roizman played an important political role for the rest of the first term of the new governor. Under the ‘Kremlin conditionality’, Kuivashev was forced to compromise with Roizman and factions of the local elite, downplaying the conflict and preventing the confrontation becoming public and, potentially, affecting the electoral performance of United Russia in the more important 2016 Duma elections (Moses, 2017).

A good example of all the problems faced by the governor is the evolution of the municipal reform. Although one of the main goals of the regional chief executive and the main request of the centre, the process that was supposed to defuse problems between the local self-government and federal institutions incorporating the municipal level into the power vertical¹ remained stalled for the rest of Kuivashev’s term. The election of Roizman as the popular mayor of the regional capital emphasized two main problems. On the one hand, it became clear that the dual-executive form of government at the municipal level remained a compromise and short-term solution which was not able to dissolve the long-standing region-city political confrontation. On the other, the ‘Roizman factor’ and his popularity became an important element in regional politics not only because he represented

Kholmanskikh. The reason for the intervention of the federal centre was pragmatic. Avoiding the eruption of the conflict between the regional executive and the Ekaterinburg elites was seen as an instrumental element to have a smooth electoral process and good results for UR in the fourth biggest city in Russia.

a direct threat to United Russia and the governor, but also because his figure was able to provide an alternative platform for an informal coalition of regional elite.

Up until 2018, when the regional executive finally managed to strip the mayor of Ekaterinburg of his electoral legitimacy, the confrontation on the city-region axis continued to develop in two directions, one institutional and the other informal, based on the political bargaining and elite accommodation. On the institutional side, the regional legislative assembly dominated by UR, under pressure from the regional executive, adopted at least three important decrees able to limit the economic independence of the regional capital. Between July 2015 and January 2016 the city was stripped of budgetary authority and funding over urban development and the instalment of advertisement installations at the municipal level (Komarov, 2015; Mukhametov, 2017). Authority was transferred to the regional government.

These policy manoeuvres were consistent with a general trend in Russia and with the process of budget centralization and rights transferred from the region to the centre and from the municipal to the regional layer of power (Sharafutdinova and Turovsky, 2017). For instance, while the city could include in its own budget about 60% of the revenues from the income tax in 2000, fourteen years later the amount declined to about 18%, while the rest was transferred to the regional budget. Thus, the economic autonomy of the fourth biggest city in Russia drastically declined. In 2014, indeed, about 42% of the budget was made up by intra-regional transfers, from regional to city level (Mukhametov, 2017).

Furthermore, on the institutional side other decisions affected the dynamic of the conflict on the city-region axis. First of all, the regional executive stripped municipalities of the right to agree upon and coordinate public events and rallies. Most importantly, the long process started in 2015 and concluded in 2016 with the decision approved by the regional assembly to abolish mayoral elections in almost all regional centres, with the exception of Ekaterinburg and Nizhnii Tagil.

On the other hand, though, despite the regional institutional encroachment on the municipal level self-government, a series of informal agreements and accommodations were also necessary, especially on the eve of 2016, a year of an important electoral test for Kuivashev and UR. Part of governor flexibility was the decision to veto the regional assembly vote which would have immediately stripped Ekaterinburg of the office of an elected mayor (Tronina, Pertsev and Nagornyykh, 2015). According to several regional experts and political activists interviewed by the author, that was a central decision in order to avoid that a city-

region conflict that would seriously affect the results of 2016 Duma election and, consequently, Kuivashev's own political career as a governor.

Understanding the importance of the autochthonous elite and their capacity to affect the electoral process controlling the local electoral machines, Kuivashev, although reluctantly, stopped his own attempt to defeat the Ekaterinburg elite opposition, opting rather for a revival of his initial policy of creeping co-optation. Indeed, since the very beginning of his term in office, the governor tried to find a balance with the regional elite slowly building his own personal network integrating a series of political heavyweights. One example was Denis Pasler, close to Vekselberg's Renova Group, which at the beginning of Kuivashev first term was appointed as PM of Sverdlovsk, the second most important position in the regional executive hierarchy (Komarov, 2016b). Another example was Sergei Nosov, co-opted into the Kuivashev executive in 2012, before being elected mayor of Nizhni Tagil with an astonishing 92% of popular support.

Elite-split and the 'region on fire' campaign

The reaction of the local elite to the municipal reform was not unexpected. On the eve of 2016 Duma elections, the region was indeed on the verge of a new conflict between the city and the region administrations. Despite Kuivashev's veto on the abolition of mayoral elections in Ekaterinburg and consequently the postponement of the project until the end of Roizman's term in office, the political mayor remained an extremely active and popular player. The 2016 federal Duma and regional assembly elections, just a year before the 2017 gubernatorial elections in Sverdlovsk, appeared as a perfect opportunity to undermine the position of the governor.

On the one hand, Roizman attempted to use his personal legitimacy and popularity to mobilize the city council and, above all, other mayors of the region against the proposed municipal reform. Although the convergence with the mayor of Nizhni Tagil, Nosov, took the form of an economic inter-municipal cooperation agreement, the political side was far more important. Roizman and Nosov were extremely popular figures and together made plans for enhanced coordination for the upcoming regional assembly elections (Mukhametov, 2017). Although in the end this attempt did not produce any visible success, the free-riding of Nosov nonetheless negatively affected his personal career in the region. In 2018, from being one of the main political competitors of the acting governor and increasingly influential within the 'party of power', he was appointed the new governor of the remote and politically marginal region of Magadan.

On the other hand, though, the most important opposition to the governor came from a consolidated coalition within UR and organised around Tungusov. It was widely speculated that between 2015 and 2016 a series of anti-governor meetings and protests across Sverdlovsk, labelled ‘region on fire’ (*Oblast’ v ogne*), and an information campaign against the governor were coordinated and financed by members of the Tungusov’s team (V’yugin, 2017).¹⁰² The protest campaign, despite being overwhelmingly local in nature and only rarely reaching the federal media, showed nonetheless the fragmentation of the governor’s control over regional administrative resources and the importance of the regional elite mobilizational tools and oversight over local political machines.

The anti-governor informal coalition received support not only from the newly formed party-coalition within the legislative assembly (Party of Pensioners, CPRF, Patrioty Rossii), but also from members of other mainstream parties such as LDPR and Just Russia. The goal, although undeclared, was to challenge the governor’s control over the regional assembly after 2016 elections. The peak of the conflict was reached in April 2016 with the arrest and charges of corruption of the Minister of State Property Management of Sverdlovsk, Aleksei P’yankov. The public resonance of the arrest of a high-profile member of the regional government was supposed to be both a public blow to Kuivashev’s image and a message to his team (Kolezev, 2017). The long-standing creeping conflict on the city-region axis, catalysed by the attempt of the governor to incorporate the regional elite into his power vertical’ through the municipal reform, was becoming an open and public confrontation.

2016 Duma elections and the victory of the varyag?

The apex of the confrontation was followed, surprisingly, by a new appeasement. Like on the eve of mayoral elections in 2013, Kuivashev tried to mediate with the local elite in order to find a ‘cease-fire’ before the most important electoral appointment for his political future, 2016 Duma and regional assembly elections, scheduled on the ‘single electoral day’ in early September. Beyond the victory of Roizman in mayoral elections, before 2016, indeed, Kuivashev did not have any major electoral challenge and consequently the opportunity to demonstrate his skills and loyalty to his sponsors in the Kremlin.¹⁰³ The September Duma

¹⁰² Although Tungusov publicly denied his involvement, former political consultants close to the regional administration confirmed his role in the political campaign.

¹⁰³ Kuivashev was appointed governor of Sverdlovsk in May 2012. According to many interviews, however, as polpred to the Urals federal district (September 2011 – May 2012), Kuivashev was able to establish good working relations with different regional and municipal groups in Sverdlovsk, both

elections acquired, indeed, greater importance for the incumbent as the results of United Russia in federal elections remained one of the most important criteria of the Kremlin's evaluation of the performance of governors (Konitzer and Wegren, 2006; Reuter, 2013).

In order to deliver good results for United Russia, though, a compromise with regional elites was deemed necessary. Despite the vast array of administrative resources of the chief executive, further concentrated through the flexible introduction of the municipal reform and consequent centralization of power at the regional level, the autochthonous elite (or at least some factions) was able to remain in control, or at least to compete for the control of resources, political machines and tools of electoral mobilization.

Problems faced by Kuivashev, indeed, were similar to those of many other outsiders (Podvintsev, 2009; Blakkisrud, 2011; Libman, 2016) emphasizing the paradox of the policy of centralization. In order to deprive regions of forms of formal and informal autonomy, limiting the governor's electoral legitimacy first, and their control over the regional elite and subnational political machines later, the chief executives remained squeezed between increasing demands from the centre and an often independent and recalcitrant autochthonous elite. In other words, the principle of 'dual commitment' continued to affect centre-periphery relations in general and those between the governor, the Kremlin and the regional elite in particular.

That was the moment when the Presidential Administration, in consultation with a representative of the regional business, namely Kozitsyn, who was the local sponsor and guarantor, got involved and brokered a deal between the governor and the recalcitrant network represented by the longstanding deputy-mayor Tungusov. How exactly Tungusov was forced to accept what regional analysts labelled as a 'coercive coalition' (*koalitsiya prinuzhdeniya*) is a matter of speculation to this day (Komarov, 2016c; Plyusnina, 2017a). What is undeniable though is that unlike the agreement on the eve of mayoral elections three years before, this time the backdoor deal was 'enforced' by full-scale cadre rotation. As a matter of fact, at the end of May 2016, four months before the September election, Tungusov was co-opted into the ranks of the executive, becoming the new Head of gubernatorial administration of Sverdlovsk region.

The remaining period of the electoral campaign preceding the September election ran quite smoothly and thanks to the cooperation of regional oligarchs and the co-optation

within United Russia and other parties. Although he was not the governor, his ability in building relations at the regional level contributed to the good results for Putin in Sverdlovsk during March 2012 presidential elections. Putin scored in Sverdlovsk 64.5% of preferences, in line with his nationwide rating (63.6%).

of Tungusov's faction, the regional executive was able to take under control of several tools of political and electoral mobilization at the municipal level. The main beneficiary appeared to be United Russia and its electoral results in a region where the performance of the 'party of power' has been historically well below the nation-wide average.

Not surprisingly, the political confrontation along the city-region axis ceased to make the headlines. Although the equilibrium remained precarious and the truce shaky, the elite agreement played a dual role, helping the executive to stabilize the political situation in the region and to appear in front of its sponsors in the Kremlin as a reliable political client. In terms of federal legislative elections, candidates affiliated with United Russia managed to win all the 7 Single Member Districts (SMD), while the party-list scored an overall 40.53%. Although, United Russia gained 54.20% of party-list vote nation-wide, the difference between Sverdlovsk and the federal average had reduced if compared with the previous federal legislative election (see Table 9).

Table 9: UR electoral results in Sverdlovsk

Year	UR share in party-list (%) – Sverdlovsk.	UR share in party-list (%) – Russia	Δ regional-national UR share	SMDs total	SMDs won by UR	Regional Turnout	National Turnout	Δ regional-national turnout	Electoral System
2021	34.70	49.82	-15.12	7	7	48.50	51.72	-3.22	Mixed
2016	40.53	54.19	-13.66	7	7	41.40	47.88	-6.48	Mixed
2011	32.71	49.32	-16.61	-	-	51.15	60.21	-9.06	Prop.
2007	62.04	64.30	-2.26	-	-	60.58	63.71	-3.13	Prop.
2003	34.13	37.56	-3.43	7	3	49.05	55.67	-6.62	Mixed

Source: Central Election Commission of Russia (<http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom>) and Election Commission of the Sverdlovsk Oblast' (<http://www.sverdlovsk.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/sverdlovsk>).

Furthermore, United Russia obtained good results in the regional legislative assembly vote, scheduled for the same day. The ‘party of power’ won a total of 35 out of 50 seats available (23 in regional SMD and 12 on a party-list basis). Now United Russia could rely on a broader consolidation of the majority of seats, especially if compared with the previous composition of the regional assembly elected in 2011 (total of 29 seats, 20 on SMD and 9 on party-list). The ability to defuse an open intra-elite conflict allowed the executive to promote a broader elite reshuffle at the regional level in order to enforce the last part of the municipal reform (abolition of elections in Ekaterinburg) and pave the way for 2017 gubernatorial elections, the first personal electoral competition for Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk. Thus, already in February 2016 one of the prospective candidates for the mayor office and an important figure of Ekaterinburg administration, Aleksandr Vysokinskii had suddenly joined Kuivashev’s administration, becoming the Deputy Head of the Sverdlovsk government (Komarov, 2016a).

On the other hand, the new intra-elite arrangement allowed the regional executive to have free hand in getting rid of possible opposition among the regional political establishment after Duma elections, decapitating emerging regional networks, what Russian experts called ‘sweeping the political field’ (*zrachistka politicheskogo polya*). In late September, one of the main joining links between the governor, the business and the regional elite since 2012, the Head of the Sverdlovsk government Pasler, was fired. During his term in office Pasler had become one of the possible competitors for the gubernatorial post in 2017 elections, counting on personal popularity and the support of regional business and political elite (Komarov, 2016b; Ol’shannikov, 2016a).¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the co-optation of Tungusov limited room for manoeuvre for the ‘political mayor’ of Ekaterinburg, Roizman. His capacity to mobilize regional institutions (city council and legislative assembly) and political elite in other major cities of the regions, such as Nizhnii Tagil with Nosov, has been increasingly limited.¹⁰⁵ At the end, despite his personal ambitions and a quite recent affiliation with the Yavlinskii’s political party, Yabloko, Roizman was not able to win enough support and consolidate his personal network. Not

¹⁰⁴ In March 2019, Pasler was appointed as the interim governor of Orenburg, taking the position of Yurii Berg. On September 2019 he was finally elected as acting governor with a 65.93% of popular support.

¹⁰⁵ Nosov was appointed governor of Magadan in 2018. Later he won gubernatorial elections with 81.5% of popular support.

surprisingly, his ambitions were inhibited by the municipal filter preventing him from being registered as a candidate in the gubernatorial race (Reshetova and Grobman, 2017).¹⁰⁶

Kuivashev was reappointed as acting governor in April 2017, thus receiving the official endorsement of the Kremlin in anticipation of the September gubernatorial election. With the co-optation of part of the regional elite, 'soft repression' of the other part and an informal support of the regional big business, few doubts remained about his ability to dominate in gubernatorial elections with a significant margin over the remaining opponents. In September 2017 the incumbent won the race with a total of 62.16% of support and with more than a 50% difference with the second competitor in the race, the CPRF candidate Aleksei Parfenof.

The consolidation of his personal position and the legitimacy acquired through the electoral process shaped the contours of his second term. One of his first steps after election, unsurprisingly, was the final completion of the municipal reform. With the weakened municipal elite opposition, partially demobilized through both co-optation and 'repression', the goal was achieved in early 2018. In April the regional legislative assembly passed the bill terminating the eight-year period of dual-executive form of government in Ekaterinburg. All the competences were transferred to a single figure, the head of the city administration (*glava*), officially appointed by the city council on the basis of results of a public competitive tender.

The move of the United Russia-dominated regional assembly caused only minor opposition and the last publicly elected mayor presented his resignation in May (Yashunskii and Mukhametshina, 2018). The deputy governor, Vysokinskii, co-opted only a couple of years before from the Ekaterinburg city administration, was soon appointed by the city council as the new head of the regional capital (Pozdnyakova and Reutova, 2018). The municipal reform was completed, the fourth-largest Russian city ceased to have an elected mayor. Once the regional elite was weakened, indeed, a growing number of former Kuivashev's associates from Tyumen joined his administration. Out of ten members of the gubernatorial administration that had previous ties to Kuivashev when he was a member of Tyumen's elite, six arrived in Sverdlovsk after the 2016-2017 electoral cycle. Finally, in 2021 Aleksei Orlov, who worked with Kuivashev when the latter was the mayor of Tobolsk (2005-2007) and Tyumen (2007-2011), was appointed as the acting mayor of Ekaterinburg.

¹⁰⁶ An overview of the controversial procedure regarding the registration of candidates for gubernatorial elections after their restoration in 2012 has been provided in the previous chapter. In short, a candidate can register for gubernatorial race only after securing the support of a percentage (between 5 and 10%) of heads and deputies of municipalities. In Sverdlovsk the necessary percentage for registration is 7.9%.

Conclusion

The case and the evolution of regional politics in Sverdlovsk show some important general trends in centre-periphery relations in Russia which may be considered as both the driving force and the product of the centralizing tendencies emerged over last twenty years of different stages of federal reform. First, it shows how tensions and conflicts within Russian regions are specific and based on unique internal political situation. Although the introduction of the municipal reform and the incorporation of the municipal level of governance, as will be also shown in the case of Perm Krai, is a general trend affecting all Russian regions, the degree of tensions and conflicts caused and how these are solved, remain a region-specific element of analysis. The configuration of interests, the role of multi-level elite and the ability of the governors to deal with internal political and economic dynamics represent a complex challenge and a distinguishing feature of each specific region.

Despite institutional powers and the general support of his sponsors in the Kremlin, the governor was not able to impose his will from above, forcing the regional elite to surrender to his rule. The example of the conflict over the introduction and realization of the municipal reform shows how the governor was forced to confront the challenge of balancing different political and economic interests. The case of Sverdlovsk partially exemplifies the paradigm of ‘dual commitment’. Political longevity, rather than institutional or electoral, depends on a dense network of informal relations with both, different factions that play the role of his sponsor at the centre and different regional influential groups.

The policy of ‘Kremlin conditionality’ in the case of post-2014 municipal reform, is a good example of these general trends. The main Kremlin requirement remains to defuse elite conflict at the regional level which, as we have seen in the chapter, might trigger several negative consequences for the stability of the system, such as offering instruments of collective action to regional networks. This, as some research shows, in a system of reduced electoral legitimacy of municipal and regional chief executives, may be not only a problem for the local *vlast*, but also for United Russia and the centre (Beazer and Reuter, 2019).

In this general framework, two main factors seem able to account for Kuivashev’s re-appointment and subsequent re-election in 2017. The first is the success not only in defusing the elite-conflict by co-opting the alternative network led by Tungusov, but also by the timing of this process. A conflict during elections is dangerous for both the electoral performance per se and for the risk of fragmentation within the regional branch of the party of power, the main electoral vehicle for the governor. Furthermore, despite his personal connections with regional business and the political elite, Roizman did not emerge as a

representative of any elite group, a factor which in the end deprived him of crucial informal tools and support in challenging the final abolition of municipal elections.

Another important factor was the governor's flexibility in dealing with consolidated regional networks. As lobbying regional and personal interests in Moscow appears as increasingly important element in governor's political activity, the monitoring capacity of the federal centre remains limited and affected by informal connections of the governor and his or her sponsor within or around the Kremlin. Thus, the policy of 'Kremlin conditionality' and personal flexibility helped Kuivashev to preserve a façade of political stability, reassuring his sponsors in the Kremlin. As will be discussed in the next part of the thesis, the inability to defuse intra-elite conflicts and consolidate a personal network was an important element in the political unsuccess of Basargin in Perm Krai.

Chapter 8 – Between regional and federal: two layers of state-business relations in Perm Krai

Introduction

Perm Krai appears as a typical industrial region of the Urals, situated in the Kama River basin and forming the eastern border of the Volga federal district, which includes another thirteen subjects of the Russian Federation. Perm Krai, which was created in 2005 after the merger between Perm Oblast' and Komi-Permyak autonomous okrug, has a population of 2.6 million, about 2% of the entire population of the Russian Federation. The vast majority of the population is ethnic Russian, making up more than 87% of the total. Other representative ethnic groups are Tatars (4.6%), Komi-Permyaks (3.2%) and Bashkirs (1.3%). The regional capital as well as the main urban and industrial centre is Perm, where live almost half of the population of the entire Krai (1.05 million). Other big urban centres are Berezniki and Solikamsk in the northern part of the region and Chaikovskii and Kungur in the south. Overall, more than 75% of the population live in urban areas, in line with the average in Russia as a whole. The per capita GRP is 503,818 rubles (about 9,840 USD), slightly lower than the national average of 578,740 rubles (11,303 USD). Overall, according to main economic indicators, Perm Krai is situated in the higher echelon of the Russian regions.

As a second case study, in what follows I analyse change and continuity in regional political dynamics in Perm Krai and the impact of the policy of recentralization on regional elites. Considering the regional economic potential and the presence of several economic groups and actors, this chapter is devoted to the assessment of the role and changing nature of state-business interaction. Taking into consideration the vast amount of natural and mineral resources (especially crude oil and potassium) Perm Krai became an important region for several big state-owned and private corporations such as Lukoil, Gazprom and Uralkali. How these and other economic giants interact with and affect regional political dynamics and how the weakly institutionalized nature of state-business relations affects the available resources and incentives to governors and to the regional elite are the main questions addressed in this chapter.

Overall, the chapter analyses the changing role of big corporations in the region and, due to major transformation in centre-region relations more broadly, the process of consolidation of dialectical and situational bargaining between the governor and big business. Specifically, it looks at the role of major corporations and their involvement in regional

political dynamics analysing structural constraints, informal tools of influence and cooperation and the consequences of the territorial distribution of the business in Perm Krai.

Governor-businessman and structural constraints

Although similar in terms of structural constraints and federal-wide dynamics affecting business-state relations, the tale of the other region at the foot of the Urals, Perm Krai, presents several similarities with Sverdlovsk, but also some distinctive characteristics which are worth investigating. The economic transformation of the 1990s and the formation of several large business groups, significantly affected political and economic processes in the region. Economic and industrial diversification, in other words, was conducive to a broader diversification of political resources and interests.

Since the second half of the 1990s indeed, regional business played an important role in politics not only as the necessary constituency for regional economic and political stability, cooperating and influencing the decision-making process of local authorities, but also playing a more active and direct role within the regional political arena. Two governors who dominated the political spectrum over the first decade of the 2000s were indeed representatives of local business. Furthermore, the fact that Perm Krai is one of the Russian oil-rich regions had an important impact on business-state dynamics, with the oil industry giant, Lukoil, playing an important role in defining the nature and influence of big corporations and their interaction with regional authorities. Overall, an important role in the Perm Krai economy, and consequently politics, is played by large national raw material-based corporations.

Since the development of the oil and chemical industry, the economy of Perm Krai is characterized by a pluralistic structure and territorially dispersed clusters of industrial and economic assets and resources (Ortung, 2004). Perm city, indeed, does not play the dominant role in the regional economy, with other important economic actors distributed across the regional territory, such as Uralkali in the second largest city, Berezniki, or Gazprom (with the regional branch ‘Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz Perm’) in the southern part of Perm Krai. Several sectors thus remain interrelated, such as the oil and gas industry, petrochemicals and chemicals factories and electricity generation, metallurgical and mechanical engineering sectors.

The economic structure of the regional capital, Perm, remains tied to several segments and economic actors, such as the construction industry and developers, petrochemicals and engineering companies. According to recent data, indeed, Perm Krai and

Perm city remain in the top half of the list of most socio-economically developed regions and cities in the Russian Federation, and between 2000s and 2010s the most rapidly developing region of the broader Urals macro-region.¹⁰⁷

Thus, this regional pluralistic economic structure has historically encouraged competition among different economic interest groups and local and regional authorities for control and distribution of political preferences and rents (Bychkova and Gel'man, 2010). Moreover, the pluralistic economic structure of the region has always been one of the structural elements preventing the head of the regional executive (the governor) from monopolizing and concentrating economic resources, thus limiting the control of the political arena. This also fostered a sort of cooperative relationship and interdependence between political and business networks, characterized by different and sometimes competing interests at both, the regional and municipal level of governance (Moses, 2002, p. 922).

However, the state-business relationship in Perm appears complicated not only because of the complex composition of geographically dispersed business with different interests and by a different economic and political weight of national and regional corporations, but also by the fact that since the beginning of the 2000s, regional politics were dominated by governors with an important background in regional business.

Active member of party politics, particularly the Komsomol, in the late soviet period and one of the most successful local businessmen in early 1990s, Yurii Trutnev started to climb the political ladder of the regional administration in 1996, becoming the elected mayor of the capital, Perm. Trutnev was indeed the founder of 'Eks Limited', a successful trading company based in Perm which during the first wave of market liberalization dominated the field of imported consumer goods, retail and other business activities ranging from the ownership of the biggest chain of shopping centres to real estate market. With the victory in gubernatorial elections in 2000, Trutnev defeated the soviet-style incumbent governor, Gennadii Igumnov. The period was characterized by the migration of Trutnev's former business (and Komsomol) associates into the structure of the regional administration (Rogers, 2015, pp. 152–158).

¹⁰⁷ Although the position of Perm Krai varies according to the parameters used and the variation due to external elements (such as the oil price), it nonetheless remains in the top 20 of Russian regions according to indicators such as the GDP, pro-capita income and industrial development. Data collected from several publications available at the Rosstat official web site, under the section: 'Regioni Rossii. Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie pokazateli', available at: <https://www.gks.ru/folder/210/document/13204>.

The beginning of Trutnev's political career in Perm Krai was an important development in regional state-business interaction and centre-region relations for at least two reasons. First, that was the beginning of a more active and prominent role of local business within the political arena, which lasted until the appointment of Viktor Basargin as governor of Perm Krai in 2012. Trutnev's network thus, from being one of the most powerful political and economic interest groups in Perm in the second half of the 1990s, expanded its influence at the regional level. During his governorship, indeed, Trutnev was able to readjust the previously established hierarchical interaction between three main actors, the governor, the capital city and the regional oligarchs and possible veto players, by integrating all of them in his broad and vaguely defined network. The new governor, relying on cooperation and integration in his administration of the previous business associate and partners, was also able to lobby the election of one of his associates as the mayor of Perm, Arkadii Kamenev (Borisova, 2010). From a long-term perspective, this allowed to ameliorate what in other cases, such as the one described in Sverdlovsk, represented one of the main problems in the process of power centralization at the regional and municipal level, namely the city-region political confrontation.

Second, despite a more active role of the regional business under Trutnev as well as his successor, Chirkunov (2005-2012), the 'capture' of state power and institutions by business groups remained limited in its reach and 'functional' in its nature (Zubarevich, 2010). Two main factors may account for this. On the one hand, the structural pluralistic nature of the regional economy prevented a single interest group from concentrating economic and consequently political power. On the other hand, paradoxically, an important 'balancing' role was played by the penetration into the region of big national corporations, which acquired new importance in particular after the 1997-8 financial crisis. Understanding the complex interdependence of the regional economy, with their core interests distributed across other regions and in Moscow, corporations such as Lukoil, Gazprom and others adopted a more pragmatic approach to state-business interaction.

Having constructive relations with the governor, whoever it was, and extracting and bargaining rents and privileges appeared far more important than trying to establish control over regional political authorities. For federal corporations moreover, the state-business interaction at the regional level remained only a segment of a dense network of formal, informal and factional interaction with federal authorities, especially after the beginning of political and budgetary centralization and, of course, the Yukos case (Sakwa, 2014). Thus, considering the changing realities of the Russian state and centre-periphery relations, having

representatives in the regional legislative assembly and informal connections with the governor and his administration became a far more important and flexible asset than participating directly in regional political competition (Turovsky, 2009; Zubarevich, 2010).

Not surprisingly, indeed, the role of big business in Perm Krai remained central to disentangle the complex reality of factionalism and regional elite influence on the dynamics of regional politics and centre-periphery interaction. Thus, despite good pre-existing ties between Igumnov and Lukoil and the fact that Moscow appeared to support the incumbent, in the 2000 gubernatorial elections the oil-giant decided nonetheless bet on the young and ambitious Trutnev, providing him the necessary support during the complicated electoral campaign.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, according to many accounts Lukoil's logic was twofold. On the one hand, establishing good relations with one of the most ambitious and fast-emerging regional actors, who in one way or another seemed destined to climb the ladder to a prominent career at the federal level. On the other hand, the aim was to prevent the possible victory of Pavel Anokhin, close associate of Lukoil's competitor SibNeft owned by Abramovich and Berezovskii (Golovanov and Suvorova, 2000; Moses, 2002).

The victory of Trutnev also shows the importance of a flexible and delicate consensual equilibrium between state and business. After his defeat in gubernatorial elections, indeed, Igumnov was granted a 'retirement award', being incorporated into the Board of Directors of Lukoil. As the new governor, Trutnev was also able to build and cement good relations with the other federal corporation which started penetrating the region in the second half of the 1990s, Gazprom. Under his supervision in 2001 Gazprom established its regional subsidiary, PermRegionGaz Ltd.¹⁰⁹ In that period a common trait of business-state interaction and mutual influence was also built through cadre policy. One long-standing deputy governor of Perm Krai under three different governors, Igor Shubin (1994-2001), was appointed general director of the new regional Gazprom subsidiary, which would soon acquire a dominant position in the regional market (Rogers, 2015, pp. 259–268).

Main vectors of state-business interaction did not change much after the expected departure of Trutnev in 2004. His negotiating skills, showed in his ability to deal with

¹⁰⁸ The gubernatorial electoral campaign could be a separate story in the story. Indeed, Trutnev, a protégé of the incumbent Igumnov, emerged as a credible candidate only in September when the incumbent was swamped by charges of embezzlement against his daughter. Until that point, the only competitor was Pavel Anokhin, close associate of Abramovich's SibNeft and Berezovskii. Igumnov, first decided to withdraw from the race designating Trutnev as his successor. After a week, and, allegedly, having received reassurance from the Kremlin, he decided to re-enter the race. Trutnev, surprisingly and after a brief trip to Moscow himself, decided to run against Igumnov, but not without winning support from the oil-giant Lukoil.

¹⁰⁹ In 2010 PermRegionGaz was restructured and became Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz Perm (GMP).

regional political and business elite and emphasized by a skilful use of the administrative resources in preparing the successful 2003 referendum which paved the way for the merger between the Perm Oblast' and the Komi-Permyak Autonomous Okrug, allowed his swift promotion to the federal level (Oracheva, 2009).¹¹⁰ In early 2004 Trutnev was indeed appointed Minister of Natural Resources. His successor and former protégé, Chirkunov, shared the business background and was, indeed, one of his partners in 'EKS Limited'. As an emerging member of the highest echelon of the federal elite, Trutnev was indeed allowed to preserve his influence in the region by appointing the successor.

Chirkunov, like his predecessor, despite being a representative of an important regional business and identifying himself more as a businessman than a politician (for instance he refused to join any political party), rather than trying to organise the regional power around his business, continued to play a role of a broker between different political and economic interests. The balance of power between the regional executive and influential economic actors remained one of the priorities of his administration. For instance, one of his first appointments within the gubernatorial administration was a representative of a big corporation. The former Lukoil-Perm vice-chief executive, Gennadii Bunichev, became one of the deputy governors in Chirkunov's team (Ivanov, 2004).

However, despite being widely considered as a loyal member of the Trutnev network, as emphasized by many regional experts during interviews and informal conversations, Chirkunov soon started a more independent political activity, distancing himself from his former business partner (Pertsev, 2017). Although some representatives of the Trutnev's team remained active in the region, such as Grigorii Kuranov,¹¹¹ allegedly protecting local interests and influence of the former governor, the elite turnover within the Chirkunov's administration allowed the new chief executive to distance himself from his powerful former business associate, consolidating his personal network (Moses, 2011).

¹¹⁰ The process of regional amalgamation in Russia was one of the initiatives launched in the early 2000s. Although conceived as one of the instruments of correction of social and economic asymmetries of the regional landscape, several research demonstrate that the process was also instrumental in consolidating the centralization of the system and countering regionalism that affected federal relations in the 1990s. For a detailed analysis see: J.P. Goode (2011). *The decline of regionalism in Putin's Russia: boundary issues*. London: Routledge.

¹¹¹ Kuranov was a director of Eks Limited back in the 1990s. Later he established a 'political-advertising company', Kucher, that worked for Trutnev during his first mayoral campaign in 1996 and later his gubernatorial elections in 2000. When Trutnev left the region, Kuranov became one of his associates in Perm Krai and the regional branch of UR. In 2013 he was parachuted in Bashkortostan, becoming Deputy PM of the Republic. In 2017 he re-joined Trutnev as a Deputy polpred to the Far Eastern Federal District.

The lack of political and economic resources to dominate over big resource-based federal corporations thus forced the political echelon to find ways of compromise and cooperation between different political and economic interests such as Lukoil and Gazprom. This complex situation, due mainly to the structural characteristic of the Perm Krai economy, created a distinctive political order which could be labelled as ‘pluralism by chance’. Since the early 2000s different factions and interests competing for political influence and resources created a sort of pluralistic, although biased, political environment.

Moreover, the case of the interaction between business and the state in Perm Krai should be emphasized as a vivid example of the institutionalization of informal practices which characterize the period of new centralism in Putin’s Russia. Indeed, if on the one hand, as discussed in previous chapters, in the second half of the first decade of 2000s big corporations ceased to compete for power at the highest level of regional politics they nonetheless preserved their informal bargaining power with federal and regional authorities based, among other things, on the penetration in formal institutions such as the regional legislative assembly and government (Turovsky, 2010b; Orlov, 2014). The benefits of having ‘representatives’ within the regional political institutions soon appeared to outweigh possible risks in case of conflict with other business factions and the executive. In pluralist regions, such as Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai, indeed, economic actors started to compete with each other and to bargain for positions and influence within official institutions.

From Lukoil to Gazprom and beyond: institutionalized informality

Several powerful economic groups can be identified in Perm Krai. The already mentioned Lukoil, with its Lukoil-Perm and Lukoil-Permnefteorgsintez regional subsidiaries, has been since the 1990s one of the most powerful economic actors in the oil-rich region.¹¹² One of the largest oil producers in the world and second in Russia after Rosneft, the corporation has several vertically integrated regional subsidiaries which include different companies and factories dealing with different stages of oil production (from extraction to transportation and production of petroleum).¹¹³ According to some evaluations, the activity of Lukoil-integrated companies represents almost 30% of revenues from taxes in the regional budget.

¹¹² Lukoil-Perm is the main company dealing with the extraction of petroleum, while Lukoil-Permnefteorgsintez is specialized in the production of oil-related products.

¹¹³ Lukoil is the first biggest non state-controlled oil-producer in Russia. Rosneft indeed is controlled by the Russian government.

Although the owner of the corporation, Vagit Alekperov¹¹⁴ who became one of the richest men in Russia after the first wave of privatization in early 1990s, is an influential figure in the Kremlin, regional influence is exercised through a dense network of relations characterized by the Lukoil-Perm general manager(s), the regional executive, regional branches of political parties and the regional legislative assembly.

Over the late 1990s and early 2000s one of the most influential Lukoil affiliated personalities in Perm was Andrei Kuzyaev. A prominent young businessman in the late Soviet period, beyond several other assets, Kuzyaev was one of the main business partners of Alekperov in Perm Krai since the early 1990s. General manager of Lukoil-Perm between 1995 and 2003 and later director of Lukoil Overseas and vice-president of Lukoil (2005 – 2014), Kuzyaev has been always one of the most influential political figures in the region. His support and good relations with Trutnev proved important during the latter's gubernatorial campaign in 2000 and the construction of cooperative relationship with the oil-giant in Perm during Chirkunov's term in office. Kuzyaev himself was a member of the regional legislative assembly from 1994 to 2006.

Although Kuzyaev rose to federal prominence and in 2014 left Lukoil to focus on his other businesses, such as ER-Telekom Holding, and his ties with Perm Krai appears today weaker than a decade ago, his political influence, albeit not dominant, is still exercised through representatives in the regional assembly and Perm city council.¹¹⁵ The managing director of PFPG Giorgii Tkachenko, for instance, is today the deputy-chair of the budget committee within the legislative assembly and member of United Russia.

Beyond the prominence of the richest man in the region, Kuzyaev, Lukoil-Perm was always informally granted significant representation in the regional government and legislature, usually elected in the SMD controlled by the oil giant in the central and northern part of the region. Among several others for instance, both general managers of Lukoil-Perm after Kuzyaev, Aleksandr Leifrid (2006-2015) and Oleg Tret'yakov (2016-present) were

¹¹⁴ Alekperov is the former Deputy Minister of Oil and Gas during the late Soviet period. It's widely speculated that Alekperov was supported by Viktor Chernomyrdin, the former PM (1992-98) and Head of Gazprom, who had close links and interests in Lukoil assets in the early 1990s. It's also speculated that in the late 1990s Lukoil supported the Primakov-Luzhkov party (Fatherland), before switching to Unity (and later United Russia).

¹¹⁵ ER-Telekom Holding is the second largest internet provider in Russia. Until 2006 Kuzyaev was a minority shareholder, when he bought a big amount of shares becoming the dominant figure in the holding. Part of the shares acquired by Kuzyaev were previously held by the regional administration of Perm Krai. ER-Telekom is integrated in the structures of another company owned by Kuzyaev, the Permskaya Finansovo-Promyshlennaya Gruppy (PFPG). PFPG was indeed the political launch pad for one of Kuzyaev's protégé, Nikita Belykh. Former Chirkunov's deputy governor (2004-2005), Belykh was later appointed as governor of Kirov (2009-2016).

important members of the regional legislative assembly affiliated with UR.¹¹⁶ Thus, it is clear that Lukoil, the most powerful private company in the Russian oil-driven industrial sector, has been able to build a dense network on both the vertical and the horizontal axis, playing on both arenas, the federal and the regional.

Another big economic player in the region is, of course, Gazprom. The biggest Russian gas corporation through the subsidiaries Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz Perm (GMP) and Gazprom Transgaz Chaikovskii (GTC), has an extremely strong position in the southern part of the region (Chaikovskii) and exercises significant influence on regional economy and politics. Although not a dominant player, Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz Perm over the years was able to establish good working relations with all the governors and preserve and foster its interests thorough a strong presence in the legislative assembly and informal ties with the regional executive. Shubin, who was the first general manager of the regional subsidiary of Gazprom appointed by Trutnev, later had an important political career. He became mayor of Perm (appointed in 2005 and later elected in 2006) and in 2010 the representative of Perm Krai in the Federation Council. In 2016 Shubin was elected MP of the State Duma, thus becoming one of the representatives of the Perm Krai in the lower house of the Russian parliament. His successor as managing director of Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz Perm, Andrei Agishev, was another active member of the ‘party of power’ and MP in the regional assembly (2006-2011).

One of the most influential representatives of Gazprom in Perm Krai politics is considered to be Viktor Chichelov, the long-standing GTC managing director (1996-2016). Involved in politics since 1997, when he was first elected to the regional assembly, he was one of the leading figure of the so called faction of ‘promyshliniki’ (industrialists) which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the governor Basargin tried to mobilize against the opposition within the regional elite and United Russia during the complicated electoral competition in 2016 (Sukhanov, 2016b). He was not re-elected in 2016 and in the same year he left the post of managing director after 20 years of service. It is widely speculated that the influence of Gazprom on the regional executive weakened after the departure of Chichelov and Basargin, although the economic power of the corporation and the direct access to the PA still remain fundamental tools of political influence.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Aleksandr Leifrid has been the Lukoil-Perm general director between 2005 and 2015. He was succeeded by Oleg Tret'yakov who is currently the general director of the regional Lukoil subsidiary. Both are members of UR. Tret'yakov is currently member of the legislative committee on the regional budget.

¹¹⁷ The decreasing political influence, or at least evidence of a more cautious approach of Gazprom, was confirmed not only by the fact that top-managers of regional subsidiaries are no longer

Also Uralkali has an important position and influence in Perm Krai. Although less powerful than giants like Gazprom and Lukoil, the presence of an important industrial complex focused on potash fertilizer production and export contributes to the economic and political pluralism of the region. Uralkali indeed has an important territorial presence in Berezniki and Solikamsk, the second and third largest cities in the region, part of the common Berezniki-Solikamsk Industrial Area in the northern part of Perm Krai. According to the official website, the company employs directly about 13000 people in the main centres of production.¹¹⁸

The former owner of Uralkali, the businessman of Belarusian origin who established the company in early 1990s and led it until 2010, Dmitrii Rybolovlev, was considered the richest man in the region and established extremely good relations with both Trutnev and Chirkunov. After his departure, relations with the executive and the influence of the Uralkali group on regional politics became more fragmented and weaker, while the control of the majority of shares of the company changed hands many times, from Suleiman Kerimov to Mikhail Prokhorov and finally to Dmitrii Mazepin.¹¹⁹ During Mazepin's ownership Sergei Chemezov was appointed Chair of the Board.

Despite the fragmentation of the ownership and some environmental issues which affected the image of the company, due to its importance in the regional economy and the concentration of the production in Berezniki and Solikamsk, Uralkali is still able to exercise a significant 'control of localities'. The corporation indeed can rely on a significant influence on the municipal government in Berezniki and has several representatives in the regional legislative assembly. For instance, Sergei D'yakov is today the mayor of Berezniki (since 2010), while the former mayor Igor' Papkov is now (since 2010) a member of the regional assembly. The most influential representative of Uralkali is probably Aleksei Chibisov, born in Sverdlovsk, deputy head of the government since 2012.

Less influential on regional politics, but nonetheless aggregators of important and differentiated interests are the activities of other two big economic groups, the military complex incorporated into the structures of Rostec and one of the largest producers of methanol in Russia, Metafrax. Over the last 20 years, indeed, Oboronprom and later Rostec were able to centralize the state control on the military complex incorporating two main

represented into the regional legislative, but also by the opinion of several experts and members of the regional political elite interviewed during the fieldwork.

¹¹⁸ More details about the structure and activity of the company can be found at the official website: <https://www.uralkali.com/ru/about/>

¹¹⁹ Mazepin is the president of SIBUR, a petrochemicals company controlled by Gazprom and 82.5% of which are owned by Mikhelson and Timchenko.

companies, Motovilikha Plants and UEC-Perm Engines.¹²⁰ As the leading figure of Rostec, thus, the influence of Sergei Chemezov on the regional industrial complex remain significant (Sukhanov and Strugov, 2017), although Rostec is less involved in regional elite confrontation and political conflicts. Sergei Popov, the managing director of UEC-Perm Engines is also a member of the regional legislative since 2016.

More involved in local level politics is Metafrax, which is the main company and employer in the Gubakha and Kizel' districts. It is widely speculated that Metafrax and its chairman, Armen Garslyan, has been one of the most influential figures in the region and an important interlocutor for the governor, especially because of his control on the tools of electoral mobilization in the central districts of the region (Russkikh, 2019). Both leading figures of Metafrax, Garslyan (2006-present) and the managing director Vladimir Daut (2006-2016), have been members of the regional parliament, with the latter also member of the regional presidium of United Russia and important contacts in Moscow.

Beyond these big corporations, other strong business groups have been formed in various sectors, contributing to the economic pluralism at the regional and municipal level. The already mentioned EKS Limited, established by former governors Trutnev and Chirkunov is certainly one of these. Also the provider of energy TKG-9, integrated into the Vekselberg's Renova Group, and Kamskii Kabel', one of several assets controlled by Vladimir Plotnikov, are important economic actors with diversified interests. The example of Plotnikov is particularly interesting as the businessman, with a criminal past, has diversified assets in the region and can rely on deep and ramified network within the Perm city council. Moreover, after a first period of confrontation, he was able to build cooperative relations with the governor during the second Chirkunov term. Over the years he was also able to build his own political legitimacy, becoming one of the members of the elected city council in 2011 (re-elected in 2016) and, according to local experts, one of the most influential figures in the region and a counterweight to the power of the regional executive (Zyryanova, 2018).¹²¹

¹²⁰ Motovilikha Plants is a military equipment manufacturer specialized in artillery, multiple rocket launchers and military vehicles. UEC-Perm Engines on the other hand is one of the leading producers of a wide range of airplane and helicopter and rocket engines, as well as gas turbine plants.

¹²¹ It's widely speculated that Plotnikov developed good relations with Arkadii Rotenberg thanks to their common activism within the Russian Judo Federation. Arkadii Rotenberg and his brother, Boris, are good friends of the president Putin since the early 1990s. For more details see: Pribylovskii (2016).

Table 10: Main economic actors in Perm Krai

<i>Big business</i>	<i>Headquarter</i>	<i>Holding</i>	<i>Key figure(s)</i>
Lukoil-Perm	Perm	Lukoil	Vagit Alekperov, Oleg Tret'yakov
Lukoil-Permnefteorgsintez	Perm	Lukoil	Vagit Alekperov, Sergei Andronov
Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz Perm (GMP)	Perm	Gazprom	Aleksei Miller, Sergei Cherezov
Gazprom Transgaz Chaikovskii (GTC)	Perm	Gazprom	Aleksei Miller, Aleksei Oleinikov
Uralkali	Berezniki	Uralkali	Sergei Chemezov, Dmitrii Osipov
Metafrax	Gubakha	Metaholding	Armen Garslyan, Vladimir Daut
UEC-Perm Engines	Perm	Rostec	Sergei Chemezov, Sergei Popov
TGK-9 ¹²²	Moscow	Renova Group	Viktor Vekselberg, Andrei Vagner
Kamskii Kabel et al.	Perm	Kamskii Kabel	Vladimir Plotnikov,
ER-Telekom Holding	Perm	PFPG	Andrei Kuzyaev, Grigorii Tkachenko

Source: Author's interviews with regional experts and political consultants; Various issues of 'Ekspert Ural' from 2018, 2019, 2020 (<https://expert.ru/ural/>); Forbes rating of the '200 Richest people in Russia' (<https://www.forbes.ru/rating/360355-200-bogateyshih-biznesmenov-rossii-2018>); Zubarevich, Natalia. 2010. 'State-Business Relations in Russia's Regions'. In *The Politics of Sub-National Authoritarianism in Russia*, eds. Cameron Ross and Vladimir Gel'man. Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Routledge, 211–26.

¹²² In 2014 TGK-9 changed the name in Volozhskaya TGK, while a year later the company become part of T-Plyus during the process of general restructuring of the holding which holds the majority of shares.

Corporate social responsibility and ‘control of localities’ in Perm Krai

The power and influence of business, however, is not projected only through its presence in regional political life and institutional structures such as the government and the legislature. The other vector of interaction, which was also characterized by a creeping institutionalization of informal relations, is the sphere of CSR and ‘control of localities’, which allows big corporations to secure their control over tools of mobilization and political machines at the local level (Frye, Reuter and Szakonyi, 2014). Thus, as already demonstrated by the example of Sverdlovsk, hand in hand with the institutionalization of informal relations through direct participation of business representatives in formal legislative and executive institutions, big corporations are able to exercise their influence also in terms of territorial presence and control. This is the case not only because in many districts corporations such as Lukoil or Uralkali are the main employers, thus exercising important influence on the tools of political mobilization in the workplace, but also because they actively participate in social life through a series of ‘social projects’ in various spheres such as education, culture, health, sports, religion and ecology.

It is not surprising that the strategy of cooperation with the state channelled through the idea of CSR, discussed in chapter 6, plays a twofold role in maintaining and breaking the regional influence of big business, which in the realities of federal relations in Russia appears to pay greater dividends than challenging executive power through direct involvement in regional politics (Chebankova, 2010). On the one hand, corporate involvement in social projects helps to consolidate the image and the legitimacy at the municipal and district level, improving the corporate image as a public goods provider and distributor. This element appears indeed consistent with the general idea of ‘corporate social responsibility’ as emerged in the West and especially in the US in the early 20th century and comprehensively discussed in academic and political circles since the 1950s.

On the other hand, CSR is defined in a specific way in Russia and appears as a more powerful informal tool in bargaining between the state and the business. It represents an indirect electoral strategy and a way to protect and increase a company’s political influence. As Douglas Rogers aptly notes in his book on the link between oil and culture in post-Soviet Perm Krai, Lukoil’s standpoint was clear:

The company’s district-level political strategy, that is, involved expanding its electoral coalitions outside of their natural (and in most cases decreasing) constituencies of oil

workers to include a range of influential local elites: schoolteachers, culture workers, health-care specialists, social services workers, low-level state administrators, and others (Rogers, 2015, p. 192).

The electoral control of localities and tools of mobilization, appears thus as an important, although more subtle element of state-business relationship integrated in a dense network of informal relations and interests. As we have seen in the previous section, the representation of the local interest groups within the structures of the regional executive and legislative remains as a crucial element in the analysis of the inter-elite configuration. Thus, the degree of involvement of business in the social life of the region is not only a tool of bargaining with the authorities, but also an indicator of the degree of informal support of an incumbent. Establishing friendly relations and taking into consideration the interests of different and fragmented economic actors and factions has always been an important skill for governors.

Lukoil is certainly the most active company in the sphere of 'social responsibility' in Perm Krai, able to work and cooperate with all the incumbents. The bargaining power of the regional oil monopolist appears difficult to undermine, especially in a period of scarcity of resources due to the problematic situation of the Russian economy. Lukoil, for instance, was the first corporation to create a 'Connection with the Society' office during the Trutnev governorship, which also served as a tool of institutionalization of informal interaction between the company and the regional executive and 'to solidify Lukoil's joint role with the state as metacoordinator of diverse spheres of activity' (Rogers, 2015, p. 186). The strict relationship remained intact even after the departure of Trutnev and the appointment of Chirkunov.

The support, of course, was and is not unconditional. First of all, cooperation with the state benefitted the company and allowed it to consolidate its control of localities. As emphasized by Rogers, indeed, Lukoil projects, grants and support of the social and cultural spheres are particularly relevant in those areas where the company holds major interests and assets (Rogers, 2015, pp. 187–192). Furthermore, the business obtained leeway over the allocation of state budget funds and in the bargaining over taxation, a distinguishing element especially if keeping in mind the general transformation of centre-periphery relations in terms of budgetary authority, which increased the importance of federal centre policy and aid distribution. With the loss of part of their political and economic resources, thus, governors were forced to rely more on the regional corporations' support to have some economic leverage at the regional level and to meet demands and expectations of the Kremlin (Orlov, 2014). On the other hand, for big private business interaction with the regional political

authorities offered an opportunity to win some concessions in terms of revenues and taxation. As budgetary policy has been increasingly centralized thus eliminating loopholes which allowed some companies to avoid paying or reducing the amount of taxes, business-state relations at the regional level acquired even more importance for corporations and their fiscal and taxation-related policies (Zubarevich, 2010). While their power to pressure the federal centre for tax concessions decreased, regional taxation schemes remained more flexible allowing big budget contributors to exercise their pressure through different channels.

For instance, in 2006 Lukoil-Perm and other corporations were able to pressure Chirkunov, even threatening to relocate their headquarters, to agree to a special taxation arrangement, the so-called 20-24% scheme.¹²³ Indeed, the arrangement reduced the corporate regional tax from 24% to 20%. Taxes collected from Lukoil only, constitute 15-20% of the annual regional budget. Also, a special agreement with Lukoil-Perm was signed. Part of the money the company saved by the taxation cut would go into the regional social sphere through cultural development projects and infrastructural reconstruction (Emel'yanova, 2006).

The 20-24% scheme had the effect of deepening state-business relations in Perm Krai, also increasing the Lukoil's socio-political role and its territorially based control of localities. Not surprisingly, despite his troubled relationship with regional elite and influential factions and interest in Perm Krai, even Basargin, the varyag parachuted in the region from the federal post of Minister of Regional Development, was able to maintain good relations with Lukoil, signing a series of short and medium terms CSR agreements.

Active participation in regional social and cultural life through CSR became a long-term strategy for quasi-monopolists at the district level such as Gazprom, Lukoil and Uralkali, thus adding a new layer to state-business relations in pluralist regions. Far from being able to 'capture' the state and regional authorities, the influence and the role of big business is today exercised through a diversified series of tools, from representatives in the regional government and legislature, to the crucial role played in social and infrastructural development, able to consolidate their control of localities and becoming a sort of state within the state in some districts. For instance, as calculated by some analysts, in the first decade of the special agreement between Lukoil and the Perm Krai administration (2006-

¹²³ Beyond the 20-24% scheme in Perm Krai there are also tax privileges assigned according to the industrial category and to individual companies. According to the federal regulation, although regions have flexibility in deciding the degree of corporate tax, they cannot go beyond the minimum of 13.5%. For further details see: <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/911502218>

2016), the oil monopolist invested 17.4 billion rubles (about 253 million USD) in development projects.¹²⁴

Thus, oil and gas-related corporations appears less interested to be heavily involved in the regional elite confrontation. Rather, their interests are more subtle and diversified not only in terms of their strategies, but also in their general focus and concerns as they need to bargain at different levels of state authority, namely at both the regional and the federal. Thus, they may be interested in exercising an indirect and informal influence in case of intra-regional elite confrontation by backing one or several factions, but the core interest remains the preservation of the already acquired position and influence, rather their expansion and monopolization of the state-business interaction (Orlov, 2014). It comes as no surprise that Lukoil continued to cooperate actively with different governors throughout different epochs of centre-region relations (from elected governors to the period of their appointment and back to elections).

This sort of continuity, as the case of Perm Krai clearly shows, was also secured by the dense agglomeration of personal and informal relations between corporations and the state. Thus, state institutions became a new career opportunity, or a golden retirement position for former business lobbyists. Conversely, as already mentioned with the Igumnov example, many political cadres and regional bureaucrats within the business structures found a way to continue their personal career after regional political and administrative experience (Borisova, 2010). An example is the former general prosecutor of Perm Krai, Aleksandr Belykh, the brother of Nikita Belykh the former protégé of Kuzyaev and Chirkunov appointed in 2009 as governor of Kirov region. When Nikita Belykh was arrested on the charge of corruption in 2016, the brother Aleksandr resigned from his post and was integrated into the structures of Lukoil-Perm, becoming the deputy head of Lukoil's legal department (Sukhanov, 2020a).

A final point should be also emphasized. If on the one hand big corporations, which may count on overwhelming advantage in terms of resources and tools of influence and having room to affect the political outcome beyond the regional level, namely relying on their network within and around the PA, appear less involved in regional elite confrontation. On the other hand, business whose main resources are concentrated in the region, the so-called regional business, is more involved in elite confrontation and regional factionalism. Indeed, for this sort of business the incentives of having representatives in formal institutions such

¹²⁴ Data provided by regional experts and analysis. For more details, see: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3276288> (accessed: 5 March 2022).

as gubernatorial administration and legislative assembly are far higher and the resources to affect the intra-regional political confrontation less concentrated. Finally, actual interests of the regional business may be more divergent if compared with giants like Lukoil, Gazprom and Uralkali. As a consequence, as we will see in the next chapter, regional business appears more likely to take part in elite confrontation, especially at the municipal level and in the regional capital during regional or national electoral processes (Bychkova and Gel'man, 2010; Orlov, 2017).

Conclusion

A complex picture of the political role of big business emerges from the analysis of state-business relations in a region with diversified economic resources such as Perm Krai. The chapter shows how some of the structural constraints interacted with the process of institutionalization of informal practices in state-business relations. Despite the progressively diminishing active role in politics, the institutionalization of 'corporate social responsibility' and the growing 'control on localities' represented an important element within the domain of relations between the regional authorities and big business. Strategies and the deployment of corporation's financial resources became more pragmatic and flexible. On the one hand, although the open opposition to the incumbent became less likely, support is not unconditional but rather situational and guided by pragmatic considerations and the broader constellation of regional actors. On the other hand, state-business relations also experienced the institutionalization of informal interaction, thus allowing big corporations to play a more independent role in defending their corporate interests. The penetration of business representatives in regional legislative assembly and at the local level through their disproportional financial resources and informal control of localities described in this chapter is an example of these trends.

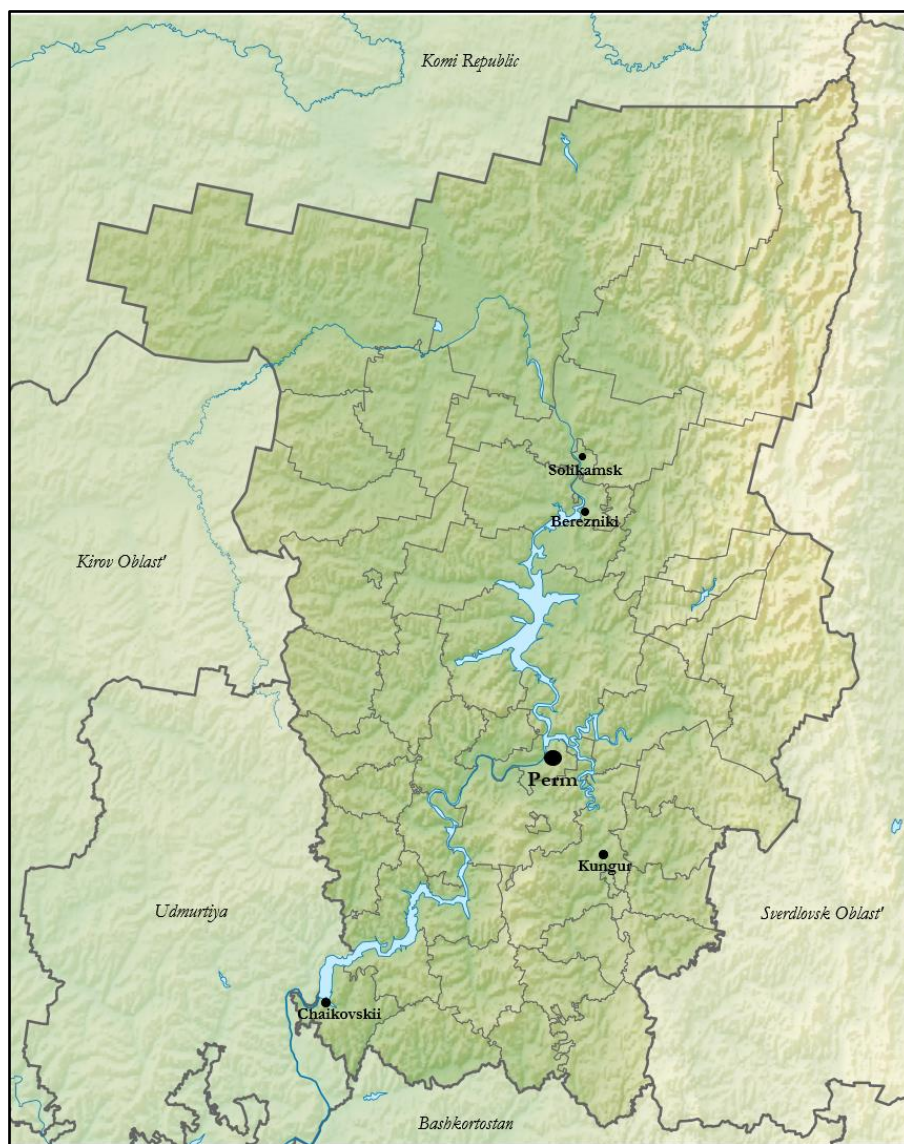
The next chapter will provide an overview of these general trends during the governorship of Basargin. It will show how the dense network of relations between political and economic interests affected the ability of the governor to prevent the emergence of and informal elite coalition within the legislative assembly and the regional branch of United Russia.

Figure 3: Perm Krai (Map of Russia)



Source: Wikipedia, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perm_Krai#/media/File:Map_of_Russia_-_Perm_Krai.svg)

Figure 4: Map of Perm Krai



Source: Wikipedia

(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relief_Map_of_Perm_Krai.svg#/media/File:Relief_Map_of_Perm_Krai.svg)

Chapter 9 - Bargaining and elite split: a competitive regime in Perm?

Introduction

The pluralism of economic and political interests described in the previous chapter makes Perm Krai a region with a heterogeneous political elite, with different factions (regional administration, gazoviki, neftyaniki, promyshlenniki etc.) and networks competing for political resources and influence. The competition, however, not always translates into open confrontation. The governor and his administration play, thus, a central role as the broker of these complex intra-elite interests.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of a complex network of informal practices binding groups and factions of Perm Krai elite with a diversified set of interests. By exploring the political career of the governor-outsider, Basargin, it shows to what extent the interaction with the regional elite and the ability to avoid what is usually known as elite-split in the region appears as a fundamental asset, hand in hand with electoral and economic indicators, in the toolkit of a successful governor. Indeed, despite the increasing political and formal powers of regional chief executives, conflicts and confrontation remain a common trait of political bargaining affecting the stability of the governor and his ability to achieve the results expected by the Kremlin.

If network dynamics affect centre-region interaction from below, similar dynamics appear also important from above. The support of the Kremlin and the ‘protection’ of one of the influential groups in and around the Presidential Administration may prove crucial for the political survival of a governor. From this vantage point, the example of Basargin, analysed in this chapter, encompasses several of these contrasting elements, which affect through informal and network-based bargaining the overall stability and predictability of federal relations in Russia.

Political elite, factionalism and city-region problem

Although historically periods of cooperation and elite-settlement characterized the political process in Perm Krai, the balance of political forces appeared increasingly unstable due to the diversification and fragmentation of interests and political developments affected by the transformation of centre-region relations since the early 2000s (Panov, 2009). An example of this development is relations on the city-region axis during the period of municipal reform and the abolition of direct mayoral elections in the majority of Russian cities. Started in 2003

with the introduction of the law on local self-government during the process of power centralization, the discussion about the new arrangement in Perm coincided with the departure of governor Trutnev and the appointment of his former business partner Chirkunov. The policy of integration of the city administration under the control of the regional executive, was not however driven only by the incentives coming from the centre. Regional authorities, and the network that Chirkunov was able to build had indeed their own interests in enhancing their control over the regional capital, Perm.

Hand in hand with the merger process of Perm Oblast' and the Komi-Permyak AO, the increasingly independent economic policy of the city administration, especially in terms of housing and municipal services represented a threat to the interests of different groups of the regional elite (Borisova, 2010). Not surprisingly, in the context of abolition of gubernatorial elections and with the support of several economic players, Chirkunov was initially able to establish informal control over the process of municipal reform. At the end of 2005 the elected mayor, Kamenev, hit by charges of corruption, was swiftly incorporated into the gubernatorial administration, becoming Deputy governor (Ponosov, 2005). The governor was also able to push his plan for the reorganisation of municipal self-government within the Perm city council. As early as early 2006 discussion was over. The city council approved the introduction of a bicephalous power system, which, in line with many other Russian cities, separated executive power between the elected mayor (*mer*) and the city-manager, the so-called 'economic manager', selected by a special commission and hired by the city administration on a contractual basis (Moses, 2013). Moreover, soon after the departure of Kamenev, Shubin, the longstanding member of the gubernatorial administration with three different governors and a representative of Gazprom interests in the region, was appointed as interim mayor (later elected in March 2006). Furthermore, Chirkunov successfully lobbied the appointment of one of his close associates as a city-manager, Arkadii Kats (Sukhanov, 2016a).¹²⁵

Even though these developments appeared to close any discussion about the political confrontation on the city-region axis, incorporating the city administration and elite under the gubernatorial vertical, it would be incorrect to say that the governor was able to control and direct municipal level politics. The incorporation of the Perm administration into the

¹²⁵ Kats started his political career under Trutnev, first as a member of the legislative assembly and later as a deputy governor (2001-2006). He was also close to the Vekselberg's Renova Group in the region, being member of the board of directors of PermEnergo and TGK-9. After the end of his political career in 2016, he became the managing director of the EKS-Limited Holding, the company established by Trutnev and Chirkunov.

gubernatorial 'sphere of influence', remained based on informal and situational coalitions with influential regional and city level political and economic actors. Furthermore, if on the surface the extended regional control over the municipal level appeared uncontested, in the background it nonetheless entailed growing elite confrontation, emphasizing the pluralism of political and economic interests framed in terms of the city-region divide and 'party of power' politics.

Despite the victory of Chirkunov's protégé, Shubin, in the 2006 mayoral elections, indeed, the competition within the regional elite was fierce, also emphasizing the complexity of the balance of interests and forces within the regional branch of UR. Although Shubin could rely on the support of the regional branch of the party and of the gubernatorial administration, another candidate from United Russia, the businessman Pavel Anokhin, entered the race to challenge the main candidate. Furthermore, also the businessman Plotnikov, in control of the regional branch of the LDPR, appeared to be a serious challenge, before he was ousted from the race by the decision of the electoral commission (Ross, 2007a). Shubin managed to win the race only in the second round with 37%, only 5% more than Anokhin. The competitor, indeed, demonstrated the importance of different elite groups within the region.

Moreover, the same division and conflict was apparent during the race for Perm city council and the regional legislative assembly, the same year. A complex process of elite accommodation and negotiation over the selection criteria of party lists exposed competition between different elite groups. For the Perm city council, for instance, Shubin and United Russia city branch leader, also a representative of Gazprom interests, Andrei Agishev, did not manage to agree a common list, ending in an intra-party competition between two different groups. A similar situation characterized the legislative assembly elections, with United Russia candidates competing with each other in several Single Member Districts (Panov, 2009). The increasing faction-based competition within United Russia in Perm, beyond the pluralism of interests, shows also how, hand in hand with the consolidation of the role of the party, interests and competition between different elite groups affected the intra-party structures and processes. Thus, a strong argument can be made that the particular development and consolidation of the party system in Russia (Reuter, 2010; Ross, 2011; Golosov, 2014) had also the effect of institutionalising the informal political processes which were previously located outside the formal structures of a party. This factionalism and the interests of the regional political and economic elite, remain today an important factor in the stability of governors and centre-region relations in general.

While in 2006 mayoral elections served the role of forming and enlarging the winning coalition, thus finding a balance between different elite groups, the process of abolition of municipal level elections, indeed, took another ten years and required a balanced approach from the executive. Under the supervision and pressure of Chirkunov between 2009 and 2010 elections were abolished in some municipal centres, most notably in the regional capital, Perm (Vodop'yanov, 2009). Starting from 2011, thus, the mayor of the regional capital has been chosen among the elected members of the city council. The process of municipal reform, was further accelerated by the amendments to federal legislation in 2014, discussed in chapter 7.

As already discussed in chapter 7, however, the reform unevenly affected regional political processes, depending on the interest groups and elite composition in each particular region. In Perm, indeed, the process of centralization and control of municipal level politics, especially in the regional capital, started well in advance, and was carried out by the mixture of formal reforms and informal tools. From this vantage point, the election of the former mayor to the post of governor in 2000 (Trutnev) and, six years later the appointment of the long-standing member of the gubernatorial team, Shubin, could be considered as two major steps toward the creeping centralization of the regional regime. For instance, despite popular opposition, Shubin himself supported the abolition of direct elections in 2011. The final nail in the coffin of the autonomy of the municipal level of governance in Perm Krai was the abolition of municipal elections in all the other cities of the region in 2015 (Panov, 2016).

Once appointed as the new governor of Perm Krai in 2012, Basargin initially showed himself critical of the system which deprived big cities and regional capitals of an elected mayor (Moses, 2013). Soon after, however, his position changed. Two main factors may account for this. On the one hand, the above-mentioned amendments of the federal legislation in the wake of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula certainly changed the set of incentives for regional governors. Despite the introduction of the so-called 'Kremlin conditionality', which allowed governors to follow a case by case strategy preserving the delicate balance between regional interests and networks (Moses, 2017), the final goal was nonetheless to achieve - or maintain as in the case of Perm - the control of the regional executive over the municipal level. On the other hand, the composition of interest groups and the increasing opposition of the regional elite faced by the varyag, became another indirect incentive for Basargin to maintain a centralized and as much as possible vertically integrated control of the municipal level. Despite his initial scepticism, indeed, Basargin was

able to establish a good working relationship with the Perm elite and city council, successfully brokering the appointment of Dmitri Samoilov as city-manager in 2014 (Dina, 2014).¹²⁶

Overall, the conflict along the city-region axis in Perm Krai appears as historically less significant than in other cases, such as Sverdlovsk. The political conflict between the regional capital and the regional administration never reached the level of confrontation that characterized dynamics in the neighbouring region. Since the early 2000s, when Trutnev relying on different elite groups and powerful economic actors (such as Lukoil, Gazprom and Uralkali) was able to climb the ladder of power from the Perm administration to the regional executive, the city council became more an arena of accommodation for municipal and regional interests of different groups, than a platform for collective action of the city elite against the region. Furthermore, by relying on the formal institutional reform initiated by the centre in 2003, Chirkunov was also able to consolidate the executive control of the municipal level, supporting the abolition of direct elections of the mayor of the regional capital. The elite conflict, indeed, usually assumed different forms from the city-region confrontation typical of Sverdlovsk discussed in the previous chapters.

As the experience of Basargin also shows, however, despite the institutional subordination of city level governance, it would be incorrect to argue that the governor, after achieving control over the municipal level of governance, was able to reign unchallenged, fully integrating the regional and municipal elite into the structures of the power vertical'. Regional elites, indeed, remained fragmented, with different interests and incentives, thus able to compete and, when possible, undermine the role and the position of the governor through different tools and instruments.

The failure of the varyag: elite split under Basargin

The resignation of Chirkunov and the appointment of the new governor, the outsider Basargin, was the last phase of the general reshuffle of the Russian governors between 2005 and 2012, when regional chief executives were appointed by the Kremlin. His replacement in Perm was hardly a surprise. The last part of his governorship was indeed affected by several problems. On the one hand, even despite his re-appointment in 2010, Chirkunov was not able to establish good relations with the Kremlin (Emel'yanova, 2010). As a governor,

¹²⁶ Samoilov joined the gubernatorial team immediately after the appointment of Basargin. In 2012 he was appointed as the Deputy PM of the regional executive, while in 2013 he became the head of the gubernatorial administration. In October 2016 he became the mayor of Perm, just after the abolition of the dual-executive model.

he always refused to join United Russia and the results of the presidential party in regional and federal elections were affected also by the increasing confrontation between Chirkunov's personal network and several other elite groups, such as the one loyal to the former governor and his business partner Trutnev.¹²⁷ For instance, while Trutnev led the United Russia list in Perm Krai in both the 2007 and 2011 Duma elections, in 2011 a disagreement over the composition of the party list between the incumbent and the former governor was one of the causes, according to several accounts, of United Russia's poor performance (Nikitin, 2015b). A series of other scandals, such as the one which forced the governor to reshuffle completely his government and the return of Putin, which affected the general trends in centre-region interaction, finally forced Chirkunov to resign in 2012.

A Sobyenin man in Perm Krai

Basargin, thus, was one of the last governors being appointed before the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections in 2012. It is widely speculated that his appointment was lobbied by Sobyenin, at that time Deputy Prime Minister and Head of the government's executive office. As discussed in chapter 5, the process of gubernatorial appointments relies on an informal process of elite management affected by different networks and factions at the federal level, constituting one of the central elements of the horizontal dimension of the federal process.

At the beginning of 2000s Basargin and Sobyenin worked together in the structures of the presidential representative in the Urals federal district, Petr Latyshev. When in 2008 Sobyenin became Deputy Prime Minister, from the post of the deputy presidential envoy in the Urals district where he worked for 8 years, Basargin was appointed minister of Regional Development in Putin's cabinet. A surprising career elevation.

Despite his powerful friends in the Kremlin, however, once in Perm Basargin faced strong opposition of the regional elite, which accompanied his entire period as governor. As a member of the legislative assembly and one of representatives of Lukoil interest in Perm noted during a private conversation, 'having powerful contacts and friends in Moscow may assure you the appointment, but once you are in, the situation is different. You can have all

¹²⁷ Although Trutnev and Chirkunov were business partner and the former was initially a Trutnev's protégé, during his governorship Chirkunov was able to consolidate a more independent network, not always in line with regional interests of the former governor. The majority of respondents during the interviews conducted in Perm Krai identified the difference between the two groups. Although some of their interests and members initially correlated, in the long run two different groups can be identified.

the contacts you want, but you must be also able to deploy them without upsetting the regional elite and its interests’.

As an outsider and native of Sverdlovsk and without any previous experience in Perm Basargin’s position appeared extremely weak from the very beginning.¹²⁸ The task, indeed, was overwhelming. The new governor needed to preserve a balance of power and find channels of interaction with the dynamic and pluralist regional elite and diversified and competing economic interests of big corporations and regional business. Furthermore, the new legislative assembly was elected just a few months before the change of the governor under the supervision of Chirkunov, for the occasion leading the list of the United Russia even without ever joining the party.

Thus, the opposition to Basargin was twofold. On the one hand institutional, as the legislative branch was filled with Chirkunov loyalists such as the speaker Valerii Sukhih. On the other hand, it was informal, from the consolidated elite groups and economic interests beyond the actual institutional structures. Basargin’s power resources remained fragmented and, despite his institutional position and the support of the centre, building his own network integrating different strands of the regional elite, appeared difficult from the very beginning.

As the appointment of governor outsiders became more common in Russia, one general trend which characterized the action of the varyags was the appointment of other outsiders and loyalists in key positions within the regional administration. Basargin in Perm Krai was not an exception. Parachuted into a complex and plural region, one of his strategies to consolidate his position was, indeed, the appointment of former associates in the government, thus balancing the power of the regional elite within the administration. For example, between 2012 and 2013 several ministers without any previous experience in the region were appointed to key position of the first Basargin executive. Oleg Demchenko, his close associate from the period when Basargin was the deputy polpred, became the Deputy Head of the government. Another prominent example was the appointment as the Head of the government of his former deputy minister of Regional Development, a businessman and politician from Chelyabinsk, Roman Panov. The appointment of Panov caused a big scandal not only because of his lack of any previous experience in the region, but especially because

¹²⁸ It should be also noted that despite its proximity to Sverdlovsk and strong economic relations which historically tie Perm Krai, Sverdlovsk and Tyumen, the region is not part of the Urals federal district, where Basargin worked as the deputy polpred. Perm Krai was included into the Volga federal district with the administrative centre is in Nizhnii Novgorod.

a few weeks after his appointment he was arrested with the charge of embezzlement during his work in the ministry of Regional Development (Dina and Sukhanov, 2012).¹²⁹

While attempting to consolidate his personal position, Basargin also tried to undermine the power and influence of the former governors' networks within the regional executive through an articulated cadre policy. Already a few months after his appointment the governor reshuffled the gubernatorial administration team. The Head of the administration under Chirkunov, the influential Fidrus Aliev, was forced to resign. While the appointment of another representative of the former governor Trutnev, Kuranov, was considered an attempt to avoid conflict with the group close to the minister of Natural Resources, the compromise lasted only a few months. Already in early January 2013, when the position of the governor within the regional branch of United Russia appeared more solid, Kuranov was also fired.

Institutionalization of an informal coalition

Taking into consideration the structural consolidation of different interest groups, the opposition to the new governor came from different, although sometimes overlapping, factions. Trutnev and Chirkunov, had still an important power base and loyal political figures in the region. Regardless their common business past, indeed, both former governors also advanced different interests from the economic and political point of view. Their close associates tried to preserve influential positions within the regional government and party structures, while Trutnev could also rely on important links within the PA in order to defend his interests in Perm Krai (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 2005).

An influential elite group consolidated around the businessman and politician, member of United Russia, Dmitrii Skrivanov. In politics since the early 2000s and since 2016 representative of the Perm Krai in the federal Duma, Skrivanov is considered the leader of an informal parliamentary group, the so-called 'gruppa tovarishchei' (group of comrades) which was formed within the legislative assembly in 2013 (Nikitin, 2015a). Even though Skrivanov has been always close to Chirkunov, after the departure of the latter he assumed a more independent position in regional politics (Sukhanov, 2020b). Another faction was consolidating around the figure of Gennadii Tushnolobov, deputy managing director of Lukoil-Perm, and other political actors who started their political careers in the late 1990s.

¹²⁹ It should be noted that the arrest of Panov is probably linked to the general anti-corruption federal campaign started at the beginning of Putin's third presidency with charges of mismanagement and corruption of the Defence Minister Anatolii Serdyukov.

Tushnolobov was initially able to establish good working relations with the new governor and in 2013, after the arrest of Panov, he was appointed as the head of the government, spreading speculations about the increasing influence of Lukoil on the regional level. Good relations with Tushnolobov, indeed, ensured Basargin the situational support of Lukoil and other business groups such as Gazprom and Renova, although this support appeared weaker immediately after 2016 federal and regional elections (Orlov, 2017).

Thus, already few months after taking up the post, the new government faced increasing opposition from the regional elite, which also affected dynamics within the regional branch of United Russia. The party, indeed, appeared unable to accommodate the interests of different groups, a fact that clearly affected the 'party vertikal' and the degree of internal fragmentation. The regional branch of the 'party of power' was affected by two serious issues. On the one hand, by the competition between different groups for the control of the regional branch; on the other, by the formation of an informal and cross-party coalition within the regional assembly. This coalition, the 'gruppa tovarishchei' led by Skrivanov, was created in opposition to Basargin and encompassed members of different parties within the legislative branch including leaders of United Russia, CPRF and Just Russia (Nikitin, 2015a).¹³⁰

Since 2013, indeed, the informal coalition created an almost unprecedented confrontation between the executive and legislative, slowing down the decision-making process and undermining Basargin's control over the United Russia-dominated regional parliament. For instance, the approval of the regional budget for 2013-2015, was particularly difficult and disrupted on several occasions by members of the parliament (Dina, 2013). Another important issue was the delayed approval of tax privileges for Gazprom proposed by the executive, which symbolically undermined the authority of the governor also in front of the federal centre. The governor, in other words, was forced to work on a case-by-case basis with single members of the regional parliament in order to get the necessary support for many important initiatives of his administration.

In line with findings of some research on the degree of centralization and fragmentation of the 'party of power' in Russia (Ross and Turovsky, 2015), in Perm several elements show how the consolidation of an informal coalition within the regional assembly and the fragmentation of the regional elite affected the unity and structures of United Russia.

¹³⁰ According to information collected from regional experts and some members of the legislative assembly, among which former Skrivanov supporters, the informal coalition, beyond important figures such as the Deputy Chairman of the assembly, Liliya Shiryayeva (JR), included the leaders of three party groups, Yurii Borisovets (UR), Aleksei Lukanin (JR) and Kseniya Aitakova (CPRF).

Despite its electoral supremacy UR failed on many occasions to serve as an instrument in the hands of the governor, demonstrating also its inability to represent a formal tool of elite consolidation and reconciliation of their diverging interests (Panov and Ross, 2013). The Perm branch of United Russia, indeed, has been historically driven by different elite groups and interests, sometimes openly conflicting even during elections (Panov, 2009).

Historical pluralism, however, turned into open and direct conflict after the appointment of Basargin. A clear example of the increased tension between the governor and the regional elite (and within the regional elite itself) was the election of the head of the regional branch of United Russia. Many accounts confirm that the election was highly controversial and was fought between the segment of the party loyal to the governor, represented by the member of the legislative assembly and an influential figure in the regional capital, Nikolai Demkin, and more recalcitrant members of the regional elite, represented by the head of the party group in the parliament, Yurii Borisovets. As confirmed by an influential member of United Russia, which was one of the organisers of the party conference, Borisovets was one of the loyalists of former governor Trutnev and member of the informal coalition organised around Skrivanov. His vertical and horizontal links allowed him to win the support within the central structures of the party. Due to Basargin's personal connections in Moscow, however, the governor was able to successfully lobby Demkin during the regional party conference thus defying the indications coming from the central committee of the party of power.

The victory of the governor, however, did not put an end to the intra-party struggle, which continued to affect regional political dynamics. If on the one hand Basargin was able to consolidate his position relying mainly on the regional capital's political elite (Demkin and Samoilov),¹³¹ on the other, the informal coalition within the legislature did not disappear. Moreover, if the confrontation during the election of the leader of the regional branch of United Russia remained mostly an intra-party affair, the preparation for the 2016 electoral cycle was characterized by open elite conflict dominating regional news. As United Russia's primary elections, first run in 2007, assumed increasing importance in the party organisation (Tkacheva and Golosov, 2019), they represent a good example of the degree of fragmentation, the presence of multiple centres of power and the uneven control of the main tools of electoral mobilization, all factors which also affected the September elections for the State Duma and the regional legislative assembly. The Perm primary elections, indeed,

¹³¹ As already mentioned, in 2014 Samoilov was appointed city-manager.

exposed fierce competition between different groups consolidated over the previous three years.

Elite conflict during elections: the case of 2016

As aptly emphasized by Kynev (2017), the 2016 elections and the composition of the state Duma, indeed, marked a new important step in the real internal diversity of United Russia, where a lot of fragmented and competing interests appeared unevenly appeased within the structure of the party. The importance of electoral results, indeed, prevailed over the coherence of the intra-party interests, thus undermining the so-called 'party vertikal'. United Russia relied almost on everyone able to control political machines and tools of mobilization at the regional and local levels, irrespective of their actual interests. On the other hand, in the context of uneven political competition, affiliation with the 'party of power' remained the most valuable option for different elite groups in order to consolidate their power in Perm Krai.

The United Russia primary elections held in May 2016 are thus a good example of intra-elite competition in Perm Krai, showing the consolidation of three main broad coalitions, the pro-gubernatorial one, the group of recalcitrant regional elite opposing Basargin and a neutral group representing mostly the interests of the big business (*promyshlenniki*), willing to support, conditionally, the governor. Although the regional elite in Perm Krai has been historically fragmented and diverse, the 2016 electoral cycle indeed made the confrontation public, thus affecting the results of United Russia and the public perception of unity within the party.

Despite the formal dominant position within the structures of the bureaucratic hierarchy, Basargin's power resources in Perm appeared further undermined during the campaign. For instance, on the eve of the primary elections the informal coalition consolidated around Skrivanov was able to extend, relying on its financial resources, control over regional media. Thus, 'Active Media' holding owned by Skrivanov slowly incorporated several other regional media, finally buying an entire media holding, 'Ural-Inform', which was traditionally considered as affiliated with the gubernatorial administration (Savelli, 2017).¹³² Although hardly measurable, the impact on the United Russia primaries, according to many experts, was nonetheless significant (Kynev, 2016; Orlov, 2017).

¹³² Active Media holding is a structure integrating several online and printed media, such as Ekho-Permi. On the other hand, Ural-Informa holding was created in 2013 and owned by a businessman from Chelyabinsk, Kirill Markevich. In 2014 Markevich was appointed Deputy Head of the

Overall, the results of United Russia primary elections further weakened the position of the governor within the Perm Krai elite and the hierarchy of United Russia, thus emphasizing the fragmented control of the governor over the regional political machines. Tools of mobilization, indeed, remained under the control of the regional elite and big business, able to deploy their control of localities. Skrivanov won the race for the United Russia nomination for the Duma election, hand in hand with good results for other members of the regional elite loyal to the former governor such as Kuranov (Orlov, 2017). As for the primary elections for the regional assembly, the financial resources and reputation at the local level of the big business proved itself fundamental, allowing Lukoil, Gazprom and Uralkali to consolidate their position within the regional legislative (Savelli, 2016b). On the eve of 2016 federal and regional elections, the position of the informal coalition opposing the chief executive and that of the big business appeared stronger and the regional elite more fragmented.

Not surprisingly, several sources interviewed in Perm noted that a week before the September 2016 federal and regional elections both the governor and Skrivanov, travelled to Moscow (Savelli, 2016a). A strong argument could be made that the Presidential Administration involvement in regional affairs is an important signal of the informal and de-institutionalized centre-region interaction. It also shows, although tangentially, that in many cases regional conflicts have to be resolved at the highest level, especially when the ‘party of power’ and the administrative resources of the governor appear insufficient to avoid open conflict with the regional elite during electoral cycles.

Despite all the odds, though, at the ballot United Russia was able to secure good results at both the federal and regional levels. As emphasized by some research, indeed, the return to a mixed electoral system and the control of political machines at the regional level allowed the ‘party of power’ to attenuate the rise of competitive politics after the 2011-2012 wave of protests, dominating especially in SMD (Semenov, 2017). Perm Krai was not an exception. In the Duma elections, United Russia won the competition in all the SMD and scored 42.70% on the party list basis.

The fact that the intra-elite conflict was played out within the structures of United Russia and that the informal coalition led by Skrivanov was able to co-opt the regional branch of at least two of the systemic opposition parties, namely JR and CPRF, hand in hand with

gubernatorial administration and he later became an advisor to the governor. In early 2016 Ural-*Inform* was bought by Active Media affiliated to Skrivanov. Ural-*Inform* owned several important media resources such as *Kommersant v Permi*, *Zvezda* and the regional branch of *RBK*.

the informal institutionalization of state-business relations through the party of power, played an important role in securing good electoral results. Thus, the systemic opposition, which five years earlier performed pretty well in Duma elections - especially if compared with nationwide dynamics - in 2016 experienced a setback, with CPRF gaining 14.24% and Just Russia only 9%, compared to respectively 21% and 16.4% in the previous electoral cycle. Nonetheless, UR results in Perm Krai appeared far lower than the national average (see Table 11). Furthermore, in line with previous studies (Panov and Ross, 2016a), the intra-elite conflict during both the UR primaries and Duma elections seemed to have negatively affected the turnout (35.17%), one of the lowest among Russian regions and in line with the federal capital (35.2%) where turnout has been historically well under the national average.¹³³ To minimize risks Basargin, probably not surprisingly taking into consideration his weak control over the regional political machines and the increasing confrontation within United Russia, did not lead the party list in Duma election, which is usually a standard practice for Russia's governors, especially those directly appointed by the Kremlin and affiliated with the party of power.

The vote for the regional legislative assembly displayed similar dynamics. According to the opinion of experts and members of the political elite, the governor was able to consolidate his position within the assembly (Nikitin, 2016). On the one hand, with the election of Skrivanov for the federal Duma the informal coalition lost its leader, undermining its degree of coherence and coordination within the new regional assembly. On the other hand, however, the real victory was obtained by big business and corporations, which further consolidated their presence within the formal institutions. During interviews and informal conversations conducted in Perm, experts gave a different perspective on the composition of the cross-party informal coalition within the legislative assembly after the 2016 elections. Overall, although the informal nature of the affiliation with the opposition group does not allow a precise measurement, the group was composed by about 14-18 MPs.¹³⁴ As described in the previous chapter, indeed, despite divergent interests among each other and the fact that their support is situational, big corporations are more likely to find ways of cooperation and negotiation with the incumbent, thus avoiding direct confrontation.

¹³³ In terms of turnout, only four other subjects of the federation registered a lower score, Saint Petersburg (32.5%), Irkutsk (32.9%), Tomsk (33.9%) and Novosibirsk (34.9%).

¹³⁴ As for the group of representatives of the business, the evaluation of its composition is based on the analysis of MPs biographies and careers conducted by the author.

Table 11: UR electoral results in Perm Krai

Year	UR share in party-list (%) – Perm	UR share in party-list (%) – Russia	Δ regional-national UR share	SMDs total	SMDs won by UR	Regional Turnout	National Turnout	Δ regional-national turnout	Electoral System
2021	33.60	49.82	16.22	4	4	39.00	51.72	12.72	Mixed
2016	42.70	54.19	-11.49	4	4	35.17	47.88	-12.71	Mixed
2011	36.30	49.32	-13.02	-	-	48.00	60.21	-12.21	Prop.
2007	62.06	64.30	-2.24	-	-	54.83	63.71	-8.88	Prop.
2003*	30.70	37.56	-6.82	4	2	62.30	55.67	6.63	Mixed

*Duma elections were held hand in hand with the amalgamation referendum between Perm Oblast' and Komi-Permyak autonomous okrug

Source: Central Election Commission of Russia (<http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom>) and Election Commission of the Perm Krai (<http://www.permkrai.izbirkom.ru/vybory-i-referendумы/federalnye/>).

From Sobyatin to Sobyatin?

Despite the weakening of the informal coalition within the legislature and the consolidation of the influence of the industrialist group, however, intra-elite conflict did not disappear. In 2016, indeed, the pressure on Basargin only increased, affecting members of his government. The last episode involved the minister for transport Almaz Zakiev a bureaucrat born in Sverdlovsk and with a previous working experience in Tyumen under Sobyatin. Zakiev was accused of embezzlement and forced to resign in October, just a few weeks after the elections. The investigation also involved Demchenko, considered one of the most influential figures within the gubernatorial administration and a close associate of the governor. Beyond widespread speculations in the regional and federal press of the possible involvement of Mikhail Babich, the polpred of the Volga district, in coordinating the increasing involvement of law enforcement agencies in regional politics (Nikitin and Pertsev, 2016), no confirmations of this fact emerged during interviews and conversation with members of the regional elite. Nonetheless, the position of the governor appeared unsustainable not only in regards to the regional elite but also his sponsors in Moscow. Perm Krai was indeed approaching another important electoral cycle, the 2017 gubernatorial elections and, above all, presidential elections in March 2018.

Torn by the increasing intra-elite conflict since 2012 and further weakened by the arrest of some members of his team, it appeared not a surprise that on the eve of 2017 gubernatorial elections the Kremlin decided to replace the governor. The announcement of Basargin's resignation, indeed, provoked confrontation between different personalities at the federal level for the appointment of the successor.¹³⁵ It was widely speculated that three main interest groups were involved in process of consultations for the name of the new governor of Perm Krai. The first was formed around the group of siloviki and the presidential envoy for the Volga federal district, Babich. According to several accounts, Babich tried to lobby one of his protégés, the former FSB officer and Chief Federal Inspector (CFI) for Perm Krai, Igor' Tsvetkov. The other two groups were consolidated around the former governor and at

¹³⁵ The timing of Basargin resignation was also unusual. Since 2012 the common practice was that the announcement of the voluntary resignation of the governor is made by the PA, hand in hand with the name of the interim governor. Violating this practice, however, Basargin announced his resignation himself. Also, the press-conference was organised in early morning while the name of the successor was announced only in late evening. According to several accounts collected during interviews, indeed, the violation of the usual practice emphasized the unusual confrontation between different factions for the appointment of the successor.

that time Deputy Prime Minister and presidential envoy for the Far Eastern federal district Trutnev and the faction around Sobyanin (Nikitin and Sukhanov, 2017).

The appointment of Maksim Reshetnikov as the interim governor thus appears a compromise along both the horizontal and the vertical axis. Like Basargin, the new governor indeed was considered to be close to Sobyanin. Since 2010 Reshetnikov worked hand in hand with Sobyanin in the structure of Moscow administration, first as deputy head of the Moscow mayor's administration and later as the Minister of the Moscow city government. Furthermore, before joining Sobyanin, the young technocrat gained experience in the Ministry of Regional Development, headed at that time precisely by Basargin. Despite his close ties to Sobyanin, however, Reshetnikov is widely considered as enjoying good relations with deputy prime minister Trutnev. Indeed, he was born in Perm' and started his political career within the Perm Krai administration when Trutnev was governor of the region. Overall, before joining Sobyanin in Moscow, Reshetnikov had worked with all three governors of the Krai since 2000.

Thus, while being a compromise figure at the top of the decision-making chain, between two influential groups linked to Sobyanin and Trutnev, he represented also a signal of appeasement for the regional elite in Perm. Although away from the region for almost ten years, Reshetnikov could nonetheless rely on the label of 'local' and good relations with some elements of the regional elite, thus on the one hand assuring a hiatus with the administration of Basargin, while on the other preserving some policy continuity. Furthermore, being a young technocrat, rather than a representative of law enforcement agency like the other possible candidate lobbied by the polpred, he appeared as the best suited figure to promote some détente with the regional elite, after five years of intense confrontation between the executive and the legislative. The new appointment was confirmed in 2017 September elections, when Reshetnikov received 82% of the popular support, thus becoming officially the elected governor of Perm Krai.

Conclusion

The case of an economically pluralist region such as the Perm Krai shows some important political tendencies in centre-periphery relations during the last period of centralization. The first is certainly the importance of informal and factional relations in regulating regional politics and centre-region interaction. Beyond the formal shell, indeed, relations between players are often regulated by patron-client dynamics, backdoor agreements and conflicts. If factionalism at the top remains important in the appointment process of regional governors,

which became more integrated into the federal bureaucracy and less representative of regional interests, it has nonetheless significant consequences at the regional level as well. This inevitably affects the ability of the chief executive to build a coherent network of channels of communication and interaction with the regional elite.

As emphasized by the example of Basargin, beyond other things, at least two different factors affect the control and monopolization of the necessary political resources by the governor. One may be labelled as situational, related to changing dynamics in Moscow and the consequent problems which may emerge within the structures of the gubernatorial administration. As the series of arrests and problematic relations with law enforcement agencies (*siloviki*) appeared out of the control of the governor and rather dependent on the decision-making process at the federal and at the district levels (*polpred*).

The other factor looks more structural, namely the degree of fragmentation of the regional elite, which is affected by numerous elements among which the structure of the regional economy, consequently the quality and quantity of available resources to the regional elite. Thus, the consolidation of a power *vertikal'* and elite co-optation at the regional level, with the governor at the top of the pyramid, appears fragile and temporary, as illustrated by the institutionalization of an informal coalition opposing Basargin. Intra-elite configuration, in other words, appears an important factor in political machinery at the regional level, also negatively affecting the centralization and the vertical control of the party of power, United Russia. Furthermore, despite the concentration of formal powers in the hands of the governor as a consequence of the general re-centralization of federal relations, the regional elite remains capable to undermine these tools of control. The competition, however, is not channelled through formal institutions, such as elections and inter-party politics, but rather remains informal.

In a nutshell, despite many similarities between Perm Krai and Sverdlovsk, this chapter also shows how peculiar characteristics play an important and independent role. If elite fragmentation in Sverdlovsk took the form of city-region confrontation on the horizontal axis, the Perm example shows that city-region confrontation is not the only indicator of the degree of fragmentation of the regional elite. In Perm Krai, indeed, the abolition of municipal elections in 2010 and the incorporation of the municipal elite into the regional echelon of power did not prevent conflict from emerging in a different form, thus affecting also the unity of United Russia. Furthermore, the role of the former governors appears also different and dependent on the formal and informal status within the highest echelon of power. If in Sverdlovsk the influence of the former heavyweight governor,

Rossel', appears today marginal, in Perm Krai on the other hand, the role and weight of the former governor Trutnev is still an important variable in shaping intra-elite dynamics. Overall, if seen through this lens, differences and similarities in political issues and dynamics at the regional level might probably tell us more about the general character of federal relations in today's Russia.

Chapter 10 - Vertical and horizontal: the federal process in the guise of centralization

Introduction

Drawing on the material presented in the empirical section of this thesis, the final chapter provides an analysis of the two case studies by placing them in a broader context of the federal process in Russia. By comparing the cases of Sverdlovsk and Perm the first section of the chapter looks at the main differences able to explain the specific political outcome that characterised the political trajectory of Kuivashev and Basargin as appointed governors of the two regions. While displaying similar electoral results and support for the Russian president, indeed, Kuivashev was able to consolidate his own power base within the region while Basargin was not able to prevent a major split within the regional elite that ultimately undermined his personal position. The first section hence analyses the peculiarities of horizontal dynamics in the regions by looking at structural and contextual elements instrumental to the different path experienced by the two governors.

The second part of the chapter then extends the analysis to the rest of Russian governors. By drawing on original data concerning characteristics and biographies of the current Russian governors and all the 176 gubernatorial contests since 2012, this part investigates changes and continuities in the portrait of regional leaders. The chapter concludes by looking at the relationship between the institutionalization of informal mechanisms regulating the process of selection and appointment of governors and the increasing unpredictability and instability of the system emphasized by the shortening time horizon of regional leaders and lack of coherence in policy of the Kremlin.

Sverdlovsk, Perm and the federal process in Russia

Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai appear as two typical industrial regions of the Urals. Sverdlovsk is the centre of the Urals federal district, while Perm Krai is today the periphery, from a geographical and political point of view, of the bigger Volga federal district with the administrative centre located in Niznii Novgorod, almost one thousand kilometres to the West. The combined population of Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai is 7 million (4.3 million in Sverdlovsk and 2.6 million in Perm Krai), about 5% of the entire population of the Russian Federation and the vast majority live in urban areas (83% in Sverdlovsk and 75% in Perm Krai). Ekaterinburg is the fourth biggest city in Russia (1.45 million), a centre of a developing

financial sector and, until recently, progressive politics. Perm on the other hand, remains a typical industrial centre where almost half of the population of the entire Krai (1.05 million) lives. The vast majority of the population of both regions is ethnic Russian (87% in Perm Krai and 90% in Sverdlovsk).

Overall, from the economic point of view both regions are situated in the higher echelon of the Russian regions according to various indicators such as regional GDP. Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai also share a 'pluralist' economic structure. Their economies are based on a complex interaction between different interest groups and regional authorities for control and distribution of political preferences and rents (Bychkova and Gel'man, 2010). Also, this structural element was certainly functional to the consolidation of a plural and strong regional elite with a diversified spectrum of goals and interests (Podvintsev, 2009). Finally, Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai experienced similar trajectories after the departure of the so-called 'heavyweight' local governors. Both have seen an outsider without any previous experience in the region appointed as acting governor by the Kremlin in 2012. Moreover, as discussed in previous chapters, the appointment of both was coordinated and lobbied by the same 'sponsor' in Moscow, Sobyenin.

Beyond the success of the party of power

The case of Perm Krai and Sverdlovsk shows some important political tendencies in centre-periphery relations during the last period of centralization. The first is certainly the importance of informal and factionalist relations in regulating regional politics and centre-region interaction. Beyond the formal shell, indeed, relations between actors are often coordinated by personalistic bonds, backdoor agreements and conflicts at both levels of governance. If factionalism at the top is important in the appointment process of regional governors, which have become more and more integrated into the bureaucratic hierarchy, their stability and survival remains affected by conflict, tension and slow crystallization of alternative and informal centres of power at the regional level, obscured by the seemingly solidified vertical system of governance. Intra and inter-elite configuration, in other words, appears an important factor in political machinery at the regional level, affecting the centralization and the vertical control and the room for manoeuvring available to the regional elite.

The different fates of Basargin in Perm and Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk represents an example showing the importance of horizontal dynamics in regional politics and their impact on the relations between the centre and the regions, hence the federal process. In the

situation of ‘dual commitment’, even though the status, and partially the legitimacy, of the regional leaders depends on the decision-making process in Moscow, the ability of consolidating their position and dealing with conflicts and regional elite networks remain an important factor for the political trajectories of Russian governors in the context of ‘dual commitment’. While in Perm Krai three different governors have been appointed since 2012, Sverdlovsk did not experience any gubernatorial turnover in this timespan, showing an unexpected degree of consolidation of power and resources of the regional chief executive.

Despite their structural similarities, indeed, the leaders of these two regions experienced different political trajectories that cannot be explained by their ability to deliver favourable electoral results for the Kremlin. As demonstrated in chapters 7 and 9, since the beginning of the process of centralization both regions remain quite similar in their capacity of mobilizing support for the ‘party of power’ without major differences over time. Both are largely considered as examples of pluralist regions with competitive regional regimes unable to deliver overwhelming majorities for United Russia in times of elections (Petrov and Titkov, 2013). While the 2007 Duma elections represent an exceptional trend in line with nation-wide dynamics, when UR gained more than 60% in both constituencies (62.04% in Sverdlovsk and 62.06% in Perm Krai) with a similar trend in the overall turnout (60.58% in Sverdlovsk and 54.83% in Perm Krai), the situation changed in 2011. The ‘party of power’ was able to mobilize far less support with only 32.71% in Sverdlovsk and 36.30% in Perm Krai. As in previous elections, both regions preserved a similar trend not only in UR support, but also in the turnout level with Sverdlovsk being slightly lower than Perm (51.15% vs 48.00%). These dynamics remained similar in 2016, the period under examination in chapters 7 and 9, with electoral results of UR slightly skewed in favour of Perm Krai, with 42.70% vis à vis 40.53% in Sverdlovsk. In both regions the turnout remained lower than the national average, but this time Sverdlovsk performed better on this parameter (41.88% vs 35.17% in Perm). As discussed in chapter 9, the difference in turnout can be explained by the extremely conflictual electoral campaign in Perm emphasizing a major rift within the regional branch of United Russia.

In the 2021 Duma elections, characterized by significant inroads made by the Communists and the declining performance of United Russia at the national level, again Sverdlovsk and Perm remained quite similar in terms of electoral results and in line with previously consolidated trends. In both regions UR gained less than 35% of support (34.70% in Sverdlovsk and 33.60% in Perm Krai), consistent with the general electoral performance of the party across the Russian Federation. Both improved in terms of turnout as well,

although Sverdlovsk again performed almost 10% better than Perm (48.50% vs 39.00%) most likely because of the new change in the leadership in Perm Krai as the successor of Basargin, Reshetnikov has been in turn replaced in January 2020 by an independent candidate previously affiliated with the liberal party (Yabloko), Dmitrii Makhonin.

Furthermore, even when analysing regional performance in presidential elections, the pattern in Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai appears very similar. Since Putin's first election in March 2000, the difference between the score in the two regions was bigger than 3 points only once, in 2004 (76.34% in Sverdlovsk and 72.75% in Perm).¹³⁶ Overall, in all the remaining four presidential elections the difference of the results for Putin (and Medvedev in 2008) was lower than 2%, with Perm Krai outperforming Sverdlovsk in 2018 (75.35% vs 74.60%).

Table 12: Results in presidential elections

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sverdlovsk</i>	<i>Perm Krai</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>National</i>
2018	74.6	75.35	-0.75	77.5
2012	64.5	62.94	1.56	64.3
2008	68.98	67.3	1.68	71.2
2004	76.34	72.75	3.59	71.9
2000	62.75	60.78	1.97	53.4

Source: Central Election Commission of Russia
<http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom>

Hence, a strong argument could be made that beyond the electoral results other distinct and interrelated factors shaped the contours of federal relations affecting the different regional political trajectories and the decision-making process at the federal level. One can include the legacy of a particular impact of the regional political regimes built by local regional leaders in the period of political and economic transition in the 1990s, the specific constellation of economic interests and groups, the structure of intra-regional networks, the particular leadership style of the governors and the interaction between regional key players and influential actors at the federal level. All these elements played an important role in shaping the space for manoeuvring of the head executive and the regional elite, hence the political trajectories of the two governors and their ability to consolidate their political leadership within Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai.

¹³⁶ In Perm this was also the last presidential election held before the official amalgamation of Perm Oblast and Komi-Permyak autonomous okrug in December 2005. The referendum on the merger was held in December 2003, hand in hand with the Duma elections.

One important difference remains the composition and type of economic actors within the regional milieu. Even though both regions are characterized by a pluralist economic structure, with different groups competing for resources and power, in Perm the dominant role is played by oil and gas giants such as Lukoil and Gazprom. In Sverdlovsk, on the other hand, despite the diversification and expansion of resources and interest beyond regional boundaries, the economic field is dominated by regional corporations with much less reach and influence at the federal level. This structural difference played an important role in the development of regional politics and consolidation of a specific type of regional regime during the period of transition with long-lasting consequences on local dynamics.

The former governor of Sverdlovsk, Rossel', was indeed able to expand his personal network encompassing main economic players. Furthermore, the governor's support proved to be central in the consolidation of the main corporations and economic groups in a period of transition to market capitalism and weakly enforced property rights across Russia (Startsev, 1999). In other words, relying on the support of local businessmen and acting as a hub for regional corporations, Rossel' was able to play a central role, mediating between different economic interests. This would allow him to erect political and economic barriers, insulating the region from the influence of the federal centre and economic penetration of federal corporations.

In Perm Krai, on the other hand, the relationship between oil giants with significant regional interests and the regional administration developed differently. The federal nature of interests and tools of Lukoil and Gazprom and their overwhelming political and economic resources and ties with key actors in Moscow played an important role in preventing the executive from monopolizing the control on the regional polity and become a centre of the regional network. On the contrary, regional politics remained fluid with several competing factions and interests, that played an important role, as described in chapter 9, in shaping the political trajectories of the region since the election of Trutnev in 2000.

Thus, while in Perm Krai the beginning of the 2000s was characterized by the active involvement of regional business in politics, regional corporations in Sverdlovsk did not compete directly for political power, but rather remained in the background using their resources to influence indirectly the regional executive. Rossel' was indeed able to maintain his position and be re-elected for a third term in 2003 not only thanks to a strategic manoeuvring with the centre and United Russia, but also because his role was deemed central to preserve the balance between different interest of the big regional business.

In Perm, on the other hand, gubernatorial elections in the early 2000s became an arena for the competition between different economic groups that emerged in the early 1990s during the period of privatization. Trutnev and Chirkunov, business partners and both governors of the Krai between 2000 and 2012, made their fortune in the regional retail business becoming successful businessmen before starting their political career (Borisova, 2011). In the early 2000s among other things, political power became a tool to protect personal economic interests against rivals while federal corporations played the role of power brokers and their indirect situational support remained crucial for any governor.

Overall, the direct involvement in politics of regional businessmen significantly influenced the future development of regional regimes in Perm and Sverdlovsk contributing to the differences in the level of institutionalization and consolidation of regional networks and their relations with federal players. In Perm Krai the constellation of political and business interests remained fluid and the main conflict emerged between interest groups with differentiated economic interests, ties to Lukoil and Gazprom and relations with actors and 'sponsors' in Moscow. In Sverdlovsk, on the contrary, the constellation of actors remained structured around the region-city divide that emerged as the main vector of intra-elite conflict already under Rossel'. Thus, the different political trajectories of the two governors outsiders appointed in 2012 can be explained by the uneven impact of regional political dynamics.

As emphasized in chapter 7, in a context of political and economic centralization the region-city conflict and the opposition to the governor remained weakly institutionalized within the framework of formal regional level institutions. Although the informal opposition led by Tungusov and the elections of Roizman as mayor of Ekaterinburg, were initially serious challenges to Kuivashev, these elite groups were not able to build a consolidated anti-governor coalition. First, their power base remained fragmented and mainly concentrated in Ekaterinburg. Despite his clout within the city council, Tungusov could not rely on strong influence within the regional assembly, beyond a few members of his network integrated into the structure of the dominant party (UR). Further, the pragmatic position of the regional corporations and oligarchs, supporting regional stability and the governor appointed by the federal centre, proved to be an important factor in the consolidation of Kuivashev's position in Sverdlovsk. Finally, neither Roizman (for obvious reasons) nor Tungusov could rely on important bonds with actors at the federal level. The long-standing leader of the Ekaterinburg elite remained mostly a figure of regional significance, unable to mobilize important links in Moscow. Thus, in the context of the municipal reform devised by the

federal centre, despite the growing tension Kuivashev was able to co-opt Tungusov and his faction, integrating and marginalizing their ability to challenge the executive.

In Perm Krai the fluidity of economic interests and groups made the constellation of actors more diffuse and less structured. This deeply ingrained pluralism of regional elite far beyond any institutional carapace allowed the institutionalization of a broad ad-hoc coalition challenging the new governor. The informal group led by Skrivanov, indeed, did not represent a consolidated elite network, but rather a temporary coalition between different interest groups. Given its blurred contours, this situational coalition was able to consolidate an institutional base in the regional assembly attracting members on a cross-party level. Moreover, differently from the Tungusov faction in Ekaterinburg that was not able to mobilize important personalities in Moscow, Skrivanov in Perm could rely on important ties within the highest echelon of federal politics, specifically the former governor and currently Deputy Prime Minister, Trutnev. After his departure from the region, Trutnev became an important member of the federal elite, yet he remained one of the most influential regional players with a significant resource advantage gathered during the time in office and a reference point for members of the local elite. Rossel' on the contrary after being replaced as the governor of Sverdlovsk was granted a period of 'golden retirement' as a senator in the Federation Council where he has served ever since. Far from being a political promotion, indeed, his regional influence and personal network in the region slowly crumbled, leaving the regional elite less consolidated and allowing more space for manoeuvring to the new governor.¹³⁷

Basargin vs Kuivashev: governors and agency

The final implication of the different trajectories of Kuivashev and Basargin is that in the context of informal institutionalization of the federal process and 'dual commitment', agency and political skills continue to play an important role in determining political outcomes. In Sverdlovsk the newly appointed governor had a significant advantage. Before his appointment in the region, he spent more than a year working within the structures of the office of the polpred for the Urals Federal District. In January 2011 he was appointed as the deputy polpred, while in September he took the post of Vinnichenko as the Plenipotentiary

¹³⁷ The role of the Trutnev's network in Perm Krai and its influence during the governorship of both, Chirkunov and Basargin as opposed to the members of regional elite close to Rossel' in Sverdlovsk has been the topic of discussion during several interviews conducted by the author with experts, political consultant and members of the regional parliaments.

Representative of the President. This allowed Kuivashev not only to familiarise himself with regional dynamics in Sverdlovsk, but also to start building working and personal relations with the main economic and political actors in the region, such as the local oligarchs like Kozitsyn, Pumpyanskii and Altushkin. The ability to establish balanced relations with the regional interest groups and the support of the local corporations during his first term proved to be all important elements in the conflictual relations with the city level elite represented by Tungusov.

In Perm Krai, by contrast, Basargin came as a total outsider and his appointment was largely perceived as a personal demotion. Between 2008 and 2012 he served as Minister of Regional Development and before that he spent 7 years (2001-2008) as deputy polpred in the Ural Federal District. His lack of any previous experience in the Volga federal district and Perm Krai made his debut on a regional scene and the consolidation of personal relations with influential local actors more complicated. This is clearly demonstrated by the erratic nature of his appointment strategy that relied mostly on bureaucrat outsiders and a series of reshuffles of the gubernatorial administration, with a clear attempt, proved to be unsuccessful, to undermine the influence of the previous governors' networks within the regional executive.

Overall, Basargin and Kuivashev because of their previous experience and background represent two different types of governors. The governor of Sverdlovsk is indeed a typical political careerist in contemporary Russia. Since the mid-1990s he worked at different levels of state administration, starting from various roles within the administration of Poikovskii municipal district in Khanty-Mansi AO before becoming the head of the same municipal unit in 2000. Later he was appointed as the head of the city of Tobolsk and then mayor of the regional capital Tyumen. Before becoming governor, in other words, Kuivashev had extensive political experience in a region, Tyumen, with a complex constellation of economic and political actors.

Basargin's career, on the other hand, resembles the typical path of a manager, rather than politician. After joining the Komsomol in late 1970s he worked as a head engineer in one of the industrial conglomerates in the Urals, before being appointed as the deputy head (and later head) of a regional branch of Federal Agency for State Property Management in early 1990s. He joined the team of the polpred for the Ural Federal District in early 2000s where he worked until the appointment as Minister of Regional Development in 2008. Throughout his career he was never involved in regional and city level politics. These differences in career path are thus likely to have shaped different skills and leadership styles

that, hand in hand with the differences in the local political dynamics, played an important role in determining their decisions and relations as governors and their contrasting political trajectories.

Different political styles and skills, indeed, might also account for the different approach in the process of regional elite management between Kuivashev and Basargin. Despite the fact that both appointed several loyalists and outsiders in their gubernatorial team at the beginning of their governorship, Kuivashev clearly chose a more cautious approach, avoiding the alienation of the autochthonous elite that an aggressive reshuffle could have caused in Sverdlovsk. Indeed, his appointment strategy changed once his position within the region appeared more stable and the region-city conflict under control, namely after the mostly successful campaign for 2016 Duma elections and after the beginning of his second term in 2017.

In conclusion, despite many similarities between Perm Krai and Sverdlovsk, distinctive characteristics play an important and independent role. Whereas elite fragmentation in Sverdlovsk took on the feature of city-region confrontation on the horizontal axis, the Perm example shows that city-region confrontation is not the only indicator of the degree of fragmentation. In Perm Krai, indeed, the incorporation of the municipal elite into the regional echelon of power did not prevent conflict from emerging in a different form. The role of the old regional elite appears also different and dependent on the dense network of informal access and protection at the central level. If in Sverdlovsk the influence of the former heavyweight governor, Rossel', appears today marginal, in Perm Krai on the other hand, the weight of the former governor Trutnev (and partially Chirkunov) is still an important variable in shaping the intra-elite dynamics and alignments.

Thus, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the comparison between Perm Krai and Sverdlovsk underlines all the complexities of the institutionalization of informal rules of the game in the federal process. While vertical forces shape the contours of federal relations, the horizontal dimension remains the focal point of the process leading to an ample range of possible outcomes.

Between chaos and control: the changing portrait of Russian governors

More broadly, the type and characteristic of Russian governors today and the increasing gubernatorial turnover since 2016 reflect some of the tendencies in the federal process emphasized by the analysis of case studies. The federal process and elite management system remain affected by the interaction between centralizing and vertical forces tamed by

horizontal and factional dynamics. As a product of backdoor agreement and bargaining between different influential groups, newly appointed governors, indeed, had different background, characteristics and tools of control and the process of adaptation is different. Once appointed, their personal ties to influential ‘sponsors’ in the centre affect their policies and, above all, the ability to establish effective control over the regions and deal with the regional elite. In turn, competition for power and conflicts at the regional level made the Kremlin’s policy even more erratic, with chances of being replaced by governors that are unable to consolidate the regional elite increasing over time. Not surprisingly, if between 2012 and 2016 (included) the average number of newly appointed governors per year was around 9, starting from 2017 up to 2021 it increased to 14.¹³⁸

Since the re-introduction of elections in 2012 up to April 2022, there have been 153 gubernatorial races and on 23 occasions governors were appointed (or reappointed) by regional parliaments through the procedure allowing regions to avoid popular elections. Overall, among these 176 gubernatorial contests (either elections or regional parliaments’ vote), a total number of 105 incumbents have been replaced. Out of 85 regions (including the unrecognized Crimea and Sevastopol), half (43) experienced at least one wave of gubernatorial turnover, about one in four regions (22) had at least two rounds of gubernatorial replacement, while in six cases the governor has been replaced three times in the last 10 years. The average period in power for those governors that have been appointed and replaced after the re-introduction of elections in 2012 is about 4 years.

¹³⁸ Data used here refers to the period following the re-introduction of elections in October 2012. It should be noted that just before turning to the election system, between January and June 2012, the Kremlin replaced several governors (19).

Table 13: Gubernatorial turnover, 2012-2021

<i>Turnover per region</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Total regions</i>
0	Chechnya, Chukotka AO, Rostov Oblast', Moscow City, Khanty-Mansi AO, Tatarstan, Karachai-Cherkessiya, Vologda Oblast', Smolensk Oblast', Sverdlovsk Oblast', Kostroma Oblast', Leningrad Oblast', Saratov Oblast', Tomsk Oblast'	14
1	Moscow Oblast', Stavropol Krai, Volgograd Oblast', Republic of Crimea, Bryansk Oblast', Krasnodar Krai, Tula Oblast', Tver Oblast', Kaliningrad Oblast', Kirov Oblast', Buryatia, Novgorod Oblast', Ryazan' Oblast', Karelia Republic, Mari El Republic, Adygeya Republic, Samara Oblast', Nizhnii Novgorod Oblast', Omsk Oblast', Pskov Oblast', Kemerovo Oblast', Voronezh Oblast', Tyumen Oblast', Sakha Republic - Yakutiya, Altai Krai, Khakassia Republic, Yamalo-Nenets AO, Lipetsk Oblast', Saint Petersburg, Kursk Oblast', Bashkortostan Republic, Altai Republic, Kalmykia Republic, Orenburg Oblast', Murmansk Oblast', Ingushetiya Republic, Chuvashia Republic, Kaluga Oblast', Arkhangelsk Oblast', Kamchatka Krai, Mordoviya Republic, Tyva Republic, Ulyanovsk Oblast'	43
2	Tambov Oblast', Yaroslavl Oblast', Astrakhan Oblast', Belgorod Oblast', Magadan, Ivanovo Oblast', Kabardino-Balkaria, Chelyabinsk Oblast', Kurgan Oblast', Udmurtiya Republic, Oryol Oblast', Novosibirsk Oblast', Krasnoyarsk Krai, Jewish Autonomous Oblast', Sakhalin Oblast', Amur Oblast', Irkutsk Oblast', Penza Oblast', Komi Republic, Perm Krai, Primorskii Krai, Khabarovsk Krai	22
3	Vladimir Oblast', Zabaikalskii Krai, Dagestan Republic, Nenets AO, Sevastopol, North Ossetia–Alania	6

Source: Author's dataset

Among the governors in power in April 2022, only 14 had been appointed before the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections, keeping their post throughout this period.¹³⁹ The majority of them were appointed during Medvedev's presidency, between 2010 (like the mayor of Moscow Sobyanin and the Head of Tatarstan, Minnikhanov) and 2012 (like Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk, Radaev in Saratov and Drozdenko in Leningrad), just before the re-introduction of elections. With the recent departure of Savchenko in Belgorod and Tuleev in Kemerovo, who came to office before Putin was elected as president in 2000, the longest-serving governor was Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya followed by Roman Kopin in Chukotka, the former protégé of Abramovich, appointed respectively in 2007 and 2008. Thus, only 8 incumbent governors in 2022 remained in office for more than 10 years. The majority of acting governors in 2022 were appointed between 2018 and 2019, eighteen and fifteen respectively.

Table 14: Regions with no gubernatorial turnover, 2012-2021

<i>Region</i>	<i>Governor/Head</i>	<i>Term Starts</i>	<i>Year(s) of re-election</i>	<i>Term Ends</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Type</i>
Chechnya	Ramzan Kadyrov	2007	2016; 2021	2026	UR	Local
Chukotka Okrug	Roman Kopin	2008	2013; 2018	2023	UR	Varyag
Rostov Oblast'	Vasilii Golubev	2010	2015; 2020	2025	UR	Varyag
Moscow City	Sergei Sobyanin	2010	2013; 2018	2023	UR	Varyag
Khanty-Mansi AO	Natal'ya Komarova	2010	2015; 2020	2025	UR	Varyag
Tatarstan	Rustam Minnikhanov	2010	2015; 2020	2025	UR	Local
Karachai-Cherkessiya	Rashid Temrezov	2011	2016; 2021	2026	UR	Local
Vologda Oblast'	Oleg Kuvshinnikov	2011	2014; 2019	2024	UR	Local
Smolensk Oblast'	Aleksei Ostrovskii	2012	2015; 2020	2025	LDPR	Varyag
Sverdlovsk Oblast'	Evghenii Kuivashev	2012	2017	2022	UR	Varyag
Kostroma Oblast'	Sergei Sitnikov	2012	2015; 2020	2025	UR	Local
Leningrad Oblast'	Aleksandr Drozdenko	2012	2015; 2020	2025	UR	Local
Saratov Oblast'	Valerii Radaev	2012	2017	2022	UR	Local
Tomsk Oblast'	Sergei Zhvachkin	2012	2017	2022	UR	Local

Source: Author's dataset

In terms of their background, previous experience and embeddedness in their regions the 85 current governors represent an increasingly heterogeneous group. Less than half of them (41) can be considered today as classical politicians, with a strong previous political

¹³⁹ Sergei Aksenov could be counted as the fifteenth. He became the Head of Crimea in 2014 when the peninsula was annexed by Russia. In April 2022 he was still the Head of the republic.

experience either at the regional or federal level. If compared with previous empirical accounts (Petrov, 2011; Kynev, 2020a), this group is decreasing, reflecting the managerial approach of the Kremlin and the influence of horizontal forces in the appointment process.

Another, growing, category is represented indeed by the so-called ‘young technocrats’, usually without any previous political experience and with a managerial background linked to private business or prominent roles in state agencies and Ministries. They are usually appointed after a probation period either as deputy ministers or within the gubernatorial administration at the regional level.

This group includes today 20 governors, all of them appointed after 2016, when Kirienko became the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the PA. The only exception is Vladimir Vladimirov appointed in 2014 as the governor of Stavropol Krai and a longstanding manager in the energy sector who worked for Lukoil and Gazprom before becoming deputy governor of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (under governor Kobylkin). There are some governors (5) that may be categorized as ‘representatives of big corporations’. Although similar to the category of technocrats in terms of their lack of previous political experience, the background of governors included in this group is clearly linked to a corporation or a private business, like Igor Artamonov governor of Lipetsk since 2018 and previously vice-president of Sberbank. Another example is Vasilii Orlov appointed as governor of Amur in 2018. His background is tied to SIBUR the largest petrochemicals company in Russia linked to the influential figure of Timchenko.¹⁴⁰

There is also a hybrid category (12) with a diverse background including businessmen-politicians, that started their political career as successful owners of important companies, such as Oleg Kozhemyako in Primorskii Krai, and former siloviki like Bezdudnyi in Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Rudenya in Tver. The common trait of these regional leaders is their significant political or managerial experience before being appointed as acting governors. Finally, although their number decreased if compared with the past, when a larger number of regional leaders were members of law enforcement agencies without any previous political experience, seven of current governors are representatives of the group of siloviki. Beyond Sergei Melikov in Dagestan and Sergei Manyailo in North-Ossetia, a paradigmatic example is Aleksei Dyumin, appointed as governor of Tula in 2016. Dyumin served in the presidential security services since late 1990s before becoming Deputy Head of the Main

¹⁴⁰ For the role and influence of Timchenko and the political trajectory of the former governor Kobylkin, see Chapter 5.

Intelligence Directorate - GRU (2014-2015) and Head of Russian Ground Forces (2015-2016).

As discussed in chapter 5, the increasing tension within the vertical system of command and the unpredictable approach of the centre shaped by horizontal dynamics is emphasized by the growing number of outsiders included in the group of Russian governors. Out of 105 newly appointed governors since 2012 more than half are varyags (58, making the 55% of the total), without any previous experience in the region they were parachuted into. The general trend of appointing an outsider became dominant after 2016. If between 2012 and 2016, on average, the proportion of outsiders in newly appointed governors was about 37%, between 2016 and 2021 varyags represented about 61%. In 2016 and 2019 the largest proportion of outsider governors were appointed, respectively 6 out of 8 and 8 out of 10. Today out of 85 acting governors 53 can be considered varyags, more than 62% of the total.

Table 15: Share of varyags among newly appointed governors, 2012-2021¹⁴¹

<i>Year</i>	<i>N. of replaced governors</i>	<i>N. of Varyags</i>	<i>Share of Varyags</i>	<i>Number of Elections</i>	<i>Including non-elections</i>
2012	1	1	100%	5	5
2013	7	3	43%	8	10
2014	11	4	36%	30	33
2015	9	3	33%	21	24
2016	8	6	75%	7	9
2017	20	13	65%	16	17
2018	20	8	40%	23	27
2019	10	8	80%	16	19
2020	12	8	67%	18	20
2021	7	4	57%	9	12
Total	105	58		153	176

Source: Author's dataset

Varyags however represent a heterogeneous group. Some of them (5) were born in the region of their appointment but built their career either in other regions or at the federal level, without establishing any link with the regional elite. For instance, Menyailo appointed as the Head of North Ossetia–Alania although originally from the North Caucasus republic, did not have any previous experience within the region. He left North Ossetia in the late 1970s

¹⁴¹ Data refers to the period starting from the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections in October 2012

before starting his military career in the Northern Fleet. He would later become the first governor of Sevastopol after the annexation of Crimea. The practice of appointing practically outsiders but who were born in the region is more widespread in the ethnic republics of North Caucasus (Zhemukhov, 2018). Another example is indeed Melikov in Dagestan.

Others (4), even though without any connection to the region, had a short probation period before being appointed as acting governors. The paradigmatic example is Alikhanov in Kaliningrad. He was parachuted into the region a year before his appointment, becoming the PM of the regional government between 2015 and 2016, the year of his appointment. Another example is Kopin in Chukotka. A close associate of the former governor, Abramovich, he first arrived in the region along with the tycoon in 2001, holding several posts within the regional administration. As Abramovich retired from politics in 2008, he was promoted as the Head of the region. Despite these differences, however, the vast majority of outsiders (44) today do not have any real previous experience in the region they are leading.

In terms of their previous career path, varyags also represent a heterogeneous group. Out of 53 outsiders, 29 are currently former federal level officials. These include some of the technocrats or siloviki appointed directly from the ministerial level like Aleksei Tsydenov in Buryatia (Deputy Minister of Transportation, 2012-2017), Stanislav Voskresenskii in Ivanovo (Deputy Minister of Economic Development, 2014-2017), Gleb Nikitin in Nizhnii Novgorod (Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, 2012-2017), Aleksandr Osipov in Zabaikalskii Krai (Deputy Minister of Development of the Far East, 2013-2018) and Igor Kobzev in Irkutsk (Deputy Minister of Emergency Situations, 2018-2019). Also, there are several former deputies from the State Duma and Federation Council like Andrei Vorob'ev in Moscow Oblast', Natal'ya Komarova in Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and Nikolai Lyubimov in Ryazan. The majority of the few varyags from the systemic opposition are also included in this category like Aleksei Ostrovskii in Smolensk (LDPR) Aleksandr Burkov in Omsk (JR), Mikhail Degtyarev in Khabarovsk Krai (LDPR) and Aleksei Russkikh in Ulyanovsk (CPRF). Finally, there are several outsiders coming from important posts within state agencies like Igor Vasil'ev in Kirov (Head of the Federal Service for State Registration, 2014-2016), Andrei Nikitin in Novgorod (Director of Agency for Strategic Initiatives, 2011-2017) and Mikhail Evraev (Deputy head of the Federal Antimonopoly Service, 2018-2021).

Another group (13 out of 53) consists of varyags previously serving in another region. Clear evidence of a weakening institutional role of governors, their incorporation into the administrative hierarchy and the role of horizontal dynamics between different influential

elite groups in the federal process is indeed the growing practice of appointment of important regional figures as governors of other regions, like Viktor Tomenko in Altai Krai (former PM of the Krasnoyarsk Krai government, 2011-2018), Sergei Nosov in Magadan (Mayor of Nizhnii Tagil, 2012-2018), Artem Zdunov in Mordoviya (PM of Dagestan, 2018-2020, previously Minister of Economy in Tatarstan, 2014-2018) and several others. This practice, which became more widespread after 2016, has several implications. In some cases it represents a clear attempt to demobilize regional elite and disrupt the emergence of alternative poles of power, like in the case of Nosov, and Denis Pasler in Sverdlovsk discussed in chapter 7.¹⁴²

In other cases the horizontal movement of cadres is a clear expression of factional dynamics. An example is the 2019 appointment of Vadim Shumkov as the governor of Kurgan. Shumkov is reputed to be an associate of the sub-network organised around the mayor of Moscow, Sobyanin, and he spent his previous career working within the gubernatorial administration in Tyumen (Sobyanin's stronghold). Another example is Vladimir Solodov in Kamchatka who is considered as a close associate of Trutnev, the former governor of Perm Krai and currently Deputy Prime Minister of Russia and polpred to the Far Eastern Federal District. Before his appointment in Kamchatka Solodov was Prime Minister of Sakha Republic in the Far Eastern district (2018-2020) and deputy polpred under Trutnev in the same federal district (2015-2018). In this group, only two incumbents were serving as governors in another region before their appointment, Oleg Kozhemyako in Primorskii Krai (governor since 2008 first in Amur until 2015 and then in Sakhalin until 2018) and Aleksandr Tsybul'skii in Arkhangelsk (Governor of Nenets Autonomous Okrug, 2018-2020).

Finally, four current outsiders before becoming governors worked within the polpred network. Two of them were presidential representative, Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk (polpred to the Ural Federal District, 2011-2012) and Menyailo in North Ossetia–Alania (polpred to the Siberian Federal District, 2016-2021). Other four varyags were appointed directly from a managerial post in business or big corporations like the already mentioned Artamonov and Pasler.

The data presented above integrates the material discussed in the analysis of the case studies in previous chapters. It provides further evidence indicating that the process of

¹⁴² Pasler is not officially included in this group. After leaving the post of PM in Sverdlovsk in 2016 he spent 3 years working as a manager in T-Plus, an electricity generation company part of the Renova Group controlled by Vekselberg. In March 2019 he was appointed as governor of Orenburg.

appointment of Russian governors is shaped by different trends and incentives that affect the role of regional leaders within their constituencies and general trends in centre-region relations more broadly. The heterogeneous type and characteristics of governors, along with the accelerated turnover ultimately reflect an ad hoc, risk aversion strategy adopted by the federal centre, rather than a long-term coherent approach aimed at the institutionalization of a clear pattern of the federal process. The increasing incoherence in multi-level governance thus reduces capacity for vertical transmission leaving ample space for the operation of horizontal forces at both levels. The changing portrait of Russian governors, indeed, indicates the importance of informal network dynamics and their effect on the general structure of centre-region interaction.

Unpredictability and the problem of mechanical control

Far from being a strategic and coherent design of centre-region relations, the federal process is characterized by intuitive, ad-hoc decision that in many cases lack consistency and coherence in the process of implementation. The increasing turnover, the growing number of outsiders appointed in key regions and the decline of governors 'politicians' are all paradigmatic elements emphasizing the fluctuation of Kremlin's policy toward the periphery. Not surprisingly in a period of ten years six regions have experienced gubernatorial turnover three times, which means that they have been ruled by four different governors, and twenty-two experienced gubernatorial turnover twice (with three different governors leading the region in ten years timespan). As discussed in chapter 5, the process of nomination and appointment, tightly controlled by the centre despite the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections, remains deeply rooted in factional dynamics and intra-elite bargaining and clientelism. This contributes to the lack of coherence in the federal process and the prominence of the approach emphasizing 'manual control' of the regions.

Decisions concerning the appointment of governors remained inconsistent with formal rules of the game and varied across time and space. Over the last ten years same regions experimented the appointment of completely different types of governors. For instance, in Zabaikalskii Krai Konstantin Il'kovskii, an outsider from Sakha with strong connections to the gas sector was replaced by a long-standing member of the local political elite and member of UR, Natal'ya Zhdanova. After only three years in office, Zhdanova was in turn replaced by a young technocrat without previous links to the region and officially without party affiliation that served as a Deputy Minister of Development of the Far East, Aleksei Osipov. In other cases in regions with a similar economic and political situation the

final decision was diametrically contrary, as the cases of Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai aptly demonstrates. Even the wave of appointment of the so-called technocrats that according to some analysts recently became the driving force of the Kremlin's strategy (Vinokurov, 2020), remained susceptible to factional and political considerations and did not yet translate in a coherent policy. Although the share of technocrats indeed increased since 2016, as suggested by the data presented above, up to April 2022 it represented only the 27% of the total number of 69 newly appointed governors in this period.

In conditions of institutionalization of informality and horizontal forces, a mechanical attempt to ensure the stability of the vertical axis and strengthening the connection between federal and regional governance is represented by the promotion of highly embedded governors to the higher echelon of the federal hierarchy. The two main examples, discussed in this work, are the former governor of Perm Krai, Trutnev, and the former governor of Tyumen, Sobyenin. Both of them are today important federal level players with their own sub-networks, interest and influence at the subnational level extending beyond regions of origin.¹⁴³ These cases, however, remain rare and based on the specific constellation of intra-elite dynamics, while the majority of governors, even when promoted, hardly reach positions beyond a deputy ministerial level.

The absence of a clear pattern of the appointment system had important consequences for governors and regional politics more broadly. The rules of the game regulating the federal process are far from clear and the evaluation of their performance by the centre remains opaque and shaped by political considerations and horizontal dynamics that forces both federal interest groups and governors 'to engage in seemingly constant recalibrations and improvisations' (Hale, Lipman and Petrov, 2019, p. 171). A clear example of these zigzags and the dual role of formal and informal practices in the federal process is represented by the inconsistency of the formal performance criteria of evaluation of governors. A series of 43 criteria measuring social and economic performance of governors were first introduced in June 2007 by the Presidential Decree N.825.¹⁴⁴ The document was later amended in May 2010 with the introduction of 5 additional criteria that made the total number of distinct indicators equal to 319 according to which the Kremlin could evaluate

¹⁴³ The other two former governors that in 2022 were Ministers of the RF are Aleksandr Kozlov (former governor of Amur, 2015-18) and Maksim Reshetnikov (former governor of Perm Krai, 2017-2020). According to the analysis of their biographies and several sources the former can be included in the Trutnev network, while the latter in the Sobyenin's.

¹⁴⁴ The Presidential Decree 'On the evaluation of the effectiveness of executive authorities in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation' was signed on 28th of June 2007. The document is available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/25729>

the performance of regional chief executives and make decisions concerning appointments and promotions. As demonstrated by Rochlitz et al (2015), however, even during appointment period (2005-2012) these indicators were rarely able to predict the fate of the governors. Due to their complexity, indeed, they were soon replaced (August 2012) by a new set of 12 indicators, but in practice were never used as in October of the same year gubernatorial elections were re-introduced.

The last attempt of institutionalization of formal rules for the governors was introduced in 2018 by the new First Deputy Chief of Staff of the PA, Kirienko. Beyond socio-economic indicators such as labour productivity, education and poverty rate, the most important element among the 20 new indicators were the approval ratings of the president and the governor (Latukhina, 2021). In the context of volatility of formal rules, however, informal and opaque evaluation process remained at the centre of the system of appointments.

As demonstrated by the cases of Perm Krai and Sverdlovsk, both sharing over time similar indicators in terms of electoral performance in parliamentary and presidential elections, hand in hand with the ability of vote mobilization other factors such as political connections and specificities of regional dynamics remain today the key drivers of gubernatorial stability. Governors indeed remain trapped in the conundrum of ‘dual commitment’, on the one hand the unpredictable policy of the centre and the importance of personal and factional links for the appointment, while on the other hand the bottom-up pressure of consolidated regional elite groups and networks. As the cases of Perm Krai and Sverdlovsk demonstrate, even delivering electoral results favourable to the Kremlin appear not always enough to guarantee the stability of governors in a context of conflict and tension within the region.

The tactic of situational manoeuvring that makes the centre policy towards the regions less coherent and predictable is further emphasized by the constantly changing relations between co-optation and coercion and between the Kremlin and the systemic opposition in a context of endogenous and exogenous pressure. For instance, since 2015 beyond an increasing number of cases involving members of the gubernatorial administration, six governors were arrested while serving their term in office on charges of bribery and misuse of public funds, reflecting the weakening position of the governors within the system. Specifically, Vyacheslav Gaizer in Komi (2015), Aleksandr Khoroshavin in Sakhalin (2015), Nikita Belykh in Kirov (2016), Aleksandr Solov'ev in Udmurtiya (2017), Sergei Furgal in Khabarovsk (2020), and Ivan Belozertsev in Penza (2021). Interestingly,

before 2015 there are no such examples, as cases of criminal proceedings against regional leaders were usually initiated well after their resignation or dismissal.¹⁴⁵

Concerning the systemic opposition, while as a tactic of spoils distribution parties represented in the State Duma were allowed to preserve some formal gubernatorial posts, since the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections, only few candidates not sanctioned by the Kremlin were able to win gubernatorial elections. While the victory of the Communist Levchenko in Irkutsk in 2015 was the first case, in 2018 other three candidates from the systemic opposition were able to defeat the incumbents in Khakassia, Vladimir and Khabarovsk Krai. The response of the centre, however, was erratic, depending on the configuration of regional forces and horizontal dynamics at the federal level. If in Khakassia Valentin Konovalov was able to preserve his post without major political conflicts, the case of Irkutsk and Khabarovsk are illustrative of the intuitive and ad-hoc decision-making process that changes over time.

In Irkutsk the Communist candidate Levchenko capitalized on the opposition to the municipal reform and on the endorsement of regional economic and financial interest groups, afraid of losing control over the financial flows controlled by the administration of the regional capital, similarly to what happened in Sverdlovsk. His victory did not represent, initially, a major challenge for the Kremlin. Member of the old Communist *nomenklatura*, Levchenko was indeed the old member of the systemic opposition reputed to play according to consolidated informal rules between the Kremlin and the CPRF. Relying on a popular mandate and support of regional elite the new governor was able to consolidate his position in Irkutsk refraining from challenging directly the policy of the centre. For instance, the opposition to the municipal reform withered as soon as the new governor assumed office (Eremenko, 2015).

The period of peaceful coexistence, however, did not last much in a context of increasing tension between the Kremlin and CPRF in Moscow. While earlier the CPRF was rarely prevented from competing in gubernatorial elections, after 2018 the party began to encounter more problems in registering its candidates. Out of 43 gubernatorial races between 2019 and 2021, ten Communist candidates (23%) were prevented from running by the 'municipal filter'.

¹⁴⁵ For example, Yurchenko in Novosibirsk, Denin in Briansk, Men' in Ivanovo, Yurevich in Chelyabinsk, Markelov in Mari El and others.

Levchenko came under increasing pressure from federal authorities, especially after he announced his intention of running for a second term in the 2020 elections. In 2019 one of his ministers was arrested for illegal logging while his son was detained and charged with embezzlement. When a massive flood hit the region, the CPRF governor was forced to resign. The appointment of a new governor came as a surprise for observers and the regional branch of United Russia alike. While the local 'party of power' lobbied Sergei Sokol, the speaker of the regional parliament reputed to have close ties to the powerful Head of Rostec Chemezov, the final decision was made in favour of Igor Kobzev, a silovik without any previous experience in Irkutsk.¹⁴⁶ Kobzev ran as independent in one of the most competitive races since 2018 and the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections more broadly, gaining 60.8% in the first round. By comparison, between 2012 and 2021 in 153 gubernatorial elections only 21 candidates supported by the Kremlin scored less than 60% (including the four defeated by the opposition). The average score for the winner in all the gubernatorial races in the timeframe is 73%. The results slightly increase when taking into consideration only elections in which a new interim had been appointed before the race (73.5%).

While Levchenko was informally forced to resign and the new interim represented a neutral figure in Irkutsk, in another region where the opposition was able to defeat the candidate supported by the Kremlin, Khabarovsk Krai, the situation developed differently. After less than two years in power, the leader of the local LDPR and governor, Sergei Furgal, was arrested in July 2020. The sudden arrest of the popularly elected regional leader caused an unprecedented protest wave that lasted several months. In contrast to the case of Irkutsk, the newly appointed interim was Mikhail Degtyarev, an outsider but from the same opposition party (LDPR) of Furgal. Although the appointment of the new governor from the same party might have represented another example of the tactic of spoils distribution to the systemic opposition and an attempt to appease the leadership of the LDPR after the brutal dismissal of a popularly elected governor, it also exposed all the problems and complexities of Moscow's dominance and control over regions. In 2021 elections, despite the unofficial support of United Russia and the ban of the most popular candidate from the Communist Party, the new interim was able to win by only a small margin scoring 56.8% in the first round of gubernatorial election. Furthermore, in Duma elections held the same day Khabarovsk Krai was the region in which UR scored the worst result across Russian regions (24.5%) overtaken by the CPRF (26.5%) that became the first party in the Krai.

¹⁴⁶ Notably, Chemezov was born in Irkutsk and preserves close ties with some members of the regional elite.

Beyond the inconsistency and unpredictability of the centre's tactics, however, what the cases of Irkutsk and Khabarovsk Krai show is the major paradox deeply ingrained in the federal process. The fight against regional autonomy in the process of centralization is fought through mechanical and flexible tools deeply affected by horizontal forces at both levels of governance. Paradoxically, this fight for control came to undermine the stability of the federal process it was tasked to achieve. In other words, the hybridity of the system and the interaction between the power vertical' and 'power horizontal' appear unable to ensure long-term stability in the federal process. Rather, it represents a short-term solution that remain susceptible to internal and external circumstances and intra-elite competition. More broadly, as aptly emphasized by Sakwa (2020, p. 211), 'the fight for mechanical stability had become such a deeply ingrained reflex that it came to undermine stability'.

Conclusion

As the example of Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai shows, vertical and horizontal forces operating in the system of multi-level governance in Russia are bound together by the informal institutionalization of personal relations and networks. These groups and networks provide a bridge for the interaction between different political and economic interests encompassing different institutions and levels of governance. Far from being consolidated coalitions, however, the boundaries of these networks remain porous and prone to recalibration according to peculiar characteristics of the regional polity. Thus, structural and contextual elements play an important role in defining the political trajectory of regional leaders and their ability to consolidate their own power within the regional milieu. Beyond the support of powerful actors in Moscow, an essential element in the appointment process, political skills of the governors remain crucial to navigate through the turbulences of regional politics.

Informal practices and their constant interaction with formal institutions are thus the central part of the operation of the federal process. The process of political re-centralization relied mostly on informal and unwritten rules allowing the erection of sophisticated tools of vertical control of the centre over the subnational level. On the other hand, however, by resting on informal practices and tools of mechanical control emphasized by the process of gubernatorial appointments and fluctuation in the turnover and group composition of regional leaders, the system remained unstable and unpredictable. This deeply ingrained reflex in the Russian federal process, despite the formal reconfiguration of the state since the beginning of the 2000s, contributed to undermining the effectiveness of the vertical axis, with much less evident capacity for the centre to control regional dynamics and actors.

Chapter 11 - Conclusions

The objective of this thesis has been to examine the role of informal institutions and horizontal forces and their effect on the nature of federal bargaining in Russia. To investigate the impact of the horizontal dimension of federal interaction, usually neglected by the literature, the study developed a conceptual framework drawing on the notion of *federal process* and the crucial distinction with the *federal structure*. Moving away from the sociological interpretation of the federal process, common in the federalist literature, the thesis integrated it with conceptual references to governance, emphasizing the multiplicity of actors operating within carapace of the Russian state. The conceptual interpretation of the federal process as multi-level governance allowed the work then to focus on the central role of networks, groups and factions within the system of centre-region interaction, investigating the role of horizontal forces and their constant interaction with vertical incentives of subordination and integration. The study then considered the role of the duality between formal and informal institutions in shaping the actual playing field in which the multiplicity of economic and political interests operate. Indeed, as noted at the beginning of this work, the federal process is rooted in an intrinsic dualism between formal and informal, with ‘federal institutions both shape and reflect the political playing field on which they are constructed’ (Kahn, 2002, p. 21). As demonstrated in chapter 4 and 5, the constant interaction between the formal federal structure and informal political practices that have been slowly institutionalised in the process of reform of federal relations not only allowed Moscow to enhance its control on the subnational level of governance *de facto* eroding federalism, but also created several problems and loopholes. These lacunae, indeed, have been filled by horizontal forces creating complex mechanisms of interaction between different levels of governance.

Relying on in-depth investigation of two case studies conducted in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, the thesis analysed these complex mechanisms of interaction showing that despite the centralization of federal relations, regional political and economic actors continued to play an important role in the federal process relying mainly on informal and personalistic groups and networks linking together different actors and interests. Furthermore, considering the role and interaction of the regional elite and networks, the study focuses on their interactive and overlapping nature, thus bridging vertical and horizontal impulses of the system. The thesis argues that the role of the regional elite is an integral part of the federal process that, although indirectly, contributes to its inherent dynamism, instability, unpredictability and bargaining. Moreover, examining all the gubernatorial elections and the biographical

characteristic of Russian governors in chapter 10, the study attempted to demonstrate that this dynamism and instability affects the process of elite-management and the role of regional leaders within the system. Governors remain trapped within the dilemma of 'dual commitment' thus representing the weak link between two levels of governance. On the one hand, the consolidation of their official position and levers of power within the regions have been tempered by the inherent pluralism of regional networks and interests. On the other hand, the constant interplay between vertical links and horizontal forces made the Kremlin's approach inherently chaotic and beset by manual interventionism.

This study enriches the existing literature on federal relations in Russia by shedding light on the complexities of interaction between formal and informal institutions and the role of elite networks at both level of governance. While all these issues are well analysed in the literature on Russian politics, federal relations are usually approached through a Moscow-centric perspective, neglecting the role of regional and local elites in shaping the contours of federal relations. The thesis, however, demonstrate that far from achieving the total subordination of the subnational level of governance, the construction of the so-called power vertikal' changed incentives and vectors of interaction, but nonetheless preserved the structural resistance and conflict within a seemingly hierarchical and solidified system of power. Problems in the vertical axis are filled by horizontal forces operating within the carapace of institutionalized informality in the federal process.

Finally, the analysis of the case studies hand in hand with the data concerning the process of all the gubernatorial elections and biographies of the regional leaders allow us to reach some partial conclusions regarding the conditions and the future of regional politics and federal relations in the changing reality of the Russian political system. Despite the total reconfiguration of the federal compact and the extreme centralization of the system, several elements of continuity with the period analysed in the historical chapter continue to characterize the process of interaction between the centre and the regions.

Bilateralism and continuity

The proliferation of the horizontal forces at different levels of governance, illustrated in chapter 5 and in the empirical part of this work, represent an important element of federal relations. The story of Sverdlovsk and Perm is highly illustrative of this argument. Far from being entirely under the Kremlin's control, the situation in the regions is far more complex, indicating in particular the role of large corporations and regional oligarchs, disunity within United Russia and the role of regionally based networks and interest groups. Despite the

administrative submission of governors to the centre, indeed, some of the structural issues inherited from the 1990s remain unaddressed. While Russian governors are today included in a new system of interaction with the centre, with different incentives and channels, intra-regional dynamics remained deeply embedded in a variety of private and corporate interests characterizing the activities of different groups and networks operating within the regional polity. The new centralized system of centre-region interaction obscures without eliminating a plethora of conflicts for resources, posts and power, emphasizing the ambivalence of a system resting on the duality between formal and informal rules.

More broadly, a strong argument can be made that this configuration is not prone to the consolidation of universal rules of the game and unification of the federal space, one of the main goals of the process of power centralization. On the contrary, in a paradoxical continuity with the 1990s, the Russian Federation and the interaction between the centre and the provinces constituting the core of the federal process remain highly segmented and volatile. On the one hand, as discussed in chapter 5, different interest groups, networks and personalities are able to affect the decision-making process in Moscow. The example of elite management and cadre rotation is paradigmatic of the importance of horizontal links and forces in the gubernatorial appointment process. On the other hand, the relations between Moscow and Russian provinces, such as Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai, reflects the specific power constellation in each region, the relationship between the regional elite and central actors and diversified and diverse corporate and political interests shaping the process.

Horizontal forces, in other words, shape the federal process at both the central and subnational levels of governance, while the multiplicity of actors and interests keeps this process segmented and volatile. Even the fact that the appointment of incumbents is rarely challenged officially by regional elite groups and only in few cases across Russian regions candidates supported or appointed by Moscow failed to win elections, does not necessarily mean that regional leaders may rely on an uncontested support. On the contrary, as demonstrated in chapters 7 and 9, in the context of 'dual commitment' for governors, regional interest groups preserve room for manoeuvring especially when a specific policy comes into collision with their interests. Thus, regional elites (or some groups) may enter into open conflict with the appointed governor, undermining his or her power base in the region and relying on diversified ties and contacts directly with actors at the centre. This was the case of Perm Krai during the Basargin governorship, with the emergence of a strong, cross-party, informal coalition able to undermine the power of the chief executive and destabilize the cohesion of the regional branch of the party of power.

Most often, however, local groups and networks may prefer to maintain a constant tension in relations with the governor, only partially undermining his or her power within the region, testing their ability to maintain authority in the region and mobilize his or her relations and ties with important actors in Moscow. This was the case of Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk analysed in chapters 6 and 7, who after the first period of increasing tension was able to consolidate his personal relations with important regional players and trigger the intervention of his sponsors in Moscow in order to defuse regional conflicts just before 2016 Duma elections.

The volatility of institutional practices affected by vertical and horizontal dynamics, indeed, nurtured the preservation of a bilateral approach in the federal process. As again the specific system of gubernatorial appointments and decision-making at the centre level demonstrates, ad hoc and individual approaches remained the core of centre-region relations. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the transformation of the formal structure, the consolidation of the power vertical' and the erosion of federalism initiated in the early 2000s, was accompanied by the parallel preservation of informal practices and backdoor agreements that characterized the federal process in the 1990s. Even though on the one hand the institutionalization of informal interaction has been instrumental in the process of centralization, the constant duality between formal and informal levels contributed to the volatility of political and institutional practices, thus undermining the stability of an extremely centralized system. As another element of continuity, indeed, the bilateralism that emerged in the form of special treaties between the centre and the regions during the 1990s remained deeply ingrained in the practices of federalism. This is clearly revealed by the selective approach of the centre towards the appointment of regional governors discussed in chapter 10.

In building and preserving relationships with particularly economically and politically strong regions the centre showed a high degree of flexibility, allowing 'heavyweight' governors to preserve an exceptional degree of control over their regions and involving members of regional interest groups in the process of selections of new governors. These features remained in place even when, starting from 2012, gubernatorial elections were re-introduced and when longstanding 'heavyweights' started to be gradually replaced. Even after 2016, when the involvement of the regional elite in the appointment process decreased and the system became seemingly more erratic, the decision-making process remained anchored to an individual approach encompassing the influence and confrontation between several groups and sub-networks at the central level. Thus, as noted by Ilchenko (2013, p. 297),

‘being abolished legally as a set of formal rules, the system of bilateral treaties, nevertheless, has not lost institutional significance’. The significant amount of exceptional treatment reserved to some regions and governors is also clearly emphasized by the different trajectories of Kuivashev in Sverdlovsk and Basargin in Perm Krai with the former, despite all the problems and conflicts, allowed to preserve his post, while the latter forced to resign.

The volatility of institutional practices, that remained complemented by informal and backdoor dialogue, hand in hand with the individual and ad hoc approach towards Russian provinces, had a paradoxical effect on the process of legal equalization and distribution of resources among the federal centre and the subjects of the federation. Although the chaotic and inconsistent legal framework that emerged from the 1990s, with thousands of regional laws violating the provision of the constitution and federal legislation, was reversed through the centralizing tendencies of the 2000s (Kahn, Trochev and Balayan, 2009), it was not completely disbanded. Variation in the implementation of federal law across different regions remained a common trait while the Kremlin continued to adopt an individual approach to the regions, a process extended not only to ethnic republics (Yakovlev and Zhuravskaya, 2009; Bruno, Bychkova and Estrin, 2013), as we have clearly seen with the implementation of the municipal reform in Sverdlovsk.

By the same token, the fiscal centralization that deprived regions of the majority of their tax and other revenues did not increase uniformity in the practice of redistribution of resources from the centre. While only a handful of regions remain today ‘donors’, the process of fiscal re-distribution from the centre remains anchored to political and individual considerations. Indeed, if transfers from the federal budget are regulated by formal fiscal instruments, other types of federal support to the regions, such as subsidies, subventions, budgetary credits and money channelled through numerous investment programs, are highly discretionary and bargained on a bilateral basis – a process in which the role of the horizontal dynamics remains prominent. Ethnic republics such as Chechnya and Tatarstan are not the only main beneficiaries of this system. Budget transfers became indeed an important political tool based on informal relations between actors in the centre, influential corporations and gubernatorial administrations and interest groups at the regional level across the Russian territory (Sharafutdinova and Turovsky, 2017; Zubarevich, 2018).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ The ability of regions to attract credits, subventions and subsidies is indeed based on their informal lobbying capacity and established relations between regional authorities, local economic players and influential members of the federal government.

The highly centralized vertical structure erected step by step since the beginning of the 2000s remains balanced by several layers of the ‘power horizontal’ based on informal institutions and practices that continued to proliferate at the federal and subnational levels of governance. In this system, the federal process operates through a series of segmented and bilateral interactions between the centre and the regions in which each of the subnational units tries to find the way out dealing directly with Moscow to bargain the degree of political autonomy and federal transfers relying more on informal connections than on formal rules of the game. As aptly noted by Chirikova (2010, p. 192), the structural asymmetry that characterizes the Russian Federation not only was not reduced throughout the period of centralization, but also affected the way in which the two levels of governance interact. In other words, as we have seen, the power vertical’ operates differently in different regions, according to local specificities, resources, and constellation of the regional elite and its links with federal actors.

Horizontal axis as the ‘surrogate’ of polyarchy

The analysis of the evolution of the federal process conducted in this work also shows that the stability of the federal process in the framework of centralization and vertical control is easier to maintain in conditions of ‘good weather’ that allowed the Kremlin to co-opt regional elite, governors and the systemic opposition. However, cracks in the wall may emerge in periods of political and economic inflection points. The wave of political mobilization and contestation associated with the return of Putin to the presidency in 2011-2012 prompted a partial, even though mostly cosmetic, reconfiguration of centre-region relations with the re-introduction of gubernatorial elections and a limited ‘liberalization’ of regional politics. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the re-configuration of formal rules caused the emergence of new informal practices and channels of interaction. By the same token, the ‘post-Crimea consensus’ inaugurated a short period of apparent stability in which the centre was able to minimize any possible challenge coming from the subnational level relying on the boosted popularity of the president. For instance, the governors who ran in elections between 2012 and 2013 won with an average of 70.6%, the cohort between 2014 and 2017 won with 75%, while the group between 2018 and 2021 with 71%.

However, far from being a long-term solution to problems characterizing centre-region relations, the stability remained only cosmetic, based mostly on mechanical tools. As the cases of Sverdlovsk and Perm Krai show, beneath this calm, indeed, the regional polity remained characterized by competition and conflict for power and resources, accumulating

energy and tension that were ready to explode in a new storm. The prolonged period of economic stagnation and a series of unpopular reforms initiated in 2018 (and, from 2020, exacerbated by the impact of the global pandemic) provided fertile ground for the re-emergence of the tension characterizing centre-region relations. Not surprisingly, on the eve of the 2018 pension reform that underlined the increasing popular dissatisfaction with the economic status quo, the inefficiency of the managerial model adopted by the Kremlin in dealing with the subnational level of governance emerged in full swing, further confirmed by the increasing regional autonomy granted by Moscow in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic (Sharafutdinova *et al.*, 2020). The 2018 inflection point, not only made life more difficult for the centre's appointees in the regions (governors), exacerbating the 'dual commitment' problem, but also re-actualized the bilateral and fragmented approach that continued to characterize the federal process. The inefficiency of previously deployed informal tools of control in a new context stimulated, again, their partial reconfiguration and increasing reliance on an arbitrary interventionism and coercion. Multi-level governance remained de-institutionalized, personalized and fragmented emphasizing the continuous tension between vertical and horizontal forces. The acceleration of gubernatorial turnover since 2016 and the changing portrait of the Russian governors discussed in chapter 10 is highly illustrative of these dynamics.

Overall, despite the image of control and subordination the creation of a centralized system and the incorporation of the lower layer of power has been far from uncontested. Paradoxically, the many zigzags and a situational approach to elite management and relations between the centre and its agents in the regions created an image of control, while under the surface the system remained affected by a high degree of segmentation. What the image of power vertical' ultimately hides is the complementary horizontal dimension of these relations. This work tentatively suggests that despite the institutionalization of the bureaucratic hierarchy, the system remains highly personalistic and situational at any layer of governance, creating a constant interplay between vertical and horizontal force.

Another important point of the analysis conducted in this work concerns the consequences of the duality between vertical and horizontal dynamics and the continuous tension between centralization and decentralization enshrined in the federal institutional design. This work, indeed, argues that in the context of the regression of democratic principles and the consolidation of a specific type of authority and power, federalism remains largely a façade while centralizing and unitary tendencies appear as predominant in the federal process. However, the major paradox characterizing multi-level governance in Russia is

indeed represented by the ambiguous role of informal institutions and practices enshrined in the federal process. If on the one hand the informal domain of politics played a crucial role in shaping the contours of the federal façade allowing the federal centre to ensure control over the subnational level of governance through mechanical means, on the other hand informality played an inherently detrimental role, undermining the stability of the system and of its pillars - such as the 'party of power' - at the regional level. Hand in hand with the formal institutionalization of the hierarchical control a parallel process of institutionalization of informality eroded the core of the power vertikal'.

This ambiguous process made the system of federal relations more susceptible to changing circumstances and the pressure of internal and external inflection points. The plurality of actors and interests involved in the federal process and crystalized in webs and networks of power analysed in different chapters of this research, along with the inherited asymmetry of the system of governance, provided a differentiated set of channels for bargaining and competition between the federal centre and Russian regions. Paradoxically, elite rivalry, competing interests, constraints and opportunities at both level of governance and their continuous interaction, described in this work as the intrinsic relationship between vertical and horizontal forces, represents a 'surrogate' of the classical form of polyarchy described by Robert Dahl (1971) in his seminal work. This type of polyarchy obviously differs from the original conception of political pluralism. Access to competition remains limited and heavily anchored in institutionalized informal practices rather than consolidated institutions. The competition and diversity of interests is translated into the federal process through mechanical and situational means.

Thus, it appears plausible to expect that with shrinking economic resources and endogenous and exogenous shocks that currently affect Russia, the level of intra and inter-elite competition will only increase, contributing to the further destabilization of the federal process, political dynamics within the regions and the overall position of Russian governors within the system. This instability and mechanical interventionism in the process of centre-region interaction, indeed, might already be behind the increasing tensions between regional elites, gubernatorial administrations and law enforcement agencies leading to a growing number of governors being charged and arrested. Thus, in a condition of 'storm' the stability of the system of centre-region relations overwhelmingly relies on personal bonds, informal bargaining and intra and inter-elite dynamics. While in the short-term stability and control might be ensured with increasing coercion and ad hoc interventionism, in the long run any relaxation of the federal centre might trigger unpredictable scenarios. Structural factors of

fragmentation and segmentation remain deeply ingrained in the federal fabric and elements of regionalism, seemingly buried in the early 2000s, might be suddenly unleashed again. The 'power horizontal' is potentially in full swing and it remains to be seen how the ongoing 'storm' will affect the institutional development of centre-region relations in Russia.

A final note to this work concerns the obvious limitations of the study, already discussed in chapter 1. One of the main limitations lays in the inability to obtain access to the main protagonists of the research. Gubernatorial administrations became secretive places and the same goes for the informal members and leaders of federal and regional networks. Although third-party accounts have offered insights into the process, our understanding of motivations of the leaders and their capacity to take strategic and tactical decisions in the specific context remains mediated.

Ultimately, the thesis attempted to reconstruct the complex interaction between vertical and horizontal dynamics affecting the federal process in Russia. Despite the centralization of federal relations, region-specific factors and the plurality of interests within the federal centre can enhance or weaken Moscow's actual control over the provinces. Without investigating the horizontal dynamics at the central level and within the regions, in other words, our understanding of the federal process remains limited. This calls for further research that investigates different cases and that can generate more qualitative and quantitative data to validate or disprove the main arguments of this thesis.

Appendix One: List of Interviewees

Kynev Aleksandr – Former Senior Lecturer at the Higher School of Economics (HSE), 18/06/2019, Moscow.

Roizman Evgenii – Former mayor of Ekaterinburg (2013-2018) and Deputy of State Duma (2003-2007), 21/06/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Kiselev Konstantin – Former Professor at Ural Federal University (2012-2016), member of the Ekaterinburg City Council (2013-), party Yabloko, 21/06/2019 and 12/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Moskvin Dmitrii – Former candidate for Ekaterinburg mayor, former Lecturer at Ural Federal University (2014-2016), 24/06/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Kovin Vitalii – Head of 'The Movement for Defence of Voters' Rights 'Golos' (Perm branch), Senior Research Fellow at Perm Federal Research Centre of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Science, 25/06/2019 and 20/11/2021, Perm.

Panov Petr – Professor at Political Science Department, Perm State University, 27/06/2019 and 06/11/2019, Perm.

Startsev Yaroslav – Professor at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), 28/06/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (1) – academic, Ekaterinburg, 01/07/2019.

Ilchenko Mikhail - Senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Ural Branch), Research Fellow at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), 01/07/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Titkov Aleksei – Senior Lecturer at the Higher School of Economics (HSE), 28/10/2019, Moscow.

Chirikova Alla - Senior Researcher, Institute of Sociology of the Federal Centre of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN), 31/10/2019, Moscow.

Interviewee requested anonymity (2) – academic, 01/11/2019, Moscow.

Krashennnikov Fedor - journalist and political analyst (Snob.ru; Echo of Moscow), 14/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (3) – political consultant, 22/11/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (4) – academic, 26/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Trubina Elena - Professor in Social Theory at the Ural Federal University, 26/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (5) – academic, 26/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Trynov Dmitrii – Senior Lecturer at the Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, 27/11/2019.

Interviewee requested anonymity (6) – political consultant, former member of the gubernatorial administration, 28/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (7) – academic and political consultant, 28/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Dolganov Aleksandr – Head of Foundation ‘SOCIUM’, 28/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (8) – Current member of the regional legislative assembly, 29/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (9) – political consultant, 29/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (10) – former member of the non-systemic opposition in the region, 29/11/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (11) – Senior official in the Ekaterinburg city administration, 02/12/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (12) – journalist, 02/12/2019, Ekaterinburg.

Interviewee requested anonymity (13) – political consultant and official within the regional branch of United Russia, 04/12/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (14) – journalist, 05/12/2019, Perm

Interviewee requested anonymity (15) – journalist, 06/12/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (16) – Member of the regional legislative assembly, 08/12/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (17) – external political consultant to the current governor, 09/12/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (18) - member of the UR Regional Committee, member of the Perm city Council, 12/12/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (19) – political consultant working for the current gubernatorial administration, 13/12/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (20) – regional official, 16/12/2019, Perm.

Interviewee requested anonymity (21) – journalist, 18/12/2019, Perm.

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