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# REPUTATION CORE OF RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES: THE CASE OF THE REGIONAL LEVEL OF EXECUTIVE POWER

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*The importance of studying the reputation of authorities is connected, on the one hand, with the formation of a consolidated system of political power and, on the other hand, with the highly social orientation of the category of the 'reputation of authorities', reflecting the value-based attitude of citizens towards them. The article presents the results of research aimed at the analysis of the reputation of Russian authorities, with a special focus on the regional branch of executive power. The paper examines the reputation of Russian authorities of different levels and branches using the example of regional executive bodies. The author determines the structure and features of the reputation core of the conceptual category 'Russia's authorities' understood both as federal and municipal authorities of the Russian Federation as a whole. The article also offers a comparison of the reputation core of regional executive authorities with that of 'Russia's authorities' in general. The methods used in this research are expert assessment and population surveys conducted in six regions of Central Russia. The study has revealed the main characteristics constituting the reputation core of executive authorities and described their specificity in different regions. Based on the results of the theoretical and empirical analyses, the author proposes a novel approach to defining the structure of the reputation core characteristic of the federal and regional executive authorities. The reputation core is a multi-component conceptual construct dominated by several integrating characteristics such as honesty, responsibility, justice, concern for and protection of citizens. No differences in the structure of the reputation core of the federal and regional executive authorities have been identified. However, the degree to which these characteristics manifest themselves varies. The reputation of regional authorities is assessed based on a system of values, expectations and the results of their work with the federal centre, citizens' experience of communication with regional authorities and the assessment of their activity. The reputation of the regional executive authorities is characterised by lesser stability of the conceptual characteristics of the near periphery and greater dynamism of the outer conceptual boundaries, especially in specific regions.*

## **Keywords:**

reputation of authorities, reputation core, Russian authorities, regional executive authorities, concept, conceptual domain

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## Introduction

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Citizens' disengagement from the actions of authorities is a prevalent feature of the national socio-political landscape [1, p. 552]. This highlights the pressing need to improve domestic political confidence, especially in light of the current foreign policy challenges. Doing so can serve as a foundation for fostering greater unity between the state and society, closing the value gap that exists between authorities and citizens, and promoting a partnership model for their interaction. The reputation of Russia's authorities is a critical component of the national symbolic capital and an intangible resource for the development of the state and municipal system of administration. Reputation plays a vital role in determining the success of the authorities' political, economic, and social positions, as well as the overall competitiveness and efficiency of the country, ultimately leading to the development of the state. Researchers note that citizens have a request for morale in politics, which creates the potential for value-based agreement between authorities and society. Moral principles and norms ensure the cohesion of society; they prevent the alienation of people from authorities and increase their motivation to participate in social life [2, p. 44–46].

According to [3, p. 50–56], reputation reflects the population's attitudes towards authorities and serves as a source of power. A strong reputation enables authorities to exercise their authority responsibly without abusing it, allowing them to maintain mutual trust [4]. The institution of reputation in the Russian political space finds its reflection in the socio-political discourse. Practitioners and experts in the field have emphasized the importance of reputation formation and social values as effective tools of power and influence, as indicated by sources such as [5; 6]. The 'Era of Reputation' defines the tasks of increased attention to its management in the system of state power. Moral and ethical principles and norms play a crucial role in ensuring social cohesion, preventing people from feeling alienated from those in power, and encouraging them to participate in social life [2, p. 44–46].

The aim of this study is to identify the key characteristics that make up the reputation of Russian authorities at the regional level, specifically focusing on regional executive bodies. In doing so, I will take into account socio-economic factors that contribute to the formation of reputation across the regions of the Russian Federation. The ultimate goal is to address a fundamental scientific problem — the development and substantiation of a methodology for studying the concept of the 'reputation of Russia's authorities'. This will make it possible to take an applied approach and determine ways of enhancing the potential for strengthening political confidence and unity between authorities and society.

This article also aims to identify the characteristics that make up the reputation core of the concept 'regional executive authorities', as part of a study of the broader concept of the 'reputation of authorities'. The concept of 'reputation of authorities' refers to the reputation of Russian authorities in general, including both state and municipal bodies across the Russian Federation. This includes

the reputation of various levels and branches of Russian power, such as federal, regional, municipal, legislative, executive, and judicial. Specifically, the study focuses on the reputation of regional executive authorities, which contributes to the analysis of the ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’ in general.

### **Theoretical basis of the study**

The main scientific approach adopted in this research is institutional or rather neo-institutional. This approach is regarded as the methodological paradigm of modern social science, serving as a universal integrator of various disciplines of social knowledge [8]. It involves the study of political phenomena and processes with an emphasis on the interdependence of social and political institutions [9]. In the context of this research, the concept of institutional logic is of primary importance. Specifically, the linguistic-semiotic variant of institutional logic is employed [10, p. 127], which refers to a system of cultural elements, such as values, beliefs, and expectations, that shape the direction of daily activities and allow us to comprehend, evaluate, and organize daily activities in time and space [11, p. 1–2]. It is essential to shift the research focus from analysing actors to a deeper understanding of their interests and choice preferences. The legitimization of actions is associated with justifying one’s own choices and behaviour in the eyes of other individuals and the public [13, p. 126]. Irhin argues that the neo-institutional approach enables a comprehensive examination of political and other institutions from a comparative, value-based, ethical, and sociological perspective. This approach allows for the identification of the internal causes and goals of institutional activities, evaluation of the quality of institutions, and determination of the potential for their transformation [14, p. 38–39].

This study employs the (neo)institutionalist approach, specifically sociological institutionalism, which is highly relevant to our research direction [15–17]. In the realm of sociology, institutions are regarded as meta-representations, embodying not just objects within the human brain, but also representations of representations that stem from attitudes [18, p. 120]. Rationality is socially constructed, and is culturally and historically contingent, shaped by institutions that serve as norms, cognitive frameworks, and systems of meaning that guide human actions, shape identity, and cultural scenarios and schemes that serve symbolic functions, rather than merely reflecting utilitarian values [19, p. 125–126].

Sociological institutionalism, as an explanatory model, adopts more adaptable categorical frameworks that elucidate the concepts being used and create new ones to address empirical phenomena that were previously overlooked [20, p. 40]. According to Barbashin, neo-institutional analysis should reveal ‘hidden institutions’ and their positive potential for communities [21, p. 100]. Moreover, informal institutions play a significant role as “their presence in some societies

and absence in others ultimately determine whether cooperation and coordination, as well as the growth of well-being, will be achieved... Formal institutions matter, but informal institutions rule” [22].

These informal or ‘hidden institutions’ also include reputation, which begins to acquire an institutional form in the country. The formation of reputation is connected with the development of business environment (e. g. [23; 24]). In civil law [25—27] and administrative law [28], reputation has been formally recognized as having legal grounds. At the same time, despite a wide range of Russian studies of reputation in the socio-political context in general and the reputation of political actors in particular (see, for example, the works by Anokhin, Vazhenina, Gallyamov, Grankin, Grishin, Kogan, Koshmarov, Mingazova, Rudakova, Timofeyeva, Trubetskoy, Ustinova, Kharlamov et al.), the reputation of Russian authorities as a multi-component institutional entity requires further study, especially in the light of the constitutional novelty of the unity of public authority [29].

I attempt to develop and substantiate the methodology of the reputational approach to the study of Russian authorities.<sup>1</sup> The primary goal of establishing any state institution is to guarantee political stability, represent collective social interests, and structure public relations [31, p. 139]. The perception of society towards political institutions and the power system in general not only affects political stability but also serves as a gauge of political system stability [32, p. 171]. Reputation can be considered a crucial indicator of the social efficiency of authorities, playing a pivotal role in ensuring political stability.

The reputational approach has gained considerable popularity in the analysis of political elites, where rating systems are developed to evaluate the reputation of politicians and countries worldwide. An instance of this is the reputation rating of countries, conducted by the international consulting company RepTrak, which relies on public opinion surveys and includes a separate set of criteria for assessing the government’s efficacy [33, p. 63]. Floyd Hunter, an American sociologist, was the first to use the reputational method to study the ruling elite. Under this method, experts assess the reputation of individuals in positions of power, based on people’s subjective opinions of their ability to influence political processes and make strategic decisions within the community. For instance, in a study to identify the key sources of the reputation of Norwegian mayors, interviews were conducted with the mayors themselves, as well as their partners and representatives from opposition parties [34]. The reputational method has also been used by Russian researchers [35]. In Russia, PRAVDASERM, a reputation measurement service, publishes a reputation rating of governors.

Various aspects of the reputation of authorities have been extensively explored in the scholarly literature. The international discourse on this topic primarily centres around approaches that encompass the entire public sector, including public agencies, organizations, and authorities. In this context, the

<sup>1</sup> E. g. [30].

notion of ‘bureaucratic reputation’ has emerged as a salient area of investigation, albeit without a clear definition, as highlighted by Edgar Bustos [36]. Sociological methods are the primary means employed to study various aspects of power’s reputation [37–42]. However, there is a noted lack of empirical research in this area [43]. The literature has explored numerous facets of reputation, such as reputational strategies in the policies of individual states [44], the application of the reputational approach to the study of European Union regulators [45], the management of reputations by anti-corruption agencies [46], the influence of reputation on the implementation of administrative policy control and accountability to representative bodies [47], the relationship between the effectiveness of anti-crisis communication strategies of public administration organizations and citizens’ perception of their reputation [48], and the dependence of governmental institutions’ reputation on the perception not only of the external but also internal audience, i. e., civil servants [49].

The study of the reputation of authorities is also pertinent from the standpoint of historical institutionalism, which regards the ‘path dependency’ of institutions as one of its central tenets [19]. It is constituted by a set of institutional problems hindering the formation of the political in Russia, the emergence of a modern type of politics, including the presence of institutional traps [50, p. 20; 51]. Informal rules underlie social inertia [52, p. 97]. Acting as an informal value-based institution, the reputation of authorities allows us to judge the degree of either deepening or weakening of the ‘path dependency’ in the development of a particular territory [53, p. 156]. One of the reasons for the support in Russia of ‘bad governance’, seen as a ‘rut’ (a perception rooted in Russian history), is the inherited ‘cultural matrix’ [54, p. 96–97]. Reputation as its part is a value standard of authorities. A positive reputation determines high support for the activities of authorities and its identification by people as “my/our authority”. The assessment of the reputation of Russian authorities can be done within the framework of investigating political identity and the interactions between political institutions. This process involves making decisions and comparing personal beliefs about the priorities of social development with the ideologies and objectives of political actors [55, p. 7–8]. A good reputation makes it possible to identify a subject according to values/identities with strong social legitimacy [34].

## **Research Methods**

Conceptual analysis is the main method of building a conceptual model of the concept ‘reputation of authorities’ [56]. Empirical testing of this model was done in two stages. During August – November 2021, I conducted an expert questionnaire survey [57–62] (N=15, leading scientists and practitioners in the field of

political science, sociology, and public relations; a ‘snowball’ sample<sup>2</sup> was used). During the same period, a survey of the population of six regions of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation was conducted (N = 1,500 respondents, the cluster sample is quota-based by gender, age, and territory of residence;<sup>3</sup> the sampling error is 2.53 %).

The regions were selected based on the objectives of the study, which focused on the analysis of the correlation between the concept ‘reputation of authorities’ and the level of socio-economic development. Geographical identification was used to determine the regions within the same federal district, excluding the capital region. The regions were also selected based on their main parameters of development. The selection of regions was based on their primary development indicators. In particular, the Smolensk, Bryansk, and Oryol regions were selected because their average level of development in multiple parameters is relatively low, and they exhibit low rates of progress. The Belgorod, Kaluga, and Lipetsk regions, on the other hand, were selected because of their high level of development and high development dynamics.

It is important to note that the selection of regions was not an easy process, as the level of regional development is a conditional synthetic criterion. Therefore, the choice of regions was based on a comprehensive analysis of their positions in regional ratings focused on social priorities. This approach was necessary to ensure that the study effectively monitored and evaluated the success of regional policy by authorities. Overall, the selection of regions was carefully considered and based on specific research goals, ensuring that the study was focused and effective in achieving its objectives.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The experts are researchers of Lomonosov Moscow State University, Higher School of Economics, RANEPA under the President of the Russian Federation, RUDN University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Institute of Sociology of the Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, etc. (10 doctors and candidates of sciences), heads and members of professional associations, research centres, experts, political consultants, political technologists (RAPN, RAPK, INSO-MAR, RASO, “International Press Club”, CEC “Rating”, Intermediate Research Center “Discourse”, OOO “Center for Political Analysis”) with an average work experience of 15–20 years.

<sup>3</sup> Population of the Russian Federation by gender and age as of January 1, 2021, 2021, *Statistical Bulletin*, URL: [https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Bul\\_chislen\\_nasel-pv\\_01-01-2021.pdf](https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Bul_chislen_nasel-pv_01-01-2021.pdf) (accessed: 02.08.2021); The number of permanent population on average per year, *EMISS, state statistics*, URL: <https://www.fedstat.ru/indicator/31556> (accessed 02.08.2021).

<sup>4</sup> Rating of regions of the Russian Federation on quality of life — 2021, 2022, *RIA Rating*, URL: [http://vid1.rian.ru/ig/ratings/life\\_2021.pdf](http://vid1.rian.ru/ig/ratings/life_2021.pdf) (accessed 10.04.2021); Rating of the socio-economic situation of the regions according to the results of 2020, 2021, *RIA Rating*, URL: <https://riarating.ru/regions/20210531/630201367.html> (accessed 05.06.2021); Rating of regions by the level of family welfare — 2020, 2021, *RIA Novosti*, URL: <https://ria.ru/20210615/blagosostoyanie-1736684198.html> (accessed 20.06.2021); Human Development Index in Russia: regional differences, 2021, 2021, *Analytical Center under the Government of the Russian Federation*, URL: [https://ac.gov.ru/uploads/2-Publications/analitika/2022/\\_2021\\_short.pdf](https://ac.gov.ru/uploads/2-Publications/analitika/2022/_2021_short.pdf) (accessed 10.04.2022).

## Research Findings

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Based on the analysis and empirical research conducted, the following findings can be presented:

1. The structure of the core of the concept ‘reputation of authorities’ is the same for the concepts of ‘reputation of Russian authorities’ and ‘reputation of the regional executive authorities’. These concepts differ in their peripheral attributes, which depend on the peculiarities of the activity of a certain level/branch of power. It is important to determine the degree of similarity of these concepts by analysing their core and periphery attributes as well as integrating and differentiating attributes of these concepts. Integrating attributes form the nucleus of the concept and the differentiating ones are variable and depend on the hierarchical level and the branch of power.

2. The generic concept ‘reputation of authorities’ has two fundamental sets of attributes — institutional and operational. Institutional attributes are related to qualitative characteristics of the government, reflecting its main function — to serve people (which is an integrating characteristic). Operational attributes are related to functional characteristics that reflect the scope and main types of activities of authorities and their effectiveness/efficiency (an integrating characteristic). This rather tentative division, however, makes it possible to determine the degree of importance of the value-based (institutional set) or pragmatic (operational, activity-based) content of the concept of reputation. It is assumed that the content of the concepts ‘reputation of Russian authorities’ and ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ is the same in terms of the presence of these two sets of attributes.

3. The level of development of the region of the Russian Federation determines the essential characteristics and content of concepts.

### 1. *The structure of the conceptual domain ‘reputation of authorities’.*

In this study, a generic structure for the conceptual domain related to the concept of ‘reputation of authorities’ is proposed, which can be applied to both the ‘reputation of Russian authorities’ as a whole and the ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’. This structure is determined by the general principles of the semantic-cognitive approach to the analysis of concepts, as developed by Popova and Sternin.<sup>5</sup> The research logic, as well as the flexibility in modeling concepts, particularly in the study of new and undefined concepts, enabled the identification of two main cores in the concept structure with a certain degree of conditionality:

— the basic core, which forms the semantic domain of the concept ‘reputation’ and includes the categorical attributes, defining the concept, and the near-nuclear

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<sup>5</sup> Three components are distinguished in the structure of the concept: a sensory image, an informational content and an interpretative field [64, p. 74–81]. We consider the information component of the concept, including the main, most important distinctive features.



zone comprising essential attributes of the concept 'reputation'. This emphasizes the two-layered nature of the phenomenon, where the near-nuclear zone could be considered a semi-periphery if viewed traditionally.

— the substantive core, which comprises its most important and meaningful attributes. It can be considered peripheral in relation to the basic core and serves to emphasize the most significant and pronounced characteristics, which contribute to the reputation of those in positions of authority. These substantive characteristics are relatively stable, as they are widely shared and form the near periphery of the basic core. Beyond the near periphery lies the distant periphery, which is less significant and more dynamic in nature. The attributes of the distant periphery are more susceptible to multifactorial influences. Finally, there is the extreme periphery, which consists of the least significant and most agile characteristics.

According to the results of the expert assessment, the conceptual domain also includes historical and cultural characteristics that which are parts of the national model of statehood and are formed under the influence of the macrodomain 'Russian authorities'. At the moment, it is a hypothesis which requires further research.

2. *The degree of similarity of the concepts 'reputation of Russia's authorities' and 'reputation of different levels and branches of Russian authorities'.*

Before demonstrating the substantive core of the concept 'regional executive authorities', let us consider the degree of the conceptual structural similarity between the aforementioned concepts. Both experts and the public were asked the question, "Can we say that the above conceptual attributes (in the public survey they were called characteristics) can equally apply to all levels and branches of Russian power?" Let us explain that experts had previously identified a number of the essential attributes and substantive characteristics of the concept 'reputation of Russian authorities'. This list of characteristics was then given to respondents in the pilot regions of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation. The list of characteristics will be presented in comparison with the content of the 'reputation of regional executive bodies and Russian authorities' (see para 5).

In the survey of the population, 82% of respondents agreed that the characteristics of the reputation of Russian authorities that had been defined by experts generally relate to the reputation of its various levels and branches. For experts, the question was open-ended, they were asked to leave comments regarding the presence of integrating and differentiating attributes specific to different levels and branches of power.

The majority of experts unequivocally translated the attributes and characteristics of the 'reputation of Russian authorities' to its various branches and levels, with the highlighted characteristics being largely universal. However, one expert held an extreme position, stating that all levels of power have their specificity, which depends on the level of authority and the area of activity.

Experts argued that the nature of power is the same across all branches and levels, and the style of political behaviour is “transmitted from higher to lower levels of authority”. Experts also noted that the essential aspect of reputation is the public perception of authorities in general at the household level (“these are the general requirements of citizens for the country’s governance system at all levels of power”, “citizens do not tend to differentiate the levels of power”). Furthermore, it is worth noting an expert opinion regarding the coherence of perceptions among the population, which stems from the presence of a constitutionally-established system of public authority and a strong reliance on the head of state. As one expert stated: “The term *public authority* has been introduced in the Constitution. The bottom line is that the population does not care who you are subordinate to. You speak for authorities, and you are the ones who are subordinate to Putin and that is it. For the population, what you say is what Putin says. Therefore, according to the public, there is no division into regional, federal, municipal authorities, federal divisions in the regions, state corporations, etc. By and large, they do not need it. These are the people who make decisions about their lives, and it is government.”

Integrating conceptual attributes include historical and cultural characteristics (such, for example, as paternalism, personification, high distance, etc.), and a single field of activity of governmental subjects (a common system of security, finance, and foreign policy). Experts clarified the integrating features of the previously identified characteristics (for example, legitimacy, responsibility, honesty; “effectiveness and efficiency concern all levels of authorities”).

Let us now turn to the differentiating features. Several experts pointed out that the manifestation of reputation characteristics, the degree of their depth, and the semantic content can vary (“the characteristics can largely apply to all authorities, but the underlying legitimacy, power, fairness are expected from the federal level”). This distinction is also related to the sphere of responsibility since “regional authorities have a stronger emphasis on local, and above all, social issues, anchored to the regional identity and local consciousness and the type of political culture supporting it”. Experts also note the difference in the degree of interaction with the population (“open/closed system of interaction”), openness and responsiveness (“the closer vertically to the population, the more open and responsive authorities are”), transparency and degree of responsibility (“local authorities recognise their responsibility”).

Some experts identified the difference in the factors underlying the formation of reputation (“the work of local authorities is assessed based on personal experiences of interaction”). As one expert pointed out, “there is a tendency to accord greater respect and favour to those occupying the highest (such as the president) and the lowest (such as the district or municipal levels) positions of authority, as well as those who are less visible to the public eye and those who are encountered more frequently.” The study emphasizes the reputation characteristics that are shaped by the region’s development specifics, including invest-

ment attractiveness, personnel reputation, business, culture, sports, and more. It also involves a system of personnel formation and methods of influencing the elite and the population. These differentiating features relate more to factors, the process of reputation formation, and evaluation, i. e. to the interpretive domain of the concept.

Empirically speaking, it can be concluded that the generic concept ‘reputation of authorities’ is primarily characterized by a prevalence of integrating attributes and features. At the same time, a number of differentiating attributes are associated with the characteristics of diverse levels and branches of power, suggesting that the reputation of authorities is not a monolithic concept but one that is differentiated across various contexts.

3. *The degree of similarity of the concepts ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ and ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’.*

Given the aforementioned findings and the study’s aim to identify distinctive attributes of the reputation core of regional executive power, it is relevant to provide an expert opinion regarding the concepts analysed. Experts were asked the following question: “Are there, in your opinion, attributes, characteristics or aspects specific to the reputation of regional executive authorities?” and “Is it possible, in your opinion, to assert that the concepts of ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’ and ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ are identical?”

It is worth noting that the majority of experts identified a high degree of similarity between the concepts, while others acknowledged both similarities and differences. Below are some examples of responses that emphasize the similarities across different levels and branches of Russian power, including the reputation of regional executive authorities: “it is all about power”,<sup>6</sup> “both are perceived at a generalized level as power in general and the conductor of Moscow’s will”; “the concepts are gradually beginning to merge in public perception due to the effects of a single vertical of power.” Moreover, the similarity of concepts is based on the assumption that “reputation implies high moral characteristics of government representatives rather than professional ones.”

The concept of the ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ has a number of specific characteristics:

— a higher degree of personification (“everything depends on the governor, the opinion about the regional government is formed based on the personality of the governor”, “by ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’ we mean the reputation of the President, or in general, the President’s team. When we say ‘the reputation of the regional government’, we mean the governor’s team”). At the same time, there may be some specifics in the assessment of reputation associated with the peculiarities of the historically established perception of authorities (“there is a transfer of the object of criticism to a higher level of power hierarchy, for instance, “if the porch has not been painted — the president of the country is to blame)”);

<sup>6</sup> In this regard, we can quote Hobbes’ saying, “The reputation of power is power.”

— the scope of responsibility, “Russian authorities’ are responsible for the whole country whereas ‘regional authorities’ deal with our local affairs”;

— regional authorities have to face higher demands regarding the current state of affairs, such as city improvement, road works, and ensuring the proper functioning of medical institutions. This translates to greater expectations, requirements, and responsibility for the regional authorities in terms of reputational risks. However, they often lack the necessary power and resources to address all regional issues, as “the main decisions are made at the federal level in Moscow”;

— for regional executive authorities, some of the characteristics are more pronounced: “The regional government can earn a positive reputation by demonstrating a commitment to rapid action, transparency, and efficiency in their decision-making processes”, “regional authorities are more accessible”; “expectations for the regional government include high demands on its communicative characteristics”; “the governor and other representatives of the regional government are expected to be able to listen to people and be on the same wavelength”; “the perception of regional authorities can be based not only on virtual communication, but also on their real-life actions.”;

— dependence on the characteristics of a region (“related to geography, national identity, culture, including religion, socio-economic characteristics of the region”);

— the ‘friend-foe’ dichotomy: it manifests in the need for ‘our’ leader (“the governor may come from the region, ‘our’ means understandable and predictable, understanding local people and having the same values and concerns”). This dichotomy is also manifested in ‘regional patriotism’ (“locals better represent the interests of the region at the federal level and are more effective lobbyists”); as a rule, regional authorities are required to protect the interests of the region to a greater extent than federal authorities, the federal government is not perceived as ‘our’ authority;

— relations with local elites (“it is important for the regional authorities to be able to build informal relations with regional elites, primarily the business elite, not for personal gain, but rather for the public good”).

It should be noted that the above-stated differentiating attributes and characteristics are also largely related to the interpretative conceptual domain (factors, sources of reputation formation, and its assessment). Nevertheless, some of them indicate a certain degree of difference in terms of the actual features and characteristics of the basic and, especially, the substantive core of the concepts.

4. *The degree of similarity of the core of the concepts ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ and ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’.*

Based on the analysis of scientific and theoretical approaches as well as expert opinions, we have identified the core components of the concept of ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’. Its categorical basis is formed by the opinion, assessment, attitude, perception/image, and public perception of authorities. The near-nuclear zone includes the following essential attributes of the concept ‘reputation’: trust

as the basic attribute, stability, time of reputation formation, personal experience of interaction, assessment based on real actions, behaviour, and authorities' actions; value-based attitude to authorities; a system of expectations, ideas about the degree of compliance of real power with its ideal variant. These features also found overwhelming support in public opinion.

We argue that the conceptual core is the same for the concept of "reputation authorities", which includes the reputation of Russian authorities in general and the reputation of its various levels and branches of power. Respectively, the content of this core fully applies to the reputation of regional executive authorities. This conclusion is drawn based on the following provisions obtained from the results of both theoretical and empirical parts of the study:

— the conceptual core is verbalized by semantic units related to the category 'reputation', which is part of both concepts. The subject incorporated in the concept 'reputation' remains unchanged, with the focus shifting only to regional executive authorities instead of the Russian authorities as a whole. Population remains the bearer of opinion about reputation in both cases;

— the study empirically substantiates the thesis about the predominance of integrating attributes and characteristics in the structure of the concept of 'reputation of authorities'. Expert opinion (see para 2 and 3) regarding the conceptual core does not reveal differentiating attributes. The differences in the essential attributes of 'reputation' are linked to their degree of manifestation at the regional level, which includes the ability to have personal interactions with local authorities, the perception of power based on actual actions, a more demanding system of expectations from authorities, and a distinct value-based relationship with authorities (which are "our" authorities).

The ideas presented in this study align with previous research on the concept of 'authorities', which is structured around five significant areas of public consciousness. Each area corresponds to a cognitive microdomain, and collectively they form the broader cognitive macro-domain of 'authority'. The core and near-core zones of each micro-concept share identical conceptual content [65, p. 123–124].

5. *The degree of similarity of the substantive core of the concepts 'reputation regional executive authorities' and 'reputation of Russia's authorities'.*

To facilitate comparison, we will provide a brief description of the substantial core of the concept "reputation of Russian authorities". Figure 1 displays the characteristics grouped into institutional and operational blocks.<sup>7</sup> We have identified the main conceptual attributes of this core, which include the primary characteristics of reputation, a near periphery of the basic core, and less significant,

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the identification of these blocks correlates with three measurements of reputation proposed by foreign scientists [66], while the institutional block corresponds to the social measurement, the activity relates to the functional one, however, the significance of the emotional one (by the example of the external image of authorities) both in the expert assessment and according to the results of a mass survey of the population (see Table 2) was not confirmed.

distant, and extreme peripheries. The population in the regions of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation were presented with a list of characteristics and were asked to select 5–7 of the most significant ones that they believed created the ‘reputation of Russian authorities’.

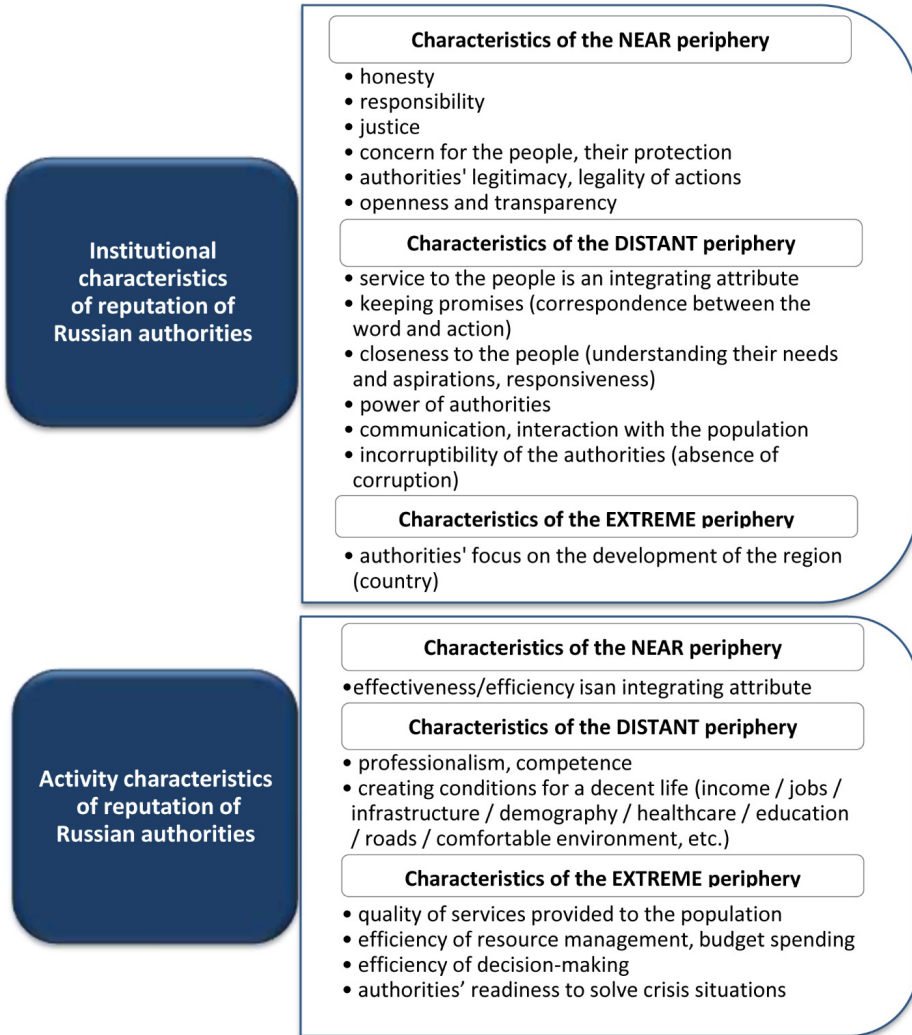


Fig. 1. The substantive core of the concept 'reputation of Russia's authorities'

After conducting the survey, it was found that the opinions of experts and the general public were in agreement regarding the most important characteristics of the 'reputation of Russian authorities'. The survey results showed that four out of the seven characteristics identified by experts were also the top priorities for more than half of the respondents. These characteristics included honesty, responsibility, justice, and concern for people and their protection. In addition to these, the experts also identified the legitimacy of power, legality, openness/transparency,

and effectiveness/efficiency as important characteristics. The remaining characteristics were classified as belonging to either the distant (significant for a quarter or more of the respondents) or the extreme periphery.

Let us turn to the international experience in the study of reputation. The author could not find any empirical studies of the content of reputation based on the example of large institutional subjects. The Finnish scientist Luoma-aho conducted a study of the reputation of 12 organizations under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland and identified reputational factors, which were classified into four functional groups: power and regulatory functions, legislation, research and semi-commercial functions. To evaluate the parameters of reputation, respondents were provided with a questionnaire consisting of contrasting theses, such as closeness versus openness, irresponsibility versus responsibility, etc. There was a total of 40 characteristics. A point scale was used for rating the parameters of reputation. The data processing revealed five key factors that contributed to reputation: authority, trust, service, respect, and efficiency. A subsequent study made it possible to generate reputational profiles for different groups of organizations based on these factors [37]. Trust is identified as a crucial component of the reputation of Russian authorities, located in the near-core zone of the core concept. Services, specifically the provision of services to the population, and efficiency of their provision are important characteristics found in both the near and extreme peripheries. Several of the reputation parameters evaluated in the questionnaire are also correlated with the attributes of the reputation of Russian authorities, which suggests that there are zones of reputation that share the same semantic content.

Lee and van Rizin have developed the Bureaucratic Reputation Scale (BRS), which is based on the theoretical framework proposed by Carpenter, who applied organizational reputation to public administration [38]. The BRS consists of four indicators, including the reputation of performance (ability to effectively achieve goals), moral reputation (ethical behaviour and adherence to moral obligations), the reputation of procedure (fairness of processes used for decision-making), and technical reputation (competence).

Lee and van Ryzin added a fifth indicator, shared reputation, which reflects the general feeling or attitude towards the subject. They conducted an empirical study using three US federal agencies to test the Bureaucratic Reputation Scale (BRS).<sup>8</sup> To assess each of the reputation indicators, respondents were asked to express the degree of their (non)agreement with six statements (for example, the moral indicator was tested by the statement “This agency seems to be corrupt”). Thirty characteristics that constitute the concept of ‘reputation’ were identified based on an expert survey, and American respondents evaluated the level of each characteristic for each federal agency [40]. The characteristics identified in the survey show a significant correlation with the reputational

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<sup>8</sup> The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

attributes of Russian authorities identified in our study. However, it is worth noting that the survey did not aim to determine the degree to which these characteristics actually matter to the population in forming a reputation, but merely sought to assess them.

While the development of methodologies and identification of common characteristics that constitute the content of reputation is undoubtedly beneficial, it is also important to note that the results of such studies alone do not fully capture the specifics of reputation as an interdisciplinary phenomenon. While they deepen our understanding of these characteristics, they do not necessarily provide insight into the formation of public perception and citizens' opinions about reputation. Therefore, it is important to study the specifics and peculiarities of reputation in different contexts to fully comprehend its complexity.

Let us return to the content of the reputation of regional executive authorities. Based on the expert opinion presented in paragraphs 2 and 3, we can draw the following conclusions regarding the content of the reputation of regional executive authorities. There is a similarity between the core attributes of the concepts 'reputation of Russia's authorities' and 'reputation of regional executive authorities'. Both concepts prioritize characteristics such as honesty, responsibility, justice, concern for people and their protection, legitimacy of power, legality, openness, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency. These elements form the near-nuclear zone of the conceptual core, indicating their high importance in shaping the reputation of both national and regional authorities.

At the same time, we observed that various characteristics related to both the near and distant peripheries are more pronounced in the 'reputation of regional executive authorities', which increases their significance compared to the concept 'reputation of Russian authorities' in general. Specifically, such characteristics as openness, transparency, closeness to people, responsiveness, communication, interaction with the population, responsibility, and protection of the interests of the region (and residents) are pronounced and well-defined at the regional level. The greater connection with regional problems and the need for special attention to the situation 'on the ground' clearly express the integrating characteristic of the operational block and the effectiveness/efficiency of authorities. However, some characteristics, such as legitimacy, strength, and justice, have a deeper meaning at the federal level, according to the experts.

Thus, the results of the analysis of expert opinion demonstrate that the core of the 'reputation of regional executive authorities' has not changed significantly in comparison with the 'reputation of Russian authorities', but it has acquired a different meaning in the intensity of the expression of different characteristics.

Let us turn to the analysis of the results of a public opinion survey. Respondents were offered the same list of characteristics describing the reputation of regional executive authorities that is similar to the characteristics of the reputation of Russian authorities in general (Table 1). The column labeled "average % by region" presents the average percentage of respondents who chose the character-



istics of the reputation of regional executive authorities, and for the purpose of comparison, the corresponding value for the reputation of Russian authorities is also presented in brackets.

Table 1

**Characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities, significant for a quarter or more of the respondents, on average and by region, %**

Characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities	Average %by region	The Belgorod region	The Kaluga region	The Lipetsk region	The Bryansk region	The Oryol region	The Smolensk region
1. Honesty	49.8 (58.3)	58.2	47.2	39.1	51.3	48.8	50.2
2. Responsibility	49.2 (52.1)	54.0	50.7	45.6	46.5	50.6	46.0
3 Concern for the people, their protection	47.7 (53.8)	49.4	47.6	44.4	45.8	56.0	45.1
4. Justice	47.5 (52.8)	54.0	44.6	44.4	49.1	45.2	43.2
5. Closeness to the people, understanding their needs and aspirations, responsiveness	43.3 (41.5)	42.7	51.1	46.0	38.5	48.2	35.2
6. Keeping promises (correspondence between the word and action)	36.8 (41.0)	33.1	45.0	31.8	37.0	35.7	40.8
7. Communication, interaction with the population	35.2 (29.4)	34.7	42.9	37.2	28.9	31.5	36.2
8. Openness, transparency	29.2 (31.2)	28.2	25.1	30.7	32.6	25.0	32.4
9. The power of authorities	27.5 (29.9)	33.6	13.4	34.5	29.7	18.5	28.6
10. Professionalism, competence	27.3 (28.7)	21.2	37.2	25.7	28.2	24.4	29.9
11. Conditions for a decent life (income / jobs / infrastructure / demography / health-care / education / roads / comfortable environment, etc.)	27.1 (27.5)	26.6	39.0	23.8	21.6	27.4	25.7
12. Incorruptibility of authorities (absence of corruption)	25.5 (31.7)	22.9	32.5	20.3	23.4	28.6	28.5
13. Service to the people, moral values / reference points of authorities	23.8 (22.8)	22.6	19.9	26.8	24.2	26.8	23.4
14. Efficiency of resource management, budget spending	22.7 (17.8)	19.8	25.5	25.7	22.0	22.0	22.0

*Source:* statistics is calculated by the author on the basis of data obtained from a mass questionnaire survey of the population of the regions of the Central Federal District, 2021.

In public opinion, the distribution of the characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities indicates their division into the near, distant and extreme periphery (see also Fig. 1), which reflects the presence of a high degree of unity of the content core of the concepts under study.

At the same time, there are peculiarities in the perception of the reputation of regional executive authorities, which are manifested in the following:

— in general, this level of power indicates a great uniformity in the distribution of characteristics according to their degree of importance, which affects a certain decrease in the stability of priority characteristics and an increase in the dynamics of the characteristics of the distant and extreme periphery (Table 2);

— manifestation of the peculiarities of choice in each particular region is increasing, while there is still no dependence on the diversity of regions (the case is the reputation of Russian authorities).

Table 2

**Meaningful characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities, significant for a quarter or more of the respondents, on average and by region, %**

Characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities	Average % by region	The Belgorod region	The Kaluga region	The Lipetsk region	The Bryansk region	The Oryol region	The Smolensk region
15. Quality of services provided to the population	20.1 (17.4)	19.2	25.5	11.5	20.5	28.6	18.7
16. Authorities' focus on the development of the region (country)	18.5 (13.8)	26.6	29.4	12.3	15.0	26.8	16.8
17. Efficiency of decision-making	17.9 (10.3)	15.3	22.1	14.9	17.6	19.1	20.6
18. Productivity, achievement of goals, efficiency	17.7 (14.9)	14.1	20.8	21.1	17.6	17.9	16.4
19. Authorities' legitimacy, legality of actions	15.3 (16.7)	16.1	14.3	17.6	16.1	13.7	12.1
20. Authorities' readiness to solve crisis situations	13.4 (13.3)	14.7	15.6	12.3	13.2	16.7	7.9
21. An external image provided by authorities: appearance of employees / buildings / interior, etc.	5.3 (3.7)	4.8	6.1	4.6	5.9	6.0	4.7

Source: statistics are calculated by the author on the basis of data obtained from a mass questionnaire survey of the population of regions of the Central Federal District, 2021.

In line with the expert assessment, we observe a varying degree of significance of different characteristics in comparison with the overall reputation of

Russian authorities. Of particular interest are characteristics such as closeness to the people, understanding their needs and aspirations, and responsiveness. In three regions (Kaluga, Lipetsk, Oryol), these characteristics are more pronounced compared to the four priority regions. We believe that this observation makes it possible to prioritize these characteristics in these regions. In the visualization of the reputational core of regional executive authorities (Fig. 2), these characteristics are attributed to the transition zone between the near and distant periphery. On the other hand, the effectiveness of resource management and budget spending, chosen by a quarter of respondents (taking into account the margin of error), is placed in the distant periphery, compared to the reputation of Russian authorities as a whole.

We would like to draw attention to the most significant changes (5–7%) in public perception regarding the importance of characteristics related to the distant and extreme periphery of the substantial core of the reputation of regional executive authorities, as compared to Russian authorities (on average across regions):

- the distant periphery includes communication, interaction with the population (more significant for the Kaluga region), fulfillment of promises and incorruptibility of authorities (less significant, especially for the Lipetsk region);
- characteristics of the extreme periphery include the quality of services provided to the population, which has increased (for the Kaluga and Oryol regions they can be attributed to the distant periphery), the focus of authorities on the development of the region (also the distant periphery for the Kaluga, Oryol and Belgorod regions), the efficiency of decision-making, effectiveness/efficiency of operation.

It should be noted that a more detailed consideration of the specifics of the choice of reputational characteristics at the level of individual regions is a task of subsequent research.

In general, changes in the degree of significance of the substantive characteristics of the ‘reputation of regional authorities’ demonstrate a fairly logical order, indicating the closeness of regional authorities in comparison with Russian authorities in general to the population, increased attention to its work to solve local problems (which is manifested in the increasing role of the characteristics of the operational block).

Thus, the findings of studying the conceptual core of the ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ and the ‘reputation of Russian authorities’ indicate a high degree of their similarity, the predominance of value-based (institutional) characteristics and increased attention to the pragmatic (the great importance of activity characteristics).

#### *6. Historical and cultural characteristics of the concept ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’.*

The concept of the ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ is influenced by historical and cultural characteristics. Based on expert opinion, certain characteristics are more pronounced for regional executive authorities, such as per-

sonification, closeness to the population, protection of the region’s interests and paternalism. These characteristics are considered to be part of the broader conceptual domain of the ‘reputation of authorities’, but require further research to determine their inclusion in the reputation core.

Based on the information presented above, we can visualize the content of the core concept of the ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ (Figure 2) and compare it to the core concept of ‘Russia’s authorities’ in general. The characteristics that have a higher or lower degree of significance or intensity compared to the reputation of Russian authorities are indicated with the symbols ‘>’ or ‘<’, respectively. If this dynamic is only identified by experts, an ‘E’ icon is displayed. The stable characteristics that remain significant at both the Russian and regional executive authority levels are highlighted in bold. To enhance visual clarity, the characteristics of the distant and extreme periphery are excluded from the figure.

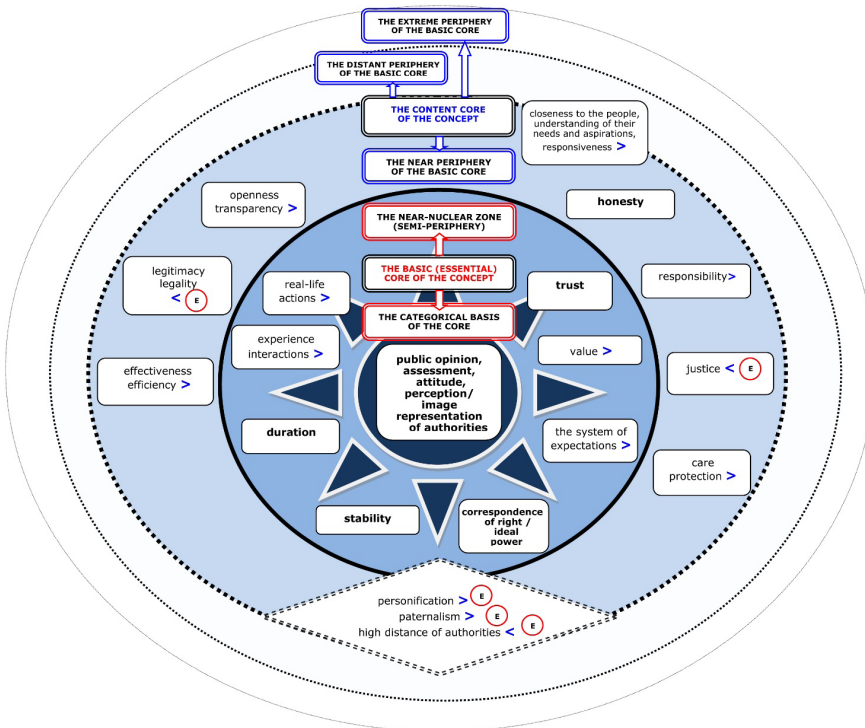


Fig. 2. Characteristics of the reputation core of regional executive authorities

Therefore, it is crucial for regional authorities to comprehend the strong interconnectedness and interdependence between the formation of their reputation and that of other public authorities. This requires the establishment of their own activities and information support, which take into account the appropriate “adjustment” or “alignment” (depending on the positive/negative agenda) of other public authorities. Secondly, it is important to place emphasis on the implementation of public policy by considering the characteristics that constitute the reputa-

tion core (bearing in mind the fact that its specificity is region-specific) as well as the priority of its value-based conceptual block. For instance, the performance of authorities should be communicated in a way that aligns with citizens' demands for honesty, fairness, and so on. Lastly, emphasis should be given to the conceptual characteristics that are in greater demand at the regional level, such as ensuring a higher level of transparency and openness.

## **Conclusions**

Let me sum up the main findings of the study and see to what extent they support our initial hypotheses based on expert opinions and public perceptions:

1. The basic core structure is essentially the same for both concepts 'reputation of Russian authorities' and 'reputation of the regional executive authorities'. This is demonstrated by the prevalence of shared attributes in both the core and the periphery of both concepts. However, the reputation of regional executive power is characterized by less stable features in the near periphery and greater dynamism in the distant and extreme periphery (which is seen especially at the level of specific regions). This results in a higher degree of significance of certain features. Both expert and public assessment suggest that the following features are more pronounced in the conceptual core of both concepts (near-core zone or semi-periphery): a value-based attitude towards authorities, higher expectations from them, the importance of personal interaction experiences, and the perception of authorities through real actions. In the characteristics of the near and distant periphery, there are such conceptual attributes as responsibility, care for and protection of people, closeness to people, understanding of their needs and aspirations, responsiveness, communication, interaction, openness, transparency, performance/efficiency, and effectiveness of resource management and budgetary expenditures.

2. The substantive core of the 'reputation authorities' is based on two main conceptual blocks: institutional and operational (activity-related). Experts have concluded that there are no pronounced differences between the attributes of the 'reputation of regional executive authorities' and the 'reputation of Russian authorities' in general. Both experts and the public highlight the significance of the value-based approach to reputation over the pragmatic aspects, although the importance of the latter has slightly increased.

3. The volume of conceptual information encoded by the 'reputation of authorities' and the structure and content of its cores are not directly dependent on the level of regional development. Each region has its own unique characteristics of public opinion that determine the specificity of the reputation while maintaining a unified view of its content. Further research should focus on identifying the shared/peculiar content of the reputational core of the Russian and regional executive authorities, taking into account such factors as the mono/multi-ethnic and mono/multi-religious composition of the region and the 'capital — periphery' divide.

This research has developed a theoretical model for the study of the reputation of the Russian authorities, identified the peculiarities of the conceptual content of the ‘reputation of the regional executive authorities’, and developed a number of methodological provisions for studying the reputation of complex institutional subjects. The study of the reputation of authorities is also relevant in light of the introduction of the category of ‘public authority’ into the Constitution of the Russian Federation. This sets a new trend of constitutional development and requires the creation of a unified system of public authority.

Reputation management involves understanding the priorities of the desirable content of the reputation, allowing authorities to build an appropriate reputational policy, and determine priorities in their own activities and in the system of information and analytical support and promotion. This will contribute to improving the social effectiveness of government and the trust of citizens.

Finally, it is important to note that the diffuse structure of the concept of reputation means that it acquires new meanings and loses old ones over time. The presented conceptual field and structure of the reputational core of the regional executive power (as well as the reputation of the Russian authorities in general) is a hypothetical research model with the most and least significant meanings listed, features determined, and their place in the structure of the concept identified.

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