Chapter 2

The Liberal and The Authoritarian: How Different Are Russian Regions?

Rostislav Turovsky

Russia’s Regions in Comparative Perspective

The comparative study of Russian regions faces a number of methodological problems, the most important being the magnitude of the variations that exist between the regions, their scope within a single state, and the correlation between Russian politics in general, and the peculiarities of regional polities. It is very important to find the correct balance between the analysis of formal political institutions, which are easier to research, and informal political practices, which are also very important but much more difficult to study. It is necessary to go beyond basing ones’ conclusions about regional politics on surveys of experts in the regions, which has been a typical approach employed in many research projects in Russia. Instead, one should rely on quantifiable variables. However, in a closed political system such as Russia, it is not surprising that scholars will often use ‘insider’ information and ‘participant observation’. In this comparative study I attempt to uncover the similarities and the differences to be found in the different types of regional polities.

O’Donnell and Schmitter define the term political regime as, “the ensemble of patterns, explicit or not, that determines the forms and channels of access to principal governmental positions, the characteristics of the actors... and the resources and strategies that they can use to gain access” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 73). Vladimir Gel’man defines a political regime as a constellation of actors with their resources and strategies and political institutions (Gel’man, Ryzhenkov and Brie 2003: 19-32). For the purpose of this chapter, a political regime will be defined as an interrelated constellation of political actors (with their resources, goals and strategies) and institutions (defined as both ‘organisations’ and ‘rules of the game’) existing in a specific territory. Considering such an understanding of a political regime, it is possible to identify different types of (national, regional, local) political regimes, and to specify their features and develop further classifications.

Comparative cross-regional political research in Russia has had to take into consideration the centralisation of politics in the 2000s. Previous research was based on the assumption that regional political regimes during the Yeltsin era had significant levels of economic and political autonomy and therefore there were wide variations in the structures and types of institutions to be found at the regional
level (Gel’man 1998). In the 2000s, the strengthening of the top-down ‘power vertical’ and Putin’s creation of a uniform legal space had a major impact on the development of regional political regimes. The Federal Law (No. 184), 4 July 2003, ‘On the General Principles of the Organisation of Legislative (Representative) and Executive Bodies of State Power of the Subjects of the Russian Federation’, severely limited the ability of regions to adopt their own unique types of political institutions and electoral systems. Moreover, the 2003 Federal Law (No. 131), ‘On the General Principles of Organising Local-Self Government in the Russian Federation’, created a much more uniform system of local government.

In this study I provide a framework for the comparative research of regional political regimes which encompasses four different axes:

1. **Axis: ‘autonomy – dependence’**. This axis defines the specific nature of regional political regimes. In present-day Russia, regional autonomy is generally low for a federal state, but informal relations between the centre and the different regions create considerable variations.

2. **Axis: ‘democracy – authoritarianism’**. It is clearly the case that in Russia all the regions are authoritarian to a certain degree as they operate within the wider framework of an authoritarian national political regime. However, public participation in the regions is not identical and the degree of pluralism in the regions also varies. Elite rivalry in the regions has become a surrogate for ‘polyarchy’, and there are poor incentives for democratic development, even in the form of electoral competition.

3. **Axis: ‘monocentric – polycentric’**. This is characterised by different patterns of authority and degrees of separation of power between various branches and territorial levels of authority. The most radical form of the monocentric model is to be found in those regions where there is a total domination of the regional executive by the governor. In regions characterised by a polycentric pattern of authority we find the presence of relatively autonomous centres of authority.

4. **Axis: ‘consolidation – competition’**. This characterises those decision-making patterns which do not coincide with the formal institutional design. This is a pattern of agenda setting and decision-making by regional political actors. In authoritarian systems such as Russia one should consider first and foremost political parties, as their derivatives.

1) **Axis ‘Autonomy – Dependence’**

Research of regions by this axis should be the starting point for comparative analysis since it is necessary to define the degree of dependency of the regions on the federal level and consequently, the actual autonomy of the regional political regimes and cross-regional differences. I have (Turovsky 2007) proposed the concept of ‘territoriality’ at the national, regional and local levels of government.

Political communities are united not only by the fact of living in the same territory but also by political interests and/or identities (individuals and micro-groups can be included into communities of different levels) which form at each level under the influence of political communication of various types and intensity. Regional communities are part of the national community (the state), and simultaneously a combination of local communities.

The autonomy and/or dependence of Russian regions can be defined and measured by the employment of six variables: 1) the status and authority of the regions, 2) The economic self-sustainability of the regions, 3) the limits placed on regional autonomy over the formation of regional political institutions, 4) the limits placed on regional autonomy through the exercise of sanctions by the Centre, 5) The degree of dependency of regional authorities on federal agencies, 6) The influence of the regions at the federal level.

During the 1990s the regions were able to exercise a considerable amount of autonomy. However, from 2005, the President was granted the right to appoint regional governors (subject to the approval of regional assemblies) and from this time onwards they have become much more dependent on the Centre. However, there are considerable differences in the levels of regional economic self-sufficiency which allows us to classify regions into economically ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ regimes. The economically ‘strong donor’ regions can secure an additional degree of autonomy for themselves by exercising informal control over federal agencies in the regions and by exercising a powerful influence in the Centre (the vast majority of regions, however, do not have such privileges).

2) **Axis ‘Democracy – Authoritarianism’**

Here, we shift our attention from the levels of regional autonomy to the patterns of authority which characterise regional political regimes. Scholars who considered these issues have focused on the continuum between democracy and authoritarianism (Gel’man, Ryzenkov, Brie 2003). Quantitative assessments of democracy in the Russian regions have been analysed in well-known studies carried out by the Carnegie Moscow Centre (Petrov 2005b), as well as in the ‘Democratic Audit of Russia’ (Yakovenko 2005). However, these previous assessments of democracy in Russian regions have a number of flaws. First, they exaggerated the level of inter-regional differences when they compared individual regions with the general characteristics of the Russian Federation as a whole which raises questions about their frame of reference and the validity of their conclusions. Second, the method of collating the opinions of experts is easily available and has limited value since it often tells us more about expert knowledge and expert stereotypes than about the regions studied. Third, the quantitative variables used in these studies are generally related to elections (i.e., voter turnout and electoral competition) which are poor measures of the political development in authoritarian regimes. In this study I take...
the pluralist approach connected with the concept of ‘polyarchy’ (Dahl 1971) as my reference point.

In an authoritarian system such as Russia, research into democracy quickly turns into the study of the concentration of authority in the hands of the ruling elite, the degree and the nature of limited public participation, and the weak influence of citizens on policy-making. Thus, in this study I deal with the paradigm of 'electoral authoritarianism' (Schedler 2006; Ross, in this volume) and/or 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2002).

Here the variables can be grouped into three major categories:

1. Political violence, repression of civil liberties and coercion toward the opposition.
2. Estimation of political participation and its efficacy.
   2.1. Electoral participation.
   2.2. Mass participation beyond elections.
   2.3. Public participation in political parties and social movements.
   2.4. The political efficacy of mass participation.
   2.5. Openness and feedback of regional authorities.
3. Electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism.
   3.1. Turnover of elites by electoral means.
   3.2. Electoral manipulation and fraud.
   3.3. Electoral competition.

The final assessment of Russian regions within the ‘democracy – authoritarianism’ axis makes it possible to group the regions along the authoritarian end of this axis within the framework of ‘urban – rural’ and ‘centre – periphery’ oppositions. Ethnic republics with their dominant titular ethnic groups and non-ethnic peripheral territories are certainly more authoritarian. In contrast, non-ethnic regions, with large industrial centres and urban agglomerations, where civic culture and public participation are more vibrant, come closer to the democratic end of this axis, but they remain authoritarian.

3) Axis ‘Monocentrism – Polycentrism’

This axis is used to assess the structure of regional authority. In the current Russian circumstances, the degree of mono-centrism and the dominance of regional executive authorities in regional institutions are assessed under this heading. In order to make this assessment, it is necessary to view the four clusters of authorities that are present in each Russian region and are created by a) the separation of powers and b) the division of authority into different branches and territorial levels (Turovsky 2006); 1) the regional executive branch, 2) the regional legislative branch, 3) local (municipal) governments and, 4) federal agencies in the regions.

Despite the tendency of the Russian political regime to consolidate power in the head of the executive branch (hereafter, the governor) – there are wide variations in the relations between executive and legislative bodies in the regions as witnessed in the myriad of different regional laws and political practices. In lieu of the national political developments of the 1990s, regional and local executive branches and legislative assemblies were separated and formally turned into independent entities. Another tendency also appeared in the 1990s which was a result of the development of federalism – the formation of independent regional levels of authority. However, during a process of decentralisation of governance in the 2000s, the Centre placed the federal agencies in the regions under stricter levels of control. Moreover, the regional level of authority itself has now been consolidated under the governor’s control, which has led to a weakening of powers of regional assemblies. It is logical to assess the structure of authority and the powers of institutions in the regions by utilising four groups of variables in regards to the four authority clusters noted above.

1. Separation of powers

An analysis of the development and efficiency of legislative control over executive power is of key interest here, as is the degree of independence of regional legislatures in decision-making. The formal authority of regional assemblies is more or less the same across the Russian Federation, and is generally defined by federal laws.

We can assess the relations between regional legislatures and governors by examining the following key factors; 1) the procedures adopted by regional legislatures to approve those gubernatorial candidates which were nominated by the President. This was first introduced in 2005. The use of this procedure is fairly uniform in all the regions throughout the country: candidates were approved everywhere at the first attempt, in some regions unanimously. 2) The second possible procedure is a vote of censure of a governor but with the reservation that, after the abolition of the popular direct election of governors which came into operation in 2005, this procedure does not have direct consequences (since the decision of whom to appoint as a new governor is up to the President). This practice has almost never been used which indicates the low autonomy of legislatures. During the 2000s, there have been only two attempts to censure a governor: in Altai Krai and in Irkutsk Oblast, but in both cases the President did not confirm the impeachment. No wonder then that there is such a 'harmony' of relations between the branches of power. The third possible procedure – the dissolution of a legislature by a governor – has not been employed (not even a single case exists).

A very important indicator of cross-regional differences are the variations to be found in the procedures governing the appointment of top members of regional executives (other than the governors). In some regions the heads of regional governments and deputy governors are elected by the regional legislature. Federal
law leaves it up to the regions whether or not to utilise this right.\(^1\) Our analysis shows that in only 17 of Russia’s 83 federal subjects there are no legal provisions for the election of executive officials by regional legislatures.\(^2\) As a rule, in those regions where there is a formal position of head of government or prime minister (the second ranking person in the regional executive branch) it is a separate post from that of the governor and is usually approved by the legislature. Very often, the deputy governors and/or deputy heads of government will also be approved by the legislature. In the majority of Russian regions, regional legislatures are entitled to approve two or more regional executive officials. Only in 14 regions are the lists of approved officials limited to one single position (the head of government or the senior deputy regional governor). However, these cross-regional variations in the strength and weakness of legislatures have little impact on the ability of the executive to control regional assemblies. The governors’ control over the electoral processes in the regions is the key factor which determines the actual separation of powers.

Finally, another set of variables are the independence and professionalism of deputies. The independence of legislatures may be determined through an examination of their law making practices (whether bills are proposed by the executive branch or by the deputies themselves) and the adoption of laws (voting of the deputies for the laws they proposed themselves and for those proposed by the executive authority). The following factors serve as criteria: the veto of adopted laws by a governor and the procedures governing the how to overcome a governor’s veto on behalf of deputies. In general, the professionalism of regional lawmakers in Russia is not high (which is supported by the fact that the majority of deputies usually work part-time combining activities in legislatures with their employment elsewhere), i.e. legislatures perform mostly representative functions (that is they represent various elite groups) rather than legislative ones. A study of those regions where information is available shows the majority of bills are submitted by the executive branch.

In general, differences between regions in terms of separation of power are insignificant, and our analysis shows that the governors are able to exercise strict control over both the legislative and executive branches of power. Recently the role of parties has become more important. Thus, it is necessary now to also carry out an additional analysis of the level of governors’ control over the regional branches of United Russia (which is the dominant party in all legislatures) and the anti-governor opposition in regional assemblies which is always below the critical point for governors.

2. Autonomy of local governments

A more complex and realistic analysis of a regional political regime should consider relations between the different levels of government existing within regions. This is a more important and interesting topic for research than the separation of powers or a study of the distribution of powers now that the President has instigated a top-down ‘power vertical’ (Gel’man et al. 2008). The level of autonomy of regional governments may be assessed for the region as a whole and for separate municipalities, primarily, large cities. Similar to the assessment of regional autonomy which was discussed in the ‘autonomy – dependence’ axis discussed above, our sixth criteria measures the levels of local government autonomy.

2.1 The local government formation model

The municipal reform that started with adoption of the Federal Law (No. 131), ‘On the General Principles of Organising Local-Self Government in the Russian Federation’ which was formally put into practice on 1 January 2009 prohibited regional governors to directly appoint the heads of municipalities (as was formerly the case in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan). There are now two different methods of forming local executives. The first model that is formally independent of the governor provides for the general election of the mayor who heads a municipality and its administration. The second is the ‘city manager’ model whereby a municipal administration is headed by an official contracted by the local assembly, and headed by the mayor (in this model, the city manager has limited authority in comparison with an elected mayor). Moreover, representatives of the regional executive are included in the selection committee, i.e., a city manager may be promoted by a governor.

In general, city mayors are popularly elected throughout Russia. Since the summer of 2009, according to our data, there was no provision for mayoral elections in 22 administrative centres in 79 regions,\(^3\) 11 of those cities are the capitals of ethnic republics. However, the fact that city mayors are still elected by the voters in 57 regional capitals is quite positive.\(^4\) In some cases the loyalty of elected mayors is secured through the interference of governors in municipal elections.

---

1. The author would like to thank D. Skripnichenko, a student in the Department of Political Science, Moscow State University, for assistance in collecting information about regional constitutions and statutes.
2. This list includes the Kaliningrad Oblast where the legislature indirectly participates in forming the government in regards with recent innovations related to including parties in decision-making (in practice, this involves only the dominant party, United Russia). In the Kaliningrad Oblast, the government is formed on the basis of the proposal of the party that wins a regional legislature election.
3. This does not include Moscow and St. Petersburg which constitute federal entities and Moscow and Leningrad Oblasts which do not have administrative centres.
4. This, however, includes a few intermediary situations where the publicly elected mayor is not the head of the local administration but the speaker of the city assembly only (Kaliningrad, Perm, etc.). In addition, some cities are currently changing or intend to change their statutes to abolish general mayoral elections.
The Politics of Sub-National Authoritarianism in Russia

26

The Liberal and The Authoritarian

of federal agencies in the regions vis-à-vis the regional governors. At times the federal agencies entered into conflict with governors (Turovsky 2003, 2006). However, a detailed analysis of cross-regional differentiations is hampered by the low transparency of the work of such agencies. Presidential envoys in the federal districts, chief federal inspectors, officials in prosecution offices, internal affairs agencies, and the Federal Security Service (FSB) and members of judicial bodies are the main subject of analysis.

3.1 Formal influence of regional authorities on appointment of federal representatives The Centre plays the decisive role in forming its staff in the regions, although, in accordance with the Constitution, judicial and law enforcement staff are appointed jointly by the Centre and the regions. Regional authorities have the right to appoint regional prosecutors. According to the federal law on the police, the opinion of regional government is taken into account during the appointment of the head of the Regional Internal Affairs Directorate (IAD). The appointment of the deputy head of public security of the regional IAD is also subject to approval of the regional authorities. In reality, these appointments are really under the sole discretion of the Centre and almost always the regions agree with the choice of such appointments made at the Centre.

3.2 Genetic affiliation of federal representatives with their regions The career background of the territorial heads of federal agencies is a good indirect indicator of their levels of autonomy vis-à-vis the governors. The practice by the Centre of appointing ‘loyal outsiders’ who have no ties to regional elites is now widespread. The appointment of outsiders to the offices of regional prosecutors was common practice in the early 2000s (Petrov 2003, 2005a; Turovsky 2006). The practice is also typical for the FSS where the appointment of regional representatives is an exception. It is partially true for the IAD and chief federal inspectors, but there are considerable differences between the regions: many of the IAD heads and chief federal inspectors do have a regional background and represent particular local elite groups (including the governors’ elites). As for the judicial system which is a part of the federal government, its heads are, conversely, more often integrated into regional elites.

3.3 Affiliation of federal representatives with regional political actors, including governors However, the career background of federal representatives alone cannot tell us about their political affiliations. In order to assess each leader, the following scale is relevant: ‘affiliation with the governor – affiliation with another regional interest group – or no evident regional affiliation’. Determining the affiliations of officials can be done through a formal analysis of their public actions and decision-making activities.

3.4 Political relevance of federal agencies in the regions Currently, federal agencies in the regions have relatively high levels of autonomy from the governors.
They are rarely affiliated with the governor and, in a number of cases, are even hostile to them, initiating investigations into the activities of governors and calling for the arrests of regional officials. This creates the potential for political games by federal representatives but, at the same time, these agencies are strictly centralised. That is why, in order to assess their role and influence on regional governance, it is necessary to estimate the character of their political activities and to find out whether or not they are political actors in the regions. I propose the following forms of assessment: "passive observation - functional activities within their mandates - active interference in the political process through actions and public statements - or the forming of a special interest group". The degree and the direction of public activity of federal officials, or the promotion of outsiders from federal authorities into regional governments are the main criteria employed here. These types of assessment have so far been made on the basis of expert surveys only. However, they have demonstrated interesting cross-regional differences. For instance, an assessment of who are considered to be the most influential people in Russian regions carried out by Oxana Gaman-Golutvin using the expert survey method, showed that in some regions federal officials ranked amongst the most influential politicians (Darovin, Sitnikov 2004).

4. Autonomy of regional representatives in the Centre.

Here we focus on various regional representatives at the federal level. These are official representatives of regional authorities in the upper chamber of the Russian parliament (The Federation Council), in the lower house of the parliament (The State Duma - deputies elected from the regional parts of the party lists). Representatives of the regions are also to be found in other national level institutions such as: the presidency, the government and the judiciary. Engaged in professional activities at the federal level, these politicians and/or officials are often able to act as independent agents and are not directly tied to the regions which nominated them. Their autonomy can be assessed by four parameters as in the previous case.

4.1 The formal influence of a region in appointing its federal representatives Regional executive and legislative authorities are formally independent in appointing senators. Although in some cases, according to the Russian media, some regions have faced the situation whereby the procedures for confirming senators within the Federation Council itself were deliberately prolonged or did not even take place on the initiative of the leadership of the upper chamber. As to the formation of regional party lists for elections to the State Duma, the final decision on who will be included in a particular list is normally made at the Centre.

4.2 Genetic affiliation of regional representatives in the centre with the region In spite of the fact that the regions formally appoint senators and the State Duma deputies are elected by party lists, in reality, under the circumstances of centralisation, the practice of imposing candidates by the Centre is widespread. This trend is especially obvious in the Federation Council where half of the current members come from Moscow (Turovsky 2007a; Turovsky, 2008). Differences have appeared between the regions: some strong regions have been able to hold on to their rights to appoint their senators independently (such as Moscow, Tatarstan, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug) whilst others have had to bow to the decisions of the Centre. Moreover, regional authorities have developed the practice of hiring federal lobbyists to help the regions promote their interests at the Centre. As a consequence, a large percentage of the senators are made up of autonomous actors who are not integrated into regional elites.

Regional representation paradoxically is higher in the lower house of the Federal Assembly, the State Duma. A majority of deputies who are members of United Russia and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation are representatives of regions (Turovsky 2007a; Turovsky 2008). This is least common for members of Just Russia and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, which are the most centralised parties. Furthermore, all of the parties use the practice of electing their Moscow-based representatives by regional party lists. The differences between the regions are determined by their levels of dependence on the Centre and by the number of votes that are required to win a seat (in large regions, it is much easier to place a few Moscow residents on the party lists).

4.3 Affiliation with regional political actors, including governors In this case the following scale should be used which is similar to the one proposed above: ‘affiliation with the governor – affiliation with another influence group of the region – or the absence of any clear regional affiliation’.

4.4 Political relevance of regional representatives on the territory of the region The main professional activity of such actors takes place outside the 

6 According to our calculations, in the summer of 2009, only in 12 out of the 83 Russia’s regions were both senators representatives of local elites at the time of their appointment. In 23 regions, senators had no connections to their regional polities. Other regions occupy intermediary position: for example, one senator in a regions comes from the regional elite, whilst the other representative does not, or there are senators who were connected with the regions during a certain period of their career and who can be called neither full representatives of the local elite nor outsiders (biographies of the members of the Federation Council were compiled by E. Ryabova, a student from the Higher School of Economics).

7 According to amendments to the Law on the Federation Council adopted in 2009 and which will come into effect on 1 January 2011, only a deputy of a regional or a local assembly can be a senator. However, the local residence requirement which was in force for a very short time has been cancelled. This means that Moscow-based representatives of the federal elite can remain members of the Federation Council but before that they will have to successfully pass through the election procedures in the regions they choose to represent.
region. That is why it is important to estimate their activeness, i.e. the nature and the degree of interference in political decision-making related to the region or implemented in the region itself.

The third and the fourth group of variables vary to a large extent from region to region. This can be explained by the growing power and influence of the Centre. This creates the potential for actors, which are more closely tied to the Centre, to become autonomous and raise their political influence. However, the actual extent of such infiltration depends on, firstly, the degree of influence wielded by federal actors in a region and, secondly, on whether or not the region has been granted the privilege to choose its representatives independently (in this case these actors will be subordinate to the governor).

The study of the four groups of variables makes it possible to place a regional political regime in the ‘monocentric – polycentric’ axis. Monocentrism means that power is concentrated in the hands of the governor who controls the legislative assembly, local governments, and federal agencies in the region and the regional representatives in the Centre. Polycentrism indicates the presence of several powerful actors that are autonomous of the governor both regionally and those who are subordinate to federal agencies. Their presence can be detected through an analysis of decision-making practices which are not related to the interests of the governor or which contradict them or at least, attempts to make decisions which are manifested in public statements or actions. It is possible to detect attempts by the governor to eliminate such actors or make public statements against them.

Regional political regimes in Russia are situated closer to the monocentric end of the axis. However, this is limited somewhat by the system of federal agencies that exist independently from the governors (Turovsky 2007b). The centralisation of powers and governance and the increased levels of federal control over the regions, in addition to turnover within federal agencies, have led to an increase in cross-regional differences rather than to their decline.8

4) Axis: ‘Consolidation – Competition’

Unlike the previous axes, the ‘consolidation – competition’ axis, the actual decision-making process may be only partially related to the official decisions of authorities. We consider a hierarchy of relevant political actors and the decisions they take as formal (visible) and informal (invisible) ones. We also focus on formal institutes and (2) the overlapping economic powers of regional and local government and (3) personal competition for status in the process of the formation of new elites.

For Russian regions, informal coalition politics is typical for regional interest groups. It is ‘hidden’ under the cover of a monocentric system and a dominant party (Turovsky 2006). Political and historical developments in post-Communist Russia have been influenced by radical societal and economic changes. However, there has been no classical democratic transition in Russia. Instead, we have witnessed the renewal of the ruling class which has been consolidated for the sake of its own survival. According to this perspective, interest groups with varied representation in various government institutions will be the key informal actors of a regional political regime, rather than formal actors associated with officially sanctioned institutions.

Defining the structure of the ruling class and dividing it into groups (collective actors) is a complicated task. That is why it is necessary to try to achieve clearer parameters of such structuring. We propose three methods of detecting and differentiating influential regional political actors in Russia under the conditions of an authoritarian regime.

First, an assessment of the self-sufficiency of actors can be a differentiation criterion. This is understood in this context as the availability of a resource base (high-status positions, clientele consisting of significant business and media networks, etc.). As a general rule, this means that the collective actor has both a group identity and a leader. Consolidation is secured through patron-client relations and resource
exchanges. The resource basis of the collective actor includes resources of power (including influence on various branches and levels of government), financial and economic resources, as well as the important resource of public presence and control. Second, are the common interests that help to stabilise and consolidate the groups. These may differ in nature and character and are often hidden, and in some cases may be illegal, corrupt or criminal. In Russian regions, bureaucratic, financial and industrial groups are significant actors (Turovsky 2008), hence the two most common interests are: preserving and expanding control over power positions and over financial and economic resources (the latter is achieved through the obtainment of power). However, the influence of non-economic (i.e., social and cultural) groups should not be underestimated, their role in the representation and implementation of social interests are also significant.

Third, the detection of collective political actors requires permanent observation of the regional political process. The deductive method detects ‘genetic’ interest groups as we previously described them. It is based on the study of biographies and other types of personal data which helps us to detect their allegiance to informal interests groups within regional governments, financial and industrial groups, and political parties. However, this method is sufficient for a first approximation, but it does not allow the observer to see the whole picture. Induction makes it possible to build up a picture gradually on the basis of analysing the authorities’ decisions, and, consequently, specifying the winning, losing and neutral actors. This type of analysis often breaks down stereotypical ideas about the stability of regional groups and ‘clans’. Electoral competition, candidate nomination, and participation in elections which constitute ‘the moment of truth’ for regional elites also have the potential to reveal new features of interest groups.

However the approach described above is based on an understanding of power as a public decision-making. This is insufficient, especially in a closed political system. That is why, by understanding power as agenda-setting, it is necessary to consider the invisible, non-public and informal processes which influence what decisions are allowed to come onto the political agenda.

Alongside the detection of political actors, it is useful to define their significance and their political role. The significance of regional actors can be placed on a scale; there are various types of actors which operate at different levels of hierarchy of influence (order). When defining the significance, in our opinion, it is necessary to consider two factors: the territorial decision-making level (regional or local), and the representation on the relevant level and the regular influence on its decision-making (permanent, limited, no influence). Hence there are at least some types of political actors. First-order actors (permanent influence at both regional and local levels); Second-order actors (limited influence at the regional level and permanent influence at the local level); Third-order actors (no influence at the regional level and limited influence at the local level); Fourth-order actors (no influence and representation at the regional level and limited influence at the local level).

There is no doubt that the governor and his/her entourage is a first-order actor, and usually it is the only one. The presence of two and more first-order actors in a Russian region indicates a low consolidation of the regional political regime. The medium level of consolidation indicates the presence of one second-order actor. If there are two or more second order actors, the consolidation of a regime is below average. In our opinion, the ideal-type high consolidation presumes the presence of the sole first order actor and the lack of second-order actors. In the case of ideal-type high competition, there will be at least two second-order actors to say nothing of two of more first-order actors. That is why in practice the number of

---

9 The analysis of interest groups is connected with the issue of clientelism, which is important for Russia, since patron-client relations usually form in these groups (Afanasev 1994; Biryukov 2009).
second-order actors is the most important factor of cross-regional differentiation along this axis.

We have so far been discussing the structure of political actors in the regions. In order to obtain a fuller picture we need to consider the methods and technologies employed by regional government, in other words, the pattern of relations between regional actors (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov, Brie 2003). A perfect example of cross-regional differentiation in this respect is the choice between the majority and consensus government models for regional legislatures. The consensus government in a legislature shows the tendency of United Russia to neutralise the real or potential opposition (or part of it) by co-opting these actors into decision-making processes, removing itself from the ‘government vs. opposition’ confrontation, and securing higher stability and lack of conflict within the regional legislature. We should note an imposed consensus model has been implemented in the State Duma, where United Russia has two thirds of the seats, but each of the other three parties has a vice-speaker position and at least one committee head. Regional governments are more authoritarian in this respect since the regions tend to have the majority government system (in the summer of 2009, according to our calculations, there were 35 such regions). However, according to our calculations, 42 regional legislatures, i.e. about a half, established the consensus government of their legislatures. In four other regions, key positions in regional legislatures are shared between independent (non-partisan) deputies and United Russia members. These four regional legislatures are obviously closer to the majority rule model than to the consensus one. It is interesting to note that the first place among holders of powerful positions in regional legislatures is taken by the leading opposition party – the CPRF (27 regions) due to the fact that they have partnership agreements with United Russia, which shows the readiness of parties to engage in pragmatic compromises. Just Russia also stands close to the Communists (22 cases). The third place is taken by the LDPR (17 cases).

Technologies of imposed consensus government are important in the respect that they strengthen the consolidation of regional political regimes. Though, it should be noted, they are not widespread. This can be explained by the weakness of second- and third-order actors, and ruling groups, therefore, they are not considered in the sphere of influence and instead use an alternative approach: the marginalisation of the opposition, rather than its inclusion in decision-making.

Another issue which arises in diverse and segmented societies such as can be found in Russian ethnic republics, is the institutional choice between consensus and competition. Practices of consensus government are typical for some republics of the North Caucasus which comprise complex ethnic diversity. Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya and Karachaevo-Cherkessiya use the consensus multi-ethnic government model to the greatest extent (such as a deliberate and agreed upon distribution of the main position of power between representatives of different titular ethnic communities), although these rare regional examples also show the practical impossibility of securing an equal and proportional representation of the different ethnic groups in regional governments (Centre 2009). Due to this situation, the balance is always shifted in favour of a dominant ethnic group.

The tendency of the ruling groups to consolidate the regional political regime is expressed in the choice between the ‘mild’ tactics of imposed consensus rule and the ‘harsh’ tactics of marginalisation of opposition groups. In all cases, the imperative of social and political stability is crucial for regional political regimes unlike the imperative of democratic development. The domination of the executive branch in the regions, of United Russia in the party system, of the titular ethnic bureaucracy in inter-ethnic relations, of the elite over the general public, and of the Centre over the regions, etc., i.e. the mandatory presence of an omnipotent dominant actor creates a favourable institutional environment for a certain form of stability. Conversely, a fully-fledged coalition system with equal partnership among actors, and their compliance with democratic rules, remains impossible in almost all regions.

The consolidation of regional political regimes in Russia should not be overstated. In the 2000s, in our opinion, a strong federal Centre became a powerful factor of cross-regional differentiation. Its centralising efforts led to greater levels of autonomy for federal agencies in the regions and increased number of actors building patron-client relations with the federal Centre (State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, city mayors, etc). The attempts of United Russia to carve out areas of autonomy for its regional leaders vis-a-vis the governors is not always possible to achieve. The political involvement of big business in the regions also weakens the consolidation of regional political regimes. The practice of gubernatorial appointments complicates the situation even more especially where we witness the appointment of officials with no previous connections to the regions. Such practices also increase the numbers of regional clienteles. The rise of powerful mayors of large and rich cities, whose resources are comparable with regional governors, has been a significant factor since the 1990s.

The majority of Russian regions belong in the category of moderate authoritarian consolidation where the number of significant actors is not limited solely to the governor. This statement requires a more detailed study of the majority of the Russian regions and, consequently, finer methodological instruments. In the analysis of the Russian regions in the 1990s, there was a strong tendency to provide examples of extremes which are, of course, colourful but do not provide an accurate account of the regional landscape. A good number of semi-consolidated, ‘intermediary’ regional political regimes that differ in the composition of their political actors and institutions remain under-studied and await further research.

---

10 The author thanks D. Kisiltsina and M. Leandrova, students in the Department of Political Science, Moscow State University, for their assistance in collecting materials on regional legislature leaders.
References
