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# Authoritarian Versus Democratic Diffusions: Explaining Institutional Choices in Russia's Local Government

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**Abstract:** Two political scientists address questions posed by the puzzling survival of the institution of elected city mayors in Russia despite the efforts of the national government to abolish it. Based on datasets not only of local government reforms across all the regions but also of the regional component of European Union aid, statistical analysis is used to challenge dominant approaches to democratic institution building and diffusion theories are applied. The findings with regard to the spatially uneven and poly-nuclear nature of institutional influences challenge prevalent approaches to authoritarianism and democratic institution building.

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**W**hy do some democratic institutions survive while others perish? This question has long preoccupied democratic theorists. It became all the more pertinent with the proliferation of various "hybrid" institutional constellations in newly democratizing settings. The rich literature on post-authoritarianism, with its whole new vocabulary of democracies or authoritarianisms "with adjectives," has done much to sensitize us to the contemporaneous co-existence of democratic and non-democratic institutions (Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Carothers, 2002). However, many of the rele-

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vant studies share an important shortcoming. Focused as they are on national-level institutions, they have remained largely oblivious to institutional survival or change in polities that are hybrid not only in terms of national make-up, but also in spatial terms. Although there is a recognition of the regional clustering in the spread of democracy (Kopstein and Reilly, 2000), until recently the sub-national spatial factor has remained peripheral to studies of democratization (Gibson, 2005).

Russia, with its diversity of sub-national institutional outcomes, presents an excellent laboratory for exploring the factors accounting for democratic institutional resilience or change. The short-lived “feckless pluralism” (Carothers, 2002) of the 1990s resulted in a diversity of sub-national institutional outcomes. Although President Vladimir Putin sought to recentralize power and introduce institutional uniformity across all regions, his success remained patchy (Chebankova, 2007). While in most regions Putin’s efforts reinforced authoritarian tendencies already at work, in others, democratic institutions showed remarkable staying power (Petrov, 2004).

This article addresses this puzzle by applying diffusion theories to the level of sub-national regions. We conceptualize democratic institutional survival as an outcome of contrasting efforts of two sets of actors—domestic agents of authoritarian diffusion, and Western democracy promoters. The variable regional outcomes are products not only of the conflicting normative aspirations of these respective actors, but also of differences in their “propagation structures” (Savage, 1985, p. 14)—hierarchical versus loosely networked. Spatial proximity and contact between model-propagating and model-emulating regions and actors are also considered important factors influencing regional institutional choices. We advance this argument by analyzing changes in a major institution of modern democracy, elections, focusing on popular election of city mayors. For the study, the authors compiled original datasets of local government reforms across all regions, as well as datasets of the regional component of European Union aid spanning nearly 15 years. In-depth interviews with regional actors and with EU officials in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Brussels were also conducted, and local press coverage of municipal reforms was analyzed.

The article is structured as follows. In the first part, we briefly discuss post-communist trajectories of local government reform in Russia. We then highlight key debates on causes of regime change and democratization. This is followed by a section discussing diffusion theories and their utility for our analysis. Next, we present results of statistical analysis testing a range of hypotheses related to survival or elimination of popular election of city mayors and advance an alternative model. The statistical findings are then supported by case study examples of regional decision-making surrounding local government reforms. Our conclusions touch upon the role of spatial factors in democratic and authoritarian diffusion, and the impact of domestic and international actors and networks on institution building.

## SETTING THE SCENE: ZIG-ZAGS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS IN RUSSIA

After the collapse of communism, Russia underwent several rounds of local government reform (Evans and Gel'man, 2004). The 1993 Constitution mandated the institutional separation of local self-government from the state, and in 1996, upon its admission to the Council of Europe (CoE), Russia ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Authority over local government was then transferred from the federal to the regional level. The regionalization of the 1990s resulted in a motley array of local government institutional structures across the country, many of them blatantly at odds with federal legislation (Kahn, 2002; Lankina, 2004). Nevertheless, most city-level local governments opted for popular election of local chief executives, although some city mayors were appointed by elected local council deputies.

When Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, he initiated a policy of recentralization (Reddaway and Orttung, 2004–2005). Local government was to become the lowest link in the administrative pyramid known as the “executive power vertical.” This approach formed the basis of the new federal law on local government, which was adopted in October 2003. The law took effect in 2006, by which time the regions were to amend their respective legislation on local government and form new institutional structures. With regard to the institution of the local chief executive, the law provided for several options: (1) the “mayor-council” model, based on popular election of both council deputies and city mayors as chief executives; (2) the “city manager” model, whereby elected local deputies hire a chief executive, or city manager, who is nominated by a special commission that includes regional governor appointees; (3) a mixed model, whereby an elected city mayor is reduced to chairing the local council, while a hired city manager is vested with the powers of chief local executive. The “city manager” was the preferred Kremlin model, irrespective of what the actual local preferences might have been. Ultimately, however, at least on paper, it was the local authorities themselves who were to decide on their model.

The pro-Putin party, United Russia (UR), the “party of power,” became a major instrument of the implementation of local government policy in the regions (Gel'man, 2006; Hale, 2006). The Kremlin invested substantial resources into building up the UR's centralized organizational structure with branches in all regions. In the process, it co-opted influential actors, including governors of some 70 out of a total of 86 of Russia's regions (Hale, 2006; Gel'man, 2006; Goode, 2007). The Kremlin's and the governors' efforts in 2003–2007 succeeded in establishing UR majority factions in all but a handful of regional legislatures. And yet, when the institutional set-up phase of the reform was over, local institutional choices in many areas demonstrated a stunning resilience of the institution of elected mayors. At the same time, the motley nature of the outcomes—with some cities even reversing the trend and shifting from appointed to elected mayors was also puzzling. Among regional capital cities,<sup>2</sup> before the 2003 law was adopted,

**Table 1.** Varieties of Organizational Models of Local Government in Russia's Cities Before and After the 2003 Reform<sup>a,b</sup>

Dataset/model	Mayor-council model (elected mayor as local chief executive)	City manager model (chief executive appointed by the council)	Mixed model (elected mayor is chair of the council; chief executive appointed by the council)
Regional capitals, 2003 (N = 75)	65 (86.7 percent)	10 (13.3 percent)	0 (0.0 percent)
Regional capitals, 2007 (N = 75)	51 (68 percent)	21 (28 percent)	3 (4 percent)
IUE survey, 2003 (N = 206)	182 (89.8 percent)	21 (10.2 percent)	0 (0.0 percent)
IUE survey, 2006 (N = 84)	56 (66.7 percent)	22 (26.1 percent)	6 (7.1 percent)

<sup>a</sup>Source: Calculations based on the authors' analysis of capital city charters and Institute of Urban Economics survey data from a representative sample of different types of municipalities. The data are available at [www.urbaneconomics.ru](http://www.urbaneconomics.ru).

10 had no direct mayoral elections, while 65 cities elected their mayors. By 2007, 21 cities had no elected mayors, and 54 had elected mayors, three of whom were not chief executives. After 2003, two regional capitals shifted from non-elected to elected mayors, while 13 cities abolished mayoral elections. Since the foregoing analysis might be biased towards regional capitals, we also looked at data on other cities. Our data on regional capitals very closely correspond to two surveys of local governments that a Moscow-based think tank, the Institute of Urban Economics (IUE or Institut ekonomiki goroda), carried out in 2003 and 2006 in all types of municipalities. The data are presented in Table 1.

What then explains these variations in local institutional outcomes? Why do some cities continue to elect their mayors while in others mayoral elections are dead? And how do we begin to theorize and empirically explore institutional survival and the multiplicity of institutional outcomes that defy authoritarian impositions?

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Extant theories of democratization suggest a range of explanations for democratic institution building, survival, and change. The socio-economic

<sup>2</sup>We excluded the federal cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg and Moscow and Leningrad *oblasti*, as well as the city of Groznyy, capital of the Chechen republic. We also omitted capitals of autonomous districts that had been merged with neighboring regions after 2003. Our sample therefore has 75 regional capitals.

modernization school highlights the role of urbanization, economic growth, and the spread of mass communications as key predictors of democracy (Lipset, 1959; Przeworski et al., 2000). "Culture" is another key word in studies of democratization: political attitudes, citizen values, and civic spirit are widely regarded as causes of the strength or fragility of democratic institutions (Putnam, 1993). These explanations dovetail with broader institutional path-dependence approaches to democratic change. Polities with a historical record of particular institutional trajectories are likely to be influenced by such trajectories in their present-day institutional choices (Kitschelt et al., 1999; Bunce, 1999). Path-dependency can also be a function of structural economic factors. In particular, regional economic concentration and resource endowment in Russia have arguably affected political actor constellations and their institutional choices (Stoner-Weiss, 1997; Gel'man, Ryzhenkov, and Brie, 2003). In the post-Soviet context, fiscal federalism and institutional asymmetry might favor some regional actors over others, reinforcing patterns not just of resource dependence, but also of political dependence on the center (Treisman, 1999). These asymmetries, in turn, might allow regional and local elites some freedom of institutional choice or limit the menu of these choices. As an alternative to structural explanations of democratization, a number of studies have stressed the role of agency, focusing on elites as key players in the process of institution building (Geddes, 1996; Way, 2005). In particular, many studies of Russian regions see local elites as "gatekeepers" and stage-managers of all political processes and institutional choices (Golosov, 2004; Stoner-Weiss, 1997).

While both the structural and elite-centered approaches have largely focused on domestic structures, actors, and processes, it has become increasingly difficult to ignore the role of external factors in democratic institution building (Przeworski et al., 2000; Huntington, 1991; Brown, 2000; Anheier et al., 2002; Whitehead, 2001; Vachudová, 2005). External influences operate both at the level of individual citizens, affecting their value systems and political orientations through interactions or "linkages," and also at the level of national elites subject to various degrees of "leverage" by powerful transnational or international actors (Levitsky and Way, 2006). The constructivist turn in international relations scholarship has also sensitized us to the importance of normative, rather than just coercive pressures and influences upon national elites (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink, 1999).

All of these approaches provide valuable building blocks for constructing models of institutional inception, survival, and change. However, they share an important shortcoming, one that our study seeks to address. Much of the scholarship on democratic institutions is essentially spatially blind. Most studies focus on the national level of the polity, regarding space and geographical contexts as a constant. Where the existence of a "hybrid" regime is recognized, again, the reference is to a particular constellation at the national level, a constellation whose hydra-like tentacles are assumed to penetrate successfully the far reaches of the national space, however expansive this space is—again, all in a uniform fashion. Even where spatial

diversity of institutional outcomes is recognized, it is seen as a function of narrower, region-specific factors, and not necessarily as a function of diverse and multi-layered spatial influences (Putnam, 1993; Heller, 2000).

Only recently, insights from the literature on diffusion, with its strong spatial component, have begun to appear in the democratization literature (O'Loughlin et al., 1998; Brinks and Coppedge, 2006; Starr and Lindborg, 2003; Kopstein and Reilly, 2000). Diffusion is defined as "the socially mediated spread of some practice within a population" (Strang and Meyer, 1993, p. 487). Diffusion theories could provide more refined insights into democratic institution building in ways that challenge widespread approaches to democratization. For example, studies have shown how socio-economic conditions have limited explanatory power, while spatial factors better explain institutional innovations (Knoke, 1982).

Our conceptualizations of spatial factors include both geographic proximity to sources of institutional influences and proximity of actors to agents of change as measured by intensity of their contacts and interactions. In constructing our framework, we draw on the study of diffusion by Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio (1983). Central to their conceptualization of diffusion is isomorphism, a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (1983, p. 149). The two scholars distinguish among three sets of diffusion influences accounting for isomorphic change: coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive diffusion would appear to be most relevant for our exploration of institutional dynamics in a semi-authoritarian setting, with its strongly pronounced hierarchy of authority relationships. Even authoritarian institution building, however, could be characterized by high levels of uncertainty (Way, 2005), and this is where mimetic isomorphism is at work. Uncertainty affects both authoritarian leaders and their subjects. Presented with a menu of policy or institutional choice options, they may have doubts as to which strategy would best serve their interests. In such cases, other actors who had already made the choice provide easy "inferential shortcuts." Finally, normative pressures emanate from sources that are perceived to be "legitimate and reputable" (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983, p. 153). Normative isomorphism is a powerful lens for studying "soft" and indeed material pressures for democratic change exerted by trans-national civil society, international, or supranational organizations.

These sources of isomorphic pressures are not mutually exclusive, with mimicry often a result of a constellation of more than one factor. Diffusion studies suggest that the spatial dimension shapes the various outcomes in profound ways. We discern two important and interrelated spatial components: actual spatial/geographic proximity and contact. There is a rich literature on the spatial component of diffusion in American states' policy innovations (Walker, 1969; Savage, 1985; Knoke, 1982; Mooney, 2001). Spatial proximity facilitates contact, but it is not always necessary. Contacts could be frequent among actors that are more

geographically remote from one another than from their immediate neighbors if they are part of formal or informal networks or groupings.

How then do we begin to theorize and empirically test varieties of diffusion influences upon institutional survival and change in authoritarian settings? The most straightforward influence upon institutional choices would be the national government itself. The spatial component of this influence would be contingent upon the extent of the penetration of national agents in the localities. Regions might be more or less plugged into federal networks propagating a given institutional framework. However, the reach and influence of the national government, even in authoritarian settings, may be limited. Alternative sources of diffusion, eroding the power of the authoritarian state, are also likely to be at work. Authoritarian states like Russia are subject to strong democratizing pressures from a variety of external actors, such as the European Union (EU) (Lankina and Getachew, 2006). Although the EU in most cases may not impose legal frameworks on countries like Russia, which do not have accession prospects, an important aspect of its democratizing *modus operandi* is a faith in communication, exchanges, partnerships, and other network activities, which are to foster shared values. However loose and informal these arrangements might be, contact with European actors creates soft pressures for domestic change. The degree to which local actors are networked into West European institutions should be therefore regarded as an important indicator of external influences.

Finally, at a purely local level, actors who have mimicked either the federal or some external practice become themselves source of mimicry for other localities in their neighborhood. Diffusion thus is three-dimensional.

In his study of the diffusion of Latin American pension reform, Kurt Weyland uses the metaphor of a pebble hitting the water to illustrate how diffusion spreads geographically from one center to areas around (2005, p. 266). What if several pebbles are simultaneously thrown into the water next to one another? While lines immediately close to one pebble will be clear, external circles from two pebbles might overlap, creating fuzziness. In other words, areas subject to pressures from multiple sources and networks, whereby "propagation structures" are "poly-" as opposed to "mono-nuclear" (Savage, 1985, p. 14), are more likely to have fuzzy institutional outcomes than those where pressures are unipolar and choices more straightforward given the limited menu. As Elisabeth Clemens and James Cook discern in their discussion of institutional durability and change, "the presence of alternatives lessens the institutional determination of action while also facilitating innovation" (1999, p. 448).

In the following sections, we explore these premises by first testing the validity of extant socio-economic, structural, citizen preferences- and values-centered, international influences as well as elite-centered approaches to institutional change. Then we extend our exploration of these premises by devising frameworks that incorporate multiple diffusion effects.

## TESTING RIVAL HYPOTHESES

### The Data

Six groups of independent variables are employed in the first stage of the analysis (Model 1): (1) modernization; (2) structural; (3) resource-dependence; (4) mass political preferences and orientations; (5) role of elites; and (6) international influences. The modernization variable is gross regional product (GRP) per capita.<sup>3</sup> The first structural variable is the share of all of the region's municipalities in its overall revenue structure. It is well known that resource-rich municipalities in Russia are more likely to engage in conflicts with regional authorities to resist redistributive pressures. These structural factors are, in turn, likely to affect institutional choices of mayors in their efforts to preserve independence from regional governors. The second structural variable relates to federal institutional asymmetries. Because the nationalist elites in the "ethnic" republics were more successful than the "Russian" *oblasti* in obtaining power-sharing concessions from the center in the course of the 1990s (Treisman, 1999), the regional status of *oblasti* versus ethnically defined republics is included to further test structural hypotheses. The regional resource-dependence variable is the percentage of federal transfers in the regional budget. We assume that regions dependent on federal transfers are more likely to show compliance with federal policies, including those related to local government reform. Two political preferences variables are employed: regional share of the vote for democratic parties in the Duma election and for the pro-Kremlin United Russia party.<sup>4</sup> The elite/agency variable is the record of the capital mayor contending for the post of governor in a given region.<sup>5</sup> We believe that this variable is an appropriate indicator for testing the hypothesis that elites influence institutional choices. The existence of elite actors at the level of capital cities strong enough to challenge regional governors has been associated with greater institutional independence of local government from regional authorities (Gel'man et al., 2002). The international influences variable is European Union aid to Russian regions.

The indicator of modernization that we used in the statistical analysis is the value for gross regional product (GRP) per capita in 2003. We employ a dummy to test the role of elites hypothesis. Our dummy takes the value of one if a region has a history of its capital city's mayor contending for the post of regional governor, and zero otherwise. In order to measure the impact of structural factors, we employ the overall percentage share of all municipalities in a given region's revenue structure in 2003.<sup>6</sup> Resource

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<sup>3</sup>Data for GRP per capita comes from the Russian State Committee on Statistics reports.

<sup>4</sup>Data for the variables "United Russia party list vote" and "Union of Right Forces and Yabloko vote" in Model 1 and "Fatherland-All Russia vote" in Model 2 were obtained from the Russian Central Electoral Commission reports.

<sup>5</sup>Data come from the authors' analyses of the regional press.

<sup>6</sup>The budget figure includes intergovernmental transfers.



dependence on the center is assessed by factoring in the percent of federal transfers in the regional budget in 2003.<sup>7</sup> As a proxy for democratic political preferences we calculate and employ the measure of the combined share of regional vote for the democratic Yabloko and Union of Right Forces parties in the 2003 Duma elections, according to the Central Electoral Commission official data. The pro-Kremlin UR party regional vote in the 2003 Duma election is also employed. While this variable could be conceptually linked to “mass political preferences” similar to the democratic vote variable—after all, public opinion surveys consistently show mass support for President Putin and the UR party—it is important to note that UR is an authoritarian, top-down structure. A pro-UR vote could be as much an indicator of actual mass preferences as it is of the use of pressure tactics and electoral manipulation and fraud by pro-UR governors and UR party activists. These issues are further addressed in Model 2, which represents an alternative, diffusion framework whereby UR is conceptualized as an authoritarian propagation structure. For the variable of federal institutional asymmetries, a dummy with a value of one is employed for regions with republic status, and zero otherwise. Finally, as a measure of external normative power influences we take the per capita volumes of aid in Euros allocated to the regions over 14 years within the framework of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program. The data are taken from a comprehensive author-constructed dataset of all projects going through the nine TACIS local support offices.<sup>8</sup>

The dependent variable in the analysis is popular election of mayors in the regions. As discussed earlier, the institutional choices pertaining to local chief executives after the municipal reform of 2003 could be divided into three groups: (1) the mayor-council model; (2) the city manager model; and (3) the mixed model. We regard the latter two institutional choices as essentially equivalent to one another in that the chief executive is not popularly elected and accountable, and in that they reflect the Kremlin preferences for top-down control of local governments. For the purposes of convenience, we therefore create a categorical dichotomy for the dependent variable. We employ a dummy, which takes the value of one if a region opted for popular election of capital city chief executive, and zero other-

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<sup>7</sup>Data obtained from [www.budgetrf.ru](http://www.budgetrf.ru) and [www.openbudget.karelia.ru](http://www.openbudget.karelia.ru) and compiled by the authors.

<sup>8</sup>Source: Compiled from project data available at <http://www.eucoop.ru/TacisPublic/en/Projects.aspx>. The data do not include national government aid flows channeled outside of the framework of EU aid projects. We are grateful to Jeremy Pilmore-Bedford and Phil Hanson for drawing attention to the importance of these data for our analysis. Assembling these data is an agenda for future research; however, with respect to EU member states, we do not expect patterns of Russian regional aid allocation to be different from aid going through EU channels. European donors and project participants—whether governments or non-state actors—take an active initiative in identifying their preferred regional partners on the Russian side of the border or shaping specific aid instruments. The record of involvement in EU projects in some regions and not others is therefore as much a reflection of EU priorities as it is of actual preferences of EU member states' national actors.

**Table 2.** Summary Statistics<sup>a</sup>

Summary Statistics	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Mayor election after 2003 (unit: dummy)	0	1	.68	.47
Mayor election before 2003 (unit: dummy)	0	1	.86	.34
Mayor was contender for post of governor (unit: dummy)	0	1	.36	.48
United Russia vote (unit: percent), 2003	25.9	77	38.3	10.81
Union of Right Forces and Yabloko vote (unit: percentage), 2003	1.9	14.6	6.9	2.66
Fatherland–All Russia vote (unit: percent), 1999	2.20	88	10.05	11.74
GRP per capita (unit: million Rubles), 2003	10.13	362.95	65.67	54.95
Share of federal transfers in regional revenue (unit: percent), 2003	3.6	92	44.72	22.95
Share of local governments' revenue in regional budget overall revenue (unit: percent), 2003	27.4	77.9	55.23	10.23
Cumulative EU aid per capita (unit: Euros), 1992–2005	0	55.36	2.82	8.86
Council of Europe Chamber of Local Authorities membership (unit: number of regional members)	0	2	.24	.51
Contiguity (unit: score)	0	1	.71	.28

<sup>a</sup>Source: In general, see pages 47–49 and 51–52 (i.e., the sections on the data in Model 1, and Model 2) and, in particular, footnotes 3–9.

wise.<sup>9</sup> The summary statistics of the left-hand side and right-hand side variables described above are presented in Table 2.

## Model 1

Our first model tests extant hypotheses related to democratization as discussed above, while also employing two variables that could be conceptually linked to an alternative, diffusion framework—the pro-Kremlin vote

<sup>9</sup>Data come from the authors' analyses of city charters, other legislation, and regional and local press.

**Table 3.** Model 1<sup>a,b</sup>

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp B
UR vote	-.207	.105	3.898	.048	.813
EU aid	.527	.266	3.932	.047	1.695
Mayor as governor contender	.446	.960	.215	.643	1.561
GRP PC	-.422	1.865	.051	.821	.655
Republic status	.369	1.053	.122	.726	1.446
Federal transfers	-.034	.034	1.000	.317	.967
Democratic vote	-.164	.279	.344	.557	.849
Local budgets' share in regional budget	.029	.049	.350	.554	1.029
Constant	10.711	8.561	1.565	.211	44852.027

<sup>a</sup>Source: In general, see pages 47–49 and 51–52 (i.e., the sections on the data Model 1, and Model 2) and, in particular, footnotes 3–9.

<sup>b</sup>N = 75; -2 log likelihood: 40.798; Cox and Sn. R Sqr: .309; Nagelk. R Sqr. = .445; Hosmer and Lemeshow: Chi sqr. 11.104 (sig.: .196)

and EU aid variables. Model 1 specifies the mayor election variable to be a function of modernization, structural, resource-dependence, mass political preferences, elite, and international influences factors. The values of all variables in the regressions other than those expressed in percentage terms and the dummy variables have been logged.

Because our outcome variable is a categorical dichotomy, while our predictor variables are both continuous and categorical, we use the logistic regression model of analysis (Field, 2005, p. 226). The results of Model 1 are presented in Table 3. The only two variables that are statistically significant at least at a 5 percent level are the United Russia vote and EU aid. The B-value, which is the natural logarithm of the odds of an outcome on the dependent variable, suggests that for every one-unit increase in UR vote, the odds against mayor election increase by about .2. At the same time for every one-unit increase in EU aid, the log odds against a regional capital abolishing mayoral elections drop by .5. The Wald statistic for the two variables is significantly different from zero, which suggests that they significantly contribute to explaining the mayor election or appointment outcomes. The -2 log likelihood (for convenience referred to subsequently as the likelihood statistic), which indicates the amount of unexplained information after the model had been fitted (Field, 2005, p. 221), is 41. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit statistic is not significant. This indicates that the model does not significantly differ from the observed data (Field, 2005).

## Model 2

Model 1 challenges standard explanations of democratic institution building and change. The only two variables that are statistically significant in the model are related to our diffusion hypotheses. The United Russia variable testifies to the power of authoritarian structures of diffusion of Kremlin preferences in the regions. While citizen democratic preferences do not appear to influence institutional choices, as is demonstrated by the lack of statistical significance of the democratic vote variable, a top-down authoritarian party with powerful “propagation structures” in the regions does appear to make a difference. A counter to Kremlin efforts is the influence of external, European Union actors as measured by the EU aid variable. These two variables capture coercive and normative isomorphic influences, respectively, on local government institutional choices. In Model 2, we employ these variables as well as additional controls and variables linked to diffusion to further test the robustness of our explanatory framework.

Because we have yet to test for the significance of a variable related to regional neighbor influences that would capture the third type of isomorphic influences—mimetic ones—we create a variable contiguity. The variable measures regional clustering of capital city mayor appointing versus electing regions. Regions are assigned a value of 1 if all adjacent regions elect capital city mayors and zero if all adjacent regions choose the city manager or mixed model. Regions bordering a mix of elector and appointer regions are assigned a value of .5.

The contiguity variable was not included in Model 1 for the following reasons. Clustering may be related to other aspects of regional variations, such as regional wealth as measured by the GRP variable, federal transfers, which often target wider geographic areas, such as the Far East or the North Caucasus, or republic status. By first testing for the significance of the above variables in Model 1, we address the possibility of clustering being a product of other factors, and not neighbor emulation, which our contiguity variable seeks to capture.

Model 2 also includes additional variables that further test the robustness of the results of Model 1 with respect to the significance of the UR vote and EU aid variables. The UR vote may be capturing region-specific factors that had already been in place even before the appearance of UR on the scene with its explicit “power vertical” agenda. For instance, regions that tend to be successful at mobilizing the pro-Kremlin vote may be also those where powerful regional governors control the grassroots level. Control over local governments through appointed mayors is an important factor in mobilizing the local vote (Lankina, 2004). So perhaps regions that supported UR and opted for appointing mayors after the 2003 reform have a past history of such appointments, as well as a history of voting for pro-government parties. One such party that preceded the appearance of UR is the Fatherland–All Russia party (FAR), which was formed before the 1999 State Duma elections and represented merely a coalition of powerful

regional governors (Hale, 2006). Simple bivariate correlation exercises show that this variable positively correlates with the 2003 UR vote, as well as with appointment of mayors before the 2003 reform. Unlike the UR party, however, FAR never had an explicit agenda of local government reform, nor had it ever assumed control of federal government in the way that the President Putin-supported UR did. This variable therefore allows us to control for region-specific factors affecting the likelihood of appointment of mayors irrespective of the UR agenda. We therefore include the variable of the percentage share of regional vote for the FAR party in the 1999 State Duma elections—that is, preceding those in 2003 and when the UR party did not yet exist. The data are obtained from the Central Electoral Commission.

In order to test further for the robustness of the external effects variable, we include another “European influence” variable. The Council of Europe (CoE) is an important institution shaping local government normative frameworks throughout Europe. The Council’s European Charter of Local Self-Government is a binding legal instrument. It states that “local authorities shall be able to determine their own internal administrative structures.” The CoE’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an influential body. For example, in November 2006, it successfully challenged the UR party’s attempts to abolish mayoral elections in regional capitals across Russia by appealing to the European Charter of Local Self-Government that Russia ratified (Makarkin, 2007, pp. 26–27). Fifteen Russian regions are represented in the Congress’s Chamber of Local Authorities. Twelve of these regions have one delegate and three have two delegates representing the region’s municipalities in this important Council of Europe body. Regional membership in the Chamber, according to CoE data, is included in this model as an additional measure of external diffusion influences.

Finally, the 2003 State Duma elections democratic vote variable is included in Model 2 for the following reasons. Studies have demonstrated that EU aid often goes to regions that are already more democratic in the first place (Lankina, 2005; Lankina and Getachew, 2006). The EU aid variable is therefore vulnerable to criticism that it may capture extant regional variations in citizen openness and democratic orientations. Including the democratic vote variable allows us to establish more conclusively whether local institutional choices are shaped by external actors, among others, or, alternatively, by citizen democratic orientations irrespective of external influences.

The results for Model 2 regressions are presented in Table 4. The likelihood statistic in this model is 28. Larger values of this statistic indicate weaker prediction of the dependent variable (Menard, 1995, p. 20). The result is therefore a substantial improvement over the predictive power in Model 1 (41), which includes variables related to standard explanations of democratic institution building but does not have the CoE, contiguity, and FAR variables. The Hosmer and Lemeshow statistic is not significant,

**Table 4.** Model 2<sup>a,b</sup>

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp. B
UR vote	-.267	.112	5.712	.017	.766
EU aid	.696	.397	3.080	.079	2.006
CoE membership	3.018	1.965	2.360	.124	20.457
FAR vote	.010	.089	.012	.914	1.010
Democratic vote	-.353	.276	1.641	.200	.703
Contiguity	7.686	3.475	4.891	.027	2177.236
Constant	8.361	4.789	3.047	.081	4276.452

<sup>a</sup>Source: In general, see pages 47–49 and 51–52 (i.e., the sections on the data in Model 1, and Model 2) and, in particular, footnotes 3–9.

<sup>b</sup>N = 75; -2 log likelihood: 28.551; Cox and Sn. R Sqr: .459; Nagelk. R Sqr. = .661; Hosmer and Lemeshow: Chi sqr. 2.665 (sig.: .954)

which indicates a good fit of the observed data with the model. The variables that were significant in Model 1 remain statistically significant—the UR vote variable at least at a 5 percent level and the EU aid variable at least at a 10 percent level—and have the expected sign on the B, as well as the expected Exp B values. The FAR and democratic vote variables are statistically insignificant and have the wrong sign.<sup>10</sup> The CoE variable is slightly beyond the 90 percent confidence level (12) and has the expected sign on the B, as well as the expected Exp B value. The contiguity variable is significant at least at a 5 percent level.

The model suggests that the UR vote is a better predictor of institutional choices than region-specific factors as captured by the FAR variable, and it confirms our premise of the active role of the pro-Kremlin loyalists as agents of diffusion. Although the CoE variable is slightly beyond the satisfactory confidence level of 90 percent, taken together with the findings on the role of EU aid, we consider this result confirmation of external diffusion influences on local institutional choices. The only information on regional involvement with the CoE available to us at this stage is the membership of 15 regions in the Chamber of Local Authorities. This is a rather crude proxy of CoE influences, particularly in comparison with our EU aid measures, which comprise comprehensive data on all TACIS projects spanning nearly a decade and a half. Additional data related to CoE activities in the respective regions and the frequency and nature of interactions between regional politicians and the Chamber may be required for more refined measures and more conclusive findings with respect to

<sup>10</sup>The FAR variable was expected to correlate negatively with mayor elections; the democratic vote, positively.

CoE influences in the regions. In the qualitative section of the article below, we provide additional examples of CoE's role in shaping local government outcomes. Finally, Model 2 results for contiguity confirm that in addition to authoritarian and normative domestic and external influences, institutional choices of the wider regional neighborhood matter. Regions are more likely to opt for appointing mayors if their immediate regional neighbors have done so. The same logic holds true for those that opted to elect mayors.

## Dependent T-Test

In order to isolate more conclusively the main influence of UR on mayor election outcomes from other factors, such as a greater or lesser proclivity to appoint mayors irrespective of UR agenda, we also conducted a dependent *t*-test on the variables of election of the mayor before the 2003 reform and after. In order to carry out this test, we gathered data on and created a variable of election or appointment of mayors before 2003—that is, prior to President Putin's local government reforms.

We assume that if there is a significant difference in the means for mayoral election before and after the 2003 reform, that difference would serve as additional evidence that the appearance of UR and its efforts at building a "power vertical" increased the likelihood of opting for mayor appointments. The test results show that, on average, the regions showed significantly less inclination to opt for election of mayors after the 2003 reform ( $M = .6800$ ,  $SE = .05423$ ) than prior to it ( $M = .8667$ ,  $SE = .03952$ ),  $t(74) = -3.545$ ,  $p < .001$ . The diffusion of authoritarian institutional models does result in a greater likelihood that mayors will be appointed, even when prior institutional choices and preferences are taken into account.

## CASE STUDIES

The statistical analysis may be insufficient for uncovering the nuances of the varieties of diffusion influences—hierarchical, mimetic, and normative. We therefore provide additional evidence of the various influences that are at work.

Figure 1 provides a good visual illustration of the spatial configuration of regions with council-nominated or appointed chief executives. The shaded areas are distinctly clustered and illustrate the two types of diffusion of authoritarian influences—hierarchical—because they correspond to the spatial profile of UR electoral support (Turovskiy, 2007), and neighboring ones, because of pro-UR neighbor influences in regions with otherwise weak support for the party. Most of the non-shaded regions that chose to elect mayors are in the Far East, Eastern Siberia, and the Northwest, and are likewise clustered. We argue that these areas are weakly influenced by authoritarian structures and/or strongly influenced by external democracy promoters, as well as their regional neighbors, which serve as models for emulation. A combination of several of the above factors is usually at work.

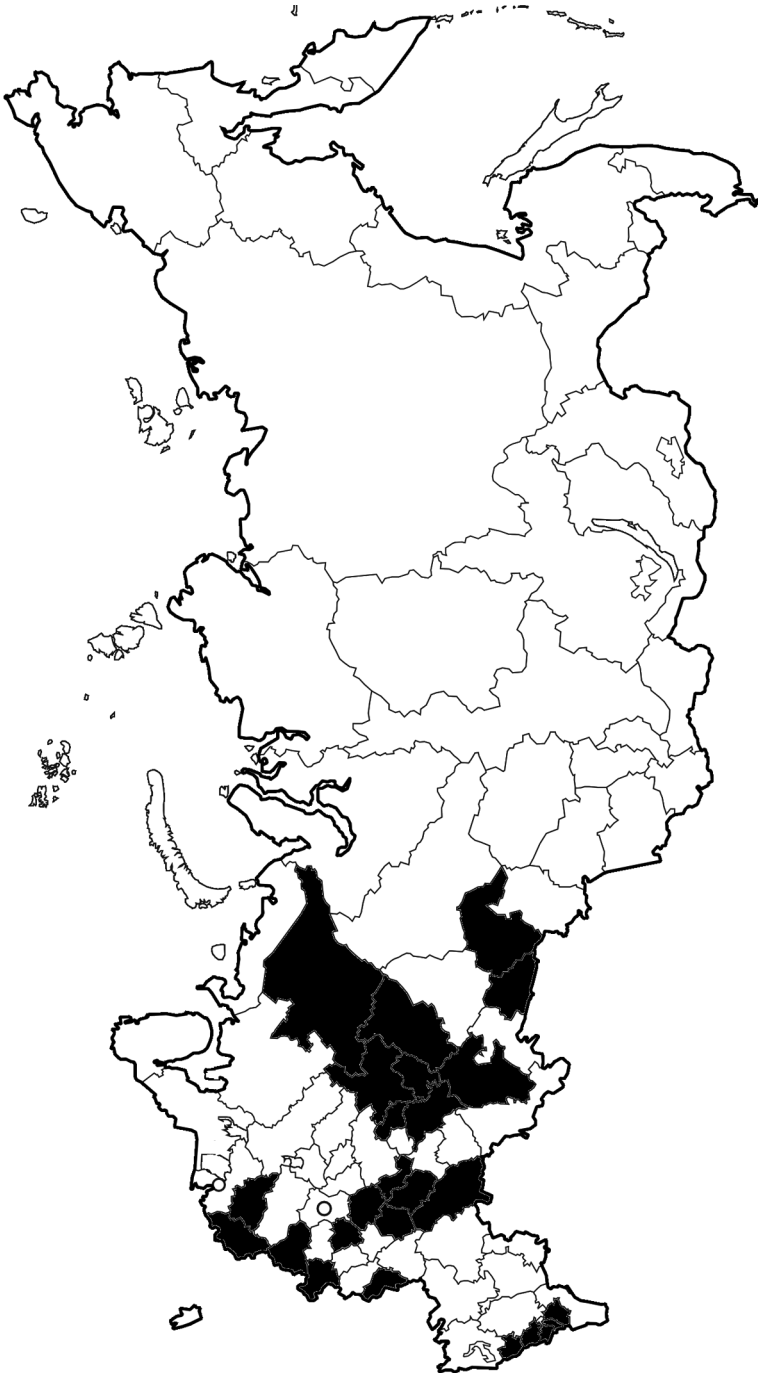


Fig. 1. Regions with chief executive not popularly elected.



For example, local press coverage of regional institutional choices suggests that mimetic factors were at work even where UR support may not have been very high. Local politicians in Penza emulated neighboring regions' cities, which eliminated mayoral elections shortly after the 2003 federal law had been adopted. The capitals of Novgorod and Pskov *oblasti* are also representative of the diffusion of institutional influences from neighbors, which boosted the efforts of pro-UR governors. The more developed Novgorod *oblast'* has long served as an institutional role model for Pskov (Petro, 2004), and this pattern was confirmed by local government institutional choices after 2003. The Novgorod *oblast'* governor, a UR loyalist, insisted on the adoption of a city manager model. Eight months later, under strong pressure from the governor and UR, the Pskov city council opted for the same model. In so doing, it explicitly cited the example of the regional neighbor. The fact that Novgorod-the-Great had already adopted a city manager model provided a convenient inferential shortcut facilitating mimetic isomorphism. In both cities, the local opposition resisted these institutional changes and called for referendums. In both regions, however, regional and local authorities sabotaged this effort. City authorities in Novgorod-the-Great scheduled the referendum for July 2006, at the height of summer vacations. The referendum was proclaimed invalid because of a low (4.5 percent) turnout, although 88.5 percent of those who participated voted for popular election of a city mayor ([www.annews.ru/news/detail.php?ID=12634](http://www.annews.ru/news/detail.php?ID=12634)). Unsurprisingly, the Pskov elites replicated their neighbor's strategy, holding a local referendum a mere one week after that in Novgorod-the-Great. The outcome of the referendum was similar to that of its neighboring city.

While authoritarian propagation structures were strong in the above and other mayor-appointing regions, most of these regions were weakly influenced by Western actors. The geographically remote North Caucasus republics, but also some of the Central Russian regions and the Volga-Urals republics in particular, stand out for virtually non-existent to low levels of EU project involvement there (Lankina and Getachew, 2006). Accordingly, in what supports diffusion studies of other settings (Clemens and Cook, 1999, p. 448), the lack of alternative models facilitated inferential shortcuts through neighbor emulation, as well as the work of UR authoritarian agents of diffusion.

The above examples illustrate how a combination of three factors—the absence of strong Western influences, the presence of active and hierarchically organized agents of authoritarian diffusion, and the presence of a neighbor that provided a convenient model for emulation—resulted in the choice to abolish popular election of city mayors. The Kremlin easily imposed its will upon the local elites and citizenry. By contrast, Western involvement and the availability of alternative models complicated the imposition of authoritarian institutional templates in other regions. Petrozavodsk, the capital of the republic of Kareliya, further illustrates the impact of democratic versus authoritarian propagation structures on institutional choices.

In the early 1990s, Kareliya had already emerged as one of the regional leaders in democratic innovations (Gel'man et al., 2002, pp. 229–276; Petrov, 2004). Since the early 1990s, the region became a major target for European Union aid programs (Lankina and Getachew, 2006). The high international “linkage” of this republic and its capital city was both resource- and normative-based. Not only was foreign aid instrumental in creating an independent media and non-governmental sectors but the drafters of Kareliya’s law on local government intentionally adopted elements of Nordic local government models.

The adoption of the new 2003 federal law provided the head of the republic, Sergey Katanandov, a UR supporter, with an opportunity to increase his control over the capital city. He insisted that the city council should eliminate popular election of city mayor and reduce the number of local deputies. While the UR deputies enthusiastically endorsed this proposal, opposition deputies vetoed it. Aside from the hierarchical pressures that UR exerted, mimetic factors also played a role in this conflict: the incumbent regional governor- and UR-backed mayor sought to reduce electoral uncertainty when faced with a strong opposition challenger. In the October 2006 mayoral elections, the incumbent won with a slim margin, but the council continued to block his efforts to push through the abolition of mayoral elections. After the elections, Katanandov and the UR-dominated republican legislature filed a legal suit against the city council, which was then dissolved pursuant to a compliant court decision. In March 2007, when fresh elections to the city council were held, the opposition secured a stunning victory. Petrozavodsk thus preserved the institutional *status quo* and the independence of its local government.

The availability of democratic European templates reinforced the municipal actors’ successful claims to legitimacy compared to those of the regional governor. At the level of municipal elites, provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government were invoked to boost the council’s claims to autonomous decision-making. At the level of the broader society, non-governmental organizations strongly trans-nationalized with European NGO networks secured grassroots mobilization support for this cause. The “poly-nuclear” nature of influences in Kareliya and the collision of authoritarian and democratic “waves” resulted in a clash of alternative municipal models, and, when the local council was disbanded, also resulted in an initially fuzzy and inconclusive outcome. Western influences, however, ultimately proved sufficiently strong and helped resist authoritarian diffusion from the center.

## CONCLUSION

Studies of democratization or, alternatively, the spread of authoritarianism point to the “wave-like” temporal dimensions of these processes (Huntington, 1991) in which elites play a key role. However, the spatial dimensions of these processes receive much less attention. By contrast, diffusion scholarship focuses largely on spatial effects of change rather

than on the role of various agents in affecting it. Our study has sought to combine these different perspectives.

Our statistical analysis shows that UR served as a major "change agent" (Savage, 1985, p. 15) of authoritarian diffusion or "propagation structure" in Russia's localities. Because of UR's centralized organization, its strong ties with regional governors, and dominance in a multitude of regional legislatures, it could exert coercive pressures for institutional isomorphism. However, the UR performance in some regions, particularly in the Far East, was not very strong (Golosov, 2004; Turovskiy, 2007). This fact helped prevent the widening of the concentric circle of authoritarian diffusion: authoritarian state building might have its geographic limits.

Our second major finding is the "poly-nuclear" nature of institutional influences, which results in spatially uneven institutional outcomes depending on the degree of penetration by the conflicting model propagating actors—authoritarian versus democratic. The European Union, a major international agent of democratic diffusion, served as a counterweight to the spread of authoritarian tendencies. It exerted its normative influence through regional aid and the fostering of network connections and exchanges that come with it. Other European institutions, like the CoE, also served as agents of normative influence: formal membership in the CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and the informal network connections that come with such membership, might also encourage regional actors to resist hierarchical authoritarian pressures. To use Walker's analogy, when faced with a choice of "league" in which to play, regions networked with European institutions are more likely to opt for a Western one and will design their local institutions accordingly (1969, p. 863).

The immediate regional neighborhood also affected the process of authoritarian and democratic diffusion, although in very different ways. Regional actors were well aware of the elimination of popular election of city mayors in neighboring regions. In circumstances of rapid institutional change with high levels of uncertainty (Mooney, 2001), they experienced mimetic or "bandwagon effect" pressures for institutional isomorphism. By contrast, regions subject to European Union influences resisted authoritarian diffusion, in part because of the external inflow of resources specifically aimed at municipal development, but also normative pressures to conform to or imitate the more developed Western neighbors. This was clearly the case in Kareliya.

Such a constellation of normative and material resource endowment factors, however, was not always sufficient for countering the mimetic and coercive authoritarian diffusions in many regions, because authoritarian and democratic diffusions are vastly different in nature. Authoritarian innovations are launched hierarchically and are backed by organizational penetration through party channels and/or the state, although neighborhood actors might also play a role in reinforcing them. By contrast, democratic diffusion at a local level is largely channeled through, and facilitated by, loose networks. The survival of democratic institutions within the

context of authoritarian state building (Way, 2005) may be therefore as much a result of the sluggishness of hierarchical authoritarian “pebbles” as it is of the strength of democratic networks and resistance. Nevertheless, even the loose, bottom-up democratic “pebble waves” could be instrumental in reducing the penetration of top-down authoritarian diffusions, albeit short of reversing them completely.

How sustainable are such “oases” of democratic institutions within an increasingly authoritarian national state? Studies of communist and post-communist state building and collapse sensitize us to potential “subversive” effects of sub-national political institutions (Bunce, 1999) vis-à-vis a national political agenda. Authoritarian impositions of institutional isomorphism may clash with alternative mimetic and normative pressures. It is sub-national rather than national actors who might serve as major agents of democratic change if they are able to preserve their autonomous power base and secure normative encouragement and resource support from without. The USSR experience demonstrates, however, that such multi-dimensional pressures might lead to the collapse of the authoritarian state itself. It remains to be seen whether Russia will opt for an even greater authoritarian response to these challenges or whether “pebble waves” of democratic diffusions—both from within and from without—will one day help overcome authoritarian hierarchical diffusions in Russia’s regions and in the country as a whole.

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