



SECOND EUROPE-ASIA LECTURE*

Regime Transition, Uncertainty and Prospects for Democratisation: The Politics of Russia's Regions in a Comparative Perspective

VLADIMIR GEL'MAN

Is democracy developing in Russia's regions?

FOR MOST WESTERN AND RUSSIAN SCHOLARS who have observed recent political developments in Russia, the evaluation of the Russian political regime as something 'between authoritarianism and democracy' is common.¹ A number of designations employing 'quasi', 'semi', 'pseudo', 'proto' and other 'democracies' with descriptive adjectives² to qualify evaluations of democratic development have been widely used during the past several years to describe Russia's political regime.³ How relevant are these approaches for analysing democratisation in Russia? It is impossible to provide a complete answer to this question concerning Russian politics without taking a comparative perspective.

The comparative-oriented approach to the study of national politics has two different, although overlapping, dimensions. First, widespread among political researchers are cross-national (i.e. international) comparisons. There are a number of books and journal articles that, to varying degrees, compare the experiences of Russia and Eastern Europe, Latin America and Southern Europe as they make (or made) the transition from authoritarian regimes. Although the theoretical foundations, as well as the implications, of such comparative studies are still uncertain,⁴ this research approach has become quite common in contemporary Russian politics.

Simultaneously, the second dimension of comparative studies of Russian politics, involving cross-regional (i.e. intra-national) comparisons, is still neglected among Western and Russian scholars. Although several comparative cross-regional studies have appeared in recent years, they have been primarily concerned with governance,⁵ separatist activism⁶ or the election of regional governors⁷ or have simply described current developments without employing specific theoretical frameworks.⁸ Further-

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TABLE 1
DAHL'S MODEL OF POLITICAL REGIMES

<i>Competitiveness/participation</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
High	Competitive oligarchy	Polyarchy
Low	Hegemony	Inclusive hegemony

Source: Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT, and London, Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 6–7.

more, case studies of transition at the regional level have appeared in the form of articles,⁹ even monographs,¹⁰ but they pay little attention to the important comparative potential of such case studies.¹¹

An interesting puzzle arises from actual cross-regional comparison, as well as the comparison of multi-level (national and regional) political developments: if democracy is developing in Russia's regions, how can we explain the significant diversity of such developments across the regions? Are the regions less 'democratic' than Russia as a whole, and why are some regions more or less democratic than others? The perspective presented in this article offers an approach toward solving this puzzle.

Part of the solution includes the application and development of theoretical concepts. In Dahl's classical model of polyarchy,¹² he included two vital dimensions of democracy, competitiveness and participation, and established a matrix of ideal types of political regimes (see Table 1). While the application of such a neatly constructed model would seem to be relatively straightforward, this is not the case for Russia's developing political regimes—both on national and regional levels. On the one hand, the application of a minimalist view of competitiveness and participation in Russia's regions shows clear evidence of democratic development. The competitive election of governors, as well as regional legislatures, is accompanied by inclusive participation, based on universal suffrage. Thus, Dahl's test of polyarchy seems to be clearly confirmed as almost half of the regional governors (the majority appointed by President El'tsin) lost office in a wave of elections in 1996–97.¹³

On the other hand, however, such a picture is analogous to drawing conclusions about the average world temperature through calculations based solely on the temperatures of Antarctica and Africa. There is great variance across a spectrum of intervening measurements that is ignored. In Russia there are many possible paths of political change across the 89 regions. Thus, despite clear signs of democratic development, there is significant evidence of officially sponsored interference in electoral contests as well as of the clear ineffectiveness of public participation that would undermine such an evaluation. Similar practices are widespread in Russia's regions. Moreover, political developments in even the most 'democratic' regions are still highly fragile, often depending on the political allegiances of political actors. Such was the case in Nizhny Novgorod's 1998 mayoral election, where regional authorities quickly denounced the results when the 'wrong' candidate came to power. Finding a pretext in that candidate's criminal past, the election was eventually invalidated.¹⁴

Similar problems for evaluating post-authoritarian regimes are discussed in the transition literature,¹⁵ further raising the question of what Dahl refers to as the

'procedural' and 'substantive' dimensions of democracy. Procedural notions of democracy generally focus on the existence of formally democratic institutions, such as a written constitution that recognises a practice of regularly scheduled elections. Substantive democracy goes beyond simple procedures to add the norms of behaviour and belief that underlie the political activities of elected officials and the existence of popular liberties. Within this context, the political institutions of Russia's regions, including the legislative, executive and judicial branches of power, recognition of separation of powers, the practices of law making, local government autonomy, electoral practices, the role of political parties and interest groups, and voluntary associations, etc., should all be re-examined in a comparative perspective.

The controversies of regional democratisation in Russia are, of course, only a part of the general problems of democratisation. Narrow explanations, such as those provided by theories of 'socioeconomic modernisation' and 'political culture', fail to solve the regional puzzle. As there are many difficulties in explaining the democratic possibilities of a whole country, the in-depth examination of particular regions, and their 'unique' political challenges, provides a valuable perspective that informs the larger, national question of democratisation. An answer to the question posed at the beginning of this section is still in the making. The political evolution of Russia's 89 regions is far from monotonic. In striving to solve Russia's regional puzzle, the discussion that follows will further contribute to the ongoing search for new frameworks of analysis.

Regional political regimes in the Russian context

The term 'political regime' is commonly applied in varying political contexts—such as constitutional models (parliamentary or presidential regimes) or forms of government as a whole (democratic or authoritarian regimes). However, these classifications are not always applicable to studies of politics in transition, where such models are ill-defined and sometimes change very rapidly. In light of these issues, the understanding of political regime should be re-examined. Thus, my use of the concept of 'political regime' is purely functional. It is a set of (1) actors with resources and strategies and (2) political institutions (i.e. a set of rules and norms).¹⁶ This definition is not related to institutional designs or ideological schemes such as, for example, totalitarian regimes.

Thus, as employed here, the concept of regime requires a re-examination of Dahl's dimensions of political regimes. While one of Dahl's 'procedural' dimensions of democracy—actors' competitiveness—remains the same, the substantive dimension includes the type of predominant political institutions. Developing O'Donnell's distinction between formal and informal institutionalisation in so-called 'new democracies',¹⁷ this dimension would include two polar ideal types, the supremacy of (1) formal institutions (such as legislation, separation of powers, local government autonomy, elections, political parties, etc.) or (2) informal institutions, or arrangements of informal practices (such as particularism, clientelism, shadow economic relations). The former is associated more or less explicitly with the principle of 'rule of law', while the latter, by contrast, could be classified as 'arbitrary rule'. Within such a framework, the typology of political regimes is as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
 TYPOLOGY OF POLITICAL REGIMES: ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS

<i>Competitiveness of actors/predominant institutions</i>	<i>Informal (‘arbitrary rule’)</i>	<i>Formal (‘rule of law’)</i>
Competitive	Hybrid regime	Democracy
Non-competitive	Authoritarian regime	

The application of this concept of political regimes to analysis of regional politics in the Russian context gives rise to new challenges. One could say that any considerations about regional political regimes would be incorrect without taking into account the dependence of regional regimes on national political developments. It is true, however, that there is no empirical evidence of consistency in federal policies toward regions, either nationwide or toward particular regions. Since the late 1980s the degree of political independence of Russia's regions has increased in various forms and degrees. After the 1995–97 wave gubernatorial elections, the federal influence in regional politics became even more insignificant. Therefore, it seems useful in analysis of regional political regimes in Russia to treat regional entities as if they were nation-states. Within this framework, federal authorities (as well as other actors outside a particular region) may be regarded as ‘external’ actors. That is, one may consider their impact on regional politics as if one were analysing the impact of international influence on national politics.

The political regimes that existed in the Russian Republic from the mid-1950s until the late 1980s—both on national and sub-national levels—were commonly regarded as authoritarian. Even pluralist-revisionist scholars who analysed regional politics in Russia observed a significantly limited pluralism among actors such as interest groups¹⁸ that was not accompanied by public contestation in the electoral arena. Despite differences in the political styles of regional élites, as well as differences in relative economic development and ethnic composition of Russia's administrative units, these regional political regimes were nevertheless configured almost identically as sets of actors and institutions.

The post-Soviet period of political development clearly demonstrated the large-scale effects of diversity in Russian regional politics, as shown by general processes of political transformation in Russia effected by democratisation and decentralisation.¹⁹ In the late 1990s the variety of political regimes in Russia includes some features of pluralist democracy in St Petersburg,²⁰ authoritarianism in Kalmykia,²¹ and even ‘warlordism’ in Primorsky *krai*,²² as well as some hybrid regimes in other regions.²³ Thus, scholars of Russia's regional politics need to provide an explanation of this variation. Why did nearly identical administrative units of the Soviet empire develop in such different directions over the past 10 years?

There are two approaches for solving this regional ‘puzzle’ based on the general framework for studying changes of political regimes in a comparative perspective. One such framework, regarded as ‘structural’²⁴ or ‘functional’,²⁵ connects causes and consequences of political changes with macro-level variables such as level of socio-economic development²⁶ or with popular values and attitudes,²⁷ as well as with

social capital.²⁸ At first sight, however, these explanations are at least challenged by the actual practices of Russia's regional politics. We cannot truly employ the prism of socio-economic determinism to show that the political regime of pre-industrial Kalmykia is precluded in advanced industrial Tatarstan owing to a lack of political competitiveness and the domination of informal institutions. It is also hard to explain the emergence of completely different political regimes in the city of Moscow²⁹ and in Sverdlovsk *oblast'*,³⁰ as both regions exhibit clearly pro-democratic and pro-market orientations in mass voting behaviour. As a result, the issue of applicability of this framework to Russia's regional politics will remain on the agenda of future discussions.

In this article I will use the second framework—'procedural'³¹ or 'transitological'³²—which explicitly rejects the idea of 'objective' pre-conditions for democracy as well as other forms of political regime.³³ This approach tends to explain the consequences of political regime change through the analysis of the transition process itself. I will begin by considering some theoretical and methodological issues of employing a transitological approach and discuss re-designing this framework for more effective analysis. I shall then try to explain the emergence of differing political regimes in the post-Soviet transition, while raising the cases of certain particular Russian regions. I shall close by presenting the implications and generalisations of this discussion.

Regime transition and uncertainty

Early in their seminal book on regime transition, O'Donnell & Schmitter raise the issue of transition from certain authoritarian rule to uncertain 'something else',³⁴ which could be democracy or a new authoritarian regime. Despite this degree of uncertainty, almost all works in this field are based on some kind of 'iron law of democratisation'. Explicitly or implicitly, this type of research has been based on teleological schemes of political development. According to such an approach, all transitions will sooner or later achieve democracy (at least in Dahl's 'procedural' sense) as the final goal of political development. But there are no well-founded reasons why this should be so, save for macro-historical speculation. This kind of historical teleology seems similar to a pure Marxist-Leninist paradigm of historical materialism. In this article I choose an alternative paradigmatic approach to analysing regime transition—one that views it as a kind of open-ended process. At least, we know the point of departure (authoritarianism), but there is no way of knowing a priori the point of arrival.

Speaking purely in functional terms, the process of regime transition (i.e. the shift from one political regime to another), regardless of the regime type itself, includes several stages: (1) the decline of the previously existing 'ancien regime'; (2) its breakdown; (3) some kind of uncertainty in all components of the political regime; (4) the outcome of uncertainty, meaning the establishment of a new political regime; (5) institutionalisation of a new political regime (regardless of whether it is a 'democracy' or 'something else'). Paradigmatic differences between 'transition to democracy'³⁵ and an 'open-ended' transition are shown in Table 3.

The crucial points in the process of regime transition are stages 2 and 4—the

TABLE 3

STAGES OF REGIME TRANSITION: 'TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY' AND 'OPEN-ENDED' MODELS

<i>Transition to democracy</i>	<i>Open-ended model</i>
1. Liberalisation	1. Decline of ancien regime
2. Transition = installation of democracy	2. Breakdown of ancien regime
3. Consolidation	3. Uncertainty
	4. Outcome of uncertainty = installation of new regime
	5. Institutionalisation of new regime

breakdown of the 'ancien regime' (i.e. 'entry' into uncertainty) and the installation of the new regime (i.e. 'exit' from or 'outcome' of uncertainty). This 'gap' of uncertainty radically differs from the 'transition to democracy' model, where the installation of democracy results from the breakdown of the authoritarian regime 'by default'.

Uncertainty is a principal stage of transition, which is distinct from uncertainties in stable regimes. As Bunce noted, the distinction is that within authoritarian regimes the positions of actors are more or less certain, yet the institutions are ill-defined (or uncertain). In democratic polities, however, the institutions are defined (or certain), while the positions of actors are uncertain or, at least, not defined a priori. During the transition period, both these elements of political regimes—actors' positions and institutions—are uncertain to varying degrees.³⁶

The variations of uncertainty are more clearly understood in connection with the use of different models of transition after the breakdown of the ancien regime employed by Karl & Schmitter.³⁷ They provide a four-cell matrix of ideal types of modes of transition, using as variables (1) types of actors who play a crucial role in the transition processes and (2) their use of strategies during the transition period.

As one can see in Table 4, these four modes of transition differ significantly in their degree of uncertainty. Pacts tend to be minimally uncertain, while revolutions provide large-scale (and, usually, long-run) uncertainty, connected with mass uprising and public violence.

The key characteristics of this uncertainty are the uncertain position of actors and the institution-free environment. Therefore, actors are free to fight for domination within the polity using all means for power maximisation, but not for the creation of democracy. The period of uncertainty in Russia's national politics gives clear evidence of this process. After the transition by imposition in August 1991, and until the violent outcome of uncertainty in October 1993, the struggle for the dominant

TABLE 4

MODES OF TRANSITION (AND DEGREE OF UNCERTAINTY)

<i>Actors/strategies</i>	<i>Compromise</i>	<i>Force</i>
Elites	Pact (Low)	Imposition (Middle)
Masses	Reform (Middle)	Revolution (High)

Source: Terry Lynn Karl & Phillippe Schmitter, 'Models of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe', *International Social Science Journal*, 43, 128, 1991, p. 275.

TABLE 5
SCENARIOS OF OUTCOMES OF UNCERTAINTY

<i>Positions of actors/ strategies of actors</i>	<i>Compromise</i>	<i>Force</i>
Dominant actor	Elite settlement	Winner takes all
Uncertainty or balance of forces	Struggle over the rules	War of all against all

position between rival actors—first between Gorbachev and El'tsin, and then between El'tsin and the Supreme Soviet—can hardly be regarded as a 'transition to democracy' in the sense of the normative theories. Even those politicians who call themselves 'democrats' have no intention of losing their positions and being replaced by other actors.

Such rational actors would reject the idea of competitive democracy, which needs the establishment of formal institutions for free and fair political competition, and threatens the loss (or at least limitation) of their powers. Indeed, the maximisation of one's own powers and the minimisation (or at least reduction) of the powers of any other actors who potentially could challenge one's position, fulfils a rational actor's strategy in a stage of uncertainty. For certain regimes, this strategy is limited either by institutions (in democratic regimes) or by other actors' opportunities, such as their positions or resources (in authoritarian regimes). During a period of uncertainty actors either have no institutional limitations or have insufficient information about other actors' resources. If one actor has enough resources to overwhelm others, it simply tries to assume the position of the dominant actor. This position means an absence of limitations on the 'leader' due to the relative weaknesses of other actors. If the resources of several actors are more or less equal, their struggle for survival could develop in the form of bargaining, if actors use a compromise strategy, or, in the case of the use of force, in the form of permanent violent conflict, such as Hobbes's 'war of all against all'.

A period of uncertainty—even large-scale and long-run—cannot exist forever, though. This stage inevitably comes to a conclusion in one way or another. The outcome (or exit) out of uncertainty could be regarded as a kind of reaction to the entry into uncertainty. Thus, partial use of the Karl & Schmitter schema of modes of transition engenders the development of a matrix similar to Table 4 that focuses on scenarios of outcomes of uncertainty. Variables in such a matrix include (1) the position of actors and (2) their use of strategies during the period of outcome of uncertainty (see Table 5).

The first of four possible outcomes of uncertainty, 'war of all against all', is an actors' decision about outcomes but does not yet qualify as a true 'exit' from uncertainty. If actors use force strategies when no one actor possesses overwhelming resources, the 'war of all against all' will continue, probably evolving into new forms. The 'warlordism' described by Kirkow in Primorsky *krai*³⁸ is the typical result of such a scenario. If in addition actors use mass mobilisation or even external intervention as a weapon in such a struggle, this scenario tends to take the form of civil war. The case of the Chechen war is clearest in this respect. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of new regime installation, this scenario of outcome of uncertainty cannot be regarded as a unit for future analysis. A second scenario could be realised if the one actor employed a force strategy better than others and achieved the position

of dominant actor. The result of this scenario is a dominant actor victory in a zero-sum game based on the principle of 'winner takes all'.

The third possible scenario of outcome of uncertainty could be developed as a result of an explicit or implicit agreement between the dominant actor and other actors over the common acceptance of institutions that secured their current positions. This scenario is called an 'elite settlement', the term employed by Higley and other authors.³⁹ Finally, uncertainty or balance of force among actors, as well as danger of defeat in zero-sum conflict, incline them to use of formal institutions as 'weapons' in the struggle for survival. The regular use of democratic and/or legal institutions as such weapons makes them inevitable. This outcome could be regarded as a 'struggle over the rules', quite the opposite of 'war of all against all' (i.e. struggle without formal rules).

The matrix proposed is simply an analytical tool; in practice the outcome of uncertainty and installation of a new regime could combine features of the different scenarios. For instance, Russia's national political regime after the events of October 1993 was installed as a combination of the 'winner takes all' and 'elite settlement' scenarios. Yet, looking at some of Russia's regions clearly approaching some of these ideal-types facilitates exposing the logic of underlying different scenarios of outcomes of uncertainty and their impact on new political regimes. This brings us from theoretical considerations to the comparative analysis of Russia's regional political regimes.

Scenarios of outcomes of uncertainty

'Winner takes all'

The causes for the emergence of a dominant actor which maximised its power through the use of force strategies could vary widely. A long duration of uncertainty tends to discredit all political actors. Thus, the opportunities for 'outsider' populists to seize all powers become more viable in cases of electoral contestation. The 1994 emergence of Lukashenka's regime in Belarus, as well as Kirsan Ilyumzhinov's regime in Kalmykia in 1993, are clear examples of this outcome (as to Russian national politics, Zhirinovskiy's electoral successes in the 1993 parliamentary elections and Lebed's achievements in the 1996 presidential poll come close to such a scenario). Mass support easily solves any potential problems that might arise due to the abolition or elimination of any institutional limitations on arbitrary rule. The dissolution of parliaments, electoral fraud and limitations on the press elicit protests only from a narrow layer of groups of political activists, who maintain few resources in conditions of mass apathy. It is interesting to note that in the cases of Belarus and Kalmykia various forms of political opposition—i.e. liberals, communists and nationalists—created a negative consensus coalition. Without sufficient resistance, populist leaders are able to avoid political competition, even strengthening their positions through a biased set of formal institutions. For example, according to Kalmykia's electoral law, one-third of the deputies of the regional legislature were elected on a non-competitive basis from a list of nominations submitted by the President of Kalmykia; moreover, the election of these deputies was legally valid if this list of candidates passed a

minimum threshold of 15% of eligible votes.⁴⁰ As a result, populist leaders are able to assert control over the public sphere as a whole, based on traditional rather than rational-legal mechanisms of legitimacy.

The assertion of power by democratically elected executives in new democratic polities⁴¹ is another option for the 'winner takes all' scenario. Political leaders who achieve top executive positions, even through the support of democratic parties or movements, attempt to avoid horizontal accountability⁴² as well as avoid the danger of electoral defeat. Mass support in an environment without formal institutions is likely to result in power maximisation by the executive, using a combination of different strategies and institutions. The political regime in the city of Moscow is a case of such an assertion of executive power.⁴³ The emergence of this regime is based on mass support of the mayor (Gavriil Popov and then Yurii Luzhkov) in elections, and a strategy to minimise the influence of alternative actors through public discrediting, administrative damage, and the incorporation of a system of 'municipal capitalism' into the mayoral office. The political stability of this regime is enhanced by mass clientelism, making it easier to form a 'political machine' in the mayoral office, which penetrates all levels of city government and is secured through the electoral legitimacy of the dominant actor as well as the political regime as a whole.

Finally, the assertion of power may result from the decay of the previous political regime owing to long-run and large-scale uncertainty and 'war of all against all'. The case of Saratov *oblast'* is typical in this respect. Ryzhenkov evaluates the political struggle in this region during 1991–96 as 'aspiration for the (re)establishment and assertion of the *obkom* position. This position is characterised by total political, economic and ideological control over the state sector and public life through the establishment of a hierarchical system of government without any control over the governing group'.⁴⁴ However, none of the actors in Saratov achieved such a goal. Long-run conflict continued over a period of five years, and all actors' positions were weakened.⁴⁵ Under these conditions, most actors were forced to agree to a 'lesser evil' outcome. Since the former vice-mayor of Saratov Dmitrii Ayatskov came to occupy the position of Governor, political competition in Saratov *oblast'* has disappeared completely.

As one can see, despite different causes in the 'winner takes all' scenario of outcome of uncertainty, the outcomes are similar to those scenarios which do not envisage any breakdown of the ancien regime. These types of political regimes have emerged in some Russian republics, such as Tatarstan, where the ancien regime of the late-Soviet period was directly transformed during the post-Soviet period into a power monopoly of the governing elite. Referring to the political development in Brazil, Linz classified these regimes as an 'authoritarian situation' rather than 'authoritarian regime'.⁴⁶ The principal distinction here is that the formal institutions of a democratic regime still survive (such as the legislature, legislation, elections or political parties) but have little influence on the decision-making process. The dominant actor faces no obstacles to excluding other actors from the political process and securing direct or indirect control over political life and the media. Any expectations that the dominant actors will disappear in the future have little foundation: under conditions of an absence of real alternatives, successful governments

can survive, secure popular support and minimise any evidence of uncontrolled political activity. The emergence of political alternatives through the influence of external actors seems, at the very least, doubtful. The Russian national authorities need stability, loyalty and predictability of regional political regimes more than open political competition with unclear consequences. Such mutual interest of external actors and the regional dominant actor tends to be institutionalised in the form of informal contracts between regional and national authorities (often confirmed by formal agreements). The scheme of 'exchange of loyalty for non-intervention' is the core of these contracts.

Overall, the 'winner takes all' scenario of outcome of uncertainty is likely to enhance the power monopoly of the dominant actor and the supremacy of informal institutions. The consequences of this scenario are the emergence of political regimes with numerous features of authoritarian rule. These regimes could be relatively stable, and the prospects of their democratisation are minimal.

'Elite settlement'

The scenario of 'elite settlement' is close to a 'pact'⁴⁷ which includes the reorganisation of elite interests and the achievement of substantial compromises among competing actors over crucial political issues. This perspective is commonly accepted by scholars of political transition who see 'pacts' as the most effective (fast and peaceful) means of democratisation.⁴⁸ However, 'pacts' which occur during the breakdown of the ancien régime are quite distinct from agreements achieved among actors simply for the sake of an end to uncertainty. The former (such as the classical Spanish Moncloa Pact) focused on defining formal institutions, such as the rules of public contestation during regime transition. Alternatively, the latter is based on the actors' intentions to secure their positions and thus to consolidate the new regime under conditions minimising competitiveness. In a framework of 'transition to democracy' pacts really serve as a mode of democratisation. But the outcome of uncertainty through pact serves to keep democratisation pending, or at least diminishes such unpleasant consequences of democracy as the threat of loss of power through public contestation.

This kind of 'elite settlement' is based on explicit or implicit agreements between the dominant actor and competitors over the sharing of powers, or the sharing of spheres of influence in a political market. Such a strategy is reasonable, even rational,⁴⁹ if the dominant actor has insufficient resources or faces other limitations on using a force strategy, while competitors have enough resources for survival but not enough for decisive steps toward their own ascent as dominant actor. Thus, both sides benefit from an 'elite settlement': the dominant actor secures its position, while its competitors receive access to subordinate positions within the governing group.⁵⁰ The formation of a 'minimum winning coalition' of dominant and subordinate actors is an immediate result of these pacts. The formation of this coalition has multiple goals, including protection against political outsiders (who are not included in the 'elite settlement') coming in and attaining powerful positions.

Among Russia's regions, the case of Nizhny Novgorod *oblast'* is typical of this scenario.⁵¹ When appointed in 1991, Governor Boris Nemtsov had no influence on

regional elites. Nemtsov had to rely on a force strategy, but later achieved several important informal agreements with the majority in the regional legislature, some enterprise directors, and parts of the administrative elite of the region. These subordinate actors were loyal to Nemtsov as the dominant actor, yet acquired greater security in their previous positions. Nemtsov used this strategy to establish more effective regional government performance⁵² and for successful conflict resolution within and outside the region that worked to his own benefit. At the same time, political competition among actors was limited. In the 1995 gubernatorial election Nemtsov won easily with an overwhelming majority; his total vote was more than twice that of his closest challenger. In 1997, however, Nemtsov was appointed a first deputy prime minister in the Russian government and left Nizhny Novgorod, thereby undermining the basis of the regional 'elite settlement'.

A scholar in Nizhny Novgorod characterised the main features of the regional political regime under Nemtsov as follows: (1) prevalence of executive authority over the legislature; (2) an informal contract of mutual loyalty between regional and national authorities; (3) indirect control of regional authorities over the media; (4) neutralisation or limitation of real or potential centres of political opposition in the region; (5) patronage of regional executives over public associations—both political groups and 'third sector' non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—in exchange for their loyalty.⁵³ Although he referred to these features as 'regional authoritarianism', the relative autonomy of the legislature and political parties and the absence of explicit violations of political and civil rights provided more grounds for classifying the impact of Nizhny Novgorod's 'elite settlement' on regional politics as a hybrid regime or 'semi-democracy'.⁵⁴

The case of Nizhny Novgorod's 'elite settlement' is not unique among Russian regions. Similar features of elite consolidation and regime transition have been found in Tomsk *oblast'* by McAuley.⁵⁵ In his study of elite developments in Omsk *oblast'* Melvin has shown that the basis of an 'elite settlement' between governing groups and left-patriotic opposition almost approached power sharing: the former won gubernatorial and city of Omsk mayoral elections, while the latter represented the region in the State Duma. As a result, elections did not challenge the positions of the governing group.⁵⁶

The achievement of the 'elite settlement' does not mean, however, the sustainability of the political regime itself. It is challenged by an informal institutionalisation of arbitrary rule that undermines functioning democratic institutions. In the case of Nizhny Novgorod *oblast'*, core decisions about a regional programme of economic reform in 1992 were issued not by the legislature (or by any other formal institution) but by an informal Coordinating Council, which included the executive and legislative heads of the region and city of Nizhny Novgorod. The continuation of these informal practices of decision making provides a pre-condition for power assertion. An outsider populist, Andrei Kliment'ev, who has a criminal background and was under investigation during the 1998 election, won the mayoral race in the city of Nizhny Novgorod. Owing to victory of the 'wrong' candidate, the regional authorities cancelled the election and called for a new race. Thus, public contestation was limited. Nevertheless, in the next round another challenger won, finally breaking the 'elite settlement'.

This kind of 'elite settlement' is generally fragile, and changes in the balance of actors' resources easily undermine its stability. The breakdown of the 'elite settlement' either results in movement toward an 'authoritarian situation' (if the dominant actor strengthens its position) or 'entry' into a new cycle of uncertainty (if the dominant actor loses its position). For instance, President Murtaza Rakhimov of Bashkortostan remained in his post after a compromise decision among regional elites to increase opportunities for rent-seeking bargains with the Russian Centre. After this goal was achieved, Rakhimov—in one way or another—injured the chances of his political competitors and asserted a power monopoly in the region.⁵⁷ In St Petersburg an attempt to form an 'elite settlement' was unsuccessful for other reasons. Mayor Anatolii Sobchak had an informal agreement with a majority of the city's legislature to create for themselves favourable conditions for the mayoral and legislative elections. But those parties and interest groups which were not included in the 'elite settlement' established a negative consensus coalition, which presented a candidate in the 1996 mayoral election. After the victory of the opposition-backed candidate, Sobchak lost his post and a new period of uncertainty had been launched.⁵⁸

The 'elite settlement' scenario of outcome of uncertainty generally includes the sharing of powers between dominant and subordinate actors in order to limit public political contestation and establish the supremacy of informal, rather than formal, institutions. These regimes are fragile and very dependent on changes in the political situation. Speaking more generally, this scenario tends to act as a 'transition' between 'winner takes all' and the following scenario—'struggle over the rules'.

'Struggle over the rules'

The third scenario of outcome of uncertainty could be described as a transition from 'war of all against all' to 'struggle over the rules'. When force strategies are exhausted, and the level of uncertainty is relatively high, the positions of political actors are threatened, as a result either of defeat in a 'war' or of unsuccessful bargaining over the 'elite settlement'. Therefore, installation of and adherence to formal institutions becomes the only opportunity for actors to survive within a regime. In such a situation, institutions become a 'weapon' for the actors.⁵⁹ Moreover, while supremacy of one actor tends to be fixed in the institutional design, uncertainty or balance of forces are likely to lead to the general acceptance of rules which allow actors to avoid the 'winner takes all' outcome.⁶⁰

Political reform during 1994–97 in Udmurtia is a typical case of 'struggle over the rules'. As a local observer noted,

the constitution-making process in the republic was faced with contradictions ... the compromise decision did not solve tensions between different groups of regional political elites. The prospects for establishing a presidency for the Republic of Udmurtia meant an opportunity for the full victory of one of these groups over its competitors. The outcome of this struggle was unclear, because the two main contenders had more or less equal political potential. Under this uncertainty, the Supreme Soviet of Udmurtia concluded that the rejection of the idea of a presidency would be the best solution of this political problem.⁶¹

Although one of these contenders, Aleksandr Volkov, was the elected chairman of

the regional legislature, he was unable to monopolise power in the region. His attempt to gain control over local government in the region was terminated by a decision of the Constitutional Court of Russia. Therefore, the struggle of elites for power maximisation was 'forced to develop within the constitutional framework'.⁶² As one can see, the use of this framework really limited opportunities for the assertion of individual power and preserved opportunities for contestation among actors.

The case of Sverdlovsk *oblast'* demonstrated a more advanced version in the development of the 'struggle over the rules' scenario. The use of formal institutions as 'weapons' here was accompanied by electoral competition among actors. Under the arbitrary rule of a dominant actor, mass politics were based on 'political machines' and administrative mobilisation. Alternatively, the 'struggle over the rules' scenario created an environment for the emergence of a competitive party system. After the 1993 dissolution of the 'Urals republic' and resignation of regional governor Eduard Rossel', regional elites in Sverdlovsk *oblast'* lost their unity, with no actors occupying a dominant position. On the one hand, having lost access to administrative resources, Rossel' was forced to use alternative mechanisms of electoral mobilisation for his return to power; he headed his own political party, an organisation labelled a non-party movement, 'Transformation of the Urals'. On the other hand, it is likely that the use of formal rules/institutions underlay the legislative decisions to create political institutions which excluded a 'winner takes all' outcome (such as a PR electoral system and the autonomy of local government). Thus, even after his victory in the 1995 gubernatorial election, Rossel' was still unable to monopolise power in the region. At the same time, his main contenders were forced to establish their own parties for elections to the regional legislature. After the 1995–98 series of electoral campaigns, the party system of Sverdlovsk *oblast'* became the basis for competition among political actors.⁶³

Speaking more generally, limitations on political struggle imposed by formal institutions make the return of actors employing force strategies unlikely. Transferring this struggle into the field of electoral competition created an environment for contending with the various alternatives in the structure of a party system. In this sense, elite conflicts, rather than settlements, are more likely to limit the influence of informal institutions and aid in the growth of political society as a whole. In the end, the 'struggle over the rules' scenario of outcome of uncertainty is likely to provide an institutional framework as a precondition for democratisation in the sense of horizontal accountability through the institutional limitation on assertions of power. Nevertheless, this outcome has not yet achieved a full-fledged democratic regime as there has been no turnover of political actors within these institutions. Huntington's 'two-turnover' test of sustainable democratisation based on the achievement of a second shift of government due to electoral defeat⁶⁴ is helpful in this sense. Until the institutionalisation of the new regime through the second election of a chief executive, it is still quite fragile. In contrast with 'authoritarian situations', the consequences of the 'struggle over the rules' scenario may be a 'democratic situation'.⁶⁵ The different scenarios of outcome of uncertainty and characteristics of new regimes in Russia's regions are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6

SCENARIOS OF OUTCOMES OF UNCERTAINTY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW REGIMES: THE CASE OF RUSSIA'S REGIONS

<i>Scenario of outcome of uncertainty</i>	<i>Consequences of outcome of uncertainty</i>	<i>Characteristics of the new political regime</i>	<i>The cases of Russia's regions</i>
Winner takes all	Authoritarian situation	Monopoly of a dominant actor, informal institutions	Saratov <i>oblast'</i> , Moscow, Kalmykia
Elite settlement	Hybrid regime	Sharing of powers between dominant and subordinated actors, informal institutions	Nizhny Novgorod, Tomsk <i>oblast'</i> , Omsk <i>oblast'</i>
Struggle over the rules	Democratic situation	Competition of actors, formal institutions, moving toward rule of law	Udmurtia, Sverdlovsk <i>oblast'</i>

Conclusion: actors, institutions and prospects

It is as yet unclear how this model of regime transition is applicable to the analysis of political developments in Russia as a whole. This issue is on the agenda for future research, however. At least three factors could challenge such a model: (1) the influence of external actors, (2) the influence of mass politics, (3) the dynamics of institutional changes. Until now, however, none of these factors has played a significant role in the changes of *regional* political regimes.

The influence of external actors—Russia's national authorities, as well as nationwide financial-industrial groups—affects persons who occupy powerful positions, but does not affect regional political regimes themselves. This lack of influence can be explained in two ways. First, state-building, which is based on the principle of rule of law, was not a priority task for Russian authorities. Second, the administrative resources of the Centre, as well as its capacity to employ force strategies, were exhausted after the 1994–96 Chechen war and the 1996–97 gubernatorial elections. Although the Centre has used some measures as substitutes for force strategies (such as pushing particular economic policies in the regions, the strengthening of presidential representatives as well as local governments vis-à-vis regional authorities), it has not been very successful. On the eve of the new wave of political struggles at the national level (especially during the 1999–2000 national elections), a compromise strategy of the Centre toward the regions—such as exchange of loyalty for non-intervention—seems the most rational.

The role of mass politics under conditions of widespread clientelism in Russia—which some consider to be a feature of Russia's political culture⁶⁶—is limited. 'Political machines' as a tool of mass mobilisation are more effective than social cleavages, which could be transformed into forms of political competition only if they were supported by cleavages among elites.⁶⁷ There is no basis to connect these effects with the uncertainty of regime transition. In the long run, 'political machines' in American or Southern Italian cities have been undermined by modernisation processes; after the breakdown of a system of mass patronage, mass politics played a crucial role in political competition.⁶⁸ Yet, this perspective seems doubtful under

conditions of arbitrary rule, which, pending the emergence of incentives to develop a party system in the regions, seems to be the only alternative to a clientelist elite-mass linkage, at least in the short term.

Finally, political institutionalisation in Russia strengthened rather than undermined authoritarian features of regional political regimes. Initially, arbitrary rule resulted from the decay of the ancien regime. Now it serves to strengthen actors in new political regimes, especially owing to their use of rent-seeking strategies. There are no actors yet who realise that it is in their interest to shift institutional frameworks from arbitrary rule toward rule of law. The emergence of such actors could be connected either with institutionalisation of democratic situations during the 'struggle over the rules' scenario or with the breakdown of those regimes, which would result in the 'winner takes all' and 'elite settlement' outcomes of uncertainty.

Speaking more broadly, democracy does not emerge 'by default' (or even 'by design'). It does not become inevitable because politicians who call themselves 'democrats' occupied power positions (even if they have good intentions). Democracy is a 'contingent outcome of conflict'⁶⁹—and nothing else. If political competition among actors continues to develop, transitions to democracy may occur. In this sense, Churchill's well-known comment on democracy as a bad form of government, save for all others, means that political competition within the framework of formal institutions is simply the 'lesser evil' for actors. The question, however, is whether Russia's actors—on national and regional levels—could choose the evil of democracy as really a 'lesser' one.

The European University at St Petersburg

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