

# Russian Regionalism in Action: The Case of the North-Western Federal District (1991–2017)

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**Abstract:** *The issue of regionalism and the “center-periphery” relationship in Russia has once again re-entered academic discourse in the context of the economic hardships and external isolation that the Russian Federation has faced since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in late 2013. This article traces the development of these concepts, using Russia’s North-West (after the reform of 2000, the North-Western Federal District) as a case study. It provides an exploratory description of the 1991–2017 period, based on a longitudinal analysis of trends and tendencies experienced by this macro-region. The article argues that while there have been some changes during this period, these have been largely superficial; overall, the North-West macro-region has not overcome its traditional deficiencies, such as sluggish economic growth and massive outflow of the population (and of young and qualified people in particular). Moreover, some problems have taken even more dangerous forms, leading to a growing gap between more developed and less vibrant parts of the North-West. The author employs a broad variety of primary and secondary sources, primarily relying on studies produced in Russian. The theoretical framework of the article includes a brief discussion of regionalism, and of how it is understood and perceived in Russia. In addition, the paper argues that the notion of “regionalism” (in its Western understanding) has been largely misconstrued by Russian ruling elites, which has led to its improper application in the practices of the local authorities.*

## Introduction

Relations between the center and the periphery (*tsentr i okrainy*) have been one of the most complicated and debated topics