

# MACHINE POLITICS: THE CONCEPT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-SOVIET STUDIES

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**Abstract:** Political machines are organizations that mobilize electoral support by trading particularistic material benefits to citizens in exchange for their votes. While political machines were characteristic of the political lives of early democracies, most notably the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, in recent decades, this model of electoral politics has become associated primarily with competitive authoritarianism. An important aspect of Russia's contemporary development is the integration of regional political machines, tracing their origins to the 1990s, into the power structures of the nascent authoritarian regime. Thus, the empirical study of machine politics is essential for understanding post-Soviet politics.

As the chaotic electoral politics of the 1990s have given way to dominating monopolistic “parties of power” in Russia and other post-Soviet countries, the concept of “political machine” is gaining increasing recognition in the ongoing research addressing electoral politics in the region. While the heuristics of the concept are quite appealing and seem to provide keys to solving many research problems that loom in the study of electoral authoritarianism, the apparent utility of the concept is circumscribed by its substantive ambiguity stemming from the fact that the very notion of political machine was not constructed deductively, on the basis of a pre-formulated theory, but rather derived inductively from a fairly limited set of observations and then extended to a much wider universe

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of phenomena observed in many countries. Under such conditions, the problem of what Giovanni Sartori called “concept stretching” can become endemic, and indeed, in common-day political speech and journalism the term “political machine” is often applied to nearly all known forms of regular political organization.<sup>1</sup> A similar tendency is noticeable in some of the scholarly treatments of the subject. Needless to argue at length, the lack of conceptual clarity severely undermines the utility of concepts in any realm of research, and post-Soviet area studies are no exception to this rule.

The main purpose of this article is to delineate the concepts of political machine and machine politics in a way that allows for avoiding the threat of concept stretching in the study of post-Soviet politics. To achieve this, the first section of the article deals with the concept at a theoretical level by clarifying what political machines are and what they are not, and relating machine politics to several closely interconnected concepts of political science, such as patronage, clientelism, and electoral linkage. In the second section, I provide a brief overview of the historical and contemporary instances of machine politics. In particular, the purpose of this analysis is to establish the relationship between the presence or absence of this phenomenon and the political regime type. The third section relates the concept of political machine to the specific political and societal settings of post-communism and analyzes the available literature on machine politics in the post-communist electoral democracies, mainly in the 1990s. The final section links the results of conceptual analysis and previous research findings to the current stage of post-communist political development. I do not report any original findings stemming from systematic research, mostly relying instead on the available anecdotal evidence from one country, Russia. Thus the aspiration of this article is not so much to make a contribution to substantive research as to delineate and clarify a new agenda for the study of elections, political parties, and political linkages in post-Soviet competitive authoritarian regimes. If used properly, the concepts of political machine and machine politics can add quite significantly to our understanding of this region’s politics.

### **What Machine Politics Are, and What They Are Not**

Political machines are political organizations that mobilize electoral support by trading particularistic material benefits to citizens in exchange for their votes.<sup>2</sup> This definition, simplistic as it is, provides the basis for distinguishing between political machines and other forms of political organization. The principal feature of a political machine is the specific

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Sartori. 1970. “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 64: 4 (December): 1033-53.

<sup>2</sup> Susan C. Stokes. 2000. “Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics with Evidence from Argentina.” *American Political Science Review* 99: 3 (August): 315-25.

way in which it builds the linkage between aspiring politicians and the electorate. There are several alternative possibilities. In fact, the traditional normative theories of elections pay little attention to the material incentives to vote, emphasizing instead the programmatic linkage between the voters and their parties or candidates. In the radical formulations of this approach, as exemplified by Anthony Downs, voters support political parties primarily because they share these parties' ideologies, defined as generalized images of the ideal society.<sup>3</sup> True, empirical research on electoral behavior in advanced democracies reduces such motivation to a relatively small faction within the real-life electorates. In fact, as demonstrated by mainstream research on electoral behavior, most voters do expect to improve their material conditions by casting their votes for the parties or candidates of their choice.<sup>4</sup>

This fact alone, however, does not make machine politics. First, parties may design packages of programmatic policies to target specific groups of voters. This kind of linkage is, in practice, almost indistinguishable from purely ideological forms of voting. A traditional mass party, as represented by the prevalent form of west European social democracy from the 1920s through the early 1950s, does advance a policy agenda that specifically targets its working-class constituency. However, this agenda is built into a wider, clearly ideological program of social transformation that presents the fundamental goals of the party as public goods that correspond to the "objective interests" of everyone in society, even if workers are better disposed to embrace these interests. Of course, public goods are not necessarily related to radical programs of social change. More typically, they include such items, commonly found in election manifestos, as promoting economic growth, reducing unemployment, suppressing inflation, ensuring security, combatting government corruption, or cleaning up the environment. While it is common to place public goods into the context of ideologies, the two are not necessarily directly linked. In the appeals of charismatic parties, the personality of the leader emerges as a guarantor of strong leadership and good governance in the common interest, and thereby as a public good in itself irrespective of this leader's ideological persuasion. Second, parties may target societal constituencies in a more focused way, emphasizing their intention and ability to provide their constituents with goods that are not public in the above sense. Rather, they belong to the category sometimes dubbed "club goods," benefits for specific groups that only can be provided by imposing costs on other groups.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Downs. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Merrill III and Bernard Grofman. 1999. *A Unified Theory of Voting: Directional and Proximity Spatial Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson. 2007. "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Intro-

repertoire of club goods offered by political parties in different societies is quite diverse. Parties may appeal to the ethnic, linguistic, or religious identities of the voters. They commonly target territorially concentrated constituencies by offering pork barrel services. The essence of this kind of populist electoral appeal is to promise the redistribution of public resources in favor of previously underprivileged groups. All such appeals, however different in scope or content, are based on the assumption that the basis for the provision of club goods is membership in targeted groups. As Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson put it, “citizens external to certain group boundaries can be excluded from the enjoyment of such benefits, but none of those inside the boundary.”<sup>6</sup>

Some definitions of political machines do not take such nuances into account. For example, according to the oft-cited definition of Thomas M. Guterbock, a political machine is “a specific type of political party: one which has a tight, hierarchical organization, includes party agents at the grass roots level and systematically distributes patronage among its members.”<sup>7</sup> This definition is certainly instrumental in the study of party politics in the United States, where parties at the sub-national level, the Democrats and the Republicans alike, normally lack any kind of mass organization,<sup>8</sup> which makes urban political machines an exceptional phenomenon. Yet such definitions are hardly applicable in cross-national research. Indeed, the traditional west European mass party, as described in the classic work of Maurice Duverger,<sup>9</sup> was not devoid of all features captured in the definition of Guterbock: it possessed a strong hierarchical organization characterized by deep territorial penetration, and it distributed patronage among its members on a wide scale. Indeed, the ability to provide “selective incentives” to its members in the form of material benefits is a major characteristic of the mass party both theoretically<sup>10</sup> and from a variety of empirical perspectives.<sup>11</sup> Yet for the majority of substan-

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duction.” In Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson. eds., *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas M. Guterbock. 1980. *Machine Politics in Transition: Party and Community in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Marjorie R. Hershey and John H. Aldrich. 2013. *Party Politics in America*. 15th ed. Boston: Pearson.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Duverger. 1954. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. London: Methuen.

<sup>10</sup> Angelo Panebianco. 1988. *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> E. Spencer Wellhofer. 1981. “The Political Incorporation of the Newly Enfranchised Voter: Organizational Encapsulation and Socialist Labor Party Development.” *Western Political Quarterly* 34: 3 (September): 399-414; Takis S. Pappas. 2009. “Patrons Against Partisans: The Politics of Patronage in Mass Ideological Parties.” *Party Politics* 15: 3 (May): 315-34.

tively important parameters, the archetypal “mass party” of the left is the direct opposite of political machines. The machines’ defining feature is not that they are targeting public goods and club goods, which is characteristic of many types of political parties, but rather that they place major emphasis on particularistic goods. This type of electoral linkage is best described as clientelistic. In its essence, such a clientelistic linkage is literally the exchange of votes for material benefits that are provided on a particularistic basis, in the form of tangible material rewards. A worker who votes for a social democratic party because she believes that social democratic policies will contribute to the improvement of her own living conditions is not involved in clientelistic exchange. Nor is a local resident who votes for her candidate because she believes that this candidate, if successful, will secure better living conditions in the neighborhood. Note that in both cases, the voters do have material considerations in mind. What is lacking is the particularistic nature of these considerations. For clientelistic exchange to take place, the voter should know with a significant degree of confidence that by delivering her vote to a party or a candidate, she becomes entitled to a tangible, personal reward. Thus the simplest (and perhaps archetypal) variety of clientelistic exchange in politics is vote buying. While in itself, vote buying is an insufficient basis for machine politics for the reason identified below, the fundamental logic of clientelistic exchange is closely akin to vote buying.

Discussion of patron-client relations is increasingly popular within the social sciences, and there is a large body of research on this phenomenon as observed in traditional societies unfamiliar with electoral practices of any kind. Of course, many of these observations have little or no relationship to the more contemporary varieties of electoral clientelism, yet certain general features are important for our understanding of machine politics. First, early anthropological research on clientelism placed special emphasis on what was dubbed “dyadic relationships,” direct face-to-face interaction between patron and client.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, if we view clientelism as an exchange of favors, with votes being traded for political benefits, then the structure of the contract, even if implicit, should be transparent for its agents. Second, clientelism is based on the reciprocal and contingent exchange between the patron and the client. Both parties provide benefits to the counteragents only on condition of the delivery of a reciprocal benefit.<sup>13</sup> Third, clientelism is a lasting relationship, which is captured by the concept of iteration. As Allen Hicken explained, “clientelism is at its core an iterated interaction, with each side anticipating future interactions

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<sup>12</sup> James C. Scott. 1972. “Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia.” *American Political Science Review* 66: 1 (March): 91-113.

<sup>13</sup> Luis Roniger. 2004. “Political Clientelism, Democracy, and Market Economy.” *Comparative Politics* 36: 3 (April): 353-375.

as they make decisions about their behavior today.”<sup>14</sup> Generally, the one-off benefits provided by politicians to the voters do not create clientelistic exchange, which excludes vote buying on a systematic basis.

Political machines represent the apex in the development of clientelistic exchange. They often operate in social contexts that are immensely more complex than the village communities observed by the early students of clientelism. Hence the features of clientelism, while remaining in place, appear in political machines in a significantly modified form. The dyadic relationships cannot be excluded from the picture, but in machine politics, direct face-to-face interactions between patrons and clients are likely to be replaced with chains of broker relationships.<sup>15</sup> In fact, this is unequivocally implied by the very term “political machine,” the imagery of which points to the existence of transmission belts and other devices connecting the ultimate patrons, party leaders, with the ultimate clients, the voters. Given that the relationships between the ultimate patrons and the brokers, electoral workers in the field, are invariably asymmetrical, a political machine can become a complex hierarchical structure. Yet the basis of this pyramid is still provided by fairly simple dyadic relationships of exchange. The other fundamental feature of clientelism, reciprocity, also occurs in political machines in a modified form. In the contemporary world, the secret ballot is a norm rather than an exception, and it is clear that if this norm is in effective force, the voters can renege on the deal, getting benefits but not delivering votes. Of course, if the voters renege en masse, the whole structure of clientelistic politics breaks down. Political machines can prevent this threat, but only if interactions are repeated over time.<sup>16</sup> This situation explains why in machine politics the necessity of iteration is much more salient than in other forms of clientelistic exchange. For machine politics as a model to flourish, clientelistic parties have to be sustainable in the long run, requiring a significant degree of organizational inertia within the party itself and in the broader society.

### **Machine Politics Around the Globe, Past and Present**

The archetypal historical cases of machine politics are the political machines that developed in some of the large cities of the United States (most notably, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> In the time of their greatest power, the U.S. urban

<sup>14</sup> Allen Hicken. 2011. “Clientelism.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 14: 289-310, p. 292.

<sup>15</sup> Susan C. Stokes. 2007. “Political Clientelism.” In Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> S. N. Eisenstadt and Louis Roniger. 1984. *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Shefter. 1994. *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

political machines were complex hierarchical structures, headed by the 'bosses' (the ultimate patrons), supported by local business leaders and other notables, and based upon the networks of electoral workers in the field. The main purpose of the machine was to secure enough votes to maintain political control over a city, county, or even a state. While the U.S. political machines were often accused of vote buying, the main material benefit offered by them to the voters came in the form of political jobs, which was quite an attraction given that during the 1870s, it was estimated that one out of every eight voters in New York City had a federal, state, or city job.<sup>18</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, machine politics in the U.S. gradually declined.<sup>19</sup> The scope of machine politics in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe was much more limited, even though clientelistic exchange flourished in many countries.<sup>20</sup> While historical details are certainly beyond the scope of this analysis, the retrospective comparison of the historical trajectories of electoral politics in the U.S. and Europe allows for identifying the societal, political and institutional conditions that facilitate or suppress the development of machine politics.

First, unlike in the majority of European countries, the United States enacted relative mass enfranchisement early. The European electorates of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were fairly limited, as a result of which the role of electoral mobilization among the economically underprivileged by means of patronage was far less prominent than in the U.S. Second, to the extent that the votes of the underprivileged were still in demand, they could be delivered within the framework provided by the traditional relationships between landlords and peasants. While certainly clientelistic in essence, this kind of electoral linkage did not have to be built into complex organizational networks similar to the U.S. political machines. The individual political resources of the landlords were often sufficient for getting the vote. Third, and related to the previous two factors, party organizations in Europe started to develop only after the individual resources of aspiring politicians eroded to the extent that made electoral coordination among them highly desirable.<sup>21</sup> The basis of this coordination, however, was provided

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<sup>18</sup> James Q. Wilson, John J. DiIulio, Jr., and Meenekshi Bose. 2013. *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, 13<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p. 217. For a somewhat dissenting view on the role of material incentives in the functioning of political machines, see Kenneth Finegold. 1995. *Experts and Politicians: Reform Challenges to Machine Politics in New York*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> See, however, Raymond E. Wolfinger. 1972. "Why Political Machines Have Not Withered Away and Other Revisionist Thoughts." *Journal of Politics* 34: 2 (May): 365-98.

<sup>20</sup> Simona Piattoni, ed. 2001. *Clientelism, Interests, and Democratic Representation: The European Experience in Historical and Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Gary W. Cox. 1987. *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the Development of Political Parties in Victorian England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

by programmatic affinities rather than by ability to deliver particularistic goods to the voters. Fourth, massive enfranchisement in Europe went hand in hand with the emergence of programmatic parties claiming to represent the emerging working class constituency. The electoral appeal of the nascent social democracy was based primarily, and overwhelmingly, on the promise of public goods. To be sure, club goods also played a role, and this role was essential for building the system of “organizational encapsulation” inherent in the organizational structure of the traditional mass party.<sup>22</sup> Yet the significance of particularistic goods was relatively small.

In the wide historical retrospective, the political trajectory of Europe was unusual. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin America, the role of electoral politics tended to be relatively small, but to the extent that politically consequential electoral processes did take place, political clientelism not only flourished but, in some cases, led to the emergence of full-scale political machines.<sup>23</sup> However, it was only after the second wave of democratization that machine politics started to be registered as a prominent feature of electoral politics outside of the U.S. Indeed, the new electoral regimes of the developing world were similar to the early political settings of the U.S. on several of the parameters identified above. First, enfranchisement was typically early and massive. Second, the individual political resources of the elite did not erode before the formation of national parties, while widespread poverty made the particularistic benefits of electoral clientelism quite attractive for large sections of the electorate. Third, the role of programmatically cohesive parties was much smaller than in Europe. Even parties purposefully targeting working class constituencies, such as the Peronistas in Argentina and the Trabalhistas in Brazil, were not ideologically committed to the left.

In 1969, James Scott opened a new research perspective by observing that the political life of many countries of what was then the “third world” bore a resemblance to the early machine politics of the U.S.<sup>24</sup> Since then, important elements of clientelistic exchange were found in the electoral politics of the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Mexico, Egypt, and many other countries. In the contemporary world, the repertoire of particularistic goods offered by the contemporary political machines is not restricted to political jobs, even though they remain an important attraction.<sup>25</sup> Other goods on offer include access to public services such as housing,

<sup>22</sup> E. Spencer Wellhofer. 1979. “Strategies of Party Organization and Voter Mobilization: Britain, Norway and Argentina.” *Comparative Political Studies* 12: 2 (July): 169-204.

<sup>23</sup> Eduardo Posada-Carbo, ed. 1996. *Elections Before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

<sup>24</sup> James C. Scott. 1969. “Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change.” *American Political Science Review* 63: 4 (December): 1142- 58.

<sup>25</sup> Nicolas van de Walle. 2003. “Presidentialism and Clientelism in Africa’s Emerging Party Systems.” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41: 2 (June): 297-321.



education, or healthcare; protection; or intervention with the bureaucracy.<sup>26</sup> Traditional bags of food are also available among many other consumer items.<sup>27</sup> As a norm, voting is officially secret, which formally creates less than permissive environments for clientelistic exchange. In practice, however, the modern-day political machines proved their ability to overcome this difficulty by building vast systems of control and monitoring that deeply penetrate into voters' social network. Even if the vote is officially secret, it may not be secret effectively, and even if it is, the voters do not necessarily believe it.<sup>28</sup> In this sense at least, the contemporary patterns of machine politics are much more complex than in the classic settings.

At the same time, the cross-national evidence accumulated in four decades of intensive research suggests two questions that are quite important for our understanding of political machines and machine politics. The first of these questions concerns the very core of the research agenda under discussion. When we speak of political machines in the U.S., we typically do not mean national political parties, either the Democrats or the Republicans. Rather, we apply the term to sub-national phenomena such as the Tweed machine in 19<sup>th</sup> century New York or the Dawson machine in 20<sup>th</sup> century Chicago. Given the definition of political machines provided above, is it possible for a national political party to embody all the necessary features? The cross-national evidence cited above clearly suggests that the answer should be negative. As demonstrated by the main body of empirical research, a national political party cannot be built solely on particularistic electoral exchange. When we speak of different models of party politics at the national level, we assume not the exclusive importance of one of the types of electoral appeal, but rather a specific mix of such types. For example, in the appeal of traditional mass parties, public goods were of paramount importance, club goods played a secondary role, while particularistic goods were peripheral at best. A national political machine is a party that promises primarily club goods while heavily supplementing this appeal with particularistic exchange. This does not mean that particularistic goods are the sole source of its appeal. But this does mean that particularistic exchange takes place as an observable, widespread behavioral pattern. Thus at the systemic level of analysis, a major conceptual distinction should be drawn not between political machines and political parties, but rather between those national political parties within which

<sup>26</sup> See Allen Hicken and Joel W. Simmons. 2008. "The Personal Vote and the Efficacy of Education Spending." *American Journal of Political Science* 52: 1 (January): 109-24; Amaney A. Jamal. 2007. *Barriers to Democracy: The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Valeria Brusco, Marcelo Nazareno, and Susan C. Stokes. 2004. "Vote Buying in Argentina." *Latin American Research Review* 39: 2 (April): 66-88.

<sup>28</sup> Simeon Nichter. 2008. "Vote Buying or Turnout Buying? Machine Politics and the Secret Ballot." *American Political Science Review* 102: 1 (February): 19-31.

political machines constitute an important component of their sub-national activities, manifest in a significant number of localities and exerting a visible impact upon national electoral returns, and those national political parties within which such a component is absent or inconsequential. In order to ascribe a real-life party to one of these categories, we have to assess the weight of the machine politics component empirically.

The second question concerns the relationship between machine politics and political regime type. It is undeniable that machine politics originate from the early phase of modern electoral democracy, and that some elements of clientelistic exchange can be found in many well-established democratic polities. Yet it is equally clear that in none of them is clientelistic exchange central for shaping the electoral appeal of political parties. This raises the question of the extent to which the pattern of machine politics is consistent with the fundamentals of liberal democracy. There is a large stream of empirical research that presents political clientelism as a pre-modern phenomenon, bound to disappear as a result of societal and political modernization.<sup>29</sup> More recently, the focus of empirical studies shifted to the causes of persistence of clientelism in contemporary democracies, which is often supplemented with institutionalist perspectives on the phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> Despite this divergence of research foci, the normative basis of scholarly reasoning about clientelism and democracy is often shaped by the notion of perverse accountability, defined as a situation “when parties know, or can make good inferences about, what individual voters have done in the voting booth and reward or punish them conditional on these actions.”<sup>31</sup> Perverse accountability is generally believed to be bad for democracy for a variety of reasons that include undermining government responsibility, keeping voters from expressing their true policy preferences at the polls, and limiting voter autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

In the contemporary world, however, the rise of democracy was paralleled by the global extension of political regimes that permit certain institutions normally associated with democracy, such as elections and political parties, to exist, while remaining authoritarian in the basic patterns of their power distribution and reproduction.<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon

<sup>29</sup> Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury. 1977. *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*. London: Duckworth.

<sup>30</sup> George Th. Mavrogordatos. 1983. *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922–1936*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>31</sup> Susan C. Stokes. 2000. “Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics with Evidence from Argentina.” *American Political Science Review* 99: 3 (August): 315–25, p. 316.

<sup>32</sup> Michael S. Kochin, and Levis A. Kochin. 1998. “When Is Vote Buying Wrong?” *Public Choice* 97: 4 (December): 645–62.

<sup>33</sup> Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli. 2010. “Political Order and One-Party Rule.” *Annual*

is referred to as “electoral authoritarianism” or “competitive authoritarianism.” The available empirical studies of electoral politics in such regimes, including pre-democratization Mexico and pre-revolution Egypt, have revealed the paramount importance of clientelistic exchange.<sup>34</sup> Arguably, it is good for electoral authoritarianism exactly for the same reasons why it is bad for democracy. If elections are designed primarily as a means of control, legitimization, and co-optation, then the government does not have to be held responsible for its policies irrespective of the observed efficiency; policy preferences of the voters do not matter; and voter autonomy should be reduced, preferably to the extent that politicians fully control the behavior of voters at the polls. Clientelistic exchange can be instrumental in achieving all these goals. It does allow for holding elections on a competitive basis, yet since electoral competition is reduced to the competition of material resources available to candidates and parties, it creates systematic leverage for those supported by the dictatorial national executive. As demonstrated by the main stream of empirical research on the subject, none of the long-lasting competitive authoritarian regimes relied upon clientelistic exchange as its sole electoral strategy. At the same time, the mix of voter incentives in such regimes was heavily biased in favor of club and particularistic goods at the expense of programmatic goods. Thus, contemporary electoral authoritarianism emerges as a suitable setting for machine politics, with grounds as fertile as those found in archaic 19<sup>th</sup> century democracies or the “uncommon democracies”<sup>35</sup> of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (such as Italy or Japan).

### **Machine Politics and Early Post-Communism**

The wide theoretical perspective offered above suggests that the environments of early post-communism, with extensive franchise and the lack of programmatically cohesive, class-based parties could be conducive to the development of clientelistic electoral exchange. In fact, however, the collapse of communist regimes produced polities and societies that were in many respects alien to the very idea of exchanging votes for material benefits. From the political perspective, the legacies of communist-era elections exerted a powerful influence. While elections were certainly secondary for the functioning of the communist regimes, they did play a role as a mechanism supporting political mobilization and legitimization. In the majority of such regimes, elections were held on a fairly regular

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*Review of Political Science* 13: 123-143.

<sup>34</sup> Lisa Blaydes. 2010. *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Beatriz Magaloni. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>35</sup> T. J. Pempel, ed. 1990. *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

basis, commanding massive voter turnouts and almost invariably leading to the success of official candidates.<sup>36</sup> While certainly void of competition, these elections still shaped the voters' thinking about the meaning of political participation. Under communism, this purpose was presented entirely in terms of public goods. The electoral appeal of the ruling communist parties was heavily programmatic, based on the idea that every citizen benefits from the "scientifically-based" policies of the regime. Club goods were secondary, and it was assumed that their delivery was not contingent upon the behavior of individual voters. Voter turnout was sometimes stimulated by the provision of low-cost food at voting stations, yet this practice was not particularistic. With the arrival of competitive elections, which was normally accompanied by the decline of the programmatic appeal of the ruling communist parties, some parties sought to fill the ideological vacuum with references to their candidates' superior experience leading to a better ability to supply specific groups of voters with a repertoire of club goods. These attempts, however, were largely overlooked by the voters. Their primary motivation in the early "founding elections" was programmatic, based on the idea that the communist regimes were to be dismantled or, for a minority of voters, preserved. Indeed, these elections were often viewed as referenda on the preservation of the communist systems.<sup>37</sup>

Within the societal settings of early post-communism, several factors resisted the emergence of clientelistic exchange. First, in contrast to many other new democracies and competitive authoritarian regimes, early post-communism was characterized by the absence of an economically affluent ruling class capable of providing tangible material rewards to voters. Instead, the arenas of "founding elections" were dominated by personalities who built public reputations by media appearances and/or political activism. Second, one of the cornerstones of the communist regimes was the non-political nature of social networks. Unlike the adepts of the "totalitarian school" of Sovietology, the representatives of the "revisionist school" argued, quite convincingly at times, that the communist regimes did involve significant amounts of patronage and clientelistic exchange.<sup>38</sup> After the fall of communism, the role of *blat* in the economies of shortage was illuminated in several important scholarly treatments.<sup>39</sup> It

<sup>36</sup> George Sakwa and Martin Crouch. 1978. "Sejm Elections in Communist Poland: An Overview and a Reappraisal". *British Journal of Political Science* 8: 4 (October): 403-24.

<sup>37</sup> Gary M. Reich. 2008. "Coordinating Party Choice in Founding Elections: Why Timing Matters." *Comparative Political Studies* 34: 10 (December): 1237-63.

<sup>38</sup> Dominic Lieven. 1994. "Western Scholarship on the Rise and Fall of the Soviet Regime: The View from 1993." *Journal of Contemporary History* 29:2 (April): 195-227.

<sup>39</sup> Alena V. Ledeneva. 1998. *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Stephen Lovell, Alena V. Ledeneva and Andrei Rogachevskii, eds. 2000. *Bribery and Blat in Russia: Negotiating Reciprocity from the Middle Ages to the 1990s*. Basingstoke: Macmillan; Shelia Fitzpatrick. 2000. *Everyday*

is however important to take into account that the *blat*-based clientelistic networks were tolerated by the authorities only on the condition that they remained absolutely devoid of any political content. In political respects, the communist societies were as atomized as traditionally portrayed by the totalitarian school, with a citizen standing alone vis-à-vis the apparatus of power. Besides, the *blat*-based networks operated on a fairly limited scale and largely collapsed after the end of the economy of shortage. They contributed little, if anything, to the shaping of electoral politics in the post-communist era. After the fall of communism, the countries of the former Soviet bloc embarked on different routes of political development. In her influential treatment of incumbent state capture in post-authoritarian regimes, Anna Grzymala-Busse identifies several such routes, clientelism representing only one of them.<sup>40</sup> Since instances of clientelism became manifest already in 1990s Russia, below I will concentrate on this case at the expense of wider comparative evidence.

The available body of empirical research shows that Russia's gradual move to machine politics was greatly facilitated by the constellation of two circumstances: the lack of viable political parties capable of penetrating the vast periphery of the country and the rise of sub-national electoral politics. The first of these components has received quite substantial treatment in the literature.<sup>41</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, it is sufficient to emphasize that the lack of viable political parties did not mean the absence of programmatic appeal in national electoral contests. Throughout the 1990s, Russia's most important elections, legislative and presidential alike, remained structured along ideological lines. This applies, for instance, to the crucially important presidential election of 1996. While Boris Yeltsin did promise an array of club goods to his constituents, the core of his message to the electorate was still programmatic, heavily focused on uprooting the legacies of communism.<sup>42</sup> To an even greater extent, this is true about national legislative elections, with television emerging as a primary media of communication between parties and the electorate.<sup>43</sup> While the picture of electoral contests in the single-member plurality

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*Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s.* New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>40</sup> Anna Grzymala-Busse. 2008. "Beyond Clientelism: Incumbent State Capture and State Formation." *Comparative Political Studies* 41: 4/5 (April/May): 638-73.

<sup>41</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 2004. *Political Parties in the Regions of Russia: Democracy Unclaimed.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner; Henry E. Hale. 2006. *Why Not Parties in Russia: Democracy, Federalism and the State.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>42</sup> Yitzhak M. Brudny. 1997. "In Pursuit of the Russian Presidency: Why and How Yeltsin Won the 1996 Presidential Election." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30: 3 (September): 255-75.

<sup>43</sup> Sarah Oates. 2006. *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia.* London and New York: Routledge.

section of Russia's electoral system was different,<sup>44</sup> the overall results of the elections were largely determined by the distribution of programmatic preferences, including voter perceptions of public goods that could be delivered by parties and candidates. An alternative model of electoral politics started to emerge only in the second half of the 1990s, at the sub-national level.

In 1995–1997, gubernatorial elections in Russia replaced the system of gubernatorial appointment introduced after the collapse of communism. Yeltsin's appointees did not fare well in these elections. While the federal authorities did invest significant efforts in their attempts to structure regional contests along the same programmatic lines as in the 1996 presidential races, these attempts were not successful due to a specific constellation of political forces at the regional level.<sup>45</sup> Unlike in Russia as a whole, the main dimension of political contestation in the regions was determined by struggles between particularistic factions of regional political elites, often (but not necessarily) represented by factions of Yeltsin appointees and their local challengers who controlled the networks of influential supporters. These networks, while sometimes finding an institutional expression in regional legislative assemblies, were largely informal, based on instrumental personal relationships between faction leaders and local notables.<sup>46</sup> Typically, they were not related to political parties, programmatic positions, or even specific policy stances. Rather, they were based on the traditional model of intra-elite patronage. It is therefore not surprising that when confronting each other in the electoral arena, the competing elite factions often reduced their promise of public goods to merely emphasizing the superior experience and other governance capacities of their leaders.<sup>47</sup> While downplaying programmatic appeal, they heavily concentrated their electoral message on the provision of club goods to the voters. They also relied on clientelistic electoral exchange, which naturally invites the notion of machine politics.

It is therefore quite understandable why this notion was brought into the study of Russian politics by several treatments of region-level electoral politics, including the lasting contributions of Henry Hale and Kimitaka Matsuzato.<sup>48</sup> The pioneering importance of their work is in

<sup>44</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 2002. "Party Support or Personal Resources? Factors of Success in the Plurality Portion of the 1999 National Legislative Elections in Russia." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 35: 1 (March): 23–38.

<sup>45</sup> Cameron Ross. 2000. "Federalism and Democratization in Russia." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 33: 4 (December): 403–20.

<sup>46</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 2003. "The Vicious Circle of Party Underdevelopment in Russia: The Regional Connection." *International Political Science Review* 24: 4 (October): 427–44.

<sup>47</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 1997. "Russian Political Parties and the 'Bosses': Evidence from the 1994 Provincial Elections in Western Siberia." *Party Politics* 3: 1 (January): 5–21.

<sup>48</sup> Henry E. Hale. 2003. "Explaining Machine Politics in Russia's Regions: Economy, Eth-

that they empirically identified the original hubs of clientelistic electoral exchange in the regions of Russia. One of them, as demonstrated by the statistical analysis of Hale, is the rural hub. In a comparative perspective, this is scarcely a surprising finding. While the U.S. political machines emerged in urban environments, the ongoing research on political clientelism clearly shows that rural constituencies are better disposed towards clientelistic exchange. The factors that facilitate it in rural environments include a greater density of social networks, the significant dependence of the rural population on local bosses, and smaller voting populations. The size of voting population is crucial for clientelistic exchange because it allows for tracing the behavior of individual voters. In the specific context of post-Soviet Russia, the rural bosses' grasp over the population was greatly reinforced by the massive survival of the residuals of the collective farm system. The second site of clientelistic exchange in Russia, as demonstrated both by the statistical inquiry of Hale and by the in-depth research of Matsuzato, is the ethnic hub, comprising ethnic republics and autonomous districts. Ethnicity-based social networks are particularly dense, and in those conditions when ethnicity becomes politicized, they often provide ample space for clientelistic exchange. Finally, the work of Hale and Matsuzato identifies the third hub of clientelistic exchange as the state administration of social services, especially to pensioners and patients in state-run hospitals. Both categories are, in their own ways, dependent on administrators in the social security and healthcare systems. While in theory, such services are a clear-cut instance of public goods, in practice, the extent to which these services can be provided can be conditional on the behavior of the recipients.

Thus it is highly likely that already in the early gubernatorial elections of the 1990s, political machines greatly contributed to political outcomes, thus emerging as an important organizational aspect of Russia's electoral politics. Accordingly, it is important to identify several important peculiarities of early machine politics in Russia. First, as a rule, the gubernatorial political machines were not linked to any political party.<sup>49</sup> They were not party machines in any conceivable sense, operating instead as loose informal networks that sometimes reproduced the networks

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nicity, and Legacy". *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19: 3 (July-September): 228-63; Kimitaka Matsuzato. 2000. "Progressive North, Conservative South? Reading the Regional Elite as a Key to Russian Electoral Puzzles." In Kimitaka Matsuzato, ed. *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic Eurasian World*. Sapporo: Slavic Research Center; Kimitaka Matsuzato. 2001. "From Ethno-Bonapartism to Centralized Caciquismo: Characteristics and Origins of the Tatarstan Political Regime, 1900-2000." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 17:4 (December): 43-77.

<sup>49</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 1999. "From Adygeya to Yaroslavl: Factors of Party Development in the Regions of Russia, 1995-1998." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51: 8 (December): 1133-65.

of instrumental friendship inherited from the Soviet period.<sup>50</sup> Second, the instances of machine politics in the 1990s were widespread but not omnipresent. The very design of Hale's research suggests that they were unlikely to be found in the predominantly Russian, mostly urban areas of the country. Third, the levels of electoral competition in many gubernatorial races were rather high, as a result of which programmatic appeals could not be eliminated from the election rhetoric of many important candidates. It is also important to note that the studies of Hale and Matsuzato provided little empirical evidence in support of the massive presence of clientelistic exchange in Russia's regional politics of that period. What can be viewed as established with certainty is the limited role of programmatic appeal. Yet as follows from the theoretical reasoning above, this suggests two possibilities: either that the contestants in gubernatorial races relied exclusively on the promise of club goods (say, greater support to agricultural firms, ethnic schooling in the republics, or increased pensions for all pensioners), or these appeals to the specific groups of voters were sizably supplemented with the distribution of particularistic goods. The first possibility does not fall under the category of machine politics, while the second certainly does. However, my reading of the available research literature, coupled with non-systematic and anecdotal evidence, suggests that clientelistic exchange was an important aspect of gubernatorial politics already in the 1990s.

### **A Monopolistic Political Machine in the Making?**

In 1999, regional political machines entered the electoral arena of Russia as an essential part of the national legislative campaign. The competing "parties of power," Unity and Fatherland–All Russia, both recruited governors in substantial numbers, and this effort paid off in the sense that for Fatherland–All Russia at least, the party list vote in the region heavily depended on the party affiliation of the governor.<sup>51</sup> Thus the gubernatorial machines demonstrated their ability to deliver the vote to national political actors. At the same time, the governors enhanced their hold on the electorate, and their incumbency advantage greatly increased. This placed the task of integrating regional political machines into a nation-wide political formation high on the political agenda of the nascent administration of Vladimir Putin. In 2002–2003, the majority of governors were recruited into the new "party of power," United Russia. The relative success of United Russia in the 2003 national legislative elections was to a large extent a product of the

<sup>50</sup> Kimitaka Matsuzato. 1997. "The Split and Reconfiguration of Ex-Communist Party Factions in the Russian Oblasts: Chelyabinsk, Samara, Ulyanovsk, Tambov, and Tver (1991-95)." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 5: 1 (Winter): 53-88.

<sup>51</sup> Vicki L. Hesli and William M. Reisinger, eds. 2003. *The 1999-2000 Elections in Russia: Their Impact and Legacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



efforts of governors who accepted political responsibility for the party's performance at the polls. The second decisive step towards the integration of regional political machines into the organizational framework of United Russia was made in December 2004, when direct gubernatorial elections were replaced with a new system that endowed the president of Russia with the exclusive right to nominate governors, subject to approval by regional legislative assembly, which was effectively equivalent to appointment. In 2004-2005, even if officially supporting United Russia, many of the governors were not unequivocally loyal to it, which sometimes resulted in the rather poor electoral performance of the "party of power." In some of the regions, the governors were able to master loyal legislative majorities that included not only United Russia but also other parties, electoral blocs, and non-party deputies elected in single-member districts. The new system of gubernatorial appointment made such strategies irrelevant, if not suicidal, for the governors, thereby creating a strong linkage between them and United Russia.

The integration of regional political machines into United Russia was part of a wider process of Russia's transition from the imperfect electoral democracy of the 1990s to competitive authoritarianism. There were other important elements of this process, including the authorities' firm grasp on the media, the gradual circumscription of basic civil liberties, such as the freedom of assembly, and the restrictive regulations of political party activities introduced in 2005.<sup>52</sup> Yet all these measures would be insufficient without a reliable mechanism of delivering the vote to the "party of power" in national legislative elections, and to the official candidates in the presidential races. From this perspective, the integration of regional political machines was a core component of the authoritarian turn in Russia. This is underscored by the fact that in many respects, United Russia borrowed its official image and election rhetoric not from the preceding "parties of power" but rather from regional political machines. While the dominant discourse of Russia's electoral politics of the 1990s was heavily ideological, imbued with references to generalized political values, the rhetoric of United Russia is characterized by explicitly "pragmatic" overtones. The public goods offered by United Russia are economic growth, the elimination of poverty, and the enhanced international standing of Russia, all of which can be achieved primarily due to the supreme leadership qualities of Vladimir Putin. Vagueness in the description of public goods, epitomized by the fact that the substance of "Putin's Plan," one of the central campaign slogans of the 2007 legislative elections, was never revealed to the electorate, is compensated by detailed listings of club goods offered to

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<sup>52</sup> Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss. 2008. "The Myth of the Authoritarian Model: How Putin's Crackdown Holds Russia Back." *Foreign Affairs* 87: 1 (January-February): 68-84.

the specific groups of voters. Some of the most targeted groups are those identified by the regional machines of the 1990s: the pensioners, the rural population, and the recipients of social welfare benefits.

The 2007-2008 national elections were highly successful for Russia's authorities. Moreover, the superior results of United Russia persisted throughout most of the subsequent electoral cycle.<sup>53</sup> Of course, much of this success grew out of the authorities' ability to plausibly offer an array of public and club goods, as described above. At the same time, the 2007-2011 electoral cycle produced ample – even if mostly anecdotal – evidence of clientelistic exchange, especially in regional legislative elections and municipal races. This evidence found backing in a larger body of field observations that emerged from the national legislative campaign of 2011.

Assembling a general picture of the most likely targets of clientelistic exchange in Russia shows that some of the targeted groups are directly inherited from the regional machine politics of the 1990s. First of all, this concerns the pensioners. While it is true that the Putin administration systematically targets this group by gradually increasing the size of their pensions, which is essentially a club good, it seems that these advances are heavily supplemented with a more particularistic approach at the grass-roots level. There is ample evidence that the amounts of material support given by the local authorities to the pensioners in the course of election campaigns, mostly in the form of packages of food and/or other consumer goods, are quite substantial.<sup>54</sup> The principal brokers in this clientelistic exchange are the state organs, mostly the local departments of social protection and the branches of the Russian Pension Fund, and such public organizations as the local Councils of Veterans of Labor, the Armed Forces, and the Law Enforcement Agencies.<sup>55</sup> Apparently, the major aim of these brokers is to increase the turnout of the pensioners on the assumption that once they reach voting stations, they are likely to vote for United Russia and its candidates. At the same time, pensioners are normally eligible for home voting, which greatly increases the feasibility of tracing their vote. Perhaps the best settings for securing the reciprocity of clientelistic exchange are provided by public hospitals.<sup>56</sup> The hospitals are entitled to

<sup>53</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 2011. "The Regional Roots of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63: 4 (June): 623-39.

<sup>54</sup> Anna Kudryavtseva. 2010. "Partiya Edinaya Rossiya Nakanune Vyborov Razdavala Maloimushchim Berdskim Starikam Krupu i Podsolnechnoe Maslo." *Kur'er-Sreda*. October 7, At <http://www.kurer-sreda.ru/2010/10/07/32553>, accessed May 4, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> For evidence on such organizations' early integration into sub-national political machines, see Ivan Kurilla. 2002. "Civil Activism without NGOs: The Communist Party as a Civil Society Substitute." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratizations* 10: 3 (Summer): 392-400.

<sup>56</sup> Ekaterina Fomina. 2012. "Kak Progolosuet Bol'nitsa – Tak Progolosuet Strana." *Novaya Gazeta*. March 7, At <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/51474.html>, accessed May 4, 2013.

organize their own small-size voting stations, and voters at such stations tend to support United Russia in overwhelming rates. The material rewards come in the form of better treatment, better medication, and – perhaps most importantly for the recipients – the opportunity to stay at the hospital for a longer time. By tradition, the secrecy of the vote is seriously compromised in many rural settings where voting stations tend to be small and home voting is endemic. The rural bosses are also capable of supplying their subjects with an array of material goods, and these goods can be denied in case of “wrong” voting. As described by a local resident in Tomsk Oblast, “They [the voters] all live in this village and understand that if you are not compliant, then your next year’s hay land will be in a very distant place (*u cherta na kulichkakh*), or they [the bosses] can do other filthy tricks. They can forget to provide you with firewood.”<sup>57</sup>

Thus the traditional target groups of machine politics remain in place. The other category of targeted population includes several groups of public sector employees, including the numerous doctors and teachers. Since they have extremely low pay and are heavily dependent on the directors of the schools and clinics where they work, these categories of the population are easy to mobilize. However, their importance for the electoral machines is not only in their own votes, but in their ability to convince large groups of others to participate in the elections, and vote for United Russia. In schools, this campaigning takes place at parent meetings, through personal contacts with the parents, and especially by telephone. The practice of having class leaders systematically and repeatedly call parents on election day, summoning them to vote, has become widespread.<sup>58</sup> An increasingly common form of machine politics targets hired personnel employed in public and private enterprises. There are numerous well-documented cases when representatives of employers demand that employees vote and the next day present evidence that they turned out and made the “right” choice in the form of a ballot photographed with a mobile phone.<sup>59</sup> In other cases, such monitoring methods are not necessary since the turnout is organized by having the workers all go to the polls at the same time. Note that in such cases, the basis of clientelistic exchange is provided not so much by material rewards but rather by the threat of punishment. This threat, however, has a well-articulated material dimension, because “wrong” behavior may lead to more work for less pay, and sometimes even to the loss of jobs.

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<sup>57</sup> Evgeniya Perestoronina. 2012. “Davno Pora!” *Tomskaya Nedelya*. October 26, At <http://tn.tomsk.ru/archives/5779>, accessed May 3, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Stepan Fadeev. 2011. “Uchitelya Volgograda Spasut Yavku na Vyborakh?” *V1.RU*, At <http://v1.ru/text/news/453893.html>, accessed May 4, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Mikhail Dezhnev and Mariya Zubkova. 2011. “Sibiriyakov Pugayut: Ne Progosuete za ER – Uvolim!” *Novyi Region*, At <http://www.nr2.ru/siberia/359488.html>, accessed May 4, 2013.

Thus the electoral machines within the organizational framework of United Russia do appear to be relying heavily on clientelistic exchange. This raises the question of electoral fraud that, as the available evidence demonstrates quite convincingly, is widespread in Russia's authoritarian elections.<sup>60</sup> If election results can be fabricated, then what is the rationale for the costly and labor-consuming clientelistic practices? As follows from the description above, the targeted groups comprise a minority of voters. In fair elections, these groups can make a sizeable addition to the overall party vote. Yet this may make little sense in the conditions when comparable amounts of votes can be added just on paper. In my understanding, such questions, however legitimate, are based on a simplified vision of Russia's electoral politics. The real picture is more complex, with the two forms of manipulation reinforcing rather than replacing each other. Consider a hypothetical precinct with 100 electors, 10 of them voting for United Russia sincerely, and 15 within the framework of clientelistic exchange. The main opposition party gets 25 votes, and other parties, 5 votes. The remaining 45 voters do not turn out. If there were no clientelistic exchange, the number of absentees would reach 60 voters, with United Russia trailing the opposition party. Both circumstances are risky for United Russia because the extremely low turnout would be noticed by the local residents, making them infer that "nobody actually voted at all, and for United Russia in particular," while the great advantage of the opposition party in the electorate would exert psychological pressure on the vote riggers, making them more likely to defect. Absent such circumstances, the vote counters would have no difficulty in adding 20 fictitious votes to United Russia, which leaves it with 45 votes compared to 25 for the main opposition party.

The situation described above is hypothetical, yet it was purposefully modeled to represent some features of the 2011 national legislative elections. The main problem of United Russia in these elections was that in the absence of sufficient support, neither electoral fraud nor clientelistic exchange provided it with an overwhelming advantage over the official opposition, which was promptly characterized as a stunning electoral defeat by many observers. This was not the case in the majority of the 2007-2009 regional elections, as well as in the municipal elections of that period. The crucial factor that explains the observed difference is voter turnout. As a rule, regional and municipal elections evoked little interest in the electorate, as a result of which even modest additions to the sincere vote for United Russia were convertible into huge gains by the combination of electoral fraud and clientelistic exchange. In 2011, however, United Russia was able to achieve little more than a simple majority of parliamentary seats, and even this victory was won at the cost

<sup>60</sup> Evgenya Lukinova, Mikhail Myagkov and Peter Ordeshook. 2011. "Metastasized Fraud in Russia's 2008 Presidential Election". *Europe-Asia Studies* 63: 4 (June): 603-22.

of severe reputation loss and subsequent political discontent. However, it is important to note that Russia's authorities met the new challenges with a set of measures revealing their general confidence in the utility of the machine-based model of electoral politics.<sup>61</sup> First and most importantly, the purely proportional electoral system used in the 2007-2011 elections was replaced with a mixed electoral system, with half of the deputies to be elected in single-member districts by plurality rule. Obviously, under the mixed system the role of clientelistic exchange in shaping the overall outcomes of elections will increase. Second, the system of gubernatorial appointment was replaced with a system of limited elections, allowing the voters to express their preferences on the de facto pre-approved candidates for governorship. Arguably, this measure can reinvigorate regional political machines. Third, it is possible that the strong linkage between United Russia and the governors will be relaxed by allowing some of the machines to operate under the auspices of Putin's new political vehicle, the All-Russian People's Front. Thus the nation-wide pattern of machine politics developed in the second half of the 2000s is likely to be accommodated to new political environments.

## Conclusion

The concept of machine politics is important for our understanding of post-communist political developments. While clientelistic exchange hardly constitutes the core of electoral politics in the region, in some of the countries, as the example of Russia demonstrates, it became widespread and significant in terms of its impact upon overall election results. The birth of machine politics in Russia took place at the sub-national level of nascent democratic politics. Yet the formation of a nationwide political machine largely coincides with the rise of competitive authoritarianism. Indeed, the integration of the pre-existing networks of clientelistic exchange into the organizational structure of the monopolistic "party of power" was in itself an important factor of regime transformation in Russia. Therefore, clientelistic exchange and machine politics emerge as important items on the future research agenda.

So far, little empirical work has been done to understand machine politics in contemporary Russia. It is difficult even to assess with the necessary degree of precision the scope of clientelistic exchange in the country. Such an assessment, however, is essential not only for the study of political machines per se, but also for our wider understanding of Russia's authoritarian elections, including the politically loaded problem of electoral

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<sup>61</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 2012. "The 2012 Political Reform in Russia: The Interplay of Liberalizing Concessions and Authoritarian Corrections." *Problems of Post-Communism* 59: 6 (November-December): 3-14.

fraud. It has to be recognized that the study of machine politics is difficult because of the covert nature of practices that constitute the phenomenon and for important methodological reasons, primarily due to the fact that the empirical distinction between club goods and particularistic goods poses an insurmountable problem for many research techniques that utilize aggregate data. This is not to say that such techniques are useless. In recent years, several scholars performed quantitative analyses aimed at uncovering the sources of United Russia's superior performance in the 2003-2011 regional legislative elections,<sup>62</sup> which resulted in some findings that can be viewed as evidence of the prominence of sub-national political machines in contemporary Russia. In particular, these studies contributed to a better understanding of indirect empirical indicators that can be productively employed for the study of machine politics in the post-Soviet world. Yet in the final analysis, unlike some other aspects of electoral behavior, clientelistic exchange cannot be adequately understood without a large amount of qualitative work in the field.

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<sup>62</sup> Grigorii V. Golosov. 2011. "Russia's Regional Legislative Elections, 2003-2007: Authoritarianism Incorporated." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63: 3 (May): 397-414; Ora John Reuter. 2013. "Regional Patrons and Hegemonic Party Electoral Performance in Russia." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29: 2 (March-April): 101-35; Petr Panov and Cameron Ross. 2013. "Sub-National Elections in Russia: Variations in United Russia's Domination of Regional Assemblies." *Europe-Asia Studies* 65: 4 (June): 737-52.