Vote Mobilization, Economic Performance and Gubernatorial Appointments in Russia

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Abstract:[1]

This paper explores the impact of vote mobilization and economic performance on gubernatorial appointments in Russia. Previous research has demonstrated that governors are more likely to be reappointed when the regime is performing well at the polls in the region. By contrast, there is inconsistent evidence that regional economic performance affects a governor's reappointment chances. We revisit this topic by updating and extending quantitative analyses of these key questions. We find consistent evidence that governors are more likely to be reappointed when regime vote shares are high in the region, a finding that extends from 2005 through 2020 and is robust to various model specifications and measurement approaches. In an update to existing research, we also show that this finding holds for multiple types of elections---regional legislative, State Duma and presidential—and we also find that high turnout is positively associated with governor reappointment. With respect to economic indicators, we find some suggestive evidence that governors are more likely to be reappointed when regional unemployment is decreasing, and investment and tax revenue are increasing, but these results are not robust. By evaluating governors on the basis of their ability to mobilize votes the center risks disincentivizing good governance. It may also give governors additional incentive to engage in electoral manipulation.

1 Introduction

Russian governors are the key political actors in Russia's regions. This makes it important to understand how they are selected and evaluated. Since 2005, Russia's governors have been (*de facto*) appointed by the president and these appointments have attracted considerable interest from political scientists. One particularly salient question is the role that political and economic criteria play in the evaluation of governors. Existing literature on subnational appointments posits that evaluating officials on the basis of their locality's economic performance creates strong incentives for officials to pursue pro-growth policies. For instance, studies in China have found that officials are more likely to be promoted when economic performance in their locality is favorable, and some scholars have linked this with China's economic miracle.[2] By contrast, when officials are evaluated on the basis of political performance criteria—such as mobilizing votes for the regime—they are more likely to focus on achieving those political goals. In this paper, we undertake a statistical analysis of this question in the case of Russia.

A number of studies have examined such questions in the context Russian gubernatorial appointments. On the whole, these studies find little evidence that governors are evaluated on the basis of economic performance and relatively consistent evidence that political criteria—specifically the regional electoral performance of the regime—play a significant role.[3]

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[2] Chenggang Xu, "The Fundamental Institutions of China's Reforms and Development," *Journal of Economic Literature"* 49, no 4 (2011): 1076–1151 and Maskin, Eric, Yingyi Qian, and Chenggang Xu, "Incentives Information and Organizational Form," *Review of Economic Studies* 67, no 2 (2000): 359-378.

[3] See, for example, Reuter, Ora John and Graeme Robertson, "Subnational Appointments inAuthoritarian Regimes: Evidence from Russian Gubernatorial Appointments," *Journal of Politics* 74, no 4 (2012): 1023–37; Reisinger, William and Bryon Moraski, "Deference or Governance? A Survival Analysis of Russia's Governors Under Presidential Control," in William Reisinger, ed., *Russia's Regions and Comparative Subnational Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013): 40–62; Rochlitz, Michael, Vera Kulpina, Thomas Remington, and Andrei Yakovlev, "Performance Incentives and Economic Growth: Regional Officials in Russia and China," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 56, no 4 (2015): 421–45; Ivanov, Yevgeny and Nikolay Petrov. "Transition to a New Model of Russian Governors' Appointments as a Reflection of Regime Transformation," *Russian Politics* 6, no (2021): 153–84.

However, these works have several limitations that the current study attempts to address. First, while most work has focused on the 2005-2011 appointment period, the present study extends analysis through 2020. Even though direct elections of governors were formally reinstated in 2012, governors continue to be *de facto* appointed, as the president retains the right to remove governors and appoints interim governors, who, in almost all cases, win lop-sided elections. Extending analysis beyond 2012 allows us to determine whether the findings from previous studies are affected by the return of these *pro forma* elections. This update is also important given the significant regime transformation that has occurred in Russia over the past decade.

Second, our work extends on existing work by comparing how vote mobilization in different types of elections---presidential, State Duma, regional---affects a governor's chances of reappointment. And where existing studies focus only on regime vote share as a factor influencing governor reappointment, we also examine whether turnout affects a governor's reappointment chances. This question is particularly relevant given recent declines in turnout in Russian elections and the Kremlin's increased interest in boosting turnout among loyal voters. To this end, we also examine whether the effect of vote mobilization and turnout on governor reappointment has changed over time.

Third, we focus on a broader set of economic indicators than most previous analyses, which have generally been limited to economic growth and unemployment. Specifically, we examine several indicators—investment and tax revenue---that are closely tracked by the Kremlin and which governors can affect directly.

Finally, by examining a longer time series, we are able to deploy more sophisticated econometric techniques that allow us to estimate the impact of vote mobilization with more causal precision. In particular, we are able to estimate the effect of regime vote shares while holding

constant lagged values of those vote shares. We are also able to check whether results are robust to fixed effect specifications and to models that take account of promotions.

Methodologically, this paper addresses these questions by replicating, updating and extending the analyses presented in Reuter and Robertson.[4] We find consistent evidence that governors are more likely to be reappointed when regime vote shares are high. This finding extends across the entire period between 2005 and 2020. Thus, we can conclude that neither the return of direct gubernatorial elections and nor the increasingly authoritarian turn in Russia has affected the general relationship between vote mobilization and a governor's reappointment chances. We also find that vote mobilization in all types of elections---presidential, State Duma, and regional---increase a governor's chances of being reappointed. These results are robust to model specification and measurement approach.

These general results corroborate and extend the general findings in Reuter and Robertson[5], but we also present some novel findings about vote mobilization that are worthy of further study. In general, higher regime vote shares in all of the studied election types is associated with a higher probability of governor reappointment, but the effect of State Duma and presidential election vote shares has increased significantly since 2007-2008. The increase coincides with growing volatility in UR support. We also demonstrate that high turnout is positively associated with governor reappointment, though there is also some evidence that vote share matters more.

With regard to economic performance, the evidence is more mixed. We find some suggestive evidence that governors in regions where unemployment is declining and tax revenue and private investment are growing are more likely to be reappointed, but this result is not robust to measurement strategy or model specification.

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[4] Reuter and Robertson, *Subnational Appointments.*
[5] Reuter and Robertson, *Subnational Appointments.*

On the whole, our findings suggest that the imperative of winning elections in an electoral authoritarian regime like Russia leads the central government to evaluate subnational officials, at least in part, on the basis of their ability to mobilize votes for the regime. The danger is that this dynamic will lead officials to myopically focus on this political task at the expense of innovation and good governance. Thus, evaluating local officials on the basis of political loyalty and performance---and to a lesser extent on the basis of economic performance---may have deleterious effects on economic development in Russia.

These dynamics may also have negative consequences for the quality of democracy in Russia. If the careers of subnational officials depend on securing high vote shares for the regime then officials will have every incentive to use whatever means necessary to generate those votes. This has the potential to create perverse incentives for governors to engage in electoral manipulation. The need to outshine one's peers gives governors extra incentive to commit fraud.

2 Vote Mobilization, Political Competence, and Economic Performance in Russian Gubernatorial Appointments

Even after the cancellation of direct elections in 2004, governors have remained among the most powerful political figures in Russia. Governors set policy direction in their regions, including most economic policy. They are also the de facto *political* face of the regime. At election time, they coordinate the center's campaign efforts, deploy administrative resources, and put their clientelist networks to work in order to mobilize votes for United Russia and other pro-regime candidates.[6]

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[6] Reuter, Ora John, "Regional Patrons and Hegemonic Party Electoral Performance in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29, no 2(2013): 101–35; Saikkonen, Inga, "Coordinating the Machine: Subnational Political Context and the Effectiveness of Machine Politics," *Acta Politica* 56, no 4 (2021): 658–76; Harvey, Cole J., "Principal–Agent Dynamics and Electoral Manipulation: Local Risks, Patronage and Tactical Variation in Russian Elections, 2003–2012," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no 5(2020): 837–62.

Given the importance of governors, the patterns that determine their selection have attracted interest from political scientists. Some studies have focused on differences in the professional backgrounds of governors[7],while others have focused on the rate of turnover in the gubernatorial corpus.[8]

Another stream of literature has focused on the factors that determine gubernatorial reappointments and dismissals.[9] Here, a central question is the extent to which governors are evaluated according to political criteria, such as vote mobilization, or on the basis of governance outcomes, such as economic performance. This framing has special relevance because one of the key findings in the literature on bureaucratic appointments is that the career incentives of officials influence how they behave in office. When officials are evaluated on the basis of political competence or loyalty, they will focus on achieving those metrics. By contrast, if they are evaluated on the basis of governance outcomes, they will focus on ensuring good governance.

The literature on economic development has focused on this tradeoff to explain variation in bureaucratic performance in developing countries, arguing that developmental bureaucracies are those where career advancement is based on meritocratic performance measures, not political connections or political service.[10] This tradeoff has been extensively scrutinized in the case of China, where multiple studies show provincial and local officials are evaluated, in part, on the

[7] Buckley, Noah, Timothy Frye, Guzel Garifullina, and Ora John Reuter, "The Political Economy of Russian Gubernatorial Election and Appointment," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no 8 (2014): 1213–33; Remington, Thomas F., Andrei A. Yakovlev, Elena Ovchinnikova, and Alexander Chasovsky, "Career Trajectories of Regional Officials: Russia and China before and after 2012," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 0 (2021): 1–26.

[8] Remington et al., "Career Trajectories;" Goode, J. Paul, "The Puzzle of Putin's Gubernatorial Appointments," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no 3 (2007): 365–99; Sharafutdinova, Gulnaz. "Subnational Governance in Russia: How Putin Changed the Contract with His Agents and the Problems It Created for Medvedev," *Publius* 40, no 4 (2007): 672–96; Paustyan, Ekaterina, "Perspectives: Gubernatorial Turnover in the Russian Regions, 2005—2012," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 26, no 3 (2018): 427–33.

[9] Promotions are relatively rare so have not been studied systematically.

[10] See, for example, Evans, Peter and James E. Rauch, "Bureaucracy and Growth: A Cross-National Analysis of the Effects of 'Weberian' State Structures on Economic Growth," *American Sociological Review* 6, no 4 (1999): 748–765.

basis of economic performance in their jurisdiction.[11]   In turn, some argue that this has helped

China achieve rapid economic growth in the 1990s and 2000s, even though it had high levels of

corruption and weak property rights.[12]

In Russia, Reuter and Robertson argue that in electoral authoritarian regimes like Russia,

central officials will have strong incentives to evaluate subnational officials on the basis of their

ability to mobilize votes.[13]   The reason is that winning elections by comfortable margins is a key

source of stability in such regimes.   Given the stakes involved, Reuter and Robertson argue that

vote mobilization will take precedence over appointment criteria based on economic

performance.[14]

Reuter and Robertson find evidence consistent with this perspective.   In the period between

2005 and 2011 they find that a governor's reappointment chances increase when United Russia's

electoral performance improves.[15]   Similarly, Reisinger and Moraski also find evidence that

gubernatorial turnover is higher in regions where the Kremlin's presidential candidate and/or

United Russia perform poorly.[16]   More recently, Ivanov and Petrov report that governors are more

likely to be dismissed in regions where United Russia is performing poorly.[17]   However, using a

different set of methods, Turovsky and Luizidis do not find robust evidence that gubernatorial

reappointment is correlated with regime vote shares.[18]

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[11] Li, Hongbin, and Li-An Zhou, "Political Turnover and Economic Performance: The Incentive Role of Personnel Control in China," *Journal of Public Economics* 89, no 9 (2005): 1743–62; Landry, Pierre F., Xiaobo Lü, and Haiyan Duan, "Does Performance Matter? Evaluating Political Selection Along the Chinese Administrative Ladder," *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no 8 (2018): 1074–1105.

[12] Xu, "The Fundamental Institutions."

[13] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments"

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Reisinger and Moraski, "Deference or Governance"

[17] Ivanov and Petrov, "Transition to a New Model"

[18] Turovsky, Rostislav and Elizaveta Luizidis, "Faktory Gubernatorskikh Otstavok v Rossii," *Polis.* Forthcoming (2022).

While the preponderance of evidence suggests that electoral performance is associated with gubernatorial turnover, the evidence on economic performance is much more mixed. Reuter and Robertson find that over the period between 2005 and 2011 there was no association between economic performance and a governor's chance of dismissal.[19] These findings are echoed by Rochlitz et al who find no clear relationship between economic performance indicators and governor promotion or turnover.[20] Turovsky and Luizidis also find that the effects of economic performance vary by time period.[21]

Finally, a different stream of explanations has focused on the role that cooptation plays in gubernatorial appointments. Early during the appointment era observers noted that most governors retained their positions even though the president now had the right to remove governors.[22] In this period, the Kremlin relied heavily on the political machines of governors to help it mobilize votes during elections. Popular governors and those with strong clientelist networks that could help the regime win elections were of great value. Thus, it made sense for the Kremlin to keep the most politically capable governors in office.[23] Consistent with this strategy, Reuter and Robertson find that governors who won their last gubernatorial elections by large margins were more likely to be reappointed during the early appointment period (i.e. 2005-2009).[24]

As a whole, this literature has produced a number of important findings, but it suffers from several shortcomings that this paper seeks to address. First, most studies focus on the 2005-2011 period and have not been extended to the post-2012 period. As we discuss below, this is

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[19] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments" In the period between 2008 and 2011, there was some weak evidence that higher economic growth was associated with a lower chance of dismissal.
[20] Rochlitz et al., "Performance Incentives"
[21] Turovsky and Luizids, "Faktory Gubernatorskikh Otstavok"
[22] Goode, "The Puzzle of Putin's Gubernatorial Appointments;" Sharafutdinova, "Subnational Governance in Russia"
[23] Reuter, "Regional Patrons"
[24] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments"

problematic not only because governors now, on paper, must be approved via direct elections again, but also because the nature of the regime has changed considerably since the Medvedev presidency.

Second, with respect to the question of how vote mobilization affects governor turnover, existing studies look at vote mobilization in different types of elections—presidential, State Duma, and regional—but there is little consideration of which type of vote mobilization matters the most. Existing studies also do not consider whether the impact of vote mobilization on gubernatorial turnover has changed over the past 15 years, or whether the importance of mobilization in different types of elections has changed.

Third, existing studies of vote mobilization only consider UR/presidential candidate vote shares as a measure of vote mobilization. And yet, in recent years, achieving high turnout has been an increasingly salient goal for the authorities. What is the effect of turnout on a governor's reappointment chances?

Fourth, most existing studies focus on a rather limited set of economic indicators—economic growth or unemployment. We expand this analysis to a broader set of performance metrics, including investment and tax revenue. In contrast to growth and unemployment, these economic performance metrics are arguably more responsive to the policy course of the regional administration.

Fifth, existing studies have been unable to use certain sophisticated econometric techniques—such as fixed effects or conditioning on lags of electoral results—because they have examined cross-sections or short time periods. This study takes advantage of the full period between 2005 and 2020, which allows for the implementation of econometric techniques that allow for making more confident claims about the causal impact of vote mobilization in particular.

3 Gubernatorial Appointments in Russia

The cancellation of direct gubernatorial elections has played a major role in the development of the modern political regime in Russia. During Yeltsin's first term, direct gubernatorial elections were rare, but they became widespread after 1996. Elections were retained during Vladimir Putin's first term, though some steps designed to strengthen the control over governors were made (the creation of institute of presidential representatives in federal districts, new regulations letting the president dismiss governors etc.). New legislation including the cancellation of direct elections was introduced in 2004, when Putin was elected president for the second time. The appointment system itself was launched in 2005 and most scholars treat this year as the start of the appointment period.

The formal system for appointing governors was not actually one of direct presidential appointment. So, during the first stage after 2005 the list of possible governor candidates was formed by plenipotentiary representatives of the president in the federal districts. The lists were not open to public, which made the selection procedure extremely nontransparent. During Medvedev's presidential term, a reform was introduced which allowed the party that won the regional legislative elections to propose a public list of at least three candidates.

This change coincided with the strengthening of the United Russia's position in regional legislatures, and the existence of this procedure made it more important for United Russia to gain parliamentary majorities in every region. However, in practice, there was often no role for the legislature at all. This happened during Putin's second presidential term when the governor used an alternative procedure that allowed a governor to subject his tenure to a confidence vote by the president. In this case there was no selection of candidates and usually the president reappointed

the governor, who in this case was no more publicly elected and joined the top-down vertical instead.

In 2012, the system was changed again and direct elections were, at least formally, reintroduced. This drastic reform was clearly linked to the Kremlin's response to 2011-12 protest wave. With the erosion of support for the United Russia and Putin, direct gubernatorial elections were viewed as an attempt to strengthen the political regime's basis at the subnational level. Elections were also aimed at reactivating governors' engagement with public opinion.

It is important to note that despite the return of direct elections, the president reserved the key role in the replacement of governors. Under the new law the president retained the right to remove governors, and when a governor's term is over, the president could designate a new interim governor. The president can also name an interim replacement if the governor resigns. Since 2012, this has been the most common mode of exit for governors. Governors that have lost the Kremlin's confidence are informally encouraged to resign. Indeed, since elections were reintroduced there has been only four instances of a governor being elected without first being anointed as interim governor by the president. The typical chain of events is for the president to name an interim governor months before the election—even if that interim governor is the incumbent—and that governor then wins in a landslide.[25] The procedure was aimed at the Kremlin's careful selection of candidates, guaranteeing its appointees' victory.

The elections themselves have also been highly regulated. First, the municipal filter has been used - every candidate had to collect a certain number of signatures from municipal deputies as well as those municipal heads who were elected directly. In addition, most regions only allow party-nominated candidates to take part in elections. Thus, independent candidates were excluded.

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[25] The average margin of victory for incumbents in the145 elections that took place between 2012 and 2020 was 62 percent. In only four cases has an incumbent lost.

The procedure determinates the new United Russia's role, as usually it was a dominating party among municipal deputies. At the same time, systemic opposition was developing as typically its representatives were unable to overpass the municipal filter without the help of the United Russia and governors. Because of the complicated process of registration and small chance of victory, the opposition began losing interest in gubernatorial elections.

It should also be noted that a few regions—mostly in the North Caucasus, autonomous okrugs, and Crimea--- continue to use an appointment system, whereby the parties present in State Duma and\or regional legislature submit their lists of candidates, the president compiles his list of candidates on this basis and submits it back to legislature which being dominated by UR votes for the incumbent / interim governor from this list.

Thus, we can conclude that, for all intents and purposes, Russian governors have been appointed by the center since 2005. In such a system, the question of how to evaluate the governors was of critical importance for the Kremlin. During the first phase of gubernatorial appointments, Putin's second term, the importance of political tasks was evident. The period was characterized by an active expansion of United Russia in the regions and a mass migration of governors into the party. These governors often took leading positions in the elections for regional legislatures which were held with the obligatory use of party lists. The center was carefully preparing the regions for the 2007 State Duma elections, which were organized entirely on the basis of party lists. The importance of economic objectives for governors during this period appears minimal – in any case the country was still experiencing a rapid economic expansion driven by high oil prices, which made it hard to differentiate economic performance in the regions.

In 2007, the government introduced an experiment by which regional administrations would be evaluated on a complex and frequently changing series of socio-economic indicators.

Thus, the top-down structure was reconceptualized and formalized, and its basis was represented not only by unofficial requirements related, for example, to the organization of elections, but also some formal social, economic and financial criteria that regions were responsible for to the center.

Since then, the formal schema for evaluating regional administrations has been constantly changing. Initially, it included 40 indicators such as GRP, poverty level, education expenses, criminality level among minors, bureaucratic obstacles for business, level of public's satisfaction with the healthcare provided, with the executive authorities themselves. In 2010 it was extended to 48 units, but after 2012 the number of criteria was sharply reduced from 48 to 12. In 2017 the number of criteria then doubled again to 24 and in 2019 it was reduced to 15. For the last time, the criteria were modified in 2021. In 2012, this formal system was augmented with Putin's "May decrees," which regional authorities were supposed to implement. In 2018, a similar decree was published.

There is little evidence, however, that these criteria formed the basis of governors' resignations. For one, the effectiveness evaluation system formally intended only encouragements - government grants were to be given to the best regions. Reuter and Robertson furthermore find no evidence that these criteria were associated with governor reappointments in the first appointment era.[26]

One possible reason for this is the state of the Russian economy, with its absence of conditions for a long-term economic growth that could become a stimulus for an encouragement or punishment for governors similar to that in China. Often governors just had to prevent the economic situation from a complete failure, and it was not possible to demand more. Apparently, the center understood natural restrictions caused by the general economic conditions and

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[26] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments"

governors' absence of resources and authority to fix the situation. The fact that president's "May decrees" from 2012 were only partially fulfilled is further evidence of this.[27] The center could not dismiss governors when failure was so widespread.

The political context of appointments has also changed. The volatile nature of public support for the regime---falling after the 2008-2009 financial crisis, then before the 2011-2012 elections and under the protest wave itself, rising again in 2014 after Crimea and then falling again after the 2018 pension reform---was a challenge for the system. In the context of this instability, governors were increasingly relied upon as executors of Kremlin's political tasks. Among such tasks there were not only election outcomes but also maintaining the president's approval ratings and weakening the non-systemic opposition along with more radical part of systemic opposition.

There are reasons to believe that the political tasks given to governors became more complicated and differentiated after 2012. For one thing, turnout has become an increasingly salient and complicated issue in Russian politics. In the 2000s, the Kremlin clearly wanted to maximize turnout, a task that was not particularly hard in the context of economic expansion and high approval ratings. But in the post-2008 context of economic crisis and rising protest sentiment, turnout could sometimes be dangerous, especially in regions with oppositional tendencies. This led to the use of differentiated strategies. In more loyal regions, the Kremlin and governors might still encourage high turnout. However, in protest regions it made sense to depress turnout, while mobilizing the loyal electorate. In recent years, the Kremlin's difficult dilemma has been to ensure electoral legitimacy---with high turnout being seen as central to that effort—while still preventing opposition-minded voters from coming to the polls.

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[27] Ross, Cameron, Rostislav Turovsky, and Marina Sukhova. "Subnational State Capacity in Russia: The Implementation of the 2012 Presidential "May Decrees," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* (2021)

Second, it is important to take into account differences between different types of elections. On one hand, it is clear that the Kremlin is first interested in federal election results. Presidential election outcomes are most important. The Kremlin's attitude towards the outcome of parliamentary elections in regions is more ambiguous. Clearly, high UR vote totals are preferred, but as United Russia's rating has declined in recent years, it has become clear that it is unreasonable to except governors to deliver the type of astronomical results that were seen in 2007. Thus, the Kremlin has devoted more attention to relations with the systemic opposition, including coopting into regional organs of power. In addition to United Russia the Kremlin helped other loyal parties. Thus, a priori, we cannot be sure that the Kremlin ordered regions to maximize United Russia's vote share. As for turnout, the Kremlin's requirements to regions were not identical.

Even if regional elections play a less considerable role, we should not underestimate them. Regional and municipal elections were used to strengthen the United Russia's position in the regions. It was important during the party's formation as well as during the instability of its ratings after 2011. While federal election results are undoubtedly more important for the regime, regional legislative contests are also closely watched by the authorities as a barometer of the ruling party's popularity in the region. What is more, vote mobilization in regional elections may be a more efficient way of gauging the political effectiveness of governors. Regional elections are more likely to focus on regional issues and their results are more affected by the political course of the regional administration. Results in federal elections, by contrast, are more influenced by the national political climate, and in the case of presidential elections, much depends on attitudes toward Vladimir Putin, which may not be as easily influenced by regional governors. What is more, federal election campaigns in the regions are often co-curated by both regional governors and political advisors from Moscow, whereas regional election campaigns are less influenced by

Moscow. This can make regional election results a cleaner signal of the governor's political effectiveness.

4 Dependent Variable and Research Design

In order to study how vote mobilization and regional economic performance affect governor turnover, we draw on a dataset that covers all 270 governors that have served in Russia's 89 (now 85) regions during the period between 2005 and 2020. The unit of analysis is the region-year and our primary dependent variable is a binary indicator equal to one if a governor is removed in a given year and zero if the governor remains in office.[28] Observations for governors who are promoted---which occurs 25 times in our data—are coded as zero (no replacement) in the main analyses.[29] We also censor the five observations when the governor dies in office and do not count this as removal. Using this coding scheme, our data contains 147 instances of governor dismissal.

Our dependent variable is binary, so we use logistic regression models throughout. We treat the data as binary time-series cross-sectional (BTSCS) duration data and, as such, model the time it takes for a governor to be dismissed. In order to account for duration dependency, each model includes a cubic polynomial of each governor's elapsed tenure in office. This makes the models functionally equivalent to Cox proportional hazard models.[30] In order to account for region-specific error correlations, all models cluster standard errors at the region level.

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[28] In the appendix, we also show models that restrict the sample only to appointment events. Unfortunately, this modeling strategy prevents the analysis of time-varying yearly covariates and does not allow us to model dynamics. But key results remain robust using that data structure.

[29] The following positions count as promotions: government minister, professional position in the presidential administration, Federal Representative in the Federal Districts (i.e. polpredy), Chairperson of the Federation Council, United Russia General Council Secretary, constitutional court judge, or governor of another region. By far the most common form of promotion is into the government. We also construct an ordered dependent variable where 0 is equal to no replacement, 1 is equal to dismissal and 2 is equal to promotion. In Table A3 in the appendix we show that most key results are robust when the process is modeled as an ordered process in this manner.

[30] Carter, David B. and Curtis S. Signorino, "Back to the Future: Modeling Time Dependence in Binary Data," *Political Analysis* 18, no 3 (2010): 271–92.

5. Independent Variables

Our key political variables are measures of pro-regime vote mobilization at the regional level. First, we use the share of the vote received by United Russia on the party list portion of the ballot in the most recent regional legislative election held under the sitting governor.[31] Second, we use the share of the vote received by United Russia on the party list portion of the ballot in the most recent State Duma election held under the sitting governor. Third, we use the share of the vote received by Vladimir Putin (or Dmitry Medvedev for 2008) in the most recent presidential elections held under the sitting governor.

One important issue to consider when modeling the effect of electoral results on governor turnover is that vote shares depend on many factors aside from the governor's mobilizational efforts. This raises the possibility of spurious correlation, but it also constitutes a fundamental measurement challenge. The problem is that what counts as a strong electoral result in one region may be a weak showing in another. Some regional electorates are more supportive of the authorities than others. The Kremlin clearly understands this, and it is likely that the authorities benchmark a governor's success at mobilizing votes against what is considered achievable for a given region. For example, in a region like Tatarstan, where United Russia routinely wins over 70% of the vote, receiving 60% of the vote would be an electoral catastrophe for the ruling party. But winning 60% of the vote in Yaroslavl Oblast, where United Russia has never received more than 50% of the vote would be a resounding victory.

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[31] This variable is available only from December 2003 onward. Prior to that, few regional elections had a PR component.

Thus, following Reuter and Robertson our primary models control for key variables that predict United Russia's electoral performance in a region. For this we use, United Russia's party list vote share in the region during the 2003 State Duma elections.[32] This variable is highly correlated with United Russia results in subsequent elections. Moreover, the 2003 elections occurred prior to the introduction of the appointment system, such that election results in 2003 could not be affected by governor incentives to mobilize votes in improve their chances of reappointment.

Another key determinant of UR vote total is whether the region is an ethnic republic, as republics typically deliver much higher vote totals for the Kremlin. Since almost all of this effect is driven by republics with large non-Russian populations, we follow previous work and use a control that is the share of the region's population that is ethnic Russian. Others controls that help establish the regime vote share baseline include a control for the year of the election (all models include year fixed effects), the region's level of urbanization, and the governor's margin of victory in his/her most recent election.

A different, arguably more precise, way of modeling relative electoral performance is to include in the model the regime's vote share in the *previous* election (i.e. a lag of the independent variable). Previous analyses that focused on the 2005-2011 time period were unable to pursue this strategy because of the short time period and insufficient number of feasible lags.[33] The longer time span analyzed here allows us to include lagged vote shares. This offers a significant empirical advantage.

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[32] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments"
[33] For example, some regions during this period had only held one regional election in the post-2003 reform period. And for Duma elections, there was only the 2007 State Duma elections, such that model that included lagged UR vote share would be equivalent to controlling for the 2003 State Duma election results as discussed above.

Another important innovation in this paper is to investigate whether governor turnover depends on voter turnout in the region. Therefore, we examine whether presidential turnout, State Duma turnout, and regional legislative election turnout affect the probability that a governor is reappointed.

In order to test the cooptation arguments discussed above we measure the strength of the governor's political machine with the governor's margin of victory in their most recent election. For the appointment period, this variable refers to the governor's last election in the pre-2004 election era. For the post-2012 election period, this variable refers to the governor's most recent election. This variable should tap both the intrinsic popularity of the governor and their ability to successfully deploy administrative resources in order to secure large margins for themselves.

We draw on a range of indicators to investigate how regional economic performance affects a governor's reappointment chances. These include: the growth rate of gross regional product, year-on-year change in unemployment rate, inflation, changes in total and private investment, and changes in tax revenue. Reuter and Robertson examine how growth rates and unemployment affect governor turnover.[34] These measures tap general economic performance in the region, so they are good proxies for the overall economic performance of the regional administration. At the same time, these are very broad-brush measures that are co-determined by many factors outside the control of the regional administration. The impact of a governor's policies on growth and unemployment may be limited, especially across a short time span. Therefore, we also examine two economic outcomes that can be affected by the governors more directly: investment (especially private investment) and tax revenue. In China, for instance, Landry and Lu find that fiscal revenue is among the best predictors of promotion for local party secretaries in China. These

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[34] Ibid.

variables have high variance and their distribution is highly skewed, so we recenter the change in investment on a positive scale and take the natural logarithm of this scale.[35]

Finally, all models also contain two governor-specific control variables. First, all models contain a dummy variable equal to one if the governor's term in office is scheduled to end in a given year. Second, all models control for the age of the governor as older governors are more likely to retire.

6. Results

We begin by discussing results on our key vote mobilization measures. The primary results are displayed in Table 1. The results indicate that governor reappointment is strongly associated with both United Russia's regional legislative and State Duma PR vote share. Governors are significantly more likely to be replaced in regions where United Russia performs poorly at the polls. The substantive effect is quite large. The predicted probability of governor dismissal in a given year when United Russia receives 85% of the vote in a Duma election (the 95th percentile in the data) is a mere 1.3%. But when UR receives 32% (the 5th percentile), the probability of governor turnover increases *twentyfold* to 26.6%. The results on presidential vote share are in the theoretically predicted direction but are not statistically significant.

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[35] Landry, Lu and Duan, "Does Performance Matter?"

Table 1: Electoral Variables: Main Specifications

VARIABLES	(1) Turnover	(2) Turnover	(3) Turnover	(4) Turnover	(5) Turnover	(6) Turnover
Percent Russian	-0.115*	-0.116**	-0.067	-0.103*	-0.127**	-0.114**
	(0.061)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.061)	(0.055)	(0.053)
End of Term	0.204***	0.209***	0.200***	0.207***	0.204***	0.197***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.018)
Age	0.004**	0.005***	0.004***	0.005***	0.004***	0.004***
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Tenure	-0.014	-0.013	0.007	-0.013	-0.005	0.009
	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)
TenureSquared	0.001	0.001	-0.001	0.001	0.000	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
TenureCubed	-0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
2003 UR Vote	0.000	0.001	-0.002*	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Gov. Margin Victory	0.000	-0.000	-0.001*	0.000	-0.000	-0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Urbanization	0.001	-0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Year of Regional Election	-0.002			-0.005		
	(0.008)			(0.008)		
UR Regional Vote	-0.005***					
	(0.001)					
UR Duma Vote		-0.006***				
		(0.002)				
Putin/Medvedev Vote			-0.002			
			(0.002)			
Regional Turnout				-0.003**		
				(0.001)		
Duma Turnout					-0.004***	
					(0.001)	
Presidential Turnout						-0.004***
						(0.001)
Observations	901	995	998	892	1,024	998

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on region in parentheses. Year fixed effects not shown. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

Table 2 shows results when the models include lags for UR's performance in the previous election. This allows for a more precise estimate of the governor's ability to mobilize votes relative to the regime's electoral baseline in the region, but the tradeoff is that including lagged independent variables leads to a decrease in sample size. The results, however, are broadly similar with those in Table 1. One exception is that the coefficient on presidential vote share is statistically

significant: in these specifications, there is evidence that governors are more likely to be replaced when Putin/Medvedev's electoral performance in the region is poor.

Table 2: Electoral Variables: Specifications with Lagged Electoral Results

VARIABLES	(1) Turnover	(2) Turnover	(3) Turnover	(4) Turnover	(5) Turnover	(6) Turnover
End of Term	0.203***	0.217***	0.201***	0.197***	0.207***	0.199***
	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.020)
Age	0.006***	0.003*	0.004**	0.006**	0.003	0.003**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Tenure	-0.021	-0.014	0.009	-0.010	-0.005	0.009
	(0.020)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.015)
TenureSquared	0.002	0.001	-0.000	0.001	0.000	-0.000
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
TenureCubed	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gov. Margin Victory	-0.000	-0.000	-0.001	-0.000	-0.000	-0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Year of Regional Election	-0.010			-0.010		
	(0.009)			(0.009)		
UR Regional Vote	-0.003**					
	(0.002)					
Lagged Regional UR Vote	-0.001					
	(0.001)					
UR Duma Vote		-0.007***				
		(0.002)				
Lagged Duma UR Vote		0.003				
		(0.002)				
Putin/Medvedev Vote			-0.005**			
			(0.002)			
Lagged Putin/Medvedev Vote			0.002			
			(0.002)			
Regional Turnout				-0.002		
				(0.002)		
Lagged Regional Turnout				-0.001		
				(0.002)		
Duma Turnout					-0.003*	
					(0.002)	
Lagged Duma Turnout					-0.000	
					(0.002)	
Presidential Turnout						-0.002
						(0.002)
Lagged Pres. Turnout						-0.002
						(0.002)
Observations	620	839	799	608	868	799

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on region in parentheses. Year fixed effects not shown. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

Columns 4-6 in Tables 1 and 2 show the results on the turnout measures. On the whole we see that voter turnout is negatively associated with governor turnover: governors are more likely to be replace when turnout is low. However, the substantive magnitude of the coefficients on State Duma and regional election turnout is slightly smaller than it is for the vote share coefficients. When Duma turnout in a region 89% (the 95th percentile in the data), the probability of a governor being removed in any given year is 2.7%. That probability rises to 19.2% when turnout is 38% (the 5th percentile). This is a sizeable seven-fold increase, but still smaller than the fifteen or twenty fold decreases seen with the vote share measures. In addition, the results are not fully robust to model specification, as the results on regional legislative turnout and presidential turnout do not reach statistical significance in Table 2. Duma turnout remains significant, however.[36]

Since turnout and regime vote share are correlated one may be serving as a proxy for the other in the above regressions. Thus, in the appendix, we explore models that include both regime vote share and turnout in the same model. In those fully specified models, regional UR vote share and UR's State Duma vote share are significant, while the corresponding turnout levels in those elections are not. Interestingly, the obverse is true for presidential elections: presidential turnout is a stronger predictor of governor reappointment than is presidential vote share. This may make some sense given the non-competitive nature of presidential elections. In all presidential elections since 2004, the victor is clear and Putin(Medvedev) win by huge margins, considerably larger than

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[36] In the appendix, we show models that use the first difference between the current and most recent elections as the key independent variable. Such models only focus on change in regime vote share, ignoring the effect of levels. These results show that increases in UR Duma vote share and turnout are associated with a lower probability of governor removal. The results are weaker and not statistically significant for changes in regional vote share/turnout and presidential vote share/turnout. This, combined with the other results presented in the paper, indicates that vote share/turnout levels, and not just changes, are important in the evaluation of governors.
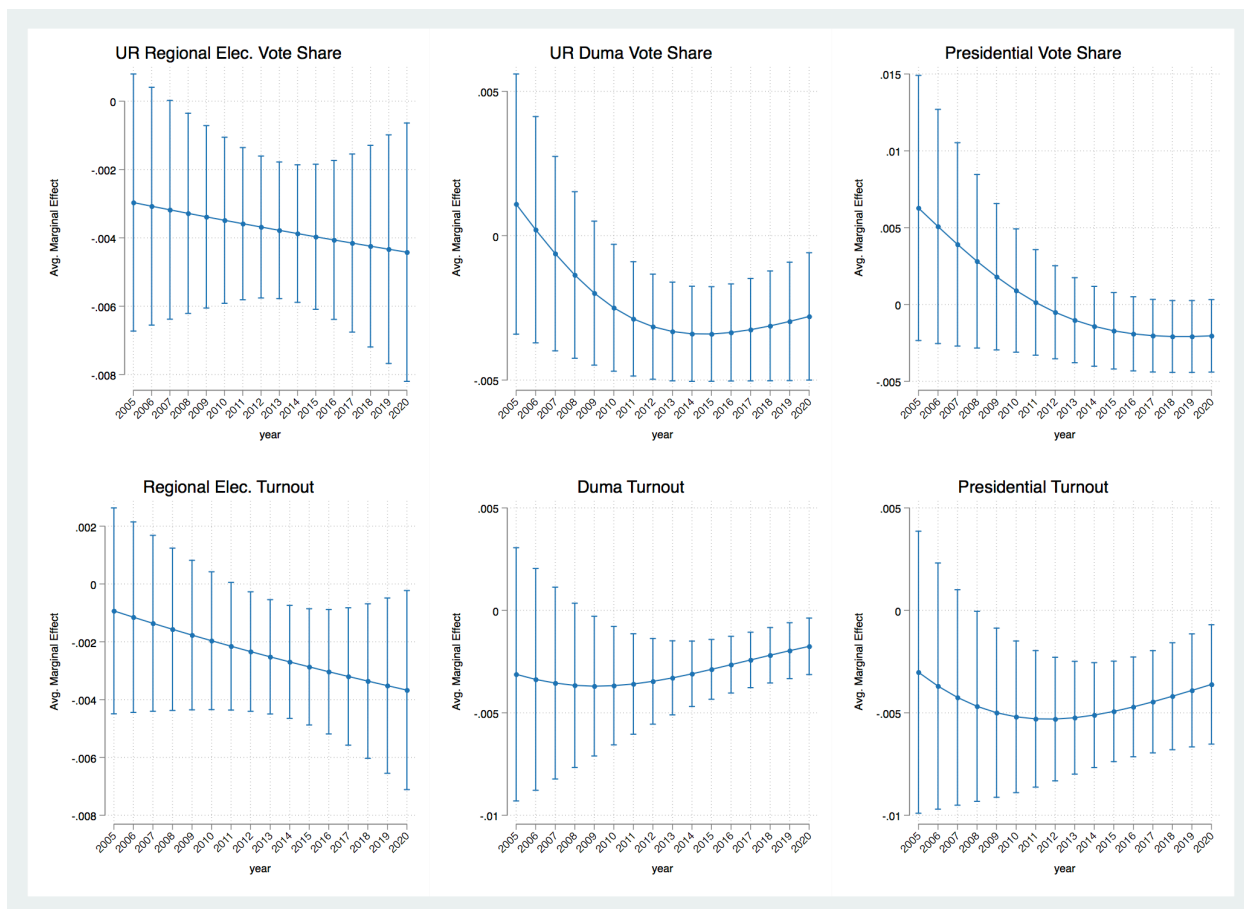
UR's vote margins in legislative contests. In this context, the main task for the authorities is not to boost the president's vote shares still higher, but rather to ensure adequate turnout.

In the appendix, we explore three alternative model specifications for the electoral variable results. First, we show that results are robust when we only include the year in which an appointment decision was made. Second, we explore models with region fixed effects. Since many key variables in our analyses are slowly or never changing within regions, we do not use fixed effects in our main results. Still, most key results are unchanged when we include region fixed effects. Finally, we show that results are robust when we separate promotions from reappointments. Table A3 shows ordered logit models where the dependent variable is a categorial variable coded 0 if the governor is dismissed in a given year, 1 if they are reappointed and 2 if they are promoted. Results are unchanged.[37]

Another important question is whether these relationships are changing over time. Is it the case that election results are becoming less important for the evaluation of governors? Or perhaps they are becoming more important? Figure 1 shows the summary results from models that explore this question by interacting each electoral performance measure with time (calendar year). Each panel shows how the average marginal effect of the electoral variable changes across time. Both UR regional vote share and regional turnout show a trend toward increased relevance, but the confidence intervals are wide and we cannot conclude statistically that there are differences in the coefficients across time. By contrast, there is clear evidence that the importance of Duma elections has increased over time. In the early mid 2000s, there was no effect of Duma vote share on governor reappointment, but this effect increased dramatically over the course of the decade.

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[37] In the appendix, we also explore models that include both the key economic performance variables and the vote results in a single model. Results are substantively and statistically similar. The one exception is that the coefficient on Regional Turnout drops below statistical significance, mostly due to the drop in sample size that is induced by including economic indicators that are unavailable for recent years.

Figure 1: Marginal Effect of Electoral Results on Governor Reappointment Over Time

This result is a useful proof of concept for the key arguments in this paper. Since the 2003 elections were held before governors were appointed, it makes sense that governors were not evaluated on the basis of those electoral results which were obtained before the appointment system was introduced.[38] We see however that, after 2007, Duma election results are consistently

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[38] Turovsky and Luizidis, "Faktory Gubernatorskikh Otstavok"

associated with governor reappointment. Indeed, the results tell a similar story for presidential election vote share and turnout. Presidential election results had little impact on governor reappointment until after the first presidential elections held under the appointment system (in 2008). Since then, there is also some tentative evidence that the importance of presidential vote shares has increased still further.

As regards other political variables, one finding is of particular note. The governor's margin of victory usually does not retain significance in these models. During the early appointment period (2005-2009) politically popular governors were more likely to be reappointed, but this variable is not significantly associated with reappointment in subsequent years.

Tables 3 and 4 examine the results on the economic performance variables. Table 3 uses the values of the indicators for the current year.[39] Since all variables refer to changes in levels, this means that each variable represents the change from the previous year to the current year. So, for example, in Model 1, the value for GRP growth in the 2016 observation is for the year 2016 and represents growth in that year relative to 2015.

One clear drawback of this measurement approach is that some of these changes occur after the decision has been made to dismiss/reappoint the governor. To take an extreme example, the value of this variable for a governor dismissed in January will refer to economic changes that took place mostly after s/he left office. Thus, Table 4 examines the effects of the same performance indicators, but examines the lagged values of these variables (the change from year t-2 to year t-1). The symmetric downside to this measurement approach is that governors are probably evaluated on the basis of the most recent economic indicators and these values are temporally

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[39] Sample sizes in these regressions are smaller than in Tables 1 and 2 because Rosstat updates economic statistics with a 2-3 year lag, so key economic variables are only available through 2018.

distant from the appointment decision, especially for governors who are evaluated at the end of the year.

Table 3: Economic Variables

VARIABLES	(1) Turnover	(2) Turnover	(3) Turnover	(4) Turnover	(5) Turnover	(6) Turnover
Percent Russian	-0.101*	-0.106*	-0.101*	-0.081	-0.069	-0.081
	(0.053)	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.053)	(0.056)	(0.053)
End of Term	0.201***	0.206***	0.204***	0.207***	0.213***	0.207***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age	0.003**	0.005***	0.005***	0.005***	0.005***	0.005***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Tenure	-0.041*	-0.041*	-0.037*	-0.048**	-0.049**	-0.048**
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
TenureSquared	0.004*	0.004*	0.004	0.004*	0.005**	0.004*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
TenureCubed	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gov. Margin Victory	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
UR Regional Vote	-0.004***	-0.005***	-0.005***	-0.004***	-0.004***	-0.004***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Year of Regional Election	0.002	-0.002	-0.001	-0.005	-0.007	-0.005
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Econ. Growth	-0.000					
	(0.003)					
Gross Regional Product	-0.000			-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Chg. CPI		-0.002				
		(0.008)				
Chg. Unemployment			0.012***			
			(0.005)			
Log Change in Tax Rev.				-0.200***		
				(0.076)		
Log Change in Investment					-0.111*	
					(0.058)	
Log Chg. Priv. Invest.						-0.200***
						(0.076)
Observations	722	777	776	770	766	770

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on region in parentheses. Year fixed effects not shown. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

The models in Table 3 indicate that neither inflation nor economic growth show a statistical relationship with governor reappointment. However, increases in unemployment are significantly associated with an increased probability of governor turnover. Model 4 also shows that increases in total tax revenue decrease the probability that a governor will be reappointed. Similarly, models 5 and 6 indicate that governors are less likely to be replaced when investment, especially private investment, is increasing.[40] Since theses variables have high variance and are sensitive to slight changes in extreme values (see footnote 8) we also adopt an alternative measurement strategy in the appendix where we bin these variables into decile ranges.   Those results are not consistent with the results in Table 3. Only Log Change in Private Investment is significant and signed in the expected direction.

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[40] Changes in tax revenue and investment have high variance. Much of this variance is simply due to the fact that larger regional economies experience larger increases and decreases in investment/revenue. Thus, all models that include these variables also include a control for the size of the regional economy (*Gross Regional Product)*. Still, sensitivity analyses reveal that results a heavily influenced by outliers. Thus, for each model we conduct a DFBETA diagnostic test and remove observations with the outlying DFBETA values (using the standard cutoff critera: $2/\sqrt{n}$, where n is the model sample size).

Table 4: Economic Variables: One Year Lags

VARIABLES	(1) Turnover	(2) Turnover	(3) Turnover	(4) Turnover	(5) Turnover	(6) Turnover
Percent Russian	-0.105*	-0.109**	-0.104*	-0.083	-0.071	-0.083
	(0.057)	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.052)
End of Term	0.205***	0.210***	0.209***	0.211***	0.214***	0.211***
	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Age	0.005***	0.005***	0.005***	0.005***	0.005***	0.005***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Tenure	-0.039*	-0.041**	-0.045**	-0.042**	-0.047**	-0.042**
	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
TenureSquared	0.004	0.004*	0.004**	0.004*	0.004**	0.004*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
TenureCubed	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gov. Margin Victory	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
UR Regional Vote	-0.005***	-0.005***	-0.005***	-0.005***	-0.004***	-0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Year of Regional Election	-0.002	-0.001	-0.001	-0.000	-0.002	-0.000
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Econ. Growth (Lag)	-0.003					
	(0.003)					
Chg. CPI (Lag)		-0.006				
		(0.006)				
Chg. Unemployment (Lag)			-0.011			
			(0.008)			
Log Change in Tax Rev. (Lag)				-0.058		
				(0.111)		
Gross Regional Product				-0.000**	-0.000	-0.000**
				(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Log Change in Investment (Lag)					-0.095	
					(0.111)	
Log Chg. Priv. Invest. (Lag)						-0.058
						(0.111)
Observations	777	819	796	813	812	813

Cell Entries are Average Marginal Effects. Standard errors clustered on region in parentheses. Year fixed effects not shown. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

These findings suggest that governors may be evaluated on certain economic performance indicators—unemployment, investment and tax collection. However, the measurement discussion above appears relevant, because Table 4 indicates that results depend heavily on which measurement approach is used. In models that use lagged performance metrics, there is no significant relationship for any measure. On the whole, there is tentative evidence that certain types of economic performance metrics *may* influence governor turnover, but this evidence is not robust to measurement approach.[41] We cannot conclude that economic performance is unimportant, but it is much harder to find consistent evidence of its effect than it is for vote mobilization.

Discussion and Conclusion

Regional governors are among the most important figures in Russian politics. Understanding the factors that decide their (re)appointment is therefore crucial to understanding developments in Russia's regions. If governors are evaluated on the basis of good governance and/or their ability to achieve economic development then they will be incentivized to pursue those goals, and this will provide a significant stimulus for innovation and economic development. If, by contrast, governors are evaluated on the basis of their ability to mobilize votes for the regime then they are likely to focus their energies on that goal.

Our results in this paper indicate that governors are evaluated more on the basis of vote mobilization than on the basis of economic performance. These results extend across the entire appointment era from 2005 to 2020. The patterns are not substantively affected by the return of

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[41] Using interaction models, we also explored whether the effect of economic performance indicators has changed over time and found no systematic evidence of this.

pro-forma elections or by the increasingly authoritarian turn in Russian politics over the past decade.   These results are robust to a variety of estimation strategies, including approaches that control for the regimes prior electoral performance in the region.

These general results corroborate and extend the general findings in Reuter and Robertson (2012), but we also present some novel findings about vote mobilization that are worthy of further study. In general, higher regime vote shares all of the studied-election types—presidential, State Duma, and regional—is associated with a higher probability of governor reappointment. However, the effect of State Duma and presidential elections has increased significantly since 2007-2008. We also demonstrate that high turnout is positively associated with governor reappointment, though there is also some evidence that vote share matters more.

With regard to economic performance, we find inconsistent and mixed evidence that positive economic performance is associated with governor reappointment. Such results can be interpreted as consistent with previous research showing that Russian governors are not evaluated on the basis of economic performance in their region.[42] Alternatively (or additionally), they may also be interpreted as a demonstration of the measurement challenges that bedevil attempts to analyze the relationship between economic performance and governor turnover. The economic performance of a regional administration is difficult to capture with a single quantitative measure and it is equally hard to choose the appropriate time period taking these measurements. By contrast, it is straightforward to measure election outcomes, which can be easily observed by the Kremlin. At the same time, it must be noted that quantitative studies in other settings (most notably China) have been able to detect a consistent linkage between economic performance and cadre rotation. The fact that it is hard to do so in Russia is telling.

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[42] Reuter and Robertson, "Subnational Appointments," Rochlitz et al., "Performance Incentives"

On the whole these findings suggest that Russia may be vulnerable to an electoral authoritarian development trap. Such a trap can emerge when central officials incentivize local officials to focus on securing votes in elections---by whatever means necessary—and simultaneously do not properly incentivize them to pursue good governance. This dynamic has the potential to undermine growth and public goods provision.

However, in concluding, it also important to note several limitations of the present analysis and several caveats about our conclusions. While we find systematic evidence that vote mobilization is statistically associated with governor reappointment, our results also indicate that this is only one among many factors that drive governor reappointment. Many of those factors go unobserved in our analyses and, in fact, these idiosyncratic factors likely explain most of the variance in governor appointments. These factors—such as personal ties and personal judgements by Kremlin political advisors—are not captured by the high level of measurement that is necessitated by quantitative analysis. While such factors are difficult to study systematically, it would be imprudent to conclude that they do not play a role in the way that governors are evaluated in Russia.