

Leadership in Modern Russian Society A Regional Survey

TATIYANA RYSKOVA

The problem of political leadership is central to the formation and development of the government and society in present-day Russia. Attempts to remove the problem of leadership from the list of most urgent problems of political analysis, and to place it instead within the context of an abstract collective will that forms politics and practice, will not lead to any meaningful results. Leadership remains a fundamental influence on the development of political and social organisms.

Freed from the restrictions of totalitarianism, modern Russian society is experiencing its own form of renaissance, producing the most varied types and models of leadership, and becoming the subject of detailed analyses in the scientific literature.¹ This condition appears most clearly at the regional level, where known models of leadership are enriched by the specific, local, politico-cultural environment and by the characteristics of everyday life in a Russian province. The historical events of this decade have impelled our return to regional leadership.

What are the most characteristic traits of modern Russia's regional leadership? The American psychologists D. Katz and R. Kahn understand leadership to be "an influential element which is separate from the mechanical fulfilling of the organization's routine duties."² It is said that the strivings of Russian provincial leaders for status exceed their official authority and prerogatives. In emphasizing this charismatic tendency of modern regional leadership, we do not claim that it is a leftover element of the former political regime, when the first secretary of the obkom party held practically all of the power of the region entrusted to him.

The tendency has been noted by several authors as universal. For example, J. Blondel has remarked, "The tie between leadership as a style of behavior and leadership as a top position gives birth to many problems. First of all, true leadership must be separate from the pure, formal activities of duty, because although these two understandings partially overlap, they do not coincide completely.

Tatiyana Ryskova is a researcher at the Center of Regional Analysis and Prognosis at the Russian Academy of Federal Service.

Some leaders do not have high positions," while others, who do occupy extremely responsible posts, cannot truly even be called leaders. But it is difficult to explain exactly what true leadership is, because a formal position and actual authority often—almost always—influence each other. Someone wants to become a leader to reach a certain position.³ In my opinion, this tendency has a deeper foundation in the historical experience of Russia's political traditions. For this reason, diagnosing the potential of a leader does not depend only on what position he will have. It is necessary to consider not only his possibilities in a given office, but also the possibilities of his future public political activities and his potential to gain leadership status through regional elections.

A division of leadership into formal and informal types appears at the regional level to a greater degree than at the federal level; formal leadership is shaped by official authorities and status, and informal by common recognition. Sometimes a leader continues to exert considerable influence on the political processes in his region even after he is dismissed from his position. R. Tucker is correct in believing that "leadership is about giving political direction, which in the end is targeted on political action."⁴ Considering this, we turn our attention to the example of the director of the Sverdlovsky region, E. Russell. President Yeltsin removed him from his post in 1994, but his authority was fully restored in the direct election for governor. Russell advocated a Ural republic to oppose what he considered the federal center's excessive control of the region. Despite disapproval of Russell's political efforts by the federal authorities, he received recognition and respect from the region's inhabitants.

There are people who have serious influence in the formation of regional leadership through their personal achievements, their past fame, or as a result of being in the epicenter of public attention for a long period of time. They are leaders in the common opinion of the region. Provincial politicians who underestimate the influence of such leaders in the regional political processes almost always end by being defeated. Local leaders have an especially important influence on decision making in the region. The people's acceptance of decisions depends largely on their support or opposition.

In the Tomsk region, G. P. Bogomiakov, the former first secretary of the Tomsk Obkom CPSU (Communist Party), was just such a figure; he now is the department chair of general relations of the Western-Siberian Commercial Bank. During his seventeen years as first leader of the province, Bogomiakov formed more than one generation of regional leaders, ranging from the provincial and district level to the municipal. Practically all of the current administrative and business elite of the region and district (including governors and the oil "generals" of the North), owe their advancement to Bogomiakov. Now, Bogomiakov plays an important part in the political life of the province, and the people there have great respect for him. During the presidential elections, as a representative of Boris Yeltsin, he spoke with industrial workers, at rural gatherings, and at various institutions. According to local experts, his support gave Yeltsin a tangible increase in votes throughout the province. As the regional representative of the president of the Russian Federation, he had constant contact with regional and district lead-

ers. Bogomiakov was in a position to influence decision making on broad political and socioeconomic problems of the region.

As Machiavelli wrote, "The mind of a ruler is judged first of all by the kind of people he gathers around himself."⁵ The survival and effectiveness of a leader in modern Russian provinces directly depends on how well his assistants, consultants, and advisors work together and to what degree they strengthen or weaken the political potential of their patron. As an example, we have the situation that confronted the former administrative head of the Briansky region, E. Barabanov, who surrounded himself with assistants and advisors of doubtful official and political reputation.⁶

In the politico-ideological views of regional leaders, strict pragmatism should be maintained in political speech and in contacts with others. It should be noted that members of the Soviet nomenklatura, who have already shown great capacity for self-preservation, were forced by new conditions to adopt a new political style. The new style related to the de-ideologizing tendencies of society, which as it has been freed from communist dogma has also been freed from the short-term prevalence of radical liberal ideas. In some cases, their adaptation to the new political way of thinking has been quite successful. A clear example is the career of Igor Stroyev, formerly a member of the Politburo Central Committee of the CPSU, who now is administrative head of the Orlovsky region and chairman of the Council of Federations.

Stroyev's political behavior during the August coup in 1991 has been viewed in varying ways. Some say that he upheld the policy of noninterference in the conflict. Others maintain that he was active on the side of the protesters. Thus, during a session of the Constitutional Court, CPSU lawyer A. M. Makarov "cited a Central Committee's document which had been signed by Stroyev, ordering the whole obkom to support the revolt participants."⁷ After the coup attempt of 1991, Stroyev went to Orel and in October 1991 was chosen director of the All-Russian Research Institute. This period of his political career, when it seemed he had receded to insignificance, was a period of reappraising values, working out new approaches to politics and a new style of behavior, and "gathering his forces." It was at that time, 1993 to 1996, that Stroyev prepared for his subsequent rise to power.

According to all surveys of general opinion, Stroyev remained the most popular figure in his region, although he did not hold a very prominent position. Yeltsin, despite his longstanding personal acquaintance with Stroyev, did not hurry to appoint him, as he was a "promoted worker of Gorbachev." However, even without presidential support, on 11 April 1993 Stroyev was elected regional head of administration with more than 70 percent of the vote. His main competition in the election was the incumbent, Nikolai Yudin. Igor Stroyev became the first elected head of administration. According to the journal *Moscow Komsomolets*, after the election Stroyev "temporarily replaced the liberal representative of the president, who had replaced him with an ex-representative of the city council, a man who was faithful to him, and had never spoken out in the press against Yeltsin's reforms. He even took the leader of the regional UVD [local

police], who in August of 1991, had raised a . . . militia in defense of the White House.”⁸ However, according to the analysts for the journal *The Daily Merchant*, immediately following the election for provincial governor, Stroyev refused to receive a delegation of local communists and in April 1993 he even refused a meeting with Gorbachev.⁹

In characterizing Stroyev as a leader, local observers note a complete lack of political principles and his evident pragmatism (used in the narrow sense of the word). Thus, for example, the department of the regional administration dealing with youth until recently consisted almost entirely of members of the local Russian National Union (RNU), a small political group with nationalistic goals. The leader of RNU, I. Semenov, actively participated in Stroyev’s election campaign. With the support of local observers, the RNU militia cruelly beat local DVP activists when they tried to picket the regional administrative building during a visit to Orel Chernomirdina in 1995. From that time, contacts with RNU were stopped. Semenov is in a pre-trial detention center and is being charged with the murder of three people. The supporters of RNU were ousted from the administration and a position was offered to Dimitri Nazarov, a retired soldier and a pensioner from the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Nazarov became well known after the 1993 election campaign, when in a broadcast he read portions of a speech containing the words, “Stroyev’s gang is striving for power.” These words offended A. Vassilkovsky, Stroyev’s present first deputy head of administration, and he brought a suit of one million rubles against Nazarov. Vassilkovsky won, but the court lowered the amount to 100,000 rubles. V. Ziabkin, one of Stroyev’s most irreconcilable enemies, was offered the position of department chair of social maintenance in the regional administration. These episodes illustrate a characteristic of Stroyev that has been noted by local experts—he demonstrates little vindictiveness in instances when it would work against his goals and is willing to integrate dangerous enemies into the power structure.

In describing Stroyev’s political participation, we should elaborate on his unique idea of solidarity, which greatly promotes his authority in the eyes of political leaders and groups that are generally of contradictory opinions. E. K. Ligachev described Stroyev as an “undependable candidate,” a leader of authority belonging to no party, someone who is loyal to the Kremlin. However, Ligachev likes the fact that “he does not change his convictions, he does not betray his past.”¹⁰ It is a great merit that Stroyev can emphasize his neutrality in the midst of former (and present) communist leaders, who firmly believe that during the August coup, first the top leaders and then, one after another, all the “group supporters” were betrayed.

The tendency toward pragmatism in regional circles was clearly shown in the 1996 gubernatorial elections, when more than half of the citizens of the Russian Federation were faced with choosing a new administrative head. In the course of that campaign, it seemed that there was a convenient reason for promulgating a certain political position. However, the suppressed majority of citizens chose a different model of political behavior. Many governors were tempted to try the charismatic role of “master” of the region, which consists of taking a paternal

attitude toward their “subjects,” representing their interests before the capital officials. This behavior, which hardly existed among the majority of governors until a few years ago, has now found fertile ground. The parliamentary and presidential elections of 1995–96 gave strong encouragement to the research of political strategists, at the basis of which are the most recent findings on political cultures of various regions of the country, the characteristics of electoral group behavior, and so forth. Strategists of the electoral campaigns not only initialize political movements to support their clients, organize work with opponents, and organize public relations campaigns, but also correct the image of the politician, organize information, and adapt the policies of “preventive action”—scattering the supporters electorate—to his campaign.

One example is Saratov city governor D. F. Ayatskov, who in April 1996 was appointed head of administration in the region. During the election campaign, he was able to establish in a relatively short time an image of a pragmatic leader. He defeated his competition with an overwhelming 81.36 percent of the votes. This quick and highly successful campaign showed the effectiveness of a model of governor-entrepreneur in the regional elections and came to be used by almost all candidates for the governor’s chair, regardless of the political bloc or clan to which they belonged.

Another example is the gubernatorial election campaign in the Leningrad region. A very difficult economic situation had created favorable conditions for victory of the candidates opposing the incumbent, who were relying on ideological rhetoric. However, V. A. Gustov, the main opponent of governor A. S. Belyakov, chose a different tactic. Gustov, formerly chairman of the region’s Council and deputy of the Council of Federations, was actively supported by the Communists. His idea was to use the same model of a pragmatic regional leader that Belyakov had tried to use. In his pre-election speeches, Gustov repeated that he was never interested in the “color” of politics, that his “party” was the people of the Leningrad region, that both communists, democrats, and all the rest are alike in being citizens.¹¹ Belyakov’s team, which had significant politico-administrative resources, had enlisted the support of such leaders as E. S. Stroyev and U. M. Luzhkov by letters declaring “sincere and working relationships shaped between them and the governor.” Thus, they were not able to establish a technological model of a governor-master, adapt it to Belyakov’s image, and use it in the election process.

This particular political style, which typifies our provincial elite, is a distinguishing feature of regional leadership in modern Russia. It is said that there is a synthesis of democratic and authoritarian methods of political behavior and activity that can be seen in the example of leaders who have a stable party and Soviet career, as well as leaders who have come into power during the past several years. Their political style barely differentiates one from another because it consists of a merging of patriarchal and servile relationships.

In completing this survey of problems of regional leadership in modern Russia, it should be mentioned that besides the unquestionable superiority of forceful personalities who occupy positions of power in the regions or who influence

key decisions, there are also other tendencies in the regional political processes. In particular, the provincial elites' aspirations to the aristocracy are strengthened from a patron-client relationship to that of a partnership. We can see the formation of various groups of influence—for example, the industrial group, “the Ural Factories,” which is active in the Udmurt Republic, or even the Council of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, which is politically active in the Nizhgorodsky region. At the present time, it is difficult to say which of these tendencies will take precedence. However, leadership at a regional level will retain its importance.

NOTES

1. See A. V. Ogariov and A. V. Ponedelkov, *Leader, Elite, Region* (Rostov-on-Don: Rostov, 1995); E. V. Kudryashova, *Leader and Leadership* (Arkhangelsk: Arkhangelsk, 1996).
2. Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), 11.
3. J. Blondel, *Political Leadership* (Moscow: Yuridicheskaya literatura, 1992), 17–18.
4. Cited from P. K. Goncharov, Y. V. Erhin, and V. V. Krapivin, *Introduction to Political Science* (Moscow: Nayka, 1994), 216–17.
5. N. Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Moscow: Moskovskiy Universitet, 1990), 69.
6. See V. Vizhutovich, “Very Executive Power: Governor of Bryansk and His Team in the Service of Criminal Business,” *Izvestiya*, 9 April 1996, 2.
7. “Makarov speech,” *Express-Chronica*, 26 January 1996, 1.
8. E. Deeva and V. Novikov, “Vot chemy menya matushka uchila,” *Moskovskiy Kommunist*, 20 January 1996, 2.
9. “Stroev Refused to Meet Gorbachev,” *Kommersant Daily*, 26 January 1996.
10. A. Sergeev, “Stroev,” *Moscow News*, 28 January 1996, 6–7.
11. “Chto govorit Gustov,” *Rodnaya Storona* 3 (1996).