

GETTING THE “DOUGH” AND SAVING THE MACHINE: LESSONS FROM TATARSTAN

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Abstract: This case study looks at the evolution of the political machine built in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the notable subnational units of the Russian Federation. The study reviews the key features of the republican political system as it was constructed under its first president Mintimer Shaimiev and explores the sources of its durability, explaining the longevity of the system after Shaimiev’s departure. The study highlights the role of center-periphery interaction and the flexible tactics employed by the local elites with the aim of taking advantage of the changing political environment and opportunities arising in the federal center. To ensure the survival of its political machine, Tatarstan is increasingly relying on federal funds to finance regional and national mega-projects undertaken in the republic.

Observers have long noted that local politics vary considerably both in nationally democratic and authoritarian settings.² The greater systematic integration of subnational and multi-level research into comparative politics is a more recent endeavor and today there is a growing body of scholarship that makes use of subnational analysis in Brazil, Argentina, Russia, India, China, and other countries.³

The recent literature on subnational political diversity can be roughly

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¹ The author thanks two anonymous reviewers and the journal editor for invaluable comments on an earlier draft of this article.

² The scholarship on American political machines, for example, has a long tradition.

³ Lily Tsai and Daniel Ziblatt. “The Rise of Subnational and Multilevel Comparative Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, forthcoming. For a good discussion of subnational level research findings and challenges, see *APSA-CP newsletter* 10 (1), January 2012.

categorized into two groups. One set of scholars has treated subnational politics as autonomous political units and, taking inspiration from national-level studies, has focused on internal and external variables responsible for varying regional political dynamics. Scholars working on Russian regions, for example, brought attention to the role of historical legacies,⁴ formal and informal institutions,⁵ and foreign aid⁶ in shaping subnational regimes. The second group has emphasized the peculiarity of subnational politics as something that occurs within the context of a larger national political scene. Scholars of Latin American politics have, for example, been more analytically cognizant of the fact that subnational political units, being part of a national polity, are influenced by their interaction with the federal government.⁷ Gibson's theory of "boundary control"⁸ and Gervasoni's analysis of the role of fiscal transfers in maintaining subnational authoritarianism⁹ are representative of the approaches that take into account the centrality of center-periphery dynamics for explaining political variation across regions.

The scholars of Russian regions have never denied the influence of the federal center on regional politics, observing that such influence has increased during the 2000s as the Kremlin tried to integrate regional elites under the "power vertical" and noting the unintended consequences of the Kremlin's cadre policies on regional political regimes.¹⁰ No influential generalizations have yet emerged from the studies of the Russian regions

⁴ Tomila Lankina. 2010. "Regional democracy variations and the forgotten legacies of western engagement," in Vladimir Gel'man and Cameron Ross, eds. *The Politics of Subnational Authoritarianism in Russia*, Farnham: Ashgate, 39-66 and Henry Hale. 2003. "Explaining Machine Politics in Russia's Regions: Economy, Ethnicity, and Legacy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19 (3): 228-263.

⁵ Kimitaka Matsuzato. 2001. "From Ethno-Bonapartism to Centralized Caciquismo: Characteristics and Origins of the Tatarstan Political Regime, 1990-2000," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 17 (4): 43-77 and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova. 2011. *Political Consequences of Crony Capitalism Inside Russia*. University of Notre Dame Press.

⁶ Tomila Lankina and Lullit Getachew. 2006. "A Geographic Incremental Theory of Democratization: Territory, Aid and Democracy in Postcommunist Regions," *World Politics* 58 (4): 536-582.

⁷ See Agustina Giraudy. 2012. "Subnational Democracy: Lessons from Latin America," *APSA-Comparative Democratization Newsletter* 10:1.

⁸ Edward Gibson. 2005. "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," *World Politics* 58: 1, 101-132.

⁹ Carlos Gervasoni. 2010. "A Rentier Theory of Subnational Regimes," *World Politics* 62:2, 302-40.

¹⁰ Andrew Konitzer and Stephen Wegren. 2006. "Federalism and Political Recentralization in the Russian Federation: United Russia as the Party of Power," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 36: 4, 503-522 and Cameron Ross. 2010. "Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations in Russia," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 26: 2, 165-187. For an analysis of the unintended consequences of the Kremlin's cadre policy, see Ora John Reuter. 2013. "Regional Patrons and Hegemonic Party Electoral Performance in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29: 2, 101-135..

that would take into account this peculiar, “nested” character of subnational politics – a system operating within and interacting with a larger system of power.¹¹ The opportunities for cross-regional conversation in the face of theoretical advancements made with the use of empirical data in other regions remain wide open as well. Considering such opportunities, this study makes a small step toward engaging one of the findings on center-periphery dynamics made outside Russia.

Of particular interest is Gervasoni’s rentier theory of subnational regimes that highlights the role of fiscal revenues in determining differences in regional political systems in federal states. Regions that receive fiscal rents (for example, in the form of federal transfers), Gervasoni argued, can enjoy the benefits of spending without the political costs of taxing. Thus, he found that in Argentina the smaller and less developed regions benefitted politically from federal transfers that allowed the rulers to build extensive patronage networks, dependent publics and weaken democratic contestation.¹²

Given Russia’s economic growth in the first decade of the 2000s and the expanding federal transfers as the Kremlin initiated a variety of national projects and supported regional ones, it seems plausible to expect that fiscal rents are an important factor shaping regional politics in Russia as well. Based on this intuition, in this study I bring attention to a single case of a notable subnational political machine in the Russian Federation that could be viewed through a “rentier theory” of subnational regimes and that provides the rationale for extending this theory beyond the universe of smaller and less developed regions in the country that provided original data for this theory. I highlight the role of center-periphery interaction and specific tactics employed by local authoritarian incumbents to consolidate the position of the ruling elite. The extraction of federal resources has been an important tactic, I argue, that has allowed for maintaining and stabilizing the operation of the political machine even in the face of important challenges, such as that of political succession in a highly personalized system of power.

The case explored in this study is the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the subnational units that has long positioned itself as a model-builder in center-periphery relations in the Russian Federation.¹³ During the last two decades, Tatarstan operated through the use of machine politics, the type

¹¹ One notable exception is Paul Goode. 2012. *The Decline of Regionalism in Putin’s Russia: Boundary Issues*. London: Routledge, though his research question focuses on variations in regionalism rather than regional political systems.

¹² Gervasoni 2010.

¹³ In the 1990s, for example, Tatarstan promoted its “Tatarstan model” of peaceful negotiations with the federal center in the pursuit of a bilateral treaty signed in 1994. Such treaties were subsequently signed by many other regions in Russia.

of politics that evolved in various other regions of Russia during the 1990s, including Bashkortostan, Oryol, Mordovia, Kalmykia and even the capital city of Moscow. Most of these regional machines, however, were dismantled in the 2000s, while Tatarstan stands out as a relatively unique case, having undergone a leadership transition but able to maintain its political system intact, preserving social, political and economic stability as well as the permanence of property rights in the republic.¹⁴ This study tries to uncover the reasons for the relative durability of Tatarstan's political machine in a period when many other regional machines have crumbled.¹⁵

The article is divided into three parts. In the first part, I define the concept of political machine and review its application in the studies of the post-Soviet region. Then, I review the key features of Tatarstan's political system as it operated under Mintimer Shaimiev, the first president of the republic, who founded the republican machine and served as its first chief operator. I describe the internal strategies and institutions that ensured political control of elites and the masses as well as external strategies employed by the republican elite vis-à-vis the Kremlin. The third part uses the case of Tatarstan to explore the adaptability and durability of the post-Soviet regional political machine, focusing on the republican elites' reaction to Putin's centralization policies and the circumstances of leadership change in Tatarstan. I argue that the longevity of the republican political machine is explained by its political flexibility and clever adaptation to the changing political environment, which allowed it to benefit from opportunities arising in the center. As Russia entered the new millennium with the new discourse of rebuilding and centralizing the state, Tatarstan's elites adapted successfully by shifting away from the rhetoric of autonomy and sovereignty and promoting the more politically neutral rhetoric that emphasized modernization, innovation, and economic diversification, issues that became especially salient during Dmitry Medvedev's presidency. Such adaptation and Tatarstan's continuing reliance on the practice of negotiations with the federal center allowed the regional elites to take advantage of vast federal resources allocated for national and regional "mega-projects." The resultant inflow of massive federal funds into the republic, in turn, allowed for the upkeep of the political machine that has survived a serious challenge of political succession without visible disruptions.

¹⁴ Mordovia, which underwent a leadership succession in 2012 and so far seems to have been able to preserve the political machine built by Nikolai Merkulshkin, is the only other region comparable to Tatarstan in this regard.

¹⁵ It is worth noting though that most dismantled political machines were not replaced by democratic and open political processes, but frequently by unstable, scandal-ridden political systems unable (rather than unwilling) to construct a new political machine.

Political Machines: American Experience and Beyond

In the most general sense, the concept of “political machine” can be defined as an “organization capable of delivering a vote with mechanical regularity.”¹⁶ The early studies of the most famous political machines in American cities, such as Chicago and New York, and such Southern states as Virginia and North Carolina have provided a wealth of data as to the central elements and the “inner logic” of such machines.¹⁷ Similar patterns of political operation were later found in many developing nations that revealed machine-like traits of building political loyalties based on material self-interest.¹⁸

These earlier studies of machine-based politics suggest several key features of such form of politics. First, a political machine represents a political organization that works to generate broad and continuous support for its own regeneration. Second, central to generating such broad and continuing support is patronage, i.e. distribution of spoils from political office to “machine workers” (“honest graft” in the words of George W. Plunkitt, a member of the Tammany Hall machine in New York at the turn of the century). And, third, one of the key mechanisms of getting the vote is a personalized material reward or a threat of punishment.¹⁹

The post-Soviet region has registered more recently as a place of operation for political machines as analysts noted the ability of particular leaders to deliver votes predictably both during regional and national elections. The concept has illuminated analyses of Kuchma’s Ukraine²⁰ and politics in Russia and its regions.²¹ These studies discuss in detail the

¹⁶ Clarence Stone. 1996. “Urban Political Machines: Taking Stock,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 29: 3, 446–50.

¹⁷ Harold Gosnell. 1968. *Machine politics: Chicago model*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Jerome Mushkat. 1971. *Tammany: The Evolution of a Political Machine, 1789-1865*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press and V. O. Key, Jr. 1949. *Southern Politics In State and Nation*. New York: Vintage Books.

¹⁸ James Scott. 1969. “Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change,” *American Political Science Review* 63: 4, 1144.

¹⁹ See the concept of ‘perverse accountability’ developed by Susan Stokes. 2005. “Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics with Evidence from Argentina,” *American Political Science Review* 99 (3): 315-25.

²⁰ Paul D’Anieri. 2005. “The Last Hurrah: The 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections and the Limits of Machine Politics,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2): 231-249.

²¹ Timothy Frye, Ora John Reuter, and David Szakonyi. 2012. “Political Machines at Work: Voter Mobilization and Electoral Subversion in the Workplace,” paper presented at the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, August 30-September 2; Reuter 2013, Hale. 2003, Matsuzato 2001, Michael Brie. 2004. “The Moscow Political Regime: The Emergence of a New Urban Political Machine,” in Alfred B. Evans Jr. and Vladimir Gel’man, eds. *The Politics of Local Government in Russia*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. J. Alexander and J. Grävingsholt. 2002. “Evaluating Democratic Progress Inside Russia: The Komi Republic and the Republic of Bashkortostan,” *Democratization* 9: 4, 77-105; and Ildar Gabdrifkov and Henry Hale. 2006. “Bashkortostan’s Democratic Moment? Patronal Presidentialism,

practices and institutions allowing regional governors to maintain political control in the 1990s and thereby provide comparative perspective on political machine operations in various regions at various times.

In his analysis of the origins of regional political machines in Russia's regions, Hale resorted to historical institutionalism, arguing for the importance of Soviet legacies and the existence of path-dependence in determining the locations of power and resource concentration. Hale argued that "the USSR created certain "pliable populations" that remained highly dependent on the state and that thus proved to be quite manipulable by regional authorities."²² Clientelistic ties reflecting the voters' dependence on the authorities have become especially important in the realms of ethnicity and agriculture, two spheres that underwent the least institutional change in the post-Soviet period.²³ These insights are fully supported by Matsuzato's analysis of Tatarstan's machine politics that highlights ethnic and rural factors in building the republican political machine, as well as earlier observations made by local political analysts.²⁴ At the same time, these two factors might not be the only ones making a polity conducive for machine politics. More general characteristics of the post-Soviet institutional environment and political culture might be conducive to machine politics, as Brie argues in his study of Moscow's urban machine.²⁵ In a more detailed study of machine politics operation in Russia, Frye, Reuter and Szakonyi identify workplace as a key site for political mobilization and argue that mobilization is easier and happens more often in "large, financially dependent firms in sectors characterized by asset immobility or slack labor markets whose managers are 'core' supporters of the regime."²⁶ This analysis suggests that besides the rural factor and ethnicity, political machines in such regions as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan were enabled by a particular economic strategy of delayed reforms (the so called "soft entry into the market") and controlled privatization. Having many industrial enterprises owned by or dependent on the state proved politically expedient for the regional political machines.

All these studies converge on the observation that patronage is the central mechanism underpinning machine politics, including all post-Soviet

Regional Regime Change, and Identity in Russia," in *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds* ed. by Osamu Ieda and Tomohiko Uyama. Slavic Eurasian Studies #10. .

²² Hale 2003, p. 229

²³ Ibid., p. 230

²⁴ Matsuzato. 2001; Midkhat Farukshin. 2002. "Tatarstan: Al'ternativnye vybory bez al'ternativy," in *Chto khotel by znat' izbiratel' Tatarstana o vyborakh*, Kazan, 2002.

²⁵ Brie 2004, p. 206 argued that the origins of the Moscow machine are in a specific institutional environment of the early 1990s and a distinct political culture characterized by bureaucratic paternalism and the personalization of public trust.

²⁶ Frye, Reuter, Szakonyi 2012, p. 34.

regional political machines in Russia. Patronage is important in this system of political organization in several ways. First, it underlies all inter-elite exchange. State officials, in exchange for their jobs and all the enrichment opportunities they obtain with their public posts, have to deliver electoral support for the machine. Rounding up votes becomes one of their most important tasks in the system.²⁷ Second, as in the case of Virginia's Byrd machine in V.O. Key's brilliant description, to be successful, the machine needs to be allied with the most important business and financial interests of the state. In such situations, "The leading citizens of each community – the banker, the preacher, the lawyer, the doctor, the merchants and often the newspaper owners whose self-interest dictates a deep concern about the way in which the government is fulfilling its responsibilities to the community which they live – surrender their self-interest..."²⁸ In fact, in the post-Soviet cases, because these "leading citizens" owe their positions to the machine and depend on it, whether for contracts or administrative, judicial and legal support, they also work along with state officials on mobilizing electoral support for the machine. As in the case of machine politics in American cities and regions, this system of political organization relies on tight connections between political and economic elites. Such linkages have been studied in the post-Soviet context using concepts of "crony capitalism,"²⁹ "municipal capitalism,"³⁰ and "oligarchy."³¹

Patronage is also important in the relations between the elites integrated into the political machine and the electorate. Especially in the 1990s, unaccustomed to the harsh realities of the market, Russian voters longed for safety and protection. In the context when the Kremlin initiated and promoted market reforms, regional rulers represented the authorities of the "last resort" who were forced to take upon themselves the task of protecting the population from the exigencies of the market.³² Indeed, those regional authorities who were able to claim more autonomy from the center and could rely on a more solid economic basis, often did promote

²⁷ On Russia, see William M. Reisinger and Bryon J. Moraski. 2011. "Skill or Loyalty? The Fate of Russia's Governors Under Presidential Control," unpublished manuscript presented at the University of Iowa's Shambaugh Conference, Lessons from Subnational Comparative Politics: Theory and Method in the Third Decade of Studying Russia's Regions, October 2011 and Ora John Reuter and Graeme Robertson. 2012. "Subnational Appointments in Authoritarian Regimes: Evidence from Russian Gubernatorial Appointments," *Journal of Politics* 74 : 4, 1023-1037.

²⁸ Key, pp. 33-34.

²⁹ Sharafutdinova. 2011.

³⁰ "City of the Dead," *The Economist*, March 18, 1999, <http://www.economist.com/node/319908>.

³¹ David Hoffman. 2002. *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia*. New York: Public Affairs.

³² David Woodruff. 1999. *Money Unmade: Barter and The Fate of Russian Capitalism*. Cornell University Press.

more socially-oriented programs, devising special programs of privatization and advancing the concept of a "soft" entry into the market. Such strategies were undertaken in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Moscow city - economically strong regions that wielded considerable autonomy from the federal center. Furthermore, in some cases, regional authorities could even extend more particularistic material privileges, such as additions to pensions, salaries of public sector employees and one-time payments to young families for the birth of a child (dubbed as "*luzhkovskie*" after Mayor Yury Luzhkov) in Moscow or additional privatization vouchers received by residents of Tatarstan as a result of a special republican privatization program, as well as small additions to pensions disbursed in the weeks prior to elections. Regional authorities, of course, used such special "carrots" to appeal to the regional population and build support for the machine. It would be inaccurate to suggest that such particularistic material rewards were directly responsible for the voting results, as was argued in the cases of American political machines that allegedly relied *primarily* on particularistic goods to gain electoral support.³³ A more complex mix of propaganda, Soviet electoral legacies, traditional rural reverence for authority, administrative pressure in the work place and outright fraud were responsible for the voting results in post-Soviet political machines.³⁴

With Putin's arrival to the presidency, the regional autonomy that had been conducive to the creation of regional political machines during the 1990s was deemed a threat to national unity. Under Putin, the Kremlin started extensive federal reforms seeking to harmonize federal and regional legislation, and standardize the federal center's relations with regions by establishing more homogenous policies and regulations. These centralizing policies indicated the president's will to control regional governors and construct the infamous "vertical of power" on the national level. In effect, Putin decided to construct a nation-wide political machine making "vote delivery" into the central assessment criteria for gubernatorial replacements.³⁵ It is also clear that Putin himself sought to integrate regional political machines into the national vertical of power rather than destroy them completely. The most notable regional machines, led by powerful regional heavyweights, such as Luzhkov, Shaimiev, Bashkortostan's Murtaza Rakhimov, Oryol's Egor Stroev, and Sverdlovsk's Eduard Rossel, survived Putin's first presidency as their leaders stayed in power in the first

³³ For the mainstream view on this see James Q. Wilson and Edward Banfield. 1963. *City Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Some studies have noted that such particularistic benefits have been overemphasized as the basis for voting (see Kenneth Finegold. 1995. *Experts and Politicians*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.).

³⁴ All of these various ingredients are discussed using the case of elections held in Tatarstan in Midkhat Farukshin and Valentin Mikhailov, eds. 2002. *Chto khotel by znat' izbiratel' Tatarstana*. Kazan.

³⁵ Reuter and Robertson 2012; Reisinger and Moraski 2012.

decade of the 2000s.

This situation changed under the presidency of Medvedev who initiated a policy of rejuvenating the gubernatorial corpus. It was under Medvedev's supervision that Kremlin-appointed functionaries replaced most notable regional heavyweights. Rossel and Stroeve left their posts in 2009; Rakhimov, Shaimiev, and Luzhkov were forced out in 2010.³⁶ In almost all of these cases, the leaders were replaced by outsiders to the regional political machines. Alexander Kozlov, a deputy minister of agriculture, replaced Oryol's Stroeve; Alexander Misharin, a deputy transport minister, replaced Rossel, Rustam Khamitov, the manager of the state-owned hydroelectric power company RusGydro, replaced Rakhimov. These replacements frequently were accompanied by investigations, which, in the cases of Stroeve, Rossel and Rakhimov led to the arrests of the former governors' team members. Such a systematic approach to these regional machines reveals that the federal center intended not only to rejuvenate regional cadres, but to remake the regional structures of power by destroying local political loyalties and installing new leaders who would be more dependent on, and loyal to, the Kremlin. These actions essentially destroyed most of the regional machines constructed in the 1990s, opening political space for greater competition on the regional and municipal levels in Russia and inadvertently undermining the federal political machine.³⁷

The Republic of Tatarstan stands out in this context as a region, where despite the replacement of the regional chief, the regional political machine has survived and appears to be thriving. Shaimiev's replacement – Rustem Minnikhanov – is the former president's closest associate who had served as republican prime minister for over ten years, becoming one of the central figures in Tatarstan's political system. Minnikhanov's appointment as Tatarstan's president revealed that the Kazan and Moscow Kremlins reached yet another compromise solution and the republican political regime did not undergo a complete "reset" as most other regional regimes have. The roots of this compromise are to be sought in the past, although understanding the longevity of the machine also requires knowledge of the present strategies of the republican leadership.

Tatarstan's *Flexible* Political Machine

The Republic of Tatarstan has produced an example of an effective and successful regional political machine characterized by a high degree of electoral control, relatively high economic and administrative effectiveness, relative social stability, and recognition from the federal center. The

³⁶ Darrell Slider, "Medvedev and the Governors," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 86, November 16, 2010, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-86-2-4.pdf>

³⁷ Reuter 2013.

machine constructed in the 1990s³⁸ has proved to be quite resilient, as it weathered serious political challenges associated with Putin's centralizing federal reforms, the two economic crises of 1998 and 2008 and, more recently, the leadership transition. The key to such resilience is the ideological adaptability displayed by the republican elites and their commitment to the practice of negotiating with the federal center in search of compromise solutions. Over the last two decades, the machine's ideological *modus operandi* has transformed from a search for greater autonomy and sovereignty to a search for more financial resources to be "repatriated" into the republic from the federal center. By flexibly adapting to the new political environment of the 2000s, Tatarstan was able to align its interests with those of the federal center and reap the financial and political benefits of such alignment that helped to perpetuate the republican political machine.

Below I review the main pillars of the republican political machine as it was constructed in the 1990s, noting how each of the pillars comprised either the "intra-elite" or the "elite-mass" components of the machine. In the following section, I explore the nature of changes in Tatarstan's political machine and a discursive shift in the republic's engagement with the federal center as the elites abandoned autonomy-seeking rhetoric replacing it with a more politically neutral language and a pragmatic focus on "milking" the center for federal funds.

Ideology

The central ideological basis for constructing an autonomous political machine in Tatarstan was provided by the "parade of sovereignties" that unfolded in the Soviet Union starting in 1988. Spearheaded by the union republics of the USSR, including the Russian Federation's "declaration of sovereignty" on June 12, 1990, the parade of sovereignties reflected an autonomy drive on the part of the constituent units of the Soviet Union in the context of the liberalizing and decentralizing political environment. The arguments made by Soviet and Russian leaders provided a basis for the sense of entitlement on the part of constituent units of the Russian Federation as well. Tatarstan was one of the most politically active republics (along with Bashkortostan, Tyva and Sakha) that followed the Russian and other Soviet republics' steps in claiming political and economic autonomy and declaring sovereignty, though stopping short of reaching for outright independence as was attempted by Chechnya. Along with Chechnya, Tatarstan refused to sign the 1992 Federal Treaty, instead demanding a bilateral treaty between Moscow and Kazan. The two sides signed such a treaty in February 1994, laying the groundwork for

³⁸ By 1993-1994 Shaimiev was able to consolidate control over the political process, wresting away any serious claims on the part of the nationalist and democratic oppositions that were active in republican political life during 1989-1992.

subsequent treaties between the federal government and other constituent units of the Russian Federation.³⁹

The arguments underpinning the regional drive for sovereignty combined two foci: national self-determination and democracy. On the subnational level this combination was reflected in the idea that federalism represented a “territorial carcass of democracy.”⁴⁰ For Russia’s regional governors and republican presidents this was not a newly invented discourse but merely an adaptation of Russia’s own claim in the context of the Soviet Union to Russia’s subnational context. Given the broader context of a political rivalry between the Russian and Soviet state authorities in 1990-1991, Russia’s regions obtained a rather unique opportunity to further their own autonomy claims.⁴¹ Tatarstan’s authorities led this process, demonstrating an acute understanding of the opportunities and limits involved in the political situation of the early 1990s, successfully taking advantage of the opportunities, while not pushing over the limits.

This ideological basis was made into an important foundation for machine politics as the elites framed an argument about the benefits from republican sovereignty accruing to all residents (sometimes even “citizens”)⁴² of Tatarstan, thus seeking popular support not only from ethnic Tatars, but also from Russians and other nationality groups residing in the republic. This ideology provided the elites with legitimacy and enabled a strong elite-mass linkage, an important element of Tatarstan’s political machine.

Institutions

Institutions have been important for building the intra-elite aspect of the republican political machine. Thus, in his analysis of Tatarstan’s politics, Matsuzato highlighted the mechanism of intra-elite exchange sustaining the republican political machine. Using the concept of “centralized caciquismo,” he described the role of meso-elites - the local chief executives in the republic’s rayons – as crucial for maintaining the political system. The president controls the local chief executives through the appointment mechanism, but also ensures their electoral mobilization capabilities by requiring them to run in the parliamentary elections on the republican

³⁹ For more on ‘projecting sovereignty’ by Tatarstan, see Katherine Graney 2010. *Of Khans and Kremains: Tatarstan and the Future of Ethno-Federalism in Russia*. Lanham: Lexington Press.

⁴⁰ Gulnaz Sharafutdinova. 2013. “Gestalt Switch in Russian Federalism: The Decline of Regional Power Under Putin,” *Comparative Politics* 45: 3, 357-376.

⁴¹ For more on this process, see Jeff Kahn. 2000. “The Parade of Sovereignties: Establishing the Vocabulary of the New Russian Federalism,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 16: 1, 58-89.

⁴² The 1992 republican Constitution provides for Republic of Tatarstan citizenship.

level, as well as supervising local council elections.⁴³ Therefore, the meso-elites have to develop their own “mini-machines,” enabling them to reach out to the electorate and organize voting results, first for themselves and then for their patron, the republican president. Their ability to win public support for themselves reveals their capacity to mobilize votes for their patron. So the meso-elites are also engaged in building their own clientele, which usually consists of the directors of state-controlled and even some private enterprises, as well as the directors of schools, hospitals, farms, and any other organizations that have public employees.⁴⁴ These officials depend heavily on the good will of rayon chiefs for the well-being of their firms and institutions and frequently even for their positions. In short, the republican-level pyramid of power consists of many “mini-pyramids” built on the *rayon* level, so the upkeep of the republican level political machine is very much a collective endeavor.⁴⁵

In his analysis of Virginian politics, Key had noted that “[T]he vitality of the machine and its long record of electoral success may rest in part on the hesitancy of the high command to outrage the sensibilities of the rank and file of the machine [...] by forcing the nomination of unacceptable persons for state office.”⁴⁶ Given the importance of the aforementioned “mini-pyramids,” it is not surprising that Tatarstan’s machine has similar features reflected, for example, in the practice of selecting *rayon* chiefs from among the local elites rather than bringing outsiders in.⁴⁷ At the same time, as in Virginia, Tatarstan also relies on a “tightly articulated hierarchy of power” about which Shaimiev boasted when commenting on Putin’s reforms and his attempt to build a nation-wide vertical of power.⁴⁸

Both Hale and Matsuzato noted the role of the unreformed agricultural sector in the operations of the republican political machine.⁴⁹ The domination of rural elites with a particular traditional worldview and more traditional and particularistic social practices has been a long-standing feature of the political regime in Tatarstan.⁵⁰ The role of the rural electorate – more dependent and manipulable – for getting the voting results

⁴³ Matsuzato 2001.

⁴⁴ Interview with a hospital employee, August 2005, Nizhnekamsk; interview with the employee of an agricultural firm, Nizhnekamsk, August 2005.

⁴⁵ I am thankful for this insight provided by one of the anonymous reviewers.

⁴⁶ Key, p. 23

⁴⁷ Matsuzato 2001.

⁴⁸ Mintimer Shaimiev. 2000. “Diktatura v Rossii uzhe iskluchena” shaimiev.tatar.ru/pub/view/671

⁴⁹ Hale. 2003 and Matsuzato. 2001.

⁵⁰ Vladimir Belyaev. 2007. “Mirovozzrenie i sotsial’noe povedenie sovremennoi praviashchei elity Tatarstana,” *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost’* #3, 150-157.; Matsuzato, 2001, and Midkhat Farukshin. 1994. “Politicheskaiia elita v Tatarstane: vyzovy vremeni i trudnosti adaptatsii,” *Polis* (6), 67-79.

desired has also been indispensable.⁵¹ Perhaps recognizing that (or out of his own rural background-based beliefs and predispositions), Tatarstan's first president had consistently promoted protectionist policies in the agricultural sector, arguing for the republic's need to be self-sufficient in basic products, such as grain.⁵² Although not all of his policies were successful, as is visible now, Tatarstan's agricultural sector has stayed afloat even as many other regions in Russia have failed to maintain theirs.⁵³

Control over the media is another important element of the political machine in Tatarstan that has played an important role in shaping "elite-mass" relations. While on the national level in the 1990s Russia had a very competitive and largely free media, Tatarstan's authorities controlled the republican media through ownership, personnel decisions and, if all else failed, repression.⁵⁴ There were a few oppositional newspapers in the republic such as *Vechernyaya Kazan* (in Russian); but the newspapers popular among the rural publics, for example, in Tatar language, were heavily censored and promoted pro-republican views.⁵⁵ The republican TV also was not a place for political debates and criticism of the authorities, but rather a mechanism for promoting attitudes deferential to the republic's leaders. Similar to other post-Soviet machines, media control played an important role for producing electoral results by shaping public opinion long before the elections themselves. Just like Virginia's "little oligarchy" in the 1920-60s, elites in Tatarstan were very concerned that the republican and local media demonstrate "a sense of honor, an aversion to open venality, a degree of sensitivity to public opinion, a concern for efficiency in administration, and, as long as it does not cost much, a feeling of social responsibility."⁵⁶

These republican-level institutions – the role of meso-elites in maintaining the regime and control over media – are not the most unique institutional features of Tatarstan's political machine. Similar institutions are to be found in the neighboring Bashkortostan, especially under its first

⁵¹ See the analysis of elections in Tatarstan by Farukshin 2002 and Valentin Mikhailov. 2002. "Noveishaia istoria vyborov v Tatarstane – istoria administrativnogo upravleniia vyborami," in *Chto khotel by znat' izbiratel' Tatarstana o vyborakh*, Kazan 2002..

⁵² For some of his views on the role of agriculture, see his celebratory speech on the day devoted to agricultural workers: <http://shaimiev.tatar.ru/pub/view/881>.

⁵³ The strategy of developing private agro-holdings with republican support has not been very successful. One of the biggest firms, VAMIN, is currently undergoing bankruptcy procedures.

⁵⁴ An infamous case, for example, is the sentencing of Irek Murtazin, a well-known journalist and a former head of Shaimiev's press service, to two years in prison for libel.

⁵⁵ Glasnost Defense Foundation, an NGO monitoring freedom of the media in Russia, has for example consistently categorized Tatarstan's media as "not free" (see their glasnost map on www.gdf.ru)

⁵⁶ Key, p. 19

president.⁵⁷ What is more unique relative to other regions is the extent to which the republican elites in Tatarstan have been able to institutionalize the informal practice of negotiating with the federal center over thorny issues in search of compromise solutions.⁵⁸ In this realm, there seem to be no rivals to Tatarstan whose elites have show-cased determination, confidence and an ability to define win-win solutions. This practice developed in the 1990s and was epitomized by the signing of the first bilateral agreement between the federal government and a subnational unit of the Russian Federation. Some analysts (along with republican elites) trace the roots of this practice to the Soviet era, when Tatarstan sought to enhance its status from autonomous republic to union-level republic.⁵⁹ The practice continued in the 2000s as the republican elites negotiated special relationships with Moscow under pressure from centralization policies and having to retreat from their claims about autonomy and state sovereignty.

Economics

As discussed earlier, political machines normally rely on patronage to ensure political support and machine-like regularity in getting the necessary electoral support. Economic resources represent an important pillar of the patronage system underlying machine politics and are important for both, intra-elite and elite-mass aspects of the machine. Where do these resources come from in Tatarstan and how do they get redistributed? While politically the republican machine relied heavily on the rural elites and voters, it is the oil and petrochemical industry that “fed” the rural elites, as Matsuzato aptly noted.⁶⁰ During the infamous “parade of sovereignties,” the republic inherited most of the economic assets that were located on the republican territory during the Soviet era. What was earlier Union level or Russian Federation level property, fell under the control of the republican authorities who devised their own ways of privatizing it.⁶¹ The resources associated with these assets became the economic basis of the political regime constructed in Tatarstan, allowing the authorities an additional mechanism to keep elites integrated and voters pliable.

Moreover, in the 1990s, as a result of the 1994 bilateral treaty with Moscow, Tatarstan enjoyed significant tax breaks and retained a greater

⁵⁷ Tomila Lankina. 1999. “Local Self-Government or Local Political Control: The Case of Bashkortostan,” *Russian Regional Report*, East-West Institute 4 (28), July 22, 1999.

⁵⁸ See also M.S. Il’chenko, 2011. “Federativnye mekhanizmy v razreshenii etnicheskikh konfliktov: peregovornyj protsess za ramkami formal’nykh pravil,” *POLIS* no. 1: 188-210..

⁵⁹ Il’chenko 2011.

⁶⁰ Matsuzato 2001, p. 53.

⁶¹ See Gulnaz Sharafutdinova. 2010. “Redistributing Sovereignty and Property Under Putin: A View from Resource-Rich Republics of the Russian Federation,” in Vladimir Gel’man and Cameron Ross, eds., *Politics of Subnational Authoritarianism in Russia* London: Ashgate. pp. 195-196.

proportion of its taxes in the local budget than most other regions.⁶² This preference caused significant consternation on the part of other Russian regions who criticized Moscow for unfairness and, in some cases, even tried to elevate their status to gain similar perquisites. Sverdlovsk oblast, for example, tried to create a “Urals Republic” to overcome the regional inequality and match the privileges received by Russia’s ethnic republics. Given the dismal economic situation and the difficulties of tax collection in the 1990s, it is hard to make a case that these privileges amounted to much in financial terms. Of greater consequence for constructing a system of patronage in the republic was the autonomy the republican authorities obtained in the process of privatization and control over major economic assets located on the territory of the republic. The local elites deliberately delayed privatization and maintained control over most regional enterprises, deciding on the personnel issues, influencing investment choices and extracting ad hoc financial “contributions” for various republican projects.⁶³ When privatization did eventually happen, individuals in or close to the president’s family monopolized most of the bigger opportunities. Starting in the second half of the 1990s, the business group TAIF, controlled among other people by the president’s son, Airat Shaimiev, rapidly rose in prominence and capitalization, acquiring shares from the most profitable petrochemical enterprises in the republic.⁶⁴

Regional Machines under Attack: Adjusting to the New Era

Putin’s federal reforms unleashed in the early 2000s threatened regional elites and their political machines.⁶⁵ In establishing more direct federal control over the regions, reforms sought to end any preferential taxation treatments that regions might have bargained for themselves earlier, discontinued bilateral treaties and, even more importantly, abolished gubernatorial elections in 2004. Tatarstan lost its tax privileges with the amount of its contributions to the federal budget increasing to about 56 percent of all the taxes collected in the republic.⁶⁶ The loss of economic privileges was paralleled by the emergence of a new discourse on state rebuilding that revealed the hollowed out nature of republican autonomy.⁶⁷

⁶² According to the 1994 treaty, the republic retained 100% of its excise taxes as well as 50% of the VAT. Furthermore, along with a few other republics, it retained all taxes collected in the republic between 1991-1993.

⁶³ The program on dilapidated housing (*vetkhoe zhil'e*) was, for example, one such project to which enterprises were expected to contribute funds regularly.

⁶⁴ Sharafutdinova 2011.

⁶⁵ See Slider, pp. 2-4. on the regional elites’ reaction to these reforms.

⁶⁶ Practically reversing the earlier set up, when the republic kept about 55% of the taxes collected.

⁶⁷ Sharafutdinova 2013.

The rhetoric of democracy and federalism had lost its previously popular appeal already by the second half of the 1990s. And if the economic growth spurred by growing oil prices helped the republican authorities to compensate for the lost taxes, ideologically, the regional elites lost ground in their ability to make claims vis-a-vis the federal center along with the sense of entitlement they had during the early 1990s. This changing situation placed significant pressure on the regional elites in Tatarstan's dominant political machine because they needed to find new strategies in their relations with the center and a new *raison d'être* for legitimizing their monolithic hold on power locally.

It is worth noting that the Kremlin was not interested in decimating machine politics per se. To the contrary, averse to any kind of uncertainty, Putin attempted to build a nation-wide political machine, investing heavily into party building.⁶⁸ In such a scheme, it made more sense to integrate regional machines into the national one. Putin's actions vis-à-vis regional elites confirm that he was keenly aware of the importance of regional elites for making the national machine work. Most of his actions focused on signaling to the regional elites "who is the boss" rather than trying to replace even the most outspoken of them. In retrospect Putin seems much more accommodating towards regional governors than his successor, Medvedev. About two thirds of all incumbents were reappointed during Putin's first two terms in power including, tellingly, most of the regional heavyweights.⁶⁹ Medvedev's approach differed in that he was not concerned with the power vertical but advanced a new discourse of modernization.⁷⁰ Cadre rejuvenation was one of the central pieces of his strategy.⁷¹ It is in this realm that he initiated the most drastic changes, replacing the most notable regional heavyweights in 2010-2011, revealing a high degree of confidence in the extent to which the federal center can control politics in the regions. Tatarstan's president Mintimer Shaimiev (frequently nicknamed *babay*) also fell under the wave of Medvedev-era

⁶⁸ On United Russia, see Andrew Konitzer and Stephen Wegren. 2006. "Federalism and Political Recentralization in the Russian Federation: United Russia As the Party of Power," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 36: 4, 503-522; Ora John Reuter. 2010. "The Politics of Dominant Party Formation: United Russia and Russia's Governors," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62: 2, 293-327.; Ora John Reuter and Thomas F. Remington. 2009. "Dominant Party Regimes and the Commitment Problem: The Case of United Russia." *Comparative Political Studies* 42: 4, 501-526; Henry Hale. 2004. "The Origins of United Russia and the Putin's Presidency: The Role of Contingency in Party System Development," *Demokratizatsiya* 12:2, 169-94; and Vladimir Gel'man. 2008. "Party Politics in Russia: From Competition to Hierarchy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60: 6, 913-930.

⁶⁹ Helge Blakkisrud. 2011. "Medvedev's New Governors," in Cameron Ross, ed., *Russian Regional Politics under Putin and Medvedev*, London: Routledge: 369.

⁷⁰ "Russian Modernization: Dmitry Medvedev's building project," *Economist* Nov 26, 2009.

⁷¹ Tatiana Stanovaya. 2008. "Dmitri Medvedev zaniatsia kadrovoy problemoi." Politcom.ru, July 28. <http://politcom.ru/6581.html>.

gubernatorial replacements.

The removal of Shaimiev, a lynchpin of the power pyramid constructed in the republic, was a challenge for Tatarstan's political machine. In some other regions where long-standing, influential governors were removed, their political machines crumbled and the new governors encountered serious challenges of governability, instability of property rights and elite conflict. Scandals around the new governor Misharin in post-Rossel Sverdlovsk,⁷² public clashes between new and ex-presidents in Bashkortostan,⁷³ the fate of the Bank of Moscow⁷⁴ and the perils facing Inteco in post-Luzhkov Moscow⁷⁵ all reflect the hazards associated with changes in the power structures in the context of crony capitalism.⁷⁶ The replacement of Shaimiev was also potentially hazardous given the political weight and reputation he had acquired that none within or outside the republic could match and given the importance of Tatarstan—both economically and politically—nationwide. Yet unlike many cases mentioned above, Tatarstan's political machine survived the leadership change. No major scandals, intra-elite conflicts or splits have spilled into the public sphere since Shaimiev's departure. There have been no debilitating conflicts over property indicating that the new president intends to change the political-economic system that had formed earlier. The political machine has not only survived the leadership transition but even flourished, supported by the federal center and the republican elites. How did this happen?

The survival of Tatarstan's political machine resulted from a confluence of structural and more contingent factors. On the one hand, the republican status and the economic weight of this oil-rich, highly industrialized region were necessary to bring the federal center to the negotiating table in the early 1990s. The republican elites have demonstrated, on the other hand, an enviable political skill reflected in the degree to which they were able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the political developments in Moscow. The elites appropriated the language of the center when they framed their pursuit of regional autonomy as a struggle for federalism and democracy.⁷⁷ They toned down and gradually abandoned the language of sovereignty in the 2000s, supporting instead

⁷² "Itogi gubernatora Misharina: reform, skandaly i kadrovaya chekharda" http://uralpolit.ru/news/polit_vlast/reviews/itogi-gubernatora-misharina-reformy-skandaly-i-kadrovaya-chekharda

⁷³ Natalia Pavlova. 2011. "Po raznye storony 'Urala'." *Kommersant*. October 11, <http://www.kommersant.ru/pda/kommersant.html?id=1792065>

⁷⁴ "Andrei Borodin zaiavil chto poluchil ubezishche v Britanii," March 1, 2013. <http://www.inosmi.ru/world/20130301/206481236.html>

⁷⁵ "Elena Baturina obvinila Dmitriia Medvedeva v reiderstve," dp.ru, March 18, 2013, http://www.dp.ru/a/2013/03/18/Elena_Baturina_obvinila_D/

⁷⁶ Sharafutdinova 2011.

⁷⁷ Sharafutdinova 2013.

Putin's vertical of power and stressing more pragmatic issues, such as modernization, innovation and economic diversification in the republic.⁷⁸ This approach became especially pertinent under the new republican president. Meanwhile the practice of negotiations with Moscow became the centerpiece of a "Tatarstan model." The skill of finding compromise solutions in relations with the center was perfected in the 1990s, at the height of decentralization, but it was also evident in the reaction elaborated by the republican elites in response to Putin's centralizing reforms⁷⁹ and was highlighted by the compromise found with regard to leadership succession in Tatarstan.

The essence of the compromise over leadership succession was that Shaimiev agreed to step down (according to Medvedev's wishes) but the successor picked to replace him was a member of his team, the long-serving prime minister Rustem Minnikhanov. Furthermore, the republican elites found a new mechanism to ensure continuity and maintain Shaimiev's presence in the public space with the federal center not interfering in this process. The new position of Republic of Tatarstan State Advisor was created specifically for Shaimiev.⁸⁰ In this new role he maintained his old office in the presidential palace and dedicated himself to issues of symbolic significance that involved, in particular, the historical sites in Sviyazhsk and Bolgar. Shaimiev initiated fundraising activities through the newly created Tatarstan Historical and Cultural Monument Revival Fund (*Vozrozhdenie*); he also started lobbying UNESCO to include these two historical sites into the World Heritage List.⁸¹ Although he eschewed any real economic or political issues and never interfered (at least publicly) in the work of the new president, his presence sent an important signal to the rest of the elites that he was part of the new political arrangement. It is plausible to suggest that his continuing presence played a stabilizing role, although it is worth noting that it required tact and skill on both sides (the old and new presidents) because such an arrangement also made the political situation more complex by "bifurcating" political loyalties.

Shaimiev's continuing public presence was helpful to fill the political gap left by his departure. A dynamic technocrat, Minnikhanov never revealed any particular talent for politics per se. To the contrary, an avid car racer, for a long time he avoided public speeches, preferring European

⁷⁸ This is clearly evident by comparing the annual presidential addresses to the State Council in the 1990s and the 2000s. Furthermore, Tatarstan is, for example, the founding member of the Association for Innovative Regions, created in 2010, and in 2012 Rustem Minnikhanov was elected a chair of the Association's Council.

⁷⁹ Sharafutdinova 2013.

⁸⁰ This post was created through the State Council, specified as solely for the first president of Tatarstan.

⁸¹ Shaimiev practically became a fundraiser for the reconstruction project of these historical sites that he sees as central for Tatar history and culture.

rally-cross championships to public appearances and press-conferences. In the new era of national politics, given the technocratic style preferred by Putin and Medvedev, Minnikhanov was a great fit. His successful performance in this new post is revealing of the type of leadership that is in demand in new Russia. Meanwhile, in his new position unburdened with being part of the power vertical, Shaimiev could use his political gravitas to send the kind of signals to the center that would have been neither appropriate nor influential if they came from Minnikhanov. In one such instance, Shaimiev sharply criticized the center and the United Russia ruling party at the conference dedicated to the twenty year-anniversary of Tatarstan's Constitution, accusing the party of imperial thinking, complaining about religious inequalities and lamenting limitations on national languages in Russia.⁸²

Mininkhanov has played his "new cards" well and his role in the preservation of Tatarstan's political machine is worth noting. He should in fact be credited with crystallizing the essence of a new model of relationships with Moscow that developed throughout the 2000s and that could be referred to as the "politics of rentierism." In the 2000s, as the federal budget swelled with oil revenues, Moscow had a much bigger pie to divide among the regions and even though some of the money was distributed based on a set formula and hard facts, considerable resources were disbursed for specific federal and even regional projects based on the lobbying capacities of the governors.⁸³ In such an environment, Tatarstani elites focused on extracting resources from the federal budget. They first "swallowed" the financial carrot offered by Moscow in exchange for their compliance with the new tax code and other federal initiatives seeking to integrate regions more tightly under the federal vertical of power.⁸⁴ They then attracted massive federal resources for celebrating Kazan's 1,000th year anniversary and initiated other regional mega-projects, such as the Universiade discussed below.

Being a core member of the republican elite, Minnikhanov was always in the center of such policy-making. Not surprisingly, at the beginning of his presidency he announced that he planned to continue the policies and

⁸² Shaimiev was evidently reacting to the intensifying role of the Orthodox Church in Russia as well as the standardizing pressures coming from Moscow in the education sphere that affected the number of hours available for learning minority languages in Russia. (<http://echo.msk.ru/news/947319-echo.html>)

⁸³ On political reasons behind federal transfers, see for example, Andrei Yakovlev, Israel Marquez, and Eugenia Nazrullaeva. 2012. "From Competition to Dominance: Political Determinants of Federal Transfers in the Russian Federation," unpublished manuscript available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2005710.

⁸⁴ Natalya Zubarevich. 2010. *Regiony Rossii: neravenstvo, krizis, modernizatsiya*. Moscow: Nezavisimyi institut sotsial'noi politiki. p. 103 also notes special preferences received by Tatarstan from the center.

strategic priorities identified by the republican authorities earlier. Lacking Shaimiev's political skill and avoiding more delicate cultural and national issues, Minnikhanov focused on the economy, promoting the issues of economic diversification, innovation and modernization and practically continuing the work he was doing as a prime minister, but with the new authority of the president. His dynamic technocratic approach worked very well in his relations with the federal center and his "street-smart" character made him an excellent lobbyist in Moscow when resource opportunities presented themselves in the federal center. Minnikhanov has been so successful in "milking" the federal budget that Tatarstan stands out among the rest of the Russian regions, outcompeted only by Chechnya in terms of federal resources flowing into the republic. Minnikhanov's role has been central not only in lobbying for that money but, even more importantly, in delivering the project results, thus setting favorable conditions for further lobbying.⁸⁵ Some commentators have referred to this politics of rentierism as a new "Tatarstan model" that replaced the model developed in the 1990s.⁸⁶ Furthermore, in a recent interview the ex-president of Bashkortostan, Rakhimov, commended Tatarstan's authorities exactly for such a strategy, positing it as a model to follow.⁸⁷

The 2005 celebration of Kazan's 1,000 year anniversary could be seen as the first trial of this model. This project was planned by the republican government inspired by the celebration of Moscow's 850th year anniversary in 1998. Under the leadership of Rafael Khakimov's History Institute, republican historians prepared a historical and archeological justification for this date; later, international and Russian scholars were invited to confirm the results of these investigations. President Yeltsin then issued a decree about celebrating Kazan's 1,000th year anniversary in 2005. The magnitude of the celebration was reflected in the amount of resources spent by the republican and federal authorities and private businesses and enterprises.⁸⁸ As a result of this celebration, Kazan benefitted from a new underground system of transportation, new roads, reconstructed historical

⁸⁵ Several of my interviewees in Kazan (June 2013) have noted Minnikhanov's dynamism and effectiveness in governance.

⁸⁶ See Rustem Vafin. 2013. "Novaia model' Tatarstana. Pochemu Putin Tatar Liubit?" *Vechniaia Kazan* June 17, 2013. <http://www.evening-kazan.ru/articles/novaya-model-tatarstanachast-2-pochemu-putin-tatar-lyubit.html>.

⁸⁷ Once again, setting Tatarstan as a model to follow, see "Polnoe intervyyu Murtazy Rakhimova. 'Ya chuvstvuyu postoyannuyu otvetstvennost' za Respubliku Bashkortostan!'" Proufu.ru, September 2, 2013, <http://proufu.ru/politika/item/29107-murtaza-rakhimov-ya-chuvstvuyu-postoyannuyu-otvetstvennost-za-respubliku-bashkortostan.html>.

⁸⁸ Of the approximately 86 billion rubles spent for reconstruction and development, 12 billion came from the federal budget, over 38 billion rubles from the republican budget and over 35 billion rubles from private investors.

buildings, new hotels, and an overall construction boom.

The recent 2013 Universiade in Kazan was another big example of this strategy. Kazan competed twice for the right to host the Summer Universiade,⁸⁹ losing first to China's Shenzhen, but then winning its second bid in 2008. The spending on this event was projected to be around 25 billion rubles, but in the end the total increased about ten-fold. Of the 228 billion rubles estimated as the actual amount, the federal center provided 67 billion and the republic around 81 billion.⁹⁰ The remaining funds came from private investors and federal loans.⁹¹ The list of "new goodies" for Kazan is significant and includes a reconstructed airport with a new railline connecting the airport with the city; three new metro stations; new state-of-the-art sports arenas, including a 45,000 seat stadium, an aquatic center (one of the largest in Russia), tennis arena, and an entire village for athletes of the Universiade that is supposed to be converted into student dorms. So successful have these projects been in terms of attracting money into the republic that the authorities now seek out new ideas for future events and projects that could be hosted in Tatarstan. Already in spring 2013, Kazan's mayor Il'sur Metshin sent out a public call for further ideas with regard to creative events and projects to be held in Kazan.⁹²

The republican authorities are not only interested in mega-events, but in any projects that are of interest to, and financed by, the federal center. The republican bureaucratic machine is mobilized quickly in response to any financial opportunities announced by the Russian federal authorities. Whenever there is a competition in which the center invites regional proposals and offers federal co-financing of particular projects, Tatarstan is among the first to react.⁹³ Tatarstan has gotten and continues to rely on extensive federal funds dedicated to the reform of utilities and municipal services.⁹⁴ Recently, the government began discussing plans to construct a high-speed railroad connecting Moscow and Kazan. This capital-intensive project promises to bring another massive inflow of federal funds to Tatarstan.⁹⁵

This new "Tatarstan model" has provided considerable support for

⁸⁹ Universiade is an international sport event that is also frequently referred to as the Youth Olympic Games.

⁹⁰ ITAR-TASS, "Ob'yom investitsii na podgotovku k Universiade-2013 sostavlyayet 228 mlrd rublei," *Kommersant*, March 21, 2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss/2150967>.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² This also is a central task outlined for his team in the mayor's office.

⁹³ An insider of Kazan's Kremlin has noted that Minnikhanov is always ready with proposals, carrying a folder for each meeting with federal officials in Moscow (interview, Kazan, June 2011). See also Vafin 2013.

⁹⁴ "Tatarstan zavavilsya na federal'nye sredstva dlya rasseleniya iz avariinykh domov." *Regnum*, February 22, 2013, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1628497.html>

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* The project is estimated at \$30 billion.

the republican political machine. The financing of federally supported projects made it possible to maintain a solid patronage system, ensuring economic dynamism and social stability in the republic. It allowed for elite integration on the republican and, very likely, national levels because of the system of kickbacks employed widely in Russia. It is also a mechanism for elite legitimation vis-à-vis the public in Tatarstan. Widespread corruption practices notwithstanding, the republican elites have enough evidence to revert to when they want to substantiate their claims of public goods provision. There are tangible infrastructure objects and buildings that have transformed Kazan and are benefiting other cities and settlements in Tatarstan.

Conclusion

Center-periphery interaction is a key factor shaping political dynamics in Tatarstan. In the last twenty years the republican elites have been able to construct and maintain an effective political machine by taking advantage of opportunities presented by the politics of the federal center and cleverly adjusting to the changing political environment. The Russian government's discourse on federalism and democracy appropriated by the republican elites has been central for regional claim-making and the construction of the republican political machine in the early 1990s. Faced with the opportunities associated with the "parade of sovereignties," Tatarstan became a leader of the "sovereignization" process inside Russia and consistently sought out economic, political and institutional privileges for the republic. As the center's discourse shifted under Putin, Tatarstan also moved away from the politics of sovereignty towards a more politically neutral language emphasizing the goals of modernization, economic diversification and the politics of rentierism, seeking access to significant development funds disbursed by the federal center. The ruling elites reaped political benefits from federally provided fiscal rents and continue to seek out further opportunities for getting new rents.

In essence, this new model reflects more of a continuity of republican elite strategies rather than a break and represents a pragmatic adaptation of the republican political system to a new political environment nationwide. As the national context shifted in the late 1990s favoring political centralization, Tatarstan adjusted smartly to the new situation, expressing support for Putin's policies in public, while doubting the ultimate effectiveness of centralization in private discussions.⁹⁶ Rather than resisting the policies of the center, the republican elites focused on "confidence-building" strategies promoting the republic as a focal point for global events, meetings and big celebrations – mega-events that would attract attention and resources

⁹⁶ Interview with Rafael Khakimov (June 2011, Kazan).

to the republic. In an interesting coincidence to Obama's 2008 campaign, from around 2005-2006 the republican elites have adopted a new slogan "bez buldyrabyz" (Yes, we can!).

Tatarstan, of course, is not the only region in Russia where the elites understand the benefits associated with federal money and compete for federal resources. The political stability in other regions of Russia – Chechnya, in particular, has benefitted from massive financial inflows from Moscow, but even such smaller and poorer regions as Mordovia – appears to rest on federal money. At the same time, it is also clear that the inflow of money per se is not a sufficient guarantee that things will get done in Russia. Any big project requires considerable governing capacity and, in the context of rampant corruption, the delivery is not guaranteed unless the regional chief can rely on consolidated administrative resources. Future research should therefore consider whether and how the regional political machine and fiscal rents might work to reinforce each other as the stronger political machines get access to greater fiscal rents, which in turn work to strengthen the political machine.

