

S. Nafziger (Williams College)

Local Politics and Public Good Provision in Late-Tsarist Russia

Recent research by development economists emphasizes the important role that local political institutions play in the provision of schooling, healthcare, and other public goods and services. In late-Tsarist Russia, the zemstvo constituted a new form of local government with substantial autonomy over spending and revenue decisions. Relatively little research has theoretically or quantitatively assessed how the zemstvo functioned or how the specific political features of the institution affected local economic development. Utilizing archival sources and newly collected data from Nizhegorodskaia guberniia, this paper will investigate how the electoral system and meeting structure of the zemstvo affected the collection and allocation of resources at the local level. The paper will apply panel data techniques to test whether these and other “democratic” features of zemstvo influenced the rate of primary school expansion and other public sector outcomes. The results of this paper will inform debates over the role of institutions in modern economic development, and they will provide insights into how the zemstvo affected the growth of the late-Tsarist economy.