

Bashkortostan's Democratic Moment? Patronal Presidentialism, Regional Regime Change, and Identity in Russia

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One of the central questions of Eurasian identity involves its relationship to democracy. While democracy is certainly practiced successfully outside the West, democracy has become a necessary condition for a valid national claim to full-fledged membership in the West. This is true on the level of practical policy as well as abstract identity, as Western organisations frequently hold up democratic development as a requirement for participation in organisations like NATO or the European Union as well as for favorable treatment in other spheres.¹ Nowhere is this issue posed as acutely as in today's Russia, which virtually spans the Eurasian mega-area but which faces identity 'pressures' (or *Sollen*, to follow IEDA Osamu's conceptualisation²) from neighboring regions of the world. These Sollen include nascent identifications with the West, with the Islamic world, and with booming East Asian market cultures, each defining a meso-area of relative influence within adjacent parts of post-Soviet Eurasia. For these reasons, the question of whether Russia is on a path to democracy or dictatorship cuts to the heart of questions of

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¹ Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington, D.C., 2003).

² IEDA Osamu, 'Regional Identities and Meso-Mega Area Dynamics in Slavic Eurasia: Focused on Eastern Europe', in MATSUZATO Kimitaka (ed.), *Emerging Meso-Areas in the Former Socialist Countries: Histories Revived or Improvised?* (Sapporo, 2005), pp. 19–41.

Russian identity and its future geopolitical orientation. While a Russian move toward democracy may not promise a move to the West, a decisive rejection of it would almost certainly portend a significant distancing from the West and the reinforcement of meso-area identifications that do not put democracy at front and center.

Since Vladimir Putin rose to power in 1999–2000, social scientists have increasingly depicted Russia as a state moving back toward autocracy after a relative brief flirtation with political openness in the 1990s. Especially with Putin's lopsided victory in the 2004 presidential contest, analysts have characterised Russia as at best a 'managed democracy' and at worst something akin to a police state with only superficial attributes of democracy. To be sure, national-level political competition in Russia as of 2005 is at its lowest point since perestroika began, with gubernatorial elections eliminated, opposition parties marginalised, and television firmly under the state's thumb. At the same time, however, observers looking below the national level to the region of Bashkortostan have observed a decidedly different trend. Long infamous as a bastion of provincial authoritarianism, this region experienced a major revitalisation in political competition during 2003–2005 and groups that were once harshly suppressed have been openly critiquing the regime and reentering the political fray. Thus, at the same time that many see political competition being extinguished at the national level, it appears to be reborn at the regional level in at least one of Russia's most notoriously autocratic provinces. How can we explain this puzzle? We suggest that a key to accounting for these dynamics is to understand the workings of 'patronal presidentialism', a set of institutions that largely define the way power is exercised in today's Russian Federation. Patronal presidential systems tend to produce cycles of political competition and political consolidation, leading countries towards what appears close to 'democracy' at some times only to lead them back to what appears closer to 'autocracy' at other times. Importantly, the cycles at the national and regional level need not be in sync. In fact, we argue, in the case of Bashkortostan the same forces eliminating political competition at the national level in 2003–2005 were simultaneously strengthening political competition in Bashkortostan, although a new constriction of the political space appears likely to emerge in the years ahead in Bashkortostan (perhaps at the same time competition opens up again at Russia's federal level). This phenomenon complicates efforts to assess the degrees to

which a country is 'democratic/democratising' or 'authoritarian/autocratising' merely by looking at levels of and trends in political competition at the federal level.

The Logic of Patronal Presidentialism at the Federal and Regional Levels

The term 'patronal presidentialism' refers to a system of government in which a presidency, whose occupant is directly elected by the population as a whole in regularly scheduled contests, is far more powerful than other state institution by virtue of two characteristics. First, the constitution delegates the president significantly more authority than other state organs, such as the parliament and the judiciary. Second, the president's power is based not only on these formally stipulated powers but on extensive patron-client relationships extant in the country. That is, power is exercised not only formally through the observance of codified law, but informally through the manipulation of informal and frequently hierarchical networks through which resources can be covertly channelled and punishments meted out.³

The key to understanding the politics of 'patronal presidentialism' lies in the relationship between the president and 'elites', who we define as 'persons who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organisations and movements of whatever kind, to affect [...] political outcomes [at the local or national level] regularly and substantially'.⁴ In postcommunist Russia, some of the most important elites include the heads of executive state structures governing Russia's regions, the owners and top managers of major financial-industrial groups (often called 'oligarchs'), and senior representatives of the federal government (everyone from security chiefs to Supreme Court judges). Each of these groups controls certain resources that they can use to

³ The concept of patronal presidentialism is also developed in: Henry E. Hale, 'Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia', *World Politics* 58:1 (2005), pp. 133–165, forthcoming.

⁴ John Higley and Michael G. Burton, 'The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns', *American Sociological Review* 54:1 (1989), pp. 17–32, citation from p. 18. The bracketed text is added to Higley and Burton's since they are defining 'national elite' whereas we are interested not only in national elites but also provincial elites.

achieve political goals. In fact, the combined resources of these groups could easily topple a patronal president, since it would be effectively impossible for a president to govern if federal orders were not carried out in the regions, if financial resources were mobilised against the president in favor of his or her rivals, and if federal executive officials did not respond to the president's attempts to stop the insubordination. The problem faced by these elites, however, is that they must act collectively in order to oust a president.⁵ The office of president, however, is precisely an institutionalised focal point for elite collective action: When a president gives an order, the general expectation is that elites will carry the order out. The president thus has a tremendous advantage over elites in any power struggle because the elites can be divided and conquered.

Indeed, patronal presidents have a great deal of power to influence the fates of all such elites for better and for worse so as to preserve presidential dominance. If regional leaders are elected, funding can be directed to their opponents or the judicial system can even be mobilised so as to remove the unwanted candidate from a race. If regional leaders are not elected and instead appointed by the president, of course, they can simply be fired. Business elites can encounter all kinds of difficulties at the hands of state officials, including disruptive inspections, expensive tax assessments, and even criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Federal officials are some of the most vulnerable of all since they can be removed from office and perhaps even charged with corruption. Indeed, as Keith Darden has demonstrated in the Ukrainian case, patronal presidents can use state resources (especially security organs) to systematically blackmail all of these elites so as to ensure compliance.⁶ Alternatively, the same presidential power can be used to 'bribe' or co-opt elites who might otherwise be inclined to act contrary to the patron's wishes. In short, the president's combination of formal and informal power puts the president in an extremely strong position to punish perceived enemies and reward friends, thereby averting challenges to his or her authority. Under such conditions, then, elites have very

⁵ Perhaps the best elaboration of the logic of elite collective action in autocratic regimes is: Mancur Olson, 'The Logic of Collective Action in Soviet-type Societies', *Journal of Soviet Nationalities* 1:2 (1990), pp. 8–27.

⁶ Keith Darden, 'Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine under Kuchma', *East European Constitutional Review* 10:2–3 (2001), pp. 67–71.

strong incentive to rally strongly around patronal presidents and not to launch or support opposition movements.

These incentives change, however, when elites come to expect that a patronal president will soon be leaving office and when a presidential election will be the formal mechanism by which the new president is selected. An expectation that the president will leave office can come from a variety of sources, including constitutionally enshrined term limits, grave illness, extreme unpopularity bred by a major scandal, or a disastrous defeat in war. At such points, elites have tremendous incentive to begin competing so as to gain control of presidential power once the incumbent leaves office. This is true even when the president names a successor and declares unequivocal support for this successor. The key is the new uncertainty that is created by the approaching succession. First, when the president leaves office, he or she personally will no longer have control of the key presidential instrument used to punish those who 'defect' from the incumbent team after the election. Second, even if the designated 'heir' wins, there is no guarantee that he or she will strictly adhere to the old president's distributional policies regarding other elites. This is extremely important since elites are very diverse in their particular interests and since patronal presidents almost always include multiple groups of elites in their ruling group who struggle within the regime for the president's favor and associated resources. Indeed, as was noted above, one way in which patronal presidents stay in power is to play one set of elites off against another, dividing and conquering them. The problem at the point of succession arises because only one person (and hence one group) can be chosen to be the successor. Rival groups thus can come to fear that the anointed successor might ultimately squeeze them out in an effort to consolidate control after winning the presidency or in an effort simply to capture all of the spoils of the presidency. Furthermore, different elite groups are tempted to consider the vast resources they would control if they managed to win the presidency for themselves, squeezing out their rivals. Thus the prospect of major gains in case of victory, combined with the fear that the designated successor might push them out even if they are loyal, provide strong incentives for these 'rival' pro-presidential elites to defect from the successor's team and to back their own candidate for the presidency. Thus, at points of expected presidential power transfer, a country that had once looked like a highly authoritarian state (with elites all falling into line behind the

president) can suddenly experience intense waves of political competition.

The result can be a cyclical pattern of political consolidation and contestation that is broadly observable in all of the post-Soviet states with patronal presidential institutions (at least, once ‘patronal presidentialism’ was consolidated in these countries in the mid-1990s).⁷ In some cases, the contestation cycles produce an opposition victory. In Ukraine, the presidential contest of 1999 represented the high point of consolidation as President Leonid Kuchma waltzed to an easy reelection, but that same country plunged into an intense cycle of contestation as Kuchma’s popularity plummeted and as he failed to run for a third term in 2004. The result was opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko’s victory in the Orange Revolution. Similarly, just as many observers were declaring democracy all but dead in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, cycles of contestation were suddenly brought about when presidents Eduard Shevardnadze and Askar Akaev each announced that they would not be amending their constitutions to seek third terms. With elites now considering it likely that these men would depart the political scene, they rebelled against attempts by these incumbents to manufacture loyal parliaments in elections widely branded as unfair, thus producing the ‘Rose’ and ‘Tulip’ Revolutions. Likewise, after making a highly unpopular concession on the critical issue of Nagorno-Karabakh shortly after beginning his constitutionally final term in office, the increasingly autocratic Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian found himself victim to a rapid elite defection to a more popular rival, Prime Minister Robert Kocharian, who quickly supplanted him as president. In other cases, incumbents’ designated successors have won these struggles. Heidar Aliiev successfully installed his son Ilham as his political heir in Azerbaijan and Russian President Boris Yeltsin managed to secure a victory for his anointed one, Vladimir Putin. In most of these cases, however, the cycles of contestation appear to have been followed by a renewed period of political consolidation. Rose Revolution victor Mikheil Saakashvili and Tulip Revolution winner Kurmanbek Bakiev both proceeded to win their first post-revolutionary presidential elections with around 90 per cent of the vote, stunning totals indeed. The younger Aliiev cracked down hard

⁷ For a theoretical elaboration and a detailed discussion of these countries, see: Hale, ‘Regime Cycles’.

on the opposition in the run-up to and aftermath of the November 2005 Azerbaijan parliamentary election and Putin has faced hardly any meaningful opposition at the federal level since a lopsided reelection in 2004.⁸

But to focus only on the federal level is to overlook the fact that 'patronal presidentialism' can produce regional-level results that can run counter to federal-level trends, at least in certain circumstances and for a certain amount of time. During periods of federal consolidation, regional political machines have strong incentive to rally around the patronal president so as to obtain or retain access to federal resources. Indeed, even machines that formerly worked against the president are likely to feel such incentives. While a new president is not likely to reject such support from former opponents, he or she also has incentives to try and weaken or remove such opponents in order to make his or her own reelection more secure and to pave the way for his or her own chosen successor at the next point of power transfer. When the president simply removes a regional boss and subjects the political machine to presidential will, the political consolidation will penetrate to the regional level. There are some instances, however, where this may not be desirable or possible for the president. In ethnofederal systems, where regions are widely understood as homelands for specific ethnic groups, an outright replacement of a provincial boss might be understood as an attack on the locally dominant ethnic minority group. When federal leaders perceive this might be the case, they may not want to risk alienating the group by pushing out the boss. Where political machines have deep roots, even patronal presidents may not want to pay all of the political costs necessary to deracinate the machine and create an entirely new authority structure. One strategy for a new president to pursue, then, is to merely weaken a regional political machine by providing political 'cover' and resources for its local opponents. These opponents can be used to pressure the machine and thereby help ensure its compliance. Furthermore, should the machine defect again at the next point of power transfer, this strategy means that the presidential team now has networks and more formal organisation in the region with which to counteract such a defection attempt.

⁸ Ukraine has so far followed a different pattern, explained in: Hale, 'Regime Cycles'.

We can thus understand a somewhat paradoxical situation that sometimes emerges in countries with patronal presidential institutions: The consolidation of power at the federal level can actually result in increased political contestation at the regional level. We now turn to a case study of one ethnically defined Russian region, the ‘republic’ of Bashkortostan. It is an interesting case because it has long been regarded as one of the most authoritarian regions in Russia, with a highly autocratic political machine that historically ran roughshod over local opposition, be it from ideological opponents or activists for non-Bashkir ethnic groups, notably Russians and Tatars.⁹ Yet ironically, we find that it began to experience something of a political renaissance at the same time that political competition at the federal level in Russia was reaching a low point as Putin moved from his first to his second term.

Bashkortostan: The Weakening of a Political Machine

Bashkortostan has long been considered one of the sturdiest and most important political machines in the Russian Federation. Accordingly, the political system that had emerged in the republic by the end of the 1990s was variously branded a neo-patrimonial regime,¹⁰ centralised *caciquismo*,¹¹ something close to Sultanism,¹² or more simply an

⁹ See: Rushan Galliamov and Ildar Gabdräfikov, ‘Presidential Elections in Bashkortostan: A Regional Example of Managed Democracy in Russia’, *Russian Election Watch* 3:4 (2004), pp. 7–8; Henry E. Hale, ‘Bashkortostan: The Logic of Ethnic Machine Politics and the Consolidation of Democracy’, in Timothy J. Colton and Jerry F. Hough (eds.), *Growing Pains: Russian Democracy and the Election of 1993* (Washington, D.C., 1998), pp. 599–636; Igor V. Kuchumov (ed.), *Bashkortostan v politicheskom prostranstve Rossii: zarubezhnaia politologiia o tendentsiakh sovremennoago razvitiia respubliki* (Ufa, 2004); MATSUZATO Kimitaka (ed.), *Respublika Marii El, Chvashskaia Respublika, Respublika Bashkortostan* (Regiony Rossii: Khronika i rukovoditeli 8; Sapporo, 2003).

¹⁰ V. Gel’man, S. Ryzhenkov, and M. Bri (Brie) (eds.), *Rossiiia regionov: transformatsiia politicheskikh rezhimov* (Moscow, 2000), p. 142.

¹¹ MATSUZATO Kimitaka, ‘Authoritarian Transformations of the Mid-Volga National Republics: An Attempt at Macro-Regionology’, *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 20:2 (2004), pp. 98–123.

¹² James Alexander and Jorn Gravingholt, ‘Evaluating Democratic Progress Inside Russia: The Komi Republic and the Republic of Bashkortostan’, *Democratizatsiya* 9:4 (2002), pp. 77–105. As for the concept of Sultanism, see: J. Linz and A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and*

authoritarian nomenklatura regime.¹³ The major components of Bashkortostan's political system during this period were republic President Murtaza Rakhimov's monopolistic control of the regional elite (especially privileging networks of ethnic Bashkirs), the republican parliament (whose composition he controlled), the economy (above all the energy complex), education and mass media (highly regulated by the state), and the judicial branch of power and law enforcement bodies (widely regarded as being under Rakhimov's thumb). This political machine was far from insignificant in nationwide Russian politics. Indeed, Bashkortostan is one of the most populous regions of the Russian Federation, making it valuable for federal office-seekers. Moreover, the republic possesses significant oil deposits and features a developed petro-chemical industry on which much of the country depends. The rise and fall of this political machine is thus a very important subject in its own right, although it also serves as an important illustration of how cycles of regime contestation and concentration at the federal and regional levels are not always perfectly in sync.

High Rakhimovism and the First Wrenches in the Machine

The dominant trend in the republic during 1990–1998 was toward the strengthening of both the political machine and its degree of autonomy from Moscow. The authoritarian climax appears to have been reached during the republic presidential elections in 1998 and the elections to the State Assembly (republic legislature) that followed in 1999. Rakhimov's demonstrated power to deliver the vote and brazenly flout Russian law if necessary made Bashkortostan a valuable commodity in the battle for the post-Yeltsin presidency, which was just getting into full gear in the spring of 1999. Rakhimov's highly consolidated political machine at first sided with the opposition Fatherland-All Russia coalition led by former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, a coalition that quickly found itself in opposition to a new prime minister appointed by Yeltsin, the former Federal Security Service chief Vladimir Putin, who in turn mobilised some of Russia's other political machines to his own cause. Thus we see that the absence of political competition

Post-Communist Europe (Baltimore, MD, 1996), pp. 42–54.

¹³ R.R. Galliamov, 'Politicheskie elity rossiiskikh respublik: osobennosti transformatsii v postsovetiskii period', *Polis* 2 (1998), pp. 108–115.

within Bashkortostan corresponded with intense competition at the federal level during the spring and summer of 1999.

The trend began to change during the second half of 1999. First, a Chechen rebel incursion into Dagestan followed by a series of deadly terrorist bombings in Moscow and other Russian cities prompted Putin to send the military into Chechnya in what he called an anti-terrorist operation. This demonstration of decisive leadership sent Putin's popularity skyward, popularity that soon transferred to the party he was backing in the December 1999 parliamentary race, the Unity bloc. After Unity soared from nonexistence to a near-first-place parliamentary finish in less than three months, Yeltsin suddenly resigned in order to make Putin acting president, effectively making him the incumbent for the presidential election, which had to be moved up to March 2000. These circumstances converged to make Putin the unrivaled favorite for the presidency, and those elites who had not irreparably burned bridges with Putin began furiously trying to curry favor with him while saving what face they may have retained.

One of Putin's first initiatives upon his election as president was to strengthen the hierarchy of state power and to create a 'single legal space' in Russia.¹⁴ This began to produce some major changes in the political life of Bashkortostan, including in the fundamental components of the local regime. One of the most important changes instituted from the resurgent Kremlin was the harmonisation of the Bashkortostan constitution and its laws with its federal counterparts. As of the end of 2002, no longer would the republic be able to get away with ignoring or contradicting federal law. This led to a series of local reforms. First, republic legislative deputies' mandates were prolonged from four to five years. Second, the legislature was transformed from a bicameral one to a single-chamber one.¹⁵ Third, the number of deputies of the legislature (the State Assembly) was cut from 174 (144 in the upper house and 30 in the lower chambers) to 120, all of whom were to be elected through small electoral districts. Most importantly, legislators were prohibited from simultaneously serving as officials of the executive branch. Under the

¹⁴ On these reforms, see: Peter Reddaway and Robert W. Orttung (eds.), *The Dynamics of Russian Politics: Putin's Reform of Federal-Regional Relations* 2 vols. (Lanham, MD, 2003–2005); Nikolai Petrov (ed.), *Federal'naia reforma 2000–2003*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2003).

¹⁵ This was not directly required, but was a response to related federal requirements.

previous system, the most influential 'party' in the upper chamber had been the bloc of executive chiefs and ministers, all of whom were appointed to their executive posts by Rakhimov and had easily ushered themselves into office. They had thus constituted an impervious pro-Rakhimov bloc in the body, so this system's end had the potential to complicate work for the Bashkortostan machine. No less importantly, electoral districts were reorganised to achieve an equality of votes. Rakhimov's gerrymandering, which heavily over-represented rural areas (a core base of his support) and underrepresented the dissent-prone capital city, Ufa, was eliminated.

The legislative elections in March 2003 were the first trial for the Rakhimovites to survive under this new system. In fact, these elections significantly differed from those in 1999. Despite the dominance of the representatives of the 'party of power' among the winners, the legislature was no longer as monolithic as it had been. This new legislature differed from previous ones in its ethnic composition and also in its deputies' concerns and preferences. Although many deputies ran in the elections under the banner of the party 'United Russia', it proved more difficult to control them than to control appointed chiefs of local administrations and ministers. The electoral campaigns showed that centrifugal tendencies had emerged within the regional elite. In several electoral districts, the regional authorities could not clearly determine who was their candidate and who was not. The authorities became shaky, which resulted in competition between two or even three candidates from the same party of power.

The Republic Presidential Elections of 2003

The pivotal event became the Bashkortostan presidential elections scheduled for December 2003, which came to feature unprecedentedly intense levels of republic-level political contestation at the same time that federal-level contestation was at an all-time low. We thus see how the consolidation phase of a patronal presidential system can actually correspond with increased competition and a major political opening at local levels. The key is to understand both Bashkortostan's machine politics, Putin's strategy for consolidating federal power, and the reactions of both federal and regional elites.

At the beginning, the Rakhimovites were convinced they would win an easy victory. They did not overload themselves in developing innovative political tactics, instead putting their trust in ‘tried and true’ methods of machine politics. For Bashkortostan, these featured the intensive exploitation of administrative resources as well as outright electoral manipulation, including falsified votes, the abuse of absentee ballots, and fraudulent election committee protocols. Yet these methods had been most effective during the 1990s, when the federal authorities had generally either left the republic to its own designs or, even better, actively or passively supported Rakhimov in these practices.¹⁶

The situation leading up to the December 2003 election, however, had changed significantly in at least five ways. First, while Yeltsin had relied on Rakhimov as a crucial ally in securing his own 1996 presidential reelection and had cultivated other clientelistic relationships with Rakhimov during the 1990s, Rakhimov was among the regional elites who had defected from Yeltsin’s team and joined the Fatherland-All Russia coalition during the 1999–2000 struggle. This meant, of course, that Putin saw Rakhimov as the opposition when Yeltsin appointed Putin prime minister and declared that Putin was his chosen political heir. Indeed, Yeltsin writes in his memoirs that one of the reasons he appointed Putin was because he would be tougher than previous prime minister Sergei Stepashin in quashing Fatherland-All Russia’s region-based challenge.¹⁷ While Rakhimov lowered the intensity of his opposition to the Yeltsin-Putin team once Putin surged in the polls during fall 1999 and became a lock to win the 2000 Russian presidential contest, it was clear that a bridge had been burned. Putin saw Rakhimov at best as an unreliable ally. At worst, from Putin’s perspective, Rakhimov was a political enemy willing to flirt with the breakup of Russia through the republic’s sovereignty drive for personal political gain, a very serious charge indeed given Putin’s interpretation of Chechnya. Indeed, as the case of Chechnya illustrates, Putin was clearly not focusing

¹⁶ See: I.M. Gabdrafiqov and A.G. Enikeev, ‘Respublika Bashkortostan. Osobennosti politicheskogo protsessa (1990–2002 gg.)’, in Matsuzato (ed.), *Respublika Marii El*, pp. 213–247; I.M. Gabdrafiqov, ‘Mezhetnicheskaia situatsiia v Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Respublika Bashkortostan’, in V. Tishkov (ed.), *Mezhetnicheskie otnosheniia i konflikty v postsovetskikh gosudarstvakh: ezhegodnyi doklad, 2003* (Moscow, 2004), pp. 144–150.

¹⁷ Boris Yeltsin, *Prezidentskii marafon: razmyshleniia, vospominaniia, vpechatleniia* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 306–315.

only on Rakhimov as the problem. Instead, he was going about restructuring the entire relationship between federal and regional elites in an effort to strengthen the state and, to be sure, prevent unwanted regionally based political challenges in the future.¹⁸

Second, as part of this restructuring, Putin's federal center had succeeded during its first three-and-a-half years in forcing the Bashkortostan leadership to amend its legislation so as to bring it into harmony with federal law as part of a broader, nationwide campaign to unify the 'legal space'. As a result, the republic entered the 'single legal space' of Russia. Courts and other elements of the legal system had come to take on a modicum of independence, with the federal government now serving as 'cover' for judges and others who might resist lures and threats coming from Rakhimov's machine. In this regard, it was characteristic that the electoral campaign started against the background of an unprecedented scandal involving the republic Supreme Court and its chairman, M. Vakilov, who had bucked subordination to the regional authorities. Political events during the first half of 2003 also showed that Rakhimov was beginning to lose his ability to control law enforcement organs, including the police, the prosecutors office, and tax inspectors—all of which he had once had almost completely under his political thumb.¹⁹

Third, Putin had also succeeded in restructuring budgetary relations between Bashkortostan and the center, with Ufa losing the 'special status' it had previously enjoyed in such affairs with Moscow. During the time of 'thriving regional sovereignties' in the mid-1990s, more than seventy per cent of all collected taxes had been left in the local budget. By 2003, Bashkortostan had been made equal with ordinary 'non-ethnic' regions (oblasts) of Russia, now transferring the same percentage of taxes to Moscow as, for example, neighboring Orenburg oblast. This curtailment of the republic's tax revenue income continues to the date of this writing and has led to regional elite grumbling: Bashkortostan Prime Minister R. Baidavletov, for example, said regarding the republic budget of 2005 that

¹⁸ See: Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State* (New York, 2006); Reddaway and Orttung (eds.), *The Dynamics of Russian Politics*.

¹⁹ On such developments more broadly in the regions, see: Reddaway and Orttung (eds.), *The Dynamics of Russian Politics*, esp. vol. 2.

‘We have never had such a budget deficit²⁰—the republic is encountering this for the first time’.²¹

Fourth, with the encouragement of Putin’s administration, the republic economy had changed in ways that created new elite groups capable of constituting, organising, or supporting a powerful opposition to the incumbent republic-level authorities. Most critically for Bashkortostan, this meant the entry of huge corporate conglomerates into the republic economy. These included such giants as Gazprom, Nikoil, Alfa Group, Mezhprombank, Lukoil, and Vimm-Bill-Dann. For years, Rakhimov had sustained a remarkably high degree of state control over the economy, with much of that which was not directly state-controlled being under the influence of Rakhimov’s broader ruling group.²² This economic monopoly, however, was now cracking, and Russia’s big firms were chomping at the bit to get a stake in Bashkortostan’s massive economic resources. Sergei Kirienko, Putin’s representative to the Volga Federal District, in which Bashkortostan was located, played an important role in facilitating these economic developments. Importantly, all this helped bring to prominence two major new potential rivals to Rakhimov, rivals who would be unusually difficult to squelch due to their possession of massive resources (financial and administrative) based both inside and outside the republic. One was the co-owner of one of the largest banks in Russia (Mezhprombank), Sergei Veremeenko. The other, Ralif Safin, was an oil magnate, one of the founders and the former vice-president of the corporation Lukoil, who had recently become a member (frequently called ‘senator’ in Russia’s political jargon) of Russia’s Federation Council by appointment from another region. Both of these figures were born, grew up, and started their careers in Bashkortostan.

Fifth, a significant part of the republic’s population had become weary of the protracted authoritarian rule of the incumbent president and

²⁰ 2.5 billion rubles.

²¹ I.M. Gabdrafiqov, ‘Etnicheskaia situatsiia v Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Bashkortostan’, in V. Tishkov (ed.), *Etnicheskaia situatsiia i konflikty v gosudarstvakh SNG i Baltii: ezhegodnyi doklad, 2004* (Moscow, 2005), pp. 193.

²² Henry E. Hale, ‘Explaining Machine Politics in Russia’s Regions: Economy, Ethnicity, and Legacy’, *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19:3 (2003), pp. 228–263; Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia?*; Robert W. Orttung, ‘Business and Politics in the Russian Regions’, *Problems of Post-Communism* 51:2 (2004), pp. 48–60.

were receptive to an opposition message. Prior to 2003, almost any potentially threatening opposition activities had been nipped in the bud. As a result, there was little opportunity for dissatisfaction to be expressed and the republic authorities thus appear to have overlooked the intensifying protest mood of much of the electorate. While Rakhimov still enjoyed significant support among part of the population, he was not so popular that he would have clearly won a free and fair election, especially when pitted against a promising rival. Rakhimov was especially disliked among Bashkortostan's ethnic Tatars, who made up over a quarter of the republic's population by most counts. Tatars particularly objected to Rakhimov's promotion of the Bashkir language and culture in education and administration, especially given that Tatars outnumbered Bashkirs in the republic.

The combination of these factors, all of which were part of a consolidation of Putin's power at the federal level, actually produced an intensely competitive political situation in Bashkortostan in 2003—a development in stark contrast with the sham competition in the republic during the 1993 and 1998 republic presidential elections. At first, twenty figures declared their intention to run for Bashkortostan's presidency, but by the last stage of the electoral campaign, only seven candidates passed through the exhausting registration procedures. While one of the aforementioned promising challengers, Ralif Safin, was among the seven, the other, Sergei Veremeenko, was not. The Central Electoral Committee of Bashkortostan in fact twice rejected Veremeenko's candidacy. But in a stunning departure from past precedent, in which Rakhimov had been allowed to exclude his strongest rivals from the 1998 race, federal authorities forced republic authorities to include Veremeenko in the race. The Russian Federation's Central Electoral Commission (CEC) initially intervened and ordered the Bashkortostan CEC to issue Veremeenko a certification of candidacy. But a citizen of Ufa brought a lawsuit to cancel this decision and initially won in a local court. On 24 November, however, the Russian and Bashkortostan Supreme Courts reinstated Veremeenko's candidacy. By this time he had only two weeks before the vote to campaign, but he was at least on the ballot.²³

²³ See: I.M. Gabdräfikov, 'Respublika eshche ne videla takogo protivostoianiiia politicheskikh sil', *Etnokonfessional'naia situatsiia v Privolzhskom federal'nom okruge: biulleten' Seti etnologicheskogo monitoringa i rannego preduprezhdeniia konfliktov* 51

Through the first round of the elections, held on 7 December, the ‘propaganda war’ among the three main candidates, Rakhimov, Veremeenko, and Safin, was quite harsh and intense. The campaigns run by the other candidates were virtually unnoticeable. Two of the latter, I. Izmestiev (a colleague of Rakhimov’s son in business) and the absolutely unknown V. Pykhachev, withdrew from the race two days before the vote. The others (the Communist Party’s R. Shugurov, the famous pro-Moscow opposition activist A. Arinin, and an independent candidate, farmer Kh. Idiiatullin) remained on the ballot but were never considered in contention.

The essence of the incumbent’s electoral strategy involved three major parts: a barrage of propaganda through republic-controlled mass media; a negative campaign to demonise his main rivals (using such language as ‘evil spirits are assaulting the republic’); powerful administrative pressure on the electorate at all levels of the state (including physical pressure); and the organising of various efforts to falsify the vote. The climax of the fraud effort was the preparation of 800,000 pre-falsified ballots by the incumbent president. On the eve of the first round of voting, at midnight on 4 December, supporters of Veremeenko and Safin discovered that the printing house *Mir Pechati*, which usually served the presidential administration, was printing falsified ballots. The opposition activists tried to invite people to the spot, but the police blockaded the building. Before long, a fire began, but the police did not even let the printing house workers, nearly suffocating from the smoke, pass into the streets. The next day, Safin and Veremeenko held a press conference in Ufa. Pointing to half-burned ballots, they blasted the republic presidential administration for attempting to steal the election (see photograph). The Prosecutors Office of Bashkortostan launched a criminal case according to Articles 142 (illegal production, storage, and distribution of ballots) and 167 (arson) of the Russian Criminal Code. The deputy prosecutor of Bashkortostan, V. Korostylev, declared that the head of Rakhimov’s presidential administration, R. Khabirov, had been the one who ordered the fake ballots to be printed. Although the republic’s chief prosecutor, F. Baikov,



The Opposition's Press Conference on 5 December 2003 (Veremeenko at center, Safin at right)

disavowed this announcement by his subordinate, both the chief and deputy prosecutors soon found themselves without these jobs under mysterious circumstances and the results of any investigation were not made public.

Also on the eve of the vote, the leaders of Rakhimov's campaign and Rakhimov himself announced publicly their confidence in victory, asserting even that they would gain the necessary 50 per cent of the vote to win without a runoff election. This time, however, the renowned principle of 'what is important is not how the vote went, but how the count went' did not apply since observers of the opposition candidates, armed with monitoring techniques, were present at nearly all polling stations, of which there were more than 3,500. Significantly, the republic prosecutors' office actually upheld the law and effectively prevented significant falsifications, at least enough to deny Rakhimov a first-round victory. According to the official tally, Rakhimov won 42.8 per cent,

Veremeenko netted 25.3 per cent, and Safin garnered 23.3 per cent.²⁴ Thus, Rakhimov and Veremeenko advanced to a runoff, with Rakhimov clearly against the ropes, having received fewer votes than the two opposition candidates combined.

Several factors converged to produce this unfavorable result for Rakhimov. The first was his rivals' youth and their well-organised campaigns. For one thing, Veremeenko, through his corporate ties and links to a strong faction in the Kremlin, had access to mass media (especially federally based print and electronic outlets) that were made available in the republic. Veremeenko's disclosure of abuse and corruption under the Rakhimov regime through these sources was particularly effective. Moreover, a significant share of the electorate engaged in a protest vote against Rakhimov, rather than actually supporting the candidate they voted for. Additionally, the opposition made very effective use of the 'ethnic card', a card that had never been played with such vigor and effect in past republic elections. Veremeenko, an ethnic Russian, lambasted 'Bashkir ethnocracy' and raised the question of the republic's treatment of ethnic Tatars and their language and culture. Indeed, an analysis of voting patterns across areas where different ethnic groups tend to dominate reveals that Tatars and Tatar-speaking Bashkirs in rural areas voted heavily for Safin, that ethnic Russians and some urban Tatars went strongly for Veremeenko, and that Bashkirs and certain segments of the Tatar and Russian populations turned out in great numbers for Rakhimov.²⁵ In other words, in the first

²⁴ *Svodnaia tablitsa Tsentral'noi izbiratel'noi komissii Respubliki Bashkortostan o rezul'tatakh vyborov prezidenta RB po itogam golosovaniia 7 dekabrya 2003 g.*

²⁵ For example, 84.0 per cent of voters in Kugarchinskii raion, where Rakhimov was born, voted for him, while Veremeenko and Safin gained only 8.9 and 3.2 per cent there. In Ilishinskii raion, the western part of the republic where Tatars and the Tatarphone population dominate, 70.0 per cent of voters cast ballots for Safin, while Rakhimov and Veremeenko gained 28.0 and 1.4 per cent, respectively. In the mainly Russian city and raion of Blagoveshchensk, 42.6, 32, and 16 per cent voted for Veremeenko, Rakhimov, and Safin, respectively. As shown above, Muslim voters (Tatars and Bashkirs) tended to split. All three main candidates attempted to use the Muslim clergy, not Islam itself, to mobilise voters. Importantly, the electoral campaigns coincided with Ramazan, when the clergy preached actively. The Spiritual Board of Bashkortostan under Mufti Nurmukhamat Nigmatullin supported Rakhimov, while many imams of the republic and neighboring regions backed the opposition candidates. Although Talgat Tadzhuddin (traditional mufti) declared neutrality, a number of his imams worked for Safin.

round of voting, the Russian and Tatar majority of the republic overwhelmed the Bashkir minority. For this reason, after the first round, Rakhimov had no alternative but to declare officially that he would try to raise the status of the Tatar language in Bashkortostan if he won the elections.²⁶

The result of the first round completely stunned Rakhimov's team. Immediately after the first round, the leaders of Rakhimov's electoral headquarters convened their whole staff and team of activists, telling them that Rakhimov's chances of winning the second round would be very low without the federal center's intervention.

As it turned out, the federal center, including even Putin himself, began to take part in the game. Rakhimov flew to Moscow in haste on 11 December and had a five-hour negotiation with the Russian president. Putin's press service publicised precious little regarding the contents and results of this negotiation, which has remained a most mysterious page in the electoral drama of 2003. Immediately after Rakhimov's return from Moscow, a rumor spread in Bashkortostan that two petrochemical corporations in Ufa, among the largest in Europe, would be given over to management (though not ownership) of Gazprom, Russia's partially state-owned gas giant. Note that during the last months before the elections, control of the four largest petrochemical and gas enterprises of Bashkortostan had already been ceded to Gazprom on the condition that not only their management but also their ownership would eventually be changed.

Almost simultaneously with Rakhimov's return from Moscow, a highly influential deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, Vladislav Surkov, and Putin's envoy to the Volga Federal District, Sergei Kirienko, visited Ufa and remarked publicly on the 'distinguished achievements in the socioeconomic development of Bashkortostan' under the leadership of Rakhimov. Almost in lock-step, the incumbent's only rival in the final round, the Kremlin-connected Veremeenko, substantially reduced the activities of his headquarters and even publicly declared that he would quit his electoral campaign. Officially, however, Veremeenko did not withdraw his candidacy, which would have let Safin into the runoff. Safin tried in vain to contact Veremeenko to jointly check

²⁶ 'Zaiavlenie kandidata v prezidenty Murtazy Rakhimova', *Vechernaia Ufa*, 12 December 2003.

the counting of the first round, in which Safin's camp believed Safin had actually won 30 per cent of the vote, enough to put him into the runoff even without Veremeenko's withdrawal. In the end, however, Safin was out while Rakhimov and a capitulating Veremeenko were left in. The second round of voting, then, completely repeated Bashkortostan's electoral tradition: 78 per cent voted for Rakhimov while Veremeenko netted just 14.8 per cent, less even than he had received in the first round. Reported turnout was quite high, more than seventy per cent. It was no surprise that Veremeenko's camp showed no desire to monitor the polling places and, as a result, no violations or petitions were registered, as opposed to the over 200 petitions and nearly 700 violations that had been recorded in the first round. Thus, despite the majority of the Bashkortostan electorate voting against the incumbent president in the first round and there being a high probability of him losing the elections if the opposition had fought for it in unison, the seventy-year-old Rakhimov secured his presidential mandate for the coming five years.

Thus while Putin's consolidation of power at the national level produced an unprecedented political opening and vigorous electoral competition prior to the first round of Bashkortostan's 2003 presidential elections, Putin ultimately let Rakhimov off the ropes after the latter had been effectively 'domesticated'. Brought to the verge of political defeat and shown that the Kremlin had the power in fact to displace him, Rakhimov was allowed to stay on after ceding control of significant political assets to Kremlin-connected corporations like Gazprom. The latter transfers of control effectively gave Putin's team some insurance against any new independence-minded urges the republic leader might come to have. Putin had broken Rakhimov's political machine and, in effect, 'appointed' him to serve another term as regional leader.

Why did Putin not simply replace Rakhimov with Veremeenko, helping the latter win in a second round? While the Kremlin has been secretive, one answer is that Putin's team feared that attempting to replace an ethnic Bashkir head of Bashkortostan with an ethnic Russian like Veremeenko could have sparked ethnic conflict in the republic, especially given how 'ethnified' the first-round results of the election had been. It would serve Putin's interests just as well, then, to have a newly tamed Rakhimov at the helm of the republic, too weak to pose much of a threat to Putin's agenda but whose presence in the republic's leadership would help prevent a Bashkir backlash.

While Rakhimov remains at the top, in the two years since the 2003 presidential election there has remained much greater scope for opposition political activity (including Tatar activism) than had been the case prior to that year. This certainly has reflected less a change in Rakhimov than in the way that Russia's patronal president chose to rein him in, fostering elite divisions in the region that in turn provided some resources and political cover for political contestation. The arrangement reached with the 2003 republic presidential election, however, proved to be only temporary, as Putin in 2004 announced a major reform that would make republic leaders much more directly dependent on the Kremlin. This announcement in and of itself, however, did not completely reverse the limited political opening Bashkortostan experienced during 2003, although it does portend another closing of the political space in the republic in the years ahead.

Beyond 2003: Putin's Post-Beslan Reforms and Political Contestation in Bashkortostan

While the final result of the 2003 balloting looked much like the results of republic presidential elections past, there were clear signs that Rakhimov's machine had suffered irreparable damage. The damage has taken several forms. First, its economic basis has been ruptured. Prior to 2003, the stability of the system and social order had been guaranteed by the iron grip of the republic government on the local economy. But in the run-up to and aftermath of the republic presidential election, the gigantic financial-industrial groups of Russia gained major footholds in the republic economy. The deals that took place during the election were just part of the story. For example, in January 2004, 75 per cent of the stock of the most influential republic bank Uralsib was purchased by the financial corporation Nikoil. That autumn, the main office of Uralsib was moved from Ufa to Moscow. More generally, state properties, including the energy complex, were privatised at unprecedented tempo in 2004. This privatisation has largely destroyed Bashkortostan's state economic monopoly, a key component of the regional political machine. These firms, especially the large national holding companies that are not based in Bashkortostan, are not dependent for their survival or overall

profitability on Bashkortostan, are much less vulnerable to the punishments Rakhimov can dole out. Plus, the mere fact of their diversity of interests makes it much more likely that there will be some funding available for opposition politicians since they can sometimes be useful to corporations seeking to advance their particular interests.

There is even evidence that these corporations are directly engaging in opposition politics. Indeed, in February 2005, Rakhimov himself, in a closed session of the legislature, was reported to have condemned certain representatives of the fuel and energy complex in the legislature for attempting to oust the chairman of the legislature, a Rakhimov ally. While this effort failed, the fact that it was attempted demonstrates that divergent economic interests can spill over into politics and that Rakhimov does not have sufficient control over the economy to prevent such efforts.²⁷

Second, Vladimir Putin's center has stripped Rakhimov of many of the real political levers that had been central mechanisms of his political machine. Much of this was already reflected in the 2003 presidential contest, including the center's wresting the courts and prosecutors out of the Bashkir president's grip. After being reelected Russian president in March 2004, Putin embarked upon further reform of the center's relations with the regional elites. The school hostage tragedy in Beslan in the autumn of 2004 accelerated the realisation of this plan, with Putin announcing some major reforms to Russia's political system. In one of the biggest changes, regional leaders would no longer be directly elected, but instead would be nominated by the Russian president and then approved by their respective provincial legislatures. Putin also proposed a shift from a mixed district-proportional election system for the State Duma to a purely proportional system.

Bashkortostan's leaders reacted to this initiative after a certain pause. Apparently, Putin's post-Beslan initiative was so unexpected that it took some time for republic authorities to determine their position. Only after several days did Rakhimov give the official statement that he not only wholly agreed with Putin's new proposal, but that indeed he had been one

²⁷ I. Gabdrarifkov, 'Obostrenie politicheskoi situatsii', *Etnokonfessional'naiia situatsiia v Privolzhskom federal'nom okruge: biulleten' Seti etnologicheskogo monitoringa i rannego preduprezhdeniia konfliktov* 93 (16–28 February 2005), pp. 6–12.

of the initiators of this proposal.²⁸ The republic's legislature chairman, K. Tolkachev, echoed Rakhimov, saying that Putin's proposal was quite logical and matched the real situation of the Russian society.²⁹ After a month, however, at the end of October 2004, Tolkachev followed the example of Tatarstan's and Chuvashii's presidents and argued against certain provisions of the reform. Tolkachev remarked that the Russian president's expected prerogative to disband a regional legislature if the latter twice rejects the presidential candidate for regional leader might cause in Russia 'permanent parliamentary crisis and create political instability in the system of managing the regions and the whole legislative branch'. Instead, on behalf of the Bashkortostan authorities, Tolkachev proposed an amendment, according to which 'the regional legislature elects the candidate for leader of the federal subject and, after that, proposes the candidacy to the Russian president for confirmation'.³⁰

The Bashkortostan leadership had not commented so critically on Putin's various initiatives for a long time. It is only possible to guess whether such an important statement could be given without Rakhimov's sanction and, if so, why the regional parliamentary chairman was authorised to criticise Putin's initiative. A possible reason for this 'division of labor' between Rakhimov and Tolkachev was that Rakhimov might not be nominated as the republic president in the case of the introduction of the appointment system. Rakhimov is more than seventy years old, and Putin wants to have at the top of the Bashkortostan government a figure not only younger but also unburdened with clientelistic commitments within the republic. Before long, Putin will need to appoint a new chief of Bashkortostan. For Rakhimov, the State Assembly, having been loyal to him, appears to be his greatest hope of remaining in his post beyond his present term. This perception that Rakhimov's time in office may be coming to an end, and the general belief that this decision will not be Rakhimov's to make, further undermines Rakhimov's authority, rendering him something of a lame duck.

Rakhimov's new weakness can be seen in the realm of public demonstrations, virtually unheard of at the height of his machine's power

²⁸ IA 'Bashinform', *Ufa*, 16 September 2004.

²⁹ IA 'Bashinform', *Ufa*, 20 September 2004.

³⁰ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 29 October 2004.

in the second half of the 1990s, but resurgent under conditions of elite division within the republic. While much of the opposition was greatly disappointed with Veremeenko's capitulation and Rakhimov's lopsided victory in 2003, it soon regrouped. The opposition, having previously counted on the federal center's declared democratising initiatives, had lost its sense of direction for a half-year after the elections when the center failed to follow through. Putin's initiative for the new stage of federal reform, however, gave a new impulse to activate the republic's political life. While most democracy advocates in Moscow blasted Putin's post-Beslan reforms as highly anti-democratic, much of Bashkortostan's anti-authoritarian opposition welcomed them, regarding them as an 'effective instrument to limit the great power and clientelism of the regional political regime'.³¹ As early as the autumn of 2004, various oppositional forces joined together and created the united opposition of Bashkortostan, in which regional organisations of the Communist Party, Yabloko, Motherland, LDPR, Public Council of Local Self-Government, and also Bashkir, Russian and Tatar organisations participated.³²

Federal Law No. 122 'On Monetisation of Benefits', which came into effect at the beginning of 2005, provoked a great deal of social tension and sparked demonstrations in many cities of Bashkortostan. According to reports in the federal mass media, pensioners' protests against the monetisation of social benefits in Bashkortostan in January 2005 were bigger than in any other region of Russia. A meeting that the united opposition organised on 22 January in front of the Ufa city hall was distinguished from other meetings not only by the number of participants but also by its revolutionary, 'orange' tones, invoking images of the Ukrainian 'Orange Revolution' that had ousted the unpopular and autocratically inclined incumbent president Leonid Kuchma. This meeting demanded the resignation of the republic leadership, while the issue of the reintroduction of benefits had only secondary significance—indeed, it was the federal, not the republic government that had introduced the unpopular benefits reforms yet it was the republic

³¹ *Kommersant*, 20 September 2004.

³² See details in: I.M. Gabdrāfikov, 'Reaktsiia na initsiativy V. Putina po reformirovaniu sistemy gosudarstvennoi vlasti: Bashkiriia', *Biulleten' Seti etnologicheskogo monitoringa i rannego preduprezhdeniia konfliktov* 57 (September-October 2004), pp. 10–13.

leadership that was the object of the most heated public criticism. Speakers called for Rakhimov's resignation over human rights violations in Bashkortostan and over the 'Bashkir version' of local self-government reform. Indeed, the question of municipal reform had become a central issue in the republic's mass mobilisations. The year 2005 was the year in which an amended version of the 'Federal Law on the General Principles of Local Self-Government of the RF' was implemented across Russia. For this purpose, as in 1995–1996, local referendums were held to confirm territorial boundaries and the administrative structures of municipalities. In Bashkortostan, the united opposition vigorously demanded the introduction of elections for mayors and the heads of districts. However, in Bashkortostan's referendum on 27 March 2005, this question was not included on the ballot. Rakhimov's supporters countered protests in part through the mobilisation, for the first time in recent years, of the nationalist organisation 'Union of Bashkir Youth', who turned up against an oppositional meeting on 16 April 2005. Nevertheless, by the end of 2005 public demonstrations had become a consistent feature of Bashkortostan politics, in marked contrast to the former tranquility of the republic during the height of the machine's power. The opposition enjoyed authority and resources sufficient to mobilise people on the streets and to publicly demand Rakhimov's resignation. Moscow was successful in depriving Bashkortostan's political machine of a great deal of its power and financial resources, and the federal center now plays a decisive role in whether it can function effectively.

Conclusion

Overall, the case of Bashkortostan shows that patronal presidential systems can generate federal and regional level regime change that appears to be in opposite directions. While Putin was consolidating his power and greatly constricting the space for political contestation at the federal level between 2000 and 2005, the same period witnessed a major political opening and renewed competition in the republic of Bashkortostan. This is because in patronal presidential systems, federal-level competition, such as that which took place in Russia in 1999,

is often fought not through a battle for the hearts and minds of voters but through the competitive mobilisation of political machines. Regional political machines, then, have very strong incentives to maximise their own vote-delivering capacity by any means possible so as to be more valuable partners in federal contests that are likely to decide the allocation of future resources. Federal politicians can be expected to try to crack political machines, but during the heat of electoral battle are likely only to focus on the weaker ones. Thus federal-level competition can lead to regional-level consolidation where the traditions of machine politics are strongest.

But once the federal contest is decided, the strongest political machines that opposed the winner are likely to find themselves the subject of political assault as the new president consolidates power, ushering in a more autocratic phase in the patronal presidential cycle. Thus when Putin won the presidency in 2000, he step-by-step broke down the authority of political machines like Rakhimov's at the same time that he was clamping down on the least loyal 'oligarchs' and restricting media autonomy. Since it is highly time-consuming and costly to build a political machine from scratch, the initial weakening of regional political machines ironically can create an apparent democratic opening at the same time that federal-level politics seem to be moving in the opposite direction, towards greater autocracy. The present discussion of Bashkortostan politics has shown how Putin did in fact systematically weaken Rakhimov's political machine by stripping it of important instruments of power and by forcibly diversifying its economy.³³ The latter move ushered major national corporations into Bashkortostan's economic and hence political arena, corporations that had economic interests sometimes at odds with those of the regional administration and that were simultaneously less vulnerable to provincial blandishments and punishments.

One result of all this was a very heated electoral struggle for Bashkortostan's presidency in 2003, one that involved perhaps the freest and fairest election to date in the republic and that forced Rakhimov into

³³ On how greater economic opportunity facilitates political party development and political opposition in general, see: Kelly M. McMann, 'The Personal Risks of Party Development', in Joel C. Moses (ed.), *Dilemmas of Transition in Post-Soviet Countries* (Chicago, 2003).

a runoff. But it was clear even before the runoff that the presidential struggle was not an end, but a means. It was a means by which federal authorities under Putin finally cracked Rakhimov's machine. Indeed, once the machine was cracked, the Kremlin orchestrated the capitulation of Rakhimov's runoff challenger (Veremeenko) and the incumbent was back in office with a comfortable margin of electoral victory. Yet the breaking of the machine has had more lasting consequences, most notably the reappearance of political protest involving the masses and political struggle within the elite during 2004 and 2005.

Nevertheless, there are strong signs that this opening is only temporary. With Putin set to appoint Bashkortostan's leader after Rakhimov's term expires in 2008 (or earlier if he either steps aside or asks for Putin's vote of early approval), a new leader will be in position with Kremlin backing to build a machine that resembled Rakhimov's in its strength. The republic's economic diversity and penetration by national corporations, however, will mean that the machine cannot easily be wielded to full effect without Kremlin sanction. The near-term future of democracy in Bashkortostan, then, is likely to depend on whether its leadership and the corporations with major interests there wind up on the Kremlin's side of any succession struggle that may ensue. If the patral presidency and the republic's machine are aligned, they will be a mighty force indeed. If not, then Bashkortostan may erupt into a new hotbed of political contention.

What we see, overall, is that the relationship between 'patronal presidentialism' and democracy is rather complex. Not only does it tend to generate cyclic patterns of regime change, apparent movement both toward and away from democracy, but it can also produce similar cycles at the regional level that critically are out of sync with the federal-level cycles, at least in some regions. These sorts of patterns are not well understood in the West, which greatly complicates Russia's relationship with the Western mega-area since democracy has increasingly become a standard by which 'true' membership in the West is judged. Indeed, all this may guarantee that Russia continues to experience difficult identity pressures that might in turn facilitate political and international destabilisation so long as the institutions of 'patronal presidentialism' are

in place and so long as other factors³⁴ facilitating these dynamics do not markedly change.

³⁴ Hale (in 'Regime Cycles') has suggested that the cycles might gradually be 'outgrown' through substantial economic development or the significant growth of party or ideological loyalties throughout Russian society.