RUSSIA’S ASYMMETRIC FEDERATION:

Are all Differences Alike?

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Executive summary

This paper investigates the relationship between provincial heterogeneity and bargaining cohesion in the creation of federal policy in Russia since 1993. It explores whether provinces with common interests have cooperated to achieve common goals, and whether this cooperation has helped shape new federal institutions in Russia. The sections are organized around three distinct questions: (1) What potential cleavages among provinces might sort them into effective bargaining blocs? (2) When will commonality of interests provide a basis for collective bargaining among provinces? (3) When will inter-regional coordination motivate provincial elites to institutionalize it in political or governmental structures – like political parties – that may, over time, acquire new and broader agendas? The paper finds that while many potential regional blocs can be recognized, few have become mobilized during the first decade of post-Communist rule. The paper attributes this outcome to the pervasiveness of cross-cutting cleavages, leaving regional leaders vulnerable to divide-and-rule tactics by the center. It concludes with a consideration of the future role of federal asymmetries in Russia’s democratic consolidation.
Introduction: heterogeneity and coalitions*

No federal system is perfectly homogeneous.¹ But why should we care about heterogeneity? And what types of heterogeneity should we care about?

This paper investigates the relationship between provincial heterogeneity and bargaining cohesion in the creation of federal policy in Russia since 1993.² To be more specific, it explores whether provinces with common interests have cooperated to achieve common goals, and whether this cooperation in turn has played a role in shaping new federal institutions in Russia.

The Russian federation – the world’s largest by territory – represents a highly fragmented political space, comprising 89 territorial subdivisions, over 100 ethnic groups, and thousands of local governmental bodies. These subnational entities differ widely in size, resource endowment, and historical legacies.

Under Soviet rule, interactions among subnational entities were channeled through and mediated by the highly centralized Communist Party. While regional elites could form alliances within the Central Committee to influence the allocation of investment funds or, more radically, to select a new General Secretary, the scope for such regional coalition-building was limited.³

Since the Soviet collapse, however, the federal government has been engaged in the protracted task of renegotiating the scope of the new Russian state. In this new climate of institutional transformation, a central question has been the division of power and authority between the federal and

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¹ I distinguish in this paper between “heterogeneity” and “symmetry.” The former, to which I refer here, addresses the differences in size, interests, resources, population, etc among territorial units comprising a federal system. “Symmetry” on the other hand, refers to the identical treatment of federal sub-units by federal authorities and in federal law. In the concluding section of this paper, I discuss the connection between heterogeneity and asymmetry, as mediated through federal institutions discussed below.

² In this paper I use “province” and “region” and occasionally “territory” interchangeably. I mean by them the highest level of sub-national units within the state (hence, in Russia, the 89 “subjects” of the Russian federation).

³ Since the composition of the Central Committee was not determined ex officio, it included not only regional “prefects” (i.e., obkom first secretaries) but also heads of powerful ministries, social organizations, etc. It was not, in other words, an institution of regional representation, though it was as close as the CPSU came to having one.
regional governments. A key determinant in answering this question has been the nature of central-regional bargaining: has the federal government been dealing with regional leaders individually and separately, or with groups of regional leaders acting collectively?

The difference between individual and collective bargaining is as significant for constitutional conflicts as it is for labor conflicts. When provincial leaders present a unified collective bargaining front, they have greater leverage over both federal officials and other “non-unionized” provincial representatives. If federal officials can disrupt inter-provincial coordination, on the other hand, they make it possible to coopt only the most powerful provincial leaders without offering concessions to lesser partners (Solnick 1996; Treisman 1999).

We should expect to see collective bargaining among those provincial leaders who share common interests with respect to federal policy and institutions. Heterogeneity among provinces thus becomes a critical factor in creating potential bargaining blocs: cleavages that divide provinces into diverse groups simultaneously sort provinces into groups that share traits. But will commonality of interests always provide the basis for collective bargaining among provinces? Are some common interests more salient than others for producing inter-provincial collaboration and coordination? When will such coordination be significant enough to motivate provincial elites to institutionalize it through the creation of political or governmental structures – like political parties – that may, over time, acquire new and broader agendas?

In this paper I treat these as essentially empirical questions, and I begin to lay out a strategy for answering them. The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section I offer a catalogue of potential cleavages that could create provincial groups with shared policy agendas. I examine five types of cleavages – constitutional, geographic, socio-economic, network and trans-regional – and consider the nature of the shared policy agenda. Next, I discuss several examples of inter-provincial collective action – success and failures – as illustrated by specific policy questions decided by the territorial chamber of the Russian parliament (the Federation Council). In the final section, I consider the role of institutions in fostering and sustaining interregional coordination. I pay particular attention in this final section to the
importance of regional cleavages to the emergence of a stable and competitive party system, thus far maddeningly elusive in the Russian transition.

**Common interests: potential bargaining groups**

Classic Olsonian collective action theory examines a variety of factors that can convert a “latent” group into one capable of collective action: small size, selective benefits, constructive asymmetry (i.e., well-endowed group members able to bear costs to provide services that other group members can enjoy by “free-riding”), and effective sanctions (Hardin 1982; Olson 1965; Sandler 1992). In addition, political leaders or entrepreneurs may play important roles in catalyzing collective action, when structural incentives are in place.

Theories of collective action are vague, however, on what constitutes a “group” in the first place, latent or otherwise. For the purposes of this discussion, I will consider groups that share at least some common interests deriving from specific common traits. While the level of analysis here is that of the province, in reality I am exploring the potential for common ground and collective action among provincial elites, or more specifically the chief executives (governors and presidents) of the 89 subjects of the Russian federation. In the final part of this section, I will also address whether a different level of analysis may be more appropriate.

**Constitutional alignments**

The Soviet system was based upon a multi-tiered federal structure. At the top of this hierarchy were the 15 Union Republics, like Ukraine, Kazakhstan or the Russian Federation (RSFSR). Each of these 15 republics became independent after 1991. The Union Republics were themselves composed of some 20 autonomous republics and 120 territorial-administrative oblasts or krais. Each autonomous republic was the designated homeland of one ethnic group (or occasionally a cluster of nationalities).

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4 Hardin (1995) addresses this problem. The broader question of group identification has, of course, inspired a vast literature.
While these autonomous republics were subordinate to the Union Republics and lacked the right to secede (which the Union Republics had, at least on paper), they did have certain privileges in the area of cultural autonomy and home rule. Eighteen autonomous oblasts or okrugs, each subordinate to an oblast or autonomous republic, constituted a third tier of ethnic homelands.

In June 1990, the Russian Federation’s newly elected legislature followed the lead of the Caucasian and Baltic republics and declared Russia to be “sovereign.” The most important implication of this declaration was that Russia’s laws were to take precedence over Soviet laws, and that Russia was to control the disposition of natural resources on her territory.

This action was quickly mimicked by the 16 autonomous republics within the borders of the Russian Federation, eager to seize the opportunity to gain greater control over their own affairs. Yeltsin encouraged them, reluctant to provide Gorbachev with any precedent for recentralization; in August 1990, he famously told the leaders of the republics to “take as much autonomy as you can swallow.”5 By October of 1990, eleven of these sixteen republics had passed their own sovereignty declarations, and by the beginning of 1991 all had followed suit.

While this parade of sovereignties did not represent a real bid for independence by the autonomous republics – in the context of the Soviet endgame, their declarations amounted to a bid for elevated status within the new federation Gorbachev was seeking to construct rather than exit from the Soviet system altogether (Filippov and Shvetsova 1999) – the turn of events left Yeltsin little opportunity to reconstruct the territorial divisions within Russia. In March 1992 he reconfirmed the status quo by signing a series of separate “federation treaties” – with the 20 autonomous republics (16 from the Soviet system plus 4 “upgraded” autonomous oblasts), the 10 autonomous okrugs and oblasts, and the 58 remaining oblasts, krais and federal cities (See Figure 1).

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The federation treaties allowed for important distinctions in the status of the republics and oblasts/krais, including greater control by the former over natural resources and internal governance. Republican leaders, therefore, had strong common interests in preserving the trappings of “sovereignty” won during the 1990-92 period. Furthermore, the clarity and immutability of the constitutional distinction between republics and non-republics greatly facilitated collective action since it defined a small group of leaders with a clear common stake in preserving the selective benefits assigned to “republics” within the new federal system (Solnick 1996).

The position of the autonomous okrugs (and Jewish autonomous oblast) was more ambiguous. While they gained recognition as subjects of the federation in their own right, eight of ten were also subordinate to other territorial units. Thus, while they also faced incentives to preserve their distinct
identities, they lacked the complete independence enjoyed by republics to band together in constitutional negotiations.6

While the 1993 Constitution ultimately declared all federation subjects to be equal, the preservation of distinctions between the republics, autonomous okrugs and oblasts/krais in that document left intact the formal hierarchical structure inherited from the Soviet period. Embedded in that structure was a well-defined small group of provinces well-equipped for collective action.

**Geographic alignments**

Provincial interests are often tied to their physical characteristics, including their location relative to other provinces in the federation. There are a number of possible alignments deriving from geography:

*Macroregions and “sectional” blocs:* Soviet economic planners recognized eleven “economic zones” used for regional planning purposes, a distinction preserved by Russian economic planners.7 These divisions served as the rough blueprint for inter-regional associations, created at the end of the Soviet period to help coordinate inter-regional trade in the wake of the precipitous demise of Gosplan.8 Eight inter-regional associations were formed in this period, containing from 8 to 19 member provinces

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6 Daniel Treisman (1997) has argued that republics and autonomous oblasts and okrugs (including those “upgraded” in 1992) exhibited different degrees of separatist activism between 1990–1994, implying that leaders of units with different status had different aspirations toward sovereignty, even after controlling for ethnic composition. Such a finding would tend to diminish the likelihood of collaboration between republics and okrugs in dealings with the federal center. However, Treisman’s separatism index is ill-suited to the task at hand, since it penalizes okrugs for failing to take steps – like a declaration of sovereignty – that would have made little sense for administrative units that were already doubly subordinated. In addition, Treisman’s index is based upon media reports of legal-separatist activity. This measure is highly problematic in the case of the sparsely populated and poorly covered okrugs and autonomous oblasts, yet Treisman’s analysis assigns equal evidentiary weight to both observed and unobserved events.

7 These zones (and the number of constituent territories) were the North (6), Northwest (5, including Kaliningrad), Central (13), Volgo-Vyatsk (5), Central Black Earth (5), North Caucasus (9, excluding Chechnya), Povolga (8), Urals (8), Western Siberia (9), Eastern Siberia (10), and the Far East (10). Among other uses, Goskomstat utilizes this division into economic zones to define the price deflators and per capita income norms used in calculating annual equalization subsidies paid by the center to the regions.

8 On the origins of these associations see Woodruff (1999, p. 75).
and subsuming all sub-units of the federation. Eight provinces belong to more than one interregional association. The associations are shown in Figure 2.

The inter-regional associations represent natural catalysts for “sectional” blocs – i.e., contiguous provinces sharing common political interests and therefore acting as a single political unit. However, the heterogeneity within regional associations can powerfully undermine the capacity of these blocs to act coherently and effectively. Given the fragmentation of Russia’s political and economic space, contiguous regions may often exhibit wide variation in socio-economic characteristics, and therefore political objectives. I address these cross-cutting cleavages later in this section, and the political role of the inter-regional associations later in this paper.

9 The associations (and number of members) are: “Northwest” (12), “North Caucasus” (10), “Central Russia” (13), “Greater Urals” (8), “Black Earth” (9), “Siberian Accord” (19), Greater Volga” (11), and “Far East” (13).

10 On sectionalism see the classic text by Key (1964). Key defined sectionalism as the correlation of geography (i.e., spatial location) and political interests. Where sectional cleavages are strong, political interests within regions or “sections” (defined accordingly) are fairly homogeneous.

11 For a clear account of the tensions within the largest bloc, the Siberian Accord, in the early stages of its activity, see Hughes (1994). See also Novikov (1997), who argues that the regional communities embodied by the inter-regional associations lack any resonance in “aspatial” Russian culture.
**Frontier Regions:** Geography can lump regions together even when they are not contiguous. One example is the case of frontier regions – i.e., regions containing international borders. In Russia, we might consider separately those regions bordering on non-CIS countries, since they may share common interests in issues of trans-border migration, tariffs, and trade.\textsuperscript{12} Under such a definition, more than a dozen provinces in the Far Eastern, Siberian and European parts of Russia might be expected to coordinate on border issues, and these regions are highlighted in Figure 3.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} The distinction of CIS and non-CIS borders is presented here merely as a hypothesis, suggested by the existence of customs unions and/or more extensive relational contracting (i.e., pre-existing supplier and distributor networks) across the borders with Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine.

\textsuperscript{13} One prominent policy question that affected border provinces but which (strikingly) did not catalyze collective action was the demarcation of the Russian border with China in the early 1990s.
The common interests shared by frontier regions has led to some coordination in other federal systems. In Europe, for instance, an “Association of European Border Regions” brings together representatives from 140 frontier provinces ranging from Scandinavia to Sicily.\textsuperscript{14} While no similar association exists in Russia (nor are any Russian regions represented in the European Border Regions Association), the potential for coordinated activity in areas of common interests nevertheless exists.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Shared Geo-Resources:} Regions that share significant natural resources may also find common ground for coordinated political activity. Regions sharing the Volga or Don rivers, bordering Lake Baikal, or sharing the Ural mountains (to name a few possible examples) may have special resource management concerns that are narrower than macroregional concerns; so, too, may regions containing large tracts of forest, desert, or taiga.\textsuperscript{16} Since the set of regions affected is likely to be small, such alignments may offer greater potential for sustained collective action among a smaller set of regions. At the same time, the range of issues for which such coordination may be sustained is likely to be quite narrow. I will not consider this category further in this paper.

\textit{Socio-economic Alignments}

Demographic characteristics of provinces can introduce powerful cleavages into the federal polity. For example, provinces with large populations may have different interests – and in a democratic polity, different bargaining power – than sparsely populated provinces. The 15 largest regions contain over 43\% of the population of the Russian federation, while the 15 smallest contain under 2\%.\textsuperscript{17}

Alternatively, Muslim republics constitute a potentially cohesive alignment within the federation. It is important to note, however, that even within nominally Muslim territories (e.g., Tatarstan, 

\textsuperscript{14} The ABRE has a web site describing the activities of the organization and its links to EU and EC programs to foster trans-border cooperation: http://www.aebr-ageg.de/index.htm.

\textsuperscript{15} In the early American republic, for instance, the western “frontier” territories constituted a pivotal interest group.

\textsuperscript{16} Again, the European community offers an example, with its association of Alpine regions.

\textsuperscript{17} The five largest provinces – Moscow city, Moscow oblast, St. Petersburg, Krasnodar krai, and Sverdlovsk oblast – by themselves account for over 20\% of the total.
Bashkortostan, Dagestan), non-Muslim communities still comprise significant segments of the population. Collective action among co-religionists might more accurately be considered a trans-provincial cleavage, linking Muslim republics with Muslim communities in other provinces.

Similarly, we might consider the urban-rural cleavage as a potential source of provincial alignments, since socio-economic characteristics such as education, industrialization and mobility tend to be aligned along this dimension. However, the political space within provinces is often fragmented on urban-rural lines and therefore urban and rural interests might be more likely to organize trans-regionally than via regional alliances.18

More significant than demographic characteristics are likely to be economic cleavages within the federation. There have been numerous attempts to create a typology of regions based on economic endowments, conditions or performance (Ekspert-Geografiia 1999; Expert Institute 1996; Lavrov et al. 1999; MFK Rennaissance 1998; Nefedova and Treivish 1994; Sapir 1997; Segbers and De Spiegeleire 1995). For the purposes of this discussion, I will highlight some of the schemes that may be most relevant to stimulating coordination among regional leaders.

“Rich” and “Poor” regions:” There has been much confusion and considerable debate over how to judge which regions are genuinely well-endowed with economic resources, and which are merely privileged by federal tax and fiscal policies or plagued by poor regional management. At a basic level, however, the notion remains appealing that some regions are simply “richer” than others due to structural factors like resource endowment or industrial profile. Figure 4, for instance, shows those regions having the highest and lowest per capita incomes measured as a percentage of the minimum subsistence level. A more relevant measure for judging the likelihood of collective action among regions, however, might be the importance of regional tax revenues to the federal budget and of net regional revenues to consolidated government revenues overall (i.e, counting extrabudgetary flows and net of federal expenditures at the

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18 The urban-rural cleavage within provinces emerges clearly from voting patterns over the last decade, as well as from the consistent rivalries between provincial governors and the mayors of the largest cities in the province (McFaul and Petrov 1998).
regional level). Figure 5 and Figure 6 show those regions in the strongest fiscal shape according to these measures. (It is important to note the predominance in the former category of Moscow city, which is alone responsible for over 30% of federal budget revenues.)

Figure 4: Regions with the highest and lowest per capita incomes as a ratio of minimum subsistence levels, 1997*

Figure 5: 
Regions contributing the greatest share of the Federal budget, 1998* 

*Source: Zubarevich and Trevish 1999
Dominant industries: Certain regions are strongly aligned with particular industrial sectors and we might therefore expect to see regional and sectoral interests coalesce to support inter-regional coordination. One particular window for such coordination occurred in 1992-94, when sectoral lobbies fought to secure their shares of state subsidies. The degree of linkage between ministerial and regional lobbies during this period – and hence the degree to which distributional struggles among sectors stimulated regional coordination – remains only partly understood.19

19 The battle over subsidies is generally portrayed as a showdown between Deputy Prime Minister Soskovets, representing industrialists, and Deputy Prime Minister Chubais, representing financiers seeking to end soft budget constraints. The “industrialist” camp was more heterogeneous, however, as the agrarian, military-industrial, oil-gas,
As one example of an industrial sector with a powerful hold over provincial interest, consider the military-industrial complex (VPK). Enterprises associated with the VPK employ vast numbers of workers, and enterprises seeking to shift production to non-military demand require large investments for conversion. Thus, VPK enterprises are major supplicants for government support – either for state orders for continued military production, or to facilitate investment for defense conversion. Estimating the regions most strongly associated with the VPK is a non-trivial exercise, but Figure 7 shows those regions with the greatest dependence on the VPK (as measured by the size of the workforce employed in it) as of 1985. Similarly, regions heavily dependent on agriculture, or oil and gas production might emerge as cohesive blocs, at least for a limited number of issues; Figure 8 shows several provinces whose industrial output is concentrated in a single sector.
Networks and Regional Alliances

The potential sectoral alignments discussed above are hypothesized to derive from a congruence of interests among regional actors based on shared economic characteristics. However, regional elites may form alliances based more directly on the business networks central to different economic sectors.

In recent years, some Russian provinces have accumulated significant ownership stakes in industrial enterprises holding dominant positions in the province. From 1992-1996, these stakes originated with the transfer of federal property shares to provincial administrations’ control in connection
with the signing of bilateral treaties and their associated inter-governmental agreements.\textsuperscript{20} Since 1996, many regions have been adding additional shares in key enterprises either through bankruptcy proceedings or in lieu of payment of regional taxes.

As a consequence, in key industries, the dominant economic actors are becoming more tightly integrated with provincial administrations. Governmental networks are therefore resembling business networks, at least in some selected (and highly concentrated) industrial sectors.\textsuperscript{21} While a comprehensive picture of regional shareholding in industrial enterprises is beyond the scope of this paper, a quick look at some high-profile sectors hints at the scale of the phenomenon.

In the automotive sector, for instance, six firms account for most output on the national market: GAZ (Nizhnii Novgorod, cars and trucks), AvtoVAZ (Samara, cars), PAZ (Nizhnii Novgorod, buses), UAZ (Ulianovsk, light trucks), KamAZ (Tatarstan, trucks), and ZIL (Moscow, trucks).\textsuperscript{22} At the end of 1997, AvtoVAZ was the single largest tax delinquent in Russia, owing almost $1.5 billion in tax arrears to federal and regional governments. As collateral against these arrears, AvtoVAZ surrendered 51% of its voting stock to government hands (federal and regional; current disposition of these shares is unclear\textsuperscript{23}). In Tatarstan, the republic’s government assumed KamAZ’s debts in return for a controlling stake in the company (43% as of December 1997). In Moscow, the city government owns a controlling stake of ZIL (49%) and has been active in restructuring the company and expanding its distribution network to other

\textsuperscript{20} More than half the subjects of the Russian federation are currently signatories to bilateral treaties (\textit{dogovory}) with the federal center. Many of these treaties were preceded or accompanied by inter-governmental agreements (\textit{soglasheniia}) transferring federal property to provincial control.

\textsuperscript{21} This development might be seen as an extension of the coordination between regional political and economic elites observed by Stoner-Weiss in successful cases of regional governance (Stoner-Weiss 1997).

\textsuperscript{22} On the Russian auto sector see Fromkin (1997).

\textsuperscript{23} According to \textit{Vedomosti} (27 September 1999), the total tax debt of AvtoVAZ to all levels is Rbls 4.5 billion. According to \textit{Samarskoe obozrenie} (August 1999, no. 31), Avtovaz’s debt to the regional administration is Rbls 1.4 billion. If these figures are accurate, the regional share of tax debts is approximately 35%, and therefore we might hazard a guess that between 15% and 20% of Avtovaz shares are held in collateral against regional tax arrears. However, \textit{Kommersant Daily} on 1 June 1999 (p. 7) reported that AvtoVAZ’s debts approached Rbls 12 billion, and that the stock issued as collateral carried a face value of Rbls 16 billion. This larger estimate may include debts to extrabudgetary funds; in that case, the regional administration’s share of AvtoVAZ stock may be closer to 5% (i.e, 10% of 50%). It is unclear, however, who exercises the proxy for these shares under the 10-year restructuring plan.
regions. In Nizhnii Novgorod, capital expansion of PAZ’s production lines was financed by Nizhnii’s Eurobond issue, and three representatives of the provincial administration sit on the 19 member board of GAZ.

The situation in the automobile sector is not unique, though anecdotal evidence must support that claim for other sectors. In oil, Bashkortostan and Tatarstan own controlling shares in their respective “state” oil companies, Bashneft (67%) and Tatneft (30%). In Orenburg, regional officials have not gained direct control of Onaco, the regional oil company, but have successfully blocked several takeover and merger attempts by outside firms. In metallurgy, giant Norilsk Nickel transferred full ownership of its Krasnoyarsk non-ferrous processing plant, a platinum, gold and silver producer, to the Krasnoyarsk provincial government in payment of tax debts. In the financial sector, several governors in the wake of the 1998 banking crisis moved to take control of regional banks, demanding ownership stakes in return for allowing the banks to continue handling provincial funds.24

As more provincial administrations collect shares in regional enterprises, they are likely to be torn between impulses to restructure enterprises, and fear of any restructuring that would make workers (voters) redundant. Similarly, they are likely to face cross-pressures to join provincial coalitions. On the one hand, political alliances may begin to follow business alliances, branching out as industrial sectors integrate vertically or horizontally. On the other hand, in competitive industries, business rivalries may create obstacles to the common fronts that might otherwise emerge among provinces with similar industrial profiles. In other words, this business-government integration could lead to the political equivalent of zaibatsu, or to a less attractive model of subnational mercantilism.

Trans-regional alliances

As noted above, certain cleavages with territorial dimensions are more accurately thought of as trans-provincial. Ethnic or religious cleavages, for instance, are likely to cut across provincial borders,

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potentially undermining provincial administrations rather than legitimizing them. The volatile issue of Tatar and Bashkir minority communities in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, for instance, has checked the impulse of either titular republican government to rely too heavily on ethnic mobilization as a central mobilizing theme. Conversely, the backlash against Islamic “fundamentalists” in the wake of the 1999 apartment bombings in Moscow has been diffused across the federation, rather than concentrated against predominantly Muslim republics.

Other sorts of alliances and networks may serve to diminish the monopoly held by provincial administrations over the organization and articulation of regional interests. Two organizations in Russia unite mayors: the Russian Union of Cities, and the newer (June 1998) Congress of Municipalities. The federal government has sought to use these bodies as a counterweight against the power of provincial governors (Smirnyagin 1999). As a consequence, governors in several regions have sought to curtail the powers of local governments, or to appoint mayors directly. In Komi and Udmurtia, for instance, laws that would have subordinated local administrations to the provincial level were overturned by federal courts.\(^25\) The concerted attempts to subordinate local governments in other regions is a sign of the concern on the part of governors that their monopoly over territorial representation of interests is not absolute.

**Inter-regional collective action: potential or real?**

The preceding discussion outlined a variety of cleavages that could produce *latent* regional alliances – i.e., groups of provinces with sufficient commonality of interests to be able to benefit from collective action provided obstacles to such coordination could be overcome. In classical collective action theory, the failure of a latent group to act collectively (or, in Olson’s terms, failure to become

\(^{25}\) The Komi law would have allowed voters to select mayors only from candidates nominated by the head of the Komi government. That law was overturned by the Russian Supreme Court in December 1998. The Udmurtia law, passed in April 1996, would have abolished local elections altogether, making mayors and district heads appointed posts. In January 1997, the Russian Constitutional Court declared the law unconstitutional, but the Udmurt government announced that it would interpret the Court’s decision in its favor and continue to implement the law (*Kommersant Daily*, 7 February 1997). The Udmurt government did not back down until 11 March 1997, after Yeltsin issued a second Presidential decree ordering it to comply with the Court ruling.
“privileged”) generally results from a divergence between the distribution of organizing costs and the
distribution of the benefits of organization (Olson 1965). In this section I consider a series of specific
episodes of policy-making to probe whether signs of interregional coordination are evident. If there is
evidence of inter-regional coordination, which alignments are most effective at organizing such
collaboration; if evidence is lacking, how can we explain this outcome?

The episodes described below are taken primarily from bills debated by the Federation Council –
the upper house of the Russian legislature – in which all regional executives are represented \textit{ex officio} (so
too are the leaders of the regional legislatures). Unfortunately, with very few exceptions, voting records
of Federation Council sessions are not preserved (other than final vote tallies), so it is impossible to
directly examine patterns of inter-regional cooperation as reflected in voting patterns.\footnote{Since January 1996, only six roll-call votes have been taken (Petrov 1999).} It is possible,
however, to examine transcripts of Federation Council debates, and together with media reports, these do
shed some light on inter-regional dynamics.

\textit{Law on the Delineation of Federal and Provincial Responsibilities:} The 1993 Russian
constitution defines a broad swath of policy areas as falling under the joint jurisdiction of federal and
provincial governments (Art. 72). According to the constitution, however (Art. 76), the delineation of
responsibility over these policy areas is to be spelled out by federal legislation. Beginning in 1994, the
State Duma made a series of attempts to formulate and pass such a law, but it encountered resistance from
the Federation Council. Instead, some prominent provincial leaders – especially in such republics as
Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha – preferred to resolve the question of overlapping jurisdictions
through the negotiation of bilateral treaties,\footnote{According to Article 11 of the constitution, delineation of powers among federal and regional institutions is to be defined “by this constitution, and the Federation and other treaties (dogovory)...” [emphasis added].} many of which violated other aspects of the constitution (Guboglo 1997; Stoner-Weiss 1999).
On 25 April 1997, the Duma passed a new version of this law on the delineation of powers, which the Federation Council (FC) considered at its session on 14 May. In presenting the law, the Chairman of the FC committee on federation policy, Novosibirsk regional legislature speaker Anatolii Sychev, noted that the new Duma bill set out to address the confusion created by the 26 bilateral treaties already signed by the federal government and regional authorities. According to Sychev, the chief objective of the law was no longer to establish a definitive division of responsibilities across policy areas for the entire federation, but simply to bring some order to the process of negotiating and signing these bilateral deals.

The new law had two controversial elements: 1) New treaties would need to be ratified by both the federal and regional parliaments (until then they were negotiated exclusively within the federal and provincial executive branches); and 2) Existing treaties would need to be brought into compliance with the new law – and with the federal constitution – within six months. Both aspects of the law addressed grievances likely felt by Sychev himself: Novosibirsk had yet to sign its own treaty with the center, and therefore could only envy the set of extra-constitutional privileges secured by republics like Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Furthermore, as head of the regional legislature, Sychev would play no role in the negotiation of any potential treaty, unless the new law took effect.

Sychev reported that his committee found some problems with the law, particularly its suggestion that constitutional amendments were required to complement the new procedure on treaties. But he noted that seven of eight members of his committee felt the law should be sent back to the reconciliation committee (i.e., a joint Duma-FC, government working group) for reworking, and he appealed to the “common sense” of the FC deputies to “make the future a little bit better” by advancing toward some resolution of the procedural morass. The lone dissenter on Sychev’s committee, who remained silent during the debate, was Tatarstan President Mintimir Shaimiev; Shaimiev wanted the law killed outright.

The FC voted to send the law back to the Duma by 98 to 23. On 14 November 1997, the Duma passed a new version of the law, which made a few concessions to the position of the treaty-holding

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provinces. Legislative approval of the laws was still required, but the Duma was now excluded at the federal level (i.e., only the FC would consider new treaties). And the retroactive requirement that existing treaties be made consistent with the new law was also preserved, though the deadline was lengthened to a year. The new law arrived in the FC on 3 December.29

The revised law was introduced by Vitalii Vishniakov, deputy chair of the FC committee on federation affairs. Vishniakov – the speaker of the oblast legislature in Chita, another province lacking a bilateral treaty with the center –described the changes in the law. He reported that eight of twelve committee members had argued in favor of adopting the law, “but unanimity was reached only on the necessity of bringing the bill before the full chamber.” Nevertheless, he announced, the committee had decided to recommend the adoption of the bill, since the Duma had addressed many of the FC’s concerns.

This triggered a tense exchange between Vishniakov and Murtaza Rakhimov, the president of Bashkortostan:

Rakhimov: I was present at the committee meeting that Valentin Evgen’evich Vishniakov was speaking of. No decision was taken there. When they managed to approve the law, I can’t figure out. This is such a significant law, we must deal with it responsibly. And I repeat, I was at the meeting of the committee on federation affairs yesterday and there weren’t more than five people there, five Federation Council members. Where did Vitalii Evgen’evich get such figures?

Vishniakov: Respected members of the Federation Council. It is true that at yesterday’s meeting we lacked a quorum, so we continued the discussion today. Council member Rakhimov was not there today. Everything I said is in complete agreement with the facts. (p. 29)

The rest of the debate continued along these contentious lines, prompting FC Chaiman Egor Stroev to ultimately warn speakers against “the use of harsh expressions toward each other” (p. 35). Speakers from the republics sought to rally provincial leaders around the flag of federalism, portraying the bill as unwarranted meddling in the prerogatives of federal subjects large and small. Sergei Sobyanin, a member of the committee on constitutional law from Khanti-Mansi, argued that the law was

29 Sovet Federatsii Federalnogo Sobraniia, Biulleten’ No. 1 (135), 3 December 1997, pp. 28-35. All quotes in this section are taken from this transcript, at the pages indicated.
unconstitutional since it conferred extra-constitutional powers on the FC that interfered with presidential prerogatives to conclude treaties with federation subjects. He was supported by Aslan Dzharimov, president of Adygea, who also called for the FC to reject the law. Interestingly, neither Adygea nor Khanti-Mansi had negotiated treaties with the federal center.

Also opposing the law was Sverdlovsk regional legislature speaker Aleksandr Shaposhnikov, who also argued (somewhat self-defeatingly) that the legislative branch had no role in the constitutionally sanctioned process of bilateral treaty negotiation. He urged the FC “not to rush into adopting this law.”

Sverdlovsk oblast, in January 1996, had become one of the first oblasts to sign a bilateral treaty with the center.

The strongest arguments against the law came, not surprisingly, from Bashkortostan and Tatarstan. Rakhimov noted that the law addressed issues that were “very important to our state (gosudarstvo)” and promptly attacked it as an attempt to “replace real federalism with overt unitarism” (p. 32). He was particularly impassioned in his attack on the law’s provision to bring existing treaties into conformity with constitutional norms: “As if the authors didn’t know the principle accepted across the democratic world that laws cannot have retroactive force” (p. 33).

Tatarstan president Shaimiev was even more damning: “Basically, nobody needs this law” (p. 33). He attacked the bill’s sponsor in the Duma, Vladimir Lysenko, who had just addressed the chamber in defense of the bill:

It’s difficult to blame him [Lysenko], because he needs his job in the State Duma. When his term is almost expiring, he has to make proposals, so he can then claim: “I proposed these. These are my laws that have been adopted.” There is no concern about federal structure of the Russian Federation here. And let’s not have any “double standard” either. Today you [to Lysenko] said that you approve of continuing the process of signing bilateral treaties. But here is what you said during the session of the reconciliation committee for the bill (let me read from the stenogram): “We lost these six months with this reconciliation committee and we now have eight more treaties signed by federation subjects that will further unravel the unitary legal and constitutional space of the Russian Federation...” and so forth. These are your words! (p. 33).

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30 This prompted an aside from Stroev: “Four years isn’t rushing.” (p. 31).
Shaimiev concluded with the extravagant claim that this “populist” attempt to undermine the rights of federation subjects would even prevent President Yeltsin from concluding a treaty with the Republic of Chechnya, since such a treaty could not enter into force without a protracted process of FC approval.

Shaimiev’s outburst prompted an equally ardent supporter of the bill, Vladimir oblast governor Nikolai Vinogradov, to rise to its defense. In so doing, he clearly revealed the limits of effective legislative coordination encompassing both the “have” and “have-nots” in the federation. Vinogradov argued that the distribution of federal privileges was essentially as zero-sum game: “Within the boundaries of any unitary fiscal-economic space, any advantage given to one federation subject necessarily violates the rights of others.” He argued that the new law “gives all members of the FC the opportunity to evaluate the preparedness of [new agreements] and offer their response to them.” He appealed to members to approve the bill: “Nobody is taking away the rights of anybody. In my opinion, it will create rules of the game according to which we can all start to work.” Without it, he claimed, the federation ran the risk of turning into a “patchwork quilt” of incompatible treaties (p. 34).

Vinogradov, a Communist, was supported by Yuri Lodkin, the Communist governor of Bryansk oblast. Curiously, although Bryansk had negotiated a bilateral treaty with the center in July 1997, Lodkin argued that a “single set of rules” should apply to all federation subjects. He accused anyone advocating outright rejection of the law (i.e., Shaimiev) of harboring “separatist tendencies.”

Ultimately, 45 FC members voted against the law, but only 73 voted in favor of it. Given the high absenteeism rate for the vote, the 41% vote in support was insufficient to pass the law. FC members decided instead to send the law back to the Duma yet again, rejecting Shaimiev’s appeal to kill it once and for all.

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31 Lodkin, who was fired from the governor’s office by Yeltsin in 1993, regained power in a December 1996 election. It is possible, therefore, that much of the work on negotiating the Bryansk treaty was done by his predecessor. In any event, Bryansk, one of the poorest Russian regions, is likely to harbor resentment toward the economic benefits enjoyed by Tatarstan and Bashkortostan to a degree unlikely to be mitigated by a political document.
The 1997 debate highlights the difficulty of assembling a robust coalition of regions within the legislature. While Shaimiev and Rakhimov attempted to portray the law as an attack on federalism, most other governors saw it (accurately) as an attempt to rein in the privileges won in the early stages of federal negotiations by a handful of strong republics – privileges that most of the other provinces were, in effect, paying for. Interestingly, however, the cleavage dividing republics from oblasts and krais seemed to remain salient in this debate, as leaders of republics without bilateral treaties lined up with Shaimiev (though we cannot know for sure how many voted with him) and at least one oblast with a treaty nevertheless argued against the status quo.

Remarkably, a new version of the Law on Delineation of Powers was passed yet again by the Duma in June 1999, and was passed by the FC and signed by Yeltsin the same month. Only six new treaties were signed in the intervening 18 months, and the treaty-signing process seems to have run out of steam. The final version of the law, as enacted by the president, still requires regional legislatures and the FC to participate in the adoption of any new treaties, though their roles are diminished. And the new law still requires existing treaties to be made to conform to the constitution, but the deadline has been extended to three years.

Forest Code: While the law discussed above directly addressed issues of center-regional relations, federalism and its associated cleavages are salient in many more mundane policy areas. Consider forestry.

In July 1996, the FC took up a revised Forestry Code (Lesnoi kodeks) as passed by the Duma, after a previous attempt to pass a code was vetoed by the president. The bill was introduced by Evgenii Savchenko, governor of Belgorod oblast and chairman of the committee on agrarian policy. Savchenko noted that his committee unanimously supported passage of the Code.33

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32 It was published in Rossiiskaia gazeta 30 June 1999.
Curiously, the first objection to the draft code was raised by Yurii Luzhkov, mayor of Moscow, a territory not known for its reliance on forestry. Luzhkov questioned whether the Code limited the ability of provinces to privatize or lease their forest lands by declaring them to be “state property.” Following this lead, other governors, including Beliakov of Leningrad oblast and Igumnov of Perm questioned whether the new Code was unconstitutional, since it declared Forest Stocks and forestry funds to be an exclusively federal area of competence (contradicting Art. 72 of the constitution). Savichev attempted to argue that shared control over forests could be easily achieved through bilateral treaties between the center and provinces, but the affront to federal sympathies was becoming clear. Though the vote on the bill yielded a result of 57 for and 40 against, the FC lacked the required quorum to pass the measure. Senators voted instead to return the bill to a reconciliation committee for reworking. Surprisingly, representatives of the regions most heavily dependent on wood and paper industries – Karelia, Komi, Arkhangesk, Kirov – played no significant role in the debate.

The bill returned to the Federation Council in revised form on 25 December 1996, after passage by the Duma.34 It was again endorsed by the FC’s committee on agrarian affairs. The revised version continued to declare forests to be “federal property,” though it earmarked 60% of forestry taxes to be allocated to the provincial level.35 This approach to the question of ownership triggered an angry speech by Karelia’s chief executive Viktor Stepanov in which he fumed that the Code would force him to revisit the questions of republican control over forests that had been painstakingly negotiated and agreed to with federal officials. And, he claimed, the Duma was complicit in this unconstitutional land grab:

I read the stenogram of the discussion of the Code by the State Duma. Duma deputies are generally annoyed by the word “federalism.” The thing is, of 450 Duma deputies, half are chosen by parties and half from regions (we proposed, at one time, that just one third would be chosen from party lists). So there aren’t many “federalists” there. Not a single law has passed addressing the rights of subjects of the Federation. And they look at us as if we were the destroyers of Russia. (p. 35)

35 These provisions are in the final Code as adopted on 29 January 1997 (No. 22-FZ, per the GARANT legal database)
Stepanov claimed that since the provinces were responsible for protecting the forests, the subjects of the federation should own them. Following on this theme, Gennadii Igumnov, governor of Perm oblast, objected to the provision of the law allocating 40% of forestry taxes to the federal government.36 He too recommended the law be rejected.

Stepanov’s speech clearly proved compelling to his colleagues, despite the fact that most were from provinces far less dependent on forestry than his. The Forest Code was rejected in a 71 to 53 vote, for the second time, and Stepanov was named to chair yet another reconciliation committee. He never got to perform the job, though, as the Duma overrode the FC veto on 22 January and this time the president signed the law.

The vote on the forest code suggests the possibility of regional leaders constructing, in effect, logrolls along the dimension of federalism. Though ultimately unsuccessful in blocking the law, Karelia’s Stepanov was able to convince many of his colleagues to join him treating the Forestry Code as an important issue in federalism rather than simply resource management. He was thus able to attract the support of far more regional leaders than simply those with stakes in forest management.

Contrasting the two cases above provides qualified support for Remington’s assertion that while distributional issues in the legislature activate partisan cleavages within the Duma, issues of federal jurisdiction and structure can unite the Federation Council against the Duma (Remington 1998). The wrinkle in this argument seems to be that regional leaders do not treat all center-periphery issues alike. Where provincial bosses seek to protect privileges that are unevenly distributed among the provinces according to the whim of the federal center (such as bilateral treaties and agreements), collective action may fail as privileged regions seek to preserve the status quo while under-privileged regions indulge their resentment. On issues that affect all provinces equally, however, common ground may be easier to find.

Judicial Reform: The difficulty of constructing coalitions around issues that affect provinces differently according to the discretion of the center became evident with another draft law debated around

36 In the 1998 budget act, this provision was finally changed to give provinces 100% of the forestry tax.
the same time as the Forest Code. On 4 December 1996, the FC debated a federal constitutional law “On the Judicial System.” Such enabling legislation was required by the 1993 constitution, and the absence of such a law had seriously frustrated efforts to implement legal reforms.

The draft law, among other things, reaffirmed federal control over the judiciary, including the appointment of judges. This was at odds with provisions in several bilateral treaties signed with republics in which the federal government ceded some authority over judicial appointments. Consequently, the bill came under harsh attack from Bashkortostan’s president Rakhimov, who claimed it would create “a judicial system characteristic of a unitary state” (p. 27). He was challenged by Viktor Ozerov, the chairman of the Khabarovsk Krai regional Duma, who warned pointedly that “I would also like to live in the United States under its laws, with each state having its own courts. But we mustn’t forget that, speaking of federalism, there are certain areas of government activity that federal systems must leave as a single entity.” More pointedly still, Moscow oblast governor Tiazhlov declared: “Judges of all levels take an oath that begins, ‘In the name of the Russian Federation.’ I think adopting this law will strengthen the meaning of these words.”

FC Speaker Stroev left little doubt about his own preferences in the vote. To begin the voting, he put the question as follows: “Very well, we stand before a choice: are we for a united Russian state or for chopping it into little pieces. Perhaps we should even have a roll-call vote?” However, confident that the measure would pass, Stroev never followed up the suggestion for a roll call, and watched with annoyance as the bill fell three votes short of the required super-majority. Frustrated, he called for a second vote, reminding the senators that the Duma and Supreme Court had worked on the draft for a full year, and that all the senators’ suggestions had already been considered. Asking his colleagues to “look ahead to tomorrow,” Stroev repeated the vote, and again fell short, this time by two votes. He called an immediate recess.

37 Sovet Federatsii Federalnogo Sobraniia, Biulleten’ No. 1 (114), 4 December 1996, pp. 23-34. As a constitutional law, the measure required a supermajority of three-fourths to pass.
After the break, Stroev continued to try to manufacture two more votes to pass the bill. He tried to maneuver his colleagues into a rare roll-call vote, but to no avail. He sought a secret vote, also to no avail. Finally, Tatarstan president Shaimiev attempted to raise the stakes by suggesting the relevant issue was not whether certain republics would lose the right to appoint their own judges (indeed, he threatened that “Tatarstan will not allow Moscow to appoint our district judges, as if they know what’s best”), but rather why oblasts and krais weren’t fighting to gain control over their own regional courts (p.33). Worried that this line of argument could spin out of control, Stroev closed off debate and shelved the bill.

It did not sit long on the shelf. Just three weeks later, the bill was again before the FC. After a long debate in which attacks on the “legal separatism” of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan came increasingly to dominate the discussion, Stroev engineered a vote to permit the bill to be considered by a written “poll” of all FC members. On the following day, the results of this vote were announced, and the bill on the judicial system finally passed by a vote of 140-18. Almost a year later, Shaimiev was still fuming over the outcome of the vote, complaining to his colleagues: “All subjects of the federation are stripped of their judicial systems; and we voted for it.”

Rakhimov’s and Shaimiev’s bid to rally their colleagues around the flag of federalism failed miserably because the status quo they sought to preserve was one in which they enjoyed an asymmetrical advantage. As noted above, such situations are not highly conducive to the creation of coalitions, as common interests are less likely to be recognized.

**Institutions and collective action**

The previous section suggested, on admittedly slim and selective evidence, that regional collective action may be more likely to emerge among groups of provinces where the objectives of

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39 This procedure, tantamount to absentee voting, has been employed on several occasions in the FC when decisions were sought on controversial bills in the face of low attendance.

40 Soviet Federatsii Federalnogo Sobraniia, *Buletten*’ *No. 1 (135)*, 3 December 1997, p. 33. He made this comment during the debate on the law on Delineation of Responsibilities discussed above. Shaimiev appealed the decision to the Constitutional Court, but the law was not overturned.
coordination do not exacerbate asymmetries within the group. In this final section, I look at three types of institutions that may help overcome obstacles to collective action. Like the dog that didn’t bark, however, these institutions have been noteworthy in the 1990s chiefly for their limited success in coordinating provincial bargaining with the center. Nevertheless, understanding why these promising beginnings yielded so few tangible results is an important first step in understanding what conditions are both necessary and sufficient for durable provincial coordination to emerge.

*Inter-regional associations*

As noted above, macro-regional or “sectional” groups of provinces are linked through the formal institutional mechanism of inter-regional associations. To date, these structures have played a surprisingly small role in national politics. Although several politicians have pointed to the associations as holding the seeds for reorganizing Russian federal space into macro-regions, their chief role to date has been to offer travelling Kremlin officials a forum to announce new directions in regional policy (Klimanov 1999; Zubarevich 1997).41

Primarily, the associations are meant to serve as macro-regional economic lobbies and trade associations. There is some evidence that even in this lesser capacity they are having only limited success. Ingush President Aushev has pointed to the small budgets commanded by the associations in declaring them “useless.” Asked about the North Caucasus Association he added: “During the crisis, all should gather and decide ‘OK, within our association, let’s not raise prices, particularly on bread.’ But this does not happen. There is no real work being done. Why do they even bother meeting? Simply to

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41 One of Vladimir Putin’s first trips as prime minister was to a meeting of the Siberian Accord, on 13 August 1999, where he flattered governors by telling them “the Kremlin is a symbol of the country but the regions are a synonym” (*Izvestiia* 14 August 1999). This was in sharp contrast to Evgenii Primakov’s appearance at the North-West Association’s meetings in February 1999, where he floated the idea of having the Kremlin return to nominating governors to increase their subservience to the Kremlin (*Moscow Times*, 24 February 1999). Almost a year later, Putin chose a meeting of the North-West Association to formally announce his candidacy for the presidency.
look at each other and then in the evening make toasts to friendship and a united Caucasus? But if there were money involved it would be a different matter.”

Even as clearinghouses to promote intra-regional economic cooperation, the associations’ records are spotty. Saratov Governor Dmitri Ayatskov has complained that his Volga association is wasting its opportunity to act as a powerful lobby for the automobile and aviation industries, which are concentrated in the Volga regions: “We need to address these economic issues rather than engaging in the political debates which take up most of our time.”

A review of the activities of the Greater Urals association noted that while it had managed to establish a coordinating council to lobby for pharmaceutical producers, it was failing at the more basic aim of promoting trade among member regions: “For example, Chelyabinsk Governor Petr Sumin complained that Sverdlovsk plans to produce tramway cars, competing with a Chelyabinsk company. Last year Bashkortostan bought 300 buses from a firm outside the Urals region, when neighboring Kurgan Oblast could have supplied the vehicles” (Stepanov 1998).

In 1998, it appeared briefly as if the policy-making role of inter-regional associations would be more formally institutionalized at the federal level – creating, perhaps, greater incentives for members to invest the time and energy needed to give the associations greater internal coherence. In September, Yeltsin signed a decree creating a “presidium” of the government that would include the leaders of the inter-regional associations. The idea was considered a bid by incoming Prime Minister Primakov to coopt regional leaders while opening clearer channels of center-regional control. This “super-cabinet” only met once or twice under Primakov, however, and the idea was apparently discarded after his removal.

The notion of macro-regions becoming meaningful political actors continues to offer real possibilities, however. In Spain, for instance, the prospect of bilateral negotiations with Madrid became

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43 Interview with Dmitri Ayatskov, EWI Russian Regional Report, 8 October 1998.

44 Vremya MN, 1 October 1999.
the catalyst for organizing 50 provinces into 17 “autonomias” with significant political roles and identities (Agranoff 1996). More broadly, in the European Union, the notion of “regions” as political actors that transcend the borders of subnational territorial administrative units is gaining currency as well. In Russia, however, the effectiveness of the interregional associations continues to be undermined by the diversity of the units grouped within them. Republic/oblast and rich/poor cleavages seem to carry greater salience than geographic proximity. Even the potential for associations to act as lobbies for highly concentrated sectors seems threatened by the potential for inter-provincial competition as regional administrations expand their ownership stakes in specific enterprises.

Federation Council committees

For inter-regional coordination to be effective, regional leaders will require means of enforcing bargains among themselves – i.e., rewarding cooperation and punishing defection. In the context of legislative coalitions, this role is often played by parliamentary structures, in particular the structure of parliamentary committees (Weingast and Marshall 1988). Committees can make bargains among legislators enforceable, despite the essential unenforceability of political bargains, by allowing legislators to share the gatekeeping roles assigned to committees.

The Federation Council is organized into 11 committees, but only a handful of these appear potentially useful as foci for coordination among like-minded provincial leaders (Petrov 1999). Ecology, for instance, is grouped with health care, science, culture and education on a single committee, diluting the potential for the committee to serve as a “club” for regions with severe environmental problems (but opening interesting possibilities for logrolling). There is a Committee for “Affairs of the North and Small-Numbered Peoples” (analogous to committees on the affairs of indigenous peoples in many states). Other than the Committee on Agrarian Policy, few of the remaining committees seem likely candidates to support the pork-barrel politics often found at the heart of legislative coalition-building.45

45 The remaining committees include: Constitutional-Legal; Security and Defense; Budget, Tax, Currency, Customs and Banking; Social Policy; Economic Policy; International Affairs; CIS Affairs; and Federation Affairs.
As the debates discussed above suggest, the influence of committee decisions over plenary affairs is erratic at best. Bills are often considered by several committees simultaneously, making it difficult for any single committee to block consideration by the full chamber. As in many parliamentary systems, the special “reconciliation committees” formed for individual bills appear far more important than the standing committees of the FC, but since these reconciliation committees are formed ad hoc (even changing their membership between rounds of consideration of the same bill) they are poor vehicles for sustaining coordination among a fixed group of provincial leaders over a protracted period. In addition, many FC members often resist serving on such ad hoc committees complaining of the added workload.46

Nevertheless, the FC committees could potentially help activate some of the less prominent alignments considered in the first section of this paper. The committee on CIS affairs, for instance, brings together governors of four regions bordering CIS states (Kurgan, Astrakhan, North Ossetia, and Bryansk) as well as two not bordering on the CIS (Amur and Moscow oblast). Interestingly, the chairman and all three deputy chairs of this committee (the governors of Kurgan, Astrakhan and Bryansk, and the speaker of the Rostov legislature) all come from provinces on the CIS border.

Governors and political parties

In many democratic systems, provincial and sectional alignments are the catalysts for the creation or realignment of national party systems. The early American party system, for instance, reflected the shifting alignments of North, South and West, rapidly eclipsing the division between large and small states that featured prominently in the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention. In several European parliamentary systems, party alignment reflects North-South cleavages within the polity.

46 After the Law on Delineation of Responsibilities was sent back yet again to a reconciliation committee in December 1997, Samara governor Titov complained to FC speaker Stroev: “Can we please create as few reconciliation committees as possible? We all have work to do back home and it is very difficult to combine that with work on reconciliation committees. We are FC members, we come here for sessions, participate in meetings of the Russian Government, and then to have to work on reconciliation committees...and this work drags on for weeks!” (Biulleten’ 1, (135), 3 December 1997, p. 35). In short, he hardly sounded like a regional leader looking for opportunities to deepen his collaboration with fellow regional leaders.
Naturally, sectional cleavages are just one of many dimensions along which party systems might be organized, and in most industrialized democracies these political cleavages are cross-cutting. More often, national parties will utilize regional alignments – the Rust belt or the Deep South in the United States, for instance – as tools to segment the electorate. But such tactics can ultimately prove self-reinforcing: the emergence of sectional voting by the electorate can lead to greater cohesiveness on the part of provincial leaders (since they can now claim to “deliver” a larger pool of votes to national politicians) and it can also produce a more homogeneous set of democratically elected leaders at the provincial level (through successive rounds of regional elections). If such processes occur in the early stages of party-building, they can become reified in lasting party alignments.

In Russia, “governors blocs” have emerged on the scene as proto-parties competing in parliamentary elections. Many analysis have interpreted these movements – like Golos Rossiia, or Vsia Rossiia, or Otechestvo – as efforts by governors to gain greater representation for “regional interests” at the federal level. However, it may be more fruitful to think of them as efforts to gain greater representation for the interests of some regions at the federal level. In other words, we should not lose sight of the fact that many movements in history that advertised themselves as advocates of “provincial rights” often represented the interests of some provinces while using the rhetoric of rights for all.

As with the inter-regional associations, these proto-parties brought together politicians representing regions of widely varying interests. Broadly speaking, the OVR bloc was sometimes thought of as a bloc of rich or “donor” regions (i.e., net donors to the federal budget), but this is a considerable oversimplification. More tellingly, the poor showing of OVR at the polls – and the collapse of Golos Rossiia well before the election – suggests that the marriage of convenience arranged by the governors failed to reflect any deeper commonality of interests among their constituents.

47 See, for example, the analyses by Olga Komarova in the EWI Russian Regional Report, 14 October 1999, or by Vitalii Tseplyev in Argumenty i fakty no. 18 (April 1999), or by Gleb Cherkasov in Vremya MN, 23 February 1999, p. 2.
Figure 9: Governors Blocs in 1999

Source: EWIR Russian Regional Report, 20 April and 7 October 1999

Legend:
- All regions
- Golos Rossii
Concluding thoughts

This paper has sought to outline the range of possible provincial alignments that might lead to coalition-building among provincial leaders – either on an issue-specific basis or through more lasting institutional arrangements. While the fragmentation of the Russian social, political and economic space offers a wide range of possible cleavages, the existing range of political institutions seems ill-suited to channeling provincial alignments into constructive bases for political cooperation. Dynamics within the Federation Council reveal episodes of effective collaboration among regional leaders, but few signs of lasting blocs or alliances. Inter-regional associations present ready-made alliances, but practice has
shown them to be too diverse to act effectively as political units. Finally, political parties offer the promise of institutionalization of like-minded provincial leaders, but thus far they have been used for short term “court” politics, rather than long-term cultivation of a cohesive, cross-provincial electorate.

With the possible exception of local governments, provinces remain the chief form of territorial organization and representation of interests in the Russian political system. Given Russia’s continuing legacy of weak institutions of civil society, the nascent democratic system is likely to continue to rely heavily on these provincial structures as the bases for democratic representation and accountability. As long as individual leaders remain opportunistic – pursuing the promise of short-term benefits manipulated by the center – these structures are likely to remain atomized, fragmented and consequently weak. Unless and until we observe the organization of more homogeneous groups of provinces into political blocs, agitating for special treatment as a class, the federal center will continue to be able to play regional elites off against one-another.

Finally, the analysis presented here can yield a new perspective on the role of asymmetry in the still-nascent Russian federation. Critiques of asymmetry in federal relations often assert that equal treatment under the law is one of the hallmarks of a democratic political system. There is a more optimistic view, however, for systems like Russia still early in their democratic development. Aspirations for asymmetric treatment can serve to bring together provincial elites (or, for that matter, elite representatives of other discrete societal interests) into political coalitions, movements and ultimately parties. Achievement of asymmetry, in turn, can provide powerful incentives for interests to organize in defense of the status quo, and for non-privileged parties to organize to upset the status quo. While asymmetry undoubtedly creates tension, such tension is also a necessary condition if patterns of patron-client subservience are ultimately to give way to democratic contestation and consolidation. Enduring asymmetry – i.e., stable alignments of privileged territories – demands institutionalization, or else a reversion to ad hoc favoritism practiced at the discretion of central actors will almost certainly ensue. Enduring asymmetry, in other words, may be a sign of the maturing of Russia’s federal system, rather than a sign of its continuing underdevelopment.
Appendix: regions highlighted in Figures 3-9

Figure 3: “Frontier Regions”
Kamchatka, Murmansk, Karelia, Leningrad obl, Sakhalin, Kaliningrad, St Petersburg, Pskov, Khabarovsk, Amur, Chita, Primorskiy, Buryatia, Jewish AO.

Figure 4: Highest and lowest per capita incomes as a ratio of minimum subsistence levels, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moscow City</td>
<td>Ust-Orda Buryat AO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yamalo-Nenetsk AO</td>
<td>Aga Buryatia AO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khant-Mansiysk AO</td>
<td>Tyva (Tuva)</td>
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<td>Tyumen</td>
<td>Chita</td>
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<td>Samara</td>
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<td>Komi</td>
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<td>Lipetsk</td>
<td>Kalmykia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tatarstan</td>
<td>Altay Krai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rostov</td>
<td>Dagestan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kemerovo</td>
<td>Kirov</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Regions contributing greatest share (%) of Federal Budget, 1997
33 %: Moscow City
7 %: Moscow Obl.
5%: Khant-Mansiysk AO; St Petersburg
3 %: Samara; Sverdlovsk
2% Perm; Yamalo-Nenetsk AO, Krasnoyarsk; Nizhniy Novgorod; Krasnodar
1 %: Tatarstan; Kemerovo; Bashkortostan; Chelyabinsk

Figure 6: “Donor” Regions (counting federal budget expenditures in the regions and extra-budgetary fund flows)
Moscow, St Petersburg, Samara, Sverdlovsk, Perm, Yamalo-Nenetsk, Yaroslavl, Krasnoyarsk, Chelyabinsk, Komi, Lipetsk, Tyumen, Leningrad, Kaliningrad, Vologda, Irkutsk, Vladimir, Kursk, Udmurtia, Chuvashia (Chavash), Belgorod, Voronezh, Omsk, Volgograd, Orenburg, Novosibirsk

Figure 7: High Employment in VPK (1985)
Vladimir, Udmurtia, Sverdlovsk, St Petersburg, Samara, Perm, Novosibirsk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Tula,
Figure 8: Regions with industrial output concentrated (>30%) in single sectors:
*Non-Ferrous Metals:* Krasnoyarsk, Khakassia, Murmansk, Chukotka, Sakha (Yakutia), Magadan, North Ossetia
*Ferrous Metals:* Sverdlovsk, Vologda, Lipetsk, Chelyabinsk, Belgorod, Kemerovo
*Forestry and Wood:* Karelia, Arkhangelsk, Komi-Permyak AO
*Chemicals and Petrochemicals:* Tatarstan, Novgorod, Tomsk
**Figure 9: Governors’ Blocs in 1999:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Golos Rossiia (As of April 1999)</th>
<th>Yedinstvo (As of October 1999)</th>
<th>Vsia Rossiya (As of October 1999)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Samara Governor Konstantin Titov, Kaliningrad Governor Leonid Gorbenko, Marii El President Vyacheslav Kislytsyn, Khakasiya Prime Minister Aleksei Lebed, Chukotka Governor Aleksandr Nazarov, Tver Governor Vladimir Platov, Vologda Governor Vycheslav Pozgalev, Tyumen Governor Leonid Roketskii, Kirov Governor Vladimir Sergeenkov, Kemerovo Governor Aman Tuleev, Magadan Governor Valentin Tsvetkov, Chelyabinsk Governor Petr Sutmin*, Penza Governor Vasilii Bochkarev*, Perm Governor Gennadii Igumnov*, Rostov Governor Vladimir Chub*</td>
<td>Adygeya President Aslan Dzhariimov, Arkhangelsk Governor Anatolii Yefremov, Astrakhan Governor Anatolii Guzhvin, Buryatia President Leonid Potapov, Chelyabinsk Governor Petr Sutmin, Chukotka Governor Aleksandr Nazarov, Evenk Governor Aleksandr Bokovikov, Ivanovo Governor Vladislav Tikhomirov, Jewish AO Governor Nikolai Volkov, Kaliningrad Governor Leonid Gorbenko, Kalmykiya President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, Kamchatka Governor Vladimir Biryukov, Koryak Governor Valentina Bronevich, Kostroma Governor Viktor Shershunov, Kursk Governor Aleksandr Rutskoi, Leningrad Governor Valeri Serdyukov, Magadan Governor Valentin Tsvetkov, Nenets Governor Vladimir Butov, Omsk Governor Leonid Polezhaev, Orenburg Governor Vladimir Yelagin, Primorskiy Krai Gov. Yevgenii Nazdratenko, Rostov Governor Vladimir Chub, Sakha President Mikhail Nikolaev, Sakhalin Governor Igor Farkhutdinov, Smolensk Governor Aleksandr Prokhorov, Tver Governor Vladimir Platov</td>
<td>Bashkortostan President Murtaza Rakhimov, Belgorod Governor Yevgenii Savchenko, Chuvashia President Nikolai Fedorov, Ingushetiya President Ruslan Aushev, Irkutsk Governor Boris Govorin, Khabarovsk Governor Viktor Ishhaev, Khanty-Mansi Governor Aleksandr Filipenko, North Osetiya President Aleksandr Dzasokhov, Penza Governor Vasilii Bochkarev, Perm Governor Gennadii Igumnov, St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev, Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Also belonged to Vsia Rossiya at the time</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: EWI Russian Regional Report, 29 April and 7 October 1999.*
| Tomsk Governor Viktor Kress  
| Tyumen Governor Leonid Roketskii |
| Sklyarov  
| Novosibirsk Governor Vitalii Mukha  
| Yaroslavl Governor Anatolii Lisitsyn |
References


