

# From the Parliamentary to the Presidential Election: Russians Get Real about Politics

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The Russian Federation's presidential election will more than any other event define the country's politics for the rest of this decade. At first blush, the election of the State Duma (the lower house of the Federal Assembly) on 17 December 1995 would appear to foretell a rough passage ahead for Boris Yeltsin and other proponents of reform. Of the forty-three parties and blocs that participated in the parliamentary campaign, only one, Viktor Chernomyrdin's Our Home Is Russia, was unreservedly pro-government, and it gleaned a paltry 10.3 percent of the ballots cast for national party lists. This paled before the 32.8 percent that flowed to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and three other left-wing parties, and was barely half of the 20 percent support received by four opposition parties of nationalist persuasion, headed by the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and the Congress of Russian Communities. A dozen factions constituting what we could call the democratic opposition, the largest of them Yabloko and Democratic Russia's Choice, were limited to 16.8 percent of all the votes in December, while ten centrist parties and blocs culled a further 14.6 percent.<sup>1</sup> Parties in the last two categories, while advocating democratic governance and a market economy in some global sense, harshly attacked Yeltsin and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, to say nothing of one another, on one specific issue after the other, from the war in Chechnya to the formulas for privatization of industry and for old-age pensions. The record shows, then, a clear majority of Russians six months before the presidential contest siding with radical opposition forces, a small minority unambiguously endorsing the present administration and its policies, and the remainder of the electorate scattered among relatively small parties who to one degree or another distanced themselves from the status quo.

If the parliamentary election is read as a dry run of the presidential election this coming June, the outlook for the reform cause might be seen as gloomy indeed. In the aftermath of the December vote, Gennady Zyuganov, the head of the KPRF, looked and sounded like a president-in-waiting. Within weeks of the opening of presidential nominations, the three leftist parties whose programs largely echo the KPRF's—the Agrarians, the Labor Russia faction, and Power to the People—fell cheerily in line behind his candidacy. On the pro-democracy and pro-Western side of the house, the instant effect of the December poll was to deflate the reputations of the two most credible alternatives to the sitting president: Chernomyrdin, the chairman of Yeltsin's cabinet since December 1992, and the economist and inveterate campaigner Grigory Yavlinsky, whose Yabloko movement embarrassed itself by attracting a mere 7 percent of the vote. Despite the widely acknowledged damage that their disunity has done to them in the past, Russian democrats have thus far failed to rally around a consensus

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candidate for the presidency. The most plausible champion of the cause now seems to be none other than Boris Yeltsin, a sixty-five-year-old in precarious health whose democratic credentials are tarnished by his spotty performance in office.

If all these things are true, then why has Zyuganov's campaign seemingly stumbled this spring, why has the Zyuganov-Yeltsin gap in spot opinion polls narrowed, and why are Russian liberals suddenly speaking of a defeat of the Communists and their allies as a realistic possibility? Western press reports have stressed contingencies such as Yeltsin's improved medical and psychological condition, his deft use of incumbency to woo voters with attention-grabbing speeches and decrees, and the willingness of foreign governments and international agencies to tailor mutual relations and financial aid to his political needs.<sup>2</sup> I agree with these points, but would like to argue further that more fundamental factors lie behind Yeltsin's and the Westernizing democrats' ostensibly improved prospects for the June-July vote. The presidential race, in my view, promises to be a close one. It will not be a walkover for the Communist-led opposition. And Yeltsin, defying forecasts to the contrary that were well-nigh universal until a short while ago, does have a decent chance of capping his comeback by election to a second presidential term. If I were giving bookmaker's odds, I would go so far as to rate him a marginally better bet than Zyuganov to capture the prize.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to realize at the outset that the array of political sentiment captured in the 1995 parliamentary election is not as unrelievedly detrimental to the reform project as it has often been portrayed. Although the communistic parties increased their vote share by 12 percent from the preceding State Duma election in December 1993, the nationalists' share actually declined by 3 percent, and among the nationalist organizations Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's extremist LDPR saw its 1993 share halved. The 27 percent of the electorate who supported Our Home Is Russia and the democratic opposition parties are by no means a negligible factor in Russian politics, and the 15 percent who voted for centrist groups cannot be excluded from the reckoning either.

The State Duma election, moreover, must be seen in the proper political and institutional context. As of Yeltsin's forceful dissolution of the Congress of People's Deputies and the adoption of the current constitution by national plebiscite at the end of 1993, ultimate authority in the Russian state has clearly resided in the executive branch, not the legislative branch. It is the president and his ministers and appointees who truly govern the Russian Federation, subject to checks and balances that are exceptionally weak by American standards.<sup>4</sup> Much of the time, the Federal Assembly functions more like a debating society or street rally than a responsible and deliberative council of lawmakers. Its accomplishments and potential for future development are given short shrift in the news media. Dissatisfied citizens could have inferred, not unreasonably, that December 1995 presented them with a megaphone, as George Wallace used to say about state-level primary elections in the United States, to "send them a message" from the privacy of the polling booth—"them" in this instance being the unaccountable officials in the Moscow executive establishment, chief among them a strongarm president whose control was not up for grabs in the election.

In a pre-election survey of a national random sample of 2,834 Russian voters that I carried out with Russian and American colleagues last November and December,<sup>5</sup> we asked voters about the general spirit in which they approached elections. Did they mark their ballots affirmatively, on behalf of candidates and parties "whose programs and promises seem to me to be the most

reasonable and realistic,” or negatively, for those “who come out against that which does not suit me in our present life”? Of those who felt able to respond, a majority, 62 percent, characterized themselves as affirmative voters, but a substantial minority, 38 percent, placed themselves in the negative category.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, negative or protest voting was noticeably more widespread among respondents who subsequently (as we discovered in post-election reinterviews of the same sample of voters) voted for one of the militant opposition parties. Negative voters made up only 25 percent of the subelectorate of the democratic opposition, 27 percent of those who chose Our Home Is Russia, and 38 percent of those who backed centrist parties; among supporters of the nationalist opposition they were 44 percent and among supporters of the radical socialist opposition 45 percent.

A vote tossed to the KPRF or the LDPR in December 1995 (or in December 1993) was a low-cost choice for the citizen, since come what may Boris Yeltsin was still going to be in the Kremlin after the votes were tallied and the parliamentary benches filled. There will be fewer cheap choices next time. In the climactic runoff round of the presidential election, in fact, the distinction between positive and negative voting will dissolve, for the very act of expressing a negative judgment about one candidate will automatically render a positive judgment about the other—all this in the certain knowledge that the contestant who leads the polls will gain the supreme office in the land. Russians in June-July 1996 will be choosing not legislators who can make fiery speeches about this or that, but the next thing to an elected monarch.

The unique binary framing of the impending vote should in principle have a moderating effect on some potential supporters of radical opposition candidates. I very much suspect that it has done so already. To the extent that tracking polls have revealed a steady increase in support for Yeltsin since January 1996, they are in all likelihood registering the effect of the people of Russia beginning to “get real” about their country’s presidential election. In addition, thinking more deeply and soberly about preferences can be expected to induce some if not all voters to consider the opportunity costs and tradeoffs implicit in the voting decision. Although the calculations that produce “strategic voting,” as compared to the “naïve voting” that has prevailed in Russia until now, can be staggeringly complex, they often boil down to the voter coming to a resolution about what to do if convinced that his initial preference either must be revised in light of fresh information or has been put out of reach by the overriding preferences of other players.

Consider, as illustration, an imaginary factory worker from Novosibirsk who voted for the LDPR in December 1995 out of anger over Russia’s economic crisis. What if he arrives at the opinion that Zhirinovskiy, as piercing and entertaining a critic of the government as he may be, does not have what it takes to lead the country as president? Were he to vote against Zhirinovskiy under these circumstances, it is far from self-evident for whom he would vote. His instinct might be to choose a candidate who shares some of Zhirinovskiy’s appealing characteristics but outstrips him in those respects in which he finds Zhirinovskiy wanting—yet there can be no guarantee that any such flesh-and-blood candidate will be available. What if this same worker actually prefers to see Zhirinovskiy installed as president but is persuaded by media reports that his hero cannot possibly advance past the first round and that a vote for him in June would on that account be “wasted”? Or what if he goes ahead and votes for Zhirinovskiy in the first round and then has to make up his mind in the second round between two runoff candidates who were previously the butt of Zhirinovskiy’s attacks?

Russian political analysts and pundits, probably as an aftereffect of their emancipation from Soviet-era censorship of all meaningful discussion of leadership issues, have been fascinated since the late 1980s with the mapping of public opinion about actual and prospective leaders. They often distill their observations into simple ordinal "ratings," or into frequency distributions, for answers to what all too commonly are wooden and abstract survey questions about leadership preference, or "trust" in public personages. Passive reliance on such *reitingi* breeds the danger for Russians and outsiders alike of construing an electoral choice as something it is not. In particular, it is misleading to rely on an unstated assumption that voting in an election is rather like voting in a beauty contest—ticking off a name in an aesthetic competition that, unlike politics, has scant relationship to the real world or to the everyday lives of the judges.

Data gathered in our surveys shows there is a wide range in the public visibility of Russian political figures. Only 40 percent of our respondents knew of Mikhail Lapshin, the chairman of the Agrarian Party, or knew enough about him to volunteer an assessment on the 100-point "feeling thermometer" employed in Western electoral research;<sup>7</sup> by contrast, 88 percent of those surveyed were willing to assess Zhirinovskiy and Chernomyrdin and 92 percent to assess Yeltsin. More important is the range in voter affect gauged on the thermometer. Russians are rather grudging in their respect for politicians in general, as only one party leader—the renowned eye surgeon and businessman Svyatoslav Fyodorov—came out with a mean rating in excess of 50 points out of 100. At the opposite extreme was the dismal 20-point mean score for Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Yeltsin fares miserably on the scale, as his average of 26 points exceeds only Zhirinovskiy and his former prime minister, Yegor Gaidar.

If one could extrapolate the presidential vote in June 1996 from the feeling thermometer scores in December 1995, Yeltsin would conceivably have been well-advised to take voluntary retirement and spare himself the effort and stress. He began the presidential marathon, after all, 12 thermometer points behind Yavlinsky, 15 points behind Zyuganov, 18 points behind General Alexander Lebed, and a staggering 36 points behind Dr. Fyodorov.

Instructive though such ratings are, their limitations should be equally obvious. No one-dimensional snapshot of opinion will lay bare subliminal considerations in the public mind or dynamic factors such as the "momentum" and "bandwagoning" that loom so large in the study of U.S. elections. Nor can a single condensed popularity index be translated mechanically into electoral strength. If it could, then would not the charisma of Svyatoslav Fyodorov, Ella Pamfilova, Alexander Lebed, and Yekaterina Lakhova have put their respective parties ahead in the scramble for seats in the State Duma? This decidedly did not occur. The LDPR, captained by the widely loathed Zhirinovskiy, won more votes than the Congress of Russian Communities, the Pamfilova-Gurov-Lysenko Bloc, and the Party of Workers' Self-Government combined. Women of Russia, the high regard for Lakhova notwithstanding, failed to clear the 5 percent threshold for party representation in the Duma that it easily surpassed in 1993. Nikolai Ryzhkov, Mikhail Gorbachev's prime minister in the 1980s, earned the same thermometer score as Gennady Zyuganov, but Zyuganov's KPRF outpolled Ryzhkov's Power to the People by a ratio of 15:1.<sup>8</sup>

All of this is to say, therefore, that survey measures of the popularity of Russian politicians ought to be taken with a grain of salt. Imperfect and subject to erosion with time, they must be used cautiously and with due regard for political context.

So far as the lineup for the presidential election is concerned, three contextual points deserve to be emphasized. First, as noted above, Russians did not start to bear down on their real options until the parliamentary election had come and gone, and until Yeltsin, the hegemonic personality in Russian politics since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, had declared his intentions.

Second, the Duma election, besides confirming the predominance of the KPRF among radical critics of the current regime, had a telling effect on the cast of characters of reform orientation. Most notably, it made a presidential candidacy by the leaders of almost all of the democratic opposition parties quixotic. The only possible exception to this generalization, Grigory Yavlinsky, also found his poll numbers quickly dropping after 17 December. Rightly or wrongly, Yavlinsky is encumbered with a reputation as a political lightweight, maladroitness at converting respect for his intellect and policy positions into robust voting support. The other major victim of 17 December was, of course, Viktor Chernomyrdin, who was locked in an intricate embrace with his presidential patron throughout 1995 and emerged incapable, for the moment at least, of playing Pompidou to Yeltsin's de Gaulle.<sup>9</sup>

A third point is that the winner-take-all structure of the presidential contest gives it a strategic dimension largely lacking in previous Russian elections. We see this already in the interplay among reform-leaning leaders. Once Yeltsin edged past Yavlinsky in the opinion polls in January-February, there seemed to be a snowball effect—to some degree the reflection, one guesses, of a proportion of democratically minded voters drawing the conclusion that only Yeltsin had the stature to prevail in a showdown with Zyuganov. Most Russians who voted for the democratic opposition in December would find a Yavlinsky, a Gaidar, or a Sergei Kovalev more congenial than Yeltsin, and many who voted for Our Home Is Russia would be happier with Chernomyrdin than with Yeltsin. If, however, the effective choice is Yeltsin or Zyuganov, not Yeltsin in the abstract or Yeltsin as opposed to various democrats' unattainable first preferences, we can hazard the prediction that the bulk of them will in the end throw in their lot with Yeltsin. Their rationale will be, as the former monetarist finance minister, Boris Fyodorov, phrased it in justifying his endorsement of Yeltsin in March 1996, that "it is better to remain in place [with Yeltsin] than to go backwards [with the KPRF]." The implicit incentives at the grassroots to make the same judgment will be hard to resist regardless of how much explicit cooperation and pact-signing go on at the elite level.<sup>10</sup>

In short, the balance of probabilities favors Yeltsin progressing together with Zyuganov past the multi-candidate first round and into the head-to-head second round of the election. Zyuganov's survival into the runoff is as much of a dead certainty as can be found on the current Russian scene. Yeltsin, for his part, seems increasingly unlikely to be tripped up by a fading Yavlinsky. Zhirinovskiy, who a year or two ago looked like a much more menacing antagonist, now has to be handicapped as a darkhorse. He has traded in his customary bravado for the demeanor of an underdog and seems to face a ceiling of 12 to 15 percent of the vote in June. Talk of a candidate representing a "third force" or "third reality" between Yeltsin and the authoritarian socialists and nationalists has to date yielded no practical fruit.<sup>11</sup>

This is far from saying that Yeltsin, should he turn out to be one of the pair of names on the runoff ballot, is a shoo-in for re-election. My crediting him with slightly better odds than Zyuganov would not be accepted by many informed observers, and is based, necessarily, less on hard data than on intuition.

We should not be naïve about Zyuganov: his advantages are manifold. They include the existence of a hard core of loyalists who identify wholeheartedly with his party (comprising almost 10 percent of the electorate), informal networks of sympathizers in many organizations and workplaces, the boost from the allied parties on the left, the KPRF's natural appeal to the economically impoverished and insecure, its symbolic associations with the superpower status and imperial reach of the Soviet past, and his personal reputation for integrity and incorruptibility.

Against these, though, must be weighed disadvantages that are no less real. Not especially prominent in public discourse until this spring, they are now being put before the Russian electorate day in and day out, especially on the government-controlled television system.<sup>12</sup> Zyuganov is a colorless personality with few achievements outside of party politics to draw upon. A blustery and excitable speaker, he is inclined to pander to his audiences, sometimes trapping himself in embarrassing contradictions. In the early stages of the campaign, he has hammered away at themes selected as if to mobilize support among those very sectors of the electorate that are most inclined to vote for him anyway. Draping himself in the symbolic trappings of the Soviet period—including hammer-and-sickle emblems and giant posters of Lenin at his big rallies—he is preaching to the converted but making few overtures toward the wider circle of voters whom he would have to pull into his tent so as to prevail in the election runoff.

The KPRF itself, while the indispensable launching pad for Zyuganov's candidacy, is simultaneously a flawed vehicle on several counts. For one thing, the party is severely divided on ideological questions between Marxist fundamentalists and West European-style social democrats—Zyuganov straddles the fence between the two—and these internal fissures have been widened by the prying inquiries of a national press that is on the whole more liberal than the electorate and has a vested interest in averting the clampdown on information flow that, fairly or unfairly, many correspondents and editors fear would accompany the return of the Communists to power. For another thing, the KPRF, even as it evokes valued features of the Soviet heritage, inevitably takes upon itself the negative baggage linked in public opinion with the discredited aspects of the defunct regime of Lenin, Stalin, and Brezhnev. Although knee-jerk anti-communism does not have the moral force it had in the early 1990s, when Yeltsin exploited it brilliantly in his ride to power, there is a sizable number of Russians who want to have nothing to do with the Soviet legacy and, mainly for that reason, with the KPRF. We asked our respondents in the post-election survey whether there was any party or parties "for which you would never vote." Sixty-three percent of respondents said they could identify such a party. Among them, the three leading villains were the LDPR (for which 61 percent said they could never bring themselves to vote), the self-mockingly eccentric Beer Lovers Party (25 percent), and Democratic Russia's Choice, forever linked in popular memory and myth with Gaidar's experiment in economic "shock therapy" (18 percent). A nose behind Democratic Russia's Choice came the KPRF, for which 17 percent said they would never vote.<sup>13</sup>

Turning to the legions arrayed against Zyuganov, there is no need to dwell on the economic and social traumas that Russia has endured, or on the mountainous political problems that anyone defending the record of the reforms undertaken since 1991 must try to surmount. It would be foolish to believe that Yeltsin will have an easy time convincing the citizens of a country whose economy has shrunk by half in five years that he deserves four more years to

continue with the job. Nonetheless, it would also be rash to conceptualize the task as hopeless or beyond human ingenuity. Yeltsin's challenge, again, must be appreciated in context. Fortunately, he does not need to accomplish the impossible feat of persuading a majority of Russians that all is well with the country. What he has to do is sell the message that his program is better than the alternative—which is not Swiss levels of affluence or the re-entry into a kind of USSR time capsule, but rule in the second half of the 1990s by Zyuganov and the KPRF.

The pattern of approval for Yeltsin and Zyuganov has a readily identifiable center of gravity. Zyuganov's most stellar ratings by far, representing a no doubt insurmountable lead in this quarter, are among citizens who voted for the KPRF or an adjacent party in the State Duma election. Yeltsin's attractiveness is at its peak with supporters of Our Home Is Russia, but his advantage over Zyuganov is about the same among supporters of the democratic opposition. In any head-to-head battle between the two men, democratic oppositionists will surely flock to Yeltsin en masse, giving him an electoral foundation not that much less substantial than the one Zyuganov begins with. If we sketch their home electorates in attitudinal terms, Yeltsin, grossly speaking, will appeal primarily to voters who score high on both economic and political liberalism and Zyuganov to voters who score low on both scales. These two clusters of voters are approximately equal in size and neither can tip the election scales itself.

That being the case, the outcome should hinge on the struggle for two subgroups of voters, the centrists and nationalists, who cast between them 35 percent of all the votes in December 1995. Even in December, near the nadir of this authority, Yeltsin was only 6 points behind Zyuganov in average thermometer rating among centrist voters. Russian centrists, as the designation implies, rank fairly close to the middle of the spectrum of opinion on both economic and political issues, but fall down somewhat on the liberal side of the distribution on political questions (involving such matters as the balance between individual freedoms and the rights of society and the use of extraordinary measures to combat crime and corruption). Yeltsin has already picked up some valuable elite endorsements from centrist politicians—especially from the leadership of Women of Russia—and has the advantage over Zyuganov of courting centrist opinion from a less remote vantage point.

The motivations of Russia's nationalist voters are the hardest of all for the outside analyst to fathom. We would not go far wrong in saying that supporters of the LDPR, the Congress of Russian Communities, and like groups are relatively authoritarian in their politics but only mildly socialistic in their economics. In the all-important economic sphere, they do not share the intense feeling of having lost out at the personal and family level that is vented by communistic voters. Like the Communists (and many others), they are supportive of the welfare state activities that have been so savaged by a half-decade of mismanaged downsizing; unlike the hard left, however, they show no enthusiasm for orthodox socialism in the sense of state ownership of the means of production, hostility to foreign investment, and similar dogmas. Herein lies the opening through which Yeltsin ought to be trying to pour his battalions in the coming weeks. To build bridges to nationalist voters, he should be talking tough on crime and corruption, as he has for some time now, and playing for time in Chechnya, keeping the conflict off the nation's television screens as much as possible but avoiding any settlement that could be depicted as a sellout of the Russian Army. Economically, his best strategy lies in combining a continued offensive against socialistically purist state control—an issue on

which the KPRF and a few fellow travelling parties are very isolated—with an attempt to reclaim the high ground on issues of popular welfare and “social protection.” Precisely such an approach can be seen in his behavior since he threw his hat into the ring.<sup>14</sup>

Russia’s fateful presidential election, in sum, should not be interpreted as moving inexorably toward a preordained conclusion. For all our anxieties about the outcome, we should take comfort from the open-ended nature of the contest: Popular sovereignty means in essence that no one but the mass of ordinary people shall determine who governs. In Russia in 1996, it cannot be a matter of indifference to friends of democracy and democratization that the outcome of an essentially free competition over leadership of the Russian Federation is not programmed in advance and will remain an object of suspense for all concerned until after the last vote has been counted.

## Notes

1. These figures do not include the 2.5 percent of the votes cast for ten fringe parties and factions that elude classification or the 2.8 percent of the electorate who voted against all of the parties entered, which they were entitled to do under the election rules.

2. Observers have in the past have also drawn attention to the possibility of Yeltsin perpetrating electoral fraud in any future presidential campaign. There were many allegations of falsification of results in the parliamentary election of December 1993, but remarkably few by comparison after the election of December 1995. Although some vote tampering probably will take place this summer, my hunch is that for various reasons it will be of limited proportions and will not be decisive to the outcome.

3. This is not to say that he will serve a second term in its entirety. Given his heart problems and history of alcohol abuse, and what we know about the health problems of the Russian population, Yeltsin’s chances of surviving until the end of a second term in June 2000 seem feeblor than his chances of being elected for such a term.

4. I set aside for current purposes Russia’s regional elites, who play an increasingly important part in government. But in the provinces, as in Moscow, it is executive rather than legislative organs that have the upper hand in decisionmaking.

5. My main partners in the survey work were William Zimmerman of the University of Michigan and Polina Kozyreva and Mikhail Kosolapov of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The project was funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. A follow-up survey in connection with the presidential election is being supported by the MacArthur Foundation.

6. These proportions omit the 14 percent of respondents who were not able to give an answer.

7. Interviewers showed our respondents a picture of a thermometer with temperatures extending from 0 to 100 degrees and told them that 0 degrees signified that the voter “very much disliked” the given politician, that 50 degrees indicated dislike and like in equal measure, and 100 degrees indicated maximum affect.

8. In most cases, respondents also gave numerical ratings for the parties headed by these leaders. Assessments of parties were as a rule more accurate predictors of voting choice than assessments of leaders, but even here numerous anomalies crop up along the lines I have indicated for the leadership ratings.

9. Like the antecedent “government party” in 1993, Gaidar’s Russia’s Choice, Our Home Is Russia got precious little succor from Yeltsin. Having created Our Home in May 1995 at Yeltsin’s bidding, Chernomyrdin was put in an unenviable bind. The more successful he was at wooing voters, the more he incited Yeltsin’s jealousy and



suspicion (this I have from interviews with Moscow insiders, but the Russian press has been full of stories to the same effect). And the more Chernomyrdin's party fell short of the initial high expectations of electoral success, the more Yeltsin felt that he and not his prime minister was obliged to fight the 1996 presidential election.

10. Chernomyrdin and Our Home Is Russia have already endorsed Yeltsin's re-election along with Boris Fyodorov, whose party drew the third largest number of votes among the democratic opposition in December 1995. Yavlinsky presses ahead for now as the nominee of Yabloko, while Gaidar has eschewed a futile run on his own but waffles over whether to endorse Yeltsin or Yabloko. I suspect that Gaidar will come down in favor of Yeltsin well before the first round and Yavlinsky will do so between the first round and the runoff.

11. The most promising prospect was General Lebed, the defender of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians in the Moldavian civil war, who entered the partisan whirl shortly after retiring from the Russian Army in mid-1995. He has badly mismanaged his political career and given not the faintest indication that he has the right stuff to be president.

12. Most Russians get their political news primarily from the Moscow-based ORT network, which adheres closely to the official line. The second-ranking source is Russian Teleradio, which operates on a longer leash but also answers to the president's office, as was shown by Yeltsin's recent dismissal of its founding director. NTV, the privately owned national channel, which tends to be much more independent in its coverage, is the main supplier of TV news for less than 5 percent of the population. Its chief executive recently joined a committee advising Yeltsin's re-election campaign.

13. Some distance behind followed the 12 percent indicating total disapproval of Our Home Is Russia.

14. Substantive points include Yeltsin's public scolding of Chernomyrdin and his ministers for neglecting social needs, orders to eliminate arrears in the payment of public-sector wages and pensions, and decrees that will benefit specific industries and regions. There will be a high bill to pay for some of these decisions, but Yeltsin is wagering that it will come due only after the election.