

The Logic of Subnational Appointments in Russia

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Abstract: In autocracies, regime leaders often face a tradeoff between appointing officials who are politically loyal and officials who are competent. Using original data on the career trajectories of Russian regional governors between 2005 and 2015 this paper synthesizes and examines a number of competing theoretical perspectives on the loyalty-competence tradeoff. I find that the Kremlin tends to appoint a mix of loyalists with direct ties to regime leaders and politically competent regional officials whose careers are built in their home region. Contrary to some existing narratives, however, the first group is fairly small. I also find no evidence that regime loyalists are more likely to be appointed when the regime is weak at the national level. The appointment strategy of the regime does, however, vary according to regional factors. Loyalists are more likely to be appointed in more populous regions where the regime can least afford rebellion. Loyalists are also likely to replace regional insiders when the latter prove unable to mobilize votes for United Russia.

Introduction

In most autocracies, leaders delegate significant authority to political appointees. The identity of these subordinates goes a long way toward determining “who gets what, when, and how” under autocracy. One perennial issue is the *type* of official that is appointed. *Type* can mean many things, but one of the most important distinctions is that between regime loyalists and competent administrators. This tradeoff goes by different names in the literature—e.g. *reds vs experts*, *clientelism vs merit*, *patronage vs policy*, *loyalty vs competence*—but the central question is always the same: when will regime leaders choose politically capable appointees over politically loyal ones. As Egorov and Sonin (2011) point out, the choice presents a real dilemma because competent subordinates are more likely to challenge the leader. But at the same time, politically loyal appointees may lack the skills and resources to accomplish key political tasks.

In recent years, there have been several theoretical treatments of the loyalty-competence tradeoff (e.g. Egorov and Sonin 2011, Lagerlof 2012, Zakharov 2016), but there have been fewer works that examine the tradeoff empirically. Drawing from different strands of literature on authoritarian appointments, this paper synthesizes a set of competing theoretical perspectives on the loyalty-competence tradeoff. I then generate empirical implications from these arguments and test them with data on Russian gubernatorial appointments between 2005 and 2016.

Some theoretical perspectives suggest that dictators will always appoint loyalists because they fear rebellion by competent agents. A competing logic, however, suggests that dictators will appoint meritoriously because competent agents are more capable of fulfilling important political tasks. Alternatively, the choice may depend on

circumstance. Some suggest that regime leaders will prefer loyalists when the regime is weak, either because competent appointees are more threatening when the regime is weak (Egorov and Sonin 2011) or because loyalists should exert more effort on behalf of regime leaders (Hassan 2016, Zakharov 2016). But a different logic holds that regime leaders will be forced to privilege competence when the regime is threatened, because this is precisely when key political tasks—e.g. mobilizing votes, quelling social unrest, and containing elite discord—must be achieved.

I examine these propositions using an original dataset that contains information on the coded biographies of 203 Russian regional governors and their ties to regime leaders. It is difficult to measure loyalty and competence, but I argue that we can adequately proxy this concept by examining the extent to which an appointee owes his/her political advancement to regime leaders, rather than to his/her own resources and skills. An official whose political qualifications consist solely in their ties to regime leaders is more likely to remain loyal in trying times. By contrast, those with autonomous resources, such as a pre-existing regional power base, will find it easier to craft a political future after a transition, and indeed, may even be able to remain in their position as governor. This reduces their incentive to remain loyal.

Based on this logic, I construct two main proxies for loyalty to the regime in Putin's Russia: 1) whether a governor has past professional ties to Putin and 2) whether the governor has spent a plurality of his political career in the region where s/he is appointed. Governors from the region—what I call insiders—have the local political networks and support bases that allow them to continue their career in a post-transition environment. This makes their loyalty tenuous. Moreover, these same resources make

them better able to fulfill key political tasks.

The data reveal that the Kremlin uses a mix of strategies in its gubernatorial appointments. It does not appoint just loyalists; it appoints a mix of regional politicians and officials with career ties to regime leaders. Moreover, contrary to some popular accounts, the share of appointees with professional ties to Putin is fairly low—14%—and has not been increasing over time.¹ A large plurality of appointees are regional insiders, although the share of appointees who are insiders has declined slightly over time.

I also find no relationship between the appointment strategy of the Kremlin and regime strength. As a proxy for the latter, I use Putin's national popularity rating and find little evidence that the regime's preference for loyalists was affected by oscillations in Putin's approval ratings.

Using a bivariate probit selection model, I also examine whether the appointment strategy varies by regional circumstance. I find that the Kremlin is more likely to appoint outsider (i.e. loyalist) governors in large, politically important regions, where rebellion by unfaithful clients would be most costly. Loyalists are also more likely to be placed in regions where United Russia is performing poorly. This finding is more open to interpretation. On the one hand, this could indicate that the Kremlin views outsiders as more willing to confront and resolve political problems. But if the Kremlin really believed that outsiders are better at mobilizing political support, it would appoint outsiders in all regions. A more plausible explanation is that they only appoint outsiders if supposedly competent insiders have demonstrated that they are actually incompetent at achieving key tasks. The first priority of regime leaders is to maintain regime support. Since 2005, regime leaders have been willing to take the risk of appointing competent—

¹ As I discuss below, 2016 appears that it may be an exception to this.

and potentially disloyal—insiders if they continue mobilizing votes for the regime. In other words, the Kremlin might prefer loyalists, but it appoints regional insiders to help it achieve key political tasks. When the latter cease to be useful, it begins appointing loyalists. The long-term danger for the Kremlin is that outsider governors are inferior at mobilizing votes for the regime (Reuter 2013). If the number of competent, insider governors continues to shrink in Russia, the vote shares of United Russia will also suffer.

Subnational Appointments in Authoritarian Regimes

In authoritarian regimes, leaders make appointments to many political offices. These offices afford their occupants with political privilege and policy influence. Thus, the study of appointments is central to the study of how power is organized under autocracy. Indeed, the process by which political offices are distributed may be a reflection of the regime's ruling strategy.

Given the central role of appointments in authoritarian governance it is not surprising that there is a long tradition of research on this topic. Sovietologists, for example, devoted enormous energy to understanding patterns of mobility among the Soviet elite. Turnover among the elite was variously attributed to: the placement of cadres in positions for which they were deemed professionally qualified, otherwise known as role-matching (Cleary 1972); the calculated rotation of cadres from position to position so as to disrupt the construction of local power bases (Brzezinski 1956); the promotion of elites for good governance (Hough 1969, Reissinger and Willerton 1989); the placement of ethnic elites in coethnic localities in order to coopt ethnic groups

(Hodnett 1978); party loyalty (Harasmyiw 1984); patron-client ties (Rigby and Harasmyiw 1980, Willerton 1992); and generational change (Moore 1960, Hodnett 1978).

An expansive literature has also developed on appointments in China. Like their Soviet counterparts, these works have found that role matching, political loyalty, and factional politics all seem to matter (e.g. Bo 2002, Zang 2004, Shih et al 2012, Li and Walder 2001, Zang 2004, Landry 2008). But in contrast to the Soviet literature, much of the work on China has focused on economic performance. Over the past 15 years, a voluminous literature has emerged demonstrating that economic (or fiscal) performance in a appointee's jurisdiction helps determine their career prospects (e.g. Maskin et al 2000, Li and Zhou 2005, Landry 2008, Guo 2007, Bo 2004).²

Much of the literature on appointments, though, has been descriptive. That is, the goal of many studies is to describe the type of officials that are appointed or to uncover the factors that lead to promotion. Less common are studies that explicitly theorize and test predictions about the trade-offs involved in adopting different types of appointment strategies. One central trade-off is the choice between loyal subordinates and competent ones.³ While dictators would clearly prefer to have their subordinates be both loyal and competent, there is no reason to assume that competence and loyalty are positively

² While China and the Soviet Union have clearly received the most attention, recent years have seen an increase in the number of studies that examine appointment strategies in other non-democracies. For example, see Matsuzato (2001) on Ukraine, Reuter and Robertson (2012) and Buckley et al (2013) on Russia, Gueorguiev and Shuler (2016) on Vietnam, and Hassan (2016) on Kenya

³ Here I define competence as the ability to achieve key political tasks, such as popular mobilization and elite management. Some works construe competence narrowly (and perhaps arbitrarily) as referring to the ability of officials to achieve key *economic* tasks (Li and Zhou 2005). This is clearly an important component of "competence," but it is clearly not the only one and it is likely not the type of competence that is most relevant for theorizing about the loyalty-competence tradeoff. After all, the analytic crux of that tradeoff involves the political threat posed by competent subordinates. Thus, political resources and savvy would seem more relevant here than technocratic economic expertise.

correlated. In fact, competence may lead to disloyalty either because competent subordinates are more capable of challenging the dictator (Egorov and Sonin 2011) or because they are more likely to have outside career options (Zakharov 2016).

The loyalty-competence tradeoff has clear implications for regime stability and, as such, it is central to many debates about authoritarian appointments. Versions of the tradeoff come in different guises. In the Soviet literature, the “reds vs experts” debate centered on the choice between appointing devoted communists as opposed to capable administrators (e.g. Rutland 1993). In the China literature, the question is whether to privilege economic performance over political (or factional) loyalty. In studies of the American bureaucratic appointments, scholars highlight the “policy vs patronage” tradeoff that is faced by presidents (Lewis 2009, Patterson and Pfiffner 2001). A consistent theme in studies of Russian regional politics, meanwhile, is the trade-off between appointing “varyags” (i.e. outsiders) governors as opposed to local power-brokers (Turovsky 2009, Chirikova 2011).

In all of these settings, the central concern is the same: when will leaders take the risk of delegating authority to someone whose loyalty is in doubt. Some models of authoritarian appointments suggest that dictators are so fearful of betrayal that they will almost always prefer loyal appointees over competent ones (Egorov and Sonin 2011, Lagerlof 2012). Pursuing a slightly different logic, Zakharov (2016) argues that low-quality (i.e. loyal) subordinates will apply greater effort in their work, because their chance of being ‘hired’ by the dictator’s successor are lower. Such models accord with the lay perception that dictatorship is synonymous with cronyism. And, indeed, it is not hard to find examples of this behavior in dictatorships. One need only recall Stalin’s

purges, the political ascent of Long March veterans under Mao (Kung and Chen 2011), Haile Selassie's illiterate viziers (Kapuschinski 1978), or the cronyistic staffing of oil companies in Gulf Monarchies (Herzog 2011, Herb 1999).

At the same time, choosing loyalists over specialists has clear downsides. After all, loyalists often lack the skills necessary to do the dictator's will. As Huber and McCarty's (2004) model of bureaucratic delegation shows, politicians will find it hard to secure the implementation of their preferred policies when bureaucratic capacity is low. Even if, as Zakharov (2016) suggests, 'low-quality' loyalists have more of a motive to exert effort, they may not have the *ability* to achieve desired outcomes. "For this reason," Huber and McCarty (2004) conclude, "politicians can often induce more desirable actions from highly competent "enemy" bureaucrats (i.e., bureaucrats with policy preferences that differ from the politician's) than from less competent "friendly" ones."

Empirically, it is clear that dictators do sometimes privilege competence over loyalty. China's Target Responsibility System, in which merit-based performance criteria are used in the evaluation of cadres, is one such example (Edin 2003, Whiting 2004). Similarly, the East Asian developmental states have been lauded for their ability to delegate economic decision-making to economic technocrats (Woo-Cumings 1999, Doner et al 2005). In sub Saharan Africa, leaders sometimes place non-coethnics in important subnational positions (Hassan 2016). In Russia, Reuter and Robertson (2012) find that governors who sat atop strong local machines were more likely keep their jobs in the mid-2000s than weak governors.

In sum, the loyalty-competence tradeoff is a central feature of the theoretical

literature on authoritarian appointments. Formal models of authoritarian appointments predict that loyal subordinates will be preferred, but there is extensive variation in the appointment strategies used by autocrats. There are few studies that develop and test hypotheses to explain this type of variation. The remainder of the paper takes up this task.

Theoretical Perspectives on Russian Gubernatorial Appointments

This paper examines authoritarian cadre strategies in the context of Russian gubernatorial appointments. From 1996-2004, most of Russia's regional governors were directly elected. In December 2004, however, legislation was passed that eliminated direct gubernatorial elections and introduced a system of centralized appointments.⁴ In mid-2012, the law was again changed to allow direct elections, and, at least on paper, Russian governors are still elected.

In practice, however, Russian governors are still appointed by the president. The president retains the right to remove governors from office at will and name interim

⁴ The exact details of the appointment process are somewhat more complicated. Under the new rules, the Russian president nominated a candidate to be approved by the regional legislature. The regional legislature had 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 were to reject the President's proposed candidate three times, then the legislature is dissolved and new elections are called. Given that almost all Russian regional legislatures were controlled by United Russia during this period, no legislature ever rejected a presidential nominee. In the same law, the President was given the authority to dismiss governors with a decree and name an interim governor.

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 Okrugs (*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 would have the right to propose a candidate for governor to the President.

This procedure for appointing governors existed from January 2005-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. Under the new law, the largest party—which was always United Russia--provided the president with a list of three candidates that the president chose from. In order to avoid public disagreements, United Russia consulted closely with the Kremlin when drawing up its candidate lists (e.g. Ivanov 2013).

replacements. The president can also name an interim replacement if the governor resigns.⁵ Indeed, since elections were reintroduced there has been only one instance 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.⁶ Thus, Russian gubernatorial elections are actually presidential appointments in disguise. In this paper, I analyze appointments for the entire post-2004 period.

How should we expect the Kremlin to navigate the loyalty-competence tradeoff in its gubernatorial appointments? One possibility is that it will always appoint loyalists. After all, the Kremlin has control over appointments and the regime should prefer loyalists because competent governors pose a greater potential threat to the regime. While it is unlikely that a single, competent governor could pose a threat of rebellion, a large number of adversarial governors could certainly pose a significant threat. Indeed, in 1999 the Kremlin narrowly avoided this exact scenario when Fatherland-All Russia a, powerful governors' party looked poised to win the Duma elections and install Evgeny Primakov as president. In addition, if Putin's popularity fell—perhaps due to a scandal or economic crisis—a popular governor might defect to the opposition and use his local power base against the Kremlin.

Alternatively, Kremlin might choose loyalist governors not because they are less threatening, but because they are more effective at fulfilling important political tasks.

⁵ Since 2012, this has been by far the most common mode of exit for governors. Governors that have lost the Kremlin's confidence are encouraged to resign.

⁶ The average margin of victory for incumbents in the 64 elections that took place between 2012 and 2015 was 63 percent. In only one case did an incumbent lose.

Zakharov (2016) suggests that loyalists will be more motivated to work for the regime because they have fewer outside options. The logic here is different, but the empirical prediction is the same: the Kremlin will prefer and appoint loyalists. This might be considered the null hypothesis.

Interestingly, gubernatorial appointments in Tsarist Russia appear to have followed this pattern. The Tsar almost never appointed local nobility as provincial governor. Instead, most viceroys were military figures or bureaucrats from the metropolises (Robbins 1990). Some see a similar dynamic developing in contemporary Russia. Kryshchanovskaya and White (2010), for example, argue that the number of government officials with military and security backgrounds—so-called *siloviki*--has increased precipitously under Putin.

A diametrically opposed prediction is that the Kremlin will privilege competence over loyalty. Even if the Kremlin prefers loyal governors it may calculate that it needs competent governors to fulfill critical tasks, such as mobilizing votes, quelling social unrest, or managing complex economic tradeoffs. And even if loyalists are more motivated to complete these tasks, as Zakharov suggests, they may lack the political skills, resources, and support networks that are necessary to achieve these goals.

Furthermore, the risk of rebellion by non-loyalist governors may, in fact, be low. Governors, after all, would face significant coordination and collective action problems in attempting to organize such a rebellion. Indeed, the 1999 attempt by governors to win the presidency was ultimately thwarted by such cooperation problems (e.g. Shvetsova 2003).

This perspective accords with insights from the recent literature on gubernatorial appointments in Russia. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia's governors built powerful

local power bases. Rather than replace all those governors with loyalists from Moscow, Putin left most governors in place in 2005 and 2006. Scholars have suggested that Putin sought to coopt these governors and draw on their political machines to help it win elections (Petrov 2006, Goode 2007, Sharafitudinova 2010, Reuter 2013). Indeed, analyses have found that, in the late 2000s, governors who had won their own elections by large margins were more likely to be reappointed (Reuter and Robertson 2012).

A third, and perhaps more sophisticated, perspective on the Kremlin's gubernatorial appointments is that the strategy varies according to circumstance. Loyalists are installed in some instances, but not in others. This would accord with recent studies of governor backgrounds--and the descriptive statistics below—which show that the backgrounds of appointed governors vary widely (Buckley et al. 2013). Many built their careers in the region where they are pointed, others come from the federal government, business, the State Duma, or, rarely, the security services.

If the decision varies by circumstance, then how does it vary? Under what conditions does the Kremlin appoint a loyalist? And when does the Kremlin choose a candidate on the basis of their political competence? Egorov and Sonin (2011) predict that dictators will have a stronger preference for loyalists when the regime is weaker and/or facing significant threats. According to this argument, the regime will fear competent subordinates most when it is vulnerable, and therefore will avoid appointing them when it is under threat.

A similar empirical prediction is generated by the argument that loyalists have more incentive to exert effort for the dictator. If loyalists are more likely to help produce better outcomes for the dictator, then the dictator will have more need for loyalists when

the regime is threatened. Hassan (2016), for example, finds that Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi stationed co-ethnic security officers in areas where the regime fared poorly in elections. Co-ethnic security officers were more willing to engage in repression in order to boost the President's vote totals. As she argues, Moi thought that officers from other ethnic groups might use their positions to help the opposition.

One hypothesis generated by these arguments is that the Kremlin will be more likely to appoint loyalists when the regime is particularly threatened. Putin may appoint loyalists at times when the regime is weak or in regions that are considered weak points. Another possibility is that Putin will send loyalists to regions that are politically important (e.g. large regions). The Kremlin can ill-afford regional governors developing their own power bases in such regions. Instead, it must ensure that leaders in these regions are firmly aligned with the regime.

There are, however, alternatives to the hypotheses sketched above. In fact, the exact opposite argument could be offered. One might contend that the regime will be most in need of competent subordinates when it is weak. According to this logic, it is crucial that key political tasks are achieved precisely when the regime is threatened. Votes must be mobilized, social unrest quelled, elite conflict kept at bay. In times of weakness, therefore, the Kremlin might feel that it must appoint competent subordinates, who can achieve these tasks, even if it means risking disloyalty. Similarly, one might expect that loyalists would be sent to less important regions, where their incompetence will do less damage. Important regions, by contrast, must be staffed by a competent governor.

The difference between these arguments hinges on the determinants of

effectiveness. If one believes that the political effectiveness of a subordinate is determined by the effort they are willing to expend on behalf of the leader, then the first proposition makes more sense. If, by contrast, one believes that the inherent skills and resources of appointees are what determines their effectiveness, then the latter is more persuasive.

Data

To study the loyalty-competence tradeoff in Russia, I use a dataset that contains the coded biographies of all 209 governors that have served in Russia since 2005. The basis for this dataset comes from the International Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (ICSID).⁷ In order to create the specific dataset used in this paper, I coded governor biographies into several categories (discussed below) and extended ICSID's database from its current end date of 2012 up through 2016.

What can the backgrounds of governors tell us about their loyalty to the regime? It should first be noted that since the President appoints all governors, they are all loyal to a point. The last decade has not witnessed any instances of governors overtly challenging the president. But *ex officio* loyalty is a trait shared by all of a dictator's subordinates. The task is to identify those whose loyalty is more tenuous than others. It is to discern who has a higher potential for disloyalty, especially in time of crisis. I argue that a key determinant of latent disloyalty is the extent to which appointees owe their political career to current regime leaders. Those whose primary political qualification is being in the good graces of regime leaders (i.e. are clients of regime leaders) are likely to be more loyal. In a post-transition environment, their career options are limited and they will be

⁷ <https://iims.hse.ru/en/csid/databases>

more faithful servants of the regime, as a result. By contrast, those with autonomous resources, such as a pre-existing regional power base, will find it easier to craft a political future after a transition. This gives them less incentive to remain loyal.

One intuitive, though imperfect, way to measure an appointee's dependence on regime leaders is to examine their professional and educational links to Putin and other regime leaders.⁸ Using social network data collected by ICSID, I coded for each appointee the number of years that they worked with or under Vladimir Putin, either before or after Putin became president. I also coded any educational links to Putin. Since other regime leaders have considerable input on Putin's cadre decisions, I also coded, in a similar fashion, the career links between members of Putin's inner circle and the governors. The other regime leaders were: Sergei Shoigu, Vladislav Surkov, Igor Sechin, Vyacheslav Volodin, Sergei Sobyanin, Sergei Ivanov, Aleksandr Khloponin, Viktor Ivanov, Dmitry Medvedev, Boris Gryzlov, and Sergei Naryshkin. Finally, I also coded career and educational linkages between governors and the President's representatives to the Federal Okrugs (*polpredy*).⁹

The data indicate a surprisingly low number of pre-existing professional connections between regime leaders and appointed governors. There is not a single governor that attended university with Putin. Twenty-eight governors (14%) worked with or under Putin at some point in their careers prior to becoming governor. However, it is worth noting that this is a very broad coding of professional connections to Putin. Any governor who worked in the federal government or Presidential Administration in any capacity while Putin was President (or Prime Minister) was coded as having a work

⁸ This method of measuring dependence on regime leaders has a long pedigree in comparative politics (e.g. Willerton 1992, Shih et al 2012).

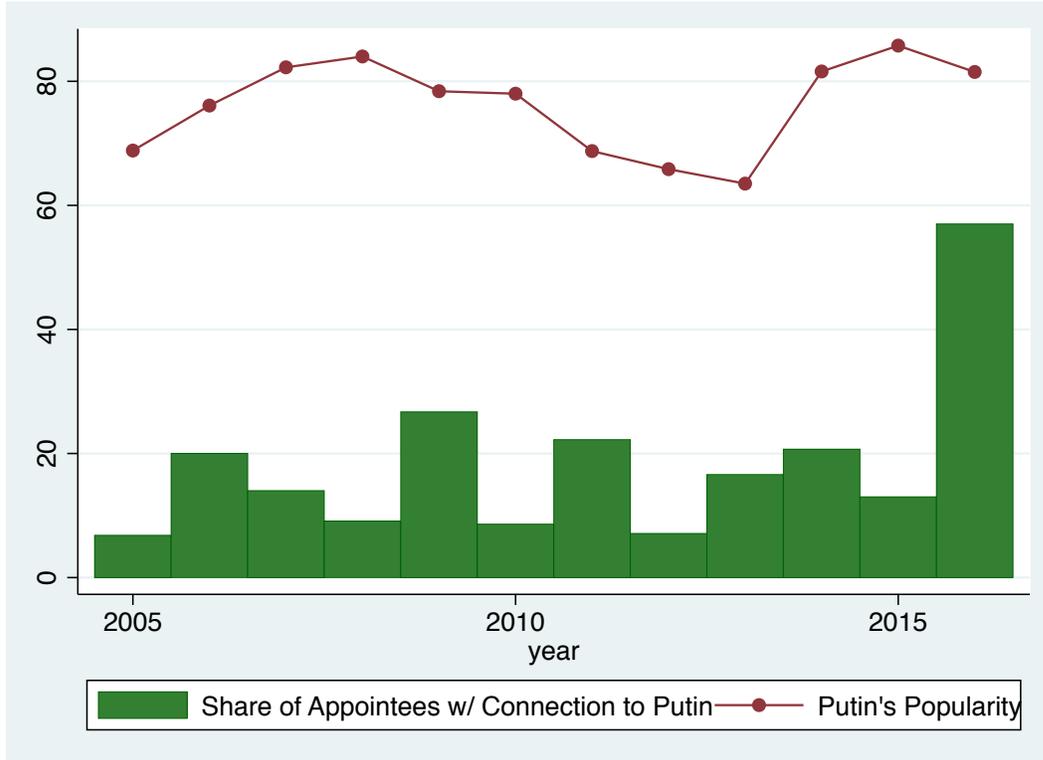
⁹ For these codings I look at the *polpred* that is in office at the time the governor is appointed/reappointed.

connection to Putin. Many of these can surely be construed as Putin's clients, but many others passed through the government for only a short period or had been in the federal government since the Yeltsin era. In fact, I was only able to identify five governors-- Mezentsev in Irkutsk, Vasiliev in Kirov, Poltavchenko in St. Petersburg, Nelidov in Karelia, and Potapenko in Nenetsk AO—with professional ties to Putin before he became President. Mezentsev, Poltavchenko, and Nelidov all worked in St. Petersburg with Putin, while Vasiliev was in the KGB with Putin.

Figure 1 shows the share and number of appointees in each year that worked with or under Putin. Note that the number of appointments in some years is quite small (e.g. there are only 7 appointment events in 2016), so percentages should be interpreted with some caution. Each observation in this data frame is an *appointment event*. In other words, the chart does *not* show the share of governors in each year with ties to Putin. Rather, it shows the share of appoint new appointees and formally reappointed governors that have ties to Putin.¹⁰

¹⁰ The online appendix includes a similar chart that focuses only on new appointees in each year.

Figure 1: Share of Appointees with Professional Ties to Putin



Note: Each bar represents the share of appointees in each year that had some professional ties to Putin. Calculated as a share of appointment events in each year.

The data does not indicate a clear temporal trend. There is no indication that Putin has been appointing more loyalists over time. This conflicts with some popular and scholarly accounts, suggesting that the regime is becoming personalist over time (e.g. Judah 2014, Baturu and Elkink 2016). It is also surprising given that there should be a mechanical correlation between Putin's tenure in office and the share of appointees with professional ties to Putin (i.e. the longer Putin is in office the larger becomes pool of potential nominees who have worked under him in the federal government).

The year 2016 appears as a major exception to the trend, but there have only been 7 appointments in 2016 thus far, so the data is sparse and conclusions must be

preliminary.¹¹ Nonetheless, Putin made headlines in 2016 by appointing 5 governors with backgrounds that deviated significantly from established patterns. As noted below, it is very rare for figures from the security services (*siloviki*) to be appointed as governor. Moreover, those *siloviki* that do become governor are usually decorated generals or war veterans. In 2016, however, Putin, for the first time, appointed three career FSB officers as governor—Mironov in Yaroslavl , Zinichev in Kaliningrad, and Vasiliev in Kirov. He also appointed the former head of his personal security detail as governor in Tula.

Figure 1 also plots Putin’s mean yearly popularity rating (from Levada Center Omnibus polls) over the period. There is not a clear relationship between his national popularity and the appointment of loyalists.

Professional linkages between governors and Putin’s inner circle were found to be even less common than linkages with Putin. Obviously, those who worked in the federal government under Putin also worked under many of the aforementioned figures. And since Putin worked in St. Petersburg with several members of his inner circle, there is also some overlap there. But aside from these overlaps, I only uncovered two instances of governors who shared work experience with one of the aforementioned members of Putin’s inner circle.¹² Moreover, none of the sitting polpreds were found to have professional connections to governors aside from previous service in the government under Putin. And only one polpred went to university with a governor that was appointed during his tenure.

¹¹ The appointment of Anton Alikhanov as governor in Kaliningradskaya Oblast’ on October 6, 2016 is not included in the data.

¹² Surkov worked with former Irkutsk governor Esipovskii for one year at Mentap. Naryshkin worked for some time in the Leningrad Oblast government with Karelia’s Nelidov. A number of governors were in the Duma at the same time as Gryzlov and Volodin, but I do not count these as professional linkages.

In sum, despite the fact that Putin and other regime leaders exercise control over gubernatorial appointments most appointees have no professional or educational ties to the top leadership. This is true even when we use an expansive conception of what constitutes a professional linkage.¹³

The data on professional connections to Putin is illuminating but it has serious drawbacks as a way of measuring the loyalty-competence tradeoff. Many appointees—especially those from business and the security services—who never formally worked in the federal government may still owe their *political* careers to Putin and his inner circle. Conversely, many of those who have worked under Putin in the federal government often did so for only a short time and spent the majority of their political career elsewhere. In order to characterize an appointee, it is probably better to look at the totality of their high-level positions. And, unfortunately, there are too few governors who spent a plurality of their career working with/under Putin to permit a meaningful statistical analysis. Finally, the reference category for the Putin connections variable does not equate to competence. Just because an appointee has not spent time working for Putin does not mean that they have the autonomous resources necessary to continue their career in a post-transition environment.

Rather than focus on snapshots from an appointee's career, the approach I take is to code the sphere of work where the appointee spent a plurality of his/her career. Figure 2 categorizes appointees in this way across time. The figure shows significant variation

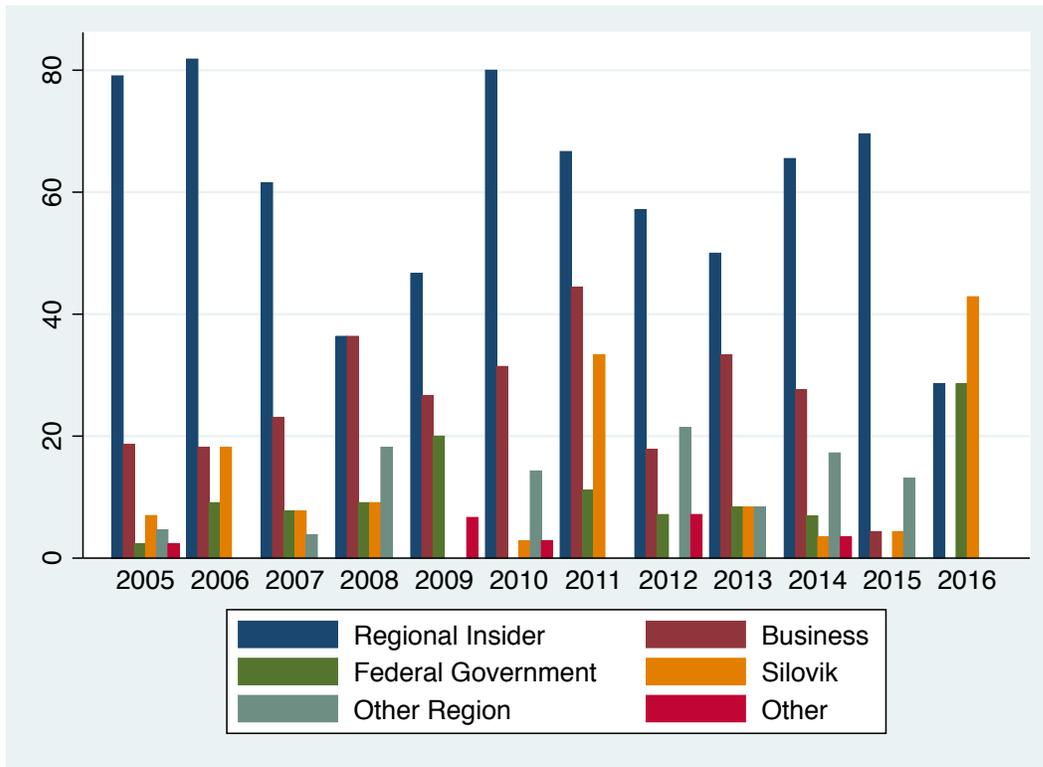
¹³ This coding does not capture informal linkages between Putin and appointees. Such links are difficult to verify, but several personal linkages between Putin and appointees have been noted in the press. For example, the current governor of Pskov, Andrei Turchak, is the son of Putin's former Judo partner. However, judging by the biographies of most governors, it seems unlikely that very many governors might have extensive informal linkages to Putin. Indeed, as I discuss below, a large majority of governors built their careers in their region.

in the career type of gubernatorial appointees. This is an interesting finding in itself. It is not the case that all or even most appointees are federal officials from Moscow. Most are from the regions, but there are also a significant number of appointees from business, the federal government, and, the security services. A small number made their careers in other regions and then were appointed as governor in a different region. An even smaller number—just three governors--served as governor in multiple regions.¹⁴ This is a common practice in China, but it is noticeably rare in Russia. The share of governors in each category varies over time, but does not seem to correlate in any clear way with political patterns such as Putin's popularity or economic performance.

One thing that Figure 2 makes clear is the distinction between governors whose careers were made in their own regions and governors who had few or no professional links to the region before becoming governor. For brevity, I will call the former insiders and the latter outsiders. In the analyses below, I use this distinction as my key measure of the loyalty-competence dimension.

¹⁴ Nikollai Merkushkin served first as governor in Mordovia and then Samara. Sergei Sobyenin was governor in Tyumen before becoming mayor of Moscow. Oleg Kozhemyako has been governor in three Far East regions. He began as governor of Koryak AO and was then named as governor in Amur Oblast. In 2015 he was named as governor in Sakhalin.

Figure 2: Primary Work Experience of Gubernatorial Appointees



Note: Calculated as a share of appointment events in each year.

One practical reason for using this distinction is that other binary categories of appointees (e.g. federal officials vs non-federal officials) are too sparse for meaningful statistical analysis. More importantly, this measure is, in my view, the most accurate measure of the background concept that can be constructed with the available data. Officials who have built their careers in their own region do not owe their career to Putin. After all, governors are the only regional officials that are appointed by the president. Moreover, insiders have autonomous power bases, networks, and resources that would

allow them to continue their political careers even if Putin were removed. While some outsiders also have autonomous resources that would ensure their political future in a post-Putin environment, many clearly do not. By contrast, almost all insiders likely have these resources. Moreover, even if an outsider has significant political resources, their position as governor is likely to be lost after regime transition. By contrast, insiders are less dependent on Putin for keeping their governorship.¹⁵

This suggests that insiders will be less loyal, but there are also good reasons to believe that insiders will be more competent at achieving key political tasks. Experience in the region gives them a number of advantages over outsiders including better information, pre-existing patronage networks, public support and ties to local elites. These advantages are likely to make them more effective at tasks such as motivating subordinates and mobilizing support. Such propositions are backed by several empirical studies. Schultz and Libman (2014), for example, find that insider Russian governors were better able to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters. Reuter (2013), meanwhile, finds that insider governors have been more effective at mobilizing votes for the ruling party.¹⁶

Finally, this measure is attractive because it taps a distinction that is salient in the minds of policymakers, participants, and citizens. Often called ‘varyagy’ (from the Russian for “Varangian,” a reference to the Slavic name for Viking “outsiders” who ruled Slavic areas around Kyiv in the 9th and 10th centuries), outsider governors are the topic of

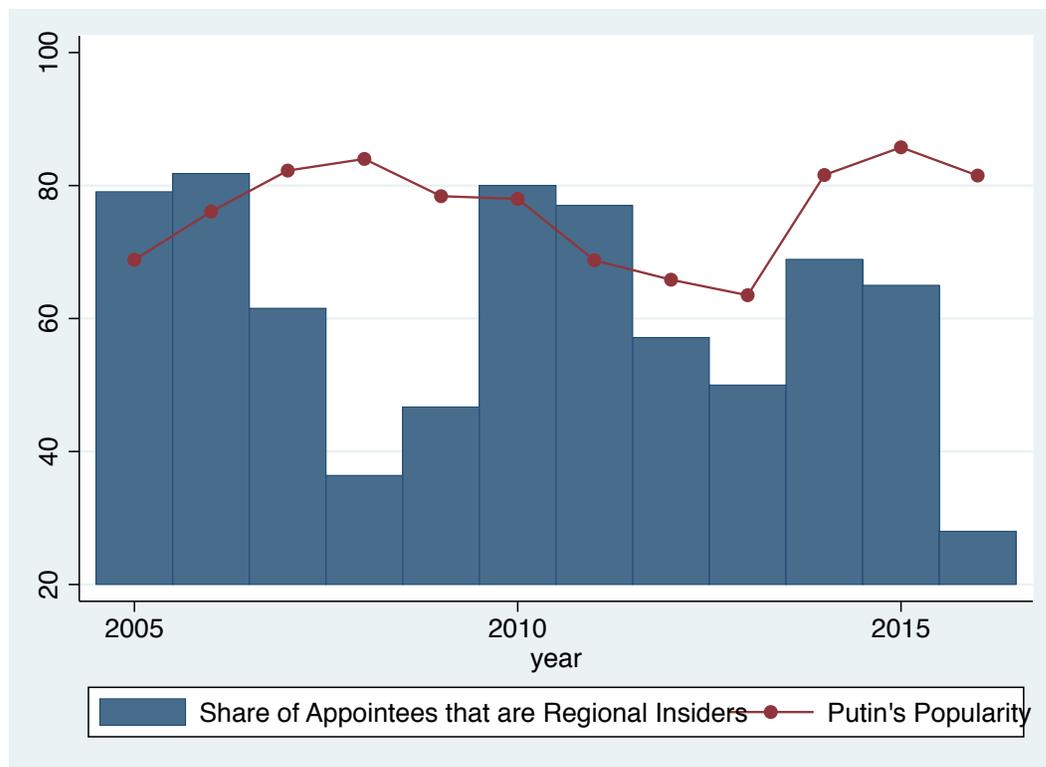
¹⁵ This measure also has a difficult time tapping informal connections. However, being an outsider is likely a necessary condition for such ties. It is implausible that many regional officials have substantial informal ties to Putin.

¹⁶ Political competence is not the only type of competence. But it is the type of competence that is most salient for the loyalty-competence tradeoff as it has been analyzed in the literature. Economic or managerial competence is another form of competence that is discussed in the literature, but this type of competence is likely less threatening to the dictator.

much discussion in the Russian press. When a ‘varyag’ is appointed governor of a region, there is inevitably much speculation about how whether the new Muscovite—they are usually Muscovites—will be able to find accommodation with local elites and win over voters. In a number of prominent cases, the failure of outsider governors to accomplish these goals has resulted in open elite conflict and the removal of the governor (Turovsky 2009).

Figure 3 shows the share of insider appointees by year. The figure indicates a slight trend away from appointing insiders, but with the exception of 2016, discussed above, the trend appears slight. And as with the previous figures, there does not appear to be a clear correlation between Putin’s national popularity levels and the appointment strategy of the Kremlin.

Figure 3: Share of Appointees with a Plurality of Work Experience in the Region



Note: Calculated as a share of appointment events in each year.

The data presented above permit some conclusions about the different theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous section. By reading the popular press, one could be forgiven for thinking that Putin only appoints his personal cronies to positions of power.¹⁷ But contrary to the argument that dictators only appoint loyalists, the data indicate that Putin still appoints many governors who cannot be construed as his clients. On the other hand, it is not the case that Putin only privileges competence (i.e. insiders) in his appointments. With the shift to appointments, Putin sometimes replaced insider governors with federal officials, businessmen, and military officers.

In addition, it does not seem to be the case that Putin is appointing more loyalists over time as he consolidates his power. Although, it remains to be seen whether 2016 is just an exception to this or the start of a new trend. Finally, there is little evidence that loyalists are any more or less likely to be appointed when the regime is “weak” at the national level, as proxied by the popularity ratings of Putin. What remains to be seen is whether the strength of the regime in the regions might affect the appointment strategy of regime leaders. The next section addresses this question.

Modeling Strategy

In this section I examine how regional factors affect the loyalty-competence tradeoff in Russian gubernatorial appointments. The outcome to be explained is the appointment of an outsider to the governor’s post. Modeling such a decision is not straightforward. One could simply estimate a model with region-year observations where the dependent

¹⁷ See, for example: Kashin, Oleg “How Do You Get to Be a Governor in Vladimir Putin’s Russia” New York Times. 8 September 2016.

variable is equal to one if the sitting governor is an outsider and zero if not. However, this conflates two different appointment decisions: the decision to reappoint (dismiss) the sitting governor, and the decision about who will replace the sitting governor if s/he is dismissed. Such a model would be biased because so many sitting governors during this period were insiders (in the mid-2000s almost all were), and the decision to name an insider would be conflated with the decision to leave a governor in place.

An alternative approach would be to model only the type of governor that is selected when a replacement is made. But this would induce selection bias. The set of observed decisions about a new governor's type is censored by the prior decision to replace the governor. More importantly, the two decisions are politically linked, so the error in the selection equation will almost certainly be correlated with the error in the outcome equation.

To address these issues, I model the gubernatorial appointment process using a selection model. More specifically, I use a Bivariate Probit with Sample Selection, which is known also as the censored probit (Greene 2008). The logic behind this model is similar to the Heckman selection model, but it is adapted for use with a dichotomous second-stage outcome variable. The model consists of two stages. The first stage models the decision to replace the sitting governor. The unit of analysis in this stage is the region-year and the dependent variable is equal to 1 if the governor is replaced, 0 if not. The time frame is 2005-2015. The second stage models the type of governor that is chosen to replace the outgoing governor. The dependent variable is equal to 1 if the governor is an outsider, 0 if the governor is an insider. As in all bivariate probit models,

errors between the equations are assumed to be correlated, and model estimates are adjusted accordingly.

The primary stage of interest is the second (outcome) stage. The main question to be addressed here is whether regime weakness affects the type of governor that is selected. As discussed in section three, some theoretical perspectives predict that the Kremlin will appoint more loyalists (outsiders) when the regime is threatened. Other perspectives, however, suggest that the regime will prefer competent appointees (insiders) when the regime is weak. I use United Russia's vote share in the most recent regional election as a measure for the strength of the regime's position in the region. United Russia's regional vote share is a good barometer of the regime's ability to maintain popular support and contain elite conflict in the region.

Another question, discussed above, concerns whether the political importance of the region affects the type of appointee that is chosen. Here political importance is construed as the extent to which it is important for the regime to maintain popular support in a region. I measure the political importance of the region with its (log) population.

The variables included in the selection equation are drawn directly from Reuter and Robertson's (2012) study of gubernatorial appointment in Russia. This includes a measure of United Russia's electoral performance in regional elections under the sitting governor's tenure. A number of scholars have found that a governor's ability to mobilize votes for the Kremlin is a primary determinant of reappointment (Reuter and Robertson 2012, Reisinger and Moraski 2013, Rochlitz 2016). Following Reuter and Robertson (2012) the model also includes several variables that determine United Russia's baseline vote in regional elections: United Russia's regional vote share in the 2003 Duma

election, the share of a region's population that is ethnically Russia (which is primarily a proxy for the ethnic republics), and the year of the election. With the inclusion of these controls the coefficient on United Russia's most recent electoral performances can be interpreted as the extent to which the party has over/underperformed in its most recent election under the sitting governor (see Reuter and Robertson 2012 for more discussion of this).

The selection equation also includes several controls that tap other known and potential determinants of a governor's reappointment chances, such as the governor's age, length of tenure in office, and the margin of the governor's victory in his own election (if applicable), and lagged economic growth in the region. Finally, the model includes a control for the governor's scheduled end of term in office, which is a strong predictor of replacement even though Putin has the authority to replace a governor at any time.¹⁸

Results

Table 1 shows the results of the main models. Before discussing the main results from the second stage, it is first worth noting several substantively important results in the selection equation.¹⁹ First, consistent with the findings in Reuter and Robertson (2012)

¹⁸ In order to avoid collinearity, the selection model requires one or more variables in the first stage that are not—and should not—be included in the second stage. The governor's scheduled end of term is a strong predictor of a governor leaving office, but should have no effect on who is chosen. In addition, the governor's tenure in office is also a good predictor of replacement, but should have no effect on the type of governor that is chosen.

¹⁹ It should be noted that the dependent variable in the selection equation is not entirely appropriate for a stand-alone analysis of gubernatorial reappointment. Reuter and Robertson (2012) censor observations in which the governor is promoted or dies in office. In other words, they do not count these as instances of a governor being replaced. The dependent variable in this selection equation counts such instances as replacements. This is necessary for modeling the second stage because new governors are still appointed when a governor is promoted or dies. Nonetheless, logit analyses in the online appendix show that the

there is a strong positive relationship between United Russia's performance in regional elections and the reappointment chances of a governor. The effect is precisely estimated and substantively large. Holding all other variables at central values, the model predicts that the probability a governor will be replaced in any give year is 5 percent when United Russia wins 70% of the vote (approximately the 90th percentile in the data). By contrast when United Russia wins just 30% of the vote (the 10th percentile in the data) the probability of replacement increases fourfold to 20 percent. Reuter and Robertson's (2012) study found that United Russia was a key predictor of governor turnover between 2005 and 2010. This analysis shows that it has continued to be a strong predictor of governor turnover after 2010.

results discussed in this section are robust to the use of a dependent variable that does not count promotions and deaths as replacements.

Table 1: Bivariate Probit Models with Selection

	1	2	3	4
Selection Equation				
DV: <i>New Governor</i>				
<i>UR Vote Share</i>	-0.025** (0.007)	-0.025** (0.007)	-0.026** (0.007)	-0.025** (0.007)
<i>UR 2003 Duma Share</i>	0.011 (0.011)	0.011 (0.011)	0.014 (0.011)	0.011 (0.011)
<i>Year of Election</i>	0.041 (0.030)	0.041 (0.030)	0.035 (0.029)	0.041 (0.030)
<i>Percent Russian</i>	-0.183 (0.439)	-0.164 (0.439)	-0.097 (0.440)	-0.191 (0.444)
<i>Governor's Margin of Victory</i>	-0.000 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.003)
<i>Lagged Growth</i>	-0.018 (0.011)	-0.018 (0.011)	-0.016 (0.011)	-0.018 (0.011)
<i>Scheduled End of Term</i>	1.234** (0.163)	1.233** (0.163)	1.202** (0.162)	1.235** (0.164)
<i>Governor's Tenure</i>	0.057** (0.020)	0.057** (0.020)	0.052** (0.019)	0.057** (0.020)
<i>Governor Age</i>	-0.002 (0.011)	-0.002 (0.011)	0.002 (0.011)	-0.003 (0.011)
Constant	-80.499 (59.682)	-80.659 (59.718)	-69.613 (58.910)	-81.470 (59.761)
Outcome Equation				
DV: <i>Outsider Governor</i>				
<i>UR Vote Share</i>	-0.027** (0.011)	-0.024* (0.013)		-0.024** (0.012)
<i>Log Population</i>			0.283* (0.157)	0.240 (0.170)
<i>UR 2003 Duma Share</i>		0.011 (0.026)		
<i>Year of Election</i>		-0.013 (0.061)		-0.019 (0.062)
<i>Percent Russian</i>		1.140 (0.955)		0.605 (0.767)
Constant	0.855 (0.566)	25.113 (122.609)	-4.132* (2.235)	35.122 (123.877)
Total Observations	571	571	574	571
Censored Observations	492	492	492	492
Uncensored Observations	79	79	82	79

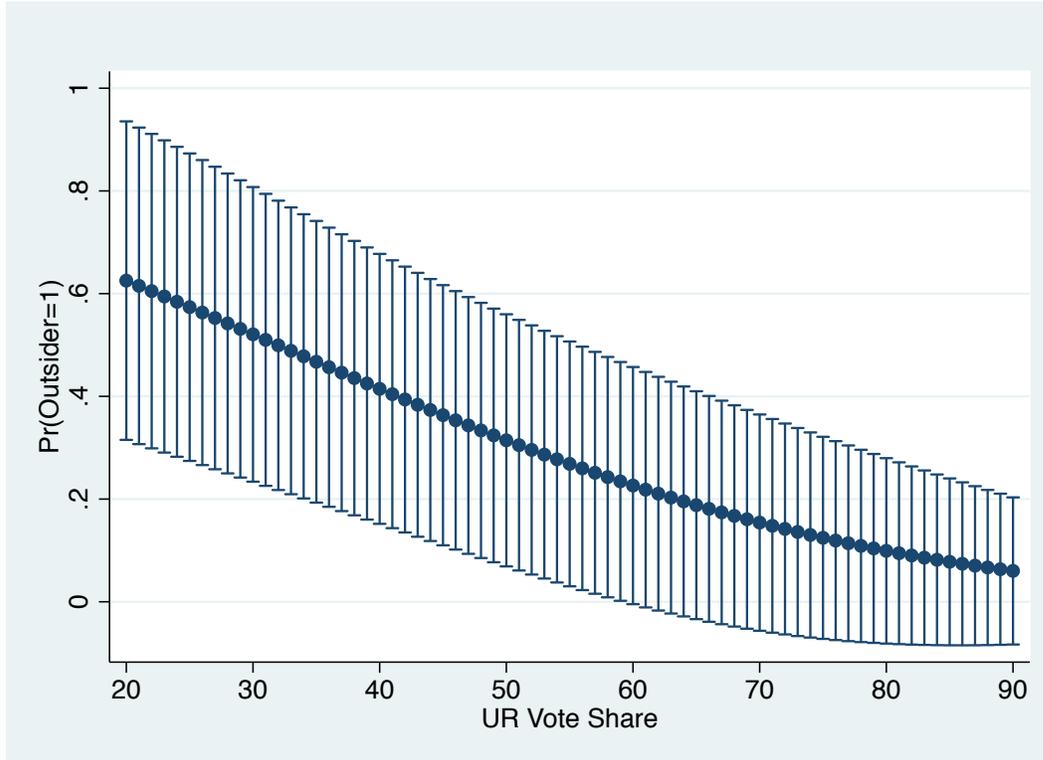
Cell entries are bivariate probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p<.1 **p<.05

Other results are also noteworthy. Longer serving governors are more likely to be replaced. Economic growth, consistent with Reuter and Robertson (2012) has a negative effect on replacement, but the effect falls short of statistical significance and the substantive magnitude of the effect is much smaller than the effect of United Russia's vote share. Finally, in contrast to Reuter and Robertson (2012) I find that the governor's margin of victory in his/her own election has no effect on reappointment. For the 2005-2011 period, there is such an effect, but not after 2011.

Turning now to the main outcome of interest, the negative and statistically significant coefficient on *UR Vote Share* in the outcome equation indicates that outsider governors are less likely to be appointed when United Russia is performing well in the region. Model 1 shows this effect without any controls, while Model 2 includes several controls that, as discussed above, determine United Russia's baseline electoral result. So, as in the selection equation, we can interpret *UR Vote Share* in these models as its *relative* performance.

The effect of *UR Vote Share* is quite large. When United Russia wins 70 percent of the vote, the chance that an outsider will be appointed to replace an outgoing governor is 15%. But when United Russia won 30 percent, the chance of an outsider appointee jumps more than three fold to 52%. The results suggest that outsiders are more likely to be appointed when the regime is politically weak in the region. A broader range of substantive effects are depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Predicted Probability of an Outsider Being Appointed



Note: Estimates are from second stage of Model 1, Table 1

Models 3 and 4 examine the relationship between a region's size and the type of governor that is appointed there. It does appear that outsiders are more commonly sent to large regions. The substantive effect is relatively large. Moving from the 10th to the 90th percentile in *Log Population*, the probability of an outsider being appointed increases from 28% to 54%. In Model 4, however, which includes some basic controls, the coefficient falls slightly short of statistical significance ($p=.157$), but the coefficient is only slightly smaller.

Discussion and Interpretation

The results indicate that outsider governors are more likely to be appointed in large, politically important regions and in regions where the ruling party is performing poorly. As discussed above, there are two reasons that dictators might prefer loyalty over competence in large, politically important regions: they may fear betrayal by a competent subordinate or they may believe that loyalists will exert more effort on behalf of the regime. Both mechanisms could explain the findings here. The Kremlin may prefer loyal governors in large regions because rebellion by a competent subordinate would be more dangerous in such settings. This accords with intuition. A rebellious mayor of Moscow is much more dangerous than a rebellious governor of Kurganskaya Oblast'. Alternatively, it may appoint loyalist governors in politically important regions because it thinks loyalists will be more effective at achieving key political tasks in those regions.

My interpretation of the findings on *UR Vote Share* is more nuanced. The theoretical perspectives sketched above suggested two reasons why loyalists might be appointed in regions where the regime is weak: it may be because the regime fears rebellion by competent subordinates when it is under threat or it may be that the regime believes loyalists are more capable of dealing with challenging political tasks. But it is hard to see how a single—or even a few—competent regional governors could pose a credible threat to the Kremlin. This leads us to consider the latter perspective. The Kremlin may appoint loyalists to regions where UR is struggling because it believes that loyalists can help revive flagging vote totals. This is possible, but there are problems with this interpretation as well. If the Kremlin believed that outsiders were inherently

better at mobilizing votes, they would likely just appoint outsiders to all governor posts. Moreover, this grates against the fact that insiders usually do better at mobilizing votes for United Russia (Reuter 2013).

It seems more likely that the Kremlin only appoints outsiders if insiders fail to deliver votes for United Russia. In other words, the Kremlin is willing to take the risk of appointing competent insiders so long as they continue to mobilize votes. Indeed, it is noteworthy that in regions with the strongest local machines—and highest UR vote totals--outgoing governors were often allowed to pick their own successor when leaving office (e.g. Chuvashia, Tatarstan, Mordovia, Krasnodar, Khabarovsk). But when insiders cease to be effective vote mobilizers, they are no longer useful to the Kremlin. In these cases, the regime turns to appointing loyalists, who are *ex ante* preferred.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the logic of gubernatorial appointments in contemporary Russia. Focusing on the loyalty-competence tradeoff, I analyzed the type of gubernatorial appointees that have been chosen by Russia's leaders between 2005 and 2015. The loyalty-competence tradeoff is a consistent theme in studies of cadre politics under authoritarianism and the choice between these two types of appointees has serious consequences for both governance and regime stability.

Some theoretical perspectives suggest that the regime would prefer loyalists, whose fealty could be assured. Meanwhile other perspectives suggest that the regime should select for competent governors who have the skills necessary for achieving key political tasks. Using new data on the career backgrounds of Russian governors, I find that neither perspective is fully accurate. The Kremlin has appointed and continues to

appoint a mix of loyalists and regional insiders. And contrary to narratives about extreme personalism in Russia, the share of appointees with personal ties to Putin and his inner circle has actually been quite low. Indeed, the share of regional leaders with personal ties to the top leadership in contemporary Russia is lower than in China or the Soviet Union (Willerton 1992, Shih et al 2012).

Why were clientelist appointments of regional officials more common in these regimes than in modern Russia? More research is needed on this question, but it seems likely that the presence of multi-party elections plays some role. Russia's leadership must find ways to dominate semi-competitive elections, and it outsources much of this task to regional officials (Reuter and Robertson 2012, Golosov 2011). Therefore, the regime cannot afford to only appoint loyalists, because such governors lack the political ties and information that are necessary for effective electoral mobilization. In this way the hybrid appointment strategy pursued by Russia's leaders mirrors the hybrid nature of Russia's regime, which contains elements of electoral autocracy, personalism, and party-based competition.

This paper also considers the conditions under which the regime pursues a given appointment strategy. After all, the regime often appoints governors with ties to the region, but it also sometimes appoints loyalists who owe their careers to Putin. When is one type of appointee chosen over the other? Contrary to some existing arguments, I do not find that loyalists are more likely to be appointed when the regime is weak, at least at the national level. Appointment patterns do not appear correlated with Putin's popularity. However, I do find that appointments strategies vary according to regional factors. The Kremlin is more likely to appoint loyalists in populous regions. In these regions,

rebellion by subordinates would be particularly problematic for the Kremlin. Thus, in some politically important settings, the Kremlin appears to sacrifice political competence for fealty.

The Kremlin is also more likely to appoint loyalists in regions where United Russia is doing poorly. The Kremlin turns to loyalists when insiders fail to mobilize votes. The main reason that the Kremlin might prefer insiders is because they are ostensibly better at achieving key political tasks. If they are unable to achieve those tasks, then there is no reason not to appoint a loyalist.

In the long-run, however, this strategy seems counterproductive. It has been shown that United Russia performs better in regions where the sitting governor has strong ties to the region (Reuter 2013). If the number of competent, insider governors continues to shrink in Russia, either through attrition or deliberate strategy, United Russia's electoral performance could become caught in a death spiral.

The findings in this paper shed new light on appointment dynamics in Putin's Russia but much work remains. In particular, more work is needed on other categories of appointment criteria. I have focused on the tradeoff between political competence and political loyalty, because this balance is fundamental to regime stability and has been the focus of considerable theoretical debate. But these political factors are clearly not the only criteria that regime leaders use when evaluating regional officials. More research is needed on how the Kremlin weighs factors such as economic competence, ethnicity, and professional preparedness.

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