# CHAPTER 4 THE EMERGENCE OF A DOMINANT PARTY IN RUSSIA: UNITED RUSSIA, PUTIN, AND REGIONAL ELITES, 2000-2010

In non-democracies, leaders and elites face a set of commitment problems. Leaders cannot commit to providing spoils to elites in the future and elites cannot commit to remaining loyal. These problems are amplified by a strategic dynamic whereby leaders remain reluctant to invest in an institution for sharing these spoils until they know that elites will tie their fates to it, and elites remain reluctant until they know that leaders will channel spoils through this institution. Dominant party institutions can help solve these commitment problems but are only likely to emerge as solutions to such dilemmas when the benefits of cooperation are maximized and the costs are minimized. These costs and benefits depend on the resources available to each side. Leaders and elites are most likely to build a dominant party when elites are strong enough that leaders need to coopt them in order to govern the country, but not so strong that they themselves are highly inclined to eschew investment in the dominant party. In this chapter, I explore this hypothesis by examining Russia's experience with ruling parties in the late 1990s and 2000s.

As the 1999-2000 election season approached, the Kremlin had no ruling party. A last ditch effort was made to create a new party of power, Unity. But, as with previous parties of power, this project failed to attract serious commitments from either the Kremlin or elites. In 1999, governors were collectively stronger than the president. The only thing stopping them from capturing the presidency was their own inability to coordinate. Given their substantial resources, few were inclined to link their fates to a centralized dominant party. For its part, the Kremlin feared that it could not control a ruling party comprised of these powerful elites. Thus, the Kremlin refrained from making serious investments in Unity. In turn, the Kremlin's reluctance to commit to Unity—and only Unity—gave elites even less reason to invest in Unity.

However, in the early 2000s circumstances began to change. A surge in oil prices, a growing economy, and Putin's high popularity ratings strengthened the federal center vis-à-vis regional elites. Elites were still very powerful and the Kremlin needed to coopt them if it wanted to win elections and govern the regions. But as the federal center strengthened, elites became more inclined to cooperate with the center. Because these elites were no longer so strong that they would shirk any obligations laid out for them in a dominant party, Putin felt comfortable investing his own resources in such a party. By publicly endorsing the party, speaking at party conferences, heading the party list, and eventually becoming party chairman, Putin associated himself much more closely with his pro-presidential party than Yeltsin had ever done. In turn, Putin's signals of support emboldened elites to make their own investments. This dynamic led both sides to invest more in the ruling party than ever before. The result was United Russia.

This chapter draws heavily upon my interviews with political elites conducted in Moscow, Yaroslavl, Rybinsk, Perm, Kurgan, Kirov, Chelyabinsk, Ekaterinburg, and Yoshkar-Ola between 2007 and 2014. Because my primary interest is in the formation of United Russia, I include only limited discussion of events after the 2011-12 election cycle. Some of those developments are addressed in the next chapter and in the conclusion.

## 4.1 Initial Failures: The Story of Unity, 1999-2001

### *From Our Home is Russia to Unity*

By early 1999, Our Home was a rump organization. Its parliamentary leader, Alexander Shokhin, had deserted it, and most governors had declared their intention to leave, begun to build their own political parties, or signed up with competing parties.[1] It retained a faction in the Duma, and its leadership prepared to run in the 1999 parliamentary election, but the party could no longer claim special ties to the Kremlin.

To understand the Kremlin's next steps in this situation, we must first understand the position that regional elites found themselves in during the run-up to the 2000 presidential election.[2] With Yeltsin still ailing, it was clear that he would not be running for a third term, but no successor was yet apparent. Governors, for their part, wanted good relations with the President. Afterall, for all the formal and informal autonomy that regional leaders accumulated in the 1990s, the Russian presidency, which was vested with extensive formal powers and direct control over a massive state apparatus, remained the strongest single office in the country.

Every governor wanted to support the winning candidate, but it was not clear which candidate this might be. The governors' dilemma was made worse by the fact that no institution (e.g. a party) existed to help them coordinate any such endorsement. Collectively, the governors (or a majority of governors) could put their political machines to work and have almost any candidate elected, but, again, for an individual governor it was not clear which of many possible candidates should be supported. The timing of the Russian electoral cycle, in which parliamentary elections are held four months before presidential ones, meant that the leader(s) of the best showing non-communist party in the December 1999 parliamentary elections would be well-positioned for presidential elections scheduled in March 2000.

---

[1] In the end, six governors were included in Our Home's 1999 party list.

[2] in The following draws heavily on accounts in Hale (2006), Hale (2004a) McFaul and Colton (2003), Makarkin (1999), and the collection of essays in Hesli and Reissinger (2003).

In this setting, some of Russia's strongest and most ambitious governors began forming their own political movements to contest the December 1999 parliamentary elections. The first to move in this direction was Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov, who, in December 1998, launched a political movement called Otechestvo (Fatherland), that drew together 11 governors in support of the bloc's demands for more federal attention to 'regional matters.' To all, however, it was apparent that Fatherland would be a vehicle for Luzhkov's own presidential ambitions. In January of 1999, another governors' party emerged with the creation of Konstantin Titov's (Samara Oblast) Golos Rossii. This grouping, which Titov initiated to further his own presidential campaign, attracted the support of 20 governors. In April 1999, another major governors' party, Vsya Rossii (All Russia), was created by Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiyev and St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev. Seventeen governors participated in this effort. Several smaller governors' parties were also started in early 1999 including, Aman Tuleev's (Kemerovo Oblast) Vozrozhdeniye (Revival) and Edinstvo (Unity) bloc, but these efforts were less successful in attracting regional leaders.

At first, the flurry of organization did not trouble the presidential administration. Yeltsin's advisors believed that the governors would be unable to present a united front against the Kremlin. In fact, the Kremlin encouraged these divisions and, at various times, offered its tacit support to each of the governors' parties, seeking to fragment the field by airing the possibility that it might support each successive attempt to organize. Thus, by the summer of 1999, there was still no certainty about who would be the most likely presidential successor and the governors had divided into several camps in nascent support of several prospective presidential hopefuls.

As Olga Shvetsova (2003) has usefully pointed out, the governors during this period were facing an electoral coordination dilemma. Individual governors wanted to back the candidate/party that a majority of other governors backed. After all, this candidate/party would surely win. The problem for each governor lay in knowing how other governors would behave. What was needed was a signal or focal point to coordinate actors' behavior on one of several possible equilibria. An existing party of power and/or an incumbent president might have created such a focal point, but neither was on hand in early 1999.

In August 4, 1999 the governors seemed to have found their focal point when Luzhkov's Fatherland formed an alliance with All-Russia. The new bloc announced its intention to support the presidential candidacy of one of Russia's most popular politicians at the time, Yevgeny Primakov. Primakov was well respected, since, as foreign minister, he had stood up to the West over NATO expansion and, as Prime Minister, had presided over Russia's first months of economic recovery following the 1998 financial crisis. Fatherland-All Russia's (OVR, hereafter) imminent endorsement of Primakov seemed to cement a focal point for the governors to rally around his candidacy.

The Kremlin was startled to action by the OVR alliance and its support of Primakov. Yeltsin's circle was characterized by a coterie of political and business elites whose wealth and power depended crucially on their access to the President.[3] Indeed, Yeltsin and his coterie had reason to believe that they might be subject to criminal investigation under a Primakov presidency. If they did not control presidential succession, Yeltsin insiders risked losing access to the power and privilege they enjoyed.

---

[3] Members of this circle included the oligarchs Boris Berozovsky and Roman Abramovich, Yeltsin's daughter Tatyana Dyachenko, presidential administration chief Alexander Voloshin, former presidential administration chief Valentin Yumashev, deputy presidential administration chiefs Igor Shabdurasulov and Vladislav Surkov and other members of the presidential administration.

The Kremlin recognized the importance of the governors and devised a plan to counter OVR. The plan depended on the governors' coordination dilemmas and their enormous political resources. It centered on the creation of an alternative governors' bloc that would be given the tacit backing of the Kremlin and newly appointed prime-minister, Vladimir Putin. The goal of creating the bloc was to divide the governors and ensure that a majority did not line up behind one of the governors' parties existing at the time. The bloc's symbolic leader would be popular Emergency Situations Minister, Sergei Shoigu. At the September 1999 session of the Federation Council, the Kremlin circulated a vague open letter calling for "Clean and Honorable Elections." The letter was perceived by observers as a statement by the signatories to coordinate their efforts in favor of the Kremlin's candidate. Thirty-nine governors signed the letter. Then, at the end of September, Putin invited a group of regional leaders to his office to assure them that the Kremlin would not be supporting Fatherland and that the Kremlin approved of the new bloc, which did not yet have an official name. This meeting led to another letter being signed by 32 governors agreeing to help Sergei Shoigu win the December Parliamentary elections. On October 3 and 6, the bloc, now called the Mezhregionalnnoye Dvizheniye "Edinstvo" (Interregional Movement "Unity"), held its founding congress.

Unity's ratings were initially stagnant, hovering at around 5-8% throughout October and early November. But just before the elections Unity's rating skyrocketed and it finished with 23% of the party list vote, ahead of the Kremlin's main rival, Fatherland-All Russia and more than any other party except the KPRF.

Unity's meteoric rise was clearly linked to Putin's own rising star as a presidential candidate and, crucially, the signals that Putin then sent about his support for the movement. By late November, Putin's ratings had soared on the shoulders of Berezovsky's media empire and the prime-minister's firm reaction to a series of terrorist attacks in August and September 1999. As Russia's most popular politician and the most likely candidate to be supported by the Kremlin in the upcoming election, Putin spoke before a gathering of governors on November 24, announcing that he would be "voting for Unity, as a citizen." As Shvetsova (2003) has emphasized, this endorsement from the Kremlin's popular favorite, cemented the recoordination of a plurality of governors away from the "Primakov Equilibrium" to a "Putin Equilibrium." The best evidence of this was that while Putin's rating as presidential candidate had climbed to 42% in mid-November, Unity's support remained at 8%. But the week after Putin's address Unity's rating jumped by 10 percentage points (Shvetsova 2003, 226).

Putin would go on to win the March presidential elections in a landslide. For its part, Unity set up a parliamentary faction in the Duma that initially counted 81 deputies(18% of the chamber). This number included the 63 mandates it had won, as well as 18 independents and defectors from other parties. Thus, as Yeltsin had to do in the First and Second Dumas, Putin would need to build shifting and cross-factional majorities in the Third Duma.

Like its predecessors, Unity's position was weak in the regions. The party was not an attempt to coopt Russia's regional elites into a dominant party, but rather a hastily constructed effort to keep them divided. Despite the fact that some forty-odd governors supported its campaign, Unity's could claim no governors as party members. In 44 gubernatorial elections held in 2000, not a single winning candidate accepted a Unity nomination. Most governors hedged their bets by supporting multiple parties and continuing to nurture their own regional parties.

Among other regional elites Unity's position was no stronger. Regional parliamentary elections held after 1998 were even more non-partisan than in the mid-1990s. On average, only

14% of regional legislative seats were won by party nominees between 1999 and 2003. And Unity won *zero* seats in 81% of the regional elections held between 1999 and July 2003.[4]

Unity's organization was minimal. The movement held a campaign rally for President Putin in February 2000, but it was not until May that the party held a founding congress that established Unity as a political party in the juridical sense. While it had branches in all regions, none of the political elite were members and branches had no permanent employees or fixed budgets. The incipient party played no role in the selection or advancement of cadres in the executive or legislative branch. And because its faction in the Duma did not hold a majority, it could not claim for its members unrivalled access to the President or the government.

By early 2001, it seemed that Unity, like its predecessors, would end up as just another discarded party of power. And, indeed, if we view Unity as an organizational entity, this is what happened. In early 2001 negotiations began for the creation of a new pro-presidential party that would be created out of a merger between Unity and OVR. On December 1, 2001, the two parties formally merged to create the All-Russia Party "Unity and Fatherland—United Russia." But before I turn to discuss that new party, I first discuss how the Kremlin and elites related to Unity and how their actions kept the party from becoming dominant in 1999 and 2000.

### *The Kremlin and Unity*

From 1998-2001, the Kremlin was still very hesitant to invest unilaterally in a dominant party. Until Unity's last minute creation in September 1999, the Kremlin made almost no moves to indicate that it would be investing in its own ruling party. Indeed, it was not until the fall of 1999 that the governors could even be sure that the Kremlin would not support OVR. According to one of OVR's leading figures, Bashkortorstan President Murtaza Rakhimov, OVR's leaders had approached the Kremlin on several occasions to ask its blessing for the creation of a party of power, but had never received a clear signal. Rakhimov claimed that the governors finally received tacit support for the creation of All Russia in 1998, but needless to say, the Kremlin did not follow up on that promise.[5]

---

[4] Golosov (2003). These data are for United Russia after 2001.

The Kremlin instead preferred to keep elites guessing by extending its support to various parties so that elites would not coordinate on one party. Indeed, even after it sent signals that it would be supporting the Unity bloc, it continued to hedge its bets. During the campaign, the Kremlin also gave its support to "Soyuz Pravykh Sil" (Union of Right Forces), a right-center party that included prominent liberal politicians from the 1990s as well as the rump of Titov's Golos Rossii movement. Putin even appeared on television with the bloc's leader one week before the election to express support for the party's platform.[6]

As regards Unity, Putin did not speak at the movement's founding congress, but he did avow later in the campaign that he would vote for it as a citizen, and in March 2000, Putin spoke at a conference of the movement's supporters. This was the first time in history that a Russian president had officially participated in a party event.

Nonetheless, the idea of turning Unity into a dominant party was not yet on the Kremlin's mind in 2000. Unity was designed as a governors' bloc and was not intended to be positioned as a pro-Kremlin party (Ivanov 2008, 43). Unity held far less than a majority in the Duma and, like his predecessor, Putin used patronage and policy concessions to build shifting coalitions that were comprised of Unity and other factions (Remington 2003, 2006). Non-partisan deputies from the single member districts were key to passing legislation. Presumably, the Kremlin could have invested resources in attracting SMD deputies to the party (e.g. the Kremlin could have started privileging Unity members above others for promotions and patronage), but the Kremlin did not do this. In fact, some sources indicate that Putin explicitly rejected his advisors' proposals to begin the process of merging Fatherland-All Russia and Unity in 2000 (Ivanov 2008, 76). Deputies not affiliated with the party of power felt secure in knowing that they could advance their interests outside the party.

---

[5] "Putin—ne plokhoi paren" *Segodnya*. 15 February, 2000.
[6] "Putin podderzhal SPS" *Vostochno-Siberskaya Pravda.* 17 December 1999.

In regional elections, the Kremlin continued to hedge its bets as well. In 1998 and 1999, the Kremlin devoted minimal attention to regional elections. It did not even organize a coordinating organization (the OKS) as it had done in 1996. Regional leaders were left to their own devices. The President's special envoys in the regions, who were, in part, charged with ensuring the election of suitable governors, gave no exclusive support to Unity-supported candidates. Hale (2004b) reports that the presidential envoys supported Unity (later United Russia) candidates in only 4 of the 24 gubernatorial elections where presidential envoys chose to endorse candidates between May 2000 and May 2003. In three cases, the presidential envoy even worked against the candidate endorsed by the party of power. The result was that multiple pro-Kremlin candidates competed with one another in many races. In a number of regions, this led to the victory of opposition candidates.

### *Elites and Unity*

Before it joined with Fatherland-All Russia to create United Russia, Unity fared no better than Our Home at attracting investments from elites. The initial letter signed by regional leaders in support of honest elections was extremely vague, and many leaders later claimed that they did not realize it was a statement of support for the Unity bloc (Lussier 2002, 66). In the end, while 50 leaders signed one of the two letters of support for Unity, only one (Vladimir Platov of Tver) actually ran on the party list and only eight appeared at a joint press conference in September announcing the formation of the bloc. Thirty-eight of the fifty governors who signed the letter ended up being affiliated with other parties during the election. Most governors were actively hostile toward the party. The leader of the Unity branch in Samara provides a vivid example:

> "Relations with the [regional] authorities are very difficult. For a long time Titov [then-governor, and long-time Yeltsin ally] forbid everyone from participating in the party. And, of course, those who had something to lose were afraid to get close to us. He [Titov] pulled away a lot of key figures and we ended up in competition with the governor.[7]

The 1999 State Duma elections were the ultimate demonstration of how the post-Soviet elite sought to avoid exclusive affiliations with federal parties that would limit their autonomy. Their preferred strategy was to hedge their bets by making provisional commitments to multiple political forces. The pattern of gubernatorial affiliation on election day was a miasma of crisscrossing and overlapping attachments. Of Russia's 88 governors, 36 maintained dual affiliations with at least two national parties/blocs in 1999 (Our Home, Unity, Fatherland, All-Russia, Voice of Russia, KPRF).[8] As an advisor to Yaroslavl governor Anatoly Lysytsin in 1999 put it:

> When the presidential administration asked Lysytsin to assist in organizing a Unity branch in the region, he did not react in a positive manner. He had been a supporter of Otechestvo. So he didn't want to work seriously on it. At the same time, he didn't want to refuse outright… [Therefore] he asked Tonkov [head of the local tire factory, one of the region's largest enterprises] to organize the party. In turn, Tonkov asked one of his subordinates to head up the effort.[9]

In turn, Lysytsin was said to have advocated the principle of "a party for every oligarch", whereby he encouraged the main business figures in the region, most of whom were his clients, to support various parties (Lapina and Chirikova 2002, p 258-9)

---

[7] Qtd in Lapina and Chirikova (2002, 247).

[8] Authors calculations based on data presented in McFaul, Petrov, and Ryabov (1999). In fact, this number is only the tip of the dual-affiliation iceberg, because it does not count the regional parties and movements that many governors backed as well. Ten governors made three or more "commitments." Astrakhan governor Anatolii Guzhvin was especially fond of electoral blocs; he signed the letter in support of the Voice of Russia group, joined All-Russia, signed the statement of 39 in tacit support of Unity, and simultaneously sat on the political council of Our Home.

[9] Author's interview with Alexander Prokhorov, Yaroslavl, 11 June 2009.

In the elections themselves, Unity was unable to attract strong candidates under its banner. Only nine candidates nominated by Unity were elected in SMD races. Incumbents and candidates with administrative resources accruing from their positions in regional and federal state-administrative apparatuses overwhelmingly chose to run as independents.[10] In regional legislative elections, the party was almost non-existent. As noted above, Unity failed to get a single candidate elected in almost 80% of regional elections. Where it did win seats, it won, on average, only 21.6% of seats (Golosov 2004). Party legislative factions were rare during this period, but when they did form, they were most often created on the basis of regional parties or interest groups (see, for example, Slider 2001), and Unity factions emerged in only a handful of regions (Kynev and Glubotskii 2003).

In gubernatorial elections held between 1999 and 2001, governors eschewed entanglement with the new party of power nearly as much as they did with Our Home in the mid-1990s. Instead, as in the 1990s, they relied on their own regionally-based parties and political machines to secure election or, in 66% of cases, reelection. Unity did not officially nominate any candidates in these elections. When endorsements were issued, the party leadership often split and supported different candidates (Turovsky 2002, 25).

Russia's business elite kept its political investments diversified as well. Regional business was clearly not affiliated with Unity, as indicated by Unity's dismal representation in regional legislatures. Instead, major regional enterprise directors preferred to run as independent candidates and use their resources to support their own slates of candidates (Turovsky 2002,

---

[10] Only two incumbents ran for reelection as Unity SMD candidates, as opposed to 91 who ran as independents. Unity attracted two candidates with high-ranking state administrative backgrounds, whereas 47 candidates with such backgrounds ran as independents (Golosov 2002).

Hale 2006).

### *Why Elites were Hesitant to Invest in Unity*

The inability of elites to commit to Unity is explained by the same factors that kept elites from making investments in Our Home is Russia. In short, they were too strong in autonomous resources. The political machines of elites were at their strongest at the end of the 1990s. By 1999, regional governors in particular had become Russia's kingmakers, and, collectively, were stronger than the Kremlin. Even if a dominant party could have made them better off by reducing uncertainty over access to spoils, there was too much to risk in relinquishing even partial control over their political machines, and, for this very reason, signals from the Kremlin that it would begin investing in institutions to ameliorate this commitment problem were not forthcoming. Thus, due to the risks and the lack of party-building signals from the Kremlin, the governors sought to pursue their own individual, diversified strategies of political advancement.

By 1998, Russia's regional elites had grown extremely powerful at the expense of the central state. In 1998, oil prices reached $15.81/barrel, their lowest inflation-adjusted level since before the Second World War. The worsening fiscal position of Moscow culminated in the August 1998 financial crisis and debt default. The central state's capacity to provide social services, levy taxes, pay wages, and enforce the rule of law was at an all-time low. The crisis led to renewed calls for autonomy by regional leaders, who argued that the crisis demonstrated the necessity for the regions to have more fiscal autonomy in order to insulate themselves from crises that originated in Moscow. Not surprisingly, Yeltsin, who was in and out of the hospital during this period, had approval ratings in the single digits.

In Chapter 3, I outlined how regional governors took advantage a weak central state to build powerful political machines. To a lesser degree, mayors, municipal administration heads, and other local politicians built similar machines at lower levels. The late 1990s gave regional elites extra time to entrench these machines and create stronger bonds of mutual support with sub-elites. By the late 1990s, these regionally-based political machines had become the primary channels of social control and, thus, political power in Russia.

I also have reviewed how enterprise directors used leverage over employees to build their own expansive political machines. Having won big through insider privatization in the mid-1990s, Russia's business elite began turning its sights on expansion in the regions by the end of 1990s. Although the financial crisis had weakened many of the most prolific financial industrial groups, their immense material resources outmatched any other non-state entity in the late 1990s. Moreover, as several scholars have noted, the financial crisis actually strengthened regional firms vis-à-vis Moscow-based firms, since the former were less tied up in the capital's banking sector (e.g. Turovsky 2002).

The political strength of Russia's regional elite was demonstrated clearly in the late 1990s. Their strategy of eschewing major party affiliation and building their own regionally-based movements to contest regional elections paid dividends. From 1998-2001, the incumbency rate of governors was 66% (up from 54% in the 1996-1997 electoral cycle). In regional legislative elections, the governors successfully packed many regional legislatures with their own clients (e.g. Slider 2001)

In national elections, the power of governors was demonstrated just as clearly. The entire drama surrounding the 1999 elections centered on which party the governors would support. Indeed, Myagkov (2003) shows that Unity received 30.4% of the vote in regions led by governors who supported Unity, compared to 7.5% in those regions led by OVR governors

(Unity received 23% nationwide). OVR received 36.9% of the vote in those regions led by OVR governors and 15.9% in regions headed by Unity governors (OVR won 13% nationwide).[11] Studies of the election results would later reveal that strong governors were exceptionally successful at getting their clients elected in the single member districts contests of the 1999 election.[12]

Business also flexed its electoral muscles during this period. The late 1990s and early 2000s were a period when business engaged in greater and more direct participation in politics (Turovsky 2002, Hale 2006). In the 1999 Duma elections, large financial industrial groups had significant success in getting their candidates elected to the Duma and placed on key committees (Hale 2006). In some regions, large companies attempted to capture the state by getting their own executives elected to governorships.

In the late 1990s, regional legislatures transformed from representative arenas in which regional business was one of the main lobbying groups into institutional fora completely dominated by competing firms and financial industrial groups. A sample of deputies in 43 regional legislatures collected by the author shows that this proportion had grown to 55% by the early 2000s.[13] But even this number likely understates the true extent of business influence in regional legislatures since many deputies were owners or major shareholders of enterprises even though they were not full-time employees of the enterprise while they served as deputies. In sum, by the late 1990s, regional legislatures usually contained all the most important economic elites in a region.

---

[11] That this correlation is not due to ideological congruence between voters' preferences, governor's bloc affiliation, and electoral results is demonstrated by the electoral blocs' self-professed lack of ideology. Unity's organizers consciously sought to avoid a programmatic ideology in its campaign (McFaul and Colton 2003). As one Unity-supporting governor stated, 'The ideology of Unity is the lack of any kind of ideology' (quoted in Hale (2004a, 184).

[12] Russian Regional Report, 22 December 1999. See also Hale (2006).

[13] This data is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

The primary goal of elites in this period was to preserve their autonomous resources. Joining a regime party would have placed limits on their autonomy. The Presidential Administration might have tried to force elites to join Unity, but it appears that the Kremlin was unwilling to force the issue. As Oryol Governor Egor Stroev put it in an interview with the author, "Of course, Unity asked me to join. Any party at that time would have liked to have me as a member. But I believed that by joining a party, I would just be joining a temporary sect. I think history proved me correct."[14] Stroev was a powerful and influential figure that Unity would have liked to attract, but it was unable to. Samara governor Konstantin Titov, who had adopted an oppositional stance toward Unity from the beginning and maintained his own political party, Golos Rossii, reported that the Kremlin did not try to keep him from running for reelection in 2000: "No one tried to stand in my way. Although, I, of course, understand that they could have….It would be so easy to find a "mistake" in my signatures [voter signatures that candidates were required to collect in order to gain ballot access] and say, that's it, 'your signatures were improperly gathered'"[15]. Just after the elections, Putin visited Samara and Titov came away with the impression that Putin supported him. When asked why he thought the Kremlin did not try to stop him from being reelected, Titov responded: "Everyone was against it. The local elites and so on. They helped me with financial and organizational resources and so on." In other words, Titov was able to avoid being pushed around by the Kremlin because he was able to mobilize political support in his region. As this and subsequent chapters will soon show, this dynamic, by which the Kremlin refrained from coercing powerful governors because of the strength of their political machines, would become a central element of the story of dominant party formation in Russia.

---

[14] Author's interview June 6, 2013, Moscow

[15] Author's interview June 14, 2012, Moscow.

The fact that the autonomous resources of elites led them to eschew close affiliation with Unity is demonstrated by several pieces of quantitative and qualitative evidence. A simple analysis of the party affiliation behavior of governors during the 1999 suggests that Unity attracted Russia's weaker governors. Among those governors with some sort of party affiliation in the run up to the 1999 Duma elections, Unity affiliated governors had an average margin of victory of 32%, while supporters of other parties averaged a 38% margin. Another operationalization of governors' machine strength during this period is provided by Henry Hale, who measures the strength of machines as the average percentage of the vote received by clients of the governor in the State Duma elections. According to this data, the clients of Unity governors won by an average margin of 24 percentage points, while the clients of other party supporters won by an average margin of 30 percentage points.

The bloc did not attract leaders of any prominent ethnic republics. Its most eager first joiners were governors who were having legal problems or who were up for reelection and were in danger of being defeated (Petrov and Makarkin 1999, Sakwa 2003). In an interview after retirement, the primary architect of the Unity campaign and then First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, Igor Shabdurasulov, stated quite plainly:

> The task was to create a counterweight to OVR. And, we created one; although it was created from governors that were considered weak, lacking in influence; roughly speaking, we gathered up all the left-overs. But at the same time, there began the struggle for those who were oscillating…this struggle was over those that feared placing all their eggs in one basket…Since I knew many of the governors, I traveled to the regions, and I frequently met with such a situation. This or that governor or president would say something like 'we'll support you, and our own guys, and somebody else.' They did this so they wouldn't make a mistake…[16]

Those governors with the strongest resources (i.e. those that had strong electoral machines or ran powerful ethnic republics) were either OVR leaders or remained independent. As

---

[16] Author's interview, May 17, 2010, Moscow.

Shabdurasulov stated in a 2009 interview, “We had a massive problem with the regional lists. In those places that were close to OVR, we had to choose among the second and third echelons of the elite. People were frightened, didn’t believe, and were afraid of being discredited”[17]

Governors in this period continued to favor individual strategies of political advancement over commitments to Unity. For this reason, the bloc was intentionally designed so as to require a minimum amount of effort or commitment from governors. The bloc had no organizational power or ideology that could restrict a governor’s freedom of maneuver. The initial letter signed by the governors in the Federation Council bound governors to nothing except “supporting honest candidates for election to the Duma.” Many governors later claimed that they were ‘surprised’ to learn that the letter was perceived as a statement of support for the Unity bloc (Lussier 2002, p66). Bloc leaders emphasized that the bloc was not an exclusive organization and that participation did not preclude them from being members of other movements (Shvetsova 2003, Markov 1999).

After the elections, many elites continued to eschew even shallow commitments to Unity, due to the restraints it might place on their behavior. In April 2000, at the founding congress of Unity, prominent Duma veteran and Regions of Russia faction leader Oleg Morozov, balked at joining the new movement due its ban on simultaneous membership in other political parties.[18] Most elites continued to criticize the Kremlin when it suited their needs, ran their own lists of candidates in elections, and did not submit to party in their regional legislatures. They retained their own political parties, continued to cultivate reputations for independence, and refused to cede the party any authority in their regions.

Russian leaders knew that Russia’s elites were so strong that they would balk at any attempt to impose constraints upon them. So rather than try to create a centralized ruling party and force governors into it the Kremlin sought to build a weak party of power—one without an ideology, policy platform, formal membership requirements, or rules governing the behavior of cadres--that could coordinate the governors around the Kremlin's preferred candidate without requiring too much from them in the way of commitment. Indeed, the Kremlin's halting and uncertain commitments to Unity further deterred elites from investing in that party, for if elites were to take the risk of relinquishing some of their autonomy, especially when they were so strong vis-à-vis the Kremlin, then they needed clear guarantees from the Kremlin that it would be supporting Unity and only Unity. These guarantees were not forthcoming. When asked how the Kremlin provided guarantees to governors that Unity would continue to be supported after the elections, the main coordinator of Unity's campaign, Igor Shabdurasulov, replied simply: "There were no such guarantees."[19] And yet, consistent with the framework outlined here, the minimal signals of support that the Kremlin *did* send produced changes in the behavior of elites. Indeed, Putin's November speech to announce that he would be voting for Unity "as a citizen" was held for an audience of governors and in the week after that speech, governors began, for the first time, to publicly announce their support for Unity.[20]

---

[17] “Edinstvo Protivopolozhnostei” *Profil* 5 October 2009.

[18] From Morozov’s biography at http://history.peoples.ru/state/politics/morozov/index.html

### *Why the Kremlin was Hesitant to Invest in Unity*

Yeltsin's hesitancy to invest in a dominant party when elites were strong was elaborated in the previous chapter. Given the statements of Yelsin's advisors, it appears that Yeltsin feared investing in Our Home when elites could not be counted on to live up to their commitments, and indeed, might even use the party to challenge the president. In 1998-1999, when regional elites were at their strongest, this consideration could only have been elevated in the president's mind. Requiring dominant party commitments from elites at such a time was unrealistic.

---

[19] Author's interview May 17, 2010, Moscow.

[20] A handful of governors declared their public support for Unity prior to that--including those on its coordinating council and Platov of Tver, who was on its party list—but it was not until these few weeks before the election that the other governors who signed Unity's initial letter of support began to associate their image with the party's campaign. See for example "Putin bankyuet po-Uralski" Kommersant. 30 November 1999.

Perhaps the best circumstantial evidence of the Kremlin's motives for refraining from making investments in a party of power is that the absolute nadir of the Kremlin's involvement in party-of-power politics coincided with their weakest moment vis-à-vis regional elites in 1998. In that year, the Kremlin had withdrawn all support for Our Home and had no plans for creating a new party of power. The presidential administration and government were even less involved in party politics than they were in 1995. Meanwhile, oil prices had reached their lowest level in December 1998 and remained low until May 1999. The fiscal position of the central state was abysmal and state capacity was weak.

In the summer of 1999, oil prices began to climb steeply, reaching their highest level in ten years in November 1999. Moreover, the fall of 1999 witnessed strong economic growth---a first since the Soviet collapse--and Prime Minister Putin's meteoric rise in popularity. And, as we have seen, the fall of 1999, was when the Kremlin made its first tentative steps toward creating Unity. Of course, such a correlation must be taken with a large grain of salt, since the fall of 1999 was the height of the Duma election campaign, but the correlation is still informative, because the Kremlin made its first tentative commitments to Unity only three months before election day and embarked on a crash campaign thereafter. The Kremlin's weakness and the governors' strength tell us why the commitment was so tentative and why they equivocated on supporting a party of power until the last moment.

Those close to Yeltsin in late 1998 and early 1999 were divided on the issue of whether to support a party of power in 1999. Most advisors thought that a pro-Kremlin party would not have "the slightest chance of success, and, therefore, why expend the effort, people, and money on it."[21] Since it was clear at the time that a successful campaign depended crucially on the support of regional leaders, Kremlin insiders feared investing in a party that could not hope to attract the support of Russia's regional elites. As Sergei Popov, vice chairman of Edinstvo's election campaign, noted in an interview with the author, "We tried to attract as many governors as possible, but in such a process it is impossible to force people. Moreover, the movement was new and unknown".[22] Indeed, by early 1999, it seemed so apparent that OVR would win that many in Yeltsin's circle were secretly negotiating with OVR's leaders about their futures in a Primakov administration. Such insiders, therefore, thought that helping to build a party to compete with OVR would only damage their future career prospects.[23] Thus, the Kremlin was reluctant to invest in a strong party of power in the run up to the 1999 election because they thought that such a party could not hope to draw the support of powerful governors. The strength of Russia's governors had reached such heights that many Kremlin insiders were worried more about their career fates after the governors' party, OVR, won the election, than they were about figuring out a way to coopt and control the governors in order to win the election.

The reasons for the Kremlin's hesitancy to rush headlong into building Unity into a dominant party after the elections were similar. Indeed, it has been suggested by those close to the Presidential Administration at the time that Putin was skeptical of transforming Unity into a party in 2000, because of the fear that it would be "taken over by Luzhkov-ites and it would slip out from under the Kremlin's control" (Ivanov 2008, 76). As the next section demonstrates, the governors (and other elites) were still extremely strong in the early 2000s. Their support was needed to pass legislation in both houses and govern the regions. Putin appears to have been initially unwilling to sanction a strong party when governors could not make the most basic commitment that a dominant party requires—refraining from directly challenging the leader for office and authority.

---

[21] Author's interview with Igor Shabdurasulov, First Deputy Head of Presidential Administration 1999-2000, May 17, 2010, Moscow.

[22] Author's interview with Sergei Popov, June 8, 2012, Moscow.

[23] Author's Interview with Igor Shabdurasulov, First Deputy Head of Presidential Administration 1999-2000, May 17, 2010, Moscow.

### *Summary*

Regional elites reached the apex of their power in 1999. Their own inability to coordinate was the only thing that prevented them from capturing the state. Although the Kremlin could have used a dominant party to manage presidential succession, it still feared the power of regional elites at this time and was reluctant to invest in one. Instead, it adopted a divide and rule strategy, which consisted of sending conflicting signals about which party it would support and then a last minute effort to draw a plurality of weak governors into its own haphazardly assembled movement. Since the Kremlin was not willing to offer any clear signals about which party it would support, elites were not willing to unilaterally relinquish their significant resources and place themselves under their suzerainty of a regime party. Indeed, the Kremlin had to carefully craft expectations about which party it would support just to draw the weakest governors to its side. Most governors had no interest in relinquishing their autonomy to a centralized ruling party.

Some view Unity as the first stage in the creation of Russia's now-dominant party, United Russia (Hale 2004). And, indeed, it is true that Unity is one of the organizational predecessors of United Russia, but Unity in 1999 had little in common with United Russia in the mid-2000s. Unity was the culmination of divide and rule politics, not an institution intended for the cooptation of elites. It was a campaign strategy, not a political party. The decision to create United Russia as a dominant party was a separate one made under different political circumstances. The remainder of this chapter discusses those circumstances.

### 4.2 The Formation of a Dominant Party in Post-Soviet Russia: the Story of United Russia, 2001-2010

All previous parties of power in Russia were created as instruments to contest national parliamentary elections and then left to decay after the election was over. In late 2000-early 2001, it appeared that Unity would suffer the same fate. Putin declined to attend the party's founding congress in May, the party was languishing in regional elections, and the regional elite continued to place its eggs in multiple baskets. Yet, the period between the 1999-2000 and 2003-04 election cycles turned out to be different from previous ones. In early 2001, negotiations began for the creation of a coalition between four centrist factions in the State Duma—Unity, OVR, and two factions composed mostly of SMD deputies, Regions of Russia and People's Deputies. In July, that coalition was given some institutional form with the creation of a coordinating council to help synchronize the voting behavior of its members. When created, the coalition controlled 234 votes, a simple majority.[24] Yet, intra-faction cohesion was low, especially among SMD deputies. Around that same time, negotiations began for the creation of a new political party that would bring together the Unity organization and what was left of the Fatherland and All-Russia party organizations. In December 2001, a merger of the parties was sealed, and a founding congress was held for the All-Russian Party "Unity and Fatherland – United Russia."

The idea for the alliance belonged to then First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, Vladislav Surkov. Surkov, Putin's closest political advisor at the time, convinced the President and key figures in the two parties to support the alliance. Though he did not join the party, Putin spoke at its founding congress, the first time a Russian head of state had attended a party congress. It was also the first time that a party of power had been created more than a year before the beginning of a national election cycle. Despite the merger, the two parties retained separate parliamentary factions for the remainder of the Third Duma.

---

[24] For more on the centrist coalition, see Smyth (2002), Remington (2006)

At its founding congress, the party created a nesting doll style leadership structure that included a congress, with delegates chosen by regional branches, to be held at least once every two years; a 100-member Central Political Council meeting several times a year and selected by the Congress; a General Council comprised of 13 Central Political Council members, meeting as circumstances required between Central Political Council sessions; and a Central Executive Committee that would serve as the everyday organizational arm of the party. The primary political organs of the party were the Central Political Council and the General Council.[25] Former Putin Advisor Alexander Bespalov was named Chairman of the General Council and, simultaneously, Head of the Central Executive Committee. These positions made Bespalov the public face of the party in its first year.

At its Congress, the party also created a parallel organ to house prominent figures that wanted to be associated with the party but not incur the commitments of party leadership (or membership). This Higher Council, as it was called, met infrequently and had an ambiguous role in the party. At the first Congress, several prominent governors joined the Council, including Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov, Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiyev, Tyumen Governor Sergei Sobyanin, and Bashkortorstan President Murtaza Rakhimov.

In spring 2002, the party began creating its own branches in the regions, contesting regional elections, and forming factions in regional legislatures. By the beginning of 2003, UR had established factions in 45 of Russia's 89 regional legislatures. But this was still a time when regional legislatures were dominated by independents and almost all were elected in single member districts. Consistent with the framework offered here, United Russia had difficulty attracting these independent deputies. On average United Russia controlled just 26% of seats in regional legislatures in early 2003, and it held a majority in only seven regions (Kynev and Glubotskii 2003). Nonetheless, UR's penetration into regional legislatures was by this time already more extensive than NDR's had ever been.

---

[25] The former was staffed with Duma deputies and some regional legislative leaders. The latter was comprised almost entirely of prominent Duma deputies. In the first General Council, Edinstvo's party leaders received five spots; Fatherland and All-Russia received four each.

In the 36 gubernatorial elections held between 2002 and early 2003, the party did not play a major role, nominating only two candidates (one on its own and one as part of an electoral bloc with other parties). Of course, the custom was for Russian governors to run as independents even if they were actively supported as a political party, so this statistic is not especially informative. More informative as an indicator of party activity during these elections is the number of elections in which the party publicly endorsed a candidate. Between January 2002 and May 2003, United Russia did this in 9 of 15 elections.[26] But, since gubernatorial candidates were not official party nominees, the party had no control over the governors it supported, and sitting governors could, and did, decline party support if they thought it might harm their electoral chances.

The party was torn by infighting over leadership posts and often clashed with governors during this period. In some regions, the party leadership chose regional secretaries from the ranks of the governors' enemies (often the chairman of a local legislature, a local mayor, or State Duma deputy). In the 15 gubernatorial elections that took place between January 2002 and May 2003, the party supported non-incumbents in five contests and lost two of those races. The party also opposed governors' regional parties in several regional legislative elections (notably Sverdlovsk) and lost. Meanwhile, some of Russia's most powerful governors simply captured the party organization in their region, subordinating it to their own regionally based organizations.[27] Thus, by early 2003, it was clear that, while the Kremlin could use the party and Putin's growing authority to help it weaken weak governors, stronger governors could still marshal the resources to keep the party at arm's length, and the strongest governors could simply capture the regional party apparatus.

---

[26] Data on party support for gubernatorial candidates in this period is from Ivanov (2008).

Hence, in early 2003, the party shifted strategy and opted to focus on coopting existing governors. Bespalov, who was blamed for adopting a counterproductive strategy vis-à-vis regional elites, was removed from his post as Chairman of the General Council and replaced by Duma Deputy Valerii Bogomolov.[28] At the same time, the party introduced a new position, Chairman of the Higher Council, headed by then Minister for Internal Affairs Boris Gryzlov. Although the Higher Council was not a leadership organ—it could only make non-binding recommendations to the Central Political Council on issues of cadres and strategy—the Chairman's post was vested with significant informal importance. Throughout 2003 and early 2004, Gryzlov served as leader of the party even though his position gave him less formal authority within the party. This is indicated by the fact that Gryzlov delivered the key address on the status of the party at the March 2003 Congress and all subsequent ones until then-prime minister Dmitry Medvedev became Chairman in 2012.

By March 2003, United Russia, with 400,000 members was the second largest party in Russia.[29] In the Duma, 151 deputies were members of the party and 41 Federation Council senators had joined. The party had set up regional branches in all regions and more than 2400 local branches. But the party was still underperforming in regional elections and the 2003 State Duma elections were approaching in December. Therefore, the Kremlin redoubled its efforts to secure the support of powerful regional leaders. United Russia became the forum for such a cooptive arrangement. In 1999, regional leaders and financial industrial groups had advanced their clients into the Duma primarily through the single-member districts. This practice continued in 2003, but the United Russia list also appeared as an attractive avenue through which regional leaders could, if they played their cards right, advance their clients into the Duma. Thus, to a greater extent than any party of power before it, United Russia's party lists were populated with the representatives of regional leaders. Twenty-nine regional leaders also agreed to have their names listed on United Russia's party list and, by December 2003, 17 governors had joined the party's Higher Council.

---

[27] This was clearly the case in Bashkortorstan and Mordovia.

[28] The position was also renamed, becoming the "Secretary of the Political Council."

[29] The KPRF remained larger by membership.

At the Third Party Congress in September, Putin delivered an address reaffirming his support for United Russia. In December, the party's rating sat at 31%, higher than any party of power in post-Soviet history. In the election, the party received 37.5% of the party list vote and won 103 (45%) of the SMD seats (223 seats in total), the best ever electoral performance by a post-Soviet party of power.

When the new Duma convened, a further 55 deputies joined the United Russia faction bringing the total to 298. By the end of January 2004, the faction had grown to 310, a two-thirds majority. Gryzlov was named faction leader and speaker of the Duma. The party expanded the number of committees in parliament from 16 to 29 and kept for itself all chairmanships. Over the course of the next four years, United Russia served as a stable and loyal voting bloc for the passage of President Putin's legislative initiatives.

On other fronts as well the party continued to grow. As Figure 4.1 shows, governors joined at a gradual pace over this period. By October 2005 more than half of Russia's governors had joined the party, and by November 2007, all but 8 of Russia's governors had joined the party. Between January 2004 and February 2005, 23 gubernatorial elections were held. The party nominated only 4 candidates but endorsed candidates in all races. The party made it a point to endorse the likely winner in almost all cases, losing only 4 contests in which it endorsed a candidate.

[Figure 4.1 Here]

Other regional elites also gradually joined the party over this period. Russian regional legislatures in the early 2000s contained the most prominent social and economic leaders in a given region. The directors of major enterprises and collective farms, local state-run television anchors, rectors of universities, and heads of local hospitals could all be found in an average regional legislature. Thus, regional legislatures provide a useful window into the political affiliations of Russia's economic and social elite.

After mid-2003, all regional legislatures were required by federal law to elect at least half their deputies on the basis of party lists. This reform helped United Russia (and all other parties) achieve higher levels of penetration in regional legislatures. As Figure 4.2 shows, the party's regional performance in the latter half of 2003 was much improved over its previous years, when it rarely managed to win any more than a handful of SMD seats.

[Figure 4.2 Here]

Nonetheless, as the argument in this book would predict, the party continued to face challenges in attracting single member district deputies who commanded independent electoral resources (see Figure 4.3). Between 2003 and 2005, the party was winning, on average, only about half the SMD seats in regional legislatures. In this period independents won, on average, over 37% of all SMD seats, and despite the inherent disproportionality that favors large parties in majoritarian electoral contests, the party often won more seats on party lists than it did in single member districts in the mid-2000s.

As the decade wore on, however, more and more single member deputies sought affiliation with the dominant party, and by the end of the decade the party was consistently winning more than 80% of SMD seats.[30] The share of independents winning seats in SMD contests plummeted and remained, on average, below 5% in each of the years after 2009. Capitalizing on disproportionality, UR's performance in those contests began to outstrip its performance on the party list. Between 2006 and 2014, UR consistently won majorities and usually supermajorities in almost all regional legislative elections. By 2010, the party controlled majorities in 82 of 83 regional legislatures and supermajorities in 68.

[Table 4.1 Here]

The orientation of Russia's national business elite toward United Russia is more difficult to assess. On the one hand, big business eagerly funded United Russia's campaign in 2003 and continued to fund the party's activities thereafter. In return, representatives of Russia's largest enterprises (e.g. Sibneft, Yukos, Lukoil, Severstal, Gazprom, Renovo, Norilsk Nikel, Basovyi

---

[30] The early-mid 2000s was also a period when UR factions were created in regional legislatures and many previously independent deputies were joining those factions. Thus, many regional legislatures acquired UR majorities several years before elections were held under the new electoral system.

Element, etc) received Duma seats on United Russia's party list. Moreover, several of Russia's most politically active tycoons, including Russian Railways President Vladimir Yakunin, RosOboronExport Chief Viktor Chemezov, VTB Bank President Andrei Kostin, and prominent investor Suleiman Kerimov joined the party between 2003 and 2006.[31] The party's higher council frequently features the Vice Presidents of major Russian corporations and the president of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Russia's largest business lobbying group, took a seat on the Presidium of the General Council in 2008. United Russia frequently 'taps' business to fund its special party projects or recruits business leaders to serve as special party emissaries in exchange for seats in the Duma.[32] On the other hand, many in the upper echelons of big business (figures such as Roman Abramovich, Viktor Vekselberg, Alexei Miller, Oleg Deripaska) have eschewed public involvement in dominant party politics.

At the local level, the party initially had difficulty making inroads, but in the mid-2000s it became dominant there as well. Between 2004 and 2007, the mayors of most of Russia's large cities joined the party.[33] By 2011, 87% were members.[34]

At lower levels of local self-government (city, local, and district councils and municipal district heads) the party began making inroads after 2004 when the party leadership instructed regional branches to step up efforts to increase the party's penetration in local government.[35] Local administration heads are key vote brokers in the Russian countryside, so coopting them was a priority for the party. By September 2007, 51.6% of Russia's 12,369 municipal regions, city districts, city settlements, and rural settlements were headed by a UR party member. In elections held in fall of 2010, the party won 68% of elections for municipal district heads.

---

[31] "Partiya Vlasti Podtyanula biznes-resursy" *Kommersant.* 27 November 2006.

[32] '"Partiya Vlasti' Torguyet Mestami" *Novaya Politika* 16 October 2006. http://www.novopol.ru/--partiya-vlasti-torguet-mestami-text12342.html

[33] See for example "Edinaya Rossiya goroda beryot" *Kommersant* 25 December 2006.

[34] In 2007, 53% of elected mayors and 88% of appointed mayors were UR members. These and other data on the party affiliation of elites presented in this chapter come from the *Database of Russian Political Elites*, a database of elite biographies and career tenures compiled by the author.

[35] Author's interview with, Andrei Rusakov, deputy head of United Russia's Central Executive Committee in Sverdlovsk Oblast' July 3 2007.

And while nationwide figures are not available, reports and interviews with United Russia officials in the regions indicate that regional party branches expended significant effort between 2004 and 2007 on establishing party majorities in Russia's previously non-partisan municipal and local councils.[36] As Table 4.3 shows, this effort paid off. By 2011, the party held majorities in 92% of the city councils in Russia's large cities and in elections held in October 2010, the party captured 72% of the seats in local councils.[37] The party's penetration of local self-government is particularly striking given the organizational resources required to recruit and field candidates in the tens of thousands of elections that take place during each election cycle.

The party has also made significant inroads into other segments of Russian society. Although figures are not available, reports indicate that the rectors of most major universities are party members and use their positions to drum up votes during elections.[38] Famous actors, directors, musicians, and athletes have all joined the party and some are even Duma members. State employees and bureaucrats are the modal category among rank and file party members, but party membership is not a requirement for civil service advancement. In many regions, the editors of state-run print media and the directors of local state-run television networks are party members. Directors of prominent enterprises that are not represented in legislatures are usually invited to sit on the regional political council (*politsovet)*, though their influence there is less than it would be if they held seats in the party's legislative faction.

---

[36] By July 2007, the Sverdlovsk regional branch had established factions in 68 of 72 local councils. By July 2009, the Yaroslavl regional branch had established factions in 17 of 21 local councils. Other reports indicate that over half of municipal council deputies were UR members by mid-2007: 'Knut i Pryanika dlya Munitsipala' *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. July 26, 2007.

[37] This data is not readily available for other years. Data for these elections was compiled by United Russia and provided to the author.

[38] At Yaroslavl State University, professors report that the rector met with heads of departments ahead of the presidential election, and while he gave no specific instructions, stressed the importance of the election result to the governor.

However, two important institutions remained mostly non-partisan in the mid-2000s: the government and the presidential administration. In 2007, only three members of the government and only a handful of Vladimir Putin's inner circle were party members. Rather than becoming part of the party, the presidential administration sought to keep its bilateral relationship with the party intact. The only area in which this rule was breached was within the Presidential Administration's Department for Internal Politics, the arm of the presidential administration that deals with all matters relating to parties, interest groups, and elections. From 2002 onward, a permanent staff was assigned to work with United Russia. In 2010, 10 specialists worked in this department. Between this department and United Russia, a bridge of cadres was created such that Department of Internal Politics (DIP) staff frequently transfer over to work in the party and vice versa.[39]

As table 4.2 shows, the share of executive branch officials that were UR members did increase significantly by the end of the decade and several high profile government officials owed their seats to party work. Moreover, no other political parties had representatives in the federal executive branch. Nonetheless, most of the federal executive branch remained non-partisan throughout the 2000s.

At the party's Fifth Congress in November 2004, the party shifted to the organizational structure that it has retained until the present day.[40] The Central Political Council was replaced by the General Council as the primary leadership organ meeting several times between congresses. Within the General Council, a Presidium was created that would meet frequently and serve as the permanent political leadership organ. In place of the old leadership posts, the party created the post of Party Chairman and Secretary of the Presidium. Both offices are charged with directing and leading the work of the General Council and Presidium, though the former also is charged with directing the work of the Higher Council. For its part, the Higher Council was retained as a symbolic institution that meets infrequently and does not participate directly in party decision making.[41] Within the Higher Council, a higher-level star chamber was created at this congress, the Bureau of the Higher Council. This organ contained the most prominent governors from the Higher Council as well as the head of the party executive committee, the Party Chairman, and the Secretary of the Presidium and his deputies.

---

[39] In 2003 and 2004, deputy head of the Department for Internal Politics, Leonid Ivlev, simultaneously held a position as deputy head of the United Russia executive committee. Oleg Govorun, DIP head between 2006 and 2011, was also a party member.

[40] This discussion of personnel changes and intra-party intrigue draws on Ivanov (2008, 186-211)

Gryzlov was chosen as party chairman and Valery Bogomolov, Vice Chairman of United Russia's Duma faction, was chosen as Secretary of the Presidium. Given his position as Duma Speaker, his keynote addresses at the party congress, and his post as head of the Higher Council, Gryzlov was clearly first among equals in this setup. In the spring of 2005, Bogomolov resigned. and was replaced by Vyacheslav Volodin, vice speaker of the Duma and former OVR deputy from Saratov, as the new Secretary of the Presidium.

The party's organizational reach expanded rapidly in the mid-2000s. By 2007, it had 83 regional branches, 2,547 local branches (28 local branches per regional branch, on average) and 53,740 primary cells. Regional branches consist of a Political Council (*politsovet*) that contains a region's most prominent economic and political figures, a Presidium within that *politsovet* that meets monthly, and a regional executive committee that serves as the permanent organizational arm of the regional branch. The regional executive committee is staffed by anywhere from 10 to 100 employees. The Secretary of the *Politsovet* (who is always simultaneously the Secretary of the Presidium) is the leading party figure in the region. These positions are not full-time positions, however. Most regional secretaries are the speakers or vice speakers of regional legislatures, though some are also Duma deputies from the region, vice governors, or governors themselves.

---

[41] At the 2005 party congress, the party changed its charter so that Higher Council candidates were required to have been members of the party for more than one year in order to be considered for membership.

[Figure 4.4 Here]

Local branches consist on average of 687 members, though branches tend not to be distributed evenly across the population, but, rather, are established to correspond to administrative divisions. So, large cities often have a single local branch while some rural branches correspond to an administrative division that contains only a few thousand people. Like the regional branch, the leading political organ of the local branch is the *Politsovet* and its Presidium, which are headed by a Secretary (usually a mayor, collective farm director, or local administration head). Local branches, as a rule, are staffed with at least two or three permanent employees though the largest local branches can have up to 20 permanent employees. The local branch executive committees play an important role in making sure that local enterprises and interest groups support the party in elections and with a dependable stream of funding. The head of the local executive committee offers the carrots (access to municipal contracts, preferential utility rates) and sticks (threats of license revocation and utility disruption) that induce local businesses and elements of civil society to cooperate with the party. Although the executive committee head almost never has personal resources of his/her own (these officials are either hired hands from the regional capital or local civil servants), he/she can speak for the Secretary of the *Politsovet* and call upon the authority of that position. The same type of arm-twisting and cooptation goes on at the regional level as well, but in most regions, it is much more overt at the local level (especially in small and medium sized towns and rural areas).[42]

United Russia's primary party cells average 33 members per cell. Each primary cell is headed by a secretary, who is a not a full-time employee. Rather these are the party's activists. They are overwhelmingly public sector employees. Many are neighborhood opinion leaders—school principals, hospital directors, or factory production line supervisors—who have access to public meeting spaces. A majority are female.[43]

Whereas in the past the approval rating of regime parties had fallen after election campaigns (when administrative resources were not being deployed to drum up support), United Russia's rating only grew after the 2003 elections. According to the Levada Center, in March 2004, 33% of likely voters were prepared to vote for the party. By December 2006, that figure had grown to 55%. The party's membership also climbed precipitously from 400,000 members in 2003 to 1.25 million in early 2007 to 1.75 million at the end of 2007. By 2014, it had 2.1 million members.

Putin continued to voice his support for the party in the inter-election period. His most significant signal of support came in fall 2007, when he announced that he would head the federal component of United Russia's party list. With Putin's announcement, the party's election campaign became highly personalized around his image and a platform called "Putin's Plan," a vague, non-ideological manifesto. At the same time, however, the party also emphasized clientelist appeals in its election campaign, billing itself as the *partiya realnykh del (the party of real deeds.)* The party attached its brand to tens of billions of dollars in public works and social spending—the so-called National Projects—funded by oil revenues. It also secured billions of dollars in budgetary funds for its own so-called 'party projects' which were managed directly by the party.

---

[42] This discussion was heavily informed by a series of interviews I conducted with local United Russia executive committee officials in Tutaev,Yaroslavl Oblast (February 2010) and Berezniki, Perm Krai (July 2008).

[43] I only have data on this for the Berezniki local branch where 22 of 25 primary party cells are headed by women, of which 14 are the directors of local schools. But my interviews with party officials in Yaroslavl Oblast and Kurgan Oblast tell me that this pattern of gender and occupational background is also evident in those oblasts.

The other great resource for the party in the 2007 campaign was the support of regional governors, almost all of which were now members. In contrast to previous Russian elections, almost all of Russia's governors put their machines to work for a single party. This, combined with Putin's popularity and lavish patronage spending, gave United Russia a landslide victory. On election day, the party raked in 64.2% of the vote, which translated into 310 mandates in the State Duma.[44] After the election, United Russia endorsed the candidacy of Putin's hand-picked successor to the presidency, Dmitry Medvedev, who subsequently won a landslide victory in the March presidential elections. Putin became prime minister under Medvedev and in April 2008, Putin accepted United Russia's invitation to become party chairman, though he did not become a party member.[45] Vladislav Surkov, United Russia's long-time advocate and coordinator in the Kremlin, stayed on in the presidential administration, but over time, the party began to coordinate its actions less with the Presidential Administration and more with the government and Prime Minister Putin's office. Between 2008 and 2012, Putin met with party leaders monthly and organized all official meetings between the Kremlin and United Russia leaders.[46] Putin's Chief of Staff, Sergei Sobyanin, handled relations with United Russia for Putin, and the party leadership's biweekly meeting with Surkov was replaced by biweekly meetings with Sobyanin.[47] This process was gradual and incomplete, however. The Presidential Administration retained a staff whose sole task was coordinating with United Russia, and reports indicate that Surkov retained significant influence on relations between the executive branch and UR. After Putin's return to the presidency in March 2012, responsibility for coordinating with UR remained divided between the government and presidential administration. Medvedev, as Putin's prime minister, formally joined United Russia and became party chairman. At the same time, in the presidential administration, Vyacheslav Volodin, who was named as First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration in December 2011 and Oleg Morozov, the new head of the DIP, became the primary points of contact for the party in the presidential administration.

---

[44] For the 2007 elections, the single member district portion of the electoral system had been removed and all deputies were elected on party lists.

[45] Gryzlov was demoted to Higher Council Chairman.

[46] "Vladimir Putin vzyal partiyu v svoi ruki" *Kommersant.* 5 June 2008.

[47] See for example "Uravnenie s dvumya izvesnymi" *Russkii Newsweek.* 31 May, 2010.

In sum, compared to previous party of power projects, United Russia was a much more robust ruling party. It consistently won elections at all levels, had an extensive organizational structure, and penetrated politics at the national, regional, and local levels. Although the party did not exercise direct collective control over the federal executive branch, it controlled legislatures at all levels and was the primary vehicle facilitating the consolidation of regional and local elites. As the next chapter explores in more detail, the party became an important forum for the distribution of rents, spoils, policy influence, and career advancement. Unlike previous party of power projects, strict party discipline was imposed. As an institutional tool for distributing careers and spoils, the party became an effective tool of cooptation for the Kremlin and helped reduce uncertainty among elites about how these goods would be disbursed. In short, United Russia became a dominant party. The next section explores why the Kremlin, on the one hand, and elites on the other made the investments that led to United Russia's emergence as a dominant party.

### *The Kremlin and United Russia*

Putin and his advisors in the Presidential Administration have exhibited a higher level of commitment to United Russia than the Kremlin had to any other party of power in post-Soviet history. But their commitments came gradually, in response both to increases in the Kremlin's own strength vis-à-vis elites and the Kremlin's perception of elites' level of commitment to the party.

By 2002, commodity prices had risen several times over from their all-time lows in 1998. And as Figure 4.5 shows, the economy was growing as well.

[Figure 4.5 Here]

Though inflation was high, incomes were expanding at a breakneck pace over the period from 1999 to 2002. At the end of 2001, Putin's popularity rating exceeded 80 percent, the highest rating for a Russian leader since Yeltsin in 1990. Putin wasted no time in spending part of this political capital. In 2000, Putin pushed through legislation eliminating the governors' (and regional parliamentary speakers') ex officio seats in the Federation Council. Henceforth, governors and regional parliaments would appoint senators to sit in the chamber. The reforms also divided the federation into seven districts, each headed by a federal appointee, whose was charged with coordinating federal agencies in the district and working with governors there. The reforms were also accompanied by an invigorated effort to force regional governments to bring their legal acts into compliance with the federal law.

The balance of resources between center and regions had begun to change and this allowed for formal changes to be made that reflected the new balance.[48] But the autonomous resources that regional leaders continued to wield meant that Putin's efforts to recentralize authority were still limited. Regional elites continued to be purveyors of stability and political authority in their regions and localities (e.g. Turovsky 2002, Hale 2003, and Goode 2007). Putin could undermine any single regional elite actor, but he still would need the collective support of these actors to govern Russia cost-effectively. The Kremlin learned this lesson in 1999 and again in 2002 when United Russia failed to make much headway at undermining regional governors.

---

[48] As noted in Chapter 2, the powers of leaders and elites are often endogenous to one another. In Russia in the early 2000s, however, it is clear that rising world oil prices produced were exogenous and contributed to several

So, the Kremlin would need to work with regional elites somehow. The only question was whether they were still strong enough that coopting them into a dominant party would be dangerous or a waste of the Kremlin's resources. The Kremlin decided that it could afford to risk some commitments, but not yet others. So, Putin spoke at the founding congress, the first time a Russian president had spoken at a party congress, and let it become public knowledge that he approved of the merger between Unity and OVR. Thus, Putin devoted some of his personal resources to the party by attaching, if only partially, his name and reputation to it. Moreover, his top political advisor, Vladislav Surkov, made it public knowledge that the Kremlin was interested in exploring ways to make the political system more stable and less dependent on Putin. At a 2002 gathering of United Russia leaders and sympathetic governors, he said: "We need to look to 2008; we will survive until then somehow…The president may leave (we will not stop him) and then what will happen? Some extreme left or extreme right president may come to power… We could make a mistake and not win. We can't just be on artificial respiration and an

---

other changes that shifted the balance of resources, including renewed economic growth, improved state capacity, and Putin's rising popularity. Each of these factors also had some exogenous determinants of their own. Economic growth in 1999 and 2000 was partially the result of a rebound from the 1998 financial crisis. Putin's popularity meanwhile was determined by economic growth as well as idiosyncratic factors relating to his personality and governing style (Treisman 2011, Hale and Colton 2009)

I.V. all the time."[49] Finally, the Kremlin also sanctioned new legislation that elevated the role of political parties in elections. These reforms—which effectively banned regional and small parties, made it easier for party nominees to register, and mandated that at least half of the seats in regional legislatures be elected on party lists—reduced (but did not entirely eliminate) the ability of both the Kremlin and regional elites to diversify their electoral strategy across multiple small parties and independent candidates.[50]

But in the period from 2001-2003, Putin was hesitant to make other commitments. At the founding congress, Putin asked delegates not to think of the new party as a 'party of power.'[51] He rejected United Russia's public proposal to form the new government on the basis of the parliamentary majority. The Kremlin also placed its eggs in multiple baskets in gubernatorial elections, tacitly supporting non-UR candidates in several races (Hale 2004). Moreover, the Kremlin did not immediately push for the creation of a single majority faction in the Duma that would be the analog of the newly formed political party outside the Duma. Instead, it allowed the separate factions to persist and continued to bargain with each of them in order to pass legislation (see Remington 2006)

The Kremlin was thinking not just of its own preferences, but also of how elites, especially governors, might relate to a new ruling party. When asked why the presidential administration did not push more governors to become party members in 2002 and 2003, a top official in the Kremlin's Department of Internal Politics, responded simply that the Kremlin had to take into account the "political will of governors" and their desire to "survive in politics," and did not think that it could force governors to join the party.[52] Similarly, Sergei Popov, head of Unity's central executive committee in 2000-2001, stated with that he feared that powerful Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov "would not want to participate any party project [because] he had his own political strength. [53]" Thus, in 2001 and 2002 the party leadership harbored no illusions about its ability to secure the commitments of Russia's governors and did not attempt to force their hand.

---

[49] Quoted in "Odinokii Paravoz" *Ekspert.* 25 February 2002.

[50] For more on these reforms see Wilson (2006).

[51] See official stenogram at http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/news/2001/12/38100.shtml. Accessed June 14, 2014.

And even if they could get governors to join the party, the Kremlin feared that it might not be able to control them. In a 2000 interview, Surkov expressed frustration at the fact that most of Unity's regional branches had been captured by governors.[54] Indeed, advisors close to the source claim that Surkov was hesitant to allow the newly formed Unity-OVR bloc to acquire a constitutional majority in the Duma, for fear of the fact that the "monster" would be difficult to control (Ivanov 2008, 136).

The Kremlin was uncertain of whether regional elites would be able remain loyal and not use the party to challenge the Kremlin. Given the manifest inability of SMD deputies to vote cohesively with their factions in the Fourth Duma (Remington 2006) and the shifting factionalism that characterized most regional legislatures, the Kremlin had good reason to doubt the ability of elites to remain loyal to one party.

And as it turned out, the Kremlin's fears that that the party might be captured by powerful elites and become difficult to control do not appear baseless. For example, at the party's Sixth Congress in 2005 in Krasynoarysk, party leaders, led by Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov, harshly criticized the government's implementation of an unpopular new law on the monetization of social benefits.[55] And in the early and mid-2000s, party leaders periodically warned about the danger that the regional branches of UR were being captured by powerful regional elites. As General Council Secretary Valery Bogomolov put it in early 2004, "oligarchs who can no longer bribe Duma deputies are moving out to the provinces and influencing local party organizations. It is important to us to build a system where leaders of regional party branches are subordinated only to the central party leadership and not to local business elites."[56]

---

[52] Author's anonymous interview with former official in the Presidential Administration's Department for Internal Politics, June 1, 2010.

[53] Author's interview with Sergei Popov, 8 June 2012.

[54] "Tak vot, ya vam govoryu: demkratia neischerpaema," *Kommersant-Vlast.* July 18, 2000.

This fear of not being able to control a party that contained powerful elites clearly motivated the Kremlin to resist United Russia's repeated calls to form the government on a partisan basis. Soon after its victory in the 2003 Duma elections, United Russia leaders began making public statements to this effect, but the Kremlin was and has been unwilling to make such an investment in a dominant party. In a 2006 press conference, Putin unequivocally voiced his opposition to a bill allowing the majority party in the Duma to name the government, calling such a law 'irresponsible.' Putin added, "It is my deep conviction that in the post-Soviet space, in the conditions of a developing economy, strengthening state capacity, and the definitive realization of federal principals, *we need firm presidential authority*."[57] Nonetheless, United Russia leaders have continued to state their desire to attain more influence in the government. Vyacheslav Volodin, then secretary of UR's presidium, described the formation of a party government as one of United Russia's 'main objectives.'[58] Another vocal advocate of a party government was Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimyev, who repeatedly called for United

---

[55] See Makarkin, Aleksei and Tat'yana Stanova. "Edinaya Rossii: Ot partii vlasti k pravyashei partii" Politcom.ru. 28 November 2005. http://www.politcom.ru/article.php?id=1664

[56] "Power to the Powerful. United Russia's Success Will Depend on Effectiveness and Popularity of Its Leaders" *Rossiskaya Gazeta* 10 August 2006 (Translated on Johnson's Russia List, August 11, 2006)

[57] "Edinaya Rossiya utochnyaet presidenta" Nezavisimaya Gazeta 2 March, 2006.

[58] Ibid.

Russia to 'fulfill its duty as a party' and create a party-government.[59] After Putin became party chairman and prime minister in early 2008, United Russia leaders made it known to the press that they expected the new government to be composed of United Russia members.[60] Putin, clearly did not agree, however, and the Russian government remained largely non-partisan.

As the 2003 Duma elections approached, however, the balance of resources continued to shift in favor of the Kremlin. Economic growth remained strong, oil prices continued to rise, central state capacity was improving, and Putin's personal popularity was near an all-time high. As the relative position of regional elites weakened, the Kremlin increasingly calculated that they would be able to secure the commitments of elites. At the same time, as the 1999 elections had demonstrated and regional campaigns in 2001 and 2002 continued to prove, the political machines of regional elites were crucial drivers of the vote, so the Kremlin needed to work with regional elites. In exchange for supporting the party, governors were given the chance to have their clients placed on United Russia's party list and have them elected in SMD races (see for instance, Petrov 2003, Hale 2004a, Slider 2006).

Breaking with the past, the Kremlin made overt commitments to United Russia in the run-up to the 2003 campaign. Most notably, the Kremlin set as its task not just to get loyalists elected to the Duma, but to have them elected under United Russia's banner. The Kremlin did give its assent to the launch of several smaller parties—Motherland, the Party of Life, People's Party—but as 2003 wore on, it became increasingly clear that United Russia would be the Kremlin's primary vehicle. And indeed, Putin addressed the party's preelection congress, pledging his full support for the party.

---

[59] "Pravitelstvo i partiya ediny?" Novaya Politika. www.novopol.ru 24 January 2007.

[60] "Partiinoye pravitelstvo obkatayut k 2010 godu" *Kommersant.* 16 April 2008.

After the elections, the Kremlin's position vis-à-vis regional elites continued to strengthen. Commodity prices were climbing at an even faster rate than in the early 2000s, reaching historical highs by 2007. Taxes and export duties from the sale of commodities swelled the federal budget and allowed for the creation of massive social spending programs, the National Projects. This concentration of resources in the hands of the government gave regional elites even more reason to develop good relations with Moscow. Moreover, the improved fiscal position of the federal government strengthened central state capacity. As Moscow became better at collecting taxes, paying salaries, providing social services, and enforcing laws, regional elites began to lose some of the informal influence they had accrued in the 1990s.

Due in large part to persistently highly commodity prices, the Russian economy continued to grow apace. From 2003 until 2008, the Russian economy grew at an average rate of 7% per year, an even faster rate than in the early 2000s. Whether this was enough make Putin popular--according to the Levada Center, 87% of Russians approved of Putin's work as President in August 2006--or whether his own personal characteristics added percentage points to his popularity rating is not important for our purposes; the bottom line is that Putin was a wildly popular politician, who sat atop a massive central state apparatus that was flush with oil revenues.

Putin capitalized on these advantages. In September 2004, a terrorist hostage taking at a primary school in North Ossetia left hundreds dead. Following the tragedy, Putin announced the need for more centralized control over regional affairs and proposed canceling gubernatorial elections. The legislation was passed in the Duma, and the President was given the authority to appoint Russia's governors henceforth.[61] By depriving governors of their electoral bases, Putin removed one of their most significant autonomous resources. Another important, but underappreciated centralizing reform of this era was the reform which removed most of the regions' rights to determine how to use natural resources extracted from the substrate. The Kremlin's preferences for such changes had been constant since the mid-1990s, but these reforms could not be passed when regional elites were so strong. The shift in the balance of resources away from regional elites made these changes possible. In this way, the institutional changes that redistributed power between center and regions can be seen as a reflection of the change in the balance of resources, rather than a cause of it.

With all these resources concentrated in its hands, it is perhaps surprising that the Kremlin continued to invest in a ruling party. Some existing accounts predict that the Kremlin would eschew party-building when it was so strong vis-à-vis the weakening the communist opposition. But in fact, the Kremlin stepped up its commitments to United Russia after 2003. Why? The answers lies in the strength of regional elites and the Kremlin's need to coopt them. Regional elites had weakened to the point that they were more willing to make investments in a dominant party, but they were not so weak that the Kremlin did not need to work with them in order to win elections, pass legislation, and maintain social quiescence. Even after the cancellation of direct gubernatorial elections, regional elites remained essential for mobilizing votes. The Kremlin learned this the hard way in fall 2004 and spring 2005 when United Russia suffered several electoral defeats in regional elections (see Figure 4.2), brought about chiefly by elite factionalism and lack of dependable governor support. In the 10 regions where governors were UR members, the party managed to collect 57% of seats, but in those 24 regions where governors were not UR members, the party managed to win only 41% of seats.

---

[61] More concretely, the President presented his choice to the regional legislature which then confirmed the choice. If the regional legislature rejected the President's candidate, the President proposed another candidate. If the legislature rejected the second candidate, the President could disband the regional legislature and call new elections.

Supplanting elites' political machines would be politically costly, because few alternative mechanisms for exercising social control existed. Those at the top of these clientelist networks were politically indispensable. Removing them could lead to the dissipation of their clienteles, and so too, the regime's ability to mobilize votes. Thus, it was more cost-effective to coopt and govern through these political machines, and this is exactly what the Kremlin did. In the first two years of the appointment era, Putin replaced only 13 of Russia's 89 governors, leaving in office scores of independent and even moderately oppositional governors. Even as late as January 2009, only 34 of Russia's elected governors had been replaced. Governors with the strongest political machines were much less likely to be replaced, especially in the first three years after the reform (Reuter and Robertson 2012).[62] In fact, some have suggested that Russia's strongest governors were resigned to the reform because they could then be reappointed and avoid looming term limits (Goode 2007, Titkov 2007). In turn, as I discuss in Chapter 5, United Russia won more votes over the course of the 2000s in those regions where governors with strong political machines supported it (see also Reuter 2013 and Golosov 2011). And, as several studies have shown, the Kremlin evaluated governors on their ability to mobilize votes for the ruling party such that governors who were successful at mobilizing voters for United Russia were more likely to be reappointed (Turovsky 2009, Reuter and Robertson 2012, Moraski and Reisinger 2013). Thus, rather than firing them en masse, the Kremlin decided to coopt Russia's governors and enlist them in the task of mobilizing support for a dominant party.

---

[62] And when strong governors were dismissed, they were often replaced with clients from within their own regional administrations (see Buckley et al 2014).

Thus, Russia's elites were strong enough that they needed to be coopted, but not so strong that they would be prone to shirk their commitments to the ruling party. As it became increasing clear that elites could make such commitments, the Kremlin stepped up its own investments in the party. After the 2003 elections, the Kremlin did not equivocate in its support for the party of power as had become customary for the Kremlin to do. In a February 2006 speech before United Russia leaders, Surkov, suggested that UR could "dominate the political system for at least the next 10-15 years."[63] In a July 2006 speech, Surkov informed activists from another pro-Kremlin party, Just Russia, that the political system would be "built around United Russia" for the foreseeable future.[64] In 2007, Putin made an unprecedented signal of his willingness to invest in a regime party by agreeing to head the United Russia party list. Putin associated himself even more closely with UR at the party's Ninth Congress in 2008 when he agreed to become Party Chairman. As Prime Minister, Putin attended every party congress—including a series of policy-based mini-congresses between 2009 and 2011--and met frequently in public with party leaders.[65]

In its relations with the Duma, the presidential administration clearly privileged United Russia over other parties (Remington 2008, Tolstykh 2008). The President's representative to the Duma attended United Russia's faction meetings, which became the primary means of lobbying in the Duma (Tolstykh 2008). By working closely with UR in the Duma, the Kremlin sent a signal to elites about how access to legislative pork, rents, and policy would be determined.

---

[63] Accessed on United Russia website http://www.edinros.ru/news.html?id=111148 March 21, 2007.

[64] Accessed on United Russia website http://www.edinros.ru/news.html?id=114850 March 21, 2007

[65] See, for example, "Edinaya Rossiya Prishla k svoemu lideru" *Kommersant.* 9 June 2009 and "V polukruge pervom" *Kommersant.* 10 April 2010.

In the years following the 2003 elections, the Kremlin also sanctioned party-building institutional changes that both strengthened United Russia's position and demonstrated the regime's commitment to investing in a dominant party. First, the electoral law for the State Duma elections was changed to a fully proportional system in which all deputies would be elected on closed party lists. Although United Russia was projected to do well in SMD races—and disproportionality in first-past the post contests inherently favors large parties—the Kremlin loathed spending time and resources on coordinating candidates in SMD races. Thus, as Regina Smyth and her colleagues have astutely observed, the Kremlin "traded seats for certainty" (Smyth et al 2007). New legislation also increased the barrier for gaining seats from 5 to 7%. Simultaneously, the Kremlin encouraged regional legislatures to increase their electoral thresholds for the party list component to a minimum of 7%. With most regional legislatures dominated by United Russia, the regional assemblies needed little active encouragement. All regional elections held after December 2005 occurred in regions that had raised the barrier to at least 7%, while some such as Moscow City had raised it to as high as 10%.

Several other electoral reforms in the mid-2000s further strengthened UR at the expense of smaller parties. New legislation adopted in 2005 also mandated that all regional and municipal elections be held on one of two specially designated "United Election Days," one in the fall and one in the spring.[66] This allowed United Russia to take advantage of economies of scale in the coordination of its electoral campaigns. Electoral blocs were banned from participating in regional elections. This removed the governors' final method of creating their own regional organizations to contest elections.[67] Finally, members of one party were prohibited from serving on the party lists of another party. This meant that United Russia members could not simultaneously run on the party list of another party without first renouncing their membership.

---

[66] In 2011, the number of unified election days was reduced to one per year.

[67] In seven of the ten elections in the second half of 2004 regional electoral blocs gained seats in the assembly. In the first half of 2005, regional electoral blocs won seats in five of seven assembly elections and in Sakhalin, a regional bloc won the election.

A further party-building reform adopted in 2005 was the introduction of an imperative mandate rule to be effective after the 2007 elections. Under the imperative mandate rule, deputies are prohibited from changing their faction affiliations once they take their seat in the Duma. This reform was later applied to regional legislatures as well.

By implementing these changes the Kremlin sought to cultivate a single dominant party that could win elections and reduce the costs associated with identifying, coordinating, and channeling resources to pro-regime candidates. Simultaneously, it made it harder, at least in the short term, for the Kremlin to renege on its investments in UR by supporting independents or multiple parties.

The Kremlin's increasing willingness to commit to United Russia was also demonstrated by its cadre politics in the mid-late 2000s. As Figure 4.6 shows, after 2006, most newly appointed governors were United Russia members.[68]

[Figure 4.6 Here]

In March 2009, legislation was passed that gave the party with the majority in a regional legislature the responsibility of drawing up a list of three candidates for the President to select from when nominating a governor.[69] This reform sent a clear signal to governors and potential governors that party loyalty was an important criterion for promotion. Although they might have preferred to be directly elected, their consolation prize was that they were now more certain about what it would take to secure promotion.

---

[68] In 2005 and 2006, the Kremlin was forced to coopt many strong, independent governors and, thus, reappointed many non-UR incumbents. I treat the elections held in 2012 and 2013 as appointments because even in the new era of Russian gubernatorial elections, the President retains the right to dismiss sitting governors and appoint interim governors. As recent history has shown, the President uses this prerogative to anoint the regime's preferred candidate, who invariably wins the election.

*Elites and United Russia*

As described in the previous section, the balance of resources between center and regions had begun to shift in favor of Moscow after 1999. This shift made cooperation with the center more attractive to elites. As a result, they grew more inclined to make some tentative commitments to a ruling party project. The first step in this direction was the formal merger of OVR with Unity in December 2001 and the decision of several prominent governors—i.e. Luzhkov, Shaimiev, Rakhimov, Merkushkin, Sobyanin—to allow their names to be associated with the new party. Several governors also allowed their clients to join newly formed United Russia factions in regional legislatures.

But much like the Kremlin, elites were at first hesitant to relinquish their autonomy and invest in United Russia.[70] Their first instinct was to retain their own political machines and make only superficial commitments to United Russia. Few governors joined the party between 2001 and 2003, and those who did often did so in a limited way—for example by joining the Higher Council which did not require formal membership. In regional legislative elections, the party made little progress. UR found it difficult to attract independent candidates and by March 2003, the party had a majority in only 6 regional legislatures. It still held less than 20% of seats in 39 legislatures. Many governors remained overtly opposed to the party and ran their own regional parties or slates of candidates against the party.[71]

---

[69] The reform had been proposed four years earlier. "Strana Sovetov Edinoi Rossii" *Gazeta.ru* 3 October 2005. United Russia first implemented this procedure in October 2006, when the party nominated Aslan Tkhakushinov to the post of President of the Republic of Adygea. Presidential envoy Dmitrii Kozak consulted with the Federal Presidium of United Russia as well as party leaders in Adygea. President Putin then proposed Tkhakushinov who was confirmed by the regional assembly. "Edinaya Rossiya odobrila vybor Dmitry Kozaka" *Kommersant* 11 October 2006.

[70] See "Edinaya Rossiya trebuyet ot Putina opredelennosti" Nezavisimaya Gazeta. 2 July 2003.

When regional elites did make promises to the new party of power, they often had a hard time keeping them. For example, Kemerovo Governor Aman Tuleev was a member of the party's higher council in 2003 and on United Russia's party list for the December 2003 elections, but he ran his own list of candidates, Sluzhu Kuzbassu (I Serve the Kuzbass), in the oblast regional election that same year. Several governors made a point to qualify their support for United Russia in the 2003 Duma election by noting that their future support was contingent on the party's future development (Slider 2006). Often governors who were members of United Russia demonstrated the shallowness of their commitment by using their administrative resources against the party even while they were formally affiliated with it. In the 2004 regional elections in Yaroslavl Oblast, the region's governor Anatoly Lysytsin, who was by that time a party member, entered into a conflict with the head of the regional branch of United Russia and, allegedly, used administrative resources against the party in those elections. The party failed to win a majority of seats.[72] In other regions, governors joined the party, but tried to keep their decision a secret.[73]

On policy debates, some party members had a hard time containing their criticism of government policy. For example, at the party's 2005 congress, held in the aftermath of controversial reforms that replaced a series of in-kind benefits to pensioners with monetary payments, tensions boiled over when Luzhkov gave a fiery speech criticizing the government for the reforms.[74]

---

[71] A prominent example was Eduard Rossel who was highly critical of Putin's centralizing reforms in the early 2000s and whose "For Our Native Ural" party beat United Russia in the regions's 2002 legislative elections.

[72] Author's interview with Alexander Prokhorov, head of United Russia's Regional Executive Committee in 2004 June 11, 2009, Yaroslavl.

[73] "Kurskii Gubernator Taino Vstupil v Edinuyu Rossiyu" *Kommersant.* 13 March 2005.

Thus, in the early 2000s, many elites avoided affiliation with the party, while others made limited commitments. Regional elites were at first reluctant to invest in a dominant party because their independent resources were still significant. These resources afforded them the opportunity to achieve many of their political goals without relying on the Kremlin. Entering the cooperative bargain with the Kremlin was attractive, but still not yet attractive enough that elites were willing to relinquish their hard-earned autonomous resources. However, as noted above, a surge in oil revenues, strong economic growth, and Putin's persistently high popularity rating were leading to a shift in the balance of resources away from the regions and toward Moscow. In turn, the Kremlin was using its new-found resources to reduce the autonomy of elites. As this balance of resources shifted, cooperation with the Kremlin became increasingly necessary in order to gain access to rents, policy, and career advancement. Thus, the incentives for elites to cooperate with the Kremlin grew over the course of the early-mid 2000s. And as a result, more and more elites found it in their best interest to seek cooperation with the Kremlin and make commitments to the emergent ruling party. Thus, after 2002 an increasing number of political elites began joining United Russia and serving in its leadership organs. Figure 4.1 shows this dynamic for governors. Similar dynamics were observed for regional legislators—by 2006, UR had majorities in 76 regional legislatures, up from just 6 in 2003—mayors, local legislators, and businessmen. This trend persisted through the mid-2000s as the Kremlin continued to strengthen vis-à-vis elites.

---

[74] For a good account of the debates between party and government leaders at this congress see "Edinaya Rossiya: ot partii vlasti k pravyashei partii" Politkom.ru. Center for Political Technologies. 28 November 2005. Accessed online http://www.politcom.ru/1664.html 20 June 2014.

That elites joined because of calculations about their own autonomy and resources is demonstrated by several pieces of qualitative and quantitative evidence. As discussed above, United Russia initially performed better in the party list component of regional elections. Prominent single member district deputies with their own autonomous electoral resources eschewed joining the party and often beat United Russia candidates. Further quantitative evidence is presented in Chapters 6 and 7. There I analyze in detail why governors and regional legislators chose to affiliate with United Russia when they did and find that those regional elites strong in autonomous resources postponed joining United Russia for longer than those without. If Putin could have created a dominant party whenever he desired, then it should not be the case that variation in resources determine the order of elites' entry into United Russia.

My interviews with regional legislators in Perm, Yaroslavl, Kurgan, Kirov, Chelyabinsk, Ekaterinburg, and Yoshkar-Ola are consistent with those findings. Deputies were unanimous in professing a desire for retaining as much autonomy as possible. Even those who had joined United Russia quite early and occupied leadership positions in the regional branch lamented centralizing tendencies within the party. Deputies who had joined the party later and, therefore, did not have leadership positions in the regional branch tended to be more concerned about remaining autonomous of the regional party leadership. As the assistant to one deputy in the Perm Krai legislature put it, "people know XXXX in YYYY [the deputy's home town]. He is respected and is authoritative as a manager. He could get elected without any sort of party affiliation. So he only linked up with United Russia at the last minute"[75]

In Chapter 7, I find that the characteristics of the firms that deputies represent help explain when they decided to give up their autonomy to United Russia. Deputies from state dependent enterprises (i.e. state owned, easily taxed, easily harassed, or dependent on government contracts) were more likely to join United Russia. In the interviews I have conducted, most deputies, for obvious reasons, were not upfront about how their firm's dependence on the state influenced their party affiliation decisions. Although, there were some exceptions. One deputy in Yaroslavl explained that when he ran for city council in 2004, he and his investment partners calculated that United Russia affiliation was not necessary because they had already managed to get all the permits for the shopping center they were building.[76] Several other independent SMD deputies who only joined United Russia after being elected maintained that their polling showed that United Russia affiliation would have hurt their chances of winning in their districts. Of course, some deputies thought that being affiliated with Putin's party was a boon to their campaign and so joined the party. On the basis of these interviews, it is hard to sort out who had more personal resources, but the important thing to take away from such responses is that if a candidate believed that he/she could run and win without United Russia, they usually did so.

---

[75] This was an anonymous interview, so the deputy's name and home town are obscured (XXXX and YYYY).

Few interview respondents reported being coerced into joining the party. In an interview with the author, former Samara governor, Konstantin Titov, claimed that he did not feel pressure from the center to join. Instead, he explained his decision to postpone joining in the following way: "I needed to think about the situation.…I needed to see what the results would be. What kind of position it [UR] would take. How it would work. And when I saw that it was going to be something real, then I decided to join."

Moreover, the fact that many governors waited several years to join even after the decision to cancel elections was made in October 2004 indicates that coercion was not the only factor influencing the decision of elites to join. If Putin had the power to force all elites into the party, then it is hard to see why the party would exist: all elites would simply be purged and no resources would be expended on creating a party organization to manage relations with them.

---

[76] Author's anonymous interview March 3, 2010, Yaroslavl.

The perspective that I develop also suggests that elites can reap benefits from party membership. When elites are strong in political resources, these potential benefits are insufficient to induce dominant party affiliation, but as resources shift toward the center, the calculus of elites changes. Evidence from the Putin-era suggests that these benefits existed and that elites considered them when making their affiliation decisions. The next chapter discusses in detail the benefits that United Russia provided to elites, so here I simply preview this discussion and relate these benefits to the affiliation calculus of elites.

To begin with, the Kremlin offered a number of explicit carrots to elites in order to secure their cooperation. In addition to allowing governors to avoid term limits by reappointing them, some have suggested that the centralizing reforms were also accompanied by several concessions to the regions such as regional disbursements of national project funds and allowing regional governments discretion over the implementation of the new law on local self-government (Kynev 2006). Reports also indicated the United Russia directed extra budgetary funds to those regions where governors promised to support United Russia—and only United Russia—in elections.[77]

Governors also valued access to the party brand and, as the 2000s wore on, were increasingly interested in making concessions to gain access to it. One example that grabbed headlines was a deal made between the UR leadership and Sverdlovsk oblast governor Eduard Rossel in 2003. In February of that year, a party delegation traveled to Ekaterinburg to hold negotiations with Rossel, whose "For Our Native Urals" party had just beaten UR handily in regional elections. Following negotiations, the delegation's leader, Duma deputy Vladislav Reznik announced that "an understanding has been reached between the party and the Sverdlovsk governor about mutual support. United Russia asked Eduard Rossel to support its SMD candidates in the upcoming elections. 'And we will support Eduard Rossel if he runs for reelection with the same platform that he has now.' By putting his machine to work for the party, Rossel was able to extract support from the center for reelection.

---

[77] See for example "Gubernatoram vypisyvayut material'nuyu pomoshsch'" *Kommersant.* 18 April 2007.

In exchange for supporting the party, governors were often given the chance to have their clients placed on United Russia's party list. In contrast to 1999, when most governors advanced their clients as independents or through their own party vehicles, they did it also through the UR list in 2003 and almost exclusively through UR in 2007. In the Fourth Duma, 53% of UR deputies were from the regions. In the fifth and sixth Dumas, the shares were 59% and 56% respectively. Thus, despite the centralizing tendencies of the 2000s, United Russia's faction remained mostly composed of deputies lobbying regional interests.

Putin's orientation toward the party also affected the calculations of elites. In interviews, several deputies mentioned their respect for President Putin as a reason for joining. As one early joining deputy in Kurgan put it, "I respect Putin very much….I wanted to be a member of his party and I thought there was a future here."[78] Vyacheslav Volodin, then secretary of the presidium, explained his decision to join the party thusly: "We joined the party because the President united us….After the 1990s, the country needed to be brought together--the territory, elites, all of society. The President did this…Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin is the moral leader of our party and we joined United Russia because this process of unification was occurring around him."[79]

---

[78] Author's interview with Alexander Luzin, leader of United Russia faction in Kurgan Oblast Duma, 24 July 2008.

In the regions, many elites closely followed signals from their governors in deciding whether to join. As one deputy in Chelyabinsk put it, "I have the deepest respect for Sumin [then-governor]. When he had his own party, I was a member. When he went over to United Russia, it was clear what I should do."[80] Thus, when making their affiliation decisions, elites not only considered how the balance of resources was changing or what concessions they could extract from the Kremlin, but also took cues from the Kremlin, and from their governors, to help them assess whether the party of power would be supported into the future. The signals that Putin and the governors gave in the early 2000s were sufficient to influence those legislators with insignificant or state-dependent resources to join the party, while those with greater resources awaited deeper signals from the executive branch and more conclusive proof that they could not achieve their political goals while remaining independent.

Finally, when deciding to join, elites also took into consideration the institutional benefits of being a ruling party member. In my interviews with regional legislators, almost all cited a desire to lobby their interests from within the party's legislative faction. A commonly heard refrain, especially from late-joining deputies, was that if you wanted to have influence in the legislature, you needed to be a UR member. There was an assumption that United Russia membership would translate into better legislative access. When Pavel Krashennikov, a prominent liberal Duma deputy and specialist on legal reform, was asked in 2003 why he had left SPS to join United Russia he responded:

---

[79] «Sekretar' presidiuma general'nogo soveta partii 'Edinoi Rossii" Vyacheslav Volodin" Osnova nashei ideologii—politika presidenta Vladimira Putina" Izvestiya. 22 February 2007.

[80] Author's interview with Semen Mitel'man, Chairman of the Economic Politics Committee Chelyabinsk Oblast Legislative Assembly, 5 July 2007.

> We could, of course, all walk to the grave constantly talking about joining forces with Yabloko [another liberal party in Russia]. Maybe some parts of society would like that. But it seems to me that most want something different. …they want judicial reforms to proceed and so that there wont be counterjudicial reforms as there were 200 years ago. Therefore, I decided to build on what I've done and continue to work on judicial reform and on the new housing code. I understand that I will get more done on this if I will be persuading from inside the system, than if I were to persuade from outside the system. That's it.[81]

Businessmen in particular were frank about how joining the party could help them lobby for their businesses. As the leader of the United Russia faction in Yaroslavl Oblast put it to me: "There are lots of different people who joined our faction, many entrepreneurs…and everyone wants everything all for themselves. Many entered parliament in order to defend their own interests and even joined our party in order to defend these interests, to lobby the interests of their own business, to get something for themselves…and our role as the faction leadership was to keep in mind that old Soviet principle 'Think about the motherland before you think about yourself'".[82]

In addition to legislative goods, many regional elites viewed party membership as useful because it provided an elevated public platform or better access to the central government. One of Lapina and Chirikova's interviews with a Samara entrepreneur illustrates this viewpoint: "Business that wants to raise its profile, that wants to be involved in some sort of business-get together gets involved with the party [then-Unity]. This is mostly large business, which needs contacts with the center, which wants access to information and to participate in different programs" (Lapina and Chirikova 2002, 258).

In fact, it was not just politicians and legislators that cited the career benefits of being a party member as their motivation for joining. In 2010, the Russian edition of Esquire published a series of interviews with famous entertainers--actors, directors, musicians, ballerinas, television presenters, and so on---asking them why they had decided to join the ruling party. Russia's first openly gay recording artist, Boris Moiseev explained his decision in simple terms:

---

[81] "Edinaya Rossiya slishkom mnogo prinyala" *Gazeta.ru* 18 December 2003.

[82] Author's interview with Vladimir Savelev, 1 March 2010.

> A real artist shouldn't be involved in politics, but in order to live quietly and peacefully, every artist needs to be in a serious party. I used to be in another party—I won't name names—but I left that party because it wasn't providing me with, how to say, any sort of bunker, any sort of defense. After all, I am the type of person who has his own views, and I have expressed them publicly--that the world is not just black and white, but blue, orange, green, and many other colors. And therefore, I needed some type of bunker, some type of protection….Of course it is more peaceful for me to be a member of the ruling party. People need to do what they do—live, work, study, own something—and not be worried all the time. You know, I used to go on tour and half my shows were cancelled because someone there didn't like me, but now it's somehow uncomfortable to cancel my shows. After all, I'm a member of United Russia. I can go to some boss in Moscow and complain: 'You know what they are doing to me, a party member? They are insulting me.'[83]

Interviewed elites also recognized the uncertainty-reducing benefits of working within a dominant party. Even those who lamented the loss of autonomy suffered under United Russia admitted that they were able to have more influence on legislation because the legislative process had become more predictable under United Russia.[84] One leading member of the United Russia faction in Sverdlovsk oblast' (and an early joiner in that region) noted: "Several times each session we tell the leader of our faction which projects and initiatives are most important to us. Everyone does this and a fair division is then worked out. This way we all know that we can fulfill certain promises to our districts and our supporters….Personally, this arrangement lets me sleep better at night."[85]

---

[83] "Zachem baleriny i gei vstupayut v Edinuyu Rossiyu" Russan *Esquire* 24 March 2010.

[84] Interviews with Yurii Yolokhov, United Russia faction member in Perm Krai Legislative Assembly, July 10, 2008, Evgenii Vyaznikov, vice chairman of the Perm Krai Legislative Assembly, July 12, 2008, Perm, Pavel Smirnov, Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, Ecology, and Natural Resources in Yaroslavl Oblast Duma, March 5, 2010, Yaroslavl and Olga Khitrova, member of United Russia faction in Yaroslavl Oblast Duma January 31, 2010, Yaroslavl.

Recognizing all these potential benefits and the increasing strength of Putin, elites began making more serious commitments to United Russia over the course of the decade. An increasing number, including many formerly independent SMD deputes in the regions, began linking their names and reputations to the party by becoming formal party members. In addition, more and more regional elites began relinquishing some of their political authority to an increasingly centralized party. Aburamoto (2010), for example, shows how the local governor's party in Khabarovsk was melded into United Russia. Increasingly, over the course of the 2000s, regional secretaries that were governors' clients were replaced by party and legislative functionaries. In turn, United Russia's leadership took an ever more active role in the management of regional elections. For example, in the run-up to the March 2007 regional elections in Murmansk, Andrei Vorob'ev, chairmen of United Russia's Central Executive Committee, personally flew to Murmansk in order to iron out a conflict between the regions' two major financial industrial groups (the Kolsk Metallurgical Company, a daughter affiliate of Norilsk Nickel, and "Apatit," a company controlling 85% of Russia's phosphate production) over spots on the party list.[86] In the past, the regional governor would have been given discretion over the allocation of these spots, but in this case, the United Russia central leadership decided the appropriate allocation of list spots.

The party also acquired the ability to sanction elites for indiscipline. This was evident in the Duma, where party discipline among pro-presidential deputies increased markedly after the formation of the United Russia faction after the 2003 election (Remington 2006). Similar upticks in voting cohesion followed the creation of UR factions in regional legislatures. And, as the next chapter discusses in detail, breaches of party discipline were routinely punished.

---

[85] Author's interview with Nail Shairmardanov, Vice Chairman of Sverdlovsk Oblast Duma, July 2, 2007, Ekaterinburg.

[86] "Murmanskikh edinorossov pomirila rukha Moskvy' *Kommersant.* 11 December 2006.

### 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how the leader-elite commitment framework outlined in Chapter 2 illuminates Russia's experience with regime parties in the 2000s. Specifically, it illustrated how changes in the balance of resources between the Kremlin and elites as well as strategic calculations about each side's willingness to commit to a ruling party affected the process of dominant party formation. In 1999 and 2000, regional elites were near the peak of their power. Their powerful political machines allowed them to hold an independent political line and made them reluctant to link their fates to a dominant party. With good reason, the Kremlin was skeptical about the ability of elites to remain committed to a ruling party and, therefore, did not want to pay the costs of sustaining such a party. In turn, the Kremlin's reluctance to seriously invest in Unity gave elites even less reason to make their own commitments.

In the early 2000s, elites remained hesitant to relinquish their autonomy to a centralized ruling party. But as the decade progressed, the balance of power between the Kremlin and regions changed as strong economic growth and treasury-filling oil revenues gave Putin enormous political capital. Given the already expansive formal powers of the Russian president and the region's persistent financial dependence on Moscow, these changes were enough to make cooperation with the center more attractive to elites, and, in turn, allowed Putin to push through centralizing reforms that weakened--but did not eliminate--elites' political machines. The Kremlin's preferences for such changes had been constant since the mid-1990s, but these reforms could not be passed when regional elites were so strong. These changes in the balance of resources also increased the incentives of elites to solve their own commitment problem vis-à-vis the center and find a way to cooperate with the Kremlin in the confines of a dominant party. Indeed, to the extent that rising oil prices and the attendant increase in rent revenues precipitated these shifts, this chapter demonstrates how natural resource wealth may not always lead autocrats to undermine their institutions. Rather, resource rents can abet the emergence of autocratic institutions if the primary impediment to institutional genesis is the hesitance of elites. In such cases, central state control over rents can make elites more inclined to cooperate with autocrats.

Importantly, however, elites were not so weak in the early-mid 2000s that the Kremlin could dispense with them entirely. The Kremlin needed access to the political machines and of regional elites in order to win elections, maintain social quiescence, and implement policy. In this way, the balance of power in Russia in the 2000s, resembles the balance of power that Migdal found to be characteristic of many African countries in the post-colonial period, where state leaders could remove any one strongman at any time, but "the pattern of social control" that they represented could not be undermined (Migdal 1988, 141). Putin could deploy his resources to have any one governor removed---an act that became simpler after the cancellation of gubernatorial elections in 2004---but he still needed the collective support of the governors' political machines.

Putin wanted to increase his control over regional elites. And so, he took measures, such as the cancellation of governors' elections, to bring them further under his control. But he also knew that eliminating their power-bases entirely would strip away the regime's ability to mobilize votes and govern cost-effectively. This is an enduring dilemma for autocrats. How can an autocrat appropriate the political resources of elites without destroying those resources? If the Kremlin were to remove all governors, the clientelist networks of the old governors would be disrupted and newly appointed outsiders might lack popularity among voters and local elites. On the other hand, granting full autonomy to governors would maximize their vote-getting ability, but then the Kremlin could not depend on being able to secure the support of the governors. The solution was to weaken them to a point and then coopt them into the emergent dominant party.

Putin is hardly the first authoritarian leader to be faced with a need to simultaneously control and draw upon the resources of elites. In an earlier era, the first General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union faced a similar dilemma that he solved through the creation of a system that would outlive him by almost 40 years. Voslensky sums up Stalin's situation:

> Stalin's protégés were his creatures. But the converse was also true; he was their creature, for they were the social base of his dictatorship, and they certainly hoped he would ensure them collective dictatorship over the country. In servilely carrying out his orders, they counted on the fact that these were given in their interests. Stalin could of course at any moment liquidate any one of them (as he often did), but in no circumstances could he liquidate the nomenklaturist class as a whole. He showed zealous concern for his protégés' interests and the reinforcement of their power, authority, and privileges. He was the creature of his creatures, and he knew that they would scrupulously respect his wishes as long as he respected theirs. (1984, 51).

Putin found this approach attractive and, no doubt, familiar. Putin's power depended on his ability to keep elites loyal. In turn, elites needed access to Putin's personal and political resources to advance their careers. Putin's power was such that he could eliminate any one elite actor, but it was not sufficient to fully undermine the system of political control that regional elites commanded. And so, while fraud, repression, and patronage clearly have been important tools that the regime uses to maintain control, the successful cooptation of regional elites was a key intermediate factor that made these tactics successful and also contributed to regime stability on its own.

United Russia was the embodiment of this cooperative relationship. As elites joined the party and the balance of resources continued to shift in favor of the Kremlin, the Kremlin calculated that it could now risk its own investments in the emergent party. In turn, the signals of commitment that the Kremlin sent emboldened elites to make their own deeper commitments. And in return for giving up their autonomy, regional elites were granted access to spoils and the various benefits of party membership in United Russia. Thus, rather than being imposed from above, United Russia emerged out of a process of cooptation and cooperation between the Kremlin and regional elites. And as the next chapter shows, credible commitments associated with the dominant party system ensured that cooperation between the two sides would be stable.

### Table 4.1 United Russia in the Legislative, Regional, and Local Elite

| | Number of Positions | Number in UR | % UR Members |
|---|---|---|---|
| Governors (2008) | 83 | 78 | 94% |
| State Duma Deputies (2010) | 450 | 314 | 70% |
| Federation Council Senators (2011) | 166 | 125 | 75% |
| Chairmen of Regional Legislatures (2010) | 83 | 83 | 100% |
| Legislatures with UR majorities (2011) | 83 | 82 | 99% |
| Mayors of cities >75K (2011) | 221 | 191 | 86% |
| City Council Majorities in Cities > 75K (2011) | 217* | 199 | 92% |
| Municipal Council Deputies elected in October 2010 | 49902 | 35685 | 71.5% |
| Heads of Municipal Administrations elected in October 2010 | 2512 | 1696 | 67.5% |

*As of the 2002 census, there are 221 Russian cities with populations over 75,000, but data is missing on four of these cities.

**Table 4.2 United Russia in the Federal Executive Branch**

| | **Number of Positions** | **Number in UR** | **% UR members** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Presidential Administration Officials (2011)* | 50 | 6 | 12% |
| Security Council (2011) | 33 | 13 | 39% |
| Vice Prime Ministers (2011) | 10 | 4 | 40% |
| Ministers (2011) | 19 | 5 | 26% |

*Includes Heads of Departments, Chief of Staff, Vice Chiefs of Staff, Official Representatives of President (including Polpredy) and Official Advisors listed on Kremlin homepage

**Figure 4.1**

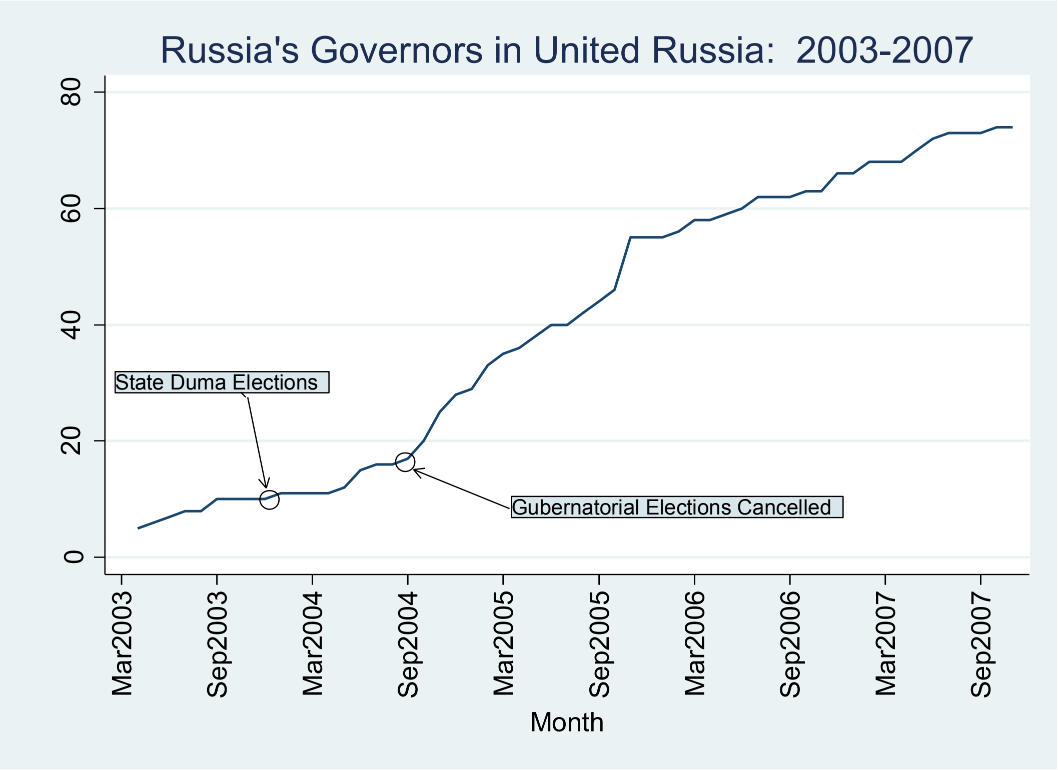

Russia's Governors in United Russia: 2003-2007
0
20
40
60
80
State Duma Elections
Gubernatorial Elections Cancelled
Mar2003
Sep2003
Mar2004
Sep2004
Mar2005
Sep2005
Mar2006
Sep2006
Mar2007
Sep2007
Month

**Figure 4.2 United Russia Performance in Regional Legislative Election Cycles**

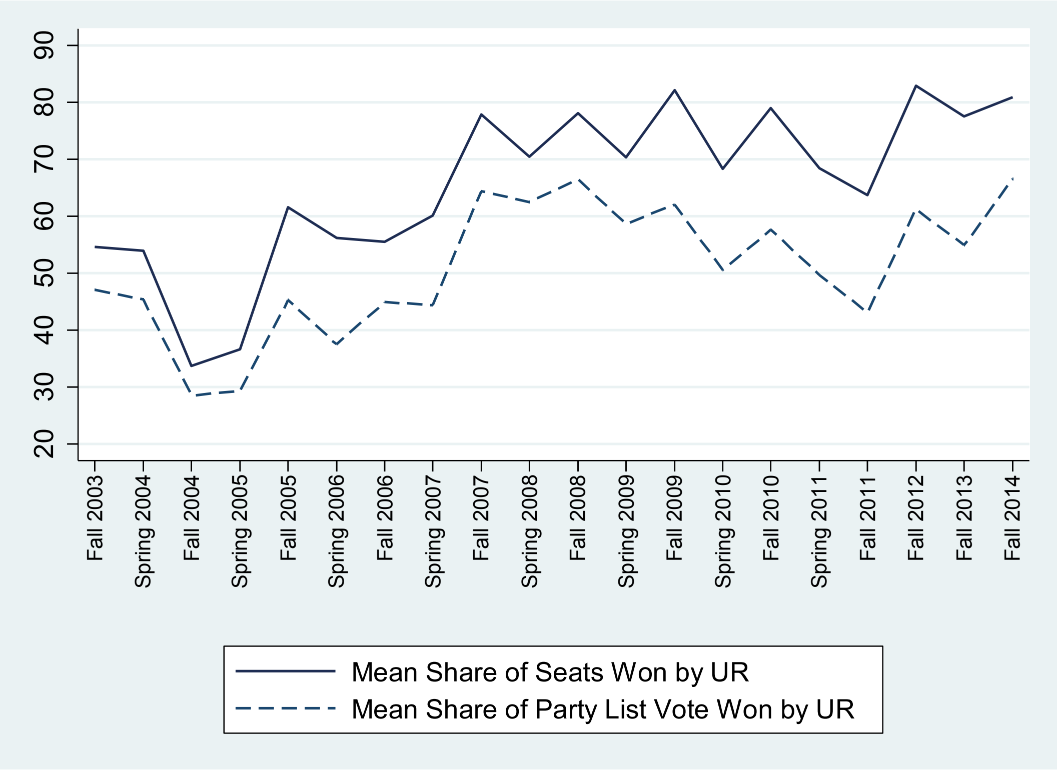


**Figure 4.3 Percent of SMD Seats Won by UR in Regional Legislative Elections**

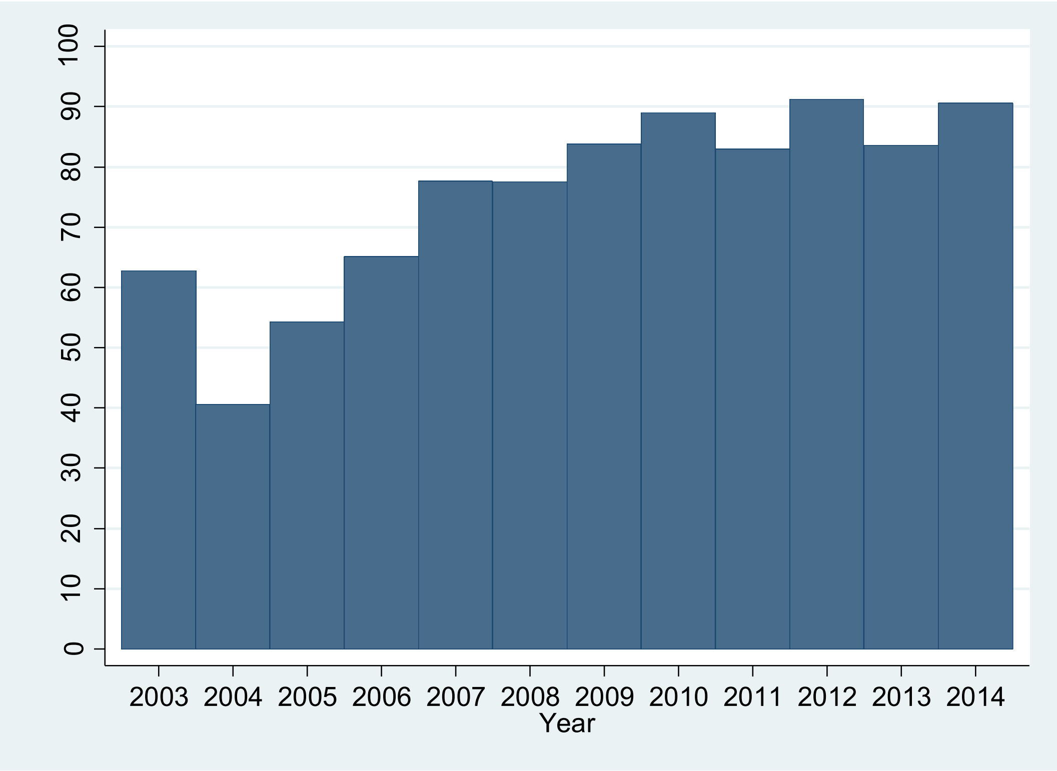


**Figure 4.4  Backgrounds of United Russia Regional Secretaries**

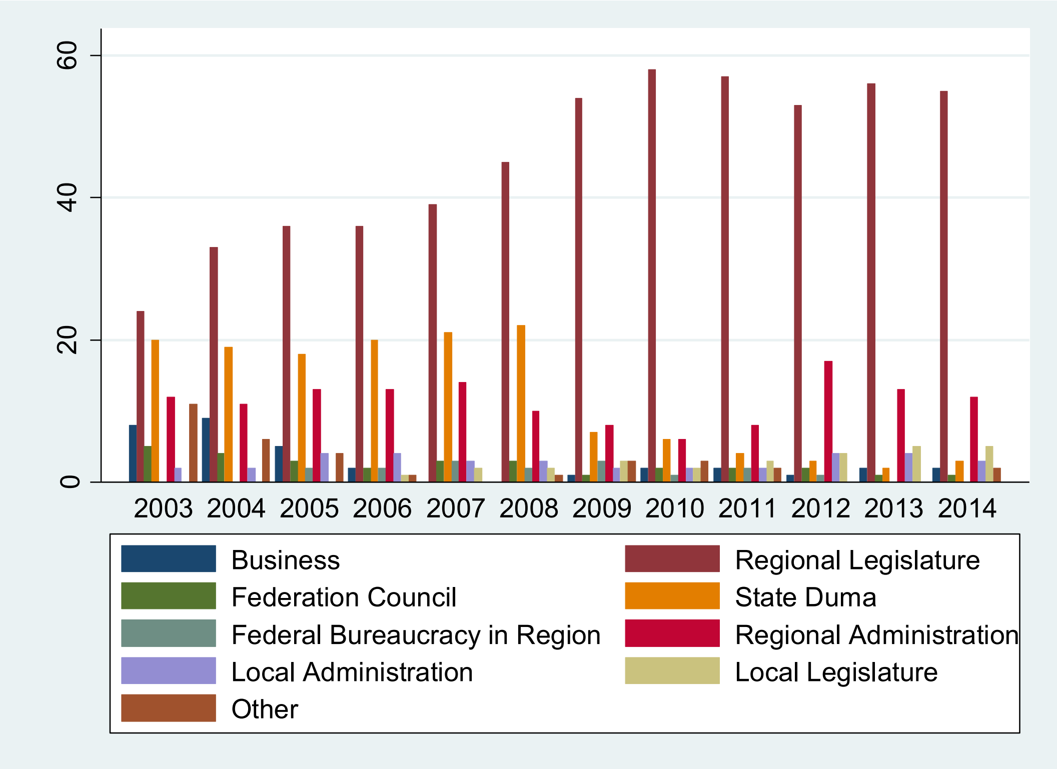


**Figure 4.5 Oil Prices and Economic Growth in Post-Soviet Russia**

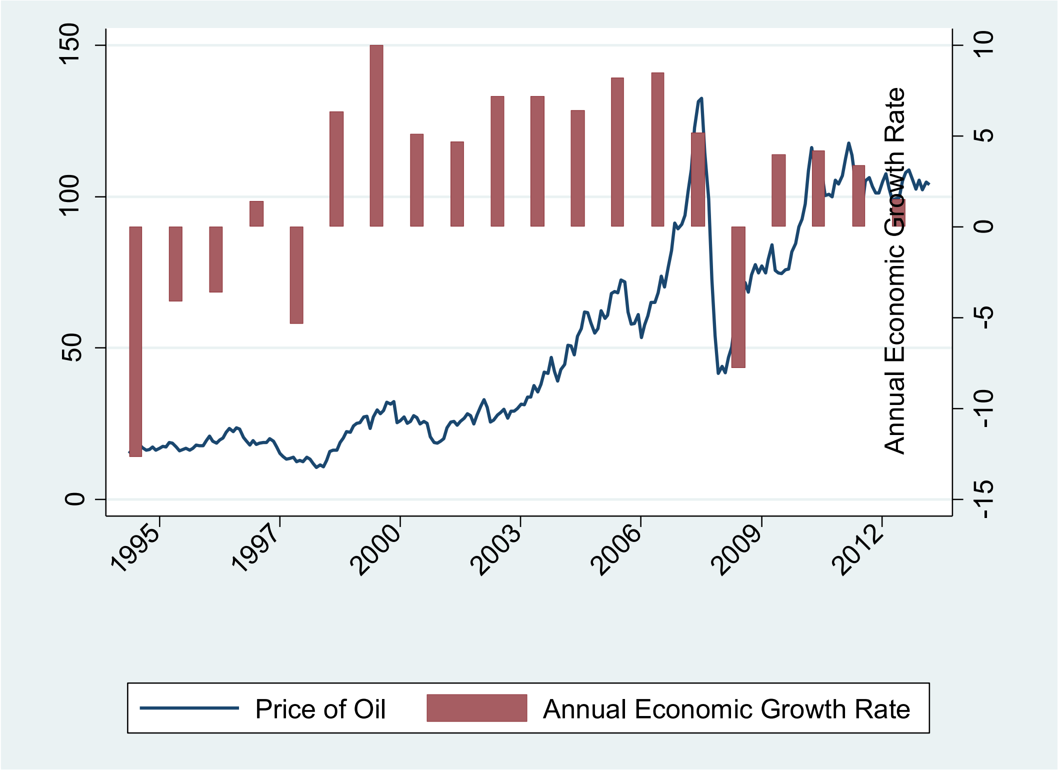
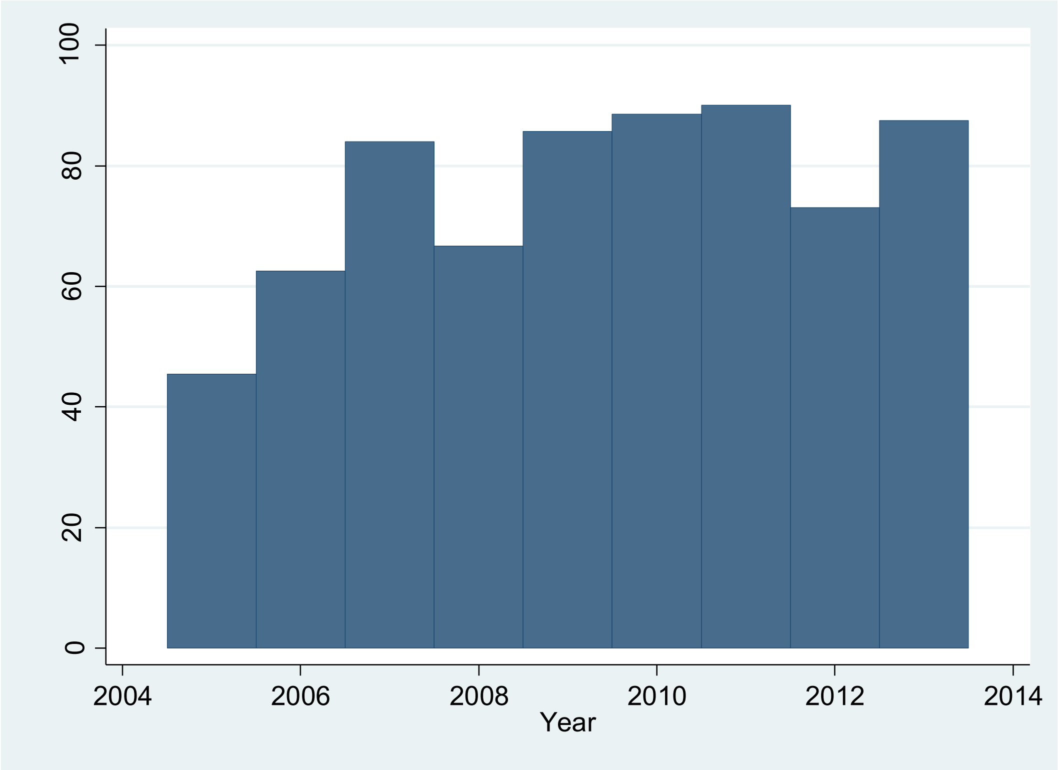


**Figure 4.6 Share of Gubernatorial Appointees Who Are UR Members Prior to Appointment***



*Note: Figures for the latter half of 2012 and all of 2013 refer to direct elections.