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Public Opinion and the 1996 Elections in Russia: Nostalgic and Statist, Yet Pro-Market and Pro-Yeltsin

David S. Mason

Butler University, dmason@butler.edu

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Public Opinion and the 1996 Elections in Russia: Nostalgic and Statist, Yet Pro-Market and Pro-Yeltsin

David S. Mason and Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson

Introduction

Between 1991 and 1996 Russia underwent a precipitous economic and social decline with decreases in production, gross national product, and wages, and increases in inequality, crime, and corruption. Most people experienced a decline in their standard of living, and many fondly recalled the security and stability of the communist era. Nevertheless, in the two main cases when the Russian electorate was confronted with a choice of directions in economic policy—the referendum of 1993 and the presidential elections of 1996—the majority chose reform. Writing about Boris Yeltsin’s surprising victory in the 1996 presidential elections, a *Pravda* commentator mused: “Logically, he should have lost, since he was unable to fully solve any of the problems that have piled up: the stagnation of production, the impoverishment of a majority of the people, growing unemployment, the chronic nonpayment of wages, the decline in science, culture and education, the continuing conflict in Chechnya, etc. Nevertheless, Yeltsin received a majority of the electorate’s votes.”¹ We will explore this apparent paradox using public opinion data from two large-scale surveys of popular perceptions concerning social, economic, and political justice that were conducted in Russia in 1991 and 1996 as part of the International Social Justice Project.² In this project, nationally repre-

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1. Boris Slavin in *Pravda*, 9 July 1996, 1–2; translated in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 48, no. 27 (31 July 1996): 8–9.

2. The International Social Justice Project is an international collaborative project that conducted a common survey on attitudes concerning justice using nationally representative samples in thirteen countries in east and west in 1991, and then replicated that survey in 1996 in Russia, Estonia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, and the Czech Republic. An analysis of the 1991 survey can be found in James R. Kluegel, David S. Mason, and Bernd Wegener, eds., *Social Justice and Political Change: Public Opinion in Capitalist and Post-Communist States* (New York, 1995). Principal investigators in the 1996 replication project are Ludmila Khakhulina and Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson (Russia); Andrus Saar (Estonia); Antal Orkeny (Hungary); Alexander Stoyanov (Bulgaria); Bernd Wegener (Germany); Petr Mateju (Czech Republic); and David Mason and James Kluegel (United States). Funding for the project was provided *Slavic Review* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997)

sentative samples of more than 1,500 respondents were interviewed in each of these two years to ascertain their attitudes and beliefs about social, political, and economic justice. The 1996 survey was conducted in the first two weeks of June, just before the first round of the presidential elections. It was an almost identical replication of the 1991 one: 80 percent of the questions were from the earlier survey; the remaining 20 percent were new questions.

We will look at a small number of questions from that survey, comparing responses from 1996 to those of 1991 and paying particular attention to the respondents' sense of their own social and economic status, their retrospective assessments of the past, their attitudes toward the fairness of the new economic and social system, in comparison to the old system. We will also discuss the implications of these attitudes for political behavior, and especially for their support of Yeltsin, of Communist Party candidate Gennadii Ziuganov, and of other presidential candidates in the elections in the summer of 1996.

The presidential elections were held in two rounds on 17 June and 3 July 1996. At the beginning of that year, polls showed Yeltsin winning only about 8 percent of the vote, with Ziuganov, Grigorii Iavlinskii, Aleksandr Lebed', and Vladimir Zhirinovskii all receiving more support.³ Over the course of the spring and summer, though, Yeltsin's standing improved dramatically and in the first round of voting in June, he won 35 percent of the vote, compared to Ziuganov's 32 percent. In the July runoff, Yeltsin won almost 54 percent of the vote, compared to Ziuganov's 40 percent. In the face of serious economic decline and widespread political apathy and antipathy, this was a stunning victory for Yeltsin.

Many analysts attributed Yeltsin's victory to his effective use of the media, his announcement about the Chechen peace talks, or his promises of government handouts to various groups and regions.⁴ Although

by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research and by the Open Society Institute. Further information on the International Social Justice Project can be found at the project's website: www.Butler.edu/ISJP.

The Russian surveys were conducted by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM), and the principal investigators were Ludmila Khakhulina and Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson. The 1996 survey was conducted from 3 to 15 June 1996 in face-to-face interviews of 1,585 respondents selected by a three-stage regionalized stratified route sample of Russia's population 18 years and older. The 1991 survey, conducted from 20 October to 25 November 1991, employed a similar sample and had 1,734 respondents.

3. President Boris Yeltsin was considered a centrist reformer; Gennadii Ziuganov was the leader of the Russian Communist Party and the candidate of a coalition of leftist parties; Grigorii Iavlinskii was a pro-market economist; the ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskii and his party, the Liberal Democratic Party, had done well in the 1993 elections; and retired General Aleksandr Lebed' was a nationalist and a hero of the Afghan war.

4. See, for example, Boris Kagarlitsky, "Russia Chooses—and Loses," *Current History* 95, no. 603 (October 1996): 305–10; Erik Depoy, "Boris Yeltsin and the 1996 Russian Presidential Election," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 1140–63; and Daniel Treisman, "Why Yeltsin Won," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (September–October 1996): 64–77.

these may have played a role, it is apparent from the opinion data that the support for Yeltsin was more deep-seated than that, being rooted in economic interests and a belief in the inevitability of the market by a significant part of the electorate. And to the extent that Yeltsin "bought" the elections with government largess, this was not simply a slick maneuver, but a response to solid support for a continuing strong governmental role in the economy and society.

Real and Perceived Decline

The government's electoral victory was remarkable in the face of the dramatic economic and social declines during the Yeltsin years. In both western democratic states and the postcommunist states of eastern Europe, sitting governments are often punished for poor economic performance. Eastern Europe, in particular, had seen electoral "left turns" in Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, and in the Russian parliamentary elections of December 1995, the Communist Party garnered twice as many votes (22 percent of the total) as any other.

Russia's long economic slide after 1989 seemed destined to play a role in the 1996 elections as well. Russia's gross domestic product dropped by almost half from 1989 to 1994, while annual inflation averaged 230 percent.⁵ Real wages declined by half from 1991 to 1996. Unemployment rose steadily, reaching 8.4 percent of the workforce (using International Labor Organization methodology) in early 1996.⁶ Almost a quarter of the population was living below the poverty line, while the number of wealthy continued growing, sharply increasing the rich-poor gap.⁷

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that most Russians were gloomy about the state of the country, the economy, and their own economic situations. When asked about their household incomes in our June 1996 survey, almost two-thirds responded that they had "much less" than they needed.⁸ When asked how satisfied they were with their standard of living, on a seven-point scale, 26 percent said they were "completely dissatisfied," compared to 21 percent in that category in the 1991 survey. With respect to their overall financial situation, 55 percent thought they were worse off than in 1991. When asked in 1996 to place themselves on a ten-point scale of "social standing" for both

5. *Transition: The Newsletter about Reforming Economies* (World Bank), September–October 1995 and April 1997.

6. *OMRI Daily Report*, 19 February 1996 (distributed by e-mail).

7. The income ratio between the richest 10 percent of the population and the poorest 10 percent jumped from 4.5 in 1992 to 13.4 in 1995. See N. K. Chandra, "Dimensions of Social and Economic Crisis in Russia Today," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 May 1996, 1145.

8. In a January 1996 survey conducted in Russia by Richard Rose, over half of the population said that they had sometimes or often had to do without both food and clothing over the past twelve months. "The Views of Rank and File Russians," *American Enterprise* 7, no. 4 (July–August 1996): 57.

1991 and 1996, about half placed themselves lower on the scale for 1996 than for 1991.

Our 1996 survey asked a number of “retrospective” questions, that is, inquiring how respondents remembered things in 1991. This enabled us to compare the remembered responses of the 1996 sample with the actual ones given by 1991 respondents. There is a clear pattern, as one might expect, of the 1996 respondents remembering 1991 much more fondly than their 1991 counterparts experienced it at the time. We mentioned above the perceptions of social standing on the ten-point scale, with 1 being low and 10 high. In the 1991 survey, the average score on this scale was 4.02. In the 1996 survey, the average score was 4.08—essentially the same as 1991. But when we asked respondents in the 1996 survey where they were on the scale in 1991, *that* average was 5.06, considerably higher than both their current standing and the real average reported in 1991. So even though there were no big changes in social standing over that five-year period, most people (50 percent) *felt* that they had lost ground, while only 18 percent felt they had gained.⁹

A similar tendency was at work in the way Russians reported satisfaction with various spheres of their lives. In both 1991 and 1996 we asked them to indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with different things in their lives, using a seven-point scale from completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied. Among others, we asked about the political system and about the respondent’s job, standard of living, and life as a whole. In 1996 we also asked people about their satisfaction “thinking back to early 1991.” We also added a question on the current market economy (for 1996) and on the planned economy (for 1991). As is evident from table 1, satisfaction levels in 1996 were not all that different from those expressed in 1991, with a slight increase for the political system and slight decreases for satisfaction with jobs, standard of living, and overall life. But in 1996, people *remembered* being much more satisfied in 1991 than they were currently. There is, thus, a kind of halo effect around the “old days,” even for the political system.

Of course, yearning for the “good old days” is not unique to the postcommunist states. Studies in the United States, for example, have found that most people perceive the world as having been better in the past¹⁰ and that nostalgia *always* occurs “in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties or uncertainties.”¹¹ As one might expect, older people are particularly likely to be nostalgic. In a stable, insti-

9. This same phenomenon was true in Bulgaria, Estonia, and Hungary, other countries involved in the International Social Justice Project replication. See David Mason, Antal Orkeny, and Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson, “Increasingly Fond Memories of a Grim Past,” *Transition: Events and Issues in the Former Soviet Union and East-Central and Southeastern Europe* (OMRI) 3, no. 5 (21 March 1997): 15–19.

10. See, for example, Krystine Irene Batcho, “Nostalgia: A Psychological Perspective,” *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 80 (1995): 131–43; and *American Demographics* 18, no. 4 (April 1996): 35.

11. Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York, 1979), 34.

Table 1
Satisfaction with Various Spheres of Life, Current and
Retrospective, 1991 and 1996
(Mean values on seven-point scale;
1 = completely dissatisfied; 7 = completely satisfied)

Spheres	1991	1996 Retrospect of 1991	1996
Political system	2.41	4.22	3.00
Job	4.46	5.21	4.29
Standard of living	3.01	4.81	2.92
Current economy	not asked	4.23	2.76
Life as whole	3.70	4.88	3.37

tutionalized system like the United States, though, nostalgia per se is not likely to have a significant political impact. In Russia, where the economic and political systems are still fluid, and where nostalgia is focused on a rejected ideological system, it can become a highly charged political issue.

The increasing pessimism and negativism about the economy and living standards mimicked, and perhaps caused, a further decline in trust in the government and political institutions in Russia. Though the old communist political system was dismantled and largely replaced with democratic institutions and processes between 1991 and 1996, there was a sharp drop-off in the number of Russians agreeing that the government could be trusted "to do what is right" and that the government is "run for the benefit of all the people" (see table 2). The 1991 figures for trust in government in Russia were not too dif-

Table 2
Trust in Government among Russians, 1991 and 1996
(in percentages)

	How often does government do what is right?		How often is government run for benefit of all?	
	1991	1996	1991	1996
Very often	3.6	1.4	1.6	0.9
Often	22.1	8.5	21.2	4.7
Sometimes	37.4	38.9	36.4	32.9
Rarely	23.6	39.1	31.5	44.2
Never	13.4	12.1	9.3	17.3
<i>N</i>	1458	1364	1452	1395

Questionnaire items: How much of the time do you think you can trust the federal government in Russia to do what is right? How much of the time do you think the federal government in Russia is run for the benefit of all the people? (Don't knows are excluded from the figures in the table.)

Table 3
Winners and Losers in the Transition
(in percentages)

Definitely won	3.3
Rather won than lost	10.4
Neither won nor lost	28.7
Rather lost than won	24.1
Definitely lost	23.2
Don't know	10.4

Questionnaire item: Do you think that you personally have won or lost from the ongoing social transformation?

ferent from those in the western countries in our 1991 survey, including Britain, Japan, and West Germany. (The United States, despite the notion that it is a country of people cynical about their government, had the most positive scores on these two questions of any of the thirteen countries in the sample.) But by 1996, the Russians were more negative about government than any of the thirteen countries in our 1991 sample, east or west; and more negative than all the other post-communist states in our 1996 sample (except Bulgaria, which was in the midst of its own economic and political crisis at the time).

These results complement those of other studies, including Richard Rose's periodic surveys in Russia where people are asked to compare the present economic and political systems with the communist era ones. In early 1996, Russians were still *much* more positive than negative (59 percent to 22 percent) about "Russia's pre-perestroika political system" and even more positive about the previous economic system (72 percent positive to 14 percent negative). As one would expect, older people were more positive about the old system than were younger people, but even among the youngest group (from 18 to 29 years old), a majority gave positive ratings to both the economic and the political systems of the pre-perestroika era.¹² As will be discussed, this reflects the substantial personal economic problems that most Russians faced during the transition process.

Overall, very few people experienced the transitional period in a positive way in personal terms. When we asked respondents if they had "personally won or lost from the ongoing social transformation," only about 15 percent felt that they were "winners," while almost half thought that they had lost (see table 3). As we will see, this overall sense of one's experience during the transition has a great deal of influence on one's perception of both the past and the present economic and political systems, and on one's voting behavior in the 1996 elections. But it will also become clear that many people voted for Yeltsin *in spite of* their own negative economic experiences of the past.

12. "The Views of Rank and File Russians," 57.

Table 4
Support for a Strong Role for the Government
(percentage of respondents agreeing “strongly” or “somewhat”)

	U.K. 1991	Russia	
		1991	1996
The government should provide a job for everyone who wants one.	66.9	95.9	94.6
The government should guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living.	82.9	88.0	93.1
The government should place an upper limit on the amount of money any one person can make.	38.6	34.2	42.6

Raise the Floor and the Ceiling

Russians' experience with the transition from plan to market has given them a curious combination of attitudes: they basically accept the idea of the transition to the market, welcome the opportunities that the market provides, and tolerate the wealth and inequality that it generates; but they also hold on to their statist and egalitarian views that call for the government to protect the poor and provide a social safety net. The contrast between these “ceiling” and “floor” issues are revealed in a battery of questions we asked in both 1991 and 1996 about the role of the government: whether the government should provide everyone with a minimum standard of living; provide a job for everyone who wants one; and place an upper limit on the amount of money any one person can make. For purposes of comparison, we have included the figures for the United Kingdom from the 1991 survey.

As is evident from table 4, Russians were almost unanimous in supporting government economic “floors” in both 1991 and 1996.¹³ It was clear from our 1991 survey, however, that this was not just a statism bred of experience under communism, since most people in the capitalist states also supported these principles.¹⁴ On the issue of state-provided jobs, however, the Russians were far more supportive than

13. High levels of support for a strong governmental role in social welfare have been found in many other surveys as well, including James L. Gibson, “Political and Economic Markets,” *Journal of Politics* 58, no. 4 (November 1996): 954–84; and Arthur H. Miller, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli, “Understanding Political Change in Post-Soviet Societies: A Further Commentary on Finifter and Mickiewicz,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 1 (March 1996): 153–66. Another study found “a massive shift away from individualism” (toward statism) in Russia between 1989 and 1995. Robert J. Brym, “Reevaluating Mass Support for Political and Economic Change in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 5 (1996): 751–66.

14. See, for example, James R. Kluegel and Masaru Miyano, “Justice Beliefs and Support for the Welfare State in Advanced Capitalism,” in Kluegel, Mason, and Wegener, eds., *Social Justice and Political Change*, 81–108.

any other country in the sample in 1991, and remained so in 1996. The increased support for a minimum standard of living and the continued high support for state-provided jobs was due in part, no doubt, to the continuing escalation of unemployment, unpaid wages, and poverty that was plaguing Russia at the time.¹⁵

On the issue of ceilings, however, Russians were much less egalitarian, in both 1991 and 1996, and their opinions were not much different from those in democratic capitalist states such as Britain. On other questions in our survey, too, one sees a reluctance on the part of Russians to limit the accumulation of wealth. Four-fifths or more of the sample agreed that "people are entitled to keep what they have earned, even if this means some people will be wealthier than others" (84.2 percent); that people who work hard deserve to earn more than those who do not (93.1 percent); and that people are entitled to pass on their wealth to their children (95.8 percent). All of these figures are slightly lower than they were in the 1991 survey—probably a reaction to the widespread tales of corruption and ostentatious wealth—but still they remained remarkably high.

Do Russians prefer flexible ceilings on wealth and incomes in their *own* self-interest, or for the good of the economy and the society? It could be, for example, that the support for high floors and ceilings are both bred of self-interest—wanting the assurance of government support in case of need, but also wanting to leave open the possibility and the opportunity for the personal accumulation of wealth. But these sentiments could also be based on some notion of what is good for the society as a whole—that minimums will protect the poor, and high ceilings will create incentives that will drive economic growth. The "good of society" issue is tapped by a proposition we posed in both 1991 and 1996: "It is all right if businessmen make good profits because everyone benefits in the end." In 1991, 72 percent of our respondents agreed with this statement; in 1996 only 41 percent did (the same percentage disagreed).

On this question, as with many others, it seems that the early enthusiasm for capitalism, and especially for profits, had diminished somewhat five years into the transition. It would be too much to say, however, that Russians were *opposed* to business profits; rather their orientation was more ambivalent. One could argue, in fact, that the 1996 responses were more sensible and realistic than the overwhelming support for business profits in 1991—support much higher than that of any of the *capitalist* countries in our sample in that year. But Russians did appear to favor the high ceilings primarily for the op-

15. A 1995 survey of elites and masses in Russia found *much* higher levels of support for state welfare policies among the masses than among the elites. Arthur H. Miller, Regan Checchio, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli, "Comparing Mass and Elite Conceptions of Social Justice in Post-Soviet Societies," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, November 1996.

Table 5
Support for Floors and Ceilings
by Winners and Losers in the Transition
(percentage of respondents agreeing “strongly” or “somewhat”)

	Government standard of living	Government provide jobs	Government limit earnings	Business profits ok	Keep what you earn
Definitely won	75.0	83.3	22.3	67.3	92.7
Rather won	89.2	90.8	23.5	70.8	92.0
Neither	93.8	95.4	37.6	47.5	87.8
Rather lost	94.3	96.8	47.9	35.7	84.6
Definitely lost	97.6	97.9	56.7	24.6	76.9

Questionnaire items: The government should guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living; the government should provide a job for everyone who wants one; the government should place an upper limit on the amount of money any one person can make; it is all right if businessmen make good profits because everyone benefits in the end; people are entitled to keep what they have earned even if this means some people will be wealthier than others.

portunities they provided for themselves and ordinary people rather than for the potential benefit they might provide to the economy as a whole.

One sees support for this proposition in table 5, which shows the level of support for high floors and ceilings broken down by winners and losers. As one might expect, the winners are more likely to favor high ceilings, and less likely to favor floors, than are the losers from the transition. But there are interesting variations on this theme. First of all, there are relatively minor differences between winners and losers on the issues of government provision of jobs and a minimal standard of living. As we saw earlier, these propositions remain virtually universal in Russia. There are much bigger differences between winners and losers on the issue of ceilings, with winners two to three times more likely to think business profits benefit all and to oppose government limits on wealth.¹⁶ The “keep-earn” question, on whether people should be able to keep what they earn, is different from the other two ceilings questions, however. Even the losers overwhelmingly support this proposition. This suggests again that Russians support the high ceilings, not so much because they think the economy will benefit, but because they think *they themselves* will benefit. While business wealth

16. The chi square statistic shows a statistically significant relationship (at the .001 level) between the winners/losers question and each of the five attitudinal questions in table 5, though the chi square is much larger on the two ceilings questions (130 for “government should place an upper limit on earnings” and 222 for “all right if businessmen make good profits”) than for the two government provisions questions (97 for “government should guarantee a minimum standard of living” and 91 for “government should provide jobs”); 16 degrees of freedom for each.

does not really benefit society, and the government should place limits on what *other* people can make, people (that is, me) should be able to keep what they have *earned*.

This tendency, to favor limits on the wealth of others, but to be opposed to restrictions on one's own possibilities, is reflected in a similar discrepancy in Russians' views of the country's future as opposed to their own futures. When asked whether the percentage of poor people will increase or decrease over the next five years (asked in both 1991 and 1996), the overwhelming majority (64 percent in 1996; 89 percent in 1991) thinks that the percentage of poor will increase. But only about 14 percent think that their *own* financial situation will deteriorate over the next five years. Somewhat more, in fact, think their own situation will improve. So there does seem to be a sense of individual opportunity and possibility, even if Russians' sense of the overall situation and prospects for the country are not very good.

Support for Socialism and Capitalism

This mix of attitudes about wealth, profits, inequality, and the role of the state leads Russians to support, in a curious way, both socialism and the market.¹⁷ As is evident from table 6, about two-thirds of the samples in both years agreed that "a free market economy is essential for our economic development" while only about a fifth opposed that proposition. At the same time, about a third of the population remains favorably disposed toward socialism and only another third is against it. Support for the market declined somewhat from 1991 to 1996, and support for socialism increased somewhat, but still more people support the market than socialism.¹⁸ Cross-tabulations of these variables show that in both 1991 and 1996, about a third of those favorably inclined to socialism also favored the market and only about a third of those favoring socialism disagreed with the development of a free market economy.

17. When asked in another 1994 survey about their favored type of government and economy, the most frequent response from Russians (39.4 percent of the total) was "a government with a strong state sector and wide private opportunities for the citizen." See M. K. Gorshkov, A. Iu. Chepurensko, and F. E. Sheregi, eds., *Rossiiia v zerkale reform: Khrestomatiia po sotsiologii sovremennogo rossiiskogo obshchestva* (Moscow, 1995), 26.

18. Rose's 1996 Russia survey, mentioned above, also found more people supporting continuing market reforms (30 percent) than halting them, even though many more people expressed positive views of the communist-era economic system than of the current one. Another All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Research survey in 1997 found similar results, with Russians one and a half times more likely to favor market reforms than oppose them, but by a similar ratio more dissatisfied than satisfied with the development of the market economy thus far. Aleksandr Golov, "Reputatsiia rinochnoi ekonomiki u rossiyan," *Economic and Social Change: The Monitoring of Public Opinion* 3 (May-June 1997): 31-33. And an earlier survey found "broad support" for the liberalizing economic reforms of 1991. Lynn D. Nelson, Lilia V. Babaeva, and Rufat O. Babaev, "Perspectives on Entrepreneurship and Privatization in Russia: Policy and Public Opinion," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 271-86.

Table 6
Support for Socialism and for the Market, 1991 and 1996
(in percentages)

	A free market economy is essential to our economic development.		Based on your experience of socialism in the Soviet Union, would you say you favor or oppose socialism?		
	1991	1996	1991	1996	
Strongly agree	26.6	20.5	7.7	13.0	Very much in favor
Somewhat agree	25.5	30.7	13.6	20.2	Somewhat in favor
Neither agree nor disagree	6.8	10.7	23.8	24.6	Neither for nor against
Somewhat disagree	8.4	9.1	17.1	16.7	Somewhat against
Strongly disagree	6.6	8.5	17.8	13.0	Totally against
Don't know	26.0	20.5	20.1	12.6	Don't know
<i>N</i>	1734	1585	1734	1585	<i>N</i>

We are interested, of course, not just in the changing levels of popular support for the market and for socialism, but in the socio-economic and demographic determinants of such support. This is revealed in regression results reported in table 7, which shows some interesting changes from 1991 to 1996.¹⁹ In the earlier survey, the most important determinants of attitudes toward *both* the market and socialism were education, age, and gender. The highly educated, men, and younger people were more favorably inclined toward the market and less favorably disposed toward socialism. By 1996, the strongest determinants of such attitudes were not demographic but economic. The most significant determinants of support for both the market and socialism were "social standing" (where one placed oneself on a ten-point scale) and household income. Furthermore, when the winners/losers question is thrown into the mix, this item becomes by far the most powerful determinant of support for both the market and socialism. So by 1996, the differences by age, gender, and education had largely been eclipsed by economic factors—how well one was doing economically and socially.²⁰ This testifies to the enormous impact economic change and dislocations have on attitudes toward fundamental issues in the postcommunist period. As we will see, this predominance of economic issues will also have a major impact on the political arena and on the elections of 1996.

Experiences of Injustice

The ambivalent attitudes toward both "Soviet-style" socialism and the market are evidenced as well in Russians' personal experiences both during and after the communist era. In our 1991 survey, we asked a series of questions about how often people had "personally experienced injustice" in their lives because of the following factors: your religious beliefs, your sex, your social background, your age, a lack of money, the part of the country you are from, your political beliefs, or your race or ethnic group. The results from the 1991 survey were surprising to us, and to many others to whom we reported them: in all of the postcommunist states, the overwhelming majority responded "never" to each of these questions (that is, that they had never experienced injustice). An index consisting of the sum of positive responses

19. The beta coefficients in this table indicate the relative weight of each independent variable (education, age, etc.) in explaining variance in the dependent variable (support for socialism versus the market) for each year.

20. Other surveys have shown mixed results on this issue of economic versus ideological determinants of support for reforms. In a 1992 survey in Russia, James Gibson ("Political and Economic Markets," 981) found that "commitment to market institutions was not so much ideological as a reflection of perceptions of current and future economic conditions." On the other hand, Miller, Checchio, Reisinger, and Hesli ("Comparing Mass and Elite Conceptions," 14) argue, in their 1995 survey, that support for a market economy and a reduced role for the state depends more on "popular perceptions of distributive justice" than on "simple economic hardship."

Table 7
Determinants of Support for Free Market and Socialism, 1991 and 1996
(standardized regression coefficient-beta)

	Support for the market 1 = high 5 = low			Approval of socialism 1 = high 5 = low		
	1991	1996	1996+	1991	1996	1996+
Education	-.15***	-.14***	-.12***	.12***	.10***	.09***
Age	.13***	.09**	.06	-.25***	-.08**	-.04
Gender (1 = M 2 = F)	.10**	.02	.02	-.11***	.01	.01
Social standing (1 = low 10 = high)	.12***	.18***	.06*	-.02	-.18***	-.04
Income (20-tiles; 1 = low)	-.07*	-.18***	-.07*	.03	.25***	.10***
Winners/losers			.38***			-.49***
R ²	.10	.16	.26	.12	.18	.36

*p < .05 **p < .01 *** p < .001; R² significant at .001 level for all values.

Note: 1996+ includes additional independent variables (winners/losers)

across all eight of these dimensions found no significant differences between the postcommunist and the capitalist states.²¹

At the time, it seemed unlikely that Russians *really* had experienced less injustice than had people in the United States or Britain, for example. We discussed several alternative explanations for the results: that (in that disruptive transitional year of 1991) they confounded or conflated experienced injustice in the communist period with the early postcommunist period; that people were perhaps afraid to answer these questions truthfully; or that people living in a closed society like the Soviet one simply did not *know* injustice (for example gender discrimination) when they experienced it.

In our 1996 survey, we asked the same set of questions again, though this time we asked them to think first about their experience of injustice "before perestroika" (that is, the communist era) and then about injustice "since the beginning of perestroika" (that is, after communism). The results of the retrospective question were astoundingly similar to those from the 1991 survey: on each of the questions (regarding sex, race, politics, and so on) over 80 percent of the respondents reported they had "never" personally experienced injustice; and fully 61 percent responded "never" on *all* of the items. Indeed, there were many more of these "never" responses than there had been in 1991, and people were no more likely to have experienced injustice "before perestroika" than they did afterwards.

There may be many social and psychological factors at work here, including the tendency reported earlier for Russians to idealize the past in the very difficult circumstances of the present. But certainly our alternative explanations from 1991 were no longer valid: the questionnaire clearly differentiated the communist from the postcommunist eras; people should no longer have been afraid to answer such questions truthfully; and they should have had a somewhat better idea, at least, of the criteria for injustice. Thus the 1991 and 1996 surveys in combination seem to confirm that on the individual level, at least, most Russians did not experience the communist era as terribly unjust. And as we have seen above, in 1996 they also remembered the objective conditions of the late communist era (social standing, standard of living, and so on) in a quite favorable way. These may have been "fond memories of a grim past," but in the difficult circumstances of 1996, *perceptions* were actually more important than reality. Perhaps the situation in 1996 was better than in 1991, but if people remembered and experienced things otherwise, that is what will affect their attitudes and behavior.

21. See David S. Mason, "Justice, Socialism and Participation in the Postcommunist States," in Kluegel, Mason, and Wegener, eds., *Social Justice and Political Change*, 54–56; and James R. Kluegel and David S. Mason, "Political Involvement in Transition: Who Participated and Electoral Dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe," Report of the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, February 1996.

Yeltsin, Ziuganov, and Popular Attitudes

Boris Yeltsin seems to have won the 1996 presidential elections by winning over the majority of Russians who wanted *both* to preserve some of the social guarantees of the communist system *and* to move ahead into a more market-oriented system—people who wanted to raise both the floors and the ceilings. The choice between Yeltsin and Ziuganov, however, was not so much based on ideology, or even on this issue of floors and ceilings, which most people favored in any case, but on more practical issues of economics and, in particular, peoples' own experience with the transition. We saw earlier that these economic issues, and whether or not people felt they were winners or losers in the transition, were the main determinants of attitudes toward socialism and toward the market. It turns out that these economic issues, and generalized support for or opposition to socialism and the market, were the greatest determinants of one's voting intentions in the 1996 elections as well.

Table 8 shows candidate voting intentions (from our 1996 survey) by this "winners or losers" scale ("Do you think that you personally have won or lost from the ongoing social transformation?") for the top vote getters in the first round of the presidential elections. As the table shows, Yeltsin was the overwhelming favorite of people who felt they were winners in the transition period, even though these constituted only about 20 percent of the sample. His support drops off sharply after that, but he still captures about half of the people who feel they are neither winners nor losers. Only among the "losers" does Yeltsin fail to win a majority. While Ziuganov wins a substantial number of these voters, the losers vote is divided among several contenders, so Ziuganov is unable to pick up even half of those who felt they had "definitely lost" from the transition.

With Yeltsin assured of winning the winners' votes in the election, he could devote his attentions to assuaging the concerns of the losers, which he did by promising continued gradual change and increased

Table 8
Presidential Voting Intentions
by Winners and Losers in the Transition
(in percentages)

Have you won or lost from the transition?	Intend to vote for following as president					Totals
	Iavlinskii	Yeltsin	Zhirinovskii	Ziuganov	Lebed'	
Definitely won	11.1	75.6	—	2.2	4.4	4.3
Rather won	9.9	77.2	2.5	1.9	4.3	15.6
Neither	12.9	50.5	4.1	12.9	6.9	30.6
Rather lost	8.5	23.2	7.0	37.1	10.7	26.2
Definitely lost	5.4	15.8	8.7	49.4	13.3	23.2

Note: Only top candidates are included, so rows do not total 100 percent.

Table 9
Voting Intentions by Winners/Losers and Market Orientation

	For Yeltsin (%)	For Ziuganov (%)	N
Pro-market winners	71	1	206
Anti-market winners	50	25	8
Pro-market losers	23	20	252
Anti-market losers	4	52	210
N			676

concern for those who had suffered the most. In the last three months before the June election, he took concrete and visible steps in this direction. He made efforts to reduce the huge backlog of overdue wages, he announced the doubling of the minimum pension, and he signed decrees compensating both those whose savings had been depleted by the 1992 hyperinflation and investors who suffered losses from fraudulent investment schemes.²²

In the end, Yeltsin was able to win over some of the “losers” in the transition who were also pro-market. The losers who were anti-market belonged to Ziuganov, Zhirinovskii, and Lebed’ in any case, and the pro-market winners were solidly in Yeltsin’s camp. But it was the middle groups that Yeltsin needed to attract, and as table 9 shows, he was able to do so. Ziuganov won hardly any of the pro-market winners, and Yeltsin struck out with the anti-market losers. But Yeltsin was able to attract most of the winners, even if they were anti-market. And even more important, he was able to attract almost a quarter of the largest of the four groups—the pro-market losers—a larger share of this group than Ziuganov was able to attract.

Logistic regression results (using odds multipliers)²³ for Yeltsin and Ziuganov supporters, displayed in table 10, again reveal that it was not

22. Treisman, “Why Yeltsin Won,” 67.

23. The coefficients in table 10 are “odds multipliers,” indicating the multiplicative change in the odds of having voted for Yeltsin or Ziuganov for a one-unit change in a specific determinant, net of the influence of the other determinants in the regression equation. An odds multiplier of greater than one indicates that the odds of voting for that candidate increase with increases in the value of a given independent variable (determinant). An odds multiplier of less than one indicates that the odds of voting for that candidate decrease with increases in the value of the independent variable. For example, in table 10, in the Yeltsin column, a coefficient of 1.26 means that the odds of voting for Yeltsin increased, on average, by 26 percent for each unit change in the variable measuring satisfaction with standard of living, which was a seven-point scale from completely dissatisfied (1) to completely satisfied (7). Compounded across the seven-unit range of this variable, a 26 percent increase from unit to unit results in a large difference between the most dissatisfied and the most satisfied people in the predicted odds of intending to vote for Yeltsin. For further information on this method, see Alfred Demaris, *Logit Modeling: Practical Applications* (Newbury Park, Calif., 1992).

Table 10
Determinants of Voting Preference for Yeltsin and Ziuganov
(odds multipliers from logistic regressions)

	Yeltsin	Ziuganov
Age	1.01	1.03***
Sex	1.29	.99
Education	1.03	1.09
Winners/losers	.73***	1.22
Satisfaction with standard of living	1.26***	.88
Experienced injustice pre-perestroika	1.03	.71**
Experienced injustice post-perestroika	.92	1.16
Index of support for equality	.99	.87
Index of support for functional inequality	.85	1.06
Support for government minimums	.97	1.24
Support for government limits on money	1.12	.96
Support for government provided jobs	1.04	.95
Support for free market	.64***	1.39***
Support for socialism	1.38***	.48***
Chi square (df)	310 (14)***	299 (14)***

p < .01 *p < .001.

Note: All of the "support" variables (the last five in the table) were coded on a 5-point scale with "1" indicating the highest support.

primarily ideology or demographics that divided Yeltsin and Ziuganov voters, but rather one's personal experiences and general support for the old or the new system. What is most informative about this table is the significance levels of these coefficients, which are marked by the asterisks. The independent variables that have the strongest effect on voting intentions for Yeltsin and Ziuganov have asterisks (with more asterisks indicating a greater level of statistical significance). Overall, one should note the relative lack of significance of both the demographic variables (age, education, sex) and the "ideological variables," which consist of individual questions mentioned earlier in this paper (for example, those in table 4) plus two indices of attitudes tapping support for equality and for "functional inequality."²⁴ Except for the age variable for Ziuganov, most of these have little bearing on intent to vote for these two candidates.

24. The "equality" index is the mean of the z scores of four questions (alpha = .60): "How much influence should the size of the family the employee supports have in determining the level of pay for an employee?"; "The fairest way of distributing wealth and income would be to give everyone equal shares"; "The most important thing is that people get what they need, even if this means allocating money from those who have earned more than they need"; "It is just luck if some people are more intelligent or skillful than others, so they don't deserve to earn more money." The "functional inequality" index is the simple mean of two questions with a five-point agree-disagree scale: "There is an incentive for individual effort only if differences in income are large enough," and "It is all right if businessmen make good profits because everyone benefits in the end."

For both candidates, the most powerful determinants of voting are the orientations toward the market and toward socialism, with the expected results that the more pro-market people supported Yeltsin and the more pro-socialist supported Ziuganov. But from the results both in this table and earlier, we know that support for these two concepts is not so much rooted in ideology as in individual experience—especially economic experience. For Yeltsin, the other determinants of support are economic—satisfaction with the standard of living and the winners/losers question—and, to a lesser extent, support for “functional inequality.” We saw this in table 8, where Yeltsin is much more likely to draw the support from those who have done well in the transition.

More surprisingly, perhaps, Ziuganov’s support was also not particularly ideological. *None* of the ideological variables in the equation were significant predictors of support for Ziuganov. His support, rather, was determined by people’s orientation toward the past; his supporters were more likely to be older, *not* to have experienced injustice in the communist era; supportive of socialism; and skeptical of the market. But this support for the past, as we have seen, is bred more of nostalgia than of ideology. Most people, especially Ziuganov’s supporters, remember the communist era as a time when they were better off, and not particularly oppressed, apparently.

Yeltsin did, however, draw more votes than Ziuganov in both the first and the runoff elections. It seems likely that this was due in part to his success at locking in support from the reformers and the winners, while at the same time drawing some support, at least, from those who were not doing so well but who nonetheless supported the market. In the end, while some people may have remembered the past more fondly than they actually experienced it, they did not want to turn back the clocks. During the course of the spring 1996 campaign, Yeltsin was able to boost his support by using the media effectively, capitalizing on popular support for *both* the market *and* state guarantees, and mobilizing those supporters to vote. It helped that his multiple opponents divided the opposition vote.

The ideological similarities and differences among supporters of the major presidential candidates are evident from table 11. This table shows the percentage of supporters of each of these candidates who agreed (strongly or somewhat) with some of the principles of equality, statism, floors, and ceilings that have been discussed in this article. These principles are arranged roughly by the amount of agreement among the supporters of the various candidates, with general agreement among all supporters for the principles at the top of the table, and less agreement for those at the bottom. As we have seen before, there is almost universal support for some of the “high floors” questions, and this is true across all four groups of supporters.²⁵ Almost all

25. These results reinforce a similar comparison of attitudes by supporters of various political parties in the 1993 elections: while supporters of the communists differed substantially from those favoring Russia’s Choice on their attitudes toward a

Table 11
Support for Equality and Statism
by Supporters of Presidential Candidates
(percentage of respondents "strongly agreeing" or "agreeing")

	Yeltsin	Zhirinovskii	Ziuganov	Lebed'
Government should provide minimum standard of living.	92.3	95.4	96.5	97.9
Government should provide jobs.	94.3	96.9	97.2	97.0
Hard workers should earn more.	93.4	95.1	94.3	99.0
People are entitled to pass wealth to children.	98.5	84.6	93.1	98.0
Give everyone equal shares of wealth.	21.6	40.3	44.0	29.3
People are entitled to keep earnings.	90.7	65.6	70.4	95.3
People should get what they need.	43.3	55.6	64.3	53.4
Government should place limits on wealth.	33.0	45.0	59.0	53.2

the supporters of all the candidates also favor some of the "high ceilings" propositions. The differences among the groups are more pronounced on the questions involving the redistribution of resources. On these the Yeltsin supporters, in particular, have much less favorable opinions than the supporters of the other candidates, and especially of the Ziuganov supporters.

But overall, there is a remarkable level of agreement on some of the key ideological issues: that the government should continue to provide basic minimums, in terms of both jobs and a standard of living; but that the society should abandon radical egalitarianism in favor of a more meritocratic system where rewards and incentives matter. It is this middle ground, we think, that Yeltsin appealed to and capitalized on. His program was to continue the reforms toward a market economy, while at the same time attempting to protect the most vulnerable members of society. In this, his campaign appeals matched the sentiments of most Russians. The people that opposed him did so largely because of their own problems during the transition, and this caused a nostalgic fondness for the past. But this nostalgia did not always translate into votes. As liberal former Prime Minister Egor Gaidar commented: "Millions of people are prepared to conduct idle conversations about how great everything used to be and how terrible every-

market economy, supporters of all parties overwhelmingly favored state control of large industries and state responsibility for jobs, health care, and housing. Matthew Wyman, Bill Miller, Stephen White, and Paul Heywood, "Public Opinion, Parties and Voters in the December 1993 Russian Elections," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 4 (1995): 591-614.

thing is now. But left to himself, a person is not carried away by such thoughts. And when left one-on-one with a ballot, a person was able to ask himself: My friend, do you really want that badly to go back to the past?"²⁶

The nostalgia was much more rooted in economics than in ideology and reflected the widespread deterioration of the economy and of living standards since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Given the less-than-ideological orientation of most Russians, however, it seems unlikely that this hankering for the past will lead people to favor a restoration of the old system. Most Russians are suffering, but they see hope in continued moderate reform and expect, however unrealistically, that their own situations will eventually improve.

This voting behavior is practical and interest-based in a way that increasingly resembles "normal" voting behavior in western democracies. Some analysts of Russian voting behavior and public opinion have suggested that votes and political participation in Russia have not been strongly related to economic issues or cleavages.²⁷ If this were true before, it no longer seems to be the case. In 1996 Russians voted for Yeltsin (or for Ziuganov) for reasons closely tied to their own economic experiences, interests, and attitudes. Both in this respect, and in their preference for Yeltsin's appeal for continuity and stability, Russia is becoming a more normal and stable society.

26. Interview with Gaidar in *Novoe vremia*, July 1996, no. 28:12-13; translated in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 48, no. 29 (14 August 1996): 16-17.

27. For example, Timothy J. Colton, "Economics and Voting in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 12, no. 4 (October-December 1996): 289-317; and Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, N.J., 1997).