

Transforming Bureaucracy: Conditional Norms and the International Standardization of Statistics in Russia

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Abstract:

This article analyzes variation in the implementation of international institutions and bureaucratic reform, using the case of the rapid and radical institutional reform of Russian economic statistics in the early 1990s. Three theoretical approaches are tested: political actors and interests; efficiency and material incentives; and constructivist approaches to identities and norms. And, a novel theoretical concept, *conditional norms*, is proposed. With conditional norms, changes in conditions, rather than changes in norms or identities per se, are the source of interest in institutional change. The analysis is based on a cross-national quantitative analysis and a case study based on extensive fieldwork.

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It is recognized that we have implemented international standards. We did it quickly and qualitatively. The first program on the transition to international standards was signed in early 1992 and this program was actually realized, which happens rarely in this country.

Vladimir Sokolin, Head of Russian State Statistics

Introduction

In an era of globalization, where international institutions have multiplied and more and more governments have signed on to standardized ways of organizing economies and societies, resistance remains plentiful. We find variation in compliance with international rules if we look across states, across issue areas, as well as within states, and within state bureaucracies. At the same time that compliance with international norms and rules seems to be ever increasing, some states, organizations, and bureaucrats repudiate rules, drag their feet, adapt rules to fit their own interests, subvert the intention of rules, or just plain ignore them.

While some high-profile events, such as signing treaties, attract attention, the real work of implementing international rules actually takes place lower down inside state bureaucracies. To understand the process by which international norms and institutions are embraced, rejected, or partially implemented, we have to consider the actors who are responsible for implementation, namely the bureaucrats in particular state agencies. It is by going inside the state that we will be able to assess the reasons why some norms or rules take hold and others do not, and we will also gain insight into one of the most vexing questions of bureaucratic reform, namely how do you get career bureaucrats to do something new?

The bureaucracy literature thus far has focused on domestic factors – primarily actors, interests, and material incentives – but the context of global norms and international institutions is also important and suggests that we need to consider international factors in explaining

bureaucratic reform. In addition, for many bureaucracies, international institutions often provide the only "objective" measures we have for gauging the quality of bureaucratic practices. Indeed, sometimes the implementation of standardized international rules is the definition of state "reform."

In order to get at the question of variation in implementation of international institutions we could consider a range of institutions, but the international System of National Accounts (SNA) is a particularly good case for several reasons. The SNA is a highly institutionalized set of international rules regarding the collection, categorization, and processing of all economic data, and it is the institutional foundation of indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – a modern convention that allows us to make instant economic comparisons across countries and over time. Today, nearly all countries, 191 in total, are attempting to implement the SNA and the quality of statistics and the capacity of statistical bureaucracies are largely measured by compliance with the SNA. Yet, there is tremendous variation across states in levels of implementation; some countries have made only hollow commitments to the SNA, some have gone part way towards implementation, while a handful of countries have embraced implementation of the SNA in its entirety. That is, like many institutional reforms meant to improve transparency and accountability, institutional reform of statistics across countries has been uneven and incomplete. Hence, the variation in SNA implementation across countries constitutes a theoretically interesting puzzle.

In this article, I analyze the implementation of international institutions and bureaucratic reform through an in-depth case study of the Russian Federation and its state statistical agency,

Goskomstat,¹ the bureaucracy responsible for Russia's move to the SNA. According to a range of measures, Russia has done remarkably well on implementation of the SNA. The fundamental puzzle I explore in this article is why in Russia during the 1990s there was rapid and radical institutional change in economic statistics, i.e. the international standardization of Russian statistics along capitalist principles. That is, why did Goskomstat's seemingly gray Soviet bureaucrats, working for less than \$50 a month, suddenly turn their backs on their past work and enthusiastically embrace sweeping institutional reform?

In developing an explanation for institutional change at Goskomstat, I examine and test three broad theoretical approaches to the question of bureaucratic reform: political actors and interests; efficiency and material incentives; and constructivist approaches to identities and norms. And, I propose a novel theoretical concept, *conditional norms*, in order to explain the process by which local actors respond to global norms, where changes in conditions, rather than norms, are a source of interests in institutional change.

The analysis in the article is based on a cross-national quantitative examination of UN and IMF data regarding the implementation of the international System of National Accounts in all countries of the world, and the case study material is based on archival material from Moscow, content analysis of Goskomstat publications over a 19-year period, and fieldwork in Moscow and 10 regions of Russia as well as Washington, D.C., yielding over 75 interviews.²

¹ Goskomstat is an acronym for *Gosudarstvennyi komitet po statistike*, or State Committee for Statistics. In 2004, Goskomstat was renamed the "Federal Service for Statistics" (*Federal'naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki*).

² In order to protect officials from possible punishment for disclosure of information, I have chosen to use coded numbers, e.g. "GKS24," in attribution of quotations from Goskomstat officials. I have made exceptions however for the very highest officials. Independent analysts are also referred to by name.

Variation in SNA implementation: Russia's unexpected progress

For over 60 years, Russia's Goskomstat had not only opposed the SNA, but was committed to an alternative Soviet statistical system. The absence of the SNA symbolized a hallmark of Soviet economic statistics, namely, their incommensurability with statistics of other countries. Moreover, Goskomstat was known as an extremely conservative, "Soviet"-style organization, marked by hierarchy, secrecy, and limited access to foreigners or outsiders and it was renowned for publishing a very limited amount of low quality data. But in 1991, Goskomstat completely broke with past practices regarding economic data and quickly embraced the SNA. And, according to range of measures, this SNA reform was remarkably successful.

The UN and IMF have documented the progress of all countries in the world on the SNA, using a range of quantitative and qualitative measures. The median country response remains one in which the only most basic data, such as on GDP at current and constant prices are compiled, but many countries are not even able to compile this basic data (UNESCO 1999). On the United Nations "SNA milestone index," a seven-point scale (0-6) which rated all UN member states on the basis of how much completed economic data countries had submitted to the UN in accordance with the 1993 SNA, the mean score for all countries was 1.6, while Russia scored a 2, meaning that out of 185 countries, Russia was worse than 18% (33 countries), at the same level as 31% (55 countries), and better than 51% (94 countries) (UNESCO 1999).

In addition, the UN made three assessments of conceptual compliance, aimed at measuring whether the concepts of the 1993 had been implemented for the data that are important to a country's economy. Russia was deemed to be in compliance, as of 2002, when the percentage of all countries that had conceptually implemented the SNA at this time was only 42.9% (UNESCO 2004).

The UN also constructed a SNA benchmark called the "Minimum Requirement Data Set" (MRDS), which consists of seven tables of data essential to the 1993 SNA. The MRDS was assessed three times, in 1998, 2001 and 2004 and Russia met the standard in 2004; however, at that time only 27% of all member states had met the MRDS standard (UNESCO 2005).

In addition, the IMF has two data dissemination standards, which are additional indicators of compliance with the SNA. Depending on the amount, type, and timeliness of data that is released to the IMF, countries qualify for either or none of the standards. Russia met the highest standard, the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS), in May 2004. In comparison, only 31% of all member states during the same period had met the SDDS (IMF 2005).

To assess quality, the UN has relied on the IMF Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes (ROSC) (UNESCO 2004; IMF and World Bank 2005). In the ROSC for Russia, the IMF's assessment of Russian statistics was astonishingly positive; in discussing agencies responsible for statistics in Russia, the report concluded that "all agencies evidence professionalism, transparency, and provide guidelines on ethical conduct of their staff" and "all datasets get high marks for accuracy and reliability" (IMF 2004, 4). This is a far cry from earlier assessments of Soviet statistics.

To review, using UN, World Bank, and IMF sources which compare Russia's progress on the SNA to other countries of the world, Russia achieved above-average levels of implementation at all stages of review, and on all dimensions of measurement. While the work is ongoing, even staunch critics of Goskomstat would acknowledge that the SNA achievements to date are impressive and that the organization of current Russian economic statistics has fundamentally improved over the Soviet period.

Explanations

Actors and Interests

In developing an explanation for institutional change at Goskomstat, theories that focus on the role of specific actors are helpful in so far as they direct us to consider the actual bureaucrats on the ground and their relations with other political actors. Whether they use principal-agent models or qualitative case studies, in these theories institutional outcomes are determined primarily by changes in the actors themselves, that is, the replacement of conservatives with reformer types, or from changes in relations between actors, namely a change in the relationship between the bureaucratic agency and politicians (Hecló 1977; Aberbach, Putnam et al. 1981; Moe 1987; Peters and Pierre 2001; Dixit 2002). Beyond politicians and bureaucrats, the interests of various societal actors outside the state, are also sometimes important to organizational and institutional outcomes (Hecló 1974; Berman 1998; Carpenter 2001). Many case studies on institutional reform in post-communist countries also focus on politics and interests both within state organizations and in society (Hausner 2001; Nelson 2001; Tanzi 2001; Johnson 2003).

International actors (Gourevitch 1978; Finnemore 1993) and transnational communities (Haas 1992; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Evangelista 1999) can also play a role in institutional change and bureaucratic reform. But the mechanism here is not just imposition of interests by outside international actors; rather it is a learning model whereby domestic actors get new information and reformulate interests due to their interaction with international or transnational actors.

In the case of Goskomstat's reforms, these actor-centered theories are of limited use for three reasons. First, the organization was not taken over by outside reformers. Within Goskomstat, both leaders and rank and file statisticians who were charged with implementing the

SNA reforms were by and large people who had worked at Goskomstat for decades on the Soviet statistical system. The current head of national accounts at Goskomstat, Irina Masakova, has worked at Goskomstat since 1972, and the head of Goskomstat, Vladimir Sokolin has been at the organization since 1971. Although there were some leadership changes, the new leaders were all chosen from within. Thus, institutional change did not come from the arrival of actors with different interests in positions of power at Goskomstat.

Second, although some key politicians and societal actors were supportive of reform, they did not actually have the power to directly force change within Goskomstat. The Gaidar government clearly supported the move to the SNA in the early 1990s, but governance in Russia in the early 1990s was chaotic at best. The executive and legislature were extraordinarily weak during the time of the reform, and they used what power they did have to battle each other for control of the state.³ This meant that although there was some congruence of interests between politicians and Goskomstat bureaucrats on the question of reform, politicians in the executive and legislature were both distracted with more important issues, and they had virtually no power, resources or even institutional levers available to control Goskomstat. Similarly, while some societal actors were supportive of change within Goskomstat, the organization was so closed that outside actors had very limited access.

Third, role of international actors in reform at Goskomstat is a bit more complicated. Top Goskomstat statisticians had decades-long, if arms-length, ties with the international statistical community, and most Western statisticians favored the SNA. However, international organizations had very limited ability to compel or force implementation of the SNA, either in Russia or other countries. If anything, the power of the international statistical community worked not through coercive incentives, but shared identity and norms, which I discuss below.

³ The culmination of this struggle was the bombing of parliament by President Yeltsin in late 1993.

In addition, Goskomstat's relationship with the international community in the Soviet period was marked by a stable division of the world into communist and capitalist economies, each with its own statistical system, and hence the relationship with the international community had been a source of stasis, not reform, of the Soviet statistical system. And, the most intense period of contact with the international community, the late 1990s to the present, *followed*, rather than preceded Goskomstat's decision to reform. Thus, the epistemic community of international statisticians in itself is not enough to explain the rapid, discontinuous reform at Goskomstat in the early 1990s.

In any case, even if we do allow for some level of domestic or international pressure, it is still very surprising that Goskomstat did not just follow the experience of most countries in the world, and pursue symbolic acceptance of the SNA and a gradual shift toward its implementation, resulting in a low level of progress in the first five to ten years. In other words, pay lip service to politicians and international actors and agree to begin the transition the SNA, but then not actually do more than the bare minimum required. This approach would have been consistent with countries facing similar economic and political conditions, i.e. resource constraints and weak state capacity. And it would have been consistent with Russia's lackluster progress on other institutional reforms.

Efficiency and Material Incentives

A second important set of theories considers the role of efficiency (Ouchi 1980; Williamson 1981) and macroeconomic conditions in bureaucratic reform. The basic idea in these theories is that institutional change should be likely when reforms are efficient or when global or domestic economic conditions create material incentives for actors to reform. The change to the SNA took place in tandem with the move to a market economy in Russia and the collapse of

Soviet communism as an alternative to capitalism in most parts the world. Thus, one might argue that increasing globalization of capitalism and the greater efficiency of the SNA made the reform inevitable.

Structurally, the change in the economy did necessitate some change in work at Goskomstat; for example, with the introduction of prices, price data needed to be collected. However, rapid implementation of the 1993 SNA was not the only choice. Goskomstat might have decided to eliminate specifically out-dated Soviet categories and gradually introduce new categories to include data on things previously excluded from Soviet statistics. This would have constituted a limited, structure-based change in categories, but a continuation of Soviet practices. True, these limited changes would not have been as efficient in the long run as a move to the SNA. However, as critics of functionalism have long argued, efficient outcomes don't happen by themselves. Therefore, we have to examine the motivations at the time of the specific actors and organizations involved in the reform process.

Some authors have taken economic arguments for bureaucratic reform in such a direction by focusing on individual maximization of material welfare (Niskanen 1971; Blais and Dion 1991) rather than overall organizational efficiency or macroeconomic conditions. Extending this argument to the multiple actors and interests discussed above, it may be the material interests of state or societal actors as well as bureaucrats that are key to reform support (Schamis 2002).

Related to material incentives, resources available to an organization are another potentially important factor in institutional reform. Material resources are needed to pay for equipment as well as to hire and retrain staff and they are the basis for material incentives, while human capital including skills and experience are necessary to undertake new or difficult tasks.

The economic rewards for moving to the SNA were, at best, quite indirect. During the most intensive period of statistical reform at Goskomstat, 1992-1996, the Russian economy registered record-breaking negative growth rates. Goskomstat was a poor organization, situated in a dramatically impoverished state, severely limiting the financial resources available for the move to the SNA. Goskomstat did receive a significant loan from the World Bank in 1999 and technical assistance from a host of international organizations, which greatly aided implementation of the SNA, but even with this loan, the budget of the organization by all accounts was very limited. The primary resource that Goskomstat relied on in the early 1990s was its human capital.

These tight budgetary constraints at Goskomstat had a clear effect on incentives within the organization. There were basically no positive incentives in the form of raises or bonuses for increased productivity or completion of reforms, but there was also no non-payments problem and thus all employees received their (low) wages without interruption. Interestingly, the lack of a non-payments problem seems to reduce the incentives for reform even more; if you know you will be paid no matter what, then why work at all, or to the extent that one does work, why work harder learning something new? Thus, it seems unlikely that the employees of Goskomstat were motivated to reform by positive personal financial gains.

Overall, macroeconomic conditions and the material incentives generated by those conditions do not provide a satisfactory explanation of the SNA reform; we are left with the same question as in the discussion of actor-centered theories, namely among those Goskomstat employees who actually implemented the reforms, where did the interest in moving away from the Soviet system and towards the international SNA come from?

Identities and Norms

A third approach to bureaucratic reform focuses on constructivist approaches to identities and norms. Identities are social categories that vary in terms of content and contestation (Abdelal, Herrera et al. 2006), while norms, following Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein, are "collective expectations about proper behavior for a given identity" (1996, 54).⁴ Normative prescriptions are often based on a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1998) in that they structure behavioral choices by providing a set of legitimate and acceptable, as well as unacceptable actions. Sometimes norms can support the development of complementary formal rules, but they can also substitute for formal rules in a subversive way that leads to rejection of formal rules.⁵ In either case, complement or substitute, norms play a role in institutional development.

Identities are critical to norms because a shared identity both prescribes and activates norms in that individuals who share identities also then share norms, and without that shared identity, the norms are unlikely to be followed. And, norms are constitutive of identity because they partially define the content of an identity group (Kowert and Legro 1996, 453); they lay out a set of informal rules by which all members of the group should abide, and following those informal rules becomes a criterion for group membership. Nevertheless, within identity groups the process of legitimation of certain actions may be more or less contested; the result of this contestation is that norms are outcomes as well as part of the social structure in which interests develop and institutional choices are made.

Scholarly literature from several fields supports the idea that norms and identities can influence institutional change. In international relations work on norms, states are motivated to

⁴ There is a great deal of consensus on this definition. See for example, (Finnemore 1993; Finnemore 1996, 23; Checkel 1998, 327-328).

⁵ See Helmke and Levitsky (2004) for a typology of informal institutions.

act in ways that are consistent with their identities, and norms provide appropriate guides to action (Katzenstein 1996; Hopf 2002; Schimmelfennig 2002). Similarly, in explaining differences between bureaucracies across states, some comparative politics scholars and anthropologists have emphasized national cultures in the development of bureaucratic organizations (Crozier 1967; Herzfeld 1992). Beyond states and national groups, bureaucratic and professional organizations are also key sites of norms (Kreps 1990; Brehm and Gates 1997; Alvensson 2002; Eden 2004), and these professional norms may influence bureaucratic reform (Peters 2003). Theories of bureaucracy that focus on building an "esprit de corps" in order to motivate employees are other examples in which being part of a group or organization has an effect on bureaucratic behavior (Kaufman 1960; Simon 1976 [1945]).

Gaps in the norms and identity literature

There are three issues in the norms literature that remain under-specified theoretically, and under-researched empirically. First, in the context of global norms, the concept of mutual constitution suggests that on the one hand, actors develop and promote norms at the global level which then have an effect on domestic actors, while on the other hand, local or domestic actors respond to these norms in different ways which then has an effect on norms and the international system as well. Yet, much of the international relations literature has been occupied only with the first area of contestation. In an important review of constructivist scholarship in international relations, Jeffrey Checkel noted that "constructivism, while good at the macrofoundations of behavior and identity (e.g. norms and social context), is very weak on the microlevel. It fails to explore systematically how norms connect with agents" (Checkel 1998, 342). In other words, the ways in which local actors in bureaucracies or other domestic organizations respond to global norms often goes unexamined.

Thus, a related second gap in the norms literature concerns variation across states, that is, global norms seem to be powerful in some contexts but not in others. The norms literature has largely ignored systematic analysis of the conditions under which norms do or do not "work." Instead, much of the norms literature is oriented toward demonstrating convergence with international norms, rather than explaining patterns of divergence (Klotz 1995; Finnemore 1996; Gurowitz 1999). Similarly, the diffusion (Elkins and Simmons 2005) and isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) literatures focus on explaining convergence, either within or across states.

Finally, a third gap in the norms literature concerns the locus and timing of institutional change. Much of the norms literature posits institutional change as a function of changes in social identities or global norms, both of which usually involve slow, long-term processes. This not only suggests that identity or norm-based change is unlikely, but it also suggests that such theories are ill-equipped to explain rapid change. Hence the role of identities and norms in rapid institutional change remains to be worked out, both theoretically and empirically.

Conditional Norms

Toward addressing these gaps in the norms literature and toward a more complete explanation of institutional change at Goskomstat, I argue that we have to look at norms from a different angle. In particular, we have to consider the way in which local actors understand norms, decide which to follow, and how they attempt to change them. As a first step, we have to distinguish between "holders" and "targets" of norms. Identity groups are holders of norms. If

the holders of the norms are all encompassing (or unlimited), we can say the norm is "universal," though this is rare in practice because most identity groups are limited.⁶

Targets are the kinds of actors to whom the norm is supposed to apply. The content of the norm can be directed at what the actor does to itself or how it treats other actors: for example, a norm regarding the kind of political institutions a state has itself versus a norm regarding what kinds of weapons a state can use against others. Because there are two sorts of target types here, i.e. the self and others, conditions can be put either on the kind of actor one is (e.g. a capitalist or communist state) or the kind of actor an other actor is (e.g. a civilized or non-civilized state).

Crucially, the targets of norms can be limited or unlimited. When norms are supposed to apply to all types of actors (targets are unlimited), they are *unconditional*, though the norm may or may not be universally held. When the targets are limited, we can call such norms, *conditional norms*.⁷ In this way, conditional norms are norms that are contingent on specific circumstances. These circumstances (or limitations on the types of actors to whom the norm is directed) can include for example, types of identities (e.g. race, gender, religion), political or economic conditions, military capabilities, etc. Conditions are critical because they delimit the circumstances in which norms apply.

For example, among some identity groups, the norm regarding democracy as an appropriate form of government is unconditional in that democracy is supposed to be suitable everywhere (targets are unlimited). In contrast, in the 19th century among some identity groups, democracy was considered appropriate only for states that were of a certain level of economic and political development, hence targets were limited and the norm regarding political

⁶ Even norms that seem universal, such as norms against cannibalism, are not held by certain societies and hence are not really universal.

⁷ As far as I know, this is the first use of the term "conditional norm" in the social sciences. However, although the term is new, conditional norms are quite common in the literature, but heretofore have not been identified as such.

institutions was conditional.⁸ Similarly "Asian values" proponents claim democracy is appropriate only for some countries, but not all countries, and hence would like to establish conditions (Zakaria 1994).

Norms regarding the legitimacy and appropriateness of the use and possession of military weapons has also varied over time depending on a range of factors. The current chemical weapons norm is unconditional; for those that hold the norm, the targets are unlimited: chemical weapons should not be used against any kind of actor, anywhere. In contrast, the norm originally spelled out in the Treaty of the Hague in 1899 was conditional in that the target for protection was limited to "great powers" – only great powers were to be protected from the use of chemical weapons; but chemical weapons could be used against states that were not great powers (Price 1995, 95). With nuclear weapons there is now an unconditional norm against the *use* of nuclear weapons in that targets are unlimited: nuclear weapons are not supposed to be used in a first strike against any type of actor (Tannenwald 2005). But the norm on *possession* of nuclear weapons is conditional and is codified in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty: states with nuclear weapons as of 1968 are allowed to have them, while other states are not (Smith 1987, 257-258).

The development of economic institutions also has been influenced by conditional norms. For example, within societies, taxation as an institution may depend on social norms about fairness that may be conditional on the wealth of the taxpayers or types of people, e.g. clergy versus business people. In addition, debates about the appropriateness of free trade for a range of types of economies, e.g. advanced versus developing economies, suggests conditions on the

⁸ For example, In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill argued that democracy was conditional on types of societies. He wrote, "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians... Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion." (Mill 1956 [1859], 14).

appropriateness of particular trade-regulating institutions. Note that what counts as a condition for a norm is not objectively given, but socially constructed in the sense of being a product of a particular time and place.

There are two sources of conditional norms. First they can be original norm formulations, which are based on ideas and interests of the time. Second, and more importantly, conditions can be a strategic response to an existing norm by identity aspirants. Actors who care about legitimacy in an identity group and who therefore do not want to simply reject a norm, but who nonetheless do not want to follow the norm may come up with conditions that allow for legitimate (in the eyes of the group) exemption. In this way, conditional norms can be a weapon of weak as well as the powerful. For example, the US and other nuclear states did not want to just reject the emerging norm of nuclear non-proliferation because they wanted to stop other states from acquiring weapons, but they but did not want to follow the norm themselves, so they tried (somewhat successfully) to establish a conditional norm limiting who was allowed to possess nuclear weapons. Similarly, the Asian values proponents, such as Singapore, similarly do not want to simply ignore the international community's calls for democracy; instead they want a legitimate exception based on cultural differences (though they haven't been so successful in establishing this as a conditional norm). Conditional norms, however, are not just surface-level rationalizations. Though they may start out as creative instrumental strategies, their evolution into norms that are widely accepted means that conditions might turn out to have consequences that the actors who initially promoted the norm might have never foreseen.⁹

Focusing on conditions in norms is important for four reasons: first, making the concept of conditions explicit clarifies the logic of norms in laying out the target to whom the norm

⁹ A good case of this is the illustrated by Frank Schimmelfennig's analysis of EU enlargement in the late 1990s (Schimmelfennig 2001, 77).

should apply. If we examine whether or not a norm is conditional, and specify those conditions (if any), we see more clearly when and for whom the norm should apply. In addition, a focus on conditionality addresses the issues of agency and mutual constitution discussed above by shedding light on how local actors might respond to global norms and how local actors might adapt norms to their own interests.

Third, conditions matter because they provide a different, potentially much more rapid mechanism for understanding the possibilities for norm-based institutional change. Identities and norms may be stable and sticky, while changing conditions might quickly change the appropriateness of norm-based action. Finally, the concept of conditional norms embeds both objective factors (e.g. economic structure or military capacity) as well as subjective factors in norms and connects these factors to maintaining legitimacy in identity groups. Hence, the concept of conditional norms is a way of understanding how various structural and material factors can be integrated into ideational frameworks.

Conditional Norms and Russia's Move to the System of National Accounts

The SNA was developed in 1953 by a handful of Western countries and revised in 1968 and 1993 as its use became more widespread. During the second half of the 20th century, the adoption of the SNA increasingly became an unconditional norm for statisticians around the world; that is, increasingly international statisticians thought the SNA was the appropriate for all countries. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had developed its own statistical system beginning in the 1920s, the Net Material Product (NMP) system, and Goskomstat remained steadfastly committed to it until 1991, when it abruptly switched to the SNA.

Goskomstat's organizational identity was marked by two primary allegiances: to the Soviet system and to the science of statistics. These loyalties were somewhat in conflict; the

international community of statisticians was committed increasingly over time to the SNA, and in many ways the SNA was antithetical to the Soviet statistical system because it called for universal, transparent, coordinated practices, and hence unlike the Soviet NMP system, did not serve the interests of the Soviet government.

In addition, there were some structural incompatibilities between the SNA and the NMP. The SNA was fundamentally based on analysis of market values and therefore premised upon the existence of prices, and the Soviet system lacked market prices. However, price indices could be constructed to convert the Soviet volume indicators to prices – and the Soviets did do this, but they often used outdated or flawed indices to underestimate input costs and inflate the value of their production. The reaction of most Western economists especially in the latter half of the 20th century to the structural incompatibilities between the SNA and the NMP was that the Soviet Union should both introduce market prices and move to the SNA. This would create the kind of economic transparency that many international statisticians valued.

The response of Soviet statisticians to the emerging global SNA norm, however, was neither to move to the SNA nor to reject the SNA altogether; instead they attempted to maintain their standing amongst international statisticians by linking the SNA to the structure of the economy. They argued that the Soviet system required the NMP statistical system, while the SNA was indeed appropriate for a specific type of economic system – a capitalist, price-based system. This demarcation of circumstances in which the SNA was appropriate was in effect the creation of a conditional norm; that is, it limited the targets of the norm by specifying the conditions under which the norm applied.

For Marxists, this argument that a country's underlying economic structure should be determinative of other institutions was hardly a stretch – this is the way in which myriad political

and economic institutional differences were legitimated in the USSR – and thus was a product of the ways in which Soviet statisticians understood the world. Using this conditional formulation, Soviet statisticians hoped to maintain legitimacy in international circles and could actively participate in UN work on the SNA. In addition, this delineation of spheres of appropriateness for the SNA also solved an internal problem for Goskomstat employees, which is that it went a long way towards reconciling the conflict between supporting the Soviet state versus supporting science and the norms of the community of international statisticians. By agreeing that the SNA should be used in capitalist countries, but that the Soviet system was appropriate for socialist countries, Goskomstat statisticians could be both Soviet and international at the same time.

The legitimacy of this conditional norm was supported by international comparison projects that attempted to evaluate the economies of socialist and capitalist countries, which often took the form of parallel treatment of the SNA and the NMP systems (United Nations Statistical Office 1977; Ivanov and Ryzhov 1978; Ivanov 1987). These comparisons suggested an equal standing between the NMP system and the SNA, and they supported the idea of institutional difference predicated on economic structural differences.

This conception of two legitimate systems based on differences in the structure of the economy still exists in written materials. For example, in a 2002 national accounts statistics textbook Aleksei Ponomarenko wrote,

Until the breakup of the Soviet Union, in the world there were two widely used macroeconomic statistical systems. The Net Material Product system (NMP)... was used by countries with planned economies. The System of National Accounts (SNA) was used by countries with market economies. Both systems existed in parallel and for a long time both were recommended by the UN (Ponomarenko 2002, 38).

In addition, the idea of two legitimate statistical systems was prevalent among Goskomstat officials. The Chairman of Goskomstat, Vladimir Sokolin said,

As a field, statistics is standardized according to international rules. The USSR was a member of international organizations in the realm of statistics but at the same time it insisted that the NMP system was the best. The NMP did suit our planned economy. In the 1980s the UN Statistical Commission recognized that both systems (NMP and SNA) had a right to exist. (Sokolin 2004)

Another official noted that the NMP and the SNA are "two different principles for assessing macroeconomic development" (GKS50 2004). A prominent statistician, Iurii Ivanov wrote, the "SNA and [NMP] belong to the same family of systems of macro economic aggregates designed to ensure a coherent description of the economic process, of the interrelationships among various economic magnitudes" (Ivanov 1987, 2). Similarly, Irina Masakova, head of the SNA department at Goskomstat, said, "My whole professional background had to do with macroeconomic statistics; the NMP is similar to the SNA" (Masakova 2004).

I asked several Goskomstat officials how they personally became in favor of changing the statistical system of Russia to the SNA. Chairman Sokolin said, "In general, I was among the people who argued that it was important to introduce a whole new statistical system, rather than to focus on specific [limited adaptations]. Former Goskomstat Chairman Iurkov was also for the modernization of the whole system" (Sokolin 2004). He then noted that during perestroika there were discussions about limited changes versus system changes within Goskomstat, with other Russian social scientists, and with foreigners. In the end, he said, "this is how we deepened our understanding of the fact that *Soviet statistics, although they were quality statistics, were not suited to the new economic system*" (Sokolin 2004, emphasis added). It is notable that Sokolin stressed his view that Soviet statistics were "quality statistics."

Andrei Kosarev, who was the head of the SNA at Goskomstat from 1995-1997, and who also directed the Center for Economic Analysis, which conducted some of the first independent estimates of GDP for 1990-1994, emphasized the change in the economy as the main reason for the move to the SNA. He said,

In the Soviet Union we knew about the System of National Accounts, at a theoretical level. At the time, some economists declared that we needed the SNA because the rest of the world has it – that is something I disagree with. Sure, that is one reason, but it is not the fundamental reason. ... I realized that a new system was needed given the new economy. (Kosarev 2004)

A number of Goskomstat officials did not put much thought at all into the move to the SNA. They claimed it was a natural outcome of the change in the structure of the economy. In describing how she became convinced of the need to move to the SNA, the current head of the SNA at Goskomstat, Irina Masakova, noted,

Life itself suggested it as everything was changing. Statistics is a mirror of the economy. It was obvious that it was important to change so there were no discussions about it. Everything was synchronous with the economy. (Masakova 2004)

Others were categorical in attributing the SNA reform to the change in the economy: "the transition was caused, first and foremost, by the economic changes" (GKS50 2004). Similarly, another current textbook explains that the move to the SNA was due to the move to the market economy in Russia. It states, "in Russia practical interest in the SNA appeared in the 1980s in connection with the transformation from the planned to a market economy" (Riabtsev and Chudilina 2001, 191).

Another way to conceptualize this norm is that in the post-Communist era there was no longer any need for different statistical systems. A theme that was repeated over and over in interviews, and can be found as well in articles about the SNA transition was the need for international commensurability. To appreciate how strange this is, one has to consider that the entire Soviet statistical system was premised on hiding information and making it (nearly) impossible for foreigners to know what was happening in the economy. On the issue of commensurability, former Goskomstat Chairman Pavel Guzhvin ended a 1993 article by saying, "... we hope to raise statistics to a level that will satisfy the demands of the market economy and

will make it possible to compare indicators of the Russian national economy's development with analogous indicators of other countries" (Guzhvin 1993, 13).

A remarkable aspect of the change to the SNA at Goskomstat is that despite a total change in organization's work, there was never any apology or suggestion of shame regarding past Soviet practices. For example, in 1996, in the midst of completing the first phase of transition to the SNA, which was a seeming renunciation of the Soviet statistical system, Goskomstat published an organizational history, titled *Russian State Statistics, 1802-1996* (Goskomstat Russia 1996), which was essentially a list of Russian and Soviet achievements in statistics without a single critical word about statistics in the Soviet period. This lack of criticism of the Soviet past was clear in interviews too; one official stated that other countries respected the NMP system, adding, "Nobody looked down at us." (GKS49 2004). Similarly, when asked how the two systems compare, several officials declined to judge, for example, one said, "Indicators were good both then and now" (GKS29 2003).

Another factor in the shift to the SNA was that it was never considered to be a new concept or a foreign imposition. Far from being alien knowledge, which was transmitted to Russian statisticians from their Western counterparts in 1991, Soviet and Russian statisticians, were long familiar with the SNA; indeed Soviet statisticians helped craft the 1968 edition at the UN. Many Soviet statisticians and mathematicians were aware of both the general contributions of their compatriots to the science of statistics in the 20th century as well as to the development of the SNA. For example, Andrei Kosarev, told me that his knowledge of the SNA came primarily from two sources: Soviet economists Iurii Ivanov and Boris Isaev (Kosarev 2004). Ivanov had worked at the UN for 11 years on the development of SNA, but had also worked at the same time in Goskomstat USSR in the department of national accounts. This meant that by

the time the economy changed in Russia, Soviet statisticians were already aware of an alternative statistical system, upon which there was widespread international consensus. Owing to this understanding of the SNA within Russia, there was hardly any need for foreigners or international organizations to convince Russian statisticians of the usefulness or appropriateness of the SNA as a statistical system for market economies; Russians were aware of this "fit" given the norm about the relationship of statistical systems to economic systems. This is not to suggest that international actors and knowledge networks were not vital for Goskomstat during the transition to SNA. However, interest in the SNA at Goskomstat occurred largely *before* the close collaboration with international organizations began. Thus the implementation of the SNA was greatly aided by international assistance, but the decision to move to SNA was taken in advance of this assistance.

The Barnett and Finnemore (2004) model of the way that authority in international organizations operates seems quite appropriate here. In contrast to the idea that domestic actors have to be coerced or actively convinced or taught to follow international norms, they suggest a more diffuse sense of authority which has been conferred on international institutions and which gives international organizations constitutive effects, i.e. "the ability to create, define, and map social reality" (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 30-31). Thus, what was most crucial on the part of international actors was not what they did after 1992, but what they did before the end of the USSR in developing and promoting the SNA as the appropriate statistical system.

In summary, I argue that ultimately the conditional norm that delineated the spheres of appropriateness of the SNA, and the change in economic conditions, were what triggered the interest in the shift to the SNA among Goskomstat employees. In this case, bureaucratic reform was not a function of a change in identities themselves, but rather a function of the logic of the

conditional norm. Ironically, the same norm that made it possible for Goskomstat statisticians to justify their use of the Soviet statistical system for decades turned out to be a recipe for change, in the unlikely case of a change in the economic system. And, interestingly the effect of the Russian economy on institutional change at Goskomstat was not primarily through effects on resources and material incentives, but rather, through its effect as a triggering mechanism on shared conditional norms.

Observable Implications

A key implication of this analysis is that if it is a Soviet norm that explains successful reform in Russia, then in other states with the same conditional norm regarding the SNA, rapid institutional change to the SNA should also be likely. Due to the shared Soviet legacy, we can test this implication by examining the experience of other post-communist states. Let us return to the SNA milestone index discussed above.

[Figure 1 here]

The regional distribution in Figure 1 suggests that wealth matters for implementation of the SNA. The two regions that do best overall are also the wealthiest regions of the world, and the worst region is the poorest. The most important predictor across countries of institutional reform seems to be state capacity, which we know is highly correlated with economic development. However, there is an important exception to this general finding; as a group, aside from North America and Western Europe, post-communist countries have gone further in implementing the SNA than any other geographic region or group of states.¹⁰

The average for the Former Soviet (FSU) and Eastern European (EE) states is 1.89, making it the third most successful region, and the average for the 24 Council for Mutual

¹⁰ For scores of all post-communist/Comecon countries on all UN and IMF SNA assessments, see Appendix 1.

Economic Assistance (Comecon) member states (including those that were members as of 1987, excluding East Germany), was 2.00, making it slightly above the FSU/EE regional average and ahead of all other regions of the world, save North America and Western Europe. Comecon is a theoretically interesting regional grouping because it includes those countries most closely allied economically with the USSR, or states that were most under the influence of the Soviet statistical and economic system, and those that therefore were likely to have shared most closely norms about the organization of the economy and statistics.¹¹ The Comecon average score of 2.00 might not seem so impressive until you consider that the mean score for all countries is 1.60 and that only 33 out of 185 countries score better than 2, and 94 are worse (55 are at 2).

This implementation of the SNA across the post-communist region is especially notable given the significant variation in conditions across post-communist states. Post-communist states have very different capacities – consider the Polish state in comparison to the Russian state. Yet, in a 1999 UN assessment of SNA implementation Russia received a higher score than Poland (UNESCO 1999). Indeed state capacity, the one variable that seems to explain SNA implementation in other places cannot explain post-communist states. This brings up the question of why some states – the newly capitalist and not very rich or capable – seem to be so much more able or willing than other states around the world to measure their economies according to capitalist principles.

To probe these relationships further, I used ordered logit to examine the relationship between income, norms, and SNA Milestone achievement level. I considered average GDP per

¹¹ Sharing Soviet norms, however, does not imply that the directionality of norm development was only from the Soviet Union to other East European or Comecon states. Economists and statisticians in East Europe or other Comecon states may also have been sources for understandings of statistics, which were then shared with their Soviet counterparts. To take just one example, Hungarian scholars have contributed broadly to economics and statistics, and it is likely that this contribution extended as well to understandings of the appropriateness of statistical systems.

capita in thousands of US dollars for the period of the SNA Milestone assessment, 1992-97. As it turns out, even controlling for income, status as an FSU or Eastern European state, or a Comecon state – my proxy for shared Soviet norms – has a positive and significant effect on SNA achievement.¹² Table 1 shows the results of two models predicting SNA Milestone achievement.

[Table 1 here]

In the table, model 1 considers the effect of being in the FSU or Eastern Europe, controlling for income, on SNA achievement; model 2 considers the effect of having been a Comecon member state. In both models, GDP per capita is significant, but so is regional status. The effect is slightly stronger for Comecon states. This makes sense theoretically in that Comecon states were most likely to have shared Soviet norms.

In addition, based on this analysis, I constructed predicted probabilities for Russia, and to suggest the effect of norms, I also did this for another simulated country that looks like Russia in terms of GDP per capita, but that was not in Comecon. I then grouped the SNA milestone scores into three groups: high, medium, low.

[Figure 2 here]

Figure 2 shows that sharing Soviet norms, as was the case with the real Russia on the left leads to higher probabilities for greater SNA achievement. If we compare the real Comecon Russia to a country like Russia which was not in Comecon, the prediction of a low score goes up from .23 to .53; for a medium score goes down from .44 to .36; and for a high SNA score goes down from .32 to .13. This simulated country gives a sense of what we might have expected of Russia in the absence of the conditional SNA norm.

¹² I also did this analysis using OLS, using log GDP per capita, and including population and education controls. In all cases, the results are very similar. Using separate FSU and EE dummy variables, the coefficient for FSU is slightly higher than for EE states, but both are strongly positive and significant.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that a conditional norm that linked the type of statistical system to the structure of the economy played a crucial role in explaining the motivation of bureaucrats within Russia for reform. For actors within Goskomstat, the conditional norm – namely that statistical systems should correspond to economic systems and that the SNA is the appropriate statistical system only for market economies – was crucial in bureaucrats' decisions to support the move to the SNA. This norm, in the context of structural economic changes, explains the bureaucratic zeal for rapid implementation of the System of National Accounts in Russia in the 1990s.

This analysis does not suggest that norms or conditional norms are only associated with positive institutional outcomes. The conditional norm associated with the 1990s SNA reform is the same one that helped prop up the Soviet statistical system for several decades. Moreover, by rationalizing the Soviet system both in the past and in the present, this norm enables Goskomstat as an organization to completely avoid any self-criticism or reflection on the failings of Soviet statistics. And, while this norm was crucial to the reform of economic statistics and the SNA, it did not necessarily change the culture or identity of the organization in general. Indeed, one of the significant aspects of conditional norms is that they are consistent with maintaining legitimacy in groups and hence stability in identities and organizational culture.

Goskomstat's experience can also shed light on a number of other puzzles. First, it suggests an explanation for the pattern of statistical reform in other post communist countries, and it also suggests shared norms as one mechanism for understanding the post-communist legacy. What linked, and continues to link, post-communist states is the understanding that the SNA is appropriate for market economies. For some Eastern European countries, there are now

many other factors such as EU enlargement that make the implementation of the SNA even more desirable. And, as the process of implementation grows more complex, we might see that factors such as resources play a bigger role. Nevertheless, the explanation of conditional norms at Russia's Goskomstat may help explain the striking level of implementation in the 1990s across nearly all post-communist and Comecon states, which differed in capacities, resources, and prospects for membership in international organizations.

In addition, this study of the transformation of Goskomstat contributes to our understandings of state-building and state capacity more generally by emphasizing structural factors including norms and economic conditions, in contrast to much of the actor-centered literature. While actors within Goskomstat are integral to my analysis of reform, I explicitly considered the origins of actors' interests in terms of the organizational and international normative context and economic constraints. This brings to the actor-centered literature a context for the construction and origin of bureaucratic interests.

The story of reform at Goskomstat defies common perceptions of the intransigence of bureaucrats. By going inside the state and examining in depth what has happened over the last 15 years at Goskomstat, we see that an apparently static, hierarchical, Soviet-type organization has actually been internally abuzz with reforms, spearheaded by people who are moved not by their meager salaries, but by the idea of making Russian statistics legitimate and respected internationally. This is a story both of the power of identities and norms, and the ingenuity of local actors who adapt those norms to suit their circumstances.

The concept of conditional norms suggests three theoretical implications. First, conditional norms allow us to better address the issue of agency and mutual constitution of norms by explicitly taking into account the responses and innovations of local actors during

multiple phases of the process of norm development. Conditionality is a contingent way in which local actors can respond to established norms and provides a mechanism for adapting norms to fit the circumstances in which local actors find themselves.

Second, conditional norms provide an alternative model of institutional change, and a novel mechanism for norm-based change, i.e. change in the conditions themselves. In this case, institutional change is due to change in the conditions upon which norms are contingent, that is, changing conditions of appropriateness for certain actions, rather than a change in the norms themselves or the identities which in norms may be situated. We often think that change is to be explained by contestation among identities or norms, which may be the case, sometimes. However, if we examine the conditionality of norms, we come to a different way of understanding the possibilities for change. Some conditions may be easier to change than identities or norms, but the potential for changing conditions depends on the nature of the conditions, e.g. material factors versus identities versus institutional systems, etc.

Third, conditional norms allow for a constructivist incorporation of structural factors into norm-based theories, where (socially constructed) structural circumstances are linked to appropriate kinds of action via norms. One important example of this concerns the economy; by considering the structure of the economy as a condition upon which norms are contingent, the effect of economic change on institutional choices and change is via the conceptual place of the economy in shared norms, rather than through the economy's effect on material interests.

Table 1

The Effect of Income and Shared Norms on SNA Milestone Level ordered logit (standard errors in parentheses)

	Model 1	Model 2
GDP per capita in 1000s of US\$ (average 1992-1997)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)
Eastern Europe and FSU states	1.09*** (0.37)	
Comecon states		1.29*** (0.38)
Observations	185	185
Log likelihood	-269.08	-267.57
Pseudo R2	0.09	0.09

*** Significant at the .01 level

Figure 1

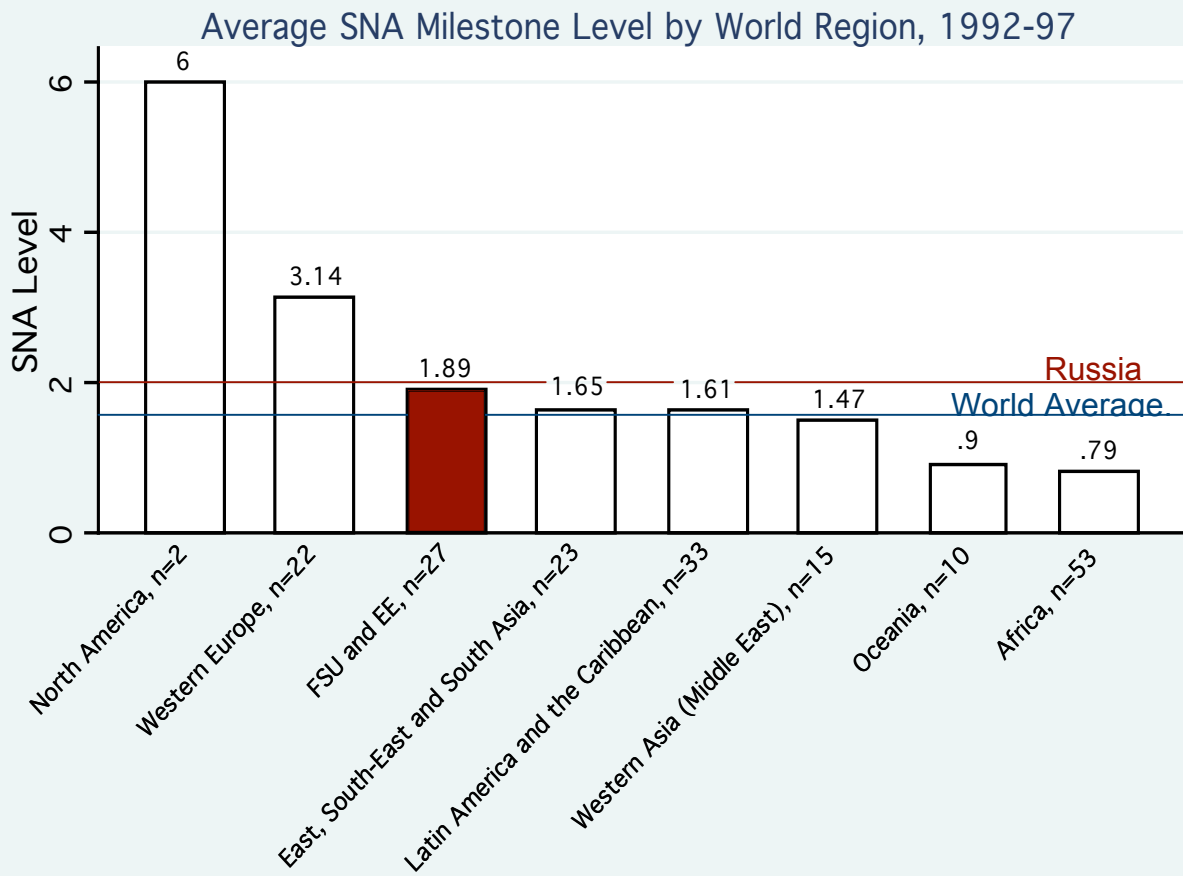
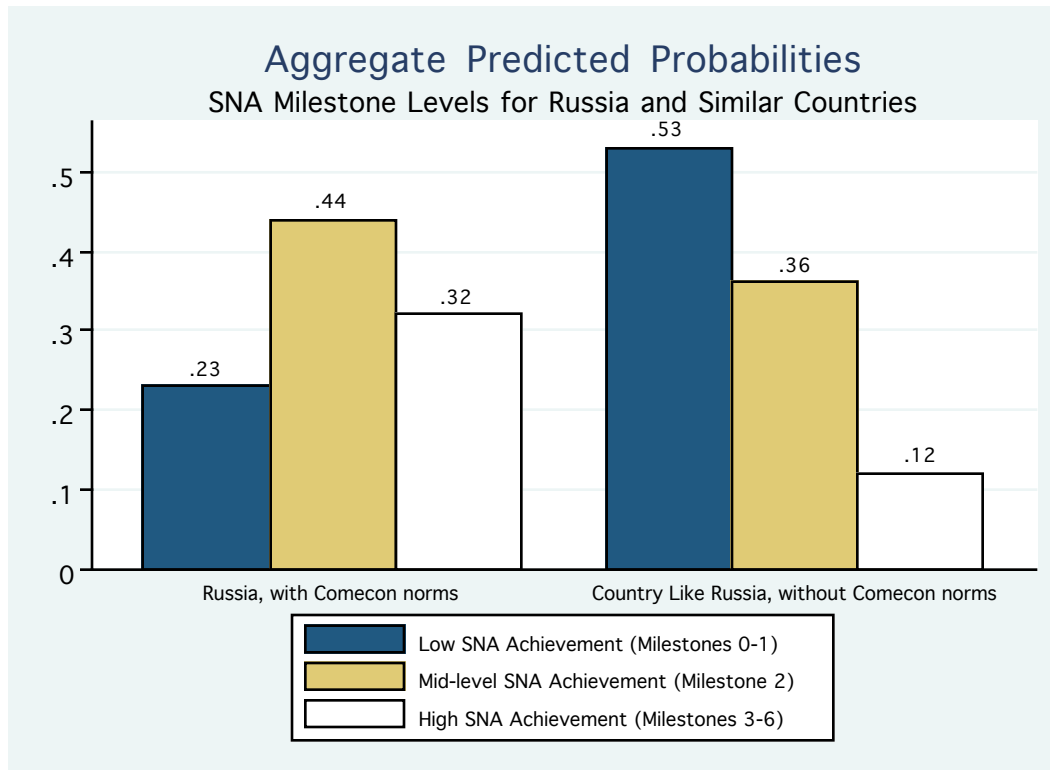


Figure 2



Appendix 1									
Country Level Scores and Regional Data for Post-Communist States									
Country or Region	1999 UN Adjusted Milestone Index Score ¹⁴	IMF Data Dissemination Standards ¹³ 1 = meets the standard				Regional categories √ = included in category			
		Dissemination index (0,1,2)	Neither SDDS nor GDDS	GDDS,	SDDS	Eastern Europe, n=12	Former USSR, n=15	Com-econ, n=24	Trans-ition, n=27
Former USSR	2.13	1.40	3	3	9		15		
Eastern Europe	1.58	1.50	2	2	8	12			
Transition Coun-tries (FSU & EE)	1.89	1.44	5	5	17				27
Comecon States	2.00	1.46	4	5	15			24	
Albania	0	1		1		√			√
Armenia	2	2			1		√	√	√
Azerbaijan	2	1		1			√	√	√
Belarus	3	2			1		√	√	√
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	1			√			√
Bulgaria	2	2			1	√		√	√
Croatia	1	2			1	√			√
Cuba	1	0	1					√	
Czech Republic	2	2			1	√		√	√
Estonia	3	2			1		√	√	√
Georgia	2	0	1				√	√	√
Hungary	4	2			1	√		√	√
Kazakhstan	2	2			1		√	√	√
Kyrgyzstan	2	2			1		√	√	√
Latvia	3	2			1		√	√	√
Lithuania	3	2			1		√	√	√
Mongolia	1	1		1				√	
Poland	1	2			1	√		√	√
Republic of Moldova	2	1		1			√	√	√
Romania	2	2			1	√		√	√
Russian Federation	2	2			1		√	√	√
Serbia and Montenegro (Yug.)	1	0	1			√			√
Slovakia	2	2			1	√		√	√
Slovenia	2	2			1	√			√
Tajikistan	1	1		1			√	√	√
Turkmenistan	1	0	1				√	√	√
Ukraine	2	2			1		√	√	√
Uzbekistan	2	0	1				√	√	√
Vietnam	1	1		1				√	
Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia	2	1		1		√			√

¹³ (IMF 2005)

¹⁴ (UNESCO 1999)

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