

CENTRALIZED BUT FRAGMENTED: THE REGIONAL DIMENSION OF RUSSIA’S “PARTY OF POWER”

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Abstract: The key question addressed in this study is: How centralized and consolidated is the Kremlin’s “party of power,” United Russia (UR)?¹ In order to answer this question we provide a detailed analysis of the recruitment of the secretaries of UR’s 83 regional political councils and the patronage ties of the secretaries with their regional governors.² A study of the recruitment of regional secretaries provides important insights into: a) the balance of federal and regional forces, and b) the balance of regional elite groups in the recruitment of local party leaders. By analyzing these appointments we can detect which party branches have been captured by regional governors or other influential regional groups. The conclusions of our analysis throw new light on the degree of centralization within UR and the consolidation of the party at the regional level. As we demonstrate, in a number of regions, UR is politically fragmented and regional factions within the party have successfully checked the powers of governors and their ability to exercise control over the appointment of UR regional secretaries.

¹ This article was prepared by the Laboratory for Regional Political Studies of the Higher School of Economics (project: “Structural Analysis of Regional Political Regimes and Electoral Space”).

² Russia claims that the Russian Federation contains 85 regions after the incorporation of two new regions in Crimea in March 2014. Those regions are not included in this study.

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Although the Putin regime has led an assault on the principles and practices of federalism, United Russia still has to operate in a multi-lateral quasi-federal polity,³ which has impacted the party's structure and organization.⁴ Deschouwer argues that parties in federations face two problems: the first is "vertical integration, the linking of the activities and strategies at two different levels." The second "is the managing of territorial variation between the regions in which the party participates in regional politics, national politics or both levels at the same time."⁵ Variations in the economic and social conditions and priorities across the units of the federation may make it difficult for a state-level party to respond to its local electoral base without bringing it into conflict with the federal level of the party organization.⁶

Moreover, the origins of federal states and the specific ways in which they were formed are of crucial importance in determining the character of the distribution of powers in federations. Federal states may emerge "from below" through the voluntary amalgamation of independent states (e.g., the U.S., Switzerland and Australia), or, on the contrary, they may result from top-down constitutional changes made to unitary states to prevent their collapse (e.g., India, Belgium, Spain). Stepan calls the former types which emerge from below as "coming together federalism" and the latter top-down varieties as "holding-together federalism."⁷ Stepan also defines a third category, "putting together federalism," which entails "a heavily coercive effort by a nondemocratic centralizing power to put together a multinational state, some of the components of which had previously been independent states."⁸ Those federations which arise out of bottom-up bargaining ("revolutions from below") generally cede more powers to their federal subjects than those which come about as the result of top-down

³ See, E. L. Gibson, ed. 2004. *Federalism and Democracy in Latin America*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkin's University Press.

⁴ The empirical data presented in this article are based on biographical data on all the regions compiled by the authors in March 2014. Other key sources are the official website of United Russia (www.er.ru), the website of the Central Electoral Commission (www.cikrf.ru) and the Charter of United Russia (www.er.ru/party/rules). Also we use data from our field research. Over the period July 2012-March 2014, Rostislav Turovsky and his team conducted 60 interviews with political scientists, leaders of regional party branches and party activists, members of regional executive and legislative bodies, and political journalists in the republics of Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Kabardino-Balkariya, Karachaevo-Cherkesiya, and North Ossetiya; Krasnoyarsk, Perm, and Stavropol' krays, Moscow, Murmansk, Tomsk, and Volgograd oblasts.

⁵ K. Deschouwer. 2006. "Political Parties as Multi-Level Organisations", in R. S. Katz and W. J. Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics*, London: Sage, 291-300.

⁶ See Mikhail Filippov, Peter Ordeshook and Olga Shvetsova. 2004. *Designing Federalism: A Theory of Self-Sustainable Federal Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; L. Kramer. 1994. "Understanding Federalism," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 47, 1485-561.

⁷ Alfred Stepan. 1999. "Federalism and democracy: beyond the U.S. model," *Journal of Democracy*, 10(4), 22-3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

bargaining amongst elites (“revolutions from above”).⁹

In a similar manner, Panebianco argues that the origins of parties have a major impact on their “organizational characteristics.”¹⁰ In particular, he stresses the differences produced by parties formed through “territorial penetration” and “territorial diffusion.” Territorial penetration occurs “when the center controls, stimulates, or directs the development of the periphery, i.e., the construction of local and intermediate party associations.” Territorial diffusion, by contrast, occurs when “development results from spontaneous germination: local elites construct party associations which are only later integrated into a national organization.”¹¹ Parties which develop through “penetration” will be more likely to produce strong cohesive and hierarchical institutions where power is concentrated at the center, whereas in those created through a process of “diffusion” the process will be “much more turbulent and complex... and the party is quite likely to give rise to decentralized and semi-autonomous structures, and consequently, to a dominant coalition divided by constant struggle for party control.”¹²

Putin created UR from above through a process of “territorial penetration.” Under Yeltsin, significant levels of de facto power had been ceded to the regions and there were fears that the country would break apart and suffer the same fate as the USSR. Thus, a key role of UR was to bolster the territorial integrity of the country and to integrate Russia’s regional elites into Putin’s new “vertical of power.” However, the success of UR’s penetration into the regions has largely been dependent on the support of regional governors and administrations.¹³ As Vladislav Surkov, the former deputy head of the Russian Presidential Administration, noted in 2006, “In the overwhelming majority of regions, UR relies on the incumbent authorities – regional leaders, city mayors, and so on.”¹⁴ In many cases, as Roberts stresses, the “party central office simply coordinates and manages pre-existing regional electoral networks, supplying them with the UR label and allowing regional elites to develop the party franchise as they see fit,” and often “it is far from certain that UR has managed to successfully penetrate every region and to create an unmediated party structure that effectively supplants the authority of the pre-existing regional elite groupings.”¹⁵

⁹ Cameron Ross. 2002. *Federalism and Democracy in Russia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. Cameron Ross. 2013. “Rossiya: Federatsiya bez Federalizma,” in Andrey Ryabov, Andrey Zakharov, and Olga Zdravomyslova, eds. *K Novoy Modeli Rossiiskovo Federalizma*. Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 105-117.

¹⁰ Angelo Panebianco. 1988. *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 51.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Sean P. Roberts. 2012. *Putin’s United Russia Party*, London and New York: Routledge, 176.

¹⁴ Ibid., 177.

¹⁵ Ibid.

UR: A Centralized Party of the Regions?

The territorial organization of UR parallels the administrative structure of the Russian Federation. There are party branches in all 83 federal subjects and inter-regional coordinative councils in each of Russia's federal districts. In addition, within every federal subject, UR has branches in all of the first-tier municipalities (e.g., the municipal rayons and city/town districts). According to UR's official web-site (<http://er.ru/party/today>), the party has 82,631 primary organizations and 2,595 local branches, which correspond to the number of first-tier municipalities. In terms of political mobilization, the party's extensive organizational structure allows it to recruit local activists and compete in elections at every administrative level.

A key turning point for the development of regional party systems came with the adoption of the 2002 federal law¹⁶ on elections, which stipulated that from 14 July 2003 all regional assemblies would be required to adopt a mixed electoral system whereby at least half of the seats would be contested in a party list system.¹⁷ Officially aimed at strengthening the party system, this new legislation brought about a sharp rise in the support for UR in regional assemblies and this success soon led to the mass entry of key regional elites into the party.¹⁸ Currently almost all of the regional governors are UR party members and the party has a majority of seats in almost all of Russia's regional assemblies.¹⁹ Moreover, UR has won three consecutive electoral campaigns in almost all of the regions, thereby satisfying Sartori's criteria for "a dominant" party.²⁰ In sharp contrast, at the federal level it is the administrative regime headed by the president and the federal government that is the dominant force in Russia. At the federal

¹⁶ "Ob Osnovnykh Garantyakh Izbiratel'nykh Prav i Prava na Uchastie v Referendume Grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii." Federal Law, No. 67, June 12, 2002, *Sobranie Zakonodatel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, No. 24, 2002, Article 2253.

¹⁷ In 2014, this proportion was amended and it can now be as low as one quarter.

¹⁸ See Grigori V. Golosov. 2004. *Political Parties in the Regions of Russia: Democracy Unclaimed*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

¹⁹ See Cameron Ross. 2011. "The Rise and Fall of Political Parties in Russia's Regional Assemblies," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63(3), May, 429-448; Petr Panov and Cameron Ross. 2013. "Sub-National Politics in Russia: Variations in the Patterns of United Russia's Electoral Domination of Regional Assemblies," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 65(4), June, 737-752; Petr Panov and Cameron Ross. 2013. "Patterns of Electoral Contestation in Russian Regional Assemblies: Between Competitive and Hegemonic Authoritarianism," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 21(3), Summer, 369-400.

²⁰ D. Sartori. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For a recent discussion of dominant parties, see O. J. Reuter. 2010. "The Politics of Dominant Party Formation: UR and Russia's Governors," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62 (2), 293-327; O. J. Reuter and R. Turovsky. 2012. "Dominant Party Rule and Legislative Leadership in Authoritarian Regimes," *Party Politics*, online version, June 15; O. J. Reuter and Thomas F. Remington. 2009. "Dominant Party Regimes and the Commitment Problem: The Case of United Russia," *Comparative Political Studies*, 42, online version.

level, UR may be a “party of power,” but it is not a “party in power.”²¹

However, it is important to stress that UR is not nearly as powerful at the municipal level. A key factor here is the fact that it is not obligatory for municipal councils to adopt a party list system for local elections. As a result, while UR is clearly the dominant party, it does not command a majority in all municipal councils and not all municipal heads are party members. Here we should stress that UR’s dominance of regional level politics has thus come about largely through the party’s penetration of the regions “from above,” rather than through a process of grass roots development “from below.”

The regional level plays the crucial role for UR activities as it directly administers elections and is engaged in decision-making in numerous subnational power bodies. Regional elites can utilize the powers and status which they gain through their membership in UR to further their own interests. Expressions of loyalty can be used as a political tool to reduce the center’s interference in their local affairs. The rationale here is that those regions with openly loyal governors will be considered safe and stable and the federal center will be less interested in their affairs, giving the governors “carte-blanche” to get on with the task of running their regions. In other words, membership in UR may require loyalty but this does not necessarily entail a loss of informal autonomy. The trade-off of loyalty for local autonomy is a rational move by regional elites which have to operate under conditions of Putin’s “power vertical.” In addition, the incorporation of regional elites within UR helps to facilitate their consolidation around a dominant regional actor, usually the governor. While the federal center consolidates the governors and other powerful regional actors, the governors will likewise seek to apply the same strategy to lower level municipalities.

As noted above, UR was primarily created to bolster the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and centralize state power. However, although the centralization of decision making within UR can most clearly be seen in the administration of elections and the recruitment of party officials, there is still some room for center-regional and regional-local bargaining. According to the party’s charter, the nominations of candidates for regional assemblies, which are chosen at regional party conferences, have to be ratified at the center by the presidium of the General Council. In their turn, regional organizations exercise considerable control over their municipal branches and in particular over the selection of candidates for elections to municipal assemblies.

Another area that is centralized but may imply center-regional bargaining is the election of the regional party leadership. At the regional

²¹ R. Sakwa. 2012. “Between Representation and Mobilisation: Problems of Political Aggregation and Opposition in Contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics*, 28(3), 319.

level the party has two main bodies. One is the political council, and its secretary is considered to be the party leader in the region, the second is the executive committee. The head of the regional executive committee is appointed by the party's central executive committee with the approval of the presidium of the General Council and the regional political council (or its presidium). Despite the fact that the head of the regional executive committee is not the formal party leader in the region, the individual who holds this post will be an influential leader in the party bureaucracy. The executive committee is responsible for the organization of all of the party's activities, including elections, and it administers a significant amount of the party's budget. Controlling these institutions, the federal leadership of UR creates another "executive vertical" in Russia.

However, the regional political councils are formally more autonomous from the center than the executive committees. According to the party charter, the heads of regional political councils are elected in the regions by regional party conferences (the charter says that voting should be competitive with at least two candidates). In practice, almost no one can be elected to a senior post without the informal approval of the federal party leadership and the presidential administration. Moreover, the federal leadership has the authority to dismiss regional party leaders (for example, if they suffer electoral defeats or deliver poor electoral results for UR).

Clientelism at Work: The Recruitment of UR's Regional Party Secretaries

UR's success in dominating regional politics and consolidating regional elites has led to a complex situation. The party's success in incorporating regional elites has brought about a situation whereby many of its regional branches are made up of different elite groups. At the regional level, UR is able to provide its members and their informal groups with the following resources and opportunities:

- Seats in the regional legislature with the accompanying spoils.
- Seats and spoils in municipal councils.
- Appointment to numerous other posts in regional and municipal power structures.
- The possibility of a career at the federal level (e.g., election to the State Duma or nomination to the Federation Council).

In analyzing UR's quasi-factions, one should consider the structure of regional clienteles (or patron-client groupings consisting of a patron and his/her clientele). The most powerful of these will usually have the regional governor as its principal patron. Some clienteles will seek to coalesce

around popularly elected city mayors who have their own independent sources of political and financial resources. Many clientele groups are centered on business groups which seek to promote their economic interests through their political representation and the connections which they are able to forge with political elites. Sometimes clientele groups are formed by State Duma deputies, senators, and speakers of regional legislatures. But these will only be successful if they are not under the control of the governors and they have their own resources. It should also be mentioned that there is more than one tier of regional clients. Inside the largest clientele groups, such as those created by the governors, one can find sub-groups (sub-clientele groups) with their own smaller patrons and specific interests. Such sub-clientele groups will often fight for influence and power within the clientele group or seek to become a first-tier clientele group in their own right.²²

The division of elites into clientele groups is connected with the division of control over resources. Each clientele group should have:

- a loyal team (usually people subordinate to and/or appointed by the patron);
- a group of supporters (different from the loyal team and representing members of elites who are not directly subordinate to the patron, but who share the same goals and are interconnected through their pursuit of the common interests of the patron);
- a loyal electorate;
- influence over the decision-making process;
- control over the media;
- financial resources;
- control of a particular territory and its resources/authorities.

The political “actorness” (which we define as a combination of internal integrity and successful external political activity) of a clientele group is defined by its ability to influence the decision-making process at the regional and/or municipal levels.²³ In a previous study, Turovsky posited a model that comprised five tiers (orders) of regional political actors. The position of these actors on a particular tier depends on their type of representation in power structures (dominance, simple representation, absence of representation); influence over decision-making (permanent,

²² See Rostislav Turovsky. 2010. “The Liberal and the Authoritarian: How Different are the Russian Regions?” in Vladimir Gel’man and Cameron Ross, eds., *The Politics of Sub-National Authoritarianism in Russia*, Farnham: Ashgate.

²³ The concept of actorness in subnational politics, which we use in this article, most closely relates to the theories of international relations, where it means the ability to be an actor in the global system. Most widely, this term is used in the debate on the European Union and its actorness, see Christopher Hill, 1993, “The capability-expectations gap or conceptualising Europe’s international role,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31 (3), 305-328.

irregular, none) and the territorial level of representation/activity (regional, municipal, both).²⁴ However, mono-centric regional regimes have only one first-tier clientele. In polycentric regimes their number can be higher. But usually quasi-factions in UR are presented by the first-tier clienteles of regional governors (with the added possibility of sub-clienteles) and a number of second-tier actors arising from municipal power or business.

The inner structure of each patron-client grouping looks like a pyramid. At the top is the patron, usually one person, but sometimes this may consist of a small group of closely connected partners. Then (lower down) come members of the loyal team, followed by the general supporters and finally (below them) the electorate. Only groupings with such multi-tier pyramidal structures can be considered as well-developed and as potential first- or second-tier political actors. UR will usually be interested in gathering together a wider range of patron-client groupings as this will enhance its electoral prospects.

Let us now see how the clientelistic structure is represented in the regional leadership of UR. There are many reasons why governors may be chosen to head UR in the regions. First of all, the governor is the most influential political actor both formally and informally. Usually the governor is a patron of the strongest (and sometimes the only) first-tier clientele in the region. So the governor's control over UR is optimal in terms of the mobilization of regional resources and the electorate. However there are two possible arguments against this. Firstly, governors have other important duties that take up most of their time and may prevent them from ruling the party in an effective manner. Secondly, in such a centralized system, the center, while achieving its own domination, is often interested in weakening the powers of the governors, including their powers to rule the party in the regions.

Very few governors control the regional branches of UR directly through holding posts as heads of regional political councils. As of 2014, only Victor Zimin in Khakassiya combines these posts. Also in 2014 the leader of UR in the Republic of Udmurtia Alexander Solovyev was appointed an interim governor. Twelve others had experience heading UR's regional political councils. Among them were the governors of Mordovia (Nikolay Merkushkin), Ingushetia (Murat Zyazikov), North Ossetia (Taymuraz Mamsurov), Tuva (Sholban Karaool), Chechen Republic (Ramzan Kadyrov), Krasnodar Krai (Alexander Tkachev), Bryansk Oblast' (Nikolay Denin), Kaliningrad Oblast' (Nikolay Tsukanov), Novgorod Oblast' (Mikhail Prusak), Saratov Oblast' (Valeriy Radaev), Smolensk Oblast' (Sergey Antufyev), and Moscow City (Sergey Sobyenin). In eight cases (including that of Solovyev),²⁵ the heads of

²⁴ Turovsky, "The Liberal and the Authoritarian."

²⁵ The others were Denin, Zimin, Antufyev, Mamsurov, Kara-ool, Kadyrov, and Radaev.

regional political councils went on to become governors and not vice-versa. This means that their careers within the party helped them to gain leading executive posts. Moreover most of the governors did not hold their leading posts in UR for long. However, most governors do not need to take on the extra post of party head. Many governors are able to exercise influence over UR through the support of loyal UR party secretaries.

In order to investigate the relationship between governors and regional party secretaries we looked to see if a change of governor was followed by a change of regional party secretary. Regional cleavages deepen with every change of governor as such a transition leads to the creation of new governors’ clienteles, while “old” clienteles try to survive. As the chief mechanism of elite consolidation, UR embraces most of the regional clienteles. A change of governor should lead to a corresponding change of support from regional elites, but not all governors are strong enough to achieve this. As a result UR (along with regional assemblies) can in some cases also act as a stronghold for “older” regional elites who may oppose the new governors, especially if they come from other regions or parties.

We hypothesize that under conditions of a mono-centric regional regime based on patron-client relations, each new governor strives to change the UR party secretary. Our analysis shows that in most cases (46 out of 83²⁶) this was indeed the case (if not always immediately). On the other hand, in 27 regions the arrival of a new governor was not followed by the replacement of the party secretary.²⁷ In some of these latter regions, there has been conflict between the local elites and the governors, who came from careers in Moscow or other regions (“outsiders” or the so called “varangians”). The remaining 10 cases comprise those regions where the governors were elected to their posts before UR was created and thus are not included in our analysis.

The results noted above demonstrate that in many cases there are connections between the changes of governors and the following changes of regional party secretaries. In those regions where newly appointed governors were able to replace their secretaries, we would surmise that the new secretaries can be considered clients of the governors. Obviously it is in the governor’s interest to control the regional party secretary and thus each governor prefers to promote a member of his/her own team to this post. If the governor succeeds, this fact reveals that he has influence over such decisions at the federal level.

However, the number of exceptions is rather high. One of the reasons for this result can be found in the insufficient resources of some

²⁶ We did not analyse branches of UR in Crimea and Sevastopol, which were created in 2014.

²⁷ This number is liable to fall as in some of these regions the change of governor took place less than two years ago and there is still time for these governors to replace their secretaries.

of the “outside” governors who often face opposition from indigenous elites (e.g., the new governors of Rostov, Ryazan’, Samara, Stavropol’, Sverdlovsk, Vladimir, and Volgograd regions were unable to change the party secretary). In these regions sometimes we can see a split in the party elite between those who support the incumbent governor and those party members who belonged to the team of the previous governor.

There are also cases where governors may be members or supporters of other parties (Oryol, Smolensk, Zabaykalskiy regions) or have no party affiliation (Kirov Oblast’). In such regions one can expect to find opposition to the governor from the UR party leadership. These recent decisions to appoint non-UR party members to senior positions in the regions (reflecting distributive party politics within the Kremlin) have the potential to create unrest at the subnational level of UR. This potential instability leads to efforts to insure connections between non-UR governors and UR by means of co-opting UR members into regional governments, retaining the UR-led status-quo in regional and municipal assemblies, promoting high-ranking UR members to the Federation Council and other measures. Also the Kremlin and Putin himself demonstrate their open support for non-UR governors (especially before elections) in order to make the local branches of UR loyal to them unconditionally.

Table 1: Posts Held by Regional Party Secretaries

- Regional Governors (2)
- Senior Posts in Regional Governments (8)
- Speakers of Regional Assemblies (26)
- Deputies of Regional Assemblies (including heads of UR factions, deputy speakers, and chairs of standing committees) (33)
- Municipal Elites (9)
- Deputies of the State Duma and Federation Council (4)
- Other (1)

Source: Calculated by the authors.

The logic of centralized systems insists that regional party secretaries should come from the governors’ clienteles. The most obvious are cases where the governors combine their gubernatorial work with the post of UR regional party secretary (Zimin in Khakasiya and the governor of Udmurtiya, Solovyev) or 8 regions where the party secretaries are members of the regional governments (deputy governors, heads of regional governments as in the Chechen Republic, republican vice-presidents as, for example, in Yakutia), and therefore come under the direct administrative control of the governors²⁸ (see Table 1). However, there are at least two

²⁸ Ingushetia, Yakutia, Chechnia, Omsk, Pskov, Ulyanovsk, Chukotka, and Yamalo-Nenets AO.

reasons why the system is more complex. In some cases, the governor can hand over the job in UR to a loyal politician. In other cases, the federal center can make a choice in favor of another person, regarding him/her an effective leader, or acting in the interest of another clientele close to the Kremlin or UR federal leadership.

At the moment, UR has far greater representation in regional legislatures than it does in executive bodies. As a result it is more logical if party secretaries work in the legislative arena. This may mean that there is wider distance between the governors and the party secretaries, but, in many cases, they will still work as one team, particularly where the governors fully control the elections to the regional assemblies. We should also note here that there has been a sharp increase in the number of deputies from regional assemblies who head the regional branches of UR. As Slider notes, their numbers rose from 18 in 2004 to 40 in 2008²⁹ and, according to our calculations, they now comprise 59 (see Table 1).

In 26 regions UR is currently headed by a speaker of the regional assembly. In most of these cases, the speakers are fully loyal to, and dependent upon the governors, and they work in tandem with them. This connection is clearly seen in the process of adopting regional laws. The most common situation is when UR is headed by one of the deputies of the regional assembly, which is the case in 33 regions. Usually this will be a deputy speaker or a head of one of the legislative committees, and, in many cases, this person will also head the UR faction in the assembly. Normally they also exercise loyalty to the governor.

But, in the minority of the regions, the situation is more complex. Some of the regional speakers who head UR branches may be prominent figures with their own political, electoral and financial resources. In some cases, they may represent older more traditional elites, such as, for example, the group headed by Farit Mukhametshin (a political leader in the Republic of Tatarstan since the 1990s). Speakers who were appointed to their posts before the current governors will often be more politically independent of the executive and often they will have their own clienteles or represent the clienteles of the former governor. Thus, regional speakers can have their own independent factions within UR, which are mainly to be found among deputies of regional assemblies. The latter can also be regional party secretaries themselves and sometimes come from non-gubernatorial clienteles. These were mainly found in regions where the change of governor was not accompanied by a change of party secretary. In some regions, local elites have been powerful enough to elect their own choice of party secretary (as for example, in Perm’ where the party is headed by local businessman Nikolay Dyomkin, who won his post in

²⁹ Darrel Slider. 2010. “How United is UR: Regional Sources of Intra-Party Conflict,” *Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 26(2), 263.

a fierce struggle with another clientele³⁰). In Krasnoyarsk Kray the UR party secretary works in the regional assembly and comes from the most powerful company in the region (Norilsk Nickel). In such cases, one can expect greater levels of bargaining between the executive and legislative branches. On the other hand, such regional party secretaries can be even more loyal to the federal center since their political persistence depends on the Kremlin and is under threat from the governor.

There are only nine regions where party secretaries are representatives of municipal elites (mostly mayors and speakers of municipal assemblies). Formally, this is another level of power, which is autonomous from the regional level. However, in fact, it is usually subdued by the governors through political and financial instruments. As a result we can expect both mayors with their own clienteles and loyal municipal heads embedded in governor's clientele. But municipal leaders of any sort enjoy only local support and this is the reason why they rarely head regional UR branches. Some of those who succeed are closely connected to the governors and represent their clienteles (for example, the mayor of Krasnodar Vladimir Evlanov who previously worked in regional government). The most interesting and more "independent" example is in Lipetsk Oblast', where UR is headed by the mayor of the regional capital, Mikhail Gulevskiy, who worked in the most powerful enterprise in the region (the Novolipetsk Iron-and-Steel Company).

It is also important to note that UR has deliberately reduced the number of its federal deputies who serve as regional party secretaries.³¹ According to the official party line, this policy was dictated by the necessity of UR regional leaders to live and work full time in their territories. As Slider notes, the number of State Duma deputies who served as regional party secretaries fell from 17 in 2004 to 8 in 2008.³² According to our calculations, by 2014 their number had dropped even further to just two (Kaliningrad and Moscow City) and there were also two members of the Federation Council (Amur and Kurgan oblasts'). It is also interesting that in most cases remaining federal deputies who head regional UR branches are more or less independent from the governor. Maybe this is also the reason why there are so few of them. UR's head in Moscow City is Nikolay Gonchar, a famous and influential politician who started his public career in the early 1990s and has been successfully elected to the State Duma many times. In Kaliningrad Oblast' it is a representative of big regional business, Andrey Kolesnik, in Kurgan, famous Moscow businessman Sergey Lisovskiy.

³⁰ O. V. Baykina. 2014. "V permskoy Yedinoy Rossii Stolknovenie Grupp Politicheskovo Vliyaniya", *Newsroom.su*, p. 141. Accessed October 24, 2014.

³¹ Finally, there is one regional party secretary (in Karelia) who holds the post of the regional university rector and she is considered to be loyal to the governor.

³² Slider, "How United is UR."

We conclude this section by listing the possible cases of informal factionalism that can arise within the regional branches of UR. Due to the fact that regional governors are the main political actors and they are usually members of UR, their factions tend to be the largest. But there are reasons why other factions can exist and even command the loyalty of some party secretaries. One of the most important relates to the structural features of regional political regimes and, in particular, their “federal-regional,” “executive-legislative,” and “regional-local” cleavages.³³ These cleavages lead to the creation of informal factions headed by federal-level politicians (such as State Duma deputies and Federation Council members), local actors (such as mayors, local assembly heads), and senior political figures in regional legislatures (such as speakers). We also need to consider the structure of business-state relations, which leads to the creation of informal factions affiliated with large Russian companies or regional businessmen.³⁴ Also of importance is the policy of the federal center which sometimes tries to weaken the autonomy of governors. One method employed by the center is to ensure the appointment of regional party officials who will depend much more on the center than on their governors. This creates a situation where the regional party leader may be independent of the governor but deeply integrated into the “power vertical,” thus combining regional “independence” with federal “dependence” – a feature which may be unique to Russia.

Distributive Politics in UR Regional Leadership

An analysis of regional party secretaries reveals the complex structure of UR. It shows that “alternative” regional factions sometimes can win the battle over the selection of the leaders of regional political councils. Our analysis allows us to see what kinds of regional elite groups and political actors form factions within UR and uncover their regional roots. We can also better understand the reasons why party secretaries change so often and rarely last a full term. Our count shows that each region has had an average of 4.3 party secretaries since the UR’s foundation in 2001. On average UR regional party secretaries have served just 2.8 years instead of their full 5-year terms.

The complex make-up of Russian regional elites has forced UR to adopt consensus policies with regard to the distribution of positions in the party leadership, electoral lists and political bodies where the party is represented (such as regional legislatures and municipal assemblies). At the same time, the most powerful regional groups, in most cases the clienteles of regional governors, try to control the distribution of posts

³³ Turovsky, “The Liberal and the Authoritarian.”

³⁴ N. Petrov, and A. Titkov, eds. 2010. *Vlast', Biznes, Obschestvo v Regionakh: Nepravil'niy Treugol'nik*, Moscow: ROSSPEN.

within UR. All this leads to an uneven balance between the politics of consensus and the politics of domination, to the benefit of the latter. But often, for the sake of stability, the dominating group/groups will give concessions to the less powerful groups when it comes to elections or the distribution of spoils.

Unsurprisingly, it is the federal center which will make the final decisions concerning who will be included in UR's party lists for regional legislative elections, bearing in mind the need to make them more balanced in terms of factional representation. For the party lists, it is important to distribute the best (i.e., electable) positions among the different factions. The distribution of places on the three highest positions is especially important since these are included on the ballot. Very often UR will select a governor, senior politician or well-known celebrity (a "locomotive") to head its party list.³⁵ And, in some cases, the three top members may include prominent leaders of key elite groups, such as mayors of regional capitals, speakers of regional legislatures, etc.³⁶ Sometimes members of the top three places on the lists can represent different factions and even be bitter enemies (it is very important for the federal center to pressurize factions to pool their forces during the electoral campaign). In majoritarian districts, UR needs to choose its strongest candidates, and this often benefits well-established members of local elites with strong roots in the localities.

As noted above, two different models of consensus/domination balance can be seen operating within UR. One is the domination of a single group, usually that of the governor. This model provides for some limited inclusion of other groups. A second model is less common and can be found in those regions with deep elite cleavages. This model allows for the creation of temporary coalitions of opposition elites during election campaigns (if it is of mutual interest), which in some cases can be implemented under the patronage of the center.

Seeking Ethnic Consensus within Multi-ethnic Regions

In multi-ethnic regions, ethnic divisions may also influence UR's informal structure. Some of these regions distribute posts among ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, which thereby become factions of UR. This is most clear in the

³⁵ Our calculation for all the regional legislative elections in 2011-13 showed that in 38 regions out of 61 where elections were held, governors headed United Russia's party list (in addition the governors of Khanty-Mansi and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs were included in the top three places in Tyumen' Oblast' which embraces these two AOs). However, in 23 regions, and this is a very significant number, the federal center chose other politicians to top their party lists.

³⁶ According to our calculation in these 61 regions, the top three places in United Russia's party lists were occupied by 20 regional speakers, 10 State Duma deputies, 8 Federation Council members (including both senators from Ingushetia), and 11 mayors, heads of assemblies or administration heads of regional capitals.

most ethnically diverse republic of Dagestan. In this republic, the position of party secretary has always been held by Kumyks, the third-largest ethnic group. Such ethnic representation can be seen as a sort of political concession from the two larger ethnic groups, the Avars and Dargins, which take turns holding the post of republican head (Kumyks usually hold the positions of regional speakers or prime ministers). In Karachaevo-Cherkesiya the post of party secretary is given to an ethnic Russian (while executive power is headed by the titular groups). The cases of Dagestan and Karachaevo-Cherkesiya show that the post of leader of UR is one of those used in the ethnic distribution of power, but it is considered to be a relatively minor post and can thus be given to smaller or less influential ethnic groups. In contrast, in Kabardino-Balkariya, with its three main ethnic groups, UR is usually led by an ethnic Kabardinian, as is the head of the republic.

In bi-ethnic republics (where a titular group resides with Russians), we find an equal distribution of the top posts between “titular” politicians and ethnic Russians (about half of the party secretaries in these republics are ethnic Russians or come from other non-titular groups). Once again this is a concession to smaller groups. For example, the Republic of Altay is usually headed by Russians (constituting the majority of its population), whilst the leader of UR is normally an ethnic Altay. In Yakutiya, UR is headed by an ethnic Russian, while the republic is headed by an ethnic Yakut.

However, the importance of ethnic factionalism within UR should not be exaggerated. Many groups of regional elites are multi-ethnic and they will unite around a particular leader in order to promote their mutual interests irrespective of the identity of the head of the party. The formal leadership of UR by a representative of an ethnic group does not necessarily mean that this group will automatically be able to rule the party in its own favor - often the regional party secretary is simply not strong enough.

Repressive Politics against Defectors & Unwanted Competitors

The formation of clientelistic quasi-factions within UR has the potential to create serious problems for the party since the party cannot satisfy them all whatever kind of distributive politics it tries to implement. As a result, in some regions, we have witnessed the defection of members to other parties and electoral challenges to the party’s official candidates. Until recently defection to Fair Russia was considered a realistic option.³⁷ In Kirov Oblast’ one of UR’s long term leaders Oleg Valenchuk defected to the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and in 2006 was elected on this party’s ticket to the Kirov Regional Assembly. Later, he returned

³⁷ Luke March. 2009. “Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastatal Opposition,” *Slavic Review*, 68(3), 504-27.

to UR and has twice been elected to the State Duma as a UR candidate. His retreat to LDPR was tactical and resulted from his failure to win the gubernatorial elections in 2003. More recently, Civic Platform has become the main beneficiary of divisions within UR. One of the most important examples here is the case of Yaroslavl', where local businessman and politician Yevgeniy Urlashov left UR and won the 2012 mayoral elections as a candidate of Civic Platform, defeating the UR candidate.

However, defection from UR to other parties has usually proven to be ineffective. Defectors rarely win elections due to lack of resources and often suffer reprisals. For example, Urlashov was charged with corruption and forced to leave his mayoral post. Under such circumstances, it is more rational for disgruntled members to fight for a better position inside UR rather than defect to another party. Within UR there is a realization that internal squabbles and divisions have to be managed and their destabilizing effects minimized and kept as far as possible from the public eye.

Electoral competition between members of UR is most active at the municipal level and especially with regard to mayoral elections. For example, in October 2008, in the election for the mayor of Nizhniy Tagil, five UR members (including two vice-mayors) stood against the official candidate of UR (Aleksey Chekanov), who was pushed into third place in the election. He was defeated by a rival member of UR, Valentina Isaeva (she was expelled from the party in 2012). In Altai Kray, the municipal legislature of the city of Barnaul refused to ratify the decision of the governor to sack the mayor of Barnaul (Vladimir Kolganov). In response UR deputies threatened to retire en-mass from the city assembly and leave the party. Another interesting case was in Smolensk, where in 2009 the UR candidate and incumbent mayor lost the elections to Edward Kachanovskiy, who had been expelled from UR during the course of the election campaign. After his victory, UR gave him back his party membership, but in 2010 he was arrested, an event that ended his political career. Divisions within UR were also clearly demonstrated during the 2010 mayoral elections in Omsk. The splits in the party here were largely caused by the conflict between the regional governor and mayor. As a result, the incumbent mayor and UR's official candidate Victor Shreider was challenged by businessman Igor' Zuga, who supposedly had the governor's support. In the end, Shreider easily won the election, but Zuga was able to win a respectable 20 percent of the votes.

In some cases local divisions within UR led to the victory of opposition candidates to the fury of the Kremlin. For example, this was the case in the 2010 mayoral elections in the town of Bratsk (Irkutsk Oblast'). For this election, UR failed to name an official candidate and two party members fought each other as "independents" (the first deputy mayor Alexander Doskal'chuk and a deputy of the regional assembly Sergey Grishin). As a

result of the split in the UR vote, the campaign was won by the communist candidate Alexander Serov (who soon after was convicted for corruption and forced to leave his post).

In some regions, factions within UR have begun to appear in public. Thus, for example, an informal movement within the party – “the Omsk Initiative” – held a majority of the seats in the previous Omsk city council (all the deputies were nominated by UR); a “United Vladivostok bloc” was created in Primorskiy Krai in 2006 by Vladimir Nikolaev, the then mayor of Vladivostok. Although the number of such cases is relatively small, and most cases are long gone, the Kremlin is aware that such open conflicts have the potential to damage the reputation of the party and its future electoral prospects. It should, however, be stressed, that those “party dissidents” who defeated UR’s official candidates have not lasted long: many had to vacate their posts soon after the elections, some of them for terms in prison.

UR, for its part, has started to take measures to block its “dissidents” from standing in elections. Firstly, party discipline has been strengthened by threatening “unofficial” candidates with exclusion from the party. Secondly, the federal party leadership has begun to take tight control over the nomination process for mayoral elections. Thirdly, competition within the party has been institutionalized with the introduction of party primaries. Competition in some of the primaries had the positive result of bringing to the fore more effective candidates. However, the most important primaries (for gubernatorial and mayoral elections) are usually organized in favor of pre-selected candidates (approved by the federal center) and rarely attract genuine contestants.³⁸ For gubernatorial elections, it is difficult to imagine real competition in the primaries as the main participants are the interim governors appointed by president. It should also be remembered that the participation of independents in gubernatorial elections has deliberately been made impossible in almost all the regions in order to prevent further divisions from developing within the regional elites.

Conclusion

It has become common to discuss Putin’s “power vertical” with an emphasis on the hierarchical system of power and the subordination of the regions to the center.³⁹ However, as we have demonstrated, there are important

³⁸ There has only been one case of a candidate protesting against the results of a gubernatorial primary. Sergey Sal’nikov (who represented the agrarian lobby and the team of one of the former governors Vyacheslav Lyubimov), disputed the results of the primary which was held in Ryazan Oblast’ in 2012.

³⁹ See Vladimir Gel’man and Cameron Ross, eds. 2010. *The Politics of Sub-National Authoritarianism in Russia*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishers; Cameron Ross and Adrian Campbell. 2009. *Federalism and Local Politics in Russia*, London and New York: Routledge; A. Konitzer and S.K. Wegren. 2006. “Federalism and Political Recentralisation in the Russian

areas of center-regional relations that are carried out informally and these do not operate according to such a strict model of hierarchical and centralized control. One of these areas is the party-building process.⁴⁰ As Kynev concludes, “The formal dominance of the “party of power” in the regions hides the fierce competition for power that takes place between interest groups (clienteles, cliques, and clans). The real struggle for power in the regions takes place behind closed doors within the ranks of UR whose public display of unity is an illusion.”⁴¹

As we have shown, factionalism within UR is rooted in the complex structures and behavioral patterns of regional elites. Whilst the classic principles of federalism are weakly enforced in Russia, they nonetheless, “establish de jure limits to the scope of governmental action; increase the number of veto players in the political system; create multiple arenas for political organization and mobilization; distribute power between regions and regionally based political actors and affect the flow of material resources (fiscal or economic) between populations living in the federal union.”⁴² Likewise the specific contours of the federal system have had an important impact on UR’s organizational structure, which in turn has helped to shape the behavioral patterns of central and regional party elites.⁴³

For most regional elites, the obvious path to success is to join UR, but the consolidation of regional elites within the “party of power” has patently failed to erase their internal divisions and cannot effectively prevent their struggle over limited resources. Unlike the institutionalized form of factionalism, which is to be found in the dominant parties of Mexico and Japan, factionalism in UR is informal and non-institutionalized. Obviously it is senseless and possibly dangerous to legalize the existing factionalism within the party, as it is based on pragmatic power and the rent-seeking interests of elite groups and leaders.

Moreover, the decision to incorporate a majority of regional elites into the party fold has created major drawbacks. A main problem for the party is that it is unable to reward all of its key members with political

Federation: United Russia as the Party of Power,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 36(4), Fall, online version.

⁴⁰ See Henry E. Hale. 2003. “Explaining Machine Politics in Russia’s Regions: Economy, Ethnicity and Legacy,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 19(3), July-September, online version; Henry E. Hale. 2005. *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism and the State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Henry E. Hale. 2004. “The Origins of United Russia and the Putin Presidency: The Role of Contingency in Party-System Development,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 12(2), Spring.

⁴¹ Alexander Kynev. 2010. “Party Politics in the Russian Regions: Competition of Interest Groups Under the Guise of Parties,” in Vladimir Gel’man and Cameron Ross, eds. *The Politics of Sub-National Authoritarianism in Russia*, Farnham: Ashgate, 149.

⁴² E. L. Gibson ed. 2004. *Federalism and Democracy in Latin America*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 9.

⁴³ Cameron Ross. 2009. *Local Politics and Democratization in Russia*, London and New York: Routledge.

posts and spoils. At the same time, the path of defection for disgruntled members is no longer a viable option. In recent years, as UR’s domination of regional assemblies has spread to incorporate all of Russia’s federal subjects, we have witnessed a sharp rise in the development of different informal factions within the party. As the Golos Association wrote, “compulsory membership in UR for all representatives of regional elites holding significant offices and representing major economic interests irrespective of their real political affiliation is in fact shifting real political competition to the internal party level.”⁴⁴ As a result, the struggle for power between parties in the regions has now turned into a struggle for power within one party – UR. In response to these developments, the party has tried to bolster its control over competing elites through its strategies of domination and consensus, but, as we have demonstrated, in many regions these policies have been far from successful.

⁴⁴ “Statement No. 1 of the Golos Electoral Monitoring Association Based on the Results of Long Term Monitoring of Regional Election Campaigns,” 18 September, 7. Available at: <http://www.golos.org/a2218.html>, accessed February 6, 2009, 7.

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