

Egorov A., Malinovskiy S. Higher education and regional elite formation in Russia (chapter in book *Assessing the Contributions of Higher Education* (edited by Marginson et al.), 2023, *Edward Elgar Publishing*)

HIGHER EDUCATION AND REGIONAL ELITE FORMATION IN RUSSIA

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RELEVANCE

Higher education influences the social structure by forming and reproducing elite class (Brint & Yoshikawa, 2017, Brint et al., 2020, Wu, 2017).

Universities foster promotion to the elite

- Transfer the privilege and prepare students for the very top positions (Stevens, 2007).
- Provide excellent academic performance for the highly paid placements in elite professions (Wang & Crawford, 2019).
- Student culture generating preferences for the high-status occupational sectors (Binder et al., 2016, 2018).
- Organizational machinery to pass elite social positions to children from privileged families (Stevens, 2009).

Empirical evidence

- In developed nations all recent cohorts of political elites have attended university (Zarifa & Davies, 2018).
- Denmark, Belgium and France: 75-90% of parliament members have graduate degree (Bovens & Wille, 2017).
- University degree is a prerequisite for influential posts in the European Parliament (Daniel 2013).

The impact of elite universities is disproportionately high

- Oxbridge (Poverty, 2014),
- Grandes Écoles (Hartman, 2006),
- Tokyo University, Hitotsubashi University, Kyoto University, Waseda University (Zang, 2004),
- University of Oslo, Norwegian School of Economics, Norwegian Business School (Mangset, 2017),
- Ankara University (Sayarı & Bilgin, 2018).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the educational background of the regional political elite in Russia?
- Is higher education a prerequisite for an elite position? If so what type of institutions or majors could contribute the most?
- How has the educational background of the regional political elite changed since Soviet times?

WHY CAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTRIBUTE TO THE POLITICAL ELITE FORMATION?

Aristocracy – the power of a minority of the best-qualified citizens

- Political professionalization.
- The academization of the political elite and diploma democracy (Bovens & Wille, 2017).
- Specific knowledge and importance of the degrees in law, economics or public administration.

Cultural norms and reproduction legitimation

- Transmission of cultural norms through education only to those who “possess the code to decipher” (Bourdieu, 1977).
- Club institutions for future politicians where cultural norms polished and disseminated (Domhoff, 1978).
- Recruitment to top positions built upon selection, assuming shared attitudes, values and beliefs (Rivera, 2015).
- Boundaries of symbolic distinctions from others in society (Lamont et. al, 2007, Binder & Abel, 2019).
- University campuses are sites for political attitudes formation (Binder, 2018).

Social capital

- Social capital improves performance in elite jobs and shape advantages in recruitment (Wegener, 1991).
- Let students to familiarise themselves with elite employers and create useful networks (Tholen et al., 2013).
- Social ties often work in the direction of codification and solidification of the elites (Burris, 2005).
- People with higher education are more likely to be closer to the central nodes of political networks (Nie et al, 1996).

RUSSIAN CONTEXT

Federal system

- High level of political and economic heterogeneity across regions.
- Each region has a regional parliament. Term: 5 years. Size: 15-110 members. ~ 4,000 members of regional parliaments.
- Regional parliaments are often subordinate to the administrative authorities (Bystrova et al., 2020).
- Still the key legislative body and recognized elite position at the regional level.

Electoral procedure at regional level

- The subject of electoral engineering (Turchenko, 2020).
- Depends on the highest executive authority in the region (Golosov, 2017).
- Relies on clientelism (Gilyov, 2017).

Political context

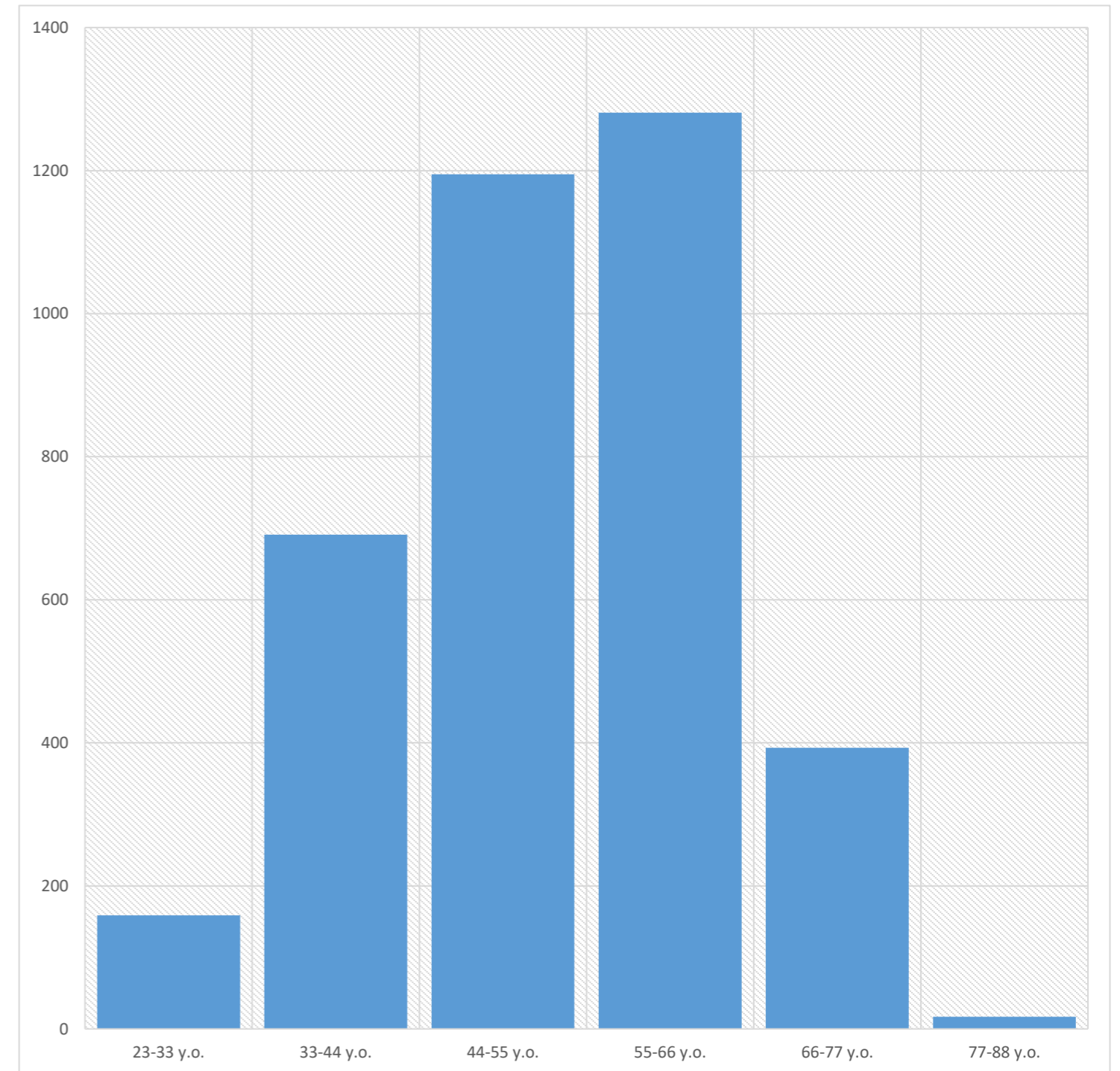
- The level of elite turnover was not increased during post-Soviet transition (Moses, 2008).
- *Siloviki* (people with military background) and businesspersons - have been stronger during post-Soviet transition.
- Pervasive centralization (Yushkov et al., 2017). The overwhelming domination of ruling party “United Russia”.
- Regional elites are self-reproducing: up to 90% are recruited from regional groups (Bystrova et al., 2020).

DATA COLLECTION

- Regional parliaments' members
- The dataset is based on the information from official biographies of regional parliaments' members
- All data available in official biographies was converted into 194 indicators that can be grouped into 4 categories: (1) basic information; (2) educational background; (3) career path; (4) other characteristics
- The data were collected during September-November 2017 and represent the situation as of September, 2017
- Total number of Individual in the sample is 3,373

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

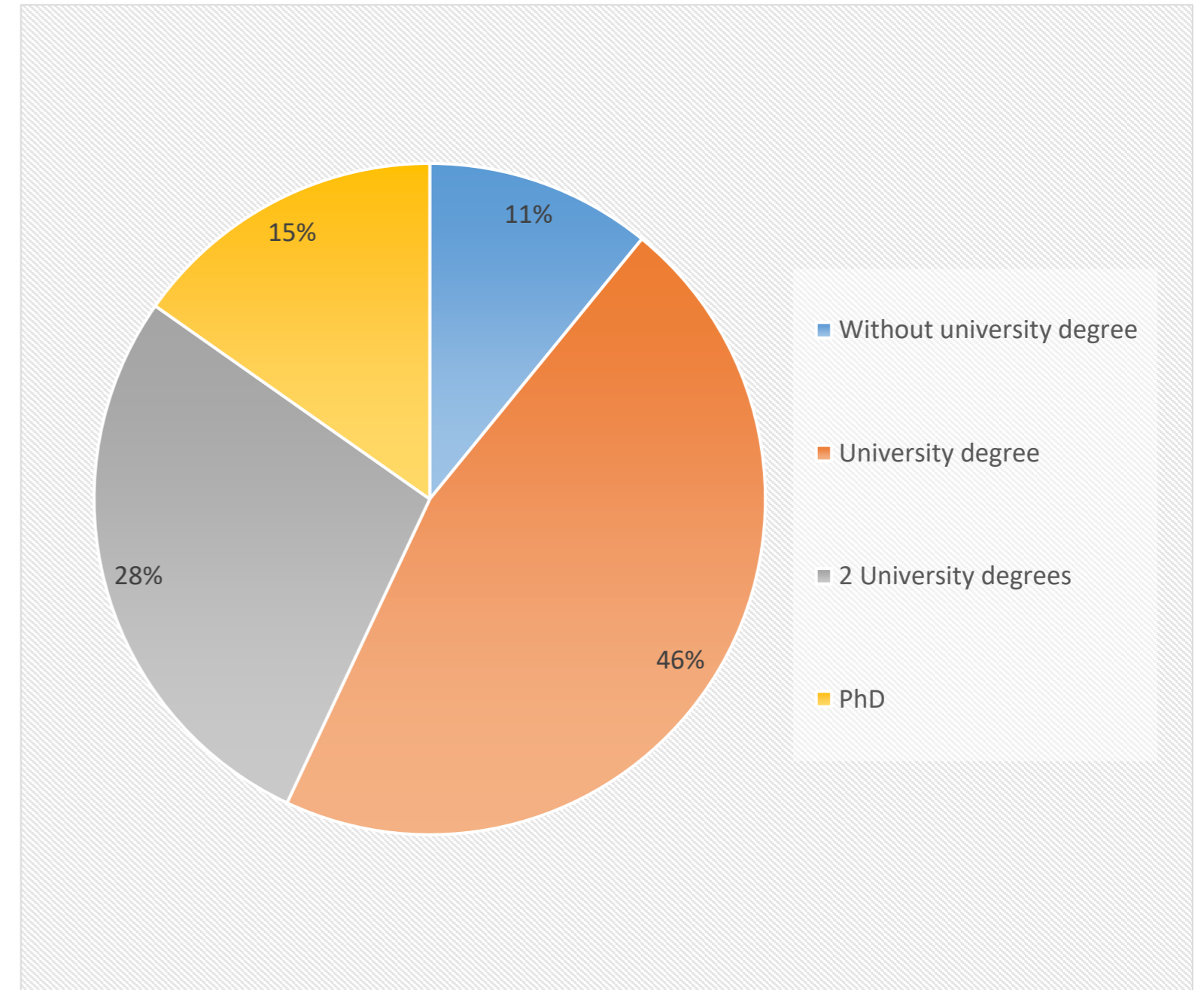
- The age of elite members in the sample varies from 23 to 89 (mean=52)
- The average time individuals from the sample are in the office – 6.3 years
- The share of females is not stable across age cohorts (from 10% to 25%)
- Approx. 50% of elite members gained their elite position outside their hometown



Distribution of regional elite members by age cohorts

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

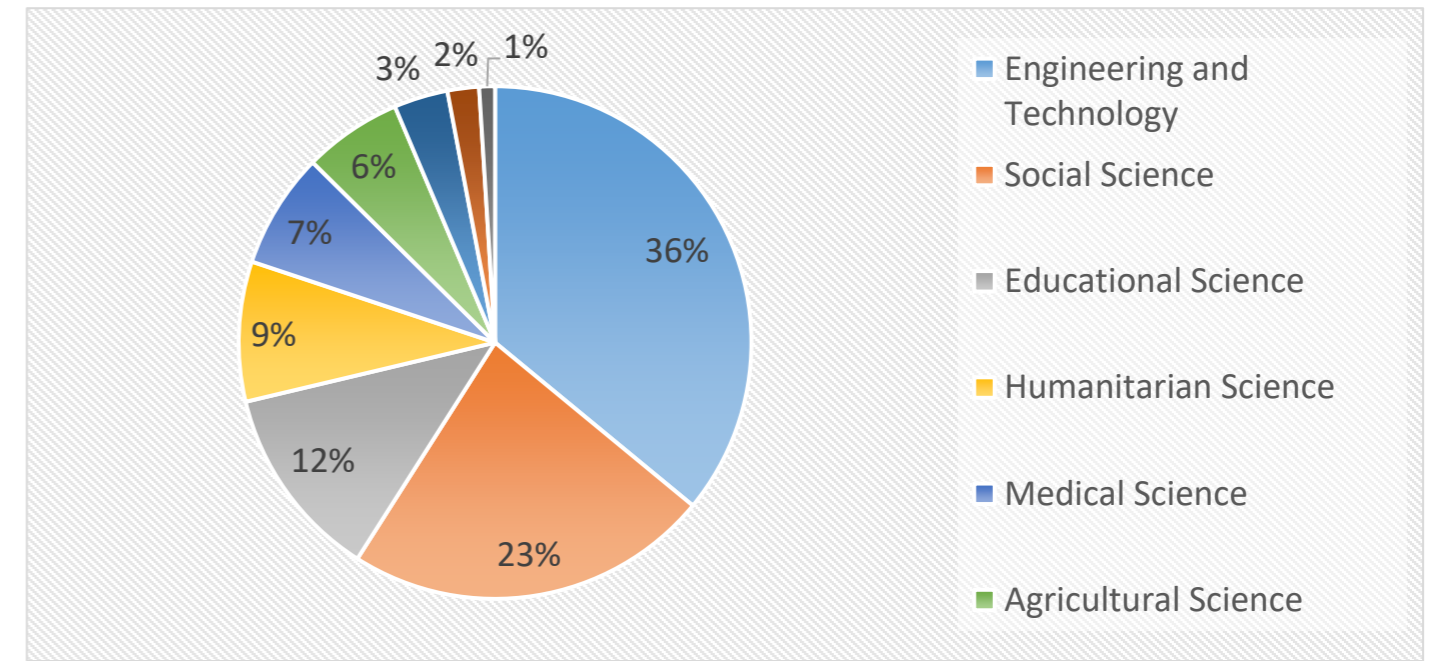
- Absolute majority of regional legislative elites (almost 90%) have at least one higher education degree
- One in ten (11%) of regional elite members has vocational education degree
- The majority of elite members (82%) gained their highest level of education before entering elite position
- Elite members are on average more educated than employed population



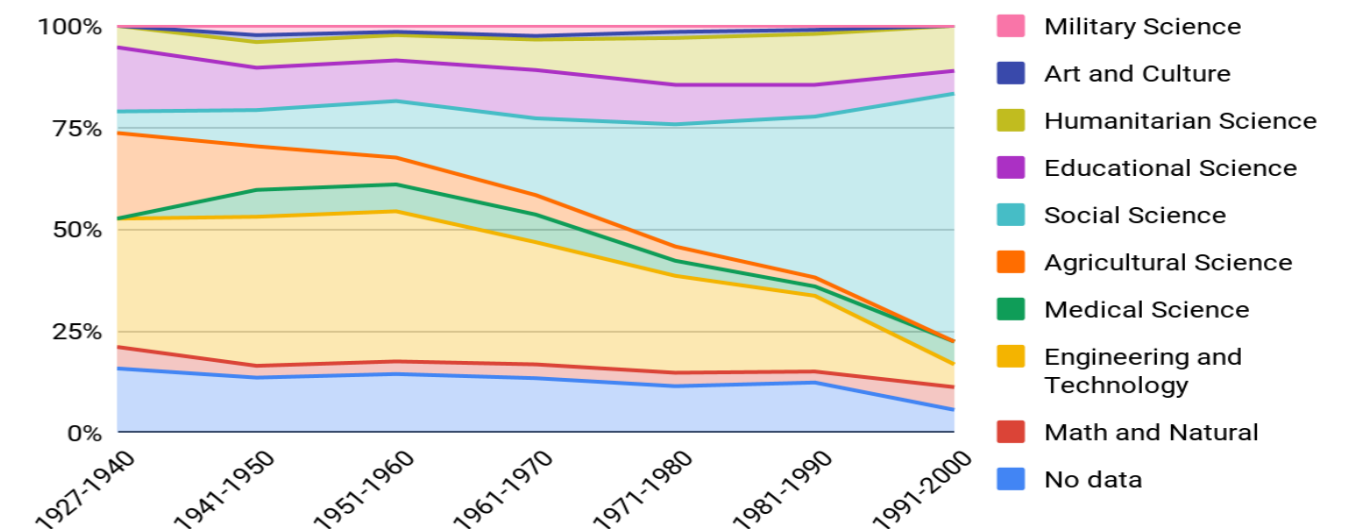
Distribution of elite members by educational attainment

FIELD OF STUDY

- Most common field of study for the regional elite members are engineering and technology (36%), social sciences (23%) and education (12%)
- However, these numbers significantly vary by the elite generation
- Starting from age cohort born in 1960s, we can observe significant expansion of elite members who obtained higher education degree in social sciences
- these changes correspond to the transformations of national higher education system
- We did not find any consistent pattern of how educational background of elite members is related to the structure of regional economy



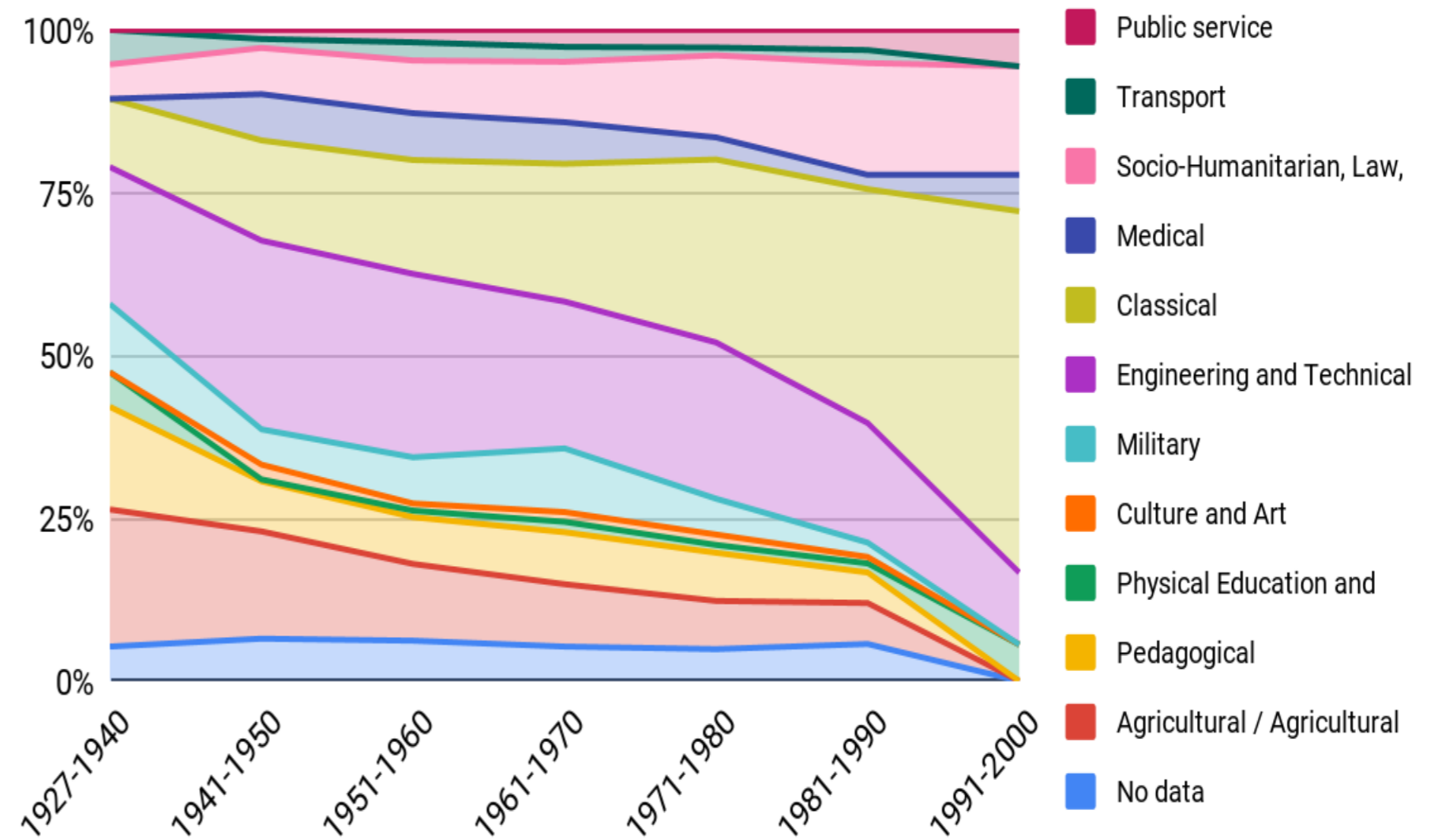
Distribution of elite members by field of study



Distribution of elite members representing different age cohorts by fields of study

TYPE OF HE INSTITUTION

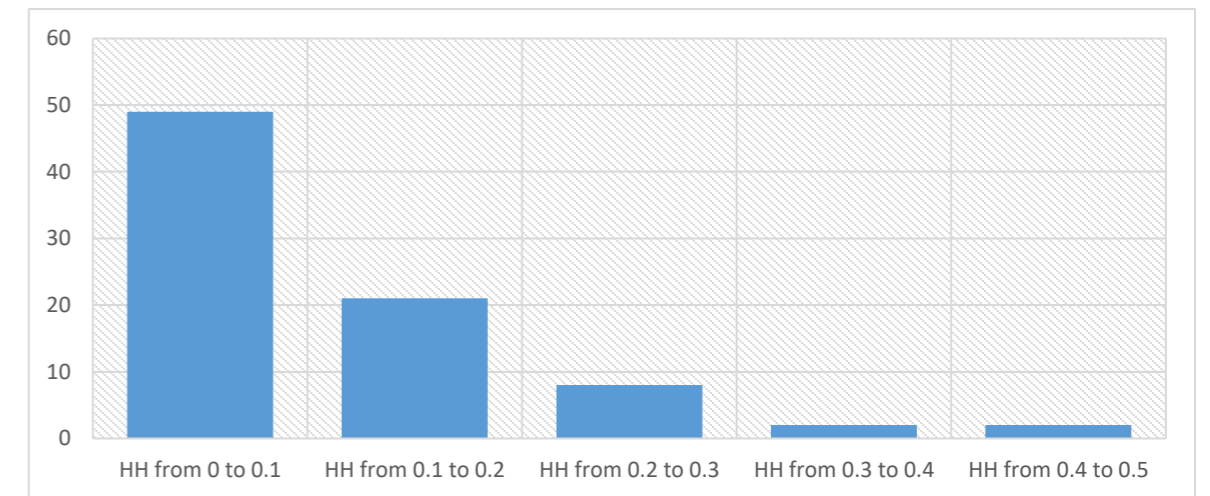
- 29% of elite members obtained their university degrees in classical universities
- The share of political elite members graduated from the classical comprehensive universities varies across different age cohorts
- The share of elite members graduated from military universities is lower in younger age cohort
- The share of elite members graduated from pedagogical and agricultural universities decreases over age cohorts



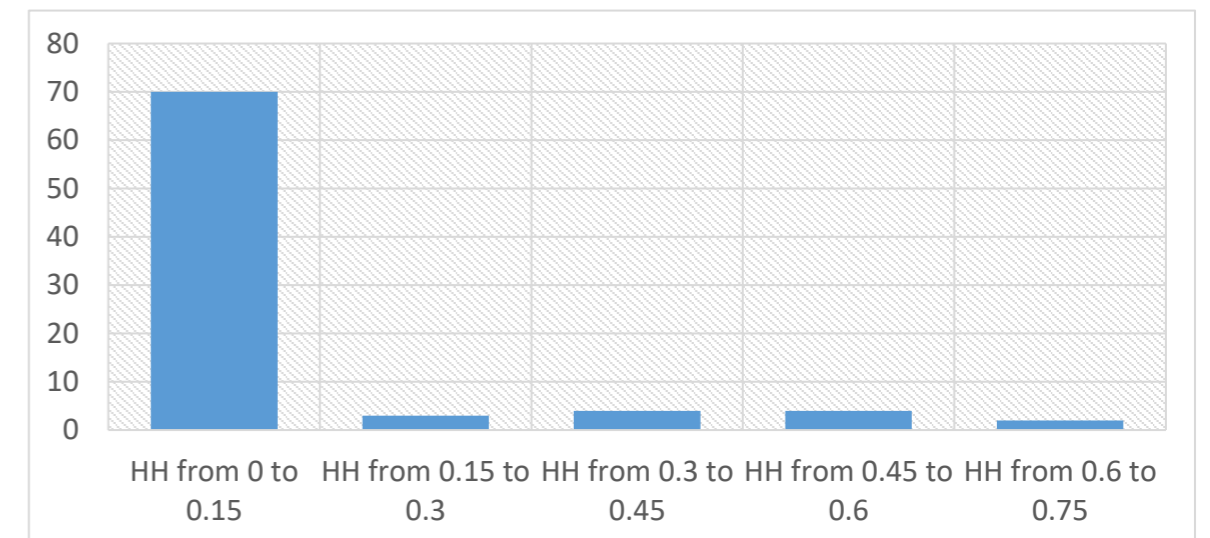
Types of universities from which elite members were graduated

ARE THE ELITE GROUPS SHAPED BY THE SAME FIELDS OF STUDY OR THE SAME UNIVERSITY?

- In order to analyze homophily level of elite members in terms of the educational background (university, field of study) we have calculated concentration Herfindahl-Hirschman (HH) index according to the following formula:
- $HH = S_1^2 + S_2^2 + \dots + S_n^2$, where
- S_i^2 - squared share of elite members in the region representing particular field of study or university.
- HH index varies from 0.01 to 1,
- where 1 corresponds to the situation when the whole regional legislature elite have the same educational background and 0.01 corresponds to the situation of the absolute diversity of universities or fields of study.



Distribution of HH index (concentration of fields of study) across regions



Distribution of HH index (concentration of universities) across regions

CONCLUSIONS

- The regional political elite is far more educated than the population in general.
- The educational profile of the elite in terms of fields of study does not differ significantly from that of the non-elite. There are no fields of study which are more conducive to an elite position.
- The shift from applied engineering and technology to economics and management reflect the changes in the higher education system. The lesser importance of infrastructure majors (i.e. pedagogy, healthcare, agriculture), which were an essential in the Soviet Union.
- Social capital through the university does not seem essential at regional level.
- Regional comprehensive universities play an important role in the elite formation, which they have retained since Soviet times.
- The role of leading universities is comparatively weaker for the cohorts of elites examined. It may be higher for federal elites or increase as vertical stratification develops

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