

Regulatory Infrastructure of The Protectorate and Bukhara's "Procedural Sovereignty" Under Emir Abdulahad Khan: A Comparative Analysis of Russian And English-Language Descriptions (1880s–1910s)

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Received: 20 January 2026; **Accepted:** 16 February 2026; **Published:** 09 March 2026

Abstract: The article offers a comparative analysis of Russian and English-language descriptions of the Bukhara Emirate under Emir Abdulahad Khan through the lens of “procedural sovereignty”: a set of rules, regulations, and access practices that made it possible to preserve an external form of autonomy while being embedded in mechanisms of Russian control. Within the Russian-language body of sources, normative-documentary materials and publicistic evidence are used. The English-language corpus is represented by travel narratives and overview publications that record practices of control, access, and “dual” governance. The study shows that Russian sources tend to emphasize the legal and procedural formalization of joint regimes, whereas English-language observers more often describe the same mechanisms as everyday practices of filtering access, controlling movement, and managing images of power. The article concludes that the political profile of Abdulahad Khan in these sources can be captured as that of a ruler of a protectorate whose authority was realized largely not through reforming institutions, but through participation in procedural circuits in which the Russian political agency acted as the key arbiter.

Keywords: Bukhara Emirate, Emir Abdulahad Khan, protectorate, political agency, regulation, “two-key” control, customs, monetary policy, access regime, comparative source analysis.

Introduction: In the historiography of the Bukhara Emirate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dependence on the Russian Empire is often described in terms of a “protectorate” and “vassalage,” yet the level of concreteness differs significantly across types of sources. Russian-language materials more often record administrative procedures and rules. By contrast, English observers are more interested in how Russia controlled the Bukhara Emirate in everyday life—how it allowed or did not allow access, and how official conversations were conducted. As a result, we can read two quite different descriptions of the same situation. Some sources present it as a set of agreements and rules, while others see it as a system in which Russia fully controlled access and managed

everything.

The aim of this article is to reframe and compare these perspectives by proposing an analytical framework of “procedural sovereignty”: a situation in which the autonomy of a political center is maintained primarily through procedures (permissions, approvals, channels of mediation), rather than through independent institutions of foreign and domestic policy.

The novelty of the article lies in the fact that the comparison is built not around a “general image of the ruler,” but around specific mechanisms by which control was fixed in legal-procedural terms and in practice. This makes it possible to avoid repeating familiar plots about ceremonial life and the “emir’s

travels,” and to focus instead on the infrastructure of governance.

METHODS

The empirical base is limited to two types of sources. The Russian corpus includes S. V. Zhukovsky’s publication with a collection of appendices and agreements reflecting the regulation of status and economic-administrative regimes; works by D. N. Logofet containing observations and normative blocks; essays by E. Markov describing the practical role of the political agent; and O. A. Chernov’s article as a historiographical reconstruction of the activity of the Russian political agent N. V. Charykov. The English-language corpus includes: W. E. Curtis (Turkestan), where “limited independence” and a regime of external communications through the agent are formulated; O. Olufsen, who records a model of “dual governance” and the correction of the emir’s orders by advice from the political agency; Richard A. Pierce, who describes norms and exceptions; and W. Rickmer Rickmers, who shows an “access policy” through an escort and the logistical preparation of meetings.

The method is qualitative comparative analysis of narratives and regulatory formulations. Within the corpus, a distinction is maintained between fact and evaluation: evaluative characteristics in the sources are treated as evidence of perception rather than as self-sufficient legal statements.

RESULTS

1. “Two-Key” Legitimation and the Political Agency as a Procedural Arbiter

In Russian publications, the normative nature of the protectorate appears through a recurring pattern: an internal decision is formally made on the emirate’s side, but acquires legal force only after external approval (or under constant notification) by the Russian political agency and the governor-general’s hierarchy (Zhukovsky, 1915, pp. 188–198; Logofet, 1909, pp. 219–221, 235–239). This scheme makes sovereignty procedurally dependent: the right to decide remains, but the “key of legality” is placed outside.

E. Markov describes this dependence as an administrative norm of everyday life: the agent is a node to which not only foreigners but also local actors turn. His recommendations are perceived as binding (Markov, pp. 375–376). In O. A. Chernov’s historiographical reconstruction, the agency’s role is also visible in critical moments of power transition: support for a candidate to the throne, confidential communications, and participation in suppressing dynastic challenges are described as elements of

stabilizing control (Chernov, 2008, p. 4).

2. Infrastructural Zones of Control: Stations, “New Bukhara,” and “Spatial Politics”

Procedural sovereignty was secured not only on paper but also in space. Zhukovsky’s normative blocks regulate regimes in settlements near stations and piers: planning, sanitary-police measures, the procedure for land acts, plot limits, and special conditions for different groups of residents (Zhukovsky, 1915, pp. 188–190). In this way, “sovereign territory” is fragmented into zones with special legal regimes where the competencies of the emirate administration and Russian institutions intersect.

In English-language descriptions, the same process reads as a “recalibration of the landscape of power.” Olufsen records the emir’s long stays away from the capital and the conflictual nature of proximity to the political agent as a factor shaping residential decisions. At the same time, he notes the role of the capital (the Ark) as a hub of representation where the emir’s representative operates and orders can be corrected by the agency (Olufsen, pp. 574–576). Richard A. Pierce emphasizes material markers of “Europeanization” in the area around the residence, which, in the terms of this article, is interpreted as a symbolic accompaniment to procedural integration (Richard A. Pierce, pp. 191–192).

3. The Access Regime for Foreigners: Escorts, Safe Passage, and Control of Communications

English-language travelers record access practices in particular detail. W. Rickmer Rickmers describes an institutionally embedded escort acting on the emir’s behalf, who provides logistics, stops, and proper reception on site, functioning as an equivalent of “safe conduct” (Rickmers, pp. 596–597). This practice is important because it shows foreign policy as “management of access”: the foreigner is permitted movement and meetings, but within a strictly defined framework of mediation and prearranged “stations.”

W. E. Curtis formulates the same framework in legal-political terms, speaking of “conditional independence” and the prohibition of external communications except through the Russian agent, which turns the emirate’s international contacts into a procedurally controlled channel (Curtis, p. 122). In the Russian perspective, a similar meaning emerges through descriptions of the agency as a “filter” and through regulatory chains of approval (Zhukovsky, 1915, pp. 188–190; Markov, pp. 375–376).

4. Financial-Legal Nodes of Dependence: Customs and Coinage as “Procedures of Sovereignty”

The most revealing area of procedural sovereignty is

represented by customs and monetary mechanisms. In Zhukovsky's appendices, the stages of Bukhara's inclusion in the Russian customs line and the conditions for coordinating decisions with the imperial center are recorded. Similarly, monetary agreements set rules for ending or limiting minting, the procedure for surrender or exchange, and exchange-rate parameters—thus translating attributes of sovereignty (customs, coinage) into a regime of agreed procedures (Zhukovsky, 1915, pp. 195–198).

In Logofet, normative rationalization is linked to economic sectors and permission regimes: the formalization of applications, plot measurements, liability, and payments describes the inclusion of capital into a regulated environment in which the decisive word remains with the chain "emirate administration — political agency — governor-general's hierarchy" (Logofet, 1909, pp. 219–221, 235–239). In English-language accounts, these processes are more often visible in their results, but when compared with Russian regulations, a common mechanism becomes clear: sovereignty is maintained as a form, while key financial-legal decisions are secured through procedures of coordination (Richard A. Pierce, pp. 191–192, 195–196; Curtis, p. 122).

DISCUSSION

The comparison reveals a stable divergence of genre perspectives. Russian texts (especially those with documentary appendices) aim to "show manageability" through norms: who approves, who appoints, what limits apply, what the notification and control procedure is. In this perspective, the protectorate looks like a consistent legal unfolding of joint regimes, and the political agency appears as an institutional interface for coordination.

English-language observers rarely reproduce the normative structure in full, but they record its "effects" at the level of practices: escorts as a substitute for free movement, the dependence of external communications on the agent, special spatial zones ("New Bukhara," station settlements), and the protocol regulation of meetings. This makes it clear that procedural control operates not only in the economy but also in political representation: the access regime simultaneously disciplines and "produces" an image of power.

In terms of the political portrait of Emir Abdulahad Khan, these sources reconstruct not so much a "reformer" or a "traditionalist" as a ruler whose effectiveness in a protectorate is determined by the ability to manage procedural circuits: to preserve symbols of autonomy while accepting as normal the external approval of key acts. This explains the

contradictory assessments: in some texts procedural integration is described as rationalization and stabilization, while in others it is presented as a restriction of independence. Methodologically, it is important that both lines rely on different levels of observation: norms versus practices.

CONCLUSION

Based on Russian and English-language sources, the article shows that Bukhara's dependence under Emir Abdulahad Khan can be described as a regime of "procedural sovereignty": formal autonomy was preserved, but key fields of legitimacy and governability were закреплены through procedures of coordination and mediation. Normative publications document the "two-key" character of control, while English-language observations demonstrate how this logic manifested in access practices, the spatial organization of power, and the management of communications. As a result, the political profile of Abdulahad Khan in these source corpora is defined less by a modernization program than by the administration of a protectorate—participation in procedural mechanisms in which the Russian political agency served as the key arbiter.

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