

Russian Politics

Challenges of Democratization

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

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First published 2001

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Sabon 10/12 pt. *System* QuarkXPress [BTS]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Russian politics: challenges of democratization / edited by Zoltan Barany, Robert G. Moser.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-80119-2 – ISBN 0-521-80512-0 (pb)

1. Russia (Federation) – Politics and government – 1991– 2. Russia (Federation)
– Economic policy – 1991– 3. Democracy – Russia (Federation) 4. Post-
communism – Russia (Federation) I. Barany, Zoltan D. II. Moser, Robert G., 1966–
JN6695.R865 2001

320.947–dc21 00-049352

ISBN 0 521 80119 2 hardback

ISBN 0 521 80512 0 paperback

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Russian Electoral Trends

Michael McFaul

Conventional explanations of Russian electoral outcomes paint a very volatile picture. The conventional story is roughly the following. The popularity of the “democrats” – the catchall label assigned to those political leaders and parties loosely associated with Boris Yeltsin – grew rapidly from the first national elections in 1989 until Boris Yeltsin’s first presidential victory in June 1991. After the introduction of shock therapy in January 1991, popular support for the democrats rapidly declined, as demonstrated by their abysmal showing in the 1993 parliamentary elections and their even worse performance in the 1995 parliamentary elections. As support for the “democrats” declined, a new force – nationalism – began to fill the vacuum, as demonstrated most dramatically by Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s surprising electoral performance in 1993. Between 1993 and 1995, however, Zhirinovsky discredited himself with silly theatrics, thereby providing a political opportunity for a communist comeback in the 1995 parliamentary elections. The combination of nationalist and communist resurgence convinced many by the winter of 1996 that the “democrats,” and Boris Yeltsin in particular, had little chance of winning the summer presidential vote.¹ Had Yeltsin lost, Russia would have followed a pattern similar to that of other post-communist countries in which those that started economic reforms after the collapse of communism were voted out of office in the second election.²

¹ See, for instance, Jerry Hough, Evelyn Davidheiser, and Susan Goodrich Lehman, *The 1996 Russian Presidential Election*, Brookings Occasional Papers (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996) and Peter Reddaway, “Red Alert,” *The New Republic*, January 29, 1996.

² This pattern, which occurred in much of the post-communist world, was first predicted in Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Table 1.1. Outcomes in binary elections

Ideological Camp	1991 ^a	April 1993 ^b	December 1993 ^c	July 1996
“Reform”	59.7%	58.7%	58.4%	53.8%
“Opposition”	36.7%	37.7%	41.6%	40.3%

^a For 1991, these labels of reform and opposition should be reversed.

^b Here we are reporting the results of the first question.

^c This is the result of the constitutional referendum.

But Yeltsin did win, in defiance of the trend in the region. Moreover, he won with an incredible record of underachievement, including negative growth rates for every year of rule, a disastrous war in Chechnya, and an explosion of crime and corruption. For many analysts, Yeltsin’s victory could only be explained as the consequence of fraud, television control, and a “brilliant” campaign, as the trajectory of electoral support for the “democrats” was in the opposite direction.

This chapter offers a different explanation for Russia’s seemingly volatile electoral history. First and foremost, Russian voters have not been as volatile in their voting patterns as the conventional account implies.³ If a Russian voter cast her ballot for a communist candidate in 1991, she probably voted against Yeltsin in the April 1993 referendum, probably voted for an opposition party (that is, either the LDPR, the CPRE, or the Agrarian Party of Russia, the APR) in the December parliamentary vote in 1993 and probably voted against the constitution in the referendum held at the same time, probably voted for an opposition party again in 1995 and 1999, and probably voted for Gennady Zyuganov in the 1996 presidential election. The converse is true for anti-communist, pro-reform supporters. A very small number of voters cast their ballots for a communist candidate in one election and then for a “democrat” in the next vote. Voters did migrate to other parties with great frequency in the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary votes, but they did not cross the boundary between “reformist” and “antireformist” camps.⁴

In elections in which voters had only two essential choices, however, voter preferences look rather stable through this entire period.⁵

³ Michael McFaul, *Russia’s 1996 Presidential Elections: The End of Polarized Politics* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1997) and Mikhail Myagkov, Peter Ordeshook, and Alexander Sobyenin, “The Russian Electorate from 1991 to 1996,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1997), pp. 134–166.

⁴ On these migrations, see Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizenship: Voting in Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), Chapter 3.

⁵ This aggregate data in no way proves that *individual* voter preferences remained stable. On this problem, see Gerald Kramer, “The Ecological Fallacy Revisited: Aggregate-versus Individual-Level Findings on Economics and Elections and Sociotropic Voting,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (March 1983), pp. 92–111.

Given all that happened in Russia during this period, this apparent electoral stability is especially striking. Despite economic depression, a violent standoff between parliament and president in October 1993, the Chechen war, and explosive social ills, the balance of support between opponents and proponents of reform remained stable and polarized from 1991 until 1996. Voters did not behave in these elections in accordance with retrospective voting models.⁶ On the contrary, only 29 percent of the voting electorate were satisfied with Yeltsin's performance when asked in an opinion poll in June 1996.⁷ When asked in November 1996, "When did you family live the best?", 10 percent responded that the period since the beginning of market reforms was the best, 13 percent named the Gorbachev period, and an amazing 61 percent cited the "stagnation" period before 1985.⁸ Nor could voters have been motivated solely by economic considerations. If Russian voters had made electoral decisions based on either the depth of their own pocket-books or their evaluations of the health of the national economy, then the incumbent Yeltsin most surely would have been tossed out of office in 1996.⁹

A different kind of cleavage issue divided the Russian electorate from 1991 to 1996 – those for "reform," however defined, and those against. This issue overrode concerns about individual interests or specific issues. Jerry Hough's summation of the 1990 Russian elections could be applied to all of the binary votes in this period, including the 1996 presidential election: "In 1990 the basic issues of the election were clear. Did the voter want to vote against the party apparatus and the system it oversaw? Were the radicals demanding too much change too rapidly or representing alien values, or both? Voters were not likely to be greatly influenced by biased press coverage or the quantity of leaflets distributed in choosing between a radical candidate and a conservative."¹⁰ During a period of change in the fundamental organization of the political and economic system in Russia, we should expect Russian voters to have been less concerned with evaluating the incumbent's past performance and more interested in choosing the candidate who most closely represented their

⁶ Morris Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

⁷ This poll was conducted by All-Russia Opinion Research Center and reported by the Associated Press, November 13, 1996.

⁸ VTsIOM, "Pyat' Let Reforma," ms., 1996.

⁹ On "pocketbook" versus "sociotropic" effects on voting behavior, see Roderick Kiewit, *Macroeconomics and Micropolitics: The Electoral Effects of Economic Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Jerry Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985–1991* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1997), p. 291.

conception of Russia's future economic and political system.¹¹ The relative weakness of other cleavage issues, such as ethnic or religious divides, further accentuated the importance of this single factor in organizing electoral preferences.¹²

The perception of volatility in electoral outcomes is produced when the results of binary votes (presidential elections and referenda) and multiple-candidate votes (parliamentary elections) are compared. This one cleavage issue did not shape Russia's parliamentary elections. Other factors contributed to a more complicated electoral outcome. First, the institutional effects of parliamentary elections with proportional representation (PR) are different than in presidential elections. Presidential elections with run-offs produce a winner-take-all outcome between two candidates, while PR electoral laws allows many to win, and thereby tend to stimulate multiparty systems.¹³ As expected, Russia's mixed system, in which half of the seats (225) were allocated according to PR and the other half in single-mandate districts, encouraged the proliferation of political parties and provided few incentives for party consolidation.¹⁴ In 1993, thirteen parties participated in the Duma elections; in 1995, forty-three parties made the ballot.¹⁵ These elections obviously offered voters a wider range of choices than two. Second, these parliamentary elections were not as critical to the fate of the system, as Russia's 1993 constitution relegated the legislative body to a secondary status in national policy making. Russians could vote with their hearts in 1995

¹¹ During periods of revolutionary change, national politics also impact on the daily lives of individuals in a more direct way than during periods of stability or evolutionary change. For instance, when Nikolai Ryzhkov outlined his "stabilization" plan in the spring of 1990, millions of Soviet citizens rushed to stores to buy anything and everything available. By contrast, few decisions in Washington have such a direct and immediate impact on millions of citizens. Under these conditions, we should expect voters to be much more in tune with national politics than during more stable periods, making them less susceptible to media manipulation.

¹² On the weakness of these other cleavage issues in the Russian case, see Stephen Whitefield and Geoffrey Evans, "The Emerging Structure of Partisan Divisions in Russian Politics," in Matthew Wyman, Stephen White, and Sarah Oates (eds.), *Elections and Voters in Post-Communist Russia* (Glasgow: Edward Elgar, 1998), pp. 68–99.

¹³ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1954); Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Thomas Remington and Steven Smith, "Political Goals, Institutional Context, and the Choice of an Electoral System: The Russian Parliamentary Election Law," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1996), pp. 1253–1279.

¹⁵ The number of "effective parties" to emerge from these elections also increased. See Robert Moser, "Electoral Systems and the Number of Parties in Postcommunist States," *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (1999), pp. 359–384.

and then vote with their heads in 1996. Third, the sequence of the parliamentary and presidential votes served to give them a different logic. When parliamentary and presidential elections occur concurrently, they can influence each other. The converse is equally true. In the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, Yeltsin did not participate, and actually had incentives, especially in 1995, to encourage fragmentation.

These factors combined to shape the outcomes of the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections in a more nuanced way than the other binary votes during this period. Centrist, nationalist, special-interest, and corporatist parties had room to wiggle in these kinds of elections. These votes also stimulated the partial emergence of a multi-party system in Russia rather than one dominated by only two groups – pro-reform and antireform, or anticommunist and pro-communist.¹⁶

In the aggregate, however, core support for reformist parties and core support for opposition parties did not change. Within these two broad camps, the balance of support between parties changed considerably.¹⁷ Within the opposition camp, the Communists improved dramatically over 1993, while the Agrarian Party and Zhirinovskiy won less than half of their 1993 support in 1995. Within the reformist camp, the newly created Our Home Is Russia electoral bloc gained at the expense of the former “party of power,” Yegor Gaidar’s Democratic Choice of Russia. In 1995, the centrist vote – voters who had tended to support the reformist side in binary votes – also was spread across several parties, adding to the impression that support for reformists was decreasing over time. In retrospect, however, the 1993 and 1995 votes look very similar. Reformists won a minority share of the vote in 1995, but they also were in the minority in 1993. Likewise, the opposition performed well in 1995, but they also did well in 1993.

Although different from the outcomes in binary votes during this period, even the outcomes in these parliamentary elections suggest stability and polarization in Russian electoral politics between 1991 and 1996. More than any single factor, attitudes about the general course of Russia’s political and economic revolution shaped electoral politics during this transitional period. The balance between those for and those against revolutionary change remained fairly constant.

In 1996, Russia’s protracted transition from communism ended.¹⁸ The specter of a return to communism receded after the 1996 vote. When

¹⁶ M. Steven Fish, “The Advent of Multipartism in Russia,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1995), pp. 340–383.

¹⁷ Colton, *Transitional Citizenship*, Chapter 3.

¹⁸ On the definition of “end of transition,” see Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and*

given the choice between the communist past and an anticommunist future, Russians overwhelmingly voted for the latter. After the 1996 vote, the communist/anticommunist divide faded in importance. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) continued to dominate the antigovernment segment of the electorate, but the CPRF evolved to become a within-system party. By the 1999 parliamentary election, a vote for the CPRF no longer meant a vote for going back to the old communist system. Anticommunism also died as a rallying cause after the 1996 vote. With the collapse of communism now complete, the anti-communist bloc lost its *raison d'être*, allowing new political formations to enter the fray and new issues to dominate the electoral process. The polarization between communist and anticommunist forces that helped to produce Yeltsin's reelection victory in 1996 played only a marginal role in Vladimir Putin's victory in Russia's March 2000 presidential election.

To develop this set of arguments about electoral outcomes in Russia in the last decade, this chapter proceeds as follows. The first section sketches the general patterns of electoral outcomes observed in transitions. This section underscores how Russia's protracted and confrontational transition from communist rule accorded elections a different dynamic. Section two discusses how the rules of the game can shape the outcome and the perception of the outcome of an election. This section focuses in particular on why presidential and parliamentary elections follow a different dynamic. Armed with the analytic framework outlined in the first two sections, the next several sections discuss in brief each national election in Russia since 1989. In addition to accounting for the influence of the structural and institutional variables described in sections two and three, these analyses of individual elections also consider the role of the campaigns and the actions of candidates. Section nine, the final section, discusses how electoral dynamics in the 1999–2000 electoral cycle differed from previous polarized votes earlier in the decade.

1. THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF RUSSIA'S POLARIZED ELECTORATE

In most transitions to democracy, the successful completion of a series of elections produces the following results. First, electoral support for the democratic challengers wanes. In first or founding elections,

Post-Communist Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3. On the Russian case specifically, see Michael McFaul, "Lessons from Russia's Protracted Transition from Communist Rule," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (1999), pp. 103–130.

“founding father” figures and their coalitions tend to score dramatic electoral victories. In second-round elections, the romantic era of transition usually ends, as expectations of voters formed during transition are almost never met.¹⁹ This reaction against the new leaders has proven especially acute in transitions from communist rule, in which political transition usually has been accompanied by painful economic transformation.²⁰ Throughout Eastern Europe, anticommunist leaders who won electoral victories in first elections lost to former communist leaders in second elections.²¹ Militantly anticommunist Poland voted out Lech Walesa. Even in the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus and his allies failed to win enough seats to reconstitute their old right-of-center coalition government.²² Sali Berisha, president of Albania, managed to “win” a second election only through massive fraud.²³

This electoral reaction against those political leaders who initiated economic reform is predicted by retrospective theories of voting behavior.²⁴ This approach to explaining elections posits that voters look retrospectively back on the tenure of the incumbent and decide if they are better or worse off during the candidate’s time (or candidate’s party’s time) in office. If the voter feels better off, then he will likely vote for the incumbent or the incumbent’s party. If the voter feels worse off, then he will likely vote for the challenger. This assessment about the past is

¹⁹ O’Donnell and Schmitter have called this electoral phenomenon the “pendulum effect” in transitions. See Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 62.

²⁰ Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*. Although Przeworski’s basic predictions about electoral backlash have proven correct, the relationship between economic reform and voting has proven to be much more complicated. Most strikingly, voters may have voted against reformers in second-round elections, but not against reform itself. Rollback did not occur. Moreover, there may be other reasons besides economics that the reformers lost second-round elections, including, for instance, the lack of unity among reformist forces. This argument is made in Anders Aslund, Peter Boone, and Simon Johnson, “How to Stabilize: Lessons from Post-Communist Countries,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, No. 1 (1996), p. 227.

²¹ Marcin Krol, “Poland’s Longing for Paternalism,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1994), pp. 85–94; Wiktor Osiatynski, “After Walesa: The Causes and Consequences of Walesa’s defeat,” *East European Constitutional Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (1995), pp. 35–44.

²² Christine Spolar, “Czech Elections Leave PM, Once Dominant, Position Weakened,” *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1996, p. A16.

²³ Christine Spolar, “Albania Reverts to a One-Party Government,” *The Washington Post*, June 22, 1996, p. A19.

²⁴ Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*.

usually undertaken with respect to individual utility and is most concerned with economic issues.²⁵

This theory offers much guidance in analyzing electoral trends in post-communist Eastern Europe. Anticommunist leaders and parties won landslide victories in most first electoral contests. Upon assuming office, these new leaders then implemented painful market reforms, which in the short run made the majorities in their countries worse off. By the time of the second round of elections, most post-communist countries were still experiencing declines in growth rates. Not surprisingly, therefore, most of the first post-communist leaders were voted out of office in the next election.

Through the 1996 presidential elections, Russia did not appear to be following this general trend. First, electoral support for opposition parties and candidates – be they communists, national patriots, or opposition “democrats” – has not grown dramatically. Instead, those who won big during Russia’s first elections continued to stay in power. This sustained support for Russia’s original challengers to the Soviet ancien régime was demonstrated most dramatically in the 1996 presidential election, when Boris Yeltsin became the first incumbent in the post-communist world to win reelection in a relatively free and fair election.²⁶ This election result was especially surprising considering all that Russians had endured under Yeltsin’s reign. After all, Yeltsin’s five-year tenure included a sustained and deep economic depression, civil war briefly in Moscow in 1993 and then the prolonged war in Chechnya, and significant increases in crime.²⁷ In 1996, opinion polls demonstrated

²⁵ Much of the literature on voting in the United States focuses on the role of economic variables, at the level of both the individual and the national economy. See, for instance, Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*; Michael MacKuen, Robert Erikson, and James Stimson, “Peasants or Bankers? The American Electorate and the U.S. Economy,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (1992), pp. 597–611; Roderick Kiewiet, *Macroeconomics and Micropolitics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Donald Kinder and Roderick Kiewiet, “Sociotropic Politics: The American Case,” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 11 (1981), pp. 129–162.

²⁶ International Republican Institute, *Russia Presidential Observation Report* (Washington, D.C.: International Republican Institute, 1996).

²⁷ For a comparison of Russia’s economic decline relative to Eastern European countries, see *Transition Report 1995: Investment and Enterprise Development* (London: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1996). For comparisons between Russia’s current depression and the American Great Depression, see Branko Milanovic, *Income, Inequality and Poverty during the Transition from Planned to Market Economy* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998).

definitely that most people thought they were better off under communism than under the current system.²⁸

Explaining why Russia did not follow the same electoral patterns as those witnessed in other post-communist transitions requires a comparative understanding of the nature of Russia's transition from communist rule. In contrast to more speedy and successful transitions in Eastern Europe, Russia's transition has been protracted and confrontational. If the starting point of Russia's transition from communist rule can be located in the mid-Gorbachev years, then Russia's transition to democracy is one of the longest in recent history. Linz and Stepan define a successful democratic transition as the moment when "[s]ufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government *de facto* has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative, and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with the other bodies *de jure*."²⁹ Russia most certainly did not meet these conditions until December 1993, when Russian voters ratified a new constitution and elected a new national parliament. The transition may well have ended only after the 1996 presidential election. Before then, the head of state had not been elected under the new constitution. Some argue that the transition will only have been completed when a change of executive power takes place through an electoral process.³⁰ Whether the end of transition is 1993, 1996, 2000, or 2004, the process has been a long one, especially when compared to the more successful transitions from communist rule in Eastern Europe.

Russia's transition has been not only long, but also confrontational and at times violent. Negotiation between the ancien régime leaders and democratic challengers never produced pacts or interim institutional arrangements.³¹ Rather, imposition has been the only mode of transition. In 1991, opposing sides failed to negotiate a new set of political rules,

²⁸ See Richard Dobson, "Is Russia Turning the Corner? Changing Russia Public Opinion, 1991–1996," R-7-96 (Washington, D.C.: United States Information Agency, September 1996) and All-Russian Center for Public Opinion (VTsIOM), "Pyat' Let Reforma" (Moscow: VTsIOM, November 1996).

²⁹ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, p. 3.

³⁰ Still others, of course, argue that Russia is not in transition to democracy at all, but rather is an authoritarian state. See Vladimir Brovkin, "The Emperor's New Clothes: Continuities of Soviet Political Culture in Contemporary Russia," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1996), p. 21.

³¹ On the importance of pacts for successful transitions, see O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.

but instead did battle with each other until one side won. This drama of dual sovereignty was replayed again in October 1993, when two opposing governments each claimed to be the legitimate government in Russia. Like the one in 1991, this confrontation ended only after one side prevailed over the other by using military force. The expanded, contested agenda of change helps to explain why Russia's transition to electoral democracy has been so long and conflictual. In transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin American and southern Europe, only the political institutions of the state were up for negotiation. Questions concerning the organization of the economy were explicitly off limits. In comparison to democratization efforts in capitalist countries, transitions from communist rule expanded the agenda of change by placing economic questions on the table, complicating the transition process. Multiethnic states such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had to face a critical issue – defining the borders of the state(s).

In terms of complexity, then, Soviet and Russian leaders faced a greater challenge in negotiating this triple transition than did their counterparts in Poland, let alone in Spain. Yet, it was the intensity of opposing preferences about this agenda that really prolonged the transition process and fueled confrontation. The extent to which plans for reform become *contested* agendas is a function of the degree of homogeneity of preferences among political actors. The greater the degree of homogeneity, the smaller the contested agenda of change. The greater the degree of heterogeneity of preferences, the wider the contested agenda of change. At the beginning of the Soviet/Russian transition, no consensus existed among political elites about the borders of the state, the nature of the economy, or the kind of political system. Conflicting ideas about the borders of the state precipitated the first armed conflict between Soviet and Russian political actors in August 1991. After one side – Yeltsin's side – won this military confrontation, the victors dictated a resolution to this hotly debated issue by dissolving the Soviet Union. In other words, the state border issue was resolved through unilateral action, not negotiation.

Antithetical ideological positions also crystallized in Russia regarding the organization of the economy. Throughout the Gorbachev period and the first years of the Russian republic, communist leaders maintained real opposition to market reforms, promoting instead a brand of state-led socialism. After Yeltsin achieved a new political advantage after the failed August 1991 putsch, he and his new team of young economic reformers initiated a radical economic reform package that began with price liberalization followed by macroeconomic stabilization and privatization. However, only months into the reform process, conservative opposition – this time located in the Russian Congress of People's Deputies – mobi-

lized to amend, impede, and eventually halt market reforms. If many post-communist countries debated what kind of market reforms to pursue after the fall of communism, Russia debated whether to pursue market reforms at all. Only after Yeltsin defeated his opponents through violence in October 1993 did his government have the capacity to pursue unilaterally policies that they considered necessary for ensuring capitalism's irreversibility. Over time and out of weakness, most opponents of capitalism eventually recognized the legitimacy of private property and the necessity of markets. In comparative perspective, this recognition came very late in Russia's transition, and the parameters of the debate about the relationship between the state and the market is still much wider in Russia than in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe.

The third issue on the agenda of change – debates about the kind of political system – took the longest to resolve. Until the fall of 1993, communists persisted in pushing for the system of soviets as the basic organization of the Soviet and Russian governments. Some nationalists argued for a return of the monarchy. Even the anticommunist movement was divided as to whether democracy was appropriate for Russia during its transition from communist rule. Many prominent advisors to Yeltsin maintained that Russia needed an authoritarian regime to manage the transformation to capitalism. At a minimum, these “democrats” urged that Yeltsin erect a strong executive system that could pursue economic reform autonomous from societal pressures. Only after the October 1993 tragedy did Yeltsin turn his attention to creating new political institutions. He dictated a solution to resolve previous debates about the form of government and then offered his opponents a binary choice of either acceptance or rejection of this order. Out of weakness and the lack of a better alternative, Yeltsin's opponents acquiesced to the new rules and began to participate in the new constitutional order after the December 1993 elections. Whether Yeltsin would agree to abide by the new rules, however, remained uncertain. Most ominously, no one knew if Yeltsin would accept the results of the 1996 presidential election if he lost. Well into the presidential campaign, Yeltsin's advisors repeatedly hinted that he would not.

Resolving Russia's contested agenda of change took so long also because of the relatively equal balance of power between those for and against revolution. In transitional periods, stalemate created through a relatively equal balance of power between forces for democracy and forces for preservation of the ancien régime can create propitious conditions for democratic transition.³² However, stalemate also can have

³² Dankwart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1970), pp. 337–363.

precisely the opposite effect. If opponents believe that their enemies cannot defeat them, they may be tempted to fight either to preserve or to overthrow the status quo. In the Soviet/Russian transition, stalemate played such a negative role. Rather than compelling opposing sides to compromise, the relatively equal balance of power between opponents fostered conflict. In the first transition period during the Gorbachev era, the balance of power between conservatives and democrats was not tilted in favor of one side or the other. Given this condition, conservatives eventually decided in August 1991 to exercise military power to preserve the Soviet Union and squelch the opposition. They miscalculated.

In contrast to democratic movements in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, the Russian “democrats” who enjoyed a temporary advantage in the wake of their August 1991 victory did not have overwhelming support within either the elite or the population as a whole.³³ Importantly, and again in contrast to most East European transitions, communist groups refused to recognize the democratic victory of August 1991 and considered illegitimate and undemocratic the policies pursued by the democrats soon thereafter. In particular, Yeltsin’s decisions to dissolve the USSR and to begin radical economic reform did not enjoy widespread support and did not result from negotiations with his political opponents. Had Yeltsin enjoyed a preponderance of power over his political opponents, he might have been able to ignore the opinion of his enemies regarding these consequential decisions. However, because the balance of power between those “for the revolution” and those “against the revolution” was relatively equal, Yeltsin’s opponents recovered from their August 1991 setback and remobilized to challenge Yeltsin’s reforms and eventually Yeltsin’s regime. Tempted (again) by the perceived ability to achieve political objectives through military force, the two sides eventually did battle again in October 1993. Even after 1993, the electoral victories of opposition forces in the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections kept alive the belief that rollback of the revolution might still be possible. In sharp contrast to their social-democratic comrades in Eastern Europe, Russian communists openly rejected social democracy and remained committed to reconstructing communism well beyond the collapse of the communist regime in the Soviet Union. As late as the spring of 1996, the deputy chairman of the Russian Communist Party declared that “the death of communism never happened . . . the Soviet Union never collapsed, [and] people still think of themselves as Soviets.”³⁴

³³ For this comparison, see Michael McFaul, *Post-Communist Politics: Democratic Prospects in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1993).

³⁴ Aleksandr Shabanov, Deputy Chairman of the CPRF, speech at the Moscow Carnegie Center, March 28, 1996. See also *III S'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Rossiiskoi Feder-*

Electoral Consequences of Protracted Transition

This protracted and confrontational mode of transition had real consequences for elections in Russia. While second elections in Eastern Europe occurred after the transition from communist rule was over, Russia held several elections, including most importantly the 1996 presidential election, during the transition process. Even throughout the 1996 campaign, the specter of communist restoration loomed, at least in the minds of Russian voters. From 1990 to 1996, voters in Russia remained polarized between those who supported and those who lamented the transition from communism. Under these circumstances, interest cleavages were fashioned more by general attitudes about the revolutionary project than by particular economic, social, or ethnic concerns. More conventional cleavages – cleavages that demarcate the contours of stable party systems – have developed slowly as a result of Russia's protracted transition from communism to a market economy and democratic polity.³⁵

The numerous labels assigned to these two camps have produced confusion and misinterpretation of Russian electoral outcomes, in both Russia and the West. In part, this confusion originates from the fact that those once defending the ancien régime became challengers to the new status quo after 1991, and vice versa. In other words, the communists were the “conservatives” before 1991, seeking to preserve the established order, while anticommunist leaders and groups – called in Russia the “democrats” – constituted the “liberals” or “progressives” seeking to change the old order. By 1993, these terms became even more confused as the “democrats” were now in power seeking to preserve the new order, while the communists became the opposition seeking to alter the status quo.³⁶ However confusing to outsiders, the basic contours of the bipolar ideological divide seem to have been understood by Russian voters. While opinion polls have demonstrated that centrist and nationalist

atsii (21–22 Yanvarya 1995 goda) (Moscow: Informpechat', 1995) and *Rossiia, Rodina, Narod! Predvybornaya platforma kandidata na post prezidenta rossiiskoi federatsii G.A. Zyuganova*, mimeo, 1996.

³⁵ S. W. Rivera, “Historical Cleavage or Transition Mode? Influences on the Emerging Party Systems in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia,” *Party Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1996), pp. 177–208 and Evans and Whitefield, “Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe.”

³⁶ Observers also get bogged down in defining “reform,” assuming that greater precision in characterizing Yeltsin's policies will produce a better explanation of electoral outcomes. Those in search of political party formation also (mis)apply categories such as left and right or labels such liberal, social democrat, and conservative to a political landscape in which these terms have lost their meanings.

labels produce confusion in the electorate, the basic divide between these two camps is easily recognized.³⁷

In highlighting the high degree of elite and societal polarization from the first elections in Russia in 1989 until the 1996 presidential election, this approach suggests that Russian voter preferences are best understood as falling within two broad categories – those in support of “reform” (however defined) and those against it. Survey data about voter attitudes may provide a more complex picture about preferences regarding specific issues, but the framework outlined in this chapter suggests that attitudes about the system, and not positions on specific issues, motivated voters throughout this period. When confronted with a choice between candidates representing alternative political and socioeconomic systems, voters are less likely to make decisions based strictly on personal, egocentric preferences.³⁸ Rather, during such periods of revolutionary change, when national politics impact directly on individual lives, we should expect voter concerns about systemic issues to be more salient than “pocketbook” issues.

This framework for understanding Russian politics suggests that Russian voters should be inclined to make choices based more on expectations about the future than on merely short-term calculations about past events, economic or otherwise.³⁹ During static periods, studies of American voting behavior have demonstrated that voters are most likely to make electoral decisions based on evaluations of past outcomes rather than future policies.⁴⁰ At the same time, advocates of the retrospective voting hypothesis have recognized specific conditions in which such behavior is less likely. As Morris Fiorina writes, “traditional retrospective voting should be most evident on issues that are not bound up in strongly held ideologies and/or among citizens who not conceptualize political affairs in ideological terms. Conversely, I doubt that the traditional theory of retrospective voting will shed much light on the behav-

³⁷ Author’s interview with Aleksandr Oslon, president of the Foundation of Public Opinion and chief pollster for the Yeltsin campaign in 1996 (December 13, 1996). See also William Zimmerman, “Foreign Policy, Political System Preference, and the Russian Presidential Election of 1996,” AAASS paper, November 16, 1996.

³⁸ On the differences between the “personal experiences” hypothesis and the “national assessments” hypothesis, see Roderick Kiewiet, *Macro-economics and Micro-politics*, pp. 15–20.

³⁹ For arguments that treat voters as prospective, concerned more with the national economy than with personal economic circumstances, see MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, “Peasants or Bankers?”; Kiewiet, *Macro-economics and Micro-politics*; and Kinder and Kiewiet, “Sociotropic Politics: The American Case,” pp. 129–162.

⁴⁰ Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*; V. O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate* (New York: Vintage, 1966); and Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

ior of the highly ideological or the disposition of issues considered touchstones of particular ideologies.”⁴¹ The political context in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union constituted one of these rare, highly ideological electoral settings identified by Fiorina. The assumption of prospective voting does not mean that the past is not important, since voters do not make prospective calculations in a historical void. On the contrary, a voter’s best information about the future is based on past experiences. In the Russian case, most voters (except the youngest) had lived in both the communist and post-communist systems. In making calculations about the expected utility of these systems in the future, therefore, they were able to compare systems and did not have to believe necessarily in campaign promises about future policies.

This argument about Russia’s revolutionary transition also suggests why party identification should not be an important determinant of voter behavior during this period, especially in binary voting situations.⁴² The crystallized divide between those for and against the “revolution” impeded interest-based party development and the emergence of third candidates. When politics are polarized, all ideological differences, class divisions, religious affiliations, and ethnic identities are subsumed by two broad categories – reform or antireform, status quo or status quo ante.

The general profiles of the two electoral camps – “communists” and “democrats” – are distinct. Younger voters have tended to vote for reformist candidates, while older voters have tended to vote for communist candidates.⁴³ Urban voters have been more likely to vote for reformist candidates, while rural voters have been more likely to vote for communist candidates. Richer voters have tended to support reformers, while poorer voters have tended to back communist candidates.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*, p. 15.

⁴² Colton, in *Transitional Citizenship*, identifies the early effects of partisanship on voting. These effects are still infant, however, as the party system is still weak and candidates often run without identifying with a party (e.g., Yeltsin in 1996). Moreover, the literature on American elections suggests that a generation must pass before party identification plays a salient role, as the party label is usually passed through families. See Part 3 of Warren Miller and Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁴³ This is a generalization. Upon closer inspection, one can identify a good deal of support for Yeltsin from older voters. For an incisive dissection of the Yeltsin coalition, see Jerry Hough and Susan Goodrich Lehmann, “The Mystery of Opponents of Economic Reform among the Yeltsin Voters,” in Mathew Wyman, Stephen White, and Sarah Oates (eds.), *Elections and Voters in Post-Communist Russia* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar Publishers: 1998), pp. 190–227.

⁴⁴ For analysis of these socioeconomic factors, see Colton, *Transitional Citizenship*, Chapter 4, and Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1997).

2. PRESIDENTIAL VERSUS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Polarization in Russian politics has not always appeared to produce polarized electoral outcomes. For instance, the bipolar logic of Russian electoral politics was not readily apparent in the three parliamentary elections during the 1990s. The alleged dissipation of polarized politics in these elections compelled some analysts to suggest that the 1996 presidential election would also be shaped by multiparty politics.

Such analyses, however, failed to account for how institutions shape choices and outcomes. In particular, Russia's presidential electoral law structured the vote in 1996 differently than the rules that guided parliamentary elections in 1995 and 1993.⁴⁵ Most importantly, Russia's parliamentary elections stimulated fragmentation and proto-party development, while the presidential election reinforced the polarizing tendencies in society already identified.⁴⁶ The same was true in the 1999–2000 electoral cycle.

While half of Russia's parliamentary seats were allocated in single-mandate districts, the other half were determined by a national system of proportional representation (PR) in 1993, 1995, and 1999 parliamentary votes. As in other countries, Russia's PR system encouraged the proliferation of political parties and provided few incentives for party consolidation.⁴⁷ By contrast, presidential elections tend to produce two-party systems, majoritarianism, and polarization.⁴⁸ This is because the electoral district magnitude for electing a president is usually one – that is, the entire country chooses one person for president. Elections in which only one candidate can win create strong incentives to consolidate alliances and narrow the field before the vote, pushing political systems toward bipolarity and majoritarianism.⁴⁹ Because the winner takes all for

⁴⁵ See especially Robert Moser, "The Electoral Effects of Presidentialism in Post-Soviet Russia," *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1/2 (1998), pp. 54–75.

⁴⁶ Juan Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?", and Arend Lijphart, "Presidentialism and Majoritarian Democracy," in Juan Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (eds.), *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives*, Vol. I (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ This tendency is often called Duverger's law or Duverger's rule. See Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1954).

⁴⁸ See Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy"; Matthew Shugart and John Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Chapter 2; and Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), Chapter 5.

⁴⁹ Lijphart, "Presidentialism and Majoritarian Democracy," especially pp. 97–99. See also Gary Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Chapter 6.

a fixed term, presidential elections become more important and confrontational than other kinds of elections. As Juan Linz notes, "The zero-sum game raises the stakes in a presidential election for winners and losers, and inevitably increases the tension and the polarization."⁵⁰ The combination of the extreme ideological divide between Yeltsin and Zyuganov and Russia's super-presidential system that grants extraordinary powers to the president magnified the stakes of this presidential election even more.

Within the universe of presidential systems, some electoral laws are more narrowing than others.⁵¹ Plurality systems in which the winner is the candidate with the most votes after one round of voting generate the strongest incentives for two-party systems. Electoral laws that include a run-off between the top two candidates in the first round tend to be more fragmentary, as they offer incentives for candidates to stay in the race. For instance, in elections with a run-off, underdog candidates can hope to squeeze into the second round and then unite all forces that lost in the first round to produce a winning coalition in the second.⁵² Between rounds, defeated candidates from the first round can attempt to trade their endorsement of one of the top two finishers in exchange for individual, ideological, or organizational gain.

Russia's presidential electoral law requires a run-off if no one receives more than fifty percent in the first round. Consequently, consolidation into large blocs need not take place before the first round. As no one expects any candidate to win more than fifty percent in the first round, this two-ballot system encourages "third-party" or "spoiler" candidates to remain in the race until the end.⁵³ In 1996, this two-ballot majoritarian system even raised the specter of surprise outcomes, whereby a newcomer such as General Lebed might sneak past Yeltsin in the first round and then defeat Zyuganov in a run-off.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the more general polarizing effects of a presidential race, as opposed to a parliamentary party-list election, shaped the contours of this election.

⁵⁰ Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy," p. 19.

⁵¹ Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, Chapter 8.

⁵² Cox, *Making Votes Count*, pp. 231–233.

⁵³ The financial rules of the campaign further encouraged these candidates, as presidential hopefuls who pulled out before the first round were required to pay for the "free" television and radio time they had received as presidential candidates.

⁵⁴ This is how Alberto Fujimori emerged from nowhere to be elected president in Peru. The same pattern was repeated in Belarus when the relatively unknown Aleksandr Lukashenko won in a majority run-off system. On Fujimori, see Gregory Schmidt, "Fujimori's 1990 Upset Victory in Peru," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1996), pp. 321–354 and Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, pp. 214–215.

The electoral cycle constitutes another institutional factor that influences electoral outcomes.⁵⁵ When parliamentary and presidential elections occur concurrently, they can influence each other. The converse is equally true. That Russia's presidential and parliamentary elections have not occurred at the same time helps to explain why the outcomes could vary so widely. In June 1991, during the referenda of April 1993 and December 1993, and again in the 1996 presidential votes, Yeltsin's participation and the binary nature of these votes helped to polarize the Russian electorate into two camps. When divided in such a way, majorities have coalesced consistently for Yeltsin and his policies. Conversely, in the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, when Yeltsin did not participate and the number of choices on the ballot was greater than two, the outcome appeared to be less positive for liberal parties and candidates.⁵⁶ A similar effect occurred during the 1999–2000 electoral cycle. Even in the first round, the 2000 presidential vote was dominated by two candidates – Putin and Zyuganov.

Taken together, two factors – the polarizing effects of Russia's protracted transition and the different institutional effects of parliamentary versus presidential elections – combine to provide a basic explanation for Russian electoral outcomes over the last decade. However, a third factor – the candidates and their campaign strategies – also must be brought into the analysis to explain particular electoral outcomes. To illustrate how these three factors interact, the next sections discuss individual electoral outcomes over the first decade of competitive electoral politics in Russia.

3. THE 1989 ELECTIONS TO THE SOVIET CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES⁵⁷

Elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 were the first semicompetitive elections in Soviet history. Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev initiated these elections as a way

⁵⁵ Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, Chapter 9.

⁵⁶ In the one election in which voters cast separate ballots in a binary, "presidential" way (the referendum on the constitution) and in a multiparty election (the parliamentary elections), the results varied. While over 50 percent of participating voters ratified the president's constitution in the referendum, only a third of these same voters supported pro-reformist political parties on the multiparty ballot.

⁵⁷ Complete results and discussion of this election and all others can be found in Michael McFaul and Nikolai Petrov (eds.), *Politicheskii Almanakh Rossii 1997* (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998). Other overviews of electoral behavior and electoral outcomes during this period include White, Rose, and McAllister, *How Russia Votes*; Colton, *Transitional Citizenship*; and Wyman, White, and Oates (eds.), *Elections and Voters in Post-Communist Russia*.

to stimulate support for his reform program, perestroika.⁵⁸ Unable to garner support for his reform ideas within the Party as a whole, Gorbachev hoped to resurrect the soviets as a set of state institutions that could assume governing power away from the Communist Party.⁵⁹

These elections were only partially democratic. One-third of the 2,250 seats in the Congress were allocated to “social organizations,” which included everything from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the Soviet Academy of Sciences.⁶⁰ All of the remaining seats, divided equally between districts determined by territorial divisions and districts carved according to population, were in principle open for contestation. In practice, however, the cumbersome electoral procedures, padded with several veto gates for the Communist Party, made the nomination of “democratic” challengers – that is, candidates outside of the *nomenklatura* system – nearly impossible.⁶¹ To be nominated, candidates had to receive the endorsement of either a worker’s collective or a public meeting of at least 500 people. After nomination, district electoral committees had the power to disqualify any candidate, a power exercised against almost half of all candidates.⁶²

Nonetheless, these elections constituted a direct threat to CPSU elites, as only the Party’s top 100 officials were “elected” through the social organization list.⁶³ The vast majority of local CPSU secretaries had to compete in contested elections, and the results were disastrous. Only nine out of thirty-two CPSU first secretaries won in contested races. Out of seventy-five secretaries running unopposed, six still lost because they

⁵⁸ On Gorbachev’s political strategy, see Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) and Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵⁹ Anatolii Sobchak, *Khozhdenie vo Vlast’* (Moskva: Novosti, 1991).

⁶⁰ Some of these social organizations’ seats were contested internally, including the famous battle for Andrei Sakharov’s election within the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The CPSU list, however, was not competitive. After considering competitive elections within the Party, Gorbachev opted for the nomination of exactly 100 candidates to insure that the Party leadership received seats in the Congress. See Giorgii Shakhnazarov, *Tsena Svobody: Reformatsiya Gorbacheva Glazami ego Pomoshchnika* (Moscow: Rossika Zevs, 1993), pp. 74–75.

⁶¹ For a chronicle of the electoral reform process leading up to the 1989 elections, see Peter Lentini, “Reforming the Electoral System: The 1989 Elections to the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies,” *The Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1991), pp. 69–94. For a personal memoir of the election process, see Sobchak, *Khozhdenie vo Vlast’*, Chapter 2.

⁶² See V. A. Kolosov, N. V. Petrov, and L. V. Smirnyagin (eds.), *Vesna 89: Geografiya i Anatomiya Parlamentskikh Vyborov* (Moskva: Progress, 1990).

⁶³ The Komosomol and official Soviet trade unions also were accorded seats, giving CPSU officials additional routes for securing a place in the new Congress without facing the electorate.

failed to receive the required 50 percent threshold of support.⁶⁴ The failure of CPSU *nomenklatura* was most impressive in Leningrad, where both the first and second secretaries as well as the majority of other lower-level Party officials failed to win seats. More generally, these elections brought new people into the Russian political process, as an estimated 88 percent of successful candidates had been elected for the first time.⁶⁵

Although local CPSU leaders were humiliated, their losses did not translate directly into gains for new political actors, or “democrats,” as they were then labeled.⁶⁶ Eighty-five percent of the new Soviet legislature were members of the CPSU, while none at the time of elections was a member of any alternative political party. The most successful candidates in 1989 were CPSU officials such as Boris Yeltsin and Telman Gdlyan, who had pushed for campaigns against corruption or advocated radical reform from within the existing system. More moderate candidates distinguished themselves from other CPSU candidates by their degree of enthusiasm for perestroika. At this early stage in the Soviet/Russian transition, polarization between “democrats” and “communists” did not play an important role.

4. THE 1990 ELECTIONS TO THE RSFSR CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES

The 1990 elections for the Russian Congress of People's Deputies were more democratic and more competitive than elections to the Soviet Congress the previous year.⁶⁷ Most importantly, the Russian electoral law did not set aside any seats for “public organizations.” Instead, all seats were filled in first-past-the-post elections in two kinds of electoral districts – one defined by the status of region (168 seats) and the other by number of voters (900 seats). If no candidate won 50 percent approval in the first round, a run-off between the top two finishers in the first round occurred two weeks later.

Formally, parties did not compete in this election, as noncommunist parties were just forming. Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution, which

⁶⁴ For details, see McFaul and Petrov (eds.), *Politicheskii Almanakh Rossii* 1997.

⁶⁵ White, Rose, and McAllister, *How Russia Votes*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ On the role of genuine outsiders in these elections, see Boris Kagarlitsky, *Farewell Perestroika* (London: Verso, 1990).

⁶⁷ Surprisingly little has been written in either Russia or the West on these pivotal elections. See Timothy Colton, “The Politics of Democratization: The Moscow Election of 1990,” *Soviet Economy*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1990), pp. 285–344. On the regional elections that occurred simultaneously with the national vote, important contributions include Gavin Helf and Jeffrey Hahn, “Old Dogs and New Tricks: Party Elites in the Russian Regional Elections of 1990,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (1992), pp. 511–530.