The Role of Regional Executives in Russian Politics

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TITLE VIII PROGRAM
Project Information

Principal Investigator: Robert Orttung
Council Contract Number: 814-23f
Date: October 2, 2000

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* The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract or grant funds provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, funds which were made available by the U.S. Department of State under Title VIII (The Soviet-East European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained herein are those of the author.
Executive summary

In the relationship between the Russian federal and regional governments, the Kremlin reigned supreme during the periods when the president was willing to exercise his powers. President Boris Yeltsin failed to use his levers during much of his two terms in office, which allowed Russia’s regional elite to decentralize power and transfer numerous functions once performed at the federal level into their own hands. The governors were able to gain considerable control over the country’s financial resources and the appointment of federal officials in the regions.

However, the governors were only able to grab such power because the president did not oppose them. Yeltsin’s successor, President Vladimir Putin, defined the Kremlin’s loss of power to the regional elite as one of the key issues that demanded his immediate attention. Shortly after his inauguration, he implemented a number of measures to recentralize political and economic authority. Through the summer of 2000 (the time period covered in this analysis), Putin won one victory after another over the regional leaders. His actions demonstrated that despite the enormous political changes Russia experienced in the 1990s, central authority remained paramount and could trump gubernatorial power at crucial points.
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Because of the enormous power the Kremlin wielded, the governors needed to maintain good ties with the president if they wanted to be effective in their home districts. Even though the governors were elected by their own constituents rather than appointed by the president, they remained highly dependent on him. The result was that, with the unusual exception of Chechnya, Russia remained a strongly cohesive country.

Who are Russia’s governors?

By any standards, Russia’s 89 regional executives as of August 2000 were a motley collection of individuals. Several were well known internationally. Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov and Krasnoyarsk Governor Aleksandr Lebed were the most recognizable to western audiences, and both seemed like strong contenders to succeed Yeltsin. By early 2000, many others were well known nationally. For example, Tula Governor Vasilii Starodubstev was one of the 1991 coup leaders against USSR President Mikhail
Gorbachev. Moscow Oblast Governor Boris Gromov led the Soviet troops out of Afghanistan in 1989. Samara Governor Konstantin Titov and Kemerovo’s Aman Tuleev both sought the presidency, though neither had much hope of succeeding.

At the beginning of 2000, the average governor was 53.5 years old. The youngest governor was Ust-Orda Buryatia’s 36-year old Valerii Maleev. Other governors in their thirties were Pskov’s Yevgenii Mikhailov, 37, and Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, 38. The oldest governor was Dagestan’s 70-year-old Magomedali Magomedov. With one exception, Russia’s governors were male. The lone woman was Koryak Autonomous Okrug Governor Valentina Bronevich. Her region was in a remote corner of the Russian Pacific coast, and she did not play a prominent role on the national stage.

Just over half of the governors had backgrounds as economic managers (see Table 1, at the end of this paper). Twenty-one governors (24 percent) began their professional lives in agriculture, the worst-performing sector of the Russian economy. Sixteen (18 percent) were industrialists, six worked in the construction industry, and three worked in transportation. These backgrounds partially explain the governors’ strong preference for avoiding political labels and pursuing pragmatic policies in their relations with the Kremlin and within their regions.

A significant number of the governors cut their political teeth working for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) before the collapse of the USSR. Twenty-two (25 percent) of the 89 governors made their careers in the CPSU, with two of them reaching the party’s Politburo (Orel’s Yegor Stroev and North Ossetia’s Aleksandr Dzasokhov). Overall, at least 44 governors (49 percent) had significant experience in the CPSU ranks.

Seven of the governors (8 percent) made their mark in the military, usually with significant experience in hot spots such as Afghanistan and Moldova. These governors by no means represented a unified bloc among Russia’s regional elite. The Lebed brothers (Aleksandr in Krasnoyarsk, Aleksei in Khakasiya) focused on managing the economic resources of their regions, perhaps hoping thereby to win support for another presidential bid by Aleksandr.
Moscow Oblast’s Gromov came to power with the support of Mayor Luzhkov, while Kursk’s Rutskoi was an early supporter of the pro-Kremlin Unity party, which saw Luzhkov as its arch-rival. Ingushetia’s Ruslan Aushev and Karachaevo-Cherkessia’s Vladimir Semenov were more concerned with managing the numerous ethnic conflicts in their North Caucasus regions than anything else. Chechnya’s President Aslan Maskhadov led Chechen rebels in their victorious battle against Russian troops in the republic’s 1994–96 battle for independence.

Only two governors built their pre-political careers as what might be considered businessmen working in the shifting sands of Russia’s post-communist economy: Kalmykia’s Ilyumzhinov and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug’s Vladimir Butov. Both of these leaders, however, had reputations as rather unscrupulous operators and certainly would not be considered worthy examples of successful capitalist enterprise. After making a fortune as the head of a trading company, Ilyumzhinov brought lots of money to his region by setting up a free economic zone, which allows companies to avoid taxes in other regions by registering there. He was considered one of Russia’s most eccentric governors. The Nenets regional legislature accused Butov of using his position to favor his own companies. He was also locked in an ongoing struggle with LUKoil, Russia’s largest oil company, which would like to develop the region’s resources itself.

Nine of the governors made careers as professional economists or urban managers, while four came from a legal background. One was a diplomat and one worked as a journalist.

Since Yeltsin authorized all regions to elect their governors in 1996, there has been enormous turnover among the country’s cadre of regional executives. At the beginning of 2000, 52 governors (58 percent) were serving their first term and had been in office less than four years. Many of them faced reelection campaigns in 2000. The Russian Duma adopted a law in October 1999 allowing governors to serve five-year terms, but no more than two in a row, so future turnover should be more muted owing to
the longer terms.\textsuperscript{1} Most incumbent governors were elected for four-year terms. Sixteen (18 percent) governors have been in office between five and eight years.

At the beginning of 2000, twenty-one governors (24 percent) had ruled their regions for more than eight years, with the longest-serving incumbents in office continually since 1989. Leaders like Tatarstan’s Shaimiev or Komi’s Yuri Spiridonov headed up their region’s CPSU organization and managed to hang on to power since then through two sets of elections. Because the new law regulating the terms of the governors does not fully come into effect until the fall of 2001, many of these executives may be able to secure a third term before being forced from office.

**The governors’ platforms**

Russia’s governors were mainly pragmatists. The vast majority of them did not consistently support any particular political ideology. Rather, they liked to keep their options open so that they could build alliances with whoever was politically, economically, or personally useful to them at any given time. Once Yeltsin resigned from office and named Vladimir Putin as acting president and his preferred successor, nearly all the governors announced that they too supported Putin, even if they had been backing Putin’s rivals just a few weeks before. No matter what a governor really thinks, it was always better to have a friend than an enemy in the Kremlin. In almost every case, expedience was more important than personal loyalty or ideological consistency.

In the period leading up to the December 1999 State Duma elections, with Yeltsin apparently sick and no longer in control of the country, Russia’s regional executives started to place bets on who they thought could win the 2000 presidential campaign (see Table 2). Many, such as Nizhnii Novgorod’s Ivan Sklyarov, placed their stake with Luzhkov and joined his Fatherland party. Others, like Tatarstan’s Shaimiev and Bashkortostan’s Rakhimov, who thought a Luzhkov victory was inevitable but were not happy about it, set up All Russia to form an arms-length alliance with Luzhkov.

\textsuperscript{1} *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 19 October 1999.
When it became clear that former Prime Minister Yevgenii Primakov had a better shot at the presidency, Luzhkov threw his support behind him. At that point All Russia made a formal alliance with Fatherland but made clear that it supported Primakov over Luzhkov as the presidential candidate. The All Russia governors favored Primakov because they thought he would make a weaker president than Luzhkov and therefore would leave greater power in their regions. All these calculations proved irrelevant after Fatherland–All Russia’s poor performance in the December 1999 elections, leaving Yeltsin an opening to virtually name his own successor as president.

Many of the weaker governors, who remained heavily dependent on the Kremlin, stayed out of the Fatherland–All Russia alliance. They joined up with a last-minute pro-Kremlin party, Unity, which went on to take a large share of Duma seats. This party included such figures as Kursk’s Aleksandr Rutskoi and Tver’s Vladimir Platov, who barely won reelection at the January 2000 polls. Although they were hardly considered the best and brightest in September, a few months later, the Unity governors appeared to have better prospects because they had picked the right horse in the parliamentary and presidential campaigns.

The 1999 State Duma elections marked the end of Our Home Is Russia, which had been the “party of power” in 1995. It did not cross the five-percent barrier, and its members, such as Novgorod’s Mikhail Prusak, dispersed into the pro-Putin majority. The Union of Right Forces, the latest reincarnation of Russia’s Choice, the party of power in 1993, became respectable again when, with Putin’s backing, it won eight percent of the vote in the 1999 Duma elections. But when Samara’s Titov decided to pursue a quixotic presidential campaign against Putin, he drove a wedge in the party between the ideological purists, who wanted a more consistent reformer in the Kremlin and did not support Putin’s prosecution of the war in Chechnya, and the more pragmatic elements who wanted to be associated with the campaign’s likely winner.

It was hard to distinguish major ideological differences between parties like Our Home Is Russia, Fatherland, and Unity. For a governor, the only reason to be affiliated with one was the desire to secure
better ties to the Kremlin. These parties represented a muddled, centrist segment of the political spectrum signifying support for a market economy, although one that had strong state intervention, and for strengthening the Russian state, although without defining exactly how to achieve this end. They opposed NATO expansion and wanted Russia to compete better globally, but were not hidebound enemies of the west.

While the Communist Party of the Russian Federation remained the only sizable opposition to the Kremlin since 1991, its inability to win more than 30 percent of the vote made it a relatively toothless threat. The leftist governors were a weak link in this already weak group because they found it more important to maintain good relations with the Kremlin than with their party comrades. Many of them, such as Volgograd’s Nikolai Maksyuta and Stavropol’s Aleksandr Chernogorov, had poor relations with local party leaders, who constantly criticized them for implementing policies that were not consistent with the party’s platform. Altai Krai Governor Aleksandr Surikov openly defied the party to support Putin. Kemerovo’s Aman Tuleev, who ran for the State Duma on the Communist party list in 1999 (without formally being a member of the party), served in Yeltsin’s cabinet and ran against Communist Party leader Gennadii Zyuganov in the 1996 and 2000 presidential campaigns.

The Lebed brothers were political outsiders who seemed increasingly peripheral. Pskov’s Yevgenii Mikhailov was the only member of Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic party to serve as governor, but as his popularity waned, he left the LDPR and appointed himself head of the regional Unity branch. Several governors, like Sverdlovsk’s Eduard Rossel and Ulyanovsk’s Yuri Goryachev, formed their own parties, which were important within their regions but had little influence beyond regional boundaries. As Federation Council speaker, Yegor Stroev liked to stay above the fray.

**Relations with Moscow**

Despite the enormous amount of decentralization in Russian politics since 1991, the governors’ relationship with Moscow remained crucial. The Russian president had an extensive set of tools he could
use to keep the regions in line. The following list roughly groups these implements in order of their usefulness, proceeding from most to least useful.

The most important tool was psychological. Yeltsin came to power, in part, by telling the regions to “take as much sovereignty as they could swallow.” Putin, in contrast, built his political popularity on his campaign to prevent Chechnya from winning independence. The difference in the way the governors perceived both the intentions of the two presidents and their ability to impose their will was quite substantial. From the beginning of his rule until 1996, Yeltsin seemed to bestow federal largesse on the regions that complained the loudest or had the most economic resources to deploy against the Kremlin. Regions therefore had incentives to exercise their autonomy. Since the 1996 presidential election, the Kremlin favored regions that were politically loyal. Putin also clearly signaled that he favored loyalty and the governors took note. Demonstration effects were very powerful in Russia and a crackdown on one region went a long way toward bringing other regions in line.

A second tool the Kremlin could exploit to maintain its authority over the regions was the disunity among the regions themselves. The regions were divided along several cleavages. Russia’s main revenue-producing assets, whether natural resources such as oil or proximity to Moscow or another major urban area, were unevenly distributed among the regions. Many of the rich regions resented that they had to subsidize poorer regions through contributions to the federal budget. Regions were also divided on the basis of the privileges assigned them in the constitution, with the republics enjoying more advantages than the oblasts and krais. The regional elites failed to organize in any effective and consistent way against the Kremlin.

A third tool of Kremlin control was the ability to offer or deny backing to help governors win reelection. On the eve of the 1999 State Duma elections, for example, First Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Igor Shabdurasulov barnstormed the country, offering governors whatever they needed to win

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2 For a discussion of this issue, see Jeff Kahn, “The Parade of Sovereignties: Establishing the Vocabulary of the New Russian Federalism,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 16:1, 2000, p. 64.
reelection in exchange for supporting Unity in the parliamentary elections and Putin in the presidential elections. In particular, the Kremlin could provide media exposure on important national networks, expertise from Moscow-based political consultants, and financial aid timed to increase popular support for the governor just before the election.

A fourth lever the Kremlin had in its relations with the governors was its control over the appointment of law-enforcement personnel in the regions. In Russia the law was applied selectively, and the Kremlin could use it to reward loyal governors or punish uppity ones. The federal government controlled the appointment of the top officials in the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the court system. The federal and regional government both had a say in appointing regional police chiefs (Ministry of Internal Affairs) and regional procurators. Until Summer 2000, the governors also had a voice in removing police chiefs, but in summer 2000 the Duma handed this power exclusively to the federal government.4

Under Yeltsin, the president often let regional leaders decide who the most appropriate officials would be, but Putin quickly signaled that he would take much of this power back. By appointing officials friendly or hostile to the governor, the Kremlin could influence the way the governor behaved. Moreover, if the Kremlin wanted to crack down on a specific region, it could call for the revocation of regional laws that violated the Russian Constitution or federal legislation. Putin used this power extensively during his first months in office. In cases where the Kremlin was generally pleased with a local executive’s performance, it could ignore inconsistencies between regional and federal legislation.

A fifth form of influence was the distribution of federal funds. This power clearly declined following the devaluation of the ruble in August 1998, but rose again in 1999 when oil prices shot up. Since federal budgets were often unrealistic and not all projects listed in the official document were actually funded, the Ministry of Finance had wide discretion in determining which regions received the

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4 On the police chiefs, see M. N. Marshunov, Postateinyi kommentarii k zakonu Rossiiskoi Federatsii O militsii, Moscow, St. Petersburg: Gerda, 2000 and www.duma.ru (the Duma took away the regions’ voice over firing police chiefs in a 7 July 2000 vote, overturning the Federation Council’s veto of the bill on 28 June 2000).
money designated for them. The federal government could also grant lucrative export-import privileges and tax breaks to specific enterprises that could dramatically help some regions. In 1998 the Kremlin introduced a treasury system in each region to enhance its control over the way tax revenues were divided between government entities. Since many regions were in debt, the local manager of Sberbank, which controlled the vast majority of the banking system’s assets, could make life easy or hard for governors by restructuring debt loads or demanding immediate payment.

Sixth, the natural resource monopolies – Unified Energy System (which controlled electricity generation and distribution), Gazprom (natural gas extraction and distribution), the Railroads Ministry, and Transneft (oil distribution pipeline) – also had powerful influence over the regions since they set prices for, and controlled access to, vital energy supplies or transportation routes. Many regions owed significant sums to these organizations and were therefore beholden to them. By putting pressure on the heads of these concerns, the Kremlin could indirectly ratchet up pressure on the regions.

Finally, the federal government signed treaties with 46 regions, the most recent being a 16 June 1998 treaty with Moscow City. Yeltsin used the early treaties with Tatarstan and Bashkortostan to offer them strong incentives to remain within the Russian Federation, specifically ceding them control over their natural resources, lucrative tax breaks, and greater control over their relations with foreign countries and persons. According to a law on center-periphery relations adopted in June 1999, all of the existing treaties must be brought into compliance with the Russian Constitution by 2002.5

These treaties were signed between Yeltsin (or in some cases, the Russian prime minister) and the regional executive, and were never approved by the federal or regional legislatures. Often, key provisions in the treaty were not published. Since the Constitution itself suffered from a number of internal contradictions, it remained unclear what the practical effect of the new law would be. On one hand, it asserted that all regions should be treated equally, while other sections clearly favored some regions over others. The Russian president could use the new law to radically restructure the relationship between the federal government and the regions, a concern that was palpable in Tatarstan at the beginning of 2000
because the republic’s leader had backed Luzhkov over Putin in the December 1999 Duma elections. The relevant regional legislature and the Federation Council must approve all new treaties, if any are concluded.

Once Putin was inaugurated as Yeltsin’s successor, he began a concerted campaign to strengthen the ability of the central government to influence the regions, unleashing a string of initiatives to strengthen federal state capacity. Initially the governors expressed cautious support for these plans, but by summer 2000 they had moved into explicit and vocal opposition.

Beyond trying to force regions to bring their legislation into compliance with federal norms, Putin’s first major initiative was to make the presidential representatives in the regions more effective. Yeltsin established the institution of presidential representatives in 1991 so that he would have an official in each region to serve as his eyes and ears. Ultimately Yeltsin had representatives in more than 80 regions, though exceptional regions like Tatarstan never had a presidential representative assigned to them.6

In practice, however, the presidential representatives were captured by the very governors they were supposed to be monitoring. In effect, representatives began to work as regional advocates at the federal level rather than federal advocates at the regional level. Yeltsin recognized this failing and tried to strengthen their powers in 1997, but this reform ended in failure. In the trial case of Primorskii Krai, Yeltsin tried to transfer some of Primorskii Krai Governor Yevgenii Nazdratenko’s powers to his representative in the region, Viktor Kondratov. However, Kondratov proved incapable of countering Nazdratenko, and the governor eventually won his removal.7

On 13 May 2000, Putin effectively abolished the office of presidential representative.8 In its place he divided Russia into seven federal districts, and appointed “governor generals” to rule over these

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5 Parlamentskaya gazeta, 30 June 1999.
larger regions. The main idea behind the reform was that the new presidential representatives would be responsible for several regions, allowing them to stand above the governors and therefore be less liable to capture by any individual regional leader. Representative were responsible for coordinating the work of the federal agencies in their federal districts and ensuring that the regions under their purview brought their legislation into line with federal norms.

The way Putin implemented this reform suggested that his main goal was to impose better top-down control over the regions. Improving the economy was only a second priority. The seven districts Putin created were based on Russia’s military districts rather than the eight economic associations that functioned during the 1990s (see Table 3). Likewise, five of the seven men appointed presidential representative had backgrounds in Russia’s law enforcement agencies. All of the representatives joined the National Security Council.

Additionally, Putin used the reform as a new way of institutionalizing the usual “divide and conquer” policy. Putin named a capital city in each of the seven districts where his representative would be based. Doing this clearly gave the seven regions privileged access to the new, and presumably powerful, representatives that the other regions did not have. By summer 2000, it was too soon to tell if the new representatives would be effective. However, they clearly faced an enormous task in dealing with the numerous regions under their jurisdiction.

Putin’s second initiative was to seek the removal of the governors and regional legislative chairmen from the upper house of the federal legislature, the Federation Council. Holding seats in the national legislature made the governors national politicians and theoretically gave them a way to organize themselves to support the collective interests of the regions against the federal government. Most importantly, the governors used the Federation Council’s monthly meetings as an excuse to come to Moscow and lobby the federal ministries to secure funding for projects in their regions.

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8 For the text of the decree, see the presidential administration’s press service announcement for 13 May 2000 at: (president.kremlin.ru)
In removing the regional executives from the upper chamber, Putin clearly sought to reduce the stature of the governors and curtail their access to Moscow. According to Putin’s plan, the governors would no longer walk the halls of power in the capital, but appeal for support to the presidential representatives in the seven federal districts. Another consequence of these reforms was to limit the governors’ access to the national media. Although the State Duma, the lower chamber of the national parliament, gave this proposal overwhelming support, the regional leaders in the Federation Council soundly vetoed it. Subsequently, a conciliatory committee worked out a compromise by which the regional leaders would no longer sit in the upper chamber, but they would maintain strong control over the representatives who replaced them. The reforms should be fully in effect by 1 January 2002.

Additionally, Putin introduced a bill to the State Duma that gave him the power to remove governors if they are accused of a committing a crime and to disband regional legislatures. Again, the Duma supported this proposal and the Federation Council rejected it. In this case, the Duma was ultimately able to override the upper house veto. According to this legislation, once the president removes a governor, new elections would have to be held in six months. Of course there is no guarantee that the Kremlin would be any happier with the new governor than the old one under this system. Putin’s proposal did not seek the right for the president to appoint governors directly, the system that had largely been in place until 1996.

Finally, Putin introduced changes to the tax code, approved in the summer of 2000, which gave the federal government greater control over the country’s tax revenue. Governors of Russia’s richest regions complained that this change would hand money that was rightfully theirs to the poorer regions, which would inevitably benefit from the federal government’s redistribution policies. Since the poor regions vastly outnumbered the rich, the Federation Council went along with these reforms.

Despite the apparently growing antagonism between the president and the governors in the summer of 2000, the president had a powerful arsenal that he could use to keep the governors in line.
Even though they were elected by their constituents, the governors had to maintain good relations with the Kremlin in order to assure that various political weapons were not used against them by Putin.

They also had to maintain good ties with the Kremlin so that they could secure federal backing for their own initiatives and simply conduct day-to-day business. Of course, having especially good relations with the Kremlin could also help them secure preferential treatment, which will always make their lives easier. Under President Yeltsin, Sverdlovsk Governor Eduard Rossel discovered that it was possible to build a powerful political base in his home region (and, coincidentally, Yeltsin’s) by pursuing an antagonistic policy toward the Kremlin. He also discovered that having an enemy in the Kremlin made it difficult to get things done. Thus, it was no surprise that once Yeltsin stepped down, Rossel announced that he would work hard to build a good relationship with Putin, a position publicly endorsed almost unanimously by the other governors.

The governors in their districts

While the Kremlin enjoyed some significant leverage in its relations with the regional executives, the governors also had considerable resources that they could use against the Kremlin as well as their local adversaries. First, in the wake of the August 1998 financial crisis, the regions inevitably became more self-sufficient and less prone to assume that the federal government would always bail them out. According to a 1999 study produced by Aleksei Lavrov’s team at the Finance Ministry, about 25 of the 89 regions contributed more to the federal budget than they received in federal spending in the mid-1990s. The conventional wisdom has been that there are only 10–12 “donor” regions, but the Lavrov finding suggested that there were many more self-sufficient regions than was widely believed.

What is most important is that the governors often had extensive control over the local economy and the resources located inside the regions they governed. In many cases, the regions owned controlling stakes in local enterprises. Luzhkov, for example, controlled extensive holdings throughout the capital,

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including large car factories, an oil company, hotels, and stores. The presidents of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan controlled the key energy companies in their regions and could use company resources for their own benefit. When the federal government tried to carry out its policy in the regions, it was playing on the governors’ home turf.

Second, the governors could use their institutional resources to shape the outcome of federal, regional, and local elections conducted in their region. In presidential campaigns, the governor could often, but not always, deliver votes for one of the candidates. Presidential candidates thus made extensive efforts to win the support of as many governors as possible. Most important in these efforts was the governors’ ability to control some or all of the significant local media.

The governors also had a powerful voice in State Duma elections, in both the party-list and single-member district votes. In 1999, the regional executives played a major role in the campaign, having themselves set up several of the parties, such as Fatherland and All Russia, which worked against the Kremlin. Other governors helped organize the pro-Kremlin Unity party. In the single-member district races, the governor-backed candidate won in about 75 percent of the contests.10 As a result, members of the State Duma elected in 1999 from both parts of the ballot were more closely allied to the governors than their predecessors had been. However, in the summer of 2000 when Putin forced the deputies to choose between loyalties to the president and the governors, the deputies overwhelmingly decided to favor the president.

Through their control of the media and other institutional resources, the governors had powerful advantages in their reelection campaigns, but these did not necessarily ensure their ability to win reelection. In fact, until the elections of 1999, governors were more likely to lose to a challenger than win (see Table 3). However, in 1999 governors discovered the technique of rescheduling elections to an earlier date as a way of throwing the opposition off balance. In the elections held from Fall 1999 to Summer 2000, their performance was much improved.

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The governors generally succeeded in influencing the election of a regional legislature sympathetic to their policies, though there were several exceptions to this rule as well. In the Federation Council, the chairperson of the regional legislature usually stood in the shadow of the region’s governor, as in the case of Saratov Oblast. In a few regions, however, executive-legislative relations were extremely conflictual. Governor Yakovlev of St. Petersburg was in constant battle with the city’s Legislative Assembly, to the point where the legislature could not elect a chairman for more than a year after it was seated in December 1998. Only Yakovlev’s overwhelming reelection in May 2000 gave him the authority to resolve the impasse. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the executive and legislative branches battled over how to develop the region’s extensive oil and gas deposits.

The governors often had trouble electing allies as mayors in the regional capitals of their constituencies, and they then tended to lock horns over the regional budget. The governor generally wanted to use some of the tax money collected in the city to subsidize programs that helped the region’s poorer rural areas, while mayors wanted revenues generated in the city to be used for projects that benefited its residents. Complicating the picture was the federal government’s strategy of supporting the mayors in order to increase its leverage over the governors.

Third, the governors were often able to capture or circumvent federal agencies working in their districts. These agencies were often dependent on the governors for their office space and other resources, so they were reluctant to buck the governors as much as their Moscow-based superiors would have liked. Although Moscow established a federal treasury system to gain better control over budgetary expenditures, governors like Ulyanovsk’s Goryachev were in some instances able to circumvent the treasury by forcing large local enterprises to pay their taxes directly to the oblast rather than through the federal system.11

Fourth, the governors used the prevalence of barter, tax write-offs, and other forms of soft budget constraints to hide how they were actually spending their money and other resources. The governors took advantage of the lack of fiscal transparency to pursue their own goals while evading oversight from the federal government and the public. Finally, the regional executives blocked the implementation of federal policies in their regions. The most prominent example of such an effort was Moscow Mayor Luzhkov’s successful campaign to prevent Anatolii Chubais’s federal privatization policy from being implemented in the capital. Luzhkov instead imposed his own program.

Thus, while the Russian president had a powerful arsenal, the governors retained some lobbying clout at the federal level and remained somewhat autonomous players at the regional level. While the president could issue decrees from the Kremlin, he had to intimidate or entice the governors to actually implement them. Yeltsin often seemed powerless precisely because he had bought the governors’ political loyalty by decentralizing power to them. In the summer of 2000 Putin seemed to be in a much stronger position because he demonstrated a willingness to use the tools available to him effectively.

**Relations among governors**

As mentioned above, the numerous divisions among the governors gave the Kremlin useful leverage over them. In established democracies, political parties often serve to aggregate political interests. In Russia, the governors’ attempts to form regionally-based political parties as a way of expressing their collective interests against the Kremlin have not proven effective. For example, the 1999 efforts to establish blocs based on the expectation that a Luzhkov-Primakov alliance could win the presidency fell apart when Yeltsin resigned and gave his prime minister the incumbent’s advantage. The rapid dissolution of the Fatherland–All Russia party suggested that there were few real bonds beyond temporary political advantage holding it together.

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Despite these failures, the governors were able to organize some forms of collective action through the Federation Council, the eight interregional associations, and other means. However, Putin’s reforms seemed aimed at diminishing the limited capacity for collective action that these institutions offered in the 1990s.

Following an agreement worked out between the State Duma and Yeltsin at the end of 1995, the upper house of Russia’s legislature was made up of the country’s 89 governors and the 89 chairmen of the regional legislatures. Putin’s reforms, however, removed the governors and regional legislative chairmen from the upper house, with the last regional leaders set to leave by 1 January 2002. Until Putin’s reform, the regional leaders effectively served as “senators,” giving them a direct voice in federal policy-making. According to the 1993 Constitution, the Federation Council must approve or reject legislation adopted by the State Duma. In the area of security policy, it must confirm changes in borders between Russian regions, approve presidential introductions of emergency rule, and ratify the use of force beyond Russia’s borders. In terms of political appointments, the Federation Council must confirm the nomination of the procurator general, judges of the highest courts, half the members of the Audit Chamber, and one-third of the Central Electoral Commission. It also must approve the impeachment of the president by a two-thirds vote. Until Putin’s reform, however, the body met for only a few days each month and its sessions were relatively poorly attended because the governors were busy with their numerous other responsibilities. Its potential for organizing the regional elite was thus effectively limited.

The Federation Council’s first collective assertion of power against the Kremlin came in 1997, when it opposed the president’s efforts to remove Governor Nazdratenko from office. In 1999, the Federation Council also stood up to the Kremlin by voting to continue anti-corruption investigations against Kremlin insiders and refusing to accept Yeltsin’s decision to fire Procurator General Yuri Skuratov.

In 2000, however, the upper house failed to prevent Putin from implementing the gist of his reforms because the regional leaders did not want to declare total war on the president. In general,
governors believed that it was easier to resolve their differences with the federal government one-on-one and in secret. Since they pursued a variety of differing interests, they preferred to avoid intervening in each other’s affairs. Moreover, the fact that all governors were equal in the Federation Council diluted the possibility of strong regional leaders (heads of the republics or rich regions, for example) from banding together.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, except in a few key cases, the Federation Council proved of little use in organizing collective action among the governors.

Another institutionalized form of cooperation between regions was the eight inter-regional associations. These groups met several times a year and often served as a forum for the Russian president to address several governors at once (see Table 5). The meetings usually focused on specific issues of concern to regional politicians, such as the forestry industry or road building. However, these associations never provided an effective base for collective political action because political differences among the governors prevented them from achieving potentially mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Saratov Governor Dmitrii Ayatskov complained, for example, that the Volga association squandered opportunities to press the interests of the aviation and automobile industries because it was distracted by political issues.\textsuperscript{14} Putin’s creation of the seven federal districts, which did not overlap well with the associations, seemed designed to further weaken them.

Outside of the Federation Council and the interregional associations, the governors worked together through multilateral large-scale investment projects, bilateral ties, and participation in interregional trade exhibitions. Directed federal programs, focused on such topics as the development of the Far East or protecting the environment of the Urals, provided a basis for regional cooperation. Bilateral agreements between regions provided the basis for cooperation between enterprises, developing infrastructure, establishing regional trade representatives, and organizing conferences, as political


scientist Vladimir Klimanov has pointed out. By November 1999, for example, Moscow city had signed 73 such bilateral agreements. Large nationally- and regionally-based enterprises that sought to preserve a unified Russian market also worked to promote linkages between regions.

**Foreign policy**

Many of Russia’s regions sought and maintained relations with foreign countries, regional governments within foreign countries, transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and international institutions. Most of these ties were economic in nature and did not elicit any particular protest from the federal government as a whole or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular. In fact, in most cases the federal government encouraged the regions to seek outside investments because it reduced the pressure on tight federal resources.

There have, of course, been occasions when regional leaders contradicted the federal government on political and national security questions. Primorskii Krai’s Nazdratenko unsuccessfully fought the adoption of a border treaty between Russia and China. Nazdratenko and Sakhalin Governor Igor Farkhutdinov protested against any potential attempts by Russia to return disputed Sakhalin territory to Japan. Luzhkov criticized the federal government’s policy toward Ukraine, arguing that the Crimean Peninsula rightfully belonged to Russia. Several regions established closer ties to Belarus’s Aleksandr Lukashenko than the federal government seemed to support. And some of Russia’s Turkic regions lent more support to Turkey than did the federal government. While these exceptions were important, they should not be exaggerated, because the regions generally played a very small role in the formation of Russia’s foreign policy.

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Conclusions

Given the speed and breadth of Putin’s reforms, and the central role of the Kremlin, it remains difficult to determine Russia’s future evolution. If Putin is able to consolidate power in the Kremlin, as seems likely, then he will be able to ensure the further cohesion of the Russian Federation. However, if his reforms fail and the economy falters, the governors will likely lose faith in the ability of the center and seek to assert their powers autonomously as they did in the last years of Yeltsin’s presidency.

The key point in Putin’s reform that observers should track are the evolution of the seven presidential representatives to the federal districts. They have an enormous task in monitoring the actions of federal and regional bodies in their jurisdictions, and it is not clear that they will be able to cope with this task. The new Federation Council may turn out to be more powerful and assertive than the current one. The governors will have control over their representatives there and will likely appoint effective lobbyists skilled at directing federal funds to their particular regions. Putin has given himself the power to remove uncooperative governors; however, it remains unclear if this power will be an effective way to pacify a region or only stir up increased animosity against the federal government when the Kremlin strikes out against an influential local leader.
Table 1

**Professional Background of Russian Governors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Number of Governors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPSU</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional administration, economists</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businesspeople</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomats</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDPR activists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

The Governors’ Political Affiliation on the Eve of the 1999 State Duma Elections

Unity:

Adygeya President Aslan Dzharimov (former member of All Russia)
Arkhangelsk Governor Anatolii Yefremov (former member of Fatherland)
Buryatia President Leonid Potapov
Chelyabinsk Governor Petr Sumin (former member of Voice of Russia and All Russia)
Chukotka Governor Aleksandr Nazarov (former member of Voice of Russia)
Dagestan President Magomedali Magomedov (unofficial supporter)
Evenk Governor Aleksandr Bokovikov
Ivanovo Governor Vladislav Tikhomirov
Kaliningrad Governor Leonid Gorbenko (former member of Voice of Russia)
Kalmkia President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov
Kamchatka Governor Vladimir Biryukov
Koryak Governor Valentina Bronевич
Kostroma Governor Viktor Shershunov
Kursk Governor Aleksandr Rutskoi
Leningrad Governor Valerii Serdyukov
Magadan Governor Valentin Tsvetkov (former member of Voice of Russia)
Nenets Governor Leonid Butov
Omsk Governor Leonid Polezhaev (former member of All Russia)
Orenburg Governor Vladimir Yelagin
Primorskii Krai Governor Yevgenii Nazdratenko
Rostov Governor Vladimir Chub (former member of Voice of Russia and All Russia)
Sakha President Mikhail Nikolaev
Sakhalin Governor Igor Farkhutdinov
Smolensk Governor Aleksandr Prokhorov
Tver Governor Vladimir Platov (former member of Voice of Russia)

Fatherland*:

Karelia Prime Minister Sergei Katanandov
Kirov Governor Vladimir Sergeenkov
Komi President Yuri Spiridonov
Mordovia President Nikolai Merkushin
Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov
Moscow Oblast Governor Anatolii Tyazhlov
Murmansk Governor Yuriy Yevdokimov
Nizhnii Novgorod Governor Ivan Sklyarov
Novosibirsk Governor Vitalii Mukha
Udmurtia State Council Chairman Aleksandr Volkov

*Fatherland united with All Russia to compete in the elections.
All Russia*:

Bashkortostan President Murtaza Rakhimov
Belgorod Governor Yevgenii Savchenko
Chuvashia President Nikolai Fedorov
Ingushetiya President Ruslan Aushev
Irkutsk Governor Boris Govorin
Khabarovsk Governor Viktor Ishaev
Khanty-Mansi Governor Aleksandr Filipenko
North Ossetia President Aleksandr Dzasokhov
Penza Governor Vasiliy Bochkarev
Perm Governor Gennadii Igumnov
St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev
Tatarstan President Minitimer Shaimiev

*All Russia united with Fatherland to compete in the elections.

Our Home Is Russia:

Astrakhan Governor Anatolii Guzhvin
Jewish Autonomous Oblast Governor Nikolai Volkov
Novgorod Governor Mikhail Prusak
Saratov Governor Dmitrii Ayatskov
Tomsk Governor Viktor Kress
Tyumen Governor Leonid Roketskii
Tyva President Sherig-Ool Oorzhak
Ust-Orda Buryatia Governor Valerii Maleev

Union of Right Forces (Pravoe Delo, Golos Rossii, Novaya Sila):

Gorno-Altai Republic President Semen Zubakin
Marii El President Vyacheslav Kislitsyn
Samara Governor Konstantin Titov
Vologda Governor Vyacheslav Pozgalev

Communists:

Altai Krai Governor Aleksandr Surikov
Amur Governor Anatolii Belonogov
Bryansk Governor Yuriy Lodkin
Kemerovo Governor Aman Tuleev
Krasnodar Governor Nikolai Kondratenko
Ryazan Governor Vyacheslav Lyubimov
Stavropol Governor Aleksandr Chernogorov
Tambov Governor Aleksandr Ryabov
Tula Governor Vasiliy Starodubtsev
Vladimir Governor Nikolai Vinogradov
Volgograd Governor Nikolai Maksyuta
Voronezh Governor Ivan Shabanov
Lebed:

Krasnoyarsk Governor Aleksandr Lebed
Khakassia Prime Minister Aleksei Lebed (also a signatory to Voice of Russia)

Zhirinovsky:

Pskov Governor Yevgenii Mikhailov

Unaffiliated with Major Blocs

Orel Governor Yegor Stroev
Sverdlovsk Governor Eduard Rossel
Ulyanovsk Governor Yuri Goryachev
Yaroslavl Governor Anatolii Lisitsyn
Table 3

Leaders and Membership of the Seven Federal Districts

CENTRAL FEDERAL DISTRICT

GEORGII POLTAVCHENKO (b. 1953), served in the KGB, St. Petersburg Federal Tax Police, and as presidential representative in Leningrad Oblast.

Capital: Moscow City
Belgorod
Bryansk
Ivanovo
Kaluga
Kostroma
Kursk
Lipetsk
Moscow Oblast
Orel
Ryazan
Smolensk
Tambov
Tver
Tula
Vladimir
Voronezh
Yaroslavl

NORTH-WEST FEDERAL DISTRICT

GENERAL VIKTOR CHERKESOV (b. 1950), served in the KGB and is known for prosecuting dissidents in the 1980s. He is married to Nataliya Chaplina, the editor of the pro-reform newspaper Chas Pik.

Capital: St. Petersburg
Arkhangelsk
Kaliningrad
Karelia
Komi
Leningrad Oblast
Murmansk
Nenets Autonomous Okrug
Novgorod
Pskov
Vologolda
SOUTHERN FEDERAL DISTRICT

ARMY GENERAL VIKTOR KAZANTSEV (b. 1946) was a career military officer who served as the commander of the federal troops in Chechnya before his appointment.

Capital: Rostov-na-Donu
Adygeya
Astrakhan
Chechnya
Dagestan
Ingushetia
Kabardino-Balkaria
Kalmykia
Karachaevo-Cherkessia
Krasnodar
North Ossetia-Alania
Rostov
Stavropol
Volgograd

VOLGA FEDERAL DISTRICT

SERGEI KIRIENKO (b. 1962) worked in the Komsomol, Garantiya Bank, and Norsi-oil. Yeltsin then appointed him first deputy fuel and energy minister, then minister, and ultimately prime minister. He was elected to the State Duma in 1999 when he lost a bid to oust Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov.

Capital: Nizhni Novgorod
Bashkortostan
Chuvashia
Kirov
Komi-Permyak Autonomous Okrug
Marii El
Mordovia
Nizhnii Novgorod
Orenburg
Penza
Perm
Samara
Saratov
Tatarstan
Udmurtia
Ulyanovsk
URAL FEDERAL DISTRICT

PETER LATYSHEV (b. 1948) long served in the Perm and then Krasnodar Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). From 1900 to 1993, he was a member of the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies. From 1994 to 2000, he served as deputy minister of internal affairs, where, among other duties, he led a corruption investigation into St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev.

Capital: Yekaterinburg
Chelyabinsk
Khanty-Mansii Autonomous Okrug
Kurgan
Sverdlovsk
Tyumen
Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

SIBERIAN FEDERAL DISTRICT

LEONID DRACHEVSKII (b. 1942) is a former world champion in rowing who served in the RSFSR State Committee on Physical Education and Sport. He was also Russian general consul in Barcelona, head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department for the CIS, ambassador to Poland, and Minister for the CIS. He is considered a moderate reformer and is well-liked by the intelligentsia.

Capital: Novosibirsk
Agin-Buryatia
Altai Krai
Buryatia
Chita
Evenk Autonomous Okrug
Gorno-Altai Republic
Irkutsk
Kemerovo
Khakasia
Krasnoyarsk
Novosibirsk
Omsk
Taimyr Autonomous Okrug
Tomsk
Tyva
Ust-Ordyn Buryat Autonomous Okrug
FAR EASTERN FEDERAL DISTRICT

LIEUTENANT GENERAL KONSTANTIN PULIKOVSKII (ret.) served as the deputy commander of the North Caucasus Military District July-August 1996 and as acting commander of federal troops in Chechnya, where he was famous for issuing an ultimatum to Grozny residents in 1996, that gave them 48 hours to leave the city.

Capital: Khabarovsk
- Amur
- Chukotka Autonomous Okrug
- Jewish Autonomous Oblast
- Kamchatka
- Khabarovsk
- Koryak Autonomous Okrug
- Magadan
- Primorskii Krai
- Sakha
- Sakhalin
Table 4

The Role of Incumbency in Gubernatorial Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of elections</th>
<th>Incumbent winners</th>
<th>Incumbent winners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1996–March 1997</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

**Membership of the Eight Interregional Associations**

**North-West**

Karelia  
Komi  
Arkhangelsk  
Vologda  
Kaliningrad  
Kirov  
Leningrad Oblast  
Murmansk  
Novgorod  
Pskov  
St. Petersburg  
Nenets AO

**Central Russia**

Bryansk  
Vladimir  
Ivanovo  
Kaliningrad  
Kaluga  
Kostroma  
Moscow Oblast  
Ryazan  
Smolensk  
Tver  
Tula  
Yaroslavl  
Moscow

**Black Earth**

Belgorod  
Bryansk  
Voronezh  
Kursk  
Lipetsk  
Novgorod  
Orel  
Tambov  
Tula
Greater Volga

Marii El
Mordovia
Tatarstan
Chuvashia
Astrakhan
Volgograd
Nizhni Novgorod
Penza
Samara
Saratov
Ulyanovsk

North Caucasus

Adygeya
Dagestan
Ingushetiya
Kabardino-Balkaria
Kalmykia
Karachaevo-Cherkessia
North Ossetia
Krasnodar
Stavropol
Rostov

Greater Ural

Bashkortostan
Udmurtia
Kurgan
Orenburg
Perm
Sverdlovsk
Chelyabinsk
Komi-Permyak AO

Siberian Accord

Gorno Altai
Buryatia
Tyva
Khakassia
Altai Krai
Krasnoyarsk
Irkutsk
Kemerovo
Novosibirsk
Omsk
Tomsk
Tyumen
Chita
Agin Buryatia AO
Taimyr AO
Ust-Orda Buryatia AO
Khanty-Mansii AO
Evenk AO
Yamal Nenets AO

**Far East**

Buryatia
Sakha (Yakutia)
Primorskiy Krai
Khabarovsk
Amur
Kamchatka
Magadan
Sakhalin
Chita
Jewish AO
Agin Buryatia AO
Koryak AO
Chukotka AO

*Eight regions are members of two associations.*