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Institutionalising Authoritarian Presidencies: Polymorphous Power and Russia's Presidential Administration

FABIAN BURKHARDT

Abstract

This article attempts to open up the 'black box' of the Russian Presidential Administration ('the Kremlin'). Borrowing from the literature on institutional presidencies and institutional approaches to authoritarianism, I argue that the administration institutionalised over the years of study, 1994–2012. More stable and predictable procedures enhanced administrative presidential powers but personalism and non-compliance with presidential orders remained. Original data on budget, staff, units, organisational structure and presidential assignments demonstrate that presidential power ought to be conceptualised as a polymorphous phenomenon that varies depending on the level of analysis. Researchers should refrain from over-personalising accounts of authoritarian regimes at the expense of more structural, organisational elements such as 'institutional presidencies'.

'THE KREMLIN' HAS BECOME A METAPHOR ATTESTING TO THE alleged omnipotence of Russia's presidents. At the same time, it has remained an impenetrable 'black box' that supposedly prevents systematic, intersubjectively verifiable analysis. Opacity is a general

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methodological problem in the study of authoritarian regimes (Goode 2010), and authoritarian secrecy becomes even more pronounced when one attempts to study high politics or ‘core executives’ such as the ‘Administration of the President of the Russian Federation’.¹ Given the lack of access and a dearth of reliable sources, researchers of executives under authoritarianism are, most of the time, forced to refract meaning and purpose from ‘public dictatorial artefacts’ (Barros 2016, p. 959). Basing assessments on official statements and media reports only is risky: exaggeration of personalism or even a misclassification of the regime type loom large. This methodological problem—as well as a certain ‘leadership bias’ in the study of presidential politics in Russia—has led to a preference towards the president instead of the presidency as the main object of analysis. The study of political leadership is a research programme in its own right (Ahlquist & Levi 2011; Elgie 2015), and the wealth of biographies and elaborations on political leadership has contributed a great deal to our knowledge of personal traits, networks, skills and styles of post-Soviet Russian leaders (Baturin *et al.* 2001; Breslauer 2002; Brown 2004; Colton 2008; Sakwa 2008; Hill & Gaddy 2015).

Nonetheless, with the institutional turn in comparative authoritarianism (Pepinsky 2014), Russia scholars, too, increasingly take institutions such as parties, parliaments, elections and courts seriously, and investigate their functions under less-than-democratic conditions. Surprisingly, however, neo-institutional, presidency-centred accounts are largely absent from this wave of scholarship.

This article rests on the simple observation that ‘rulers cannot rule alone’ (Policzer 2009). To achieve their goals, rulers need to rely on others, and the more successfully they interact with these other actors in stable, but at the same time adaptive, institutional arrangements, the higher the likelihood that the ruler, and the regime as a whole, will survive. Even under totalitarianism, Stalin created the *nomenklatura* and invented an ‘apparatus that enabled him to rule Russia’ (Voslenskii 1984, p. 48), leading scholars to note a certain ‘systemisation of government’ (Gorlizki 2002, p. 700) with bureaucratic routines and internal division of labour. While authoritarian regimes differ across cases in terms of internal organisation (Wahman *et al.* 2013), they also evolve and adapt within-case longitudinally over time, for instance, by ‘upgrading authoritarianism’ (Heydemann 2007) or the procedural ‘rationalisation of politics’ (Brooker 2014, p. 40). By examining the degree of change in the institutionalisation of Russia’s Presidential Administration in the period between 1994 under the new framework of the December 1993 constitution, and 2012, the end of Dmitrii Medvedev’s presidency, this article seeks to contribute to our understanding of the institutional components of the rise and stabilisation of authoritarianism in Russia (Levitsky & Way 2010; Gel’man 2015; Reuter 2017) and institutional components of change within authoritarian regimes more generally.

The argument, in short, is that in Russia, throughout the period under study, we witnessed a paradox of administrative, presidential power, and of governance more in general. On the one hand, an administration with more stable and predictable procedures and rules made the president more powerful and thus created preconditions for the stabilisation and adaptation

¹Colloquially called ‘the Kremlin’, this institution represents the main concern of this article, which uses interchangeably the terms ‘the Kremlin’ and ‘the Presidential Administration’ to indicate its core empirical focus.

of the authoritarian regime itself. At the same time, presidential governance was also weak and inefficient as the president was often incapable of steering and monitoring his own agents. Presidential administrative power is thus a polymorphous phenomenon that varies across time, indicators and also policy domains (Gingerich 2013; Jessop 2016, pp. 42–5). It can only be understood if one moves beyond the person of the president.

The article is structured as follows. In the first section I briefly recap relevant literature on institutions under authoritarianism and connect it to larger debates on the allegedly contradictory perspective of institutionalisation—sometimes called proceduralism in the literature—and personalism. In the next section, I describe my analytical framework, which is derived from the comparative literature on the ‘institutional presidency’, then I outline the operationalisation and data sources. The main body of the article is dedicated to the discussion of the four indicators of institutionalisation: autonomy, adaptability, complexity and coherence. In the conclusion, I summarise the main findings of Russia’s paradox of presidential power.

Institutions under authoritarianism and neopatrimonialism

By now it is widely acknowledged that the transitology paradigm and democratisation studies have ‘the taste of ashes’ (Art 2012, p. 351): with the institutional turn in comparative authoritarianism (Pepinsky 2014), scholars ceased to regard democratic-looking institutions as mere window-dressing but attributed to them functions in their own right. It is generally accepted that ‘the same institution produces different results depending on the context’ (North *et al.* 2009, p. 15). In this perspective, processes of institutionalisation help strengthen the regime and therefore contribute to their persistence and capability to adapt over time.

Yet, so far, this literature has mainly focused on elections, parties, legislatures and, to a lesser degree, constitutional courts and their functionalities in stabilising authoritarianism (Frye 2012; Brancati 2014; Pepinsky 2014). Given the prominence of this research paradigm in comparative politics, it is striking that executives, usually assumed to be at the core of most authoritarian polities, are mostly absent or reduced to a personalised ‘dictator’ or ‘autocrat’; for example, in game-theoretical models of authoritarian politics. In fact, this might be one of the features that distinguishes the recent wave of authoritarianism studies from previous ones. The literature on bureaucratic authoritarianism (O’Donnell 1973; Stepan 1973; Collier 1979), for instance, paid heightened attention to the institutionalisation of authoritarian rule and the role of executives and presidencies therein. Philippe Schmitter stated that the ‘cornerstone to this authoritarian edifice is what Marx referred to as “*die verselbstständigten Mächte der Exekutivgewalt*”’, which he translated as a ‘progressive independence of the executive power’, a quintessential marker for an institutionalised authoritarian regime. In practical terms, this process was defined by the ‘rapid establishment of a large, stable and balanced resource base for the state apparatus’, ‘increased penetration of the economy by state instruments of control’, and ‘heavy expenditure for external defence and internal security’ (Schmitter 1973, pp. 187–91).

Among the new wave of authoritarianism studies, those stressing organisational power (Haber 2006; Levitsky & Way 2010) or state power (Slater 2010) allowing these regimes

to make decision and rules, as well as to execute and enforce these rules accordingly, are most similar to the above-mentioned studies from the second half of the twentieth century. On a more abstract level, these institutions of domination in institutionalised authoritarian regimes reduce uncertainty of future outcomes by means of stable patterns recurring over time (González 2008; Schedler 2013).

In Soviet and post-Soviet studies, the debate between institutionalisation and personalisation certainly is one of the classic *topoi* frequently revisited by scholars (Fortescue 2010). With regard to post-Soviet Russia, Eugene Huskey, for example, argues that by 2010 Russia had become a technocratic authoritarian regime (in some respects, even similar to those in Latin America) with an ever-increasing ‘bureaucratisation of politics’ (Huskey 2010, p. 365) and administrators running politics instead of politicians. In a similar vein, Fortescue argues that Putin maintained an ‘institutionalised core to the policy process’ (Fortescue 2010, p. 44; 2016) where routinised procedures helped to overcome factionalism of competing networks.

Opponents of this view argue that bad governance in Russia can be ascribed to neopatrimonial (Fisun 2012) or ‘patronal’ (Hale 2015) regime characteristics, which are sometimes explained by its legacy of ‘patrimonial communism’ (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999), but also as a result of the ‘consequence of the purposeful actions of political and economic actors’ (Gel’man 2016, p. 459). This ‘politico-economic system’ combines different modes of governance and domination wherein ‘personal claims to power, ties and are combined with, and complemented, complicated and conflicted by, impersonal institutions, which have some existence independent of individual political actors’, most notably a ‘bureaucratic state machinery’ (Robinson 2017, p. 349).

Which expectations should we develop with regard to an institutionalisation of Russia’s Presidential Administration? On the one hand, by the 2000s, the Kremlin was being described as the ‘integrating force of governmental bureaucracy’ (Ogushi 2009, p. 21), which ‘solves collective dilemmas for politicians’ (Remington 2010, p. 36) that other underdeveloped, or under-institutionalised, entities such as various civic, partisan, communications and interest-based organisations, could not. On the other hand, informal practices, network governance and virtual politics (Wilson 2005; Ledeneva 2013) are thought to be pervasive features of Russia’s bureaucracy in general, and the Kremlin in particular. Nevertheless, Jennifer Gandhi and her co-authors found that Russia was the eleventh least personalist regime of 100 personalist authoritarian regimes in their sample (Reuter 2017, pp. 280–81), hence personalism and arbitrariness should also be less pronounced with regard to the Presidential Administration than commonly assumed. In the course of time, the Kremlin evolved from an executive office that ‘defies traditional categories of organisational analysis’ (Huskey 1999, p. 58) due to the mix of ‘hierarchical bureaucracy’ and a ‘loose confederation of offices’ to a sustainable, self-sufficient centre of governance (Zuikov 2011). Based on what we know about Russia’s regime trajectory and the sparse research on the Kremlin, we can expect a gradual institutionalisation over time, but personalism should remain a notable feature of the Presidential Administration. Therefore, the main hypothesis advanced in this article is that, given Russia’s regime characteristics and trajectory described above, the degree of institutionalisation of the Kremlin should increase over time. The subsequent section explains the operationalisation of the main concept of institutionalisation and the measurement of change over time in more detail.

Analytical framework, operationalisation and data sources

In the scholarly debate on presidentialism, executive–legislative relations have occupied centre stage (Shugart 2006; Fix-Fierro & Salazar-Ugarte 2012). However, particularly in the United States, public administration research on the ‘institutional presidency’ revolves around the ‘organisational character of the presidency—its growth in size, the complexity of its work, and the general way in which it resembles a large, well-organised bureaucracy’ (Burke 2003, p. 402). The evolution of the executive presidency has been investigated under the umbrella term of ‘institutionalisation’, which ‘was and is at the core of the modern presidency’ (Moe 2009, p. 703), and is usually broadly understood as a process during which an organisation ‘acquires value and stability’ (Huntington 1968, p. 12). In particular, it is crucial for the presidential branch to acquire ‘permanent staff positions and regularised advising routines’ (Dickinson & Lebo 2007, p. 207) that survive fluctuations of presidents and chief of staffs for longer periods of time. Within the literature on presidentialism, work on institutionalisation mirrors a broader research paradigm in public administration on the systematic analysis of ‘bureaucratisation’ (Eisenstadt 1959; Pugh *et al.* 1963) or even ‘bureaometrics’ (Hood & Dunsire 1981).

However, beyond the United States, and democratic regimes more broadly, theoretical and empirical analyses of presidential administrations or centre of governments (Alessandro *et al.* 2013) are still lacking. Even in a region where presidentialism studies has thrived in the last decades, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), research on presidential centres is ‘practically non-existent’ (Bonvecchi & Scartascini 2014, p. 151). However, recent work on Latin America (Inacio & Llanos 2016), in particular, Colombia (Mejía-Guinand *et al.* 2018), as well as on South Korea (Kim 2004; Jung *et al.* 2012), raises hope that approaching ‘administrative presidential power’ in this manner might prove valuable in other world regions, too.

Methodologically, Russia is an ideal case for a longitudinal, cross-temporal case-based study (Ragin 1987, p. 38; Rohlfing 2012, pp. 129–32) on institutionalisation due to large variation over time in its trajectory from a more pluralist and competitive to a stable, hegemonic authoritarian regime under three presidents in five presidential terms. This not only allows for a systematic analysis of Russia’s Presidential Administration, but also promises some comparative insights for the study of administrative power and the literature on the ‘institutional presidency’ in general.

For the purpose of this article, I rely on four indicators initially developed by Huntington (1965) and applied to the US (Ragsdale & Theis 1997) and Latin American (Inacio & Llanos 2015) presidencies and adapt them for the Russian Presidential Administration. Two of them—autonomy and adaptability—relate to the external dimension and outer boundaries while complexity and coherence refer to the internal stability of structures and procedures.

Autonomy

Huntington (1965, p. 495) proposes that autonomy can be measured by ‘the distinctiveness of the norms and values of the organisation compared with those of other groups, by the personnel controls (in terms of co-optation, penetration, and purging) existing between the organisation and other groups, and by the degree to which the organisation controls its own material

resources'. Ragsdale and Theis (1997) suggest the budget growth of the administration as their first indicator, as a growing budget contributes to stability and value, facilitates independent action by the administration and makes it less vulnerable to outside influence.

Budget growth. The budget of the Russian Presidential Administration can be tracked in a supplement to the annual law 'O federal'nom byudzhete' (On the Federal Budget) in which the respective sum is assigned to Budget Item 303, 'Upravlenie delami prezidenta' (Property Management Department) (Burkhardt 2018). One might argue that budgetary assignments are not very useful indicators in neopatrimonial states where public office is not separated from private gain, and where the Presidential Administration has additional means of extracting funds from non-state actors for public and private purposes. However, the dynamics of budget development over time and in comparison to other state organs, such as the government apparatus (*apparat pravitel'stva*), are indicative of the relative importance of bureaucratic organisations as bureaucratic actors spend considerable energy on increasing their chunk of the federal budget. Furthermore, budget items also signal status as they indicate how much of the 'administrative rent' (Kordonskii 2008)—resources that can be extracted from state and non-state actors for the benefit of the own state authority (*vedomstvennost'*) or private gain—specific organs are entitled to appropriate for themselves. Therefore, the higher the budget share of the Kremlin in relation to other federal organs, the more autonomous it will be, and therefore the higher the degree of institutionalisation of the Kremlin.

Recruitment of staff. Another important indicator of establishing external boundaries is how entry and exit are regulated. The more institutionalised an organisation, the more difficult it will be for outsiders to be recruited, and the turnover of staff will be less frequent (Polsby 1968). US presidents must decide to what degree to 'politicise' (Moe & Wilson 1994) executive offices and find highly qualified but also loyal and ideologically close personnel by means of patronage (Lewis 2008, pp. 28–9; 2009; Hollibaugh *et al.* 2014). Autocrats face similar choices between competence and loyalty, but their preferences tilt towards coercion and monitoring qualities as the mobilisation of counter-elites must be contained and subordinate agents monitored. Following Greitens (2016, pp. 27–30), it can be assumed that the more socially exclusive the staff composition and the less permeable the institutional boundaries, the more loyal staff will be. In addition, appointment patterns in the logic of cadre pools (Huskey 2004) and cadre rotation are crucial aspects of a centralised bureaucratic apparatus indispensable for controlling large territories (Siegel 2018) such as the Russian Federation.

To track recruitment patterns within the Presidential Administration, I assembled an original database of all presidential representatives in the 1990s (*polnomochnye predstaviteli, polpredy*), their successors in the 2000s after the federalism reform, the chief federal inspectors (*glavnnye federal'nye inspektora*—CFI) in Russia's federal subjects (Burkhardt & Libman 2018), and coded their biographical and professional background (Burkhardt 2018).

To operationalise social exclusiveness, the annual share of staff with a *silovik* (former military or security services) background is calculated. *Siloviki* do not form a homogenous group (Taylor 2017) but they are ideologically predisposed to favour a 'strong state' and vertical hierarchies (Taylor 2002; Titaev 2016). Moreover, *siloviki* were found to have closed, more exclusive

employment systems: entry into the profession usually follows graduation from specialised educational institutions (Ogushi 2015). Following this, I operationalised cadre management by means of pools, regular career paths and cadre rotation through the annual share of staff across the regions with previous experience in the apparatus of the presidential representatives in the Presidential Administration. Hence, it can be hypothesised that the higher the mean annual share of staff with a background in the *siloviki* and the apparatus itself, the higher social exclusiveness and the more advanced the cadre management system, and therefore the autonomy and the degree of institutionalisation of the Kremlin.

Adaptability

For Huntington (1965), an organisation's adaptability increases in line with its age and mastery of environmental challenges. Over time, strategies are developed to deal with specific problems, and these coping skills accumulate in the course of time. Presidents decide to create, modify or eliminate administrative units; some prove to be more resilient and turn into core units that survive several presidents. A higher, and more irregular turnover rate of heads of the administration can also be assumed to be associated with a lower life span of units (Burkhardt 2018). Resilience and longer survival duration of administrative units attests to fewer presidential interventions, and therefore that the institutional unit has a value independent of an individual president. More stable core executives are expected to enhance policy-making capacities (Goetz & Wollmann 2001) and ameliorate information flows (Rudalevige 2005).

Changes to the structure of the Russian Presidential Administration are formalised by presidential decree. By gathering the start and end dates of all units of the administration (dates of creation, and termination or merger of administrative units, for more details see Burkhardt 2018), over time, mean durations can be calculated for various time periods which indicate unit resilience. A 'survival analysis' of these units will therefore illustrate how far uncertainty is reduced by reference to lower turnover rates. Therefore, it can be assumed that the higher the mean duration of units in a given period, the higher the stability and, consequently, the degree of institutionalisation of the Kremlin.

Complexity

While adaptability refers to the endurance of units, complexity marks specialisation and division of labour both hierarchically and functionally. A diversity of sub-units not only increases the stability of the whole organisation but also creates value by forming internal identities that help to maintain bureaucrat loyalty (Ragsdale & Theis 1997). Moreover, the delegation of autonomy to other units might be beneficial not only within the presidential administrative core, but also by means of 'agencification' (Mortensen 2016) by displacement. In other words, units are separated from the Presidential Administration and made into autonomous agencies. In addition to specialisation, agencies displaced further away from the presidential centre can serve as a 'lightning rod' and divert blame from the president, therefore minimising risks associated with policy failure (Hood 2007). On the other hand, over-complexity can also lead to the diminished coherence of the Presidential Administration as a whole (Krause & Cohen 1997).

To study change in complexity over time, organisational charts are typically used (Rudalevige 2005). They allow for drawing inferences on functional diversification and (potentially parallel) hierarchies as well as the subordination patterns of administration sub-units. One way to operationalise complexity is ‘span of control’, measured as the number of organisational units directly subordinate to the president and the head of the Presidential Administration. The optimal size of the span of control is contested in the literature and varies depending on the goals of the organisation, but an increased span is usually associated with enhanced efficiency and performance (Theobald & Nicholson-Crotty 2005).

Another proposed measure by Ragsdale and Thies is staff size, which I compile from a variety of sources such as archive material, statistical yearbooks, media reports and secondary literature. In sum, it can be assumed that the higher the specialisation—the span of control and staff size of the administration—the higher the complexity and, therefore, the degree of institutionalisation of the Kremlin.

Coherence

Coherence refers to unity and consensus within an organisation. Ragsdale and Theis (1997) relate this to an organisation’s ability to manage its workload and refer to Polsby’s understanding as ‘universalistic rather than particularistic criteria, and automatic rather than discretionary methods for conducting internal business’ (Polsby 1968, p. 145). Therefore, in an ideally coherent organisation, violation of rules and non-compliance with top-down orders would be minimal.

Following this logic, I analyse the annual implementation rate of presidential ‘assignments’ (*porucheniya*) retrieved from the journal *Prezidentskii kontrol*.² To date, in the literature only anecdotal evidence exists for the implementation of presidential decisions, with the bulk of research concentrated on law- or decree-making, namely, the input-side of policy-making. Technically, an assignment is the lowest administrative action a Russian president can take to give an order. Both higher-ranking ‘decrees’ (*ukazy*) and ‘orders’ (*rasporiazheniya*), are internally broken down into assignments in the administrative routine and then monitored (‘controlled’) by the Presidential Administration’s Monitoring Department. Therefore, assignments are certainly one of the most powerful tools at the president’s disposal to direct the executive branch and a suitable benchmark to track implementation. I assume that the higher the implementation

²*Prezidentskii Kontrol* (Presidential Monitoring, or Presidential Oversight, ISSN 1560-0300) is an official monthly information bulletin published by the Presidential Administration’s publishing house ‘Legal Literature’. The journal has been published since 10 January 1994 under the guidance of the Presidential Administration’s Monitoring Department (*Kontrol’noe Upravlenie*), one of the ‘core units’ of the administration. It is particularly valuable because it is an internal publication targeted at professionals in oversight and law enforcement bodies. It features a wide range of genres including official documents, opinion pieces or reports from the Russian regions. A large part of the content is dedicated to presidential oversight, but the journal also features analyses on several dozens of other authorities in the domain of oversight and law enforcement such as the Ministry of Finance or the General Prosecutor’s Office. The journal thus offers a unique glimpse into the internal world of an administrative unit of the Presidential Administration which is not often reported upon in the media. Of particular value are the annual reports on the main results of the Monitoring Department’s oversight activity with regard to the implementation of presidential decrees and assignments by the federal and regional bureaucracy.

rate of presidential assignments, the higher the degree of coherence of the Kremlin and, therefore, its institutionalisation.

In sum, the main assumption advanced in this article is that, over time, paralleling Russia's overall trajectory towards a consolidated authoritarian regime with strong neopatrimonial elements, the institutionalisation of the Kremlin should markedly increase while non-procedural, personalist elements should still persist. The subsequent section demonstrates the findings for the respective criteria in detail.

Ordering vertical power—towards the institutionalisation of the Presidential Administration

Autonomy

Budget. The budget-making process exemplifies the change of relative power in the triangle (presidency–government–*Duma*) in the course of the 1990s and the 2000s. While in the mid-1990s the budget process was characterised by 'procedural breakdown and deadlock in the *Duma*' (Ostrow 2000, ch. 5), in the 2000s the parliament was 'effectively marginalised, both in policy making and oversight' (Kraan *et al.* 2008; Remington 2008, p. 179; Fortescue 2017). The following two figures represent the share of the Presidential Administration in relation to the annual state budget in the respective fiscal years for the period 1994–2012. Figure 1 underpins the gradual shift of relative power between state organs towards the executive in terms of budget. While in 1994 the Kremlin and the *Duma* had about the same share of the budget (0.1%) at their disposal, between 1996 and 1999 the Kremlin share was about twice as high, but still at a comparatively low level. The years 2000–2003 mark a transition period; the gap widens continuously from 2005. The trends for the Federation Council and the Constitutional Court are similar.

The number of sub-items in each spending category is also indicative. In 1997, for example, there is only one line for the State *Duma* while the Kremlin has nine. In 2007, the difference is much more pronounced, with a proportion of 13 for the *Duma* and 91 items for the Kremlin. This inflation of items does not so much attest to more and more detailed budget laws but, rather, to a gradual differentiation and expansion of activities officially funded by the Presidential Administration. Beside the apparatuses of the Presidential Administration, the government and Property Management Department, this list includes expenses for independent experts, compensation for plaintiffs who won cases at the European Court of Human Rights against Russia, state support for civil society, scientific research, cultural awards, a presidential reserve fund, construction works, various Federal Investment Programmes, educational institutions, clinics and a patriotism programme.

However, as Figure 2 shows, the Kremlin budget share is much lower than that of the Ministry of Defence (MinOborony), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) or the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MChS), while it is on a comparable level to the Ministry of Justice (MinYust) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID).

These five ministries, the 'presidential bloc', are directly subordinate to the presidency; therefore the president has the final say over spending. Nevertheless, ministries controlling about 10% (MinOborony) or 5–10% (MVD) of the state budget possess considerable

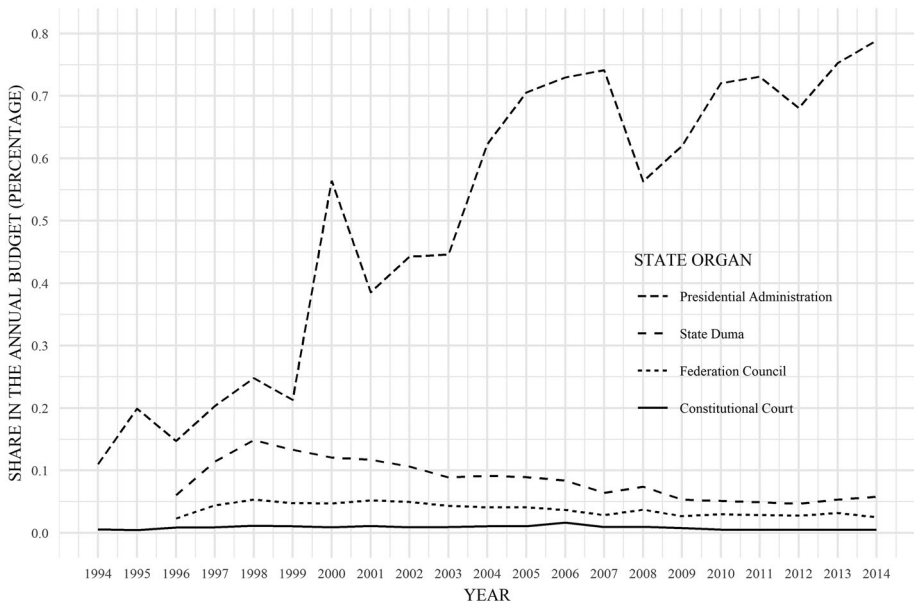


FIGURE 1. SHARE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE ANNUAL BUDGETS (%) COMPARED TO OTHER STATE ORGANS
 Source: Compiled and calculated by the author from data included in Burkhardt (2018).

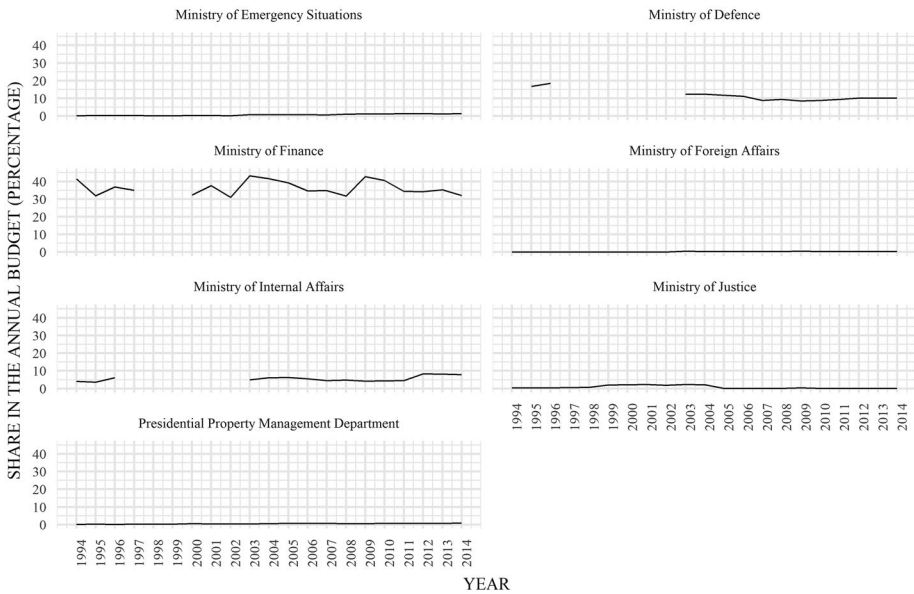


FIGURE 2. SHARE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE ANNUAL BUDGET (%) COMPARED TO MINISTRIES IN THE ‘PRESIDENTIAL BLOC’ OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE
 Source: Compiled and calculated by the author from Burkhardt (2018).

autonomy, and therefore bureaucratic weight, themselves. This is even more crucial for the Ministry of Finance: in the period 1994–2012, it received between 30% and 45% of the state budget, and it is generally considered the central player in the budget process (Noble 2017), although it is obliged to follow the president’s general guidelines without being formally subordinate to him. This constellation necessitates intense coordination and delegation of tasks and, at the same time, internal monitoring of agents, who naturally develop interests of their own. On the other hand, the growth of the Kremlin’s budget share in the period under observation was smoother and more gradual, and cuts were less pronounced and short-term in contrast to, for instance, the MinYust, which experienced a surge in 1999 and then a steep drop in 2005.

In sum, this section demonstrates that the Kremlin’s autonomy increased considerably in the period of investigation in relation to other institutions while major shares of the budget remained delegated and under the supervision of powerful ministries and other agencies. This section therefore provides evidence for a gradual institutionalisation, but the shares—and even more so, the precise sums—ought to be treated with caution, as this approach does not account for extra-budgetary funds as well as the variation of the control of informal financial flows (such as informal election funds, ‘voluntary’ payments by state and private companies and business tycoons to cover costs for various social and economic issues in Russian regions, slush funds). Informal resources are naturally hard to measure, but the basic assumption is that the longitudinal trend for both formal and informal autonomy of various state organs is strongly correlated.

Recruitment patterns in the Presidential Administration. Nominations and appointments are among the most powerful instruments at a president’s disposal. Beside those appointment powers already stipulated in the constitution, the presidency over the time has accumulated even more powers (Burkhardt 2017), for example, to appoint top managers in state corporations or additional posts in state organs. The basic issue of selecting between two archetypes is relevant across regime types: professional appointees based on meritocracy, or patronage appointees based on personal acquaintance and loyalty. Under conditions of patronal presidentialism, in which ‘the president also wields a high degree of informal power based on widespread patron–client relationships at the intersection of the state and the economy’ (Hale 2005, pp. 137–38), patronage by default is the appointment type of choice. In one of the few empirical studies using surveys among public servants below the age of 35 in the years 2001–2002, it was found that informal contacts such as personal ties and acquaintance indeed prevailed over meritocratic hiring methods to enter state service. However, in the self-perception of young bureaucrats, performance-based criteria also mattered in moving up the career ladder (Gimpelson *et al.* 2009). Studies of gubernatorial appointments between 2004 and 2012 unequivocally show that political loyalty superseded economic competence as the primary selection criteria: governors who delivered higher voting results for United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*—UR) were more likely to be reappointed (Reuter & Robertson 2012).

Figure 3 summarises recruitment patterns of *polpredy* and CFI in the years between 1991 and 2012 and shows the two background characteristics highlighted, namely *siloviki* (if the person had served in a power authority before) and apparatus (that is, having previous bureaucratic experience in the apparatus of the presidential representative).

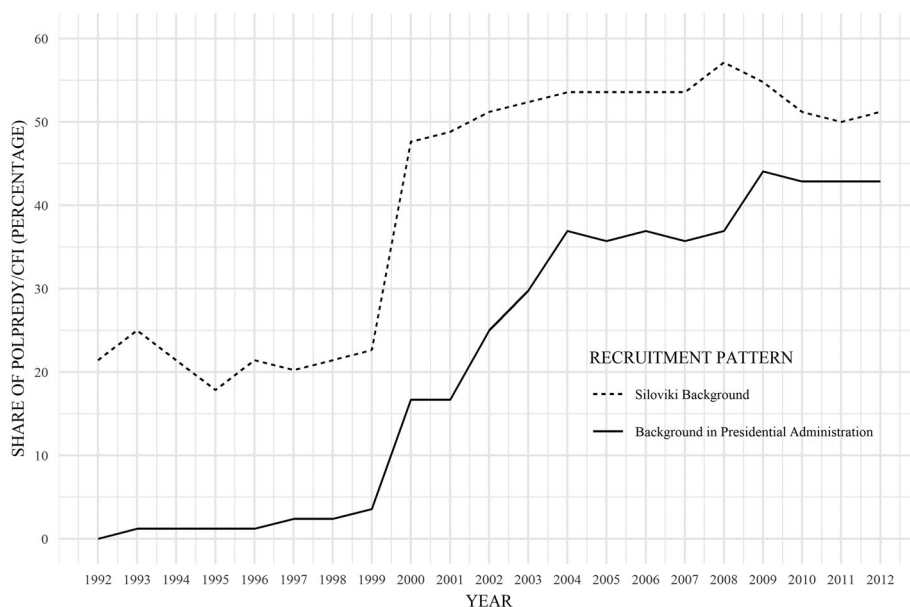


FIGURE 3. RECRUITMENT PATTERNS OF PRESIDENTIAL REPRESENTATIVES (*POLPREDY*) AND CHIEF FEDERAL INSPECTORS (CFI) 1991–2012 ($N=472$)

Source: Compiled and calculated by the author on data from Burkhardt (2018) and Burkhardt and Libman (2018).

The proportion of bureaucrats with a *siloviki* background increases sharply from the years 1999–2000. While in the 1990s, the mean is 21%, in the 2000s the figure is as high as 52%, with a peak of 57% in 2008. With regard to officials who had previously worked in the apparatus, three phases can be distinguished. Until 1999, almost no *polpredy* had previous experience in the same sphere. In the second, transitional phase, the share increased to 14 in 2000 and 25 in 2003. In the third phase of stability, every third CFI had previously worked in the apparatus.

How should these figures be interpreted in terms of autonomy and institutionalisation? Departing from the three perspectives on *siloviki*—‘cohort’, ‘clan’ and ‘corporate actors’—elaborated by (Taylor 2011), I propose a fourth approach which I denote ‘exclusive cadre management’. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the cadre management system of the CPSU—the *nomenklatura*—had also disappeared. Consequently, recruitment to state bureaucracy and upward elite mobility was in flux and not institutionalised. This only began to change in 1997, with early efforts to revive a cadre reserve system, which only gained traction after 2004 with a new law on state service (Huskey 2004). In agreement with critics (Renz 2006; Rivera & Rivera 2018) of the militocracy approach framed by Kryshstanovskaya and White (2003), who claimed that the appointment of officials with a *siloviki* background was the main trend in cadre politics in Vladimir Putin’s first two presidential terms, Eugene Huskey argued that ‘the distinguishing characteristic of the Russian political leadership is less its militarisation than its bureaucratisation’ (Huskey 2012, p. 175). In this view, ‘rising through the ranks’ in state service was overall more

pronounced than the *siloviki* background as such. This line of reasoning is corroborated in an empirical study by Atsushi Ogushi on the recruitment patterns of deputy ministers in Russia in the period 1999–2013. *Siloviki* ministries were precisely those with exclusive hiring systems, that is, ministers were appointed more systematically. Moreover, horizontal inter-ministerial transfer of personnel was more frequent among staff with a *siloviki* background, therefore this cohort could be regarded as an ‘integrating force in Russian bureaucracy’ (Ogushi 2015, p. 11).

Returning to the presidential representatives and CFI in Russian regions, the increase of officials in the 2000s who had a background in the apparatus of the presidential representative itself to an average of one third attests to more systematic hiring of officials who already had experience in the sphere in which they were to be employed. This pattern is in stark contrast to recruitment in the 1990s. In the first phase of the existence of presidential representatives in the regions from 1991 to 1997, 44% had a background in either the RSFSR’s Supreme Soviet or the Federal Assembly, 25% had been members of a pro-Yel’tsin party, 25% had worked in a regional executive or local self-administrations, and 38% had been a deputy in either a regional or local parliament. In the 2000s the share of CFI who had a background as an elected politician dropped to about 6%, while the dominant party UR played almost no role as a cadre reserve. While experience in regional and local executives remained on a comparable level to the 1990s, those who had spent some time in either private or state enterprises rose to about one quarter. These ‘revolving doors’ between business and state administration further contributed to the neopatrimonial character of Russia’s state. A second feature that attests to persistent personalisation is the sharp increase of the *siloviki* share from 1999 to 2000 when Putin replaced Yel’tsin, and the less pronounced decrease during the Medvedev presidency: both ‘bumps’ attest to how the appointment preferences and patronage networks of the civilian presidents Yel’tsin and Medvedev differed from those of the former KGB officer and FSB director Putin.

Given the centrifugal character of federal relations in the 1990s (Stoner-Weiss 2006), the *siloviki* as an integrating force in the bureaucracy and officials with previous experience and specialisation in the Kremlin apparatus were part of the centre’s effort to wrest back control from the regions. The continuous institutionalisation of the increasingly socially exclusive cadre policy contributed to the Kremlin’s autonomy—in this particular example, with regard to Russian regions—and therefore helped the presidency ‘to solve collective dilemmas’ (Remington 2010, p. 36) in the face of the weakness of other intermediary institutions such as parties or civil society.

Adaptability

The Presidential Administration was created by presidential decree in July 1991,³ a month after the first presidential elections had taken place in the RSFSR. The very beginning of its existence was described as a ‘revolutionary headquarters’, an ‘operational group’ and

³Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Sovetskoi Federativnoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki N13 ‘Ob Administratsii Prezidenta RSFSR’, 19 July 1991, available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102012108&rdk=0&firstDoc=1&lastdoc=1>, accessed 16 March 2020.

‘working apparatus’ (Zuikov 2011). Initially, the Presidential Administration was composed of merely 13 sub-units and almost 600 staff. In the course of that year, the Kremlin acquired enormous capacity, both in a political-administrative and material-technical sense, that led a group of politicians to conclude in September 1991 that the Kremlin had become a ‘hyperstructure’ upon which hinged all other state organs (Zuikov 2011, pp. 36–7). Among others, the Property Management Department of the Presidential Administration received real estate such as buildings, enterprises and sanatoriums from the Central Committee of the CPSU and the RSFSR as well as those facilities that had belonged to the presidential apparatus of the Soviet Union (Ogushi 2009; Huskey 2014).

The analysis of presidential decrees detected that a total of 100 administrative units existed on average for 1,825 days or exactly five years. However, the difference between the units is enormous, as indicated by a large standard deviation of 2,053. Seven of them existed for the whole period under study (between approximately 20–21 years depending on when the unit was created) and can thus be considered core units that covered functions essential to the Kremlin: the protocol unit, the chancellery, the office of the head of the Presidential Administration, the Monitoring Department, the Department for State and Legal Affairs, the apparatus of the Security Council and the publishing house Legal Literature (*Yuridicheskaya Literatura*). Another seven units straddled the 1990s and the 2000s, with a survival length of between 11 and 14 years. These were the units for handling citizens’ complaints and appeals, the departments for foreign policy, for information and document management, for state awards, pardons, citizenship and the organisation unit.⁴ In some instances, the administrative status of these units changed; for example, from ‘press service’ to ‘press department’,⁵ from citizenship division (*otdel*) to department (*upravlenie*) or from main department (*glavnoe upravlenie*) to simply department (*upravlenie*). Nevertheless, their functional specialisation did not alter as was the case when units were merged or even liquidated.

In terms of quantity, the number of units created in the 1990s was four times as high as in the 2000s (81 compared to 19). With 2,227 days against 1,730, the units survived 1.3 times longer in the 2000s as compared to the 1990s (see Table 1 and Burkhardt 2018). If the seven core units are excluded, these differences are even more staggering: while departments created in the 2000s survived on average for a little over six years, in the 1990s they endured only slightly more than three years. The most volatile period for units was between 1996 and 1998: in a mere three years, no less than 38 units were created that on

⁴For a list of the complete titles of the departments see Burkhardt (2018).

⁵As elaborated on in the section on ‘complexity’, the organisational structure of the Presidential Administration has undergone considerable change since its creation. The main distinction of units is between independent units and those subordinate to other units. After the public administration reform in 2004, the *upravlenie* (department or division) overseen by a presidential aide (*pomoshchnik*) became the standard independent unit, and the *otdel* (section or unit) became the main subordinate administrative unit. One of the few exceptions is the *referentura*, the speechwriters’ department. Before 2004, the naming of the independent administrative units was much more diverse, which to a certain degree also reflected the vaguely defined, but unequal administrative weight of the various units. Names of independent units included *Glavnoe upravlenie* (‘Main department’), *upravlenie* (‘department’), *sluzhba* (‘service’), *kantselyariya* (‘chancellery’), *apparat* (‘apparatus’) or *Analiticheskii tsentr* (‘Analytical centre’). The more orderly naming of administrative units can thus also be read as one of the characteristics of the institutionalisation of the Presidential Administration.

TABLE 1
AVERAGE LIFE SPAN OF ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION
1991–2012 IN DAYS

	<i>Average (in days)</i>	<i>Absolute number of units</i>	<i>Average (in days, excluding seven core units)</i>	<i>Absolute number of units (excluding seven core units)</i>
Whole period	1,825	100	1,399	93
Established in the 1990s	1,730	81	1,186	74
Established in the 2000s	2,228	19	2,228	19

average lasted only 2.6 years. In contrast, the transition from Yel'tsin's second term to Putin's first term from an institutional perspective was generally smooth. The 1996 statute⁶ on the Presidential Administration remained in force until 2004, when a new statute⁷ was passed by presidential decree which remains in force until today. Most units remained in place, and a mere five new units were created in June 2000. Furthermore, the restructuring and creation of units in the 2000s as a rule coincided with presidential elections in the years 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012. Nonetheless, reshuffles beyond electoral cycles did take place. In some instances, units were created to cater to entirely new policy objectives; for example, the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (2005)⁸ or the apparatus of the President's Ombudsperson for Children's Rights (2009).⁹

In conclusion, it can be stated that it is not so much a change of presidential leadership that is the most prominent environmental challenge for the survival of units but rather a reshuffle of heads of the Presidential Administration (Burkhardt 2018). Anatolii Chubais in 1996, Valentin Yumashev in 1997 and Nikolai Bordyuzha in 1998 came with their own visions of how the administration should look (Zuikov 2012a). The rotation of heads of the Presidential Administration, in itself, reflected the instability and procedural irregularity that was characteristic of the broader political context. The stabilisation and regularisation of processes in the 2000s are reflected in the four times lower number of units created: in this period, institutional change occurred mainly after presidential elections.

Complexity

Functional specialisation and increasing span of control. The trajectory of the Kremlin in post-Soviet Russia can be viewed as a process of gauging the right balance between diversification and governability, in particular, in the years between 1991 and 2000. This

⁶Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii N1412 'Ob utverzhdenii Polozheniya ob Administratsii Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 2 October 1996, available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102043536&rdk=0&firstDoc=1&lastdoc=1>, accessed 16 March 2020.

⁷Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii N490 'Ob utverzhdenii Polozheniya ob Administratsii Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 6 April 2004, available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102086147&rdk=0&firstDoc=1&lastdoc=1>, accessed 16 March 2020.

⁸Upravlenie po mezhregional'nym i kul'turnym svyazyam s zarubezhnymi stranami.

⁹Apparat Upolnomochennogo pri Prezidente po pravam rebenka.

was less a process of conscious institutional engineering than one of a ‘rebuilding the ship at sea’ in a transitional context with high uncertainty and short planning horizons.

Organisational charts (Burkhardt 2018) have been used from the very beginning by chiefs of staff to model the structure of the Presidential Administration, define hierarchies, specialisations and information flows. In one of the first systematic treatments of the Presidential Administration during the Yel'tsin period, Huskey stated that the Kremlin was ‘in part a hierarchical bureaucracy, in part a loose confederation of offices, the Executive Office of the President defies traditional categories of organisational analysis’ (Huskey 1999, p. 58). In this reading, organisational charts have little practical meaning as hierarchies cannot be inferred from them. Another objection is that actors and their personalised relationships trump official hierarchies: ‘formal positions mattered less than the shifting patterns of influence that focused around the president himself, and the struggles for influence that intensified whenever the president was indisposed’ (White 1997, p. 52). Nevertheless, similar to formal institutions in general, such as constitutions and laws (Frye 1997; Burkhardt 2017), these macro-structural arrangements in the Kremlin were the object of power struggles, and the fact that they were amended several times during the period of study indicates that they must be meaningful, otherwise actors would not have invested the scarce resources available to change them.

This section will solely focus on the ‘span of control’, measured as the number of organisational units directly subordinate to the president and the head of the Presidential Administration, without delving into the complexity of lower-level units. The head of the Kremlin—or chief of staff—as the main plenipotentiary of the president is responsible for conducting the Presidential Administration’s business. Deputy heads are responsible for specific policy fields or functional specialisations, and their number indicates the degree to which parallel verticals exist within the Kremlin. Usually, in span-of-control measures, only the head of a particular organisation and their direct subordinates are included. In the case of the Presidential Administration, however, the subordination of units and deputy heads changed over the period of study with configurations ranging from subordination to either the head of the Presidential Administration or the president, or dual subordination to both of them.

Based on the analysis of five organisational charts retrieved from presidential decrees, archives and media, Table 2 demonstrates that the span of control—and therefore the complexity—of the Kremlin markedly increased in the period 1993–2013. This longitudinal trajectory confirms the hypothesis that a wider span of control and regularised patterns of a more diversified organisation are associated with overall stability. A comparatively low number of units and hierarchies under the president and the chief of staff was characteristic of the 1990s. A narrow span of control had at least two disadvantages, which were particularly evident in the early years under Sergei Filatov. First, the limited span at times led to intense competition among powerful hierarchies; for example, the so-called Service of Aides (*Sluzhba Pomoshchnikov*)—senior special advisers directly subordinate to the president—who often vied for the president’s ear with the chief of staff himself (Baturin *et al.* 2001). Second, the multitude of smaller units below the uppermost administrative layer caused governance problems, therefore Filatov had a hard time maintaining unity within the administration (Schröder 1996; Huskey 1999, p. 61). In particular, Filatov’s successor, Nikolai Egorov, was determined to

TABLE 2
SPAN OF CONTROL OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE HEAD OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
ADMINISTRATION (CHIEF OF STAFF)

Date	22 February 1993	January 1994	29 January 1996	21 April 2004	8 May 2013
President	B.N. Yel'tsin	B.N. Yel'tsin	B.N. Yel'tsin	V.V. Putin	V.V. Putin
Chief of Staff	S. Filatov	S. Filatov	N. Egorov	D.A. Medvedev	S.B. Ivanov
Hierarchies under the President	4	6	5	15	18
Hierarchies under the Chief of Staff	6	3	8	14	13
Departments under Chief of Staff	14	3	13	15	13

streamline the Kremlin by centralisation in the style of military or law enforcement agencies (Zuikov 2012b), but his stint in the first half of 1996 was too brief, and his efforts to reorganise the Kremlin were thwarted by the next chief of staff, Anatolii Chubais.

Three specific developments lend support to Chubais' claim that he managed to draw a line under the Kremlin reform for the near future (Kutsyllo 1996). Before his tenure, two powerful units were displaced from the Kremlin and thus gained independence: the Main Property Department (*Upravlenie Delami*) responsible for budgeting and in possession of a large network of real estate and enterprises in August 1995; and the presidential security service (*Sluzhba bezopasnosti Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*—formerly Main Guards Department) in July 1996. Chubais himself dissolved the position of the First Aide (*Pervyi Pomoshchnik*) and put the Service of Aides under direct control of the head of the Kremlin, therefore abolishing a parallel hierarchy within the Kremlin and direct access by the aides to the president. Consequently, by either completely abolishing or displacing powerful parallel hierarchies within the Kremlin, both the position of the president and the chief of staff were enhanced. Until the end of Yel'tsin's second presidential term, another three chiefs of staff presided over the Presidential Administration; however, the approximate level of the span of control and differentiation had already been reached by February 1998, that is, without too-powerful units or positions that would either endanger the chief of staff or other units. This configuration became the new gold standard in the subsequent decades under President Putin.

The 'change of guard' from presidents Yel'tsin to Putin in 1999–2000 was somewhat smoothed out by chief of staff Aleksandr Voloshin, who served both presidents, from March 1999 to October 2003, and changes from an organisational vantage point were rather minor. An internal memorandum that was leaked to *Kommersant* as 'Edition No. 6'¹⁰ made some waves at the time because it suggested wide-ranging reform plans for the Presidential Administration and its role in the political system. This memorandum's meaning should not be overestimated; it never became a blueprint for restructuring the

¹⁰'Redaktsiya N 6', *Zhurnal Kommersant* "Vlast", 9 May 2000, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/16875>, accessed 16 March 2020.

administration and ‘an actual outline of the proposal to significantly increase the political control by the Kremlin’s Presidential Administration’, as claimed by Dawisha (2014, p. 253). Much more crucial was the 2000 federalism reform, which created presidential representatives (*polpredy*) in seven federal districts. These envoys and their apparatuses became part of the Kremlin. Second, for the first time a proper department for domestic politics, the Main Department for Domestic Politics,¹¹ was created in June 2000; by the mid-2000s, this department had become ‘a headquarters for managing society and elites’ (Pallin 2017, p. 255).

While the span of control had reached a highly diversified level, with more than ten subordinate units by 1998, the subordination patterns between president and head of the Kremlin were varied. By June 2000, chief of staff Voloshin had ten deputies, among them two first deputies, a structure that mirrored the government’s pattern of (first) vice prime ministers. With the 2004 administrative reform of public civil service, the overall number of deputies in the Kremlin was reduced to two. However, this did not change the functional division of labour as the previous deputy chiefs of staff remained presidential aides (*pomoshchniki*) heading their respective departments, although some minor redundant functions were indeed reduced (Vardul’ & Smirnov 2004). While the chief of staff presided over the coordination of his deputies and the aides, the latter were also directly subordinate to the president, creating a certain ambiguity of accountability and subordination. Presidential advisers (*sovetniki*) had much less administrative weight than aides who simultaneously headed departments. The weight of the former was more symbolic than administrative, and often a sinecure or intermediate post for civil servants close to the president.

In sharp contrast to the 1990s, when changes were often abrupt and haphazard, major adjustments were made in proximity to presidential elections, namely in 2000, 2004 and 2013. In between elections, at times new departments were founded by ‘layering’ them into the Kremlin, but this restructuring was less the result of power struggles than of the president’s changing policy preferences and, to some degree, was also an adaptation to a changing domestic and international environment. In February 2005, for example, the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries¹² was established, a move that coincided with an emerging soft power strategy including the creation of the international television network *Russia Today* in 2005 and the foundation *Russkii Mir* to promote the Russian perspective in foreign countries and among Russian speakers abroad. Under the new president Dmitrii Medvedev, the position and apparatus of the children’s ombudsman was established in October 2009, a follow-up to Medvedev’s pledge to focus on family and child policy.

¹¹Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii N 629 ‘Ob utverzhdenii Polozheniya o Glavnom upravlenii vnutrennei politiki Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, 2 June 2002, available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102071344&rdk=0&firstDoc=1&lastdoc=1>, accessed 16 March 2020.

¹²Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii N 198 ‘Ob Upravlenii Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii po mezhregional’nym i kul’turnym svyazyam s zarubezhnymi stranami’, 22 February 2005, available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=102085970&backlink=1&&nd=102091154>, accessed 16 March 2020.

The Medvedev interim presidency from 2008 to 2012 and Putin's return to the presidency thereafter supports the argument of this article that the institutionalisation of the Presidential Administration played a crucial role in enhancing the autonomy of the presidency. Medvedev did not change the organisational structure of the Presidential Administration; instead, he aimed to place his own patronage network while a large number of Putin's confidants were transferred to the government apparatus. Prime Minister Putin's patronage networks and leadership skills exceeded those of Medvedev by far, but he nevertheless strove to increase the formal autonomy of the prime minister's apparatus from the Presidential Administration. For example, the obligation for presidential counter-signature for some types of governmental documents was abolished. In other words, Putin simply had to return to the presidency as the formal competences of the post of the prime minister were too weak to sustain *de facto* leadership while Medvedev occupied the presidency as *de jure* leader backed by the institutionalised Presidential Administration. If Putin had not returned to the presidency in 2012, one might surmise that the Putin–Medvedev 'tandem' would have likely turned into a diarchy or, in the words of Hale (2015), competing pyramids, with unforeseeable consequences for stability in the Presidential Administration, and the regime as a whole.

Number of employees. The size of the Russian bureaucracy is not only proverbial but it commonly represents a matter of public complaint. Nevertheless, public administration scholars highlight that the size of Russia's bureaucracy both as a percentage of the labour force and the total population compared to many other, among others, developed countries, is small. Robert Brym, Vladimir Magun and Vladimir Gimpelson therefore concluded that 'Russia's state bureaucracy is problematic in many ways, but size itself is not one of them' (Gimpelson *et al.* 2009, p. 101). The general dilemma faced by large federal states such as post-Soviet Russia has been that a small bureaucracy is likely not to be able to cope. On the other hand, an oversized bureaucracy has a potentially stifling effect on society and business as well as being prone to corruption. Empirical studies, indeed, conclude that larger bureaucracies in Russian regions increase corruption (Dininio & Orttung 2005) and negatively affect economic growth. Alexander Libman finds that 'even a small bureaucracy can be harmful for growth even during a generally favourable economic environment, such as that in Russia in the early 2000s, if its quality is bad enough' (Libman 2012, p. 1347).

Figure 4 illustrates that in the 2000s the number of bureaucrats employed in the federal executive almost doubled at the regional level, reaching a peak in 2010 with 635,400, compared to 346,100 officials in 1994. On the federal level, the numbers of Moscow-based bureaucrats are 35,700 for 2010 and 33,800 for 1994 respectively.

As the expansion of the bureaucracy in the mid-2000s mainly materialised on the regional level of the federal executive, a similar pattern might be expected to have occurred at the Kremlin level. As a matter of fact, in the period of investigation the number of Kremlin staff oscillated between approximately 1,400 and 2,000 staff (Zuikov 2012a, p. 151). In 1998 the number was 1,826 (Huskey 1999, p. 93) after a reduction of 100 staff from the year before; between 2000 and 2004, the Kremlin staff totalled approximately 2,000 (Sokolova 2004).

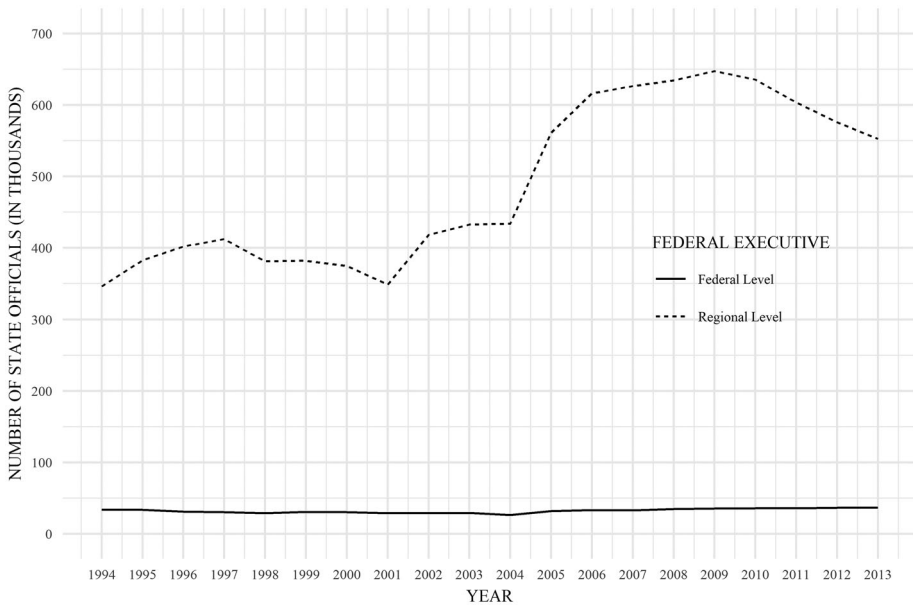


FIGURE 4. NUMBER OF BUREAUCRATS IN RUSSIA'S CIVIL STATE SERVICE (IN THOUSANDS)

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from *Ezhegodnyi Statisticheskii Sbornik*, available at: <https://www.gks.ru/folder/210/document/12994>, accessed 16 March 2020.

As of 2009, the Russian State Statistics Service *Rosstat* has regularly published employee numbers of federal organs. As Figure 5 demonstrates, the number of employees in the Kremlin gradually increased from 1,544 in 2009 to 1,730 in 2014. Most other organs selected for comparison kept their numbers at a more or less steady level in this period. It should be noted that these numbers exclude officials from the category of military and law enforcement agencies. According to data released by the Ministry of Finance, the number of staff is 2,408 as of May 2019.¹³ The figure is significantly higher than in previous years because the ministry appears to include employees in the regions as well as non-civil service staff with a security background. When interpreting staff figures, it is crucial to keep in mind the source of information and the methodology used. Nonetheless, in a longitudinal perspective, the number of Kremlin employees has been surprisingly stable over time. Compared to other federal executive organs it is rather a compact, mid-sized organisation.

In sum, only in the early phase that precedes our analytical time frame did complexity, measured as staff size, increase markedly. Hence, the more general assumption about staff growth over time cannot be confirmed. However, the results tie in very well with more specific Russia-related research asserting that it is not so much the quantity but, rather, the

¹³'Number of Employees in Federal State Organs', Ministry of Finance, 2020, available at: https://www.minfin.ru/ru/OpenData/7710168360-FGO_staff/7710168360-FGO_staff-visual/, accessed 16 March 2020.

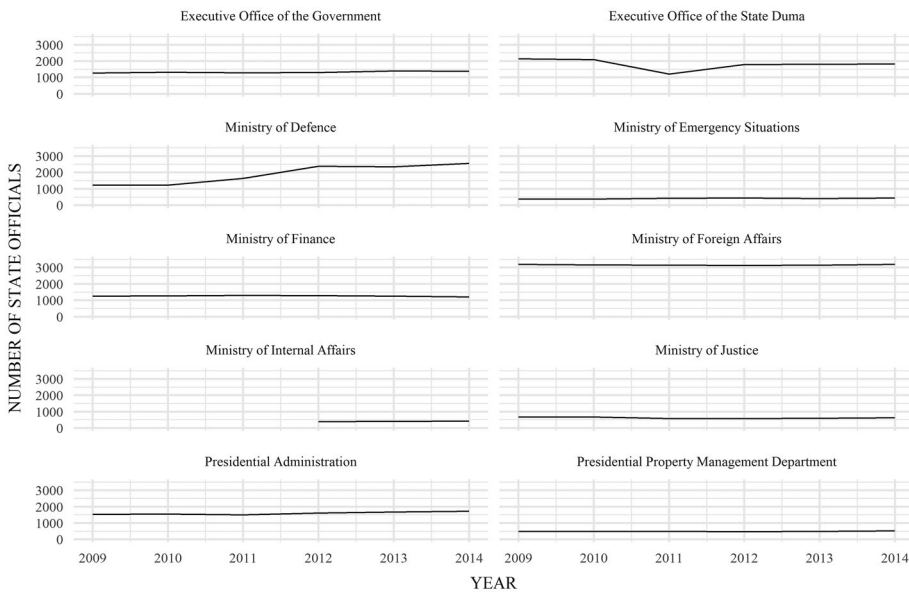


FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN SELECTED FEDERAL AUTHORITIES (FEDERAL LEVEL, ONLY CIVIL SERVANTS)

Source: Compiled by the author from Rosstat for the period 2009–2014. The information was extracted from: ‘Spravka o chislennosti i oplate truda grazhdanskikh sluzhashchykh federal’nykh gosudarstvennykh organov sentral’nykh apparatov ministerstv i vedomstv’, an annual information sheet available on the Rosstat website at: www.gks.ru, accessed 16 March 2020.

quality of the Russian bureaucracy that is crucial for performance. The next section explores the quality of governance in the Presidential Administration further.

Coherence

Even in highly personalised regimes, presidents need to rely on a ‘centre of government’ (Alessandro *et al.* 2013), such as a Presidential Administration, as an auxiliary apparatus to exert their will. If, on the other hand, one takes the political system as a whole and regards the president and the administration as a unified actor, this actor must monitor other actors or agents, such as the cabinet, parliament, constitutional court and subnational entities, and coordinate its actions with theirs. To this end, ‘rules of the game’ need to be agreed upon, monitored and enforced.

In executive–legislative relations, researchers have predominantly looked at what might be called the ‘input side’ of presidential power, that is, the process of agreeing upon the rules of the game by passing laws and decrees. However, even when presidents act unilaterally by decree, these are by no means self-enforcing. As Remington points out, ‘where bureaucratic or third-party self-interest coincides with the president’s political and policy interests, a presidential decree stands a much greater chance of being carried out’ (Remington 2014, p. 141).

The Presidential Administration's Monitoring Department (*Kontrol'noe Upravlenie*) has been collecting summary implementation statistics for presidential assignments since the establishment of the Kremlin in the early 1990s ('output side'). These internal data can provide a systematic overview of how other actors actually comply with rules set by the president in the form of assignments. Some data on assignments have been published on the Kremlin website since 2008 but, since the figure accounts for less than 2% of total presidential output per year, this publicly available information cannot be regarded as representative. Hence, aggregate data for this article were collected from archival issues of *Presidential Monitoring*.

The legal status of 'assignments' remains undefined, a 'blank spot' for Russian constitutional and legal scholars (Startsev 2000). Unlike decrees and directives, assignments are not mentioned in the Russian constitution. Nevertheless, over the years they have become an 'extra-legal, but undoubtedly a "pure declaration of intent" of the head of the state and their implementation is obligatory' (Startsev 2000, p. 139). Internally, assignments are categorised according to the official responsible (by name, not post), the addressee (that is, state authority or organisation), the subject or policy field of the assignments and the implementation deadline. Addressees include not only those federal ministries, services, agencies and presidential representatives in the federal subjects directly subordinate to the president but encompass, horizontally and vertically, virtually all state organs in the federal state administration as well as regional executives. Probably most surprising with regard to the separation of powers, the formal division of labour and subordination, assignments can also be addressed to the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General's Office, the State *Duma* and the Federation Council, the Audit Chamber, Commissions and Councils attached to the president and government as well as the All-Russian People's Front (ONF) or state companies such as Russian Highways (*RosAvtodor*) or state corporations such as Russia's Development Bank VEB and the atomic energy corporation *Rosatom*. Where there is no formal subordination, as in the case of the Supreme Court or the *Duma*, these addressees are either 'recommended' or 'requested' to take a specific action, not ordered; subordinate institutions such as ministries are asked to fulfil a task 'in cooperation' with other actors formally not subject to presidential directives (Burkhardt 2018).

Figure 6 shows the trajectory of assignments in absolute numbers per year between 1994 and 2012 in three dimensions. In the hierarchy of presidential acts, decrees and directives are more substantial than assignments. However, this makes them also more general, and lower specificity complicates the monitoring of implementation and the potential-meting out of sanctions. Therefore, to increase the degree of obligation, crucial items of decrees and directives are broken down into separate assignments with concrete addressees and implementation deadlines, in a move that enhances the leverage available to the Monitoring Department. Direct assignments are those given by the president on various occasions independently of decrees and directives. The total number of assignments aggregates direct assignments and those contained in decrees and directives as well as assignments given by the head of the Presidential Administration by order of the president.

Unfortunately, a considerable number of data points are missing for direct assignments and those contained in decrees and directives. Still, the total number renders a fairly conclusive picture that also correlates with other research on legislative and decree output

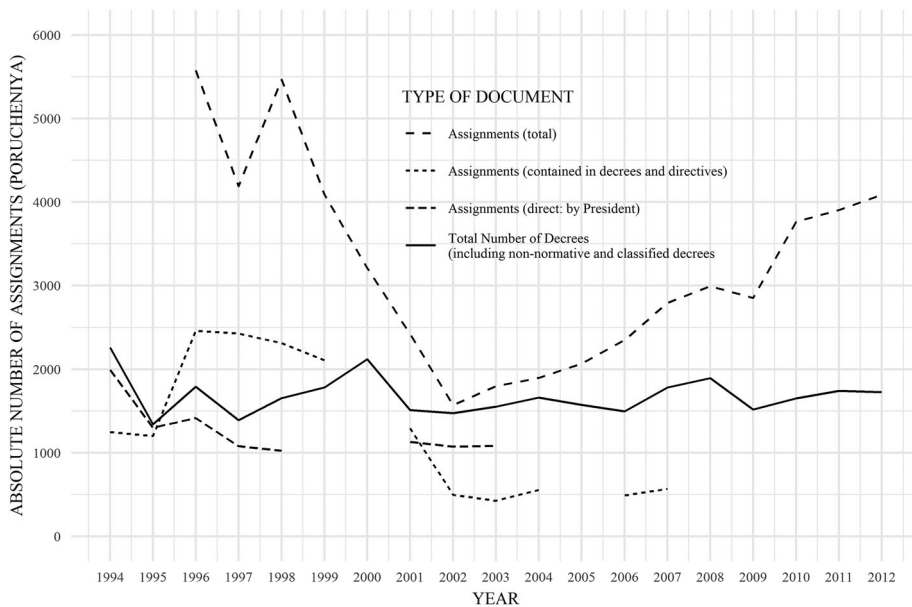


FIGURE 6. ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF ASSIGNMENTS (*PORUCHENIYA*) PER YEAR

Source: Compiled and calculated by the author based on the journal *Prezidentskii Kontrol'* (Presidential Monitoring) and kremlin.ru. *Prezidentskii Kontrol'* was accessed in the online database Integrum for the years 1999–2008, and in print for the years 1993–1998 and 2010–2012.

(Remington 2014). It is impossible to track policy domains of the assignments, but three quantitative trends over time should be highlighted. First, presidential assignment activity peaked between 1996 and 1998, with 5,578 assignments in 1996, 4,190 in 1997 and 5,466 in 1998. As various analyses have demonstrated, presidential decree activity also peaked in 1996 but then subsided significantly in the following years (Parrish 1998; Protsyk 2004; Haspel *et al.* 2006). In a hostile legislative environment, such as the second *Duma*, Yel'tsin chose to circumvent the *Duma*, but also managed, by the strategic use of decrees, 'to move parliament to produce legislation acceptable to the president' and 'as a way of preventing legislation' (Remington 2014, p. 132). Owing to more successful presidential bargaining in the following years, decree activity, unlike the quantity of assignments, decreased. The period 1996–1998 was a time of high intra-executive conflict between the presidency and the government (Sokolowski 2001), which was also manifested in the high turnover of prime ministers and ministers. Given the monitoring mechanisms that accompany the assignments, it can be argued that the high number of assignments was a measure to discipline the government ministries in a time of economic crisis. Second, the trend of decreasing assignment activity continued and reached its lowest point in 2002, with a minimum of 1,572. This, again, was paralleled by presidential decree activity and even legislative output in the *Duma*. Generally, Putin's first term was the least active with regard to policy-making output. Third, assignment numbers picked up again, in particular, as of 2006, which was again paralleled by decrees, parliamentary legislation, and even

decisions of the Constitutional Court. Because of the rise of the pro-presidential UR and an absence of intra-executive conflict between the Presidential Administration and the government, this surge can be attributed to increased policy activity in fields such as the economy by means of state *dirigisme*, but also in domains such as military, law enforcement and security (Burkhardt 2017). This increased use of formal policy instruments also calls into question arguments about the increasing deinstitutionalisation of the regime and the prevalence of informal practices. This development attests to an increasing bureaucratisation—among other factors, facilitated by computerisation and the heightened processing capacities of the bureaucracy—and the regulation of domains that had remained untouched by the activist state before. Moreover, as a result of slack compliance, old, unimplemented assignments were simply replaced with new ones.

Implementation statistics are systematically gathered and processed internally by the Monitoring Department and regularly reported to the president and the chief of staff, usually every quarter. The implementation rate given in these reports is the percentage of implemented in relation to non-implemented assignments. What counts as implementation is essentially determined by the Monitoring Department itself, based on reports on the achieved results delivered by the addressees of the assignments. Once a satisfactory level is achieved, the monitoring of the assignment is formally terminated (*snyatie s kontrolya*) and therefore the addressee is deemed to have complied with the given task. Another distinction is whether the assignment was implemented by the deadline or whether this deadline was extended by the Monitoring Department by request of the addressee.

Figure 7 presents implementation rates gathered from various sources for the period 1994–2012 with a few omissions, mainly arising from the varying standard of the reports.

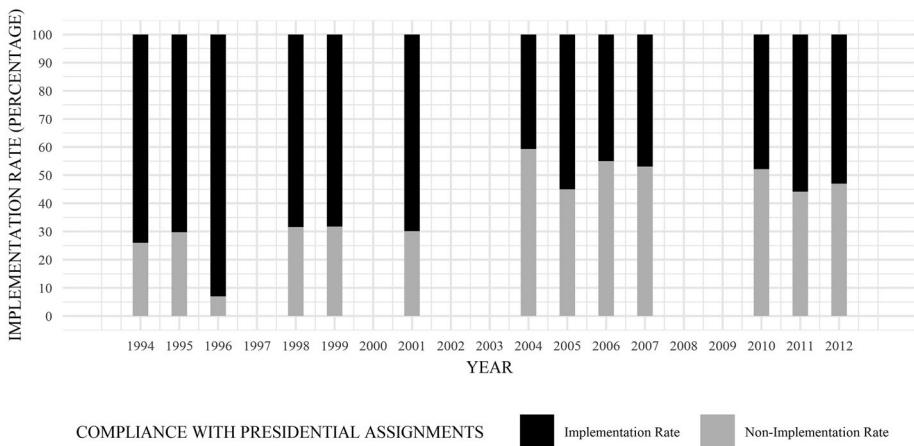


FIGURE 7. IMPLEMENTATION AND NON-IMPLEMENTATION RATES PER YEAR 1994–2012 FOR PRESIDENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS

Source: Compiled from *Prezidentskii Kontrol'*, kremlin.ru and Monaghan (2012) for the years 2005 and 2006. Data points for 1997, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2008 and 2009 were omitted because of lack of confidence in how the given numbers were to be interpreted in relation to the other years.

Sometimes the annual report for the whole year is missing and only numbers for January until September are listed, which are naturally lower than for the whole year. In other instances, it was not entirely clear what the reported numbers mean or relate to, for example, if the number of implemented assignments relates to the total number of assignments or those contained in decrees and directives.

What Figure 7 shows is that the implementation rates reported by the Monitoring Department are notably higher in the 1990s than in the 2000s. While in the Yel'tsin period, 75% of all assignments were fulfilled, in the 2000s the rate fell to 52%. By contrast, the difference between the two Putin terms and Medvedev's term is less than 1%. At first glance, this might appear surprising as, by most accounts, the presidency in the 2000s is thought to be 'stronger' and more 'powerful' than it was in the 1990s, and thus one would expect that other actors in the executive vertical would also be more compliant.

Many theories and explanations exist as to why subordinates comply with a ruler's prescriptions, for example, to pay taxes or to be drafted into the army. In Charles Tilly's model, compliance depends on three factors: coercion, capital and commitment (Tilly 2004). All three variables have changed over time as well as how they interact among themselves. According to Brian Taylor, who defines state capacity 'as the ability of a state to ensure the reliable implementation of its decisions by its own personnel' (Taylor 2011, p. 16), coercive state capacity to sanction deviant behaviour has increased in Russia over time, but he warns that this only holds for special tasks and exceptional decisions while 'much less progress was made in coping with the core, routine tasks' (Taylor 2011, p. 111) of the bureaucracy. Capital—available resources transferable to agents in exchange for compliance, due to sustained economic growth and surplus budgets—also rose. On the other hand, inefficient exploitation of these resources because of corruption and bad governance still prevailed. Lastly, regarding commitment, open conflict between the branches of government, both horizontally and vertically, was more or less superseded. Still, in particular within the bureaucracy, mutual distrust and competing interests for resources and the state budget prevailed or even increased in the 2000s, as Russia became progressively wealthier. In the following sections, three potential explanations—policy relevance, blackmail and bad governance—are given for the apparent decrease in implementation discipline.

One explanation for the decrease of the implementation rate in the internal statistics might be the very policy relevance of the assignments and the monitoring stringency. The former head of the State Property Management Committee and deputy prime minister, Al'fred Kokh, recalls that, in the late 1990s, he received an official reprimand from the prime minister's apparatus when he had an implementation rate of lower than 95%. However, there were many ways of phrasing a 'formal reply' (*otpiska*) to indicate compliance with an assignment, even though the actual task had not actually been completed; nevertheless, this would be counted as successful implementation.¹⁴ Therefore, to increase the policy relevance, the assignments also needed to address more pressing issues. This required substantial financial backing. As a rule, assignments with a higher policy relevance tackled

¹⁴ Author's interview with former Deputy Prime Minister Al'fred Kokh, Munich, 27 November 2014.

more complex policies, thus the assignments were also more difficult to implement. Together with the increased monitoring capacity of the Presidential Administration's Monitoring Department and tougher regulation of compliance over the years, including so-called preventive control (*uprezhdayushchii kontrol'*) and increased workload of reporting requirements for addressees, presidential assignments became more difficult to implement which was then reflected in the annual statistics.

A second explanation might be that there was no incentive for the Kremlin to seek higher implementation rates. Under increasingly authoritarian conditions, lower implementation rates might have been beneficial to the president as 'institutional mechanisms used to secure the loyalty and obedience of officials within the state's administrative hierarchies' (Darden 2008, p. 37). A lack of compliance with assignments makes any official as a 'client' vulnerable to the president as the 'patron' because the formal rules of state service are being violated. These formal violations are carefully monitored and recorded, but rules are not consistently enforced. Punishment is suspended and meted out selectively. On the one hand, this gives subordinate clients—especially on the lower ranks—more leeway to act and potentially also 'to get things done' as the multitude of formal regulations and assignments are often contradictory and time-consuming to follow through. On the other hand, officials are entirely at the mercy of their superiors as any time violations can be produced for formal reprimands, dismissals or even criminal charges. Based on reports by the Kremlin's Monitoring Department, President Dmitrii Medvedev in 2010 had threatened to sack governors in at least ten regions because of inflated prices in the state procurement of medical equipment. In the law enforcement agencies, so-called quota systems (*palochnaya sistema*) are 'highly important institutions of organisational control' (Volkov 2010). Hence, these pre-given quotas are not objective numbers reflecting crime rates or the like, but figures set by a plan. Officials then fake performance to formally meet the plan (Paneyakh 2014). While it is reasonable to assume that the Monitoring Department statistics also represent targets set by the political and administrative leadership and are used as a disciplining instrument, quota systems generally show an upward trend with 'improving' results until they are adjusted to the actual reality on the ground (Bevan & Hood 2006). Moreover, this perspective somewhat overstates vertical control while commonly the vertical and horizontal coordination between bureaucratic agencies is reluctant and faltering at best, due to competing interests, lack of capacity, and gaming strategies from below to subvert the implementation process.

Third, lower implementation rates are not so much a conscious top-down strategy as a symptom of bad governance and 'failure of an activist state to control its agents' (Markus 2007, p. 294). There is indeed evidence that while capacity to complete extraordinary, politicised tasks increased in the period under study, the completion of routine tasks and maintenance of unity and discipline hardly followed universalistic criteria. To the contrary, 'manual control' and discretionary interventions by the president abound, a practice that frequently includes private gains for specific actors, and the president must thus turn 'orders' into 'deals' to achieve compliance (Pavlovsky 2016), a characteristic of neopatrimonial regimes. Subordinate actors deploy multiple strategies to formally comply with implementation targets due to 'a multitude of "principals" and simultaneous tasks, low motivation, a lack of resources and time, strict monitoring of implementation deadlines without necessary monitoring of the quality of implementation of these

assignments' (Kuz'minov & Zhulin 2016). Such strategies, for example, include changing the indicators used to calculate the assignment targets; the introduction of a normative act such as a federal law with a maximum number of state organs and authorities, which increases coordination efforts and gives formal justification for postponing the implementation deadlines of assignments; transferring responsibility to lower levels of the state administration, which allows federal ministries to blame regional administrations for delays or insufficient implementation; and lastly, to choose the most simple, but also most costly solution to problems posed in assignments, which then transfers responsibility to the Ministry of Finance for delays because of negotiations to trim the assignment's budget (Kuz'minov & Zhulin 2016, pp. 14–7). All these coping strategies allow assignment addressees to comply formally with assignment targets, or at least help to minimise their vulnerability with regard to the Kremlin's Monitoring Department and other supervisory authorities. However, this leads to a highly inefficient equilibrium and a paradox of presidential power in Russia: an apparently powerful president with a capable administration and extensive monitoring authority who at the same time finds it difficult to have his own decisions implemented. Therefore, proactively setting policy becomes cumbersome under normal circumstances; the exceptions are rare and costly cases where the president opts for 'manual control', an extraordinary measure hardly suited to solving day-to-day tasks in a complex bureaucratised politico-economic system.

Conclusions for Russia's paradox of governance: partial institutionalisation and the omnipotent impotent presidency

Adam Przeworski has famously written that 'since any order is better than disorder, any order is established' (Przeworski 1991, p. 86). In this sense, after a protracted and turbulent period in the early and mid-1990s, 'any order', and therefore also increased organisational capacity, had been established in the Presidential Administration by the end of the decade and the early 2000s. As the low survival rate of units in the Kremlin and some experiments with the span of control and displaced units have demonstrated, this process of ordering was more the result of trial and error than of purposeful institutional engineering.

Overall, this article has sought to demonstrate that, in the course of the period of investigation (1994–2012), most indicators attest at least to a partial institutionalisation of the Presidential Administration. With an increased annual budget share and an ever more exclusive hiring pattern, the autonomy of the Presidential Administration in relation to other state organs increased markedly. The longevity of organisational units rose over time; restructuring became more regular and, from the 2000s, usually coincided with presidential elections, therefore enhancing adaptability. With a higher span of control by both the president and the head of the Presidential Administration, complexity also increased. The article therefore argues that analysts should refrain from over-personalising accounts of authoritarian regimes at the expense of more structural, organisational factors.

Second, judgements about the degree of institutionalisation need to be qualified. As expected, elements of personalism and neopatrimonialism persisted. This continuity of neopatrimonialism is most apparent in recruitment patterns of *polpredy* and CFI: both Putin in 2000 and Medvedev to a lesser degree in 2008 relied on their patronage networks, which sharply increased the share of *siloviki* after 2000 and crowded some of


them out in Medvedev's term. Moreover, the share of staff with a background in business increased in the 2000s; these revolving doors and interpenetration enhanced rent-seeking opportunities significantly. In addition, the necessity for delegation and coordination with a large number of self-interested and resourceful actors in their own right, such as government ministries or regional administrations, remained, hence non-compliance with presidential orders can be regarded as one of the key issues of governance in Russia up until the present.

Overall, these findings attest to Russia's paradox of presidential power, and governance in general. On the one hand, during the period of study an administration with more stable and predictable procedures and rules made the president more powerful. At the same time, presidential governance is weak and inefficient as the president frequently proves unable to monitor and steer his own agents, a phenomenon which has been aptly called 'debilitated dirigisme' (Markus 2007). This type of patronal presidential power—and, with it, the regime as such—can be safeguarded to a large extent by coercion and reactive control (Ledyaeu 2008). Nevertheless, proactive governance with a more balanced relationship between various state actors and increased accountability to the electorate would also mean fostering 'quasi-voluntary compliance' (Levi 1988). A seemingly omnipotent president with an at least partially institutionalised Presidential Administration helps to prop up the authoritarian regime, but always entails varying degrees of impotence (Shevtsova & Eckert 2000), in particular, when other actors need to be empowered to get things done, a necessity even for governance under autocracy: seemingly omnipotent presidents cannot rule alone.

In this respect, the findings of this article also speak to a more general literature on presidencies and centres of government. Although there is a lack of comparative cross-national and cross-regional research, one might surmise that presidential administrations tend to institutionalise over time both in democratic and authoritarian polities across regime types. Nevertheless, Western democracies in particular have seen major debureaucratisation efforts since the 1970s in the wake of New Public Management (NPM) reforms. Therefore, bureaucratic organisations are faced with ups and downs, and waves of bureaucratisation and debureaucratisation (Olsen 2008). Under authoritarianism, NPM-inspired debureaucratisation efforts are much less likely to succeed as they would undermine the organisational power of the ruler and regime as such. Deinstitutionalisation, it can be presumed, should occur in later periods of previously institutionalised regimes when they start to decay and are about to transition to other types of regimes or even collapse.

Moreover, findings of this article lend support to critics of the so-called 'unitary executive theory', which simply assumes that direct presidential action 'self-executes'. However, full compliance with presidential orders cannot be taken for granted, neither in democracies (Mayer 2009; Kennedy 2015) nor in authoritarian regimes such as Russia. Paralleling insights on the state (Jessop 2016, pp. 42–5), it can be argued that presidential power is a polymorphous concept that varies across time, indicators and policy domains depending on the level of analysis (Gingerich 2013). Future single-country and cross-national comparative research should thus move beyond the dichotomy of a weak or strong president and investigate more closely when, and under which circumstances, presidents are able to govern effectively by means of their administrations. Rousseau wrote that 'the

strongest ... is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty' (as cited in Huntington 1968, p. 9). Comparative researchers working with national-level data on executive power should take this variation within one country and over time into account. In fact, a promising avenue for future research would be to look for patterns of similarity and difference in the institutionalisation of bureaucratic organisations both across and within countries.

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