Russia's 1996 Gubernatorial Elections and the Implications for Yeltsin

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During the second half of 1996, forty-five Russian oblasts, krais, and autonomous okrugs, along with five of the country's ethnic republics, elected their top executives. By January 1997, only a few regions were still governed by appointees of President Boris Yeltsin, and even those governors were scheduled to face the voters during the first half of the year.

Before the wave of regional voting began, Yeltsin's allies portrayed the gubernatorial elections as a continuation of the struggle against communism, which had been the defining theme of the president's 1996 re-election campaign. Throughout the autumn, as an unexpectedly large number of incumbents were voted out of office, the Kremlin insisted that the results were good news, insofar as the winners were mostly "professionals," who would cooperate with Moscow, rather than Communists.

By early 1997, Russia's political landscape looked quite different. The elections turned out to be far from the red-versus-white contests the presidential race had been. Both the Kremlin and opposition leaders portrayed the elections as a success, but it remains difficult to predict where the primary loyalties of the new governors will lie. Moreover, it seems that the Kremlin will find it easier to deal with the "red governors" than with nominally pro-Yeltsin "pragmatists."

Preparing for the Campaign

The presidential administration and the Left opposition camp adopted regional election strategies aimed not only at winning governors' chairs, but also at strengthening their overall position outside Moscow. In July, Anatoly Chubais was appointed presidential chief of staff, and he assigned to his first deputy, Alexander Kazakov, the task of overseeing the Kremlin's regional election effort. Sergei Samoilov, head of the administration's territorial department, provided analytical support.[1] Political consulting firms that had cooperated with Yeltsin's presidential campaign

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worked on behalf of many governors.[2] The goal was not to save every incumbent—the Kremlin knew some Yeltsin appointees were bound to lose—but to keep regional leaders dependent on, and grateful to, the presidential administration.

The Kremlin also tried to improve the electoral prospects of Yeltsin appointees through a "cadre" policy, beginning in the first half of 1996, when Yeltsin fired several unpopular governors (most were ostensibly fired for misuse of budgetary funds). The strategy was seemingly vindicated when Dmitry Ayatskov, appointed in April, easily won the 1 September election in Saratov oblast, where a majority had voted for Communist candidate Gennady Zyuganov in the presidential race. Soon afterward, the administration replaced the governors of Ryazan and Voronezh oblasts, also considered part of the "red belt."

A parallel pro-Yeltsin effort was carried out by the All-Russian Coordinating Council (OKS), which united more than twenty political parties and organizations that had rallied around Yeltsin in the spring. The council sought to put up a united front in each region against candidates of the Left opposition and to keep "democratic" and "centrist" activists permanently in the president's camp.[3] The OKS backed challengers in a handful of regions, but it tended to rally around incumbents, even though its chairman, former Presidential Chief of Staff Sergei Filatov, admitted that many of the sitting governors could not accurately be described as "reformers."[4] The council's support was only symbolic, since some member groups—in particular, the Reforms-New Course movement of longtime Yeltsin ally Vladimir Shumeiko—frequently supported alternative gubernatorial candidates.

Incumbents rarely invoked political issues during their campaigns. Instead, they ran for office as seasoned professionals who stood above political passions. For instance, Vladimir oblast Governor Yuri Vlasov asked voters to recognize his "enormous experience, connections, knowledge acquired over the past five years" and not to blame "the driver of the car" for "potholes in the road" (meaning the problems encountered during Russia's difficult transition).[5] Other incumbents promised to lobby for regional interests. Khabarovsk Governor Viktor Ishaev's main campaign slogans were "My party is Khabarovsk krai" and "I need a mandate of popular trust in order to speak with Moscow on equal terms."[6]

Meanwhile, the Left opposition camp, though stung by Zyuganov's failed presidential bid, quickly regrouped. In August, Zyuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) formed a left-wing umbrella movement, the Popular-Patriotic Union of Russia (NPSR). The alliance included the Agrarian Party and many prominent Yeltsin critics, such as former Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, Duma Culture Committee Chairman and filmmaker Stanislav Govorukhin, and Duma deputy and former Soviet prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov.

In addition to electing governors who would be sympathetic to their cause, opposition leaders hoped to use the regional campaigns to improve their organization and image.[7] Ryzhkov noted that the National Salvation Front, an alliance of Communist and nationalist groups formed in 1992, disintegrated because activists from the member groups never cooperated at the local level.[8] Every gubernatorial election presented an opportunity to build a regional branch of the NPSR, cementing the coalition in place for use in future national and regional elections.

The NPSR was also designed to establish the Left's reputation as a "constructive" rather than antisystemic opposition. "Red scare" rhetoric had devastated Zyuganov's presidential campaign, and NPSR gubernatorial candidates ran as representatives of the "popular-patriotic forces" rather than as Communists. In the search for protest votes, they pledged to solve concrete economic problems, not to restore socialism. Zyuganov praised his allies for their professional qualities; for instance, he described the NPSR candidate in Vladimir as "young," "energetic," and "contemporary."[9] The NPSR endorsed non-Communists in many regions, which occasionally aroused suspicion within KPRF ranks. Zyuganov had to order a KPRF candidate to withdraw in favor of Rutskoi in Kursk oblast, and a leading Communist in Bryansk denounced the NPSR's nominee for governor as a "careerist."[10] The Left opposition also chose its battles carefully. Where incumbents were vulnerable, NPSR leaders traveled widely and campaigned personally on behalf of their nominees, but they did not waste many human or financial resources on lost causes.

The New Regional Leaders

Of the fifty incumbents who faced elections between September 1996 and January 1997, twenty-three were re-elected and twenty-four were defeated. Another three continue to serve pending repeat elections in Amur oblast and Agin-Buryat and Evenki autonomous okrugs. The new governors can be divided into four groups.11

Left Opposition

Fifteen of the twenty-four new governors were elected mainly with the backing of the NPSR. Communist-backed candidates did better as the election season wore on: eleven of the fifteen NPSR winners were elected during December or January. All of them had at one time served in governments or legislatures at the oblast or local level, except for Rutskoi, who gained fame as a hero of the war in Afghanistan and as Yeltsin's vice president. Rutskoi was elected by a landslide in his native region of Kursk after a last-minute decision by the Supreme Court's presidium, which ordered the oblast electoral commission to register him as a candidate.

Most of the successful NPSR candidates were in their forties or fifties; the youngest was thirty-seven-year-old Duma deputy Alexander Chernogorov, the winner in Stavropol krai. Seven had served as chairmen of regional or local legislatures immediately before being elected governor (Krasnodar and Altai krais and Voronezh, Volgograd, Kaluga, Vladimir, and Kurgan oblasts). Four others were State Duma deputies (Kirov, Bryansk, and Chelyabinsk oblasts and Stavropol krai), and one (Ryazan) worked in the Parliament's Audit Chamber. Two of the Duma deputies were former regional leaders who had been fired by President Yeltsin: Yuri Lodkin was elected governor of Bryansk in April 1993 but removed that September after supporting the Supreme Soviet in its showdown with Yeltsin.[12] Pyotr Sumin was removed as head of the Chelyabinsk oblast ispolkom soon after the August 1991 coup. He then gained more votes than any other candidate in a spring 1993 gubernatorial election, but the results were annulled.[13] The successful NPSR candidate in Kostroma had headed a department

TABLE 1. Russian Regional Leaders Elected September 1996–January 1997

Date	Region	Election[a]	Governor/Leader	Affiliation	Percentage of votes received
1 September	Saratov Oblast	first round	Dmitry Ayatskov	incument	81
22 September	Amur Oblast[b]	single round	Yuri Lyashko	incumbent	42
29 September	Leningrad Oblast	first round	Vadim Gustov	strong manager	53
	Rostov Oblast	first round	Vladimir Chub	incument	62
6 October	Vologda Oblast	first round	Vyacheslav Pozgalev	incumbent	80
13 October	Yamalo-Nenets AO	first round	Yuri Neelov	incumbent	68
20 October	Kaliningrad Oblast	run-off	Leonid Gorbenko	strong manager[c]	50
	Kirov Oblast	run-off	Vladimir Sergeenkov	NPSR[d]	50
	Kursk Oblast	first round	Alexander Rutskoi	NPSR[d]	79
	Sakhalin Oblast	single round	Igor Farkhutdinov	incumbent	39
	Jewish Autonomous Oblast	first round	Nikolai Volkov	incumbent	72
27 October	Chita Oblast	single round	Ravil Geniatulin	incumbent	31
	Khanty-Mansi AO	first round	Alexander Filipenko	incumbent	72
	Agin-Buryat AO[e]	first round	Bolot Ayushev	incumbent	49
3 November	Pskov Oblast	run-off	Yevgeny Mikhailov	LDPR[f]	56
	Magadan Oblast	single round	Valentin Tsvetkov	strong manager[c]	46
10 November	Kaluga Oblast	run-off	Valery Sudarenkov	NPSR[d]	63
17 November	Stavropol Krai	run-off	Alexander Chernogorov	NPSR[d]	55
	Ust-Orda Buryat AO	single round	Valery Maleev	strong manager[c]	37
	Komi-Permyak AO	first round	Nikolai Poluyanov	incumbent	70
	Koryak AO	single round	Valentina Bronevich	strong manager[c]	46

(table continues)

TABLE 1.—Continued

Date	Region	Election[a]	Governor/Leader	Affiliation	Percentage of votes received
1 December	Altai Krai	run-off	Alexander Surikov	NPSR[d]	49
	Murmansk Oblast	run-off	Yuri Yevdokimov	Lebed[g]	44
	Kamchatka Oblast	run-off	Vladimir Biryukov	incumbent	61
	Ivanovo Oblast	first round	Vladislav Tikhomirov	incument	50
	Samara Oblast	first round	Konstantin Titov	incumbent	63
8 December	Kurgan Oblast	run-off	Oleg Bogomolov	NPSR[d]	67
	Khabarovsk Krai	first round	Viktor Ishaev	incumbent	77
	Bryansk Oblast	first round	Yuri Lodkin	NPSR[d]	55
	Voronezh Oblast	single round	Ivan Shabanov	NPSR[d]	49
	Vladimir Oblast	first round	Nikolai Vinogradov	NPSR[d]	63
	Astrakhan Oblast	first round	Anatoly Guzhvin	incumbent	52
13 December	Nenets AO	single round	Vladimir Butov	strong manager[c]	49
22 December	Republic of Sakha (Yakutiya)	first round	Mikhail Nikolaev	incumbent	60
	Kostroma Oblast	run-off	Viktor Shershunov	NPSR[d]	64
	Ryazan Oblast	first round	Vyacheslav Lyubimov	NPSR[d]	56
	Arkhangelsk Oblast	run-off	Anatoly Yefremov	incumbent	58
	Perm Oblast	run-off	Gennady Igumnov	incumbent	65
	Republic of Khakassiya	run-off	Alexei Lebed	Lebed[g]	71
	Ulyanovsk Oblast	single round	Yuri Goryachev	incumbent	43
	Chelyabinsk Oblast	first round	Pyotr Sumin	NPSR[d]	54
	Krasnodar Krai	first round	Nikolai Kondratenko	NPSR[d]	82
	Chukot AO	first round	Alexander Nazarov	incumbent	63

(table continues)

TABLE 1.—Continued

Date	Region	Election[a]	Governor/Leader	Affiliation	Percentage of votes received
	Taimyr AO	first round	Gennady Nedelin	incumbent	64
	Evenki AOb	single round	Anatoly Yakimov	incumbent	35
29 December	Volgograd Oblast	run-off	Nikolai Maksyuta	NPSR[d]	51
4 January	Republic of Marii-El	run-off	Vyacheslav Kislitsyn	NPSR[d]	59
12 January	Tyumen Oblast	run-off	Leonid Roketsky	incumbent	59
	Republic of Adygeya	first round	Aslan Dzharimov	incumbent	58
	Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya	first round	Valery Kokov	incumbent	97

[a]First round = winner elected in first round after gaining more than 50 percent of the vote; single round = regional electoral law requires only plurality, winner elected in first round; run-off = winner elected in second round between top two candidates from first round; incumbent = incumbent won.
[b]Result annulled because of alleged voting irregularities; incumbent remains in office pending repeat election.
[c]Strong manager = nonincumbent winner who campaigned as an independent and generally supports Yeltsin.
[d]NPSR = winner backed by Popular-Patriotic Union of Russia.
[e]Result annulled because there were only two candidates and neither gained 50 percent; incumbent remains in office pending repeat election.
[f]LDPR = winner backed by Liberal Democratic Party of Russia.
[g]Lebed = winner backed by Alexander Lebed.

in the capital city's government, while the winner of the presidential election in the Marii-El Republic had run a *raion* before being fired by the incumbent he eventually defeated.

Strong Managers

The second-largest group of new governors are best described as "strong managers" (*krepkie khozyaistvenniki*). They won six races, in Leningrad, Kaliningrad, and Magadan oblasts, as well as Ust-Orda Buryat, Nenets, and Koryak autonomous okrugs. As they are a relatively new breed among Russian governors, their backgrounds and campaign strategies deserve special attention.

The model for the strong managers is Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who has acquired a reputation as an effective leader during his five years in office. He generally supports Yeltsin on political matters, but he boasts a broader appeal. In the June 1996 mayoral election that coincided with the first round of the presidential election, Luzhkov won an astonishing 89 percent of the vote; Yeltsin carried the capital city with 61 percent in the first round and 74 percent in the run-off against Zyuganov. In Russian political parlance, Luzhkov is usually described as an advocate of a strong state (*gosudarstvennik*)—never as a "democrat."

The first new regional leader to emerge in the Luzhkov mold in 1996 was Vladimir Yakovlev, who narrowly defeated Anatoly Sobchak in the June gubernatorial election in St. Petersburg (the office of mayor was renamed governor to emphasize that St. Petersburg has the status of a Russian Federation subject). Sobchak was Yeltsin's man in the race and the favorite of local democrats. Yakovlev had served as first deputy mayor under Sobchak, and he attacked his former boss as a poor manager who had not solved the city's housing shortage. Luzhkov reportedly helped secure financing for Yakovlev's campaign.

Like Yakovlev, the strong managers running for governor in autumn 1996 campaigned on economic issues, not political differences with the incumbent. They ran as independents, usually with support from the business community; some were themselves successful entrepreneurs. Several of them were backed by Shumeiko, who had good connections among the regional elite, having chaired the Federation Council in 1994 and 1995.[14] The Kremlin even offered covert support to some of the strong managers, in part because their prospects for election were good and in part because the incumbents had been appointed under past chiefs of staff, while the team of Presidential Chief of Staff Anatoly Chubais wanted "its own" governors.[15]

The entrepreneur Vadim Gustov soundly defeated Leningrad oblast Governor Alexander Belyakov on 29 September, by 53 percent to 32 percent of the vote.[16] Endorsed by the NPSR, Gustov had served as chairman of the Leningrad oblast soviet until it was dissolved in October 1993 and had stayed in the White House with other Yeltsin opponents during the siege of the Supreme Soviet. Belyakov consequently tried to play the red card in the campaign, but the Communist label did not fit Gustov. He disavowed the idea of a planned economy, boasting that he had studied in Sweden and had never even read Marx's *Das Kapital*.[17] Further strengthening Gustov's non-Communist credentials, he was supported by Shumeiko,

Democratic Russia, the regional branch of the pro-government Our Home Is Russia movement, and even the famous anti-Communist Sobchak (Belyakov had backed Vladimir Yakovlev's candidacy in St. Petersburg).[18] First Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Kazakov quipped that Gustov owed less to the Communist Zyuganov than to the bank Menatep, which has close ties to the Kremlin.[19] In campaign appearances, Gustov portrayed the incumbent as a friend of Moscow who did not stand up for Leningrad's interests.

Kaliningrad oblast Governor Yuri Matochkin was the next to fall to a strong manager, losing a 13 October run-off election to Leonid Gorbenko, the controversial director of the Kaliningrad fishing port.[20] The presidential administration officially supported Matochkin but did little to help his campaign. Gorbenko was backed by close Yeltsin ally Sergei Shakhrai and Shumeiko's movement (in 1993, Gorbenko withdrew his bid for a seat in the Federation Council in favor of Shumeiko).[21] His campaign rhetoric stressed the importance of management, not ideology, and he criticized Matochkin for making "empty promises" and taking on "unrealistic projects."[22] Gorbenko's own managerial skills were disputed; by some accounts, the port thrived under his leadership, but *Izvestiya* depicted him as a corrupt manager who cheated his own workers.[23] A rival gubernatorial candidate accused Gorbenko of embezzling funds to build himself a US$1 million house.[24]

The victorious candidate in Magadan, Valentin Tsvetkov, gained a reputation locally as a manager of a "new generation" during the perestroika years, when he was the director of a construction enterprise.[25] He also had a good electoral track record in the oblast, having been elected to the Federation Council in 1993 and to the State Duma in 1995. Tsvetkov joined the Duma faction Russian Regions and became chairman of the Duma's Committee on the North. The Magadan race was fought not on political issues but on how best to increase gold and silver output in the oblast. Tsvetkov also promised to create new jobs and raise income to world levels.[26] He was supported by Shumeiko's Reforms-New Course and, after advancing to the second round, by the KPRF, Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), and Grigory Yavlinsky's Yabloko movement.

On 17 November, voters in Koryak autonomous okrug elected Russia's first woman governor, Valentina Bronevich. She had chaired a *raion ispolkom* from 1986 to 1990 and later headed the Kamchatka oblast electoral commission (Koryak is the northern part of the Kamchatka peninsula). Bronevich had been involved with several commercial firms in the fishing industry, and during her energetic campaign, she promised to develop the okrug's natural resources and create jobs for every resident. The response of the Koryak leadership to the disintegration of the local economy should be more than "sucking money from the federal budget," she argued.[27] Bronevich was supported by Reforms-New Course and unofficially by the Kremlin as well.[28]

On the same day that Bronevich was elected, residents of Ust-Orda Buryat autonomous okrug elected Russia's youngest governor, thirty-two-year-old Valery Maleev. The director of a state farm, Maleev also held a seat in the okrug legislature. A company headed by his cousin financed his campaign, and organizational support was provided by the okrug branch of Our Home Is Russia.[29]

Maleev campaigned on the need to develop better ties between Ust-Orda Buryat and the federal government, as well as ties between the okrug and Irkutsk oblast, of which it is a part.[30]

Finally, Vladimir Butov, an entrepreneur who also served in the okrug legislature, was elected in Nenets autonomous okrug on 13 December. Butov ran an aggressive and populist campaign, promising to increase wages to 5 million rubles per month and pensions to 1.5 million (far above the national average wage of 835,000 rubles in November and the national average pension of 320,700 rubles in December). In addition, Butov promised to provide free trips to the okrug's capital city for residents from outlying areas and free trips out of the city for urban dwellers. Unlike the other strong managers, he appears not to have been supported by the Kremlin or any major Moscow politicians. The official ITAR-TASS news agency contrasted Butov's unrealistic promises with the incumbent's "feasible program for social and economic stabilization."[31]

The appeal of the strong managers frightened incumbents. The Kaliningrad governor offered local Communists a coalition government in the hope that they would support him in the run-off against Gorbenko, but the KPRF backed Gorbenko instead. In Volgograd, the incumbent Ivan Shabunin viewed Volgograd Mayor Yuri Chekhov as a greater threat than his Communist opponent, even though Zyuganov carried the oblast in the presidential race (Chekhov had the backing of Luzhkov and some figures in the Kremlin). A political consultant hired by Shabunin orchstrated a smear campaign against Chekhov,[32] which helped keep the mayor out of the second round, but Shabunin lost the run-off to the NPSR candidate.

Supporters of Lebed

Two new regional leaders appealed primarily to backers of former Security Council secretary Alexander Lebed. Lebed's younger brother Alexei was elected prime minister of the Republic of Khakassiya in December (unlike most Russian republics, Khakassiya has no presidency). On the strength of his brother's popularity, the younger Lebed won a seat in the State Duma from the republic in 1995, and the elder Lebed campaigned on his brother's behalf before the December 1996 election as well.

The same month, Yuri Yevdokimov won in Murmansk as the nominee of Lebed's Honor and Motherland movement. Yevdokimov's biography was similar to that of Communist-backed candidates in several other regions—he had headed the Murmansk soviet before it was dissolved in 1993—but he downplayed that part of his experience. Yevdokimov's election platform began with the words, "I am far from the same person I was three years ago."[33] Yevdokimov's campaign rhetoric was logical, given that in the first round of the presidential election Lebed gained 25 percent of the vote in Murmansk, while Zyuganov won only 12 percent.

Follower of Zhirinovsky

Voters in Pskov oblast, traditionally a bastion of support for Zhirinovsky, in November elected Russia's first LDPR governor, thirty-three-year-old Duma deputy Yevgeny Mikhailov.[34] Zhirinovsky campaigned actively for his protégé, and Mikhailov

also had the backing of local Communists in the Pskov run-off. Zhirinovsky's party generally fared poorly in the regional elections. Only in the Marii-El presidential race did another LPDR candidate advance to a run-off election, but he was soundly beaten. The LDPR's gubernatorial nominee in Chita oblast finished a close third.

Election Patterns

Although no rules held true for all fifty elections, several patterns can be discerned.

• ***The campaigns were not a struggle for or against communism.*** Although in most regions the leading contenders were from the "party of power" and the Left opposition, the races did not play out as red-versus-white battles. During the presidential campaign, Yeltsin's supporters had warned that a Communist victory would lead directly to civil war, famine, and repression. But such warnings were not a potent weapon in the regional races, and few incumbents played the anti-Communist card, particularly after the strategy failed for the Leningrad incumbent Belyakov. On the contrary, observers commented on the similarities between some incumbents and their Communist-backed challengers, saying it was only by chance that they ended up on opposite sides of Russia's political divide.[35] Kazakov admitted after the election season ended that "it would be a big stretch to consider many of those [incumbents] who lost democrats and reformers."[36] The All-Russian Coordinating Council, set up to prevent Communist victories, soon faded into irrelevance. By December, Our Home Is Russia—its most influential member—had stopped attending the council's meetings.

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The gubernatorial elections marked the transformation of the "red belt" into the "protest belt," according to sociologist Dmitry Olshansky.[37] Where opposition candidates won, neither they nor the voters were motivated by ideology. During his successful campaign for governor of Altai krai, NPSR candidate Alexander Surikov stressed that he was for "a non-partisan administration" and in one interview even boasted that Yeltsin had asked him to make a toast at a May 1996 meeting of leading Siberian politicians.[38] That Surikov would choose to emphasize his friendly relations with Yeltsin is even more surprising in light of the fact that Zyuganov carried the krai in July by a wide margin, 55 percent to 39 percent. Moreover, new governors elected from the Left opposition camp were soon invited to consultations with Kremlin officials and most quickly found a common language with the federal authorities.

• ***The outcomes of the gubernatorial races were correlated with regional economic conditions.*** Not surprisingly, sitting governors did better in wealthier regions, where Yeltsin had also polled well in the presidential race. When incumbents in the more prosperous regions lost, it was to strong managers, not

to Left opposition candidates. The results of the elections in autonomous okrugs, several of which are resource-rich, illustrate this trend: incumbents won in five okrugs (Yamalo-Nenets, Khanty-Mansi, Komi-Permyak, Chukot, and Taimyr) and lost to strong managers in three (Ust-Orda Buryat, Koryak, and Nenets). The incumbent also won in Samara oblast; like Khanty-Mansi and Yamalo-Nenets, Samara is one of Russia's approximately ten "donor regions," so called because they contribute more to the federal budget than they receive from Moscow.

In contrast, NPSR candidates did better in poorer regions, where opposition sentiment had traditionally been strong. Where Zyuganov out-polled Yeltsin by a wide margin in the presidential race, candidates representing the Left opposition almost always won (Bryansk, Voronezh, Kursk, Kaluga, Stavropol, Altai, and Marii-El). A notable exception was Ulyanovsk, but there the incumbent Yuri Goryachev had maintained price controls on basic foodstuffs and implemented other policies that appealed to the left-leaning electorate.

Only in Chelyabinsk did voters elect a gubernatorial candidate from the Left opposition, despite having handed a lopsided victory to Yeltsin over Zyuganov (58 percent to 35 percent). Although the NPSR nominee, Duma Deputy Pyotr Sumin, had supported Zyuganov's presidential bid, he was not a KPRF member. He had won a seat in the State Duma from Chelyabinsk in 1995, running on the ticket of Lebed's Congress of Russian Communities. Furthermore, he had won a previous gubernatorial election in the oblast that was annulled in 1993.

• ***Run-offs were dangerous for incumbents.*** Electoral laws, which vary widely among Russian regions, also affected the outcomes, and incumbents tended to do better in regions where the law required only that the winner gain a plurality of votes rather than 50 percent plus one. Incumbent governors were elected with less than half of the vote in Sakhalin (39 percent), Chita (31 percent), and Ulyanovsk (43 percent), all regions with a single-round electoral system.

By contrast, incumbents often ran into trouble in regions where a run-off election was required if no candidate gained 50 percent in the first round, as opposition groups coalesced around the challenger. Five sitting governors lost run-off elections despite having led in the first round: they included incumbents in Kaliningrad (who gained 31 percent in the first round), Pskov (31 percent), Murmansk (32 percent), Nenets autonomous okrug (43 percent), and Volgograd (37 percent). In a relatively crowded field, governors were often able to gain more votes than any other candidate, but the advantages of incumbency were not always enough to deliver victory against one challenger representing the united opposition.

• ***Neither tenure in office nor media coverage was a decisive factor in the regional races.*** Contrary to the expectations of some in the Yeltsin camp, relatively recent presidential appointees did not do better than governors who had served for a long time. Of the fourteen governors who were appointed less than a year before they faced the voters, five were re-elected and seven were defeated (the elections in Amur oblast and Agin-Buryat autonomous okrug were annulled, and the incumbents remained in office pending repeat elections). Of the thirty-

three governors who had served for more than a year—many of them since autumn 1991—fifteen incumbents won and seventeen lost (the incumbent in Evenki autonomous okrug also remained in office after that election was annulled). Nevertheless, the administration's "cadre" strategy may have prevented a few opposition victories, since most of the new appointees were in traditional opposition strongholds.

Similarly, favorable coverage from both local and Moscow-based media was not enough to save the jobs of sitting governors. Virtually everywhere, the local press was dominated by supporters of the incumbent, and local electronic media showed a pro-incumbent bias as well, although coverage on independent television and radio stations was generally more balanced than on the state-run regional networks.[39] Chelyabinsk Governor Vadim Solovev started a new television station a few months before he was scheduled to face the voters.[40] A rival accused Krasnodar Governor Nikolai Yegorov of imposing an "information blockade" in the krai media.[41] Local radio stations in Stavropol played a song about Governor Pyotr Marchenko with the refrain, "Marchenko, Marchenko, my love, I will vote only for you."[42] All three lost by convincing margins to candidates who found little support among journalists.

However, effective use of the media may have swung some races, especially for a few strong managers whose campaigns were well funded. The winner in Nenets blanketed local television with advertisements during the two weeks before the run-off and doubled his percentage of the vote between the first and second rounds.[43] Gorbenko spent billions of rubles on his successful campaign, and some of the money went toward securing the support of the influential local newspaper *Kaliningradskaya Pravda*.[44]

• ***Most regional leaders were forced to play by the rules***. Attempts by incumbents to avoid the voters' judgment usually failed. The governor of Koryak autonomous okrug, Sergei Leushkin, declared emergency rule after losing to Bronevich, but he was forced to step down. Similarly, the Supreme Court of the Marii-El Republic overturned a decree issued by President Vladislav Zotin, who tried at the last moment to cancel the 22 December election. Despite repeated appeals on local television by Zotin's supporters, who advised voters not to participate in the election and did not inform them of the court ruling, turnout was high, at about 67 percent (twice as high as for legislative elections in Marii-El in October), and Zotin was trounced. Krasnodar Governor Nikolai Yegorov tried to use regional courts to postpone a repeat gubernatorial election in December when it became apparent that he would lose, but his court appeals were all rebuffed, and he eventually lost by a huge margin.

However, in Kemerovo oblast, the incumbent appears to have manipulated the system to stave off an opposition victory. In October, the gubernatorial election planned for December was postponed until sometime in 1997, ostensibly because Kemerovo lacked an electoral law. The absence of such legislation did not concern the authorities when the vote was first scheduled, and incumbent Mikhail Kislyuk almost certainly would have lost; the region periodically has experienced strikes by Kuzbass coal miners.

In addition, two governors who apparently lost by slim margins remain in office pending repeat elections scheduled for March 1997. The Amur election was annulled by an oblast court after the Communist-backed candidate won by only 189 votes. In Evenki autonomous okrug, where the final tally showed the incumbent losing to an independent candidate by sixty-five votes, the okrug electoral commission annulled the result. In both cases, voting irregularities were cited, but supporters of the challengers complained that the alleged violations were only a pretext to allow the incumbents to stay in power.[45]

Still, most gubernatorial elections were held on time, and most losing governors stepped down gracefully, indicating that basic democratic procedures are taking root in Russia. Politicians on both sides of Russia's major political divide found reasons to declare the 1996 regional elections a success: The Kremlin boasted that most new governors were willing to cooperate with the "party of power," while the opposition noted that the majority of sitting governors lost.

Implications

Whereas some Yeltsin allies had predicted in September that no more than five to ten incumbents would lose, twenty-four were defeated—an apparently poor outcome. However, officials in the presidential administration saw things differently. First Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Kazakov downplayed the setbacks for incumbents, saying that most successful challengers were experienced professionals who would cooperate with the Kremlin. He expressed concern about only eight new governors, whom he did not name.[46] His colleague Samoilov was more candid; he admitted that when the elections were scheduled, the Kremlin was expecting an economic upturn in autumn 1996, not a deepening payments crisis.[47] Furthermore, Yeltsin's expensive re-election campaign had not left enough money to help incumbents in regions with the worst wage and pension arrears.[48]

For his part, Yeltsin announced that he would "respect the choice of Russians" and cooperate with all elected governors. The most important outcome of the elections, he said, was that for the first time in history, the Russian people had chosen their own leaders.[49] Yeltsin failed to mention that he had long resisted giving up the power to hire and fire governors; his administration had sought to delay the regional elections several times since they were first proposed in late 1991.[50]

Meanwhile, Zyuganov and his supporters depicted the election results as a popular vote of no confidence in Yeltsin's policies, with the opposition winning around twenty-five governor's seats despite the machinations of the "party of power" (about a dozen governors are claimed by both the Kremlin and the Communists as tacit supporters, including all the strong managers). The opposition newspaper *Zavtra* argued that the incumbents won for the most part in sparsely populated regions, such as Sakhalin and Taimyr autonomous okrug, whereas sitting governors lost in more populous areas, such as Krasnodar, Altai, Stavropol, Leningrad, Voronezh, Chelyabinsk, Kursk, and Bryansk.[51] *Sovetskaya Rossiya* predicted that the opposition governors would implement a "new economic policy" that would eventually lead to Russia's revival.[52]

Despite their public statements, both the Kremlin and the opposition have reason to be concerned about the election results. Zyuganov's problems are more serious: Past experience has shown that it is extremely difficult for the opposition to hang on to governors elected under its banner. Vitaly Mukha was considered a "red governor" when he was elected in Novosibirsk in December 1995, but he soon rejected the Communist label and declared his neutrality during the 1996 presidential campaign. Federation Council Speaker Yegor Stroev, who himself was considered sympathetic to the opposition when he was elected in Orel in 1993, said that all governors become moderate after they are in office, "no matter what color they were at the time of the election." He added, "It's impossible to build communism in one region, I can say this from my own experience."[53]

Furthermore, because gubernatorial candidates representing the Left opposition were elected primarily in poor regions, they will be forced to cooperate with Moscow, which still holds the purse strings. Already this year, some new governors elected with backing from the NPSR have distanced themselves from the Left bloc after being elected, most conspicuously Rutskoi. He pledged to focus on local economic concerns, suspended his membership in the NPSR, and even had a cordial meeting with Presidential Chief of Staff Chubais, who is despised in the opposition camp (Rutskoi's quick turnaround raised suspicions that he had struck a deal with the authorities in order to obtain the Supreme Court decision allowing him to contest the Kursk election).

Yet the new landscape has pitfalls for the Kremlin as well. Elected governors cannot be removed by presidential decree and thus owe less allegiance to Yeltsin than their predecessors. In the summer of 1996, when an energy crisis and labor unrest swept Primorsky krai, the presidential administration regretted not having the authority to fire Governor Yevgeny Nazdratenko, who was elected in December 1995 with the Kremlin's backing.

Although he repeatedly claimed at press conferences that pro-Yeltsin candidates were routing the opposition in the regional elections, Kazakov complained in November that after the elections, governors "will not be controlled by the president, government, local legislatures, or anyone at all. I try hard to find a single positive element in the very idea of these elections and I can't."[54] He remarked after the election season was over that, "in current Russian conditions, it was a mistake to hold governor's elections . . . we were in a bit of a hurry."[55] Notably, the virtually unchecked powers of regional leaders did not concern the administration when most governors were appointed by Yeltsin.

The Kremlin has more at stake than maintaining its influence over how the regions are governed. Each of the new governors also became, ex officio, a member of the Federation Council, and a more assertive upper house of Parliament could cause problems for Yeltsin.[56] Although the balance of power in Russia is heavily weighted toward the president, the Constitution grants the Federation Council significant powers, among them the authority to do all of the following:

- approve changes in borders between federation subjects
- approve presidential decrees on introducing martial law or declaring a state of emergency

• decide questions on deploying the armed forces of the Russian Federation outside Russian territory

• set the date of presidential elections

• confirm presidential nominees for the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court

• and remove the president from his post (after a complicated impeachment procedure)

In addition, while most laws passed by the Duma are automatically forwarded to the president if the council does not consider them within fourteen days, certain categories of laws must be approved by the council before they are sent to the president, among them laws concerning

• the federal budget,

• federal taxes and collections,

• financial, currency, credit, or customs regulations, and monetary emissions,

• ratification or denunciation of international treaties,

• the status and defense of Russian Federation borders, and

• declarations of war and peace.

In 1996, the upper house often blocked legislation passed by the State Duma, where left-wing deputies have a working majority. However, given Russia's acute social and economic problems, relations between the federal and regional authorities are likely to be more strained in the coming year, and the Federation Council may become less compliant with the Kremlin's wishes. The strong managers and at least ten of the incumbents re-elected in 1996 can now be considered a "third force" in the council, led by Moscow Mayor Luzhkov.[57] This group includes the heads of some comparatively wealthy republics as well as the governors of the donor regions.[58] Although they are resource rich, republics such as Tatarstan and Sakha (Yakutiya) are not counted as donors because they contribute little to the federal budget, thanks to power-sharing agreements signed with federal authorities. The "third force" could cause far more problems for the government and administration than the Communist governors. Aware of this possibility, Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Babichev has promised that cabinet ministers will be more responsive to governors in the coming year. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin will meet with two or three governors a week and with the entire Federation Council every three months, Babichev said.[59] In addition, Chubais and Chernomyrdin may make some policy concessions to the governors, such as lowering energy prices and the Central Bank's interest rates.[60]

Even more threatening from the administration's point of view, the upper house may now be ready to approve changes in Russia's constitutional structure, an idea that seemed unthinkable just a few months ago. The Left opposition has long advocated changing the Constitution, and Zyuganov's allies claim to have drafted twelve amendments to alter the balance of power. In the past, such amendments were believed to have no chance of being passed by the Federation Council. But in January, Stroev became the first loyal Yeltsin ally to call for constitutional amendments to strengthen the legislature. In particular, he said that the

upper house should have a voice in naming the "power ministers" (defense, interior, security services).[61]

Stroev's comments drew criticism from the president's camp, but he stood his ground and again advocated constitutional changes at the Federation Council's first 1997 session. When Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiev, a consistent supporter of Yeltsin since 1994, also advocated amendments to increase the legislature's authority, it appeared that the ground had shifted in the upper house. Alluding to the fact that the Constitution was passed by controversial referendum in December 1993, two months after the shelling of the White House, Shaimiev explained, "We all know how [the Constitution] was prepared, in what circumstances it was adopted."[62] He went further than Stroev, calling for constitutional amendments to expand the rights of Russian regions with respect to the center.[63]

Of course, the calls for reducing presidential power are not merely a response to the gubernatorial elections; they were no doubt prompted by Yeltsin's continuing illness and the uneasiness surrounding his potential successor. There is no guarantee that new supporters of constitutional reform could muster the three-fourths majority required to approve constitutional amendments in the upper house. Still, the debate over constitutional amendments indicates that the Kremlin can no longer take the support of the upper house for granted. Several options for removing elected governors are being mooted in the presidential administration,[64] and some Kremlin officials have called for passing a law to establish procedures by which federal authorities could remove regional elected officials, but such a law would never be passed by the Federation Council. Although the elected governors are likely to cooperate with Moscow more often than not, they will also be more emboldened to stand up for regional interests than their predecessors, who could be removed with a stroke of Yeltsin's pen.

NOTES

1. See also Robert Orttung, "Yeltsin Administration Prepares for Local Elections," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:3, 11 September 1996.

2. The image-makers' efforts were occasionally counterproductive. See interview with Andrei Shutov, "V Kremle ponyali, chto ideologiya—ne glavnoe," *Kommersant-Daily*, 16 November 1996, 1, 3; also Lev Sigal, "Slugi dyavola svalili gubernatora," *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 9–15 January 1997, 8.

3. See also Laura Belin, "The All-Russian Coordinating Council: Another Umbrella Anti-Communist Movement," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:3, 11 September 1996.

4. Interview with Sergei Filatov, "Kampaniya novaya—zadacha prezhnyaya," *Kultura,* 7 September 1996, 1, 3.

5. From Yuri Vlasov's appeal to voters, "Ne vini konya, vini dorogu," *Prizyv* (Vladimir), 29 November 1996, 1.

6. See interview with Ishaev, "Dalnii Vostok ot nas nedalek," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta,* 5 December 1996, 2; also "Loyalnost Kremlyu kak formula uspekha," *Moskovskie Novosti,* 22–29 December 1996, 6.

7. For more on the strategy adopted by KPRF and NPSR leaders, see Laura Belin, "The Opposition's Regional Election Strategy: Winning Isn't Everything," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:4, 18 September 1996.

8. See interview published as "Gennady Zyuganov i Nikolai Ryzhkov: vtoraya popytka oppozitsii stat obedinennoi," *Novaya Sibir,* 9 August 1996, 2.

9. Interview with Gennady Zyuganov, "Lukavaya sueta na krayu propasti," *Sovetskaya Rossiya,* 14 September 1996, 1–2.

10. Oleg Shenkarev, "Lodkin: kommunist ili karerist?" *Bryanskie Izvestiya*, 15 November 1996, 1.

11. Labels used here refer to the candidates' primary affiliation. In some regions, NPSR candidates were also backed by Lebed (Chelyabinsk). In addition, the NPSR occasionally backed "strong managers" in regions where it did not field a viable candidate (Leningrad, Magadan).

12. For more on the Bryansk race, see Anna Paretskaya, "Bryansk's Choice: Two Former Governors Challenge Incumbent for Their Old Job," and Penny Morvant, "Bryansk's Embattled Economy," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:14, 27 November 1996.

13. Anatoly Belozertsev, "Petr Sumin i ego komanda," *Pravda*, 5 October 1996, 1.

14. See also Laura Belin, "Yeltsin Ally Shumeiko Steers His Own Course in Regional Elections," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:13, 20 November 1996.

15. Gleb Cherkasov and Vladimir Shpak, "Regionalnye vybory: pobedu prazdnuyut vse," *Segodnya*, 26 December 1996, 2.

16. See also Robert Orttung, "Why Did Belyakov Lose in Leningrad Oblast?" *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:6, 2 October 1996.

17. Igor Arkhipov, "Novogo gubernatora podderzhali krasnye, belye i zelenye," *Kommersant-Daily*, 1 October 1996, 1, 3.

18. Elvi Usmanova, "Pobedil imidzh khozyaistvennika," *Delovoi mir*, 4–9 October 1996, 2.

19. Irina Nagornykh, "U 'partii vlatst'—dvukhnedelnyi antrakt," *Segodnya*, 30 October 1996, 2.

20. For more on the Kaliningrad race, see Robert Orttung, "Kaliningrad Faces Runoff Between Two Pragmatists," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:7, 9 October 1996.

21. Gleb Cherkasov, "Kreml mozhet 'upustit' eshche odin region," *Segodnya*, 17 October 1996, 2.

22. Gleb Cherkasov, "Shestogo oktyabrya Kaliningadskaya oblast izberet sebe vsyu mestnuyu vlast," *Segodnya*, 20 September 1996, 3.

23. Nikolai Lashkevich, Besik Urigashvili, "Gubernskie igry v zapadnom anklave s elementami detektiva, komedii i melodramy," *Izvestiya*, 3 October 1996, 4.

24. Natalya Arkhangelskaya, "Ocherednaya bitva za Kenigsberg," *Kommersant-Daily*, 27 September 1996, 3.

25. Andrei Ratmanov, "Gubernator protiv deputata," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11 October 1996, 2.

26. RIA-Novosti, 10 October 1996.

27. Irina Dronova, "Priblizhayutsya vybory v Koyakskom AO," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta,* 12 November 1996, 3

28. RIA-Novosti, 13 November 1996.

29. ITAR-TASS, 18 November 1996.

30. Radio Rossii, "Informatsionno-analiticheskaya programma," 15 November 1996.

31. ITAR-TASS, 13 December 1996.

32. Valery Kornev, "V vyborakh v Volgograde uchastvuet Makiavelli," *Izvestiya*, 20 December 1996, 2.

33. L. Kolesnikova, "Ya uzhe daleko ne tot, kem byl tri goda nazad," *Murmanskii Vestnik*, 20 September 1996, 1.

34. See also Scott Parrish, "Pskov Elects First LDPR Governor," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:11, 6 November 1996.

35. See discussion of Rostov race in Yuri Bespalov, Alexander Kalinin, Valery Konovalov, "Osen na Donu mozhet stat krasnoi," *Izvestiya*, 12 September 1996, 4.

36. Interview with Alexander Kazakov, "Chtob tebya vybrali," *Rossiiskie Vesti*, 22 January 1997, 1–2.

37. Dmitry Olshansky, "'Rozhdestvenskie podarki' iz regionov," Delovoi mir, 18

December 1996, 1.

38. Surikov's comments appeared in the local newspaper Svet Oktyabrya, as quoted in Leonid Smirnyagin, "V gubernatorskikh vyborakh pobezhdaet rossiiskii izbiratel," *Rossiiskie Vesti*, 3 December 1996, 1–2.

39. Some Russian regions with particularly strong independent radio and television stations, such as Sverdlovsk and Novosibirsk oblasts, elected their governors in 1995.

40. German Galkin, "Dlya pobey nuzhen 'Fokus,'" *Kommersant-Daily*, 19 September 1996, 3

41. Interview with gubernatorial candidate Yevgeny Kharitonov, Radio Mayak, 18 October 1996.

42. Viktor Sharov, Gleb Cherkasov, Irina Nagornykh, Segodnya, 26 October 1996, 2; see also Laura Belin, "Incumbent Faces Difficult Test in Stavropol," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:9, 23 October 1996.

43. Dmitry Kamyshev, "'Akula kapitalizma' vsplyla u beregov Ledovitogo okeana," *Kommersant-Daily*, 15 December 1996, 3.

44. Lashkevich and Urigashvili, see note 23 above.

45. A public appeal from Anatoly Belonogov, the apparent winner in Amur, was published in *Amurskaya Pravda*, 7 December 1996, 4. For a discussion of the Evenk case, see Nikolai Grishanov, "Vybory po-Evenkiiski," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 January 1997, 2.

46. NTV, "Segodnya," 23 December 1996.

47. Interview with Sergei Samoilov published as Gleb Cherkasov, "Kreml ne zhdet bolshikh nepriyatnostei ot Senata," *Segodnya*, 27 December 1996, 2.

48. Cherkasov and Shpak, "Regionalnye vybory."

49. ITAR-TASS, 25 December 1996.

50. See Anna Paretskaya, "Governors: From Presidential Appointment to Popular Elections," *OMRI Russian Regional Report* 1:1, 28 August 1996; and Anna Paretskaya, "Regional Governors Could Offset the `Red Duma,'" *Transition* 2:4, 23 February 1996, 34–35, 64.

51. Nikolai Anisin, "Mandat na chistku," *Zavtra* 53 (December 1996): 1.

52. Oleg Cherkovets, "`Krasnyi poyas' zamknul Moskvu," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 26 December 1996, 3.

53. Russian Public Television, "Vremya," 23 December 1996.

54. Reuters, 4 November 1996.

55. Interview with Alexander Kazakov, "Chtob tebya vybrali," *Rossiiskie vesti*, 22 January 1997, 1–2.

56. For background on the role of the upper house, see Laura Belin, "The Federation Council: The Prize at Stake," *OMRI Russian Regional Report*, 1:2, 4 September 1996.

57. Cherkasov and Shpak, "Regionalnye vybory."

58. Vladimir Todres, "Marsh Gubernatorov," *Itogi,* 21 January 1997.

59. Russian Television, "Vesti," 25 December 1996.

60. Veronika Kutsyllo, "Sovet Federatsii krasnet ne sobiraetsya," *Kommersant-Daily,* 25 December 1996, 3.

61. Anna Ostapchuk, "Yegor Stroev: `President pervym skazal, chto nuzhno sovershenstvovat konstitutsiyu,'" *Moskovskie Novosti*, 19–26 January 1997, 2.

62. Shaimiev made these remarks in an interview published in *Respublika Tatarstan*, as quoted by ITAR-TASS, 24 January 1997.

63. RIA-Novosti, 5 February 1997.

64. Dmitry Pinsker, "Pryanik, knut ili sotrudnichestvo," *Itogi*, 28 January 1997.

p.183
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