
GEOGRAPHICAL ATLAS OF RUSSIA

Presidential Elections in the Russian Federation on March 4, 2012: Evolution of Regional Support

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Abstract—The reorientation of formal support for the elected president of the Russian Federation to regions of a “specific electoral regime,” where voting results decisively depend on the administrative resources of local authorities, had been finished by 2012. The established territorial structure of the official support for the new president is directly opposite to the structure, which B. Eltsin rested upon during the 1996 presidential elections in the Russian Federation. Then the president won, being supported by large cities, while his principal competitor gathered votes in the republican province using the inertial administrative apparatus. Today urbanized territories demonstrate minimal support for the new power. This can give birth to problems in the near future.

Keywords: elections, electoral geography, regional elites, administrative resources

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The elections of the president of the Russian Federation of March 4, 2012, amazingly made electoral territorial analysis meaningful again. The two previous cycles (2004 and 2008) were more likely to be transitional from the more competitive elections of the 1990s, when the political preferences of voters played a decisive role, to the epoch, when the decisive word came to belong to the administrative resources of regional elites and the federal center. Therefore, the election results of the 2000s demonstrated strange regional jumps that were rather quickly revealed to be mainly explained by situational agreements between Moscow and local authorities, as well as staff changes in the composition of the latter.

The process of consolidation of administrative resources in the center and regions came to a logical finish by the electoral cycle of 2011–2012, and geographical regularities acquired a sort of meaning again: now the results of V. Putin reflect the degree of loyalty of the regional establishment multiplied by the capability of authorities to control the voting process and count of votes in their regions.

Five federal subjects, where Putin gathered the maximal percentage of votes (from 99.8 to 90.0%), are the Chechen Republic, Republic of Dagestan, Republic of Ingushetia, Karachay–Cherkess Republic, and the Republic of Tyva. The regions, where his official result was the smallest (from 47 to 53.5%) are Moscow, Kaliningrad, Kostroma, Orel, and Vladimir oblasts. Since Kostroma and Orel oblasts showed an analogous result (52.8%), we can add the sixth lowest region—Yaroslavl oblast—where Putin got the support of 54.5%.

In essence, St. Petersburg must also be related to this group, where, despite Putin’s official result of 58.8%, independent observers fixed mass falsifications that gave him an additional percentage of not less than 8–10% [4, 5].

The wave of dismissals of governors after December 4, 2011 (the elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation), became a practical confirmation of the reliance on administrative resources as a major source of electoral results. During five months, 11 people have already left, among which dominate leaders who showed weak results either at the elections to the State Duma in December or at the presidential elections in March (the voting for the United Russia party and Putin, respectively): Perm and Primorsky krais and Kostroma, Moscow, Murmansk, Omsk, Smolensk, Tomsk, and Yaroslavl oblasts. Only the dismissal of the governor of Stavropol krai, where the electoral record was higher than the medium one but there took place resonance hunger-strike of protests against the falsification of local elections in the city of Lermontov, can be regarded as an exception.

The map of the official support for Putin (Fig. 1) that mainly recalls an earlier built cartogram for the “index of electoral governance” (Fig. 2) reflecting the dependence of the electoral process on the administrative control at the local level can be regarded as an analytical confirmation [2].

The area of electoral support for Putin in 2012 was finally shifted to the sociocultural periphery of Russia, where public life, mass media, and political activity

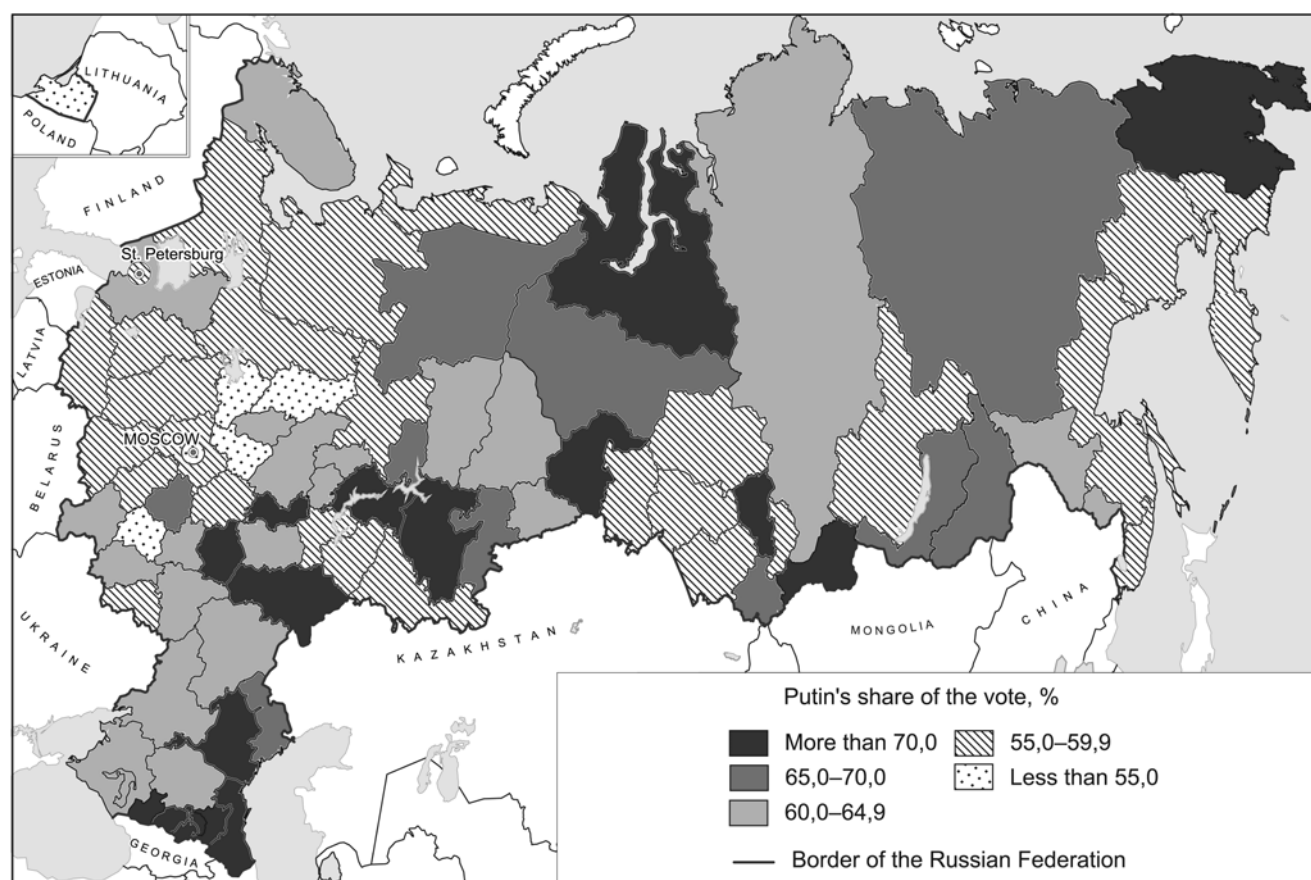


Fig. 1. Putin's share of the vote during the presidential elections in the Russian Federation on March 4, 2012.

were suppressed by the authoritative style of governance. The twenty most loyal regions (in addition to the five previously mentioned regions, in descending order) looks eloquent: the Republic of Mordovia (87.1%), Yamalo–Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Republic of Tatarstan, Kabardino–Balkarian Republic, Kemerovo oblast, Republic of Bashkortostan, Tyumen oblast, Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, Tambov oblast, Saratov oblast, Republic of Kalmykia, Republic of North Ossetia–Alania, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Astrakhan oblast, and Tula oblast (67.8%).

Signs of this drift appeared as early as 2000, when the regional elites of the so-called “Red Belt” (mainly, the Black-Soil Belt to the south of Moscow) were persuaded in practice that state capitalism had much more advantages than the soviet model of governance. Correspondingly, the “Red Belt” immediately turned into “Putin's belt,” although indicators of electoral freedoms and democracy did not improve there [2].

Subsequently, Putin's process of mobilization of the regional establishment from the areas of “specific electoral regime” continued successfully, which was reflected in the formation of the so-called “Putin's consensus of elites” (expression of political scientist G. Pavlovskii) and a successful operation ensured by

Putin to transfer power to a successor at the presidential elections of 2008, when D. Medvedev received a record 70.3% with the consolidated support of the center and regions.

Since that period, the structure of electoral support for the tandem between Putin and Medvedev constantly worsened: the share of votes gathered in the areas of “specific electoral regime” (mainly, republics and autonomous okrugs) was growing, and the indicators of support in urbanized and, therefore, more freely voting territories were decreasing.

As a result, by 2012, Putin's electoral geography turned into an antipode of B. Eltsin's electoral geography in 1996. Then, in the first round of elections on June 16, 1996, the current president of the Russian Federation was mainly given the highest level of support in large cities (primarily capital cities). At a total result of 35.3% (his major competitor—G. Zyuganov—had 32.0%), B. Eltsin gathered 42.9% in the 100 largest cities of the country. G. Zyuganov got support of only 22.9% there. In the ten largest million-plus cities, B. Eltsin had 52.4%, while G. Zyuganov had only 18.1% [1]. By the way, this is the most visual answer to those, who try to discredit the idea of electoral democracy in Russia at present, stating that hon-

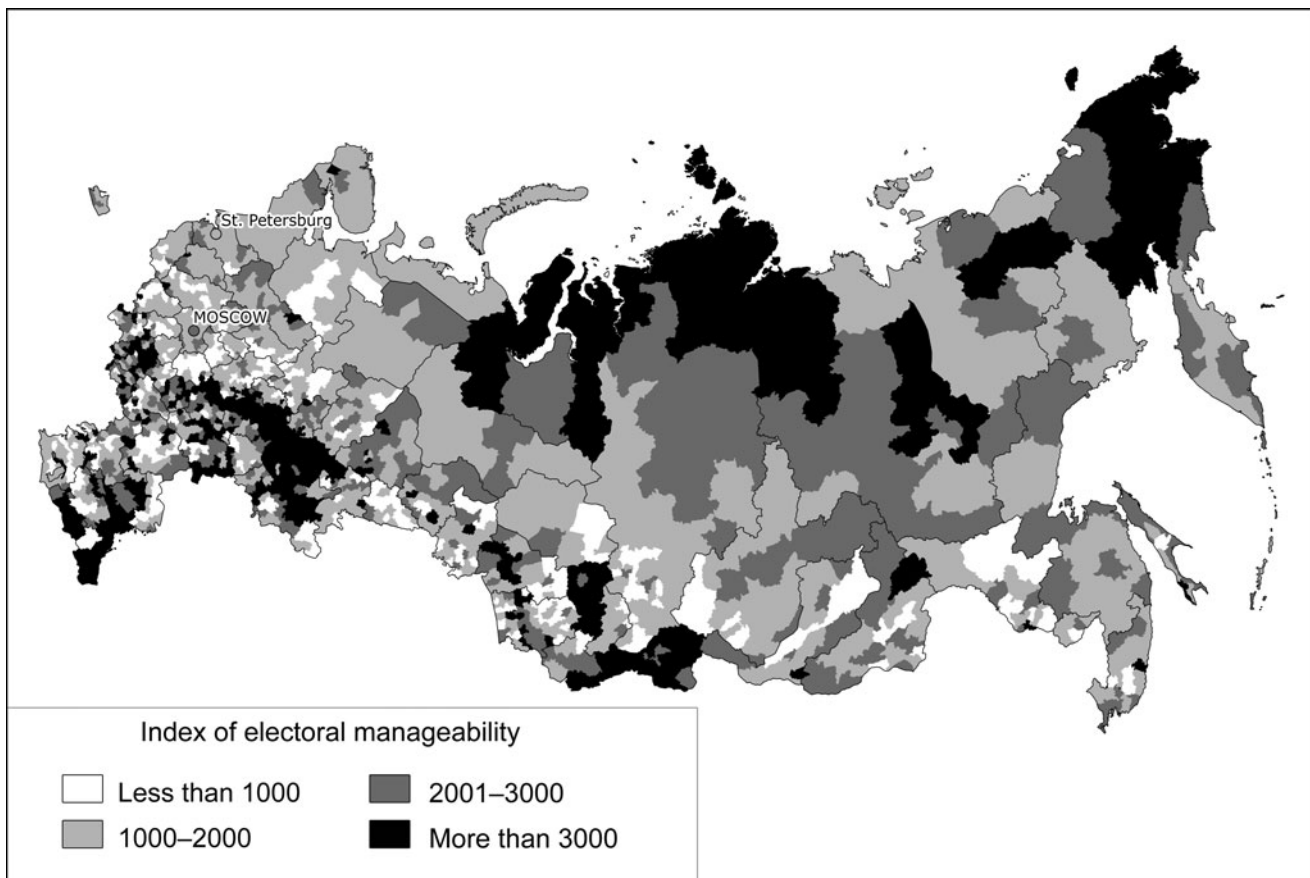


Fig. 2. Index of electoral manageability by territorial election commissions in Russia.

est elections are not possible in our country at all and that “falsifications during Eltsin’s elections were even more numerous.”

The 1996 elections were far from being ideal, but they were more honest and competitive than the elections of Putin’s epoch. The victory of B. Eltsin was predetermined by the attitude of citizens rather than the manipulations of regional elites in the areas of “specific electoral regime.” The political life in large cities is richer and freer, and the falsification of results is more difficult there compared to the republican depth of the country. An interesting example is St. Petersburg of the 2012 pattern, where falsifications, although being unprecedentedly large-scale, were immediately fixed by the opposition, press, and public observers. As of May 2012, more than 300 complaints regarding violations of the electoral rights of citizens were made to the courts of St. Petersburg (admittedly, with no particular hope for success) [3, 4]. In Moscow, owing to the fact that public observers took half of voting stations under their control, authorities did not risk making mass violations at all and the official result of Putin turned out to be less than 50%.

As can be seen, Putin has a status opposite to that of B. Eltsin: he has minimum support in large cities and urbanized territories of the old nucleus of Russian

civilization. If Eltsin was a president of cities (it is cities that brought him victory in 1996), Putin, on the contrary, is a president of province. Only the consolidated efforts of authorities in the areas of “specific electoral regime” permitted him to win in the first round. This being the case, there are hardly any grounds to doubt that he would have won successfully in the second round in any case; there is no more popular politician in the country today.

Urbanized territories in modern Russia awake up to politics after been ten-year dorment. It is here, where the activity of volunteers who undertook the hard work of control over the work of election commissions and opposition to the administrative pressure is focused. More than 12000 independent observers who presented their reports and copies of the primary protocols from voting stations (before their “correction” in the interests of power) were registered on the internet portal of the League of Voters (<https://svodnyprotokol.ru/>) that was established after the scandalous elections to the State Duma of December 4, 2011. Most volunteers live in urbanized and comparatively advanced regions (Fig. 3). The political incomppliance of the urban sociocultural environment is evidently determined by the higher educational level of the population, mobility, and the relatively free access to

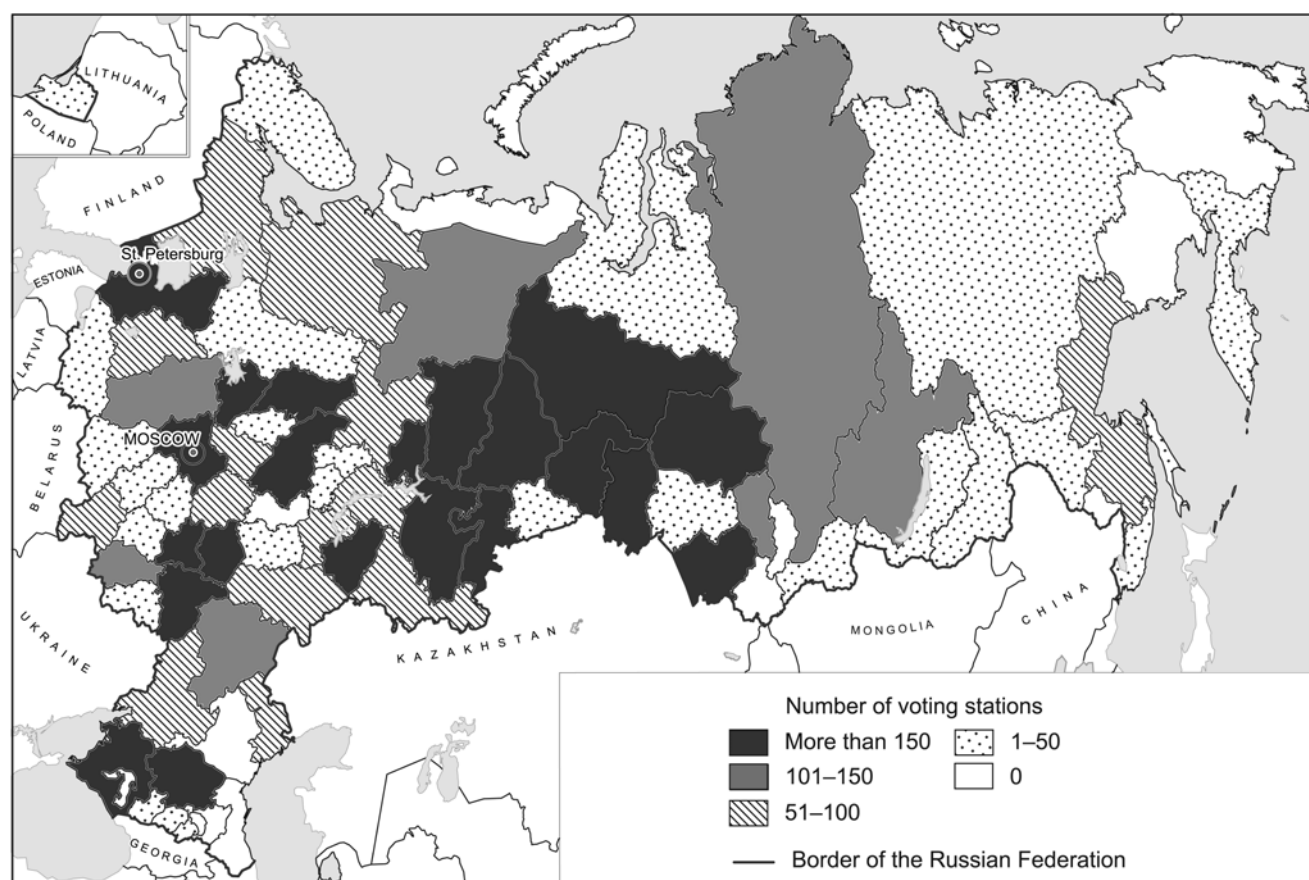


Fig. 3. Number of voting stations observed by volunteers of the ‘Consolidated Protocol’ during the presidential elections in the Russian Federation on March 4, 2012.

information, in particular, owing to the expansion of the Internet and independent mass media, as well as the greater audacity of political parties and activists.

It is difficult not to notice the similarity between the political and geographical structure of voting in March 2012 and that of the referendum in March 17, 1991, concerning the conservation or otherwise of the Soviet Union. The question of the referendum was deliberately formulated unclearly: “Do you consider it necessary to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights and freedoms of persons of all nationalities would be fully guaranteed?” The republics of the Soviet Union that were relatively advanced and oriented towards the European system of values either politely refrained from taking part in the referendum (Armenia, Georgia, and Moldavia) or openly conducted alternative “electoral population surveys” (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), in which citizens raised their voices for the state sovereignty of their republics. The independent elections or referendums in the republics were complicated by procedural restrictions, owing to which they had to conceal their answer under “population surveys.”

The maximal loyalty to the Soviet Union (owing to the decisive role of the local administration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) was mainly shown by the republics of Central Asia, in which the style of political governance slightly differed and differs from today’s Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Karachay–Cherkessia, or Tyva. The highest results for the preservation of the Soviet Union in the 1990 referendum were demonstrated by Abkhazia (99.06%), Turkmenia (97.9%), Karakalpaka (97.6%), Kirgizia (96.7%), and Tajikistan (96.2%). Since the decisive role in economic, social, and information development is played by large cities, it is not difficult to foresee the trajectory of subsequent political development in Russia at the official 73% level of urbanization in Russia.

The conflict between advanced agglomerations that more and more sharply feel a need for legal guarantees and freedoms for their development and conservative areas of “specific electoral regime” that determine the political trend in the entire federation using their specific methods for the organization of elections will rapidly deepen. Under these conditions, Putin’s “vertical” that more and more evidently rests

upon the loyalty of conservative elites in national republics of the North Caucasus, Siberia, Volga region, and South Ural, as well as several autonomous okrugs, will experience growing difficulties in the work of conserving the stability and territorial integrity of the state.

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