

ELECTIONS IN RUSSIA, 1989-2001: THE END OF THE CHAPTER?

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A dozen years of elections is, perhaps, the major positive result of late Soviet and post-Soviet transformation in Russia. Because of these elections it is now possible to discuss Russia's transition toward democracy, perhaps electoral democracy.

Since March 1989, when relatively free and fair elections to the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR took place, Russian citizens have been coming to polling stations at least once a year. There have been five national parliamentary elections (1989, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1999), three presidential elections (1991, 1996, 2000), four national referenda (two in 1991, two in 1993), four rounds of elections for regional legislatures (1990, 1993-94, 1996-97, 2000-01), and two rounds of gubernatorial elections (1996-97, 2000-01).

The country passed through two complete electoral cycles (1995-1997 and 1999-2001), when elections to all elective offices took place, and through two incomplete cycles: simultaneous elections to Soviets of all levels in 1990, and elections for both houses of the Federal Assembly and regional legislatures in 1993-1994.

The number of elections and elective offices in Russia, however, is relatively small. There are approximately 3,000 elections once in four years¹ and about 20,000 elective offices.

The total number of officials and personnel taking part in the administration of elections is much larger: about 45,000 officials at the level of the federal, regional, district (in large regions) and territorial election commissions, and several hundred thousand more at the level of 96,000 precincts, plus several hundred thousand ordinary members of precinct commissions composed of teachers, trade union activists and other grass-root citizens. Taking into account observers participating in the work of electoral commissions

¹ There are about 2,500 elections of top executives at three levels: national, regional and local (in some regions like Tatarstan, Moscow, Bashkiriia there still exists the system of appointments of local level heads of administration) and 500 elections for legislatures at the same three levels (at the local level, legislative bodies exist in cities only). Some experts have suggested there are too few elective offices in Russia now and that an essential increase in their number could promote both democracy and federalism. See-Ordeshook Peter C., "Russia's Party System: Is Russian Federalism Viable?" *PSA*, no.12 (1996), pp.195-217.

as well as campaign staffers and the candidates themselves, the total of those directly involved in elections comes to at least one million more.

Elections shape a society, especially during periods of upheaval when they play the role of a catalyst for change. They also reflect the politics of the society at a particular moment. Russian elections have attracted a lot of attention both in Russia and abroad. There are numerous publications on each of the national campaigns,² including three fundamental comparative studies on all Russian national elections.³ However, the last electoral cycle of 1999-2001 added much to both electoral development in Russia and to the knowledge of its development. It is thus worthwhile reviewing the entire set of Russian elections in order to assess the general trends of their evolution.

March 26, 1989 - March 26, 2000

The March 26, 2000 election completed an eleven-year period of transformation from the Soviet decorative democracy into a Russian manipulative-delegative one, with preprogrammed election results and the approval of appointed officials by voting. The beginning of the election cycle of 1999-2001 was marked by a brutal collision of elite clans during the parliamentary campaigning; by the mobilization of the electorate orchestrated by the Kremlin; by the more effective exploitation of the war in Chechnya than in the 1995-1996 elections; and by the preterm resignation of the former president and appointment of

² See-Kolosov Vladimir, Nikolai Petrov, and Leonid Smirniagin, eds., *Vesna 89: Geographiia i anatomiia parlamentskikh vyborov* (*The Spring of 1989: Geography and Analysis of the Elections to the Congress of People's Deputies*) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990); Michael Urban, "Boris Eltsin, Democratic Russia, and the Campaign for the Russian Presidency," *Soviet Studies*, vol. 2 (1992); Marie Mendras, "Le trois Russie. Analyse du referendum du 25 avril 1993," *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 43(6) (December 1993), pp. 897-939; Timothy Colton and Jerry Hough, eds., *Growing Pains: Russian Democracy and the Election of 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998); Ralph Clem and Peter Craumer, "A Rayon-Level Analysis of the Russian Election and Constitution Plebiscite of December 1993," *Post-Soviet Geography*, no. 8 (October 1993), pp. 459-475; Ralph Clem and Peter Craumer, "The Geography of the Russian 1995 Parliamentary Election," *Post-Soviet Geography*, no. 10 (December 1995), pp. 587-616; Ralph Clem and Peter Craumer, "Urban-Rural Voting Differences in Russian Elections, 1995-1996: A Rayon-Level Analysis," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics (henceforth: PSG&E)*, no. 10 (December 1997), pp. 379-395; Ralph Clem and Peter Craumer, "Regional Patterns of Political Preference in Russia: the December 1999 Duma Elections," *PSG&E*, no.1 (2000), pp. 1-29; Laura Belin and Robert W. Orttung, *The Russian Parliamentary Elections of 1995* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Jerry Hough, Evelyn Davidheiser, Susan Goodrich Lehman, *The 1996 Russian Presidential Election*, Brookings Occasional Papers (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996); Brudny Y., "In Pursuit of the Russian Presidency: Why and How Yeltsin Won the 1996 Presidential Election," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, no. 3 (1997); Michael McFaul, *Russia Between Elections: What the 1995 Parliamentary Elections Really Mean* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996); Michael McFaul, *The Russian 1996 Presidential Election: The End of Polarized Politics* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1997); Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov, and Andrei Riabov, eds., *Rossii a izbirateĭnom tsykle 1999-2000 godov (Russia in 1999-2000 Electoral Cycle)* (Moscow: Gendalgh, 2000); Nikolai Petrov, *Analiz vyborov 1995 goda v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu po regionam i okrugam (Analysis of 1995 Elections to the State Duma by Regions and Constituencies/ Parliamentary elections 1995 in Russia)* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1996), pp. 7-57.

³ Stephen White, Richard Rose, Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publ., 1997); Michael McFaul and Nikolai Petrov, eds., *Politicheskii al'manakh Rossii 1997 (Political Almanac of Russia, 1997)* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1998), vol.1; Vladimir Gel'man, Grigory Golosov, Yelena Meleshkina, eds., *Pervyi elektoralnyi tsikl v Rossii, 1993-1996 (The First Electoral Cycle in Russia 1993-1996)* (Moscow: Ves' Mir, 2000), 248 p.; Vladimir Gel'man, Grigory Golosov, Yelena Meleshkina, eds., *Vtoroi*

his official successor, in order to provide maximum advantage to the latter. The result of the campaign was that the political class managed to avoid any real transfer of power. Power was bequeathed internally, while elections legitimized it externally. This blueprint has been observed throughout most of the post-Soviet period. One can hardly expect anything different in Russia, at least in the near future.

The presidential election of 2000 was similar to the previous elections in that it was again about preserving power, rather than transferring it. In maintaining the status quo, the Kremlin has significant advantages stemming from its substantial administrative resources and from the peculiarities of existing legislation. The law allows the denial of registration, as well as de-registration, of any candidate who provides imprecise information about himself/herself or members of his/her family or who exceeds the maximum campaign financing limit. The last election was rather inexpensive, but, because of the overall commercialization, candidates barely managed to comply with the requirements specified by this law. This sword of Damocles hangs over any candidate who is a potential threat to the Kremlin. It did not account for the disqualification of any candidate in this election. But the future remains perilous for any of the contenders for power.

Electoral Transition

The evolution of the elections reflects the general development of society. Increasing stabilization has become the major feature of the socio-political background influencing elections. Elections are held regularly and by the same rules. Since 1993 there have been three consecutive elections to the State Duma according to almost identical laws.⁴ Once the initial social activism in the period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s declined, the unstable balance between different elite groups enabled elections to be more or less free and fair.⁵ Stabilization has thus resulted in an increase of administrative control over elections.

Another important point is the changing role of elections in providing connections between the regime and society. In the case of legislative elections in a state that invests an inordinate amount of power in the president, the process becomes more important than the result. In gubernatorial and especially presidential elections the result is important, but

elektoralnyi tsikl v Rossii, 1993-1996 (The Second Electoral Cycle in Russia 1999-2000) (Moscow: Ves' Mir, 2002), 214 p.

⁴ On the evolution of electoral rules see, Vladimir Gel'man, "The Institutional Design: Establishing the Rules of the Game," in Vladimir Gel'man, Grigory Golosov, Yelena Meleshkina, eds., *The First Electoral Cycle in Russia (1993-1996)*, p. 248; and Thomas Remington, Sarah Smith, "Political Goals, Institutional Context, and the Choice of an Electoral System: The Russian Parliamentary Election Law," *American Journal of Political Science*, no. 2 (1998).

⁵ The voting in the 1991 all-Union and Russian referenda can serve as good examples of how the power struggle can promote electoral democracy. As two separate commissions were acting at each of the polling stations, none of them could take a risk of cheating, and this system is considered to be the most fair one.

an increasing number of voters feel that the results are predetermined and nothing depends on them as individual voters.

Recent electoral developments in Russia can be divided into four distinct periods:

1. March 1989-April 1993 — the founding elections of 1989-1990 and a plebiscitarian pseudodemocracy,
2. December 1993-April 1994 — transitional elections,
3. December 1995-April 1997 — hopeful second elections, and
4. December 1999-April 2001 — the third elections amidst the loss of hope.

The First Cycle: 1989-1990

The first period was characterized by great expectations and the highest level of social activism. The Soviet political elites were shocked by the first real elections and it took several years for them to recover and adjust, building a kind of manageable electoral democracy. New elements intruded themselves into politics. Many referenda have been held at the national, regional and local levels since the first one in Soviet history on March 1991. The main subjects included the state and political institutions, ecology, and the restoration of pre-Soviet geographical names. None of these was launched by popular initiative. Rather, they were used by different elites to enforce their positions in the political struggle.

The Second Cycle: 1993-1995

During the elections of 1993 and 1995, there was a trend away from ad hoc, and leader-centered, politics to more stable party and program-centered politics. The events of September-October 1993 was once described as the victory of one wing of Bolsheviks over another wing of Bolsheviks. The fight between two major branches of power was completed and the elite consolidated its position. In order to reinforce and legalize the new political balance and to implement the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet political institutions, the adoption of a new constitution and legislative elections at all levels were required. At this stage, the voters, not the elites, were shocked by what was happening, and different forms of protest, including absenteeism, negativism and voting for parties regarded as outside of the system such as the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia or the Women of Russia party reached their maximum. Because the central government was self-absorbed, it did not intervene in regional elections. This left room for a variety of new regional legislatures to be formed.

The Third Cycle: 1995-1997

Political stability, the maturity of the political system, and the rationality of voters' behavior defined the entire third electoral cycle, from 1995-1997. For the first time in contemporary history, elections took place on time and by the same rules as previous ones. These rules were now determined by law, not by presidential decree. Natural selection operated with regard to political parties, and only those with distinct platforms and strong representation in the regions reached the Duma. The growing political professionalism, commercialization, and inaccessibility of higher politics accompanied the general stabilization. Most importantly, presidential elections took place despite all fears, and the communists failed to bring the system down. This was a real achievement, and various deviations from normal democracy — the huge financial advantage of the leading candidate, the absence of pluralism in the media, the utilization of administrative privilege — were considered to be inevitable. In gubernatorial elections, which took place on a mass scale for the first time, nearly half of the incumbents lost, creating an impression of democracy triumphant.

The Fourth Cycle: 1999-2000

With real power at stake, the situation changed radically. The fourth electoral cycle (December 1999-April 2001) is more reminiscent of the first cycle 1993 than of the second and third cycles of elections. The growth of political uncertainty brought back ephemeral political parties, an absence of programs, and so forth. The dirtiest political technologies now flourished, including the use of war in Chechnya for the negative consolidation of society. Instead of promoting democracy in the regions, the federal authority resorted to political tricks that were to be expected in many areas anyway.

Manipulation likewise manifested itself in the timing of the elections, in the establishment of the party of power on the eve of elections, and in the failure of its presidential candidate to campaign or even present a platform. All this led to elections with predetermined results. Blackmail was widely used by the Kremlin to promote its goals in parliamentary, presidential and gubernatorial elections. In this cycle, the incumbent governors were much more successful expert in those cases when they were forced out of the race by the Kremlin.⁶

Since April 1995, with the end of the transitional period, the voter turnout in national elections has stabilized at the “ordinary” level of between sixty and seventy percent.

⁶ These successful efforts to retain power can be explained by a number of factors including the lessons learned from the first elections; the consolidation of regional elites; the increased control over legislatures by the governors; and the more convenient election rules (the general adoption of one-round elections giving the incumbent a decisive advantage).

Obviously, during the Soviet period, the turnout figures of 99.9 percent signified something other than the highest social and political activism. Indeed, in the late Soviet period, absenteeism (the failure to turn out for the election) was an indicator of social protest. The December 1993 elections can also be seen as “abnormal,” following so shortly after the bloody October events in Moscow. They were marked both by a drop in turnout and also by the phenomenon of protest voting.

The Basic Parameters of the Russian Elections, 1989-2001

The following table presents the basic parameters of Russian elections from 1989 to 2001. These include voter turnout; competitiveness; the winners’ electoral base and margin of victory; the percentages of the vote won by incumbents and challengers as well as by Muscovites and women; the party nominees; the invalid ballots; the voting against all candidates; fraud; and the money spent.

Absenteeism or the failure to turn out. This is one of the most universal indicators of electoral behavior in Russia. In stable democracies, it reflects the level of political passivity. However, transitional democracies, including Russia in 1989-2001, are very different. In the first post-totalitarian elections, absenteeism was *active* rather than *passive*, reflecting the progress society had made since the 99.9 percent turnout of the Soviet era. Until April 1993 when the turnout first reached its equilibrium level, the more active the region was politically, the greater the level of absenteeism. Not voting was seen as a way of demonstrating the break with the Soviet past. Cities, and especially capitals — which were the leaders in societal transformation — manifested the highest absenteeism.

Once the electoral transition is over, the failure to turn out reflects differences in political culture, including the degree to which administrative resources are used to control the elections.⁷ Absenteeism is higher in a number of ethnic republics and rural regions and is lower in urban regions and in the north. Different elections attract different degrees of participation. The turnout has been the lowest in the regional legislative elections (30-40 percent), higher in gubernatorial elections (50-60 percent) and in national parliamentary elections (60-65 percent), and highest in presidential elections (65-70 percent).

The competitiveness of elections can be evaluated by different indicators. Taking *the average number of candidates per seat* in the Duma, it reached the rather high level of 6.3 in the second elections (1990), and it remained approximately the same until the 1995

⁷ The reported turnout there can easily reach 93%, as in Ingushetiia in the 2000 presidential election, or can be even higher in the case of regional elections.

Basic parameters of electoral behavior, 1991-2002

	1989	1990	1991 ref.	1991 pres.	1993 ref. (Apr.)	1993 ref. (Dec.)	1993 (Duma)	1993 (CF)	1995 (Duma)	1996—I	1996— II	1995—1997 governors	1995—1997 reg. legisl.	1999 (Duma)	2000 pres.	1999—2002 governors
Turnout	86.9	76.8	75.4	74.7	64.0	54.4	54.8	54.1	64.4	69.7	68.8	53.8	42.8	61.9	68.7	53.3
Candidates per mandate	2.0	6.3	—	6.0	—	—	6.8	2.7	11.7	10.0	2.0	5.0	5.9	10.4	11.0	6.2
Winner's base	...	...	73.0	57.3	58.3	57.1	27.0	52.3	28.6	35.5	53.8	60.8	...	33.9	52.9	61.7
Winner's margin	...	...	—	40.4	—	9.9	9.9	—	12.7	3.3	13.5	31.2	...	15.7	23.7	40.2
Share of Muscovites*	20.4	9.1	—	66.6	—	—	36.9	3.4	24.4	80.0	100.0	5.1	...	29.0	81.8	4.8
Share of women*	8.5	2.9	—	—	—	—	13.6	4.5	10.2	—	—	1.3	9.7	9.3	9.1	2.5
Share of party nominees*	85	86	—	—	—	—	40.6	...	65.8	18.2	—	13.7	18.6	50.5	16.7	4.8
Newcomers**	...	97.0	—	—	—	—	75.0	63.1	49.3	—	—	55.3	...	54.7	—	35.0
Incumbents in races	...	...	—	—	—	—	...	—	78.2	100.0	—	100.0	....	69.6	100.0	89.9
Invalid ballots	2.6	6.9	2.3	2.2	2.8	2.4	7.3	4.8	2.3	1.4	1.1	2.1	...	2.0	0.9	...
Negativism	9.2	14.5	27.0	1.9	8.5	40.6	14.8	12.4	9.6	1.5	4.8	5.8	...	3.3	1.9	7.4
Number of effective candidates*****	...	...	—	2.7	—	—	9.1	...	11.1	3.9	2.2	2.9	...	6.8	2.7	3.0
Expenses (\$ US, mld)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	~200	~1000	~300	~400	~300	~300	~100	~500
"Administrative resource"*****	...	...	3	4.5	7.5	10	10	15	13	6.5	9.5	~15	~10	~15	~7	~15

* Estimated as a share of candidates for presidential elections and as a share of winners for other elections (CPSU members for 1989 and 1990)

** Estimated as continuity with the USSR Congress of Peoples Deputies for 1990, and with the RSFSR Congress of peoples deputies for 1993 (State Duma)

*** Number of effective parties in case of Duma elections

**** Estimated as deviation from free and fair voting results in percentage points

Regional legislatures: Calculated 72 campaigns in 1995-1997 and 50 campaigns in 1998-2000 on a base of official Central Electoral Commission's reference books

Duma elections, when it almost doubled, reaching its maximum (11.7 candidates per seat). The 1999 Duma elections showed a slight decrease in the number of candidates (10.4).

Examining the *winners' margins* produces a different picture. It has been growing by a quarter in each Duma election. On the average, the second candidate in 1999 received only about half the winner's votes. Taking the proportional part of the mixed electoral system, the *number of effective parties* can serve as a measure of competitiveness. In 1993, it was 9.5, it increased by one-third in 1995, and then dropped to 7.7 in 1999. In short, after an initial period of real competition, the competitiveness of elections is now in decline.

Negativism. In the elections of 1989 and 1990, the Soviet/Stalinist ballot was still used. Voters had to strike off the names of all candidates for whom they did not want to vote for.⁸ At the time, the size of the negative vote (the rejection of all candidates) could be counted by subtracting the total number of votes obtained by all the candidates from the overall number of ballots. In 1993, a new ballot was introduced, which had the option of voting "against all candidates." However, at that time and in the following parliamentary elections, negative voting did not count when determining the winner. In 1989-1990 and again since 1999, it has counted. To a certain degree, negativism and absenteeism are interchangeable. If, for example, potential voters are disappointed with the lack of choice, they can protest by taking either the more passive form of absenteeism or the more active form of negativism. This is clearly seen in the case of simultaneous elections when voters who otherwise would have stayed away are drawn to cast their vote against all candidates in an election of major importance.⁹

The so-called *administrative factor* plays a very important role in all Russian elections. Candidates and parties backed by the party of power are placed in a very privileged position in different ways. These include the establishment of "convenient" rules and timing (especially in the case of regional elections); the use of state resources controlled by bureaucrats (primarily money and the mass media); and the mobilization of businesses dependent on the regime. They also include the use of courts and election commissions to put pressure on, or even to exclude, opponents. Finally there is *direct fraud*. The lack of transparency and of public control over elections makes it hardly possible to speak about proven fraud on a national scale. It is possible, however, to

⁸ This form was designed for Soviet elections to make it easier both to vote (as there was only one name on the ballot, a voter only had to take the ballot and put it into a box without making any marks) and to control voting (it made it possible to define anybody who was marking a ballot paper as suspect).

⁹ The December 1993 elections to the Moscow city duma can serve as good example. They took place at the same time as elections to the State Duma and the voting on the constitution. Thus the turnout was much higher than in other regional elections that took place later, but one third of all votes were cast against all candidates.

evaluate the extent of fraud in regions in a broad sense (a deviation from the freely expressed will of the voters) using mathematical-statistical methods¹⁰ and specific cases.

Despite the numbers, which look similar to those of the 1995-1997 cycle, the role of the administrative factor in last elections increased significantly, due to several reasons. The most important of them are: 1) the consolidation of the elites at different levels, and the growth of central control with its potential to augment administrative influence at both regional and federal levels; 2) the active employment of election commissions, courts and coercive structures simply to exclude undesirable candidates (rendering hidden forms of fraud superfluous). The declining number of incumbents participating in the races is a clear indication of this point. Gerrymandering as a form of electoral engineering is not particularly widespread in national elections.¹¹ However, in regional elections, it is common for the urban, less controllable population to be underrepresented.¹² This sometimes takes the extreme form of so-called administrative-territorial districts, in which a small rural *raion* (district) may receive the same representation as a larger regional center.

The *percentage of women among deputies* is indicative not only of women's position in society but also—as an analysis of the 1989 elections showed—the extent to which the nomenklatura controls elections.¹³ Women constituted 8.5 percent in the Congress of People's Deputies. As the table indicates, the women's showing in the second round of elections in 1990 was about one third of that in the first one. There was a rise in 1993, when the "Women of Russia" movement received almost nine percent of the votes. In 1995 the percentage of women dropped, and it has now returned to the 1989 level.¹⁴ In

¹⁰ These methods have been developed over a long period of time by the analytical group led by Aleksandr Sobianin and Vladislav Sukhovol'skii. Results of their studies of 1991-1993 elections were summarized in the book *Democracy Limited by Fraud*. Aleksandr Sobianin, Vladislav Sukhovolskii, *Demokratiia, ogranichennaia fal'sifikatsiiami: vybory i referendumy v Rossii v 1991-1993 gg.* (Moscow: Project Group on Human Rights, 1995). "The essence of these methods is easy. Any falsification of results if not uniform throughout the entire country, leads in certain places to a sharp increase in the number of votes obtained by a given candidate or a party while the average support for other parties and candidates remains stable. Thus, having vast information on election results by precincts, territorial commissions, and districts, we can determine with a certain degree of confidence the extent of the fraud and which candidate is favored." (Sobianin, Sukhovolskii, *Demokratiia, ogranichennaia fal'sifikatsiiami*, p. 2).

¹¹ See, however, *Ryabomandra*, named after the former Central Election commission chair Nikolai Riabov in Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov, eds., *Political Almanac of Russia, 1997*, vol. 1, p. 194.

¹² The resulting phenomenon of political life in Russia was illustrated and analyzed in full in material of the 1993-95 legislative elections (Nikolai Petrov, "Vybory organov predstavitelnoi vlasti v regionakh ("Significance of Regional Elections Viewed,") *FBIS-SOV-95-111-S* (Translation of the article "Elections of Organs of Representative Power," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, no. 3,4 (March, April 1995).

¹³ It is worth recalling that the Supreme Soviet had perfectly balanced gender and occupational structures. In 1989, regional authorities in some cases tried to repeat the same practice choosing "representative" candidates. The greater the percentage of women among candidates the more the nomenklatura interfered in elections (Kolosov, Petrov, Smirniagin, eds., *Vesna 89*).

¹⁴ The drop in women's representation in comparison with previous communist parliaments is typical of the post-communist transition (Steven Saxonberg, "Women in East European Parliaments," *Journal of Democracy*, no.2 (April 2000), pp. 145-58.), but in the majority of cases unlike Russia the drop in the first post-communist election was followed by a steady increase in the later elections. Russia would conform to the universal scheme much better if one consider the 1989 election as the first post-communist one.

individual rather than mass elections to executive offices, the percentage of women candidates is even lower.

The *percentage of Muscovites* among Russian parliament deputies is several times higher than the percentage of Muscovites in the Russian population as a whole. This is not surprising, when taking into account the high level of centralization and the concentration of the intelligentsia in the capital city. The representation of Muscovites was smallest of all in the Russian Congress of 1990, but in the Duma elections of 1993 they constituted nearly 40% of the elected members. In 1995, the number of Muscovites decreased to one-quarter, but it is now increasing again. The national elections work like a pump, with only a few deputies from the regions leaving the capital after the expiration of their term. An opposite process, though incomparably smaller in scale, is the participation of Muscovites in regional elections. There are now a dozen governors and republican presidents who came from or through Moscow.¹⁵

The participation of regional leaders in elections during the decade has changed greatly in terms of both scale and success. In 1989 it was obligatory for first secretaries of the Communist party regional committees to take part in elections. One-third of them failed.¹⁶ This eventually led to vociferous scandals and quiet replacements. In 1990 many regional bosses participated in elections to the Russian Congress. Twenty of them won, including some who had failed a year earlier. None of the 1989 winners took part in these elections because it was impossible to hold a mandate in both the Congress of Peoples' Deputies and in a republic-level legislature, and all regional bosses opted to take their places in the regional councils. The elections of 1993 to the Federal Council constituted the last national campaign in which regional leaders participated. It was a special, "deluxe" campaign that was very different from elections to the lower house. Seven out of every eight governors thus managed to win that time. Since 1993 the regional leadership, even the highest, has not participated in national elections.

The results of the first (1989) and second (1990) elections profoundly affected the Soviet nomenklatura, leading, however, to its modification rather than its demise. The nomenklatura, which became Russian in December 1991, recuperated quickly from the shock caused by the first elections and was, more or less, prepared for further changes by early 1993. In 1993, special elections "for bosses" were organized, and starting in 1995, there were individual elections in each region, where, to a significant extent, it was possible

¹⁵ They are: Ruslan Aushev (1993, Ingushetiia); Kirsan Iliumzhinov (1993, Kalmykiia), Nikolai Fedorov (1993, Chuvashiia); Yevgenii Savchenko (1993, Belgorod oblast); Yegor Stroiev (1993, Orel oblast); Yevgenii Mikhailov (1996, Pskov oblast); Viacheslav Liubimov (1996, Riazan oblast); Aleksei Lebed (1996, Khakasiia); the late Aleksandr Lebed (1998, Krasnoiarsk krai); Aleksandr Dzasokhov (1998, North Ossetiia); Nikolai Semenov (1999, Karachai-Cherkessiia); Boris Gromov (2000, Moscow oblast); Roman Abramovich (2001, Chukotka); Boris Zolotarev (2001, Evenki); Aleksandr Khloponin (2001, Taimyr district and 2002 Krasnoiarsk krai).

for regional leaders to establish their own rules of the game and avoid strict control from above or below. In the first of two series of gubernatorial elections that took place in 1995-1997, about half of the incumbents won a subsequent term; in the second series, in 1999-2001, they lost only one-third of the contests.

Turnover. There are two factors affecting turnover: extent and frequency. Neither of the first Congresses — the Union and the Russian — lasted their whole term; and the three first parliamentary elections — in 1989, 1990 and 1993 — were held under different rules and with different constituencies. In the second (1995) and the third elections to the State Duma (1999), about one-half of the deputies were replaced. The percentage of newcomers was rather high. Looking at 225 single-mandate districts, the continuity is even less pronounced: There were 176 incumbents seeking reelection in 1995 and 68 (36.1 percent) of them succeeded. In 1999, 76 incumbents won out of 156 contestants (48.7 percent). As many as one-third of the incumbents did not seek reelection in their constituencies.¹⁷ Among those who did, the percentage of losers is at least as large as that of winners.

Governors are different. In 1995-1997, all of them ran for reelection, but half lost. In 1999-2001 the incumbents' chances of winning became much higher, but due to pressure from the Kremlin, several did not run for reelection, or, as in the case of Aleksandr Rutskoi, were prevented from doing so by the courts. In regional legislative elections, the percentage of incumbents reelected did not exceed more than one-quarter to one-third.

Expenses. The first Russian elections were relatively inexpensive. With socio-political and economic stabilization, elections have become routine. Social enthusiasm has been declining, and is increasingly replaced by professionalism. The 1995 elections to the Duma marked the start of real commercialization, when the cost of a serious campaign was measured in six-digit dollar figures. According to different estimates, the cost of Yeltsin's 1996 presidential campaign reached between \$.5 billion to \$1.5 billion. Putin's presidential election was less costly (if one does not add the cost of the renewed war in Chechnya which was a necessary element in Putin's victory). A more or less serious gubernatorial campaign can cost the candidate up to \$20 million.

There are two major obstacles when trying to estimate the financial cost of the elections. The first is connected to the huge gap between official and real expenditures, with the latter liable to exceed the former by a factor of 100. The second problem is connected to the transitional nature of the Russian economy, which retains the

¹⁶ It happened mainly in urban industrial regions to the north of Moscow.

¹⁷ There are two basic reasons why incumbents are not trying to defend their mandates, the first is related to the loss of support of either regional authorities or sponsors, the second has to do with the jobs they could find in the government during the four years of their term (that is why in 1999, four years after the previous elections, the number of incumbents in races was less than in 1995, when only two years had passed since 1993 elections). It shows, in any case, that the deputies' connections with the voters between elections are rather weak.

characteristics of a communal economy along with market characteristics. Costs for the same service can differ greatly, with incumbent governors and presidents receiving many services for free.

Partisanship. The percentage of candidates nominated by political parties is increasing, but the growth is very slow. Elections in Russia are still personal, which leads to widespread populism and a lack of responsibility by elected officials. In 1999, there was a “departisanization” of the elections, with party candidates winning in half the districts, in comparison with two-thirds of the districts four years earlier. Even communist candidates — incumbents and regional party activists — were registered in some cases as “independents.” Moreover, candidates who came into the Duma on a party ticket can easily leave a faction. Where they exist, factions in regional parliaments are organized not by parties, but by professional groups and, above all, by elite clans. In elections for executive offices, the percentage of party nominees is much lower. Overall, the personal factor is still very strong in elections in Russia. This enables candidates to resort to populism and allows elected officials to evade responsibility and supervision.

The Central Electoral Commission

Stalin’s cynical formula: “It doesn’t matter how they vote, it matters who counts the results,” still retains its importance at both the national and regional levels. At the national level, the timing of elections is directly connected to the formation and operation of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC). Until the autumn of 1993, the CEC was under the leadership of Vasilii Kazakov, an old-fashioned Soviet-style official. In September 1993, when “old specialists” were unable to guarantee the organization of elections at very short notice, Yeltsin appointed a new commission under the leadership of Nikolai Riabov, who had served as deputy speaker of the Duma. His prior experience was limited to a small provincial technical college in the south. The CEC consisted mainly of bureaucrats from the former Supreme Soviet and it produced the desired results for the authorities. Numerous complaints were filed, however, including those from newly elected Duma deputies whom the CEC did not manage to provide with detailed electoral statistics. Since 1993, the CEC has transformed itself from a technical service to a very influential and powerful body. It has become “the ministry of elections,” with the head of the CEC considered among the country’s top ten politicians. Soon after the 1993 elections Riabov was appointed ambassador to the Czech Republic, and a new period began for the CEC under Aleksandr Ivanchenko, Riabov’s former deputy.

Whereas the first post-Soviet CEC was merely appointed by Yeltsin, the next one was formed in 1995 under a new law. This law specified that five CEC members were appointed by the Duma, five by the Federal Council and five by the president. Ivanchenko

managed to keep his position in 1995, but not in 1999, when the ten names proposed by the Duma and the Federal Council differed from those favored by the CEC leadership, and when Yeltsin did not even include Ivanchenko in his list of five. Moreover, the Kremlin candidate failed, and Aleksandr Veshniakov, the former secretary and then deputy CEC chair was elected to be the new head of the Central Electoral Commission. He seemed close to leftists and thus, for the first time since 1993, the CEC looked as though it would not be directly controlled by the Kremlin.¹⁸

The CEC consists not only of fifteen commissioners, but also of a huge apparatus that is directly controlled by three leading CEC members: the chairman, his deputy and the secretary. According to Soviet tradition, the person who controls the apparatus controls the entire mechanism. Ordinary CEC members did not play any important role in 1993, and were not even allowed to enter the rooms where voting results were counted.

Regional election commissions are supervised by the CEC, but they are not directly subordinate to it. Half of their members are appointed by the governor, the other half by the regional legislature. In the majority of regions, they are totally controlled by the local administration.¹⁹

In addition to the pyramid of election commissions, a whole election industry has emerged in Russia — the only industry to develop rapidly during the decade of Russia's "great depression." It encompasses consulting, public relations, image-making and mass media businesses, with a turnover measured in billions of dollars. There are well-established "players" in the field,²⁰ but the electoral business is diversifying intensively with more and more companies springing up.

Russia has easily achieved a market economy in the electoral sphere. Given the weakness of political parties, this means that the results serve the interests not of major social groups but rather of the elite clans that dominate politics and business. Interestingly, instead of sending their representatives to elective offices, tycoons themselves are now starting to become deputies and even governors.²¹

¹⁸ The last CEC rotation which took place in 2003 has left eight "old" CEC members including Veshniakov, elected the chair for the next term. The seven new CEC members came either from its apparatus or from regional commissions.

¹⁹ Since 2003 a kind of supervision if not subordination of the CEC over regional election commissions was introduced with CEC naming two commission members – the one of the governor's half, the other of the legislature and commission chair.

²⁰ They are "Nikkolo-M" (Yekaterina Yegorova, Igor Mintusov), "Image-contact"(Alekssei Sitnikov), "Novokom" (Alekssei Koshmarov), "Polity" (Viacheslav Nikonov), "The Center for Political Technologies" (Igor Bunin), The Institute of Regional Problems (Maksim Dianov), "Russky Proect" (Mikhail Maliutin) et al.

²¹ There were three such cases in 2001 in remote autonomous districts with rich resources and a sparse population: Aleksandr Khloponin in the Taimyr district, Roman Abramovich in Chukotka and Boris Zolotarev in the Evenki district.

The reform of electoral legislation

A large-scale reform of Russia's electoral legislation was launched early in Putin's presidency. According to the head of the CEC, Aleksandr Veshniakov, such a systemic review of the legislation had "not been undertaken in the last eight years"²². The reform strategy was formulated in the CEC report of 2000 "On the Improvement and Development of the Electoral Legislation." Changes which are recommended were subsequently incorporated into the law on "On Political Parties" and in the amendments to the preexisting law "On the Basic Guarantees Providing Citizens of the Russian Federation with the Right to Vote and to Participate in Referenda". The reforms have left a particular mark on the regions (much more so, for example, than at the center). Among the most important changes so far have been the introduction of a mixed proportional-majoritarian system in elections to the legislatures; the weakening of the control exercised by the regional authorities over electoral commissions; and the appearance of an "electoral vertical" leading towards tighter central control over elections in regions.

The new version of the law "On the Elections of the Deputies to the State Duma" contains a significant number of innovations. These include a tightening of control in some areas and a relaxation of control in others. To the first group belongs the introduction of a single fixed date for elections (the second Sunday of December); a mandatory reduction of the period allowed for campaigns; a sharp increase in the maximal permissible campaign expenditures;²³ and, finally, more stringent regulation and enforcement of registration rules for candidates. The reverse is true of the new law's broader definition of "electoral agitation" permitting a looser and more benign regulation of the mass media. However, on the whole the defining element of the new version of the law is tougher control by the state — through the restriction of un-sanctioned grassroots public activism (voters' groups lose the right to nominate candidates, with that right reserved for political parties and for independent candidates), and through the consolidation of the existing political parties, which according to the law "On Political Parties" will be placed under strong administrative control.

At the beginning of 2003 the final amendments to the laws on banking, the mass media, and Civil as well as Criminal law codes were made. Changes in regional laws will come later, but not by much since new rules of elections to regional legislatures are coming into effect already in mid-2003.

²² "Centralization is Needed for Protection of Democracy". Veshniakov's interview to "Vlast" (in Russian). *Vlast*, no. 325, July 2, 2002, pp.26-27.

²³ The increase is twofold, from one to two million rubles per candidates in single-mandate districts, and six-fold — (up to 150 million rubles) for parties and electoral blocks

National, Regional and Local Elections

Elites and Citizens in the Elections

Both reflecting, and reinforcing, the lack of interest in local elections, democratization operates less as it moves from the top down. The lower the level of elections, the more severe are the various violations. In fact, in many regions (for example, Moscow, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Voronezh, Krasnodar, Novosibirsk) in violation of the federal law, there are no elections at all to choose the heads of administration.²⁴

Voter decision-making operates according to various patterns: more personal in the national elections, partisan-personal in the regional contests, and professional-personal at the local level. National elections are about politics, regional elections are about economics, and local elections are about being “good guys.” Implementing the same set of rules at different levels can produce very different results. For example, there are only six regions where the mixed system is used to form the regional legislature. In these cases, political parties are very different from the all-Russian ones. Even if they use nationally-recognized names to attract voters, they may well represent broad personal and clan coalitions of local elites.

Turnout, even in the most popular regional elections, the gubernatorial contests, is much lower than at the national level: 50-55 percent.²⁵ Competitiveness is lower as well, with fewer effective candidates and with the winner’s margin of victory often reaching 70 or even 80 percentage points. This reflects the desert-like nature of politics in a number of regions, with a lack of potential replacements for the leader. It is especially true with regard to regions where the leader has been ruling since 1990 or even longer (Bashkiria, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Tatarstan).

Looking at the chain of command — descending from the governor to the deputies to the mayors — makes it clear that cases of total loyalty to, or control by, the governor are rather rare (Tatarstan, Saratov, Kemerovo). Often, leftist deputies are elected in regions where the rightist governor came to office some time earlier, or vice versa — a phenomenon that can be explained either by a natural disappointment in whoever is in power or by a latent desire to counterbalance one force by the other.

Timing

Timing is an essential factor that can play a decisive role in an election. In Russia the season is also important. Both bad weather in winter and early spring and good

²⁴ To avoid direct elections at subregional level the administrations there are considered to be units of state power, not of self-administration.

²⁵ This is an average figure, derived from an 85-95 percent or even higher official turnout in some republics in which gubernatorial elections were held simultaneously with national ones and a more usual 40-45percent turnout in oblasts and kraia.

weather in summer can reduce turnout. For example, good weather can provide potential voters with an excuse to take the day off rather than vote. Both situations have disproportionate effects on voters with differing political preferences.²⁶ Rural regions are different from urban areas. In the more traditional rural areas, religious holidays and the agrarian cycle can be a factor, as the population experiences a contented and plentiful autumn or a troubled spring.²⁷

Simultaneous elections make administrative control more complicated. Governors do their best to separate the gubernatorial campaigns from any others, and to ensure that they precede all other regional elections. The governors regard it as even more important to delay elections to local administrative offices than to legislative bodies. In this case, the governor will then be dealing with local heads who know that they are going to be dependent on him, and they are the ones who control the regional electoral machines.²⁸ By the same logic, Yeltsin allowed extensive gubernatorial elections in 1996 only after the presidential elections. The logic of a governor might be different if he needs to avoid competition with the mayor of a regional center. In such a case, mayoral elections can coincide with gubernatorial ones.²⁹

Simultaneous elections to legislatures at all levels took place only once (in 1990). Such elections promote democracy, party development at both national and regional levels, and close working connections between lawmakers at different levels. From the standpoint of democratization, it is regrettable that there are not more such cases.

Early elections give an advantage to incumbents because they can choose a time when competitors will be least prepared. When the federal law restricted changes in electoral terms, epidemics of formal resignations broke out, and in early 2001, the head of

²⁶ That is why some experts were arguing against December parliamentary elections in 1993 (the same day, December 19, that the first elections to the Supreme Soviet were held in 1936 by Stalin). In 1996, in the presidential elections, the timing of the second round was of the vital importance not only due to Yeltsin's bad health, but also due to the vacations of students, and of urban dwellers in dachas. That's why the CEC appointed the second round not on Sunday but in the middle of the week, on Wednesday. In order not to violate the law, Wednesday, July 3 was declared a nonworking day. As a result, the official turnout figure showed a drop of less than one percentage point.

²⁷ In 1993, for example, gubernatorial elections were shifted in the Smolensk oblast to avoid coinciding with Easter.

²⁸ The sequence of the 1996-97 Saratov elections can serve, perhaps, as an almost ideal example of political timing. First, the newly appointed governor cancelled local elections scheduled for April. Then, just before the presidential elections, he appointed new mayors and raion heads. The gubernatorial elections took place two months after the presidential ones. Opening the broad round of gubernatorial elections, they attracted the special attention of the Kremlin. The incumbent won handily on the heels of the presidential campaign. A few months later, at the beginning of the next year local elections took place; local heads were appointed by the governor not elected by popular vote. Legislative elections took place a year after the gubernatorial ones and coincided with the region's jubilee celebration and Yeltsin's visit. Under the new regional law, the majoritarian system was implemented for the legislative elections instead of the former majoritarian-proportional one, which was less convenient for the authorities.

²⁹ The analysis of a sequence of gubernatorial, legislative and mayoral elections in 1996-1997 showed that the most widespread option was gubernatorial—mayoral—legislative in consecutive order; after that came the option of holding the gubernatorial and the mayoral elections at the same time to be followed later by those to the legislature. The most democratic sequence—simultaneous elections — even though it was the least costly, came third (*Political Almanac* 1997, vol. 1, pp. 265-272).

the CEC warned that an amendment to the election law was needed to prohibit governors who had resigned from running again in early elections.

The president is, of course, much more powerful than the ordinary governor. Instead of accommodating himself to the political calendar, he can make history by himself. Notably, both wars in Chechnya started on the eve of major electoral cycles and were intensively exploited in the presidential elections of 1996 and 2000.

Regional Electoral Behavior

Models of electoral behavior vary not only according to their timing but also with regard to their geographical location. Regional voting patterns are rather stable and spatially meaningful, which makes it possible to discuss a mature electoral landscape.

Based on voting patterns in the 1995 parliamentary and 1996 presidential elections, five regional types can be distinguished: 1) strongly reformist, 2) moderately reformist, 3) conservative, 4) unstable, 5) controlled.³⁰ The two reformist and the unstable groups are almost equal in the support that they receive — approximately twenty to twenty-five percent of the voting public. The percentage of the conservatives is approximately thirty percent, and the controlled group is ten percent. These groups, which are identifiable by a few basic patterns of voting behavior, have distinct social physiognomies. The reformist type is the most urban (the average percentage of city dwellers here is about eighty percent of the regional population), while the controlled type is the most rural (more than fifty percent).

In the 1999-2001 electoral cycle, the composition of regional types remained practically the same³¹ (Fig.1).

Types, defined on the basis of the general character of electoral preferences differ by other parameters of electoral behavior as well (see Table 1).

The general character of the electoral landscape can be defined as latitudinal-zonal with a well-pronounced north-south gradient. The most generalized pattern of electoral behavior is represented by five major electoral sectors: the north, the south, the core, the heartland and the half-moon. The “more developed and progressive” north and the “more conservative and conformist” south can be considered the two poles with the other three major sectors occupying intermediate positions (Fig.2).

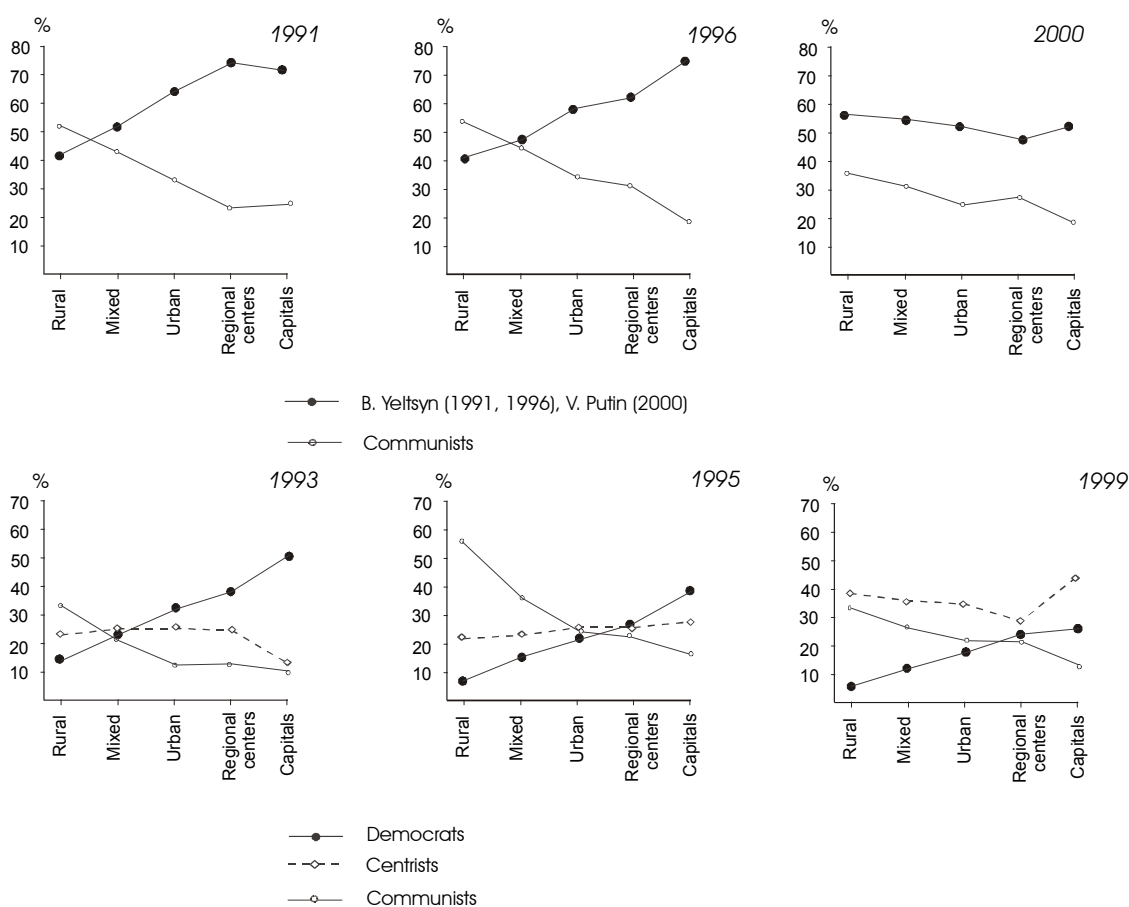
Variations in electoral behavior within regions can be much larger than between regions. The same two poles can be seen here, with regional centers and cities playing the role of

³⁰ See Michael MacFaul, Nikolai Petrov, “Russian Electoral Politics After Transition: Regional and National Assessments”, *PSG&E*, 38 (8), 1997, pp.507-549.

³¹ There were four regions only, which changed their types: North Ossetia and three Far-Eastern regions. North Ossetia left “the controlled” type for “the conservative”; the Amur oblast left the “conservative” type for “the unstable”; Koryak and Chukotka autonomous districts left the “strong reformist” type for the “controlled” type in 1999. (Nikolai Petrov, Alexei Titkov, “Vybory-99 v regional'nom izmerenii” (“Elections-99 in the Regional Dimension”) (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2001), pp. 197-224.

“electoral north” and the periphery the role of “electoral south.” The set of graphs (Fig.1) showing electoral support for “democrats,” “communists” and “centrists” by five types of single-mandate electoral districts³² illustrates this point. The more urban and central the district, the greater the democrats’ support, and the smaller the support for the communists. However, this distinct regularity was significantly disrupted in the last electoral cycle, which can be explained as one more sign of the decline in polarized politics.³³ The differences in electoral behavior within regions and between regions are being eroded.

Figure 1
Electoral Support for “Democrats,” “Communists” and “Centrists”

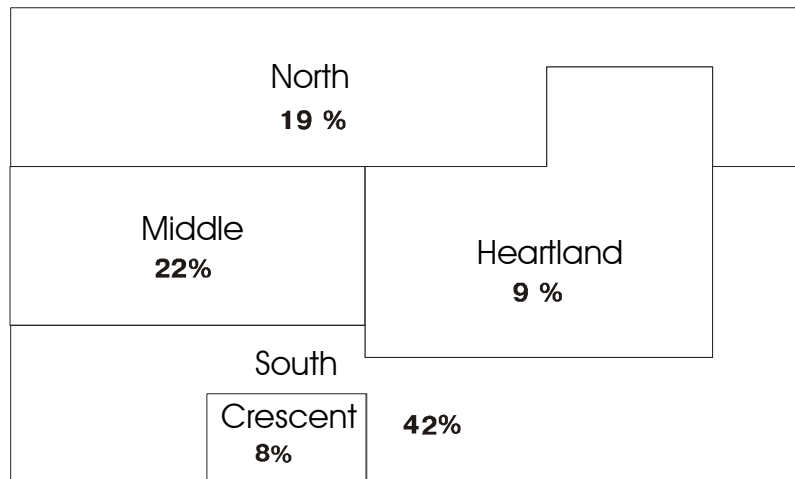


Major political forces' support
 by different types of SMD's, 1991-2000

³² The same set of 225 single-mandate districts was used both in the 1995 and 1999 Duma elections. We divided them into five groups: capitals (Moscow and St. Petersburg districts, 10.7 million voters in 2000), regional centers (12.1 million), predominantly urban (19.3 million), mixed (53.6 million) and predominantly rural (14.2 million), and recalculated results of the 1991, 1996 and 2000 presidential and 1993 Duma elections by the same set of districts.

³³ See Michael McFaul, *The Russian 1996 Presidential Election*.

Figure 2



Explanatory Models of Electoral Behavior

The following picture emerges concerning the electoral preferences of Russian voters. The basic proportions are rather stable in the majority of oblasts and kraia, but erratic with regard to ethnic republics. In the latter units it is not so easy to distinguish between the changeability of voters and that of regional leaders who control the electorate to varying degrees. In some cases, the evidence of administrative influence is rather clear—for example, when the republics of the North Caucasus almost totally “changed their minds” between June 1991 (the presidential election) and April 1993 (the referendum), or when the Volga republics and Dagestan made a similar turnabout within a few weeks between the first and the second rounds of the presidential election in 1996.

The remarkable stability of certain voting patterns speaks in favor of models that employ the concept of political culture and explain voting behavior by some basic characteristics of the electorate. The primary cleavage is that between the urban and rural (or the industrial and agricultural), taking into account the differences in age, education and economic opportunities. It is reflected in the north-south divide, which appeared in the very first elections in 1989 and has reappeared ever since. The urban factor is sometimes sufficient to explain up to fifty percent of the variation in electoral results. Age (especially in regard to pensioners) and education level can be important as well, but these indicators are interrelated.

Different economic indicators such as unemployment, income level, GDP and federal subventions are of much less importance in Russia’s case. This is rather natural for a transitional period marked by a high level of political and economic instability. Previous

attempts to build models suggesting economic determinism have failed.³⁵ Geographic and political-cultural factors appear to be much more relevant.

Back to the Future

Essentially, the role of elections in Russia can be seen as the legitimization of existing power rather than as providing for the transfer of power. Not the political parties, but the authorities and business are the major players in the electoral process. Despite some exceptions in the regions, the attempts to improve elections by means of better electoral laws have failed. Elections have been a pacemaker and catalyst of society's development, but no more than that.

Russian society has become accustomed to elections as a kind of political theater. The revolutionary character of elections, the unpredictability of their results, the sincerity of the nonprofessional actors, the participation of the masses themselves — these are all vestiges of the past. Professionalism, commercialization, and high quality technical effects have taken over. Elections, which used to be a kind of peoples' theater have become an academic theater. As in other countries, they have become a necessary attribute of political life, and following the Western fashion, a very expensive attribute.

The elections themselves, their regularity, and habitual character need not evoke either extreme enthusiasm or pessimism. Any election — even if it is controlled, even if it is adapted to the needs of the old nomenklatura system, even if it manipulates public opinion and is accompanied by fraud — is better than none at all. It is an element of public politics that introduces democratic procedures and activates society's development. It provides the ruling class with some feedback from society and it stimulates the consolidation at least of an elite, if not of society. Finally, it sets a tempo in political developments, expanding current possibilities and formulating tasks for the future.

How stable is the very institution of democratic elections in Russia? Stephen White, Richard Rose and Ian McAllister are correct in concluding that “before an election, politicians debate not only who should win but also whether an election should be held at all.”³⁶ But the political elite needs elections in their present form to legitimize itself. Certainly, the huge electoral business is vitally interested in keeping the elections going. Does society need the elections as such? Yes, it does. It needs elections as a pillar of democracy, just as it needed the parliament in 1993, well aware of all its limitations, yet

³⁵ One of the most serious recent attempts of such a kind was undertaken by Daniel Treisman (Daniel S. Treisman, *After the Deluge: Regional Crises and Political Consolidation in Russia* [Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999]), who tried to build a simple model linking financial aid to the regions' direct and immediate impact on the voting for the “party of power.” Effective in his discussion of fiscal federalism, he was less so in using electoral and political statistics and in explaining results of his correlation analysis. I believe that the high degree of political instability and the economic crises shaped campaigns between 1989 and 1996 in a way that made it hardly possible to think about economic determinism. The 1999-2001 cycle might be different.

willing to protect it when under threat. Thus, the abolition of elections by some sort of authoritarian regime in Russia seems unlikely. They will rather continue their internal transformation, in the direction which could clearly be seen emerging during the cycle of 1999-2001.

Elections were then held for the sake of elections, not unlike the carnival in Brazil. They neither brought into existence real political parties nor significantly promoted the building of civil society in the country. They have modified the nomenklatura elite system rather than changed society as a whole. Why was this so? It is like a car engine running in neutral. One needs to get into gear before the car will start moving. Elections are a necessary — but not a sufficient — condition for democratic development.

³⁶ White, Rose, McAllister, *How Russia Votes?*, p. xiii.