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The Political Economy of Russian Gubernatorial Election and Appointment

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The Political Economy of Russian Gubernatorial Election and Appointment

NOAH BUCKLEY, TIMOTHY FRYE, GUZEL GARIFULLINA &
ORA JOHN REUTER

Abstract

Political and economic outcomes depend, in part, on the quality of the officials making policy. Some argue that free elections are the best method for selecting competent officials. Others argue that elections lead to the selection of amateurs and demagogues. We use original data on the biographies of Russian regional governors to examine the backgrounds of elected and appointed governors. Elected governors are more likely to be locals. Appointed governors are more likely to be federal bureaucrats or hold a graduate degree. We conclude the paper by speculating on other possible explanations for variation in governor background.

TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES much of the literature in political economy focuses on designing incentives that encourage self-interested officials to eschew opportunism (Mayhew 1974; Buchanan 1989, pp. 13–24). This ‘incentive’ argument assumes that public officials are largely motivated by the extrinsic value of their position and thus are driven by concerns about tenure, wages, rents and other material benefits. In recent years, however, scholars have begun to pay more attention to how the quality of public officials influences outcomes independent of the incentives they face. According to this ‘selection’ argument, policy outcomes depend on the individual characteristics of office holders. Whether as a result of differences in skill, public spiritedness, education, life experience or gender, the assumption is that some officials are either better able to carry out their tasks or have stronger intrinsic motivations to pursue good policies for their own sake (Besley 2005). To achieve better economic and political outcomes, the ‘selection’ argument emphasises the quality of public officials rather than the impact of incentives. Indeed, selecting high quality public officials may be especially important in developing countries where institutional constraints are less binding and meritocratic incentive schemes function poorly.

In this article, we focus on Russia, a country where there has long been speculation about how characteristics of leaders and officials might influence their governing style.

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In the Soviet period, the debate on ‘reds’ and ‘experts’ was grounded in speculation about how cadres with specific career skills might differ in their approach to industrial and political management (Moore 1950; Rutland 1993). In post-Soviet Russia, the style and substance of Putin’s rule have often been attributed to his years in the KGB (Kryshtanovskaya & White 2003). At the sub-national level, young reform-minded Russian governors were initially thought to be more capable at navigating the transition in the early and mid-1990s. In the Putin era, observers believed that the introduction of direct elections would lead to the mass appointment of governors with backgrounds in the security services, who, as a result, might rule in a more authoritarian fashion. Unfortunately, speculation on such topics in contemporary Russia is more prevalent than hard data and empirical tests.

A focus on Russia also allows us to engage a second broad debate in political economy by examining whether the traits of public officials vary according to their method of selection. More specifically, we examine whether and how elected regional governors differ from appointed regional governors. From 1992 to 2004, Russia’s governors were elected in a popular vote, but in 2004, then-President Vladimir Putin pushed through a reform cancelling direct gubernatorial elections and replacing them with a system of centralised appointments. One argument is that elected officials are more likely to be of high quality because voters prefer high quality candidates (Besley 2005). On the other hand, other lines of research suggest that appointed officials may be of higher quality either because majoritarian failures result in political amateurs being elected (Linz 1994), or because the social planners making appointments have long time horizons and seek the public rather than the private good (Evans 1995). Indeed, many justified the decision to cancel gubernatorial elections in 2004 as a way to purge criminals, political amateurs and incompetents from the gubernatorial corpus.¹ This raises the question of whether it is true that elected officials are more likely to be incompetent or whether the most effective way to select capable public officials is at the ballot box.

To explore these and other issues, we created a novel dataset that includes biographical information on the universe of regional governors in Russia from 1992 to 2010. These data include comprehensive information on the social backgrounds, career trajectories and demographic characteristics of Russia’s regional executives. We consolidate and cross-validate biographical information from numerous primary and secondary sources in one transparent dataset that includes coding for a wide variety of governor characteristics. Along with examining the differences between elected and appointed governors, we use our original data to provide a systematic portrait of Russia’s governors.

In preliminary analyses, we find that appointed and elected governors in Russia have many features in common. They are statistically indistinguishable in their age; are just as likely to have worked in the regional or local administration; and are equally likely to have come to the governor’s post from business. Their educational profiles are quite similar, and

¹As Putin said in a July 2011 press conference, ‘I don’t want to talk about [the cancellation of direct gubernatorial elections], but I will say: back then ... everything seemed democratic and very good, but then pseudo-criminal elements began to rise up, fill their pockets with money, and manipulate both public consciousness and elected governors’, available at: <http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/15900/>, accessed 24 February 2012. Indeed, in 2012, as Russian legislators considered changes to law that would reintroduce some form of gubernatorial elections, there were proposals to install minimal qualification requirements for candidates, such as a higher education. See ‘Senatory proyavili otzyvchivost’ k gubernatoram’, *Kommersant*, 22 February 2012, available at: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss/1878499>, accessed 11 June 2014.

their ethnicities differ little. Moreover, elected and appointed officials are returned to office at the same rate. There is some evidence, however, that appointed governors are less likely to be born in the region in which they serve, are more likely to have an economics degree and to hold a graduate degree. Appointed governors are also more likely to come directly from the federal bureaucracy than are elected governors. These results suggest that appointed governors have a slightly more technocratic background.

These initial findings suggest three broader points. First, it implies that in an environment of weak institutions the impact of selection method on the traits of the office holder may be muted. Elections for governors in Russia were often marked by low levels of political competition and a very uneven playing field between incumbents and challengers, which may dampen the selection effects of elections (Konitzer 2006). This suggests a need to examine the details of the selection method and the context in which it operates. Moreover, other analyses have found that presidents in Russia have tended to appoint governors who are able to mobilise high vote totals for the regime and/or who have high approval ratings (Reuter & Robertson 2012). Social planners in many settings cannot credibly commit to appointing competent economic managers because they are compelled by circumstances to appoint competent political managers or take into account the preferences of the median voter.

Second, in contrast to much of the received wisdom in Russia, we find little evidence that members of the security forces are overrepresented among appointed governors (Kryshtanovskaya & White 2005). Only 8% of elected governors and 9% of appointed governors had a plurality of their work experience in the power ministries.

Third, it is important to note that just because we find that elected and appointed governors share many commonalities in their background and work experience, it does not mean that the method of selection is inconsequential for policies or outcomes. It only means that differences in policies and outcomes between elected and appointed governors are probably not occurring as a result of 'selection'. Elections and appointments may still have large impacts on policymaking and outcomes as a result of the incentives that each of these two types of officials face for retaining their office.

Our findings are descriptive. Rigorous causal analysis is stymied by the fact that gubernatorial appointments were introduced in all regions in Russia at the same time in 2005. Therefore, the characteristics of appointed governors may be determined not only by the selection method, but also by factors correlated with time. Factors specific to the time period, such as the state of the economy or the nature of political changes, may account for differences in governor characteristics. Thus, we do not make strong causal claims. Rather, we present evidence from a novel dataset to present suggestive descriptive evidence. Indeed, one purpose of this article is to make readers aware of the properties of the dataset.

We begin by providing a theoretical justification for studying political selection before introducing the details of the methods of selection of governors in Russia. We then examine how the background of governors varies with the method of selection using simple, bivariate comparisons and conclude by exploring several possible areas for future research.

Theory

This section focuses on two related questions to motivate our study of the backgrounds of regional governors in Russia under different appointment procedures. Does the quality

of politicians matter for political and economic outcomes? Do different methods of appointment lead to variation in the quality of politicians?

Historians have long emphasised the importance of individual leaders in specific historical circumstances and normative political theorists have argued about the design of institutions that would induce the ‘best’ people to take up public office. Yet, most social scientists have preferred to study how variation in incentives influences outcomes rather than to examine how variation in the traits and qualities of individuals making these decisions influences outcomes. The reluctance to address this issue is driven in part by the difficulty of the task. Identifying which particular qualities matter for which particular policies is a challenge, as is finding objective indicators of the quality of public officials. In addition, the quality of leaders is rarely randomly assigned, which makes identifying the causal impact of different leadership traits difficult.

In recent years, however, a number of scholars have argued forcefully for the importance of studying the quality of public officials. Most prominently, Besley (2005) argues that two features of politics make the quality of leaders an important determinant of policy outcomes. First, if there are limits to the extent to which state officials can commit to policy positions, then the quality of the official picked for public office is consequential. If officials have considerable leeway over policy choice, it matters greatly what type of official is doing the choosing. The ubiquity of commitment problems in politics therefore suggests the importance of studying the quality of public officials. Second, where elections are a weak tool to control politicians, public officials will also have many opportunities to choose policy largely independent of voter preferences. Building on Besley’s insights one might argue that the quality of public officials is especially important under autocratic rule where commitment problems are exacerbated and meaningful elections absent.

Recent studies have brought empirical evidence to bear on how the traits of leaders influence outcomes. Besley *et al.* (2011) find that more educated state leaders are associated with higher rates of economic growth. Carnes (2012) demonstrates that legislators from business backgrounds exhibit more conservative economic voting behaviour. Pande (2003) finds that reservation for scheduled castes at the state level in India affected policies toward those groups. Similarly, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) find that issues especially relevant to women were more likely to be raised in village governments where more women were members. And a number of authors find that technocratic bureaucrats generate better governance outcomes than political cronies (Evans & Rauch 1999; Geddes 1994). These findings would be familiar to scholars of the Soviet Union who long debated the impact of having ‘reds’ or ‘experts’ in positions of decision-making authority (Moore 1950; Friedrich & Brzezinski 1956; Rutland 1993). In sum, there are good theoretical and empirical grounds for expecting that the different qualities of leaders may influence important political and economic outcomes.

A second body of literature with a somewhat longer pedigree examines how methods of appointment influence the quality of public officials. Scholars have examined this question in two general ways. One body of work examines differences in the quality of leaders between democracy and autocracy.² On this view, the type of regime can shape the size of the pool of possible candidates with citizens in democracies having a larger reservoir of

²A large body of work examines differences in policy outcomes between democracy and autocracy that may be attributable to differences in the quality of leaders between these two contexts (Jones & Olken 2005).

candidates from which to choose their leaders. In support of this argument, Besley and Reynal-Querol (2011) use a panel of countries from 1848 to 2004 and find that leaders in democracies tend to have higher levels of education than their counterparts in autocracies. Similarly, Galasso and Nannicini (2011) examine how political competition influences the quality of public officials. Using data from single-member district elections from 1994 to 2006 in Italy, they find that politicians with higher *ex-ante* quality—as measured by years of schooling, previous market income and local government experience—were more likely to run in a contestable district. That is, political competition shapes the quality of the candidates that parties choose to run for office. In addition, they find that politicians elected in contestable districts are more likely to attend votes in parliament and that as a result this is driven more by a selection effect than by incentives alone.

Meanwhile, the state-led development literature suggests that appointed technocrats may be in a better position to make rational and efficient economic policy (Evans 1995). Voters, it is argued, demand policies that are inflationary, strain the treasury or deter private investment. Because they are insulated from such popular pressures, unelected bureaucrats are better positioned to keep government spending under control and make efficient economic policy. Relatedly, those who advocate the Weberian concept of bureaucracy suggest that bureaucratic selection should be depoliticised, lest bureaucrats be enticed to make public policy decisions on the basis of political rather than rational, economic calculations (Cukierman *et al.* 1992; Evans & Rauch 1999).

Other studies have examined how the method of selection shapes the quality of officeholders. For example, Veronese (2004) finds that a move to directly elected mayors in Italy led to selection of a group with higher levels of human capital.³ In China, Luo (2010) finds that compared to their appointed counterparts, elected heads of village councils have more years of schooling and greater experience in business. This result is especially relevant to our paper given that it is one of the few quantitative studies of how the method of appointment influences the qualities of a regional leader in an authoritarian setting. Similarly, Ma and Wu (2011) find that appointment mechanisms influence fiscal transparency across China's regions.

In sum, there are good reasons to believe that the quality of public officials is an important determinant of public policy and that methods of selection can shape the quality of public officials in democracies and autocracies alike. But the literature is divided on whether elected officials are of higher quality than appointed ones. Some suggest that the accountability mechanisms of elections lead voters to select higher quality officials. Others suggest that elections open the door for officials who lack the skills, training and aptitude to implement rational policy.

³There is a large literature examining how the method of appointment influences policy outcomes resulting from the quality of the public official making the policy decision. Besley and Coate (2003) find that elected regulators take more pro-consumer positions than do appointed regulators. Enikolopov (2006) shows that elected chief executives of local governments in the United States favour higher public employment than their appointed counterparts as the latter need to worry about the median voter while the former need only worry about the official who appointed them. Even in autocratic regimes whether officials are appointed or elected may influence outcomes. In Russia, Vasilyeva (2011) examines three types of appointed regional governors to determine how a leader's background influences choices over education and health spending at the regional level from 2004 to 2009. She finds that the method of appointment influences spending choices, but that these effects are conditional on the level of political competition. More specifically, appointed governors who had not been previously elected spent less on health and education when facing higher levels of political competition.

Russian regional chief executives

Contemporary Russia provides a good case to study the impact of selection rules on the quality of political officials for several reasons. First, Russia has over 80 regions headed by chief executives, permitting comparison across a large number of like units.⁴ Second, Russia's regional chief executives are important figures who exert extensive influence over political, economic and social life in their regions. Third, the method of selection of these officials has changed over time. From 1992 to 1996, some of Russia's regional executives were elected, while most were appointed. From 1996 to 2004, almost all of Russia's regional executives were directly elected. Since 2005, all of Russia's governors have been directly appointed by the president. In the following section, we provide necessary background on these changes.

In the Soviet Union, *de facto* executive power at the regional level was vested in the first secretary of the regional committee (*obkom*) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). *Obkom* first secretaries were a critical link in the circular flow of power that defined the Soviet system (Daniels 1971; Hough 1997). *Obkom* first secretaries were officially elected at regional party plenums, but the *Politburo* of the Central Committee nominated the candidate to be approved at the plenum. In a practice initiated by Lenin and perfected by Stalin, the General Secretary of the CPSU assumed the key role in selecting nominees. In turn, *obkom* first secretaries nominated delegates to serve in regional conferences, which in turn selected delegates to the party congresses at the union level that selected the General Secretary. The regional secretaries thus became a support base for the General Secretary, while the General Secretary was simultaneously under their collective control. Thus, the Soviet leadership gave careful consideration to the appointment of new *obkom* first secretaries, and jealously guarded their privileged position in making those appointments.

Scholars shared this interest in who was appointed to these important posts. Scores of books and articles have been written on the generational, ethnic, occupational, ideological and social differences among regional secretaries, both across time and *oblast'*. Whatever their background, Soviet specialists were relatively certain that patron–client linkages within the party played a major role in determining who was appointed where (Rigby & Harasymiw 1980; Willerton 1992). A perennial issue that was never resolved by either scholars or Soviet leaders was the relative mix between political ideologues ('reds'), on the one hand, and technical, managerial or economic 'experts' on the other. The former were thought to be experts in cadre management and were well versed in the party dogma. The latter, meanwhile, were specialists in economic management (Hough 1969). The debate mattered, for, according to some, the Soviet economy stagnated and eventually collapsed in part due to the excessive influence of 'reds' on economic decision making (Rutland 1993).

As the Soviet Union collapsed, *de facto* executive power in the Russian Republic passed to the chairmen of the executive committees (*ispolkomy*) of the regional Councils of People's Deputies, popularly elected for the first time in March 1990, and then to newly created 'head of administration' posts, which were formally established in August 1991. These heads of administration quickly became known as 'governors', except in the republics, most of which called their chief executives 'presidents'. Republics were given the

⁴From 1991 to 2007, Russia had 89 regions. Between 2007 and 2009, the number was gradually decreased to 83.

right to elect their chief executives while governors in other regions were to be either appointed or elected at the discretion of the president. By the end of 1991, seven republics had held direct elections, and by March 1992, Yel'tsin had appointed governors in all other regions.

In most regions, the heads of regional *ispolkomy* and regional or local *sovery*, many of whom were loyal to Yel'tsin, were appointed as governors. At the time, the federal government was focusing its energies on economic reform and did not want to risk having reform opponents installed in these powerful regional posts (Turovsky 2005). Indeed, as economic reform became less popular, Yel'tsin postponed the holding of elections. Federal law required that governors be elected, but left the timetable open and gave Yel'tsin wide discretion to determine when the first elections would be held. In 1993, Yel'tsin allowed elections in six *oblasti* only to see five of his appointees lose, while Chelyabinsk simply defied Yel'tsin and held elections without the president's permission. In 1994, Yel'tsin permitted elections only in Irkutsk *Oblast'*. By the end of 1994, meanwhile, most republics had elected presidents. In 1995, Yel'tsin permitted elections to be held in 12 *oblasti*, where his appointees stood a good chance of winning. Yel'tsin also permitted Sverdlovsk to hold elections after it credibly threatened to hold elections without his blessing.

Yel'tsin was reluctant to allow gubernatorial elections, many of which were sure to be won by the Communist opposition. By late 1995, however, Yel'tsin found it increasingly difficult to resist calls from the *Duma* opposition and regional leaders for direct elections in the remainder of Russia's *oblasti* and *kraya*. Yel'tsin, however, was able to ensure that almost all of these elections would be postponed until after the presidential elections. Thus, in the autumn of 1996 and spring of 1997, direct elections were held for the first time in most of Russia's non-republics. In 1999, a federal law was signed that established uniform rules for the election of regional governors, and abolished the president's right to appoint or remove governors. Russia's elected governors were a motley bunch, as our analysis below shows. Communists, centrists, democrats, economic managers, agricultural specialists, legislators, seasoned political veterans and upstart newcomers were all represented among Russia's elected governors.

Russia's governors were chosen by direct election for the remainder of the Yel'tsin era and for the first four years of the Putin era. In December 2004, however, President Putin pushed a reform through the *Duma* that cancelled direct elections for governors. Elections were replaced with a system of appointments whereby the Russian president would nominate a candidate to be approved by the regional legislature. The regional legislature has the right to reject the candidate, at which point the president has the right to renominate the same candidate or propose a different candidate. If the legislature rejects the president's proposed candidate three times, then the legislature is dissolved and new elections are called. In the same law, the president was given the authority to dismiss governors with a decree and name an interim governor. The law also provided elected governors with the option of appealing to the president to make a decision on reappointing them prior to the end of their elected terms. The option of early appeal was reserved solely for governors who had never been appointed or reappointed by the president and was utilised by 43 governors between 2005 and 2007.

Also in December 2004, President Putin issued a decree that established a formal procedure for vetting candidates. The president's special representatives to the Federal *okrug* (*polpredy*) were tasked with submitting two candidates to the president's chief of

staff who would then submit those candidates to the president. In December 2005, the law was changed again so that, in addition to the *polpredy*, the largest party in a region's regional legislature (or the largest parties if two or more parties received the largest and equal shares of mandates or participated together in an electoral bloc) would have the right to propose a candidate for governor to the president.⁵

This procedure for appointing governors existed from January 2005 to December 2008. In April 2009, it was amended again when President Medvedev pushed through a new amendment to the law on gubernatorial appointments that gave the largest party in regional legislatures the exclusive right to propose candidates to the president for appointment in their respective regions.⁶ Under the new law, the largest party provides the president with a list of three candidates that the president can choose from. The president then chooses a candidate from among that list and submits it to the regional legislature as under the existing law. Since 2008, United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*) has been the largest party in every regional legislature, so the new law, on paper at least, gives the ruling party a direct say in the gubernatorial appointment process. The new amendments went into effect on 1 July 2009, and the first formal application of the new law occurred on 20 August 2009, when United Russia presented President Medvedev with three candidates to fill the governor's post in Sverdlovsk *Oblast'*. Since then, the central party leadership has proposed candidates to the president for nomination. Insider accounts suggest, however, that the party consults closely with the Kremlin when drawing up these lists (Ivanov 2011).

Description of data

In this paper we introduce and employ a novel dataset consisting of detailed biographical and political data on every individual who has held elected or appointed office as head of a Russian 'subject of the federation'. We collected data from a variety of sources including the Labyrinth repository, current and past (via the web archive 'The Wayback Machine')⁷ regional administration websites, Wikipedia and other sources. A group of Russian research assistants was trained by the authors to systematically access and record relevant data from these sources. We strove to make the data-collection process transparent and replicable, while maximising the amount of data captured.

Data collection proceeded in a series of 'passes'. Each research assistant was assigned a set of regions and was instructed to collect information from successively more obscure and less direct sources in every pass. Multiple layers of quality control were maintained by assigning research assistants to subsequently check the data collected on a particular region—a region that they were not assigned to for the first pass. The authors also conducted a substantial amount of cross-referencing and monitoring of the incoming data.

⁵Importantly, parties and the *polpredy* were not given the right to propose new candidates at any time. Their right of proposal only existed when a governor's term had expired, when a governor had been dismissed by the president, or when a governor left office voluntarily for other reasons (or died).

⁶This amendment to law thus juridicially superseded President Putin's decrees on how candidate lists for governors would be drawn up.

⁷'The Wayback Machine' is an archive and portal that has been crawling and storing a large set of websites for many years. We accessed the websites of regional administrations within The Wayback Machine's archive for as many years as we could. 'Internet Archive: Wayback Machine', available at: <http://www.archive.org/web/web.php>, accessed 2 December 2011; 'Labyrinth', *Panorama Center*, available at: <http://www.labyrinth.ru/>, accessed 2 December 2011.

The next step in the data collection entailed coding the raw biographical data collected by our team of research assistants. Coders relied on a redundant transparent set of coding rules and each made multiple passes through the source material to glean biographical information. Research assistants were not assigned to code the same regions that they primarily collected data on. They were encouraged to note any and all discrepancies or confusion, and coding rules were made as clear and explicit as possible in order to minimise measurement error in this stage. The authors once again re-checked substantial portions of the coded data, working to ensure that codings matched the original data and were consistent across coders. As a final step, discrepancies were identified by examining descriptive statistics and aggregated data.

From the coded data we built career histories, coded educational profiles, identified political characteristics, such as party membership, and assembled demographic data for each governor. Our data encompass all Russian regions (up to 89, depending on the year) and all years after the creation of the Russian Federation in which each region had an official head, such as governor or president. The structure of our dataset allows us to analyse this universe of Russian governors in terms of region-year, term in office, election/appointment event or individual.

The data in our dataset fall into several general blocks. Basic personal and demographics characteristics like age, place of birth and nationality form a foundation. A substantial set of variables captures educational attainment, as well as a categorical coding of educational specialisation and place of higher (university) education. The core of our dataset consists of a maximally comprehensive recording of each governor's career trajectory. Using the sources listed above, several rounds of data collection and coding were undertaken to ensure that we located as much of these data as possible. While these variables are necessarily incomplete and imperfect, we located and mapped a substantial proportion of governors' career trajectories. From these data we constructed a number of measures that allow us to succinctly characterise each governor's background. Important political variables are also included in our dataset. Membership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, United Russia and other political parties, including year of entry into each, was noted where available.

These data represent an improvement over existing data sources on Russia's governors for two reasons. First, they are more comprehensive in drawing together disparate information on governor backgrounds. Several studies of Russian governors have used specific data on turnover (Kontizer 2006), business backgrounds (Gehlbach *et al.* 2010), security background (Kryshtanovskaya & White 2010) and insider–outsider status (Libman & Schultz 2014), but no comprehensive dataset has been compiled, to our knowledge. Second, this dataset is replicable and accessible for scholars to use in their own research.

Comparing elected and appointed governors

In this section, we compare the characteristics of governors elected between 1992 and 2005 with the characteristics of governors appointed between 2005 and 2010.⁸ Table 1 provides

⁸Our dataset begins in 1992 and includes all those governors elected after the fall of the Soviet Union. We exclude the 86 appointments made by Yel'tsin in the period from 1991 to 1996 for three reasons. First, the extraordinary political circumstances of the transition period and the high degree of uncertainty make these appointments exceptional. Indeed, as noted above, the appointments made in this period were anomalous in

TABLE 1
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

	<i>N</i>
Number of governors	205
Number of election events	232
Number of appointment events	140
Number of regions	88
Start year	1992
End year	2010

some basic descriptive statistics on these data. Our data cover 140 appointments and 232 elections. The total number of governors, 205, is less than the total number of appointments and elections because many governors were re-elected or reappointed to multiple terms.

One demographic characteristic that can be dispensed with quickly is gender. Almost all Russian governors have been men. Only three governors since 1992 have been women: Valentina Bronevich in tiny Koryakskii Autonomous *Okrug*, 1996–2000; Valentina Matvienko in St Petersburg, 2003–2011; and Natalya Komarova in Yamalo–Nenetskii Autonomous *Okrug*, 2010–present.⁹ For this reason, we use the masculine ‘he’ when referring to Russian governors in this paper.

We examine the characteristics of governors along a number of dimensions: insider–outsider status, education, career experience, post-tenure, profession, ethnicity and age. As most of our measures are binary variables, we present the percentage of elections that resulted in a governor with each characteristic taking office and the percentage of appointments that resulted in a governor with each characteristic taking office. When variables are continuous (as with years of work experience in the region and age), we present averages for elected governors and appointed governors. Comparing these means allows us to identify the raw variation in each measure between election events and appointment events. In each table, we report *t*-statistics for the differences in means between elected and appointed governors for both binary and continuous variables. A *t*-statistic that is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (greater than 1.96 or less than –1.96) gives us some confidence that the difference between these two groups is not simply due to random chance.

Insider–outsider status

Are elected governors more likely to be from the regions where they serve? If Russia’s appointments were made on the basis of technocratic competence, then there would be no reason for social planners to prefer local candidates. Or, more cynically, if those making appointments prefer to appoint their cronies, then we would expect that locals would actually be disadvantaged. The question is important because ties of local officials to their

Footnote 8 continued

that many of them were reappointments of sitting heads of *ispolkomy*, who had been elected in semi-free legislative elections (Turovsky 2005). Second, since federal law at this time stipulated that regional governors were to be elected, each of these appointments were interim appointments made by Yel’tsin until such time as elections would be held. Finally, there are large amounts of missing data on the biographies of governors in this era.

⁹Marina Kovtun was appointed governor in Murmansk in 2012.

TABLE 2
REGIONAL EXPERIENCE OF GOVERNORS

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Appointed</i>	<i>t</i> value
Born in the region	48%	48%	0.03
Years of work experience in the region	13	10	3.05**
Most recent place of work is in the region	81%	66%	3.16**
Higher education in the region	37%	31%	1.29
Worked in regional executive immediately prior to taking office	25%	24%	0.15
Worked in regional executive at any time prior to taking office	60%	57%	0.61

Note: Numbers in the second and third columns are percentages of the elected or appointed governor subsample. Columns may not add up to 100 due to coding rules and since these categories are not exhaustive. The final column shows the *t* value on the difference in means between the elected and appointed subsamples.

** Significant at 0.05.

localities may have important effects on how they govern. Some suggest that outsiders are in a better position to pursue efficient economic policies because they are less prone to capture by local interests (Libman & Schultz 2014), while others suggest that insiders are more likely to achieve good economic policy outcomes, either because they have better knowledge of local conditions (Hayek 1945) or because their ties with local elites actually reduce the costs of doing business (Persson & Zhuravskaya 2012). What is more, as we note below, a Russian governorship is a peak of career position. Insider governors often enter business or politics in their regions after they leave office, whereas outsiders typically return to Moscow or their home region. Thus, the personal financial interests of governors may also influence how they govern. For these reasons, the relative breakdown of insiders and outsiders in the Russian gubernatorial *corpus* is of interest.

Many observers believed that the introduction of appointments in Russia would lead to the wholesale appointment of outsiders. Outsiders, often called ‘*varyagi*’ (‘Varangians’) by Russians, have been viewed with both suspicion and delight in their new region. Some thought that *varyagi* would disrupt local clientelist networks, business connections, and political machines.¹⁰ Others have pointed out, however, that publics and business leaders often welcomed outsiders, believing that governors with strong ties to Moscow could use those ties to attract investment and federal funds (Sobolev *et al.* 2012; DeBardeleben & Zherebtsev 2011). We examine whether outsiders were indeed more common in the appointment era.

We operationalise insider–outsider status using measures of each governor’s life experiences in the region in which they take office. Table 2 shows the results. As a reminder, each column shows the percentage of elected and appointed governors with the given characteristic if the characteristic is binary and the mean value of the characteristic for elected and appointed governors, respectively, if the characteristic is continuous.

As shown in the table, elected and appointed governors differ in terms of local work experience. On average, appointed governors have nearly a third less work experience in their governed region than do elected governors, and even if they do have work experience in the region, it is more likely to have been in the more distant past. However, appointed

¹⁰Research from Cambodia by Malesky and Samphantharak (2008) finds that firms exposed to a shock to their bribe schedules by a change in governor invest significantly less in subsequent periods, as they wait for new information about their new chief executive.

TABLE 3
CAREER EXPERIENCE

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Appointed</i>	<i>t</i> value
In private sector	6%	15%	− 2.78**
In state-owned enterprises	26%	15%	2.60**
As elected official	12%	15%	− 0.91
In the CPSU	29%	15%	3.36**
In a power ministry	9%	11%	− 0.72
In the federal bureaucracy	1%	6%	− 2.32**
In the federal bureaucracy in the regions	0%	1%	− 0.34
In regional administration	9%	11%	− 0.72
In regional administration in another region	0%	1%	− 1.42
In local administration	7%	7%	0.07
In local administration in another region	0%	1%	− 0.91

Note: Numbers in the second and third columns are percentages of the elected or appointed governor subsample. Columns may not add up to 100 due to coding rules and since these categories are not exhaustive. The final column shows the *t* value on the difference in means between the elected and appointed subsamples.

** Significant at 0.05.

governors are no more or less likely to be born or be educated in their governed region than elected governors.

We also emphasise, however, that a majority of appointees have ties to the region. Sixty-six percent were working in the region immediately prior to being appointed. Furthermore, only 22% of appointees had never worked in the region where they were appointed. Even in the appointment era, it seems, the Kremlin has felt compelled to appoint mostly local officials. The Kremlin needed governors with some modicum of local political authority, since governors were tasked with coordinating the vote for the ruling party in their respective regions.

Career and political experience

The pre-gubernatorial careers of governors are formative experiences that shape their outlook and skills. Carnes (2012) finds that the career history of members of Congress in the US is a significant predictor of their voting behaviour: businessmen and farm owners are more conservative than workers, lawyers or service-based professionals. In the Soviet era, specialists thought that officials with management experience performed differently in their jobs than those whose primary work experience was in the party (Hough 1969; Rutland 1993).

Table 3 explores the work histories of Russian governors in more detail. The second and third columns contain the percentage of elected and appointed governors, respectively, who spent a plurality of their careers in the given sector. A governor's 'career' is taken as the most recent ten positions held by the governor, prior to becoming governor, or the most recent 20 years of work experience if the most recent ten positions do not reach up to 20 years. The full career history is taken into account if the governor's entire post-university job history is accounted for in less than ten positions. We then calculate the number of years spent by the governor in each of the 11 fields below. Each governor is categorised according to the field in which he spent the plurality of his career.

Examining Table 3, we see that there are surprisingly few differences between elected and appointed governors. Elected governors are just as likely as appointed governors to come from the security services ('power ministries'), and only about 10% of governors in either era have such a career background. Appointed governors are slightly more likely to have made their careers in the federal bureaucracy, but the overall frequency is very low. Most governors made their careers as elected officials, in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the CPSU or in the regional administration where they served as governor. This holds true for both elected and appointed governors.

The only other categories for which appointed and elected governors differ are private sector experience, state-owned enterprise experience and experience in the CPSU. These differences are not surprising. Appointed governors are more likely to have spent a plurality of their career in the private sector, because the private sector existed in Russia for a longer portion of their pre-gubernatorial careers. Also, because elected governors were more likely to reach the peak of their pre-gubernatorial career in the Soviet era, they are more likely to have spent most of their careers working in party work or working in SOEs. Thus, the method of selection is not a likely source of differences in the private sector work experience of governors.

When we combine private sector and SOE experience into one category we see that elected and appointed governors do not differ in the extent to which they make their careers in the economic sector.

In Table 4, we explore some political characteristics of Russian governors. In Table 3 we can see that appointed governors are far less likely to have a plurality of work experience in the CPSU, while in Table 4 we can see that they are also much less likely to have been a member of the CPSU at all. The difference in CPSU membership and work experience in the CPSU is likely a function of time rather than selection method. Regional elites who held office in the late 1980s were very likely to be CPSU members and many of these officials retained office following the collapse of the USSR.

What about experience in electoral politics after the fall of the USSR? Interestingly, we find that elected governors were slightly more likely to have held elected office. This is peculiar, because appointed governors have had more time to gain experience in electoral politics than elected governors. While most elected *and* appointed governors had held an elected position, this is more likely to be the case for governors who were elected into office. This might be interpreted as suggestive evidence that appointed governors are more likely to be apolitical and technocratic.

TABLE 4
POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Appointed</i>	<i>t</i> value
Held elected position immediately prior to taking office	64%	58%	1.22
Held elected position at any time prior to taking office	53%	41%	2.09**
Was member of a previous governor's executive team	18%	19%	-0.28
Re-elected or re-appointed	53%	56%	-0.42
Member of CPSU	73%	48%	4.85**

Note: Numbers in the second and third columns are percentages of the elected or appointed governor subsample. Columns may not add up to 100 due to coding rules and since these categories are not exhaustive. The final column shows the *t* value on the difference in means between the elected and appointed subsamples.

** Significant at 0.05.

TABLE 5
MOST RECENT PLACE OF WORK

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Appointed</i>	<i>t</i> value
Regional administration (home region)	18%	17%	0.22
Regional administration (different region)	0%	4%	-3.22**
Regional legislature	24%	16%	1.92*
State <i>Duma</i>	14%	14%	0.16
Federation Council	7%	5%	1.02
Local executive (including mayors)	8%	11%	-0.98
Local legislature	3%	3%	0.08
Party work (non-KPSS)	2%	0%	0.81
Business	11%	11%	-0.21
Federal government	4%	10%	-2.40**
Presidential administration	3%	5%	-1.24
Force structures	3%	3%	0.30
Academic	1%	0%	0.52
Television	0%	0%	0.77
Election commission	0%	0%	0.77

Note: Numbers in the second and third columns are percentages of the elected or appointed governor subsample. Columns may not add up to 100 due to coding rules and since these categories are not exhaustive. The final column shows the *t* value on the difference in means between the elected and appointed subsamples.

* Significant at 0.10, ** significant at 0.05.

Table 5 presents a different perspective on the career backgrounds of Russian governors. It shows the percentage of governors in a given selection category (elected or appointed) whose most recent place of work was in the given sectors. Because many officials advance through the ranks of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the CPSU or private business and then move to high-level political positions, this table gives a slightly different picture of the backgrounds of Russian governors, but the general theme is the same: elected and appointed governors are surprisingly similar in their observable characteristics.

Overall, the most common pre-gubernatorial career steps in Russia are the regional administration and regional legislature. Deputy governors are very often appointed governor and voters also tended to select such governors frequently. Governors in the elected era were more likely to be employed on a full-time basis in the regional legislature prior to being elected, but this difference is somewhat artificial, because many elected governors were the chairmen of the regional soviets in the late transition period, when this position became the *de facto* chief executive. These chairmen were either appointed as governor by Yel'tsin (and then re-elected) or leveraged their *de facto* incumbency status to get elected. This difference may also pick up on the fact that regional legislatures were less important arenas for exerting influence on policy in the Putin era than they were in the Yel'tsin era.

A total of 14% of elected and appointed governors came to office via the State *Duma*, but there is no difference between elected and appointed governors in the frequency with which this occurred. The same is true of the Federation Council, positions in local (municipal) politics, and post-Soviet party work.¹¹ Of the governors, 11% came directly from the

¹¹From 1996 to 2002, governors held *ex officio* positions as Federation Council senators. During this time, the chairmen of regional legislators also held *ex officio* seats. We do not count either of these as career experience in the Federation Council. Only being elected to the Federation Council prior to 1996 or appointed after 2001 counts as Federation Council experience.

business world, with no difference between elected and appointed governors. Few governors come from the Presidential Administration in the elected era (3%), a path that became slightly more common in the appointed period (5%).

One of the only categories for which there is a significant difference between appointed and elected governors is Federal Government. Many more appointed governors had their most recent work experience in the Federal Government. In the appointment era, some governors were chosen from the administrations of other regions, which did not happen at all in the election era. But this was still very rare in the appointment era, occurring in only 4% of cases. Finally, very few governors came directly from the security services, either in the appointed era or the elected era. In fact, there are even fewer governors from the security services in the appointed era than during the elected era, a finding that stands in contrast to those who argue that the Russian political elite has been taken over by representatives of the security services (Kryshtanovskaya & White 2003).

On the whole, Table 5 paints a picture of a gubernatorial *corpus* that hails mostly from the political elite. One difference of note is the Federal Government category. There does seem to be an increase in the number of federal bureaucrats who are finding employment as regional governors in the appointment era.

It is also important to know where a Russian governorship fits in the hierarchy of elite positions in Russia. If it is merely a stepping-stone on the way to bigger and better things, then governors may govern with an eye to their next promotion. If, on the other hand, governorships are peak career positions, then governors are likely to focus on reappointment or re-election. Table 6 shows the post-tenure positions of Russian governors. It breaks the

TABLE 6
POST-TENURE CAREERS OF RUSSIAN GOVERNORS

	<i>Lost/Did not run in Elections</i>	<i>Removed by Putin or Medvedev</i>
Deceased	7.1%	6.6%
Retired	1.2%	1.6%
Regional administration (Home)	14.2%	4.9%
Regional administration (Different)	1.2%	1.6%
Regional legislature	6.0%	1.6%
Local executive	2.4%	0.0%
State <i>Duma</i>	4.8%	4.9%
Federation Council	9.5%	26.2%
Presidential administration	3.6%	14.7%
Federal government	15.5%	9.8%
Diplomatic corps	1.2%	3.2%
Presidential representative in <i>okrug</i> (post-2000)	0.0%	4.9%
Presidential representative in regions (pre-2000)	6.0%	0.0%
Social/political organisation	2.4%	3.3%
Business	19.0%	9.8%
Academia	3.6%	3.3%
Show business	0.0%	1.6%
Under arrest	1.2%	1.6%
Of which promotions to higher office	3.6%	8.0%

Note: These totals indicate the total number of governors for which data are available on post-tenure careers.

TABLE 7
EDUCATION

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Appointed</i>	<i>t</i> value
Holds graduate degree	34%	45%	-2.00**
Agricultural education	15%	5%	3.13**
Economics education	8%	16%	-1.85*
Humanities education	6%	5%	0.41
Legal education	7%	10%	-0.88
Military education	5%	4%	0.57
Pedagogical education	3%	4%	-0.51
Technological or engineering education	55%	57%	-0.23
Higher education in an elite university	5%	5%	0.23
Higher education in other Moscow/St Petersburg university	27%	37%	-1.70*
Higher education in a regional university	68%	58%	1.54

Note: Numbers in the second and third columns are percentages of the elected or appointed governor subsample. Columns may not add up to 100 due to coding rules and since these categories are not exhaustive. The final column shows the *t* value on the difference in means between the elected and appointed subsamples.

* Significant at 0.010, ** significant at 0.05.

data into two categories: those governors who either lost elections or did not run again, and those governors who were not reappointed in the appointment era. The final row in the table shows the number and percentage of post-career positions that were promotions.¹²

One of the major stories of this table is in the last row. Governorships are a peak of career position in Russia. Very few governors are promoted to higher positions. Indeed, we identified only five clear instances of governors being promoted in the appointment era.¹³ Conversely, there are only two instances of a federal minister or highly ranked presidential administration official being made governor in the appointment era. One of these, the appointment of Sergei Sobyenin, Head of the Government's Apparatus, as mayor of Moscow, was clearly not a demotion.¹⁴

Table 6 also shows other interesting differences and similarities. For the appointment era, the modal category of post-gubernatorial professional activity is taking a seat in the Federation Council, which appears to be an honorary, low-responsibility position allowing governors to exit politics gracefully. By contrast, a plurality of governors who left office in the elections-era entered business. Many also entered lower level positions in the federal government or stayed on in the regional administrations of their home region. In the appointment era, the second most common post-tenure position was in the Presidential Administration, where eight governors were given positions as *sovetniki* (advisors). By all appearances, these were honorary positions similar to the Federation Council golden parachutes.

¹²Promotions are considered to be high-ranking leadership positions in the State *Duma* or Federation Council (Speaker or Vice Speaker), ministerial positions in the government or high-ranking positions in the Presidential Administration (including presidential representatives to the federal districts).

¹³These cases are Trutnev (Perm) who was promoted to Minister of Natural Resources, Sobyenin (Tyumen) who was appointed Chief of the Presidential Administration under Putin in 2005, Khloponin (Krasnoyarsk) who was appointed as *polpred* in the North Caucasus Federal *Okrug*, Ishayev (Khabarovsk) who was appointed *polpred* in the Far East Federal *Okrug*, and Tolokonskii (Novosibirsk) who was appointed *polpred* in the Siberian Federal *Okrug*.

¹⁴The other instance was the appointment of Minister of Agriculture Aleksei Gordeyev as governor of Voronezh in 2009.

TABLE 8
DEMOGRAPHICS

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Appointed</i>	<i>t</i> value
Non-Russian nationality in a titular republic	87%	89%	− 0.42
Age at time of election or appointment	52	53	− 1.41

Note: Numbers in the second and third columns of the first row are percentages of the elected or appointed governor subsample. Numbers in the second and third columns of the second row are mean ages in years for the elected and appointed governor subsamples, respectively.

Education and demographics

Elected and appointed governors may also vary according to fundamental personal characteristics such as education and age. Besley *et al.* (2011) find that economic growth is higher in countries with educated leaders, so the question is not unimportant. Table 7 investigates the question. We find that in fact appointed governors are substantially more likely to be well educated. They are much more likely to have a graduate degree (*kandidatskaya* or *doktorskaya stepen'*), but we are hesitant to make too much of this finding given the fact that the number of people acquiring an advanced degree in Russia increased dramatically in the 1990s.¹⁵

Appointed governors' education itself is substantially more likely to be in the realm of economics, sustaining the idea that appointed governors are more technocratic. Furthermore, supporting our earlier conclusions about insider–outsider status, appointed governors are slightly more likely than elected governors to have received their higher education in the elite institutions of Moscow or St Petersburg ($p < 0.10$).

Perhaps surprisingly, there is no difference between elected and appointed governors in age, as Table 8 shows. The same is true of nationality. As in the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has pursued a policy of appointing members of titular ethnic groups to head ethnic republics. This tendency does not differ greatly between the appointment and election period.

Discussion

Appointed and elected governors in Russia are surprisingly similar in many respects, but there are some differences as well. Elected governors differ from appointed governors in terms of insider–outsider status, graduate education, experience in the federal government, experience in the CPSU and elected experience. Does the selection method produce these differences? Further research is needed, but it appears that the Kremlin displayed a small preference for more technocratic types of governors that had higher levels of education, degrees in economics and immediate career backgrounds in the federal bureaucracy. They were also more likely to prefer outsider governors than voters, but, overall, insider governors were more likely to be appointed than outsiders.

¹⁵In 1997, the number of people receiving the candidate of science degree was 14,000. By 2010, that figure had risen to 30,000. See 'Interview with Chairman of the Russian Academy of Sciences, M. D. Kirpichnikov', 24 January 2011, available at: <http://www.ras.ru/news/shownews.aspx?id=5e4a5d25-73d7-4a91-b157-5ddc570c7a05>, accessed 24 February 2012.

Even though there are only slight differences between appointed and elected governors, there is significant variation in the background, demographics and education of the gubernatorial *corpus*. What explains these differences aside from the selection mechanism? In the following sections, we offer some thoughts on these questions.

Democracy

One important mediating factor in the relationship between economic and political demands and governor characteristics may be the extent to which politics in a region are democratic or authoritarian. Besley and Reynal-Querol (2011) find that voters in democratic countries are more likely to select highly educated leaders. This assumes that voters have an intrinsic preference for high quality leaders. On the other hand, when the population is involved in choosing its leaders, the prevalence of populism and clientelism may increase and result in less capable leaders with stronger political machines.

Demand-side factors

The type of challenges facing a region may determine the type of governor selected. Will voters in a region facing acute economic challenges be more likely to select a technocratic governor who has the background and skills necessary to effectively manage the economy? Will central planners respond to the same incentives? The same question arises for political challenges. Will regions that face particularly thorny problems of social unrest, civil strife or political polarisation be more likely to support leaders with the background and skills necessary to address those problems? Indeed, what are the characteristics that predispose an official to being competent at solving a specific problem? The question has not been addressed in the literature. Our data can be used to shed light on it.

Political machines

Governor characteristics may also be affected by the characteristics of the regional political elite. This may occur in several ways, such as if the previous governor implicitly or explicitly ‘chose’ his successor or if the policy preferences of previous governors are transmitted to subsequent office holders. Sticky policies, hold-over vice governors and ministers, or clientelistic debts and capture by local interest groups may all serve as means of allowing an outgoing governor to influence the traits of his successor.

Though it is difficult to identify the presence of these inter-temporal mechanisms, our data may offer insights into how clientelistic or personal networks, entrenched political machines and policy inertia operate at a sub-national level in Russia. Russian regional governors are well known for the elaborate patron–client networks that they constructed in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Slinko *et al.* 2005; Hale 2006). Are regions with strong political machines more likely to select insiders? Is this true just for the appointment era as well? Or is it the case that the Kremlin preferred to break up strong political machines by replacing the leadership with outsiders? These are all questions for future research.

Conclusion

The capability of public officials is thought to be an important determinant of the quality of policy. What then determines the quality of official selected? One important candidate explanation is the selection mechanism. Elected officials are thought to be of higher quality because voters prefer more competent and educated candidates. Detractors argue that central planners are better than voters at selecting high quality officials. This debate cuts right to the heart of arguments about the relative merits of democracy, decentralisation and development. In this paper we used original data on the backgrounds of Russian regional governors from 1992 to 2010 to examine whether elected governors differ from appointed governors in important ways.

We find that there are some differences. Elected governors are more likely to have been elected to another office, and to be from the region where they serve. Appointed governors are more likely to be federal bureaucrats, hold a graduate degree and have education in economics. These findings suggest that appointed governors are slightly more technocratic, but the difference is slight and the majority of both elected and appointed governors are not from technocratic backgrounds. What is more, the differences in education seem likely to be caused by changes in educational practices in the post-Soviet period.

On most dimensions, however, we find that elected and appointed governors differ little. Elected and appointed governors are equally likely to come from the regional administration where they serve as governor; are equally likely to have made their careers in the legislative arena; and are similar in their business experience. They do not differ in their age or ethnic backgrounds, and turnover rates are similar under appointments and elections. Finally, neither elected nor appointed governors are likely to come from the security services.

We make no strong claims about the exogeneity of the selection mechanism and therefore eschew strong causal claims. All elections in our sample occurred from 1992 to 2004 and all appointments occurred after 2004. It is certainly possible that political circumstances, unique to the post-2004 era, created the differences in gubernatorial type that we observe across time. This is a challenging issue that we hope to address in the future. In addition, our analysis has focused only on simple bivariate comparisons between elected and appointed governors and more sophisticated statistical analyses may turn up somewhat different patterns, although it is surprising that we find so few differences even in simple pairwise comparisons.

Nonetheless, the similarities between elected and appointed regional executives are striking. We believe that these similarities highlight two broader points of interest for institutional analysis. First, the extent to which elections generate differences in the type of official selected is likely dependent on the quality of those elections. Non-competitive elections do not give voters control over outcomes and may mute the impact of elections on candidate quality. Elections in Russia's regions certainly varied in the quality of democracy and the level of competitiveness and may have dampened the power of elections as a selection mechanism. It is possible that elections with more competitive races will result in the selection of different types of candidates than flawed elections. Further research is needed to examine this proposition.

Second, the notion that central planners are wholly freed from popular pressure seems unfounded in most political settings. In most authoritarian regimes, autocrats are compelled to respond to popular and political pressures in some fashion. In Russia, the Kremlin clearly

takes into account popular opinion and the need to win elections in making its gubernatorial appointments (Reuter & Robertson 2012). As a result, this concern for public opinion may reduce the differences in the impact of elections and appointments on the characteristics of public officials. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which these imperatives influence the exact type of governor selected, but again they point to the insight that public opinion may serve as a constraint on public officials even in an autocratic setting.

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