TITLE: REGIONAL PATTERNS OF VOTER TURNOUT IN RUSSIAN ELECTIONS, 1993-1996

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SUMMARY

The totality of the Russian political process since 1989 suggests that an electoral geography of that country has emerged, with some regions identified as supportive of the economic liberalization policies of the government, and other regions clearly opposed to reform. These regional patterns of political affinity have been remarkably stable from the first electoral event in post-Soviet Russia, the national referendum on the efficacy of the Yeltsin government in April, 1993, right through the elections to the new Duma and simultaneous constitutional plebiscite in December 1993, the elections to the second Duma in December, 1995, and the presidential elections in June-July, 1996. Support for Yeltsin and the reform parties has been strongest in the North and Northwest, the city and oblast of Moscow, the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East, whereas areas along the western and southern margins of the country have tended to vote for nationalist parties or parties of the left. The emergence of regional power bases for different political points of view is to be expected in a country as large and diverse as Russia, and to some extent this regionalization of politics might be viewed as normal.

Voter turnout in the four national electoral events in Russia since early 1993 has also varied over both time and space, often dramatically. National turnout levels experienced a significant decline between the April, 1993 referendum (64.5%) and the December, 1993 parliamentary election and constitutional plebiscite (54.8%), but then recovered (to 64.8%) for the December, 1995 Duma vote and rose again (to 68.9%) for the presidential race of July, 1996. These macro changes are understandable in light of the external political and social turmoil that preceded or accompanied each event. Thus, the rancorous exchanges between President Yeltsin and the Congress of People's Deputies through 1992 and into 1993 no doubt alienated many voters from the political process; even so, about two-thirds of those eligible voted in the April 25, 1993 referendum, and in only one of the 87 units of Russia which participated did turnout fall below 50 percent. The violent and abrupt end of the Congress of People's Deputies in October 1993 and the suddenness with which the new Duma would be elected that December certainly contributed further to voter absenteeism: it was clearly unrealistic to expect that new parties could form and mount campaigns on such short notice, or that candidates in the single-member district races would conduct meaningful, issue-oriented or ideologically-based races. What became clear was that parties with a structural base, notably the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), which had inherited a grass-roots organization from its Soviet-era predecessor, would do comparatively well. The higher turnout in the December, 1995 Duma election can be attributed to the generally more stable political situation in Russia and the longer lead time for parties to coalesce and to participate in the pre-election campaign. In the event, over 11 million more voters went to the polls in the 1995 election than in the 1993 Duma

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election. Finally, the much-publicized and energetic campaign for the Russian presidency in June and July 1996 generated a record-high turnout for the post-Soviet period.

A comparison of national turnout levels in the post-Soviet Russian elections and referenda with those both in the established and transitional democracies places Russia close to the bottom of the list. Including only the two most recent electoral events in Russia, with turnouts in the mid-to high-60 percent range would, however, raise it to within a few percentage points of Japan, Spain, Ireland, and the 1997 British parliamentary election (71.3% turnout), and ahead of Hungary and Poland. It is difficult to explain Russian national turnout by reference to the factors discussed in the more general literature on voter participation because Russia’s electoral system is a hybrid of the institutional types which are usually employed to explain cross-national differences. Thus, although half of the Russian Duma is elected through PR in a national district, which ordinarily increases voter turnout, the other half comes from single-member districts, which typically depresses turnout. Further, the five-percent threshold required to receive Duma seats through the party list (PR) vote probably discourages voting for minor parties and thereby reduces turnout. The proliferation of parties in the Russian Duma elections (13 in 1993 and 43 in 1995) would likewise be expected to lower voting participation rates overall, but turnout went up between the two Duma elections even though the latter featured considerably more parties. On the other hand, direct elections for a powerful executive, such as the 1996 presidential races, would be likely to have the effect observed: higher turnout owing to the salience of the event. Again, to what extent these institutional factors operate regionally is much more difficult to conceptualize, but clearly, given the spatial patterns discussed below, powerful influences are at work to shape the electoral landscape, not only in terms of party affiliation and attitudes, but also as regards voter turnout.

Regional differences in voter turnout in Russia are linked both to institutional and socioeconomic factors. In the regions, affinity for parties with strong organizational or grass-roots structure (such as the KPRF) raises turnout. Age, occupation, education, and levels of urbanization also relate to the degree of electoral participation. Economic conditions in the regions have less effect on turnout, although variation in wages is important as a determinant of turnout across the country. Because the social structural and economic variables are not independent of one another, what emerges from this set of factors is a complex relationship which requires further study employing multivariate analysis. Meanwhile, we can say with some confidence that regions in which the population is characterized by relatively higher levels of urbanization, education, white collar employment, and wages and a younger age distribution will typically manifest lower voter participation. On the other hand, areas which are more rural and agricultural, with older and less-educated populations and lower wages will evince higher voter turnout.

In this paper we have not attempted to adduce other, more idiosyncratic influences on voter participation, especially those relating to regional elites and/or local issues, although we recognize
that in some cases these are very important. Thus, in some cases, especially in the non-Russian republics (e.g., Tatarstan and Bashkortostan), the local political leadership has effectively suppressed or, alternatively, maximized turnout, depending on the benefits accruing from doing either. Likewise, the national leadership has courted or scorned regional governors, some of whom (e.g., Eduard Rossel of Sverdlovsk Oblast) have been able to sway events within their constituencies. Finally, the presence on the ballot of highly popular politicians with specific regional bases ("favorite sons", such as Aman Tuleyev in Kemerovo Oblast or Aleksandr Lebed in Tula Oblast) no doubt increases turnout on given occasions.

Whatever the causal factors behind regional variations in voter turnout in post-Soviet Russia, these patterns have remained highly consistent over time, and can be expected to be so in future political contests. Typical of the electoral geography of large countries in general, the political landscape of Russia deserves further study as democratization in that country continues to evolve.
Voter turnout is one of the most important—if not the most important—aspects of political activity on the part of individuals in democracies. Given that, an intriguing question connected with voter turnout is: why do turnout rates vary so considerably from country to country? There is a rich literature on the subject in political science, replete with theory and extensive testing of empirical evidence, both of which are brought to bear on widespread cross-national disparities in electoral participation. Interestingly, however, comparatively little attention has been given to regional differences in electoral participation, even though these spatial patterns often manifest quite large variations which, given geographically uneven political affinities, may affect the outcome of national political contests.

Our purpose in this paper will be to test a set of propositions on the regional dimension of voter turnout developed from the theoretical and comparative literature in the context of the post-Soviet Russian elections and referenda. In so doing, we hope to shed some light on the Russian case specifically, and perhaps to use the Russian example to inform theory. As will be made clear below, the current Russian political scene is very much a work-in-progress, and therefore requires a cautious approach insofar as the application of concepts deriving from the mature democracies of Europe, the United States, Canada, Japan, and other countries is concerned. Yet, the opportunity to explore the momentous political changes underway in Russia from a comparative perspective, nascent as they may be, is not only timely but also potentially rewarding intellectually.

National Differences in Voter Turnout

In the broadest and perhaps over-simplified terms, the central divide on the issue of cross-national differences in voter turnout is between those who see political culture as the most important determinant of turnout (and other forms of efficacy), and those who maintain that political institutions shape the extent to which people participate in electoral (and other) politics. Thus, on the one hand, the "...political cultural approach [argues] that (1) people's responses to their situations are shaped by subjective orientations, which vary cross-culturally...and (2) these variations in subjective orientations reflect differences in one's socialization experience..."2 On the other hand, "...political institutions shape the distribution of incentives for political actors, whether they are candidates for office or simply citizens contemplating whether to vote."3

Operationalizing the concepts of political culture and institutions and linking same to differences in voter turnout is problematic, but we can summarize the main arguments as follows. Political cultural norms develop through a lengthy, inter-generational process, and condition people's reactions to "external situations", including changes in political systems and the opportunities for
participation offered, or not, thereby. Thus, for example, in the transition from authoritarian to democratic government, electoral participation would be attenuated by the "lessons" learned under the earlier regime. Norms involving one's satisfaction with life, with the willingness to discuss politics, and with levels of trust in others would be key elements of efficacy.

In the study of the role of political institutions in determining levels of voter turnout, such factors as nationally competitive districts, electoral disproportionality, multipartyism, unicameralism, and compulsory voting laws are commonly seen as having the potential to affect electoral behavior. In nationally competitive elections, it is argued, "parties have the incentive to mobilize everywhere, [whereas] with single-member districts, some areas may be written off as hopeless." Likewise, "the degree of proportionality in the translation of votes into seats..." will encourage or discourage adherents of minor parties to vote. The proliferation of political parties has also been shown to have a depressing effect on turnout, even though proponents of proportional representation (PR) electoral systems, which are widely thought to encourage party formation, often view PR as a vehicle for mobilizing the electorate. Finally, the existence of compulsory voting laws obviously results in higher turnout, and unicameral legislatures allow the electorate to have a more direct influence on politics (rather than have a situation of bicameral gridlock which would render the legislative process ineffectual and thus unappealing to voters).

The Problem of Spatial Variations in Voter Turnout

Significant regional variations in voter turnout are typical of most countries. In the case of the 1992 American presidential election, for example, voter turnout among the states ranged from a high of 72 percent (Maine) to a low of 42 percent (Hawaii); this 30 percentage-point spread is greater than that found in most studies of voter turnout among democratic countries. In the 1994 Federal Elections in Germany, turnout ranged from 70.6 percent in Saxony-Anhalt to 83.5 percent in the Saarland, almost a 13 percentage point difference. The 1997 General Election in Britain produced an even greater range in turnout among the 659 constituencies of Parliament; from a low of 50 percent in Hackney North and Stoke Newington to a high of 88 percent turnout in Stevenage. Yet, virtually all of the "classic" works on voter turnout ignore totally or give only passing attention to sub-national patterns of electoral participation.

Regardless of one's emphasis on either the political culture or political institutions approach to explaining differences in electoral participation, there are major problems conceptually in accounting for sub-national variations. The principal difficulty in explaining inter-regional dissimilarities in turnout is that both the concepts and the operational factors discussed in the literature extant are almost exclusively national or individual in scope. A strong case can be made that national-level factors carry much greater weight than individual characteristics in explaining cross-national voter turnout patterns; in this regard, Franklin points out that "...the most striking message is that turnout..."
varies much more from country to country than it does between different types of individuals." Likewise, Blais and Carty maintain that "...available evidence gives little indication that socioeconomic variables substantially alter aggregate results." That being true, how do we account for regional differences? That is, if political culture and political institutions vary principally between rather than within countries, then nationally-specific norms and/or institutions cannot explain marked regional disparities in electoral participation. Specifically, if from the institutional perspective the role of unicameralism, multipartyism, and electoral disproportionality affect voter participation, it is hard to see how such national factors would contribute much to understanding sub-national variations in the rate at which people vote, since such influences would be national in scope. At the sub-national level, it may be the case that variations in social structure and regional economic conditions have a more pronounced effect on turnout than analysts of cross-national differences appreciate.

Political geographers, however, have challenged the view that regions are simply summations of individual traits: rather, regions assume a particular character deriving from the influences of place. Unfortunately, a shortfall remains in the theoretical framework of place as an intermediary between the national and individual levels. Initially, theories of modernization provided the theoretical basis for electoral geography, but the failure of anticipated national homogenization called this notion increasingly into question. Theories of "uneven development" have also been adduced to explain spatial aspects of political behavior, with socioeconomic inequalities engendered by the effects of world economic forces on individual regions translating into changes in the composition and outlook of the electorate. More recently, political geographers have increasingly taken into account theories of political behavior from political science and political sociology, especially theories based on social cleavages and rational choice theory. The principal difficulty in this approach has been that regional variations in voting behavior cannot be explained completely, or even close to completely, by reference to national level forces. As Reynolds and Knight suggest, the field has been reluctant to discount the importance of the social cleavage model, which assumes that desegregating regional populations along class or social composition lines, and then applying the national alignments of party affiliation or other manifestations of political behavior to these groupings will explain how the regions voted.

For many geographers, it has become an increasingly more attractive idea that place provides a context in which both structural or utility models operate, but under the influence of local forces which might shape political (and other) behavior. The problem to date is a lack of specification of the local or contextual influences, be they socialization, variations in political culture, degree of political mobilization, or something else. For example, O'Loughlin and his colleagues tested several propositions drawn from neighboring disciplines in their analysis of the German election of 1930, and found mixed support for national cross-cutting generalizations based on class, alienation, "political confessionalism", economic self-interest, and a "catch all" category. They concluded that
"...Insights into the complex voting decision are obtained by the union of spatial and socio-economic data in mixed spatial-structural regression models", whereas in stating that "...German local circumstances mediated voting behavior..." they suggested that these "local circumstances [may be] obscure to the analyst." Furthermore, electoral geographers have concentrated on regional patterns of party preference as the primary subject of research: voter turnout has largely been overlooked.

The importance of place as a mediating context for various social structural features, or as the conduit through which macro-economic forces shape the individual in the rational choice mode, or as the venue for local cultural influences, has become ever more clear as additional cases are tested empirically. Often seen in the past as an inconvenient residual or unexplained digression from national trends, considerations of place must now be included in any analysis of sub-national electoral results.

It is also the case that the increasing sophistication, both technically and conceptually, of electoral geography models has assuaged concerns of the ecological fallacy. In fact, a place-based approach using aggregate data (rather than individual data obtained from surveys) allows one to avoid the shortcomings of a strict compositional approach derived from national cleavages. Further, the use of aggregate data on the regional scale compensates for a lack of survey data, especially in those cases—such as Russia—where rigorous survey-taking is just now coming into its own.

The challenge, therefore, is to identify in the literature on electoral participation the social-demographic traits, norms, or institutions which might manifest themselves differently among regions and which might be adduced to explain spatial patterns of turnout. Here we will propose such factors as seem reasonable conceptually and which we can operationalize empirically; at the outset, we wish to make it clear that this is exploratory work, and that certainly much remains to be done before we can even hazard meaningful conclusions about the underlying causes of geographical variations in voting rates.

**Trends in Russian Voter Turnout**

The totality of the Russian political process since 1989 suggests that an electoral geography of that country has emerged, with some regions identified as supportive of the economic liberalization policies of the government, and other regions clearly opposed to reform. These regional patterns of political affinity have been remarkably stable from the first electoral event in post-Soviet Russia, the national referendum on the efficacy of the Yeltsin government in April, 1993, right through the elections to the new Duma and simultaneous constitutional plebiscite in December 1993, the elections to the second Duma in December, 1995, and the presidential elections in June-July, 1996. Support for Yeltsin and the reform parties has been strongest in the North and Northwest, the city and oblast of Moscow, the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East, whereas areas along the western and southern margins of the country have tended to vote for nationalist parties or parties of the left. The
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Deputies through 1992 and into 1993 no doubt alienated many voters from the political process; even
so, about two-thirds of those eligible voted in the April 25, 1993 referendum, and in only one of the
87 units of Russia which participated did turnout fall below 50 percent. The violent and abrupt end
of the Congress of People's Deputies in October 1993 and the suddenness with which the new Duma
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Regional Patterns of Voter Turnout

Our main purpose here is to describe and explain the geographical dimension to voter turnout in the post-Soviet Russian elections, patterns that have remained generally stable over time, but with changes important to the overall outcome. Since the first post-Soviet electoral event in Russia (the April, 1993 referendum), it has been clear that certain regions would typically manifest higher turnout and others lower turnout. As results of the 1993 referendum show, areas along the western border, across the Central Chernozem region, the North Caucasus, the Volga, and eastward along the southern tier of units in the Urals, West Siberia, and East Siberia were typically higher turnout areas, whereas units to the Northwest and North had lower turnout rates (Figure 1). Among the 86 of the 89 units of Russia which participated fully in the April, 1993 referendum, the highest turnout was in Ryazan Oblast (78.8%) and the lowest in the Khanty-Mansiy Autonomous Okrug (54.3%), for a percentage point spread of 24.5 (Table 1). Within the overall lower turnout in the December, 1993 Duma election and constitutional plebiscite, the same regional pattern emerged as with that evidenced in April (Figure 2): generally higher turnout along the western and southern margins of the country, generally lower turnout across the Northwest and North (the correlation coefficient for turnout in April and that in December, 1993 was .813). In keeping with the lower national turnout, the mean for regional turnout levels declined, and the standard deviation increased owing to a greater range among units: highest turnout among the 87 units participating fully was in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic (70.3%) and lowest, again, in the Khanty-Mansiy AO (39.7%) increasing turnout range to 30.6 percentage points (Table 1). Disproportionately large declines in regional turnout occurred in the North, Urals, West Siberia, and East Siberia (compare Figures 1 and 2), with especially notable decreases in the city of Moscow (down 12 percentage points) and Sverdlovsk Oblast (down 18 points).

The rebound in voter turnout in the Duma election of December, 1995 is evident also in the regional figures (Table 1). The mean among the 89 units participating rose to 65 percent, and the range decreased to 22.4 percentage points with an accompanying narrowing of the standard
deviation: a high of 75.5 percent in Belgorod Oblast and a low of 53.1 percent in Sverdlovsk Oblast bounded the range. Again, one finds the by-now familiar spatial pattern of turnout, with a generally south/north divide (Figure 3). However, a lower correlation between regional turnout in December, 1993 and that for December, 1995 (0.674) suggests that this pattern changed more during this inter-election period than between April and December, 1993. In fact, most of the change in turnout is accounted for by larger than average increases in the Northwest, Urals, North Caucasus, West Siberia, East Siberia, and the Far East (Figure 4).

Regional patterns of electoral participation for the presidential election of June/July 1996 again appear very similar to those seen in previous contests (Figure 5). For the first round on 16 June, the mean turnout among regions was up from that of December, 1995, and the range and standard deviation declined still further from the prior election (Table 1). Among the 89 units of Russia, the highest turnout was in Bashkortostan (79.0%) and the lowest in Murmansk Oblast (59.6%). The correlation coefficient for regional turnout in June, 1996 compared with December, 1995 is 0.758, illustrating again the overall stability of the spatial patterns. Residuals from the regression revealed that much of the change over this period is accounted for by increases in turnout in the Urals, Volga, and North Caucasus regions (Figure 6). In the runoff election between Yeltsin and Zyuganov on 3 July, national turnout declined by almost a percentage point, with an accompanying effect on mean turnout among regions (Table 1). Likewise, the range and standard deviation increased, indicating greater dispersion at the regional level. Highest turnout on 3 July 1996 was in the Ingush Republic (83.4%) and lowest was, again, in Murmansk Oblast (56.5%)

We selected five units representing different parts of the political spectrum to illustrate how turnout levels and changes therein vary from region to region across Russia. The city of Moscow and Sverdlovsk Oblast are units in which the reform-oriented parties have done well: Belgorod Oblast, in the Central Chernozem region, has voted overwhelmingly for the left (KPRF and Agrarian Party, for the most part); Pskov Oblast has been a bastion of the right-wing or nationalist parties; and Tatarstan is of interest owing to its very different electoral participation rates. As is clear from Figure 7, turnout levels have been consistently higher in Belgorod and Pskov oblasts, but increases from the low point of December 1993 to December, 1995 and June/July, 1996 were much greater in Moscow and Sverdlovsk Oblast. Tatarstan, which effectively boycotted the two elections of 1993 and had a relatively low turnout in December, 1995, surged to very high rates in the 1996 races. Clearly, very different factors must be at work in these regions to produce such differences in voting behavior.
Correlates of Regional Voter Turnout

In the literature on voter participation at the national level, there is some support for the idea that turnout is higher in cases where party organization is sufficiently strong to mobilize voters. As Powell put it, "We would expect dense, penetrative, nationally-oriented party organizations to be most effective in getting voters to the polls in national elections." From this we would propose that in those regions of Russia where well-organized parties are strongest, voter turnout will be relatively higher. In the Russian case, this would lead us to hypothesize relatively higher turnout in regions where the vote is predominantly for the KPRF and/or other parties of the left, owing to their superior organizations.

In our previously-published work on the Russian elections, we investigated the statistical relationships between voter turnout and various aspects of political preference. In the April, 1993 referendum, we found that turnout correlated negatively and significantly (at the .01 level) with support for Yeltsin, but the coefficients (-.391 and -.406 on Questions 1 and 2 regarding support for Yeltsin and for his economic policies) were not especially strong. In analyzing the December, 1993 Duma elections and the simultaneous constitutional plebiscite, we determined that voter turnout among regions correlated positively and significantly with the percentage of the national party list vote going to the Agrarian-KPRF alliance (.596), negatively and significantly with the vote for reform parties (-.573), and negatively and significantly with the percentage of voters approving the new constitution (-.723). In the December, 1995 Duma elections, the correlation coefficient between turnout and the left vote was .532 and between turnout and the vote for reform parties -.461 (both significant at the .01 level), which suggests that the strength of the linkage between party preferences and turnout among regions deteriorated somewhat between 1993 and 1995. In interpreting that change, it was evident that turnout increased at more than the national rate in some regions associated with reform voting.

In the presidential elections of June and July, 1996, the statistical relationship between turnout and candidate preference was considerably weaker than in the Duma contests. Specifically, the correlation between the percentage of the vote for Yeltsin and turnout in round one was -.283 and in round two -.203, neither of which is significant at the .01 level. The relationship between the percentage of the vote for Zyuganov and turnout was .410 and .253, respectively (the first is significant and the second not). Thus, although the signs are in the expected direction (higher turnout in left-voting regions and lower in reform/Yeltsin territory), the magnitude of the coefficients suggests that regional loyalties evident in previous elections weakened considerably in this type of election, that Yeltsin made strong inroads in previously left-voting regions, especially between the two rounds, and that turnout rose in pro-Yeltsin regions and declined in some KPRF strongholds.
Effective Number of Parties and Turnout

In a previous work, we investigated the relationship between voting for party groupings among the regions, using what political scientists refer to as the "effective number of parties".\textsuperscript{35} In multi-party elections, such measures as the "N coefficient" are used to describe the extent to which voters disperse or concentrate their votes among ballot choices.\textsuperscript{36} Observed values for $N$ across numerous elections world-wide range from 1.8 to 10.3, with the lower value indicating just under two effective parties and the upper value representing about ten effective parties.\textsuperscript{37} Elections in which many parties garner relatively large shares of the vote will result in a higher $N$ value, while two or three party systems produce lower $N$ values.

The December 1993 Russian Duma election resulted in a highly fractionated $N$ coefficient of 7.58.\textsuperscript{38} The December 1995 Russian Duma election, with 43 parties on the national party list ballot yielded an $N$ value of 10.7 for Russia as a whole, placing it toward the very top of the range of observed national elections in terms of the degree of fractionalization.

As is the case with all aspects of Russian electoral politics, there are huge differences among the regions in terms of the degree of concentration of voting for parties. For example, in the 1995 Duma elections, among the 89 units of Russia the $N$ coefficient varied from 3.4 to 16.4 effective parties, suggesting that in some regions the voters concentrated on a few parties, and in others dispersed their votes widely among many choices.\textsuperscript{19} Further, in our previous study we found that the $N$ coefficient was highly and significantly correlated (-.736) with voting for the left political parties: that is, those regions with lower $N$ values are usually the ones in which the left, and especially the KPRF, did well, indicating that the concentration of votes tended to benefit the left more than the reform or rightist parties.\textsuperscript{40} On the other hand, units in which the reform parties were a plurality (mainly in the North, Northwest, and Center regions) had relatively high $N$ values, indicating greater dispersal of votes among parties.\textsuperscript{11} The statistical relationship between the $N$ coefficient itself and voter turnout for the December, 1995 Duma election was -.417 (significant at the .01 level).

Another view of the degree of concentration of voting by party is given by looking at the magnitude of the pluralities achieved by the winning parties in the 225 electoral districts in the December, 1995 Duma contest. Here again, it is evident that the KPRF in particular has a more compact electorate, winning their districts by a higher average plurality (26.4\%) than Yabloko (16.5\%), NDR (22.0\%) or the LDPR (17.2\%). It is instructive that the participation of so many parties allows for a comparatively low percentage to win a district plurality. In fact, of the individual parties, only the KPRF won a majority of votes in any electoral district in 1995. Among party blocs, the left gained a majority in 22 of the 225 electoral districts and the reform parties in 26 (23 of which were in the cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg). The right bloc of parties did not win a majority in any of the 225 electoral districts in 1995.
Social Structure and Voter Turnout

In cross-national studies of electoral participation, several social structural variables have been found to have an effect on voter turnout; again, the preponderance of opinion relegates these influences to secondary importance compared with institutional factors. For our purposes, however, sub-national or regional differences in social structure may have some explanatory value insofar as spatial patterns of turnout are concerned. In previous studies we analyzed the relationship between the social structure (demographic composition) of regions and voting behavior as manifested by party and candidate preference in the Duma and presidential contests and voting on the referendum of April, 1993 and constitutional plebiscite in December, 1993. Generally, we found that social structural variables such as the level of urbanization, educational attainment, age, and occupation related to voting outcomes across Russia’s 89 constituent territorial units. Separately, we investigated these same relationships among 300 rayons from a sample of ten oblasts, and found that at a larger geographical scale the statistical relationships found at the oblast-republic level intensify. In this section we test for the effects of regional variations in age, education, occupations, and urban-rural residence on turnout for the four national political events in the post-Soviet period (Table 2).

Age

Age is one of the social or demographic variables mentioned most often in cross-national turnout studies. Generally, the rate of voting increases with age, although not always linearly. In this study, we calculate the percentage of those older than working age (55 and older for women and 60 and older for men) in each region of Russia and compare that with voter turnout rates. The results (Table 2) suggest that age relates positively and significantly to turnout across the regions in all of the Russian elections, with the strongest coefficient in the December, 1993 Duma election and plebiscite.

Education

Educational attainment at the individual level is also associated with turnout. Typically, higher levels of education relate to higher turnout rates; however, this relationship is much more pronounced in the United States than in Europe. To test the relationship between educational attainment and turnout among Russia’s regions, we calculated the percentage of the working age population with higher, incomplete higher, and specialized secondary education for each unit and regressed those values against turnout. In the Russian case, higher levels of educational attainment correlate negatively with turnout (Table 2), which is to say that units with more highly educated populations have lower voter turnout, and vice versa.

Occupations

Powell (1986: 26) examined the relationship between white collar employment and turnout in his cross-national study, and found essentially no correlation between the two. He acknowledges, however, that in many cases "...to know a voter’s occupation or religion enables us to predict his or
her voting preference to a very great degree.” To investigate links between occupations and electoral participation in post-Soviet Russia, we related the occupational composition of units to their respective turnout rates (Table 2). Units with a relatively higher percentage of agricultural workers exhibited higher turnout, often strongly so, but little or no relationship was evident for either industrial workers or white collar occupations.

**Urban-Rural Residence**

Differences in voting behavior along the urban-rural continuum have been noted in earlier studies of Russian elections. For example, Hough found voter turnout to be especially low in the large industrial cities and higher in smaller cities and towns and in rural areas. In our previous article on voting patterns at the rayon level among 10 sample oblasts for the December, 1993 Duma election, we likewise saw pronounced differences in turnout by size of urban population, with predominantly rural rayons manifesting high turnout (over 70% on the average) and large cities characterized by much lower turnout (around 50%).

Here we test the level of urbanization among the units of Russia against voter turnout, and find a fairly strong association between the two in the predicted direction (higher levels of urbanization associated with lower turnout rates). The relationship, which was statistically significant at the .01 level in all years, was particularly strong in the two Duma elections and less so in the April, 1993 referendum and the 1996 presidential election (Table 2).

**Voter Turnout and Economic Conditions**

One of the most interesting aspects of voter turnout is the manner in which it relates—or doesn’t—to economic conditions. As Radcliff put it, “The most striking aspect of the literature [on the economy and turnout] may be its inconsistency.” Do people go to the polls to vote out governments which they believe to be responsible for economic hardship, or do they withdraw from the electoral process, perhaps alienated and preoccupied with managing their affairs? Radcliff argued that “...the electoral importance of the economy varies both spatially and temporally due to contextual conditions that vary from place to place and time to time.” In general, he found that deteriorating macroeconomic conditions—translated into trends in income—led to lower turnout in developing countries, mainly because they lack social insurance programs which might cushion families and individuals against the hardships occasioned by recession. Such programs in developed countries mitigate these circumstances, and consequently little decline in turnout results during difficult times.

Colton, in his survey-based study of the effects of economics on voting in the December, 1995 Duma election, noted that “Economic malaise had no effect on the penchant to vote or abstain, as economic pessimists came to the polls in almost identical numbers to optimists.” We are interested in determining if there are any relationships between the state of the economy and the
propensity to vote among the regions of Russia: in other words, to determine if spatial differences in economic conditions have any effect on voter turnout. To investigate this relationship, we examined several variables representative of the economic situation in the regions and regressed them on voter turnout.

In general, we found very little correlation between macroeconomic conditions at the regional level and voter turnout. Such measures as change in industrial production, change in agricultural production, change in the volume of retail sales, change in the consumer price index, and housing privatization had no significant relationship with turnout. On the other hand, some measures of individual economic well-being did correlate with turnout. Wages, especially, had a negative association with turnout (-.470 in December 1993 and -.417 in December 1995, both significant at the .01 level), suggesting that areas with relatively lower wages had higher voter participation. However, unemployment had no discernible effect on turnout.

Conclusions

Regional differences in voter turnout in Russia are linked both to institutional and socioeconomic factors. In the regions, affinity for parties with strong organizational or grass-roots structure (such as the KPRF) raises turnout. Age, occupation, education, and levels of urbanization also relate to the degree of electoral participation. Economic conditions in the regions have less effect on turnout, although variation in wages is important as a determinant of turnout across the country. Because the social structural and economic variables are not independent of one another, what emerges from this set of factors is a complex relationship which requires further study employing multivariate analysis. Meanwhile, we can say with some confidence that regions in which the population is characterized by relatively higher levels of urbanization, education, white collar employment, and wages and a younger age distribution will typically manifest lower voter participation. On the other hand, areas which are more rural and agricultural, with older and less-educated populations and lower wages will evince higher voter turnout.

In this paper we have not attempted to adduce other, more idiosyncratic influences on voter participation, especially those relating to regional elites and/or local issues, although we recognize that in some cases these are very important. Thus, in some cases, especially in the non-Russian republics (e.g., Tatarstan and Bashkortostan), the local political leadership has effectively suppressed or, alternatively, maximized turnout, depending on the benefits accruing from doing either. Likewise, the national leadership has courted or scorned regional governors, some of whom (e.g., Eduard Rossel of Sverdlovsk Oblast) have been able to sway events within their constituencies. Finally, the presence on the ballot of highly popular politicians with specific regional bases ("favorite sons", such as Aman Tuleyev in Kemerovo Oblast or Aleksandr Lebed in Tula Oblast) no doubt increases turnout on given occasions.
Whatever the causal factors behind regional variations in voter turnout in post-Soviet Russia, these patterns have remained highly consistent over time, and can be expected to be so in future political contests. Typical of the electoral geography of large countries in general, the political landscape of Russia deserves further study as democratization in that country continues to evolve.
### Table 1. Regional Voter Turnout, Russian Elections: April, 1993 - July, 1996*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Range (% pts.)</th>
<th>Minimum (%)</th>
<th>Maximum (%)</th>
<th>Mean (%)</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>April 1993**</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>66.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1993***</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>56.6</td>
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<td>December 1995</td>
<td>22.4</td>
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<td>75.5</td>
<td>65.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1996</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>3.913</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 1996</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>4.806</td>
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</table>

* Turnout measured by ballots-in-box as a percentage of eligible voters.
** N = 86 (excludes Tatarstan, Chechnya, and Aga-Buryat AO).
*** N = 87 (excludes Tatarstan and Chechnya). Turnout is for constitutional plebiscite.

Table 2. Bivariate Correlation Coefficients, Voter Turnout and Selected Socioeconomic Variables, By Region, Russian Elections, April, 1993 - June, 1996

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<tr>
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<td>Older Population</td>
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<td>April 1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1993</td>
<td>.442 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1995</td>
<td>.318 *</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1996</td>
<td>.399 *</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>April 1993</td>
<td>-.249</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1993</td>
<td>-.434 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1995</td>
<td>-.384 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1996</td>
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<td>Agricultural Workers</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>December 1993</td>
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<td>December 1995</td>
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<td>Level of Urbanization</td>
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<td>-.389 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1996</td>
<td>-.344 *</td>
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</table>

N=86 for April 1993; 87 for December 1993; 89 for December 1995 and June 1996. Coefficients with an asterisk (*) are significant at the .01 level.
Figure 1. April 1993 Russian Referendum Turnout
Figure 3. December 1995 Russian Duma Election
Turnout
Figure 4. Percentage Point Change in Voter Turnout
December 1993 to December 1995
Figure 5. June 1996 Russian Presidential Election Turnout
Figure 6. Percentage Point Change in Voter Turnout December 1995 to June 1996
Figure 7. Turnout by Region, 1993-1996
ENDNOTES

1 The authors wish to acknowledge funding support from The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, which however is not responsible for the contents or findings of this paper. We are also grateful to Andrei Berezkin for his advice and Judith Rasoletti for her assistance.


4 Inglehart, p. 4.


6 Powell, 1986, p. 21. Nationally competitive elections to legislatures based on proportional representation typically generate higher voter turnout than those which involve single-member, plurality winner, districts. Further, turnout increases with district magnitude (i.e., the number of members elected).

7 Jackman and Miller, p. 470. Blais and Carty (p. 177) found that in a larger set of elections than those studied by Jackman (1987), "the extent of disproportionality does not appear to have any significant impact". This difference is due mainly to the time periods involved: when Blais and Carty considered only post-World War II elections, as did Jackman, they found a statistically significant relationship between disproportionality and turnout.


10 Fred M. Shelley, J. Clark Archer, Fiona M. Davidson, and Stanley D. Brunn, Political Geography of the United States. New York: Guilford Press, 1996, p. 119. Excluding the cases of Switzerland and the United States, which they consider atypical, Jackman and Miller (p. 485) found that voter turnout, averaged over multiple elections in the period 1981-1990, ranged from a low of 69 percent (Canada) to a high of 93 percent (Italy), which has a compulsory voting law.

11 American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, "Election Year 1994 Reports, Federal Election (Bundestagswahl)," 1996.


14 Blais and Carty, p. 172.


16 Ibid.


21 One exception is the work by O'Loughlin and colleagues (Ibid), which related changes in turnout to increases in the vote for the Nazi Party in the German election of 1930; among other things, this study desegregated the
relationship between turnout and party preference by region, and found significantly different impacts on electoral outcomes.


25 Russian electoral law enfranchises all citizens 18 years of age and older, excepting those declared incompetent by a court or in prison. Voter registration lists are compiled by local heads of administration, are updated twice a year, and are provided to polling station election committees. In this paper, we use "ballots-in-box" as the measure of participation. There is some wastage between ballots issued and ballots-in-box, and some ballots are invalidated for various reasons.

26 Actually, declines in voter turnout manifested themselves beginning in the contested elections during the Soviet period. Turnout was 78.8% for the March, 1990 voting for the Russian Federation Congress of People's Deputies and 74.7% for the Russian Federation presidential election of June, 1991.


28 Franklin, p. 218.

29 The Chechen Republic did not participate in the referendum. Returns from the Aga-Buryat Autonomous Okrug were received late and thus not included in the official results. The referendum was essentially boycotted in Tatarstan, where a low turnout (22.6%) invalidated the result.

30 The Chechen Republic did not participate in the December elections, and once again a boycott of the election in Tatarstan produced a very low turnout (13.9%) which invalidated the result.

31 Powell, p. 22.


33 Clem and Craumer, "The Politics of Russia's Regions," p. 83


37 Ibid., pp. 81-83.


39 Clem and Craumer, "The Regional Dimension."

40 Ibid.

41 Taking the analysis down to the level of 225 electoral districts and focusing on individual parties yields even more convincing evidence of the relationship between concentration of voting and preference for the left parties: the correlation coefficient between N and the percentage of the vote for the KPRF was -.801.


44 Franklin, p. 220; Powell, pp. 20-30.

45 Franklin, p. 224.

46 Powell, p. 29.
47 Ibid., p. 22.
49 Clem and Craumer, "A Rayon Level Analysis."
51 Ibid., p. 445.