Shifting Electoral Geography in
Russia's 1991 and 1996 Presidential Elections

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Abstract

This essay reexamines Russia's 1991 and 1996 presidential elections. In contrast to some studies which argue that the Russian electorate was stable between 1991 and 1996, this paper demonstrates that the electoral geography in the two elections was quite different, with oblast-level vote totals for Boris Yel'tsin in 1991 and 1996 only poorly correlated. Further, while Yel'tsin's performance in both elections was better in urban than in rural regions, the urban-rural divide in 1996 is found to be different from that in 1991. Finally, in support of the argument of Russian electoral stability after 1993, regional voting patterns between 1993 and 1996 are shown to be both similar to each other and different from that in the 1991 election.

1. Introduction

Numerous studies have plotted the development of Russian electoral politics in the almost ten years since modern Russia's first direct presidential election. While diverse methodologies have been employed, from analysis of ecological (aggregate) data to surveys of individuals to elite interviews, a common thread runs through much of the literature. Russian electoral geography is seen as displaying stability over time, with its most prominent and recurring feature the urban-rural divide.[2]

Scholars differ, however, in the time period in which they see Russian electoral politics as stable, and in particular in whether it includes both the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections. For some, the period of stability extends back to the first presidential election. McFaul (1997), for example, examines vote totals for the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections, the referendum of April 1993, and the constitutional plebiscite of December 1993, and argues that the Russian electorate has remained remarkably stable, with a solid majority in favor of moving forward rather than moving back. Yel'tsin won in 1996, McFaul says, because he was able to mobilize the same electorate to vote for him that had done so in 1991, and that had voted for reform whenever faced with a clear choice between two paths.[3] Berezkin *et al* (1999, pp. 400-401) also argue the similarity between Russia's 1991 and later elections, asserting that "between 1991 and 1996, voting patterns in Russia have been remarkably stable – a fact evidenced by the persistence of the urban-rural correlation across elections".

In contrast, other studies have noted differences between the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections. In an analysis of rayon-level voting returns, Myagkov *et al* (1997) find mixed evidence for stability in the Russian vote from the 1991 election to the first round of the 1996 election. They argue that while most of those who voted for Yel'tsin in 1996 had also done so in

1991, Zyuganov drew supporters in 1996 from across the spectrum of voters in the 1991 election. However, they do not identify regional patterns or compare the 1991 election with the second round of the 1996 election.[4] Oreshkin and Kozlov (1996, p.6) argue, correctly, that "the 45 million supporters of B. Yel'tsin [in 1991] differ very strongly from his 40 million supporters [in 1996]," an observation that will be developed in greater detail in this paper.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the stability of regional voting patterns does not extend back as far as 1991. Indeed, at the oblast level, 1991 and 1996 election results are only poorly correlated, and the magnitude of change in Yel'tsin's support is quite large. Further, this paper shows that the urban-rural divide in the 1996 election was different from that in the 1991 election. By a remarkable coincidence, perhaps, in both 1991 and 1996 the regions where Yel'tsin did poorly were more rural than average. But they were not the same regions. Finally, this paper lends support to Clem and Craumer's (1997) finding of electoral stability between 1993 and 1996 by demonstrating the similarity of vote tallies over that period, and their collective divergence from election results in 1991.

The methodology of this paper is analysis of oblast-level vote totals in the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections (and, in the penultimate section, in the April 1993 referendum and intervening parliamentary elections).[5] All oblasts, republics, autonomous okrugs, and autonomous oblasts, plus the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow, are included in the data set, with the exception of Chechnya and Ingushetia, as the aggregation of data from the two republics in 1991 makes direct comparison with 1996 impossible. Thus, the number of cases is 87.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 compares results from the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections. Section 3 analyzes the urban-rural divide, placing this seemingly constant feature of Russian politics in the context of regional shifts in Yel'tsin's support across the two

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presidential elections. Section 4 broadens the analysis to include the April 1993 referendum and the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections. Section 5 concludes.

2. Different Elections, Different Majorities

Before discussing Russia's first two presidential elections, a brief detour into American political history may help to place the following discussion in context. In 1980, Ronald Reagan captured the American presidency, winning 44 out of 50 states. It was a dramatic turnaround for the Republican Party, which in 1976 had lost the presidency to Jimmy Carter in a close election that saw the two parties roughly divide the states between them.

The Pearson correlation coefficient of the state-level vote for the Republican candidate between the 1976 and 1980 U.S. presidential elections, a pair of elections that saw not only a change in victorious party but a major voter realignment, is 0.83.[6] As shown in Table 1, the corresponding correlations between the oblast-level vote for Yel'tsin in 1991 and the two elections in 1996 are markedly lower. The correlation between the 1991 election and the first round of the 1996 election is 0.14. The correlation between the 1991 election and the second round of the 1996 election is a marginally higher, but still very low, 0.27. In other words, only 7 percent of the variation in the oblast vote for Yel'tsin in the second round of the 1996 election, and only 2 percent of the variation in the oblast vote in the first round, can be explained by the oblast vote for Yel'tsin in 1991.

Table 1

Table 2 extends the analysis by examining regional patterns. Whether looking at the first round when Yel'tsin faced nine challengers, or the second when he faced only Zyuganov, clear

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shifts in Yel'tsin's support are visible. Yel'tsin did relatively better in the North, Northwest, East Siberia, Far East, and Kaliningrad, and relatively worse almost everywhere else. In fact, in some parts of the country he did much better (up 12 points in the North) or much worse (down 19 points in the Central Black Soil region).

Table 2

Table 3 shows that large regional shifts in support are evident even if attention is restricted to the regions that provided at least one million votes to Yel'tsin in the first election. Comparing vote totals for Yel'tsin in 1991 and the second round of the 1996 election, eight of the ten oblasts show a drop in the number (not percentage) of votes received by Yel'tsin. However, only Perm' Oblast has a decline in votes (9.6 percent) similar to that for Russia as a whole (11.7 percent). In contrast, Samara Oblast, Nizhegorod Oblast, Chelyabinsk Oblast, and Sverdlovsk Oblast all show substantially larger declines, ranging from 24 percent to 36 percent, while Yel'tsin did relatively better in Krasnodar Oblast, Rostov Oblast, and Moscow Oblast. Finally, counter to the national trend, Yel'tsin actually garnered more votes in Moscow City and St. Petersburg in 1996 than in 1991.

Table 3

Two points are being made here. First, despite Yel'tsin's similar vote total in 1991 and 1996, a large number of individuals shifted their support towards or away from him between the elections. Weighted by 1996 population, the mean magnitude (mean absolute value) of change in vote for Yel'tsin from 1991 to the second round of 1996 is approximately ten percentage points. Had all oblasts swung ten points the same direction, Yel'tsin would have either lost the

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second round (assuming he had made it there) or won an enormously lopsided victory. In neither case would the Russian electorate have been termed stable.

Second, however, not all oblasts did swing the same direction. For whatever reasons, there are clear geographic patterns in the change in Yel'tsin's support. Having won the "Red Belt" in 1991, Yel'tsin was routed in that stretch of the country in 1996. Meanwhile, in the North and Northwest, he turned a subpar performance in 1991 into the cornerstone of a victory five years later. That these trends balanced out nationwide produced a vote total in Russia's second presidential election reminiscent of that in the first. But the electoral map looked very different.

Overall, then, there was a substantial change in Russia's electoral geography between 1991 and 1996, representing large shifts in electoral support for Yel'tsin. How does one reconcile this fact with the apparent durability of the urban-rural divide in Russian electoral politics? That is the subject of the following section.

3. The Shifting Urban-Rural Divide

As discussed above, many analysts have noted the persistence of the urban-rural divide as a determinant of Russian electoral outcomes. Table 4 confirms this basic observation by presenting results from OLS regressions of the oblast-level percent vote for Yel'tsin in 1991 and the second round of the 1996 election on the percentage of the oblast population living in rural areas. In the first election, the estimated coefficient on percent rural is statistically significantly different from zero at the 1 percent level; in the second, at the 5 percent level.[7] Further, the estimated magnitude of the coefficient is politically significant. For every two percentage points more rural that the oblast population is in the first election, and every five points in the second, Yel'tsin is predicted to receive one less percentage point of the vote total. As percent rural

ranges from 0 (in St. Petersburg and Moscow) to 100 (in Ust'-Orda Buryat Autonomous Okrug in 1996), the political impact of the urban-rural divide appears to be sizeable.[8]

Table 4

How is one to reconcile the persistence of urban-rural voting differences with the fluidity of the Russian electorate noted in the previous section? Table 5 suggests the answer. While in both elections the oblasts in which Yel'tsin did best were predominantly urban, and the oblasts where he did worst were predominantly rural, different oblasts comprised the set of best and worst oblasts in the two elections. In other words, a different set of urban-rural differences appears to be driving the correlation between percent rural and vote for Yel'tsin in the two elections.

Table 5

The regression results in Table 6 support this explanation. In these estimations, percent vote for Yel'tsin in 1991 and the second round of the 1996 election are regressed on percent rural, as before, but also on Yel'tsin's vote in the other election. If the estimated coefficient on percent rural is similar in magnitude even after controlling for the correlation between percent rural and vote for Yel'tsin in the other election, that will indicate that a different set of oblasts is responsible for the urban-rural divide in the two elections.[9]

Table 6

Examination of the regression results shows this to be largely true. The estimated coefficient on percent rural when vote for Yel'tsin in 1991 is the dependent variable drops only slightly from -.480 in the original regression to -.455 when controlling for the correlation

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between percent rural and vote for Yel'tsin in 1996. The drop is larger in the other direction, with the estimated coefficient on percent rural declining from -.181 to -.102 and no longer precisely estimated. Nonetheless, controlling for the correlation between percent rural and vote for Yel'tsin in 1991 eliminates less than half the estimated effect of percent rural on vote for Yel'tsin in 1996. In other words, the correlation between percent rural and vote for Yel'tsin is largely driven by a different set of cases in the two elections. There was an urban-rural divide in both elections, but it was not the same divide.[10]

4. The Uniqueness of the 1991 Election

The results reported above demonstrate that the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections were quite different from each other, but do not shed light on the broader stability or instability of Russian electoral geography between the two elections. How do the 1991 and 1996 elections compare with those votes which came between? Do regional patterns of electoral preferences show constant flux over this time period, or do they begin to gel at some point in time?

In fact, the 1991 presidential election was quite different from those which followed. Table 7 presents results from a factor analysis (principal components analysis) of the oblast-level vote for Yel'tsin in the 1991 election and April 1993 referendum (first question)[11], for democratic/reform parties in the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections,[12] and for Yel'tsin in both rounds of the 1996 election. Accepting a cutoff eigenvalue marginally less than the conventional level of one, there appear to be two underlying dimensions to the six votes, with the first dimension explaining variation in regional voting patterns from 1993 on, and the second dimension explaining variation in the 1991 election.[13] In other words, election results from 1991 largely line up along one dimension, and results from 1993 and later line up along another.

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Table 7

5. Conclusions

The major findings of this paper – the very different electoral geography in the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections, the spurious nature of the seemingly constant urban-rural divide across the two elections, and more generally the uniqueness of the 1991 election among votes held between 1991 and 1996 – hold lessons for our understanding of Russian politics. Yel'tsin did not merely cobble together the same coalition in 1996 that had worked for him in 1991. Rather, he apparently relied on a regional distribution of political preferences that developed after his 1991 victory, drawing support from parts of the country where he had done poorly five years before, even while losing support in regions that had been solidly in his column in 1991. The large shifts in regional voting patterns from the 1991 election raise interesting questions about the nature of the Russian voting decision, and in particular about the extent to which campaign tactics, the role of regional elites, and individuals' experiences with political and economic reforms might have varied across regions and over time. The fact that Russian electoral geography shifted again during the 1999 parliamentary elections (Clem and Craumer 2000) demonstrates that such questions remain current.

Relatedly, a shifting urban-rural divide implies that the model of political economy that serves as the explanation for urban-rural voting differences is insufficient. It may be true that some rural residents voted against Yel'tsin because they stood to gain less, or had already lost more, from his economic policies than urban voters.[14] The conclusions of this paper, however, suggest that such a model serves at most as a partial explanation. In both 1991 and 1996,

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Yel'tsin did well in some rural areas, though poorly in others, and the urban-rural fault line lay across different sets of regions in the two elections.

Russia is presumably settling into a few years' rest between national elections. For political observers, that represents an opportunity to reflect on why Russia's electoral map has undergone the changes that it has, and remained constant when it has. Finding answers to these questions may help to illuminate not only Russia's electoral past, but also its future.

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Table 1: Correlation of Oblast Vote for Yel'tsin Across Elections

	1991 - 1996 First Round	1991 - 1996 Second Round
Pearson Correlation Coefficient	0.14	0.27
Significance Level	P = .208	P = .011

Note: N = 87.

Table 2: Vote for Yel'tsin by Macroregion

Macroregion	1991	1996 - First Round	Change From 1991	1996 - Second Round	Change From 1991
North	53.2	42.1	-11.1	65.0	11.9
Northwest	50.4	36.9	-13.5	59.9	9.5
Central	56.1	31.9	-24.2	50.5	-5.5
Volga-Vyatsk	58.8	27.0	-31.8	44.1	-14.7
Central Black Soil	54.8	23.1	-31.7	36.1	-18.6
Volga	54.6	32.4	-22.3	49.0	-5.6
North Caucasus	52.7	26.5	-26.2	47.5	-5.2
Ural	61.8	41.4	-20.4	57.1	-4.7
West Siberia	53.4	35.0	-18.5	53.5	0.1
East Siberia	40.8	38.6	-2.1	53.8	13.0
Far East	52.2	37.3	-14.9	58.9	6.7
Kaliningrad	41.0	33.5	-7.5	57.7	16.7
Russia	58.6	35.0	-23.6	53.8	-4.8

Note: Unweighted average across oblasts within each macroregion, with the exception of the national total, which is a weighted average. Weighting by 1996 population produces qualitatively similar results, except in East Siberia and the Far East, where the results in this table are exaggerated by large swings in sparsely populated regions.

Table 3: Vote Totals for Yel'tsin in Selected Regions, 1991 and 1996, Second Round

	1991 (1000s)	1996 (1000s)	Change	% Change
Perm' Oblast	1032	933	-99	-9.6%
Krasnodar Kray	1158	1116	-42	-3.6%
Samara Oblast	1235	910	-325	-26.3%
Rostov Oblast	1318	1220	-98	-7.4%
Nizhegorod Oblast	1504	967	-537	-35.7%
Chelyabinsk Oblast	1639	1082	-557	-34.0%
St. Petersburg	1660	1760	100	6.0%
Sverdlovsk Oblast	2282	1727	-555	-24.3%
Moscow Oblast	2521	2462	-59	-2.3%
Moscow city	3344	3630	286	8.6%
Russia	45552	40208	-5344	-11.7%

Table 4: OLS Regression of Percent Vote for Yel'tsin on Percent Rural

	Percent Vote for Yel'tsin 1991		Percent Vote for Yel'tsin 1996 (2nd Round)	
	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error
Constant	68.6***	2.52	58.7***	2.81
Percent Rural	-.480***	.071	-.181**	.076
R^2	.352		.063	
Standard Error of the Estimate	10.0		11.8	

Note: *** indicates significance at the .01 level, ** at the .05 level, * at the .10 level. Percent rural is percent rural in 1991 and 1996 for the first and second regression, respectively. N = 87.

Table 5: Highest and Lowest Percent Vote Figures for Yel'tsin in 1991 and 1996 (Second Round) Elections

Vote for Yel'tsin 1991			Vote for Yel'tsin 1996 (2nd Round)		
	Percent of Total Vote	Percent Rural		Percent of Total Vote	Percent Rural
Lowest Percent Vote Figures			**Lowest Percent Vote Figures**		
Tyva Republic	15.7	**52.5**	Chuvash Republic	31.8	**39.4**
Aginskiy-Buryat Aok	18.1	**67.1**	Oryol Oblast	32.1	**37.1**
Altay Republic	23.1	**72.9**	Tambov Oblast	32.6	**42.2**
North Ossetian Republic	27.7	*31.1*	Adygey Republic	34.5	**46.1**
Kalmyk Republic	32.1	**54.0**	Penza Oblast	35.5	**35.8**
Ust'-Orda Buryat Aok	33.1	**81.4**	Kursk Oblast	36.2	**39.9**
Pskov Oblast	34.3	**36.1**	Belgorod Oblast	36.3	**35.2**
Buryat Republic	35.2	**39.8**	Bryansk Oblast	36.3	*31.6*
Chita Oblast	37.6	**35.8**	Voronezh Oblast	37.0	**38.4**
Smolensk Oblast	38.1	*31.2*	Ul'yanovsk Oblast	37.8	*27.3*
Highest Percent Vote Figures			**Highest Percent Vote Figures**		
Dagestan Republic	66.6	**56.0**	Murmansk Oblast	70.1	*8.0*
Saint Petersburg	68.4	*0.0*	Kalmyk Republic	70.3	**61.5**
Yamal-Nenets AOk	68.7	*17.5*	Perm' Oblast	70.8	*23.5*
Samara Oblast	69.2	*19.1*	Taymyr AOk	71.6	**33.8**
Khanty Mansiy AOk	69.5	*8.6*	Saint Petersburg	73.9	*0.0*
Nizhegorod Oblast	71.1	*22.5*	Khanty Mansiy AOk	74.2	*8.6*
Perm' Oblast	73.2	*22.9*	Chukchi AOk	74.3	*29.9*
Moscow City	73.9	*0.0*	Sverdlovsk Oblast	76.9	*12.4*
Chelyabinsk Oblast	78.2	*17.2*	Moscow City	77.3	*0.0*
Sverdlovsk Oblast	85.6	*12.4*	Yamal-Nenets AOk	79.3	*17.1*

Note: Bold figures indicate percent rural above average; italicized figures indicate percent rural below average. Average percent rural is 32.2 % in 1991, 33.2 in 1996 (unweighted means across regions).

Table 6: OLS Regression of Percent Vote for Yel'tsin on Percent Rural, Controlling for Correlation Between Percent Rural and Vote for Yel'tsin in Other Election

	Percent Vote for Yel'tsin 1991		Percent Vote for Yel'tsin 1996 (2nd Round)	
	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error
Constant	62.4***	6.21	46.2***	8.82
Percent Rural	-.455***	.074	-.102	.092
Percent Vote for Yel'tsin in 1991	--	--	.186	.124
Percent Vote for Yel'tsin in 1996 (2nd Round)	.103	.094	--	--
R^2	.361		.087	
Standard Error of the Estimate	10.0		11.7	

Note: *** indicates significance at the .01 level, ** at the .05 level, * at the .10 level. Percent rural is percent rural in 1991 and 1996 for the first and second regression, respectively. N = 87.

Table 7: Factor Analysis of Oblast-Level Vote for Yel'tsin, Democracy, and Reform from 1991 to 1996

Total Variance Explained			
	Initial Eigenvalues		
Component	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	4.204	70.1	70.1
2	.938	15.6	85.7
3	.381	6.3	92.0
4	.257	4.3	96.3
5	.165	2.7	99.1
6	.055	0.9	100.0
Component Matrix with First Two Components Extracted			
		Component	
		1	**2**
Vote for Yel'tsin, 1991		.390	.912
Support for Yel'tsin, 1993 Referendum (1st Question)		.846	-.099
Vote for Democratic Parties, 1993 Parliamentary Elections		.902	-.127
Vote for Democratic Parties, 1995 Parliamentary Elections		.899	.151
Vote for Yel'tsin, 1996 (1st Round)		.900	-.216
Vote for Yel'tsin, 1996 (2nd Round)		.951	-.104

Extraction Method: Principal Components Analysis.
Note: See text for data sources and definitions.

[2] In addition to the sources cited immediately below, see Clem and Craumer (1997, p. 379) for an argument of stability between the 1993 and 1996 elections, and Clem and Craumer (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1995, 1996, 1997) for evidence of an urban-rural divide.

[3] See also McFaul and Petrov (1997), especially pp. 509-11.

[4] The results presented in Table 11 of Myagkov *et al* are for vote change between the 1991 election and the first round of the 1996 election, contrary to what is stated in the text and the title of the table. Also note that Table 11 shows that only 45 percent of Yel'tsin's voters in 1991 are estimated to have voted for him again in 1996, substantially less than the two-thirds reported in the text.

[5] Voting data for the presidential elections are from McFaul (1997), Appendices 4 through 6; for the April 1993 referendum from Clem and Craumer (1993); for the 1993 parliamentary elections from Clem and Craumer (1995a); and for the 1995 parliamentary elections from Clem and Craumer (1995c). Data on the urban-rural composition of oblast populations are from Goskomstat Rossii (1997).

[6] Author's calculations.

[7] Note that this result is consistent with Clem and Craumer's (1996) finding that the correlation between urbanization and vote for Yel'tsin in the second round of the 1996 election is not

significant at the .01 level. However, their conclusion that the relationship is "weak and statistically not significant" seems too sweeping. While acceptable significance levels are largely a matter of convention, regarding an estimated coefficient that is significantly different from zero at the .05 level as "statistically significant" does not seem inappropriate for the relatively small number of cases in this sample.

[8] In a regression of percent vote for Yel'tsin in the first round of the 1996 election on percent rural, the estimated coefficient on percent rural is imprecisely estimated, in contrast to the two regressions discussed in this paragraph. However, when a dummy variable for "control of local officials by the center" is added as a covariate, the estimated coefficient on percent rural is negative, sizeable, and significantly different from zero at the .05 level. (The estimated coefficient on percent rural continues to be precisely estimated when vote for Yel'tsin in the second round of the 1996 election is the dependent variable and the dummy variable for control by center is added). Coding of the control variable is taken from McFaul and Petrov (1997).

[9] While it may seem odd to regress vote for Yel'tsin in 1991 on vote for Yel'tsin in 1996, it is not the coefficient on vote for Yel'tsin in 1996 that we are interested in. The method is identical to regressing percent rural on vote for Yel'tsin in one election, taking the residuals from that regression (which represent that portion of percent rural not correlated with vote for Yel'tsin in that election), and then running a "residual regression" of vote for Yel'tsin in the other election on the residuals. See, e.g., Goldberger (1991), pp. 185-6.

[10] Similar results obtain when the mean of percent rural in 1991 and 1996 is used in all regressions rather than percent rural in the year that the election took place (see notes to Tables 4 and 6).

[11] The wording of the first question on the April 1993 referendum was "Do you have confidence in the President of the Russian Federation, B. N. Yel'tsin?"

[12] See Clem and Craumer (1995a) and Clem and Craumer (1995c) for coding of democratic/reform parties in the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, respectively.

[13] Analogous results are obtained by calculating Pearson correlation coefficients of the oblast vote across pairs of elections.

[14] Berezkin *et al* (1999, p. 396) suggest that the consistent finding of an urban-rural divide lends support to a version of this model of Russian political economy.