Trading Places?: Regionalism in Russia and Ukraine

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Introduction

In 1991, the politics of withdraw from the USSR took on similar spatial dynamics in Russia and Ukraine. In both cases, regions emerged in 1989-1991 as key actors that spurred the exit of these former Soviet republics. Yet despite similar origins, regionalism took on different trajectories. While Russia decentralized power to an unprecedented extent following independence, Russia’s regions later receded as political actors with the Kremlin’s campaign to recentralize power during Vladimir Putin’s presidency. By contrast, Ukraine’s drive for independence emerged from a regional base but Kyiv moved faster to centralize power, consolidating the center’s dominant role with the 1996 constitution. Indeed, a number of Leonid Kuchma’s methods for (re-)establishing control over the regions later would be emulated by Putin in constructing his “ruling vertical.”

In attempting to account for these divergent outcomes, one confronts a deep division in existing approaches to understanding regionalist trajectories. The various literatures on regionalism, separatism, and ethnofederalism are divided roughly into two camps over the factors that account for regionalist trajectories: those that focus on institutions and particularly on ethnofederalism¹, and those that emphasize the roles of elites at the central and

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subnational levels. This division figures prominently in the literature assessing regionalist trajectories in Eurasia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1990s and into the next decade, the discussion of regionalism or subnationalist sovereignty movements was dominated by institutionalist approaches. These approaches elaborated the various means by which ethnofederal institutions adopted during the Soviet era served as incubators for the development of anti-Soviet nationalism while providing the rudimentary attributes of statehood which would serve as vehicles for secessionist mobilization. In the post-Soviet era, the preservation of ethnofederal institutions and legacies came to be identified with frozen conflicts, conflictual center-regional relations, and persistent threats to democracy and statehood. A second significant literature shifted attention from institutions to bargaining,

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competition, and leadership tactics among central and regional elites, including the tactics of co-opting, dividing, or otherwise accommodating regionalists.\(^6\)

With regard to Russia and Ukraine, however, both institutionalist and elite-oriented approaches would predict a relatively similar trajectory for regionalism in both countries: given the centralization of power and the homogenization of regional and national political institutions, one would expect to see regionalism diminish as regional actors are co-opted by the center, regionalist organizations are induced to join national politics, and regional goods are claimed as public goods. Moreover, one might predict the effect to be greater in Ukraine than in Russia, where centralized power sits uneasily alongside ethnofederal institutions. In fact, one finds just the opposite: in Russia, regionalism yielded to state centralization under Putin, while it continued to compete for citizens’ allegiances in offering different visions of national identity in Ukraine despite the earlier centralization of power in the 1990s. The persistence of regionalism was vividly displayed during the Orange Revolution, which was interpreted by observers as a choice between Eastern and Western varieties of national identity, and in subsequent electoral contests.\(^7\)

This puzzling set of outcomes may be explained by differences in regional territorialization – a dimension of center-regional relations which is often overlooked in both

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institutionalist and elite-oriented approaches to regionalism. In Russia, regionalism was bounded by existing subnational divisions and sustained by the adoption of mixed ethnic and administrative principles for federal relations. In other words, regions were understood as corresponding to existing administrative-territorial units, which provided regionalists with ready-made political institutions for contesting power during the 1990s. Yet this correspondence of regionalism to administrative-territorial regions also left regionalists vulnerable to the homogenization of regional and national political institutions. Regionalism in Ukraine was less associated with individual administrative units than with broader zones that mirror historical periods of incorporation into the USSR, as well as variations in linguistic and ethnic composition. While this form of regionalism was less threatening to Ukraine’s central state in the 1990s than was the case in Russia, it also proved more resistant to the centralization of power and institutional homogenization. The fuzzy relationship between regions and territory in Ukraine permitted the expansion of regionalist claims upon national identity, whereas the specific association of regions with federal “subjects” limited the adaptability and appeal of such claims in Russia.

This paper utilizes process tracing to compare the development and trajectories of regionalism in Russia and Ukraine. While the method may be used for the purpose of testing

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theory within a single case, it is also warranted as an exploratory mechanism for isolating and identifying causal mechanisms related to a common phenomenon found within a small number of cases. The study of regionalism in Russia mostly focuses on federal relations in the 1990s, particularly involving Russia’s “donor” regions and the secessionist potential of its ethnic republics. The study of regionalism in Ukraine focuses on identifying the extent and stability of macro-regional identities and their implications for national elections. Clearly it would be unproductive to assess these cases in the terms peculiar to the study of each country’s “regionalism.” Instead, process tracing provides a means to tease out commensurable observations from both cases and to construct narratives about the path of regionalism in each country.

For the present study, process-oriented observations are built around the two key differences that typically obstruct comparisons of regionalism in Russia and Ukraine: institutions and territory. If few scholarly comparisons have been made between regionalism in Russia and Ukraine, the most likely reason is the fundamental difference in state structures. Ukraine opted for a unitary structure in its 1996 Constitution in which governorships are appointed by the president. By contrast, Russia adapted the structure of the RSFSR to an admixture of ethno-federal and administrative-territorial divisions. Several former Soviet autonomous republics (ASSRs) adopted their own republican constitutions and elected presidents prior to the adoption of the 1993 Constitution. In the vast majority of regions, governors were appointed until the mid-1990s, then elected for nearly a decade, and finally appointed once more starting in 2005.

These institutional differences are buttressed by differences in the size and varieties of territorial divisions in Russia and Ukraine. Both countries inherited their territorial grid from the Soviet system with units of varying institutional status. Russia’s ethno-federal system contained 89 federal subjects (21 republics, 49 oblasts, six krais, ten autonomous okrugs, one autonomous oblast, plus Moscow and St. Petersburg) at independence.\textsuperscript{10} Compared to Russia, Ukraine’s regional structure appeared less complicated in possessing 24 oblasts, one autonomous republic (Crimea), and two special status cities (Kyiv and Sevastopol).

The paper begins with a brief examination of trajectories of the subnational sovereignty movements that emerged during 1990-1993 and continues to the more enduring forms of regionalism to develop in each country. The paper then focuses on the institutional dimension of regionalism and center-regional dynamics in each country. Despite their manifest differences in structure, the central responses to regionalism in each country turn out to be broadly similar. Instead, the critical point of departure appears to be the territorial shape of regionalism. The comparison suggests that regionalism is easier to contain where regionalist territorial claims align with regional political institutions. Where regionalism attaches to macro-regional boundaries, however, it appears more persistent and less vulnerable to the center’s manipulation of regional political institutions.

“Republicanization” Movements (1990-1993)

\textsuperscript{10} One result of the centralization of power under Putin was the consolidation of several regions into larger units. As of this writing Russia consists of 21 republics, 46 oblasts, nine krais, four autonomous okrugs, one autonomous oblast, and two federal cities.
Both Russia and Ukraine experienced a briefly intense period of regionalist and even separatist mobilization during the final days of the USSR, as well as longer, sustained challenges from regionalized interests that persisted throughout the 1990s. In the latter sense, regional elites in both Russia and Ukraine took advantage of the central state’s weakness to press for autonomy and economic advantage. By and large, these were not secessionist movements though the central government sometimes perceived them as such.\textsuperscript{11}

The first wave of spontaneous and innovative regionalism was stimulated by the examples of the Union republics’ declarations of sovereignty and the opportunity to leverage Mikhail Gorbachev’s new Union Treaty into an improvement in regional status. In both Ukraine and Russia, this primarily took the form of “republicanization” movements which followed the example of the Soviet republics, aiming to promote their status within the new states. This process continued into the first years of post-Soviet rule as power struggles in each capital paralyzed central states until connections between center and periphery were re-established.

After Russia declared its sovereignty on June 12, 1990, its autonomous republics (ASSRs) joined the “parade of sovereignties” in demanding equal status with the Union republics.\textsuperscript{12} Yeltsin encouraged this process, famously urging the ASSRs to “take as much independence as you can swallow.”\textsuperscript{13} The Russian Congress of People’s Deputies amended the RSFSR’s constitution to promote its ASSRs to full constituent republics in December 1990. The next summer, the Russian Supreme Soviet further promoted four autonomous oblasts to republics.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} TASS, August 7, 1990.
The process of republicanization was not limited to the autonomies, nor did it end with the collapse of the USSR. Some of the newly-elected oblast governments threatened to withhold taxes from collection by the federal treasury.\textsuperscript{15} The movement among oblasts and krais gained momentum as economic protest grew into political demands for increased status. The proposals during this time included a Pomor Republic centered in Arkhangel’sk, a Central Russian Republic formed from eleven regions and centered in Orel’, a Leningrad Republic centered in St. Petersburg, a Neva Republic for St. Petersburg alone, a Southern Urals Republic formed around Cheliabinsk, a Siberian Republic based in Novosibirsk, an East Siberian Republic centered in Irkutsk, and a Maritime Republic with its capital in Vladivostok.\textsuperscript{16} Four regions added questions about elevation to republican status to the April 1993 nationwide referendum, each of which was approved by sizable majorities.\textsuperscript{17} Other oblasts sought to promote their federal status to that of republic, the most notorious instance being the failed attempt by Eduard Rossel’ to transform Sverdlovsk into an Urals Republic in 1993.\textsuperscript{18}

Similarly, Ukraine’s declaration of sovereignty on July 16, 1990, stimulated discussions of creating a Donetsk-Dnipro or Dnipro autonomous region. In August 1990, another such proposal in Odessa called for “special state status” for the historical area of Novorossiia

\textsuperscript{16} Vladimir Shlapentokh, Roman Levita, and Mikhail Loiberg, \textit{From Submission to Rebellion: The Provinces Versus the Center in Russia} (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 109.

(comprised of five Ukrainian oblasts and a portion of the Dniester region of Moldova). The best known case of regionalism throughout the 1990s was Crimea though it was a particularly thorny issue in the Donbas regions, as well (see below). Regionalism was also associated with calls for federalism, starting in Galicia prior to Ukraine’s independence.

Other forms of regionalism developed in Western Ukraine. The Society of Carpathian Ruthenians was formed in Transcarpathia in 1990 to push for the return of the region’s status of autonomous republic. Motivated in part by Crimea’s example, a referendum was planned on whether the region should join Ukraine as an autonomous territory. The word “autonomous” was dropped from the referendum in December 1991 after Kravchuk met with regional leaders. Movements by the Hungarian minority population in Transcarpathia and the Romanian and Moldovan minorities in Bukovina further aimed at securing local autonomy. Hungarians in Transcarpathia agitated for the transformation of the Berehove raion into a Hungarian national district. Bulgarians and Gagauz in Odessa similarly pressed for the creation of a Bolhrad national district.

The republicanization movements in Russia and Ukraine did not prove to be durable. In Russia, the process halted with the formalization of regional status in the 1992 Federal Treaties. The resolution of the armed conflict between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet in October 1993

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was followed by the dissolution of regional parliaments, leaving newly-appointed governors to
steer the drafting of regional charters and to guide the first stages of privatization until the
adoption of Yeltsin’s Constitution in December 1993.\textsuperscript{24} In Ukraine, a formal constitution was
not adopted until 1996. Central authority began to be restored following the presidential
election in 1994, continuing with the “Constitutional Treaty” in 1995 that gave Kuchma the
power to appoint the elected speakers of oblast parliaments as the heads of regional
administrations.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, the republicanization movements in Ukraine were more likely to
orient around subregional and cross-regional cleavages as opposed to movements in Russia
focused simply on regional promotion or enlargement. These cleavages may have worked to
“de-activate” regional and ethnopolitical claims based on individual oblasts in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Durable Regionalisms in the 1990s}

The more persistent forms of regionalism in Russia and Ukraine followed the republicanization
movements, extending through the 1990s and into the next decade. These forms of regionalism
tended to be based upon ethno-territorial claims (Crimea in Ukraine and the ethnic republics in
Russia) or economic claims (the Donbas in Ukraine and the so-called “donor” regions in Russia).

\textsuperscript{24} Jeffrey W. Hahn, "Democratization and Political Participation in Russia's Regions," in \textit{Democratic Changes and
Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova}, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 148. New regional assemblies were not elected until the spring of
\textsuperscript{25} Kerstin Zimmer, "Not So Different after All? Centre-Regional Relations: A Ukrainian Comparison," in \textit{Politics in
the Russian Regions}, ed. Graeme Gill (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 118. To that point, the election of
chairmen for oblast parliaments underscored the center’s weakness, which was helpless to compel regions to stop.
\textsuperscript{26} Sasse, "The 'New' Ukraine," 84.
These durable forms of regionalism were advanced by regional political machines which associated regionalism with preserving the distinctiveness of regional political institutions.27

As the two varieties of regionalism emerged together, the interaction among them meant that ethnic and economic claims became, at times, difficult to entangle—perhaps best illustrated by Crimea. As of the 1989 census, Russians made up two-thirds of the region’s population. For the quarter of the population that was Ukrainian, nearly half (47.4 percent) reported Russian as their native language, there were no Ukrainian-language schools, and Ukrainian-language broadcasts were limited.28 As Sasse (2007) observes, the region’s political identity came to rest upon “a sense of Crimea’s distinctiveness from the rest of Ukraine and a recognition of the profound Russian cultural orientation, embodied in the predominant use of the Russian language.”29 At the same time, the peninsula’s Communist Party pushed for autonomy in 1989-1990 to preserve traditional power structures despite developments in Moscow and Kyiv.30 The region held a referendum in January 1991 on the “re-establishment” of the region’s status as an autonomous republic in the USSR in order to participate in the new Union Treaty (passed with 93.3 percent).31 Technically speaking, Crimea’s status could only be re-established as an autonomous republic within the RSFSR (as it had been prior to its transfer to Ukraine in 1954). Nevertheless, Ukraine’s Supreme Soviet affirmed the region’s status as an

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autonomous republic within Ukraine the following month. The Crimean Supreme Soviet declared the region’s sovereignty in September 1991.

Tensions between Kyiv and Sevastopol rose during the early part of 1992, exacerbated by suggestions from Moscow that Crimea ought to be returned to Russia. When Ukraine’s parliament finally passed a law on the region’s status in May 1992, it fell short of Crimea’s expectations of treatment as an equal partner with Kyiv. The Crimean parliament declared the region’s independence (subject to a referendum planned for August 1992) while adding a constitutional amendment stating that Crimea was part of Ukraine on a treaty basis. Kyiv responded by declaring the act unconstitutional, after which Crimea backed down and suspended the referendum (though not the actual declaration). This was followed by a compromise that affirmed Crimea’s status as part of Ukraine while granting Crimeans joint citizenship and property rights.32

In March 1994, the leader of the pro-independence Republican Movement of Crimea, Yuri Meshkov, was elected Crimea’s president. A rift soon developed between Meshkov and the region’s parliament, allowing Leonid Kuchma an opening to roll back Crimea’s institutional distinctiveness. In November 1994, the Ukrainian parliament annulled a swath of Crimean legislation on the grounds that it violated the Constitution. The Crimean presidency and constitution were abolished in March 1995. The new Ukrainian Constitution provided significant autonomy for the region and granted its own constitution.33 This special treatment of Crimea in fact allowed the central government to further extend its control over the region

through the establishment of central institutions and representatives on its territory.34 Once Russia formally disavowed any territorial claims to Crimea in 1997, the peninsula’s leadership was forced to accept permanent accommodation with Kyiv.35

The role of political machines in advancing regionalism is particularly evident in the Donbas area (including portions of Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts). The Donbas is often considered to be distinguished by its large ethnic Russian population though “territorial and economic components prevail over the ethnic element” as sources of regionalism.36 The Donbas is the most industrialized area of Ukraine and early agitation for a federal system was motivated in part by the complaint that it received less money from the central government than it contributed, effectively subsidizing other regions—a complaint echoed by “donor” regions in Russia’s federal system (see below).37 In October 1991, Donetsk urged the Ukrainian parliament to consider introducing a German-style federal system.38 Both the Donetsk and Luhansk regional parliaments voted for regional autonomy in June 1993.39

The regionalist movements in Crimea and the Donbas had a number of elements in common: particularly, the persistence of (unreconstructed) Communist parties as organizational vehicles, resistance to Ukrainian nationalism (perceived as a Western Ukrainian project), the pursuit of official recognition of Russian as a state language on par with Ukrainian, and demands for regional autonomy or federalism. The rise of regionalism in Crimea and the Donbas regions also reflected differences in the rates of replacement of Soviet-era elites, which

34 Sasse, "The 'New' Ukraine," 93.
occurred faster in Kyiv and Western Ukraine. Elites from the latter regions achieved an early integration in central political institutions following Ukraine’s independence. This started to change once the “red directors” in the Eastern industrial regions organized to protect the fuel and power sectors from price liberalization, eventually allying with agricultural lobbies from southern and central regions interested in preserving state credits.\textsuperscript{40} The Donbas variety of regionalism thus shared ethno-linguistic claims and ethno-territorial goals that appealed to constituencies in multiple regions. It was the fusion of these goals with economic complaints that made regionalism appealing for regional elites who, in turn, converted it into a means to shelter regional political machines from central intervention.

The merging of ethno-territorial and economic varieties of regionalism also occurred in Russia. In the former ASSRs, republican parliaments issued sovereignty declarations, drafted new constitutions, and elected their own presidents as early as 1991. The republics generally expected to become full partners with the center—initially in the planned Union Treaty, then with Moscow as envisioned in the Federal Treaties of March 1992.\textsuperscript{41} While the Kremlin viewed the Federal Treaties as a short-term solution, they still managed to generate discontent among republics and oblasts, alike. Prominent among the republics, Chechnia (which declared independence the previous year) and Tatarstan refused to sign the Treaty. Bashkortostan and Sakha-lakutiia only signed after receiving budgetary concessions from the center.\textsuperscript{42} More generally, the Treaties acknowledged the republics’ right to all land and natural resources on

\textsuperscript{40} Nemiria, “Regionalism,” 188.
\textsuperscript{41} There were three separate Federal Treaties: one for the republics, one for the provinces (oblasts and krais), and one for the remaining autonomous okrugs.
\textsuperscript{42} Cameron Ross, \textit{Federalism and Democratisation in Russia} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 24.
their territory. This provision particularly made provincial leaders feel like second class citizens and stimulated efforts to form inter-regional associations.⁴³

Already in this early phase, ethno-territorial movements among the republics shifted to more moderate sets of economic claims.⁴⁴ This is particularly striking in the way that Tatarstan’s referendum on sovereignty in 1992 defined an aggrieved community in terms of territory and administrative status⁴⁵, though this did not prevent it from making ethno-territorial claims when confronting the federal center. While the 1993 Constitution abolished the portion of the Federal Treaties which elaborated the powers reserved for the republics, it maintained the provision for signing bilateral power sharing treaties between the center and individual regions. Starting in 1994, the republics continued to press for economic concessions by signing bilateral power sharing treaties with the Kremlin which guaranteed extra-constitutional privileges (such as rights to manage natural resources).⁴⁶ With a few notable exceptions, however, the republics tended to be under-developed with vulnerable populations that were largely dependent upon the state sector for employment and settled in ethnic clusters. This set of conditions favored the emergence and consolidation of regional political machines.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ M.N. Guboglo, ed., *Federalizm Vlasti i Vlast’ Federalizma* (Moscow: IntelTekh, 1997). A handful of powerful oblasts also took advantage of the bilateral treaty process, though the republics were the principle beneficiaries.
⁴⁷ Hale, "Explaining Machine Politics in Russia's Regions," 245.
Among the provinces (or, as they are sometimes called, the “non-ethnic” regions), Yeltsin’s appointed governors were constrained to a greater extent than republican leaders in the drafting of provincial charters (ustavy). As a result, regional political institutions among the provinces were much less distinctive than those found in the republics that originated with republican constitutions. However, the governors seized the initiative in the privatization of state assets on the regional level and a number of regions leveraged their positions to acquire bilateral treaties similar to those gained by the republics. Among the regions which were net contributors to the federal budget, or “donor” regions (the number of which varied from 1993 to 1999), regionalist complaints formed about the republics which benefited by exploiting the center’s fear of ethnic separatism. The donor regions further voiced complaints about subsidizing failing and economically irresponsible regions.

As the Kremlin sought to enlist the support of Russia’s governors for the 1995-6 electoral cycle, it moved to allow gubernatorial elections in the provinces (republican presidents were already elected starting in 1991). The transformation of governors from appointed to elected office provided a direct stimulus for the growth of regionalism. In the large round of regional elections during 1996-7, about two-thirds of Yeltsin’s appointed governors lost office. Gubernatorial candidates often linked regional identities with anti-center platforms, and of course newly elected governors were no longer accountable to the Kremlin. Most governors eschewed identifying with national parties and, in many cases, invented

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regional parties to serve as vehicles for their election and to place allies in regional parliaments.\textsuperscript{52}

The newly-elected governors proved more experienced and politically savvy than their appointed predecessors, managing to win re-election in 68 percent of gubernatorial contests over the next large round of elections in 1999-2000.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, the governors became national political actors in their dual role as senators in the Federation Council with the power to block federal legislation deemed hostile to regional interests. The new wave of governors quickly secured control of regional economies or formed alliances with power economic actors in the regions. They further co-opted the regional representatives and agents of federal ministries, including even the Presidential Representatives which were supposed to monitor the governors for the Kremlin.\textsuperscript{54}

Among the durable regionalisms in Russia, one finds similar to Ukraine that the fusion of economic complaints with ethno-territorial goals proved useful for republican elites. Unique to Russia, however, was the opportunity to secure elected governorships which made exploiting regional identities and anti-center platforms an appealing (and successful) strategy in the mid-1990s. In addition, there remained significant distinctions between ethno-territorial and economic claims associated with regionalism in Russia. In the first place, ethno-territorial claims were exclusively available to the republics such that they could not be appropriated by, and did not resonate with, other kinds of regions. Where gubernatorial candidates in Russia’s provinces cultivated regional identities in their election campaigns, they also crafted regionalist platforms.


\textsuperscript{53} Ross, \textit{Federalism and Democratisation in Russia}, 105.

that lined up with regional borders. This led to the development of region-specific parties and a focus on region-specific claims in such a way that inter-regional associations and macro-regional identities never acquired political significance. More importantly, this meant that regionalist agendas could not be converted into nationalist projects as was the case with Donbas regionalism (or Western Ukrainian nationalism, for that matter).

In addition, Russia’s republics and provinces differed in terms of the institutionalization of regionalism. The republics drafted constitutions much earlier than the provinces and even prior to the adoption of Russia’s Constitution. As a result, republican political institutions were both distinctive and relatively insulated from central intervention. Republican presidents also were elected much earlier, meaning that there was a great deal more continuity with Soviet-era nomenklatura within the republics than in other regions. Among the provinces, charters were regulated to a much greater degree than republican constitutions, making provincial political institutions easier for the Kremlin to monitor and manipulate. Where charismatic governors discovered or exploited regionalism to gain elected office, the durability of regionalism would depend upon their ongoing commitment to the cause. One also found a faster rate of replacement among regional elites in the provinces where electoral opportunities and regional political machines emerged later than in the republics.

Regionalism and State Centralization

The preceding sections illustrate the extent to which the rise of regionalism in both Russia and Ukraine was driven by regional political machines and occurred within the context of weak
central states. In both countries, the new governments settled for preserving Soviet-era regional institutions and boundaries while attempting to reconstruct state power. The somewhat predictable result in both cases was that central states were buffeted by regionalist assaults on central state authority. Ukraine’s and Russia’s central states re-asserted their authority over the regions, but they did so at different times and with significantly different degrees of success. In Ukraine, centralization began almost immediately following Kuchma’s election in 1994, yet regionalism remains a prominent feature of national politics to this day. Russia moved to centralize power in the Kremlin only after 2000, but it proved more effective in taming regionalism than its neighbor.

At independence, Ukraine still operated under a Soviet-era Constitution in which the regions were governed by oblast soviets (councils) which, in turn, were subordinated to the national parliament. Leonid Kravchuk attempted to increase presidential control over the regions in March 1992 with the creation of presidential representatives (somewhat similar to Boris Yeltsin’s institutional creation) in each region. These were intended to act as regional executives and would be subordinate to the president.

Discontent with the central government spread among the regions as Kravchuk’s government failed to implement market reforms while the president and parliament competed for influence among regional administrations, as was the case in Russia. Existing cultural-historical differences among Ukraine’s regions were magnified and widened by competing regional interests in the industrial and agricultural sectors of the economy. Moreover, the steeper decline in living standards relative to Russia made the latter appear increasingly
attractive for Ukrainians whose loyalties to the central state remained in question.55 Bowing to pressure from the Eastern oblasts in 1993, Kravchuk granted them autonomy by presidential decree. The following year, parliament abolished the presidential representatives while transforming the elected heads of oblast soviets into regional executives (or governors).

The weakness of the central state was compounded by the lack of other unifying national institutions. The adoption of a mixed ballot system for the 1994 parliamentary elections produced a proliferation of parties rather than consolidating the party system. The result was the well-known polarization of voting in the April 1994 parliamentary elections between Western and Eastern Ukraine. The vote for nationalist parties was regionally confined to Galicia, Western Ukraine, and Kyiv. The Communist Party (along with the Socialist Party and Peasants’ Party) received the bulk of its support from Crimea and the Donbas. These regions further held referenda on the adoption of Russian as a state language and participation in the CIS (in the Donbas), adopting a federal system for Ukraine, and joint Ukrainian-Russian citizenship (in Crimea).56 This pattern continued with the presidential election in June 1994. Former Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma not only promised improved ties with Russia and the CIS, but also represented the powerful “red directors.”57 Kuchma defeated Kravchuk in the second round owing largely to the support of voters in Ukraine’s Eastern and East-Central regions.

57 Andrew Wilson, Ukraine's Orange Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 38.
Kuchma’s election in 1994 permitted an influx of Easterners in central government. This reversed the previous phase when Western interests dominated central government in 1991-2, though arguably this reversal weakened the president’s control over both Western and Eastern regions (upon whom Kuchma came to depend). Following his election, Kuchma moved to subordinate the elected chairmen of oblast soviets by decree in August 1994. The next month he created a Council of Regions as an advisory body. This brought together the chairmen of oblast Soviets (and the city Soviets of Kyiv and Sevastopol), making them subordinate to the president while bypassing the parliament. He next claimed the power to veto any regional law found to violate the Constitution or other laws in October 1994. Kuchma’s early moves thus anticipated the centralizing measures later taken by Vladimir Putin in Russia, though without the revival of the institution of presidential representatives. The adoption of the “Law on Power” in June 1995 gave Kuchma the ability to appoint the heads of regional and local administrations. The 1996 Constitution moved even further in strengthening presidential control by formally establishing Ukraine as a unitary state and separating the heads of oblast administrations from oblast councils: they became governors, part of a chain of executive power connecting the president to the regional and village levels.

The appointed governorships provided a novel source of patronage and Kuchma already promised certain governorships to political parties in exchange for their support of the draft Constitution. Wilson (2005) describes Kuchma’s rise as a balancing act among three

competing clans based in Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, and Kyiv. In the absence of unifying national institutions (particularly a strong party system), he came to rely upon his appointed governors to mobilize voters. Initially, he exercised restraint given the recent electoral mandate of oblast council chairmen though the number of replacements increased with the approaching election season. In the 1998 elections, Matsuzato (2001) argues that Kuchma exploited the rivalry between Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk in order to weaken potential opposition while simultaneously using Transcarpathians’ distaste for “Galician chauvinism” to drive a wedge among Western regions. His re-election in 1999 was a function of his cultivation of regional caciques and his use of gubernatorial appointments to sustain the governors’ loyalty alongside a sense of vulnerability to manipulation by the center. The center’s reliance upon appointed governors to mobilize votes, in turn, required an expansion of regional executives’ powers and the transfer of lucrative state assets to the control of regional elites. This also paralleled Russia’s experience following the elimination of gubernatorial elections in Russia (see below).

The 1998-1999 elections differed from previous elections in that they were dominated by Ukraine’s economy rather than its identity. Ukraine’s central regions (as well as the ideological center) proved critical for the elections and competition for these regions’ support became an enduring feature of subsequent campaigns. Aside from this one election cycle,

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62 Wilson, Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, 38-42.
63 Matsuzato, “All Kuchma’s Men,” 420.
however, voting in every national contest has split the country broadly into East and West. Regional differences continue to influence voting in national elections in relatively stable patterns observed since the Orange Revolution.  

Against the persistence of regionalism in Ukrainian politics, one might argue that the regionalization of popular support for Ukraine’s political parties and candidates does not translate into the regionalization of policy. D’Anieri (2007) demonstrates, parties elected from the same region (or macro-region) did not vote together in Ukraine’s parliament prior to the Orange Revolution. Immediately following the Orange Revolution, nearly two-thirds of new cabinet ministers were drawn from central regions while just four each were drawn from Eastern and Western regions. Indeed, some have argued that 2004 was the last time that voters in Eastern regions were mobilized by appeals for regional autonomy. Yet the party list for the Party of Regions in 2007 was dominated by actors from the Donbas, with Donetsk oblast clearly leading all others. While a great many candidates listed their place of residence as Kyiv (including Yanukovych), they were unquestionably connected with Eastern regions. By contrast, the Yulia Tymoshenko and Our Ukraine blocs lacked clear regional profiles in their party lists. Nevertheless, the media continued to depict Yulia Tymoshenko and Viktor Yanukovych as Western and Eastern candidates in the 2010 presidential election. And soon after the 2010

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66 On the merging of regionalism and nationalism in the Orange Revolution, see: Kuzio, "Nationalism, Identity and Civil Society in Ukraine: Understanding the Orange Revolution."
67 D’Anieri, Understanding Ukrainian Politics, 113.
elections, Yanukovych provided clear indication of the ongoing importance attributed to the regional dimension of Ukraine’s politics by sacking eleven governors appointed by his predecessor.\textsuperscript{72}

Like Ukraine, Russia initially confronted the problem of central state weakness. After encouraging the ASSRs to mobilize in his struggle with Gorbachev, Yeltsin found that he had to preserve the asymmetrical federal structure of the RSFSR.\textsuperscript{73} Though the 1993 Constitution declared that all regions (“subjects”) were equal, it preserved ethno-federal elements that protected the republics’ status. Hence, ethno-federal institutions facilitated its persistence of regionalism, but they also ensured that regionalism would not be converted into nationalist projects.

Yeltsin instituted a system of presidential representatives though they were intended to serve as the Kremlin’s eyes and ears rather than function as regional executives.\textsuperscript{74} Yeltsin also was willing to wheel and deal, offering extra-constitutional bargains (including economic autonomy) to mollify regionalist oblasts and republics. At the same time, this strategy of bilateral bargaining helped to prevent anti-center regional coalitions from forming throughout the 1990s.\textsuperscript{75} He continued to give away power in order to keep power through the conversion of governors from appointed to elected positions. After securing re-election in 1996, Yeltsin attempted to roll back regionalism, first by reinvigorating the institution of Presidential

\textsuperscript{72} Interfax-Ukraine, March 18, 2010.

\textsuperscript{73} Jeffrey Kahn, \textit{Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Lynn and Novikov, "Refederalizing Russia: Debates on the Idea of Federalism in Russia."

\textsuperscript{74} Busygina, "Predstavitelei Prezidenta.", Huskey, \textit{Presidential Power in Russia}, 192-5.

Representatives in 1997 and then with legislation requiring regions to bring their constitutions and charters into conformity with the federal Constitution in 1999. Neither of these measures had a significant effect. Yeltsin’s tactics of divide and conquer broke down by the end of the decade as influential governors linked with opposition in the Fatherland-All Russia movement to challenge the party of power in the 1999 parliamentary elections and the 2000 presidential election.

After the success of Unity in turning back the regionalist threat and Vladimir Putin’s election in March 2000, the Kremlin pursued the re-centralization of power with renewed determination. In May 2000, Putin announced the creation of seven Federal Districts to oversee Russia’s regions which would be led by reformed Presidential Representatives and their army of Federal Inspectors.76 The Federal Districts became the staging ground for rolling back legal inconsistencies in regional charters and constitutions, and for intervening in gubernatorial elections to ensure the election of the Kremlin’s favored candidates. Perhaps their most important effect, however, was to disrupt the governors’ influence over federal agents and officials in the regions and re-subordinate them to the federal center.77 The Federal Districts created a “cadres quake,” establishing a means to co-opt regional officials into the Presidential Administration and re-insert them into regional politics.78 Putin also weakened the governors by removing them from the Federation Council in 2001-2 and pushing for the adoption of

legislation to allow the president to sack elected governors and dissolve regional parliaments. The new Law on Parties (2001) further eliminated regional parties and compelled regional parliaments to be elected, at least in part, by party list.\textsuperscript{79}

A further set of reforms aimed at diminishing the basis for economic complaints among regionalists. The revised Tax Code in 2002 effectively eliminated the category of “donor” regions by substantially reducing the share of taxes retained by regional administrations and increasing the amount to be transferred to federal coffers. In 2003, the Kozak Commission focused on eliminating the bilateral treaties, which henceforth would require confirmation by regional parliaments and the State Duma. It also worked to eliminate gray areas in the Constitution regarding jointly held powers between the center and the regions, though the practical effect was to allocate the most lucrative of those powers to the federal center. The Kremlin also encouraged the autonomous okrugs to merge with neighboring oblasts or krais in the interest of increasing regional economic performance, starting with the referendum on merging Perm oblast with Komi-Permiak autonomous okrug in 2003.\textsuperscript{80}

The culmination of Putin’s assault on regionalism was the elimination of gubernatorial elections, announced immediately following the Beslan crisis in September 2004.\textsuperscript{81} The relative ease with which this was accomplished betrays the thin institutional foundations of regionalism, particularly among the provinces where elected governors opted to forego noisy and expensive elections in exchange for gaining access to the resources and authority of the Presidential Administration. By contrast, the republican parliaments dragged out the process of

revising their constitutions. They further resisted the notion of regional enlargement, and republican presidents tended to be re-appointed rather than replaced. Rather, what republican executives gained by supporting the move to a system of presidential appointments was the ability to exploit the Kremlin’s centralizing rhetoric to preserve and further expand their authority within the republics. While the conversion of regional executives into presidential appointees effectively rendered the Presidential Representatives superfluous, the Kremlin gained the ability to hold governors accountable for performance in national elections.

When compared to the persistence of regionalism in Ukraine, its swift demise in Russia is striking. As discussed above, regionalism arose within individual regions in Russia’s federal structure and gained in momentum with the introduction of direct gubernatorial elections. Unlike Ukraine, national elections did not take on fundamentally regional contours except to the extent that the Kremlin required regional leaders to mobilize voters. Yeltsin relied upon governors to mobilize voters in his bid for re-election in 1996, but the Duma election in December 1999 was the only national election in which regionalist governors sought to position themselves to gain control over the central government. After Putin came to power, the task of taming the regions became a straight-forward matter of co-opting regional governors and homogenizing regional political institutions.

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Contrary to early predictions that regionalism in Ukraine would force it closer to Russia’s federal model of center-regional relations, one arguably observes the reverse: Putin’s centralizing reforms and the decline of regionalism in Russia appear to follow the example set by Kuchma in Ukraine. Moreover, regionalism remains a persistent and significant feature of Ukraine’s politics while it subsided in Russia following its peak at the end of the 1990s. This difference is all the more striking when one considers that Russia’s federal system provides a firmer institutional basis than Ukraine’s unitary state structure for regionalists to maintain power locally and to pursue central political agendas.

Given the broad correspondence between varieties and political organization of durable regionalisms in both countries and the common centralizing means to weaken or undo their institutional foundations despite fundamentally different state structures, both institutionalist and elite-oriented varieties of explanation appear insufficient to account for the persistence of regionalism in Ukrainian politics and its decline in Russia. However, a critical difference which emerges from the discussion of process appears to be the territorial framework within which regions “matter.”

In post-Soviet Russia, regions and regional identities territorialized along the lines of existing administrative-territorial boundaries: first among the former ASSRs, then among the provinces with the introduction of gubernatorial elections. While most Russians identify to some extent with a macro-regional orientation (i.e., the Urals, the Volga, Western or Eastern

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83 Turovskii, "Stravnitel'nyi Analiz Tendentsii Regional'nogo Razvitiia Rossii i Ukrainy."
Siberia), these orientations are not claimed by any major national parties, nor do they present competing national visions. Hence, even though Russia’s federal system possesses a more varied network of territorial divisions, the links between regions and political institutions are much simpler than in Ukraine.

This association of regions with Russia’s federal “subjects” (sub”ekty) proved a double-edged sword for both the center and the regions. On the one hand, it facilitated regionalist mobilization against the central state early on—particularly among the ethnic republics—and provided the resources and authority to promote regional interests and block central intervention in regional politics during the 1990s. However, this also meant that Russia’s regionalisms were territorially-bound and did not resonate with elites or citizens in neighboring regions. For instance, attempts to induce regional leaders to cross regional boundaries in the form of the eight inter-regional associations, such as Siberian Accord (Siberskoe soglashenie) foundered owing to internal conflicts and suspicions among ambitious governors. Instead, the inter-regional associations remained forums for economic cooperation and lobbying in which membership did not entail political commitments.84 In other words, the appeal of regionalism was confined to individual regions and could not be converted into broader macro-regional or nationalist projects.

If regionalism in Russia was bound to individual administrative-territorial units, the relationship between regionalism and territory is much more complicated in Ukraine. While there is little doubt that regions “matter” in Ukrainian politics, there is much debate over the

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kinds of regions in play. In contrast to the Russian case where regionalism is synonymous with individual federal units, regionalism in Ukraine tends to encompass more than one oblast. The dominant trope for understanding regionalism in Ukraine relates to the cultural division between Eastern and Western halves. The East-West division maps onto a series of binary opposites: Eastern Ukraine is more industrialized and russified, with a greater proportion of ethnic Russians and Russophone Ukrainians. Western Ukraine is more agrarian and has a greater number of ethnic Ukrainians. The regions of Eastern Ukraine tend to lean towards Russia and the former Soviet states, while regions in Western Ukraine tend to lean towards Eastern Europe.

This is an attractive narrative that appears to correspond with the outcomes of the most significant national elections in post-Soviet Ukraine. The Eastern/Western division appeared particularly salient during the crucial parliamentary and presidential elections of 1994 and during the Orange Revolution in 2004. Yet at times the differences between Eastern and Western regions appear to be overstated. In the December 1991 referendum on independence, the highest “Yes” vote was found in the West though even in the Eastern regions more than 86 percent voted in favor of independence. In general, surveys indicated that Eastern Ukrainians were no less committed to the Ukrainian state and its territorial integrity than Western Ukrainians though they desired closer ties with Russia whereas Westerners were more likely to

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85 To facilitate comparison, I refer to these as “macro-regions” while continuing to use “region” as synonymous with oblasts and other primary subnational units. Logically, one should also refer to “macro-regionalism” in Ukraine rather than regionalism, though this unnecessarily confuses the matter by introducing a neologism.
87 By contrast, a bare majority (54.2 percent) in Crimea voted for independence while just over 42 percent voted against. Holdar, "Torn between East and West," 119-20, Sasse, *The Crimea Question*, 141-2.
view Russia as a threat. Nevertheless, distinct differences in regional political preferences appear to follow a loose division of the country between East and West. Particularly during the mid-1990s, Eastern regions favored greater regional autonomy and a federal model of government while Western regions favored a strong central authority and a unitary form of government.

While the division between Eastern and Western Ukraine seems to have a firm grip on the public imagination and the media, there are a number of difficulties with dividing Ukraine into two macro-regions. Sometimes the Dnipro river is used to define the boundary between East and West (left bank and right bank, respectively), though often scholars use the Westernmost and Easternmost regions (especially Lviv and Donetsk) to illustrate generally opposed cultural-political tendencies. Moreover, the East/West distinction does not always consistently map onto politically active linguistic and economic differences, such that important differences among Eastern or Western regions (and within-region differences) are minimized in analysis. Finally, the use of census data and surveys to associate ethnicity and language with territory tends to present social identities as categorical and exclusive, whereas people possess multiple, layered identities that are sometimes even contradictory. For example, most

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89 Hesli, "Public Support for the Devolution of Power in Ukraine: Regional Patterns."
92 On the politics surrounding the identification of language preferences in Ukraine’s census, see: Arel, "Interpreting 'Nationality' and 'Language' in the 2001 Ukrainian Census."
Ukrainians have some ability to speak or understand both Russian and Ukrainian and many speak a combination of both known as *surzhyk*.

The fuzziness of macro-regional boundaries produced a lively scholarly debate over the appropriate varieties of regions (or macro-regions) that are active in Ukrainian politics. In testing the implications of working with different numbers of regions, Barrington and Herron (2004) discover that language (Russophone or Ukrainophone) appears to be a statistically significant factor in determining regime support when the country is divided into two or eight macro-regions, but not with a four-region model. Similarly, religious differences appear significant with a two-region model but not with four- and eight-region models. Barrington and Faranda (2009) further find that, using an eight-region model, a north/south division might be just as useful as the traditional East/West division for identifying distinct regional cultures though they note significant blurring around the edges of their macro-regions.

An alternative approach is offered by Birch (2000), who divides Ukraine into five macro-regions that correspond with their historical incorporation into Soviet Ukraine: former Habsburg regions (including Galicia and Bukovina) which were split among Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then annexed by the USSR in 1944; Western Volhynia, which long was part of Poland before it was taken over by Imperial Russia in the eighteenth century, then again under Polish rule during the interwar years before its incorporation into the USSR in 1944; Right Bank regions, which were part of Poland until acquired by Russia in 1793, and incorporated into Ukraine with the creation

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94 Lowell Barrington and Regina Faranda, “Reexamining Region, Ethnicity, and Language in Ukraine,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2009): 249. The one region where cultural markers unambiguously line up with juridical borders is Crimea, which they treat separately from the other seven macro-regions.
of the USSR in 1922; Left Bank regions, which had the longest history of Russian rule and were a major center for industrialization and Russian immigration during the Soviet era; and former Ottoman lands, which experienced rapid frontier-style development during the nineteenth century after incorporation in Tsarist Russia.95

In this scheme, the “regional effect” on politics during the 1990s varies significantly by macro-region. The macro-regions that were last to be incorporated into the USSR gravitate towards rightist, nationalist parties. In the regions that were part of the USSR from its creation, economics matters more than history, benefiting leftist parties. Birch also notes, however, that historical and economic cleavages do not line up neatly. Barrington (2002) adopts a similar schema for dividing Ukraine into eight macro-regions that correspond to significant historical and demographic factors. His 1998 survey of all oblasts reveals that these macro-regions exert a stronger effect on support for the government and regime than either ethnicity or language.96 Katchanovski (2006) similarly finds that regional political cleavages continue to reflect cultural-historical differences emerging from their varied experiences prior to the Second World War.97

Hence, there is some evidence that cultural boundaries are defined in terms of macro-regions drawn in accordance with historical cleavages defined by their period of incorporation into Soviet Ukraine. There may be some flexibility in the definition of cultural boundaries, however, as suggested by the move to a system of appointed governors and the steady

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95 Birch, “Interpreting the Regional Effect in Ukrainian Politics.”
increase in gubernatorial replacements under Kuchma.\textsuperscript{98} Where cultural boundaries seem most porous is in those regions where elite career paths were most cosmopolitan during the Soviet era. Industrial and administrative elites from Eastern regions (Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Kharkov), Crimea, and Kyiv were deeply integrated with the Soviet \textit{nomenklatura} and it was common for their careers to advance them to Moscow.\textsuperscript{99} By contrast, the career paths of elites in Western regions tended to be regionally confined. In this light, it is not surprising that calls for federalism emerged as an opposition strategy in Galicia \textit{prior} to Ukraine’s independence, or that they were less likely to view relations with Russia in positive light following independence. Similarly, elites in the Donbas regions found it less difficult to reconcile their commitment to Ukraine’s territorial integrity with their calls for federalism or regional autonomy immediately \textit{after} independence, along with their preference for closer ties with Russia.

In line with this interpretation, Arel (2006) argues that Eastern Ukrainian identity is a bi-ethnic and bilingual rather than opposed to Ukrainian national identity. Likewise, Eastern Ukrainian regionalism seeks political inclusion rather than secession. In the context of Ukraine’s politics after the Orange Revolution, the durability of support for the Party of Regions reflects the macro-regional structure of ethnic, linguistic, and historical identities preserved since independence. Whereas the Orangists suspected the Regionals of playing the secessionist card, in fact they sought to protect themselves from exclusion. More to the point, the exclusion of a single party from power would mean the exclusion of an entire territory.\textsuperscript{100} This last point in particular helps to explain why the macro-regional shape of regionalism persists or, to put it

\textsuperscript{98} Though it is also the case that Kuchma tended to draw his gubernatorial appointments from within regions, likely as a practical means to ensure that regional political machines continued to function.

\textsuperscript{99} Sasse, \textit{The Crimea Question}, 130, Sasse, "The 'New' Ukraine," 86.

\textsuperscript{100} Dominique Arel, "La Face Cachée De La Révolution Orange: L’ukraine En Négation Face À Son Problème Régional," \textit{Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest} 37, no. 4 (2006).
differently, why supporters of the Party of Regions outside of Donetsk seemingly vote for the hegemony of one oblast.

**Conclusion**

The territorial limits of regionalism in Russia made it increasingly vulnerable to central intervention once the Kremlin acquired the will to intervene in regional politics. If the territorial limits of regionalism provided opportunities for mobilization and institutionalization in terms of the adoption of regional constitutions and charters and the election of governors on anti-Kremlin platforms, the account of Putin’s centralization of power demonstrates that they also provided the center with concrete levers to combat regionalism. In this sense, it is worth recalling that Putin’s centralization of power was justified not just in terms of restoring the “ruling vertical,” but also in creating uniform legal and information spaces throughout the country.  

Of course, it is not certain that this will remain the case. The homogenization of regional political institutions and the decline of provincial regionalism in Russia have accompanied increased nationalist sentiment in recent years. The more that Russia becomes a federation in name only, the more one suspects that Russians are likely to view regional divisions as ephemeral and regional political institutions as interchangeable. In essence, the centralization of power under Putin bears the potential to facilitate the emergence of nationalist projects

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101 Following mass protests of the December 2011 elections to the State Duma, the Kremlin introduced legislation to restore direct gubernatorial elections. While an analysis of this move would go beyond the confines of this article, it is unlikely that it would stimulate a revival of regionalism in Russia – at the very least, not without additional reforms to permit greater variation in the design of regional political institutions and the participation of political parties formed on the regional or inter-regional levels.
which activate along ethno-territorial lines defined by the “non-ethnic” regions (or rather, ethnically Russian regions lacking republican status). Yet even if this comes to pass, this form of nationalism would elide regional differences rather than seek to conquer or colonize the central government on their behalf.

The political implications of the macro-regional shape of regionalism go some way to explain the persistence of regionalism in Ukraine and, ipso facto, the speed of its decline in Russia. In the contest for control of the central state, regional actors seek to convert macro-regional claims into national projects. In effect, the lack of institutional alternatives for the realization of regionalist claims channels those claims into the contest for the state. Such platforms are most effective in the course of nationwide elections when the state is convincingly at stake.

Outside of national elections, divisions among regions (and further divisions among macro-regions) are easily exploited by the center to keep would-be regionalists divided and uncoordinated. The homogenization of regional political institutions and the ability to replace regional governors by appointment makes it possible for the center to intervene in regional politics and head off challenges at the oblast level. However, this ability to influence regional politics remains disconnected from macro-regional identities: they may not be institutionalized as administrative-territorial divisions, but neither are they vulnerable to administrative manipulation. Rather, the persistence of regionalism on a macro-regional scale makes all politics appear to be national in form but regional in content.
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